

The Challenge of the Populist Right in Democratic Europe in the 2024 European Parliamentary Elections

MUSTAFA DEMIR AND AMELIA HADFIELD

ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of the June 2024 European Parliamentary elections on the European Union's political landscape, examining the rise of right-wing populism. The elections underscored tensions between centrist and populist parties, affecting legislative priorities and institutional power balances. Populism, with its anti-elite stance, threatens democratic norms and societal cohesion. The article explores its negative effects on EU democratization and integration, citing Hungary, Poland, Italy, and France as examples of restrictive migration policies and challenges to the EU's green agenda. Additionally, the article highlights the impact of the elections on the EU's foreign relations, particularly concerning ties with authoritarian regimes like Russia. Despite not having achieved a majority, right-wing populists' growing influence endangers the EU's liberal values. The article calls for centrist parties to address these issues to maintain democratic integrity.

Mustafa Demir is Teaching and Research Fellow in International Politics and Sociology at the University of Surrey. He studies the effects of democratization on the political economy and international relations; the nexus between populism and authoritarianism, with an emphasis on religious and civilizationist populism; and emerging international alliances among populist authoritarian actors, a phenomenon he terms the 'populist international.'

Amelia Hadfield is Associate Vice President for External Engagement at the University of Surrey. Amelia's research, teaching, consulting, and postgraduate supervision cover EU foreign and security policy and new forms of EU-UK relations, among many others.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union is a regionally-integrated body formed after World War II to promote peace and preserve the principles of liberal democracy among its member states. This integration effort has led to significant economic progress, including the adoption of a shared currency and the establishment of the Schengen Area, which enables the free movement of goods and labor across twenty-nine European countries. However, the scope of integration extends beyond the economy; political unity is a critical objective of the EU, which has dedicated executive and legislative bodies with jurisdiction across EU member states. Despite grappling with various challenges over the years, the EU has created new institutions and advanced integration through a series of agreements.¹ Nevertheless, political integration at the regional level remains a contentious issue, particularly regarding the sovereignty of member states.²

The EU operates through a complex system of institutions, which collaborate to oversee regional integration and policy formulation. The European Parliament (EP)—a legislative body composed of representatives elected directly by EU citizens—works in conjunction with the Council of the European Union, which represents the member states' governments.³ The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, proposes legislation and guarantees adherence to treaty obligations. The European Council establishes the overall policy direction, while the Court of Justice ensures legal uniformity across the union.⁴

The outcome of the June 2024 European Parliamentary elections influences both the EP's and wider EU institutions' dynamics by resetting key legislative priorities. First, as a result of the new leaders who will steer these same institutions and second, in terms of the tensions between the centrist parties that have maintained their traditional dominance within the EP and the increase, both within the EP itself and in EU Member States, of right-wing, populist parties.⁵ This article examines the recent European Parliamentary elections, analyzing the results with reference to the rise of right-wing populist forces and their impact on the EU's political landscape. To achieve this, it will first explain the concept of populism before exploring the issues that rising populism can create for EU policies.

POPULISM

Populism—a political ideology that originated in the nineteenth century—has been embraced by various political figures, parties, and

movements since its inception.⁶ Although it is not often self-described as such, populism is characterized as a democratic vision that prioritizes the direct expression of the will of ‘the people’. This perspective is often associated with political stances that emphasize the significance of ‘the people’ as opposed to the ‘elite’. ‘The elite,’ commonly referred to as the political, economic, cultural, and media establishment, are accused of prioritizing their own interests, as well as those of large corporations and foreign countries, over the general populace.

Populism manifests in various forms influenced by economic, socio-cultural, and nationalistic factors. Examples include anti-establishment, anti-immigrant, and identitarian populism, as well as economic variants like protectionist populism.⁷ In Europe, radical right-wing populism often features nativist, Euroskeptic, and xenophobic narratives.⁸

Populism is often viewed negatively because of its potential to disrupt democratic political culture. Even without gaining government power, populists can influence mainstream politics by introducing radical ideas as potential policy options, and challenging established institutions and constitutions. A key strategy involves creating antagonistic binaries, and then polarizing society into distinct camps to capitalize on this division.

