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STATE OF POPULISM IN EUROPE

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STATE OF **POPULISM**
IN EUROPE

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Preface

2018 was the year of biding our time in European politics. After months of negotiations, it was still not clear what would happen with the United Kingdom, how – if at all – it would leave the European Union. Citizens still perceive that no stable solutions were proposed for the grand challenges facing the European Union, from the deepening of monetary integration over the joint management of refugee affairs all the way to the principles that will define the coming budget cycle. The intensifying struggle between progressive and populist parties appears to have come to a stalemate. While in Italy and Hungary the populists scored decisive electoral victories, in Sweden and Luxembourg pro-European forces – centre-left in the former and centre-right in the latter – prevailed. Support for the EU reached a record high in 2018 – but so is the rejection of refugees and immigrants in many of the EU's Member States.

On account of the improving European economic indicators, many thought that populist appeal would be declining among Europeans in 2018. Yet the upward economic indicators, the record low unemployment and the absence of a major crisis – the emergence of a *Pax Europa* of sorts – still proved insufficient in steering voters back to the centre-right and centre-left parties. The positive economic environment most likely did play a role in halting further landslide changes in terms of electoral support towards populist parties. At the same time, the nostalgia for the Europe of the 1980s and 1990s continues to predominate among the voters of European populists. They are yearning for the stability and predictability of those times, the job security, the strong role of the state as a protector and provider. Voters of populist parties want change that will turn the world back to this old "order". Moreover, the impact of the series of terrorist acts in Europe, the refugee crisis in 2015, and the growing social disparities also continue to exert an impact, and most importantly so the populist forces' campaigns based on these issues.

What has not changed since 2015, however, is that at the end of the year FEPS and Policy Solutions once again evaluated what kind of an impact populist parties had over the past 12 months on European politics. FEPS and Policy Solutions have tracked the policies and popularity of over 80 populist parties in 2018 and we analysed the trends that have emerged. We have also evaluated the issues that these parties introduced into the public debates in each of the EU countries and assessed these parties' activities during election campaigns. We have continuously updated a unique database called Populism Tracker on the FEPS Progressive Post website, and we have shared numerous analyses with readers who are interested in these issues.

This volume presents our work over the last year, reviewing the trends and the most important activities of populist parties in the 28 EU countries, and we outline how their popularity evolved over this period – almost like an encyclopaedia. Our goal is to learn in finer detail about European and national political trends, and to thereby help both the researchers of this issue as well as those who work on ensuring that Europe continues to preserve its progressive values in the coming decades.



Methodology

Some of the recurring and controversial questions that feature in research related to populism ask which parties and politicians can be called populists, how precise and/or important this concept really is, and whether populist parties pose a threat to democracy. The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Policy Solutions classify parties as populist on the basis of several criteria, and we use the word descriptively rather than in an evaluative or negative sense. We primarily examined whether a given party's programme, the rhetoric of its leading politicians and its official campaign messages cohere with Cas Mudde's definition, which argues that populism is a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. The party programmes, leadership rhetoric and campaign slogans are then assessed in terms of their tendency to build upon animosity in society, the use of the "us versus them" dichotomy, the rejection of social and political pluralism, and whether they prefer direct democracy to a representative system. If a party met all or several of these criteria, and their popularity was sufficiently significant in the polls, we included it in our list of populist parties. In compiling this list, we also took into consideration categorizations in the relevant academic literature – that is to say, designations by leading political analysts and researchers. Naturally, populist politicians often supplement their messages with other ideologies and values, such as nativism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, illiberalism, socialism or communism. We have attempted to categorize individual parties as either left-wing or right-wing populists. We are of course aware that choosing to label a party as populist or to deliberately omit one of these parties from this study could be controversial. Nonetheless, we hope that the categorization we came up with based on our methodology will mesh with the assessments of our readers.

About Populism Tracker

The Populism Tracker of The Progressive Post is the most comprehensive website investigating populist trends in all the countries of the EU. The website is operated by FEPS and Policy Solutions. The Populism Tracker allows readers to continuously monitor the popularity of all European populist parties by using its Populism Map. It allows for the analysis of trends with the help of a continuously updated Populism Graph, and the website also offers studies, research and analyses published by Policy Solutions, FEPS and their partners on the subject of populism. Link: www.progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism-tracker

Trends in European populism in 2018

In 2018, **six EU countries held parliamentary elections**, in the following temporal order: Italy, Hungary, Slovenia, Sweden, Latvia and Luxembourg. **Populist parties gained in strength in all of these countries.** The **Five Star Movement** ended up winning the election in **Italy** and then entered into a coalition with the right-wing populist **League**. In **Hungary** – in a “free but not fair election” as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stated – the governing **Fidesz** party won a two-thirds supermajority in parliament with 49% of the votes. In **Slovenia** the **Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)** won the election with a populist campaign leaning on tools they had learned from Viktor Orbán in Hungary¹. In addition to the SDS, however, the left-wing populist **Levica** and the far-right **Slovenian National Party** also performed better than four years ago. In the end, however, a centre-left/liberal government was formed in Slovenia based on the cooperation between the progressive parties. In **Sweden**, the **Sweden Democrats** party surged to 17.5%, but its third place was only enough to encumber – rather than to forestall – the incumbent social democratic prime minister Stefan Löfven from forming another government. In **Latvia** the anti-elite **Who Owns the State** party rose swiftly to become the second most popular party, although at the same time the right-wing populist **For Latvia From the Heart** lost ground compared to previous elections. In **Luxembourg**, too, the non-mainstream parties increased their support, but the 5.5% result of the sole populist formation, the left-wing **Déi Lénk** party, is still not enough to give mainstream parties cause for concern.

Based on our Populism Tracker database, **At the end of 2018, 30.3% of European likely voters would have voted for a populist party**, in other words, over a quarter of the electorate supports some populist formation. A year ago, in December 2017, this ratio was somewhat lower at only 26.5%. Therefore, **one can definitely not speak about a populist breakthrough.** What is happening instead is **a slow and steady rise in the support for populist parties.** The rising trend in support for populism, or its novelty, often coupled with its extremism, the combative style of populists – along with their policies that threaten liberal democracy and progressive values if they happen to take control of government – are of concern – even if the absolute level of their support could suggest otherwise. But one can also look at these figures from another angle: the fact that 30.3% of the voters support populists (and some also support non-populist but extremist parties) also implies that **over two-thirds of Europeans are pro-EU, pro-liberal democracy and continue to vote for traditional parties** (centre-left, centre-right, liberal, green). However, the support of roughly a quarter of the electorate appears to be enough for populist parties to elevate themselves as an **alternative to the left/right divide** that traditionally shapes politics, **creating a new, populist/centrist political cleavage instead**, which they can potentially wield to **block the will of the majority** in an increasingly **fragmented political arena**. If, for example, the centre-left/green and centre-right/liberal parties fail to agree on economic issues, while there is also no agreement between populists and mainstream parties on issues such as the future of the European Union and the eurozone, immigration, human rights or relations with Russia, then with all the various groups incapable of cooperating with one another, the **populists could effectively paralyse decision-making processes even without commanding a majority.**

It emerges from the trends in 2018 that **populist parties primarily (but not exclusively) gained strength in countries that went through election campaigns**, such as **Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Sweden and Hungary** (see Figure 1). Among the 28 EU Member States, there were **only 10 countries in which we found a significant growth in the aggregate support of populist parties**; five of these had general elections. In **Spain**, it was the Andalusian regional election that gave the right-wing populist **VOX** party an opportunity to substantially increase their support. In **Bulgaria**, by contrast, the already popular centre-right major governing party, GERB, recovered some previously lost ground and was one of the top performers; in other words, in the Balkan country the rising support for populists is not reflective of a new development.

¹ We have thus far not included the SDS among the populist formations. We will have to assess whether they will continue to veer away from their previously moderate policies in the medium-term.



Countries with significant change of support for populist parties in 2018

(Increase in percentage points)

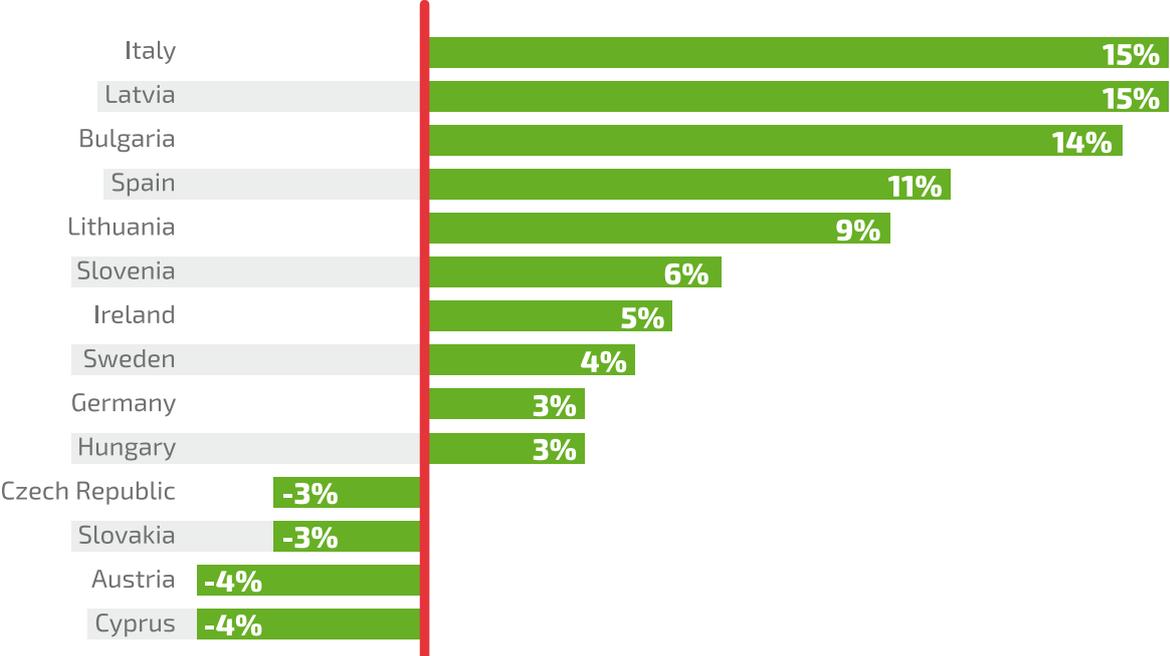


Figure 1 - Source: Populism Tracker

What is clearly apparent, however, is that – with the exception of Italy – the **major shifts are not happening in Western Europe** but at the EU’s “periphery”. Moreover, in several of the recently democratised **Central and Eastern European countries** there are signs that the **traditional parties have failed to establish themselves** and to achieve the same level of social embeddedness as their Western European counterparts.

The other obvious trend is that **where populists have managed to increase their strength, they rarely lost the ground they had previously gained**. Support for **populism fell in only four countries** in excess of the general margin of polling error: **Czechia, Slovakia, Austria and Cyprus**.

All of these shifts in popularity have not changed the fact that **the aggregate support for populist parties is still highest in Hungary** (see Figure 2). The governing party Fidesz and the largest opposition party, Jobbik, are supported by 69% of likely voters. However, while Fidesz continues to pursue increasingly radical and populist policies, in the last years Jobbik has sought to present itself as a centre-right formation. It is thus conceivable that as of 2019 the once extremist far-right party will probably be no longer accounted among the populist formations in Europe.

Countries with the highest aggregate support for populist parties in 2018

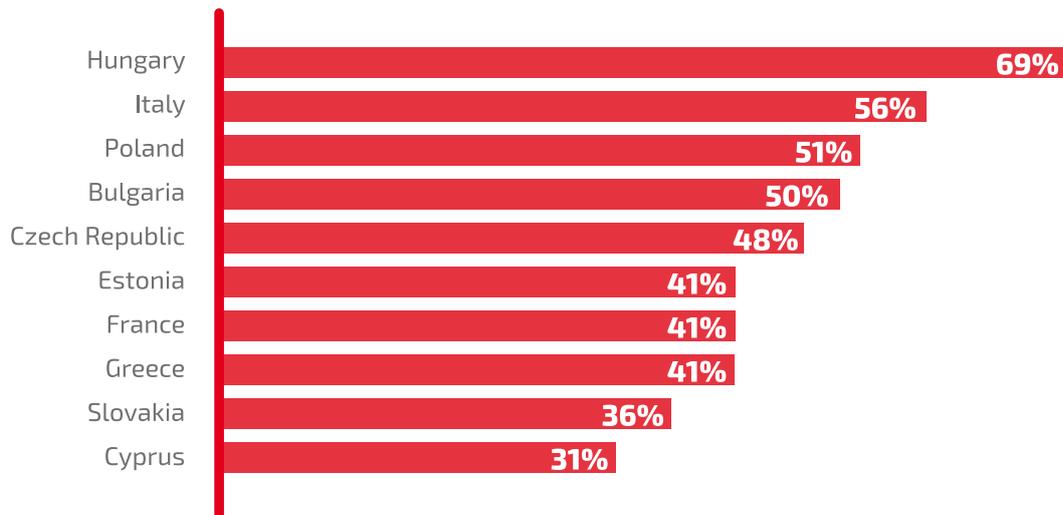


Figure 2 - Source: Populism Tracker

In Italy, 56% of likely voters support populist parties, which makes for the second highest ratio in the European Union. **Poland ranks third, Bulgaria is fourth and Czechia comes in fifth.** It is important to note that the populists are in government in all five of these countries and hence despite all previous assumptions, populists do not necessarily lose support once they enter in government. In fact, in these countries, they appear to retain or even increase their popularity whilst governing. Populist governments are seemingly popular in their own countries.

France is the only Western European country where over a third of the citizens would vote for a populist party. But since both right-wing (National Rally, France Arise) and left-wing populism (France Untamed, French Communist Party) are relatively strong in France – and are in an irreconcilable conflict with one another – **centrist parties have a shot at winning elections despite the fact that 41% of the public support populists.**

Similarly to France, in most countries several populist parties have each separately increased their support to a slight extent, which has added up to a discernible rise in their overall level of support. However, there were also some remarkable “individual” performances: **the far-right League in Italy surged by 18 points** in the span of a mere 12 months, the **Who Owns the State party in Latvia had a 13-point higher support** than at the end of 2017, while Spanish **Vox improved its standing in the polls by 9 points** (see Figure 3). Furthermore, it is important to note that the **most significant surges were all attained only by right-wing populist parties.** Among the left-wing populists, only the Slovenian Levica, the Irish Sinn Féin, the Greek Syriza, the Lithuanian Labour Party and Déi Lénk in Luxembourg managed to increase their support – and their gains were limited to 3-4 points.

Fundamentally, most of the 80 populist parties in the EU Member States did not tend to grow but stagnated. **In only 17 cases did we observe an increase** in support that exceeded the standard margin of polling error (3 points). At the same time, however, declining support was still less characteristic of the performance of populist parties; **only 5 of them lost 3 points or more.** The seemingly biggest loser appeared to be the Czech ANO party, but the relevance of its 6-point drop is mitigated by the fact that it has fallen relative to the inflated level of support it experienced in the post-election honeymoon in the aftermath of its victory in 2017; it remains the most popular political formation in Czechia by far. **The real losers of last year are the French politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his France Untamed party**, which have lost the support of 4% of the voters despite their opposition status and the mass demonstrations by the Yellow Vest movement, which feature many social demands that Mélenchon and his party also tend to advance.

Another characteristic indicator of **Central and Eastern Europe’s drift towards populism** is that **11 of the 17 populist parties that have gained ground in the polls are in that region.** Two further parties in this crowd (the League in Italy and Syriza in Greece) represent the Mediterranean region, three are in Western Europe (the National Rally, Alternative for Germany and Sinn Féin) and only one, the Sweden Democrats, is in the Scandinavian region.



Populist parties with significant change in 2018

(Increase in percentage points)

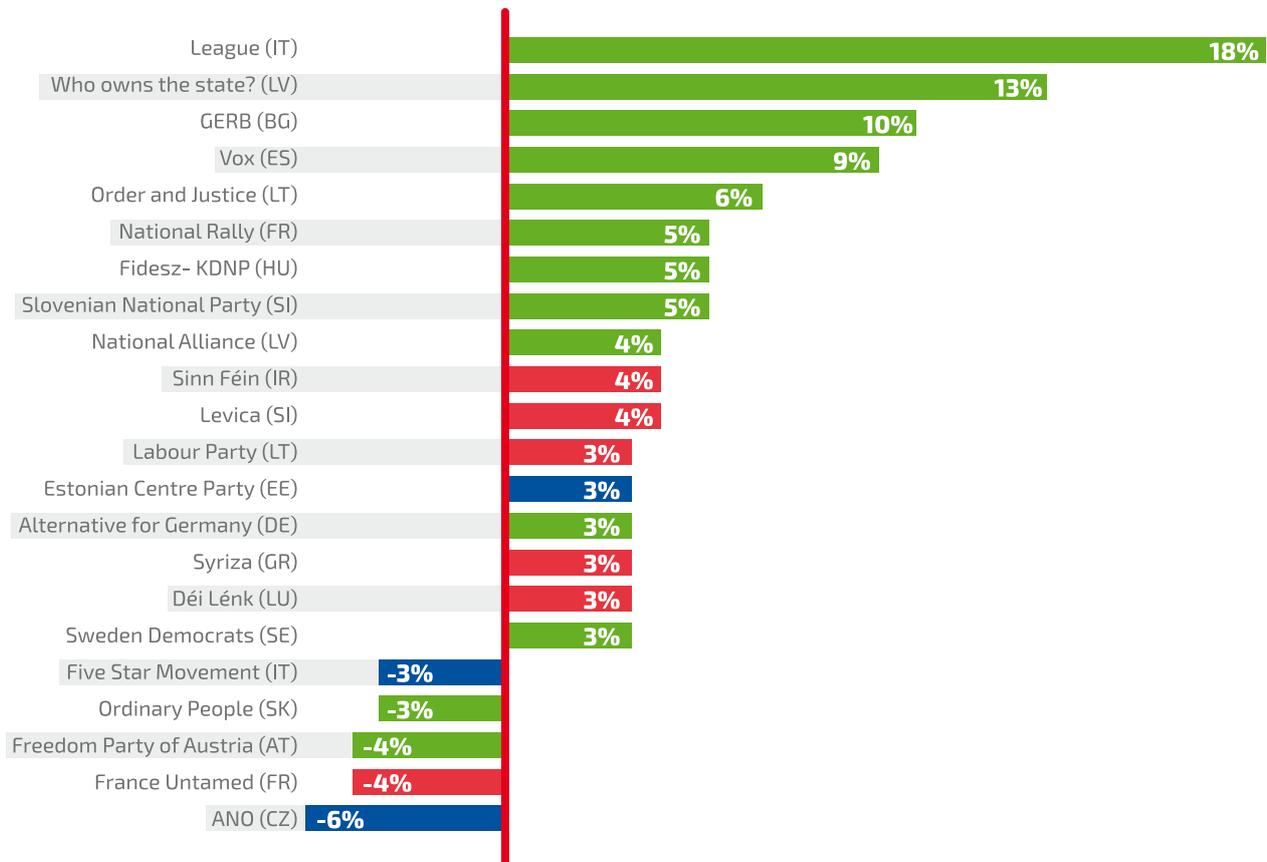


Figure 3 - Source: Populism Tracker

Of the 10 populist parties with the highest level of support, 5 are in Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, all 5 of these are also governing parties (see Figure 4). While the Czech ANO party, the Estonian Centre Party and the Bulgarian GERB are basically centrist parties that use populist rhetoric, the Polish and Hungarian governing parties (Law and Justice and Fidesz, respectively) are staunchly right-wing populist formations that pursue illiberal policies. Despite that fact – or maybe because of that – Fidesz stands at 57% in the polls while Law and Justice is supported by 42% of likely voters.

The other five parties in our top ten ranking of the most popular populist parties hail from **Southern and Western Europe**, and **four of them are governing parties**. Thus, **among the most popular populist parties in Europe, only one, Sinn Féin, is in opposition**.

All in all, **two major – and interconnected – trends must be highlighted with respect to the situation of populism in 2018**. The first key observation is that the **parties that tend to profit from the surge in populism are still generally right-wing** – and in some cases far-right – parties. Apparently, in the vast majority of EU Member States **right-wing populists are more likely to take control of the levers of government than left-wing populists**. The striking growth in the support of the League in Italy, the Who Owns the State party in Latvia and VOX in Spain, along with the uniquely high level of support experienced by Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice in Poland and GERB in Bulgaria – despite these parties having been in government in their respective countries for several years now – are all crucial examples of this trend. **Moreover, in 2019 we expect the Polish right-wing populist Law and Justice party and the liberal-populist Estonian Centre Party to be endorsed by their respective countries' voters for another four-year term.**

Populist parties with the largest support in 2018

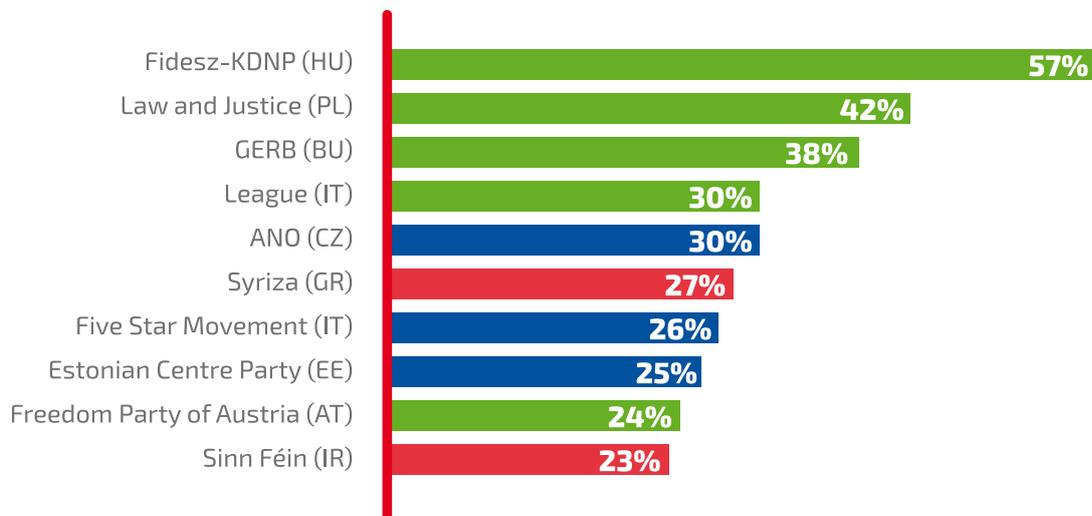


Figure 4 - Source: Populism Tracker

Before 2018, a clear and obvious line separated the Mediterranean region from the rest of Europe in the sense that **in the Southern countries the populist surge was almost completely limited to left-wing populists** (e.g. Greece and Spain), while in the other European regions the right was on the rise. The other important trend of 2018 is that **this division no longer exists** – the **right-wing populists have gained enormously in the polls in Italy and Spain**, while the situation of left-wing populists has either remained unchanged or has deteriorated. In Greece, Syriza appears headed for a defeat in the Greek parliamentary elections, while the far-left populist parties in Portugal will continue to be relegated to an opposition status. In fact, the latter may lose whatever influence they have left as the governing centre-left Socialist Party is increasingly gaining in terms of popularity. In the meanwhile, **the clash between right-wing and left-wing populists in Italy** (Matteo Salvini vs. Luigi Di Maio) **and France** (Marine Le Pen vs. Jean-Luc Mélenchon) appears to result in **a shift that favours the populist right-wing players**.

The surge in populism will of course not only impact individual EU Member States but the entire EU institutional system. The European Union is wrapping up the most tumultuous five years of its existence, which have been marked by a variety of unpopular and historical events, from the euro crisis all the way to the refugee crisis. In light of these, **it may be considered a success that – according to our analysis – the mainstream parties, that is the centre-right, centre-left and liberal formations will continue to hold on to a majority in the European Parliament (EP) after 2019**. At the same time, as a **first in the EP's history the European Peoples' Party (EPP) and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) will not wield a majority together**, they will need another "coalition partner" if they want to continue to jointly shape the future of Europe. Our predictions also show that **a third of the European Parliament will be made up of euroskeptic and populist MEPs**, which is enough to cause **numerous conflicts, slow down and from time to time even stall the EU's decision-making process**.

Nevertheless, it is also important to stress that the **euroskeptic/populist forces will be far from a majority** in any of the EU institutions. **In other words, supported by roughly a quarter of the European electorate the total share of populists will be large enough to make it difficult for the mainstream to bypass the populists in the decision-making process. However, populist forces will not be powerful enough to exert control over the future of Europe after the 2019 EU elections. Pro-European political forces will remain the principal actors with regard to the direction of the EU.**

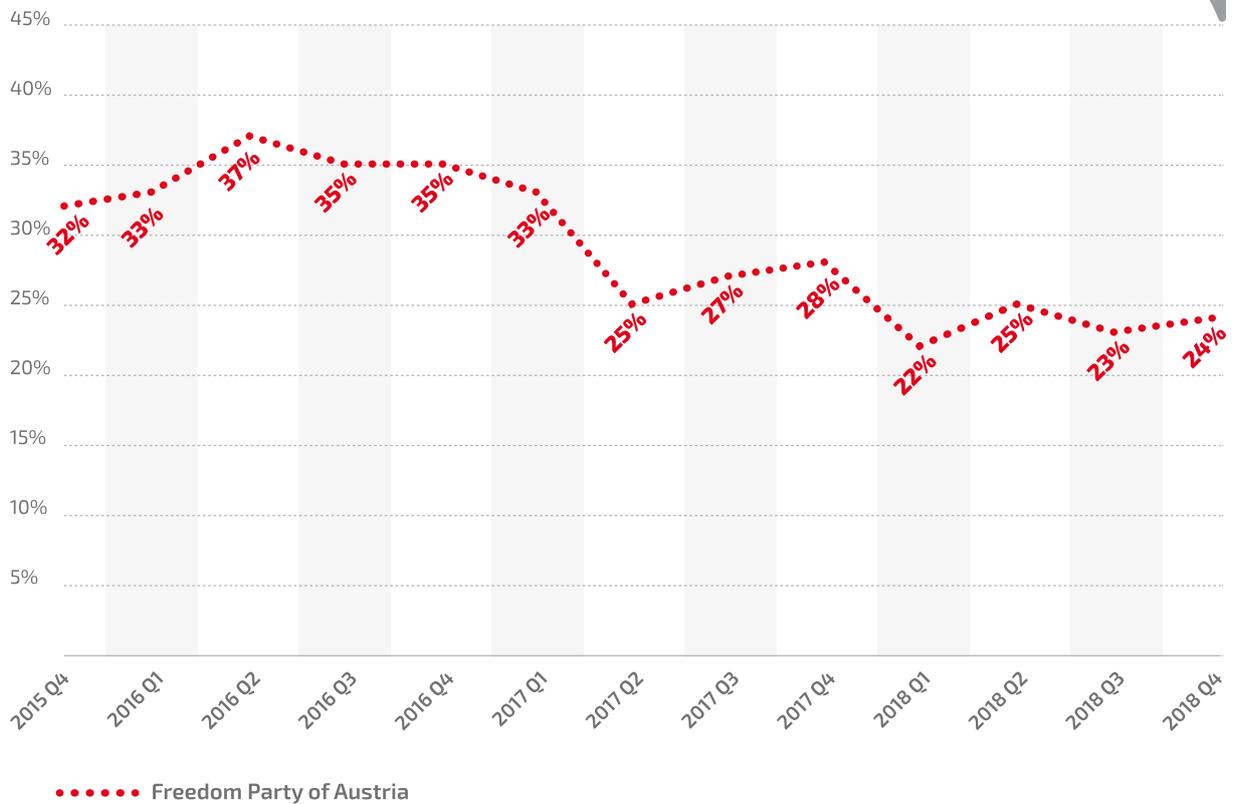


Austria

2018 was a hectic year for the sole Austrian populist formation, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). After the shining legislative election results of October 2017, the far-right populist party entered into a coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and went into the new year with a 28% support in the polls. Being in government proved rather challenging for this populist party as well: In the first quarter of 2018, support for the FPÖ dropped 6 points, to 22%. The junior party in the coalition government subsequently managed to regain 3 points and stood at 25% at the end of June. But the summer proved disappointing for the radicals, they dropped another 2 points, and only recouped 1 point until the end of the year. Thus, at the of 2018 still almost every fourth Austrian (24%) backs the Freedom Party of Austria.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Freedom Party of Austria | ENF | 19.5% | 24% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN AUSTRIA



There were four state elections in Austria during the first half of the year and none of them yielded a satisfying outcome for the FPÖ leadership because the party failed to repeat its outstanding performance in the last parliamentary election. Although in the state of Lower Austria the Freedom Party managed to double its seats in the regional parliament, the Landtag, it was a bittersweet victory for the FPÖ as it found itself embroiled in a neo-Nazi scandal during the campaign. It turned out that the FPÖ candidate Udo Landbauer had been a member of an extremist group at the age of 15.² The revelation had a massive negative impact

on the party's popularity at the national level, and it was presumably the main catalyst for its drop in the polls at the beginning of 2018. To make things worse for the party, the FPÖ suffered a painful defeat in the Carinthia state election, which used to be the party's stronghold. In the parliamentary election of 2017, the FPÖ had won 32% of the votes in the state – which had been governed by the party's emblematic leader Jörg Haider from 1999 on. Despite its previously strong position in the state, in March 2018 the FPÖ received only 23% of the votes in Carinthia, 2 points short of its declared target of 25%.³

2 P. Oltermann, Austria to dissolve Nazi songbook fraternity linked to Freedom party [in:] The Guardian, 1 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/31/austria-dissolve-fraternity-linked-far-right-freedom-party-songbook>

3 Spiegel, Austrian Right-Wing Populists Lose Ground, [in:] Spiegel Online, 4 March 2018, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/austrian-right-wing-populists-collapse-in-carinthia-state-election-a-886762.html>

The most significant political victory for the party was the decision to rescind the smoking ban in restaurants and bars in the spring of 2018. This had been one of the key election pledges by party leader Heinz-Christian Strache before entering the coalition. Despite considerable criticisms from medical experts and a section of society, the FPÖ successfully transformed the public perception of the problem from a public health concern into a freedom of choice issue.⁴ The smoking ban had been introduced in 2015 by the grand coalition comprising the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the centre-right ÖVP, and it caused an uproar among the owners of cafés because their business diminished palpably after the adoption of the law. Moreover, since Viennese coffeehouse culture is considered a vital part of Austrian culture, the ban wasn't very popular with the general public, either. Crucially, the FPÖ capitalised most on this issue in the Austrian capital, strengthening its position in Vienna, which is popularly known as *Red Vienna* and is generally dominated by the left.

Vladimir Putin's surprise appearance at the wedding of the Austrian foreign minister Karin Kneissl also damaged the FPÖ in the polls. Although Kneissl is technically an independent politician, she was nominated for her government position by the FPÖ, which she thus represents in the Austrian cabinet. The image of the Russian president dancing with the bride spread virally and caused a huge outcry in the media, mainly because Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and his vice chancellor, the FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache, were also present at the event. What made the situation especially awkward was that Austria has been holding the EU's rotating presidency since July. Putin's visit thus led to criticisms from both the domestic opposition as well as from international public opinion, which attacked the government for failing to stand up for European interests and values.⁵ Although both governing parties were to some extent implicated, the negative impact was limited to the radicals: while the ÖVP's support did not decline in Q3, the FPÖ dropped 2 points mainly on account of Putin's visit.

Looking across the entire year, the main reason behind the slight drop in FPÖ's numbers is Sebastian Kurz's astute balancing of pro-European solutions with strong views on migration, which take the wind out of the sails of the far-right party. And this

manifests itself in the polls, as the ÖVP still leads the race between the major parties with the support of over a third of likely voters. The chancellor was also actively engaged in combatting radical Islam: during 2018, the Austrian authorities shut down several mosques that were associated with radicals. At the same time, Kurz also successfully distanced himself from racism, which is still a major challenge for the FPÖ.⁶ A good example of the FPÖ's blatantly xenophobic communication is the latest poster campaign of the radical formation, launched in October, in which Muslims are depicted as criminals. The party illustrated its proposal to reduce the amount of child benefits paid to recipients who live abroad (i.e. to stop paying for children who live in other EU member states) with images of Muslim women who had their eyes blacked out. The interesting fact about this measure is that it affects mainly Eastern European migrants like Hungarian or Slovak citizens rather than the Muslim minority in Austria.

Nevertheless, it seems probable that the FPÖ will manage to increase the number of its seats in Strasbourg after the European Elections in May 2019. Consequentially, the party could become an important member of a potential anti-immigration bloc in the next European Parliament. However, they will be in intense competition with the Social Democrats for the second place, as the two parties are head-to-head in the polls.

4 E. Schuktheis, Austrian plan to drop smoking ban ignites opposition to far right [in:] Politico, 3 March 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/fpo-heinz-christian-strache-austrian-plan-to-drop-smoking-ban-ignites-opposition-to-far-right/>

5 J. Le Blond (2018). Anger as Austria's foreign minister invites Putin to her wedding. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/17/anger-austria-foreign-minister-invites-putin-to-wedding>

6 B. Gerdziunas, Kurz shuts down mosques, takes aims at 'political Islam', Politico, 6 August 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/kurz-islam-mosques-shuts-down-takes-aims-at-political/>

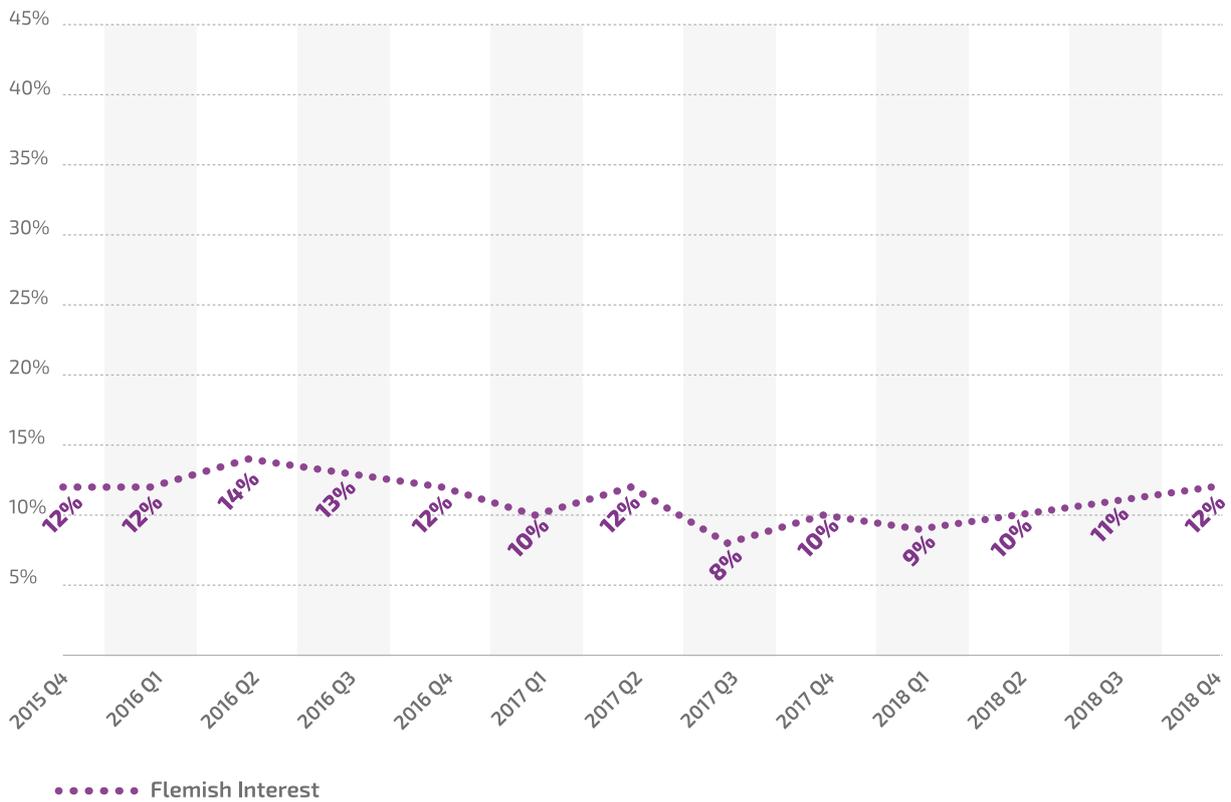


Belgium

In the course of 2018, we observed a slight increase in the popularity of Belgium's only populist party, Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang - VB), which had enjoyed the backing of every tenth citizen at the beginning of the year. After a minor drop in the first months of 2018, Vlaams Belang improved by a point in each quarter and it stood at 12% among likely voters in the polls at the end of 2018. We can call this a moderate victory for the party since Vlaams Belang's main priority in 2018 was to win over nationalist voters from the centre-right nationalist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) before the legislative election of 2019. Nonetheless, populism still has limited influence in Belgian politics.

| | | | |
|------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
| Flemish Interest | ENF | 4.16% In Belgium | 12% In Flanders |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN BELGIUM/FLANDERS



The most anticipated political event of the year in Belgium was the local election, which was seen as the preview for the 2019 general elections. During the campaign preceding the municipal election, a huge scandal hit Vlaams Belang when a newspaper revealed that at least fifteen of their candidates sympathise with Nazi ideology. The newspaper research showed that representatives of the party had liked and shared neo-Nazi content on social media.⁷ The party launched an internal investigation following the rule put forward by the current party leader, Tom Van Grieken, that such kinds of explicit endorsements of extremism are prohibited. Van Grieken instituted this policy because he aims to rebrand the party by leaving behind its radical past. Nevertheless, the party was soon embroiled in another unsettling scandal as its parliamentary leader, Filip Dewinter, was accused of regularly meeting with a Chinese spy and advising a Chinese company.⁸

Ultimately, the local election resulted in a huge leap forward for VB. Together with the Greens, the right-wing populist party achieved the biggest gains in terms of seats in parliament. The sense of success was reflected by Van Grieken's assessment that *The Vlaams Belang is back*. In its successful campaign, the party focused mainly on immigration,⁹ indicating that Vlaams Belang will likely continue to disseminate anti-immigrant messages to their voters. This is likely to prove increasingly dangerous to N-VA, which will in turn lead to the intensification of the competition between the two parties in 2019 and will probably increase the radicalization of Belgian politics.

