

Electoral rights of EU citizens

Summary

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This survey was requested by the former Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security (after an administrative reorganisation now DG Justice) and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM "Research and Speechwriting" Unit).

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

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Electoral rights of EU citizens

Conducted by
The Gallup Organization, Hungary
upon the request of the former Directorate-
General for Justice, Freedom and Security (after
an administrative reorganisation now DG
Justice).



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Directorate-General for Communication (DG
COMM "Research and Speechwriting" Unit).

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THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

The Treaty of Maastricht established the Citizenship of the Union in 1992. The foremost purpose of the institutionalisation of this new legal status was to strengthen and enhance European identity and to enable European citizens to participate more intensively in the Community integration process.

The right of European citizenship is extended to every person who is a national of an EU Member State. European citizenship does not substitute but rather supplements the citizenship of each State. Those holding European citizenship are entitled to some fundamental rights within the EU, regardless of which State they are the citizens of. Electoral rights are part of these fundamental rights – every citizen currently has the right to vote and stand as candidate in European and municipal elections in whichever member state they reside in.

This Flash Eurobarometer survey on European Union citizenship (N^o 292) commissioned by the European Commission asked citizens of the EU to clarify how familiar they were with their voting rights as EU citizens and about their opinion on possible directions for measures that may increase participation in European Parliament elections.

The survey's fieldwork was carried out between 10 and 14 of March, 2010. Over 27,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 years and over were interviewed in the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union. Interviews were predominantly carried out by telephone. However, due to the low fixed-line telephone coverage in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, face-to-face interviews were also conducted in these countries (700 telephone and 300 face-to-face interviews). Note: Flash Eurobarometer surveys systematically include mobile phones in samples in Austria, Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on key socio-demographic variables. More details on survey methodology are included in the Annex of the Analytical Report.

Whenever possible, comparisons were made with a previous Flash Eurobarometer survey, Flash 213 (carried out in 2007), which included questions related to awareness of voting rights.

Main findings

- Less than a year after the 2009 European Elections in June, the current Flash Eurobarometer study detected a remarkable shift in perceptions regarding electoral rights of EU citizens resident in other EU member states.
- In 2007, prior to the EP Elections, Flash Eurobarometer 213 found little awareness that non-nationals -provided that they are EU citizens- may vote in a member state where they live and of which they are not nationals. Only 37% could correctly identify that such persons are entitled to vote in municipal elections and 54% knew that electoral rights are also provided for EU elections. The landscape has changed completely for 2010: now the overwhelming majority (69%) are aware that non-national EU citizens may vote in municipal elections and 67% also correctly identify that electoral rights are provided in European Elections.
- However, while awareness has increased, it is not necessarily precise. The proportion of those who believe that EU citizens resident in another member state are also entitled to vote in *national* elections has increased, too. In each member state where this question was relevant, only a minority of citizens were able to correctly identify as false the proposition that resident non-national EU citizens have the right to vote or to stand as candidate in *regional* elections.
- A hypothetical extension of the non-domestic electoral rights of EU citizens would include their ability to vote and to stand as candidates in national and regional elections elsewhere in the EU where they permanently reside. Citizens were rather ambivalent regarding these proposals. While the majority did support the idea of including permanent resident non-national EU citizens in the electoral lists on both levels, a very significant minority of EU voters did not favour these propositions. The margin was slimmer when it came to national elections: 50% in the EU favoured the extension the electoral rights to non-national EU citizens residing in the respondent's country, while 43% were opposed to it. Taking part in regional elections was favoured by 54% (where such elections are held) and opposed by 39%.
- Some questions in the survey addressed the ongoing problem of meagre citizen involvement in EU politics, specifically, the notoriously low turnout at EP elections. Citizens once again confirmed that a clearer vision of the EU's role in their lives (84%) and better information on programmes, candidates (83%) and the elections themselves (80%) could boost their motivation to vote. 61% also agreed that citizens would be more likely to participate if the elections were held on the same day throughout the union. Only a minority of those interviewed were optimistic that moving the Election Day from June to May could boost participation (31%).
- The proposition that more citizens would be tempted to vote if party lists included non-national EU citizens as candidates running for an MEP position was dismissed only by a slim margin. 47% of those interviewed felt that non-nationals appearing on the lists would not attract more voters (to participate or to vote for the given party), while 42% felt that this may be possible. Such multi-nationalisation of party lists was considered less attractive for local elections (with only 31% anticipating that this could attract voters.)

