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## Electoral System Incentives for a Party-Serving Personal Vote

*How Can High Personalization Occur under PR?*

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**ABSTRACT** Candidate-centric campaigns are most likely to occur when electoral system incentives to personalize do not conflict with party-based incentives. Then it makes sense for candidates to use any campaign mean to improve their chances to win a seat while also helping the party win more seats and increasing their standing within the organization. The Romanian electoral system uniquely combined mechanisms that enabled all three motivations for almost all candidates. Our analysis of the degree and determinants of personalization in the 2012 parliamentary elections illustrates that electoral system incentives were key factors driving campaign personalization as a party-congruent rather than adversarial campaign strategy. **KEYWORDS** personalization, electoral systems, constituency campaigns, Romania

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### INTRODUCTION

Parties remain fundamentally at the heart of contemporary electoral competition. Yet, significant decreases in party membership, the shrinking reach of intermediate partisan organizations like trade unions, the changes in communication techniques, as well as an increasing citizens' disaffection from political parties (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000), facilitate personalization in electoral politics (Karvonen, 2010). As Renwick and Pilet (2016, p. 5) show, the personalization of politics is a multifaceted concept with diverse and contested meanings. It implies an increased relevance of party leaders in all matters of government (Poguntke & Webb, 2007) and of candidate traits in candidate selection and vote choice (Aarts et al., 2011). At the same time, a growing literature suggests that many recent electoral reforms promoted candidate-centric features (Renwick & Pilet, 2016), and that voters do make use of existing possibilities to choose between candidates and influence candidates' chances to win a seat (Karvonen, 2010). Media coverage of campaigns (Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi, 2012) and candidates' campaign strategies (Zittel, 2015) show markedly different degrees of personalization across countries, as well as parties (Cross & Young, 2015; Eder et al., 2015; De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015; Chiru, 2015).

We refer to personalization very broadly (and loosely) to mean simply any focus on specific individual candidates in election campaigns, including three interrelated but not fully overlapping dimensions of personalization: role definition or campaign norm, campaign

means, and campaign message. The classic model proposed by Carey and Shugart (1995) and revised by Shugart (2001) seeks to explain cross-national differences in personalization through electoral system incentives for candidates to cultivate a personal vote seen as distinct from the party reputation, yet not necessarily opposed to it, an aspect also confirmed in recent research (Cross & Young, 2015; Zittel, 2015).<sup>1</sup> This article proposes a number of building blocks for an alternative theory that starts from candidates' potential motivations to personalize their campaigns and explicitly puts the parties at the center of such decisions. It can be said that if Renwick and Pilet (2016) look at candidate centeredness of electoral systems specifically from the perspective of the voter, we look at it specifically from the perspective of the candidate.

We argue that candidates personalize campaigns to raise (a) their own chances to get elected in the given election; (b) the seat count for their party (over and above their own chances); and/or (c) their individual standing within the party. We expect these three factors to have separate effects. However, they can cumulate—and, thus, maximize personalization—only in specific contexts: motive (a) can occur only where there is a direct vote for individual candidates; motive (b) is added if the vote for a candidate also counts as a vote for the nominating party even if the candidate is not elected; and motive (c) requires that candidates can count on an intra-party mechanism that rewards rather than punishes individual success at the polls.

Our central argument is that personalization from the point of view of the candidate should be highest when all three motives are activated by the political context, and not just for some candidates, but for most. Commonly used electoral systems do not meet this criterion. From the systems in which votes go to a specific individual candidate, First Past The Post (FPTP) systems, for instance, do not include motive (b); (c) is a plausible motive for personalization only if running in a marginal seat or when party labels are weak or nonexistent; otherwise, it is either superfluous or a waste of resources. In open-list systems, in turn, candidates attracting many personal votes may worry that their electoral success will hurt them inside the party if it comes to the apparent detriment of other candidates from the same party (e.g., less popular party leaders) or to (perceived) party unity. Hence, the drive to personalize remains limited except when name recognition and intra-party differentiation are necessary to allow voters to express a choice such as in single transferable vote (STV). Recent electoral engineering did, however, produce an electoral system in which all three motives of individualized campaigning can be to some extent salient for virtually all candidates of any party that expects to win seats.

The 2012 Romanian parliamentary election is uniquely suitable to examine candidates' perceptions and behavior under this unusual configuration of incentives.<sup>2</sup> We also expect

1. The personal vote refers specifically to voting support attracted by candidates over and above what their party would get. The three personalization strategies that we look at cultivate a personal vote but may not exhaust all the means of doing that. The latter may also include, for instance, personal vote-seeking efforts that capitalize on the candidate's opposition to party policies, or public statements. Our interchangeable use of campaign personalization and building the personal vote should be understood with this caveat in mind.

2. The 2008 Romanian elections held under the same rules were not covered by the Comparative Candidate Survey.

personalization to be particularly common among candidates because it can be supported by party organizational culture. Hence, it becomes a mainstream candidate strategy rather than just a choice suitable for maverick or locally entrenched candidates or momentarily unpopular parties. Put differently, our study of candidates' campaign behavior and norms under this system tests if the oft-documented and seemingly inevitable conflict between party goals and personalized campaigning may be the result of electoral system design features that can, in principle, be replaced to avoid such a trade-off. It also considers why differences may occur across parties and in relation to individual characteristics of the candidates.

The introduction is followed by a discussion of our alternative theory on how electoral system incentives shape campaign personalization. The third section presents the hypotheses of our study. Next comes a description of the research design that includes a discussion of the dependent variables and of the variables' operationalization. The fifth section presents the multivariate analyses and discusses the main findings. The conclusion summarizes our arguments and results and points to further directions of research.

### ELECTORAL SYSTEM INCENTIVES FOR PERSONALIZATION

We argue that campaign personalization should be most widespread in electoral systems that motivate and enable the greatest possible number of candidates to use personalized appeals, and also make their parties favorably disposed toward these efforts. Unlike prior accounts of how electoral systems facilitate personalization, which focus on checklists of specific electoral system features like the pioneering work of Carey and Shugart (1995), this approach considers several possible motives to personalize and asks how many incentives the electoral system activates for how many of the candidates.<sup>3</sup> Broadening the perspective on candidate motivations is important for explaining any extra campaign effort such as reaching out to voters with personalized appeals by candidates with either very high or very low probability of getting elected on account of their party label. Gschwend and Zittel (2015) show that personal votes materialize only to the extent that candidates actively seek them, which further suggests the need to focus on candidates' motivation to seek a personal vote instead of just the opportunities for personal votes to make a difference for the candidates' election chances.

