

Performing Democracy

An Analysis of Church-Based Electoral Capital in Romania

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Introduction

RESEARCHING POLITICS has always been a laborious task, mostly due to the complexity of the subject as well as to the geographic, social, and economic implications. Introducing religion and its more tangible component, the church, into the scientific analysis can make the task even more daunting. Religion has been peripheral to the concerns of the majority of political scientists as it has been considered limited in scope and usage and, therefore, cast aside for many years. The relation between religion and politics has long been overlooked, and severely underestimated. Nevertheless, numerous efforts were made to this end, as researchers attempted to shed light on this highly complex field and comprehend the links and relations between religion and different state, regional, and local politics, with a strong focus on elections, campaigns, voter turnout, and electoral results (Liddle and Mujani 2007; De La O and Rodden 2008; Elff and Rossteutscher 2011; Stegmueller 2013; Goldberg 2014).

The role of the church in modern societies is complex and it is correlated with the historic evolution of religion and religiosity in an area, confessional division being the most important factor for determining the complexity and magnitude of inference (Rosta 2012). In Eastern European countries, the collapse of communism marked an end of the era of atheist state repression, starting the debate (Tomka 2011; Pickel 2009) related to the direction in religiosity: secularization or religious revival (Frunză 2012). Some of these countries experienced intense secularization processes with an impact on the social, economic and political environment (Garrard and Garrard 2008; Evans and Northmore-Ball 2012) (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic), while the revival trend is widespread

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(Evans and Northmore-Ball 2012) across Orthodox countries (e.g. Russia, Romania). But Romania is a noteworthy case study also given its particular post-communist development: in contrast to other European countries, high levels of religious belief co-exist with robust positive feelings towards the European Union (Tarta 2015).

The religious revival in post-communist Romania registered a peak value (Voicu and Constantin 2012) in the first decade of the transition from socialism to a democratic system (1990–1999), and the magnitude of the change is considerably higher compared to previous years. Romania's Constitution recognizes the spiritual, educational, social-charitable, cultural and social partnership role of 18 religions and religious denominations, as well as their status as agents of social peace. As a consequence, the church and religious practices gained a central place in civil society and, with various state support schemes (subsidies and incentives), the Orthodox Church became a powerful institution: religious education was introduced in the school curricula while the number of religious studies students has increased. The most important effect of these changes was a new perception on religion and religious issues, which became highly visible in the media (Stan and Turcescu 2007; Voicu 2007; Voicu and Constantin 2012), while the church enjoys one of the highest levels of trust in society. In this context, there was a state-church cleavage in the political systems, and religious belief turned out to be one of the motivations for party choices after 1990 (Whitefield 2002; Enyedi 2004; Pickel 2008) with the support of the clergy, who appeared as the supporters of a specific political establishment by openly endorsing candidates (Mayer 2009), guiding voters (Wilcox and Sigelman 2001) or various activities to mobilize voters in "The Souls to the Polls" campaigns (Herron and Smith 2012; Garrett 2015). These actions may lead to positive attitudes towards democratic institutions (Evans and Northmore-Ball 2012) even if, based on the positive correlation between religious beliefs and authoritarianism, negative examples have also been documented (White and McAlister 2000; Rosta 2009).

It is generally assumed that targeted campaigns may influence voter participation, leading not only to a higher or a lower turnout, but also determining or influencing the final decision regarding voting options. However, the act of voting is determined by several factors, but the decision of a person to participate in the election process is related to the benefits and costs that are expected.

Five approaches of observed participation levels at elections were determined (Dhillon and Peralta 2002; Veiga and Gonçalves Veiga 2018): instrumental, expressive, ethical, group-based, and information-based.

Instrumental theories are focused on the individual perception about the consequences of the electoral process (Downs 1957; Ricker and Ordeshook 1968; Blais 2000; Ali and Lin 2013; Dubois and Leprince 2017). The need of a person to express attitudes and opinions when voting is the main reason behind the expressive theories (Fiorina 1976; Brennan and Brooks 2013; Blais and Galais 2016), while the altruistic intentions of an individual and the utilities of a person's vote towards the other members of their community hold the ethical characteristic of voting (Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1993; Grossman and Helpman 2001). The importance of information in the decision of whether to vote or not is highlighted by the information-based theories (Feddersen and

Pesendorfer 1996 and 1999; Matsusaka 1995). Analyzing the reasons behind the act of voting, each theory suggests a diverse turnout due to different campaigns to mobilize or not the voters.

The financial subsidies and additional resources provided by the state to the church are frequently considered an unethical mechanism. This implies more control and influence of the church over many important government actions, including but not limited to: elections, popular votes, and referendums (Pickel and Gladkich 2012). Thus, it is mainly assumed that a closer interaction between church and state will adjust a number of tasks in society leading to the idea of state-regulated church and decreasing the social relevance of religion in society.

