

The Effects of the Romanian Citizens' Perception of Democratic Deficiency on Their Turnout at the European Parliamentary Elections

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to link voter perception with election turnout, to determine whether it is possible for the former to influence the latter. More specifically, its aim is to answer the following question: *What Are the Effects of the Romanian Citizens' Perception of Democratic Deficiency in the European Parliament on Their Turnout at the Parliamentary Elections between 2007 and 2019?* Democratic deficiency will be understood as the absence of three important democratic factors: legitimacy, accountability and representation. To determine whether Romanians perceive the European Parliament as democratically deficient, the analysis employs Eurobarometer survey data, as well as European Election Study figures, focusing on the questions which relate to the aforementioned factors. The following analysis finds that, while citizens have held a generally positive image of the European Parliament in regard to its democratic credentials, the number of people holding this perception has slowly been going down over the years. Afterwards, the study introduces the Romanian case, going over the citizens' turnout at the European Parliamentary elections between 2007 and 2019. The turnout pattern found is then linked to the Romanian citizens' answers to the surveys, which constituted their perceptions of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament. This link shows that those who hold a more positive perception toward the European Parliament are more likely to vote than those who do not. In addition, the thesis finds that certain factors have played a more important role in shaping the perception of the citizens, motivating their choice to vote differently, depending on the year. Finally, the study discusses the Romanian's fight against democratic deficiency in their own country. It argues that this conflict was the main reason for shaping the Romanians' perception of the European Parliament throughout the years, influencing their choice to vote in the elections.

1. Introduction

The European Union is governed by the principle of representative democracy, having its citizens directly represented at Union level by the European Parliament. However, it can also be argued that the Parliament is not truly democratic, as it lacks several significant qualities needed to be as such, making it democratically deficient. Depending on the number of individuals sharing this belief, the damage done to the reputation and influence of the European Union institution could be immense. Therefore, it would be important to analyze what the exact effects of the voters' perception of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament are on their turnout at the European parliamentary elections.

While it would be useful to gauge the general European perception of the European Parliament's democratic deficiency, narrowing it down to one nation will provide for a more thorough analysis. Having experienced one of the sharpest increases in the European Union in terms of election turnout, rising by roughly 20% between the 2014 and 2019 elections (European Parliament, 2021), Romania is a perfect case study for the aforementioned analysis. In other words, it would be of use to see why the increase has happened in the Romanian case and try to relate it to the perception of the Romanian citizens on the democratic qualities of the European Parliament. Depending on whether those democratic qualities are perceived as unfulfilled by the Romanian citizens, democratic deficiency may or may not be present in the European Parliament according to the Romanian citizens' perception. As such, a question can be formulated as follows: *What are the effects of the Romanian citizens' perception of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament on their turnout at the parliamentary elections?* Because it is a rather complex question, several potential sub-questions can be derived from it. They will provide the necessary details which will make it easier to answer this main research question. These sub-questions are as follows:

1. What characteristics can be attributed to democracy? Does their absence imply democratic deficiency?
2. What is the perception of the Romanian citizens regarding the European Parliament's democratic deficiency?
3. What is the relation between the Romanian turnout figures between the 2007 and 2019 European Parliamentary elections and the Romanians' perception of the European Parliament's democratic deficiency?

This analysis is especially important, since it attempts to add to the discussion of the relation between election turnout and voter perception, which has already been extensively assessed in previous literature. Firstly, this thesis challenges the arguments brought forward by Reif and Schmitt (1980), and later Marsh and Mikhaylov (2010), which label the European Parliamentary elections to be second-order national ones. The paper argues that these European elections are not only important, but that they are also related to the citizens' support for the European Union. Thus, it builds upon Stockemer's (2011) findings that turnout in elections is driven by the citizens' satisfaction with the European Union, using Eurobarometer data to do this as well. Even though earlier analyses have used survey data to gauge the perceptions of the people towards the Union and its institutions, and relate them to turnout, they have done so by using surveys carried after the elections have happened (Schäfer, 2021). This study uses surveys carried before the elections as well, in order to establish what the perception of the people was going into the elections, in addition to their perceptions after them. While previous studies have tackled the relation between voters' democratic perception and turnout, it was largely done on specific democratic elements, and not democratic deficiency specifically. For example, previous analyses have looked into how perceptions of electoral fairness influenced vote attendance (Birch, 2010), or how representation of voter interest affected turnout (Zipp, 1985). Other studies which have indeed touched upon the relation between democratic perception and voter intention have reversed the causal chain, looking into how the former affected the latter (Kostelka & Blais, 2018). These studies have also kept the analysis largely constrained to the national level. The interest of this thesis is to move the analysis outside of national borders, and focus on how perception regarding democratic deficiency in a European institution can impact the voter's turnout at elections.

In addition, prior literature put a focus on the European Union as a whole, analyzing whether it suffers from democratic deficiency. For example, Moravcsik (2002) focused on whether the European Union was democratically legitimate, proposing a list of aspects that are required for democracy to exist within it. He established that the European Union does not suffer from democratic deficiency, and that it is democratically legitimate when compared to prevailing standards in existing democracies. Features such a system of constitutional checks and balances, through the separation of powers, fiscal limits, voting requirements and narrow mandates that tie the European institutions together, make the European Union a legitimate democratic institution. Others, such as Mair and Thomassen (2010), disagree with statements like Moravcsik's, believing that it would be unwise for the institution to try and replicate the

process of government representation at the European level. That is because the conditions facilitating the effective fusion of the functions of representation and government control no longer pertain. As a result, institutions such as the European Parliament do not effectively represent the will of the European citizens.

The aim of the research questions outlined above is to delve away from more general analyses of the European Union and focus on the European Parliament. Interest will be given to this institution because it is the only one out of the three major actors in the Union's legislative process that Europeans can directly influence, through the act of voting. It would be relevant to look into a Union institution that already has a clear democratic framework in place and analyze whether it is actually perceived as being democratic by Europeans. It must be noted that other factors, such as domestic politics, also play a role in the way the European Parliament is perceived by the peoples of Europe. As such, depending on the form of government and other social factors present in the Member State, the perception may differ from one population to another. In addition, the following analysis will also showcase how views on certain institutions can affect their success in terms of citizen participation. In this case, it is the perception towards an international institution as suffering from democratic deficiency. Therefore, it would be relevant to look into this institution which has a clear democratic framework in place and analyze whether it is actually perceived as being democratic by European citizens.

The Romanian case was chosen as its citizens' turnout has experienced one of the sharpest increases in the European Union. While it was not a particularly impressive turnout at roughly 52%, it is notable as it has risen by 20% when compared to the prior 2014 election's turnout (European Parliament, 2021). This rise is important when considering the overall turnout at the European Parliamentary elections, which has been dropping and stagnating. This shows that there is a lack of interest from the European voters towards the European Parliament. One of the reasons for the stagnation in turnout could arguably be the citizens' perception of the European Union institution. The citizens' perception may be that democratic deficiency is present within the institution. Therefore, it would be of use to see why the increase has happened in the Romanian case and try to relate it to the perception of the Romanian citizens on the democratic qualities of the European Parliament. Depending on whether those democratic qualities are perceived as unfulfilled by the Romanian citizens, democratic deficiency may or may not be present in the European Parliament according to their perception.

In order to answer the three questions posed above, theoretical background on what it means to have democratic deficiency will be given. By using the relevant literature, the main characteristics of democracy will be determined. As a result, it will be argued that those organizations which do not meet all of these characteristics do suffer from democratic deficiency. The case of the European Union will be brought up, providing an explanation for why the European Parliament has been chosen specifically, out of all the other European Union institutions. By going through the previously found characteristics, it will be determined whether the European Parliament suffers from democratic deficiency or not. After the theory has been explained, the general design of the research and the methods used for data collection will be explained in detail. It will be argued that the perception of the Romanian citizens regarding the Parliament's democratic deficiency will be determined through the usage of public surveys. Those surveys will be introduced, as well as the criteria for choosing the questions.

Having set up the framework of the thesis through the Theory and Research Design sections, the following chapter will be focused on the answers given to the relevant survey questions, which will be compiled. Based on these answers, and the individuals who have given them, a complete image can be formed in regard to democratic deficiency perception in Romania. The findings of this chapter will then be put in relation to the turnout figures between the 2007 and 2019 European parliamentary elections. As such, this second analysis chapter will be concerned with the relation between the two variables. A pattern will be found between the European Parliamentary election years and the responses of Romanian citizens in the surveys. The chapter will try to prove that the Romanian population's answers to those surveys, which constituted their perception of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament, contributed to a change in turnout numbers at the elections. A particular interest will be given to the turnout numbers between the 2014 and 2019 elections, as a sharp rise in voter numbers occurred. The third analysis chapter will be tackling this issue, determining what factors contributed to the rise in number of people whose perception of the European Parliament has improved, which in turn contributed to the rise in numbers at the elections. It will be argued that a major catalyst which has led Romanian citizens to concentrate on the Parliament were the 2017 and 2018 protests against the government. Being that this distrust in the national government has had a major impact on the people's support of the Union, these findings will confirm elements from prior analyses conducted by Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) and Rohrschneider (2002). Finally, the findings of these chapters will be summarized in the Conclusion.

In the chapters that follow, an attempt will be made to not only link voter perception to election turnout, but also determine a causal relation between the former and the latter. However, before delving into that topic, theoretical background will be necessary in order to properly understand the important concepts tackled by the thesis. The forthcoming chapter will be going over these concepts, reviewing what the existing body of literature has already found in their regard.

2. Theory

The European Union is an avid promoter of peace and democracy in the continent, comprising twenty-seven countries and governing common economic, social and security policies. Despite these efforts, it can also be argued that the Union still lacks many essential characteristics that would make it democratic. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects which should be present when assessing whether the Union, as well as any other institution, can be considered as democratic. This chapter aims to explain these aspects extensively, focusing on whether they are present when it comes to the European Parliament. Afterwards, the interest will shift toward electoral turnout, and the factors which influence it, establishing the theoretical framework within which the analysis of the thesis will be conducted.

