

# POLITICS

## TREND: WINTER TAKES ITS TOLL.

### Romania May Be Doing Better, but Romanians Feel It's Going Worse

Compared to our previous poll of January, there ~~was~~ a clear downturn in the public opinion. A significant ~~rate-proportion~~ of Romanians are unhappy with their lives, the number of those who believe ~~that~~ the country is heading in the wrong direction has increased, and the number of those who ~~doubt-are confident that~~ the Government has the ability to handle things has decreased significantly. ~~A large minority still, but a minority only (38%) considers the Government can cope with the social and economic problems of the country, while the majority considers it unable to do so (48%).~~ The ~~energy bill~~ hardships of this winter and the ~~recent~~ corruption scandals ~~which plagued the first term~~ have ~~obviously~~ taken their toll ~~on public mood.~~

Fig. 1. Country heading in the good direction

	%
Agree	31.9
Disagree	57.3 (up from 50.9 Jan 2002)
No answer	10.9
Total	100.0

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**Fig. 2. Satisfaction with one's life**

	%
Not satisfied at all	26.0
Not satisfied	52.4
Quite satisfied	20.5
Little satisfied	0.8
Total	100.0

**Fig. 3. Better off than last year**

	%
Much better	0.4
Better	11.6
Same	40.5
Worse	37.2
Much worse	10.1
Total	100.0

**Fig. 4. The Government can improve things**

	%
Agree	38.1 (down from 45.1 in Jan 2002)
Disagree	47.7
No answer	14.2
Total	100.0

The depressive mood of Romanians also shows in their negative expectations **concerningfor** the future. Most people are **skc**eptical, do not expect things to improve considerably in **the near futurea year**, and **a majority does not expect Romania to be invited to join NATO, despite being supporters of her joining.**

Fig. 5. Expectations of life improvement ~~one year from now~~~~year on~~

	%
Much better	1.7
Better	21.8
Same	32.5
Worse	22.8
Much worse	8.3
No answer	12.9
Total	100.0

Fig. 6. Romania will be invited to join NATO this year

	%
Optimists	34.2
Pessimists	42.0
Do not know	23.8
Total	100.0

This discontent ~~is has~~ not yet turned into political capital ~~for opposition parties~~, be it negative or positive. Party preference has stayed largely the same since our last polling, with a dominant party (PSD), slightly below the absolute majority (47%). The Democratic Party has ~~slightly~~ narrowed ~~a bit~~ the distance separating it from Greater Romania Party (PRM), but the three important opposition parties together do not reach PSD's score. ~~Within the~~ ~~As regards possible future~~ presidential ~~race~~ candidates, Adrian Nastase seems to have consolidated ~~at least partly~~ the transfer from Ion Iliescu's voters. The support of the current President for any of the candidates is likely to play an important role in the 2004 electoral ~~campaign~~ for presidential elections. However, the percent~~age~~ of undecided is strikingly high, and significantly more people are confused concerning presidential elections (50%) than concerning legislative elections (42%).

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**Fig. 7. Party preferences**

	%
PD	12.4
PSD (PDSR or PSD)	47.5
PNL (and ApR)	10.5
PNTCD	1.5
PRM	14.9
PUR	2.5
UDMR	7.0
UFD	1.9
Other party	1.9
Undecided	42.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The profile of NATO-optimists is ~~worth noting~~ rather vague. Pessimism seems to draw equally on urban and rural residents. We found no significant regional differences, although in our sample people from Bucharest were the most optimistic and those from Transylvania the most pessimistic. The more optimistic are likely to be ~~the oldest~~ and ~~the least~~ educated, ~~as well as~~ those in favor of Romania joining NATO ~~tend to be more optimistic.~~

**Fig. 8. President preference**

	%
Adrian Nastase	42.7
C.V. Tudor	16.9
Valeriu Stoica	0.7
Petre Roman	1.6
Theodor Stolojan	7.5
Traian Basescu	16.5
Emil Constantinescu	2.1
Mugur Isarescu	1.6
Ion Iliescu	0.2
Mircea Geoana	3.2
Other	6.9
Undecided	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Fig. 9. Explanatory model of NATO-optimism

Predictor	Association and significance
Favors NATO integration	+ ***
Income	N/S
Low education	+ *
Aged	+ *
Town size	N/S
R <sup>2</sup>	0.11

Legend: + signifies a positive correlation, - a negative correlation; \* predictor significant at  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (\*\*\*=strongest association); N/S means that the variable did not turn out to be a predictor

Whilste Romania has recorded some progress in its race to join NATO, although European integration is stalling as usual, Romanians seem not to have noticed themit. By and large they are as pessimistic as they were a year ago, and significantly more scepticalal towards the direction that the country is heading to, and the Government's ability to lead it.