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THE IDEOLOGICAL MAPPING OF
POLITICAL PARTIES IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

What are the main dimensions of competition between political parties in Romania? Is there a match of the electorate policy preferences with those of political parties? This paper analyzes what are the main dimensions of competition between parties in Romania by looking at the issue preferences of the party in the electorate. We use data obtained from the voting advice application (VAA) applied in 2012 (votulmeu.com) in Romania. Finally we compare our results with Chapel Hill expert party mappings and claim that VAA data are a reliable source for finding out the programmatic peferences of party supporters.

- VAA
- *party mappings*
- *Romania*
- *online survey*
- *left-right*

Introduction

The analysis of the ideology of political parties and voters are important topics for political scientists (Germann et al. 2012). The ideological space occupied by political parties is analyzed by researchers with the help of candidates, politicians (Kitschelt et al. 1999, Hix and Crombez 2005) or experts (Benoit and Laver 2006). Others use the programs of political parties (Budge et al. 2001). Party mappings on the left and right dimensions improve the chances for citizens to cast a correct vote. They provide a heuristic device that assist citizens in expressing preferences on issues (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989, Inglehart and Klingemann 1976). There is little research (Germann et al. 2012, Marian and King 2014) that surveys the ideological preferences of the party in the electorate (Key 1964) or that compares the ideological preferences of citizens to the ideological positions of political parties (Huber and Powell 1994). This article explores the potential of a new method of gathering data that can be used to explore the political preferences of citizens. VAA (Voting Advice Applications) data allows the comparison of the ideological positions of citizens with the positions of political parties. It is also a tool that helps voters to make informed choices (Alvarez et al. 2014, Ruusuvirta and Rosema 2009, Wall et al. 2014). VAAs have become popular in many European countries (Garzia and Marschall 2012). The application asks users to express preferences on 30 issues that are considered important for the upcoming elections. After

completing the survey, the online tool ranks the political parties running in elections according to their compatibility with the users preferences. The advantages of VAAs for party mapping are that it is a cost efficient tool of data gathering, it secures more anonimity to respondents than traditional or telephone surveys and includes a higher number of issues than regular surveys (Garzia et al. 2014). The main disadvantage is that users are self selected. This article explores the usefulness of VAA in Romania. It claims that despite the problems that arise from self selection, the application generates party mappings that are comparable with other methods of assessing the ideological space of political parties.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we briefly account for the studies that use VAA for party mapping and political behavior. Secondly, we present the approaches used in party mappings in general with a focus on studies that used VAAs, followed by a discussion on party mappings in Romania. Next we describe the Romanian VAA and the methodology, followed by a presentation of the results and a discussion on the implications of the findings. This paper will use the VAA (Voting Advice Application) data collected from the application „votulmeu.com" to build party maps based on the preferences of citizens and political parties.

VAA Studies

The rationale of a voting advice application is to provide an online tool that helps citizens in making an informed vote choice at elections. The application matches the users' preferences to the stances of political parties. VAAs is now widely used in Europe (Germann et al. 2012). The popularity of this application is motivated by the increasing number of floating voters that need guidance during the electoral campaign (Mair 2008). Researchers use these data to test hypotheses regarding the quality of advice it gives (Alvarez et al. 2014) and the biases it encompasses (Gemenis 2013), as a determinant of vote choice (Andreadis et al. 2013) or as a measurement of congruence between citizens and candidates or political parties (Fivaz et al. 2014).

The number of citizens that respond to voting advice applications varies substantially. For example in the Netherlands in the 2006 elections there were 4,6 million users, in Germany in 2009 there were 6,7 million (12% of the electorate), Belgium (13% of the electorate), and Switzerland (more than 20% of the electorate) had 1 million users each (Garzia 2010, Walgrave et al. 2008). In the Czech Republic at the first direct presidential elections organized in 2013, over 1 million users used KohoVolit.eu the Czech VAA. With the exception of the Czech Republic, in several other Eastern European countries VAAs are not very popular. In the 2009 European Elections in Poland there were 31389 users, in Lithuania 1836 and in Latvia 974. In Romania in 2009 there were 1678 respondents VAA, Bulgaria 6319 and Hungary 6622 (Trechsel 2010). The Romanian 2012 VAA used in this paper had 16107 users, representing 0, 08% of the electorate. Compared to the Romanian European elections VAA from 2009 (1678 users) (Trechsel 2010) the number of respondents increased substantially.