Democratic Factors

Moravcsik (2002) believes that arguments against the European Union being democratic are misplaced. He argues that the European Union is democratically legitimate, and to prove this, he proposes a list of aspects that are required for democracy to exist in it. There are three main characteristics which would determine what makes something democratic: legitimacy, accountability, and representation. The first characteristic, legitimacy, is probably both the most important, and hardest to achieve factor out of the three. Legitimacy concerns the popular acceptance and recognition by the public of an authority or governing regime. Through this recognition, represented by consent and mutual understandings, the authority gains political power (Ashcraft, 1991). Typically, political legitimacy can be broken into three types, namely traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal (Weber, 1964). Traditional legitimacy derives from societal customs and habits which emphasize the history of that certain authority. When it comes to the European Union, its traditional legitimacy is questionable. For example, the European Union lacks the grounding in a common history, culture, discourse and symbolism on which individual polities can draw, being the multinational body that it is (Moravcsik, 2002). However, Moravcsik argues that these factors are not enough to disqualify the European Union from being treated as a democratically legitimate body (Ibid.).

Charismatic legitimacy is derived from the ideas and personal charisma of a leader, whose persona charms the people of the society, who are driven to agree with the authority's regime (Weber, 1964). The European Union does not have many such personalities who would charm the European people. Perhaps the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, would come close to the profile of charismatic leader. Merkel has gained the confidence of residents of several

important European Union Members, such as France, Italy, or Belgium, in the past years (Schumacher & Fagan, 2020), and has even been described as the de facto leader of the Union (Vick, 2015). However, despite being the longest-serving incumbent head of government in the European Union, Merkel is nothing more than an ambassador to the organization. Ultimately, she is a German leader, not holding any official position in the European Union aside from the one conferred by her national position. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is a charismatic leader for people to look up to in the European Union.

Rational-legal legitimacy stems from a system of institutional procedures. Within this system, authorities establish and enforce the rule of law in the name of public interest. In the European Union case, this is represented by the constraints imposed on European Union policy by the European Constitutional Settlement. The treaty and legislative provisions have the force of constitutional law, embedding a set of substantive, fiscal, administrative, legal, and procedural constraints on European Union policy-making (Moravcsik, 2002). Not only do these constraints ensure the legitimacy of the Union, but they also offer a system of constitutional checks and balances, ensuring that the organization remains accountable. This brings forth the second characteristic of democracy.

Accountability represents the responsibility of elected officials to represent and act in the interests of the citizens who have delegated power to them (Fearon, 1999). In terms of the European Union, Moravcsik distinguishes between two mechanisms of accountability. Firstly, direct accountability is established through the European Parliament. It is directly elected through proportional representation within Member States, and has the power to make decisions late into the legislative process, limiting the Commission's power as primary agenda-setter (Moravcsik, 2002). Through Parliamentary elections, the citizens can hold the Commission accountable as well, due to the Spitzenkandidat system, which sees the lead candidate of the majority governing coalition following the elections become the Commission's President. Secondly, indirect accountability is ensured through elected national officials, who are present and influential throughout the European Union. Whether it is the elected heads of state in the European Council, or the officials in the Council of Ministers, they all have the ability to influence European policy in some way. Furthermore, these representatives can be recalled or re-instructed with ease, should the need arise (Moravcsik, 2002), making them accountable to European citizens.

From the above explanations, it can be seen that representation is also an important democratic characteristic. It includes citizens in the public policy-making process through the political actors who act in their best interest. Mair and Thomassen (2010) even argued that European elections and parties are effective as instruments of political representation, as there is no competition between political parties on European issues. Furthermore, the European Union's political and regulatory process is overall transparent, gathering enough information and having enough individuals in order to ensure that scrutiny will be given where necessary (Moravcsik, 2002). The regulatory process is also open to input from important areas of the public, such as civil society, making sure that the European Union is constrained in terms of the power and influence it can gain, needing to constantly give reasons to the Europeans it represents.

Of course, these factors do not necessarily appear separately. In fact, it could be argued that they influence one another in an upwards fashion. Because they represent the people, authorities such as the European Union would then be accountable to the Member States and their peoples, which would also make them legitimate, as the people have recognized and accepted their rule.

Democratic Deficiency in the European Parliament

The aforementioned characteristics can also be applied to European Union institutions, not just the European Union itself. This is especially the case when looking at the European Parliament. The European Commission is the bureaucratic-executive branch, responsible for proposing and overseeing the implementation of laws and policies, as well as managing the European Union budget and processing Union membership applications (McCormick, 2015). This means that it lacks representation for the population of Europe. The Councils are institutions where discussions are carried behind closed doors, by national representatives of Member States. While the Council has representation, what it lacks in is accountability due to the secretive nature of its discussions. The European Parliament is the only branch that is directly elected, being representative, and where Europeans can have a say, holding those representatives accountable through the act of voting itself (Karlsson, Gustavsson & Persson, 2009).

Even so, voters seem to have taken little interest in the European Parliament, as election turnout has fallen from 63% in 1979 to around 43% in 2014 (McCormick, 2015), only rising slightly in 2019, to around 50% (European Parliament, 2021). In other words, there seems to be a low motivation to vote from the European electorate. There could be several explanations for this.

Firstly, it could be that voters deem the European elections to be additional, second-order elections, which do not matter ultimately, as it is the national political systems which take most of the important decisions (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). While this does not mean that there is a democratic deficit within the European Union, changes need to be made in order to legitimize the elections, and encourage a more effective electoral process (Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2010). Secondly, European elections happen every five years, a period too long for MEPs to be left unaccountable for, and potentially leaving negative impacts on Europeans' lives. Moreover, it can be argued that European Parliament candidates do not need to cater to their respective constituencies, since they are unlikely to be punished or rewarded for their actions inside the institution. Because candidates are proposed by their parties, it can be said that their goal is to ultimately remain on good terms with the party, so they will get put on the list. As such, it would seem that the Parliament lacks some democratic qualities, just like the other European Union institutions, not being properly accountable.

Although there is a lack of genuine accountability of the Parliament to the European electorate, that does not necessarily mean that the institution is democratically deficient. An argument can be made about how European elections are fought by national parties on national issues, and that people vote based on them. However, European issues are polity issues that require the consent of national governments (Mair & Thomassen, 2010). As such, if European issues are reflected by the national issues promoted by those parties, the voters will be represented through their vote. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that citizens have a say in a European Union branch that is no longer a mere consultative assembly, but a co-legislator. The Parliament has grown to have joint decision-making powers with the Council of Ministers, and through the Lisbon Treaty, the Parliament's financial, legislative and supervisory powers have been strengthened (McCormick, 2015). Furthermore, the reach of the institution includes the other important Union bodies, as it is influential in the appointment of the Commission and its President. It can therefore be said that through their vote, the electorate shapes not only the European Parliament, but also the dealings of the other European Union institutions, as a result.

Turnout Factors

An issue with the European Parliament elections is that turnout has stagnated, receiving low interest from the citizens. While this low turnout can be deemed as undesirable, there are a number of explanations for the people's choice to vote or not. Several factors contribute to election participation, such as economic, cultural, technological, demographic, or institutional

ones. Some factors are more influential than others, and oftentimes a mixture of them influence the choice of individuals regarding the vote.

The strongest predictor of individual turnout has to do with habit, whether or not one has voted previously in other elections (Fowler, 2006). To develop this habitual behavior of voting in elections, there are a few socioeconomic factors which play a role. Arguably, the most important one is education, meaning that the more educated a person is, the more likely they are to vote. In addition to education, another important factor is income. Typically, the wealthier the people are, the more likely they are to vote, regardless of their educational background. This may be because those in lower income households have given up on their respective government, deciding not to engage with it by voting. Of course, the level of influence these two factors have on habitual voting differs from one ethnic group to another, as they will have different levels of education and income.

There is an even greater difference between nations when it comes to turnout, stemming from cultural and institutional factors. While wealth and literacy have some effect on turnout, they are not reliable measures when taken on a nationwide scale. Both weaker countries and stronger ones in terms of economy and education have had high turnouts for long periods of time (Wolfinger et al., 1990). Rather, what would influence nationwide turnout more is the age of the democracy. Requiring significant involvement from the population, elections in younger democracies would need time for people to understand and be confident in the electoral process, developing a cultural habit of voting over time (Powell, 1986). Trust in government, interest in politics, and belief in the effectiveness of voting are all aspects which develop within societies over a longer period of time. As a result, turnout only becomes part of the culture of a nation once enough time has passed.

Institutional factors have a significant impact on turnout too. While attitudes take time to develop into something different, rules or laws are easier to change. For example, making voting compulsory would have a more direct and dramatic effect on turnout than allowing every citizen to have a choice (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021). Countries such as Australia, which have compulsory voting implemented, have benefited from consistently high turnout figures (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021), albeit at the expense of limiting free will. Furthermore, the modalities of how electoral registration is conducted can also affect turnout. Registration could both act as a barrier and as an innovation for democratic systems. Rolling registration in the

United Kingdom, for instance, moved away from the previous model, which would update the electoral register yearly, to a monthly model. This improved turnout, as in the previous model, elections taking place later in the year would suffer from lower turnout, due to voters moving away from home, or passing away. Other institutional factors that are also likely to have important effects on election turnout include the effect a vote will have on a policy, known as election saliency, and how closely the result reflects the will of the populace, known as proportionality.

Between Perception and Turnout

It has been argued that the public simply does not care about European politics, and that the European Parliamentary elections have been unable to capture the public's interest, whose turnouts have been lower than most national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Furthermore, many seem to use the vote as an act of approval or disapproval for national parties, rather than electing representatives at the European Union level (Clark, 2014), and thus influencing the way European politics go. It has been widely argued in the literature that this lack of interest in voting stems from the fact that the public does not perceive European politics as relevant to their own lives (Moravcsik, 2002). Even though there are Europeans who abstain from voting due to a lack of interest in European politics, it has been found that doubts about the European Parliament would better explain this turnout stagnation over the years (Clark, 2014). In other words, the way in which the voters perceive the European Parliament is a key factor which affects their election turnout.

