Keeping the Doors Closed:  
Leadership Selection in Post-Communist Romania

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Paper prepared for the 25th Annual Conference of the Italian Society of Political Science  
Palermo, September 8-10, 2011  
Un equilibrio ancora in costruzione”

Abstract:  
Our paper is the first systematic exploration of the leadership selection process in the Romanian party system. We use process-tracing and qualitative tools, employing data from party statutes and documents of the national conventions. We focus on the parliamentary political parties throughout the entire post-communism period. The analysis shows that nothing has changed at the level of centralization of decision and inclusiveness with the members’ involvement remaining marginal in all parties. The competitiveness of the internal elections presents a more diverse and dynamic picture. We propose a novel typology for cross-cases comparisons that illustrates the association between informal decentralization and increased competitiveness. Second, we advance explanations for the persistence of the ‘exclusiveness’ status quo, that take into account intra-organizational, institutional and exogenous factors.
Introduction

The fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) coincided with the (re)appearance of multi-party systems where independent actors had the chance to form elected governments. As first post-communist institutional actors, the political parties grew on the crude soil of no prior competition (Kitschelt 1992; Mair 1997), lack of representation, and any democratic experience for half of century (Lewis 1996). Additionally, parties were confronted with adversarial popular attitudes, triggered by the equivalence in people’s minds between ‘party’ and the communist state (Szczerbiak 2001; Millard 2004; Kopecky 2007). These structural settings were initially complemented by two instrumental and procedural traits: the dominant control of the parliamentary party over leadership politics and the limited recruitment and involvement of party members (Lewis 2000; Mair and van Biezen 2001; Kopecky 2001; van Biezen 2003; Weldon 2006). However, in most post-communist countries the status quo was partially changed by allowing citizens to participate more in the life of the parties. This happened either through the gradual prevalence of certain permeable organizational models such as in Bulgaria (Spirova 2005; 2007), or through the appearance of new parties, more open to grassroots involvement such as ‘Politics can be different’ - LMP in Hungary (Batory 2010).

In stark contrast with these developments, the Romanian parties display an uninterrupted oligarchic inertia. For two decades, there is little if any change with respect to the decision making process within political parties. Despite the increasing discontent of citizens with their elected leaders, constant low levels of party membership, and continuous success of anti-democratic forces, the political parties continue to have highly centralized leadership selection and removal mechanisms with reduced members’ involvement. Moreover, while all the parliamentary parties have suffered at one moment or another in time major electoral defeats, they nevertheless resisted temptation to change significantly their organizations. The empirical puzzle resulting from this situation coincides with the research question driving our paper: what causes the lack of reforms with respect to the leadership selection in the Romanian political parties?

In answering this question, we use process-tracing and qualitative tools, employing data from party statutes and documents of the national congresses. We focus on the parliamentary political parties throughout the entire post-communism period.
The analysis has two major goals: first, it describes the differences between political parties in terms of recruitment, ending up with a useful typology for cross-cases comparisons; second, we seek explanations for the persistence of the status quo at three interconnected levels – party organization, party system, and exogenous factors. Our results indicate that the absence of individual and collective challenges within the party, the structure of incentives for candidates, the charisma of the party presidents, the lack of real threats in the political arena (e.g. low number of entries and exits, the relatively low level of electoral volatility), and the components of the electoral system represent valid explanations for ignoring the intra-party reforms and for the dominance of the party in central office.

The CEE party systems are under-investigated from the perspective of the leadership selection. With the exception of a few analyses focusing on the system (Cular 2009; Rybar and Deegan Krause 2009) or on specific parties (Linek and Lyons 2009), there are no available descriptions of the norms and procedures of party leadership selection. The topic is marginally approached when discussing various components of party organizations. In this respect, Romania is not an outlier among the CEE countries. It lacks a systematic account of the selection procedures both in longitudinal and cross-party perspectives. The few studies dealing with the party organization (Pop-Eleches 1999; 2008; Stefan 2004; Preda and Soare 2008; Gherghina 2009; Sum 2010; Matichescu and Protsyk 2011) focused more on the issues related to candidate selection and leadership control over party resources instead of exploring how those leaders gained access to power and how this process evolved over time. This paper fills this void with an analysis covering the most relevant political parties in Romania throughout the entire the post-communist period.

The first section includes the theoretical underpinning of our endeavor. The research design introduces the main indicators used in the paper briefly describes the five main Romanian parties under scrutiny. The third section analyzes the formal party regulations concerning leadership selection. Next, we present all the cases of leadership renewal or re-election, which are then analyzed with respect to inclusiveness and competitiveness. The last two sections ground the findings in the wider context of Romanian party politics pointing to both competing and complementary explanations.
Why Democratize the Leadership Selection?

Intra-party democracy is a broad and often unclear concept (Michels 1919; Wright 1971) that mainly describes a broad range of measures allowing the involvement of members in the internal deliberation of political parties (Scarrow 2005, 1). In empirical terms, the internal democracy of political parties witnessed a gradual longitudinal evolution. The initial studies conducted on party organizations revealed a domination of the elites in reaching decisions and quasi-absence of any democratic mechanism (Ostrogorsky 1906; Michels 1911; Duverger 1954; Mackenzie 1956). Starting with the social changes occurring in the aftermath of World War II and the appearance of the mass party (Duverger 1954), the monopoly of elites in the decision making process gradually diminished and members started enjoying a loud voice. Consequently, the party regulations begun to formalize this growing influence of members (Gallagher et al. 2005) and thus reinforced notable organizational changes towards internal democratization (Bille 2001; Kittilson and Scarrow 2003). On these grounds, members were provided decision power in two major processes of selection – of candidates (Pennings and Hazan 2001; Rahat and Hazan 2001) and leaders (LeDuc 2001; Denham and O’Hara 2007) – and policy settings (Scarrow 2005). Such developments contradict earlier assessments according to which democracy exists only between parties (Schattschneider 1942; Dahl 1956).

