

## **The Eurobarometer and the statistical imagination of racism in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses how Eurobarometer public opinion polling practices, aimed at measuring racism and xenophobia in the late 1980s, have contributed to the imagination of Europe. In the wake of the electoral success of radical right-wing parties in the European Elections of 1984, members of the European Parliament asked for an inquiry to examine the rise of racism and fascist groups in Europe. This resulted in a special survey on racism and xenophobia – the first harmonized survey on this topic on European scale – carried out by the Eurobarometer in 1988. Acknowledging the performativity of the public opinion survey, the main question this paper addresses is: 'How do Eurobarometer practices of measuring racism on a European scale contribute to the statistical and ideological constitution of racism, the European people, and the political project Europe?' Based on an analysis of Eurobarometer reports and documentation, this paper scrutinizes how Europe and racism co-constitute each other, mediated through the shifting between different 'scales of observation' involved in Eurobarometer practices. As this paper argues, techniques of European opinion polling contribute to the imagination of a homogeneous European political and ideological whole, from which stabilized categories of non-European immigrant 'others' are excluded. By creating an opposition between 'democratic Europe' and individualized 'nationalist xenophobia', racism is simultaneously enacted as a lower class attitude 'not of Europe' and as a permanent rem(a)inder of the past that serves to legitimate the project of European unification itself.