

DO LEADERS MATTER? A CASE STUDY FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA, IASI COUNTY, FROM 2020-2024

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Abstract: This article aims to make a theoretical incursion on electoral behaviour through the prism of the relations that matter when voters choose, insisting on determinisms that can matter to them: the relationships between political leaders and the parties they belong to.

Starting from the theoretical analyses carried out, especially for the electoral rounds at the national/central level, the article aims to outline the formula of determinism between local leaders appointed for mayors in local elections to influence the results of the electoral elections about the vote obtained by the parties for the nomination of the elected representatives proposed for the Local Councils / the parties to which they belong. The proposed analysis is quantitative, and exploratory, starting from the results obtained in Iasi County in the local elections of 2020 and 2024 for the appointment of Mayors (political leaders) and Local Councils (parties).

Keywords: electoral system, local elections, leader, political party, electoral behaviour

Résumé : Cet article se propose de faire une incursion théorique sur les comportements électoraux à travers le prisme des ressorts qui comptent lorsque les électeurs choisissent, en insistant sur les déterminismes qui peuvent avoir de l'importance pour eux: les relations entre les dirigeants politiques et les partis auxquels ils appartiennent. À partir des analyses théoriques réalisées notamment pour les tours électoraux au niveau national/central, l'article vise à esquisser la formule de déterminisme entre les élus locaux nommés pour les Maires lors des élections locales afin d'influencer les résultats des élections électorales en relation avec le vote obtenu par les partis pour la désignation des élus proposés aux Conseils Locaux/partis auxquels ils appartiennent.

L'analyse proposée est quantitative, exploratoire, à partir des résultats obtenus dans le comté de Iasi lors des élections locales de 2020 – 2024 pour la nomination des Maires (leader politique) et des Conseils Locaux (parti) dans le comté de Iasi.

Mots-clés : système électoral, élections locales, leader, parti politique, comportement électoral

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Abstract: Articolul de față își propune să realizeze o incursiune teoretică asupra comportamentului electoral prin prisma resorturilor care contează atunci când electorii aleg, insistând asupra determinismelor care pot conta pentru aceștia: raporturile dintre liderii politici și partidele din care aceștia fac parte.

Pornind de la analizele teoretice realizate mai ales pentru rundele electorale de nivel național /central, articolul își propune să contureze formula de determinism dintre liderii locali desemnați pentru funcția de primari la alegerile locale în sensul de a influența rezultatele alegerilor electorale în raport cu votul obținut de partide pentru desemnarea aleșilor propuși pentru Consiliile locale/ partidele din care aceștia fac parte.

Analiza propusă este una cantitativă, exploratorie, pornind de la rezultatele obținute în județul Iași la alegerile locale din anii 2020 – 2024 pentru desemnarea Primarilor (lider politic) și a Consiliilor locale (partid) din județul Iași.

Cuvinte cheie: sistem electoral, alegeri locale, lider, partid politic, comportament electoral

1. Introduction

Electoral behaviour refers to how the voter acts in front of the ballot paper, what he votes for, as well as the determinisms / the springs that make him choose one candidate or another / a political leader or another / a political party or another or a coalition of parties.

Regardless of the typology of the electoral system (majority, proportional or mixed), the electoral behaviour of the voter is influenced or can be influenced deliberately or accidentally, consciously or unconsciously, by various stimuli (leader, party, typology of electoral offer, type of society in which elections take place, type of content promoted in campaigns, types of policies, etc.), determining him to vote objectively or subjectively.

From this point of view, this analysis will present both theoretically and practically – based on a case study – what is the role of the political leader and of the party in determining the voting option, and – from a theoretical point of view – which other determinisms can influence the electoral option, in the sense of rounding off the discursive universe.

2. Determinisms of the electoral behaviour: leaders and/or parties

What is the relationship between the party leader and his party during the electoral period is a question that arouses interest both at the level of the profile research and at the level of political-electoral practices, as long as the goal of each political party is to reach government, regardless of which political-administrative level we take into account: from the national level (presidential elections, for Parliament, etc.) up to the local level (for City Halls, County Councils, etc.).

In terms of research, several lines have been distinguished over time:

a. researches claiming that the party leader is the one who determines the electoral preferences of voters, including for the party they come from;

b. researches that argues that voters' electoral preferences for the party or the party leader should not be equated, the voters effectively choose the party

separately from the leader; research claiming that it is the party that influences voters' electoral preferences before the leader's preferences;

c. as well as research claiming that other factors determine the preferences of the electorate at the time of elections, beyond the party to which the leader belongs or his capacity as leader of the party.

a. This dimension supports the view that leaders determine the electors' preferences before any other kind of reasoning. Of course, the uninominal electoral systems primarily highlight the candidate/leader of the party in front of the proportional ones, but at the level of the present analysis, we take into account the fact that the elector can vote based on this consideration strictly related to the characteristics of the leader, even when he is put in front of a list, in the case of a proportional electoral system. In the literature, several points of view have been developed regarding the number and the typology of leadership qualities that determine voter preferences.

Bittner (2011), among others, argues that to understand leader effects, we should study leaders' character traits. Voters likely base their general judgment of party leaders on their judgments of these leaders' wide range of characteristics (Greene 2001; Ohr and Oscarsson, 2013). In addition, evaluations on character traits can be measured more reliably than general leader perceptions (e.g., Schwarz 1998). But which character traits do voters desire in their political leaders? The extensive literature review on leadership traits distinguishes between two traits (e.g. Bittner 2011; Johnston 2002), three traits (e.g., Funk 1999), four traits (e.g., Kinder 1986; Miller *et al.* 1986), six traits (e.g., Bass 1981), and up to fourteen character dimensions (Simonton 1986).

