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AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM INDEX 2024
TIMBRO

ABOUT THE INDEX

Timbro is the leading free market think tank in the Nordic countries. Our mission is to promote and disseminate ideas supporting the principles of free markets, free enterprise, individual liberty and a free society. Timbro was founded in 1978 by Sture Eskilsson and the Swedish Employers' Association, a precursor to the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. Since 2003, Timbro is financed by the Swedish Free Enterprise Foundation.

The Authoritarian Populism Index offers a comprehensive overview of the major ideological trends in European politics, focusing on parties advocating illiberal and authoritarian ideologies.

It provides a thorough European and historical context for both national and contemporary events and elections, allowing for a deeper understanding of political developments.

Additionally, it highlights the primary electoral challenges faced by proponents of liberal democracy, liberalism, and market economy principles.

The index was first published in 2016, and its subsequent editions were released in 2017 and 2019. The previous editions garnered extensive media coverage throughout Europe, and the index is widely used by academic researchers.

This fourth edition has been updated, revised, and expanded to include 31 countries and covers every election from 1945 to 2023.

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APRIL 2024
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS 9

INTRODUCTION 13

METHOD AND DATA 17

IDEOLOGICAL TRENDS IN EUROPE 1946—2023 21

POPULISTS AND AUTHORITARIANS IN POWER 39

UNDERSTANDING POPULISM 43

CONCLUSIONS 55

COUNTRY PROFILES

AUSTRIA 61

BELGIUM 71

BULGARIA 79

CROATIA 87

CYPRUS 95

CZECH REPUBLIC 102

DENMARK 110

ESTONIA 118

FINLAND 124

FRANCE 132

GERMANY 144

GREECE 154

HUNGARY 164

ICELAND 176

IRELAND 182

ITALY 188

LATVIA 200

LITHUANIA 206

LUXEMBOURG 212

MALTA 218

NETHERLANDS 224

NORWAY 234

POLAND 240

PORTUGAL 250

ROMANIA 258

SLOVAKIA 266

SLOVENIA 274

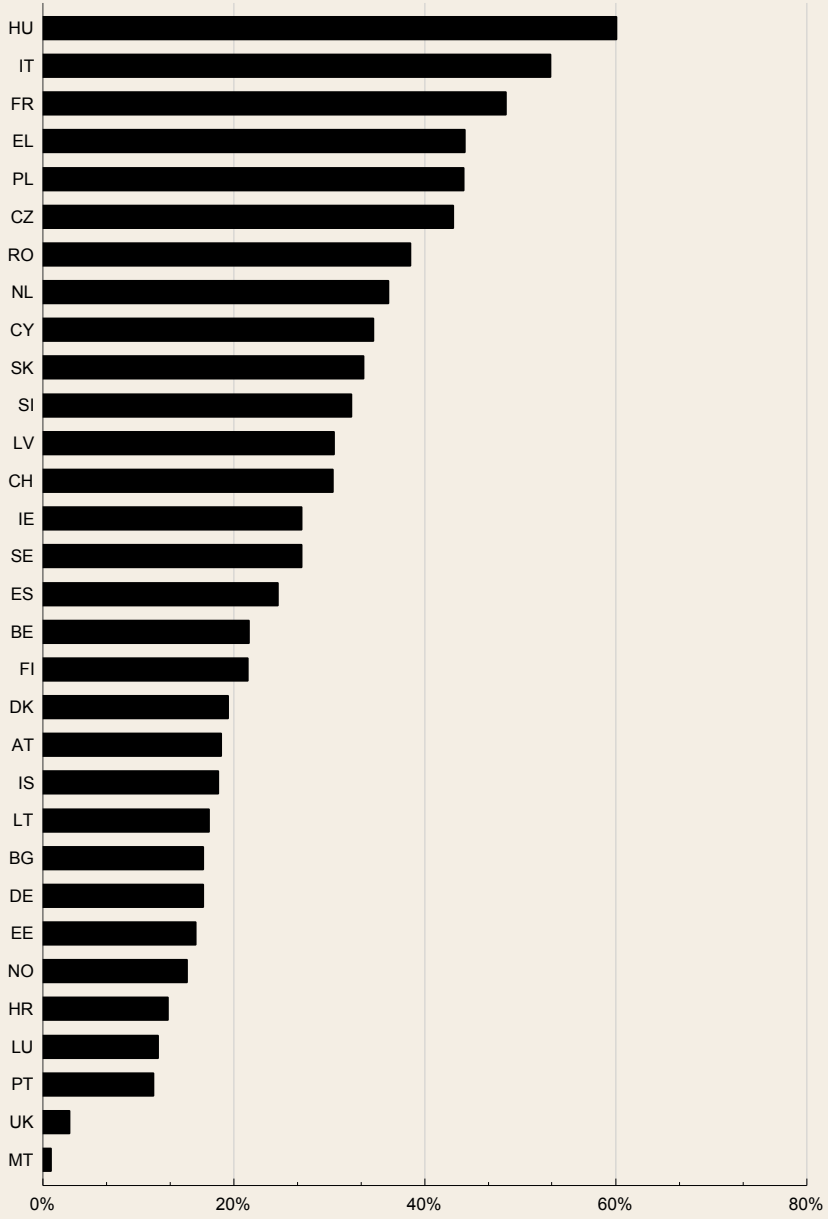
SPAIN 280

SWEDEN 288

SWITZERLAND 296

UNITED KINGDOM 302

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN 2023 BY COUNTRY



KEY FINDINGS

COUNTRIES WITH AUTHORITARIAN/POPULIST PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT



The average support for left and right-wing parties in Europe advocating populist and/or authoritarian ideologies currently stands at 26.9 per cent. While this figure represents a historically high level of support, 2023 signifies the fifth consecutive year without any additional growth. At present, there is evidence suggesting a consolidation of support for populist parties, but no indication of further expansion.

The five countries with the highest support for populist and/or authoritarian parties are Hungary, Italy, France, Greece, and Poland. Conversely, the bottom five countries in terms of support for such parties are Croatia, Portugal, the UK, Luxembourg, and Malta.

The electoral support for national conservative parties remains very high, having increased steadily since 1990. The average support is currently at 13.9 per cent, slightly down from 14.1 per cent in 2022.

While support for right-wing authoritarianism/populism continues to rise, there has been a steady decline in support for the radical left in recent years. These parties have likely failed to maintain the momentum they gained in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

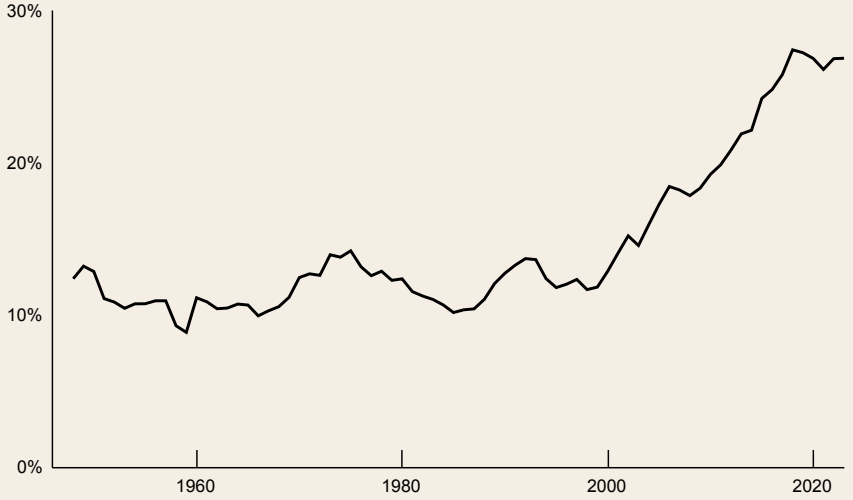
In 2023, the electoral support for liberal parties reached an all-time high, peaking at 12.3 per cent. This growth has followed a consistent pattern since 2010.

As of March 2024, populist and/or authoritarian parties are participating in eight governments across Europe: Hungary, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland, Switzerland and Romania. This marks the lowest level of government participation since 2014, down from 15 countries in 2019.

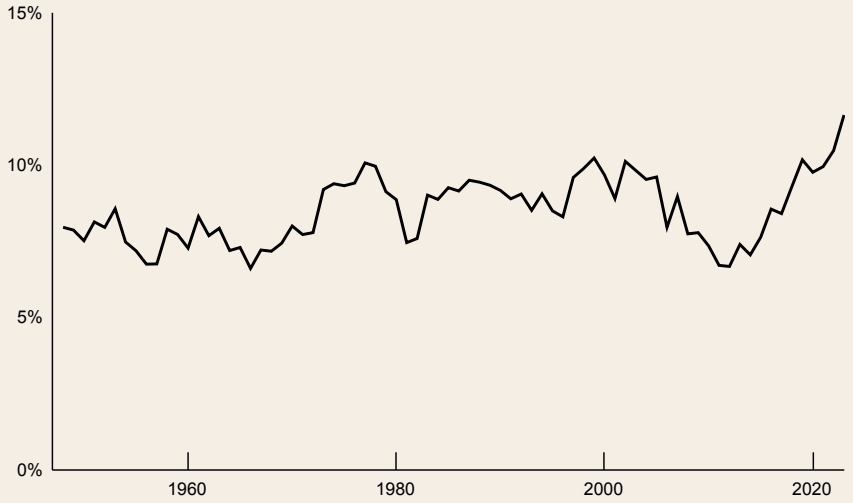
The report highlights the 60 most relevant authoritarian and/or populist parties in Europe. 25 of these parties are classified as left-wing on economic issues, while 18 are classified as right wing. On cultural issues, 32 parties are classified as conservative while 11 are classified as progressive. On European issues, 22 parties are classified as hard eurosceptics, 19 as soft eurosceptics and 9 parties as pro-European.

The merits of populist parties in government vary significantly. While some, such as Fidesz and Law and Justice (PiS), have demonstrated themselves to be unreliable defenders or even opponents of liberal democracy, others such as The Finns Party (PS) and Brothers of Italy (FdI) have thus far operated within the formal and informal structures of the current order. Out of the 60 most relevant parties, 18 are considered to have a high democratic credibility while 22 are considered to have a low democratic credibility.

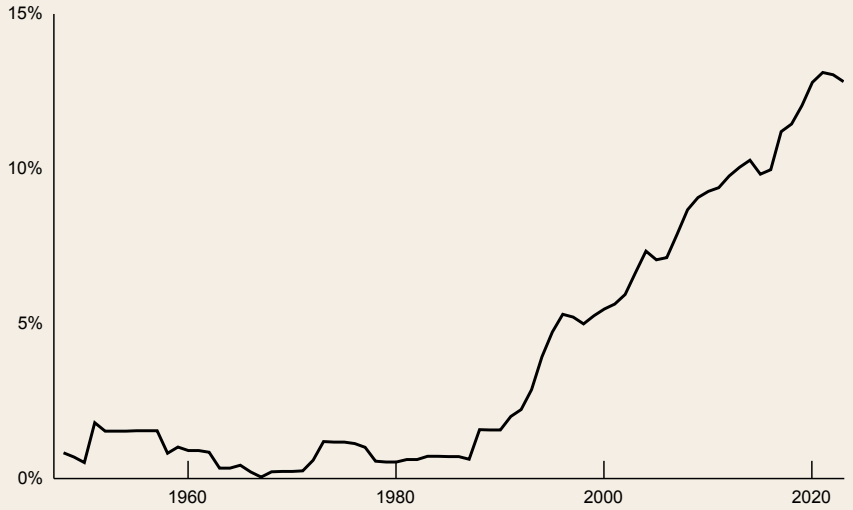
AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM 1946—2023



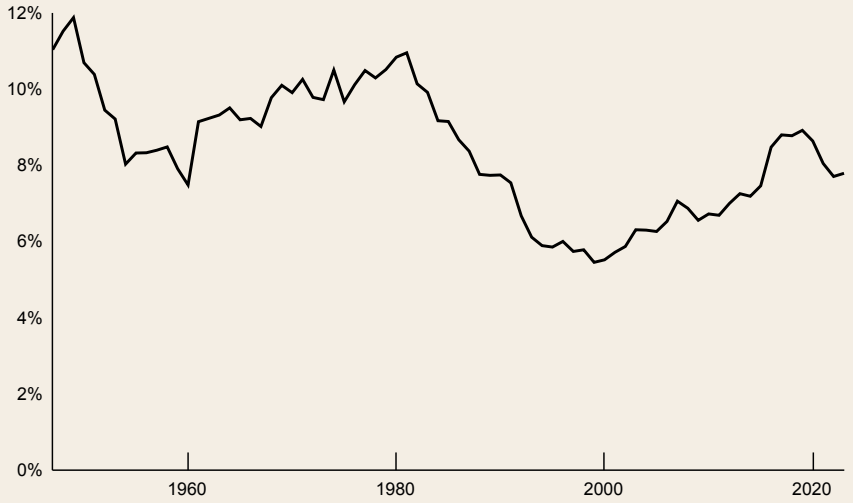
AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR LIBERALISM 1946—2023



AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL CONSERVATISM 1946—2023



AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR LEFT WING AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM 1946—2023



INTRODUCTION

In the 2023 elections in Europe, right-wing populist parties dominated headlines yet again. A synopsis of the national elections held in ten European countries demonstrates this:

- In Estonia, the national-conservative Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) became the second-largest party in parliament following the elections in March. With 16.1 per cent of the vote, the EKRE achieved its second-best result ever and is now the largest opposition party.
- In Finland, the Finns Party achieved its best-ever election result in April. With 20.1 per cent of the vote, it formed part of the coalition government for the second time, allying with the National Coalition Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Swedish People's Party.
- In Bulgaria, in April, the Revival party became the third-largest party in parliament with 13.6 per cent of the vote – the best result ever for a far-right party in the country.
- In Greece – which held two elections in 2023, in May and in June – three smaller national-conservative parties together won almost 13 per cent of the vote.
- In Spain, the right-wing populist Vox defended its position as the third-largest party in the June election. However, it lost almost 3 per cent of the vote share compared with the previous election, when it received 12.4 per cent.
- In Slovakia, Robert Fico returned as prime minister in September after his national conservative and left-populist party, Smer (Direction – Social Democracy), won the parliamentary elections. The nationalist Slovak National Party, or SNS, also entered parliament, while two other far-right parties failed.
- In Luxembourg, the national-conservative Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR) achieved its best result ever, gaining 9.3 per cent of the vote and becoming the fourth-largest party in the country.

- In Poland, the October elections led to a change of power, with the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party losing power after eight years of running the government. However, PiS obtained the largest share of the votes (35.4 per cent), while another nationalist party – Confederation Liberty and Independence (KWiN) – received an additional 7 per cent.
- In Switzerland, in November, the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) became the largest party once again, gathering 27.9 per cent of the vote.
- In the Netherlands, in November, Geert Wilders's right-wing populist Party for Freedom surprised almost everyone by winning the election. As of March 2024, it is still unclear whether Wilders will manage to form a government.

To these results, we should add the consistent polling successes of like-minded parties in countries such as Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, and Austria, as well as major gains in important regional elections such as in Bavaria.

To summarise, the elections in 2023 were yet another reminder that we are living in an age of populism. The sustained increase in electoral support for these parties, and their expanding influence, represent the most significant transformation in the European political landscape since the advent of democracy. Initially perceived as a wave, trend, or threat to be managed, populism has now become entrenched in our political reality. It is no longer a singular event to be addressed but rather a new normal that we must contend with. As Henry Olsen argued in an article in The Spectator last year, we are well past the time of wondering if populist sentiments will fade:

> *It's rather time to consider the heretofore unthinkable: perhaps populism will be to the twenty-first century what labour union-backed social democracy was to the twentieth. // This populist future remains, for now, only a distant sight on the horizon. The growing strength of populist movements and ideas show it moving closer. If events continue to take their current course, the world in 2070 will be as different from today as that of 1970 was from 1920.*[1]

1 https://thespectator.com/topic/why-were-all-populists-now-populism/

Over the past few decades, the political discourse in the western world has focussed on understanding, combating, and addressing the ascent of populist parties. There is a rich and constantly growing academic literature on populism: what constitutes a populist party, what explains the rise of populism, how populism is related to various issues, and so on. This report does not directly contribute to this literature. Instead, it provides a comprehensive empirical overview of the emergence of populism in Europe in the hope of establishing a solid empirical foundation upon which diverse theoretical frameworks and normative discussions can rest.

The report and the index provide a comprehensive overview of the major ideological trends in European politics, focussing specifically on anti-system parties. Covering all national elections in European democracies between 1945 and 2023, the report contextualises the challenge of populism as both a contemporary phenomenon and one with historical roots. By situating individual events in the context of broader historical and political developments, the study provides empirical and historical perspectives that enable a deeper understanding of the emergence and evolution of populism.

METHOD AND DATA

This report aims to map broad ideological trends in European politics, particularly focussing on parties that may pose a threat to liberal democracy, market economy, and the rule of law. To achieve this, we classified and indexed parties based on ideology and, where relevant, further distinguished them as either authoritarian or populist.

Why parties? Political parties serve as vessels for ideas, but populist ideas are rarely confined to a single party. Significant changes typically occur through broad alliances. In the immediate post-war era, there was growing support for a robust, interventionist state across almost the entire political spectrum. The neoliberal shift away from the 'strong state' in the 1980s would not have had a significant political impact had it been championed solely by neoliberal parties that had not garnered much political support historically. It was the broad centre – toward which both social democrats and conservatives gravitated during the 1980s and 1990s – that facilitated this shift. Although green parties capitalised on the increasing interest in environmental issues, environmental policies were adopted by parties across the spectrum. Moreover, support for major issues in our time is not exclusive to individual parties. For example, right-wing populist parties were the first to advocate for reduced immigration, but they gradually gained support from other parties.

Most notably, the populist worldview – that politics should be framed as a conflict between the people and the elite – has permeated not only other parties, but it has also influenced intellectuals and political commentators. During the 1960s and 1970s, Marxist ideas exerted a disproportionate amount of influence on societal institutions compared to the significance of communist parties. Similarly, neoliberal ideas wielded considerable influence during the 1980s despite lacking strong support among political parties.

In comparison, it can be argued that political parties have been essential for the development of populist ideas, as there have not been other significant arenas where idea development occurs

(no university faculties, editorial pages, think tanks etc.). In politics, the populists' ideas were concretised and weighed against others and conflicts of goals arose.

Analysing ideological shifts through the electoral results of ever-changing political parties, which may vary in terms of ideas and policies, is not optimal. However, it remains the best instrument available to us at this time. Opinion survey results are often even more contingent, as the definition of labels such as 'liberal', 'socialist', and 'conservative' can shift over time. In this regard, political parties offer a degree of continuity: a liberal party will consistently exhibit more liberal tendencies than socialist or conservative parties, and vice versa.

Our categorisation of parties aims to align with how parties perceive themselves as well as how they are typically described in media and research. While categorising mainstream parties such as social democratic, green, liberal, conservative, and Christian democratic is usually straightforward, difficulties arise when there is a broad coalition of ideological traditions, especially within centre-right parties. Therefore, conservative and liberal-conservative parties have been treated as a single category in our populism index.

Categorising populist and authoritarian parties poses additional challenges, as few parties self-identify as such. Therefore, our categorisation relies heavily on previous research, albeit consensus may be lacking. Further, parties have been classified as authoritarian under two different circumstances: if they openly advocate non-democratic ideologies – e.g., Marxism-Leninism, fascism, Nazism – or if they have demonstrated a willingness to abandon democratic principles while in power – e.g., Fidesz, PiS, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS).

In post-communist Europe, parties may be anti-establishment and populist in rhetoric while adhering to liberal, pro-European, and pro-market ideas. Such parties have not been included in this index, acknowledging that strong anti-establishment sentiment can sometimes coexist with respect for democratic and liberal ideals, particularly in dysfunctional democracies. This index also acknowledges that parties may change their ideological foundations over time. Sometimes, a change is caused by a decision in a party congress or a shift in leadership. Sometimes, these changes occur gradually, which makes it hard to determine the precise juncture at which a change from one ideology to another takes effect. In light of this, it should be noted that our index relies heavily on secondary literature.

Political parties typically aim at one or more of three general goals: office, vote and influence. Even though these goals are logically compatible – increased voter support leads to influence and a more likely path to political positions – parties sometimes have to prioritise between them. The index studies to what extent populist parties have succeeded in reaching two of these goals: votes and office. Influence on policy is beyond the scope of this index.

The index spans thirty-one countries, including all EU members, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, from when they became independent and began holding democratic elections.

Election results have been used to measure the demand for authoritarian populism. The index covers all elections from 1945 to 2023.[14] A European mean value based on the previous election in each country is provided in order to give an easy-to-read overview of year-to-year changes. Hence, the Swedish election of 2018 provides the basis for the Swedish average also in 2019, 2020, and 2021, while the election of 2022 provides the basis for 2022 and 2023. In other words, the index answers the question of how many voters picked an authoritarian populist party at the turn of the year of the last election.Thus the result will not depend on whether a certain country had an election in a given year, nor on the number of countries having an election in a given year. European elections, and in some cases regional elections, are discussed in the report but not included in the index.

In cases where a country holds multiple elections in one year, only the last election results are included. The index encompasses all political parties winning at least 1 per cent of the vote in a national election, with smaller parties included if categorisation is straightforward.

14 Election results have been obtained from parties-and-elections.eu and Wikipedia. These sources, together with the Elections in Europe website, have also been used for the ideological classification, in addition to secondary literature dealing with specific parties, countries and regions The expert study Chapel Hill Expert Survey has also been consulted for parties positions on economics, the EU and social issues..

IDEOLOGICAL TRENDS IN EUROPE 1946—2023



The vast majority of political parties can be categorised into a handful of party families, such as liberals, conservatives, social democrats and greens. Parties within the same family share a common ideological heritage, occupy similar positions within their respective party systems (with social democrats typically on the left, liberals in the middle, and conservatives on the right), and tend to align on a wide range of issues. They also seek proximity to one another, often forming party groups in institutions such as the European Parliament.

While most parties maintain fidelity to their ideological legacy, shifts do occur, as seen when former communist parties across Western and Eastern Europe rebranded themselves as democratic socialists following the end of the Cold War.

The continuity of ideology is significant to voters, as various explanatory models of voter behaviour suggest. While economic, social, and individual factors all play a role, studies consistently indicate that voters generally align closely with the ideology of the parties they support. Therefore, for voters, knowing that a party is "socialist," "green," or "liberal" is crucial in informing their choices on election day.

In what follows, we discuss the relevant aspects of the changes in European politics over the past seventy years. While unique circumstances may explain individual election results for specific parties in particular countries, there are likely common circumstances underlying long-term trends for entire party families.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

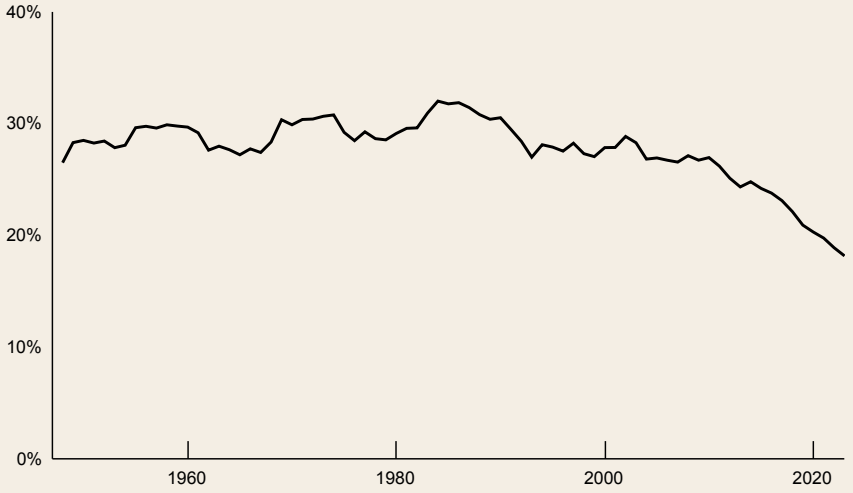
Social democratic parties have considerably influenced western European politics for over a century. According to our index, they reached their zenith in 1982, commanding average support of over 32 per cent. Even at the turn of the millennium, their support remained robust at around 28 per cent. However, in the past two decades, they have witnessed a sharp decline, plummeting to an all-time low of just over 17 per cent in 2022.

Southern Europe and Scandinavia remain strongholds of social democracy, and countries such as Spain, Portugal, Malta, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are the only ones where support still exceeds 30 per cent.

While support is declining in most countries, Social democratic parties in Denmark, Finland, Spain and Slovakia have experienced a positive trend over the past decade.

With the exception of Czechia, social democrats hold representation in all national parliaments in Europe. As of March 2024, they govern thirteen out of 31 countries: they have formed single-party governments in Malta and Portugal, and participated in governing coalitions in Romania, Cyprus, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Norway, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, 1946—2023



LIBERAL CONSERVATIVES

Conservatism is one of the oldest ideologies and was originally conceived in opposition to liberalism. However, from the 1970s onwards, conservative parties began to incorporate liberal ideas, initially focussing on economic issues and later including social matters. This was not a dramatic shift but a gradual evolution, underscoring conservative parties' ability to adapt and gradually embrace new concepts.

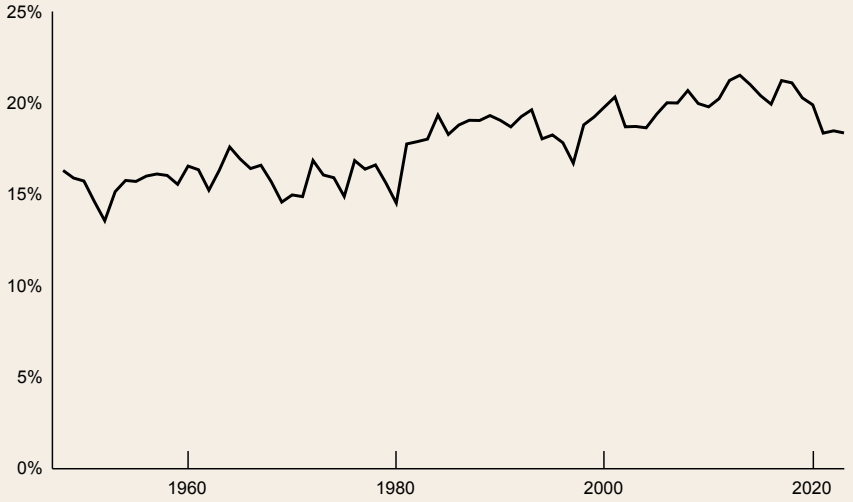
The graph illustrates the trajectory of the predominant centre-right parties in most countries, with exceptions noted in nations where a robust Christian democratic party holds sway, such as Germany, Austria, and Italy.

Support for liberal conservatism reached its pinnacle as recently as 2011, commanding an average of 21.5 per cent of the vote. However, over the past decade, this support has waned. The statistics for 2023, standing at 18 per cent, mark the lowest level since 1994. The index shows the most positive trends for Romania and the United Kingdom.

Presently, the strongest support for liberal conservatism is observed in the United Kingdom, Greece, and Croatia. Conservative parties demonstrate consistent performance across post-communist Europe.

Liberal conservative parties are today part of governments in Sweden, Ireland, Romania, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom. As of March 2024, liberal conservative parties are also part of caretaker governments in Bulgaria and the Netherlands.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR LIBERAL CONSERVATISM/CONSERVATISM, 1946—2023



CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

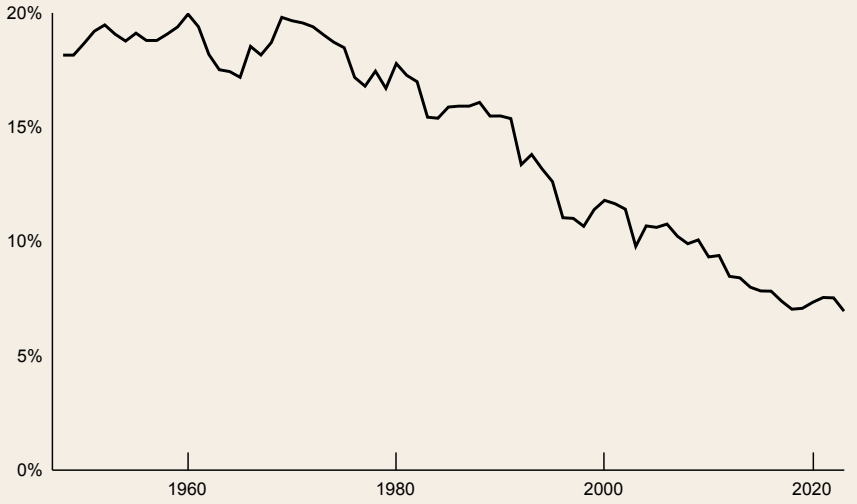
Christian democratic parties experienced significant success in western Europe during the initial post-war decades, dominating politics in countries such as Germany, Italy, and Austria, as well as the Benelux nations. The index highlights their peak in 1958, with average support nearing 20 per cent. However, their electoral fortunes began to decline in the 1970s, a trend that has persisted ever since. In 2023, their support hit its second-lowest point on record, with the lowest support having been seen in 2022.

Support for Christian democratic parties remains strongest in countries where they historically thrived. At present, Christian democrats maintain support above ten percent in seven nations: Malta, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In recent years, Austria and Finland are the only countries where christian democratic parties have gained support in two consecutive elections.

Currently, Christian Democratic parties participate in governments in five countries: Czechia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland and Sweden. The Christian Democratic party is also part of the care-taker government in the Netherlands.

In several countries, the primary centre-right parties function as broad ideological coalitions, encompassing elements of conservatism, Christian democracy, and liberalism. The European People's Party, the predominant parliamentary group in the European Parliament, exemplifies this phenomenon, successfully uniting Christian democratic, conservative, and liberal conservative parties.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY, 1946—2023



LIBERALS

Liberal parties have been a fixture in all democracies, typically positioning themselves in the centre between the leftists (socialists) and the rightists (conservatives), often able to collaborate with both. Liberal ideas have influenced the ideological development of both the right and the left, with socialists and conservatives incorporating liberal ideas on economic, social, and international issues.

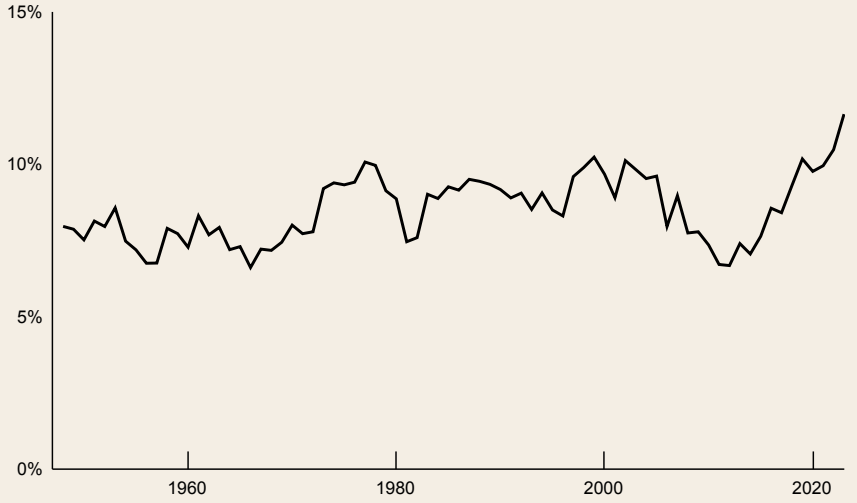
The category of liberal parties is diverse, encompassing social-liberal, libertarian, green liberal, and some conservative liberal parties. While most parties fall under the umbrella of social liberalism, there is considerable variation within this category.

Electoral support for liberal parties has shown relative stability over time, hovering between seven and ten percent. However, the early 2000s witnessed a gradual decline, with support dipping below seven percent in 2009 and 2010. Since then, there has been a resurgence, culminating in a record level of 12.3 percent in 2023.

The notable increase in support for liberal parties, representing an 84 percent rise over 12 years, is a story often overlooked in media and literature. This surge is primarily driven by shifts in the Baltic states, Central Europe, and Southern Europe, though Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom have experienced waning support for liberalism during the same period. Currently, support for liberal parties is strongest in Slovenia, Estonia, France, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. A positive trend (growth in at least the two last elections), can be identified in Croatia, Germany, Romania, Finland, Estonia, Slovakia and France.

As of March 2024, liberal parties are part of coalition governments in Sweden, Luxembourg, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland and Lithuania.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR LIBERALISM, 1946—2023



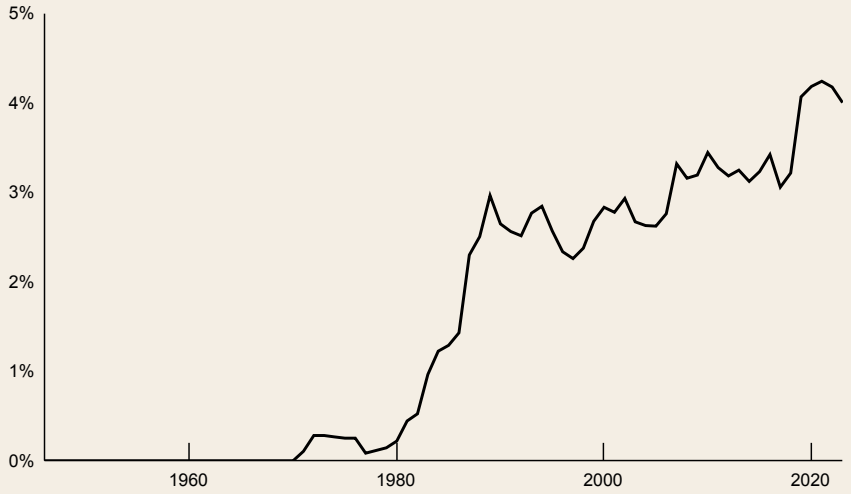
GREENS

Green parties emerged within most West European party systems during the 1980s, marking a significant shift in political dynamics. While the average support for Green parties peaked in 2021, it remains at historically high levels in 2023. The initial strongholds of Green parties, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria, Switzerland, and Germany, continue to show robust support. Positive trends can be seen in Ireland, Romania, Germany, Norway and Slovenia.

However, Green parties have encountered considerable challenges in gaining traction in post-communist Europe, where their presence remains limited.

Currently, Green parties are represented in less than half of the parliaments in Europe. As of March 2024, they participate in government coalitions in four countries: Germany, Ireland, Belgium, and Austria.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR GREENS, 1946—2023



COMMUNISTS AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS

In the aftermath of World War II, communism experienced a surge in popularity among both voters and intellectuals across Western Europe, leading to the inclusion of communist parties in early post-war governments in several countries including Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Italy, and France. However, by 1950, all communist parties found themselves back in opposition.

Although average voter support for communist parties was above ten percent in the 1940s, it declined sharply in the following decade. The 1960s saw a minor revival of the support for far left parties, coinciding with a fragmentation among the far left. A new generation formed radical factions influenced by Maoism and other revolutionary ideas and split from the established parties, which many considered – in the words of student revolt leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit – 'basically senile'. However, these splinter groups rarely achieved electoral success. More significantly, an ideological shift towards eurocommunism emerged in the 1970s, advocating for the abandonment of revolutionary ideals and Marxist-Leninist doctrines in favour of a socialism compatible with democracy, aiming to broaden the appeal of the radical left. This shift proved successful for the Italian Communist Party and also led to a shift on the far left in Denmark and Norway.

By 1989, the average support for communist parties in the West had dwindled to around seven percent, subsequently falling to approximately two percent. Despite this decline, communist parties continue to find relatively stronger support in southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Portugal) and northwestern Europe (Belgium, Norway, Denmark).

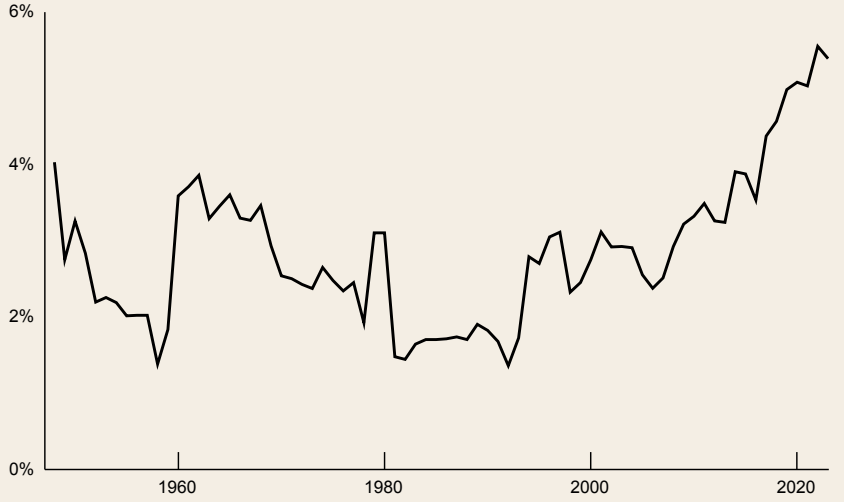
Democratic socialism can be a confusing phrase. Several of Europe's social democratic parties actually refer to themselves as socialist parties, and "democratic socialism" was used by many of them to distinguish themselves from the non-democratic branch of the labour movement. However, in this context, democratic socialism refers to parties that are positioned to the left of social democracy, based on socialist ideas, and reject non-democratic methods. Analytically, this also includes the Italian Communist Party from the 1970s. It was an anti-system party that abandoned the dream of revolution.

Democratic socialist parties saw an increase in voter support immediately after the 2008 financial crisis. This increase held steady for a decade and peaked in 2018 with an average support of 5.1 percent. Since then, support has slightly declined. A few countries, especially in southern Europe, stand out with much stronger voter support, for instance, France, Spain, Greece, and Ireland. Support is weakest in former Eastern Bloc states.

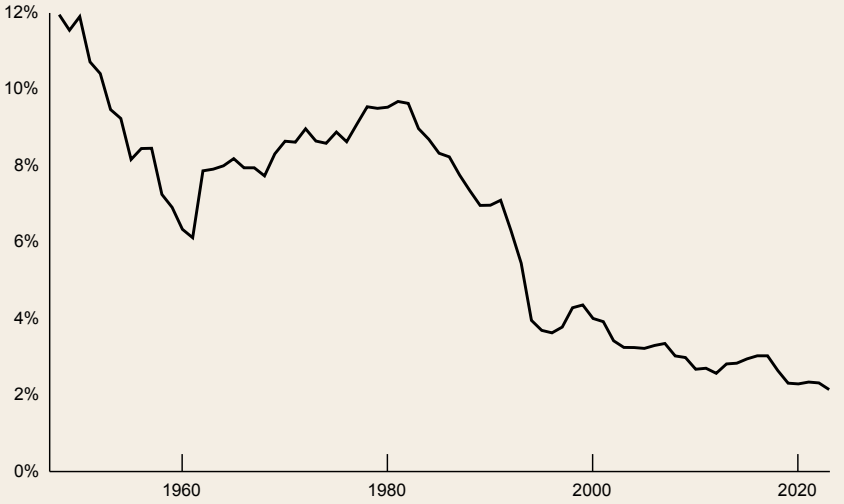


Symbol for Italian Communist Party 1921-1945

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM, 1946—2023



AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR FAR LEFT, 1946—2023



NATIONAL CONSERVATIVES AND RADICAL RIGHTISTS

Parties to the right of the established right wing constitute the least consolidated party family. This is due to several factors. Firstly, nationalist parties have traditionally struggled to cooperate with other nationalist parties. Secondly, there is no sharp divide in this case, such as the one between democratic socialism, social democracy, and non-democratic communism, which have long been established on the left. Instead, this divide is analytical and normative, with individual parties occupying different sides throughout their lifetimes. Thirdly, this party family consists of parties that have long been defined in terms outside of ideologies: populists, protest parties, discontent parties, and anti-establishment parties. Although accurate, this way of portraying them has led to underestimating the common, underlying ideological core that still exists.

