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# Masculinity today.

Research on young men's attitudes.

2026



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# **MASCULINITY TODAY.**

**Research on young men's attitudes.**

Illustrations by Alina Marinescu.

**BUCHAREST  
2026**

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# FOREWORD

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The research "Values and Attitudes of Young Men in Romania" aimed to explore the changes in the perceptions and opinions of this demographic group, as a result of the rapid developments in society, driven by the development of new technologies.

Similar analyses from other countries tend toward the conclusion that the impact of online socialization on young people, and particularly on young men, is a major one. The change in lifestyle leads to the modification of values and attitudes, often with the embrace of radical ideologies. From this arises the danger of generalizing a form of violent extremism, which could sabotage the foundations of liberal democracy. In Romania, recent studies draw attention to the increase in radicalization and violence, for the time being predominantly in the online environment. It is necessary to understand the phenomenon, in order to be able to act with preventive measures, before it escalates.

The research in Romania was carried out, in partnership, by the Center for Public Innovation, the FILIA Center and the Center For Equal Opportunity Policies. The research team was composed of Ionela Băluță (UB), Andreea Rusu (FILIA), Claudiu Tufiș (UB), and Ovidiu Voicu (ACIP). Lucian Burci and Radu Tidvă participated in conducting semi-structured interviews. Oana Băluță and Vlad Viski contributed with valuable suggestions to the design of the research.

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The research was based on survey data collection and participant recruitment services for interviews offered professionally by Ipsos Romania. The research project was made possible through the generous financial support of the Open Society Foundations.

All opinions expressed in the research report belong to the authors, members of the research team, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funder.

# INTRODUCTION

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*Ionela Băluță*

## **Why research on young men?**

Studying the values, behaviors and representations of men, the way they perceive and perform masculinity, gender roles and identities is important both for the academic space and for public policies.

From an academic point of view, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by R.W. Connell in the 1980s, opened a field of research on the way in which dominant gender norms impose, through the process of socialization, obligatory behaviors and characteristics for a "real" man. In recent years, the concept of the "Man Box", defined as "a set of normative cultural ideals and beliefs which act to pressure men into behaving in particular ways" (Doyle & Hammersley 2022, 5), has been used in a series of quantitative studies that analyzed to what extent these dominant ideas and beliefs about masculinity are internalized and accepted by men. In short, this hegemonic masculinity values and imposes (through the process of socialization) the masculine values and behaviors appreciated and validated at the social level, thus playing a central role in the identity construction of adolescents and men: physical strength and aggressiveness, courage and the rejection of any form of weakness (including the acknowledgment of emotional or psychological problems), the dominant role in relationships with women (which translates into being the head of the family but also into controlling the partner), the obligation to ensure the existence of the couple/family (hence the importance of money, but also the legitimization of some forms of economic violence against partners), virility (measured by sexual performance but also by the promotion of different rules regarding the sexuality of men and women), etc.

The results show that adolescents and men who adhere to the values and beliefs of hegemonic masculinity far more easily accept aggressive behaviors (from bullying to physical and sexual violence), reject gender equality, women's rights (the right to abortion), feminism, but also other types of masculinities (men with egalitarian values, men who support feminism, men from the LGBTQI+ community, but also racialized men, etc.).

Hegemonic masculinity encourages and contributes to the (re)production of violence against women and homophobic and transphobic attitudes (often associated with other discriminatory behaviors such as racism) that generate not only exclusion and discrimination, but can lead to violence against persons who are part of or are assumed to be part of these groups. At the same time, it must be emphasized that these adolescents and men are much more prone to taking risks that can also endanger their own lives (smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, drug use, speeding, etc.). Also, in order not to appear "weak," they have fewer friends, do not ask for help when facing problems, resort far less to therapy, but also to the doctor. At the global level, the suicide rate is twice as high among men compared to women. (<https://www.iasp.info/wspd/references/>). At the EU level, in 2021 men represented 78.6% of suicide cases. (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20240909-1>).

To all these aspects are added two worrying trends, highlighted in recent research. Firstly, a discursive, but sometimes also action-oriented, closeness can be observed between the various masculinist networks in the manosphere and extremist and neo-fascist networks. Misogyny and anti-feminist discourse, linked to an alleged crisis of masculinity, are the main themes that connect the two spaces and lead to a mutual reinforcement. Secondly, there is a trend of having higher percentages among young men (around the age of 20) who share the most radical values and ideas in this "man box." This is explained by the much greater exposure to social networks, which represent the favorite terrain of expression both for masculinist groups (many of them operating exclusively online), and for extremist and neo-fascist or, in the Romanian case, neo-legionary ones.

Given these trends, the study of representations, values and behaviors of young men is essential for a whole series of public policies, which should integrate this type of data and information, from gender equality policies and combating violence against women to policies for combating extremism, fascism and promoting democratic values.

## Exploring the topic in Romania

In Romania there is no data and analysis on the representations, values and behaviors of young men regarding gender roles and hegemonic masculinity. Our study falls within the broader category of youth studies (see also Mărginean 1996, Bădescu et al. 2010, Bădescu, Sandu, Angi & Greab 2019, Bădescu, Umbreş, Voicu & Tufiş 2024, or Mihai, Shehu & Stancea 2025). By precisely delimiting both the population analyzed (young men, aged 15 to 29) and the main research theme (gender roles and masculinity), this project opens up a new line of research in Romania. Within this project, we carried out the first quantitative research with a nationally representative sample for the population analyzed, as well as an exploratory qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents from Bucharest.

We aimed to explore first of all the level of acceptance and internalization of the traditional and patriarchal male model. Then, precisely because it was the first research on this category of population, but also because we wanted to measure the correlation between hegemonic masculinity and the political/ideological values and positioning of the respondents, we introduced sections on their opinions regarding civic participation, democracy and voting options in the presidential elections. In addition, besides the section with socio-demographic data, we also introduced sections that look at information sources, online behavior, the type of platforms frequented and the people who influence them.

## **„The Man Box”**

The Man Box is a concept used by the Equimundo centre in research on the norms and patterns of contemporary masculinity and their effects on men's lives, as well as on society. The Man Box defines the core of the rigid, culturally and socially constructed pattern of a masculine ideal that is transmitted to and imposed on men. This pattern of hegemonic masculinity includes seven dimensions: self-sufficiency; acting tough; physical attractiveness; adherence to rigid gender roles; heterosexuality; sexual performance; and the use of aggression to resolve conflicts.

(<https://www.equimundo.org/resources/man-box/>)

## **Manosphere**

The manosphere is a network of online communities (websites, forums, influencers) that promote various forms of discourse about "true masculinity", advancing traditional gender relations and roles and the idea that men must preserve or reclaim their dominant role. Although it is a heterogeneous space, most of its content is anti-feminist, constructs the "crisis of masculinity" as the cause of all of men's problems, and promises recipes for success in becoming a real man. These discourses simplify complex social transformations and turn them into binary oppositions, creating a sense of coherence and control. Anti-liberal and anti-equality values, the promotion of aggressiveness and of hostility towards women, LGBTQI+ people, and other social groups, connect the manosphere to far-right groups, actors, and political parties.

# CONTEXT

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*Ionela Băluță, Andreea Rusu*

## **Masculinity, social roles and political behaviors - a few theoretical landmarks**

The design of this research (conception of the questionnaire, the interview guide) and the interpretation of the results start from the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity in relation to the gender order and from research in recent years on the "Man Box" and the construction of masculinity, with a focus on young men.

### **The gender order and hegemonic masculinity.**

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was used by R.W. Connell, starting from theories of social change and from the Gramscian concept of hegemony, understood not only as domination and control, but also as a strategy of structural change. Thus, in 1987, Connell shows that at the macro-social level there is a dominant structural version of masculinity, which he calls hegemonic masculinity, and which is "constructed in relation to various subordinated kinds of masculinity as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how the patriarchal social order works" (Connell 1987: 183). This conceptualization underlines that we are dealing with something much more (and structural) than the masculine gender role and that the main stake is one of power: the reproduction of the heteronormative patriarchal order, but also of class, racial, ethnic hierarchies. The hegemonic masculinity of Western societies is constructed in relation to heteronormativity and the institution of marriage, and homosexuality is one of the dominated and marginalized forms of masculinity. This conceptualization must not be understood or used in an essentializing (or essentialized) way, and even less in a binary one. There are dynamics and variations depending on the historical, cultural, social and political contexts, and the interaction between alternative masculinity models and femininity models must be carefully contextualized and analyzed in relation to specific social, political and economic systems.

The theorization of hegemonic masculinity must be placed within the analysis that Connell makes regarding gender relations and roles and especially put in relation to the two concepts he proposes to understand the social, structural dimension, but also the power stakes of gender construction: gender regime and gender order. We do not intend here to have a discussion about the very rich (and not without controversies) literature regarding the definition of gender (see for example I. Băluță 2024). But it is important to emphasize that gender is not an attribute of persons, but a system of classification based on socially perceived and constructed differences, crossed by power interests (political, economic). Without a doubt, at the micro-social level there is a plurality of practices, values, norms and behaviors, but in any society there are dominant models and norms that act in a hegemonic logic. In current Western societies, the gender order remains binary and heteronormative and intertwines with other systems of domination: class, race, ethnicity, etc.

## **Anti-gender movements, illiberal political ideologies and the reinforcement of the traditional gender order**

Although important transformations had already taken place since the 1970s-1980s, both at the legislative and public policy level, as well as at the level of social practices and interactions, which seemed to suggest a transformation of the gender order, in the last two decades anti-democratic and autocratic tendencies are increasingly visible. Social conservatism (including the patriarchal gender order), nationalism with chauvinist nuances and illiberalism are elements that appear equally in the rhetoric of anti-gender campaigns and in radical populist and far-right movements and parties (Cinpoș & Norocel 2020; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Anti-gender campaigns, extremist parties (which often have neo-fascist, neo-legionary positions) and a series of reactionary actors (churches, religious movements, radical/extremist mass media etc.) have elaborated a true fantasmatic construction around gender (with the variants "gender ideology," "gender identity," "gender theory"), which reunites real and/or imaginary threats and transforms them into identity fears in order to create moral panic (Butler 2024, Corrêa, Paternotte & House 2023; Graff & Korolczuk 2021).

One of the scenarios present in many national contexts, adapted of course to local realities and colors, is that gender would be a colonizing project of Western elites (Sorosist/from Brussels) who would want the elimination of the Christian/Orthodox foundations of current societies, of "true" traditions

and of national identity (Korolczuk & Graff 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017). Illiberal political ideologies and regimes (from radical right-wing populism to the extreme right) use the scarecrow of "gender / gender ideology" to promote traditional-regressive, religious values, transposed into anti-democratic policies: the banning or limiting of the right to abortion, denial or withdrawal of rights for people from the LGBTQI+ community, rejection or withdrawal of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, banning gender studies, rejection and demonization of sex education, criticism of gender equality, of feminism and their replacement with concepts or ideas such as protecting women, protecting the family and children (Bogaards & Petó 2022; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017).

In Romania too, gender/gender ideology has been used, for over a decade (more visibly since the Family Referendum of 2018), to coagulate regressive and religious networks, helping to propel extremist parties onto the mainstream political scene – the entry into parliament of the AUR party in 2020 (Băluță O. 2023, Dragolea 2022, Norocel & Băluță 2021, Soare & Tufiş 2021). Analyzing the discursive strategies of the 2024 electoral campaign, Marincea shows that the legionary imaginary is reactualized and mobilized, among other things, starting from the threat that liberal values and progressivism (which include gender and sexual diversity) would represent for national, Orthodox, traditional identity (Marincea 2025). The "traditional family" becomes in many political contexts and for an increasingly wide range of political actors (not only extremist and populist parties but also liberal or even social-democratic parties, as in Romania) a symbol of authentic, ancestral national identity and a mobilizing slogan against the decadent West and the progressivism (woke-ism) that would ruin national traditions and origins. Although the temporal landmarks are lost in a mythologized and imprecise past, the definition of the traditional family is clearly heteronormative, founded on (biological or biblical, as the case may be) binarism: a family is made up of a man and a woman, who have children and in which gender roles are the traditional ones (Băluță & Tufiş 2024). The report elaborated by Oana Băluță within the YouDare project (<https://you-dare.eu/>) shows that there is an important link, both at the ideological and strategic level, between anti-gender campaigns and extremist mobilizations.

Radical and far-right parties and associations make full use of hegemonic masculinity (the white, virile, strong, patriotic, faithful, nationalistic man) both at the rhetorical level (to construct a political project based on social conservatism, chauvinist and illiberal nationalism) and at the strategic level,

by building associations and networks in which "real" men are called/trained. From the AUR party to neo-legionary associations and football ultras groups, the cultivation of a masculinity in which physical strength, the spirit of combat and sacrifice and leadership abilities (even if only at the family level) are central. Young men, especially from vulnerable social categories, are attracted by the discourses of the extreme right that valorize masculinity, power and national purity (Dolghin and Neagu 2022). Violent masculinity is present in many of the discourses and practices of neo-legionary associations but also among ultras groups: recently, men's fighting clubs organized in Bucharest, Braşov and Cluj-Napoca cultivate hyper-masculinity and physical confrontation (Lösche 2024).

## **Hegemonic masculinity: from the manosphere to far-right extremist ideologies**

In recent decades, especially with the development of social networks, an online space/subculture has been built and consolidated, defined in the research that analyzed it as the manosphere (Ging 2017). Beyond the diverse names and the differences in ideas and behaviors that can exist (for example, Pick Up Artists focus on courses on how to conquer and dominate women, while "incels" incite to hatred and violence against women), the manosphere promotes the "Red Pill" philosophy, through which men would be liberated from "feminist ideology" (Ging 2017). A recent subculture of incels is based on the "black-pill" philosophy: only men who have specific physical/genetic characteristics can be competitive in the romantic relationship market. The masculinist influencer Clavicular and the techniques of "looksmaxxing" mirror the exacerbation of this philosophy, proposing including interventions on the body (without any scientific basis) that can affect the health of young people. This space is in continuous dynamics, new trends and new sub-cultures appear, such as "men going their own way," "alpha male," "sigma male," with common points but also differences. The narrative constructions that circulate in the manosphere take more or less violent and vulgar forms, but all insist on the fact that in current societies, due to feminism and progressivism (woke-ism), women would be in power, men would have lost both their power and their masculine identity and must fight against political correctness and progressive ideologies to protect their own existence and to put men back in the place they "should" occupy in society (Marwick and Caplan 2018).

The analysis of the online space is essential, not only because the manosphere was practically consolidated here, but also because the use of social networks and online communication instruments is specific both to masculinist and extremist movements (communicating directly or implicitly and amplifying each other). Moreover, both target adolescents and young men very much, to attract them as early as possible (and to make them captive) in masculinist and extremist ideology. Like extremist associations/groups, the manosphere uses online groups and influencers to spread the idea of an imminent crisis of masculinity, of society and of gender relations, and then to propose their own saving solutions (Duminică 2025).

For the Romanian space, Norocel (2015) shows, from an intersectional perspective, that masculine identity is central to the Romanian ethno-nationalist project. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed at the intersection of privilege and oppression, being disciplined through religion, mass media and conservative discourses that promote heterosexuality, traditionalism and ethnic belonging as norms. In this framework, masculinity and nationalism reinforce each other, and the standards of a "real man" contribute to the definition of an exclusive national identity and to the marginalization of those perceived as "the others." Regarding the manosphere, the first research from our country on this topic explores the online platforms dedicated to masculinity (Duminică 2025). The work analyzes 5 websites of groups and one influencer's website that contain keywords from the "manosphere," publish and disseminate manosphere-specific materials, and propose courses or camps for men to teach them how to be real men: Calea Bărbatului Conștient [The Path of the Conscious Man](<https://theodorpop.com/>); Bărbatul Superior [The Superior Man](<https://barbatulsuperior.ro/>); Arta Seducției [The Art of Seduction](<https://artaseductiei.ro/>); TU, BĂRBAT! 2.0 with CEZAR IONAȘCUU (<https://cezarionascu.com/>); Dinastia Bărbaților [The Dynasty of Men] (<https://dinastiabarbatilor.ro/>); Masculinist (<https://masculinist.ro/>). Under the pretext of the crisis of masculinity, linked also to the threat to national identity and social order, men are called to rediscover and cultivate their "true" masculinity. As Duminică shows, "the reiteration of binary structures is frequent, together with the glorification of authority, hierarchy and complementarity between the sexes, in which the man has the role of protective leader, and the woman – that of support or inspiration." The values and behaviors promoted have many elements in common with neo-legionary and fascist ideologies, from references to the "natural order," based on clear hierarchies and authority, to ultra-nationalist and religious accents. In fact, Cezar Ionașcu was one of the influencers who campaigned for Călin Georgescu in 2025.

## „The Man Box”

Precisely because the growth of these masculinist ideologies was observed, as well as their connection with aggressive behaviors and extremist ideologies, in recent years quantitative research has been carried out internationally that aimed to better understand the values, representations and attitudes of young men. The choice to study predominantly men between 15 and 29 years of age was made following data that showed that these men were more attached to traditional masculine roles than older ones. This trend is also explained by the greater exposure of young people to the online environment, which is populated by figures and groups where not only are themes specific to hegemonic masculinity disseminated, but which target adolescents and young men in particular (Evolving Manhood 2024).

The concept of Man Box refers to the cultural norms and beliefs about a masculine ideal that dictates how a man must be and behave. The most important elements in this ideal are: stoicism, toughness / acting with toughness and courage, limiting the expression of emotions, overcoming problems without asking for support, being dominant in relationships with others (primarily with women) and if necessary even aggressive, violent, looking good physically (i.e., strong, muscular). These norms and beliefs are transmitted and learned, internalized through socialization processes and social interactions. Those who adhere to and internalize these values and beliefs are situated inside the Man Box, and those who do not accept these norms are classified outside the box (Doyle & Hammersley 2022: 5). The scale of this Man Box was developed by Equimundo (Centre for Masculinities and Social Justice) and contains 17 types of messages (for each category there are several statements that transpose the respective category into statements) based on which the classification inside or outside the box is made, depending on the degree of acceptance of these messages. Some of the statements used in this scale are: "men must solve their problems alone"; "men must use violence if necessary"; "the man is the one who must bring money into the home, for his wife and children"; "a man must not do household chores."

In recent years, the Men's Development Network has carried out quantitative research under the name Men's Attitudes Now (MAN) in many countries: Ireland, USA, UK, Mexico, Jamaica, the Caribbean, Jordan (Doyle & Hammersley 2022: 3).

Without being able to summarize all these studies, we present some of their results. The research conducted in 2017 in the USA, UK and Mexico highlights, among other things: in all three countries, men inside the box have at a much higher percentage at least one of the indicators of depression and suicidal ideation; they are in much higher percentages exposed to violence but also the perpetrators of violence (Heilman, Barker & Harrison 2017). Research on Ireland shows for example that men classified inside the box responded at a much higher percentage that in case of depression they would not ask anyone for help; also, in different percentages, they assume risky behaviors more than others (Doyle & Hammersley 2022). Data for Australia (The Men's Project & Flood 2018) shows, among other things, that: suicidal thoughts were present at double the percentage among men inside the box (44% versus 22%); they make sexual comments in public space towards unknown women much more than others (46% versus 7%); they assume risky behaviors in traffic much more often (38% versus 11%).

In addition to the research presented above, the international comparative studies carried out by IPSOS in collaboration with King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership and The Policy Institute in 2024 (IPSOS 2024) and 2026 (IPSOS 2026) are also worth mentioning.

## **Previous research from Romania**

In 2018, *the Gender Barometer* (Grünberg 2019) showed that young people are located more in the segment called "parochial behavior," characterized by a critical perspective on gender equality, maintaining that "too much has been discussed" about it and that it is exclusively to the advantage of women. At the same time, this segment is differentiated by its stronger support for the idea that both spouses must bring money into the home, while domestic activities and child-rearing would remain exclusively female tasks (with lower support rates than in the case of other age segments, but still in the majority). Within the Barometer, the authors emphasize several times the idea of "contradictory positions" and an "oscillation between conservative and modern values" within this age segment. Regarding the gender difference, young women have more confidence in the capacity of women to be leaders at the political-administrative level, with 59% of them disagreeing with the statement "Men are more capable of leading than women," compared to 50% of young men who agree with the statement. These gender differences are observed throughout the report and underline a discrepancy between the perceptions and values of women and young men.

*The Gender Violence Barometer* (Băluță & Tufiș 2022) shows that young people accept patriarchal values to a lesser extent, with differences that vary, by comparison with those aged 45 and over, from 8% up to 19%. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of young people (75%) still agree that "women need the protection of a man," and the majority (52%) consider that "the man is the head of the family." Also, in *Caring for Democracy. The Political Interests of Women in 2024* (Mateescu & Tufiș 2024), the authors emphasize the fact that "the distribution of roles in Romanian households is traditional-patriarchal," without notable differences between age groups. Thus, in couples there are small but statistically significant differences rather depending on the woman's level of education, the woman's age not being correlated with "significant differences regarding the distribution of roles in the household, young women adopting the traditional-patriarchal model to the same extent as older ones."

The research launched in April 2025 by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, *Young People from Romania. Gender Differences, Political Participation and Support for Democratic Values* (Mihai, Shehu & Stancea 2025), shows us that there are significant gender differences between young people in Romania regarding the perception of gender equality and the rights of LGBTQI+ or ethnic minorities. In the case of women's rights, 42.5% of young women consider that women do not have sufficient rights in Romania, compared to 45.9% of young men who consider that women have sufficient rights. Regarding minority rights, in the case of young women over 40% consider that they do not benefit from sufficient rights (48.7% for ethnic minorities and 42.5% for LGBTQI+), compared to less than a third of young men (28.6% for ethnic minorities and 27.4% for LGBTQI+). Therefore, young women have a greater openness and are more tolerant regarding minority rights and support gender equality to a greater extent.

The majority of young people in Romania maintain that democracy is the best form of government, and the gender differences are insignificant at this chapter. The percentage of young men who would support dictatorship is slightly higher than that of young women (24.7% compared to 20%), which indicates gender differences regarding the inclination toward authoritarianism among young people. If only 20% of young women would choose dictatorship instead of democracy, among men this percentage rises slightly to 24.7%, suggesting a greater inclination toward authoritarian regimes.

This growing trend can also be observed over time: according to the FES study from 2019, only 14% of men and 7% of women expressed a preference for authoritarian regimes. The autocratic tendency is also reflected in the preference for a strong leader who does not take parliament or elections into account, supported by 37.7% of women and 37% of men (Bădescu, Sandu, Angi & Greab 2019).

At the same time, some Romanian young people are willing to give up certain freedoms in exchange for a higher standard of living, 28.9% of women and 31.8% of men agreeing with this idea.

# METHODOLOGY

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*Claudiu Tufiş*

The present study uses a mixed methodology, combining a quantitative component, through a public opinion survey, and a qualitative component, through 30 in-depth interviews.

The public opinion survey was conducted in the period May 28 – June 19, 2025 by Ipsos, at the request of the FILIA Center and the Center for Public Innovation. The survey was conducted using the face-to-face method, at the respondents' homes. The target population of the survey was represented by male persons aged between 15 and 29 years.

The selection of localities included in the sample was carried out using stratification on two strata: development regions (8 regions) and size of locality (rural localities, urban localities under 50,000 inhabitants, urban between 50,000 and 200,000 inhabitants, urban over 200,000 inhabitants, and Bucharest). 102 localities were included in the sample, and the achieved sample size was 1,611 respondents. In establishing the sample at the locality level, the population by domicile was taken into account according to the data available at the National Institute of Statistics.

Within the localities, households were selected using the random walk method with a statistical step. Depending on the number of interviews allocated per locality, in each locality starting points were randomly selected so that between 5-10 interviews were conducted at each starting point. In rural localities, two starting points were selected: one in the center of the locality and one at the edge of the locality.

Within the households, the selection of respondents was carried out randomly, from all eligible persons in the household (male persons aged 15-29 years). The interview was conducted only with the randomly selected person, without replacement.

The questionnaire used in the research was produced by the project's research team, was sent for comments and suggestions to a small group of researchers experienced in the topic of the questionnaire, and was pre-tested by Ipsos.

The questionnaires were administered only by male interview operators, with a minimum of three years of experience. All interview operators participated in a training session regarding the sampling method and the questionnaire of this study. The quality of the data was verified through GPS coordinates, audio recordings (if the respondents' consent was given) and telephone calls. The average duration of the interview was approximately 20 minutes, varying between 17 and 38 minutes. The refusal rate was approximately 25%, higher in large cities and lower in rural areas.