First, *political skills* include the skills needed to perform well in the political arena, such as general competence, political intelligence, and strategic behaviour. Second, strong and powerful leadership, (self-)confidence, and decisive behaviour by party leaders are called *vigorousness*. Third, *integrity* refers to leaders' honesty, (un) corruption, and whether the leader is focused on his or her own needs or on the needs of the electorate. Fourth, *communicative skills* refers to both inspiring or visionary leadership and the mediagenic skills of the leader, including whether the leader comes across as friendly, clear, empathic, and charming. Finally, the stability of leaders' visions and actions is labelled *consistency* and includes whether the leader behaves predictably (Aaldering *et al.* 2018, p. 75).

b. With this analytical dimension according to which voters' preferences are determined strictly by the party, we can mention here two dimensions: on one hand, the partisan vote (strictly subjective), on other hand, the calculated vote (determined by the calculation of the political party being able to become governmental or not). In terms of determining the preferences of voters according to the affinity for one party or another, the logic of electoral behaviour is clear: the elector will vote according to the affinity he has for the party, regardless of the competence of the candidates it presents, regardless of its real chances, regardless of the electoral platform. This type of emotional voting translated into a form of loyalty to a party can be the result of a long electoral tradition inherited from the

family, or coming strictly from the notoriety of the party itself: its historical capacity to win several rounds of elections, to resist over time throughout the electoral rounds, etc.

The other objective dimension of party voting is determined by the calculation made by the elector in terms of the party's ability to effectively win the elections in which it participates. Whether it is a majority or proportional electoral system, there is an objective calculation of voters to vote for large parties that have a real chance of winning elections, seats in elective legislative institutions and guaranteeing stable governments/stable mandates (guaranteed by large parties with as many seats as possible in the assemblies for which they run). In other words, to vote for large parties to the detriment of small parties and to be less interested in the typology of the electoral system, the used techniques, the calculation methods, the ideology of the parties, on the nominal candidacies or the notoriety of the candidates.

Although electoral outcomes only reflect the most immediate consequences of electoral systems (they do not reflect the long-term consequences for redistribution, see for instance Iversen and Soskice 2006), the approach allows us to effectively capture citizens' views on the matter. It is more natural and intuitive for citizens to pass a judgment on concrete results rather than on abstract and technical rules. Furthermore, people are used to seeing electoral outcomes, and they update their political attitudes following the announcement of results (Anderson *et al.* 2005). The electoral outcomes that citizens find good for democracy do not neatly conform to the proportional or majoritarian vision of democracy, (...) but to the efficiency/legitimacy of the government (Blais, *et al.* 2021).

Minority governments are usually seen as less desirable than majority governments for two reasons. First, they are more likely to be dismantled before term limits given that the opposition parties enjoy a majority of parliamentary seats and can always dismiss the government. This creates instability whereas citizens often want governments that are strong and steady (Gallagher *et al.* 2011; Warwick 1994). Second, minority governments must negotiate with opposition parties to pass bills and adopt policies, and they are thus less likely to meet their electoral promises (Strom and Swindle, 2002).

c. Concerning those researches that distinguish between different factors that can influence the preferences of the electorate, concerning the literature, we can identify the following lines. The electorate's preferences are determined, beyond the party's leadership and the party's notoriety, by: the degree of media coverage of the leader, the correlation of national/local issues with the electoral agenda – that is, the public policies supported and considered important for that community/society, the type of society/community and the conspiracy theories, etc.

The media are likely to play an important role in the way political leaders influence society (Bittner 2011). Most voters never meet party leaders in real life, and therefore, they form their judgments about them mainly based on their

representation in the media (e.g., Esser and Strömbäck 2014; Robinson 1976; Strömbäck 2008). Thus, media coverage of party leaders is a likely source of electoral leader effects. Our study focuses on the extent to which media coverage of party leaders affects support for their parties. We refer to the media coverage of party leaders in terms of their leadership traits as „mediated leadership images” (Aalderling *et al.* 2018, p.73). The behaviour of voters and, implicitly, the electoral preference are determined, according to these points of view, by the content and media frequency of news (on all channels) during the electoral period referring to the candidate political party and leader. Moreover, this news must have a positive character to determine voters' preferences and, also through the media, both the political leaders and the political parties must remain visible throughout the electoral campaign, to „remind” the voter whom to vote for. Van der Meer (2012) argues that keeping the voter's voting choice alive through the media works especially in smaller communities, where parties and their leaders need to make themselves seen through as many channels as possible to voters, with an electoral agenda that brings those communities' issues to the forefront.

The type of community determines the behaviour and the preferences of the electorate, beyond party formations or the qualities of the leader. This type of influence is observed in ethnically and culturally divided societies/communities, where several types of minorities live, etc., so they do not have a unitary character.

Scholars from Lijphart to Nordlinger or Reilly suggest that in divided places political elites need to identify connections between themselves and their voters. This link is already presumed by parties representing politically relevant groups, since, as Diamond and Gunther (Diamond and Gunther 2001, p. 23) suggest, „the electoral logic of the ethnic party is to harden and mobilize its ethnic base with exclusive, often polarizing appeals to ethnic group opportunity and threat”. Even though reaching out across the divide is acknowledged to contribute more substantively to the stability of consociational places, mobilizing voter support for non-binary politics in a polity operating under consociational arrangements is considerably more difficult (Tonge 2020). The central challenge for cross-segmental parties in consociations is to develop strategies that yield electoral success and ensure their political relevance (Agarin & Jarett 2022, p. 723). In these societies, consociational democracies, what matters is that the political parties identify themselves through their programs with those minority groups either through political measures that respond to specific problems presented in their electoral agendas, or through the construction of a leader who is recognized by each minority as coming from their ranks/belonging to that minority (sexual, ethnic, religious, etc.), beyond notoriety, personal qualities, background, studies, etc. The overlap of the two dimensions: a leader belonging to the minority and/or party promoting minority needs as a priority, determines the electoral preferences of the voters in these types of communities/societies/consociational democracies.

