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RELIGION AND POLITICAL
COMMUNICATION DURING ELECTIONS IN
ROMANIA

In the context in which the majority of Romanians are orthodox and the level of trust in Church is very high, this paper aims to analyze the level of political interference into religious life. The article focuses on particular aspects of political communication, namely the use of religious symbols and religious events in electoral campaigns.

The main hypothesis of the research refers to the supposition that during the electoral years, the visibility of politicians presented by newspapers as attending religious events is higher than in the rest of the time. Moreover, the paper aims to analyze if there is an overlapping between the years in which politicians are presented to attend more religious services and the years in which people have higher trust in Church.

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Introduction

The interplay of politics and religion is a frequently discussed, yet very sensitive issue in Romania. This matter can be treated from at least two perspectives. First, in their aim to improve their electoral image, there is the involvement of politicians into religion. Second there is the involvement of priests into political aspects of life, either by supporting certain political actors or by running for public offices. This paper will specifically focus on the first perspective, namely, the involvement of political personalities into religion life.

With a strong Christian heritage, Romania has a majority of around 87% Orthodox Christians, 4,7% Romano-Catholics and 8,3% other religions.¹ Thus, in the context in which the majority of Romanians are orthodox and, as presented in the following part, the level of trust in Church is very high, this paper aims to analyze the level of political interference into religious life.

Based on Public Opinion Barometers, the level of Romanians trust in Church is significantly high. The table below presents the evolution of *very high* and *high* trust in Church from 1996 to 2007, these data being the only available ones.

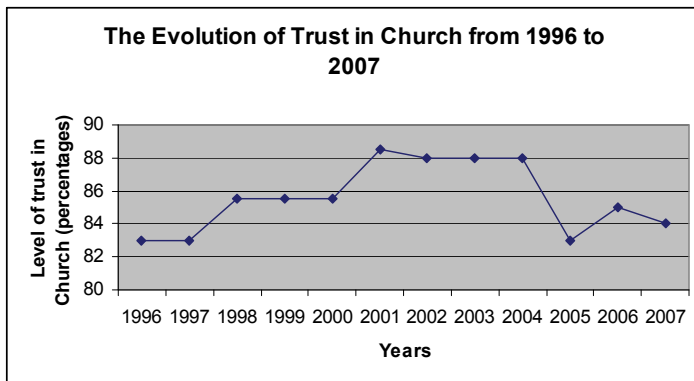
Table no. 1 – The evolution of *very high* and *high* levels of trust (in percentages) in Church from 1996 to 2007

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
83	83	85,5	85,5	85,5	88,5	88	88	88	83	85	84

Source: Public Opinion Barometers from 2003 to 2007, Open Society Foundation, The Gallup Organization Romania

The main conclusion that can be draw from this table is that the level of trust in Church is varying around 85%. However, due to the fact that these data represents averages on percentages obtained in different months of the same year, it is important to emphasize that, for instance, in December 1997 there was registered the lowest level of trust in Church, within the analyzed period, namely 76%. Thus, as the following figure shows, we may claim that there are slightly important fluctuations of trust between years.

Figure no. 1 – The evolution of *very high* and *high* levels of trust in Church from 1996 to 2007 (in percentages)



Source: Public Opinion Barometers from 2003 to 2007, Open Society Foundation, The Gallup Organization Romania

Based on the above figure we can argue that the highest point of *very high* and *high* level of trust in Church is reached in 2001, with a stagnation of three years, from 2002 to 2004. Although the differences between the annual levels of trust are not necessarily significant, we must admit that there are relevant ups and downs. Thus, for instance, while from 1996 till 2001 it can be observed a relatively increasing level of trust, from 2001 till 2005 there is a decrease in the level of trust in Church. In 2006 the level of trust seemed to increase again, but it decreased till 2007.