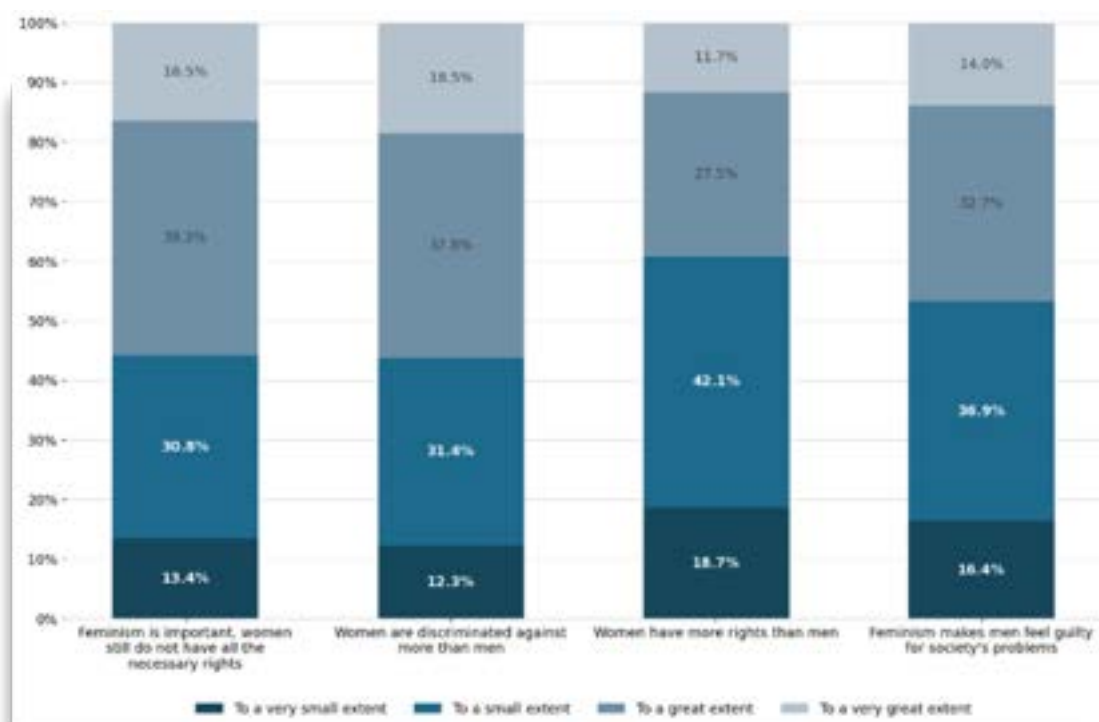
The quantitative research was complemented by **an exploratory qualitative research**, which had as its objective the in-depth understanding of the values and attitudes of young men. The qualitative survey was conducted through the semi-structured interview method in the period July 14 – August 14, 2025 by two operators, young men. The sample was constituted by the firm that also conducted the survey by questionnaire and targeted young people from Bucharest, with different socio-demographic characteristics: in total, 30 interviews were carried out and validated, with a duration between 40 minutes and 2 hours and 10 minutes (the majority being over one hour). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, were recorded with the permission of the respondents and were transcribed by a team of volunteers from the FILIA Center. The interviews were conducted by two students from the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest, who benefited from two training sessions for conducting interviews, participated in the elaboration of the interview guide and conducted two trial interviews before the start of the research interviews. The interview guide (Annex 2) was created starting from the theoretical literature and international research presented in the sections above and was adapted based on the preliminary results of the survey by questionnaire. We insisted more on the topics which, as results from the questionnaires, need additional research. For this report, the interviews are used only as a complement and an illustration of the results of the survey by questionnaire.

# OPINIONS ABOUT FEMINISM

*Ionela Băluță*

We begin the presentation of our study's results with one of the key themes we analyzed: the respondents' opinions on feminism and women's rights.

*Figure 1 Opinions about feminism (percentage)*

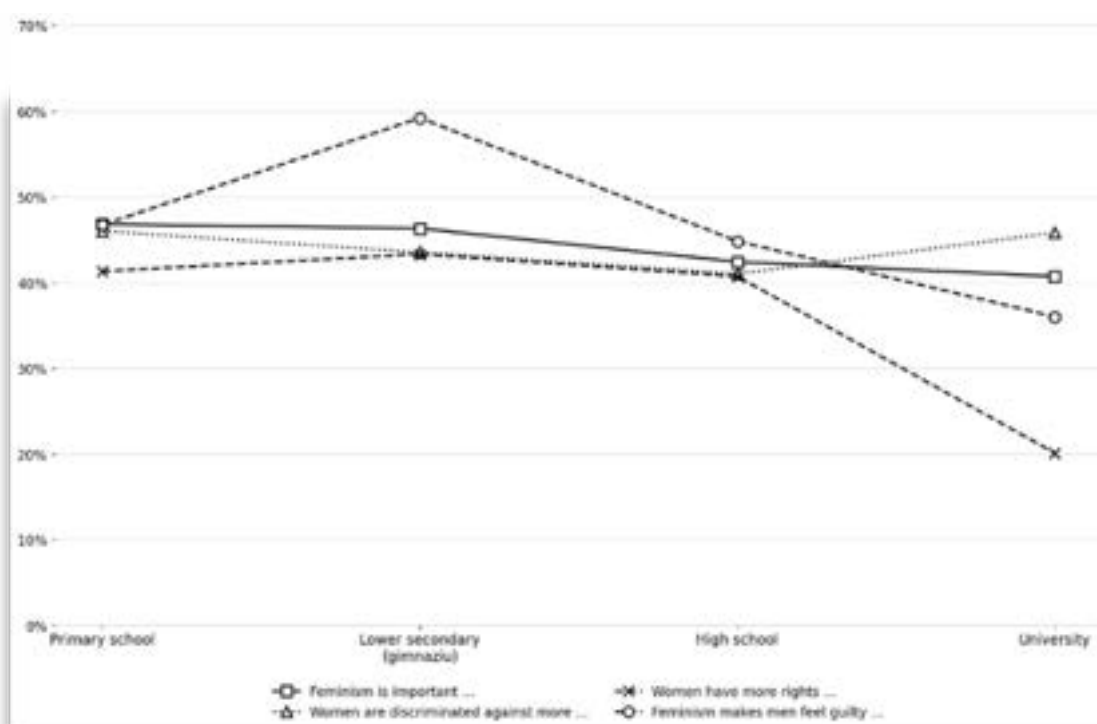


The general percentages show that just over half of the young men in Romania consider that women still do not have all the necessary rights or that women would be discriminated against more than men. Almost half (47%) consider that feminism would be responsible for generating a feeling of culpability, making men feel guilty for the problems in society. A large percentage of respondents (44%) also consider that women would have more rights than men. These answers indicate not only the limited support for feminist demands, but especially the internalization of the discourse spread by groups and masculinist influencers in the manosphere, who identify in feminism (and feminists) the source of men's problems.

We will comment in what follows on the correlation of these opinions with various socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. We will place the emphasis especially on the differences that exceed 10 percentage points, which reflect a stronger influence of one of the characteristics on the opinions and values of young men.

An important variation regarding the opinion that women have more rights than men appears depending on the level of education: those with higher education agree with this statement in a proportion of only 20%, while for all other categories (primary school, vocational school and high school) the acceptance of this statement reaches percentages of over 40%, thus being double. And for the statement that feminism makes men feel guilty, the largest gap is between men with higher education, who agree in a proportion of 36%, while among respondents who graduated from lower secondary school (gimnaziu) the corresponding percentage is 59%.

*Figure 2 Opinions about feminism related to education (percentage)*

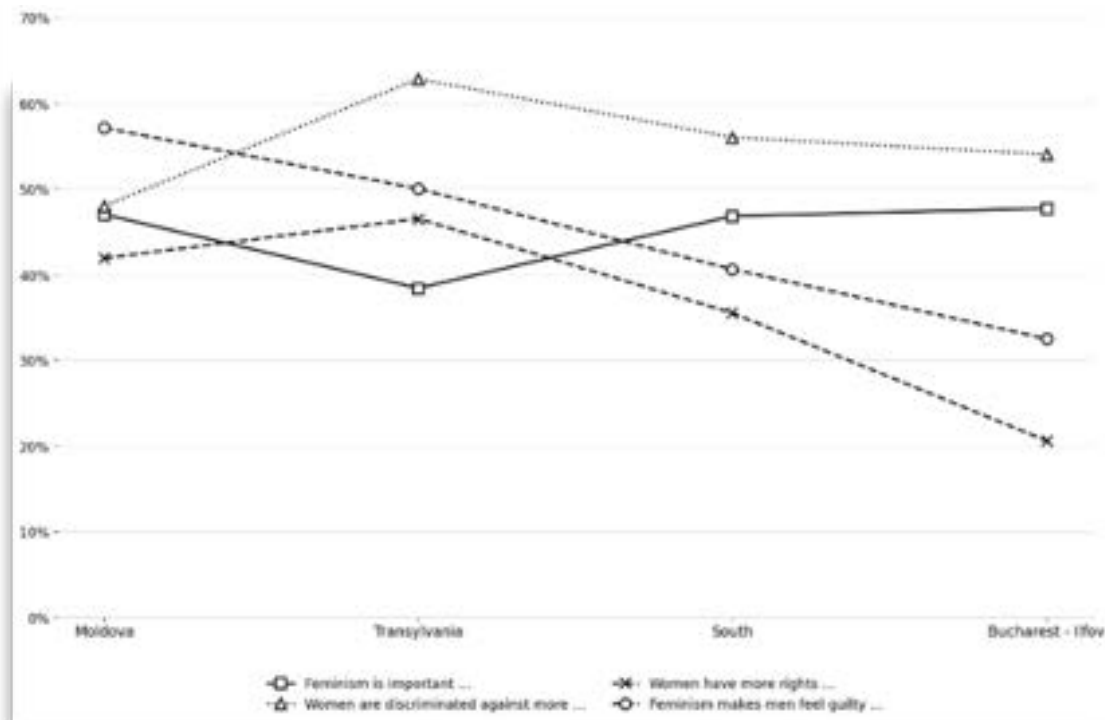


Regarding occupational status, the following differences draw attention. Men from the category "self-employed" least agree that feminism is important: only 38%, compared to the average of 56% and with a gap of 22% compared to those who work full-time (60%). Men who work occasionally believe, in the highest percentage (65%), that feminism makes men feel guilty for the problems in society (compared to the average of 47%). This time, however, those who are self-employed record the lowest percentage of acceptance (42%), followed by those who work full-time (45%).

Those who have a good economic status (income over 6,000 lei and those who declare that they can afford to buy everything necessary for a good standard of living) are less inclined to agree with the idea that women have more rights (27% compared to the average of 39%) or that feminism makes men feel guilty (33% compared to 47%), but at the same time they are below the average at the statements regarding the need for feminism (51% compared to 56%) and the fact that women are more discriminated against (51% compared to 56%).

Finally, regarding geographical regions, respondents from Bucharest-Ilfov are much less inclined to agree with the statement that women have more rights than men: 21%, compared to the average of 39% and compared to respondents from Transylvania, who agree with this in a proportion of 46%. A large gap is also observed at the statement that feminism makes men feel guilty for the problems of society: men from the Bucharest-Ilfov region agree with this statement in a proportion of only 32%, the average being 47%, and the highest acceptance, of 57%, is recorded in the Moldova region.

Figure 3 Opinion about feminism related to region (percentage)



## What do the interviews tell us?

To the question of what is your opinion about feminism and women's rights, the majority of answers are of the type "I agree with women's rights, but...". With 3-4 exceptions, who say that feminism is needed because women still face situations of inequality and various types of violence, the rest of the respondents say that it is good for women to have the same rights as men, but that, nowadays, in Romania, feminism would be exaggerated, since the situation of women is no longer what it was 100 years ago. The answers show the influence of discourses from the manosphere, which discredit and distort feminist demands.

Thus, an argument present in several answers is the fact that feminists would actually want to gain power, that it has gotten to the point where they command in the couple and men can no longer say anything, that they would want to dominate men, or even to exterminate them:

*"It seems to me like a good thing, but it's exaggerated into stupidity. Obviously it's normal to have as a movement the whole thing, but what we're talking about, there are special cases that appear online just because they're exaggerated. But the thing that 'we don't need men' and so on seems to me like a stupid thing, a joke thing, done for views, a madness of theirs. It doesn't seem ok to me. But feminism at its base, in my opinion, seems to me like a good thing, at the base, it seems important to me. (...). It seems to me much more ok how I heard it was before. But I don't think there are cases in Romania exactly, I think in the West or in America, those are the things that 'we don't need men, that kill all men,' that thing, those seem to me like some nonsense."  
(R4)*

Another argument, which aims at the reaffirmation of the hierarchical biological differences between women and men, refers to the fact that women would not be able to go to war and nor to do everything a man does, who would actually have far more responsibilities:

*"I consider that, and I've encountered persons who consider themselves very feminist, I consider that they don't realize what they actually want and that feminists or feminists are feminists until they're put in front of a concrete situation. If they had the same duties, responsibilities and so on, of going to war in the case of a conflict situation, in the next second nobody is feminist anymore, it fell instantly." (R5)*

The stereotype of "frustrated," "crazy" feminists is doubled by the association of feminism with the LGBTQI+ movement, which leads to the rejection of current feminism by a respondent who repeats several times that in the past feminism was a good thing and that he supports women's rights:

*"Feminism is a general manner. (...). I believe that last century it was a very good idea, only that, very often, persons confuse true feminism: to be equal to men, they want to be above them because ok, I understand, in history they were treated as slaves, as if they didn't know anything, without any kind of voice. It's a good thing, only that many persons confuse feminism with LGBT-ism and with a 'trend' put together. (...) It is very good, it's a beneficial thing for*

*everybody, in the sense that why should you have a problem regarding the vote, an opinion, related to abortion, related to her rights, to be with others in the home, with men, with one, with another, divorces. She deserves all these rights. Just don't confuse their history, that they were suppressed, I don't understand that, with frustration, with madness." (R10)*

The spread of discourse about "radical" feminism from the public space, without any rigorous definition of terms and without pertinent arguments, influences the opinions of young men, who come to believe that radical feminism is just as bad as the extermination of Roma or Jews:

*"The feminist movement, I even did a project at university about this, I know where it started, from England, (...) it had at the beginning some very useful effects for English industrial society, the fact that women said they want to go to work/war. But to get from a good idea and a beautiful past to do what is happening today seems to me an extreme polarization. What feminism is today seems to me the equivalent of far right wing – with the extreme right in political terms – with those who say let's kill all Roma, let's put Jews in the gas chamber and so on... that is the parallel with modern extremist feminism." (R8)*

Finally, there also appears the discourse about feminists who would no longer be "women," and feminism and women would be the causes of violence and crimes against women:

*"I agree with them, I agree with women's rights and, as I also said earlier, there are some women who are not really women, but they still demand their rights, I mean I don't know, from their behavior they are somewhat more ungraceful, more unkempt, more... They don't actually do their duty, not necessarily of woman – the duty of being a human being. And you demand some rights. From the following perspective you shouldn't receive them. As long as you don't prove that you should deserve them. And I'm not saying just about women now, even if masculinism existed, it would be the same thing. Usually, I think that this*

*thing with feminism gave birth to all the crimes committed by men, especially the Andrew Tate scandal. I'm not saying, it's also the fault of those boys or men, however you want to call them, but I think it's also their fault, because you sought to have company with them. You created this thing. The fault is on both sides, not just one." (R20)*

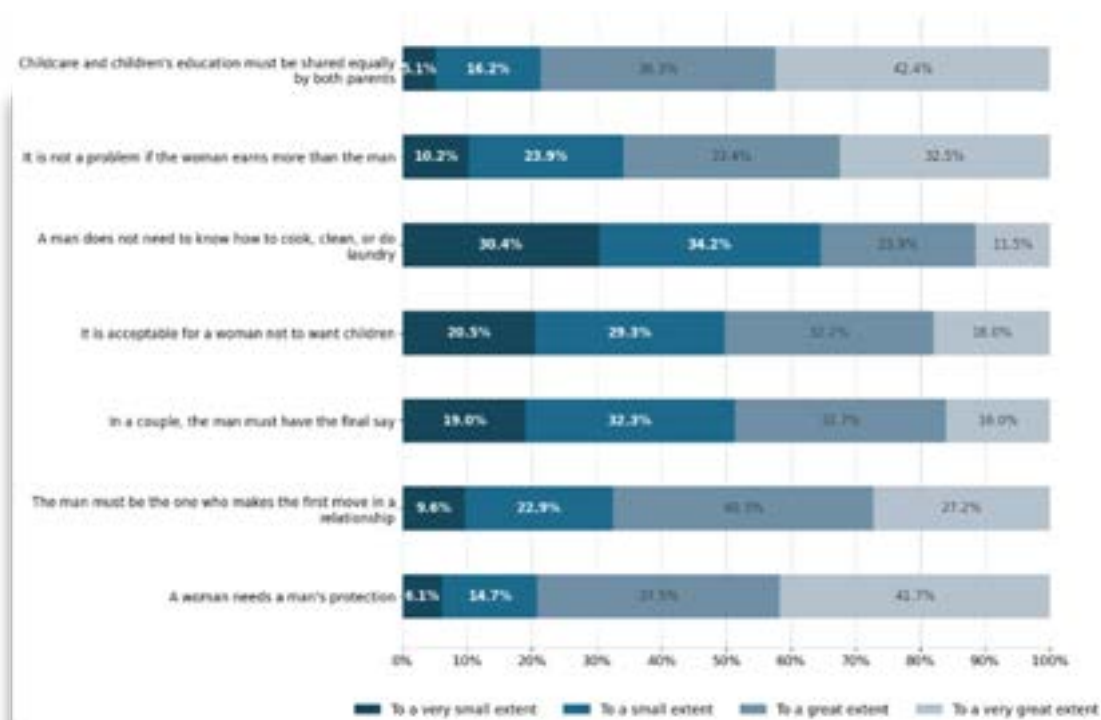
All these answers show the spread of anti-feminist discourses and attitudes in society. In a social context in which there is no kind of education for gender equality and sex education, but religion is an optional subject (which often functions as a compulsory subject), the propagation, especially in the online space, of anti-feminist ideas and attitudes represents a major threat to women's rights and democratic principles. Even young people who have read about feminism in the past, when speaking about current feminism seem to use only themes from the online space, in which antagonism is exacerbated and many of the feminist demands are distorted. The manosphere and the online space thus constitute factors that reinforce the "man box" and can bring back to patriarchal gender roles those men who had ideas, values and behaviors that went beyond hegemonic masculinity.

# MASCULINITY AND GENDER ROLES IN COUPLES

Ionela Băluță

The questionnaire uses three sets of questions to explore respondents' representations and opinions of romantic relationships and gender roles, as well as about the qualities and behaviours of men.

Figure 4 Opinions about gender roles in the couple (percentage)



If we look at the answers to these questions as a whole, we see that the majority of respondents accept and/or value traditional gender roles and the traditional male model. 79% believe that women need a man's protection, 68% believe that the man must take the first step in a relationship, and 49% believe the man must always have the last say. This way, inside the couple, the man is the one supposed to have an active role, a decisive, protective, and even controlling role.

The stereotype of women needing men's protection is correlated with another, that of women being weak and sensitive, and thus unable to take care of themselves.

The data show a more nuanced view of traditional gender roles, with 79% of respondents believing that the carework and education of children should be split equally between both parents, 65% of respondents disagreeing with the statement that men don't need to be able to cook, clean, or do laundry, and 66% not opposed to the woman earning more than the man. These opinions are quite far from the traditional gender stereotypes according to which women (and women alone) must perform all domestic and care work, and the man is the (only) one that must bring money home. This data should, however, be interpreted cautiously. On the one hand, to say that both parents are responsible for the care and education of their children doesn't necessarily also imply a real and equal participation of both parents, especially when we talk about tasks related to cleanliness, food, medical care, or the relationship with the school/kindergarden. Similarly, to say that it wouldn't hurt for a man to be able to cook, wash, or clean doesn't mean that the domestic work of the couple would be equally split between the two partners.

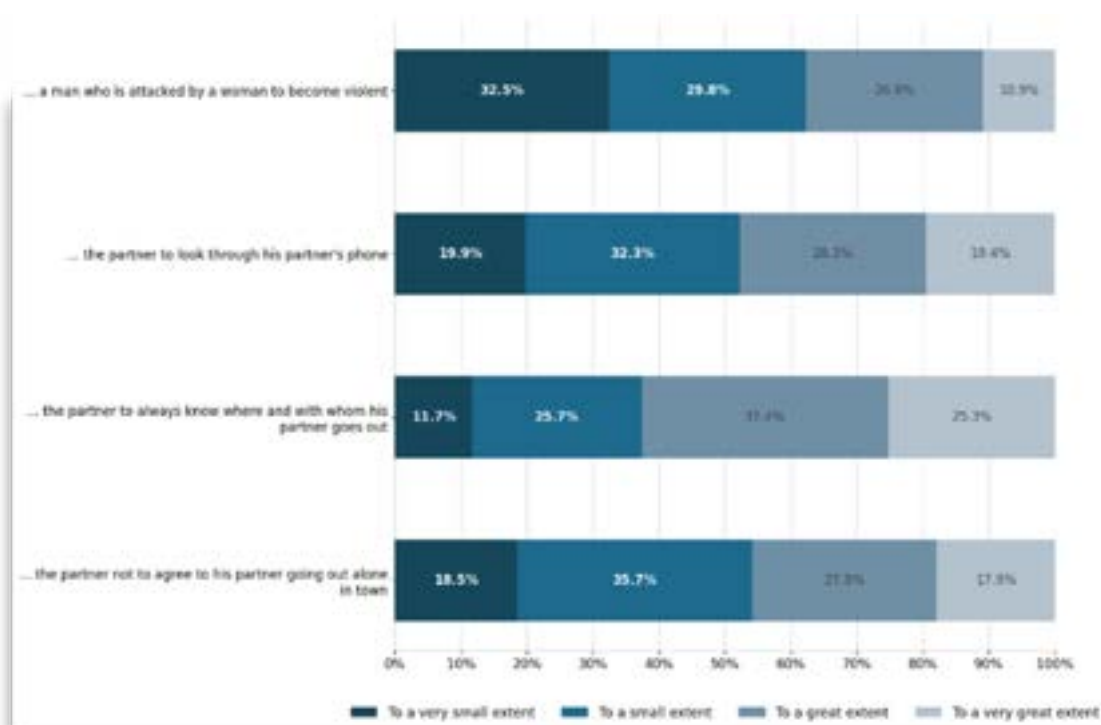
The research at the European level shows the persistence of some important inequalities at the practical level concerning the split of care and domestic work. As to the raising and caretaking of children, fathers take part in recreational activities, or sports much more, and much less when it comes to the care responsibilities, but also formal education (maintaining a relationship with the school, supervising homework).



*The Gender Barometer for Romania* (2018) shows, actually, that for the questions pertaining to “who does the housework” the answers reflect an unequal and patriarchal split: women iron clothes (82%), do the laundry (80%), prepare food (77%), do the dishes (73%), and do housekeeping (71%). On the other hand, these results should also be viewed in relation to the others. As long as the couple relationship is seen from a point of view where the man is the leader, also taking into account half of respondents that think he should have the last say, the real split of tasks on an equitable and equal manner would be well worth exploring further, in research that would also take into account real behaviours and practices.

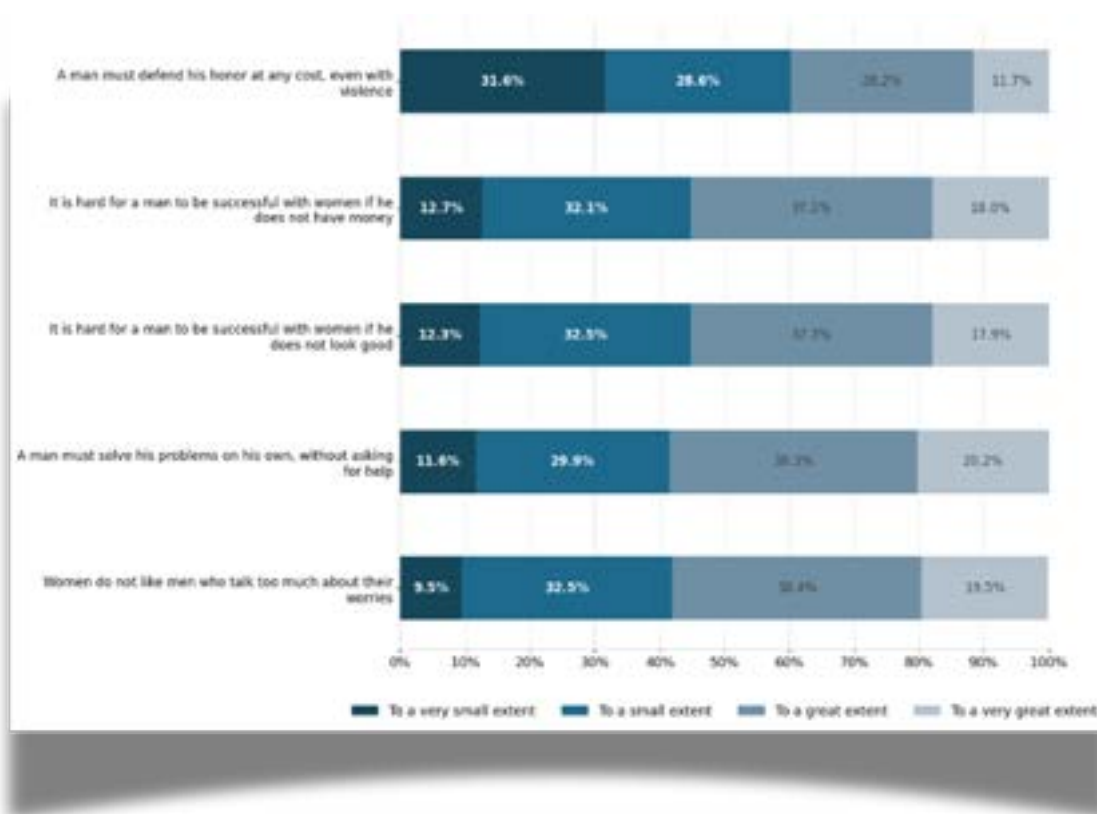
The opinions regarding the statement that it is acceptable for a woman not to want children are also worth a more nuanced interpretation and further exploration in the future. Basically, 50% of men think it is acceptable for a woman to not want to have kids, but if we flip the statement, we can say that the other 50% of men do not agree with this, thus denying the autonomy of women to make decisions about their own body.

*Figure 5 Opinions regarding different forms of control and violence in the couple (percentage)*



Second of all, tolerance towards forms of control and violence is high: 63% of respondents think it is normal for a boyfriend to always know where and with whom his girlfriend is going out, 48% do not see an issue with the boyfriend going through his girlfriend's phone, and 46% accept social violence, agreeing with the boyfriend not letting his girlfriend go out alone. These answers are linked with the ones from the first category, confirming the predominance of a traditional, patriarchal model in romantic relationships.

