

The Far Right's Political Power Is Expected To Grow In EU Elections



C.J. Polychroniou

06-06-2024 ~ Far right and hardline conservative parties may emerge as the third-biggest political force in the European Parliament.

Every five years, citizens of European Union (EU) governments elect their representatives as members of the European Parliament. With 720 seats up for grabs, this year's election, which will take place from June 6-9, is especially crucial for the future of the continent for several reasons.

First, the deadliest war on European soil in more than 70 years has been going on since February 24, 2022, yet Europe remains politically subservient to the United States and is thus completely incapable of forging a strategy of its own to deal with the Ukraine crisis.

Second, Europe is facing an [economic stagnation](#) so severe that its [economic laggards](#), namely Greece, Portugal and Spain — peripheral countries with severe vulnerabilities as they rely excessively on imports and tourism while carrying high public debt and facing high unemployment levels — have become the EU's top economic performers.

Third, democracy in European states has been in decline for several years now. For example, declines in the [rule of law and freedom of the press](#) are well documented, while the recent bans of pro-Palestine protests speak volumes of

Europe's democracy deficiencies. Meanwhile, far right parties are making big inroads across Europe.

Fourth, the EU has failed as a political and economic union in promoting integration, in defending humanistic values and in securing prosperity for future generations. It has also failed, subsequently, to create a framework for collective governance. These failures are built into the architecture of this Frankenstein-like entity as the EU was not intended to be democratic and its institutions and their decision-making procedures lack democratic legitimacy.

It is for all the above reasons that many Europeans have become disillusioned with mainstream political parties and why far right parties are gaining support, with [young people fueling the growth of right-wing extremism](#).

In the 2019 elections for the European Parliament, 50.7 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. This was a historic turnout, although there was a dramatic difference between different EU member states. In some countries, such as in Belgium and Luxembourg, voter turnout was over 80 percent, but less than 30 percent voted in central and eastern European countries like [Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic](#). There was also lower turnout in Italy, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Malta and Bulgaria. While overall, Europeans vote more for their heads of government than for representatives in the European Parliament, it seems that socioeconomic indicators play a crucial role: Voter turnout is lower in countries where the average salary is lower, though there are exceptions. Nonetheless, [the voter turnout in 2019 was the highest it had been in 20 years](#).

The outcome of the 2019 European Parliament elections was a mix of encouraging and ominous results. First, pundits who had predicted a huge surge of far right parties were proven wrong, but the EU's political landscape was nonetheless shaken up as mainstream political parties (center-left and center-right parties), which had dominated the EU since its inception, lost their majority for the first time in the European Parliament. Nationalist and far right parties ended up with more representation in the European Parliament after the 2019 elections than in any previous one, but the Greens also did quite well, winning more seats (55) than ever before in the European Parliament.

In sum, there was no such thing as "[a new dawn](#)" for the far right. Still, it was obvious that the far right was on the march as it scored well not only in countries

where it had already taken root (such as in France, Italy, Austria and Hungary), but also saw increases in other countries, including Germany, Sweden and Spain. But the alternative and radical left won just 5 percent of the vote, losing 14 seats and ending up with just 38 seats in total. Radical parties of the left are facing a truly existential crisis in Europe and there are no signs of a turnaround. Europe's radical left is fractured, demoralized and lacks a vision for the future, let alone a strategy for radical social change. Its economic agenda and rhetoric have been hijacked by the far right as the left narrative is no longer about the working class.

Unsurprisingly enough, and given that the economic and political environment across Europe has deteriorated since 2019 while far right ideas and parties have become mainstream and normalized in many member states, the [forecast](#) for the 2024 European Parliament elections is that there will be a major shift to the right and the far right, while center-left and green parties will lose seats. So, while we may still not witness a "new dawn" for the far right in 2024, it is quite certain that far right and hardline conservative parties will emerge as the third-biggest political force in the next European Parliament. The only consolation from this ominous development is that, for the time being, the far right is divided. [Marine Le Pen](#), the leader of the National Rally party in France, has distanced herself from Germany's AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) and is making overtures to Italy's Giorgia Meloni, who has emerged in the last two years as [Europe's most powerful right-wing leader](#) and is now widely regarded as a [kingmaker](#) ahead of the European elections.

Unlike the German far right AfD, and perhaps Le Pen's National Rally, Meloni does not want to dismantle the EU (she has not delivered on her election campaign promise to clash with the European Union elites) and has even tried to convince people that she rejects fascism, claiming it cannot coexist with democracy and that her far right party Brothers of Italy has [consigned fascism to history](#). Nonetheless, her migration policy and domestic policy measures, particularly in the areas of civil rights and social and cultural values, show that she is clearly pursuing a far right agenda, and her rhetoric finds a strong resonance with people who are drawn to fascism. Even so, Meloni has succeeded in being seen as a reliable partner of NATO and the U.S., while her foreign policy stances on Ukraine and Israel have erased whatever worries Brussels and Washington may initially have had about her leadership.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether Meloni will align herself with the center-

right or with the far right in the new European Parliament. The question about whether Meloni is a pragmatist or an ideological politician may very well be answered by the strategy that she decides to adopt in her role “as a kingmaker for the EU.” But the bigger question is whether this really matters much. The EU is failing Europe’s citizens, and perhaps a case can be made that it is disillusionment more than anything else that is driving Europeans to the far right since all mainstream political parties across the continent remain pro-EU. As a case in point, [the far right is surging even in Ireland](#) — and this is a country that had never before had a far right movement.

There are many factors — such as deindustrialization, profound economic inequalities, the decline of the welfare state and the failure of the left — that have contributed to the rise of extreme right-wing parties and movements in Europe. However, the most consistent theme of the far right’s platform is opposition to immigration, and occasionally opposition to feminism and to LGBTQ rights. It is also mainly anti-immigrant sentiment that is fueling the surge of far right politics in Ireland. In Germany, support for the AfD stems largely from opposition to the country’s policies on migration.

In sum, the reasons for the rise and surge of the far right in Europe abound; thus, there needs to be a multilevel strategy to confront the monsters of neo-fascism. Moreover, the results of the upcoming EU elections will surely tell us a great deal about the contemporary European state of mind and what may lie ahead for the continent. A “new dawn” for the far right isn’t out of the question. But even then, the European situation may not be as dramatic as the one facing U.S. voters in November, where their choice for the highest office in the land is between a former president who was rated by scholars as the worst president in U.S. history and is now convicted of falsifying business records, and an incumbent who is seen by many, both at home and abroad, as a war criminal.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular

contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).