The research that uses VAAs targets its design, validity and its effects on vote choice and political representation (Marschall and Garzia 2014, Triga et al. 2012). Studies that inquire about the quality of the match given by VAAs (Lefevere and

Walgrave 2012) warn about the potential of the application to give the wrong advices because of the way the statements are phrased. Researchers focus on the effect of statement selection (Baka et al. 2012, Gemenis 2013) and they issue warnings about the distortions and the manipulative potential of the application (Nuytemans et al. 2010). Secondly there are studies that measure the impact of VAA's on the party choice (Marschall and Garzia 2014, Triga et al. 2012). VAAs can be considered as an additional tool of the electoral campaign that helps voters to make informed choices. That is why it could be considered as an instrument of political influence (Çarkoğlu et al. 2012, Wall et al. 2014). There is an abundant literature on the effects of political campaigning on political preferences. Hansen (2011) identifies six stories explaining the impact of electoral campaigns. First citizens can learn from campaigns what are their duties and choices (civic learning model) (Freedman et al. 2004 and Moore, 1987), secondly citizens have predispositions that are simply reinforced through campaigns (minimal effects model) (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954, Schmitt-Beck 2007: 753), thirdly political campaigns can set the issues according to which citizens judge candidates (priming studies) (Iyengar and Simon, 1993) and influence party choice, fourthly citizens acquire and digest information obtained from political campaigns and make decisions according to the type of information they remember (memory based models) (Althaus 2003, Zaller, 1992). The fifth model sees voters as continuously ingesting information (Lodge et al. 1995) from political discourses and adjusting or reinforcing their preferences. And finally, we have the model of heuristics (Iyengar, 1990, Lau and Redlawsk, 2001, Sniderman et al. 1991) that considers voters as investing minimal efforts to obtain good quality or enough information to make a choice between candidates. Studies that use VAA embraced the models of campaign influence on vote choice (Fivaz and Nadig 2012, Marschall and Schultze 2012, Pianzola and Ladner 2011, Ruusuvirta and Rosema 2009). Some compared vote switching of VAA users to non-users. The results showed that VAA users are more likely to resort to vote switching (Andreadis, Pianzola et al. 2013) than non-VAA users. This finding confirms the civic learning model in which the VAA is viewed as a political learning device. Wall et al. (2011) used an experimental design to present the Dutch VAA as more of a tool for reinforcing pre-existing preferences of citizens. They found confirmation of the minimal effects model of VAA influence on vote in electoral campaigns.

Some accentuate the use of VAA as an alternative for measuring congruence (Alvarez et al. 2014) or mapping the preferences of the party in the electorate (Garzia and Marschall 2012, Gemenis 2013). The mapping of political parties could replace expert surveys or party manifesto party mappings (Mendez and Wheatley 2014). VAAs are easy to organize, the number of respondents is high and in many countries the data obtained is representative (Mendez and Wheatley 2014). Research that includes VAA party mappings focus on accuracy and the match with party mappings from manifesto data or surveys (Gemenis 2014, Mendez and Wheatley 2014, Wheatley et al. 2014). The results indicated that VAAs can be used especially in countries in which the number of users is high and approximating the population's socio demographic characteristics (Gemenis 2013, Mendez and Wheatley 2014). Although VAAs may accurately measure party positions, these cannot take into account valence issues and can be manipulated by candidates who might choose to have positions close to as many voters as possible in order to get a higher score (Wagner and Ruusuvirta, 2010). VAA respondents

are unlike the national population. They are well educated, young and interested in politics. Where possible, the problem of representativeness was partially solved by giving weight to under-represented groups (Wheatley et al. 2014).