The rivalry between the former governing party N-VA and VB emerged when the New Flemish Alliance quit the government in December 2018, a few months before the legislative election, because the N-VA was adamantly opposed to the decision of the prime minister, Charles Michel, to support the UN's Global Compact for Migration.¹⁰ N-VA's exit from the government's coalition can be interpreted as an attempt to win back radical voters and a more pronounced shift toward anti-immigration populism. The prelude of this step by the N-VA is Vlaams Belang's loud opposition to the UN's migration compact and their attacks against the government, especially with respect

to the New Flemish Alliance's inability to prevent the adoption of the pact. Moreover, Vlaams Belang organised an event where it hosted Steve Bannon, the former consultant of US President Donald Trump, as well as Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French far-right.¹¹ In the Belgian national context, the meeting was important in highlighting that the VB associates with populist heavyweights across Europe – which served to bolster its populist *bona fides* with the Belgian public – while at the same time it also positioned the party in the top ranks of international far-right movements.¹²

2019 will be an extremely important year in Belgium since in addition to the European elections, the country will also hold a general and a regional election. Vlaams Belang will almost certainly increase the number of its seats in the Chamber of Representatives and in the Flemish regional parliament. At the same time, it is unlikely that it can add more seats to its one-seat delegation in Strasbourg. However, it is still unclear how the race between the New Flemish Alliance and Vlaams Belang will ultimately shape up and how the N-VA's exit from the government will affect the party's popularity. Nevertheless, it is very likely that the two nationalist parties will adopt tougher positions on immigration. Although the N-VA's position as the leading party in Flanders is not in jeopardy as 28% of the voters in the region back the nationalist party, their move to leave the coalition and focus on anti-migration rhetoric could halt the growing popularity of Vlaams Belang.

7 Person (2018) "Candidates with Nazi sympathies exposed, Vlaams Belang launches investigation" *vrtnews.be*, 2 October. Available at: <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2018/10/02/candidates-with-nazi-sympathies-exposed/>.

8 "Belgian Parliament Member from Vlaams Belang Party Suspected of Spying for China - Reports" (2018) *UrduPoint*. Available at: <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/world/belgian-parliament-member-from-vlaams-belang-478925.html>.

9 Person (2018) "So who won the election?" *vrtnews.be*, 15 October. Available at: <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2018/10/15/so-who-won-the-election/>.

10 Cerulus, L. (2018) "The man who broke Belgium's government" *POLITICO*, 13 December. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/theo-franckenthe-man-who-broke-belgium-government/>.

11 Rtbf (2018) "Le Vlaams Belang reçoit Marine Le Pen et Steve Bannon pour atomiser le Pacte sur les migrations" *RTBF Info*, 8 December. Available at: https://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail_le-vlaams-belang-recoit-marine-le-pen-et-steve-bannon-pour-atomiser-le-pacte-sur-les-migrations?id=10092814.

12 *ibid*

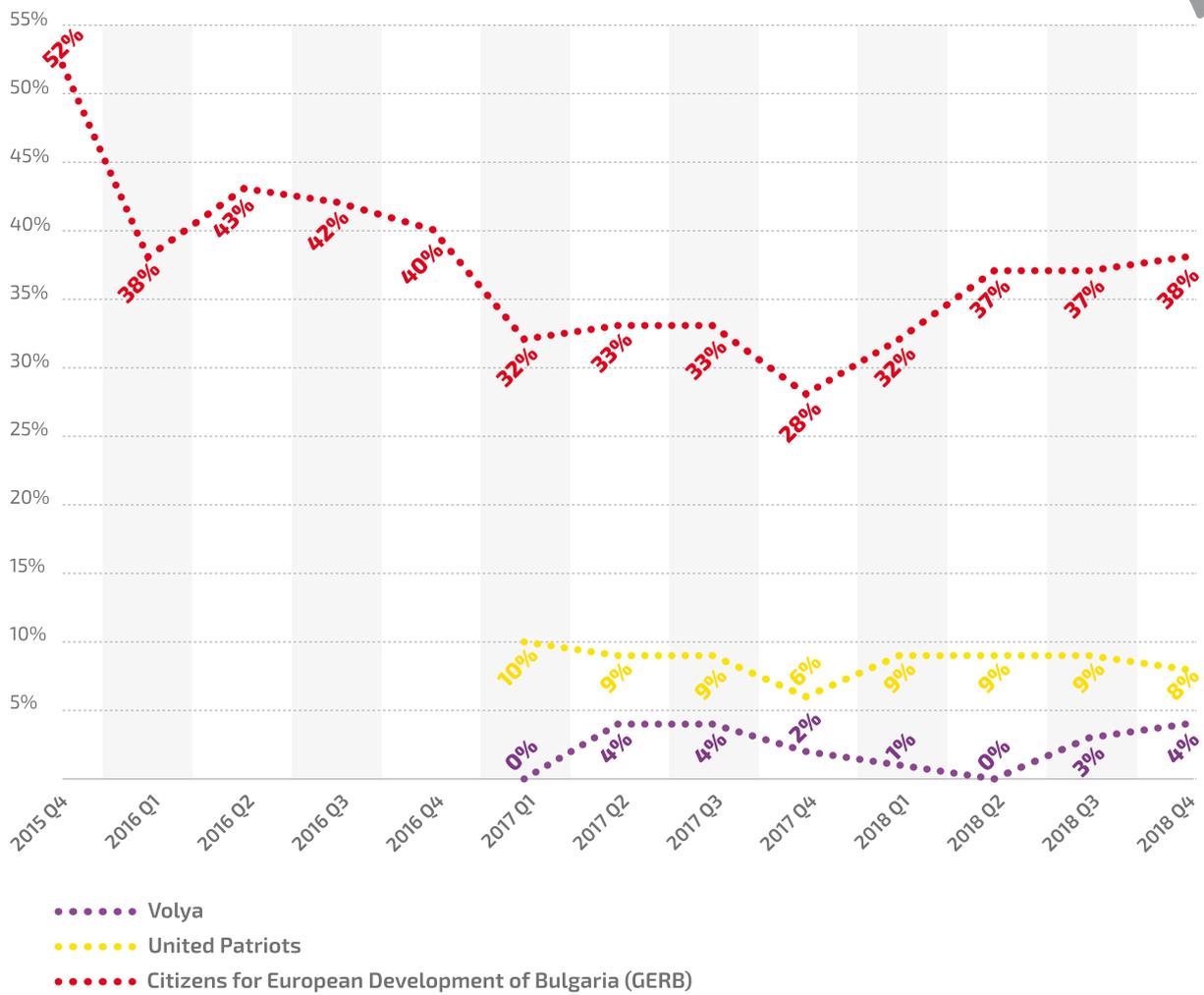


Bulgaria

Bulgarian populist formations have definitely made progress in 2018: the aggregated support for populist parties increased by 14 points and now, at the end of 2018, every second Bulgarian would vote for a populist formation. This is the third largest level of growth in the support for populists within the European Union. Although support for two minor far-right parties, United Patriots and Volya, rose by only 2 points, the ruling GERB managed to expand its standing in the polls by 10 points during 2018. While it stood at 28% among likely voters in December 2017, GERB added 4 percentage points early in the new year and then another 5 percentage points during the spring. After the stabilisation of its voter base, it finished the year with 38% of support among likely voters.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria | EPP | 30.40% | 38% |
| United Patriots | ECR | - | 8% |
| Volya | - | - | 4% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN BULGARIA



The year had started with many difficulties for the Bulgarian ruling party, the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). When the Bulgarian government took over the EU's rotating presidency in January, there were concerns in the EU leadership that the politicians of United Patriots, GERB's ultra-nationalist coalition partner, might play an important role in the European Council.¹³ Prime Minister Boyko Borisov has also been criticised for the state of press freedom in Bulgaria, which ranked the lowest among all EU countries in the World Press Freedom Index.¹⁴ Moreover, thousands of Bulgarians were out in the streets in January to protest against the government for authorising the construction of a skiing resort in a national park, but the demonstrations were not only about the environmental issue but also about corruption and media plurality.¹⁵

Furthermore, GERB and United Patriots (UP) refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention, an agreement combating any form of violence against women, which subsequently led to massive protests by the mothers of disabled children, which also fuelled criticisms of the ruling parties.¹⁶ Despite all this, support for GERB soared in 2018. However, in evaluating these numbers, we need to keep in mind that many media outlets are careful not to appear critical of the government.¹⁷ Another reason for the increasing support for GERB is that the government took huge steps toward the introduction of the euro in Bulgaria by entering the eurozone's waiting room, a decision that was well received by citizens.¹⁸

The most significant political event in 2018, which also drew international attention to Bulgaria, was the tragic death of a young journalist. Victoria Marinova was murdered in October 2018, a few days after the broadcasting of a report in which she investigated a case of corruption involving EU funds. There were speculations that the murder was

connected to her work as a journalist.¹⁹ According to the authorities, the murder was sexually motivated, but some Bulgarian journalists argued that there are inconsistencies in the government's version of the events.²⁰ However, polls indicated that the murder had no negative impact on the popularity of the government, although GERB's advantage over the leading opposition party, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, narrowed during the year.

Controversies within the GERB's coalition partner, the United Patriots, did not have any significant effect on the popularity of the smaller populist formation's either. The alliance of three nationalist and ultra-conservative parties (NFSB, IMRO and Ataka) remained stable at a level of 8-9% throughout 2018.

On the other hand, 2018 was an encouraging year for the populist Volya (in English: "Will"), and its charismatic leader, Veselin Mareshki. The Bulgarian billionaire owns a chain of petrol stations, has interests in the pharmaceutical sector and is frequently referred to as the "Bulgarian Trump"²¹ in the press because like the US president, he prefers to cast himself as an anti-establishment figure despite the fact that Volya actually supports the Borisov government. His party is strictly opposed to immigration, celebrates nationalism and, as is usually the case with far-right populist formations in Europe, it has friendly relations with Russia.²² Volya also nurtures close ties to Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, and it has joined the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom this year,²³ the European movement known for including the Austrian FPÖ or the Dutch PVV, in addition to the French populists.

Volya's most important initiative during 2018 was a campaign for a referendum on the country's exit from NATO, which was launched in May – this appears to be the party's main message ahead of the European elections in 2019. According to the party leader Mareshki, the Bulgarian people receive

13 Cooper, H. (2018, January 28). Bulgarian far right set to shock Brussels. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgarian-far-right-set-to-shock-brussels/>

14 Barigazzi, J. (2018) "Bulgarian PM: We'll stay out of Polish politics," POLITICO, 12 January. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/boyko-borisov-donald-tusk-dont-speak-out-on-polish-politics/>

15 Petkova, M. (2018) "#SavePirin: Why are Bulgarians protesting?" GCC News | Al Jazeera, 19 January. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/savepirin-bulgarians-protesting-180119114337870.html>.

16 Rone, J. (2018) "Bulgaria's turn to lead the Council of the European Union just ended. How did things go?" The Washington Post, 5 July. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/05/bulgarias-turn-to-lead-the-council-of-the-european-union-just-ended-how-did-things-go/?utm_term=.d2a808a5de71.

17 Reports Without Borders 2018 Annual Report, Bulgaria, available here: <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

18 "Alpha Research poll: Six out of 10 Bulgarians do not foresee early elections" (2018) The Sofia Globe, 26 July. Available at: <https://sofiaglobe.com/2018/07/25/alpha-research-poll-six-out-of-10-bulgarians-do-not-foresee-early-elections/>.

19 Bayer, L. (2018) "EPP applauds Bulgaria while others question murder probe" POLITICO, 12 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/victoria-marinova-boyko-borisov-epp-applauds-bulgaria-while-others-question-murder-probe/>.

20 Bayer, L. (2018) "EPP applauds Bulgaria while others question murder probe" POLITICO, 12 October. Available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/victoria-marinova-boyko-borisov-epp-applauds-bulgaria-while-others-question-murder-probe/>.

21 Atkinson, J. (2018) "Interview with the Bulgarian Trump: 'We have to unite to save our countries from the madness of current EU leaders'" Voice of Europe, 15 October. Available at: <http://voiceofeurope.com/2018/10/interview-with-the-bulgarian-trump-we-have-to-unite-to-save-our-countries-from-the-madness-of-current-eu-leaders/>.

22 Lyman, R. (2017) "In Bulgaria, a Businessman Who Talks (and Acts) Like Trump" The New York Times, 24 February. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/24/world/europe/in-bulgaria-a-businessman-who-talks-like-trump-acts-like-trump.html>.

23 Gotev, G. (2018) "Le Pen seeks to rally far-right allies for European elections" euractiv.com, 2 May. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/le-pen-seeks-to-rally-far-right-allies-for-european-elections/>.

nothing in return for their financial contribution to the Alliance, which has resulted in the Bulgarian society's descent into even deeper poverty.²⁴ He has also harshly attacked the European Union, which he believes has caused huge damage to Bulgaria by preventing major energy developments and investments projects. He also agrees with far-right populists who argue that the *"EU looks like the Soviet Union"* and does not represent the interests of ordinary people. Nevertheless, Volya had been a negligible political actor in the first half of 2018, but its increasing activity at the national and international levels led to a growth of 4 points within six months.

For 2019, it will still be a challenge for GERB and the UP to smooth the tensions in the coalition, and it seems that the UP will end up being the loser in this situation. Borisov's party will likely increase the number of its seats in the next European Parliament in 2019, and Volya is the formation that stands to profit the most from the internal crisis among the United Patriots.

²⁴ "Volya Leader to Launch a Bulgarian Referendum for Leaving NATO" (2018) EU Scoop. Available at: <https://www.euscoop.com/en/2018/5/3/volya-referendum-leave-nato>.

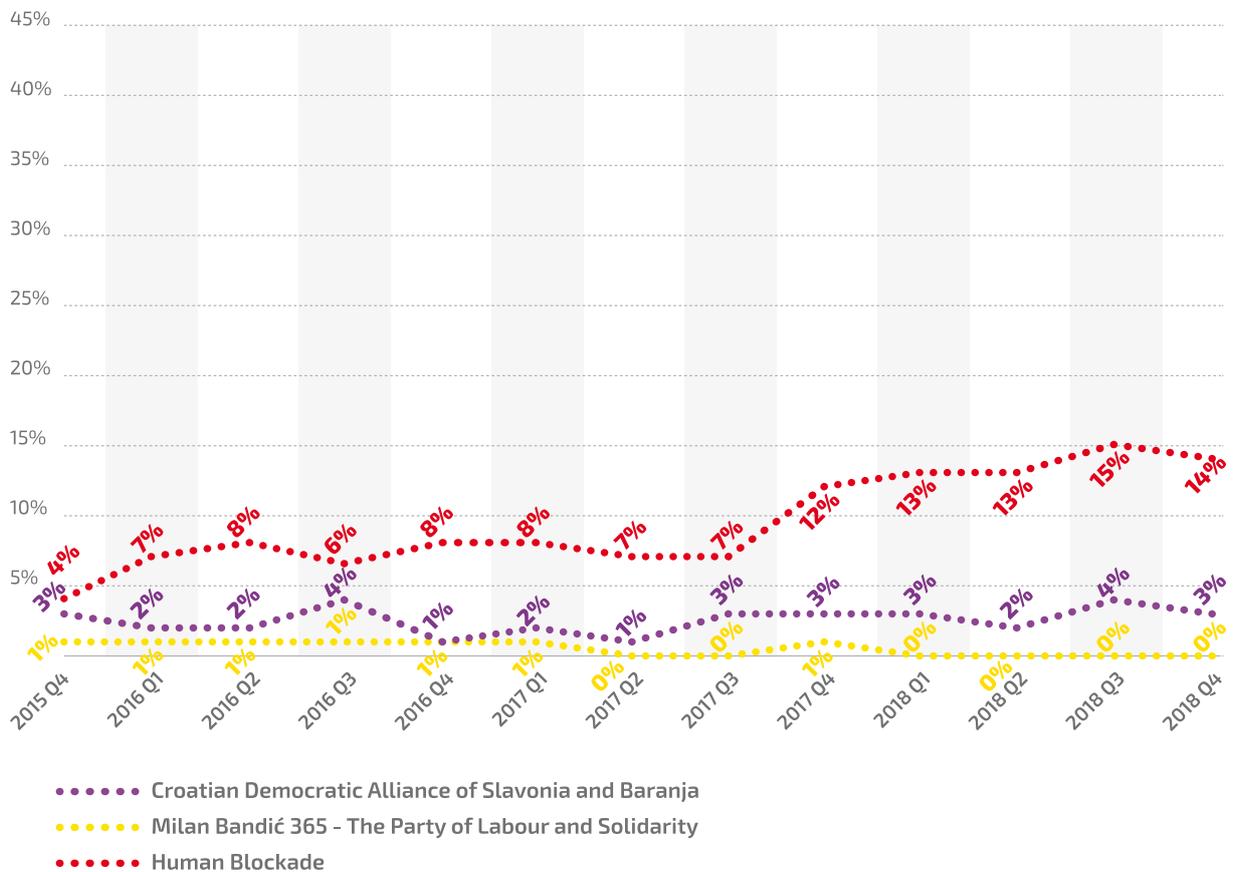


Croatia

We did not observe a huge shift in the popularity of the Croatian populist parties in 2018. Aggregate support for anti-establishment parties increased only by 1 point over the year and stood at 17% in December. However, these parties may experience more of a momentum in 2019. The support for the main right-wing and centre-left parties, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), respectively, has been continuously falling since the last legislative elections held in 2016, in parallel with a surge in the support of Human Blockade (Živi Zid). At the end of 2017, the latter populist formation was backed by 12% of Croatians, while a year later the same ratio stood at 14%. The growth is more pronounced if we take into account the fact that the party won only 0.5% of the votes in the 2014 EP election. Still, generally speaking the year 2018 did not provide the populist parties with much of a reason to celebrate.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| Human Blockade (Živi Zid) | - | - | 14% |
| Milan Bandić 365 - The Party of Labour and Solidarity | - | - | 3% |
| Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja | - | - | 0% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN CROATIA



Human Blockade's rising popularity is undoubtedly the result of their approach of avoiding all issues that divide society and raise conflicts.²⁵ Their communication is explicitly focused on how to improve citizens' lives, they are not involved in ideological debates and they reject the right-wing and left-wing labels, defining themselves as humanists instead.²⁶

The party, which is often compared to the Italian Five Star Movement,²⁷ held its first party convention in April. At the assembly, the party leaders presented their programme entitled *Croatia Promising Equal Opportunities for All*. According to the party manifesto,²⁸ corruption is the most important problem in need of a solution in Croatia right now, and correspondingly the party demands an overhaul of the country's judicial system. Human Blockade also calls for a comprehensive pension reform. Furthermore, the party proposes investments in healthcare, arguing that access to such care is not a privilege but a basic human right. In addition to the above, they would also like to impose a tax on the assets of banks, introduce a lower VAT and legalise marijuana.

The party is opposed to the introduction of the euro in Croatia since they regard their national currency, the Kuna, as the symbol of national sovereignty²⁹. When it comes to foreign policy, Human Blockade supports Croatia's exit from NATO and the EU, and on these points, they share the general European populist outlook. They characterise the EU as an assembly of alienated bureaucrats who cannot provide solutions for the problems that citizens face.³⁰ Their anti-NATO stance is strongly linked to their demand to tighten Croatia's relations with Russia.

2018 was not a memorable year for Croatia's other, more leftist populist party, Milan Bandić 365, which failed to increase its electoral support. Only three percent of voters backed the party of the mayor of

Zagreb, the same proportion as during the previous year. Bandić's supporters founded the party in 2015, during the period when Bandić was under arrest on the charges of corruption, involvement in organized crime and abuse of office.³¹ To the surprise of many, BM 365 entered the Croatian parliament in 2015 and then again in 2016. BM 365 currently supports the minority government in parliament, even though it is not part of a coalition.

Bandić, who is still considered one of the country's most influential politicians, had reason to celebrate in October 2018 as he was acquitted of charges of defrauding Zagreb's municipal budget. The mayor had been accused of allowing a church-affiliated group to campaign without paying the required fees.³² In addition to his acquittal, the Russian President Vladimir Putin also awarded Bandić the Order of Friendship in November, an honour which was previously more likely to be bestowed on Serbs.³³ In view of Russia's position on and ambitions regarding the Balkan peninsula, as well as the current HDZ government's pro-European attitude, Putin's decision to decorate the Croatian politician can be realistically seen as an attempt to influence the Croatian public.

The third Croatian populist party, the Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja, has failed to make an impact in public opinion and put itself back on the political map, as its support remained unmeasurable throughout the year.

In conclusion, a few months before the European Elections the major question in the context of Croatian populism is how Human Blockade will perform in the ballots and if the party can successfully exploit its popularity among young adults to outperform the SDP and become the second strongest party in Croatia. The ruling HDZ is expected to win the election by a wide margin, while the Social Democrats and Human Blockade are expected to win 2-3 seats each. At this point it is still uncertain which EP group the future MEPs of Živi Zid (Human Blockade) will join.

25 Pavlic V. (2018), Will Živi Zid Come to Power after Next Elections?, Total Croatia News, Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/27853-what-happens-if-zivi-zid-comes-to-power>

26 "Živi Zid party holds first convention since formation" (2018) N1 HR. Available at: <http://hr.n1info.com/a298486/English/NEWS/Zivi-Zid-party-holds-first-convention-since-formation.html>

27 "Croatian Populists Gaining Momentum" (2018) BMI Research: Fitch Solutions. Available at: <https://www.fitchsolutions.com/country-risk-sovereigns/croatian-populists-gaining-momentum-03-10-2018>

28 "Živi Zid party holds first convention since formation" (2018) N1 HR. Available at: <http://hr.n1info.com/a298486/English/NEWS/Zivi-Zid-party-holds-first-convention-since-formation.html>

29 Morgan, S. (2018) "Croatia accelerates plans for joining the eurozone" euractiv.com, 11 May. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/croatia-accelerates-plans-for-joining-the-eurozone/>

30 "Živi Zid party wants Croatia's departure from NATO and EU" (2018) N1 HR. Available at: <http://hr.n1info.com/a335750/English/NEWS/Zivi-Zid-party-wants-Croatia-s-departure-from-NATO-and-EU.html>

31 "Fans of Zagreb's Embattled Mayor Form New Party" (2018) Balkan Insight. Available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/slim-chances-for-zagreb-mayor-s-newly-formed-party>

32 RFE/RL and Balkan Service (2018) "Zagreb Mayor Acquitted on Fraud Charge, Faces Second Corruption Trial," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 19 October. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/zagreb-mayor-acquitted-on-fraud-charge-faces-second-corruption-trial/29553378.html>

33 Pavlic, V. Russian President Putin Awards Order of Friendship to Zagreb Mayor Bandić, Total Croatia News, 20 August 2018 Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/30512-russian-president-putin-awards-order-of-friendship-to-zagreb-mayor-bandic>

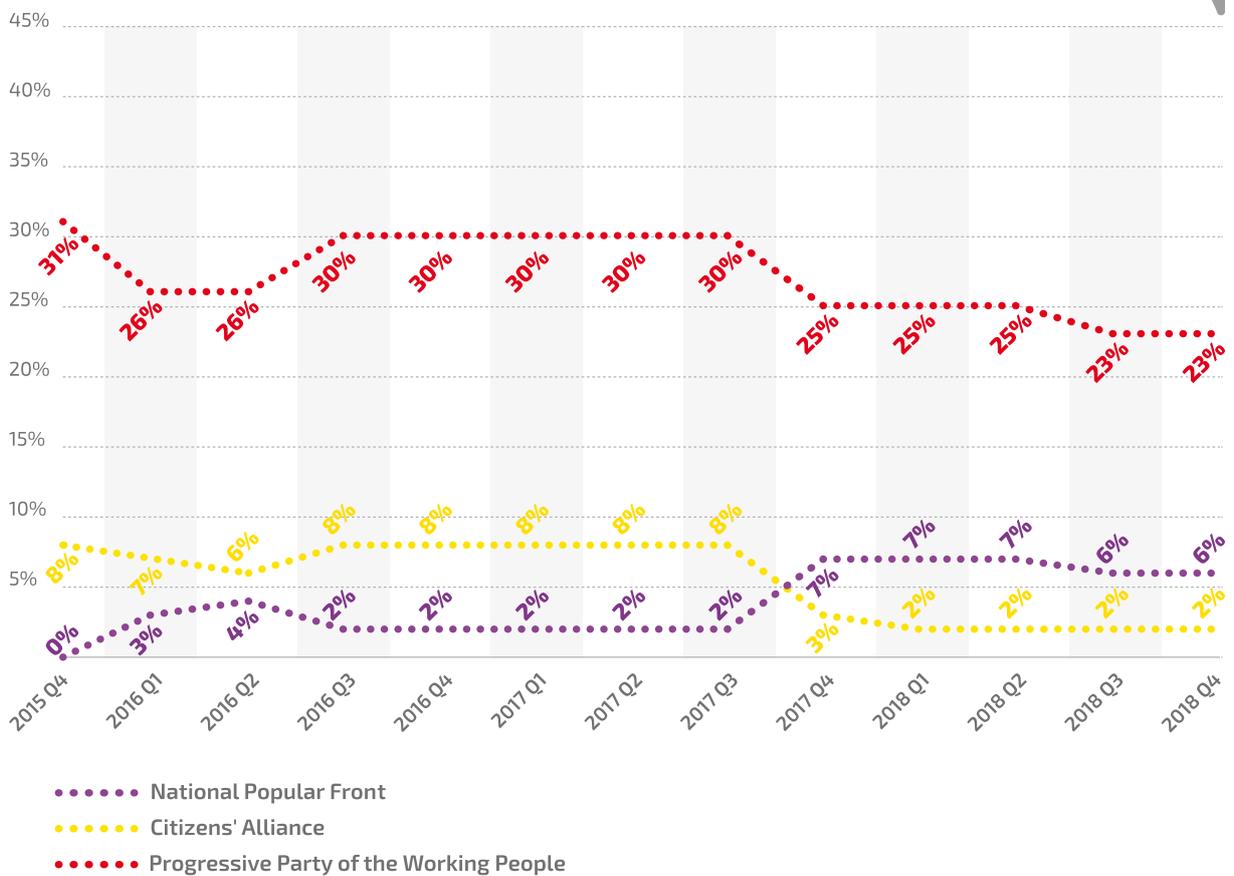


Cyprus

Populism has lost some ground in Cyprus in 2018 as the popularity of anti-elite parties clearly dropped during the last 12 months. The aggregate support for populist parties decreased by 4 points and all of them lost some strength throughout the year. The strongest party among them, the radical left-wing party AKEL, lost 2 points, while the other leftist populist formation, Citizens' Alliance, as well as the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) each lost 1 point in polls. Compared to the aggregated support of 35% calculated at the end of 2017, a year later fewer than a third of Cypriot voters would opt for a populist formation (31%).

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) | GUE/NGL | 26.90% | 23% |
| National Popular Front (ELAM) | - | - | 6% |
| Citizens' Alliance | - | 6.78% | 2% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN CYPRUS



In Cyprus, the year 2018 began with a presidential election. The main issues that determined the campaign were the reunification of the island and the economic situation of the country. In the second-round run-off (since none of the candidates received more than half of the votes cast in the first round), the incumbent right-wing President Nicos Anastasiades faced off with AKEL's candidate, Stavros Malas, who ran as an independent candidate. AKEL's leaders hoped that his distance from the party, whose brand has suffered over the last few years, would help Malas win more votes. AKEL's reputation continues to suffer from the memory of Cyprus' economic crisis at the beginning of the decade, when the leftist party was in government and could not avert a financial meltdown in 2012-13.

During the campaign, Malas' right-wing opponents underlined their contribution to the stabilisation of the economy and their role in the country's economic resurgence before the election. The reunification of the island was also a focal point of the campaign and Malas tried to highlight the issue even more emphatically as the incumbent president, Nicos Anastasiades had failed to reach an agreement with Ankara in 2017. AKEL's candidate positioned himself as being more committed to the cause of reunification than Anastasiades and attacked his opponent for walking away from the reunification negotiations.³⁴

Finally, the conservative Anastasiades won only 5 points (35.5%) more than his left-wing challenger (30.2%) in the first round, and without the endorsements of the other candidates who dropped out of the race, the competition between the leading candidates was close in the second round as well.³⁵ However, it was no surprise when Anastasiades, defeated Malas with the 56% of the votes. In the first round of the election, the two populist candidates, Christos Christou of ELAM and Giorgos Lillikas of the Citizens' Alliance received 6% and 2% of votes, respectively.

The relations between Turkey and Cyprus continued to play a vital role in the political life of Cyprus in 2018. A gas dispute erupted between Ankara and Nicosia after the election, because Turkey blocked Cyprus' gas explorations in the region. Turkey wants to gain a foothold in securing the rights to the hydrocarbon reserves near the Cyprian shores for

the Turkish Cypriots, but the right-wing government is trying to assert the interests of Greek Cypriots. The controversy dominated the country's political agenda throughout 2018 and gave rise to intense nationalist sentiments among Cypriots. This probably contributed to the slight drop in AKEL's support in 2018.

At centre of the political activities in 2018 of the National Popular Front (ELAM), which is a local offshoot of Greece's neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, was the vehement objection to the opening of new checkpoints on the border between the northern and southern sides of the Island. The extremist movement organised demonstrations and collected signatures to prevent the opening of these checkpoints³⁶ since the party claims that it is detrimental to the interests of the people in the South.³⁷ In the meanwhile, the main initiative in 2018 of the other populist party, the Citizens' Alliance, was a proposal to raise the minimum wage to 1,125 euros per month. Despite this social message, the party was not able to improve its poll figures in 2018.

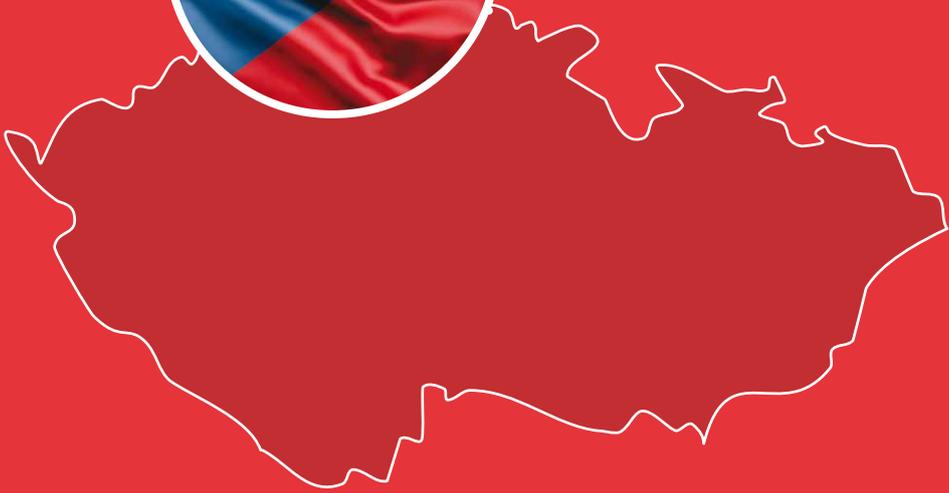
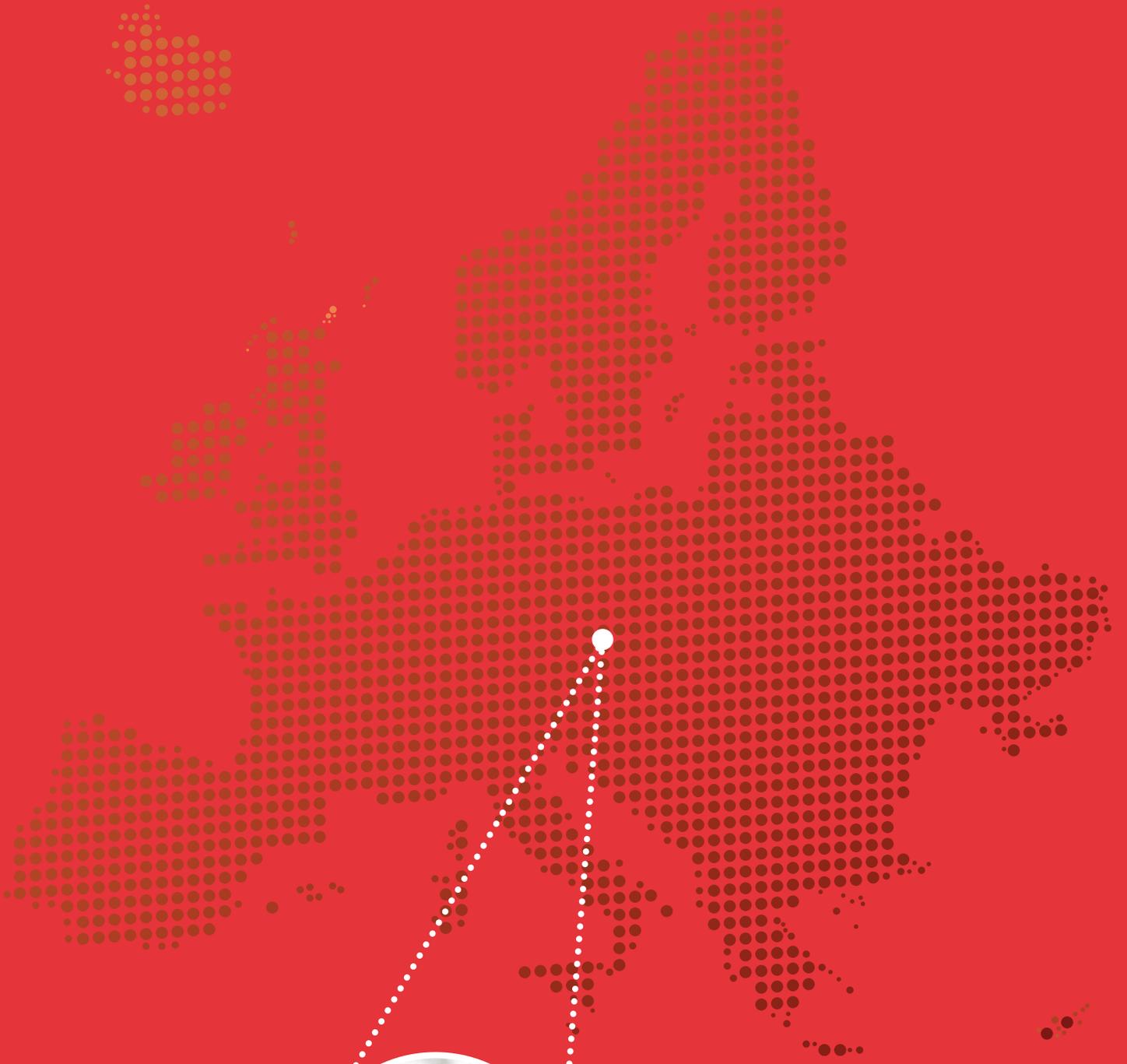
The polls suggest that AKEL's two seats are not in danger in the next European Parliament. ELAM also has the chance to enter the European Parliament for the first time in 2019 as they stand at 6% in the polls. The Citizens Alliance, however, will likely fail once again in its bid to win representation at a supranational level.