Scholars documented that the church influence is higher in disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and the social and economic characteristics for active church attendances (practical believers) include lower monthly incomes, residence in rural areas, females, with primary and secondary education (Krunoslav 2012; Voicu and Constantin 2012). Therefore, a comparative analysis of rural and urban areas may highlight discrepancies and different spatial patterns of the two, based on the degree of influence that monastic sites have on the rural compared to the urban population.

Our study aims to analyze the impact of monastic sites on the local population during elections, by defining spatial and social patterns, at the level of the 603 administrative units in Romania, based on the urban-rural division. Thus, based on location, confessional division and monasteries popularity, the estimated results should determine the inferences religious activities have on electoral behavior in Romania.

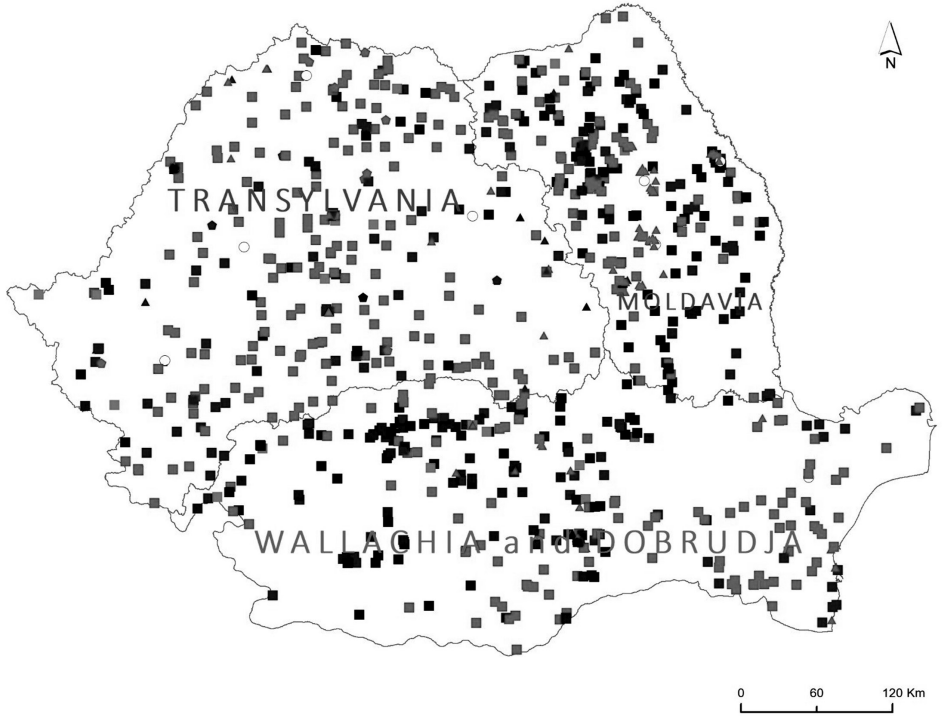
To reach the research objective, the structure of this paper first sets Romania's diversity in terms of confessions (Section 2) and the national recent political history in terms of parties and electoral events (Section 3). The fourth section details the materials and methodological approaches used (Section 4), while the results (Section 5) present a general assessment of Romanian monastic site typology and spatial distribution, followed by the analysis of the role played by the clergy in electoral events (Section 6). Concluding observations are presented in Section 7.

Romania's Historical Regions and Confessional Diversity

BEFORE 1859, Romania was divided into three main regions: Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia. Each region had been under the influence of the constant changing neighboring political systems (Ottoman, Habsburg, Russian etc.) (Knippenberg 2006; Oțetea 1970). Thus, the confessional diversity that characterizes the country today is simply the natural consequence of the historical path the Romanians followed (fig. 1).

A large majority of the citizens (92%) are Christian with 81% of the population identified as part of the Eastern Orthodox Church, while other Christian denominations include the Catholic Church—Roman Catholicism (4.33%) and Greek Catholicism

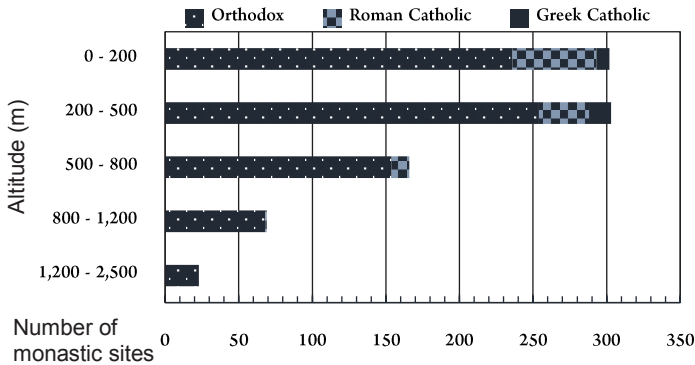
FIG. 1. THE EVOLUTION OF MAIN CONFESSIONS AND MONASTIC SITES IN ROMANIA'S HISTORICAL REGIONS