The consequences of members’ involvement are ambivalent. On the one hand, the use of internally democratic procedures bears two connected advantages: they allow the selection of capable and appealing candidates/leaders and strengthen the democratic culture of the society (Scarrow 1999; 2005). The latter reflects the impact on the electoral environment, being consistent with previous studies emphasizing the role of parties’ strategies and internal organization on individual involvement in political life (Epstein 1967; Powell 1982). On the other hand, emerging tensions between members and leaders can represent important obstacles to the modernization of the party organization (Panebianco 1988) or to the homogeneity of party manifestos, i.e. radical vs. moderate (May 1973). Moving beyond these advantages and risks, the selection of leaders is of relevant importance for the life of the party. Whereas the candidate selection involves the choices political parties present to voters, the stake for the party leadership is considerably higher as whoever holds the control over the selection procedures controls the party (Schattschneider 1942). Such a claim is even more
relevant in the context of accumulated influence gained by the contemporary party leaders in the legislature, electorate, and own organizations (Bean and Mughan 1989; Wattenberg 1991; Mughan 1993; 2000; Farrell 1996; Davis 1998; Scarrow et al. 2000). Such central positions are captured by concepts such as personalization (Kaase 1994) or “presidentialization” (Poguntke and Webb 2005) of party politics.

The democratization of party leadership selection was prescribed as a cure for many contemporary democratic diseases. Its action was explored at three interconnected levels. First, it was expected “to reduce the parties’ elitist and oligarchic tendencies by attracting more leadership aspirants and producing more competitive contests” (Kenig 2008: 240). Second, this move was also thought to empower the parties’ rank and file and generally make party membership more attractive (Harmel and Janda 1994), thus creating opportunities for new recruitment (LeDuc 2001, 325). Such a measure can represent an effective alternative to the ideological and material incentives that gradually lost their ability to retain and attract members (Ignazi et al. 2005). Third, more intra-party democracy and larger public exposure of it are perceived as one of the ways to fight democratic disengagement (Schmitter and Trechsel 2004).

From an instrumental perspective, the extension of party selectorates was frequently associated with two mechanisms. On the one hand, it aimed to improve the image of the party in the eyes of the electorate and thus represented an electoral asset. The democratization of leadership selection often occurred as an adaptation function of the party organization after electoral defeats (Mair et al. 2004). The latter convinced party elites of the need for renewal (Deschouwer 1992; LeDuc 2001) and provided additional arguments to those in favor of more grassroots participation (Cross and Blais 2011). In this respect, the reform of leadership selection was introduced to the public as a legitimizing process in the attempt to gain voters’ confidence especially by the opposition parties (Cross 1996). On the other hand, newly emerged parties seemed more likely to adopt inclusive leadership selection methods both in order to boost their brand image in the voters’ eyes and because they lacked established party elites that would veto the move in order to conserve their influence (Gauja 2009; Cross and Blais 2011). Empirically, it seems that this hypothesis works only for the new parties on the left (i.e., Green parties) which tend to have low boundary control and a broad organizational reach (Bolleyer 2008). At the same time, elites can control the leadership selection by democratizing the entire process. Through the participation of individual
members, elites diminish the power of activists and middle-rank members (Katz and Mair 1995).

At a glance, CEE exhibits the general features that would, in principle, encourage parties to promote a democratic leadership selection. One reason is represented by the much lower levels of party membership compared to Western European countries (Lewis 1996; Bielasiak 1997; Kopecký 2001; Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen 2003; Spirova 2007). Low affiliation levels are mainly due to two related factors: the membership recruitment strategies and the refuse of citizens to enroll in political parties (Szczerbiak 2006, 115). A second argument is related to the ideological confusion and weak programmatic identities among the competitors in most post-communist elections (Kitschelt 1995; Millard 2004; Grzymala-Busse 2006) leading to a situation in which voters could hardly be expected to develop identification and attach loyalty towards parties (Mair 1997). Moreover, previous research indicates high levels of electoral volatility throughout the entire post-communist period both in absolute values and relative to established democracies (Rose et al. 1998; Toka 1998; Krupavicius 1999; Lewis 2000; Birch 2001, Sikk 2005; Tavits 2005).

However, three characteristics of political parties indicate that the existence of inclusive leadership selection is quite unlikely in CEE. First, in the absence of strong social cleavages (Rivera 1996), political parties did not have societal roots, but rather institutional (van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004) anchors, and they were formed following a top-down approach in which elites played the crucial role. Second, partially as a consequence of the initial origins and process of formation, the centralization of candidate selection is quite high across the region (Gherghina 2009a). There are isolated instances in which political parties provide high autonomy to the territorial organizations in deciding the candidates for the national legislative elections. Only a handful of parties are formally inclusive, i.e. have drafted regulations for primaries, that in reality only half of these actors organize. Third, the extensive relationships developed by the CEE parties with the state (Kopecký 2006; van Biezen and Kopecký 2007; Kopecký 2008) and their clientelistic practices make difficult the democratization of leadership selection. The particular case of the Romanian political parties illustrates that wealth plays a crucial role in the candidate selection and list composition for both the national (Stefan 2004; Protsyk and Matichescu 2011) and European (Gherghina and Chiru 2010) elections. In this respect, the elites’ interest to hold control of the selection
procedures is not limited to candidates but covers also their own positions. This rationale indicates little if any reasons to increase the inclusiveness and/or decentralization in deciding about the leadership of the party.

This combination of contextual factors generates a puzzling situation in which benefits and risks of leadership selection intermingle. Our case study explores the situation of leadership selection in the Romanian party system departing from three dimensions emphasized by previous studies: inclusiveness, centralization (Rahat and Hazan 2001; 2010; LeDuc 2001), and competitiveness of internal elections (Engstrom and Engstrom 2008; Kenig 2008). Whereas previous studies are usually concerned with the type of reforms and the rationales behind them (Lisi 2009), there are extremely few attempts to explain the lack of reforms (Cross and Blais 2011). The examination of formal and informal leadership selection on these three analytic dimensions provides relevant information about the reform and its obstacles.

**Research Design**

The five political parties investigated in this paper simultaneously fulfill three criteria that make them relevant actors on the domestic political scene. First, we avoided episodic political parties by selecting those competitors present in at least half of the post-communist Romanian legislatures. Second, we accounted for the appealing parties to the electorate by selecting parties competing in at least two elections on individual basis (e.g. without an electoral alliance or coalition). Finally, we targeted parties with coalition and blackmail potential (in the sense imagined by Sartori 1976). The resulting pool includes the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). Brief profiles of these parties are sketched in the following sub-section.

