

Stability within Commotion: Romanian Electoral Patterns, 2004-2009

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The first Basescu presidency was a period of continual political conflict and crisis. It can be portrayed as a tragic-comedy in four stages. The first was the growing personal and partisan antagonism between President Basescu and Prime Minister Tariceanu, undermining the Truth-and-Justice Alliance that stood at the core of the governing coalition elected in late 2004. The second was the collapse of that governing coalition after Romania's final accession to the European Union and the unsuccessful attempt to impeach President Basescu for alleged constitutional violations. The third was the war of accusations during the minority Tariceanu-II government, with hostile co-habitation across the dual executive and the resurgent Social Democratic Party holding the balance of power. The fourth was confirmation of three-party deadlock consequent to the 2008 parliamentary elections, leading to a no-confidence vote for the caretaker Boc government and the failure to invest a successor while the viciously nasty 2009 presidential campaign proceeded.

Nevertheless, despite the trouble and turmoil in Bucharest, there was a surprising degree of electoral stability throughout the period, far greater than ordinarily recognized in the popular literature. This chapter will examine three essential indicators of such stability. The first, quite obviously, is the election of Basescu in 2004 and his re-election in 2009, both times by slim margins when defeat was the safe prediction. In 2004, he gained 51.2 percent of the second-round runoff vote although receiving just 33.9 percent in the initial round. Adrian Nastase had received more than 40 percent in the initial round and the PSD was already optimistically preparing the coalition in parliament needed for continuity of its dominion. In 2009, Basescu led after the initial round, but narrowly with only 32.4 percent of the vote. The combined votes from the parties allied against him—PSD, PNL, and PRM—would have insured a second-round defeat, yet instead he prevailed over Mircea Geoana by 50.3 percent to 49.7 percent.

The remarkable electoral stability from 2004 through 2009, we argue, goes far deeper than continuity of the elected President. Given persistent headlines proclaiming political rifts and individual scandals, one might well expect increased voter alienation and disaffection. Yet there is no convincing evidence of declining electoral turnout among voters. Based on official voter rolls, calculated turnout for the initial round of presidential voting in 2004 was 58.1 percent of eligible voters and in 2009 it was 56.6 percent. Calculated turnout for the second round of presidential voting in 2004 was 53.0 percent of eligible voters and in 2009 it was 57.1 percent.

Even more important, the pattern of vote allocation among the main political parties also shows considerable stability. Comparing county-level vote percentages, the correlation coefficient for the PSD presidential candidate, initial round 2004 versus initial round 2009, is 0.902. The parallel correlation by county, Truth-and-Justice Alliance candidate vote percentage initial-round 2004 versus the combined PNL and PD-L vote percentage initial-round 2009 is 0.845. Such apparent consistency amidst the turbulence of Romanian politics during the Basescu era certainly deserves careful examination.

Relative stability within the Romanian electorate during the first Basescu presidency might be interpreted as a good sign, indicative of the increasing maturity of the Romanian political system. To many commentators, the 2004 elections represented the end of the post-communist era of transition. The communist successor party had again been denied office, EU accession was imminent, and the major battle against corruption and inefficiency allegedly had been launched. It might thus also be anticipated that the party system would regularize, with voters becoming more settled in their ideological predispositions and partisan affiliations. On the other hand, relative electoral stability equally could be grounds for concern. The first Basescu presidential era ended with the Romanian political system locked in stalemate, with none of the three major parties able to achieve a majority and none welcome to the prospect of cooperation with the others. The consequence was government fragility, sufficient to deter social reform, economic recovery programs, and budgetary restraint. Electoral stability under such conditions suggests the absence of a structural solution and the persistence of virulent attacks as the parties flounder desperately in the effort to gain precedence. It will have to be seen whether the same political configuration continues during the second Basescu presidential term. The past does not encourage optimism.

Methodologically, this chapter proceeds with caution. There were eleven national elections in Romania between 2004 and 2009: two presidential elections (2004 and 2009) with two rounds of balloting for each; two parliamentary elections (2004 and 2008) with separate ballots for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate; two elections for the European Parliament (2007 and 2009), and one national election regarding the proposed impeachment of President Basescu (2007). Ideally, there would exist panel data in which the same potential voters

are interviewed each election in order to document micro-level changes in beliefs and behaviors. Somewhat less perfect, there would exist systematic public opinion polls from similarly drawn random samples, permitting inferences of probability regarding differential subgroup behavioral trends over time. Unfortunately, the principal data available for cross-election comparisons come from the Biroul Central Electoral and are organized by county. The consequence is that our observed patterns systematically refer, not to individual voters, but instead to the geographic localities comprised by individual voters. There is always potential for ecological fallacy when one attempts to deduce individual attributes using only the aggregates to which they belong. Exercising due methodological concern, we offer tentative substantive findings and careful distinguish perceived aggregate-county patterns from micro-individual ones. The findings are important, however, because they challenge a number of prevalent interpretations, asserting fundamental electoral stability despite the commotion that characterizes contemporary Romanian politics.

