PARLEMETER 2019
HEEDING THE CALL BEYOND THE VOTE
A STRONGER PARLIAMENT TO LISTEN TO CITIZENS VOICES
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eurobarometer Survey 92.2 of the European Parliament
A Public Opinion Monitoring Study
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A Public Opinion Monitoring Study

Eurobarometer survey commissioned by the European Parliament
Directorate-General for Communication
Public Opinion Monitoring Unit
PE 645.472
‘Sunlit uplands’ for EU membership support
After a positive increase over seven years, citizens’ support for membership in the European Union has settled on a high level: Nearly six in ten Europeans are in favour of their country’s EU membership.

Citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU
The 2019 European elections have contributed positively to the increased level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the European Union: 52% (+3 pp) of Europeans share this feeling.

Europeans call for a stronger Parliament
European citizens want the European Parliament to have a stronger role in the future. A few months after the European elections, 58% of respondents call for a more influential Parliament. This is a plus of 7 points since spring 2019 and of 14 points since September 2015 – the indicator reaches its highest level since 2007.

Image of the European Parliament on the move
Citizens’ image of the European Parliament remains predominantly neutral (46%, +3 pp), but a closer look at the data shows an increasing gap between Europeans with a positive image of the European Parliament (33%, +1pp) and those with a negative view (19%, -2 pp).

‘My voice counts in the EU’ back to pre-election levels
As expected, citizens’ feeling that their voice counts in the EU went back to pre-election levels. While the perception of ‘my voice counts’ indeed strongly relates with the momentum of elections, it also underlines the constant expectation of European citizens that their voice be heard.
Climate change, poverty, terrorism and unemployment as key priorities
A majority of Europeans calls for concrete European action in the areas of climate change, the fight against poverty, terrorism and unemployment. When it comes to the defence of European values, a clear majority believes that human rights worldwide, the freedom of speech and gender equality must be preserved as the Union’s fundamental values.

Climate change: top environmental issue for European citizens
Looking at an array of environmental issues, an absolute majority on EU average considers climate change to be the most important environmental issue of today, followed by air pollution, marine pollution, deforestation and the growing amount of waste.

Youth-led climate action works
Nearly six out of ten Europeans believe that the youth-led protests for climate action had a direct policy impact both at EU level and in domestic politics.

More information? Yes, please!
Three-quarters of European citizens (77%) would like to receive more information on the activities of the European institutions. Main interests: The concrete consequences of EU legislation at local, regional and national level as well as more information on the activities of the European Parliament and its Members.

Willing to engage
Three in ten respondents would be encouraged to become more engaged with the activities of their country’s MEPs if they were to receive more information about their roles and activities, or see them more often in media.
CONTINUED SUNLIT UPLANDS FOR EU SUPPORT

After an almost continuous increase between 2011 and 2018, citizen support for European Union membership has settled on a stable high level. Nearly six in ten Europeans (59%, =) are in favour of their country’s EU membership, allowing this traditional Eurobarometer key indicator to enjoy sunlit uplands already for the third year in a row1.

Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the EU is...?

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Source: Parlemeter 2019 (92.2), Q812

A majority of respondents in 25 Member States think that their country’s membership is a “good thing”. The level of support among these countries varies between 81% in Ireland as well as Luxembourg, and 42% in the United Kingdom. In the remaining three Member States: Italy, Czechia and Slovakia, a majority of respondents see EU membership as neither good nor bad for their country.

Compared to June 2019, a clear rise in support for EU membership is visible in France, where the share of positive views increased by 6 percentage points to 58%. In Greece, support rose by 5 points to 47% and in Latvia, by 4 points to 59%. On the other hand, EU support decreased in Lithuania (-8 pp), the United Kingdom (-7 pp), Poland and Cyprus (both -5 pp).

Against the backdrop of Brexit, the United Kingdom is the only country showing a massive increase in undecided opinions as to EU Membership: 31% of British respondents (an increase of 11 points compared to June 2019) see EU membership as neither good nor bad for the UK.