Although our outcome of interest is a negative one, i.e. non-reform of leadership selection, one should not straightforwardly reject the relevance of the five cases analyzed here for the understanding of democratization processes. Thus, if we apply the ‘possibility principle’ (Mahoney and Goertz 2004) one can reject only one case, that of PRM – as being totally irrelevant, given its high centralization, absolute lack of competitiveness in leadership selection, and gradual marginalization on the political
scene. All the other four parties could have engaged in reform for distinct reasons that will be explained further on.

Our attention focuses on the inclusiveness and centralization as key components of the leadership selection process (LeDuc 2001; Rahat and Hazan 2001; 2010). More precisely, we are interested in the size of the selectorate: how many sections of the party or members are allowed to participate in the selection process? The centralization refers to the level of autonomy enjoyed by party branches and their influence over effective decisions about the leadership contests. Moreover, we account for the competitiveness of party leadership elections - assessed through the net difference of vote shares received by the first two competitors. Compared to existing measures, it has two advantages. First, unlike the Effective Number of Candidates, an extension of Laakso and Taagepera’s ENP (1979), our calculation is not sensitive to the number of challengers. The empirical features of the Romanian parties indicate that such a solution is useful as there are rare instances (e.g. PNL in 2001) when the third candidate receives a perceptible amount of votes. Usually, third and fourth candidates have a symbolic role, receiving the votes of a very small percentage of the internal electorate. Second it does not overestimate the competitiveness of races with many candidates but reduced shares of votes, as Kenig’s index (2008) does. Our choice to emphasize the absolute difference between the winner and the candidate finishing second is motivated by the belief that in judging competitiveness a premium should be put on the measure of how close the race was, and implicitly for such a closed context, on the likelihood for the incumbent to lose (see also Janda et al. 2010, for a similar emphasis – on the seat share of the second largest party for the quality of governance).

We use document analysis and process tracing to map the evolution of the leadership selection processes. Thus our data comprises official documents (mainly party statutes, but also official accounts of conventions) and secondary literature (chronologies, political analyses of leadership change etc.).

*The Romanian Political Parties*

The Social Democrats (PSD) is the largest Romanian party in the post-communist period. It is one of the two successors of the Romanian Communist Party and the direct continuator of the Iliescu-wing of the National Salvation Front (FSN) – the neo-communist umbrella organization that took over the control of the country after
Ceausescu’s breakdown (Pop-Eleches 1999). After the 1991 FSN National Convention, when Petre Roman became president of the Front, the supporters of the country’s President, Ion Iliescu left FSN to form a new party, FDSN (later called PDSR and PSD). The party governed Romania until 1996 and again alone between 2000 and 2004. Their last presence in power happened in a coalition with PDL that lasted only one year (2009). PSD won the most recent three elections with a similar electoral support: around 35%.

The Democratic Liberal Party, PDL (formerly called ‘Democratic Party’ – PD until late 2007) is the other direct successor of the National Salvation Front (FSN). The party was present in all post-communist parliaments and participated in government in three occasions: in 1996-2000 together with the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), in 2005-2007 in coalition with PNL and UDMR, and since the 2008 elections, first together with PSD and after 2009 in a coalition with UDMR. The party shifted its ideological orientation in 2005: following a decade-long affiliation with the Socialist International it has become a member of the European People’s Party.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) is the only historical party revived in 1990 that managed to achieve the status of major political force, and survive as a parliamentary party for two decades. PNL governed as part of the CDR in 1996-2000, and then again in 2004-2008 (with PDL and UDMR until 2007, and then as a minority government with UMR).

The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) is – as indicated by its name – an ethnic party which reunites different ideological visions and organizations of the Hungarian minority. Despite its declared pluralism, UDMR is affiliated with the EPP. The Alliance has been present in all the post-communist parliaments and in all governments formed since 1996.¹

The Greater Romania Party (PRM) was founded by two of the chief sycophants of the Ceauşescu regime, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Eugen Barbu and continued its idiosyncratic national-communist doctrine. The party is run with a strong hand by Vadim Tudor since the beginning and reached a peak of popular support at the 2000 elections, when it received the second largest share of votes. However, the charisma of its leader, mainly based on xenophobic and authoritarian rhetoric has slowly faded away

¹ One exception was the year 2009. Also, between 2000 and 2004 UDMR supported the PSD minority government and received in exchange policy concessions and allocation of resources equivalent to a formal presence in power.
and as a consequence in 2008 the party failed for the first time to gain parliamentary representation.

The Regulations of Leadership Selection

This section summarizes the party regulations concerning the selection of leaders as mentioned in their official statutes (the most recent version). At the same time, we reveal the most important modifications brought to these rules during the entire post-communist period. Table 1 includes the key components of the leadership selection procedures and provides an indication of the major similarities and differences between the Romanian parties. In terms of common procedures, all parties rely on territorial delegates (and thus no real variation with respect to inclusiveness) with representation quotas decided by the central leadership (usually on the basis of the branches’ varying degrees of electoral success). One further formal provision observed at all political parties but PRM is the presence of ex-officio delegates. Regarding the differences, some parties such as PSD and PRM keep their regulations broad and include only general guidelines, whereas parties like UDMR and PNL exhibit clearer statutes. The latter refer to the explicit means of leader dismissal or the presentation of explicit criteria for the representation algorithm. UDMR has the most specific regulation among the Romanian parties including details on the mandates for youth members or delegates of corporate organizations. Given its profile as a conglomerate of platforms, the specificity of UDMR provisions is an expected outcome.