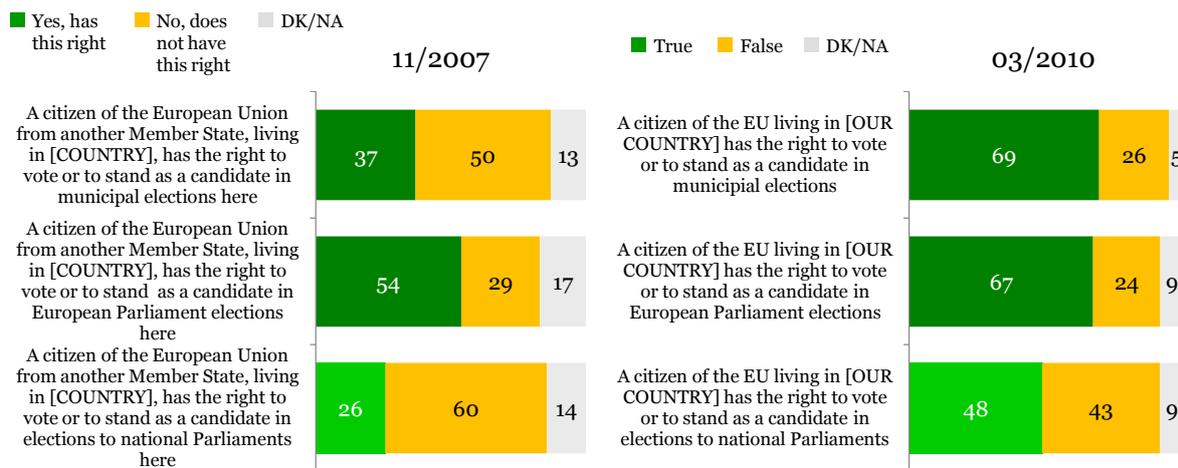
1. Awareness of EU-citizens’ electoral rights

A significant swing in opinions since 2007 towards awareness of inclusive electoral rights in member states resulted in a much higher awareness of the existing electoral rights in municipal elections. It also led to a misperception that EU citizens may vote or stand as candidate in national elections.

Less than a year after the 2009 European Elections in June, the current Flash Eurobarometer study detected a remarkable shift in perceptions regarding electoral rights of EU citizens resident in other EU member states.

In 2007, prior to the elections, Flash Eurobarometer 213¹ found little awareness that non-nationals - provided that they are EU citizens- may vote in a member state of which they are not nationals. Only 37% could correctly identify that such persons are entitled to vote in municipal elections and 54% knew that electoral rights are also provided for EU elections. On the other hand, 60% were aware that such rights are not provided when it comes to national elections. The landscape has changed completely for 2010: now the overwhelming majority (69%) are aware that non-national EU citizens may vote in municipal elections and 67% also correctly identify that electoral rights are provided in European Elections.

Awareness of electoral rights that a citizen of the EU has, 2007-2010



Q1(2010). For each of the statements which I am going to read out, please tell me if this is true or false:
Q4(2007). In fact, all citizens of the EU Member States are "citizens of the European Union". In your opinion, what rights does a citizen of the European Union have?
 Base: all respondents, % EU27

However, while awareness has increased, it is not necessarily precise. The proportion of those who believe that EU citizens resident in another member state are also entitled to vote in national elections has increased, too. Almost half (48%) of those interviewed thought this was the case.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_213_en.pdf

Municipal elections

The awareness of electoral rights in municipal elections has increased dramatically in each member state. In 2007, there was only one country in the EU where more than half of the citizens could correctly identify such a right; now the majority in each member state are aware of this right. On average, the proportion of those aware of such a right has almost doubled at the EU level (2007: 37%, 2010: 69%). Extreme levels of increase were detected in a great number of member states (see chart below), i.e. +51 percentage points in the Netherlands, where citizens were aware in highest proportion – 83% -- that such a right existed.