Time frame	Confessions	Confession	Time Frame	Regions		
				Moldavia	Wallachia and Dobruja	Transylvania
● 1-1400	□ Orthodox	Greek Catholic	1601-1800		1	2
● 1401-1600	○ Greek Catholic	Catholic	1801-1989			8
● 1601-1800	△ Roman Catholic		1990-2016			12
● 1801-1989			No data			1
● 1990-2016		Roman Catholic	1-1400			3
○ No data			1401-1600			1
			1601-1800		1	6
			1801-1989	4	2	14
			1990-2016	38	20	11
			No data	3		1
		Orthodox	1-1400	4		7
			1401-1600	34	42	6
			1601-1800	62	62	17
			1801-1989	39	48	49
			1990-2016	85	104	163
			No data		2	2

DATA SOURCE: Ciocoi et al. 2016; Iraşcu 2014.

FIG. 2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF MONASTIC SITES ON ALTITUDINAL CLASSES



DATA SOURCE: Ciocoi et al. 2016; Iraşcu 2014.

(3.3%), Calvinism (2.99%), and Pentecostal denominations (1.80%) (Institutul Național de Statistică 2011).

As a traditional Orthodox country, in terms of religious settlements and number of parishioners, the Orthodox monasteries outscore any other religion. However, based on the materials analyzed (Ciocoi et al. 2016; Iraşcu 2014; Nicula et al. 2019; Surd, Constantin, and Nicula 2017), the 16th century marked the start of confessional diversification by the edification of Roman Catholic monastic sites, and the 17th century for the Greek Catholics (fig. 1). The exception was the period between the 11th and 12th century marked by the establishment of two Roman Catholic settlements, followed by no other edifications for these confessions.

Contrariwise, the Orthodox monastic sites have been present in the region of interest since the 2nd century, as Orthodoxy was the only confession (marked by religious edifices) in the area until the 11th century (Ciocoi et al. 2016). The highest number of monastic sites were built in the 20th century (252), along with the Roman and Greek Catholics that had also registered a remarkable progress during the same time period (51, respectively 11 monastic sites) (Iraşcu 2014).

Furthermore, analyzed by altitude, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic sites are present only at altitudes below 800 meters, while only the Orthodox monasteries were built up to the altitude of over 2,000 meters (fig. 2). The reason for this can be the dominant presence of Orthodox monasteries from 2nd century until 16th century. From that moment on, Roman and Greek Catholic sites started to develop mostly in the proximity of urban areas (at low altitudes), unlike the Orthodox sites that did not benefit from the same existing infrastructure in earlier centuries, resulting in a great spatial disparity of confessions.

Political Parties and Electoral Events in Romania

ROMANIA IS one of the former communist countries from the Eastern bloc (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998), along with Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and others. Since the fall of communism in 1989 (Gilberg 1990), many political parties took part in the elections for Romania's Parliament. However, there has been a constant struggle between the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party, two antagonistic groups in terms of their perspective over political principles and values (Bernhard and Kubik 2014).

The most recent parliamentary elections from 2016 are included in this study, as they have drawn the attention of the national and international mass media due to the protests that followed immediately after (Nicula et al. 2019). In addition, along with presidential elections, being one of the major political event of great interest for Romanians, the 2016 parliamentary elections analysis, linked to the involvement of the clergy, should highlight the degree of interest manifested by religious communities in national political issues.

As an analogy, the study includes the analysis of voter turnout rates during another significant electoral event for Romanians—the 2018 referendum for the amendment of the Constitution. For this, the voters were asked whether they agreed to revise the Romanian Constitution as it was approved by the Parliament, based on the 258 Civil Code article that stated: 'The family is based on the freely agreed marriage between spouses, on their equality, as well as on the right and duty of parents to provide the raising and education of their children' (Civil Code 2009). More precisely, the intention was to replace the word 'spouses' with 'man and woman' to suggest the interdiction of same sex marriages.

Besides the importance of being the first civil initiative since the fall of communism in 1989 (Stanciu 2018), the initiative for the 2018 referendum was publicly endorsed by both Romanian Orthodox (Coman 2019) and Greek Catholic Churches. Therefore, this electoral event is one of the best examples for how the Romanian clergy interferes with the voting process.

The arguments for analyzing these electoral events stem from their actuality, but also from their opposed typology: the parliamentary elections with a strong political bend, compared to a civil referendum with great implications for a country ranked first in the religious commitment hierarchy in Europe (Evans and Baronavski 2018). This antagonism would best emphasize the subjectivity of the clergy's implication and influence on electoral events, based on their personal interest: the preservation of a vastly religious population, with traditional values and of a high level of trust in a church unflinching in its principles (in this case, promoting only opposed gender marriages).