It is also important to underline the fact that, in the contemporary Romanian society, the role of the Church is a relevant one. Since 1989,

Church is “one of the dominant forces in transition by imposing its views on democracy through direct and indirect engagement”.²

In a context in which religion seems to matter so intensively, this paper aims to analyze if political sphere is interfering with the religion one. The research questions are the following: *Is there any interplay of politics into religious events?* and *Can we argue that politicians’ attendances to religious events are political communication tools during electoral campaigns?*

Thus the main hypothesis of the research refers to the supposition that during the electoral years, the visibility of politicians presented by newspapers as attending religious events is higher than in the rest of the time. Aiming to emphasize a positive image transfer between the idea of being a religious person and running public offices, political personalities use religious symbols in their process of political communication. Moreover, the paper aims to analyze if there is an overlap between the years in which politicians seems to attend more religious services and the years in which citizens have a higher level of trust in Church.

From the methodological point of view, this paper will use content analysis on online media coverage. The content analysis will be conducted on *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul* newspapers. The studied period is between 1998 and 2008. The selected articles refer to the presence of politicians at the religious events organized mainly for the main religious holidays of the year.

The topic of this paper can be considered relevant because the interpenetration between politics and religion affects and intermix two separate sets of values. Moreover, although an old issue, the inference of politics into religious life is a relatively poor discussed aspect.

Political communication and a history of religious and politics interplay

Political communication is a complex concept having a multidimensional character. Political communication has been analyzed from different points of view such as the historical, psychological, sociological, and the point of view of the political sciences, to mention only the most relevant.

Political communication is defined by Richard Perloff as “the process by which a nation’s leadership, media and citizenry exchange and confer meaning upon messages that relate to the conduct of public policy”.³ In the context of contemporary political communication, the role of media cannot be underestimated. Thus, as the communication scientists Otfried Jarren and Patrick Donges argue, political communication is a process that involves mainly three components: the leadership, the media and the citizens. Political communication is beyond the simple presentation of politics, it is politics in itself.⁴

One important concepts used in political communication is that of *image*. The term originates in social psychology, but it is broadly used in communication science. Image is a multidimensional concept of rational, emotional and social nature. Image is the perception that the public has with respect to a person or object.⁵ In addition, emphasizing the concept of *image*, communication scholars speak about *image transfer*, a communication process that is taking place when a person or object associates its image to the image of a different person or object. Based on empirical data presented above, one can conclude that *trust* is a highly represented dimension of the image of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Political communication is not only related to elections, but it is intensively conducted during these times. Electoral campaigns are one of the most highly analyzed fields of political communication and this article is related to the elections as a field of performance for political communication. The relationship between religious and politics in Romania has a complex nature and deep historical roots. In the first years after 1989 the political parties and actors were not strongly related to religious symbols and actors. The presence of symbols and that of politicians at the religious events increased with the religious revival of the last years. The first electoral campaigns conducted in Romania after 1989, in 1990 and 1992, included political candidates coming from different churches. However, laic candidates did not associate their image to religious symbols and did not attend religious rituals that were presented by the press. The 1996 electoral campaign marked a turn over to religious values and behaviors. The presidential candidates included in their *electoral itineraries* visits to the Orthodox churches and attendances to religious services. Electoral materials included pictures with the candidates surrounded by Christian Orthodox icons and symbols. One of the candidates included God in its slogan of religious inspiration: "He Who Votes for Me, Votes for God". The presidential candidate Emil Constantinescu even asked Ion Iliescu his opponent during a TV debate if he believes in God, knowing what kind of answer the declared atheist candidate will answer. In the same year, the Transylvanian leaders of the social-democrat party wrote a letter to the Synod of the Christian Orthodox Church asking for electoral support. This demand was highly discussed at that time.⁶

In 1998, one of the candidates running for the mayor's office in Bucharest attended a religious ceremony and was invited to sanctuary. This aspect was also intensively presented in the media. Six years later, in 2004, in both local and national campaigns, the majority of political parties built a special relationship with the churches. They included in their political platforms the needs of targeted religious communities and encouraged their candidates to use religious symbols, to attend religious ceremonies that would make them popular.⁷

In this context, the paper also aims to underline the fact that, not only that the presence of religious symbols intensifies after 2004, but also that the number of newspapers' articles on the issue of politics and religion interplay has increased in the last ten years.