EP elections

The awareness of the right to vote and to stand as candidate in European Elections has also increased significantly across the EU. In the current study, 79% of Irish, 76% of Spanish and 75% of Latvian citizens were aware of this right, topping the list of all member states. These results represent a percentage point change of +18, +10 and +33, respectively. Awareness only decreased in Poland (-5), where awareness of non-national EU citizens' right to take part in EU Elections in their country of residence is the lowest (48%) of all member states. Everywhere else, at least 6 in 10 citizens are able to identify this right.

National elections

The swing towards a higher awareness of electoral rights granted to non-national EU citizens in other member states affected the perception of electoral rights in national elections of EU citizens who are only residents in another member state. In each member state, the proportion of those who correctly identified that such rights are currently not provided has decreased remarkably since 2007 (i.e. -34 percentage points in Slovenia, -37 in Slovakia – the least in Luxembourg, -6). Currently, Danish (58%), Austrian (57%) and French (55%) citizens are most likely to state that taking part in national elections *is not a right* of an EU citizen residing in another member state. On the other hand, less than 3 in 10 in Malta (24%), Ireland (26%), Slovakia (27%) and Belgium (29%) identified correctly that this statement was false.

Regional elections

In several EU member states regional elections are held separately from national and municipal elections². In these countries the survey asked whether or not respondents believe that non-national EU citizens (who are local residents) have the right to vote or stand as candidate in these regional elections. Overall in the countries concerned, 59% thought that “*a citizen of the EU living in [OUR COUNTRY], has the right to vote or to stand as a candidate in regional elections*”. On average, 34% said this statement was false.

In each member state where this question was relevant, only a minority of citizens were able to correctly identify as false the proposition that resident non-national EU citizens *have the right to vote or to stand as candidate in regional elections*. Only about a quarter in Belgium (23%), Slovakia (24%), the Netherlands (25%) and in the UK (25%) knew that non-national EU citizens do not have electoral rights in regional elections. Even in Austria, where most citizens could identify this proposition as false, less than 50% of those interviewed could do so (49%). (This items has not been asked before, thus trends are not available.)

² The question is relevant for Austria (*Länder*), Belgium (*Région*), the Czech Republic (*Kraje*), Denmark (*Amtskommuner*), Germany (*Länder*), Spain (*Comunidades autónomas*), France (*Région*), Italy (2 autonomous provinces and 20 regions), The Netherlands (*provinciale staten*), Poland (*województwo*), Slovakia (*Kraje*), Sweden (Landstingsfullmäktige), the United Kingdom. The other Member States do not organise regional elections.

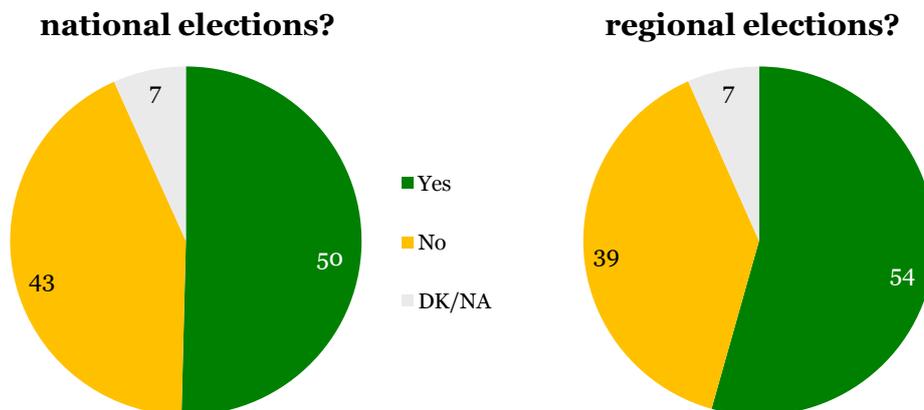
2. Participating in national and regional elections – a hypothetical extension of the electoral rights of non-national EU citizens