Wheatley et al. (2014) mapped political parties in Scotland with results from an experiment in which they compared the party supporters' preferences on VAA with a face to face survey. They discovered remarkable similarities between the political preferences of online users and the surveyed population. Germann et al. (2012) build party mappings with the Smartvote VAA application for the Swiss parliamentary elections of 2007, and found comparable results with mappings from survey data. Our paper belongs to this stream of studies. We explore and identify the patterns yielding from the political preferences expressed by users of the Votulmeu (My Vote) in Romania and compare our results with expert surveys.

Ideological space and party mappings

Researchers map parties most often according to expert surveys, interviews with representatives or party activists (Kitschelt et al. 1999, Grecu 2003, Markowski and Tucker 2010) and party manifestoes (Benoit and Laver 2006, Budge et al. 2001, Klingemann et al. 2006, Laver 2001). The VAA presents certain advantages compared to them: they are cost effective, the number of respondents is high and they offer a platform that allows the comparison of preferences of citizens with parties. On the other hand respondents are self-selected and candidates can manipulate their position so that the VAA will advise users to vote for the candidates' own party (Germann et al. 2012).

For Romania, and for most of post-communist new democracies in Eastern Europe, Herbert Kitschelt (1992) identifies two issue dimensions on which most parties compete. One source of competition between political parties is viewed as originating from the allocation of material resources in society. On the one hand there are political parties that support the unstructured allocation while other parties will support a redistributive system. Secondly the competition among parties stems from the way rights should be distributed in society. One camp supports a universal, equal opportunities view of how these rights should be allocated. The other camp agrees that certain groups should enjoy more rights than others. Others topics identified by Kitschelt (1992) were regime divide or the communist/anticommunist divide, national-cosmopolitan and ethnic divide. Evans and Whitefield (1993) and Whitefield (2002) confirm Kitschelts' findings. Whitefield (2002) claims that despite the diversity of cleavages, the dimensions of competition in Eastern Europe turned out to be not very different from the Western European political systems. The importance of ethnic diversity (attitudes toward Hungarians or Russians) remains one specific dimension of competition in some countries from Eastern Europe (Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, or Romania). Kitschelt (1992) uses mass surveys and expert placement of parties when building the party mappings for The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. For Romania he maps parties on the distributive versus spontaneous market allocation axis and the authoritarian versus libertarian axis. Grecu (2003), who uses expert survey data from 2002 presents similar findings to discover, in Romania, an economic dimension and a pro versus anti attitude towards minorities.

Later studies confirm the existence of two dimensions of competition among parties in Romania (Benoit and Laver 2006). Fesnic (2008) builds party mappings using preferences of the Romanian electorate from 1993 until 2006 and identifies a dimension labelled left-right referring to what Hooghe et al. (2010) called economic left right. The second dimension identified is labeled by Fesnic New Politics referring to the authoritarian/libertarian preferences.

European integration is an issue that gains relevance in Eastern Europe starting with the negotiations to join the European Union. The Chapel Hill expert surveys of 2006 and 2010 focus on this topic, revealing parties as having differentiated positions in Eastern Europe (Hooghe et al. 2010 and Bakker et al. 2012). In Poland the choice for a Eurosceptic party in 2002 predicted an anti EU attitude in the referendum, overshadowing socio-demographic determinants. The result is surprising for a political system characterized by low party loyalties (Markowski and Tucker, 2010). Considering these findings *we hypothesize that with the help of the 2012 Romanian VAA data we will identify dimensions of competition similar to other party mappings for Romania. The economic left right dimension, GAL-TAN and attitudes toward EU are the issues on which Romanian parties would be differentiated.*

