

The Eurobarometer's sunny outlook

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Eurobarometer consistently paints an overly positive picture of the EU

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Summary

The Eurobarometer survey, which measures public opinion in European countries about the EU, suffers from serious methodological shortcomings, especially in the Netherlands. The most recent survey (winter 2025) reports that only 14% of Dutch people have a negative opinion of the EU. However, a similar poll by Peil.nl shows that this percentage is actually 34%. This difference appears to be largely due to systematic distortions in the Eurobarometer sample.

Analysis shows that the Eurobarometer sample is heavily overrepresented by higher educated people (60% have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 37% according to the CBS) and people who position themselves politically on the left (43% left, 25% right). By contrast, both Peil.nl and the National Voter Survey find that more people position themselves on the right than on the left. Because higher educated and left-wing voters are on average more positive about the EU, this significantly distorts the results.

In addition, it appears that the survey was conducted face-to-face, often with pre-selected participants. This led to a strong non-response bias: people with a more critical attitude toward the EU are much less willing to participate in a long and intensive interview. This confirms the suspicion that mainly pro-EU respondents participated in the survey.

Comparisons between the results of the Eurobarometer and those of Peil.nl on identical questions show major differences: for example, while Eurobarometer reports that 85% of Dutch people consider EU membership to be beneficial, according to Peil.nl this figure is only 63%. This pattern is repeated in other questions about the European Parliament and the general image of the EU.

The same distortions are also visible in previous Eurobarometer surveys and in other countries, particularly Sweden and Finland. There, too, there is an overrepresentation of highly educated and left-wing voters. The distortion appears to be structural: in the Netherlands, Eurobarometer has shown twice as many left-wing voters as right-wing voters since 2016, while election results do not support this.

The research organization Verian does not acknowledge these differences and emphasizes the consistency of the research design. As a result, inaccurate perceptions and unreliable country scores persist, even though these figures can influence policy-making and public opinion.

Introduction

The Eurobarometer is the EU's standard program for public opinion monitoring. It has been conducted twice a year by the European Commission since 1974. Through a series of opinion polls, the European Parliament aims to gauge Europeans' views on important issues, including the European Union and its policies.

On 25 March, the latest Eurobarometer results (Winter 103) were presented. [This is the press release](#) on the subject.

The survey, conducted again in February 2025, was carried out in the 27 EU countries plus three others. In each country, a sample of around 1,000 people aged 15 and over was surveyed. It was conducted by Verian (formerly Kantar).

One of the results of the survey was that 66% of all citizens want the EU to play a more important role in protecting against global crises and security threats. The press release also states that at national level, the results vary in favour of a greater role for the EU, ranging from 87% in Sweden to 47% in Romania and 44% in Poland. In the Netherlands, the figure is 84%.

The Eurobarometer reports can be found on their own website. [This is the relevant report](#). A comparison of the results with the situation in the Netherlands reveals striking differences.

Part 1: The Netherlands at the beginning of 2025

Surprising results

A closer look at the results of the Dutch survey reveals, among other things, that 14% of Dutch people gave a negative answer to the question "What image does the EU evoke in you in general?". 3% answered "very negatively" and 11% "negatively".

This 14% negative response seems difficult to reconcile with Dutch political relations. In the last parliamentary elections, the parties PVV+BBB+FvD+JA21 obtained approximately one-third of the votes. If we assume that none of the remaining voters are negative about the European Union, then – in order to reach that national figure of 14% – less than half of the voters of these four parties would have to give a (fairly) negative answer. This does not correspond with the results of the EU surveys.

Therefore, to get an idea, this identical question was asked via the dutch opinion panel Peil.nl (of Maurice de Hond) in early April 2025, and we see the following figures among these four parties:

	Quite negative	Negative	Totally negative
PVV	36%	46%	82%
BBB	37%	38%	75%
FvD	9%	88%	97%
JA21	51%	22%	73%
Total	35%	47%	82%

So, of this group of voters, 82% are negative towards the EU. And since this comprises approximately one third of voters, this means that at least more than a quarter of Dutch voters are negative, rather than the 14% measured.

This under the assumption that among all other parties, this negative percentage is 0%.

For GroenLinks/PvdA, D66, CDA, and Volt voters, less than 5% are negative. In contrast, among VVD voters, 15% are quite negative and 5% are negative, with higher negativity also seen in SP voters.

According to the Peil.nl survey, 34% of respondents in the Netherlands express a negative opinion regarding the European Union.

This contrasts sharply with the Eurobarometer, which reports 14% for the Netherlands.

Our analysis of the Eurobarometer survey has led to some unexpected findings that provide insight into the factors contributing to this significant disparity.

The Eurobarometer's misrepresentations

In any sample survey, every effort is made to ensure that the composition of the sample is as similar as possible to that of the population. This was also done in this survey and is explained in detail in the report.

