

MAIN FINDINGS

In view of the up-coming European Elections, the European Parliament, in collaboration with the European Commission decided to launch a barometer study with the principal objective of measuring over time the evolution of public opinion on this major event.

The results presented here below are the **second** of a series of three waves of surveys constituting this Flash Eurobarometer 161 conducted by TNS Sofres / EOS Gallup Europe. Interviews were carried-out by telephone in most Member States. However, as the fixed telephone penetration rate is too low in five countries, interviews here were conducted face-to-face.

Knowledge of the date of the European Elections

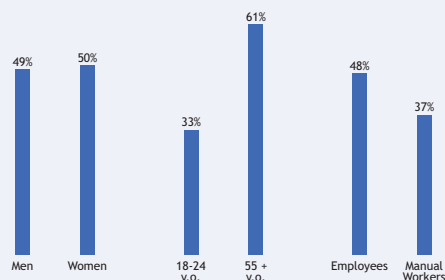
Compared to wave 1 of this barometer, knowledge of the date of the next European Elections is improving. In the beginning of May, only a little over one third of respondents (37%) knew that the elections will take place during the month of June. 51% now give a correct date. That said, about the same number gave either a wrong answer (13%) or ignored the date (36%). As D-Day draws closer, lack of knowledge of this date, as we might expect, is improving in all countries but remains strong in the United Kingdom (62%, -12 points compared to wave 1), Denmark (75%, -12 points) and the Scandinavian countries in general. Voters in the new Member States are still relatively more informed about this date than the original 15.

Q. We would like to know the probability that you will go to vote at the next European elections that will be held in [COUNTRY] on next June [10-11-12-13] next. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that you are certain of not going to vote and 10 means that you are certain of going to vote in these elections, where would you place yourself? The intermediate scores allow you to qualify your attitude.

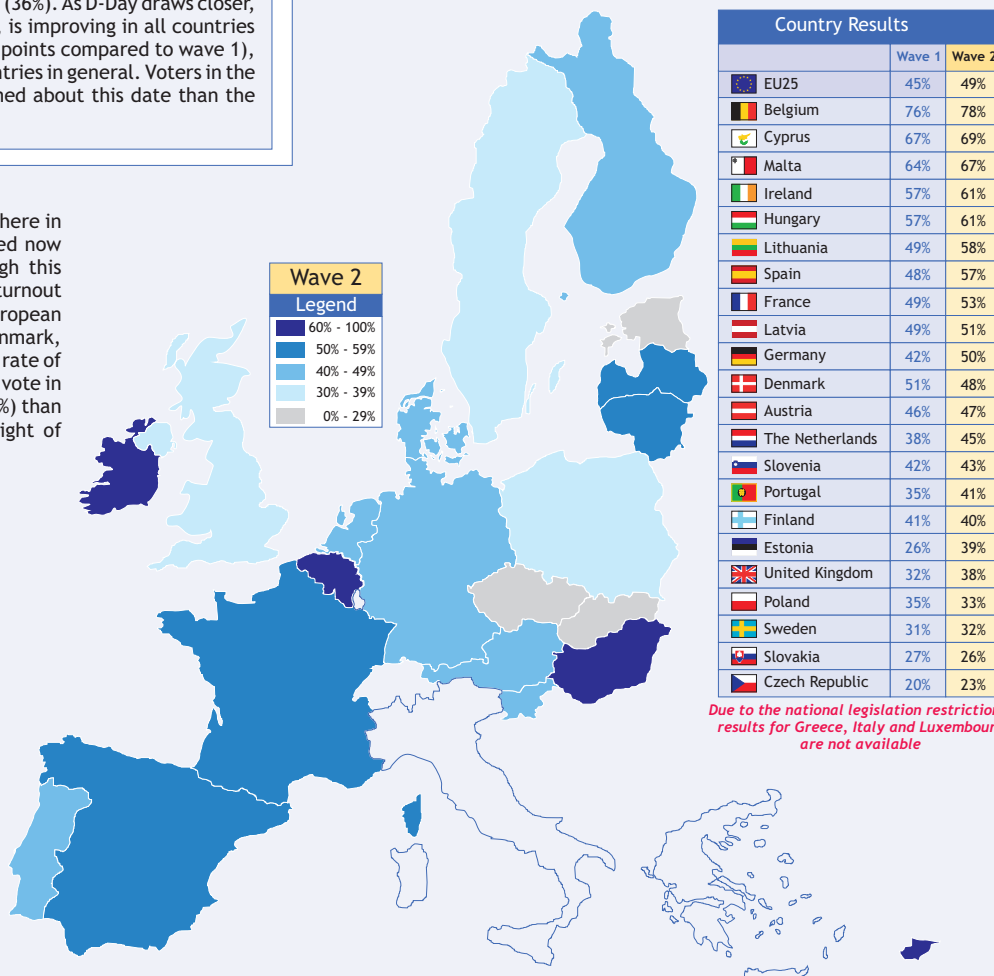
Answers "10"