Table 1: The Comparison of Leadership Selection Regulations at the Romanian Political Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>PSD</th>
<th>PDL</th>
<th>PNL</th>
<th>UDMR</th>
<th>PRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex officio delegates (central leadership)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial delegates</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central leaders decide on the representation algorithm of delegates</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear procedure for the representation algorithm</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>not applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved mandates for youth members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegates of corporate organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Convention can sack the President</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President elected on list (with a team of leaders)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In PSD, there is a requirement of minimum three years of membership in order for a politician to be able to run for a national party office. The President is elected through

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² Starting with 2010 the president is elected on a list together with his/her leadership team. Previously the statute allowed only for single candidatures for each party office.
secret ballot\(^3\) by the National Convention (Congress) of the Party, which takes place every four years. The participants are delegates elected through secret ballot by the county conventions according to an algorithm of representation established by the party’s National Executive Committee. The algorithm is decided based on “the number of party members, the political activity and the electoral results of each party organization” (art. 48). Two thirds of the delegates with voting right have to be present in order for the National Convention to take place (art. 48). An Extraordinary Convention can be called under certain conditions (art. 49). The president is elected for a four year mandate through a majority run-off formula (art. 53). The previous statute, adopted in May 2005 stipulated only one round of voting, which meant that the candidate who got the plurality of option was automatically declared the winner (art. 77). The PSD Extraordinary Congress held on October 16\(^{th}\) 2010 (more than 4,500 delegates) modified the party statute in the direction of allowing all party members to vote for the president of the party starting with the ordinary Congress scheduled to take place in 2014 (Antena 3 2010). The same Congress announced open primaries for the nomination of the party’s candidate to the country's presidential elections. The norms for the implementation of these reforms are still to be drafted by the General Secretariat of the party.

Since its beginning, the PDL used a list election of its leader, based on a competition of motions (party strategies) and leadership teams that supports each of them. The first politician to sign the winning proposal becomes the new president of the party in a majority runoff contest (art. 79). The next four signers become prim-vice presidents while the fifth is the new secretary general. All the thirty members of the group promoting the motion become members of the National Council of Coordination (art. 79). This leadership selection process takes place in the National Convention, which is supposed to be organized every four years. The center (The National Coordination Council) decides on the number of delegates, which cannot be lower than 1000 (art. 63.3). The delegates at the National Convention are elected by the county organizations, with the exception of “ex officio delegates”, i.e., members of the national leadership of the party (art. 64). The delegates are elected by the polity bureaus of every county branch. The number of delegates each organization is entitled to corresponds to an algorithm of representation, decided by the centre mainly on the basis of electoral

\(^3\) Until the 2005 National Convention all votes were public.
results (art. 65). Currently, a proposal/“motion” can be debated at the National Convention only if its promoters gathered the support of at least ten county organizations (art. 74). In the first decade of the party's existence a motion needed the support of half plus one of the organizations, provision which limited from the start any competition at the National Convention.

The National Congress on PNL, scheduled every four years, is in charge with the selection of the party leader. At the Congress have a right to participate the members of the National Permanent Delegation (NPD) and the delegates elected by the territorial organizations (art. 55), according to the representation algorithm decided by the NPD (art. 57). The latter is established by taking into account the number of party members of each organization (1/4 weigh) and its results at the local, national and European elections (3/4 weigh) (art. 57). Any candidate running for a national party office has to have at least 2 years of membership (art. 87). The Congress can sanction or sack the President at the proposal of the Permanent Delegation (art. 61).

The UDMR's Congress elects the party's president every four years. The leadership of the Union (The Executive Presidium, the Council of the Representatives of the Alliance, ministers and state secretaries/under-secretaries) has the right to participate at the Congress ex officio (UDMR Statute, art. 44). 15% of the delegate mandates are reserved for members of the youth organizations of UDMR (art. 44). The rest of delegates are nominated by territorial and corporate organizations inside the Alliance (art. 44). The president is elected through a majority run-off contest (art. 60) for a four year mandate. In order to be able to run for the office a candidate needs either the support of two organizations represented in the Council of the Representatives of the Alliance or the signatures of 1,000 party members (art. 60). The National Convention can decide to sack the President if requested so by the Alliance's Council of Representatives (art. 45).

The PRM statute does not offer too many details concerning the leadership selection. The only pieces of information are that: the party's president is elected through secret ballot by the National Congress, which is organized every four years; the participants are delegates elected by the county conventions according to an algorithm of representation established by the party's Permanent Bureau (art. 43).
The Selectorates’ Inclusiveness as a Constant

Based on the provisions of the statutes, all Romanian parties choose their leaders at national conventions that include local delegates and the central leadership. In terms of LeDuc’s continuum of leadership selection (2001, 325), the decision is taken at the same layer – the party conventions – involving local and territorial delegates. In all the cases, but PNL and UDMR, the centre has the opportunity to manipulate the number of delegates, given the loose character of the criteria employed to decide the algorithm of representation. The sole exception to the rule of leadership decided at national conventions happened in 2005 when the Plenary of the PRM National Council selected a new president. This organism is more inclusive than the parliamentary caucus but still more exclusive than all the other options in the continuum. To return to the general level - there is very little (if any) variation in the inclusiveness of the leadership selectorates. The only observable differences are not of a qualitative kind, but reflect slight numerical changes in the compositions of the parties’ electoral congresses.

Table 2 illustrates the number of delegates enjoying voting right, that participated at the Romanian parties’ national conventions. Despite the level of missing data (which is a recurrent problem for the first Congresses, but also for those lacking any real stake, as in the case of the PRM), it is still possible to observe a general trend for more inclusiveness. This trend is most visible for PSD and PNL and also for UDMR, although at a more reduced level in the latter case. The largest selectorate was registered without doubt at the 2005 PDL National Convention, which was nothing more than a “coronation”, decided upon in advanced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>PSD</th>
<th>PDL</th>
<th>PNL</th>
<th>UDMR</th>
<th>PRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1137</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>1271</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>3715</td>
<td>1431</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are number of voting delegates

This trend is not related to a proportional, gradual increase in party membership, compared with mid-1990s. As a matter of fact, two of the parties, UDMR and PDL, have suffered important losses in membership in that period, while for PSD and PRM the
initial ascending slope leveled off in the recent years. Figure 1 illustrates the evolutions in party membership rates in Romania. The vertical axis represents the percentage of members out the whole population that had the right to vote at the elections held in those years.

**Figure 1: The Evolution of the Membership Organizations for Romanian Parties (1990-2008)**

The increased size of national conventions reflect a tendency of the parties to capitalize on the more and more amplified media coverage these events produce, especially after the appearance of private channels specialized in news. With these occasions the party leaderships want to transmit a message of strength to the electorate – and they organize the conventions in immense halls (at the former House of the People or in large exhibition complexes such as Romexpo) that, of course, need to be filled with delegates.