Other authors argue that what counts when they vote are the public policies supported by the political party or by the party leader. It is not important for the organizational dimensions or institutionalization, but only **the public**

policies on the electoral agenda. Referring to the elections for the European Parliament, the specialized literature in the field highlighted the importance of public policies promoted in the electoral campaigns as determining the electoral choice. Based on previous research regarding the relation between policy issues and electoral participation, we argue that the link between the key policy issues and the individual's decision to turn out during European elections functions through two direct and one indirect channels. First, EU citizens should be more inclined to vote when they perceive a major transnational policy issue as highly important (Braun and Schäfer 2022, p. 125). Second, people should feel more incentivized to participate in an EP election when they hold an extreme opinion on a key policy issue. These two direct channels imply that both meta-attitudinal cognitions (such as issue importance) as well as more operative forms (such as attitude extremity) affect political behaviour (Bassili 1996). Third, the public relevance of certain policy issues should enhance the mobilization effect of personal issue importance among the citizens of this country.

Beyond the importance of the parties or of the leaders, in the specialized literature, some authors claim that the determination of voters' preference is also determined by what are called **the conspiracy theories**. The appeal made during the election campaigns to the conspiracy theories refers to the invocation of some evil political forces (parties, politicians, coalitions, other political-economic actors, etc.) that can destroy the state/community unit itself, can generate internal insecurity (fights between social classes produced against the background of various forms of abuse) or international (attraction of the community/state in regional or international conflicts, etc.), a fact that directs the electoral preferences of the voters as far as possible about them or lead to the actuation of a mental calculation of the lowest evil type.

It is expected that conspiratorial news heightens anxiety, which occurs when people appraise a situation as unpleasant, highly threatening and uncertain (Lerner and Keltner 2000), and when a situation seems out of control (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). An anxious reaction is how we detect threats and danger (Eysenck 1992). For instance, election interference might make citizens wonder about their government's legitimacy, or question how the election might be decided. While election interference would cause uncertainty, we also anticipated that conspiratorial news would heighten anger, which is distinct from anxiety. Anger is more likely when a threat or harm is characterized by certainty (Brader *et al.* 2011).

Thus, the preferences of the electorate will be directed towards that political formation or that political actor that will more skilfully use the conspiracy theories and will place itself in the desirable formula of removing any risk that could appear to the state, to the well-being, peace, prosperity of the state or the electoral community of which it is a part.

Beyond these determinisms that can influence the voter's preferences when they vote, this article aims to identify if there is a continuity in the voters' preference between the political leader of the party and the party to which he

belongs, through the applicability of the working hypothesis to the local level, in the elections for the Local Councils / Mayor of Iași County, from the 2020 and 2024 local elections.

3. Methodology and sample

The present study aims to test whether there is continuity between the voter's preference in the localities of Iasi County for the political parties that ran for the local elections in 2020 and 2024 for the Local Councils and the political leaders of the respective political parties that ran for the position of Mayor. The proposed analysis is a quantitative, exploratory one, starting from the results obtained in Iași County in the 2020 and 2024 local elections for the appointment of Mayors and Local Councils in Iași County, using as statistical data the results recorded for each locality/communes in part of Iași County, taken from the specialized site <https://rezultatevot.ro> (see notes 34 and 35). This analysis records the results obtained for all 97 localities [in urban area (5 cities)² and rural area (92 de communes/localities)³] from Iasi county, elections for the Mayor (uninominal elections– which count the political leader of the party) and for the Local Councils (LC) of the localities (where the party counts, taking into account the percentage of the party that obtained the highest percentages for this structure/ generically named, dominant party).

4. Results

About the 97 localities in Iași county, at the level of the 2020 elections, in 97% of them, the party to which the elected Mayor belongs was the same as the party that holds the largest percentage (dominant party) in the Local Council (LC) of the locality, and in 3% of the county's localities, the party to which the elected Mayor belongs was different from the party that obtained the highest percentage in the Local Council (LC) and for 2024, in the local elections, the percentage of localities where there are different parties between the political colour of the mayor and the majority in the Local Council has increased to 5% (see **Fig. 1**).

² Data from: <https://iasi.insse.ro/despre-noi/despre-judetul-iasi/geografie-si-statistici/>, accessed on 21.01.2024.

³ Data from: https://localitati.fandom.com/ro/wiki/List%C4%83_de_comune_din_jude%C8%9Bul_Ia%C8%99i, accessed on 21.01.2024.

