
European Parliament elections

The European Parliament elections – an interactive guide



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More than 350m EU citizens can vote in May to elect a new European Parliament, the bloc's only directly elected institution, and shape the future of the EU.

The elections are likely to be the most consequential in a generation.

The mainstream centre-left and centre-right will probably lose their joint control of the legislature for the first time in 25 years. The socialists are in disarray in France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, while moderate conservatives are being squeezed by Eurosceptics and the far-right across the EU following years of austerity and a backlash over immigration. Anti-establishment and nationalist parties, which surged into first place in some countries in 2014, are expected to make further gains, particularly in Italy, Germany and Spain — and could disrupt the way the EU works if they can

find a way to work together. Centrist pro-Europeans, led by France's Emmanuel Macron, are seeking to play a bigger role.

Twenty-seven member states — assuming the UK departs the bloc before then — will vote between May 23 and 26. Here the FT explains how the European Parliament election works and what is at stake.



If you would like to know more, tap or click on [the words highlighted this way](#) — they provide extra context.

When you tap or click on the word, you will see a short explanation.

Hide

What are the elections for?

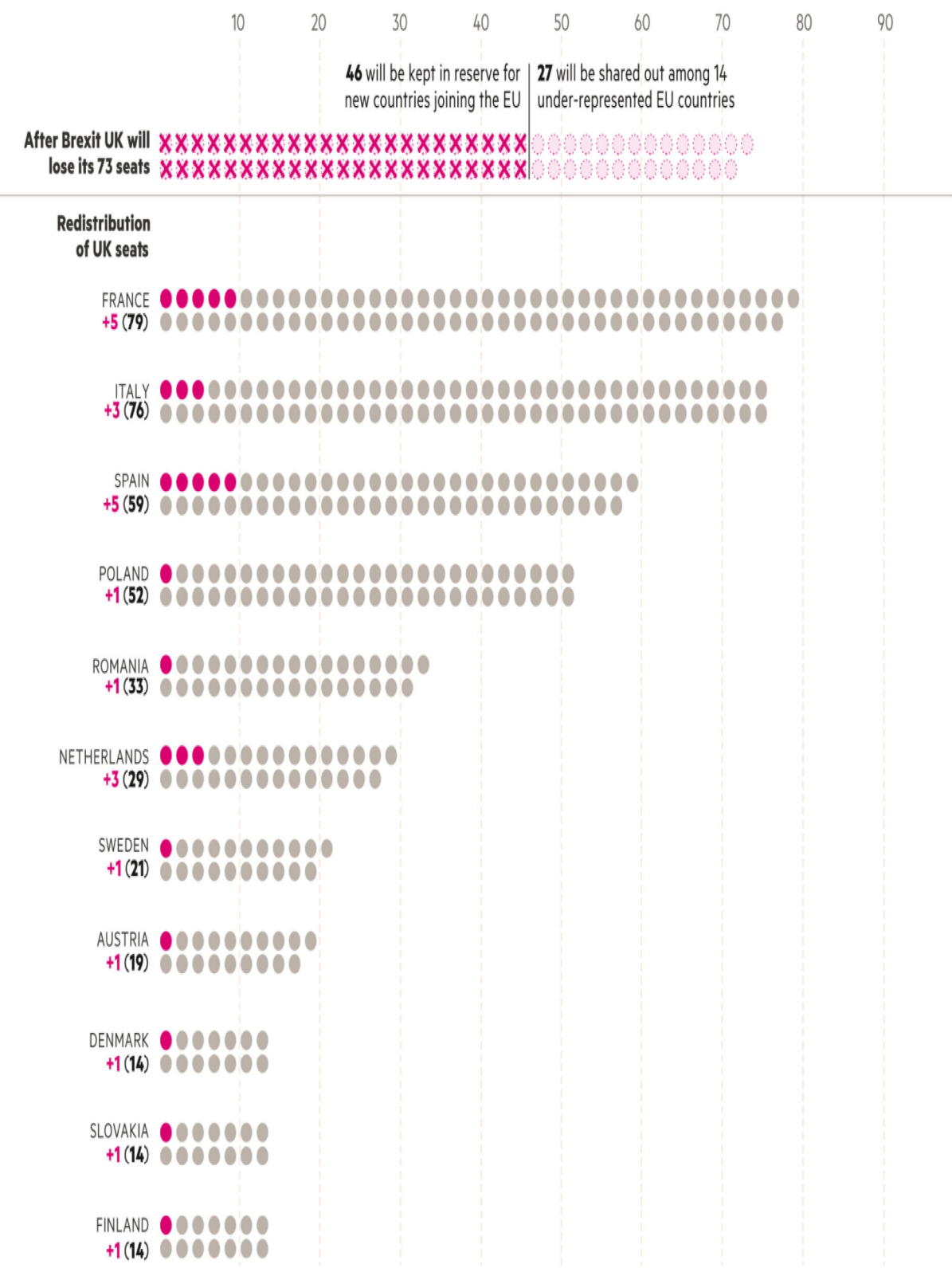
The elections bring in members of parliament (MEPs) who fulfill the European Parliament's three main duties:

