

## **Working Paper**

# **The 2024 European Elections**

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# VOTING IN THE DARK: EVALUATING THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS POLITICAL EFFECTS

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One of the issues that arises with respect to the European elections is to determine what counts most for voters when choosing an electoral list. One might believe that internal issues are clearly distinguished from external issues and that political issues within France essentially shape electoral decisions. However, this is to overlook the fact that French political life is strongly conditioned by choices made at a European level, with respect to a number of economic and social sectors that have a direct impact on the way in which government action is perceived. One of the clearest examples of this is provided by the common agricultural policy and its positive effects for some farmers which are negative for others depending on the nature and scope of their holdings. This in turn fuels considerable conflict that poses the question of how much room to manoeuvre leaders at national level truly have. However, other areas where the EU actions is decisive can also be cited, whether this concerns the environment, the definition of rules on public health or indeed the fight against terrorism.

The question of how to evaluate actions carried out by the EU then becomes central. What factors have the most impact on such an evaluation? And what does such an evaluation reveal about how French voters generally perceive the EU? What are the consequences of such an evaluation on political choices made? Analysis shows firstly that the majority of those surveyed don't really know how to evaluate action carried out by the EU. Those who do evaluate the manner in which it operates are more frequently negative than positive. Evaluation depends much more on how those survey classify their personal circumstances and how they may evolve rather than their social class, age and level of education. Their evaluation has a strong impact on their level of interest in the European electoral campaign, their motivation to vote and their voting intentions. However, it only very slightly modifies the somewhat general wish to modify the European project.

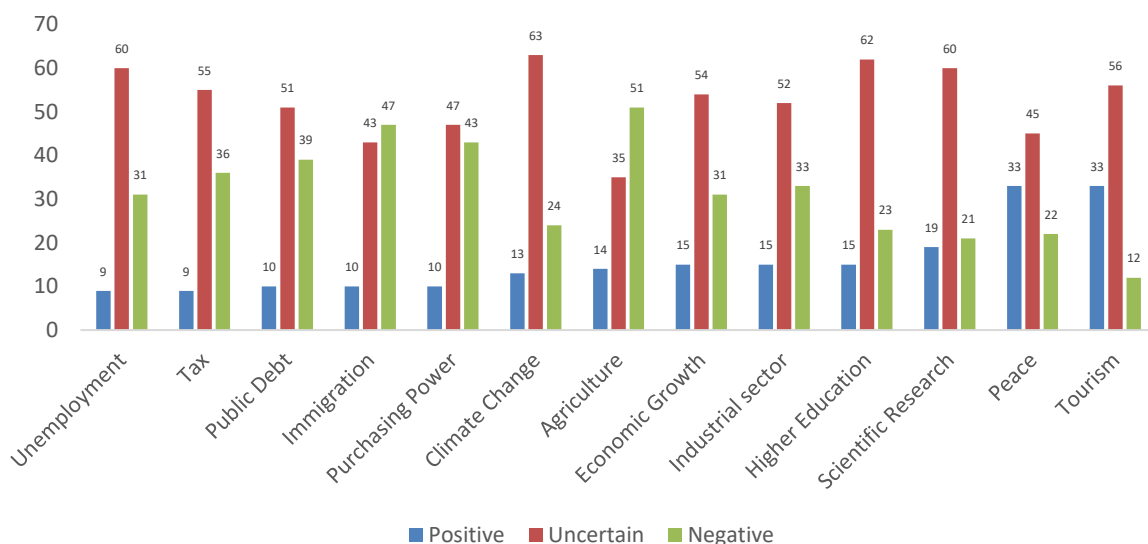
The results presented are based on the results of the Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne, electoral survey Wave 3, 2024, using a representative sample of 11,770 individuals surveyed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.

## A very poor vision of EU action

Respondents were asked what influence policies implemented at EU level had on the situation in France with respect to 13 different national terrains: unemployment, taxation, debt and deficits, immigration, climate change, growth, purchasing power, peace in Europe and in the world, agriculture, industry, research, third level education and tourism in France.