34 Stefanini, S. (2018) "Cyprus' Anastasiades heads to runoff with center-left rival" POLITICO, 29 January. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/cyprus-anastasiades-headed-for-runoff-vote-exit-polls/>.

35 Smith, H. (2018) "Cyprus voters focus on which president could reunite island" The Guardian, 2 February. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/02/cyprus-election-reunification-presidential-runoff-nicos-anastasiades-stavros-malas>.

36 Turner, K. (2018) ELAM demo calls for all checkpoints to be closed, Cyprus Mail Online, 11 November 2018, Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/11/11/elam-demo-calls-for-all-checkpoints-to-be-closed/>

37 Andreeou E. (2018): Elam seeking to prevent opening of new crossing points, Cyprus Mail Online, 7 November 2018, Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/11/07/elam-seeking-to-prevent-opening-of-new-crossing-points/>

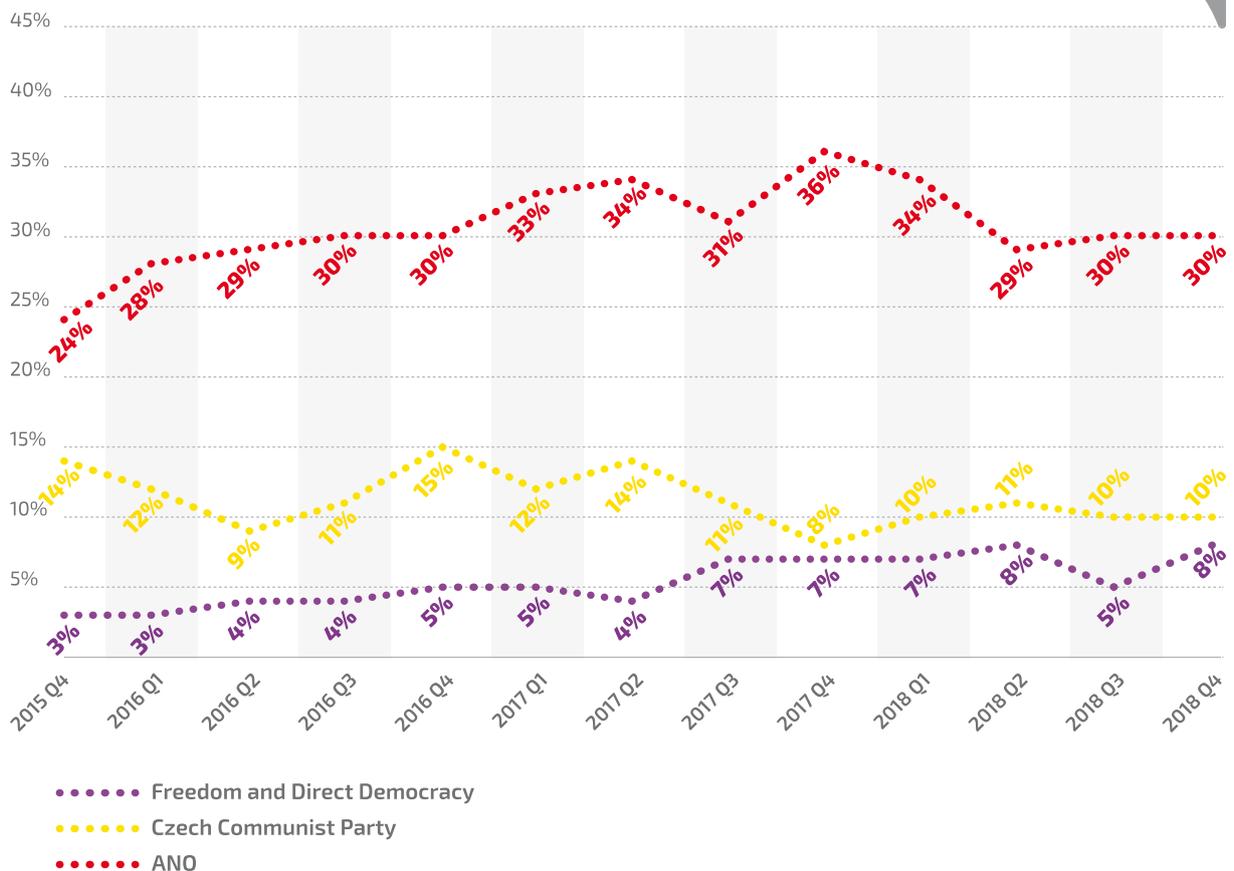


Czech Republic

The popularity of populist parties in the Czech Republic was lower in 2018 than in the previous year. The aggregate support for non-mainstream parties decreased by 3 points in a year, and at this time 48% of citizens would vote for these parties. The downward trend held steady until autumn as their popularity slipped gradually from season to season. Only during the last few months of the year did they register a slight uptick in their support. Although the ruling ANO suffered the greatest losses – its support dropped 6 points throughout the year – it is still the strongest party in the country with a 30% vote share among likely voters. Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) has increased its support by 1 point and stood at 8% in the polls, while the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) was able to expand its base by 2 points, which means that in December 2018 every tenth Czech would have voted for the Marxist formation.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| ANO 2011 | ALDE | 16.13% | 30% |
| Czech Communist Party | GUE/NGL | 10.98% | 10% |
| Freedom and Direct Democracy | - | 6.78% | 8% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



In 2017, populist powers suffered important electoral defeats all across Europe, with the exception of the Czech Republic where the populist ANO party led by Andrej Babiš won the election. The year 2018 began with a presidential election in the Czech Republic, in which the main issue of contention concerned

the direction that populism will take in Europe and Czechia in the new year. The incumbent president, Miloš Zeman, has been at the centre of numerous scandals over the years. He has no appreciation at all for political correctness and has uttered several shocking statements in the past. Combined with his

anti-establishment attitude, these have turned him into a hugely controversial character. His personality reflects his political views: Zeman vociferously opposes immigration and uses harsh language to give voice to this opinion, he has urged a referendum on the country's exit from the EU, and he nurtures close ties with the Russian President Vladimir Putin. Incidentally, there were accusations that Moscow has provided assistance in funding Zeman's election campaign.³⁸ Owing in part to the endorsement of two protest parties (ANO and SPD), Zeman was ultimately re-elected with a narrow majority against the centrist independent scientist Jiří Drahoš.³⁹

The year 2018 did not start out well for the other populist leader of Czechia, Andrej Babiš. After ANO's huge victory in the legislative election last October, Babiš's efforts at forming a government ended in failure: All opposition parties refused to enter into a coalition with him because of the charges against him in connection with the accusation that he misappropriated EU funds. He then decided to form a minority government but lost a vote of confidence in January. In the middle of the summer, after a lengthy process of negotiation between ANO and the Social Democrats, the coalition received the necessary support in the parliament with the help of the communist KSČM.

2018 was a time full of paradoxes for the communist KSČM: After almost 30 years of political isolation, it has returned to power at the national level, even though they formally remain outside the government. In exchange for the KSČM's support, Babiš backed some of their demands, such as the introduction of a tax on church properties (at the same time he resisted other KSČM demands, such as the call for a reduction in the country's contributions to NATO missions).⁴⁰ Despite this success, however, the communists' vote share of 8% in the last election is the worst result in the party's history. Their involvement in the government and the hoped-for surge in popularity as a result of their governmental role and the related accomplishments are seen as their last chance to avoid fading into political insignificance.⁴¹ Nevertheless, their popularity never fell below 10% throughout the year, even as the 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring led to a resurgence

in anti-communist public sentiments and hostility towards the party.⁴²

For Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) 2018 was a disappointing year, primarily because the party failed to stabilise its base after the unexpectedly good result it attained in the legislative election of the previous year, when the party led by Tomio Okamura won more than 10% of the votes. Furthermore, the local elections in October 2018 were also unsuccessful for the extremist party as they won only 155 seats in local council, which was a result far below expectations. Okamura is of Japanese and Czech parentage, but he has adopted the toughest anti-immigration stance in Czech politics⁴³ and would like for Czechia to withdraw from the EU and NATO. During the months of uncertainty before Babiš managed to form his government, ANO had been in talks with the far-right party to potentially form a coalition, which raised fears about the possibility of a "Czexit". Prime Minister Babiš soothed the international concerns, however, by backing the adoption of a law that would make it more difficult to hold a referendum on EU membership.⁴⁴

As for the prospects in 2019, the stability of the Babiš-led government is still shaky. Nevertheless, ANO is expected to increase the number of seats it holds in the European Parliament, while the Communists are projected to lose 1 or 2 seats. The far-right SPD's future is also uncertain: the French politician Marine Le Pen and the Dutch politician Geert Wilders would welcome Okamura with open arms into an anti-European platform, but considering the SPD's performance in 2018, together with the declining level of euroscepticism⁴⁵ in the Czech Republic, passing the 5% threshold could be a challenge for the far-right party.

38 Morkowitz, S. (2018) "How (the European) Trump won a second term" POLITICO, 30 January. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/milos-zeman-czech-republic-how-the-european-donald-trump-won-a-second-term/>.

39 Tait, R. (2018) "Czech Republic re-elects far-right president Miloš Zeman" The Guardian, 27 January. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/27/czech-republic-far-right-president-re-elected>.

40 Shotter, J. (2018) "Czech Communists help Babis finally form a government" Financial Times, 12 July. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/2f6853fe-839e-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929>.

41 Shotter, J. (2018) "Czech Communists help Babis finally form a government" Financial Times, 12 July. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/2f6853fe-839e-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929>.

42 Tait, R. (2018) "Czech communists confront bitter legacy of Prague Spring" The Guardian, 12 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/12/czech-communists-confront-bitter-legacy-of-prague-spring>.

43 Kim Sengupta Terezin, Czech Republic (2018) "Czech Holocaust survivor warns against rising tide of antisemitism and racism across Europe" The Independent, 11 June. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/holocaust-anti-semitism-racism-europe-czech-republic-nazis-a8390101.html>.

44 Wróbel, A. (2018) "Prague backs anti-Czexit bill" POLITICO, 28 March. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/prague-backs-anti-czexit-bill/>.

45 Radoslav T. (2018) "Euroskeptic Campaign Backfires to Boost Czech Support for EU", (2018) Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-18/euroskeptic-campaign-backfires-to-boost-czech-support-for-eu>.

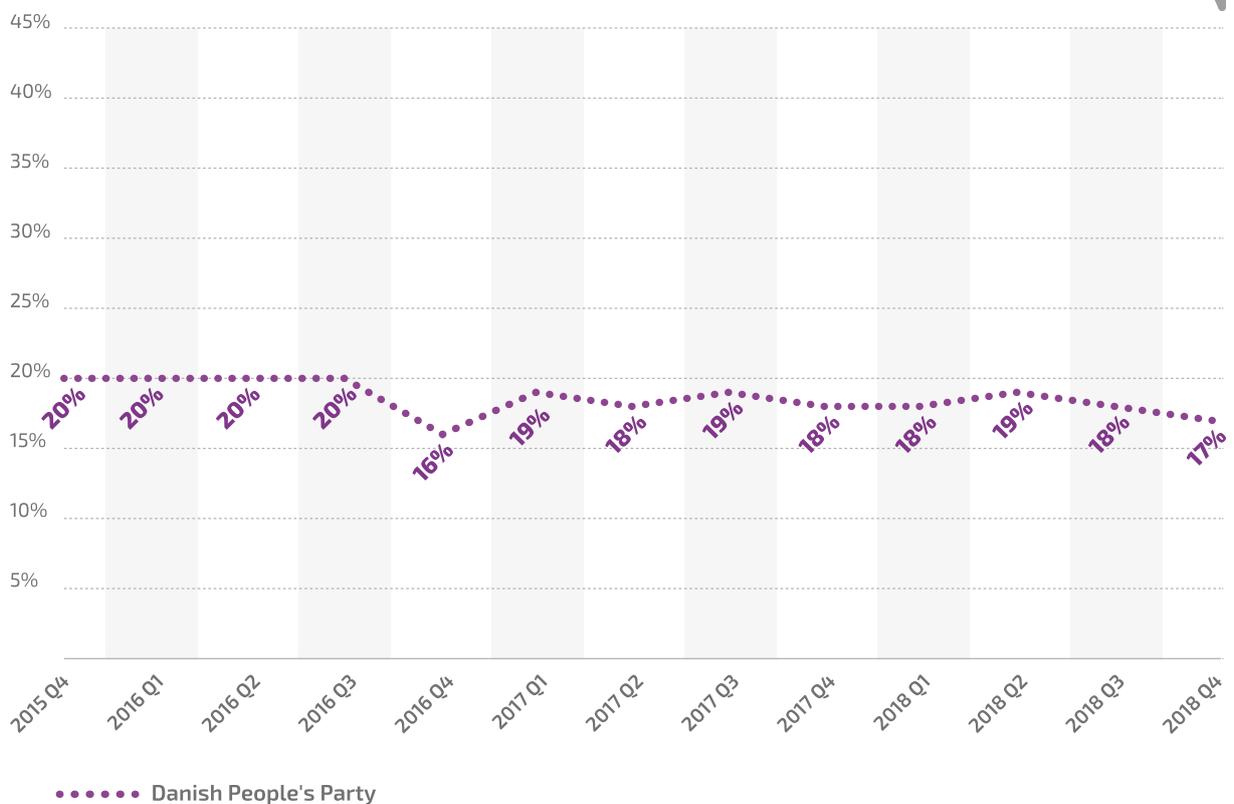


Denmark

Denmark had one of the most stable political landscapes across Europe in 2018. In comparison with the last polls of 2017, we observed only minor shifts of less than 2 points for any of the 11 relevant parties in the country. Moreover, the red and blue blocs (that is, the aggregated support for left-wing and right-wing political parties) had exactly the same level of support at the end of 2018 as they did at the end of 2017. At the end of 2018, red left-wing parties enjoyed a narrow lead (51%) over the right-wing blues (49%). The only relevant populist party in the country, the Danish People's Party, lost only 1 point throughout the year and stood at 17% at the end of 2018. Still, at the beginning of the summer vacation almost every fifth (19%) Dane backed the nationalist formation. Despite the apparent calmness in Danish politics, we are witnessing the outcome of some protracted political developments in a year when immigration was undoubtedly the hottest political issue in Denmark.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|-----------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Danish People's Party | ECR | 26.60% | 17% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN THE DENMARK



Danish populists had every reason to be satisfied as several initiatives they have been pushing for a long time were finally adopted in 2018. As a symbolic victory for the far-right, Denmark passed a law banning burqas and niqabs in May 2018.⁴⁶ The Danish People's Party (DPP) had campaigned for

such a policy for many years. A look at the country's political discourse shows that the DPP's systematic and persistent anti-Muslim communication has succeeded in pushing Denmark's public sphere to the right.

These developments may be seen as a sign of DPP's success in making its previously radical stances accepted by the political mainstream. Such

⁴⁶ Guardian (2018) "Denmark passes law banning burqa and niqab," The Guardian, 31 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/31/denmark-passes-law-banning-burqa-and-niqab>.

a development owes to two main factors. The first of these is the party's peculiar position in Danish politics as an outsider with an almost-governmental position. This gives them massive political clout and allows them to be a major force in setting the public agenda. Furthermore, the negative attitudes toward Islam that they promote with their rhetoric has been present in Danish society since at least the violent reactions against the publication of cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005.

The centre-left Social Democrats have shifted their position on immigration policies over the past few years and they have increasingly adopted a harder line against immigrants. This shift implied that the Social Democrats and their traditional ally, the Danish Social Liberal Party, have drifted apart over this issue. The break between them can now be considered official after a statement by the Social Democrat's leader, Mette Frederiksen, in which she declared that her party aims to form a government without the Social Liberals in the event of an election victory. Moreover, Frederiksen said that if she were to form a government, she would accept the DPP's external support.⁴⁷

The DPP tried to bolster anti-immigration attitudes in Danish society throughout the year. At the time when the Danish legislature was in the process of drafting a new bill on citizenship, the DPP joined forces with the centre-right Conservative People's Party and proposed to include a mandatory handshake in the citizenship ceremony. This measure is primarily seen as targeting Muslims since some of them refuse to shake hands with women for religious reasons.⁴⁸ Moreover, they intended to introduce an annual cap of 1,000 on the number of persons who can be awarded citizenship, giving the authorities leeway to treat migrants of western origins preferentially.⁴⁹

DPP politicians also haven't abandoned their dream of leaving the EU. Leaders of the party follow the Brexit negotiations closely, as in the case of a successful exit of the UK from the EU the Danish populist party will push for a referendum on the eventual British concessions in order to

avoid similarly protracted exit negotiations.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the majority of Danes are happy with the country's EU membership and would vote against an exit.⁵¹

2019 could be a prelude to a whole new era in Danish politics, as after the 2019 legislative election a potential (and maybe informal) coalition between the leftist Social Democrats and the right-wing populist Danish People's Party could fundamentally reshape the classic *red* and *blue* division in Denmark. Moreover, due to the typically low turnout in the elections to the European Parliament, the DPP might well exceed expectations at the polls, just as it happened in 2014.

47 Wienberg, C. (2018) "Denmark's Biggest Party Adopts Anti-Immigrant View" (2018) Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-06/anti-immigrant-view-adopted-by-denmark-s-biggest-political-party>.

48 Henley, J. (2018) "Danish mayors vow to ignore citizenship handshake plan," *The Guardian*, 20 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/20/danish-mayors-vow-to-ignore-citizenship-handshake-rule>.

49 Local, R. T. (2018) "No more than 1,000 new Danish citizenships annually: DF as law change talks begin," *The Local*, 16 May. Available at: <https://www.thelocal.dk/20180516/no-more-than-1000-new-danish-citizenships-annually-df-as-law-change-talks-begin>.

50 Levring, P., (2018) "Danish Nationalists Want Same Concessions as U.K.'s Brexit Deal", (2018) Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-08/danish-nationalists-want-same-concessions-as-u-k-s-brexite-deal>.

51 The Local (2018) "Most Danes satisfied with EU membership, would vote against leaving: survey," *The Local*, 17 October. Available at: <https://www.thelocal.dk/20181017/most-danes-satisfied-with-eu-membership-would-vote-against-leaving-survey>.

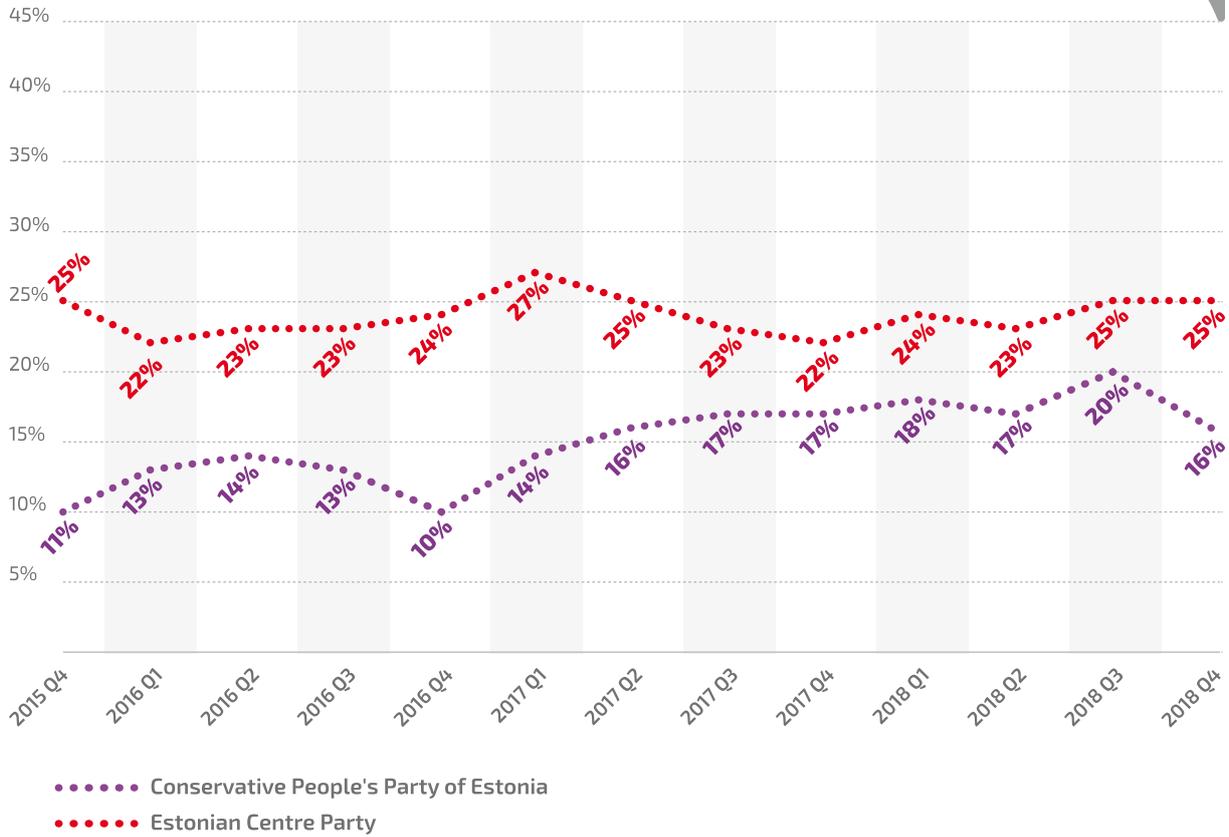


Estonia

The Baltic country's two populist formations had utterly different experiences in terms of popularity in 2018. While the Estonian Centre Party (Centre) increased its popularity by 3 points in the first half and stood at 25% in polls, support for the far-right Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) initially grew by 3 points, and then dropped by 4 points. But a look behind the scenes reveals that the actual situation was more complex than what these seemingly straightforward numbers suggest.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| Estonian Centre Party | ALDE | 22.40% | 25% |
| Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) | - | 4.00% | 16% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN ESTONIA



The Centre Party's electorate has changed a lot since Jüri Ratas assumed the leadership of the party. The Centre Party had been traditionally the political home for the country's Russian minority, mainly because the party was loudly euroskeptic and Russia-friendly under the leadership of Edgar

Savisaar, that is until 2016.⁵² Ratas pushed the party into a different direction, and since his selection as leader the Centre Party has pivoted towards a pro-Western outlook. This development in turn began to feed back into the party's base, which also gradually changed. Subsequently, the popularity of

52 Raik, K. (2018): The rise of Estonia's radical right: to engage or not to engage?, European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October. Available at: https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_rise_of_estonias_radical_right_to_engage_or_not_to_engage.

the Centre Party among Russian-speaking voters dropped from 83% to 65% between the beginning of the year and September. This is the lowest level of support that the party has ever experienced among the Russian community in Estonia.⁵³ At the same time, however, the party has increased its popularity among ethnic Estonians, its vote share in this demographic rose from 12% to 18% during the same period.

The new direction of the Centre Party also meant that the party has decided to leave populism behind and has begun to transform itself into a mainstream and progressive political force, although many voters still identify the Centre Party with Savisaar.⁵⁴ Moreover, a formal agreement between the Centre Party and Vladimir Putin's United Russia is still in effect.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the new party leader emphasised the importance of the fight against populism in his speech at the European Parliament.⁵⁶

In parallel, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) opened its doors to the thus orphaned Russian voters, especially as the majority of these voters have conservative attitudes that frequently mesh with the EKRE's initiatives and positions. The party was founded in 2012 but it started to grow significantly in 2014 when a bill on the recognition of same-sex unions was adopted by the Estonian parliament, the *Riigikogu*, and then once again a year later when the refugee crisis deepened.⁵⁷ As a result of all these developments, the EKRE managed to stabilise its base over the past year. In fact, by summer 2018 the party attained a record level of support, as every fifth Estonian in the category of likely voters backed the far-right populist formation.

However, another conservative party, the Pro Patria, could pose a threat to the continuing surge in EKRE's support. Pro Patria, currently the junior coalition partner in the Estonian government, has moved further to the right in recent months. The

right-wing party provoked a government crisis when its minister of justice blocked the government's approval of the UN Global Compact for Migration.⁵⁸ This move was motivated by a desire to win back voters from EKRE by taking decisive action in the area of migration. Taking such a stance had become an increasingly pressing concern for the party whose share of popular support has hovered around the election threshold with only a few months to go until the legislative elections.⁵⁹ EKRE, for its part, also has not kept silent about this issue, calling for a referendum on the UN agreement.

As the Estonian legislative election of March 2019 is approaching, parties have already launched their campaigns.⁶⁰ At the heart of the Centre Party's campaign are families with small children. They have pledged to raise child support as well as to increase pensions. Moreover, they are also focusing on education and public transportation, although their commitment to bilingual education may come back to haunt them with their new ethnic Estonian voters. The other populist party, EKRE, is urging an economic reform, especially lowering taxes and excise duties. Their campaign also prioritises healthcare and justice, and they propose to reduce hospital waiting lists and would like to see a comprehensive reform of the justice system.⁶¹

How to deal with EKRE will be a crucial question for mainstream parties in the legislative election next March since none of them would like to include the populist party in a coalition government. However, a potential agreement between the Centre and EKRE is not impossible.⁶² In the context of the EP elections, the Centre Party may increase its number of seats from 1 to 2, while EKRE looks poised to send its very first MEP to Strasbourg, who will likely to join the ranks of other Eurosceptic and far-right politicians.

53 ERR (2018) "Centre exchanges Russian support for Estonian," ERR, 24 September. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/863785/centre-exchanges-russian-support-for-estonian>.

54 Whyte, A. (2018) "Never a good deed unpunished: Centre Party clean up costing it the election," ERR, 8 October. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/867384/never-a-good-deed-unpunished-centre-party-clean-up-costing-it-the-election>.

55 "Estonian PM will not cancel pact with Putin's political party despite his country's tough stand against Russian aggression" (2018) The Globe and Mail, 29 May. Available at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-estonian-pm-will-not-cancel-pact-with-putins-political-party-despite/>.

56 "Estonian Prime Minister Ratas: Europe is a thought that must become a feeling" (2018) Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180925IPR14316/estonian-prime-minister-ratas-europe-is-a-thought-that-must-become-a-feeling>.

57 Raik, K. (2018) "The rise of Estonia's radical right: to engage or not to engage?," European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October. Available at: https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_rise_of_estonias_radical_right_to_engage_or_not_to_engage.

58 Dispute Over Migration Sends Estonian Government Into Crisis, Bloomberg, 16 November 2018, Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-16/dispute-over-migration-sends-estonian-government-into-crisis>

59 Cavegn, D. (2018) "Analysis: Government crisis a result of Pro Patria campaign tactics," ERR, 25 November. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/879804/analysis-government-crisis-a-result-of-pro-patria-campaign-tactics>.

60 ERR (2018) "The bold and the beautiful: political party pledges ahead of 2019," ERR, 14 August. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/853727/the-bold-and-the-beautiful-political-party-pledges-ahead-of-2019>.

61 Whyte, A. (2018) "Estonian political parties and policies overview: Part 2," ERR, 18 November. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/878025/estonian-political-parties-and-policies-overview-part-2>.

62 Whyte, A. (2018) "Never a good deed unpunished: Centre Party clean up costing it the election," ERR, 8 October. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/867384/never-a-good-deed-unpunished-centre-party-clean-up-costing-it-the-election>.

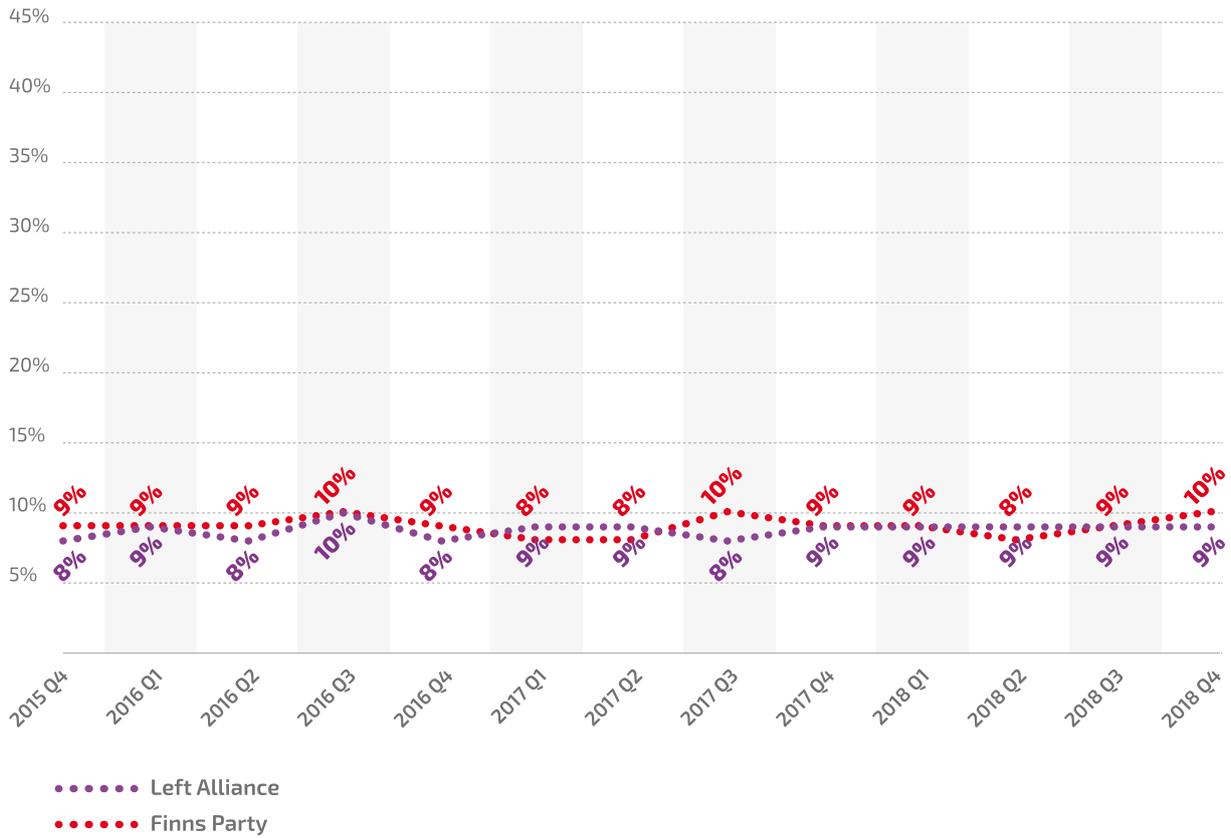


Finland

Aggregate support for the populists in Finland did not shift significantly during 2018. At the end of the year the anti-establishment parties still enjoyed the support of every fifth Finnish voter. The popularity of the left-wing populist Left Alliance held steady at 9% throughout the year, while support for the right-wing populist Finns Party (FP) grew by only 1 point in 12 months, and it stood at 10% at the end of the year. What this means is that the Finns Party has not yet been able to recover its previous electorate that it had lost after they entered power in 2015.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Left Alliance | GUE/NGL | 9.30% | 9% |
| Finns Party | ECR | 12.90% | 10% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN FINLAND



In Finland, 2018 began with a presidential election which resulted in the widely anticipated victory of the popular incumbent, Sauli Niinistö. The independent politician easily won the election amassing 63% of the votes in the first round, thus obviating the need for a runoff. The populist candidates, Laura Huhtasaari of the Finns Party and Merja Kyllönen of the Left Alliance, received 7% and 3% of the votes, respectively.

The Finns Party essentially used Huhtasaari's candidacy as a pre-campaign tool before the legislative and European elections in 2019, and they seized the opportunity to present the party's new profile at the national level. The Finnish government nearly collapsed in 2017 as a result of the decision by the Finns Party to elect Jussi Halla-aho as the new party leader. Halla-aho is a controversial politician with a history of offensive comments, aimed at Islam or Somalis, for example. As a consequence of his election, the party's parliamentary group split into two, with the moderate wing of the party seceding from the Finns and forming a new party, which remained a part of the government while the radicals joined the opposition.

Initially, Huhtasaari was elected to the position of party vice-president at the party congress, but shortly thereafter she was nominated to lead the party. She only became an MP in 2015 but she quickly drew the attention of voters by proffering hard-line policies on immigration and her fiery and emotional speeches.⁶³ The *Finnish Marine Le Pen* (she earned the moniker because of her blonde hair and radical rhetoric⁶⁴) follows the standards set by European populists in harshly opposing immigration, celebrating nationalism and speaking negatively about the European Union. At the same time, her election campaign was beset by a few gaffes, mainly due to her lack of experience with TV appearances. She also faced criticisms after revelations that she was guilty of plagiarism.⁶⁵

In the meanwhile, the left-wing populist party in Finland, the Left Alliance, unveiled its economic reform proposal. The leftist party's programme proposes to overhaul the social security system. The key proposal is the introduction of an 800-euro universal basic income starting in 2023, and the Left Alliance wants to enact the measures that lay the groundwork for this reform – including the

consolidation of a variety of social security benefits – during the next term of parliament.⁶⁶ Turning to other policy areas, the Left Alliance was the only party that stood up for privacy rights when Finland's parliament modified the constitution with respect to privacy in order to ensure the adoption of an intelligence bill aimed at defending national security.⁶⁷

A few months before the next Finnish legislative and European elections there are still no indications that the Finns Party will be able to expand its share of the votes, as the party still appears to suffer from the fallout of its split in 2017. The rebranding that the party has undertaken since then by placing Huhtasaari front and centre has not led to a breakthrough with the voters yet, nor did the new appeal to voters' emotions lead to discernible change. It is still in doubt whether these will be enough in the future. It seems almost certain that the Finns Party will not join the government coalition in 2019, but it is expected to win one or two seats in Strasbourg. The Left Alliance's prospects are similar, so the direct influence of the populist parties on Finnish politics will likely remain limited.