**From Coronations to Competition**

In the light of the previous empirical argument according to which inclusiveness is not a variable in the leadership selection of the Romanian parties, this section focuses on their competitiveness and the centralization of decision making within parties. In this respect, we focus on the political contexts of leadership stability and change in each party, ending up with a typology that reflects rigidity in terms of centralization and relative flexibility with respect to the competitiveness.

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4 In the interviews conducted by Gherghina (2009a), PNL officials declared that they were not aware of the party’s membership rates for the 1992-2000 period, since no central national register of members was maintained.

5 On the contrary, in the first post-communist decade, party congresses were much smaller events, and significantly fewer accounts of them appeared in the media.
A Centralized Selection Process

For five electoral cycles the Romanian parties operated under a closed proportional representation electoral system. This institutional setting is believed to favor the centralization of candidate selection (Lundell 2004; Hazan and Voerman 2006) and generally, of decision making within parties (Blais and Massicotte 1996). However, the effect of the systemic institutional framework was mediated by internal party regulations as well as by more contingent events: such as the appearance of asymmetric levels of autonomy enjoyed by certain branches due to their electoral success or overall contribution to the party budget.

For two of the five parties things were rather clear and constant in what concerns the level of organizational autonomy enjoyed by the various branches. First, PRM is certainly the most centralized of all parties. This happens both formally – judging from party regulations (Gherghina 2009a) – and informally, as its central leadership, intervenes frequently in the internal life of the branches, to impose candidates on eligible positions (Chiru 2010), or to change local leaders (Antena3.ro 2008).

At the other end of the centralization continuum, UDMR branches enjoyed from the very beginning of the Alliance a large degree of autonomy (Stefan 2004; Gherghina 2009a; Chiru 2010). This status quo was maintained also through the existence of the mini-Parliament of the Alliance (the Council of Representatives) and the un-interrupted organization of closed primaries for legislative recruitment. Although not as decentralized as the UDMR, PNL has allowed its local organizations to participate more in the decision making compared to the rest of the parties (Gherghina 2009a). This decentralization may be the result of the numerous splits and mergers witnessed by PNL throughout the post-communist period. The increased powers of local and territorial organizations in nominating and selecting candidates partially diminish the shock generated by the numerous organizational changes decided at central level.

Unlike the previous three cases, PSD presents a rather surprising evolution: it transformed from a highly centralized organization dominated by its parliamentary elite in the early 1990s to a much looser structure starting with the third presence in power (2000). This change can be attributed mainly to the preeminence that local bosses have

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6 The 2008 change introduced single member districts but kept at the same time much of the PR logic, as there are two stages of redistribution for those electoral colleges where no candidate received the absolute majority of votes.
gained in the party, mainly based on their electoral and financial domination of entire counties (Chiru 2010). Many of them – labeled ‘local barons’ by media – were elected for several mandates as presidents of county councils and were involved in corruption scandals triggered mainly by their clientelistic networks (România Curată 2008). Their influence in the party thus increased exponentially, especially due to their party financing and vote mobilization capabilities.

Finally, PDL – although recognized for most of its existence as a “party of mayors” – was dominated in terms of decision making by its parliamentary elite during the Roman leadership (Ștefan 2004) and later on by Băsescu and its close collaborators. The lack of alternative power centers in the party is reflected both by the legerity with which its central leadership could impose non-party members as candidates for eligible public positions or even newcomers for party offices, and by the lack of contestation which will make the subject of the next section.

The Evolution of Competitiveness
As the Constitution prohibited the country’s president to be party leader at the same time, the party formed after the split with FSN, which was named firstly, Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN) and then Party of Socialist Democracy in Romania (PDSR) got a front man in the person of the president of the Senate, Oliviu Gherman. After the 1996 defeat at the presidential and parliamentary elections, Iliescu returned to the party and Gherman resigned naturally. The National Conference of the party (January 1997) elected Iliescu as president, with 626 votes pro and 2 against (Stoica 2004, 85). The election of Iliescu for a new mandate of country president in December 2000 opened up the highest position in the party once again. The delegates at the National Convention of the party (held in January 2001) elected unanimously Adrian Năstase, who was Romania’s prime-minister at that time, as the new head of PDSR (Radu 2010). At the Congress held in June 2001, when PDSR united with PDSR to form PSD, Năstase was confirmed as president by unanimity once again. The 2005 National Convention was the first in the party’s history when the leadership was elected through a secret ballot (Institutul Ovidiu Sincai 2005). Four candidates run for the highest office: the former president of Romania and party iconic figure, Ion Iliescu, Mircea Geoană (former Foreign Affairs Minister) and two outsiders, Serban Nicolae and Dorinel Soare.
The latter two got in the end only 9 and 2 votes respectively. Against all odds, Geoană vanquished without doubt Iliescu: 964 to 530 votes (Euractiv 2011).

Geoană’s presidency was reconfirmed one and a half years later at the Extraordinary National Convention (December 2006) when he defeated Sorin Oprescu. The latter gathered only 399 votes compared to 978 of the incumbent (9 AM 2006). However, after losing the national presidential elections in December 2009 despite having the support of all the parliamentary parties, but PDL, Geoană found his position within its own party eroded. At the National Convention organized in February 2010, Victor Ponta, a younger politician, former Minister of Justice became the new PSD president, after winning 75 more votes than Geoană - 856 to 781 (Mediafax 2010).

In PDL, Roman was re-elected 3 times: in 1994, 1997, and 2000. He ran every time alone as the statute of the PD allowed de facto for only one “motion” to be presented at the Convention, i.e., it required the support of more than half of the party organizations (pdl.org). At the Extraordinary National Convention held in 2001, run for the first time more than one candidate. The incumbent (Roman), was allowed to present/defend the motion with which he was elected one year before, although he did not receive the necessary support from the party organizations. His challengers were Traian Băsescu, mayor of Bucharest at the time (the only one who gathered the required signatures to present a motion) and Senator Simona Marinescu (the leadership made another exception by allowing her candidature). Roman’s popularity had shrunk dramatically as he received only 2% in the 2000 presidential contest, compared to the 7% score of his party in that year’s parliamentary elections. Băsescu, who received 653 votes, defeated Roman - 304 votes, and Marinescu, with 64 options (Stoica 2004: 130).