When in power, populist leaders frequently contribute to the decline, erosion, or de-democratization of democratic institutions, such as the media or the judiciary, which they perceive as hostile to the will of the people. By claiming to be the sole representative of the people, populist parties can easily justify disregarding institutional constraints or suppressing the rights of political opponents under the auspices of public service. This subversive role underscores the dual threat posed by populism: it destabilizes democratic norms and exacerbates societal divisions.⁹

By claiming to be the sole representative of the people, populist parties can easily justify disregarding institutional constraints or suppressing the rights of political opponents under the auspices of public service.

Populism often arises when socio-economic problems have not been addressed, and political parties fail to provide remedies for an extended period. As Kyle and Meyer point out, citizens are less likely to object to the deterioration of democratic institutions if they believe a corrupt elite has taken control of them.¹⁰ As such, populist leaders cannot be held solely responsible for the decline of liberal democracy.

When the European Parliament and Council are dominated by populists, the Commission will inevitably be dominated by populists. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the populist right’s conception of and perspective on the EU to raise awareness about the potential consequences of this shift in political power and the implications it may hold for the future of the EU.

CONCERNS CAUSED BY THE RISE OF POPULISM

Pre-election Concerns of a Right-wing Populist Shift for EU Values

The EU elections, which took place between June 6 and June 9, 2024, saw 705 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected across twenty-six member states to serve five-year terms from 2024 to 2029. The dominant narrative revolving around the 2024 elections before they were held presented a potential turning point in EU policy, largely due to the rising influence of far right populist parties.¹¹ This was perceived as threatening to the liberal principles within the bloc, with the risk of exacerbating ongoing institution-member state tensions and outright challenges to EU normative frameworks, present legislation, and future policies. These changes could alter the dynamics and shift the course of the EU for years to come. John Henley suggested that “[p]opulist ‘anti-European’ parties [we]re on track for big gains in June’s European elections that could tip the parliament’s balance sharply to the right and jeopardize key pillars of the EU’s agenda, including climate action.”¹²

Populist parties—which position themselves as champions of the ‘common people’ against perceived adversaries such as refugees, multinational corporations, and additional ‘others’—were also likely to capture roughly one-third of the available seats; specifically, far right groups advocating for a pro-sovereigntist approach.¹³

.....
The rise of populism, within major EU member states and the next EU Parliament threatens to impede essential democratizing reforms, posing risks to the EU’s democratic fabric.
.....

How the Rise of Right-wing Populism Challenges EU Democratisation and Integration Efforts

The rise of populism, within major EU member states and the next EU Parliament threatens to impede essential democratizing reforms, posing risks to the EU’s democratic fabric. Right-wing populism in Europe typi-

cally expresses itself through resistance to EU-level democratization efforts, which are often viewed as threats to national sovereignty, because they result in further political integration at the regional level, potentially at the expense of national interests.

For example, in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party portray EU critiques of Hungary's democratic standards, particularly around media freedom and judicial independence, as assaults on Hungarian sovereignty. As the EU approaches the conclusion of the European Media Freedom Act, Fidesz has responded with a new law allowing for intensified attacks on the country's few remaining independent media outlets. This has resulted in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urging EU institutions to reopen the sanctions procedure against Hungary for breaching the rule of law.¹⁴

Should other populist groups gain parliamentary power across Europe, we may witness a similar trend where the autonomy of the free press is compromised, challenging the very core of free and fair media across the continent.

In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) similarly pushes back against EU interventions around judicial reform, portraying them as essential safeguards against EU encroachment. To this end, in late 2019, the Polish Sejm passed a law aimed at constraining the structure and operations of the judiciary.¹⁵ Dubbed the "muzzle" law, this legislation enables a "disciplinary chamber to bring charges against judges who challenge the ruling party's platform."¹⁶

Populism in Italy and France has also garnered substantial attention in over last few years. Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini and his League Party have criticized EU policies, particularly around immigration, as threats to Italian security and sovereignty.¹⁷ Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's National Rally, similarly advocates for increased national autonomy, arguing that the EU undermines French sovereignty through its centralization efforts.¹⁸ These examples demonstrate how right-wing populist parties in Europe challenge EU-level democratization efforts, viewing it as a violation of national sovereignty.