Certainty to vote

An encouraging increase of 4 points can be observed here in comparison with wave 1. 49% of persons interviewed now confirm that they are certain to vote. Even though this result cannot be considered as a prediction of the turnout rate, it is close to the turnout rate within the European Union in 1999 (49.8%). It should be noted that Denmark, Slovakia and Poland are the only countries where the rate of certainty to vote decreases. Finally, the certainty to vote in the new Members of the European Union is lower (38%) than amongst the original 15 (52%). Of course, the weight of Poland in the EU10 average is quite significant.



As observed in the previous wave of this barometer, young people continue to be much less inclined to go to vote than their elders: 33% (+1 point) of those in the 18-24 age category confirm that they are certain to vote as opposed to 61% (+4 points) of those who are aged 55 and over. The same can be said of manual workers (37%, +6 points) compared to employees (48%, +4 points).



Due to the national legislation restrictions, results for Greece, Italy and Luxembourg are not available

Keys to mobilisation

At the time of voting, voter's interest in Europe remains the main factor that will influence their decision: 72% (-1 point) of interviewees consider this to be an essential element in their decision during the next European Elections. Next in line, we find the purely political aspects, such as the stance of candidates or parties on European as well as national issues. There is little difference in ranking order between both waves of this study but as time goes by, national issues seem to be increasingly significant. There is now a difference of two to three points between the weight of European issues and national ones to the benefit of the latter.

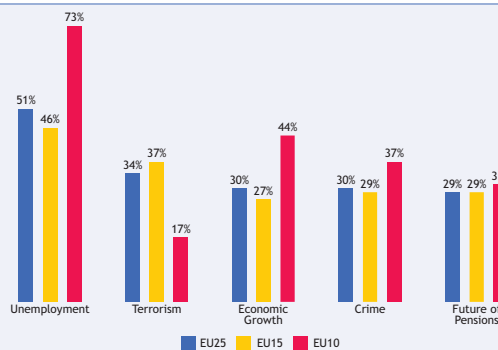
Reasons for not voting

The ranking order for this question has evolved. If people do not intend to vote, it is not only because a majority of them (59%, +2 points) consider that in any case their vote will not change anything in the results but also because this population considers that the Parliament does not deal with their concerns (60%). Amongst potential non-voters, this criticism has gained more than 5 points in two weeks.

Two other elements could explain abstention: lack of information on the elections (54%) and lack of knowledge of the role of the European Parliament (52%). These two dimensions remain stable.

Campaign themes

Hardly any evolution in the results of this question between both waves: unemployment (51%) remains clearly ahead of themes that European citizens would like to see covered in the election campaign, especially in the new Member States (73% against 43% in the EU15). Terrorism ranks second (34%, but only 17% in the ten new Member States), ahead of economic growth (30%), the future of pension funds (30%, particularly crucial in Eastern Europe 44%) and crime (29%). Agriculture seems to remain a very important issue (28%) in the new Member States compared to the original 15 (only 12%).



Opinion on the European Union and the European Parliament

- Close to three quarters of interviewees (73%, -1 point) confirm that they are attached to Europe and 77% of them consider that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing (as opposed to 18% who are of the opposite opinion).
- However, only 34% (-2 points) of European citizens consider that they are well represented by Members of the European Parliament. 44% (-1 point) consider that the Parliament takes their concerns into consideration. However, 47% are of the opposite opinion.
- For 69% (-1 point) of citizens, it is important to know who will be the candidates that will be elected as deputies proof that they are not disinterested in these elections. To their mind, it is more important to know this than knowing which party will win the most seats in these elections (60%).
- Finally an encouraging result: as seen in the first knowledge question, the level of information seems to increase. 42% of interviewees (no less than 7 points of improvement) confirm that they are well informed for going to vote.

Knowledge of the number of Member States in the European Union

- A few days after the Enlargement to ten new Member States, 40% of European citizens knew that the European Union consists of 25 Member States. Two weeks later, this knowledge rate has fallen to only 32%. This decrease is observed in each Member State. The current level of communication about the enlargement of the EU is significantly lower than it was before and shortly after the 1st of May. This partly explains the evolution between both waves.

Q. After the recent enlargement of the European Union, can you tell me how many countries now belong to the European Union?

Total "good answers"

- In parallel, the rate of incorrect answers progresses: a little more than one third of interviewees give an incorrect answer (compared to 27% in wave 1) and one third do not answer (as was the case previously). The rates of lack of knowledge remain particularly high in the United Kingdom (where only 11% of respondents give a correct answer) as well as in Germany (19%, -12 points) and in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries.

