Far-Right & Populist Surge

Far-Right & Populist Surge

Last updated: 25 May 2026

European Parliament Caucuses After 2024 Elections

The 2024 European Parliament elections saw significant gains for far-right and populist groups. Three main groupings cover the far-right spectrum:

1. Patriots for Europe (PfE)

- Formed June 2024 by Orbán, Le Pen, and others
- **Leader:** Jordan Bardella (RN)
- **Third-largest group** in the European Parliament — ~84 MEPs
- Includes: RN (France, 30 MEPs), Fidesz (Hungary, pre-defeat), Lega (Italy), FPÖ (Austria), PVV (Netherlands), Vlaams Belang (Belgium), Vox (Spain), Chega (Portugal), Danish People's Party
- Campaign slogan: "Make Europe Great Again" — held a "MEGA rally" in Madrid (Feb 2025)
- Fiercely anti-EU, nativist, anti-immigration, opposes climate policy

2. European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)

- Pre-existing group, centre-right to hard-right
- Largest component: Fratelli d'Italia (Meloni, 24 MEPs)
- Also includes PiS (Poland), ODS (Czech), Sweden Democrats, Finns Party
- **4th largest group** — ~70 MEPs
- More pro-Ukraine and pro-NATO than PfE
- Meloni has sought a "respectable far right" positioning — more willing to engage with the EPP

3. Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN)

- The farther-right, more radical group
- **Includes AfD** (Germany) — excluded by PfE as too extreme
- ~25-30 MEPs
- More explicitly ethno-nationalist, anti-EU, and pro-Russia

Overall: Far-right and hard-right MEPs across the three groups represent roughly 180-200 seats out of 720 — about 25-28% of the Parliament. They are not a majority but are large enough to influence debates and coalition formation.

Country-by-Country

?? France — Rassemblement National

- RN under Le Pen (figurehead) and Bardella (leader, MEP) is the dominant opposition force
- Topped 2024 European election in France with ~31%
- Positioning for **2027 presidential election** — Le Pen remains standard-bearer but Bardella increasingly presented as future
- Édouard Philippe (ex-PM, centrist/right) seen as early favourite "to beat populists" (BBC)
- RN continues to demand: tougher immigration, "national preference" in jobs and welfare, sovereignty from EU institutions
- **Concern:** Le Pen faces potential EU embezzlement trial appeal verdict (7 July 2026) — could bar her from standing

?? Germany — AfD, BSW, CDU Shift Right

- **AfD:** Polling 18-22% nationally — second-strongest party. Strong in eastern Germany. Categorised as *rechtsextrem* in several states. Lead candidate Alice Weidel. Described as "Russia-friendly" — Politico reported Putin's trolls boosting AfD
- **BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht):** Polling 5-8%. Left-populist, anti-immigration, anti-NATO, socially conservative. Complicates coalition arithmetic
- **CDU shift right:** Merz shifted CDU rightward on migration — "asylum turnaround," pushbacks, harder deportations. Deliberate strategy to undercut AfD support, risks normalising far-right positions
- **Centre-left decline:** SPD polling in low teens, Greens also declining (Politico: "Germany's center left is on the brink of oblivion")

?? Italy — Giorgia Meloni / Fratelli d'Italia

- In government since Oct 2022. Governing coalition with Forza Italia and Lega
- More pragmatic than feared on Ukraine and EU — but hard line on migration
- **Constitutional referendum defeat (23 March 2026):** 54% No vs 46% Yes — reform to separate judges/prosecutors rejected
- First significant electoral defeat for Meloni. Local elections (May 2026) showed coalition still performing well
- Press freedom concerns: Politico reported "A dangerous new phase: Under Meloni, concerns for press freedom in Italy mount"
- Polling still ~28-30% for FdI as of early 2026

?? Netherlands — Wilders / PVV

- PVV won 37 seats in Nov 2023 election (first place)
- Dick Schoof became PM (July 2024) — Wilders agreed not to take the premiership
- **Schoof cabinet collapsed (Feb 2026):** PVV withdrew June 2025, NSC withdrew Aug 2025
- **New election Oct 2025:** D66's Rob Jetten narrowly beat Wilders
- Jetten (38) became Netherlands' youngest ever and first openly gay PM (23 Feb 2026)
- Wilders now in opposition, vowing to oppose everything
- PVV had driven "strictest migration regime ever" — including opt-out from EU asylum rules

?? Austria — FPÖ

- **Herbert Kickl (FPÖ)** won the 2024 general election (~28.8%, first place)
- Could not initially form government due to cordon sanitaire by ÖVP and SPÖ
- By 2026, ÖVP increasingly willing to coalise — **FPÖ-ÖVP coalition likely as the next government**
- If Kickl becomes Chancellor, he would be Austria's first far-right leader since WWII
- Politico: "In Austria's Kickl, the EU has its next Orbán"
- Uses term "Volkskanzler" (Nazi connotations) and calls for "remigration"

?? Belgium — Vlaams Belang

- Led by Tom Van Grieken. Largest party in Flanders, ~17-20% nationally
- Came second in June 2024 federal election (surprise defeat to N-VA's De Wever)
- All Flemish parties maintain cordon sanitaire against VB
- Joined Orbán's Patriots for Europe in July 2024

?? Spain — Vox

- Led by Santiago Abascal. Third-largest party (~12-14%)
- Vox surged 2023 but could not enter government. PP falling short of majority

- In coalition with PP at regional level (Castile and León)
- Sánchez's move to grant legal status to 500,000 unauthorised immigrants (Apr 2026) — direct challenge to Vox

