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The Constitutional Court of Romania – strategic judicial behaviour

– SUMMARY –

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A research paper begins, in principle, with finding an enigma about the world that betrays our expectations and for which there is not yet a solution (Linos and Carlson 2017, 219). The enigma around which this work gravitates is born in the context in which institutions that regulate people's lives have been formed over time on the political stages of the world. Along with these, other institutions developed to verify that those norms are created in a way that respects the original will of the people when they decided, through the adoption of constitutions, on the creation of those institutions that would regulate their lives. If the first bear the title of assemblies, legislative bodies or parliaments, the others bear the name of constitutional courts, tribunals, or councils.

Regulating people's lives, which comes to materialize in principle in laws adopted by the legislative bodies of states, is dependent on politics regardless of how we define politics. Over time, however, it has been noticed that the study of the politics of the legislative bodies of the states is not enough to explain how regulating people's lives materializes, since there are also constitutional courts that check that materialization of the norms and can decide whether that materialization can be or not accepted, whether or not it remains valid, by validating or invalidating those materializations. In short, the constitutional courts can, after verifying a law passed by a legislative body, decide whether that law is valid or not, that is, whether that law will come to regulate people's lives or not.

The study of the adoption of laws appears to provide a lacunar picture of politics to the extent that such picture would not be complete without the study of the verification, validation or invalidation of laws after their adoption. Given that we are talking about laws, i.e. rules for people to follow, which are based on the highest political stakes in a society, the influences of politics have been observed or at least assumed to have effects on constitutional courts as well.

Constitutional courts apparently have the final say on the existence or non-existence of rules. Theoretically speaking, constitutional courts should not be influenced in any way by the politics present in the legislative bodies if we take into account the fact that these courts are formed

from groups of people called judges, a name that carries the connotation of lack of political bias. In this sense, a basic concept of today's democracies, the one referring to the "rule of law", also called "l'État de droit" (in French), is represented by the view that a dispute, be it a dispute between a law and a constitution, will be resolved on the basis of already existing rules, and the identity of a judge or a party, regardless of the (political) power that party has, will not condition the ruling given to the dispute (Friedman and Martin 2009, 1). Such a constitutional court on which the influence of political factors is presumed in various forms is the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR).

This paper mainly aims to verify and express an opinion, through the methods and models developed in the sphere of the confluence between political sciences and legal sciences, a confluence called empirical legal research, if the CCR, when it decides whether the laws adopted by the Romanian Parliament in the procedure of solving the objections of unconstitutionality (i.e. after the adoption of laws by Parliament and before their entry into force) is or is it not influenced by political factors or other factors of another nature. It is also desired to observe whether prior knowledge of political factors or other factors of another nature can help predict the type of decision the CCR would make – i.e. a decision to validate the laws or to invalidate them.

The research question advanced by this paper is the following: what is the main modality by which the CCR makes decisions? I explore the following three directions regarding decision making: (1) strictly based on constitutional, legal norms and precedents given by previous decisions, (2) based on its political preferences or (3) by taking into account the behavior of other actors involved in the process of adoption, verification and validation/invalidation of laws, whether these political actors are external to the CCR or they are the constitutional judges, who relate to each other.

Through the ways in which the purpose of the work is achieved – the expositions related to the typology of research, the concept of verification/control of laws as it can be found in other states, as well as in Romania, the documentation of the evolution of this concept and institution in Romania, the exploration of practices related to the types of people who become CCR judges, the creation of an image regarding the sum of the factors that influence the decisions of the constitutional courts and the verification of the hypotheses that connect those factors present in Romania with the decisions of the CCR – this paper materializes an innovative and more thorough

approach on how a public institution at the centre of Romania's political life (CCR) makes decisions on the rules that ultimately dictate people's lives.

