

# The Eesti Laul Superfinal: An espresso mistake?

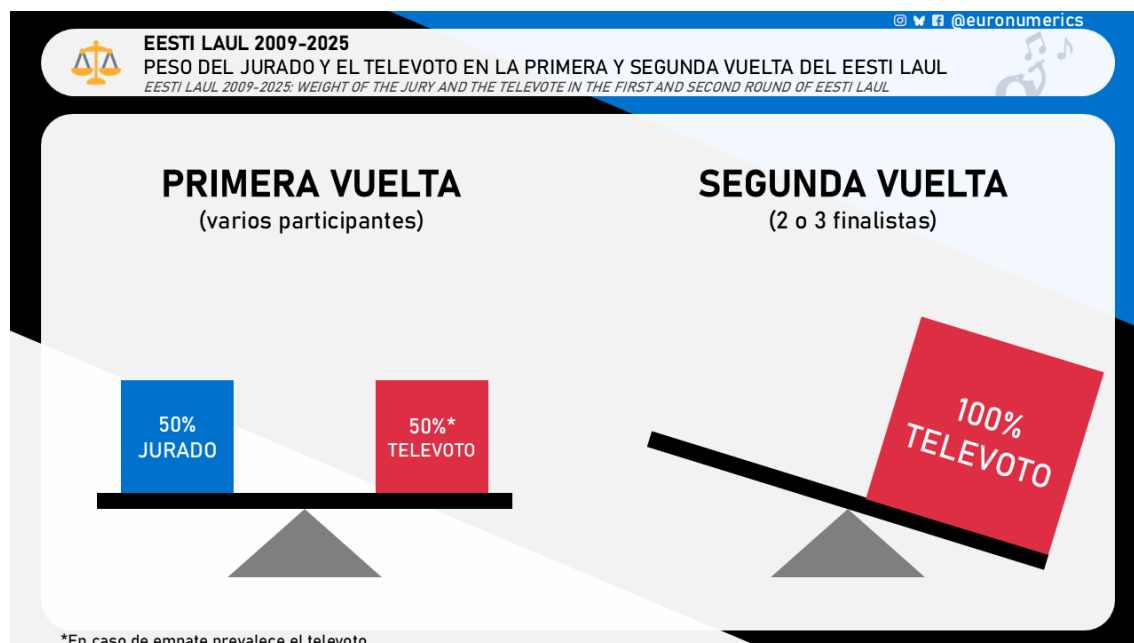
Written by Jesús Manuel Rodrigo Céspedes (@Euronumerics) 24/02/2025

During the Eurovision pre-selection season, we have many formulas to choose the representatives. Some formats opt for a final plus a superfinal with fewer candidates. This is the case of Estonia and its legendary Eesti Laul. Do the winners change much from the first round to the second? What has been the impact on the results of the superfinal? Prepare yourself an espresso macchiato and we will tell you here.

## THE SECOND ROUND, THE SUPERFINAL IN EUROVISION

The Eesti Laul («Estonian song») is the Estonian preselection for Eurovision. Its debut took place in 2009, replacing the Eurolaul, and today it is one of the classic national finals of the Eurovision pre-season.

Although the qualification system has varied on occasions, the format of the final has remained the same: a first phase where the jury and televoting choose some superfinalists who face each other in a final duel decided by the televoting. The superfinal is a very characteristic aspect of this preselection and is what we are going to analyze in this blog.



Always keeping the distances, the superfinal is a concept that exists in other selection systems. In the electoral processes of several countries such as France or Colombia, there is a first round where several candidates are presented and, unless one of them wins a majority, the two with the most votes go to a second round in which the winner is decided. In other words, it is an election in two stages. One advantage of this second round of voting is that it allows those who voted for other options in the first round to use their vote in the second, since in one-round systems this vote would not have had all the possible benefits. Among the disadvantages we can

point out that competitiveness between all is lost, as is the case with Eurovision, and the possible forced legitimacy.

In this blog we will see if there have been changes between the winner of Eesti Laul in the first and second round, the behaviour of the televoting in both rounds and the reflection of these results in Estonia's final position in Eurovision.

### AN EESTI-DRAMA EVERY 3 YEARS

From 2009 to 2025 we have enjoyed 17 editions of Eesti Laul. In 8 of them the winner of the first round (jury and televoting) coincided with the final winner in the second round. On 3 occasions there was a tie for first place in the first round, but if the televoting had broken the tie (as is applied in the preselection for other positions) the winner would have coincided anyway.

