



GLOBSEC TRENDS 2023

COUNTRY REPORT ROMANIA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2023, GLOBSEC conducted a poll involving 1,000 respondents in eight Central and Eastern European countries to analyse societal attitudes on the EU, NATO, the war in Ukraine, and health, among other topics. Based on the results in Romania, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- **Romanian youth are highly vulnerable to pro-Kremlin narratives on some issues.** The youngest age cohort of Romanians (18-34 years) proved to be more susceptible to pro-Russian narratives concerning NATO or the war in Ukraine than the older age group (55+). This poses a potential challenge to Romania in the long term. However, there are certain exceptions, for instance on democratic values and LGBTI+ people's rights, where younger people are more resilient to narratives often spread by the Kremlin to undermine liberal democracies.
- **Losing faith in the US.** After a substantial increase in Romanians considering the US to be one of the country's top two strategic partners, support declined in the past year. The voters who lost faith in the US did not opt for Russia or China instead. Rather, they became undecided and could be more easily manipulated via misleading narratives.
- **Confusion about the war.** Some segments of Romanian society are confused about the war in Ukraine. For instance, while 78% of Romanian respondents believe that weapon deliveries to Ukraine help the country defend itself, 59% agreed that they provoke Russia and bring Romania closer to war, indicating a large part of respondents agreeing with both statements. The battle of narratives about the war is certainly not over in Romania, and malign actors will seek to exploit this confusion.
- **Anti-AU narratives resonate.** Romanians are the most likely among the polled countries to agree that the EU dictates to them what Romania should do, without having the power to influence these decisions. This belief is prevalent across the society, but it did not cause a turn away from the EU membership support.
- **Lack of respect for LGBTI+ rights.** Romania is one of the least welcoming countries towards sexual minorities in CEE. Respondents in the middle-aged group (35-54 years) and the older age group (55+) were especially reluctant to accept rights for LGBTI+ people.
- **Healthcare-related disinformation sticks strongly.** Romanian respondents hold firm beliefs in misleading narratives regarding healthcare. Attitudes towards this issue could be blamed for a significant collapse in support for EU membership and trust in authorities during the years of the pandemic.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Reach out to young Romanians:** Romanian opinion-shapers and trusted experts need to focus more on communicating with young people to ensure that Romanian society remains resilient to foreign malign influence attempts in the long term. The data shows that, so far, Romania has failed to fully engage the youth in embracing the country's Western orientation in terms of institutions. It is crucial for these efforts to be led by independent NGOs and experts, not the political elite, which often lacks the trust of the local youth.
- 2. Communicate about the benefits of the West:** It is highly recommended to regularly communicate the benefits of Romania being a part of the West. The understanding that Romania is better off in the EU/NATO should not be taken for granted. Launching a long educational campaign outlining the basics of how the European Union and NATO function, and how Romania can influence policy outcomes, would be especially beneficial. Education on this should be integrated into school curricula from a young age.
- 3. Approve Romania's Schengen accession:** It is crucial for Romania's entry to Schengen to be approved. The news about Romania being denied this opportunity is seen as unfair, pushing Romanians to feel like second-tier citizens in the EU. Both the Commission and the European Parliament recommend the country's accession, so Schengen members opposing it should consider the negative effects their decision is having on local societies.
- 4. The LGBTI+ issue needs to be addressed:** Since the Romanian population is unwelcoming towards sexual minorities, this topic will have to be addressed with great care before populist forces dominate the political agenda regarding this issue. Pro-Western elites need to avoid being labelled as attempting to 'force' policies onto Romanian society.
- 5. Find trusted voices of science:** Data on belief in healthcare-related disinformation suggests that Romania lacks adequate trusted voices on these matters. A campaign to shape opinions on healthcare is crucial to ensure that possible future inoculation campaigns do not encounter long-term resistance from the population. This campaign should be built on representatives of science explaining key healthcare-related data in layman's terms..



Anchored in the West, but...

GLOBSEC Trends polling¹ revealed that the Central and Eastern European region (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) remains firmly committed to their place in Western organizations (EU and NATO). The region also strongly supports Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion. However, there are also reasons for concern: some disinformation narratives are widely shared by the populations of certain countries, including those related to sanctions against Russia or weapons deliveries to Ukraine. Two key outliers in the 8-country sample are Slovakia and Bulgaria, where the absolute majority does not see Russia as the primary culprit for the war in Ukraine, and where maintaining sanctions against Russia is strongly opposed by society.

The overall picture in Romania looks fairly positive: results suggest that Romanians want to see their country firmly anchored in the West. Romanians are the most likely to express a desire for their country to remain an EU member, and backing for NATO membership is the second-highest among the 8 countries surveyed.

Regarding Romanian respondents' choices in bilateral relations, they were far less likely to select Western countries, such as the US or the UK, as Romania's top two strategic partners compared to 2022. Preference for the US fell from 75% to 53%, and for the UK, it declined from 23% to 16%. Support for Germany dropped significantly after 2021, from 42% to 19% in 2022, only recovering to 25% by 2023. This does not necessarily mean that Romanians are increasingly opting to partner with eastern authoritarian regimes; rather, there is a relatively large, 22%-strong group who could not answer the question regarding the country's strategic partners. These respondents could be influenced either way in the future.

In other cases, Romanian public attitudes are not as Kremlin-critical as those of some peers, like Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, or Czechia. For instance, while 85% of Poles say Russia is primarily responsible for the war, only 65% of Romanians agree. Romanian respondents' belief in a variety of pro-Kremlin narratives is strong, compared to the aforementioned peers; for example, 59% said that by providing military equipment to Ukraine, their country is provoking Russia and bringing itself closer to war. These proportions are high even though the factual counterparts of these statements — namely that sanctions work and should be in place until Russia's withdrawal, and that providing military equipment to Ukraine helps Ukraine defend itself — are supported by even larger segments of Romanian society (67 and 78%, respectively).

Finally, while respondents demonstrated firm support for the country's position in the western institutional system, they were somewhat less clear in supporting liberal democratic values. Romanian respondents were the most likely in the CEE region to agree that LGBTI+ is an immoral and decadent ideology, with only 37% of them agreeing that the rights of LGBTI+ people (such as the right to marriage) should be guaranteed. In the following report, we will pinpoint the main vulnerabilities in Romanian society, especially those that could, in the long term, threaten the country's position in the West.

[1] <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2023-united-we-still-stand>

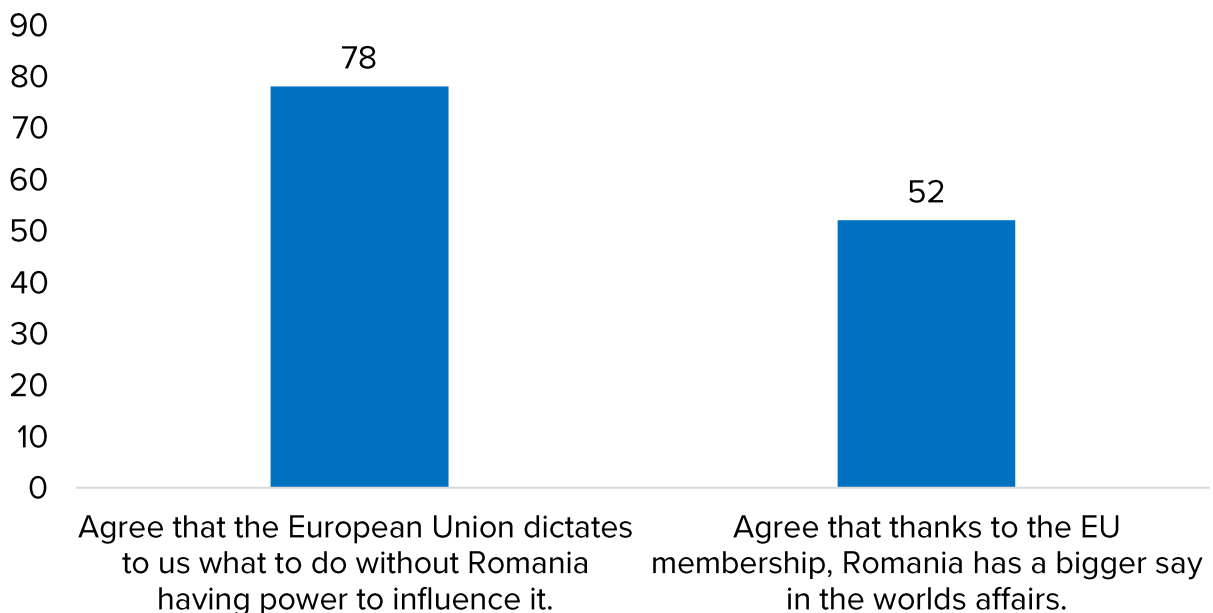


Despite EU support, anti-EU narratives resonate

While Romanian respondents were highly likely to express a desire to remain a part of the European Union, anti-EU disinformation narratives have influenced the population as well. Among the 8 countries surveyed, Romanians were the most likely (78%) to agree that ‘the EU dictates what they should do without Romania having the power to influence it.’ This belief is prevalent across Romanian society, with only a very few social strata being less vulnerable to this narrative, such as university-educated Romanians.