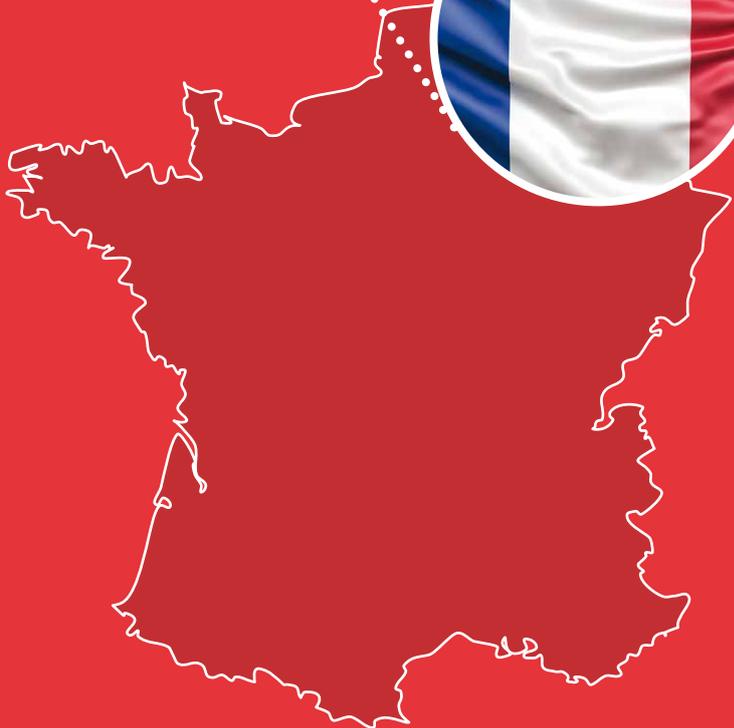
63 "Laura Huhtasaari: Nativist hoping for a breakthrough" (2018) Yle Uutiset. Available at: https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/laura_huhtasaari_nativist_hoping_for_a_breakthrough/9975291.

64 Standish, R. (2018) "Finland's Marine Le Pen," POLITICO, 29 January. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/laura-huhtasaari-president-election-finland-marine-le-pen/>.

65 *ibid*

66 Teivainen, A. (2018) "Left Alliance: Finland's social security system should be based on €800 basic income," Helsinki Times. Available at: <http://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/politics/15986-left-alliance-finland-s-social-security-system-should-be-based-on-800-basic-income.html>.

67 "Finland parliament weakens constitutional privacy right to pass..." (2018) Reuters, 3 October. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-finland-security/finland-parliament-weakens-constitutional-privacy-right-to-pass-security-law-idUSKCN1MD1R0>.

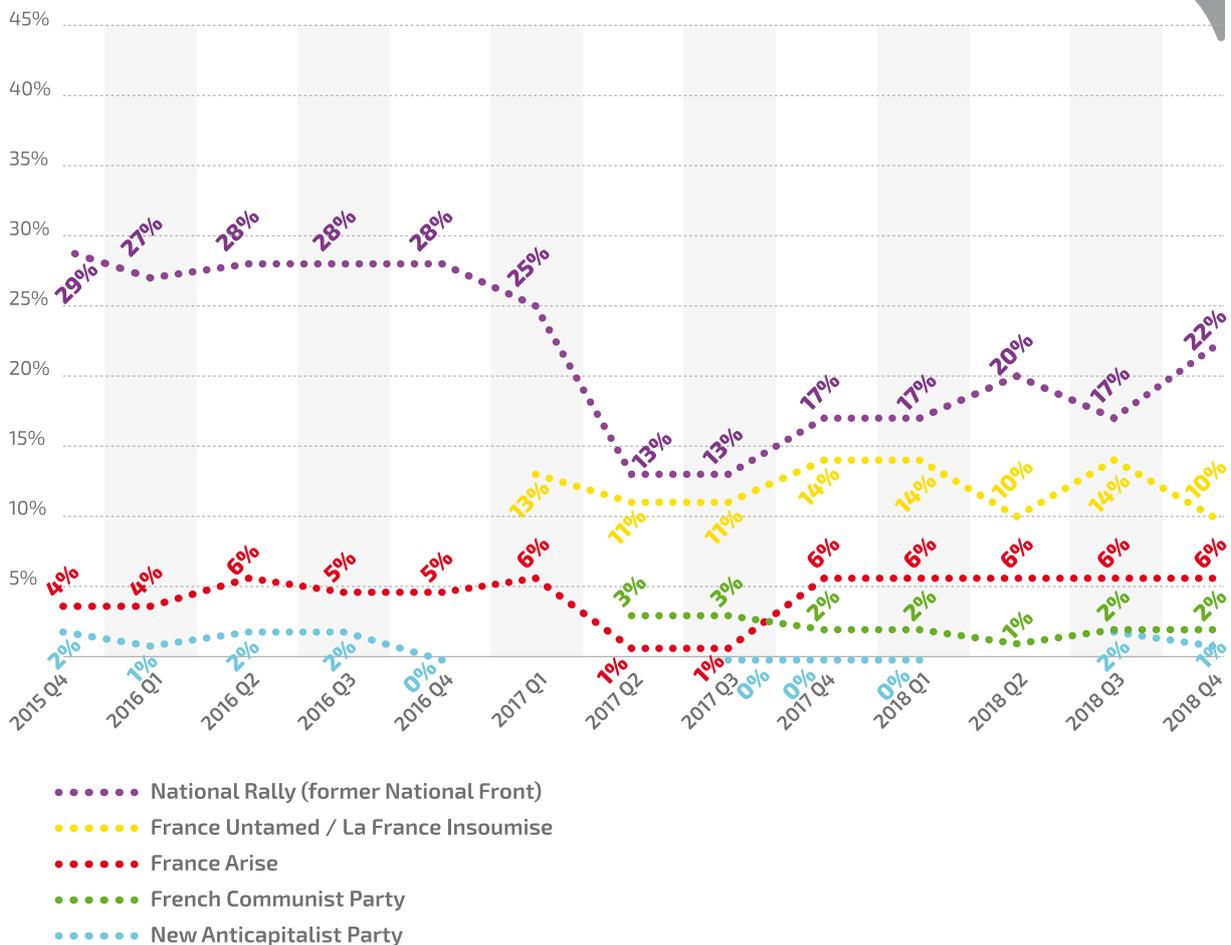


France

Support for populism in France did not change significantly in 2018. At the same time, however, what we are seeing is that the balance of power between anti-establishment parties has shifted even more to the ideological right. The right-wing populist National Rally, formerly known as the National Front, had successfully overcome the internal crisis that befell it during the second half of 2017, and it was able to gain 5 points in the polls. With 22% support, Marine Le Pen's formation was the strongest party in France at the end of 2018. On the other hand, the far-left France Untamed fell by 4 points during 2018, and at the end of the year only every tenth French would have opted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon's formation. We did not observe any significant changes in the support of minor anti-establishment formations. France Arise (6%), the French Communist Party (2%) and the New Anticapitalist Party (1%) had the same vote share as in the previous year.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| National Rally (former National Front) | ENF | 24.95% | 22% |
| France Untamed / La France Insoumise | GUE/NGL | - | 10% |
| France Arise | EFD | 3.82% | 6% |
| French Communist Party | GUE/NGL | - | 2% |
| New Anticapitalist Party | NA | 0.30% | 1% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN FRANCE



After the defeat of Le Pen against Macron in the runoff of the 2017 presidential election, and the subsequent internal tensions within the party that led to the departure of several politicians (who launched a new party called The Patriots), the National Front was able to recover in 2018. First, it changed its name to National Rally in order to rebrand itself and attract a broader range of voters. Party leaders hoped that the new name would be enough to signal a turn away from its racist and antisemitic history. Furthermore, Le Pen also began to strengthen her party at the international level and placed a greater emphasis on cooperation with allies, primarily with the Italian Deputy PM Matteo Salvini.

However, it should also be noted that there was a period in the summer of 2018 when the popularity of the National Rally dropped significantly. The main reason behind that was probably the investigation into the party leader's misuse of EU funds. Still, the party's support bounced back quickly in autumn, when Le Pen intensified her campaign while the popularity of the President Emmanuel Macron and his party continued to decline.

In the case of the far-left France Untamed we observed the absolute opposite trend, as in the second half of 2017 it seemed that Jean-Luc Mélenchon would be able to emerge as the leading politician of the French opposition. The past year, by contrast, was overshadowed by the financial abuses of Mélenchon and his party. Their popularity reached its lowest point in October when he responded angrily to a police raid at the party's headquarters by shouting at officers and shoving a prosecutor.⁶⁸ Moreover, Mélenchon also had to face an internal crisis within his party as several members quit the organisation due to his autocratic leadership and the lack of democratic functioning.⁶⁹

Despite the fact that Mélenchon led several rallies against the president and his reforms in 2018, the radical politician was unable to sustain the momentum of these protests or to capitalise on the 50th anniversary of *Mai 68* and to exploit social discontent. It seems that even if the revolution prophesied by Mélenchon will materialise, he will not be the one likely to lead it.

The minor populist parties were not able to improve their positions in 2018. With the surge in the support of the National Rally, there was no space for

the nationalist France Arise to grow. But it amounts to bad news for Marine Le Pen that France Arise will run separately in the European Parliamentary elections, since this will split the radical right-wing vote. The New Anticapitalist Party and the French Communist Party also have yet to break through in French politics as they remain marginal political formations.

Things have not looked too bright for Emmanuel Macron in the second year of his presidency. Across the entire nation, protests against his reforms, like the Yellow Vest movement, have become part of everyday reality, and these protests grow increasingly violent and reinforce the image of Macron as the "president of the rich". Moreover, various statements by Macron that smack of disrespect towards citizens fuel anti-establishment attitudes in society, which was also encouraged by the controversial Benalla affair.⁷⁰ In combination, these developments pave the ground for populist rhetoric and raise the French public's receptivity to anti-system solutions.

Previously, Macron had raised the stakes too high by overvaluing the European elections as the most important event of his five-year term. He spent a lot of energy trying to frame the election of May 2019 as the final battle in Europe between populists and liberals. If his party fails to do well in the election, his reputation will take another major blow to the benefit of Le Pen's National Rally which can then confidently look forward to the new year and the EP election. Although there is no certainty that the far-right party will be able to reach the 25% of the votes it won in 2014, what is certain is that the weight of the far-right radicals will increase in Strasbourg and that Le Pen's party will be among the most prominent representatives of this group. Moreover, discontent with Macron will further pave the ground for a victory of Le Pen's kind of politics in 2022. As for Mélenchon, apart from the growing tensions within his party, the major threat in the 2019 EP campaign is the growing popularity of the Greens. However, France Untamed seems almost certain to expand the size of its representation in the European Parliament and there is a probability that France Arise will enter the EP for the first time in its history.

68 Henley, J. (2018) "French leftwinger Jean-Luc Mélenchon reacts angrily to police raids," The Guardian, 16 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/16/french-leftwinger-jean-luc-melenchon-reacts-angrily-to-police-raids>.

69 *ibid*

70 See more on the Benalla affair here: <https://www.france24.com/en/20180724-france-macron-benalla-affair-timeline-elysee-palace-scandal-politics-parliament-inquiry>

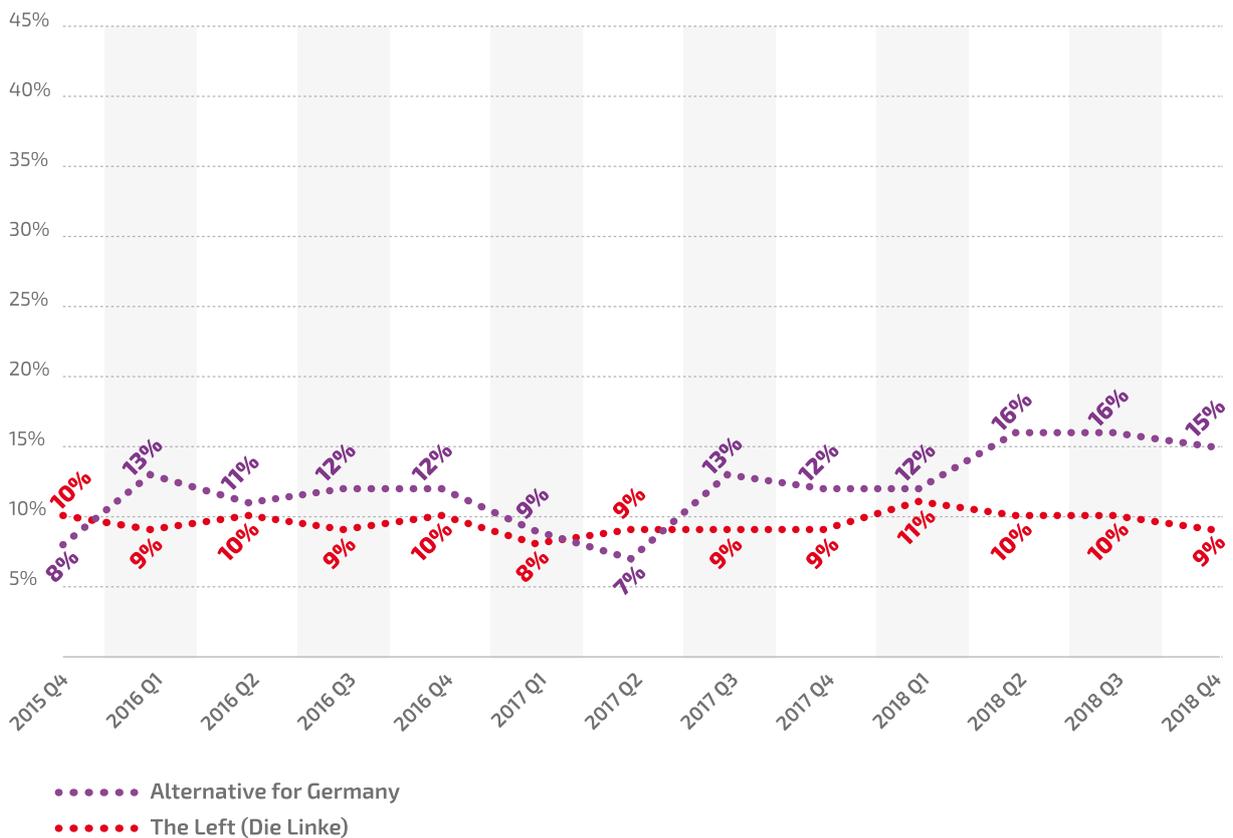


Germany

As opposed to 2017, in 2018 populism was on the rise in Germany. The aggregate support of populist parties grew by 3 points in a year, and almost every fourth German backed an anti-establishment formation by the end of 2018. But the support for populism increased only among right-wing voters. While the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) managed to expand its electorate from 12% to 15% among likely voters, the leftist Die Linke is in exactly the same position in the polls as it was at the same time in 2017. The decline of the German traditional centre-left and centre-right parties has not stopped in 2018, but, surprisingly, it was not only populist parties that benefited from their weakening – the Greens have emerged as the political winners of this year.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|-------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Alternative for Germany (AfD) | EFD | 7.10% | 15% |
| The Left (Die Linke) | GUE/NGL | 7.40% | 9% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN GERMANY



The most important moment in German politics in 2018 was Angela Merkel's decision to retire as the chair of the main governing party CDU. Merkel went further still when she announced that she would withdraw as chancellor as well after her current term ends in 2021. The new leader of the CDU is Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the former general secretary of the party and a Merkel protégée, who

is seen as likely to continue the moderate political course charted by Merkel.

Two state elections were held in 2018 which gave the AfD an opportunity to show that the party can gain momentum and exploit the tensions between the governing parties and the declining support for mainstreams forces in general. A few

months after the difficult negotiations to conclude a coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD had ended, the Christian Social Union attacked Chancellor Angela Merkel for her policies on migration, which almost led to a collapse of the coalition. The aim of Horst Seehofer's party (CSU) before the Bavarian state election was to regain the support of right-wing voters who had abandoned them in favour of the AfD because of the "refugee friendly" policy of the federal government. Looking at the outcome of the Bavarian vote, however, one can conclude that this was not a successful strategy: the CSU experienced one of its worst election setbacks ever, while the AfD entered the state parliament for the first time. However, the far-right party did not achieve a major breakthrough as it won only 10% of the votes, which was significantly below its standing in the national polls. In a traditionally conservative region, such a result was a disappointment. This is an important signal for both CSU and AfD that focusing only on the issue of migration is not sufficient for winning over new voters. This insight was also confirmed by the surprisingly good results of the Greens and the Free Voters of Bavaria, a local conservative party.

The AfD's result in the Hessian state election were better suited for celebration, since by entering the state parliament in Hesse for the first time, the party is now represented in all 16 German federal states. Moreover, their result of 13% in an economically booming state with low unemployment indicates that the party's messages resonate far beyond the economically underprivileged regions and that the dissatisfaction with the governing parties' handling of migration has not dissipated.⁷¹

In addition to the AfD's excellent results, however, there were two scandals that affected the party negatively. First, it was finally proven that the party had been supported financially by Russia.⁷² It was revealed that three party leaders had flown to Moscow during the campaign for the 2017 national election, and that their trip had been paid for by Russian donors. Subsequently, a financial fraud scandal hit the party in November, when it was revealed that their co-leader had violated campaign finance regulations.

As far as Die Linke (The Left) is concerned, 2018 was disappointing for the left-wing formation as

it failed to capitalise on the declining strength of the Social Democrats (SPD). Instead, the Greens attracted the highest share of former SPD voters and thus took advantage of the centre-left party's crisis. The main reason that Die Linke has not been able to gain traction is the party's deep and ongoing division over migration. With the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the base of Die Linke, which is concentrated in the Eastern regions of Germany, began to gradually drift over to the far-right party. This development split the far-left party into two camps. One side attempted to adapt to the growing anti-immigrant sentiments in society. The prominent representative of this line, Sahra Wagenknecht, repeatedly criticized Merkel for her migration policy and called for asylum laws to be tightened. This led to a rift within Die Linke, which the party leadership sought to put to rest by presenting a proposal on the party's foreign policy. Finally, an overwhelming majority at the party congress voted for a policy of open borders, but the party nevertheless remains divided on the issue as Wagenknecht launched a new movement two months later, which aims to address voters who prefer a tougher approach to migration.⁷³

In terms of the future of these populist parties, 2019 could lead to slight improvements for the AfD, as the migration issue continues to divide German society. However, as the Chemnitz riots showed, the extremist face of the party also leads to apprehensions among citizens. In the coming EP election, the AfD is expected to come in third after the CDU/CSU and the Greens. The AfD's EP group is likely to emerge as a major anti-immigration force in Strasbourg. Die Linke, on the other hand, is expected to maintain its current number of seats or even lose some, as in addition to the SPD, the AfD and The Greens, too, could try to lure the voters of the far-left party during the election campaign of 2019.

71 Blond, J. L. (2018) "Merkel suffers another election setback in key German state of Hesse," The Guardian, 29 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/28/merkel-suffers-another-election-setback-key-german-state-of-hesse>.

72 AfD members' flight sponsored with Russian money, DW, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/report-afd-members-flight-sponsored-with-russian-money/a-43872774>

73 Connolly, K. (2018) "German politicians launch leftwing 'Get Up' movement," The Guardian, 4 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/04/german-politicians-launch-leftwing-stand-up-movement>.

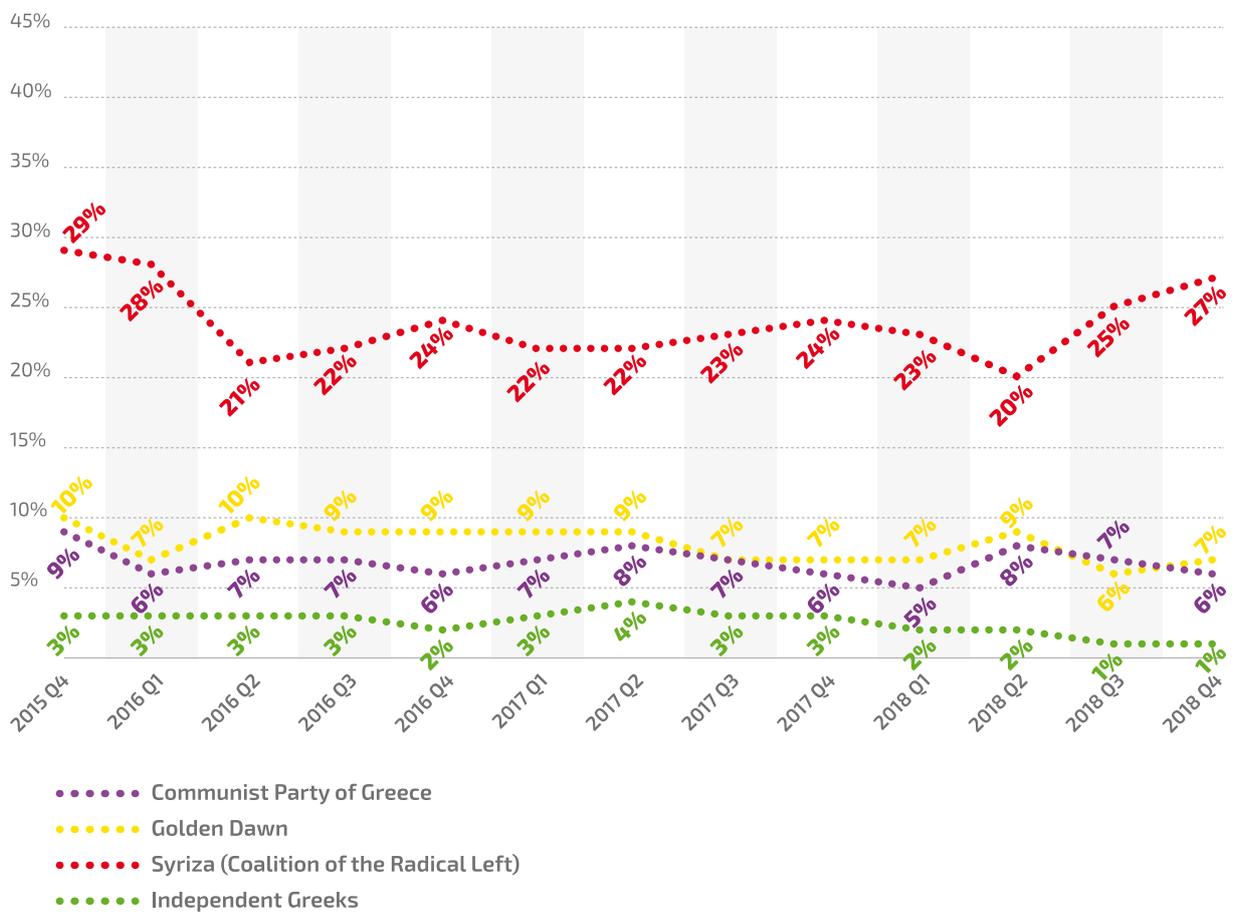


Greece

The traditionally high support for populist parties in Greece has not changed significantly during 2018, as aggregated support for anti-establishment parties rose by only 1 point throughout the year and stood at 41% in December 2018. The ruling Syriza party was the only populist party that managed to increase its support, as the far-left formation expanded its base by 3 points. The coming year, 2019, will be the last in the Tsipras government's current term, and his party is in second place right now in the polls with a support of 27% of likely voters. The popularity of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) remains unchanged at the end of 2018 as compared to the same time of the year in 2017. However, both parties' support fluctuated substantially throughout the year. The nationalist Independent Greeks (ANEL) dropped 2 points and their vote share of 1% indicates that the party could be in trouble in 2019.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|-------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Coalition of the Radical Left | GUE/NGL | 26.57% | 27% |
| Golden Dawn | NI | 9.38% | 7% |
| Communist Party of Greece | GUE/NGL | 6.07% | 6% |
| Independent Greeks | NI | 3.45% | 1% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN GREECE



The first half of the year was a burdensome one for the Greek prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, as criticisms towards him and his Syriza party intensified in the process of negotiating a compromise between Greece and Macedonia. The two countries were in a drawn-out dispute over the name of the former Yugoslavian republic as Greece opposed the name Macedonia for historical and irredentist reasons. But after ten years of nationalist populism, a new left-wing government came into power in Macedonia at the end of 2016, which actively sought to resolve the conflict. The negotiations between the two sides intensified during the first half of 2018, which generated huge tensions in Greek politics. The first months of the year were accompanied by massive protests in Athens and in the northern part of the country, mainly in Thessaloniki. The opposition tried to exploit the situation and submitted a no-confidence motion in parliament. The motion was not carried, however, and the bilateral agreement was signed in June.

The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn was among the loudest detractors of the agreement. Golden Dawn organized several rallies against the proposed name change and the party's popularity surged as it successfully capitalised on the rising nationalist mood. Moreover, their activists were also energised after a period of relative calm and committed attacks against migrants, left-wing activists and even a politician.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, once the dispute between Greece and Macedonia subsided, their vote share in polls dropped to the same level where it was before.

Apart from the name dispute issue, the dissatisfaction with Tsipras and his party increased further in the summer mainly because of how his government handled a tragic wildfire disaster that hit the country in July. The disaster left at least 90 dead and hundreds without a home.⁷⁵ It also elicited heavy criticisms of the government since the authorities were ill-prepared for such a severe situation.⁷⁶ Tsipras took responsibility and admitted that his government could have done more to save lives.⁷⁷ Even the frank admission of responsibility could not prevent his party from falling to a low point in 2018 in terms of popular support, however.

74 Smith, H. (2018) "Far-right thugs' attack mayor of Thessaloniki at remembrance event," *The Guardian*, 20 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/20/suspected-far-right-thugs-attack-mayor-of-thessaloniki-greece-at-rally>.

75 "Greece wildfires: Emergency chiefs replaced" (2018) *BBC News*, 5 August. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45077978>.

76 Smith, H. (2018) "Greece wildfires: authorities blamed for high death toll," *The Guardian*, 26 July. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/26/greece-wildfires-authorities-blamed-for-high-death-toll>.

77 Smith, H. (2018) "Tsipras takes political responsibility for Greece's wildfire disaster," *The Guardian*, 27 July. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/27/tsipras-talks-of-greeces-heaviest-moment-after-forest-fires>.

But at the end of summer, following a long period of harsh austerity, Greece finally concluded the bailout programme. Although the economy is far from booming,⁷⁸ Tsipras immediately began to concentrate on his campaign ahead of the 2019 election. First, he revamped his cabinet, adding new and young faces, which was seen as an attempt to make his cabinet more attractive and to open up towards the electoral centre.⁷⁹ Secondly, he pledged to improve Greeks' standard of living by raising wages and increasing welfare spending. Finally, the prime minister took a huge step towards the separation of church and state by agreeing with the Orthodox Church on the removal of priests from civil service payrolls. Also, the Church agreed to allow the government to make the Greek state "religiously neutral".⁸⁰ From the money saved by these acts, Tsipras promised that he would create new jobs in the public sector with the intent of lowering the unemployment rate.⁸¹

It is apparent that the measures taken by the government had a pronounced impact on the popularity of Syriza, as the party's support surged by 7 points in six months. Despite its improved standing in the polls, Syriza is still lagging behind the centre-right opposition party New Democracy. Syriza's coalition partner, the right-wing populist ANEL, declined so massively throughout the year that it is now a marginal player in Greek politics. Except for a few demonstrations, the anti-EU and anti-NATO Communist Party of Greece also proved unable to play a major role in Greek politics in 2018.

It is still uncertain whether Tsipras' endeavour to shed his party's radical image and turn it into a progressive centre-left party in order to remain in power will be successful. Nevertheless, Syriza is likely to hold on to its 6 seats in the European Parliament, and KKE and Golden Dawn are also expected to continue their disruptive work in the European Parliament after 2019.

78 Alderman, L. (2018) "Greece's Bailout Is Ending. The Pain Is Far from Over," *The New York Times*, 19 August. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/business/greece-bailout-financial-crisis.html>.

79 Smith, H. (2018) "Greek PM seeks to claim centre ground with cabinet shake-up," *The Guardian*, 29 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/29/greece-alexis-tsipras-cabinet-shakeup-syriza>.

80 "Greece Church agreement to take 10,000 priests off payroll" (2018) *BBC News*, 7 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46122997>.

81 Kitsantonis, N. (2018) "Greek Leader's Efforts to Loosen Church-State Ties Are Met With Scepticism" *The New York Times*, 16 November. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/16/world/europe/greece-tsipras-orthodox-church.html>.

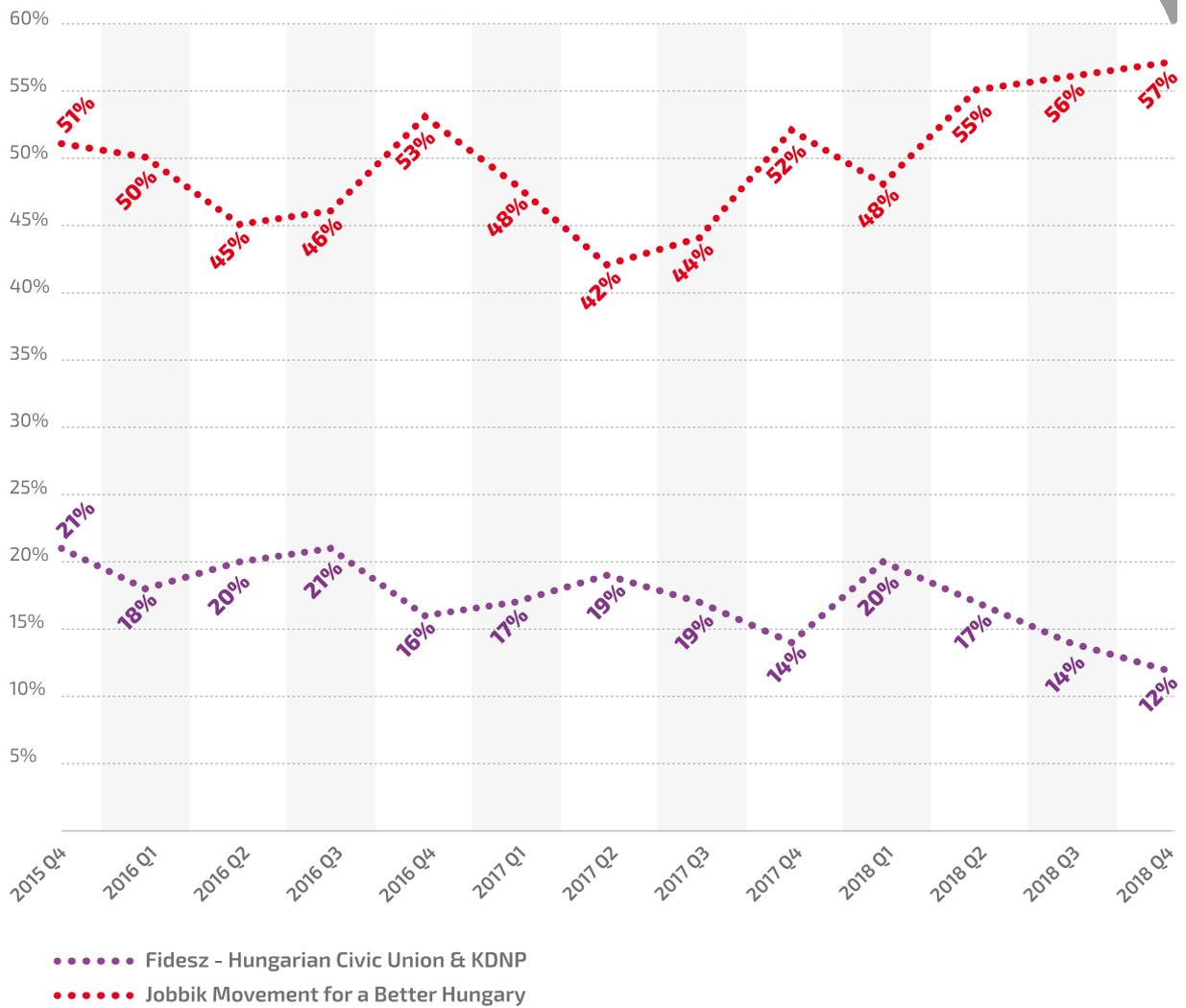


Hungary

Populism was still the dominant political approach in Hungary in 2018. Moreover, its hegemonic position was further reinforced as the aggregate support for these parties increased throughout the year. The most prominent nationalist party in Europe, Fidesz, attained a record level of support with 57% of likely voters in Hungary opting for Viktor Orbán's brand of illiberal politics at the end of the 2018. This is 5 points higher than a year ago. The formerly far-right Jobbik party, which has tried to reposition itself as a centrist party, lost 2 points and now stands at 12% in the polls. Jobbik also lost its previous position as the strongest opposition party by far, since the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) currently also stands at 12%.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Union & KDNP | EPP | 51.48% | 57% |
| Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary | Non-Inscrits | 14.68% | 12% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN HUNGARY



In 2018, Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party won the third consecutive legislative election with a two-thirds majority in the Hungarian parliament, which further cemented their dominant position in the country's political life. Ever since 2015, Fidesz has been focusing on the issue of migration, and ultimately this strategy was electorally successful as the party secured almost half of all the votes cast in April and secured a constitutional majority that allows them to easily amend or totally rewrite the Hungarian constitution. The party launched a massive anti-immigrant campaign right before the refugee crisis in 2015, and the intensity of this campaign has not decreased throughout the years. Fidesz's xenophobic rhetoric, in combination with the country's economic boom and the ruling power's tough attacks on media freedom, did not leave much chance for the fragmented and paralysed opposition.

Fidesz's main message was quite simple before the election, as it reduced election day to the ultimate battle between "anti-migration" and "pro-migration" forces, and to a fight where Hungary's future is at stake.⁸² According to the governing party, they were the only political force in Hungary who represented the will of the people and who could defend Hungarians from the threat of migration. Fidesz had no political programme apart from defending the country's sovereignty and not letting any immigrants in. In the party's vision, the liberal leadership of the European Union is partnering with George Soros and together they want to flood Hungary with immigrants from the Middle-East and Africa in order to erase Hungary's national identity.

Fidesz's anti-EU stance is anything but new since the party has loudly opposed the further federalization of the continent for a while now and has been pushing the idea of a European Union of nation-states since coming to power in 2010. Still, its anti-Soros campaign is a new chapter in the party's constant struggle with the establishment. George Soros is a New York-based billionaire and philanthropist who is originally from Hungary. Soros figures frequently in far-right conspiracy theories since he is funding organizations committed to liberal values all across the world. The ruling party began to demonize Soros a year before the election by launching a poster campaign and a national "consultation". According to Fidesz's ubiquitous claim, politicians of the opposition as well as NGOs are Soros' "mercenaries" who are seeking to

execute what the government claims is the "Soros Plan", namely to settle masses of migrants in the country.

In the months before the election, Jobbik was the strongest political force of the opposition and it tried to demonstrate to voters that it had left behind its radical past. Their ideological pivot was mainly compelled by Fidesz's swing to the right in recent years, as the governing party's xenophobic rhetoric left no political space on the far right.⁸³ Jobbik's programme can be described as centre-right with leftist social pledges: the party has abandoned its call for exiting the EU, it is attacking the government for pervasive corruption, and wants to carry out reforms in health and education. At the same time, Jobbik politicians also emphasised their initiative for a wage union in the EU which aims at eliminating wage inequalities between EU Member States.

Jobbik's lower-than-expected vote share of 20% in the election, followed by the retirement from politics of the party's long-standing leader, Gábor Vona, highlighted the deep divisions within the party. Finally, the radical wing of Jobbik left the organization and founded a new party called *Our Home Movement*, which is led by László Toroczkai, an iconic figure among Hungarian radicals and Dóra Dúró, the face of Jobbik for many years.⁸⁴ The tensions that emerged within Jobbik had a huge impact on the party as it lost almost half its voters and has yet to find its own voice.