The first analysis shows that the majority of those surveyed do not know what to think of EU action on policies implemented in France. Uncertainty dominates as shown by respondents positioning themselves between 4 and 6 on a scale of 1 to 10: perhaps not too bad, perhaps slightly positive... A negative opinion then follows as demonstrated by a positioning between 0 and 3 on the evaluation scale. The list of areas where EU action seems to be most negative clearly reflect national preoccupations: agriculture (51% of negative judgements of the EU), immigration (47%), purchasing power (43%), debt (36%). On the other hand, the frequency of clearly positive judgements, measured by a positioning between 7 and 10 on the scale, is much lower: 33% for peace in Europe and tourism in France, 19% for research, 15% for growth and for industry. Opinion is in strong contrast to debate among experts with respect to exports and investment.

Graph 1: Evaluation of EU action by domain (%)



Source: Luc Rouban, electoral survey Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne, Wave 3, 2024

Interpreting the graph: Areas were classified in order, on the basis of percentage of positive evaluations

## Who is favourable to European Union action?

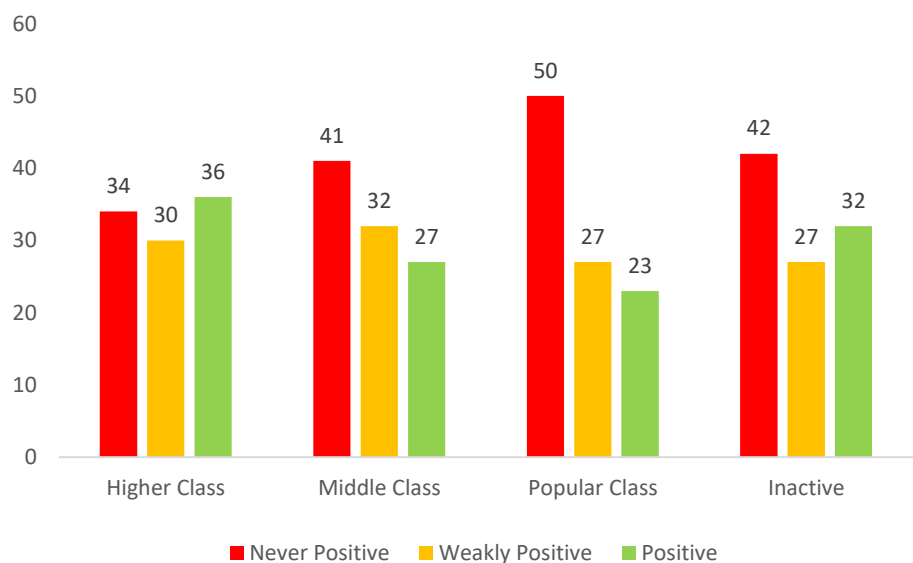
Based on these results, we built an indicator that measured the number of positive evaluations on a scale of 0 to 13. Only 9% of the sample made an overall very positive evaluation (at least seven positive answers) of EU action in France and 44% of all respondents were never positive on any item<sup>1</sup>. In order to better understand the answers, given that the distribution is more than a little unbalanced, we divided the indicator into three groups depending on the degree of Europeanisation among respondents. The first of these included those who are never positive, the second those who are only slightly positive (one or two positive evaluations) and the third includes those who are more strongly positive (three to 13 positive evaluations). The first group includes 44% of respondents, the second, 29% and the third 27%.

**1.** Which does not mean that they are systematically negative but that they never go higher than 6 on a scale of 1 to 10

These three groups allow different attitudes to the EU to be clearly identified. The first brings together respondents who feel exclusively French at 53% whereas in the second group this proportion decreases to 30% and finally to 17% in the group who made a positive evaluation. In this last case, 60% of respondents see themselves as being French and European and as many as 18% of them see themselves first as European and secondly as French.