We reckon that probably any candidate has personal attributes that may appeal to some voters. But notwithstanding these qualifications, the appeal to a personal vote cannot be persuasive unless there is a plausible link between some extra votes for the candidate and a possible seat gain for her. Satisfying this condition is hard for many candidates—most from the minor parties and all running for a seat that is safe for a major party—in single-member district elections, and for all but a few ticket leaders under closed-list proportional representation (PR).<sup>4</sup> But even in open-list systems, the motivation and opportunity to seek a personal vote may be limited if the votes for the candidate do not help

3. For Carey and Shugart (1995), maintaining party reputation is important for candidates only as a means of helping their own election to the legislature.

4. Indeed, Karlsen and Skogerbø (2015) observe that only such candidates use personalized and localized appeals in a closed-list system.

the party beyond getting the candidate in question elected, particularly if personal votes for one candidate undermine the chances of other candidates of the same party. Indeed, it is noted that parties often discourage rather than reward personalization because it may weaken party cohesion and control just like a more direct say of voters in candidate selection does (Bergman et al., 2013).

To maximize personalization, it is necessary to have at least three things. First, a candidate-centric vote counting system (Eder et al., 2015, p. 317; Farrell & McAllister, 2006; Söderlund, 2016) must make it apparent for both candidates and voters that some extra votes can conceivably earn a seat for individual candidates. Second, some form of vote pooling across the candidates of the same party must motivate candidates to seek personal votes in the service of extra votes for the party even if they themselves are virtually certain to be (or certain not to be) elected. In this respect we are in disagreement with those who consider that pooling leads to shirking (Andre et al., 2016). We agree with Farrell and McAllister (2006, p. 729), who consider systems where “vote is nominal only, but vote may pool or transfer to other candidates” to be highly candidate-centered rather than mid-range as Shugart (2001) contends. Third, both vote pooling and the absence of direct competition between candidates of the same party may be necessary for the parties to develop a truly favorable disposition toward individualized campaigning by their candidates and, thus, personal votes to be unambiguous positives for the candidates’ standing within the party. If this is all achieved, then nearly all relevant-party candidates will have reasons and opportunity to seek personal votes to help (a) their own election, (b) other candidates of their party, and/or (c) their own standing within the party.

These factors occur together very rarely and may even look incompatible. If there is no intra-party competition among candidates, and votes are pooled across the candidates of the same party, then it is hard to see votes as support for individual candidates rather than the whole party. FPTP achieves the latter, but then the vote for one candidate cannot help the election of other candidates from the same party.

Yet, after five electoral cycles under closed-list PR, in 2008 Romania adopted a mixed proportional electoral system that satisfied all the above criteria, albeit to the detriment of the citizens’ ease of understanding seat allocation. Under this so-called “uninominal” system,<sup>5</sup> every voter cast one vote for an individual candidate in one of the 316 “electoral colleges” of the lower house, as well as another vote for an individual candidate in the 137 “electoral colleges” of the Senate. Both houses used the same electoral system; the only differences were the different sizes of the electoral colleges and the existence of some seats reserved for ethnic minorities (of no concern here). The electoral colleges (i.e., single-member districts, henceforth SMDs) were nested within 43 multimember constituencies (henceforth counties). Candidates ran in only one SMD each, and they were the sole candidate of their party in that district. Candidate nomination was largely party controlled, and the same slate of parties contested the election across the entire country, irrespectively

5. The system was used at the 2008 and 2012 elections before a return to closed-list PR was decided in 2015.

of regional variations in party strength. In both elections held under these rules, four electoral contenders (parties and multiparty alliances) obtained seats in parliament.

The total seat share of each party had to follow a set of PR rules, and each SMD had to return one deputy. Candidates were automatically allocated a “direct seat” if they had an absolute majority of votes in the SMD. In order to achieve proportionality, assembly size was flexible. In the absence of a national list for compensation purposes, extra seats were allocated to SMDs to the extent this was necessary for each party to receive as many seats as “due” following the PR rules. This led to more than one MP for some SMDs.

The PR rules were applied to the total vote of the parties and alliances that passed the threshold.<sup>6</sup> First, each eligible party was assigned as many seats in each county as many full Hare quotas of the eligible party vote it obtained there. Remaining votes not adding up to full quotas were aggregated by party at the national level, and as many seats were allocated among them by the d’Hondt method as the difference between the total number of SMDs minus the number of full Hare quotas that were already awarded a seat within the counties. The seats won at this national tier were assigned to specific counties such that each county ended up with as many MPs (excluding overhang seats) as SMDs.

Finally, party candidates were matched with SMDs. First, those candidates obtaining 50%+1 of the votes were assigned their seats, and no other seat would be allocated in that SMD in the next tier unless their party had won more direct seats than it would have been entitled to proportionally in the respective county. Next, the remaining candidates were allocated second tier, or “redistributed,” seats depending on their absolute number of votes. Once a party was not due any more seats in the county, its remaining candidates were skipped over in the search for winners. Likewise, once an SMD was allocated, all the remaining candidates of the district were skipped over in the search.<sup>7</sup>

This complex seat allocation procedure was explained in the election law in 2,065 words that ordinary voters, candidates, and journalists could rarely if ever comprehend. Keen observers of the 2008 races could, however, readily see that a little more than 70% of the plurality winners and over 10% of the second- and third-place candidates were elected. Even fourth-place candidates got a 1% chance to represent their SMD in parliament (Marian & King, 2010, p. 14). By the time of the 2012 election that we analyze below, we would expect candidates to understand that (1) votes were cast for individual candidates, and more votes always meant a better chance to win a seat, even for candidates who finished fourth in their SMD; (2) the vote for a candidate indirectly improved the chances of all other candidates of the same party, and most candidates’ chances to get elected were affected above all by their parties’ vote total in the county as well as nationwide; (3) there was no direct intra-party competition for votes because each party had just one candidate in each SMD, but there was an indirect competition within the county in terms of absolute vote numbers. Thus, the party could have rather clear expectations in terms of level of support, given the strong geographic stability of party votes (Giugăl et al., 2011).

6. The threshold is 5% of all valid votes nationwide (and up to 10% for alliances) or winning 9 SMDs with an absolute majority.