When Băsescu became the president of Romania at the end of 2004, Emil Boc followed him as interim leader of the party until the Extraordinary National Convention held in June 2005. Although there were discussions about alternative motions, their promoters were one by one discouraged (Jurnalul 2005a), and in the end Boc – the president’s favorite – run alone and won the office. The motion also meant changing the ideological orientation of the party, from social democracy to a right/popular orientation. Almost four thousand delegates (3,715) voted at this Convention (Ziua 2005).

Although according to the statute an ordinary National Convention (supposed among other things to elect a new leadership) should have been organized in 2009, it

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7 Only 144 of them voted against Boc’s candidature, while 16 ballots were canceled.
did not take place until the present. To sum up, only one in one case (2001) did more candidates run to become the president of the party, and even in that occasion the contest was not too competitive – with Băsescu being seen from the start as the front-runner and gathering in the end twice as many votes as the incumbent.

PNL is by far the parliamentary party with most changes in leadership since 1990: not less than six. Only one leader, Mircea Ionescu Quintus managed to win a second mandate (1993-1997, 1997-2001). At the National Congress held in February 2001 Valeriu Stoica (the protégée of the incumbent president, Ionescu-Quintus) defeated Călin Popescu-Târiceanu, Crin Antonescu. Stoica received 509 votes, Popescu-Târiceanu 248, while 179 delegated opted for Antonescu (*Observator Cultural* 2001). At the Extraordinary Congress organized in August 2002, Theodor Stolojan, supported by Stoica, defeated Ludovic Orban by a large majority - 944 to 193 votes. (Radu 2003). Stolojan resigned from his position in early October 2004, and Călin Popescu-Târiceanu became the interim president of the party. The Congress held in February 2005 registered only one candidature for the highest party office, that of the incumbent Târiceanu: elected with 1110 votes, while only 161 delegates voted against him (Jurnalul 2005). In 2002 and 2005 there was a list vote for the whole Permanent Political Bureau. The most competitive leader selection within the PNL was that of Crin Antonescu in March 2009. He defeated the incumbent Popescu-Târiceanu (Romania’s Prime Minister between 2004 and 2008) by a margin of 327 votes - out of the 1419 valid ballots (Mediafax 2009). At the Extraordinary Congress organized one year later Antonescu was re-elected in a comfortable manner, gathering almost three times more options from the party delegates than his challenger, Ludovic Orban (*Antena 1* 2010)

For most of the post-communist period UDMR was lead by the poet Marko Béla (1993-2011). But the first president of the Alliance was the writer Domokos Géza (1990-1991, 1991-1993). At the first Congress of the Alliance, held in April 1990 Domokos Géza did not have a counter-candidate (Bogdán 2011). However, one year later - in late May 1991, a second National Congress took place in which Domokos’s presidency was challenged by the Secretary General of the party, Szőcs Géza. It was the most competitive presidential contest held ever in Romania, with Domokos retaining the party’s leadership after winning six more votes than Szőcs: 129 to 123. Szőcs became vice-president of UDMR (Bogdán 2011).
Markó Béla’s eighteen years of rule begun at the third Congress of UDMR organized in January 1993. Then he defeated Mina László, by winning 226 out of 252 votes casted by the delegates (Udvardy, 2010). At the fourth Congress, held in May 1995, Markó Béla was re-elected by a large margin: 226 delegates voted for him as opposed to the 57 ballots casted for Kónya-Hamar Sándor and the 51 options registered for Borbély Imre (Bogdán 2011). The last time when Markó Béla’s presidency was challenged formally was at the sixth Congress, in May 1999. His counter-candidate, Kincses Előd managed to secure only 157 votes compared to 274 delegates voting for Markó (Udvardy, 2010). In the following two National Congresses from February 2003 (Europa Liberă 2003) and March 2007 (Ferencz 2007) the incumbent president was re-elected as the sole candidate. In the latter case he received more than 90% of the votes (Ferencz 2007). Prior to the Tenth Congress, held recently (February 2011) Markó announced that he will not run for a new mandate. Three candidates, Kelemen Hunor, Eckstein-Kovacs Peter and Olosz Gergely fought for his succession. Hunor, currently the Minister of Culture, and the chosen heir of Marko Béla, was elected from the first round after receiving 70% of the votes (Gândul 2011).

In PRM, Corneliu Vadim Tudor was elected by unanimity of votes at the 1993 and 1997 Conventions (Stoica 2004). He was the unique candidate for the party president office also at the November 2001, November 2005 and October 2010 Congresses. In March 2005 a plenary session of the National Council modified the statute so as to change the name of the party and to elect a new president! Corneliu Ciontu was elected in the same day - with only six votes against - the president of the new party, renamed The Popular Greater Romania Party (PPRM). These spectacular changes happened at the decision of C.V. Tudor, who made a step behind, to become only the honorary president of the party (Jurnalul 2005b). Tudor hoped that in this way the party’s application for membership in the European Popular Party would be accepted. Only three months later, in June 2005 another plenary session of the National Council reversed both changes, and C.V. Tudor was once again the president of PRM. Moreover, the ex-president, Ciontu and another MP were excluded from the party (Jurnalul 2005c).

Table 3 summarizes the competition of every leadership selection process. Whenever it was more than one candidate, we use the difference between the first and

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*The fifth Congress of UDMR, organized in October 1997 was an Extraordinary Congress, which did not comprise any elections. The case was the same with the ninth Congress, held in April 2009.*
second competitor explained in the research design section. Overall, PNL appears to be the most competitive Romanian party – in spite of some missing data – with the least elections in which a single candidate was involved. The following two parties in terms of competitiveness are separated by a small difference and display contrasting trends of the number of candidates. On the one hand, UDMR has competitive elections almost from the beginning – an exception is the first congress – and this competition is limited starting with the sixth election after 2000. On the other hand, PSD had a single candidate until 2005. Two of the most recent three elections are characterized by high competition, thus indicating that the leadership selection has become much more competitive. This is not surprising given the 2004 failure to form the government after winning the elections and the 2009 defeat in the presidential elections of PSD’s leader Mircea Geoană. PDL and PRM are characterized by single candidates, only one election at PDL being an open competition between two candidates. However, this openness from 2001 implied a tight contest in which the difference between the challenger and incumbent was relatively small. PRM had no real or even formal competition, all cases being coronations.