Comparative Electoral Turnout

There were significant differences in turnout across the eleven national Romanian elections, 2004-2009. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish intertemporal trends from cross-sectional variation. For the former, time is a critical variable and thus the claim requires evidence of a clear longitudinal movement in the data. For the latter, type of election is the critical variable and it requires evidence that elections for similar offices produce similar levels of aggregate participation from eligible voters.

There are certainly grounds to expect a downward longitudinal trend in election turnout. Opinion polls regularly report voters' lack of trust in the Romanian political class, lack of enthusiasm for its leaders, and low sense of efficacy that politicians are listening and responding to their voice. Optimism that the 2004 elections would bring sweeping reform (Gross and Tismaneanu 2005) has long faded, given the low level of Romanian state capacity and entrenched political stalemate. Repeated mutual accusations of malfeasance and corruption have only encouraged voter cynicism (Ciobanu 2009). These opinions have not resulted in any widespread rejection of democracy as a form of government; in that sense, the post-communist transition has been a success (Mungiu-Pippidi 2007; Crowther 2010). Rather, they reflect dissatisfaction with the operation of democracy in Romania. Thus it is plausible to hypothesize an effect on aggregate turnout, declining over time as an indicator of mounting frustration and voter alienation.

Existing data, while revealing considerable variation across elections, provide no convincing support for this interpretation regarding the 2004-2009 period.

The presidential elections had the highest turnout, with remarkable consistency when one compares 2004 (58.08 percent and 55.61 percent) and 2009

(52.97 percent and 57.13 percent). Cross-nationally, many voters believe that an important election involves a presidential contest. Those who vote periodically often reserve their participation for the presidency, as the only national representative with a unified and encompassing constituency. The European Parliament elections consistently had the lowest effective turnout, in both 2007 (28.11 percent) and 2009 (26.54 percent). Again, this is not exceptional. Despite the rising importance of transnational issues, voters across Europe feel somewhat disconnected from the EU Parliament and attach much greater significance to representation within national boundaries. The Romanian parliamentary elections show a contrast, largely because the 2004 vote (56.61 percent/56.85 percent) was held in coordination with presidential first-round election, while the 2008 vote (37.57 percent/37.58 percent) was independent of other contests. Turnout in the latter was thus predictably lower and is quite similar in aggregate percentage, for example, to U.S. mid-term Congressional elections. The 2007 presidential impeachment referendum (44.32 percent) as could be expected had a higher turnout than the 2008 parliamentary elections because it concerned the future of the national executive, but a lower turnout than all regularly scheduled presidential campaigns.

Table 2-1: Effective Electoral Turnout Percentages
(Valid Votes/Eligible Voters)

Date	Office	Turnout
2004 November	President—First Round	58.08%
2004 November	Parliament—Deputies	56.61
2004 November	Parliament—Senate	56.85
2004 December	President—Second Round	55.61
2007 May	Presidential Impeachment	44.32
2007 November	European Parliament	28.11
2008 November	Parliament—Deputies	37.57
2008 November	Parliament—Senate	37.58
2009 June	European Parliament	26.54
2009 November	President—First Round	52.97
2009 December	President—Second Round	57.13

Source: Biroul Electoral Central

These findings are based solely on elections that occurred during the first Basescu presidency. They do not support any claim that turnout variation within the period show a downward linear trend over time. Instead, there is strong reason to conclude that variation in electoral salience primarily was a product of the type of office contested.

A more detailed examination utilizes cross-election comparisons of effective turnout percentages by county. (Whenever possible, we disaggregated the Bucharest vote by Sector; whenever possible, we included the Diaspora vote as a separate observation.) The complete correlation matrix, comprised of all elections, reveals substantial variation. Counties with comparatively high turnout in one election do not necessarily have high turnout in other elections. However, there is a dramatic reduction in this variation when similar types of elections are compared.

The lowest of these matched correlation coefficients are from Romanian parliamentary elections, which is expected given that (as already noted) the 2004 contest was held in conjunction with the first-round presidential election while the 2008 contest was not. All other correlation coefficients are quite high. Considerable consistency in county turnout for the two European Parliament elections (0.6570) seems to reflect the core of persistent voters. Considerable consistency for the second-round presidential elections (0.6328) and for the presidential impeachment vote with the two second-round presidential elections (0.6273 and 0.5908) seems to reflect the stable perceived importance in selecting the singular person designated as the national executive.

