

POLITICS

TREND ANALYSIS: POLITICAL TRUST AND PREFERENCE²

As the effects of the latest elections are fading away, the decline in political trust can play a critical role once the Government moves for the unpopular measures it is bound to take.

The government's decline in public trust reported in our previous issue is confirmed. The polling institute CURS reports that a majority of the population is now skeptical towards the overall direction of the country, despite the Government scoring well on both the Schengen 'black' visa issue and the Report of the European Parliament. The decline of public trust in the government shows that we are entering a second phase of government support after the relaxation which usually follows the elections: the government is progressively reduced to the trust of its basic constituency, and further decline of support in the urban areas is to be expected. However, as the situation of the political opposition seems to degrade rather than improve, the main challenges to this government come from the economic and social situation and not from the opposition and media. By and large, the government also seems to continue enjoying a friendly media, with the exception of Culture Minister Razvan Teodorescu, author of a few highly controversial decisions.

² Data from the CURS poll of July 2001 sponsored by the Romanian Association for Freedom and Development (ARLD) and the June Metromedia Barometer of Opinion sponsored by the Open Society Foundation. References are made to a previous March CURS poll.

Fig. 1. Public mood on life and government (%)

	February	March	May	June
Romania heading nowhere or in the wrong direction	54	39	52	46
Satisfied with living conditions	18		25	
Optimism with one's economic future in one year's time	36		19	
Trust in President	58		48	
Trust in Prime Minister	67		49	
Trust in main opposition leader (Traian Basescu)	65		50	
Trust in government	52		44	
Trust in Judiciary	40		29	

The parties preference situation has remained quite stable.

Fig. 2. Voters' options

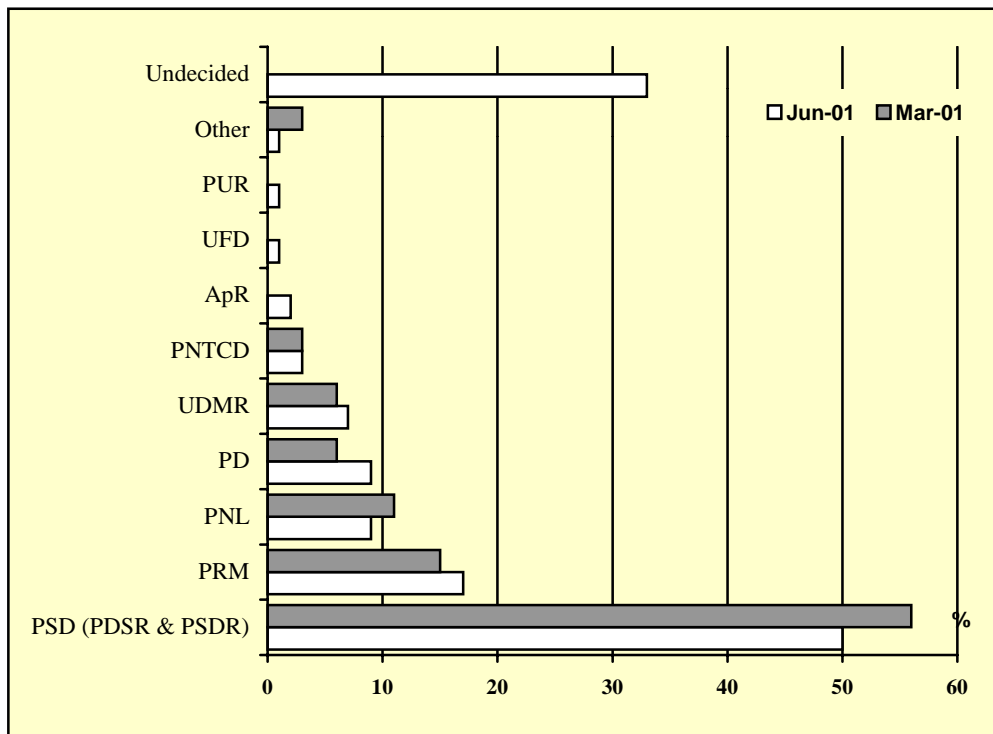


Fig. 3. Crosstab: former and current vote preference (%)

Today's vote preference	Latest elections vote				
	PDSR	PRM	PNL	ApR	PD
PDSR	89.1	4.1	1.5	-	3.1
PRM	8.2	82	3.1	-	3.6
PNL	11.3	3.2	75.8	-	4.8
ApR	12.5	12.5	25	25	25
PD	7.4	1.9	5.6	1.9	81.5

Based on BOP data, Metromedia, June 2001.

A closer look at the public confidence top, still led by Adrian Nastase, Ion Iliescu and Traian Basescu, shows a cleavage between rural areas, endorsing Ion Iliescu, and urban ones endorsing both Nastase and Basescu. Confidence in the leader of the government party and the main leader of the opposition is significantly correlated (Pearson 0.282). All other things being equal, Basescu is endorsed by a younger generation compared to Nastase. Determinants of trust in Ion Iliescu are different, however, as President Iliescu remains still the main public figure trusted by the worse off, the old and the peasants, in other words by those strongly dissatisfied with their lives.

Fig. 4. Explanatory OLS regression models. Trust in political leaders

Determinants	Trust Iliescu	Trust Basescu	Trust Nastase
Wealth ³	- ***	NS	NS
Age	**	NS	*
Education	NS	NS	NS
Town size ⁴	***	- *	NS
Satisfied with one's life	- *	NS	NS
Trust Government	***	**	***
Trust trade unions	NS	***	NS
Trust political parties	NS	*	*
Trust Parliament	NS	NS	NS
Trust state companies	NS	NS	NS
Adjusted R ²	0.156	0.072	0.140

* significant at $p < 0.05$, ** significant at $p < 0.01$, *** significant at $p < 0.000$; - indicates a negative correlation. NS signifies the variable did not turn out as a predictor.

³ Scales ascending if not otherwise specified.

⁴ 1 to 6, 6 is village

Fig. 5. Subjective assessment of one's living standards evolution (%)

	Living standard compared to last year	Expectations for living standard in one year's time
Much worse	7	5
Worse	35	21
Same as last year	40	30
Better	15	29
Much Better	1	
No Answer	2	14

The top of worst fears of the population has remained basically the same as over the last years, with fear of price rises and sickness on the first two positions. The fear of a war and its effects in the region ranks only fourth with about a fifth of the total answers.

Fig. 6. Which are your two main concerns?

People's most stringent worries (% , only relevant choices out of a larger number of indices)	Most stringent	Second most stringent
Prices	52	49
Disease	43	46
Future of children	38	39
War in the region	19	18
Crime	17	20
Unemployment	16	17
Social Unrest	8	6