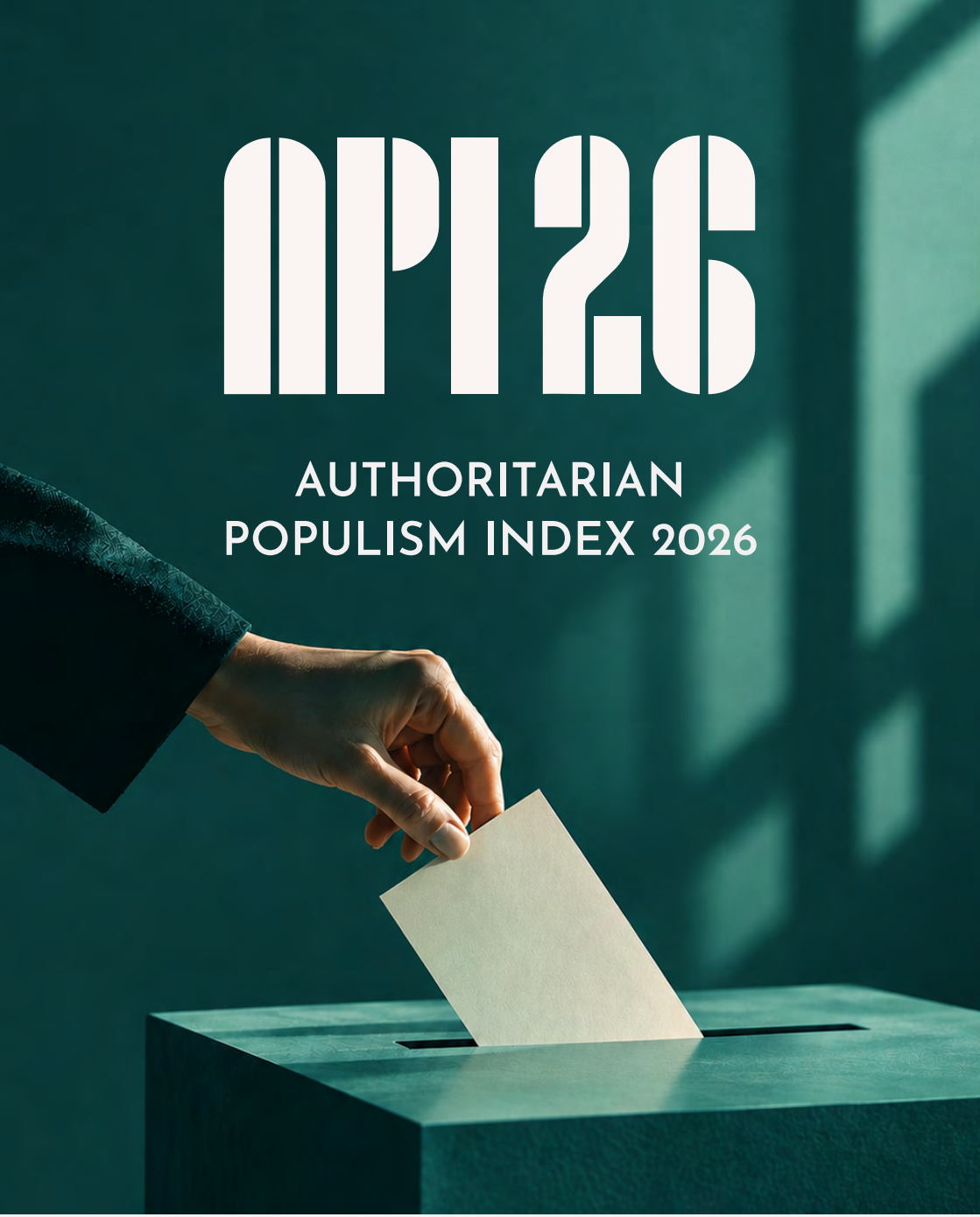
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AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM INDEX 2026



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ABOUT THE INDEX

The Authoritarian Populism Index maps ideological trends in European politics, tracking parties that pose a challenge to liberal democracy, the market economy and the rule of law. First published in 2016, the index now covers more than 260 parties in 31 European democracies, with in-depth analysis of the 76 most relevant parties, and with electoral data spanning from the first post-war elections to 2026. The 2026 edition – the fifth in the series – substantially expands its comparative analysis of individual parties, examining their positions on economics, social issues, EU membership and democratic norms. It also traces what happens when challenger parties enter government, and how their stances on Russia and the United States have become a new dividing line within the European radical right.

ABOUT TIMBRO

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.

ABOUT EPICENTER

EPICENTER, the European Policy Information Center, is an independent network of thirteen leading think tanks from across Europe. It seeks to inform the European policy debate and promote the principles of a free society by bringing together the expertise of its members. EPICENTER is formed by the Center for Political Studies (Denmark), Civil Development Forum (Poland), Fundalib (Spain), the Institut Économique Molinari (France), the Institute of Economic Affairs (UK), the Institute of Economic and Social Studies (Slovakia), the Institute for Market Economics (Bulgaria), Istituto Bruno Leoni (Italy), KEFiM (Greece), the Lithuanian Free Market Institute, Prometheus (Germany), IES Europe (Romania), and Timbro (Sweden). Like its members, EPICENTER is politically independent and does not accept taxpayer funding.



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SUMMARY

- The Authoritarian Populism Index, now in its fifth edition, finds that Europe's challenger parties have never been stronger. Almost one in three voters, 32.6%, now backs them. The plateau seen in the last edition proved temporary, and challengers win more than 20% of the vote in 26 of the 31 countries.

- The radical right has driven most of the rise and remains close to its record high. The radical left, despite a recent uptick, remains a shadow of its post-war strength.

- Challenger parties are no longer outsiders knocking on the door of power. By summer 2026 they sat in 11 of the 31 governments. Government participation has tamed some of them, but emboldened others or brought their coalitions down.

- The old pillars of post-war politics are crumbling. Christian democrats and social democrats have suffered the heaviest losses, while liberals are holding close to their best-ever results.

- Of the 76 parties examined, most are culturally conservative, and they are split evenly between economic left and right. A minority want to leave the EU; many would rather reshape it from within. The real warning sign is democracy itself: 18 parties are classified as highly authoritarian.

INTRODUCTION

'Yesterday we were the heretics. Today we are the mainstream.'[1] Viktor Orbán stood before an audience of political allies in Madrid in February 2025. The meeting, organised by Spain's Vox under the slogan 'Make Europe Great Again' took place only weeks after Donald Trump's return to the White House. While European governments across the political spectrum struggled to respond to renewed tariff threats, talk of annexing Greenland and an increasingly confrontational American foreign policy, the leaders gathered in Madrid celebrated Trump's victory as their own. Appearing alongside Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Geert Wilders and other representatives of the Patriots for Europe alliance, Orbán declared that 'Trump's tornado has changed the world in just a couple of weeks.' Trump, Wilders added, 'brings a message of hope.'

Eighteen months later, the mood is markedly different. Orbán has lost power despite receiving unprecedented support from almost the entire European radical right during the Hungarian election campaign. Donald Trump has become more of a political liability than an electoral asset for several of his European allies,

1 'In Madrid, Europe's far right looks to Trump as role model', *Le Monde*, 9 February 2025 (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/02/09/in-madrid-europe-s-far-right-looks-to-trump-as-a-role-model)

while Russia's war against Ukraine continues to expose divisions within the nationalist right, contributing to internal conflict in parties such as Poland's Law and Justice (PiS). Elsewhere, the experience of government has proved costly. The Sweden Democrats experienced their first general-election setback after providing confidence-and-supply to the centre-right government for four years. In both Finland and Croatia, radical-right governing parties have suffered sharp declines in opinion polls. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) brought down the government in which it participated and has since slipped back towards its traditional levels of support, once again finding itself without political influence.

Yet these setbacks should not obscure the broader picture. Across Europe, challenger parties continue to reshape the political landscape. Giorgia Meloni leads Italy's most stable government in decades. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), Reform UK in Britain and Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France have all, at different points, topped national opinion polls. Chega has emerged as Portugal's largest party, AUR leads the polls in Romania, and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) has continued to strengthen its position after winning the 2024 election despite remaining outside government. In Scandinavia, the Progress Party has become Norway's largest party, and the Danish People's Party has staged an unexpected comeback. Even where these parties remain excluded from office, they increasingly shape the political agenda.

Nor is the challenge to the political establishment confined to the right. In France, the next presidential election may pit the radical right against Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the radical left. In Bulgaria, years of political instability have given way to a government led by a left-wing populist former president, while in Greece Alexis Tsipras has returned to frontline politics with a new party that has quickly become one of the country's largest.

Election campaigns often give the impression that European politics is changing dramatically from one year to the next. This report argues the opposite. Individual parties rise and fall, governments are formed and collapse, but the long-term transformation of the European party system has followed remarkably consistent patterns for more than three decades.

The Authoritarian Populism Index was first published in the summer of 2016. It aimed to provide a clear, accessible overview of the long-term electoral development of Europe's populist parties. At the time, media coverage largely focused on electoral breakthroughs by high-profile leaders such as Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen, while setbacks received far less attention. By examining election results across Europe over a longer period, the Index demonstrated that support for the populist right had followed a steady upward trajectory since 1990, that the populist left had reversed its long post-Cold War decline, and that together these parties attracted close to one-fifth of the European electorate.

The first edition appeared only weeks after the Brexit referendum and months before Donald Trump was elected president. At the time, many observers wondered whether Europe had reached 'peak populism': had populist parties reached the limits of their electoral potential? Would Brexit and Trump's victory be followed by an electoral backlash?

The Index has subsequently been updated in 2017, 2019 and 2024. The most recent edition expanded the historical analysis to cover the entire post-war period. Rather than confirming the peak populism thesis, the data showed that support for the populist right continued to grow after 2016, while the resurgence of the populist left proved more short-lived.

The 2024 edition also introduced an expanded comparative analysis of the major populist parties. This demonstrated that, despite

often being grouped together, these parties differ substantially in their positions on economic policy, European integration and the liberal-democratic order.

The 2026 edition is the fifth in the series. It covers the same 31 European democracies as previous editions – the member states of the European Union together with the United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The analysis spans 1945 to October 2026 and includes every parliamentary election held during that period.

Beyond updating the electoral data, this edition substantially expands the comparative analysis of individual parties, examining their historical development, ideological profiles and democratic credibility.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Electoral support for challenger parties has continued to increase and reach record levels in 2026

There are many ways to classify political parties, of which ideological party families are often the most useful. Yet ideological opponents frequently share important assumptions in practice – not only about policy, but above all about the rules and institutions of politics itself. Throughout the post-war era, the mainstream European left and right have competed within a broad consensus: that public and private ownership should coexist; that majority rule must be constrained by individual rights; and that national sovereignty should be balanced by international cooperation and, increasingly, supranational institutions, to name just a few examples.

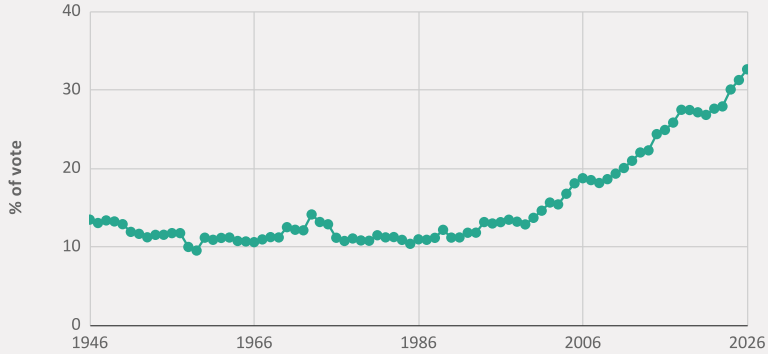
This order has always been challenged from different directions. Radical parties of the left and right have sought, on ideological grounds, fundamentally different societies – rejecting, for example, private ownership, multiculturalism, or supranational integration. Protest parties, meanwhile, have condemned the existing political system and its representatives as failed, corrupt, or incapable of responding to new challenges.

If these highly diverse forces are grouped together as *challenger parties* – united less by a common programme than by their

sharp rejection of the political mainstream – a striking long-term pattern emerges.

From the first post-war elections until the late 1990s, the combined vote share for all challenger parties – populist, authoritarian and extremist, on both the left and the right – remained remarkably stable at around 10%, reaching only a temporary peak of 14% in the early 1970s. For more than half a century, mainstream parties – social democrats, liberals, Christian democrats, conservatives and, later, Greens – consistently attracted around nine out of ten voters.

Figure 1. Average vote share of challenger parties across European democracies, 1946–2026



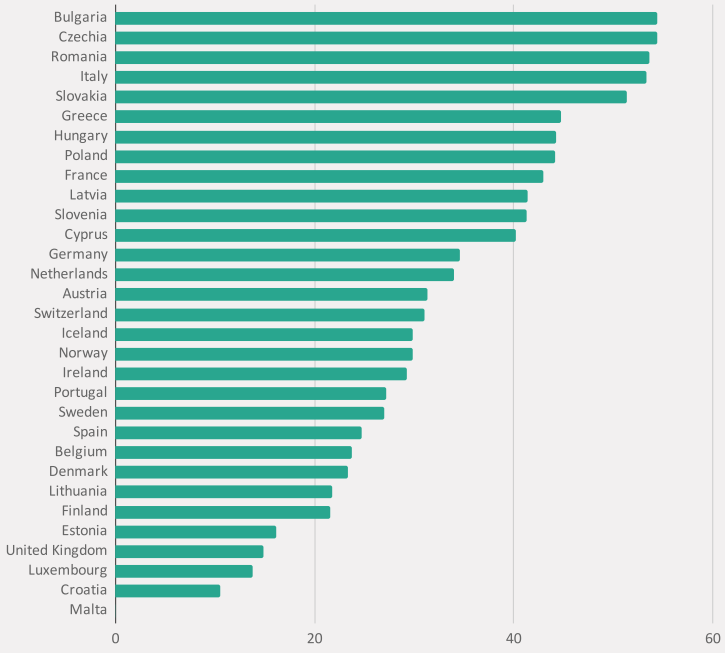
Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

This pattern changed around the turn of the millennium. By the years following the global financial crisis, support for challenger parties had roughly doubled to around 20%. The refugee crisis triggered a further surge, and between 2015 and 2023 their combined support stabilised at around one quarter of the electorate. During the past three years, support has increased once again, surpassing 30% for the first time. Challenger parties now attract roughly three times as many voters as they did during most of the post-war era.

2. Populist and/or authoritarian parties pose a challenge across all of Europe

The overall trend masks considerable cross-national variation. In Bulgaria, Czechia, Romania, Italy and Slovakia, challenger parties now attract more than half of all voters, while Malta remains an outlier with no parliamentary challenger parties at all. Even so, the rise is remarkably widespread. In 26 of the 31 democracies included in the Index, challenger parties now command more than 20% of the vote. Seven of the ten countries with the highest levels of support are post-communist democracies.

Figure 2. Combined vote share of challenger parties at the most recent parliamentary election, by country

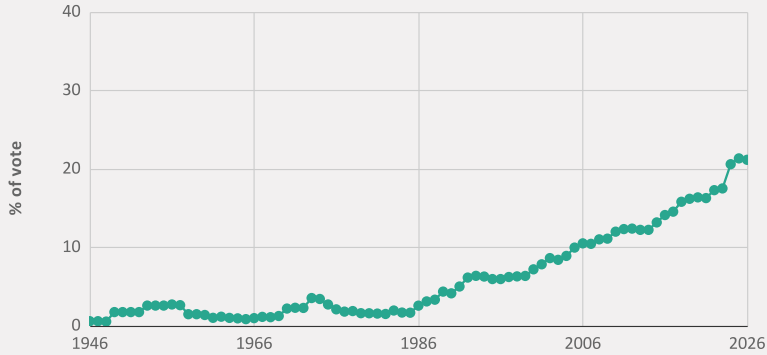


Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

3. The rise of the radical right has not slowed down

Support for challenger parties on the right has increased steadily for more than three decades and has reached new highs in most years of the 2020s, peaking at 21.3% in 2025. Although the refugee crisis of 2015 produced an immediate electoral surge, and immigration remains a highly salient political issue in many European countries, the subsequent rise cannot be explained by migration alone. Electoral support has continued to increase even after the refugee crisis itself receded.

Figure 3. Average vote share of right-wing challenger parties across European democracies, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

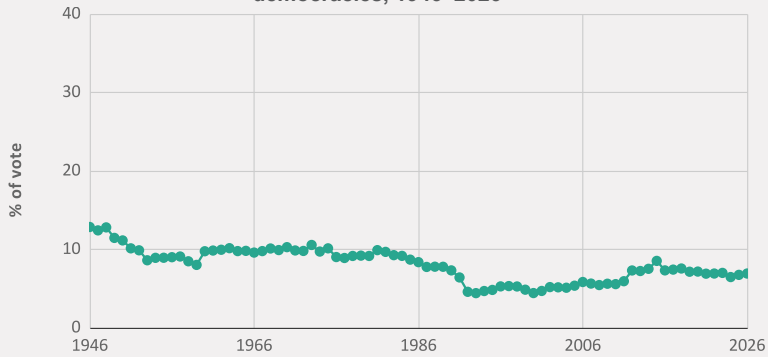
The graph, however, conceals an even more profound transformation. During most of the post-war period, the radical right consisted primarily of small fascist and neo-fascist parties with little prospect of attracting broad electoral support. Since the 1990s, these have gradually been replaced by a new generation of parties combining nationalism and populism while distancing themselves from overtly anti-democratic extremism. This shift has enabled the radical right to move from the political margins into the electoral mainstream.

The most striking feature of the current wave is not the repeated record highs, but its remarkable resilience. Individual elections continue to produce spectacular victories and occasional setbacks, yet the baseline level of support has continued to rise. In 20 out of 31 countries, support for the radical right increased in the latest election. Unlike previous waves of right-wing radicalism, today's challenger parties have demonstrated an ability to retain much of their electorate over time, suggesting that they have become a permanent feature of the European party system rather than a temporary protest phenomenon.

4. The populist left rises again

Support for challenger parties on the left has followed a very different trajectory. From the first post-war elections until the end of the Cold War, the left-wing challenger camp consisted primarily of communist parties, varying in ideological orthodoxy and their relationship to the Soviet Union. Despite these differences, their combined electoral support remained remarkably stable throughout most of the post-war period.

Figure 4. Average vote share of left-wing challenger parties across European democracies, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

The collapse of communism triggered a sharp decline. By the mid-1990s, left-wing challenger parties had reached their lowest levels of support in the entire post-war period. The 2008 financial crisis produced a partial recovery, driven primarily by new left-wing populist parties in Southern Europe, most notably Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Yet, in historical perspective, this resurgence was relatively modest and geographically concentrated.

Unlike the radical right, the radical left has failed to sustain an upward trajectory. Support has remained well below its post-war levels in much of Europe, and the gains made after the financial crisis have largely stagnated or been reversed. It remains to be seen whether the increase in the last few years marks a shift towards a new trend. In 13 out of 31 countries, the radical left won less than 1% of the vote in the latest election.

5. Challenger parties have become a normal part of government

In the immediate post-war years, communist parties participated in governments in eight Western European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy and Luxembourg. None of these arrangements lasted more than a few years, and by 1950 all Western European communist parties were again in opposition. Government participation remained exceptional during the following decades. Communists returned to government twice in Finland during the 1960s and 1970s and in France in the early 1980s. In Cyprus, the communist AKEL entered government in the late 1970s, while the Italian Communist Party reached its historic confidence-and-supply agreement with the Christian Democrats. In 1989, KKE also participated briefly in government in Greece.

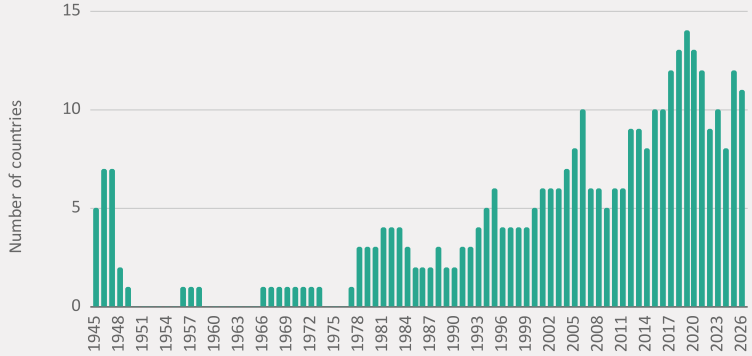
Government cooperation with challenger parties on the right was even more unusual. The Finnish Rural Party participated in government during the 1980s, and in Denmark the Progress Party provided parliamentary support for centre-right governments on two occasions.

The pattern began to change after the end of the Cold War. During the 1990s, nationalist parties participated in governments in post-communist Slovakia, Romania, Estonia and Latvia, as well as in Italy. On the radical left, government participation remained much more limited, with the French Communist Party the principal example during the decade.

The trend accelerated after 2000. The inclusion of the FPÖ in an ÖVP-led Austrian government attracted huge international attention, and the coalition survived an election and continued into a second term. Silvio Berlusconi renewed his cooperation with Lega and AN in Italy, PiS first entered government in Poland, and the Danish People's Party became an influential parliamentary support party. AKEL returned to government in Cyprus, while challenger parties also participated in governments in several Central and Eastern European countries, including Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The decisive shift, however, came during the 2010s. Fidesz returned to power in Hungary in 2010, beginning what would become 16 years of uninterrupted government. By the middle of the decade, challenger parties were entering governments across Europe: PiS returned to power in Poland, the FPÖ again joined the Austrian government, the Progress Party entered government in Norway, the Finns Party in Finland and ANO in Czechia. In Italy, the Five Star Movement and Lega formed a government together, while Syriza came to power in Greece. By 2019, challenger parties participated in 14 of the 31 governments covered by the Index.

Figure 5. Number of countries with challenger parties in government, 1945–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, around 45 different governments have included one or more challenger parties, while an additional dozen or so have depended on them. A few of these governments have proved remarkably durable: Fidesz governed Hungary for 16 consecutive years, while governments in Poland, Norway and Slovakia have also won re-election. Most, however, have ended prematurely and only lasted one to three years. This is not, however, a distinctive feature of governments involving challenger parties, but rather reflects the broader difficulties of maintaining stable coalition governments in increasingly fragmented party systems.

By the summer of 2026, challenger parties participated in 11 of the 31 governments covered by this index – more than one in three. Their transition from political outsiders to potential governing parties has therefore become a Europe-wide phenomenon. Only six of the 31 countries – Germany, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom – have never had a radical-left or radical-right challenger party in national government during the post-war period. In three of these countries – Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom – challenger

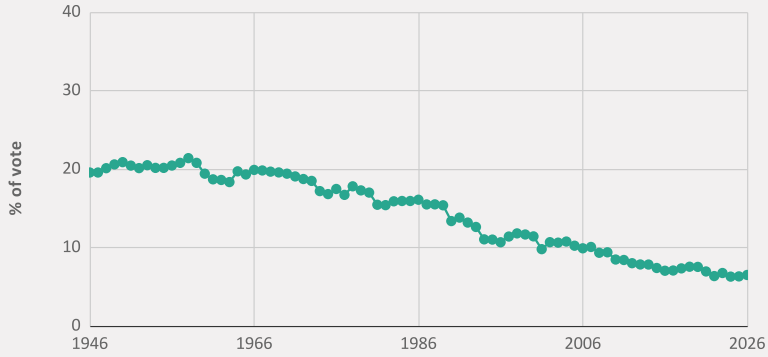
parties have nevertheless exercised political influence through confidence-and-supply arrangements.

6. Christian democrats are the main losers on the mainstream right

From the first post-war elections until the 1970s, Christian democratic and conservative parties were the two dominant party families on the centre-right in Western Europe. Together, they attracted around 35–40% of the vote on average.

Christian democratic parties began to lose support in the mid-1970s. Since then, their decline has been remarkably persistent, with average support falling to around 6.5% in 2026. Christian democratic parties now receive measurable electoral support in 13 of the 31 countries included in the study. They remain strongest in Malta, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria.

Figure 6. Average vote share of Christian democratic parties, 1946–2026



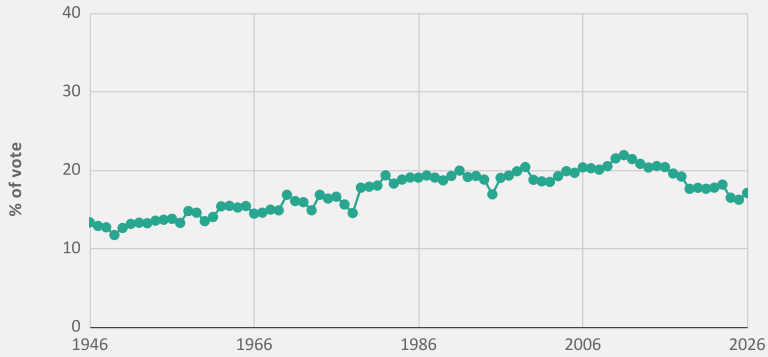
Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

Conservative parties have followed a considerably more stable trajectory. Their average support increased gradually during the

post-war period and peaked at above 20% around 2010. Over the following 15 years, they lost roughly five percentage points on average, although the most recent two years indicate a possible reversal of that trend. In 2026, average support stands at 17.1%.

Conservative parties are currently strongest in Croatia, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Hungary also joined this group in 2026, following the victory of Péter Magyar's newly established centre-right Tisza party over Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in the April parliamentary election.

Figure 7. Average vote share of conservative parties, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

7. Electoral support for Greens remains at pre-refugee crisis level

Green parties emerged as a significant political force in Western Europe during the 1980s and could initially, in several respects, be regarded as challenger parties. They promoted visions of society that differed sharply from the political mainstream. Many advocated more participatory forms of democracy, opposed military defence and nuclear weapons, questioned economic growth as

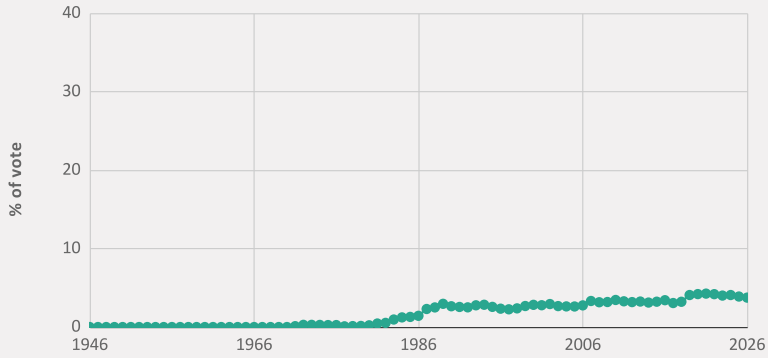
a political objective, and favoured decentralisation, small-scale production and local decision-making.

Over time, however, Green parties have undergone considerable adaptation. Both organisationally and programmatically, they have become more similar to established parties and have increasingly accepted the institutions and constraints of parliamentary government. Where they have become electorally significant, they have participated in or supported governments, most often with centre-left parties but occasionally also with centre-right parties.

An important distinction nevertheless separates Green parties from the parties classified here as challenger parties. Although the early Greens often challenged established political institutions and conventional conceptions of economic and social development, they generally lacked the populist and authoritarian elements characteristic of many other challengers. They did not typically portray politics as a fundamental struggle between a homogeneous people and a corrupt elite, and their emphasis on pluralism, decentralisation, and expanded political participation was fundamentally different from authoritarian conceptions of political power. In this sense, their challenge to the post-war mainstream was primarily ideological and institutional rather than populist or anti-pluralist.

Across Europe, Green parties remain a relatively small party family. In 2026, they attract an average of 3.8% of the vote. The variation between countries is substantial, however. Green parties receive more than 5% in 11 of the 31 countries included in the study, with their strongest support found in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Their geographical distribution is also unusually uneven. With the partial exceptions of Croatia and Romania, Green parties remain electorally marginal throughout post-communist Europe.

Figure 8. Average vote share of green parties, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

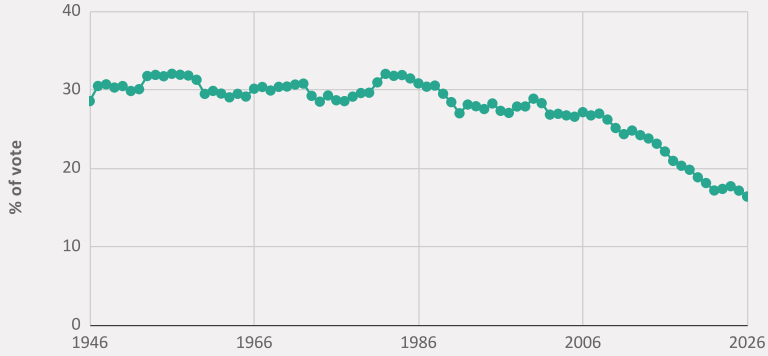
8. Social democratic parties have lost more than four in ten voters since 2000

Social democratic parties have played a central role in European politics throughout the post-war period. In almost every country, they have continuously been the principal political force on the left. They have participated in countless governments and, in some cases, dominated national politics for decades. In Sweden, for example, the Social Democrats governed continuously from 1936 to 1976.

Remarkably, their aggregate electoral strength remained broadly stable for most of the post-war era. As late as around 2000, average support was still close to its long-term historical level. Since then, however, the trend has been consistently downward. Between 2001 and 2026, average support for social democratic parties fell from around 28% to 16%.

The decline has been widespread, although far from uniform. In 2026, Malta, the United Kingdom and Spain are the only countries in which social democratic parties receive more than 30% of the vote.

Figure 9. Average vote share of social democratic parties, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

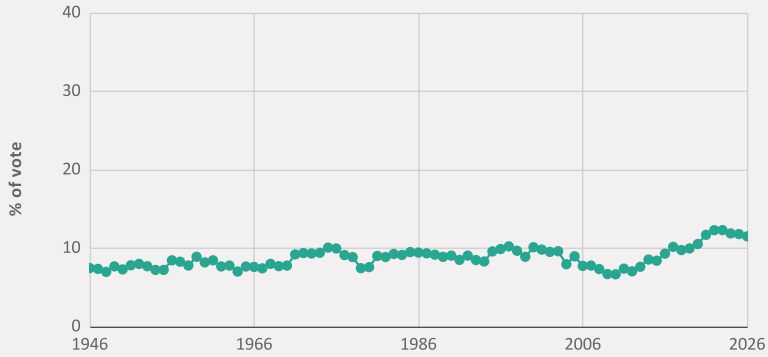
9. Liberal parties are not long-term losers from the transformation

Unlike Christian democratic and social democratic parties, liberal parties have not emerged as long-term losers from the transformation of European party systems. Their average support declined during the first decade of the twenty-first century, but then recovered substantially. By around 2020, liberal parties had reached their highest levels of support during the entire period covered by the study.

In 2026, liberal parties attract an average of 11.5% of the vote. This represents only a modest decline from the record level of 12.3% reached in 2022 and 2023.

Support is strongest in Estonia, where liberal parties together received more than 44% in the most recent parliamentary election. Liberal parties also command more than 20% of the vote in Slovenia, Slovakia, Belgium, Switzerland and France.

Figure 10. Average vote share of liberal parties, 1946–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

10. Moderation is not an automatic consequence of government participation

One of the most important questions is what happens when challenger parties move from opposition towards political power. The European experience shows both a clear pattern in which parties are willing to cooperate with them and considerable variation in what happens afterwards.

In Western Europe, cooperation with parties of the radical right has overwhelmingly been initiated by parties of the mainstream right. Conservative and Christian democratic parties have entered coalitions or parliamentary agreements with radical-right challengers in countries including Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. In the Nordic countries, liberal parties have also participated in such arrangements. Mainstream parties of the left, by contrast, have generally maintained a much stricter barrier against cooperation with the radical right.

The pattern is reversed on the radical left. Social democratic and green parties have repeatedly cooperated with parties further to

their left, either through formal coalitions or parliamentary support arrangements. Examples include Podemos in Spain, the Portuguese Communist Party and Left Bloc, and the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark. This reflects the continued importance of the traditional left-right divide. Despite the rise of populism and new political cleavages, government cooperation in Western Europe still occurs predominantly within established political blocs.

The dividing lines have been less rigid in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Social democratic parties have on several occasions cooperated with nationalist or radical-right parties. In Slovakia, Robert Fico's Smer formed a government with the nationalist SNS in 2006, a decision serious enough for Smer to be temporarily suspended from the Party of European Socialists. More recently, the Lithuanian Social Democrats brought the populist and nationalist Dawn of Nemunas into government after the 2024 election despite controversy over its leader's antisemitic statements. That cooperation lasted until 2026, when the Social Democrats expelled the party from the coalition amid accusations of increasing radicalisation.

Government participation can have a powerful moderating effect on challenger parties. Entering a coalition forces parties to choose between maintaining ideological purity and accepting the constraints of governing together with more established partners. This has been particularly visible in foreign and European policy, areas where governments have less room for unilateral experimentation and international alliances impose strong constraints.

The Sweden Democrats provide a clear example. The party historically advocated Swedish withdrawal from the European Union and contained significant internal sympathy for Russia. During its cooperation with the centre-right government after 2022, however, it accepted Swedish EU and NATO policy and became a firm supporter of Ukraine. The government and the Sweden Democrats jointly agreed on large multiyear military and

civilian support packages for Ukraine, and the party has supported tighter sanctions against Russia and Ukraine's eventual EU membership.

A similar process is evident in Finland. The Finns Party entered government for a second time in 2023 after a history of pronounced euroscepticism and internal divisions over foreign policy. In office, it accepted a government programme strongly committed to EU cooperation, NATO, sanctions against Russia and continued military and economic support for Ukraine. Government participation did not turn the party into a conventional liberal party, particularly on migration and cultural issues, but it substantially narrowed the range of possible positions in European and security policy.

Moderation is not, however, an automatic consequence of entering government. Parties can also use cooperation with mainstream parties to gain legitimacy and access to power without abandoning their more radical objectives. Austria provides one of the clearest examples. The FPÖ participated in government with the conservative ÖVP between 2000 and 2005 and again between 2017 and 2019, but neither experience produced lasting ideological moderation. The party subsequently became more radical under Herbert Kickl, particularly in its attitudes towards immigration, the EU, COVID restrictions and Russia. After becoming the largest party in the 2024 election, it attempted to form a government led by Kickl, but negotiations with ÖVP collapsed in February 2025 amid disagreements over policy and control of key state institutions.

The Netherlands provides another example of the limits of institutionalisation. After its 2023 electoral victory, Geert Wilders's PVV entered government for the first time in 2024, although Wilders himself remained outside the cabinet. Participation required important compromises, particularly on constitutional questions, European policy and support for Ukraine. Yet rather than accept

continued compromise, Wilders withdrew the PVV from the coalition in June 2025 when the other parties immediately refused to accept additional demands for an even more restrictive asylum policy. The government collapsed after only 11 months.

These cases suggest that cooperation should not be understood as a simple process through which mainstream parties inevitably tame their more radical partners. At least three outcomes are possible. Challenger parties may become more moderate as the price of influence; they may remain ideologically radical while learning to operate more effectively within established institutions; or cooperation may break down because the compromises required by the government conflict with the political identity on which the challenger party depends.

There is therefore no simple answer to whether cooperation strengthens or weakens challenger parties. Exclusion can preserve their outsider status and allow them to blame an entrenched political establishment for preventing the implementation of the popular will. Cooperation can deprive them of that argument and expose them to the compromises and failures of government. But it can also legitimise them, give them governing experience and move policies once considered radical into the political mainstream.

This final effect may ultimately be the most important. The influence of challenger parties cannot be measured only by whether they themselves enter government. In several countries, mainstream parties have adopted substantial parts of their agendas, particularly on immigration, integration, national identity and European sovereignty. A challenger party may therefore lose elections or even disappear while leaving behind political changes that prove far more durable than the party itself.

11. Migration and nationalism remain defining issues for the radical right

Immigration has been a defining issue for the radical right since its breakthrough in the 1980s. Opposition to immigration, multiculturalism and changing conceptions of national identity has helped distinguish these parties from the political mainstream, while the issue has also been crucial to their ability to attract substantial electoral support. The 2015 refugee crisis provided an especially powerful boost to nationalist parties across Europe.

Migration remains highly politically salient for these parties. The events in Ceuta in late July 2026 provided a striking illustration. The sudden arrival of tens of thousands of migrants in the Spanish enclave was rapidly seized upon by radical-right politicians across Europe, including Vox, AfD, RN and FdI, as evidence of failed European and national migration policies. The episode demonstrated both the issue's continued importance and the extent to which migration has become a transnational political issue for the European radical right.

Opposition to Islam has become an important component of this mobilisation, with radical-right rhetoric increasingly focused specifically on immigration from Muslim-majority countries and on the perceived incompatibility of Islam with European societies. Antisemitism has also remained present within parts of the radical right, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Antisemitic rhetoric and controversies have at the same time appeared within parts of the radical left, notably in connection with Israel and the Palestinian conflict, although its political expression differs from those found on the nationalist right.

Opposition to immigration, multiculturalism and identity politics has been a defining feature of radical-right parties. But this is not merely a wave of protest. These parties also embody a nationalist ideology rooted in a vision of homogeneous nation-states. Al-

though Europe's nationalist parties achieved their breakthroughs long before Trump, there has also been an evident import of messages from the MAGA movement, most recently exemplified by the Sweden Democrats' 2026 election campaign, whose central slogan was that 'Sweden should become Sweden again'. On other cultural and social issues, however, the traditional left-right divide remains considerably stronger. Support for abortion rights, LGBT rights and gender equality unites most challenger parties on the left, while only a small minority of those on the right adopt similarly liberal positions.

Of the 76 parties examined here, 53 are classified as conservative on cultural issues, 8 as moderate and 15 as progressive. All 15 progressive parties are also classified as economically left-wing. The relationship does not operate in the opposite direction: several parties combine left-wing economic policies with conservative positions on immigration, national identity or other cultural issues. These include Revival (Vazrazhdane) in Bulgaria, BSW in Germany, KKE in Greece, the People's Party in Iceland, Dawn of Nemunas in Lithuania, PSD in Romania, and Hlas and Smer in Slovakia.

12. Challenger parties are equally leftist and rightist on economic policy

Economic policy is often less central to challenger parties than other dimensions of political conflict. A core element of populism is precisely the claim that the most important divide in society runs between the 'people' and 'the elite', rather than along the traditional conflict between labour and capital. The rise of the culture wars has reinforced this tendency, with material questions often overshadowed by conflicts over immigration and national identity, religion, freedom of expression and, increasingly, climate policy.

Economic policy nevertheless remains fundamental to classifying parties on the conventional left-right spectrum. This only partly corresponds to the labels parties use for themselves. Left-wing populist and radical-left parties almost invariably also pursue left-wing economic policies. On the right, by contrast, variation is much greater, ranging from market-liberal parties to parties combining nationalism with protectionism, welfare chauvinism, or extensive state intervention.

Over time, several changes have taken place. Some of the earliest radical-right parties, such as the Front National in France and Vlaams Blok in Belgium, long pursued an almost neoliberal economic agenda. Today's Rassemblement National and Vlaams Belang, however, have moved considerably further to the left, with greater emphasis on protectionism and welfare. The Sweden Democrats have moved in the opposite direction, from a centrist position towards an economic agenda that in recent years has become more closely aligned with that of the mainstream right. This fluidity in economic policy should primarily be understood as reflecting the lower salience of economic issues for these parties, which also makes such positions easier to adapt.

Of the 76 parties examined here, 26 are classified as economically right-wing, 27 as left-wing and 23 as centre.

The relationship between economic and cultural positions is also asymmetric. With one exception, every economically right-wing party in the sample is classified as culturally conservative. The exception is Norway's Progress Party, which combines a clearly right-wing economic programme with more moderate positions on several cultural and social issues.

13. Euroscepticism is weakening, at least temporarily

Euroscepticism has changed substantially over the course of the post-war period. Earlier generations of challenger parties frequently treated European integration as something to be rejected outright. Communist parties opposed the European project as capitalist and Atlanticist, while nationalist parties regarded it as a threat to sovereignty and national self-government. For many of these parties, withdrawal from the European Community or later the European Union was therefore an explicit objective.

Today, outright exit has become considerably less common. Most challenger parties have adapted pragmatically to the reality of EU membership. Brussels nevertheless remains an important rhetorical adversary, portrayed as the centre of an unaccountable political elite, a vehicle for globalisation and an institution that has transferred power away from national electorates. At the same time, many nationalist parties increasingly view the European Union not only as an obstacle but also as a potential instrument for advancing their own political agenda. Rather than leaving the Union, they seek to reshape it from within, strengthen national sovereignty and redirect European cooperation towards migration control, border protection, defence and a more conservative conception of European identity.

Jordan Bardella summarised this new approach particularly clearly in an interview with *Politico*: ‘We do not wish to leave the European Union. We wish to change everything without destroying anything.’[2] The formulation captures an important transformation of the nationalist right: the objective is increasingly not withdrawal from European integration, but political control over its direction.

2 ‘Jordan Bardella is coming for the EU budget’, *Politico*, 15 June 2026 (https://www.politico.eu/article/france-eu-far-right-jordan-bardella-coming-for-europe/)

All but two of the 76 parties examined here, Brothers of Italy and PSD, can be described as eurosceptic in at least some sense. None advocates a substantial further transfer of power from the national level to Brussels, and most favour either limiting integration or returning competences to member states. The degree of opposition nevertheless varies considerably.

The distinction used here is consequently one of degree rather than a simple division between pro-European and anti-European parties. Parties classified as pro-European accept EU membership and the Union's basic institutional framework, while criticising particular policies or aspects of integration. In this respect, they may overlap with mainstream centre-right and centre-left parties in some countries that are likewise sceptical of a stronger or more centralised EU.

Soft eurosceptic parties accept membership, at least for the time being, but seek a substantial reduction in the powers exercised at the EU level and a corresponding shift of authority back to the member states. Hard eurosceptic parties go further by actively seeking to move their countries towards withdrawal from the EU, although they may differ considerably in how immediate that objective is and in the political path they envisage for achieving it. In countries outside the EU, this category includes parties that actively oppose membership.

This distinction also captures the extent to which some challenger parties have moderated over time. Italy's Brothers of Italy is a clear example. Although rooted in a strongly sovereigntist tradition, the party has, in government, accepted the euro, worked pragmatically within EU institutions, and abandoned any suggestion that Italy should leave the Union. Similar adaptation processes can be observed elsewhere, even among parties that continue to use strongly anti-Brussels rhetoric.

Twenty of the 76 parties are classified as hard eurosceptic. This group includes parties in EU member states that continue to contemplate withdrawal or reject central elements of the integration project, as well as parties in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland that continue to oppose EU membership or favour remaining outside the Union.

14. Authoritarianism is still the main reason for concern

European challenger parties almost invariably present themselves as democratic – often as more genuinely democratic than the established parties they oppose. They typically argue that mainstream parties, courts, media institutions, bureaucracies or supranational organisations have insulated political decision-making from popular control. In this respect, they differ markedly from many of the far-left and far-right movements of the early post-war period, some of which openly rejected liberal democracy or regarded parliamentary institutions as merely transitional.

This makes authoritarianism more difficult to assess. The central question is rarely whether contemporary challenger parties formally accept elections or majority rule. Rather, it is how they understand the limits of majority power, political pluralism, judicial independence, media freedom, minority rights and the autonomy of institutions outside direct political control.

Authoritarianism is the dimension on which the greatest uncertainty remains. Of the 76 parties analysed, 18 are classified as highly authoritarian. This category includes parties such as Fidesz, PiS and Smer, which have already demonstrated in government how far they are prepared to go in weakening judicial independence, constraining media pluralism, politicising state institutions or otherwise eroding liberal-democratic checks and

balances. In these cases, the threat to liberal democracy, the rule of law and the institutional foundations of the market economy can no longer reasonably be regarded as merely hypothetical.

A low classification should not be interpreted as implying an absence of problems. Compared with established mainstream parties, even many of the challengers classified as low contain more radical factions and supporters, tolerate harsher rhetoric from prominent representatives and periodically provide platforms for attacks on minorities or other forms of illiberal political mobilisation. What distinguishes them is that these tendencies have not developed into a systemic challenge to liberal democracy, the rule of law or the basic institutions of a market economy.

The medium category is therefore both the largest and, in some respects, the most important. It identifies parties with significant illiberal, anti-pluralist or authoritarian tendencies for which the ultimate consequences of sustained political power remain uncertain. Some may follow the path of parties that have moderated through participation in government; others could instead use political power to reshape institutions in a more authoritarian direction. In these cases, the classification reflects not the absence of warning signs, but uncertainty about how far the parties would ultimately be prepared to go.

15. Relations with Russia and the United States have become new dividing lines

Relations with Russia and the United States have increasingly become a principal dividing line within European challenger parties. For much of the 2010s, parts of the European radical right developed close relations with both Russia and the emerging American populist right. Russian actors cultivated contacts with nationalist and eurosceptic parties and, in some cases, provided direct financial support. Marine Le Pen’s Front National, for

example, received a €9.4 million loan from a Russian bank in 2014.[3] At the same time, Donald Trump's first presidency and the rise of the MAGA movement provided many European challenger parties with an influential ideological and political ally in the United States.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally altered this landscape. Sympathy for Moscow, which had previously carried relatively limited political costs in several countries, became much more difficult to reconcile with aspirations for political legitimacy and government participation. For some parties, distancing themselves from Russia became an important component of mainstreaming. This has been particularly evident in countries close to Russia and among parties seeking cooperation with established centre-right parties.

The second Trump presidency has further complicated the picture. Trump, Vice-President JD Vance, Elon Musk and other figures associated with MAGA have openly supported or encouraged nationalist political forces in Europe. The clearest example has been the increasingly close relationship between MAGA and the German AfD. Yet American support has not produced the straightforward electoral advantage that European challengers might once have expected. Trump's confrontational approach towards Europe, NATO and Ukraine has made association with him politically costly in many countries and exposed sharp disagreements within the European right. The clash between Trump and President Zelenskyy in 2025, for example, divided nationalist parties: Orbán, Salvini and much of the AfD broadly welcomed Trump's approach, while figures in Poland, Spain and elsewhere were considerably more critical.

3 'Marine Le Pen justifie le prêt russe du FN', *Le Monde*, 23 November 2014 (https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/11/23/marine-le-pen-justifie-le-pret-russe-du-fn_4528041_823448.html)

This suggests an important limit to American influence. The rise of European challenger parties has not depended on Trump's or MAGA's success. Vance's interventions in European politics, Musk's endorsements and the broader attempt to construct a transatlantic nationalist movement have provided visibility, networks and ideological reinforcement, but the principal sources of these parties' electoral strength remain domestic. Immigration, distrust of established parties, cultural conflict and dissatisfaction with existing political institutions have proved considerably more durable than any particular relationship with the American right.

Russia has become even more divisive. Some parties continue to advocate positions favourable to Moscow. Austria's FPÖ has opposed sanctions and questioned Western support for Ukraine, presenting its position as a defence of Austrian neutrality. Germany's AfD contains a powerful pro-Russian current, while Viktor Orbán repeatedly obstructed or delayed European measures against Moscow while in office. Other parties have experienced internal conflict over the issue. In Estonia, disagreements over Ukraine were part of a broader struggle within EKRE, whose 2024 split led to the departure of several prominent politicians. The party leadership has itself had to insist that EKRE is not pro-Russian, illustrating how politically sensitive the issue has become in a country directly exposed to Russian security threats.

Italy illustrates particularly clearly how the issue cuts across conventional ideological boundaries. Giorgia Meloni and FdI have remained firmly committed to Ukraine and the Atlantic alliance, while both Matteo Salvini's Lega and the radical-right Futuro Nazionale have opposed or sought to restrict further arms deliveries. On the left, the Five Star Movement has likewise opposed continued military support while insisting that it supports Ukraine politically and economically. In July 2026, FdI voted in favour of a European Parliament report supporting Ukraine's European integration, while Lega and M5S voted against it.

