



## High School and University Students' Opinions about Politics

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### Abstract

*This paper is a part of a larger thesis, which compares two groups' relations to politics, based on empirical sources. The main question, which can be answered only partly in this paper is, what are the particularities of the political culture of the studied populations?*

*Results of study support that in several questions differences based on age – education level – locality proved to be stronger than ethnical ones, but the second type of differences are also significant i.e. in perceiving a few social gaps, trust in international institutions etc. Social background seems to play a sporadic role in shaping opinions about politics. Diffuse support for democracy is completed with weaker specific support. Romanian university students seem to have the most positive attitude toward direction and advances of Romanian democracy. Trust in institutions and perception of governments' performance is connected, as a recent empirical study also confirmed based on the results of EVS and WVS of the last two decades (Tufiş 2010). Relations among the studied elements of political culture indicate that new directions and methods would be needed in order to find empirically supported explanations. Students develop/form their opinions about politics probably more based on the attitudes brought from socialization agents, than on their own information and experience.*

### Keywords

*attitudes, trust in institutions, social gaps, political opinions*

### Introduction

This paper is a part of a larger thesis, which compares two groups' – high school and university students – relation to politics, based on empirical sources. The main question (which can be answered only partly in this paper) is: what are the particularities of the political culture of the studied populations?

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The timeliness of this topic is rooted in changes that took place after 1989 in political culture. Together with questions dating back sixty years, these new changes have spurred much debate and questioning in the literature, but few answers were given.

The *empirical resources* are the result of two studies done in Romania. In addition to these datasets, the results of Hungarian and Romanian studies on a similar topic were taken in to account<sup>2</sup>. Empirical antecedents<sup>3</sup> of the last decade and a half were invaluable for the conceptualization and planning of this research. Thus, in the interpretation of the research results, it is possible to build from the foundation of international literature.

*Study of university students.* In 2002 a study titled ‘Democracy?!’ was done among Hungarian and Romanian speaking students at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. The sample was quota based. Gender, branch of study and year of study quotas were set. All the branches of study from Cluj, from Babes-Bolyai University were taken into account. In ‘Democracy?!’ a total of 802 people were surveyed, 446 Hungarian speakers and 356 Romanian speakers. ‘Democracy?!’ began from the experiences resulting from ‘Civic culture 1’ (one of the studies in the series mentioned above) and it used some of the questions from that study.

*Study of high school students.* The second study took place in 2004, among 12th grade students from the ethnically Hungarian city of Odorheiu Secuiesc. In this city there are seven high schools where the language of study is Hungarian. There is a school, where there is an exclusively Romanian section, with two parallel classes. This was left out of the study because the target group was Hungarian-speaking students. The single class at the church school was also left out of the study. In total, 27 classes were interviewed. The study focused on the whole target population, so the dataset includes 373 students (only those students who were absent at the time of the research are not represented here).

While planning both of the studies the author aimed to reveal/explore the student’s relationship to politics, as the content of political culture. The analysis is comprised of five dimensions: interest in politics, media consumption, political awareness, opinions

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<sup>2</sup> Worthy of mention are some of the studies done among the adult population, for example the ‘Consolidation of democracy’ international comparison study from the nineties. We may also note studies which focus on the young generation’s relation to politics, like ‘Civic culture’ studies done among university students from Cluj. There are several other national and international studies, which can be considered antecedents and are available for comparison. Among these is a study realized in 2000 among high school students in Hungary and Romania, the Mozaik 2001 study, and also a research done among high school students in four Transylvanian cities.

<sup>3</sup> The amount of political sociology research in Romania has greatly increased since the regime change in 1989. This is one field of study that plays an important role both in Romanian and international research contracts. This is supported also by empirical studies, which focus on exploring the situation of Romanian sociology in the nineties. i.e. Kiss Tamás –Sólyom Andrea (2002): A román szociológia helye és helyzete a kilencvenes években. In *Mi újság a Kelet-Közép-Európai szociológiában?* Kovács Éva (ed.), Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, but the same results can be read in the following articles also: Larionescu, Maria (2001): The State of Romanian Sociology since 1989. Draft, Collegium Budapest, and Larionescu, Maria (2003): *Observații asupra sociologiei românești din perioada de tranziție*, Romanian Journal of Political Science PolSci, vol. 3, no 1.

and actions. This paper focuses only on one dimension of the complex content of political culture: political values. Prior to examining this, the theoretical, methodological, conceptual and explanatory problems which the author confronted will be sketched out.

### **Theoretical Problems**

During the preparation of the empirical research about political culture, several theoretical and methodological problems arose. Thus it is possible to conclude that it is a challenge to add something irrevocable to the existing approaches. It is not easy to say something new about the complex problem, which has been studied for decades. Nevertheless the author will try to do so.

Two main problems will be raised, which determine the process of analysis. The first is the problem of the definition of certain concepts. The conceptual framework plays an important role in choosing methodology, in research design and also in the explanation of the results. The second is the problem of Eastern European particularities. Three characteristics will be mentioned shortly, which underline that the approaches found in international references can be applied only partly because of the local specificities in Eastern Europe.

#### ***Uncertainty or Opportunity? What Does (Does Not) Belong to The Concept of Political and Civic Culture?***

The subtitle of this section – uncertainty or opportunity – attempts to capture the particularities of defining political culture, either as a freedom or a difficulty.

In the last few decades several studies about political culture were done. The studies can be classified based on time, geographic location, researcher's motivations, they can also be classified by subtopics which are also related to time, location etc. The author considers as the main parameters the events from 1989, East and West, and the exploring and explaining goals of other authors, but this picture of course can be clarified in every dimension. Despite the large number of studies, the approaches found in the literature leave several questions open. In the few decades that the concept of political and civic culture has been in existence, there has been no consensus in defining it. This complicates the analysis. At the same time this can be interpreted as the freedom of the choice. Namely one can choose the elements that are the most useful to the chosen model<sup>4</sup>.

The definition of political culture, of democracy and the concepts of political left and right side can be described as theoretical problems, which, over the last few decades

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<sup>4</sup> The analysis in this paper is linked to the American research antecedents from the fifties and sixties, the central-east-European studies from nineties, and also to the Romanian political culture studies. In defining political culture it is helpful to begin with Almond and Verba's theory and typology, as well as a few central-east-European approaches. During the analysis, the logic of a similar Hungarian research will be used, research by Szabó and Örkény. In the interpretation of national system specificities, the problems explained by Kiss offer a starting point. Finally, in comparing this study's results with national ones, analysis patterns will be used, which in Hungarian literature were introduced by Simon.

have earned a good deal of theoretical and empirical meaning, in addition to a few controversial approaches.

This analysis focuses on political culture from several aspects according to the approach of Almond and Verba. On one hand, this study analyzes “*political culture*” as “*process culture*”, which can be measured as the perception of conflicts between social groups, and as attitudes against representatives of different nations. On the other hand it is possible to talk about “*policy culture*”, i.e. electoral preferences, the judgment of the institution, and mobilization. We can also create a picture of “*system culture*”, if we measure the acceptance of democracy in general, and Romanian democracy (Almond – Powell 1996).

### ***Eastern-European Specialties***

One of the questions of empirical political sociology is how a citizen, a person, or a group can adjust to the uncertainties and changes in the system? What citizen strategies arise to co-exist with the changing reality, with the cognitive dissonances? According to the author’s hypothesis and the antecedent empirical experience, one of the strategies is to opt out of the political situation. Another comfortable alternative can be the acceptance of easy accessible elements, for example rhetorical elements, such as nationalist and ethnocentric rhetoric. In the following three characteristics of the Romanian democratic system that differ from Western democracies will be explored.

