

# THE DYNAMICS OF THE ROMANIAN DIASPORA ELECTORAL ASSET

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## Abstract

The Romania's turnout has experienced over the post-communist period a continuous deterioration. The highest official presence at the polls was 86.19% in 1990 presidential elections, while the lowest turnout was 26.51% in 2007 in the referendum on the uninominal vote. The absenteeism causes are many and complex and migration, temporary or permanent, is one of these. The likelihood that migrants have the interest and / or resources of go to vote is relatively low. However, the last elections in Romania were characterized by an increase of intensity of Diaspora's electoral activity: the number of votes cast abroad increased from 43,882 in the 1992 presidential election (first round) to 379,116,2014 presidential elections (second round). Simultaneously importance of Diaspora voting has increased significantly: in 1992 the votes from abroad represented 0.35% votes of the total votes cast, in 2014 these votes accounted for 3.23%.

This paper proposes an analysis structured on two dimensions: political asset and electoral asset of Romanian Diaspora. The political asset is understood both as political participation and the internalization of new dimensions of specific political culture of the host country. In this context the work aims to analyze the impact of the voting from abroad on Romanian elections.

**Keywords:** electoral asset, Diaspora, voting from abroad, migration, electoral rights

## Résumé

En Roumanie, la participation au vote a baissé constamment tout au long de la période post-communiste. Du taux de participation officiel de 86,19% enregistré en 1990 aux élections présidentielles, on est arrivé, au referendum de 2007 sur l'introduction du vote uninominal, à un taux historiquement bas de 26,51%. Les causes de l'absentéisme sont nombreuses et complexes – l'émigration, temporaire ou définitive, étant l'une d'entre elles. La probabilité que les migrants aient l'intérêt et/ou les ressources nécessaires pour participer au vote est relativement réduite. Pourtant, les derniers scrutins roumains ont connu une intensification de la participation électorale de la diaspora: le nombre de votes exprimés à l'étranger est passé de 43.882 aux élections présidentielles de 1992 (au premier tour) à 379.116 aux élections présidentielles de 2014 (deuxième tour). Par conséquent, le poids des voix de la diaspora s'est accru d'une manière significative: si aux élections de 1992 les votes de la diaspora représentaient 0,35% du total des votes exprimés, en 2014 ces votes s'élevaient à 3,23%.

Le travail présenté ici propose une analyse structurée sur deux axes: celui de l'actif politique et de l'actif électoral de la diaspora roumaine. L'actif politique comprend la participation politique et l'intériorisation des nouvelles dimensions de la culture politique

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spécifique au pays hôte. Dans ce contexte le travail se propose une analyse de l'impact des votes exprimés à l'étranger sur les élections roumaines.

**Mots-clés:** actif électoral, vote à l'étranger, migration, droits électoraux

### **Rezumat**

Prezența la vot în România a cunoscut de-a lungul perioadei post-comuniste o continuă deteriorare. De la o prezență oficială la urne de 86,19% înregistrată în anul 1990 la alegerile prezidențiale s-a ajuns ca la referendumul din 2007 privind introducerea votului uninominal să se înregistreze un minim istoric de 26,51%. Cauzale absenteismului sunt numeroase și complexe, migrația, temporară sau definitivă, fiind una dintre acestea. Probabilitatea ca migranții să aibă interesul și/sau resursele necesare prezentării la vot este relativ scăzută. Cu toate acestea, ultimile scrutine din România au fost caracterizate de o creștere a intensității activității electorale a diasporei: numărul de voturi exprimate în străinătate a crescut de la 43.882 la alegerile prezidențiale din 1992 (turul I) la 379.116 la alegerile prezidențiale din 2014 (turul II). Concomitent importanța votului diasporei a crescut semnificativ: dacă în 1992 voturile din diaspora reprezentau 0,35% din totalul voturilor exprimate, în 2014 aceste voturi au reprezentat 3,23%.

