Sieps
Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies

April 2024:10epa

EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

The 2024 European Parliament Elections: Potential Outcome and Consequences

Simon Hix and Abdul Noury*

Summary

The European Parliament elections in June 2024 are likely to produce a much more right-leaning assembly with 25 per cent of MEPs in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) groups. The centrist "super grand coalition" – European People's Party (EPP), Socialists and Democrats (S&D), and Renew Europe (RE) – will still have a majority of seats. But a centre-left coalition (between S&D, RE, Greens/EFA, and the Left) is likely to fall below 50 per cent, and a "populist right coalition" (between EPP, ECR and ID, adding Fidesz MEPs) is only a few seats short of a majority for the first time.

To illustrate the significance of the elections, the paper discusses the current balance of power in the European Parliament, how coalitions have formed across different policy issues, and how voting cohesion of the political groups has also varied across policy issues. Changes in group and coalition sizes are likely to lead to different policy outcomes in the next term, particularly on environmental and migration issues. The first major test of the patterns of politics of the new Parliament will be the election of the Commission President.

* Simon Hix is the Stein Rokkan Chair in Comparative Politics, European University Institute, Florence. Abdul Noury is Associate Professor of Political Science, NYU Abu Dhabi.

The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors.

1. Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament elections will be the first chance for European voters to pass judgement at the ballot box on how the European Union (EU) has addressed the major political and policy challenges of the last few years: Brexit, COVID, the Russian attack on Ukraine, the ambitious European Green Deal, the management of refugees and migration, and most recently the conflict in the Middle East.

Five years ago, populist right parties performed well in the European Parliament elections. But, in part because of a higher than usual turnout of younger voters in several of the larger member states (particularly Germany, Poland, Romania, and Spain), green and liberal parties also did well. The new Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen – from the centre-right EPP group – interpreted the 2019 election result as a mandate for an ambitious plan to promote the transition of the European economy and society to carbon neutrality. President von der Leyen is standing for a second term and will need to be re-elected by the new Parliament. What happens in the elections in June 2024 will therefore shape the political direction of the EU, via the election of the next Commission President and the policy mandate the new President is given.

The elections will also determine the types of policies the EU will be able to adopt for the next five years. Although the European Parliament does not have full legislative power on all issues, its powers have been dramatically extended in recent years, to cover all areas of regulation of the single market, the setting of European-wide environmental and social standards, the governance of migration, international trade agreements, and even in some areas of EU foreign policy. For example, in the current Parliament, a centre-left coalition of parties and MEPs has been able to support the Commission's ambitious environmental policy agenda.

Using data from recent opinion polls and our research on voting patterns in the current Parliament (until the February 2024 plenary session), we try to answer several questions. How are the 2024 European Parliament elections likely to change the composition of the Parliament and the balance of power between the political groups in the chamber? Given what we know about patterns of coalition formation by policy area and the variations in internal party cohesion across policy issues, how will the make-up of the new Parliament shape the direction of EU policy in the coming years? And, last but not least, what are Ursula von der Leyen's chances to be re-elected as Commission President?

2. Potential Outcome of the June 2024 elections

Figure 1 shows the current composition of the European Parliament and the potential outcome in June. This outcome is based on the latest opinion polls, as pooled by EuropeElects.eu in March 2024.[1]

