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Analysis of the 2024 European Elections in Germany

Majority for the stable centre
despite a strong right wing

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INTRODUCTION

The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections were a mixed bag. There is no uniform trend across Europe. The results vary too much from country to country for that. Despite slight losses, the democratic party families continue to constitute Europe's stable middle ground. The European People's Party (EPP) is clearly the strongest force and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) remains in second place while the Liberals and the Greens have suffered significant losses. At the same time, the right-wing fringes of the party spectrum have gained substantially. Yet this is mostly accounted for by three of the EU's founder member states. The right-wing parties' gains in parliament come primarily from Germany, France and Italy. Right-wing parties did not have the same success in Scandinavia or, Italy apart, southern Europe. So the middle of Europe's democratic spectrum held overall. But there are marked shifts between the parties within that fold.

To an extent, the results for Germany reflect the European trends:

- The Christian-democratic CDU/CSU (the 'Union') made slight gains in the European elections and held its ground as the strongest force.
- The parties making up the 'traffic light' coalition were hit by disillusion with the government and lost overall, with the Greens especially shedding a lot of votes compared to 2019.
- The Social Democratic Party (SPD) came third and recorded its worst-ever European election outcome.
- Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is establishing itself as a permanent feature in the German party landscape. It is no longer merely a protest and disillusion choice, either, with voters also endorsing its far-right positions.
- The Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW, the 'Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance') achieved an impressive outcome from scratch and also has the potential to displace the left-wing Die Linke in the German Bundestag.
- Smaller parties once again benefited from the lack of the five per cent threshold that applies in German national elections and gained more seats than in 2019.

Voter turnout in Germany was high at 64.8 per cent and once again exceeded turnout in 2019. For the first time, young people aged 16 and over were able to vote in European Parliament elections. This notably benefited smaller parties, who attracted over a third of all votes in

the under-25 age group. In contrast, the Greens have clearly lost popularity among young people.

Five years after the 2019 elections, which rode a strong pro-European wave, the election results testify to crisis fatigue and worries about instability in Europe. The electoral term was marked by the pandemic and its huge economic impacts, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, rising inflation and increasing concerns about Europe's own security. This eroded confidence in politicians' problem-solving abilities and also impacted people's perceptions of Europe. The long-established predominantly positive image of the EU in Germany has become more nuanced, shifting closer to the situation in other EU countries.

A look at the individual election outcomes across Europe shows that the shift to the right is mainly a phenomenon of France, Italy and Germany. Right-wing parties made significant gains in all three of these countries. Poland's PiS was also able to match its 2019 performance. In the Scandinavian countries and in Spain and Portugal, on the other hand, the parties of the democratic centre have gained in strength. These countries are sending only a small number of MEPs to the right-wing parliamentary groupings.

The results lend a boost to Ursula von der Leyen for her second term in office as president of the European Commission. She was the lead candidate of the strongest group, which also managed to win additional votes. EPP, S&D and the liberal Renew Europe – the three political groups she has relied on for support to date – still have a majority, although this has now become even more slender. As von der Leyen was elected with only a wafer-thin majority in 2019, there will be considerable temptation to seek allies in the growing camp of right-wing parties. Von der Leyen should also be able to count on the support of the European Council. This could rehabilitate the Spitzenkandidat principle, which the Council disregarded in 2019. But the situation in 2024 is different. The results have left Emmanuel Macron in a weakened position, unable to mobilise support this time for alternative candidates. Donald Tusk and Olaf Scholz already work closely with the current Commission president, who also has the support of Giorgia Meloni.

The final balance of power in the European Parliament itself will be negotiated in the days ahead. This is because a number of parties have now been elected that did not previously belong to any of the parliamentary groups – among them Germany's BSW. Negotiations on their affiliation will gather pace in the coming days. There will also be further changes primarily in the right-wing fringe after AfD was ejected from the Identity and Democracy (ID) group before the elections even started. The situation is open, with the conceivable outcomes including both a

broad alliance of radical right-wing parties and a fragmentation into three different groups. That in turn could lead to the radical right-wing parties ultimately wielding less influence in the European Parliament despite their bigger share of the vote. ←

2 MAIN RESULTS

As in the 2019 European elections, CDU/CSU emerged as the strongest force in Germany with 30 per cent and showed a slight gain (of 1.2 percentage points). Also as in 2019, the CDU/CSU will make up the largest German group in the European Parliament, with 30 MEPs. The CDU/CSU is particularly strong among older voter groups, but has also made gains among young voters. It performed much better in western Germany than in eastern Germany.

In contrast, all three of the ‘traffic light’ parties forming the governing coalition lost ground. At 14 per cent, the SPD became the third-strongest party and lost almost two percentage points compared to the last European elections. It achieved its best election results in Bremen, Saarland and Lower Saxony – three of the German Länder where it also returns the state premier. The SPD lost by far the most to the nonvoter camp, but also suffered further losses to the CDU/CSU, other parties, BSW and the AfD.

The Greens sustained heavy losses. They fell from a record high of over 20 per cent in 2019 to just under 12 per cent, and are the main victims of an abating pro-European wave and of climate policy losing sway in the public debate. It incurred its biggest losses in the 16-24 age group, among whom it performed best in the last European elections. The Greens scored their best results in the city states of Hamburg, Berlin and Bremen.

The FDP also lost some ground compared to the last European elections, but managed to hold on to five per cent. Given the poor polling figures in the run-up to the elections, the party itself portrays this as a positive outcome.

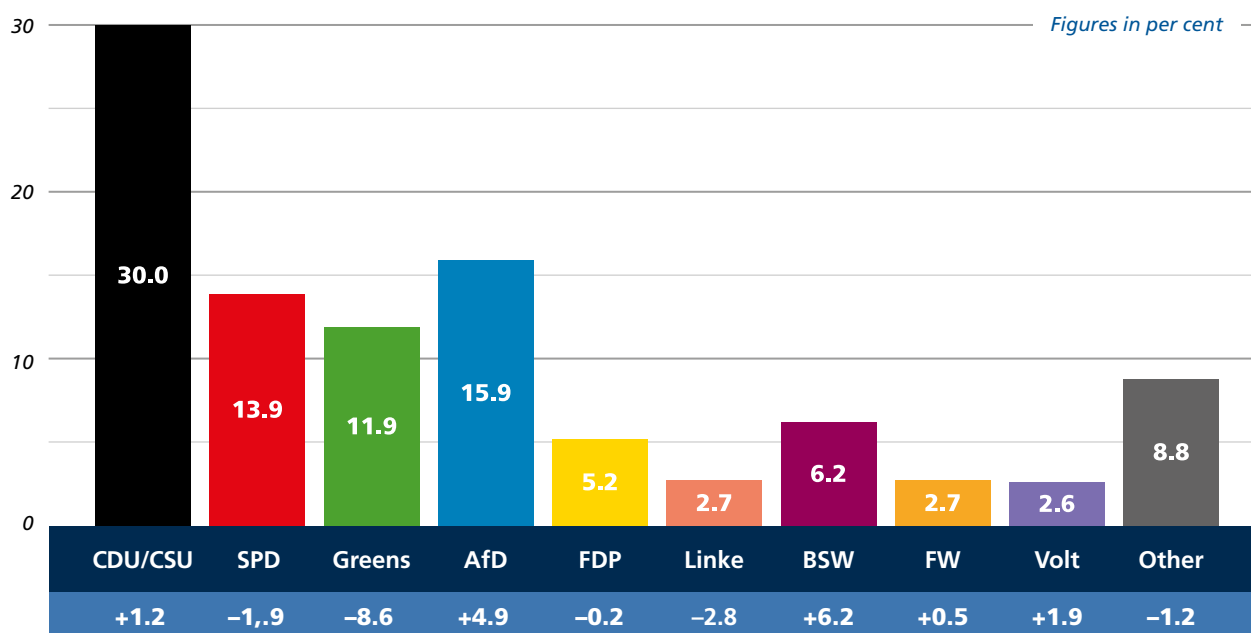
Another loser is Die Linke, which dropped to 2.7 per cent – half its 2019 share of the vote. It took its biggest losses in the east of Germany – its former heartland – and shed many votes to BSW.

The AfD managed to gain just under five percentage points. The party emerged as the second-strongest force at almost 16 per cent. It is the strongest party in eastern Germany with almost 27 per cent, ahead of the Union, and scored over 30 per cent in Saxony, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt. The party achieved its biggest gains among the youngest age group. The AfD continues to perform best among working-age male voters with a low level of formal education, although it is now making deep inroads into other voter groups. Also, far-right positions are gaining ground among the electorate, with 51 per cent of AfD voters voting for the party out of conviction and only 44 per cent out of disillusionment with other parties.

The other winners of the election evening are the ‘other’ parties. Small parties traditionally do well in the European elections because they do not have to pass the five per cent

Share of the vote by party in the 2024 European elections

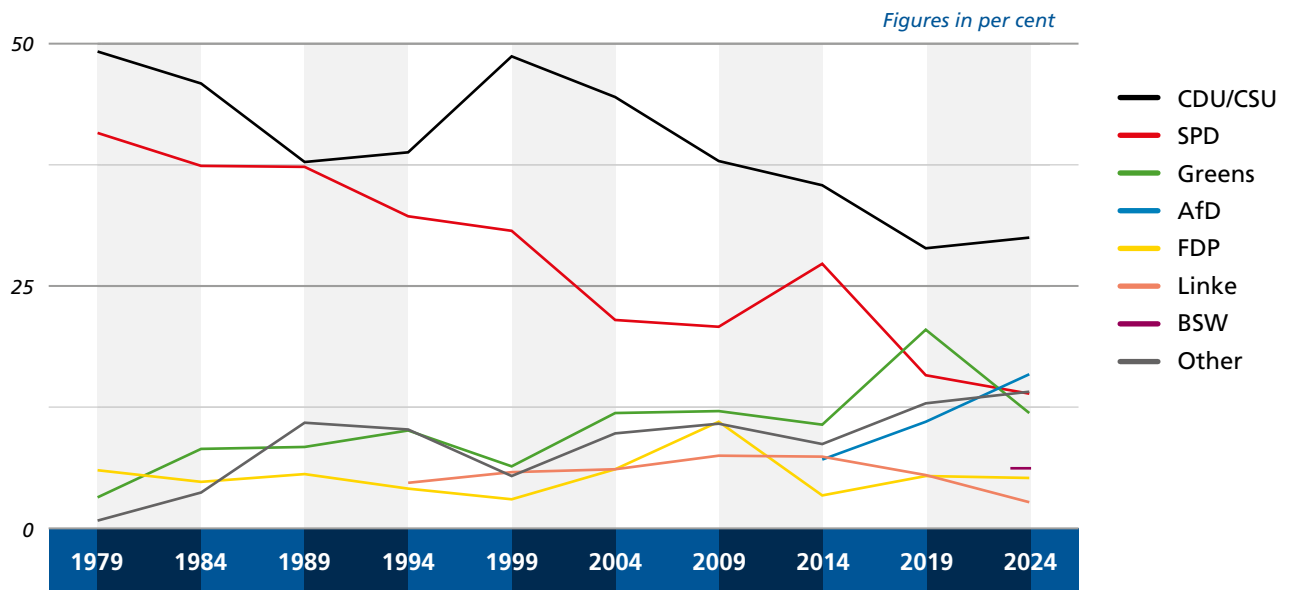
Fig. 1



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis)