7. This does not apply to overhang seats, which implied at least an SMD with two representatives.

Thus, while the small print of the law was bewildering and the SMD-level results often looked baffling, this electoral system created favorable conditions for virtually all candidates of the seat-winning parties and alliances to be motivated to do whatever they could, including a personalized campaign, to increase their vote. It also motivated them to rightfully expect every vote to improve (a) their own chances of election, as well as (b) that of other candidates in the same party, and (c) their own standing in the party. Although one candidate's strong showing could still unseat another candidate of the same party by winning more votes, there was no direct intra-party competition for the votes. Hence, parties had no reason to oppose personalized campaigns by the candidates. In turn, individual shirking is unlikely to be related to vote pooling (Andre et al., 2016) since underperformers (compared to party expectations or the party county average) are easily identified by the party.

The uncertainty of seat allocation might diminish motive (a), but this was a PR system where most deputies won redistributed seats, sometimes in spite of not getting the highest number of votes in the SMD yet directly in relation with their own as well as the party's vote totals. Thus, motives (b) and (c) to maximize votes remained effective, even if a candidate seemed to be virtually guaranteed a direct seat, and, provided that the party had any chance to pass the legal threshold for representation, all three motives could work for candidates with no chance whatsoever at winning a direct seat, as long as they had a chance to win a redistributed seat.

One's chances of getting a redistributed seat depend on the number of votes obtained in the SMD. Since the SMDs are not equal in terms of number of registered voters, the chance to get a redistributed seat depends on the size of the SMD rather than the size of the multimember district. It is thus first the size of the SMD that has to be taken into account in any measure of electoral system incentives. Second, while the Carey and Shugart and derived models (Shugart, 2001; Farrell & McAllister, 2006; Wallack et al., 2003; Johnson & Wallack, 2008) generally attribute considerable influence to district magnitude—albeit of varying direction in different electoral systems—our theory does not justify such an expectation here. All candidates run and campaign in SMDs, and the size of the multimember district is not likely to provide clear incentives one way or another, in view of the PR seat allocation tier, especially given the uncertainty about one's chances at the higher tiers of allocation. In turn, candidates and parties are more likely to be motivated to personalize their campaign as another strategy in counties where the party holds more seats and thus a stronger vote base, which makes party magnitude in county (PMC) a better predictor of a candidate's incentives to cultivate a personal vote than district magnitude. Again, even if the voter does not have a direct choice between candidates, it is important to think from the perspective of the candidate, who experiences a form of intra-party competition, with any candidate with more votes having at least a theoretically higher chance for a seat. For many candidates, the uncertainty regarding individual chances in the PR seat allocation, combined with relative certainty about the party magnitude in the county, especially given the geographic stability of party support (Giugāl et al., 2011), could act as a catalyst for campaign personalization.

## HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Following our expectations, under this electoral system campaign personalization should be very high in a cross-national comparison since all three motivations to personalize are salient for a larger proportion of candidates. This makes personalization a plausible campaign strategy for nearly all candidates as well as their parties especially since it can be a complementary approach.

Nonetheless, we expect variation across parties and candidates in the extent of personalization due to

- incentives inherent in the electoral system acting in interaction with the candidates' competitive position;
- party organizational or contextual characteristics reinforcing or undermining the search for personal votes; and
- candidate-level factors that may prompt or facilitate campaign personalization.

We expect that

- *candidates with a more realistic chance to win seats are more likely to personalize their campaigns than others (H1).*

Given the electoral system they can win either direct seats or redistributed seats, and we shall operationalize two sub-hypotheses:

- *candidates are more likely to personalize when they expect a better chance to win a direct seat (H1a) and also*
- *when they have a better chance to win a redistributed seat (H1b).*

*H1b* is a specific test of our interpretation of electoral incentives that goes against Shugart (2001) and is more in line with Farrell and McAllister (2006). In turn, if pooling worked as a deterrent for personalization, given uncertainties regarding individual chances in PR seat allocation, then only *H1a* applied.

Few candidates have reasons to shirk once there is any hope for them or the party, but uncertainty may mean that candidates can more easily estimate the chances of the party in the county than their individual chances.<sup>8</sup> Therefore:

- *candidates whose party holds more seats in the county are more likely to personalize campaigns (H2).*

An important tenet of our theory is that not all parties are equally likely to favor personalized campaigning (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015; Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). Decentralized selectorates will tend to favor candidates who can campaign convincingly on local issues, especially in parties with a strong programmatic profile and collective identity (Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015, p. 431). Empirically, too, the openness of candidate selection was shown to

8. The competitive position of candidates as revealed by actual election results from 2012 may not fully match subjective expectations, but we are interested in the actual competitive positions as electoral system variables not their perceptions.

influence the politicians' decision whether to build a personal reputation and to cultivate a personal vote (Shomer, 2009).<sup>9</sup> We therefore hypothesize that

- *candidates from party organizations where nomination was decided at the national, rather than the county, level are less likely to personalize campaigns (H3).*

Whereas the degree of party centralization is thought to be a lasting feature of parties, other aspects of the party's operation may be volatile and yet impact how much the party encourages personalized campaigning. Whether the popularity of the party is high or low may well influence if candidates believe that they should emphasize themselves and develop independent campaigning activities and localized messages. We expect that

- *the declining electoral strength of a party in a region incentivizes personalized campaigning (H4).*

Such an effect was contemplated by Cross and Young (2015, p. 311) and Eder et al. (2015, p. 324) but was not directly tested as yet.

The personal attributes of the candidate may also suppress or strengthen the motivation to personalize the campaign. A wide range of factors were already examined in the previous literature (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015; Cross & Young, 2015; Eder et al., 2015). We focus on the one hand on those related to local embeddedness in a region that may provide important resources for campaign personalization in terms of localized issue appeals, record of constituency service, wide name recognition, significant local office, or organizational resources directly linked to the candidate (Shugart et al., 2005, p. 441; Tavits, 2009, p. 797). They may also give candidates a point to prove to peers in the local organization by allowing themselves to claim a personal seat following a personalized campaign. Hence, we expect that

- *incumbents of the SMD are more likely to personalize campaigns (H5),*
- *as are local candidates (H6).*

Some candidates may be motivated to personalize their campaign not so much because of some extra resources but because of an extra liability, especially in terms of their standing within the party. First, a candidate whose nomination was contested (Hazan & Rahat, 2010) may not just be willing but actually need to focus on his personal qualities and use his own means of campaigning given a possibly less favorable allocation of resources within the party for a host of reasons, including an actual lack of support within some of the party branch factions. Second, candidates who are ideologically distinct and distant from their party colleagues cannot credibly campaign solely on the party platform (Zittel & Gschwend, 2008). Thus, we hypothesize that

- *candidates whose nomination was contested and candidates who are ideologically far from the mainstream of their party are expected to personalize campaigns more (H7, H8).*

9. At this point we depart from Shugart (2001), and, similarly with Farrell and McAllister (2006), we consider nomination procedures as a party organizational level factor separate from ballot format. The latter is an electoral system incentive only insofar as it refers to the dichotomy between the presence on the ballot of a fixed option, be it candidate or party, or of an intra-party choice.

## DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION

To study candidates' campaign strategies in the 2012 Romanian elections, we use the Romanian Candidate Study (part of the wave 1 of the Comparative Candidate Survey) that surveyed 406 from the 1,802 candidates of the parties that passed the electoral threshold. The response rate (22.6%) is in line with the completed samples of other elite surveys (Bailer, 2014). Most responses were received via an online survey (393), and a few (14) via self-administered paper questionnaires. Approximately one in five respondents was an incumbent (81), and 234 were unelected candidates (57.5% of all). The sample is fairly representative of the population of candidates. We used the Duncan Index of Dissimilarity (Duncan & Duncan, 1955) to gauge differences between frequency distributions in the sample and the population. The deviations range between a reassuringly modest 3.1% and 5.1% for variables like party affiliation, sex, and incumbency. Elected candidates are, however, slightly overrepresented in the sample, by almost 11%.

### Dimensions of Campaign Personalization: The Dependent Variables

We analyze campaign personalization on three dimensions: perception or beliefs about the main focus of the campaign, the means or activities, and the messages used in the campaign. In terms of messages we look only at localization, meaning individual candidates' focus on constituency issues. We see the three as distinct but related dimensions of (individual) candidate campaigning, each of them referring to a domain within candidates' campaign communication efforts, which may or may not include messages that distinguish the candidates from the party or just highlight party campaign issues or topics that are relevant for the candidate and the local context.

The first, "campaign norm" (Zittel & Gschwend, 2008) or "communicative focus" (Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015), measures the self-declared overall campaign role or strategy. We rely on the commonly used CCS I question, asking the candidates to rate the goal of their campaign on a 0–10 scale, where 0 meant attracting attention to their party and 10 to themselves. Figure 1 plots mean levels of campaign norms aggregated by country studies (the corresponding levels for the Romanian candidates are shown with the darker colours). Romania has the fifth-highest rate of candidate-centered norms both when comparing the full samples (22 country studies) and when the comparison refers only to elected candidates.

But we would not want to base our conclusions regarding campaign personalization merely on the goal definition that the candidates profess. Therefore, we also use a scale of personalized **means of campaigning** that the respondents claimed to have used independently from their party. The index is based on seven items asking about the organization of social events and consultation hours, and the design of one's own placards, flyers, website, newspaper ads, and TV or radio commercials. When examined with factor analysis, all the seven items loaded highly on one factor, which had an eigenvalue of 2.922, while the next factor retained had a value of only .220. The additive scale of the seven items shows how many of these means the candidate used independently of the party. The index has a very high reliability (Cronbach alpha = .828). Although not all the seven items were asked in all CCS country studies, four of them were included in most questionnaires. Thus, we could compare the independent design and usage of placards, flyers, newspaper ads, and personal website.

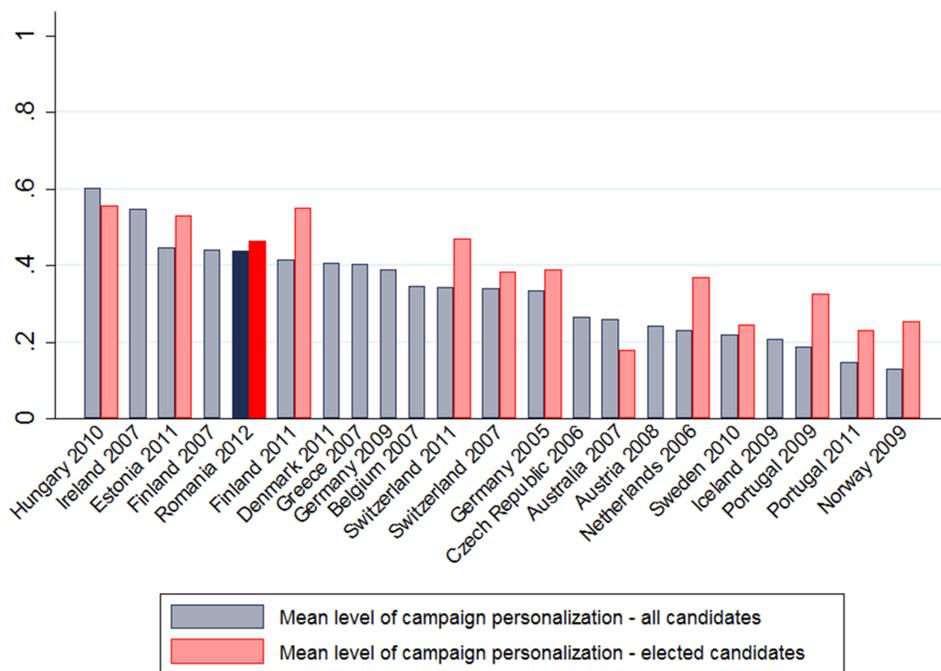


FIGURE 1. Campaign norms in 22 parliamentary elections (CCS I).  
 Source: Authors' own calculations based on CCS I.

Figure 2 illustrates the mean levels of independent campaign means aggregated by country studies. Romania has the third-highest mean both when comparing the full samples (24 country studies) and when the comparison refers only to elected candidates.

Further, we assess **campaign localization** using the question “During your campaign did you raise any issue specific to your district, not promoted by the party at the regional or national level?” By referring to issues that the party does not focus on in the county and nationally, this variable captures bringing up issues specific to the SMD. This creates a peculiarity in that among the candidates of the ethnic Hungarian party UDMR, which has a strong regionalist agenda, only one-third declared they promoted a constituency agenda, whereas for the other parties the corresponding proportion ranged between 77% and 83%. We are inclined to think that this does not necessarily reflect low personalization among the UDMR candidates, but the overriding importance of the county and regional level as part of the party campaign strategy among the geographically very concentrated Hungarian population. Thus, community themes are intrinsically integrated in the party campaign strategy in terms of either programmatic or clientelistic appeals. In the rest of the country, there is very modest campaigning if at all and the appeal would be fundamentally just on ethnic grounds; although ethnicity may be seen from the outside as a candidate characteristic, it is unlikely to be perceived as such by the candidates or the party. Moreover, in terms of localization, for the candidates of the UDMR local issues are unlikely either to be at the SMD level or to be distinct from the party stances or policy positions toward the ethnic group even if they were specific to certain localities.