1 With level varying between 57% and 62% since March 2017
Young people remain the biggest overall supporters of the European Union in comparison to other age cohorts. 64% of 15-24-year-olds believe that EU membership is a "good thing", compared to 54% of Europeans aged 55+. Yet, this survey also shows a 6 point decrease in support from young people compared to June 2019. It is too early to say whether this development is a first signal of youth detachment. Nevertheless, the decrease in EU support among young people is certainly evidence that their support, including electoral participation and overall interest specifically, cannot not be taken for granted.

**STRONGER FEELING OF SATISFACTION WITH EU DEMOCRACY**

While favourability towards EU membership remains stable, the overall feeling of optimism on the future of the Union continues to be a slow but steadily rising trend.

Thirty-two percent of citizens believe that the EU is on the right track. That is an increase of 5 percentage points compared to spring 2019 and a continuation of the positive trend observed since November 2011. The share of citizens feeling that things are going in the wrong direction in the EU is decreasing equally by 5 points, with a relative majority of 46% of respondents holding this view.

At the same time, the recent European elections and active participation of citizens in the latter have contributed positively to an increasing feeling of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the European Union.

Signals indicating that citizens trust and appreciate the European democratic process were already emerging from previous Eurobarometer surveys and are confirmed, in particular, by the current Parlemeter results on various features of European democracy.

Fifty-two percent of Europeans are satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union and 56% share this opinion concerning their own country. Over the past twelve months, this feeling has improved with regards to the EU democratic process, while similar changes are less significant on the functioning of democracy at the national level.

The national share of citizens satisfied with the way EU democracy works roughly doubles across the 28 Member States. Ireland (77%), Denmark (77%) and Poland (73%) enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction, while Spain and UK (both 45%), Italy (44%) and Greece (34%) are the countries where people are the least satisfied with the EU democratic process.

Looking at national systems, the share of ‘satisfied’ responses almost triples, from Romania (34%), Croatia (33%) and Greece (32%) to Denmark (93%), Luxembourg (84%) and the Netherlands (83%) enjoying the highest percentages of citizen appreciation for national democratic processes.
In 14 countries, the overall degree of satisfaction with European democracy is greater than the one expressed for the national one. These differences are particularly striking for Romania, Croatia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland. Concerning national changes, Hungary, Poland, Czechia and Spain show the highest increases in support for EU democracy since spring 2019 (+13 pp, +11 pp, +10 pp and +9 pp respectively). These increases should be put into context, taking into account specific political developments such as, for example, the European Union’s position on compliance with the rule of law in Hungary and Poland, or the uncertain political climate in Spain.

INCREASED INTEREST IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Another factor that helps to better assess the evolution of public opinion on the European Union is the growing attention to European affairs, shared by citizens and the media over the last year.

Asked whether their personal interest in European affairs has changed over the past twelve months, a large majority of respondents state that it has stayed the same (62%). However, 22% of Europeans say that it has increased, while only 15% state the opposite.

Nationally, rising interest in European matters is very significant in Ireland (45%) and in the United Kingdom (43%); partly echoing the national public discourse dominated by the Brexit debate. At the other end of the scale, Italy and Romania stand out with 27% and 22% of citizens claiming respectively that their interest in European issues has dropped in the last year.

There is a clear correlation between restored public interest in EU-related matters and an increased discussion of the latter in the media. Overall, nearly one in two Europeans did not notice any change in media coverage, but 36% of Europeans admit that the amount of EU-related coverage has risen, while 11% believe that it has decreased.

THE VIEWS OF CITIZENS ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ARE SHIFTING

Against a background of rising confidence in European democracy and growing interest in EU-related issues, the European Parliament appears to be benefiting from trust recovery.

Although the image of the European Parliament among citizens remains predominantly neutral (46%, +3 pp since September 2018), the trend line shows an increasing gap between Europeans with a positive image of the European Parliament (33%, +1 pp) and those with a negative view (19%, -2 pp).
Ireland is the country with the highest number of positive image respondents (52%), followed by Denmark (49%), Portugal (49%) and Sweden (48%). Czechia, France and Spain are at the other end of the scale with a ‘positive’ score of 20%, 24% and 25% respectively.