Development of shares of the vote in European elections 1979-2024

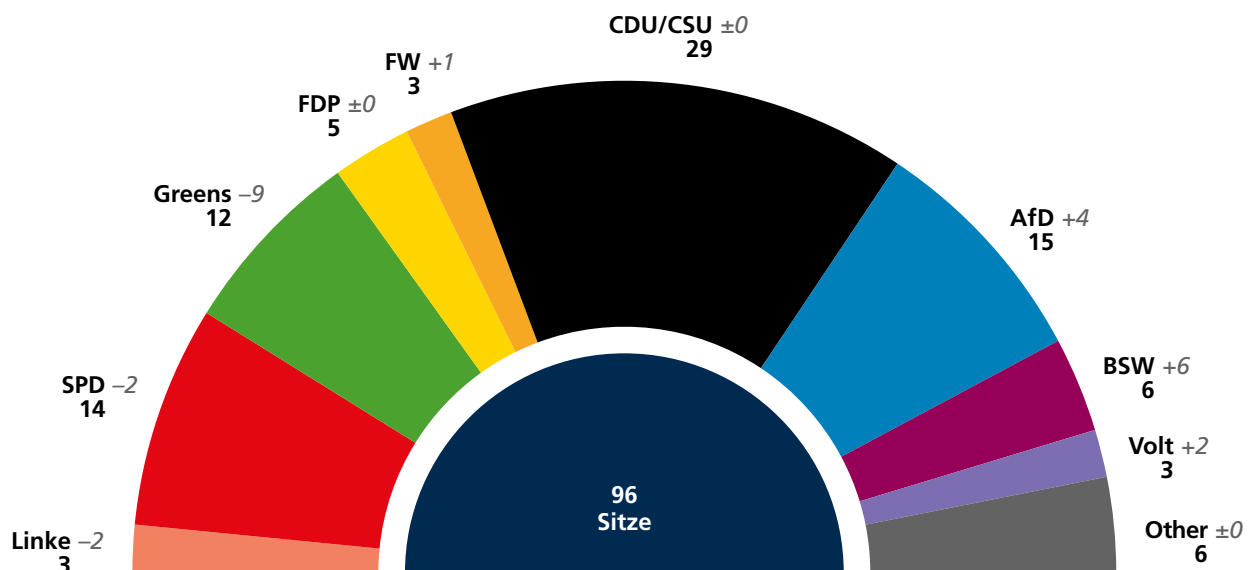
Fig. 2



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis)

Distribution of seats among German parties in the European Parliament

Fig. 3



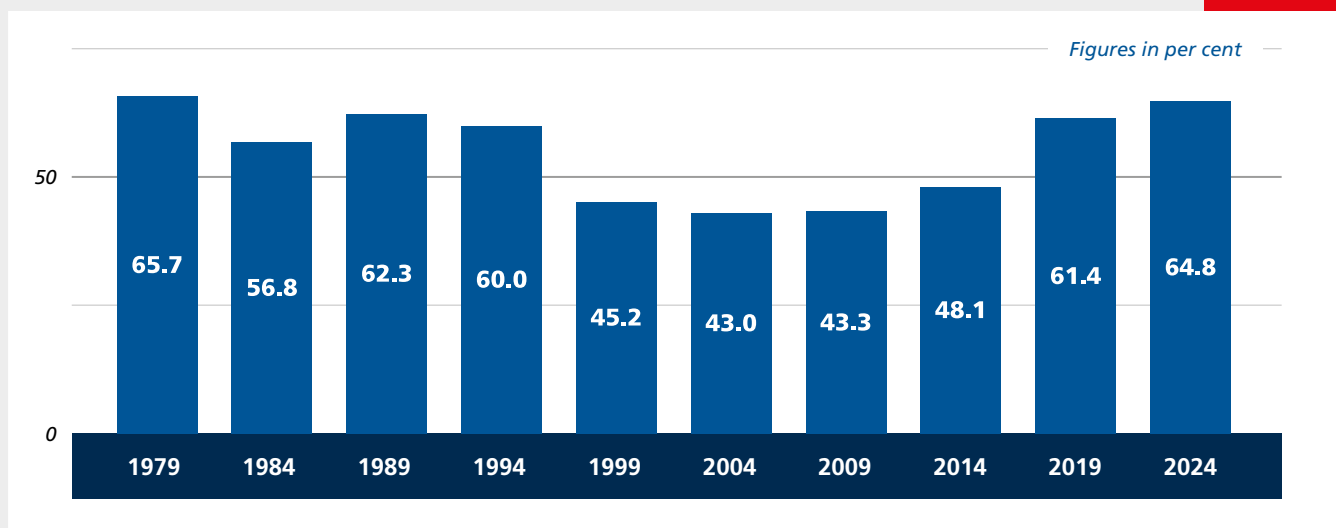
Source: Federal Returning Officer, provisional final result. Other: Die Partei 2, Tierschutzpartei 1, ÖDP 1, FAMILIE 1 and PdF 1.

threshold that applies to national elections in Germany. In total, they garnered over 20 per cent of the vote, another 7.4 percentage points more than in the last European elections. Without the five per cent threshold, only around one per cent of the votes is enough to gain a seat in the European Parliament. As a result, 12 of the 96 seats allocated in Germany have gone to the small parties. The Freie Wähler

(‘Free Voters’) and Volt have benefited most in 2024 with three seats, Die Partei (‘The Party’) with two seats and the Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei (‘Ecological Democratic Party’), the Familien-Partei (‘Family Party’), Tierschutzpartei (‘Animal Welfare Party’) and Partei des Fortschritts (‘Progress Party’) all with one seat each. Particularly noteworthy is Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, which

Voter turnout in European elections 1979-2024

Fig. 4



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis)

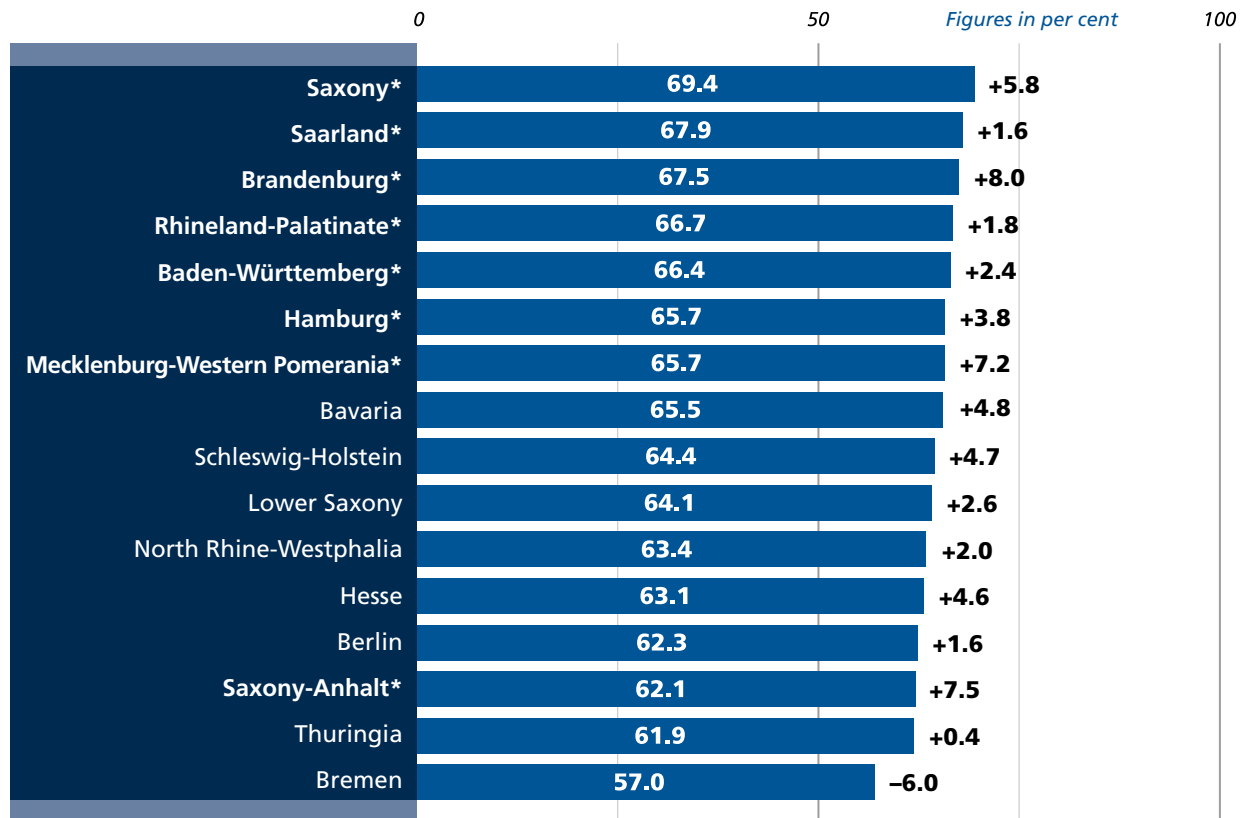
won 6.2 per cent of the vote standing for the very first time and will be represented with an additional six seats in the European Parliament. BSW did best in eastern Germany, scoring double figures in all eastern German Länder.

At just under 65 per cent, turnout was at around the same high level as in the first EP elections in 1979. Voter turnout was relatively evenly distributed across the country. Only in Bremen was it slightly down (by six percentage points); everywhere else it showed a slight increase. All

Länder with above-average voter turnout had local elections at the same time. The only exception is Bavaria, which generally has a high turnout in national-level elections. Saxony-Anhalt is near the bottom of the table, despite concurrent local elections, but still shows a 7.5 percentage point increase in voter turnout. Brandenburg recorded the highest increase, of eight percentage points. BSW, the AfD and minor parties have benefited most from local elections being held at the same time. ←

Voter turnout in 2024 European elections by Länder

Fig. 5



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis). | * With concurrent local/district elections

WHO VOTED FOR WHOM?

MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN GERMANY

Looking at the results for eastern and western Germany separately, major differences can be observed across almost all parties. The biggest difference, of 15 percentage points, is seen for the AfD. The party reached 28 per cent in eastern Germany but only 13 per cent in western Germany. The picture is reversed for the CDU/CSU, which shows a difference of 11 percentage points between east and west. In western Germany, 32 per cent of the electorate voted for the CDU/CSU, while the figure in eastern Germany was only 21 per cent. The Greens and the SPD also performed better in the west, albeit with differences of only six and five percentage points respectively. In the last Bundestag elections, the SPD won roughly an equal share of the vote in both eastern and western Germany. The difference is slightly greater for BSW, which took 12 per cent in eastern Germany but only five per cent in western Germany. Die Linke and the FDP each show a difference of only three percentage points, although in relative terms they are twice as strong in the one half of the country than in the other: The FDP reached six per cent in western Germany but only three per cent in eastern Germany. In contrast, the figures for Die Linke are five per cent in eastern Germany and only two per cent in western Germany. The differences for the smaller parties are not as large due to the parties' small

size, but they are still visible. The Freie Wähler and Volt, for example, are significantly stronger in western Germany.

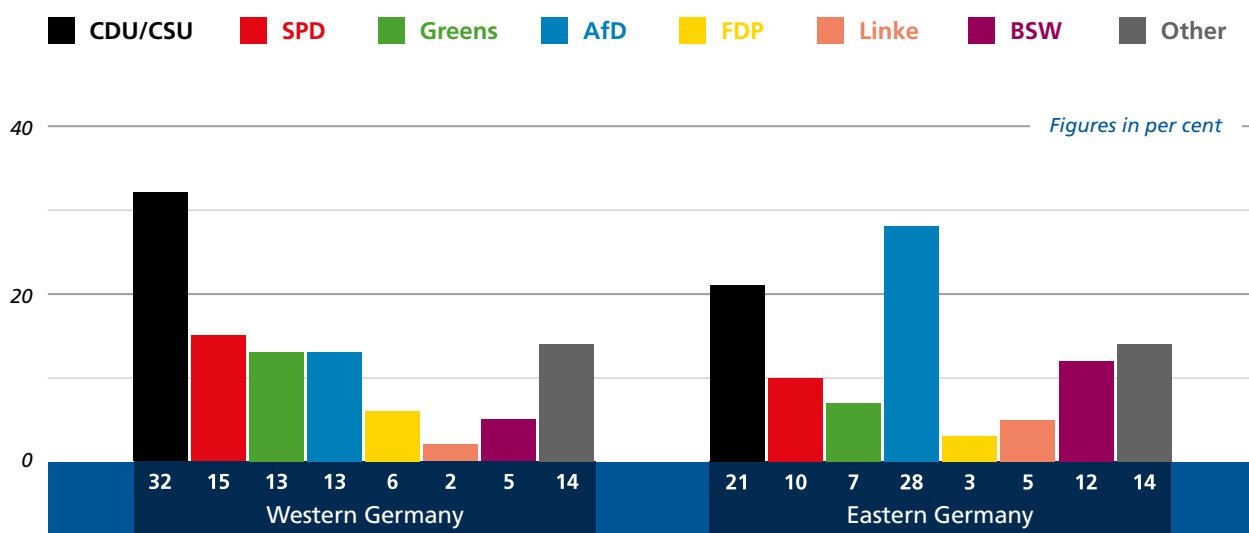
In eastern Germany, then, the AfD, BSW and Die Linke performed above average, while in western Germany the Union, the SPD, the Greens, the FDP, Freie Wähler and Volt achieved significantly better results. The parties of the 'traffic light' coalition together totalled 20 per cent, behind the figures achieved by either the AfD or the CDU/CSU on its own. In western Germany, the SPD, the Greens and the FDP collectively have 34 per cent.

VOTING CHOICES BY AGE GROUP

With the voting age lowered to 16, the youngest group of voters are now the 16-to-24 age group. This group stands out for a tendency to vote for small parties. A third of them voted for parties that would have failed to pass the five per cent threshold in Bundestag elections. However, the CDU/CSU and the AfD also gained among the youngest age group, increasing by five and 11 percentage points to totals of 17 and 16 per cent respectively. The Greens suffered the biggest losses among young voters with a steep 23 percentage point fall to just 11 per cent of the 16-24 age group. They are followed by the SPD with nine per cent and Volt with seven per cent of the youngest voters. The SPD improved slightly by one percentage point among the

Comparison of vote shares in eastern and western Germany

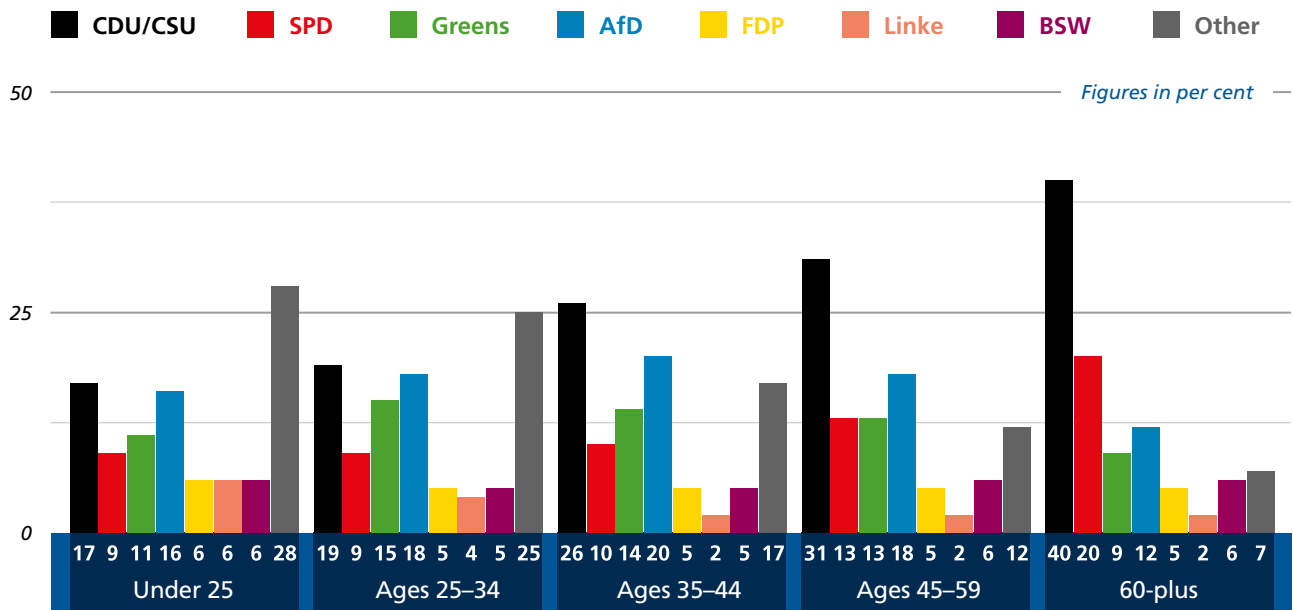
Fig. 6



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll

Comparison of vote shares by age group

Fig. 7



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll

youngest age group but performed better among the older age groups. In the case of the SPD, the shifts within age groups are limited to the narrow range of plus one to minus two percentage points. The figures for the FDP are similar (with shifts between zero and minus two percentage points), while Die Linke saw losses of minus two to minus three percentage points.

The parties also show clear age profiles. The CDU/CSU and the SPD clearly perform best among the 60-plus age group. They did about twice as well with the oldest age group as they did with voters under 35. As mentioned above, the smaller parties are very popular among the youngest voters. Volt, Die Partei and also Die Linke perform above average here. Due to heavy losses among voters under 25, the Greens now did best in the 25-34 age group, where they have a 15 per cent share. The AfD achieved its best result among 35-44 year-olds, at 20 per cent, while it only managed 12 per cent among the over-60s. There is hardly any age profile to be seen at BSW, with results between five and six per cent in all age groups. As in the last Bundestag elections, the FDP achieved its best result among young men under 25, with nine per cent. Among young women under 25, however, only four per cent voted FDP. Overall, then, there are only minor age-related changes in voting for the FDP. The under-25 age group came in at around six per cent for the FDP overall, with all older age groups around five per cent.

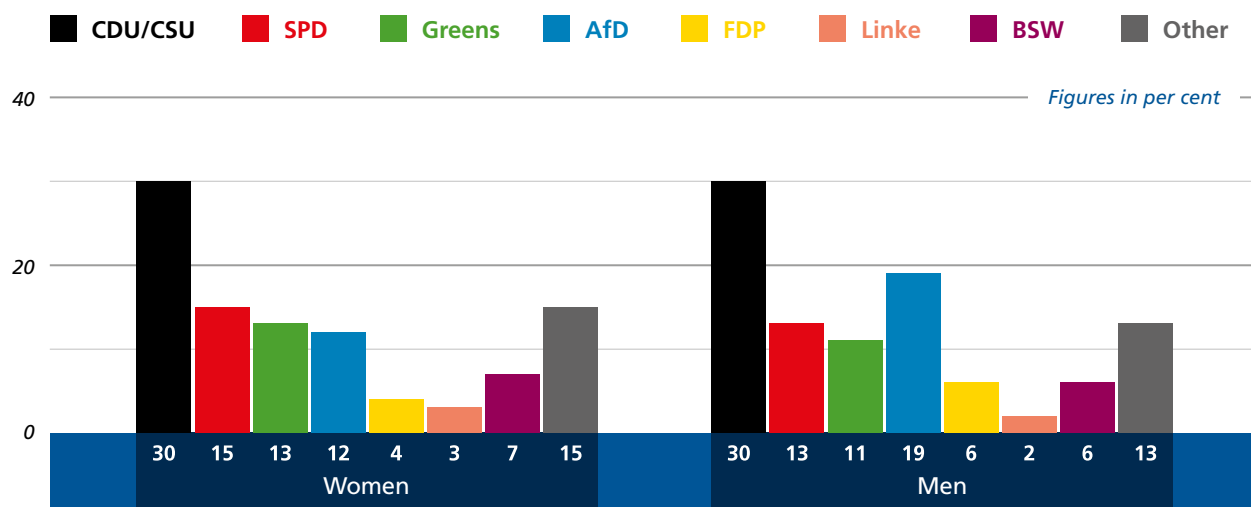
VOTING BY WOMEN AND MEN UNIFORM WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS

Looking at voting behaviour by gender, for most parties the differences in voting behaviour between women and men is less than two per cent. The CDU/CSU thus scored 30 per cent of the vote among women and men alike. In the case of the Greens and the SPD, slightly more women voted for them than men (13 to 11 and 15 to 13 per cent, respectively). Only the AfD is clearly out of step here – as it was in previous elections – with 19 per cent of men but only 12 per cent of women voting for the party. Combining age and gender, the AfD in particular is seen to do best among men aged 35-44, where it reached 24 per cent. Its best result among women is in the same age group, but amounts to only 16 per cent. Just nine per cent of women over 60 voted AfD, while the figure for men over 60 was 14 per cent – in both cases the worst result by age group.