In a comparative perspective, campaign localization is relatively high in Romania. Figure 3 shows that Romania has the fifth-highest share of candidates promoting a constituency agenda

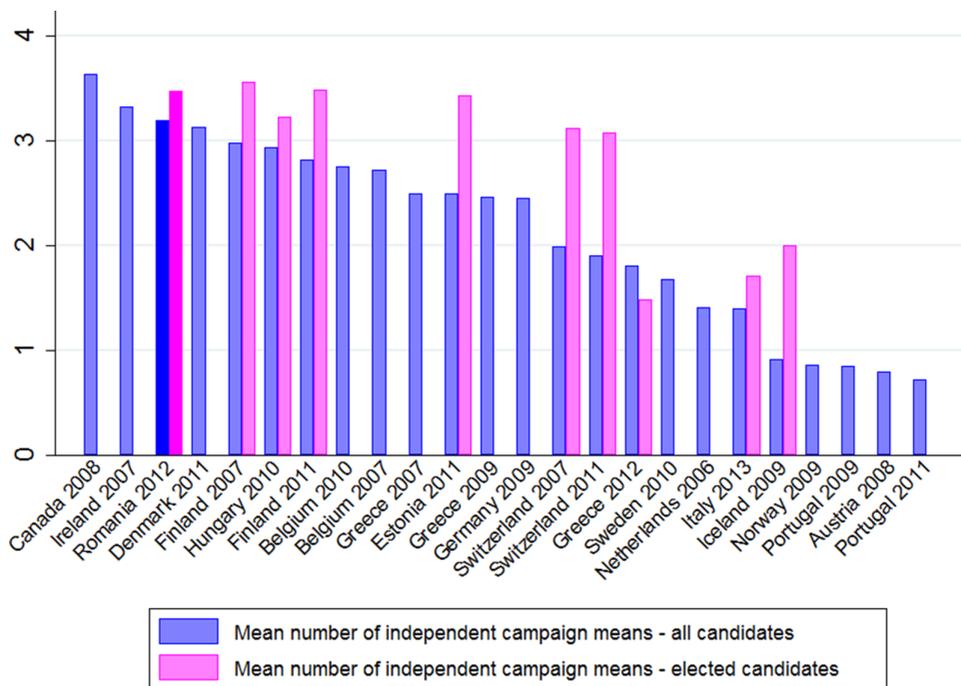


FIGURE 2. Independent campaign means in 24 parliamentary elections (CCS I).

Source: Authors' own calculations based on CCS I.

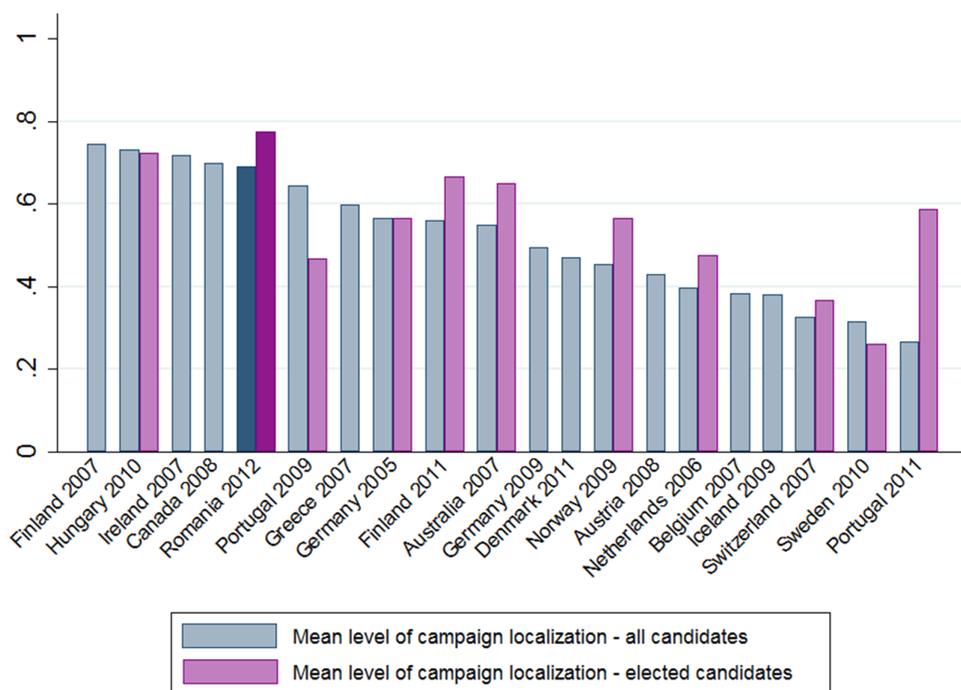


FIGURE 3. Campaign localization in 20 parliamentary elections (CCS I).

Source: Authors' own calculations based on CCS I.

among 20 CCS I studies, and the highest of the 11 studies that identify elected candidates. While the levels of campaign personalization in Romania are remarkable in comparative perspective, they are not the highest in the analyzed samples. Nevertheless, at prima facie, the argument regarding electoral system incentives still holds if one considers the fact that only Irish candidates, running under STV, appear to have more-personalized campaigns than Romanian candidates on all the three dimensions. Similarly, the levels of personalization in Romania are on a par with those seen in Finland under open-list PR. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that only a comparative research design would provide the means to test fully our theoretical propositions regarding the personalization incentives under different electoral systems.

### Links between the Three Dimensions

Our multivariate analyses will look at the three dimensions separately on theoretical grounds. Moreover, the correlations between the three measures, while positive and statistically significant, are rather weak (see Table 1), corroborating the theoretical intuition that these dimensions ought to be separated.

### Operationalization of the Independent Variables

In the Romanian mixed proportional electoral system all candidates compete in an SMD, but only those that win 50%+1 of the votes win a direct seat. The other candidates enter additional rounds of seat redistribution according to (a) the party vote share at the county and national level and (b) how their own party's candidates in the county are ordered by the absolute number of votes (see above). For these reasons we need to disentangle the likelihood to win the two types of seat.

*Direct seat likelihood* is a reverted scale based on the difference between the 50% threshold and the percentage of votes received by the candidate, that is, the extra percentage of votes the candidate would have needed to win the SMD directly, with negative numbers implying surplus votes. We reversed the scale so that a higher value implies a higher likelihood of winning the seat.