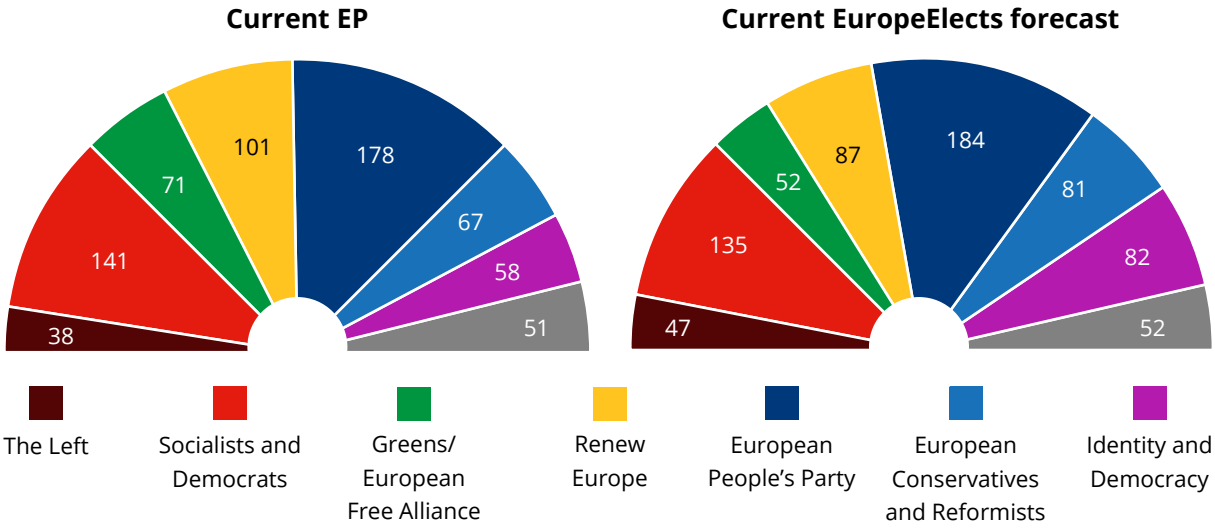
Three things are particularly striking. First, there is likely to be a dramatic increase in the number of MEPs on the right of the EPP, that is, in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy (ID) groups. In fact, the Identity and Democracy group looks set to become the fourth largest group in the new Parliament. Furthermore, the largest national party that currently sits as "non-attached", Viktor Orbán's *Fidesz* (who are projected to win 10 MEPs), are considering joining ECR. If they do, ECR will be the third largest group, while ID will be the fifth largest group, and together these two groups will command 173 MEPs in the Parliament.

Other research has predicted that "populist right" parties are likely to top the polls in June in nine of the 27 EU member states and come second or third in a further nine (Cunningham et al. 2024). If this happens, a "populist surge" will be the dominant media story following the election. In short, in the 2024 European Parliament election we are set to see a "breakthrough" for the radical right at the European level, in terms of this political force reaching a level where it can no longer be ignored in the shaping of politics and policy – in the same way that these parties have had a breakthrough at the national level in many countries.

Second, and related, there is likely to be a clear shift to the right in the balance of power in the

[1] https://europeelects.eu/2024/03/31/march-2024/

Figure 1. **Current European Parliament and Potential Composition after June 2024**



Note: The current European Parliament has 705 seats, and this will increase to 720 in June 2024. The "non-attached" members in the forecast includes 4 MEPs from parties who are not currently affiliated to a political group. The forecast sizes come from EuropeElects.eu.

new Parliament, with the median MEP moving from the centrist Renew Group to the European People's Party (EPP). Because legislative coalitions in the European Parliament form on an issue-by-issue basis – as we will show – the political location of the median MEP in the Parliament is critical, as this member is invariably on the winning side in key votes. This will put the EPP in a powerful position, in that it will be able to decide whether to form coalitions to the centre/left (with RE, S&D, and G/EFA) – or to the right (with ECR and ID).

Third, the two historically dominant groups in the European Parliament – EPP and S&D – will be slightly more marginalised. The EPP is almost certain to remain the largest group, but the classic "grand coalition" between these two groups will be further diminished. This coalition fell below 50 per cent of the MEPs for the first time in 2019, which forced these two groups to work more closely with RE. However, these three parties together will only be able to command a clear majority of seats in key votes if they can enforce a high level of party discipline.

In combination, these three changes are likely to have a dramatic effect on political dynamics in the next Parliament and on policy outcomes.