Methodological Perspective

The paper aims to empirically analyze the level of politicians' involvement in religious life through one perspective. By realizing media coverage, the research will emphasize both if religious services are a tool in creating electoral capital and if there can be a connection between the evolution of trust in Church, the evolution of trust in political institutions and the level of politicians presence in articles that refers to their involvement in religious life.

The media coverage has been conducted on the online version of two Romanian newspapers *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul*. The reason for choosing these two newspapers is twofold. First, based on data from BRAT (Romania Office of Circulations' Audit), these newspapers are on the top of number of copies sold.⁸ Second, from the most read newspapers, the selected ones have the longest archive online period available: 1998, respectively 2001. The content analysis will be preponderantly quantitative. However, the analysis will also provide information based on a qualitative content analysis approach.

While the media coverage on *Evenimentul Zilei* was done from 1998 till 2008, the media coverage on *Adevărul* was done between 2002 and 2008, these archive intervals being the only available ones. There have been selected those articles that are mainly related to politicians' attendance in religious services. The table below shows the evolution of the number of articles in the given period.

Table no.2 – The evolution of number of articles in *Evenimentul Zilei* and in *Adevărul*, articles that present politicians' presence to different religious services

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
E. Zilei	2	7	3	2	8	12	10	3	7	23	4
Adevărul	-	-	-	-	5	8	5	1	5	13	12

The dark grey highlighted cells represent the electoral years: 2000 - general and presidential elections, 2004 - general and presidential elections, 2007 - national elections for the European Parliament, and 2008 - general elections. Although in 2003 there was organized a Constitutional referendum, this analysis will not consider this year as an electoral one due to the fact it did not imply a traditional electoral dispute between

politicians and parties. The light grey highlighted cells represent the number of articles written on the analyzed issue in the pre-electoral year.

Based on the main hypothesis, the concept of visibility is operationalized in this context as the number of articles that present political personalities attending religious events. Thus, the data presented above shows that, with only one exemption, the hypothesis is infirmed. The exemption is related to 2007 when the elections for European Parliament took place and when the number of articles relating politics and religion is the highest in both newspapers' cases.

One interesting aspect that can be noticed is that the number of articles is higher in the pre-election year, respectively 1999, 2003 and 2007. This does not necessarily mean that politicians do participate more to religious services in the pre-electoral years, but that the number of articles regarding this issue is higher in this period. However, based on this result, we may claim that, even if the date of election is usually in the second part of a year, politicians start their electoral campaign at least one year before.

It is also important to stress that, based on the above table, the number of articles on politicians participation in religious life is following an increasing trend. Thus, regarding *Evenimentul Zilei* newspaper, while till 2000 the average number of articles written on the above mentioned aspect is around four, since 2000 on, the average number of articles is double. The pattern can be observed in the case of *Adevărul* as well. The average number of articles appeared in the first considered years is lower than the last analyzed ones. Most probably, as a consequence of the democratic development, this reality can be explained by the desire to develop new electoral strategies or by becoming more aware of the citizens' potential.

A more in depth analysis of politicians' appearance in religious events

Although reality is clearly described by the above presented data, a more in depth analysis is important. Thus, the following parts of the paper will emphasize the connection between the religious holidays and the number of articles describing each holiday, the evolution of the number of appearances of the most important politicians during the analyzed period, and the range of quotations that explicitly refer to politicians' attendance to religious events as a tool in collecting more votes.

The main Holidays or occasions in which politicians are presented as attending religious events are listed in the tables below.

Table no. 3 – The number of *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul* articles grouped by year and by most important religious events – from 1998 till 2004

Year	Holiday/Occasion	The number of articles in <i>Evenimentul zilei</i>	The number of articles in <i>Adevărul</i>
1998	Easter	1	
	Pope visit in Romania	1	
1999	Easter	1	
	Pope visit in Romania	2	
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	1	
	Church consecration	2	
2000	Easter	1	
	Saint Parascheva	2	
2001	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	2	
2002	Easter	3	2
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	5	3
2003	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	7	7
	Saint Bartolomeu	1	
	Church consecration	1	
	Saint Parascheva	1	1
2004	Epiphany (Baptism of Christ)	1	
	Palm Sunday	1	
	Easter	1	
	Participation to religious services	2	1
	Religious service in memoriam of Stefan cel Mare		4
	Funds allocated for building a Church	1	
	General articles on politicians implication in religious life	2	
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	2	