Additionally, Romanians were the second least likely to agree that ‘thanks to EU membership, Romania has a bigger say in the world’s affairs.’ In this case, no specific societal groups stand out as being less susceptible.

Those who agree with key EU-related narratives in Romania, in %



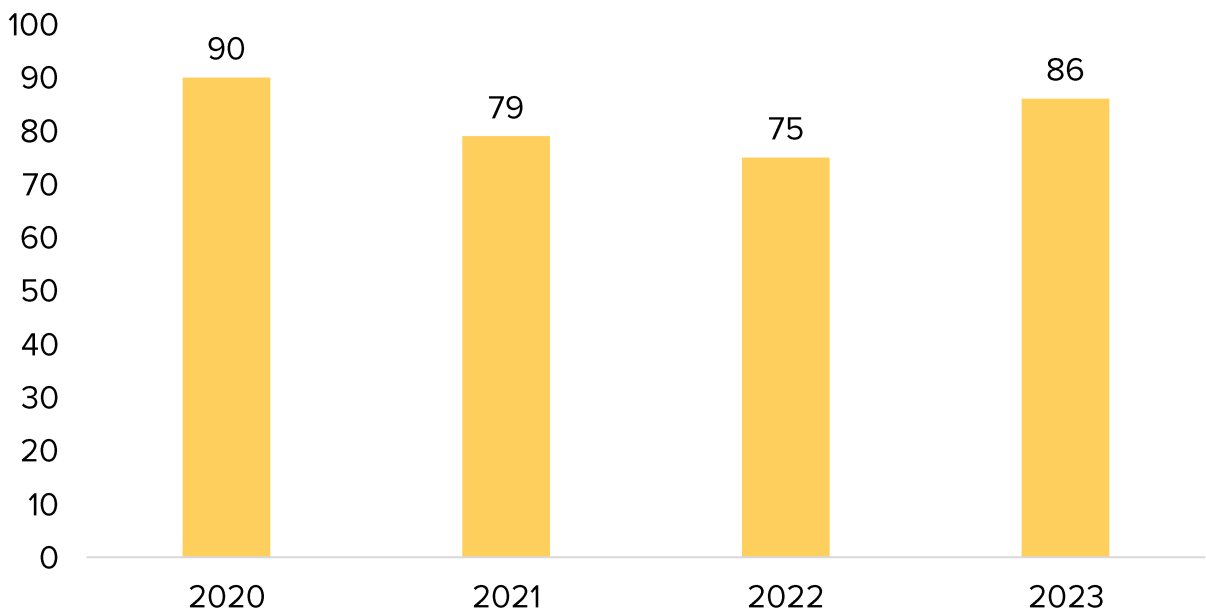


Despite EU support, anti-EU narratives resonate

These results indicate that Romanian political and economic elites have failed to clearly explain to the public how the EU operates and how it benefits their lives. While it has not yet led to a deterioration of support for EU membership, this vulnerability can be exploited by hostile actors. Additionally, the result is very likely the consequence of Romania's exclusion from the Schengen Zone, primarily due to a veto by Austria², and despite the European Commission's³ and the European Parliament's⁴ clear call for Romania (and Bulgaria) to join the area by the end of 2023.

There is a precedent for the volatility of Romanian backing for EU membership. According to GLOBSEC Trends results over the past years, Romanian support for membership fell from 90% in 2020 to 75% in 2022, suggesting that during the years of the pandemic, a substantial part of the Romanian population turned away from the Union. Their support was, however, restored with the end of the large-scale COVID-19 pandemic and with the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Those who supported Romania's EU membership between 2020 and 2023, in %



[2] <https://www.rferl.org/a/austria-romania-opposition-schengen/32561532.html>

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_6945

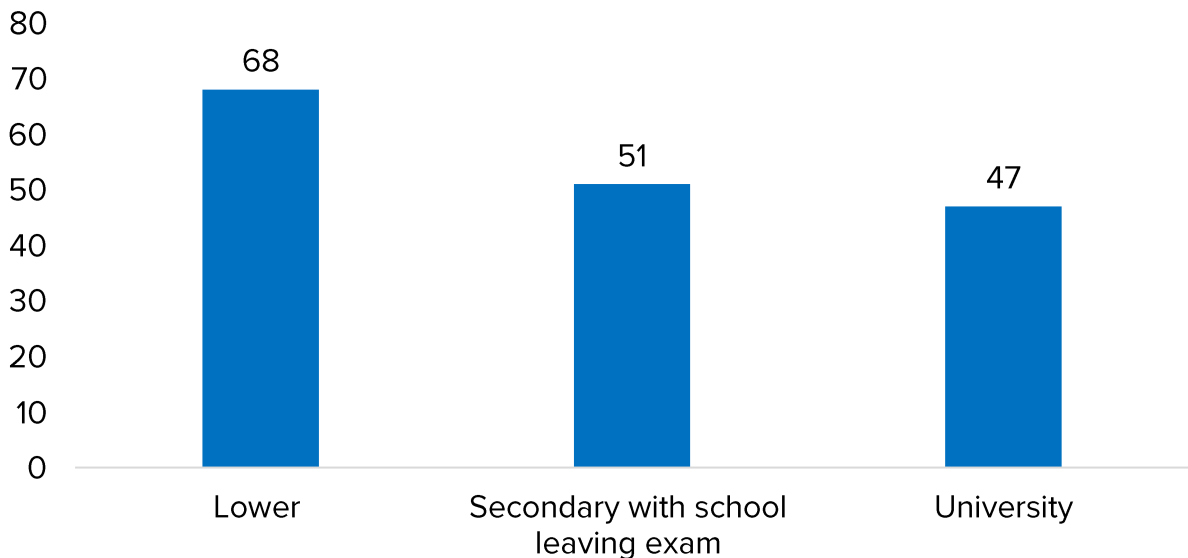
[4] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230707IPRO2431/bulgaria-and-romania-should-be-in-schengen-by-end-of-2023-says-parliament>



Despite EU support, anti-EU narratives resonate

Another matter on which Romanian society proved to be vulnerable is the Euro: 55% agreed that the introduction of the currency would infringe on the country's sovereignty and impoverish the economy, while only 37% disagreed. The level of attained education influenced choices substantially.

Those who agree that 'The introduction of the euro will infringe on our country's sovereignty and impoverish our economy' by education, in %





NATO: Questions about commitment?

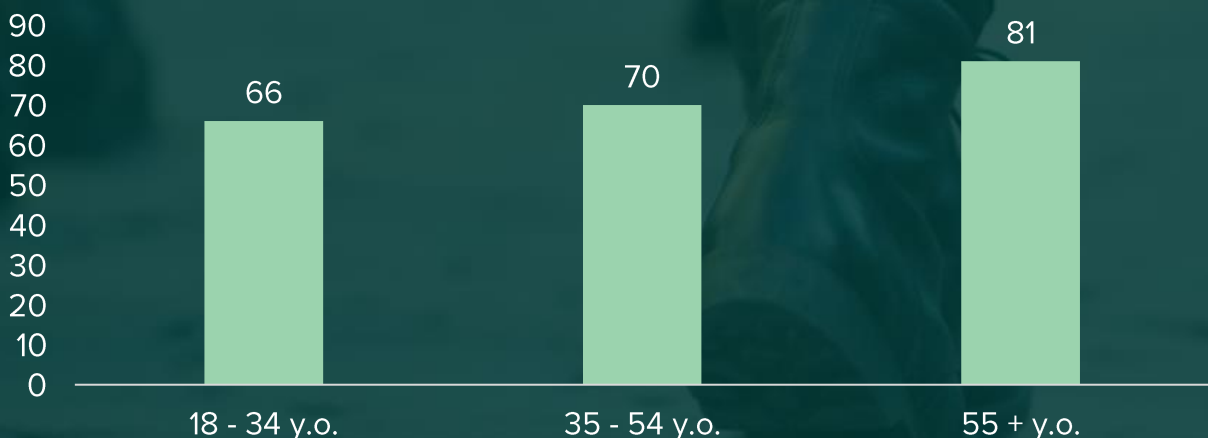
Romanian respondents were the second most likely to express a desire for their country to remain a NATO member, and membership enjoys support across the whole of society.

Importantly, the proportion of Romanians who believe 'their country's NATO membership makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack them' increased by 11 percentage points in 2022, reaching 73%. Yet, this figure still falls below the average of 77% in the 8 countries surveyed.

On this matter, Romanian respondents differed significantly based on age groups. The results from the sample reveal that the youngest citizens are the least likely to say that being a NATO member brings security benefits, although the attitudes of middle-aged Romanians (between 35 and 54 years of age) closely align with them. The oldest Romanians are the most likely to agree with the statement regarding NATO's security guarantees. The result is presumably a consequence of multiple factors.

First, older Romanians have a direct experience of living under a non-democratic political system backed by Moscow and outside of Western organizations. This experience could influence them towards a better acknowledgment of the importance of security guarantees. Second, even beyond the communist era, the historical relationship between Romania and Russia was acrimonious at best.⁵ Third, this historical aversion is not moderated by allegedly shared cultural and historical ties, such as common Slavic heritage, that is often utilised to spread pro-Kremlin sympathies in other countries across the region.

Those who agree that 'My country's membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack us' by age groups.