Although Orbán has no contender in Hungary, he had to face growing criticism in the European Union. In September 2018, the European Parliament (EP) voted to sanction Hungary based on its assessment that the Hungarian government has been systematically breaching the rule of law, attacking the freedom of the press and disrespecting EU values.⁸⁵ However, the EP's decision, which launched a procedure that could hypothetically lead to the suspension of Hungary's voting rights in the European Council, failed to exert a negative impact on either Fidesz's domestic popularity or its membership in the European People's Party (EPP).

83 Dunai, M. (2018) "Hungary's Jobbik eyes election gains after ditching far-right views," Reuters, 22 March. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-election-jobbik/hungarys-jobbik-eyes-election-gains-after-ditching-far-right-views-idUSKBN1GY2BT>

84 Haines, J. R. (2018) "A New Political Movement Emerges on Hungary's Far Right" (2018) Foreign Policy Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/07/a-new-political-movement-emerges-on-hungarys-far-right/>

85 Rankin, J. (2018) "MEPs vote to pursue action against Hungary over Orbán crackdown," The Guardian, 12 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/eu-meps-vote-to-pursue-action-against-hungary-over-orban-crackdown>

82 McAuley, J. (2018) "Hungary votes to keep prime minister and right wing in power," The Washington Post, 8 April. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hungary-goes-to-polls-with-possibility-of-reelecting-viktor-orban-to-3rd-term-as-prime-minister/2018/04/08/c884984c-36b2-11e8-af3c-2123715f78df_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d209a7056138.

The combative attitude of Orbán and Fidesz have not changed since the election. Indeed, its governance has become even more authoritarian than before. A comprehensive list of such measure is beyond the scope of the present writing, but some particularly illustrative examples include the ruling party's restriction of the freedom of assembly, the provision banning any kind of assistance for undocumented immigrants, the criminalisation of homelessness, the reform of the country's judicial system (which is likely to reduce the independence of the latter), and the government's continued attacks against the freedom of the press. Furthermore, the government's actions have successfully aimed at the effective expulsion from Hungary of one of the country's most prominent institutions of higher education, the Soros-founded Central European University (CEU). CEU will relocate some of its most important programmes to Vienna, as parliament passed a bill which makes the university's operation in Hungary impossible.⁸⁶ However, despite these measures, the government has been able to further expand its base, owing in significant part to the increase in real wages and the robust economic growth in Hungary. However, it should be noted that a huge proportion of Hungarian society is simply unaware of any negative news about the government since Fidesz has continued to eliminate critical media sources.

In 2019, Fidesz is expected to increase the number of its seats in the next European Parliament. At the same time, however, it is still unknown whether they will remain in the European People's Party or join a new Eurosceptic group. In any case, Fidesz is likely to set a new record in the election, potentially even winning as much as 60% of the vote. The opposition's ability to mobilise their voters is still subpar, but if Jobbik could halt its decline in the polls it would be likely to hold on to its three seats in the European Parliament.

⁸⁶ "The Central European University is moving to Vienna" (2018) The Economist, 5 December. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/12/05/the-central-european-university-is-moving-to-vienna>

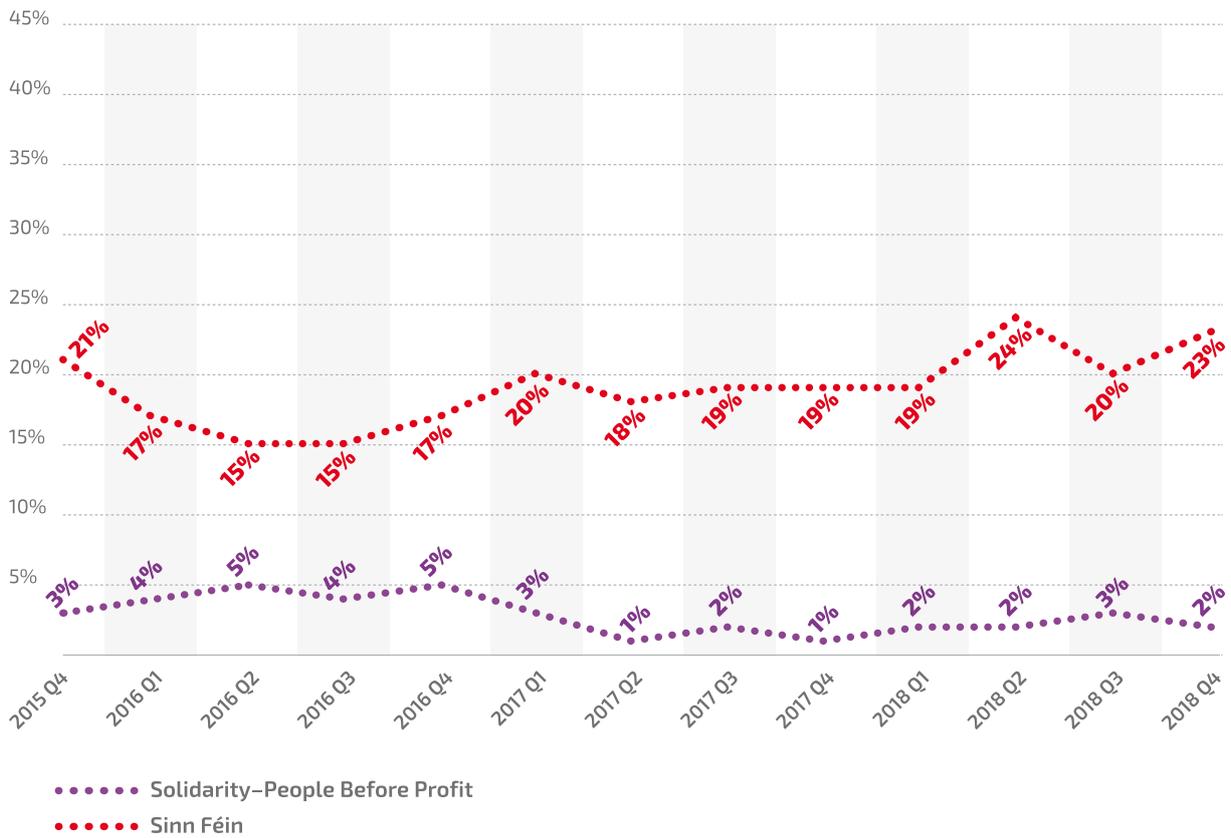


Ireland

The vote share of populist parties in Ireland rose from one-fifth (20%) to one-fourth (25%) of likely voters during 2018. The main catalyst of the increase was the rising support for Sinn Féin, as the left-wing nationalist party's popularity grew by 4 points throughout the year. This did not indicate a steady improvement in their support, however, but rather growth by fits and starts. The electoral alliance of democratic socialists, the Solidarity-People Before Profit party, was still a marginal political player in the country. Despite their increase by 1 point in the polls throughout the year, only 2 percent of the Irish citizens support them.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Sinn Féin | GUE/NGL | 17.00% | 23% |
| Solidarity–People Before Profit | - | - | 2% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN IRELAND



Ireland, a country where Catholic traditions are deeply rooted in society, held two referendums in 2018 which signalled a progressive shift in society. In May, citizens went to the ballot box to decide on the liberalisation of the country's abortion law, which ranked at the time as one of the strictest in Europe. The two mainstream parties of the country, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, did not officially endorse any position on this issue, unlike Sinn Féin, which was in favour of the liberalisation.⁸⁷ However, Sinn Féin's official party policy was still stricter than the one that was the subject of the referendum.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Irish citizens voted for the proposed liberalisation and during the campaign Sinn Féin was able to significantly improve its support and to overtake Fianna Fáil in the polls, thus becoming the strongest opposition party.

However, the day of the other referendum - which was held on the same day as the presidential election - did not give the party much reason to celebrate. The result of 6% achieved by Sinn Féin's presidential candidate, Liadh Ní Riada, was seen as a failure for the party, since the candidate's support was far lower than the nominating party's popularity had suggested. Ní Riada's campaign was mired in some controversies, but her party also made a mistake by nominating her too late, barely a month before the election.⁸⁹ Moreover, she did not focus sufficiently on the main message of her campaign, a "United Ireland", and she did not position herself clearly enough as the Sinn Féin candidate, which is why she failed to capitalise on the successful party brand.⁹⁰

Sinn Féin began the year with a change in its leadership when Gerry Adams, the longest-serving president of the party, retired after 34 years in that position. The new leader became his former deputy, Mary Lou McDonald, who seized the opportunity to shift her party to the centre. Unlike her predecessor, McDonald does not have to carry any historical baggage concerning her party's relationship with the terrorist group IRA.⁹¹ McDonald's political strategy is to turn Sinn Féin into a potential partner in a coalition government with one of the mainstream parties in Ireland. At the same time, the uncertainties surrounding Brexit have made the

realisation of this aspiration difficult.⁹² McDonald's goal of potentially entering into a coalition is meant to promote the party's agenda of a United Ireland, but the current uncertainty surrounding the future of Northern Ireland rendered the new direction of Sinn Féin unpredictable.⁹³

The other populist party of Ireland, the leftist alliance between Solidarity and People Before Profit, did not support any candidate in the presidential election. The parties claimed instead that "they wanted to deal with people's everyday problems".⁹⁴ The far-left party focused mainly on the issue of housing in 2018; together with Sinn Féin, it wanted to oust Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy who was widely criticised because of the increasing homelessness in the country. The left-wing populists were especially⁹⁵ active in the protests⁹⁶ on housing.⁹⁷

Due to the uncertainty of the fate of Northern Ireland and of the Brexit process overall, Irish politics is looking at a busy year in 2019. With respect to the elections to the European Parliament, which will be held on the same day as the local elections in Ireland, Sinn Féin will likely hold on to its 3 seats, although they also have a chance to increase the number of their seats in Strasbourg. Solidarity-People Before Profit, on the other hand, needs to improve significantly if it would like to enter the EP for the first time in the party's history.

87 Holland, K. (2018) "Ireland's abortion referendum: 'It's painful and it's personal'", *The Guardian*, 13 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/13/ireland-abortion-referendum-25-may-repeal-campaign-women>.

88 *ibid*

89 McGee, H. (2018) "Sinn Féin's presidential campaign was a failure," *The Irish Times*, 28 October. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/sinn-fein-s-presidential-campaign-was-a-failure-1.3678354>.

90 *ibid*

91 O'loughlin, E. (2018) "Sinn Fein Gets a New Leader, Mary Lou McDonald," *The New York Times*, 10 February. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/10/world/europe/sinn-fein-mary-lou-mcdonald-gerry-adams.html>.

92 Leahy, P. (2018) "Pat Leahy: Mary Lou McDonald's political strategy is unravelling," *The Irish Times*, 10 November. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/pat-leahy-mary-lou-mcdonald-s-political-strategy-is-unravelling-1.3692503>.

93 *ibid*

94 McGee, H. (2018) "Solidarity-PBP unimpressed with presidential hopefuls," *The Irish Times*, 11 September. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/solidarity-pbp-unimpressed-with-presidential-hopefuls-1.3625889>.

95 McCurry, C. and Press Association (2018) "Solidarity-People Before Profit to back no-confidence motion in Housing Minister," *Independent.ie*, 11 September. Available at: <https://www.independent.ie/breaking-news/irish-news/solidaritypeople-before-profit-to-back-noconfidence-motion-in-housing-minister-37306766.html>.

96 Dillon, F. and Larkin, L. (2018) "Housing: More than 10,000 vent their anger over crisis," *Independent.ie*, 4 October. Available at: <https://www.independent.ie/business/personal-finance/property-mortgages/housing-more-than-10000-vent-their-anger-over-crisis-37383350.html>.

97 McCurry, C. and Press Association (2018) "Solidarity-People Before Profit to back no-confidence motion in Housing Minister," *Independent.ie*, 11 September. Available at: <https://www.independent.ie/breaking-news/irish-news/solidaritypeople-before-profit-to-back-noconfidence-motion-in-housing-minister-37306766.html>.

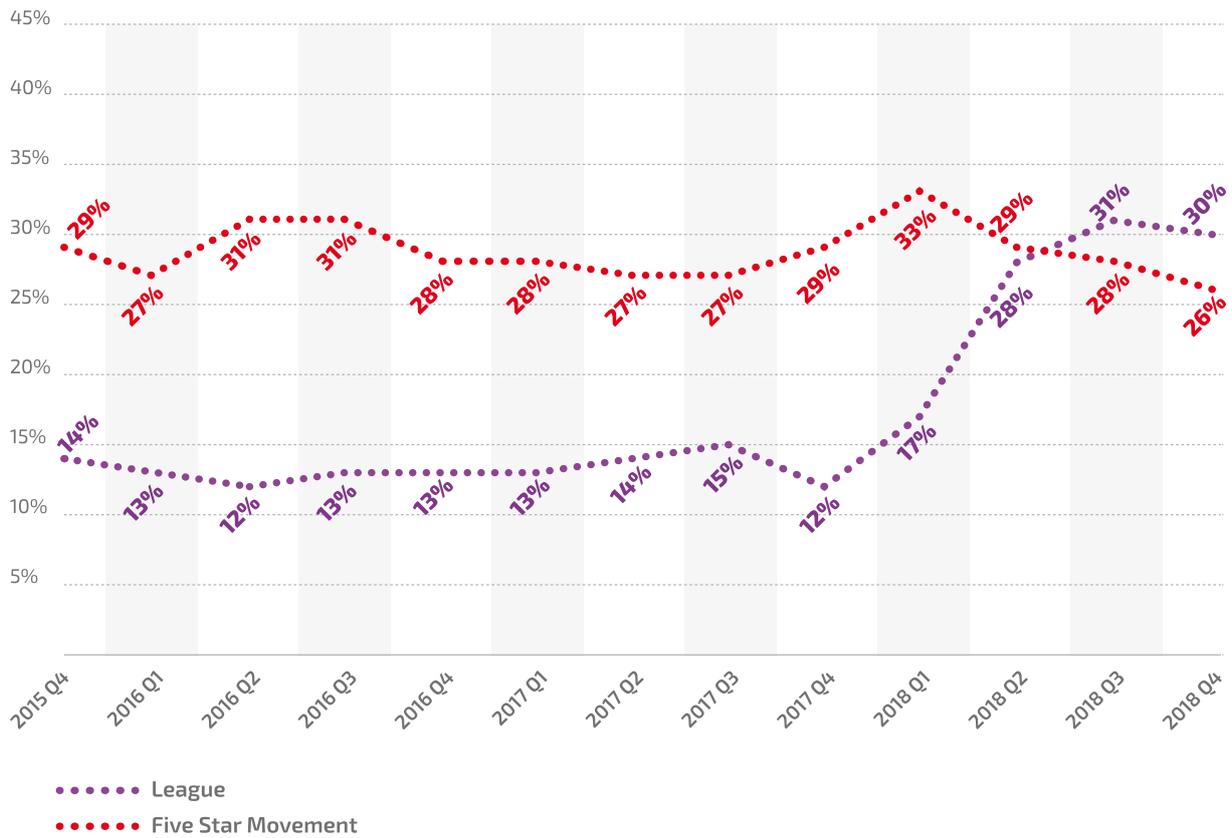


Italy

The support of populist parties in Italy has soared in 2018 as their aggregated support surged by 15 points in just 12 months. This year, the absolute winner in Italian politics is the League. Not only has the far-right populist party's vote share increased from 12 percent to 30 percent, but they have also joined the Italian government. Moreover, they have secured key cabinet posts as party leader Matteo Salvini serves as both deputy prime minister and minister of the interior. Through these positions, Salvini has emerged as the de facto leader of the country. At the same time, the other – less radical – populist party, the Five Star Movement, lost 7 points during 2018 and now stands at 26% in the opinion polls.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Five Star Movement | EFDD | 21.15% | 26% |
| League (Northern League) | ENF | 6.15% | 30% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN ITALY



At the beginning of 2018, Italy was in the midst of an election campaign in the run-up to the legislative election held in March. Apart from the country's economic problems, especially unemployment, the public discourse in Italy was dominated by the topic of immigration. The election resulted in a hung parliament as the right-wing alliance led by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi failed to secure the 40 percent necessary to govern.⁹⁸ The mainstream political forces underperformed in the election: the far-right League (18%) overtook Berlusconi's centre-right Forza Italia (14%), and the incumbent governing party, the centre-left Democratic Party, came in a distant second at 23%, lagging nine points behind the 32% result of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement, the party founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo.

After protracted coalition negotiations, the two populist and anti-establishment parties, the League and M5S, joined forces to form a government led by the independent Giuseppe Conte, a previously little known law professor without any relevant political experience.⁹⁹ Both parties of the coalition are intensely euroskeptic and their coalition agreement contains proposals that clearly run afoul of EU policies and Italy's obligations in the realm of fiscal policy (including budget balance and public debt) and asylum policy. Additionally, contrary to the austerity measures expected by the EU, the parties agreed on cutting taxes, amending the pension law and introducing a universal basic income.¹⁰⁰

The League burst into the centre of Italian politics with a bang in the first half of the year. For many years, the Northern League as it was known then had been a minor political player in Italy with separatist ambitions for the Northern part of the country. However, its current leader, Matteo Salvini has successfully rebranded the party since he took over the leadership in 2013. Interestingly, the League's governmental position has not diminished the party's popularity yet, in fact it has boosted the League even further in the polls. In the few months after the election, the party's popularity almost doubled, mainly because of Salvini's hardline approach to immigration.¹⁰¹

After assuming office, Salvini blocked NGO rescue ships from Italian ports to decrease the number of refugees arriving in Italy. This led to a huge international outcry but proved popular with the Italian public. Then he proposed a number of restrictive measures which were passed by the Italian parliament at the end of the year: the new law has removed the possibility of extending asylum on humanitarian grounds and contains a series of administrative restrictions regarding immigration.¹⁰² Salvini's tough position on immigration made him popular across Europe, which has boosted his ambitions for the EP election of 2019. For the election, Salvini intends to organise a new anti-immigration front in Brussels. Salvini hosted the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán at an unofficial meeting in Milan, where the two populist leaders announced their plans to challenge the EU's current leadership and to change its main policies, starting with immigration.¹⁰³ Then, Salvini continued to criticise the European Union jointly with Marine Le Pen: the two allies met in Rome where they harshly attacked the EU Commission for voicing its concerns about the Italian budget.¹⁰⁴

The notion of boosting his personal popularity by blaming the European Union was one of the motivations behind Salvini's suggestion that the tragic bridge collapse in Genova was the result of the EU's fiscal rules, which prevented Italy from investing in infrastructure, even though at the time when he made these assertions the cause of the disaster had not yet been established by the authorities.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, M5S provides a good illustration of the standard challenges that populist parties tend to be confronted with once they enter government. First, the party had to walk back some of its campaign pledges, mainly those relating to environmental issues, even though environmentalism is one of the core elements of the party's ideals.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the party is still struggling with the implementation of its flagship policy, the guaranteed basic income.

98 Deutsche Welle (2018) "Italy election to result in hung parliament | DW | 05.03.2018" DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-election-to-result-in-hung-parliament/a-42823814>.

99 Zampano, G. (2018) "Giuseppe Conte asked to form Italian government," POLITICO, 24 May. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/giuseppe-conte-asked-to-form-italian-government/>.

100 Zampano, G. (2018) "5Stars and League reach deal to break Italian impasse," POLITICO, 14 May. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/5stars-and-league-reach-deal-to-break-italian-impasse/>.

101 Giuffrida, A. (2018) "Matteo Salvini rides wave of popularity in wake of Genoa disaster," The Guardian, 22 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/22/matteo-salvini-rides-wave-of-popularity-in-wake-of-genoa-disaster>.

102 Scherer, S. (2018) "Italy's Salvini gets win with new asylum and security rules," Reuters, 29 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-politics-immigration-security/italys-salvini-gets-win-with-new-asylum-and-security-rules-idUSKCN1NY1JN>.

103 Tondo, L. (2018) "Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orbán to form anti-migration front," The Guardian, 28 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/28/matteo-salvini-viktor-orban-anti-migrant-plan-brussels>.

104 France24 (2018) "Le Pen and Salvini vow to storm Brussels 'bunker' in EU elections," France 24, 9 October. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20181008-le-pen-salvini-brussels-bunker-european-elections>.

105 Ma, A. (2018) "Italy's deputy prime minister is blaming the EU for the deadly bridge collapse, even though nobody knows what caused it yet," Business Insider, 15 August. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/italy-bridge-collapse-matteo-salvini-blames-eu-for-genoa-disaster-2018-8>.

106 Balmer, C. (2018) "Italy's 5-Star struggles to keep up with soaring Salvini," Reuters, 22 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-5star-analysis-idUSKCN1NR103>.

The proposal was particularly popular among voters in the underdeveloped south of Italy, and although party leader Luigi Di Maio intends to introduce it in 2019, the League and Salvini are not likely to support the plan. The League's electoral base, which is concentrated in the wealthy northern part of the country, is adamantly opposed to any major increases in social expenditures, which leads to ongoing tensions between the ruling parties. Furthermore, the League has been able to win the support of a significant chunk of M5S's base of voters, for two main reasons. First, unlike M5S, the League has prior governmental experience, while the former does not operate as a fully-fledged professional political force.¹⁰⁷ Second, Salvini's stance on immigration, which reaches large audiences through his professional communication in social media, has made the League more attractive for protest voters who were not strongly committed to the M5S.

It is expected that popularity of the government will decline in 2019 mainly due to the fact that the coalition will not be able to circumvent EU rules and will probably be forced to cut spending, which means that the government won't be able to implement its previous welfare pledges.¹⁰⁸ What we do not know as of yet is how the popularity of the two parties will change and whether one of them will be able to weather these developments without losing significant support. With respect to the EP elections, M5S is likely to slightly increase its delegation in Strasbourg, while – based on the projection of the Populism Tracker – the League seems to have a real shot at forming the largest anti-immigration group in the EP with 30 delegates. The group could well serve as the core of a new populist far-right group in the next European Parliament.

107 Balmer, C. (2018) "Italy's 5-Star struggles to keep up with soaring Salvini," Reuters, 22 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-5star-analysis/italys-5-star-struggles-to-keep-up-with-soaring-salvini-idUSKCN1NR103>.

108 Borrelli, S. S. (2018) "Italy waves white flag on budget," POLITICO, 6 December. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-commission-budget-waves-white-flag-rome-brussels/>.

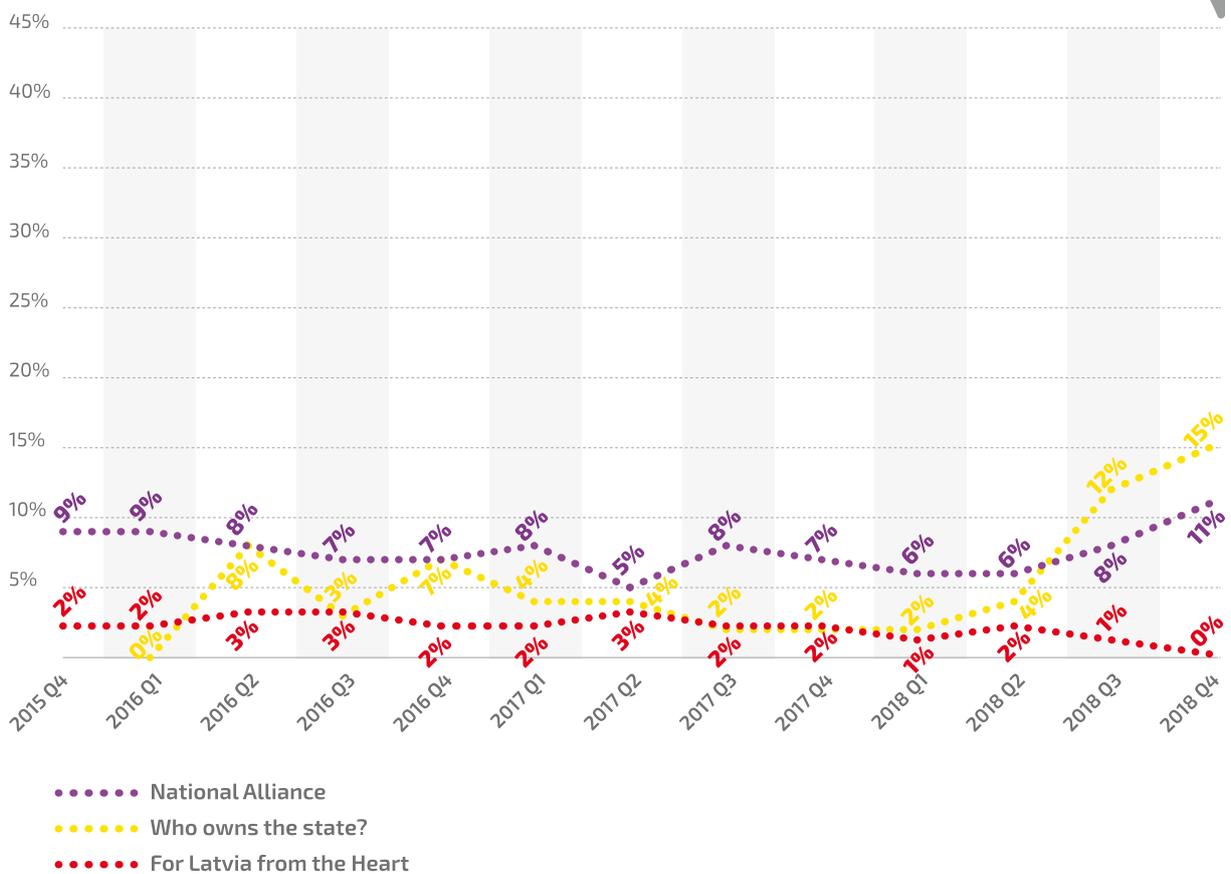


Latvia

The support of Latvia's populists skyrocketed in 2018. Their aggregate support in opinion polls rose considerably, by 15 points, and over a quarter of the voters were backing an anti-establishment party at the end of 2018. The greatest beneficiary of this trend in 2018 was the Who Owns the State? (KPV LV) party, which has emerged as a relevant political actor within a mere 2 years since its creation. The party, which was founded in 2016 and had been supported by 2 percent of likely voters in December 2017, stood at 15% in opinion polls at the end of 2018. The right-wing National Alliance was also able to add some support, and they stood at 4 points throughout the year. At the same time, the For Latvia from the Heart party disappeared from Latvian politics.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| National Alliance (For Fatherland and Freedom/ LNNK) | ECR | 14.25% | 11% |
| Who Owns the State? | - | - | 15% |
| For Latvia from the Heart | ECR | - | 0% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN LATVIA



The main political event of 2018 in Latvia was the legislative election held in October 2018, which restructured the political landscape in the Baltic country. The social democratic Harmony, which is the preferred party of the country's Russian minority, came in first with 20% of the votes, followed by the populist KPV LV, which received 14%. The ruling centre-right alliance won only a combined 28% of the votes, and as a result it will not be able to continue to govern without including a new coalition partner in the government.¹⁰⁹ This situation resulted in protracted coalition talks, and the parties were unable to agree on a coalition until the end of the year.

No matter which parties will ultimately form government, the election result of the Who Owns the State party (KPV LV) was undoubtedly the biggest surprise of this election. Artuss Kaimiņš, a former actor and radio host who entered the Latvian parliament, the Saeima, in 2014 representing another political party, founded the KPV LV in 2016. The populist party is opposed to the EU and endorses closer ties to Russia. Its main messages reflect an anti-establishment attitude and its primary goal appears to be to disrupt the current Latvian political elite. Furthermore, it stands for a libertarian economic policy: KPV LV wants to decrease taxes and improve business conditions, as well as to shrink the state by lowering the number of ministries.¹¹⁰ The party's high vote share in the election was somewhat unexpected, since although it is extremely popular among diaspora voters, opinion polls do not probe expats and hence their preferences were not reflected in the polls.¹¹²

The populist formation increased its popularity primarily through its political practices and aggressive rhetoric,¹¹³ which were mostly inspired by US President Donald Trump. In addition to Kaimiņš' entertaining videos and broadcasts from the Saeima, the party leader also harshly attacked media outlets, accusing them of corruption and

spreading lies.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, KPV LV's candidate for prime minister, Aldis Gobzems, publicly criticised and threatened a journalist who works for the public media. Nevertheless, Gobzems' name was put forth as a candidate for prime minister, but he failed to secure a majority support.

The other populist force, the nationalist right-wing National Alliance, finally managed to recover from its setback in 2018, during which their share of support among likely voters dropped to 5 points. Its eventual tally of 11% in the election still resulted in a loss of seats in the Saeima. The far-right party, which had been a coalition partner in a previous government in 2011, experienced the usual fate of anti-establishment parties when they ascended to power as part of a coalition government: they lost their anti-elite image.¹¹⁵ This loss was compounded by the party's financial and corruption scandals, which the New Conservative Party (NCP) continuously highlighted during the campaign with the intention of winning over disappointed right-wing voters.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, this proved successful and the NCP outperformed the National Alliance in the election.

In the previous legislative election held in 2014, two new parties had been able to enter the Saeima: the Latvian Association of Regions and the populist For Latvia from the Heart. None of them were able to win any seats again in 2018, which may be a warning sign for the KPV LV party. Nevertheless, KPV LV is expected to win enough votes to enter the European Parliament in 2019, although it is still unclear which EP party group they will join in Strasbourg. The continued presence of the National Alliance in the EP is not in jeopardy either, although there is also some uncertainty as to which group they will join in the event of the breakup of the ECR group in the EP.

109 Bayer, L. (2018) "Pro-Russian, populist parties garner most votes in Latvian election," POLITICO, 8 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/harmony-russia-populist-latvia-election-maris-kucinskis/>.

110 Klūga, M. (2018) "Who are KPV LV's new MPs?" / Article / LSM.LV, 22 October. Available at: <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/who-are-kpv-lvs-new-mps.a296867/>.

111 Re:Baltica (2018) "In Russia's shadow, populists rise before the Latvian elections" Re:Baltica - The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism. Available at: <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2018/10/in-russias-shadow-populists-rise-before-the-latvian-elections/>.

112 *ibid*

113 "Welcome to the geography of populism: The diaspora vote in the UK during the 2018 Latvian elections" (2018) USAPP, 17 October. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/10/10/welcome-to-the-geography-of-populism-the-diaspora-vote-in-the-uk-during-the-2018-latvian-elections/>.

114 Re:Baltica (2018) "In Russia's shadow, populists rise before the Latvian elections", Re:Baltica - The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism. Available at: <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2018/10/in-russias-shadow-populists-rise-before-the-latvian-elections/>.

115 "Why Latvian Elections Matter for Europe" (2018) Foreign Policy Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/09/why-latvian-elections-matter-for-europe/>.

116 Bērziņa, S. (2018) "Conservative parties at one another's throats" / Article / LSM.LV, 19 June. Available at: <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/conservative-parties-at-one-another-s-throats.a282514/>.

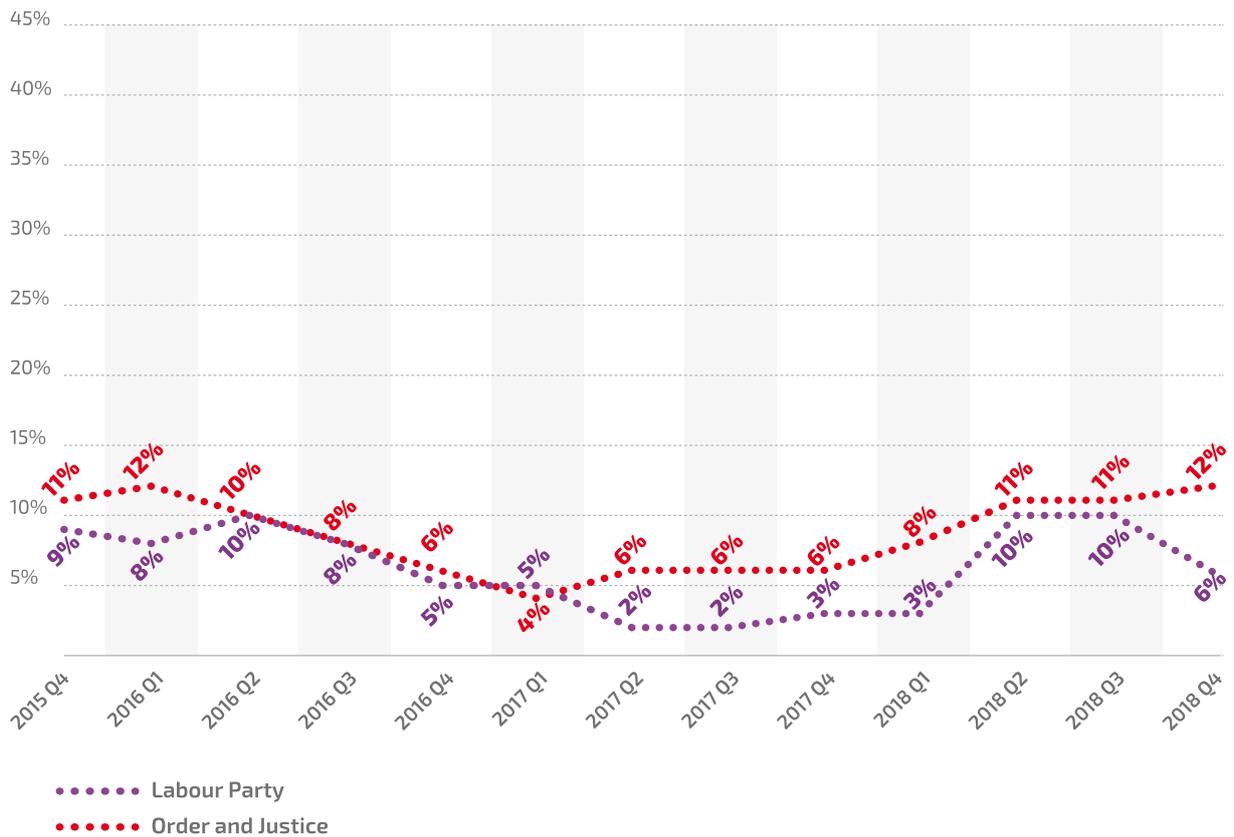


Lithuania

We observed a significant surge in the popularity of Lithuanian populists as the two anti-establishment parties' aggregate support rose by 9 points in the span of a year. Almost every fifth citizen (18%) indicated a preference for one of these formations at the end of 2018. The Order and Justice party improved more significantly as its support increased by 6 points and reached 12% support among likely voters at the end of the year. At the same time, the left-wing populist Labour Party was able to halt its decline and gained 3 points in 2018. As a result, its share of the vote stands at 6%, just above the Lithuanian electoral threshold of 5%.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|-------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Order and Justice | EFD | 14.27% | 12% |
| Labour Party | ALDE | - | 6% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN LITHUANIA



From the perspective of the Lithuanian populist parties, the most important event of 2018 was the agreement between the national-populist Order and Justice party and the Lithuanian governing parties. The agreement stipulates that Order and Justice will support the government in the Lithuanian parliament, the Seimas. Order and Justice did not formally join the coalition government, which is made up of the Union of Lithuanian Farmers and Greens (LVŽS) and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP), but at the same time they no longer consider themselves as part of the opposition either.¹¹⁷

Order and Justice was originally founded under the name Liberal Democratic Party in 2002, and its leader, Rolandas Paksas, immediately won the Lithuanian presidential election in 2003. However, a year later Paksas was removed from office because of corruption charges. That was when his party changed its name to Order and Justice, which it continues to use to date. Order and Justice mixes nationalist policies with the suggestions of direct democracy, the notion of boosting the national industry and the total rejection of immigration.

In 2018, the party presented the Lithuanian governing parties with a list of 15 demands; it wanted the latter to meet in exchange for supporting the government in the legislature. Among other issues, the list included the demand to increase the minimum wage to 50% of the average salary, to cut the tax on heating oil and to limit the weekend opening times of shopping malls.¹¹⁸ The governing parties acquiesced to a substantial portion of the demands, thereby paving the way to an agreement between the government and Order and Justice.