Lucrarea de față își propune realizarea unei analize structurată pe două dimensiuni: activul politic și activul electoral al diasporei românești. Prin activul politic este înțeles atât ca participare politică cât și ca interiorizare a unor noi dimensiuni ale culturii politice specifice țării gazde. În acest context lucrarea își propune o analiză a impactului voturilor din străinătate asupra alegerilor din România..

**Cuvinte cheie:** activ electoral, diaspora, vot în străinătate, migrație, drepturi electorale

## **1. Introduction**

Migration is a very complex phenomenon. People have migrated looking for a better and safer living environment, better working conditions and so on (Lupu 2006). Freedom of movement, transport accessibility, increased access to information and communication technology has boosted a consistent increase of migration. Nowadays migration is a more complex phenomenon than ever. Literature on migration is dealing with new concepts and variables like citizenship and multiple loyalties, trans-border citizenship or migrants' transnationalism (Castels 2002; Glick Schiller 2005; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2003). The concepts are partially overlapping, but, in the same time, the concepts are emphases a specific dimension: diaspora, migrants, long-term migrants, citizens living abroad, abroad workers, non-resident citizens, trans-national community and so on.

The largest part of the Romanian diaspora can be circumscribed concept of workers abroad. There is a wide range of competences of Romanian workers abroad, from laborers in construction, agriculture, cleaning (Italy, Spain) to highly qualified in medicine (France, Germany, Austria). In addition to Romanian migrant workers community enhanced in the 90's and especially in the 00's, there is a sustainable and lasting community of Romanians who emigrated before 1989 for

reasons of political persecution (Burean 2011). After 1989 we distinguished four waves of emigration Romanian (Sandu 2007; Alexe 2011): wave 1 (1990-1995), wave 2 (1996-2001), wave 3 (2002 to 2006) and wave 4 (2007 - present). The first two waves are characterized by an exploratory emigration of workers. The crisis that started in 1997 in Romania makes the second wave of emigration to almost double in volume compared to the first. The third wave marks an unprecedented growth of immigration in the context of visa-exempt for Romanians for the Schengen Area in 2002. This wave is characterized, in contrast to the first two by a decrease in the level of qualifications of migrants. The fourth wave is marked by the global crisis. Despite a series of studies that projected a substantial return of migrant workers (Sandu, Alexandru 2009) the Romanian diaspora consolidated and even continued to grow. More recent research (Alexe 2011) shows that over a third of the country's households, ie approx. 2.5 million had at least one member abroad since 1989. The impact of migration over the past 25 years is difficult to quantify. Emigration has had significant effects on the national economy (Lazea 2014), the demographic structure (Netedu 2008) and even the electoral process (Asiminei 2013). Up to 6.3 percent of Romania's Gross Domestic Product resulted from remittances in 2006. The volume of remittances had decline over the last years reaching 3 percent in 2013. The volume of remittances underlines a great dependency of Romanian economy of the remittances from migrant workers. The demographic structure has been affected by emigration. Migration has generated negative effects including on birth, marriage, divorce, employment and so on. The lack of effective mechanisms to record the status of emigrant has unexpected effects on electoral process. Studies of electoral sociology discuss about an official presence at the pooling stations and a real presence. For instance in 2009 European Parliament election the official turnout was 27.7 percent but the real turnout was about 36.0 percent (Asiminei 2013, p. 74). The implications of the turnout are high since the referendum has a threshold of 50 percent plus one turnout.

The unprecedented growth of the Romanian migration is itself a strong enough element to legitimize an analysis of rights and political representation of the Diaspora. The external voting is raising a series of questions regarding the idea of nation's citizens, of political community (Schiller 2005; Angi *et al.* 2009), but also, of the diaspora concept itself.