The *redistributed seat likelihood* is computed depending on the number of redistributed seats allocated in the county, the number of redistributed seats the candidate's party was entitled to receive proportionally, and the actual number it received. If the candidate's party won any redistributed seats in the district, we computed the difference between the smallest number of votes with which a candidate of the same party won a redistributed seat in the

TABLE 1. Bi-variate correlations between dependent variables

Variables	Campaign norm	Independent campaigning
Independent campaigning	.210*** N = 378	
Constituency agenda	.276*** N = 390	.228*** N = 377

Source: Authors' own calculations.

\*Significance at: \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*:  $p < .05$

district and the number of votes received by the respondent. The calculus followed the complex rules of seat allocation to reflect how close or far the candidate was to passing the threshold where a redistributed seat could be allocated to them. If the candidate's party did not win any redistributed seat in the county, the likelihood of winning a redistributed seat was computed as the sum of two numbers. The first was the difference between the vote total of the smallest party in the county that still picked up redistributed seats there on the one hand, and the total vote of the respondent's party in the district on the other. The second was the difference between the vote of the biggest vote getter in the respondent's party and the vote for the respondent. In those counties where no redistributed seat was allocated (to any party), the likelihood to win such a seat was computed as the sum of two numbers. The first was the difference between the electoral quotient (the number of votes needed to win a seat in that county) and the total vote of the respondent's party in the district. The second was the difference between the vote of the biggest vote getter in the respondent's party and the vote for the respondent. All the above sums were then transformed to percentages relative to the total district vote. In those cases in which the candidate's party had already won directly all the seats it was entitled to proportionally before the allocation of redistributed seats, we considered the candidate to have had no chance to obtain a redistributed seat.

It must be said that candidates could rely on a number of heuristics to estimate their likelihood of winning a direct mandate or a redistributed seat. The first is that the local elections, which are usually held five months before the parliamentary ones, are a very good predictor of the party vote in the national elections. This applied even more in 2012, given the huge unpopularity of the former governing party, the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), and the success of the newly formed Social Liberal Union (USL).

Second, each candidate had information about the likelihood of winning a redistributed mandate based on the size of the population living in the SMD in which she ran. The variance in population size matters the most because the mandates of a party in a county are allocated to its candidates in the order of the raw number of votes each received, after the mandates won directly have been deducted from the total number of seats the party was entitled to win according to its proportion of votes. These two elements alleviate the potential endogeneity problem of the two independent variables.

The *party magnitude* variable records the number of parliamentary seats won by the party in the same county in 2008. It enters our models because we expect the information about how many seats the party got in the county in the preceding national election to have shaped candidates' expectations of success independently of their more or less informed or rational anticipation of upcoming election results. We expect that the past success of the party increases expectations and thus justifies an extra personal effort.

We calculate *party popularity* as the difference in vote share received by the candidate's party in the 2012 and 2008 county council elections. These elections took place just a few months before the general election in both years, and, in the dearth of reliable polling figures at the subnational level, had to be the most up-to-date and credible information available to candidates about how much their party's reputation can help or hurt them in the general election campaign. We expect that candidates of parties' losing ground may be less confident

in the electoral value of the party label and thus, *ceteris paribus*, personalize their campaign more than others.

The *ideological distance* between a candidate and her party was computed by using the absolute difference between the candidate's self-placement on a 0–10 left-right scale and the party's perceived ideological position on the same scale. The latter is represented by the mean of the party placement scores assigned by all the respondents of the respective party. We multiply imputed missing data because the ideological distance variable had a somewhat troubling 11% of omissions. Regression coefficients were pooled across the five imputed data sets. To ease the interpretation and comparison of the effects, all variables in the analysis were standardized, after the imputations, so as to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

### MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

We ran three nested multivariate models for each of the three dependent variables. The logic of the nested models is to try to see separately the effects of the main electoral system variables and of the party and candidate characteristics that might plausibly be related to them, that is, to candidates' distance from winning a direct or indirect seat. For instance, we mentioned that candidates with certain characteristics that the party deems valuable are more likely to be nominated in more-hopeful places. Also, there is a link between being an incumbent or having a larger party base in the constituency and how many votes the candidate is going to get, but how close one actually was to getting a seat cannot logically influence (prior) facts such as the previous level of support for the party in the SMD or constituency. Therefore, the first model includes the theoretically relevant variables except the two main electoral system variables related to H1.

The latter are added in the second model: where the candidate is nominated and the likelihood to get a direct or redistributed seat is related to party and candidate characteristics so that they pick up some of the impact of the party and candidate variables when they are all together in a model. Thus, the need to also present separately and to focus mostly on the results from model 2 as the more parsimonious one.

The third model controls for further variables used in the literature but not central to our theory: district magnitude (number of seats in the county not including *Überhangmandaten*), urban constituency, age of the candidate, and senatorial candidate. Party dummies are also brought in since it is plausible that parties may have different strategies on campaign personalization for reasons not captured by our theory-driven variables on party strength (party magnitude in county) and popularity changes (party popularity), which are meant to improve the substantive explanatory capacity of the model (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015).

### Candidates' Perceptions of the Need to Cultivate a Personal Vote as a Chosen Communicative Focus

As can be seen in Table 2, the more a candidate could expect to win a direct seat, the more likely they were to consider a personal campaign focus (H1a). This effect is quite large: one standard deviation increase in the likelihood of winning a direct seat increases campaign personalization by one-third of a point. The variable measuring the likelihood of winning

TABLE 2. Predicting candidates' campaign norm (OLS models)

	M1	M2	M3
Party magnitude in county	0.259***	0.212***	0.215*
Nomination level	0.171***	0.170***	0.137**
Party popularity	-0.030	-0.056	-0.005
Incumbent	0.047	0.009	0.008
Local candidate	0.140**	0.134**	0.079
Contested nomination	0.078	0.050	-0.016
Ideological distance	-0.009	0.012	0.046
Direct seat likelihood		0.314**	0.124
Redistributed seat likelihood		0.279***	0.144
District magnitude			-0.155
Senate candidate			-0.039
Urban district			0.073
Age			-0.114*
ARD			0.110
PPDD			-0.040
UDMR			-0.246*
Constant	0.000	0.000	0.000
R <sup>2</sup>	.137	.168	.249
N	406	406	406

Source: Authors' own calculations.

\*Significance at: \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*:  $p < .05$

a redistributed seat had a similarly large positive effect on the personalization of the campaign (H1b). The estimated effects of the other variables barely changed when these two were added to the model.