Table 2-2: Bi-Variate Correlations for Effective Turnout Percentages
(Valid Votes/Eligible Voters, County-Level Data)

Election	Pearson's r
2004 President First-Round—2009 President First-Round	0.4039
2004 President Second-Round—2009 President Second-Round	0.6328
2004 Parliament Deputies—2008 Parliament Deputies	0.2886
2004 Parliament Senate—2008 Parliament Senate	0.3010
2007 European Parliament—2009 European Parliament	0.6570
2007 President Impeachment—2004 President Second-Round	0.6273
2007 President Impeachment—2009 President Second-Round	0.5908

Source: Biroul Electoral Central

Common wisdom in the political science literature suggests that turnout is in part influenced by such sociological variables as age, education, and economic status (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Sigelman et al. 1985). Lacking comparative individual-level surveys, we can rely only on county-level ecological inferences across Romanian elections; the probability of significant findings is thus reduced and the interpretation of any finding is more uncertain. Nevertheless, one result does appear with relative consistency. It is expected that low salience elections, with fewer short-run mobilizing pressures, should reveal greater turnout effects from underlying sociological causes than high salience elections. This seems to be true, but in a manner opposite to hypothesized. In

low salience elections during the Basescu period—the European Parliament in 2007 and 2009; the Romanian Parliament in 2008—higher turnout is associated with counties that are more rural and have a lower regional economic product. We speculate that clientele networks might be more penetrating within such counties. By contrast, urbanization and affluence show a positive relationship to turnout sporadically and only in high-salience elections. Sociologist Dumitru Sandu has divided Romania into eight distinct cultural regions (Sandu 2002). We found no systematic turnout differences by region, across the eleven national Romanian elections studied.

Available data do allow us to examine a major political variable often hypothesized to affect turnout. Romanian presidential elections utilize majority rule to determine a winner. Given the two-candidate second-round runoff, a sizable number of voters find their top preferences eliminated from contention. In 2004, for example, slightly more than 25 percent of first-round voters did not select either Nastase or Basescu; in 2009, slightly more than 36 percent of first-round voters did not select either Geoana or Basescu. The question is whether these so-called “frustrated voters,” whose preferred candidates do not appear on the second-round ballot, will stay home or turn out. We can make indirect inferences from county-level data, regressing the percentage of frustrated voters against the change in turnout, first-round to second-round of presidential balloting. There certainly appear to be stay-home effects among frustrated voters for the Hungarian Union. The greater the Hungarian first-round frustrated vote in a county, the smaller the net turnout in the second-round (i.e., the regression coefficients are negative and strongly significant). Ecological estimation indicates that approximately one-third of Hungarian Union voters stayed home in the second rounds. By contrast, there is a considerably smaller stay-home effect among frustrated voters for the other eliminated parties in 2004 and no estimated effect at all in 2009. This remains true when we statistically isolate the frustrated PNL voters. Despite the bitter two-sided conflict of the Liberals with both Democrats and Social Democrats during the initial Basescu presidency, there are no grounds to conclude that Liberal voters systematically stayed at home when the second-round choice in 2009 remained candidates from those other two parties.

Comparative Party Percentages

From a quick look at the raw scores (Table 2-3), there appears to be considerable flux in party success across the Basescu era. The Social Democratic vote percentage was nearly one-quarter lower in the first presidential round in 2009 compared to 2004. The major parties of the right, the Democrats and Liberals, together garnered more than 50 percent of the vote in the first presidential round in 2009 and in the parliamentary elections in 2008, compared to approximately one-third when they ran in Alliance in first presidential round in 2004. These changes prompted an enormous amount of commentary in the popular press, leadership struggles within the parties, and political controversy across them.

For example, President Basescu pushed strongly for snap elections immediately following his electoral victory in December 2004, on the assumption that his Truth-and-Justice Alliance would dramatically be able to increase its parliamentary representation, enabling it to rule without unwelcome coalition partners. He similarly pushed for snap elections approximately a year later in part because his Democratic Party had shown increased popularity relative to the allied National Liberal Party and thus could receive a more favorable apportionment of seats in parliament and ministries in the government.