## **2. Concepts and methodology**

In this paper we will use the concept of Diaspora when referring to migrants. Van Hear (1998) identifies three characteristics of the Diaspora: (1) the population should be dispersed from the homeland in two or more countries; (2) its presence is enduring; (3) the potential for movement between the host country and homeland exists. All this concepts put into discussions the rights and obligations that migrants have both to the host country and to home country. The central idea is that migrants

do not simply abandon their home country but, in most of the cases, they retain intense ties with the homeland. On the other hand, home countries are also trying to preserve the ties with the emigrants, including the political one and the right to be represented in homeland politics.

In a synthetic manner Diaspora is defined as “population of a country who has migrated abroad and keeps strong identity ties with the homeland” (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2007, p. 246). In this case we only need to distinguish diaspora from occasional visitors abroad (tourists or business travelers). The most significant part of the Romanian diaspora is falling under the concept of abroad workers.

We consider that diaspora has three crucial assets: economic, political and electoral. Electoral asset is understood as remittances, savings, purchases and investments in Romania. Political asset is understood as voting rights, political participation (number of votes cast from abroad) and as political socialization (internalization of new dimensions of specific political culture of the host country). Electoral asset is understood as distribution of votes to electoral competitors. In this paper we will be focusing on the political asset (voting rights and political participation) and on the electoral asset (votes casts from abroad).

The paper is based on a secondary analysis of series of data from the International Institute for Democracy and The Electoral Assistance and from The Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority data bases.

### **3. Political asset**

The political asset is in a very close relation with economic asset and with electoral asset. As shown a few lines above, political asset is referring to voting rights, to political participation and to political socialization. Diaspora's economic asset contributes decisively to ensure political stability within the country. Remittances lower social pressure generated by the low employment rate and low rate of income in the country. Furthermore, political asset generates the framework within the electoral process in taking place. In this paper we will be focusing on the voting rights and on the political participation.

#### ***3.1. Voting rights***

The spread and the consolidation of democracy (Grecu 2012), the globalization process and the increase of migration process determined an growing interest in the voting rights of citizens living, working or just traveling abroad. The acknowledgement of Diasporas and the discussions on globalization determined a significant number of countries to start to adopt external voting. Most of the EU member states introduced the external voting in '80 and '90. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2014).

In literature we can find arguments both pro and against external voting. The most important arguments pro external votes arguments (Gamlen 2006; Østegaard-Nielsen 2003) are dealing with the ideas of establishing and enforcing a “transnational nation”; securing the remittances and expanding the sphere of political rights. On the other hand, we can identify a number of arguments against external vote, most important are dealing with the lack of information and the lack of responsibility (Grace 2007) but also with economic principles like the necessity of being domestic taxes in order to be political represented (Burean 2011).

The extension of the voting rights to the Romanian Diaspora was not simply a result of counting numbers but more a complex political decisions (Burean 2011). A brief history of the Romanian external voting is presented in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. A brief history of Romanian external voting table*

<b>Year</b>	<b>External voting</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1823 - 1947	no external voting	No voting rights for the Romanian diaspora
1948 - 1989	no external voting	The Romanian diaspora was largely dissident
1990	external voting	For the first time were organized polling stations abroad (embassies and consulates)
1991	external voting	The 1991 Constitution acknowledged the existence of Romanian Diaspora and legitimated voting stations in embassies and consulates
1991 - 2004	external voting	The votes cast were not attributed to any special Diaspora electoral district, but were merely added to those from the Bucharest district
2004 - 2008	external voting	Significant increasing of number of polling stations
2008 - present	external voting	New election law created electoral districts for diaspora (4 seats for lower chamber and 2 seats for upper chamber)
2009	external voting	Romanian diaspora change the outcomes of Presidential election
2014	external voting	The highest turnout ( $\approx$ 380,000 voters, Presidential election)

Before 1990 no external voting was possible and there was no interest for this in the Romanian diaspora. From 1990 until 2008 the votes from abroad were not attributed to any special diaspora electoral district, but were merely added to those from the Bucharest district. From 2008 the new electoral law created electoral districts for diaspora (4 seats for lower chamber and 2 seats for upper chamber).

