

Corina MORUȚAN

# Family Background Influence on Romanian's Youth Voting Behaviour



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**Pagin 1 sat  
goal inten ionat**

*I want to thank my family, especially my sister Iustina, for the great education they gave me, for making me believe in the power of the upcoming generations, for making me understand the importance of civic duty and last, but not least, for their constant and unconditioned support. I am also very grateful to my faculty teachers, who taught me how crucial is to truly understand the social reality in which we live. This book is a tribute to you all. Thank you!*

*Yours sincerely,  
Corina Moruțan*

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# Preface

Despite the fact that almost 20 years have passed from the May 20, 1990 founding elections and, in the mean time, a few rounds of national, local or European elections took place specialized studies on electoral issues are few. There are of course a few exceptions<sup>1</sup>. Also missing are scientific discussions on youth political socialization. This book is a step forward in filling this void. The fact that an analysis of youth's relationship with politics is carried out by a young sociology graduate is a plus, the insider view being often beneficial in social research.

What makes us go to the polls or vote for a certain party? Most people would answer these two questions by invoking personal or political actor related reasons and circumstances (or combinations of these two). Among voter responses we would surely find something like "we had no time", "I was out of town", "I was sick", "we did not want to vote as a sign of protest", "there was nobody to vote with " or "I like this party/ candidate", "I trust this party / candidate ", "I always vote with this party", "I voted against the current government", "He is honest, he is a good politician etc...". All these responses have in common people's implicit "belief" that they are (all) actors of their own thoughts, attitudes, values, decisions and behaviours. In other words, *"What do I think and how do I act is due to me, is because I decided this."* Self-determination seems to be a constant feature in voters' reasoning (or rationalization in some cases), when asked to justify their personal choices. If someone would tell people

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<sup>1</sup> Some papers which flash through our minds are those of Pavel Câmpeanu (*De patru ori în fața urnelor*, 1993, All), Alfred Bulai (*Mecanismele electorale ale societății românești*, 1999, Paideia), Vintilă Mihăilescu (coordinator) (*Sondajele de opinie. Mod de utilizare*, 2001, Paideia), Traian Rotariu and Mircea Comșa (coordinators) (*Alegerile generale 2004. O perspectivă sociologică*, 2005, Eikon), Gheorghe Teodorescu (coordinator) (*Alegeri 2008. Vol. 1: Campania, lideri și sondaje / Vol. 2: Continuitate și schimbare*, 2009, Polirom).

that who they are and what they do it depends less on them, on their will, and is mostly due to the social context in which they live, that person, maybe a sociologist, would be looked at distrustfully. The situation is not surprising given that starting with the first studies in electoral sociology<sup>2</sup> experts have faced a similar situation.

The conclusions are, nevertheless, unequivocal<sup>3</sup>: most voters decide who to vote for before the electoral campaign, political preferences show a remarkable stability over time and between generations and, more than this, they are closely related to social group affiliation (social class, religion, race, family, social network, etc.).

The present paper, "*Family Background Influence on Romanian's Youth Voting Behaviour*", falls into this tradition of analysing and explaining the voting behaviour. The author aims to find out whether and to what extent the parents' voting choices are reproduced by their children. Also, the research aims are to identify how family background influences the voting behaviour of Romanian youth, and what are the family characteristics that allow us to predict youth voting behaviour.

The family background concept is operationalized on three dimensions and for each dimension several sub-dimensions were considered: socio-economic (parents' occupational status, parents' education, and the financial situation of the family), political

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<sup>2</sup> Lazarsfeld, Paul F., Berelson, Bernard, Gaudet, Hazel. 1944. *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>3</sup> The conclusions proposed by „*The People's Choice*” are taken again and shaded into another paper (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee. 1954. *Voting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press), by introducing in the voting explaining model of two new concepts: group identification (the affective connection with a group which is not a part of the immediate social context) and group perception (the perception of a social group / social category vote intentions).