As a result of the agreement between Order and Justice and the government, the parties supporting the Lithuanian cabinet now control a narrow majority of 73 seats in the 141-member Lithuanian parliament, at the price of pushing the government to a right-wing/populist direction - despite the fact that the government was originally centre-left in its ideological outlook. As part of the agreement, Order and Justice was also given one of the Seimas' vice-speaker positions.

At the same time, Order and Justice has been plagued by internal conflicts due to the deep rift between the current party chair Remigijus Žemaitaitis and the former leader Rolandas Paksas. The two politicians disagreed on whom the party should nominate in the 2019 presidential election. As a result of the conflict, Paksas left the party and launched a new movement while Order and Justice experienced a dip in its popularity at the end of 2018 on account of Paksas' secession.

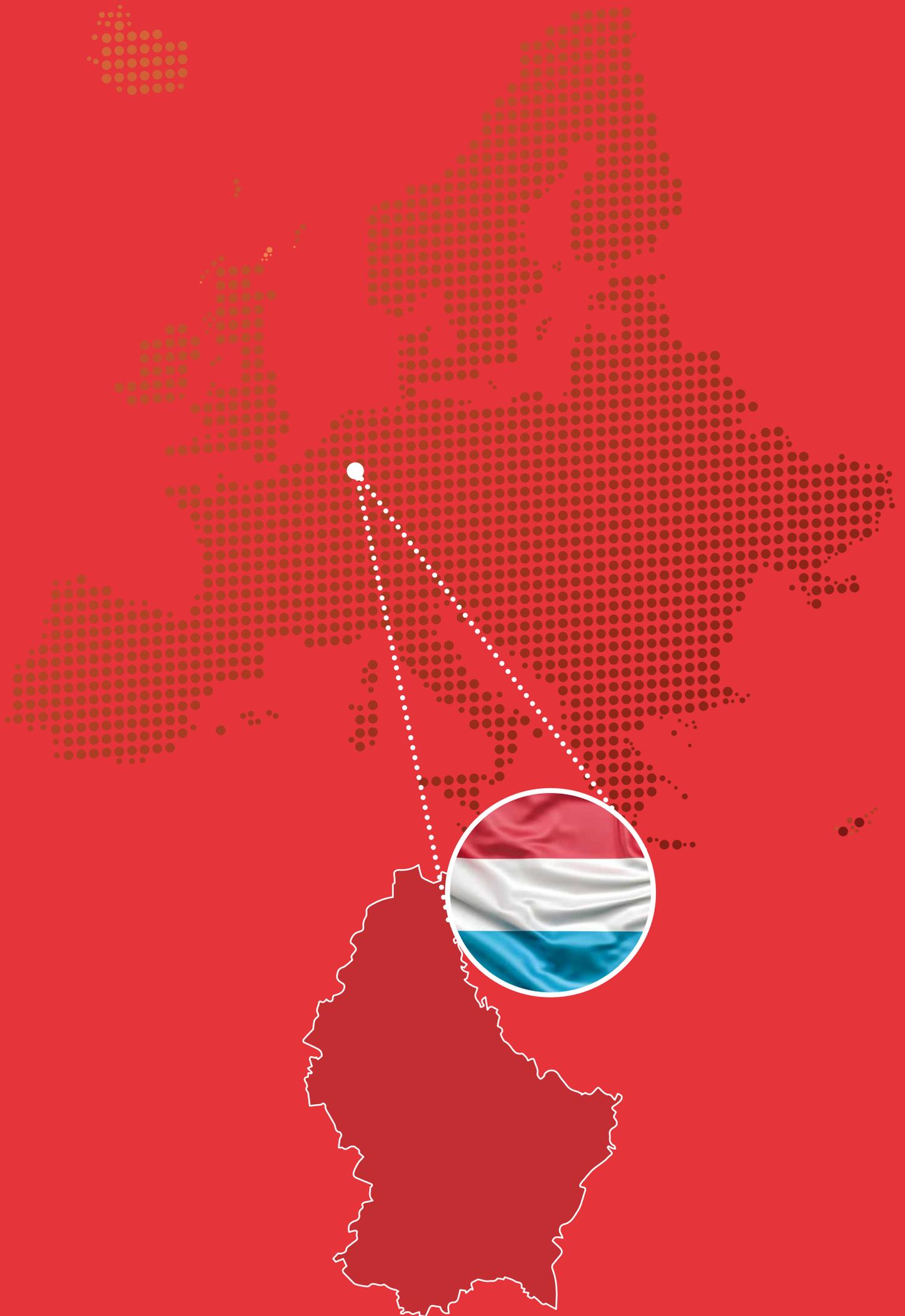
The other populist party in Lithuania, the left-wing Labour Party, has had a mixed year. Early in the year its popularity climbed to 10%, but at the end final quarter of 2018 it had dropped to 6%. The party has also lost a substantial share of its membership in the process, with some 1,500 members leaving in the span of a year.¹¹⁹

However, with respect to 2019, the number of populist Lithuanian MEPs in Strasbourg and Brussels is unlikely to increase since Order and Justice is expected to win only a single seat – one less than its current number of two – while Labour is likely to hold on to its single seat in the European Parliament.

117 Delfi.lt (2018): „Order and Justice joins Lithuania's ruling coalition in parliament“ Available at: <https://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/politics/order-and-justice-joins-lithuanias-ruling-coalition-in-parliament.d?id=79034879>

118 Delfi.lt (2018): „Lithuania's ruling bloc, Order and Justice MPs put off signing deal until September“ Available at: <https://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/politics/lithuanias-ruling-bloc-order-and-justice-mps-put-off-signing-deal-until-september.d?id=78967573>

119 Delfi.lt: „Labour Party loses more members than any other Lithuanian party“ Available at: <https://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/politics/labour-party-loses-more-members-than-any-other-lithuanian-party-in-past-6-months.d?id=77317203>

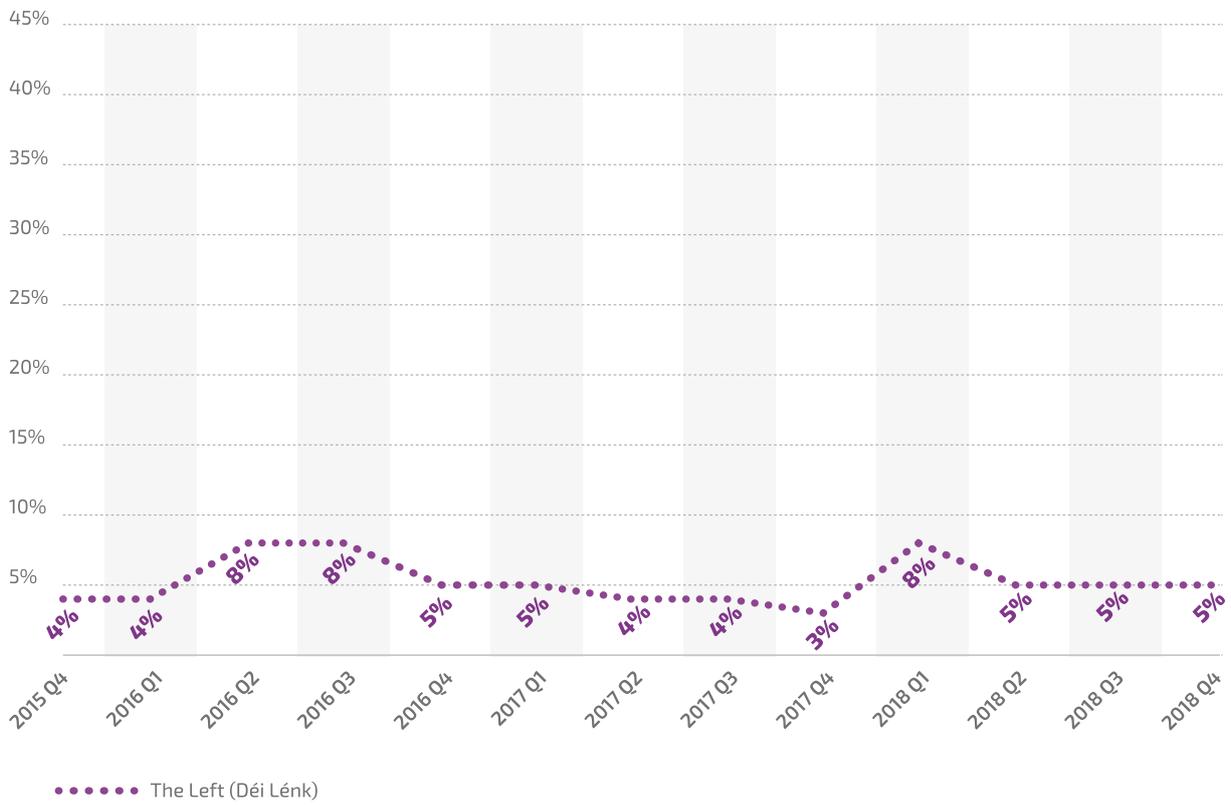


Luxembourg

Luxembourg is still one of the few member states in the European Union which have been able to resist populism. Populism continues to play a marginal role in the country's politics. As in the previous year, at the end of 2018 the left-wing Déi Lénk (DL), the only anti-establishment party in the Grand Duchy, was a minor political force: a mere 5 percent of voters backed the party, which was 2 points higher than in December 2017. Although there was some upward oscillation in its popularity among likely voters in the first quarter of the year, when 8% of voters indicated that they would vote for them, support for Déi Lénk (5%) was markedly stable throughout the rest of the year.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| The Left (Déi Lénk) | GUE/NGL | 5.76% | 5% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN LUXEMBOURG



The most significant political event in this Benelux country in 2018 was the general election held in October. As a result of the election, the current left-liberal government was given another term by the voters.¹²⁰ The general trend of the traditional mainstream parties losing support had reached Luxembourg as well, as the three major parties, the centre-right Christian Social People's Party, the centre-left Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party, and the social liberal Democratic Party all lost voters compared to their previous electoral result in 2013. The clear winners of the election were the environmental forces, that is the Greens and the Pirates.¹²¹ The Greens won 15% of the votes (the best result in the party's history) and increased the number of their seats in the Chamber of Deputies from 6 to 9, while the Pirate Party of Luxembourg entered the Chamber for the first time.

For the left-wing populist Déi Lénk (DL), the election was not as successful as their supporters and leaders had previously hoped: although they slightly (by 0.5%) increased their support compared to their election tally in 2013, the party failed to increase the number of its seats in parliament. Their 5 percent of the votes cast netted them to two seats, exactly the same figure as five years prior. Still, the party had never received this many votes in an election.

During the campaign, the party promoted two main issues: social justice and ecological transition.¹²² The Left was pushing for a break with neoliberal capitalism, which they claim is "extremely dangerous to life conditions and endangers social cohesion in the country".¹²³ They also wanted to reduce working hours, increase the minimum wage, introduce a sixth week of paid holiday and provide better access to housing.¹²⁴ When it comes to ecological matters, DL promoted a radical change in energy policy, fought for 100% renewable energy, the energy conservation-oriented renovation of the existing housing stock and free public transport.¹²⁵

Unlike the other parties, in its campaign materials the Left focused on policy substance rather than personalities: their billboards focused solely on their political messages and showcased no personalities, and the party explicitly did not want to put their leaders and representatives at the centre of their campaign. The party argued that they want to persuade their voters with their programme and not by using marketing techniques to appeal to voters' emotions.¹²⁶

For a minor party such as Déi Lénk, entering the European Parliament is extremely difficult in Luxembourg due to the low number of seats available to the country. Hence the DL is not expected to gain a seat in Strasbourg in 2019 for the first time in the party's history since they would have to at least double the number of their voters, which seems almost impossible in a country where the balance between the various political forces is traditionally stable. Moreover, in the shadow of the Greens and the Pirate Party it will be particularly difficult for The Left to grow. Still, a potential further decline in the support of the centre-left could boost the left-wing populist party.

120 POLITICO (2018) "Xavier Bettel: His government 'confirmed' after Luxembourg vote," POLITICO, 15 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/xavier-bettel-his-government-confirmed-after-luxembourg-vote/>.

121 Heath, R. (2018) "5 lessons from Europe's busy electoral weekend," POLITICO, 16 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/decoding-europes-weekend-elections/>.

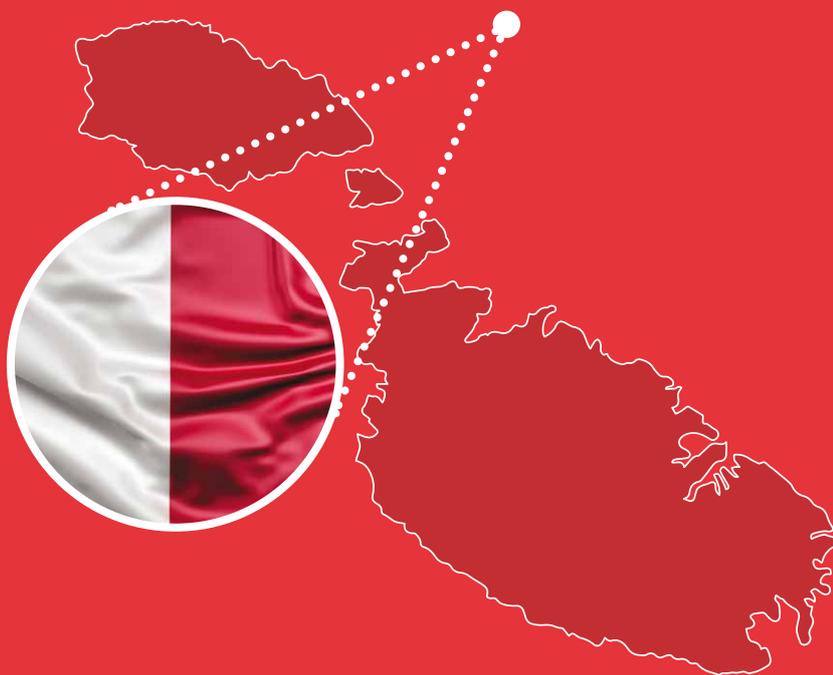
122 Grasser, F. (2018) "[Législatives] Déi Lénk: Engagé.e.s pour le changement," Le Quotidien. Available at: <http://www.lequotidien.lu/a-la-une/dei-lenk-engage-e-s-pour-le-changement/>.

123 "Status quo for déi Lénk after Luxembourg election" (2018) Luxembourg Times - Luxembourg. Available at: <https://luxtimes.lu/luxembourg/35368-status-quo-for-d-i-l-nk-after-luxembourg-election>.

124 "The European Elections Monitor" (2018) Transatlantic Relations after Brexit. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/eem/1777-the-christian-social-people-s-party-could-return-to-office-in-luxembourg-after-the-general-elections-on-14th-october>.

125 "Déi Lénk présente ses objectifs de campagne" (2018) 5minutes.lu - A la une. Available at: <http://5minutes.rtl.lu/grande-region/luxembourg/1198880.html>.

126 Status quo for déi Lénk after Luxembourg election" (2018) Luxembourg Times - Luxembourg. Available at: <https://luxtimes.lu/luxembourg/35368-status-quo-for-d-i-l-nk-after-luxembourg-election>



Malta

Malta is one of only two EU Member States without a significant populist political formation. Since the island gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1964, Maltese politics have been dominated by two parties, the social democratic Labour Party (PL) and the conservative Nationalist Party (PN). The left-wing party has been in power since 2013 and according to the latest poll Labour was backed by over two-thirds (69%) of the likely voters at the end of 2018, while only 29% would vote for Nationalist Party.

In the entire EU community, public opinion regarding the European Union is the most positive in Malta, where 93% of the public believe that the country has benefited from EU membership.¹²⁷ This suggests that an anti-EU rhetoric would be doomed in Malta. At the same time, however, on account of its location along the central Mediterranean route of migration the island is massively affected by the refugee crisis, which has raised anxieties: among the citizens of all 28 member states of the EU, the Maltese were most likely to mention immigration as a concern, with 39% of adults naming immigration as one of the two most important issues facing the country.¹²⁸ Although the Nationalist Party intended to use a tougher rhetoric on migration, the incumbent social democratic prime minister,

Joseph Muscat, was able to neutralise that with his confident approach as well as his decision to close the island's ports to NGO rescue ships.¹²⁹

In the last Maltese EP election in 2014, the far-right Imperium Europa led by the writer Norman Lowell won almost 3 percent of the votes, but since then the far-right has been declining and lacks charismatic public figures to lead it.¹³⁰ Moreover, at the end of 2018 none of the minor political parties had more than 1 percent support in the polls and hence it is not expected that any new Maltese political formation will be able to enter the European Parliament.

127 Heath, R. (2018) "Europeans love the EU (and populists too)," POLITICO, 9 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europeans-love-the-eu-and-populists-too/>.

128 European Commission: Eurobarometer 89 - Spring 2018, Public opinion in the European Union, Fieldwork: March 2018

129 Tondo, L. and McVeigh, K. (2018) "No NGO rescue boats currently in central Mediterranean, agencies warn," The Guardian, 12 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/migrant-rescue-ships-mediterranean>.

130 *ibid*

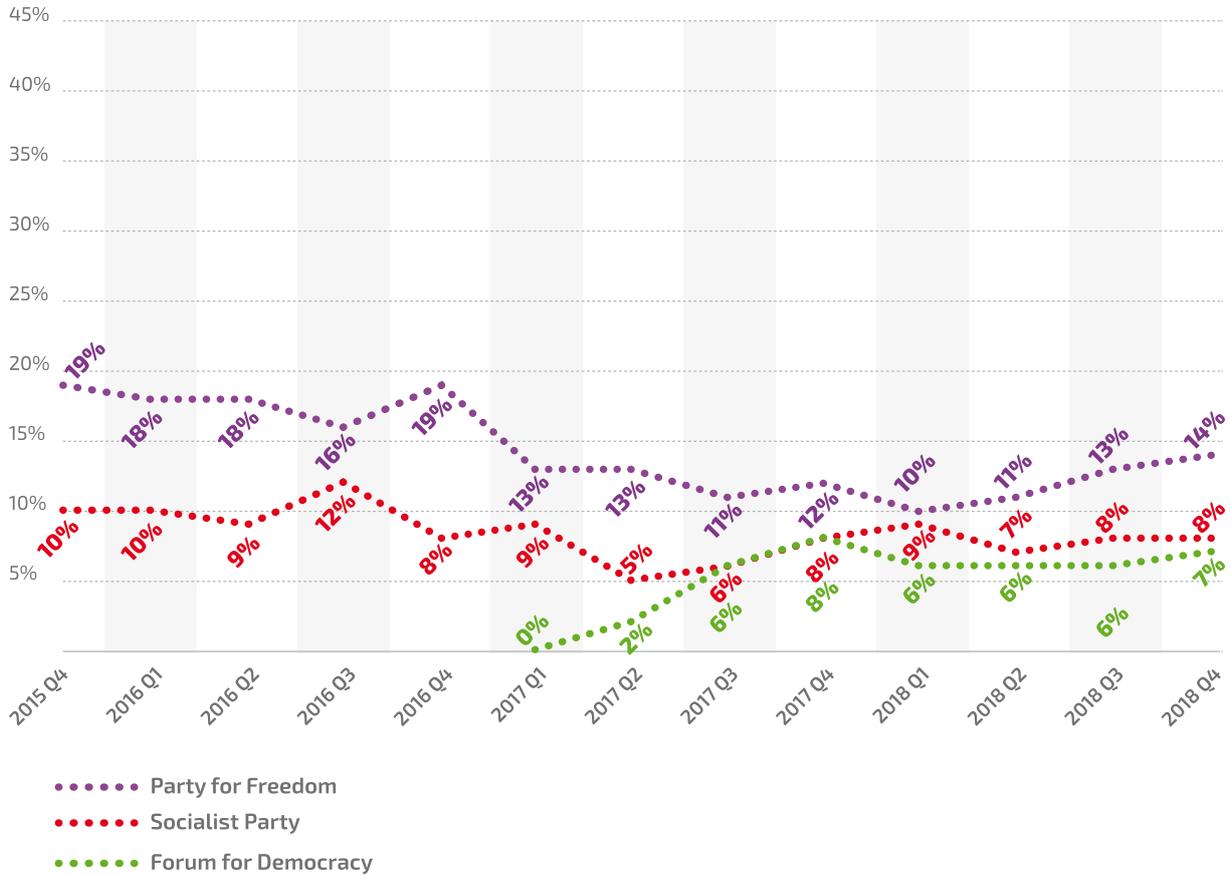


The Netherlands

In 2018, the fight for Dutch voters intensified between two right-wing populist parties, the Forum for Democracy (FvD) and the Party for Freedom (PVV). Although the Forum for Democracy successfully consolidated the support of the new voters it had previously won, it was not able to improve its level of support any further during the year: 7% of society backed the party at the end of 2018, one point lower than a year before. Geert Wilders' PVV slightly increased its popularity, as 14% of likely voters would choose it, which is a net plus of 2 points compared to its popularity in December 2017. Except for a minor ebb and flow period in the first half of the year, the left-wing populist Socialist Party's support was stable throughout the year, this formation is still backed by 8 percent of the public.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Party for Freedom | ENF | 13.20% | 14% |
| Socialist Party | GUE/NGL | 9.60% | 8% |
| Forum for Democracy | - | - | 7% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN THE NETHERLANDS



After the victory of the centre-right politician Mark Rutte over the populist Geert Wilders in the 2017 election – when leader of the incumbent People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) shifted slightly to the right, thereby limiting the PVV’s room for manoeuvre¹³¹ –, the Freedom Party (PVV) had to face another challenger, the Forum for Democracy (FvD). For many years, the PVV had been synonymous with the far-right in the Netherlands, but the emergence of a new populist formation, the Pvd, has yielded a competitor in this realm. Geert Wilders is an old-school populist in the European mould who embraces a tough stance on immigration, while the FvD leader Thierry Baudet embodies a modern type of alt-right populist politician.

Baudet mixes nativism, conservatism and populism in one intellectual framework, and he is waging a culture war against Marxism, feminism and modernity. He is also opposed to immigration, Islam and the country’s membership in the EU while he promotes the predominance of nation-states in European politics.¹³² His freshness and new approach to far-right populism have shaken up Dutch politics and his populist formation has been able to appeal to young voters, a demographic that Wilders could never really reach. At the same time, however, the FvD’s policies are more controversial than those of the PVV. They have been accused of racism when they claimed that there is a direct relationship between IQ and human race,¹³³ and also of sexism in connection with a comment by Baudet saying that women “generally excel less in many occupations and lack ambition”.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the party is popular among higher-educated voters, too.¹³⁵

The first months of 2018 were dominated by the electoral campaign that preceded the local elections where – apart from the question of immigration – the housing shortage and skyrocketing rents were the main issues.¹³⁶ The Pvd competed only

in Amsterdam, but surprisingly it was able to take 3 seats in the traditionally liberal metropolis. For the Freedom Party, the municipal ballot was less successful, it massively underperformed in Rotterdam, although it did achieve some important gains and won seats in every council they ran for.¹³⁷¹³⁸

In order to stop the Freedom Party’s slight decline and to become an agenda setting player again in Dutch politics, Wilders reheated an old message, a defence of the freedom of expression. Wilders announced a cartoon contest limited to images depicting the prophet Muhammad, but he was forced to cancel the event after he received death threats and provoked a large-scale protest in Pakistan because in Islam images and caricatures of Muhammad are considered blasphemy.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Wilders achieved his objective since he intended to reinforce the stereotype that Muslims are violent and aggressive, while casting himself in the role of the guardian of free speech.¹⁴⁰ By the way, this contest was connected to his criminal conviction for inciting discrimination: Wilders had been found guilty on account of his statements about Moroccan people at a rally, although he has appealed the decision.¹⁴¹

PVV’s slight improvement in the second half of the year is likely the result of Wilders’ re-activation. Apart from the controversial cartoon contest, the far-right leader also submitted a proposal in Parliament to ban all forms of Islamic expression, removing “mosques, Islamic schools, the Koran and burqas from the Netherlands”.¹⁴² Moreover, he uttered a harsh insult against a Turkish-born Dutch MP, Tunahan Kuzu, and also loudly opposed an agreement on immigrants between the Dutch and Turkish governments.¹⁴³ Regarding his activity on social media, he intensified his attacks against Islam on Twitter. As a result, over 100 mosques reported

131 Kleinpaste, T. (2018) “The New Dutch Disease Is White Nationalism,” *Foreign Policy*, 20 March. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/20/the-new-dutch-disease-is-white-nationalism/>.

132 *ibid*

133 “Forum for Democracy under fire over race/IQ debate and democracy itself” (2018) *DutchNews.nl*, 28 February. Available at: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2018/02/forum-for-democracy-under-fire-over-raceiq-debate-and-democracy-itself/>.

134 Sterling, T. (2018) “New-look Dutch nationalist party wins seats in Amsterdam election,” *Reuters*, 21 March. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-election/new-look-dutch-nationalist-party-wins-seats-in-amsterdam-election-idUSKBN1GX150>.

135 Faber, S. (2018) “Is Dutch Bad Boy Thierry Baudet the New Face of the European Alt-Right?,” *The Nation*, 5 April. Available at: <https://www.thenation.com/article/is-dutch-bad-boy-thierry-baudet-the-new-face-of-the-european-alt-right/>.

136 Sterling, T. (2018) “New-look Dutch nationalist party wins seats in Amsterdam election,” *Reuters*, 21 March. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-election/new-look-dutch-nationalist-party-wins-seats-in-amsterdam-election-idUSKBN1GX150>.

137 Kroet, C. (2018) “Rutte’s support steady in Dutch local elections,” *POLITICO*, 22 March. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-ruttes-support-steady-in-dutch-local-elections/>.

138 Corder[AP, M. (2018) “Mixed picture for populist Wilders in Dutch local elections,” *The Washington Post*, 22 March. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/mixed-picture-for-populist-wilders-in-dutch-local-elections/2018/03/22/3dbbd092-2dd7-11e8-8dc9-3b51e028b845_story.html?utm_term=.b0c14be5ac92.

139 Press, A. (2018) “Far-right Dutch MP cancels Muhammad cartoon competition,” *The Guardian*, 30 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/30/geert-wilders-far-right-dutch-mp-cancels-muhammed-cartoon-competition>.

140 Hague, M. Z.-M. in T. (2018) “Cartoon row sought to rile Dutch Muslims, but found only dignity,” *The Guardian*, 1 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/01/dutch-cartoon-row-geert-wilders-muslims-pakistan-dignity>.

141 Wröbel, A. (2018) “Geert Wilders begins appeal of discrimination conviction,” *POLITICO*, 17 May. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/geert-wilders-begins-appeal-of-discrimination-conviction-netherlands/>.

142 “Populist proposal to ban Islamic expressions in Netherlands immediately shot down” (2018) *NL Times*, 19 September. Available at: <https://nltimes.nl/2018/09/19/populist-proposal-ban-islamic-expressions-netherlands-immediately-shot>.

143 *ibid*

his posts to Twitter and asked the social media site to shut down his account because of his hateful comments.¹⁴⁴ These scandals ultimately proved beneficial for a party which has for many years now pursued a strategy of scandalmongering, and then using the resulting outrage and media attention to promote their messages in public.

The Netherlands' far-left populist Socialist Party (SP) was not able to dominate national politics in 2018. The party suffered major losses in the municipal elections. Interestingly, support for the Socialist Party was halved at a time when housing was a major campaign issue and the party is the loudest advocate of solving this problem.¹⁴⁵ In addition, the SP wanted to make healthcare more accessible (mainly for the elderly), to invest more in culture and to create more jobs. Nevertheless, the SP found itself in the same situation as other far-left parties in Western Europe: despite the steep decline of centre-left parties around the continent, the Green parties have profited in terms of expanding their base and winning over centre-left voters, even while radical leftist parties failed to capitalise from the decline of the centre-left.

2019 is not likely to bring huge changes in the support of the Dutch populists but it is important to monitor how the race between FvD and PVV shapes up and whether they will manage to win over the sympathisers of other parties. In the European election the PVV will likely hold on to its current 4 seats, while the FvD has the chance to win at least 3 seats and to enter the European Parliament as a newcomer. The Socialist Party also has a decent shot at expanding its EP delegation of 2 MEPs to 3. However, the rise of the Greens and the partial comeback of the social democratic PvdA (currently at 13%) are likely to limit the extent of any far-left breakthrough.

144 Kennedy, R. (2018) "More than 100 mosques ask Twitter to ban far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders | The Cube," Euronews, 6 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/06/more-than-100-mosques-ask-twitter-to-ban-far-right-dutch-politician-geert-wilders-the-cube>.

145 "Local elections 2018: No change as Amsterdam finalises new-look council" (2018) DutchNews.nl, 23 March. Available at: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2018/03/local-elections-2018-no-change-as-amsterdam-finalises-new-look-council/>.

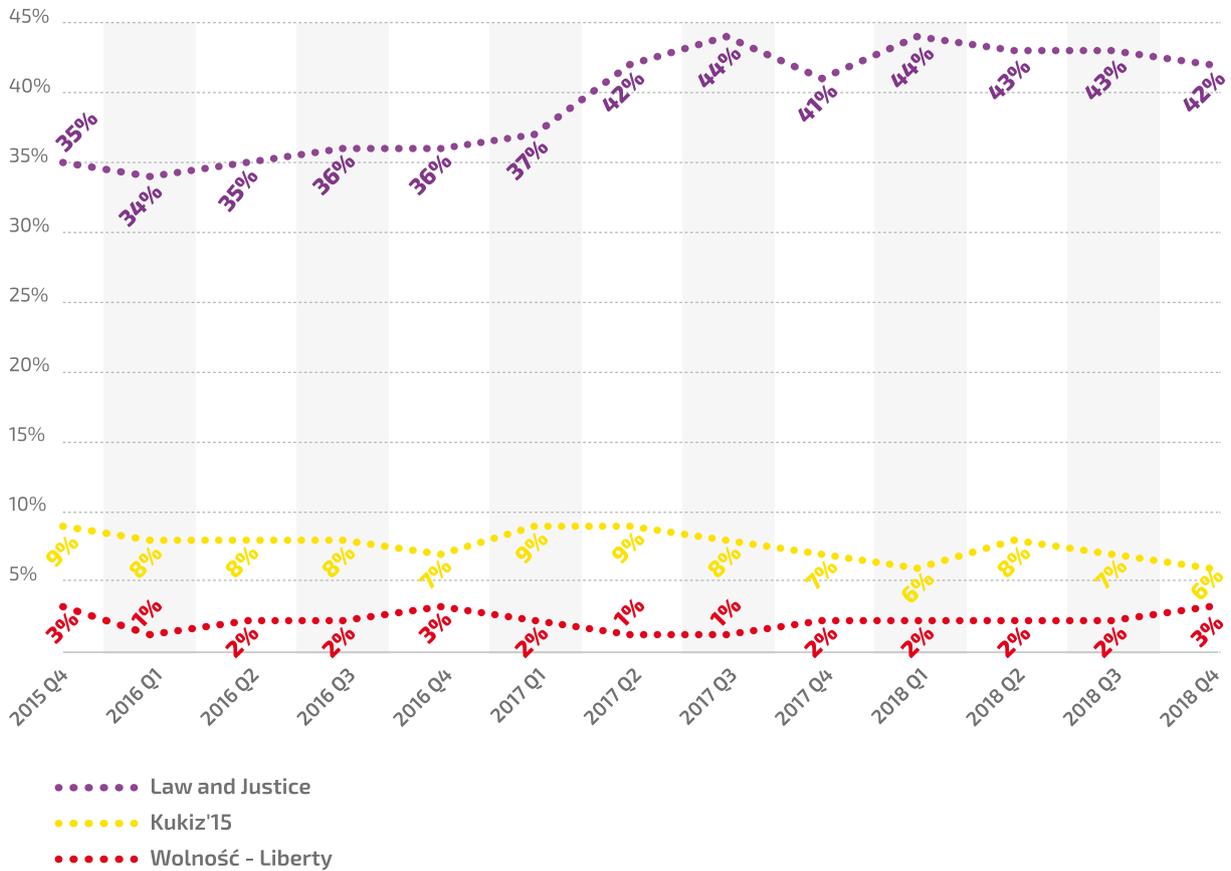


Poland

2018 was not a hectic time for the Polish populist parties. As it prepared for the local elections in October, the governing Law and Justice (PiS) was able to successfully stabilise its electorate before the ballot. PiS ended 2017 with a 41% level of support, then it reached its highest vote share of 2018 (44%) among likely voters in the first months of the new year. After the local elections in the fall, its support experienced a slight dip in connection with a case of corruption that was uncovered in November, and the party concluded 2018 with 42% in public support. Other smaller populist parties, like Kukiz'15 and Wolność, stagnated between 6% to 8% and 2% to 3% support, respectively, throughout the year.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Law and Justice | ECR | 32.33% | 42% |
| Kukiz'15 | - | - | 6% |
| Wolność - Liberty (formerly: Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic – Freedom and Hope) | - | - | 3% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN POLAND



In December 2017, the right-wing populist governing party, the PiS, and the party's de facto leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, replaced Prime Minister Beata Szydło with the former finance minister Mateusz Morawiecki. His knowledge of economics and foreign languages made him a suitable replacement, as the Polish government continued the fierce debate with EU institutions concerning the Polish judiciary reforms.¹⁴⁶ This debate was exacerbated by the European Commission's launching of an Article 7 procedure against Poland in December 2017.¹⁴⁷ One contentious point was the Polish government's decision to force 20 members of the Polish Supreme Court to retire by lowering the mandatory retirement age of judges from 70 to 65 years. At the beginning of the year, PiS leaders made several announcements saying that they would continue the reforms no matter what the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) would have to say about it, and they also questioned the Commission's legitimacy. But in December 2018, after the local elections, PiS suddenly proposed an amendment of the impugned bill and allowed the judges to return.¹⁴⁸

During the year, the parties were preparing for the local elections held in October, which both the government and the opposition sought to portray as a verdict on PiS's governance. The president of the European Council, the Pole Donald Tusk, raised the stakes by stating that Poland is getting ready to quit the EU despite the fact that a high proportion of the Polish public supports EU membership.¹⁴⁹ PiS decided that international conflicts would serve to increase its support. In January, Kaczyński stated that the government will protect national interests against "powers that have treated Poland as their own private loot for years." Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro initiated a revision of the Holocaust Law, which would aim to sweep discussions of Poland's wartime history under the rug, according to the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the government withdrew this amendment in June. The Polish government

also reopened the issue of war reparations, with President Andrzej Duda calling for German reparation payments in October.¹⁵¹ However, all these international conflicts did not significantly affect public support for the government.

Although PiS won the local elections with a substantial lead over the coalition of centrist parties – 34% versus 27% – it only won the governing majority in 6 out of the 16 regions, mostly because other parties are very unlikely to enter into a coalition with the ruling party. What gives Polish regions special significance is that they are unavoidable when it comes to the distribution of EU cohesion funds. Thus, they can hinder the work of the government. The governing party's result also means that they performed much worse at the local level than their overall popularity would suggest. The party also failed to achieve one of its most important goals; keeping down the support of the *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe's* (PSL), their biggest competitor in rural areas. Furthermore, PiS easily lost mayoral elections in more populated cities against centrist candidates as their controversial issues mobilised opposition voters in urban areas.¹⁵²

At the end of the year a corruption scandal hit the PiS which resulted in the immediate removal from office of Marek Chrzanowski, the chairman of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority, who had been appointed to this position by former PM Beata Szydło. As a consequence of this scandal, the popularity of the ruling party slightly dropped in the polls.¹⁵³ The opposition tried to seize the opportunity and initiated a vote of no confidence against the prime minister, but Morawiecki pre-empted them by calling himself for a vote of confidence which he won handily.