For the items 'gender', 'age distribution', 'country/region distribution' and 'degree of urbanity', this representativeness has been ensured, as can be seen [from the published data](#).

However, when examining two other characteristics, which **were not weighted**, there appear to be very substantial differences with the national figures known in the Netherlands. These differences have a major impact on the results of the study.

These relate to the proportion of respondents who describe themselves as "left-wing" and the educational level of the respondents.

In the winter 2025 Eurobarometer survey, 43% of Dutch respondents identified as left of centre and 25% as right. However, the Peil.nl survey found more people identifying as right of centre than left.

Perhaps even more surprising is the level of education of those surveyed in the Dutch part of the Eurobarometer. The report shows that no less than 60% (!) of respondents in this survey had HBO or university education. Literally, it says at the "Bachelor" level, "Master" or "Doctor". **But according to the CBS (Dutch National Bureau of Statistics), this figure is not 60%, but 37%!**

The Peil survey shows that voters on the left or far left have a 9% negative opinion of the EU, while those on the right or far right have a 72% negative opinion of the EU.

It is clear that the Dutch Eurobarometer sample greatly overestimates left-wing voters, which has a significant impact on the results.

In the Netherlands, voters with higher levels of education are also clearly more positive about the EU than those with lower levels of education. So even the overly high level of education in the Dutch sample generates a substantially more positive opinion of the EU in the Eurobarometer.

This matter was brought to the attention of Verian's research team in Brussels, who noted that the Peil.nl survey may not accurately represent the population of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the results from Peil.nl align closely with those reported by CBS, especially in terms of educational attainment.

But there is another important source that demonstrates the extent of the problems with the Eurobarometer sample in the Netherlands.

National Voter Survey for Parliamentary Elections in the Netherlands

In November 2023, Dutch universities conducted a National Voter Survey alongside the Netherlands' Lower House elections, including questions on education and political orientation. A comparison of these results reveals clear differences between the Eurobarometer sample and the broader Dutch population.

Below, these figures are compared with those from the autumn 2023 Eurobarometer (number 100).

Higher education	National Voter Survey 2023	Eurobarometer autumn 2023
Doctorate	1%	2%
Master	11%	25%
Bachelor's degree	24%	27%
Total	36%	54%

Thus, at the end of 2023, the National Voter Survey showed that 36% had completed secondary education or higher, while the Eurobarometer showed 54%.

Even more pronounced were the Eurobarometer's problems with the left-right scale.

Right-left scale (excluding no response)	National Voter Survey 2023	Eurobarometer Autumn 2023
Four peripheral scores on the left	27%	43%
Four peripheral scores on the right	38%	24%

While the National Voters Survey in The Netherlands, as well as Peil.nl, show that there are clearly more centre-right voters than centre-left voters in the Netherlands, the Eurobarometer observes a strong overrepresentation of left-wing voters from (up to 43% left-wing and 24% right-wing). In contrast, the National Voter Survey shows more right-wing than left-wing voters (as does Peil.nl).

And the problems are even more serious than these figures show. Because the cause of this huge difference in these two variables (left-right scale and educational level) has an even greater impact on the results than might appear at first glance.

Significant problems of non-response bias.

According to Eurobarometer reports, the survey in the Netherlands was administered through face-to-face interviews and, considering the length of the questionnaire, required an average duration of 45 minutes.

The approach in the Netherlands was to first try to arrange appointments through Verian's own panel for the face-to-face survey, which was then conducted at the respondents' homes or using digital methods (face-to-face with remote video).

Surveys always run the risk of selective non-response. This means that the cooperation of respondents depends on the topic surveyed.

Suppose a survey is conducted on the perception of football and someone is asked if they want to be there face-to-face for a half-hour interview. It is not difficult to understand that those who participate in the survey are much more enthusiastic about football than those who are not enthusiastic about football and therefore do not cooperate.

It is not accurate to state that 80% of Dutch people are (very) positive about football solely because the sample was representative in terms of gender, age, and region. It is very well possible that 50% of individuals with favourable opinions about football participated in the survey, while only 10% of those with negative perceptions were willing to engage in a thirty-minute face-to-face discussion on the topic. As a result, it is conceivable that less than half of the Dutch population holds a positive view of football, despite the survey indicating an approval rate of 80%.

That this happened with the Eurobarometer is not entirely imaginary, but 100% certain and easy to prove. The final group that participated in this survey in the Netherlands is much more left-wing than the average Dutch person and significantly more educated. This is because left-wing Dutch people with higher education are clearly more positive about the EU than right-wing Dutch people with lower education.

This can already be seen in the Eurobarometer survey results themselves. But it is also clearly visible in the figures from Peil.nl.