EU citizens and countries are highly divided on whether or not to award electoral rights to non-national EU citizens in national elections

The questionnaire presented the idea of a hypothetical extension of the non-domestic electoral rights of EU citizens that would include their ability to vote and to stand as candidates in national and regional elections elsewhere in the EU where they permanently reside. In the current state of the EU law, it is up to member states to award electoral rights to such individuals, and in practice such rights are not currently provided in the member states.

Citizens were rather ambivalent regarding these proposals. The majority did support the idea of including permanent resident non-national EU citizens in the electoral lists on both levels, but a very significant minority of EU voters did not favour the proposition. The margin was slimmer when it came to national elections: 50% in the EU favoured the extension the electoral rights to non-national EU citizens residing in the respondent's country, while 43% were opposed to it. Taking part in regional elections was favoured by 54% and opposed by 39%. On both questions, 7% had no opinion.

Should EU citizens living in another Member State have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in ...



Q2//Q3. Let's take a situation where a citizen of the EU lives in another Member State than his/her Member State of origin (i.e. of which he/she is a national). Should this citizen have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in **REGIONAL//NATIONAL** elections organised in the Member State where he/she lives in case **regional//national** elections are held there?

Base: all respondents, % EU27

Member states results are far from univocal: in several member states a convincing majority supported fully allowing EU citizen to partake in **national elections**. This proposition was the most popular in Ireland (68% in favour vs. only 27% against), Spain (62% vs. 35%), Malta (58% vs. 32%), the UK (58% vs. 35%), Romania (57% vs. 29%) and Luxembourg (57% vs. 40%).

On the other hand, a clear majority in a number of member states especially in Scandinavia dismissed the idea of including foreign EU citizens in electoral lists for national elections: many more Danes (62% disagreed versus 32% agreed), Finns (55% vs. 41%), Swedes (54% versus 41%) opposed than supported the idea. The opinions are similar in some of the Eastern member states, for example in Hungary (54% vs. 35%), the Czech Republic (52% vs. 41%) and Estonia (51% vs. 35%).

In some of the largest member states the public was highly split on this proposition: in Germany and Italy a nominal majority supported the idea, while a marginal minority were opposed in France.

Results vary somewhat, but the bottom line remains unchanged: European Union member states are very diverse when it comes to allowing citizens of other EU member states to run or vote in **regional elections** (note that most member states do not hold such elections, but their citizens may be subjects of such entitlement in other member states). However, compared to national elections, fewer countries were outright opposed to the idea of including non-national EU citizens: the opponents outnumbered the supporters significantly in only five countries, while we found a similarly negative climate of opinion regarding electoral rights in national elections in 10 member states.

3. Citizenship or residence as preferred determinant of electoral rights in EP Elections

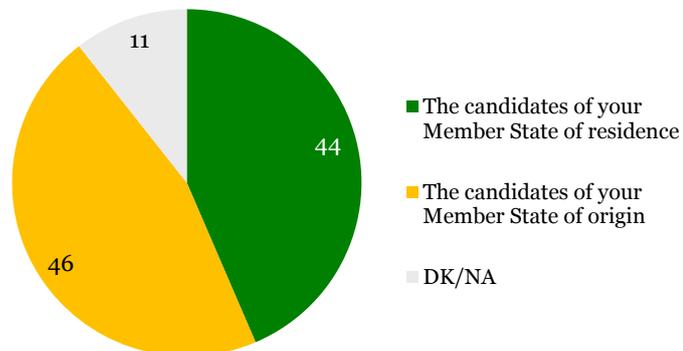
Since double vote is prohibited in EP elections, those EU citizens who reside in another Member State can either vote in their home Member State (of which they are the nationals) either in the Member State where they reside (without being nationals of that State). Voting in both Member States at the same European elections is not allowed.