Citizens who hold a ‘neutral’ opinion of the European Parliament are more frequently women, young people and students, as well as people with a lower income. At the same time, managers, as well as those who feel their voice counts in the EU, hold the most positive image of the institution.

An important conclusion can be drawn from this finding: the feeling that ‘my voice counts’ is a decisive factor in shaping public opinion on the European Parliament as a democratic and directly-elected institution, influencing a shift from negative to positive views.

This also opens up to new ways of looking at citizen engagement with the European Parliament. It seems that it may depend on the opinion they have of the institution in addition to, and even mainly on, the perception that things can change by voting; that European democracy can deliver adequate responses to their personal expectations.
STRENGTH CALL FOR A MORE INFLUENTIAL EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT EVER MEASURED

If citizens trust that by voting things can change and, in addition, believe that their voice counts in the EU, one might expect that such attitudes be also reflected in the call for a more influential European Parliament. Indeed, over the past four years, respondents to consecutive Eurobarometer surveys have increased their wish for a more important Parliament. The present Eurobarometer survey returns the strongest ever call for a more influential European Parliament since this question was first asked in 2007. Fifty-eight percent of Europeans, a 7 percentage point increase since spring 2019 and 14 points since September 2015, call for a more important role for the European Parliament. In 25 Member States, a relative majority of citizens wish for a more influential institution. The variance ranges from 89% in Cyprus to 39% in Denmark.

Knowledge of the Parliament’s activities may well be a determining factor in this support for more influence. In all countries - with the exception of only Cyprus, Spain, Luxembourg and Romania - the proportion of citizens calling for a more important role is significantly higher among those with high-level knowledge of the Parliament’s legislative activities.

The level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the European Union has a similar impact: the more respondents express satisfaction with the democratic system in the EU, the more they would like to see the European Parliament have more influence.
WEAKER PERCEPTION OF ‘MY VOICE COUNTS IN THE EU’: EXPECTED ADJUSTMENT OR CALL FOR ACTION?

The call for a stronger role for the European Parliament combined with growing satisfaction with the way European democracy operates are grounds to assume that the European Parliament is continuously more entrusted by its citizens. Yet, the present survey shows that the feeling that their voice counts in the EU is going back to pre-election levels.

The share of respondents believing their voice counts in the EU registers at 49%, the same level as in February-March 2019. The result recorded in the post-electoral Eurobarometer survey was at 56%.

Findings demonstrate that the perception that ‘my voice counts’ is strongly linked to the momentum of elections. Support for the European project on its own is not enough to move the feeling that ‘my voice counts’. Although in a good number of EU countries support for EU membership goes along with a relatively strong feeling that ‘my voice counts in the EU’, in some others, the link is less obvious. As an example, the overall feeling of ‘my voice counts in the EU’ is quite strong in Austria, Croatia and Slovakia, whereas the level of favourability towards EU membership in the same countries remains relatively low.

THE PRIORITIES TO DEFEND

As demonstrated by voting results in the European elections, citizens’ expectations concerning priority topics for the European Parliament are strong.

In October 2019, 32% of respondents say that combating climate change and preserving the environment, oceans and biodiversity should be on top of the list of priorities for the European Parliament. Tackling social exclusion and poverty comes second on 31%, followed - at some distance - by combating terrorism and organised crime (24%) as well as combating youth unemployment and striving for full employment in all EU countries (24%). Investment in high education and setting the right conditions for economic growth constitute the next chunk of important issues for 22% and 18% of respondents respectively.

Source: Parlemeter 2019 (92.2), QBST
Tackling social exclusion and poverty is the first concern in twelve countries, on an equal footing with other topics in six of them. In eleven countries, combating climate change and protecting the environment come first (shared top priority in two Member States). Youth unemployment remains a key concern in five countries while the fight against terrorism is the top concern in three. Protecting external borders is a first priority only in Estonia, sharing first place with combating terrorism and tackling social exclusion and poverty. Improving consumer rights as well as the quality and access to health services for all citizens leads the list in Portugal and Romania, both on equal level with other items. Finally, Malta is the only country that cites the strengthening of a common migration and integration policy as its citizens’ top-level concern.