The question of Russia therefore increasingly intersects with the broader transformation of euroscepticism. Parties that favour a stronger European defence capacity and regard Russia as the principal security threat have acquired an additional reason to accept European cooperation. By contrast, parties that oppose sanctions, military support for Ukraine, or a stronger European security role also tend to favour a much more radical reduction of EU power. The old dividing line between nationalists and European integration has consequently become more complicated. For some nationalist parties, cooperation through the EU is increasingly regarded as necessary to defend national sovereignty against Russia, while others continue to portray both Brussels and Western support for Ukraine as parts of the same hostile international establishment.

METHODOLOGY

The report contains two analytical components: one quantitative and one qualitative.

The quantitative component is the Index itself. Its purpose is to measure as accurately as possible how electoral support for populist and authoritarian parties in Europe has changed over time and across countries. The qualitative component provides context for the rise of the parties that currently exert the greatest political influence and offers a basic guide to their ideological profiles.

THE QUANTITATIVE INDEX

The Index is based exclusively on results from national parliamentary elections. In each election, all parties are classified according to their main ideological party family. Seven party families are distinguished: social democratic, green, liberal, Christian democratic, conservative, radical left and radical right.

Political labels can both clarify and obscure. Parties are rarely expressions of a single ideological tradition and often combine elements drawn from several. Nevertheless, ideological classification remains useful. It matters whether a political movement has its centre of gravity in socialism, liberalism, conservatism or nationalism.

In most cases, however, classification is relatively straightforward. Parties' descriptions of themselves – in their names, programmes and public communication – are generally consistent over time and usually correspond reasonably well with how they are described in the media and classified in academic research.

The categories radical left and radical right are broader than the other party families and are used here primarily as analytical umbrella categories. The radical left includes democratic socialism and left-wing populism as well as more ideologically radical traditions such as Maoism and Marxism-Leninism. The radical right likewise includes national conservatism and right-wing populism as well as more explicitly radical traditions such as fascism and extreme nationalism.

Neither category should therefore be understood as a single coherent ideological family. Both contain parties that differ substantially from one another and, in some cases, explicitly reject other parties placed in the same broad category.

The boundary between mainstream and radical parties is also not always clear-cut. These differences are explored in greater detail for the most important contemporary parties in the qualitative part of the report. For the purposes of the Index, however, the main task is to estimate support for parties located to the left of mainstream social democracy and the Green left, and to the right of mainstream liberal conservatism and Christian democracy. For that purpose, the categories radical left and radical right remain analytically useful.

Most European party systems also contain parties belonging to other ideological traditions – for example agrarian or pirate parties – as well as parties defined primarily by regional, linguistic or ethnic identity. These are not included in the Index.

HOW THE INDEX IS CONSTRUCTED

The aim is to provide as complete an estimate as possible for each election. All parties with a known ideological affiliation are therefore included when calculating aggregate support for the relevant party families, regardless of their size.

Only parties that have received at least 1.0% of the national vote in at least one parliamentary election are, however, reported individually in the party database. The database currently contains 260 parties that meet this criterion, ranging from 19 in Italy to none in Malta.

This means that the total Index value for a country in a given election may be slightly higher than the combined vote share of the parties individually listed in the database.

Sweden's 2026 election provides an example. The Sweden Democrats received 17.5% of the vote and the Left Party 8.4%. In addition, another 1.1% of voters supported smaller radical parties: the Örebro Party received 0.6%, Alternative for Sweden 0.4% and Ambition Sweden 0.1%. The total Index value for Sweden in 2026 is therefore 27.0%.

Most populist or authoritarian parties can be placed reasonably clearly on either the left or the right and are therefore included in the radical-left or radical-right totals respectively.

There is, however, a smaller group of parties that should be included in an Index of authoritarian populism but do not fit easily on the conventional left-right scale. Examples include The Keys to Croatia and Italy's Five Star Movement. Such parties are classified as centre for the purposes of the left-right aggregation. Their results are included in Figure 1, which measures the combined support for all challenger parties, but not in the separate totals for the radical left or radical right. Since this is a

small and heterogeneous group, there is little analytical value in reporting its aggregate support separately.

There are also parties that identify with, and participate in, established mainstream party families while at the same time displaying sufficiently strong populist or authoritarian characteristics to warrant inclusion. Fidesz remained a member of the European People's Party until 2021, while Romania's Social Democratic Party remains affiliated with the Party of European Socialists. Progressive Bulgaria is another example: it is broadly a mainstream centre-left party in ideological terms, but its populist characteristics justify its inclusion in the Index.

To calculate the annual Index, each country is assigned a value based on the most recent parliamentary election. An election result therefore remains in the dataset until it is replaced by a new election. Italy's 2022 election result, for example, determines Italy's values for 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026, and will remain in place until the next parliamentary election.

When more than one parliamentary election is held in the same calendar year, the result of the final election of that year is used.

Where parties contest an election as part of a broader electoral alliance and no reliable breakdown of the vote between the constituent parties is available, the result is assigned on a case-by-case basis.

In France in 2022, for example, La France Insoumise was both the driving force behind and the largest party within the NUPES alliance, with Jean-Luc Mélenchon as its leading figure. The alliance's result is therefore attributed to LFI and included in the radical-left total. NUPES also included the French Communist Party and several other parties of the radical left.

By contrast, Romania's broad electoral alliance between the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party in 2012, which received almost 60% of the vote, had no comparably dominant party and was centred on a mainstream rather than radical political platform. Its result is therefore not counted as support for challenger parties.

Election results are primarily collected from published election statistics and secondary compilations, including Wikipedia and Parties and Elections in Europe. Where necessary, these are cross-checked against official election results and other sources.

SELECTION OF COUNTRIES AND TIME PERIOD

The study covers the entire post-war period. The long time span serves several purposes. It makes it possible to identify long-term trends, trace the historical roots of contemporary challenger parties and place recent developments in a broader perspective.

Many parties that appear new today belong to political traditions that have existed, disappeared and re-emerged in different forms over several decades.

The study covers European countries during periods in which they have been independent and governed through free and competitive elections.

Countries therefore enter the study at different points in time. States that became independent after World War II are included from the establishment of independence and democratic elections, such as Cyprus and Malta. Former dictatorships are included from the point at which authoritarian rule was replaced by competitive electoral democracy.

Holding elections is not in itself sufficient for inclusion.

Croatia, for example, is included from 2000 rather than from independence in 1991. Although multiparty elections were held throughout the 1990s, the political system under Franjo Tuđman remained sufficiently authoritarian for those elections to be excluded from the study.

Greece is likewise included only from 1974. Although parliamentary elections were held between 1946 and 1964, the Communist Party was banned and political competition was restricted, so these elections are excluded.

The same principle explains why Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine are excluded.

Once a country has entered the study as a democracy, it normally remains included even if the quality of liberal democracy later deteriorates.

Hungary therefore remains part of the dataset under Viktor Orbán despite substantial democratic backsliding. This is essential to the purpose of the study: the erosion of liberal democracy by parties operating within an electoral system is itself one of the developments the Index is intended to capture.

THE PARTY DATABASE

The party database includes all parties that have received at least 1.0% of the national vote in at least one parliamentary election.

For each party, the database records its abbreviation, its name in the original language and in English, the year it was founded and, where relevant, dissolved, as well as whether it is classified as left, centre or right.

The database also includes all of the party's results in national parliamentary elections.

In addition, parties are classified along the four dimensions examined in the report: economic policy, sociocultural issues, attitudes towards European integration and authoritarianism.

Blank cells indicate either that a dimension is not relevant to the party in question – for example, attitudes towards the European Union for some historical parties – or that there is insufficient empirical evidence to make a reliable classification.

Many parties have changed position over time. As a general rule, the classification reflects the party's current position or, for parties that no longer exist, its position during the final phase of its existence.

The database contains 267 parties in total. Of these, 260 meet the general inclusion criterion of having received at least 1.0% of the national vote in at least one parliamentary election. Seven additional parties are included despite not meeting this threshold. Three have achieved substantial parliamentary representation through electoral alliances with larger parties: Sovereign Poland, which has won seats in several elections on the lists of PiS; the National Movement in Poland, which has won seats as part of alliances with Kukiz'15 and Konfederacja; and the Democratic Unionist Party in the United Kingdom, which has also exercised significant national influence, including through its confidence-and-supply agreement with the Conservative government. ANTARSYA in Greece received 1.2% in the first of the two Greek elections held in 2012, but as only the final election of each year is recorded, its listed results fall below the threshold. A further three parties are included because they are considered among the most politically relevant challengers today despite not yet having reached 1.0% in a national parliamentary election: the Confederation of the Polish Crown in Poland, Voice of Reason in Greece and the Greek Left Alliance.

THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The Index provides an essential empirical foundation for the analysis. Individual electoral breakthroughs can otherwise appear more dramatic or more exceptional than they are. The long time series makes it possible to distinguish temporary fluctuations from structural change.

It shows, for example, the remarkable stability in support for challenger parties between 1945 and around 2000, as well as the smaller but visible increase that occurred in the early 1970s. Against that background, the sharp rise in support during the twenty-first century becomes much clearer.

Behind the aggregate figures, however, lie many different national stories. The broad trend is similar across much of Europe, but 31 countries also mean 31 different political contexts. Electoral systems, institutional structures and political cultures differ, as do countries' exposure to developments such as migration, economic crises and geographical proximity to Russia. The country chapters that follow therefore place the emergence and development of the most important parties in their national context.

As noted above, it is generally easier to draw a distinction between the political mainstream and its challengers than to draw precise boundaries between concepts such as populism, nationalism and extremism. Even that distinction has become more difficult over time as some formerly radical positions have moved closer to the political mainstream.

Political labels can therefore sometimes obscure as much as they clarify. Terms such as extremist, authoritarian and populist are analytically useful, but they can also create a considerable distance between a party's own understanding of itself and the language used to describe it. Moreover, parties commonly

grouped together as belonging to the radical right or radical left often differ considerably in both ideology and political practice.

The country chapters therefore focus less on assigning a single label and more on tracing the development of the most important parties and examining their ideological positions across four dimensions.

An overall assessment has been made of which parties currently constitute relevant challengers, with electoral support as the main consideration. This results in 76 parties, which are classified along four dimensions: economic policy, sociocultural issues, European integration and authoritarianism.

These dimensions were selected because, taken together, they capture a broader range of politically relevant differences than a narrower focus on labels such as populist, nationalist or authoritarian.

As far as possible, classifications are consistent with established academic and expert assessments. Where the classification used in the Index differs significantly from common descriptions of a party, the reasons are discussed separately.

The historical accounts and descriptions of party programmes and political positions are based on a broad range of secondary sources, including books, academic research, expert analyses, party documents and news reporting. Sources are provided for direct quotations.

ECONOMIC POLICY

Economic positions are classified as left, centre or right. The assessment is based on the overall orientation of a party's economic programme, including attitudes towards taxation, redistribution,

welfare provision, public ownership, regulation, free trade, tariffs and economic protectionism.

The categories describe a party's general economic centre of gravity rather than requiring consistency across every individual issue. Populist parties, in particular, often combine policies traditionally associated with different sides of the economic spectrum.

Indeed, many populist parties deliberately combine popular policies from both left and right: lower taxes alongside more generous welfare provision, for example.

SOCIOCULTURAL POLICY

Sociocultural positions are classified as progressive, moderate or conservative. The classification is based on an overall assessment of attitudes towards immigration, national and cultural identity, gender equality, LGBT rights, family policy, religion and related questions.

Migration is important but not decisive on its own. A party may favour restrictive immigration policies while remaining relatively liberal on family, gender and minority rights, or conversely combine relatively open migration policies with strong religious or social conservatism.

Pim Fortuyn's List in the Netherlands remains perhaps the clearest example of a party that justified opposition to immigration partly in progressive terms, presenting liberal attitudes towards gender equality and homosexuality as values that needed to be defended against illiberal cultural influences.

One complication is that the political baseline differs substantially across Europe. Parties in parts of south-eastern Europe, for example, may be considerably more socially conservative than

parties occupying an equivalent position in northern Europe. The classification therefore seeks to capture parties' overall ideological orientation while remaining attentive to national context.

EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Parties are classified as pro-European, soft eurosceptic or hard eurosceptic. Hard euroscepticism is generally reserved for parties advocating withdrawal from the European Union or, in non-member states, opposing accession in principle.

Soft euroscepticism refers to parties that accept continued EU membership but seek to restrict the scope of integration, return powers to national governments or resist further transfers of sovereignty to EU institutions.

Some of these positions may also be found among clearly pro-European mainstream parties. Liberal, conservative and social democratic parties may all oppose particular transfers of power to the EU without being meaningfully eurosceptic.

The distinction lies partly in how opposition to integration is framed. For eurosceptic parties, criticism of Brussels is generally rooted in a broader emphasis on national sovereignty and, often, in an anti-establishment narrative in which EU institutions are portrayed as distant elites acting against the interests or wishes of ordinary citizens.

Pro-European parties broadly support continued membership and European cooperation and do not make opposition to further integration a defining feature of their political identity.

AUTHORITARIANISM

Placing a populist party on an economic left-right scale is, in principle, no different from placing a mainstream party on the same scale. The same is broadly true of sociocultural issues and of attitudes towards European integration.

Authoritarianism is different. Mainstream parties can certainly display authoritarian tendencies, and individual representatives of mainstream parties may express admiration for authoritarian leaders, adopt pro-Russian positions or attack independent media. Such examples can be found across European politics.

What matters for classification, however, is whether such attitudes become characteristic of the party itself: whether they are promoted by the leadership, incorporated into party programmes or political practice, or at least tolerated to such an extent that they form a recurring part of the party's political identity.

A latent authoritarian tendency can also be regarded as an important feature of populism itself. Populism understands politics not primarily as a competition between different interests or a plurality of legitimate ideas, but as a conflict between the people and the elite. Populism is therefore more than a campaign style. It contains an ideological claim about society's fundamental political division.

In its most characteristic form, populism portrays the elite as relatively homogeneous, detached from ordinary citizens and motivated by its own economic, political or ideological interests. Accusations of corruption, self-enrichment and betrayal are consequently common. The people are correspondingly portrayed as possessing a coherent political will. Populist parties characteristically claim that their own policies express this authentic popular will more directly than established political institutions and parties.

Elements of such rhetoric can occasionally be found among mainstream parties. What distinguishes populist parties is that the opposition between people and elite becomes a central organising principle of their political worldview rather than merely a rhetorical device used in particular circumstances.

For that reason, parties included in this study can generally be expected to display stronger anti-pluralist or authoritarian tendencies than mainstream parties. There are nevertheless very substantial differences within the group. The categories low, medium and high are intended to make those differences visible.

A low classification should not be interpreted as the complete absence of authoritarian or anti-pluralist tendencies. Many parties in this category use a populist rhetoric that presents politics as a struggle between a relatively homogeneous people and a corrupt or detached elite. Such rhetoric sits uneasily with the pluralist foundations of liberal democracy.

What distinguishes parties classified as low is that these tendencies have not developed into a systemic challenge to liberal democracy. There is little evidence that they seek fundamental changes to the institutional framework of liberal democracy. A party may therefore be strongly populist, nationalist, socially conservative or radical in other respects while still receiving a low authoritarianism score.

High is reserved for parties that, in theory or practice, demonstrate a willingness to undermine fundamental elements of liberal democracy. This can include attempts to weaken judicial independence, media pluralism, political opposition, electoral competition or other institutional constraints on executive power.

Viktor Orbán's Fidesz provides a clear example. During 16 years in government, it deliberately and successfully weakened parts of Hungary's liberal-democratic institutional framework while in-

creasingly rejecting liberal democracy as an ideal. Poland's Law and Justice is placed in the same category for similar reasons.

The category also includes communist parties that continue to defend political traditions explicitly hostile to liberal-democratic pluralism and have not clearly broken with that ideological legacy.

The classification is based on political behaviour as well as formal programmes. The Austrian FPÖ, for example, cannot be assessed solely through its official policy documents. Episodes such as the Ibiza scandal provide evidence of senior representatives' willingness to abuse state power, compromise independent media and subordinate public institutions to partisan interests.

The assessment also considers how parties respond to contemporary authoritarian powers and political leaders.

Attitudes towards Vladimir Putin's Russia and, increasingly, towards Donald Trump and his administration can function as useful indicators of democratic reflexes. They are not decisive by themselves, but a party's willingness to excuse or defend attacks on democratic institutions abroad may provide additional evidence about its own conception of democracy.

Medium represents the intermediate category. Parties classified as medium display illiberal or authoritarian tendencies that raise genuine concerns, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude that they are fundamentally hostile to democratic competition or liberal-democratic institutions.

This is necessarily the category with the greatest uncertainty. Some of these parties may moderate when exposed to the constraints of government. Others may instead use political power to weaken institutional checks and move towards the pattern already observed in parties classified as high.

COUNTRY ANALYSIS



AUSTRIA

Austria occupies a unique place in the history of the European populist right. When the centre-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) formed a coalition government with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in 2000, it triggered an unprecedented diplomatic boycott by the other EU member states. A quarter of a century later, cooperation between mainstream conservatives and right-wing populist parties has become a recurring feature of European politics, and the FPÖ has established itself as one of Europe's strongest and most enduring challenger parties. Despite corruption scandals, internal splits and repeated periods in government, the party has remained a central force in Austrian politics and one of the most influential parties within the European populist right.

Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ)

The earliest challenge to Austria's post-war party system came from the far left. The Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), founded in 1918, briefly participated in government after World War II, winning 5.4% of the vote in the 1945 election. Although the party had attracted little electoral support before the war, its prominent role in the resistance against the Austrofascist and Nazi regimes contributed to its post-war legitimacy. Electoral support nevertheless declined rapidly during the Cold War. The KPÖ remained

loyal to the Soviet Union, supporting both the 1956 invasion of Hungary and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and rejected the turn towards Eurocommunism adopted by several Western European communist parties. It subsequently spent decades on the political margins.

In recent years, the KPÖ has nevertheless experienced a modest revival, particularly at the local and regional level. In 2021, Elke Kahr became mayor of Graz, making her the country's first communist mayor, and the party returned to the Salzburg state parliament in 2023. In the 2024 European Parliament election, the KPÖ achieved its best nationwide result since the 1960s with 3% of the vote, although it remained below the parliamentary threshold in the national election later that year.

Although the party continues to describe itself as communist and has traditionally opposed Austria's membership in the European Union, its recent electoral successes have been driven less by ideological renewal than by a strong emphasis on housing policy and local governance. Unlike many other European communist parties, the KPÖ has also been critical of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)

Another early challenge came from the Federation of Independents (VdU), founded in 1949. Bringing together national liberals, pan-German nationalists and many former Nazis excluded from the two major parties, it sought to challenge the dominance of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Unlike the mainstream parties, the VdU opposed Austrian neutrality and favoured NATO membership. In 1956, it merged with the Freedom Party to form the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).

The FPÖ inherited much of the VdU's political tradition. It maintained an 'openness to all' policy that welcomed former Nazis and collaborators into the party. Its first chairman, Anton Reinthaller, had served as an SS officer, while his successor, Friedrich Peter, had also served in the Waffen-SS. Although the FPÖ contained a particularly large proportion of former Nazis, both the SPÖ and ÖVP also recruited former members of the Nazi Party during the post-war decades. The so-called 'whispered slogan' in Adolf Schärf's 1957 presidential campaign – 'those who were once for Adolf will vote for Adolf again this year' – illustrated how even the Social Democrats sought to avoid alienating former Nazi voters.[4]

Although the FPÖ cooperated with both the ÖVP and the SPÖ at the regional and local levels, it remained excluded from national government. In 1967, its most radical faction split off to form the National Democratic Party (NDP), led by Norbert Burger, who had previously headed the FPÖ's student organisation. Closely aligned with the German NPD, the NDP advocated an Anschluss with Germany and was widely regarded as a neo-Nazi party. Burger received just over 3% of the vote in the 1980 presidential election before the party was dissolved by the interior ministry in 1988, a decision upheld by the Constitutional Court. The split was widely interpreted as marking a break with the FPÖ's most explicit Nazi legacy and opened the way for a more liberal direction under Norbert Steger.

Following the split, the FPÖ gradually adopted a more liberal and market-oriented profile. Under Norbert Steger, who became party leader in 1980, the party entered its first national coalition government with the SPÖ in 1983. However, the strategy failed to halt the party's electoral decline and participation in government

4 'Tod in der Donau', *Der Spiegel*, 22 April 2025 (https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/oesterreich-fpoe-fordert-untersuchung-zum-mysterioesen-tod-eines-justizbeamten-a-a9ca54c3-275f-4f83-a02d-1928465208f7)

deepened internal divisions. Against this backdrop, Jörg Haider successfully challenged Steger for the party leadership in 1986.

Jörg Haider quickly transformed the FPÖ after taking over the party leadership in 1986. Three years later, he became governor of Carinthia after the FPÖ finished second in the regional elections. His tenure was nevertheless controversial. In 1991, he was forced to resign after praising the employment policies of Nazi Germany, reinforcing the party's reputation as a political outlier.

Haider's electoral success was fuelled by growing dissatisfaction with Austria's *Proporz* system – the informal power-sharing arrangement between the SPÖ and the ÖVP that was particularly entrenched in Carinthia. He also placed increasing emphasis on immigration, presenting the FPÖ as an anti-establishment alternative to the political consensus that had dominated Austrian politics for decades.

In 1993, the FPÖ launched its 'Austria First' campaign, calling for a referendum on immigration. The party argued that immigration threatened the welfare state and Austria's national identity, while increasingly portraying Islam as incompatible with Austrian society. At the same time, the FPÖ abandoned its earlier pro-European orientation and campaigned against Austria's accession to the European Union in the 1994 referendum. The shift prompted a split within the party, with five MPs leaving to establish the Liberal Forum, which later became part of today's NEOS.

The latter half of the 1990s proved highly favourable for the FPÖ. Growing immigration following the wars in the former Yugoslavia, combined with public dissatisfaction over austerity measures associated with EU membership, created favourable conditions for the party. Haider also repositioned the FPÖ economically, combining restrictive immigration policies with a more welfare-oriented economic platform. In the 1999 parliamentary election, the FPÖ won almost 27% of the vote – its best result

at the time – and narrowly overtook the ÖVP. After coalition negotiations between the SPÖ and the ÖVP broke down, the ÖVP instead turned to Haider and invited the FPÖ into government despite strong international criticism.

When the ÖVP nevertheless proceeded with the coalition in February 2000, the reaction from the rest of Europe was unprecedented. Israel recalled its ambassador from Vienna, while the other 14 EU member states imposed an informal diplomatic boycott of Austria. Never before had another member state been politically isolated because of the participation of a democratically elected party in government.

The boycott proved difficult to sustain. An expert report commissioned by the European Union concluded in September 2000 that neither the Austrian government nor the FPÖ ministers posed a threat to the Union's fundamental values. The report also warned that continuing the sanctions risked strengthening anti-EU sentiment within Austria. The diplomatic measures were therefore lifted after only a few months.

Although widely regarded as the architect of the coalition, Jörg Haider neither joined the government nor remained party leader. Instead, Susanne Riess-Passer succeeded him as FPÖ leader, while the party obtained six of the 16 cabinet posts, including the vice chancellorship and the ministries of finance, defence, justice, social affairs and infrastructure.

The coalition nevertheless remained deeply controversial within Austria. President Thomas Klestil made clear his reservations during the inauguration ceremony, which took place in an unusually tense atmosphere amid large public demonstrations.

In retrospect, the Austrian boycott marked both the high-water mark of Europe's attempt to isolate right-wing populist parties and

the beginning of a gradual normalisation of cooperation between mainstream conservative and populist parties.

The FPÖ paid a heavy electoral price for entering government. In the 2002 election, the party lost almost two-thirds of its voters. Although the FPÖ remained in government, internal conflicts intensified. In 2005, Haider and all FPÖ ministers broke away to establish the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), which replaced the FPÖ as the ÖVP's coalition partner, while the FPÖ returned to the opposition.

Following the 2006 election, both parties entered opposition. After Haider's death in a car accident in 2008, Josef Bucher attempted to reposition the BZÖ as a more economically liberal party with less emphasis on immigration. Without Haider's personal appeal, however, the party rapidly declined and disappeared from parliament in 2013.

Under Heinz-Christian Strache, who became party leader in 2005, the FPÖ gradually rebuilt its electoral support by returning to a more confrontational anti-immigration profile. Strache increasingly promoted the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory, claiming that mass immigration threatened Austria's national identity.

The 2015 migration crisis further strengthened the party. FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer narrowly lost the 2016 presidential election after winning the first round, and the party won 26% of the vote in the 2017 parliamentary election, almost matching its historic 1999 result.

The FPÖ returned to government in coalition with Sebastian Kurz's ÖVP. The coalition implemented one of the most restrictive immigration agendas in Austria's post-war history. The government tightened asylum and welfare rules, expanded border controls, reduced benefits for recognised refugees and introduced a ban on full-face veils in public. It also promoted a stronger emphasis on

Austrian identity and sought to limit the influence of political Islam. Although many of these measures were formally implemented by the ÖVP, they reflected long-standing FPÖ priorities and illustrated the party's growing influence over the Austrian political agenda.

The coalition collapsed in 2019 following the Ibiza affair, one of the most consequential political scandals in modern Austrian history. A secretly recorded video showed Strache apparently offering public contracts and political influence to a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch in exchange for favourable media coverage and campaign support. Strache resigned, the government fell, and Austria was forced into early elections.

Following the 2019 election, the ÖVP instead formed a coalition with the Greens. Hofer succeeded Strache as party leader but struggled to restore the party's electoral fortunes after the Ibiza scandal. In a notable speech in 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Hofer controversially stated that the Quran posed a greater threat to Austria than the coronavirus.

In 2021, Herbert Kickl replaced Hofer as party leader. Unlike the more pragmatic Hofer, Kickl adopted a markedly more confrontational strategy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he became one of Austria's leading critics of lockdowns and vaccination policies, refused to wear a face mask in parliament and repeatedly spread conspiracy theories surrounding the pandemic.

Kickl has also argued that legal constraints should not prevent governments from implementing the policies they consider necessary, stating that 'the law should follow politics, not politics the law.'[5] The remark attracted widespread criticism and

5 'Das Recht hat der Politik zu folgen und nicht die Politik dem Recht', *Tages-Anzeiger*, 25 January 2019 (https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/das-recht-hat-der-politik-zu-folgen-und-nicht-die-politik-dem-recht-946627436098)

reinforced concerns about the party's commitment to liberal constitutional principles.

For the first time in its history, the FPÖ emerged as the largest party in the 2024 parliamentary election. Throughout the election campaign, all other parliamentary parties had ruled out governing with Herbert Kickl, portraying the FPÖ as a threat to Austria's liberal-democratic order. After the election, President Alexander Van der Bellen broke with convention by declining to give the largest party the first opportunity to form a government, arguing that safeguarding liberal democracy had to take precedence.

Coalition negotiations between the ÖVP, the SPÖ and NEOS continued throughout the autumn but collapsed shortly after the turn of the year. Their failure led to the resignation of Chancellor and ÖVP leader Karl Nehammer, who had personified the party's refusal to cooperate with the FPÖ. His successor, Christian Stocker, immediately reversed course and opened coalition talks with Herbert Kickl.

The negotiations, which attracted considerable international attention, began in January 2025 but broke down the following month. The talks were based on the assumption that Kickl would become chancellor, while the FPÖ sought control over several key ministries, including the interior, finance, media and EU portfolios. Instead, the ÖVP ultimately returned to negotiations with the SPÖ and NEOS, leading to the formation of a three-party coalition under Stocker. The FPÖ thus remained in opposition despite having won the election and has since continued to lead opinion polls by a substantial margin.

Since Austria joined the European Union in 1995, the FPÖ has been represented in the European Parliament. After periods as non-attached members and brief participation in earlier right-wing groups, the party became one of the driving forces behind the creation of Patriots for Europe following the 2024 European Parliament election. Together with Hungary's Fidesz and the Czech

ANO, the FPÖ helped establish the group, which immediately became the third-largest political group in the Parliament. The FPÖ doubled its representation from three to six seats.

Ideologically, the FPÖ combines economic liberalism with welfare chauvinism and one of Europe's most restrictive positions on immigration. Since the early 1990s, immigration has been the party's defining issue, and in the 2024 election it campaigned under the slogan 'Fortress Austria'. While the party originally drew heavily on pan-German nationalism, this has gradually been replaced by a stronger emphasis on Austrian national identity.

The FPÖ has also remained among Europe's most Russia-friendly right-wing populist parties following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Herbert Kickl argued that both NATO and Russia shared responsibility for the war, FPÖ MPs walked out during Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to the Austrian parliament, and the party campaigned in 2024 for the removal of EU sanctions against Russia.

The FPÖ has increasingly aligned itself with the international conservative movement surrounding Donald Trump. Petra Steger, an FPÖ Member of the European Parliament, described the party as sharing 'a range of political priorities' with the MAGA movement, including opposition to mass migration and support for stronger protections for freedom of expression online.[6]

Since 1990, Austria has consistently had a parliamentary majority to the right of the political centre. Nevertheless, the ÖVP has governed with the FPÖ on only three occasions, reflecting the party's long-standing dilemma: whether to cooperate with Austria's strongest challenger party or seek broader centrist coalitions. Repeated breakdowns in coalition negotiations illustrate that this question remains one of the defining features of Austrian politics.

6 'MAGA embrace: Europe's nationalists head to Washington', *Politico*, 5 March 2026 (https://www.politico.eu/article/maga-embrace-europes-nationalists-head-to-washington/)

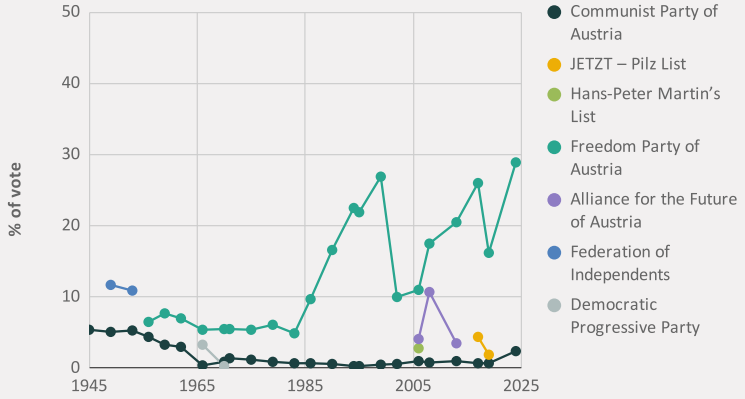
FPÖ summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

KPÖ summary

Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 11. Vote share of challenger parties in Austria, 1945–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

BELGIUM

Belgian party politics differs from most other European countries in two important respects. First, almost no genuinely nationwide parties exist. During the 1960s and 1970s, most of the traditional parties split into separate Dutch-speaking and French-speaking organisations, reflecting the increasingly federal structure of the country. Flanders and Wallonia consequently developed largely separate party systems, while Brussels constitutes a third, partly overlapping political arena. The Workers' Party (PVDA/PTB) is today the only significant parliamentary party that remains organised across the linguistic divide.

Second, Belgium developed one of Europe's most durable attempts to isolate the radical right. Beginning in the late 1980s, the established parties maintained an informal *cordon sanitaire* against Vlaams Blok (VB) and its successor Vlaams Belang, refusing to form governing coalitions with the party. The cordon remained intact at the national and regional levels for decades, although it was partially breached after the 2024 local elections when Vlaams Belang entered local governing coalitions in several Flemish municipalities.

The Belgian Communist Party (KPB/PCB) was founded in 1921 and remained closely aligned with the Soviet Union for much of its existence. It reached the height of its popularity immediately after World War II, finishing third in the 1946 election with more

than 12% of the vote. The party participated in coalition governments between 1944 and 1947 but subsequently declined rapidly and never returned to government.

Workers' Party of Belgium (PVDA/PTB)

The Workers' Party of Belgium (PVDA/PTB) originated in the radical student movement of the late 1960s and was formally established in its present form in 1979. It developed in opposition to the older Communist Party, which it regarded as revisionist, and was initially strongly Maoist. For decades the party remained electorally marginal and maintained a highly orthodox revolutionary ideology.

A major transformation began during the 2000s, particularly under Peter Mertens. The party gradually abandoned references to Mao, Stalin, and revolutionary struggle in its public presentation, adopted a more pragmatic electoral strategy, and placed greater emphasis on concrete socioeconomic issues such as healthcare, wages, pensions, and taxation. The transformation was partly inspired by the electoral success of the Dutch Socialist Party. Unlike almost every other major Belgian party, PVDA/PTB also maintained a unitary national organisation and strongly opposed further division of Belgium.

The strategy eventually produced substantial electoral growth. The party entered the federal parliament in 2014, expanded considerably in 2019 and won 9.9% of the national vote and 15 seats in the 2024 federal election, making it one of the largest parties in parliament. It remains particularly strong in French-speaking industrial areas but has also established a significant electorate in Flanders.

Economically, PVDA/PTB remains firmly on the radical left, advocating greater public ownership, substantially higher taxation

of wealth and large corporations, stronger trade unions and extensive redistribution. On sociocultural issues, it is now clearly progressive, supporting feminism, LGBT rights, anti-racism and comparatively liberal migration and asylum policies.

The party remains strongly critical of NATO and Western foreign policy. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it explicitly condemned the invasion and supported resolutions affirming Ukrainian sovereignty, but opposed increased military escalation and several broader sanctions packages. In the European Parliament, it abstained on resolutions that combined condemnation of Russia with increased military support for Ukraine, while supporting targeted sanctions against Russian oligarchs.

PVDA/PTB won its first seat in the European Parliament in 2019 and joined GUE/NGL, now The Left. In 2024 it increased its representation to two MEPs after receiving 10.7% of the Belgian vote.

The People's Union (VU) was founded in 1954 as a Flemish nationalist party seeking greater recognition for the Dutch language and greater autonomy for Flanders. Over time it developed into a broad political movement containing left-wing, centrist and conservative nationalists. It played an important role in pushing Belgium towards federalisation during the 1970s and 1980s, when the traditional Belgian parties were themselves splitting along linguistic lines.

Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang

The compromises involved in federalisation were rejected by the most radical Flemish nationalists. In 1978, Vlaams Nationale Partij and Vlaamse Volkspartij contested the election together as Vlaams Blok, which became a unified party the following year.

Vlaams Blok initially remained small and concentrated primarily on Flemish independence. During the 1980s, however, immigration increasingly displaced constitutional reform as the party's principal mobilising issue. Future leader Filip Dewinter became one of the most prominent representatives of this new orientation. The party achieved a breakthrough in the 1989 European election and an even larger advance in the 1991 parliamentary election, remembered in Belgium as 'Black Sunday'.

Vlaams Blok subsequently became one of Europe's most successful radical-right parties, increasing its support during most elections from the 1980s until the mid-2000s. It combined Flemish separatism, anti-immigration politics and social conservatism with an increasingly explicit anti-establishment message.

The party also had longstanding connections to the extreme right. Its founding leader Karel Dillen had translated Holocaust-denial literature during the 1950s. In 2001, vice-president Roeland Raes resigned after questioning aspects of the Holocaust and the authenticity of Anne Frank's diary. The party's notorious 70-point programme, published in 1992 and partly inspired by Jean-Marie Le Pen's French National Front, proposed far-reaching measures to encourage or compel the departure of immigrants.

These positions motivated the other major parties to establish the *cordon sanitaire* around Vlaams Blok in 1989. The party was excluded from governing coalitions despite its growing electoral support.

In 2004, organisations connected to Vlaams Blok were convicted of violating Belgian anti-discrimination legislation. The party dissolved itself and immediately re-established itself as Vlaams Belang (VB). Although the new party attempted to soften parts of its rhetoric, the fundamental ideological orientation remained largely unchanged.

VB initially continued to perform strongly but declined substantially after 2007 and reached a low point in the 2014 federal election. This was widely interpreted as evidence that the *cordon sanitaire* had succeeded in limiting the party's appeal. The conclusion proved premature. Vlaams Belang returned strongly in 2019 and continued growing in 2024.

Ahead of the 2024 elections, several opinion polls suggested that VB might become the largest party in Flanders. It ultimately fell short of this expectation but nevertheless increased its support. In the federal election, it received 13.8% nationally and won 20 seats, becoming one of the two second-largest parties in the Chamber behind N-VA. In Flanders it finished only narrowly behind N-VA and was the largest party in almost half of Flemish municipalities.

The local elections later that year produced a historic change. Vlaams Belang won an absolute majority in Ninove and entered governing coalitions with local lists in Ranst, Izegem and Brecht. For the first time, politicians outside VB were therefore willing to govern together with the party. The traditional *cordon sanitaire* consequently ceased to be absolute at the local level, although the major national parties continued to exclude VB from federal and Flemish governments.

Vlaams Belang has also changed ideologically over time. It was once clearly economically right-wing and strongly neoliberal but has moved towards the centre on economic issues, combining tax reductions with protection of pensions, welfare benefits and purchasing power for Belgian citizens. The party remains strongly conservative on sociocultural issues and highly restrictive towards immigration, Islam and multiculturalism. Flemish independence remains a fundamental objective.

VB is strongly eurosceptic but does not make immediate Belgian withdrawal from the EU its principal objective. It favours a much

looser Europe based on sovereign nation-states and opposes further European integration.

The party's relationship with Russia has been particularly controversial. Before 2022, several senior representatives cultivated contacts with Russia and expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin. Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced a substantial rhetorical shift. Party leader Tom Van Grieken acknowledged that he had seriously misjudged Putin,[7] while Filip Dewinter, who had previously praised aspects of Putin's leadership, described him as a dictator.[8] Nevertheless, the party has remained more sceptical than the Belgian mainstream towards sanctions, military aid and further escalation of the conflict.

VB entered the European Parliament in 1989 and initially cooperated with Jean-Marie Le Pen's radical-right group. Its MEPs subsequently spent long periods among the non-attached members before participating in successive attempts to organise the European radical right. In 2019 it joined Identity and Democracy. After the 2024 election, its three MEPs became members of the new Patriots for Europe group. Vlaams Belang received 14.5% nationally in the 2024 European election and finished first among the Dutch-speaking electoral college with 22.9%.

Wallonia also saw the rise of a radical-right party in the 1980s. The Belgian National Front (FN) combined Belgian nationalism with strong opposition to immigration and, unlike Vlaams

7 '"We hebben ons grandioos in Poetin vergist": Tom Van Grieken (Vlaams Belang) over vluchtelingencrisis en de band met Rusland', *Het Nieuwsblad*, 9 April 2022 (https://www.nieuwsblad.be/binnenland/we-hebben-ons-grandioos-in-poetin-vergist-tom-van-grieken-vlaams-belang-over-vluchtelingencrisis-en-de-band-met-rusland/56491240.html)

8 'The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Ties Between the Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the Putin Regime', *European Center for Populism Studies*, 17 March 2022 (https://www.populismstudies.org/the-impact-of-the-russia-ukraine-war-on-ties-between-the-vlaams-belang-in-belgium-and-the-putin-regime/)

Blok, rejected Flemish separatism. It borrowed its name and much of its ideology from Jean-Marie Le Pen's French National Front, although organisational cooperation between the two remained limited.

FN first entered the federal parliament in 1991 and remained intermittently represented until 2010, normally receiving around 1–2% nationally. It was also subjected to a *cordon sanitaire* and never exercised meaningful influence on government. Party leader Daniel Féret was convicted in 2006 for incitement to racial hatred in party propaganda. The organisation subsequently disintegrated amid internal conflicts and legal disputes and eventually disappeared from significant electoral politics.

The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) emerged in 2001 from the dissolution of the People's Union and became its principal successor on the nationalist centre-right. It advocates Flemish nationalism through a more civic and institutional approach than Vlaams Belang, with the long-term objective of transforming Belgium into a confederal state and eventually maximising Flemish self-government.

Initially a relatively small party, N-VA expanded dramatically under Bart De Wever and became the dominant political force in Flanders during the 2010s. It combines Flemish nationalism with economically liberal and conservative policies, restrictive positions on immigration and integration, and criticism of further European centralisation. Although elements of its rhetoric have sometimes been described as populist, N-VA is better understood today as an established national-conservative or conservative nationalist party rather than part of the populist radical right.

The distinction from Vlaams Belang is particularly important. N-VA has maintained the *cordon sanitaire* at the national and regional levels, accepts Belgium's democratic and constitutional institutions while seeking to reform them, and has con-

sistently supported NATO, Ukraine and a strongly Western foreign-policy orientation.

In the 2024 federal election, N-VA again finished first nationally, receiving 16.7% and winning 24 seats. After lengthy coalition negotiations, party leader Bart De Wever became prime minister in February 2025, leading a five-party coalition. He was the first Flemish nationalist ever to become prime minister of Belgium. N-VA's evolution from challenger to the party leading the federal government illustrates how extensively Flemish nationalism has been incorporated into the Belgian political mainstream.

A smaller populist offshoot of the Flemish nationalist movement was List Dedecker (LDD), founded in 2007 by former N-VA senator Jean-Marie Dedecker. The party combined radical economic liberalism, opposition to the political establishment and conservative positions on immigration and security. It entered the Belgian parliament in 2007 and retained representation in 2010, while also winning a seat in the European Parliament in 2009. LDD was notable for being one of the first parties on the Flemish right to question the usefulness of maintaining the *cordon sanitaire* against Vlaams Belang. Its electoral importance subsequently declined sharply.

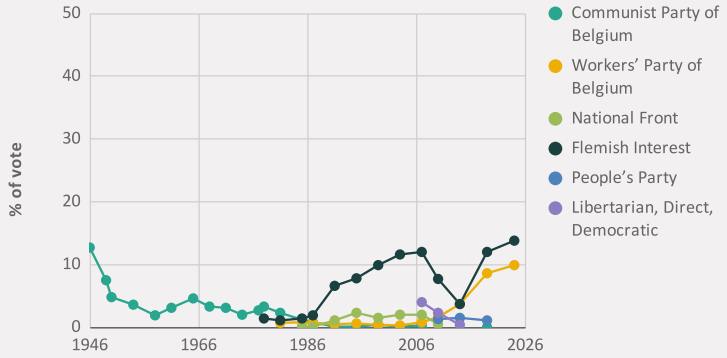
VB summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

PVDA/PTB summary

Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 12. Vote share of challenger parties in Belgium, 1946–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

BULGARIA

During the first decade after the fall of communism, Bulgaria appeared to be moving towards a relatively stable two-party system centred on the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the successor to the Communist Party, and the centre-right Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), which alternated in government during the 1990s. Instead, Bulgarian politics developed into one of Europe's most volatile party systems, characterised by repeated party realignments, unstable governments and the emergence of successive anti-establishment movements. By 2026, Bulgaria had held eight parliamentary elections in five years, illustrating the country's prolonged political instability.

This pattern was broken in 2001 when the anti-establishment National Movement Simeon II (NDSV), led by the country's former king, won more than 42% of the vote and formed a government. Although NDSV itself pursued broadly mainstream liberal and pro-European policies rather than ideological populism, its electoral breakthrough fundamentally transformed the Bulgarian party system. Rather than returning to a stable two-party structure, Bulgarian politics entered a prolonged period characterised by high electoral volatility, repeated party realignments and the emergence of new anti-establishment parties.

GERB, founded in 2006 by Boyko Borisov, proved considerably more durable than most of these new parties. A conservative,

pro-European party affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP), it dominated Bulgarian politics for much of the period after 2009, and Borisov served three terms as prime minister. Nevertheless, GERB never restored stability to the party system. Instead, successive anti-establishment parties repeatedly entered parliament, achieved electoral success and then rapidly lost support.

The most important examples were There Is Such a People (ITN), which won the July 2021 election, We Continue the Change (PP), which won the November 2021 election, and finally Progressive Bulgaria (PB), which won an outright parliamentary majority in 2026.

The fragmented party system made government formation increasingly difficult. Between April 2021 and April 2026, Bulgaria held eight parliamentary elections, illustrating one of the longest periods of political instability in any EU member state. Coalition governments repeatedly collapsed after only a few months in office, while new parties continued to emerge and established parties struggled to maintain their electoral support.

Unlike the post-war party systems of several Western European countries, Bulgaria did not develop a significant radical-left challenger after democratisation. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), successor to the Communist Party, instead became an established governing party, while smaller communist parties remained marginal. The first successful anti-establishment challenger emerged from the radical right with the founding of Ataka in 2005.

Ataka was founded in 2005 by the journalist and television presenter Volen Siderov, and became Bulgaria's first successful radical-right party after the fall of communism. The party combined Bulgarian nationalism with strong anti-establishment rhetoric, hostility towards ethnic minorities – particularly the Turkish

minority – and opposition to immigration, although immigration remained a relatively minor political issue in Bulgaria. Its representatives frequently employed inflammatory rhetoric. For example, MP Magdalena Tasheva referred to Syrian refugees as 'monsters', 'savages' and 'scum', illustrating the party's openly xenophobic political style.[9] The party also advocated closer relations with Russia, opposed both NATO and deeper European integration, and called for a stronger political role for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Ataka entered parliament in 2005 with 8.1% of the vote and reached its electoral peak in 2009, when it won 9.4%. During the following years, the party frequently provided parliamentary support to governments, most notably those led by GERB, giving it political influence beyond its electoral strength.

From the early 2010s onwards, however, Ataka gradually lost support. Internal conflicts led several prominent members to leave the party, contributing to the emergence of new nationalist parties, most notably the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB). At the same time, the re-established Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO) increasingly challenged Ataka for dominance within the Bulgarian radical right. These developments culminated in the formation of the United Patriots electoral alliance ahead of the 2017 parliamentary election.

In the 2017 parliamentary election, the three radical-right parties – Ataka, VMRO and NFSB – formed the electoral alliance United Patriots, which won just over 9% of the vote. Following the election, the alliance entered a coalition government with GERB. The decision was particularly noteworthy because GERB had

9 'Racism and related discriminatory practices in Bulgaria', *European Network Against Racism*, 2013 (https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/country_briefing_-_bulgaria_final.pdf)

previously ruled out cooperation with openly pro-Russian parties such as Ataka. VMRO leader Krasimir Karakachanov became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, while the alliance exercised considerable influence over migration, minority and defence policy.

Ataka left the governing coalition in 2019, whereas VMRO and NFSB remained in government until the 2021 election. However, the alliance soon fragmented. In the 2021 election, none of the three parties reached the parliamentary threshold, ending the United Patriots' dominance on the Bulgarian radical right.

Since 2021, Ataka has received no more than 0.5% of the vote in any parliamentary election and appears to have disappeared from the political scene, after having been represented in every parliament between 2005 and 2021. In the 2023 election, the party joined a pro-Russian electoral alliance together with, among others, the remnants of the Communist Party, but the alliance received only around 0.5% of the vote. Many of the themes introduced by Ataka – including uncompromising anti-establishment rhetoric, the portrayal of political opponents as 'traitors', hostility towards ethnic minorities, and a strongly pro-Russian orientation – were subsequently adopted by other Bulgarian radical-right parties.

Several other nationalist parties also briefly entered parliament during this period. Reload Bulgaria won parliamentary representation in 2014 and cooperated with VMRO in the 2014 European Parliament election, enabling VMRO to gain its first seat in the European Parliament. Volya entered parliament in 2017 and supported the GERB government, while Bulgarian Rise briefly held parliamentary representation between 2022 and 2023. None of these parties, however, established a lasting position in Bulgarian politics.

Revival

The decline of the United Patriots was followed by the emergence of another radical-right party, Revival (Vazrazhdane, V), which has become the most successful nationalist party in post-communist Bulgaria. Revival was founded in 2014 by its current leader, Kostadin Kostadinov, who had previously been active in both NDSV and VMRO before leaving what he regarded as an overly moderate nationalist movement. The party was deliberately founded on 2 August, the anniversary of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire, a date of strong symbolic importance in Bulgarian nationalism.