It is therefore remarkable to discover high correlations in the county-level party vote across elections. The question is, examining the vote percentage of each major party, whether the degree of variance for County- X_i in Election- Y_1 ,

Table 2-3: Effective Partisan Vote Percentages
(Party Vote/Total Valid Votes)

Date	Office	PSD	PD-L	PNL	UDMR	PRM
2004 Nov.	President, 1st Round	40.94%	33.92*%	5.10%	12.57%	
2004 Nov.	Parliament, Deputies	36.61	31.33*	6.17	12.92	
2004 Nov.	Parliament, Senate	37.13	31.77*	6.23	13.63	
2004 Dec.	President, 2nd Round	48.77	51.23*	--	--	
2007 Nov.	European Parliament	23.12	28.82	13.45	5.52	4.15
2008 Nov.	Parliament, Deputies	33.10	32.36	18.57	6.17	3.15
2008 Nov.	Parliament, Senate	34.16	33.57	18.74	6.39	3.57
2009 June	European Parliament	31.08	29.71	14.52	8.92	8.66
2009 Nov.	President, 1st Round	31.15	32.45	20.02	3.84	5.56
2009 Dec.	President, 2nd Round	49.67	50.33	--	--	--

Source: Biroul Electoral Central

Notes: *In 2004, the Democratic and National Liberal Parties ran together as the Truth-and-Justice Alliance. The Social Democratic Party regularly has run in alliance with the small Humanist/Conservative Party.

above or below the aggregate mean, is matched by a similar degree of variance in Election- Y_2 . The answer is strongly affirmative. For ease of presentation, Table 2-4 compares party vote percentages for multi-candidate elections to the same office. Support for the Hungarian Union consistently comes from a small number of counties, mostly in Transylvania, where the Hungarian minority is concentrated. The observed cross-election correlations are predictably extremely high, all above 0.95. Yet there are almost equally high cross-election correlations for the Social Democratic Party, particularly when we compare across high-salience elections (first-round presidential vote, $r = 0.9019$) and across low-

salience elections (European Parliament vote, $r = 0.9186$). The correlation coefficients for Romanian parliament are still strong but somewhat lower, stemming from the fact that the 2004 elections were high-salience and the 2008 elections were low-salience because the latter was conducted separate from the presidential contest. Moreover, we find virtually the same pattern for the major parties of the right, when after 2007 we sum by county the vote for the Democratic and Liberal parties and correlate it to the vote for the defunct Truth-and-Justice Alliance. Again there is striking stability (first-round presidential vote, $r=0.8449$; European Parliament vote, $r=0.8757$), with strong but somewhat lower correlations for Romanian Parliament because of the change in voter salience. As with the previous analysis of turnout, cross-election differences in county-level vote patterns are relatively small, and those that exist apparently are not a function of longitudinal change over time, but instead of the type of election contested.

Table 2-4: Bi-Variate Correlations for Party Percentages
(Party Vote/Valid Voters, County-Level Data)

<u>Multi-Candidate Election</u>	<u>Pearson's r</u>
Social Democratic Party	
2004 President First-Round—2009 President First-Round	0.9019
2004 Parliament—2008 Parliament (Deputies/Senate)	0.7095 / 0.7061
2007 European Parliament—2009 European Parliament	0.9186
Democratic Party and Liberal Party	
2004 President First-Round—2009 President First-Round	0.8449
2004 Parliament—2008 Parliament (Deputies/Senate)	0.7078 / 0.6961
2007 European Parliament—2009 European Parliament	0.8757
Hungarian Union	
2004 President First-Round—2009 President First-Round	0.9959
2004 Parliament—2008 Parliament (Deputies/Senate)	0.9970 / 0.9971
2007 European Parliament—2009 European Parliament	0.9575

Source: Biroul Electoral Central

This interpretation is reinforced by an examination of party vote by region of the country. For multi-candidate elections throughout the Basescu era, the Social Democratic Party showed consistent support in the south (Oltenia and Muntenia) and the east (Moldova). The Democratic Party showed consistent support in Bucharest and the cities of historic Transylvania (Brasov, Cluj, Sibiu, and Timisoara). The Hungarian Union had its greatest support in two minority-

dominated counties of the center, Covasna and Harghita, and along the border with Hungary. Regarding core sociological variables, assessed by ecological regression, the Social Democratic Party across the Basescu era did better in counties with a higher percentage of rural inhabitants, especially in high-salience elections; similarly, the party did better in counties with a higher percentage of inhabitants 60 years old and greater, again in high-salience elections. There is no evidence that these relationships declined over years 2004-2009.

Conceptually, when interpreting election results, it is important to distinguish party vote outcomes from structural vote patterns. By analogy, it is important to distinguish shifts in the observed water level from shifts in the underlying geography of the oceans and coastline. Each needs to be analyzed separately. The former is quickly apparent but the latter is more fundamental (Marian and King 2010). Our argument is that the structure of Romanian elections has been distinctly stable over the eleven national elections of the initial Basescu presidency. The preferences of individual voters might change, election to election, but the core topography of electoral patterns has been quite constant, despite the turmoil of everyday political news.