[5] https://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/src/files/Globsec_VI_Romania-Report_online.pdf

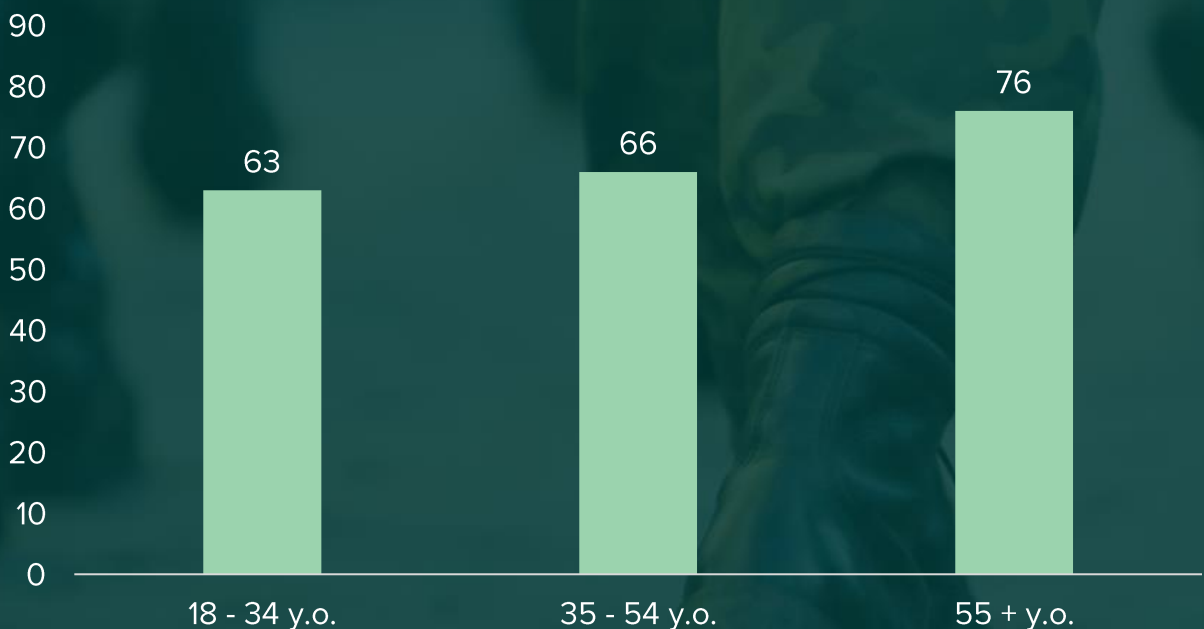


NATO: Questions about commitment?

Another area where Romanian public attitudes diverged from the 8-country average in a negative direction is the question of defending NATO neighbours. Sixty-nine percent of Romanians agreed that ‘their country should defend our NATO neighbours in case of an attack’ – a substantially lower proportion than citizens wanting to remain a part of NATO.

The division by age groups looks similar to the previous statement: the youngest Romanian citizens were the least likely to agree with defending NATO neighbours, while the oldest were the most firmly committed to it. The answer could suggest that younger Romanians, who would likely be drafted to protect those neighbours, are more reluctant to agree than their older peers, who would be unlikely to be physically deployed to the front lines. Naturally, it is easier to agree to going to war for those who would not be fighting physically.

Those who agree that 'Romania should help defend our NATO neighbours, e.g. Poland, Baltic states in case of an attack' by age group



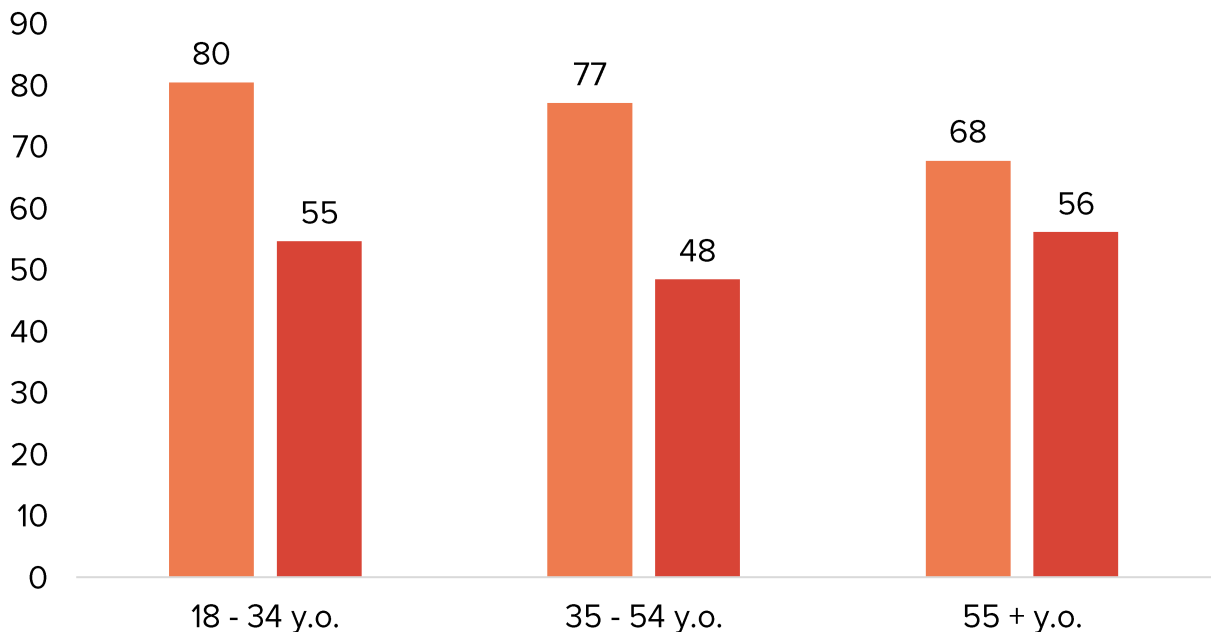


Less affinity towards the United States

The proportion of Romanian respondents who view the US as one of the two main strategic partners for the country fell from 75% to 53% - a decrease of 22 percentage points. Due to this significant drop, the results are visible across all societal groups.

In terms of age groups, the decrease in those who see the US as a key strategic partner for Romania was 25 percentage points among the 18-34 age group, 29 among those between the ages of 35 and 54, and the lowest, 12 percentage points, among the Romanians older than 55 years. As a result, Romanians over the age of 55 are now as likely to consider the US a key strategic partner as the youngest age group.

Views on Romania's partnership with the US by age group



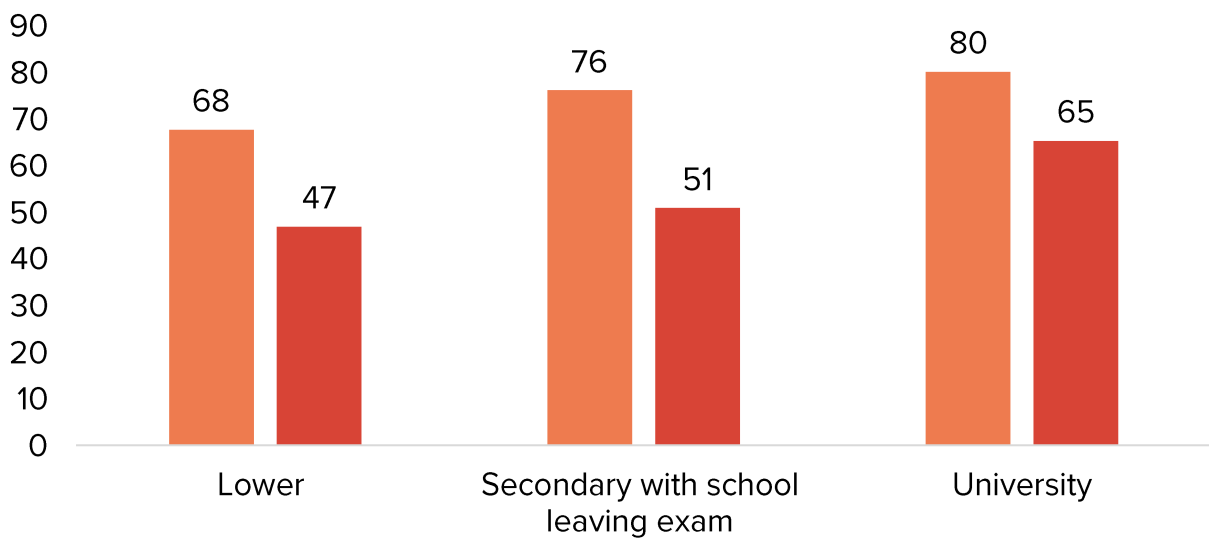
- Those who saw the US as one of two key strategic partners for Romania in 2022.
- Those who saw the US as one of two key strategic partners for Romania in 2023.



Less affinity towards the United States

Regarding the decrease based on educational attainment, those with secondary education with a school leaving exam were the most likely to turn away from the US between 2022 and 2023: from 76% in 2022 to 51% in 2023.