Kukiz'15, another populist party in Poland led by the former punk rock musician Paweł Kukiz, has managed to stabilise its base in recent years between 6% and 9%. The party is animated by an anti-system attitude and has a diverse membership recruited from various movements with diverse political ideologies. However, this year the party tried to break with some movements that it had been aligned with in the past and as a symbolic gesture Kukiz literally apologised for having entered into an alliance with an extreme right group before

146 Bershidsky L. (2018) "Polish Nationalism Gets a European Makeover" Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2017-12-08/who-is-mateusz-morawiecki-poland-s-new-prime-minister>

147 Boffey, D. and Davies, C. (2017) "Poland cries foul as EU triggers 'nuclear option' over judicial independence," *The Guardian*, 20 December. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/20/eu-process-poland-voting-rights>

148 Florkiewicz, P. (2018) "Poland reverses Supreme Court law changes after EU ruling," *Reuters*, 21 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-eu-court/poland-backtracks-on-supreme-court-law-contested-by-eu-idUSKCN1NQVD>

149 Waterfield, B. (2018) "Poland wants out of the EU, warns Donald Tusk", *The Times*. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/poland-wants-out-of-the-eu-warns-donald-tusk-fcw2x9zvz>

150 Davies, C. (2018) "Poland makes partial U-turn on Holocaust law after Israel row," *The Guardian*, 27 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/27/poland-partial-u-turn-controversial-holocaust-law>

151 Bayer, L. (2018) "Duda calls for German reparation payments," *POLITICO*, 29 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/duda-calls-for-german-reparation-payments/>

152 "Who really won Poland's local elections?" (2018) *USAPP*, 12 November. Available at: <http://blogs.ise.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/11/05/who-really-won-polands-local-elections/>.

153 Broniatowski, M. (2018) "Banking corruption scandal throws Polish politics into turmoil," *POLITICO*, 16 November. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/banking-corruption-scandal-throws-polish-politics-into-turmoil/>

the 2015 national election, with the result that the extremists gained representation in the Polish parliament, the Sejm.¹⁵⁴

In the regional election, Kukiz' result of 6% was lower than their support in the polls had previously suggested. Furthermore, they also failed to take the electoral threshold in any of the Polish regions. Nevertheless, their support among young voters remained stable throughout the year and Kukiz'15 might even emerge as a potential ally of PiS after the legislative election in 2019.¹⁵⁵ The other small euroskeptic party, Wolność, did not succeed in any of the regions either, as they received only 2% of the total votes. However, they did manage to slightly improve their poll results later in 2018.

Although every Polish government in the last fifteen years dropped in the polls as a result of corruption scandals, it seems very likely that the opposition will not be able to use the Chrzanowski scandal to increase their support before the EP election in 2019.¹⁵⁶ PiS is almost certainly set to increase the number of its seats in the EP, while Kukiz'15 also has a slight chance to enter the European Parliament for the first time in the party's history. On the other hand, Wolność's chances of entering the EP are not quite as solid. With respect to the presidential and the legislative elections in 2019, PiS has no apparent reason to worry.

154 "What are the prospects for Poland's rock star-politician Paweł Kukiz?" (2018) USAPP, 18 June. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/06/12/what-are-the-prospects-for-polands-rock-star-politician-pawel-kukiz/>

155 *ibid*

156 Broniatowski, M. (2018) "Banking corruption scandal throws Polish politics into turmoil," POLITICO, 16 November. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/banking-corruption-scandal-throws-polish-politics-into-turmoil/>

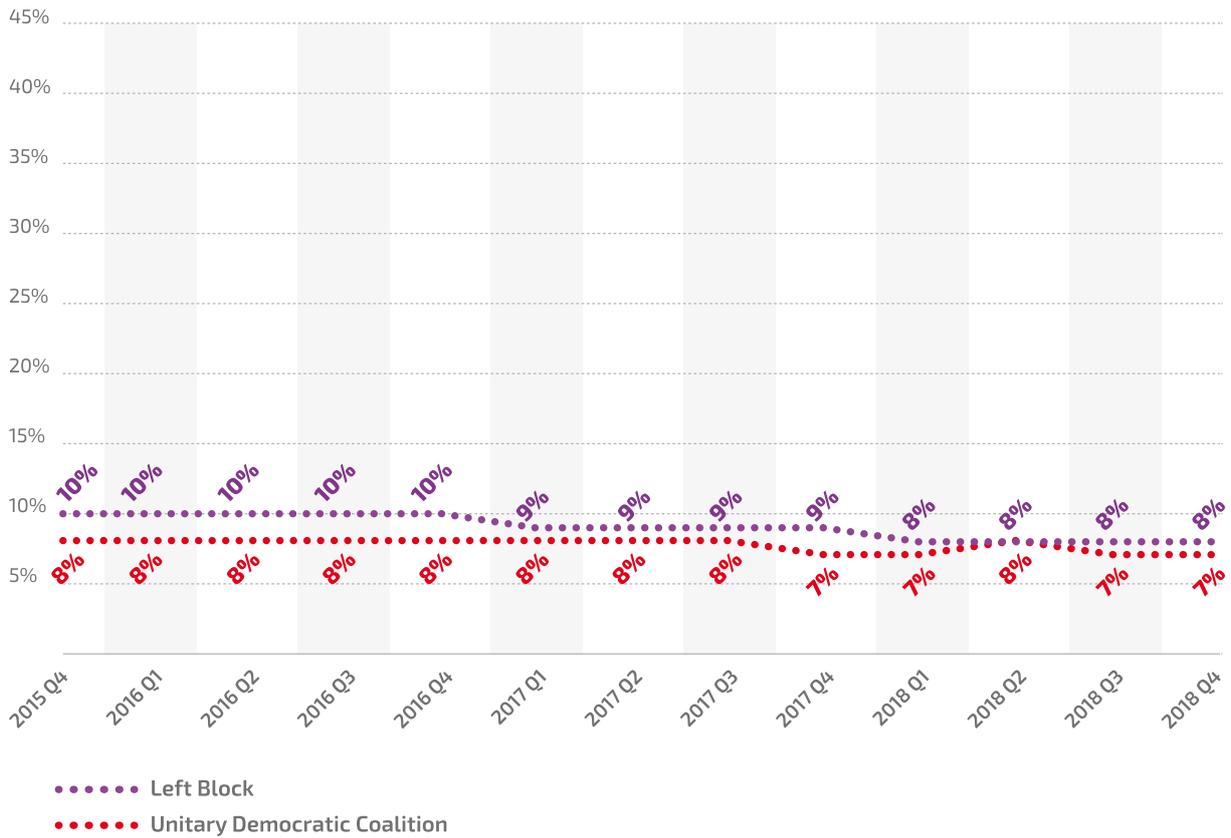


Portugal

Support for populism in Portugal was extremely stable throughout 2018. Only the far-left Left Block (BE) registered a marginal 1-point decrease in popularity. Thus, support for the two significant Portuguese populist parties remained essentially unchanged throughout the year. In December 2018, 8% of the Portuguese backed the Left Block and another 7% preferred the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU), the alliance between the Communists (PCP) and the Greens (PEV). Populism is still not a dominant political attitude in the country, and thus far Portugal has also been able to resist the surge of the far-right that tends to characterise current European politics.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Left Block | GUE/NGL | 4.93% | 8% |
| Unitary Democratic Coalition | GUE/NGL | 12.69% | 7% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN PORTUGAL



Portuguese politics is somewhat of an “anomaly” in Europe as Portugal is one of the few countries where left-wing politics continues to flourish and dominate the political landscape. Although the ruling Socialist Party (PS) governs with minority support in parliament, the two left-wing populist parties, the BE and the CDU, support the minority government from the outside. The current term of government has been characterized by declining unemployment, higher economic growth and low budget deficits, which is a huge leap forward after the tough years of crisis in Portugal. After the last election, Prime Minister António Costa chose to enter into a cooperation with the far-left rather than the centre-right, with the argument that a “*grand coalition is the best soil for right-wing populism*”.¹⁵⁷ What makes their strategy work is the division of issues between them. The two smaller parties stay silent on matters such as the budget and push only for previously agreed upon measures, such as the minimum wage hike, and in return they have leeway to criticise the Socialists on issues like foreign policy.¹⁵⁸ Thanks to the successful implementation of this arrangement, the support for the two minor parties did not change, even as the PS’s popularity has increased significantly in recent years.

In advance of the approaching European and general legislative elections scheduled for 2019, the two minor parties slightly adjusted their tactics. In November 2018, the party congress of the Left Bloc adopted an official motion which calls for a more critical attitude toward the PS.¹⁵⁹ According to the new strategy, the BE emphasises that the country would perform better if Costa were to disregard EU rules because the austerity of the foregoing years had failed to resolve the structural problems in the country. According to the motion, the Left Bloc will be more aggressive in promoting labour rights, environmental issues, public control over strategic economic sectors and the improvement of the quality of public services, especially healthcare.

The Unitary Democratic Coalition was not idle during the past year either, and it tried to palpably set itself apart from the Socialists with similar methods as the Left Bloc. For both the Left Bloc and the CDU a major challenge was to make clear to leftist voters that the impressive economic growth figures owe

in part to them despite the fact that they are not formally part of the government.

Apart from the personal charisma of Prime Minister António Costa, there are several other reasons why Portugal has proven immune to the right-wing populist zeitgeist. First, the memories of Salazar’s dictatorship are probably still too fresh in society, and the Portuguese are opposed to extreme nationalism.¹⁶⁰ Second, in recent years Portugal has experienced a massive outflow of citizens who went to other EU member states. This definitely had a negative impact on the Portuguese economy, which has led to a reappraisal of the potential benefits of immigration.¹⁶¹ This positive attitude toward migrants is also fuelled by the government as the popular cabinet promotes solidarity towards refugees, without facing an overt view challenging or criticising this view in the domestic public discourse. Nevertheless, the fact that since the outbreak of the economic crisis a huge proportion of society has turned away from politics and the trust in political institutions has dropped significantly opens up the possibility that frustrations might be channelled into such political attitudes in the future.¹⁶²

The crucial question for Portuguese politics in 2019 is whether the PS will be the only party that will reap the political profits from the flourishing economy and the popular government policies or whether the two minor parties’ leaders will also be able to successfully convince Portuguese voters that they played an important role in the recent economic recovery. The Socialists are almost certain to be confirmed in office, in fact the party has a realistic shot at winning an absolute majority in parliament in 2019. As for the elections to the European Parliament, the CDU will certainly lose one seat in Strasbourg and may potentially lose as many as two, while the BE is expected to expand its one-member delegation in the European Parliament by adding another MEP.

¹⁵⁷ “Social democracy is floundering everywhere in Europe, except Portugal” (2018) *The Economist*, 14 April. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/04/14/social-democracy-is-floundering-everywhere-in-europe-except-portugal>.

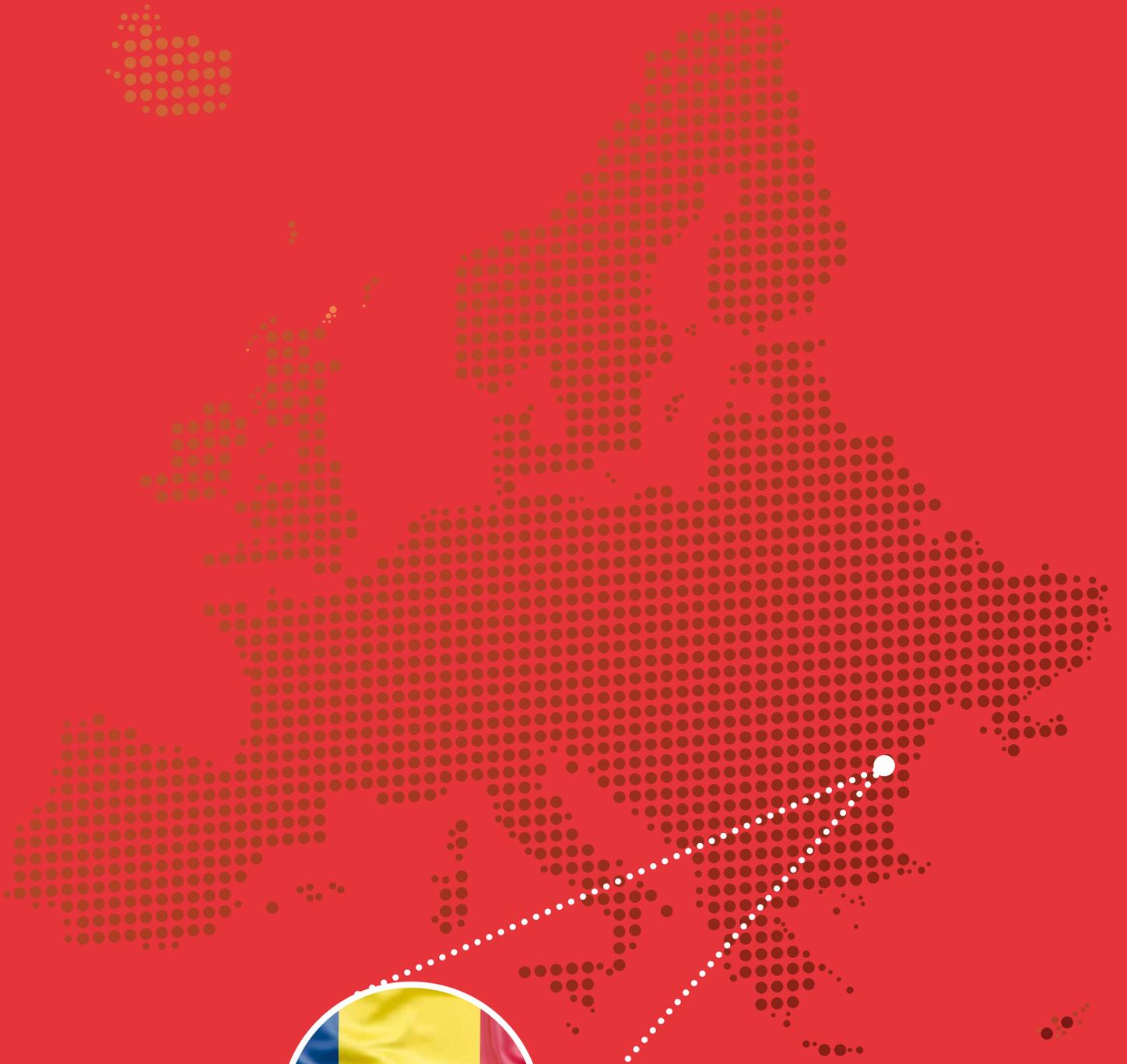
¹⁵⁸ “How Portugal manages to square the circle” (2018) *Investigate Europe*. Available at: <https://www.investigate-europe.eu/how-portugal-manages-to-square-the-circle/>.

¹⁵⁹ “At its convention, Portugal’s Left Bloc gears up for year of crucial fights” (2018) *Green Left Weekly*, 19 November. Available at: <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/its-convention-portugals-left-bloc-gears-year-crucial-fights>.

¹⁶⁰ Atkins, C. J. (2018) “Portuguese Communists chart a ‘patriotic politics of the left’” *People’s World*, 11 September. Available at: <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/portuguese-communists-chart-a-patriotic-politics-of-the-left/>.

¹⁶¹ Silva, I. M. da (2018) “Portugal populist exception?” *Euronews*, 8 November. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/05/portugal-populist-exception>.

¹⁶² *ibid*



Romania

Apart from Malta, Romania was the only country in the European Union without any genuine populist parties that had significant public support in 2018. At the end of the year, the ruling Social Democratic Party led the polls with 33% among likely voters, while its junior coalition partner ALDE was backed by 9% of Romanians. The leading opposition party was the National Liberal Party, which enjoyed the support of every fifth Romanian, followed by the Pro Romania Party (9%), the Save Romania Union (7%) and the Hungarian ethnic minority party, UDMR (6%).

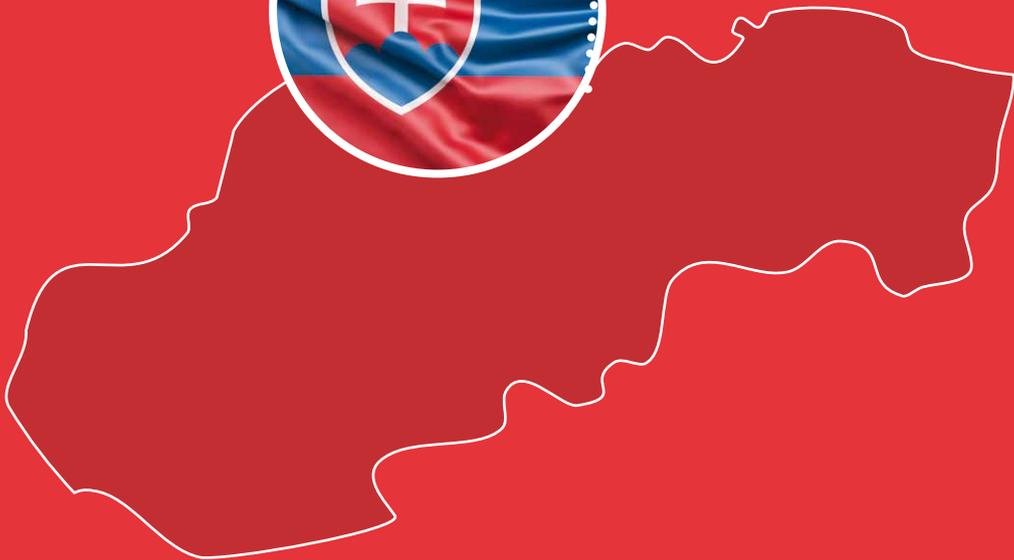
Despite the lack of anti-establishment parties in Romania, the general mood of the country is not positive. In August, thousands of Romanians, mainly emigrants living in various European countries, protested against corruption and the government's plans to curtail anti-corruption efforts.¹⁶³ But the police reacted with brutality to the peaceful rally, and hundreds of protesters were hurt during the resultant battle. This further stoked the prevailing anger in society. These protests indicated that a huge part of Romanian society is displeased with the country's political elite.

Politicians of the governing party in Romania invested themselves heavily into campaign efforts

relating to the referendum on same-sex unions. In addition to the fact that the current government changed the referendum rules by lowering the required threshold for validity and allowing the vote to proceed over two day period which cast doubts on the seriousness of the ballot – hate towards LGBT+ people, already marginalized in the country, increased further.¹⁶⁴ Although, it is not expected that a new populist formation will emerge in Romania over the coming year, it is important to observe the growing anti-establishment attitude in the country because the general conservative outlook in Romania could be an ideal ground for populist rhetoric to arise.

¹⁶³ Ciobanu, C. (2018) "Migrants left for a better life. Now they fight for a better Romania | Claudia Ciobanu," The Guardian, 22 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/22/romania-migrant-diaspora-protest-police-crackdown-corruption>.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, S. (2018) "Romanians to vote in referendum LGBT groups say is fuelling hate," The Guardian, 5 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/05/romanians-to-vote-in-referendum-lgbt-groups-say-is-fuelling-hate-marriage-corruption>.

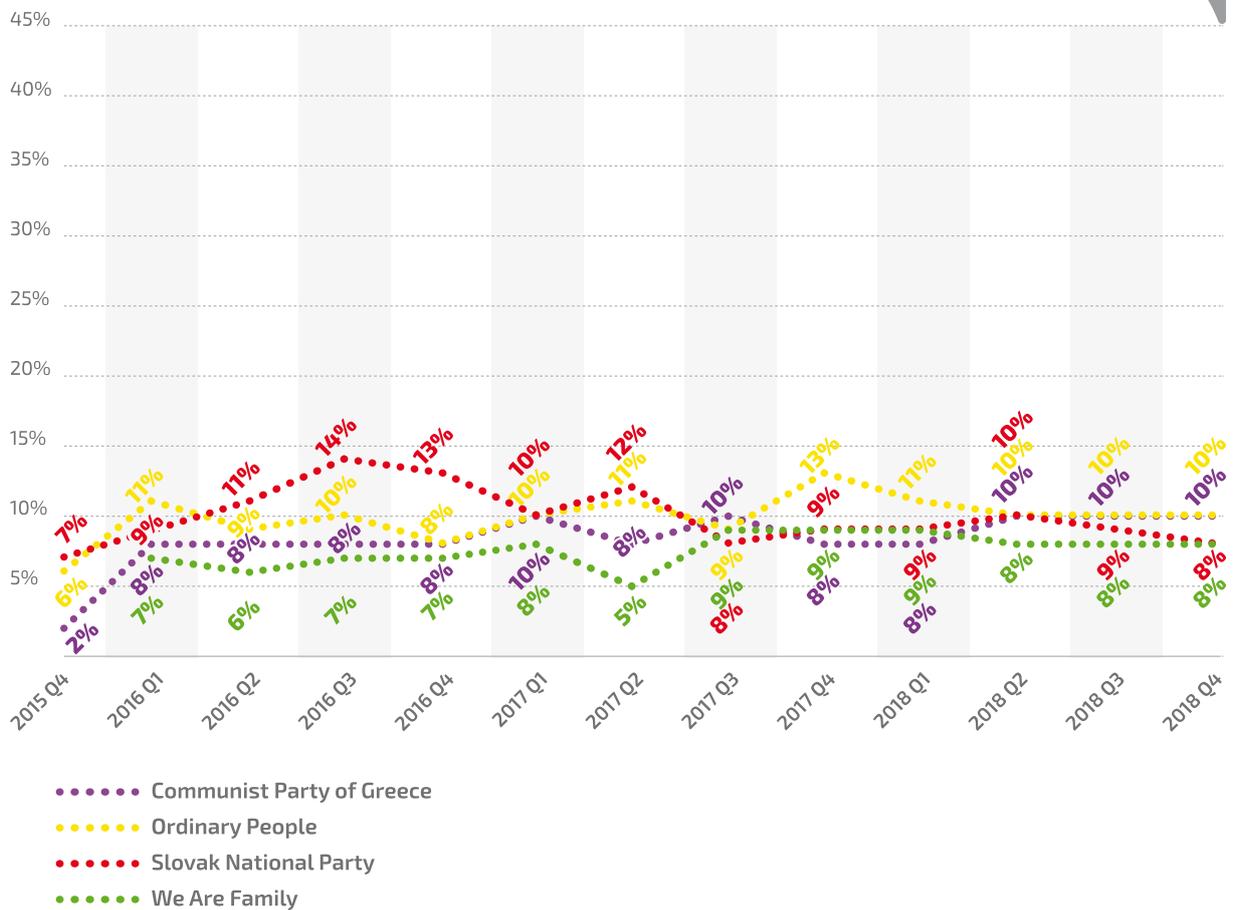


Slovakia

The popularity of populist parties declined significantly in Slovakia throughout the year as aggregated support for anti-establishment parties decreased by 3 points in 2018. Still, over a third of the public (36%) expressed a preference for populists in December 2018. At the end of the year, there were two populist parties that were each backed by a tenth of all voters: the extremist and neo-Nazi Kotleba – People's Party-Our Slovakia (L'SNS) and the right-wing Ordinary People (OL'aNO). While Kotleba's "balance" for 2018 was positive as the party's popularity improved by 2 points, OL'aNO lost significant ground as its support dropped by 3 points. The nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) and the We Are Family (Sme Rodina) were on the exact same track in 2018: both parties had been supported by 9 percent at the end of 2017 and stood at 8 percent one year later.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| Kotleba – People’s Party - Our Slovakia | NA | 1.73% | 10% |
| Ordinary People | ECR | 7.46% | 10% |
| Slovak National Party | EFD | 3.61% | 8% |
| We Are Family | NA | - | 8% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN SLOVAKIA



The murder of the Slovakian investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his partner in February 2018 had an immense impact on Slovakian politics this year. The journalist was almost certainly killed because of his investigations into the relations between the Italian mafia and the highest echelons of Slovakian politics.¹⁶⁵¹⁶⁶ The murder triggered a political crisis in the Central European country. Ultimately, Prime Minister Robert Fico had to step down and his deputy, Peter Pellegrini, formed a new government,¹⁶⁷ which was able to stabilise Smer's dominant position and for the most part recovered the voters that the main governing party had lost in the wake of the scandal. At the end of 2018, Smer enjoyed the same level of support among likely voters (24%) as it had before the murder (25%).

Interestingly, none of the populist forces really managed to generate momentum for themselves from this political crisis, and Slovakian politics continued to be characterised in 2018 by a lack of confidence in the political parties. General voter apathy and the mistrust of political parties was definitely highlighted by the results of the local election held in November, since independent candidates were spectacularly successful, especially in big cities.¹⁶⁸

The only populist formation that was able to slightly improve its standing in 2018 was the neo-Nazi Marian Kotleba's party, L'SNS. Still, in other respects the year was not a success for the former governor of the province of Banská Bystrica. Kotleba was charged with extremism after he had expressed his sympathy for a movement that seeks to suppress fundamental rights and freedoms.¹⁶⁹ Kotleba's support took the form of giving a charity a symbolic cheque for 1,488 euros. Prosecutors claimed that the numbers 14 and 88 are widely used by neo-Nazis because the number 14 stands for a white supremacist slogan while 88 is a symbolic representation of the Nazi's "Heil Hitler" salute.¹⁷⁰ If Kotleba is found guilty, he faces a maximum prison sentence of three years.

165 Deutsche Welle (2018) "Investigative journalist Jan Kuciak killed in Slovakia | DW | 26.02.2018," DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/investigative-journalist-jan-kuciak-killed-in-slovakia/a-42745005>.

166 Davies, C. (2018) "Slovakia's PM resigns amid scandal over murder of journalist," The Guardian, 15 March. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/15/slovakias-prime-minister-robert-fico-resigns-journalist-murder>.

167 Deutsche Welle (2018) "New Slovak government wins confidence vote amid ongoing protests | DW | 27.03.2018," DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/new-slovak-government-wins-confidence-vote-amid-ongoing-protests/a-43146389>.

168 "Local election in Slovakia: Smer comes first, but not unscathed" (2018) OSW, 23 November. Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2018-11-21/local-election-slovakia-smer-comes-first-not-unscathed>.

169 Financial Times (2018) "Slovak far-right leader indicted", Financial Times. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/8151348a-91de-11e8-b639-7680cedcc421>.

170 "Slovakia: Chair of neo-Nazi party indicted for using Nazi symbols on checks" (2018) romea.cz. Available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-chair-of-neo-nazi-party-indicted-for-using-nazi-symbols-on-checks-2>.

Nevertheless, Kotleba was preparing for the presidential election scheduled for 2019, in which he plans to run. Although he is not seen as a realistic contender, it should be noted that with a 20 percent vote share among young people, L'SNS is the most popular party in this generation.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the far-right threat in Slovakia became even more alarming when it was revealed that the Night Wolves, a paramilitary organisation and motorcycle club affiliated with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, had set up a military base in Slovakia. Moreover, the Slovak Recruits, a right-wing paramilitary group, conducted training exercises at the site of the Russian organisation using old tanks.¹⁷²

Moreover, it turns out that the junior partner in the ruling coalition, the Slovak National Party apparently also has some ties to the Russian government. Defence Minister Peter Gajdos, who represents the nationalist party in the coalition government, postponed a long-awaited decision on purchasing fighter aircrafts in June. The delay was widely perceived to be in service of Moscow's interests because Slovakia had a pre-existing contract with Russia for the maintenance of Slovakia's fleet of MiG-29 fighters.¹⁷³ The sympathy of the party and its leader, Andrej Danko, for Russia are hardly new or surprising. Danko visited Moscow regularly in 2018 and the party played a major role in the Slovakian government's decision not to expel Russian diplomats after the Skripal case, the notorious poisoning incident of Sergei Skripal, a Russian-UK double agent, and his daughter.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, SNS's tough euroskeptic and anti-NATO stance falls on fertile ground in Slovakia where, according to studies, public opinion is fairly favourable towards Russia, which is also reflected in the far-right party's steady support throughout the year.

We Are Family did not change its tactics in 2018, migration continues to be in the foreground of its communication. The party, which was founded by businessman Boris Kollár in 2015, is harshly opposed to the UN's Global Compact for Migration, and has tried to fuel the tensions in the government

171 Spectorator (2018) "First-time voters favour extremists," *spectator.sme.sk*, 27 November. Available at: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20971385/first-time-voters-favour-extremists.html>.

172 "Why Slovakia worries about the Night Wolves" (2018) The Economist, 10 September. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/09/10/why-slovakia-worries-about-the-night-wolves>.

173 "Slovakia delays decision to replace Russian fighter jets" (2018) Reuters, 20 June. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovakia-defence/slovakia-delays-decision-to-replace-russian-fighter-jets-idUSKBN1G1QW>.

174 Kalan, D. (2018) "Why Is Slovakia, a Proud EU and NATO Member, Drifting Toward Russia?," *World Politics Review*, 26 June. Available at: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/24936/why-is-slovakia-a-proud-eu-and-nato-member-drifting-toward-russia>.

which was divided over the question. Nevertheless, Boris Kollár's formation has failed to significantly improve in the polls and it is still unable to rise to double digits in terms of popular support. On the other hand, in balance OL'aNO definitely had a bad year as the party's support dropped 3 points.

A presidential election is scheduled in Slovakia for 2019, and the race is still open as there are several candidates with realistic chances at winning. Neither of these candidates is supported by the populist formations, however.¹⁷⁵ With respect to the election to the European Parliament in 2019, Kotleba's L'SNS and Sme Rodina are likely to win their first seats in the EP, while the Slovak National Party is also expected to return to the European Parliament after a 5-year break. OL'aNO will likely maintain its current level of representation in the EP, although it is still unclear which EP group they will join in the event of a potential breakup of the ECR group.

175 Spectator (2018) "Poll: Mistrík would win the presidential race," [spectator.sme.sk](https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22007561/poll-mistrik-would-win-the-presidential-race.html), 12 December. Available at: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22007561/poll-mistrik-would-win-the-presidential-race.html>.

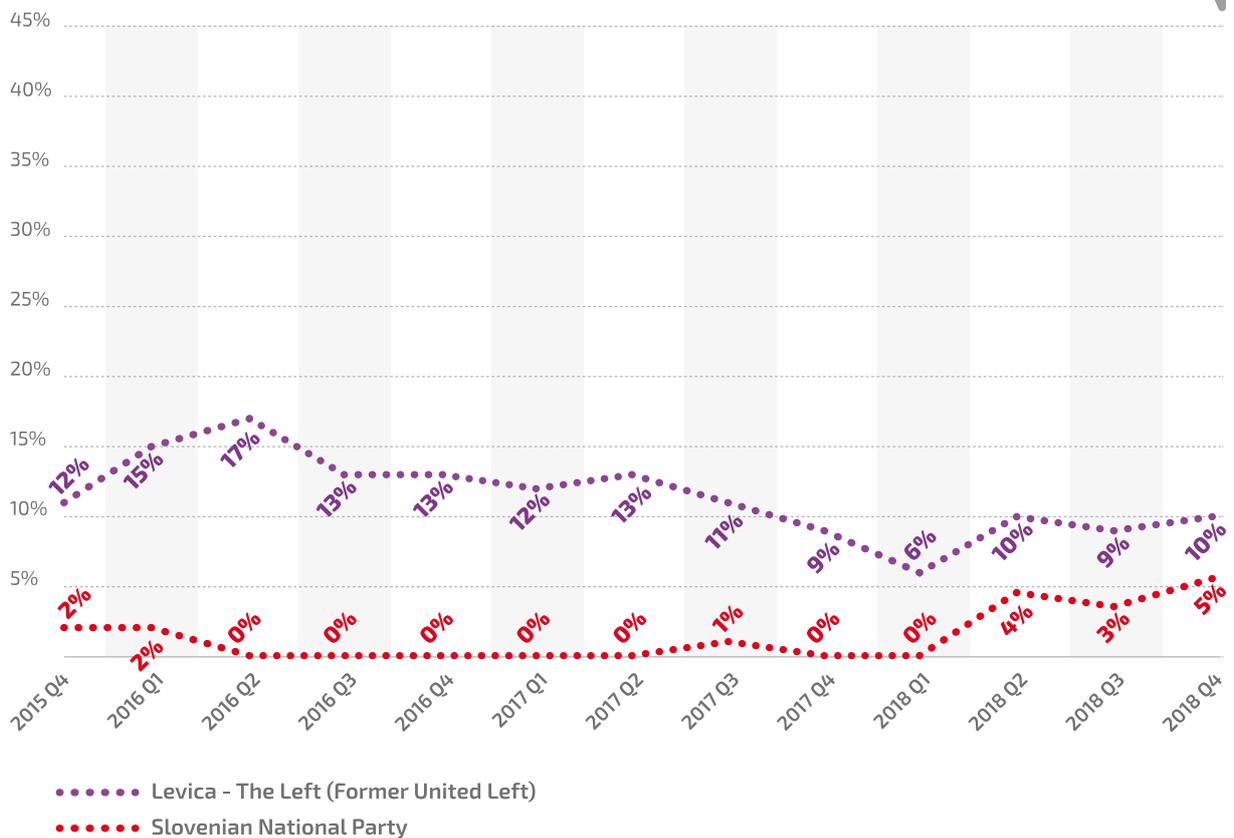


Slovenia

Slovenia experienced a surge in populism in 2018 as the aggregate support for populist parties increased by 9 points in the course of the year. The left-wing Levica party doubled the number of its voters within a year, increasing its share of voter support from 6% in December 2017 to the point where every tenth Slovene would vote for it at the end of 2018. The far-right Slovenian National Party was able to come back from irrelevance by re-entering Parliament in 2018. As a result, it stood at 5 percent of the votes compared to its undetectable support at the end of 2017. Nevertheless, in addition to the growth in the support of the two populist parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party's anti-immigration rhetoric and shift to the far-right in 2018 were also crucial aspects of the overall picture.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Levica - The Left (Former United Left) | GUE/NGL | 5.47% | 10% |
| Slovenian National Party | NA | 4.04% | 5% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN SLOVENIA



Most of 2018 was mired in uncertainty in Slovenia. In March, a few months following a referendum in which Slovenes backed the social-liberal government's 1-billion-euro investment project into railway construction, the Slovenian Supreme Court annulled the result and ordered a new vote because of the government's one-sided

campaign.¹⁷⁶ Following the decision, Prime Minister Miro Cerar, the leader of the Modern Centre Party, unexpectedly resigned from his position and President Borut Pahor announced a snap vote.

During the election campaign, front-runner Janez Janša, the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party

¹⁷⁶ "Slovenian court orders a new referendum on railway" (2018) Reuters, 14 March. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovenia-railway/slovenian-court-orders-a-new-referendum-on-railway-idUSKCN1GQ2DI>.

(SDS), played from Viktor Orbán's political playbook and rebranded himself as a tough, populist anti-migrant leader.¹⁷⁷ Like his Hungarian partner, Janša had started his career as a member of the anti-communist resistance, then he ruled the country as a pro-market liberal, and then turned towards the right. Furthermore, Janša ran a campaign that drew on Orbán's know-how: the former PM emphasised that Slovenia is being threatened by immigration and the persistence of communism, and he is the only person¹⁷⁸ who can defend the country's future¹⁷⁹ from the mysterious "dark forces" that are trying to change for the worse.¹⁸⁰ He even invited the Hungarian prime minister to campaign rallies and often referred to Orbán's governance as an example to be followed.¹⁸¹ At the same time, the Hungarian leader's personality set the tone in the campaign as Janša's adversaries harshly attacked the former Slovenian prime minister because of his ties to Orbán and the rhetoric Janša had borrowed from the latter.¹⁸² In the end, the "Slovenes first" slogan and Orbán's charisma did not prove sufficient for Janša to climb back into power. Still, the SDS did secure 25 percent of the votes and won the ballot.

The outcome of the election was unclear and as a result the summer was characterized by a protracted political stalemate.¹⁸³ Finally, the centre-left List of Marjan Sarec (LMS) formed a minority government with the single-issue Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), the centrist Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB), the Social Democrats, the social liberal Modern Centre Party (SMC) and Levica. The latter is not an official member of the coalition, however.