Citizens were extremely divided on candidates or lists they preferred to vote for – “if they lived in another Member State” – in the European elections. About as many (44%) said they preferred to vote on the list of the country where they resided

(provided that they reside outside of their country) as indicated that they still preferred to exercise their right to vote in their home country (46%), the latter being marginally more popular on the EU level.

Generally speaking, the preference to vote according to the place of residence is more attractive for citizens in some of the pre-2004 member states (i.e. Spain: 52%, France: 50%, Luxembourg: 49% or Germany: 48% -- in each country a decisive majority supports residence-based electoral participation), while most countries where the majority prefers voting in their home country are member states that joined the EU in 2004 or later (most notably Latvia, Poland and Bulgaria where less than a quarter of citizens would prefer voting locally if they lived abroad).

Preferred candidates to vote for in European elections



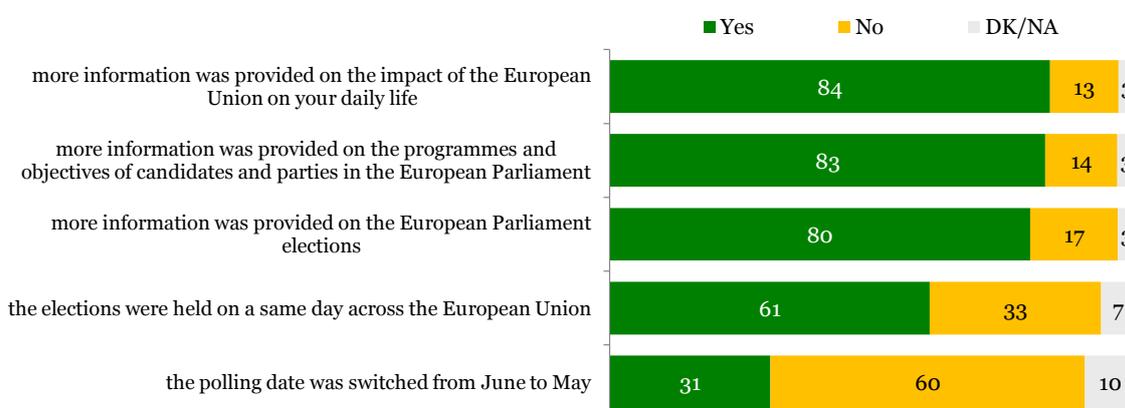
Q4. If you lived in another Member State than your Member State of origin (i.e. of which you are a national) would you rather vote in European elections for...
Base: all respondents, % EU27

4. Means for improving political participation

Most citizens claim that improved information (on the EU, the election and the participants) could boost participation rates in EP elections

Some questions in the survey addressed the ongoing problem of low turnout at EP elections³. Citizens once again confirmed that a clearer vision of the EU's role in their lives (84%) and better information on programmes, candidates (83%) and the elections themselves (80%) could boost their motivation to vote. 61% also agreed that they would be more likely to participate if the elections were held on the same day throughout the union. Only a minority of those interviewed were optimistic that moving the Election Day from June to May could boost participation (31%).

In future European elections turnout would be higher if ...



Q6. In future European elections turnout would be higher if ...
Base: all respondents, % EU27

However, such evaluations should not be treated at face value: the different social desirability of the responses may distort the way citizens answer questions. Increased efforts to provide information may not in fact result automatically in a higher turnout rate.

