



## The European Parliament after 2024: Navigating a Fractured Continent

Antony Dawson D'silva\*

Associate Professor, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam – 682011, Kerala, India

\*Corresponding Author's Email: [antonydawson@maharajas.ac.in](mailto:antonydawson@maharajas.ac.in)

### Abstract

The 2024 European Parliament elections marked a significant turning point in the political trajectory of the European Union, producing a legislative chamber that is at once more ideologically diverse, more institutionally assertive, and more operationally challenged than any of its predecessors. Scholars of European integration have long warned that the twin pressures of democratic responsiveness and effective supranational governance are difficult to reconcile within a single institution (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). This article examines the post 2024 European Parliament through a multidimensional analytical lens encompassing electoral outcomes, internal coalition dynamics, key legislative priorities, external pressures, and the Parliament's evolving capacity to speak with a coherent voice on matters of continental significance. Drawing on electoral data, institutional theory, and comparative political analysis, the article argues that the Parliament's current condition reflects not merely the arithmetic of seat distributions but a deeper structural tension between democratic responsiveness and the demands of effective supranational governance. The implications extend beyond Brussels corridors and into the lived realities of approximately 450 million European citizens whose futures depend on the Parliament's capacity to transcend its internal fractures and forge actionable consensus in an era of compounding global crises.

**Keywords:** European Parliament, 2024 elections, populism, Euroscepticism, EU governance, Green Deal, democratic deficit, coalition politics

### Introduction

Democratic institutions do not exist in a vacuum. They are shaped by the societies they serve, and when those societies undergo profound transformation, the institutions that represent them must either adapt or risk losing their legitimacy (Runciman, 2018; Schmidt, 2020). Few examples illustrate this dynamic more clearly than the European Parliament (EP) following the 2024 European elections. Widely described as a watershed electoral moment, the June 2024 vote fundamentally reshuffled the composition of the only directly elected supranational parliament in the world, accelerating tendencies that had been building for over a decade and generating new ones that few analysts had anticipated (European Parliament, 2024).

The surge in support for nationalist and right wing parties across multiple member states, the fragmentation of the traditional centrist blocs that had long governed legislative proceedings, and the emergence of novel cross border coalitions have collectively produced a Parliament that is both more

representative of the continent's political diversity and less capable of the smooth consensus building on which the EU's institutional machinery depends. This paradox more democracy, yet arguably more dysfunction sits at the heart of contemporary European Parliamentary experience, echoing what De Wilde and Zürn (2012) described as the inherent tension between politicisation and effective European governance.

This article undertakes a comprehensive examination of the post 2024 European Parliament, proceeding through several analytical stages. First, it maps the electoral landscape that produced the current chamber, identifying the forces and grievances that drove voters in new directions. Second, it examines the internal architecture of the Parliament, analyzing how its political groups have responded to ideological fragmentation. Third, it assesses the Parliament's legislative agenda, focusing on the most contested policy domains. Fourth, it interrogates the Parliament's relationship with other EU institutions, particularly the Commission and the Council. Fifth, it situates the EP within the broader global context of democratic backsliding and institutional stress. The article concludes by assessing the Parliament's capacity to navigate its internal fractures and contribute meaningfully to European integration in the years ahead.

## **Materials and Methods**

### ***The 2024 Electoral Landscape: What Changed and Why***

Any analysis of the post 2024 European Parliament must begin with a careful examination of the electoral dynamics that brought it into existence. The elections held across all 27 member states between June 6 and 9, 2024, produced outcomes that confirmed some long-standing trends while also generating genuine surprises. Voter turnout reached approximately 51%, broadly consistent with the upward trend established in 2019, suggesting that European citizens continue to assign increasing relevance to the Parliament despite persistent critiques of its distance from everyday concerns (European Parliament, 2024).

The most consequential development was the substantial gains registered by right wing and far right political formations across numerous member states. In France, the Rassemblement National achieved its strongest ever European performance, prompting President Emmanuel Macron to dissolve the National Assembly and call snap legislative elections. In Italy, the governing Fratelli d'Italia consolidated its position as a dominant force. In Germany, the Alternative für Deutschland posted historically strong numbers despite ongoing legal and political controversies. In Austria, Hungary, and the Netherlands, right wing forces similarly performed well. These patterns are consistent with the broader European trend that Mudde (2019) identified as the normalization of far right politics across Western democracies.