The main visible change in party electoral fortunes over this period was the decline of the Social Democratic Party from plurality position in the 2004 multi-party elections to approximately parity with the Democratic Party in the 2008 and 2009 multi-party elections. This has produced repeated political shakeups within the PSD. Importantly, however, the shift occurred quite soon after the Basescu second-round presidential victory in December 2004, has been quite stable since, and really entailed the loss of only a few percentage points in the aggregate vote. A second visible change in party percentages resulted from the bitter split within the right-center alliance. Again, despite the political turbulence, electoral patterns soon stabilized, with the PNL garnering about one-fifth of the total vote and the PD-L garnering about one-third. Moreover, there does not appear to be effective migration across the major parties of the right. Correlation matrices for the period after the split reveal consistent and statistically significant relationships: Romanian counties with PNL vote percentages above (or below) the mean score in one multi-candidate election systematically tend to have similar variance in the PNL vote relative to the mean in other multi-candidate elections. The same holds true for PD-L vote percentages.

Even more significant, from the perspective of electoral patterns, are the two potential changes in party fortunes that did not occur. First, despite legitimate and continuing concerns (Sum 2010; Shafir 2008), the minor nationalist and/or populist parties never successfully challenged for political power during the Basescu era. There was potential for the rise of a party of the-people-against-the-politicians, mobilizing citizen discontent against the everyday squabbles in Bucharest. There was potential for the rise of a party glorifying allegedly historic Romanian autonomy, blaming the dislocations of transition and then of economic recession upon the westward subservience of all three major parties.

Yet neither the Greater Romanian Party of Vadim Tudor, nor the New Generation Party of "Gigi" Becali during this period received more than a small percentage of the vote. Neither, in fact, achieved the electoral threshold for parliamentary representation in 2008.

The second potential major change that did not occur concerns escape from electoral stalemate among the three major parties. Upon the right-alliance split, none of the major parties could win a majority in a multi-candidate contest. Some combination of two-against-one was necessary for governance. The vote allocation among the PD-L, PNL and PSD did shift at the margin from election to election, but the fundamental conditions of stalemate remained inviolable during the period under study. Our analysis shows that the pattern is deeply rooted in underlying vote structures. It has proved relatively enduring, despite the strategic efforts of the parties to undermine and alter it. The persistence of three-party electoral deadlock, grounded in identifiable Romanian vote structures, best symbolizes this paper's central theme—fundamental electoral stability within commotion. Resolution would have required dramatic party reconfiguration or realignment. There are no indications in the data signaling any such core partisan restructuring during the initial Basescu presidency. It is a matter critical to his second term in office.

The Basescu Victories

In both 2004 and 2009, the odds were against Traian Basescu winning the presidency. In 2004, he became the lead candidate for the Truth-and-Justice Alliance only after Theodor Stolojan withdrew two months before the election citing poor health. The Social Democratic Party clearly anticipated continuation in power despite charges of corruption, a weak economic record, and hesitant compliance with the standards established for EU accession. After the first round of voting, Adrian Nastase of the PSD needed barely more than one-third of the minor-party vote to secure victory in the runoff. Negotiations were proceeding with the Hungarian Union in order to give the party majority support in Parliament and the ability to form a government. Yet the presidential campaign revealed Nastase to be stiff and distant compared to Basescu, who presented himself as a man of the common people. Moreover, it was Basescu who was best identified with the demand for change. As he remarked bluntly during a televised presidential debate, it was a shame that the country was forced to choose between two former communists, that no politician untainted by the past had arisen to prominence in the fifteen years since revolution (Stan 2005; Downs and Miller 2006).

To determine the basis of the Basescu victory in 2004, we rely upon an integrated system of weighted multivariate ecological regressions based on county vote percentages by candidate. Logically, the Basescu vote in the second-round runoff (B_2) is a function (x_1) of the non-Basescu vote in the first round (Q_1), plus a function (x_2) of the Basescu vote in the first round ($1 - Q_1$):

$$B_2 = x_1(Q_1) + x_2(1 - Q_1)$$

Regrouping the terms yields:

$$B_2 = x_2 + (x_1 - x_2)(Q_1)$$

which is the standard form for a linear regression (Goodman 1953; 1959). The intercept coefficient indicates the allocation from the first-round Basescu vote, and the slope coefficient minus the intercept indicates the allocation from the first-round non-Basescu vote. Multiple regression estimation is used to segment the non-Basescu vote (Q_1) into component parts (Q_{1a} , Q_{1b} , Q_{1c} ,...), indicating the vote share from each separate first-round candidate. Weighting each regression by total votes cast reduces the distortion caused by different sized electoral constituencies. The same technique is then employed to estimate the second round Nastase (N_2) vote, as a function (z_1) of the non-Nastase vote (R_1) in the first round plus a function (z_2) of the Nastase vote ($1 - R_1$) in the first round.

