

PRESS RELEASE

Half Full Or Half Empty? Europeans Are Divided On The State Of Their Society

Europeans will primarily determine whether anti-Europeans or pro-Europeans set the tone in Brussels and Strasbourg in the future. However, they are divided on their assessment of society and the EU. The pessimists among them have more sympathy for the national-populist movements, while the optimists support pro-European parties. One thing unites both camps, however: The vast majority wants to take part in the European elections, according to the findings in the latest eupinions, the EU opinion poll.

Gütersloh (Germany), 3 April 2019. Europeans are divided before the European elections. When asked about their assessment of the economy, society and the EU at present, Europeans frequently fall into two camps: the confident optimists (49 percent) who are largely satisfied with the state of society and the precarious pessimists (51 percent) who are inclined to be dissatisfied and critical. Europeans are in agreement on one thing, however: Roughly two-thirds of all citizens want to take part in the European elections in May. In Germany, the optimists outnumber the pessimists according to the opinion poll: 62 percent of Germans are not worried about the state of society, which is the highest amount in a large EU country, according to the study. Those are the findings in “eupinions”, the EU-wide opinion poll that the Bertelsmann Stiftung regularly conducts to learn about Europeans’ view of current issues. The opinion poll is representative of the EU and its five largest Member States. Over 11,000 persons were surveyed throughout Europe.

“European sentiment fluctuates between ‘bonjour tristesse’ and ‘ode to joy’. To shape rather than lag behind megatrends like globalization and digitalization, Europe must speak with one voice. That is why we need a European Parliament capable of taking action and setting the course for a strong Europe in the 21st century,” says Aart De Geus, Chairman of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, in regard to the findings in the latest eupinions.

The camps: Europeans are divided on the state of the EU and society

All EU countries are divided on the questions of society and an assessment of the EU. In general, it can be said that people who are categorized socially and economically as precarious tend to criticize EU methods and think that Brussels and Strasbourg neglect the concerns of citizens. Confident citizens, by contrast, have a somewhat more positive view of the EU on the whole, and are better informed about European politics. While almost three-quarters (74 percent) of socially precarious citizens say that the EU is too complicated and the majority of them say that it ignores the concerns of citizens (55 percent), only 54 and 47 percent of confident respondents, respectively, share these views. The reverse can be seen in their assessment of democracy: A majority of confident Europeans (60 percent) is satisfied here, while this applies only to a minority in the case of precarious citizens (42 percent).

Irrespective of social or economic precariousness, a majority of Europeans are persuaded that they will vote for their candidates for the European Parliament this year: 65 percent of the socially precarious and 68 percent of the confident citizenry intend to go to the polls for the European elections. “The tremendous interest in going to vote is fundamentally encouraging and shows that Europe takes it seriously. But only on May 26 will we see which camp

can mobilize better and will set the tone in Brussels in the future,” says Isabell Hoffmann, manager of the eupinions project.

Precarious citizens frequently sympathize with parties on the political fringe

An interesting finding in the opinion poll is also that socially precarious voters fundamentally are more inclined to sympathize with right-wing populist and national-conservative parties such as the Lega in Italy, the Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) in France or the AfD in Germany. Economically precarious citizens are often drawn, by contrast, to left-wing parties such as Die Linke in Germany or the movement led by Jean-Luc Melenchon, La France insoumise, in France.

Confident citizens, on the contrary, frequently express their support for parties in the political middle. Furthermore, they are more likely than the economically and socially precarious to consider climate change a central issue.

Additional information

“eupinions” is the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s public opinion research instrument, developed in cooperation with Dalia Research. We regularly question the citizens of all 28 EU Member States on European matters. The opinion poll for this analysis took place in December 2018 and, with a sample size of 11,735 participants, is representative of the EU and its Member States Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland. Detailed information on the opinion poll methodology can be found on page 47 of the publication: “The confident, anxious and furious: the consequences of polarization for the 2019 European Parliament elections”.

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You will find more information under:
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de and at www.eupinions.eu

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