Revival combines Bulgarian nationalism with uncompromising anti-establishment rhetoric and a strong emphasis on national sovereignty. Like Ataka and VMRO before it, the party has frequently targeted ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma community, and several leading representatives have made openly antisemitic or xenophobic statements. Kostadinov himself has referred to Roma as 'parasites', while his former running mate Elena Guncheva argued during the 2021 presidential campaign that Jewish politicians were merely 'guests' in Bulgaria because 'this is the land of Bulgarians'.[10]

The party gained national prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic by organising demonstrations against public health restrictions and spreading conspiracy theories about both the pandemic and vaccination programmes. In January 2022, Revival supporters attempted to storm the National Assembly dur-

10 'It denies COVID and wants out of NATO and the EU. Now Bulgaria's pro-Kremlin, far-right Revival Party is in Parliament', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 22 November 2021 (https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-revival-party-parliament-eu/31572826.html)

ing a protest against the government's COVID policies, further reinforcing the party's anti-establishment profile.[11]

Revival is the most pro-Russian party currently represented in the Bulgarian parliament. It opposes Bulgaria's membership of both NATO and the European Union and has called for referendums on withdrawing from both organisations. The party advocates the normalisation of relations with Russia and has consistently opposed military and financial support for Ukraine. At party events, Russian flags and pro-Putin imagery are common, while Kostadinov has described 'Russophobic garbage' as needing to be 'exterminated like pests'.[12] After Donald Trump's return to the White House in 2025, Revival also endorsed his claims regarding Greenland and Canada and renewed its own territorial demands concerning North Macedonia and southern Bessarabia.[13] The party is strongly opposed to Bulgaria's adoption of the euro and instead advocates pegging the national currency to the US dollar.

Economically, Revival differs from many Western European radical-right parties by advocating a relatively interventionist economic policy. It supports the nationalisation of strategic companies, higher pensions and minimum wages, while combining

11 'Anti-vaccine protesters try to storm Bulgaria's parliament', *Reuters*, 12 January 2022 (https://www.investing.com/news/coronavirus/antivaccine-protesters-try-to-storm-bulgarias-parliament-2737134)

12 'Revival on the Rise: Ahead of Elections, Far-Right Party is tapping into Bulgarian public anger', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 1 October 2022; 'For Putin, against'Global Liberalism': Why so many Bulgarian parties support Russia', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2 October 2022 (https://www.rferl.org/amp/bulgaria-elections-pro-russian-parties/32061638.html)

13 'Right-wing Politician Backs Trump on Territorial Expansion, Urges Bulgarian Claims on Macedonia and Bessarabia', *Novinite*, 9 January 2025 (https://www.novinite.com/articles/230227/Right-wing+Politician+Backs+Trump+on+Territorial+Expansion%2C+Urges+Bulgarian+Claims+on+Macedonia+and+Bessarabia)

these positions with social conservatism, defence of Orthodox Christian values and strong opposition to LGBT rights.[14]

Revival entered parliament for the first time in 2021 and rapidly increased its electoral support. The party achieved its best result in the 2023 parliamentary election with 13.6% of the vote. It maintained almost the same level of support in both parliamentary elections and the European Parliament election in 2024, where it won three seats. The 2026 election, however, represented a major setback. Revival narrowly remained in parliament with 4.2% of the vote, though it remained the largest party on the Bulgarian radical right.

Since 2024, Revival has been a member of the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group in the European Parliament, alongside Germany's AfD.

The success of Revival also coincided with the emergence of two smaller radical-right parties. Velichie ('Greatness'), founded in 2023, narrowly entered parliament in 2024 but lost all representation in 2026 following internal conflicts and a series of defections. The party primarily focused on opposition to the euro, support for nuclear power and scepticism towards military support for Ukraine. Although generally regarded as pro-Russian, it differed from Revival by supporting Bulgaria's continued membership in both NATO and the European Union.

Morality, Unity, Honour (MECh), founded in 2024 by former ITN and PP politician Radostin Vasilev, entered parliament later the same year. The party adopted positions similar to Revival on crime, national sovereignty and opposition to the euro but

14 'The Bulgarian Elections: The Rise of the Radical Right?', *C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo*, 8 April 2021 (https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2021/the-bulgarian-elections-the-rise.html)

likewise failed to retain parliamentary representation after the 2026 election.

Progressive Bulgaria

A different type of populist challenge emerged in 2026 with the formation of Progressive Bulgaria (PB). Unlike the nationalist parties discussed above, PB is not characterised by ideological radicalism. Instead, it combines broadly mainstream economic and institutional policies with a strongly populist political style centred on opposition to corruption, oligarchic interests and the political establishment.

PB was established in March 2026, formally as an electoral coalition with several smaller social democratic parties, but in practice as the political vehicle of President Rumen Radev. Elected president in 2016 with the support of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and re-elected in 2021, Radev became the first Bulgarian head of state to resign the presidency to seek executive office. Following PB's victory in the 2026 parliamentary election, he became prime minister.

Throughout his presidency, Radev cultivated an image as an opponent of corruption and entrenched political elites, frequently accusing Bulgaria's established parties of serving oligarchic interests rather than ordinary citizens. At the same time, he came into increasingly sharp conflict with successive governments over Bulgaria's foreign and European policy. While the governments elected after 2021 prioritised deeper European integration, military support for Ukraine and preparations for joining the euro area, Radev repeatedly called for a more pragmatic relationship with Russia and opposed rapid euro adoption. In 2025, he unsuccessfully attempted to initiate a referendum on Bulgaria's entry into the eurozone.

These positions led many observers to describe Radev as one of the more Russia-friendly leaders within the European Union, often comparing him with Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico, although Radev himself has consistently rejected such characterisations. PB combines economically interventionist policies with conservative positions on social issues, while maintaining that its primary mission is to reform the Bulgarian state rather than to advance a coherent ideological programme.

The new party achieved an immediate breakthrough in the 2026 parliamentary election, winning an outright majority and forming Bulgaria's first single-party government in many years. The election sharply contrasted with the period between 2021 and 2025, when Bulgaria held eight parliamentary elections and experienced repeated government crises.

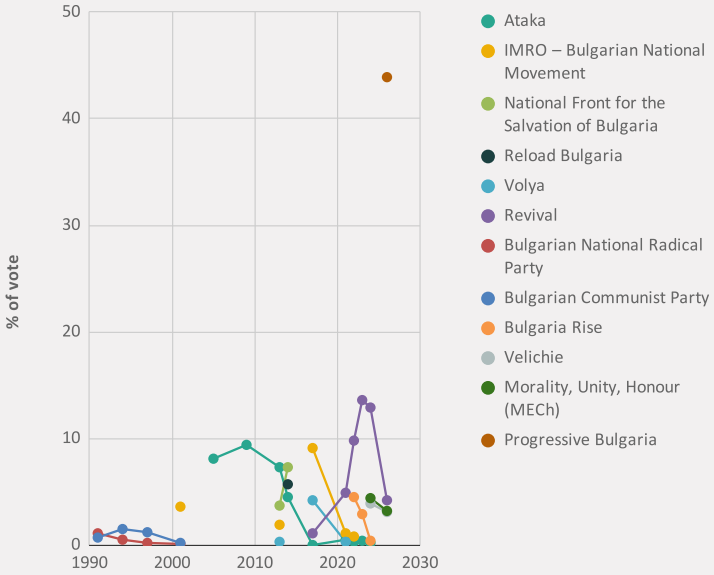
Revival summary

Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Progressive Bulgaria summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 13. Vote share of challenger parties in Bulgaria, 1990–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

CROATIA

Croatian politics has been dominated by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) since independence in 1991. Founded while Croatia was still part of Yugoslavia, HDZ led the country through the War of Independence and remained the dominant governing party throughout most of the post-war period. Under President Franjo Tuđman, the party exercised considerable influence not only over the government but also over the media, business sector and armed forces. Croatian politics has also been characterised by a strong nationalist discourse and enduring tensions between the Croatian majority and the Serbian minority.

Following Tuđman's death in 1999, Croatia entered a new political phase. The prospect of EU membership encouraged political, judicial and economic reforms that strengthened democratic institutions. Under Ivo Sanader, HDZ gradually transformed itself into a mainstream centre-right party and adopted new statutes emphasising democratic principles. Today, HDZ is a member of the European People's Party and one of the most pro-European conservative parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, elements of Croatian nationalism remain influential within the party, and HDZ has occasionally cooperated with parties and politicians from the radical right. Most notably, Zlatko Hasanbegović served as Minister of Culture in 2016 despite earlier writings in which he portrayed members of the Ustaša movement as

heroes and martyrs, and subsequent attempts to reduce funding for independent media.[15]

The first major anti-establishment challenge to Croatia's established parties came from Human Shield (Živi Zid), later renamed The Keys to Croatia (Ključ Hrvatske, ZZ). Originally founded as a protest movement against home evictions during the financial crisis, the party entered parliament in 2015 and consolidated its position in the 2016 election. Rejecting the traditional left-right divide, ZZ combined a radical critique of political and financial elites with an eclectic mix of policies drawn from both the left and the right.

Economically, the party advocated a strongly interventionist programme, including the abolition of private banks, a proposal championed by party leader Ivan Sinčić, who also finished third in the 2014 presidential election and was elected to the European Parliament in 2019. On social issues, however, the party adopted relatively progressive positions, such as supporting the legalisation of cannabis, while simultaneously opposing immigration. ZZ initially campaigned for a Croatian withdrawal from the European Union but later moderated its position to soft euroscepticism. The party also became associated with conspiracy theories concerning chemtrails, vaccinations and other anti-establishment narratives.

For a party that built its reputation on fighting corruption, it was particularly damaging when several leading representatives became embroiled in corruption scandals in 2019. The party subsequently entered a rapid decline, lost its parliamentary rep-

15 'Croatia's election is a warning about the return of nationalism to the Balkans', *The Guardian*, 12 September 2016 (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/12/croatias-election-warning-nationalism-balkans-eu-government-second-world-war-fascism)

resentation in the 2020 election and its sole seat in the European Parliament in 2024.

Homeland Movement

The Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret, DP) was founded ahead of the 2020 parliamentary election by the singer and former HDZ politician Miroslav Škoro, after he had finished third in the 2019 presidential election. Presenting himself as an outsider, Škoro argued that 'decades-long destruction of Croatia' had brought the country to 'the brink of ruin'.[16] DP immediately established itself as Croatia's third-largest political force, filling the political space to the right of the increasingly moderate HDZ.

The party combines nationalist and populist rhetoric with a strong emphasis on culture-war issues. It has consistently campaigned against immigration, minority rights – particularly those of the Serbian minority – and what it describes as left-wing influence over Croatian society. Some scholars classify DP as a far-right party and compare it to Fidesz in Hungary. In the 2019 presidential campaign, Škoro promised to pardon Tomislav Merčep, a former politician and paramilitary commander convicted of war crimes,[17] while the party has repeatedly promoted a more positive interpretation of Croatia's nationalist legacy.

DP is socially conservative, advocating a total ban on abortion and opposing the expansion of LGBT rights. On economic issues, however, it occupies a more conventional centre-right position, favouring lower taxes, deregulation and reduced bureau-

16 'Škoro: Domovinski pokret je reakcija na višedesetljetno uništavanje RH', *HINA*, 22 June 2020 (https://www.hina.hr/vijest/10398853)

17 'Miroslav Škoro: "Pomilovao bih Tomislava Merčepa"', *Večernji list*, 17 December 2019 (https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/predsjednicki-kandidat-porucio-pomilovao-bih-tomislava-mercepa-1366944)

cracy, while also supporting selected welfare measures such as free childcare. The party supports Croatia's membership in the European Union but opposes the adoption of the euro, placing it within the soft eurosceptic camp.

Following Miroslav Škoro's resignation in 2021 after an internal dispute over party finances, Ivan Penava, the mayor of Vukovar, became party leader. Penava had previously attracted attention for opposing expanded minority rights for the city's Serbian population, arguing that the legacy of the Croatian War of Independence made such measures inappropriate.

The 2024 parliamentary election marked a breakthrough for DP. The party won 9.4% of the vote, consolidated its position as Croatia's third-largest party and entered government in coalition with HDZ, securing four ministerial posts. It thus became the first successful radical-right party to participate in government in independent Croatia. Later that year, however, internal conflicts led several prominent members to leave the party and form the splinter party DOMiNO. Since then, DP has lost substantial support in opinion polls, while DOMiNO has so far remained a marginal political force.

The emergence of DP has also contributed to a broader realignment of the Croatian right. Several smaller national conservative parties have cooperated with DP in elections or parliamentary work, including the remains of ZZ and Croatian Sovereignists (HS), while others have gravitated towards the splinter party DOMiNO following the internal split in 2024.

Another challenger to Croatia's established parties is Most (The Bridge), a liberal-conservative party founded in 2012. Originally emerging as a coalition of independent local politicians, Most built its electoral success on criticism of corruption, clientelism and the dominance of HDZ and SDP. The party participated in

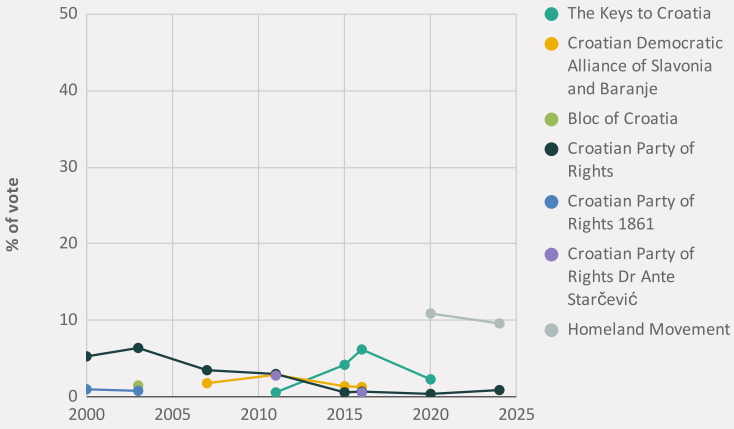
coalition governments with HDZ between 2015 and 2017, but later returned to the opposition.

Most combines fiscal conservatism with socially conservative positions and advocates political reforms aimed at increasing transparency and reducing the influence of political elites. The party is softly eurosceptic and belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) in the European Parliament. While some scholars classify Most as partially populist because of its anti-establishment rhetoric, it has generally pursued a more moderate course than DP and other parties on the Croatian right. In the 2024 parliamentary election, Most formed an electoral alliance with Croatian Sovereignists, although the latter subsequently joined a parliamentary group together with DOMiNO.

DP summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 14. Vote share of challenger parties in Croatia, 2000–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

CYPRUS

Cyprus is the only EU member state with a presidential system, where the president serves as both head of state and head of government. Political parties nevertheless remain central to the political system. In comparative perspective, Cyprus stands out for combining one of Europe's strongest communist parties with a growing nationalist far-right movement.

Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL)

The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) is one of Europe's oldest and most successful communist parties. It traces its origins to the Communist Party of Cyprus, founded in 1926 during British colonial rule. Although the communist movement was illegal for much of the colonial period, AKEL gradually established itself as one of the island's dominant political forces. Since independence in 1960, it has consistently been one of the two or three largest parties in Cyprus and remains the country's leading party on the left.

AKEL reached the peak of its political influence in 2008, when its long-serving general secretary, Demetris Christofias, became the first communist head of state in an EU member state. Christofias, who had once described the collapse of the Soviet Union

as ‘a crime against humanity’,[18] nevertheless pledged to respect the market economy. His election campaign focused primarily on restarting negotiations with the Turkish Cypriot leadership in an effort to reunify the island. Although some progress was made, the reunification process was soon overshadowed by the global financial crisis. Christofias sought to address the crisis through tax increases and loans from Russia rather than the austerity measures requested by the EU in exchange for financial assistance. He did not seek re-election in 2013, after which AKEL entered a prolonged period of electoral decline.

In the 2021 parliamentary election, AKEL recorded its worst result ever in a national election, winning just 22% of the vote. The party performed even worse in the 2024 European Parliament election, receiving only 21.5%. The 2026 parliamentary election marked a modest recovery, as AKEL increased its vote share to just over 23%, consolidating its position as the country’s second-largest party.

Despite its electoral decline, AKEL remains a pragmatic governing party, rather than a revolutionary movement. It supported Cyprus’ accession to the European Union in 2004, although it opposed adopting the euro four years later. The party advocates a federal solution to the Cyprus dispute and continues to express admiration for the Cuban political and economic system. Ideologically, however, AKEL has changed remarkably little. The party explicitly defines itself as Marxist-Leninist and states that it does not abandon its long-term objective of socialism, even if it does not currently seek to implement a radical transformation of society. As the party explains in its programme:

‘AKEL is strongly convinced that despite the blow inflicted on the labour and communist movement internationally, the

18 ‘Cyprus elects its first communist president’, *The Guardian*, 24 February 2008 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/25/cyprus.greece)

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.'[19]

Thus, while AKEL today operates fully within Cyprus' democratic system and has repeatedly demonstrated a pragmatic approach to governing, it continues to identify with a Marxist-Leninist ideological tradition historically associated with one-party rule. Since 2021, the party has been led by Stefanos Stefanou.

AKEL has been represented in the European Parliament since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, winning two seats in every election until 2024, when it was reduced to one following its weakest electoral performance to date. In 2019, the party made history when Niyazi Kızılyürek became the first Turkish Cypriot elected to the European Parliament, and the first member of the Turkish Cypriot community to hold elected office since 1963. AKEL's MEPs have consistently belonged to the GUE/NGL group.

National Popular Front (ELAM)

Several smaller nationalist parties – including New Horizons (Neo), European Party (Evroko) and the Solidarity Movement (KA) – won parliamentary representation during the 2000s. None became major political forces, but together they illustrate the fragmented character of the Cypriot nationalist right before ELAM emerged as its dominant representative.

19 'Party of the People', *AKEL*, 20 March 2006 (https://akel.org.cy/party-of-the-people/?lang=en)

The National Popular Front (ELAM) is the most successful radical-right party in the history of the Republic of Cyprus. Founded in 2008, ELAM originated as the Cypriot branch of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn (XA). Before registering as an independent political party, the organisation operated under the name Golden Dawn: Cypriot Kernel, and senior Golden Dawn figure Ilias Kasidiaris declared that 'ELAM is the Golden Dawn of Cyprus.' Although ELAM gradually distanced itself from Golden Dawn and formally ended its financial relationship with the Greek party in 2020, its origins remain central to understanding its ideological development.

ELAM combines Greek-Cypriot nationalism with strong opposition to immigration and social conservatism. The party rejects a federal solution to the Cyprus dispute and instead advocates *Enosis* – the political union of Cyprus with Greece. It opposes multiculturalism, supports close cooperation between the state and the Orthodox Church, and campaigns against what it describes as 'gender ideology' and other progressive social reforms. Immigration has nevertheless become the party's dominant issue. ELAM advocates a complete ban on Islamic headscarves in public institutions and argues that welfare benefits should be denied to Turkish Cypriots and other non-Greek communities. Economically, the party combines nationalist rhetoric with a relatively interventionist programme, making it somewhat more left-leaning than many Western European radical-right parties.

Like Golden Dawn before it, ELAM has sought to expand its electoral appeal through a combination of anti-establishment rhetoric and local activism. The party gained visibility by organising charity campaigns, blood donations and voluntary work during natural disasters, while simultaneously blaming immigration for social and economic problems. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ELAM also campaigned against several of the government's public-health restrictions.

After years of gradual growth, ELAM achieved its electoral breakthrough in the 2021 parliamentary election, winning 6.8% of the vote and becoming the fourth-largest party in parliament. The party performed even better in the 2024 European Parliament election, receiving 11% of the vote and winning its first seat in the European Parliament, where it joined the ECR group. In the 2026 parliamentary election, ELAM consolidated its position by winning 10.9% of the vote and becoming the third-largest party in parliament.

Since its foundation, ELAM has been led by Christos Christou, who has also represented the party in the presidential elections of 2018 and 2023.

Although ELAM has sought to present itself as a more respectable and electorally viable successor to Golden Dawn, its democratic credentials remain contested. Party members and supporters have repeatedly been linked to violent attacks against immigrants and political opponents, while leading representatives have occasionally suggested that violence may be justified in defence of the nation. At the same time, ELAM has pursued a deliberate strategy of political normalisation by moderating its public rhetoric without abandoning its core programme. This strategy has been partly successful. The party has become an increasingly important actor in Cypriot politics, with mainstream politicians showing a greater willingness to engage with ELAM, particularly after the 2023 presidential election. The recruitment of several prominent former DISY politicians ahead of the 2024 European Parliament election further illustrates the party's growing legitimacy within parts of the centre-right.

Direct Democracy Cyprus

The biggest political surprise in recent Cypriot politics came not from the established parties but from the independent YouTuber and social media influencer Fidias Panayiotou. Running without

party backing or a conventional political programme, Panayiotou won 19.4% of the vote in the 2024 European Parliament election, becoming one of Cyprus' six MEPs. His campaign relied almost entirely on social media, where he had built a large international audience through videos featuring public stunts and encounters with celebrities, including Elon Musk. His candidacy is also widely believed to have contributed to a sharp increase in voter turnout, which rose from 45 to 59%.

Panayiotou presented himself as politically inexperienced rather than ideological, arguing that ordinary citizens should play a much more direct role in political decision-making. After entering the European Parliament, he used polls on X and TikTok to ask his followers how he should vote on major issues, including whether to support Ursula von der Leyen's reappointment as President of the European Commission. Throughout his first year in office, Panayiotou remained formally non-attached in the European Parliament.

In October 2025, Panayiotou founded Direct Democracy Cyprus (ADK). The party seeks to transform representative democracy through digital participation, allowing members to determine the positions taken by elected representatives through online voting using digital identification. Rather than replacing elections, the project aims to make representatives continuously accountable to party members. Early opinion polls suggested support of around 7%, and in the 2026 parliamentary election ADK won 5.4% of the vote, securing four seats and becoming the smallest party in parliament. Party leader Fidias Panayiotou was elected to the House of Representatives but declined to take up his seat, opting instead to continue serving as a Member of the European Parliament.[20]

20 'Cypriot YouTuber Fidias Panayiotou says he will keep his MEP seat', *Politico Europe* (https://www.politico.eu/article/cypriot-youtuber-fidias-panayiotou-says-he-will-keep-his-mep-seat/)

Although Panayiotou has largely avoided placing himself on the traditional left-right spectrum, he has increasingly taken positions associated with the European populist right. Elon Musk publicly endorsed him, tweeting ‘Fidias for EU president!’, and *Politico* described Panayiotou as ‘Elon Musk’s man in the European Parliament’. He has criticised EU military support for Ukraine as ‘crazy and inhumane’, voted in ways widely regarded as favourable to Russia, and in May 2025 joined a delegation to Moscow together with representatives of Smer and Sahra Wagenknecht’s alliance.[21]

While ADK cannot yet be classified as either a radical-right or radical-left party, its electoral success illustrates the emergence of a new form of digitally organised anti-establishment politics centred on direct online participation rather than traditional ideology. Together with ELAM’s continued growth, the 2026 parliamentary election confirmed that Cyprus’ traditional party system is increasingly being challenged by new anti-establishment actors.

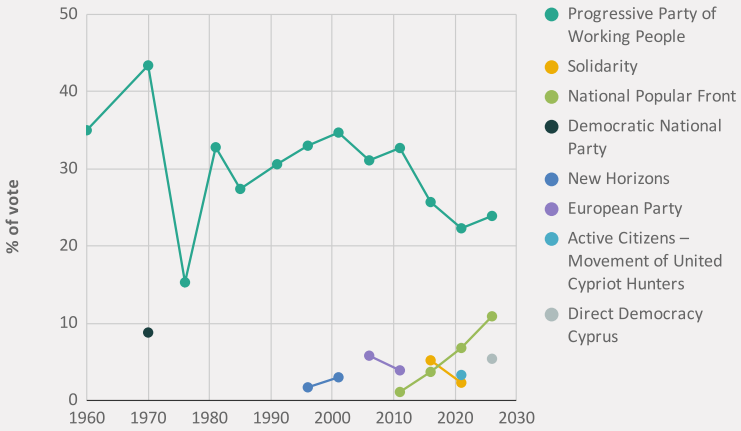
21 ‘Cypriot MEP Fidias Panayiotou travels to Moscow with German and Slovak lawmakers’, *Politico Europe*, 8 May 2025 (https://www.politico.eu/article/cyprus-mep-fidias-panayiotou-travels-to-moscow-with-german-and-slovak-lawmakers/)

AKEL summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

ELAM summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

ADK summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 15. Vote share of challenger parties in Cyprus, 1960–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

CZECHIA

In 1990, the Czech opposition united under the umbrella organisation Civic Forum and easily won the first free election. By the second election in 1992, six months before the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Czechia had developed a pluralistic party system including Christian democrats, liberals, conservatives and a revived Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). The centre-right dominated the 1990s before ČSSD won in 1998 and 2002. Since around 2010, however, the Czech party system has become considerably more volatile, with the decline of several established parties and the emergence of successive populist and anti-establishment challengers.

The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), for many years led by Václav Klaus, combined economic liberalism with national conservatism and soft euroscepticism. Together with the British Conservatives, it was one of the founders of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in 2009. Although ODS has remained an important mainstream party, its ideological legacy – particularly Klaus's combination of market liberalism, national sovereignty and hostility towards European environmental policy – later influenced new challengers on the Czech right.

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) was for decades the most successful unreformed communist party in post-communist Europe. As the organisational successor to the

Communist Party that had ruled Czechoslovakia, it retained a Marxist identity and remained strongly supportive of state intervention and welfare policies while opposing NATO and taking a comparatively favourable view of Russia. It was also eurosceptic and increasingly critical of immigration. KSČM was represented in every Czech parliament until 2021, when it fell below the electoral threshold. It subsequently became the main force behind the broader left-nationalist Stačilo! alliance, which nevertheless narrowly failed to enter parliament in 2025 with 4.3% of the vote.

The first important challenger from the radical right was Rally for the Republic (SPR-RSČ), founded in 1989 and led by Miroslav Sládek. It peaked at 8% in 1996 before losing parliamentary representation two years later. The party opposed both EU and NATO membership, promoted economic populism and became notorious for anti-Roma rhetoric.

An even more extreme milieu later developed around the Workers' Party (DS). Founded in 2003, it combined economic populism with increasingly explicit ethnic nationalism, anti-Roma mobilisation and links to neo-Nazi activists. Party members organised marches through Roma neighbourhoods while the party called for the abolition of registered partnerships for same-sex couples and described homosexuality as a 'sexual deviation'. In 2010, the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the Workers' Party on the grounds that it represented a threat to democracy. Its political milieu continued through the Workers' Party of Social Justice (DSSS), but without significant electoral success.

ANO

The most important transformation of Czech politics came with ANO 2011 ('Yes'), founded by billionaire businessman Andrej Babiš. Initially created as an anti-corruption civic movement, ANO presented professional business management as an alternative

to conventional party politics. Babiš emphasised his identity as an entrepreneur rather than a politician; one of the movement's early slogans declared: 'We're not like the politicians. We toil.'[22]

ANO finished second in the 2013 parliamentary election and entered government with ČSSD and the Christian Democrats. It won the 2017 election, after which Babiš became prime minister. Following a short-lived single-party cabinet, he formed another minority government with ČSSD in 2018, dependent on parliamentary support from KSČM. This effectively ended the exclusion of the Communists from influence over national government. Babiš remained prime minister until ANO narrowly lost power after the 2021 election.

ANO has always been ideologically flexible. It initially combined centrist and centre-right economic positions with managerial anti-politics, but increasingly shifted towards welfare protection, higher pensions and state intervention as its electorate became older and more working-class. At the same time, it moved sharply in a national-conservative direction on immigration, climate policy and cultural questions. Babiš became one of the most outspoken critics of the EU Green Deal and migration policy while rejecting Czech withdrawal from either the EU or NATO.

This transformation accelerated after 2021. ANO left the liberal Renew Europe group after the 2024 European election, and Babiš joined Viktor Orbán and the Austrian FPÖ in founding Patriots for Europe. He increasingly presented himself as part of

22 'Political earthquake in the Czech Republic: Rejection of established parties', *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, 31 October 2013 (https://www.boell.de/en/2013/10/31/political-earthquake-czech-republic-rejection-established-parties)

the same European populist camp and by 2025 openly described himself as a ‘Trumpist’.[23]

ANO returned decisively to power in the 2025 election, winning 34.5% of the vote and 80 of the 200 seats. Babiš formed a government with Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and the new right-wing Motorists for Themselves, giving the coalition 108 seats. The new government took office in December 2025. It has shifted Czech policy towards a more sovereignty-oriented position, opposing EU migration and climate policies, reducing defence spending, and scaling back support for Ukraine, while Babiš has continued to insist that Czechia will remain in both the EU and NATO.

ANO has also raised concerns about democratic standards, although its record is considerably less authoritarian than that of Fidesz or Smer. Babiš concentrated decision-making strongly around himself, while his simultaneous political and business interests produced persistent conflicts of interest. His Agrofert business empire has received substantial public and EU subsidies, and his ownership of major Czech media outlets intensified concerns about the concentration of economic, media, and political power. Large demonstrations against Babiš took place in 2018 and 2019. After his return to government, European prosecutors opened a new investigation in 2026 into subsidy payments involving companies formerly controlled by him; Babiš denies wrongdoing.

The government has also revived concerns about media independence. In 2026, it proposed abolishing the licence-fee financing of Czech Television and Czech Radio and replacing it with

23 ‘EU’s next problem child? Babis win in Czech vote would boost populists’, *Reuters*, 23 September 2025 (https://www.reuters.com/world/eus-next-problem-child-babis-win-czech-vote-would-boost-populists-2025-09-23/)

direct state-budget funding. Thousands demonstrated against the reform, arguing that it would make public broadcasting more vulnerable to political pressure.

Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)

Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) was founded in 2015 by Tomio Okamura after he split from the short-lived populist Dawn movement, which he had also founded. SPD is a national-conservative radical-right party built around opposition to immigration, Islam and multiculturalism. During the 2017 election campaign, its message was encapsulated in the slogan 'No to Islam'. Okamura had already attracted controversy for statements about Roma while leading Dawn, including advocating state support for Roma emigration.

SPD supports referendums on Czech membership of both the EU and NATO and has generally taken a much more sympathetic view of Russia than the mainstream Czech right. It also mobilised strongly against COVID restrictions. The party established close ties with Marine Le Pen and other European radical-right parties and remained represented after the 2025 election, receiving 7.8% and 15 seats. Its entry into the Babiš government marked the first time that the modern Czech radical right participated directly in national government.

Motorists

A new challenger emerged on the right in the 2024 European election. Motorists for Themselves (Motoristé sobě) grew out of opposition to environmental regulation and restrictions on car use and was strongly influenced by the political legacy of Václav Klaus. Running together with the anti-establishment Přísaha movement, it won more than 10% in the European election,

largely thanks to the popularity of former racing driver Filip Turek. The party later contested the 2025 parliamentary election independently, winning 6.8% and 13 seats.

The Motorists combine market liberalism, tax cuts and deregulation with national conservatism and strong opposition to environmental and climate policies. They reject the euro, the EU migration pact and further transfers of sovereignty to Brussels but explicitly oppose leaving the EU. Their programme describes Czechia as part of the West, supports continued NATO membership and rules out political or commercial normalisation with Russia while the war in Ukraine continues.

The party nevertheless has a deliberately provocative political culture. Turek became embroiled in controversy over past racist, homophobic and Nazi-related social-media material and a photograph showing him making what was interpreted as a Nazi salute.[24] He denied or played down several of the allegations, but President Petr Pavel considered the record serious enough to oppose his appointment to the cabinet.

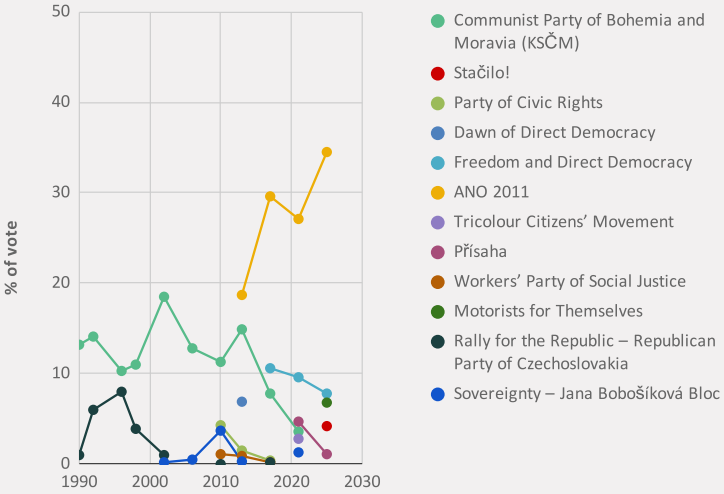
24 'Czech president voices opposition to cabinet nominee who made Nazi salute', *Reuters*, 26 November 2025 (https://www.reuters.com/world/czech-president-voices-opposition-cabinet-nominee-who-made-nazi-salute-2025-11-26/)

ANO summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

SPD summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Motorists summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 16. Vote share of challenger parties in Czechia, 1990–2025



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

DENMARK

Denmark has traditionally had the most fragmented party system among the Nordic countries. Party splits have been common, and elections have frequently resulted in new parties entering parliament or established ones disappearing. Anti-establishment parties have been represented in parliament since the 1970s, making Denmark one of the earliest European cases of sustained populist representation.

The Danish Communist Party (DKP), founded in 1919, was banned during the German occupation but legalised after liberation and briefly participated in the government formed in 1945. After the war, it was the only established party to oppose Danish membership of NATO. Its support subsequently declined sharply. The party remained loyal to the Soviet Union, including after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, which contributed to a major split. Many former members instead joined the new Socialist People's Party (SF), a democratic socialist party that quickly replaced the communists as the leading force to the left of the Social Democrats.

Red-Green Alliance

DKP, which continued to receive financial support from Moscow, briefly returned to parliament during the 1970s, benefiting from its opposition to Danish membership of the European Community. In 1989, DKP joined the Left Socialists, themselves originating in a 1967 split from SF, and other radical-left groups to establish the Red-Green Alliance (EL).

EL remains a radical socialist party, and its programme explicitly calls for a 'socialist and democratic revolution', understood as replacing capitalism through democratic means.[25] It has repeatedly provided parliamentary support for centre-left governments but has never participated in one. The party is strongly left-wing economically and progressive on social issues. It has also traditionally opposed Danish membership of the EU, although its practical European policy has become more nuanced over time.

Danish People's Party

The Progress Party (FRP) was one of Europe's earliest successful right-wing populist parties. Founded by tax lawyer Mogens Glistrup in 1972, it achieved an immediate breakthrough in the 'earthquake election' of 1973, when it became the second-largest party. The party began as an anti-tax protest movement rather than an ideologically coherent organisation, advocating drastic reductions in taxation, bureaucracy, and the size of the state.

During the 1980s, immigration increasingly became part of its political agenda. Glistrup, an exceptionally controversial political figure who was imprisoned for tax fraud, adopted increasing-

25 'Enhedslistens principprogram', *Enhedslisten* (https://vores.enhedslisten.dk/enhedslistens-principprogram/)

ly radical and openly racist rhetoric and eventually called for Denmark to become a 'Mohammedan-free zone' (Andersen and Trondal, 2024). The Progress Party never participated in government but at times provided parliamentary support for centre-right governments.

Internal conflicts increasingly divided the party between pragmatists, known as the 'slappere', and hardliners, the 'strammere'. In 1995, the leading pragmatists left to establish the Danish People's Party (DF). Pia Kjærsgaard, a prominent Progress Party MP and deputy leader, became the new party's first leader.

DF placed immigration, integration and national identity much more consistently at the centre of its political programme. It was also much more centralised and disciplined than the Progress Party, leaving considerably less room for internal opposition. Initially, the established parties attempted to isolate it. In 1999, Social Democratic prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen famously told the party that, regardless of its efforts, it would never become 'respectable' (*stuerent*).[26]

Only two years later, however, DF began a decade of close cooperation with the Liberal-Conservative government elected in 2001, providing the parliamentary majority without formally entering government. Initially, its principal demands concerned immigration and integration, but the party gradually broadened its agenda and increasingly emphasised welfare, pensions and protection of the Danish welfare state.

DF exerted substantial influence on government policy, helping push Denmark towards one of Europe's most restrictive immigration regimes during the 2000s and promoting increasingly strong

26 'Folketingets åbningsdebat', *Folketingstidende*, 7 October 1999 (https://www.folketingstidende.dk/samling/19991/redegoerelse/R1/19991_R1_M3_referat.pdf)

demands for cultural assimilation. At the same time, it successfully maintained much of its outsider image despite exercising considerable influence over government policy.

While Kjærsgaard laid the foundations for this influence, her successor Kristian Thulesen Dahl presided over the party's greatest electoral successes. DF finished first in Denmark in the 2014 European Parliament election and reached a record 21.1% in the 2015 parliamentary election, becoming the country's second-largest party.

The peak was followed by a dramatic decline. The party lost voters to both the mainstream right, which had adopted much of its immigration agenda, and newer parties offering more radical alternatives. Internal conflicts and leadership problems accelerated the collapse. In the 2022 election, DF narrowly remained in parliament with only 2.6% of the vote.

Under Morten Messerschmidt, however, the party gradually recovered. It returned to a sharper nationalist and populist profile, once again making immigration, Islam, Danish sovereignty and opposition to EU interference central issues, while retaining its traditional defence of welfare and pensions. Recent proposals have included ending asylum applications on Danish territory, reducing Muslim immigration, expanding deportations of criminal foreigners and restricting immigrants' access to welfare benefits. At the same time, DF has continued to support increased defence spending and has treated Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a serious security threat, distinguishing it from the Russia-friendly wing of the European radical right.

The recovery culminated in the 2026 parliamentary election, when DF won 9.1% of the vote and 16 seats. The result restored the party as a major force on the Danish right after a decade of decline. DF remained in opposition to the new centre-left government formed under Mette Frederiksen.

The New Right (Nye Borgerlige) was founded in 2015 by Pernille Vermund. It combined an even more restrictive immigration policy than DF with economic liberalism, placing it clearly to the right of DF on both economic and sociocultural issues. The party demanded a complete halt to spontaneous asylum immigration, much greater use of deportations and a reduction of the welfare state, while also advocating Danish withdrawal from the EU.

After several years of internal conflicts and declining support, Vermund left the party and joined the Liberal Alliance in 2024, arguing that New Right should be dissolved. The party did not contest the 2026 parliamentary election and had by then effectively disappeared from national politics.

One of its former MPs, Lars Boje Mathiesen, instead founded the Citizens' Party (Borgernes Parti) in 2024. Boje had briefly led New Right in 2023 before being removed and expelled following an internal conflict. His new party combined radical economic liberalism, strong anti-establishment rhetoric and a highly restrictive approach to immigration, Islam and climate policy.

The Citizens' Party narrowly crossed the electoral threshold in 2026, receiving 2.1% and four seats. The breakthrough immediately turned into organisational chaos. One MP was expelled only four days after the election, another left shortly afterwards, and a third departed in May. Within little more than a month, Boje was once again the party's sole representative in parliament.

Denmark Democrats

Inger Støjberg, a former immigration minister for the liberal-conservative Venstre, founded the Denmark Democrats (DD) in 2022. Støjberg had become one of Denmark's most prominent advocates of restrictive immigration policies while serving as minister. Her ministry famously maintained a running count of new

immigration restrictions and celebrated the fiftieth measure with a cake. She was later impeached and convicted for unlawfully ordering the separation of asylum-seeking couples where one partner was a minor, receiving a sentence of 60 days' imprisonment.

After serving her sentence, Støjberg established the Denmark Democrats, which immediately won 8.1% in the 2022 election. The party is national-conservative and populist and resembles DF in several respects, combining restrictive immigration policy with support for substantial parts of the welfare state.

Its most distinctive theme, however, has been the conflict between metropolitan Denmark and smaller towns and rural areas. DD portrays political and administrative centralisation in Copenhagen as detrimental to what it calls 'Production Denmark', emphasising farmers, small businesses, local hospitals and public services outside the largest cities. This political cleavage gained additional importance following the Social Democratic government's controversial decision during the COVID-19 pandemic to cull Denmark's entire mink population, devastating an industry concentrated in rural Jutland.

DD has continued to advocate an exceptionally restrictive immigration policy, including permanent border controls, fewer asylum seekers, greater repatriation and stronger demands for cultural assimilation. It is also strongly critical of EU centralisation and wants powers transferred back to Denmark, but unlike DF it does not advocate leaving the European Union. Economically, it combines tax and duty reductions with defence of welfare provision, particularly in rural areas and for pensioners.

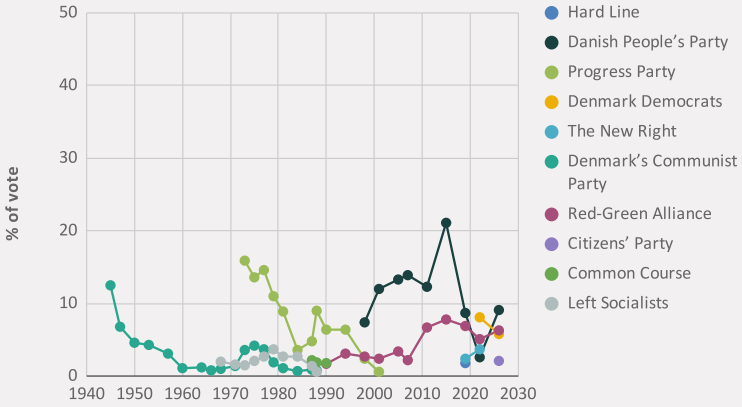
The party clearly positioned itself within the centre-right bloc from its foundation. In the 2026 parliamentary election, however, its support declined to 5.8% and ten seats. While remaining an important force on the nationalist right, it was overtaken decisively by the revived Danish People's Party.

Danish People's Party summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Denmark Democrats summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Red-Green Alliance summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 17. Vote share of challenger parties in Denmark, 1945–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

ESTONIA

Nationalism has been a recurring feature of Estonian politics both before and after the restoration of independence in 1991. During the 1990s, even liberal and centre-right parties advocated relatively assimilationist policies towards the country's large Russian-speaking minority. Nevertheless, space remained for more radical nationalist alternatives, although these have generally remained weaker than in neighbouring Latvia and Lithuania until the emergence of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE). No party to the left of the Social Democrats has won parliamentary representation since independence in 1991.

The far-right Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP) was founded in 1988 by nationalist and anti-communist dissidents. Before independence, its primary objective was to restore Estonia as a sovereign, non-communist state. After 1991, it advocated a strongly anti-Russian and ethnically nationalist agenda, arguing that Estonia should be a nation primarily for ethnic Estonians. In the first free parliamentary election in 1992, ERSP won almost 9% of the vote and joined the centre-right coalition government that governed until 1995. It later merged with the Pro Patria National Coalition to form the conservative Pro Patria Union.

The Centre Party (Keskerakond, EK) was founded in 1991 as the successor to the Estonian Popular Front. Under its long-serving leader Edgar Savisaar, the party was often described as pop-

ulist and criticised for its highly personalised leadership style, while Savisaar himself became embroiled in several corruption scandals. The party was initially sceptical of Estonia's integration into the European Union but has gradually abandoned its eurosceptic positions.

Economically, the Centre Party has traditionally occupied a position to the left of the Estonian political mainstream while taking relatively conservative positions on some social issues. Despite this, it identifies itself as a social-liberal party and belongs to the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament. Its decision to form a coalition government with EKRE between 2019 and 2021 generated considerable internal criticism.

Although the Centre Party is sometimes described as populist, particularly under Savisaar's leadership, it is not included in this index because of its relatively weak anti-establishment profile. Nevertheless, it should be regarded as a borderline case, especially in its earlier years.

Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE)

The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) is the most successful nationalist party in the Baltic states. It was founded in 2012 through a merger between the agrarian People's Union of Estonia and the nationalist Estonian Patriotic Movement. Since its formation, EKRE has transformed from a marginal challenger into one of Estonia's largest parties. Its greatest electoral success came in 2019, when it won 17.8% of the vote and entered government in coalition with the Centre Party and Pro Patria. The coalition remained in office until early 2021.

EKRE combines Estonian nationalism with classic populist rhetoric, portraying political and liberal elites as acting against the interests of 'ordinary Estonians' (Petsinis, 2019). In an interview

with The Guardian, former MP and youth leader Ruuben Kaalep summarised the party's mission as fighting 'native replacement', 'the LGBT agenda' and 'leftist global ideological hegemony'.[27] The party opposes immigration and multiculturalism, arguing that Estonia should remain a nation primarily for ethnic Estonians. At the same time, it has adopted an ambivalent approach towards the country's large Russian-speaking minority, hoping to attract socially conservative Russian-speaking voters while maintaining its nationalist profile. This balancing act also shaped the party's foreign policy.

EKRE is strongly conservative on social issues, campaigning against LGBT rights, gender studies and what it describes as 'globalist' values. Former party leader Mart Helme caused a political crisis as Minister of the Interior in 2020, after suggesting that homosexuals would be better off moving to Sweden.[28] His son Martin Helme, another leading EKRE figure, had declared on television: 'I want Estonia to be a white country'.[29] Economically, EKRE occupies a relatively centrist position within Estonian politics, combining calls for lower taxes with support for increased welfare spending and a more interventionist role for the state. The party is soft eurosceptic, advocating a referendum on Estonia's EU membership while stopping short of calling for immediate withdrawal.

27 'Racism, sexism, Nazi economics: Estonia's far right in power', *The Guardian*, 21 May 2019 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/21/racism-sexism-nazi-economics-estonia-far-right-in-power)

28 'Estonia president slams minister over homophobic comments', *Deutsche Welle*, 18 October 2020 (https://www.dw.com/en/estonian-president-slams-interior-minister-over-homophobic-interview/a-55311378)

29 'Far-right party deputy: "We are the mainstream in Estonia"', *Deutsche Welle*, 14 March 2019 (https://www.dw.com/en/far-right-party-deputy-we-are-the-mainstream-in-estonia/a-47893557)

EKRE has repeatedly expressed admiration for Viktor Orbán's Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland. The party has also been among Donald Trump's strongest supporters in Europe since 2016. Both former party leader Mart Helme and his successor, Martin Helme, claimed that Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 US presidential election was fraudulent, and Mart Helme resigned as Minister of the Interior after accusing Biden of corruption.[30] Several leading representatives have also criticised Estonia's public broadcaster and argued that politically biased journalists should be dismissed. During EKRE's time in government, prominent journalist Ahto Lobjakas resigned from public broadcasting, stating that he no longer felt able to work independently.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EKRE was often criticised for adopting comparatively accommodating positions towards Moscow, and ahead of the 2019 European Parliament election the party was accused of being infiltrated by Russian oligarchs. Following the invasion, however, the party adopted a considerably more critical stance towards Russia. Nevertheless, disagreements over Russia, together with disputes over the party's internal leadership and increasingly confrontational rhetoric, contributed to a major split after the 2023 parliamentary election. Following the election defeat, EKRE also pursued a strategy of systematic parliamentary obstruction.

In 2024, six of the party's 17 MPs left to form the splinter party Estonian Nationalists and Conservatives (ERK).[31] The split also involved the party's first MEP, Jaak Madison – often described as EKRE's more moderate and polished public face had previously sparked controversy by writing that fascism contained 'many

30 'Högerpopulisterna vinner terräng i Estland', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 4 March 2023 (https://www.hbl.fi/2023-03-04/hogerpopulisterna-vinner-terrang-i-estland-u_amU/)

31 'National conservative party leader: EKRE looking at tough times', *ERR News*, 12 June 2024 (https://news.err.ee/1609369076/national-conservative-party-leader-ekre-looking-at-tough-times)

positive nuances' and by praising aspects of Nazi Germany's economic record[32] – as well as most of EKRE's youth organisation, led by Ruuben Kaalep. After being re-elected to the European Parliament in 2024, Madison joined the Centre Party and switched from the Patriots for Europe (formerly ID) group to ECR.