The most important division today is the one between far-right and national conservative parties. They unite on many fronts and often share both nationalism and conservatism. However, far-right parties distinguish themselves from national conservative ones through their view of democracy and unreserved support for authoritarian ideals.

As shown, support for far-right parties is very weak, although it has increased over time. In 2023, they reached the highest level to date: 1.7 per cent. When such low levels are involved, it is to be expected that individual parties would naturally play a significant role, and the increase in 2023 is driven mainly by the Bulgarian Revival party. Greece, France, Poland, and Hungary also stand out with stronger support for these parties.

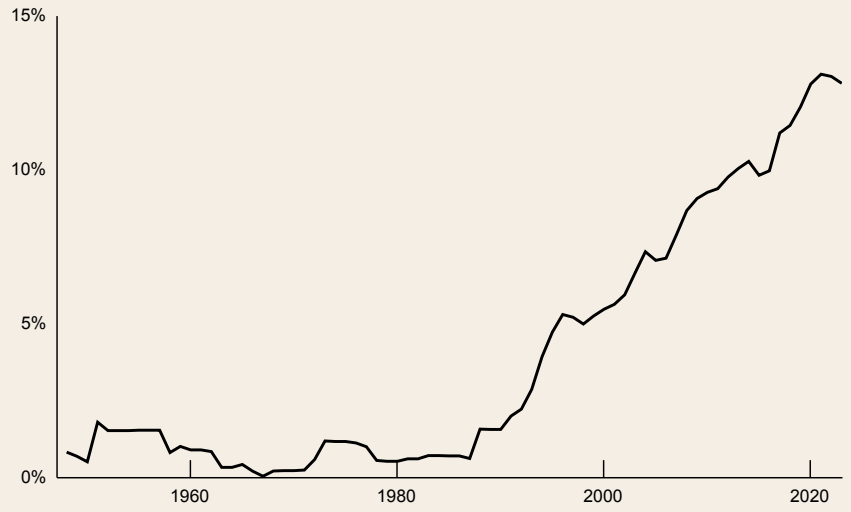
National conservative ideas have traditionally been accommodated within broader conservative parties, so the graph may potentially underestimate their historical significance. However, there is no doubt that we have seen a remarkable growth in the number of parties that can aptly be described in these terms. The average support in 2023 was 13.9 per cent, a slight decrease from the record high in 2022 at 14.2 per cent. National conservatism garnered 0 per cent support in 2023 in only two countries – Iceland and Ireland – meaning it is an ideology with measurable support in most countries. Support for it is highest in Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Switzerland, followed by the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.



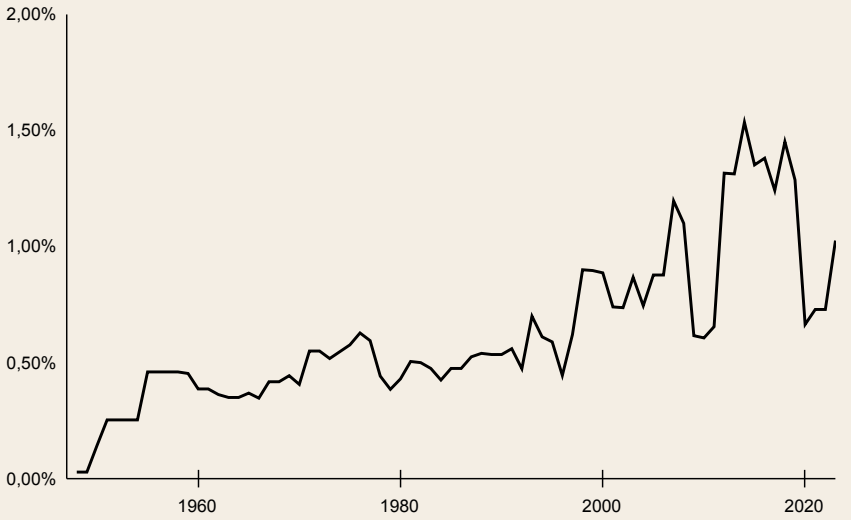
Viktor Orbán, leader of national conservative party *Fidesz* in Hungary.

"Official visit to the OECD of Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary", by OECD. (https://www.flickr.com/photos/oecd/25684931464/), licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0, isolated subject, added grain and made black and white from original.

AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL CONSERVATISM, 1946—2023



AVERAGE SUPPORT FOR FAR RIGHT, 1946—2023



POPULISTS AND AUTHORITARIANS IN POWER

There is no cohesive party family that can be described as populist, let alone as authoritarian populism. The parties detailed in this report differ from each other both in terms of their position on the left-right spectrum and in their approach to the democratic system.

However, there is both analytical and political value in assessing the support for all these anti-establishment parties. It provides insight into the extent of the threat to established parties, both for those who want to understand the ongoing processes of change in European politics purely on academic grounds and for those who, for political or ideological reasons, want to address the threat.

The average support for left and right-wing parties in Europe advocating populist and/or authoritarian ideologies currently stands at 26.9 percent. While this figure represents a historically high level of support, 2023 signifies the fifth consecutive year without any additional growth. At present, there is evidence suggesting a consolidation of support for populist parties, but no indication of further expansion. Only two countries - the UK and Malta - have support levels below 10 percent. The trend is increasing in Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Croatia, Latvia, Italy, and France. The trend is decreasing in Greece, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Denmark. In several cases, however, the trends are weak, and given the fluctuating support in most countries, there is no reason to believe that any of these trends would be sustainable.

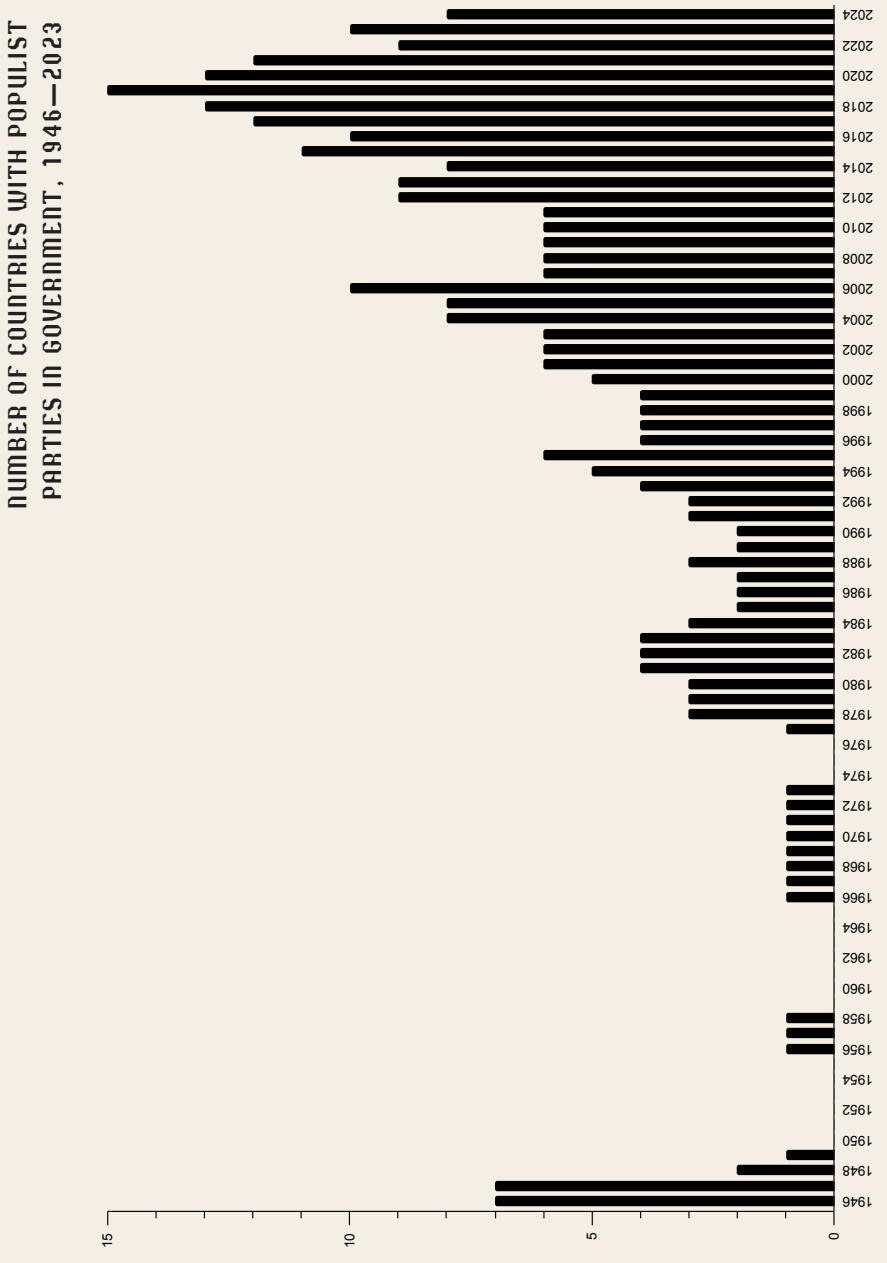
A more significant change concerns government participation. Authoritarian parties - exclusively pro-Soviet communist parties - participated in approximately every other Western

European government in the early post-war years. In 1946 and 1947, seven Western European democracies had communist parties in government. However, this was a quickly passing phase. By 1950, the number was down to 0. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were only two cases of authoritarian parties' participation in government: in Iceland and Finland. In the 1980s, there were between two and four such collaborations each year, in addition to Iceland and Finland, also in France, Cyprus, and Greece.

The 1990s brought about a doubling (from 1993 between 4 and 6 countries each year), largely due to democratisation in Eastern Europe. Estonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Latvia had at various times far-right parties in government cooperation. In addition, Italy and, at the turn of the millennium, Austria, joined the list. During the first decade of the 2000s, there was a further increase, reaching a peak in 2006 with 10 parallel government collaborations in Europe. Two years later, the number was down to 5 again, before steadily increasing to a record high of 15 countries in 2019, in addition to 5 cases of confidence-and-supply. That is, as recently as five years ago, almost every other country in the study had a populist or authoritarian party in government and more than half of the countries had a populist or authoritarian party that exerted influence.

However, since then, most collaborations have been terminated, and fewer have been added. As of March 2024, populist and/or authoritarian parties are participating in eight governments across Europe, namely Hungary, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland, Switzerland and Romania. In addition, there is one case (Sweden) of a confidence-and-supply agreement. This marks the lowest level of government participation since 2014, down from 15 countries in 2019.

Here too, there is no reason to believe that this would be a sustainable trend. However, it is worth noting that we are currently at about 50 percent of the influence these parties had five years ago, based on government participation.



UNDERSTANDING POPULISM

It may seem challenging to discuss populist parties in a meaningful way, as the term is often applied inconsistently and with various connotations, often wielded as an invective. However, there is consensus among scholars that parties classified as populists share certain features. Scholars differ when it comes to labels, definitions, and theoretical frameworks but are in agreement on the existence of populist parties.

This is not solely a theoretical point. If you read through the various country profiles in this report you will likely encounter a sense of saturation, as similar examples, arguments, and characteristics recur in the descriptions of many parties.

The first common characteristic is that such parties thrive primarily on a conflict narrative that pits the people against the elite. This sets them apart from parties that have leveraged from other divides such as urban–rural, labour–capital, church–state, or centre–periphery. Margaret Canovan famously notes that populist movements, whether on the left or the right, assume the existence of a singular 'people' who have been marginalised by those in power – corrupt politicians and an unrepresentative elite.[2] Populist parties, therefore, present themselves as the authentic voice of the people, positioning themselves as defenders of the people against an elite establishment.

This worldview is reflected in an often harsh and uncompromising anti-elite rhetoric that portrays the elite as being corrupt and controlled by hidden interests – globalism, capitalism, and, in the case of right-wing populists, multiculturalism, and so on. It is also firmly rooted in a nationalist idea of who constitutes the people and, consequently,

2 Canovan, Margaret, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," Political Studies, 47:1, 1999.

who constitutes the out-group that threatens the in-group. For right-wing populists, this conflict is existential. Therefore, when Sweden Democrats (SD) leader, Jimmie Åkesson, refers to his supporters as 'Friends of Sweden', or when the Vox party leader, Santiago Abascal, refers to his opponents as 'anti-Spain', the premise behind both is the same – namely, some belong to the nation and some are enemies of the nation, with the latter including cultural Marxists, globalists, liberals, foreigners, and minorities.

Populism is thus both a matter of ideology and communication. References to the true will of the people, common sense, and xenophobic stereotypes are effective communication tools and also reflect the ideological world of populism. This idea-driven content is what distinguishes populist parties from non-populist ones. While non-populist parties may adopt populist communication tactics at times, they do not embrace the fundamental idea that 'the elite' is inherently at odds with 'the people'. Therefore, understanding populism requires looking beyond its surface manifestations and examining its underlying ideological foundations.

Populism, in these senses, can be combined with various positions and stances on other issues. In this report, the most relevant populist parties in contemporary European politics are classified along four dimensions: economic issues, social and cultural issues, European Union–related (EU) matters, and democratic credibility.

ECONOMY

In most democracies, views on economic issues are crucial for positioning parties on the left–right spectrum. Parties advocating for a larger state, higher taxes, greater redistribution of wealth, and increased state ownership are placed on the left. Parties aiming to reduce the size of the state, lower taxes, privatise public property, and implement market solutions are placed on the right. However, with regard to populist parties, this precept describes them only partially. Herein, views on immigration and national identity are crucial, meaning that populist parties opposed to immigration are usually classified as right-wing populists regardless of their stance on economic issues.

The variation among populist parties in terms of economic views is significant. While some still acknowledge the traditional left–right spectrum, others see it as a distraction from the true conflict: one between the elite and the people.

Of the 60 major parties outlined in the report, 18 are classified as right-wing and 25 as left-wing. In practice, this means that all parties commonly referred to as left-wing populist also have a clear left-wing economic policy, while those labelled as right-wing populist are divided between a clear right-wing policy and a centrist one.

In February 2024, The Economist featured a modified Make America Great Again (MAGA) hat on its cover page, symbolising not only America, but also Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and several other countries aspiring to become 'great again' under the umbrella of a 'global anti-globalist alliance' (or GAGA). The leading article highlights how contrary the principles of the national-conservative parties are to modern market-friendly conservatism. They distrust markets and big corporations and dislike free trade and international cooperation but have a strong belief in the power of the state as a tool to achieve their own visions. They often show scant respect for public institutions and the rule of law and are willing to manipulate them to serve their own purposes.

It is crucial to emphasise such distinctions, especially as the intellectual leaders of the national conservative movement make claims to the legacy of Thatcher and Reagan. However, it is not just the ideals that differ. Today's national-conservative parties are also expensive for their home countries. A research study published at the end of 2023 examined the economic effects of populist parties in power. The consequences were significant: 15 years of populist rule lower a nation's per capita GDP by 10 per cent compared to non-populist rule.[3]

The economic outcomes of embracing right-wing populism are often overlooked. While much attention has been paid to these movements based on their origins and immigration policies, their economic policy programmes have rarely been scrutinised or taken seriously. To an extent, this approach is understandable. Populist parties rarely prioritise economic issues. Historically, there have been some exceptions – such as Mogens Glistrup's

3 Funke, Manuel, Moritz Schularick, and Christoph Trebesch, "Populist Leaders and the Economy." American Economic Review, 113:12, 2023. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20202045

Progress Party in 1970s Denmark, and the Swedish New Democracy in the early 1990s, both of which started as protest parties against high taxes and bureaucracy – but in contemporary times, immigration and EU opposition have always taken precedence.

This does not mean that economic policies are unimportant. There is no clear pattern, but, overall, there is a noticeable leftward tilt, even more so in recent years. Right-wing populists and their voters want tax cuts, but not at the expense of deteriorating welfare. They want to reduce public spending, but only for immigrants, minorities, or supranational organisations. They have a fundamentally protectionist view of trade and international economics. Moreover, over time, several of these parties have moved from the right to the left. The SD partly goes against the trend; in economic matters, it is further to the right today than it was ten years ago, although it is clear that it still stands considerably to the left of the ruling centre-right parties.

CULTURE

While the materially based left–right conflict has been a feature of all European democracies, conflicts around cultural values have gained varying levels of traction across the continent. Over time, however, this dimension has gained importance, and it is precisely these issues that are at the centre of the ongoing so-called culture wars. Populist parties are central actors in this context: they have prioritised these issues, benefitted from them, and successfully managed to shift the entire political landscape.

Of the 60 major parties outlined in the report, only eleven are classified as progressive on social issues. 17 of the parties are classified as moderate and 32 as conservative. In practice, this means that almost all parties commonly referred to as right-wing populist also have a clear conservative policy on social issues, while those labelled as left-wing populist are divided between progressives, moderates and even conservatives.

It goes without saying that the nationalist parties tend to prioritise nationalism above all. Even though opposition to immigration may be what attracts many voters, the main goal of these parties is to maintain ethnic and cultural homogeneity. That is why, for the past thirty years, Hungarian nationalists have encouraged the immigration of ethnic Hungarians. Similarly, Vox encourages immigration to Spain from Latin America. Whether these parties believe in the possibility of the assimilation they claim to demand can be called into question. This is not to say that other arguments against immigration lack significance: economic arguments and concerns about crime and social tensions are compelling. Nevertheless, a more existential threat persists regardless of how successful immigrants are in integrating into the labour market.

Based on the same ideological motivations, nationalist parties are also opposed to ethnic minority rights. Resistance to identity politics – and, more recently, to the so-called 'woke' movement – has been strongly mobilising. Left-wing populist parties are more divided on these issues. For some, antiracism, wokeism, and minority rights have been critical ideological projects with considerable mobilising potential. Other parties, or factions within parties, have made a different assessment and sought to reduce conflict with nationalist parties on cultural issues. This has led to intense internal struggles within left-wing radical parties in countries such as Sweden and Germany.

The family is a cornerstone of conservative ideology, and it is hardly surprising that national conservative parties have embraced the traditional view of the family. Many of these parties have their origins in what can best be described as reactionary political projects. The French populist tradition – from which both Poujadism and Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front originate – is a good example of this. It is a conservatism deeply rooted in an era when women had not entered the workforce, homosexuals were in the closet, and European empires ruled the world – that is, a world and society based on natural and conservative hierarchies.

Although the strength of these attitudes has waned today, the ideological legacy persists in parts, albeit with differences along regional and national lines. For example, populists in northern Europe are comparatively liberal in their views on gender equality, abortion, and same-sex relationships. In contrast, populists in southern and eastern Europe maintain a more conservative outlook.

Populist parties also have varying attitudes towards religion. Left-wing populist parties almost always share the secularist ideals that have been dominant within leftist radical movements, with their outlook often bordering on hostility towards religion. Many nationalist parties, especially in

southern and eastern Europe, tend to ally with the churches of the majority population while sharply criticising other religions, particularly Islam. Scandinavian and northern European populist parties are more divided, and often within the parties themselves, some factions want to emphasise their Christian heritage, whereas others are more generally critical of religion.

EUROPE

For Europe's nationalists, the EU used to be the root of most problems. Any election manifesto or policy document from any European nationalist party from any year invariably contains ideologically driven criticism of the EU. For nationalists, the nation-state is the only legitimate arena for exercising power – supranationalism is inherently incompatible with the sovereignty of nations. Therefore, 'Europeanisation' was considered as detestable as globalisation, and opposition to the EU has also been a winning formula. Alongside the migration issue, no other issue has had as much mobilising significance for nationalist, far-right, and right-wing populist parties alike as the EU.

But there are signs that things are beginning to change. While opposition to the EU has always been the centrepiece, there has been an underlying shift in Eurosceptic parties' view of Europe, making the 2024 European Parliament elections more interesting than they have been in a long time. Few parties advocate for an immediate withdrawal from the EU. For example, the SD no longer pushes for withdrawal. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni has surprised many with a consistently EU-positive stance during her time as prime minister. Marine Le Pen – who once during her collaboration with Wilders was eager to be called 'Madame Frexit' – abandoned the promise of a referendum on withdrawal from the Union upon losing the presidential election in 2017. When she met voters five years later, she promised that France would remain an EU member even if she became president.

Of the 60 major parties outlined in the report, only 22 are classified as hard eurosceptics. 29 parties are classified as soft eurosceptics, while nine are categorised as pro-European.

Perhaps we are seeing the contours of a new divide in European politics. These parties increasingly assume the role of defenders of a common European culture, identity, and way of life. This shift is not solely tactical, forced by Brexit and Putin. It is also ideological. Previously, hostility towards the EU was motivated by the perception that Brussels threatened national distinctiveness. Now, these parties are propagating the idea that the EU is governed by a cosmopolitan elite that is selling out European culture. This Euroscepticism, in contrast to the earlier anti-EU stance, is motivated by a new-found love for Europe. In this narrative, Europe is defined in opposition to Turkey, Islam, the Middle East, North Africa, and – since February 2022, perhaps again – Russia. The European way of life is perceived to be threatened by these external forces. In such an existential struggle, the transition to a more pragmatic view of the EU is a means to foster the narrative about a clash of civilisations in Europe.

DEMOCRACY

The relationship between populism and democracy is complex and subject to various interpretations. While some view populism as a negative force and even a threat to democracy, others argue that it is an integral part of democracy, and represents a vital tension between the elite and the electorate.

However, while populist parties by definition are anti-establishment, they are not necessarily anti-democratic. Political scientist Takis S. Pappas proposed the concept of "democratic illiberalism" to define contemporary populism.[4] This perspective acknowledges the majority's right to make decisions but rejects liberal constraints on political power. As political scientist Cas Mudde noted in his now classic study, populism can thus serve as an alternative to non-democratic forms of liberalism. In its best form, populism can act as a corrective for a political elite that fails to adhere to democratic principles.[5]

Many see populism as inherently incompatible with liberal democracy. By definition, populism subscribes to the notion of a general will and a homogeneous nation. This stands in contradiction to the pluralistic nature of liberal democracies. Therefore, for example, political scientist Jan-Werner Müller argues that populism always poses a threat to democracy and that the two are incompatible.[6] One must

4 Pappas, Takis S, Populism and liberal democracy. A comparative and theoretical analysis. Oxford University Press, 2019.
5 Mudde, Cas, Populist radical right parties in Europe, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
6 Müller, Jan-Werner, What is populism? University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

choose whether one is a democrat or a populist. In a review article in The Oxford Handbook of Populism (2017), Stefan Rummens argues that although populism certainly can be seen as a symptom of flawed democracy, it does not follow that populism itself is the remedy. Rummens points out that those who embrace the democratic potential of populism usually assume that liberal democracy itself is a paradox because, for these people, liberal democracy inherently contains a tension between the supposedly opposing forces of popular will (democracy) and rights (liberalism). But this interpretation is far from clear, Rummens reminds us. Instead, liberal democracy must be regarded as a unified system. Rummens summarises: 'Populism, in the sense of "pure popular will," is not a constitutive part of liberal democracy but is an ideology fundamentally opposed to its values and procedures.' Others have argued that populism still serves a function. Democracies always give rise to elites, and this inevitable elitism needs to be balanced. Therefore, reminders that established parties have voters to represent and thus need to anchor their choices can be helpful.

In this sense, populism can be said to serve as a corrective, a necessary restorer when the democratic elite loses its footing. A recent study demonstrates that voters' satisfaction with how democracy functions has increased after right-wing populist parties have been included in governments in several European countries.[7] Of course, it is primarily the party's sympathisers who become more positive, while a corresponding dissatisfaction from opponents is not as prominent. There is also some evidence to suggest that populist parties have contributed to increased voter turnouts by mobilising voters who otherwise would have abstained from voting.

In its annual report on the state of democracy, the Economist argues that "the representation of right-wing parties such as the Sweden Democrats or the Finns party in government is not in itself detrimental to democracy; indeed the exclusion of such parties that have the support of large sections of the electorate could be construed as anti-democratic".[8]

7 Harteveld, E., Kokkonen, A., Linde, J. & Dahlberg, S., "A tough trade-off?: The asymmetrical impact of populist radical right inclusion on satisfaction with democracy and government." European Political Science Review, 13:1, 2021.

8 Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023, p. 40.

It is still too early to predict the long-term effects of populist successes in Europe, as there have been only a few prolonged government collaborations involving populist parties. Many of these collaborations have been short-lived because of the difficulties populist parties face in compromising with established parties. Additionally, in cases where populist parties have been part of coalition governments, they have typically held only a few ministerial positions, making assessing their overall impact on policy challenging.

The narrative of a threat to liberal democracy is justified based on the parties' ideological roots. Still, at least in western Europe, there are no signs yet that authoritarian populism has weakened any of the democracies. In eastern Europe, however, the conditions are different since nationalism is mainstream in public debate and populism is impossible to understand beyond a context of deep corruption.

A 2016 study by political scientists Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn argues that right-wing populist parties tend not to compromise on their core issues, such as immigration and multiculturalism.[9] This conclusion aligns with the fact that many of these parties associate strongly with only one or two key policy areas. However, the overall impact of populist parties in government is complex: while they generally adhere to democratic norms and fulfil their coalition agreements, they often maintain their populist rhetoric and do not significantly broaden their policy repertoire.

The difference between authoritarian and non-authoritarian ideologies is crucial. However, even non-authoritarian populists have a democratic perspective that deviates from the mainstream in most countries. Authoritarian populism lacks interest in, and sometimes patience for, constitutional rule of law. Anton Pelinka defines populism as "... a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent 'the people's direct rule'"[10], and political scientist Tjitsjke Akkerman concludes that populist parties are "activists with respect to

9 Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe. Into the Mainstream?

10 Pelinka, Anton (2013), "Right-wing populism: Concept and typology" in Right-wing populism in Europe. Politics and Discourse (Wodar, Khosravinik & Mral, eds). London: Bloomsbury. Page 3.

the law."[11] The late chairman of the previously successful Polish populist party Samoobrona, Andrzej Lepper, succinctly formulated this view on democracy: "If the law works against people and generally accepted notions of legality, then it isn't law. The only thing to do is to break it for the sake of the majority".[12]

Hence, populists prefer fewer obstacles in the democratic process to allow temporary majorities to legislate and enforce new laws. Mechanisms to slow down the procedure are seen as hindrances for the majority. Collectively, the people take priority over individuals or minority groups. According to Cas Mudde, right-wing populists, as soon as they reach power, practice the ideal of "...an extreme form of majoritarian democracy, in which minority rights can exist only as long as they have majority support".[13] This also means that courts shouldn't be allowed to veto legislation, which explains the frequent conflicts between authoritarian populists in power and constitutional courts.

Of the 60 major parties outlined in the report, 18 are classified as having a high democratic credibility, 22 are classified as medium and 20 as having a low democratic credibility.

However, there are two countries where the effects of populist successes are well documented. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's national-conservative party, Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance, has been the dominant governing party since 2010, while in Poland, the national-conservative party PiS was the leading governing party in 2005–2007 and then again in 2015–2023. Both countries have witnessed setbacks to democracy: electoral laws have been changed to disadvantage the opposition, media independence has been curtailed, the mission and composition of constitutional courts have been altered to favour the government, academic freedom has been threatened, foreign organisations have been undermined, and the rights of women and minorities have been curtailed. At times, they have both been threatened with sanctions from Brussels and have rapidly declined in independent democracy assessments.

However, it is unclear how representative the developments in Hungary and Poland are of the rest of Europe, particularly western Europe. Neither Poland nor Hungary was a stable democracy that happened to fall into the hands of unscrupulous demagogues. The totality of Poland's democratic experiences before 1989 was limited to a few years in the 1920s, while Hungary remained an authoritarian state throughout the interwar period. Even in the first years after the fall of communism, the dividing line between an authoritarian and a libertarian right was evident, as was the tension between nationalism and liberalism. Moreover, in both countries, electoral successes have been facilitated by a corrupt left still associated with communist dictatorships.
Throughout European history, parliamentary bodies have included parties that oppose the democratic system in which they operate. "However, there is a crucial qualitative distinction between the authoritarian right and libertarian right: the former explicitly reject democracy and its governing structures, whereas the latter seek to undermine democratic rules from within the system. Therefore, it remains a vital task to try to identify the dividing line between authoritarianism and populism, although this could be challenging."

11 Akkerman, Tjitske (2005), "Anti-immigration parties and the defence of liberal values: The exceptional case of the List Pim Fortuyn". Journal of Political Ideologies, 10:3.
12 Mudde, Cas (2007), Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 154..
13 Mudde, Cas (2007), Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 156.

CONCLUSIONS

To begin, let's establish what we know. Firstly, right-wing populist parties have grown steadily over the past thirty years. They have grown in tandem with the increasing demand for their ideas - on immigration, Europe, multiculturalism, globalisation - and thanks to their ability to adapt their rhetoric and programs to a level of radicalism that voters can tolerate.

This is in itself the single most important explanation, meaning it revolves around a political-ideological supply meeting a demand. Of course, the parties themselves have contributed to the increase in demand by mobilizing around these conflict dimensions, but there is no evidence to suggest that the demand has been created. And secondly, they have grown independently of economic crises or growth. There is a strong temptation from many quarters to explain the growth in material terms, preferably by being able to blame the opponents' economic policies for the emergence. Especially from the left, there is a strong desire to attribute the rise of populism to neoliberal economic policies. But this explanation is difficult to reconcile with how the trend lines actually look. Concerns about unemployment, dissatisfaction with cutbacks (or high taxes), and the inability to generate growth can at best be partial explanations.

Thirdly, they have grown independently of how other parties have acted towards them. This is an important point. Much energy has been devoted to advising established parties: should they cooperate, compete, neglect, or oppose? The cordon sanitaire strategy has been tried in many countries but has never held over time, given that the aim was to reduce support. Even in countries where parties are still kept out of government participation - Belgium, Germany - they have indirectly had significant policy influence through the pressure they create solely based on their electoral weight. This isolation strategy can of course be advocated for other reasons, but it has a poor track record in terms of what is studied in this index.

Fourthly, they have grown independently of political terrain. Political systems and political culture may have lag

effects, but in the long run, even inhospitable systems have proven penetrable. UKIP never succeeded in parliamentary elections due to the electoral system, but instead managed to win European Parliament elections and force a referendum that decided the future of Britain for many years. Fifteen years ago, Sweden was considered a lost cause for nationalists. Ten years ago, the same was said, citing Franco's legacy, about Spain. Five years ago, citing Salazar's legacy, about Portugal.

And finally, they have in most cases come to power because established right-wing parties have deemed cooperation with them to be a less painful option than eternal opposition or prolonged and unfruitful collaborations with left-wing parties. Only in Hungary, Italy, and Poland, and to some extent in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia, have authoritarian/populist parties reached the highest positions on their own merit. In the vast majority of cases, they have been invited in by established parties.

However, while this undoubtedly marks a new phase, it is important to remind ourselves of the historical experiences of our democracies. Anti-systemic parties have long been present in European democracies, evolving in different forms with the times. From the considerable influence of communist parties in the post-war years to the first appearance of populist parties in the 1950s and the major upheavals in party systems during the 1970s, European politics has seen a spectrum of anti-establishment movements that has come and gone.

While historical comparisons provide context, this report underscores the fact that contemporary support for populism is at unprecedented levels. This raises questions about the substantive differences between contemporary populist parties and challenger parties of earlier generations. The substance of politics, beyond the populist facade, must be evaluated.

Comparing, for instance, Moscow-aligned communists of the 1950s to Putin-aligned nationalists in the 2020s presents challenges because one is evaluating the relative threat posed by different categories of anti-systemic parties. Similarly, assessing whether for example a minor far-right party poses a greater threat than a larger left-wing populist party depends primarily on one's own values and perspectives.

This report also highlights the paradoxical trajectory of anti-systemic parties, noting that success in challenging the establishment can lead to integration into the political mainstream. Indeed, the data shows that anti-systemic parties are now insiders in most European democracies, having at some point been included in government or confidence-and-supply agreements in 27 out of 31 countries covered in this index. The only exceptions are Germany, Ireland, Malta, and Croatia (which is included in the index from 2000).

It should be underlined that the long-term consequences of these developments are still unknown. Previously, the commonly held belief was that populist parties were successful in the opposition but failed in government, both in terms of their ability to implement policies and retain voters. And indeed, responsibility comes at a political cost. However, at this time, it is not certain that the price is higher for populists than for any other party. Almost a decade ago, Albertazzi and McDonnell claimed that 'Populist parties are neither inevitably episodic nor are they destined to fail in government,' and this assertion rings even more true now.[15]

15 Daniele Albertazzi & Duncan McDonnell (2015), Populists in Power, Routledge, p. 3.

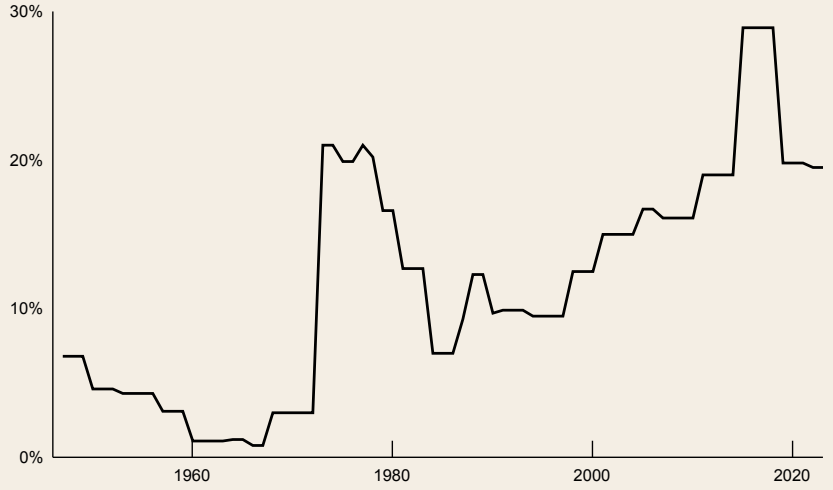
COUNTRY PROFILES


AUSTRIA
POPULISM RANK: #20
Eitan Rudinsky

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2019: **+1,5%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2019: **-11,2%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Much has changed in Europe since Austria faced a boycott from other EU countries in the early 2000s when the centre-right ÖVP entered into a coalition government with the right-wing populist FPÖ. Despite facing corruption scandals and several tumultuous periods in government, the FPÖ remains one of Europe's strongest populist parties.

The first challenge to the established parties came from the far left. The Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), which was loyal to the Soviet Union, experienced some popularity after World War II. It participated in the Austrian government between 1945 and 1947 and garnered approximately five per cent of the vote in the first post-war elections. However, support for the party waned in the early 1960s. Consequently, the communists remained largely irrelevant in Austrian politics for decades. In recent years, however, the KPÖ has experienced a revival, with notable performances in a few regional elections.

The Federation of Independents, formed in 1949, was a coalition rooted in pan-Germanism and national liberalism. It aimed to provide an alternative to Austria's two major parties at the time: the social democrats – Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) – and the Christian democrats – Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). In 1955, it merged with the Freedom Party, which led to the establishment of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) the following year.

The FPÖ and its predecessor maintained an 'openness to all' policy, which meant that even former Nazis were welcomed into the party. The first leader of the FPÖ, Anton Reinthaller, had been an SS officer; his successor, Friedrich Peter, also had a Nazi background. While the proportion of former Nazis was higher in the FPÖ, it is important to note here that the SPÖ and the ÖVP also had members with Nazi backgrounds. Although the FPÖ cooperated with the ÖVP and the SPÖ at local and regional levels, they did not do so nationally.

In 1967, a more extreme faction of the FPÖ split off from the party and formed the National Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP was founded by Norbert Burger, who had previously led the student movement within the FPÖ. Often considered a sister party to the German NPD, the NDP advocated for the reintroduction of the death penalty and a union (Anschluss) with Germany.

One of the NDP's most notable achievements was when Burger received over 3 per cent of the vote in the presidential election in 1980. However,

in 1988, the party was banned by the Supreme Court.

Following the split, the FPÖ took a more liberal direction for some time. In 1980, Norbert Steger became the party's leader. Despite declining voter support, the FPÖ entered into a coalition government with the SPÖ in 1983. This marked a first in the party's history and also led to disagreements within the party. In the same year, Jörg Haider became the party's regional leader in Carinthia. This sparked a power struggle between Haider and Steger, with Haider winning eventually and assuming the party leadership in 1986. In 1989, Haider became the governor of Carinthia after the party achieved second place in the regional elections. However, two years later, he had to resign following an infamous statement wherein he praised the labour market policies of Nazi Germany.

In 1993, the FPÖ launched its 'Austria First' campaign, advocating for a referendum on immigration. The party argued that Austria had never been an immigrant country, that migration threatened welfare, and that Islam posed an existential and cultural threat to the Austrian nation. Additionally, the FPÖ shifted its position on European integration and campaigned against Austria's membership in the EU. These changes led to a split within the party, with five members of parliament (MPs) leaving to form their party – the Liberal Forum – which later became NEOS – The New Austria and Liberal Forum and replaced the FPÖ within the Liberal International, the international organisation of liberal parties.

The latter half of the 1990s was very favourable for the FPÖ, as it capitalised on dissatisfaction with austerity policies, partly motivated by European Union membership, and the necessary adjustments that followed, as well as the increased immigration to Austria that was mainly a consequence of the Yugoslav Wars. This also led to direct policy shifts, with the FPÖ moving to the left on economic issues and to the right on socio-cultural issues.[1]

The 1999 election marked the most successful outcome for the FPÖ thus far, as the party garnered almost 27 per cent of the vote. Following unsuccessful negotiations with the SPÖ, the ÖVP turned to Haider and invited the FPÖ to join the government, despite the threat of sanctions from other countries, who claimed that such a cooperation would legitimise right-wing extremism. When the ÖVP proceeded with this coalition, Israel recalled its ambassador to Vienna, and all EU countries isolated Austria in an unprecedented boycott. However, in September 2000, the other countries had to back down after an expert report found that the Austrian government or the FPÖ ministers did not pose a threat to the values of the EU.[2] It is worth noting that Haider did not participate in the government and also stepped down from the party leadership during this period.