#### *East-West, East-East Differences in Political Culture*

Although the literature mainly discusses East-West differences among European political cultures, it is possible to collect information about the heterogeneity of micro and macro regions in transition through the comparative research done in post-communist societies. There are East-West divergences in the levels of political culture, in political customs, discourses, subcultures, ideologies and institutions. A *political custom* of note is the group of *political mutes*, which is usually larger in Eastern Europe (Ágh 2002).

One of the Eastern European particularities is the heterogeneity of *discourses*. But, the existence of parallel, mutually exclusive *political subcultures* – unable to communicate with each other – is also Eastern European specificity. The mentioned characteristics lead to *fragmented* political culture, putting at risk the stability of the system. The Hungarian-speaking minority’s political palette forms subcultural spaces and groups, the result of which can be lack of representation in parliament<sup>5</sup>. There are further East-West differences at the level of *political institutions*. According to Linz and Stepan these institutions are not continuous in Eastern Europe. The author describes a kind of

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<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian-speaking minority’s situation becomes paradoxical, because its own political plurality puts at risk representation in the parliament in Bucharest. There are now two parties representing the Hungarian-speaking minority in Romania. If they do not obtain consensus, the votes may be split, and in the next election the Hungarian-speaking minority will not achieve parliamentary representation.

*deformed recurrence cycle*, where instead of new institutions being developed, old institutions are revived but transformed (Linz – Stepan 1996).

Finally, there is the matter of differences among the political style of elites. The main segment of the East and Central European political elite can be characterized – using Verba and Pye's expression, in a simplified way – by ideological political style<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand there are some cases when other scientists miss the *ideology*<sup>7</sup>. Seeing the comparison from the East, the picture is more nuanced. Several scientists underline that it would be an exaggerated simplification to draw a line between East and West, thus considering post-communist societies homogeneous (Ágh 1998, Enyedi 2004, 2005).

At the same time, it is useful to consider similar characteristics between the political culture of the Central and Eastern European region. Though the next two statements refer to Hungarian political culture, they are also valid in the area of this study. One comes from Attila Ágh: *the exaggerated formation of parties jeopardizes the development of civil society*. According to the author, societal movements shape political culture, and these have a short life, because they are institutionalized too early and lose their flexibility (Ágh 1996, cited by Enyedi 2004). Another important remark comes from András Gerő. He considers the *different expectations set upon a person and their surroundings* as a regional characteristic. The person expects from the larger surroundings a European behavioural pattern, but from his own circle, he accepts avoidance of the rules (Gerő 2005, cited by Sólyom 2009).

#### *The Political Orientation of the Parties and Inconsistencies in their Political Values*

During the analysis the scientist should pay attention to the Romanian (and Eastern European) particularity, that being well versed in the political parties encounters problems. Since the Romanian party system is a specific one: several party platforms contain values belonging to both the left and right. For this reason, is not easy to put the parties on the traditional left-right scale. The changes in the Romanian parties are also hard to follow. During the campaign period these changes become stronger, partly because of the competition to acquire the sympathy of undecided voters, and partly

<sup>6</sup> While the elites are not the target group of this study, this paper does not interpret the rules of elites, there are some remarks, which are important related to this question. Borza describes the circulation of the Romanian political elite, Bozóki summarizes the Eastern and Central-European approaches to these rules. The author considers that from the pragmatic and ideological political styles, the latter is more widespread among the political elite. This does not mean ideological consistency within the elite. The elite's behaviour depends instead on the individual issues. That is the reason why the Romanian elite can be characterized by the mixture of the two types, namely by pragmatic ideologies representation.

<sup>7</sup> In their opinion the level of ideology, where the subcultures' political discourses crystallize, is totally absent in the region. George Schöpflin compares post-communist political cultures with Western democracies. In his opinion the former have as common characteristics the lack of communitarian ideology, the culture of weak legitimacy, and the tradition of mistrust related to formal institutions (Schöpflin 2003). Several similar approaches about mistrust in institutions and its origins could be found in Romanian literature too, i.e. Bogdan Voicu offers explanation based on the results of EVS and WVS results (Voicu 2005).

because parties attempt to align themselves with what are perceived to be the dominant political climate.

Thus the value-mediatory mechanism of the parties does not lead to the consequent representation of values. Voters have to find other means to create their electoral strategies – because they cannot rely on the consequent value-mediation, they can cling to rhetorical messages of the parties, i.e. in economic policy messages. The Romanian-speaking university students – according to the results of Civic culture I. study – seem to be divided by different economic policy questions.

At the same time, the parties are always looking for new instruments for increasing their voter base. They try to use labels in their self-definition; these labels often create new gaps among the electorate. It is important to know that in the Romanian political arena, there are two, radically different structures for Hungarian- and Romanian-speaking voters. While the Romanian-speaking students can choose from several parties, the Hungarian-speaking students can say yes or no to the parliamentary representation from one party<sup>8</sup>. All of the parties for Romanian-speakers emphasize the national dimension: i.e. electoral campaign periods all the parties use the rhetoric of ethnicity in attracting voters, every party adduce national identity. Partly due to the mentioned characteristic Romanian-speaking voters can more really choose between parties, less between ideologies<sup>9</sup>.

*In Society, the Gaps between People Are not along the Political Left and Right Side (Selective Democratization)*

This can be connected to several factors. One of them is the specificity, that most important problems of societies in transition are not political, but social, societal, and ethnic tensions.

A second phenomenon mentioned above, is that parties try to create new gaps among electors, and their rhetoric can underline values belonging traditionally to both the left and right. This latter phenomenon characterizes more and more societies' political parties.

A third factor is *selective democratization*. This is a particularity of political consciousness that characterizes the transitional nature of Eastern European societies. Selective democratization describes the process by which a group of citizens prefer to combine the facilities of the old regime (i.e. the material security, employment, availability of housing, predictable possibilities for advancement) with advantageous elements of the new system. Some scientists consider this phenomenon to be a characteristic of Eastern and Central-European societies in transition (Kéri 1999, Lázár 1993).

A fourth problem is the dysfunction of the political left-right scale, as a methodological question, this problem has a history of several decades. In spite of its

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<sup>8</sup> at the time of the study

<sup>9</sup> This problem can be interpreted from another point of view. The value-mediation of parties probably adjusts to the potential voters claims. Thus, if the group, whose national identity is not important, would be large enough, probably parties would appear to answer this claim.

deficits, and the existence of alternatives, the left-right scale still exists today. While the empirical sources that the author references use this research design – it refers mainly to the analysing logic adapted by Simon from Fuchs and Klingemann – the scale remains a support for the study.

### Methodological Problems

When a scientist tries to define the position of the analysis in the context of empirical antecedents, questions inevitably arise about selective linking to anterior research traditions<sup>10</sup>.

The main methodological problem results from the fact that the study compares two different groups from the point of view of 'active citizenship'. The main difference between the populations is related to geographic location, more so than age or difference in educational level. One of the groups is in a pre-political stage (they are not of voting age), so they are at the beginning of political adulthood. The other group has the potential to be politically active (to exercise their right to vote). Unlike the other group, they are of voting age, but they may not act on their right. The concept of potential is used here because of several French studies, which describe the political idleness, and uncertainty of youth between 18 and 28 years old. As we can see, most opinions in the literature do not distinguish where the formal beginning of the politically active period begins in these groups. For example, Percheron and Muxel, based on empirical studies, determined that we can not distinguish an important difference between teenagers and youth in their twenties in terms of their interest to politics, knowledge and actions. For practical purposes, active citizenship develops after they turn 18 years old. At the same time, the picture is more nuanced if political actions are discussed separately from each other. Examining non-conventional political actions (Barnes – Kaase 1979), it can be seen that young people can be active in the questions affecting them, without being active voters. Several studies show that young people try putting off their first voting.