Only two further gender differences in relation to age groups stand out. One is the apparently strong appeal of the FDP to men under 25. Nine per cent of men under 25 voted FDP, as against four per cent of women under 25. The opposite is the case with regard to voting behaviour for Die Linke: Nine per cent of women under 25 but only three per cent of men under 25 gave Die Linke their vote.

Comparison of vote shares by gender

Fig. 8



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll

OCCUPATION AND EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

As is to be expected based on the results by age group, the CDU/CSU won 41 per cent of the pensioner vote. The SPD came second here with 21 per cent. Only 11 per cent of pensioners voted AfD, followed by the Greens with eight per cent and BSW with seven per cent.

Among the working population, the CDU/CSU is in first place among employees, civil servants and the self-employed. The party achieved its best result among civil servants, 34 per cent of whom voted for the CDU/CSU, with the Greens in second place at 20 per cent followed by the SPD at 13 per cent. Among the self-employed and employees, the AfD came in second place with 17 and 15 per cent respectively. The Greens were close behind (15 and 13 per cent).

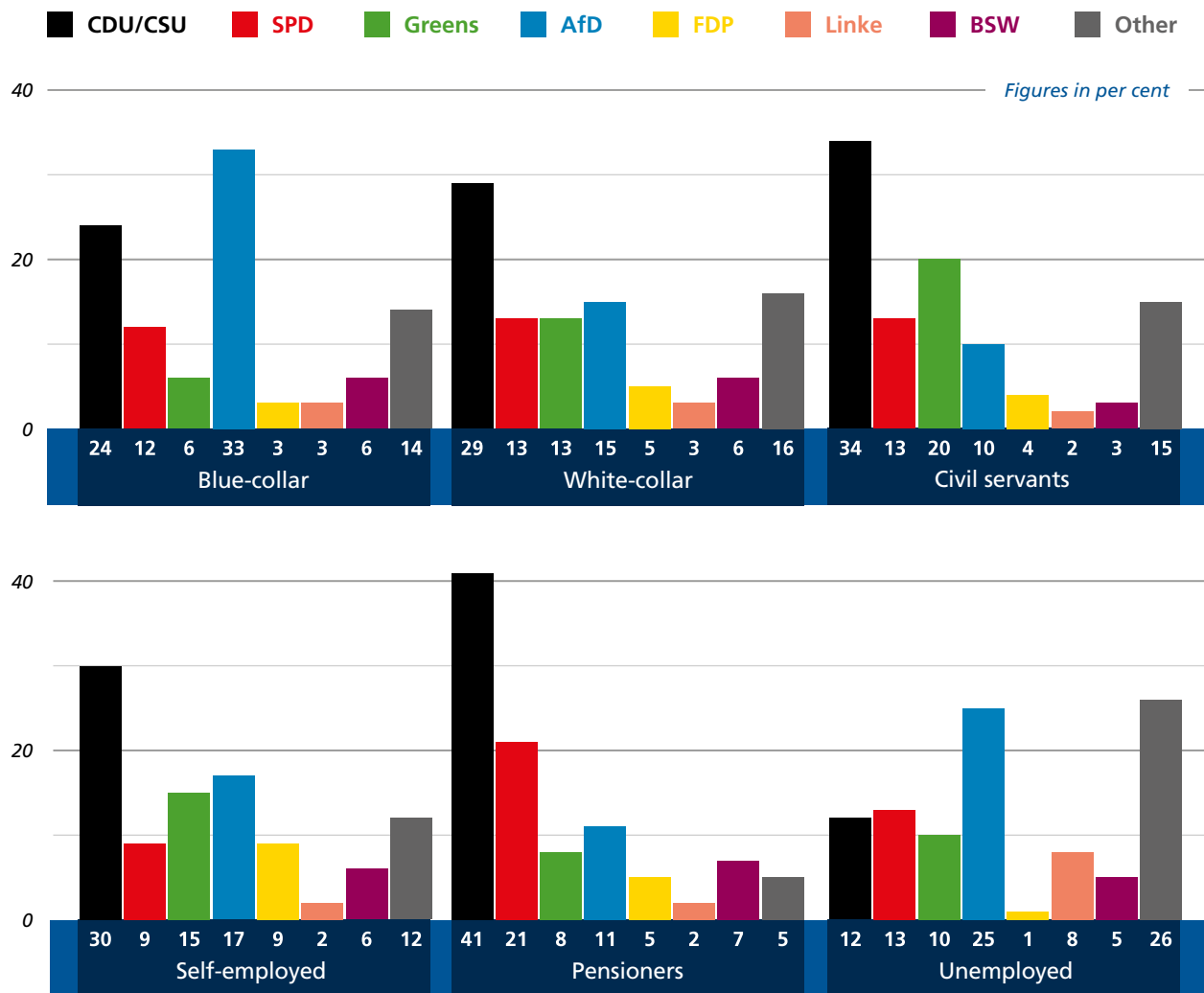
In terms of German labour law, a distinction is no longer made between 'Arbeiter' (blue-collar workers) and 'Angestellte' (white-collar workers). Frequently, however, people can still indicate which of these groups they belong to in surveys. This is the case with the infratest dimap exit poll. A third of respondents who stated their occupation as 'Arbeiter' voted AfD. Second place is taken by the CDU/CSU at 24 per cent. The SPD trails in third place here with just 12 per cent.

The AfD was also the most popular choice among the unemployed (25 per cent), followed by the SPD (13 per cent) and the CDU/CSU (12 per cent). The comparatively low percentages here can be explained by the fact that almost a third of the unemployed vote went to small and very small parties.

Occupational differences are also evident when looking at the highest level of education. 28 per cent of voters with an upper secondary school leaving certificate or higher education degree voted for the CDU/CSU, followed by the Greens with 18 per cent. The SPD came third here with 13 per cent. In the group with a lower educational qualification or no qualifications, the CDU/CSU also took first place with 31 per cent. However, second place was held by the AfD here with 27 per cent. Among the group with higher educational qualifications, the AfD only reached ten percent. Third place in the group with lower formal education qualifications went to the SPD at 11 per cent. The SPD appeals fairly evenly to all occupational and educational groups. The only outliers at the top and the bottom are pensioners (21 per cent) and the self-employed (nine per cent). ←

Comparison of vote shares by occupation

Fig. 9



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND REASONS FOR VOTING

VIOLENCE, SCANDALS AND TIKTOK

This year's European election campaign has been very different from those in previous years. It was far more savage and was marked by scandals surrounding the AfD, while TikTok established itself as the social media election campaign platform of choice for engaging with younger voters.

The sad climax of physical attacks on election campaigners was undoubtedly the brutal assault on SPD MEP Matthias Ecke in Dresden, who was hospitalised in early May after being attacked by right-wing youths while putting up election posters. Violence during the election campaign ranged from insults and spitting at people to the destruction of election posters and physical assaults on volunteer campaign workers and politicians alike. While all parties were targeted, those from the progressive spectrum were particularly frequently attacked. The offences were not confined to individual regions of Germany, but extended throughout the country. Last year's FES "Mitte" study already identified an increase in the approval and justification of political violence. 13 per cent of those surveyed thought that some politicians deserved what they got if "the anger against them" led to violence (in 2020/21 the figure had been five per cent; Zick et al. 2023). The attacks during the European election campaign are not the only sign of attitudes translating into action and there appears to be a fundamental increase in animosity. This is shown by the fact that the 'politically motivated crime' statistics already revealed an increase in assaults on elected officials in 2023 (Bundeskriminalamt 2024). Following the assault on Matthias Ecke, all democratic parties expressed solidarity, condemned the attack and called for a peaceful election campaign.

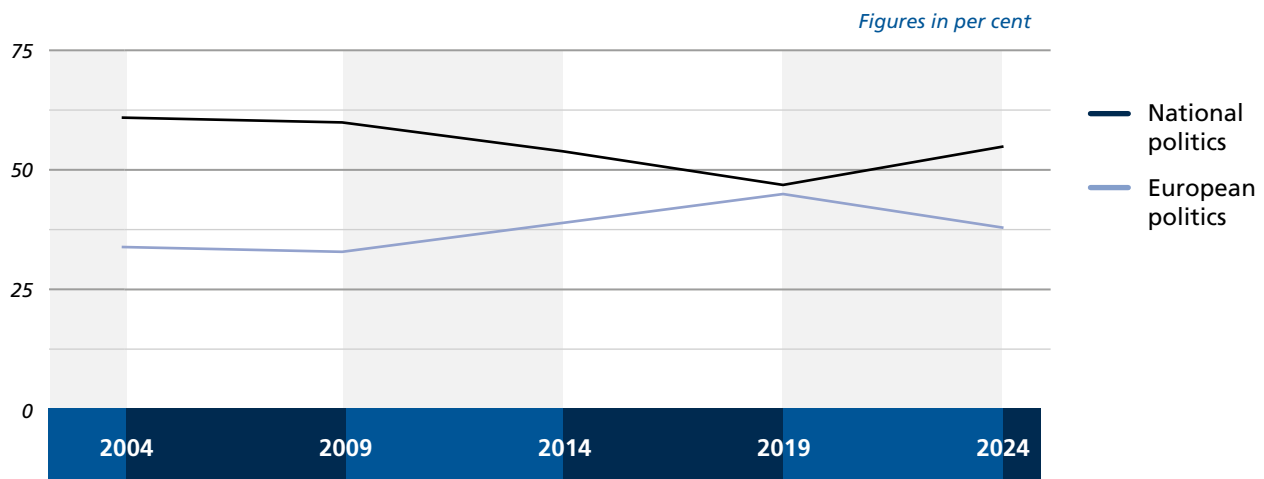
The AfD was rocked during the hot phase of the election campaign by major scandals that led to the withdrawal of its two lead candidates but had little impact on its approval ratings among hardcore supporters. News surfaced in early May of an espionage affair surrounding an employee of Maximilian Krah, the AfD's top candidate (and first on the AfD electoral list). The employee was accused of spying for China. Next, in mid-May, the immunity of AfD member of the Bundestag Petr Bystron (second on the AfD electoral list) was lifted due to initial suspicions of bribery and money laundering. The series of scandals then culminated in the ejection of all AfD MEPs from the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group in the European Parliament. On top of the preceding incidents, the expulsion proceedings were triggered by Maximilian Krah mak-

ing comments trivialising the SS in an interview. This was finally too much even for the AfD leadership, who banned their top candidate from election campaign appearances and forced his resignation from the party's national executive committee. Whereas Krah was expelled from the AfD group, Petr Bystron continues to sit in the European Parliament with the remainder of the AfD MEPs.