The following elections were a disaster for the FPÖ: it lost almost two-thirds of its voters in 2002. However, it continued being in government, which led to increasing conflict within the party between the pragmatics who wanted to compromise in order to achieve policy results and radicals who wanted to maintain the party's outsider appearance. In 2005, Haider finally left the party and formed the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ [Bündnis Zukunft Österreich]), which overtook the FPÖ's position in the coalition government, sending the FPÖ back to the opposition. After the 2006 election, both parties continued in the opposition. When Haider died in a car crash in 2008, Josef Bucher succeeded him and led BZÖ into a more right-wing economic direction, focussing less on opposing immigration. However, without Haider, BZÖ failed to maintain the interest of voters, and the party disappeared from the scene in the 2010s.

Under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache, the FPÖ slowly recovered, adopting a more radical stance with a heightened focus on immigration with Strache claiming that a population exchange was under way.[3] In 2016, benefitting from the migration crisis, FPÖ-candidate Norbert Hofer almost won the presidential elections. After having finished first in the first round, he lost the second upon gaining only 49.7 per cent of the vote. In 2017, the FPÖ received 26 per cent of the vote – close to its best results ever. For the second time, it formed a coalition with the ÖVP under the chancellorship of

1 Reinhard Heinisch & Annika Werner, "Austria: Tracing the Christian Democrats' adaptation to the silent counter-revolution" in Tim Bale & Crisóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Riding the populist wave. Europe's mainstream right in crisis. Cambridge University Press, 2021.

2 Pelinka, Anton, "The Haider Phenomenon in Austria: Examining the FPÖ in European context". The Journal of the International Institute, 9:1, 2001

3 Reuters, May 1, 2019: https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1S73PI/

Sebastian Kurz. However, this government only lasted for a year and a half. The Ibiza affair – one of the major scandals in modern Austrian history – brought down both the government and the leadership of the FPÖ when it was revealed through a sting operation that Strache was ready to partake in corrupt activities in exchange for secret help with the FPÖ's election campaign.

After snap elections in 2019, the ÖVP formed a coalition with The Greens – The Green Alternative. Hofer succeeded Strache as party leader and continued the political course for the FPÖ, i.e. a radical anti-immigration and anti-islamic policy. In a speech made in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hofer famously said that the Koran poses a greater threat to Austria than Corona.[4]

The Ibiza scandal led to a sharp drop in the popularity of the FPÖ. Nonetheless, they have managed to make a striking comeback – since late 2022, they have topped the polls ahead of the 2024 elections. In 2021, Herbert Kickl succeeded Hofer. Kickl was interior minister in the 2017–2019 government and made many headlines. He was hardly criticised for his comment on the European Convention on Human Rights there are 'strange legal structures, sometimes many years old and developed under totally different circumstances, that prevent us from doing what is necessary. I would like to take on those rules.' Kickl continued: 'I believe that it is up to the law to follow politics and not for politics to follow the law.'[5] During the pandemic, Kickl was among the harsher critics of the restrictions, refusing to wear a face mask in parliament and spreading conspiracy theories about the vaccine.[6] The FPÖ has always been right-leaning on economic issues, although increasingly supportive of the welfare state. The immigration issue has been important since the early 1990s and explains much of the growth of the party. The pan-Germanism of the party's early years has been replaced by a more direct Austrian nationalism. The FPÖ has continued to be supportive of Russia even after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Kickl has argued that Russia and NATO 'shared responsibility' for the invasion; when Zelensky made a speech at the Austrian Bundestag, Kickl and other FPÖ MPs walked out.[7]

A few other short-lived anti-establishment parties have come and gone in Austria. In the early 2000s, the Eurosceptic party, Hans-Peter Martin's List, had modest success in the European Parliament (EP) elections, although never gained representation in the Austrian parliament. The left-wing populist party, JETZT – Pilz List, formed by Peter Pilz – a former MP for The Greens – entered parliament in 2017 but was voted out two years later.

Every election in Austria since 1990 has delivered a right-wing majority in parliament. The ÖVP has chosen to govern with the populist right only three times – an illustration of the ambiguous attitude that prevails within the ÖVP.

4 Kurier, June 17, 2020, https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/koran-gefaehrlicher-als-corona-muslime-zeigen-norbert-hofer-an/400942760

5 Deutsche Welle, January 24, 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/austrian-interior-minister-accused-of-attacking-rule-of-law/a-47224454

6 Vienna Online, April 7, 2021, https://www.vienna.at/maskenpflicht-im-parlament-hofer-kritisiert-kickl/6950373

7 Al Jazeera, March 30, 2023 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/30/austria-far-right-lawmakers-walk-out-of-zelenskyy-speech



Daniel Frank

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **3/18**

The FPÖ has been represented in the EP since Austria joined the EU in 1995. The FPÖ MPs were non-inscrits until the foundation of the Europe of Nations and Freedom (EFN) in 2015. Since then, the FPÖ has been one of the more important parties in the EFN/Identity and Democracy (ID) group. In 2019, the EP elections took place just days after the Ibiza Affair, which led to a worse result for FPÖ than expected.

Martin's List won two seats in 2004 and three seats in 2009. The party did not join any European party group, although there was disagreement among its MEPs.

FPÖ SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

KPÖ SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**



BELGIUM

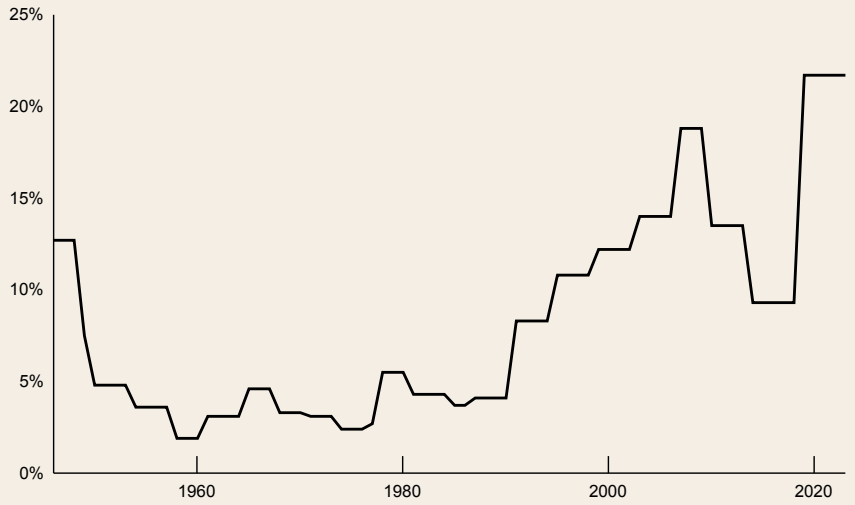
POPULISM RANK: #17

Paul Deetman

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2019: **+4,9%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2019: **+7,5%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Belgian party politics differ in two respects. Firstly, there are almost no Belgian-wide parties anymore; instead, most parties operate solely in Flanders or Wallonia. Secondly, established parties in Belgium have maintained a cordon sanitaire against the far-right Vlaams Belang over time.

The Communist Party of Belgium (KPB [Kommunistische Partij van België]) was formed in 1921 and remained loyal to the Soviet Union during the majority of its existence. The KPB reached the height of its popularity directly after World War II, finishing third in the 1946 elections with 12 per cent of the vote. In 1946–1947, it was part of a coalition government. However, support for it diminished quickly, and the KPB never returned to power. The Workers Party of Belgium (PVDA [Partij van de Arbeid van België]/PTB [Parti du Travail de Belgique]) has its roots in the student protest movements of the late 1960s. It became a full-fledged party in 1979. The PTB was formed in opposition to the KPB – which it considered to be revisionist – and was strongly influenced by Maoism. For a long time, the PTB had no electoral success. It experienced a rise in support in the 2000s, following an attempt to break from its separatist tendencies in the past.[1] The party has continued to grow in opinion polls and rose to become the second-largest party in the beginning of 2024.

Currently, it is the only 'fully Belgian' party in the parliament, i.e., the only party without regional branches, even though it remains stronger among the electorate in Wallonia. The change in PTB's stance in the 2000s, with fewer references to Lenin and Mao, is inspired by the Socialist Party (SP) in the Netherlands. The PTB is radically left-wing on economic issues, often takes moderate positions on social issues, and abstains from the parliamentary vote condemning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

The People's Union (VU [Volksunie]), a Flemish nationalist party, was formed in 1954 to promote the Flemish language. The VU later broadened its scope and became a big tent party, successfully attracting voters from both the left, the centre, and the right. The VU contributed to the growing attention given to the Flemish question in the 1970s – a time when the established parties split into the Wallonian and Flemish (Flanders) branches.

1 Delwit, Pascal (2022), "The Labor party of Belgium (PTB-PVDA): A modern radical left party? Frontiers in political science, vol 4, https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.862949/full

Eventually, the VU split as well, when a more radical anti-federalist faction of the party, exited. In the 1978 election, an alliance was formed between two smaller radically nationalist parties, which in 1979 was turned into a new political party: Vlaams Blok (VB).

The VB did not make much noise in its early years, being active mostly in Antwerp and focussing solely on the issue of independence for Flanders. In the mid-1980s, attention gradually shifted towards anti-immigration messages. In 1987, a youth organisation was formed by, among others, future party leader, Filip Dewinter. Its big break came in the EP elections in 1989, followed by a strong result in the Belgian elections in 1991, immediately referred to as the 'black Sunday' in Belgium. The VB then continued to grow, increasing its share of the votes in every election from 1981 to 2007.

The VB has a long history of extremism and, occasionally, even antisemitism. Its first party leader, Karel Dillen, infamous for translating a Holocaust denial book in the 1950s, was elected to the post for life in 1981. He eventually resigned in 1996, continuing as an MEP until 2004. Roeland Raes, party vice president in the early 2000s, caused a media scandal after questioning the scale of the Holocaust and the authenticity of The Diary of Anne Frank (1947). In 1992, the VB presented a controversial '70-points plan', with 70 proposals to 'solve the immigration problem'. The plan was inspired by a similar plan made by Jean-Marie Le Pen for France. The VB has also argued for the mass-scale expulsion of immigrants from Belgium.

The extremist ideology of the VB motivated the other parties in parliament to systematically exclude it from power, culminating in an informal agreement – a cordon sanitaire – in 1989. The VB was disbanded in 2004 after a court found the party sanctioning illegal discrimination. It regrouped as Vlaams Belang the same year, party leader Frank Vanhecke claiming 'We change our name, but not our programme'. A few years later, the party began to drop in the polls. The 2014 election saw the lowest support for the party since the mid-1980s, a decline widely interpreted as a success of the cordon sanitaire strategy. Nonetheless, the VB bounced back and achieved 12 per cent of the vote in the 2019 elections, which was equal to the result of their best election ever in 2007.

The VB used to be right-wing on economic issues but has moved towards the centre during the last decade. It remains very critical of the EU and has always maintained a conservative view on social issues. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced the VB to shift its position on Putin's regime, with senior member Tom van Grieken claiming that he had been seriously mistaken about Putin and DeWinter, who earlier had praised Putin, now called him a dictator.[2]

The cordon sanitaire also excluded the Wallonian counterpart to the VB: the National Front (FN). The FN was a Belgian nationalist party strongly opposed to separatism in Flanders and immigration. It shared its name and ideology with the more famous French party but never had a close association with Le Pen's party. In 2006, party president Daniel Féret was sentenced to 250 hours of community service for spreading racist messages in the election campaign. The FN later changed its name to National Democracy. It was represented in parliament between 1991–2010 but never had any influence. In 1997, they merged with Agir, a small Liege-based nationalist party.

The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA [Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie]) was formed in 2001, becoming the de facto successor of the defunct VU. The N-VA is a Flemish nationalist party, advocating a more civic form of nationalism than the VB. Originally a big tent party, the N-VA is now one of the country's leading centre-right parties and is classified by some scholars as populist and far-right.[3] In 2007, an N-VA senator, Jean-Marie Dedecker, left the party and formed the List Dedecker (currently LDD [Libertarian, Direct, Democratic]), which won representation in the 2007 and 2010 elections, as well as an MEP in 2009. The LDD is a populist party, right-wing both on economic and social issues. It was the first party to stay out of the cordon sanitaire against the VB.

2 Pauwels, Teun, "The impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on ties between the Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the Putin regime". European Center for Populism Studies, March 8, 2023.
3 The PopuList database 2023, https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Belgium.pdf


Lil Artsy

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **4/21**

The VB entered the EP in 1989 with one seat and joined Le Pen's far-right group. In 1994, they were joined in the parliament by the FN, although both parties lacked a group. The VB MEPs then spent many years as non-inscrit but are now founding members of the ID group. They elected three MEPs in the 2019 election. Belgium is also represented in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group through the N-VA. In 2019, PVDA-PTB gained one seat, which became Belgium's first seat ever in The Left in the European Parliament (GUE-NGL [Gauche unitaire européenne/Gauche verte nordique]) group.

PVDA/PTB SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

VB SUMMARY

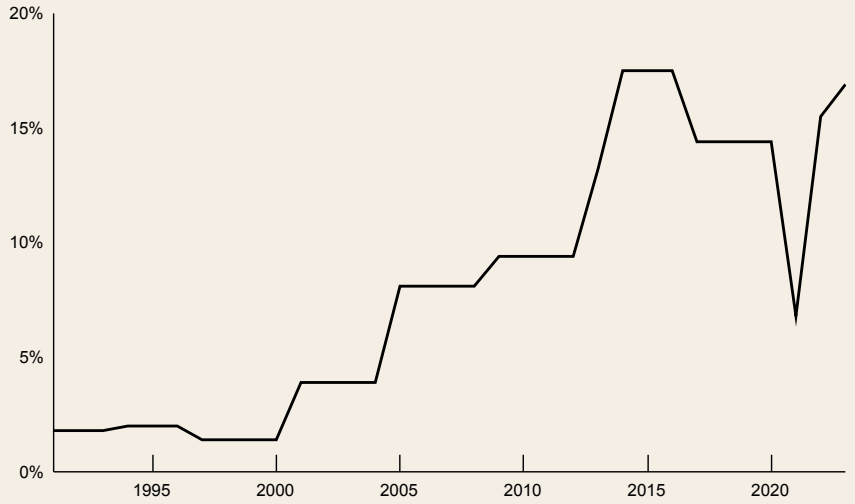
Economics: **CENTRE-RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**


BULGARIA
POPULISM RANK: #23
Robert Dan

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: +/-0%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: +1,4%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



During the first post-communist decade, Bulgaria appeared to be moving towards a two-party system, dominated by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) – a direct successor to the Bulgarian Communist Party – and Union of Democratic Forces (SDS [Sayuz na demokratichnite sili]) – the broad centre-right coalition. The stability was broken in 2001 when a brand new anti-establishment party, former king Simeon II's National Movement Simeon II – populist but centre-oriented – won over 42 per cent of the vote. It was the start of a constant reshuffle in Bulgarian party politics, wherein each election has resulted in new parties entering parliament and old ones leaving as well as consistently high levels of volatility while rendering government formation more and more difficult.

In the 2020s, Bulgarian politics entered its most turbulent phase yet. From the spring of 2021 to the spring of 2023, no less than five parliamentary elections have been held (three in 2021, one in 2022, and one in 2023). No stable government could be formed after the first four elections, at the pace of ever-increasing polarisation.

Despite being the largest party in the April 2021 election, the GERB – a conservative party that, in 2013, became the first to win two elections consecutively and whose leader, Boyko Borissov, has been prime minister for three terms (2009–2013, 2014–2017, 2017–2021) – was unable to form a government. Instead, a re-election was called for just two months later in which the newly formed There Is Such A People, (ITN [Ima takav narod]) – an anti-establishment party that combines anti-corruption messages with economic right-wing policies and some conservative viewpoints – became the largest party.

However, the ITN refused to cooperate with any other party, which is why a third election had to be called in the same year. In the November 2021 elections, the ITN lost almost two-thirds of its voter support. Instead, yet another newly formed liberal party, We Continue The Change (PP [Prodalzhavame promyanata]), won the election with 25 per cent of the vote. The PP eventually formed a government with the BSP, the liberal-conservative Democratic Bulgaria (DB) and, despite previous resistance, the ITN. However, this government did not last. In June 2022, the ITN left the government after a conflict over the country's relationship with North Macedonia.

Since the 2023 election, Bulgaria has had a coalition government consisting of the PP and the GERB, together with their respective associate parties the DB and the SDS. This fragile

centre-right alliance is based on common opposition to the pro-Kremlin president Rumen Radev as well as a common goal of Bulgaria's entrance into the eurozone. In November 2023, the GERB suffered heavy losses in the local elections, including losing the mayoral position in cities such as Sofia and Varna, which further increased the strain on the government.

Bulgaria has seen a steady flow of nationalist and far-right parties in the 2000s. The first with any success was Ataka (Attack), a far-right party that was formed in 2005 by TV journalist Volen Siderov. Ataka won 8 per cent of the vote in the 2005 election and 9 per cent in 2009, while Siderov finished second in the presidential elections in 2006. At the time, the party was given a fair share of international attention. It still stands as a solid representation of Bulgarian ultra-nationalism, with all successors following pretty much the same formula: uncompromising rhetoric against the establishment (most opponents are dismissed as 'traitors') and hate speech against minorities, especially the Romani, the Turks, and the Muslims. Magdalena Tasheva, an Ataka MP, compared refugees from Syria with monkeys and called them 'savages', 'scum', and 'mass murderers'.[1]

Ataka has been a staunch opponent of the country's NATO membership which came into effect in 2004. It is fiercely pro-Russian – a legacy dating back to Russian support for Bulgaria's independent movement in the nineteenth century – even wanting to annul the post–World War I peace treaty which forced Bulgaria to cede territory to the former Yugoslavia. Siderov has also systematically promoted conspiracy theories. Further, Ataka wants to give the orthodox church a central role in politics. Economically, the party is left-wing, arguing for the nationalisation of banks and laws against foreigners buying agricultural land.

During the 2010s, the radical right split into several factions. Ataka, which had been a supporting party in parliament for the GERB, saw its voter support halved in the 2014 election when two other nationalist parties with similar ideology and policies – the VMRO and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) – entered parliament. The Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija (VMRO), meaning Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, was formed in 1991 and claims the legacy of a nineteenth-century nationalist organisation of the same name. Similar to Ataka, this party promotes hate speech against the Romani and Turkish minorities, a campaign it describes as 'a fight against gypsyfication'. It is also strongly critical of LGBTQ rights and gender theories. The NFSB was established in 2011 when Ataka split following a conflict between Siderov and Valeri Simeonov, who then became the founder and party leader of the NFSB.

In the 2017 election, all three radical right parties came together in an electoral alliance that won just over 9 per cent of the vote. After the election, these three parties, i.e., Ataka, the NFSB, and the VMRO, entered a coalition government with the GERB. The VMRO's party leader, Krasimir Karakachanov, became deputy prime minister and was given the responsibility for internal security. Ataka left the government in 2019, while the other two parties remained until 2021.

The Reload Bulgaria (PB) is a right-wing populist party that entered parliament in 2014 but was voted out three years later. In the 2014 EP elections, it allied with the VMRO, which enabled it to receive representation in the EP in 2014–2019. The NFSB eventually joined forces with the Volya Movement (the Will Movement), which was formed back in 2007 under a different name. Politically, the Volya Movement is closer to other national conservative parties. It entered parliament in 2017, giving confidence and supply to the government, but failed to re-enter in 2021.

The national conservative and pro-Russian Bulgarian Rise won representation in the 2022 elections but was voted out a year later. Ataka received 0.5 per cent votes in all three elections in 2021 and appears to be out of the political scene after having held seats in every parliament since 2005. In the 2023 election, it joined in a pro-Russian alliance with, among others, the remnants of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but the voter support remained around 0.5 per cent.

However, the downward trend of the radical right was broken in the early 2020s by yet another new party, the Revival, which has become the most successful far-right party in post-communist Bulgaria. The Revival was formed in 2014 by its current chairman Kostadin Kostadinov. Kostadinov had earlier been a member of the NFSB

1 New York Times, December 15, 2013.

and the IMRO but left the two nationalist parties since he found them too moderate. The Revival was founded on 2 August, i.e., on the day of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire – an event of great symbolic value for Bulgarian nationalists. Kostadinov has written several books, including a textbook for elementary school, on Bulgarian history and nationalism.

With its harsh antiziganism and fascist features, the Revival hardly qualifies as a democratic party. Kostadinov himself was once arrested after allegedly having led a gang of skinheads in a violent attack on a Romani community. In 2013, after a flood in Varna killed ten people, he claimed no one from the Romani community volunteered to provide aid and described them as 'parasites' and 'non-human vermin'. Elena Guncheva, Kostadinov's running mate in the presidential elections in 2021, has said that Jewish candidates were 'only guests' in the country: 'this is the land of Bulgarians'.[2] During the pandemic, the party organised demonstrations against the government's COVID-19 measures. In January 2022, it tried to storm the National Assembly. It also spread conspiracy theories regarding both the pandemic and the vaccine.

The Revival is strongly anti-EU, anti-NATO, and pro-Russian. The party has called for a referendum on withdrawing from NATO and the EU. Kostadinov has claimed that 'everything is determined by Kozyak [the street of the US embassy in Sofia]' and wants to 'normalize' relations with Putin's Russia. At party events, Russian flags and t-shirts featuring Putin are seen often. The party is active on social media and known for spreading pro-Russian views. Kostadinov has said that the 'Russophobic garbage' should be 'exterminated like pest'.

Like every far-right party in Bulgaria, the Revival is left-leaning when it comes to economic policy with demands for the nationalisation of large companies, increased pensions, minimum wages, etc. It is conservative on social issues, promising to uphold Christian values and 'the traditional Bulgarian family'.

2 Radio Free Europe, November 21, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-revival-party-parliament-eu/31572826.html

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/17**

Ataka won three seats in the EP in 2007. It became a founding member of the short-lived nationalist group Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty with the French National Front. Ataka lost its seats in the first Bulgarian EP elections in 2007 but gained two seats in the 2009 elections. Both Attack MEPs were non-inscrits and failed to re-enter the EP in 2014.
For the 2014 elections, the PB and the VMRO formed an electoral coalition and were thus able to win two seats, both representatives joining the ECR group. The VMRO's MEP, Angel Dzhambazki, has been subject to a long list of accusations, including hate speech towards the Jewish, Romani, and LGBT people. Dzhambazki was re-elected in 2019, together with another MEP from the VMRO. They both continued in ECR.

REVIVAL SUMMARY

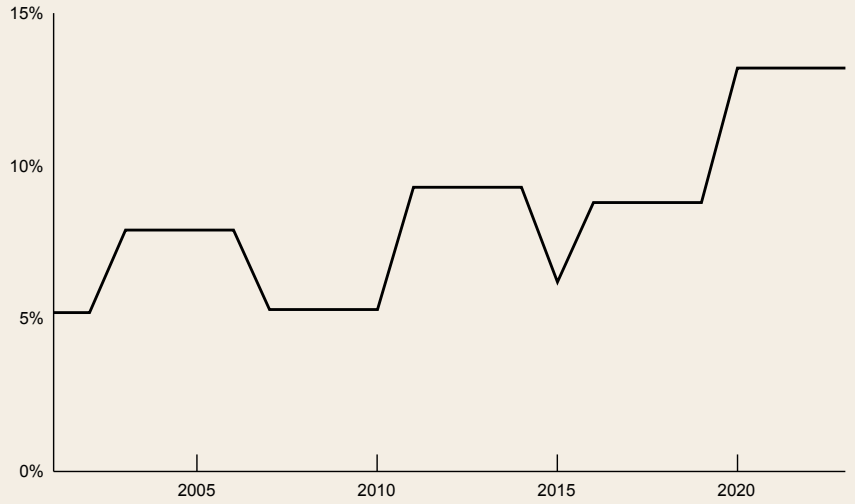
Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**


CROATIA
POPULISM RANK: #27
Spencer Davis

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2020: 0%.
Voter support, radical right in 2020: +8,3%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Croatian domestic politics has been dominated by one party since independence - The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ [Hrvatska demokratska zajednica]). While HDZ has moderated its nationalist policies, the party has cooperated with extremists. In recent years, several discontented parties have also gained prominence.

The HDZ was formed in 1990 when Croatia was still a republic in Yugoslavia. HDZ won the first free parliamentary elections in the same year, led Croatia during the War of Independence (1991–1995), and continued to dominate the domestic political scene in the post-war period. Croatian political discourse was and still is strongly coloured by nationalism and strong antagonisms between the Croatian majority and the remaining Serbian minority.

The death of President Franjo Tuđjman in 1999 marked the beginning of a new phase in Croatian politics. From the turn of the millennium, Croatia came to meet the criteria for a full-fledged democracy. The broad domestic consensus around the importance of EU membership and implementing the necessary political, economic, and judicial reforms were important factors in strengthening democracy. The HDZ, which first lost power in 2000, initially opposed the centre-left government's cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, protesting against the extradition of Croatian citizens. Ivo Sanader, who succeeded Tudjman as party leader, emerged victorious from an internal power struggle and led the party in a new direction. In 2003, HDZ adopted new statutes emphasising that the party was based on democratic principles.

In the following decades, the HDZ has transformed into a centre-right party. It has now integrated into the European conservative party family through its membership in the EPP. The party has received the largest share of votes in all but one of the elections since 2003. Even though the HDZ is strongly pro-EU, it still harbours a lot of nationalism.It has also cooperated with extremists. In 2016, Zlatko Hasanbegovic was appointed minister of culture. Hasanbegovic is a far right extremist who has praised the fascist Ustasha regime, and spent his time in office cutting funding for independent media and pushing out allegedly left-leaning media managers from public television.[1]

The other dominant party in Croatia is the Social Democratic Party of Cro-

1 Paul Hockenos, "Croatia's far right weaponizes the past", Foreign Policy, May 6, 2016. https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/06/croatias-far-right-weaponizes-the-past-ustase-hasanbegovic/

atia (SDP), with roots in the Croatian Communist Party (League of Communists of Croatia). SDP is a centre-oriented social democratic party, part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the EP. Both the HDZ and the SDP have formed alliances with a large number of smaller parties in the highly fragmented Croatian party system but have never formed a broad coalition together.

Two anti-establishment parties have been relatively successful in Croatia. The Key of Croatia (ZZ, founded under the name Human Shield [Živi zid]) is an anti-establishment party that made a breakthrough in the 2015 and 2016 elections. The party rejects classification in terms of left or right and shares several similarities with Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S). The Key of Croatia has combined a radical left-wing critique of capitalism with hard-line immigration opposition and progressive social policies. For instance, party chairman Ivan Sinčić, who came third in the presidential elections in 2014 and, in 2019, became MEP for the party, believes in abolishing private banks, and the party is also in favour of legalising marijuana. In its early years, the ZZ advocated a 'Croxit', but later switched to a softer Euroscepticism. The party has also contributed to the spread of conspiracy theories about chemtrails and vaccinations.[2]

For a party that had initially won success by attacking corruption in the country, it was a heavy blow when, in 2019, it was revealed that the ZZ had also been involved in several corruption scandals. The party has changed its name several times; it was voted out of parliament in the 2020 election.

Ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections, a new national conservative party was formed: Miroslav Škoro Homeland Movement (DPMS [Domovinski pokret Miroslava Škore]). Škoro is an established folk singer and has released records since the 1990s. After a short political career in the HDZ in the 2000s, he returned to politics in 2019 and finished in third place in the 2019 presidential election. He then formed his own party, which also finished third in the 2020 election. At the founding of the party, Škoro said that Croatia above all needs unity: 'The wrong policies in the last 20 years have brought the country to the brink of ruin'.

In the summer of 2021, Škoro left the party after a conflict over funding, which led to a name change to simply DP. The party has since been led by Ivan Penava, who is the former mayor of Vukovar where he opposed minority rights for the Serbian minority, citing how badly the city suffered during the war.[3]

Some political scientists have classified the DP as far-right and compared them to Fidesz in Hungary.[4] The DP has consistently prioritised culture war issues, targeting immigration and minority policies, particularly against the Serbian minority. In the 2019 presidential election, Škoro campaigned on the promise to pardon Tomislav Mercep, a former politician and paramilitary leader who was convicted of serious war crimes, including being responsible for the murders of 43 civilian Serbians committed by his unit.
The DP is also conservative on social issues, for example, it is a strong opponent of abortion and campaigned in the 2020 elections on a total ban (which is not a unique position in Croatian politics, even candidates for HDZ and Most are strongly anti-abortion).[5]On economic issues, the DP lean to the right: promising reduced bureaucracy, strict limits to the interference of politics in the economy and reduced number of regulations, but also free kindergartens.[6] The DP is softly Eurosceptic: in favour of membership in the EU but against adopting the euro.

In 2020, the DP was part of an electoral alliance with several smaller parties. Notable among these is Croatian Sovereigntists (HS [Hrvatski suverenisti]), a Christian conservative party that was formed in 2019 and then merged with some other small parties. The HS currently holds four seats in parliament. The coalition also included Bloc for Croatia (BzH [Blok za Hrvatsku]), a motley group of right-wing radical parties, which has one seat in parliament. Since the election, six of the eleven DP parliamentarians have left

2 The Guardian, May 17, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/27/nba-star-a-tv-chef-and-a-sad-comic-meet-some-of-europes-new-meps-europe-eu-elections

3 Balkan Insight, July 18, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/18/croatian-president-backs-delay-to-extended-rights-for-vukovar-serbs/

4 Deutsche Welle, June 7, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/croatian-pm-hails-victory-for-conservatives-in-parliamentary-vote/a-54060379

5 Euronews, April 7, 220, https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/04/croatia-election-will-the-ruling-party-s-early-election-gamble-pay-off

6 Total Croatia New, May 11, 2023, https://total-croatia-news.com/news/politics/skoro-zagreb-has-lost-its-way-in-poor-management-over-last-20-years/

the party for another party group in Croatia's highly fragmented Sabor.
The DP has grown in the void created to the right in the party system when HDZ moved towards the centre. Throughout the years of independence, there has been mobilisation from, among others, the catholic church, which has called for a strong Christian right.

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/12**

In the first Croatian EP elections in 2013, the far-right Croatian Party of Rights Dr. Ante Starčević (HSP AS [Hrvatska stranka prava dr. Ante Starčević]) – a splinter from the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP [Hrvatska stranka prava]) – won one seat, thanks to its electoral alliance with the HDZ and the popularity of its candidate: Ruža Tomašić. Tomašić has since been re-elected in 2014 and 2019 (as a candidate for her new party, the short-lived conservative Croatian Conservative Party (HKS [Hrvatska konzervativna stranka])) and is a member of the ECR group. She has been noted both for her work against crime and her recurring nationalist statements. In 2019, the ZZ also won one seat with a non-inscrit MEP.

DP SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE-RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

DOMOVINSKI POKRET



Konstantinos Orphanou

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2021: -3,4%.
Voter support, radical right in 2021: +0,2%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

Cyprus is the only country in the EU with a presidential system, where the president serves as both the head of state and the head of government. The political parties still play a significant role, with the party system including both a large communist party and high-nationalist anti-establishment parties.

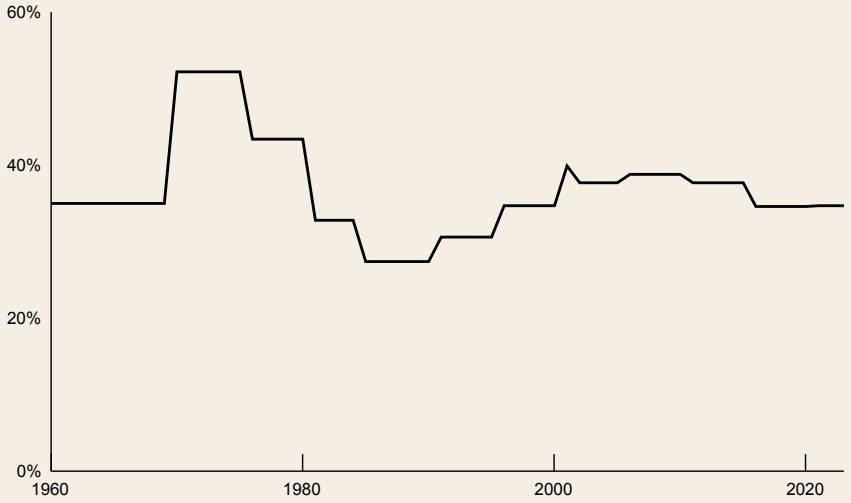
The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL [Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú]) is one of Europe's most successful communist parties. The AKEL's roots go back to the Communist Party of Cyprus, which was founded in 1928 when Cyprus was still under British colonial rule. Although illegal during British rule, the communist party was accused of collaborating with the colonial overlords by the nationalist organisations in Cyprus. Since independence, the AKEL has been among the top two parties in every election except in 1985 when it finished third.

In 2008, Demetris Christofias – who had been party secretary of the AKEL for two decades and once described the fall of the Soviet empire as 'a crime against humanity'[1] – was elected president and became the first-ever communist head of state in an EU country. He claimed that although a proud communist, he would leave the free market alone. He won the election mostly on his promise to start negotiations and try to unify the divided island. Although his government made some progress in this regard, the unification process was overshadowed by the emerging financial crisis. Christofias tried to handle the crisis by raising taxes and taking loans from Russia rather than accepting the austerity policy that the EU requested in exchange for an aid package. He did not seek re-election in 2013, and the AKEL has lost support in every election since then. In the spring of 2021, the AKEL saw its worst result ever, winning only 22 per cent of the vote. Nonetheless, it is still the second-largest party in parliament and, consequently, the leading opposition party.

If there ever was one, the AKEL is a pragmatic communist party. Although slightly Eurosceptic, it supported Cyprus EU membership in 2004 but later was against introducing the euro in the country. The party supports a federal solution for the division of Cyprus and admires the economic system of Cuba. It claims on its website that, at this stage, the AKEL 'does not

1 The Guardian, February 25, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/25/cyprus.greece

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Note: In the 1976 election, AKEL joined a broad electoral coalition that received 71.9 per cent of the vote. The exact share of votes that AKEL obtained is unknown. However, since they retained the nine seats they had from the previous election, in the index the score from 1970 is used for 1976 as well.

seek to implement its long-term programme for a radical transformation of society', but also that 'this of course does not mean that we desert our socialist vision and orientation'. The text continues:

> *AKEL is strongly convinced that despite the blow inflicted on the labour and communist movement internationally, the Marxist-Leninist theory, the way it should be developed and renewed with the continual progress of knowledge and economic, social and political development, remains a firm ideological base of the struggle for a better world, a world of peace, democracy, social justice and socialism.*[2]

Thus, even though the communist ideology does not seem to guide the party in daily politics, it is clear that the AKEL legitimises anti-democratic ideas and opinions. In the EP, the AKEL is a member of the GUE-NGL group. Stefanos Stefanou has been general secretary of the party since 2021.

On the far right, the turnover of small national conservative parties has been high. These parties usually combine a hard line towards the Turkish side of the island with relatively pro-European agendas. Parties such as the New Horizons, Evroko, and the Solidarity Movement (KA [Kinima Allilengyi]) have won seats in elections during the 2000s without making any major impact on the country's politics. None of them have ever been in government. The National Popular Front (ELAM [Ethniko Laiko Metopo]), a Greek-Cypriote ethno-nationalist party, has been slightly more successful. It is a far-right party founded in 2008. From the start, the ELAM had close connections to the neo-Nazi, and now illegal, Golden Dawn (XA [Χρυσή Αυγή or Chrysí Avgí]) party in Greece. The ELAM was originally to be considered a Cypriot branch of the XA. Before registering as a party, it was called Golden Dawn: Cypriot Kernel. Ilias Kasidiaris, the convicted leader of the XA, maintained that 'ELAM is the Golden Dawn of Cyprus'. [TCC1] However, in the summer of 2020, the ELAM cut its financial ties to the XA after previously receiving extensive support.

The ELAM opposes any federal solution to the Cyprus dispute, instead arguing that Cyprus should be united with Greece. It is highly conservative on social issues and somewhat left-leaning on economic issues. It is opposed to globalisation and migration and wants a total ban on all forms of Muslim headscarves. The ELAM is also against the legalisation of cannabis and dictates that the president consults with the Church of Cyprus on important issues. Moreover, it wants to abolish welfare and subsidies for ethnic Turks.

The ELAM scored its best result ever in the parliamentary elections in 2021 and became the fourth-largest party with 6.8 per cent of the vote. However, it did even better in the 2019 EP election, winning 8.3 per cent. It has gained popularity following the same recipe as Golden Dawn in Greece: blaming the economic crisis on immigrants and taking an active part in charity work; its members volunteer to fight forest fires, donate blood, and participate in other charitable works. Christos Christou has been president of the party since its foundation. In the presidential elections in 2018 and 2023, Christou won 5.6 per cent and 6 per cent of the vote, respectively.

The democratic legitimacy of the ELAM can be questioned. Supporters and members have been involved in several acts of violence against immigrants and students at the University of Nicosia, Nicosia. Christou has hinted that the party may be open to violence if needed.[3] The current strategy of the party leadership is widely described as an attempt to become a more mature version of the XA and maintain its anti-establishment position while simultaneously moderating its rhetoric. After the 2021 election, the president of Cyprus proposed a coalition government between the Democratic Rally and the ELAM, an offer it rejected.

2 https://akel.org.cy/announcement/

3 Open Democracy, April 16, 2021, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/remnants-golden-dawn-are-winning-support-cyprus/



Igor Starkov

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/6**

With respect to the EP elections, the AKEL has won two seats in every election since Cyprus became a member in 2004. In 2009, party member Niyazi Kızılyürek became the first ethnic Turkish-Cypriot to be elected to the EP and thus the first from the Turkish-Cypriot community to hold elected office since 1963. All AKEL MEPs have joined the GUE-NGL group.

According to the few polls in the country, support for the ELAM has increased considerably since the 2021 election. At the beginning of 2024, the ELAM had 17 per cent of the vote; it seems likely that it will win its first seat in the EP.