Materials and Methods

WORLDWIDE, THERE are different definitions of monasteries, based on the culture, tradition and religion of each country. In Romania, a monastery is defined as “a (1) religious institution where parishioners, monks or nuns, organized in communities, are living isolated from the modern world; (2) set of sanctums grouped around a church, including the monks or nuns that are living there” (MDA 2010), (3) religious site where monks or nuns live isolated from the modern world according to some strict rules, (4) sanctuary where the divine service is officiated by monks (DEX 1998).

The data used in this study is based on the inventory of monastic sites by Ciocoi et al. (2016) and Iraşcu (2014). The resulting database includes Orthodox and Catholic monasteries, hermitages, abbeys, chapels, cathedrals, convents, dioceses, episcopates, metochions, sanctuaries, vicarages, but also orphanages managed by religious communities. Information regarding the number of parishioners (monks or nuns), religion, address and earliest mention for each religious site was included in the final database.

Along with the information on monastic sites, electoral and census data has also been taken into consideration in further analysis. The information provided by the Central Electoral Bureau includes data referring to turnout rates at the parliamentary elections (11 December 2016) and the constitutional referendum on the definition of the ‘family’ as mentioned in the Romanian Constitution (6–7 October 2018).

The correlations between the quantitative and qualitative social and economic characteristics of the administrative units that include monastic sites and the 2016 election votes on the additional lists, along with the votes for the 2018 referendum on the definition of family, were determined using a set of statistical indices. The standard statistical method (Pearson correlation matrix) was used to determine the strongest correlations between the evaluated datasets and mathematical models that were generated using linear regressions. The robustness of the regression models was assessed using the coefficient of determination values (R^2) and significance levels.

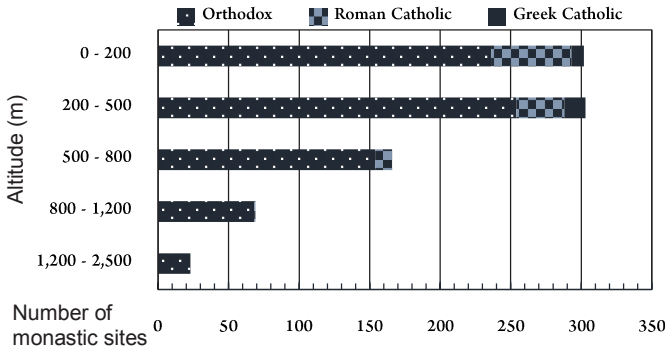
Geospatial and geostatistical analyses were developed using ArcGIS (ESRI, Redlands, CA), SPSS (IBM Analytics) and Microsoft Office suite. To assess the spatial variability of the results of above-mentioned electoral events, the maps were correlated with the previously created monastic sites database.

Results

Romanian Monastic Site Typology and Spatial Distribution

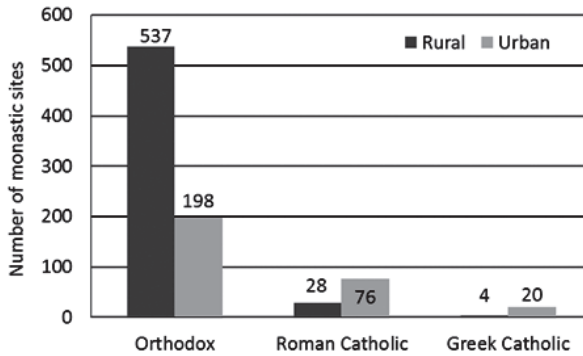
A NUMBER OF 863 Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic monastic sites have been identified along with information regarding their religion, year of construction and organization forms, the number of monks and/or nuns, and accommodation facilities. A typology segregation shows that the majority of the analyzed religious sites fall into the monastery (66.85%) and hermitage categories

FIG. 3. MONASTIC SITES TYPOLOGY



DATA SOURCE: Ciocoi et al. 2016; Iraşcu 2014.

FIG. 4. THE DISTRIBUTION OF MONASTIC SITES ACCORDING TO THE MAIN CONFESSIONAL STRUCTURES



DATA SOURCE: Ciocoi et al. 2016; Iraşcu 2014.

(19.46%), while other types of religious forms of organization have a lower quantitative impact and belong almost entirely to Roman and Greek Catholic monastic sites (fig. 3).

The spatial distribution of monasteries revealed a discrepancy between rural and urban areas (fig. 4). Thus, Romania’s rural areas show the dominant presence of 537 Orthodox monastic sites compared to only 28 Roman Catholic and 4 Greek Catholic monastic sites. On the contrary, the majority of Roman and Greek Catholic monasteries are located in urban areas, whilst the number of urban Orthodox monastic sites is significantly lower compared to the rural areas.

Since Orthodox Christianity is the traditional religion of the Romanian people, the Orthodox monastic sites are naturally concentrated in rural areas, given the slow urbanization rate of the country until 1970. On the other hand, as Roman and Greek Catholic confessions have been consistently gaining parishioners only since the 16th century, they

had the advantage of a much more developed infrastructure and preferred the urban areas as a location for their religious settlements.