Anti-migration

The surge of right-wing populism has had a substantial impact on the EU's migration policy reflecting a noteworthy transformation in the political landscape of Europe.¹⁹ Across the EU, far right parties have gained traction, affected outcomes, and set political agendas around migration in

the 2020s. For example, during the Dutch general elections in November 2023, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV), which touts a firmly anti-immigration agenda, made significant gains.

Similarly, the National Rally in France, under the sway of right-wing populism, has enacted an immigration bill that poses severe challenges to the rights of asylum seekers and migrants. France's immigration legislation further limited the rights of migrants, under the pressure of right and far right factions, to secure necessary votes in December 2023.²⁰ Human Rights Watch highlighted concerns over the removal of crucial protections for foreigners ordered to leave France and those under forced removal.²¹ The bill also diminishes appeal rights for asylum seekers, undermines due process for migrants, and introduces punitive measures against individuals not adhering to "the principles of the Republic." This vague criterion disproportionately targets Muslims suspected of "separatism."²²

The French Defender of Rights, an independent institution, has voiced strong disapproval of the bill, asserting that it directly opposes the fundamental principles of the French Republic. The impact of this legislative change, influenced by the surge of right-wing populism, not only modifies France's position on immigration, but could also hold far-reaching implications for EU migration and asylum policies, due to an increasing inclination toward nationalism and restrictive immigration measures.²³

These developments reflect a potential shift toward more restrictive immigration policies within the EU, driven by a European Parliament that may increasingly favor stringent nativist measures. The political climate suggests an imminent push for reforms to the EU's asylum policy framework, including enhanced member state discretion around immigration policy and limitations on the distribution of refugee quotas. The International Rescue Committee has raised concerns about the discussions around the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, emphasizing the need for a more balanced approach.²⁴

Impacts on Environment Policy

The possibility of right-wing populists gaining the majority in the EU Parliament poses a substantial risk to the EU's environmental objectives, particularly those that involve shifting toward a carbon-free green economy.²⁵ This emerging threat creates uncertainty for the upcoming reelection of key figures who have been central to championing these policies. Populists in the legislative process may alter the landscape by poten-

tially impeding the EU's efforts to promote eco-friendly initiatives and sustainable growth.

In recent years, the EU has assumed leadership in several significant environmental policies, making substantial strides toward becoming a global leader in the green transition. Notable initiatives include the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM),²⁶ which aims to level the playing field between EU producers and those from countries with less stringent climate policies; the enhancement of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS),²⁷ the world's first major carbon market; and promoting the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) across member states. Furthermore, the EU has committed considerable funding to assist developing nations in their environmental sustainability efforts, showcasing its dedication to global climate leadership.

The role of the EP is key in determining EU legislation for the next five years. Far right resurgence at the expense of the center, or disinclination among increasingly disaffected centrist parties themselves may see a new EP block crucial legislation for advancing the Green Deal's next phase, aimed at reducing the EU's dependence on external energy sources. This in turn would pose significant political and geopolitical challenges.²⁸

Beyond individual actors, populist movements have also impacted environmental platforms among mainstream political parties. The European People's Party (EPP), the largest party in the European Parliament, indicated a possible shift in their strategy in a leaked draft of the 2024 EU election manifesto.²⁹ The early draft of the manifesto proposed easing strict regulations, including reversing the EU's plan to phase out combustion engines in the transition to a zero-carbon economy. However, this provision was omitted from the final version.³⁰ This change underscores the internal debate within an established center-right party and the complex political landscape of the EU, particularly regarding environmental policy and regulation, where diverse political ideologies can substantially influence the decision-making process.³¹

*Far right resurgence at
the expense of the center,
or disinclination among
increasingly disaffected
centrist parties themselves
may see a new EP block
crucial legislation for
advancing the Green
Deal's next phase, aimed
at reducing the EU's
dependence on external
energy sources.*

The Commission has also demonstrated a rightward shift by prioritizing industry over climate measures. It has given in to farmers’ complaints during EU elections to avoid giving hard-right parties a chance to capitalize on the issue.³² *The Financial Times* reported that the agricultural lobby has identified an opportunity to exert significant influence upon EU leaders.³³ Politicians have become skilled at capitalizing on the backlash against the costs of the green transition, especially among rural communities. Meanwhile, center-right parties are aware of the potential electoral benefits of adopting a “pragmatic” approach, which often entails weakening targets.