Scientific progress often builds on the results of previous work (Leeuw and Schmeets 2016, 91). The study of political influences on constitutional courts took shape for the first time in the United States of America, when empirical legal research started to develop (Cane and Kritzer 2013, 23, 1021; Leeuw and Schmeets 2016, 29; Bartels and Bonneau 2015, 15 , 22), that is, that type of research that is at the confluence between research specific to political sciences and legal research – constitutional courts being considered in the vast majority of the scientific literature as institutions that are at the confluence between politics and law. Those empirical studies of courts with the power to review the constitutionality of laws then continued to be conducted mostly in the USA, with the Supreme Court of the United States as the main object of study (Whittington, Kelemen and Caldeira 2008, 3). The attention of researchers on the constitutional courts of other states later gains scope, while the methodology of empirical legal research ends up being applied in a nuanced manner (Dyevre 2010, 300), taking into account the political and legal specificity of the states and their constitutional courts. Empirical studies with the object of analyzing courts with the power to control legislation by reference to constitutions have been published by researchers in many states, even in those with a similar past to Romania, including its neighbouring states (Garoupa 2019, 143–45), but in Romania the situation is almost completely different. Following the examination of the local scientific literature, we were unable to identify research or works related to the CCR (with the exception of a limited number of papers), which are positioned on the pattern of empirical legal research and which are based on an effective statistical data analysis.

The present study complements the scientific literature regarding the factors that influence or do not influence the CCR in its decision making, by statistically verifying the hypotheses that outline the research question. However, not only the need to understand the local situation or the lack of studies regarding this situation determined this research regarding the CCR, but also the perspective of the politics manifested at or by it.

Every state has, in one form or another, a constitution, that is, every state has a set of written or unwritten rules that regulate the organization and functioning of the state, whether we are talking about democratic states or authoritarian states (Focșeneanu 2018, 15). The control of the constitutionality of laws, in the countries where this exists, assumes that, in principle, a group of

judges have the power to check whether a law has been adopted in compliance with that constitution (Heringa 2014, 188). Those judges, ideally, are considered to be decision makers in their process of checking/controlling laws based on the lack of political bias characteristic to the legislative bodies.

Even so, the view according to which the decision of the judges is based exclusively on the constitutional and objective legal norms is appreciated in the scientific community as not corresponding to reality (Avbelj and Šušteršič 2019b, 142), which is why the studies take into account the political factors that manifest themselves at or by these constitutional courts. If data about the political circumstances in which decisions were made in the past is processed, with the help of statistical analysis methods, one could also anticipate what will happen in the future. The present study also quantifies the possibility that, depending on known political influences, the CCR will decide in one direction or another. At the same time, it should also be noted that this work comes to explain the decision making process of an institution that was created to shape the political and legal life of Romania also in the future: paraphrasing other authors from the other side of the Atlantic (J. L. Yates and Boddery 2017, 399), Presidents of Romania have been and will be, but the CCR is and will continue to be present in the life of Romania through the legacy it leaves behind materialized in the decisions pronounced by it, which remain to be respected in the future.

On the one hand, there is the theoretical conception according to which judges, including those who make up the constitutional courts, decide based on the rules, without being influenced by the political context or political actors who manifest, or at least wish to manifest, their influence in any way or another on the outcome of the conflicts that are judged. On the other hand, political science researchers argue that judges, especially constitutional judges, are not bound by rules, but, on the contrary, are influenced by different internal or external factors, consciously or unconsciously. The main way in which this conflict can be verified between political science researchers and those who, lawyers or not, plead for the lack of bias of judges in one form or another, is done within the framework of empirical legal research by modeling the decision making process, to explain past behaviour and predict future behaviour (Friedman and Martin 2009, 2).

Empirical legal research is complex because it encompasses other sciences such as psychology, sociology, economics, etc., each with the advantages and disadvantages of its own

methodologies and results. But the more the researcher approaches a topic from multiple perspectives, the more likely the concluding remarks will be trustworthy and contribute to how a phenomenon or event is understood (Cane and Kritzer 2013, 1107). It can be argued that such contribution, in the matter of checking the constitutionality of laws, will be even more effectively built when the researcher has an "intimate" knowledge of how laws and the law work, being a practitioner of it (Towfigh 2014, 681–82).

What leads a judge to decide one way or another is considered to be a combination of attitudes, beliefs and experiences that cannot be measured as objectively as a physical phenomenon (Fischman and Law 2009a, 166). Because of this, all empirical legal studies are imperfect, especially due to the fact that they are based on observational, non-experimental data, but these imperfections, given in principle by the different methods of data selection from a population, do not invalidate the results of a study as long as the limitations of the studies in question are admitted in an enlightening manner (M. A. Hall and Wright 2008, 105). A limitation that this study does not have is represented by the problem of the sample: this thesis analyses the entire population of data regarding the decisions issued by the CCR in solving the unconstitutionality objections, over a period of 30 years, from June 1992 to June 2022, thus avoiding a study based on anecdotal evidence.