Assessing the Role of the Romanian Clergy in Electoral Events

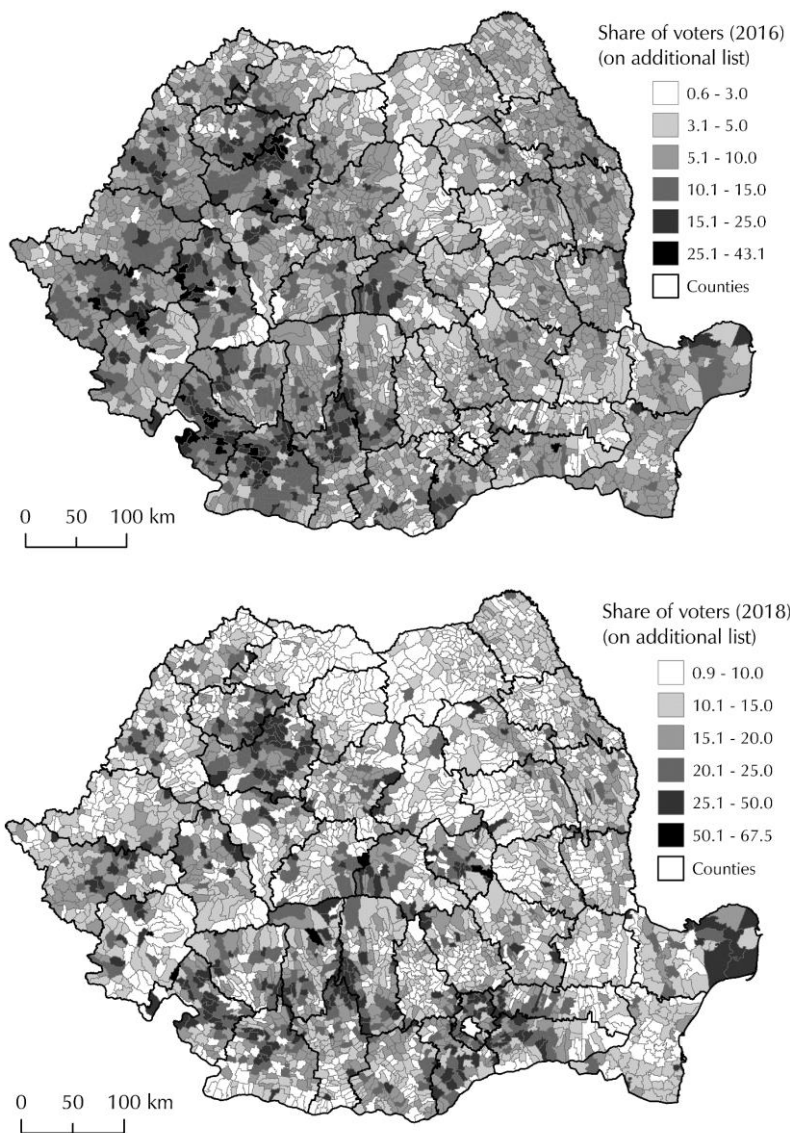
ASSUMING THAT regular church attendance is associated with a higher probability of voting (Gerber, Gruber, and Hungerman 2016) and the religious behaviors, traditions, and beliefs may influence electoral actions, the causal effect of monastic sites (location, activities, reputation) on voter turnout has been investigated. Moreover, the study comes in a context in which religious pilgrimage has developed exponentially in Romania during the last decades (Bănică 2016).

In order to determine the effects that religious activities have on electoral behavior, we followed a two-stage analysis based on the official results of the recent electoral events in Romania: the parliamentary elections of 2016 and the referendum for the Constitution amendment of 2018. The main indicator used in the analysis is the electoral participation rates (voter turnout) at both events, in the localities including monastic sites compared against the other localities and national mean values (fig. 5). Voter turnout is assessed based on the total number of valid votes and the number of electors registered on additional lists.

The analysis of the parliamentary elections of 2016 show an electoral participation rate of 41.2% of population, with discrepancies among rural areas (41.6%) and urban areas (37.8%) and also with notable differences between localities hosting monastic sites (national level: 39.9%; urban: 37.9%; rural: 40.5%). These values suggest and confirm the current international trend (Breux, Couture, and Goodman 2017) in the electoral process, characterized by a low level of participation, with higher voter turnout in rural localities compared to urban ones. The share of voters on additional lists (votes from electors having their residence outside the electoral district) usually flags the existence of various polarizing circumstances giving no judgment on what was the cause for such situations. Voter turnout on additional lists registered a national rate of 7.3% (7.7% in rural areas; 4.1% in urban areas) while the localities hosting monastic sites registered lower values (national rate: 6.5%; rural areas: 7.3%; urban areas: 3.7%), suggesting a reduced level of implication of the clergy in advocating, guiding and endorsing the participation in electoral activities.