In February 2024, President von der Leyen also signaled a shift to the right by abandoning key green policies. According to a senior commission official, the EPP—her own political group—and other EU leaders are pressuring her to weaken crucial climate commitments. Despite these pressures, the political parties she is trying to win over by moving rightward have deemed her efforts inadequate.

Populist International: Influence on EU’s Foreign Relations

Since the close of the Second World War, the EU has held a pivotal position in championing democracy and human rights, a central tenet of its foreign policy. The 2007 Treaty on European Union (TEU) explicitly states that promoting democracy worldwide is a top priority. Addressing this mission of the EU, a relevant document on “Promoting democracy and observing elections” reads as follows:

Supporting democracy worldwide is a priority for the European Union. Democracy remains the only system of governance in which people can fully realise [sic] their human rights and is a determining factor for development and long-term stability. As the only directly elected EU institution, the European Parliament is particularly committed to promoting democracy.³⁴

The European Parliament, being the only directly elected institution of the EU, takes a special interest in advocating for democracy. The rise of

The rise of populist influence over EU institutions would have negative outcomes on the EU’s capacity to promote democracy.

populist influence over EU institutions would have negative outcomes on the EU’s capacity to promote democracy. Greater populist influence in the EP could redirect resources from democracy-support programs to national interests, reduce trust in international partnerships, and lead to fragmented

policies across member states. Additionally, populism may alter EU foreign policy, fostering more transactional relationships that prioritize short-term gains over democratic values, weakening the EU's role as a global advocate for democracy.³⁵

One important aspect of the political landscape is the potential influence of the far right's ties to authoritarian regimes, such as Russia. Some observers view this as a "love-in-the-air" relationship between Putin and Europe's far right political parties.³⁶ While some argue that the invasion of Ukraine has reversed this trend,³⁷ others have highlighted concerns around backdoor diplomacy and the projection of "sharp power"³⁸ by Russia, through these parties, within democratic systems.³⁹ This intricate interplay between internal and external political forces is crucial in shaping the EU's foreign policy decisions. Rachman observes how prominent far right leaders, such as Victor Orbán, Geert Wilders, and Robert Fico, have openly discussed "accommodation" when it comes to Vladimir Putin's Russia.⁴⁰

Among these populist leaders, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán's actions have significantly impacted the EU's foreign policy towards Russia. Characterized as 'Europe's chief disrupter,'⁴¹ the EU's 'Trojan Horse,'⁴² or 'friends of enemies of his friends,'⁴³ Orbán has repeatedly obstructed key EU initiatives in this matter, including vetoing an aid package for Ukraine, delaying Sweden's NATO accession, and Ukraine's EU membership. Orbán's diplomatic engagement with Putin, being the first EU leader to meet with him since the invasion of Ukraine, has attracted widespread criticism and heightened fears that he may seek to undermine EU institutions, particularly targeting the European Commission and its president. This behavior suggests a deliberate effort to weaken the EU's collective power and its ability to uphold democratic values and unity.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the EU's recent decision to unfreeze billions of euros in funds for Hungary,⁴⁵ despite previous concerns about human rights and the rule of law—a strategic move to secure Orbán's support for critical EU foreign policy initiatives rather than a response to genuine improvements in Hungary's governance—raises concerns about compromising democratic values for pragmatic purposes.

These developments highlight the complex challenges the EU faces in addressing the threat of populism. The actions of leaders like Orbán both challenge the EU's internal cohesion and its stance on the global stage, emphasizing the need for a more effective strategy to safeguard the Union's democratic values and institutional integrity against populist encroachments.

REFLECTING ON THE ELECTION OUTCOMES

Following the four-day marathon from June 6 to June 9, the European parliamentary elections resulted in an uneasy truce between the populists and far right and the reassuringly immovable pro-European center. There were initial expectations that the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR), which includes a spectrum of populist right-wing elements,⁴⁶ would gain a bigger majority, but the mainstream European People’s Party surprisingly retained its strength, remaining the largest party with 189 seats.