- Pass EU laws
- Supervise the European Commission
- Oversee the EU's €145bn annual budget

MEPs will also decide, together with the EU member governments, who will replace Jean-Claude Juncker as president of the [European Commission](#) .

With the UK's planned exit from the bloc, the parliament will shrink from 751 seats to 705. Fourteen under-represented countries will [gain seats](#) ,

including France, Italy and Spain, and 46 seats will be held in reserve for new countries that may join the EU in the future.

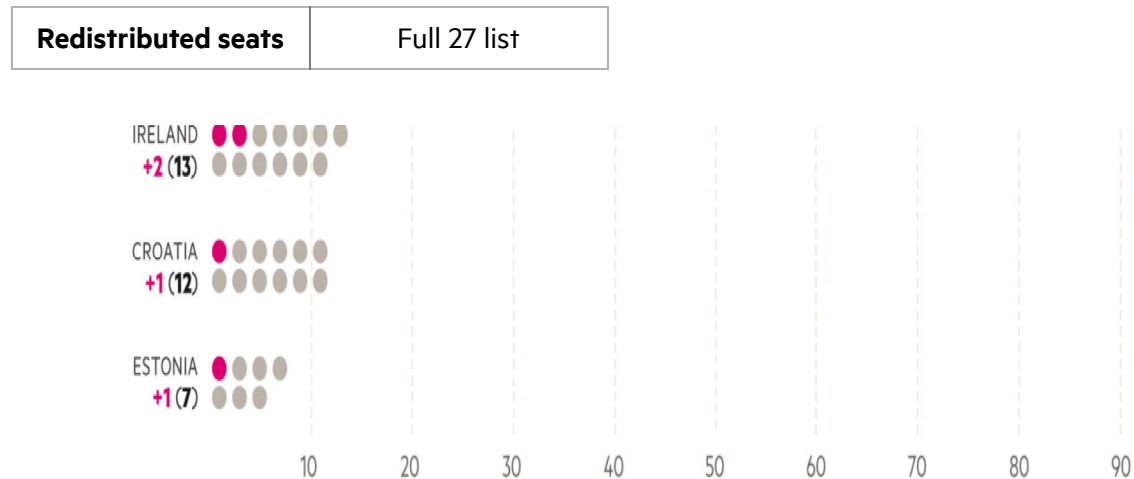


After Brexit, UK will lose its 73 seats in the EP

Some will be dropped and some – reallocated to other countries

SEATS

 In reserve  New
 Reallocated Unchanged



Who's in it?

The European Parliament is unique in that national political parties organise themselves into pan-European **groups** , roughly along ideological lines, which work with each other to pass legislation.