The 2018 constitutional referendum shows extremely low electoral participation rates (25.5%), causing the referendum to be invalidated as the required voter turnout threshold was below 30% due to a general intention to boycott the Referendum (Kuźelewska 2019). However, the results are useful for the hypothesis testing and provide accurate information about the electoral behavior of voters. Thus, differences in voter turnout between rural (26.2%) and urban areas (19.1%) have been registered. Moreover, analyzing the votes on additional lists, some discrepancies between localities hosting monastic sites (rural: 22.3%; urban: 17%) and other localities (rural: 22.1%; urban: 16.7%) were observed. Since the Romanian Orthodox Church publicly

FIG. 5. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION RATES ON ADDITIONAL LISTS:
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2016 (UP); CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM 2018 (DOWN)

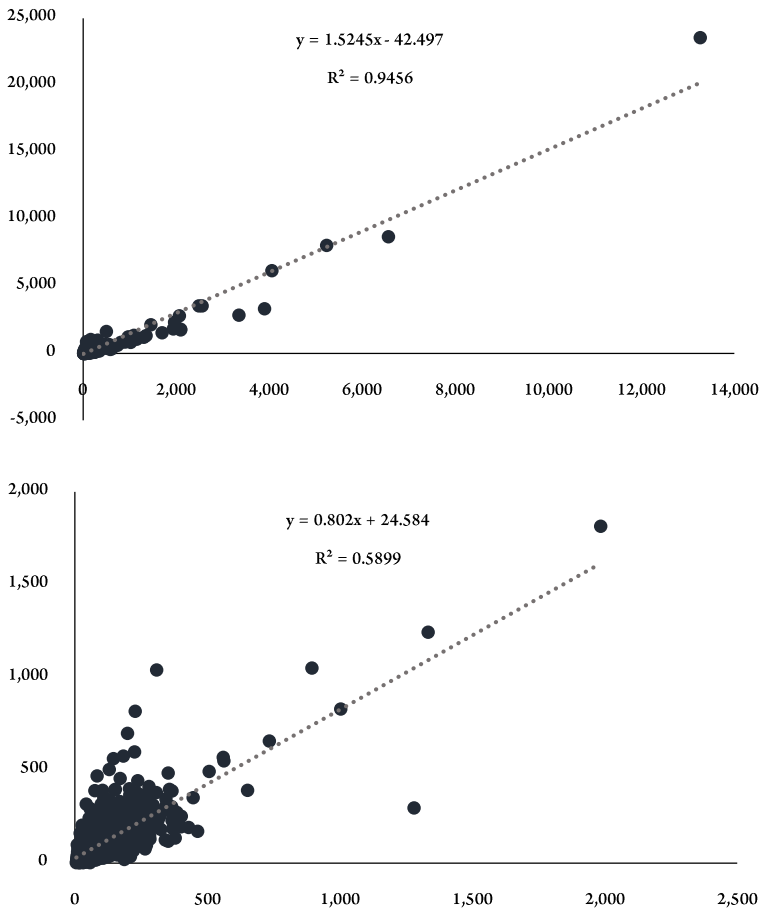


DATA SOURCE: Central Electoral Bureau 2016.

advocated and endorsed the referendum, these results only suggest even more the inference of the church in the public vote.

Therefore, the discrepancies between the analyses of the considered electoral events suggest different levels of implication of the clergy. Applied to the national level, the correlation between the two events with variables represented by votes on additional lists returns dissimilar results, depending on the presence of monastic sites in the administrative units taken into consideration. While the administrative units including monastic sites registered 0.95 for R2, the rest of the localities returned a value of 0.59 for R2, suggesting that the clergy does in fact exercise a certain level of influence in the voting process (fig. 6).

FIG. 6. REGRESSION ANALYSIS:
LOCALITIES INCLUDING MONASTIC SITES (UP), OTHER LOCALITIES (DOWN)