Table no. 4 (the continuation of Table no.3) – The number of *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul* articles grouped by year and by most important religious events – from 2005 till 2008

Year	Holiday/Occasion	The number of articles in <i>Evenimentul zilei</i>	The number of articles in <i>Adevărul</i>
2005	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	2	1
	Saint Parascheva	1	
2006	Celebrating the Titular of Monastery	1	
	Saint Parascheva	4	1

	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary		1
	Easter		1
	The installation of the new Metropolitan of Transylvania – Bartolomeu Anania		2
	Church consecration	1	
2007	Easter	2	1
	Sanctification of Pahomie	5	
	Metropolitan Cathedral consecration	1	
	Patriarch's Funerals	3	
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	2	1
	Sanctification of Varlaam of Moldavia	3	1
	The funerals of Teoctist Patriarch		5
	The new Patriarch	3	1
	Visit to a church in construction	1	
	Saint Parascheva	2	2
	The consecration of the place of the future Mântuirii Neamului Cathedral	1	2
2008	Sunday Liturgy	1	
	Easter	1	3
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary		1
	Saint Parascheva		2
	The inauguration of Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from Italy		1
	Visiting a Church		2
	The installation of the new Metropolitan of Moldavia		3
	Religious Holiday – The Virgin Mary's Belt	2	

In both newspapers, the politicians are presented as participating most frequently to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Holiday, Easter, and Saint Parascheva Holiday. As expected, the variety of Holidays attended by politicians is different from year to year. Thus, the most varied religious events in which politicians took part are in 2004, 2007 and 2008. Although, strictly from the point of view of the number of articles, the main hypothesis is only partially valid, from the point of view of the variety of religious events attended the hypothesis seems to be confirmed.

In a context in which we claim that the number of newspapers articles that present political personalities attending religious events is more frequent in electoral years, it is important to analyze how often politicians are mentioned. The number of political personalities that are mentioned in the analyzed articles outruns 75 persons. However, the table below presents only a small part of these names. The selection is based

both on the importance of politicians' functions and on the frequency of their appearance in the newspaper.

Table no. 5 – The frequencies of politicians names' appearances in religious event in *Evenimentul Zilei* ("E") and *Adevărul* ("A") articles from 1998 till 2008 (the highlighted years are the electoral years) – there are listed only the names that appear most frequently

Politicians	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008	
	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A
Emil Constantinescu	2	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	6	7	-	-
Ion Iliescu	5	-	1	-	6	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	22	-	-	-	-	5	8	-	-
Teodor Meleşcanu	5	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	8	1	-	1
Petre Roman	-	-	1	-	5	-	2	-	3	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Th. Stolojan	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	4
Adrian Năstase	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	13	7	7	11	10	9	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Ioan Rus	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	3	8	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Traian Băsescu	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2	7	8	8	10	3	23	30	70	32	7	20
Mircea Geoana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	5	9	-	2
Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3	-	-	29	12	-	4
Emil Boc	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	-	-	2	10	4	-	7

As this table shows, it is clear the fact that the distribution of politicians' appearances in religious sphere during the 10 analyzed years is interdependent with their role and visibility in political sphere. Thus, as expected, while the politicians that run important offices in the late '90s are more visible in that period and less visible from 2001 on, for the politicians that are running offices in the present time it is exactly the other way around.

It is important to specify that the numbers listed in the above table represents the number of a name's appearance. Thus, it means that a name could have appeared many times in a single article and that, in certain articles, a name could have appeared more often than in others.