It appears that candidates in counties where the party had more seats, and those who live in the SMD where they ran, subscribed to a more personalized campaign norm (H2 and H6 confirmed), as did those who were nominated at a higher (national) level (H3 disconfirmed). The ideological distance vis-à-vis the party, being nominated following a competitive selection (contested nomination) and incumbency, had no statistically significant influence on campaigning norms (H8, H7, and H5, respectively, not confirmed).

When all control variables are added in model 3, two record a significant effect: older candidates and those from the Hungarian party UDMR are more likely to prioritize party-centered campaigns than others. However, the electoral system variables lose their predictive power, which suggests that the belief in a campaign focused on the candidate is not necessarily higher among those who are empirically closer to getting a seat but for those whose party held more seats in the county and were nominated centrally (since the only variables that remain significant are PMC and nomination level).

The effects of the introduction of the additional variables may not suggest that the electoral-system-induced chances to be elected do not matter. The way the system actually functions for seat allocation is so full of uncertainty that almost all candidates may believe they should personalize given the other mentioned motivations, irrespective of their own election chances. We should refrain from overinterpretation as the electoral system variables measure actual closeness to getting a seat rather than pre-electoral expectations. However, hopefulness, which was found in other studies to matter, is probably better captured here by PMC that remains significant even in the third model. Possibly, from a candidate perspective it makes sense to use personalization as a strategy more where chances are better at least for the party.

The kind of candidate features that remain significant in the third model can also be read as evidence that a candidate-centered focus is not more likely among those candidates who need to prove more within the party (contested nomination) or those with more personal resources in terms of image (incumbents, local candidates, older candidates). In turn, those who are parachuted by the central party may believe that a focus on themselves might help the party; maybe this is why they were nominated there, which is consistent with findings from Belgium (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015).

#### The Use of Independent Means of Campaigning

The models for independent campaigning (see Table 3) reveal a rather distinct configuration of explanatory factors than for the focus definition, which again underlines the need to distinguish various dimensions of campaign personalization.

In model 2, the electoral system variables measuring how close the candidates were to obtain a direct or redistributed seat have the largest positive coefficients (H<sub>1</sub> confirmed). Following their introduction in model 2, the effect of party magnitude in constituency loses statistical significance (H<sub>2</sub> disconfirmed). This can be interpreted as evidence that candidates rely more on recent information regarding vote potential than on the past record of the party in the county when assessing their actual chances and deciding what campaign means to use.

In the parsimonious model, candidates from parties that lost popularity in the constituency are more likely to run independent campaigns (H<sub>4</sub>). The introduction of party dummies in model 3 renders party popularity statistically insignificant and finds candidates of the increasingly unpopular Right Romania Alliance (ARD) significantly more likely to run independent campaigns than USL candidates. However, we cannot tell whether this is (primarily) due to their loss in popularity or it is connected to the fact that the main party of the alliance, PDL, is generally much more decentralized in terms of resource mobilization and more dependent on local fiefdoms and wealthy politicians than the other parties. Thus, it is impossible to say whether H<sub>4</sub> on the relevance of party popularity is confirmed or disconfirmed.

Decentralized nomination does not have any significant effect in any of the three models (H<sub>3</sub> disconfirmed); among the candidate characteristics expected to be conducive to more personalized behavior, incumbency and contested nomination made no difference (H<sub>5</sub> and H<sub>7</sub> disconfirmed), and, unexpectedly, ideologically closer candidates are more likely to run

TABLE 3. Independent campaigning (OLS models)

	M1	M2	M3
Party magnitude in county	0.122*	0.022	-0.097
Nomination level	-0.006	-0.004	0.008
Party popularity	-0.052	-0.192*	0.024
Incumbent	0.097	0.020	0.006
Local candidate	0.141**	0.131**	0.108*
Contested nomination	0.114*	0.068	0.074
Ideological distance	-0.172**	-0.142**	-0.103
Direct seat likelihood		0.500***	0.569***
Redistributed seat likelihood		0.304***	0.282**
District magnitude			-0.007
Senate candidate			-0.052
Urban district			0.075
Age			-0.022
ARD			0.386**
PPDD			0.054
UDMR			0.209
Constant	0.000	0.000	0.000
R <sup>2</sup>	.089	.146	.188
N	406	406	406

Source: Authors' own calculations.

\*Significance at: \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*:  $p < .05$

independent campaigns (H8 disconfirmed).<sup>10</sup> All three models indicate that candidates who live in the SMD where they run also campaigned more independently compared to the rest (H6 confirmed).

The electoral system makes it difficult to predict one's chances to be elected at the SMD level; thus, incumbency does not provide candidates sufficient cues about their chances to be elected in order to increase personalization. In turn, PMC is a better electoral system indicator of party vote pool and election chances at least until more accurate measures of electoral system related chances are introduced (in model 2). These variables measuring the seat likelihood remain the main explanatory variables also in model 3. Model 3 suggests that candidates who in the end were close to winning a direct or a redistributed seat were more likely to run individualized campaigns and so were candidates of the ARD and those living in the SMD.

10. One standard deviation increase in ideological distance amounts to a decrease of 0.17 to 0.14 on the scale of independent campaigning. This might be an artifact resulting from the better capacity of senior, well-established politicians to assess the ideological position of their party and declare themselves close to it.

Since independent campaigning requires costly resources, we may indeed expect stronger responsiveness to cost-benefit calculus of this aspect of campaign personalization than to others.

All findings seem to indicate that independent campaigning is primarily driven by the assessment of the outcome of the elections, not by intra-party processes that would promote more independently-minded candidates or by individual financial resources. Local candidates who campaign more independently may not necessarily suggest a strategy divergent from the party; on the contrary, it is plausible to see this as parties making use of both the symbolic and practical resources these candidates may have in their SMD, especially as organizational resources at the SMD level or individual financial resources do not seem to be related to independent campaigning.<sup>11</sup>

### Localized Campaigning

Given that this dependent variable is dichotomous, we ran binary logistic regression models.<sup>12</sup> Table 4 indicates that H1 is corroborated: once again, the variables measuring election prospects have the largest effects. However, this time, the likelihood of winning a redistributed seat has a slightly stronger effect than the direct seat likelihood variable.

The same is true regarding the second hypothesis, which focuses on the effect of party magnitude. Indeed, candidates from stronger party branches seem more likely to have a localized campaign message and to talk about local issues not covered by their party.