It is worth considering the studied population's relation to democracy from the point of view of political *socialization* as well. At the time of the system change, the majority of the studied youth were in their kindergarten and elementary school years. The socialization institutions, especially the family and the school were represented by actors who were brought up in a non-democratic system, and the adjustment to the new system is not always successful for them. Institutions can have inflexible reactions to changes, and a routine lasting several decades can accumulate a force of inertia. From this point of view, the young generations may indirectly bear some heritage of the totalitarian system, which can affect their political culture. The influence of mediated heritage can be observed in abstinence from politics, in political perplexity, in relation to

<sup>10</sup> The issue, as mentioned in the introduction, disposes of plentiful theoretical and empirical antecedents. When the researcher tries to put this analysis in a larger context, it is necessary to select from the „traditions”, which have different time and space characteristics, approaches and concepts. This study is linked to the American schools of the fifties and sixties, to the Central Eastern European studies from nineties, and to Romanian political culture studies.

authoritarianism, in trust for institutions etc. These probably affect the two studied groups with different intensities.

It would only be proper to ask what the reason is for the comparison of high school and university students. One of the main differences between them comes from their age characteristics. In this paper, the criterion of comparison is not the age difference, measured by years, but a qualitative boundary. This boundary is the distinction between the high school students – who are too young to formally participate in the political process, and the university students, who are of legal age to be politically active. This paper focuses on the similarity and differences between the groups as they relate to this boundary.

Beyond the two group's capacities to be formally active in politics, there are additional differences that are relevant for this study. The author considers that the two characteristics need to be clarified. One is the difference in educational level. This study compares high school and university students – obviously these two groups have received different degrees of education<sup>11</sup>. The other characteristic is the different geographic location of each group: the high school students inhabit a small city in Seklerland (a region of Romania with a strong ethnic Hungarian majority); the university students live in a large more ethnically mixed city in central Transylvania. The ramifications of the differences between these communities can not be ignored in this study. As above, these differences introduce another methodological problem: the local particularities can not be separated from the age and study level characteristics<sup>12</sup>.

An argument for the comparison of the high school students from Odorheiu Secuiesc, with the university students from Cluj can be that the majority of the university students come from small cities similar to that of the high school students, and they spend only a few years in the big city. Behind this reason there are several other similarities between them, so the two groups are not as different as they first appear. Further, any new studies would yield time differences, would solve only some of the problems and would result other kinds of dilemmas. Therefore, the researcher can only take into consideration the methodological limits resulting from the fact that the age, study level and local specificities can not be handled separately from each other. And finally it is important to underline that the results cannot be generalized to a wider population than students from Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj and high school students in their last year in Odorhei.

The author considers three other methodological problems necessary for clarification, to decide, that (a) among whom, (b) with which method can political culture be studied, and (c) what essential methodological criteria should be kept. These are the

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<sup>11</sup> This difference introduces a methodological problem: the effect of education level can not be handled separately from the age difference, so the characteristics coming from the age of the students can not be separated from the characteristics of their educational level. To avoid this dilemma it would be ideal to have some other data about two other populations that have the same age, and which have completed their education.

<sup>12</sup> To control these effects other studies in the same city among students from different study levels would be needed. The opportunity to carry out these studies is limited, because the differences between the educational institutions from the two cities would yield new problems.

following: On which level can political culture be studied? Which method should be chosen? Can the normative pitfall be avoided?

### ***On which Level Should Political Culture Be Studied?***

In the research concerning the content of political culture, there are analyses focusing on both individual and group or community. According to certain approaches, for a complete picture, scientists need to study both. Gabriel – paraphrasing the definitions of Almond and Verba – argues for a distinction. He postulates that political culture is a characteristic of communities, states, nations, while on personal level it comes to disposition (Gabriel 1997).

The concept of political socialization resolves the debate between the approaches of collective and individual political culture. Namely socialization supposes the receptive role of the person, who can be characterized by knowledge-, attitude- and pattern-acquisition, and also the transitive role of community, which gives its collective knowledge system to future generations.

### ***Which Method Should Be Chosen?***

Several critics speak about weaknesses of political culture research elaborated with quantitative methods. For example, one view is that a quantitative study is exaggerated, static, normative, and limits the concepts of political culture and democracy.

A following problem, which is important to consider, is that certain concepts mean different things to the scientist and respondents. The quantitative research can only ask about hypothetical situations related to respondents' political actions, instead of their real action patterns. Caution must be taken during the conceptualization and design of research, and also in its explanation. For example, if the stability of a system is measured by people's satisfaction with democracy, one might discover that the Romanian system is more stable than Western European systems.

Undoubtedly, quantitative research can not measure real political actions compared to observation. It is impossible to learn from a survey if the respondent will really participate in the elections, if they would really accept a representative of a different nation as neighbour. We can only describe how they would react in a hypothetical situation, not what would happen in a real one<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the critiques, the majority of political culture research employs quantitative methods. The researcher who chooses quantitative methods have to pay attention to the methodological limits, and should be careful when creating the conceptual framework, research design, and also during the explanation.

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<sup>13</sup> To resolve these problems, a scientist who had already chosen a survey as their method, should interpret the results carefully; and should take into account these limits to the extent possible.

### **How to Avoid the 'Normative' Pitfall?**

The approaches, wide-spread in literature, which attach importance to citizen participation, and typologies, which sort citizen cultures hierarchically should be handled with circumspection. Though the role of participation in a functioning democracy is indispensable to ensure adequate representation, this does not mean that a researcher can consider the active citizen more „developed” than the passive, absent ones<sup>14</sup>.

The author confronted the temptation of the normative attitude in regards to the majority of the dimensions of political culture studied<sup>15</sup>: interest in politics<sup>16</sup>, political awareness<sup>17</sup> and action<sup>18</sup>. Media consumption is the field which should not take into account the normative pitfall. This paper's topic is the most subjective dimension: including evaluations about the system, institutions and conflicts between social groups.

### **Political Values**

After the theoretical and methodological dilemmas, let us see what characterizes the political values of the studied groups. In this part of the analysis students' attitudes related to democracy, the functioning of Romanian democracy and institutions are explored. This is the most subjective dimension of the study.

According to empirical approaches, stability of a democratic system depends on citizens' support (Almond – Powell 1996, Lipset 1995, Linz – Stepan 1996, Fuchs 1998). Political opinions together with values and affections can function as directing and

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<sup>14</sup> In order to avoid these problems, it is possible to use the critiques of classical political science approaches (which have a tradition of several decades).

<sup>15</sup> There are two important principles in the analysis:

1. Cognitive, rather than normative attitudes are used in regarded to the political culture of the studied populations.
2. The study attempts to create a possible model for interpreting the results of political culture. Starting from the references and empirical experiences, the author attempts to adapt approaches from Almond & Verba, Barnes & Kaase and Szabó & Örkény. However, the structure of the model proposed is flexible; the results can transform its criteria, coordinates, and types. Thus the compulsion to create correspondence between theoretical and empirical types is avoided.

<sup>16</sup> Hudon and Hébert have studied political interest among Canadian students. They underlined that, behind contradictory opinions about the political interest of young people there is normative attitude, which has to be avoided (Hudon & Hébert 1999). Namely, in the study of the insufficiency of young people's political interest', one finds the assumption that it is normal to be interested in politics.

<sup>17</sup> In the explanation of political awareness, the 'normative' problem should be acknowledged. Here emerges the methodological dilemma of which questions should be asked to ascertain whether certain citizens are more well-informed than others. Since majority of the author's theoretical and methodological starting points operate within the sphere of political knowledge/awareness, and because the methodology of the researchers below is adapted to a great extent, political knowledge emerges as a component in the analysis. The author will attempt to use this less in the interpretation of theoretical and empirical types of political culture.