With the exception of 2008, all the electoral years present a slightly higher number of politicians' appearances than in the non-electoral years. Thus, for example, Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman or Theodor Stolojan have their names listed in articles related to religious event appeared in electoral

years more often than in other years. The most populated year from the point of view of appearances is 2007, the year when elections for European Parliament took place. We cannot statistically stress that there is a connection between the high number of appearances and the fact that 2007 was an electoral year. However, we may suppose that religious events could have been a tool in the parties' electoral fight. It is also interesting to observe that in 2007 the number of politicians' appearances to religious events is higher than in the rest of the years for both new and long lasting politicians.

Based on the above data, we may stress that the evolution of general appearances of politicians in newspapers in electoral years is following an increasing trend. Thus, the number of appearances in religious events in 2007 and 2008 is visibly higher than in 2000 and 2004.

There are a few political personalities that are almost constantly presented by the media as participating to religious events. The most relevant example is Petre Roman, who six consecutive years has almost the same number of appearances. The cases of Adrian Năstase, Traian Băsescu, and Ioan Rus respect almost the same trend.

The person whose name appears most frequently in the analyzed newspapers is Traian Băsescu. The number of his appearances has significantly increased since he is the Romania's President. In comparison with Traian Băsescu, neither Emil Constantinescu, nor Ion Iliescu, both former Romanian's Presidents, has an important number of appearances in the selected articles. The possible explanations of this reality can be multiple: from the level of media development which was higher in the last years, to the increase of electoral competition, or to the diversification of electoral tools in attracting electoral capital.

As a conclusion to this part of the paper, the analyzed data from both newspapers shows that, in general, in electoral years the politicians' appearance in religious events is higher than in the rest of the period. Moreover, it can be stressed that, compared with non-electoral years, in electoral ones written media talks about a larger range of political personalities.

Emphasizing the idea that individuals are intensively influenced by what media say and think, it is important to stress if the above mentioned newspapers articles have references to electoral campaign or to the desire of politicians to improve their sympathy capital through a religious behavior.

In the context in which the word "electoral", or other derived words, appear for around 49 times in all the analyzed articles from *Evenimentul Zilei* and for 21 times in *Adevărul*, it is imperative to emphasize some important examples of electoral references of the texts. Thus, the tables below present the most relevant quotations that reflect the connection between participation to a religious event and the desire to gain more

electoral capital. Aiming only to underline this connection, the following analysis tries not to use political parties' names.

Table no. 6 – Articles from *Evenimentul Zilei* that *explicitly* refer to the idea that politicians use the Church in order to make electoral campaign

Date	The title of the article	Electoral quotations
<i>EVENIMENTUL ZILEI</i>		
14 th of October, 2000	Electoral agenda	[...] They have one single common goal in their agendas: to participate to the liturgy.
17 th of August, 2002	PSD disrespected the holy ones	The distribution of some small icons with the inscription "(...) donation" on them (...)
14 th of August, 2003	Party's Saint Mary of the party	All vice-presidents and executives have the task to spread to the monasteries and churches from the entire country. [...] On Saint Mary/s Holiday, hundreds of thousands of people go to halidoms, a good opportunity for electoral campaigns. (...) the (...) leaders that will not come to the Saint Mary's Holyday risk to be taken into consideration (...).
16 th of August, 2003	PSD confiscated Saint Mary	It obliged citizens that came to church that, besides the religious service, to listen to governmental promises and achievements.
19 th of October, 2003	Electoral baits everywhere	(...) the authorities get to use even the religious services in order to bring votes.
1 st of June, 2004	Electoral campaign at the Church's doors	(...) more and more people (...) complain that, during the religious services or right after them, members (...) do electoral campaign.
24 th of July, 2004	Orthodox Church's transfiguration	It rarely existed religious holiday in which the governmental party's representatives did not come (...) in order to conduct an electoral campaign.
27 th of November, 2004	Traian Basescu kneed in the Church	The last public appearance (...) before elections took place yesterday at Saint George Church.
14 th of April, 2007	Voiculescu is threatening!	"(...) uses the church and the Saint Altar in order to hold political discourses (...)."
15 th of April, 2007	The President has Allied with the Saints	(...) understood how important the Church is, what enormous power it has. The Church voice is heard even in the last hamlet, while political messages meet the growing Romanians' indifference. [...] (...) country in which there live 19 millions of orthodox believers and 15.000 of priests. The biggest "electoral army" that, without any command and silently, can influence any elections in Romania.
10 th of March, 2008	From the Church to the Bar	(...) at the Sunday Liturgy, in an electoral action (...). The conviction cure ended across the road, into a bar.