AKEL SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **PRO EU**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

ELAM SUMMARY

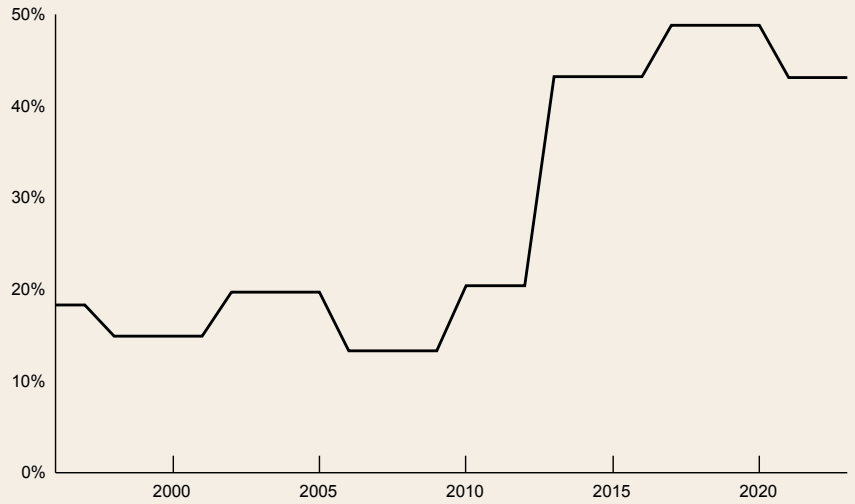
Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **STRONG EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**


CZECH REPUBLIC
POPULISM RANK: #6
Marcin Jozwiak

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2021: **-4,6%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2021: **+1,4%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



In 1990, the Czech opposition joined forces and created the Civic Forum, an umbrella organisation that easily won the first free elections held in Czechoslovakia. By the time of the second elections, in 1992 – six months before the division of Czechoslovakia – Czechia had developed a pluralistic party system with Christian democrats, liberals, conservatives, greens and, in contrast to other post-communist countries, even a social democratic party with roots in the interwar years. While the centre-right parties won the first elections, the Social Democracy (ČSSD [Česká strana sociálně demokratická]) won in 1998 and 2002, after which power shifted again in 2010. Since 2010, however, Czech party politics have become much more volatile with various new parties appearing over the years, including quite a few populist parties.

The Civic Democratic Party (ODS [Občanská demokratická strana]), under the leadership of Vaclav Klaus, combined market liberalism with soft Euroscepticism and national conservative views on immigration. The ODS teamed up with the British conservatives in the EP and together they cofounded the ECR group.

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM [Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy]) is the most successful communist party in post-communist Europe. Being a direct successor of the party that ruled Czechoslovakia during the Cold War, it never changed its name or ideology. The party has been represented in every parliament until 2021. The KSČM focusses on welfare issues and is opposed to NATO, instead favouring closer ties with Russia. It is also Eurosceptic and somewhat anti-immigration. Support for the party remained pretty stable until the mid-2010s but has since dropped considerably.

The Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR–RSC [Sdružení pro republiku - Republikánská strana Československa]) was a far-right party formed in 1989. Its best performance was in the 1996 election when it finished fifth with 8 per cent of the vote, and it lost representation two years later. Although the party is still around, the voters have left. The SPR–RSC profiled itself through opposition to EU and NATO membership as well as to immigration. The party also stood for economic populism and attracted attention due to its open antiziganism.

Formed in 2003 as a competitor to the KSČM, the Labor Party was even more radical than the SPR-RSC. Advocating for free healthcare, the party gradually became more anti-communist and more nationalist, with a strong focus on law and order and campaigns

against minorities. It wanted to ban homosexuality and organised mobs against Romani people among other things. In the early 2010s, the party was banned by the Czech Supreme Court, which argued that the party's ideology was anti-democratic. After the decision, the party changed its name to the Workers Party for Social Justice. Currently, the party describes itself as having a national socialist view but claims that it is not inspired by Hitler's 'variant' of Nazism. However, that has not stopped the party from having a youth wing, Dělnická mládež, which is similar to the Hitler Youth.[1]

ANO 2011 was formed in 2011 by businessman Andrej Babis and quickly enjoyed electoral success. It won the EP elections in 2014 and joined the government as a junior coalition member with the CSSD and the Christian democrats the same year. After the 2017 election, Babis became prime minister and led a short-lived, one-party minority government. Then, in 2018, he formed a coalition with the CSSD and resumed leadership. This also being a minority government, Babis relied on parliamentary support from the KSCM, thus ending the long-time cordon sanitaire against them.

ANO is widely described in the literature as a populist party, although pundits differ on whether to place them to the centre or centre-right.[2] Babis himself portrayed himself as a business leader rather than a politician[3] and in the election campaign in 2013, the slogan was: "We're not like the politicians. We toil."[4] The consensus over the last years has been that ANO has become increasingly left-leaning on economic issues while increasingly conservative on social issues. It has shown an ambiguous attitude towards the EU, often voicing Euroscepticism, while sometimes even being in favour of adopting the euro. In the 2021 election campaign, ANO mostly focussed on welfare and anti-immigration messages. Viktor Orbán endorsed ANO in the national elections.

1 Mares, Miroslav, 2011, "Czech extreme right parties: an unsuccessful story." Communist and post-communist studies. 44:4. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0967067X1100050X

2 Hajek, Lukas (2017), "Left, Right, Left, Right... Centre: Ideological Position's Andrej Babis's ANO", Czech Journal of Political Science, No 3. https://czechpolsci.eu/article/view/34946

3 Sarah Engler, Bartek Pytlas & Kevin Deegan-Krause, "Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe" in Varieties of Populism in Europe in times of crisis, Manuela Caiani & Paolo Graziano (eds), Routledge, 2021.

4 https://www.boell.de/en/2013/10/31/political-earthquake-czech-republic-rejection-established-parties

In the EP, ANO has been part of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE) since 2014. The party, and particularly its leader Babis, is often criticised for its authoritarian methods. Following a series of political and financial scandals in 2018 and 2019, the Babis government was the target of several demonstrations. Several former MPs and MEPs have left the party, claiming that ANO is not a liberal party anymore. Nevertheless, the party remains popular with the voters, having been on top of the polls most of the last decade and polling way above 30 per cent at the beginning of 2024.

The Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD [Svoboda a přímá demokracie]) was formed in 2015 by Tomio Okamura following a split from a short-lived populist party called Dawn (Úsvit; also founded by Okamura). The SPD is a national conservative and populist party with a strong focus on anti-immigration and resistance to Islam and multiculturalism. In the 2017 election campaign, the party slogan simply read 'No to Islam'. Okamura raised controversy in 2013, while leading Usvit, with the publication of a text where he argued that it was ""not the fault of the neo-Nazis, the Czechs or the Turks" that "gypsies" are "perceived pejoratively" today, and that the Czech Republic should "democratically support the gypsies' emigration".[5]

The SPD follows hard Euroscepticism and is in favour of a Czech exit from the EU, as well as NATO. The party gained from its opposition to the COVID-19 restrictions. In the EP, it is closely associated with the ID group, which also inspired its name. For national elections, it has been endorsed by Marine Le Pen.

The Tricolour Citizens' Movement was formed in 2019 as a national conservative party, uniting several small right-wing populist parties. It failed to enter parliament in 2021 and has teamed up with SPD for the 2024 EP elections.

5 https://www.boell.de/en/2013/10/31/political-earthquake-czech-republic-rejection-established-parties



Palu Malerba

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **9/21**

The KSČM has been represented in the EP since the Czech Republic became a member in 2004. Currently, it has one MEP, Kateřina Konečná. She has also been party leader since 2023 and has received criticism for defending Azerbaijan on human rights issues.

ANO joined the ALDE group in 2014 and has remained, although several MEP:s have left. SPD is a member of the ID group.

ANO SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE-LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

SPD SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTER-LEFT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**



DENMARK

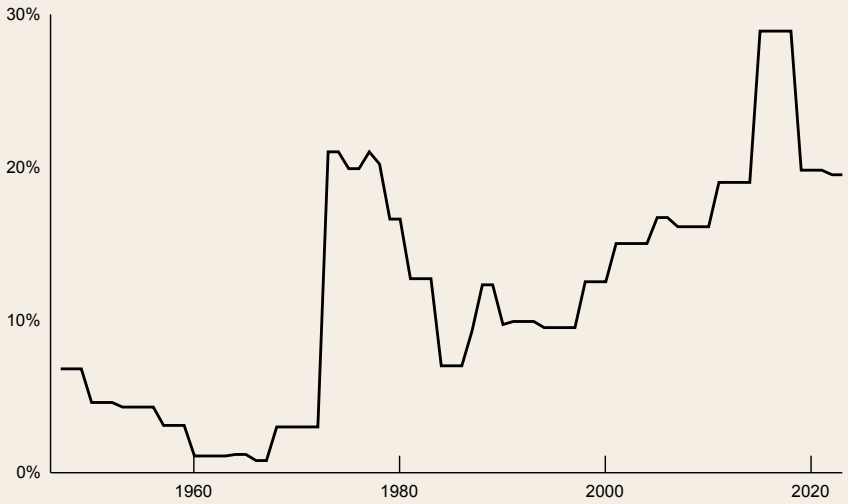
POPULISM RANK: #19

Gustav Lundborg

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: **-1,8%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2022: **+1,5%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Denmark has always had the most fragmented party system among the Nordic countries. Party splits are common, and elections more often than not result in new parties entering or old parties exiting parliament. Anti-establishment parties have been represented in parliament since the 1970s.

The Communist Party of Denmark (DKP [Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti]) was formed in 1919. It was banned during the German occupation but legalised after liberation and, shortly after, participated in government in 1945. After World War II, it was the only established party to oppose Denmark joining NATO. The DKP's popularity vanished in the following decades. Because of its loyalty towards the Soviet Union, even upon the invasion of Hungary in 1956, the party suffered a split and many members instead formed the non-revolutionary Socialist People's Party, which quickly took over as the leading alternative left of the social democrats.

The DKP, still enjoying financial support from Moscow, made a short comeback in parliament in the 1970s, gaining from its opposition to Denmark joining the European Community (EC). In 1989, the DKP joined forces with the Leftist Alliance, a 1967 splinter from the Socialist People's Party, to form the Red-Green Alliance (RGA). The RGA is a radical left party – still believing in the necessity of revolution – that has given parliamentary support to several centre-left governments in Denmark, although never participated in one. It opposes EU membership and is strongly left-leaning on economic issues but progressive on social issues. In 2007, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, a candidate for the party, became the centre of a huge controversy due to her conservative Islamic views, including her refusal to shake the hands of men and her support for the death penalty.

The Progress Party (FrP [Fremskridtspartiet]) was one of the earliest right-wing populist parties in Europe. It was formed in 1972 and enjoyed immediate success, coming second in the 'earthquake' elections in 1973. The FrP has always remained a populist party without striving to be ideologically consistent. While originally a protest party against taxes, in the 1980s it added anti-immigration to its repertoire, with party leader Mogens Glistrup infamously promising to make Denmark 'a Muslim free zone'. The FrP never joined a government but provided parliamentary support for several centre-right coalitions. Glistrup, founder and leader of the party for the first fifteen years, was a highly controversial politician who served time to avoid taxes and made frequent racist comments.

The FrP was marked by factional battles between the so-called 'slap-

pere' ('pragmatics') and 'strammere' ('hardliners'). In 1995, the leaders of the pragmatic faction left the party and founded the Danish People's Party (DF [Dansk Folkeparti]), a socially conservative and anti-immigration party, which became highly successful. Pia Kjærsgaard, MP and vice-president of the FrP, became the first party leader of the DF.

The DF initially focussed more on immigration issues than FRP had and evolved into a different kind of party: it was much more centralised, with little or no space for internal critics. Initially, the established parties tried to isolate it. In 1999, the Social Democratic prime minister, Poul Nyrup, famously claimed that 'no matter how hard they try, they will never be respectable' ('stueren').

Only two years later, the DF began a decade-long cooperation with the centre-right government, functioning as a parliamentary support party. At first, it almost exclusively put forward demands related to immigration and integration policy but later broadened its scope, with a stronger focus on welfare issues. For a long time, the DF managed to maintain its image as an outsider, even though it was highly responsible for government policy through the confidence-and-supply structure.

The DF has had a huge influence on government policy, being responsible for the country switching towards one of the hardest regulated migration policies in Europe in the early 2000s, while increasing demands on assimilation for migrants to Denmark. While Kjærsgaard was the architect behind the party's policy successes, her successor, Kristian Thulesen Dahl, had the best election results, winning the 2014 EP elections, and then earning an unprecedented 21 per cent of the vote in the national election the following years. Since then, the DF has suffered heavy losses, almost losing representation in the parliament in 2022, with both voters and MPs joining the new radical right parties that have emerged in the country, for instance, the Denmark Democrats.

The New Right is a national conservative party formed in 2015 by Pernille Vermund. It has mainly focussed on anti-immigration in combination with economic liberalism, placing itself to the right of the DF both on economic and social issues. The party wants a total freeze of asylum immigration, that every immigrant who receives a sentence should be expelled, and that all immigrants must be self-financed. It is also against Denmark's membership in the EU. In 2024, Vermund joined the centre-right Liberal Alliance, suggesting that the New Right should simply cease to exist.

In 2022, Inger Støjberg, former minister for immigration, left the liberal-conservative Venstre and formed a new party: Denmark Democrats (DD). Støjberg first came into the spotlight for her handling of migration issues during her ministerial term. The website of her department had a counter that showed the number of restrictions in the foreign law that she had implemented, and when it reached 50, they celebrated with cake.[1] She was later impeached for misconduct in office. After serving her six-week sentence, she founded the DD, which won 8 per cent of the vote in the elections the same year. The urban-rural conflict has increased in importance in Denmark in recent years, especially after the decision by the Social Democratic government during the pandemic to cull all the country's minks, thereby devastating an entire industry. DD sees great potential here. Asked on what separates DD from DF, Stöjberg mentioned tax policy - she wants tax cuts for low incomes - and the EU - she does not want to leave the EU.[2] Unlike DF, DD also clearly positions itself to the right in Danish bloc politics.

1 The Independent, March 16, 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/danish-integration-minister-inger-stojberg-furious-backlash-celebrating-tougher-immigration-laws-cake-facebook-a7632161.html

2 Altinget, August 17, 2022, https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/stoejberg-vil-ikke-frede-s-og-dfs-aftale-om-hoejere-dagpenge-det-tager-vi-henad-vejen



Shvets Anna

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/14**

The Eurosceptic leftist party, The People's Movement Against EU, has only contested in EU elections and was represented in the EP between 1979 and 2019, spending the last period within the GUE-NGL group. It lost its seat in the 2019 election, mainly due to the RGA competing in the EP elections for the first time. The RGA gained one seat and joined the GUE group.
The FrP was represented in the EP during 1984–1989. The DF entered in 1999, first joining the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN). During 2009–2019, it was in the ECR group and since 2019 in the ID group. In 2015, the party and future party leader Morten Messerschmidt were involved in a scandal regarding misuse of EU funding. Since 2019, it has had only one MEP.

DF SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

DD SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTER**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**



ESTONIA

POPULISM RANK: #25

SUMMARY

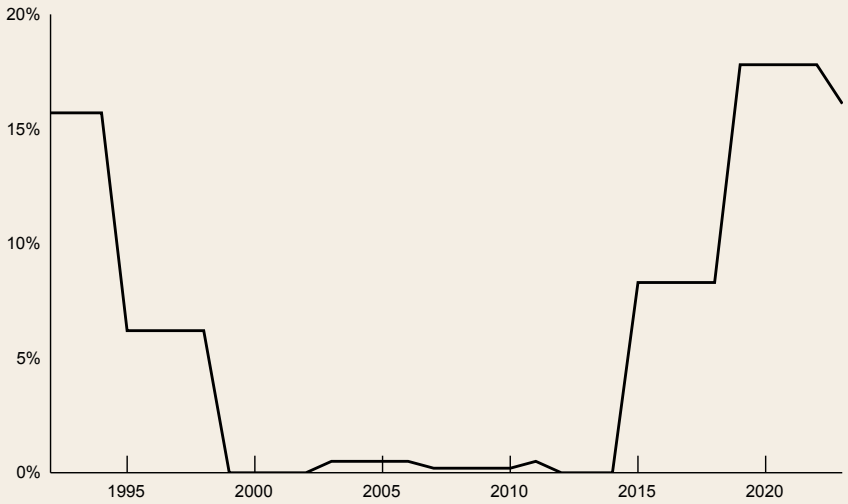
Voter support, radical left in 2023: -0%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: -1,7%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

Nationalism has been a feature of Estonian politics both before and after its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. In the 1990s, even liberal and centre-oriented parties advocated for strong assimilationist policies towards the large ethnic Russian minority. Still, there has been some space for even more radical alternatives to the right of the mainstream.

The far right Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP) was established in 1988 by nationalist and anti-communist dissidents. Its primary objective was to establish a non-communist Estonia (before independence) and, in line with its anti-Russian stance, to make the country exclusively for ethnic Estonians (after independence). In the first free elections of 1992, the party garnered almost nine per cent of the votes and became part of the right-wing coalition government from 1992 to 1995. The ERSP later merged with the Pro Patria National Coalition to form the conservative Pro Patria Union.

The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE [Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond]) is the most successful nationalist party in the Baltic states. It was founded in 2012 through a merger of the agrarian People's Union of Estonia and the nationalist Estonian Patriotic Movement. In 2019–2021, it participated in a coalition government with the Estonian Centre Party (EK [Eesti Keskerakond]).

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The EKRE employs typical populist rhetoric, claiming that the 'liberal elite' is working against the 'real interest of the people'. In an interview with The Guardian, MP Ruuben Kaalep summed up his party's mission as a fight against 'native replacement', 'the LGBT agenda', and 'leftist global ideological hegemony'.[1] Thus, the EKRE is strongly nationalist and against immigration, arguing that Estonia should be a country of ethnic Estonians only. At the same time, it has shown an ambiguous attitude towards the ethnic Russian minority since it also wants to attract their votes; many in this group are more conservative and Eurosceptic. As a result, the EKRE avoided taking a clear stand against Russia following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The party was also accused of being infiltrated by Russian oligarchs ahead of the 2019 EP elections.[2]

The EKRE is strongly conservative on social issues, including main-

1 The Guardian, May 21, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/21/racism-sexism-nazi-economics-estonia-far-right-in-power-ekre
2 Estonian World, February 19, 2023, https://estonianworld.com/security/politico-russian-paramilitary-group-tried-to-interfere-with-estonian-politics-through-ekre/

taining a negative stance on HTBQ rights. Its party leader, Mart Helme, had to resign as interior minister after giving an interview where he stated that he did not have a 'friendly view' on homosexuals and suggested that they emigrate to Sweden.[3] A few years earlier, he claimed in a TV interview that blacks were not welcome in his Estonia: 'I want Estonia to be a white country.'[4] The EKRE politicians have often mentioned Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance and Law and Justice (PiS [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość]) as succesful parties with good policies; both Helme and son Martin have claimed that Joe Biden's election victory in the 2020 US presidential election was the result of electoral fraud. Mart Helme has also said that 'partial' journalists should be fired from public service. It is noteworthy that after the EKRE came into power, well-known public service journalist Ahto Lobjakas quit his job, claiming that although he was not fired, he was made to choose between self-censorship or leaving.[5]

On economics, the EKRE takes a centre position within the Estonian landscape, often with populist promises of lower taxes combined with increased welfare spending. It is sceptical about NATO and has proposed a new referendum on Estonia's membership in the EU, although it denies it wants Estonia to leave the EU. Early in 2024, EKRE is polling around 20 per cent, and is currently the second largest party.

The EK was formed in 1991 as a direct successor of the Popular Front of Estonia. It is variously described as centrist, liberal, or populist. Long-time party leader Edgar Savisaar has often been criticised for autocratic methods and was also involved in corruption scandals. Initially, the EK did not fully support Estonia's membership in the EU but has since abandoned its Euroscepticism. The party takes a clear left-wing stance on economic issues but tends to be conservative on social issues, e.g., it opposes LGBTQ rights. The EK is nonetheless a member of Renew Europe – a pro-LBGTQ group – in the EP and self-defines as a social liberal party. Its coalition with the EKRE led to harsh criticism within the party. It is not included in the list of populist parties mainly due to its lack of anti-elitism, but it should be noted that it is a borderline case, even more so historically.

To the left of the Social Democratic Party, there is a void in Estonian politics. No far-left party has appeared in the country during the three decades since its independence.

3 Eurotopics, October 20, 2020, https://www.eurotopics.net/en/249713/outrage-over-estonia-s-homophobic-interior-minister?pk_campaign=et2020-11-10-en&pk_kwd=251010
4 Dagens Nyheter, March 1, 2019.
5 Dagens Nyheter, May 19, 2019.

EKRE SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **1/6**

The first MEP for the EKRE, Jaak Madison, was elected in 2019 and joined the ID group. Madison, who according to The Guardian is regarded as 'the polished face of the party', has had his fair share of controversy: a few years before becoming an MEP, Madison wrote a blog post wherein he argued that the Holocaust had 'positive aspects'.[6]

6 The Guardian, Ma7 19, 2021 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/21/racism-sexism-nazi-economics-estonia-far-right-in-power-ekre

FINLAND

POPULISM RANK: #18



Tuomas Ahonen

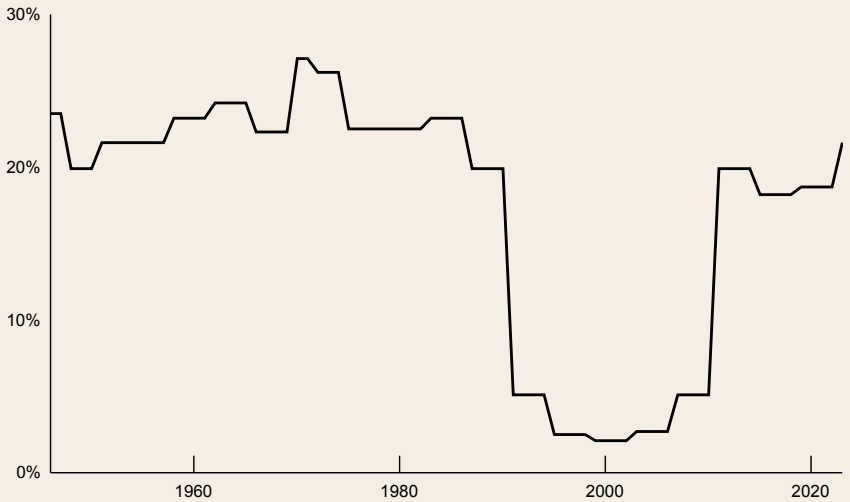
SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: -0,1%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: +3%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **PS**

Finland is among the countries where communists had the strongest popular support in the decades after World War II. The Communist Party of Finland had been banned before and during the war but re-emerged in 1944 within the framework of the Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL [Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto]). The SKDL was an umbrella organisation, quite similar to the model that was used in the early post-war years in Soviet-dominated eastern Europe. It gathered between 15 per cent to 25 per cent of the electorate between the 1940s and the 1980s. It was part of the governing coalition three times: between 1946–1948, 1966–1970, and 1977–1982. In 1958, it became the largest party in Finland – the second time a communist party won an election in Europe.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the SKDL was as strong as the Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP), which led to fierce competition between the two parties, not the least within the trade unions. Including them in government was part of a strategy of President Urho Kekkonen, often dubbed as 'hugging them to death'. In the early 1970s, the party's core took a Eurocommunist turn. However, a Stalin-loyal cadre – the so-called Taistoists – remained and was allowed to continue, mainly due to threats from Moscow to cease funding if the party split.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The party finally split in the mid-1980s, when a group of orthodox Marxist-Leninists formed the Democratic Alternative (Deva [Demokraattinen Vaihtoehto]). The Deva won 4 per cent of the vote in the 1987 election but was voted out of parliament in 1991. Most of the SKDL joined the newly formed Left Alliance (VAS [Vasemmistoliitto]) in 1990, which followed in a democratic, socialist path.

Finland also has a long tradition of agrarian populism. In 1959, The Finnish Rural Party (SMP [Suomen maaseudun puolue]) was formed by long-time party leader, Veikko Vennamo, as a breakaway from the Agrarian League (currently the Center Party of Finland). In 1970, the SMP experienced its best election result on a populist programme, with a strong focus on support for farmers and the unemployed. Amidst weakening electoral support and several internal conflicts during the second half of the 1970s, Vennamo retired from politics and was succeeded by his son, the less charismatic, Pekka Vennamo.

The SMP managed to make a comeback with more than 9 per cent of the vote in the 1983 election, after which it joined a centre-left government coalition. Four years later, it entered a right-wing coalition, thus remaining in government for eight consis-

tent years. The SMP was a populist, anti-establishment party with a negative view of elites. The party rested on Christian values and opposed the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1971. It held nationalist views and was critical of the position of the Swedish minority.

In the 1990s, the SMP finally fell apart. Some of its leading members, including party leader Raimo Vistbacka and party secretary Timo Soini, founded the Finns Party (PS [Perussuomalaiset]) in the fall of 1995. The PS failed in its first four elections, gaining only 1 per cent of the vote in 1999 as well as in 2003. In 2007, support increased to 4 per cent. The breakthrough came in 2011 when they finished third with 19 per cent. Soini, party leader since 1997, got the most votes of any candidate both in the 2009 EP elections and the 2011 national elections.

After the 2011 election, the PS started negotiations with the liberal-conservative National Coalition Party (NCP) and the SDP to form a coalition government but chose not to participate due to the other parties will to support the EU bailouts in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

Four years later, having consolidated its position as the third-largest party in the next election, the PS finally joined a coalition government, this time with the NCP and the Center Party of Finland. Soini assumed the post of foreign minister while the party changed course; the Euroscepticism was softened and the anti-elitist rhetoric moderated.

In 2017, Soini resigned as party leader and was succeeded by the more radical Jussi Halla-aho, who had a background in far-right movements and was influenced by American alt-right movements. The leaders of the coalition partners then declared that they had no intention of governing together with the PS under the leadership of Halla-aho. Consequently, all PS ministers left the party and formed a new parliamentary group called Blue Reform, thus enabling the coalition government to continue. On the other hand, the PS entered the opposition. Blue Reform failed to enter parliament after the 2019 elections, but the PS performed well with the voters once again. The party had a campaign video showing a "pissed-off monster" who attacks the country's traitorous leaders.[1]

In 2021, Riikka Purra took over the leadership and, in 2023, led the party to its best result ever: the second-largest party in the country with 20 per cent of the vote. The PS then entered government for the second time, now with the NCP, the Christian Democrats, and the Swedish People's Party of Finland. The PS currently holds seven posts in the government.

In recent years, the PS has suffered some minor splits of more radical elements. The MP Ano Turtiainen was expelled from the party in 2020 following a racist tweet. He then formed a new, pro-Russian party – the Power Belongs to the People – which has neo-Nazi connections. Following a split in the youth organisation of the PS, another minor fascist party was formed: the Blue-And-Black Movement (SKL [Sinimusta Liike]). The leader of the youth organisation, Toni Jalonen, left the PS after he referred to himself as a 'fascist' at a meeting[2]. He had previously received criticism for posting a tweet with a picture of a black family with the comment: "vote for the True Finns Party so this does not become Finland's future".[3]

In ideological terms, the PS is a national conservative party. It is conservative on social issues and more left-leaning on economic issues. Soini once described his party as a 'workers' party without socialism'.[4] It is in favour of increased progressivity in the tax system, state support for farmers and industry, and strengthening the welfare state. It is strongly nationalist and critical against the status of Swedish as an obligatory second language in school, instead supporting policies to strengthen Finnish identity. It is somewhat sceptical about climate change, having called the Paris Agreement 'catastrophic for the economy'.[5] The PS is softly Eurosceptic: it has a long-term goal of leaving the EU but in the short term it argues that Finland needs to remain in the union to defend Finnish interests. It was also

1 The Economist, April 17, 2019, https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/04/17/the-right-wing-finns-party-does-well-in-finlands-election
2 Svenska Yle, March 23, 2020, https://svenska.yle.fi/a/7-1453805
3 Helsingfors Dagblad, May 23, 2019, https://www.hbl.fi/artikel/6422b344-7614-48d6-87aa-d48a7fe0baab
4 https://jacobin.com/2017/04/true-finns-finland-timo-soini-nationalists-far-right-xenophobia-elections/
5 https://basta.media/extreme-droite-Europe-rechauffement-climat-negationnisme-vote-energie-fossile-automobile-renouvelables-frontiere-racisme-ecologie

against NATO membership, claiming the need for national sovereignty. The party changed its stance on this matter after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and is among the most anti-Russian of Europe's populist parties. As of March 2024, it polls around 19 per cent as the third largest party in Finland.

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/14**

The PS has been represented in the EP since 2009. It became a founding member of the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) but switched to ECR after the 2014 election. In 2019, it left the ECR to join the ID group. It eventually returned to the ECR in 2023, a move that coincided with its participation in the new Finnish government.

PS SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**



Mitchell Henderson



FRANCE

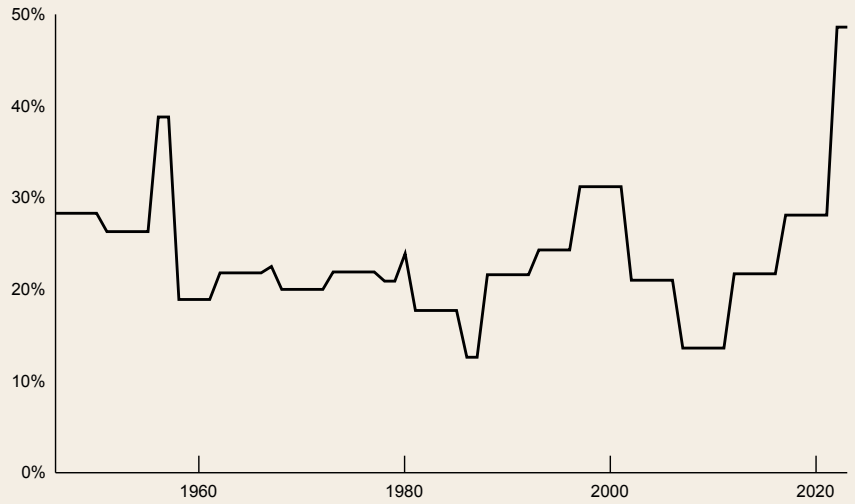
POPULISM RANK: #3

Jérémy Glineur

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: +12%.
Voter support, radical right in 2022: +8,5%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Among established democracies, France stands out in several respects. The French president has more power than any other head of state in western Europe. The country's modern history contains several turbulent events that have had significant domestic and international impact. Further, its electorate has consistently shown marked support for various far-left and far-right challengers.

The French Communist Party (PCF [Parti communiste français]) was founded in 1920 and is one of the few far-left parties in western Europe that managed to become the dominant left-wing party in its country. The PCF often outperformed the Socialist Party (PS [Parti socialiste]) at elections and controls the largest trade union organisation, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT [Confédération Générale du Travail]), as well as the highly influential newspaper, L'Humanité. The PCF, like many other communist parties loyal to the Soviet Union, won legitimacy during the war and enjoyed great electoral success in the first post-war elections. It was even part of the first, short-lived, post-occupation French governments under the so-called 'tripartisme system', together with the PS and the Popular Republican Movement (Christian democrats). However, from 1947, the party was excluded from government cooperation and came to be isolated for a long period as a result of its close connections with the Soviet Union.

Among voters, the PCF remained the most popular left-wing party in all elections until 1978. In the 1956 election, the PCF became the largest party in the country – the first time in western Europe that a communist party had won a national election. However, support slowly weakened in the following decades. The PCF stubbornly rejected its Italian sister party's Eurocommunist turn, instead opting for a hardened, more pro-Soviet approach, combined with an anti-immigration rhetoric, in the late 1970s. When the PCF returned to government – as a minor coalition partner to the PS after François Mitterrand's victory in the 1981 presidential election – it was weaker than before, holding only four ministerial posts that were later reduced to three.

In 1994, Robert Hue succeeded long-time party leader George Marchais and initiated a reform of the party's centralised structure and Marxist-Leninist dogmas. The PCF participated in government again between 1997 and 2002. Diminishing support in the 2000s led it to join an electoral coalition in 2012 and then again in 2022, this time as part of the broad, green-left coalition that includes both the PS and The Greens.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon left behind a long career in the PS when he exited the party in 2008 to form the Left Party (PG [Parti de gauche]), ahead of the upcoming EP elections. The PG then formed an alliance called the Left Front (FG [Front de gauche]) with the PCF, among others. For the 2012 presidential election, Mélenchon was a candidate and the representative of a broad radical left movement. In 2016, France Unbowed (FI [France Insoumise]) originated as an electoral platform with Mélenchon as its leader. He again became the leading leftist candidate in the presidential election in 2017, this time reaching 20 per cent. He repeated this feat in 2022. For the 2022 legislative election, the FI joined the PS, the PCF, and several other parties in yet another coalition called the NUPES (New Ecological and Social People's Union [Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale]).

The FI is rooted in far-left ideas, with a clear populist approach, somewhat similar to those of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. Besides being radically leftist on economic issues, it mostly takes moderate positions on social issues. It is softly Eurosceptic, advocating a renegotiation of the EU founding treaties. It wants France to leave NATO. Mélenchon defended Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 and voted against sanctions against Russia, even though he criticised Putin after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.[1] As recently as 2019, Mélenchon expressed admiration for the Venezuelan regime.[2]

Outside of the PCF and the FI, several other far-left parties have gained a minor following through the years, including the Trotskyist Workers' Struggle (LO [Lutte Ouvrière]).

The radical right also has an extensive history in France. The Union for the Defense of Tradesmen and Artisans (UDCA) was a populist party led by Pierre Poujade. Poujade had supported Philippe Pétain during the first years of occupation. In 1953, he led a tax revolt in southern France that soon came to be known as Poujadism. It was a broad coalition united through opposition against urbanisation, Americanisation, and centralisation. The movement defended shopkeepers and small business owners against tax authorities and supermarkets, in the words of Catherine Fieschi, it was 'a tax revolt dressed up as Political rebellion'.[3]

Poujade was an anti-modernist, following a reactionary tradition of thought dating back to the days of the French Revolution. His movement also harboured strong antisemitism and championed French Algeria's independence. Poujade was basically an anti-modernist, following a reactionary tradition of thought dating back to the days of the revolution. Poujade used a sharp populist rhetoric, including calling the National Assembly 'the biggest brothel in Paris' and bragging about his own lack of education." His movement also harboured strong anti-semitism and defended French Algeria against independence.

After experiencing success in the 1956 legislative election, Poujade quickly disappeared from the scene. It was a shock to the establishment that an anti-system party had been able to gather 10 per cent of the vote. One of those who participated in the National Assembly for the Poujadists in 1956 was Jean-Marie Le Pen, then the youngest MP ever. Three years later, he made headlines when he accused President Charles de Gaulle of a coup d'état: 'I allow myself to call a cat a cat and a coup d'état a coup d'état.'[4] At the beginning of 1960, he was arrested by the police for his calls for violent strikes, and when Prime Minister Michel Debré explained the contents of the peace agreement in Algeria in the spring of 1962, Le Pen exclaimed that he should be hanged.

In 1972, Le Pen became leader of the National Front (FN [Front National]), which began as a merger of several small extreme-right organisations and groups of veterans from the Algerian war. The FN is the single most important far-right party in post-war Europe. As Fieschi argues, Le Pen "rewrote the gamebook for challenger parties on the right and shaped contemporary populism".[5] The FN has had a huge influence not only on French but also on European politics, although, thus far, it has never been close to forming a government.

After having failed to gather interest and commitment among the extreme right in its first decade, the FN's

1 https://www.mediacites.fr/veracites-2022/jean-luc-melenchon-a-ete-un-soutien-aux-positions-de-poutine/
2 Le Point, January 27, 2019, https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/venezuela-les-encouragements-de-melenchon-a-nicolas-maduro-27-01-2019-2289257_20.php#11
3 Fieschi, p.44,
4 Dagens Nyheter, November 28, 1959.
5 Catherine Fieschi (2019), Populocrazy. The Tyranny of Authenticity of the Rise of Populism. Agenda Publishing, Newcastle.

breakthrough came in the 1983 municipal election – leading to several cooperations with the centre-right – and the 1984 EP election – the first electoral campaign wherein Le Pen benefitted from participating in primetime national TV debates. Ahead of the legislative election in 1986, the centre-right was divided on whether to cooperate with the far right. The introduction of a proportional electoral system was advantageous to the FN. Mitterrand was accused of pushing through the change to split the right and urging the media to give smaller parties more coverage. Due to a switch to a majoritarian electoral system in 1988, the FN lost their seats even though the electoral support remained around 10 per cent, and 15 per cent for Le Pen in the presidential election the same year.

Support continued to rise in the 1990s, while the party was still marginalised by other parties at the national level. In 1995, the NF won its first mayoral races in the towns of Toulon and Orange. In 2002, Le Pen shocked the establishment when he made it to the second round of the presidential election. This generated a large-scale mobilisation against the far right, with voters from the far left to the centre-right uniting behind the unpopular president Jacques Chirac in the final round.

The rest of the decade was difficult for the FN as it witnessed a decline in support. In 2011, Le Pen finally stepped aside and let his daughter, Marine Le Pen, take over the leadership of the party. She initiated a process of 'dédiabolisation' (de-demonisation), trying to moderate the party's message and give the FN a more modern perspective. Eventually, she changed the party name to National Rally (RN [Rassemblement National]). She even expelled her father from the party, which he had created.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's FN was the quintessential populist party. "Le Pen - le Peuple" read one of its famous electoral slogans. It followed in the anti-modernist tradition of Poujadism. True to its ideals, it was against the nation-wide celebration of the bicentennial of the revolution in 1989.[6] The FN formulated an ethnic version of French nationalism in sharp contrast to official republicanism. It was the party for those who never wanted to forget the Algerian War, and never forgave De Gaulle for the surrender. It barely tried to hide its antisemitism.

Marine Le Pen has tried to modernise the party in those aspects. Opposition to immigration, however, remains very important for the party, with arguments that immigration constitutes an existential threat to French identity. In his book Inside the Mind of Marine Le Pen, Michel Eltchaninoff argues that there indeed is an ideological base for the RN of Le Pen, even though many argue differently. He quotes Jean-Claude Martinez, senior member of the party, as saying that "Le Pen doesn't have any ideas. She only acts through instinct".

Economically, the RN used to be strictly right-leaning. It was even influenced by neo-liberal ideas of the 1970s and 1980s. However, since the 2000s, it has turned left; it currently supports a strong welfare state. On social issues, the party has become less conservative over time. When the National Assembly voted to constitutionally protect the right to abortion in March 2024, the party was divided in the vote.[7]

Although never part of the government, the FN/RN has been very influential even when it comes to policy. The established right gradually took steps to follow the anti-immigration stance, with Sarkozy almost outperforming the FN in this respect in the presidential campaign in 2007. The conservative and gaullist centre-right has continued down this path for most of the 2020s, with ever more disappointing electoral results.

During the pandemic, the RN exploited popular resistance against the COVID-19 restrictions. When Macron said that he wanted to 'emmerder' ('annoy') with the unvaccinated, he deepened the electoral divide, since surveys show that 90 per cent of the unvaccinated group supported Le Pen.[8]

Though always in the shadow of the FN or the RN, several other radical rights have appeared and enjoyed occasional success. The Movement for France (MPF) was founded in 1994 by Philippe de Villiers and enjoyed a brief success by finishing third in the 1994 EP elections. Self-described as a Gaullist party, it combined con-

6 Peter Davies, The Extreme Right In France

7 Politico, March 4, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/france-moves-to-make-abortion-a-constitutional-right-amid-rollbacks-in-us-and-europe/

8 https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/politique/arnaud-benedetti-le-macronisme-est-le-trumpisme-des-elites-20220105

servative ideals with soft Euroscepticism. France Arise (DLF [Debout la France]) is a Eurosceptic and anti-immigration party that was founded in 1999 by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan as a splinter from the centre-right Rally for the Republic.