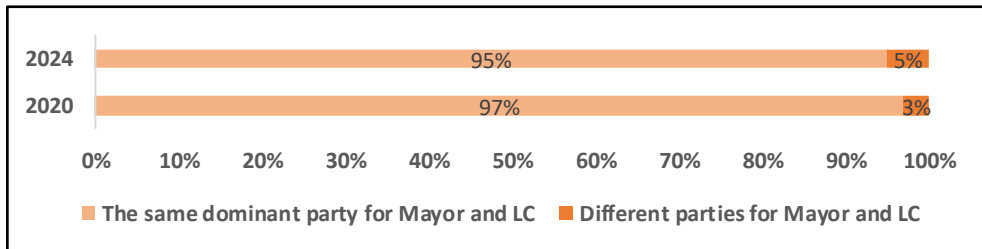


Figure 1. Electoral situation in Iasi County in 2020 and 2024

Of the 97 localities in Iași county, in the 2020 elections, in 51% of them, PNL was the party that held the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 43% of the localities, PSD is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 2% of the localities, USR-PLUS is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 1% of the localities, PMP is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; and in 3% of the localities of the county, there are different parties about the variable dominant party in the Local Council and the party from which the political leader who obtained the position of Mayor comes (see Figure 2).

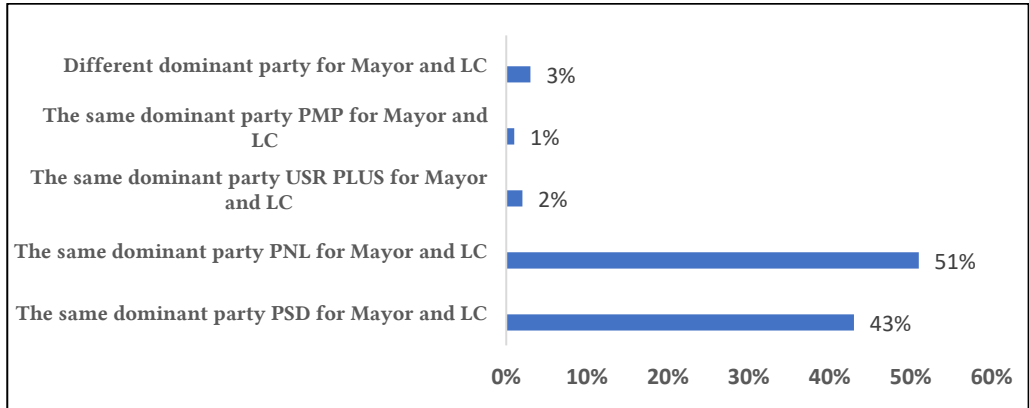


Figure 2. Electoral situation for total localities in 2020

In the 2024 elections, two parties have the same political coloration between the party from which the mayor comes and the majority in the Local Council. PNL obtains 52% of the localities, and PSD increases to 48% (see **Figure 3**).

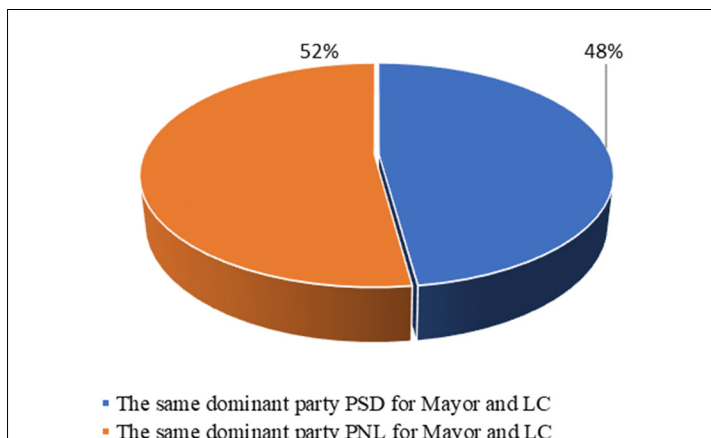


Figure 3. Electoral situation for total localities in 2024

Concerning the situation of the 3% percentages that do not overlap the percentages of the political leader with the percentages of the dominant party in the Local Council, the situation brings to the fore a formula of political cohabitation between PSD, PNL and USR-PLUS, and for the 5% of cases registered in the 2024 elections, the formula of cohabitation brings to the fore another political party – AUR – which did not participate in the 2020 elections, USR-PLUS disappearing from the political chessboard at the county level (see **Table no. 1** and **Table no. 2**).

It can be observed that there is no strict rule that can be separated concerning the three cases presented: in the sense that the dominant parties in the Local Councils can be both left (Social Democrat Party – PSD) and right (National Liberal Party – PNL), the case of obtaining the position of the Mayor - the same (they come from the entire political board of the county). The only rule that can be deduced is that, regardless of the type of the party, in all cases, the percentages obtained by the leader candidate for the position of Mayor are higher than those of the dominant parties in the Local Councils, which can lead us to conclude at this level of the analysis that the leader seems to matter more in determining the electoral choice in 2020, and in 2024.

Detailing the percentages obtained by the main parties at the county level in 2020 (PNL, PSD, USR-PLUS and PMP), we can see that there are two large parties that dominate the county PNL and PSD and two parties – Save Romania Union and PLUS: USR-PLUS and Popular Movement Party: PMP – that obtain 3% among the localities in the county (see **Table no. 3**, **Table no. 5** and **Table no. 7**).

In the 2024 elections, the percentages obtained by the main parties at the county level (PNL, PSD, AUR), we can see that there are two major parties that dominate the county, PNL and PSD (see **Table no. 4**, **Table no. 6**).

Concerning the data presented in **Table no. 3**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained in 2020 by a PNL mayor - 87.33% in Scobinti commune, and for the Local Council - PNL obtained the highest score in Plugari commune - 82.15%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from

PNL is obtained in Dumești commune - 26.98%, and the Local Council, in the same commune - 28.14%. The average of the percentages obtained by PNL at the level of Iași County is 56.85%.

The percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PNL is obtained in the commune of Dumești - 26.98%, and in the Local Council, in the same commune - 28.14%. The average of the percentages obtained by the PNL at the level of Iași is 56.85%.

About the data presented in **Table no. 4**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained in the 2024 elections by a PNL mayor - 89.39% in Ciortestești commune, and for the Local Council - PNL obtains the highest score also in Ciortestești commune - 83.53%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PNL is obtained in the commune of Rediu - 28.92%, and in the Local Council, in the municipality of Iași - 24.7%. The average of the percentages obtained by PNL at the level of Iași is 61.29% for the Mayor and 54.56% - for CL.

In 2020, in 27 of the localities, the position of PNL Mayor is obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 19 of the localities, the party obtained LC higher percentages than the average of the party's percentages.

In 2024, in 21 of the localities, the position of PNL Mayor is obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 24 of the localities, the party obtains CL percentages higher than the average of the party's percentages.

About the data presented in **Table no. 5**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained by a PSD mayor - 92.77% in Tătăruși commune, and for the Local Council - PSD obtains the highest score in the same commune - 87.57%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PSD is obtained in Prisăcani commune - 38.44%, and in the Local Council, in Hârlău - 31.81%. The average percentage obtained by PSD at the level of Iași is 56.2%.

In 2020, in 23 of the localities, the position of PSD Mayor was obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 15 of the localities, the party obtained higher percentages for LC than the average of the party's percentages.

Concerning the data presented in Table no. 6, it can be seen that in the 2024 elections, the highest percentage is obtained by a PSD mayor - 93.9% in Țuțora commune, and for the Local Council - PSD obtains the highest score in Brăești commune - 85.76%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PSD is obtained in the commune of Prisăcani - 38%, and in the Local Council, in the commune of Focuri - 36.28%. The average of the percentages obtained by the PSD at the level of Iași is 64.43% for the mayor and 58.55% for the Local Council.

It can also be observed that in 2020, the number of communes obtained by the two parties at the county level is quite close, 49 localities - PNL, compared to 42 localities - PSD, and in the 2024 elections, the number of communes obtained by the two parties at the county level is quite close 48 localities - PNL, compared to

44 localities – PSD However, we cannot exclude the importance of the parties, their notoriety, their size, their tradition, which may be other variables that can determine the electoral choice, beyond the boundaries of the present analysis. The trend seems to be at the county level between 2020-2024 of orientation to the left on the political chessboard of voters.

Table no. 7 shows the same tendency to maintain determinism between the leader of the party appointed to the position of Mayor and the party he belongs to, which obtained the highest percentages in the Local Council (dominant party).

We note that in the case of the other two parties - USR-PLUS and PMP - which obtained the highest percentages at the level of Local Councils as well as the position of Mayor, the political leader of the same party, the only regularity that can be remembered is that the party leader, regardless of the party, obtains higher percentages than those obtained by the party from which it comes and which ranked first in the Local Council (dominant party). Being much smaller, newer parties, without a tradition at the county level, the number of localities for which they obtain both positions – of Mayor and they get more votes in the Local Council – is much lower – in 3% of the county's localities. At the level of 2024, this tendency of small parties to obtain a majority in CL and the position of Mayor disappears completely.

On the other hand, to emphasize the relationship between the position of Mayor - the political leader from the same party and the party that obtains the highest percentage (dominant party in the Local Council), the percentage values for the two local administrative level positions were compared. Thus, in 2020 election, for the PNL, in 94% of cases, the percentages of the PNL Mayor are higher than the percentages obtained by the same party for the Local Council - dominant party and in 2024, the percentage increases to 100%. Thus, for the 2020 elections, for the PSD, in 93% of cases, the PSD Mayor's percentages are higher than the percentages obtained by the same party for the Local Council - dominant party and in 2024, the percentage increases to 95%.

We can thus conclude that, regardless of the ideology of the party (right-PNL and left-PSD), it seems that the electoral option is determined by the political leader, and candidate for the position of Mayor, in only 6% of cases - the percentage obtained by the PNL for the Local Council is higher than the percentage obtained by the PNL candidate for the position of Mayor and only in 7% of the cases - the percentage obtained by the PSD for the Local Council is higher than the percentage obtained by the PSD candidate for mayor in the 2020 elections, and the trend for 2024 is to further outline the mayor's position as a locomotive about the party to which he belongs and which obtains the majority in the Local Council.

Also, in the two 2020-2024 electoral rounds, out of a total of 97 localities, in 2024 compared to 2020, in 73 of the municipalities the same political coloration line was maintained for both the position of mayor or the majority in CL, and in 24 of the cases the large parties – PNL and PSD – either took over either the majority in the Local Council or the position of mayor in front of the small parties (in 4 communes), or they reversed the roles between them (19 cases, of which in 10

cases PSD took over communes in which PNL had traditionally voted in 2020, and in 8 cases – vice versa) (see **Table no. 8**).

These cases and these percentages do not, however, allow us to exclude the case where the voter's electoral option is determined by the party and, later, by the political leader-candidate for the position of Mayor. At the level of the present analysis, however, we can say that, in terms of the percentages obtained, at the level of Iasi County, the voters' electoral option seems to be much more strongly influenced by the political leader, candidate for the position of Mayor, whether or not he is part of the same party as the party that obtains the most votes in the Local Council (dominant party). However, in terms of the percentages of over 90% in the 2020 elections / even 100% in the 2024 elections, in which the political leader who obtains the position of mayor and the party that obtains the most votes in the Local Council come from the same party, he emphasizes the determinism between the two variables and seems to orient the county more to the left in 2024 compared to the trend to the right recorded in the 2020 elections.