According to political consultant Johannes Hillje (2024), "among the political parties, the AfD is the coverage champion on all social media platforms". As a first mover, the AfD has managed to build channels with a wide reach, particularly on TikTok, and gather around itself a right-wing populist influencer community. In a direct comparison across all parties, the AfD's videos received by far the most likes. If only for the reason that TikTok is the most popular social media platform among teenagers and young adults, this target audience should not be left to the AfD alone. All democratic parties have therefore stepped up their social media activities in the run-up to the European elections, vying for users' attention with political and witty content. As an analysis by the German Economic Institute (IW; Böhmer et al. 2024) has now shown, the FDP and its top candidate Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann in particular have succeeded in attracting attention with astute videos about herself and her stance on the war in Ukraine. Surprisingly, these also outperformed the AfD videos with the most likes, although this was partly because TikTok curtailed Maximilian Krah's reach due to rules violations. The parties and top candidates largely focused their content on the scandals surrounding the AfD and the potential impacts of its policies. These videos also gained the most likes, while content on European policy, climate policy or for that matter economic or social policy proved less popular. Ultimately, only a very small proportion of young voters' likes on FDP content translated into actual votes (six per cent among 16-24 year olds). However, the AfD's strong gains among first-time voters and young voters (an increase of 11 per cent) are alarming and may be due in part to a successful social media strategy. On the other hand, the strong performance of the Union with young voters (17 per cent) and the collapse of the Greens among this group are more likely to be due to current affairs than to TikTok videos.

Reasons for voting: national/European politics 2004-2024

Fig. 10



Source: infratest dimap *Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis)*, ARD – infratest dimap exit poll

NATIONAL POLITICS AS MAIN REASON FOR VOTING

It is often argued that European elections are a form of subordinate poll on national politics; they are referred to as second-order elections. This reduced relevance is said to be borne out by lower turnout and the dominance of national issues in campaigning. European elections are thus considered more a judgement of the current national government than of European policies emanating from Brussels. The voter turnout argument can be rebutted somewhat given the record turnout in Germany, although this was still ten percentage points short of the turnout for the Bundestag elections in 2021. For the majority of voters in Germany, the main reason for voting was national politics. Some 55 per cent of voters thus said that national political issues were decisive for their vote, compared to 38 per cent who said European policy issues predominated. This marks a slight trend reversal on the 2019 European elections, when European policy issues held far more sway.

The fact that national and European election issues are closely connected is underscored by the similarities in recent polling on the ‘Sunday question’ (“Who would you vote for if the election was held this Sunday?”). Comparing the responses for the Bundestag with those for the European Parliament, the results are strikingly similar. The ‘traffic light’ coalition should therefore see the outcome of the European election as a call to better explain and implement its policies. Overall, the argument that European elections are second-order elections is confirmed for the 2024 election year.

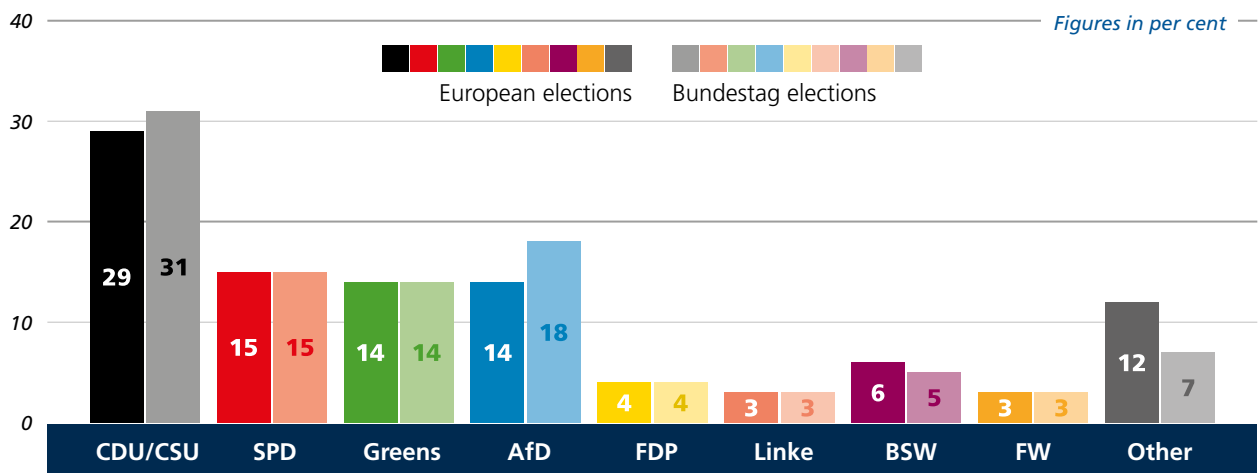
KEY ISSUES IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

The geopolitical shifts since the 2019 European elections are reflected in the issues rated as most relevant to the European elections. While climate change and the environment were undisputedly the top election issues in 2019, this year they are securing peace and social security. The Russian war against Ukraine and its knock-on costs in the form of inflation and energy prices dominate this year’s agenda. Climate change and the environment have lost nine percentage points and now only rank fourth among the key political issues. Contrary to the media discourse, it seems almost surprising that migration takes only third place, well behind the other two top issues (albeit with an increase of five percentage points compared to 2019). However, an attack by an Afghan in Mannheim in which a police officer was killed may have given a boost to anti-immigration attitudes that are not yet reflected in the issue preferences.

A look at issue preferences by party affiliation reveals a less uniform and more nuanced picture. For Greens supporters, the environment and climate change remain the most important issue (52 per cent), while social security is most important for SPD supporters (35 per cent), closely followed by securing peace (32 per cent). Securing peace is the decisive issue both for BSW voters (37 per cent) and CDU/CSU voters (28 per cent), while for Greens supporters it has second place. The fact that war and peace rank as such an important issue does not mean, however, that voters share the same opinion on how peace can be brought about. On the contrary, there are pronounced party-political differences on questions of arms exports and preconditions for peace negotiations. Only for AfD supporters is immigration the undisputed top issue, with 46 per cent rating it as the most relevant. Immigration is the second

'Sunday question'* comparison between European and Bundestag elections

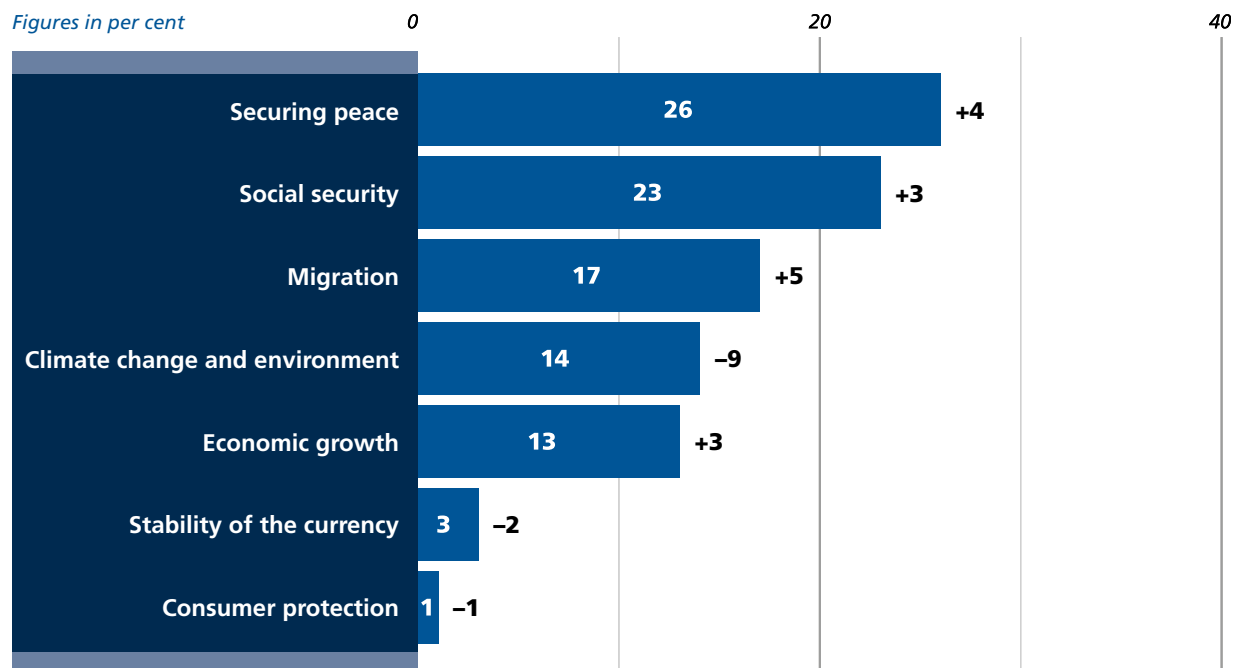
Fig. 11



Source: ARD-DeutschlandTrend, May II 2024, infratest dimap. | * "Who would you vote for if the election was held this Sunday?"

Key political issues

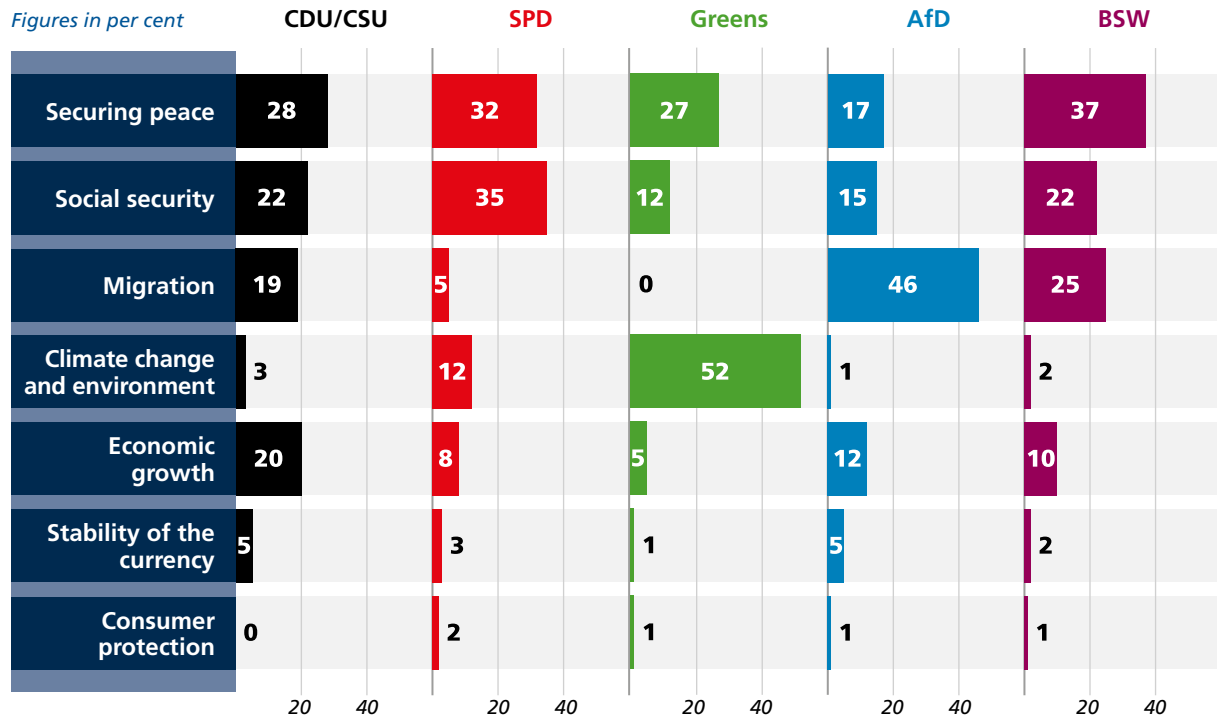
Fig. 12



Source: ARD-DeutschlandTrend, May II 2024, infratest dimap.