*Figure 6 Opinions regarding different types of masculinity (percentage)*



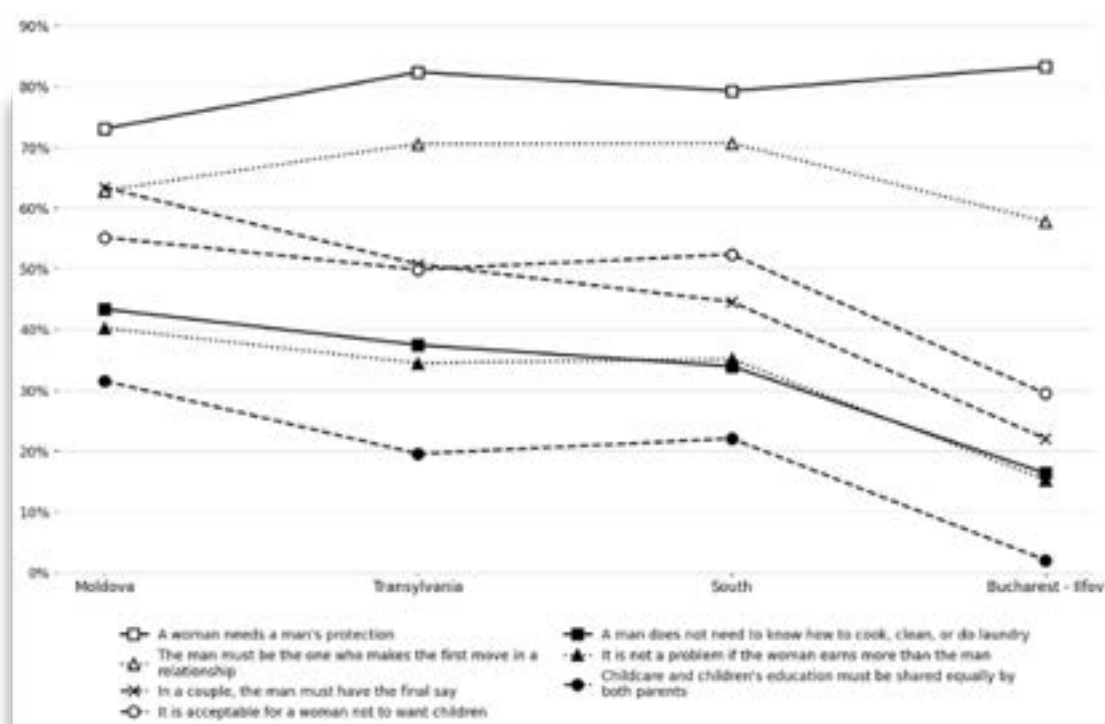
Third of all, the type of masculinity that is most valued/internalised is the traditional/patriarchal one: the man must solve his own problems (59%), shouldn't talk about his worries (58%), and the success of a relationship is directly linked to money (55%). The fact that 55% of respondents also point to physical appearance as a condition for the success of a relationship is worth a more thorough exploration in future research. In the patriarchal model beauty is only important for women, and physical strength is important for men. If physical appearance refers to muscle and physical strength, then it lands in the category of hegemonic masculinity. If "looking good" means something else, maybe this can show a change in/re-formulation of the patriarchal masculine ideal.

## What are the factors that most influence the opinions and values of young men?

If we analyse the answers in correlation with the socio-demographic indicators, the 7 statements regarding gender relations can lead us to a series of interesting observations. Firstly, of the 7 statements, the one regarding the woman's need to be protected by the man registers the lowest fluctuations irrespective of the category of respondents (age, education level, economic status, place of residence, marital status), indicating a high degree of agreement in the analyzed population regarding this statement

In total, of the 7 affirmations, there were small differences in percentage (lower than 10%) registered between respondents for the following socio-demographic indicators: age, if they live with their parents or alone, if they have or do not have children. Even though for two of the statements there are registered differences of 12%, respectively 11%, not even the place of residence (whether rural or urban) doesn't appear to be a major determinant in the formation of opinions and attitudes towards gender roles in the couple or the ideal of masculinity.

*Figure 7 Opinions regarding gender roles according to region (percentage)*

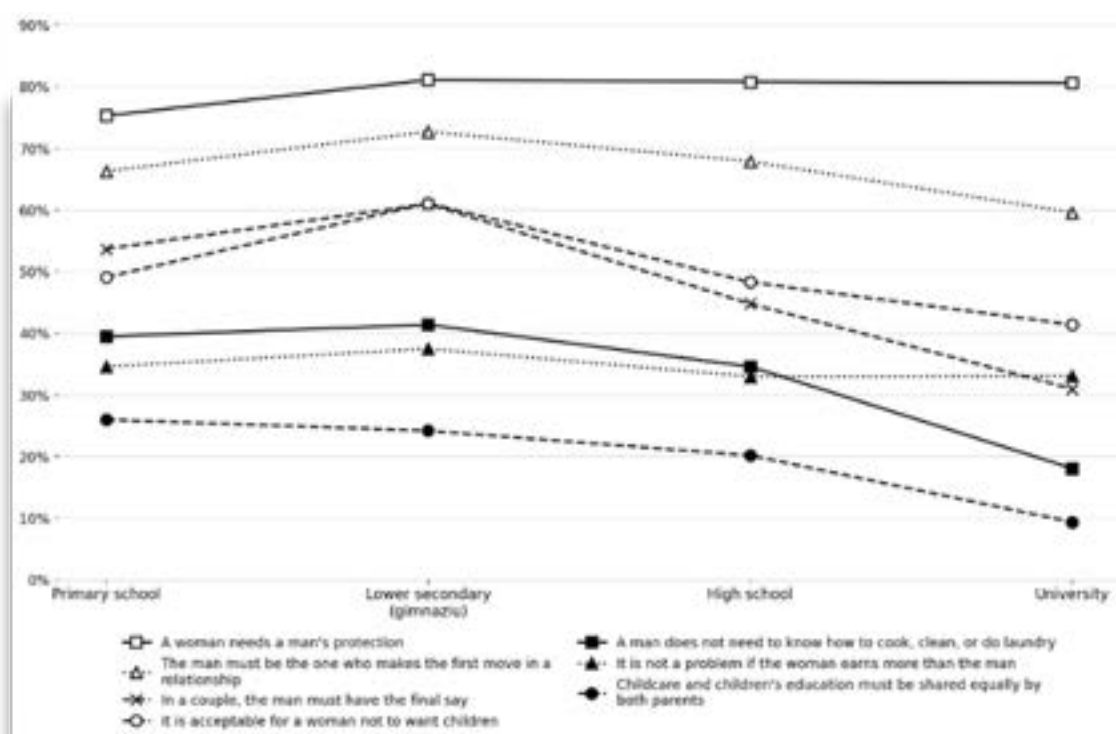


Some data is interesting though. The biggest differences between respondents show up according to their geographical region. For the statement that the man must always have the last say, there is a difference of 41% between the Bucharest-Ilfov region and the Moldova region. Respondents from the Bucharest-Ilfov region agree with the statement 22% of the time, while for the region of Moldova the percentage is 63%. Following, the region with the next highest level of acceptability of this patriarchal belief is the region of Transilvania (51%) and the South region (45%). The statement that a man doesn't need to be able to cook, clean, or do laundry etc. again shows a big difference, of 27%, between Bucharest-Ilfov (16% acceptability) and Moldova (43%). This time again Transilvania is the closest to Moldova (With 37% of respondents in agreement with the statement). For the last four questions in the set the difference stays high (between 25% and 29%) between Bucharest-Ilfov, where respondents have much more egalitarian opinions, and Moldova, where patriarchal norms and values are much more widespread. Thus, at the geographical regions level, Bucharest-Ilfov is the region where stereotypes and patriarchal norms relating to gender roles in couple relationships are the least accepted, while Moldova sits at the opposite end, with very high percentage differences. The percentage differences between Transilvania and the South are small (between 0 and 3%), the South region being generally a bit more conservative. They are both, however, much closer in values and societal norms to the region of Moldova rather than the Bucharest-Ilfov region.

**The education level is a second indicator that differentiates answers.** Therefore, higher education graduates agree that the man must have the last say in proportion of 31%, while among those that graduated a vocational school, the percentage is 61%, and for those with only a primary school education the acceptability of this social norm is 54%, **with a 30%, and respectively 23% difference.** Those with a high school education are in the middle, agreeing with the statement in a proportion of 45%, with a 14% difference to those that graduated higher education. We also observe significant differences in the question related to domestic work, where the largest difference is again between highly educated and vocationally trained people (21%), with primary education following closely (21%), while also noting a difference of 17% for high school education. As to what concerns the education and carework for children, the largest difference is between higher education and primary education graduates (17%), followed by vocational training (15%) and high school education (11%). In short, we observe significant differences between higher education and primary education or vocational t

raining graduates: for the former stereotypes and traditional gender norms are weaker, leaving space for some more egalitarian opinions and attitudes. Highschool graduates slightly favor an adjustment to patriarchal roles, though the distance between them and university educated people remains significant (over 10%).

*Figure 8 Opinions regarding gender roles according to education level (percentage)*



**Income level also determines differences.** The largest difference is between those earning between 2000 and 3000 RON - who believe in traditional gender roles in the highest proportion, and those with an income of over 7000 RON - who are closer to egalitarian values. Thus, the latter agree only in a proportion of 34% that the man must always have the last say, while respondents with incomes ranging between 2000 and 3000 RON agree with the statement in a proportion of 57% (the difference is therefore 23%). The difference between these two categories manifests for all 7 points. Note, also, that in many cases in the questionnaire, the people without income or with an income of less than 2000 RON have more egalitarian values than the 2000-3000 RON category. For example, when faced with the statement “the man doesn’t need to be able to cook, clean etc”, those from the 2000-3000 category agree in a proportion of 43%, while those with an income under 2000 RON only agree in a proportion of 33%, and those without an income

agree a percentage of 36%. Of course, when interpreting the data we must not forget the respondents' profile: young men of ages between 15 and 29. It is thus highly probable that those with no income are not only very poor people, but also teenagers and young people that are still in the education system and have no income because of this. Also, for the category of under 2000 RON it is possible that among them there are young people earning a monthly scholarship from their place of study, or young people that have part-time jobs, so their income might not necessarily reflect the real economic status of every respondent. One thing is certain though: for those with higher incomes we can statistically observe a shift from the traditional patriarchal model towards a more egalitarian model of a couple relationship. Economic capital is for the most part, associated with greater access to education and cultural resources. An analysis correlating the level of education and economic capital might help lead to more solid conclusions in this sense.

**Work status** was quantified by the following categories: not currently working, looking for work; working fulltime; working part-time; occasional worker; freelancer; attending professional training. Those working part-time agree the least that the woman needs the man's protection (63%), compared to freelancers (90%) or those attending professional training (81%); on the other hand, when faced with the other statements their responses place them within the area of traditional gender roles. On average, freelance men and those attending professional training showcase values and opinions closer to an egalitarian model of the couple, even though the differences between the other categories aren't that significant percentage-wise.

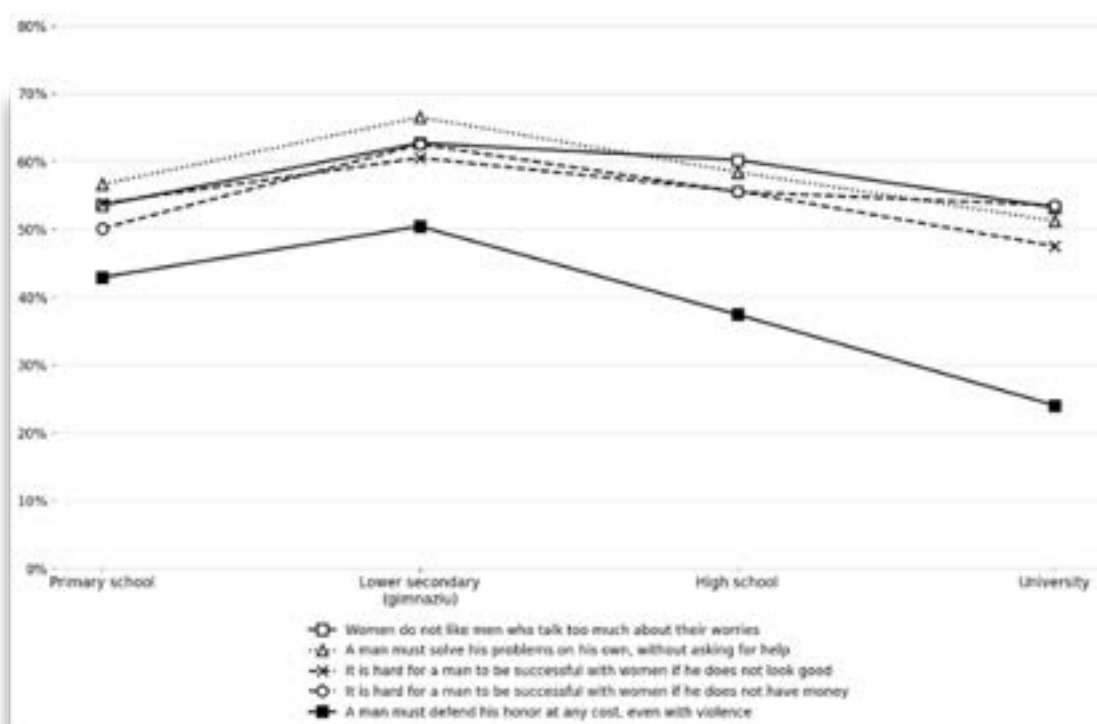
**Concerning the five questions referring to various types of masculinity**, we notice that the lowest internal differences show up for the statements relating to the stereotype of the man as a strong and rational person (not talking at length about his worries in a relationship) and the stereotype of the man that must provide for the couple/family (the importance of money for the success of a relationship). Small differences also show up regarding physical appearance, but as we have already mentioned, this aspect should be further explored to better understand its significance, if it is rather linked to traditional masculinity or if it shifts towards an alternative masculinity.

For this question as well the largest internal differences are a product of geographical location. The Bucharest-Ilfov region, for all five questions, registers the answers closest to a less aggressive and dominant masculinity. The other regions are usually much closer, with small percentage differences.

Only when it comes to the patriarchal norm of using violence to protect one's honor are the answers from the region of Transilvania much closer to those from the Bucharest-Ilfov region (33%, and 30% respectively), while in Moldova 53% of respondents accept the idea of violence, and in the South region the percentage goes up to 40%.

**Educational capital is, in this case as well, a differentiating factor**, but we only see significant differences appear for two out of the 5 statements. Thus, for the statements regarding expressing concern, the importance of physical appearance and money in a relationship the differences are lower, of under 10%. The highest differences show up in the affirmation related to the man's need to defend his honor, even if he has to resort to violence. The statement is considered valid by 24% of the respondents with a university education, by 50% of those that graduated vocational education, by 43% of those with a primary school education, and by 37% of those with a highschool education.

*Figure 9 Opinions regarding the types of masculinity according to education level (percentage)*



Thus, we can observe that people with a lower education level have incorporated an aggressive model of masculinity, a model that is starting to be accepted less and less by those with a university education, **the difference between the two categories ranging from simple to double (24% versus 50%)**.

They tend to also move past the stereotype that men are strong and shouldn't ask for help, and they solve their own problems, even though 51% still agree with this statement. On the other hand, those that have a vocational education validate this stereotype in a proportion of 67%. The hegemonic masculinity model favours unequal and abusive couple relationships, but at the same time mandates that men behave with a stoic demeanor that stops them from asking for help when they encounter problems, which can lead to, as we have shown in the introductory section, to addictions, risky behaviours, but also to an increase in the risk of untreated mental illnesses.

**The economic capital** shows that those with incomes of over 7000 RON are increasingly moving away from patriarchal masculinity. Thus, only 26% of them agree with the use of violence for protecting one's honor, while for the category of incomes of 2000-3000 RON the percentage is double, of 50%. The no income category accepts this stereotype in a proportion of 41%, and those with incomes under 2000 RON accept it in a proportion of 40%. For the other statements the differences between categories are lower. For the last statement, regarding the importance of money for the success of a relationship, those with incomes ranging between 2000 and 3000 RON agree in a proportion of 64%, compared to only 46% of those with an income of over 7000 RON. Besides having internalised traditional norms of masculinity, this difference could also be explained by the social position and experience of individuals: when you have (enough) money you might be less conscious of what it means to lack money and of the way this lack influences your romantic, and social relationships in general.

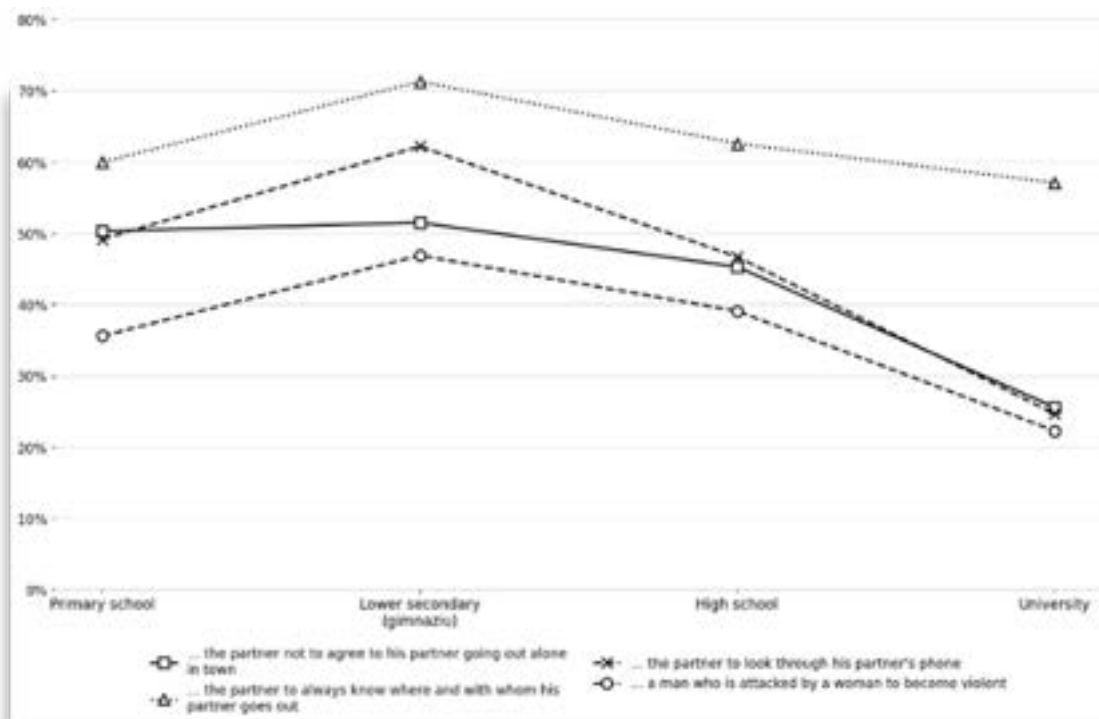
**Whether they lived alone or with their parents** is another element that influences the model of masculinity, even though the differences between categories aren't very significant. We notice, however, that those living with their parents or their own free will share, in a smaller part, the aggressive behaviour, the stereotype that men must be strong and solve their own problem, or the idea that money is important to the success of a relationship. Those that wish they lived alone but have not because they lack the approval of their parents reproduce patriarchal norms to a higher degree. Thus, only in this category does the percentage of those that disagree with violence for the sake of protecting one's honor pass 50% (52% to be more precise). And those who wish they lived alone but cannot financially afford it are closer to hegemonic masculinity: 65% believe that a man cannot ask for help in order to solve his problems, and 64% believe that money is important for the success of a relationship.

**The link between political values and gender norms** appears when we take a look at the differences between the candidate the respondents voted for in the presidential elections. For the second round of the elections the differences between those who voted for Nicușor Dan and those that voted for George Simion is, on average, 10%, those that voted Nicușor Dan having a model of masculinity that slightly distances itself from the patriarchal norms. We can observe more significant differences , at least regarding the statements about the use of violence and problem solving on one's own, between those that voted for Elena Lasconi and George Simion in the first round of the presidential elections. Thus, Elena Lasconi's voters agree in proportion of 32% with the statement that a man's honor must be defended at any cost, even by using violence, while George Simion's voters agree with this in a proportion of 45%. Then, 45% of Elena Lasconi's voters agree that men should solve their own problems by themselves, without asking for help, while George Simion voters validate this patriarchal norm in a proportion of 67%. Beyond the different ideological or doctrine options, which would be worth diving into for further research, the data that was collected also suggests that the possibility of voting for a woman presidency candidate might be an indicator for the adoption of more egalitarian gender roles and norms.

Even though **the age of the respondents** is one of the indicators that shows little internal variation, it is worth noting that teenagers (ages 15–17) have a higher acceptance rate for social violence (the boyfriend not allowing his girlfriend to go out alone) than those between 25 and 29 years old: 54% of the former agree with the statement, compared to 42% of the latter.

Instead, the importance of educational capital in the reduction of patriarchal gender norms and rejecting abusive behaviors is once again confirmed. Thus, the greatest differences arise regarding the statement that it is normal for the boyfriend to look through his girlfriend's phone: while only 25% of those with a university education approve of this type of monitoring, which is one of the first signs of a toxic relationship, the majority of those with a lower secondary education (gimnaziu) (62%) approve of it, while those with primary and high school education are close to 50% (49% and 47%, respectively). Similarly, social violence (not letting one's partner go out alone) is accepted by over half of respondents with primary education (50%) and lower secondary education (52%), by 45% of respondents with a highschool education, and by only 26% of those with a university education.

Figure 10 Opinions regarding forms of control and violence according to education level (percentage)



**Differences of over 20 percent are also present by the level of income:** those with an income of over 7000 RON are much less likely to agree with all of the affirmations, meaning the control, social and psychological violence over their girlfriend. The highest acceptance rate is among the people with incomes between 2000 and 3000 RON, respectively those earning under 2000 RON. Of course, taking into account the demographic of this research, it would be worth investigating in more detail what it means for young people to have less than 2000 RON a month or not have an income, and what are the other socio-demographic characteristics of those with low incomes. But it is a warning sign of the potential of economic instability to favor the adherence to patriarchal values and norms that go against democratic principles.

Finally, **the high differences are once again being registered according to the region**, with respondents from Bucharest-Ilfov that accept in a much lower proportion the social violence and control over the girlfriend than the other geographic regions.

## What do the interviews tell us about stereotypes and gender roles?

The interviews were organised with the respondents presently residing in Bucharest, the region that has registered, through the analysis of the questionnaire, the most favourable responses for less traditional gender roles. Almost all respondents favour an evenly-balanced couple relationship, where both partners split the domestic work, make decisions together, value communication, and reject the idea of violence. On the other hand, they believe that there are biological differences between women and men that then are transposed into the way they perceive the social roles of women and men: men are those that must ensure the family's (firstly, financial) stability, and women are seen as more sensitive, empathic, better suited to care for children.

The answers for the question "What does being a real man mean to you?" and "What does being a successful man mean to you?" reflect this differentiated and hierarchical conception of gender roles:

*"So, to be a successful man, if I was able to make enough money for my family, so that my wife wouldn't have to work, if she doesn't want to, that would be my number one". (R2)*

*"Generally, to be a real man is to, first of all, hold on firmly to what you believe in. If you are to fight for something, you should fight for it to the very end and never give up, or be constantly thinking of a way to reach your goals. Not in a machiavellian sense, though. And at the same time, [be] someone who is able to protect and support someone else, his future wife" (R9)*

*"Meaning a real man is that who does not really have fear, who is always ready or at least prepares himself ahead of time for anything, who does not show fear, doesn't show emotions and is always ready to take on anything without, yes, and always end up successful" (R13)*

*"To me, to be a real man means to be a good protector and a good father, to know how to create a family and to take care of them" (R21)*

*“When I think about a normal man, I think he must be decisive, unapologetic, not easily scared, he must be “set on himself”.” (R27)*

The differences are quite small between the answers, and so they are influenced very little by age, education level or professional and economic standing. With a few small differences and some exceptions, the majority of respondents share then the masculine role of the “breadwinner”, and over half of them share the one of the “head of the family”.

As to what concerns the division of domestic labour and childcare, all respondents agree that a collaboration must exist between the two partners. Relating to domestic work only a few of the men interviewed believe that some things are more specifically done by women (eg. doing the laundry), but they all rather embrace the idea of the division of labor. When they live or have lived with a partner, their responses show that in general the split of household tasks is not perfectly equal, but rather a 40%-60% split, as the respondents themselves admit. One single answer reproduces quite starkly the traditional split of domestic and care work:

*“Generally I’m the one to handle groceries, carrying heavy things, money, logistics, electronics (...)” (R5)*

In the other cases, the main difference shows up when it comes to childcare, where more interviewees believe that, especially in the beginning, but also afterwards, mothers know best how to take care of kids and offer them the emotional support they need:

*“Both parents, by the time spent, generally the mother, because, I don’t know, we all got used to the idea that the task would be hers, but it can be the father’s as well.” (R13)*

*“The mother will be, at least in the first 3 years, the most important person. But you should also support both the child and the mother, on this road. If the mother is away, you should be able to change his diaper, be able to feed him, be able to be a temporary replacement for the mother.” (R9)*

The influence of the dominant society-wide stereotypes is very clear: with 2-3 exceptions, even in the case of respondents with more egalitarian values, the idea that women would be more knowledgeable of, or would be better suited for taking care of children is quite strong. Or, this stereotype leads to behaviours and practices that perpetuate an unequal split of childcare, this being one of the main leading causes of inequalities on the job market.

Between the factors that influence the values and behaviours of young men, from the analysis of the interviews and of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the most important differences are caused by the existence of some very religious values and by frequenting the manosphere. The men that quote religion as extremely important to them (one of the respondents even saying that from 13 years old his masculine ideal was Jesus Christ), as well as those that previously followed or currently follow masculinist influencers (Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, Dani Mocanu, Buhnici) share patriarchal values related to gender roles and the idea of family. On the other hand, the men that volunteered in highschool, were involved in Erasmus projects, or in representing their fellow students, who follow influencers such as Faiăr, Zăvlog or FILIA Center manage to “get out of the box” of masculinity and have opinions and values that are (closer to) egalitarian.