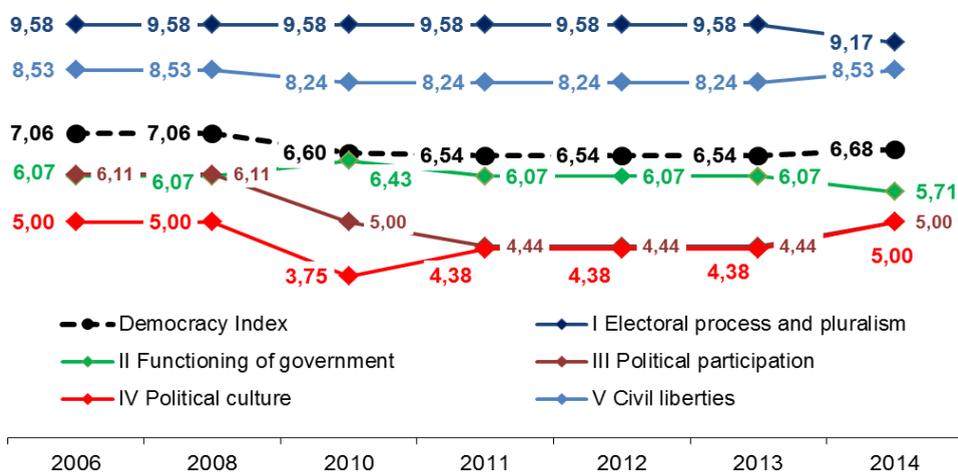
The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2007) defines five external voting methods: personal (an elector attends a polling station in person in order to cast his/her vote), postal (an elector completes his or her ballot

paper and returns it by post to an official designated to conduct the election), proxy (an elector who is qualified to vote formally appoints another person to vote on his or her behalf), e-voting (any method of voting using electronic means) and fax (an elector receives and returns the voting material by fax).

In Romania Diaspora is voting for presidential elections, parliamentary elections, euro parliamentary elections and referendums. The votes from abroad are casts only through personal voting method.

### 3.2. Political participation

Political participation is a multidimensional concept (Almond and Verba 1996; Dahl 2000; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 2001). On the other hand, the concept of political participation is an indicator of a more complex index: democracy index. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of democracy (2006-2014) measures the state of democracy worldwide for 165 independent states and two territories. The Democracy index is based on five indicators: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Countries are placed within one of four types of regimes: full democracies; flawed democracies; hybrid regimes; and authoritarian regimes. Romania is placed in the flawed democracies type. The highest points (in 2014) are scored by the electoral process and pluralism 9.17 from a maximum of 10 points and civil liberties 8.53 points. The lowest points are scored by the functioning of government (5.71 points); political participation (5.00 points) and political culture (5.00 points).

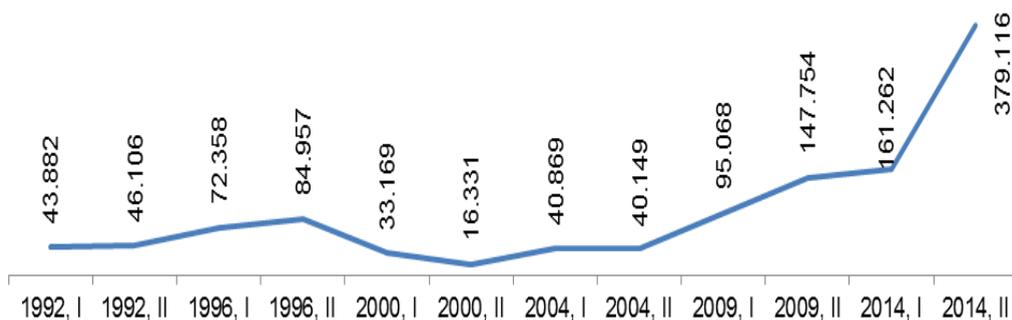


Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2006-2014)