Key political issues by choice of party

Fig. 13



Source: ARD-DeutschlandTrend, May II 2024, infratest dimap.

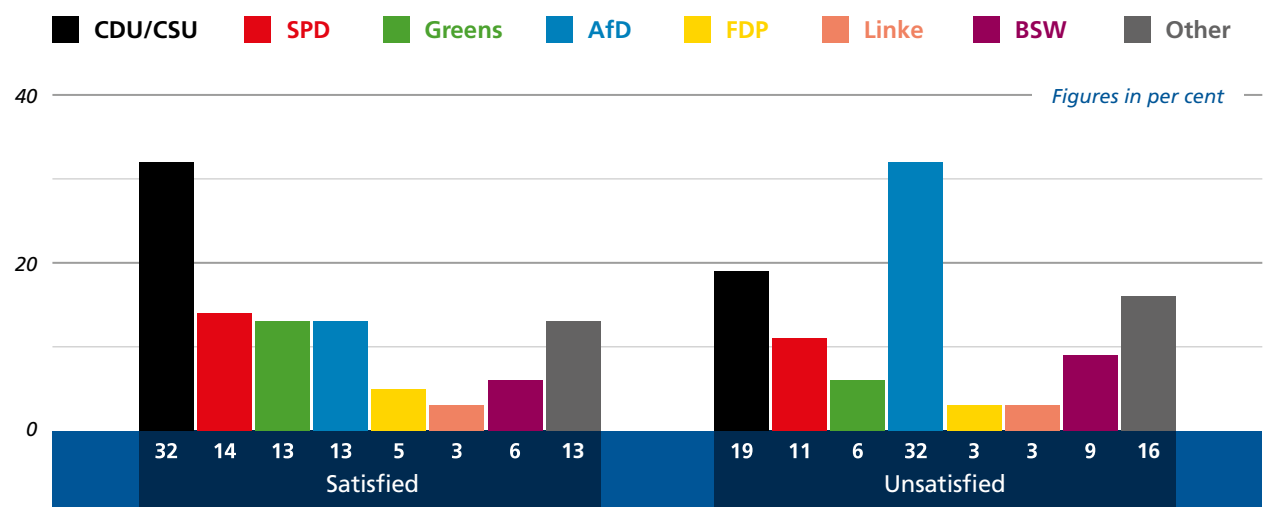
most important issue for BSW supporters, but only the fourth most important for CDU/CSU supporters.

How voters assess their own economic situation also influences how they vote, as it reflects their concerns and aspirations with regard to their own lives. A third of those who rated their own economic situation as very good or good in a post-election survey voted for the CDU/CSU.

That is twice as many as for all other parties. The opposite picture is seen for those who are dissatisfied with their economic situation. Almost a third of AfD voters rate their own situation as less good or as bad. Even if the AfD is now being voted for more out of conviction than disillusionment, there is still a deep dissatisfaction among the party's electorate that is expressed at the ballot box. ←

Comparison of vote shares by voters' satisfaction with their own economic situation

Fig. 14



Source: ARD-DeutschlandTrend, May II 2024, infratest dimap.

5 VOTER MIGRATION

The infratest dimap voter migration model relates the European elections to voting in the 2021 Bundestag elections. It is therefore an exercise in comparing two different elections and quite different logic. This needs to be borne in mind when interpreting the voter migration figures. In addition, use is made of a recall question on how a respondent voted in the last Bundestag elections. However, numerous studies have shown that voting recall is not always accurate. The inflows and outflows should therefore be treated with particular caution. Nevertheless, the size ratios and relative rankings give at least an idea of the migratory movements. Turning to the individual parties:

The CDU/CSU has gained from most other parties, with the strongest gains at the expense of the SPD (+1,450,000 votes), followed by the FDP (+1,090,000) and the Greens (+560,000). It lost most votes to nonvoters (-1,300,000), followed by the AfD (-570,000)

Compared to the last Bundestag elections, the SPD lost in all directions. The largest outflow was to the nonvoter camp (-2,490,000). Out of the competitor parties, the CDU/CSU snatched the biggest share of the vote from the SPD (-1,450,000). This was followed by the 'other' parties (-640,000), BSW (-580,000) and only then the AfD

(-570,000). A similar number was accounted for by deceased voters (-510,000 votes).

The Greens gained 80,000 votes from the SPD and, according to the model, otherwise showed a net loss. This was accounted for first by the 'other' parties (-860,000), then the CDU/CSU (-560,000) and then nonvoters (-540,000).

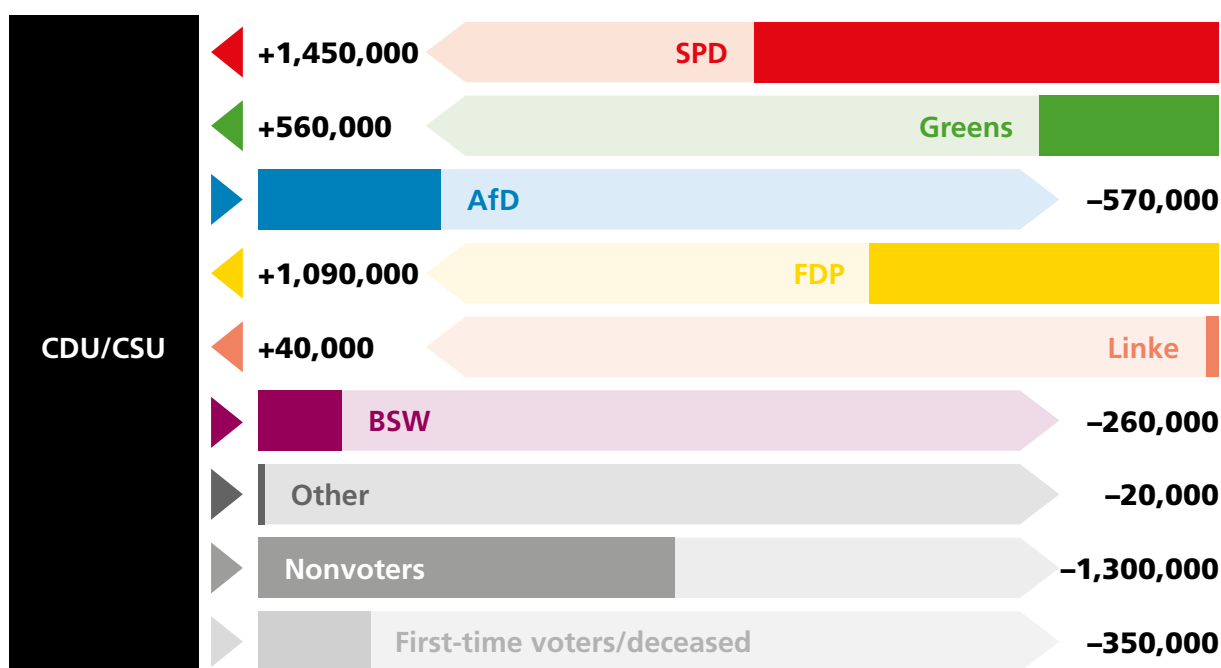
A look at the third 'traffic light' coalition party, the FDP, reveals a very similar picture in terms of outflows. The CDU/CSU and nonvoters account for just over a million votes each. Half a million went to 'other' parties, only then followed by the AfD (-430,000). Inflows came from the partners in the governing coalition: the SPD (+120,000) and the Greens (+30,000).

The AfD lost votes to the nonvoter camp (-380,000) and BSW (-160,000). The biggest gains came in equal measure from the CDU/CSU and the SPD (+570,000 each), closely followed by the FDP (+430,000).

In the run-up to the election, there was much speculation about which other parties the new BSW would take votes from. According to the infratest dimap model, 580,000 votes that went to the SPD in the 2021 Bundestag elections were won by BSW. In second place is the influx of

Voter migration CDU/CSU

Fig. 15



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll.

former voters from Die Linke (+470,000), followed by the Union (+260,000) and the FDP (+230,000). Only then came the AfD (+160,000), which had previously been widely touted as a potential main source of votes. Similar inflows were calculated to have come from the Greens (+150,000) and nonvoters (+140,000).

The election research institute Forschungsgruppe Wahlen also calculated voter migration for BSW, but used the 2019 European elections for comparison. By those calculations, most BSW voters were nonvoters in the 2019 European elections (+860,000). After those, the most votes came from Die Linke (+460,000), ‘other’ parties (+360,000) and the CDU/CSU (+250,000). These were trailed by former SPD voters from the 2019 European elections (+230,000).