It could be that the European citizens perceive the European Parliament in a more pessimistic light because they have not been fully informed about its powers (Clark, 2014), which have been slowly expanding, as previously mentioned. However, the lack of knowledge about the European Union institution should not discourage voters, who could simply use national institutions as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of European ones (Rohrschneider, 2002; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). As such, in countries with weak national parliaments and unresponsive political institutions, the European Parliament would look better in comparison. This could be seen in the case of Romania, who had a troubling leadup to the European Parliamentary elections of 2019 due to national issues involving the poor choices of the elected government. A series of anti-government protests took place between 2017 and 2018 in the country, which resulted in several anti-corruption measures taken by the otherwise unresponsive parliament. Because the Romanian citizens were confronted with a weak national

parliament, it can be argued that they saw the European Parliament in a better light, as a result. As such, the aforementioned jump in turnout at the European Parliamentary elections between 2014 and 2019 could be explained in this way.

What remains certain is that the people's perceptions do play a role in their turnout at elections. Previous analyses have gone into how perception relates to turnout at elections, but they have usually done so on a national basis, concentrating on the relation citizens have with their country's government. Furthermore, they have not tackled democratic perception as a whole. Instead, they all focused on different aspects related to it. For example, Birch (2010) has focused on perceptions of electoral fairness, and whether voters deem the election process to be meaningful. She found that citizens who perceive elections to be fair were more likely to vote in elections, whereas those who have reservations about it tend to not vote. Therefore, election perception impacts the choice to vote or not. Zipp (1985) argued that, while there a link between perception and turnout, it is not related to the electoral process. Instead, he found that people do not attend elections because they perceive that their interests are not represented by the candidates. Conversely, if a person's preferences are closely linked to a candidate's, that person is more likely to vote. Meanwhile, academics such as Kostelka and Blais (2018) have looked into democratic perception, more specifically the satisfaction of the voters with democracy, and its relation to turnout, but have argued that the causal relation is reversed. In other words, they believed that voter turnout affects satisfaction with democracy, arguing that there is no clear evidence that those who are less democratically satisfied before an election will vote less. At the same time, they also do not deny that other factors, like political scandals for example, may impact the people's satisfaction with democracy, which will also affect the way they will continue to vote going forward. Ultimately, they deem elections to be the central element for democracy, and that most of the time, turnout is shown to affect the citizens' perception towards democracy.

Moving the analysis from the national level to the international one, this study aims to contribute to the discussion of how perception and turnout are linked to one another. In addition, it also aims to combine several important factors in order to establish a more complete image of what it means to be democratic in the minds of the voters, instead of focusing on a single aspect. This will aid in the forthcoming assessment of whether democratic deficiency is perceived as present in the European Parliament by the Romanian population. If the factors which constitute democracy are not viewed as present in the European Parliament by the voters, then democratic deficiency will be deemed to exist. Finally, this thesis will run on the

assumption that it is perception which influences turnout, unlike what Kostelka and Blais argued. Instead, it will build upon Stockemer's (2011) findings, who argued that turnout is driven by citizen perception. In terms of the latter, while the existing body of literature has already debated whether the European Parliament could be deemed as being democratically deficient or not, not much importance was given to whether citizens agree with such opinions or not. Certainly, not all voters engage with academic readings before making up their minds on whether to go ahead with the vote or not. Each citizen has their own perception in regard to how democratically lacking one institution is over another, or whether it is worth it to turn up and vote in European elections. As such, their opinions may differ from those of academics, and it would be important to gauge what these perspectives are in order to better determine how the European Parliament is viewed by Europeans.

While the factors which may determine turnout in elections have been presented above, the aim of this thesis is to argue that what these factors ultimately do is to impact the perspective of the voter, which then manifests itself through their voting choice. These factors do not directly influence a person's turnout during an election, but they create a mindset which makes the person more or less likely to vote, and if they do, which person or party they support. Therefore, in order to prove this, the coming chapters will attempt to establish a link between voter perception and election turnout, by using the European Parliament and Romanian citizens as a case study. The design of this research will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

3. Research Design, Data and Methodology

Having established a theoretical framework for the thesis, it is time to discuss the design of the research which will be conducted in the coming chapters. This section will serve as an explanation of that design. The strategy chosen for answering the main research question will be explained, going over the ways in which the sub-questions will be tackled. Afterwards, the methodologies which were used in gathering the data relevant to the research will be shown. Details regarding the surveys chosen will be given, as well as the criteria for choosing the survey questions.

Strategy and Design

As established before, the main research question will be answered by tackling each sub-question one after the other. In order to assess the relation between election turnout and perception on democratic deficiency in the European Parliament, data from surveys like the Eurobarometer and figures from the European Parliament's election turnout website will be used. The Romanian case will be introduced afterwards, going over the Romanian citizens' turnout at the European Parliamentary elections between 2007 and 2019. Doing so will determine a pattern in turnout. This pattern will be linked to the Romanian citizens' answers in the surveys. This link is important, as it will answer the question posed by the title, bearing in mind the relation between voter perception and election turnout found earlier.

For each empirical sub-question presented in the *Introduction*, the following analyses will be performed in order to provide an answer. Having already answered the first sub-question in the section above, the following two questions will constitute the main focus of the incoming chapters. These questions will be resolved as follows:

What is the perception of the Romanian citizens regarding the European Parliament's democratic deficiency?

To answer this sub-question, the data collected from surveys will be of use. For each of the election years that Romania was part of, a survey is chosen, meant to highlight what opinions the citizens had ahead of the election date. It is important for the surveys to be as close to the election date as possible, so as to establish a perception near to the one the electorate had when the elections happened. While no survey has been found at the time of writing which specifically tackles the population's attitude in regard to democratic deficiency in the European Parliament, there is still a way to measure this attitude. The previous chapter has established

that democratic deficiency will be understood as the failure of fulfilling three democratic characteristic, those being legitimacy, accountability, and representation. Therefore, surveys which tackle these topics will be of interest, as they show the population's perception on whether those principles of democracy are met.

It could be the case that the questions do not specifically mention these terms, but instead reference them. Questions regarding the image people have of the European Parliament will be considered to reference legitimacy, as having a good image in the eyes of the people would mean that the Parliament is not only recognized, but accepted as well. Trust is also a measure of empirical legitimacy, as it would imply that the citizens have accepted the institution. In terms of image and trust, the perceptions people have of the European Union as a whole will be presented as well, in order to compare them to the Parliament's. It would be interesting to see whether the people perceive the Parliament in a better light than the Union, and what this could entail for its democratic credentials. On that note, questions focused on whether citizens believe they have a voice in the European Union, whether it listens to them, and their satisfaction with the level of democracy in the organization, will be of interest. While these topics can simply be taken as a general measure of the whole concept of democratic deficiency, they can also be deemed to reference representation, as the voters will perceive the people within the institution to be akin to their wishes. Other survey questions will be used when appropriate in order to add depth, complementing the analysis done on the main survey items of interest. Nevertheless, accountability is a rather difficult factor to measure, especially relating to the secondary data used, because it does not have a specific question which could be interpreted as measuring it. Therefore, a focus will be placed on legitimacy, as it was previously deemed the most important factor out of the three, while also tackling representation within the general theoretical framework established before.

Depending on the answers given by the Romanian responders to those survey questions, the perception will be viewed as positive, negative or neutral. There will also be cases where the citizens do not know what opinion to have. As it will be shown in the following section, the amount of people who give this answer will become smaller throughout the years. Nevertheless, it is still a valid answer to be considered because it shows how Romanians began to understand more about the Union as the years went on. Positive and negative reactions will mostly be represented through levels of intensity, or whether people hold a stronger or weaker opinion while leaning towards one of the two sides. Expressions such as *totally* and *partially*,

or *very* and *somewhat* will be used to describe these intensity levels, allowing for a deeper analysis.

What is the relation between the Romanian turnout figures between the 2007 and 2019 European Parliamentary elections and the Romanians' perception of the European Parliament's democratic deficiency?

To answer this sub-question, the outcome of the previous question will be put in relation with the data attained from the European Parliament website's election turnout results. In other words, an individual-level analysis will be carried in order to check whether the previous aggregate-level analysis has a micro-foundation. A pattern needs to be found between the European Parliamentary election years and the responses of the Romanian citizens in those surveys. As exemplified in an earlier section, a rise can be seen from the 2014 election to the 2019 election. As such, the Romanian population's answers to the surveys in the months leading up to the elections will be of interest. A link will be drawn between the turnout in the 2014 European election and the survey answers of 2014, and the same will be done for the 2019 election turnout and survey answers of the 2018 survey. In other words, it is expected that the Romanian population's answers to those surveys, which constituted their perception of the European Parliament's democratic deficiency, contributed to the change in turnout numbers at the European elections. Therefore, the change in perception for Romanians towards democratic deficiency in the European Parliament highlights a change in turnout as well. Being that the rise in turnout has been so special between 2014 and 2019, more attention will be given to these years.

Main Elements Researched

As the major entity that will be researched in the study, the Romanian citizens represent the main unit of analysis. More specifically, the research will be conducted at an individual level, looking into which people believe more, or less strongly that the European Parliament is democratically deficient, which segments of the population are more skeptical about the European Union and its Parliament, who votes and who abstains, and how such differences can be explained. The setting is represented by the European Parliamentary elections between 2007 and 2019. This period of time was chosen as it represents the elections that Romania was part of, after becoming a member of the European Union in 2007. In this period of time, four elections took place, in 2007, 2009, 2014 and 2019, respectively.

In terms of variables, there are two important ones: the turnout at the European Parliament elections and the belief of the Romanian citizens regarding the European Parliament being democratically deficient. The turnout at the European Parliament elections will be understood as the number of people that have attended the elections. It is necessary for turnout at the elections to be between 2007 and 2019 and made by the Romanian citizens. Measurements for this variable will be done using the European Parliament's data on election turnout and be represented by percentages, which can be found online (European Parliament, 2021). While the main focus will be put on Romania's turnout during the aforementioned elections, the overall turnout figures for the European Union as a whole may be of interest as well. That is because they could constitute a reference point for comparison with Romania's numbers. As for the Romanians' perception of the European Parliament being democratically deficient, this variable will be defined through the data obtained from Eurobarometer surveys. While the data only tackles a fragment of the total electorate, it will serve to paint a general picture of what the citizens perceived, regardless of their participating in the European parliamentary elections or not.

