

OPINION POLLS AND ELECTION

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2000 election year in Romania freed passions and debates on public opinion polls never seen before. As political actors are getting more and more professional inputs by incorporating social studies in their making decision process, the consequences of polls became crucial within a competitive environment with winners and losers. On the one hand the natural "illiteracy" of politicians or journalist in sampling and interviewing bring about some public misinterpretation of polls' results. On the other hand, the sociologists or pollsters spent little time introducing lay people with basic principles of their work or formulating simple rules of reading polls' results. Moreover, less effort has been invested during the last ten years into dedicated studies to measure or prove the effects of public opinion polls on voting behavior in Romania. Some people simply take into account Western professional findings on this issue. This article is trying to pay more attention to common mistakes in reading polls and also to study the effects of polls reporting on voting behavior - both changing preferences and mobilization to vote. Some conclusions on the famous bandwagon or underdog effects in Romania might really strike the one who found about them from the Western scientific literature.

Debates on opinion polls

One of the most debated issues of the 2000 electoral campaign in Romania was the capacity of releasing polls results to influence voters' preferences in presidential and parliamentary elections. The same issue has been long discussed during Bucharest local elections in June 2000. As anticipated, the controversy is starting from or extending to the competence of carrying out polls in Romania. It is of course not all the people literate in reading polls' results and that is why confusion, distrust and contest of polls' institution spread very quickly.

As we have the specific skills, although directly involved in polls production it is notwithstanding a useful exercise to take some distance from this phenomenon and try to assess it as if we were outsiders. Opinion polls are practical instruments for various decision makers and agencies, which started to break through almost every sector of the society since the World War II in the United States. All these surveys based on opinion questionnaires and