As the ‘other’ parties did very well in the European elections and there was also no five per cent threshold as there is in Bundestag elections, it is likewise worth taking a look at voter migration with regard to these parties. First and foremost, people who voted for the ‘traffic light’ coalition parties in the last Bundestag elections made use of the opportunity to vote for smaller parties. The largest outflow towards small parties was incurred by the Greens (-860,000), followed by the SPD (-640,000) and the FDP

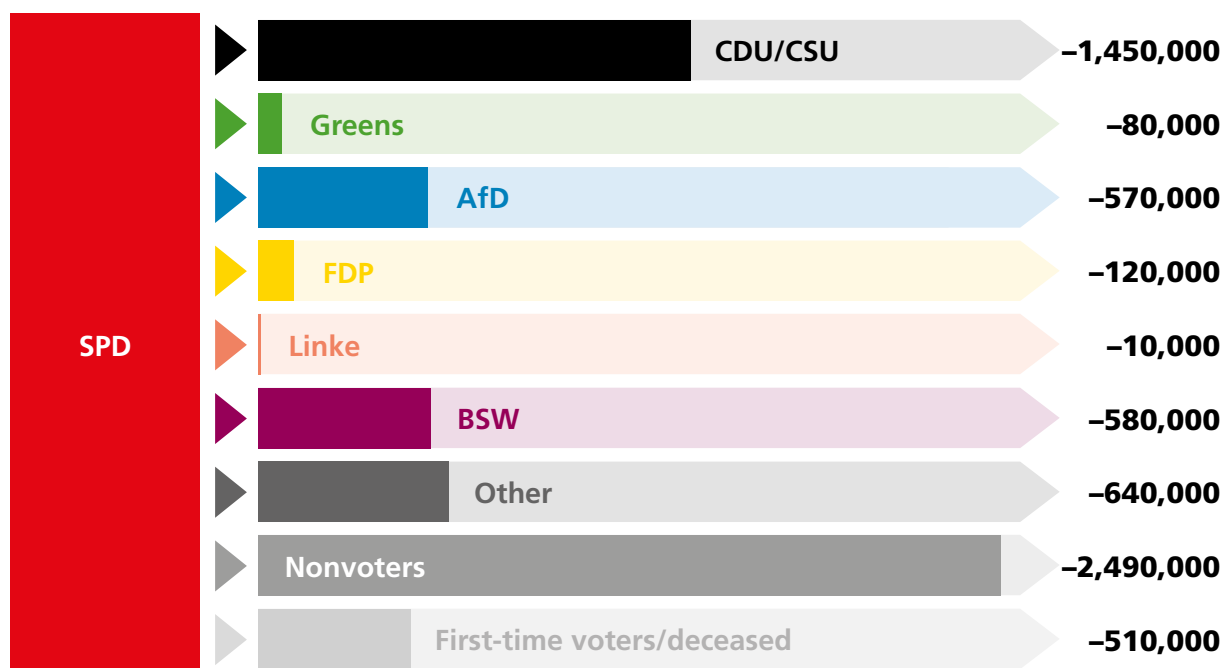
(-500,000). In the opposite direction, voters of ‘other’ parties in the last Bundestag elections switched to the nonvoters camp (-690,000), BSW (-300,000) and the AfD (-170,000).

The voter migration analysis shows that many voters took the opportunity of voting for smaller or new parties. As there is no percentage threshold in European Parliament elections, there was little risk in trying an alternative. The three governing coalition parties lost particularly heavily to the ‘other parties’ category. The SPD, which was successful in the Bundestag elections, is the main source of votes for most other parties. Most alarmingly for the social democrats, however, is the fact that the SPD lost most votes to the nonvoter camp.

The survey institutes’ voter migration models do not support the assumption that BSW would automatically diminish the AfD vote. Nevertheless, the AfD was still polling above 20 per cent in January 2024. It has lost significant ground since the Correctiv revelations, the many AfD scandals in the European election campaign and the emergence of BSW. There has evidently been a demobilisation and reorientation of potential AfD voters that does not show through well enough in voter migration models based on earlier points of reference. ←

Voter migration SPD

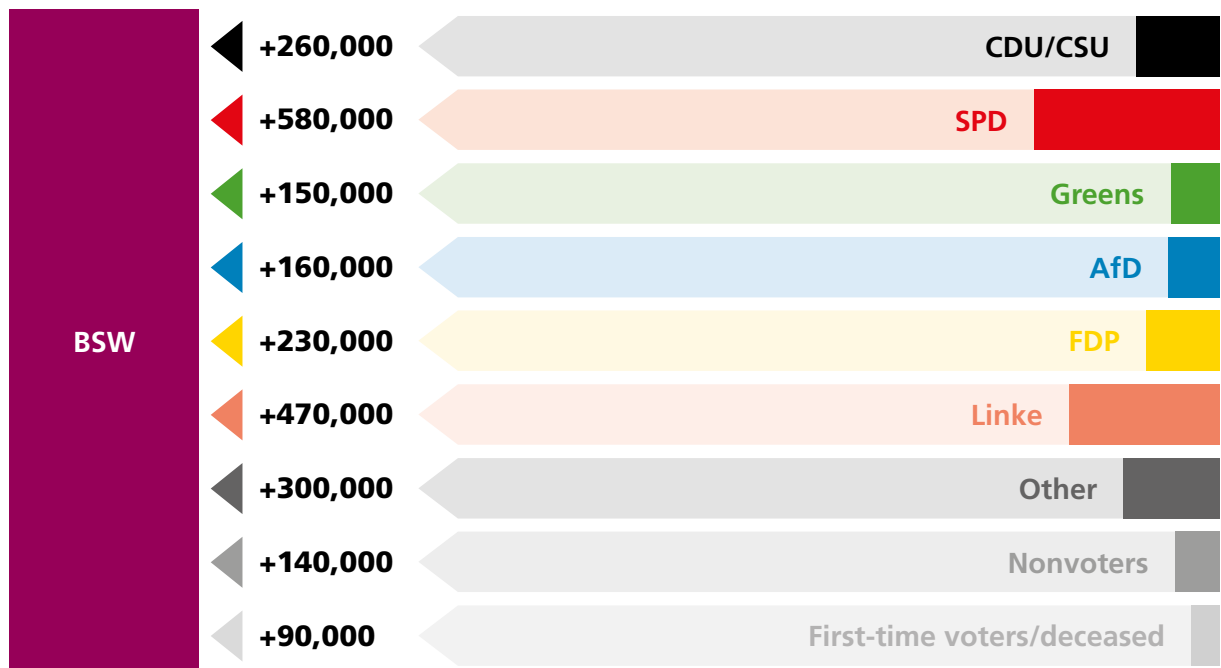
Fig. 16



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll.

Voter migration BSW

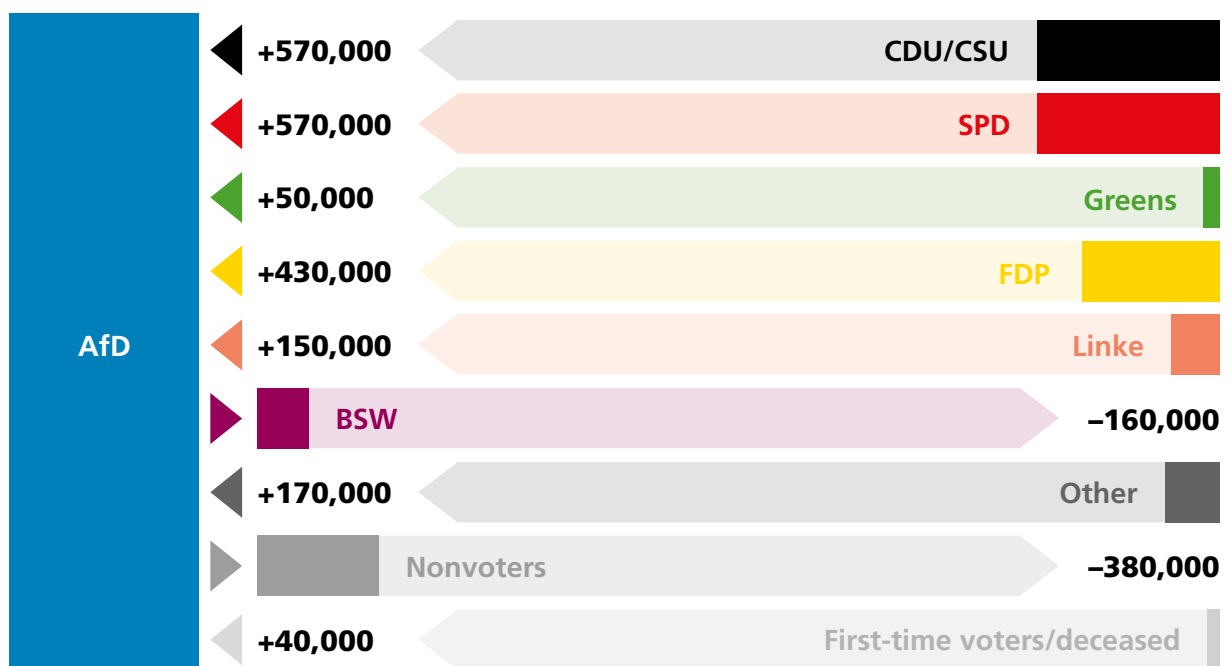
Fig. 17



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll.

Voter migration AfD

Fig. 18



Source: infratest dimap Wahlanalyse Europa 2024 (2024 European election analysis), ARD – infratest dimap exit poll.

OUTLOOK FOR PARLIAMENT AND THE COMMISSION

The European Parliament does not have the same rights as national parliaments. It has gained more powers in recent years, however, and is now a key institution in the governance of the European Union. This is because the Parliament elects and supervises the Commission, co-decides on EU legislation and is needed to adopt the common budget. The accession of new members requires its consent and it can bring an action before the European Court of Justice against other institutions of the Union for violations of EU treaties.

The composition of the European Parliament, to the extent foreseeable as of 10 June, is as follows:

The EPP, to which the CDU/CSU belong, is by far the largest parliamentary group with 186 seats. The social democratic S&D group remains the second largest force with 135 seats. Based on current figures, the liberal Renew group is the third largest with 79 seats. On the right wing of the Parliament, the populist European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) have 73 seats. This group includes the Polish PiS party and the post-fascist Italian ruling party Fratelli d'Italia. The far-right ID – which includes Austria's FPÖ, the French Rassemblement National (RN) and the Italian Lega – won 58 seats, mainly on the back of RN's

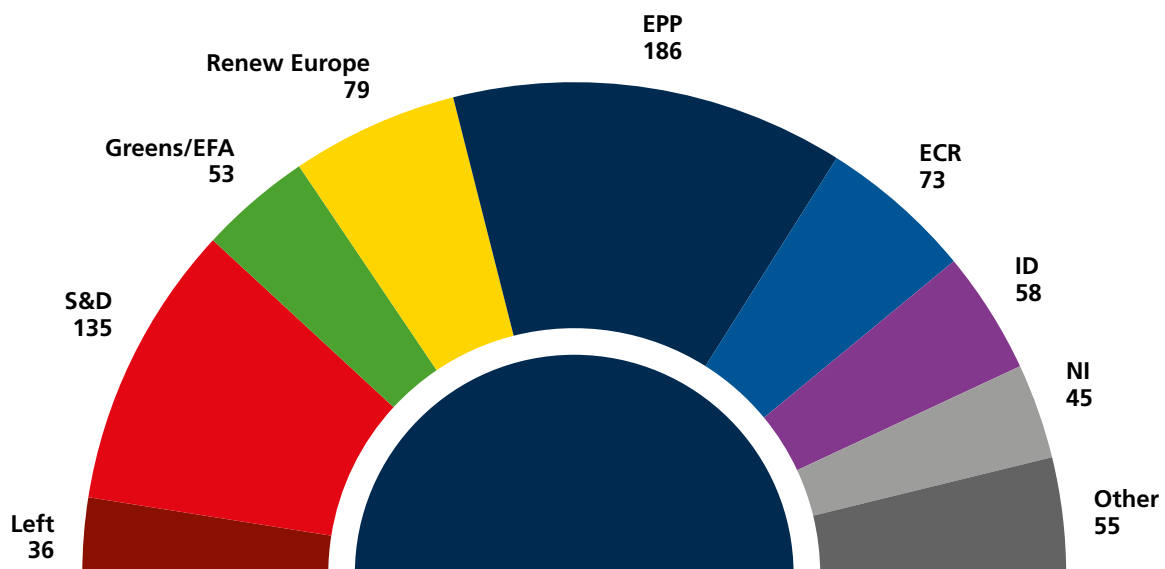
gains in France. The Greens group lost votes and now has 53 seats, while The Left secured 36 seats.