The social profile of the different groups shows that the socio-professional category does play a role but only to a limited extent. It might have been expected that a strong correlation between higher socio-professional categories and the positive group would emerge or indeed between working class categories and the group who are never positive whereas 34% higher socio-professional category respondents are in the latter group and 36% are in the positive group. Within working class categories, 50% of respondents are located within the group who are never positive whereas 23% of them are in the positive group.

Graph 2: Positive perception of EU action according to socio-professional category (%)



Source: Luc Rouban, Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne electoral survey Wave 3, 2024

Interpreting the graph: The socio-professional categories include individuals who work and the retired. The “inactive category” includes individuals who are part of the household, students and school pupils

Age does not really have an influence on evaluation of EU action. One might have thought that the youngest respondents would have been systematically more positive and open to a European future or, on the other hand, that older respondents would have had a systematically more positive judgement of a Europe that incarnated peace. However, the results do not show a particular cleavage. Fully 43% of 18–24-year-olds belong to the group that is never positive compared to 45% of those who are 65 and older, and 35% of them belong to the positive group compared to 27% of those who are 65 and older.

The level of education does modify the distribution between the groups but only to the advantage of the positive group. Respondents with no qualifications make up 16% of this group compared to 32% of those who have a higher education diploma. However, there is no correlation between the level of diploma and belonging to the group of those who are never positive given that 44% of respondents with no qualification belong to this group, along with 53% of those who have the BEP-CAP, 49% who have a high school diploma and 39% of those who have a higher education qualification.

### *Understanding EU evaluations*

A regression analysis shows that the likelihood of having a judgement that is at the very least somewhat positive on the effect of EU action, depends more than any other demographic or socio-economic variables (such as level of education, patrimony, age bracket, or socio-professional category) on whether the individual is satisfied with their life or more satisfied with their life than they were five years ago. A third variable, in the order of the analysis, is the fact of having had the opportunity - either for business or pleasure - to travel to other EU countries. This last factor has a reasonably strong statistical influence and shows that frequenting other European countries creates a predisposition towards a positive view of the effects of the EU. On average, 40% of respondents had the opportunity to go to another EU country very often or somewhat often. Those who had the opportunity to visit other EU countries very often make up 43% of the group with the most positive evaluation of the EU, compared to 17% of those who have never visited another European country.

However, there does exist a certain asymmetry between positively evaluating the EU and negatively evaluating it. This can be observed in the fact that 42% of those who have had the opportunity to visit another EU country very often make a negative evaluation of the EU compared to 56% of those who have never visited another EU country. This asymmetry shows that merely having some knowledge about other European countries or indeed EU countries does not have an impact on the evaluation being made. This can be confirmed by one simple observation. Among respondents who esteem that they are well informed about the EU - those who position themselves between 5 and 10 on a scale from 0 - 10, 38% are located in the group of those who are never positive, 28% in the group of those who only slightly positive and 35% in the positive group.

The question that now arises is whether the same hierarchy of correlations can be found when looking at those who are negative about the EU, i.e. those who never or rarely go beyond 3 on the 0 - 10 scale. On average, only 27% of respondents never give such a low score. Once again, it is indeed the variables that measure the level of satisfaction with life which eliminate all other dimensions. This time, however, the question of determining whether the personal situation of respondents has changed for the better or not over the past five years, arrives by quite a distance at the top of the explanatory model. The reading in terms of class struggle does not seem useful as representations of action implemented by the EU greatly depend not on social status or profession but on a global dynamic in which professional mobility or standards of living play a significant role and ultimately become out of step with expectations.

Graph 3: Evaluation of EU action and of the individual's own life over the past five years (% on the upper part of the indicator)