Table 3: Competitiveness of the Romanian Party Leadership Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elections in Congresses</th>
<th>PSD</th>
<th>PDL</th>
<th>PNL</th>
<th>UDMR⁹</th>
<th>PRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>2 candidates</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>27.89</td>
<td>79.36</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>66.04</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>28.48</td>
<td>22.78</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>27.14</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>42.04</td>
<td>23.04</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>46.82</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
<td>1 candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>67.87</td>
<td>87.13</td>
<td>52.76</td>
<td>63.62</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent success rate¹¹</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of the leadership selections (19 out of 34) were actually, “coronations”, i.e., races with only one contender (Kenig 2008: 245). Accordingly, the incumbent

⁹ For all the parties, but more important for the UDMR, the congresses exposed in the table are only those conventions that elected leaders.
¹⁰ The average is calculated by considering the instances where a single candidate contested as no competition and thus received a score of 100. High values of the average indicate low competitiveness in elections.
¹¹ For the incumbency success rate were taken into account only those cases were the incumbent participated in elections. This does not bias our indicator as in the Romanian parties it is more frequently for a president that steps down to ensure the election of a favorite (two cases in PSD and PNL, and one in PDL, UDMR and PRM) than for a leader to resign because he knows that he will be defeated in the next elections.
success rates are quite high – above 75% in all parties. This rate is somewhat misleading as it puts on a par the elections in UDMR and those in PRM. The former was characterized by open contestation of the incumbent and more changes of leader compared to the centralized PRM. The positioning of PNL at the other extreme in terms of the incumbent’s success is logically consistent with the previous findings according to which the party was the most competitive. The surprising finding is related to the relatively low success of incumbents in PSD where competition was opened only a few years ago. In two out of three elections with more than one candidate the challenger won in tight competitions.

The Lack of Reform in Leadership Selection

On the basis of these findings, table 4 includes the typology created on the dimensions of centralization of decision making (referred as autonomy of the territorial organizations of the party) and the competitiveness. The coding of the former reflects both the party statutes and the informal evolutions previously described. High competitiveness is any difference smaller than 30%, whereas everything above that threshold enters into the low competitiveness category. With one exception, the 2006 Congress of PSD (table 3), the following score is around the value of 50%. Thus, the discrepancy between the two categories is quite high with no cases situated at the category boundary; the cut-off point does not influence the positioning of the cases in the cells of the typology.

Table 4: A Typology of Leadership Selection among the Romanian Political Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Autonomy</th>
<th>High Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Competitiveness</strong></td>
<td><strong>High Competitiveness</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At a glance, two general observations are visible. First, most cases are located in the cell corresponding to low competitiveness and low autonomy of the territorial branches. These situations imply that quite often there is a single candidate and the decision to select him (there is no female leader in any Romanian party under scrutiny) is usually concentrated in the hands of the centre through increased decision with respect to the quota of territorial representatives. Second, the dynamic is only visible with respect to
the competitiveness dimension: the number of candidates and the stake of elections increase at various times. However, the high rates of incumbent success (table 3) indicate that this is only a formal openness and most of the times the challengers have little if any chance in winning. With two exceptions (PSD starting 2005), there is no shift in the degree of centralization. Political parties continue to select leaders using the same procedures for two decades. Why does nothing change?

One of the main explanations is related to the relatively high degree of personalization of the Romanian politics. Without strong programmatic orientation, some of the Romanian parties have sought to command the allegiance of voters through the charismatic appeal of their leaders – PRM and PDL being the prime examples here. In exchange, as long as their popularity drove the party support, the leaders ‘represented and hierarchically guided a collective of followers’, and were allowed to ‘circumvent organizational boundary controls whenever needed’ (Bolleyer, 2008: 16). This ultra-privileged position of the party president perpetuated even if the leader changed as in the case of the PDL after Băsescu defeated Roman. One distinctive treat of this particular organizational setup is the fact that in ‘normal times’ (i.e., in the absence of catastrophic electoral defeats) no politician dares to contest the leadership. Thus, no challengers run for party presidency in any of the National Conventions of either of the two parties (with the exception of the PDL in 2001, after Roman fell four percentage points behind the score of his party).

One decisive factor contributing to the personalization is the charisma of the leader. This is especially visible in the case of PRM where Vadim Tudor’s popularity was for long time the main source of the relative success of his party (Gherghina 2009b; Sum 2011). The same is the case with the PDL – identified in the 90’s by the voters with Roman as a reform-oriented force in contrast with the old communist, apparatchik style of the politicians in the other successor of the FSN. More important, the popularity gained by its second leader, Băsescu, with his anti-political, populist discourse transformed PDL from a party on the verge of extinction into the second largest political force. With the current PDL government poor handling of the economic crisis, and Băsescu’s image decline, the party seems to have returned on the slippery slope of the early 2000s.

A second important aspect of personalization, which is more evenly distributed across parties, refers to the practice of presidents handpicking their successors. Actually,
almost one quarter of all leadership selections (eight out of thirty-four) were represented by this type of situations. None of these protégées (Năstase in PSD, Boc in PDL, Stoica and Stolojan in PNL, Hunor in UDMR) had a difficult time being elected.

The Absence of Bottom-Up Pressures

An additional crucial explanation of the problematic democratization refers to the lack of pressure from bellow. Most of the members of the Romanian parties rarely pay their membership fees and participate only seldom to the activities of their branches. Conversely, the local and regional party leaders declare inflated rates of membership, so as to gain leverage in the higher decision-making organisms of party and they even pay some of these fictitious members’ fees (Ghinea 2011). At the same time, these leaders have a strong control over their branches and no real interest for larger participation neither in the daily life of the party, nor in its internal elections.

On the other hand, the democratization of legislative recruitment and leadership selection was thought to contribute to ‘the leader autonomy feature’ of cartel parties as described by Richard Katz (2001). His hypothesis was that party leaders are very keen to give a say to individual members through the opening of recruitment because by doing so they undermine the power of mid-level elites. Once the latter grow weaker it is much easier for the party leaders to impose their preferences and to maneuver the individual party members to support their desired direction of action.