Methodology

"Votul meu" is the VAA that went online one month before the Romanian parliamentary elections that took place on December 9, 2012. The users had to express their preferences on thirty statements that were considered to be the most important for that particular electoral campaign. The possible answers were: "Completely Agree", "Agree", "Neither Agree nor Disagree", "Disagree" and "Completely Disagree". One extra option presented to respondents was "Don't Know". The positions of the political parties in Romania were coded on the same 30 statements by country experts. The application matched the responses of each applicant with the score obtained by the party through the expert coding. Pre-electoral surveys predicted that four relevant parties and coalitions would enter the parliament. These were The Social Democratic Party (PSD-Partidul Social Democrat) and The National Liberal Party (PNL- Partidul Național Liberal) united in a coalition called The Social Liberal Union. They were joined by two smaller parliamentary parties such as the Conservative Party (PC-Partidul Conservator) and The National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR-Uniunea Nationala pentru Progresul României). Both parties had less than 2% of electoral support yet they had parliamentary representation in the 2008-2012 legislature and gained seats in the 2012 parliamentary elections. The Democratic Liberal Party (PDL - Partidul Democrat Liberal) was also part of an electoral coalition named The Right Romania Alliance (ARD- Alianta Romania Dreapta) that included the Civic Force (FC - Forta Civica) and the National Peasant Party who's few representatives gained parliamentary representation. The People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD- Partidul Poporului Dan Diaconescu) surprisingly won 47 seats (Romanian Electoral Office 2012) in the lower chamber of representatives with a populist electoral message (Gherghina and Miscoiu 2014). Finally. the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR- Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România) gained 18 seats in the lower chamber of representatives (Romanian Electoral Office 2012).

In addition to the preferences on policies users were asked questions on party identification, voting behavior and left and right. "Votul Meu" contained 18484 respondents. Not all of them completed all the questions in the survey or had valid answers. After applying various filtering procedure 16107 respondents' answers were kept.
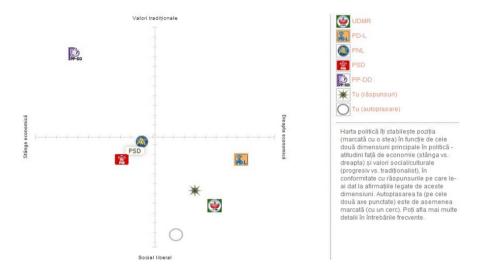

Figure 1. Positions of political parties according to expert surveys used in the VAA Votulmeu at the 2012 parliamentary elections. These positions are matched with the users preferences.

Gemenis (2013) identifies a deductive and inductive method of finding issue dimensions. A deductive method refers to the selection of issues to be introduced in the factor analysis that match pre-determined dimensions, while the latter method is employed to find dimensionality in all issues on which users express preferences. We find the inductive method more convincing as our purpose is to explore the preferences of the VAA online users and find dimensionality in all their responses. For the inductive method the identification of dimensions is done by factor analysis with Varimax rotation. To identify the groupings of statements that qualified for theoretical constructs, we selected factors with Cronbach alpha higher than 0.7. As a further test we made use of Mokken scaling to test the validity of our constructs (Wheatley et al. 2014).

In order to identify the positions of parties on the ideological maps we have selected the respondents that felt close to a party and they intend to vote for that party. Thus we followed the selection method used by Wheatley et al. (2014) and Germann et al. (2012). These restrictions reduced the number of respondents to 6259. Next we compared the Chapel Hill expert surveys of 2010 and 2006 to our party mappings. These surveys contain identical questions with the 2012 Romanian VAA for the GAL-TAN and economic dimensions although the coding method was different. We recoded the VAA data to match the Chapel Hill coding.

Data analysis and results

In 2012, Romania registered the lowest Internet penetration in the European Union. Therefore it is no surprise that the data generated by Votul Meu suffered to a greater extent from representation concerns as other VAAs. 78% of the Romanian VAA respondents have graduate studies, and 78% come from urban areas. A 2012 face to face survey showed that 13% of the population has graduate studies and half of the population of Romania lives in rural areas. The population that was surveyed differs in terms of political preferences as well. The majority prefers center right wing parties. Moreover according to the VAA users the center right wing parties would win the parliamentary election. Thus our data is not nationally representative. It is more likely to be representing the urban and citizens with more years of education. On the other hand Zaller (1992) and later Althaus (2003) showed that the better off category of population might also be the most influential voice on representatives. Secondly this group is ideal to survey because the chances to discover patterns of ideological thinking are increased.

