

**BOOK REVIEW****ELECTORAL SOCIOLOGY. ELECTIONS, VOTERS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR**

by Romeo Asiminei, *Sociologie electorală. Alegeri, Alegători și comportamente de vot*. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2013

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The *Electoral Sociology. Elections, Voters and Voting Behavior* written by Romeo Asiminei (2013) deconstructs the electoral mechanism in an attempt to provide an answer to the fundamental question of electoral sociology: *How voters decide who to vote for?* The analysis of the voting electoral mechanism is performed under three different dimensions which cannot exist separately: elections, voters and the voting behavior. In order to provide a conclusive answer to the question how voters decide who to vote for the book focused on the electoral events in post-communist Romania (1990-2009).

The author argues that for most voters the political parties and the political ideology are some kind of abstract terms, treated, mostly with disinterest. However, the vote is truly a “total social fact” and involves selecting a solution with impact on all social systems and subsystems. The literature proposes several models that make the electoral mechanisms explicit, models combined into three categories: sociological models, psycho-sociological and models and economic models. In this book the author is proposing a new model that has both an explanatory function as well as a function of orientation for the electoral research (election predictions): *the integrative model*. Summarizing, the model assumes a rational vote based on a series of signification and redefinitions of the three images (the candidate identity, the image communicated by the candidate and the candidate's perceived image) and an ideal portrait (for the candidate who will hold the position for which the electoral process is conducted). Finally, the voter tests the candidates' perceived images against a reference ideal portrait.

In addition the book examines a number of constitutive elements of the electoral process: the sources of the political participation (interpreted in a constructivist view), electoral systems and their impact on the electoral situation and the relationship between socio-economic and political context on the electoral behavior by analyzing the first six election cycles in post-communist Romania.

The book is structured in four parts: I. Political participation, II. Voting models and voting behavior prediction, III. Electoral Systems and IV. Elections and electoral behavior in post-communist Romania.

In order to answer to the fundamental question the book first analyzes the phenomenon even lead actor: the voter. Thus, the author tried to identify the levers of political participation. The answer to this question was structured based on a

constructivist approach: introspection - objectification - exteriorization. The data shows, unsurprisingly if we refer to the other research available, relatively low political culture (poor knowledge of the political phenomenon but also a pronounced disinterest to everything involving this phenomenon). Therefore, such a level of political culture will generate political socialization while impaired and is caused by poor political socialization materialized in very low levels of all forms of political participation (from simple information measure, to participate in election meetings and engagement in support of a candidate). Under these conditions the results of the case study on voting are not unexpected: a negative trend in Romania reported turnout in the first elections in post-communist period. The data analyzed show a differentiation turnout by type of election. In Romania, the most important are presidential elections (recording the highest rates of participation), second place the local elections and the parliamentary elections in third place. In the European context turnout rates in Romania are among the lowest in the European Union. From the methodological point of view requires the use of methods for estimating turnout, the more efficient the experiment in an investigation, and analysis of official presence at voting history.

Voting takes place in the framework described by the electoral system. It is difficult, in fact impossible, to say which is the best electoral system. Choosing a particular type of electoral system, whether we refer to majority, proportional or mixed models and based on the evolution of democracy currently are being used different approaches from mass democracy to individualistic and consumerist models worldwide. Essentially all electoral systems whether referring to the majority or to the proportion in mixed or other electoral systems generate disproportionate results tend to reduce the effective number of parties and can produce a parliamentary majority. The case study in third part analyzes the impact of new mixed proportional voting system uninominal district implemented for the first time in the 2008 Romanian parliamentary elections. One of the conclusions is that although numerically the composition of Parliament 2008-2012 was renewed, the system was unable to generate a real change in the political decision-making power. Targeted process of renewing the political class has not led eventually to significant changes in parliamentary structures. Furthermore, although the system adopted showed the lowest degree of systemic disproportionality (understood as the ratio of the actual percentage of votes and percentage of seats won) the result was the creation of a manufactured majority and an artificial minority (“artificial minority” is a concept that author is proposing to develop the Lijphart's theory).

Moreover, electoral competition takes place in a specific political and economic context. For a comprehensive analysis of these influences is essential to consider that an entire election cycle assessment and not just election time. In the forth part of the book the author proposes an analysis using a grid for each election cycle: analysis of social and economic context (social indicators, demographic, economic, significant events), analysis of political context (evolution of political life),

campaigning (themes, strategies) and the result. The case study in the last part of the book sought to identify whether socio-economic indicator and in what sense is associated with position indicator when the election winning party on political axis, with a retrospective voting model. Data analysis shows that there is little association between economic performance and political party ruling party's position that wins elections, concluding that economic factors are rather a constitutive element of election image building, rather than a decisive element in the functioning electoral mechanism.

Given these issues and analyzing the main patterns of voting the author proposed a new model, the integrative model, explaining in a more comprehensive manner the Romanian electoral mechanism. Integrative model is based on the evaluation of candidate image in relation to the ideal portrait of position's occupant for which elections are being held. The model is based on two premises: (1) vote is a rational process based on a set of actions redefinitions and (2) the vote is a personalized voter scheme by way of simplification of the political scene; there is little place for abstract concepts and ideology. Essentially integrative model analyzes the relationship between the three images (the candidate identity, the image communicated by the candidate and the candidate's perceived image) and an ideal portrait. Following a process of successive redefinition the voters are drawing a series of images of candidates (candidate's perceived image). The evaluation process consists of superimposing these images over an ideal portrait of occupant target position of those choices. Vote is given to those candidates whose images are in a great proportion superimposed over the ideal portrait. Integrative model proposed both a function of explanatory mechanism and, as well, a function of orientation of sociological research, defining a set of indicators and variables associated with each field delimited by the candidate's images and ideal portrait.

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