Data Collection Methods

As previously mentioned, surveys will help measure the Romanian perception towards the European Parliament's democratic deficiency. One such survey is *Eurobarometer 68.1*, published in 2012. The data for this survey has been collected 22 September and 3 November 2007 by Kantar Public Brussels on request of the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission (European Commission, 2012). Participants in the survey were represented by the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States, resident in each of the Member States and aged 15 years and over. The survey has also been conducted in the two candidate countries at the time, Croatia and Turkey, and in the Turkish Cypriot Community and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (European Commission, 2012). In these countries, the survey covers the national population of citizens and the population of citizens of all the European Union Member States that are residents in these countries and have a sufficient command of the national languages to answer the questionnaire. This survey is meant to gather data on perception for the 2007 elections.

The following survey is *Eurobarometer 71.1*, published in 2013. The data for this survey has been collected between 16 January and 21 February 2009 by Antonis Papacostas, on part of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (European Commission,

2013). Participants in the survey were represented by the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States and other EU nationals, resident in any of the Member States and aged 15 years and over. In the three candidate countries at the time, Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as in the Turkish Cypriot Community, the survey covers the national population of citizens and the population of citizens of all the European Union Member States that are residents in these countries and have a sufficient command of the national languages to answer the questionnaire (European Commission, 2013). This survey is meant to gather information on perception for the 2009 elections.

For the perceptions leading into the 2014 elections, *Eurobarometer 81.2* will be used, published in 2017. The data for this survey has been collected between 15 and 24 March 2014 by Kantar Public Brussels on request of the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission (European Commission, 2017). Participants in the survey were represented by the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States and other EU nationals, resident in any of the 28 Member States and aged 15 years and over. *Eurobarometer Survey 89.2*, published in 2019, will be used to gather information on perception during the last election year analyzed. The data for this survey has been collected between 11 and 22 April 2018 by Kantar Public Brussels on request of the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission and European Parliament, respectively (European Commission & European Parliament, 2019). Participants in the survey were represented by the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union Member States and other EU nationals, resident in any of the 28 Member States and aged 15 years and over. Of interest will be the answers given to questions relating to the Romanians' image of the European Parliament, the role it plays in European affairs, Romanians' interest in elections, and its progress for democracy within the European Union (European Commission & European Parliament, 2019).

For all of the four surveys mentioned, the data was collected through individual face-to-face interviews, or Computer Assisted Personal Interview. The participants in these surveys have almost always been around 50% male and 50% female, evenly selected from the main regions of the country. On average, around 100 people per region were chosen. In terms of the age of the survey taker, responders were averaged between 15 and 80 years, each age being represented by 1 or 2% of the total number of Romanians taking the survey. Of those who chose to reveal their political choices, between 30 and 40% of the responders placed themselves around the center of the political compass, while between 30 to 35% of responders claimed

they were leaning either to the right or to the left, respectively. It would be important to note that more people chose to reveal their political choices as the years progressed, especially with regard to those who were center-leaning, whose numbers went up by 10% by 2018.

Additionally, *European Election Voter Study* data will be used to find how the perception of Romanians has developed after the elections took place, putting it in relation to turnout, and assessing how individual perceptions have influenced the choice to vote. The Voter Studies of interest will be the ones conducted in 2009, 2014 and 2019, which were conducted in all the European Union member states at the time. The sample size of the Romanian study-takers was roughly 1000 for all of the years. The data was collected between 5 June and 9 July for 2009, between 30 May and 27 June for 2014, and between 14 June and 7 November for 2019, by Gallup International.

With a clear framework, design, and methodology set in place, the analysis can begin in the coming chapters. As highlighted above, the following section will be concerned with understanding the perception of the Romanian voters regarding democratic deficiency in the European Parliament throughout the years.

4. The Romanian Citizens' Perception of Democratic Deficiency in the European Parliament

In order to move forward with the analysis, the perception of the Romanian citizens in regard to the European Parliament's democratic deficiency must be made clear. The aim of this chapter is to compile the answers to the relevant questions which appear in the Eurobarometer surveys chosen. Based on the answers given in the surveys, and the individuals who have given these answers, a complete image can be formed regarding democratic deficiency perception in Romania. The development of this perception will be observed on a year-by-year basis, starting with 2007, and ending with 2018. Tables will be provided for further illustration of the data collected, should it be necessary. Along with the tables, the exact survey questions which were asked will be displayed as well, in order to understand the way in which the topics were formulated. Where relevant, explanations will be given for why citizens chose to answer in one way, rather than another, and what that could mean for their perceptions of democratic deficiency.

2007: Romania's Entry in the European Parliament

On 1 January 2007, Romania became an official Member State of the European Union, alongside Bulgaria. Later that year, and before the November European Parliamentary elections, a Eurobarometer survey was conducted, in which 1034 Romanians from various parts of the country were asked about their opinions on the Union, as well as its institutions. As it can be seen in the table below, over 67% of the citizens tended to trust the European Union, with just over 60% believing that things were going in the right direction in it at the time. In terms of the European Parliament, the people had an even better opinion of it compared to the Union itself. Not only did 90% of the responders hear about it, but almost 72% tended to trust it, with close to 20% not knowing what to think of it yet, while only about 9% tended not to trust it, as *Table 4.2* shows. This relatively high number of undecided responders could have meant that some Romanians still needed time to form an opinion of the Parliament at the time, which is not surprising, being that the European Union membership was still something new to them. This is reflected by their answers in regard to their level of information when it comes to the Parliament's activities. Only 1.6% believed they were very well informed, and 20.5% considered they knew about the Parliament fairly well. This cumulative 22% contrasted the 67% of people who were either fairly or very badly informed in that regard.

Table 4.1 Romanians' Trust in the European Union¹

	2007	2009	2014
Tend to trust	67.4%	60.8%	57.6%
Tend not to trust	20.9%	24.5%	34.5%
Don't know	11.7%	14.7%	8.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1, Eurobarometer 71.1, Eurobarometer 81.2

Table 4.2 Romanians' Trust in the European Parliament²

	2007	2009	2014
Tend to Trust	71.9%	57.8%	57.0%
Tend not to Trust	9.1%	23.5%	32.6%
Don't Know	19.1%	18.7%	10.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1, Eurobarometer 71.1, Eurobarometer 81.2

Even so, over 25% of citizens believed that the Parliament's role is very important in the life of the European Union, and another 51% deemed its role to be fairly important. In terms of its qualities, citizens were also very positive. Over half of the responders to the survey, close to 56%, believed that the European Parliament listens to European citizens, whereas only 12% thought otherwise, shown below in *Table 4.3*. The higher percentage of positive opinions on the Parliament is further reflected by the overall image Romanian citizens have of the institution. The data collected in *Table 4.4* shows that more than a half, or about 62%, had a very or fairly positive image of the Parliament, compared to ones who did not, at less than 4%. It would be important to point out that 22% of citizens did not have a strong opinion on the matter, being neutral, and 12% did not know what to answer. Those figures are similar to the image Romanian citizens have of the European Union as a whole. As *Table 4.5* points out, 66.5% of responders had a very or fairly positive image of the Union, while about 5% did not. Once again, the amount of people without a strong opinion was significant, at 23%. The relatively high percentages of people who did not have a clear answer appear for the previous questions as well, where 34% did not know if not listening to citizens would describe the Parliament accurately. Once again, this uncertainty reflects the recency of Romania's

¹ Romanians were asked the following question, in regard to the European Union: I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

² Romanians were asked the following question, in regard to the European Parliament: Please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

membership in the European Union, as many citizens still felt that they needed time to form a clear opinion.

Table 4.3 Romanians' Perception on Whether the European Parliament Listens to Them (2007)³

	Percentage	Frequency
Describes very well	13.9%	144
Describes fairly well	39.7%	411
Describes fairly badly	10.6%	110
Describes very badly	1.6%	17
Don't know	34.0%	352
Total	100.0%	1034

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1

Table 4.4 Romanians' Image of the European Parliament⁴

	2007	2018
Very positive	10.3%	5.4%
Fairly positive	51.8%	38.2%
Neutral	22.3%	38.3%
Fairly negative	3.0%	13.0%
Very negative	0.6%	3.1%
Don't Know	12.0%	1.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1, Eurobarometer 89.2

Table 4.5 Romanians' Image of the European Union⁵

	2007	2009	2014	2018
Very positive	11.8%	13.9%	10.2%	7.7%
Fairly positive	54.7%	50.1%	45.6%	45.8%
Neutral	23.4%	25.8%	30.8%	35.1%
Fairly negative	3.6%	5.2%	8.2%	7.8%
Very negative	1.0%	1.7%	2.8%	1.5%
Don't Know	5.5%	3.3%	2.3%	2.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1, Eurobarometer 71.1, Eurobarometer 81.2, Eurobarometer 89.2

³ Romanians were asked the following question in regard to Listening to Citizens: Please tell me for each of the following words/expressions whether it describes very well, fairly well, fairly badly or very badly your perception of the European parliament.

⁴ Romanians were asked the following question: In general, does the European Parliament conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?

⁵ Romanians were asked the following question: In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?

While the topics of these questions certainly reflect aspects related to democracy, citizens were specifically asked whether they deemed the Parliament to be democratic as well. Overall, more than 70% of responders perceived the Union institution to be democratic, while only about 5% thought that would not be the case, and 24% did not know what to think yet, like *Table 4.6* highlights. Romanian Citizens were also asked about their level of satisfaction with democracy in the European Union. As shown in *Table 4.7*, 51% were already satisfied with the way democracy worked in the European Union, while 23% were not, leaving the remaining 26% uncertain. It is clear by now that the high figure of positive reactions seen throughout the data, coupled with the larger number of undecided citizens compared to the citizens with negative perceptions, meant that Romanians were looking forward to their future in the European Union. Even though they had just entered it, and some had not formed an opinion yet, their perception of the Union and its institutions was overall optimistic.