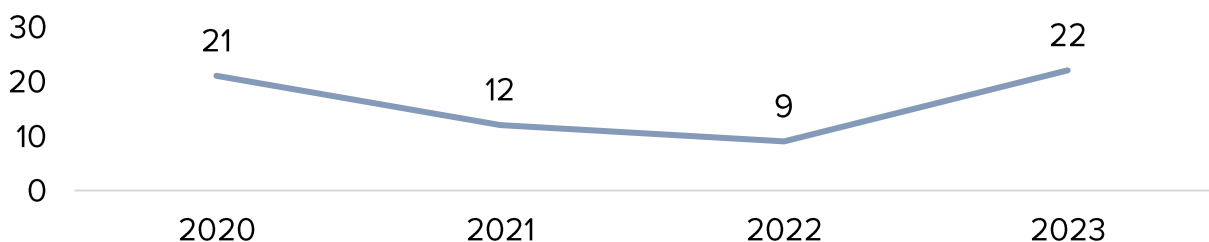
Views on Romania's partnership with the US by education



- Those who saw the US as one of two key strategic partners for Romania in 2022.
- Those who saw the US as one of two key strategic partners for Romania in 2023.

As noted in the introductory chapter, the turn away from the US does not imply that Romanian respondents moved towards the East - only 3% viewed Russia as a strategic partner, and 4% said the same about China. An increase was, however, identified in the number of Romanians who did not know the answer to the question regarding strategic partners.

Those who did not answer the question about strategic partners

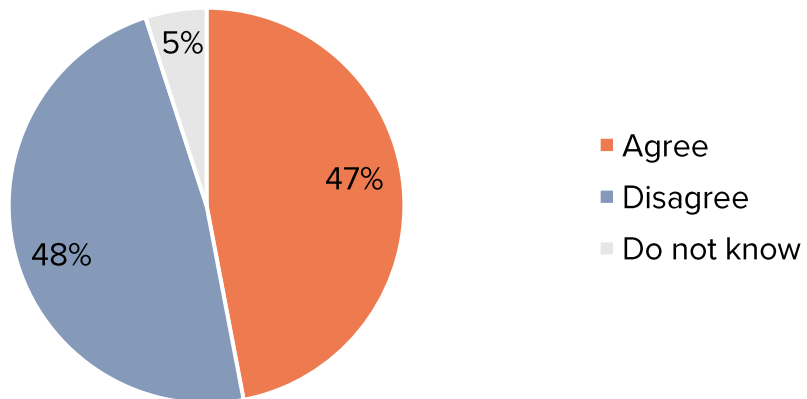




Less affinity towards the United States

Romanian respondents were specifically asked about the US-Romania partnership. Forty-seven percent agreed that ‘the strategic partnership with the US does not benefit Romania; it only transformed Romania into an importer of arms and military equipment,’ while 48% disagreed. This indicates that Romanian respondents are not entirely clear on what benefits the partnership with Washington brings to their country. This fact can be exploited to turn other Romanian respondents away from the United States. Another major factor affecting trust in the West, in general, is that Romania, as noted above, has been denied entry into Schengen, and the country still has not become a part of the US Visa Waiver program despite years of negotiations.⁶ Data shows that Romanian society is divided on this matter across all strata; no societal group stands out as substantially more vulnerable than others.

The strategic partnership with the US does not benefit Romania, it only transformed Romania in importer of arms and military equipment.



[6] <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-significant-progress-visa-waiver-us-official-2023>

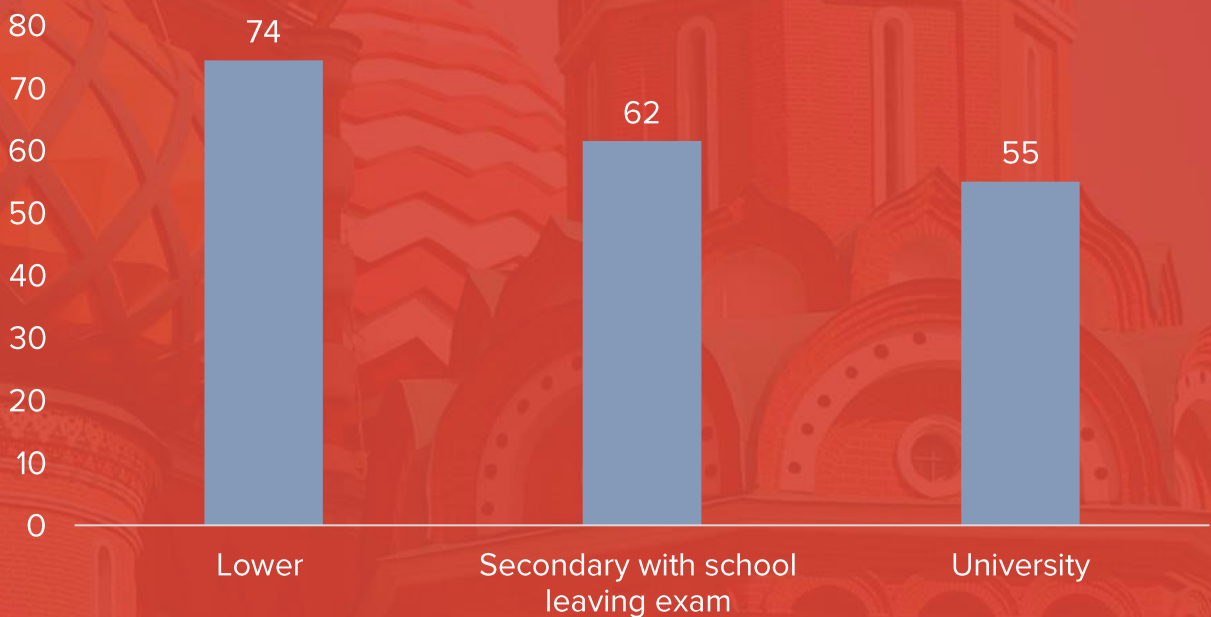


Russia viewed as a threat

64% of Romanian respondents view Russia as a threat, a number above the 8-country average. However, once again, answers differ substantially based on age groups: 56% of those between 35 and 54 years of age believe it, compared to 74% of citizens aged 55 and above.

In this case, the differences are even starker when it comes to education. Perhaps surprisingly, university-educated Romanians were substantially less likely to consider Russia a threat to their country than those with lower levels of education attainment. This could be explained by multiple reasons. It is possible that university-educated respondents were more informed about the state of the Russian Armed Forces and their failure in Ukraine, which could lower their threat perception. A better understanding of NATO and an increased belief in Russia's inability to go to war with NATO could contribute to this as well. Finally, other data substantiates that some among university-educated Romanians are more susceptible to pro-Kremlin narratives about the war, which are attempting to depict Russia as a peaceful actor.

Those who consider Russia to be a threat by level of education.

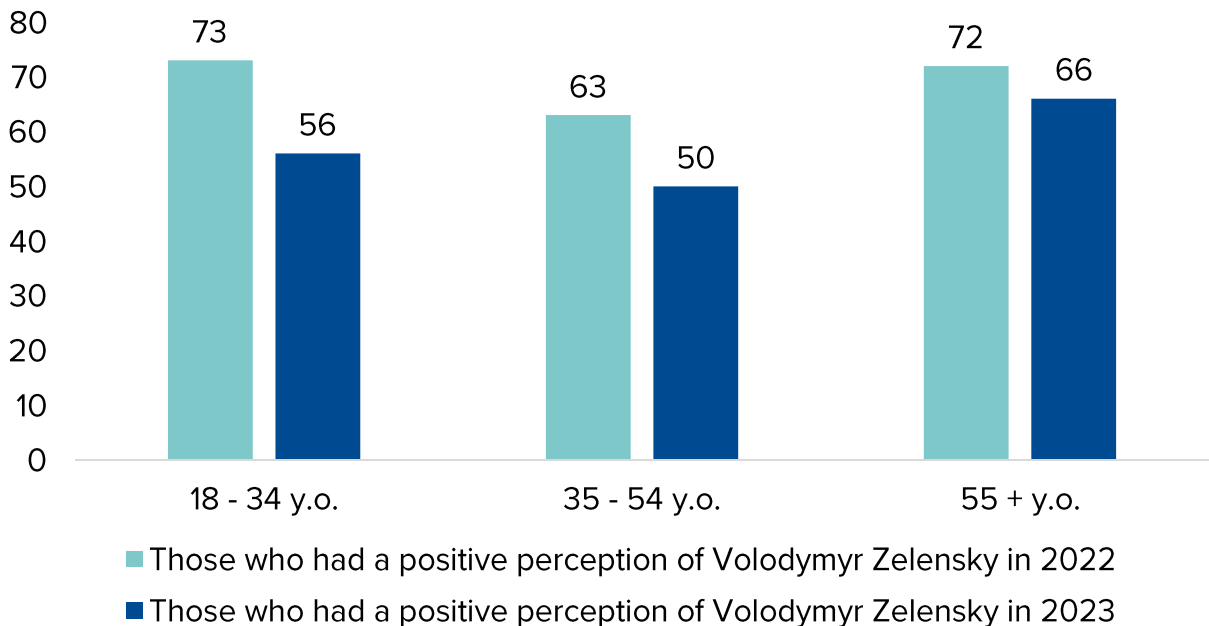




Decline for Zelensky, better ratings for Biden

Romania was one of the four countries surveyed where positive perceptions of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky fell compared to 2022. In Romania’s case, the decline was by 12 percentage points, moving from 69% to 57%. President Zelensky’s ratings fell primarily due to a very substantial drop in positive perceptions among the youngest age group – a decrease of 15 percentage points. The decrease was the same among those with a secondary qualification with a school leaving exam. The result makes it clear that young Romanians are the most likely to turn away from Ukraine; they might be the most susceptible to war fatigue.