Table no. 7 – Articles from *Adevărul* that explicitly refer to the idea that politicians use the Church in order to make electoral campaign

Date	The title of the article	Electoral quotations
ADEVĂRUL		
13 th of October 2003	There are expected a million of pilgrims for Saint Parascheva Holiday	Not being an electoral year, politicians do not come to kiss the holy relics.
16 th of August 2003	PSD has nothing saintly	This is only a part of the trollopish campaign (...) organized in order to gain parishioners' votes and influence on Orthodox and Catholic Churches. The electoral propaganda made during the religious service whipped up murmurs (...).
16 th of October 2006	"The first pilgrim of the country skipped the queue to see Saint Parascheva's relics"	As there was an electoral year, the highest was the politicians' inflow on the 14 th of October.
3 rd of August 2007	The collective emotion politics	It is hard to find in this country a public assembly which generate emotions and where politicians would not be present in the first rows.
16 th of August 2007	On Saint Mary Holiday, Romanians do not get ride of politicians infiltrated among priests	In comparison with pilgrims, politicians seem to come to monasteries as to a big electoral show.

Based on the above selected quotations, we may claim that the number of electoral references made in the articles that present politicians to religious events is significant. Moreover, the message transmitted through these references seems to be very clear. Even though the *Evenimentul Zilei* archive is higher than *Adevărul* one, the difference between the numbers of important electoral references in the former newspaper is not significantly bigger than in the latter one.

The table below presents the evolution of the number of electoral references existed in the analyzed articles of both newspapers. As it can be remarked, with the exception of 2007, the initial hypothesis is infirmed again by the fact that the most numerous electoral references are made not in the electoral years but in the pre-electoral year.

Table no. 6 – The number of specifically electoral references in the analyzed articles in *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul*, by year (there are listed only those years in which the analyzed articles contain electoral references)

	2000	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008
<i>Ev. Zilei</i>	1	1	3	3	-	2	1
<i>Adevărul</i>	-	-	2	-	1	2	-

It is also important to notice that all the above listed newspapers' references on politicians' attendance to religious services are strongly presented as electoral actions. Thus, we may argue that the written media

present the image of a politician that take part in religious events in a negative manner. From the distribution of electoral materials during or after the church service, to delivering political discourses, all politicians' actions within religious context risk to be perceived as manipulative and thus incredulous.

Trust in politics, trust in Church and the number of politicians' appearances

Newspapers tend to present politicians' participation to church services as a party duty in order to increase the general level of trust. In a context in which the level of trust in Church is constantly high, as presented in the introduction, and the level of trust in politics in general is low and very low, as presented in the following table, it is somehow desirable for politicians to try to connect their ultimate electoral goals to the values in which the majority believes.

Table no. 7 - The evolution of *very high* and *high* levels of trust (in percentages) in different political institution, from 1996 to 2007 (the data are from the last months of every year)

Trust in...	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Presidency	-	56	40	21	19	54	48	43	42	46	45	41
Government	26	36	28	11	13	49	38	29	27	30	20	22
Parliament	23	27	20	10	9	36	29	19	18	22	14	18
Political Parties	-	-	12	8	8	10	15	12	-	13	7	12

Source: Public Opinion Barometers from 2003 to 2007, Open Society Foundation, The Gallup Organization Romania

Statistical data confirm the fact that Romanians have a low level of trust in politics in general. While the average of the level of trust in Presidency is around 40%, the level of trust in political parties has an average of around 10%. In this context it is challenging to analyze three sets of data and the connection between them from the point of view of the period: the level of trust in Church, the level of trust in politics, and the evolution of the number of newspapers' articles that present politicians involve in religious events.