Table 4.6 Romanians' Perception on Whether the European Parliament is Democratic (2007)⁶

	Percentage	Frequency
Describes very well	25.9%	268
Describes fairly well	44.7%	462
Describes fairly badly	4.7%	49
Describes very badly	0.6%	6
Don't know	24.1%	249
Total	100.0%	1034

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1

Table 4.7 Romanians' Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union⁷

	2007	2014	2018
Very satisfied	8.3%	11.8%	6.3%
Fairly satisfied	42.7%	47.7%	49.9%
Not very satisfied	15.9%	19.7%	26.9%
Not at all satisfied	6.8%	6.3%	6.6%
Don't know	26.3%	14.5%	10.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 68.1, Eurobarometer 81.2, Eurobarometer 89.2

⁶ Romanians were asked the following question in regard to being Democratic: Please tell me for each of the following words/expressions whether it describes very well, fairly well, fairly badly or very badly your perception of the European parliament.

⁷ Romanians were asked the following question: On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union?

2009: The Effects of the Financial Crisis on Perception

The following election year was a tough one for Europeans, who have been gravely affected by the Financial Crisis, which had a significant adverse effect on the economic and labor market, raising the unemployment rates throughout all Member States. Of the 1067 Romanians which took part in the 2009 Eurobarometer survey, a little over 33% believed that the Crisis had very important repercussions on their personal situations, and an additional 47% deemed that the repercussions were at least fairly important, shown in the table below. In other words, 80% of the people in the poll felt like the Crisis affected them in some way. With that being said, it would be expected that their perceptions of the European Union and its institutions would worsen due to the effects of the Crisis, being that the Union was unable to protect its members against it. However, the public perception of Romanian citizens has not actually changed much, when compared to the 2007 results.

Table 4.8 The Effects of Financial Crisis on Romanians' Lives (2009)⁸

	Percentage	Frequency
Very important repercussions	33.2%	354
Fairly important repercussions	46.8%	499
Not really any repercussions	8.5%	91
No repercussions at all	1.5%	16
Don't know	9.7%	104
Unknown	0.3%	3
Total	100.0%	1067

Source: Eurobarometer 71.1

Almost 70% of responders believed that the European Union membership has benefited their country, and close to 61% tended to trust the Union, while 24.5% did not tend to do so, as highlighted previously in *Table 4.1*. The responses in regard to the European Parliament were similar, with almost 58% placing their trust in the institution, and 23.5% not, also highlighted above in *Table 4.2*. With such figures, it can be seen that the percentage of people without a clear opinion on these matters has dropped, with less than 15% of citizens not knowing whether to trust the European Union or not, and less than 19% not knowing this in regard to the European Parliament. The Parliament has also remained legitimate in the eyes of Romanians, as almost 46% of them believed that its role in European affairs has strengthened in the last ten years. Over 67% of responders had a generally favorable impression of the Parliament as well, with a smaller 10% having a generally unfavorable image of it, leaving 21.5% without a strong

⁸ Romanians were asked the following question: To what extent do you think that the current economic and financial crisis is or is not having an effect on your personal situation?

impression towards it. Just like in 2007, a significant number of people still did not have a clear opinion in regard to the Parliament, especially when compared to the negative opinions towards it.

2014: Romanians' Perception Ahead of Their Third European Parliamentary Election

Romania would prepare for its third election as part of the European Union in 2014, having gone through an economic crisis, as well as a migrant one a few years prior. These events have seemingly affected the perceptions of Romanians, as the trust in the European Union fell, compared to the other years, with less than 58% of responders tending to trust the Union, whereas 34.5% did not, as the *Table 4.1* illustrated. While trust was still kept by over a half of the Romanian responders, the fact that the percentage of people not tending to trust the Union rose so much is telling of the effects current events had on Europeans and how they viewed the organization, but also its institutions. The trust figures in relation to the European Parliament are similar to the ones of the Union, as 57% of people tended to trust the Parliament, and just less than 33% did not, shown in *Table 4.2*. Nevertheless, the image of the Union and its institutions remained rather positive. According to *Table 4.5*, a little over 10% maintained a very positive view, and about 46% a fairly positive one, compared to the 11% of people who had a negative image of it. Surprisingly, almost 31% had a neutral image of it, a number higher than in 2007.

In terms of democratic credentials, only about 12% of responders were very satisfied with the way democracy worked in the European Union, close to 48% being fairly satisfied, and a cumulative 26% either not being very satisfied or satisfied at all, as illustrated in *Table 4.7*. Furthermore, only about 39% of Romanians attributed the notion of democracy when asked what the European Union meant to them personally. Coupled with the rising neutral stance on it, it can be argued that the citizens have started to doubt the legitimacy and representation of the Union and its institutions. This fact is reflected in the number of people that believed their voice counted in the European Union, highlighted by the table below. Only 34% of responders agreed, either totally or partially, that their voice mattered, while about 59% disagreed, out of which 26% did so totally. In other words, more Romanians felt like they did not have a say in European affairs than those who thought otherwise, only seven years into their Union membership. However, this would not remain the case for long, as in just four years, the figures would change again.

Table 4.9 Romanians' Perception on Whether Their Voice Counts in the European Union⁹

	2014	2018
Totally agree	7.1%	8.4%
Tend to agree	26.8%	34.4%
Tend to disagree	32.9%	28.3%
Totally disagree	26.2%	21.8%
Don't Know	6.9%	7.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 81.2, Eurobarometer 89.2

2018: Onward to the 2019 Elections

With a little less than a year before their next European elections, the Romanian citizens had once again experienced several events which may have impacted their perceptions, but this time, they would occur locally. Throughout 2017 and 2018, anti-government protests took place, which saw impressive turnouts from Romanians all over the country, seeking to fix the recent laws and regulations implemented by the Romanian Parliament which inadvertently encouraged corruption. With more citizens getting involved in political matters, their perceptions towards the European Union would once again evolve.

The Union's image in the eyes of Romanians had further developed, as shown in *Table 4.5*, with the neutral stance growing from 31% to 35%. The positive opinions have not changed much, only dropping slightly, especially when it concerned those who had a very positive image of it, who have reached almost 8%, while close to 46% had a fairly positive image of it. On the other hand, the number of individuals with negative opinions has lowered, reaching a cumulative 9% between those who had a very negative image and those who had a fairly negative one. The amount of people who believed their voice counted in the European Union has also shifted, as illustrated in *Table 4.9*. Almost 43% of people agreed that their voice mattered, at least partially, while 50% disagreed, with almost 22% disagreeing with the statement totally. These figures show that the number of people believing they had a say in European matters had increased by almost 9% between 2014 and 2018.

Focusing on the European Parliament, the citizen's image of it is very different when compared to their initial thoughts in 2007. These changes are showcased in *Table 4.4*. Less than 44% of responders had a positive image of the institution, of which only 5% had a very positive one,

⁹ Romanians were asked the following question: Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: My voice counts in the EU.

and 16% had a fairly or very negative impression in regard to the Parliament. However, the most significant number of people belonged to the neutral opinion side, of which 38% did not feel strongly about the Parliament. People were also asked about how the Parliamentary elections may impact democracy in the European Union. In the previous election of 2014, the leading candidate of the political party which had won the most votes, Jean-Claude Juncker, was also elected President of the European Commission. Therefore, Europeans also took part in the process of electing the European Commission's President while voting for who should represent them in the Parliament, signifying a potential progress for democracy within the Union. Almost 18% of the responders agreed with this statement totally, followed by almost 45% who tended to agree as well. As established in the table below, only 22% of Romanians disagreed, either totally or partially. This meant that people generally thought the Parliament, through its elections, made progress for democracy in the European Union.

Table 4.10 Romanians' Perception on Democratic Progress within the European Union (2018)¹⁰

	Percentage	Frequency
Totally agree	17.9%	195
Tend to agree	44.9%	489
Tend to disagree	18.3%	199
Totally disagree	4.1%	45
Don't Know	13.1%	143
Unknown	1.7%	19
Total	100.0%	1090

Source: Eurobarometer 89.2

Having gone through the years, a few claims can be made in regard to the Romanian perception toward the European Parliament. Firstly, as the years went on, the number of people who did not know what to answer has gone down. This shows that people have become more informed about the Union in the years following Romania's entry, and that enough time had passed for them to have an opinion on it. Secondly, people seem to generally think about the Union and the Parliament in a positive light. While the number of people who have remained positive has been slowly going down, if not fluctuating throughout the years, it still forms the majority answer for the survey questions. Finally, the percentage of people who are neutral, not holding strong positive or negative feelings towards the organization and its composite institutions, has slowly been going up. This means that more Romanian people are showing low interest for the

¹⁰ Romanians were asked the following question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement regarding this process of electing the President of the European Commission depending on the results of the European Parliament elections: It represents significant progress for democracy within the EU?

Union, which could have important ramifications for events such as elections. If the number of people who are neutral towards European matters keeps growing, turnout numbers at future elections will only suffer. However, before tackling what the future of European Parliamentary elections might look like, it is necessary to go over the elections which had already taken place. Therefore, the next section will focus on Romania's turnout figures during the elections it was part of, looking into what they could mean for the answers found in this chapter.

5. The Relation between Voter Perception and Election Turnout

The previous section has showcased the perceptions of Romanian citizens throughout the years in relation to the European Union and its Parliament. This chapter will be dedicated to highlighting the turnout figures of Romanians during the European Parliamentary election years, putting them in relation to the aforementioned findings. The study carried in this chapter will move from the general to the individual level, in order to add more depth to the analysis and attempt to answer the main research question posed earlier in the *Introduction*. Eurobarometer and European Election Study answers given by Romanians in relation to voting in the elections will be used where necessary. Just like in the previous chapter, tables will be provided, should they be relevant, along with the exact survey question asked.