The EP has eight political groups, ranging from mainstream centre-right and centre-left forces to anti-EU alliances.

The European parliament's rules require a group to have at least 25 MEPs from at least seven member states. Groups qualify for parliamentary funds, committee jobs and the right to handle policy files. Some chose to put forward candidates for the commission presidency, a *Spitzenkandidat*, in the elections.

Who are the *Spitzenkandidaten*?



Jan Zahradil (ECR), Frans Timmermans (S&D), Ska Keller and Bas Eickhout (European Greens), Manfred Weber (EPP)

The *Spitzenkandidat*, or lead candidate, system was first tried out in 2014 and propelled Mr Juncker to the EU's top job. Rather than leave the choice of commission president to EU leaders after the election, it involves the big pan-European political groups each picking a top candidate before the vote.

The eventual winner must convince a [qualified majority](#) of the heads of EU national governments, the European Council, to nominate them for the commission post, a decision which is far from automatic. The nominee will then need to command support from newly elected MEPs, essentially by building a coalition of supportive groups. [Here is the list](#) of all known candidates so far.

The 2019 election, however, will probably be the trickier than the 2014 debut. Some vested interests that supported the process four years ago are weaker. The mainstream centre-right and centre-left parties who most vociferously promoted the process — and divvied up top jobs between themselves — are unlikely to command a majority in the parliament. Building a coalition in the next parliament will potentially be harder, and the parliament may not be as united in insisting on a *Spitzenkandidat*.

What's at stake?

In short, the elections will help set the future direction of the EU and the laws that govern the bloc. And they come at a critical time.

Brexit has spurred nationalist, anti-EU groups across Europe, many of whom see the elections as a referendum on the EU's survival. There are deepening divisions in the bloc between east and west, north and south. And the EU is still dealing with the fallout from the 2015 migration crisis and the subsequent [far-right surge](#)



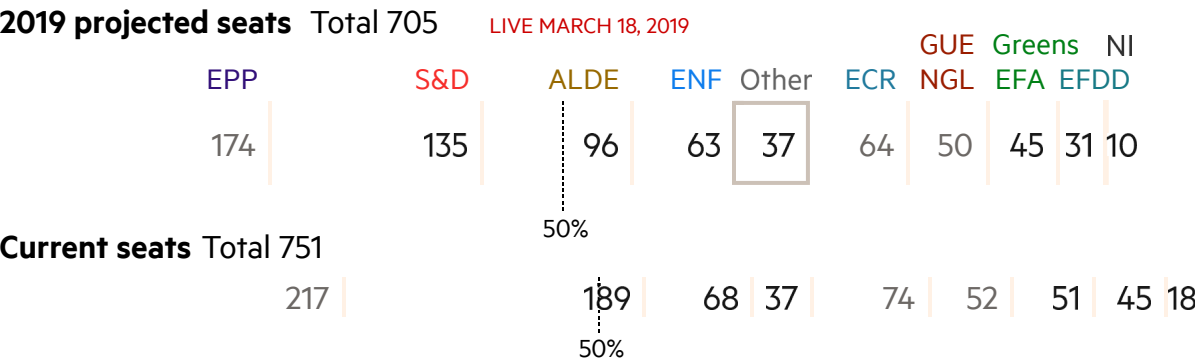
Major campaign issues range from spending, climate change and labour rights, to immigration, refugees and rule of law.

What do the polls say?

The centre-right and centre-left are projected to remain the largest groups in parliament, but are expected to lose the combined majority they've held since the parliament's inception.

Polls suggest that the far-right will boost its numbers — probably not enough to bring the institution to its knees, but it could be enough to [disrupt the way the EU works](#) .

French president Emmanuel Macron is eager to reach a wider European audience in the hope of limiting the presence of right-wing nationalists in the next European Parliament. Recent opinion polls in France show that Mr Macron’s La République en Marche party has regained a narrow lead over the far-right Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen on voting intentions for the European elections.