Reconquête (R! [Reconquest]) was formed in 2021 by journalist Eric Zemmour. The party is regarded as being authoritarian and far right, as it leans towards the racist conspiracy theory of 'the great replacement'.[9] Zemmour has also expressed sympathy for the actions of the Vichy regime. R! wants to 'slash immigration to almost zero' and conduct a policy of 'de-Islamisation', including large-scale deportations.[10] Additionally, it is strongly Eurosceptic and also critical of France's involvement in NATO. On economic issues, it takes a right-wing position.

Zemmour had high opinion figures early in the presidential campaign but, eventually, he failed. R! also received a modest result in the legislative elections later that spring.

9 Meaning that Muslim migrants will replace French citizens.
10 EU Observer, December 6, 2021, https://euobserver.com/tickers/153731



Matt Hardy

FI SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

RN SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

R! SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **28/74**

The NF entered the EP in 1984, after which they formed the first far-right group in the parliament, together with the Italian Social Movement. The group existed until 1989 – now with Belgian and German far-right parties – but was dissolved in 1994. In 2007, the FN created the short-lived Tradition, Identity, Sovereignty group, which was dissolved the same year. The party then continued without group affiliation until 2015, when they formed the EFN group in 2019 and later renamed it ID. The RN currently holds 22 seats, being the dominant delegation in the ID group.

Since the first EP elections in 1979, the PCF has been one of the largest delegations in the far-left group, together with the Italian communists in the 1980s. Since 2019, the PCF has not been represented in the EP; the FI has taken its position and currently holds six seats.


GERMANY
POPULISM RANK: #24
Valeriia Miller

SUMMARY

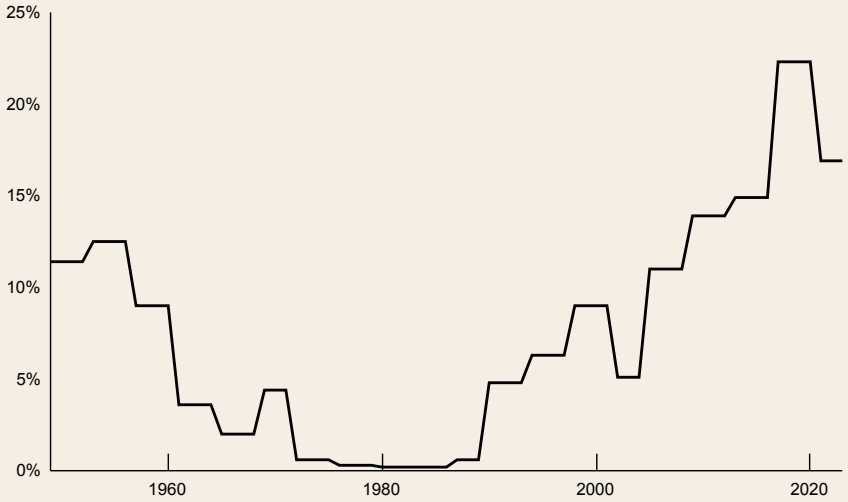
Voter support, radical left in 2021: **-4,4%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2021: **+2,6%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

In post-war Germany, extremist political parties were effectively marginalised. It took a significant amount of time before a right-wing populist party emerged in parliament. Even in the 2020s, both the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD [Alternative für Deutschland]) and the left-wing populist The Left [Die Linke] remained excluded from government cooperation.

In the inaugural elections of the West German Bundestag in 1949, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD [Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands]) secured parliamentary representation first and the last time in the post-war period, receiving just over 5 per cent of the vote. By the 1953 election, support for the KPD had dwindled by half. Since then, neither the KPD nor any other communist party has managed to secure electoral success.

Additionally, a fascist party, the German Right Party (DRP [Deutsche Rechtspartei]), obtained seats in the first democratic elections following the war. As no per centage threshold had been established, the DRP secured five mandates with a mere 1.8 per cent of the vote. Nonetheless, akin to the KPD, the DRP was unable to maintain its parliamentary presence in subsequent elections, never making a return to the political arena.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



In the 1950s, two nationalist but non-fascist parties emerged to the right of the major centre-right parties – the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU). The national conservative German Party (DP [Deutsche Partei]) became part of Konrad Adenauer's coalition government alongside the CDU and the liberal Free Democratic Party. Following the 1953 election, this coalition was joined by the All-German Bloc/League of Expellees and Deprived of Rights, which held parliamentary seats for one term. However, after the 1957 election, CDU/CSU governed alone; post-1960, there was no party to the right of them in parliament.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, anti-establishment parties faced minimal success in West Germany. The neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD [Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands]) emerged in 1964 and achieved some regional success. It secured representation in seven state parliaments during the 1966–1968 elections. At the federal level, the NPD nearly met the threshold in the 1969 election, benefitting from dissatisfaction with the grand coalition and the aftermath of the student revolts of the 1960s.

Support for the NPD declined rapidly in the 1970s. In the 1980s, new radical right parties emerged, including The

Republicans (REP) in 1983 and the German People's Union (DVU [Deutsche Volksunion]) in 1987. The REP, initially formed by defectors from the Bavarian-based CSU, experienced internal tensions between national conservatives and more radical factions. Conversely, the DVU, led by founder Gerhard Frey, tightly controlled the party from the top.

In 1987, the DVU secured a seat in the state election in Bremen and achieved moderate success in the north for the next decade, also gaining a mandate in the state parliament of Schleswig-Holstein. The REP, predominantly based in southern Germany, experienced its peak success in the 1989 EP election, garnering 7 per cent of the vote and gaining two MEPs. However, internal contradictions – such as conflicts between national conservatives and right-wing extremists – hindered the REP's momentum in the 1990s.

By the late 1990s, both the NPD and DVU experienced regional successes again. In 1998, the DVU won nearly 13 per cent of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt, followed by entry into the state parliament in Brandenburg the next year. However, internal divisions arose and meanwhile, the NPD secured representation in Saxony (2004) and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (2006). Both parties began cooperation, culminating in a merger in 2011.

Meanwhile, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) – successors to the East German Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) – entered the Bundestag in 1990. The PDS struggled to gain traction in western Germany but was increasingly successful in the East, ending up as the second-largest party in most elections in the eastern states. The party was isolated at most levels and faced internal strife.

In 2005, the Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG [Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative]) party was established by dissidents from the SPD who opposed Gerhard Schröder's liberal economic policies, in particular, the labour market reforms suggested by him. The WASG collaborated with the PDS in the 2005 election, leading to a complete merger in 2007 under the name The Left.

Throughout the late 2000s, the Die Linke consistently set new records in state elections, capitalising on the broader leftward shift in Europe following the 2008 financial crisis. The 2009 federal election was also successful for the party. However, at the federal level, the Die Linke remained politically isolated, facing a cordon sanitaire. Nonetheless, at the state level, it managed to break through, participating in several regional governments. In 2014, the party secured its first ministerial post after a successful election in Thuringia. However, its wave of success eventually waned and the party experienced setbacks in various elections during the latter half of the 2010s and early 2020s.

The classification of the Die Linke is disputed. The authors of The PopuList classify it as 'borderline populist, borderline far left'.[1] To some extent, it is a big tent organisation with various formalised factions, including the Communist Platform, which cooperates with the KPD.

Early on, one of the prominent figures in the party, Oskar Lafontaine, faced criticism for his use of the term 'fremdarbeiter' – a pejorative word for labour migrants, associated with Nazism – which was seen as anti-immigrant and reminiscent of a problematic populist worldview.[2] In the wake of the European refugee crisis of 2015, a faction within the party argued for a larger focus on limiting immigration.

In the 2021 election, the Die Linke was halved and achieved its worst election result since 2002, with 4.9 per cent of the vote. However, it retained proportional representation in the Bundestag thanks to the electoral system. The party is believed to have suffered from the CDU's negative campaign against its potential inclusion in the government. In 2022, a faction led by long-time party figure Sahra Wagenknecht opposed sanctions against Russia, contrary to the stance of the majority of her party. This disagreement led to a prolonged period of internal strife within the party. Eventually, in October 2023, Wagenknecht and her allies decided to leave the Die Linke. Subsequently, in January 2024, she founded the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW [Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht]), intending to contest the EP election. Although the BSW has yet to participate in an election, it has been polling significantly above the 5 per cent threshold.

1 https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Germany.pdf, see also Jonathan Olsen, "The Left Party and the AfD", German politics and society, 36:1, 2018, and . https://euagenda.eu/upload/publications/state_of_populism_in_europe_2020_final.pdf.pdf

2 http://www.signandsight.com/features/241.html

To the right, in the spring of 2013, the AfD emerged, founded by former CDU politicians, business leaders, and economists. The party garnered attention for the notable presence of academics among members, earning them the early nickname 'the professors' party'. Its central belief was that Germany should exit the Eurozone. Although narrowly missing entry into the German parliament in the fall of 2013, the following year, the party saw success in the EP election as well as in most subsequent state elections.

Initially, the AfD was Eurosceptic but economically liberal. Gradually, the party became more anti-immigrant and nationalist, especially after Frauke Petry was elected as spokesperson in the summer of 2015. This shift also had consequences at the European level, as the AfD, which had previously cooperated with the British Tories in the ECR group, moved towards the Austrian FPÖ.

After the refugee crisis in the autumn/winter of 2015–2016, the AfD had significant successes in the state elections in the spring of 2016. The party then adopted a strong anti-Islam agenda, asserting that Islam does not belong in Germany. At the same time, it demanded the lifting of sanctions against Russia. In the 2017 election, the AfD finally won seats at the federal level with almost 13 per cent of the vote. After the election, Petry left to form a new party (which failed), which resulted in another shift towards a more radical direction.

Leading representatives of the AfD have made a series of drastic statements. For example, Beatrix von Storch, the deputy leader – and granddaughter of Hitler's finance minister – advocated for the police to shoot at women and children trying to cross the border into Germany, although she later claimed that her computer mouse had slipped.[3] Von Storch also criticised the police in Cologne, who had tweeted a New Year's greeting in Arabic, accusing them of appeasing 'barbaric, gang-raping Muslim hordes of men'. Parliamentarian Alice Weidel defended von Storch, stating that the German authorities 'submit to imported, marauding, groping, beating, knifing migrant mob'.

In the September 2021 election, the AfD lost 2.3 per centage points, remaining at its second-best election result ever: 10.6 per cent. Additionally, the fascist NPD had its worst election ever, receiving only 0.1 per cent of the vote. Shortly after the election, the AfD began to grow in the polls again. The party now consists of a national-conservative faction as well as a more identitarian and radically anti-immigration one. Björn Höcke, seen as one of the leading representatives of this identitarian faction, has criticised and ridiculed the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin: 'Germans are the only people in the world who plant a monument of shame in the heart of the capital", "laughable policy of coming to terms with the past.'[4]

In June 2023, Robert Sesselmann was elected mayor of Sonneberg, a smaller city with 57,000 inhabitants. It was the first time an AfD candidate won a local election. Sesselmann won in the first round, with low voter turnout. In the second round, all other parties united against him, and voter turnout increased, but Sesselmann won with even greater support. This sparked a debate in Germany about the strategy of isolating versus cooperating with the party. In July 2023, Friedrich Merz, the new leader of the CDU, opened up to the idea of cooperating with the party locally, triggering strong reactions within his party. AfD's lead candidate in the EP election in 2024, Maximilian Krah, hails from the party's right-wing faction and has gained notoriety for his posts on TikTok, where he suffered a ban after spreading conspiracy spread conspiracy theories about population replacement. He has also asserted that "multicultural means multicriminal" and criticized Pride flags.[5]

3 The Guardian, January 3, 2018.

4 BBC News, January 18, 2017.

5 Politico, March 22, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/tiktok-curtail-germany-far-right-mep-eu-election-candidate-maximilian-krah-conspiracy-theory/

THE LINKE SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

BSW SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

AFD SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **18/96**

The Republicans won six MEPs in 1989 and joined the far-right group, Le Pen's National Front. They only remained in the EP for one five-year period. The PDS was first voted in in 1999, joining the GUE group. The PDS and its successor party the Die Linke have been represented in all parliaments since, always in the GUE group. The AfD won representation in 2014 and then again in 2019. It is currently a member of the ID group. In 2014, Germany abolished its threshold for EP elections, which led to several small parties gaining seats. In 2014, the NPD received 1 per cent of the vote, which was enough to gain an MEP. It lost representation in 2019.


GREECE
POPULISM RANK: #4
Spencer Davis

SUMMARY

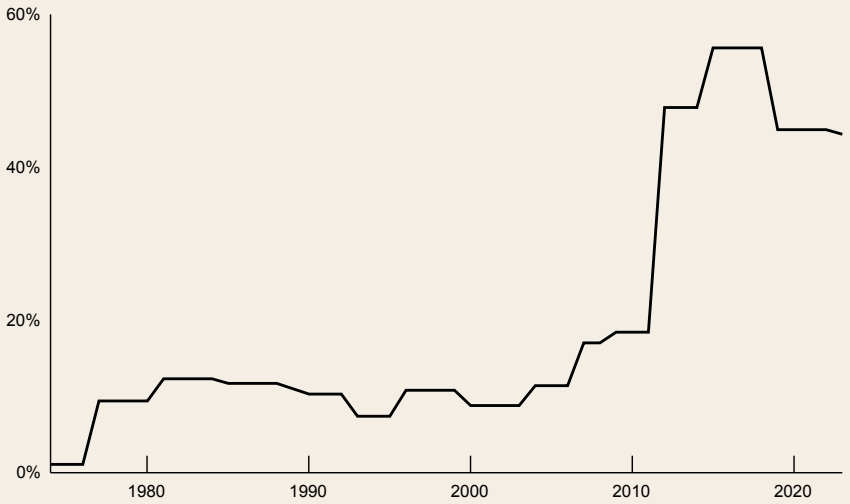
Voter support, radical left in 2023: -9,3%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: +6,2%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

Post-war Greece initially had a very volatile political landscape, with several broad coalitions lacking a clear ideological base. Gradually, conservative, centrist, and leftist parties consolidated their positions in the country. While the Socialist Party of Greece also included communists, radical right ideas were featured in the conservative and centrist parties. Nationalism has always been mainstream in Greece.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE [Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas]) dates back to 1918 and is the oldest party in the country. It was banned in the 1930s and not legalised again until after the fall of the military junta in the late 1970s. While still illegal, the KKE suffered a split in 1967 when supporters of Eurocommunism formed the KKE Interior, criticising the KKE for being ruled by the 'exterior', i.e., the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, both parties competed together in the first election after the fall of the junta in 1974.

The KKE Interior split in the 1980s, and one of its factions reunited with the KKE to form the electoral coalition Synaspismos for the 1989 legislative elections. This alliance then entered a short-lived coalition with the conservative New Democracy; this was the only time that the KKE was a part of the Greek government.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The KKE remains fairly popular, despite being loyal to the old ideas of Marxism–Leninism and a communist revolution. In addition to being far to the left on economic issues, the KKE is against the Greek membership in NATO and the EU and takes conservative positions on social issues.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the United Democratic Left attracted many communist voters, even though the party never openly supported communism, as well as non-communist supporters.

Synaspismos was one of several factions that merged to form the Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (Syriza) in 2004. The party had modest success in its early years. It was the Greek financial crisis that turned Syriza into the major left-wing party in Greece, allowing it to profit from the dissatisfaction with the austerity deal that the government – a grand coalition of the PASOK and New Democracy – reached with the so-called European Troika (the EC, the ECB, and the IMF).

Syriza won the snap elections held in January 2015, and party leader Alexis Tsipras became prime minister, with Yanou Varoutakis taking the position of finance minister. Trying to deliver on their promise to the voters to renegotiate the loan agreement, they

travelled to European capitals, in a failed attempt to persuade the leaders of other countries to accept their opposition to the austerity policy. The refusal of the Syriza government to the Troika's proposed reform of pensions and the labour market led to a stalemate. In June 2015, Tsipras asked for an extension of the deadline for the loan payment, having called a referendum on the terms of the bailout. The Troika refused to extend the deadline, but after Tsipras got the result he wanted in the referendum, new negotiations started. Under Syriza's leadership, Greece accepted most of the demands of the creditors. This led to splits within Syriza, with Tsipras being accused of betraying the radicalism of the leftist movement. After losing several MPs, Tsipras called a new snap election in August 2015. Surprisingly, the voters returned Syriza and its coalition partner, Independent Greeks – National Patriotic Alliance (ANEL [Anexartitoi Ellines]), to the government with almost the same support as in the previous election. This government remained in power until 2019.

In the 2000s, Syriza was described as an emblematic case of European left-wing populism.According to political scientist Cas Mudde, Syriza constitutes a 'rejuvenated form' of Greek left populism, which is characterised by overpromises on which parties seldom deliver.[1] By opponents, and also some experts, Syriza has been accused of authoritarian ideals and methods, some arguing that it tried to push through similar reforms as national populist leaders in Hungary and Poland.

These accusations have been exemplified by proposed electoral reform and interference in the administration of government agencies and the party's media policy. In 2016, the Syriza government wanted to regulate the media market and limit the number of licences issued, meaning that half of Greece's eight TV channels would have to shut down. The government argued that reform of the licensing system was necessary to reduce corruption in the media industry and increase the revenue to the treasury. The idea was that the TV broadcasting licences would be auctioned at a starting price of €3 million. However, several TV channels appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, arguing that the auction violated the constitution because it would be run by the government instead of the independent State Media Council.

1 Mudde, Cas (2016), SYRIZA: The Failure of the populist promise. Palgrave, MacMillan.

Both the New Democracy and PASOK claimed that the auction was an attempt to gain 'absolute control' over the media and that Syriza showed a lack of respect for democracy and freedom of expression. The Supreme Court invalidated the auction in October 2016. However, Syriza – and media minister Nikos Pappas, who was responsible for the auction – was unrelenting in its ambitions to reform the Greek media industry. Pappas maintained, 'Legal decisions do not make governments, only the people do'.[2]

The years spent in government had had a moderating and deradicalizing effect on Syriza, which softened its Euroscepticism and anti-elite rhetoric. This led to several splits from the party and, eventually, weakened opinion polls. Late in 2023, the PASOK once again overtook the position as the largest left-wing party in the country.

Several other populist left movements have appeared in recent years. Popular Unity – Insubordinate Left (LAE [Laïkí Enótita]) was formed in 2015. It believes that Greece should leave the EU and NATO. It also upholds a strong anti-elitist rhetoric. Zoe Konstantopoulou, a former speaker of parliament, distanced herself from the austerity policy of the Syriza government and formed Course of Freedom (PE [Plefsi Eleftherias]) in 2016. The PE is a left-wing nationalist and populist party, which opposes neo-liberalism and globalism as well as North Macedonia's right to use the name Macedonia.

MeRa25 [Métopo Evropaikís Realistikís Anypakoís] was formed in 2018 by Yanis Varoufakis, who was formerly the finance minister in the Syriza government. It is part of a Europe-wide moment for radical leftist ideas, is strongly anti-capitalism, and has been described as populist and reactionary.[3] It entered parliament in 2019 but was voted out in 2023.

Following the fall of the military junta in 1974, far right-parties had a hard time for several decades. In 1984, former junta leader, Georgios Papadopoulos, formed a far-right party, the National Political Union. It never had any success in Greek elections, alt-

2 New York Times, August 30, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/30/world/europe/greece-cracks-down-on-triangle-of-corruption-in-tv.html, Financial Times, October 27, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/c8d5347e-9bd0-11e6-8f9b-70e3cabccfae

3 https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Greece.pdf

hough it managed to win a seat in the EP in 1984.

The first radical right party to achieve some success was the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS [Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós]). In the early 2000s, LAOS gained momentum as a national conservative and more populist alternative to the right of New Democracy, of which it was a splinter party. In 2011–2012, in the early days of the Greek financial crisis, the LAOS was part of Lucas Papademos' national unity government. After this, the party quickly lost support.

In the 1970s, a young man named Nikolaos Michaloliakos active in right-wing extremist circles was convicted of assault. In prison, Michaloliakos met representatives of the junta that had been overthrown in 1974. Once released, he founded the newspaper Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) in 1980. The newspaper was discontinued four years later, and Michaoliakos became a member of the far-right National Political Union. After becoming the leader of the party's youth union, he broke away and formed the Popular National Movement - Golden Dawn.

Amid the nationwide protests in Greece against Macedonian independence, new far-right activists were attracted to the Golden Dawn, which was registered as a political party in 1993. In its very first election – to the EP in 1994 – it gained 0.1 per cent of the votes. At this time, the party consisted of various groups of right-wing extremists, several of whom fought as volunteers for Republika Srpska in the Bosnian War. In the 1996 parliamentary elections, it gathered even less and remained a peripheral political force. Nonetheless, it gained media attention through its members' violent crimes against immigrants and repeated confrontations with anarchist and left-wing extremist groups. For instance, in 1999, two Albanians were murdered in central Athens by a party member provoked by the burning of the Greek flag during a football match between Greece and Albania.

In the early 2000s, the party formally ceased to exist. After a failed collaboration with another far-right party – the Patriotic Alliance – the Golden Dawn was resurrected in 2007. The first major success as a party came in the local elections in 2010 when it won 5 per cent of the vote in Athens, which gave it a mandate in the municipal parliament. National success then followed in 2012, with 7 per cent of the vote and 21 mandates. Part of the success can be attributed to the party prioritising social and economic issues such as opposition to welfare cuts and unemployment. Its activists also showed a strong presence in poor neighbourhoods, handing out food to the poor.

In 2012, the Golden Dawn MP Ilias Kasidiaris threw a glass of water at a female opponent in a live TV debate, after which he dealt several blows to the head of another. The TV broadcast was quickly interrupted, but the images quickly spread on social media around the world and became a perfect illustration of how close violence was to the Greek fascists. Notably, Kasidiaris has also denied the Holocaust.
The Golden Dawn is without reservation an extremist far-right party with a fascist ideology. It benefitted from the financial crisis and was re-elected in 2015 but its support began to drop in the late 2010s and it is no longer represented in parliament.

To some extent, its place has been taken by two other far-right parties. The Spartans is a neo-fascist and ultra-nationalist party that was formed in 2016 and entered parliament for the first time in 2023. The Democratic Patriotic Movement "Victory" was formed in 2019 and is equally nationalist, but has strongly ultra-conservative views on social issues.

ANEL is yet another nationalist party, although without fascist roots. It was formed as a splinter of New Democracy in 2012. It became a minor coalition party to the Syriza in the 2015 government as both parties found common ground in opposition to the EU's bailout programme, austerity policy, and foreign interference in Greek domestic policy. ANEL's nationalism became apparent when party leader Panos Kammenos resigned from the post of defence minister in 2018 due to his opposition to the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. The agreement resolved the name conflict that has severed relations between the two countries ever since North Macedonia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1993.

The Greek Solution (EL [Ellinikí Lýsi]) made some gains in the 2019 and 2022 elections, winning 3 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. It was formed in 2016 by former MPs of the LAOS and is considered a far-right party with a strong focus on ethnic Greek nationalism.

KKE SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

SYRIZA SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

EL SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **11/21**

The KKE has been represented in the EP since Greece entered in 1981. It was a member of the GUE group until it left in 2014, claiming that the GUE had given up on its radical ideas. The KKE-E was also represented in the EP in the 1980s. The LAOS won one seat in 2004 and two in 2009, joining the EFD group.

Syriza won its first MEP in 2009, joining the GUE group together with the KKE. In 2014, Syriza became the biggest party in the EP election, winning six seats. In the same election, Golden Dawn won three seats. However, since no other party wanted to cooperate with the Golden Dawn, its MEPs were non-inscrits for the entire period.

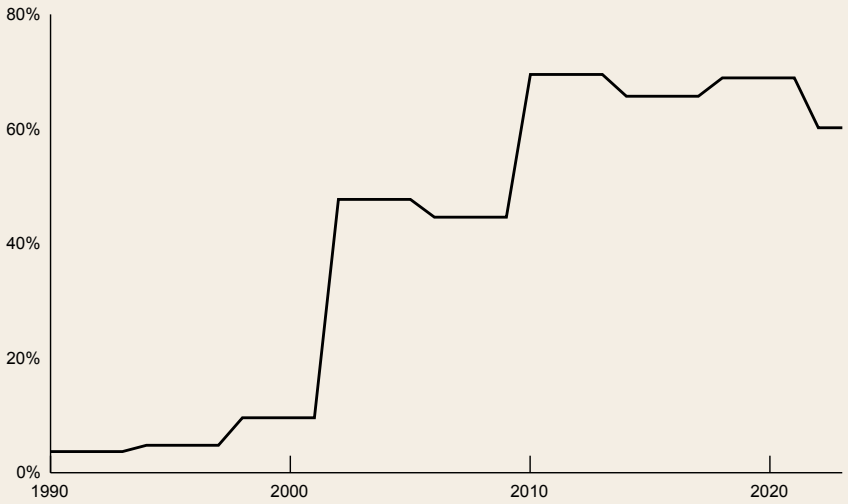
In the current parliament, Greece has a majority of either far-left or far-right MEPs. Syriza has six seats, all participating in the GUE group. The KKE and Golden Dawn have two seats each, all of them acting outside of the organised groups. In addition, the EL won one seat, as a non-inscrit.


HUNGARY
POPULISM RANK: #1
Timi Keszthelyi

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: **-0,1%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2022: **-8,6%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **FIDESZ**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Unlike in other post-communist countries, there was never a unified opposition movement against communism in Hungary. By the time of the first democratic elections in 1990, the opposition was already divided into liberal, agrarian, Christian democratic, and conservative parties. Nationalist currents existed within all these parties, perhaps most notably in the first election's winner, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF [Magyar Demokrata Fórum]), whose leader József Antall flirted with irredentist sentiments and believed that the Hungarian nation transcended the borders of the state.

In 1993, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP [Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja]) was formed following a split from the MDF. The MIEP was an antisemitic and extreme nationalist party. It entered parliament in 1998 and was one of the first far-right parties to achieve success in the region, which garnered international attention.

The transformation of the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz, formed in 1988) from a social liberal to a national conservative party was initially less visible. Part of the reason was the gradual nature of this shift, with the Fidesz already moving in a more conservative direction before the 1994 parliamentary election. However, the transition to a national conservative and authoritarian populist party occurred primarily during the 2000s. During Fidesz's first term in office from 1998 to 2002, the reform policies initiated by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP [Magyar Szocialista Párt]) in the previous term were carried forward, and Hungary took significant steps towards EU membership. The Fidesz's return to power and landslide victory in the 2010 election was facilitated by widespread discontent with corruption within the incumbent left-wing government.

The Fidesz founder Viktor Orbán's project is based on populism, nationalism, and an authoritarian view of governance. In his political speeches in recent years, Orbán repeatedly highlights demography, migration, and gender as three crucial issues. Demography refers to the low birth rate in Hungary and the long-term risk that the Hungarian nation may not be able to reproduce itself. Migration alludes, without reservations, to conspiracy theories of population replacement, suggesting that migrants will come to replace Hungarians. Gender pertains to the perception that the Western world embraces a gender ideology according to which natural gender roles should be broken down.

The party's victory in the 2010 election provided him with a supermajority, enabling him to amend the constitution. Essentially, Orbán transformed the Hungarian constitution from an instrument of democratic governance into a tool of populist rule by incorporating legal changes into the constitution rather than enacting them as regular legislation.

The current Hungarian constitution came into force on 1 January 2012, and the Hungarian Parliament has passed a total of twelve amendments to the constitution since then. The constitution and its amendments have been criticised by Hungarian opposition parties, human rights organisations, and international bodies such as the Venice Commission, which is the EC's advisory expert group on constitutional law. The constitution has been criticised both for its content and how it has been written. The preamble reflects the national-conservative ideology of the Fidesz party, mentioning Christianity as central to the survival of the Hungarian nation and stating that 'the family and the nation constitute the fundamental framework of our coexistence'. Later in the constitution, marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman.

The Fidesz constitution undermines the separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches of government and the Hungarian courts in many ways. For example, the rules for appointing judges to the Constitutional Court of Hungary have been changed to allow the government to nominate and appoint judges without considering the opinions of opposition parties, which they had been required to do previously. The new rules for appointment to the Constitutional Court also mean that the Hungarian Parliament selects the president of the Constitutional Court for a term of twelve years, instead of the earlier rule of the judges choosing a president for a term of three years. In 2011, the number of judges on the Constitutional Court increased from eleven to fifteen. By the end of 2014, a total of eleven judges had been appointed by the Fidesz majority in parliament.

The fourth amendment to the constitution, which passed on 11 March 2013, has been perhaps the most controversial addition, as it contains provisions that strengthen the state's power. For instance, it limits the authority of the Constitutional Court by invalidating all decisions made by the court before the new constitution came into force in 2012 and repeals the Constitutional Court's power to invalidate laws already written into the constitution. The amendment also restricts the Constitutional Court to only invalidate an amendment to the constitution on procedural grounds, i.e., if the parliamentary vote does not occur correctly, not based on the content of the amendment. The fourth amendment also limits opportunities for campaigning outside of state media.[1]

After receiving criticism from both the EC and the Council of Europe, the Hungarian government made another amendment to the constitution in 2013, which allowed political campaign advertisements in both state and commercial media.

At this time, Orbán claimed that Hungary was 'fully dedicated' to European standards. It was not until a speech in the summer of 2014 that Orbán mentioned the phrase he is now often associated with, 'illiberal democracy'. The last ten years, Orbán has positioned himself as a defender of national sovereignty and as the leader of European nations fighting against globalism, multiculturalism and liberalism. The nationalist worldview was articulated in a frequently cited speech by Orbán:

> *"We do not want our own colour, traditions and national culture to be mixed with those of others. We do not want that at all. We do not want to be a diverse country. We want to be how we became 1,100 years ago here in the Carpathian Basin."*[2]

Orbáns' and Fidesz' nationalism is also directed against the neighbouring states. In the fall of 2022, Orbán attended a football match, wearing a scarf depicting a map of Hungary's borders before the Treaty of Trianon which sparked condemnation from both Ukraine and Romania.[3] In a speech in 2023 in Romania, he claimed that Transylvania and Szeklerland did not belong to Romania: "we have never claimed that these are Romanian administrative areas."[4]
Since the Fidesz came to power in 2010, Orbán's government has gra-

1 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21748878
2 Politico, July 26, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/on-hungary-viktor-orban-racing-mixing-comments-brussels-looks-the-other-way/
3 Euronews, November 22, 2022, https://www.euronews.com/2022/11/22/viktor-orban-criticised-for-wearing-scarf-with-greater-hungary-map
4 https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-32nd-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp/

dually reshaped the Hungarian media landscape, with Hungary steadily declining in press freedom rankings such as Freedom House's. Early in Fidesz's first term, the party focussed on reforming Hungarian media legislation. In the latter half of 2010, five different laws were implemented without input from other parties or stakeholders. The Hungarian government has referred to other European legislation and systems, including the Swedish Public Employment Service, to demonstrate that Hungarian media legislation complies with European norms.

However, a study from the Central European University has found that these references were arbitrary. This study concludes that Hungarian media legislation violates European norms by centralising control over all types of media, including digital, to a single authority, allowing the media council to appoint positions within state media, and granting extensive sanctioning powers to the media council.[5]

The media laws enacted in 2010 centralised all media regulation – not just for state media but also for private print and digital media – under one authority called National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH [Nemzeti Média- es Hírközlési Hatóság]), whose head also leads a media council of five people. This media council is responsible for content regulation. Every news organisation in the country – including internet-based ones – must register with the media council within sixty days of starting operations, facing fines if they fail to do so.

The media council has extensive powers to fine and, in some cases, shut down media organisations if their reporting is deemed unbalanced or incites hatred against nations, minority groups, or even majority groups. The head of the media council has the authority to nominate individuals to leadership positions within all state media – a process that usually does not occur internally within public service media. The new media laws also centralised all state media under one umbrella – Media Services and Support Trust Fund (MTVA [Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap]) – which is overseen by the media council.

5 http://medialaws.ceu.hu/summary.html

Simultaneously, when the new media laws came into force in 2010, many senior executives and hundreds of employees were dismissed from state media, according to labour representatives. These dismissals were justified by the government as part of a 'restructuring' necessary due to budget cuts. However, shortly after the dismissals, state media received a significant budget increase, strengthening suspicions that this restructuring was politically motivated.

Control over universities is also being tightened. Research institutes sympathetic to the regime receive the funding they need to inundate universities with national-conservative views. A law with the revealing name "Stop Soros" entailed heavy taxation and extensive state control over non-governmental organisations working for freedom of movement and minority rights. A necessary measure, according to Viktor Orbán, to protect Hungary from becoming an immigrant country.[6]

In April 2018, the Hungarian parliament passed a law stipulating that a particular type of institution, funded from abroad but conducting educational activities in Hungary, must operate in both Hungary and the donor's home country. The law also requires such educational institutions to have obtained permission to operate in Hungary through a bilateral agreement between the Hungarian government and the donor's home country (in this case, the USA). Coincidentally, there was only one such educational institution in Hungary: the Central European University (CEU), financed by Hungarian-American businessman George Soros and long seen as a liberal bastion in Central Europe. In 2021, Hungary repealed a proposed NGO law that specifically aimed to cover civil society organisations receiving foreign grants of at least 24,000 euros, effectively targeting Soros-sponsored organisations. Amnesty International argued that the proposed NGO law, especially the term "foreign agents," strongly resembles similar legislation pushed through by Putin's government in Russia to discredit civil society and turn people against international human rights organisations.[7]

6 Dagens Nyheter, April 9, 2018, https://www.dn.se/nyheter/varlden/starkt-orban-ska-forsvara-for-ungrare-som-hjalper-flyktingar/

7 Amnesty International, April 22, 2021 https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/04/hungary-lexngo-repealed-but-replacement-very-concerning/

Since 2012, Orbán's government has made several changes to electoral laws as well. Among other things, the number of members in parliament has been halved, and the number of electoral districts decreased from 176 to 106 – changes that are advantageous for the Fidesz.

In economic matters, the Fidesz is difficult to categorise. Although Orbán positions himself to the right, in practice, he has advocated for and implemented nationalisations, expansions of the state bureaucracy, and profit caps on companies.[8]

Early on, the Fidesz was challenged from the right by Jobbik – Conservatives (Movement for a Better Hungary). Jobbik emerged from the remnants of the defunct MIEP before the 2002 election and made significant strides in the 2010 election. At the subsequent opening of parliament, party leader Gábor Vona took his oath of office wearing a black vest resembling the uniform of the paramilitary organisation Hungarian Guard, reinforcing the informal links between the far-right movements parliamentary and extra-parliamentary currents.

Initially, Jobbik continued the antisemitic tradition in Hungary. In 2013, it organised protests against the Jewish World Congress held in Budapest, with Vona telling his supporters that 'The Israeli conquerors, these investors, should look for another country in the world for themselves because Hungary is not for sale.'[9]

Jobbik has gradually moderated its stance and seeks to rebrand itself as a conservative European party. It has abandoned its criticism of the EU and now participates in a broad electoral alliance that gathers most opposition forces against the Fidesz. Given the history of the party, however, the democratic credibility of the party can be questioned.

The Our Homeland Movement (MHM [Mi Hazánk Mozgalom]) was formed in 2018 as a splinter from Jobbik by members disappointed by the party's moderation strategy. The MHM is a radically nationalist, anti-immigration, and hard Eurosceptic party. It is openly racist and authoritarian. On economic issues, they strive to make Hungary economically independent from other countries. They won almost six per cent in the 2022 election which made them the third largest party

8 https://www.theunpopulist.net/p/right-wing-populists-are-just-as?utm_medium=email
9 BBC, May 4th, 2013.



EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **14/21**

Since Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, the Fidesz has won all EP elections in the country and has been a member of the EPP group in the EP. In 2019, Fidesz was suspended from the EPP but did not leave the party group until 2021.[10]

The Jobbik has been represented in the EP since 2009 but has never been part of a party group.

10 https://www.politico.eu/article/epp-suspension-rules-fidesz-european-parliament-viktor-orban-hungary/

FIDESZ SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

JOBBIK SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

MHM SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**


ICELAND
POPULISM RANK: #21
Matt Hardy

SUMMARY

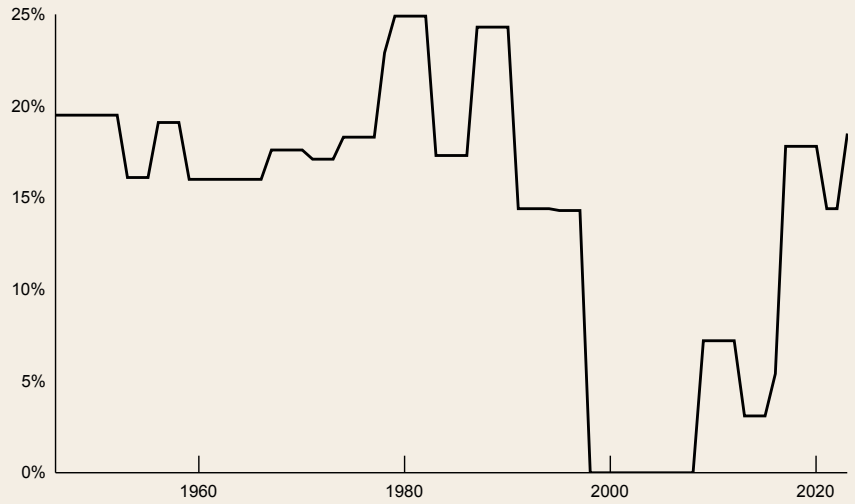
Voter support, radical left in 2021: +4,1%.
Voter support, radical right in 2021: -5,4%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

The Icelandic party system was highly stable until the twenty-first century, with only a handful of parties in parliament. However, the financial crisis between 2008-11 changed this. Since then, many parties have been formed, both liberal and populist ones.

Iceland is one of the countries that had a strong communist party in the years following World War II. The People's Unity Party – Socialist Party was formed in 1938 as an alliance between the Communist Party of Iceland (formed in 1930) and a splinter group from the Social Democratic Party. Although the communists were the dominant force within this new group, they abandoned their membership in the Communist International (Comintern) before World War II. In the first post-war elections, the Socialist Party was successful, reaching almost 20 per cent of the vote, and participated in the coalition government until 1949.

In 1956, the Socialist Party formed the People's Alliance (AB [Alþýðubandalagið]) with another splinter group from the Social Democratic Party. The AB remained a strong radical left alternative, reaching its peak with almost 25 per cent of the vote in the late 1970s. It participated in five coalition governments between the 1950s and the 1990s.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The Citizens' Party was a short-lived, right-wing populist party that entered parliament in 1987. The Citizens' Movement was another short-lived populist party founded in reaction to the 2008 financial crisis, which won representation in the 2009 parliamentary election.