Romania's Turnout Figures Throughout the Years

In the November 2007 elections, only Romania and Bulgaria had participated, having just joined the Union earlier that year. As a result, only these two countries needed to elect members for the European Parliament, without the need for a bigger election involving the other member states. While higher than its neighbor's figure, Romania's turnout at these elections has been underwhelming, with only about 29% of the voters bothering to come and vote. Two years later, when the time came for Romanians to vote alongside their fellow European Union members in the general European Parliament elections, the turnout figures worsened. Less than 28% of the eligible population voted, much worse when compared to its membership colleague, Bulgaria, whose turnout rose to almost 39%, and even more so when compared to the European Union average of 43%. However, the disappointing turnout numbers for Romania would not remain as such when the time for the next elections came in 2014. About 32% of Romanians voted. While it was still below the Union's average, which remained close to 43%, what mattered was that the Romanian turnout figure had improved. The same could not be said about Bulgaria, whose numbers had fallen, and would continue to do so during the following election in 2019. As mentioned before, Romania had experienced an incredible increase in turnout numbers during these past elections, going up to 51%, with a nearly 20% increase in turnout figures between election years. This figure was even higher than the Union average, which was less than 51%. Therefore, throughout the years, Romania's turnout at the elections had fallen between 2007 and 2009, only to rise again beyond the original 2007 figure in the following years, as it can be seen in the table below.

Table 5.1 Turnout Figures for the European Parliamentary Elections in Romania, Bulgaria and the European Union as a whole (2007 – 2019)

	2007	2009	2014	2019
Romania	29.4%	27.6%	32.4%	51.2%
Bulgaria	29.2%	38.9%	35.8%	32.6%
EU	-	42.9%	42.6%	50.6%

Source: European Parliament

Linking Voter Perception to Turnout

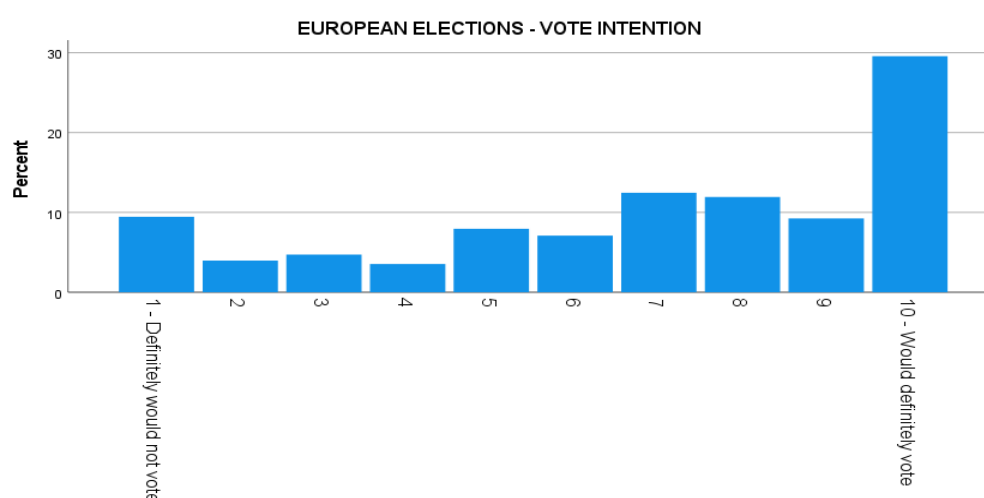
At first glance, the turnout pattern throughout the years seems to mirror the responses of the people regarding the level of trust they had placed in the European Parliament. Just like turnout had dropped between 2007 and 2009, so had the trust in the institution, going from 72% to about 58%. Furthermore, it would seem that this change in perception regarding the European Parliament affected their intention to vote as well. When looking at the survey answers Romanians gave in 2009 relating to the upcoming election, the drop is arguably justified. As *Table 5.2* shows, only 10% of responders were very interested in the elections, whereas close to 46% were only somewhat interested, and a total of 37% were either somewhat or very disinterested in them. When it came to the intention of voting, only about 26% confirmed that they would definitely vote, with another 36% declaring that they might go to vote, followed by 7% who were undecided, almost 11% who were probably not going to vote, and 8% who claimed they would definitely not vote, highlighted below in *Figure 5.1*. Of those who were thinking of not voting, about 10% of the total responders said that they would not be voting because the European Parliament did not sufficiently deal with problems which concerned them. While the percentage of people leaning towards voting in the election was higher than the one comprised of people who were either undecided or not going to vote, the percentage of people who were definitely going to vote was smaller than the ones who were less sure about it. This shows that, despite having a good perception towards the European Parliament, most Romanians were not ready to commit to a vote just yet.

Table 5.2 Romanians' Interest in the European Parliamentary Elections¹¹

	2009	2018
Very interested	10.0%	10.7%
Somewhat interested	45.8%	42.8%
Not very interested	20.9%	31.1%
Not at all interested	15.8%	12.5%
Don't Know	7.1%	1.2%
Missing	0.3%	1.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Eurobarometer 71.1, Eurobarometer 89.2

Figure 5.1 The Likelihood of Voting in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections¹²



Source: Eurobarometer 71.1

Nevertheless, trust in the European Parliament did have an influence on the choice of Romanians to vote. To illustrate this, *Table 5.3* has been constructed, cross-tabulating the data from the previous *Table 4.2* with the data from *Figure 5.1*. For the sake of comprehending the results better, options 8 to 10 in the figure above were understood as *High Intention* to vote, options 4 to 7 as *Medium Intention*, and finally options 1 to 3 constituted *Low Intention*. It can be seen that 60% of the citizens who tended to trust the European Parliament, were also the ones who had a high intention of voting in the elections, compared to less than 35% of those who did not place their trust in the Parliament, who have also expressed a high intention of voting. Conversely, those who did not tend to trust the Parliament had a lower intention to vote

¹¹ Romanians were asked the following question: The next European elections will be held in June 2009/May 2019. To what extent are you interested or disinterested in these elections?

¹² Romanians were asked the following question: Can you tell me on a scale of 1 to 10 how likely it is that you would vote in the next European election in June 2009? Please place yourself at a point on this scale where "1" indicates that you would definitely not vote, "10" indicates that you would definitely vote, and the remaining numbers indicates something in between these two positions.

than those who tended to trust it, being at 28%, compared to a little less than 12%. Even in the medium vote intention category, those who trusted the European institution less outnumbered those who did by almost 10%. Interestingly, it can also be seen that there are more people who expressed a higher intention to vote in the elections than not, despite not placing their trust in the Parliament. This shows that people may still be inclined to attend the elections, even though they do not necessarily perceive the European Parliament in a positive light. A potential reason for why this may be the case will be given in the next section.

Table 5.3 Cross-Tabulating Trust in the European Parliament with the Romanian Citizens' Intention to Vote in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections (2009)

Figures for 2009		Trust in the European Parliament		
		Tend to Trust	Tend not to Trust	Total
European Elections Vote Intention	High Intention	60.2%	34.7%	126
	Medium Intention	28.0%	37.1%	235
	Low Intention	11.8%	28.2%	410
Total		100.0% (558)	100.0% (213)	771

Source: Eurobarometer 71.1

Using the data from the European Election Study, it can indeed be seen that the individuals who did vote were the ones with generally positive perceptions of the European Parliament. For example, as *Table 5.3* showcases, a little over 73% of those who thought that the European Parliament considers their concerns as citizens casted their vote. Meanwhile, 55% of those who did not have a clear opinion, and 52% of those who did not think the European Parliament listened to them, did not vote in the elections. Therefore, those with positive perceptions towards a democratic quality of the European Parliament were more inclined to vote, whereas those who were either undecided or held a negative perception were not.

Table 5.4 Cross-Tabulating the Perception on whether the European Parliament Considers the Concerns of Citizens with European Parliamentary Election Turnout (2009)

Figures for 2009		European Parliament Considers Concerns of Citizens			
		Agree	Neither	Disagree	Total
Vote in European Elections	Voted	73.4%	45.0%	47.7%	506
	Did not vote	26.6%	55.0%	52.3%	387
Total		100.0% (611)	100.0% (131)	100.0% (151)	893

Source: European Election Survey 2009

Even so, in the following election year, the level of trust people had in the Parliament remained essentially the same, while the turnout figures rose. In addition, the number of people who

distrusted the Parliament had grown, from 23.5% to almost 33%. Even the level of trust people had in the European Union fell, from almost 61% to just over 57.5%. However, despite their perception toward the European Union and its institutions being more negative than in 2009, they still chose to exercise their democratic duties and vote. Moreover, those who held generally positive perceptions for the European Parliament were more predisposed to vote than those who did not, just like in 2009. As the table below illustrates, almost 63% of those who believed that the Parliament considered their concerns voted in the election, whereas only 45% of those who did not believe this to be the case voted. This meant that almost 55% of those who did not think their concerns were considered by the institution did not vote, much more than those who did believe in that statement, at about 37%.

Table 5.5 Cross-Tabulating the Perception on whether the European Parliament Considers the Concerns of Citizens with European Parliamentary Election Turnout (2014)

Figures for 2014		European Parliament Considers Concerns of Citizens		
		Agree	Disagree	Total
Vote in European Elections	Voted	62.6%	45.4%	546
	Did not vote	37.4%	54.6%	466
Total		100.0% (505)	100.0% (507)	1012

Source: European Election Survey 2014

Going into the turnout rise between 2014 and 2019, it can be explained by the shift in opinion regarding whether Romanians believed their voice mattered in the Union. As previously shown, the number of people who believed their voice mattered grew by almost 9%, from roughly 34% to almost 43%. In terms of survey data on the subject of the incoming elections, only about 11% were very interested in them, with almost 43% being fairly interested. While those figures are rather similar to the 2009 ones, the number of people not interested in them rose, mainly due to the percentage of people without a clear opinion becoming lower throughout the years. Overall, about 44%, or close to a half of the survey participants were not interested in the elections, either partially or entirely, as it can be seen from the previous *Table 5.2*.