The data population has certain characteristics that are called variables, because they vary in time and/or space (e.g. the number of judges who make a decision varies from one decision to another, the type of solution varies, which can be one of admitting or rejecting the objection of unconstitutionality), empirical legal studies essentially presupposing statistical analyses that consider such a population of data. Most variables used in this thesis[1] are nominal categorical variables[2]. The most important dependent variables are those related to the ruling (the objection is admitted or rejected – i.e. law invalidated or validated) and the manner in which the decision was taken (with a majority vote or unanimously), which are dichotomous variables. Dichotomous variables are a type of categorical variable that can take one of two possible values or categories, those two categories being mutually exclusive and exhaustive. This implies that those two categories cover all possible outcomes, and an observation or data point can belong to one of the

[1] As they are explained in Annex 3 – Explanations for the units of analysis and variables.
[2] However, there are also categorical ordinal variables or numerical variables.

two categories, but not both simultaneously (an objection of unconstitutionality cannot be both admitted and rejected at the same time, a decision cannot be taken by both a majority vote and unanimously at the same time, the majority of the judges in the panel cannot come from an urban environment and from a rural environment at the same time, etc.). Dichotomous variables are often represented in this paper as "Yes" and "No", but there are other variations of representation. With this in mind, the secondary hypotheses were analysed and tested through the cross-tabulation/contingency tables procedure and binary logistic regression modeling, both representing statistical methods/techniques used in political (social) sciences to model, summarize, describe and analyse the relationship between categorical (dichotomous) variables. Subsequently, these statistical procedures were graphically represented to allow efficient visualization of the data thus analysed. Discovering relevant insights is simplified by dividing the data into subgroups for ease of interpretation. Cross-tabulation has certain limitations. First, in principle, cross-tabulation procedures are limited to two categorical variables at a time, but there are situations where relationships between several variables can be explored simultaneously. Also, it does not directly provide probability estimates or predict the likelihood of an event occurring. Given the need to be able to detect the influence of political factors in the decision making process of a constitutional court, it would not be sufficient just to ascertain a descriptive statistic between the decisions to admit or reject the objections of unconstitutionality and different political circumstances or the decisions taken unanimously and those taken with the majority to prove the presence of the influence of political factors in the decisions of the constitutional court, but several hypotheses and variables must be taken into account (Garoupa 2019, 141), in a way that tends to represent a causal model, at least correlational. In order to be able to more robustly test the secondary hypotheses that shape the behaviour of the CCR, those limits are met by binary logistic regression.

From the perspective of the results, this thesis joins other similar works showing that the courts are not only, paraphrasing Montesquieu, "mouthpieces of the law" (Dyevre 2010, 299). In addition to theoretical and historical novelties, this paper comes with an empirical analysis that highlights several aspects. CCR is influenced when: the fragmentation of the Romanian political arena and case saliency fluctuates; the members of the Parliament, the President of Romania and the Government of Romania submit objections of unconstitutionality; the number of male/urban-born judges in the panel changes. The CCR is not influenced when there is a political identity between most of the CCR judges and the political actor who submitted the first objection of

unconstitutionality, the President of Romania, the main Government party, the main parliamentary party or one of the two presidents of the Chambers in Parliament.