The People's Party is a populist and softly Eurosceptic party that has been represented in parliament since 2016. It combines left-wing economic policy with conservative positions on cultural issues. The party was formed by Inga Sæland, who has a visual impairment; the party's primary motivation has been to aid and improve the lives of the disabled.[TCC1]

The Centre Party was founded in 2017 as a splinter of the Progressive Party. It is conservative, agrarian, and populist and gathered almost 11 per cent of the vote in the 2017 parliamentary elections. It should also be noted that the Progressive Party – one of Iceland's oldest and most powerful parties – has been classified as populist by some analysts in recent times, although that classification is disputed.[1]

1 https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Iceland.pdf, https://iris.rais.is/en/publications/populism-in-iceland-has-the-progressive-party-turned-populist



Matt Hardy

EP ELECTIONS

Not a member of the European Union.

FIF SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

M SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

MIÐFLOKKURINN

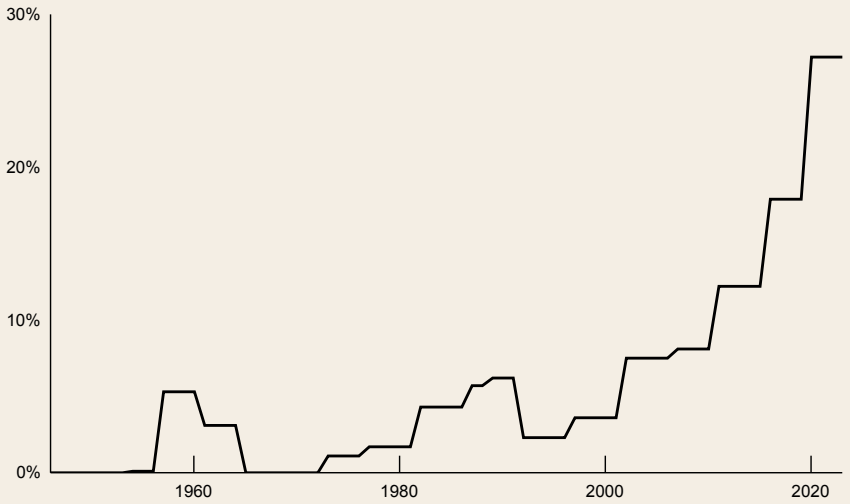


Iain

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2020: +9,7%.
Voter support, radical right in 2020: +0,5%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Ireland is one of those countries where new parties have faced the most difficulties in gaining ground. Since the country's independence in 1920, Irish party politics has been dominated by the two catholic centre-right parties: Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG). The Labour Party – among the more centrist social democratic parties in Europe – has been the third-largest party in Ireland for a long time. The country's electoral system has favoured eccentric candidates from the major parties but disadvantaged new actors outside the party system. For several decades, the high level of emigration from Ireland has reduced the social pressure for change, in what is essentially a very conservative political landscape, narrowing the space for newcomers and alternatives even more.

As a consequence, no radical right-wing party has ever emerged in Ireland, and the contenders on the left wing have had few successes. Ireland's communist party, the Workers' Party (WP), has roots dating back to the early twentieth century. Until the 1980s, the communists had very weak voter support and did not win a seat in parliament. Unusual for a European communist party, it achieved its greatest success towards the end of the decade. In the 1989 EP election, the WP became the fifth-largest party with 7 per cent of the vote. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the party split when a reformist section broke away while the orthodox members remained. Eventually, the reformers merged with the Labour Party. Since the split, the WP has gathered less than 1 per cent of the vote in the elections.
Two older Trotskyist parties from the 1970s have maintained some relevance in the 2000s. The Socialist Party was formed in 1972 by defectors from the Labour Party who referred to themselves as the Militant Tendency. The SP remained faithful to the revolutionary methods and the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, and, consequently, remained small. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is another Trotskyist party that had to endure very weak voter support.

The 2008 financial crisis motivated severe cuts in welfare spending, something all established parties stood behind. Therefore, attempts were made to create a broad left-wing radical movement in Ireland with inspiration from Podemos and Syriza to mobilise against the austerity policy. Both the old Trotskyist parties participated: the SP established the Anti-Austerity Alliance while the SWP had already formed the People Before Profit (PBP) in 2005.

However, the 2011 general election – the first after the financial crisis – was a failure. Much of the blame for this was placed on dogmatic communists unable to let go of their old-fashioned ideological analysis.[1]

Nonetheless, this movement gained renewed vigour in 2014–2015 when the Fine Gael–Labour Party government proposed to introduce charges on water. However, a major campaign, the Right2Water Ireland, again paid off poorly on election day, resulting in marginal success in the 2016 election. The PBP has since allied with the Anti-Austerity Alliance (renamed as Solidarity party) as People Before Profit–Solidarity. The PBP–S uses the label eco-socialism for its ideology. Nevertheless, the party's Trotskyist core remains, as its opponents like to point out. The party has hardliner class rhetoric and advocates an Irish Brexit; it is the only party in Ireland with parliamentary representation opposed to EU integration. It has opposed sanctions on Russia.

The 2020 Irish general election was described as an earthquake. For the first time, the Sinn Féin (SF) gained the most votes (24 per cent) in an election. SF was established in 1905 but did not participate regularly in elections in the 1980s. As late as the mid 1990s, it merely garnered around one per cent of the votes. The SF's classification has been debated in the literature. Several political scientists describe the party as a left-wing populist with a pronounced we-against-them discourse that pits the people against the elite. But while the SF shows several features of classic populism, it has become less anti-establishment over time and is largely a mainstream party today. While it is a nationalist party, nationalism has been a left-wing position in Ireland, and the party displays few similarities with other nationalist parties in Europe. It has also not engaged in anti-immigration rhetoric.

The success in recent years can be attributed to several factors such as the party broadening from a one-sided focus on a united Ireland to more general left-wing politics and a popular party leader in Mary Lou McDonald. The party also benefited from a focus on housing policy – one of the main issues in Ireland in recent years. The SF promised voters a sizeable investment in rental apartments and rent ceilings. 'A New Ireland was born yesterday', McDonald declared after the election.[2]

The SF continued to do even better in the polls until a decline in 2023. Some analysts suggest that this was due to a lack of understanding of the migration issue and the difficulties of uniting social conservative and urban liberal segments within the same party.

1 Richard Dunphy, "Beyond nationalism? The Anti-Austerity social movement in Ireland", Journal of civil society, 13:3, 2017. https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/18634479/s1_ln27015578837028655_1939656818Hwf714326221ldV_41353096227015578PDF_HI0001.pdf

2 Foreign Policy, February 14, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/14/ireland-elections-sinn-fein-populism/

SF SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

Sinn Féin

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **1/14**

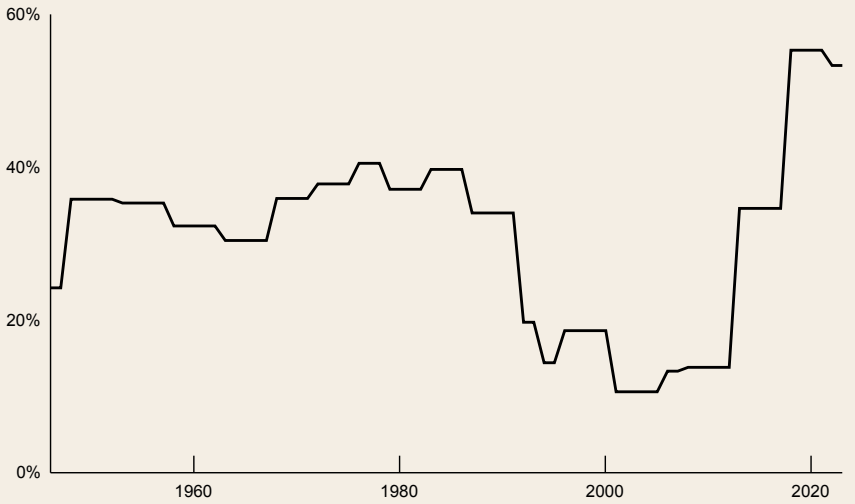
Ireland has been particularly well represented in the radical left group in the EP. The WP won one seat in 1989, and the SP won one seat in 2009. In 2019, four of Ireland's thirteen seats went to GUE-NGL: one seat for the SF, two seats for the socialist party, the Independents 4 Change , and one for an independent candidate.


ITALY
POPULISM RANK: #2
Mark Neal

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: **-1,1%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2022: **+16,4%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **FDL & LEGA**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



In recent decades, the Italian party system has been highly fragmented and marked by the presence of various parties, coalitions, and high volatility. During the post-war period, however, Italian politics was dominated by three main parties: the Christian Democracy (DC [Democrazia Cristiana]), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI [Partito Socialista Italiano]), and the Italian Communist Party (PCI [Partito Comunista Italiano]). The DC attracted voters from the political centre and right and held the prime ministerial position uninterrupted from the end of World War II until 1981. On the left, the PCI was the stronger party overall, with the PSI playing a subordinate role.

The 1948 general election was particularly significant for the country, as Italian politics became a battleground in the global conflict between East and West during the early years of the Cold War. Strong support from the United States allowed the DC to win the election after a highly controversial and dirty campaign.

The PSI broke ties with the PCI after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. On the other hand, the DC moved towards the left, shifting the balance in the party system towards the centre, despite the presence of a strong communist party in the country. During the 1970s, the PCI sought cooperation with the DC and began promoting Eurocommunism and distancing itself from the Soviet Union. From 1976 to 1978, the PCI supported the DC in parliament, marking a historic collaboration. This partnership ended in 1978 with the assassination of Aldo Moro, who was a left-leaning prime minister for the DC in the 1960s and 1970s. The PCI also condemned the Red Brigades but lost popularity due to general dissatisfaction with left-wing radicalism. However, following the death of popular party leader Enrico Berlinguer, the PCI was the largest party in the EP elections in 1984 – the first time a communist party won a national election in western Europe since the 1950s.

In the 1990s, the mainstream from the PCI entered the new democratic left coalition that was formed and which, through several mergers and alliances, now constitutes the core of the leading social democratic party, the Democratic Party (PD). The radical leftist ideas were kept alive in the newly formed The Communist Refoundation Party (PRC [Partito della Rifondazione Comunista]) with relatively strong voter support, receiving at least five percent of the votes in each election until 2006. The party now leads a dwindling existence.

There has always been relatively strong support for radical right-wing alternatives in Italy. The first radical right-

wing parliamentary challenger was the Front of the Ordinary Man (FQ [Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque]). The party opposed the anti-fascist parties upfront and was hence accused of harbouring many former fascists. It also advocated for the monarchy. The party was formed in 1946 and led by Guglielmo Giannini. It participated in the elections of 1946 and 1948. The FQ rejected ideologies and saw no significant difference between fascists and anti-fascists. The party had brief successes in the 1946 election but later lost voters to the DC. The remnants of the party merged into the Italian Social Movement (MSI [Movimento Sociale Italiano]) in the 1970s. 'Qualunquismo' has since become a term for a cynical view of politics, similar to Poujadism in France in the 1950s.

The MSI was founded in Rome in 1946. The party carried on the legacy of Mussolini and aimed to restore fascism and crush democracy. The MSI had many local branches, was funded through private donations, and collaborated with fascists across Europe. It benefitted from Italy never fully reckoning with its past in the same way as Germany, which allowed it to propagate the narrative that the Italian regime had been relatively harmless. The party became a home for many who had worked under Mussolini. However, voter support was weak, and its first election (1948) was a disappointment. The MSI gradually evolved in a post-fascist direction.

In 1994, the party was replaced by the National Alliance (AN [Alleanza Nationale]) – a democratic and national conservative party – through a merger with factions of the DC. Former MSI members dominated AN, and MSI's last leader, Gianfranco Fini, became its party leader.

The Forza Italia (FI) emerged when a vacuum was created on the right after the corruption scandals of 1992–1993, also known as Tangentopoli. Many initially believed that the reformed communists in the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS [Partito Democratico della Sinistra]) would benefit from this incident and come to power. Instead, media magnate Silvio Berlusconi formed the FI– a populist but pro-European, pro-market party with an ideology similar to that of the DC – in 1994, which became the largest party in the general election that year. Although the party shared many similarities with populist parties in terms of political communication, it also positioned itself ideologically and policy-wise close to the former Christian Democrats and quickly became part of the establishment. Occasionally, FI under Berlusconi turned softly eurosceptic, and it can be considered a borderline populist party for much of its existence.

The FI formed an alliance with the AN in southern Italy. The AN was a broad party with several factions. Economically, it was to the left of Berlusconi and advocated for more state intervention. It reconsidered its view on the EU, aiming to become part of a large right-wing coalition. However, it retained the MSI symbol in its party logo to emphasise continuity, while leaders often distanced themselves from fascism and Nazism. In 2009, it eventually merged into a Berlusconi-led coalition called The People of Freedom.

In the north, the FI allied with Lega Nord (LN [Northern League]). The LN was formed in 1989 through the merger of several regional parties in northern Italy, the most important of which were Lega Lombardo and Liga Veneta. The LN was a secessionist party that advocated for the independence of the northern regions of Italy from the central authority under the proposed name Padania. In addition, it was critical of immigration and placed itself to the right on economic issues. The LN made a breakthrough in regional elections in 1990, followed by its first national success in the 1992 and 1994 elections, when it formed an alliance with the FI.

The LN participated in Berlusconi's first government in 1994 and secured five ministerial positions: budget, interior, industry, Europe, and institutional reforms. However, conflicts within the government between the LN and the centralist AN led to the government's downfall after about a year. In 1996, the FI lost the election to the centre-left.

In the 1996 election, the LN ran independently, and apart from the left and right coalitions, ruled out further collaboration with Berlusconi. However, in the run-up to the 2001 election, the LN allied with Berlusconi once again. The election was a major disappointment for the party: it received only 4 per cent of the vote. However, for Berlusconi, the election was a success, as the FI regained power and ruled for the next five years.

Ahead of the 2006 election, Berlusconi sparked controversy when he sought and received support from, among others, Alessandra Mussolini and Luca Romagnoli, who was a well-known Holocaust denier. At times, under Berlusconi, the FI turned softly Eurosceptic. It can be said that it was a borderline populist party for much of its existence.

In the 2010s, the LN transformed into a national party, with its branches extending in the south as well. The 2018 name change to the Lega symbolised that it was now a party for all of Italy and no longer just a separatist movement for northern Italians. Under Matteo Salvini's leadership, which started in 2013, opposition to immigration became the party's foremost concern as he promised: 'More carabinieri! Fewer irregular aliens![1]' At the continental level, the Lega allied itself with the Dutch Party for Freedom and the French FN.

Salvini also had close ties to Vladimir Putin until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Bernard-Henri Lévy has called Salvini 'A European Putinist' and described him as a mixture of a casino boss in a Scorsese film and a member of the Corleone clan. During the winter of 2019–2020, the Sardines movement – a grassroots initiative organising demonstrations against Salvini – was formed.

The Lega entered government once again in early 2021; this time with only three posts. After the 2022 election, together with the FI, it joined Giorgia Meloni's government. The party was assigned five posts, and Salvini was made the deputy prime minister.

In a study on the previous government participation of the Lega, it was found that the party has been able to achieve key policy victories without having to tone down its rhetoric or lose the support of party members.[2] With that said, it is obvious that the Lega contains factions – centrists and rightists, moderates, and radicals – and that, time and again, these factions have been rifts between them.

The Five Star Movement (M5S [Movimento 5 Stelle]) was founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo. The party was preceded by several years of activism from Grillo's side, involving various forms of citizen initiatives. Vaffanculo Day[3] was launched in 2007 and aimed to organise and mobilise for changes in nomination systems, among other things. Ahead of the 2009 EP election, Grillo introduced candidates on other parties' lists.

1 The Economist, July 11, 2019, https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/07/11/will-matteo-salvini-wreck-the-euro

2 https://www.routledge.com/Populists-in-Power/Albertazzi-McDonnell/p/book/9780415600972

3 'V-day', literally meaning 'Fuck-off Day', but also referencing the Normandy landings, the film V for Vendetta, and the Roman numeral, v

The M5S was formed as a political party in the fall of 2009. From 2010 to 2012, it participated in numerous local and regional elections and achieved rising success, which gained national attention. In the 2013 general election, it became the second-largest party in the country. Luigi di Maio started working with Grillo as early as 2007, quickly rose through the ranks, and entered parliament in 2013. He was the party's prime ministerial candidate for the 2018 election.

The Italian parliamentary election of 2018 election marks one of the most crucial triumphs of European populism so far. Not only did the M5S become the overwhelmingly largest party in the country – gathering more voters than almost any other party had in decades – but, in parliament, it was followed by the Lega. Thus, in 2018, Italy became the first country in Europe where the two largest parties in parliament were populist. Further, the M5S and the Lega formed a coalition government, with Giuseppe Conte as prime minister.

Conte had never been politically active before and followed a tradition of technocratic prime ministers such as Lamberto Dini and Mario Monti. The negotiations were preceded by great uncertainty and speculation about immediate snap elections. The M5S refused to enter into a coalition with the FI, which was already in an alliance with the Lega. Conte himself initially declined the position before accepting it later. The president refused to approve Paolo Savona as finance minister, citing his perceived Euroscepticism. Thus, Savona was instead made minister for Europe. Eventually, the parties entered into an alliance and the government was formed; Di Maio and Salvini both became deputy prime ministers. Di Maio was responsible, among other things, for the introduction of citizens' wages, which had been an important election promise made by the M5S. Salvini, on the other hand, focussed on reducing immigration. This involved closing Italian ports to boats carrying people rescued from the sea, slashing funding for reception centres, and tightening the criteria for migrants being granted protected status.[4]

After barely a year, the government fell when Salvini motioned no confidence against Conte over disagreement on public investment in railroads. Between 2019 and 2021, the M5S instead governed in coalition with the centre-left

4 The Economist, July 12, 2019.

Democratic Party (PD [Partito Democratico]). Conte continued as prime minister, and Di Maio served as foreign minister.

Conte resigned in February 2021 and was replaced by Mario Draghi, former president of the European Central Bank. After resigning as prime minister, Conte joined the M5S and was elected party leader during the summer of 2021. Conte has been described as a 'technocratic populist', self-identifying as the defender of the people. There were recurring conflicts between him, Grillo, and Di Maio. In the summer of 2022, Di Maio left the M5S and formed a short-lived party – Together for the Future (IpF [Insieme per il Futuro]), which served as a parliamentary platform.

The M5S is a populist party, as it rejects both the left and the right. However, the party has combined progressive social policies and green politics with cooperation with anti-immigrant parties. Its view of democracy is populist, it is sceptical of representative democracy and demands increased direct democracy. Di Maio wants to renounce the euro, dissolve NATO, and have the US stop confronting Russia but condemn Russia's war. Conte's government has reduced taxes for small business owners, introduced a citizens' income, made climate investments, advocated for Eurobonds, and managed the COVID-19 pandemic promptly.

From 2014 to 2017, the M5S was part of the ID Group in the EP. Grillo wanted to enter the party into the ALDE but was denied; subsequently, he chose to be non-affiliated.

Francesco Storace had been a member of the MSI and the AN. He was elected to parliament in 1994. Storace belonged to the right-wing faction and became increasingly critical of Fini's leadership. In the early 2000s, he was the regional president of Lazio, and for a brief period from 2005 to 2006, he was the minister of health in Berlusconi's third government.

In 2007, Storace formed a new right-wing party: The Right (LD [La Destra]). The LD was authoritarian, socially conservative, and nationalist and combined statism and welfare investments with proposals for a flat tax. For this reason, it also attracted libertarians such as Giancarlo Pagliarini, who previously represented the LN.

Before the 2008 election, the LD formed an electoral alliance with a small fascist party called the Tricolour Flame (MSFT [Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore]). The MSFT was formed in 1995, when the MSI merged with the AN, by individuals who refused to join the AN and rejected centralism. The party has remained faithful to the fascist ideals of the Mussolini regime all along. It won one seat in the senate in 1996, which it defended in 2001. However, in elections to the Chamber of Deputies, it has never won more than a fraction of the votes. The MSFT stands out for its combination of radical anti-democratic ideology and a humorous and youthful approach.

In 2017, the LD merged with the National Action (AN [Azione Nazionale]), which was a short-lived party created to fill the void left by the old AN. The newly formed party was called the National Movement for Sovereignty (MNS [Movimento Nazionale per la Sovranità]). Two years later, the MNS merged into the Brothers of Italy (FdI [Fratelli d'Italia]).

An even more radical alternative to the other parties was formed in 1997 called the New Force (FN [Forza Nuova]), which was a fascist and violent party. The FN was founded and led by Roberto Fiore. Fiore was active in militant far-right groups in the 1980s. He was arrested in absentia while living in the UK in 1985 and collaborated with the British National Party's Nick Griffin. Back in Italy, he formed the FN and positioned himself as a leading ideologue on the far right. Fiore calls himself a neo-fascist. The FN has not garnered more than a fraction of the voters but has been part of the broad electoral alliances around Berlusconi.

Another movement that emerged from this milieu is CasaPound Italia (CPI), which was formed in 2003 and eventually transformed into a political party. However, the CPI has also not been successful, gathering just under 1 per cent of the vote in the 2018 election and, subsequently, deciding to return to being a social movement. In 2019, a legal process began in Rome after Facebook (Meta) removed the CPI from the platform due to the spread of hate speech. The court initially ruled in favour of the movement, but the decision was overturned in 2022.

The FdI was founded in 2012 by several members who split from the People of Freedom. The party's first leader was Ignazio La Russa who previously had been a member of the MSI and the AN. In 2013, Meloni succeeded him. The party uses the tricolour flame as a logo, which had previously been used by the MSI and the AN and was said to symbolise the spirit of Mussolini. The FdI has

been a part of an electoral coalition with the Lega and the FI in every election it has contested.

Following the general election win in 2022, the FdI went on to win all four regional elections held in 2023 before losing the Sardinia election in February 2024 to a candidate from the M5S, who was backed by the centre-left parties.

On economic issues, the FdI is slightly right-leaning. During his campaign, Salvini promised tax cuts for everyone as well as increased pensions. In the summer of 2023, despite protests, the FdI-led government curtailed the citizens' income project after four years, raising the requirements to receive benefits. Meloni has also introduced a controversial tax on banks.

FdI maintains a moderate conservative stance. Notably, under the Meloni-led government, measures have been implemented to restrict same-sex parents from legally registering their partner's child as their own. Additionally, the party maintains a staunch opposition to abortion. While previously known for its outspoken criticism of the EU, Meloni's tenure in power has seen a notable shift in attitude towards a more pragmatic approach.

LEGA SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT WING**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

M5S SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **48/76**

The PCI was one of the largest party delegations in parliament during the 1980s. Between 1979 and 1989, it was a key member of the Communist and Allies Group. When this group split in 1989, the PCI founded the European United Left, which collapsed in 1993 when the PCI dissolved as a party. Italy has been represented in the GUE group by the PRC (1994–2009), the short lived Communist Party of Italy (PdCI, 1999–2009), and the left-wing coalition The Other Europe (AET, 2014–2019).

The MSI was represented in the EP between 1979 and 1994 and was part of Le Pen's far-right group between 1984 and 1989. The LN first entered the EP in 1989, with its two MEPs joining the Rainbow Group. In 1994, it joined the Group of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). After 1997, it was mostly non-attached until 2004, when it joined the Independence/Democracy group. In 2009, it joined the EFD group.

The M5S joined the EP in 2014 and became a member of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). The Lega also joined the EP in 2014 but remained non-attached until it co-founded the EFN group one year later. After 2019, the Lega joined the ID group, while the M5S remained non-inscrits.

The AN was a member of the UEN group from 1994 to 2004.

FDI SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT WING**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**


LATVIA
POPULISM RANK: #12
Efrem Efre

SUMMARY

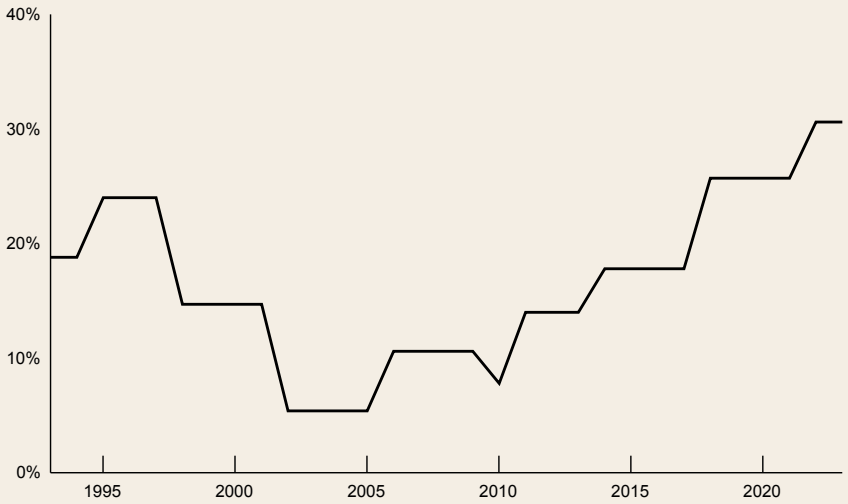
Voter support, radical left in 2022: -2,3%.
Voter support, radical right in 2022: +0%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

The Latvian party system had a very turbulent start, as it faced significant upheavals during the 1990s such as several short-lived parties, numerous divisions and mergers, and the emergence of many parties with unclear ideological positions.

Early on, national conservative parties stemmed from the more radical nationalist factions of the Latvian independence movement. The For Fatherland And Freedom (TB/LNNK [Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK]) was a nationalist party that viewed independent Latvia as a continuation of the pre-1940 era and considered all actions during the Soviet occupation illegal, thus nullifying the citizenship of Soviet citizens. The TB/LNNK was successful in the 1990s and early 2000s, achieving election results of over 10 per cent and participating in most Latvian governments until 2010. In 2010, it merged with the All For Latvia! to form the National Alliance (NA), which was in government from 2008 until 2023.

Being part of the government for such a long time has resulted in NA becoming more mainstream and consequently losing some of its populist characteristics. The once strong anti-elite and anti-corruption rhetoric seems to have diminished in influence now that the party is integrated into the established governing elite.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The NA and its predecessors have always been the most anti-Russian party in parliament. Several of its policy proposals have become mainstream, such as discontinuing Russian-language education, reducing the presence of Russian in public and private domains, and dismantling Soviet-era monuments. As a reaction to this, the NA grew even more radical, entertaining discussions about the compulsory relocation of pro-Kremlin Russian-speaking individuals from Latvia.[1]

The NA is also strongly anti-immigration, socially conservative but also market-friendly. It supports Latvia's membership in the EU but is critical of further power transfer to Brussels.

Who Owns The State? (KPV [Kam pieder valsts?]) is a populist anti-establishment party. It was successful in the 2018 parliamentary election and entered the government, which quickly collapsed due to internal disputes. The party rebranded as For a Humane Latvia in 2022 and in the same year, it failed to be re-elected.

1 Daunis Auers, "The Russia-Ukraine War and right-wing populism in Latvia" in The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on right-wing populism in Europe, Gilles Ivaldi and Emilia Zankina (eds), European Center for Populism, 2023, https://www.populismstudies.org/the-russia-ukraine-war-and-right-wing-populism-in-latvia/

It started out with an anti-corruption agenda, but soon assumed a familiar, general, populist stance, "[...] portraying the existing political elite as venal, elitist and interested only in staying in power while keeping the vast majority of the population in poverty and desperation."[2] Its PM candidate Gobzems emanated "[...] the rhetorics employed by Donald Trump in his election campaign," and publicly threatened to "personally fire" journalists from public service.

Latvia First (LPV [Latvija pirmajā vietā]) was formed in 2021 by Ainārs Šlesers. It benefitted from resistance to COVID-19 restrictions. It is a populist, protectionist, and conservative party and entered parliament in 2022 with 6 per cent of the vote.

For Stability! (S!) was founded in 2021 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, using anti-vaccination tropes, primarily targeting the Russian-speaking part of the electorate. It also took a pro-Russian stance after the invasion of Ukraine. It won 6.9 percent in the 2022 elections.

2 https://en.rebaltica.lv/2018/08/who-is-who-in-upcoming-latvian-parliamentary-elections/

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/8**

The TB/LNNK was originally a member of the UEN group but joined the ECR group in 2009. The NA has been part of the ECR group since entering the parliament in 2014 and currently holds two seats.

NA SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

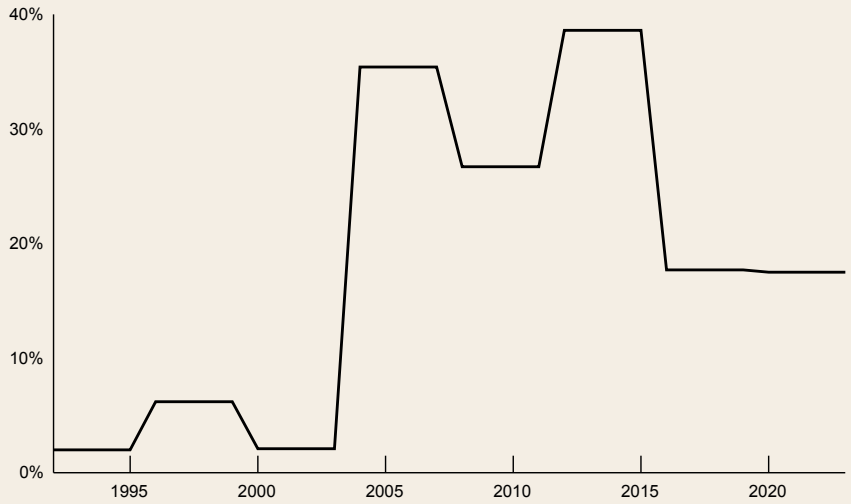



LITHUANIA
POPULISM RANK: #22
Paulina Lazauskaite

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2020: **0%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2020: **-10,1%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Lithuania's party system resembles that of Latvia – it has a highly fluid party landscape and numerous mergers – and, similarly, its political parties have taken time to establish a clear ideological profile. Lithuania has seen a plethora of parties that could be classified as populist, but most of them have had limited or fluctuating voter support.

The most successful radical right party over time has been Order and Justice (TT [Tvarka ir teisingumas]). The TT was founded in 2002 and has participated in several governments between 2010 and 2019. It was national conservative and held right-wing positions on economic and social issues. Following an internal conflict, all MP:s except the group leader left the parliamentary faction for TT in 2019. The dissident's instead formed a new parliamentary group called For Lithuania's Welfare. In 2020, the party ceased to exist.

The Labour Party (DP [Darbo partija]) is the most successful populist party in Lithuania. It was formed in 2004 and won the election the same year, after which it formed a short-lived government. The DP is a centrist populist party that is strongly tied to its founder, and de facto leader for twenty years, Viktor Uspaskich. The party is officially pro-EU but has gained votes by flirting with Eurosceptic attitudes. Since the refugee crisis in 2015, the party has been strongly critical of immigration. The DP is relatively friendly towards Russia.

Voter support for DP has fluctuated considerably. After the initial success in 2004, it lost more than two thirds of the support for the 2008 election, only reaching nine percent. Four years later, however, they once again reached more than 20 percent, only to fall back to 5 percent in 2016. In 2020, they got 10 percent and is currently the third-largest party in parliament.



Karolina Wv

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **1/11**

The TT was in the EP between 2004–2019 and was a member of three groups: the UEN, the EFD, and the EFDD. The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union initially joined the UEN but switched to the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) in 2009. The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance is a member of ECR and holds one seat.

The DP initially joined the ALDE and was a member from 2004 to 2021. In 2021, Uspaskich, now an MEP, was expelled from the Renew group – ALDE's successor – due to homophobic comments, after which the entire DP delegation left Renew.

DP SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

DARBO PARTIJA

LUXEMBOURG

POPULISM RANK: #28



Knko Photography

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: -2,3%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: +1%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

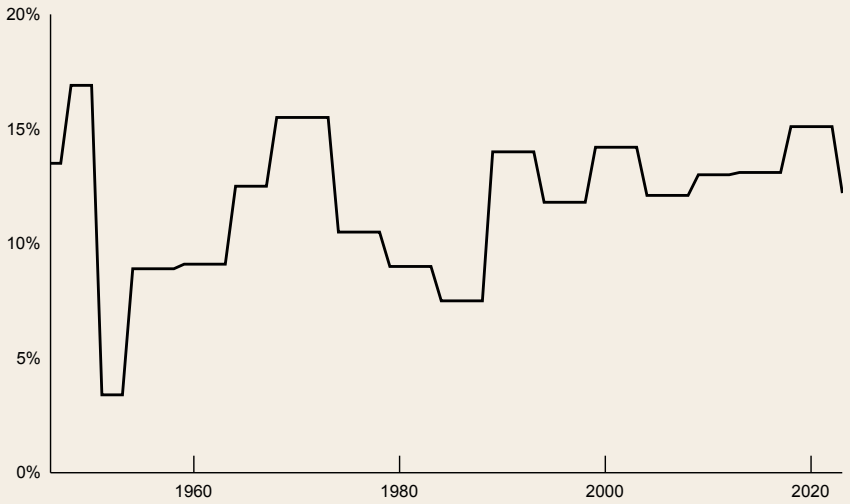
Luxembourg is one of the six founding nations of the EU and has – despite its small size – had considerable influence over European politics over the years. Until the 1980s, Luxembourg had a four-party system consisting of the Luxembourg Socialist Worker's Party (LSAP [Lëtzebuerger Sozialistesch Aarbechterpartei]), the Christian Social People's Party (CSV [Chrëschtlech Sozial Volleksspartei]), the Democratic Party (DP), and the Communist Party (KPL [Kommunistesch Partei vu Lëtzebuerg]).

The Marxist-Leninist KPL took part in the first all-inclusive, post-war government but from 1947 onwards it remained in opposition. The KPL saw its best election results in the 1940s and 1960s, after which it lost support. Its last MP was elected in 1999, and the party has not had any influence on national politics in the last decades.

The Left (DL [Dei Lenk]) was formed in 1999 with, originally, the KPL as a founding member. It has come to be the leading radical left party in the country. The party's ideas are founded on socialism and anti-capitalism, combined with progressive social politics and Euroscepticism. It has never been part of a governing coalition.

The radical right has never been particularly strong in Luxembourg. The National Movement was an unsuccessful far-right party, which dissolved after failing to enter parliament in the late 1980s and mid-1990s.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Currently, the most right-wing party in Luxembourg is the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR). It was founded in 1987 as a single-issue party, focussing on pension reform, but later broadened its politics. The ADR is economically liberal while conservative on social issues. It is the most Eurosceptic party in the country, besides the DL. The ADR has been represented in parliament since 1987 but has never been part of any government.

ADR is classified as a right wing populist party in several studies and is included in this index as well.[1] It contains several elements of an anti-establishment party. Even though the ADR is more Eurosceptic and critical of immigration than other parties in Luxembourg, it should be underscored that it is quite moderate even on those issues compared to other national conservative parties in Europe. The ADR wants to strengthen the status of the Luxembourgish language and wants to intro-

1 Paul Carls, "Approaching right-wing populism in the context of transnational economic integration: lessons from Luxembourg", European Politics and Society, 24:2, 2023, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23745118.2021.1993056, https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Luxembourg.pdf,

duce deep institutional reform, favouring a Swiss-style direct democracy. During the pandemic, it was very critical of the government, arguing that the restrictions constituted unacceptable limits to personal freedom.

The current leader of the ADR, Fred Keup, has been described as more radical on immigration and multiculturalism than his predecessor, Jean Schoos. Keup was the informal spokesperson of the successful 'No' campaign in the 2015 referendum on whether to extend voting rights to non-citizens; the campaign was a major victory for the party. Keup was elected party leader in 2022. The bio on his X profile reads 'Stop woke ideology'.

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **0/6**

The CSV, the DP, the LSAP, and The Greens are the only four parties that have ever won seats in the EP. Although reaching 10 per cent of the votes in the 2019 election, the ADR failed to gain a seat. On the European level, the ADR is a member of the ECR while the DL is a member of the GUE-NGL.

DL SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

déi Lénk

ADR SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT WING**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

adr



MALTA

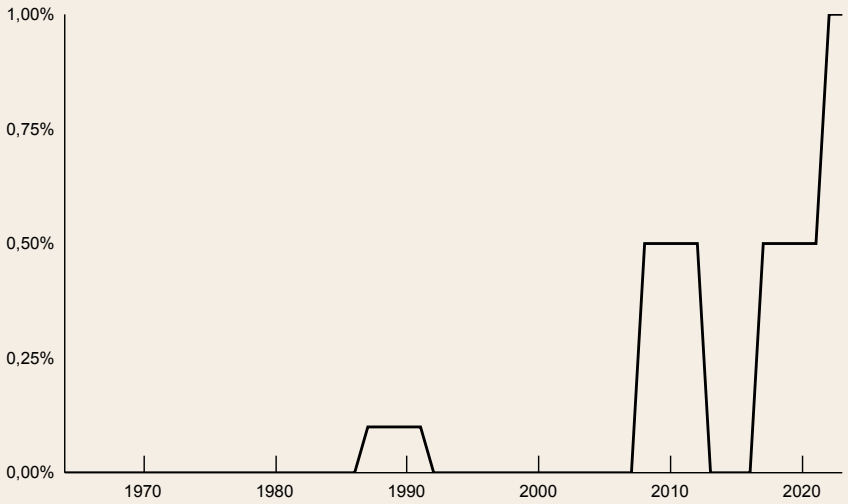
POPULISM RANK: #31

Knko Photography

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: 0%.
Voter support, radical right in 2022: +1%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Malta has had Europe's most cemented two-party system for more than half a century. From its independence in 1964 until the last parliamentary election in 2022, no parties other than the Labour Party (PL [Partit Laburista]) and the conservative Nationalist Party (PN [Partit Nazzjonalista]) have won seats in the national parliament.

For a long time, party politics in the country was highly polarised, with fierce opposition between the PL and the PN. Both parties have also accommodated a wide range of opinions, including some that often are defended by the far left or far right in other countries. The PL, for example, drifted quite far to the left in the 1970s and 1980s, when, during its time in government, it turned the country away from the West and instead improved relations with, for example, the dictatorship in Libya.

The PN on the other hand has been a strongly nationalist party. While also from the 1990s, it drove for integration into the West and membership in the EU. It remains very conservative on social issues, in many cases taking positions that are closer to national conservative parties than to those of most other co-member parties in the EPP group.

A handful of parties have tried but failed to challenge the big two. A partial explanation for the failures of these small parties is that the electoral system strongly favours the two large parties. Some of these challenger parties have been far out on the fringes, but none have gathered much support.

The single biggest success for a radical right-wing party was when the Imperium Europa won 3.2 per cent of the vote in the EP elections in 2019. However, it was not enough for a mandate. The Imperium Europe is a fascist and openly racist party led by Norman Lowell, who, among other things, denies the Holocaust and has called Auschwitz the 'Disneyland of Poland'. The party did not run in the last parliamentary elections, held in March 2022.