<sup>18</sup> During the analysis of political action there are also a few methodological rules, which have to be taken into account. A first criterion is to avoid creating a hierarchy where active citizens rank more highly than passive citizens. In this study, conventional and un-conventional political actions are considered to be complementary types, so they cannot be compared with each other.

determining factor of political „behaviour”. Political value-orientations can be considered to be opinion-constellations, a position frame forming part of a youth's world view, which can determine the political action patterns. On the other hand, the author speculates that a segment of the youth population can be characterized by a discrepancy of political opinions and actions. An example of these can be found in the field of election behaviour. A group of young people prefer values belonging to the political left, at the same time they vote for the party which communicates the values of the right.

Three components of the dimension of political opinions are separated in the following paragraphs: system culture, relation to institutions and judgment of gaps.

(a) *System culture*. This was analyzed from two points of view: the evaluation of democracy and Romanian version of democracy (Mărginean et al 2001). These two levels were differentiated by Easton as diffuse support and specific support of the system (Easton 1975, 1979, cited by Pollack et al 2003 and also Fuchs 1998).

Acceptance of democracy as a system does not distinguish the studied population<sup>19</sup>. The majority of youth and adults<sup>20</sup> agree with the necessity of a multi-party system and parliament, therefore this element is omitted from the aggregate indicator of political opinions.

(b) *Relation to institutions*. In the nineties, more and more theoretical and empirical studies recognized the role of social capital in the functioning of democratic institutions, in forming of interest in politics and political activity (Putnam 2000, Pasek et al 2006). In this part, one pillar of Putnam's social capital will be addressed: trust. Trust in political institutions has constituted a part of public opinion surveys since the eighties in Hungary, and since the nineties in post communist societies in general (Marián – Szabó 1999).

Bădescu distinguishes three types of trust: political, general and strategic. One of these is included in present study – political trust – which can be defined as the evaluation of government based on citizens' expectations (Miller 1974, Hetherington 1998, 1999; cited by Bădescu 1999). Despite the rich literature and long professional debates about relation among trust, performance of institution and satisfaction with government (Miller 1974, Citrin 1974; cited by Keele 2005) there are several questions and few answers on this topic.

One group of authors who studies the functioning of democracy focuses on government accountability<sup>21</sup> (Rose-Ackerman 2007, Schmitter 2003, 2007). According to

<sup>19</sup> The following table shows that the majority of studied populations accept democracy as a system. The value of the Chi-square is 81,97 sig 0,000 in the case of elections and 4 sig 0,134 in the case of the parliament.

	High school students 2004 N=368	University students 2002		Romanian adult population 1998 N=1204	Romanian adult population 1990 N=1238
		Hungarians N=172	Romanians N=612		
Elections are needed	88%	84%	100%	87%	92%
Parliament is needed	86%	92%	87%	79%	89%

<sup>20</sup> Thanks to Ioan Mărginean, who made the results of the survey 'Consolidation of democracy' from 1998 available

<sup>21</sup> In Romanian language there can not be find an expression for the same concept.

Rose-Ackerman, accountability can be „translated” to the field of administration’s performance and policy-making.

Relation to institutions being studied together with elector preferences can be defined as policy culture in a next article. Regarding institutions, it is important to mention the heritage of socialism, which can influence the attitudes of the studied population (mainly through indirect means). The communist regimes of the East-Central European region attempted to achieve „integration” of classes, religions, lifestyles, beliefs and values based on ideology, forbidding all organizations in which these played a role. This also influenced the redoubling of socialization (Erős – Kovács – Lévai 1985, cited by Szabó – Falus 2000) – and created a uniform economic and societal state system. This led to the political practice Sztompka calls „civilizational incompetence”, which can be characterized by: “high levels of distrust in others and institutions, lack of legitimacy in particular of the justice system, and prominently the lack of mechanisms to deal with a diversity of interests and the ensuing overt tensions” (Sztompka 1993, Nowotny 2002; cited by Karstedt 2006, p. 61).

(c) *Opinions about social conflicts, or gaps.* The study of socio-cultural gaps appeared in the seventies, when Lipset and Rokkan tried to use historical factors rather than political background to explore the motivation of politics of European nations (Lipset 1995, Inglehart 1990, 2000, Simon 2004).

Opinions about gaps will be studied together with social distance as process culture in the follow up to this paper. While studying the evaluation of the gaps the main goal was to answer the question: based on student’s opinions, which gaps are dividing people? This question arises from a few facts. One of them is the functioning deficit of the political left-right scale as a means of measurement, and the debates about this in international references in the last decades. Another is that a significant number of Romanian and East Central European parties are not based on political left-right divide, but they try to form new gaps in the competition for votes.

## **Data and Variables**

The empirical sources for this analysis are the surveys presented in the introduction to this paper. The database of university students was weighted by ethnicity. Behind these data, in order to put the studied population in national context, the ‘Consolidation of democracy in East-Central Europe’ studies from 1998 and 1990 will be used as a basis for comparison. In 1990 1234, in 1998 1208 people were surveyed from the population above 18 years old.

In the following the variables that contribute to creating an empirical picture about political opinions will be presented. The opinions about Romanian democracy are measured by three questions: to evaluate the functioning of democracy on a scale from 1

to 10 (1), to rate positively or negatively the progress of democracy<sup>22</sup> (2), and to evaluate the country's situation after 1989<sup>23</sup> (3).

Relation to institutions includes satisfaction with the performance of anterior administrations<sup>24</sup> and trust in political and civil institutions<sup>25</sup>. Opinions about gaps were measured in an international study about the consolidation of democracy, which can be used as a starting point. Nine social group-pairs were enumerated, and students were asked to evaluate the importance of gaps between them<sup>26</sup>.

The social start position refers to the volume of material and cultural capital of the students' families. Material capital is an additive indicator formed by three questions: subjective judgment of the families' financial situation, consumer durables and the students' monthly allowance. Cultural capital includes the educational level of the parents and the residence type. Public religiosity was measured by frequency of church attendance.

Interest in politics was measured by creating an additive indicator<sup>27</sup>. Media consumption is also an additive indicator, which was formed by using frequencies (never, rarely, often, very often) of three types of media (newspaper, television, radio). Political awareness was measured using an indicator that was created based on Simon's

<sup>22</sup> Related to this topic the question is the following: What do you think about the direction of democracy in Romania? Does democracy conduct things in good or wrong direction in Romania? The answers of the both questions are: 1. wrong direction, 2. fairly wrong direction, 3. fairly good direction, 4. good direction

<sup>23</sup> In your opinion has the situation of the country in general gotten better or worse compared to the situation before 1989? 1. gotten worse, 2. gotten better

<sup>24</sup> How do you consider the politics of administrations to be since 1989? (1. very wrong, 2. fairly wrong, 3. satisfactory, 4. fairly good, 5. very good)

	1	2	3	4	5	I don't know
Iliescu 1990-1996						
Constantinescu 1996-2000						
Iliescu 2000-						

<sup>25</sup> The author measured the level of trust in twenty political and civic institutions, using a four grade scale (not at all, low level, high level, totally)

<sup>26</sup> The nine group-pairs: 1. poor and rich people, 2. Hungarians and Romanians, 3. young and old people, 4. rural and urban dwellers, 5. employers and employees, 6. people belonging to the political left and right side, 7. people who live in Transylvania and in the rest of Romania, 8. members of the Orthodox church and those of other religions, 9. the cadre and the opposition of the old political system. The measurement was done on a four step scale: 1. not important at all, 2. fairly un-important, 3. fairly important, 4. quite important.

<sup>27</sup> The question regarding the influence of friends was left below, because the answers were not strongly linked to political activities. The question formulated for the students was: There are people who are interested in politics and there are others who consider it boring. We enumerate some activities. Please mark how often you do the following:

	never	rarely	often	very often
1. How often do you read about politics in newspapers?				
2. How often do you talk about politics?				
3. How often do you try to convince your friends about your truth?				

approach; the ability of students to define and connect values were accumulated related to the concept of democracy and political left and right.