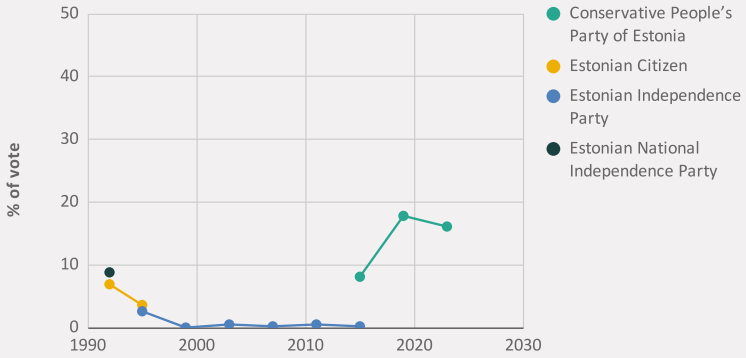
The new party has so far attracted only limited support in opinion polls, while EKRE itself has declined to its lowest polling levels in more than five years. The party also performed poorly in the 2025 local elections, losing around five percentage points compared with the previous municipal elections, and remained Estonia's fourth-largest party in the spring of 2026.

32 'EKRE could join Center as second 'pariah' after party defends new MP's controversial 2012 blog post', *ERR News*, 3 March 2015 (https://news.err.ee/115323/ekre-could-join-center-as-second-pariah-after-party-defends-new-mp-s-controversial-2012-blog-post)

EKRE summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 18. Vote share of challenger parties in Estonia, 1992–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

FINLAND

Finland had one of Western Europe's strongest communist movements during the post-war decades, and communist representatives participated in several governments. During the 1970s and 1980s, the agrarian-populist Finnish Rural Party challenged the established parties. The most significant challenger in recent decades has been the national conservative Finns Party (PS), which emerged as one of Finland's leading political parties during the 2010s, participated in several governments, and survived a major party split. Since 2023, it has been the second-largest party in the governing coalition. As of July 2026, it polls around 14%, down about five percentage points from the 2023 parliamentary election.

Finland was among the Western European countries where communists enjoyed the strongest electoral support after World War II. Although the Communist Party had been banned before and during the war, it re-emerged in 1944 within the Democratic League of the People of Finland (SKDL), a broad left-wing alliance dominated by the communists and broadly resembling the popular-front organisations established elsewhere in post-war Europe. Between the 1940s and the 1980s, the SKDL consistently won between 15 and 25% of the vote. It participated in government on three occasions: 1946–48, 1966–70, and 1977–82. In the 1958 election, it became Finland's largest party, although it remained far from an overall parliamentary majority.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the SKDL rivalled the Social Democratic Party in electoral strength, leading to fierce competition, particularly within the trade union movement. President Urho Kekkonen regarded the inclusion of communists in government as a means of integrating and moderating them, a strategy often described as ‘embracing them to death’. During the early 1970s, the party leadership increasingly embraced Eurocommunism, while an influential Stalinist faction, known as the Taistoists, remained within the organisation. Despite profound ideological differences, the Taistoists were allowed to remain, partly because Moscow threatened to withdraw financial support if the movement split. Only in the mid-1980s did the division become formal, when orthodox Marxist-Leninists established the Democratic Alternative (Deva). Deva won 4% of the vote in 1987 but lost parliamentary representation in 1991. Most of the SKDL subsequently joined the newly established Left Alliance (VAS) in 1990, which gradually developed into a democratic socialist party with a socially progressive profile. Although some scholars have noted populist elements in its early rhetoric, it is generally classified as a radical left rather than a left-populist party.

Finland also has a long tradition of agrarian populism. The Finnish Rural Party (SMP) was founded in 1959 by its longtime leader, Veikko Vennamo, following a split from the Agrarian Union (now the Centre Party). The party achieved its electoral breakthrough in 1970 on a populist platform centred on ‘the forgotten people’, particularly small farmers and the unemployed (Arter 2010).

After declining electoral support and a series of internal conflicts during the second half of the 1970s, Vennamo retired from politics and was succeeded by his son Pekka, who lacked his father’s political charisma. Nevertheless, the SMP returned to more than 9% of the vote in the 1983 election and subsequently joined a centre-left coalition government. Four years later, it entered a coalition led by the centre-right National Coalition Party and remained in government until 1990.

The SMP combined anti-establishment rhetoric with strong criticism of political, cultural and academic elites. It emphasised Christian values, opposed the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1971, adopted a nationalist profile, and criticised the privileged status of the Swedish language and Swedish-speaking minority.

Finns Party

Following the collapse of the SMP during the 1990s, several prominent members – including party leader Raimo Vistbacka and party secretary Timo Soini – founded the Finns Party (PS) in 1995. The new party remained electorally marginal during its first decade, winning only around 1% of the vote in both 1999 and 2003. Support increased to 4% in 2007 before the party achieved its breakthrough in 2011, when it finished third with 19% of the vote. Soini, who had led the party since 1997, received more personal votes than any other candidate in both the 2009 European Parliament election and the 2011 parliamentary election.

Following the 2011 election, the Finns Party entered coalition negotiations with the National Coalition Party and the Social Democrats. However, it ultimately declined to join the government because of its opposition to EU bailout mechanisms established during the eurozone crisis.

After retaining its position as Finland's third-largest party in the 2015 election, the Finns Party entered government together with the National Coalition Party and the Centre Party. Soini became foreign minister, and under his leadership the party moderated both its eurosceptic stance and its anti-establishment rhetoric.

In 2017, Soini stepped down and was succeeded by Jussi Halla-aho, who had become one of Finland's most prominent anti-immigration voices through his blog *Scripta*. Following his election, the leaders of the coalition parties declared that they

were unwilling to continue governing with the Finns Party under Halla-aho's leadership. As a result, all Finns Party ministers left the party to establish Blue Reform, allowing the coalition government to survive while the Finns Party returned to the opposition.

Blue Reform failed to win parliamentary representation in the 2019 election, while the Finns Party again emerged as one of Finland's strongest parties. Its election campaign included a widely discussed video featuring an angry monster attacking the country's 'traitorous' political leaders.

Riikka Purra succeeded Halla-aho as party leader in 2021. In the 2023 election, she led the Finns Party to its best result to date, finishing second with 20% of the vote. The party subsequently entered government for the second time, together with the National Coalition Party, the Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party. It currently holds seven ministerial posts, including the Ministry of Finance, headed by Purra.

In recent years, the Finns Party has experienced several small splinter groups on its radical fringe. MP Ano Turtiainen was expelled from the Finns Party parliamentary group in 2020 following a racist social media post[33] from the party itself in 2021. He subsequently founded Power Belongs to the People, a strongly pro-Russian and anti-NATO party with links to far-right and neo-Nazi milieus.[34] Another small extremist party, the Blue-and-Black Movement, emerged following a split within the party's youth organisation. Its leader, Toni Jalonen, left the Finns Party

33 'Finns Party parliamentary group ejects MP over racist tweet', *Yle News*, 4 June 2020 (https://yle.fi/a/3-11386276)

34 'VKK holds first party meeting, Russian embassy to send representative', *Yle News*, 17 June 2022 (https://yle.fi/a/3-12499041)

after publicly describing himself as a fascist.[35] 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'.[36]

Ideologically, the Finns Party combines national conservatism with economic interventionism. It is socially conservative while supporting a relatively extensive welfare state, greater tax progressivity, and state support for agriculture and industry. Soini once described it as 'a workers' party without socialism'.[37] The party is strongly nationalist and has long opposed compulsory Swedish instruction in Finnish schools, instead advocating policies intended to strengthen Finnish national identity.

The Finns Party remains softly eurosceptic. While it continues to identify withdrawal from the European Union as a long-term objective, it argues that Finland should remain within the EU for the foreseeable future to defend Finnish interests. The party initially opposed NATO membership on sovereignty grounds but reversed its position following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Since then it has become one of Europe's most consistently anti-Russian populist parties.

Since returning to government in 2023, the Finns Party has had its greatest policy impact in migration and criminal justice. It has secured substantially stricter rules on citizenship, residence permits, asylum and family migration, while also supporting tougher criminal penalties and expanded police powers. The party

35 'Finns Party to sack youth wing's vice chair for declaring himself a fascist', *Yle News*, 24 February 2020 (https://yle.fi/a/3-11225062)

36 'Finns Party youth wing members charged with inciting ethnic hatred', *Yle News*, 4 November 2020 (https://yle.fi/a/3-11630631)

37 'Finnish elections: a rare moment of stability in European politics?', *Europe Elects*, 26 March 2019 (https://europeelects.eu/2019/03/26/finnish-elections-a-rare-moment-of-stability-in-european-politics/)

has also influenced energy policy by promoting nuclear power and a somewhat less ambitious climate agenda. By contrast, it has largely aligned itself with the government's mainstream positions on foreign and European policy, including strong support for Ukraine. At the same time, the party has continued to generate political controversies. In 2024, *The New York Times* summarised its first year back in government by noting that 'a government minister has had to apologise for racist remarks, another was forced to resign after making Nazi references, and most recently, a lawmaker was expelled from the party after firing a gun outside a bar.'[38]

The Finns Party has been represented in the European Parliament since 2009. It was a founding member of the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group, joined the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) after the 2014 election, moved to Identity and Democracy (ID) in 2019, and returned to ECR in 2023 following its return to government. The 2024 European Parliament election was a major disappointment for the party, which lost one of its two seats and received only 7% of the vote.

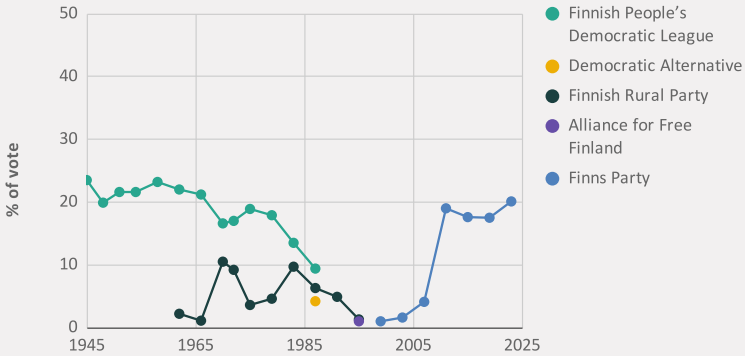
As of June 2026, it polls around 14% as the third-largest party in Finland, down about five percentage points since the 2023 elections.

38 'Finnish Lawmaker Is Expelled From Party After Shooting Outside Nightclub', The New York Times, 13 May 2024 (https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/world/europe/finland-mp-expelled-timo-vornanen.html)

PS summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 19. Vote share of challenger parties in Finland, 1945–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

FRANCE

Among established democracies, France stands out in several respects. The president exercises greater political power than any other head of state in Western Europe, while the country's modern political history has been marked by repeated periods of institutional and social turbulence. French voters have also consistently provided unusually strong support for parties on both the radical left and radical right.

The French Communist Party (PCF), founded in 1920, was one of the few communist parties in Western Europe to become the dominant force on the left. It frequently outperformed the Socialist Party (PS), maintained close links with the powerful CGT trade-union confederation and controlled the influential newspaper *L'Humanité*. Like several communist parties with close ties to Moscow, the PCF gained considerable legitimacy from its role in the resistance during World War II and performed strongly in the first post-war elections.

The PCF participated in the first post-war governments under the so-called tripartite system alongside the Socialists and Christian Democrats. In 1947, however, it was excluded from government and subsequently remained politically isolated for decades, largely because of its close relationship with the Soviet Union.

Among voters, the party nevertheless remained the strongest force on the French left until 1978. In the 1956 parliamentary election, the PCF became the largest party in the country, an exceptional achievement for a communist party in Western Europe. Its support subsequently declined slowly. Unlike the Italian Communist Party and some other Western European counterparts, the PCF rejected the Eurocommunist turn during the 1970s and instead retained a comparatively orthodox, pro-Soviet orientation. During the same period, prominent party representatives occasionally adopted strongly restrictive rhetoric on immigration.

The PCF returned to national government after François Mitterrand's presidential victory in 1981, although by then it was clearly subordinate to the Socialist Party. Four communist ministers initially joined the government. Their participation caused concern among some of France's Western allies, while Mitterrand simultaneously maintained a deliberately firm line towards Moscow.

Robert Hue succeeded the long-serving Georges Marchais as party leader in 1994 and initiated reforms of the party's highly centralised organisation and Marxist-Leninist identity. The PCF again participated in government between 1997 and 2002 under Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. Continued electoral decline during the 2000s increasingly pushed it towards broader left-wing electoral alliances.

European elections had long provided the PCF with an important additional arena. From the first direct European Parliament election in 1979, it was one of the principal parties in the parliament's communist and radical-left groups, alongside the Italian communists. Its independent electoral strength eventually declined, however, and the PCF failed to win representation on its own list in 2019.

France Unbowed (LFI)

A new radical-left force emerged around Jean-Luc Mélenchon. After a long career in the Socialist Party, Mélenchon left in 2008 and founded the Left Party (PG). The PG subsequently joined the PCF and other organisations to form the Left Front. Mélenchon became its presidential candidate in 2012.

In 2016 he created La France Insoumise (LFI), originally as a movement and electoral platform centred on his 2017 presidential campaign. Mélenchon received almost 20% in that election and repeated the achievement in 2022, when he came close to qualifying for the second round.

For the parliamentary election later in 2022, LFI joined the Socialists, the Greens, the Communists, and smaller parties in the New Ecological and Social People's Union (NUPES). LFI was the dominant force within the alliance, marking an important change in the balance of power on the French left.

NUPES nevertheless proved weakly cohesive. Tensions became particularly intense following Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023, when senior LFI representatives initially refused to characterise the attack as terrorism and Mélenchon's rhetoric generated strong criticism from the Socialists and other partners.[39] More broadly, disagreements over Mélenchon's leadership, European policy and the war in Gaza contributed to the effective collapse of NUPES.

The left nevertheless reunited with remarkable speed after President Emmanuel Macron dissolved the National Assembly

39 'Mélenchon has become a problem for the entire French left', *Le Monde*, 12 October 2023 (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/10/12/melenchon-has-become-a-problem-for-the-entire-french-left_6166285_23.html)

following the 2024 European election. LFI, the Socialists, the Greens, and the Communists created a new alliance, the New Popular Front (NFP). In the subsequent parliamentary election, the alliance unexpectedly won most seats, although it remained far short of a majority. The cooperation did not resolve the deep divisions between LFI and the more moderate parts of the left.

LFI is rooted in the radical left and combines a strongly redistributive economic programme with a clear populist approach, comparable in some respects to Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. On cultural and social issues, LFI generally takes progressive positions, including on immigration, minority rights, gender equality and LGBT rights. Its broader progressive credentials have nevertheless been complicated by repeated controversies over antisemitism. Mélenchon and other leading figures have been accused of minimising antisemitism and of using rhetoric drawing on antisemitic stereotypes, particularly since the Hamas attacks of October 2023.[40] LFI strongly rejects the accusation that the party itself is antisemitic, but the controversy has generated serious tensions with other parties of the French left.

LFI's democratic profile is also more ambiguous than that of most mainstream left parties. It participates fully in electoral democracy and does not advocate abolishing democratic competition, but its highly personalised leadership, confrontational attitude towards institutions and internal dissent, and Mélenchon's record of sympathy for or accommodation towards authoritarian governments abroad point in a more illiberal direction. This includes his past defence of Hugo Chávez's Venezuela and his comparatively ac-

40 'Elections législatives : les accusations d'antisémitisme contre LFI ont empoisonné la campagne de la gauche', *Le Monde*, 28 June 2024 (https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2024/06/28/elections-legislatives-les-accusations-d-antisemitisme-contre-lfi-ont-empoisonne-la-campagne-de-la-gauche_6245007_823448.html)

commodating stance towards Putin's Russia before the invasion of Ukraine.[41]

Its relationship with European integration is more complicated. LFI does not advocate leaving the European Union, but wants fundamental renegotiation of its economic and institutional framework. It has explicitly argued that a left-wing French government should be prepared to disobey European rules when these prevent implementation of its programme.

Foreign policy has also distinguished LFI from the French mainstream. Mélenchon previously took an accommodating view of Russia, defended Russia's claim to Crimea after its 2014 annexation and opposed sanctions. LFI condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and supports Ukrainian sovereignty, but has remained much more sceptical than mainstream French parties towards military escalation and has emphasised negotiations and diplomacy. The movement also favours a more independent French foreign policy and withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command.

Several smaller far-left organisations have also maintained limited electoral support, most notably the Trotskyist Workers' Struggle (LO).

The radical right also has a long history in post-war France. One important precursor was Pierre Poujade's Union for the Defence of Tradesmen and Artisans (UDCA), which emerged from a tax revolt among shopkeepers and small business owners in southern France in 1953.

41 'Jean-Luc Mélenchon : « A quoi bon un candidat du Parti socialiste ? »', *Le Monde*, 5 January 2017 (https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/01/05/jean-luc-melenchon-a-quoi-bon-un-candidat-du-ps_5057887_4854003.html)

Poujadism combined resistance to taxation, bureaucratic centralisation, urbanisation and economic modernisation with a broader anti-establishment revolt against the political elite. Political scientist Catherine Fieschi (2019) has described it as ‘a tax revolt dressed up as a political rebellion’. Poujade’s rhetoric was aggressively populist: he celebrated his lack of formal education and notoriously described the National Assembly as the largest brothel in Paris. The movement also contained strong antisemitic currents and fiercely defended French Algeria.

One of the movement’s successful candidates in the 1956 parliamentary election was Jean-Marie Le Pen, who at 27 became the youngest member of the National Assembly. Le Pen quickly became known for confrontational rhetoric and his passionate defence of French Algeria.

The Poujadists won more than 11% of the vote in 1956, shocking the political establishment, but their success proved short-lived. The movement largely disappeared within a few years.

National Rally (RN)

Le Pen subsequently became involved in several organisations on the extreme right before becoming the first president of the National Front (FN) in 1972. The new party brought together a heterogeneous collection of nationalists, former collaborationists, activists from the Algerian-war milieu and other extreme-right groups. In organisational terms, it was partly inspired by the more successful Italian Social Movement (MSI).

The FN would eventually become the most important far-right party in post-war Western Europe. Its importance extended far beyond France: under Le Pen, it helped develop themes, rhetoric, and political strategies later adopted by challenger parties across the continent.

For its first decade, however, the FN remained electorally insignificant. Its breakthrough began in local elections in 1983 and was consolidated in the 1984 European Parliament election, when the party won around 11%. The European election gave Le Pen access to national television debates and helped transform him into a major political figure.

FN representatives subsequently helped establish the first substantial far-right group in the directly elected European Parliament, alongside the Italian MSI and other nationalist parties. This made the European Parliament an important arena for the internationalisation of the post-war radical right.

Ahead of the 1986 parliamentary election, the French centre-right was divided over whether cooperation with the FN was acceptable. The introduction of proportional representation enabled the party to enter the National Assembly with 35 deputies. President Mitterrand's conservative opponents accused him of deliberately changing the electoral system to divide the right.[42]

The reintroduction of the two-round majoritarian system in 1988 eliminated most FN representation despite the party maintaining around 10% of the vote. Le Pen simultaneously won 14.4% in that year's presidential election.

Support continued to grow during the 1990s, while the party remained largely isolated by its competitors at the national level. It achieved important local breakthroughs, including victories in several mayoral elections.

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42 'Qui est responsable de la montée du Front national ? M. Mitterrand s'offusque des attaques portées contre lui. Il n'a pas tout à fait tort', *Le Monde*, 21 June 1990 (https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1990/06/21/qui-est-responsable-de-la-montee-du-front-national-m-mitterrand-s-offusque-des-attaques-portees-contre-lui-il-n-a-pas-tout-a-fait-tort_3993108_1819218.html)

Le Pen's confrontational politics occasionally also crossed into physical violence. During the 1997 parliamentary campaign, he assaulted Socialist candidate Annette Peulvast-Bergeal during a confrontation in Mantes-la-Jolie. His subsequent conviction included a one-year period of electoral ineligibility, which eventually cost him both his seat on the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regional council and his mandate in the European Parliament in 2000.[43]

In 2002 Jean-Marie Le Pen produced one of the great shocks of modern French politics by defeating Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and reaching the second round of the presidential election. The result generated massive mobilisation against the far right. Voters ranging from the radical left to the centre-right rallied behind incumbent president Jacques Chirac, who defeated Le Pen overwhelmingly.

The rest of the decade was more difficult for the FN, with electoral support declining and persistent financial and organisational problems. In 2011 Jean-Marie Le Pen finally relinquished the leadership to his daughter Marine Le Pen.

The relationship between the mainstream right and the FN was initially ambiguous. During the 1980s, parts of the RPR and UDF experimented with local electoral arrangements and tactical cooperation with the far right. In Dreux in 1983, for example, the mainstream right joined forces with the FN to win control of the municipality, while further local arrangements followed later

43 'La cour d'appel de Versailles condamne Jean-Marie Le Pen à un an d'inéligibilité', *Le Monde*, 19 November 1998 (https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1998/11/19/la-cour-d-appel-de-versailles-condamne-jean-marie-le-pen-a-un-an-d-ineligibilite_3696515_1819218.html); 'Jean-Marie Le Pen privé de mandats et en panne de relève', *Le Monde*, 24 April 2000 (https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2000/04/24/jean-marie-le-pen-prive-de-mandats-et-en-panne-de-releve_51938_3224.html)

in the decade. From the late 1980s, however, Jacques Chirac and the national leadership of the mainstream right increasingly moved towards a *cordon sanitaire*. In 1988, the RPR formally condemned both national and local alliances with the FN, linking this position explicitly to the rejection of racism and antisemitism. Although local politicians occasionally continued to challenge the principle – most dramatically during the 1998 regional elections – Chirac's moral and political rejection of cooperation helped establish exclusion of the FN as the dominant norm on the French right.

Marine Le Pen initiated a deliberate process of *dédiabolisation* – de-demonisation – designed to distance the party from its extremist image and make it acceptable to a much broader electorate. The strategy included moderating some policy positions, changing the party's rhetoric, recruiting new candidates and eventually renaming the organisation Rassemblement National (RN). Most symbolically, Marine Le Pen expelled her own father from the party he had founded.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's FN had been the quintessential populist challenger party. The slogan 'Le Pen – le Peuple' captured its claim to represent ordinary French citizens against a corrupt establishment. It also retained important elements of the reactionary tradition associated with Poujadism and French Algeria. Its nationalism was strongly ethnic rather than republican, and antisemitism remained visible among leading representatives.

Marine Le Pen has successfully marginalised much of this older rhetoric. Opposition to immigration nevertheless remains central to RN's political identity, with the party portraying large-scale immigration as a threat to French identity, social cohesion and security.

On cultural issues, the party has moderated selectively rather than comprehensively. It remains strongly restrictive on immi-

gration and emphasises national identity, law and order and opposition to political Islam, but has become less conventionally conservative on some questions of individual lifestyle. For example, RN parliamentarians were divided rather than uniformly opposed when the National Assembly voted in 2024 to enshrine abortion rights in the constitution.

Economically, the FN was historically situated clearly on the right and was influenced by neo-liberal thinking during the 1980s. Under Marine Le Pen, it moved substantially towards economic nationalism, protectionism and defence of the welfare state. RN has repeatedly attacked centrist governments from the left on pensions, purchasing power and public services.

At the same time, the party combines these positions with tax reductions, support for businesses and economic nationalism. Under Jordan Bardella, some more market-oriented themes have again become visible. RN is consequently difficult to position neatly on the traditional economic left-right dimension and is best classified here as economically centrist.

Its European policy has undergone a similar process of moderation. The FN was historically strongly hostile to European integration, and Marine Le Pen campaigned in 2017 on leaving the euro. These positions were subsequently abandoned. RN now accepts French membership of both the European Union and the euro, while advocating a much looser Union centred on sovereign nation-states, stronger national border controls and the restoration of national competences.

This moderation has not eliminated the party's strongly sovereigntist political symbolism. Following the 2026 municipal elections, several newly elected RN mayors removed European Union flags from their town halls. In Carcassonne, mayor Christophe Barthès filmed himself taking down the EU flag and declared that

French flags should take its place.[44] Similar gestures occurred in several other RN-controlled municipalities, illustrating the continued tension between the party leadership's abandonment of Frexit and the more confrontational anti-EU attitudes that remain widespread within the party.

RN comes from a strongly anti-Atlanticist tradition that for many years brought the party close to Putin's Russia. Only more recently, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has the party sought to distance itself from Putin, although significant internal differences remain. While Bardella represents the party's most Putin-critical wing, Le Pen continues to take a more ambivalent position. Thierry Mariani, an MEP and one of the party's most openly pro-Russian figures, was still the party's candidate for mayor of Paris in 2026.[45]

Despite never having participated in national government, FN/RN has exercised considerable influence over French policy. The established right gradually adopted increasingly restrictive positions on immigration, with Nicolas Sarkozy making immigration and national identity central themes of his successful 2007 presidential campaign. This convergence continued during the 2010s and 2020s even as the traditional republican and Gaullist centre-right suffered increasingly disappointing electoral results.

RN also exploited opposition to government restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among voters hostile to vaccination requirements and health passes.

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44 'Are the French removing the EU flag from public buildings and is it illegal?', *Euronews*, 1 April 2026 (https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/04/01/are-the-french-removing-the-eu-flag-from-public-buildings-and-is-it-illegal)

45 'France's far right faces internal split over Russia', *Politico Europe*, 22 September 2026 (https://www.politico.eu/article/france-far-right-faces-internal-split-over-russia/)

The party's electoral advance accelerated markedly during the 2020s. Marine Le Pen received 41.5% in the second round of the 2022 presidential election, by far the strongest presidential performance achieved by the French radical right to that point. In the parliamentary election later that year, RN made an equally important breakthrough, winning 89 seats and establishing a large permanent parliamentary presence for the first time under the Fifth Republic.

Jordan Bardella succeeded Marine Le Pen as party president in 2022, allowing her to concentrate on parliamentary and presidential politics. His rise also broadened RN's appeal among younger voters and increased his own national profile. Compared with Le Pen, Bardella has generally been associated with a more market-oriented economic outlook, making him potentially more attractive to centre-right and economically conservative voters. This has also contributed to a somewhat more conventional image abroad, including among parts of the European centre-right, without implying any fundamental moderation of RN's positions on immigration, national identity or sovereignty.

The 2024 European election marked another breakthrough. Bardella headed the RN list, which won 31.4% of the vote and 30 seats – more than twice the support of Macron's list. LFI received 9.9% and nine seats, while Reconquête also cleared the threshold with 5.5% and five seats.

The magnitude of RN's victory prompted Macron to dissolve the National Assembly immediately after the European election. RN and its allies again finished first in votes in the opening round of the parliamentary election. However, extensive tactical withdrawals by left-wing and centrist candidates before the second round prevented the party from converting this support into a parliamentary plurality. The New Popular Front instead emerged with the largest parliamentary bloc.

At the European level, RN's institutional position also changed after the 2024 election. The party had previously been the dominant force in the Identity and Democracy group. It subsequently joined the newly created Patriots for Europe, together with parties including Viktor Orbán's Fidesz, and Bardella became president of the group.

The 2026 municipal elections produced further gains for RN, but the results were considerably more uneven than its strength in national elections, and opinion polls might have suggested. The party consolidated several existing strongholds, particularly in the south-east and north, and Louis Aliot was re-elected outright in Perpignan in the first round. Yet RN failed to capture several major cities it had targeted, including Marseille, Toulon and Nîmes, underlining the continued limits of its appeal in much of urban France.

The elections nevertheless revealed a potentially more important political shift. Between the two rounds, RN entered into several local arrangements with candidates from the established right, something that had long been politically taboo. Jordan Bardella openly encouraged this strategy, extending a 'hand to right-wing lists' and presenting cooperation as a means of defeating the left.[46] In Reims, for example, RN candidate Anne-Sophie Frigout merged her list with that of Stéphane Lang, a dissident from Les Républicains. The arrangements remained limited rather than systematic, but they represented a further erosion of the *cordon sanitaire* and fit Bardella's broader strategy of making RN more attractive to mainstream conservative voters.

46 '2026 municipal election results: Key takeaways from a first round marked by low turnout', *Le Monde*, 16 March 2026 (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2026/03/16/2026-municipal-election-results-key-takeaways-from-a-first-round-marked-by-low-turnout_6751474_5.html)

The party's growing institutionalisation has created new problems for its anti-establishment image. In 2025, Marine Le Pen was convicted in the case concerning the misuse of European Parliament funds to pay national party employees. In July 2026, a Paris appeals court upheld Le Pen's conviction but reduced her electoral ban to 45 months, with 30 of them suspended. As the remaining 15-month ban had effectively already been served, the ruling cleared her to stand in the 2027 presidential election. Le Pen immediately confirmed her candidacy and announced that she would appeal the conviction to the Cour de Cassation.

Several other radical-right or national-conservative parties have appeared alongside FN/RN, although none has achieved comparable durability.

The Movement for France (MPF), established by Philippe de Villiers in 1994, combined traditional social conservatism, nationalism and opposition to further European integration. It achieved its strongest early result in the 1994 European election and remained intermittently relevant for more than a decade.

Debout la France (DLF), founded by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan after his departure from the mainstream Gaullist right, represents a sovereignist tradition rather than the historical extreme right. It combines strong euroscepticism and restrictive immigration policies with economic protectionism and a comparatively interventionist view of the state. Dupont-Aignan endorsed Marine Le Pen before the second round of the 2017 presidential election, illustrating the gradual erosion of the traditional barrier between sovereignist conservatives and RN.

Reconquête

A more significant challenge emerged ahead of the 2022 presidential election with Éric Zemmour and his new party Reconquête. Zemmour, a journalist and television commentator, positioned himself to the right of Marine Le Pen and criticised her *dédiabolisation* strategy for diluting the radical right's ideological message. Reconquête advocates reducing immigration to extremely low levels, large-scale deportations of illegal immigrants and a programme of what Zemmour calls 'de-Islamisation'. Zemmour has repeatedly promoted the 'Great Replacement' theory, according to which European populations are being replaced through Muslim immigration,[47] and has made revisionist statements about the Vichy regime.[48]

On economic issues, Reconquête stands clearly on the right, favouring lower taxation and a more market-oriented programme than RN. It is strongly conservative on cultural and social questions and places immigration, Islam, national identity and traditional family values at the centre of its politics.

Reconquête is also more fundamentally hostile to European integration than the contemporary RN. Although Zemmour no longer primarily campaigns for a formal Frexit, the party seeks a broad restoration of national sovereignty and rejects key elements of the existing European legal order. It is therefore classified here as hard eurosceptic.

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47 'Comment des expressions issues de l'extrême droite comme "grand remplacement" ou "Français de papier" se sont glissées dans le débat public', *Le Monde*, 15 January 2024 (https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2024/01/15/comment-des-expressions-issues-de-l-extreme-droite-comme-grand-remplacement-ou-francais-de-papier-se-sont-glissees-dans-le-debat-public_6210832_4355770.html)

48 'Vichy, Pétain et les juifs : l'historien Robert O. Paxton répond aux polémiques, dans un rare entretien au 'Monde'', *Le Monde*, 2 December 2021 (https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/video/2021/12/02/vichy-et-les-juifs-l-historien-robert-o-paxton-repond-a-eric-zemmour-dans-un-rare-entretien-au-monde_6104444_3224.html)

The party's political vision also contains more explicitly illiberal and authoritarian elements than RN's current programme. Its ethnic conception of the nation, proposals for extensive discrimination between citizens and foreigners, and radical programme of deportation justify classification as high on authoritarianism.

Zemmour initially achieved strikingly high polling figures during the 2022 presidential campaign but eventually received just over 7%. Reconquête performed poorly in the parliamentary election that followed and failed to establish a national parliamentary presence.

The 2024 European election nevertheless provided the party with its first substantial institutional breakthrough. A list headed by Marion Maréchal, Marine Le Pen's niece, received 5.5% and elected five MEPs.

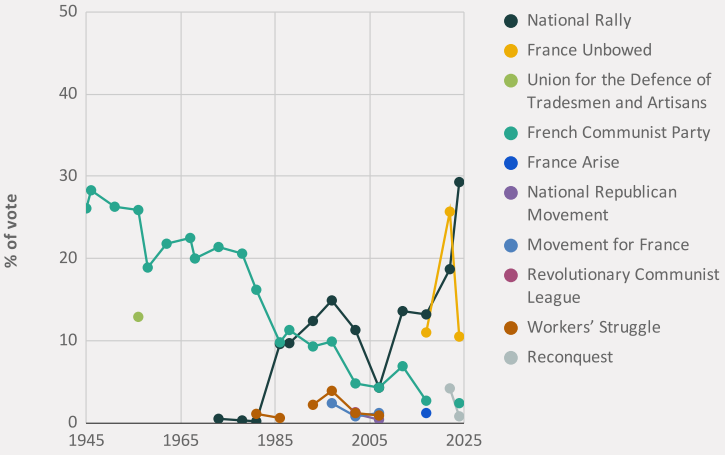
The success did not stabilise the party. Shortly after the election, Maréchal and several of Reconquête's newly elected MEPs broke with Zemmour after supporting cooperation with RN ahead of the snap parliamentary election. The split reinforced RN's dominant position within the French radical right and left Reconquête considerably weakened.

LFI summary
Economics: left
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

RN summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

REC summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Figure 20. Vote share of challenger parties in France, 1945–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

GERMANY

During most of the post-war era, extremist and anti-establishment parties were effectively marginalised in West Germany. The development of the party system after reunification made the picture more complicated. Die Linke and its predecessor PDS became an established force, particularly in eastern Germany, and eventually participated in several state governments. On the right, however, parties outside the CDU/CSU remained excluded from the Bundestag until the breakthrough of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Since AfD entered parliament in 2017, the other parliamentary parties have continued to reject formal cooperation with it at the federal level.

In the inaugural election to the West German Bundestag in 1949, the German Communist Party (KPD) secured parliamentary representation for the only time in the post-war period, receiving just over 5% of the vote. By the 1953 election, developments in East Germany had strongly delegitimised the KPD, and its support was approximately halved. Since then, neither the KPD nor any other communist party has achieved significant electoral success at the federal level.

A fascist party, the German Right Party (DRP), also obtained seats in the first federal election. The electoral threshold at the time was applied at the state rather than national level, enabling the DRP to secure five mandates with only 1.8% of the

nationwide vote. Like the KPD, however, it failed to maintain a parliamentary presence.

In the 1950s, two non-fascist parties also emerged to the right of the Christian Democratic CDU and CSU. The national-conservative German Party (DP) participated in Konrad Adenauer's coalition governments. Following the 1953 election, the All-German Bloc/League of Expellees and Deprived of Rights (GB/BHE) also entered government. The CDU/CSU won an absolute parliamentary majority in 1957, although the DP initially remained in the government. By 1960, however, no party to the right of the CDU/CSU was represented in the Bundestag.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, anti-establishment parties achieved little lasting success in West Germany. The far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) was founded in 1964, with former DP and DRP members among its founders, and achieved a series of regional successes. It entered seven state parliaments between 1966 and 1968 and narrowly missed the 5% threshold in the 1969 federal election.

Support for the NPD declined rapidly during the 1970s. New parties on the radical right emerged in the following decade, including the Republicans (REP) in 1983 and the German People's Union (DVU) in 1987. The REP, initially founded by defectors from the Bavarian CSU, was divided between national-conservative and more radical factions. The DVU, by contrast, was tightly controlled by its founder, publisher Gerhard Frey.

The DVU first gained state parliamentary representation in Bremen in 1987 and subsequently achieved some regional successes, particularly in northern and eastern Germany. The REP, whose support was concentrated more heavily in southern Germany, peaked in the 1989 European Parliament election, receiving 7.1% and electing six MEPs. They joined the far-right

group alongside Jean-Marie Le Pen's French National Front, but disappeared from the European Parliament five years later.

By the late 1990s, both the NPD and DVU again achieved regional successes. In 1998, the DVU won almost 13% in Saxony-Anhalt and entered the Brandenburg parliament the following year. The NPD subsequently entered the state parliaments of Saxony in 2004 and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in 2006. The NPD and DVU increasingly cooperated and eventually merged in 2011, although the merger did little to improve their electoral fortunes.

Die Linke

Meanwhile, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), successor to East Germany's ruling Socialist Unity Party, entered the Bundestag in 1990. The PDS struggled to gain traction in western Germany but established itself as a major party in the East, frequently becoming the second-largest party in the eastern states. At the federal level, it remained politically isolated, although cooperation with the SPD gradually became more common at the state level.

The party also established a continuous presence in the European Parliament. The PDS first won representation there in 1999 and, together with its successor Die Linke, has been represented in every subsequent European Parliament, consistently sitting with the European radical-left group.

In 2005, Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG) was established by trade unionists and dissidents from the SPD who opposed Gerhard Schröder's market-oriented economic reforms, particularly the Hartz labour-market reforms. WASG cooperated electorally with the PDS in 2005, before the two organisations formally merged as Die Linke in 2007.

The new party achieved strong results during the late 2000s, expanding beyond its eastern German base and benefiting from opposition to welfare and labour-market reforms and, later, from the political effects of the financial crisis. Die Linke remained excluded from the federal government but increasingly participated in state governments. In 2014, Bodo Ramelow became Minister-President of Thuringia, the first state government led by Die Linke.

The classification of Die Linke has sometimes been disputed. The party has also included several formalised ideological factions, ranging from pragmatic democratic socialists to more orthodox Marxist groups such as the Communist Platform.

There were also internal disagreements over immigration. Former party leader Oskar Lafontaine was criticised early on for using the term *Fremdarbeiter*, historically associated with Nazi Germany, while after the 2015 refugee crisis a faction associated particularly with Sahra Wagenknecht argued that the party should take greater account of the negative social consequences of high immigration. These positions remained controversial within a party whose mainstream increasingly adopted strongly progressive positions on migration and cultural issues.

In the 2021 federal election, Die Linke almost halved its support, receiving only 4.9%. It nevertheless retained proportional representation in the Bundestag by winning three constituency seats. The poor result intensified longstanding internal conflicts, particularly between Wagenknecht and the party's dominant progressive wing.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these conflicts increasingly concerned foreign policy as well as immigration and cultural politics. Wagenknecht strongly opposed sanctions on Russia and German military support for Ukraine. In October

2023, she and several allies left Die Linke and subsequently established Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW).

The split initially appeared to pose an existential threat to Die Linke. In the 2024 European Parliament election, the party fell to 2.7% and three seats. In the three eastern state elections later that year, it suffered further substantial losses, although it retained representation in Thuringia and, through direct mandates, Saxony.

The party nevertheless recovered dramatically ahead of the 2025 federal election. A campaign that strongly emphasised rents, inequality, and social welfare, combined with considerable success among younger and urban voters, helped Die Linke win 8.8% and 64 seats. Die Linke thus demonstrated that it had survived the Wagenknecht split and re-established itself as a significant national party.

The recovery has not, however, translated evenly to the state level. In the 2026 elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, Die Linke improved its vote share but remained below the 5% threshold at 4.4% in both states, while in Saxony-Anhalt it fell from 11.0% to 8.6%. The final state elections of the year underlined this uneven picture. In Berlin, Die Linke more than doubled its support to 25.7% and emerged as the largest party for the first time, whereas in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern it fell from 9.9% to 6.5%, although it remained represented in the state parliament.

Ideologically, Die Linke remains clearly on the economic left, advocating extensive redistribution, stronger welfare provision and greater public control over the economy. On cultural and social issues, it is strongly progressive, including on immigration, citizenship and minority rights. Its attitude towards European integration is more ambivalent: it supports European cooperation but strongly criticises the existing treaties, economic governance and

increasing European defence integration. It is therefore best understood as softly eurosceptic rather than anti-European. Despite radical criticism of parts of the political and economic system, Die Linke accepts liberal-democratic institutions and has extensive experience of democratic government at state level. Its authoritarianism is therefore low. Its 2025 programme explicitly combines radical economic reform with support for democracy and a substantially reformed, rather than abolished, European Union.

Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW)

BSW emerged directly from the divisions within Die Linke. Formally established in January 2024 around Sahra Wagenknecht, it combined traditional left-wing economic policies with positions on migration, cultural issues, and foreign policy that differed sharply from those of Die Linke.

Its first electoral test was the 2024 European Parliament election, in which BSW received 6.2% and won six seats, immediately establishing itself as a significant national political force. Later that year it won 11.8% in Saxony, 15.8% in Thuringia and 13.5% in Brandenburg. It subsequently entered coalition governments in Thuringia and Brandenburg, although the Brandenburg coalition collapsed in January 2026 amid the fragmentation of the BSW parliamentary group.

The party was less successful in the 2025 federal election. With 4.98% of the vote, BSW missed the 5% threshold by an exceptionally small margin and consequently received no Bundestag seats. Subsequent state elections nevertheless suggested that the extraordinary momentum of 2024 had weakened. It received only 1.4% in Baden-Württemberg in March 2026 and 2.0% in Rhineland-Palatinate later that month. Its performance was stronger in Saxony-Anhalt in September, where it won 6.8% and entered the state parliament, indicating that the party retained

a more substantial electoral base in eastern Germany. The final state elections of the year reinforced the picture of sharp regional variation: BSW remained marginal in Berlin, winning only 1.7%, but performed somewhat better in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where it received 4.3% and narrowly failed to enter the state parliament.

BSW is economically a party of the left. It supports redistribution and stronger welfare provision, while emphasising industrial production, small and medium-sized companies and cheap energy more strongly than Die Linke. It combines this economic position with a more restrictive approach towards immigration and a rejection of identity politics.

BSW is also sceptical of important elements of European integration and sharply critical of EU foreign and security policy, sanctions against Russia and military assistance to Ukraine. The party operates within democratic institutions and has participated in coalition government, but its unusually leader-centred organisation, populist understanding of politics, and sharp criticism of established institutions place it somewhat further from liberal pluralism than Die Linke.

Alternative for Germany (AfD)

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was established in the spring of 2013 by a group that included former CDU politicians, business leaders and economists. Its unusually high proportion of academics produced the early nickname ‘the professors’ party’. The central political demand was opposition to the euro and to the financial assistance provided to southern European countries during the Eurozone crisis.

AfD narrowly missed entry into the Bundestag in 2013 but won 7.1% and seven seats in the European Parliament the following

year. The 2014 election was also the first European election held after Germany abolished its electoral threshold, enabling several very small parties to gain representation; among them was the NPD, which won one seat with around 1% of the vote.

Initially, AfD was primarily eurosceptic and economically liberal. The party gradually became more nationalist and anti-immigration, particularly after Frauke Petry defeated founder Bernd Lucke for the leadership in 2015. The change was also visible at the European level: AfD moved away from cooperation with the British Conservatives and other relatively moderate eurosceptics in the ECR towards parties such as Austria's FPÖ.

The 2015–16 refugee crisis accelerated this transformation. AfD adopted a strongly anti-immigration and anti-Islam agenda, declaring that Islam did not belong in Germany. At the same time, it developed a markedly pro-Russian foreign-policy orientation and demanded an end to sanctions against Moscow.

In the 2017 federal election, AfD finally entered the Bundestag with 12.6% of the vote. Petry left the party immediately afterwards, contributing to another shift in the balance of power towards its more radical factions.

Leading representatives repeatedly attracted controversy for rhetoric on immigration and German history. Beatrix von Storch suggested that border police might be required to use firearms against migrants crossing the border illegally, while Alice Weidel used highly inflammatory language about criminal migrants.[49] Björn Höcke, who became the central figure of the party's radical nationalist wing, described Berlin's Holocaust Memorial

49 'AfD leaders and their most offensive remarks', *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2017 (https://www.dw.com/en/afd-leaders-and-their-most-offensive-remarks/a-37651099)

as a ‘monument of shame’ and attacked Germany’s culture of historical remembrance.[50]

AfD suffered a modest setback in the 2021 federal election, falling to 10.4%, but subsequently began to grow rapidly. Dissatisfaction with the SPD-Green-FDP government, inflation, migration, energy prices and climate policy all contributed to its recovery.

The party also continued to radicalise. Höcke and other representatives of the nationalist wing gained influence, while the remaining liberal and national-conservative factions weakened. AfD maintained its opposition to sanctions against Russia and became one of the strongest opponents of German military assistance to Ukraine.

The party’s regional breakthrough was particularly visible in eastern Germany. In 2023, Robert Sesselmann became the first AfD candidate to win a district executive position, in Sonneberg, Thuringia. In the 2024 state elections, AfD became the largest party in Thuringia with 32.8%, finishing narrowly behind the CDU in Saxony and the SPD in Brandenburg.

In the 2024 European Parliament election, AfD received 15.9% and 15 seats, its strongest nationwide result to that point. The campaign was marked by controversies surrounding lead candidate Maximilian Krah, and shortly before the election AfD’s delegation was expelled from the Identity and Democracy group. Following the election, AfD became the leading force in the newly established Europe of Sovereign Nations group.

50 ‘AfD politician says Germany should stop atoning for Nazi crimes’, *The Guardian*, 18 January 2017 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/18/afd-politician-says-germany-should-stop-atoning-for-nazi-crimes)

The February 2025 federal election marked AfD's definitive breakthrough as a major national party. It almost doubled its vote share to 20.8%, gained 152 seats and became the second-largest party in the Bundestag behind the CDU/CSU. Its strongest support remained in eastern Germany, but its gains across western Germany showed it could no longer be regarded primarily as a regional eastern phenomenon. The other major parties nevertheless continued to reject coalition cooperation with AfD.

This western expansion continued in the 2026 state elections. AfD won 18.8% in Baden-Württemberg and 21.3% of second votes in Rhineland-Palatinate, the latter its strongest result to that point in a western state under the state's new electoral system. The party's strongest performance of the year came in eastern Germany: in Saxony-Anhalt in September, AfD won 43.8% of second votes and 39 of 83 seats, more than doubling its 2021 vote share. Two weeks later, it won 38.2% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, up from 16.7% in 2021, while its 16.3% result in Berlin was considerably weaker but still represented a substantial presence in the capital.

Economically, AfD remains on the right. It favours lower taxation, deregulation and a smaller regulatory role for the state, although these positions coexist with protectionist and welfare-nationalist elements. On cultural issues, it is clearly conservative, with immigration, Islam, national identity, family policy and opposition to progressive social policies at the centre of its programme. Its current programme also attacks EU regulation and calls for a fundamental transfer of powers back to the nation-states.

AfD's foreign-policy orientation nevertheless contains significant internal tensions. Alice Weidel and figures more closely tied to the party's western German base have cultivated closer ties with the American MAGA movement and tend to favour a more Atlanticist outlook. By contrast, Tino Chrupalla, Björn Höcke and parts of the party's stronger eastern wing have been more openly

pro-Russian and more sceptical of American power and military intervention. Chrupalla has argued for a more independent German foreign policy and closer relations with Russia. Despite these differences, the factions broadly agree on ending German military support for Ukraine and restoring economic ties with Russia.

Similar divisions are visible over Israel, with Weidel and parts of the western wing generally adopting a more pro-Israeli position than the more anti-interventionist eastern faction.

AfD has consequently moved from its original opposition to the euro towards much broader rejection of European integration and is now best classified as hard eurosceptic. Its authoritarianism is also high relative to the other challenger parties considered here. This assessment reflects not merely anti-establishment rhetoric but the increasing influence of ethnonationalist currents, attacks on important liberal-democratic norms and institutions, and the radicalisation of several regional organisations. These characteristics distinguish AfD from both its more economically liberal origins and comparatively conventional right-populist parties elsewhere in Europe.