The PL has been in power since 2013. Its last term was marked by a political crisis, with widespread corruption revelations and the murder of a political journalist forcing the resignation of the prime minister Joseph Muscat. Despite these events, its election campaign was undramatic, partly because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and partly because the opinion polls showed too big a distance between the two top parties. The election resulted in PL being re-elected with somewhat stronger support, while PN lost two seats. Once again, no new party managed to challenge the two big ones. Two radical right parties each received 0.5 per cent of the vote.



Efrem Efre

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **0/6**

Since Malta became a member of the EU in 2004, The PN (EPP) and the PL (S&D) are the only two parties that have won seats in the previous EP elections.

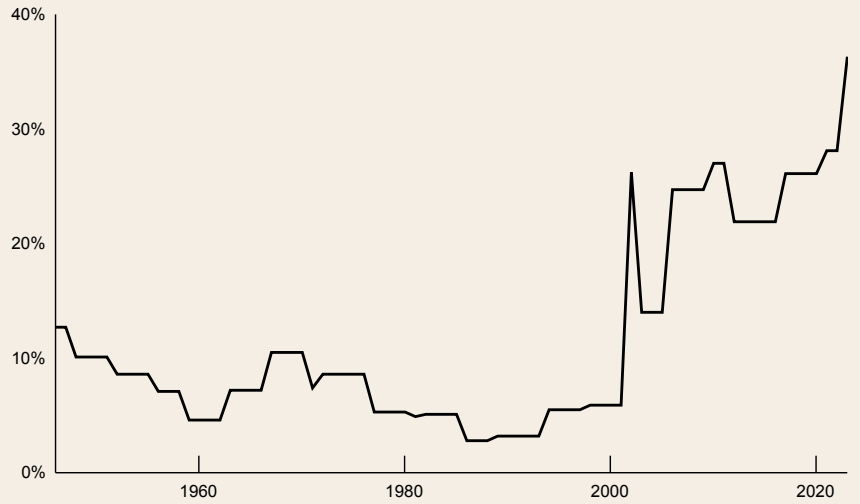


Jamal

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: **-3,6%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2023: **+11,8%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Just as in Germany, Italy, and several other western European countries, Dutch politics during the initial post-war decades was dominated by Christian democracy. Here, however, the Christian democratic movement consisted of three parties – two were Protestant and one was Catholic – that came together to form the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) only in the 1970s, which still exists. At least one Christian democratic party was part of every Dutch government from 1918 to 1994. Such parties have allied with liberals as well as social democrats – almost always with large majorities – and within the framework of a consensus-oriented political culture.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the social democratic Labour Party (PvdA [Partij van de Arbeid]) was as strong as the CDA, the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD [Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie]) being the third force. The CDA was finally pushed out of power by a centre-left coalition – the PvdA, the VVD, and the left-liberal Democrats 66 (D66) – in the 1994 general election. With the support of this coalition, the PvdA, under the leadership of Wim Kok, came to embody the liberalism of the 1990s: Wok's administration was responsible for reduced taxes, deepened European integration, and the legalisation of prostitution, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia. And, for building a wall against the slowly growing right-wing populism.

In recent decades, the Netherlands has witnessed one of Europe's most fragmented party systems. This is largely due to an electoral system without a percentage threshold, meaning that around 0.7 per cent of votes are enough to gain a seat. In the 2021 election, seventeen parties entered parliament, including three newcomers. In 2023, this figure fell to fifteen and only one new party entered parliament.

One consequence of this fragmentation is that it increases difficulties in creating stable governments. After the 2017 general election, 225 days passed until a new government was formed. This record was broken in 2021 with 299 days, even though, in the end, the same four parties continued to govern. Nonetheless, this fragmentation has fostered fertile ground for political entrepreneurs of all flavours, creating endless opportunities for small, often radical, parties to gain some influence. However, this has mostly meant that left and right-wing parties have had to lean towards the centre to form stable governing majorities.

The Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN [Communistische Partij Nederland]) was formed in 1909 and achieved its greatest success immediately after World War II by gathering

10 per cent of the vote in the 1946 election. However, support for the CPN gradually declined over the following decades as the legitimacy of its ideology weakened. In 1956, the CPN supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary amidst opposition from the other parties.

The student revolts of the 1960s acted as a boost, and the party increased its voter support in the early 1970s. Towards the end of the decade, it moved on to a more Eurocommunist line and tried to profile itself on new issues such as gender equality. In the 1986 election, the party was voted out of parliament. In 1989, it joined the newly formed green left – the GroenLinks – where the party's more progressive representatives had influence.

Several other smaller communist parties were formed from the 1960s onward. Among these was the Socialist Party (SP), which was formed in 1971 by Maoists who disagreed with the Leninists on the role of intellectuals in the class struggle. The SP competed in parliamentary elections for the first time in 1977 with no success. It continued to fail throughout the 1980s. In 1991, it adopted a new programme wherein it abandoned Maoism and instead profiled itself as a democratic left-wing party, with a strong outsider profile that was illustrated by its 1994 slogan 'Vote against, vote SP!' From 1994, and well into the 2000s, the PvdA had a stated strategy to isolate and oppose the SP by consistently voting against its proposals.

The SP is often described as a left-wing populist party[1], although it came to moderate that position in the 2000s.[2] In 2023, it campaigned on what political scientist Cas Mudde has described as an 'old left' platform, 'combining traditional left-wing economic positions, for example on healthcare, with demands for a temporary stop on migrant workers' and attacks on identity politics.[3]

The protestant fundamentalist Reformed Political Party (SGP [Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij]) is one of the country's historic parties with roots in the 1910s. Originally formed on a strong anti-Catholic foundation, the party has been represented in parliament with a few mandates throughout the post-war period. While the SGP defends the separation between church and state, it wants the whole society to rest on the Bible and wants to replace freedom of religion with freedom of conscience. The party does also want to re-introduce the death penalty and is strongly anti-feminist, disallowing female membership until 2006. As of now, the SGP has always been in opposition.

The Farmer's Party (BP [Boerenpartij]) was a populist and conservative rural party formed in the late 1950s. The BP was represented in parliament between 1963 and 1980. The party combined an economic right-wing policy with populist anti-establishment rhetoric similar to Poujadism in France. The party split, among other things, after it was discovered that a senator had a Nazi background and had been a member of the SS.

The Centre Party (CP) was a short-lived far-right party that won a seat in the parliamentary election in 1982. In the EP election in 1984, it won 2.5 per cent of the vote. The party then split between moderates and radicals. The moderates eventually broke away and formed the Centre Democrats (CD) in 1984. The CP was dissolved in 1986 while the CD remained in parliament until 1998. It achieved its best results in the mid-1990s, acquiring three seats in parliament. However, its popularity took a hard hit before the 1994 election, when a recording was leaked to the media in which a representative bragged about having set fire to a refugee facility.

Integration and migration issues came to dominate Dutch politics in the twenty-first century. In 1999, Pim Fortuyn became party leader of the newly founded the Livable Netherlands (LN). The party achieved local success and also began to rise in national opinion with its criticism of immigration. According to Fortuyn, Islam was an 'achterlijke' ('backward'/'retarded') religion. Fortuyn was expelled in 2002 amidst the controversy that ensued following his comments and instead formed his own party: the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF [Lijst Pim Fortuyn]). However, he remained the leader of the LN in Rotterdam and won a third of the votes in municipal elections there in the spring of 2002. Meanwhile, the LPF became a sensation in the 2002 election: it won 17 per cent of the vote

1 Louwerse, Tom & Simon Otjes (2018), "How populists wage opposition: parliamentary opposition behaviour and populism in the Netherlands". Political Studies 67:2. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0032321718774717

2 Blanksma, Thijs (2022), "Alternating between 'vote against!' and 'vote for!' A case study of left-wing populism in the Netherlands. Master Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

3 The Guardian, January 16. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/16/conservative-left-europe-far-right-sahra-wagenknecht-germany

and took a seat in the government. However, Fortuyn was assassinated a few days before the election. The LN won two mandates in the 2002 election but disappeared in the election the following year. It was avowedly anti-establishment but not as strongly anti-immigration as the LPF.

This was a turbulent period for the government. First, LPF minister Philomena Bijlhout was forced to resign after it was revealed she had been part of a militia in Suriname. Then, Hilbrand Nawijn, minister for migration and integration, revealed that he supported the death penalty. The short-lived government also supported the American invasion of Iraq. Further, it abandoned the former government's plans of forbidding mink farms. By the 2003 election, the LPF had lost more than two-thirds of its voter support and disappeared completely in the 2006 election.

Regardless of these consequences, the long-term political influence of Fortuyn's project should not be underestimated. The coalition government of the VVD, the CDA and the D66 which was formed after the 2003 election began a radical shift in Dutch migration and immigrant policy. Together with Denmark, the Netherlands became a symbol of a tougher stance on immigration in Europe, with harsh rules for citizenship, family migration, and asylum.

The most successful right-wing populist party in the Netherlands is the Party for Freedom (PVV [Partij voor de Vrijheid]), which was formed by Geert Wilders before the 2006 election. Wilders was previously a member of the liberal-conservative VVD but left the party and founded the PVV as a reaction to the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh. The party took over the position of the LPF with even more radical stances: it is strongly anti-immigration, anti-Islam, and anti-EU. It is also stringently opposed to the accession of Turkey to the EU. It became not only the Netherlands' most successful right-wing populist ever but also one of the most famous representatives of the populist movement in Europe. Before the EP elections in 2014, Wilders joined Marine Le Pen at a high-profile press conference where they promised to crush the 'monster in Brussels'.

The PVV, however, has an unusual mechanism. Extremely centralised, it does not conduct normal election campaigns but completely trusts Wilder's media appearances. It achieved its first milestone in the 2010 election when it became the support party for Mark Rutte's first government. Although the Christian democrats refused to sit in a government together with the right-wing populists, they did accept their confidence and supply. This collaboration broke up after less than two years because the PVV refused to accept the government's proposed cuts in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Rutte later claimed that the cooperation with the PVV was the greatest mistake he ever made.[4]
Since then, Wilders has remained in opposition, and the PVV has performed well in the EP elections. In 2023, the PVV witnessed an unexpected success when it won an election for the first time.

The PVV was challenged in the mid-2010s by the Forum for Democracy (FvD [Forum voor Democratie]). The FvD has often had great success in the opinion polls under the leadership of Thierry Baudet. The party was formed in 2016 and entered parliament with two seats the following year. It reached its best result in the 2021 election, with 5 per cent of the vote. The FvD was originally seen as a less radical alternative to the PVV but it evolved in an even more radical direction, with recurring scandals and frequent racist and homophobic statements from its representatives. In 2020, party representatives compared the COVID-19 restrictions to the Nazi occupation during World War II.[5]

The FvD has continued to be pro-Putin even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It is one of the leading parties in Europe that espouses the conspiracy theory of 'the great replacement' and has argued for the creation of a counter-society beyond the reach of the Dutch state.
As a result of the conflicts within the FvD, a new party called the Right Answer 21 (JA21 [Juiste Antwoord 2021]) was formed in 2021. This party also emerged with the ambition to fill the void between the established right and right-wing populism. The JA21 has had limited success thus far.

The Farmer–Citizen Movement (BBB [BoerBurgerBeweging]) was formed in 2019 and is an agrarian right-wing populist party. It plays on 'the elite versus the people' opposition, claiming to defend the 'gewone Neder-

4 https://nltimes.nl/2018/02/19/pm-rutte-calls-working-anti-islam-pvv-biggest-mistake
5 https://www.timesofisrael.com/dutch-party-equates-covid-measures-to-nazism-on-national-holocaust-memorial-day/

landers' ('ordinary Dutch people'). It has a strong focus on agricultural issues and opposes climate action. It has proposed the creation of a ministry for the countryside, to be situated at least 100 kilometres from the Hague. The BBB experienced success in the local elections in the spring of 2023 and led the national opinion polls for a few months over the summer. However, afterwards, its popularity declined rapidly and it lost votes to yet another new party: the New Social Contract (NSC).

The NSC was launched by Pieter Omtzigt, a former CDA politician, who became famous while investigating the abuses of the tax authority. The party uses anti-establishment rhetoric but bears few other similarities to right-wing populist parties.

Following the 2023 election, negotiations on cabinet formation started between the PVV, the VVD, the BBB and the NSC. In February, the NSC withdrew due to disagreements on economic issues. In March 2024, Wilders announced that he would not be prime minister to facilitate the formation of a coalition with his party. At the time of writing, a government has still not been installed. The PVV has continued to grow in the opinion polls, reaching an unprecedented 34 per cent in January 2024.

BBB SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTER**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **5/28**

The SGP holds one seat in the EP. Since 2014, its representative has been a member of the ECR group after having previously been denied membership due to the party's stance on gender equality. The SP was represented in the EP between 1999 and 2019 but lost representation after the 2019 election. It has always been a part of the GUE group.

In 2014, the PVV won four seats in the EP. A year later, it was able to join the ENF group. In 2019, the PVV lost all representation in the EP.

The FvD won three seats in the 2019 election and a fourth after Brexit. Initially, it joined the ECR group, but in 2020 three of its MEPs left the FvD itself, instead joining the JA21 party while continuing in the ECR. In the aftermath, the FvD distanced itself from the ECR and joined the ID group. In 2022, its remaining MEP was expelled from the ID group for sharing pro-Putin messages on X.

SP SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

PVV SUMMARY

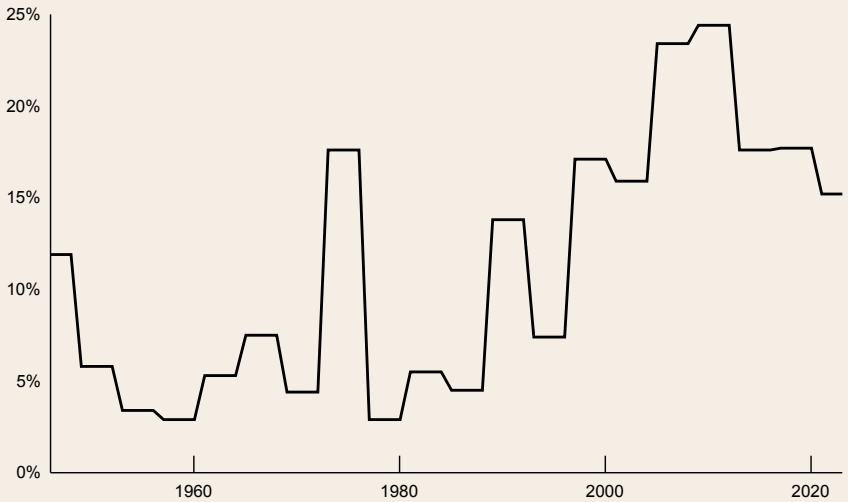
Economics: **CENTER-RIGHT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**


NORWAY
POPULISM RANK: #26
Tobias Bjørkli

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2021: +2,3%.
Voter support, radical right in 2021: -2,5%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Norway had a very stable party system during the first post-war decades. The Communist Party of Norway (NKP [Norges Kommunistiske Parti]) had a brief period of success directly after World War II but soon declined. The Labour Party opposed it strongly, labelling the party as extremist. Throughout the Cold War, the NKP remained loyal to Moscow.

The Socialist People's Party was formed as a splinter from the Labour Party in 1961 and was represented in parliament through the 1960s. Its youth organization drifted towards revolutionary ideas, leading to a split. The more radical faction eventually formed the leftist Red Electoral Alliance (RV [Raud Valallianse]), which, for a long time, only mobilised small sections of the electorate. In 2007, the RV was turned into a unified party called the Red Party. The Red Party first entered parliament in 2017 and achieved its best result ever in 2021, with more than 4 per cent of the vote. It is radically left-wing on economic issues, progressive on social issues, strongly Eurosceptic, and ambiguous towards its revolutionary ideological roots.

The Progress Party (FrP [Fremskrittspartiet]) was founded in 1973 by Anders Lange and was originally known as the Anders Lange's Party. It aimed to lower taxes, reduce welfare benefits, and cut foreign aid. After Lange's death in 1974, Carl I. Hagen was chosen as the successor and led the party's resurgence in the 1981 election. In 1983, the FrP abandoned its previously ideology-free stance and adopted a libertarian ideology with a new programme. However, it was not until the end of the decade – and due to an increased focus on immigration issues – that the party was able to make significant strides among Norwegian voters.

FrP:s first major success came in the 1987 local elections, partly due to attention drawn by a letter from a Muslim immigrant predicting the Islamization of Norway no matter what politicians did to stop it, due to the sheer amount of muslim babies being born. It sparked a major debate. Hagen was later accused of forging the letter, dubbed the Mustafa letter, leading to a legal process. From then on, the party focused on reducing asylum immigration. The following year, the FrP surged in opinion polls and became the third-largest party in parliament in 1989. During this time, the party pushed for a referendum on refugee immigration.

However, the party's libertarian faction persisted, leading to internal strife and declining support in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, immigration issues once again regained prominence in the national debate,

leading to its renewed popularity. In the early 2000s, the FrP reached new highs in opinion polls, but the 2001 election was a disappointment. Hagen aimed to make the party more cooperative, which resulted in the departure and expulsion of radical immigration critics.

In 2006, after leading the party for 27 years, Hagen stepped down to become vice president of the Norwegian parliament. Siv Jensen succeeded him with hopes of increasing the party's appeal and potentially leading a future government. The FrP gained significant success in the 2007 local elections, with its candidates becoming mayors in 17 municipalities. However, the party's support declined leading up to the 2009 parliamentary elections, even though it achieved its best result ever with 22 per cent of the vote. Despite being previously shunned by other parties, the Conservative Party expressed willingness to collaborate with the FrP after the election. The FrP experienced setbacks in the 2011 local elections but later formed a coalition government with the Conservative Party after winning the 2013 parliamentary election. The liberal Venstre and the Christian Democrats initially provided confidence-and-supply but later joined the government.

In 2020, the FrP left the government, the triggering factor being the government's decision to repatriate a woman with a connection to the Islamic state, but this move also reflected underlying growing discontent with the ruling government. The other three parties continued as a minority government.

The FrP has consistently leaned right on economic issues, oscillating between radical neoliberal ideas and centrism over time. It has maintained highly restrictive stances on migration issues but is relatively moderate on social matters. Unlike many nationalist and populist parties, the FrP is pro-EU and is among the more pro-European parties in Norway. It has no authoritarian baggage, has long avoided being subjected to a cordon sanitaire, and is now considered borderline populist.

EP ELECTIONS

Not a member of the European Union.

FRP SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

RED SUMMARY

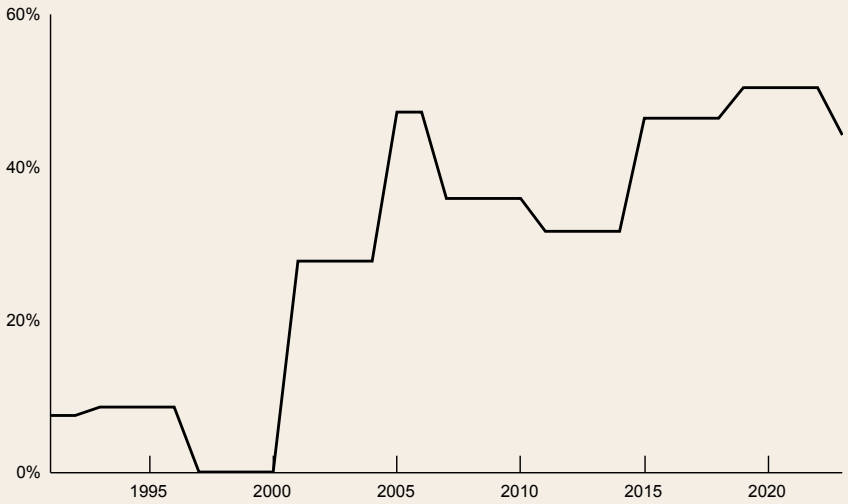
Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**


POLAND
POPULISM RANK: #5
Michael Block

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: **0%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2023: **-6,2%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Poland was the first country in Eastern Europe where the communist party was forced to loosen its grip and allow free elections. At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, there were few observers who predicted that Poland, alongside Hungary, would be the country where authoritarian populism would achieve the greatest success.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Poland's party system rapidly evolved into a chaotic pluralism, characterised by fragmentation, during the early 1990s. As many as 29 parties won seats after the first parliamentary elections in 1991. Ahead of the 1993 election, a threshold percentage was introduced, which reduced the number of parties significantly and allowed for the formation of more stable governments. The only nationalist party to gather support in the 1990s was the Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN [Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej]), which was founded in 1979. The KPN is only borderline populist.

In the late 1990s, Poland experienced an economic downturn, with shrinking GDP and rising unemployment, alongside unpopular structural adjustments to prepare for its EU membership. Dissatisfaction was high when the Poles went to the polls for the fourth time since democracy was established, shortly after the September 11 attacks in the US. Voters sought a political overhaul, ousting the ruling Christian democrats and liberals from both power and parliament. In their place, the social democrats emerged as the largest party.

Simultaneously, several populist parties – including the left-wing populist Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP [Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej]), which was led by former boxer Andrzej Lepper – gained prominence. The SRP unexpectedly became the country's third-largest party after the 2001 election, making Lepper a prominent figure amid concerns about right-wing populism in Europe during the early 2000s. The SRP had no previous electoral successes, but it garnered significant media attention after organising roadblocks; throwing potatoes at the Ministry of Agriculture, Warsaw; throwing frozen chickens from a food importer's warehouse; and other spectacular demonstrations against proposed economic reform.

The Polish Family League (LPR [Liga Polskich Rodzin]) was the modest name of a highly reactionary party formed ahead of the 2001 election. Like the SRP, it opposed EU membership and benefitted from the prevailing dissatisfaction with economic reforms, but the LPR also distinguished itself through its anti-abortion stance. Thanks to constant advertising on the

Catholic – and primarily antisemitic – radio channel Radio Maryja, the LPR reached many right-wing Catholic voters.

The LPR can be seen as a continuation of a nationalist tradition going back to Roman Dmowski – one of the most important Polish ideologists of the interwar period. According to Dmowski, Catholicism constituted the essence of the Polish nation. In other words, a non-Catholic could never be Polish. He believed that the goal must therefore be an ethnically and religiously homogeneous country, which Poland became as a result of the Holocaust, the expulsion of Germans, and the border changes after World War II. It was in this deeply antisemitic tradition that the LPR was formed in 2001. For example, in Warsaw, its members convinced the then-mayor Lech Kaczyński to erect a statue of Dmowski.

Alongside antisemitism, Polish nationalism also harbours a very strong anti-German sentiment. Lepper, for example, could kill two birds with one stone with statements such as 'the Germans are an even greater threat to our nation than the Jews'. He likened the EU membership to the German invasion of 1939. Even as recently as the 2023 election campaign, opposition to Germany was strong, with the Law and Justice (PiS [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość]) stirring up the long-settled question of German war reparations and repeatedly portraying Donald Tusk as a 'German lapdog'.[1]

The two parties that came to dominate Polish politics in the twenty-first century were also formed ahead of the 2001 election: the PiS and Civic Platform (PO [Platforma Obywatelska]). Both have roots leading back to the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS [Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność]) and various smaller parties of the 1990s. Both entered parliament and have gradually strengthened their position in opposition to the increasingly unpopular social democrats.

The PiS was founded in 2001 by Jarosław Kaczyński, who aimed to leverage the popularity of his twin brother, Lech.[2] Initially, the PiS focussed on anti-corruption and 'law and order' principles, encapsulated in slogans such as 'Fourth Republic'. The party wished to highlight the need for a conservative shift away from the perceived post-communist corruption in Poland. It positioned itself as a champion for the disenfranchised, addressing those left behind amid Poland's economic transformation following the collapse of communism.[3]

The left-wing government that ruled Poland in the early 2000s did manage to implement effective economic reforms and successfully conclude membership negotiations with the EU; Poland became a member in the spring of 2004. However, this was overshadowed by a corruption scandal where it was revealed that the government, through intermediaries, had offered to tailor media legislation for an international TV company in exchange for money in the right pockets. The voters' verdict was harsh: in the 2005 election, the government was voted out and instead, the PiS and the PO emerged as the two largest parties, a position they have both retained in all elections since then. Incidentally, it was the first and only time that all parties in the Polish parliament were re-elected and no new party was voted in. Failed government negotiations between the PiS and the PO resulted in the PiS forming a coalition with the left-populist SRP and the far-nationalist LPR. It is worth noting that, in practice, Poland has never applied any strategy of isolation against fringe parties, regardless of how extreme they have been. President Aleksander Kwasniewski did label the SRP as anti-democratic and sometimes refused to invite the party to consultations, but, typically, there have been open doors between all parties in parliament.

This coalition lasted for one year. Lepper, who took the position as minister of agriculture, was accused of both corruption and sexual harassment. Consequently, he resigned, a government crisis led to re-elections in 2007, and both the SRP and the LPR disappeared from Polish politics, never to return.

1 New York Times, October 8, 2023 https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/08/world/europe/poland-election-nazis-germany.html

2 Tim Bale & Aleks Szczerbiak, "Why is there no Christian Democracy in Poland (and why does this matter?", SEI Working Paper, No 91, 2006, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-91.pdf&site=266

3 The Guardian, October 25, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/25/poland-right-law-justice-party-europe

However, the demand for populist, nationalist, and xenophobic rhetoric did not cease with the existence of these parties. Instead, it was fulfilled to an even greater extent by the PiS as well as by some smaller parties that emerged and sometimes achieved some success on the right wing. Returning to power in 2015 after two terms in opposition marked a pivotal moment for the PiS. It signalled a resurgence of nationalist and populist sentiments in Poland. However, its tenure has been marred by persistent conflicts with the EU, particularly concerning its attempts to exert control over the Polish judiciary, law enforcement, and media institutions. These conflicts reflect a broader ideological struggle between the PiS' vision of national sovereignty and the EU norms on democracy and the rule of law.

Despite EU warnings and condemnation, the PiS pushed forward with controversial reforms, including changes to the appointment of judges and media regulations. These moves sparked domestic and international criticism, with accusations of undermining democratic principles and eroding institutional checks and balances. The PiS' assertive approach to governance has polarised Polish society and intensified divisions within the country's political landscape.

Two months after the PiS came to power in January 2016, President Andrzej Duda signed a law granting the government the power to appoint heads of public radio and TV, which was previously overseen by a special media committee. A presidential spokesperson justified the law, stating a desire for state media to be 'impartial, objective, and reliable' and arguing the current structure did not allow for it. Under this media law, contracts for senior executives at Telewizja Polska and Polskie Radio would be terminated, and the Ministry of Finance would appoint their successors. A total of 141 journalists were dismissed, forced to resign, or moved to lower positions between the 2015 election and May 2016.[4]

In the months leading up to the 2015 parliamentary elections, a third of the fifteen seats on the Constitutional Tribunal became vacant due to retirements. The ruling coalition at the time, which was led by the PO, passed a law allowing the outgoing parliament to appoint all five judges. However, the Constitutional Tribunal later ruled that this law was unconstitutional because the outgoing parliament was authorised to appoint only three judges, not at all five. Despite this ruling, the newly elected PiS government disregarded the PO coalition's selection and issued a resolution declaring the election of all five judges invalid. The newly elected parliament then appointed replacements for these judges the day before the Constitutional Tribunal announced its final decision. On the night before the decision, President Duda hastily swore in four judges appointed by his party. Additionally, in December 2016, he appointed a PiS-supported judge, Julia Przylebska, as the president of the Constitutional Tribunal. Kaczyński, the PiS leader – widely considered Poland's most powerful figure despite formally just being a member of parliament – had previously referred to the Constitutional Tribunal as 'a bastion of everything that is wrong in Poland'.[5]

EU institutions, led by the EC under then–Vice President Frans Timmermans, expressed concerns about Poland's rule of law. In January 2016, the EC launched an investigation under Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty, marking the first such scrutiny of a member state's legal system. In July 2016, the EC issued a recommendation urging Poland to respect the Constitutional Tribunal's decisions from December 2015 and reinstate lawfully appointed judges. By December 2016, the EC gave Poland two months to repeal new regulations concerning the Constitutional Tribunal. Poland's Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski responded that the government advocates for a "normal democracy" where election winners have the right to govern.[6]

Over its eight years in power, PiS eroded democratic structures in Poland. Additionally, the party has articulated a clear nationalism and adopted staunchly conservative positions on various social issues such as LGBTQ rights and abortion rights. In economic policy, the party has positioned itself slightly left of center, consistently investing in welfare, social transfers, and the like. It maintains a soft criti-

4 Telegraph, January 7, 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/12088295/Polands-president-signs-controversial-new-media-law.html, https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2016/05/polands-political-cleansing-of-journalists/

5 Politico, December 8, 2015, https://www.politico.eu/article/law-vs-justice-poland-constitution-judges/, Politico, December 24, 2015, https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-constitution-crisis-kaczynski-duda/

6 Euractiv, Januar 3, 2017, https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/polish-fm-calls-tusk-icon-of-evil-and-stupidity

cism of the EU, continually questioning the legitimacy of decisions made in Brussels without advocating for or actively pursuing Poland's withdrawal from the union. Unlike many other populist parties in Europe, PiS has consistently been critical of Russia under Putin's leadership.

Alongside the PiS, there exist various nationalist, far-right, populist, and/or authoritarian parties in the country that have secured seats in parliament. Many of these parties form ever-changing electoral alliances, making the party system difficult to comprehend. Sovereign Poland is a nationalist and conservative catholic party who has been represented in parliament since 2015 through electoral alliances with PiS. It currently holds 18 seats.

Kukiz' 15 was established by rock singer Pavel Kukiz who surprisingly got 20 percent of the votes in the 2015 presidential election on a nationalist platform. In the parliamentary election the same year, his party garnered eight percent of the vote. Since then, Kukiz has participated in electoral coalitions, losing all but two MPs in the 2023 elections. The party is eurosceptic, in favour of direct democracy and wants to switch from the proportional to a majoritarian first-past-the-post electoral system.

Konfederacja (The Confederation Liberty and Independence), formed in 2018, is an electoral coalition that obtained nearly seven percent of the vote in 2019 and repeated this feat in 2023. Konfederacja comprises a multitude of parties, the majority of which are radical nationalists, with several holding anti-Semitic positions. It also includes parties that advocate for changing Poland's political system to a presidential system or monarchy. They have campaigned against immigration and hold strong socially conservative views, with uncompromising opposition to abortion and LGBTQ rights. In economic matters, they lean distinctly to the right. Additionally, they have been highly critical of pandemic-related restrictions.

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **27/52**

The PiS joined the UEN group in 2004 but has been a leading member of the ECR group since its formation in 2009. Both the LPR (IND/DEM group) and the SRP (UEN) won representation in 2004 but lost their MEPs in 2009. In 2014, Janusz Korwin-Mikke was elected an MEP for his then-party KPN. In 2019, Poland only sent MEPs to three EP groups (EPP, S&D, and ECR) despite having 52 seats.

PIS SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE-LEFT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

KONFEDERACJA SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**



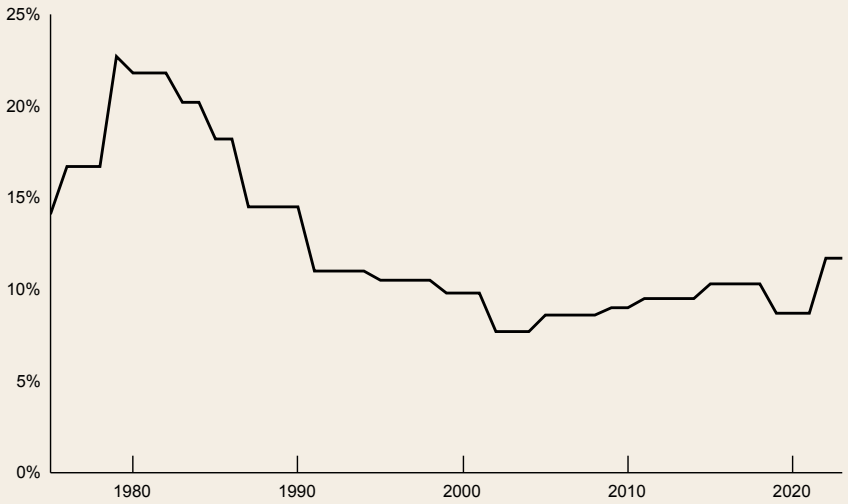
PORTUGAL

POPULISM RANK: #29

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: -2,6%.
Voter support, radical right in 2022: +5,6%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Since the end of the Salazar dictatorship and its first democratic elections in 1975, Portugal has had a relatively stable party system with few relevant parties. The centre-left Socialist Party (PS [Partido Socialista]) and the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD [Partido Social Democrata]) have alternated as the biggest parties. No other party has yet held the prime ministerial post. The support for anti-systemic parties has been modest.

To the left, the PS has been challenged by several more radical alternatives. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) dates back to 1921. It has been among the strongest communist parties in western Europe, often gathering over 10 per cent of the vote. Since 1987, it has been in an electoral alliance called the Unitary Democratic Coalition with the Ecologist Party "The Greens" party (PEV [Partido Ecologista "Os Verdes]). Between 2015 and 2019, the PCP supported a PS government through a confidence-and-supply agreement.

The PCP is an orthodox communist party, still faithful to Marxist principles and symbols – the hammer and the sickle remain in the party logo– as well as traditional Leninist ideas of the party's role in society. Its internal organisation still resembles the old communist party structure, complete with a central committee. The PCP used to be strongly Eurosceptic but it has softened its position in this regard in recent years. It is the only party in Portugal that did not condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Rather, just as the Kremlin, the PCP called it a 'special operation' and blamed NATO and the West for the war. On social issues, the PCP used to be quite conservative, but it has moderated its positions on many issues.

Another left-wing coalition, the Left Bloc (BE [Bloco de Esquerda]) was formed in 1999 by several small Leninist, Maoist, and Trotskyist parties. Despite its heritage, the BE has developed in a clear democratic and progressive direction. Today, it is a democratic socialist party. It has abandoned most of its anti-establishment rhetoric and is neither anti-systemic nor Eurosceptic.

For a long time, Portugal remained one of few countries in Europe without a successful radical right party, which was widely interpreted as a reflection of how the legacy of the fascist dictatorship made right-wing extremism taboo in the country. This changed in 2019 when the newly formed the CHEGA! (Chega [Enough]) entered parliament. Three years later, it increased its support to 7 per cent in the parliamentary election.

Chega is a national conservative party with clear populist traits. It has focussed on fighting crime and corruption in addition to being opposed to immigration and multiculturalism. Corruption was one of the party's main issues in the election campaign 2024; Chega launched a slogan that read: 'such high taxes to finance corruption.'

Additionally, the party is generally sceptical of the EU and focussed on crime, for which it demands much tougher measures. Notably, a membership vote in 2020 narrowly rejected the reinstatement of the death penalty. Party leader André Ventura, previously a TV football commentator, is strongly critical of Islam and the Romani people. Consequently, the party is often accused of racism and antiziganism.[1] In particular, concern has been raised regarding the extremism within the party's youth movement.[2]

The party is conservative on social issues. Ventura has said that he is opposed to abortion as well as bullfighting, but that he does not aim to outlaw either. Economically, the party is far to the right and follows a strict fiscal conservatism. Chega wants a greatly reduced bureaucracy with, essentially, abolished redistribution. In his 2023 presidential campaign, Ventura said he did not aspire to be president for 'all Portuguese' but only 'the good Portuguese'. This supposedly excluded not only criminals but also welfare recipients, i.e., those who are often rhetorically equated with the Romani people. However, in the campaign for the March 2024 elections, Chega promised higher salaries, increased minimum wage and pensions and better conditions for workers while also cutting taxes.[3]

The Portuguese right is divided on whether to cooperate with the populists or not. The PSD has been reluctant towards cooperation with Chega. In a televised debate in February 2024,[1] PSD leader, Luís Montenegro, told Ventura:

> *As a matter of principle, the PSD will never make a political agreement with someone who has policies, opinions, which are often xenophobic, racist, populist, excessively demagogic.*[4]

Meanwhile, the minor coalition partners of the PSD – the conservative CDS – People's Party (CDS–PP [Centro Democrático e Social – Partido Popular]) – have been in favour of forming a coalition. There has also been media debate on whether it is racist to link increased immigration with insecurity, as former socialist prime minister Pedro Passos Coelho did in the election campaign in 2024.

1 Euronews, August 21, 2023, https://www.euronews.com/2023/08/21/they-say-theyre-not-racist-how-far-right-extremism-seeped-into-portugals-mainstream-politi
2 https://globalextremism.org/post/chega-youth/
3 New York Times, March 21, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/21/world/europe/portugal-chega.html
4 Reuters, February 13, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/feisty-portuguese-election-debate-dims-hopes-post-poll-compromises-2024-02-13/



Lisa Fotios

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **4/20**

The PCP has won two to three seats in every EP election in Portugal. It has always been a member of the GUE group and currently holds two seats. The BE is also a part of the GUE group.

None of Portugal's far-right groups has ever been represented in the EP. The Chega is however set to join the ID group if they win representation in the June 2024 elections, which seems highly likely.

CHEGA SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**

Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**

EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**

Democratic credibility: **LOW**

PCP SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**

Social issues: **MODERATE**

EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**

Democratic credibility: **LOW**



Reanimated Man X

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2020: -0,4%.
Voter support, radical right in 2020: +5,9%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): NONE

The Romanian party system has offered new line-ups for each election in the past. Countless mergers, splits, new formations, and name changes have almost made it too difficult for voters to navigate Romanian politics.

Unlike the other Warsaw Pact countries, Romania experienced a violent revolution when the communist regime fell in 1989. The Romanian Communist Party (PCR [Partidul Comunist Român]) was banned immediately. In its place, many prominent communists rallied within the National Salvation Front (FSN [Frontul Salvării Naționale]) led by Ion Iliescu. Iliescu experienced a landslide victory in the country's first elections in 1990 after a campaign that was marked by violence and engendered significant obstacles for opposition parties in communicating their agenda.