Before engaging into the analysis of preferences we follow Converse's (1964) warnings regarding the pursuit of patterns of ideological thinking. When discussing about people having belief systems we have to take into account the number of non-responses. Converse (1964) noted that the number of "no opinion" in surveys is quite high leaving the expression of preferences to a few citizens. In the Romanian VAA the number of non-responses on issues is low. It ranges from 0.6% (89) to 7.5% (1190). Party supporters represent 38% (6177) of the respondents in our survey. The level non response of party supporters ranged from 0.5% (31) to 4.6% (282). Next, in order to map the preferences of the party in the electorate (Key, 1964) we used exploratory factor analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Factor analysis of 30 statements on important Romanian issues.

Nr.	Issue	Austerity measures/ European integration	GAL-TAN	Left-right
1	The state should intervene to lower the price of basic foods.	-.302	-.119	**.684**
2	The Romanian state should allow the Canadian company Gabriel Resources to continue operations at Rosia Montana.	**,608**	,123	-.179
3	The poorest citizens should pay less income tax.	-,214	-,011	**.680**
4	Pension funds should be nationalized to fill shortages in the state pension fund.	-,128	,039	**.645**
5	External loans from institutions such as the IMF are a good solution to crisis situations.	**,662**	,063	-.091
6	Foreign private investors' access to natural resources contracts in Romania should be banned.	-,331	-,131	.437

7	It is acceptable for the government to cut salaries in the public sector during the crisis to keep the budget deficit at a low level.	**,619**	,043	-.297
8	Parliament should remain bicameral.	-,586	,033	.048
9	Romania should become a parliamentary republic.	-,578	,112	.084
10	All proven collaborators of the Securitate should be denied access to public functions.	,158	-,050	-.085
11	Ethnically-based parties should be banned.	-,080	-,398	-.094
12	Romania should restore the monarchy.	-,256	,122	-.069
13	The Bucharest authorities have too much power to decide on matters in the rest of the country.	,064	,244	.000
14	Romania should cede more decision-making power to the EU.	**,615**	,224	-.230
15	Romania should improve its relationship with Russia.	-,213	-,062	.070
16	Romania should pursue reunification with Moldova	,272	-,280	.147
17	International partners (such as the U.S. or EU) have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of Romania when they feel there is a threat to democracy.	**,714**	,154	-.082
18	Homosexuals should have the right to express themselves freely in public.	,113	,161	-.073
19	The church has too much influence in Romanian society.	-,004	,042	-.032
20	The death penalty should be reintroduced for heinous crimes.	,045	-,160	.218
21	The law should give priority to employees against their employers.	-,113	-,054	**.692**
22	Women should have the right to decide whether to remain pregnant.	,058	-,058	.000
23	Between kindergarden and first grade, children should go to a preparatory class at school.	,576	,080	-.027
24	Small rural hospitals should be closed, and the state should invest in larger regional hospitals.	,594	,100	-.267
25	Hungarian politicians should cooperate more with the authorities in Budapest than those from Bucharest to meet the objectives of the Hungarian minority in Romania.	,121	**,604**	.074

26	All Hungarians should be obliged to learn Romanian.	-,064	-,583	,262
27	A territorial reform should include the creation of an autonomous Hungarian region.	,073	**,784**	-,012
28	Cultural autonomy for minorities would constitute a threat to Romania.	-,158	-,466	,294
29	Minorities should have the right to education exclusively in the mother tongue, including at university.	,137	**,702**	-.035
30	The Roma ethnic population of cities should live isolated from the rest of the community.	-,005	-,012	.062

The analysis yields eight dimensions that had an Eigen values larger than a unity. We selected the issues with the loading coefficients higher than 0,6 and identified three dimensions with Cronbach alpha 0,781, 0,616 and 0.712 showing robust internal consistency.. The three dimensions are labeled in Table 1. In order to provide an additional test of the robustness of our findings we use Mokken scaling. Mokken scaling shows whether the identified dimensions have components that are scalable. The indicator of scalability H shows that the scale has moderate strength (between .3 and .5 - see Table 2).