### **Results, Hypotheses and Answers**

This paper does not try to present all the connections, or to verify applicability of the references. Because of the length limitation, only selected results will be presented here. The author formulated four hypotheses about political opinions. By answering them, some similarities and differences between high school and university students are brought to light.

*H1. Political opinions differ according to ethnical affiliation, social starting position, and also of educational level – age – locality<sup>28</sup>.*

During an anterior study, ('Civic culture I.', carried out in 1999-2000) political and economic axes were used to measure political orientations. One of the most important results was that Romanian-speaking and Hungarian-speaking students are thinking in a different coordinate system. The former are close to the classical political science classification (liberal – socialist – conservative), while the latter are thinking in a communitarian and an individual value orientation system. Based on the mentioned results, it can be supposed that there are ethnic differences between the studied university students in their political value orientations. Western and Central European, as well as American studies from the sixties concluded that political value-orientations differ according to layers. Newer results show that the strata dependency of value-orientations disappears, and the trend is stronger in the East than in the West (Enyedi 2004). As a consequence of the elevator-effect, the entire social strata move into a better situation, and the differences among the social strata do not manifest systematically in political opinions, in party preferences or election behaviour. The author of the present study supposes that the stratifying particularities, which were refuted in international literature, could still affect Romanian youth.

Besides the mentioned factors, the author supposes that there are age particularities in relation to politics, for example high school students' relationship can differ from that of university students', because the formers' image about political institutions probably was formulated by local, indirect, less personal experiences, which they bring mainly from their family, and from peer group, school. According to the results, ethnicity, social background and age divide the studied populations on certain questions. In the following there are empirical examples of differences and similarities.

Judgment about the functioning of democracy is linked with the material capital of the family among university students. The students who come from an unfavourable material background are more dissatisfied with democracy. But even the students with good material situation are rather dissatisfied with democracy. High school students' opinion about Romanian democracy is independent from their social background.

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<sup>28</sup> Currently, there is not enough research to handle educational level, age and locality as separate criteria.

**Table 1. Satisfaction with Romanian democracy on the basis of material situation among university students, averages<sup>29</sup> (1. dissatisfied... 10. satisfied)**

	Hungarian university students, N=162			Romanian university students, N=596		
	material situation					
	weak	medium	good	weak	medium	good
averages	3,10	3,62	4,43	3,71	4,11	4,68
st. deviations	1,50	1,67	1,93	1,83	1,81	1,99

On some questions Romanian-speaking and Hungarian-speaking youth differ expressly. An example of this is the differing evaluation of gaps. One of the initial hypotheses of the author stated that for Hungarian-speaking students the conflict between the national majority and minority is the priority, while in the case of Romanian-speakers this gap is overwritten by social tensions. This hypothesis was partly justified. For Hungarian-speaking students the gap between majority and minority really seems to be in first place in terms of importance, and for Romanian-speakers the same gap appears in third place. While the conflict between poor and rich people is the second most important according to Hungarian-speakers, Romanian-speaker students don't consider it one of the important gaps (it appears in the fifth place). Romanian-speaking students think that the relation between employers and employees and between political left and right side form the two most important conflicts. The averages for conflicts the students judged to be the gravest are presented in bold in the table.

There are also some questions in which Romanian and Hungarian-speaking students don't differ considerably. Concerning this, an example can be brought from the field of trust in institutions. It was supposed that Hungarian-speaking students would have less trust in institutions compared to Romanian-speaking students. Although the ethnical differences are significant in the case of the following institutions: government, army, NATO, EU, King and local authorities, but in international institutions and the King Hungarian students trust more. Thus international institutions are more trusted by Hungarian students, national institutions more by Romanians. The background of these differences could be originated from attitudes shaped by the minority and majority existence. They have different reference groups, follow different media channels, they bring different information from their families about experiences with national authorities etc. According to several public opinion barometers about trust in institutions church and army are trusted by Romanians. The difference among national sample and students could indicate a start of change in the attitudes toward the traditional institutes but the level of difference is only informative.

<sup>29</sup> The significance of ANOVA in the group of Hungarian students is 0,020, in the case of Romanian students it is 0,002.

**Table 2. Judgment of the gravity of conflicts among high school and university students and also among Romanian adult inhabitants, averages<sup>30</sup> (1=not grave at all, 4=very grave)**

Conflicts between...		High school students N=371	University students N=793	Hungarian university students N=173	Romanian university students N=620	Romanian adult population	
						1998 N=1204	1990 N=1234
Hungarians and Romanians	average	<b>3,36</b>	2,80	<b>3,19</b>	2,70	<b>3,00</b>	1,62
	st. dev.	0,76	0,86	0,71	0,87	0,91	n.d.
Poor and rich	average	<b>2,93</b>	2,64	<b>2,88</b>	2,57	<b>2,85</b>	1,82
	st. dev.	0,80	0,79	0,76	0,79	0,95	n.d.
Employers and employees	average	<b>2,90</b>	<b>2,98</b>	<b>3,01</b>	<b>2,97</b>	n.d.	n.d.
	st. dev.	0,81	0,76	0,74	0,77		
Political left and right	average	2,63	2,74	2,77	2,73	2,73	1,98
	st. dev.	0,96	0,89	0,86	0,89	0,96	n.d.
The cadre and opposition of the old political system	average	2,36	2,61	2,65	2,60	n.d.	n.d.
	st. dev.	1,00	0,91	0,88	0,92		
Transylvania and the rest of Romania	average	2,53	2,32	2,52	2,26	n.d.	n.d.
	st. dev.	0,95	0,95	0,88	0,96		
Young and old	average	2,28	2,23	2,11	2,26	2,69	1,21
	st. dev.	0,83	0,84	0,73	0,87	0,99	n.d.
Rural and urban	average	2,23	1,93	1,99	1,91	n.d.	n.d.
	st. dev.	0,84	0,78	0,74	0,78		
Transylvania and the rest of Romania	average	1,95	2,35	2,26	2,38	n.d.	n.d.
	st. dev.	0,91	0,91	0,89	0,92		

The hypothesis, which supposed age-differences in trust related to political institutions, was not justified. Though age differences are significant in the majority of the institutions, the sizes of differences are only one or two decimal points, thus table no 3. does not show the averages for university students in total (the trust in institutions of Hungarian and Romanian students together). Standard deviations are similar in the studied populations: in the case of more trusted institutions the attitudes are more close to each other (deviation from the average is between 18 and 30%), than in the case of less trusted institutions (the coefficient is between 40 and 47%)

<sup>30</sup> The significance of ANOVA based on age in the case of the gap between young and old people is 0,064, in conflicts between employers and employees 0,119, in the gap between the political left and right 0,061, in other conflicts 0,000. Based on ethnicity, ANOVA is significant in the case of four conflicts: poor and rich, Hungarians and Romanians, young and old, Transylvania and the rest of Romania.