The centre left Social Democrats, the liberal Renew Europe group, and the Greens all experienced significant losses. The Greens, in particular, suffered what commentators characterized as a dramatic reversal of their strong 2019 performance, when climate anxiety had driven substantial numbers of younger voters toward environmental parties. By 2024, with economic pressures bearing down on households and a cost of living crisis reshaping political priorities, green concerns had been partially displaced by anxieties about purchasing power, immigration, and geopolitical insecurity, a dynamic that Norris and Inglehart (2019) anticipated in their analysis of cultural backlash movements across advanced democracies.

The European People's Party (EPP) retained its position as the largest single group within the Parliament, but its margin over rivals contracted, and its ability to anchor centrist governing coalitions

became more complicated. The EPP's internal tensions between its traditional Christian democratic wing and members more sympathetic to nationalist positions had grown more pronounced, mirroring what Bartolini and Mair (2001) described as the progressive hollowing out of mass party organisations in European democracies.

Structural explanations for these electoral shifts are not difficult to identify. Across Europe, the convergence of several crises - the inflationary aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy price volatility generated by Russia's war in Ukraine, anxieties about immigration following record movement of people across the Mediterranean and eastern borders, and growing skepticism about the costs of ambitious climate transition policies created fertile ground for political actors who could channel public frustration into electoral gain (Kriesi et al., 2008). The right's ability to articulate grievances about sovereignty, cultural identity, and economic anxiety resonated with voters who felt that mainstream parties had inadequately addressed their concerns.

### ***Internal Architecture: Political Groups in Transition***

The European Parliament does not organise itself along national lines. Its members sit in transnational political groups that aggregate parties from different member states sharing broad ideological commitments. This architecture is central to the Parliament's functioning, as group membership determines committee assignments, speaking time, and access to resources (Corbett et al., 2023). The post 2024 reconfiguration of these groups has been among the most complex and consequential episodes in the Parliament's history.

Perhaps the most dramatic development was the emergence of the Patriots for Europe group, which rapidly became the third largest grouping in the Parliament after attracting members from far right parties across multiple countries. Its formation represented a significant organizational achievement for nationalist forces that had previously been dispersed across different groups or registered as non attached members, limiting their institutional influence. The consolidation of this bloc gave far right voices a more coordinated platform within parliamentary proceedings, amplifying their capacity to shape debates, propose amendments, and use procedural mechanisms to advance their agendas a development that Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) would recognize as the natural institutionalization of Eurosceptic party families.

Simultaneously, the Identity and Democracy group underwent significant shifts, with some constituent parties gravitating toward the Patriots formation and others maintaining their existing affiliations. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) also repositioned itself, seeking to occupy a distinct space between the mainstream EPP and the more openly nationalist formations, presenting itself as a responsible conservative alternative rather than a radical rejection of European institutions (Caiani & Graziano, 2016).

The response of the traditional centrist groups to these developments has been one of the defining institutional stories of the post 2024 Parliament. The so called "cordon sanitaire", the informal agreement among mainstream parties to exclude far right groups from governing coalitions came under increasing pressure, particularly as arithmetical realities made it more difficult to assemble stable legislative majorities without drawing on votes from the right. As Hix et al. (2007) demonstrated in their foundational study of parliamentary voting behavior, the coherence of legislative coalitions within the EP depends fundamentally on the willingness of political groups to subordinate short term tactical interests to longer term cooperative norms.

These dynamics have generated significant tensions within the Parliament's traditional working culture. Committee chairs, negotiation procedures, and the allocation of rapporteurships the

designated role of leading the Parliament's work on specific legislative files have all become subjects of heightened contestation. The Parliament's capacity to function effectively depends significantly on intergroup cooperation, and when that cooperation is compromised by ideological polarisation, the cost is measured not merely in political terms but in legislative output and the quality of democratic deliberation (Christiansen & Reh, 2009).

## Results and Discussions

### *Legislative Priorities and Policy Contestation*

#### Climate and Environmental Policy

The European Green Deal, the EU's flagship environmental policy framework, has become one of the most contested terrains within the post 2024 Parliament. Launched under the previous Commission and designed to make Europe climate neutral by 2050, it represented an ambitious agenda that shaped much of the 2019–2024 legislative cycle. The new Parliament's composition has generated considerable uncertainty about its future trajectory, as right-wing groups have pushed for a recalibration of environmental ambitions, arguing that regulatory burdens on industry, farmers, and consumers need to be eased in response to economic pressures (Schmidt, 2020).