Contrary to our expectation for H3, candidates nominated at the national level tend to include more constituency issues in their campaigns than candidates who were chosen by county or local selectorates. Some of these candidates were probably parachuted by the party in the district, and their locally focused campaign is probably a measure of their efforts to compensate for the lack of local roots. In turn, the nomination contest variable (H7) is one of the most important predictors of localized campaigning. As hypothesized, candidates who were nominated without any competition are significantly less likely to campaign on local issues compared with candidates who had more than one challenger.

It appears that a focus on local messages is not necessarily an escape route for parties losing popularity (H4 not corroborated). Moreover, being an incumbent or a local candidate does not make any difference for campaign localization, and the same is true for ideological distance (H5, H6, and H8, respectively, not supported).

The only significant party dummy effect is associated with the UDMR and is strongly negative. UDMR candidates prioritize an agenda of ethnic issues that may be local but are not confined to the boundaries of particular SMDs and are not different from those emphasized by the national or regional party; in the counties where they have virtually no chance of winning a seat (southern and eastern Romania), candidates are put forward only as a formality necessary to collect a few scattered ethnic votes and there is no real campaigning.

11. In a model not shown here, we also controlled for the candidates' campaign budget as well as for their own financial contribution. Neither made a difference for independent campaigning.

12. We also ran—for comparability with the models for campaign norms and independent campaigning—OLS models with the dependent variable standardized just like the independent variables were in all models. There are no substantial changes regarding the magnitude and direction of the main effects.

TABLE 4. Promoting constituency agenda

	M1 (logistic)	M2 (logistic)	M3 (logistic)
Party magnitude in county	0.618***	0.443*	0.538
Nomination level	0.285*	0.289*	0.205
Party popularity	0.109	0.131	-0.217
Incumbent	-0.047	-0.126	-0.108
Local candidate	0.203	0.190	0.128
Contested nomination	0.584***	0.509***	0.365*
Ideological distance	-0.094	-0.050	-0.107
Direct seat likelihood		0.945**	0.516
Redistributed seat likelihood		1.014***	0.617*
District magnitude			-0.235
Senate candidate			-0.224
Urban district			0.02
Age			-0.045
ARD			-0.307
PPDD			0.098
UDMR			-0.640*
Constant	1.038***	1.068***	1.066***
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>	.106	.154	.190
N	406	406	406

Source: Authors' own calculations.

\*Significance at: \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*:  $p < .05$

### Robustness Checks<sup>13</sup>

The models were also run alternatively with party–county clustered standard errors to take account of possible autocorrelation of residuals among candidates from the same county and party. The substantive findings remained the same. The findings also turn out to be robust to changes in model specifications that included adding length of membership in the party (to capture effects of party socialization), length of career in local politics, and the population size of the SMD.

Finally, we re-ran the regressions using Kernel Regularized Least Squares (Hainmueller & Hazlett, 2014) in order to assess whether our models suffer from misspecification bias consisting in ignoring nonlinear effects or interactions among the independent variables. Comparing the results presented in the article with those of the KRLS, one observes that the direction and significance of the average effect of each independent variable in each model are virtually identical.

13. The full results of these tests are not shown, but are available from the authors on request.

## CONCLUSIONS

By looking at the 2012 Romanian election, we provide a test of how a very specific combination of electoral system factors is associated with personalized campaigning seen in terms of role definition, campaign means, and message content, specifically localization. We find high levels of personalization on all three dimensions and a considerable relevance of the incentives inherent in the electoral system. Personalization can be seen as a party congruent rather than adversarial campaign strategy.

The sources of personalization on the three dimensions differ slightly. Independent campaign activities are driven more by individual resources and electability, candidate characteristics such as local roots are significant in this case, whereas party-driven features like centralized nomination and party strength in the county are not.

In line with our alternative theory of candidate motivations, not only those candidates with a chance to win a majoritarian seat in an SMD were likely to resort to a personalized focus, but also those even only remotely hopeful to win a redistributed seat. Given the uncertainties about PR seat allocation chances, any extra vote could theoretically help any candidate to be elected (keeping alive motivation (a) for a large proportion of candidates). Although there are no specific transfers to other candidates that usually further motivate candidates (Farrell & McAllister, 2006), the performance of each candidate is quite clear to the party given fairly stable geographic party support. Thus, both carrots and sticks are present and can motivate candidates to personalize to help the party (motivation b) or to improve their standing within it (motivation c in our theory).

We find that those candidates with some chance for a redistributed seat and those in counties where their party base was stronger (higher PMC) were more likely to believe in the need to focus on themselves and to localize their messages. This suggests that pooling did not have a shirking effect, maybe on the contrary, but also that personalization is in line with party goals.<sup>14</sup> Since we control for candidate characteristics that are meant to reflect a candidate's standing within the local party (local candidate, contested candidacy, incumbency), it is plausible to also interpret, as a signal of party-endorsed personalization, the tendency that more centrally (i.e., nationally) nominated candidates are more likely to believe in a personal focus and to localize their campaigns.

When added in all models, party dummies tend to have significant effects as also found in previous analyses (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015). We make further steps in trying to theoretically capture variance driven by specific party characteristics such as electoral strength on the long and short term (PMC and party popularity, respectively). Yet, declining party support in the county does not have a significant effect, except for independent campaigning before the introduction of the party dummies. These confounding effects cannot be disentangled with the available data. More research, especially cross-national, is needed to further theorize and model various party characteristics, organizational and ideological, in a more systematic manner, rather than just allude to ideological and structural differences.

14. We venture to say that probably if personalization was more of an alternative to the party line and to the party campaign, then party popularity should be more consistently positive and significant, while PMC less.

It may also be the case that for all parties in Romania except the UDMR, an ethnic party constrained by electoral geography and (programmatic and patronage) commitments, everything is allowed in order to win votes and thus candidate-centric campaigning is more likely to be acceptable than in other contexts, which would at least boost the electoral system incentives. Notwithstanding the unique nature of the electoral system, what we observe directly is that the levels of campaign personalization in Romania are in line with other candidate-centric electoral systems with or without intra-party preference.

Thus, our analysis raises questions that extend beyond the Romanian context and a peculiar electoral system. It goes directly to the core of the question of what personalization and its distinct dimensions represent in relation to political parties and party campaign strategies. These issues also call for additional thinking and innovation in both conceptualization and measurement. They give credence to the idea that in order to understand specific incentives, electoral system typologies should be more explicitly defined taking into account different points of view, specifically those of the voters and candidates (Renwick & Pilet, 2016) and acknowledge that politicians' perceptions of electoral system incentives are endogenous to the political system and party competition they are part of (Söderlund, 2016). ■

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