

The 2019 European Parliament Elections

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Between May 23 and 26, 2019, the 28 member states of the European Union (EU) held elections for the 751 members of the next [European Parliament](#) (EP). The only directly elected EU institution, the EP represents the bloc's roughly 513 million citizens. The EP has accumulated more power over time within the EU, and through such entities as the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, Congress is likely to engage the EP, including on certain aspects of U.S.-EU relations. Some analysts suggest that gains for parties considered "euroskeptic"—that is, critical of the EU or anti-EU to varying degrees—may influence the functioning of the EP, the EU, and the conduct of U.S.-EU relations. (See also CRS In Focus IF11211, [The European Parliament and U.S. Interests](#).)

Election Results and Possible Implications

Members of the EP (MEPs) serve five-year terms and are organized into groups that caucus according to political orientation rather than nationality. A [political group](#) must consist of at least 25 MEPs from a minimum of seven EU countries. In the 2014-2019 EP, there were eight political groups—containing over 200 national parties—and several "non-attached" or independent MEPs. Political groups give MEPs more influence, as groups receive funding from the EP and more speaking time and have a formal role in EP decision-making. The relative size of the groups also helps determine EP leadership and committee posts.

The European Parliament

Political Group	2014-2019 Seats	2019 Election Results
European People's Party (EPP; center-right)	216	179
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D; center-left)	185	152
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR; right-wing, euroskeptic)	77	60

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE; centrist/liberals) + new pro-EU parties (from France and Romania)	69	109
Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA; greens/regionalists)	52	74
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL; far-left/former communists)	52	38
Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD; right-wing/far-right, euroskeptic)	42	44
Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)/European Alliance of People and Nations (EAPN; far-right/euroskeptic)	36	73
Non-attached	20	22

Sources: [European Parliament](#); [Politico Europe](#).

The center-right EPP and the center-left S&D retained their positions as the two largest political groups but lost their combined majority amid increased fragmentation and [gains for euroskeptic, liberal, and green parties](#). At the same time, experts suggest that [euroskeptic parties did not do as well as some predicted](#), and pro-EU groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, and Greens/EFA) hold a combined 513 seats (68%). Although the EPP and the S&D have tended to cooperate and dominate past parliaments, voting coalitions on specific legislation vary. Compromise and coalition-building are thus long-standing, essential features of the EP but may take on [heightened importance](#) in the next term.

Analysts [question whether the broad array of euroskeptic parties can work together](#) to block legislation or hinder EU policymaking. Although most euroskeptic parties are on the right or far right (and are predominantly nationalist and anti-immigration), some are on the left or far left. In the 2014-2019 EP, euroskeptic MEPs on the right were spread among at least three groups and struggled to form a cohesive opposition due to competing agendas and diverse views (including on EU reforms, migration, and Russia). The leader of Italy's far-right *Lega* party, Matteo Salvini, is seeking to form [a new, larger euroskeptic group](#), EAPN, which is expected to encompass ENF and some parties previously in ECR and EFDD. Even if euroskeptic parties can forge a more united front, they would be a collective minority and would have to gain support from other groups to have much impact on the legislative process.

Some observers assert that euroskeptic gains in the EP could have other consequences. The EP provides euroskeptics with a venue from which to espouse their critical views—possibly eroding public support for the EU—and a platform from which to advance themselves in their respective national politics. Euroskeptic MEPs could shift certain policies, such as EU enlargement, if they can prompt pro-EU political groups or EU leaders to embrace similar positions.

The outcome of the EP elections is also linked to [the selection of the next president of the European Commission](#) (the EU's executive). EU leaders must take the EP election results into account in choosing the next commission president. The EP must then approve the nominee by an absolute majority. The fragmented election results [may weaken the EPP's claim](#) (based on it winning the most seats) for its ["lead candidate"](#) to become the next commission president.

The composition of the political groups would be affected if the United Kingdom leaves the EU ("[Brexit](#)") during the new EP term. The UK's 73 MEPs would depart, and the overall number of MEPs would decrease to 705, but certain EU countries would gain additional seats (according to an agreed [post-Brexit seat redistribution](#)). S&D, ALDE, the Greens,

and euroskeptic groups would lose seats—and potentially some influence—following Brexit (currently scheduled to occur by October 31, 2019).

U.S. and Congressional Interests

The EP's role in EU policy-making [may be of interest to Congress](#) in several areas, including:

Trade. Although many MEPs would support a [possible U.S.-EU free trade agreement \(FTA\)](#), far-right and far-left MEPs concerned about the effects of free trade and globalization could complicate the required EP approval. A future U.S.-EU FTA could also face opposition from EP green parties, given the Trump Administration's announced withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

Counterterrorism. EP decisions may influence efforts to enhance EU-wide counterterrorism capabilities. Many MEPs, especially but not exclusively on the left, are mindful of balancing stronger counterterrorism measures with upholding civil liberties and privacy protections.

Data privacy. The EP has played a central role in shaping the EU's approach to data privacy and data protection, notably with the EU's new [General Data Protection Regulation](#), which applies to many U.S. companies doing business in Europe.

Russia. Numerous far-right euroskeptic parties in the EP hold pro-Russian views. EU and U.S. officials, including some Members of Congress, are increasingly concerned about [Russia's possible influence on these parties](#), including through close political ties and financial support in some cases.