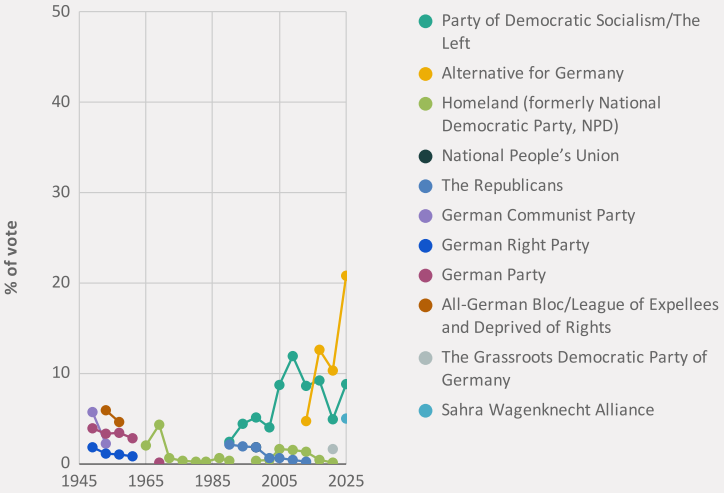
AfD also faces occasional competition from even more radical forces in eastern Germany. In the 2026 mayoral election in Aue-Bad Schlema, former NPD activist Stefan Hartung of the far-right Freie Sachsen finished first in the opening round, ahead of both the CDU and AfD, before narrowly losing the second round.

Die Linke summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

BSW summary
Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

AfD summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Figure 21. Vote share of challenger parties in Germany, 1949–2025



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

GREECE

Post-war Greek politics was initially highly volatile, with broad and unstable political coalitions and comparatively weak ideological organisation. Over time, conservative, centrist and left-wing political blocs gradually consolidated. Nationalism, however, was never confined to the radical right. It has long been an important component of mainstream Greek politics, while radical currents have appeared within both the left and the conservative camp.

Communist Party of Greece (KKE)

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) is the country's oldest surviving political party, founded in 1918. It was banned during the authoritarian regimes of the inter-war period and remained illegal until after the fall of the military junta in 1974. During the 1950s and 1960s, many communist voters instead supported the United Democratic Left, a broader left-wing formation that also attracted non-communists.

While still illegal, KKE split in February 1968, months before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The breakaway KKE Interior rejected Moscow's control and moved towards Eurocommunism, while the original KKE retained a much more orthodox pro-Soviet position. KKE Interior took its name from the claim that the original KKE was effectively directed from 'outside' Greece, above

all from Moscow, while the new faction represented a more independent, domestically rooted communist movement. The two nevertheless competed together in the first election after the fall of the junta in 1974.

One successor to KKE Interior subsequently joined KKE in the electoral coalition Synaspismos for the 1989 election. The coalition briefly participated in a government led by the conservative New Democracy, an extraordinary alliance justified principally by the desire to investigate corruption scandals involving PASOK. This remains the only period in which KKE has participated in national government.

KKE remains unusually orthodox for a successful contemporary European communist party. It continues to identify with Marxism-Leninism, advocates the replacement of capitalism with socialism and rejects both NATO and Greek membership in the European Union. Economically it is firmly on the far left, while on several sociocultural questions it is more conservative than most parties of the European radical left.

Syriza

Synaspismos later became one of the principal components of Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left, established in 2004. Syriza initially remained a relatively small force, but the financial and sovereign-debt crisis transformed Greek politics. The austerity programmes agreed between successive Greek governments and the so-called Troika – the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund – destroyed much of the established party system and allowed Syriza to replace PASOK as the principal party of the left.

Syriza won the January 2015 election, and Alexis Tsipras became prime minister, with Yanis Varoufakis as finance minis-

ter. The new government attempted to renegotiate the bailout agreement and reverse austerity. Months of confrontation with Greece's creditors culminated in a referendum in July 2015, in which 61% rejected the creditors' proposed terms.

Despite winning the referendum, Tsipras subsequently accepted a new bailout that included many of the measures he had campaigned against. The decision produced a major split on the left and accusations that Syriza had betrayed its anti-austerity mandate. Tsipras called another election in September 2015 and was nevertheless returned to government with almost unchanged support, again governing together with the nationalist Independent Greeks (ANEL). The coalition remained in power until 2019.

Syriza became one of the emblematic cases of European left-wing populism. Its early rhetoric constructed politics around a conflict between ordinary Greeks and an entrenched domestic and international elite, including the traditional parties, oligarchic business interests and the institutions responsible for the bailout. Its political project combined radical-left economics with a strong claim that it represented the authentic democratic will of the Greek people against a discredited establishment.

The party's relationship with liberal-democratic institutions was more ambiguous. Critics accused the Syriza government of attempting to increase political control over independent institutions and the media. The most important controversy concerned a 2016 attempt to restrict the number of nationwide television licences to four and allocate them through an auction controlled by the government rather than the constitutionally independent broadcasting authority (Oikonomou 2016). New Democracy and PASOK portrayed this as an attempt to gain political control over television.[51]

51 'Greece cuts TV channels from eight to four in controversial licence auction', The Guardian, 2 September 2016 (https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/sep/02/greece-tv-channels-licence-auction)

The Council of State struck down the arrangement as unconstitutional. Nikos Pappas, the minister responsible for the reform, declared that 'the courts judge, they do not legislate' and that laws were made by parliament, a statement that reinforced concerns about Syriza's majoritarian conception of democracy.[52] The episode provides one of the clearest examples of the illiberal tendencies that accompanied the party's early populism, although Syriza never challenged competitive elections or attempted a systematic dismantling of democratic institutions.

Government participation nevertheless had a strong moderating effect. Syriza accepted the bailout framework it had promised to overturn, abandoned the prospect of leaving the euro, softened its hostility towards the EU and gradually reduced its earlier anti-establishment rhetoric. The party also moved closer to conventional European progressive politics on social issues, minority rights and environmental policy.

This transformation produced repeated splits. After Syriza's heavy defeats in the two parliamentary elections of 2023, Tsipras resigned as leader. He was succeeded in September 2023 by Stefanos Kasselakis, a US-based businessman with little prior involvement in the Greek left. His election intensified rather than resolved the party's ideological crisis.

A major part of Syriza's traditional left wing left in late 2023, accusing Kasselakis of abandoning the party's ideological identity and adopting an increasingly personalised, even 'Trumpian', political style.[53] Eleven MPs subsequently formed the New Left.

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52 'Pappas: "The courts judge, they do not legislate"', *To Vima*, 25 October 2016 (https://www.tovima.gr/2016/10/25/international/pappas-the-courts-judge-they-do-not-legislate/)

53 'Leftwing faction splits from Greece's main opposition party, Syriza', *The Guardian*, 12 November 2023 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/12/leftwing-faction-splits-from-greeces-main-opposition-party-syriza)

The crisis continued after Syriza received 14.9% in the 2024 European election. Kasselakis was removed as leader later that year and founded a new party, Movement for Democracy, taking further MPs with him. PASOK consequently overtook Syriza as the official parliamentary opposition in November 2024.

By 2025–26 Syriza had become a minor force compared with the party that governed Greece a decade earlier. Opinion polls during 2026 frequently placed it only around 1–4%, illustrating one of the most dramatic collapses of a formerly dominant challenger party in Europe.

Greek Left Alliance (ELAS)

A further major realignment of the Greek left came in May 2026, when Alexis Tsipras returned to frontline politics and launched a new party, the Greek Left Alliance (ELAS). The new formation was presented as a broad progressive project intended to unite social democratic, radical-left and green traditions rather than simply recreate Syriza. Tsipras emphasised social justice, democratic reform, economic reconstruction and what he described as a new form of patriotism.

ELAS also reflected Tsipras's attempt to distance himself from the organisational conflicts and ideological fragmentation that had consumed Syriza after his departure. Rather than immediately recruiting entire factions from the old party, the new organisation initially stressed renewal and sought to attract new members directly, although several former Syriza figures soon became involved. The launch further weakened both Syriza and New Left and accelerated the broader reorganisation of the Greek centre-left and radical left.

Ideologically, ELAS appears considerably more moderate than the Syriza of 2015. Its founding declaration places greater em-

phasis on institutional reform, economic development and broad progressive cooperation than on confrontation with the EU or the political establishment. Tsipras has presented the party as a governing alternative rather than a protest movement.

Several other formations emerged from Syriza and the broader anti-austerity left. Popular Unity was created by Syriza defectors in 2015 and advocated withdrawal from the euro and NATO, but failed to build lasting electoral support.

Course of Freedom

Former parliamentary speaker Zoe Konstantopoulou founded Course of Freedom (PE) in 2016 after breaking with Tsipras over the bailout agreement. The party combines left-wing opposition to austerity and economic liberalism with nationalism, strong anti-establishment rhetoric and an unusually personalised leadership style. It opposed the Prespa Agreement with North Macedonia and has been critical of globalisation and established political elites.

Course of Freedom entered parliament in 2023 and subsequently increased its support substantially. It won 3.4% and one seat in the 2024 European election. In 2025 and early 2026, several polls placed the party close to or above 10% and occasionally in competition for second place, although its support became more volatile in 2026.

MeRA25 was founded in 2018 by former Syriza finance minister Yanis Varoufakis as the Greek section of his transnational DiEM25 project. The party combines radical-left economics, opposition to austerity, and strong criticism of the institutional structure of the eurozone. It entered parliament in 2019 but fell below the threshold in both 2023 elections. In the 2024 European election it received 2.5% and again failed to win representation.

A further anti-establishment challenger emerged in 2026 around Maria Karystianou, whose daughter was killed in the 2023 Tempi train disaster. Karystianou had become one of the most prominent figures in the mass protests demanding accountability for the crash and, in May 2026, launched Hope for Democracy. The new party strongly emphasises corruption, institutional failure and the distance between ordinary citizens and the political establishment. It initially attracted double-digit support in some opinion polls, although this declined during the summer as the movement struggled to develop a broader programme and suffered internal disputes.

The far right largely disappeared from parliamentary politics after the fall of the military junta in 1974. Former junta leader Georgios Papadopoulos established the National Political Union from prison in 1984. The party remained electorally marginal domestically but unexpectedly won a seat in the European Parliament that year.

The first more durable radical-right challenger was Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), founded by former New Democracy MP Georgios Karatzaferis. It combined Greek nationalism, Orthodox Christianity, hostility towards immigration and populist rhetoric. LAOS entered parliament in 2007 and briefly participated in the technocratic national-unity government formed during the 2011 debt crisis. Government participation proved electorally disastrous, and the party rapidly disappeared from parliament.

A much more extreme challenge came from Golden Dawn (XA). Its leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos had been active in violent neo-fascist circles since the 1970s and maintained links with supporters of the former military dictatorship. Golden Dawn developed during the 1980s and 1990s as an explicitly neo-Nazi movement with a strong record of street violence.

Several members participated as volunteers on the Bosnian Serb side during the Yugoslav wars, while party activists were repeatedly involved in violent attacks against immigrants and political opponents. Golden Dawn remained electorally marginal until the financial crisis.

Its first substantial breakthrough came in the 2010 Athens municipal election, followed by 7% of the national vote in May 2012 and 21 parliamentary seats. Alongside extreme nationalism and hostility towards immigrants, Golden Dawn cultivated a social-populist image, distributing food and assistance to Greeks in poor neighbourhoods while excluding immigrants.

The party's relationship with political violence was unusually explicit. In 2012, MP Ilias Kasidiaris threw water at one female opponent during a live television debate and then repeatedly struck another.[54] The incident became an international symbol of the violence surrounding the party. Kasidiaris has also publicly questioned the Holocaust.[55]

Golden Dawn was not simply a radical-right populist party but an explicitly neo-Nazi and violent organisation. The murder of anti-fascist musician Pavlos Fyssas by a Golden Dawn member in 2013 led to a major criminal investigation. In 2020, a Greek court found Golden Dawn to constitute a criminal organisation and convicted Michaloliakos and several other senior figures of directing it.

54 'Golden Dawn MP's live TV assault shocks Greece', *The Guardian*, 7 June 2012 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/07/golden-dawn-tv-assault-greece)

55 'Golden Dawn MP Kasidiaris suggests he denies Holocaust took place', *Kathimerini*, 6 June 2013 (https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/141996/golden-dawn-mp-kasidiaris-suggests-he-denies-holocaust-took-place/)

Its electoral space did not disappear. Instead, several new nationalist and radical-right parties emerged during the 2010s and 2020s.

Greek Solution

Greek Solution (EL) was founded in 2016 by former LAOS MP Kyriakos Velopoulos. It entered parliament in 2019 and increased its support in both elections of 2023. The party combines ethnic Greek nationalism, restrictive immigration policy, social conservatism and euroscepticism with a populist economic message. It has also historically displayed comparatively positive attitudes towards Russia and Orthodox geopolitical ties.

Greek Solution continued growing after 2023. It received 9.3% in the 2024 European election, making it the fourth-largest party nationally and giving it two MEPs. It remained one of the principal parties of the nationalist right in polling through 2025–26, generally receiving between roughly 6 and 10%.

Niki

Victory (Niki) represents a different form of radical conservatism. Founded in 2019, it is deeply rooted in Orthodox Christianity and emphasises the traditional family, religion and Greek national identity. It entered parliament in 2023. Niki opposes liberal abortion and LGBT policies, takes a highly restrictive position on immigration and has promoted themes associated with demographic replacement. It has also been markedly sceptical of Greek support for Ukraine and advocates a more neutral position towards Russia.

Niki received 4.4% and one seat in the 2024 European election.

The Spartans entered parliament in 2023 with 4.6% after receiving the public support of imprisoned former senior Golden Dawn figure Ilias Kasidiaris. The party was widely regarded as a vehicle allowing Kasidiaris's political milieu to circumvent restrictions imposed on parties effectively controlled by convicted leaders of criminal organisations.

The Greek Supreme Court barred the Spartans from participating in the 2024 European election, finding that Kasidiaris was effectively exercising leadership over the party. In June 2025, three of its MPs were stripped of their parliamentary seats after a court concluded that voters had been misled about the party's real leadership.

Voice of Reason

A further competitor emerged in the form of Voice of Reason, founded in 2023 by Afroditi Latinopoulou, a former New Democracy member. The party received 3.0% in the 2024 European election, and Latinopoulou was elected as its first MEP, subsequently joining Patriots for Europe.

Voice of Reason represents a modern national-conservative and populist radical-right politics strongly influenced by contemporary culture-war themes. It campaigns against immigration, multiculturalism and what it calls the 'woke agenda', emphasises the traditional nuclear family and Greek Orthodox identity, opposes same-sex marriage and adoption and supports much stronger deportation policies. Latinopoulou has also advocated the death penalty for particularly serious crimes.

At the same time, its foreign-policy profile differs from the more Russia-friendly sections of the Greek radical right. Latinopoulou has explicitly condemned Russian aggression and supported

European Parliament resolutions against Russian actions, while strongly emphasising Greek and European national sovereignty.

Independent Greeks (ANEL) represented an earlier nationalist challenger without fascist roots. Founded in 2012 as a split from New Democracy, the party combined conservative nationalism with populist opposition to austerity and foreign interference. These positions provided sufficient common ground for ANEL to enter a coalition with Syriza after the 2015 election, despite the enormous ideological distance between the two parties on most sociocultural issues.

The alliance survived until 2019. ANEL leader and defence minister Panos Kammenos ultimately left the government because of his opposition to the Prespa Agreement resolving Greece's long-running dispute with North Macedonia. The party subsequently disappeared from parliament.

KKE summary
Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Syriza summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Greek Solution summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Course of Freedom summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

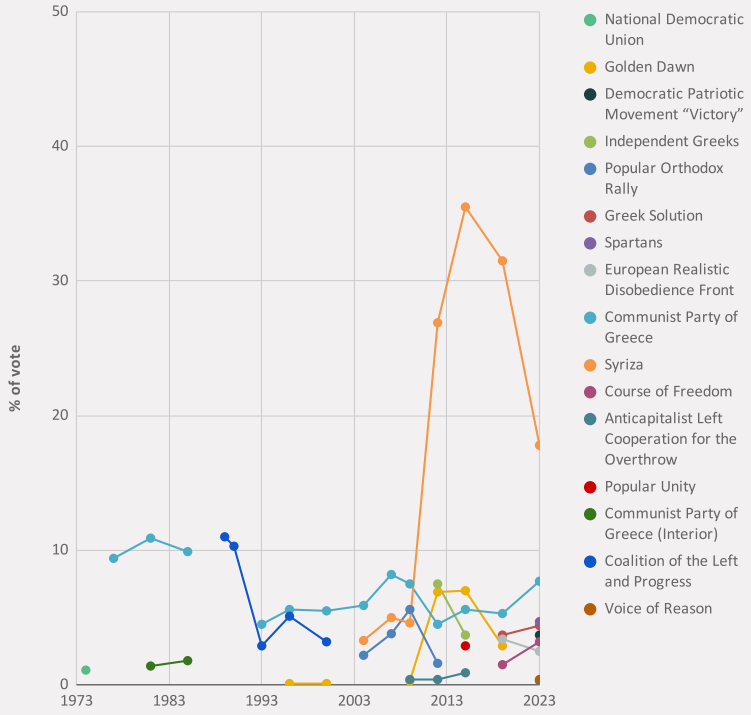
ELAS summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Niki summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Voice of Reason summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 22. Vote share of challenger parties in Greece, 1974–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

HUNGARY

Unlike in several other post-communist countries, Hungary never developed a unified opposition movement against communism. By the first democratic election in 1990, the opposition had already divided into liberal, agrarian, Christian democratic and conservative parties. Nationalist currents existed within several of them, perhaps most notably in the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), whose leader József Antall occasionally invoked the idea of a Hungarian nation extending beyond the borders of the state.

The Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) emerged from a split in MDF in 1993. It developed into an antisemitic and extreme nationalist party and entered parliament in 1998 with 5.5% of the vote, becoming one of the first successful far-right parties in post-communist Central Europe. Four years later, MIÉP lost its parliamentary representation.

Fidesz

The transformation of Fidesz was far more consequential. Established in 1988 as the Alliance of Young Democrats, it began as a liberal and strongly anti-communist youth movement. During the early 1990s, however, Viktor Orbán gradually shifted the party towards the conservative right. In government between 1998 and 2002, Fidesz continued many of the market reforms introduced

by its predecessors, oversaw Hungary's entry into NATO in 1999 and strongly supported accession to the European Union.

The more fundamental transformation took place after Fidesz lost the 2002 election. Orbán disputed the result's legitimacy and mobilised mass demonstrations against the new government, while Fidesz increasingly combined nationalism, social conservatism, and populist opposition to the liberal and socialist establishment.

Widespread dissatisfaction with corruption and economic mismanagement under the Socialist-led governments paved the way for Fidesz's landslide victory in 2010. Orbán returned as prime minister with a two-thirds parliamentary majority, giving Fidesz the constitutional power required to reshape the political system. He remained in office for the following 16 years.

The political system constructed after 2010 combined competitive elections with a systematic weakening of liberal-democratic constraints. A new constitution entered into force in 2012 and was subsequently amended repeatedly. It strengthened the national-conservative ideological character of the state, emphasising Christianity, nation and the traditional family, while marriage was constitutionally defined as a union between a man and a woman.

More importantly, Fidesz used its parliamentary supermajorities to weaken institutional checks on government power. It changed the appointment system and expanded the Constitutional Court, allowing the governing majority to fill an increasing share of its seats. Constitutional amendments also restricted the Court's ability to review measures incorporated directly into the constitution. Electoral rules and constituency boundaries were redesigned in ways favourable to Fidesz, while senior positions in numerous public institutions were filled for unusually long terms.

Orbán himself eventually embraced the description of the new political model. In a widely discussed 2014 speech, he argued that Hungary was building an ‘illiberal state’, explicitly contrasting his project with Western liberal democracy (Orbán 2014).

Control over the media became another central component of the system. Legislation adopted shortly after Fidesz returned to power centralised media regulation under institutions dominated by government appointees and brought public broadcasting under much tighter political control. Senior managers and hundreds of employees were removed from state media, while government advertising and the acquisition of private media outlets by Fidesz-aligned business interests gradually created a media environment heavily skewed towards the governing party.

The pressure later extended to universities and civil society. The Central European University, founded by George Soros, was effectively forced to move most of its teaching activities from Budapest after legislation adopted in 2017 imposed new requirements on foreign universities. NGOs receiving foreign funding were repeatedly targeted by legislation and government campaigns, often portrayed as foreign agents acting against Hungarian sovereignty. In the 2020s, the government created a Sovereignty Protection Office with broad powers to investigate organisations accused of serving foreign interests. Further proposals in 2025 sought to increase controls over foreign-funded media and civil-society organisations.

Nationalism and cultural conflict became increasingly central to Fidesz’s political identity. Orbán repeatedly identified demography, migration and gender as existential questions for the Hungarian nation. Low birth rates were presented as a threat to national survival, immigration as an attempt to replace European populations, and progressive gender politics as an assault on natural family structures.

This nationalism also incorporated the historical Hungarian communities beyond the country's current borders. Orbán occasionally used symbols associated with pre-Trianon Greater Hungary, including appearing in 2022 with a football scarf depicting Hungary's historical borders, provoking criticism from neighbouring states.[56]

Migration became Fidesz's most effective political issue after the 2015 European refugee crisis. The government constructed a border fence, rejected EU refugee quotas and presented itself as the defender of Christian Europe against mass immigration and multiculturalism. Over time, similar rhetoric was increasingly applied to LGBT issues, feminism and what Orbán described as Western 'gender ideology'.

Economically, Fidesz has been more difficult to classify. Orbán presents himself as a right-wing politician and has used low corporate and income taxes to attract investment. At the same time, his governments expanded state ownership in strategic sectors, imposed sectoral taxes and price controls, increased the role of state-directed capital and developed a system in which politically connected domestic companies benefited extensively from government contracts. The result is better described as economic nationalism and state capitalism than conventional economic liberalism.

Fidesz also underwent a profound transformation in European and foreign policy. Having taken Hungary into the EU accession process during its first government, it became one of the Union's principal internal opponents after 2010. Orbán increasingly portrayed Brussels as an external elite attempting to impose migra-

56 'Orban's "Greater Hungary" scarf likely on agenda at central Europe summit', *Euronews*, 24 November 2022 (https://www.euronews.com/2022/11/24/ukraine-crisis-hungary-easteurope)

tion, liberal social values and political centralisation on sovereign European nations.

The conflict eventually broke Fidesz's relationship with the mainstream European centre-right. The party was suspended from the European People's Party in 2019 and left its parliamentary group in 2021. After the 2024 European election, Fidesz became a founding member of Patriots for Europe, alongside parties including France's National Rally and Austria's FPÖ.

Relations with Russia developed in the opposite direction. Despite his earlier anti-communism, Orbán cultivated close relations with Vladimir Putin, maintained Hungary's dependence on Russian energy and repeatedly obstructed or delayed EU measures against Russia after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Hungary remained formally committed to NATO but opposed extensive military support for Ukraine and resisted Ukrainian accession to the EU.

Donald Trump became Orbán's most important political ally outside Europe. Orbán endorsed Trump before the 2016 election and increasingly presented Trumpism and his own model as parts of the same international conservative revolt against liberalism, immigration and globalism. The relationship became even closer after Trump returned to the presidency in 2025. Trump openly endorsed Orbán for re-election in 2026, while senior members of the US administration described Orbán's continued leadership as important to American interests.

Fidesz's political dominance nevertheless came to an abrupt end in 2026. A new centre-right challenger, Tisza, led by former Fidesz insider Péter Magyar, had emerged in 2024 and rapidly consolidated most of the opposition vote. Magyar combined conservative and patriotic themes with criticism of corruption, state propaganda and Hungary's increasing isolation within the EU.

In the parliamentary election of April 2026, Tisza won 53.2% of the party-list vote compared with 38.6% for Fidesz-KDNP. Because it also won 96 of the 106 constituency seats, Tisza secured 141 of the 199 parliamentary seats, a two-thirds majority of its own. The result ended Orbán's 16 consecutive years in power. The scale of the defeat was particularly striking given that many of the electoral and institutional reforms introduced after 2010 had previously favoured Fidesz.

Fidesz therefore represents one of the clearest European examples of authoritarian populism developing within electoral democracy. Orbán never abolished competitive elections, but over 16 years his governments systematically tilted the institutional playing field through constitutional reform, political control of public media, weakened checks and balances, pressure on civil society and the use of state resources to reinforce partisan power. The 2026 election simultaneously demonstrated the extent of this transformation and an important limit to it. Despite highly unequal conditions of competition, voters were ultimately able to remove Fidesz from office.

Fidesz was initially challenged from the nationalist right by Jobbik. The party emerged from the milieu surrounding the declining MIÉP and achieved its breakthrough in 2010 with almost 17% of the vote. Its early politics combined aggressive nationalism, antisemitism, hostility towards Roma and close links to the paramilitary Hungarian Guard. At the opening of parliament in 2010, party leader Gábor Vona symbolically wore a vest associated with the banned organisation.

Jobbik subsequently attempted one of the most dramatic ideological transformations among European radical-right parties. During the second half of the 2010s, Vona promoted a strategy of moderation, distancing the party from antisemitism and paramilitary politics and eventually accepting both EU membership

and cooperation with liberal and left-wing opposition parties against Fidesz.

Our Homeland Movement

This shift produced a new split on the radical right. Former Jobbik politicians founded Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk) in 2018, preserving a much harder nationalist, anti-immigration and socially conservative profile. It also became strongly associated with opposition to COVID restrictions and vaccination policy and remained much more eurosceptic than the moderated Jobbik.

As Jobbik declined, Mi Hazánk replaced it as the principal party to the right of Fidesz. It entered parliament in 2022 and survived the dramatic realignment of 2026, receiving 5.6% of the list vote and winning six seats. Jobbik, by contrast, had effectively disappeared as an independent parliamentary force.

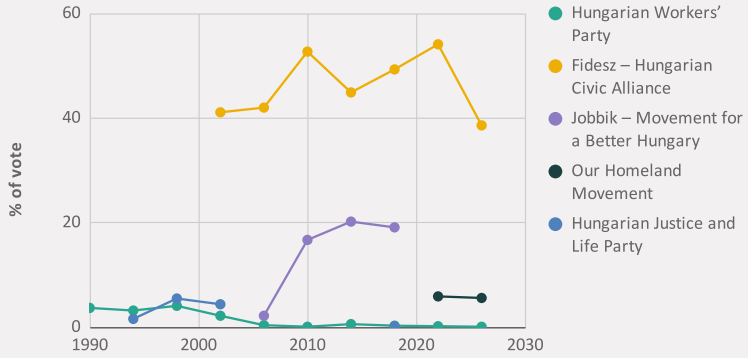
Fidesz summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Our Homeland Movement summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 23. Vote share of challenger parties in Hungary, 1990–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

ICELAND

The Icelandic party system was highly stable during most of the post-war period, with only a handful of parties regularly represented in parliament. The 2008 financial crisis and its political aftermath fundamentally changed this pattern. Since then, electoral volatility has increased sharply, and several new parties have entered parliament, ranging from liberal reform parties to populist movements.

Iceland was one of the European countries where the communist movement enjoyed substantial support in the years after World War II. The Popular Unity Party – Socialist Party was formed in 1938 through a merger between the Communist Party, founded in 1930, and a left-wing splinter from the Social Democrats. Although communists were the dominant force within the new party, it did not join the Comintern. In the first post-war elections, the Socialist Party received between 16 and 20% of the vote and participated in government until 1949.

In 1956, the Socialist Party joined another left-wing splinter from the Social Democrats to form the People's Alliance (AB), initially as an electoral alliance and, from 1968, as a unified political party. The People's Alliance remained a strong radical-left force, peaking at 22.9% of the vote in 1978. It participated in five coalition governments between 1956 and 1991.

The Citizen's Party was a short-lived right-wing populist party that entered parliament in 1987. The Civic Movement was another short-lived populist formation, created in response to the financial crisis and winning representation in the 2009 election.

People's Party

The People's Party (FiF) was founded in 2016 by Inga Sæland and has been represented in parliament since 2017. It combines left-wing economic policies, particularly strong support for pensioners, disabled people and low-income groups, with more conservative positions on immigration and some cultural issues. Sæland, who is visually impaired, has frequently presented her own experience of disability and economic hardship as part of the party's political motivation.

The party initially remained a medium-sized populist force but expanded substantially in the 2024 election, when it won 13.8% of the vote and ten seats, its best result ever. It subsequently joined a coalition government with the Social Democratic Alliance and the liberal Reform Party, with Sæland becoming Minister of Social Affairs and Housing. The party has also taken a more restrictive approach to immigration, including support for stricter asylum rules and deportation of non-citizens convicted of serious crimes. It remains sceptical towards European integration, although as part of the government it has accepted a referendum on reopening Iceland's EU accession negotiations.

Centre Party

The Centre Party (M) was founded in 2017 as a splinter from the Progressive Party. Led by former prime minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, it combines conservative, agrarian and populist themes with strong euroscepticism and economic na-

tionalism. It opposed the liberalisation of Iceland's abortion law in 2019 and has increasingly emphasised immigration and national sovereignty. In its 2024 election programme, the party called for a complete rewriting of immigration law, argued that asylum applications should generally not be made after arrival in Iceland, and stressed assimilation into Icelandic society and culture.

The Centre Party won almost 11% in its first election in 2017, before losing around half of its support in 2021. It rebounded strongly in 2024, however, receiving 12.1% and eight seats, its best result to date.

It should also be noted that the Progressive Party, one of Iceland's oldest and historically most influential parties, has sometimes been classified as populist, particularly during the 2010s, although this classification remains disputed.

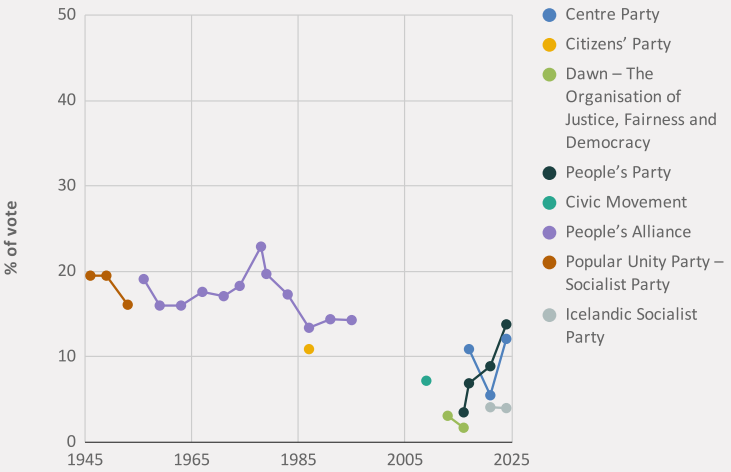
People's Party summary

Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Centre Party summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 24. Vote share of challenger parties in Iceland, 1946–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

IRELAND

Ireland has historically been one of the European countries in which new political parties have found it most difficult to establish themselves. Since the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, politics has been dominated by Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG), two broadly centre-right parties whose original division reflected the legacy of the Civil War rather than a conventional left-right cleavage. For much of the twentieth century, Labour constituted the main third force, although it remained considerably weaker than the two dominant parties.

Ireland's electoral system, based on proportional representation by the single transferable vote, has encouraged strong local candidates, independents and competition between candidates from the same party. Combined with the organisational strength of the established parties and a historically conservative political culture, this contributed to an unusually stable party system. Large-scale emigration also reduced some of the social pressures that elsewhere contributed to the emergence of new political movements.

Ireland has long been exceptional in Europe for the weakness of the radical right. Anti-immigration movements and several small radical-right parties became more visible during the migration controversy of the early 2020s, and a small number of anti-immigration candidates won seats in the 2024 local elec-

tions. Yet the breakthrough remained very limited. Despite fielding an unprecedented number of candidates in the 2024 general election, explicitly radical-right parties failed to win a single seat.

Two newer parties have nevertheless begun to challenge Ireland's traditional exceptionalism, although both remain small. In the 2024 general election, Aontú won 3.9% of the vote and two seats, while Independent Ireland received 3.6% and won four seats.

Aontú is broadly left-wing economically, supporting extensive social and affordable housing, stronger tenant protection, increased welfare support and expanded public services. At the same time, it is strongly conservative on sociocultural issues. The party was founded after its leader Peadar Tóibín left Sinn Féin over abortion, and opposition to abortion remains one of its defining positions. Aontú describes itself as fully pro-life and has opposed further liberalisation of abortion law, while also taking conservative positions on gender issues and a more restrictive line on immigration.

Independent Ireland is more conventionally economically right-wing and populist, combining criticism of the political establishment with restrictive positions on immigration, opposition to parts of climate policy and a strong emphasis on rural interests and national sovereignty.

On the radical left, the Workers' Party (WP) has roots in the republican movement and emerged from Official Sinn Féin. For many years it had very limited electoral support, but it grew during the 1980s and reached its high point towards the end of the decade. In the 1989 European Parliament election, the party won more than 7% of the vote and secured a seat. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, a reformist majority broke away in 1992 to form Democratic Left, which later merged with the Labour

Party. The remaining Workers' Party subsequently returned to electoral marginality.

Two Trotskyist traditions also became relevant during the 2000s. The Socialist Party developed from the Irish Militant tendency, which organised inside Labour from the early 1970s before eventually emerging as an independent organisation. It remained explicitly revolutionary socialist and continued to identify with the Marxist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. A second organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, subsequently became the main force behind People Before Profit (PBP), created in the mid-2000s as a broader electoral initiative.

The 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent austerity programme created new opportunities for the radical left. The United Left Alliance brought together the Socialist Party, People Before Profit and other activists ahead of the 2011 election and won five seats, but the alliance soon fragmented. A new initiative, the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA), was subsequently launched with strong involvement from the Socialist Party and gained momentum through campaigns against property taxes and water charges.

The movement reached its greatest strength during the protests against water charges in 2014–15. The AAA achieved notable successes in the 2014 local and by-elections and, together with People Before Profit, won several seats in the 2016 general election. The two organisations later cooperated electorally under the label People Before Profit–Solidarity. PBP today describes itself as eco-socialist, but remains firmly rooted in revolutionary socialist politics. It uses strongly class-based rhetoric and takes a highly critical position towards the EU and NATO. It condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine but opposes Western military involvement, NATO and EU efforts to increase military support for Ukraine, instead calling for negotiations. Solidarity likewise

remains explicitly revolutionary socialist and identifies with the Marxist tradition associated with Lenin and Trotsky.

Sinn Féin

The February 2020 election was widely described as an earthquake. For the first time, Sinn Féin (SF) won the largest share of first-preference votes, with 24.5%. Its success reflected a broadening of the party's appeal beyond Irish reunification towards housing, welfare and other socioeconomic issues, as well as the popularity of its leader Mary Lou McDonald. Housing was particularly important, with Sinn Féin promising large-scale public construction and greater protection for tenants.

Support continued to rise after the election, at times placing Sinn Féin far ahead of its competitors in opinion polls. From 2023, however, this support declined significantly. Immigration became an important source of difficulty, particularly among working-class voters who had previously supported the party. Following disappointing local and European election results in June 2024, Sinn Féin hardened its approach, proposing stronger management of asylum applications, more effective deportations and greater consultation with local communities. It nevertheless stopped well short of the anti-immigration politics of the radical right.

In the November 2024 general election, Sinn Féin fell to 19.0% of the first-preference vote and 39 seats. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael both received larger vote shares and subsequently remained the dominant forces in government. The result demonstrated both how profoundly Sinn Féin had transformed the Irish party system and the limits to its ability to replace the two traditional governing parties.

Sinn Féin's ideological classification remains debated. It is frequently described as left-wing populist, reflecting its longstanding rhetoric contrasting ordinary people with political and economic

elites. At the same time, its anti-establishment profile has weakened considerably as it has become one of the Republic of Ireland's principal governing alternatives. Its nationalism also differs sharply from that of most nationalist parties elsewhere in Europe: Irish republican nationalism has historically been associated with the left, and Sinn Féin remains socially progressive and broadly supportive of immigration.

The party has also moderated its historically eurosceptic position. It now supports continued Irish membership of the EU while opposing further centralisation, EU militarisation and some forms of integration, describing itself as 'Eurocritical' rather than eurosceptic. Sinn Féin strongly supports Irish military neutrality and opposes NATO membership, but it condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, supported sanctions against Russia and affirmed Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

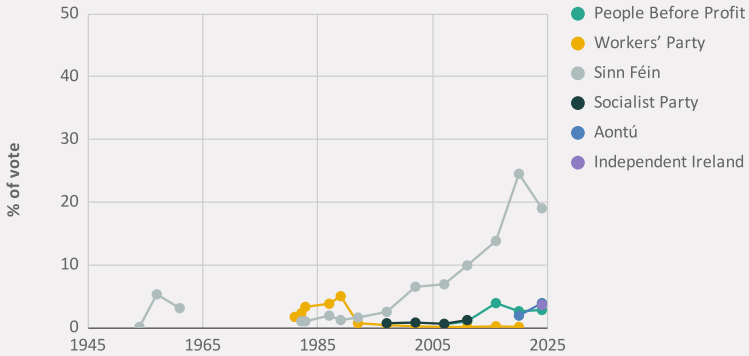
Ireland has long remained largely resistant to the rise of the radical right. Anti-immigration politics became more visible during the early 2020s, but electoral breakthroughs remained limited. The 2024 general election nevertheless brought modest gains for two newer challenger parties: the socially conservative Aontú won two seats, while the right-wing populist Independent Ireland won four. Both are more moderate than many of the radical-right parties that have gained ground elsewhere in Europe, but their emergence marked a limited expansion of the political space to the right of Ireland's established parties.

Ireland has also been unusually well represented on the radical left in the European Parliament. The Workers' Party won a seat in 1989 and the Socialist Party one in 2009. In the 2019 election, four Irish MEPs joined the GUE/NGL group: one from Sinn Féin, two from Independents 4 Change and the independent Luke 'Ming' Flanagan. This was a strikingly high representation for the European radical left in a country where radical-left parties have generally remained small in national elections.

Sinn Féin summary

Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 25. Vote share of challenger parties in Ireland, 1948–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

ITALY

In recent decades, the Italian party system has been characterised by fragmentation, shifting electoral alliances and high volatility. During most of the post-war period, however, politics revolved around three large parties: the Christian Democrats (DC), the Communist Party (PCI) and, at some distance, the Socialist Party (PSI). DC held the premiership without interruption from the end of World War II until 1981, while PCI became the strongest party on the left.

The 1948 election was particularly significant, turning Italy into an important arena in the emerging Cold War. The United States strongly supported the Christian Democrats politically and economically, while the Soviet Union backed the Communist-led left. The campaign was highly polarised, and DC won an absolute majority of seats. American diplomatic records openly described the election as a struggle between Western democracy and Soviet-oriented communism and emphasised the importance of US aid to the anti-communist government.

The Socialists gradually broke with the Communists after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and, above all, the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. This paved the way for PSI's later cooperation with DC and shifted the political centre of gravity towards the centre-left.

PCI meanwhile remained the strongest communist party in Western Europe. During the 1970s, under Enrico Berlinguer, it developed Eurocommunism, distanced itself from Moscow and pursued a ‘historic compromise’ with the Christian Democrats. From 1976, the party provided parliamentary support for DC-led governments without formally joining them. Aldo Moro, a former Christian Democratic prime minister and one of the main proponents of cooperation with PCI, was kidnapped and murdered by the Red Brigades in 1978. His death seriously weakened the strategy, although the parliamentary arrangement survived until the end of that year. PCI finally withdrew its support amid disputes including Italy’s entry into the European Monetary System, and Giulio Andreotti resigned in January 1979.

Despite its gradual moderation, PCI never entered a national government. It remained electorally strong until the end of the Cold War and, shortly after Berlinguer’s death, received 33.3% in the 1984 European election, narrowly overtaking DC and becoming the largest party in a nationwide Italian election for the first time.

After communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, most of PCI transformed first into the Democratic Party of the Left and eventually became one of the main components of today’s centre-left Democratic Party (PD). Those who rejected the social-democratic transformation founded the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC) in 1991. PRC remained an important radical-left party through the 1990s and early 2000s, receiving at least 5% in every parliamentary election from 1992 through 2006, but subsequently declined sharply. In the 2024 European election, it participated in the broader Peace Land Dignity list, which received only 2.2% and won no seats.

Italy also maintained a substantial political space to the right of mainstream conservatism. One of the first post-war challengers was the Front of the Ordinary Man (Fronte dell’Uomo

Qualunque), which grew out of a satirical newspaper founded by playwright and journalist Guglielmo Giannini. It attacked the established parties, communist influence and the anti-fascist political elite while presenting itself as representing ordinary people against professional politicians. In the 1946 Constituent Assembly election it received 5.3% and 30 seats, with particularly strong support in the south, but rapidly disintegrated. The term *qualunquismo* subsequently entered Italian political language as a description of cynical, anti-political populism.

A much more durable force was the Italian Social Movement (MSI), founded in 1946 by former fascists and veterans of Mussolini's regime. MSI preserved important ideological and symbolic elements of Italian fascism while operating within electoral politics. The party contained both more institutional and explicitly radical factions; some members and associated movements were involved in the violent far-right milieu of the 1960s and 1970s.

During the following decades, MSI gradually sought greater political respectability. Under Gianfranco Fini, this culminated in the transformation into National Alliance (AN). AN first appeared as a broader electoral formation in 1994 and became a fully constituted party at the Fiuggi congress in January 1995. Fini explicitly rejected totalitarianism and sought to turn the post-fascist movement into a democratic national-conservative party. The organisational leadership, however, remained heavily drawn from MSI, and the tricolour flame was retained as a symbol of continuity.

The collapse of Italy's established party system during the *Tangentopoli* corruption scandals of the early 1990s created a much larger political opening. Media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi founded Forza Italia (FI) in 1994 and immediately became the dominant figure on the centre-right. FI combined strong personal leadership and populist political communication with market-oriented economics and generally pro-European positions. Although Berlusconi often attacked judges, journalists and the political

establishment, FI rapidly became an established governing party rather than remaining an outsider movement.

Berlusconi created a novel alliance structure in 1994. In southern Italy, FI cooperated with National Alliance; in the north, it allied with Lega Nord. This brought the post-fascist right into national government for the first time. AN remained somewhat more economically interventionist and socially conservative than FI but increasingly presented itself as a conventional national-conservative party. In 2009, AN and FI merged with several smaller parties to form the People of Freedom. FI was subsequently re-established as a separate party in 2013.

Lega

Lega Nord had developed from several northern regionalist parties during the 1980s, most importantly Lega Lombarda and Liga Veneta. Under Umberto Bossi, it combined hostility towards the political establishment and central government with demands for greater northern autonomy, and at times outright independence for a hypothetical state of 'Padania'. It also promoted relatively market-oriented economic policies and increasingly restrictive positions on immigration.

Lega entered Berlusconi's first government in 1994 but soon withdrew, helping bring the government down. After running independently in 1996, it returned to alliance with Berlusconi in 2001 and became a recurring component of centre-right governments. The inclusion of Lega and the post-fascist National Alliance in the 2001 government prompted discussion in several EU countries about whether Italy should face a political boycott similar to the measures imposed on Austria after the FPÖ entered government the previous year. In the Italian case, however, other EU governments adopted a wait-and-see approach, partly reflecting

dissatisfaction with the Austrian precedent, and no comparable sanctions followed.

The party changed fundamentally under Matteo Salvini, who became leader in 2013. Northern separatism gradually gave way to Italian nationalism, and the shortened name Lega symbolised the attempt to expand into central and southern Italy. Opposition to immigration and Islam became central, while Salvini cultivated relations with Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders and other radical-right politicians. He also developed a highly favourable attitude towards Vladimir Putin before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Lega achieved 17.4% in the 2018 parliamentary election and entered government with the Five Star Movement. Salvini became interior minister and deputy prime minister and focused heavily on migration, closing Italian ports to rescue vessels, reducing resources for reception and tightening criteria for humanitarian protection.

The party reached its electoral high point in the 2019 European election, winning 34.3% and 28 seats – easily the largest Italian party. Salvini then attempted to bring down the government in the expectation of an early election, but M5S instead formed a new coalition with PD. The miscalculation marked the beginning of a prolonged decline. Lega subsequently joined Mario Draghi's broad government in 2021 and Meloni's government after 2022. In the 2024 European election, its support had fallen to just 9.0%, while FdI won almost 29%. Lega's MEPs subsequently joined the Patriots for Europe group.

Five Star Movement (M5S)

The Five Star Movement (M5S) represented a different form of populist challenge. It was founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo after several years of online mobilisation and local activism. One of Grillo's most famous initiatives was the 2007 'Vaffanculo Day' – literally 'Fuck-off Day' – mobilising supporters against corrupt and professional politicians and demanding reforms to the electoral and nomination systems.[57]

M5S rejected the traditional left-right distinction and combined environmentalism, direct democracy and hostility towards the political establishment with an ideologically eclectic policy platform. Its organisational model was built around online participation and distrust of representative institutions, although in practice substantial power remained concentrated around Grillo and the party leadership.

The party entered parliament spectacularly in 2013 and became the largest single party in the 2018 election with 32.7%. That election represented one of the greatest populist breakthroughs in contemporary Western Europe: M5S and Lega became the two dominant parliamentary parties and formed a government together.

Giuseppe Conte, previously politically unknown, became prime minister, while Luigi Di Maio and Salvini served as deputy prime ministers. M5S implemented its flagship *citizens' income*, while Lega focused on immigration. The unusual alliance lasted little more than a year before Salvini brought it down in 2019.

57 'The rallying cry of comedy', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2007 (https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2007/sep/19/italysanswertomichaelmoore)

M5S then switched partners and governed with the centre-left PD, with Conte remaining prime minister until Mario Draghi replaced him in 2021. Conte subsequently became leader of M5S. Under his leadership, the party has moved more clearly towards the left, placing greater emphasis on welfare, redistribution, environmental policy and opposition to austerity. Earlier positions such as possible withdrawal from the euro or NATO have disappeared, although Conte has been much more sceptical than the Meloni government about military aid to Ukraine.

Government participation was accompanied by severe electoral decline. M5S fell to 15.4% in the 2022 parliamentary election and 10.0% in the 2024 European election. Its eight MEPs subsequently joined The Left group, marking a striking development for a movement that had entered the European Parliament in 2014 as an ideologically ambiguous populist force allied with Nigel Farage's EFDD group.

Several smaller organisations kept more explicitly fascist traditions alive. Former MSI politician Francesco Storace founded La Destra in 2007 after opposing Fini's moderation of National Alliance. It combined nationalism and social conservatism with a mixture of statist welfare policies and tax cuts. Before the 2008 election, it allied with the Tricolour Flame (Fiamma Tricolore), founded by MSI hardliners who rejected the transformation into AN.

Forza Nuova, founded in 1997 by Roberto Fiore, represented a still more explicitly neo-fascist and extra-parliamentary tradition. Fiore had been active in Italy's militant radical-right milieu before spending several years in Britain and developing relations with the British far right. Forza Nuova never established significant national electoral support but remained visible through demonstrations and political violence.

CasaPound emerged from the same broader milieu in the early 2000s, combining neo-fascist symbolism with housing activism and a modern youth-oriented subculture. It received just under 1% in the 2018 parliamentary election and subsequently withdrew from electoral politics to concentrate on movement activity.

Brothers of Italy

The most important heir to the post-fascist tradition, however, became Brothers of Italy (FdI). The party was founded in 2012 by politicians leaving Berlusconi's People of Freedom. Several leading figures had previously belonged to MSI and AN; Ignazio La Russa became its first president and Giorgia Meloni, herself a former activist in the MSI youth movement, became party leader in 2014. FdI retained the tricolour flame previously used by MSI and AN.

Initially, the party remained small. Its decision to stay outside Mario Draghi's broad coalition in 2021 proved strategically decisive, allowing Meloni to become the principal opposition leader while Lega and FI participated in government. FdI rose from 4.4% in the 2018 election to 26.0% in 2022 and became Italy's largest party. Meloni subsequently formed a government with Lega and Forza Italia and became Italy's first female prime minister.