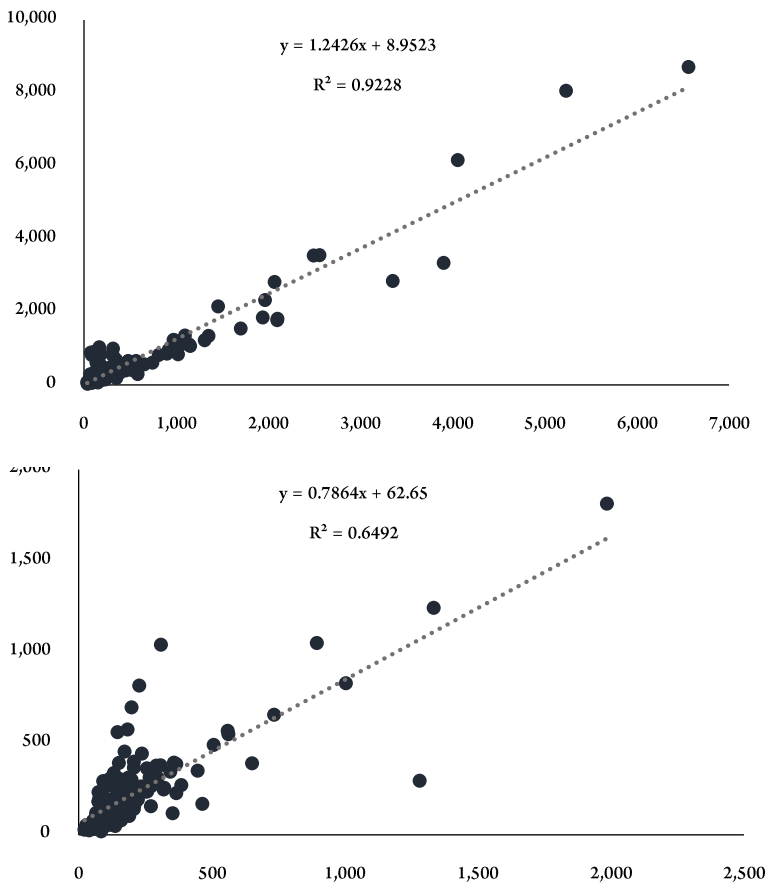


DATA SOURCE: OWN compilation.

While the parliamentary elections were of lower direct interest for the church, the results of the referendum on the definition of the ‘family’ could have altered the beliefs and principles endorsed by the Orthodox, who strictly oppose same gender marriages.

In urban areas, the correlation matrices returned similar values for R2 to the national analysis, respectively 0.65 for the urban areas without monastic sites and 0.92 for those urban areas that include religious sites (fig. 7). Consequently, the involvement of the clergy in the voting process is once again illustrated by the correlations results, based on the number of votes on additional lists.

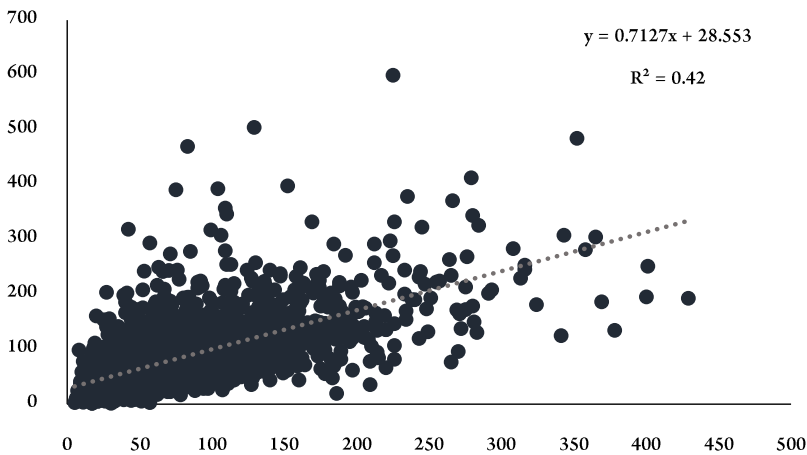
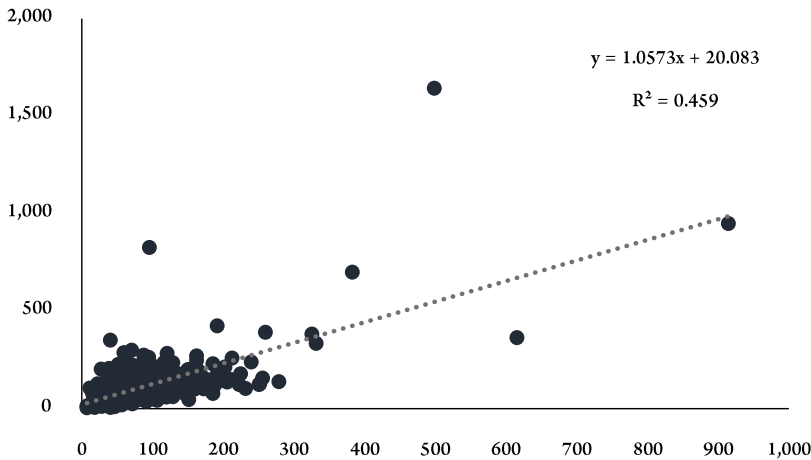
FIG. 7. REGRESSION ANALYSIS:
 URBAN AREAS INCLUDING MONASTIC SITES (UP), OTHER URBAN AREAS (DOWN)



DATA SOURCE: own compilation.

Unlike the urban areas, the same correlation for the rural administrative units, distinguished by the presence of monastic sites, the correlation matrices returned less drastic differences in terms of the R2 values (0.46 where monastic sites are present and 0.42 for the other localities) (fig. 8).

FIG. 8. REGRESSION ANALYSIS:
RURAL AREAS INCLUDING MONASTIC SITES (UP), OTHER RURAL AREAS (DOWN)



Data source: own compilation.