Similarly to how the findings from 2009 were put into perspective, *Table 5.6* has been constructed, cross-tabulating the data from the previous *Table 4.4* with the data from *Table 5.2*. For the sake of comprehending the results better, the first two rows of *Table 5.2* have been merged into the *Interested* category, and the following two into the *Not Interested* category. Furthermore, the *Very* and *Fairly* degrees have been merged into one category for each of the

two polarly opposite perceptions, which will be understood as simply *Positive* and *Negative*, respectively. Just as in 2009, those who have had a positive image of the European Parliament have generally been interested in the elections, outnumbering those with a negative image of it, more specifically over 71% compared to over 39.5%. Once again, it can be seen that the citizens with positive perceptions toward the European Parliament are more interested in the elections, compared to those who do not. These findings were reflected by the data collected after the elections by the European Election Study, and showcased by *Table 5.7*. Almost 90% of those who trusted the European Parliament voted in the 2019 election, followed by 84% of those who neither trusted nor distrusted the institution, leaving those who did not place their trust in it to vote in a proportion of 79.5%. In addition, it would seem that more individuals who were satisfied with the way democracy worked in the European Union went to vote than those who did not. As *Table 5.8* shows, a little over 88% of Romanians who were satisfied with democracy voted, compared to the 84.5% who also voted, but were not satisfied.

Table 5.6 Cross-Tabulating the Romanians' Image of the European Parliament with Their Interest in the Next Elections

Figures for 2018		European Parliament Image			
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Interest in the Next Elections	Interested	71.0%	44.0%	39.5%	573
	Not Interested	29.0%	56.0%	60.5%	466
Total		100.0% (458)	100.0% (409)	100.0% (172)	1039

Source: Eurobarometer 89.2

Table 5.7 Cross-Tabulating the Romanians' Trust in the European Parliament with Their European Parliamentary Election Turnout

Figures for 2019		Romanians' Trust in the European Parliament			
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Vote in European Elections	Voted	89.8%	83.9%	79.5%	837
	Did not vote	10.2%	16.1%	20.5%	130
Total		100.0% (586)	100.0% (186)	100.0% (195)	967

Source: European Election Study 2019

Table 5.8 Cross-Tabulating the Romanian's Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union with Their European Parliamentary Election Turnout

Figures for 2019		Satisfaction with Democracy in the EU		
		Agree	Disagree	Total
Vote in European Elections	Voted	88.4%	84.5%	830
	Did not vote	11.6%	15.5%	127
Total		100.0% (551)	100.0% (406)	957

Source: European Election Survey 2019

The pattern found in the 2018 case, and later in the 2019 ones, seems to be similar to the one in 2009. Firstly, those who are more positive about the Parliament are also the ones who are more likely to vote in the elections. Secondly, regardless of perception, people generally tend to lean in the direction of attending the elections. This latter finding is important, as it shows that there are other factors at play, which influence the choice of Romanians to vote in the elections, despite their overall perception being less than positive.

A Closer Look into the Perception-Turnout Relation

From the analysis above, it can be argued that not all the factors relating to democracy have played a role in affecting the turnout at the European Parliamentary elections throughout the years. Rather than working together and affecting the perception of the citizen as a whole, only certain elements seemed to influence the choice of voting in the elections from year to year. Especially in the case of the turnout differences between 2014 and 2019, it would seem that the shift in opinion related to how Romanians felt that they had a voice aided the 20% rise. As such, a further look into what happened in the periods between the election years would be necessary. Doing so will aid in finding out which factors have contributed to the change in opinion which made Romanian citizens feel like their voice mattered more, which in turn influenced their election presence. Furthermore, it will shed more light on why people began to vote more since 2014, despite their democratic perceptions of that year not being exactly favorable towards the European Parliament and European Union. The following chapter will be focusing on analyzing these findings.

6. The Case of 2014 – 2019: How National Protests Influenced the Perception of the Romanian Citizens towards a European Institution

The previous chapters have shown what the perception of the Romanian people has been regarding a potential democratic deficit in the European Parliament, and how this perception has affected their turnout at the four Parliamentary elections which have happened since the country joined the European Union. However, two interesting findings have been made. The first is that there have been some factors which drove people to believe in European democracy and vote, despite their perception of the Parliament worsening in 2014. The second is that 2019's significant rise in turnout could be explained by how more people began to think they had a voice in European matters. It can be argued that these two findings can be explained by a common reason: the democratic issues Romanians have confronted since the nineties nationally. The aim of this chapter is to go over the history Romania had with democracy, since the fall of the Communist regime in December 1989. A focus will be placed on how this history can explain the changes in perception people have had towards the European Parliament, and how these contributed to their turnout increasing at the European Parliamentary elections, as a result.

The History of Romanian Democracy

Following the Romanian Revolution which ended on Christmas day 1989, resulting in the trial and execution of Communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu along with his wife, the Communist regime in Romania would meet its end as well. With the new leader of the impromptu governing coalition, Ion Iliescu, democracy and civil liberties would be restored, marking a new era for the country. However, 1990 would be a very troublesome year for the new Romanian political class, who not only had to catch up to a Europe that was increasingly united and free, but also had to face several social issues. Protests were initiated by students and professors part of the University of Bucharest in April 1990 after a series of injustices that had happened earlier in the year. Iliescu's party, the National Salvation Front (NSF), was only meant to act as a temporary government until the May elections of that year, which it would organize as well. Despite former promises, it decided to run in those elections, using its status and fame as being the leading organization during the Revolution, as well as its authority over the other parties it revived, to eventually win the election with 66% of the vote (National Commission for Statistics, 1990).

Such tensions, and the academics' fears that the party would continue the horrific reign of the Communist regime, having former Communist party members among its ranks, prompted them to protest against the government. The movement, known as the Golaniad, from the Romanian word *golan*, or hoodlum, used to describe the protesters by Iliescu himself (Cristea, 2007), became the biggest kind of protest in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Rus, 2007). The Golaniad protesters even put forward a series of demands for the government, which aimed to ensure fair elections in the country, without any Communist influences, limiting the powers of the government over media, and allowing Romanian citizens to have more of a voice in political matters (Cristea, 2007). Nevertheless, these demands would not be met, and the NSF would go on to win the elections in a corrupt fashion, as previously mentioned. Even so, the protest did not stop, prompting Iliescu to call forth the miners of the Jiu-Valley in June 1990 in order to counter the protesters, who proved to be a cheap, but loyal paramilitary force for many smaller protests in the past (Deletant, 2004). This was done by the NSF to save face, not having to rely on the state's police force beyond the usual guarding duties they had for protests such as these. While the Golaniad was ultimately stopped in a rather violent fashion thanks to the miners, it influenced the way the country would act moving forward. Further influenced by pressures from the international press, who had documented the protests, the governing NSF party would slowly meet the demands of the protesters, installing a fair multi-party system, based on free elections, and removing its tight controls over the media (Roper, 2000). However, its corrupt ways would continue for years to come.

Due to the government's change of heart following the backlash of the Golaniad, Romania had managed to continue to achieve significant progress internationally, entering NATO in 2004, followed by its European Union membership in 2007. Even with such developments, the Romanian citizens continued to distrust its government, still using protesting as a tool for expressing such displeasures. Romania was known internationally for being one of the most corrupt-riddled countries in Europe when it was admitted into the European Union (John, 2017). Nevertheless, that has changed over the years, in large part due to Romania's National Anticorruption Directorate's authority, presided by Laura Codruța Kövesi. It was reported that around 2000 politicians have been convicted for abuse of power between 2014 and 2016 alone, including former prime minister Adrian Năstase, amongst other political elites (John, 2017). The Social-Democrat Party in Romania, known as PSD, has argued that Kövesi is politically biased, because it has indicted more of their officials than any other party (John, 2017). Regardless, such claims do not hold much ground, considering that PSD has become notorious

after committing large-scale electoral frauds during the 2004 parliamentary and presidential elections, having a corruption record.

To add fuel to the fire, on 31 January 2017, the country's ruling coalition, of which PSD was part of, gave an executive order, without the parliament's input, to decriminalize abuse in office by those who were part of it, if the sums of money involved were less than \$48.000 (Marinas & Ilie, 2017). This decree aimed to stop all investigations for pending corruption offences and would free all officials imprisoned for corruption, blocking any further investigations related to those offences from being brought to justice. Despite the claims of the prime minister at the time, Sorin Grindeanu, that the changes were needed for the constitution and to reduce prison overcrowding (John, 2017), it can be argued that the executive order was an attempt to combat the anti-corruption efforts made by Kövesi's Directorate, and allow the allies of Grindeanu to escape censure. The most important example of the botched benefits of this decree was PSD leader, Liviu Dragnea, who had been blocked from becoming prime minister due to corruption charges, leaving the Grindeanu responsible.

The absurdity of the decree received widespread condemnation, prompting people to respond, and the next day, a total of 300.000 Romanians came to protest throughout the country (Marinas & Ilie, 2017). The number only continued to grow with each passing day, making this protest larger than the previous display of the Golaniad. After six nights of protests in various cities across the country, PSD withdrew the controversial decree, lacking the mandate to implement this law (John, 2017). Nevertheless, in a surprising move, the government also dismissed Kövesi, arguably the pillar that held the anti-corruption campaign, amongst other questionable decisions on penal and judicial code modifications (Besliu, 2017). It is important to remember that the protests which started in 2017 were meant to send a message to the government to refrain from moving against the country's fight against corruption which has been ongoing since the nineties. Removing Kövesi from her position only showed that this message was not heard. The government had become unrepresentative of its people's wishes.

In a desperate attempt to make them accountable for their actions, the Romanian citizens' protests continued sporadically into 2018. The diaspora had also joined the protests, returning to Romania in August, protesting along the people who have been fighting almost daily against the government for a year (Ilie, 2018). This was done to show the government that, no matter where in the world, people were still thinking of their homeland, being unhappy with how things were. The August protests were also when the situation turned violent, mirroring the

aggressive end of the Golaniad. This time, it was the police force carrying the attack. Interestingly, almost thirty years after the Golaniad, the government was not afraid to be seen in a bad light anymore, using its institutional powers to eliminate those that did not conform. The violence of the police was devastating, using explosives and spraying water and tear gas on the crowd, resulting in many injuries (Ilie, 2018).

Despite these happenings, the protesters did not give up, continuing their demonstrations throughout the rest of 2018, and in 2019 as well, albeit less frequently. In early January 2019, when Romania took over the leadership of the European Council, protesters arrived in front of the building where the talks between European Union representatives and Romanian ones had been held (Luca, 2019). They sought the help of the Union in their fight against corruption in their country, believing that this institution, which was dealing outside the Romanian borders, at the European level, could represent and aid them better than the national government ever did in the thirty years Romania had been supposedly democratic.