**Table 3. Trust related to institutions in comparison, averages<sup>31</sup> (1-not at all, 4-completely)**

	High school students 2004 N=367		University students 2002				Romanian adult population 1998 N=1204	
	average	st. dev.	Hungarians N=172		Romanians N=608		average	st. dev.
			average	st. dev.	average	st. dev.		
Family and relatives	3,59	0,66	3,59	0,58	3,59	0,63	3,37	0,77
European Union	2,97	0,84	3,09	0,71	2,76	0,78	n.d.	
Mass media	2,86	0,84	2,80	0,78	2,56	0,78	2,22	0,77
Classmates	2,82	0,73	2,82	0,69	2,19	0,66	-	
NATO	2,75	0,86	2,85	0,78	2,43	0,84	n.d.	
Student organizations	2,75	0,74	2,50	0,73	2,40	0,71	-	
Church	2,72	0,93	2,52	0,94	2,52	1,02	2,96	0,95
Neighbours	2,68	0,78	2,49	0,78	2,01	0,73	2,30	0,86
Teachers	2,63	0,73	n.d.					
Court	2,59	0,84	n.d.					
Police	2,27	0,84	1,94	0,75	2,19	0,79	2,13	0,86
Army	2,24	0,79	1,86	0,77	2,54	0,80	2,93	0,88
DAHR <sup>32</sup>	2,21	0,83	2,37	0,76	-	0,70	-	
Demonstration	2,20	0,83	2,10	0,78	2,10	0,85	n.d.	
Local government	2,19	0,76	2,20	0,77	2,21	0,73	n.d.	
Parliament	2,09	0,77	2,09	0,77	2,09	0,75	1,90	0,83
President	2,02	0,75	1,73	0,74	2,01	0,80	n.d.	
King <sup>33</sup>	1,91	0,90	1,86	0,86	1,63	0,84	n.d.	
Government	1,90	0,68	1,94	0,72	2,08	0,74	1,85	0,80
Politicians	1,63	0,72	1,63	0,70	1,63	0,65	n.d.	

Mărginean and co-authors conclude that mistrust in some state institutions and the critical attitude seen above comes from the high expectations for the functioning of the democratic system. According to a survey elaborated in 2000, half of Romanian adult inhabitants do not trust in political institutions at all, and another quarter have a low level of trust in those institutions (parties, politicians, parliament, government, prime-minister, and president). Mattei Dogan considers the general mistrust in institutions can be interpreted as collective aspiration to the stabilization of democracy (Dogan 2001). The citizens' critical attitude can be useful from the perspective of the functioning of democracy. Though the national studies show that support for the values of democracy have increased, on the level of institutions, trust in politicians, government institutions and democratic system has decreased (Mureanu 1999). Mistrust in political and market economy' institutions is not a Romanian particularity (Murányi 2006), western consolidated democracies are also characterized by this trend (Dogan 1997, 1998a, 1998b, Mărginean et al 2001).

In addition, the aforementioned phenomenon that value-mediation of parties is inconsequential, and that they try to create new gaps between certain social groups, introducing and expropriating certain fields and concepts contributes to mistrust related

<sup>31</sup> The ANOVA based on ethnicity is significant except in the case of the following institutions: politicians, parliament, demonstration, church, family and relatives.

<sup>32</sup> Democratic Alliance of Hungarians from Romania

<sup>33</sup> It refers to the institution, which was actual in the first period of the XX. century, and which is still respected by a group of inhabitants.

to politics. Among the tools used by parties in the competition for votes, rather than addressing questions related to policies, parties try to erode „the trustworthiness of their opponent”. (Hammer 2005, p. 26).

*H2. Acceptance of democracy as a system is combined with relatively high disappointment regarding Romanian democracy.*

Studies elaborated in the last one and a half decades have obtained a concordant result. Namely, while support for the democratic system is generally high, satisfaction with the functioning of Romanian democracy seems to be relatively low (Mărginean – Mureanu 1998, p. 91). The problematic functioning of state institutions may be the missing link here. According to the answers given in the study exaggerated bureaucratization, abuse of authority, and corruption leave much to be desired. These could be the reason for dissatisfaction and worry (Mărginean 1999, Mărginean et al 2001). Difficulties in the functioning of democracy are a source of dissatisfaction.

Opinion-questions tried to discover the image of the Romanian „version” of democracy. Three types of questions were used: evaluation of the functioning of democracy on a scale from 1-10 (1), qualifying the direction of the advancement of democracy (2), and judging the country’s situation since 1989 (3).

### ***Satisfaction with the Functioning of Democracy***

It can be concluded that both students and the Romanian adult population qualify the functioning of democracy as medium or weaker than medium. This is not a Romanian particularity. In 2000 according to the results of a study realized in Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, Slovakia, the former East-Germany, Czech Republic and Estonia, the majority of the population is characterized by acceptance of democracy and dissatisfaction related to the functioning of democracy. Bulgaria and Russia are exceptions, where half and 40% of the population support democracy as a system, thus these societies cannot be regarded as consolidated. The congruency of the structure and culture, namely of the values, is needed for the legitimacy of the system to remain efficient against external and internal risks (Pollack et al 2003). Dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy is not a post socialist particularity since the regime change. In Western European societies between the seventies and the nineties almost half of the population is dissatisfied with democracy. The most extreme case is Italy, where, according to data from 1987 and 1995, three quarters of the population was dissatisfied with functioning of democracy (Dogan 1998a, Dogan 1997, Dogan 1998b). These data also confirm that legitimacy of the system should be separated from judgment of its performance.

**Table 4. Satisfaction with Romanian democracy in comparison, averages<sup>34</sup> (1. dissatisfied... 10. satisfied)**

	High school students 2004 N=367	University students 2002 N=792	Hungarian university students N=173	Romanian university students N=619	Romanian adult population 1998 N=1204
averages	4,26	4,02	3,66	4,12	3,57
st. dev.	1,91	1,83	1,71	1,85	2,17

### **Judgment of Democracy's Advancement Direction**

The majority of Hungarian students consider that democracy has advanced in a wrong or rather wrong direction in Romania while majority of Romanian students seem to think that democracy advances in a good direction. On the other hand there are less people who have objection to democracy as system, namely, more than a half of students guess that democracy turns things in good direction in Romania. It was supposed that students understood the same way the questions as the researcher.

**Table 5. Judgment of the direction of advancement of democracy, and of the country's future in comparison (%)**

	High school students N=365		Hungarian university students N=169		Romanian university students N=612		University students N=781	
	In Romania, what direction has democracy turned things?							
	wrong	good	wrong	good	wrong	good	wrong	good
Democracy advances in the wrong direction	<b>43</b>	6	<b>39</b>	20	<b>26</b>	15	<b>29</b>	16
Democracy advances in the good direction	18	<b>33</b>	3	<b>38</b>	3	<b>56</b>	3	<b>52</b>
Chi-square	<b>105,581***</b>		<b>54,851**</b>		<b>245,305***</b>		<b>304,456***</b>	

Level of significance: \*\*\* < 0.01, \*\* < 0.05

Table 5 illustrates both examples of age and ethnic difference. On the one hand more high school students (18%) believe that, while democracy turned things for the worse, it is gradually getting better, while more university students (15-20%) believe the reverse statement: that democracy was an improvement but it is gradually degrading. On the other hand while one third of Hungarian students consider the direction and advances of democracy being positive, half of Romanian students seem to evaluate "optimistic" the present situation at the time of the field research.

The two questions regarded to Romanian democracy seems to be linked to each other, namely the young according whom democracy advances in a good direction also think that democracy turns things in good direction in Romania and inversely: those who are more satisfied with the functioning of democracy also see its future more positively. The proportions in bold show these mentioned connections. High school students' opinions about Romanian democracy are independent from their social background.

<sup>34</sup> The significance of ANOVA based on age is 0, 042, based on ethnicity is 0, 004.

### **Judgment of the Country's Situation**

According to three-quarters of the interviewed population, the country's situation has gotten better since 1989<sup>35</sup>. Judgment of situation since 1989 has a bearing on the evaluation of the functioning of democracy. People who think the country's situation is improving are more satisfied. Another group, who believe country's situation is getting worse, are less satisfied. It can be concluded that satisfaction with the functioning of democracy depends on one's perception of country's situation. This tendency generally characterizes the majority of Eastern-European countries one decade after their regime change (Pollack et al 2003).