AÑO	GANADOR PRIMERA VUELTA	GANADOR SEGUNDA VUELTA	RESULTADO EN EUROVISIÓN
2015	Elina Borg y Stig Rästa "Goodbye to yesterday"		7°
2016	Jüri Pootsmann "Play"		No clasificado
2017	Kerli "Spirit animal"	Koit Toome Y Laura "Verona"	No clasificado
2018	Elina Nechayeva "La forza"		8°
2019	Stefan "Without you"	Victor Crone "Storm"	20°
2020	Jaagup Tuisk "Beautiful lie"	Uku Suviste "What love is"	Cancelado
2021	Uku Suviste "The lucky one"		No clasificado
2022	Stefan "Hope"		13°
2023	Alina "Bridges"		8°
2024	Ollie "My friend"	5miinsut y Puuluup "Nendest..."	20°
2025	Tommy Cash "Espresso Macchiato"		¿?

Therefore, we have 6 editions left in which the superfinal served to change the representative of Estonia. The most recent in 2024, when Ollie *My friend* was surpassed by 5miinust. In the first round 5miinust were ahead in the televoting and this position was asserted in the final round which they also won.

In short, the existence of the superfinal has served to change the winner of Eesti Laul in 35% of the cases (6 out of 17). Another way of looking at it is how the preliminary round, which has a jury vote, has changed the final result. Well, only in the first edition in 2009 did the audience favourite, Laura *Destiny*, fail to make it to the final round.

### THE BAD OMENS OF THE 3 EESTI-SORPASSOS

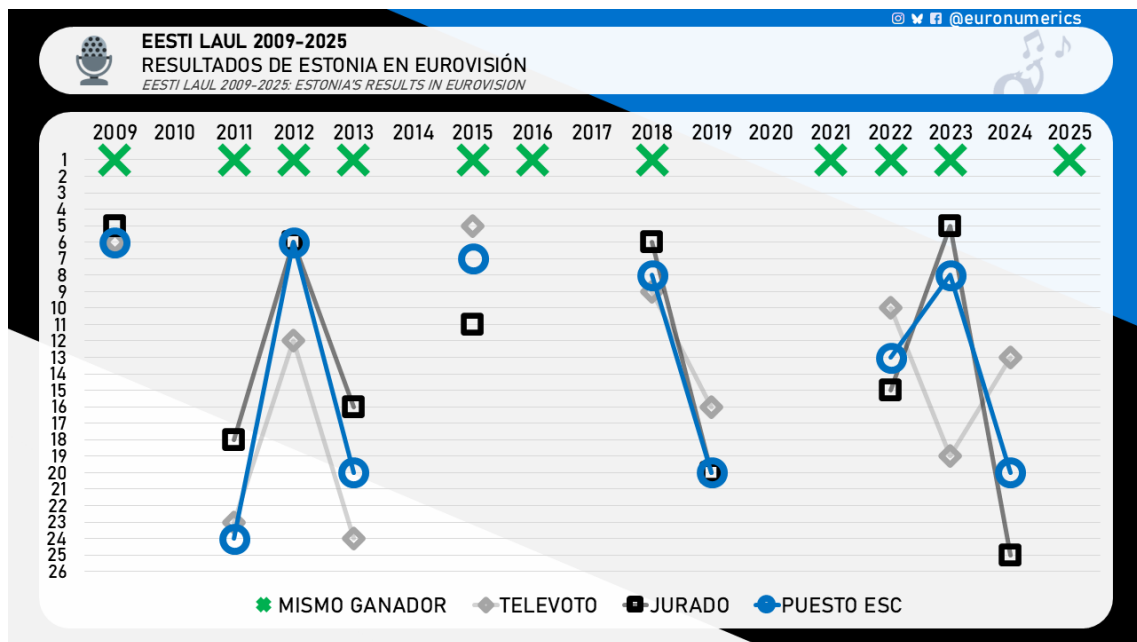
A peculiarity of this superfinal is that the final result is left to the audience. The first filter is a mix of jury and televoting, but it is only the popular vote that decides the winner in a smaller

group of options. How has this televoting performed in both rounds? Has the order within the televoting ever changed from one round to the next?

In this case, we will observe whether the winner of the televoting in the first and second rounds coincide. Of the 17 editions, only in 3 of them was the winner of the televoting in the first round different from that of the second round (in 2009 we said that the winner of the televoting in the first round did not qualify for the final, but the second, Urban Symphony, continued to be ahead of the other option in the second round).

These 3 editions of the dispute were 2010, 2013 and 2014, when there were only 2 superfinalists (from 2009 to 2014 there were two superfinalists and from 2015 to the present, three). It is not much data, but it could show that by having fewer options it is easier for the winner of the televote to vary, that is, for there to be an *sorpasso*.

The following graph shows the results of Estonia in Eurovision: in blue the final position, in black the position of the jury and in grey the position of the televote. The years with a green cross are those in which the winner was the same in both rounds of voting.



The *sorpasso* of 2010 is practically anecdotal because in the first round there was only a difference of 19 votes between the first and the second (which is 0.1% of the total of 18,804 votes in that round). There were more notable changes in 2013 and 2014, but they were fairly evenly matched editions in which the second-chance vote had more weight.