# OPINIONS REGARDING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

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*Andreea Rusu*

## Personal relationships

Many of the form's questions looked to analyse the respondent's own relationships, and more specifically how easy they find it to start friendship or couple relationships and who they reach out to when they struggle in their personal life.

For the first set of statements, the vast majority of respondents believe they have can easily make friends (82%), go out (77%), enter a romantic relationship (65%), stay in a medium/long-term relationship (62%) and to have sexual relations (68%). It is important to note that these answers can be influenced by what we call the social desirability effect, meaning the tendency of respondents to say what they think is expected of them.

*Tabel 1 Types of relationships*

<b>In general, is for you to.... (%)</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Difficult</b>
Make friends.	82%	18%
Go on dates.	77%	23%
Enter a romantic relationship.	65%	35%
Stay in a medium/long-term relationship.	62%	38%
Have sexual relations.	68%	32%

## What are the factors that influence young men's relationships the most?

By analyzing the responses in correlation with the socio-demographic indicators, we see some notable differences. The age of the respondent creates a fluctuation that varies between 6% and 20%, as such: for a) to make friends, 88% of those aged between 18 and 20 years old say they find it easy, as well as 77% of those aged 21 to 24. The largest difference is found however, among the statements: d) to stay in a relationship long-term, where 55% of those aged between 15 and 17 years old say they find it easy, as well as 70% of those aged 25-29 years old, and e) to have sexual relations, where 55% of those between 15 and 17 years old say they find it easy, along with 75% of those aged 25-29 years old. These fluctuations are easy to infer due to the age differences and the different expectations that young people of 15-17 years old have from romantic relationships, that tend to explore and get to know more people, than those of 25-29 years old that are maybe looking for long-term relationships.

**Important differences are also found when it comes to respondents' work situation.** Those working part-time face a higher difficulty making friends (34% say they find it difficult) compared to those currently attending vocational training (only 12% say they find it difficult), freelance (13% find it difficult) or those that work fulltime (18% find it difficult). The ones that have the easiest time going out are occasional workers (88% view it as easy), compared to freelancers (65% say it's easy for them), and those working part-time (70%). As to what concerns the maintenance of a long-term relationship, those that find it the easiest are freelancers (69%), and those that find it most difficult are those working part-time (50% say they find it easy).

Figure 11 Types of relationships according to age (percentage)

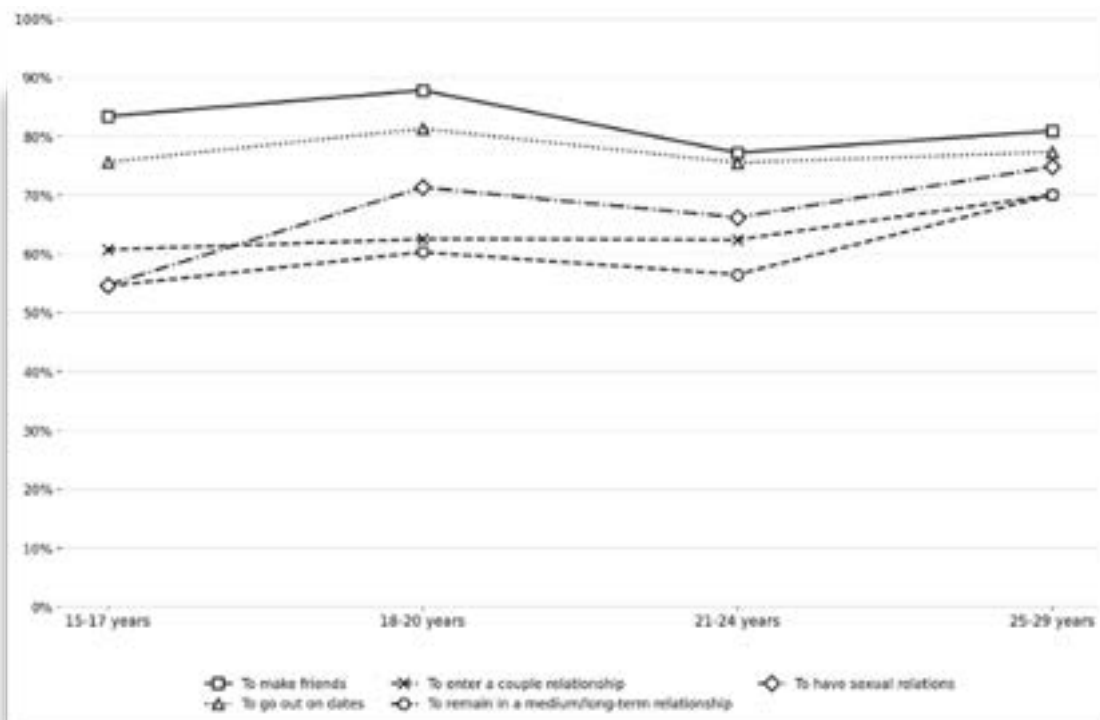
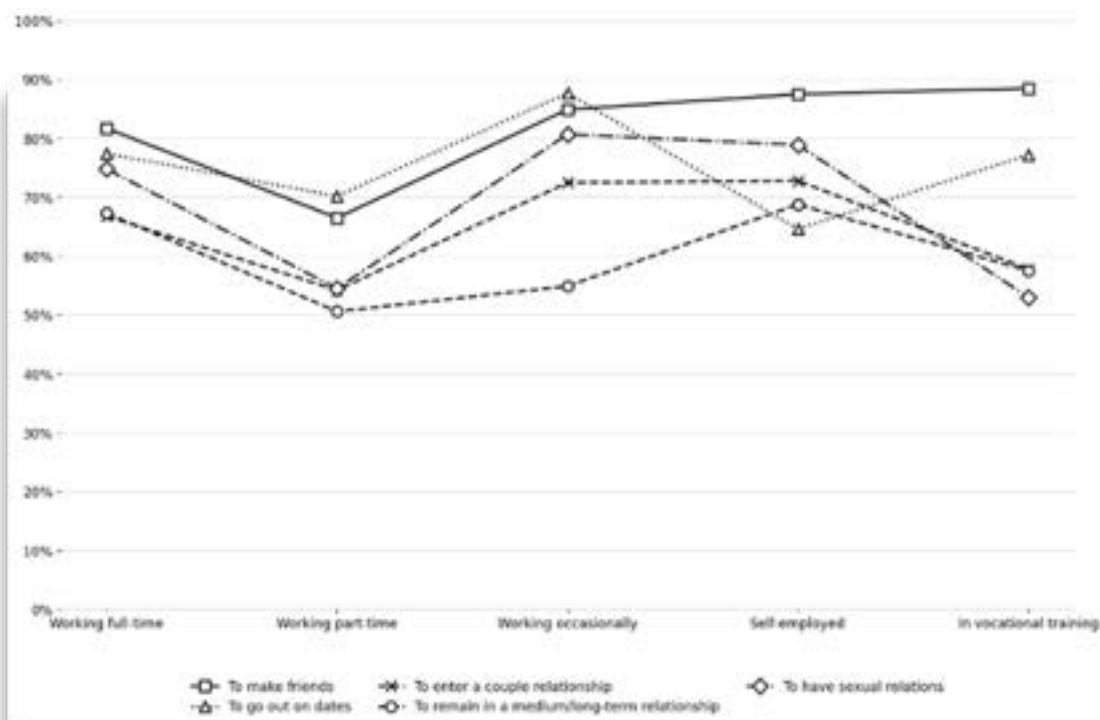
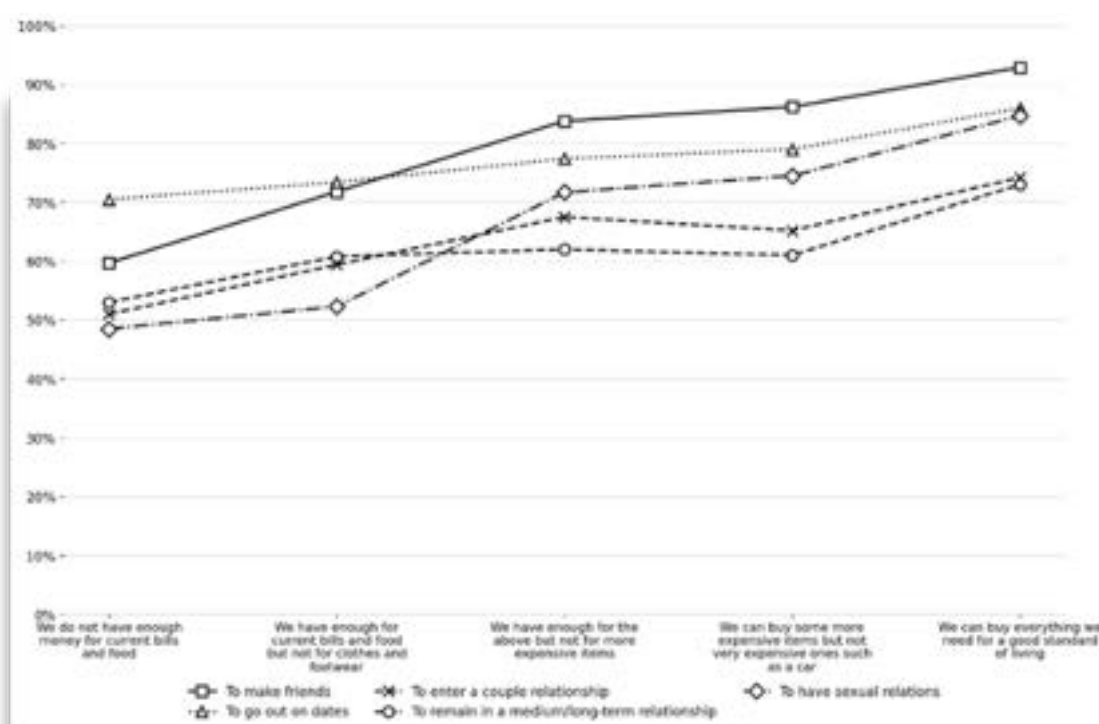


Figure 12 Types of relationships according to occupational status (percentage)



When it comes to the household's finances, respondents that do not "have enough money for bills and groceries" find it the most difficult to start relationships, both friendship, and romantic ones, and those with a financial situation that allows them to "buy what they need" find it easier, with differences from 60% easier to make new friends, to 93% and 51% easier to start a romantic relationship at 74%. In order to fully understand the reasons for these gaps another, more in depth research is required, relating to social relationships, that this paper could not cover.

*Figure 13 Types of relationships according to the financial situation (percentage)*



It is important that we mention the fact that, when it comes to urban-rural differences, these are not statistically representative, and when it comes to Romania's regions, the only significant differences are related to the ease of having sexual relations, for which respondents from the South region say they find it easy in a proportion of 61%, compared to 72-73% for Bucharest-Ilfov, Transilvania, and Moldova.

When they are faced with a personal matter, respondents speak to their family (63% of the time), to their partner (regardless of gender; 62% of the time), to friends or colleagues (55%) or look for information online (50%). Besides this, 47% of respondents assert that often they do not ask anyone, but rather solve their own problems.

42% claim they do this rarely, and only 11% never. This data correlates with the interviews we discussed. Some of the respondents say they talk to their girlfriend, their family, or very close friends, even mentioning that “men need emotional support because they hold too many of their feelings in” (R31), and another group reiterates gender stereotypes, claiming that men should face their problems alone, or self-describing themselves as “the type that doesn’t talk too much”, internalizing their problems until “they can no longer bear it” (R17).

*Tabel 2 Personal problems*

<b>When you face a personal problem, how often... (%)</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
Discuss with your partner	62%	33%	5%
Discuss with family	63%	34%	3%
Discuss with friends / colleagues	55%	40%	5%
Search for information online	50%	40%	10%
Ask on online groups / channels (reddit, telegram, instagram etc.)	23%	42%	35%
Ask the priest, pastor, confessor	17%	37%	46%
Ask a mentor, coach, psychologist, counselor	15%	36%	49%
Ask no one, you solve your problems yourself	47%	42%	11%

Other responses were “to ask in online groups/or channels”, to which 23,5% of respondents claimed to often use them, 41,5% of respondents said they use these resources rarely, and 35% never use them. 46% of respondents say they never consult with their priest, their pastor, or their confessor, and 37% say they do it rarely. A similar statistic is found in the case of mentors, coaches, psychologists, and counselors as well, where 49% say they never ask for their help, and 36% say they rarely do so.

## How do the answers differ based on socio-demographic factors?

For an easier understanding of the differences, we shall mention the most statistically relevant differences, in order. For option a) speak to your partner (regardless of gender): The differences based on age were directly proportional to the age of the respondent, those between 25 and 29 years old speaking to their partner more often than those younger - this is most likely linked to the probability of them being in a long-term relationship, as we have observed earlier in this paper. One other notable difference is related to work status, where those that work fulltime speak to their partner often, in a proportion of 72%, compared to those that work part-time (51%), and those that are not employed, but are seeking employment (52%). Also, in the case of those who lack income, or with an income of under 2000 RON, 52%, and respectively 54% say they often speak to their girlfriend, as opposed to 81% of those with an income of over 7000 RON, and 84% of those with an income between 5001 and 7000 RON. The same kind of difference can be found when looking at the education level, where graduates of higher education often speak (to their girlfriend) in a proportion of 75% compared to those that graduated vocational education (55%). The differences between rural-urban and by region are also important: 55% of those from rural areas speak to their partner (regardless of gender) often, compared to 69% of people from urban areas; de asemena, 88% of Bucharest-Ilfov compared to 49% of Moldova, 54% of the South region, and 72% of Transilvania. These differences by region can be found recurrently throughout the course of this research, where young men from the Bucharest-Ilfov region seem to adhere to patriarchal values less than those from other regions.

In the case of option b) talk to your family, the largest differences are related to the work status of respondents - those that work part-time talk about their issues often in a proportion of 39%, compared to those that are currently attending vocational training (72%), and those that are not employed and are not seeking employment (67%). These differences are not explained by the age of the respondents, because in this case differences are lower (speak to their family often 64%-67%, of those younger than 20 years old, compared to 59-63% of those between 21 and 29 years old). There are no notable differences regarding income, all categories being a maximum of 5 percent away from the average. There are no notable differences concerning the rural-urban area of respondents.

For option c) discuss with friends/colleagues, those that are younger speak more often to their peers (60-61% for those under 20, compared to 52% of those aged between 21-24 years old, and 50% of those aged 25-29 years old). Other notable differences relate to income, where those that most often talk to their friends/colleagues are those with incomes of under 2000 RON (67%), those that do not have an income (62%), those with incomes over 7000 RON (60%), and speaking to their peers the least are those with incomes between 5001 and 7000 RON - 43%.

In the case of d) look up information online, by age, we see a clear decrease in frequency: 57% of those 15 to 17 years old, and 56% of those 18 to 20 years old often look for information online, compared to 50% in the case of 21 to 24 year olds, and only 44% in the case of 25 to 29 year olds, while the answer “never” goes from 8-9% up to 12%. The education level follows this trend as well: those with a university degree use this resource more often (58% say “often”), followed by highschool and vocational education (50-52%), while respondents who finished primary education answer “often” in a proportion of 47% , and 12% of them “never”. Employment status further widens the gaps: young people attending vocational training (59%), those that work occasionally (58%), and those that do not work, but are looking for employment (55%) are most often online, compared to those that work part-time, where only 38% do this often. By income and financial standing of the household, the frequency of looking up information online goes up together with economic comfort: from 45% answering “often” in households who lack adequate funds for bills and groceries, to 55-57% in households who can afford more expensive items, or a better standard of living. The differences between urban and rural are, again, visible: in rural areas, 45% “often” look for information online, compared to 55% of those living in urban areas, and for Bucharest-Ilfov the percentage reaches 62%, compared to 45% in Transilvania and 49% in the South region.

In the case of option e) “ask in online groups or channels”, the significant differences show up in regions, where those in the South region use these channels the least often (19%), while in Moldova they are used the most (33%), but between urban and rural there are no statistically significant differences. Also, as the respondents get older, the possibility of them using these channels goes down (from 26% saying “often” for 15-17 year olds, to 20% for 25-29 year olds). There are no conclusive differences based on income.

Those that speak the most with their priest, pastor, or confessor, are those from the region of Moldova (27% say “often” compared to 13-16% in the rest of the country), those from rural areas (20% compared to 15%), those that are married (24% compared to 16% of unmarried people), and full-time employees (21% say “often” compared to 8% of freelancers).

Those that would ask a mentor, coach, psychologist, or counselor are for the most part from the region of Moldova (23% answer “often”, compared to 8% for the South region, 15% for Transylvania, and 19% for Bucharest), and have an income between 2001 and 3000 RON (19% answer “often”), or an income of over 7000 RON (21% answer “often”).

The option “do not ask anyone, you solve your own problems” has quite a few differences that would be worth a deep analysis, based on many socio-economic categories. In the case of the respondents’ age, the option of “never” is similar for all categories, however, 42% of those between 15 and 17 years old say that they solve their own problems often, compared to 50-51% for 18–24-year-olds and 46% for 25-29 years old. Most likely these differences are on one hand related to the dependence on their parents for minors in some decisions and problems, with a higher probability that after 25 years old respondents would be in a couple relationship where solving problems is a team effort. Those that have kids solve their own problems most often (54% compared to 46%). It is the same for those with an income higher than 7000 RON (55% compared to 45-49% for the other categories). Also, there is a difference by region, similar to the one for income, where 55% of respondents from Transylvania solve their own problems “often”, compared to 40-47% for other regions.

This research has also found some notable differences based on marriage status, and the existence of a romantic relationship. 46% of married respondents declare that they solve their own problems, 47% of those that are unmarried, and 58% of those that are unmarried, but have a stable relationship and live with their partner. Even if the data does not allow, right now, for a more detailed analysis, a possible explanation could be the length of the relationship. Young men in this situation are moving from a status based on friendship relations to a status based on the relationship with their partner, but have not reached it yet. This Hypothesis is credible considering the respondents’ ages, but, we must mention it once again, it is just a hypothesis, until we can have a more in-depth research on this topic.

## Sexuality and Bullying

This part of the study explored respondents' views on sexual relationships and their experiences with bullying. It is important to note that the entire section was completed by the respondents directly on a tablet, ensuring complete anonymity of their responses. This methodological choice helped build greater trust among respondents, encouraging them to express their opinions honestly.

### Views on Sexuality

Question sets F1 and F2, presented in the tables below, should be analyzed in tandem to understand the gender stereotypes prevalent among young men.



*Tabel 3 Gender stereotypes regarding men*

<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements.. (%)</b>	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>To a small extent</b>
Men who have had many sexual relationships are experienced	73%	27%
A real man never refuses sex	54%	46%
If a man cheats on his partner / wife, it is not very serious	42%	58%
It is more important to me that my partner be beautiful than intelligent	40%	60%
Men cannot be friends with women because they will always want more	47%	53%

Thus, 73% of respondents agree to a great extent with the statement “Men who have had many sexual partners are experienced,” and 58% agree to a great extent that “women who have had many sexual partners are promiscuous.” These two mirror-image statements clearly reveal the existence of a double standard: men’s sexual behaviors are often valued, while the same behavior in women is morally condemned. The persistence of these differences in perception, including among young people, indicates that stereotypes about sexuality are deeply ingrained and continue to shape how men and women are judged for the same actions.

*Tabel 4 Gender stereotypes regarding women*

<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements... (%)</b>	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>To a small extent</b>
Women who have had many sexual relationships are promiscuous	58%	42%
In a couple, the female partner should be available for sex whenever the male partner wants it.	53%	47%
If a woman cheats on her partner / husband, it is not very serious	38%	62%
For women, it is more important that you have a large penis than that you treat them nicely.	41%	59%
Girls / women look for a partner who has money.	57%	43%

The greatest socio-demographic differences are related to the level of formal education: 80% of respondents with vocational training agree with the first statement to a great extent, compared to 74% of those with high school and college education and 67% of those with only elementary school education.

Regarding the statement “women who have had many sexual partners are promiscuous,” the same trend holds, with 65% of those with vocational education agreeing to a great extent, 57% of high school graduates, 58% of primary school graduates, and 48% of college graduates agreeing to a great extent. It is important to note that these statistics underscore the need to introduce gender equality education in schools, starting in elementary school, to challenge patriarchal stereotypes in society.

Regarding the respondents’ ages, we observe that those with the lowest percentage agreeing to a great extent with the first statement are those aged 15 to 17 (67%), but in the case of the statement about women, the age differences are not mirrored; those aged 25–29 are, in this case, the age group with the lowest percentage agreeing to a great extent (55%).

Those who work occasionally are most likely to agree with the statement “Men who have had many sexual partners are experienced” (80% agree to a great extent) compared to the national average of 73%. When considering the respondents’ financial situation, those living in poverty or near poverty are significantly less likely to agree to a great extent with the statement about men (64%) compared to those with a better financial situation (74–77%).

*Figure 14 Opinions regarding sexual relationships according to age (percentages)*

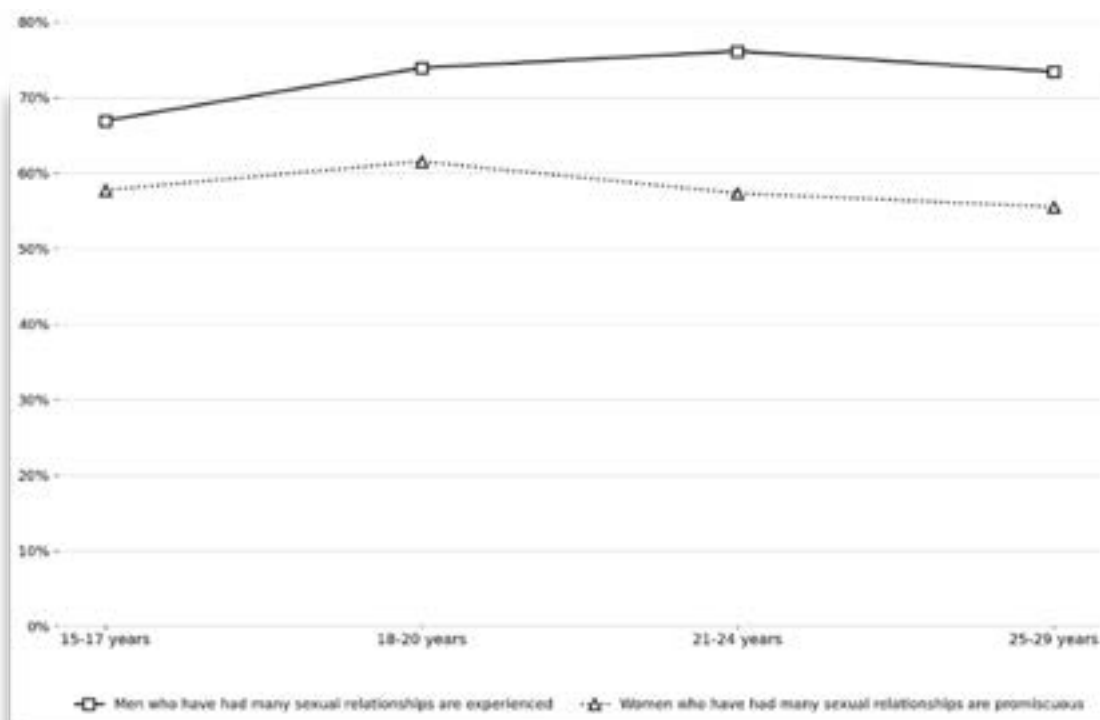
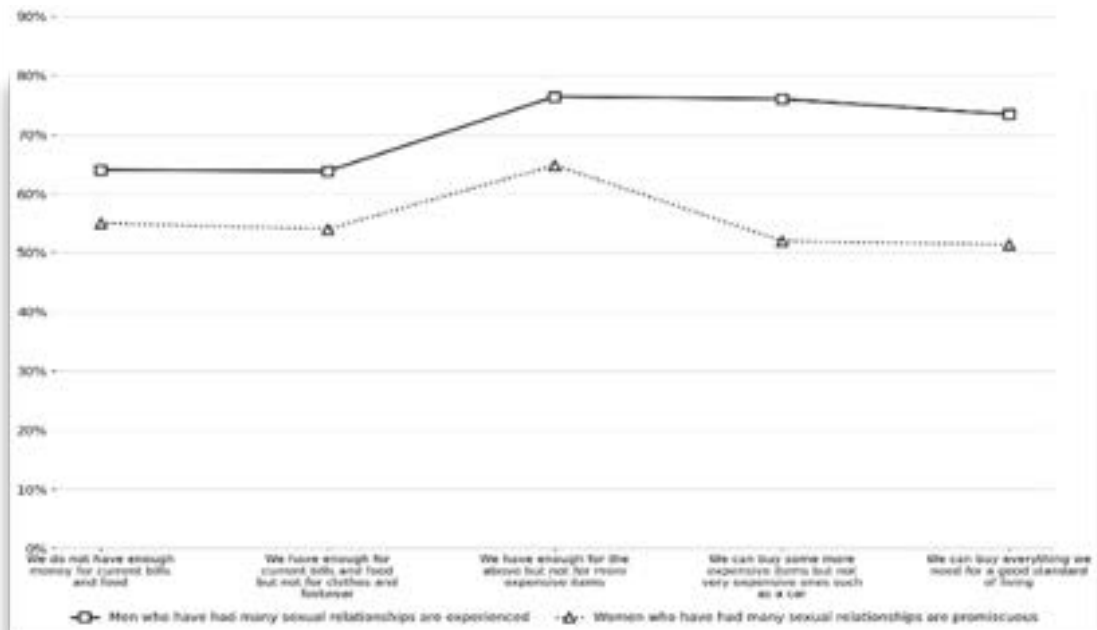


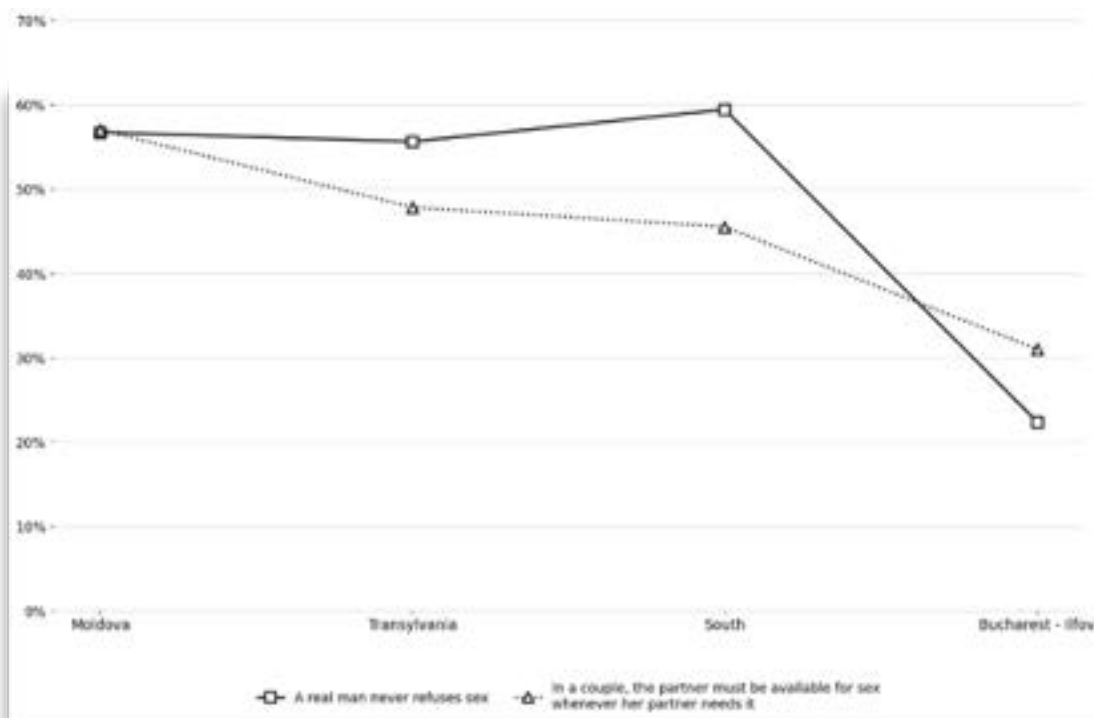
Figure 15 Opinions regarding sexual relationships according to financial status (percentage)



54% of respondents agree to a great extent that “a real man never turns down sex,” and 53% agree to a great extent that “in a couple, the female partner must be available for sex whenever the male partner wants it.” These views highlight gender stereotypes regarding what constitutes a “real man” and the association of this with a high sex drive, as well as the idea that women have a “duty” to satisfy their partner and be available whenever he wants. In Romania, marital rape was criminalized only in 2000. It is also interesting that young men’s opinions on this subject are split almost 50-50, which shows that there is a division in society regarding the acceptance or rejection of gender stereotypes.