Figure 1. Democracy index and political participation

Romania is characterized by a low score of democracy index 6.68 points from a maximum of 10 points. The score is decreased by the functioning of government, political participation and political culture. An important component of political participation indicator is the turnout. The analysis of the turnout rates in Romania highlights a genuine crisis. From an official turnout of 86.19% in 1990 Presidential election the turnout dropped to a 26.51% in 2007 referendum. The decreasing tendency of the vote participation rate in Romania may be also globally applied. The vote participation rate has constantly decreased in Romania since 1990. The rate of the turnout is tightly connected with the type of the election. Generally, the higher turnout is registered at the presidential and parliamentary elections and the lower at the euro parliamentary elections (Asiminei 2013). The electoral absenteeism and the decreasing politic interest of the Romanian people show an important loss of trust in the political class and, on a long term, question the legitimacy of the elected ones.

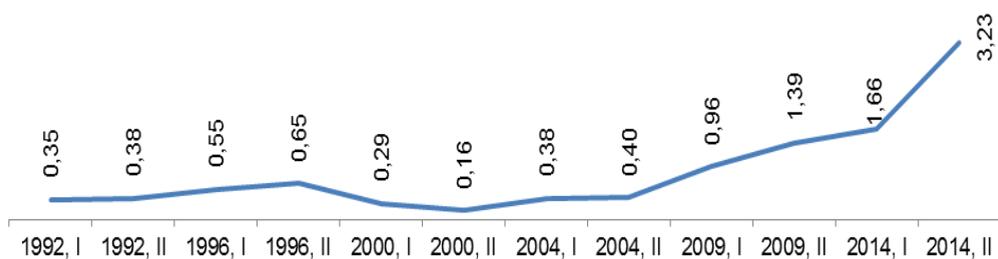
Despite the low in country political participation, the evolution of the Romania's Diaspora is absolutely staggering. In 1992 almost 44,000 electors cast their votes from abroad. In 2014 almost 380,000 electors voted for the Romanian president. The 2014 presidential election, second round, marked the highest external turnout in Romanian history. The figure below show how unpredictable is the Diaspora's turnout. For instance, the number of voters had increased in 2014 with 146%, second round, compared to 2009, second round in presidential election.



Source: Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 2014

*Figure. 2. The presidential turnout abroad*

Much more we had calculated the impact of votes as percentage of votes cast abroad from the total number of votes. Before 2009 the vote from abroad had a very low impact on elections. Starting with 2009 the Diaspora's political participation increased along with its impact: from 0.96 % of votes cast abroad from the total number of votes to 3.23 % in 2014, second round.



Source: Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 2014

Figure. 3. The impact of external voting

We can conclude that Romanian Diaspora is more and more interested in the political issues in their country of origin. The Diaspora's political activity had significantly increased in the last two presidential elections (2009, 2014).

#### 4. Electoral asset

The dynamics of the electoral asset include two periods before 2009 and after the 2009 presidential election. Before 2009 the electoral asset of the Romanian diaspora was insignificant. After 2009 the diaspora proved to be a valuable electoral resource and the candidates for the office of President of Romania have used it intensively. The 2009 presidential election was the first election in which candidates (especially candidates from the right-wing parties like PDL) had a tailored communication campaign targeted abroad. The 2014 presidential election consolidate the importance of Diaspora in the final output of the national elections. The candidates had strong messages orientated to Diaspora (see *Table 2*).