The so-called "farmer protests" that swept across several member states in early 2024, with agricultural workers expressing frustration at EU environmental mandates, added political momentum to calls to reconsider the Green Deal's component policies. Legislative files concerning land use, pesticide regulation, and emissions standards for vehicles have all become flashpoints in the new Parliament. These tensions reflect a broader challenge that Hooghe and Marks (2009) described in their post-functionalist theory: once European integration produces policies with visible distributional consequences, it triggers political mobilisation that constrains institutional ambitions.

At the same time, advocates of ambitious climate action have argued that the urgency of the climate crisis does not diminish because of electoral shifts. Scientific evidence on accelerating temperature rise, more frequent extreme weather events, and the long-term economic costs of inaction continue to inform the positions of Greens, Social Democrats, and significant portions of the Renew group. The resulting legislative dynamic is one of ongoing friction, in which specific environmental files move forward slowly, are amended substantially, or in some cases stall in committee proceedings.

#### Migration and Border Policy

Migration emerged as the dominant issue in the 2024 European elections and remains central to the post 2024 Parliament's political calculus. The EU Migration and Asylum Pact, painstakingly negotiated over years and finally adopted in 2024, provided a new framework for managing migration flows, but implementation challenges and ongoing movement of people across European borders have kept the issue at the forefront of political debate (European Parliament, 2024). Far-right and conservative groups within the Parliament have advocated for stricter border enforcement, accelerated deportation mechanisms, and reduced legal migration pathways.

These positions have found traction beyond their immediate political base, as even some traditionally centrist parties have adopted harder rhetoric on migration in response to electoral pressures. The tension between these approaches and the EU's foundational commitments to human

rights, asylum law, and international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention creates ongoing legal and ethical complications that the Parliament must navigate. Civil society organisations, legal experts, and human rights bodies have repeatedly warned that some proposed measures would violate EU fundamental rights standards, echoing the concerns that Kelemen (2017) raised about the compatibility of national authoritarian tendencies with EU constitutional values.

### Digital and Technological Governance

One arena in which the post 2024 Parliament has demonstrated a degree of cross-cutting consensus is digital governance. The Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, and the AI Act adopted in 2024 established the EU as a global leader in technology regulation, implementing a risk-based framework that has attracted international attention. The new Parliament has inherited the task of overseeing the implementation of these landmark frameworks while addressing emerging questions they did not fully anticipate (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2023). Issues such as AI-generated disinformation, the market power of large digital platforms, data governance across borders, and the implications of advanced technologies for security and economic competitiveness have all moved up the legislative agenda.

While ideological divisions are not absent in this domain, there is somewhat broader agreement on the principle that the EU should exert regulatory agency over major technology actors. This consensus has provided a basis for productive cross-group collaboration, representing a partial exception to the broader pattern of legislative fragmentation that characterises the post 2024 Parliament (Christiansen & Reh, 2009).

### *Inter-institutional Relations: The Parliament and Its Partners*

The European Parliament does not legislate alone. Its relationship with the European Commission and the Council of the European Union fundamentally shapes what the Parliament can achieve. In the post 2024 period, these inter-institutional relationships have taken on new characteristics that reflect both the Parliament's changed composition and the priorities of the new Commission that took office under Ursula von der Leyen's second term. As Corbett et al. (2023) have emphasised, the EP's power to confirm or reject the Commission gives it a meaningful lever over the direction of EU executive policy, making the investiture process a critical moment of democratic accountability.

Von der Leyen's second term began with the Parliament's approval, but not without controversy, as her coalition-building efforts necessarily involved accommodating diverse political demands from groups across the ideological spectrum. The implicit commitments made during this process have shaped the Commission's legislative program, creating tension with member states and Parliament factions whose priorities were not fully reflected in the agreed agenda. This dynamic illustrates what Schmidt (2020) characterised as governance by rules that privilege technocratic coherence over democratic accountability.