Consequently, in terms of rural-urban differences, the urban areas suffer a higher level of influence from the clergy during elections, while in rural areas no major effects were noticed. Although the rural localities of Romania are known for maintaining their traditions in terms of religion and culture, the registered voter turnout rates were lower than those registered in urban areas. Given the fact that the data taken into consideration refers to the number of votes on additional lists for both electoral events analyzed, the higher R2 value for the urban areas that include monastic sites compared to the rural areas can be explained by the touristic attraction factor that characterizes the urban localities.

Thus, the involvement of the clergy, illustrated as well by the correlation matrices, resulted from their motivation to advocate for changing the Constitution article from its current form, so that the reliability of the church would not be compromised.

Conclusions

THE SUBJECT approached in this paper appears timely and suggests the increasing role of the clergy in social and political sectors of the civil society, motivating their position through the beliefs embraced by their religious traditions and convictions. With results that rely on the election rates and statistics made at the level of 603 administrative units hosting the 863 monastic sites identified, spatial patterns of voter turnout are derived and the relation between electoral behavior and the clergy political implications is modeled.

The results of two electoral events (one with political implications compared against one with social valences) from Romania are analyzed in order to assess the level of church and clergy influence on the electoral proceedings. In addition to previous studies, this research compares the participation rates at the 2016 parliamentary elections against the 2018 popular vote for constitutional amendment, and relates them with the spatial locations of monastic sites. Aiming to derive spatial patterns of voter turnout, the presence or absence of religious institutions is analyzed in each locality and interrelated to the elector participation rates.

The geographic distribution of the Romanian monastic sites shows territorial discrepancies, since only the Orthodox churches were built in areas located at altitudes higher than 800 m, while the Roman and Greek Catholic churches benefit from much more accessible positions. On the other hand, the Orthodox monastic sites are present in each of Romania's counties, while Greek and Roman Catholic communities are only concentrated in a few administrative units. Furthermore, the urban and rural areas also play a major role in religious spatial patterns, as the rural is almost entirely marked by Orthodox monastic sites, while the Catholic communities are present mostly in urban areas. Hence, even though Romania is characterized by an ethnic and religious diversity, a clear dominance of Orthodoxy is seen in both the historical background and in the remarkable number of monastic sites scattered throughout the country.

The clergy's involvement in the two sets of elections under analysis is determined through voter turnout rates. The key of the study is the relation between voter numbers and the rural/urban localities that either do or do not host monastic sites. Since the parliamentary elections did not have a direct impact on the image of the church, the involvement of the clergy in the electoral process was minimal. However, the referendum on the definition of 'family' witnessed a higher degree of implication from the church, as the results of the elections would have had direct and major repercussions on altering the Orthodox and Catholic dogmas regarding same sex marriages. Despite this, voter turnout rates were lower compared to the parliamentary elections based on the general intention to boycott the referendum and argue for a free will on marriages regardless of the spouses' gender. Moreover, higher voter turnout rates were recorded in rural areas compared to urban localities during both electoral events. These rates suggest the interference of the Orthodox churches (located mainly in rural areas) based on the stronger connection between the clergy and the local population due to their more traditional way of living compared against the population from urban areas.

The analysis also included the number of voters on additional lists at the analyzed events, mostly in areas hosting monastic sites, because these rates suggest that voters tended to take part in the voting process as a consequence of clerical guidance and mobilization. The correlations highlight the involvement of the clergy expressed by the higher value of R^2 for the administrative units that include monastic sites (0.95), while the localities that host no religious sites returned much lower values (0.59). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the clergy's involvement in political events can influence the willingness of the population to vote on different matters.

Such models can be used in further approaches to assess with a high level of confidence the impact religious institutions have on the population's attitude towards the electoral process. Based on the state's autonomy, a completely independent church will encourage ethical behavior during the electoral events—as long as they do not affect public security, public order, health and morals or fundamental human rights and freedoms—while national churches, even in traditional democratic systems, are subject to state interference. Therefore, used in the proper context, this approach has the potential to return different, but significant, results in studies focused on any other European countries with various political environments.



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Abstract

Performing Democracy: An Analysis of Church-Based Electoral Capital in Romania

Confessional diversity triggers various social and political behaviors of citizens. In terms of the relation between politics and religion, Romania is both a diverse and a complex case study, as the church not only had a strong influence on the historical process of state formation, but still casts a long shadow on political decisions. Therefore, the current study aims to determine a connection between the monastic sites' location and their influence on the political decisions of citizens, in two national elections that had a major impact on the recent political developments in the country: the 2016 parliamentary elections and the 2018 constitutional referendum (on defining the 'family'). The confessional and social discrepancies between Romania's rural and urban areas lead to a comparative analysis of the votes on additional lists for the two events. Results indicate a different degree of clergy involvement in the electoral process, depending on the impact of the political event on church reliability. Thus, Romania's church-based electoral capital is assessed using spatial and statistical analysis, resulting in territorial patterns based on voter turnout results.

Keywords

monastic sites, political system, voter turnout, regression analysis, Romania