Far right winners, despite some national upsets, do not constitute an over-mighty EP majority and are unlikely to form an overall super-party. Geert Wilders’ Dutch far right PVV was edged into second place by the Left-Green alliance, and Orbán’s Hungarian Fidesz missed the predicted landslide, surpassing the new opposition party of Péter Magyar with 43.7 percent but falling short of the anticipated 50 percent. Far right seats were few and far between in many other countries, though an appreciable number of far right independents might join various groupings.

Unexpectedly, French President Emmanuel Macron faced defeat at the hands of the Marine Le Pen’s and Jordan Bardella’s National Rally party, which led him to call snap national elections. This can be perceived as a concerning indication of the increasing far right influence in the elections.

Looking ahead, major rifts can and will remain between the new far right additions to the EP, its institutions and future as the wellsprings of populist discontent are incredibly wide-ranging. Despite having common ideological ground and sharing fascist historical roots, these parties differ significantly in their beliefs and approaches; the crux of which lie in choosing between remaining defiantly outside the EU system or working pragmatically from within it.

CONCLUSION

Centrist parties in Europe have had difficulty addressing immediate needs and presenting compelling alternatives to far right demands, leading to either policy failures or a departure from their core ideologies, thereby

creating opportunities for ambitious opponents. Although far right populists have not gained a majority in the European Parliament, their influence at the national level remains a significant concern for Europe. Therefore, while the EPP is likely to secure the future of the European Union project, it must collaborate with the ECR and respond to the far right's demands, which focus more on 'remain-based' Euroscepticism rather than outright rejection of the EU.⁴⁷

However, considering the increasing visibility of figures like Viktor Orbán, Geert Wilders, and their like-minded allies at both the national and EU levels, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that liberal European values and the liberal international order are in danger. This growing consciousness and solidarity among right-wing populist parties and figures suggest an alternative vision for the EU, one that is illiberal. Given the possibility of Trump's reelection and the emergence of new right-wing populist cadres in the West, the political landscape will have significant consequences for Europe and beyond.*f*

ENDNOTES

- 1 Among the institutions created are the European Parliament, which functions as the directly elected legislative body; the European Central Bank, tasked with the Euro's management and the EU's monetary policy; and the European Court of Justice, which ensures uniform application of EU law across member states. The integration has been multidimensional, encompassing economic, political, and geographic aspects. Economically, the Single Market and the Economic and Monetary Union, including the euro adoption, exemplify this integration. Politically, the EU has fostered a common foreign and security policy alongside increased cooperation in justice, environmental, and health affairs. Geographically, the Schengen Agreement has enabled borderless travel between member states, facilitating easier movement. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which formalised the EU and laid the groundwork for economic and monetary union, the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which reformed institutional structures and increased transparency and democratic legitimacy, and the Schengen Agreement, have all been pivotal in enhancing integration.
- 2 John Pinder and Simon Usherwood, *The European Union: Very Short Introduction* (OUP: Oxford, 2007).
- 3 The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union collaborate in the legislative process within the European Union through a procedure known as the "Ordinary Legislative Procedure" or "co-decision." This process involves both bodies working together to adopt legislation, ensuring that both the directly elected representatives of EU citizens in the Parliament and the member states' government representatives in the Council have a say. They must agree on a text in its entirety, which requires negotiation and sometimes conciliation, to pass any legislative act. This procedure underscores the EU's dual legitimacy structure, balancing the interests of its citizens and member states.
- 4 "Types of institutions and bodies," *The European Union*, accessed on April 12, 2024, https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/types-institutions-and-bodies_en.