Two such initiatives from above were launched with respect to legislative recruitment. First, at the express wish of party president, Adrian Năstase, PSD organized closed primaries in 2004 to elect the party’s candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections. In the end, the results of this internal contest were not implemented partly because PSD gave some of the eligible positions on its list to a smaller electoral partner, PUR and partly because they were heavily contested as no serious control of those voting (members or nor) was implemented (Mediafax 2004). This experience casts a serious doubt on the actual enforcement of the recently adopted provisions allowing all party members to vote for the election of the next leader. Similarly, in 2008 Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, the PNL president at that time, announced that all politicians who wanted to run as candidates for the general elections should be first validated through an internal vote open to all members (Hotnews 2008). No such contest took ever place.

The Lack of Credible Threats
No new party entered the Romanian Parliament since 1996 and the aggregate electoral volatility is one of the lowest among all post-communist party systems (Sikk 2005; Gherghina 2008; Casal Bertoa and Enyedi 2011). Additionally, since the 2000 elections all parties managed to preserve their parliamentary positions (with the exception of PRM in 2008). This stabilization of the party system was to an important extent a manufactured trend: as the existing parties agreed to impose high entry barriers. First, two hundred thousand signatures are required for the establishment of a new party. Second, there was a progressive increase in the degree of electoral support that a non-parliamentary party needs to achieve in order to receive state subsidies. As a result no extra parliamentary party qualified for public funding after the 2000 and 2004 elections (Gherghina et al. 2011). Third, at the turn of the millennium, the electoral threshold was increased (from 3%) to 5% for individual parties and 8-10% for alliances.

The fact that the parties were more or less sure of their presence in Parliament and that new parties were prevented for entering the scene had the role of helping to maintain the organizational status-quo. A proof in this sense is the story of a meteoric party, The Union for the Reconstruction of Romania (URR) which did practice genuine internal democracy. The party was founded by a group of young, Western-educated entrepreneurs and was meant to be a real alternative to the existing parties: with members that paid their fees, and were allowed to vote for all leadership positions in the party as well as for the selection of candidates for public offices. Although the party managed to attract the support of leading intellectuals and artists, it failed to surpass the electoral threshold and succumbed shortly after together with its open organizational model.

Although some of the patterns documented above still apply, the lack of reform in UDMR deserves an additional, more contextualized explanation. The Alliance is the sole in Romania to have organized every four years internal elections - open to all members - for the nomination of its candidates. Thus, logistically for UDMR it would be the easiest to fully democratize its leadership selection. However, undertaking such a step could have potentially aggrieved the internal conflict between ‘radicals’ and ‘moderates’, and eventually facilitated a split, with disastrous effects for the Hungarian minority’s legislative representation, given the high electoral threshold. Instead in the eighteen years of rule by the ‘moderate’ Markó Béla, the radicals have lost many internal battles and their choice to exit the Alliance individually and form alternative organizations (a
Conclusion

The leadership selection process within the Romanian political parties is generally characterized by limited longitudinal variation. This paper illustrates how the inclusiveness is a constant across the last two decades with the initial regulations being still in place. The size and oscillations of the membership rates had no impact on the provisions regarding the amount of people involved in decision-making. The same trend – with one exception – is visible when looking at the level of centralization. Not surprisingly, these two features are connected. All Romanian parties have national organizations and the elites at that level have the tendency to exercise control over the composition of delegates involved in the leadership selection. The dynamic component of the decision making regarding the selection of leaders is represented by the level of competitiveness. This is not directly related to the time passed from the emergence of political parties or with their experience on the political scene. Instead, it is associated with critical junctures in the life of parties (e.g. low electoral performances). Consequently, the intra-party dynamics appear to be predominantly a function of adaptation to exogenous factors.

With the exception of inclusiveness that is strikingly similar, there are relevant differences between the Romanian parties in terms of centralization of decision-making and competitiveness. Our typology identifies two main clusters of parties. On the one hand, the radical-right PRM and the two successor parties (PDL and PSD for most of its existence) display rigid selection mechanisms in which the territorial organizations do not play an active role and there is always a certain winner, known beforehand. Unsurprisingly, these are the parties with most coronations in the entire party system. On the other hand, the liberal and the ethnic parties and PSD since 2005 are characterized by more open selection procedures in which the territorial branches have a say and competitions are not only symbolic. In the cases of PNL and UDMR, their organizational structure and development justifies such a behavior: PNL is the party with the most numerous splits and mergers among the Romanian parties, whereas UDMR acts like an umbrella entity incorporating a variety of local and territorial organizations and foundations.
The main theoretical implications of these findings are the existence of specific axes of leadership selection and the limited transformation of intra-party democracy around the competition dimension. The inclusiveness – used in many typologies and previous studies – is replaced in the Romanian case by competitiveness. In fact, this is the only dimension with longitudinal variation within parties and thus becomes the pillar of leadership selection democratization. Such a situation occurs in the presence of rarely modified centralization of decision. Although our analysis is conducted on a single case study, the same features can be observed in numerous political parties in CEE.

These observations have two contrasting empirical implications. On the one hand, the lack of reforms towards increased involvement of members in the decision making (inclusiveness and decentralization) makes difficult the promotion of new leaders. The absence of bottom-up pressures combined with a personalization of politics (strengthened by charismatic leaders) perpetuates such practices. By controlling the selection process, the elites keep the doors closed to challengers that might bring new ideas. Moreover, the presence of new leaders could modify the adaptation potential that is currently limited with respect to electoral failures. In this context, the intra-party competition often brings to the fore the same people that compete for official positions. On the other hand, this rigidity can be directly linked to the limited entries and exits from the Romanian political scene and the stability of inter-party competition patterns. The low rates of dramatic alternations of leaders help increasing the homogeneity of the party in the eyes of the voters. Thus, new actors face a psychological barrier in getting access to Parliament and the existing actors rely on a minimal core of voters that usually ensures their survival on the political scene.

Further studies might complement the findings revealed by the present analysis with qualitative data that would ideally capture the opinions of party leaders, mid-level activists and rank and file members with respect to the inclusiveness and competitiveness of leadership selection. One could then judge if the party socialization has made actors internalize continuity and leadership stability as core organizational values, or inversely, whether this static picture only conceals accumulated intense dissatisfaction which could fuel dramatic bottom-up changes in the near future.
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