

PRESS RELEASE

## European Elections: Increased Voter Turnout Expected, von der Leyen Enjoys High Profile

A new “eupinions” survey conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung indicates that 60 percent of Europeans plan to participate in the upcoming European elections this June, marking an increase of about ten percentage points from the last election five years ago.

The survey also reveals that 75 percent of Europeans recognize Ursula von der Leyen by name and face. This means that the current Commission President, who will be seeking a second term in office after the European elections, enjoys much greater recognizability than her predecessors. At the same time, 70 percent of respondents feel they lack sufficient information about her work to properly assess her performance. This finding points to a potential need for reforms to strengthen the connection between European citizens and the leadership of the Commission.

Gütersloh, May 8, 2024. “Ursula von der Leyen has achieved what other Commission Presidents before her could not: The vast majority of Europeans recognize her name and know what she looks like. This is remarkable, because European politicians generally struggle to gain media visibility in member states,” explains Isabell Hoffmann, Europe expert at the Bertelsmann Stiftung and co-author of the current eupinions study “The Von der Leyen Effect: High visibility, low accountability.” Nevertheless, only about 30 percent feel that they are sufficiently well-informed about the president’s activities to evaluate her performance. “To strengthen the office of the European executive – for the future and beyond its current officeholder – this knowledge gap must be narrowed, and the office must be legitimized more robustly through general elections, either by adopting a stronger lead candidate model or by implementing direct elections,” Hoffmann adds.

More than 13,000 EU citizens were surveyed for the study. Von der Leyen’s handling of the war of aggression in Ukraine and her management of the COVID-19 pandemic are cited as her most significant accomplishments, both of which have elevated her profile in the EU. She has thus demonstrated the qualities that Europeans value most in a Commission President – problem-solving abilities, crisis management and experience. Von der Leyen’s performance is viewed positively among the third of respondents who report feeling sufficiently informed to make this judgment. On a scale from 1 (worst rating) to 10 (best rating), the current lead candidate for the European People’s Party averages a score of 6, with Belgians rating her most favorably and her fellow German nationals the most critically.

The study also reflects on the controversial nature of von der Leyen’s election as Commission President in 2019, a process that exposed flaws in the current system, notably the European Council’s disregard for lead candidates nominated by European political parties. Coming into office as a compromise candidate, von der Leyen initially faced an uphill battle in gaining recognition and a majority in the European Parliament. Despite overcoming these challenges, the choice of the next Commission President remains a matter of negotiation among the heads of state and government in the European Council.

The study’s authors suggest two possible reforms: The Commission President could be elected directly by the European Parliament without prior agreements from the European Council or directly by EU citizens alongside parliamentary elections. While these reforms

would mark progress, they cannot solve all problems by themselves. “No single reform, however well-designed, will instantly create a mandate for European policymaking and leadership,” says Hoffmann. “As the EU aims to push ahead successfully with enlargement to include new member states, a series of reforms are needed to strengthen the legitimacy of its leaders and thus improve the EU’s ability to act.” The moment to introduce these reforms, the study suggests, is immediately following the elections where a 60 percent voter turnout is anticipated – an increase of about ten percentage points from five years ago.

Additional information:

eupinions is a platform for European public opinion, initiated by Bertelsmann Stiftung. Every three months, eupinions conducts a survey of citizens in all EU member states on issues of relevance to Europe. The data for this analysis was collected in December 2023 by its project partner Latana in every member state of the European Union. With a sample size of 13,299, the survey is representative of the EU as a whole. It is also representative of seven member states, namely Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. The Italian Institute for European Policymaking at Bocconi University is a knowledge partner. The Belgian King Baudouin Foundation supports eupinions.

Contact: **Isabell Hoffmann, Phone: +49 30 27 57 88 126**  
**Email: [isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)**  
**The study is available at [eupinions.eu](https://eupinions.eu)**

---

**About the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Inspiring people. Shaping the future.**

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to ensuring that everyone in society can participate in political, economic and cultural life. Our programs include Education and the Next Generation, Democracy and Social Cohesion, Digitalization and the Common Good, Europe’s Future, Health, and Sustainable Social Market Economies. In our work, we focus on people, because people are the drivers of change and can make the world a better place. We therefore engage in sharing knowledge, promoting expertise and developing solutions. A nonprofit foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung was established in 1977 by Reinhard Mohn.

**For more information, please visit: [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)**