(parents' partisanship, turnout and voting intentions) and informational (frequency of discussions on political issues, the frequency of accessing information on political issues through media channels, all at family level). Referring to youth voting behaviour, the measurements used focused on statements regarding turnout and the voting choice for the June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 local elections.

The research method used in this case, the indirect survey, involved data collection from 100 students, over 18 years old, from six distinctive high schools from Bistrița and Cluj-Napoca, based on a self-applied questionnaire. The data was collected immediately following the June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 local elections. Following the statistical analysis of the collected data, the author presents some conclusions, systematically organized according to the research hypotheses. Some of the conclusions are presented below.

The socio-economic characteristics of the family generally present a weak relationship with the voting behaviour (turnout and the preference for a party). Thus, youth originating in families with a higher socio-economic status (good family financial situation, parents with higher education and prestigious occupations) tend to declare to a greater extent that they have voted, compared with those which come from families with a lower socio-economic status.

The political variables, namely the parents' partisanship and their voting participation, are two of the most important predictors of youth voting participation rate. The conclusion applies equally to both parents, the influence differences between them being insignificant. Also, the analyses reveal the fact that young people who originate in families in which political discussions are frequent they present a higher voting participation rate.

The second hypothesis tested aims to assess the degree of intergenerational reproduction of political choices. All the analyses performed have led to the same conclusion: the degree of reproduction of the parents' political choices is very high. In the case of father's political options, data indicates an over 75 percent degree of reproduction, the differences regarding party preferences being small and statistically insignificant. Somehow surprising, because men are considered to be more competent in political matters than women, mothers' political choices are reproduced to a larger extent (mothers have the advantage of more time spent with children, so there are greater chances for the "transmission" of preferences process to take place). Also, the differences in the "transparency" of parents' political preferences may be an alternative explanation.

As expected, and in accordance with the results of other similar studies, young people from families in which parents are informed on politics and political issues are frequently discussed present a higher interest in politics (third hypothesis).

Like any approach to a social research, this too remains tributary to the methodological options and the available resources. Three methodological limitations (which the author honestly points out), normal for a research project based on personal effort and resources can be mentioned: the measurement of parents' political attitudes through their children, the reduced sample size (causing the lack of statistical significance in some cases) and the lack of national representativeness of the sample.

On the other hand, even if the investigation is not conducted on a representative sample at national or local level, corroborating the results with those of other representative

surveys (from Romania or from other countries), supports the validity of the conclusions.

Science is a continuous process. Moreover, any response obtained in a certain moment is not a definitive one and could definitely incite more questions. Therefore, even if the results obtained in the present study bring arguments in favour of the role of family background in youth political socialization, it would be interesting to see how persistent is the parents' influence during time, which are the political contents that are to be transmitted with priority, which are the other factors that mediate the transmission process, or how can we explain the difference between mother's and father's influence. This could be addressed using a longitudinal research design, preferably a panel one, with one annual wave, extended on the adolescence period, but also on the early adulthood, doubled by a qualitative approach based on interviews.

Written in an accessible language, but still preserving the rigour of a scientific work, the paper addresses equally students and professors from social science departments and a wider audience interested in the Romanian political world and its way of reproducing through family, as the result of an insidious, prolonged, and thereby very effective process.

**Mircea Comşa**

# Pagin 1 sat goal inten ionat

## ***Abstract***

*In understanding the youth voting behaviour several theories were developed. One of the most inquired agents of political socialization in the specialized literature is family. In this context, the present research intention was to emphasize the family background contribution in the development of youth voting behaviour. Thus, an investigation was conducted, on a sample of 100 high school students, 18 and 19 years old, in order to observe the particular features of family which weight the most in the process of political socialization. The family background influence was explored in several aspects, such as the socio-economic parental status, the family political attributes or the informational level within family. The focus of the inquiry was on sketching out the existing similarities in terms of voting participation rate and vote intention, between the young and the older generation.*



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