The three most popular suggestions were supported by a convincing majority in each Member State. When it came to benefits of **elections being held on the same day across Europe**, the opinions varied more significantly. Interestingly, Italians --for whom voting on the same day (provided that the rest of Europe does not adopt their system) would mean losing one of the two days they were able to cast their ballots – confirmed this proposition in very high numbers (68%). On the other hand, Czech and Slovak respondents (who also voted prior to Sunday) were among those least likely to anticipate a higher turnout from a uniform date (42% and 45% respectively). Of all countries considered, Hungarians were the least optimistic that further uniformisation of the election date could boost voter participation (32% confirmed, 56% disagreed).

The **idea of moving the EP elections to May from June** to boost participation was confirmed by the majority only in Finland, where 52% of respondents felt that such a move may increase the turnout in their country which had been in the 30-40% range in the past three EP elections (40.3% in 2009). In none of the other member states was the majority optimistic that such a strategy could indeed improve participation.

³ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout_en.html

Non-nationals as candidates in EP elections

The proposition that more citizens would be tempted to vote if party lists included non-national EU citizens as candidates running for an MEP position was dismissed only by a slim margin. 47% of those interviewed felt that non-nationals appearing on the lists would not attract more voters (to participate or to vote for the given party), while 42% felt that this may be possible. 11% did not provide a clear answer to this question.

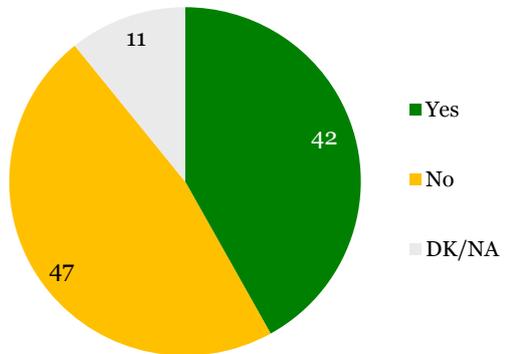
Once again, it was the Irish who were most in agreement that such lists may boost participation (64%), followed by Luxembourgish (57%), Portuguese (52%), British (52%), Spanish (51%) and French (50%) respondents. In all other member states those who felt that lists that included non-nationals may be attractive to voters were in the minority, most so in Denmark (24%), Hungary (27%) and Estonia (28%).

Non-nationals as candidates on local elections

In a question similar to the one above but on local elections – whether or not the inclusion of non-nationals on party lists would attract voters – the vast majority across the EU (except for three member states) did not think that multi-nationalisation of local election voting lists (where lists are used) would attract voters. On the EU27 level, only 31% felt that including non-national EU citizen candidates on local party lists could be attractive to voters.

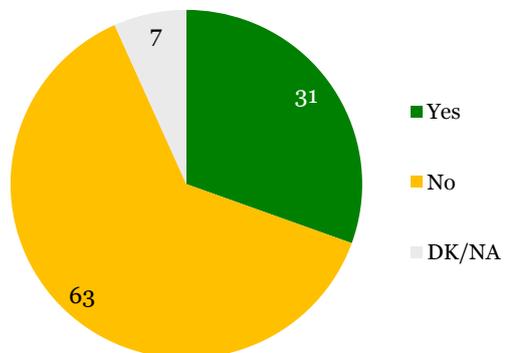
The three member states where the (relative) majority said that the enrolment of non-national candidates in local election lists would attract voters were Ireland (54%), Luxembourg (51%) and Portugal (45% versus 42% who felt the contrary). On the other hand, this proposition was confirmed only by a quarter or less in ten member states, with extreme lows recorded in Denmark, Hungary (both 18%) and Slovenia (19%).

A list in the European elections can attract more voters if it includes candidates who are nationals of other Member States?



Q5. Do you think that a list in the European elections can attract more voters if it includes candidates who are nationals of other Member States?
Base: all respondents, % EU27

A list in local elections can attract more voters if it included candidates who are the nationals of other Member States?



Q7. Do you think that a list in local elections can attract more voters if it included candidates who are the nationals of other Member States?
Base: all respondents, % EU27