Table 2 Mokken scales with scalability coefficient (Hi) on issues that load as important on the factor analysis
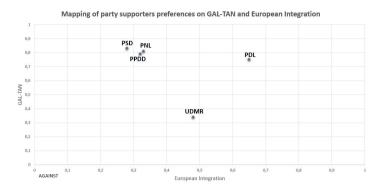
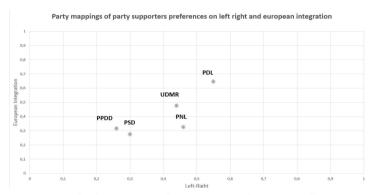| Item	Question	Scales		
		European integration (0.449)	GAL-TAN (0.403)	Left-Right (0.423)
1	The state should intervene to lower the price of basic foods.			0.458
2	The Romanian state should allow the Canadian company Gabriel Resources to continue operations at Rosia Montana.	0.396		
3	The poorest citizens should pay less income tax.			0.418
4	Pension funds should be nationalized to fill shortages in the state pension fund.			0.416
5	External loans from institutions such as the IMF are a good solution to crisis situations.	0.438		
7	It is acceptable for the government to cut salaries in the public sector during the crisis to keep the budget deficit at a low level.	0.437		
14	Romania should cede more decision-making power to the EU.	0.476		
17	International partners (such as the U.S. or EU) have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of Romania when they feel there is a threat to democracy.	0.495		

21	The law should give priority to employees against their employers.			0.394
25	Hungarian politicians should cooperate more with the authorities in Budapest than those from Bucharest to meet the objectives of the Hungarian minority in Romania.		0.313	
27	A territorial reform should include the creation of an autonomous Hungarian region.		0.464	
29	Minorities should have the right to education exclusively in the mother tongue, including at university.		0.426	

The first dimension loaded on a mixture of economic policies and preferences on the influence of IMF and EU. It includes environmental concerns, public fund cuts, surrendering decision-making to EU and accepting IMF and EU as protectors of democracy. This is a dimension that reflects the main electoral campaign topics. On the 6th of July 2012, president Basescu was suspended by the Parliament. A referendum was organized in order to support this decision. The referendum failed to reach the 50% turnout required for the validation. The EU, IMF and Venice Commission issued several warnings to Prime Minister Victor Ponta and interim president Crin Antonescu not to influence the results of the referendum and respect the decisions of the Constitutional Courts. The other source for this dimension is the role IMF had on the austerity measures imposed by the government of Prime Minister Emil Boc. The most radical measure was the 25% wage cuts of each public sector employee. We would call this the European integration and austerity measures dimension. We suspect that it is a transient topic that is connected to the context of the 2012 referendum for the dismissal of the president, the economic crisis and the tense relationship with IMF and EU.

The second dimension covers preferences on issues referring to the Hungarian community, the cultural autonomy for all minorities and education in mother tongue. This issue is similar to the libertarian-cosmopolitan politics versus authoritarian particularist politics dimension identified by Kitschelts'(1992) party mappings. Following Marks et al. (2006) and Wheatley et al. (2014) we call this dimension Green-Alternative –Libertarian / Traditional-Authoritarian Nationalist GAL/TAN.

The third dimension includes preferences that refer to issues similar to the economic left-right dimension. States intervention to lower the price of basic foods, protection of the public pensions system and states protection of employees are topics that divide citizens on the economic left-right scale. We consider that the last two dimensions are more stable and explain party positions and shifts over time. Next, we mapped parties by calculating the average score a group of party supporters receives on the three dimensions and mapped the scores on pairs of dimensions.
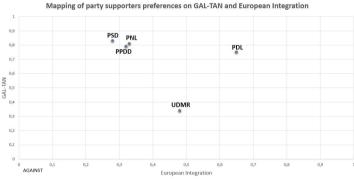
Figure 2. Party mappings on three dimensions: European integration, GAL-TAN, economic left-right (Positions represent the average position of party supporters recoded so that variation will range from 0 to 1.)