Viewed horizontally within each equation, the coefficients should be statistically significant and should account for nearly 100 percent of the observed variance. Viewed vertically across the set of equations, the results should reflect virtually a 100 percent allocation of round-one vote percentages for all candidates into round-two percentages for the two remaining candidates.

Our goal is to estimate the proportion of 2004 first-round voters for Basescu, for Nastase, for Bela (Hungarian), and for Other who voted in the 2004 second-round for either Basescu or Nastase. The multivariate ecological technique is inherently crude, for it relies upon vote percentages by county in order to assess the patterned behavior of individuals within those counties. Each individual voter in the first round of the 2004 presidential vote had to decide which candidate to vote for in the second round; our estimation technique, however, has available only the observed sum of those individual voter choices as a share of the total county vote. Conclusions in this specific case are further complicated by the fact that some 2004 first-round individual voters stayed home in the second-round, while others who had failed to turn out in the first-round in fact voted in the second round. Even more problematic is the fact that turnout was more than 4 percent lower in the 2004 second round than the first round. Nevertheless, the empirical results from the ecological estimations are so strikingly apparent that, despite valid hesitations, some conclusions leap from Table 2-5.

A first-round vote for Basescu in 2004 predicts a slightly greater-than-one Basescu vote in the second-round; the same holds true for Nastase. This is mostly like a consequence of the changes in turnout. (A separate estimate reveals that a Basescu or Nastase first-round vote predicts a slightly higher second-round turnout, whereas a vote for one of the eliminated candidates predicts a lower turnout.) The second-round turnout gain for both candidates, given the calculated range of error, is approximately the same.

Far more important is the contrast in votes gained from the candidates eliminated for the second round. A vote for Bela (UDMR) in the first round predicts a second-round vote for Nastase by nearly 3-to-1. A vote for the other minor

parties predicts a second-round vote for Basescu by approximately 4-to-1. Only about 5 percent of the first-round electorate had voted for Bela as opposed to 20 percent for the other minor parties. The implication, if our estimates are accurate, is that the overall allocation from eliminated candidates strongly advantaged Basescu, by more than one million votes. This formed the basis for his narrow second-round victory. We gain confidence in the findings as generally they match those from reported exit polls (Razvan 2004).

Table 2-5: Ecological Vote Estimations—2004

Basescu ₂	=	1.082 - 1.184Nas ₁ - 0.810Bela ₁ - 0.221Oth ₁	R ² = .957
Nastase ₂	=	1.102 - 1.184Bas ₁ - 0.374Bela ₁ - 0.963Oth ₁	R ² = .957
		PD/PNL PSD UDMR	
		<u>Basescu₁</u> <u>Nastase₁</u> <u>Bela₁</u> <u>Other₁</u>	
Basescu—2nd Round		1.082 -0.102 0.272 0.861	
Nastase—2nd Round		-0.082 1.102 0.728 0.139	

It is possible, to some degree, to distinguish among the candidates in the Other category, to isolate the probable second-round effects from each. The easiest estimation concerns the voters for Corneliu Vadim Tudor of the nationalist, Greater Romania Party. With more than 12.5 percent of the total first-round vote, he can be introduced separately into the multivariate ecological system of equations and the resulting parameters remain statistically significant. A first-round vote for Vadim predicts a second-round vote for Basescu at 85 percent, as opposed to a second-round vote for Nastase at 15 percent. No other eliminated candidate received as much as 2 percent of the total first-round vote, deterring independent assessment; yet for estimation purposes their vote can be added to the Vadim percentage to determine whether the estimated coefficients rise or fall accordingly. For example, the second-round prediction from a first-round vote to (Vadim + Becali) is 83 percent to Basescu, suggesting that Becali voters (1.8 percent of the aggregate) supported Basescu somewhat less than those from Vadim alone. More interesting are the allocations from Gheorghe Ciuhandu (1.9 percent) of the Christian Democratic Party, which had led the 1996 coalition that defeated the PSD, and from Petre Roman (1.3 percent), who once had been instrumental in founding the Democratic Party. We should expect their voters strongly to have supported Basescu in the second round, and this is confirmed by the data. The second-round prediction from a first-round vote to (Vadim + Ciuhandu + Roman) is more than 90 percent to Basescu, somewhat higher than from Vadim alone. In fact, when we subtract these three candidates from the Other category, the second-round allocation from the Remainder-Other category slightly favors Nastase over Basescu.