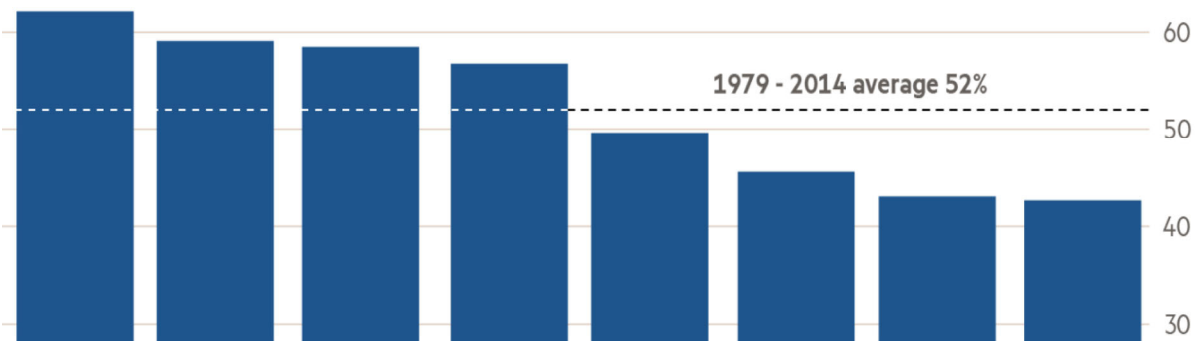
Read our methodology [here](#) .

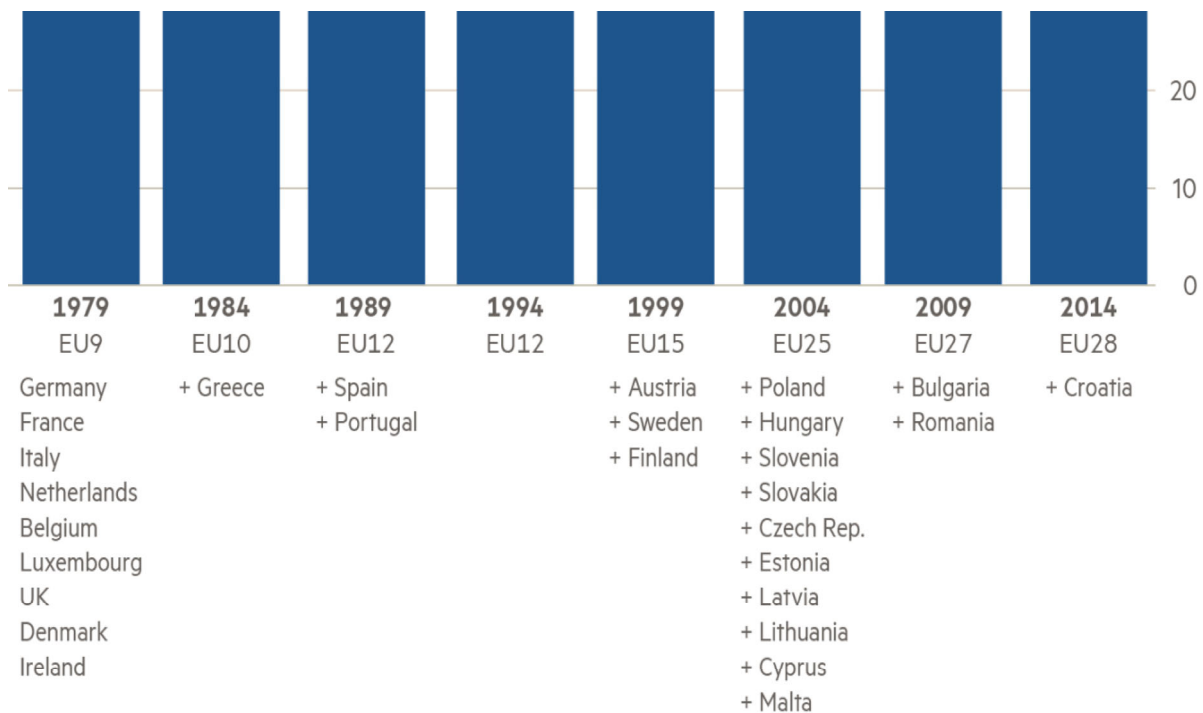
What about turnout?