What these editions have in common is that they did not yield good results for the Baltic country. In 2010 and 2014 it did not qualify for the final and in 2013 it only obtained 20th place (16th in the jury and 24th in the televote). The margins of victory were very tight, less than 10 percentage points in each case, suggesting that no one really stood out and that the winner was rather random.

## THE SUPERFINAL: THE MIRAGE OF THE POPULAR VOTE

What is the impact of the superfinal on Estonia's results at Eurovision? Of the five editions in which the superfinal served to change the winner (we do not count the sixth, which is that of the cancelled 2020 contest), in three of them Estonia did not qualify for the final and in the other two it came 20th (in these two cases always with a better result in the televote than in the jury).

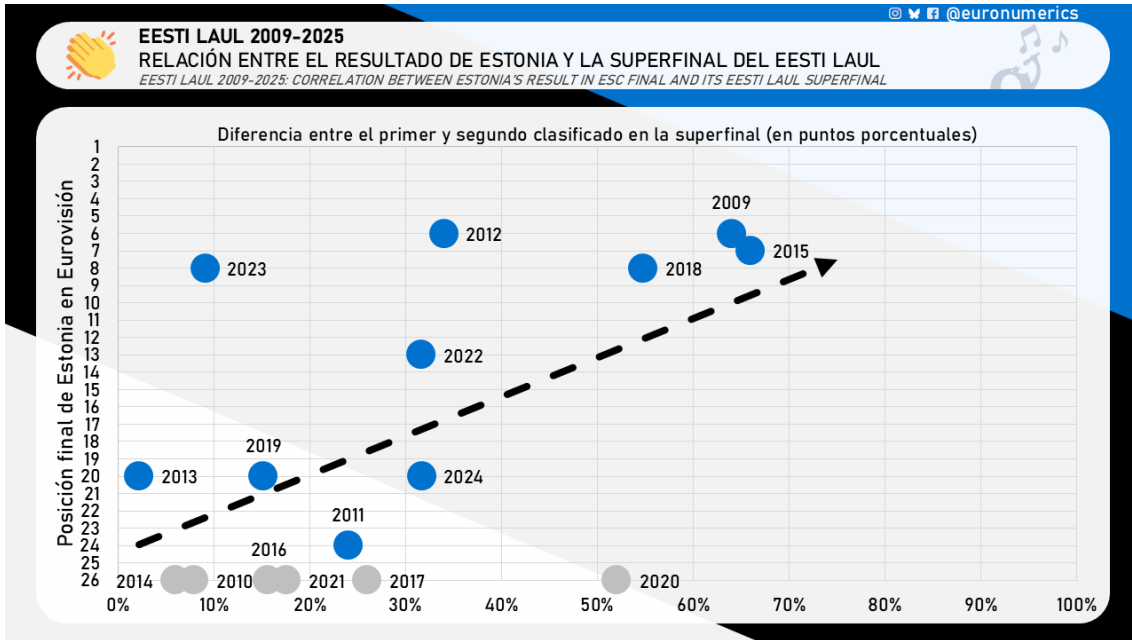
We cannot know if the change of winner with the superfinal improves the result at Eurovision, but its instability gives clues that that year the result might not be good due to not having had the support of the jury, which has indirectly gained weight in the Eurovision final.

Whenever the winner has been the same in both rounds, Estonia has qualified for the final except in 2016 (where it also came last in the semi-final) and 2021, which was the year of Uku Suviste's second chance. In 2011 and 2013, the result was not good either. Ultimately, the fact that the superfinal does not change the winner does not mean a good position.

However, Estonia's best positions have been achieved when the superfinal has not been relevant. The five top 10 positions in the country in this period were achieved when the winner of the first round was the same as in the second. In other words, the fact that the winner remains in the top 10 seems to be a necessary condition for a good position but not sufficient to achieve it.

What does give us more clues about the superfinal is the margin of votes between the first and second placed. The biggest differences correspond to the best results except in 2023, when Alike was much better viewed by the jury than by the televote.

The following axis represents two coordinates: horizontally the difference in percentage points between the first and second placed teams in the superfinal and vertically Estonia's final position in each year since 2009. The grey dots represent the years in which they did not qualify for the final. The dotted line suggests that the greater the difference, the better the Baltic country's performance.



What is the outlook for Estonia with this data? Tommy Cash won both in the first round and in the superfinal, then the necessary condition for him to achieve a good position is met, a top 10. Furthermore, their margin of victory in the superfinal over the runner-up was a historic 75 percentage points (84% to 9%). In other words, all the ingredients we have seen for *Espresso Macchiato* to achieve a good result for Estonia are in place, especially in the televoting.

In short, the superfinal only changes the winner in 1 out of 3 editions in favour of the public's criteria, and it also does not seem to provide better results than including the jury. What a superfinal like Eesti Laul does seem to give us are clues about the chances of its winners in Eurovision. This information, depending on the situation, can be as hopeful as it is disheartening. And you, in light of this analysis, would you introduce a superfinal at the Benidorm Fest? Should this system also be implemented in Eurovision?