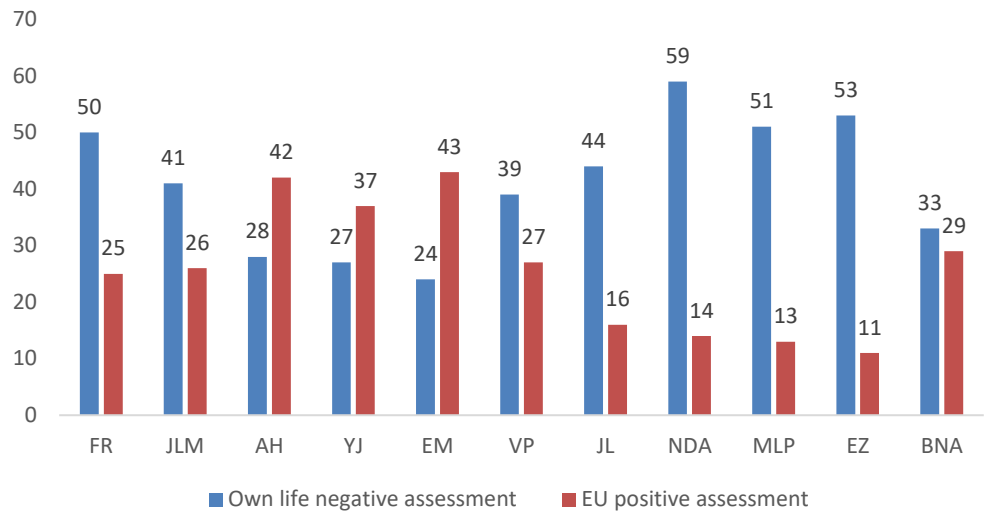
Source: Luc Rouban, Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne electoral survey, Wave 3, 2024

Interpreting the graph: Fully 85% of respondents who position themselves at 0 on the evaluation scale of their own life over the past five years make a negative evaluation of EU action

### *The subjectivisation of the political*

The powerful statistical effect of how respondents evaluate their own life, the on evaluation of the EU is clearly in line with previous electoral choices. In particular, the RN vote remains closely linked to a negative evaluation of the EU and a negative evaluation of the individual's social or professional position while its electoral base is constantly expanding to include the middle and upper categories. The opposite is clearly the case for Macron's electorate. It can then be observed that the proportion of left-wing voters, (with the exception of the (French) Communist Party), who believe that their quality of life has been decreasing over the past five years, remains significantly lower than the proportions that characterise radical right electorates, and to a certain extent Valérie Pécresse's electorate, where answers are more or less at the same level as those provided by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's electorate.

**Graph 4: Evaluation of one's own life over the past five years and positive evaluation of EU action by the electorate who voted in the 1st round of the 2022 presidential election (%)**



Source: Luc Rouban, Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne, electoral survey Wave 3, 2024

**Interpreting the graph:** FR: Fabien Roussel; JLM: Jean-Luc Mélenchon; AH: Anne Hidalgo ; YJ: Yannick Jadot; EM: Emmanuel Macro ; JL: Jean Lassalle; VP: Valérie Pécresse; NDA: Nicolas Dupont-Aignan; MLP: Marine Le Pen; EZ: Éric Zemmour; BNA: blank or spoilt votes, abstention. Only electorates whose numbers are sufficient for a reliable statistical analysis have been retained

### *The effects of evaluation*

What are the political effects of this evaluation? The first question to be answered concerns the effect of the evaluation on interest in the European elections campaign. The fact of positively evaluating EU action effectively leads to a stronger interest in these elections<sup>2</sup>. This is the case for 71% of the positive evaluation group compared to 54% of the slightly positive group and 4.9% among the group who are never positive. The same is true about firm intentions to vote in these elections<sup>3</sup>. Fully of respondents in the positive group intend to vote, as do 76% of the slightly positive group and 67% of those who are never positive.