There is an intriguing implication from this analysis of the vote allocation from first-round eliminated candidates. When we transform estimated vote percentages into calculated individual votes cast, Basescu's second-round relative advantage from Ciuhandu and Roman voters more than compensates for his relative disadvantage from Hungarian Union voters. The votes from all other eliminated candidates are minimally relevant—except for those from Vadim Tudor that overwhelmingly benefited Basescu. This suggests, albeit tentatively, that nationalist voters from the PRM were essential and decisive to Basescu's victory in December 2004. Without them, Basescu would not have been able to overcome the lead Nastase had established after the first round of voting. It is an ironic conclusion, for it was Vadim Tudor and the PRM that later were most vehement in condemnation of Basescu's performance in office, including leading the chorus of screams and insults in Parliament greeting his presentation of the "Tismaneanu Report" describing and condemning the crimes and criminals of the former communist era (Tanasoiu 2007).

Regarding the 2009 presidential election, Basescu received a slightly lower first-round vote percentage than he had in 2004 although this time he narrowly won the plurality leader among the candidates. Yet, he could no longer count upon support (unlike 2004) from the National Liberal Party, the opposition Social Democrats felt resurgent, and his personal popularity had fallen considerably since the failed 2007 impeachment referendum. Moreover, times of severe economic recession usually forebode disaster to incumbents, who are blamed for rising unemployment and declining real incomes. During the campaign, Basescu's attacks on media moguls and the corrupt political elite now sounded somewhat stale and overused, as did his call for constitutional reform as a panacea to cure Romania's political ills. The most sensational item in the campaign was a film, given prominence by opposition television stations, of Basescu allegedly slapping a 7-year-old boy, although the alleged incident occurred five years before and the film was most probably doctored.

To explore the basis of Basescu's 2009 victory, we again utilize a system of weighted multivariate ecological regressions, based on county vote percentages by candidate. From the estimates, interpreted broadly, it appears that the first-round vote predicts the second-round vote more strongly in 2009 for Basescu than for Geoana. Of the eliminated candidates, Basescu garnered about a quarter of the votes from Antonescu (PNL), about half of those from Kelemen (UDMR), and about 60 percent from other minor party candidates. Within the category of "Other," the first round Vadim Tudor vote (now only 5.6 percent of the aggregate) predicts heavily against Basescu unlike in 2004, while the remainder of the category (7.0 percent of the aggregate) predicts toward Basescu. Confidence in the results is increased, again, as they are generally consistent with those from exit polls taken on the day of the election (INSOMAR 2009).

Analysis of the findings requires two separate comparisons. First, comparing the 2004 estimates to those for 2009, there are apparent changes in the sec-

ond-round allocation of votes from eliminated candidates. The UDMR vote shifts from overwhelmingly pro-PSD to approximately equal between the parties. In fact, the three counties where Basescu gained the most in 2009 second-round compared to 2004 were Harghita (71.2 percent Kelemen first-round vote), Satu Mare (24.2 percent Kelemen), and Covasna (52.8 percent Kelemen). This occurred despite the fact that Kelemen endorsed Geoana in the runoff. By contrast, the combined Other vote shifts from overwhelmingly pro-Basescu to minimally pro-Basescu. These had significant effects. Basescu won the 2009 runoff over Geoana by only 70,048 votes out of nearly 10.5 million cast. Had the allocation percentage from UDMR voters remained in 2009 as it was in 2004, everything else held equal, Basescu most likely would have lost, albeit even more narrowly. On the other hand, had the allocation percentage from Other voters remained in 2009 as it was in 2004, Basescu would have won with a slightly greater total. Calculations show that these two changes approximately cancel each other out.

Table 2-6: Ecological Vote Estimations—2009

$$\text{Basescu}_2 = 1.123 - 1.133\text{Geo}_1 - 0.882\text{Ant}_1 - 0.628\text{Kel}_1 - 0.532\text{Oth}_1 \quad R^2 = .958$$

$$\text{Geoana}_2 = 1.010 - 1.133\text{Bas}_1 - 0.251\text{Ant}_1 - 0.505\text{Kel}_1 - 0.601\text{Oth}_1 \quad R^2 = .958$$

	PD-L Basescu ₁	PSD Geoana ₁	PNL Antonescu ₁	UDMR Kelemen ₁	Other ₁
Basescu—2nd Round	1.123	-0.010	0.241	0.495	0.591
Geoana—2nd Round	-0.123	1.010	0.759	0.505	0.409