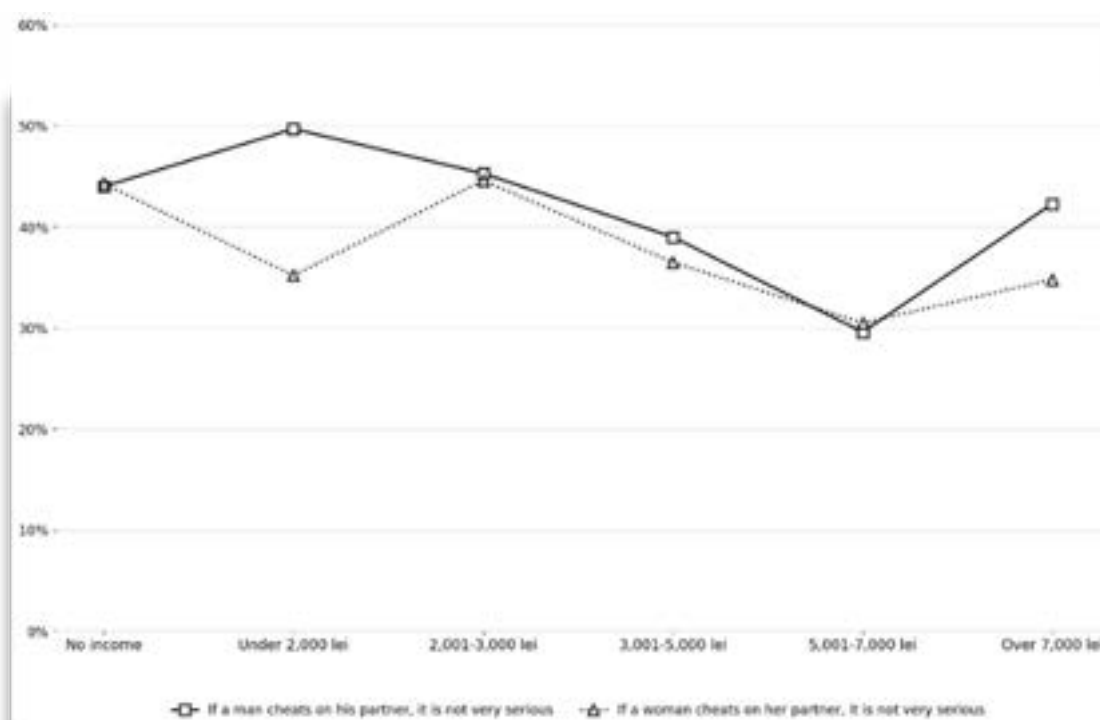
Figure 16 Opinions regarding sexual relationships according to region (percentage)



By age, the differences are minimal, suggesting that these stereotypes are distributed relatively evenly across the age groups in the sample. However, opinions are influenced by a number of factors, including the respondent’s formal education, employment status, marital status, and the region where they live. Thus, the most significant differences appear between those with higher education and those with vocational education: college graduates reject the statement much more often (61% “to a small extent”), while vocational school graduates agree with it most often (64% “to a great extent”). High school and elementary school graduates are close to the national average, with around 53–55% agreeing to a great extent. In the case of the second statement, “in a couple, the female partner must be available for sex whenever the male partner wants it,” the same pattern holds: college graduates reject the statement at a very high rate (70% “to a small extent”), while those with vocational training agree with it more often (54% “to a great extent”). Regarding employment status, those who work occasionally agree to a great extent with the statement about men at a rate of 71%, while those in vocational training have the lowest rate of agreement to a great extent (32%). In the case of the corresponding statement about women, the differences are not as significant.

Marital status is another factor influencing responses, with respondents who are married or living with a partner showing stronger agreement with the statement about men—57% and 63%, respectively—compared to those who are unmarried (52%) or do not live with a partner (53%). A similar situation is observed for the corresponding statement about women, where 66% of respondents who do not live with a partner agree to a small extent, compared to 50% of those who are married, 51% of those living with a partner, and 52% of those who are unmarried. In terms of regions, respondents from Bucharest-Ifov are more likely to reject these statements, with 78% agreeing to a small extent with the first (compared to the national average of 46%) and 69% with the second (compared to the national average of 53%). As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis, the two statements function as mirror images: one concerns “true” masculinity, the other women’s sexual availability. The results show that stereotypical images of sexuality remain strongly intertwined and continue to shape what young people believe is “desirable” in a relationship.

*Figure 17 Opinions regarding infidelity according to income (percentage)*



When it comes to infidelity, 57.5% of young men in Romania agree to a small extent that “if a man cheats on his partner/wife, it is not very serious,” and 62% agree to a small extent that “if a woman cheats on her partner/husband, it is not very serious.” The difference when analyzed by gender is less than 5%. Although this is not a very large difference, it remains consistent across nearly all sociodemographic categories and reveals a double standard. In addition to the small but consistent differences in perceptions of male and female infidelity, there are several notable contrasts within certain sociodemographic groups. For example, regarding occupation, the largest difference between the two statements is among those who work occasionally: 60% agree to a great extent that it is not very serious if a man cheats, compared to 59% who agree to a small extent that it would not be very serious if a woman cheats. A similar pattern emerges among young people with high incomes (over 7,000 lei): 42% agree to a great extent that it is less serious for men, compared to 35% for women. The situation is similar for those with incomes under 2,000 lei, where 50% agree to a great extent that it is less serious for men, compared to 35%. In no other income category are the differences as pronounced as among those with the highest and lowest incomes. Furthermore, in Bucharest-Ilfov, 72% disapprove of male infidelity (agree to a small extent) and 71% disapprove of female infidelity as well, while in Moldova, 52% disapprove of male infidelity, but the proportion disapproving of female infidelity rises to 61%.

59.5% of respondents agree to a small extent with the statement “It is more important to me that my partner be beautiful than intelligent,” and an almost identical percentage, 59%, agree with the statement “It is more important to women that you have a large penis than that you treat her well.” These responses indicate a relative rejection of gender stereotypes, but they can also be interpreted the other way around: 4 out of 10 young people (40.5% in the first case and 41% in the second) remain aligned with patriarchal beliefs. Another interesting aspect of these statements is that in nearly all socio-demographic categories, the data are identical (within each category) for both statements, with very small differences, generally within the margin of error. There are, however, a few exceptions:

- 54% of vocational school graduates agree to a great extent that penis size is more important than behavior, while 52% agree to a small extent that it is more important for their partner to be beautiful

- 22% of those with incomes over 7,000 lei agree to a great extent that it is more important for a partner to be beautiful, and 32% that penis size is more important. The difference in agreement between the two statements is 10%.
- In the case of those in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, the difference is the opposite of that among those with incomes over 7,000 lei: 27% agree to a great extent that their partner's beauty is more important, while 18% agree to a great extent that penis size is more important

There are again notable differences across socio-demographic categories regarding the level of formal education, with those who have completed vocational school agreeing to a great extent with both statements (48% for the statement on appearance and 54% for the one on penis size) compared to those with a college education (26% and 25%, respectively).

The final statements we will analyze from the two sets are: "Girls/women look for a partner who has money," with which 57% agree to a great extent, and "Men cannot be friends with women because they will always want more," with which 47% agree to a great extent. We will address them separately.

**The statement "Girls/women look for a partner who has money"** is at the heart of one of the most extensive recent online campaigns in conservative circles, namely the concept of "tradwives" (traditional wives). This concept and lifestyle is promoted by men (influencers, public figures, and members of the so-called "manosphere"), but also by women (also from the influencer sphere) who discuss the "feminist trap" that has forced women to enter the workforce and work, when in fact it would have been much simpler and more desirable for them to be supported. Most of the people promoting this concept are extremely wealthy and present an idealized and unrealistic lifestyle for a middle-class or poor family. Moreover, many of these women actually work, earning money from online ads and promotions.

57% of young people agree to a great extent with the statement "Girls/women look for a partner who has money," and 43% agree to a small extent. In this case, there are no statistically significant differences across age groups. Regarding formal education, those who have completed primary school agree with the statement to the least extent (52% agree to a great extent), while those who have completed vocational school agree most often (61% agree to a great extent).

Those who work occasionally agree with the statement to a greater extent (70% agree to a great extent) compared to those in vocational training (47% agree to a great extent).

The statement **“Men can’t be friends with women because they’ll always want more”** masks a pattern of social violence, in which women are not allowed to have their own group of friends or male friends, or to go out alone, for “fear” that they will be “seduced” by other men. This pattern was also identified in the Gender-Based Violence Barometer (I. Băluță, C. Tufiș, FILIA Center 2022): 1 in 4 Romanians believed it is acceptable for a woman not to be allowed to go out unaccompanied by her partner or to be forbidden by her partner from having a group of friends.

47% of respondents agree to a great extent with the statement “Men cannot be friends with women because they will always want more,” and 53% agree to a small extent. Similar to the analysis of the statement above, the differences across age groups are not statistically significant in this case either, but there are significant differences regarding level of formal education and employment status. 54% of those who completed vocational school agree to a great extent with the statement, compared to 37% of those with a college degree. 60% of those who work occasionally agree to a great extent, compared to 40% of those in vocational training.

## **Sexual Life**

Regarding the sexual life of young men, 74% of respondents said they have become sexually active. The differences by age are as follows: 27% of those aged 15–17 have become sexually active, with the percentage rising to 75% among those aged 18–20, 87% among those aged 21–24, and 92% among those aged 25–29. Of these, 40% always use protection, 26% often, 20% sometimes, 6% rarely, and 8% never.

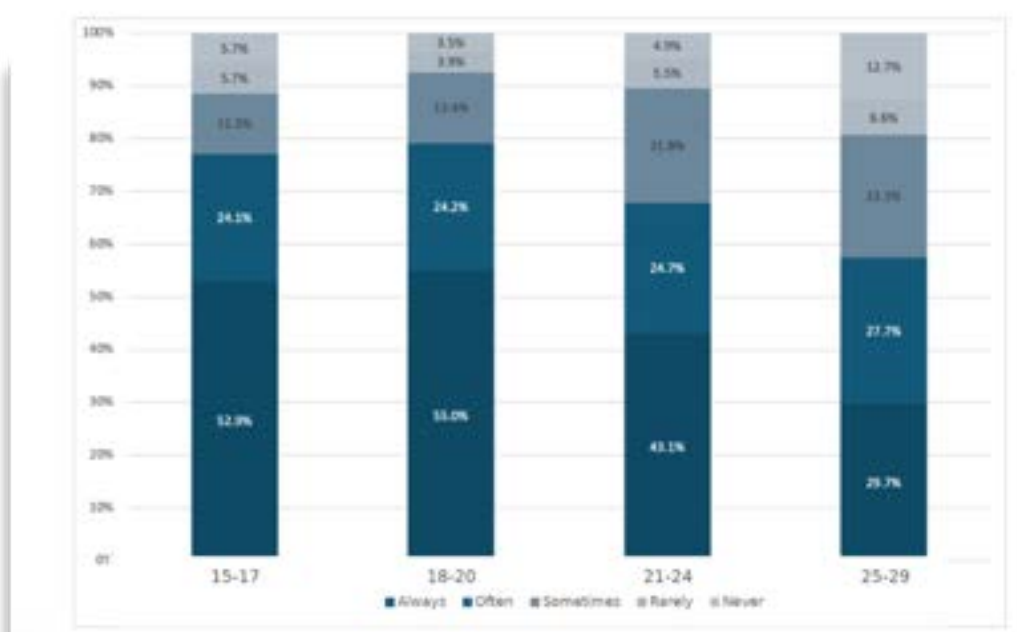
Most respondents who are sexually active say they use protection at least sometimes when having sex, but only 40% do so always.

The data show differences in the frequency with which young men use protection during sex. Regarding the age of respondents, consistent use of protection is highest among young people under 20 who have become sexually active (53% of those aged 15–17 and 55% of those aged 18–20 always use protection, while 24% use protection often).

However, the fact that almost 1 in 2 boys aged 15–17 do not always use protection is concerning given the high rates of teenage pregnancy.

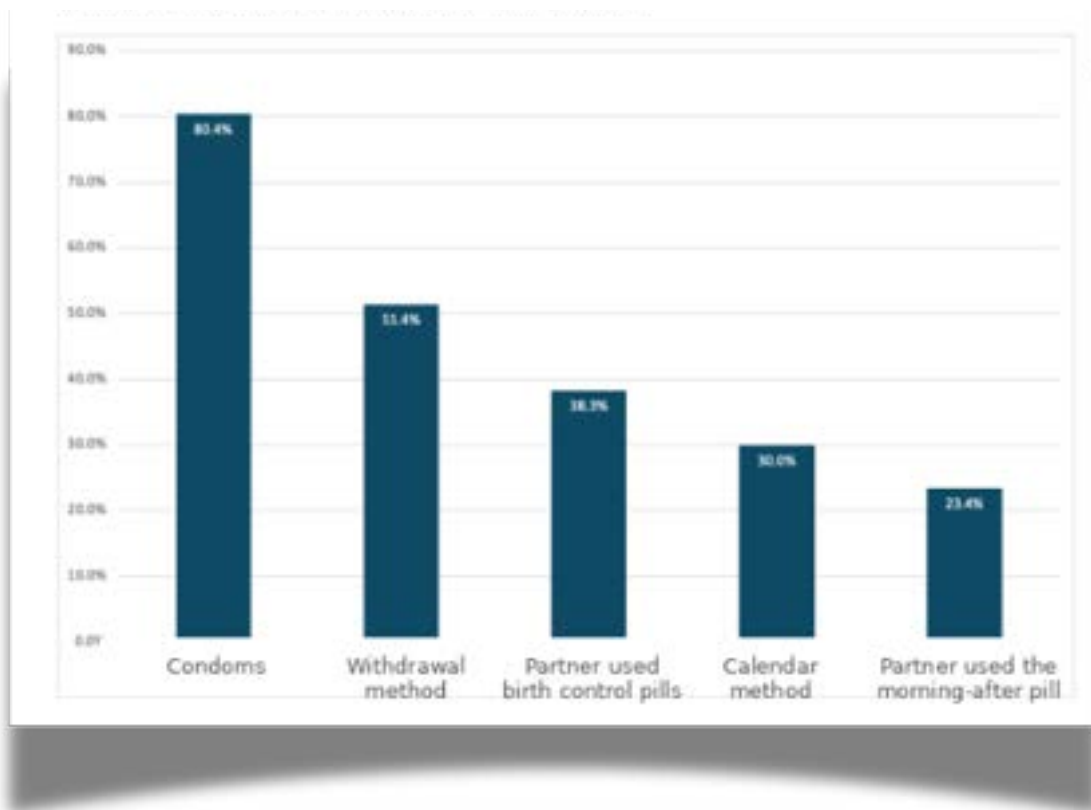
In the 21–24 age group, there is a noticeable decline: 43% always use protection, 25% often, and 27% use protection only sometimes/rarely, while 5% never do. The lowest rates are found among those aged 25–29, where only 30% of young people say they always use protection, 28% often, 23% sometimes/rarely, and 7% never.

*Figure 18 Use of contraception during sex by age group (percentage)*



The most commonly used method of contraception is the condom, used by 80% of respondents, followed by the withdrawal method (51%) and, at a considerable distance, contraceptive pills (38%), the rhythm method (30%), and the morning-after pill (23%). It is important to note that the withdrawal method and the rhythm method have a high failure rate in preventing pregnancy: one in five women will become pregnant within a year of use, versus one in ten who use oral contraceptives or one in 100 who use an IUD. We chose to include them, however, because they are widely regarded as such. They also do not provide protection against sexually transmitted infections. The fact that 1 in 2 young men have chosen to use the withdrawal method at least once raises questions about the information they have regarding sex education: protection against sexually transmitted infections or unwanted pregnancies.

Figure 19 Contraception methods (percentage)



With regard to the withdrawal method and the calendar method, there are significant socio-demographic differences among respondents based on age, level of formal education, and household financial situation. The withdrawal method is reported to be used at much higher rates among young people aged 21–29 (52–56%) compared to those under 20 (42–45%), while the calendar method was most frequently used by respondents aged 25–29 (36%) compared to those under 20 (22–23%). Another factor influencing the responses is formal education level, such that those with higher education used these methods significantly more: 59% use the withdrawal method, compared to 46% with primary education, and 37% use the calendar method compared to 26% with primary education. This correlation may be linked to age, but it is worth noting.

Regarding age differences, young people under 20 are more likely to report using condoms (91% of those aged 18–20 and 89% of those aged 15–17) compared to 82% of those aged 21–24 and 73% of those over 25. This suggests that condom use has become more popular in recent years among younger men.

## Bullying

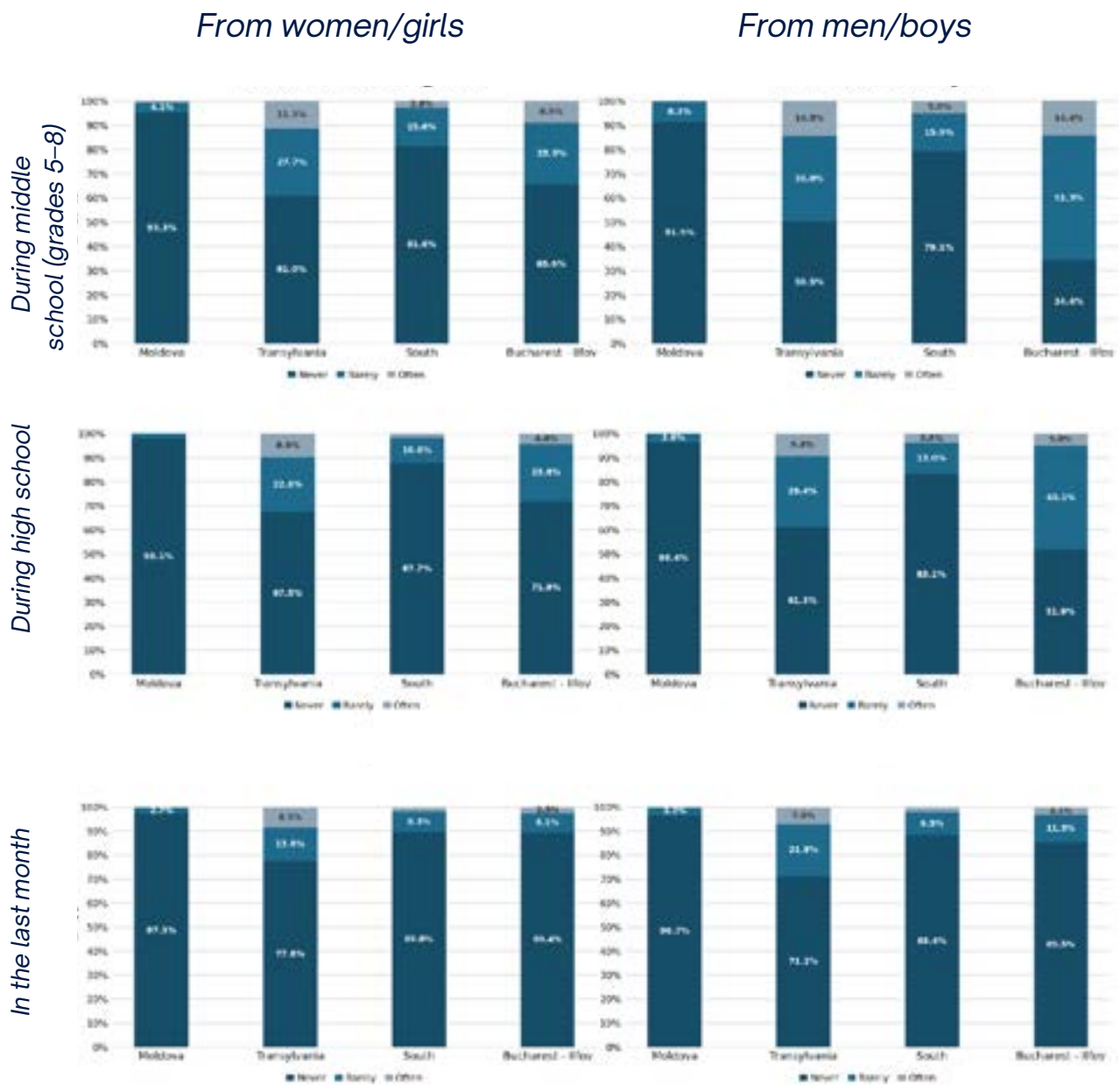
We included several sets of questions in the questionnaire that addressed the topics of bullying and cyberbullying, covering various time periods.

*Tabelul 5 Bullying*

<b>Have you been the target / victim of bullying or online harassment... (%)</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>During middle school (grades 5–8)</b>			
...from girls?	6%	18%	76%
...from other boys?	8%	24%	68%
<b>During high school</b>			
...from girls?	4%	14%	82%
...from other boys?	5%	19%	76%
<b>In the last month</b>			
...from women/girls?	4%	9%	87%
...from other men/boys?	3%	13%	84%

The overall data show that bullying and online harassment are more likely to be perpetrated by boys/men than by women: in middle school, 32% (combined “often” and “rarely”) were harassed by other boys/men compared to 24% by girls/women; in high school, 24% compared to 18%; and in the past month, 16% compared to 13%. The fact that online harassment and bullying are more often perpetrated by males shows that the dynamics of dominance and competition play an important role from an early age. At the same time, we can observe that bullying and online harassment are fairly widespread phenomena, with more than 1 in 10 respondents having been victims in the past month.