As always, citizens’ priorities reflect respective national contexts and socio-demographics strongly. They may and will differ greatly, both in terms of support levels and the scale of importance from country to country and indeed within countries across different socio-demographic subgroups. Looking only at the issue of climate change, the map below shows the spread between countries on this topic ranging from 62% support in Sweden to a mere 14% in Bulgaria.
THE VALUES TO PRESERVE

A more uniform opinion across countries and a more stable trend is found when looking at the values that the European Parliament should defend as a matter of priority.

The protection of human rights worldwide remains by far the foremost value in citizens’ minds, according to 48% (+2 pp compared to September 2018) of responses. Gender equality, despite a tiny flexion, is in second place (38%, =), together with freedom of speech (38%).

One in three Europeans also mentions solidarity between EU Member States (33%, +3 pp), while international solidarity between the EU and poor countries in the world and intercultural or interreligious dialogue are seen as main values by more than one fifth of the population (respectively 23%, +1 pp, and 22%, -1 pp). Finally, 18% (-2 pp) of Europeans also mention the protection of minorities and 10% of respondents look at the abolition of the death penalty in the world as a pressing value to fight for.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE ACTION

Climate change and other environment-related issues are becoming increasingly part of our everyday lives. From natural disasters and temperature records, to the youth-led #FridaysForFuture movement bringing millions to the streets, not to mention political debates focussing on these issues, Europeans are showing their concerns and demanding concrete measures.

Parliament’s own Eurobarometer data reflects this exponentially increasing sense of urgency in a number of surveys over this period: In April 2018, only 35% of respondents chose climate change as their priority topic for the European election campaign, ranking it fifth. In February-March 2019, climate change was already mentioned as their top priority by 55% of respondents who said that they were likely to vote in the elections.

In Parliament’s post-electoral Eurobarometer survey ‘combatting climate change and protecting the environment’ turned out to be the second most important reason that pushed Europeans to vote in the European elections in May 2019. Thirty-seven percent of voters on average in the EU chose this issue as their reason for voting, after the economy and growth (44%). For young people and students climate change was the main driver to go to vote.

Climate change is top environmental issue for European citizens

The present survey continues to explore citizens’ attitudes and concerns regarding climate change. More than half of respondents consider climate change (52%) to be the most important environmental issue. Looking at more specific issues, Europeans place air pollution (35%), marine pollution (31%), deforestation and the growing amount of waste (both 28%) on top of the concerns relating to the environment. On the lower end of this list, one can find the environmental damage caused by tourism and noise pollution, both mentioned by less than one in ten respondents.

Although climate change tops the EU average, a deeper look at the national level shows that, in some countries, respondents have greater concerns about other environmental issues. Those who put climate change at the top of their environmental concerns are more likely to be young (60% are aged 15 to 24,

Q From the following list, please pick the environmental issue which you consider the most important. Firstly? And then? (Max. 4 answers) (% - The most mentioned answer by country)
compared to 48% aged 55+), students (62%), highly educated (57% compared to 47% of those with lower education levels) or managers (58%). They also tend to have positive views on the European Parliament and its role: 58% of those who have a positive image of the EP mention climate change as their key priority – compared to 44% of those who have a negative image of the EP.

Air pollution is the most important environmental issue for more than two-thirds of citizens in Malta (69%), and around half in Bulgaria (52%) and Poland (49%), while deforestation is the most important issue in Lithuania (63%), Estonia and Romania (both 54%). Respondents saying that deforestation is an important issue are likely to be young (35% aged 15–24 compared to 27% aged 55+), still studying (34%) and frequent internet users (29%).

The final item considered as the most important issue by some Europeans is the growing amount of waste. It is first for respondents in Latvia (48%), Slovenia (42%), Slovakia (40%) and Czechia (39%). No clear profile emerges from socio-demographic analysis of these respondents, but it appears that they are more likely to be older, contrary to the previous items (30% are 40 years old or more compared to 26% of 15 to 24 year-olds).