Positive perceptions of Volodymyr Zelensky by age group



In contrast, and despite the fact that Romanian respondents were less likely to view the United States as a strategic partner in 2023 than the previous year, US President Joe Biden’s approval rating improved in Romania, rising from 49% in 2022 to 62% a year later. According to Funky Citizens’ Elena Calistru, this increase can be attributed to Joe Biden’s strong support for Ukraine, indicating to the region that it would not be left behind should they also be challenged by external foes.⁷

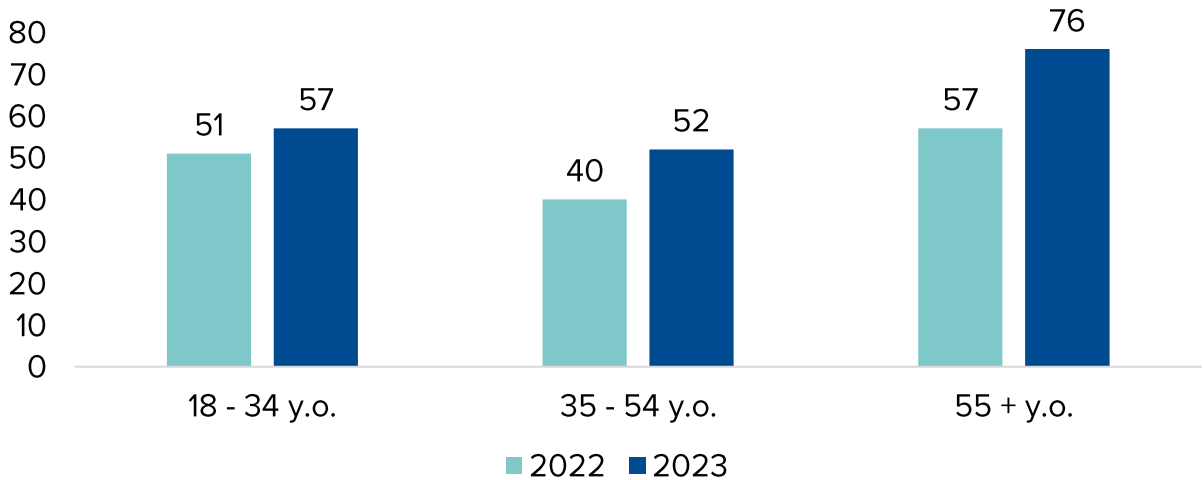
[7] The quote is from an interview conducted for the purpose of this project. See more in the comparative GLOBSEC Trends 2023 study, available here: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2023-united-we-still-stand>



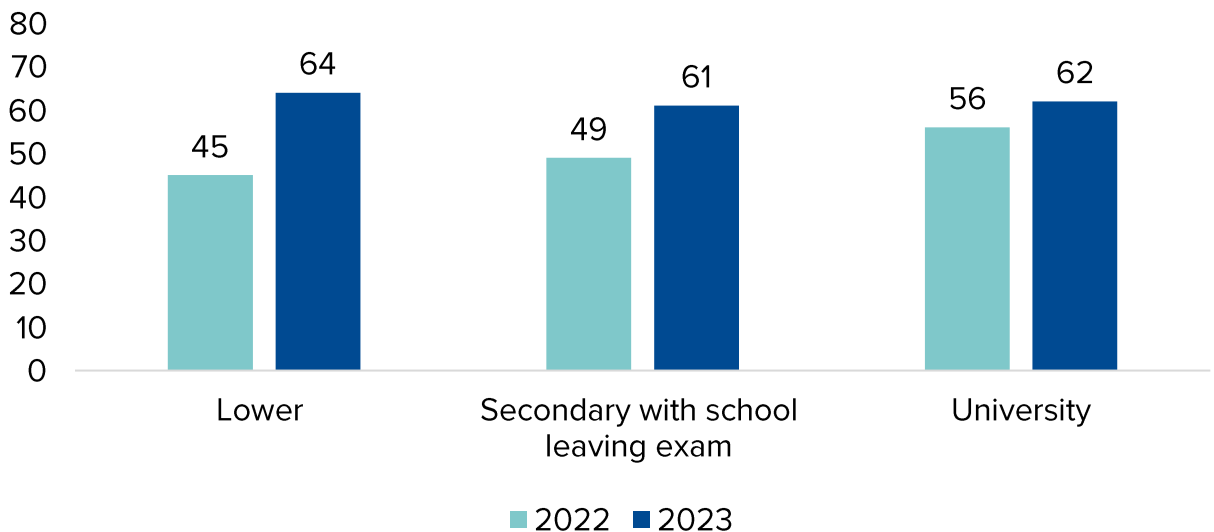
Decline for Zelensky, better ratings for Biden

While the president's approval improved in essentially all societal groups, those over 55 were the most likely to form a more positive opinion of President Biden; his rating improved by 19 percentage points. The level of increase was similar among those who did not pass a secondary school leaving exam.

Those who view President Joe Biden positively by age group



Those who view President Joe Biden positively by education





Some hesitation about the war

65% percent of Romanians stated that they primarily identify Russia as responsible for the war in Ukraine, which is nearly unchanged compared to 2022 and almost equal to the 8-country average of 64%. 67% percent of Romanian respondents agreed that economic sanctions against Russia work and should remain in place, marking the third-highest value in the entire sample.

As has been the case on most occasions, middle-aged respondents (35-54 years of age) were the least likely to place primary responsibility on Russia, with the youngest citizens aligning more closely with their attitudes than with those of the most Kremlin-critical societal layer (55+ years of age).

What is more surprising is that university-educated Romanians proved to be the least likely to attribute the primary responsibility to Russia, while the usually least Kremlin-critical layer of society based on education – those with a school leaving exam – were the most hawkish when it came to this particular question.

Those who find Russia responsible for the war in Ukraine by education





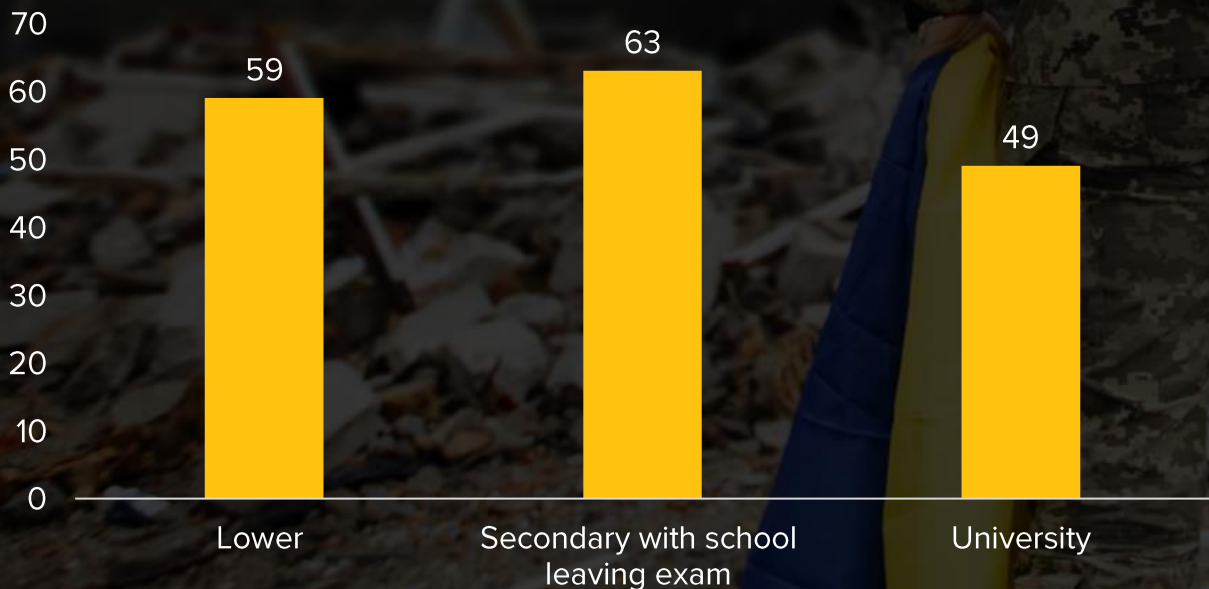
Some hesitation about the war

While 67% of Romanians agreed that economic sanctions against Russia work and should remain in place, 60% of them stated that the sanctions are ineffective because they do not harm Russia. This indicates that there were respondents who agreed with both questions, showing that there is some level of confusion in Romanian society about the issue, although it is possible that some Romanians who agreed with the second statement would like stronger sanctions against Russia.

On sanctions, the type of settlement respondents live in was the most decisive factor influencing popular opinion: 65% of urban voters stated that sanctions were ineffective, but only 54% of rural voters did so.

Romanian respondents also showcased confusion regarding questions on weapon deliveries to Ukraine: 78% agreed that they are helping the country defend itself against Russia, but 59% said that they are provoking Russia and bringing the country closer to war. The 59% figure matches that of Bulgaria, where the population is generally much more favourable to the Kremlin. The answers to the latter statement indicate that while age is important in determining how one sees weapon deliveries, educational attainment is the most critical factor: 63% of those with a school leaving exam believed that the weapon deliveries are bringing Romania closer to war, but only 49% of the university-educated thought so.