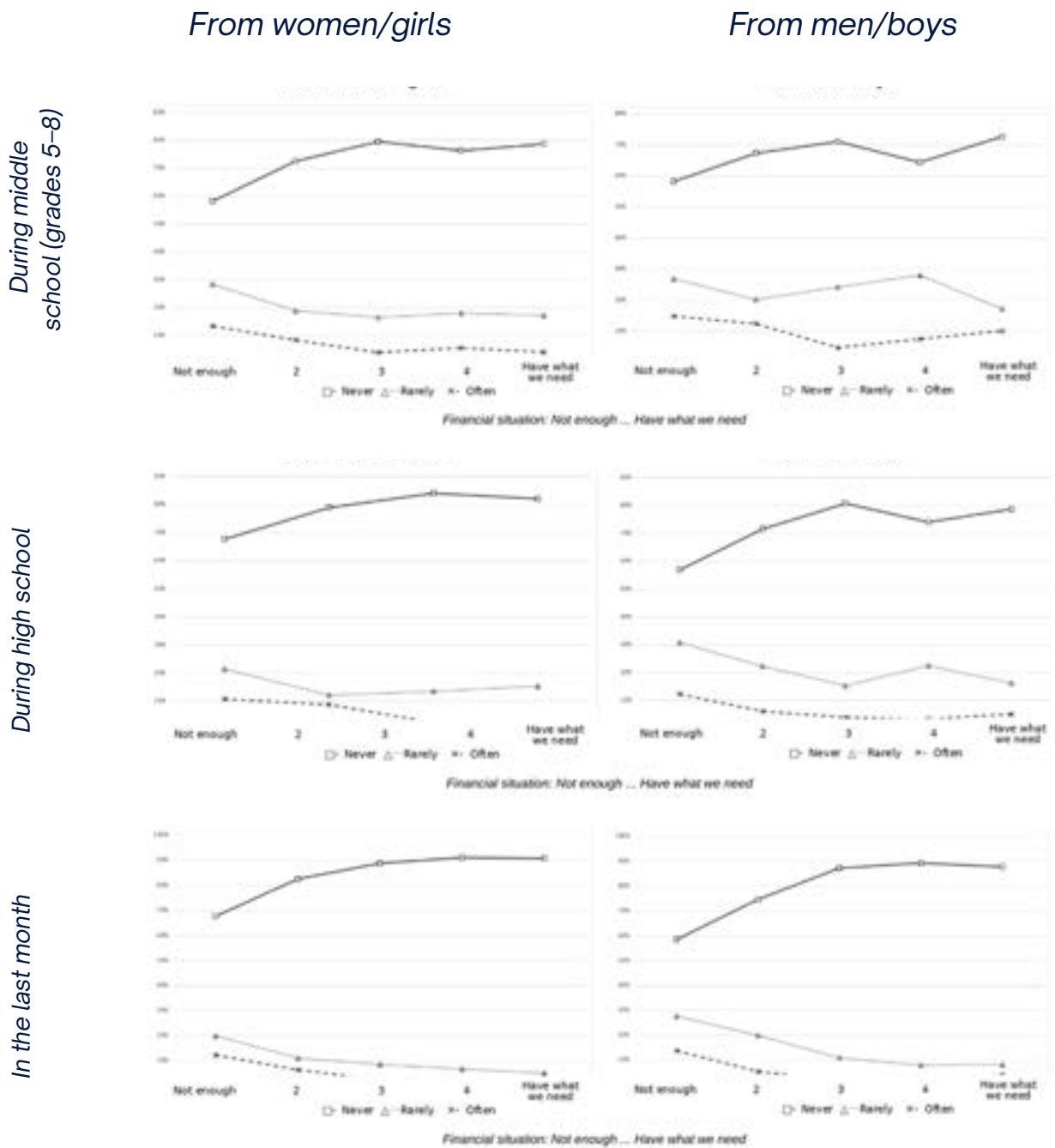
Figure 20 Bullying according to region (percentage)



The most significant difference across socio-demographic groups, which holds true throughout the section on bullying and online harassment, is related to region: respondents from Bucharest-Ilfov and Transylvania are far less likely than those from the Moldova or South regions to report that they have never been victims of bullying. These data do not mean that bullying does not occur nationwide, but may indicate a lower level of awareness of what constitutes bullying or harassment among respondents. However, a separate, more in-depth study could clarify these findings.

Urban-rural differences are moderate: young people in rural areas tend to report more often that they have never been victims, while in urban areas the frequency of “rarely” and “often” responses increases slightly, especially regarding bullying by boys in middle and high school.

Figure 21 Bullying according to financial status (percentage)



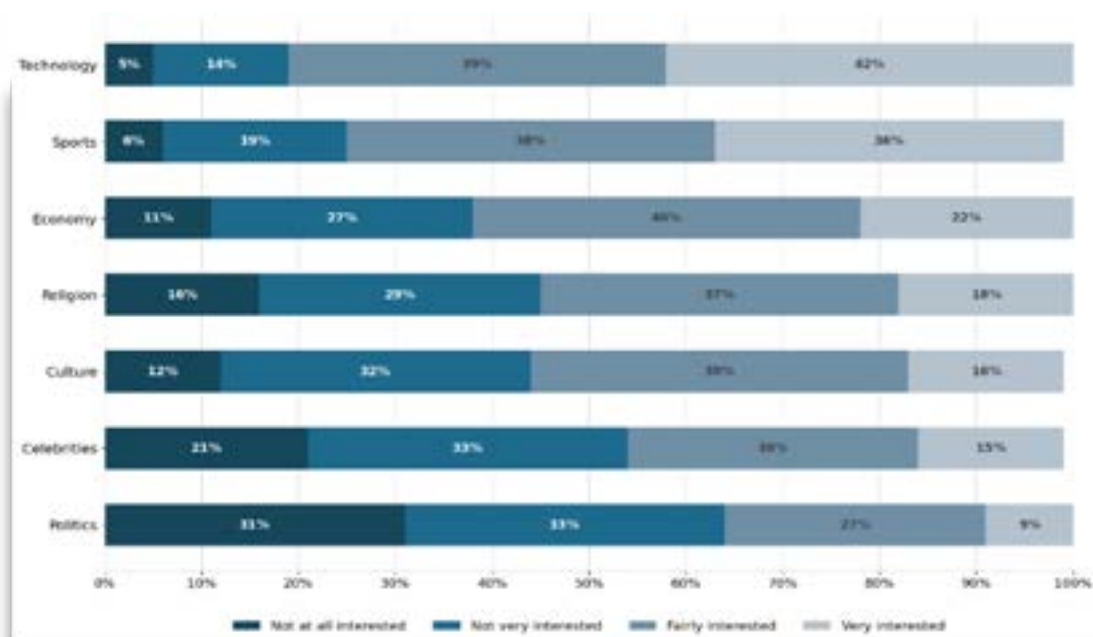
Other notable differences are found based on household financial status, where young people living in families that cannot afford to pay their current bills and buy food are the ones who report the highest percentages of having been victims (often, rarely, or in the past month): 41% of girls and 42% of boys in middle school, 33% of girls in high school and 43% of boys, 32% in the past month among girls and 42% among boys. The differences compared to those living in families that can afford everything they need for a good life range from 15 to 30 percentage points. Thus, nearly 1 in 2 boys and young men living in poverty say they have been victims of bullying in the past month, compared to about 1 in 10 among those living in families with greater financial means (12% of men/boys bullied in the past month). These statistics clearly show the link between bullying and classism or class-based discrimination. We saw the same link in one of the interviews, in which the respondent (R7) recounts that there were instances in which he was insulted by women because “they were rejected.”

# ONLINE: SOCIALIZING AND INFLUENCING

Ovidiu Voicu

We asked respondents to answer a few questions regarding how often they engage in various activities in their daily lives. This is not an exhaustive study of daily life, but rather an examination of topics that we traditionally associate with young men. We will review these responses before continuing with a more in-depth discussion of time spent online.

Figure 22 Interest regarding different aspects of day to day life (percentage)

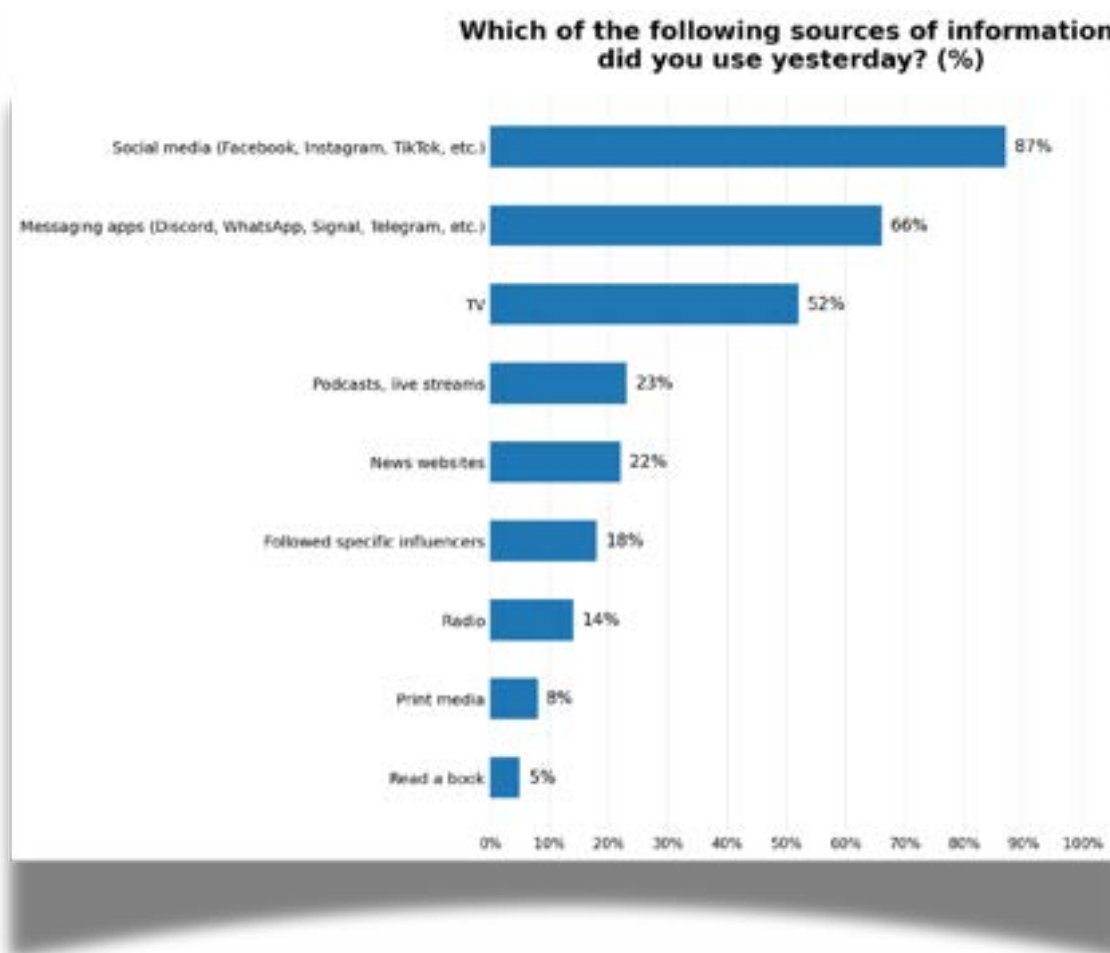


Given a predefined list of life topics, young men are, predictably, much more interested in technology and sports than in politics or celebrities (we assume that sports stars still fall under the sports category). Of all respondents, 81% say they are fairly or very interested in technology, which ranks first. Sports come in second, a common interest for 74% of young Romanian men. They show greater interest in the economy (62%) than in religion (55%) or culture (55%). Less than half are interested in celebrities (45%) and politics (36%).

While not exhaustive, and taking into account the potential influence of socially desirable responses (which could affect, for example, the stated interest in culture), the list reveals an expected hierarchy of preferences, similar to examples from other countries. Interest in sports is also evident in the fact that nearly half of respondents (47%) say they go to the gym, with a significant portion of them (27%) doing so at least once a week.

Interest in technology is also reflected in terms of information sources. Respondents were given a list of potential information sources and asked to indicate which ones they had used the previous day. The most commonly used sources were, in fact, online: 87% of respondents said they got their news from social media, and 66% said they used other types of apps. Television rounds out the top three sources of daily news, cited by 52% of the young men surveyed.

*Figure 23 Sources of information utilized (percentage)*





Information obtained through individual interviews (the qualitative component of the research) supports and complements the survey data. The long-standing hypothesis of rapid change in preferred information sources is confirmed. We are no longer just talking about the “death of TV,” but also about the clear decline of Facebook. None of the young men interviewed mentioned TV or Facebook as their primary source. While Facebook is considered outdated (“my parents use it”), YouTube is the new TV, for example, consumed passively during meals or other moments. TikTok and Instagram are the dominant platforms for quick entertainment, although some respondents deliberately choose to avoid TikTok to protect their time and/or mental health.

The interviews confirm a clear break from traditional mainstream media. Young men place their trust in “personal brands” (influencers) or independent journalism (sources such as Recorder and Mindcraft Stories were mentioned). Political news is consumed in “digestible” formats on Instagram (mentions: GenȘtiri, Politică la Minut). Occasionally, AI (primarily ChatGPT) is used as an information tool, signaling a shift in how information is sought: from “search and select” (Google) to “direct synthesis” (ChatGPT).

It is important to highlight a significant methodological caveat. The interviews were conducted in Bucharest and are not representative of the entire country. The selection of respondents may explain why the sources mentioned are predominantly liberal, and why sources from the so-called “sovereignist” space do not appear.

## How influential are influencers?

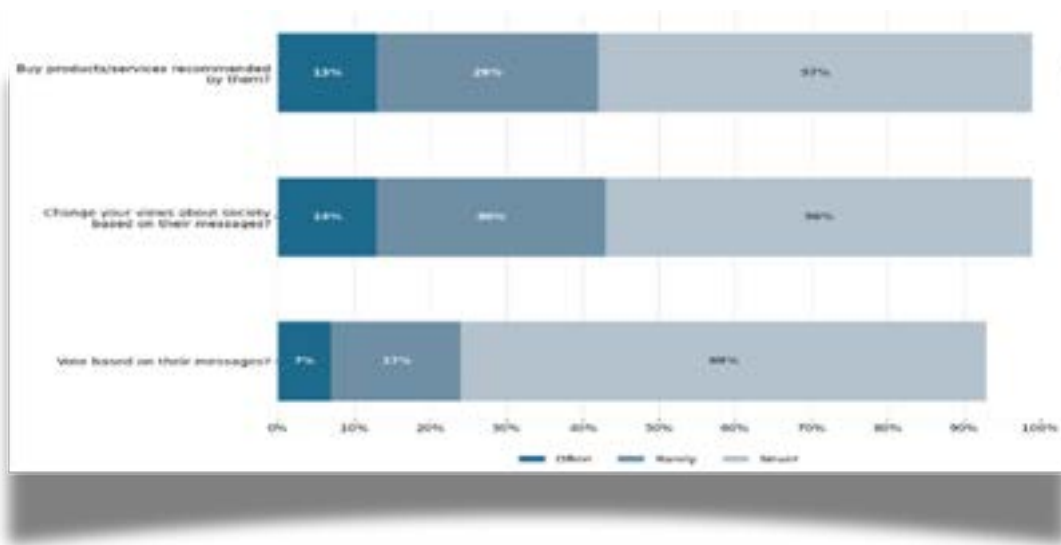
Our research included several questions that allow us to take an exploratory look into the world of influencers. We did not define this term, leaving its interpretation up to the respondents. Typically, we refer to people who are active online and have a large number of followers.

We used open-ended questions to find out who the most followed influencers are among young men in Romania. Only 55% of respondents spontaneously provided at least one name; the percentage was significantly lower—23%—for those who mentioned two names, and only 11% specified a third influencer. We use the word “only” because the 55% figure isn’t as high as we expected. Still, more than half of young Romanian men can name an influencer, which undoubtedly indicates a growing trend in the importance of these communicators.

On the other hand, we cannot say that there is a specific influencer who is the undisputed favorite of Romanians (men, in this case). Respondents listed no fewer than 314 different names of people or YouTube/TikTok/Instagram channels, etc. Most of these had only 1–2 mentions. This indicates a fairly diverse “market” of influencers, with numerous small “bubbles,” without any dominant names that were overwhelmingly mentioned spontaneously (note that these were open-ended questions with no predetermined answer options). With these caveats in mind, we still have data to highlight the names that appeared most frequently: Selly (mentioned by 23%), Dorian Popa (14%), Dani Mocanu, Petruț Bisoj, Jador (5% each), Zbir (4%), Tzanca Uraganu, Smiley (3% each), Bogdan IBM, Andra, Gami, Imogen, Culita Sterp, Faiăr (2% each), and many others with 1% or fewer mentions.

But how influential are influencers? At least according to their own statements, not very much. 57% of respondents say they never buy products or services or change their opinions about society based on influencers’ recommendations. However, 13% say they do this often, and about 30% rarely. The influence of influencers is even lower when it comes to voting: 69% of young men say they have never decided who to vote for based on influencers’ messages, while 17% say they have done so rarely, and 7% often.

Figure 24 The influence of influencers



## Time spent online – an important part of personal life

Young men in Romania spend a relatively large amount of time online every day. Only 7% of respondents say they spend less than an hour online daily, while nearly half (49%) spend up to 3 hours online, about a third (34%) between 4 and 6 hours, and 9% say they spend even more than 6 hours online.

The data from our research align well with the results of similar studies, which show comparable trends. The responses received represent a self-assessment of time spent online. Previous studies suggest that in such situations, respondents tend to underestimate the time they spend online, as it is not considered socially desirable behavior.

*Table 6 Time spent online daily according to socio-demographic characteristics (percentage)*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>&lt; 1 oră</b>	<b>1-3 ore</b>	<b>4-6 ore</b>	<b>&gt; 6 ore</b>
Age	15-18	3%	43%	41%	12%
	19-24	6%	47%	36%	11%
	25-29	12%	58%	25%	5%
Education	Up to 8 grades	5%	45%	38%	12%
	Secondary education	8%	50%	33%	8%
	Higher education	11%	61%	22%	6%
Lives with parents	Yes	4%	46%	38%	11%
	No	12%	57%	25%	5%
Has a relationship	Yes	13%	56%	25%	6%
	No	5%	47%	37%	10%
Leaves with partner	Yes	15%	58%	21%	6%
	No	5%	47%	37%	10%
Has a job or similar	Yes	4%	41%	41%	13%
	No	9%	56%	28%	6%
Self-perception of material situation	Below average	8%	50%	31%	10%
	Avearg	8%	49%	34%	9%
	Above average	3%	52%	34%	9%
<b>Total</b>		<b>7%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>9%</b>

When analyzing the responses through the lens of various sociodemographic categories, we can observe some nuances, but no significant differences. In general, people with few personal responsibilities (who are younger, unemployed, without a stable relationship, and living with their parents) spend more time online. This suggests that a significant portion of this time is spent on leisure activities. At the same time, there are no significant differences based on educational level or self-perceived financial status (poor/rich). Most likely, the use of the online environment for professional activities plays a role.

An analysis of the responses from individual interviews complements the survey data and reveals a variety of profiles, ranging from pragmatic users to heavy users, highlighting distinct approaches that shape the digital landscape of the younger generation. Some respondents try to consciously manage their time, for example by limiting themselves to “a maximum of 3 hours a day outside of work.” At the opposite end of the spectrum, one respondent describes a total integration of the internet into domestic life, estimating that they spend 80–90% of their time at home online. Another respondent says that “the laptop is always on, even during household chores,” and that meals are invariably accompanied by YouTube content. For some young people, the time spent online varies drastically depending on the context. For example, a young student says that for him, in 12th grade, the internet was nonexistent because he studied up to 14 hours a day for college admissions, but during vacation he spends at least 5 hours a day online.

We can say that, for respondents, time spent online is an elastic and omnipresent resource. For the young people interviewed, the internet is not a separate activity, but a permanent state that blends with or overlaps reality. Most say that time spent online varies between three and five hours, but can reach 90% of free time for some. It is interesting that several interviews reveal a keen awareness of the addictive nature of algorithms (indicated by terms such as “brainrot” and “doom scrolling”), but this awareness is accompanied more by resignation than by pragmatism and restraint.

## **The Social Function of Time Spent Online**

While this study does not aim to analyze in detail the various roles that online activity plays in the lives of respondents, we are interested in the social function of the virtual space.

We asked respondents how often they use various types of platforms specifically for socializing (i.e., not just for their primary function, in the case of streaming apps or online games). Approximately 4 out of 5 young men use social media and messaging apps daily, which are the most popular types of apps for interacting with others.

Three findings highlight the importance of the virtual environment as a social space. First, only 0.6% of respondents said they do not use any of these apps to interact with others. Second, over 80% of young men use at least one form of online socializing daily. Third, at least half of those surveyed use streaming platforms or online gaming apps at least occasionally for socializing, in addition to their primary function.

*Figure 25 Frequency of online socializing (percentage)*

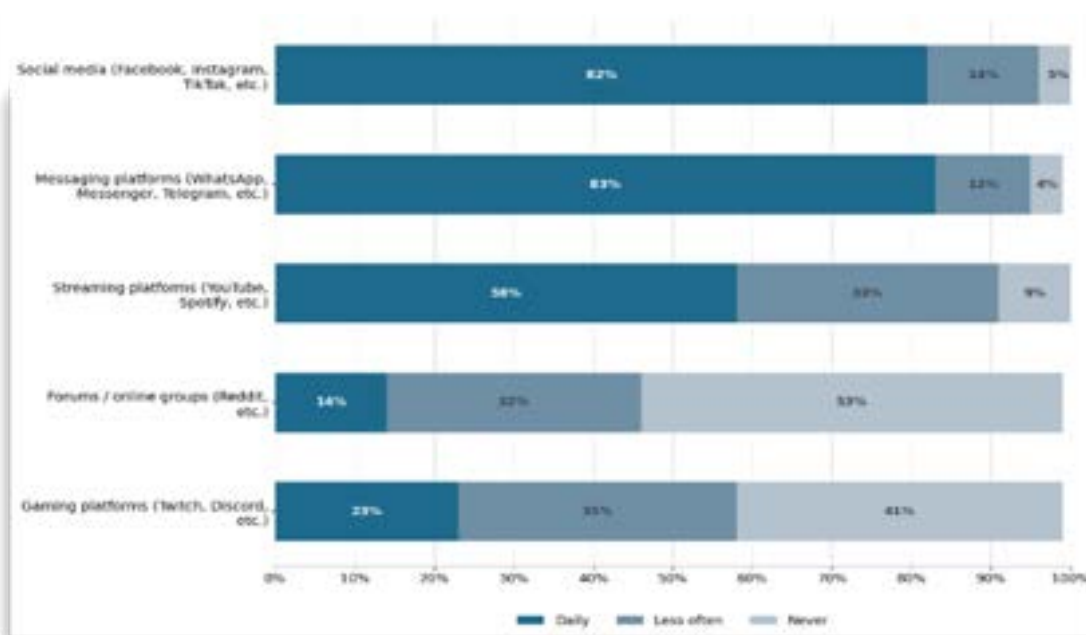
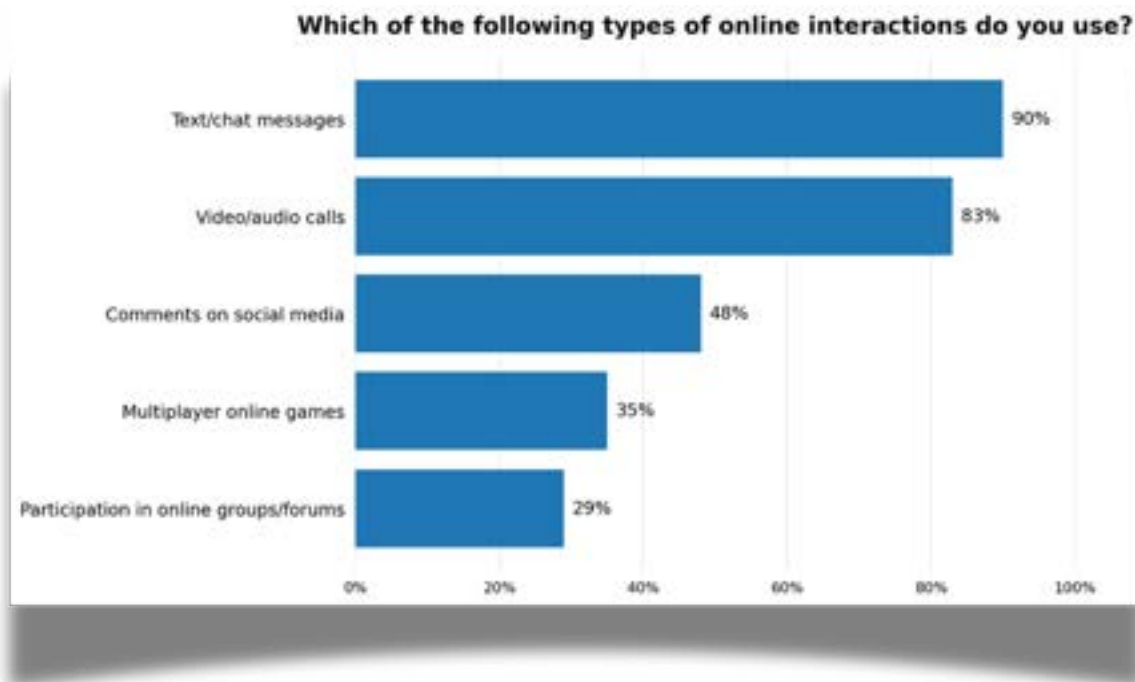


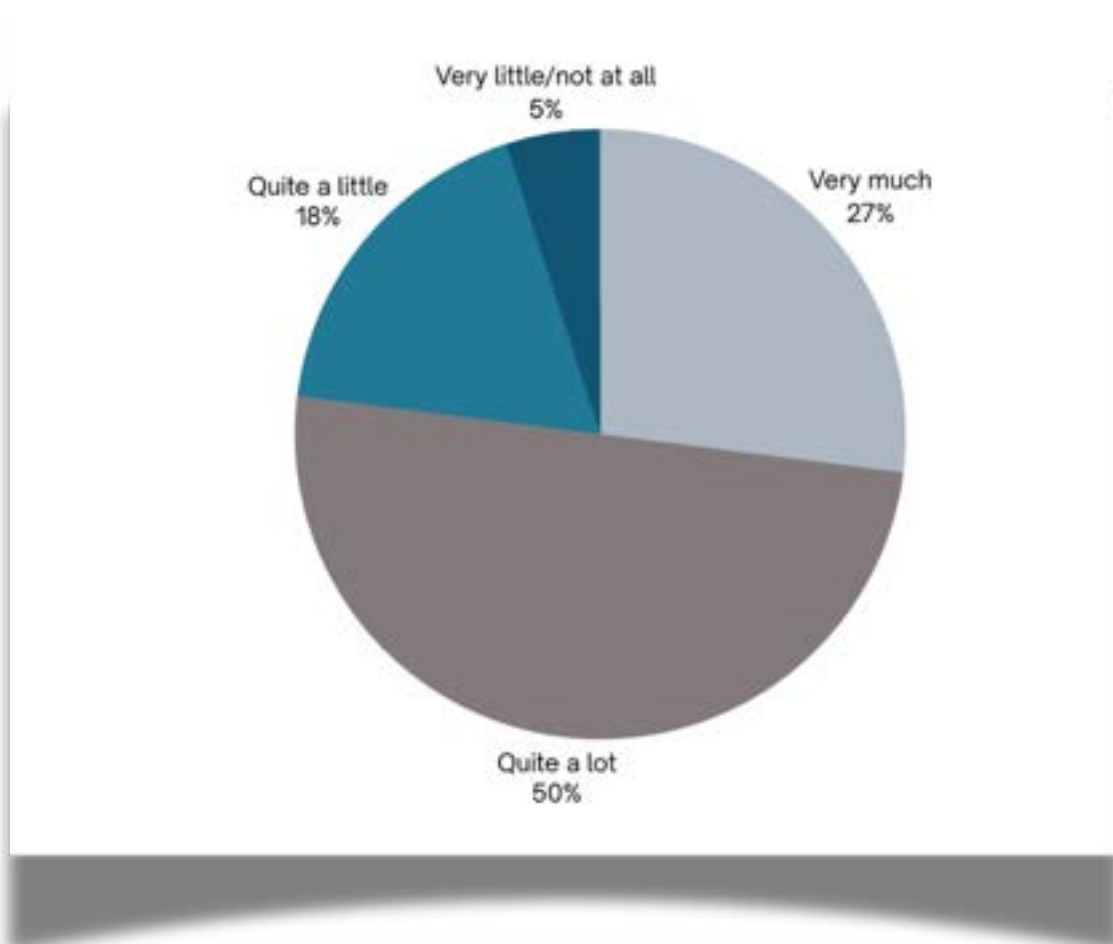
Figure 26 Types of online interaction (percentage)



Text messages are the primary means of online interaction among young men, used by 90% of respondents. They have thus surpassed audio or video calls, mentioned by only 83% of the study participants. It is interesting, once again, to note the increasingly important role played by online games, mentioned by a third of respondents as a form of interaction. These have surpassed the more well-known online forums in terms of usage.