Levica is a democratic socialist party that campaigned mainly on the promise of increasing public expenditures. The party calls for higher levels of state investment in education and R&D, and for either increasing the minimum wage to 700 euros or raising the minimum level of welfare

benefits.¹⁸⁴ Levica unexpectedly received 9% of the votes in the election, a few points higher than originally forecast. In part, this success owed to the fact that the party's leading candidate, Luka Mesec, performed well in the televised debates in which he consistently criticised his political opponents and promoted his own agenda.¹⁸⁵ Their result allowed the party to become the kingmaker in Slovenian politics by providing the minority government with indispensable support. The objective of supporting the government from the outside is similar to the role played by the Portuguese far-left parties, which have used their leverage as the key swing votes in parliament in terms of keeping the government in power to push various social initiatives.¹⁸⁶ An adaptation of this strategy to the Slovenian context could help Levica rebrand its current radical image and to cast itself as a constructive political actor.

The legislative election was also fruitful for the far-right Slovenian National Party and its leader, Zmago Jelincic Plemeniti, as the party was able to return to the parliament after a 7-years hiatus.¹⁸⁷ The party stated that it would support Janša's SDS in forming a government, but ultimately it ended up in opposition along with the SDS. The party promoted a nationalist, euroskeptic and protectionist agenda, relying heavily on anti-immigrant rhetoric during the campaign.¹⁸⁸ It should be added that SNS's success was essentially unexpected because the party and its leader had been flying under the radar in recent years and only mobilised during the campaign period. Nevertheless, the anti-refugee sentiment among Slovenian voters was strong enough to propel the nationalist party back into the Slovenian political arena.

The better than expected result of the populist parties notwithstanding, winning seats in the 2019 EP election will be a major challenge for them because of the low number of seats in the EP awarded to Slovenia. Still, Levica has a real shot at entering the European Parliament for the first time – although their eventual result will depend to a large extent on how successfully they can leverage their position as an outside supporter of the current government.

177 Hopkins, V. (2018) "Slovenian survivor targets victory à la Orbán," *POLITICO*, 2 June. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/slovenian-survivor-targets-victory-a-la-orban/>.

178 *ibid*

179 *ibid*

180 Surk, B. (2018) "Slovenia Elections Tilt Another European Country to the Right," *The New York Times*, 3 June. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/03/world/europe/slovenia-election.html>.

181 Deutsche Welle (2018) "Anti-immigration leader Janez Janša to form Slovenia government | DW | 04.06.2018," *DW.COM*. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/anti-immigration-leader-janez-jansa-to-form-slovenia-government/a-44067203>.

182 *ibid*

183 Novak, M. (2018) "Slovenia faces political uncertainty after election," *Reuters*, 4 June. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovenia-election/slovenia-faces-political-uncertainty-after-election-idUSKCN1J01KD>.

184 "Slovenia's Parliamentary Elections: A Xenophobic Right, a Fragmented Centre and a Rising Left - The Bullet" (2018) *Socialist Project*, 17 September. Available at: <https://socialistproject.ca/2018/07/slovenia-parliamentary-elections-xenophobic-right/>.

185 "Democratic Socialists Advance in Slovenia" (2018) *RLS*, 19 July. Available at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/39126/democratic-socialists-advance-in-slovenia/>.

186 *ibid*

187 Houghton, T., Krasovec, A. and Deegan-Krause, K. (2018) "Slovenia voted on Sunday. Is an anti-immigrant government on the way?," *The Washington Post*, 5 June. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/05/slovenian-voted-on-sunday-is-an-anti-immigrant-government-on-the-way/?noredirect&utm_term=.575af3e4fa7b.

188 "National Party Pushes Anti-Migrant and Anti-Elite Platform" (2018) *www.total-slovenia-news.com*. Available at: <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/1264-national-party-pushes-anti-migrant-and-anti-elite-platform-feature>.

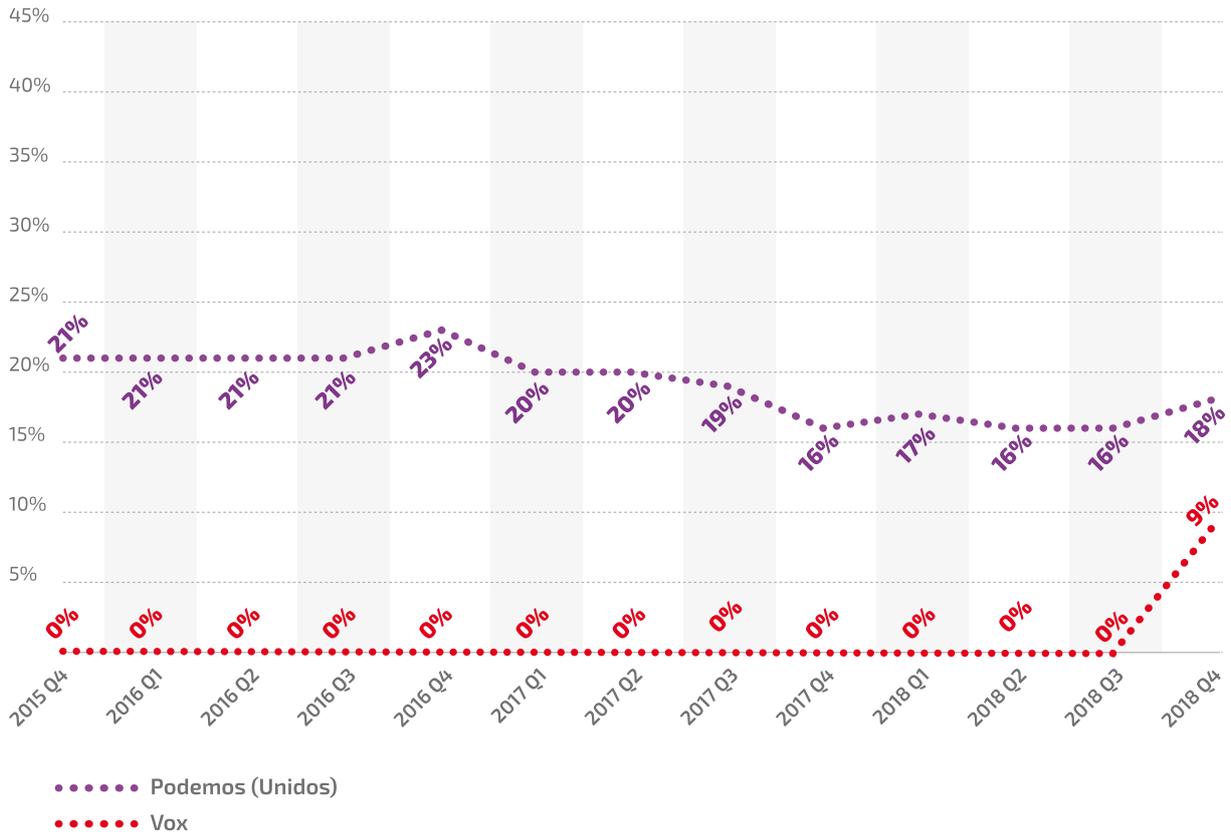


Spain

As of 2018, the level of support for populism in Spain was still rather modest. The left-wing populist Podemos's support of 16% among likely voters did not budge between the beginning of the year and autumn 2018. It has increased slightly (by 2 points) since then, and stood at 18% in December 2018. At the same time, a more serious reason for concern is the breakthrough of the far-right in Spain (in the form of the Vox party). Until the end of 2018, Spain had been one of the last EU Member States that resisted right-wing populism, but the rise of Vox ended this calm period.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Podemos (Unidos) | GUE/NGL | 7.97% | 18% |
| Vox | - | 1.57% | 9% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN SPAIN



Following the legislative election of 2016, which resulted in a hung parliament, the position of the Spanish government was unstable. The ruling centre-right People's Party (PP) had no majority in the extremely fragmented Congress of Deputies, and the political crisis wrought by separatist efforts in Catalonia made governance almost impossible for the controversial prime minister, Mariano Rajoy. The conviction of prominent party members on charges of corruption proved to be the final drop. Prime Minister Rajoy was ousted in a vote of no confidence in June, and he was succeeded as head of government by the leader of the Spanish centre-left, Pedro Sánchez (PSOE). Even though Podemos sought to join the government, the Socialists refused to allow that and instead formed a minority government with only 84 deputies out of 350, resulting in a weak cabinet.¹⁸⁹

The past year was definitely not the best period for the left-wing populist party Podemos. The internal tensions that weighed on the party intensified after revelations about the acquisition of a controversial luxury house in the spring of 2018 by Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias and his partner, Irene Montero, the parliamentary spokeswoman for Podemos. The couple bought a particularly expensive house in Madrid's elegant outskirts and this definitely exerted a negative impact on the party's reputation.¹⁹⁰ A few years earlier Podemos had celebrated its working-class origins and criticised the political elite for their thriftless lifestyle.¹⁹¹ What made the affair even more embarrassing for Iglesias was that the media dug up his previous comments on the political establishment.¹⁹² Ultimately, Iglesias survived a no-confidence vote within the party but the scandal strengthened the perception that Podemos' leaders have become part of the elite they had once fought against.

However, Podemos and PSOE have drifted increasingly closer to one another throughout the year, and this rapprochement may be seen as the groundwork for the formation of a coalition government in 2019 or 2020.¹⁹³ First, Podemos shifted into a more cooperative mode, abandoning

its previous confrontational style. Then Prime Minister Sánchez and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias signed a comprehensive deal in October to avoid early elections, which included an agreement on the 2019 budget. After tough years of austerity, Spain is moving in a more progressive direction by raising the minimum wage, public pensions and unemployment benefits, as well cutting fees in healthcare and education and raising corporate taxes.¹⁹⁴ By taking this step, Podemos was able to persuade the Socialists to introduce more progressive and anti-austerity policies than PSOE's stances.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, Podemos also shared in the success of adopting such popular measures, but it did so from a position outside the government, which meant it could assume less of the actual responsibility for these policies.

The most unexpected news in Spanish politics in 2018 was unequivocally the rise of Vox, a representative of the right-wing populist ideology of the sort that Spain had been immune to for many years for a variety of reasons. First, just as the legacy of Salazar's rule still looms large in Portugal, the memory of Franco's fascist military dictatorship is still too vivid in Spanish society. Moreover, thus far the Partido Popular's staunchly conservative ideology had taken the wind out of the sails of any attempt at establishing a successful far-right party. Finally, although the culturally and ethnically diverse regions in the country might seem like fertile soil for far-right populism, in Spain secessionist regionalism is traditionally combined with far-left politics. But because of the crisis of the People's Party, the disappointed PP voters have either shifted their allegiance to the centrist (culturally progressive but economically liberal) Ciudadanos or – especially the more conservative voters among them – they have been left without a party.

Vox, which was founded in 2013 and went largely unnoticed for years,¹⁹⁶ is mainly appealing to the aforementioned disappointed right-wing voters by emphasising two key political issues: keeping Spain together as a nation-state by re-centralising the state and immigration.¹⁹⁷ The idea to abolish Spain's decentralised system of governance is clearly a

189 "New Spanish PM seeks government without hard-left Podemos" (2018) Reuters, 3 June. Available at: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-spain-politics/new-spanish-pm-seeks-government-without-hard-left-podemos-idUKKCN1IZ0FO>.

190 Jones, S. (2018) "Spain's Podemos leader to face party vote over luxury house purchase," The Guardian, 20 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/20/spain-podemos-leader-pablo-iglesias-no-confidence-vote-anti-austerity-principles-house-purchase>.

191 Torres, D. (2018) "Podemos leaders face party vote over luxury villa," POLITICO, 22 May. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/pablo-iglesias-irene-montero-podemos-leaders-face-party-vote-over-luxury-villa/>.

192 *ibid*

193 Marcos, J. and Marcos, A. (2018) "Spain's Podemos: from street protests to governing deals in four years," EL PAÍS, 17 October. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/10/16/inenglish/1539692544_763322.html.

194 Pérez, C., Cué, C. E., Marcos, A., Díez, A., Casqueiro, J. and Marcos, J. (2018) "Spain's PM and Podemos leader sign deal for biggest wage hike in 40 years," EL PAÍS, 12 October. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/10/12/inenglish/1539332885_013808.html.

195 Marcos, J. and Marcos, A. (2018) "Spain's Podemos: from street protests to governing deals in four years," EL PAÍS, 17 October. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/10/16/inenglish/1539692544_763322.html.

196 Torres, D. (2018) "Vox shocks Spain," POLITICO, 4 December. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/vox-spain-far-right-shakes-up/>.

197 Jones, S. (2018) "Far right breakthrough in Andalucía send shockwave through Spanish politics," The Guardian, 9 December. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/09/far-right-andalucia-seville-vox-party-shockwave-spanish-politics>.

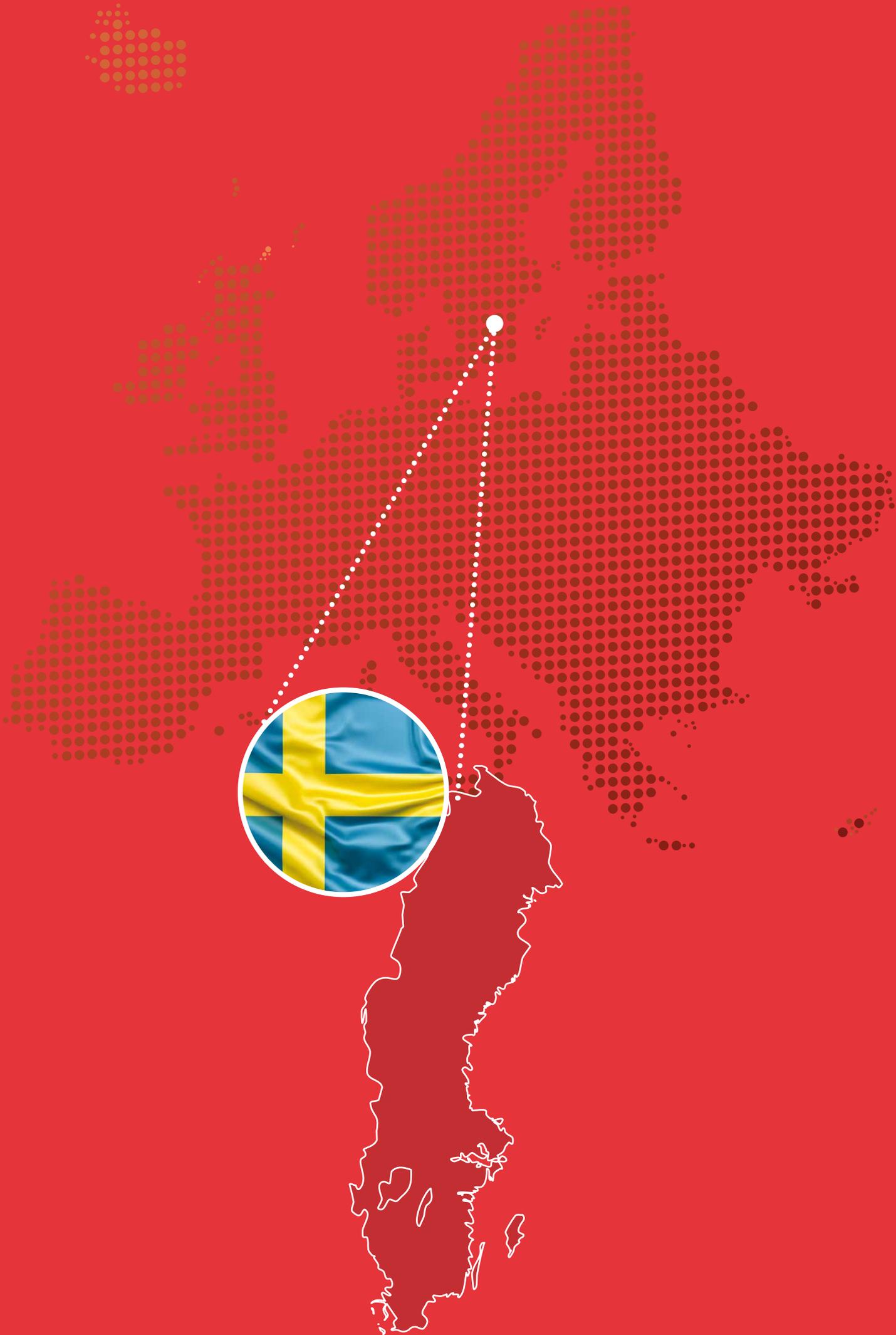
response to the Catalan independence efforts: the previous conservative Rajoy government proved unable to handle the crisis, and thus Vox represents a tougher line on the issue to appeal to Spanish nationalists. With respect to migration, Vox wants a tougher stance on illegal immigration and to prioritise Spaniards over foreigners in the allocation of social services.¹⁹⁸

Although the party was almost undetectable in the polls conducted throughout the year, in December 2018 it received 11% of the votes in the Andalusian regional election,¹⁹⁹ which was somewhat of a shock in the country's political life. In recent years, Spanish politics had been divided among four main political parties with roughly equal levels of support, and it is almost impossible to predict how the party system will shift because of the breakthrough of the far right.

The further rise of Vox might accelerate the process of rapprochement between PSOE and Podemos, but at the same time the possibility of a snap election still exists. The outstanding result of Vox is unambiguously a threat to the position of the PP. Interestingly, it is Ciudadanos that could potentially profit the most from the surge in Vox's support since the centrist party's number one ally, Macron and his La République En Marche! party have successfully positioned themselves as the main adversaries of populism and have amassed political capital from this position. The Spanish centrists could also win politically by emphasising a new cleavage between humanist liberalism and xenophobic populism. With respect to the EP elections in 2019, Vox is reasonably well-positioned to capture several seats in Strasbourg while Podemos might also double the number of the 5 seats it currently holds. However, Podemos might also end up with what is only the fourth biggest Spanish delegation in the European Parliament. As for the PSOE, not only is the party expected to win the EP elections in Spain, but they also would form one of the largest centre-left/progressive national delegations in Strasbourg from 2019 on.

198 Lambertucci, C. (2018) "Far-right political party Vox attracts 9,000 people to Madrid rally," EL PAÍS, 8 October. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/10/08/inenglish/1538983913_173766.html.

199 "Spain far-right Vox party gains foothold in Andalusia election" (2018) BBC News, 3 December. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46422036>.

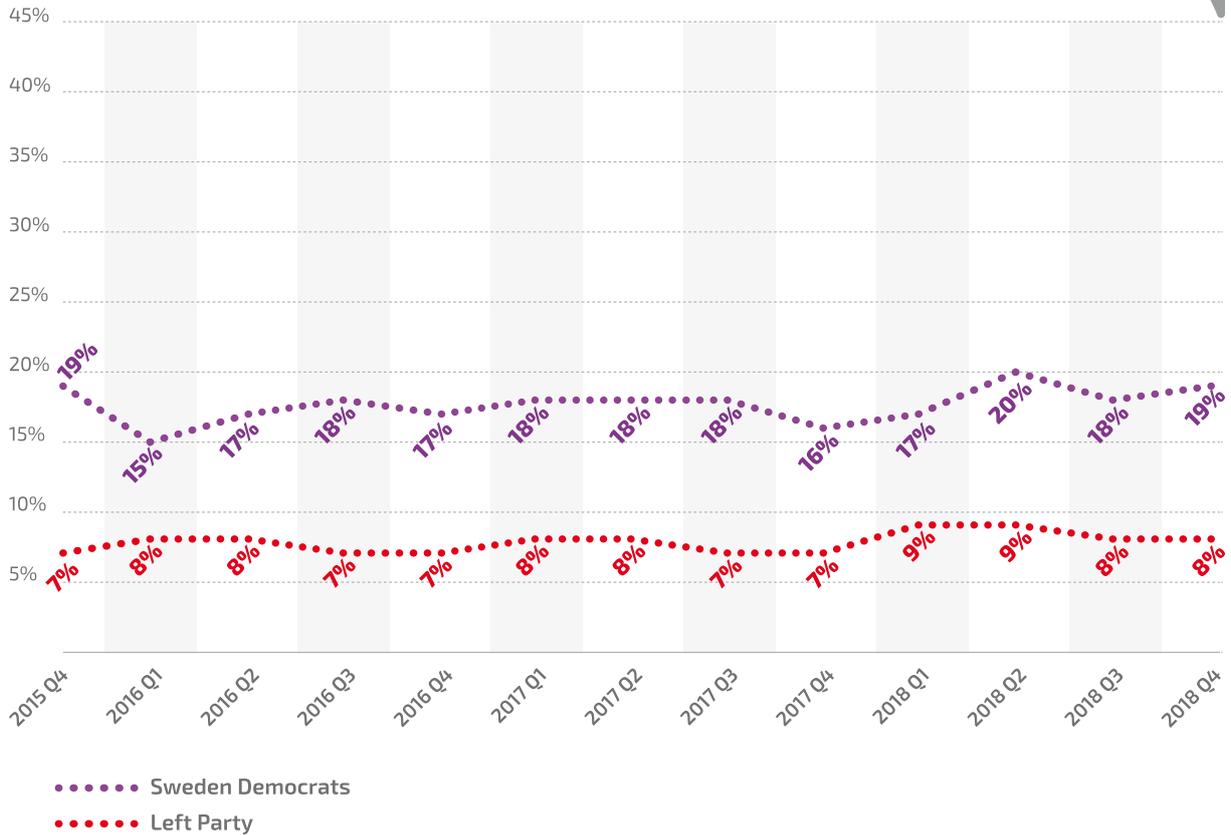


Sweden

Although Swedish populist parties did make gains in terms of popularity in 2018, the expected breakthrough did not occur. The major populist party, the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD), significantly increased its popularity in the first half of the year, breaking the 20-percent mark around the middle of the year. Subsequently, SD finished third with a historic 18% of the votes in the general election on 9 September 2018. Later, the Sweden Democrats increased its support in the polls by one point and stood at 19% at the end of the year. Although the far-right party's election result is far from revolutionary, it is still significant as SD's share of the seats in parliament contributes to the current deadlock in the process of government formation. On the far-left end of the political spectrum, the Left Party only achieved slight gains in popularity and stood at 8%, which means that the aggregated support of populists in Sweden grew by 4 points in 2018.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| Sweden Democrats | EFD | 9.70% | 19% |
| Left Party | GUE/NGL | 6.30% | 8% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN SWEDEN



At some point during the year it seemed that even in Sweden, which is generally considered boring politically, a populist formation might be able to profoundly upset the political balance by emerging as the winner of the 2018 election. A few weeks before the vote there were opinion polls which indicated that the Sweden Democrats had a shot at becoming the leading political force. The Sweden Democrats were successful in turning immigration

into the focal issue of the election campaign in 2018. The party has also been benefiting from increasing reports of crimes linked to immigrant gangs in several major cities. One major incident took place in August 2018, just a month before the election, when 80 cars were set on fire in Gothenburg in a

series of attacks.²⁰⁰ The story of that catastrophic night resonated perfectly with the message of the Sweden Democrats: the necessity of drawing a distinction between those “those who build cars and those who burn them.”²⁰¹

Stopping immigration, cracking down on crime, security in the online sphere, and the weakening of the welfare state and of traditional values were the issues that the far right emphasised in 2018. With these messages, the Sweden Democrats attracted voters from both major established parties in Sweden, drawing roughly the same level of support from each.²⁰² In the first half of the year the Sweden Democrats’ popularity peaked in parallel with the weakening performance of the governing Social Democrats: Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and his party still suffered from the blows of the IT scandal in 2017²⁰³, however, welfare system-related and housing issues also contributed to this lack of stability.

In their political agenda, the Sweden Democrats successfully linked certain welfare state-related problems to immigration. The housing shortage, caused by the massive influx of refugees in 2015, was a critical issue for working class voters and undermined the credibility of the governing party, the *Socialdemokraterna*.²⁰⁴ While the *Moderaterna*, the most popular party on the right, was not able to benefit from these scandals, the Sweden Democrats managed to position themselves as the guardians of the welfare state. SD also shifted the epicentre of Swedish politics to the right during the electoral campaign. Thus, for example, the ruling Social Democrats announced the goal of cutting the number of immigrants by half in May 2018, and some of PM Löfven’s speeches focused on the incidents of crime that had occurred during the summer.²⁰⁵

The other populist party, the left-wing *Vänsterpartiet*, is widely viewed as an integral part of the political

system despite their controversial views on the Swedish monarchy.²⁰⁶ In their election campaign, the party focused on the question of equality, called for a more generous welfare system as well as boosting LGBT+ and women’s rights.²⁰⁷ Its result of 8% in the election definitely marked a major step forward for the party since the number of their seats in parliament increased from 21 to 28. While their outside support of the left-wing minority government in the previous term was crucial on some issues, at this time some sort of arrangement between centre-right and centre-leftist parties seems inevitable for the formation of a coalition government; and such a centrist government will definitely not count on the parliamentary support of the *Vänsterpartiet*.

However, all in all, the election results showed that the rise of populist parties in Sweden is not as pronounced as it was forecast. SD and the left-populist *Vänsterpartiet* gained 18% and 8% of the votes, respectively. In the last months of 2018, both parties’ popularity stabilised at this level, as the focus of the political agenda shifted to government formation and related budgetary issues.²⁰⁸ The mainstream parties successfully halted the further rise of populist formations by reacting to the issues raised by the latter and adopting some of their characteristic features. At the end of the year it still appears that the Sweden Democrats will stay in quarantine in all areas of politics. Despite their relatively solid results, none of the potential plans for coalition formation count on their outside support. The majority of Swedish society would prefer to keep in political quarantine, and the stigma of racism that attaches to them acts as a force that limits them and outweighs the widespread societal concerns about immigration that the party focuses on.

With respect to the European level, in the EP elections in May 2019 the Sweden Democrats will definitely increase the number of their seats in Strasbourg, while the Left Party is also widely expected to win another – its second – seat in the EP.

200 Kelly B. (2018), Sweden Democrats: How a nationalist, anti-immigrant party took root in a liberal Nordic haven, Independent Online, 8 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sweden-democrats-election-results-nationalist-populist-party-anti-immigrant-refugees-a8515576.html>

201 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tXeGGpDOAc>

202 Duxbury C. (2018), Sweden braces for political uncertainty as far right makes gains, Politico, 9 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/swedens-two-main-blocs-neck-and-neck-in-election-exit-poll/>

203 See more about the scandal here: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/27/europe/sweden-it-scandal/index.html>

204 Duxbury, C. (2018) “Swedish Social Democrats’ struggle for relevance,” POLITICO, 10 September. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-social-democrats-struggle-for-relevance-stefan-lofven/>.

205 Owoseye T. (2018), Swedish prime minister lashes out after masked youth torch dozens of cars nationwide, Independent Online, 14 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/sweden-pm-cars-arson-attacks-burned-vandalism-arson-attacks-nationwide-a8491136.html>

206 Babones S. (2018), Who’s Afraid of the Sweden Democrats?, The National Interest Online, 10 September 2018. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/whos-afraid-sweden-democrats-30977>

207 Boros T., Laki G. (2018): Populism Report Q3 2018 in: FEPS - Populism Report Q3 2018

208 Duxbury C. (2018), In Sweden all, politics is really local, Politico, 4 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-stefan-lofven-ulf-kristersson-sweden-election-in-sweden-all-politics-really-is-local/>

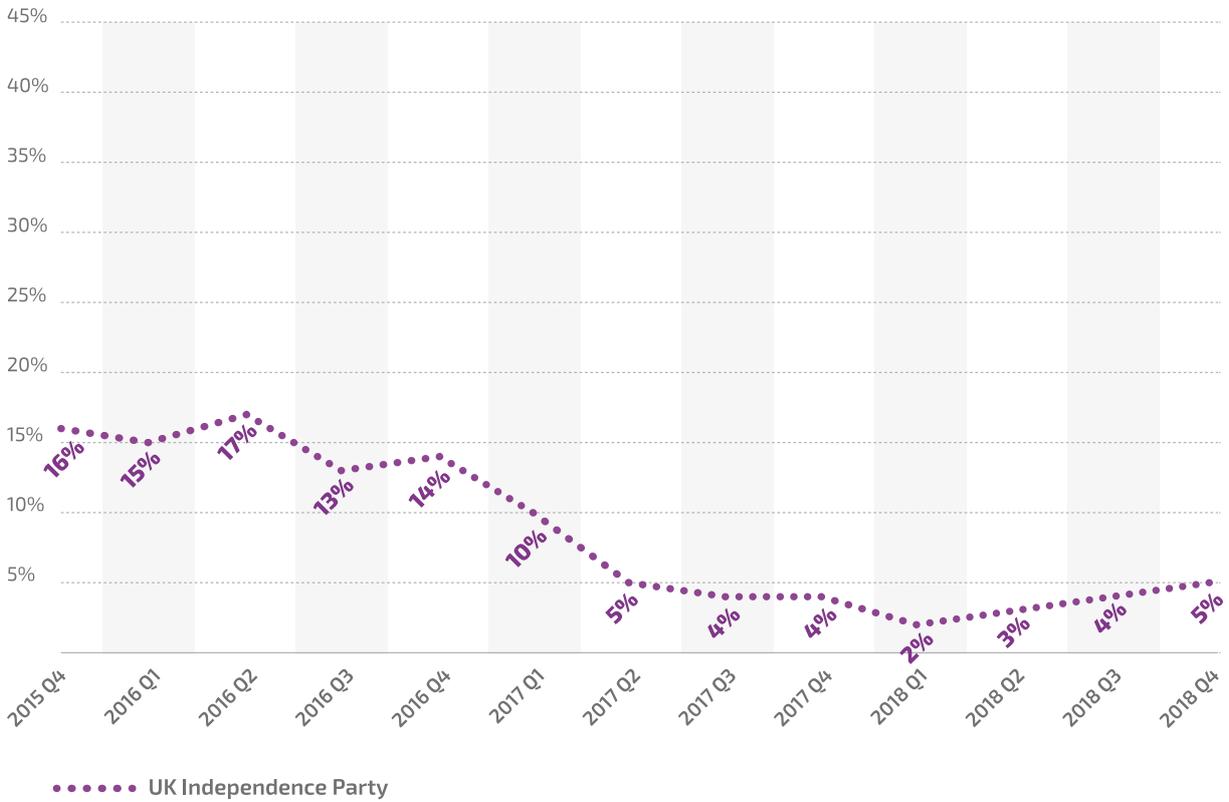


United Kingdom

UKIP, the UK's only significant populist party, still has been unable to recover its support since the onset of its disastrous crisis in 2016. The anti-EU party dropped to 2% among likely voters early in the year. It subsequently recouped a point in each quarter. As compared to its poll results in December 2017, the party has improved by only a single point and stood at 5% in the polls at the end of 2018. UKIP continues to struggle with the challenge of re-establishing itself as a major player in the political scene of the United Kingdom.

| | Political Group in the European Parliament | Share of the votes in the 2014 EP election | Current support |
|-----------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| UK Independence Party | EFD | 27.50% | 5% |

SUPPORT FOR POPULIST PARTIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



Since the departure of the iconic Nigel Farage from the UKIP leadership in 2016, the party has been unable to find its own voice and direction. Currently, UKIP lacks a strong leader and the party has been side-lined in the Brexit debate, even though this has been its flagship issue for many years.²⁰⁹ At the beginning of the year, UKIP had been led by Henry Bolton, but he had to step down after a scandal involving racist comments by his partner: the party leader’s girlfriend had sent offensive messages

about Prince Harry’s fiancée, Meghan Markle.²¹⁰ Subsequently, MEP Gerard Batten became the new chair. Batten launched his leadership with the stabilisation of the party’s financial situation. His stated goals also included the organisational and political restoration of the party.²¹¹ However, Batten’s debut was unsuccessful as UKIP

²⁰⁹ “UKIP members vote to sack embattled leader Henry Bolton” (2018) BBC News, 17 February. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-43098646>.

²¹⁰ “UKIP’s leader announces plans to quit on day he is confirmed” (2018) BBC News, 14 April. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43769408>.

²¹¹ Lister, S. (2018) “New Ukip leader Gerard Batten announces plans to quit after uncontested election,” The Independent, 15 April. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ukip-latest-new-leader-gerard-batten-henry-bolton-jo-marney-meghan-markle-a8305211.html>.

underperformed in the local elections held in May. The party's vote share was slightly above 1% and it won only 3 council seats even though in 2015 it had amassed 201 seats.²¹²

To reinvigorate UKIP, its new leader decided to redirect the party towards the far right by adopting an anti-Islam stance. Batten's attitude toward Islam was well-known since he had been widely criticised previously for his comments describing Islam as a death cult.²¹³ For many years, UKIP had refused to allow former members of extremist groups to enter the party, but Batten started to appeal to far-right groups as well.²¹⁴ This marks a considerable shift as under Nigel Farage UKIP had focused on the European Union and refrained from engaging in harsh Islamophobia of the kind we see in continental Europe.²¹⁵ Moreover, the party also started to admit far-right activists, such as controversial YouTube vloggers with links to the alt-right movement.²¹⁶ This step can be considered as "politically logical" because in light of the protracted and never-ending jangle surrounding Brexit, which the British people are increasingly getting weary of, it could be fruitful for the party to shift focus and emphasise another populist issue.

UKIP's own shift combined with the Tories' clutter over Brexit contributed to the slight improvement of UKIP:²¹⁷ the party's membership surged by 15 percent in the month following Prime Minister Theresa May's Chequers plan, which involved a much softer Brexit proposal than previously expected.²¹⁸ But it should be noted that the new members are primarily young adults who were following the party's new social media stars, they do not represent UKIP's traditional electoral base. The last symbolic step of the party's transformation was Tommy Robinson's drift towards the party. Tommy Robinson is an iconic celebrity on the

British far-right, a co-founder and former leader of the English Defence League who has been sentenced to jail several times, most recently for contempt of court. After his appointment, Gerard Batten frequently praised Robinson, once likening his imprisonment to that of Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela on the grounds that "they were on the right side of a very great cause."²¹⁹ Later, Robinson was brought on as a UKIP adviser on the issues of rape and prison reforms. Batten was the subject of massive criticisms by party members, which led to a failed vote of no confidence against the party leader.²²⁰ However, UKIP still lost its most iconic public figure, Nigel Farage. The former UKIP leader quit the party in December 2018 after disagreements with the leadership over the appointment of Tommy Robinson.²²¹ Several other well-known UKIP figures also left the party at the same time as Farage.²²² Farage stated that the party had become unrecognisable because of its anti-Muslim fixation.²²³

The completely unpredictable Brexit process and the still unknown outcome of UKIP's shift towards the xenophobic far-right make it impossible to forecast the political trends in the United Kingdom in 2019. The slight but steady improvement in UKIP's polling figures throughout the year indicates that the new strategy has some potential, however. With the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, UKIP will lose its access to the European Parliament, which is an important stage for that party that had contributed a lot to UKIP's popularity in recent years. In any event, the historical two-party domination of British politics won't yield a lot of space for the further rise of UKIP unless it manages to invent new political instruments which it can exploit to substitute for Farage's witticisms in Strasbourg and Brussels.

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State of Populism in Europe

The past few years have seen a surge in the public support of populist, Eurosceptical and radical parties throughout almost the entire European Union. In several countries, their popularity matches or even exceeds the level of public support of the centre-left. Even though the centre-left parties, think tanks and researchers are aware of this challenge, there is still more that could be done in this field. There is occasional research on individual populist parties in some countries, but there is no regular overview – updated every year – how the popularity of populist parties changes in the EU Member States, where new parties appear and old ones disappear.

That is the reason why FEPS and Policy Solutions have launched this series of yearbooks, entitled “State of Populism in Europe”.

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Policy Solutions is a progressive political research institute based in Budapest. Among the pre-eminent areas of its research are the investigation of how the quality of democracy evolves, the analysis of factors driving populism, and election research.

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