**Table 6. A comparison of people's satisfaction with democracy depending on the country's situation since the regime change, averages<sup>36</sup> (1. dissatisfied... 10. satisfied)**

The country's situation	University students N=776		Hungarian university students N=169		Romanian university students N=606	
	average	st. dev.	average	st. dev.	average	st. dev.
got worse since 1989	3,39	1,93	3,20	1,77	3,44	1,98
got better since 1989	4,25	1,76	3,83	1,67	4,36	1,77

Regarding system culture, it can be affirmed that the studied population is characterized by a preference of democracy as a system in general. But the way it is functioning in Romania produces dissatisfaction among young people. Though the empirical part of the study can't identify the background of dissatisfaction, it is possible that negative opinions have their root in the expectations behind the experiences, because what democracy is cannot be separated from what democracy should be. (Sartori 1987, cited by Simon 2005). Pollack and co-authors offer three reasons for the low level of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Eastern and Central European countries. Firstly, political institutions cannot satisfy the high expectations of the population. Secondly, institutions and elites should define their own roles in a democratic system. Thirdly, one decade after the regime change Eastern and Central European societies have just recovered from the economic crisis that occurred with the failure of communism (Pollack et al 2003). In addition to the three mentioned reasons a few more particularities can be enumerated, i.e. perception of high rate of corruption. From their judgment of the country's situation, it can be seen that though the generation in question only possesses experience with the economic situation before 1989 from the perspective of a young child, this does not prevent them from answering, or forming an

<sup>35</sup> There are no considerable differences between students' opinions on the grounds of gender, public religiosity, material and cultural capital, or type of instruction (the majority of them have a positive opinion about the country's changing situation over time).

<sup>36</sup> The significance of ANOVA among high school students is 0, 086, (this is the reason why table no 6 does not present their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy based on their judgment of the country's situation) among university students 0, 000, among Hungarian university students 0, 035, and among Romanian university students 0, 000.

opinion. An opinion shaped, perhaps, through socialization, thus they have some information to form their own ideas.

Acceptance of democracy as a system is generalized, and according to a majority of students, the economic situation has improved compared to 1989, and difficulties in the functioning of democracy are a source of dissatisfaction. By analyzing trust in institutions and perception of gaps, we can find ourselves closer to the Romanian particularities that the studied populations have objections about.

*H3, Trust related to institutions and opinions about administrations are bound up together.*

Oskar W. Gabriel, (based on comparative empirical studies among states within the European Community) concluded that satisfaction with democracy and the evaluation of administrations' performance are connected to each other. The same hypothesis among the target group says that the more positively they judge the current administration's efficiency, the higher their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Similarly the legitimacy of the system has a bearing on trust in institutions. For example, in Hungary, the more an institution has a political character, the less people trust in it (Körösényi 1997, p. 92). The author supposes a similar trend regarding trust in institutions among the studied population, with the remark that here ethnic differences could be coming into play, i.e. Hungarian-speaking students have lower trust in state institutions than Romanian-speakers. Relation to institutions also has a bearing on the political traditions of the society.

Usually, trust in institutions and opinions about administrations' performance bear upon each other. It was supposed that satisfaction with the functioning of democracy has a bearing on trust in institutions, namely those who have more trust in state-, government-, political institutions are more satisfied with democracy and the inverse.

Results justify an association between the two variables in every population and institution. The students who are more satisfied with the functioning of democracy have more trust in system-independent institutions also, compared to less satisfied students. The same tendency can be observed in both of high school and university students groups, the age and ethnic differences are not stressed.

Evaluations of the actual administration and trust in institutions have positive links to each other. The group that perceives the administration's performance to be acceptable generally has greater trust in institutions.

**Table 7.a. Connections between the functioning of democracy and trust in institutions (correlation coefficients)**

	High school students N=351	University students N=642	Hungarian university students N=134	Romanian university students N=508
<b>Political institutions</b>				
Government	,218**	,311**	,213**	,329**
Army	,179 <sup>v</sup>	,254**	,179*	,248**
Court <sup>37</sup>	,070*	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Local administration	n.s.	,171*	,202**	,152*
Parliament	,170*	,254**	n.s.	n.s.
President	,214**	,348**	,240**	,181*
King	,224**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Police	,191*	,287**	,221**	,292**
Politicians	,254**	,189*	,188*	,267**
DAHR	,237**	,238**	,218**	,259**
EU	n.s.	,093*	n.s.	,130*
NATO	,111*	,082*	,112*	n.s.
<b>Civil institutions</b>				
Church	,152*	,136*	n.s.	,165*
Neighbours	,180*	,109*	,095*	,123*
Classmates	,173*	,090*	,138*	n.s.
Media	n.s.	,135*	n.s.	,172*
Teachers	,137*	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Student organizations	n.s.	,129*	n.s.	,228**

Level of significance: \*\* < 0.01, \* < 0.05

Opinions of the actual administration and opinions about the functioning of Romanian democracy are also related to each other. Based on results, it can be concluded that those who feel positively about the actual administration's performance, are also satisfied with the functioning of democracy, and consider the direction of its advance a good one. Another group who qualifies actual governance as less good is also dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and considers its advance to be the wrong direction. The strongest connection between the evaluation of democracy and administrations can be found in the opinion of university students. Thus, the young people studied „behave” in these questions as Gabriel described European Community inhabitants in the period between the nineteen seventies and the nineteen nineties. A recent study proved based on data from EVS and WVS between 1990 and 2007 that government effectiveness, control of corruption, rule of law influence support of free market model (Tufiş 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Though the court is independent from politics it was classified among political institutions just to make a difference between closer civil and more distant political ones.

**Table 7b. Connections between the evaluation of the actual administration and trust in institutions (correlation coefficients)**

	High school students N=351	University students N=642	Hungarian university students N=134	Romanian university students N=508
<b>Political institutions</b>				
Government	,304**	,304**	,332**	,293**
Army	n.s.	,200**	n.s.	,202**
NATO	n.s.	,163*	,178**	,188*
President	,260**	,401**	,227**	,429**
Police	n.s.	,163*	n.s.	,172*
Politicians	,145*	,235**	,178*	,256**
King	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parliament	,209**	,261**	,177*	,284**
Demonstration	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
European Union	n.s.	,135*	,112*	,163*
DAHR	,116*	,235**	,206**	,258**
Local administration	n.s.	,148*	,229**	,119*
Court	,143*	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Civil institutions</b>				
Media	n.s.	,087*	,145*	n.s.
Family and relatives	,116*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Neighbours	,116*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Classmates	,136*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Student organizations	n.s.	,193*	,130*	,270**
Teachers	,126*	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Church	n.s.	,129*	n.s.	,166*

Level of significance: \*\* < 0.01, \* < 0.05

*H4. Political opinions and other elements of political culture do not necessarily bear relation to each other.*

The last question of this analysis is if the students' opinions differ depending on interest in politics, orientation and awareness. The elements of political culture can be unrelated to each other. Anterior experiences show a simple example of the independence, namely the opinions and actions without any information about politics (election participation).

Satisfaction with institutions and other dimensions of political culture (interest, media consumption, and awareness) are connected to each other. But the positive or negative linking depends on the population studied and on dimension of political culture. An example is that judgment of some gaps is dependent on the level of political awareness, for both high school and university students. Another example for connections among the dimensions of political culture is the link between trust in institutions, interest in politics and media consumption.

Groups of high school students based on their interest in politics behave differently in relation to some political institutions. The groups that are less interested in politics usually have less trust in the institutions of democracy, in government and in politicians, while those who are moderate or very interested in politics behave similarly to each other and trust relatively more in those same institutions.

More politically informed high school students have greater trust in mass media, and less in other institutions, when compared to less informed high school students. Those who have less political information have more trust in their direct surroundings, like neighbours, classmates and church. Regarding political institutions, they trust the president more than high school students who have more information about democracy and the political left and right. Probably in the cases of political institutions students decide to trust in an institution based more on their stereotypes brought from their family, peer group, school than their own experience or information collected from mass media.