In trilogue negotiations - the three-way discussions between Parliament, Council, and Commission through which most EU legislation is finalised- the Parliament's position depends heavily on the ability of its negotiating teams to speak with unified authority. When political groups are fragmented, or when cross-cutting alliances shift across different legislative files, the Parliament's negotiating coherence can be compromised, giving the Council greater leverage to shape final legislative outcomes (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2023). This dynamic has been observable in several

high-profile negotiations in the post 2024 period, where Council positions have prevailed on contested points over Parliament's initial preferences.

The Parliament's relationship with the European Court of Justice also warrants consideration. The Court has on multiple occasions been called upon to adjudicate disputes involving the Parliament's institutional prerogatives, and its jurisprudence has progressively expanded the scope of parliamentary authority in ways that the founding treaties may not have fully anticipated (Christiansen & Reh, 2009). In the post 2024 context, legal challenges to legislation passed by the new Parliament, particularly in areas touching on fundamental rights, may increasingly emerge as a mechanism through which civil society organisations and other actors seek to constrain political outcomes they view as incompatible with EU constitutional values.

### ***External Pressures: Geopolitics, Security, and Economic Uncertainty***

The Parliament does not operate in isolation from the broader geopolitical environment. The ongoing war in Ukraine, the transformation of transatlantic relations, growing strategic competition with China, and the threat of terrorism and hybrid warfare have all impinged on the Parliament's agenda (Zürn, 2018). The war in Ukraine has been, in many respects, a catalytic event for European defence cooperation. Before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the EU's role in defence remained limited and heavily dependent on member state initiatives and NATO structures. The post-invasion period saw an acceleration of EU-level defence spending coordination, industrial policy for defence manufacturing, and discussions about the creation of shared European military capacities.

The economic backdrop against which the Parliament operates continues to be characterised by uncertainty. While the acute inflationary pressures of 2022 and 2023 have moderated, European economies face structural challenges including demographic decline, productivity growth gaps relative to the United States and China, the costs of digital and energy transitions, and the burden of supporting Ukraine. The Parliament has debated multiple proposals for EU level fiscal tools, including the issuance of common debt instruments and the expansion of EU own resources. These debates touch on fundamental questions of fiscal sovereignty that divide member states along lines that do not always map neatly onto the left- right ideological spectrum (Schmidt, 2020).

The relationship between the EU and the United States under shifting American administrations has also been a source of significant legislative attention. Questions about trade policy, technology standards, defence burden sharing, and the extraterritorial application of US law to European companies and citizens have generated parliamentary discussions about European strategic autonomy - the ambition to reduce the EU's dependence on external actors in key domains (Zürn, 2018). The Parliament has generally been a proponent of strengthening European capacities, though divisions persist about how far such autonomy should extend and what trade-offs it might require.

### ***Democratic Legitimacy and the Participation Challenge***

One of the most enduring critiques of the European Parliament has been the so-called democratic deficit, the perception that EU institutions are distant from citizens, opaque in their operations, and insufficiently accountable to the people in whose name they act (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Despite successive treaty reforms that have expanded the Parliament's powers and despite efforts to increase the visibility of European-level political contestation, this critique retains salience and has indeed been partly validated by the 2024 electoral results.

When voters in multiple countries expressed dissatisfaction with the direction of EU policy by supporting parties that had explicitly campaigned on platforms of institutional critique or outright Euroscepticism, they were exercising precisely the kind of democratic agency that advocates of a more powerful Parliament had long sought to encourage (Caiani & Graziano, 2016). The irony is that this democratic energy has partly been channelled toward forces whose policy prescriptions would, if implemented, constrain some of the Parliament's most significant legislative achievements and weaken certain foundational principles of the European project.

The Conference on the Future of Europe, concluded in 2022, generated extensive recommendations from citizens' panels for institutional reform and treaty change. The post 2024 Parliament has inherited the task of determining what, if anything, should be done with these recommendations. Treaty revision, a politically fraught process requiring unanimity among member states and ratification through national procedures, represents one pathway toward institutional reform, but the political conditions for such revision remain unpredictable (Christiansen & Reh, 2009). Alternative approaches to strengthening democratic legitimacy have focused on improving transparency in legislative processes, enhancing the capacity of national parliaments to scrutinise EU legislation, and experimenting with deliberative democratic mechanisms such as citizens' assemblies on specific policy questions.