The thesis is structured in nine chapters, followed by the bibliography. After the introduction, this paper addresses the topic of empirical legal research and its connection with political sciences and how it can be used to study the CCR. Although empirical legal research is a developing field of research, lawyers are not always familiar with the possibilities and limits of this type of research and the available methods, political sciences researchers being the pioneers of studies that analyse the legal arena through the research methods and theories specific to the social sciences. The thesis begins with the recognition of empirical legal research as an independent field of study and its relationship with doctrinal study, before debating the usefulness and specificity of empirical legal research methods. To see how empirical legal research can benefit the study of the CCR, the contextualization that will take place will refer to empirical legal research on courts in general and constitutional courts in particular, without omitting the connection between this field of study and the research carried out in the field of political sciences. Empirical legal research, which began in the northern part of the American continent in the interwar period, has as its object of study legal institutions and the law, studying them through research methods taken from the social sciences to identify patterns. This type of research comes as an empirical alternative to the doctrinal study, which involves proposing solutions regarding the application of laws, rather than ascertaining the factual effects of laws and legal institutions, and finds its main utility in discovering the transparency, accountability and efficiency of the world of laws and its institutions. Empirical legal research takes very diverse forms because it draws on other sciences and their research methods and focuses most attention on courts, especially constitutional ones, that deal with abstract rules. The purpose of most empirical legal studies on courts is to test hypotheses about the reasons behind judges' behavior, along with predicting the outcome, that is, the decision made by a court. Studies in empirical legal research regarding courts have, to the greatest extent, had as their object of analysis the supreme courts – "apex courts" – with the right to invalidate laws or actions of the political power, this being the main reason why this type of studies that approach constitutional courts and their decisions empirically is carried out in the field of political sciences. Subsequently, this chapter discusses the purpose and usefulness of this type of research regarding the decisions issued by the CCR in solving the objections of unconstitutionality, decisions that have extremely vast implications that reverberate

in society, as they outline and especially limit the power and even shape the Romanian political regime.

The thesis then addresses the concept of courts with the power to control laws, especially Kelsenian ones[3] – i.e. those separated from the supreme court in a state. In order to set the framework in which the CCR operates from a normative and practical point of view, it is necessary to see what a Kelsenian-type constitutional court entails, through a logical and cursive exposition of the theories and practices established at the level of these courts. Indeed, as the literature notes, no theory can be devised that encompasses all the historical and contextual variations in which all courts with the power to legislatively review legislation have been created (Dixon and Ginsburg 2018, 36– 59), especially because due to the specificity of constitutional and historical circumstances, such as the lack of a written constitution or the existence of a constitution that can be easily modified (Deleanu 2006, 233), not all countries of the world have adopted a form of constitutionality control of laws (Safta 2018, 97). After presenting the reasons for the creation of constitutional courts/supreme courts with prerogatives in the control of laws and presenting some typologies regarding these courts, the main historical events that marked the evolution of these courts will be outlined. In the context of the presentation of the main features of the constitutional courts, the arguments regarding the immersion in the sphere of politics undertaken by these courts will also be discussed. Initially, the reasons why such courts are created are presented: diminishing trust in legislative bodies; the strategy of political parties participating in the creation of a constitutional court, especially when new constitutions are adopted; the influence of the regional and international sphere through the "power of example"; the historical and cultural context that allows or argues for correcting the mistakes of the past; the need to respect the fundamental law and the rights of citizens. The classifications of the constitutional control of laws are then addressed, the most important classification being that between the American model – in which ordinary courts, led by the supreme court, decide the constitutionality of laws – and the Kelsenian model – in which a special court, separated from the classic judicial system, is created to decide on the correctness of laws in relation to the fundamental law, and the historical evolution of this control of the constitutionality of laws. The chapter then continues with the formation and functioning of the Kelsenian constitutional courts of most states – i.e. their main/common

[3] Name given by the scientific literature after Hans Kelsen, the one who materialized in the Constitution of Austria this concept of the constitutional court that is separated from the usual judicial system.

characteristics – and concludes by analyzing the problems imposed primarily by the interference of this control in the political arena and the other way around, represented mainly by the fact that political parties have the main say in the appointment of judges in the constitutional courts and by analysing the controversy according to which a small group of people not elected by the electorate can decide to invalidate laws passed by legislative bodies.

The empirical study of the decisions of the CCR cannot be undertaken without presenting the norms that define the CCR, the place it occupies in the organization of the Romanian state, the way in which the court panels are formed and its powers, because any result must be understood through the lens of the way where a constitutional court operates in the specific political context of a country. Considering the object of study of this thesis, i.e. the CCR decisions pronounced in the *a priori* control[4], it is necessary to detail this function of the CCR in the context of the political controversies based on which the main hypotheses of this paper start. After presenting the rules on the basis of which the CCR operates, starting from the Constitution, Law no. 47/1992 regarding the organization and functioning of the Constitutional Court and also reaching the internal regulations, the chapter addresses how judges are assigned within the CCR, the activities that the CCR undertakes within the state and how they are carried out. The aspects related to independence, immovability, incompatibility are discussed, but the procedure for solving requests addressed to the CCR, the solutions that the CCR can pronounce through its decisions and the effects of these decisions on the Romanian political and legal system are also described. Before ending, the chapter presents the Romanian specificity in the matter of the interference between the political sphere and the CCR, whose judges are assigned by the Parliament and the President of Romania, and the characteristics of the decisions pronounced in solving of the objections of the unconstitutionality of the laws – that is, the decisions to validate or invalidate the laws before their coming into force.