**Table 8. Trust in institutions according to interest in politics and knowledge among high school students, averages<sup>38</sup> (1 - not at all, 4 - completely)**

	Interest in politics			Political awareness		
	not interested	moderately interested	very interested	less informed	moderately informed	well informed
Mass media	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,74	2,96	3,05
Classmates	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,92	2,82	2,60
Church	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,75	2,70	2,35
Neighbours	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,82	2,66	2,33
Parliament	1,96	2,09	2,25	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
President	1,89	2,10	2,11	2,09	2,02	1,77
Government	1,77	1,96	1,98	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Politicians	1,53	1,71	1,76	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

Regularity of media consumption makes a difference among high school students' relationship to institutions in one single question: trust related to politicians. Students who regularly consume news show greater trust in politicians than those who are not interested in public events and media. Trust in politicians means a rather diffuse trust, because it's not related necessarily to those in power, but to politics in general. Interest in media seems to boost diffuse trust, rather than specific.

Romanian university students have different attitudes towards institutions depending on their level of interest in politics, media consumption and awareness (about democracy and the political left-right). Two observations can be underlined related to this. Students who have greater trust in state institutions (army, police, and government) are moderately interested and fairly informed about politics compared to others. Students who are very interested in politics, well informed and who consume news frequently have more trust in both international and community institutions.

<sup>38</sup> N=356 in the case of interest in politics and N=301 in the case of political knowledge, the ANOVA is significant except in the cells marked with n.s. (under 0, 050)

The frequency of media consumption does not affect Hungarian-speaking university students' relation to institutions. Their interest in politics plays a role in the judgment of some political institutions: the less interested students have less trust in politicians, local public administration and the king. A similar directional connection between political awareness and trust in some institutions can be observed. The less information a respondent has about democracy and the political left and right side, the less trust there is in the local public administration, mass media. The same tendency prevails related to classmates as well.

**Table 9. Trust in institutions according to interest in politics, media consumption and knowledge among Romanian university students, averages<sup>39</sup> (1 - not at all, 4 - completely)**

	Interest in politics			Political awareness			Media consumption		
	not interested	moderately interested	very interested	less informed	moderately informed	well informed	low	medium	high
EU	2,79	2,62	2,96	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mass media	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,35	2,60	2,68	2,20	2,59	2,63
Classmates	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	2,34	2,66	2,62
NATO	2,25	2,37	2,62	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Army	2,06	2,62	2,53	2,42	2,64	2,42	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Police	1,88	2,30	2,11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
King	1,66	1,53	1,78	1,47	1,62	1,89	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Student organizations	1,46	1,59	1,90	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	1,32	1,67	1,81
Government	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	1,87	2,19	2,11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

In the following section, the reader will observe that judgment of country's situation after 1989 is independent from interest in politics and media consumption, but awareness has a significant relationship to opinions in this question also.

It can be supposed that the studied population, as a consequence of their youth, the further the administration is in the past, the fewer answers they give judging the administration's performance. If the target group does answer, they author believes they can be put into one of two extreme cases. The first is that through socialization agents, students who come from family, school, or peer group backgrounds where politics are discussed, who are interested in politics, and consume news, can gain the information necessary for forming their opinions. The second are those who cannot be characterized by any of the aforementioned conditions, who are probably forming opinions without information. Thus these suppositions may not be justified based on empirical results, but they belong to the methodological principle, according to which, the dimensions of political culture can function independent from each other.

When asked to evaluate the performance of the administrations after 1989, the farther back in history the teenagers were asked to judge, the less well they were able to

<sup>39</sup> N=504 in the case of interest in politics, N=576 in the case of political knowledge, N= 434 in the case of media consumption, the ANOVA is significant except in the cells marked with n.s. (under 0, 050). Only those institutions are included in the table which trust differ significantly in at least one element from interest in politics, awareness and media consumption.

form their opinions. Three quarters of the students evaluated the first period after 1989, 80% of them could evaluate the periods after that. Every third student judged all the administrations to be performing at a medium level. The students had the most positive image of Constantinescu's administration between 1996 and 2000. This was true for both the high school students<sup>40</sup>, and the Hungarian-speaking university students. They formed similar opinions about the two periods of Iliescu's presidency the evaluation of the administration's politics from Iliescu's second period seems to be rather positive. Students' interest in politics and media consumption does not lead to a difference in their judgment of administration's performance, or their ability to answer. So interest in politics and media consumption has no bearing on forming opinions, but trust in institutions is not independent from the mentioned dimensions of political culture.

According to Romanian-speaking university students, each new administration is an improvement over the last. Political knowledge plays a role in the evaluation of the Iliescu-administration's performance following immediately after 1989. The politically well-informed judge the first Iliescu-administration's performance to be worse and those who are less-informed judge it to be relatively positive.

### **Cluster Groups Created from Political Opinions**

Political opinions and values, as element of political culture can be compared with interest in politics, media consumption and action. The presented issues must be considered, to determine how they could help in creating an aggregate indicator.

Though the students' perception of gaps and relationship to institutions are connected to each other only in some questions, this study attempts to create types from three elements: relationship to institutions (which includes the evaluation of the Iliescu's administrations), perception of gaps, and opinion about the functioning of democracy. At the same time this study attempts to take these three elements and build a model from them. It was found that there are three groups in every population.

**Table 10. Cluster groups based on political opinions<sup>41</sup> (column %)**

	High school students	University students	Hungarian university students	Romanian university students
Dissatisfied both with political and social life, do not trust	38	42	47	40
Satisfied with politics, dissatisfied with social relations	40	29	30	29,5
Moderately satisfied with politics, satisfied with social relations	22	28	23	29,5
Cramer V and case number	,104** (N=777)		ns. (N=545)	

<sup>40</sup> Among high school and university students there are not significant differences based on gender, religion, material and human capital, or type of instruction.

<sup>41</sup> K-Means cluster analysis was realized in the three groups before weighting.

Generally, the majority is not satisfied with the functioning of democracy, and the performance of administrations. The groups differ mainly in relation to their perception of institutions and gaps. The proportion of the satisfied group (the third cluster group) is the largest among Romanian-speaking students, but there are not very huge differences. The second cluster group, represented in every sample, can be characterized as having general satisfaction with democracy and political institutions, but perceiving the social gaps as important. One of the considerable differences among the populations is the proportion of students belonging to this cluster group. While 40% of high school student can be ranked in this group, among the university students only slightly less than every third person appears here. Beside the aforementioned satisfied and partly dissatisfied cluster groups, there is a third, which includes the most dissatisfied students.

Age – educational level – locality differences proved to be significant. High school students perceive social relations among groups as graver than university students. Among high school students, those who live in rural settlements seem to perceive social gaps as graver, than those who live in town. Political awareness is associated with dissatisfaction. The groups created by political opinion among Hungarian-speaking university students do not differ in social background, political interest, media consumption or awareness. It must be noted though, that the small number of cases hinders the statistical relevancy of the results. Among Romanian-speaking university students the group that is well informed about the political left-right and democracy and interested in politics seems to be more optimistic than the less informed and less interested groups.

### **Next Steps**

Based on results, it can be concluded that there are differences in political culture (interest in politics, media consumption, political awareness and opinions) between the studied populations. These differences are based on ethnicity, age – educational level – locality. Social background has less of an effect on young people's relation to politics. One of the most notable results is that the dimensions of political culture are weakly linked to each other<sup>42</sup>; this plays a role especially in creating political culture types.

The next step in this work is to create a picture of the dimensions of political action, starting from the results of references and research antecedents.

Following that, it is necessary to compare the elements and relationships between interest in politics, media consumption, awareness and actions; finally, to answer the main questions of the research and analysis. These questions are:

- (1) What are the similarities and differences between the political culture of high school and university students?
- (2) Which factors play a role in forming the political culture patterns of social groups?
- (3) What is the relation between theoretical typologies from international literature and empirical types, created in this study?

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<sup>42</sup> It should be considered that the small cases numbers affect the analysis of relationships.

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