It is by comparing the 2009 first and second round vote patterns that we find the basis of the Basescu re-election victory. First, the leadership of the National Liberal Party refused in the runoff round to endorse their former partner in the Truth-and-Justice Alliance and instead formally supported Geoana, entailing a left-right alliance against the center. Given the 20 percent PNL vote in the first round, the final election outcome largely depended on the party's ability to direct its voters toward the PSD. The PNL was relatively successful in this effort, but not sufficiently successful. Calculating counter-factually, just a 2.5 percent greater allocation of PNL votes to Geoana rather Basescu would have resulted in a different candidate winning. Second, turnout in the 2009 second round was 750,000 votes greater than in the first round. Ecological estimation incorporating allocations from eligible non-voters confirms that Basescu did far better in garnering support from those who neglected to turn out in the first round. Had the allocation from first-round non-voters been equal, Geoana most likely would have won. Finally, it is useful to distinguish the votes cast within Romania from those cast by the Diaspora abroad. Basescu received nearly 79 percent of the

146,876 votes in the Diaspora. Subtracting counterfactually these from the total, Geoana would have won the election by .0014 of total votes cast. The conclusion is that Basescu triumphed by holding on to his supporters and barely escaping critical losses from opponents, by gaining from first-round non-voters, and by winning considerable endorsement from Romanians abroad. It was a limping victory, hardly the grounds on which to claim mandate for a second term.

Discussion

The overall findings from this study using, albeit with caution, county-level data for the set of national elections during the first Basescu presidency indicate: (1) that turnout patterns were not observably variable over time, but responded instead to the type of office contested; (2) that party preference patterns were not observably variable over time, but were remarkably consistent once we control for the type of office contested; (3) that three-party stalemate appears intrinsic to observable vote patterns, apparently quite consistent amidst the mayhem of party contestation; and (4) that the Basescu second-round victory in 2004 was based on nationalist support that soon deserted him; in 2009 it was based on a somewhat ad hoc combination of voters and should not be interpreted as an auger of core electoral transformation.

Our claim is that relative electoral stability persisted during the Basescu period despite conditions of extreme political turmoil. Individual voters might have shifted in engagement and preferences, but the net effect has been minimal upon aggregate vote patterns. This might be thought surprising. Consistently in the news were stories of personal scandals, partisan accusations, and institutional conflicts. A plausible and common interpretation is that high political turmoil within a society should cause political disaffection and electoral instability. To the contrary, we found no evidence supporting this position. Noise in the political atmosphere did not necessarily result in noise on the ground. Quite possibly, the institutionalization of the major parties at the local level has increased. Quite possibly, voters have become immune to the everyday chaos of events.

In fact, we speculate, the causal signs might well be reversed. In our view, stability on the ground has led in contemporary Romanian politics to ever-greater noise in the atmosphere, which in turn has helped reinforce stability on the ground. The political logic is plausible. Parties facing entrenched electoral stalemate strategically should seek dramatic revelations in the effort to shake voters from their comfortable partisan predispositions. The usual repertoire of campaign promises and constituency service largely had proved ineffective for inducing decisive shifts. Partisan warfare among elite political actors intensified as the competition for political advantage was played repeatedly without resolution. It is almost natural, under such conditions, for each established faction to vilify rival established factions, blamed them for using entrenched positions to derail national progress and for using existing prerogatives to reward supporters and persecute opponents. Each thinks it necessary to inform the public of the

danger; each believes the strategy valuable for convincing the public to sever former electoral ties and to shift allegiance decisively in its direction. Rhetoric escalates along with partisan intransigence. Personal animosities explode as a consequence of political frustration.

Yet those critical voters least attached to party and most susceptible to shifting voting allegiance ordinarily tend to be more audience than activist. As consumers of the daily news, they are inundated from all sides by the regular eruption of scandalous attacks and passionate condemnations. After a while, it is not even entertainment. These voters become less attentive to the headlines and less influenced by the partisan messages delivered. They might become distressed by the tenor of Romanian politics, but they are hardly influenced by it. The result is reinforcement in, rather than deflection from, any prior voting predisposition, especially if shared by others with similar social background and/or participating in similar social networks. Ironically, the deeper the structural political stalemate, the more vicious the partisan squabbles; the more vicious the partisan squabbles, the more that critical voters will be unaffected by them; the more that critical voters are unaffected, the more the parties have incentive to further intensify their squabbles in the attempt to break the stalemate.

We have no present data with which to test this conjecture. While congruent with our main findings, it remains a hypothesis for future research. If true, however, the implication is that stability within commotion could well be a comparatively long-term situation for Romania, affecting the second Basescu presidency and quite possibly beyond.

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