YOUTH-LED CLIMATE PROTESTS AND THEIR EXPECTED POLICY OUTCOMES

The #FridaysForFuture movement as well as other similar protest activities have mobilised millions of people throughout the EU and globally over the course of the past year, resulting in intense media coverage.

The survey asked respondents whether these youth-led protests have actually contributed to more political measures being taken to fight climate change – both at the European and national level. The answers to both questions are significant: close to six out of ten Europeans are confident or even convinced, that youth-led climate protests have a direct policy impact in both cases.

An absolute majority of respondents in 25 Member States think that these youth-led climate change protests contribute to the implementation of further measures to fight political climate change in the EU. Most convinced of this influence are the Irish with nearly three quarters of participants (74%), the Swedes (71%) and the Cypriots (70%). In fact, in Ireland and Cyprus slightly over three in ten of respondents believe that these actions will ‘definitely’ have a positive policy outcome in the EU (31% and 35%, respectively). In Estonia, there is a less obvious difference between those who think these protests could lead to more political measures being taken to combat climate change in the EU (49%) and those who do not think so (45%) - this is also the case in the UK (47% vs 42%). Czechia is the only country where more respondents believe that actions such as the youth-led protests would not contribute to more political measures being taken by the EU to fight climate change (52% against 42% who think they could).
The variance between Member States is greater when looking at the respondents who believe that youth-led protests would influence political measures against climate change in their own country. In 19 European countries, an absolute majority of respondents believe so, in three more countries (Lithuania, Malta and the United Kingdom) a relative majority of respondents share this belief. In several countries, all of them from Central or Eastern Europe, more respondents believe that their national politics would not be influenced by youth-led climate protests. In Slovenia 52% see no such influence, compared to 44% who do, in Croatia 55% stand against 42% of respondents who would see such an impact. Other countries with a majority being sceptical about the direct impact of youth-led protest on national policy-making include Latvia (54% against 41%), Estonia (54% against 40%), Bulgaria (44% against 38%) and Czechia (58% against 37%).

The socio-demographic analysis reveals the younger the respondents, the more likely they are to think that EU will be impacted by such protests. Respondents in this camp are also more likely to be highly educated or still studying, to be managers and frequent internet users. Another important characteristic is their positive attitude towards the EU and the European Parliament.
The 2019 European elections have significantly reinforced the importance – and need – of constant interaction and engagement with European citizens. Voters have become more highly educated and informed – and they are willing to engage politically more than before. Voters in 2019 are more confident, empowered and engaged. Next to the increased levels of empowerment and engagement, expectations concerning the positive consequences of voting rose – reinforcing the need for more engagement and debate from the European Parliament.

The democratic power and influence of the European Parliament is underpinned by the mandate conferred by voters from all EU Member States. It depends on their regular, continuing and active participation in its work on their behalf. Yet this participation is largely reliant on knowledge: the more citizens understand what the European Parliament is, what it does and what it stands for, the more likely they are to vote in European elections, in turn strengthening the European Parliament’s democratic legitimacy.

The 2019 Parlemeter survey asked respondents a series of questions measuring their current level of knowledge on the work of the European Parliament, as well as their interest in receiving more information on the European Union and its institutions, specifically the European Parliament and its Members.

**KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PARLIAMENT’S WORK**

Sixty-one percent of respondents on EU average said that have a medium or high level of knowledge about the work of the EP. Asked to position themselves on a scale of one to ten (with ‘10’ meaning that ‘you know a lot’) as to how much they think they know about the work of the European Parliament, 55% professed having a medium level of knowledge (scale range 4–7). With 6%, only a marginal share of citizens, claiming to have a ‘high level of knowledge’ (scale range 8–10), while 39% of respondents said they have a ‘low level of knowledge’ (scale range 1–3). The EU average level of knowledge about the work of the European Parliament is therefore 4.2 on a scale from one to ten.