Beginning with 1992 the Romanian diaspora cast its votes predominantly toward right-wing parties' candidates. In 1992 and 1996 elections the most important candidates were Ion Iliescu (FDSN; PDSR) and Emil Constantinescu (CDR). In both elections the diaspora elected the candidate of the right-wing party Emil Constantinescu as president, but only in 1996 Emil Constantinescu wins the election. In 2000 Presidential election the extreme right party's candidate Corneliu Vadim Tudor qualified in second round along with Ion Iliescu (left wing parties PDSR-PUR-PSDR). In order to "save the democracy" the diaspora voted for Ion Iliescu in the second round. This was the first and the last time when diaspora elected a left-wing candidate. In 2004 the political situation has returned to normal and diaspora voted for the new right-wing party candidate Traian Basescu. In the 2009 presidential election diaspora changed the outcome of the presidential elections imposing Traian Basescu as president. The rival Mircea Geoană won the election in country but lost the election due to the high number of votes from diaspora cast to Traian Băsescu.

Table 2. *Romanian Diaspora's electoral asset (% of votes)*

<b>Presidential Election 1992</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Ion Iliescu (FDSN)	47.34	28.48	60.83	37.13
Emil Constantinescu (CDR)	31.25	55.97	38.18	62.86
Gheorghe Funar (PUNR)	10.87	7.63		
Caius Traian Dragomir (FSN)	4.74	3.22		
<b>Presidential Election 1996</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Ion Iliescu (PDSR)	32.25	19.33	45.59	22.72
Emil Constantinescu (CDR)	28.21	46.52	54.40	77.27
Petre Roman (USD)	20.53	18.39		
Gyorgy Frunda (UDMR)	6.01	4.53		
Corneliu Vadim Tudor (PRM)	4.72	3.70		
<b>Presidential Election 2000</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Ion Iliescu (PDSR-PUR-PSDR)	36.35	12.19	66.82	70.00
Corneliu Vadim Tudor (PRM)	28.34	10.64	33.17	29.99
Theodor Stolojan (PNL)	11.78	21.49		
Mugur Isărescu (Indep.)	9.53	38.81		
Gyorgy Frunda (UDMR)	6.21	9.42		
<b>Presidential Election 2004</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Adrian Năstase (PSD + PUR)	40.93	25.73	48.77	27.87
Traian Băsescu (PNL - PD)	33.91	54.06	51.22	72.12
Corneliu Vadim Tudor (PRM)	12.56	6.50		
Marko Bela (UDMR)	5.10	5.65		
<b>Presidential Election 2009</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Traian Băsescu (PDL)	32.44	56.05	50.33	78.86
Mircea Geoană (PSD + PC)	31.15	12.41	49.66	21.13
Crin Antonescu (PNL)	20.02	17.42		
Corneliu Vadim Tudor (PRM)	5.56	5.38		
<b>Presidential Election 2014</b> <b>Candidates</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abroad</b>
Victor Ponta (PSD-UNPR-PC)	40.44	15.90	45.56	10.26
Klaus Iohannis (ACL PNL-PDL)	30.37	46.17	54.43	89.73
Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (Indep.)	5.36	2.95		
Elena Udrea (PMP)	5.20	9.78		
Monica Macovei (Indep.)	4.44	15.20		

Source: Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 2014

In 2014 presidential election the Diaspora cast its votes again to the right-wing candidate Klaus Iohannis. Despite the massive abroad turnout, the outcome was not influenced directly by the diaspora. Klaus Iohannis also won the election at national level. The intense political communication generated an increased turnout in-country and out-country and decisively contributed to the victory of the right-wing candidate. The central theme of the political communication the Diaspora's right to vote.

## 5. Conclusions

The Romanian Diaspora has grown unprecedented since 2002. Despite this growth its political and electoral asset was modest until 2009. After the 2009 presidential election the impact of external votes on the election outcomes was decisive. The last six post-communist presidential elections (1992-2014) were characterized by a strongly oriented diaspora towards right-wing parties' candidates. We can conclude that Romanian Diaspora is not just an economic asset, but a high important political and electoral asset. Further questions are raised by this paper. The questions are dealing with the likelihood that Romanians living abroad had internalized a considerable degree of values and practices of the host country and wish to transfer it to Romania and with the question of ideology implications in diaspora's electoral behavior. The paper is raising other questions like the competence of diaspora's vote or the importance of vote in migrants identity construct.

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