Negative percentage on the EU in Peil.nl

- Respondents on the left and far left: 9% negative about the EU
- Right-wing and far-right respondents: 72% negative about the EU
- Education HBO/Bachelor or higher: 24% negative about the EU
- LO/VMBO education: 55% negative about the EU

The Eurobarometer also shows differences between these two groups, but not as marked as on Peil.nl.

Negative percentage on the EU in the Eurobarometer¹ (and Peil.nl).

- Left and far left: 4% (Peil.nl 9%)
- Right and far right: 32% (Peil.nl 72%)
- Higher education: 10% (Peil.nl 24%)
- Lower education: 19% (Peil.nl 55% negative about the EU).

The variation between Peil.nl and the Dutch sample in the Eurobarometer is only minimally explained by differences in how educational level is defined.

The substantial variation observed within the groups (with right and far-right respondents in Peil.nl showing 72% negativity, compared to 32% in the Eurobarometer) can be attributed to the composition of the survey samples. Specifically, right-wing voters who participated in the Eurobarometer do not constitute a representative sample of all right-wing voters; rather, those with more positive attitudes toward Europe were significantly more likely to participate in the survey.

Because if the non-response bias in the overall population surveyed has already caused a strong overrepresentation of left-wing and highly educated voters, it has also caused something similar within the subgroups themselves.

The impact of this on the results of the Dutch Eurobarometer is enormous. The results of the Dutch sample of Eurobarometer 103 (winter 2025) are skewed and do not reflect what the Dutch population really thinks of Europe.

First, we will look at the results of Peil.nl with the same questions as the Eurobarometer. We will then analyse the previous figures for the Netherlands (spoiler alert: the same problem existed there) and the figures for other countries (spoiler alert: similar problems exist there too, at least for some of the countries).

¹ Based on data from Eurobarometer 101 from 2024, as the complete data file for the winter 2025 survey is not yet available.

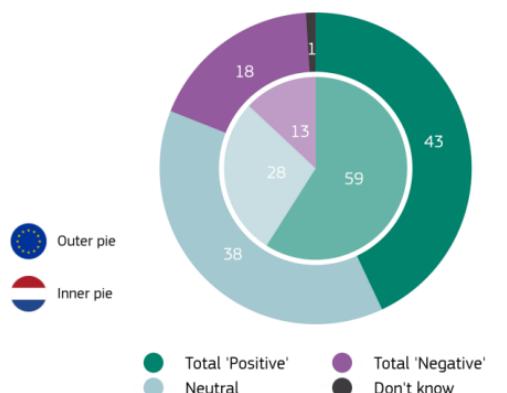
Comparison between Peil.nl and Eurobarometer Netherlands

A series of questions from the Eurobarometer survey conducted earlier this year were repeated by Peil.nl. The level of education and the left-right divide in terms of representativeness were taken into account.

There was no bias due to non-response, or if there was, it was minimal. If there was, it was not directly related to the subject of the survey because the questions were asked in the context of a range of political and non-political issues.

These are the results.

D78. In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (%)



Green: Positive - Blue/grey: Neutral - Purple: Negative

Q1: Overall, what image does the European Union (EU) evoke for you?

	Eurobarometer	Peil.nl	Absolute difference (percentage point)	Relative difference (percentage)
Positive	63%	47%	-	
Neutral	23%	19%	-	
Negative	14%	34%	20%	143%
Total	100%	100		

Q2: All things considered, do you think the Netherlands has benefited from its membership of the EU?

	Eurobarometer	Peil.nl	Absolute difference (percentage point)	Relative difference (percentage)
Benefit	85%	63%		
No benefit	13%	30%	17%	131%
Don't know	3%	7%		
Total	100%	100%		

Q3. Would you personally like the European Parliament to play a more important or less important role?

	Eurobarometer	Peil.nl	Absolute difference (percentage point)	Relative difference (percentage)
Most important	66%	39%		
Less important	27%	42%	15%	56%
No change	7%	19%		

Q 4. Overall, do you think that the Netherlands benefits from being a member of the EU?

	Eurobarometer	Peil.nl	Absolute difference (percentage point)	Relative difference (percentage)
Good	85%	68%		
No	13%	25%	12%	92%
Don't know	2%	7%		

For each of these four questions, the significant impact of the Eurobarometer is clear: the more than 1,000 people who participated in the Eurobarometer in the Netherlands are clearly more positive about the EU than if an adequate sample had been taken.

The findings from the Dutch segment of the Eurobarometer survey may present a skewed representation of public opinion regarding the EU.

This is attributable to lower participation rates among individuals holding negative views toward Europe in the 45-minute face-to-face interviews.

Part 2: Other countries and previous research

The question is to what extent the survey conducted in early 2025 in other countries shows something similar to the Netherlands.