How National Issues Influence European Perception

The events explained above highlight a couple of aspects in terms of Romanians' relation to democracy. First of all, it is clear that the country is still in a state of democratic transition, having only become a democracy in the nineties, after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Due to political elites who have repeatedly shown that they are more interested in their personal gains over the interests of the population, a divide has been formed between the political class and the country's populace. As such, it would not be surprising for Romanian citizens to follow other democracies as a model for how their country should be like. Being that Romania has become a member of the European Union relatively early into its time as a democracy, even beginning their application process in 1993, it can be argued that the institution constituted the perfect model for citizens to follow.

Secondly, it is also apparent that the national government is democratically deficient. It is not representative, constantly making decisions against the interests of the Romanian population throughout the years. It is not accountable, as the elected officials have sought to save themselves and their political allies, with decisions and decrees which have served to give them more power, instead of working for the betterment of the society which has voted them. Arguably, it was the lack of accountability which has led the population to protest, both in the nineties through the Golaniad, and again with the big protests of 2017-2018. Without any better way to hold the politicians accountable for the decisions they had made, Romanians had to

resort to protests in order to attempt to achieve some change. As it lacked accountability and representation, the government had also become illegitimate in the eyes of the people, who have labelled the individuals who composed it as corrupts and thieves (Marinas & Ilie, 2017). Indeed, such labels are justified, when considering that ever since the nineties, the parliament has been plagued by people who have done crimes, to the point where a National Anticorruption Directorate was created to stop them. Without legitimacy, accountability, or representation, the Romanian government has failed the democratic test, losing the citizens' trust. By comparison, the European Parliament, which has always had more people trusting it than not throughout the years, even with that number slowly dropping, has been much better perceived by the Romanian people.

Having understood Romania's situation, as well as the views of its citizens, the findings of the previous chapter can be put into context. The political situation in Romania has influenced the perceptions of the citizens. In addition, the overwhelmingly positive opinion people had towards the European Union when they had just joined in 2007 can also be explained by the fact that Romanians had finally found a democratic model to look up to. It can be argued that the Union membership was welcomed by the people, as its presence could influence the political elites to act more democratically. Of course, trust in the Union and its institutions had fallen slowly over the years, but so did the number of people who did not have a clear opinion on them. Moreover, the number of people who have thought positively of these European bodies has always outweighed the amount of people with negative perceptions of it throughout the years. This shows that Romanians have largely remained hopeful in regard to the European Union and what it entails.

Using the European Election Study data, it is clear that the people are looking up to the European Union and the European Parliament. Not only that, but the people who are perceiving the Union and Parliament in a positive light generally do not view the national government positively too. As shown in *Table 6.1*, throughout the years, the number of people who are satisfied with the Union, but not with the national government, has become higher, from 51% in 2009, to 64% in 2014. While this number dropped slightly in 2019, it was still above half, at 52%. Going back to the previous chapter's analysis, the rise in turnout which began in 2009 can also be explained through this rise in the amount of people who were democratically satisfied in with the European Union. Additionally, the increase in terms of people who believed their voice mattered from 2014 to 2019 can be explained by the protests which happened the years prior. Romanians saw that if they came together, they could achieve change,

and this was manifested into the European level as well. If they wanted to make a change for the better and improve democracy in their country, the people had to remove the politicians they deemed as corrupt from the European Parliament too, not just the national one. In order to do so, voting for the right people was necessary, hence the rise in turnout by almost 20%. This rise is further explained by the fact that Romanians have continuously distrusted their national parliament, while trusting the European Parliament, throughout these years. As *Table 6.2* illustrates, the number of citizens who trusted the European Parliament, but did not trust their national one, has always been consistently above half. In 2014, 58.4% of those who tended to trust the Parliament did not trust the national one, while in 2019, this figure rose slightly to 58.5%.

Table 6.1 Cross-Tabulating Romanians' Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union with their Satisfaction with Democracy in the Country (2009-2019)

Figures for 2009		SatDem Country		
		Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
SatDem European Union	Satisfied	81.8%	51.0%	462
	Dissatisfied	18.2%	49.0%	317
Total		100.0% (209)	100.0% (570)	779
Figures for 2014		SatDem Country		
		Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
SatDem European Union	Satisfied	89.2%	64.0%	671
	Dissatisfied	10.8%	36.0%	293
Total		100.0% (213)	100.0% (751)	964
Figures for 2019		SatDem Country		
		Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
SatDem European Union	Satisfied	85.1%	52.1%	552
	Dissatisfied	14.9%	47.9%	409
Total		100.0% (141)	100.0% (829)	970

Source: European Election Survey 2009, Eurobarometer 81.2, European Election Survey 2019

Table 6.2 Cross-Tabulating Romanians' Trust in the European Parliament with their Trust in the National Parliament (2014-2019)

Figures for 2014		Trust in the National Government			
		Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Total	
Trust in the European Parliament	Tend to trust	84.0%	58.4%	619	
	Tend not to trust	16.0%	41.6%	361	
Total		100.0% (182)	100.0% (798)	980	
Figures for 2019		Trust in the National Government			
		Trust	Neither	Not trust	Total
Trust in the European Parliament	Trust	66.8%	57.8%	58.5%	581
	Neither	15.9%	30.3%	16.5%	187
	Not trust	17.3%	11.9%	25.0%	196
Total		100.0% (220)	100.0% (211)	100.0% (533)	964

Source: Eurobarometer 81.2 and European Election Survey 2019

Overall, what can be seen in this Romanian case study is that the poor democratic state of the local government had influenced the actions of the citizens, who had been protesting against it for the better part of the past thirty years. Deeming the national government as democratically deficient has made Romanians look outside their borders, to the European Union. Thus, the Union and its bodies were deemed more democratic when compared to the national government, impacting the citizens' perceptions. Despite some of the survey answers indicating a slow weakening of positive perceptions towards the Union and Parliament, they have always remained on the positive side, with significantly more than half of the people surveyed perceiving the institution as not suffering from democratic deficiency. This shows that the people have never stopped believing in the democratic potential of the Parliament, and have mobilized themselves to vote more as the years have gone by. Therefore, it can be argued that the national situation in Romania has influenced the perceptions of the citizens towards the European Parliament, deeming it democratic, which has impacted their attendance at the elections, as a result.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to find out what the effects of the Romanian citizens' perception of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament was on their turnout at the parliamentary elections. As stated earlier, to answer the main research question, it was necessary to answer a few other secondary research questions, pertaining to the characteristics of democratic deficiency in the European Parliament, the perception of Romanian citizens regarding the Parliament's democratic deficiency, and the relation between this perception and the turnout figures at the European Parliamentary elections. It was expected that the perception of Romanian citizens would influence their choice to attend the elections through the hypothesis that turnout would change when perceptions would as well.

Three characteristics were found to represent democracy in organizations, namely legitimacy, accountability and representation. Should these qualities not be present within the European Parliament, then it would be considered to be democratically deficient. Focusing on legitimacy as the most important democratic factor, Eurobarometer surveys were used to determine what the aggregate perception of the Romanian people was in regard to the Parliament. Following the analysis of these surveys, several aspects were found relating to perception. Firstly, the number of people who did not know how to answer the survey questions had become lower over the years, which shows that Romanians have become more informed about the Union and its bodies. Secondly, the number of people holding a positive perception toward the Parliament has remained above half of the total Romanians surveyed, meaning that people seem to view the institution in a positive light generally. Lastly, it was found that the people who have not held a strong positive or negative perception towards the Parliament have been multiplying as the years went on. Should the numbers continue to grow, it could potentially endanger turnout numbers at future elections.

Following this aggregate analysis on perception, the focus shifted on the individual level. Putting the developments which occurred during the four European elections Romania was part of in relation to the citizens' perceptions found previously, it was shown that those who tended to trust the Parliament, and viewed it in a positive light, were more likely to attend the elections. Conversely, those with negative perceptions towards the parliament tended to not vote in the elections. It was also deemed that a further look into Romania's history with democracy was necessary, due to the significant rise in turnout between 2014 and 2019. Throughout the years, the country has been consistently fighting against the government, which was deemed to be

democratically deficient. While constantly protesting against it, the citizens have begun to look outside of their borders, to the European Union, viewing its parliament as a democratically legitimate model to follow. Therefore, the country's political situation has influenced the citizens' perceptions toward the Parliament, deeming it democratic, a factor which has contributed to their election turnout over the years.

This makes the European Parliamentary elections highly important for Romanians, and not at all second-order national ones, like Reif and Schmitt believed. The analysis conducted also proved that those who supported the Union, and its bodies, would attend the elections, again disproving the second-order election theory. Additionally, it confirms Stockemer's findings regarding elections, and how they are driven by the citizens' stances on the institution. The paper also adapted elements from Rhorschneider and Sanchez-Cuenca's theories, who argued that Union support is a function of people's trust in domestic institutions. As such, the analysis showed that, while participation in elections was primarily driven by the citizens' attitudes toward the Union, that was only because they have initially grown displeased with the national government.

An issue with the research design of this paper was that it carried its analysis on the basis of secondary data. This made it difficult to link survey items to the three democratic factors identified, and for that reason, only one of the factors was mainly focused on. Moreover, a clear cause and effect relation could not be established. While the analysis proved that there is a link between perception and turnout, it was unable to demonstrate that it was perception which ultimately drove people to vote. Therefore, future studies should focus on creating a dedicated set of survey questions, which ask people questions such as whether they perceive the Parliament to be accountable, representative and legitimate, whether they have voted or not, and whether they believe that these perceptions have driven them to turn up to the elections. In addition, more in-depth statistical procedures would be needed as well, in order to prove the chain of causality. The analysis conducted here has only used aggregate measures and cross-tabulations, which are useful to establish links, but cannot reasonably determine empirical causality.

To conclude with, these problems ultimately made answering the question posed in the *Introduction* rather difficult. As a result, the effects of the Romanian citizens' perceptions regarding the European Parliament's democratic deficiency on their turnout at the elections remain rather uncertain. What is clear, however, is that people who have voted were also the

ones who did not perceive a democratic deficit to exist, whereas those who did not vote were also the ones who deemed the deficit to be present.

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