For about three-quarters of respondents (77%), online socializing seems to be a sufficient substitute for in-person interaction. They say that this form of interaction helps them a lot or very much to stay connected with others. Only 22% say the opposite, namely that online interaction helps them a little or very little in meeting their need for connection. At the same time, nearly half of young Romanian men (48%) say there have been situations where people they interacted with on social media became their friends in real life.

Figure 27 Perception of online socializing as means to connect (percentage)



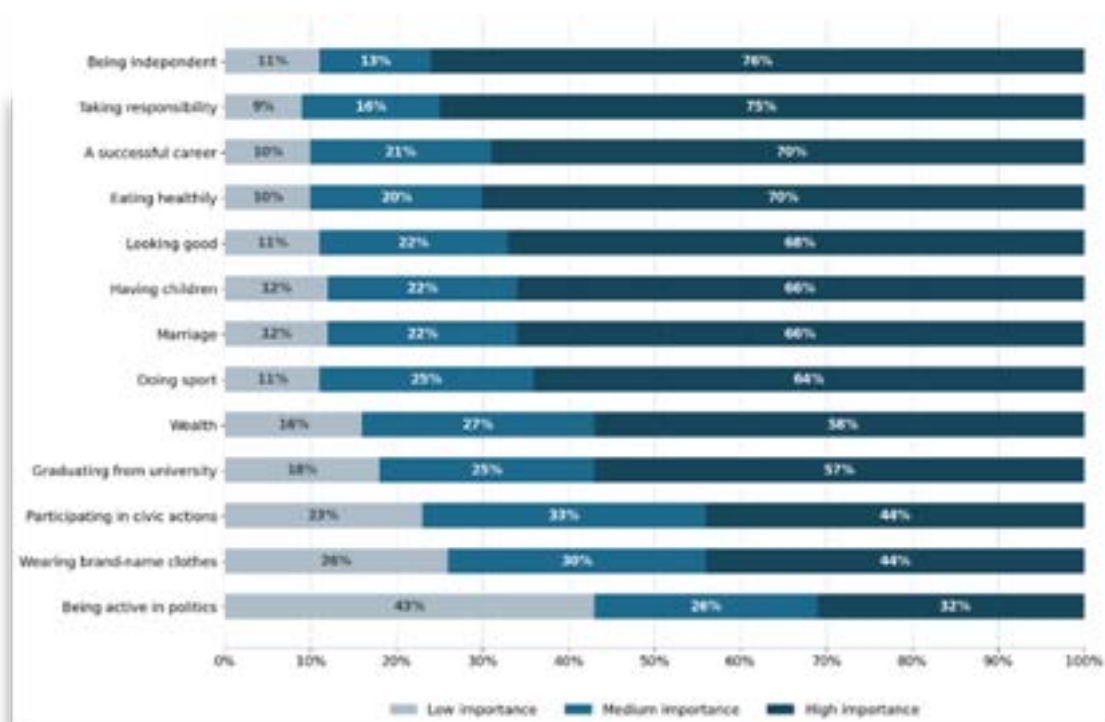
We conclude this section with a look at the “filter bubble” theory. When asked how often they encounter opinions different from their own on social media, 52% of respondents say often, 37% say rarely, and only 9% say never (the remaining 2% did not answer the question). The theory that people tend to stay in “their bubble,” that is, interact primarily with people who share their views, does not seem to hold true, at least in the case of young men. This, however, remains a starting point for future research.

# ASPIRATIONS AND VALUES

*Claudiu Tufiş*

In the previous sections of the report we observed the complexity of young men's opinions on themes related to what it means to be a man, on feminism, couple relationships, or sexuality. Young men in Romania are not a homogeneous group: many of them accept certain components of a modern model, characterized by flexible relationships, personal autonomy, the intensive use of technology, or an interest in individual development. Others, however, remain attached to traditional values regarding family, religion, the nation, or the protective role of the man. The results presented so far show that a modernization of lifestyle can exist even without a liberalization of social values. Building on these results, in this section we turn our attention to the aspirations and values of young men in Romania, in a broad sense. We included in the questionnaire questions on priority domains in personal life, but also on attitudes towards different social groups, on democratic values and, more broadly, on political values.

*Figure 28. Aspirations of young Romanian men (percentages)*



The first theme analyzed is that of the aspirations of young Romanian men, who were asked to indicate how important each of 13 life goals is to them. The results generally indicate a low degree of differentiation in the preference for these priorities: for the first eight of them only about 10% of respondents consider them of low importance, between 13% and 25% consider them of medium importance, while the proportion of those who consider them of high importance varies between 64% and 76%. For two other priorities, wealth and graduating from university, the proportion of those who consider them very important is slightly below 60%, but almost 20% attach low importance to them, while about a quarter consider them of only medium importance. Finally, for three of these priorities (participating in civic actions, wearing brand-name clothes, and being active in politics) fewer than half of respondents consider them of high importance. The very low importance attached to activity in the political sphere stands out by far: only 32% of respondents consider it of high importance, while 43% consider it of only low importance.

To understand better how these aspirations cluster in respondents' minds, we carried out a factor analysis (principal components). This type of analysis makes it possible to identify the dimensions that respondents have in mind when answering the questionnaire's questions. The results of the factor analysis suggest that there are four factors that determine the answers to this set of questions.

A first factor includes taking responsibility, independence, graduating from university, a successful career, doing sport, and eating healthily. These are all aspirations related to personal development and self-realization, suggesting a closeness to the theme of masculinity, in which the masculine ideal involves having control over one's own life, one's own body, and one's personal trajectory. A second, clearly identified component represents a life project centered on family, including having children and marriage as aspirations of great importance. This component coexists with the previous one, centered on individualism.



A third component includes aspirations that may be regarded as status indicators: wealth, looking good, and wearing brand-name clothes. Finally, the fourth component includes only the two aspirations related to participation in civic actions and political activity. To put it simply, we can say that the four components identified in the factor analysis reflect four different trajectories: individual performance, family, wealth, and social and political involvement.

Returning to the ranking of these aspirations, a few observations are worth making. First, family, represented by marriage and having children, sits only in the middle of the ranking in terms of the importance attached to it by young Romanian men. For them, at this point in their lives, it is more important to be independent, to have a successful career, and to look good than to have a family. The relatively low importance attached to graduating from university — fewer than 60% of respondents consider it of high importance, while almost 20% consider it of low importance — reflects the current context of Romanian society, in which education is strongly devalued: higher education is not a dominant marker of success for young men. Not least, it is worth noting that civic and political participation do not manage to attract many young men: while independence ranks first in this hierarchy, these two forms of participation rank last.

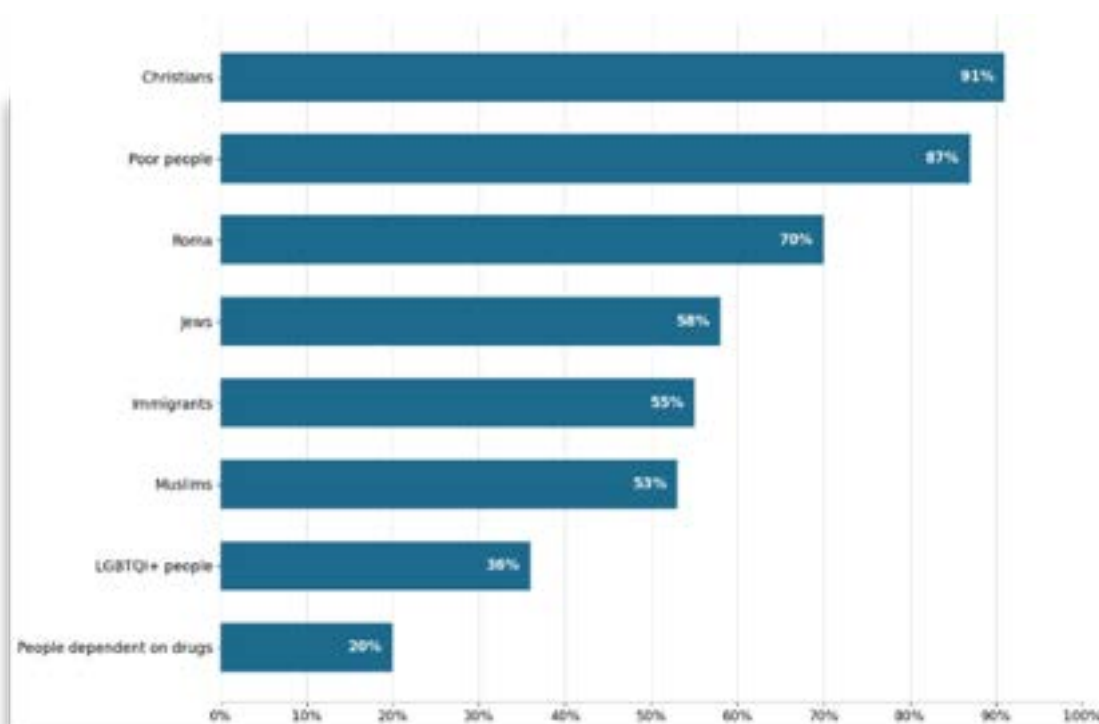
The questionnaire also included a set of questions through which we assessed respondents' willingness to accept as neighbors people belonging to diverse social groups. The answers demonstrate a clear preference for certain categories and an equally clear rejection of others. Two groups enjoy near-universal acceptance: Christians (91%) and poor people (87%). Given the structure of Romania's population, these groups are culturally familiar and have a low potential to be identified as threats.

Roma are accepted as neighbors by 70% of respondents. The data show remarkable progress compared with a study on the civic and political involvement of young people, carried out in 2010, in which 71% of male high-school students in Romania answered that they would not want to have Roma as neighbors (Bădescu et al. 2010: 17). Of course, it also helps that over the past decade there has been very little public discussion about Roma, with attention being directed towards other categories considered to represent a greater threat, from refugees and immigrants to progressives and supporters of certain political parties.

Jews (58%), immigrants (55%), and Muslims (53%) fall into an intermediate zone, with more than half of young men accepting the possibility of having neighbors belonging to these groups. It is worth noting that for these groups no greater acceptance is observed compared with the situation recorded in the 2010 study cited above, as was the case with the acceptance of Roma. The two results, interpreted together, suggest that the answer in the case of accepting Roma might also be influenced by social desirability and by a favorable context.

The most rejected categories are LGBTQI+ people (accepted by only 36%) and people dependent on drugs (accepted by only 20%). In the case of LGBTQI+ people, the low level of acceptance can be linked to the results from the previous sections. In a context such as Romania's in these years, in which the gender order is understood in binary, heteronormative, and traditional terms, the acceptance of sexual minorities is more difficult. In the case of people dependent on drugs, the very low level of acceptance suggests a strong stigmatization of addiction, rather than an approach centered on vulnerability, public health, and social support.

*Figure 29. Tolerance among young Romanian men (percentages)*



For this set of questions as well, we carried out a factor analysis, which identified two latent components. The first component groups attitudes towards minority groups perceived as different, as the other: Muslims, immigrants, Jews, LGBTQI+ people, people dependent on drugs, and Roma. The inclusion of very different categories, by ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference, within the same factor suggests a pattern of responses identified in the specialist literature as a form of generalized prejudice, a value orientation in which hostility towards one minority group is usually accompanied by hostility towards other minority groups as well.

The second component brings together attitudes towards Christians and poor people, indicating a dimension of acceptance of culturally familiar categories. The differentiation of the two components suggests that openness towards “the other” and the acceptance of familiar categories are distinct processes, which can evolve independently.

Comparisons by various socio-demographic characteristics show that the degree of tolerance towards various groups is not uniformly distributed in the population. For example, tolerance towards Jews, immigrants, or Muslims increases from about 50% among respondents with low education, to about 60% among those with medium education, and to over 75% among those with higher education. Similarly, tolerance towards LGBTQI+ people increases from about 25% among those with low education to almost 60% among those with higher education. Respondents from urban areas tend to be slightly more tolerant towards these groups than respondents living in rural areas. Finally, in relation to political preferences, the maximum difference in tolerance is observed in the case of LGBTQI+ people: only 32% of George Simion's supporters would accept neighbors from this category, while among Nicușor Dan's supporters the corresponding proportion is 47%.

Figure 30. Democratic values among young Romanian men (percentages)

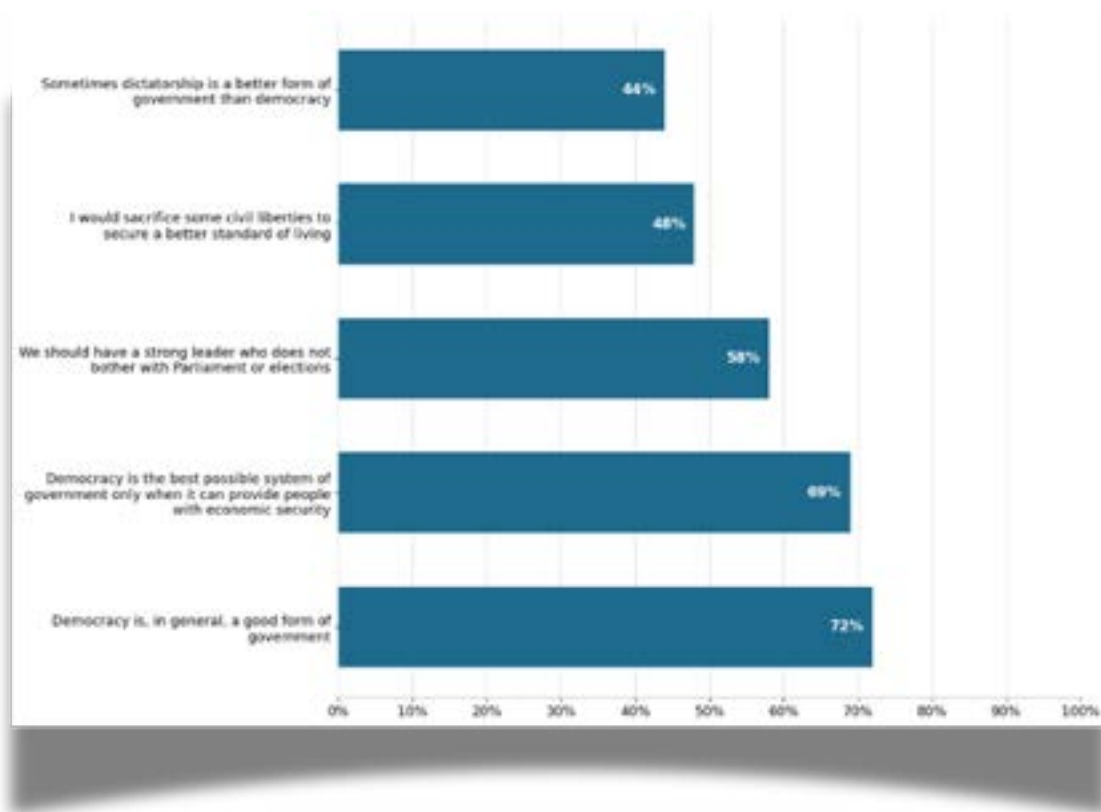


Figure 30 presents respondents' answers to five statements about the democratic regime and its alternatives. Support for democracy is in the majority, with 72% agreeing that “democracy is, in general, a good form of government”. The result is similar to that of other studies, which show that the idea of democracy continues to enjoy strong support in Romania. At the same time, we know that this question is usually influenced by socially desirable answers: it is possible that some respondents say they agree with this statement even if, in reality, this is not the case. To address this problem, the set of questions also includes a series of items that measure respondents' support for alternatives to democracy.

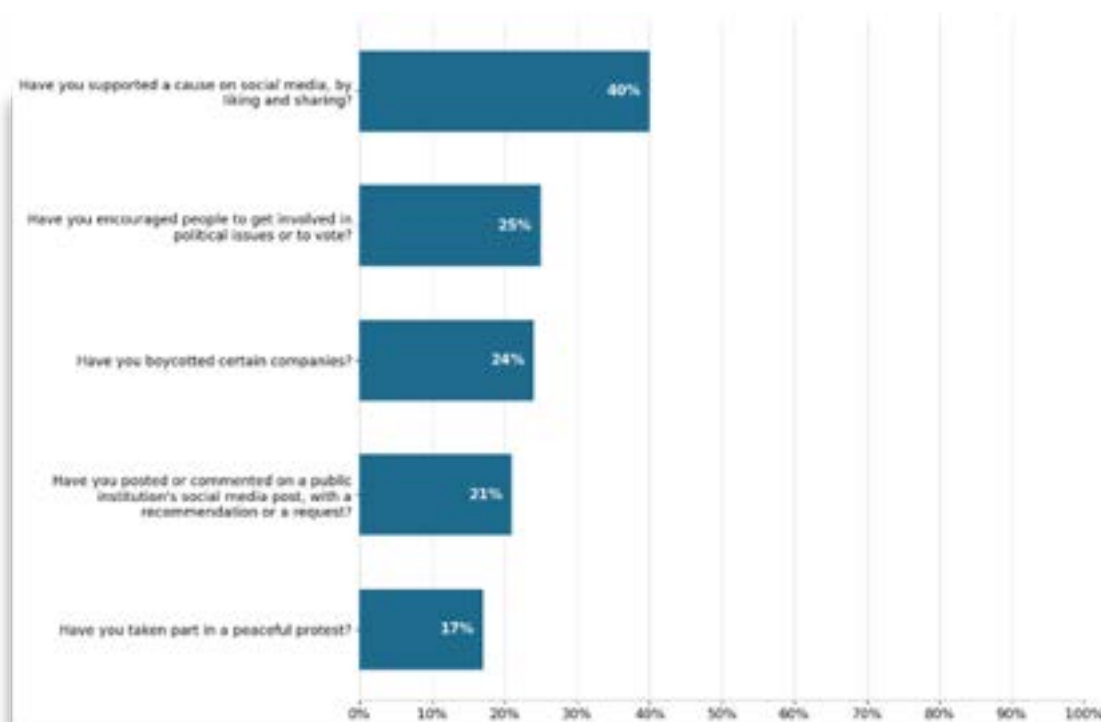
The results for these additional questions are slightly worrying: 58% of young men agree that “we should have a strong leader who does not bother with Parliament or elections”, 48% would give up “some civil liberties in order to secure a better standard of living”, and 44% consider that “sometimes dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy”.

Taken as a whole, the data presented here build the picture of a formal democracy. Let us not forget that the Economist Intelligence Unit included Romania among hybrid regimes in 2024, a category made up of countries that can no longer be claimed to be democratic regimes. The situation improved slightly in 2025, when Romania returned to the category of flawed democracies, but it is clear that democracy in Romania has for some time been subject to strong pressures. In this context, it is not necessarily surprising that young men signal a preference for alternative solutions to democracy. Heightened support for the idea of a strong leader is a constant in Romanian political culture in general, not only among young men. But at the same time, it is also an attitude that has prepared the ground for populist-authoritarian discourses, which become attractive precisely by promoting the idea that a strong leader can do what corrupt politicians cannot.

These results describe a situation of democratic ambivalence. Most respondents accept democracy as a good form of government, but an important part is willing to accept the limitation of civil liberties, the bypassing of representative institutions, or even dictatorship under certain conditions. Analyzing support for authoritarian or illiberal alternatives by respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, we identify relationships similar to those found in the previous sections: support for authoritarianism decreases with the level of education (while 45% of those with at most high-school education agree that a dictatorship can sometimes be better than democracy, only 29% of those with higher education hold the same opinion). Significant differences for this question are also observed by area of residence, region, and vote in the second round of the presidential elections: the lowest level of acceptance of the idea that dictatorship can be better than democracy is recorded among those in urban areas (37% compared with 52% in rural areas), among those in Bucharest (28%), and among Nicușor Dan's supporters (39% compared with 52% among George Simion's supporters).

With regard to the civic and political participation of young Romanian men, we already know from the first set of questions in this section that these are rarely valued and do not represent important aspirations. The data here show a low level of mobilization, with a clear hierarchy among forms of involvement. The most widespread is supporting a cause on social media (40%), followed by encouraging other people to get involved in politics or to vote (25%), boycotting certain companies (24%), commenting on social media on the posts of public institutions (21%), and taking part in a peaceful protest (17%).

Figure 31. Civic and political participation among young Romanian men (percentages)



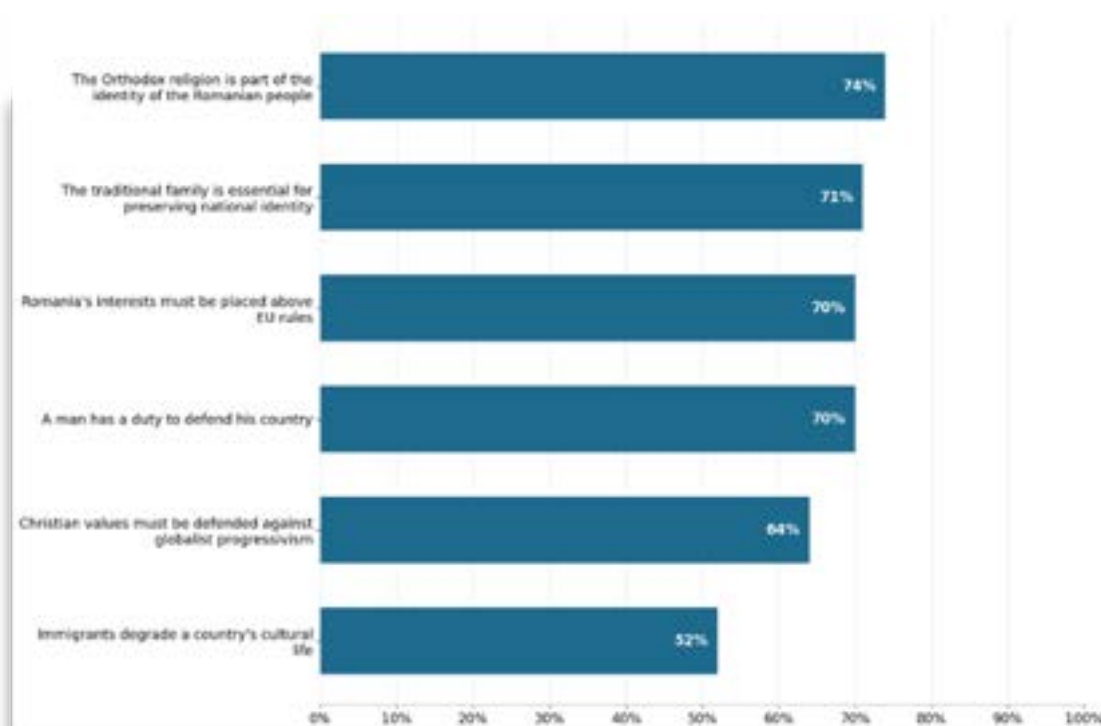
The data confirm the more general observation that a large part of young people's political action has moved into the digital space, with traditional forms of mobilization being used more rarely. The preference for online participation confirms the results discussed in an earlier section, which showed that the digital environment is the main ecosystem of information and socialization for young men. It must be noted, however, that civic or political participation through “likes and shares” is a rather weak form of involvement, one that does not require much effort. It is possible that this type of online involvement reduces the potential for physical participation, because after sharing a message the psychological pressure to act in support of a particular position is diminished. Although young men are not civically absent, their participation is rather occasional, digital, and of low intensity. Although social media can function as a space of visibility and of signaling positions, online mobilization does not automatically translate into offline mobilization.

We end the presentation of the data in this section with a discussion of support for a set of statements that delimit the Romanian conservative value space among young Romanian men. The results show a heightened level of

agreement (about 70%) with statements that bring together, within the same value construct, religion, family, the nation, sovereignty, and the masculine role of defense: 74% of respondents agree that the Orthodox religion is part of the identity of the Romanian people; 71% consider that the traditional family is essential for preserving national identity; 70% agree that Romania's interests must be placed above the rules of the European Union; likewise 70% consider that a man has a duty to defend his country; 64% agree that Christian values must be defended against globalist progressivism; and finally 52% agree that immigrants degrade a country's cultural life.

It is worth mentioning in this context that the questions presented here do not measure only a traditional, respectable form of conservative values (the link between religion and identity, or the duty to defend one's country) but also forms of conservatism promoted by populist, nationalist, and sovereigntist parties. These forms are identified through the presence of terms with a strong value charge: the traditional family, globalist progressivism, or the degradation of cultural life. The fact that over two-thirds of young Romanian men agree with specific political positions, clearly configured in the illiberal space, is a result that deserves further analysis.