- 5 Gregor Fitzi, Jürgen Mackert, and Bryan S. Turner, eds, *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy: Volume 3: Migration, Gender and Religion* (Routledge, 2018).
- 6 Anders Backlund and Ann-Cathrine Jungar, "Populist radical right party-voter policy representation in Western Europe," *Representation* 55, no. 4 (2019): 393-413.
- 7 "Dictionary of Populism," European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS), 2020, <https://www.populismstudies.org/resources/vocabulary/>.
- 8 Bulent Kenes and Mustafa Demir, *Populist Radical Right in the West: Nativist Putinist Authoritarianism, Conspiracy Theories, Violence and Sexism* (Palgrave, 2024 forthcoming).
- 9 Mustafa Demir and Greg Barton, *Islamist Populism in Turkey and Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis* (Springer Nature, 2023).
- 10 Jordan Kyle and Brett Meyer, "High Tide? Populism in Power, 1990-2020", Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, February 7, 2020, <https://institute.global/policy/high-tide-populism-power-1990-2020>.
- 11 Kevin Cunningham, Susi Dennison, Simon Hix and Imogen Learmonth, "Policy Brief: A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2024 European Parliament elections," *European Council in Foreign Relations*, January 23, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/>.
- 12 John Henley, "'Anti-European' populists on track for big gains in EU elections, says report," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/24/anti-european-populists-on-track-for-big-gains-in-eu-elections-says-report>.
- 13 Rosa Balfour and Laura Gelhaus, "How Influential Will Europe's Populist Parties Really Be in the Next European Parliament?," German Marshall Fund (GMF), accessed April 11, 2024, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/how-influential-will-europes-populist-parties-really-be-next-european-parliament>.
- 14 "Hungary's sovereignty law is Viktor Orban's new dangerous provocation targeting independent media," *Reporters Without Borders*, December 2023, <https://rsf.org/en/hungary-s-sovereignty-law-viktor-orban-s-new-dangerous-provocation-targeting-independent-media>.
- 15 The "muzzle" law passed in late 2019 by Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) is part of a broader series of judicial reforms aimed at increasing government control over the judiciary, initiated since their rise to power in 2015. Key reforms include: changes to the Constitutional Tribunal in 2015, which altered judge appointments and tribunal decision processes; a 2017 revision of the National Council of the Judiciary that shifted member selection to parliamentary control; modifications to the Law on Ordinary Courts in 2017, transferring significant powers to the Minister of Justice; and a controversial Supreme Court Law that sought to lower the retirement age of judges, facilitating a turnover aligned with governmental preferences. These reforms have raised concerns over the erosion of judicial independence and democratic principles in Poland.
- 16 John Macy and Allyson K. Duncan, "The Collapse of Judicial Independence in Poland: A Cautionary Tale," *Judicature* 104, no.3 (2020-2021): 40.
- 17 Alexander Stille, "How Matteo Salvini pulled Italy to the far right," *The Guardian*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>.
- 18 Jon Hennley and Jennifer Rankin, "'Frexit in all but name': what a Marine Le Pen win would mean for EU," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/15/frexit-what-marine-le-pen-win-mean-eu>.
- 19 Ayhan Kaya, "Influence of Populism on the European Migration Agenda," *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2023*, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/influence-of-populism-on-the-european-migration-agenda/>.

- 20 “French parliament adopts toughened immigration law backed by far right,” *RFI*, December 20, 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20231220-french-parliament-adopts-toughened-immigration-law-backed-by-far-right>.
- 21 “France: Immigration Bill Threatens Rights,” *HRW*, November 6, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/06/france-immigration-bill-threatens-rights#:~:text=Key%20concerns%20in%20the%20bill,the%20principles%20of%20the%20Republic>.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Claire Hédon, “France’s defender of rights: ‘The immigration bill threatens the fundamental rights of foreigners,’” *Le-Monde*, December 12, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/12/12/france-s-defender-of-rights-the-immigration-bill-threatens-the-fundamental-rights-of-foreigners_6336395_23.html.
- 24 “What is the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?” *International Rescue Committee*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/what-eu-pact-migration-and-asylum>.
- 25 “The European Green Deal,” *The European Commission*, accessed April 12, 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.
- 26 “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism,” European Commission, https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en.
- 27 “EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS),” European Commission, https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en.
- 28 Central to the Green Deal is the energy transition, highlighted in the EU’s RepowerEU strategy, which is a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and focuses on cutting reliance on Russian energy to increase political leverage. Amelia Hadfield and Mustafa Demir, “UK, EU and Third Party Energy Security Issues: 2024 and Beyond,” *Centre for Britain and Europe*, January 2024, <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/CBE-EU-UK-energy-security-spring-2024.pdf>.
- 29 Mark Grier, “LEAK: EU centre-right targets Brussels ‘red tape’, says AI should not be hindered,” *Euractiv*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/leak-eu-centre-right-targets-brussels-red-tape-says-ai-should-not-be-hindered/>.
- 30 “EPP Manifesto 2024,” epp, accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.epp.eu/papers/epp-manifesto-2024>.
- 31 Josh Gabbatiss, “EU election 2024: What the manifestos say on energy and climate change,” *CarbonBrief*, May 24, 2014, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/eu-election-2024-what-the-manifestos-say-on-energy-and-climate-change/>.
- 32 By addressing farmers’ concerns during EU elections, the Commission aims to mitigate the appeal of hard-right parties who might exploit dissatisfaction with stringent climate policies. This tactical decision is designed to retain voter support within more centrist or traditional constituencies, preventing those voters from shifting their allegiance to radical right-wing populists who could promise less regulatory interference in industries such as farming.
- 33 “The rise of agricultural populism,” *The Financial Times*, February 5, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/37ed3c5b-736a-4ae7-81af-dbedd1d98047>.
- 34 “Promoting democracy and observing elections,” *European Parliament*, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/166/promoting-democracy-and-observing-elections>.
- 35 Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy Erodes from the Top: Leaders, Citizens, and the Challenge of Populism in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023); Milada Anna Vachudova, “Populism, democracy, and party system change in Europe,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 471-498.