Education level

First, we compare the official figures on education in the 27 countries surveyed with those in the survey. We take the attribute 'highest level of education' and then the percentage of 'university graduates or higher'.

In 24 countries, we see figures in the survey for this characteristic that are similar to the known figures. In three countries, we see large differences:

- Netherlands: official figure: 36% compared to survey figure: 60%.
- Sweden: official figure: 27% compared to research figure: 41%.
- Finland: official figure: 27% compared to research figure: 43%.

If we want to delve deeper into the technical application of this survey, especially in these countries, it is important to note that this report has not yet been published.

[However, the technical report of the October 2024 survey is available.](#)

With regard to the finding of large differences in the level of education, it is important to note that the report from the end of 2024 states that in these three countries (and in four others) the survey was also conducted via CAVI, i.e. via video connections (video calls). However, it is unclear what proportion of all calls were made in this way (and this does not refer to the survey conducted in early 2025).

In the justification for the October 2024 survey, the following is stated for the Netherlands and Sweden:

"The preselection of respondents in the Netherlands and Sweden is organised centrally.

Within each randomly selected sampling point, a random sample of households is drawn from the sampling frame. Respondents are then contacted by telephone from the CATI centre (telephone interview centre). Lists of pre-approved respondents are then provided to the interviewers. The interviewers then contact the respondents to arrange an appointment for the interview."

As a result, the response rates for Sweden and the Netherlands, at 82%, are much higher than those for the other countries. These response rates appear to include people who actually cooperated in the survey from the group that had given their prior consent. A response rate of 82% therefore means that, after all, 18% of that group did not participate in or complete the interview.

The survey figures at the end of 2024 show that Sweden (55 minutes), the Netherlands (43) and Finland (48) took relatively MORE time than elsewhere: the average across Europe was 37 minutes.

It is also noteworthy that the proportion of left-wing voters (on the left-right spectrum) in Eurobarometer in Sweden is the highest in Europe (50% left and 25% right), followed by the Netherlands with 41% left and 30% right. In most countries, the share of the left is between 15% and 30% (Belgium, for example, 28%, France 26% and Germany 25%).

However, in Sweden, if we look at the Novus-väljarbarometer political poll from February 2025, left-wing parties appear to be above 50% and right-wing parties above 45% (and therefore not 25% as reported by Eurobarometer).

In the 27 EU countries, the survey at the end of October 2024 showed 44% positive responses, 38% neutral and 17% negative. The figures in Sweden and the Netherlands were significantly more positive: Netherlands: 56% positive, 32% neutral and 12% negative.

Sweden: 55% positive, 31% neutral and 14% negative.

In this regard, the Netherlands and Sweden were among the top seven countries that were most positive about the EU.

Left-Right

Since 2016, the left-right split among the Dutch sample of the Eurobarometer has also been known. In all these years, the group of left-wing voters was almost twice as large as that of right-wing voters in the Dutch part of the Eurobarometer survey.

In the 2017 parliamentary elections, right-wing parties won more seats than left-wing parties. But in the 2016 Eurobarometer, the left-wing voter group was twice as large as the right-wing voter group. This is a strong indication that the problem observed around the quality of the sample in the Netherlands in 2025 was also present in 2016!

In Sweden, too, the 2018 election results for left-wing and right-wing parties were roughly 50-50, but in the Eurobarometer, there was also a significantly higher proportion of left-wing voters than right-wing voters in Sweden.

We do not have figures for other countries, but taking into account the French elections and other research, the Sciences Po/Cevipof survey (October 2024) shows that 36% of voters are on the right of centre and 26% on the left. This contrasts with the Eurobarometer, where more French people place themselves to the left of centre (25%) than to the right (20%). In other countries, too, we have the impression that the Eurobarometer shows more people on the left of centre than in the national proportions.

Part 3. Verian Brussels reaction

The above results were presented to the research agency that has been conducting/coordinating the survey in all countries on behalf of the EU for many years.

The response focused mainly on the fact that the survey had to remain comparable over time and that further consultations on the survey were being held with the client.

It was not clear from the response to what extent there was a willingness to adjust the design/approach of the research or to otherwise communicate that the national results, at least for the Netherlands and Sweden, are very different from reality.

These issues are likely to have a significant impact not only on the results for the Netherlands and Sweden, but also on those for many other countries, albeit presumably to a lesser extent.

Conclusion

The information disseminated by the EU based on its own Eurobarometer survey does not always provide an accurate picture of national perceptions of the EU. This is due to a strong selection bias caused by the survey design.

This bias is more pronounced in some countries than in others.

It is puzzling that the large differences in the Netherlands on characteristics such as education and the left-right scale, already reflected in the 2016 Eurobarometer, have not been recognized since then by either the researchers or the client(s). As a result, a misleading picture of the population's attitudes towards the EU has been presented in several countries for many years.