The FSN splintered during the subsequent mandate. In the 1992 legislative elections, Iliescu's breakaway party – the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN [Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale]) – won renewed confidence and governed for the next four years with the help of three fringe parties: the communist Socialist Party of Labour (PSM [Partidul Socialist al Muncii]), the nationalist Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR [Partidul Unității Naționale a Românilor]), and the nationalist Greater Romania Party

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



(PRM [Partidul România Mare]). These parties initially supported the Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (PSDR [Partidul Democrat Agrar din România]) in parliament but intermittently joined the government during 1993–1996. The radical nationalism advocated by these coalition parties led to friction, particularly in foreign policy. As a result, Romania had strained relations during these years, particularly with Hungary but also with Moldova, Yugoslavia, and others. The cooperation ended when Iliescu, on a state visit to the United States, compared the party leaders of PRM and PUNR to the maverick Russian extreme nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovski.[1]

The PSDR later changed its name to the Social Democratic Party (PSD [Partidul Social Democrat]). The PSD can be best described as espousing a combination of left-wing populism and national conservatism. There is a noticeable continuity with the Romanian dictatorship of the post-war period, which seamlessly combined communism and nationalism, but also a clear resemblance to the political ideologies that unite populists across eastern Europe. The PSD has repeatedly been criticised for corruption and

1 Micharl Shafir & Dan Ionescu, "A Nebulous Political Shift"

attacks on the rule of law. Key events, such as the conviction of former party leader Liviu Dragnea and attempts to decriminalise corruption, highlight the party's disregard for legal norms. The PSD was suspended from its EP party group in 2019 due to a lack of democratic credibility.[2]

The PUNR was formed in 1990 led by Gheorghe Funar. Funar quickly gained notoriety as a nationalist mayor in Cluj-Napoca. During his mayorship, the colours of the Romanian tricolour were painted on everything in the city from park benches to trash cans and pavement, while street signs were changed, statues were renamed, and Romanian culture was prioritised while the Hungarians and the Romani were discriminated against. Similarly, the Christmas decorations in the city were limited to red, yellow, and blue colours. When Romania and Hungary signed a bilateral friendship agreement in 1996, Funar organised a funeral procession in Cluj. He also put up a sign in front of the Hungarian consulate saying, 'This is the seat of the Hungarian spies in Romania.'

Funar garnered nearly 11 per cent in the 1992 presidential election, while the PUNR won 7 per cent in the parliamentary elections. After a year of supporting the government in parliament, the PUNR joined the government in 1993 and held three ministerial positions: agriculture, foreign affairs, and economic reforms. However, Foreign Minister Ion Mihai Pacepa resigned after a few months. The PUNR remained in the government until 1995 and in parliament until 2000.

Funar was expelled from the party in 1997 and instead became a member of the PRM. He served as mayor of Cluj until 2004. He has made several antisemitic statements over the years, including calling Einstein mentally retarded and claiming that he stole the theory of relativity from a Romanian poet.

The PRM was formed in 1991 and was led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor until he died in 2015. In 1994, the PRM joined the government and also obtained three ministerial positions: youth, culture, and industrial policy. Similar to the PUNR, the PRM left the government prematurely.

2 The classification of PSD is disputed. The PopuList includes them only in the 1990s. https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Romania.pdf

The PRM's biggest success came in the 2000 presidential election when Tudor finished in second place. Afterwards, the party sought to moderate with the ambition of joining the EPP. However, their membership application was rejected. Instead, Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 allowed a far-right group to emerge in the EP: Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS), which was comprised of the PRM and other parties such as the French National Front and the Austrian FPÖ.

The PRM has advocated for a classical nationalism, with the ultimate goal of recreating Greater Romania, with the borders from the interwar period. The party aims to unite all ethnic Romanians into a homogeneous state and advocates for the annexation of Moldova, among other things. It has also campaigned for a ban on the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR [Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România]), accusing it of wanting to break Transylvania away from Romania. Unusually for a nationalist party, the PRM was in favour of Romania's EU membership.

The PSM was a relatively short-lived leftist, extremist, and de facto communist party formed in 1990. It entered parliament in 1992 with a narrow margin and gained some influence by being part of the FDSN coalition government. The PSM lost its parliamentary seats in 1996 and was dissolved in 2003.

In 1996, the right-wing opposition managed to win the election. Since then, Romanian politics has been dominated by relatively centrist parties such as liberals, conservatives, and social democrats. No extremist party has been part of the government since 1996. However, several anti-establishment parties have emerged, achieving temporary success but rarely becoming long-lasting.

For instance, the New Generation Party (PNG [Partidul Noua Generație]) was a right-wing extremist nationalist party formed in 2000. Its best performance was in the 2004 election when it won 2 per cent of the vote. From 2003, it was led by Gigi Becali, owner of the Steaua Bucarest football club.

Similarly, the People's Party – Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD) was formed in 2011 and entered parliament in 2012 but was dissolved two years later due to internal divisions. The party gained votes on promises to fight corruption and foster social justice, largely due to

the leader's significant media visibility.

The latest example is the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR). The party was formed in the fall of 2019 and surprised most by becoming the third-largest party in the 2020 legislative elections. Party leader George Simion had previously campaigned to unite Moldova and Romania. The party name alludes to this goal of reuniting all Romanians in a Greater Romania, i.e., claiming Moldova.[3]

The vice–party leader has previously participated in a citizen movement advocating for a traditional view of marriage and campaigned for a constitutional amendment to guarantee that only a man and a woman can enter into marriage. However, the party is not opposed to abortion. In August 2022, Simion live-streamed his wedding on Facebook and invited the entire population to watch, provided they were wearing traditional Romanian attire.
In its first years, the AUR had shared party leadership to emphasise grassroots support. The party is pro-NATO, advocates for energy self-sufficiency, and views the Fidesz and the PiS as role models.

3 https://www.populismstudies.org/mapping-european-populism-panel-5-populist-radical-right-left-parties-and-far-right-movements-in-the-balkan-countries/

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **8/32**

Romania became a member of the EU on 1 January 2007. The first MEPs from Romania were elected by parliament based on the results of the last national elections. This meant that the extreme nationalist PRM received three seats. Together with Ataka from Bulgaria, the PRM was a founding member of the short-lived ITS group.

In the first Romanian EP elections in November 2007, the PRM lost its seats, only to return in 2009 with three seats. Among the new MEPs were Tudor and Becali. The PRM's third MEP left the party and joined the S&D group after a year.

The PRM was voted out of the EP in 2014 and, ever since, no right-wing Romanian party has gained seats in the EP. If elected in 2024, the AUR has said it will join the ECR group.

PSD SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

AUR SUMMARY

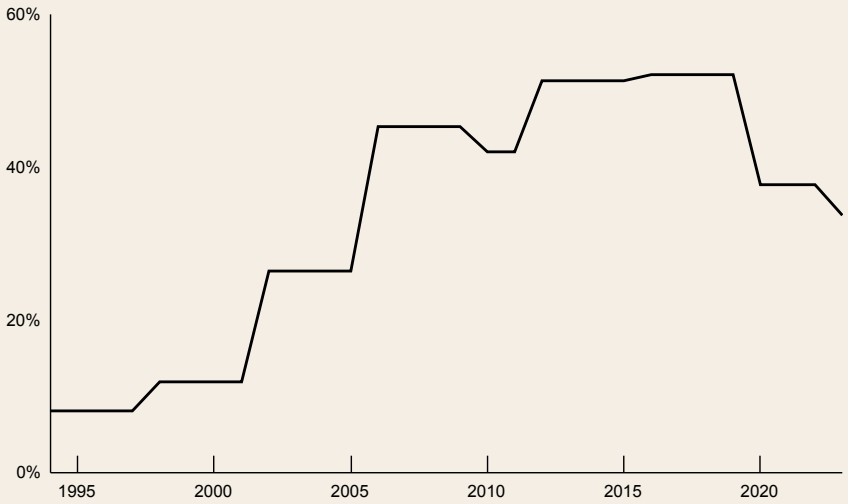
Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**


SLOVAKIA
POPULISM RANK: #10
Mareks Steins

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: +2%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: -6%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **SMER & SNS**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Slovakia has undergone many abrupt political shifts during its short time as an independent country. Slovakia has also had a large number of populist, right-wing, and left-wing extremist parties in parliament, including two populist parties that have held sway in government for multiple terms.

Just like in the Czech Republic, a broad umbrella organisation for oppositional forces emerged here, which split soon after the Velvet revolution in 1989. Vladimír Mečiar, the prime minister since 1990, then formed the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS [Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko]), which led the country to independence. Mečiar became the country's first prime minister at its independence in 1993 and returned to power after the first elections in 1994. The HZDS portrayed itself as a pragmatic centrist party but was in fact both populist and authoritarian, with strong power concentration in Mečiar's hands. He tightened centralised control and weakened democratic institutions. Soon conflict with President Michal Kováč also ensued. The Mečiar government made attempts to force Kováč to resign, for instance, by limiting his powers, reducing the budget, and compelling him to halve his staff.

Between 1994 and 1998, Mečiar led a coalition government together with the far-left Union of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS [Združenie robotníkov Slovenska]) and the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS [Slovenská národná strana]). The consequence of Mečiar's rule was that Slovakia's EU entry was delayed, as it lagged behind front-runners Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in reform policies. For example, Mečiar was strongly critical of the economic shock therapy implemented in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The SNS rests on a fascist foundation and has sought to revive the fascist Slovak state of the interwar period. Longtime party leader Ján Slota repeatedly made controversial remarks against the Romani and Hungarians, calling Hungarians 'a cancer in the body of the Slovak nation'. He warned his followers that Hungary would take over the country if they did not take a hard line. In 2000, when Slota was mayor of Žilina, the city council voted to dedicate a plaque honouring fascist leader Jozef Tiso, whom Slota called 'one of the greatest sons of the Slovak nation'. Despite divisions within the party, the SNS has persisted for a long time, surviving a split by its former party leader, and has been part of several governments. Economically, the party is right-leaning. It is also strongly Eurosceptic. The HZDS gradually lost voter support in the early 2000s. Much of its voter base was taken over by the

left-wing populist Direction – Social Democracy (Smer – sociálna demokracia), which was formed in 1999 by Robert Fico, who had left the Party of the Democratic Left (SLD [Strana demokratickej ľavice]) the year before. In 2006, the Smer won the election and formed a government together with the HZDS and the SNS, which once again worsened the country's international relations and led to a suspension of the Smer from the Party of European Socialists (PES).

The coalition government lasted for four years. After two years in opposition, Fico returned to power in 2012, now with his own majority. This government lasted until 2018 and after five years in opposition, returned to power in the autumn of 2023. The formation of a government once again led to a suspension from PES and exclusion from the S&D group in the European parliament.[1]

When in power, Smer has continued in the HZDS's authoritarian footsteps. On several occasions, Fico has described Smer as a party lacking ideology, a party that will run the country like a business. Characteristically, 'order, justice, and stability' have been highlighted as keywords in election campaigns. The party has also used nationalist rhetoric that continues along the same lines as the HZDS; for example, it has described Slovakia as a nation for Slovaks, not for its minorities. The party's roots in Slovak social democracy, combined with its nationalism, characterise it best as a left-wing populist and national conservative party. It is left-leaning on economic issues, conservative on social issues, and has become Eurosceptic in recent years, with Fico being a close ally of Hungary in Brussels.

Smer exhibits strong authoritarian tendencies, and Fico has, in several ways, tested the boundaries of democracy. For example, Fico's government has proposed reforms to public broadcasting (Radio and Television of Slovakia) where the media company would be directly subordinated to parliament and the Ministry of Culture. These reforms have sparked sharp domestic and international criticism. On the reform proposals, RTVS Director General Ľuboš Machaj said that he felt reminded of the times of communist censorship. Critics of the government have also expressed concerns about threats to press freedom in the country.

Further, Fico attacked the Constitutional Court: in 2022, his government pushed through a reform that weakened the judiciary's ability to prosecute graft, including dismantling an anti-corruption office, notwithstanding the street protests across Slovakia and warnings from Brussels about safeguarding the rule of law.[2]

The Smer also has troubling Russian connections. The party has been financed by a Russian bank and has propagated significant public opinion in favour of Russia. When Fico took office as prime minister in October 2023, the government announced that it would immediately suspend military aid to Ukraine.

The We Are Family (SR [Sme rodina]) is a right-wing populist party formed in 2015 that participated in the centre-right government 2020–2023. It is Eurosceptic, socially conservative, and economically right-wing.

The People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS [Ľudová strana naše Slovensko]) was founded by Marian Kotleba in 2010 and is an extreme right-wing party. It describes itself as the successor to the fascist government of the interwar period. It has benefitted from discontent and poverty and is one of the most openly right-wing extremist parties in Europe. After several successful elections, it failed in 2023 and was forced to leave parliament. L'SNS MEP Milan Uhrik left the party in 2021 and formed the neo-fascist party Republic Movement, which gained 4 per cent of the vote in the 2023 election.

1 https://www.politico.eu/article/european-socialists-suspent-robert-fico-smer-hlas-party/

2 https://www.ft.com/content/34668641-ea11-47c3-9b22-8c1383db9275

SNS SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

SMER SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **LOW**

SR SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **5/14**

The Smer won three seats in the first EP elections in Slovakia in 2004 and then joined the PES group. The HZDS won three seats in 2004 but remained non-attached. However, in 2009, the only remaining MEP from the HZDS joined the ALDE group. The SNS entered the EP in 2009 with one seat and joined the EFDD group.

The liberal Freedom and Solidarity (SaS [Sloboda a Solidarita]) entered parliament in 2014, but its members have been part of the ECR group, which the MEP from the OLANO also joined from 2014 to 2019.

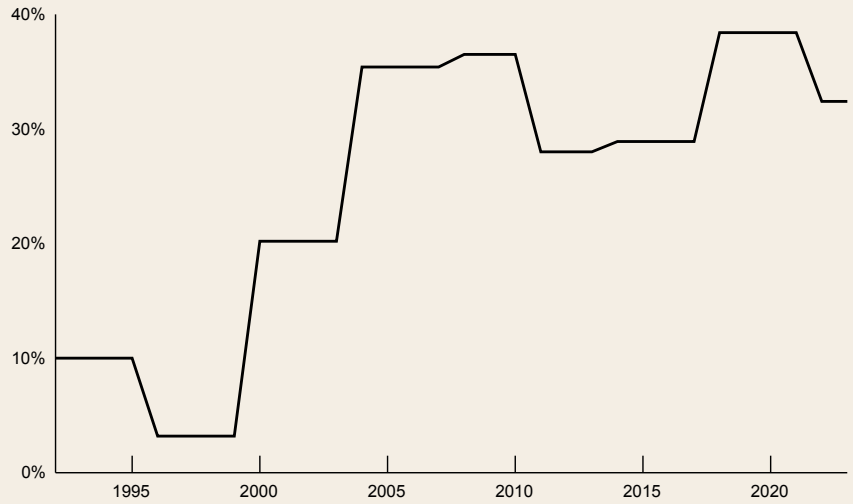
L'SNS won two seats in 2019, which have remained non-attached in the EP.


SLOVENIA
POPULISM RANK: #11
Alex Azabache

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: -4,8%.
Voter support, radical right in 2022: -4,1%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): LEVICA

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Since independence in 1991, Slovenia has had a multi-party system with relatively high turnover of parties. There has been a consensus regarding the importance of European integration and a generally Western-oriented policy, with exceptions for fringe parties. Most governments have been coalition governments.

The Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS [Slovenska demokratska stranka]) is a pro-market and socially conservative populist party founded in 1989 as the Social Democratic Party. Led by Janez Janša since 1993, it exhibits moderate nationalism and, sometimes, a xenophobic rhetoric. Janša, dubbed 'Marshal Tweeto' due to his social media activity, has steered the party in a populist and partly autocratic direction, evident in its name change, which happened in 2003.

The first SDS government (2004–2008) faced widespread criticism for allegedly meddling in the independence of the press. Accusations include politicising the press by appointing political allies to key positions in state-owned media outlets and using state-owned funds to purge critical editors and journalists. The SDS alleges bias in Slovenian media favouring the left, initiating what Janša termed a 'War with the media'.[1] Janša's government has cultivated party-aligned media outlets, accused of false reporting, hate speech, and political manipulation. Critics argue that Janša's aggressive stance towards the media has chilled press freedom, sparking concern from international observers, including the US State Department and the EP.

Changes to laws governing public broadcaster, RTV Slovenia, increased political control over its editorial board, leading to a referendum challenge. A secret 2007 deal between then prime minister Janša and the Laško Breweries head granted editorial influence over the flagship national newspaper Delo, which caused resignations and difficulties in critical reporting. Supported by international organisations, journalists launched a petition against media pressures, while the SDS continued to deny impropriety and claimed that the media was being controlled by leftist opposition groups.

In the 2011 snap parliamentary election, the SDS won 26 per cent of the vote. It succeeded in forming a ruling coalition government amid an economic downturn and went on to implement drastic reforms including

1 Politico, February 16, 2021, https://www.politico.eu/article/slovenia-war-on-media-janez-jansa/

privatisation, budget cuts, and austerity measures. However, the reforms failed to alleviate economic troubles, leading to increased unemployment, falling living standards, and a double-dip recession. Protests erupted nationwide against austerity measures and corruption allegations, culminating in the collapse of the government and the appointment of a new prime minister in 2013.

In early 2020, disagreements over health insurance reform led to the resignation of Slovenia's finance minister as well as Prime Minister Šarec, which prompted a call for early elections. The SDS managed to form a new government with the support of New Slovenia – Christian Democrats, the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS [Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije]), and the Modern Centre Party (SMC [Stranka modernega centra]), despite previous opposition to a Janša-led government from all three parties. Janša assumed office as prime minister for the third time, with the coalition agreement outlining various policies including military service reintroduction, healthcare reforms, vocational education emphasis, carbon neutrality commitment, decentralisation, and tax reductions, among others.

In a report on the state of democracy in Slovenia, Freedom House argued that "the current right-wing government has continued attempts to undermine the rule of law and democratic institutions, including the media and judiciary".[2]

The Left (Levica) is a left-wing populist party founded in 2014 as a coalition of several green, progressive, and radical left forces, which then merged into a party in 2017. It has been part of the coalition government since 2022. It is leftist on economic issues, strongly sceptical of NATO membership, and progressive on social issues.

The Slovenian National Party (SNS [Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka]) is a nationalist party that gained 10 per cent in the first democratic elections in independent Slovenia in 1992, a year after it was formed. The SNS is anti-immigration and anti-minority and also opposed Slovenia's accession to the EU and NATO. It remained in parliament until 2022. The party never participated in government but provided confidence and supply between 2018 and 2020.

2 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022, https://freedomhouse.org/country/slovenia/freedom-world/2022

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **2/8**

The SDS has been represented in every EP since Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. It has always been a part of the EPP group and currently holds three seats. No Slovenian MEP has so far represented the far-left or far-right groups in the EP.

SDS SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

LEVICA SUMMARY

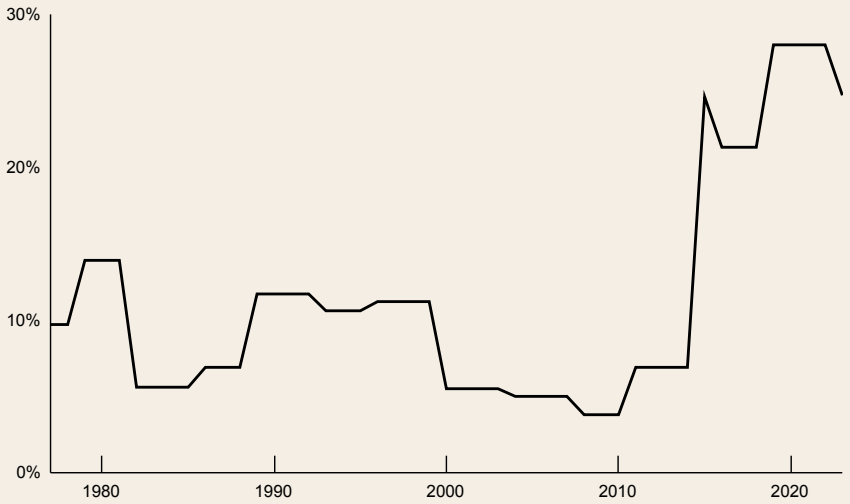
Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **PRO-EUROPEAN**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**


SPAIN
POPULISM RANK: #16
Andie Venzl

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2023: -0,6%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: -2,7%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **PCE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Since the transition to democracy after Francisco Franco's death in 1975, Spanish politics has been dominated by two major parties: the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE [Partido Socialista Obrero Español]) and the conservative People's Party (PP). In addition, the party system has accommodated a large number of parties, many of them being regional. Especially on the left, the number of radical parties at the regional and national levels is almost overwhelming. There is also a tradition, particularly on the left, of forming very large electoral alliances.

The Communist Party of Spain (PCE [Partido Comunista de España]) was formed in 1921 as a breakaway faction from the PSOE. The party operated illegally during the dictatorship but played a significant role as an opposition to the fascist regime. Following Franco's death in 1975, the PCE was legalised in 1977 and achieved third place in the first democratic elections held the same year. The PCE adopted a Eurocommunist approach early on, advocating for revolution within the framework of the democratic system, which led to several splits within the party by more orthodox factions.

In 1986, the PCE established the umbrella organisation the United Left (IU [Izquierda Unida]) in collaboration with several smaller radical left parties. The PCE has not run independently in elections since then but has always been part of electoral alliances. The PCE/IU did not lose support following the fall of communism in 1989, instead, it enjoyed some of its best electoral results in the 1990s.

Both the PCE and the IU have maintained ambiguity regarding their ideological roots and their role in Spanish politics. As recently as 2017, the PCE reintroduced Marxism–Leninism into its party programme. On social issues, it has become more progressive and focusses strongly on ecological issues.

The Podemos (We Can) was established in 2014 by Pablo Iglesias Turrión, emerging from the anti-austerity protest movement of the early 2010s. It achieved significant success in the EP election in 2014 and gained representation in the national parliament a year later. In the mid-2010s, alongside the Syriza in Greece, the Podemos was viewed as one of the prominent examples of a new emerging populist left. After a hung parliament, new elections were conducted in 2016, during which the Podemos formed an electoral coalition with the IU called the Unidos Podemos (UP).

In the 2019 general election, the Podemos experienced a setback but, despite this, after lengthy negotiations, it eventually managed to enter into a

coalition government with the PSOE. For the PSOE, it was a significant step to finally admit the Podemos. It tried to find ways to limit the Podemos' participation such as declaring that the Podemos could only nominate 'experts' and not politicians as ministers. Particularly, the PSOE's support for Venezuela was highlighted as compromising, as was Podemos' support for Catalan separatists.

The Podemos has been characterised as a broad coalition of diverse left-wing movements. Originally, the party was distinctly populist, drawing inspiration from figures such as Hugo Chavez. Its coalition with the PSOE led to moderation and the classification of the party as populist has been disputed since then.[1]

Turrión left politics in 2021. The following year, Yolanda Diaz formed the Sumar – a new green and leftist electoral platform that united the Podemos, the IU and many other leftist, progressive, and green parties. These parties competed in the 2023 general election together and gathered 12 per cent of the vote. Late in 2023, the Podemos left the Sumar, while the Sumar, the IU, and the PCE joined a left-wing government under the leadership of the PSOE.

The far right in Spain experienced a decline following the end of the dictatorship. The sole political party advocating for Francoism and a revival of fascism was the New Force (FN [Fuerza Nueva]) which garnered 2 per cent of the vote in 1982 but soon faded away. This party had direct ties to extra-parliamentary groups that were responsible for various acts of terrorism during the years of democratic transition.

Vox (meaning 'voice') is a radical right party that was founded in 2013, partly as a splinter from the PP. In 2014, Santiago Abascal became party leader. The Vox's early years were marked by failure, but it experienced a breakthrough in the regional election in Andalusia in 2018, which was followed by them returning 15 percent in the general election in 2019. The 2023 elections were a disappointment for Vox, with 12 percent of the votes.

The Vox is strongly nationalist and conservative on social issues; it is opposed to abortion and espouses clear anti-feminist rhetoric. It leans to the right on economic matters and holds a somewhat mild Eurosceptic stance. The party employs nationalist rhetoric that pits Spanish nationalists against enemies of Spain ('anti-España'). It is strongly centralist, aiming to strip regions of power, take control of Gibraltar, and outlaw separatist movements.

In 2020, it supported Donald Trump in the US presidential election and refused to acknowledge Biden's victory, sharing the extreme right-wing conspiracy that the elections were stolen.

There have been tensions within the party between a more hardliner nationalist faction and a faction that has emphasised economic liberalism. Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, co-founder along with Abascal, left political activity in 2023, most likely out of disagreements with the party line. He belonged to the moderate faction.

1 https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Spain.pdf

PCE SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **PRO-EU**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

PODEMOS SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

VOX SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSKEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **10/59**

Since 1987, Spain has always been represented by the radical left group in the EP. The IU has often been among the larger delegations in the GUE, but in 2004 and 2009, it only won a single seat. In the outgoing parliament, the Podemos has three seats, the IU has two, and a regional Basque party has one seat in the GUE group.

The Basque nationalist party Herri Batasuna (HB) had seats in the EP from 1987 to 1994. Vox entered the EP in 2019 and joined the ECR group with four seats.



SWEDEN

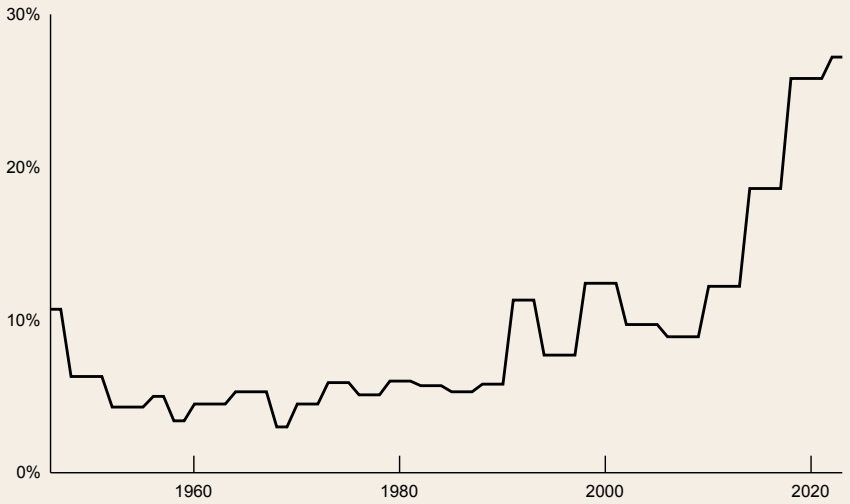
POPULISM RANK: #15

Matthias Derksen

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2022: **-1,3%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2022: **+2,7%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



During the post-war decades, Sweden's five-party system was among the most stable in the world and experienced very low electoral volatility. Only towards the end of the 1980s did a new party – the Green Party (MP [Miljöpartiet]) – finally manage to enter parliament. In addition, Swedish party politics has been characterised by the strong position of The Social Democrats (S), which governed uninterrupted between 1936 and 1976.

For a long time, the only challenge came from the left. The Left Party – The Communist (VPK [Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna]) was founded as the Communist Party of Sweden (SKP [Sveriges kommunistiska parti]) through a split from the S in the revolutionary year 1917. The SKP was loyal to Moscow, supported the invasion of Hungary in 1956, and also supported de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union. A shift took place when C.-H. Hermansson became party leader in the 1960s, and the party criticised the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. At the party congress in 1969, a faction from northern Sweden protested strongly against the critique of the Soviet Union and several splits followed, none of them electorally successful.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the VPK, like several other western communist parties, gradually came to advocate democratic socialism while maintaining friendly relations with the regimes in the East. After having been politically isolated for a long time, the VPK negotiated policy with the S for the first time in the early 1980s and towards the end of the decade] brought down a social democratic government together with the centre-right parties.

Only at the party congress in 1993 did the party abandon communism as an ideology. It then changed its name to the Left Party (V [Vänsterpartiet]). In the early 2000s, the party once again had a party leader, Lars Ohly, who called himself a communist, which was also common in the youth association. Today, the V defines itself as a socialist and feminist party. The party's degree of populism and anti-establishment status is debated, with several scholars classifying it as 'borderline left populist'.[1] It has never participated in government but had confidence-and-supply agreements with several S-governments. It is radically leftist on economic issues and progressive on social issues. The party has opposed Sweden's integration in the EU but softened its eurosceptic stance in recent years.

1 https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-PopuList-3.0-short-version.pdf, https://euagenda.eu/upload/publications/state_of_populism_in_europe_2020_final.pdf.pdf

To the right of the centre-right party the Moderates (M), there was a void in the Swedish party system until the 1980s. The New Democracy (NyD) was a right-wing populist party that achieved rapid but short-lived success in the early 1990s. The NyD's early profile issues were tax cuts, reduced bureaucracy, and general anti-establishment rhetoric. During its three years in parliament, the NyD exerted a certain influence on the centre-right coalition, although it never formally had a confidence-and-supply agreement. It gradually developed into an anti-immigration party and in the 1994 election, all other parties strongly distanced themselves from it due to its racist rhetoric. The NyD was voted out in the 1994 election, never to return.

The Sweden Democrats (SD) was founded in 1988. A majority of the founders had a background in various far right movements from the 1970s and 1980s and the party was from the beginning strongly associated with neo-nazism and the skinhead movement. The SD gained some local representation in the 1990s but remained irrelevant at the national level until the early 2000s. It moderated its politics, abandoning the openly racist segments of its migration programme and attempting to exclude members expressing anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi views.

SD:s moderation has led to two splinters of some relevance, firstly the National Democrats in 2001 and then Alternative for Sweden in 2018. None of the splinters have been successful with the voters, however.

The SD's first breakthrough came in 2010 when it entered the Swedish parliament. The following year, it added social conservatism to nationalism in its programme. In 2014, it won representation in the EP. Later that year, it more than doubled its support in the national elections.

The 2022 election was a great success for the SD, which, for the first time, became the second-largest party in the country. Notably, the party has increased its voter support for nine consecutive elections. After the 2022 election, the party began formal government negotiations with three centre-right parties. These negotiations resulted in the so-called Tidö Agreement, which gives the SD an equal influence over government policy without having seats in government. The agreement has a broad political scope, although it is not comprehensive. The SD has primarily influenced criminal and migration policy but is also considered to have influenced economic policy by opposing liberal economic reforms and welfare cuts.
The SD used to be strongly Eurosceptic but has moderated its position and no longer advocates an immediate 'Swexit'. It was also opposed to NATO membership but changed its position even before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The SD is socially conservative but takes rather moderate positions on most social issues, a reflection of how Sweden differs from most countries. For example, nowadays, the SD is in favour of liberal abortion laws and equal treatment of same-sex couples, although it took much more conservative positions on these issues before. On economic issues, the SD used to be more left-leaning but has gradually shifted more to the right.

The SD is generally considered to be anti-liberal but democratic. For example, the party's 2019 ideological programme begins by adhering to 'the classical definition of democracy, where the concept of democracy is not made synonymous with one's own political views'. Additionally, the programme clarifies that the party would like to see stronger elements of direct democracy and that a 'common national and cultural identity' is a cornerstone of a functioning democracy.

Nonetheless, it is also clear that the SD dislikes many concrete aspects of liberal democracy. The party's representatives repeatedly express their opposition to minority rights, their scepticism towards independent media, their disinterest in international conventions, and their desire to control research and education, with gender studies being a particular target. There are numerous quotes from prominent party members suggesting that the Sweden Democrats aspire to lead Sweden in a direction similar to Hungary or Poland. However, after one and a half years as an almost regular coalition partner, there is little evidence to suggest that the SD has actively pursued such measures.

Cooperation with the SD is highly controversial in Sweden. Until the late 2010s, the party was the subject of an informal cordon sanitaire, with all other parties promising to never cooperate with it. This was sometimes motivated by the fact that the SD has roots in right-wing extremism but also due to its migration policy.



Oscar Helgstrand

EP ELECTIONS

Number of authoritarian or populist MEP:s (2019): **4/20**

The SD first won seats in the EP in 2014. It hesitated to join the EFN group in 2015, instead joining the ECR group in 2018. It has threatened to leave the group if the Fidesz is allowed membership. The V has been part of the GUE group since Sweden joined the EU in 1995.

V SUMMARY

Economics: **LEFT**
Social issues: **PROGRESSIVE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**

SD SUMMARY

Economics: **CENTRE**
Social issues: **MODERATE**
EU: **SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**


SWITZERLAND
POPULISM RANK: #13
Rafa De

SUMMARY

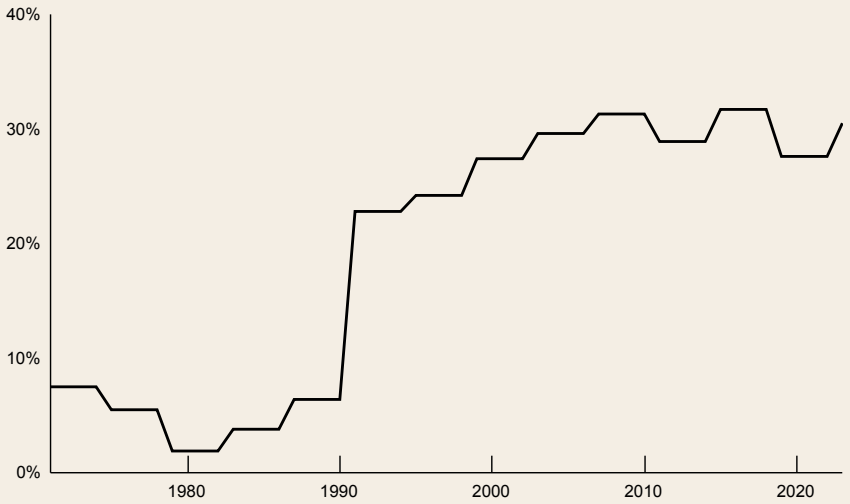
Voter support, radical left in 2023: **-0,4%.**
Voter support, radical right in 2023: **+1,1%.**
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **SVP**

Switzerland stands out from other countries in this index due to its constitution and democratic structure: power is highly decentralised, with weak central authority relative to the regional cantons, and direct democracy is utilised heavily through frequent referendums. The country operates as a combination of representative and direct democracy, with a unique system of governance led by a permanent coalition government representing major parties.

In this study, Switzerland's political landscape has been analysed starting from 1971, i.e., after it granted women the right to vote – the last country in Europe to do so. While smaller parties have challenged the dominant ones without significant success, Switzerland is home to one of Europe's earliest and most successful anti-establishment parties.

The Swiss People's Party (SVP [Schweizerische Volkspartei]) emerged in 1971 from a merger of agrarian and social liberal factions, already harbouring tensions between conservatism and liberalism. Its electoral fortunes rose sharply in the 1980s, propelled by hardliner stances on immigration and elitism. In 1999, the SVP for the first time became Switzerland's largest party, a position they have maintained in every election since then.

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



Under the leadership of Christoph Blocher, the SVP shifted its focus and maintained policy victories without moderating its rhetoric or losing voter support. The party has long campaigned against immigration and has nationalist or xenophobic tones. It opposes immigration both on economic and cultural grounds. In recent years it has opposed the strict COVID-19 measures, and resisted sanctions against Russia, while adhering to conservative social views. The SVP is basically to the right on economic issues, advocating reduced welfare benefits and tax cuts, but they are also relatively protectionist and in favour of subsidies to farmers. It is not only one of the most eurosceptic parties in Switzerland; it is also critical of any international involvement by the country whatsoever.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the SVP was challenged by a few minor right wing populist parties, namely the Swiss Democrats and the Freedom Party of Switzerland. These parties never got more than three and five percent, respectively.



Ricky Esquivel

EP ELECTIONS

Not a member of the European Union.

SVP SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**

Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**

EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**

Democratic credibility: **MEDIUM**



UNITED KINGDOM

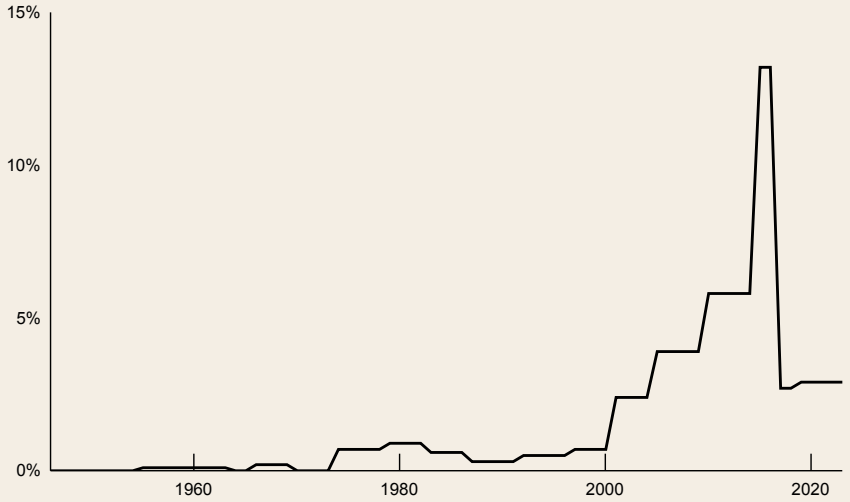
POPULISM RANK: #30

Clément Proust

SUMMARY

Voter support, radical left in 2019: 0%.
Voter support, radical right in 2023: +0,2%.
Populist/authoritarian parties in government (March 2024): **NONE**

POPULISM VOTE SHARE



The United Kingdom (UK) stands out from the other countries in the study due to its electoral system. Unlike other European countries, the UK has a pure majoritarian electoral system. This system strongly favours the emergence of a two-party system and has been of great significance in the absence of anti-establishment parties in the country. Even parties that gather a relatively large share of the votes usually receive very few seats in parliament. For example, the Liberal Democrats – for long the third-largest party in the country – received just over 11 per cent of the vote in the 2019 general election but only 1 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons.

Another consequence of this system is that radical views have often been accommodated within the major parties. The Labour Party has thus housed militant, radically socialist factions, while the Conservative Party (Tories) has accommodated national conservative factions.

Established in 1991 as the Anti-Federalist League by Alan Sked, the party was later renamed the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in 1993. In 1997, Sked was ousted by a faction led by Nigel Farage, which led to a reshaping of the party's direction. Sked himself soon left the party, claiming that it had turned racist. Under Farage's leadership, the UKIP expanded its platform, notably focussing on immigration issues. This strategy proved successful, with notable electoral victories in the 2013 local elections, 2014 European elections, and finally the 2015 general elections, where they garnered over 12 per cent of the vote. Farage resigned as leader after the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016, contributing to UKIP's subsequent decline.

The UKIP is ideologically classified as a right-wing populist party, championing staunch Euroscepticism and British nationalism while opposing immigration, multiculturalism, and what it perceives as the 'Islamification' of UK.

Following his departure from the UKIP, Farage founded the Brexit Party to ensure the implementation of Brexit. In the 2019 elections, it secured 2 per cent of the vote. In 2021, the party rebranded as Reform UK, shifting its focus to anti-lockdown sentiments. The Reform UK can be characterised as populist and nationalist in its orientation. Early in 2024, Reform started to take-off in the polls, passing ten percent voter support.

In Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was founded in 1971. It is a national conservative and strongly Eurosceptical party, bordering on populism. Despite having a limited number of seats, it played a

crucial role as a confidence-and-supply partner for the Tory government between 2017 and 2019. This marks the closest proximity a populist or anti-establishment party has ever come to government in the United Kingdom.

EP ELECTIONS

Not a member of the European Union.

REFORM SUMMARY

Economics: **RIGHT**
Social issues: **CONSERVATIVE**
EU: **HARD EUROSCEPTICISM**
Democratic credibility: **HIGH**



API.24

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM INDEX 2024