?? Portugal — Chega

- Led by André Ventura. Won 18% in March 2024 election (50 seats) — quadrupled 2022 result
- Centre-right AD governs with Chega's support in parliament
- Chega underperformed expectations in 2025 local elections — suggests a ceiling on support

?? Sweden — Sweden Democrats (SD)

- Led by Jimmie Åkesson. Second-largest party (~20-22%)
- Propping up Kristersson's centre-right coalition via Tidö Agreement
- Next election: 13 September 2026. SD positioning to strengthen its kingmaker role
- Successfully pushed most restrictive migration policy in Swedish history

?? Finland — Finns Party

- Led by Riikka Purra (also Finance Minister) — second-largest party, formal coalition partner
- Repeatedly damaged by racism scandals but remains in government ~18-20%
- Purra's position as Finance Minister in austerity government has forced compromises

?? Hungary — Orbán's Fall (April 2026)

The single biggest European political story of 2026.

- **Viktor Orbán** and Fidesz defeated after 16 years in power (since 2010)
- **Péter Magyar** and the Tisza Party won a landslide
- BBC: "Orbán's era was over in a flash and Hungary's next PM is a man in a hurry"
- **Why Orbán lost:** massive corruption scandal (pedophile cover-up), economy/inflation/cost-of-living crisis, EU funds frozen, Magyar's effective grassroots campaigning ("Walk for Hungary" demonstrations 2024-25), younger voters turning decisively against Fidesz, fatigue with "illiberal democracy" after 16 years
- **Magyar:** Pro-EU, anti-corruption, rule of law restoration, reconciliation with Brussels
- Trump's association became toxic — Politico: "Trump turns totally toxic for Europe's far right" (Apr 2026)
- Orbán's removal cleared the way for EU sanctions on Israeli settlers he had previously blocked

?? Poland — PiS Lost Power (2023)

- PiS lost Oct 2023 election to Donald Tusk's Civic Coalition
- PiS remains largest single party (~33-35%). Strong in rural/eastern Poland
- **Karol Nawrocki (PiS-aligned)** won 2025 presidential election — gives PiS veto power over legislation
- PiS in financial trouble — national election commission rejected its financial report (Nov 2024)

?? Slovakia — Fico / Smer

- Fico returned to power Sept 2023 — pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine
- PES permanently expelled Smer for far-right turn (Sept 2025)
- Fico survived assassination attempt (2024) — used it to attack opposition and media
- Government broadly unpopular but Fico's grip remains firm

What's Driving the Surge?

1. **Migration** (dominant factor) — 2015-16 refugee crisis reshaped politics. Ongoing Mediterranean arrivals, integration difficulties keep immigration as the top issue
2. **Cost-of-living / economic insecurity** — post-COVID inflation, Ukraine war energy crisis, housing shortages
3. **Cultural backlash** — against LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, environmental regulation, multiculturalism
4. **Distrust of institutions** — mainstream parties, media, EU institutions seen as out of touch. Corruption scandals play into anti-establishment narratives
5. **Farmer protests** — 2023-24 protests across Europe channelled by far right
6. **Russian influence** — Politico (May 2026): "Putin's trolls are weakening Merz to boost Russia-friendly far right"
7. **Trump factor (mixed)** — initially energised European far right, but by 2026 his association became toxic (Politico, Apr 2026)

How Has the Mainstream Responded?

Dominant response: co-option, not resistance.

- **Commission (von der Leyen):** Moved steadily rightward on migration — New Pact on Migration, returns deals, externalisation
- **EPP (Weber):** Co-opting far-right positions while maintaining leaky cordon sanitaire on formal coalitions

- **National mainstream right:** CDU under Merz, PP in Spain, KOK in Finland, Moderates in Sweden — all shifting right
- **Cordons sanitaires:** Still intact in Belgium, France (fraying), partially in Germany. Collapsing in Austria. **Abandoned** in Sweden and Finland
- **Left/Socialist response:** Limited. The left has largely accepted rightward framing on migration

Overall verdict: The mainstream has largely conceded the argument on migration and adopted far-right framing, while maintaining institutional barriers to formal power-sharing — barriers that are fraying.

Migration Policy Shift — "Fortress Europe"

- **New Pact on Migration and Asylum (adopted 2024):** Mandatory border screening, faster asylum procedures at borders, solidarity mechanism (relocations or financial contributions), expanded detention
- **Returns hubs:** Commission finalising a plan for "return hubs" in third countries (echoing Australia's offshore processing and UK's Rwanda plan) — Politico (20 May 2026): "EU closes in on migrant returns deal"
- **EU-Tunisia deal** (July 2023) — paying third countries to prevent departures. Replicated with Libya, Mauritania, Turkey
- **UK-EU cooperation on returns** being discussed as part of the reset

---

Sources

- Politico Europe — multiple articles on far-right surge, migration, Orbán defeat
- BBC News — country-by-country election results and analysis
- Politico Europe — "Trump turns totally toxic for Europe's far right" (Apr 2026)
- Politico Europe — "EU closes in on migrant returns deal" (20 May 2026)
- Politico Europe — "In Austria's Kickl, the EU has its next Orbán"
- Politico Europe — "Putin's trolls are weakening Merz to boost Russia-friendly far right" (May 2026)
- BBC News — "Jordan Bardella to lead far-right European Parliament group Patriots for Europe"
- BBC News — "Hungary's new PM Magyar sworn in after landslide victory"
- Wikipedia — 2024 European Parliament election

Revision #1
Created 2026-08-21 11:41:54 UTC by Admin
Updated 2026-08-21 11:41:54 UTC by Admin