Then follows the chapter dedicated to the history of the control of the constitutionality of laws in Romania and the history of the CCR. As some reputable authors argue, the role played by a constitutional court in a state cannot be understood without first understanding the process by which constitutional regulations came into existence, regulations under which a constitutional

[4] The terms *a priori* and *a posteriori* are used in the legal language specific to decisions issued by the CCR to distinguish between decisions that concern laws before they are promulgated and before their entry into force (*a priori* decisions) and decisions that concern laws after they have been promulgated and have already entered into force (*a posteriori* decisions).

court is established in the overwhelming majority of the states where such an institution is present. We must take into account the fact that the details of the process of checking the constitutionality of laws are the product of political negotiations within the assemblies that adopted the fundamental law (Garoupa 2019, 135). That is, one must take into account the political process on the basis of which those constitutional texts were drafted, a process which mainly involved debating, voting and modifying the drafts and projects regarding a constitutional law and the compromises made within the legislative assembly that adopted that constitution (Garoupa 2012, 29; Berridge 2018, 369; Oliveira Diniz Gonçalves 2022, 2). The analysis of the history of the CCR starts with the history of constitutionality control in Romania before 1989, taking into account the different jurisprudential or institutional ways in which this constitutionality control was exercised starting from 1858. Starting the foray with the Paris Convention of 1858, continuing with Cuza's Statute of 1864, the Constitutions from 1866, and the following ones, the way in which, before 1989, the control of the constitutionality of laws in Romania had different forms is outlined: through the courts, through specialized organs of the state, through structures of the legislative body. The comments will mainly continue with the analysis of the official documents that were used in the Constituent Assembly by the members of the Romanian Parliament, focusing on the Commission that was in charge of drafting the Constitution. After the Revolution of 1989, a commission was created with the aim of drafting the Romanian Constitution of 1991, the fundamental law by which the CCR was established. For this reason, a very careful look is cast on documenting and revealing how the debates within the Constituent Assembly and within the Drafting Commission of the Constitution led to the creation of the CCR, in order to discern the arguments behind the establishment of this institution. The history of the creation of the CCR ends with the adoption of the 1991 Constitution and the formation of the first panel of judges of the CCR. It also considers the history and evolution of the CCR after its establishment in the political context produced by the main institutions and relevant political events. The 17 judicial panels that have been active until the summer of 2022 are presented along with the significant political events in which they participated, which they determined or which influenced them in one way or another.

The identification of the patterns of the assigning practice of the 41 judges who worked during the 30 years studied period outlines the sixth chapter of this paper. The hypothesis advanced by the literature is that according to which constitutional judges will vote according to their political preferences, preferences that are identified with their political affiliation, affiliation given

by the party of the political actor who assigned them judges to the constitutional court. For this reason, after a generalization regarding the political game underlying the appointments of judges in the constitutional courts, the political affiliation of each of the 41 judges who worked at the CCR during the 30 years of studied activity will be argued. Afterwards, a descriptive statistic will be explored regarding the 16 court panels made up of the 41 judges, concluding with the reasons for the premature departures of some of the members of the Court. The main personal, professional and political characteristics of the judges are taken into account in order to outline empirical data regarding the assignments made within this institution, with the aim of outlining patterns that are mainly used as variables in the following statistical analyses.