These figures should be treated with caution for two reasons. Firstly, 55 seats have been won by parties that did not previously belong to any of the parliamentary groups – among them Germany's BSW – and a further 45 MEPs (including the AfD) are 'non-attached'. Negotiations on their affiliation will gather pace in the coming days. Secondly, there will be further changes primarily on the right-wing fringe after the AfD's ejection from the ID group. It is quite possible that there will be yet more changes here.

The 2024 elections thus result in a Parliament with what continues to be a stable centre and a stronger right wing. A trend away from large, dominant party blocs has been apparent for some time. The longstanding EPP/S&D grand coalition has steadily lost ground and since 2019 has only been able to secure a majority in collaboration with the liberal Renew Europe group. To an extent, this trend has continued. While the EPP group has made gains, S&D suffered slight losses, while Renew Europe has shed a significant number of seats. With a majority of 400 out of 720 seats (as of 4 pm on 10 June; European Parliament 2024), these three groups could nevertheless once again furnish the Commis-

Distribution of seats among parliamentary groups in the European Parliament, 2024

Abb. 19



Quelle: <https://results.elections.europa.eu/> as of 10/6/2024, 6:15 pm, provisional on the basis of 27 available countries.

sion with the backing it needs. The populist and radical right in the ECR and ID groups, together with parties outside them such as the AfD, collectively won just over 20 per cent of seats in the Parliament for the first time.

At the same time, it is not entirely clear so soon after the elections how the seats will be allocated among the parliamentary groups or which groups will ultimately exist in the end. The recalibration of the groups to the right of the EPP had already started before the European elections, when France's RN saw to it that the AfD was ousted from the ID group. This exemplifies a basic problem of the European right-wing parties. At best, they are united by a fundamentally EU-critical stance, but on closer inspection this spans a wide range of different positions. They also differ sharply in their approach to Russia. Meloni and PiS in Poland are firmly in favour of supporting Ukraine, while Fidesz in Hungary, the AfD and the FPÖ want to end that support. France's RN, which has traditionally been more supportive of Putin's Russia, tends to hold back here because Marine Le Pen does not want to jeopardise her prospects of gaining power at home. All this could ultimately lead to the right, despite the increase in votes, becoming even further fragmented and ending up divided into three different parliamentary groups.

This is because it is quite possible that new groups will emerge after the elections, and in two cases German parties are at the centre of attention here. BSW, with its six MEPs, is likely to try to form a group of left-wing conservatives and is on the lookout for partners. The AfD, on the other hand, is likely to seek a parliamentary grouping with the FPÖ and other parties, as it has become too extreme even for the existing far-right group. However, it is not known whether the FPÖ would play along as it is currently still part of ID. Various groups will also be courting some of the smaller parties that are new to the Parliament. The bar for forming a new group is set quite high, requiring a minimum of 23 MEPs from at least seven EU member states.

A SECOND TERM FOR URSULA VON DER LEYEN?

The experience of 2019 has shown that the road to the Commission presidency can be a tough one. This is because two very different institutions have to be persuaded in order to win. The European Council, comprising the 27 heads of state and government, is responsible for nominating the candidate, who then needs to be elected by the Parliament. The timing is flexible. June will see two EU summits at either of which the nomination is likely to take place, with the election in the Parliament taking place immediately afterwards in July or after the summer recess in September.

The *Spitzenkandidat* system, which was admittedly disregarded in the nomination of Ursula von der Leyen in

2019¹, in principle strengthens the hand of the largest parliamentary group. This relates to the right to occupy the post of Commission President and to play a leading role in building a parliamentary majority in his or her support. Ursula von der Leyen reaffirmed this on the evening of the elections. She expects to be able to secure a second term.

Her chances are good. Von der Leyen is likely to obtain the nomination in the Council where, after all, voting is by qualified majority so Viktor Orbán cannot stand in the way. Any rival candidate is unlikely to have sufficient support in the Council. French President Macron has been dealt a blow by the election results and is now occupied with the snap election in France. Neither he nor Chancellor Scholz will be interested in opening up another political front. At the same time, von der Leyen enjoys the support of Donald Tusk and apparently also of Giorgia Meloni.

To be elected as Commission President by the European Parliament, however, she needs a majority vote at first go. For this, she needs 361 votes – and there is no second try. Von der Leyen has consistently presented herself in recent years as a champion of the political centre. She has had the support of the EPP, S&D and the liberal Renew Europe groups, and has also relied on close collaboration with the Green group, in particular to get her ambitious plans off the ground for the European Green Deal. That balancing act will become more difficult in the new Parliament, partly because some EPP members will no longer be as supportive of her policies and will seek to roll back previous deals on climate change and agriculture. This will cause friction, notably with the S&D.

Party discipline is not as pronounced in the European Parliament as it is in national parliaments. That makes it even harder to reckon with a safe majority. This is because the political groups on whose support von der Leyen has been able to rely to date – the EPP, the S&D and the liberal Renew – have just 39 votes more than the required majority. That could be enough to guarantee her election. At the same time, however, with procedures as they stand, it is unlikely to produce stable majorities for the difficult decisions that lie ahead. The European Parliament's agenda not only includes negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework from 2028, but also questions of strengthening European security and the EU's position relative to China and the US in an increasingly fierce contest for market access, resources and investment.

Two procedural steps could be helpful here and boost the democratic centre. The first is the presentation of the staff package for the new Commission. All parties that von der Leyen depends on for her to be elected need to see themselves represented. At the same time, it needs to bring out the basic principles laid down by the EPP for cooperation with other parties: in favour of Europe, supporting Ukraine and the rule of law. With this team, and when setting out her priorities, she needs to provoke as few dissenters as possible in the three centrist groups, while at the

¹ In 2019, the EPP's lead candidate was Manfred Weber. After the election, Emmanuel Macron proposed Ursula von der Leyen as a compromise candidate for Commission President, disregarding the party lists.

same time appealing to potential supporters from the Greens or the ECR group. This is a difficult balancing act as these two groups are diametrically opposed on certain issues such as climate action or migration. If she fails to get elected, the hitherto theoretical scenarios for other candidates for the Commission presidency will have to be revived and the EU will be somewhat hamstrung until late autumn.

The second step is the presentation of the Commission's programme and hence the policy priorities for the five-year electoral term. This also needs to reflect the priorities of the three centre parties. However, it will be necessary to cut firmer deals here on how to curb an informal rightward drift in the EU.

RESISTING THE 'MELONISATION' OF EUROPE'S CONSERVATIVES

This is because the election results put the EPP in the driving seat when it comes to finding a majority in the democratic camp. It is the conservatives who determine whether there is a firewall against the far-right parties clustered in the ECR and ID groups and beyond. Some parties, especially those in the ECR, are making strenuous efforts to become politically acceptable. Marine Le Pen's moves to distance herself from the AfD can be seen as an attempt, together with the post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia, to draw closer to the conservative mainstream. Giorgia Meloni talks openly about how her government model in Rome – a coalition of conservatives, right-wing populists and post-fascists – ought to be replicated in Brussels.

However, a closer look at the programmes of these parties and above all their governmental practice, in Poland and Italy for example, shows that the common ground they share with the EPP, S&D and Renew relates mainly to support for Ukraine. On this issue there is a clear divide between the two right-wing camps, the ECR (pro-Ukraine) and the ID (sceptical to opposed to supporting Ukraine). However, in terms of both undermining democratic institutions and occupying key positions in all public institutions, both Meloni and the PiS in Poland have more or less followed the example of Orbán in Hungary. Open cooperation between the EPP and these parties would therefore pose a threat to the upholding of democratic standards in the EU. At the same time, it would lead to the S&D group ceasing to support von der Leyen. If, then, the EPP is serious about its principles, it must maintain a clear firewall against cooperation with parties in the ECR and ID groups, for these are devoid of support for European integration and the rule of law in Europe.

RISK OF BACKSLIDING ON CLIMATE ACTION AND IN MIGRATION POLICY

Even with such a firewall and the right wing fragmented into three groups, there remains the threat of a shift in political emphasis in the European Parliament. This is because of the lack of governing parties, let alone a German-style coalition agreement. While the Commission generally relies on particular groups, votes on EU legislation tend to be dominated by issue coalitions rather than firm political compacts between individual parties. Aside from their party affiliation, national background plays an important role for MEPs.

In the past, this has enabled the conservative Commission President von der Leyen to push through the European Green Deal with the support of left-of-centre parties, while the vote on migration policy and agreements with third countries was also clinched with the aid of parties to the right of the EPP.

In the new Parliament in 2024, there will be no majority to the left of the EPP, which has already turned its back on the Green Deal in the face of farmer protests. This means that the EU's ambitious climate targets are likely to be watered down even further, which would appear fatal given the flood disasters that hit Europe in 2023 and 2024. The EU will not then be able to play the leading international role in climate action that it has aspired to in the past. If the important post of Commission executive vice-president for climate action went to a relatively conservative commissioner, this could set back EU climate policy. It could also impact cooperation with countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia that expect more European responsibility in this area.

The shift to the right will also make itself felt in migration policy, where the programmatic overlaps between the EPP and the parties further to the right are even more pronounced. If the Commission were to make a proposal enabling a further tightening of migration policy, such as outsourcing asylum proceedings to third countries, that proposal could be pushed through, though with additional support and not on their own, by EPP, ECR and ID. The S&D and Renew groups should clearly signal in advance how they will deal with any such collaborations between the EPP and the right-wing groups. The current, relatively loose models of cooperation in the European Parliament are not capable of preventing a drift to the right. More explicit agreements and clear courses of action are needed to prevent the EPP from drifting ever closer to the groups to its right. The social-democratic group in the European Parliament should make this the fundamental condition for its renewed support for Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President. ←

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The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections were a mixed bag. There are no uniform trends across Europe. The results vary too much from country to country for that. Despite slight losses, the democratic party families continue to represent Europe's stable middle ground. At the same time, the right-wing fringes of the party spectrum have gained substantially. The right-wing parties' gains in parliament come primarily from France, Germany and Italy. It is not yet possible to say what parliamentary groups the parties to the right of centre will form. However, Ursula von der Leyen is once again likely to become Commission President, as her current coalition partners still have a majority in the Parliament (albeit a smaller one than in 2019) and she will probably have the support of the heads of government. Nevertheless, the political shifts in Europe will make it harder in future to find stable majorities for constructive solutions, especially in conflict-prone areas such as securing the peace, climate action and migration policy.

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