Turnout in European elections has historically been low, far lower than most national elections. In the 2014 elections, only 42.6 percent of all eligible voters cast their votes.

Turnout in European elections has fallen by nearly a third since 1979

Per cent of eligible voters





Source: European Parliament
© FT

In a report last year, the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy, attributed falling turnout to a broad erosion of trust in institutions and said that protest votes are becoming more common. “Liberal democracies have less legitimacy than at any time since World War II,” the report said.

Another explanation, according to the Journal of European Integration, is that the public simply does not care as much about the European elections. “The stakes are lower,” wrote Nicholas Clark, who authored the study, in an email to the FT. “National governments hold much of the power, the European Parliament does not.” Mr Clark added: “Many voters simply do not know what the EP does and therefore do not find as much reason to vote.”

What do you want to know about the European elections? The FT is keen to answer your queries. Share your questions in the comments below.

Illustrations: Sarah Tanat-Jones



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Good European

3 days ago

I do so hope that come May 23rd we get to hold our elections for a fresh batch of MEPs in the UK. It would do so many ill informed people good to discover the European Union is more democratic than the British parliamentary system, to have a chance to see what the EU does for them and how they get to decide who represents them in that arena. Nothing like what the europhobic British media portrays at all.

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Grovester

7 days ago

“National governments hold much of the power, the European Parliament does not.”

But but but the Daily Mail and the Telegraph and The Sun and the Daily Express and The Times and those lovely Russian bots on Twitter have been telling me for years that the EU has been ruling us with an iron fist and they have all the power and we're not sovereign and we have to make ourselves free from the evil EUSSR even if it means we'll lose our jobs and make Jacob Rees-Mogg even more money?

I don't understand.

Can someone please explain this?

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Homo Deus

8 days ago

I really enjoyed this interactive overview! Where can I see how the EU used its approx. €145bn annual budget so far?

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Niki Blasina FT FT

8 days ago

@Homo Deus Great to hear! You can dive into the EU budget here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/eu-budget_en

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Homo Deus

7 days ago

@Niki Blasina FT @Homo Deus Thank you :)!

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Upton

8 days ago

A full explanation of the Spitzenkandidat system here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/27/eu-democratic-bandwagon-juncker-president-wanted>

"A catalogue of complacency, negligence, miscalculation and manoeuvring by national leaders over the past nine months conspired to deliver an outcome no one really wanted – Jean-Claude Juncker, Europe's accidental president."

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Sebastian

8 days ago

@Upton

Also known as the Westminster process: the boss of the party that wins the most votes gets the top job.

Okay, any system that can result in the likes of Theresa May at the helm is obviously deficient but that's different from being undemocratic.

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Sir Cweldrik

8 days ago

@Upton @Sebastian Obvious: Macron's vision of Europe. We are talking about the European Parliament. It is also likely that the Spanish voter will vote for the Spanish

party which sides with Macron's vision of Europe even if that party isn't the winner today.

Intelligent voters in UK should not vote Tory (nor Labour). They should vote LibDem or Green, the only pro-European parties in UK - unless they know the Tory or Labour candidate is pro-European and prefer their politics. Voting intelligently is the solution to the present stupid chaos both main parties have led.

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Not known

8 days ago

@Sir Cweldrik @Upton @Sebastian would be very funny if the UK ends up voting and there is a majority of pro-European MEPs voted in; all whilst the government is still trying to get us out...

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