Theories that provide an overview of the behaviour of constitutional courts are then put into perspective in order to outline the basis for empirical analyses of the CCR. The literature on the main theories, hypotheses and demonstrations related to the judicial behavior of the constitutional courts has been grouped to highlight primarily the judicial behaviour of the constitutional courts in their external political arena – i.e. the "politics" made by the constitutional courts, by reference to their decisions –, then the judicial behaviour of the judges within the constitutional courts – i.e. the politicization/polarization found inside the constitutional courts, by reference to the type of votes that were the basis of the decisions of these courts. Other factors that reflect the politics made by the constitutional courts or made within these courts that do not relate to the arena of other political actors or the internal "politicians" of these courts (e.g. the way decisions and opinions are drafted and written) were also taken into account. It is started with the idea that different models exist to capture how judges are perceived to make decisions. Finally, a main typology of the behaviour of constitutional judges is highlighted, i.e. the three perspectives to explain how judges make decisions, namely:

- the legal/formal model of decision making, the classic one, which assumes that judges make decisions based on normative arguments, mainly written matters – norms, conclusions, precedents;
- the attitudinal model of decision making, which assumes that judges effectively decide only on the basis of their raw political preferences, a perspective that also implies that a changing a judge changes the average of the political preferences of the constitutional court, so those who appoint constitutional judges are practically invited to assign either

people whose political preferences coincide with their own, or people who show their loyalty to the designator in order to tip the balance of chance to a decision that suits them;

- the strategic model of decision making, which assumes that judges decide in an institutional context, with two sub-modalities:
    - the externalist one, from the perspective of which, starting from the reality that judges do not make decisions "in a vacuum", but anticipate the reaction of other political actors, so that in promoting their political preferences they take into account and are constrained by the institutional and political context external to the constitutional court in which they operate;
    - the internalist one, which reflects the fact that decision making involves a collegial "game", in which judges juggle between their power of influence over their colleagues and the opportunity to join their colleagues if they see that their preferences are unlikely to prevail, being constrained by of the formal rules of how to make a decision in a collegial panel.

These three ways of judging the behaviour of constitutional courts are the basis of the research question of the thesis. The essence of the discussion consists in the externalist and internalist strategic behaviour, according to the distinction mentioned above, by identifying in the specialized literature the main predictors of the strategic behaviour of constitutional courts. In addition to the political factors, the influence of the personal characteristics of the judges is also addressed, as well as the aspects related to the writing of the decisions of the constitutional courts.

The result of the empirical analyses of all CCR decisions in the period between 1992 and 2022 in solving the objections of unconstitutionality is presented in the eighth chapter. After an immersion in descriptive empirical analyses, the focus shifts to finding causal relationships between various political or other factors and how the CCR responded to the objections of unconstitutionality. Variables are analysed regarding the fragmentation of the political arena, the size of the majority or the opposition, case saliency, the identity of those who submit objections of unconstitutionality to the CCR, both from the perspective of the externalist and the internalist strategic behaviour. Later, the influences of the personal characteristics of the CCR judges – their gender, age and place of birth – are also taken into account. Finally, the conclusion is reached that

the CCR “does not make political decisions”, but it cannot be argued that it simply decides based on normative arguments, but rather that the CCR “makes strategic decisions”.

First of all, it is shown that the CCR followed the tendency to admit the objections of unconstitutionality (that is, to invalidate laws) when: the fragmentation of the Romanian political arena decreases; case saliency decreases; members of the Parliament do not submit objections of unconstitutionality; the President of Romania submits objections of unconstitutionality also; the Government of Romania submits objections of unconstitutionality also; there is no political identity between the Prime Minister of Romania and the main party “represented” in the CCR.

Secondly, the CCR revealed the tendency to adopt decisions by majority vote (that is, not to vote unanimously) when: the fragmentation of the Romanian political arena increases; case saliency increases; the members of the Parliament submit objections of unconstitutionality also; the President of Romania does not submit objections of unconstitutionality; the Romanian Government does not submit objections of unconstitutionality.

The tendency of the CCR to invalidate laws was then noticed to the extent that: the number of male judges in the panels decreases; the majority of panel judges were born in the urban environment, as well as the tendency of the CCR to adopt decisions by majority vote when: the number of male judges in the panels increases; the average age of the panels is increasing; most of the judges in the panels were born in the rural area.

It is pointed out that the CCR is not influenced in making its decisions when: the first objector is a political actor with the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party; the President of Romania has the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party; the main Government party has the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party; the main parliamentary party has the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party; the President of the Chamber of Deputies has the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party; the President of the Senate has the same political identity as most CCR judges affiliated with a party.

The thesis ends by presenting the general conclusions reported in each chapter, as well as by discussing the main implications and contributions of the research, along with the outline of future research themes.

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