5. Conclusions

The electoral choice/option is a complex one and has many determinants behind it. Based on the present quantitative study, it appears that there is a determinism between the party leader and the party he belongs to. For the voter, both the leader and the party he belongs to matter when he votes. About the present research, it is difficult to determine the causal relationship, if the choice of the leader determines the choice of the party or vice versa, the party leader is chosen according to the party he belongs to at the local level. However, it can be seen that in the majority of cases, where there is an overlap between the political colour of the dominant party in the Local Council and the political colour of the political leader who obtained the position of Mayor, the percentages of the political leader are above the value of the percentages obtained by the party of which it is a part. This fact seems to determine that the political leader matters first in the voters' choices, as he acquires the function of locomotive for the party to which he belongs or, in other words, it seems that the electoral option of the voters is determined first by the characteristics of the political leader and then by the importance of the party itself, and the tendency to shape this approach is visible between the electoral rounds between 2020-2024, at the local elections. However, it is difficult to determine if there are no other reasonings that voters take into account when they vote at the local level, determinisms that combine with those of the political leader variable, such as those mentioned in this analysis, taken from the literature specialized.

However, we can conclude that, to the specialized literature and the purposes of the present research, electoral behaviour in terms of the expressed vote is determined both by the political leader of the party and by the party to which it belongs, that there is a determinism between the two variables, but it is difficult to establish the meaning of the causal relationship. It seems that the leader is the one who determines the electoral choice and, then, the choice of the party as an

electoral option, but, based on the data used, we cannot exclude the importance of the other variants of determinism that can influence the electoral choice, and we cannot exclude whether there may be other variables that to concurrently determine the electoral choice. Moreover, the present study does not propose to establish this sense of the causal relationship, nor does it propose to eliminate the other determinisms of electoral behaviour presented at the theoretical level (state/community typology; conspiracy theories, etc.).

It is worth remembering that, implicitly at the level of local elections, the electoral behaviour of the voter is determined by the importance of the political leader who is running, by the importance of the political party from which he comes, and subsequent studies will observe whether at the local level implicitly the other determinisms presented at the present level of analysis may exist or coexist.

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Anexes

Table no. 1. Electoral situation in three localities in 2020

| Localities | Mayor percentage | Party from which the Mayor belongs | LC percentage | Dominant party in LC |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Pascani | 40,11 | PNL | 36,52 | PSD |
| Mircesti | 47,32 | USR-PLUS | 40,81 | PNL |
| Mogosesti Siret | 36,54 | PSD | 35,96 | PNL |

Table no. 2. Electoral situations in other five localities in 2024

| Localities | Mayor percentage | Party from which the Mayor belongs | LC percentage | Dominant party in LC |
|------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Harlau | 38,31 | PSD | 33,31 | PNL |
| Vladeni | 45,76 | PNL | 44,1 | PSD |
| Popesti | 35,94 | PNL | 34,65 | AUR |
| Dumesti | 43,98 | PSD | 40,57 | PNL |
| Tansa | 52,54 | PSD | 46,95 | PNL |

Table no. 3. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PNL party (2020)

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PNL | Dominant party in LC percentage -PNL |
|----|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Lespezi | 45,11 | 37,3 |
| 2 | Deleni | 86,05 | 71,7 |
| 3 | Scobinti | 87,33 | 71,22 |
| 4 | Plugari | 87,23 | 82,15 |
| 5 | Coarnele Caprei | 51,67 | 51,65 |
| 6 | Cristesti | 62,06 | 56,99 |
| 7 | Valea Seaca | 35,49 | 28,3 |
| 8 | Todiresti | 50,38 | 41,55 |
| 9 | Gropnita | 75,8 | 66,53 |
| 10 | Trifesti | 77,97 | 72,1 |
| 11 | Probota | 72,75 | 58,54 |
| 12 | Romanesti | 61,45 | 51,11 |
| 13 | Harmanesti | 61,29 | 58,24 |
| 14 | Stolniceni-Prajescu | 63,49 | 47,27 |
| 15 | Alexandru Ioan Cuza | 42,81 | 40,09 |
| 16 | Halaucesti | 67,77 | 62,35 |
| 17 | Bals | 51,67 | 50,24 |
| 18 | Braesti | 79,19 | 77,53 |
| 19 | Podu Iloaiei | 59,16 | 53,94 |
| 20 | Popesti | 52,16 | 48,93 |
| 21 | Sinesti | 73,76 | 65,21 |
| 22 | Dumesti | 26,98 | 28,14 |
| 23 | Victoria | 63,03 | 59,41 |
| 24 | Popricani | 53,02 | 47,03 |
| 25 | Letcani | 60,05 | 56,15 |
| 26 | Horlesti | 80,24 | 76,38 |
| 27 | Miroslava | 56,26 | 46,66 |
| 28 | Iasi | 42,01 | 32,24 |
| 29 | Aroneanu | 50,05 | 46,19 |
| 30 | Golaesti | 43,33 | 45,2 |