European integration -0 means opposition to European integration

GAL-TAN – GAL means green, alternative, liberal and TAN means traditional, authoritarian, nationalist

Left-Right – left is a preference for state intervention in the market and support for social services and right symbolizes a minimal state and privatization of social services

The results show that the four groups of supporters of parliamentary parties have distinct positions on the identified dimensions. Relative to other parties, the PSD supporters have center-left preferences on the economic left-right dimension. The party that is the most to the left is the populist PP-DD. PNL is considered a liberal

pro-market party (Fesnic, 2008). The party mappings show, however, that supporters are left wing, against the influence of IMF and EU and foreign investors. On left-right axis, this party's position is center-left confirming the party's ideological shift. The liberal party joined a coalition with the social-democrats in 2011 and formed the government together with PSD in 2012. Previous party mappings placed this party as the most right wing as a pro-market and libertarian party (Grecu, 2003, Fesnic, 2008).

PDL is the party that is a former splinter from PDSR (PDSR - The Party of Social Democracy from Romania). The party was in government from 2008 until May 2012 when the Ungureanu government received a vote of no confidence. PDL had to implement harsh economic reforms following EU and IMF recommendations. These included a 25% cut in public sector wages and the cancellation of all monetary premiums. Its government initiated several controversial reforms in education, health and public administration. The party mappings show this party as center-right on the economic left-right axis and the strongest supporter of IMF and EU intervention in the economy or country's decision making process. This is not a surprise. Earlier in 2012, the dismissal of the president, supported by PDL, raised serious concerns about the democratic consolidation and the separation of powers in the country. EU officials, the Venice Commission and the US Ambassador criticized the USL government for pressuring the Constitutional Court to issue a decision through which the dismissal of the president would be permanent. These reactions generated criticisms from USL leaders who accused The European Union and The United States of interfering with Romanian national decision making. This was an unprecedented type of discourse coming from a country in which citizens and parties showed solid support for the EU and the United States. PDL encouraged its supporters not to turn out at the referendum. UDMR supporters are centrist on European integration and the economic left-right axes. The party is set apart from the other parties on GAL-TAN. UDMR is the party that represents the ethnic Hungarians. Its main goal is to ensure the representation of its minority thus it is the most open to rights accorded to the Hungarian minority. Given its focus on Hungarian minority rights, UDMR was able to be in alliance with both left and right wing parties from 1996 until 2012.

PNL, PSD and PPDD have similar positions on the austerity measures and the interference of EU and IMF in national decision making. These parties were especially vocal against the declarations of Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany, and other officials that criticized Romanian officials with tampering with the independence of the Constitutional Court during the dismissal of Traian Basescu. The PDL electorate supports the austerity measures and the pro-market policies. PDL's economic policies in 2011 and 2012 included austerity measures such as wage and benefit cuts, taxation of pensions higher than 250 euro and increased VAT tax from 19% to 24%. It seems that a part of the Romanian electorate supports these measures.

Besides the 30 statements, the users were asked to place themselves on a GAL-TAN and economic scales. We compared the positions of party supporters on the scales identified in the factor analysis with the answers on the GAL-TAN and the economic axes. It seems that supporters from all parties view themselves far more social liberal when they are asked to express a preference between being a social liberal or a conservative traditionalist regarding minority rights. On the economic left-right the most surprising position is that of PNL supporters. They view themselves as

supporters of market economy when asked to express a preference on the left-right axis but are at odds with the policy preferences they support (Fig. 2) and with the position of their party (Fig. 1). While the expert party mapping of PNL is closely matched by the mapping of policy preferences, the positioning of party supporters on the left-right axis does not reveal such a shift. Party supporters see themselves as right wing social liberals at odds with the policy preferences they support. One reason for such a mismatch might lie in the lacking capacity of citizens to use the economic left right and GAL-TAN (Marian and King 2014) axes as a proxy for identifying parties closed to them. Marian and King (2014) observed that since 1990 no more than 40% of citizens place themselves on the left-right scale, although data from 2012 shows that this percentage increased.