FdI combines national conservatism with relatively right-wing economics, restrictive migration policies and opposition to progressive changes in family and gender policy. Meloni's government largely dismantled M5S's citizens' income programme, pursued tax reductions and labour-market incentives but has also intervened actively in strategic sectors and occasionally imposed new taxes and price measures.

On social issues, the government has emphasised the traditional family, natalist policies and opposition to surrogacy and 'gender

ideology'. It has restricted the legal recognition of children in same-sex families, although it has not sought to repeal Italy's existing civil-union legislation. Migration has remained central, but government policy has been more constrained than the rhetoric of opposition. The most innovative initiative – processing certain asylum seekers in Italian-controlled centres in Albania – encountered repeated legal challenges. In August 2025, the European Court of Justice ruled against important aspects of Italy's system for classifying countries of origin as 'safe', further obstructing the scheme.

Meloni has moderated much more clearly on European and foreign policy. Earlier FdI rhetoric was strongly eurosceptic, but in office she developed a pragmatic working relationship with EU institutions and abandoned any suggestion of leaving the euro or fundamentally confronting the Union. She has also remained firmly Atlanticist and strongly supportive of Ukraine, sharply distinguishing FdI from the Russia-friendly elements found in Lega and several other European radical-right parties. Under Friedrich Merz, this has also brought Italy closer to Germany on European foreign and security policy. Meloni and Merz have stressed the need for a stronger European role within NATO, continued support for Ukraine and closer strategic cooperation between Rome and Berlin, reflecting a considerable convergence between two governments from different political traditions.

The 2024 European election confirmed rather than weakened Meloni's dominance. FdI won 28.75% and 24 seats, up dramatically from only 6.4% in 2019. PD came second with 24.1%, while M5S fell to 10.0%, Forza Italia won 9.6% and Lega 9.0%. FdI remained in the ECR group, where it became by far the most important national delegation. The contrast with 2019 was striking: in five years, Lega had fallen from 34.3 to 9.0%, while FdI rose from 6.4 to 28.8.

Regional elections have produced a more mixed picture. The centre-left captured Sardinia from the right in early 2024 and

later retained Emilia-Romagna while taking Umbria, but the centre-right retained several other regions. The 2025 regional cycle similarly produced no broad national realignment: the right retained regions including Veneto, while the centre-left held Campania and Puglia. M5S's Roberto Fico won the presidency of Campania. The results suggested that Meloni remained nationally dominant but that a coordinated opposition could compete effectively in individual regions.

Meloni's record on liberal democracy is considerably less confrontational than that of Orbán or Slovakia's Robert Fico. Her government has not dismantled competitive elections, subordinated the judiciary or systematically neutralised political opposition. The European Commission has continued to raise concerns about media pluralism, the governance of the public broadcaster RAI, and other rule-of-law issues,[58] while relations between the government and the judiciary have frequently been confrontational. At the same time, Italy's institutional checks have continued to operate and constrain the government.

The clearest example was Meloni's attempt to reform the judiciary. The proposal would have separated the career structures of prosecutors and judges and reorganised their self-governing bodies. The government argued that this would reduce political factionalism within the judiciary, while opponents warned that it could weaken judicial independence. Because parliament did not approve the constitutional changes by the required two-thirds majority, the government put the reform to a referendum in March 2026. Voters rejected the reform by approximately 54 to 46%, delivering Meloni the most important political defeat of her premiership. She accepted the result and remained in office.

58 '2025 Rule of Law Report – Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Italy', European Commission, 8 July 2025 (https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en)

The government subsequently advanced a separate reform of the electoral system. In July 2026, the Chamber of Deputies approved a proposal replacing the existing mixed system with proportional representation combined with a majority bonus for a coalition receiving more than 42%. The opposition argued the reform was designed to favour Meloni's coalition ahead of the 2027 election. As of August 2026, however, the legislation had not completed its parliamentary passage.

An additional challenge has now emerged on Meloni's right. Former general Roberto Vannacci was elected to the European Parliament for Lega in 2024 after attracting attention for strongly nationalist positions on immigration, LGBT issues – he has declared that gays are 'not normal' – and identity, as well as his opposition to continued military support for Ukraine.[59] After breaking with Lega, he launched the new far-right Futuro Nazionale in June 2026, attacking Meloni for having moderated once in government. Early polls placed the party at around 5–6% and, in at least one survey, slightly ahead of Lega. It is too early to judge whether it will become a durable party, but its emergence demonstrates that Meloni's successful incorporation of the radical right has not eliminated competition further to her right. Overall, the Meloni government represents a particularly important case of a radical-right challenger entering government and undergoing selective rather than general moderation. FdI has substantially moderated its positions on the EU, NATO and foreign policy while retaining a strongly national-conservative agenda on migration, family and cultural issues. Institutionally, tensions with courts and public media justify continued scrutiny, but the experience so far differs substantially from the systematic transformation of liberal-democratic institutions seen under Fidesz in Hungary or Smer in Slovakia.

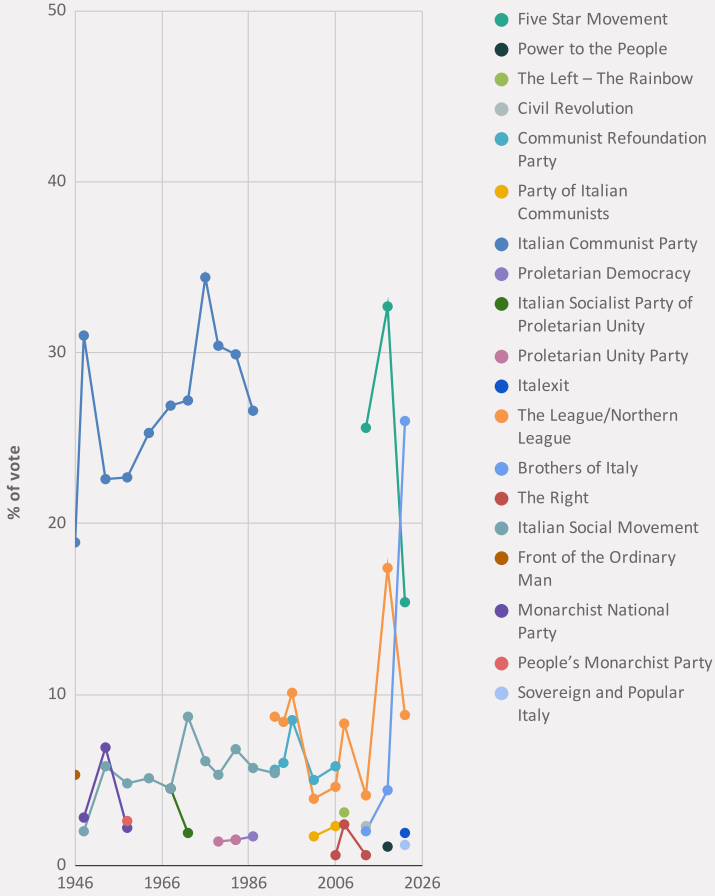
59 *'Giorgia Meloni Is Remaking Italy in Her Image'*, *The New York Times*, 21 August 2026 (https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/21/world)

FdI summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: pro-European
Authoritarianism: low

Lega summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

M5S summary
Economics: left
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 26. Vote share of challenger parties in Italy, 1946–2022



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

LATVIA

The Latvian party system had a turbulent start after the restoration of independence in 1991. The 1990s were characterised by high electoral volatility, numerous short-lived parties, frequent splits and mergers, and political organisations with relatively weak or unclear ideological identities. National identity, relations with the large Russian-speaking minority and attitudes towards the Soviet legacy were particularly important political dividing lines.

National-conservative parties emerged early from the more radical nationalist wing of the independence movement. For Fatherland and Freedom (TB), which later merged with the Latvian National Independence Movement to form TB/LNNK, regarded the restored Latvian state as the legal continuation of the republic that had existed before the Soviet occupation in 1940. It consequently rejected the idea that Soviet-era immigration had created an automatic right to Latvian citizenship. TB/LNNK became an important party in the 1990s, receiving almost 15% in 1998, and subsequently participated as a junior partner in several Latvian governments.

National Alliance

In 2010, TB/LNNK formed an electoral alliance with the younger and more radical All for Latvia! (VL), which subsequently developed into the National Alliance (NA). The party entered government in 2011 and remained there continuously until 2023. After nearly three years in opposition, it returned to government in May 2026 as part of the coalition led by Andris Kulbergs. In the October 2026 parliamentary election, NA received 8.9% of the vote and won ten seats. Although this represented a weaker result than in the previous election, the party remained an established parliamentary force and entered post-election coalition discussions as one of the parties in the outgoing Kulbergs government. Long participation in government has gradually institutionalised the party and weakened some of the anti-establishment characteristics associated particularly with All for Latvia!. Nevertheless, NA remained the most consistently nationalist and anti-Russian of Latvia's major parliamentary parties.

Several positions previously associated with the nationalist right subsequently moved into the Latvian mainstream, particularly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These included the gradual elimination of Russian as a language of public education, reduced use of Russian in public life, and the removal of prominent Soviet monuments. As the mainstream parties adopted harder positions towards Russia and integration, NA continued to push further, including proposals targeting Russian citizens and residents considered supportive of the Kremlin.

NA combines a strongly restrictive approach to immigration with social conservatism and broadly market-oriented economic policies. It supports Latvian membership of the European Union but opposes further transfers of sovereignty to Brussels and is therefore best regarded as softly eurosceptic. It is strongly Atlanticist and has been among Latvia's most consistent supporters of Ukraine and opponents of Russia.

TB/LNNK initially belonged to the Union for Europe of the Nations in the European Parliament before joining the newly established European Conservatives and Reformists group in 2009. The National Alliance has remained associated with ECR. It won two of Latvia's nine seats in the 2024 European election, receiving 22.1% of the vote, its strongest European election result to date.

A different form of populism emerged with Who Owns the State? (KPV LV), which achieved a breakthrough in the 2018 parliamentary election. Running primarily on an anti-corruption and anti-establishment platform, it won 16 seats and became one of the largest parties in parliament. Its rhetoric portrayed the established political class as corrupt, self-serving, and detached from ordinary citizens, while its prime ministerial candidate, Aldis Gobzems, adopted a highly personalised, confrontational campaigning style sometimes compared with Donald Trump. He also drew controversy by threatening journalists at the public broadcaster.[60]

KPV nevertheless entered government after the election, undermining some of its outsider appeal. Severe internal conflicts soon followed, with defections, leadership disputes and collapsing public support. The party was renamed For a Humane Latvia, but the rebranding failed to reverse its decline, and it disappeared from parliament in the 2022 election. KPV thus became another example of the rapid rise and equally rapid collapse that has characterised parts of the Latvian party system since independence.

60 'Who Is Who In Upcoming Latvian Parliamentary Elections', *Re:Baltica*, 30 August 2018 (https://en.rebaltica.lv/2018/08/who-is-who-in-upcoming-latvian-parliamentary-elections/)

Latvia First

Two new populist parties entered parliament in 2022. Latvia First (LPV) was founded in 2021 by businessman and former minister Ainārs Šlesers, one of the most prominent and controversial figures in post-independence Latvian politics. It initially benefited considerably from opposition to COVID-19 restrictions and vaccination policies. Combining economic nationalism and protectionism with social conservatism, anti-establishment rhetoric and increasingly restrictive positions on immigration, it won around 6% of the vote and nine seats in 2022.

Latvia First subsequently developed closer links with the European populist right. In the 2024 European election, it received 6.2% and won one seat, subsequently joining Patriots for Europe. LPV representatives emphasised opposition to migration, EU bureaucracy and the Green Deal.

The party's support increased sharply ahead of the 2026 parliamentary election. In October, LPV received around 13% of the vote and emerged as the second-largest party, although Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs ruled out cooperation with it in government formation.

The party has been more ambiguous towards Russia than the mainstream Latvian right: although it does not openly support the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Šlesers has promoted negotiations and has been unwilling to condemn initiatives by Viktor Orbán involving contacts with Vladimir Putin. During the 2026 campaign, the party also attracted substantial support among Russian-speaking voters, while presenting itself primarily as a nationalist and anti-establishment alternative rather than an explicitly pro-Russian party.

For Stability!

For Stability! (S!) was also founded in 2021 and initially grew out of opposition to COVID-19 restrictions and vaccination policy. Led by Aleksejs Rosļikovs, it primarily targeted Latvia's Russian-speaking electorate and filled part of the electoral space previously occupied by Harmony. The party combined anti-establishment populism and socially conservative positions with demands for greater protection of Russian-language rights. It won 6.9% and 11 seats in the 2022 election, making it the largest of the two new populist parties in parliament.

For Stability! took a markedly different position on Russia and Ukraine from almost the entire Latvian political mainstream. Its politicians criticised Latvia's policies towards Russia and its Russian-speaking minority, opposed several measures introduced after the invasion of Ukraine and used rhetoric sympathetic to Russian geopolitical narratives. This, together with its concentration among Russian-speaking voters, distinguished it sharply from the ethnonationalist radical right represented by the National Alliance.

The party's position weakened substantially during the following parliamentary term. In 2026, Rosļikovs left Latvia for Belarus while facing criminal proceedings over alleged incitement of national and ethnic hatred and was subsequently removed from the Riga City Council. He stepped down as party chairman in April, although he remained politically active and appeared on the party's candidate list for the parliamentary election.

In the October 2026 parliamentary election, For Stability! received only 2.0% of the vote and lost all of its seats.

Sovereign Power

A further new populist force is Sovereign Power (SV), founded in 2022 and led by Jūlija Stepaņenko, a former MP who had previously represented several other parties and became a prominent opponent of COVID-19 restrictions. The party failed to enter parliament in the 2022 election and received only 2.6% in the 2024 European election. It subsequently allied with Alliance of Young Latvians and achieved a major breakthrough in the 2025 Riga municipal election. The alliance continued to grow ahead of the 2026 parliamentary election and received 11.7% of the vote, becoming the third-largest electoral list in the country.

SV is a right-wing populist and strongly socially conservative party, emphasising traditional family values and opposing what it regards as progressive ideology in education and legislation. At the same time, it differs markedly from the ethnonationalist National Alliance in its approach to Latvia's Russian-speaking population. It supports greater opportunities for Russian-language education, minority-language private schools and easier naturalisation for Latvia's non-citizens.

Economically, the party combines tax cuts and support for small businesses with protectionism, extensive welfare commitments and economic nationalism. It opposes privatisation of strategic state companies, advocates greater state involvement in banking and energy, and favours preferential treatment of Latvian producers. It is strongly critical of the EU's Green Deal and further supranational interference, although it does not advocate Latvian withdrawal from the European Union.

In foreign policy, SV occupies a markedly different position from Latvia's mainstream parties. It opposes Latvian participation in and financing of military conflicts, calls for diplomatic solutions and wants part of the defence budget redirected towards domestic priorities. It also opposes compulsory military service.

While the party does not openly align itself with Russia, its position implies strong opposition to Latvia's current level of military support for Ukraine.

The party retains much of the anti-establishment style associated with the COVID-19 protest movement. It advocates more referendums, a directly elected president, halving the number of MPs and reduced state funding for political parties, and has even proposed considering withdrawal from the World Health Organization.

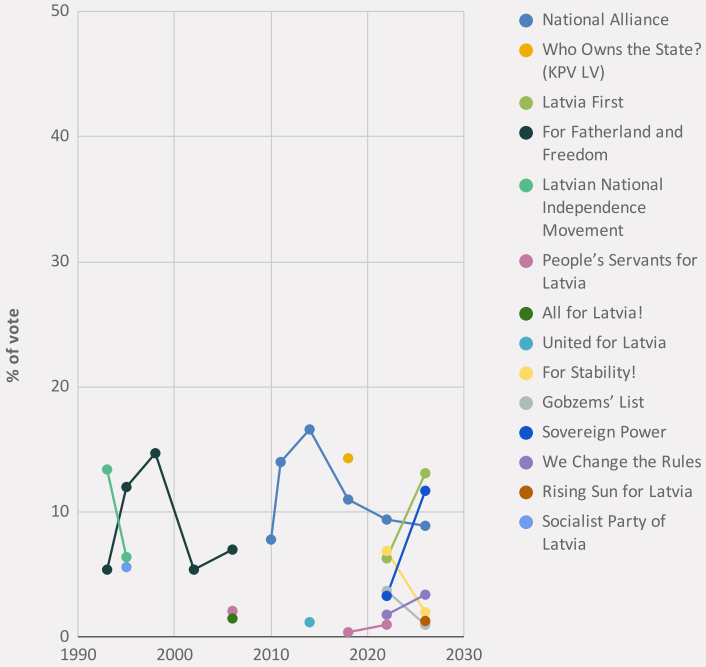
NA summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

LPV summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

S! summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

SV summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 27. Vote share of challenger parties in Latvia, 1993–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

LITHUANIA

Lithuania's party system resembles that of Latvia in its high degree of volatility. Since the restoration of independence, numerous parties have emerged, merged, split or disappeared, and ideological identities have often been comparatively weak. Lithuania has consequently produced a large number of parties that can be described as populist, although most have either remained small or enjoyed only temporary electoral success.

One of the most durable radical-right and populist parties of the early post-communist period was Order and Justice (TT). The party was founded in 2002 by Rolandas Paksas and developed into a national-conservative and populist force, combining conservative positions on social issues with generally right-wing economic policies and strong criticism of the political establishment. Paksas was elected president in 2003 but impeached the following year, after which his conflict with the political establishment became central to the party's identity.

Order and Justice regularly received around 10% of the vote during the 2000s and entered government after the 2012 election as a junior partner in the Social Democratic-led coalition. It remained in government until 2016 and later supported the Skvernelis government, briefly joining an expanded governing coalition in 2019. Internal conflicts subsequently caused most of

its parliamentary representatives to leave, and the party effectively ceased to exist in 2020.

TT was represented in the European Parliament from 2004 to 2019. Its representatives initially belonged to the Union for Europe of the Nations, later joining Europe of Freedom and Democracy and its successor, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy.

The Labour Party (DP) became the most electorally successful populist party of Lithuania's first post-communist decades. Founded in 2003 by Russian-born businessman Viktor Uspaskich, it achieved an immediate breakthrough in the 2004 parliamentary election, receiving around 28% of the proportional vote. It subsequently entered government and became one of the major actors in Lithuanian politics.

DP was strongly personalised around Uspaskich, who remained its dominant figure for most of the following two decades. Ideologically, the party combined centrist and economically interventionist policies with populist anti-establishment rhetoric. It was formally supportive of EU membership but periodically adopted more eurosceptic positions, while becoming increasingly restrictive on immigration after the European refugee crisis. Uspaskich and other party figures were also frequently regarded as comparatively sympathetic to Russia.

Electoral support fluctuated sharply. After its breakthrough in 2004, the party lost most of its voters in 2008, before recovering to more than 20% in 2012. It fell back again in 2016 and partially recovered in 2020, when it returned to parliament with around 10% of the proportional vote.

The party's decline accelerated during the 2020s. Uspaskich was expelled from the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament in 2021 following homophobic comments, after which

the Labour delegation left the group.[61] Internal divisions and corruption scandals subsequently weakened the party, and its parliamentary group collapsed in 2024. In that year's parliamentary election, Labour participated in the Peace Coalition, which received only around 2.2% of the proportional vote and failed to win representation. Thus, after two decades of fluctuating but sometimes substantial support, DP had effectively disappeared from parliament by 2024.

Dawn of Nemunas

The major new populist breakthrough came instead from Dawn of Nemunas (NA), founded in 2023 by Remigijus Žemaitaitis. Žemaitaitis had previously represented several centre-right and populist parties but was forced to leave parliament in 2024 after the Constitutional Court ruled that antisemitic statements he had made on social media violated his parliamentary oath. He nevertheless returned to politics as leader of his newly established party.

Dawn of Nemunas made an immediate breakthrough in the 2024 parliamentary election, receiving approximately 15% of the proportional vote and winning 20 seats, making it the third-largest party in parliament. Despite pre-election promises by leading Social Democrats not to cooperate with Žemaitaitis, the election-winning Social Democratic Party invited Dawn of Nemunas into government together with the Democratic Union 'For Lithuania'. The

61 'Lithuanian Labour Party quits Renew Europe after MEP's expulsion', *Politico Europe*, 21 January 2021.

decision generated significant protests at home and criticism abroad because of Žemaitaitis's antisemitic statements.[62]

Dawn of Nemunas combines economic populism and broadly left-leaning socioeconomic policies with nationalism and strongly conservative sociocultural positions. It has advocated greater redistribution, protection of household incomes and resistance to reforms perceived as harming lower- and middle-income groups, while taking much more conservative positions on cultural and identity issues. Its political style is strongly anti-establishment and highly personalised around Žemaitaitis.

The party is softly eurosceptic rather than anti-EU. It does not advocate Lithuanian withdrawal from the European Union but criticises Brussels, further centralisation and several EU policy initiatives. It is also notably less enthusiastic about Lithuania's strongly Atlanticist and pro-Ukrainian foreign policy than the principal mainstream parties. While Dawn of Nemunas does not openly support Russia and participated in a government committed to substantial military support for Ukraine, its representatives have opposed some sanctions and trade restrictions against Russia and Belarus and have called for a more cautious approach to military commitments.

Tensions over foreign and security policy became increasingly important during its time in government. The coalition finally broke down in June 2026 after Dawn of Nemunas opposed plans for a new military training area and after continued controversies surrounding Žemaitaitis, who had by then been convicted of inciting hatred against Jews and trivialising the Holocaust. The Social Democrats expelled the party from the governing coalition,

62 'Thousands protest in Vilnius against government party whose leader is on trial for antisemitism', *Reuters*, 14 November 2024 (https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-vilnius-against-government-party-whose-leader-is-trial-2024-11-14/)

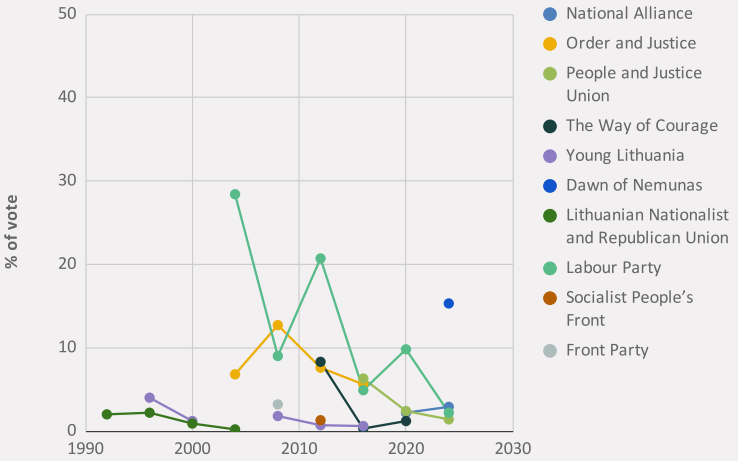
citing its increasing radicalisation and obstruction of government policy. A new Social Democratic-led government without Dawn of Nemunas took office in July 2026.

A smaller radical nationalist party, the National Alliance (NS), was founded in 2020. It combines Lithuanian nationalism, strong social conservatism, restrictive immigration policies and euroscepticism. Unlike Dawn of Nemunas, it is strongly anti-Russian and firmly aligned with Lithuania's Western geopolitical orientation. The party has so far remained electorally small. It received 2.9% of the proportional vote in the 2024 parliamentary election, below the 5% threshold, but its candidate Vytautas Sinica won a single constituency seat in Vilnius, giving the party its first representation in parliament.

Dawn of Nemunas summary

Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 28. Vote share of challenger parties in Lithuania, 1992–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg is one of the six founding member states of the European Union and has, despite its small size, exercised considerable influence over European politics. Until the 1980s, the country was dominated by four established parties: the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP), the Christian Social People's Party (CSV), the liberal Democratic Party (DP), and the Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL).

The Marxist-Leninist KPL participated in the broad coalition government formed after World War II but remained in opposition after 1947. It achieved its strongest results during the 1940s and 1960s before entering a long period of decline. The party lost its last independently elected parliamentary seat in 1994. It subsequently participated in the formation of déi Lénk, whose joint list won one seat in 1999, but later resumed contesting elections separately and has had little influence on national politics during the twenty-first century.

déi Lénk

déi Lénk (DL) was established in 1999 as an alliance of radical-left groups, with the KPL among its original participants. It has developed into Luxembourg's leading radical-left party and has been continuously represented in the Chamber of Deputies since

2009. The party is generally classified as part of the radical left and is included in several comparative datasets of populist parties. It combines socialism and anti-capitalism with progressive positions on social issues and soft euroscepticism. It advocates Luxembourg's withdrawal from NATO and has strongly criticised NATO expansion, military rearmament and Western security policy in relation to the war in Ukraine. It has never participated in a governing coalition.

Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR)

The radical right has historically remained weak in Luxembourg. The National Movement was a far-right party that contested the parliamentary and European elections of 1989 and 1994 but failed to win representation. It dissolved after the 1994 elections.

The most right-wing party represented in Luxembourg today is the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR). It was founded in 1987 as a single-issue movement campaigning for pension equality but subsequently broadened its programme. The ADR combines economic liberalism with social conservatism and is the country's most eurosceptic parliamentary party apart from déi Lénk. It has been represented in the Chamber of Deputies since 1989 but has never entered government.

The ADR is classified as a right-wing populist or national-conservative party in several comparative studies and is included in this index. It has a clear anti-establishment profile, although its positions on immigration and European integration have generally remained more moderate than those of many other national-conservative parties in Europe. The party seeks to strengthen the status of the Luxembourgish language and supports extensive institutional reform, including greater use of direct democracy on the Swiss model. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it strongly criticised government restrictions as unjustified limitations on individual

freedom. Until the 2023 election, all of its parliamentary representatives had been men.

Fred Keup, who served as party president between 2022 and 2024 and remains leader of its parliamentary group, adopted a more confrontational profile on immigration and multiculturalism than several of his predecessors. Before entering parliament, he became a prominent spokesperson for the successful no campaign in the 2015 referendum on extending voting rights in national elections to non-citizen residents. The referendum result represented an important political success for the ADR. In 2024, Keup was succeeded as party president by Alexandra Schoos, the daughter of Jean Schoos, who had led the party between 2013 and 2022.

Before 2024, the CSV, DP, LSAP and the Greens were the only Luxembourgish parties to have won representation in the European Parliament. In the 2024 election, the ADR secured a seat for the first time, receiving 11.8% of the vote – its strongest performance in a nationwide election. Its elected representative, Fernand Kartheiser, initially joined the European Conservatives and Reformists group. In June 2025, however, he was expelled from the group following a visit to Moscow and repeated criticism of EU sanctions against Russia.[63] Kartheiser subsequently continued as a non-attached member of the European Parliament. Déi Lénk again failed to win a seat and remains affiliated at the European level with the parties represented in The Left group.

63 ‘ECR group expels Luxembourg MEP Fernand Kartheiser’, *RTL Today*, 19 June 2025 (https://today.rtl.lu/news/world/ecr-group-expels-luxembourg-mep-fernand-kartheiser-2310150)

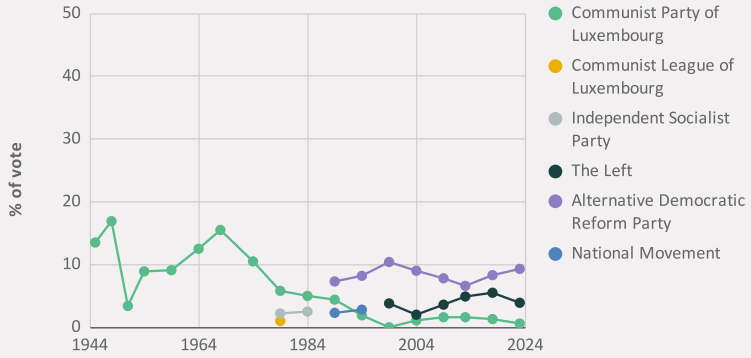
déi Lénk summary

Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

ADR summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 29. Vote share of challenger parties in Luxembourg, 1945–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

MALTA

Malta has had one of Europe's most stable two-party systems for more than half a century. From independence in 1964 until the parliamentary election of 2026, no party other than the Labour Party (PL) and the Nationalist Party (PN) has won seats in the national parliament. Malta is therefore the only EU member state in which no populist party has ever won parliamentary representation.

One explanation for the absence of successful challengers is Malta's electoral system, which strongly favours the two largest parties. At the same time, both PL and PN have historically accommodated a relatively broad range of ideological positions that in many other European countries have been represented by parties on the radical left or right.

For much of the post-independence period, Maltese politics was highly polarised, with intense competition between PL and PN. During its period in government between 1971 and 1987, the Labour Party moved significantly to the left, pursuing a foreign policy that reduced Malta's dependence on the West while strengthening relations with countries such as Libya under Muammar Gaddafi. The party also opposed Malta's accession to the European Union for many years.

The Nationalist Party, by contrast, combined Christian democracy with a strong emphasis on Maltese national identity while advocating closer integration with Western Europe and membership of the European Union. It also remained socially conservative, often taking positions closer to those of European national conservative parties than to many other members of the European People's Party. With only a brief interruption, PN governed Malta between 1987 and 2013, overseeing the country's consolidation as a pro-Western market economy. Labour's return to office in 2013 did not fundamentally alter this orientation.

A handful of smaller parties have attempted to challenge the dominance of PL and PN, but with little success. Some of these challengers have been located on the political fringes, but none has attracted significant electoral support. The strongest performance by a fascist party came in the 2019 European Parliament election, when Imperium Europa won 3.2% of the vote. This was nevertheless insufficient to secure a seat. Support fell to 2.6% in the 2024 European Parliament election, and in the 2026 parliamentary election the party received less than 0.1% of the vote. Another nationalist challenger, Aħwa Maltin, contested all constituencies in the 2026 parliamentary election but received only slightly more than 0.5% of the vote.

Today, both PL and PN are firmly pro-European and broadly supportive of the market economy. Both parties also retain socially conservative positions. Abortion remained illegal under all circumstances until 2023 and is still criminalised except where the woman's life or health is at serious risk. The Nationalist Party opposed even this limited liberalisation.

In January 2025, a new centrist party, Momentum, was established under the leadership of Arnold Cassola. Unlike earlier challengers on the radical right, Momentum seeks to challenge Malta's two-party system from the political centre, focusing on good governance, anti-corruption and environmental issues.

It has so far attracted around 3% in opinion polls. There are still few indications that Malta's longstanding two-party system is weakening. Malta therefore remains an exceptional case in contemporary European party politics, being the only EU member state in which no populist party has ever secured parliamentary representation.

NETHERLANDS

During the first post-war decades, Dutch politics was dominated by Christian democratic parties, as in Germany, Italy and several other Western European countries. In the Netherlands, however, the Christian democratic movement was initially divided between two Protestant and one Catholic party. These eventually merged during the 1970s to form the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). At least one Christian democratic party participated in every Dutch government from 1918 to 1994, sometimes with liberals and sometimes with social democrats, usually within a strongly consensus-oriented political culture.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Social Democrats (PvdA) became roughly as strong as the CDA, with the liberal VVD constituting a third major force. Only after the 1994 election was the CDA excluded from government. Under Wim Kok, PvdA governed with VVD and the left-liberal D66 in the so-called purple coalitions. These governments came to embody much of the economic and sociocultural liberalism of the 1990s, combining market-oriented reforms and deeper European integration with the legalisation of prostitution, same-sex marriage and euthanasia.

In recent decades, the Netherlands has developed one of Europe's most fragmented party systems. This is partly a consequence of an electoral system with effectively no percentage threshold: around two-thirds of 1% of the national vote is normally

sufficient to win a seat. Seventeen parties entered parliament in 2021 and 15 in 2023 and 2025. The fragmentation has made government formation increasingly difficult. It took 225 days to form a government after the 2017 election and a record 299 days after the 2021 election.

The Dutch party system has consequently provided unusually favourable conditions for political entrepreneurs of very different ideological orientations. Small parties can gain parliamentary representation relatively easily, although participation in government normally requires broad coalitions and considerable ideological compromise.

The Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) was founded in 1909 and achieved its greatest electoral success immediately after World War II, receiving more than 10% in 1946. Support gradually declined as the legitimacy of Soviet communism weakened. The CPN supported the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and remained politically isolated. Student radicalism gave the party a temporary revival during the early 1970s, but towards the end of the decade it moved towards Eurocommunism and increasingly emphasised new issues such as feminism. It lost its parliamentary representation in 1986 and subsequently participated in the creation of GroenLinks.

Socialist Party

Several smaller communist and revolutionary socialist movements also emerged during the post-war period. The most successful was the Socialist Party (SP), founded in 1971 by Maoists. The party remained electorally marginal during the 1970s and 1980s but underwent a fundamental transformation around 1990–91, abandoning Maoism and revolutionary rhetoric and presenting itself instead as a democratic socialist protest party.

Its 1994 campaign slogan, ‘Vote against, vote SP!’, captured the party’s strongly oppositional identity.

The SP subsequently developed into one of Western Europe’s more successful radical-left parties. It is frequently described as left-wing populist, particularly because of its emphasis on ordinary citizens against political and economic elites, although its populism became less pronounced as it became institutionalised. During the 2000s it achieved substantial national support, before entering a long period of decline. More recently, it has increasingly combined traditional left-wing economics with culturally more moderate positions. In the 2023 election, for example, it called for a temporary restriction on labour migration and criticised parts of contemporary identity politics.

The SP was represented in the European Parliament between 1999 and 2019 and belonged to the radical-left GUE/NGL group.

The Protestant Reformed Political Party (SGP), founded in 1918, is one of the oldest continuously existing Dutch parties. It has maintained a small but stable parliamentary presence throughout the post-war period. The party is based on orthodox Calvinism and seeks a society explicitly grounded in biblical principles. It strongly opposes abortion and same-sex marriage, has advocated the reintroduction of the death penalty and historically excluded women from full political participation. Women were not permitted to become party members until 2006. SGP also holds a seat in the European Parliament, where its representative has belonged to the ECR group since 2014; the party had previously been denied membership because of its position on gender equality. Despite its highly conservative programme, SGP has always operated within parliamentary institutions and remained in opposition.

The Farmers’ Party (BP), represented in parliament between 1963 and 1981, was an early rural populist party combining

right-wing economic policies with anti-establishment rhetoric resembling French Poujadism. Internal conflicts eventually contributed to its collapse, including controversy after it emerged that one of its senators had served in the Waffen-SS.

The Centre Party (CP) was an early far-right anti-immigration party that won a parliamentary seat in 1982 and received 2.5% in the 1984 European election. Internal divisions produced the Centre Democrats (CD), led by Hans Janmaat, which survived longer and achieved its strongest result in 1994 with three parliamentary seats. Both parties remained politically isolated and were widely regarded as extremist. Shortly before the 1994 election, the movement was hit by a scandal when a secretly recorded party representative was heard boasting that he had set fire to a refugee facility, illustrating the extremist milieu surrounding parts of the organisation.

Pim Fortuyn fundamentally transformed the Dutch debate on immigration and integration. The flamboyant former academic combined strong criticism of immigration and Islam with liberal positions on sexuality, gender equality and individual freedom. Islam was, in Fortuyn's words, an *achterlijke* religion – normally translated as 'backward', although the Dutch word can carry an even more derogatory connotation. His particular contribution to the European radical right was therefore not traditional religious conservatism, but the argument that immigration from Muslim countries threatened the liberal and secular character of Dutch society.

After breaking with Livable Netherlands, Fortuyn founded the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) in 2002. He was murdered nine days before the parliamentary election, but LPF nevertheless received more than 17% of the vote and immediately entered government.

The period in government quickly became chaotic. Junior minister Philomena Bijlhout resigned only hours after taking office

when it emerged that she had belonged to a militia in Suriname during the military regime. Shortly afterwards, immigration and integration minister Hilbrand Nawijn publicly stated that he personally supported the death penalty, despite this not being government policy. The coalition also supported the American invasion of Iraq and reversed the previous government's plans to ban mink farming. Internal conflicts within LPF soon made the coalition unworkable, and the government collapsed after only a few months. In the following election, LPF lost more than two-thirds of its support and disappeared completely from parliament by 2006.

Its longer-term political influence was nevertheless substantial. The government formed after the 2003 election began a major tightening of Dutch migration and integration policy. Together with Denmark, the Netherlands became one of the principal European examples of the mainstreaming of restrictive policies on asylum, family migration, citizenship and cultural integration.

Party for Freedom

The most successful successor to Fortuyn was Geert Wilders. A former VVD MP, Wilders left the liberal-conservative party in 2004 and founded the Party for Freedom (PVV), which entered parliament in 2006. PVV adopted an even more radical position on immigration and Islam while combining these issues with strong opposition to European integration.

The party is highly unusual organisationally. Wilders is its only formal member, giving him almost complete control over candidate selection and strategy. The party therefore lacks the conventional membership organisation of almost every other significant European political party.

PVV achieved its first breakthrough in the 2010 election and subsequently provided parliamentary support to Mark Rutte's minority VVD-CDA government. The cooperation collapsed in 2012 when Wilders refused to support further austerity measures. Rutte later described the arrangement with PVV as the greatest mistake of his political career. The episode appeared for several years to demonstrate the limits of cooperation between the mainstream Dutch right and Wilders. That judgement became more complicated after the 2023 election, when VVD once again participated in negotiations that ultimately brought PVV into government.

Wilders also played an important role in attempts to organise radical-right parties at the European level. Together with Marine Le Pen, he campaigned before the 2014 European election against what they called the Brussels establishment and subsequently helped establish the Europe of Nations and Freedom group.

PVV's greatest breakthrough came in the November 2023 parliamentary election, when it unexpectedly became the largest party with 23.5% of the vote and 37 seats. The result created an unprecedented situation: for the first time, a radical-right party was the dominant force in Dutch parliamentary politics.

Government formation nevertheless proved exceptionally difficult. Wilders initially sought to become prime minister, but VVD, New Social Contract (NSC) and the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) were unwilling to support a cabinet led directly by him. In March 2024 he therefore abandoned his claim to the premiership to help reach a coalition agreement.

After more than seven months of negotiations, PVV, VVD, NSC and BBB formed the Schoof government in July 2024. Former senior civil servant Dick Schoof became the non-partisan prime minister, while PVV received five ministries and four junior min-

isterial posts. The arrangement was deliberately designed to create distance between the four party leaders and the cabinet itself.

The government represented a major shift to the right, particularly on migration. Its programme promised what it described as the strictest asylum regime in Dutch history, including a two-status asylum system, restrictions on family reunification, tougher deportation policies and attempts to obtain exemptions from European asylum rules. Marjolein Faber, one of Wilders's longstanding political allies, became Minister for Asylum and Migration and was charged with implementing the coalition's asylum programme.

Despite this, Wilders increasingly argued that implementation was too slow. In May 2025 he presented a new set of additional demands for an immediate reduction in asylum migration and threatened to withdraw from the government unless the coalition partners accepted them. On 3 June he carried out the threat and removed PVV from the coalition. The Schoof government collapsed after less than a year in office.

The episode illustrated both PVV's success and the limits of its transition from protest party to governing party. For the first time, Wilders had succeeded in placing his party at the centre of government and shaping policy around its principal issue. At the same time, he ultimately preferred to bring down the government rather than accept compromises over the pace and scope of migration policy.

PVV's highly centralised and unusually thin party organisation also became a practical problem in government. Although it supplied five ministers and four junior ministers, the party had a limited pool of experienced administrators from which to recruit, a consequence of Wilders's longstanding refusal to develop PVV into a conventional membership organisation.

A new parliamentary election was held in October 2025. PVV lost much of the support gained two years earlier, falling to 16.7% and 26 seats. The social-liberal D66 narrowly overtook it with 16.9%, although both parties won 26 seats. PVV nevertheless remained one of the two largest parties in parliament.

The setback was followed by the most serious internal split in PVV's history. In January 2026, seven of its 26 MPs, led by Gidi Markuszower, left the parliamentary group and formed Groep-Markuszower. The defectors explicitly criticised Wilders's highly centralised leadership and demanded that PVV become a conventional membership party with greater internal democracy. They also argued that the party had become too narrowly focused on immigration and Islam and needed to cooperate more constructively with other parties.[64] The split reduced PVV to 19 MPs and exposed a longstanding organisational weakness: almost two decades after its foundation, Wilders remained the party's only formal member and retained near-total control over strategy and candidate selection.

The Schoof government's experience made another coalition with Wilders politically unattractive to the mainstream parties. After 117 days of negotiations, D66, VVD and CDA instead formed a minority government under D66 leader Rob Jetten in February 2026. Together, the three parties held only 66 of the 150 seats and therefore required support from opposition parties to pass legislation.

Ideologically, PVV remains strongly nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-Islam. It advocates a drastic reduction in immigration, tighter restrictions on asylum and family migration and policies

64 'Opstand tegen Wilders: zeven PVV'ers beginnen eigen fractie', *NOS*, 20 January 2026 (https://nos.nl/artikel/2598974-opstand-tegen-wilders-zeven-pvv-ers-beginnen-eigen-fractie)

aimed specifically at limiting Islamic institutions and practices. Wilders has repeatedly called for bans on the Quran, Islamic schools and mosques, although some of the party's most constitutionally problematic proposals were temporarily withdrawn during the 2023–24 government negotiations.

On economic policy, the party has moved considerably away from the market-liberal right. It combines calls for lower taxes with defence of pensions, healthcare and benefits for Dutch citizens and is therefore best understood as economically centrist or welfare-chauvinist.

PVV remains one of the most eurosceptic major parties in Western Europe. It historically advocated a Dutch withdrawal from the EU, although Wilders de-emphasised 'Nexit' during the 2023 campaign and subsequently accepted continued membership as a political reality. Its broader objective remains a drastic reduction of EU powers and restoration of national sovereignty.

The party's attitude towards Russia has also changed. Wilders previously cultivated ties with Russia and criticised sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he condemned Putin and the invasion, although he remained sceptical of extensive Dutch military aid. Joining the Schoof coalition required PVV to accept continued support for Ukraine and NATO.

Forum for Democracy

The radical-right space was meanwhile challenged by Forum for Democracy (FvD). Founded in 2016 and led by Thierry Baudet, the party initially presented itself as an intellectual and more economically liberal alternative to PVV. It entered parliament in 2017 and became the largest party in the 2019 provincial elections.

FvD subsequently radicalised dramatically. Internal scandals involving racist, antisemitic and homophobic statements produced repeated splits. Baudet increasingly embraced conspiracy theories, including the 'Great Replacement', and during the COVID-19 pandemic compared government restrictions with the Nazi occupation.[65] The party has also remained openly sympathetic towards Vladimir Putin following the invasion of Ukraine and has promoted narratives closely aligned with Russian propaganda.

Baudet increasingly presented Dutch society itself as fundamentally corrupted and argued for the construction of a parallel or 'counter-society' outside existing institutions (Baudet 2026). These developments moved FvD from a radical-right protest party towards a much more explicitly anti-system and authoritarian form of politics.

FvD won three seats in the 2019 European Parliament election and initially joined ECR. Internal conflicts subsequently led three of its MEPs to leave the party and participate in the formation of JA21, while the remaining FvD representation moved to the Identity and Democracy group. Its remaining MEP was expelled from ID in 2022 following strongly pro-Russian statements.

FvD appeared to be declining after these conflicts but recovered in the 2025 parliamentary election, receiving 4.5% and seven seats.

65 'Forum-leider Baudet noemt ongevaccineerden "de nieuwe Joden"', *NOS*, 14 November 2021 (https://nos.nl/artikel/2405628-forum-leider-baudet-noemt-ongevaccineerden-de-nieuwe-joden); 'Baudet moet vergelijking coronabeleid met Holocaust verwijderen van Twitter', *NOS*, 15 December 2021 (https://nos.nl/artikel/2409612-baudet-moet-vergelijking-coronabeleid-met-holocaust-verwijderen-van-twitter)

JA21

JA21 was founded in 2021 by former FvD politicians who rejected Baudet's increasing radicalism and conspiracy-oriented politics. Led by Joost Eerdmans, it sought to occupy the space between the mainstream centre-right and parties such as PVV and FvD.

The party describes itself as conservative liberal. It combines a clearly right-wing economic programme of lower taxes, deregulation and a smaller state with strongly restrictive immigration policies and conservative positions on national identity, crime and integration. It supports NATO, increased defence expenditure and military support for Ukraine, sharply distinguishing it from FvD. On Europe, JA21 opposes further transfers of sovereignty but accepts continued Dutch EU membership and economic cooperation.

For several years JA21 remained electorally marginal, winning only one seat in 2023. The 2025 election produced a major breakthrough, however: the party won 6.0% and nine seats. It benefited from both dissatisfaction with PVV's period in government and voters seeking a restrictive migration policy without the more radical style of Wilders or Baudet.

The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) was established in 2019 as an agrarian and populist response to conflicts over nitrogen emissions, agricultural regulation and the perceived concentration of political power in The Hague. It explicitly presents itself as the voice of ordinary citizens and rural communities against an urban political and administrative elite.

BBB achieved spectacular success in the 2023 provincial elections, becoming the largest party nationally and briefly leading parliamentary opinion polls. Its support declined before the national election, partly because of the emergence of New Social

Contract, but BBB nevertheless entered parliament and later joined the Schoof government.

Government participation reduced much of its outsider profile. After the coalition collapsed, BBB lost heavily in the 2025 election and was reduced to four seats.

New Social Contract (NSC) was founded in 2023 by Pieter Omtzigt, a former CDA politician who had gained widespread popularity through his role in exposing the childcare benefits scandal. The party campaigned on institutional reform, administrative competence, social security and restoring trust in government. Although it used strong anti-establishment rhetoric, it differed considerably from the populist radical right and was primarily focused on governance and institutional reform.

NSC won 20 seats in its first election in 2023 and became crucial to the formation of the Schoof coalition. Participation in government proved disastrous. Internal conflicts, doubts over cooperation with PVV, Omtzigt's recurring periods of absence and several ministerial resignations rapidly undermined the party's support. After PVV left the government in June 2025, NSC ministers themselves resigned in August over disagreements concerning the government's policy towards Israel and Gaza.

The collapse was completed in the October 2025 election. Only two years after winning 20 seats, NSC lost all of its parliamentary representation. The episode made NSC one of the most dramatic examples of the volatility of the contemporary Dutch party system.

PVV summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

SP summary

Economics: left
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

FvD summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

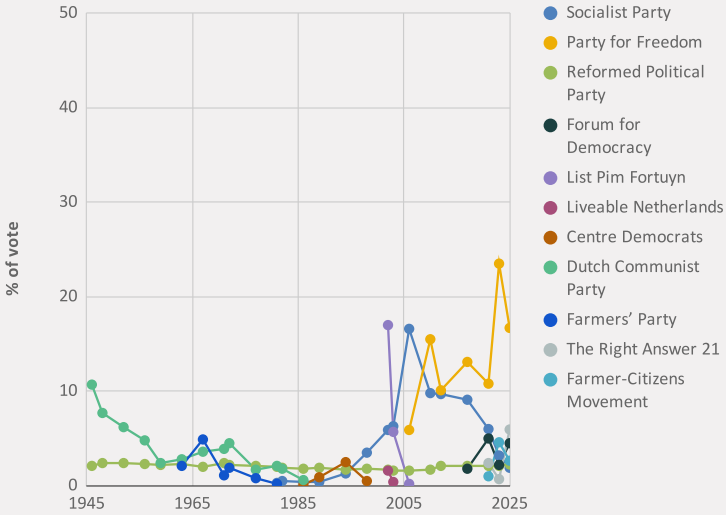
JA21 summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

BBB summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 30. Vote share of challenger parties in the Netherlands, 1946–2025



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

NORWAY

Norway had a highly stable party system with low electoral volatility during the first post-war decades. The Communist Party enjoyed a brief period of success immediately after World War II but soon declined. The Social Democrats strongly opposed the communists and portrayed them as extremists, while the Communist Party remained closely aligned with Moscow throughout much of the Cold War.