In Austria (5.0), Romania (4.8) and Poland (4.7) the average subjective level of knowledge about the EP is highest. Overall, there are relatively small discrepancies between Member States, with the spread ranging from 5.0 in Austria to a 3.4 average subjective knowledge in France. France is also the only country with an absolute majority of respondents (54%) declaring to have a low level of knowledge on the work of the European Parliament, followed by the UK and Slovenia (both 47% low level of knowledge) and Estonia (46%). Overall, in 27 Member States citizens claim to have medium or high level knowledge, whereas in twelve EU Member States more than four in ten respondents claim to have only a low level of knowledge.
CLEAR INTEREST IN MORE INFORMATION

More than three-quarters of EU citizens (77%) would like to receive more information about at least one of seven proposed aspects of the new legislative period and the activities of the European institutions.

On average across the EU, interest is highest on the concrete consequences of European legislation on the respondent’s country. 31% of respondents chose this option, closely followed by information on ‘what the European Parliament is doing’ (29%), ‘what the EU has concretely done or changed in your city, region or country’ (28%) and ‘the activities of national MEPs in the European Parliament’ (27%). Within a very small variance across the issues measured, ‘interest in the activities of the European Commission’ or ‘the positions of the national government on current EU topics’ rank last with 24% each.

A much more varied picture appears when looking at the dispersion between countries on what respondents want to know more about. In eleven countries, citizens would most like to receive more information about the concrete consequences of EU legislation on their country. Results are highest in Northern European countries, with 62% in the Netherlands and 60% in Sweden, followed by Finland (54%) and Denmark (50%).

Respondents in five countries, mostly from South-Eastern Europe, are interested in receiving more information about what the EU has concretely done or changed in their city, their region or their country. This segment is led by Greece (47%), followed by Romania (40%), Croatia (37%), Bulgaria (36%) as well as Slovakia (29%).

Citizens from Cyprus (44%), Lithuania (38%) and Poland (28%) would like to know more about what their MEPs are doing in the European Parliament, while respondents from six countries are most interested in receiving more information about the work and activities of the European Parliament in general, including France (36%) and Italy (35%).

Outliers are Spain and the United Kingdom. In both countries, the answer most given was that respondents would not wish to receive more information (34%/ES and 31%/UK). Irish respondents on the other hand mostly cited interest in their own government’s position on current EU topics (33%).

The interest to receive more information is expressed both by voters (83%) and abstainers (68%) alike. Only 28% of 2019 non-voters and 15% of voters are not interested in receiving more information.
ENGAGEMENT WITH MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Three in ten respondents would be encouraged to be more engaged with the activities of their country’s MEPs if they were to receive more information on their roles and activities, or see them more often in the media (29%). For one in five respondents, getting to address an MEP directly on a specific issue and receiving a concrete answer would encourage further engagement. Sixteen percent of respondents on EU average would wish to meet their MEPs at events in their city or region, while 13% of respondents would find visiting the European Parliament in Brussels or Strasbourg an attractive option. Last in this range is the option to interact with Members via social media (12%).

Seventy-four percent of voters in the 2019 European elections name at least one way of engaging more with MEPs, with only 24% of them not being interested in further engagement. Also, more than half of citizens who did not vote in the last European elections give at least one way of engaging more (56%), with the wish to receive more information about the role and activities of their MEPs being the most cited engagement option.
METHODOLOGY AND DATA PRESENTATION

Kantar conducted the Parlemeter 2019 as Eurobarometer survey 92.2 for the European Parliament. The fieldwork took place from 8 to 22 October 2019 in all 28 EU Member States. 27,607 respondents, drawn as a representative sample from the general population aged 15+, were interviewed face-to-face.

You can find the full report, including national factsheets, data annexes and results volumes online on http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/

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This executive summary highlights some of the main findings of the 2019 Parlemeter, conducted as Eurobarometer survey 92.2 for the European Parliament by

KANTAR

The fieldwork took place from 8 to 22 October 2019 in all 28 EU Member States. 27,607 respondents, drawn as a representative sample from the general population aged 15+, were interviewed face-to-face.

The present Eurobarometer survey examines European citizens’ opinions on EU membership, on their attitudes towards European democracy and the role of the European Parliament. Questions on priority policies for the European Parliament at the beginning of the new legislative term, with a special focus on climate change and environmental issues, complete the survey together with a dedicated set of questions on citizens’ expectations as to more information from and engagement with the European Parliament and its Members.