- 36 Alina Polyakova, "STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: Putin and Europe's Far Right," *World Affairs* 177, no. 3 (2014): 36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43555253>.
- 37 Adam Holesch and Piotr Zagórski, "How the Ukraine war has eroded the links between Putin and the European far right," *LSE*, May 23, 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/05/23/how-the-ukraine-war-has-eroded-the-links-between-putin-and-the-european-far-right/>.
- 38 Kim Taehwan, "Authoritarian Sharp Power: Comparing China and Russia," *The Asan Forum*, June 18, 2018, <https://theasanforum.org/authoritarian-sharp-power-comparing-china-and-russia/>.
- 39 Andrew S. Weiss, "With Friends Like These: The Kremlin's Far-Right and Populist Connections in Italy and Austria," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 27, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/02/27/with-friends-like-these-kremlin-s-far-right-and-populist-connections-in-italy-and-austria-pub-81100>.
- 40 Gideon Rachman, "The far right is moving into Europe's mainstream," *The Financial Times*, November 27, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/8384228d-8156-4134-8eb4-035c068704b9>.
- 41 Ben Hall, Marton Dunai and Henry Foy, "Viktor Orbán: what is the endgame for Europe's chief disrupter?" *The Financial Times*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/e158834e-1860-4dee-9d2f-3458ec71f287..>
- 42 Elisabeth Zerofsky, "Viktor Orbán's Far-Right Vision for Europe," *The New Yorker*, January 7, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/14/viktor-orbans-far-right-vision-for-europe>; Maryon Gera, "Here, the Hungarian people will decide how to raise our children": Populist rhetoric and social categorization in Viktor Orbán's anti-LGBTQ campaign in Hungary," *New Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2023): 104-129; Bulent Kenes, "Viktor Orbán: Past to Present," *European Center for Populism Studies*, August 2, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.55271/lp0001>.
- 43 Marion Van Renthergem, "The Orbán/Trump alliance is a threat to Europe," *The New European*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/the-orban-trump-alliance-is-a-threat-to-europe/>.
- 44 Ben Hall, Marton Dunai and Henry Foy, "Viktor Orbán: what is the endgame for Europe's chief disrupter?" *The Financial Times*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/e158834e-1860-4dee-9d2f-3458ec71f287>.
- 45 Nicolas Camut, "Commission unblocks €10.2B for Hungary as EU tries to sway Viktor Orbán on Ukraine," *Politico*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-unblocks-e10-2-billion-for-hungary-as-eu-tries-to-sway-viktor-orban-on-ukraine/>.
- 46 Duncan McDonnell and Annika Werner, "European Conservatives and Reformists: A Very Respectable Marriage," *International Populism: The Radical Right in the European Parliament*, online (2020): 55-92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197500859.003.0003>.
- 47 Catherine De Vries, "The European Parliament elections and what comes next," UK in a Changing Europe, June 5, 2024, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-european-parliament-elections-and-what-comes-next/>.