The Parliament's own communication apparatus has invested in digital outreach, youth engagement initiatives, and multilingual accessibility, though evaluations of these efforts suggest that the gap between institutional ambition and actual public awareness remains substantial. As De Wilde and Zürn (2012) argued, politicisation of European integration while necessary for democratic accountability also risks generating a backlash that undermines the very institutions it is meant to legitimise.

## Conclusion

The European Parliament that emerged from the 2024 elections is not the Parliament that its founders envisioned, nor the one that emerged from the optimistic integrationist spirit of the post-Cold War decades. It is, instead, a chamber that reflects with unusual fidelity the contradictions and anxieties of a continent grappling simultaneously with its internal divisions and its external vulnerabilities. The fractures within the Parliament are not incidental features of a particular electoral cycle; they are expressions of deeper social, economic, and cultural tensions that European integration has not resolved and that, in some respects, it has intensified (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

Yet fracture is not the same as failure. Democratic institutions are not designed to eliminate political conflict; they are designed to manage it through structured deliberation, negotiated compromise, and procedures that allow majorities to govern while protecting minority rights (Runciman, 2018). The European Parliament, notwithstanding its considerable challenges, continues to fulfill this function in important respects. Legislation continues to pass. Committees continue to conduct oversight. The Parliament's role as a counterweight to executive power within the EU system continues to be exercised, if unevenly and with varying effectiveness across different policy domains.

What the post 2024 Parliament requires from its members, from national governments, from the Commission, and from European citizens is a renewed commitment to the underlying purposes of the enterprise. That enterprise is not the defence of any particular political ideology, nor the preservation of any specific policy agenda. It is the maintenance of a framework within which diverse peoples can address shared problems through shared institutions, without recourse to the conflicts

that devastated the continent in the twentieth century (Verney & Bosco, 2013). This purpose remains as relevant as ever, even as perhaps precisely because it is more contested than it has been in decades.

The coming years will test the Parliament's resilience across multiple dimensions: its legislative productivity, its inter-institutional relationships, its democratic legitimacy, and its capacity to engage with crises that no single national government can address alone. The history of European integration offers grounds for measured optimism. The project has weathered previous crises, the empty chair crisis of the 1960s, the enlargement debates of the 1990s and 2000s, the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis of 2015–2016, and the COVID-19 pandemic by finding, usually at considerable political cost and after significant delay, pathways to renewed cooperation (Corbett et al., 2023). Whether it can do so again, in conditions of heightened political polarization and geopolitical uncertainty, is the defining question of the post 2024 European Parliament's mandate.

## References

- Bartolini, S., & Mair, P. (2001). Challenges to contemporary political parties. In L. Diamond & R. Gunther (Eds.), *Political parties and democracy* (pp. 327–343). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Caiani, M., & Graziano, P. (2016). Varieties of Euroscepticism. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(4), 523–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1122055>
- Christiansen, T., & Reh, C. (2009). *Constitutionalizing the European Union*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Corbett, R., Jacobs, F., & Neville, D. (2023). *The European Parliament* (10th ed.). John Harper Publishing.
- De Wilde, P., & Zürn, M. (2012). Can the politicization of European integration be reversed? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(S1), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2011.02232.x>
- European Parliament. (2024). Results of the 2024 European elections. <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/>
- Follesdal, A., & Hix, S. (2006). Why there is a democratic deficit in the EU: A response to Majone and Moravcsik. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(3), 533–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x>
- Hix, S., Noury, A., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2009). A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000409>
- Kelemen, R. D. (2017). Europe's other democratic deficit: National authoritarianism in Europe's democratic union. *Government and Opposition*, 52(2), 211–238. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2016.41>
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *Western European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C. (2019). *The far right today*. Polity Press.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2023). The EP's role in EU external relations: Informal influence and formal procedures. *Journal of European Integration*, 45(2), 209–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2022.2085451>
- Runciman, D. (2018). *How democracy ends*. Basic Books.



- Schmidt, V. A. (2020). *Europe's crisis of legitimacy: Governing by rules and ruling by numbers in the eurozone*. Oxford University Press.
- Taggart, P., & Szczerbiak, A. (2004). Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00143.x>
- Verney, S., & Bosco, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Elections in hard times: Southern Europe 2010–11*. Routledge.