Those who think that providing military equipment and weapons to Ukraine, Romania is provoking Russia and bringing itself closer to war



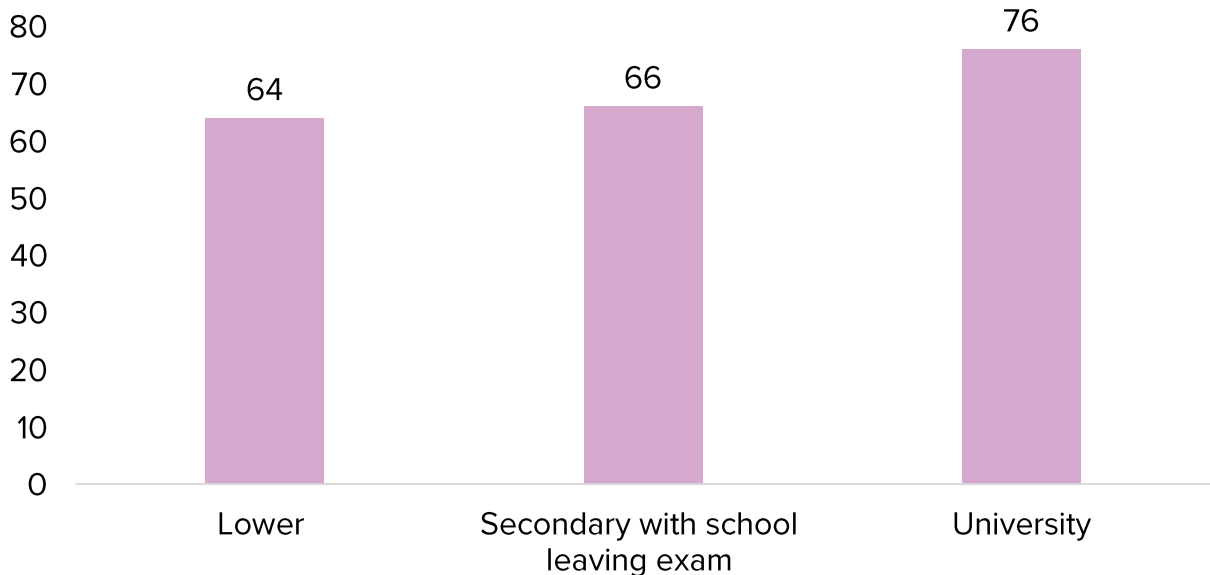


Consensus on democracy

In the 8-country sample, 80% of respondents stated that they believe democracy, a system based on equality, human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law, is good for their respective country. However, when asked about liberal democracy, only 61% approved of the same definition, marking a difference of 19 percentage points. In Romania, this difference was considerably smaller at 8 percentage points.

While approval of democracy is fairly consistent across societal groups, educational attainment plays a significant role in the case of liberal democracy. While only 64% of lower-educated voters agreed with the statement on liberal democracy, 76% of university-educated voters did.

Those who agree that 'Liberal democracy as a system based on equality, human rights and freedoms, rule of law is good for our country' by education



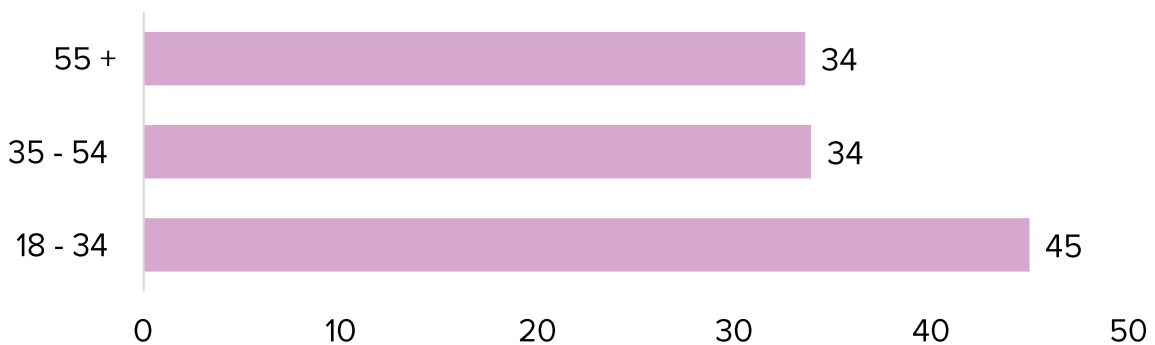


No rights for those we disagree with?

One aspect where Romanian society does not align with liberal democratic values is the issue of rights for the LGBTI+ people. For instance, only 37% of Romanian respondents agreed that the rights of LGBTI+ people, such as the right to marriage, should be guaranteed, despite broadly supporting a definition of democracy that includes equality and human rights.

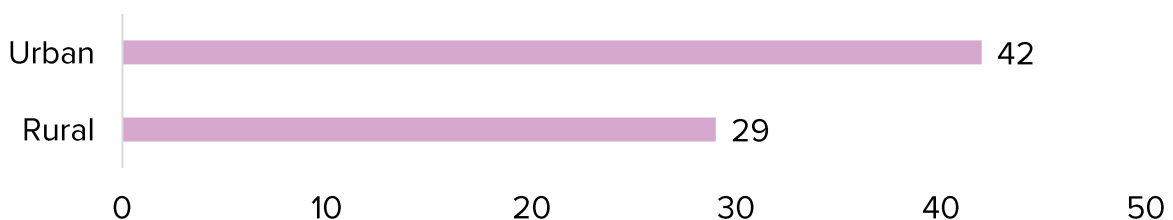
In terms of the acceptance of LGBTI+ people, age is a key determining factor. Unlike in most other cases in the country, the youngest Romanians (18-34) are the most accepting of LGBTI+ people's rights, while middle-aged and older citizens are similarly averse to them. University-educated voters are also more tolerant than less educated citizens.

Those who agree that 'The rights of LGBTI community (such as a right to marriage) should be guaranteed' by age group



The question of sexual minorities is another area where there is a clear urban-rural divide in Romania.

Those who agree that 'The rights of LGBTI community (such as a right to marriage) should be guaranteed' by type of settlement

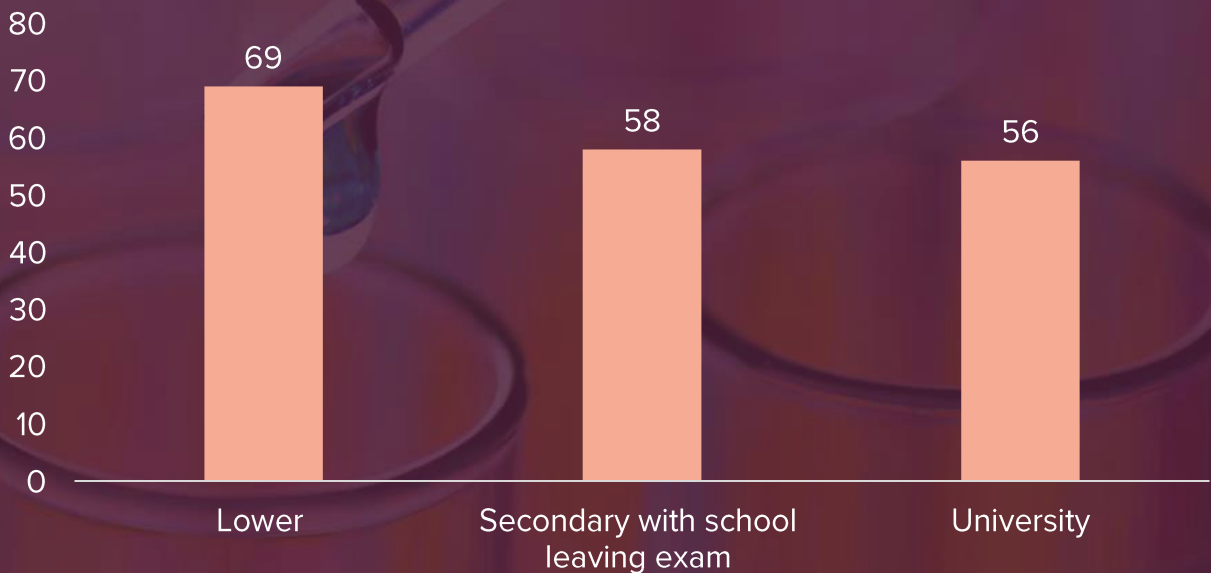




Major concerns about healthcare

Romania proved to be one of the most susceptible countries to healthcare-related disinformation narratives. Sixty-one percent of Romanians agreed that 'Pharmaceutical companies hide effective, real treatments for diseases (e.g., COVID-19, cancer) because they are driven by profits' – the second-highest value after Bulgaria. Data shows that this is a widely held belief across the entirety of Romanian society, although those with lower levels of education are even more susceptible to it.

Those who agree that 'Pharmaceutical companies hide effective, real treatment for diseases (e.g. COVID-19, cancer) because they are driven by profits' by education



Even more concerning is the fact that Romanian respondents were the most likely to agree that 'COVID-19 vaccination increases the chance of untimely deaths.' This not only exceeds the 33% average for the entire sample but also makes Romania the only country where the absolute majority holds this belief. Once again, the level of attained education is the key determinant of views on this matter.