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PNL | Dominant party in LC percentage -PNL |
|----|---------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 31 | Ungheni | 57,48 | 53,84 |
| 32 | Holboca | 53,76 | 49 |
| 33 | Tomesti | 77,49 | 60,13 |
| 34 | Barnova | 51,99 | 44,58 |
| 35 | Mogosesti | 50,99 | 46,61 |
| 36 | Mironeasa | 82,67 | 80,11 |
| 37 | Dagata | 61,35 | 57,18 |
| 38 | Tansa | 59,78 | 51,3 |
| 39 | Tibanesti | 59,49 | 51,73 |
| 40 | Scanteia | 50,06 | 47,36 |
| 41 | Dobrovat | 78,2 | 58,97 |
| 42 | Schitu Duca | 48,62 | 35,24 |
| 43 | Comarna | 54,53 | 51,24 |
| 44 | Costuleni | 68,72 | 60,77 |
| 45 | Ciortesti | 61,05 | 58,56 |
| 46 | Mosna | 82,75 | 64,23 |
| 47 | Ceplenita | 38,96 | 39,29 |
| 48 | Valea Lupului | 38,87 | 37,45 |
| 49 | Rachiteni | 49,67 | 48,14 |

Table no. 4. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PNL party (2024)

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PNL | Dominant party in LC percentage - PNL |
|----|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Deleni | 78,57 | 70,76 |
| 2 | Scobinti | 77,19 | 65,19 |
| 3 | Plugari | 88,79 | 83,28 |
| 4 | Coarnele Caprei | 60,1 | 54,17 |
| 5 | Cristesti | 88,19 | 79,48 |
| 6 | Todiresti | 70,86 | 60,34 |
| 7 | Trifesti | 71,06 | 64,83 |
| 8 | Probota | 72,77 | 68,49 |
| 9 | Erbiceni | 48,13 | 46,17 |
| 10 | Romanesti | 62,48 | 59,01 |
| 11 | Pascani | 52,18 | 41,39 |
| 12 | Harmanesti | 47,23 | 44,07 |
| 13 | Alexandru Ioan Cuza | 63,54 | 55,78 |
| 14 | Halaucesti | 60,28 | 57,88 |
| 15 | Rachiteni | 56,28 | 52,63 |
| 16 | Oteleni | 47,47 | 42 |
| 17 | Podu Iloaiei | 76,84 | 64,64 |
| 18 | Sinesti | 85,39 | 74,96 |
| 19 | Movileni | 64,52 | 60,32 |
| 20 | Rediu | 28,92 | 28,32 |
| 21 | Victoria | 61,62 | 57,43 |
| 22 | Popricani | 60,01 | 52,6 |
| 23 | Letcani | 50,48 | 47,32 |
| 24 | Horlesti | 77,97 | 70,81 |
| 25 | Miroslava | 44,7 | 36 |
| 26 | Iasi | 32,24 | 24,7 |

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PNL | Dominant party in LC percentage - PNL |
|----|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 27 | Aroneanu | 54,33 | 51,21 |
| 28 | Golaesti | 60,43 | 57,84 |
| 29 | Ungheni | 46,74 | 38,41 |
| 30 | Holboca | 67,5 | 54,39 |
| 31 | Tomesti | 75,24 | 52,81 |
| 32 | Barnova | 37,65 | 33,14 |
| 33 | Mironeasa | 76,09 | 73,55 |
| 34 | Dagata | 67,21 | 60,88 |
| 35 | Tibanesti | 52,96 | 46,04 |
| 36 | Draguseni | 50,68 | 44,93 |
| 37 | Scanteia | 45,84 | 38,09 |
| 38 | Schitu Duca | 59,96 | 56,56 |
| 39 | Comarna | 43 | 41,95 |
| 40 | Costuleni | 60,2 | 55,12 |
| 41 | Ciortesti | 89,39 | 83,53 |
| 42 | Gorban | 56,59 | 43,42 |
| 43 | Mosna | 82,04 | 61,93 |
| 44 | Dolhesti | 55,51 | 54,67 |
| 45 | Cozmesti | 42,67 | 38,55 |
| 46 | Ceplenita | 53,5 | 49,38 |
| 47 | Mogosesti Siret | 54,52 | 50,67 |
| 48 | Valea Lupului | 82,43 | 69,32 |

Table no. 5. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PSD party (2020)

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PSD | Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD |
|----|--------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Tatarusi | 92,77 | 87,57 |
| 2 | Siretel | 54,86 | 51,15 |
| 3 | Harlau | 43,2 | 31,81 |
| 4 | Sipote | 55,77 | 54,41 |
| 5 | Bivolari | 61,78 | 53,89 |
| 6 | Vanatori | 58,55 | 50,19 |
| 7 | Cotnari | 47,35 | 45,54 |
| 8 | Belcesti | 45,14 | 44,75 |
| 9 | Focuri | 63,69 | 51,36 |
| 10 | Vladeni | 49,74 | 48,52 |
| 11 | Roscani | 57,8 | 57,26 |
| 12 | Tiganasi | 78,44 | 60,56 |
| 13 | Erbiceni | 69,07 | 62,02 |
| 14 | Baltati | 58,16 | 51,05 |
| 15 | Ion Neculce | 79,53 | 74,19 |
| 16 | Strunga | 62,57 | 59,62 |
| 17 | Helesteni | 48,03 | 44,89 |
| 18 | Motca | 72,42 | 60,96 |
| 19 | Miroslovesti | 45,72 | 46,18 |
| 20 | Ciohorani | 70,13 | 63,14 |
| 21 | Butea | 75,97 | 65,27 |
| 22 | Ruginoasa | 58,98 | 51,88 |
| 23 | Cucuteni | 58,4 | 58,8 |