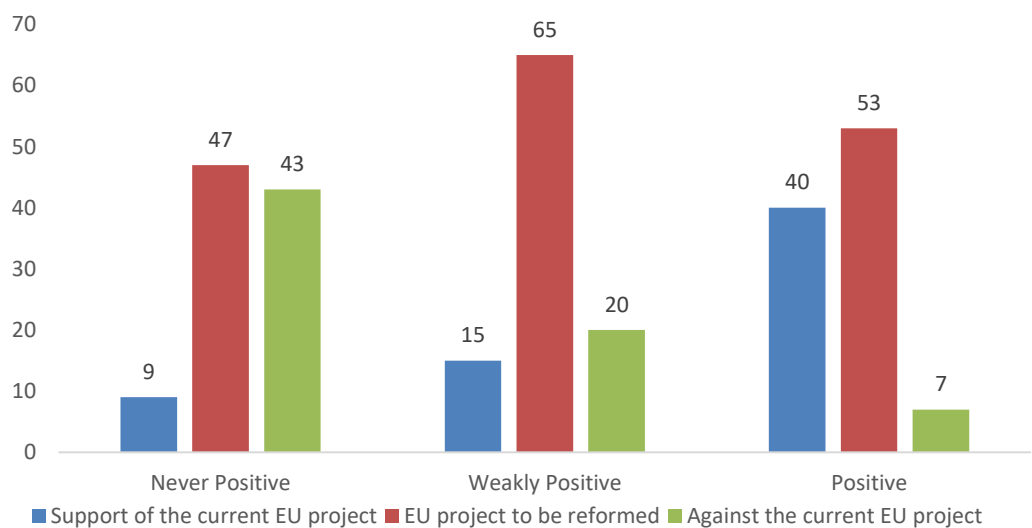
As can be seen above, differences do exist, but it can clearly be seen that even those who are never positive are interested in these elections and want to vote. This suggests that, for them, the elections represent not so much the designation of deputies in the European Parliament but rather a political test in favour of or against Gabriel Attal's government and the political leadership of Emmanuel Macron. Quite logically, 62% of members of the positive group will decide on their vote depending on the proposals advanced by the parties on European questions compared to 38% of them on the basis of national questions. These proportions are reversed for the slightly positive group (47% compared to 53%) and for those who are never positive (37% compared to 63%).

- 2.**  
I.e. a position between 7 and 10 on a scale of 0 to 10
- 3.**  
A position between 7 and 10 on a scale of 0 to 10

On the other hand, belonging to one of these three evaluation groups does not change a basic tendency towards a general lack of satisfaction with respect to the European project as it is currently led. On average, 54% of respondents say they are favourable to the European project but not as it is at the moment, 19% are favourable to the current project and 27% are unfavourable to the European project. While there exist strong differences between the evaluation groups with regard to accepting either the project as it is or a pure and simple rejection of it, these differences are erased to a large extent with regard to reforming the project.

Nonetheless, 62% of the positive evaluation group would prefer to see more integration compared to 31% of those who are only slightly positive and 16% of those who are never positive. Inversely, the proportion of those who believe that unification has already gone too far, move in the same order of evaluation, from 8% to 25% and then 43%. Only 30% of positive respondents answer “neither one nor the other” as do 44% of those who are only slightly interested and 41% of those who are never interested.

**Graph 5: Evaluation of EU actions and the conception of the European project (%)**



Source: Luc Rouban, Cevipof, Ipsos, Le Monde, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Institut Montaigne, electoral survey Wave 3, 2024

Voting intentions expressed in March 2024 for the elections on June 9th merely confirm the political and social dynamics observed above. The probability of a vote for one of the radical right lists (RN, *Reconquête*, *Debout la France*, *Patriotes*, *UPR*) depends primarily on the evaluation that respondents make of their own life more than on the evaluations they make of EU actions.

## Conclusion

In political terms, the EU therefore continues to be seen by the majority of voters as an ectoplasm through which can be seen either internal issues, such as transforming European elections into a referendum for or against Emmanuel Macron, or the projection of socio-political structures which, for years have shaped political life in France, undoubtedly especially since 2018 and the Yellow Vests crisis. This latter crisis remains the founding moment of another way of looking at French society, rather in terms of a class struggle. Instead, the focus is on social dynamics and mobility and the failure of the Republican model in terms of its ambition to emancipate its citizens. Thus, the evaluation of EU action continues to be marked by a great deal of indecision. What can be seen here is the limits of a democracy of public policy, a type of democracy where access is reserved to professionals who are familiar with their own sector and its problems, but which continues to be opaque to voters not in the know, who have great difficulty in interpreting the EU. A political translation of the EU remains unreadable.

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