Consequences of belief in health-related disinformation

The strong susceptibility to health-related disinformation could, first of all, make it difficult in the future for Romania to respond to health crises, especially if they can only be combatted via vaccinations.

Moreover, this could explain why a significant portion of Romanians turned away from the West and their own public institutions during the pandemic. For instance, during the years of the pandemic, Romanian support for EU membership slipped from 90% to 75%. In the same period, trust in the armed forces collapsed from 78% to 61%, likely as a result of how authorities handled the pandemic – according to Elena Calistru from Funky Citizens.⁸ Trust in the government did get a boost after 2020, likely due to the election of a new cabinet in December 2020, but it quickly decreased over the next 12 months.

The end of the pandemic, in contrast, led to an increase in support for EU membership, an increase in trust in public institutions, as well as trust in standard mainstream media. This development made Romania the only country where trust in the government increased between 2022 and 2023.

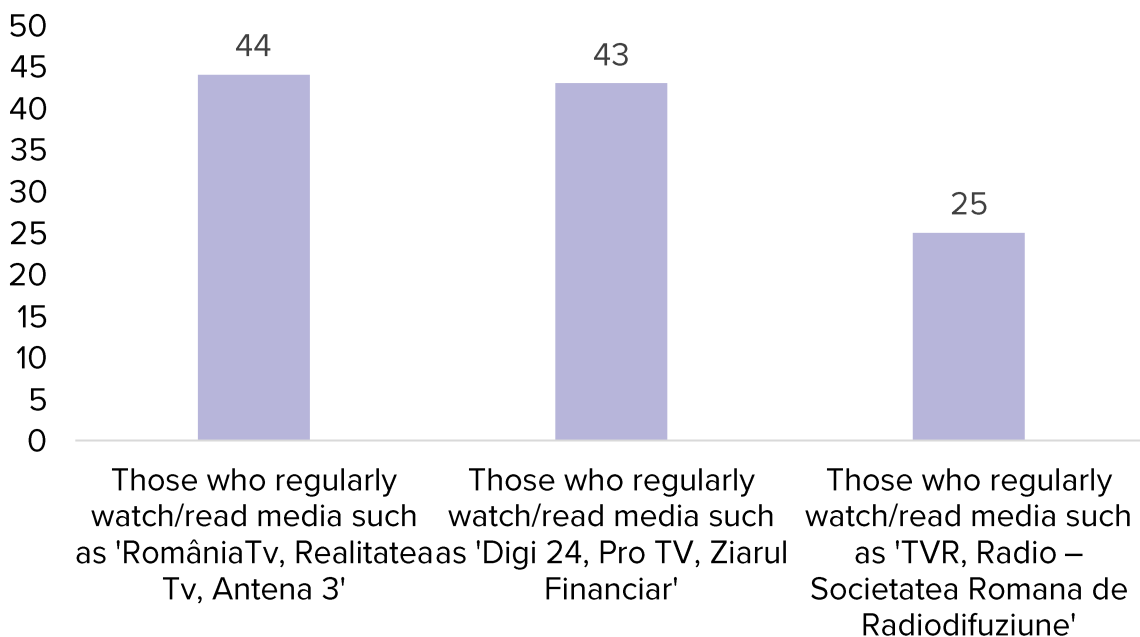
[8] The quote is from an interview conducted for the purpose of this project. See more in the comparative GLOBSEC Trends 2023 study, available here: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2023-united-we-still-stand>



Media consumption habits

Romanian respondents were asked about the type of media outlets they regularly consume. Three groups of outlets were watched/read regularly by at least 25% of Romanians. Two groups of sources (group 1 consisting of Romania TV, Realitatea TV, and Antena 3; and group 2 encompassing Digi 24, Pro TV, and Ziarul Financiar) were followed regularly by nearly the same proportion of people. These can be considered important voices in Romanian society. The third substantially influential group of media is public channels (e.g., TVR, hereinafter referred to as group 3). Based on the data, in general, the views exhibited by regular followers of these three groups do not differ substantially from each other concerning Ukraine, Russia, and the West, and are often somewhat more aligned with Kremlin-critical or pro-West views than the followers of most other media groups.

Media consumption habits in Romania

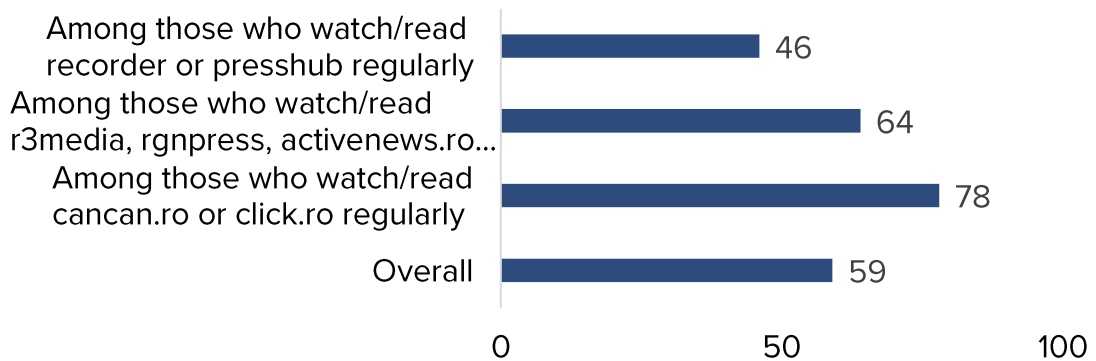


The regular followers of tabloids (e.g., *cancan.ro*), extremist (e.g., *r3media*), or independent (e.g., *recorder*) outlets think much differently about the world, although their regular followers only make up small portions of the sample. The core followers of the first two are more likely to take pro-Russian positions, for instance, on weapon deliveries to Ukraine, while those of the latter are more resilient on this issue.



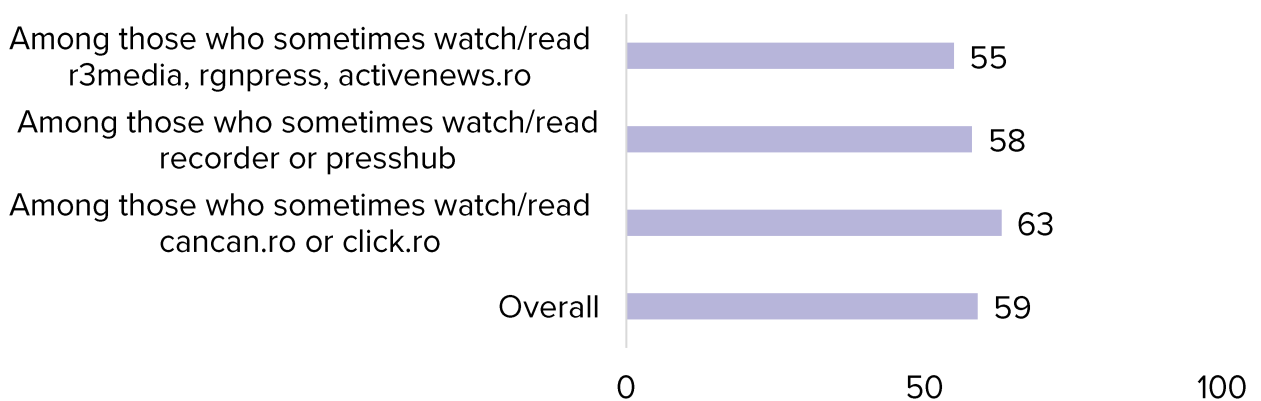
Media consumption habits

Those who agree that 'By providing military equipment and weapons to Ukraine, Romania is provoking Russia and bringing itself closer to the war' among regular followers



Among the much larger group of those who sometimes follow tabloids (e.g., cancan.ro, 26%), extremist (e.g., r3media, 16%), or independent (e.g., recorder, 17%) media, tabloid readers remain the most likely to say that providing military equipment to Ukraine risks provoking war with Ukraine. However, the occasional followers of extremist or independent media are both less likely than the average to align with this view.