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PSD | Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD |
|----|------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 24 | Oteleni | 61,03 | 44,85 |
| 25 | Lungani | 67,78 | 66,25 |
| 26 | Madarjac | 46,96 | 35,58 |
| 27 | Tutura | 68,52 | 62,74 |
| 28 | Ciurea | 58,55 | 46,78 |
| 29 | Voinesti | 56,37 | 45,23 |
| 30 | Tibana | 53,2 | 43,75 |
| 31 | Ipatele | 70,62 | 68,75 |
| 32 | Scheia | 50,81 | 42,59 |
| 33 | Draguseni | 50,44 | 52,95 |
| 34 | Grajduri | 55,25 | 47,8 |
| 35 | Prisacani | 38,44 | 38,43 |
| 36 | Raducaneni | 43,98 | 38,86 |
| 37 | Grozesti | 54,37 | 51,36 |
| 38 | Gorban | 49,27 | 44,02 |
| 39 | Dolhesti | 45,58 | 43,41 |
| 40 | Cozmesti | 52,96 | 48,21 |
| 41 | Costesti | 89,02 | 82,03 |
| 42 | Fantanele | 63,64 | 58,02 |

Table no. 6. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PSD party (2020)

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PSD | Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD |
|----|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Tatarusi | 87,41 | 81,1 |
| 2 | Lespezi | 38,5 | 38,63 |
| 3 | Siretel | 77,77 | 72,06 |
| 4 | Sipote | 58,89 | 58,01 |
| 5 | Andrieseni | 50,92 | 50,37 |
| 6 | Bivolari | 55,81 | 51,04 |
| 7 | Valea Seaca | 52,29 | 49,54 |
| 8 | Vanatori | 73,41 | 66,31 |
| 9 | Cotnari | 48,06 | 44,87 |
| 10 | Belcesti | 64,57 | 60,85 |
| 11 | Focuri | 58,22 | 36,28 |
| 12 | Gropnita | 75,35 | 73,53 |
| 13 | Roscani | 48,19 | 47,29 |
| 14 | Tiganasi | 79,89 | 69,94 |
| 15 | Baltati | 54,04 | 51,45 |
| 16 | Ion Neculce | 73,89 | 67,9 |
| 17 | Strunga | 57,63 | 56,8 |
| 18 | Helesteni | 57,03 | 56,54 |
| 19 | Motca | 64,35 | 53,19 |
| 20 | Miroslovesti | 68,31 | 58,48 |
| 21 | Ciohorani | 55,75 | 49,84 |
| 22 | Stolniceni-Prajescu | 66,76 | 56,6 |
| 23 | Mircesti | 41,28 | 38,63 |
| 24 | Butea | 79,48 | 68,91 |
| 25 | Ruginoasa | 54,05 | 46,33 |
| 26 | Cucuteni | 66,14 | 66,61 |

| No | Localities | Mayor percentage - PSD | Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD |
|----|------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 27 | Bals | 84,93 | 80 |
| 28 | Braesti | 86,9 | 85,76 |
| 29 | Lungani | 87,25 | 84,96 |
| 30 | Madarjac | 66,71 | 55,36 |
| 31 | Tutura | 93,9 | 82,45 |
| 32 | Ciurea | 56,21 | 45,73 |
| 33 | Mogosesti | 49,28 | 43,97 |
| 34 | Voinești | 49,37 | 46,58 |
| 35 | Tibana | 58,63 | 50,87 |
| 36 | Ipatele | 75,5 | 71,73 |
| 37 | Scheia | 61,67 | 51,53 |
| 38 | Grajduri | 58,87 | 47,48 |
| 39 | Dobrovat | 81,94 | 67,4 |
| 40 | Prisacani | 38 | 37,28 |
| 41 | Raducaneni | 58,15 | 47,63 |
| 42 | Grozesti | 75,03 | 71,18 |
| 43 | Costesti | 83,47 | 78,82 |
| 44 | Fantanele | 61,4 | 56,58 |

Table no. 7. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for different parties (2020)

| No | Locality from Iasi County | Mayor percentage | Party from which the Mayor belongs | Percentage LC | Dominant party in LC |
|----|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Andrieseni | 32,48 | PMP | 27,33 | PMP |
| 2 | Movileni | 36,5 | USR-PLUS | 33,55 | USR-PLUS |
| 3 | Rediu | 41,8 | USR-PLUS | 37,32 | USR-PLUS |

Table no. 8. Comparative analysis for the electoral situation between parties

| No | Locality IASI | Mayor party 2024 | Mayor party 2020 | Dominant party in LC 2020 | Dominant party in LC 2024 |
|----|---------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Lespezi | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 2 | Andrieseni | PSD | PMP | PMP | PSD |
| 3 | Valea Seaca | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 4 | Gropnita | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 5 | Vladeni | PNL | PSD | PSD | PSD |
| 6 | Erbiceni | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 7 | Stolniceni-Prajescu | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 8 | Mircesti | PSD | USR-PLUS | PNL | PSD |
| 9 | Bals | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 10 | Oteleni | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 11 | Braesti | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 12 | Popesti | PNL | PNL | PNL | AUR |
| 13 | Dumesti | PSD | PNL | PNL | PNL |
| 14 | Movileni | PNL | USR-PLUS | USR-PLUS | PNL |
| 15 | Rediu | PNL | USR-PLUS | USR-PLUS | PNL |
| 16 | Mogosesti | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |
| 17 | Tansa | PSD | PNL | PNL | PNL |
| 18 | Draguseni | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 19 | Dobrovat | PSD | PNL | PNL | PSD |

DO LEADERS MATTER?

| No | Locality IASI | Mayor party 2024 | Mayor party 2020 | Dominant party in LC 2020 | Dominant party in LC 2024 |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 20 | Gorban | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 21 | Dolhesti | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 22 | Cozmesti | PNL | PSD | PSD | PNL |
| 23 | Mogosesti Siret | PNL | PSD | PNL | PNL |