We do not have surveys from 2012 applied in Romania to test the external validity of our findings. However we use the Chapel Hill expert survey from 2010 and 2006 to compare the positions of PSD, PNL, PDL and UDMR with our findings. The expert data of the Chapel Hill survey confirms the ideological positions of political parties and party supporters on the GAL-TAN and economic left-right.
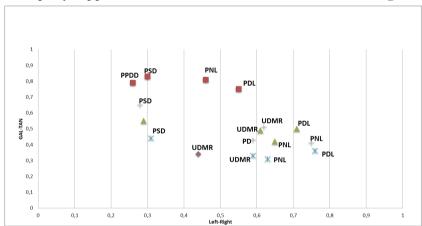

Figure 3. The ideological positions of political parties in Romania. For VAA data positions represent the average position of party supporters recoded so that variation will range from 0 to 1, The Chapel Hill data represent average party positions according to country experts

■ VAA 2012 preferences compiled from the aggregation of issue stances of party supporters

▲ VAA 2012 positions of parties on GAL-TAN and economic axes according to the expert survey

✛ Chapel Hill expert survey 2010   ✳ Chapel Hill expert survey 2006 GAL means green alternative liberal and TAN- traditional, authoritarian, nationalist

The positions of political parties by experts are similar with the party supporters' preferences on the economy and GAL-TAN axes. PDL and PNL are viewed as center right wing parties. On GAL-TAN, PNL and UDMR are the most liberal followed by PDL and PSD. PNL has a different position than in our party mappings but this is possibly due to its recent ideological shift towards the left. The obvious discrepancy lies in comparing the preferences of citizens based on issues on GAL-TAN. Although most party supporters view themselves as social liberal, in a similar vein to how experts

see parties, the party supporters' preferences on specific issues that target acceptance of Hungarians reveal a far more conservative view. The party mappings in the expert surveys match closely the party supporters' positions on the left right and GAL-TAN adding to the validity of our results.

Conclusions

VAA applications provide a unique opportunity for social scientists to map, test and analyze the programmatic thinking of citizens. Despite its limitations, VAA data are easy to obtain, the issues cover several domains, and the number of respondents is high. In this paper VAA "Votulmeu.com" was used to test whether we can draw valid party mappings of party supporters' preferences. The data obtained from the Romanian VAA is not representative of the whole population as it is confronted with problems of self-selection and it is biased towards citizens who use the internet, the highly educated living in urban areas. The biases are larger for Romania due to its low number of internet users (40% in 2012), the smallest figure in the European Union. There were above 16000 respondents that completed the survey. The number of respondents was small in comparison with other VAA's applied in Europe but it was ten times larger than a VAA applied in Romania in 2009. The party mappings of preferences revealed that there were three important dimensions of competition. The first included a mixture of economic austerity measures and attitudes on foreign policy. This is a dimension that was particularly salient in 2011 and 2012. At the beginning of 2011, Basescu, announced the implementation of harsh austerity measures such as the raise of VAT from 19 to 24% and 25% wage cuts in the public sector. The IMF recommended some of these measures. Later, in 2012, the president was suspended by a majority vote in parliament. EU officials reacted to the attempts of the Ponta government to avoid constitutional rulings and dismiss the president. The mingling of international institutions affected the opinions of citizens. The second dimension identified was GAL-TAN with left wing parties being more conservative than the right wing ones. Thirdly the economic left-right dimension covered issues that have to do with providing protection for the pension system and protecting employees from employers. The mappings confirmed previous studies on the analysis of party programmatic competition in Romania. The validity of the results was tested by comparing the expert positioning of political parties in Romania by the Chapel Hill survey. While the preferences on the economic dimension were similar, on GAL-TAN issues party supporters had more conservative preferences. At the same time, they viewed themselves as more social liberal. The expert surveys mappings and the mapping of party supporters' preferences on the left-right and GAL-TAN, with the help of the VAA, showed remarkable similarity. To conclude, we find that VAA for Romania is a valid and cost effective resource for party mappings.

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