*Figure 32. Conservative values among young Romanian men (percentages)*



The data show the presence of a significant conservative core among young men. The traditional family is associated with national identity; the Orthodox religion is associated with the identity of the Romanian people; the man's role is linked to defending the country; and national interests are set in opposition to the rules of the European Union. The conservatism measured here has an identity and political dimension, not only a moral one.

If we previously saw that the masculine role is defined through protection, control, responsibility, and the ability to solve problems on one's own, here we observe that, in addition to the role of protector of the woman and the family, the man is also imagined as a defender of the country. The link between masculinity, protection, and the nation shows that gender norms can be tied to conservative political values, and parties such as AUR have used this type of argumentative mechanism in the political space. The interpretation of the traditional family as essential for preserving national identity shows that the family is perceived as an institution with a collective symbolic role. In this framework, debates about feminism, sex education, the rights of LGBTQI+ people, or gender equality can be interpreted by some young men not only as debates about rights, but also as interventions on national identity and the social order. Finally, support for the idea that Romania's interests must be placed above EU rules demonstrates a certain degree of receptiveness towards a sovereigntist perspective that has gained significant support among Romania's population in recent years.

From the interviews carried out in the qualitative component of the research, we have extracted a series of quotes that we believe will clarify part of the discussions presented in this section:

*“For my life, I would say that [religion] is the most important thing. Including for society. Because... I notice that in countries that are strongly Orthodox there is much more peace, people are different. That is, the people from a church... were always much more malleable, calmer, they sought quiet, they sought peace because they also have this fear of God. Whereas if it is completely absent, then nothing stops me from making up my own rules... You have no standard to relate to and everything becomes total chaos.” (R5)*

*“The feminist movement had, at the beginning, some very useful effects... but to go from a good idea and a beautiful past to what is happening nowadays seems to me an extreme polarization [...] These women are no longer campaigning for equal opportunities, but for the subjugation of men below the level of women.” (R8)*

*“I used to have a saying: the man makes the house and the woman maintains it... I think she must know best how to be a woman and we, as men, must know best how to make her feel like a woman... You cannot see a girl behaving like a man and vice versa.” (R38)*

*“The woman must be loyal, calm... the first thing I look for in a woman... is not to get a headache.” (R5)*

*“Patriotism is very important; all the peoples of the world should show patriotism, should love the people they were born into; every religion should be proud of what it is, of its ancestors, of its people. I am not a fan of universalism. I do not fully agree with the mass migrations pumped up because of wars. The fact that an ethnic/cultural mosaic is being created is not okay, ending up as mixed-race peoples.” (R8)*

*“First of all, the belief in God, that is in first place. [...] In second place... a purpose. For me, a goal, to reach my goal. That is why I play a lot of video games and try to reach a high level, because I know I am talented at it and that gives me a sense of meaning, to grind every day so I can become as good as possible.” (R2)*

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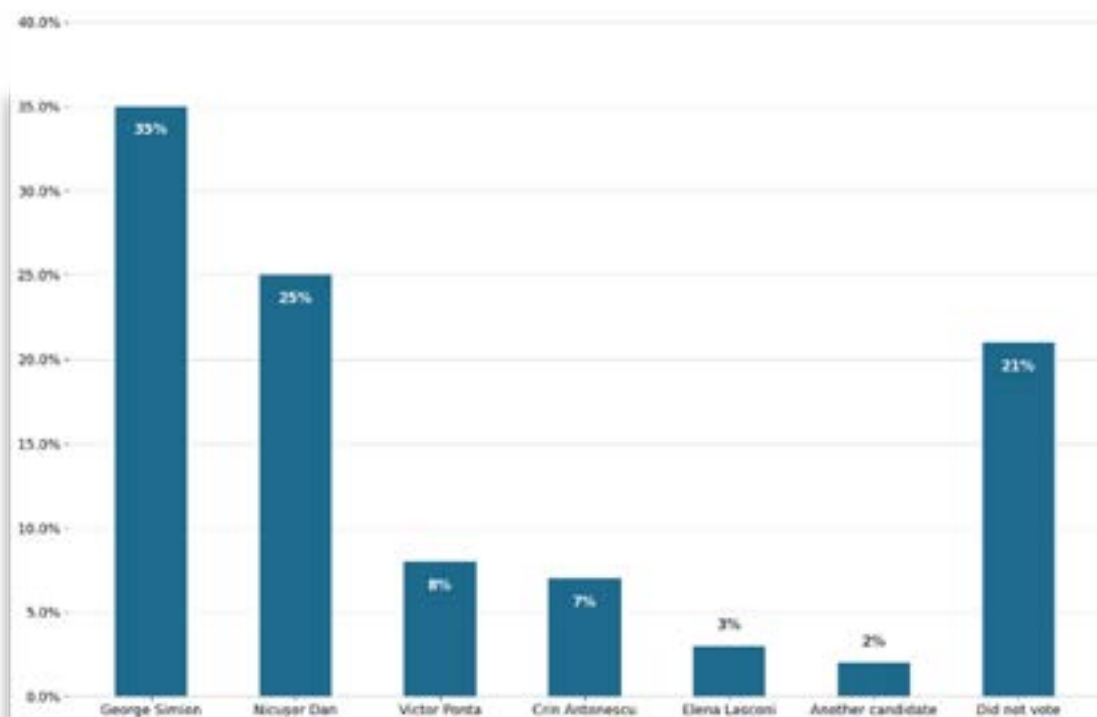
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*Claudiu Tufiş*

The questionnaire applied in this research also included a short set of questions through which we sought to measure respondents' voting preferences in the context of the 2025 presidential elections. These elections represented an exceptional political context, marked by the annulment of the first round of November 2024, in which the independent candidate Călin Georgescu came first, by the invalidation of his candidacy under accusations of electoral fraud, by the organization of a new ballot in May 2025, and by the sharp polarization of the electorate between populist-nationalist candidates and pro-European candidates. In order not to complicate the measurement too much, we chose to use only a question about the vote in the two rounds of the presidential elections. It must be noted that measuring the vote through self-reporting can be influenced by multiple sources of error, from memory problems to the fact that the winner always receives a reporting bonus from more conformist voters. Although we cannot guarantee the elimination of these errors, we consider that they have a minimal effect on the results, because the data were collected relatively quickly after the elections and in a context of strong polarization, in which those who voted for the candidates who lost the elections had little reason to hide this.

The data on the vote in the first round of the presidential elections (4 May 2025) differ slightly from the official results, which can be explained by the fact that our sample includes only young men, not the entire population, and that the official results do not include those who did not vote (21% in our sample). The largest differences are recorded in the case of the candidates Crin Antonescu and Victor Ponta, who were voted for in a significantly smaller proportion by our respondents — which is to be expected, given the ages of these candidates.

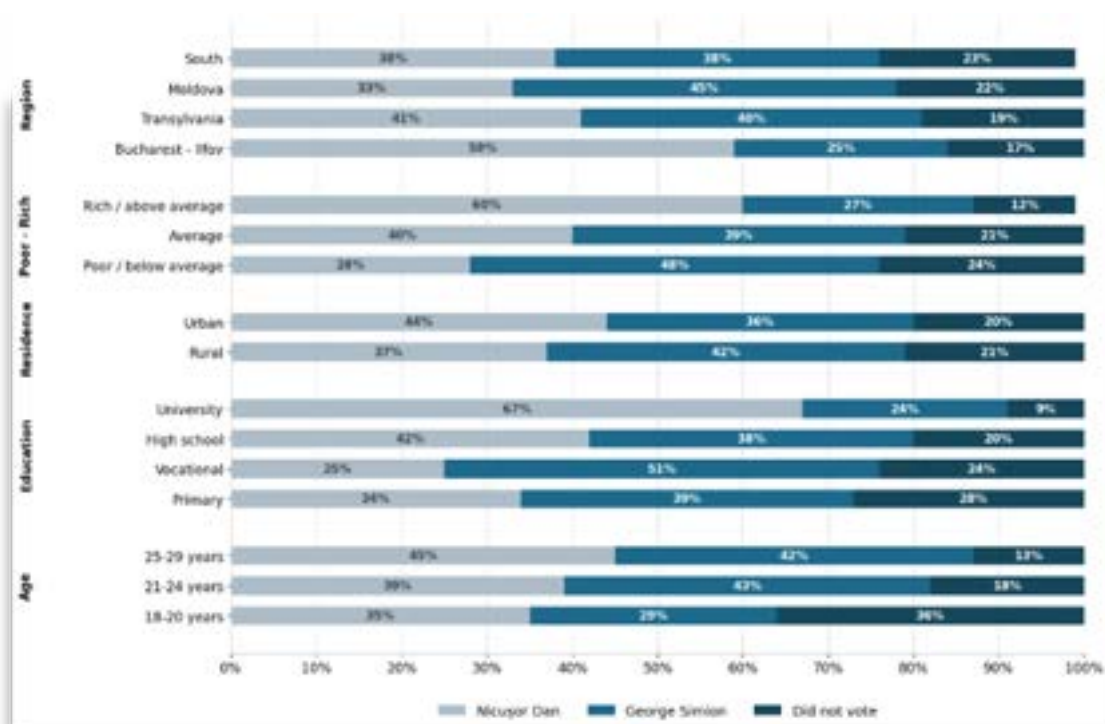
Figure 33. Vote in the first round of the 2025 presidential elections (percentages)



Taking into account the discussion in the previous sections of the report, which shows significant proportions of young men with values similar to those promoted by George Simion and the party he leads (AUR), it is not at all surprising that George Simion came first in our sample as well. Moreover, we know from multiple studies analyzing populism in Europe that young men are one of the main drivers of the rise of populism in recent years. The high proportion of people who declare that they did not vote, 21%, is not surprising, given the results discussed in the previous section, which showed that political participation ranks last in young men's priorities.

The results on the vote in the second round of the presidential elections (18 May 2025) are close to the official ones: 41% voted for Nicușor Dan, 39% for George Simion, and 21% did not vote. Considering only those who voted, 51% of respondents declare that they voted for Nicușor Dan (compared with 53.6% officially) and 49% voted for George Simion (compared with 46.4% officially).

Figure 34 Vote in the second round of the 2025 presidential elections (percentages)



We decided to present the data on the second-round vote disaggregated by five socio-demographic variables: region, financial situation, area of residence, education, and age. By region, we observe a distinction that has also been noted in other sections of the report: the Bucharest-Ilfov region differs significantly from the rest of the country. Here, almost 60% of young men voted for Nicușor Dan, while only 25% voted for George Simion. At the opposite pole, in Moldova only 33% of young men voted for Nicușor Dan, while 45% chose George Simion. We can therefore observe that the differences between regions in terms of gender values are found in the same direction in terms of the vote in the presidential elections.

There is a strong association between respondents' financial situation and how they voted in the second round of the presidential elections: young men who consider themselves wealthy voted 60% for Nicușor Dan and only 27% for George Simion, while among those who consider themselves rather poor the vote was reversed: 28% for Nicușor Dan and 48% for George Simion.

This result suggests that support for populist candidates does not have only an informational component; it is not a mistaken choice determined by too little education. Voting for such candidates and the preference for certain conservative values can also be interpreted as rational reactions to a context that is unfavorable to them.

The largest differences are observed by level of education: young men with higher education voted 67% for Nicușor Dan and only 24% for George Simion. The vote for Nicușor Dan falls to only 42% among those with high-school education and to only 25% among those with eight grades or vocational education. Conversely, the vote for George Simion rises to 38% among high-school graduates and to 51% among those with lower-secondary education.

Differences are also observed by area of residence, with urban voters tending to vote for Nicușor Dan while rural voters rather preferred George Simion. In terms of age, the most important result is that those aged 18–20 abstained from voting in a significantly higher proportion: 36% of them declare that they did not vote, compared with the 21% average across the whole sample. On the basis of these data alone we cannot say very much about this difference, but it is the kind of difference that we will follow with interest at the next round of elections, to see whether it was just a momentary result or whether it indicates a more important and lasting change in the rate of electoral participation.

The interviews provided us with additional details about how young men relate to the electoral process and to their political preferences, suggesting the existence of four main categories of orientation towards politics. A first category, which, from the survey data, we know to be relatively small in number, is that of respondents who show a high degree of interest in politics:

*“[...] it dictates everything we do in society. I do not agree with people who say we should not talk about politics. Everything is political.” (R32)*

*“I am passionate about politics; I am part of a political association. Everything that has happened now with the elections seems fascinating to me. It seems to me that every person should be involved at least a little in politics and have some idea [...]” (R29)*

*“I am among the exceptions who are also interested in politics and in what happens in society.” (R6)*

A second category is made up of those who are not necessarily interested in politics but pay attention to it when important events take place. They are the ones who consider that voting is important and that one is obliged to vote in an informed way:

*“Usually, before voting, I do my research, I read, I also debate it with two-three-four people... In any case, I know I cannot influence things too much.” (R4)*

*“I am interested, but at a fairly low level. I am interested, but at important moments, around important moments, that is roughly when I do my homework. I look for various sources... as was the case now with the presidential elections...” (R20)*

*“As for voting, I did vote, it is just that I am too small to be able to make such a big difference. I mean you have to go and vote so that... you should not ignore it, but neither take it to the extreme...” (R38)*

A third category is that of those who are disappointed and uninterested in politics:

*“No [I did not vote]... Because I am not interested and there are many things, and on TikTok there are many, propaganda can appear for one candidate or another based on what you give a like to... You have to do a lot of research to actually know what is true.” (R2)*

*“Not really, no. Unfortunately, because of the situation we have, the fact that it seems to me that at that point it is very easy to be corrupt... I do not trust anything to do with politics either.” (R5)*

*“Honestly, no. It does not seem to me that [politics] is very important for anything. It seems to me that politicians do not deserve their positions.” (R27)*

Finally, the fourth category is made up of respondents with controversial or even radical ideas about the right to vote:

*“There sould be a psychological test to be allowed to vote. Or I would make voting compulsory... if you do not vote you get a fine... with that test you can realize that if he can vote for someone it will be a disaster.” (R9)*

*“To pass a threshold, or to have certain skills or qualifications in order to be able to vote... you cannot have a university professor who teaches political studies and make his vote count as much as that of a simple country person who has never been out in his life...” (R26)*

# CONCLUSIONS

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*Ovidiu Voicu*

The research highlights a complex and sometimes contradicting landscape when it comes to young men's (15-29 y/o) values. There's a remarkable tension between traditional-patriarchal models and egalitarian values. Results underline the importance of understanding hegemonic masculinity in a context marked by digitalization and a rise in conservative ideologies.

Relating to feminism and gender equality is an important social and political value in liberal democracies. In fact, gender equality has been integrated as a political principle in international treaties and conventions (such as the EU treaties) and has become one of the indicators for measuring democratic quality. In the 21st century, we can no longer consider a regime as democratic if gender equality is not integrated as a political value and normative principle. Research shows that young men tend to have a critical perspective on gender equality, many considering that this topic has been discussed excessively and that it exclusively favors women. There is a significant gender gap in the perception of rights. Recent FILIA studies show that young women often consider they do not have enough rights. Our research shows that young men tend to believe that the current situation is either fair or that the balance hangs in favour of women, to their detriment. Interviews allow the identification of more nuanced explanations. The expansion of masculinist discourses online, as well as the growth of far-right parties, associations and groups, contribute to this dynamic, but more research is needed to understand it.

Conservative views are also present and reflected in attitudes towards masculinity and roles in a couple. The research shows the persistence of the patriarchal model, with more than half of young men agreeing with traditional roles. What we perceive as the model of the "male head of the family" and of the woman needing the protection of a man remains dominant.

Delving deeper into the themes of relationship dynamics and the vision of masculinity, the research indicates that young men in Romania navigate between a traditional-conservative model (with nationalist and religious

accents), the pressures of an egalitarian democratic model and the new masculinist discourses in the manosphere. The interviews reveal various factors that influence the values and attitudes of young men: the masculine model in the family (especially the father figure); the gender role model in the family; religious values and discourse; (masculinist) online content, especially on social media. The persistence of the ideal of a protective man and the main provider of resources remains a central feature of male identity, being accepted by a significant proportion of respondents. This world view is not just a personal preference, but reflects a cultural structure in which male authority is still symbolically linked to the control of resources and the ability to ensure family stability.

The persistence of traditional roles also translates into an unequal division of invisible labor within the couple. Although at a declarative level many young people support equality of opportunities, in practice, household responsibilities and childcare are overwhelmingly transferred to women. There is a subtle resistance to men's full involvement in the domestic sphere, which is often perceived as a diminution of male prestige. Thus, the partnership model remains asymmetrical, where women's economic emancipation has not been accompanied by an equivalent redefinition of men's responsibilities in the home.

At the same time, the study highlights a direct correlation between the level of education and openness to more democratic forms of organizing couple life. Young people with high educational capital tend to reject rigid stereotypes more easily, being more willing to negotiate roles and accept increased autonomy for their partners. In contrast, in environments with limited access to education or economic resources, patriarchal norms are stricter, and the control exercised over the partner is sometimes confused with a form of care or affirmation of masculinity. This discrepancy suggests that the vision of the couple is deeply fragmented depending on the social trajectory of young people, which can produce tensions between gender expectations and current economic realities.

Analysis of data on relationships and sexuality reveals a persistence of a double standard that disproportionately penalizes women's sexual freedom. A considerable proportion of young men continue to associate the number of sexual partners a woman has with a decrease in her moral value, using pejorative labels that are not equally applied to men in similar situations. This mentality indicates that, despite access to information and apparent

modernization, control over women's bodies and reputations remains a central pillar in defining honor and conduct norms for many young people, especially for those with a trade school educational background.

In terms of couple dynamics, there is a worrying normalization of controlling behaviors, which are often misinterpreted as evidence of affection or involvement. Acceptance of intrusions into privacy, such as checking cell phones or monitoring one's partner's circle of friends, is more common among young people who adhere to conservative values. These attitudes are not isolated incidents, but reflect a power structure in which the man feels entitled to exercise surveillance as a form of maintaining relationship stability, often ignoring the limits of consent and individual autonomy..

The research also highlights that the lack of formal and systematic sex education leaves a void that is quickly filled by often harmful digital content. In the absence of clear guidelines about mutual respect and communication, many young people shape their sexual and relationship expectations based on myths that promote male dominance and female submission. This creates an environment conducive to the perpetuation of unequal relationships, where control becomes a substitute for trust, and is viewed as a terrain for validating power rather than a space for partnership and mutual pleasure.

The digital environment is no longer just a social space. It has become the main ecosystem for identity formation and values for young men in Romania. It is now the central pillar in the information and socialization process of young men in Romania, with 87% of them using social networks as their main source of news. There is a clear break from the mainstream press and platforms considered obsolete, such as Facebook, in favor of fast video formats on TikTok or Instagram and passive content consumption on YouTube.

The online environment's influence is amplified by the growing role of influencers themselves. Over half of young men are able to spontaneously name at least one influencer. Although the influencer market is fragmented into numerous small bubbles, young people's trust has shifted from traditional institutions to personal brands and influencers, who often become vectors for messages that glorify authority, hierarchy, and binary gender roles.

**The research highlights a significant adherence to the norms of hegemonic masculinity and an increased vulnerability to the influence of the online sphere. Despite the very real influence of current democratic values, we find that a patriarchal view of relationships between men and women is perpetuated from one generation to the next.**

At the same time, dependence on the online ecosystem can facilitate young people's exposure to the "manosphere". The "manosphere" is a virtual space that promotes the idea of a crisis of masculinity caused by feminism and in order to "solve" it proposes a return to a patriarchal couple model, in which the man has absolute power and the woman must submit to him. The discourses are numerous and varied, some of them explicitly supporting violence against women (from economic and social, to verbal or even physical and sexual). The digital space can also function as a terrain for the exercise of power through online bullying and harassment, phenomena that are mostly perpetrated by men. This dynamic of competition and dominance, present since middle school, is closely linked to class-based discrimination, with young people from families with limited financial resources being much more exposed to victimization.

In terms of aspirations, young men are mainly oriented towards autonomy, individual responsibility, material stability, health, career and family. Success is mainly imagined as the possibility of having control over one's own life. At the same time, the emphasis on physical appearance, sports and a healthy lifestyle shows that the contemporary masculine ideal increasingly includes body size, which should not be surprising in the context of the increased role that social media plays in the socialization of young people. These orientations can become problematic to the extent that the pressure of individual success is combined with rigid models of masculinity and reduced institutional support, which can skew the concepts of autonomy and responsibility into an obligation to succeed alone.

Young men's democratic values are marked by formal support for the idea of democracy, combined with significant support for illiberal or autocratic alternatives: the idea of a strong leader, a willingness to sacrifice some civil liberties, or even accepting a dictatorship in certain situations. Support for democracy is tenuous and appears to depend more on economic performance than on democratic principles.

The data suggests that young men are significantly attracted to a conservative core of values, composed of values such as the traditional family, Orthodox religion, national identity, sovereignty and the protective role of men. This conservatism is also found in the increased rejection of minority groups perceived as different or threatening, such as LGBTQI+ people, immigrants, Muslims or drug addicts. Thus, conservative values provide a framework for interpreting belonging, normality and boundaries between those who are part of the community and those who ought to be excluded. As we have seen in recent years, such a political orientation has created fertile ground for political discourses that present diversity, gender equality or belonging to the European project as threats to the family, the nation and the social order.

Social values, economic status, education and other socio-demographic characteristics intersect, generating diverse electorates among young men. Our data shows that support for conservative, sovereigntist or anti-establishment candidates is more pronounced in certain social categories, while voting for candidates perceived as liberal or pro-European is more frequent among respondents with higher education, greater resources and localized in urban zones, most notably in the Bucharest-Ilfov area. At the same time, the low level of voting participation among young men suggests their poor civic integration.

**In order to address the challenges identified in the report, it is essential to implement educational strategies that aim to deconstruct gender stereotypes from the earliest stages of schooling.** A priority measure should be integrating content focused on gender equality, equal opportunities and mutual respect into the national curriculum, providing young people with the necessary tools to recognize and reject models of masculinity based on dominance and control. Education for gender equality and equal opportunities, education to combat gender-based violence and sex education must also become mandatory elements in teacher training. It is very important for male and female teachers to understand how gender stereotypes work and are reproduced and to be aware that teaching practices can reproduce these stereotypes. In parallel, given the increased dependence on the digital environment, media literacy programs are needed to help young people critically navigate the content promoted on social media, teaching them to identify hate speech or radicalization attempts specific to the manosphere and the far right.

Another fundamental area of intervention targets the sphere of mental health and social policies, through campaigns that combat the stigma associated with the expression of male vulnerability. It is necessary to promote alternative models of masculinity that go beyond the binary and hierarchical logic of the traditional patriarchal model. This would be doubly beneficial, firstly contributing to strengthening gender equality, through examples that encourage the active involvement of men in family life and the equitable assumption of household responsibilities. In this sense, public policies should support the participation of young fathers in childcare, thus contributing to the erosion of the barrier between the public and domestic spheres. Secondly, models of non-hegemonic masculinity would help increase the safety of young men, as well as to reduce and/or adequately treat emotional and mental health problems. Research on the Man Box concept, presented in the introduction, has highlighted the predisposition of young men who share patriarchal masculine values to engage in risky behaviors (from speeding to excessive alcohol or other substance use), as well as repressing emotions and refusing to seek help, which increased risk of suicide. While our questionnaire could not sufficiently explore these correlations, the responses show that respondents believe that a “real man” is strong and solves his own problems. Encouraging boys to express their emotions, to be able to recognize when they are vulnerable and need help can clearly contribute to reducing risks and psycho-emotional disorders.

Interventions also need to be tailored to local needs, paying particular attention to areas where patriarchal norms are more rigid and where access to modern educational resources is limited. Research shows that in less developed administrative units, authoritarian values that support a patriarchal masculine model are more prevalent. Public schools and civic groups in these areas should be supported as a priority, to compensate for the general lack of resources. Responses to the interviews revealed that civic and community involvement (in student associations, human rights NGOs) is more likely correlated with having egalitarian values, a willingness to communicate and with accepting the idea of therapy. Therefore, strengthening or creating opportunities for community action beyond large cities is very important, both for stimulating participatory civic culture and for the psychological and emotional safety of young men.

The importance of individual work, especially through direct, in-person meetings, should not be ignored either. Creating programs that offer young people of all genders safe spaces for socialization, idea exchanging and mutual knowledge is vital. Providing opportunities for individual work outside the online environment can be done through projects such as the creation of community centers, culture programs or promoting organized sports in pre-university education, as well as by facilitating access to volunteer programs and participation in the life of non-governmental organizations. We emphasize that in all these activities, the staff should have basic notions of gender equality, in order to be able to encourage egalitarian and inclusive behaviors and practices. Otherwise, we risk finding ourselves in a situation where, for example, in a community sports center, the staff reproduces the stereotype that boys must be strong and girls delicate, discouraging boys who would like to opt for dance or gymnastics classes, etc.

Last but not least, closer collaboration between state institutions, civil society organizations and digital platforms is important to limit the spread of toxic content that fuels misogyny and extremism. Combating online harassment and bullying must become a priority, not only through punitive measures, but also by promoting counter-narratives that validate democratic values and pluralism. By transforming the online space from an environment of radicalization to one of accurate information, a healthy evolution of the identity of young men can be ensured, while protecting social cohesion and the fundamental rights of all citizens.

In conclusion, the data signals the urgent need for public policies and educational programs focused on gender equality, combating harassment, and promoting alternative models of masculinity, to counter the influence of radical networks and promote a healthy and democratic model of masculinity.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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*Our research shows that young men tend to believe that the current situation is either fair or that the balance hangs in favour of women, to their detriment. Interviews allow the identification of more nuanced explanations. The expansion of masculinist discourses online, as well as the growth of far-right parties, associations and groups, contribute to this dynamic, but more research is needed to understand it.*

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