Those who agree that 'By providing military equipment and weapons to Ukraine, Romania is provoking Russia and bringing itself closer to the war' among occasional followers

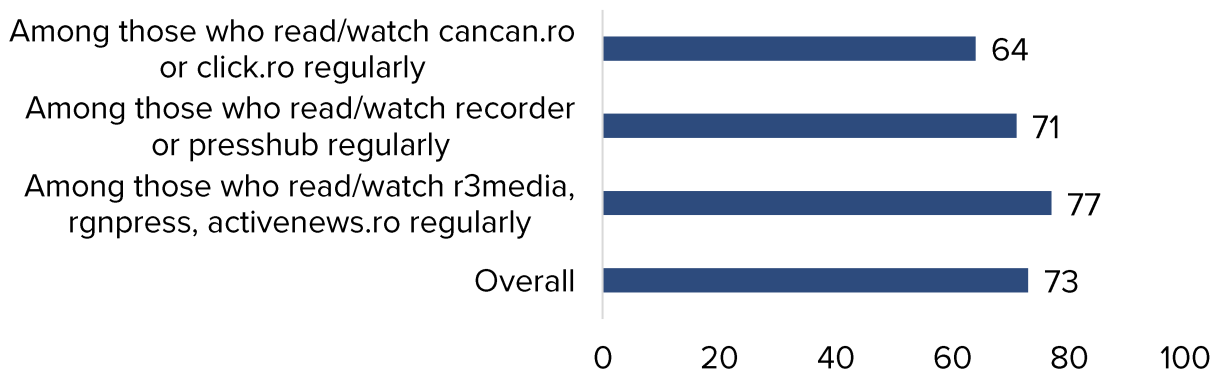




Media consumption habits

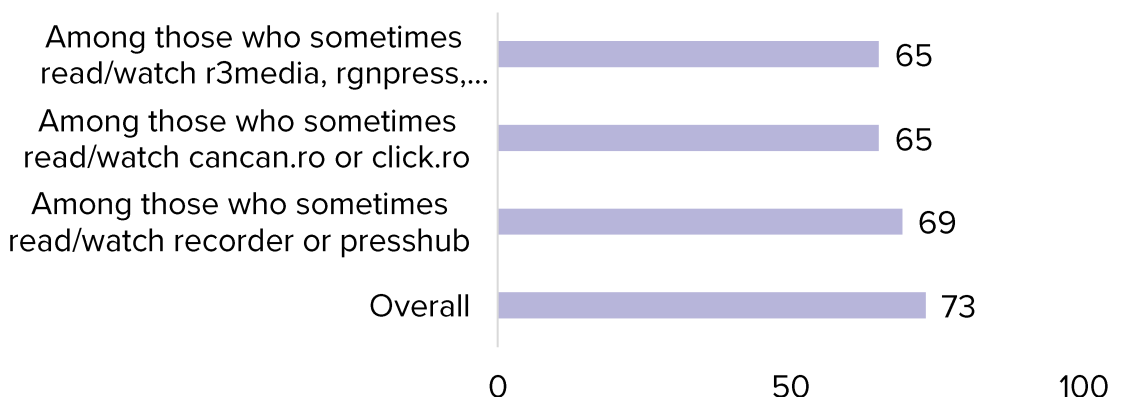
Media consumption also influences views on issues concerning the Western institutional system. Overall, 73% of Romanian respondents agreed that their country's membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack the country. This proportion was even higher at 77% among those regularly watching extremist media (e.g., r3media), while those who follow tabloids (e.g., cancan.ro) regularly were substantially less likely to agree with the statement.

Those who agree that 'My country's membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack us' among regular followers



The situation is only slightly different among those following these groups of media occasionally. All three groups are below the average, especially the occasional followers of tabloids (e.g., cancan.ro) and extremist media (e.g., r3media).

Those who agree that 'My country's membership in NATO makes it less likely that a foreign nation will attack us' among occasional followers

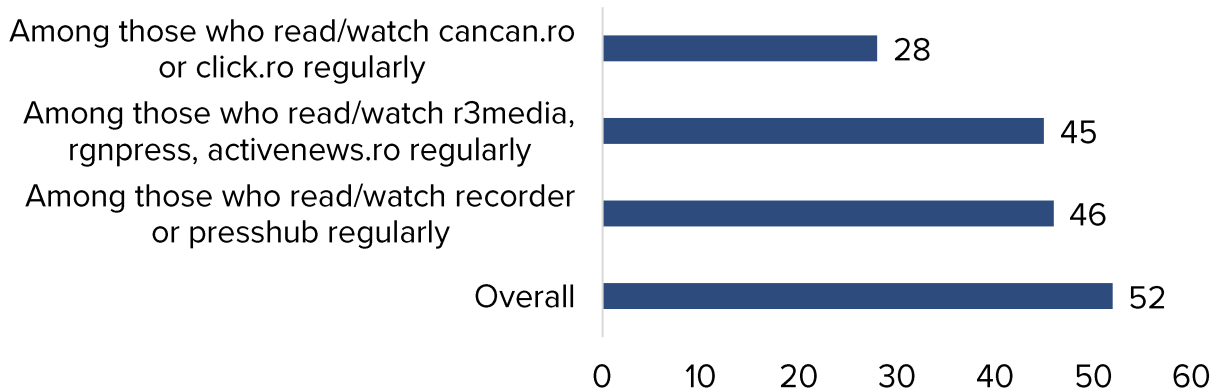




Media consumption habits

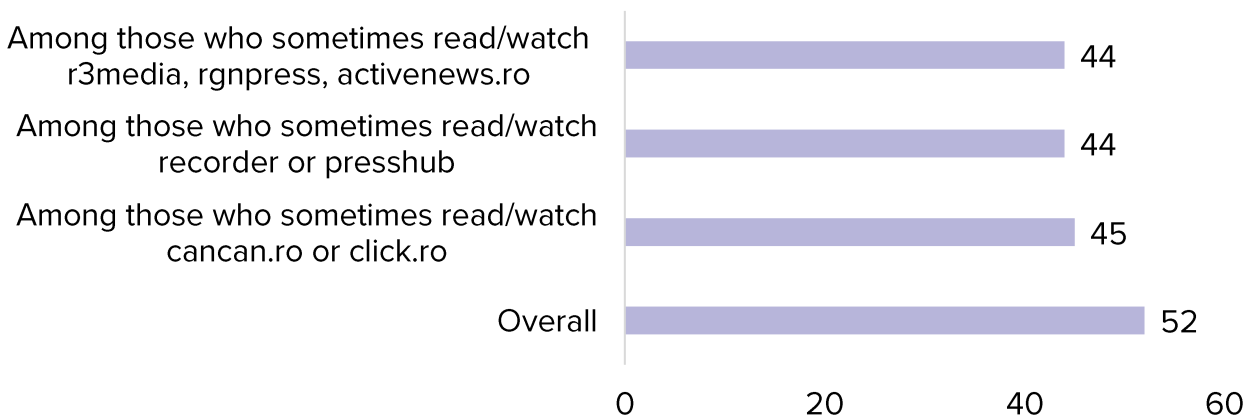
The situation is largely similar in the case of the EU. In the total sample, 52% of Romanian respondents agreed that 'Thanks to EU membership, Romania has a bigger say in the world's affairs.' This proportion is lower among the regular followers of independent media (e.g., recorder), extremist outlets (e.g., r3media), but especially those of tabloids (e.g., cancan.ro).

Those who agree that 'Thanks to the EU membership, Romania has a bigger say in the world's affairs' among regular followers



Among occasional followers, all three groups align similarly. They are slightly less likely to agree with the statement on the EU than the average Romanian.

Those who agree that 'Thanks to the EU membership, Romania has a bigger say in the world's affairs' among occasional followers





CONCLUSIONS

Romanian society, overall, is firmly anchored in Western organisations, highly valuing their country’s membership in the EU and NATO. However, they are highly vulnerable to certain misleading narratives about these organisations, particularly the European Union. These beliefs can be exploited by foreign and domestic populist actors alike for their own gains.

On the war in Ukraine, Romanian respondents are often positioned between the most Kremlin-critical and pro-Kremlin societies, but about two-thirds of Romanian society back Ukraine fairly consistently. Regardless, misleading narratives (e.g., about sanctions or weapon deliveries to Ukraine) could also create confusion for some respondents, presenting a vulnerability.

Where Romanian society is certainly vulnerable is their alignment with democratic values, particularly in the case of LGBTI+ people – even if, conceptually, the vast majority of Romanian respondents agreed on equality, human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law being good for their country.

Another area of vulnerability is healthcare: Romanians are extremely susceptible to healthcare-related disinformation, and the pandemic actually shook the conviction of a significant layer of Romanians in the West and their public institutions.

The 2023 GLOBSEC Trends survey shows that the states that freed themselves from Soviet domination with the fall of the Iron Curtain can be divided into multiple categories. Romania, Poland, and Czechia constitute one of these groups, where overt Kremlin influence does not work due to historical animosity between these countries and the Kremlin, allowing pro-West sentiments to cement themselves in large layers of the local populations. Thus, in this group, the Kremlin can mainly exploit negative views on democratic values and societal gaps to deteriorate the bond between the three countries mentioned above and Western organisations, and create confusion about western geopolitical aims. In contrast, Slovak and Bulgarian societies tend to view Russia favourably due to cultural ties. Thus, the Kremlin can employ a different strategy in the latter group, focusing partly on pan-Slavism and more positive narratives about the historical connections between Moscow on one hand and Bratislava or Sofia on the other.

As a consequence, the main threat to Romania is not that the Kremlin can depict Russia as a good alternative to the West. The main challenge is that Russian malign influencing efforts coupled with potential local supporters can highlight Romanian “neutrality” as the most “desirable” option – even if it seems like an impossible task today. The strategic communication efforts of Romanian actors should, therefore, focus on promoting the benefits of belonging to the West to the average Romanian, especially the youth, who have proven to be more susceptible to foreign malign influence.



CREDITS

A detailed methodology for GLOBSEC Trends 2023 is available in the project's comparative study, available on GLOBSEC's website. The study can be found on this link:

<https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2023-united-we-still-stand>

The polling in Romania was done by ISRA Center Marketing. The sample size was 1000 and the pollster used computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). The poll, carried out in March 2023, was – as in all countries – representative of Romania in terms of gender, age, place of residence and size of settlement.

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