Red

The Socialist People's Party (SF) was formed as a left-wing split from the Labour Party in 1961 and was represented in parliament during the 1960s. Its youth organisation, however, became increasingly revolutionary and Maoist and broke with the party in 1969. This milieu subsequently became the basis of the Workers' Communist Party (AKP), founded in 1973. The same year, the Red Electoral Alliance (RV) was established as an electoral alliance dominated by AKP and independent socialists.

For decades, this revolutionary left mobilised only a small share of the electorate. In 2007, AKP and the Red Electoral Alliance were dissolved into a new unified party, Red (Rødt). The party first entered parliament in 2017 and achieved its national breakthrough in 2021, when it won 4.7% of the vote and eight seats.

It increased its representation further to nine seats in the 2025 election. Red remains radically left-wing on economic issues, progressive on social issues and strongly eurosceptic. It opposes both Norwegian EU membership and the EEA agreement. Although the party has gradually distanced itself from parts of its revolutionary communist heritage, its relationship with that tradition has continued to generate internal debate.

Foreign policy has also illustrated this tension. Red remains opposed to NATO and advocates a more independent Norwegian defence policy. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the party initially opposed Norwegian arms deliveries, but following an intense internal debate it changed its position in 2023 and accepted military assistance to Ukraine while retaining its opposition to NATO.

Progress Party

The Progress Party (FrP) was founded in 1973 as Anders Lange's Party, initially campaigning for drastic reductions in taxes, public spending and government intervention. After Lange's death in 1974, the party went through a period of organisational turmoil. Carl I. Hagen, who had briefly left to form the Reform Party, returned and became party leader in 1978. Under Hagen, the party gradually developed from a loosely organised tax protest movement into a more conventional political party.

During the 1980s, FrP combined radical market-liberal ideas with growing criticism of immigration. Immigration became particularly prominent during the 1987 local election campaign, when Hagen publicised the so-called Mustafa letter, purportedly written by a Muslim immigrant and warning that Muslims would eventually dominate Norway through demographic growth. The controversy generated enormous attention and helped establish immigration and Islam as central themes for the party. FrP sub-

sequently surged and became the third-largest party in the 1989 parliamentary election.

Internal tensions nevertheless persisted between libertarians and the more populist and immigration-focused leadership. These culminated in a major confrontation at the party congress in 1994, after which much of the libertarian wing left the party. FrP increasingly combined demands for lower taxes and a smaller state with defence of popular welfare programmes and a highly restrictive immigration policy.

During the early 2000s, Hagen sought to make the party a more credible potential governing partner, while several radical immigration critics were marginalised or expelled. Hagen stepped down in 2006 after 28 years as party leader and was succeeded by Siv Jensen. FrP received 22.9% in the 2009 parliamentary election, then its best result ever.

The breakthrough into government came after the 2013 election, when FrP entered a coalition with the Conservative Party. The Liberal Party joined the government in 2018 and the Christian Democrats in 2019. FrP left the coalition in January 2020, formally triggered by the government's decision to repatriate a Norwegian woman associated with the Islamic State and her children from Syria, but the withdrawal also reflected broader dissatisfaction with compromises made during seven years in government.

Siv Jensen was succeeded as party leader by Sylvi Listhaug in 2021. Under her leadership, FrP returned to a sharper opposition profile centred on immigration, crime, taxation, energy prices and opposition to costly climate policies. This strategy culminated in the 2025 parliamentary election, when FrP won 23.8% of the vote and 47 seats, by far its best result ever. It became Norway's second-largest party, overtaking the Conservatives as the dominant force on the non-socialist right outside the Labour Party.

Since the election, FrP has remained clearly ahead in opinion polls and has frequently been the largest party nationwide.

The Progress Party remains clearly on the economic right, advocating lower taxes and less regulation, although its commitment to Norway's extensive welfare state distinguishes it from a consistently neoliberal party. It maintains one of the most restrictive immigration policies among Norway's parliamentary parties and has increasingly emphasised cultural integration, Islam and crime. On most other social issues, however, it is considerably more moderate than many European radical-right parties.

FrP is also eurosceptic. It opposes Norwegian membership in the European Union and is critical of increasing EU supranationalism, although it supports continued economic cooperation through the EEA agreement. In recent years it has demanded greater Norwegian sovereignty within the EEA framework and has opposed further European integration in areas such as energy and migration.

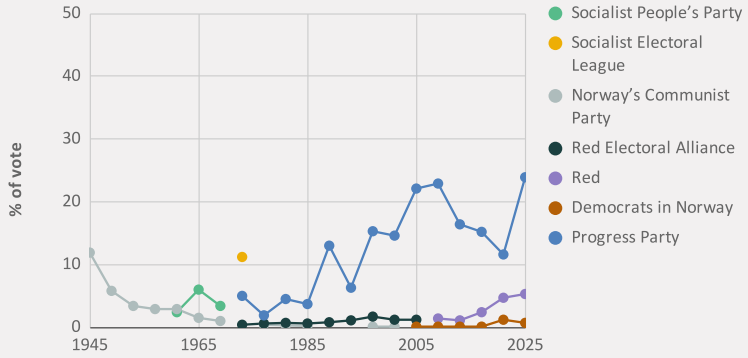
In foreign and security policy, FrP differs markedly from the Russia-friendly wing of the European populist right. It strongly supports NATO, increased defence spending and Norwegian military cooperation with Western allies, and has supported assistance to Ukraine following Russia's invasion.

FrP has no anti-democratic or authoritarian heritage and has long participated fully in Norway's parliamentary system. Other parties gradually abandoned attempts to isolate it, culminating in its entry into government in 2013. Although the party is commonly classified as populist radical right in comparative research, its long institutionalisation, participation in government, and relatively liberal positions on several social issues distinguish it from many more radical parties in this family.

Red summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Progress Party summary
Economics: right
Social issues: moderate
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 31. Vote share of challenger parties in Norway, 1945–2025



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

POLAND

Poland was the first country in communist Eastern Europe where the ruling party was forced to loosen its grip and accept partly free elections. At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, few observers would have predicted that Poland, alongside Hungary, would later become one of the European countries where authoritarian populism achieved its greatest electoral and governmental success.

After the fall of communism in 1989, Poland's party system rapidly developed into a highly fragmented pluralism. No fewer than 29 parties won representation in the first fully free parliamentary election in 1991. Before the 1993 election, electoral thresholds were introduced, dramatically reducing the number of parliamentary parties and contributing to more stable governments.

Despite this fragmentation, explicitly nationalist challenger parties achieved relatively little success during the 1990s. The Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), founded already in 1979 as an anti-communist independence movement, won parliamentary representation but is better understood as national conservative and only borderline populist.

By the end of the 1990s, Poland was experiencing mounting dissatisfaction with the social costs of economic transformation. Unemployment was high, while structural reforms associated

with preparations for EU membership generated considerable political opposition. When Poles went to the polls in 2001, voters decisively rejected the governing centre-right, whose principal parties disappeared from parliament. The Democratic Left Alliance emerged as the dominant force, but the election also produced a major populist breakthrough.

The agrarian-populist Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona) unexpectedly became the country's third-largest party. Its leader Andrzej Lepper, a farmer and former boxer, had built a public profile through spectacular protests against liberal economic reforms, including road blockades, throwing potatoes at the Ministry of Agriculture, and throwing frozen chickens from a food importer's warehouse.[66] The party combined economic protectionism and demands for greater state intervention with aggressive anti-establishment rhetoric.

Another new party was the League of Polish Families (LPR), a radically Catholic and nationalist organisation. Like Samoobrona, it opposed Polish membership of the European Union and benefited from resistance to economic transformation. It also distinguished itself through uncompromising opposition to abortion, hostility towards LGBT rights and close links with conservative Catholic networks, particularly Radio Maryja.

LPR drew on a Polish nationalist tradition associated with Roman Dmowski and the pre-war National Democracy movement, in which Catholicism was regarded as central to Polish national identity and a non-Catholic never could be accepted as part of the nation. This tradition also contained strong antisemitic elements.

66 'U.S. Pork Producer Hogtied in Polish Venture', *The Washington Post*, 3 July 2000.

Antisemitism and anti-German sentiment remained recurring features of parts of the Polish nationalist right. Lepper himself combined the two in inflammatory rhetoric and compared EU membership to the German invasion of 1939 and claimed that 'the Germans are an even greater threat to our nation than the Jews' (Pankowski 2010).

Law and Justice

Ahead of the 2001 election, two parties that have come to dominate Polish politics in the twenty-first century were formed: Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO). Both had roots in Solidarity and various smaller parties in the 1990s.

PiS was founded in 2001 by Jarosław Kaczyński and was initially closely tied to the popularity of his twin brother, Lech Kaczyński. The party emphasised corruption, crime and the weakness of the post-communist state. Its demand for a 'Fourth Republic' reflected the belief that the political and economic order created after 1989 remained contaminated by informal networks inherited from communism.

The party also increasingly presented itself as the defender of those who had lost economically or socially from the transition to capitalism. This combination of cultural conservatism, nationalism, welfare-oriented economics, and hostility towards established elites would eventually distinguish PiS from both the market-liberal centre-right and many radical-right parties elsewhere in Europe.

The centre-left government elected in 2001 successfully completed Poland's EU accession negotiations, and Poland joined the Union in 2004. Its political position nevertheless collapsed following a major corruption scandal. In the 2005 election, PiS and Civ-

ic Platform emerged as the two largest parties, establishing the bipolar competition that would dominate Polish politics thereafter.

Expected coalition negotiations between PiS and PO failed. PiS initially formed a minority government and in 2006 entered a formal coalition with Samoobrona and LPR.

The inclusion of both challenger parties demonstrated an important feature of Polish politics: unlike in several Western European countries, there was never a durable *cordon sanitaire* around nationalist or populist parties. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski had sometimes described Samoobrona as anti-democratic and excluded it from consultations, but parliamentary cooperation across these boundaries remained possible.

The coalition was highly unstable. Lepper became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture but was subsequently implicated in corruption allegations and other scandals. Following repeated government crises, early elections were held in 2007. Both Samoobrona and LPR fell below the electoral threshold and effectively disappeared from national politics.

Their disappearance did not eliminate the electorate for nationalist and anti-establishment politics. Much of that political space was increasingly occupied by PiS.

After losing the 2007 election, PiS spent eight years in opposition before returning to government with an outright parliamentary majority in 2015. This marked an important shift in the character of both the party and Polish politics.

PiS combined a strongly conservative cultural programme with an expansive welfare agenda, including major increases in family benefits and social transfers. It also intensified its nationalist rhetoric and presented political conflict as a struggle between a legitimate national majority and liberal, post-communist and

foreign-controlled elites. Its return to power soon generated a major conflict over democratic institutions.

In late 2015, an existing dispute over appointments to the Constitutional Tribunal escalated dramatically. The outgoing Civic Platform-led parliament had attempted to appoint five judges before the election, although the Tribunal subsequently ruled that it was entitled to appoint only three. The incoming PiS majority rejected all five appointments and selected its own candidates, while President Andrzej Duda rapidly swore several of them in.

The government subsequently introduced further changes to the functioning of the Tribunal. Jarosław Kaczyński described the institution as a bastion of what was wrong with the Polish state, while critics accused PiS of attempting to neutralise a central constitutional check on executive power.

Public broadcasting was another early target. In January 2016, President Duda signed legislation allowing the government to replace the management of public television and radio. Large numbers of journalists subsequently left or were dismissed, and public broadcasting developed into an openly partisan supporter of the government.

The European Commission responded in January 2016 by opening a dialogue with Poland under its Rule of Law Framework, the first time the mechanism had been used. After repeated recommendations failed to resolve the dispute, the Commission initiated the Article 7 procedure against Poland in December 2017, arguing that there was a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law.

During its eight years in government, PiS extended its influence over the judiciary, public media and other state institutions. The reforms did not abolish competitive elections, and opposition parties continued to win major local and national contests, but

they significantly weakened institutional checks and contributed to democratic backsliding.

PiS also developed an increasingly explicit form of national conservatism. It opposed liberalisation of abortion law, repeatedly attacked what it described as ‘LGBT ideology’ and emphasised Catholic and traditional family values. On economic policy, however, it differed sharply from the market-oriented right. Its governments substantially increased welfare payments, family transfers and state intervention in the economy.

Its relationship with European integration has been confrontational but not secessionist. PiS has repeatedly challenged the authority of EU institutions and emphasised the supremacy of Polish national sovereignty, but it has never seriously advocated Polish withdrawal from the Union.

Foreign policy provides an important distinction from many other European populist-right parties. PiS has consistently regarded Russia as a major strategic threat and strongly supported NATO, close relations with the United States and military support for Ukraine after Russia’s full-scale invasion. This support has nevertheless coexisted with sharp historical tensions with Ukraine. In May 2026, President Zelenskyy awarded a Ukrainian special-forces unit the honorary title ‘Heroes of the UPA’, referring to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which was responsible for massacres of Polish civilians in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia during World War II. The decision provoked strong reactions across the Polish political spectrum, particularly on the right. President Karol Nawrocki, elected with PiS support, first proposed revoking Zelenskyy’s Order of the White Eagle and subsequently did so in June 2026, while leading PiS formally backed the decision and accused the Ukrainian authorities of glorifying a movement

responsible for crimes against Poles.[67] The episode illustrated how strongly historical memory continues to shape Polish nationalism even within a political camp otherwise firmly committed to resisting Russia.

PiS remained the largest party in the October 2023 parliamentary election, receiving 35.4% and 194 of the 460 seats in the Sejm. However, it lost its parliamentary majority. Civic Coalition received 30.7%, Third Way 14.4% and the New Left 8.6%. Together, the three opposition blocs commanded a clear majority and subsequently formed a government under Donald Tusk.

The transfer of power demonstrated that electoral competition remained meaningful despite the institutional changes of the PiS years. It also initiated a highly contentious process of reversing those changes. The new government attempted to regain control of public media and reform the judiciary, while President Duda and PiS-controlled or PiS-influenced institutions resisted many of these measures.

PiS nevertheless remained an exceptionally strong opposition party. In the 2024 European Parliament election, it received 36.2% and 20 seats, finishing narrowly behind Civic Coalition. Konfederacja achieved a major breakthrough with 12.1% and six seats.

In October 2024, PiS formally merged with its smaller hard-right ally Sovereign Poland, which had previously participated in elections on PiS lists and had been particularly associated with the government's conflicts over the judiciary and the EU.

67 'Varsovie et Kiev en pleine crise mémorielle à la veille d'une conférence sur la reconstruction de l'Ukraine', *Le Monde*, 20 June 2026.

The 2025 presidential election demonstrated both the continuing strength of the Polish right and its growing fragmentation. PiS backed historian Karol Nawrocki rather than running a senior party politician. In the second round, Nawrocki narrowly defeated Civic Platform's Rafał Trzaskowski by 50.9 to 49.1% and took office in August 2025. Nawrocki's victory gave the right control of the presidency despite its exclusion from national government and provided an important institutional counterweight to Tusk's government.

Kukiz'15

Another important anti-establishment challenge emerged in 2015 around rock musician Paweł Kukiz. Running as an independent presidential candidate on a nationalist and strongly anti-party-system platform, Kukiz unexpectedly received more than 20% of the vote. His newly created Kukiz'15 movement subsequently won 8.8% in the parliamentary election.

Kukiz'15 was less ideologically coherent than most other challenger parties. Its central demands concerned institutional reform, particularly the introduction of single-member constituencies, referendums, and other forms of direct democracy, while its parliamentary group initially included both libertarian and nationalist currents. The movement fragmented rapidly and gradually lost its independent political position. Kukiz later cooperated increasingly closely with PiS, and in 2023 he and several allies were elected on the United Right's lists. By the mid-2020s, Kukiz'15 had ceased to constitute a significant independent electoral force.

Konfederacja

Alongside PiS, a more radical and increasingly successful challenger has developed on the right.

Konfederacja (The Confederation Freedom and Independence) was created in 2018–19 as an electoral alliance bringing together several nationalist, libertarian and radical-right organisations. It entered parliament in 2019 with 6.8% and received 7.2% in 2023.

The alliance has always contained considerable ideological diversity. Its two principal currents have been the economically libertarian New Hope, associated with Janusz Korwin-Mikke and later Sławomir Mentzen, and the nationalist National Movement, associated with Krzysztof Bosak. A still more radical component was Grzegorz Braun's Confederation of the Polish Crown.

Despite these differences, the parties share opposition to immigration, strong social conservatism and hostility towards further European integration. Konfederacja has been particularly uncompromising on abortion and LGBT issues and has campaigned against EU climate policies and COVID-related restrictions.

Economically, it is clearly to the right of PiS. The Mentzen/New Hope wing, in particular, advocates substantial tax reductions, deregulation, and a smaller welfare state. The alliance is also more eurosceptic than PiS, although its major leaders have generally stopped short of making Polexit an immediate political demand.

Its democratic profile is mixed. Libertarian elements coexist with radical nationalists, and some constituent organisations have promoted highly illiberal views. Several prominent figures have also used antisemitic or conspiratorial rhetoric. At the same time, Konfederacja functions as a competitive parliamentary party and includes factions whose principal radicalism concerns economics rather than political institutions.

The 2024 European election highlighted the alliance's internal diversity. Konfederacja received 12.1% and six seats, but its MEPs subsequently divided between different European alignments. Three representatives associated with New Hope joined

the Europe of Sovereign Nations group alongside Germany's AfD, while other representatives remained outside that group.

Confederation of the Polish Crown

The most radical component of Konfederacja eventually broke away. Grzegorz Braun had long been among the most controversial figures in Polish politics. His politics combine Catholic integralism, Polish nationalism, extreme hostility towards immigration and European integration, and repeated antisemitic rhetoric. In December 2023, he generated international attention after using a fire extinguisher to put out Hanukkah candles in the Polish parliament.[68]

Braun announced an independent presidential candidacy in January 2025, despite Konfederacja having already selected Sławomir Mentzen. He was subsequently expelled from Konfederacja, and his Confederation of the Polish Crown (KKP) developed into a separate political force.

KKP is distinctly more radical than the remaining Konfederacja. It explicitly advocates Poland's withdrawal from the European Union and describes the EU in authoritarian and conspiratorial terms. In 2025, the party formally declared Polexit necessary for preserving Polish independence.

Its explicitly ethnonationalist and religious conception of the Polish state, antisemitic rhetoric and rejection of important liberal-democratic norms place it clearly in the authoritarian far right.

68 'Far-right Polish MP uses fire extinguisher on Hanukkah candles in parliament', *Reuters*, 12 December 2023 (https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/far-right-polish-mp-uses-fire-extinguisher-hanukkah-candles-parliament-2023-12-12/)

By 2026, the right no longer revolved as completely around PiS as it had during the previous decade. Konfederacja had established itself as a substantial independent force, Braun had created a still more radical competitor, and PiS itself experienced its most important split in more than 20 years.

The conflict centred on former Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. In April 2026, he established an association called Rozwój Plus (Development Plus), intended to broaden the appeal of the Polish right beyond PiS's traditional electorate. The initiative represented a somewhat more economically liberal and pragmatic tendency within PiS and increasingly clashed with Jarosław Kaczyński's leadership.

In July, the PiS leadership ordered members to leave politically active external associations. Morawiecki and dozens of his supporters refused. More than 30 parliamentarians consequently left or were removed from PiS, and Morawiecki subsequently announced the creation of a separate Rozwój Plus parliamentary group involving around 40 MPs and a senator.

As of August 2026, Rozwój Plus is therefore better described as a political association and parliamentary formation rather than an established party. Morawiecki has announced that a new political party will formally be registered by October 2026.

Its precise ideological profile is still developing. Compared with the remaining PiS leadership, the Morawiecki faction appears somewhat more economically liberal, more favourable to business, and somewhat more pragmatic in its relationship with EU institutions. It nevertheless remains firmly conservative and nationalist and shares much of PiS's political legacy.

The split significantly changed the parliamentary balance. PiS won 194 seats in 2023, but by the summer of 2026 its parliamentary group had fallen substantially due to defections.

PiS summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

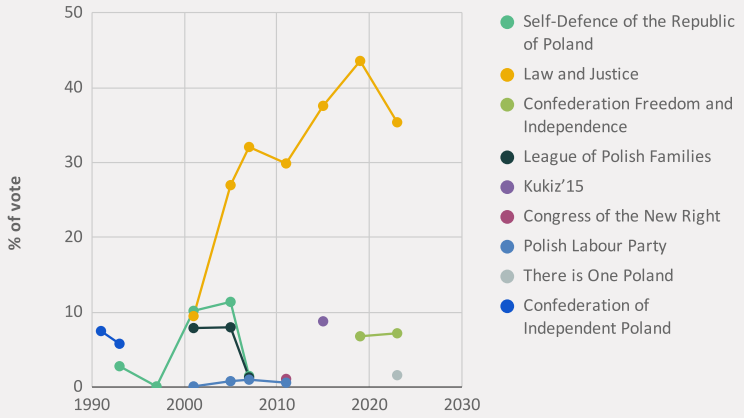
Confederation of the Polish Crown summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Konfederacja summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 32. Vote share of challenger parties in Poland, 1991–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

PORTUGAL

Since the democratic transition in 1974–75, Portugal has maintained one of Europe's most stable party systems. The centre-left Socialist Party (PS) and the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) have alternated in government for almost five decades, and no other party has yet held the office of prime minister. Compared with most European democracies, support for challenger parties remained remarkably limited until the late 2010s.

Portuguese Communist Party

To the left, the principal challenger has long been the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), founded in 1921. Throughout the post-war period, it has been one of Western Europe's strongest communist parties, often winning more than 10% of the vote. Since 1987, PCP has contested elections together with the Green Party (PEV) in the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU). Between 2015 and 2019, it provided parliamentary support to a Socialist minority government.

PCP remains one of Europe's most orthodox communist parties. It continues to embrace Marxism-Leninism, retains the hammer and sickle in its logo, and preserves a traditional communist party structure centred on a powerful Central Committee. Although the party has moderated its opposition to the European Union, it

remains strongly critical of both NATO and European integration. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, PCP rejected the view that Moscow alone was responsible for the conflict. It placed substantial responsibility on the United States, NATO and the EU, arguing that NATO enlargement and Western involvement in Ukraine had contributed decisively to the confrontation, and consistently opposed further military escalation in favour of negotiations and a ceasefire.

On social issues, PCP has also gradually transformed. Traditionally, the party combined communist economics with socially conservative positions, reflecting both its orthodox Marxist-Leninist identity and its working-class electorate. Over time, however, it has adopted increasingly progressive positions on issues such as gender equality and LGBT rights. At the same time, the party has generally taken a more cautious approach to immigration than many other parties on the European left, placing greater emphasis on labour market protection and workers' rights than on multiculturalism or identity politics.

The Left Bloc (BE) was founded in 1999 through the merger of several Trotskyist, Maoist and other radical-left organisations. Despite these origins, the party has gradually evolved into a democratic socialist and socially progressive party, abandoning much of its earlier anti-system rhetoric. Today, BE is broadly pro-democratic and no longer represents a significant challenge to the constitutional order.

Chega

Portugal remained one of the last West European democracies without a successful radical-right party, a pattern often attributed to the enduring legacy of the Salazar dictatorship. This changed in 2019, when André Ventura founded Chega ('Enough'). After entering parliament with a single seat, the party rapidly expand-

ed, winning 7% in 2022, 18% in 2024 and almost 23% in the 2025 election, becoming one of the country's three major parties. Despite this growth, Chega has so far remained outside government.

Chega combines national conservatism with strong populist rhetoric centred on crime, corruption and immigration. Party leader André Ventura, a former television football commentator rather than a career politician, has portrayed himself as an outsider challenging a corrupt political establishment. He frequently contrasts 'ordinary Portuguese' with political elites while directing criticism towards immigration, Islam, Roma communities and multiculturalism. The party has advocated substantially tougher criminal justice policies, and although members narrowly rejected restoring the death penalty, the proposal illustrates its punitive approach to crime. During the 2026 presidential campaign, where Ventura came second with 33% of the votes in the second round, Ventura declared that he did not aspire to be president of 'all Portuguese', but only of 'the good Portuguese'.

Chega is economically right-leaning, although its programme has become more flexible as the party has grown. While it initially advocated a much smaller state and lower taxes, it has more recently combined tax cuts with promises of higher wages, pensions, and other measures aimed at lower- and middle-income voters. On social issues, the party is conservative, while remaining only softly eurosceptic and supportive of Portugal's continued EU and NATO membership.

André Ventura has said that he personally is opposed to abortion as well as bullfighting, while not aiming to outlaw either. It has campaigned against mixed-gender bathrooms in schools.

While supportive of Portugal's continued EU membership, it opposes further political integration and has aligned itself closely with other European parties on the populist right.

Chega's rapid rise has fundamentally altered Portuguese politics. The PSD has repeatedly rejected formal cooperation with the party, describing several of its positions as xenophobic and racist, while parts of the broader Portuguese right have argued that continued exclusion of Chega is becoming increasingly difficult as its electoral support continues to grow.

The party has repeatedly been accused of racism, particularly because of its rhetoric towards Roma communities and immigrants. Particular concern has also been expressed about extremism within Chega's youth organisation, which has on several occasions been associated with more radical positions than the party leadership itself.

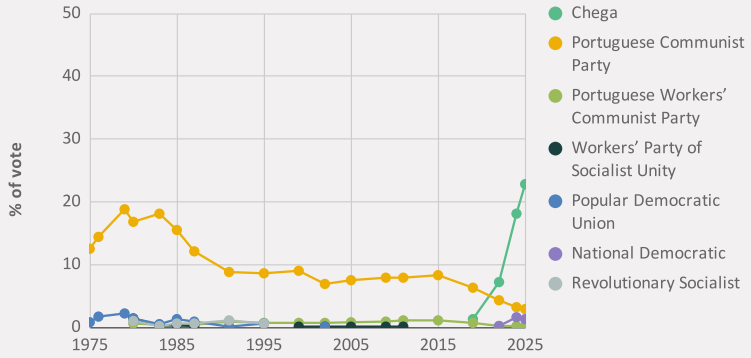
PCP summary

Economics: left
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Chega summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 33. Vote share of challenger parties in Portugal, 1975–2025



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

ROMANIA

Romania has one of the most volatile party systems in Central and Eastern Europe. Since the fall of communism, countless mergers, splits, new parties and name changes have made it difficult for voters to navigate the political landscape. At the same time, the country has repeatedly produced successful anti-establishment and nationalist parties. While many of these have proved short-lived, radical and populist parties have remained a recurring feature of Romanian politics, ranging from the nationalist coalition partners of the early 1990s to the emergence of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) three decades later.

Unlike the largely peaceful transitions elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania experienced a violent revolution in 1989. The Communist Party was immediately dissolved, but many former communist officials regrouped within the National Salvation Front under Ion Iliescu. The Front won a landslide victory in the first democratic elections in 1990, following a campaign marked by violence and significant obstacles to opposition parties communicating their message.

Social Democratic Party (PSD)

During Iliescu's first presidency, the National Salvation Front split. Iliescu's successor party, the Democratic National Salvation Front (later renamed the Social Democratic Party, PSD), remained in power after the 1992 election with parliamentary support from three fringe parties: the nationalist Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), the nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), and the communist Socialist Party of Labour (PSM). During the following years, all three parties participated in or supported government in various degrees, making Romania one of the few post-communist democracies where radical nationalist parties gained executive power during the democratic transition.

The coalition's nationalist rhetoric created tensions both domestically and internationally. Relations with neighbouring Hungary deteriorated as PUNR and PRM promoted an ethnic conception of the Romanian nation, while nationalist disputes also complicated relations with Moldova and the former Yugoslavia. The cooperation eventually ended after Iliescu publicly distanced himself from his coalition partners, comparing the leaders of PRM and PUNR to the Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky during a state visit to the United States.

PSD subsequently evolved into Romania's dominant mainstream left-wing party, but its post-communist origins have remained a source of controversy. Although affiliated with the Party of European Socialists, PSD has often been described as more socially conservative and nationalist than many of its Western European counterparts. Throughout its history, the party has combined centre-left economic policies with national conservatism, while critics have repeatedly accused it of clientelism, corruption and attempts to undermine judicial independence and other democratic checks and balances.

These concerns culminated under the leadership of Liviu Dragnea. Government attempts to weaken anti-corruption legislation and decriminalise certain corruption offences triggered the largest street protests since the fall of communism. In 2019, the Party of European Socialists suspended PSD over concerns about the rule of law and democratic standards.

Despite these controversies, PSD has remained one of Romania's two dominant governing parties throughout most of the post-communist period. At the same time, the party has shown a willingness to cooperate tactically with nationalist challengers. In the spring of 2026, PSD joined forces with AUR in a successful vote of no confidence that brought down the pro-European minority government led by Ilie Bolojan, although PSD ruled out forming a coalition government with AUR afterwards.[69]

The Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) was founded in 1990 and led by Gheorghe Funar, who became nationally known as the nationalist mayor of Cluj. The party became a leading voice of Romanian ethnic nationalism during the country's democratic transition and, together with PRM, helped shape the nationalist agenda of the governing coalition in the early 1990s. As mayor, Funar turned Cluj into a symbol of Romanian nationalism by covering much of the city with the colours of the Romanian tricolour – from park benches and rubbish bins to pavements and public decorations – while systematically discriminating against the Hungarian minority. Following the Romanian-Hungarian friendship treaty in 1996, he organised a mock funeral procession in protest and publicly accused the Hungarian consulate in Cluj of serving as a centre for espionage. He also became known for a series of antisemitic statements, among them the claim that

69 'Romanian socialists and far right topple government', *Politico Europe*, 5 May 2026 (https://www.politico.eu/article/romania-government-collapses/)

Albert Einstein was ‘mentally retarded’ and had stolen the theory of relativity from a Romanian poet.[70]

PUNR won 7% of the vote in the 1992 parliamentary election, while Funar received almost 11% in the presidential election the same year. After initially supporting the government in parliament, PUNR entered the governing coalition in August 1994, receiving the ministries of agriculture and communications. The justice minister also joined the party shortly afterwards, and the alliance was formalised in early 1995 as part of the so-called ‘Red Quadrilateral’. PUNR remained in government until September 1996, helping to reinforce the nationalist orientation of Romanian politics during the country’s early democratic transition.

After internal divisions, Funar was expelled from the party in 1997 and joined PRM. PUNR rapidly declined thereafter and lost its parliamentary representation in the 2000 election.

The Greater Romania Party (PRM) was founded in 1991 by the writer Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who had previously served as a court poet during Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship. The party combined Romanian ultranationalism with social conservatism, authoritarianism and economic nationalism. It advocated the creation of a ‘Greater Romania’ through the incorporation of Moldova and parts of Ukraine, while also promoting strong anti-Hungarian and antisemitic rhetoric. Tudor repeatedly praised both Ceaușescu and the wartime dictator Ion Antonescu and described the Holocaust as ‘the biggest lie in the world’ (Light and Young 2023).

70 ‘“Einstein era un handicapat și nu a fost nici măcar portar la un laborator de fizică”. Funar: Eminescu a fost primul care s-a ocupat de teoria relativității’, *B1 TV*, 10 March 2016 (https://www.b1tv.ro/eveniment/einstein-era-un-handicapat-si-nu-a-fost-nici-macar-portar-la-un-laborator-de-fizica-funar-eminescu-a-fost-primul-care-s-a-ocupat-de-teoria-relativitatii-si-care-a-scris-formula-de-calcul-a-vitezei-lum-143012.html)

Like PUNR, PRM initially provided parliamentary support to Nicolae Văcăroiu's government. Its cooperation with the governing PDSR was formalised in early 1995 as part of the so-called 'Red Quadrilateral', although unlike PUNR, PRM was not allocated cabinet portfolios. The party withdrew from the alliance in October 1995. Despite its limited role in government, PRM subsequently became the most electorally successful nationalist party of Romania's post-communist era.

The party reached its peak in the 2000 elections, winning almost one-fifth of the vote, while Tudor advanced to the second round of the presidential election with 28%. His success prompted broad cooperation among mainstream parties, and in the run-off he was decisively defeated by Ion Iliescu. In the following years, PRM attempted to moderate its image and sought membership of the European People's Party (EPP), but its application was rejected.

Unlike many nationalist parties in Western Europe, PRM supported Romania's accession to the European Union. In the European Parliament, PRM became one of the founding members of the short-lived Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS) group, alongside Bulgaria's Ataka. After losing its representation in Romania's first European Parliament election in 2007, the party returned with three seats in 2009. One of its MEPs, Dumitru Zamfirescu, became known as 'The Yes Man' after reportedly never voting against a single proposal during his term, regardless of its content. It had, however, already lost its representation in the Romanian parliament the previous year. PRM lost its final seats in the European Parliament in 2014, and party leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor died the following year.

The Socialist Party of Labour (PSM) was a hardline communist party formed in 1990 by former members of the Romanian Communist Party. It entered parliament in 1992 and participated in the governing coalition between 1993 and 1995. After losing its

parliamentary representation in 1996, the party gradually declined and was dissolved in 2003.

The 1996 election marked a turning point in Romanian politics as the centre-right opposition defeated Iliescu's governing coalition. Over the next two decades, the government alternated primarily between mainstream liberals, conservatives, and social democrats. Although no extremist party returned to government, several anti-establishment movements achieved temporary electoral success without becoming lasting political forces.

Among them were the New Generation Party (PNG), founded in 2000 and later led by Steaua Bucharest owner Gigi Becali, and the People's Party – Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD), established in 2011. PNG remained electorally marginal, while PP-DD entered parliament in 2012 on an anti-corruption and populist platform before collapsing due to internal divisions just two years later.

Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR)

The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) was founded in 2019 and quickly transformed Romanian politics. In the parliamentary election the following year, the party unexpectedly entered parliament as the fourth-largest party, capitalising on widespread dissatisfaction with the political establishment. AUR consolidated its position in Romania's 2024 super-election year, which included elections to the European Parliament, local councils, the presidency and the national parliament. In the parliamentary election, the party almost doubled its support to 18%, becoming the country's second-largest party. Since the 2024 election, AUR has continued to strengthen its position and has consistently emerged as by far the largest party in national opinion polls.

Party leader George Simion first gained national prominence through campaigns advocating the unification of Romania and Moldova. The party's name itself reflects this ambition and alludes to the idea of a 'Greater Romania'. More broadly, AUR combines Romanian nationalism with social conservatism, anti-establishment rhetoric and support for greater national sovereignty.

On social issues, AUR promotes traditional family values and has close links to Romania's conservative civic movement. The party's deputy leader previously campaigned for a constitutional amendment defining marriage exclusively as a union between a man and a woman. At the same time, AUR has generally avoided advocating a complete ban on abortion. Simion has also cultivated a strongly symbolic nationalist style. In 2022, he live-streamed his wedding on Facebook and invited Romanians to attend wearing traditional national dress.

Unlike many European radical-right parties, AUR supports Romania's membership in NATO and has backed higher defence spending. The party is more critical of further European integration and identifies closely with Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) and Hungary's Fidesz, although its territorial claims regarding Moldova have at times complicated relations with Hungarian nationalists. Following the 2024 European Parliament election, AUR's six MEPs joined the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group.

AUR has also positioned itself as one of Donald Trump's closest allies in Europe. Speaking at a conservative conference in Washington, D.C., Simion described the MAGA movement as 'extremely important' for Romania's conservative-patriotic camp. He attended Trump's inauguration in January 2025, where he

participated in a symbolic celebration featuring a cake shaped like Greenland and decorated with a US flag.[71]

The 2024 presidential election further transformed Romanian politics. The first round was unexpectedly won by the independent nationalist candidate Călin Georgescu, who had previously been associated with AUR before breaking with the party. Georgescu emphasised that he did not represent any political party, instead presenting himself as a direct representative of the Romanian people and as an opponent of the established political class. He attracted international attention through his nationalist and anti-establishment rhetoric, which drew comparisons with Donald Trump, as well as his openly pro-Russian positions, including praise for Vladimir Putin.[72]

Romania's Constitutional Court subsequently annulled the election, after declassified intelligence reports pointed to serious irregularities in the campaign including coordinated online activity, artificial amplification of Georgescu's social-media presence and suspected foreign interference. The decision proved highly controversial, both domestically and internationally. It was criticised by US Vice President J.D. Vance in his widely discussed speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025, where he cited the Romanian case as part of a broader critique of democratic standards in Europe.

Following Georgescu's exclusion from the rerun, AUR leader George Simion emerged as the nationalist candidate and advanced to the second round of the presidential election in 2025,

71 'MAGA embrace: Europe's nationalists head to Washington', *Politico Europe*, 17 January 2025 (https://www.politico.eu/article/maga-embrace-europes-nationalists-head-to-washington/)

72 'How Putin won the Romanian election', *Politico Europe*, 23 December 2024 (https://www.politico.eu/article/how-vladimir-putin-win-romania-election-calin-georgescu/)

promising to make Georgescu prime minister if he won. During the final days of the campaign, as opinion polls suggested a tightening race, Simion repeatedly claimed that only electoral fraud could prevent him from winning. Shortly before polling stations closed, he alleged that 'many deceased people' had appeared on the electoral rolls, echoing Donald Trump's claims following the 2020 US presidential election.[73] After losing the runoff, Simion continued to question the legitimacy of the result, although he presented no evidence that electoral fraud had affected the outcome.[74]

S.O.S. Romania

S.O.S. Romania was founded in 2021 and entered parliament in 2024. The party is led by Diana Șoșoacă, who was elected to the Romanian Senate as an AUR candidate in 2020 before breaking with the party and becoming one of its most outspoken critics.

Compared with AUR, S.O.S. Romania combines Romanian nationalism and social conservatism with more radical euroscepticism and an openly pro-Russian foreign policy. The party is also irredentist, maintaining territorial claims on parts of present-day Ukraine and Moldova. These positions have contributed to Șoșoacă being banned from entering Ukraine.

Șoșoacă has repeatedly attracted controversy through antisemitic statements, conspiracy theories and attacks on Romania's constitutional order. In 2024, Romania's Constitutional Court

73 'Romanian election results: Moderate Nicușor Dan wins clear majority against ultranationalist George Simion', *Politico Europe*, 19 May 2025 (https://www.politico.eu/article/romanian-presidential-election-results-nicusor-dan-george-simion)

74 'Hard-right candidate who lost Romania's presidential race contests results at top court', *Associated Press*, 21 May 2025 (https://apnews.com/article/09647fefa8198d2f845f654639f50feb)

barred her from standing in the presidential election, arguing that her public positions were incompatible with the constitutional principles of democracy and the rule of law.[75] Following the 2024 European Parliament election, S.O.S. Romania won two seats. However, its MEPs remained non-attached after the party failed to join the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group, reportedly because Hungary's Our Homeland Movement vetoed its application over the party's territorial claims against Ukraine.

Party of Young People (POT)

The Party of Young People (POT) was founded in 2023 by Anamaria Gavrilă, a former AUR member of parliament. The party supported independent presidential candidate Călin Georgescu in the 2024 presidential election and entered parliament that same year.

POT combines Romanian nationalism with strong social conservatism and a pronounced emphasis on traditional Christian values. The party opposes abortion and same-sex marriage, advocates free-market economic policies and promotes a strongly eurosceptic and sovereigntist agenda. Its rhetoric frequently invokes faith, God, and Romania's Christian heritage.

In foreign policy, POT combines criticism of further European integration with support for Romania's strategic partnership with the United States and continued NATO membership, while arguing that Romanian national interests should take precedence within both alliances.

75 'Romania's top court says it barred candidate from presidential race over pro-Russian views', *Reuters*, 8 October 2024 (https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/romanias-top-court-says-it-barred-candidate-presidential-race-over-pro-russian-2024-10-08/)

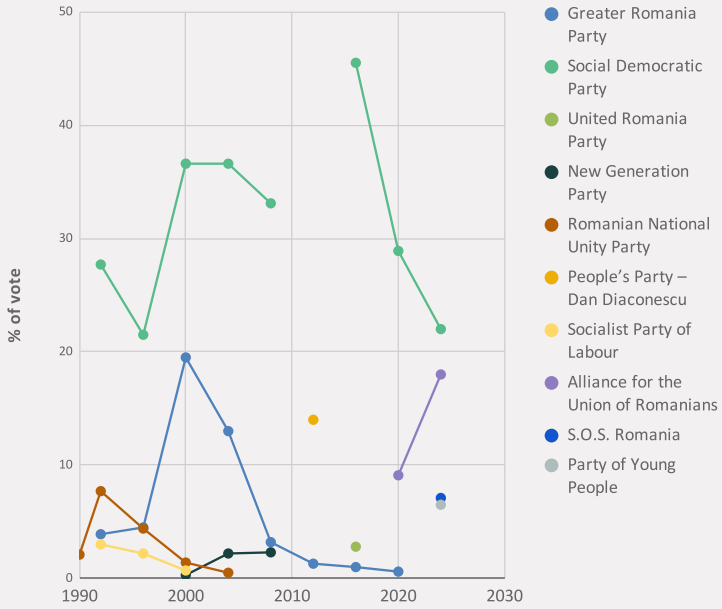
PSD summary
Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: pro-European
Authoritarianism: medium

AUR summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

S.O.S. Romania summary
Economics: centre
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

POT summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Figure 34. Vote share of challenger parties in Romania, 1990–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia has experienced several abrupt political realignments during its relatively short history as an independent state. Its party system has repeatedly produced strong populist and anti-establishment movements, ranging from authoritarian centrism and left-wing nationalism to explicitly far-right parties. Two populist parties – HZDS under Vladimír Mečiar and Smer under Robert Fico – have dominated government for long periods.

As in the Czech Republic, a broad opposition movement emerged during the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and quickly fragmented after the fall of communism. Vladimír Mečiar, who became Slovak prime minister within Czechoslovakia in 1990, subsequently founded the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). The party won the 1992 election and led Slovakia into independence the following year. Mečiar became the first prime minister of independent Slovakia and returned to power after the 1994 election.

HZDS presented itself as pragmatic and centrist but developed into a strongly personalised, nationalist and authoritarian populist party. Political power was concentrated around Mečiar, while conflicts with the presidency, opposition parties, public media and other independent institutions became increasingly severe. His government attempted to weaken President Michal Kováč politically and institutionally, including by restricting presidential resources and powers.

Between 1994 and 1998, Mečiar governed together with the far-left Union of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS) and the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS). The authoritarian character of his government seriously damaged Slovakia's international standing. While Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic advanced towards NATO and EU membership, Slovakia was increasingly treated as a laggard in democratic and economic reform. In 1997, the European Commission concluded that Slovakia did not satisfactorily meet the political Copenhagen criteria, citing insufficient respect for constitutional institutions, the rule of law and the rights of the opposition. As a result, Slovakia was excluded from the first round of EU accession negotiations launched with the leading Central and Eastern European candidates. Mečiar was also strongly critical of the rapid market reforms pursued elsewhere in Central Europe.

Smer

HZDS gradually declined during the early 2000s. Much of its political space was eventually occupied by Smer, founded in 1999 by Robert Fico after he left the post-communist Party of the Democratic Left.

Fico initially presented Smer as a pragmatic rather than ideological party, arguing that Slovakia needed practical solutions rather than conventional left- or right-wing politics (Haughton 2002). Characteristically, 'order, justice and stability' have featured prominently as campaign themes. This ideological flexibility helped Smer combine social-democratic economic policies with nationalism, social conservatism and increasingly authoritarian populism. Smer won the 2006 election and formed a coalition with HZDS and SNS. The decision to govern with SNS led to Smer's temporary suspension from the Party of European Socialists. After two years in opposition, Fico returned to power in 2012 with an outright parliamentary majority and remained

prime minister until 2018, when mass protests following the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée forced his resignation.

Fico returned after the 2023 election, when Smer received 22.9% and formed a coalition with Hlas – a social-democratic party that had split from Smer three years earlier – and SNS. Smer and Hlas were subsequently suspended from the Party of European Socialists, while their MEPs were excluded from the S&D group.

Smer's ideological evolution has been unusual. Its economic policies remain broadly left-wing, emphasising welfare provision, pensions and an active role for the state. At the same time, the party has become increasingly national-conservative on sociocultural issues, strongly hostile towards progressive identity politics and increasingly critical of liberalism, migration and LGBT rights. Fico has also moved sharply towards eurosceptic and sovereignty-oriented rhetoric while stopping short of advocating Slovak withdrawal from the European Union.

In government, Smer has increasingly continued the authoritarian tradition associated with Mečiar. Fico portrays politics as a struggle between the democratically expressed will of ordinary Slovaks and an entrenched liberal establishment consisting of opposition parties, independent media, NGOs, judges and foreign institutions. His governments have repeatedly sought to weaken institutional constraints, presenting them as politically biased or controlled by hostile elites.

The fourth Fico government moved particularly rapidly. In early 2024, it abolished the Special Prosecutor's Office responsible for major corruption cases and reduced penalties and limitation periods for several economic crimes. The Constitutional Court subsequently upheld most of the reform but struck down some provisions. The European Commission, opposition parties and

civil-society groups warned that the changes weakened Slovakia's capacity to investigate high-level corruption.

The government also fundamentally reorganised public broadcasting. In 2024, RTVS was abolished and replaced by Slovak Television and Radio (STVR). The reform removed the existing management and created a new governing structure that critics argued gave the government significantly greater political influence. The European Commission raised concerns about media independence, while the Reuters Institute subsequently described the new broadcaster as increasingly exposed to political control.

Attacks on independent media have accompanied these institutional reforms. Fico has repeatedly described critical media organisations as hostile or politically motivated, while government politicians have increasingly bypassed traditional journalism in favour of friendly alternative media and direct communication through social networks (European Commission 2025).

The authoritarian trajectory became even clearer in 2025. Parliament adopted tighter rules for NGOs that critics compared with foreign-agent legislation, while Fico increasingly portrayed civil-society organisations and opposition movements as instruments of foreign political interests. Further judicial reforms in late 2025 dismantled the existing whistleblower-protection agency and again triggered mass demonstrations.

In September 2025, the government secured a constitutional amendment explicitly designed by Fico as a 'dam against progressivism'.[76] It recognised only two genders, tightened adoption

76 'Slovakia amends constitution to promote "national identity"', *Reuters*, 26 September 2025 (https://www.reuters.com/world/slovakia-amends-constitution-promote-national-identity-2025-09-26/)

rules and asserted Slovak sovereignty over EU law in areas defined as relating to national identity, family and culture. The European Commission subsequently opened infringement proceedings, arguing that the amendment conflicted with the primacy of EU law.

These reforms illustrate an important change in Smer's ideology. What began as a pragmatic left-populist party has evolved into a form of national-conservative and increasingly illiberal populism, combining economic interventionism with strong cultural conservatism, attacks on liberal institutions and a conception of sovereignty resembling that promoted by Viktor Orbán in Hungary.

Foreign policy has developed in the same direction. On returning to power in October 2023, Fico immediately ended official Slovak military aid to Ukraine. He has repeatedly criticised Western sanctions on Russia, opposed further military escalation and argued that peace negotiations should take precedence over support for Ukrainian military victory.

Fico has cultivated an unusually close relationship with Vladimir Putin for an EU and NATO leader. He travelled to Moscow for talks with Putin in December 2024 and again met him in Russia in 2025 and 2026. In 2025, Fico threatened to block further EU sanctions against Russia, arguing they harmed Slovak national interests. In May 2026, he again met Putin in Moscow, with both leaders emphasising the restoration of pragmatic Slovak-Russian economic relations.

This foreign-policy reorientation generated some of the largest demonstrations in Slovakia since 2018. Tens of thousands protested during early 2025 under slogans such as 'Slovakia is Europe', accusing Fico of moving the country towards Russia and away from its Western orientation.