An interesting question is whether or not there is an overlapping between the years in which the level of trust in politics is lower, the years in which the level of trust in Church is higher, and the years in which newspapers' number of references related to politicians' participation in religious events is also high. Based on a large part of the already analyzed data, we can argue that there is not pattern regarding the above mentioned issue. Thus, we cannot claim that when the level of trust in politicians is decreasing, the number of articles that present politicians participating to religious events is higher.

Regarding the connection between the level of trust in Church and the number of politicians' appearances in the religious events, as presented in the written media, we can stress that the hypothesis does not fully validate. While between 2001 and 2004 there is a pattern that would confirm the hypothesis, 2007 is an exceptional case again. In 2007 the number of articles is the highest (23) but the level of trust in Church is among the lowest (84%). Therefore, we cannot conclude the fact that politicians pay attention to the fluctuation of the citizens' level of trust in politics in general and in Church in particular in order to diminish their disadvantages by participating more to religious events.

Conclusions

Based on media coverage of two of the most important Romanian newspapers, *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul*, this paper analyzes the relationship between politics and religion. Specifically, it emphasized the level of politicians' involvement into religious events in order to increase their electoral capital. Using both a quantitative and a qualitative research, the study mainly aims to validate if the visibility of the politicians that participate in religious services during Christian Holidays is higher in the electoral years than in the rest of the time.

The results show that the hypothesis is only partially valid. While the electoral year 2007 is an exception, in all the other analyzed situations, the number of articles that present politicians to religious events is higher in the very pre-electoral year. In the context in which the Church is perceived as a pleader for religious solutions to social, economical and political problems⁹, media presents numerous explicit specifications in the analyzed articles that underline the fact the politicians do use the religious values as a tool in gaining more votes.

We may also claim that, even though there are articles that do not make any specific reference to the idea of political propaganda, the majority of the articles emphasize a negative and a critical attitude on politicians' behavior. Although the politicians' desirable goal is that of transferring their religious image on the public offices they run, a large number of articles reveals a high level of reticence of church-goers on political propaganda within the Church.

In conclusion, we may argue that, based on the fact that political communication seems to depend on the accomplishments of social responsibility¹⁰, political personalities are increasingly trying to get electoral advantages by showing that they respect religious values. However, the written media seems to be frequently skeptical on the credibility of politicians' behavior.

In our paper we only looked for the media coverage of the interaction between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Political Actors in Romania by focusing on the fervency of interaction during elections. From

the point of view of political communication a further step should be taken by focusing on the role of the interaction in the construction of the communication strategy. The reason of the interaction is the transfer of a positive image of trust, leadership, Christian values but also the opportunity to target – if we may use a marketing and advertising term – a large number of potential voters. This type of political communication is far beyond ideologies, as we saw leaders from various parties having different ideologies, from socialist to ultra nationalist, looking forward to meet with the population by approaching the Church.

The conclusions of this article are at the same time an invitation to continue our research by also taking into consideration the 2009 electoral year, focusing especially on the presidential elections. The image transfer is, we might suppose, more relevant in this case. The president of the state is, for the majority of the population in Romania and especially for those living in the rural area and having strong religious ties, the most important leader and should have the traditional qualities of a leader, including an authoritarian character. As we saw in our research there is a tendency towards a stronger presence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the presidential candidates' events in the last years.

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Notes

¹ National Census Report, 2002.

² Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu. "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-communist Democratisation", *EUROPE- ASIA Studies*. Vol. 52. No.8, (2000): 1467.

³ Richard M. Perloff. *Political Communication*. Politics, Press and Public in America. (London: Mahwah Nj., 1998): 8.

⁴ Otfried Jarren and Donges. *Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft*. (Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag. Band 1. 2002a): 21.

⁵ Delia Cristina Balaban. *Comuniare publicitară*. (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2005): 47.

⁶ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu , *op. cit.*, 2000.

⁷ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu. "Pulpits, Ballots and Party Cards: Religion and Elections in Romania", *Religion, State and Society*. Vol. 33. No.4. (December, 2005): 358.

⁸ Romania Office of Circulations' Audit. BRAT (Biroul Roman de Audit al Tirajelor).

⁹ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu , *op. cit.*, 2000: 1476.

¹⁰ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu , *op. cit.*, 2005.