Fico has also expressed open admiration for Donald Trump's political approach. During a visit to Washington, he praised the MAGA movement as 'a vision that resonates urgently not only in the United States but across the world' and welcomed Trump's emphasis on national interest and political pragmatism. Fico argued that this was 'exactly what each and every one of us should be doing', illustrating the broader ideological convergence between Smer's sovereignty-oriented populism and the contemporary Trumpist right.[77]

Slovak politics was further polarised by an assassination attempt against Fico in May 2024. He was shot several times at close range and seriously wounded while greeting supporters after a government meeting. Politicians across the political spectrum condemned the attack and initially called for de-escalation. Fico later blamed the political climate created by his opponents and hostile media, reinforcing rather than reducing confrontation between the government and the opposition.

Hlas

Hlas – Social Democracy was founded in 2020 by former prime minister Peter Pellegrini and a group of other politicians who broke away from Smer after the party's defeat in that year's election. Initially, Hlas presented itself as a more moderate and conventionally social-democratic alternative to Fico. Pellegrini adopted a less confrontational style, emphasised Slovakia's membership of the EU and NATO and distanced himself from some of Fico's increasingly radical rhetoric. This initially

77 'Trump is "doing Europe a great service," Slovak leader tells rapt Washington crowd', *Politico Europe*, 22 February 2025 (https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-europe-great-service-slovak-leader-robert-fico-washington/)

made Hlas appear a plausible coalition partner even for some centre-right parties.

The party received 14.7% in the 2023 election and finished third, giving it a pivotal position in government formation. Pellegrini ultimately chose to reunite with his former political allies, entering a coalition with Smer and SNS. Hlas and Smer were subsequently suspended from the Party of European Socialists, and their MEPs were excluded from the S&D group. In 2024, Pellegrini was elected president with 53.1% of the vote and was succeeded as party leader by Interior Minister Matúš Šutaj Eštok.

Since entering government, the ideological distance between Hlas and Smer has narrowed considerably. Hlas has supported most of the government's major institutional and cultural reforms, including changes to criminal law, public broadcasting and the 2025 constitutional amendment on gender, family and national sovereignty. Under Šutaj Eštok, the party has also adopted a more combative political style and increasingly similar rhetoric on progressive politics, NGOs and the opposition.

Important differences nevertheless remain. Hlas has generally been less confrontational towards the EU and more clearly anchored in Slovakia's Western orientation. It has occasionally resisted the most radical proposals of its coalition partners: in 2026, for example, Hlas's opposition contributed to the government abandoning plans to replace the existing whistleblower-protection authority. Pellegrini has also distanced himself from suggestions of Slovak neutrality and from some of Fico's more accommodating rhetoric towards Russia.

Hlas therefore illustrates the opposite of what was originally anticipated when the party split from Smer. Rather than establishing a durable moderate social-democratic alternative, participation in Fico's government has pulled it increasingly towards Smer's combination of economic interventionism, social conservatism

and national sovereignty. By 2026 it is better understood as the more moderate wing of the same broader left-nationalist political camp than as a clearly distinct ideological alternative.

Slovak National Party (SNS)

The Slovak National Party (SNS) represents a long tradition of radical Slovak nationalism. The contemporary party should not be regarded as the direct organisational successor of the wartime fascist regime, but important parts of the party have repeatedly expressed admiration for Jozef Tiso and the authoritarian Slovak state that existed as a client of Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1945.

Long-time party leader Ján Slota became notorious for aggressive rhetoric against Roma and ethnic Hungarians. He described Hungarians as ‘a cancer in the body of the Slovak nation’ that needed to be removed, and repeatedly portrayed Hungarian influence as a threat to Slovak sovereignty. In 2000, while Slota was mayor of Žilina, the city council voted overwhelmingly to erect a plaque honouring wartime president Jozef Tiso, whom Slota had described as ‘one of the greatest sons of the Slovak nation’. The plan was later abandoned following widespread criticism (European Parliament 2000).

Despite repeated internal splits, SNS has remained a persistent force in Slovak politics and has participated in several governments, including those led by Mečiar and Fico. It returned to parliament in 2023 with 5.6% and again entered government together with Smer and Hlas. Economically, the party combines broadly right-leaning and protectionist policies with economic nationalism. It is strongly socially conservative, nationalist and eurosceptic, and remains comparatively sympathetic towards Russia.

We Are Family (Sme Rodina) represents a different strand of Slovak right-wing populism. Founded by businessman Boris Kollár in 2015, it combined social conservatism and restrictive immigration policy with personalised anti-establishment politics. The party participated in the centre-right government formed after the 2020 election, when it received 8.2% of the vote. Its support collapsed in 2023 to around 2%, and it lost all parliamentary representation.

People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), founded by Marian Kotleba in 2010, was considerably more extreme. It openly drew on the political symbolism of the wartime Slovak state and developed into one of Europe's clearest examples of neo-fascist parliamentary politics. The party combined anti-Roma racism, extreme nationalism, social conservatism, hostility towards NATO and the EU and strongly pro-Russian positions.

Republika

ĽSNS entered parliament in 2016 and remained represented after the 2020 election, but internal conflicts and legal pressure weakened the organisation. In 2021 several leading figures, including MEP Milan Uhrík, broke away to establish Republic (Republika). ĽSNS subsequently collapsed, receiving less than 1% in both the 2023 parliamentary election and the 2024 European election.

Republic attempted to present a more electorally respectable version of the same nationalist political milieu. Led by Uhrík, it avoided some of ĽSNS's overt fascist symbolism while retaining radical nationalism, opposition to immigration, strong social conservatism, hard euroscepticism and a markedly pro-Russian foreign-policy orientation.

The party narrowly failed to enter parliament in 2023, receiving just under 5%. However, it achieved a major breakthrough in

the 2024 European election, receiving 12.5% – the third-highest result nationally – and winning two seats. One of its MEPs, Milan Uhrík, joined the Europe of Sovereign Nations group.

Republic's rise indicates that the decline of Kotleba's party did not mark the disappearance of the Slovak extreme right. Rather, much of its electorate and political space migrated to a less explicitly neo-fascist but still strongly nationalist, authoritarian and Russia-friendly successor.

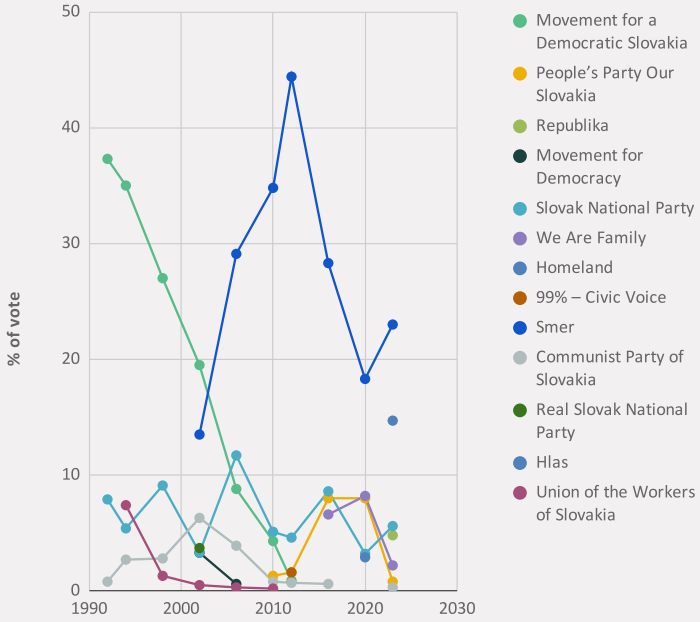
SNS summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Smer summary
Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Hlas summary
Economics: left
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Republika summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Figure 35. Vote share of challenger parties in Slovakia, 1992–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

SLOVENIA

Since independence in 1991, Slovenia has maintained a competitive multi-party system characterised by frequent party turnover and coalition governments. Successive governments have shared a broad consensus in favour of European integration and Western institutions. The principal challenge to liberal-democratic norms has not come from fringe extremist parties but from the mainstream centre-right Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), whose ideological development under Janez Janša has often been compared with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary.

The first significant challenger party emerged on the nationalist right. The Slovenian National Party (SNS), founded in 1991, won around 10% of the vote in the 1992 election. The party combines hard-line nationalism with opposition to immigration, minority rights, the European Union and NATO, and has frequently been described as far right. Although SNS has never entered government, it provided parliamentary support to the minority government between 2018 and 2020. Electoral support has gradually declined, however, and the party has failed to clear the parliamentary threshold in four of the past five elections.

Slovenian Democratic Party

The Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) followed a markedly different trajectory. Founded in 1989 as the Social Democratic Party, it emerged from the anti-communist opposition movement during the final years of Yugoslavia. Janez Janša, who has led the party since 1993, played a prominent role in Slovenia's independence as defence minister before being dismissed following a political scandal.

Around the turn of the millennium, SDS abandoned its social-democratic identity, adopted its current name, and repositioned itself as a liberal-conservative party within the European People's Party (EPP). At the same time, Janša gradually steered the party in a more nationalist and populist direction. Although SDS has remained firmly pro-Western and supportive of EU and NATO membership, critics have increasingly accused it of undermining liberal-democratic norms.

SDS has been one of Slovenia's two dominant governing parties since independence. Janša served as prime minister between 2004–08, again from 2012–13, and for a third time between 2020 and 2022. Although SDS finished second in the 2026 parliamentary election, Janša again succeeded in assembling a parliamentary majority and returned as prime minister for a fourth time.

Although each government pursued somewhat different priorities, concerns over democratic standards have centred on the party's relationship with independent institutions rather than its economic or foreign policies.

The most persistent criticism has concerned media freedom. During its periods in office, SDS was repeatedly accused of politicising public broadcasting, appointing political allies to senior media positions, using state-owned companies to pressure critical newspapers, and building a network of party-aligned media

outlets. Janša himself adopted an increasingly confrontational style towards journalists – earning the nickname ‘Marshal Tweeto’ – while both Freedom House (2022) and V-Dem (Boese 2022) concluded that his third government represented a significant deterioration in Slovenia’s democratic standards.

In 2007, a secret agreement reportedly gave Janša influence over editorial appointments at the country’s largest newspaper, *Delo*, prompting resignations and protests from Slovenian journalists.

Ideologically, SDS today combines liberal-conservative economic policies with a strong emphasis on immigration, national identity and traditional values. The party remains firmly committed to Slovenia’s membership of both the European Union and NATO, but has become increasingly critical of further European integration and has positioned itself as one of the EPP’s most outspoken conservative members. Janša has cultivated close political ties with Viktor Orbán and has repeatedly expressed admiration for Donald Trump, portraying both as defenders of national sovereignty against liberal elites.[78] Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, SDS has remained consistently pro-Ukrainian and supportive of NATO, distinguishing it from many parties on the European populist right.

Despite these controversies, SDS has remained one of Slovenia’s two dominant governing parties and has consistently belonged to the EPP family. Since Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004, the party has continuously been represented in the European Parliament. In 2026, however, MEP Branko Grims was expelled from the EPP Group after cooperating with the far-right Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN).

78 ‘Slovenia election pits liberals against populist right in tight race’, *Reuters*, 19 March 2026.

Levica

Levica (The Left) was founded in 2014 by several green, socialist and radical-left movements that had emerged from the anti-austerity protests of 2012–13. Although often described as left-wing populist because of its anti-elite rhetoric, the party combines democratic socialism with progressive positions on social issues and strong scepticism towards NATO. After supporting a centre-left minority government between 2018 and 2020, Levica entered government following the 2022 election, marking the first participation of the Slovenian radical left in national government. Following the 2026 election, Levica returned to opposition.

Resni.ca

Another recent challenger is Resni.ca ('Let's Get Real'), founded in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic as an anti-lockdown movement. Initially centred on opposition to vaccination requirements and pandemic restrictions, the party has since broadened its platform to include criticism of immigration, climate policies and the political establishment. In the 2026 parliamentary election, Resni.ca entered parliament for the first time, winning five seats.

Since entering parliament, the party has played an important role in the formation of Janez Janša's fourth government, helping elect its leader, Zoran Stevanović, as Speaker of Parliament and providing parliamentary support to the new centre-right majority while remaining formally outside the cabinet.

Resni.ca has repeatedly been described as pro-Russian. Party leader Zoran Stevanović has strongly criticised Western sanctions against Russia, advocated a referendum on Slovenia's NATO membership and, after becoming Speaker of Parliament in 2026, announced plans to visit Moscow in an effort

to rebuild dialogue between Russia and the West.[79] The party has also promoted conspiracy-oriented narratives and strongly anti-establishment rhetoric, reinforcing its profile as one of Slovenia's most system-critical political movements.

Unlike many other Central European countries, Slovenia has never elected either a far-right or a radical-left MEP to one of the European Parliament's political groups on the extremes. The country's principal challenge to liberal democracy has instead come from within the European mainstream through the evolution of the SDS.

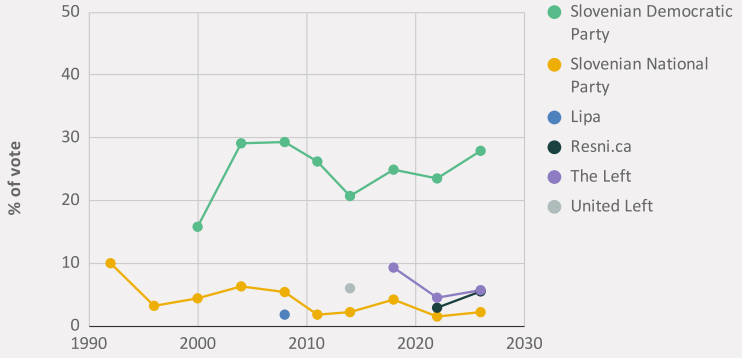
79 'Besede predsednika državnega zbora Stevanovića o obisku v Moskvi in referendumu o Natu opažene v tujini', *N1 Slovenija*, 15 April 2026 (https://n1info.si/volitve-2026/besede-predsednika-drzavnega-zbora-stevanovica-o-obisku-v-moskvi-in-referendumu-o-natu-opazene-v-tujini/)

SDS summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Levica summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Resni.ca summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: high

Figure 36. Vote share of challenger parties in Slovenia, 1992–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

SPAIN

Since the transition to democracy after Franco's death in 1975, Spanish politics has been dominated nationally by two major parties, the socialist PSOE and the conservative PP. At the same time, Spain has one of Europe's most decentralised political systems. The 17 autonomous communities have their own parliaments and governments, and regional party systems differ substantially from one another. Regionalist and nationalist parties have therefore played an unusually important role, particularly in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Navarre and the Canary Islands. They have frequently held the balance of power in the national parliament and have, on several occasions, been necessary for the formation or survival of governments in Madrid.

This multilevel structure has contributed to an unusually fragmented party landscape. Especially on the left, Spain has produced a large number of radical, regionalist, and nationalist parties, often participating in broad electoral alliances that differ between elections and territories.

Communist Party of Spain (PCE)

The Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was formed in 1921 as a breakaway from the Socialist Party. It operated illegally under the Franco dictatorship but became one of the principal organised

forces of opposition. Following Franco's death in 1975, the PCE was legalised in 1977 and finished third in the first democratic parliamentary election later that year.

The party increasingly adopted Eurocommunism, accepting political pluralism, parliamentary democracy and a peaceful transition towards socialism. This contributed to splits by more orthodox communist factions. In 1986, the PCE joined several smaller left-wing organisations to establish the umbrella organisation United Left (IU). Since then, the PCE has generally contested national elections through IU or broader electoral coalitions rather than independently.

Unlike many West European communist parties, the PCE/IU did not collapse after the fall of the Eastern Bloc. IU instead achieved some of its strongest results in the 1990s. Ideological tensions nevertheless remained. In 2017, the PCE formally restored Marxism-Leninism as its ideological definition, while in practice the party continued to operate as a democratic radical-left force.[80] It has also become strongly progressive on social issues and increasingly emphasised environmental politics.

Podemos

Podemos was founded in 2014 by Pablo Iglesias and other activists associated with the anti-austerity protest movement. It achieved an immediate breakthrough in the 2014 European Parliament election and entered the national parliament the following year. Together with Syriza in Greece, Podemos became a leading

80 'Vuelve el PCE' se presenta esta semana en Sevilla, Málaga y Córdoba para 'reivindicar su propia personalidad', *Europa Press*, 16 July 2018 (https://www.europapress.es/andalucia/noticia-vuelve-pce-presenta-semana-sevilla-malaga-cordoba-reivindicar-propia-personalidad-20180716170403.html)

example of the new European populist left that emerged after the financial and euro crises.

Podemos also attracted criticism over its conception of democracy and its relationship with the Latin American populist left. Its early strategy was explicitly influenced by the theories of Ernesto Laclau and by the political experiences of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, constructing politics as a conflict between *the people* and *la casta*, a supposedly self-serving political and economic elite. This approach emphasised popular sovereignty and participatory democracy but also contained a more majoritarian understanding of democracy, with less emphasis on pluralism and institutional constraints.

The relationship with Venezuela was particularly controversial. Several leading founders of Podemos had previously worked with or advised institutions connected to Hugo Chávez's government, and Pablo Iglesias had publicly praised aspects of the Bolivarian political model.[81] The party later distanced itself from Venezuela as the Maduro regime became increasingly authoritarian, but the break was gradual. In 2015 Podemos opposed a European Parliament resolution calling for the release of Venezuelan political prisoners, and in early 2016 it declined to join other major Spanish parties in a declaration demanding that Maduro respect the opposition's victory in the parliamentary election.[82] At the same time, Podemos increasingly criticised Maduro's behaviour and denied that the Venezuelan government had financed the party.

These positions raised doubts about Podemos's liberal-democratic instincts in its early years. However, the party did not challenge

81 'Foundation linked to new party Podemos received €3.7m from Hugo Chávez', *El País*, 18 June 2014 (https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2014/06/18/inenglish/1403082454_361529.html)

82 'Podemos elude apoyar la democracia en Venezuela', *El País*, 4 January 2016.

electoral competition or advocate authoritarian rule in Spain, and participation in parliament and later in coalition government substantially reduced its original anti-system character. Its trajectory is therefore better understood as one of a strongly populist and initially illiberal-leaning radical-left party that became increasingly institutionalised rather than as an anti-democratic party in the conventional sense.

After the inconclusive 2015 election, it formed an alliance with IU under the name Unidos Podemos for the 2016 election, subsequently developing into the broader Unidas Podemos coalition. After another election in November 2019, Unidas Podemos entered a coalition government with PSOE in January 2020. This represented a major step in the institutionalisation of the radical left: for the first time since the democratic transition, ministers from a political force clearly to the left of the Socialists entered the national government.

During its period in government, Unidas Podemos contributed to a substantial shift in Spanish socioeconomic and social policy. The coalition increased the minimum wage, introduced a national minimum-income scheme, revised the labour legislation adopted under the previous conservative government, and passed Spain's first national housing law, which included mechanisms to limit rent increases in high-pressure housing markets. It also pursued strongly progressive policies on gender and LGBT issues, including the transgender rights law promoted by Equality Minister Irene Montero.

Government participation nevertheless generated increasing internal tensions. Iglesias left national politics in 2021, while Labour Minister Yolanda Díaz gradually became the most prominent figure of the broader alternative left. Her political style was less confrontational and less explicitly populist than Iglesias's.

Díaz subsequently created Sumar as a broader platform bringing together IU, the PCE, Más País/Más Madrid, the Catalan Comuns, green parties and other regional left-wing organisations. Podemos reluctantly joined the alliance for the 2023 general election, in which Sumar received 12.3% of the vote. The relationship was already deeply conflictual, particularly over leadership, candidate selection and the exclusion of prominent Podemos figures such as Irene Montero.

After the election, Sumar entered a new PSOE-led coalition government and received five cabinet posts, with Díaz continuing as deputy prime minister and labour minister. Podemos received no ministries. In December 2023, its five MPs left the Sumar parliamentary group, completing the organisational split.

Since then, Podemos and Sumar have competed separately. Podemos returned to a more confrontational opposition profile, criticising the government from the left on housing, foreign policy and social spending. In the 2024 European election, Sumar received 4.7% and three seats while Podemos won 3.3% and two, illustrating the fragmentation of the alternative left. Attempts to rebuild a broader alliance continued through 2025–26, but by the summer of 2026 the principal organisations remained divided, and Podemos continued to pursue an independent strategy.

The far right largely disappeared from parliamentary politics during the first decades after Franco. The principal explicitly Francoist organisation was Fuerza Nueva (FN), which remained electorally marginal and disappeared during the 1980s. Parts of the extra-parliamentary extreme right were involved in political violence during the democratic transition.

Spain consequently remained an important European exception for several decades: despite the survival of socially conservative and nationalist currents within the PP, no electorally successful radical-right party existed independently of the mainstream right.

Vox

This changed with Vox. The party was founded in 2013, partly by former members of the PP, and Santiago Abascal became its leader the following year. After several years of electoral failure, Vox achieved its first major breakthrough in the 2018 Andalusian regional election and subsequently received 15.1% in the November 2019 general election, becoming the third-largest party in parliament.

Vox is strongly Spanish nationalist and centralist. It seeks to reverse much of Spain's territorial decentralisation, sharply reduce the powers of the autonomous communities and take a particularly hard line against Catalan and Basque separatism. Its rhetoric frequently distinguishes between patriotic Spaniards and forces portrayed as belonging to an *anti-España*, including separatists, the radical left and parts of the cultural establishment.

The party is strongly conservative on sociocultural issues. It opposes further liberalisation of abortion, rejects much of contemporary feminist and gender-equality policy, campaigns against LGBT and transgender legislation, and increasingly presents immigration and Islam as threats to security and national cohesion. Economically, Vox remains broadly on the right, favouring tax reductions, deregulation and a smaller state, although nationalist and protectionist elements have become more prominent as the party has developed.

Vox is eurosceptic but does not advocate Spanish withdrawal from the European Union. Instead, it supports a Europe of sovereign nation-states and opposes further supranational integration. It has developed close relations with other nationalist parties in Europe and joined the Patriots for Europe group after the 2024 European election.

The party has also maintained unusually close links with Donald Trump and the American populist right. Abascal openly supported Trump during the 2020 presidential election. After major American media organisations had projected Joe Biden as the winner, Vox initially refused to recognise his victory and insisted on waiting for the formal certification of the result.[83]

Internal tensions have periodically emerged between a more economically liberal wing and a harder nationalist and socially conservative faction. Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, one of the party's founders and a prominent representative of the more economically liberal tendency, left active politics in 2023. His departure was widely interpreted as evidence that the nationalist, culture-war-oriented faction around Abascal had consolidated control.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Vox and the mainstream PP has become considerably closer than during Vox's initial breakthrough. After the 2023 regional and local elections, the two parties formed governing arrangements in a number of autonomous communities, including several formal coalition governments. PP thus increasingly treated Vox as a legitimate coalition partner rather than attempting to isolate it.

This rapprochement has also contributed to a broader shift in Spanish politics towards more restrictive positions on immigration. Migration became increasingly salient as arrivals to the Canary Islands and other entry routes rose, while Vox consistently pushed the issue towards the centre of political competition. The PP adopted a harder rhetoric of its own, although signifi-

83 'Vox se niega a reconocer la derrota de Trump y aún no considera vencedor a Biden', *20 Minutos*, 10 November 2020 (https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/4469233/0/vox-se-niega-a-reconocer-la-derrota-de-trump-y-aun-no-considera-vencedor-a-biden/)

cant differences remained over the extent of deportations and burden-sharing between regions.

These differences produced a major rupture in July 2024. Vox withdrew from five regional coalition governments with the PP after the latter accepted the redistribution of several hundred unaccompanied migrant minors from the Canary Islands to other regions. Abascal argued that the policy endangered Spaniards and accused the PP of facilitating mass immigration.

The split did not restore the earlier cordon around Vox. Cooperation between the two parties continued on numerous issues and in some regions subsequently resumed or survived in other forms. By 2026, migration had become one of the principal areas in which Vox attempted to force the PP further to the right, advocating immediate repatriation of irregular migrants, deportation of foreign citizens convicted of crimes, and broader policies of ‘remigration’.

The growing importance of migration has been reinforced by increasing pressure on Spain’s border regions. Continued arrivals to the Canary Islands and, most dramatically, the migration crisis in Ceuta in the summer of 2026 kept immigration near the centre of national political debate.

The radical-right space has also become more fragmented. In the 2024 European Parliament election, the anti-establishment platform Se Acabó la Fiesta (SALF, ‘The Party is Over’), led by social-media activist Luiz ‘Alvise’ Pérez, unexpectedly received 4.6% of the vote and won three seats. This placed it only five percentage points behind Vox and made it one of the most striking new entrants in the election.

Pérez had built a large online following through an intensely anti-establishment and anti-corruption message, frequently combined with disinformation and highly confrontational attacks on

politicians and journalists. He summarised his approach during the 2024 campaign by saying that he had not entered into politics to reform the system but to destroy it.[84] SALF initially lacked a conventional party organisation or detailed programme, functioning largely as a personal vehicle for Pérez.

The movement subsequently became more ideologically defined. By 2025, Pérez was campaigning for mass deportations of irregular migrants, large tax reductions and a referendum on whether Spain should remain in the European Union. SALF therefore developed from a primarily anti-corruption and anti-system protest vehicle into a more recognisably radical-right, nationalist and hard-eurosceptic party.

SALF has nevertheless been highly unstable. Two of its three elected MEPs subsequently broke with Pérez, while Pérez himself became the subject of several judicial investigations and controversies. By 2026, the movement remained electorally relevant but was still far less organisationally developed than Vox.

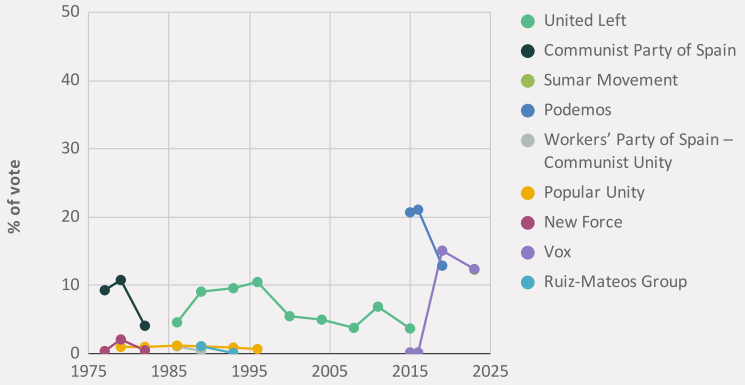
84 ‘El auge de Alvise Pérez y por qué ha logrado tres eurodiputados y 800.000 votos’, *El País*, 10 June 2024 (https://elpais.com/espana/2024-06-10/el-auge-de-alvise-perez-y-por-que-ha-logrado-tres-eurodiputados-y-casi-800000-votos.html)

PCE summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Vox summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Podemos summary
Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 37. Vote share of challenger parties in Spain, 1977–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

SWEDEN

Sweden was long regarded as one of Europe's most stable party systems. For much of the post-war period, the Social Democrats (S) dominated Swedish politics, while no new party entered parliament between 1936 and 1988. The main challenger in recent decades has been the Sweden Democrats (SD), which has developed from a marginal far-right movement into one of the country's largest parties. Since 2022, the party has exercised substantial influence over government policy through the Tidö Agreement while remaining outside the cabinet.

Left Party

For many decades, the principal challenge to Sweden's established parties came from the left. The Communist Party of Sweden (SKP) was formed through a split from the Social Democrats (S) during the revolutionary year of 1917. Throughout the post-war period, the party remained loyal to Moscow. It supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, while at the same time endorsing Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation. A gradual ideological shift began after C-H Hermansson became party leader in 1964. Under his leadership, the party condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. At the 1969 party congress, a pro-Soviet faction based primarily in northern Sweden protested against the leadership's criticism of the Soviet Union, leading

to several splits. None of the breakaway parties achieved lasting electoral success.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Left Party Communists (VPK), like several other Western European communist parties, gradually moved towards democratic socialism while maintaining generally friendly relations with the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. After decades of political isolation, the party entered into policy negotiations with the Social Democrats in the early 1980s. At the end of the decade, however, it briefly joined the centre-right opposition in bringing down a Social Democratic government.

In 1990, the party changed its name to the Left Party (V), reflecting its ambition to broaden its political appeal. Nevertheless, communism remained part of the party programme until the 1993 party congress, when it was formally abandoned as the party's official ideology. The party's communist heritage continued to generate internal debate. In the early 2000s, party leader Lars Ohly publicly described himself as a communist, a label that was also commonly embraced by members of the party's youth organisation.

Today, the Left Party defines itself as socialist and feminist. Some scholars classify it as a borderline case of left-wing populism, although it is more commonly described as a democratic socialist or radical-left party. It has never participated in government but has on several occasions provided confidence-and-supply support to Social Democratic minority governments. Economically, the party advocates radical left-wing policies, while taking progressive positions on social issues. It opposed Sweden's membership of the European Union and remained opposed to Sweden's accession to NATO. In recent years, however, it has moderated its euroscepticism. During the 2020s, the party has faced repeated controversies involving antisemitic statements by

local representatives. In 2026, several members were expelled following an investigation by the newspaper *Expressen*.[85]

Since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, the Left Party has been represented in the European Parliament's radical-left group.

To the right of the Moderate Party (M), Sweden's leading centre-right party, a political vacuum existed for many decades. This changed with the emergence of New Democracy (NyD), a right-wing populist party founded by the businessman Bert Karlsson and the aristocrat Ian Wachtmeister, which achieved rapid but short-lived electoral success in the early 1990s. In the 1991 parliamentary election, NyD won 6.7% of the vote on a platform combining tax cuts, deregulation and reduced bureaucracy with anti-establishment rhetoric. Although the party never entered into a formal confidence-and-supply agreement with the centre-right government, it exerted some influence over government policy during the 1991–94 parliamentary term.

NyD was characterised by weak organisation, internal conflicts and frequent leadership disputes. The party gradually adopted a more restrictive position on immigration, and by the 1994 election its rhetoric had become increasingly controversial, prompting the established parties to distance themselves because of repeated racist statements by leading representatives. Electoral support collapsed to 1.2% in the 1994 election, and the party soon disappeared from national politics.

Although its parliamentary career was brief, New Democracy demonstrated that there was an electoral constituency for

85 'Hela listan: 25 V-kandidater som firar terror och hyllar diktaturer', *Expressen*, 5 June 2026 (https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/politik/hela-listan-25-v-kandidater-som-firar-terror-och-hyllar-diktaturer/)

anti-establishment and immigration-critical politics outside the established party system.

Sweden Democrats

The Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) was founded in 1988. Most of its founders had previously been active in various far-right movements during the 1970s and 1980s, and the party was initially closely associated with neo-Nazism and the skinhead movement. During the 1990s, SD won a limited number of seats in local government but remained electorally insignificant at the national level. From the early 2000s onward, however, the party began a process of moderation. It abandoned explicitly racist elements of its migration policy, adopted a more professional organisation, and sought to expel members expressing neo-Nazi or antisemitic views. This process also resulted in several splits. The most significant were the National Democrats, founded in 2001, and Alternative for Sweden, established in 2018. Neither party has achieved lasting electoral success.

The Sweden Democrats entered parliament for the first time in 2010, winning 5.7% of the vote. The following year, the party adopted social conservatism as an official ideological label alongside nationalism, which had long formed the core of its programme. In 2014, SD won representation in the European Parliament and later that year more than doubled its support in the parliamentary election. Following the European refugee crisis in 2015, the party continued to gain support in the opinion polls. Until the 2018 election, however, all other parliamentary parties maintained a *cordon sanitaire* and refused to cooperate politically with SD.

The 2022 parliamentary election marked another milestone for the party. Having increased its vote share in nine consecutive parliamentary elections, SD became Sweden’s second-largest

party. Following the election, it participated for the first time in formal government negotiations with the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. These negotiations resulted in the Tidö Agreement, under which SD remained outside the government but exercised substantial influence over government policy through a detailed cooperation agreement. The party has primarily influenced migration and criminal justice policy, while the coalition parties have generally been able to reach agreement on economic policy. In the 2026 election, however, the Tidö parties lost their parliamentary majority. SD fell from 20.5% to 17.5%, its first decline in a parliamentary election, and lost its position as Sweden's second-largest party to the Moderates. Jimmie Åkesson has led the party since 2005, making him one of Europe's longest-serving party leaders.

Over time, the Sweden Democrats have moderated several of their policy positions. The party no longer advocates an immediate Swedish withdrawal from the European Union, although it remains one of the country's most eurosceptic parties. It also abandoned its opposition to NATO membership before Sweden applied for membership in 2022. Additionally, the party underwent a marked change in its international orientation during the 2020s. While several leading representatives had previously expressed admiration for Donald Trump and some members adopted comparatively accommodating positions towards Vladimir Putin's Russia, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally altered the party's foreign policy profile. By 2025–26, SD had become one of Europe's most pro-Ukrainian national-conservative parties. Although the party remained broadly sympathetic to the Trump administration, it increasingly distanced itself from those elements of the European radical right that sought closer relations with Russia.

On social issues, SD remains socially conservative but occupies relatively moderate positions by European standards. For example, the party supports Sweden's liberal abortion legislation and

equal legal treatment of same-sex couples, although it previously advocated considerably more conservative policies in both areas. Economically, the party has gradually moved from a more welfare-oriented profile towards the centre-right, while continuing to defend an expansive welfare state.

The Sweden Democrats are generally regarded as a democratic but anti-liberal party. The party's 2019 ideological programme explicitly endorses representative democracy while arguing that democracy should not be equated with liberal values. It also advocates stronger elements of direct democracy and argues that a common national and cultural identity is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy.

At the same time, the party has expressed reservations about several core elements of liberal democracy. Leading representatives have criticised minority rights, questioned aspects of judicial and media independence, expressed scepticism towards international conventions, and argued for greater political influence over publicly funded research and education, particularly gender studies. Several prominent party representatives have also expressed admiration for political developments in Hungary under Viktor Orbán and, to a lesser extent, Poland under Law and Justice. However, there is limited evidence that SD has sought to pursue comparable institutional reforms within the framework of the Tidö Agreement.

The Sweden Democrats won representation in the European Parliament for the first time in 2014. In 2014, the party joined the newly formed Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group. In 2018, it transferred to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), where it remains today. In the 2024 European Parliament election, SD lost vote share for the first time in a nationwide election but retained its three seats.

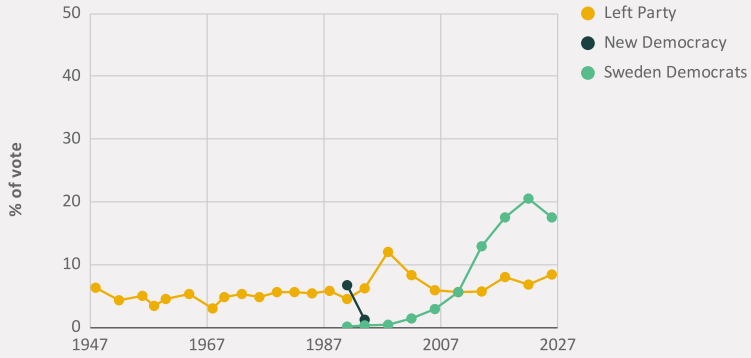
SD summary

Economics: centre
Social issues: moderate
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Left Party summary

Economics: left
Social issues: progressive
EU: soft euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: low

Figure 38. Vote share of challenger parties in Sweden, 1948–2026



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

SWITZERLAND

Switzerland stands out from the other countries in the study because of its distinctive constitutional and democratic structure. Political power is highly decentralised, with considerable authority resting with the cantons, while direct democracy plays an unusually important role through frequent referendums and popular initiatives. Representative and direct democracy are combined with a system of consociational government in which the major parties share executive power in the seven-member Federal Council.

Switzerland is included in the study from 1971, when women gained the right to vote and stand for election at the federal level. Switzerland was one of the last European countries to introduce women's suffrage, followed only by Liechtenstein. While several smaller parties have subsequently challenged the established parties without achieving lasting national success, Switzerland has also produced one of Europe's earliest and most successful radical-right parties.

Swiss People's Party

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) was established in 1971 through the merger of the agrarian Farmers, Traders and Citizens' Party with the Democratic parties of Glarus and Graubünden. Initially

the smallest of the major governing parties, the SVP was transformed during the 1980s and especially the 1990s under the influence of Christoph Blocher and the increasingly dominant Zurich branch. Combining opposition to European integration with increasingly restrictive positions on immigration and asylum, it expanded rapidly during the 1990s. In 1999, the SVP became Switzerland's largest party by vote share for the first time, a position it has retained in every subsequent federal election.

Under Blocher and his successors, the SVP combined participation in Switzerland's consensus-based political institutions with an increasingly confrontational and anti-establishment political style. Immigration and asylum have remained central issues, often framed in strongly nationalist and at times xenophobic terms, and opposed on both economic and cultural grounds. This remained evident in 2026, when the SVP promoted a referendum initiative to cap Switzerland's permanent resident population at 10 million until 2050. If the population exceeded 9.5 million, the proposal would have required measures particularly on asylum and family reunification, and ultimately the termination of agreements contributing to population growth, including the EU agreement on free movement. The initiative was rejected by 54.8 to 45.2%, but the relatively strong support illustrated the continued salience of immigration as a core SVP issue.

The party also strongly defends Swiss sovereignty and neutrality, opposes EU membership and deeper European integration, and is sceptical of international commitments that constrain national autonomy. More recently, it opposed many COVID-19 restrictions and has been critical of Switzerland's participation in sanctions against Russia.

Economically, the SVP is broadly on the right, advocating lower taxes, reduced public spending and restrictions on welfare benefits. At the same time, its agrarian roots are reflected in support

for agricultural protection and subsidies. On social issues, it remains strongly conservative.

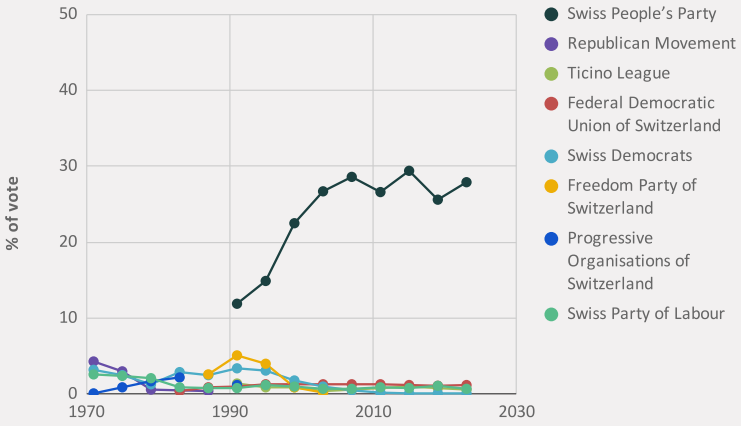
The SVP is unusual among the parties examined in this study for combining radical-right and anti-establishment politics with long-standing participation in national government. Its predecessor entered the Federal Council as early as 1929, and the party has remained part of Switzerland's power-sharing system for most of the period covered here. Its rise therefore represents less a challenge from outside the political system than a radicalisation of one of its established governing parties.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the SVP also faced competition from smaller right-wing populist parties, notably the Swiss Democrats and the Freedom Party of Switzerland. Neither established itself as a durable national competitor, and much of the political space they occupied was subsequently absorbed by the expanding SVP.

SVP summary

Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 39. Vote share of challenger parties in Switzerland, 1971–2023



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom stands out from the other countries in the study because of its electoral system. Elections to the House of Commons use a first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies, strongly favouring large parties and penalising parties whose support is geographically dispersed. This has historically reinforced a two-party system and made it exceptionally difficult for new challenger parties to translate substantial voter support into parliamentary representation. In 2015, for example, UKIP received 12.6% of the national vote but won only one of 650 seats. Similarly, the Liberal Democrats received 11.5% in 2019 but won only 11 seats.

Another consequence has been that radical political currents have often been accommodated within the major parties themselves. Labour has historically contained revolutionary and radical socialist factions, while the Conservatives have accommodated nationalist, socially conservative and strongly eurosceptic tendencies. The transformation of the Conservative Party during the Brexit period illustrates how political demands originating outside the established party system can eventually reshape one of the major parties.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) originated in the Anti-Federalist League, established by academic Alan Sked in 1991, and adopted its new name in 1993. After internal con-

flicts, Sked left the party in 1997 and subsequently argued that nationalist and racist elements had gained increasing influence. Nigel Farage emerged as the party's dominant figure and gradually broadened its appeal beyond opposition to European integration, increasingly emphasising immigration, national identity and criticism of the political establishment.

The strategy produced a series of breakthroughs. UKIP made major gains in the 2013 local elections, finished first in the 2014 European Parliament election and received 12.6% of the vote in the 2015 general election. Its greatest political achievement was nevertheless the referendum on EU membership in 2016. UKIP had campaigned for such a referendum for years, and the victory of the Leave side effectively accomplished the party's principal objective. Farage resigned shortly afterwards, and UKIP rapidly declined.

UKIP is generally classified as a right-wing populist or populist radical-right party. It combined hard euroscepticism and British nationalism with strong opposition to immigration and multiculturalism and increasingly portrayed Islam as a threat to British culture.

Reform UK

Farage subsequently became the central figure in the Brexit Party, founded in 2019 to ensure that the result of the referendum was implemented. It won the 2019 European Parliament election with more than 30% of the vote. In the general election later that year, it received 2% nationally after choosing not to contest constituencies held by the Conservatives, thereby reducing the risk of splitting the pro-Brexit vote.

The party was renamed Reform UK in 2021 and initially focused heavily on opposing COVID-19 lockdowns. It subsequently

developed into a broader nationalist and populist party, with immigration, Brexit, taxation, crime, opposition to net-zero climate policies and criticism of the political establishment as its principal themes.

Reform achieved its first major national breakthrough in the 2024 general election. With Farage once again as leader, the party received 14.3% of the vote, the third-highest vote share nationally, and won five seats. The electoral system remained a major obstacle: Reform received more votes than the Liberal Democrats but won five seats compared with 72 for the Liberal Democrats.

The breakthrough continued during 2025. Reform won the Runcorn and Helsby by-election from Labour by six votes, overturning a large Labour majority from the previous year. In the English local elections it won 677 seats and control of ten councils, as well as the newly created mayoralties of Greater Lincolnshire and Hull and East Yorkshire. The results provided Reform with something UKIP had largely lacked: a substantial organisation and political presence in local government.

The electoral advances were accompanied by an extraordinary rise in opinion polls. Reform first led a national YouGov poll in February 2025 and later established a substantial lead, peaking at 34% in an Ipsos poll that September. The party remained competitive through 2026, but its support gradually declined and by September, Labour had moved ahead.

Ideologically, Reform combines economic liberalism with elements of economic nationalism and welfare chauvinism. It has advocated substantial tax cuts, deregulation, lower public spending and opposition to climate-related costs, placing it clearly on the economic right. During 2026 it moved further in this direction, proposing welfare savings of around £50 billion, including major reductions in disability benefits and excluding most foreign na-

tionals from large parts of the welfare system. At the same time, it protects politically popular programmes such as state pensions.

On sociocultural issues, the party has become increasingly conservative. Reform advocates drastic reductions in immigration, much stronger border enforcement and large-scale deportations of illegal migrants and foreign criminals. It has increasingly linked immigration to crime, cultural cohesion and Islam, while senior representatives have attacked multiculturalism, progressive gender politics and what the party describes as ‘woke’ institutions. These positions place Reform substantially to the right of the contemporary Conservative Party on immigration and national identity, although it remains less consistently socially conservative on issues such as abortion and homosexuality than many continental radical-right parties.

The party has also experienced recurring problems with candidates and activists expressing racist, antisemitic, misogynistic or homophobic views. A particularly prominent case occurred during the February 2026 Gorton and Denton by-election, where Reform selected political commentator Matthew Goodwin. Members of his campaign team were exposed for racist and antisemitic social-media posts; his interim campaign manager Adam Mitula had used racist language, made homophobic claims and minimised the Holocaust. Reform suspended him, although he subsequently reappeared as an election agent for party candidates. Goodwin himself finished second with 28%, behind the Green candidate but ahead of Labour.

Farage’s relationship with Donald Trump has long distinguished Reform from much of the traditional British right. Farage supported Trump from his first presidential campaign, appeared with him during the 2016 campaign and has repeatedly described their relationship as close. Trump, in turn, praised Farage after Brexit and suggested he should become British ambassador to the United States. The relationship remained important after

Trump's return to the presidency in 2025, although it increasingly became a political liability as Trump became unpopular among British voters. Farage has occasionally distanced himself from Trump, notably rejecting his claim that Volodymyr Zelensky was a dictator,[86] while continuing to defend the relationship broadly. By 2026 he was considerably less inclined to emphasise his personal proximity to the president.

Reform has generally remained supportive of NATO and Western defence, distinguishing it from the pro-Russian section of the European radical right. Farage has nevertheless been more sceptical than the British mainstream about the extent of Western involvement in Ukraine and has repeatedly argued that NATO and EU expansion contributed to provoking Russia, while also describing Russia's invasion as wrong.

Reform's relationship with liberal democracy is more ambiguous than that of most established conservative parties. The party accepts electoral democracy and has not advocated restrictions on political competition, but several of its positions challenge important liberal constraints on majority rule. Most notably, it supports withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights, major restrictions on legal avenues used to prevent deportations, and the abolition of parts of the existing equality legislation. Farage also employs strongly populist rhetoric, portraying the political establishment as a self-serving elite or 'uniparty' that has betrayed the popular will expressed in the Brexit referendum. His long-standing political affinity with Donald Trump adds to these concerns, although Farage has distanced himself from some of Trump's more explicitly anti-democratic claims.

86 'Farage says Zelenskyy is not a dictator and Trump "should not be taken literally"', *Sky News*, 20 February 2025 (https://news.sky.com/story/farage-says-zelenskyy-is-not-a-dictator-and-trump-should-not-be-taken-literally-13313289)

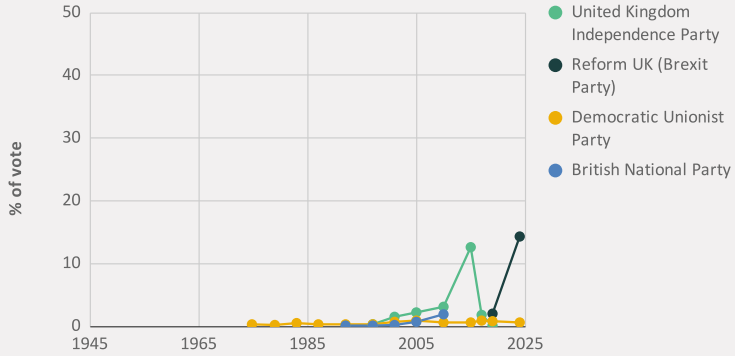
The rapid growth of Reform has produced tensions on its own right flank. Rupert Lowe, elected as a Reform MP for Great Yarmouth in 2024, became increasingly critical of Farage's highly centralised leadership. Elon Musk, who had initially appeared interested in supporting Reform financially, publicly turned against Farage in January 2025 and suggested that he should be replaced. Lowe was among the figures Musk praised as a possible future leader. After a bitter internal conflict, Reform suspended Lowe in March 2025; he subsequently sat as an independent. Prosecutors later decided not to pursue allegations that he had threatened Reform chairman Zia Yusuf.

Lowe moved further to the right and formally launched Restore Britain as a political party in February 2026. The party presents itself not as an attempt to reform the existing political settlement but as a fundamental rejection of it. It advocates mass deportations, a ban on the burqa and niqab, restrictions on Islamic practices, and a ban on non-stunned halal and kosher slaughter. It also proposes a binding referendum on restoring the death penalty, the repeal of legal gender recognition and major restrictions on postal voting.

Restore Britain has so far remained a small party but has demonstrated some electoral potential. In its first parliamentary by-election, in Makerfield in June 2026, it received 6.8% of the vote and finished third, while Reform received 34.5%. Polling in which Restore Britain is explicitly offered as an option has subsequently put the party at a few per cent nationally.

Reform summary
Economics: right
Social issues: conservative
EU: hard euroscepticism
Authoritarianism: medium

Figure 40. Vote share of challenger parties in the United Kingdom, 1945–2024



Source: Authoritarian Populism Index 2026

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