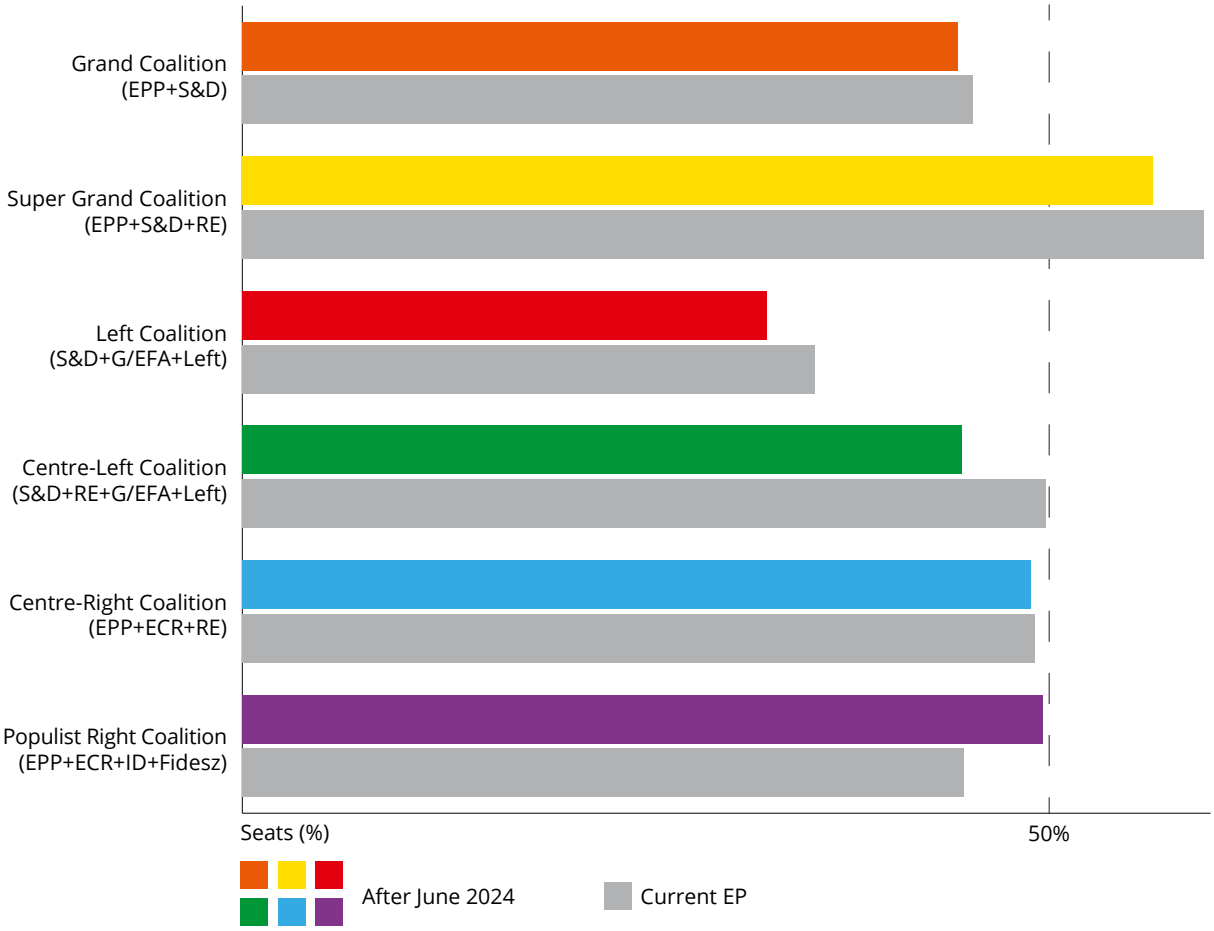
3. Changing Political Dynamics: Coalition Sizes

To start to consider the potential implications of the election outcome let us first look at the likely sizes of the various coalitions in the Parliament. Unlike in national parliaments in Europe, there is no built-in "governing coalition" in the European Parliament. Instead, coalitions form issue-by-issue, and even vote-by-vote on each issue in the Parliament. Hence, the size of the potential coalitions that could form on an issue is a key determinant of the likely political and policy implications of the 2024 elections. Figure 2 hence shows the changing sizes of the main types of coalitions in the chamber.

The "grand coalition" between the EPP and S&D is likely to continue to decline, and the "super grand coalition" between EPP, S&D and RE is set to decline from just below 60 per cent of the seats to just over 56 per cent. So, the three centrist groups should still be able to command a majority in the chamber, but they will not be able to afford too many defectors amongst their ranks of national parties and MEPs.

A "left coalition" (of S&D, G/EFA, and the Left) is likely to fall to approximately 33 per cent of the seats, whereas a "centre-right coalition" (of EPP, RE, and ECR) is likely to rise to 49 per cent of the seats.

Figure 2. **Coalition Sizes**



Source: Compiled by the authors from EuropeElects data and data about the current group sizes on the European Parliament website.

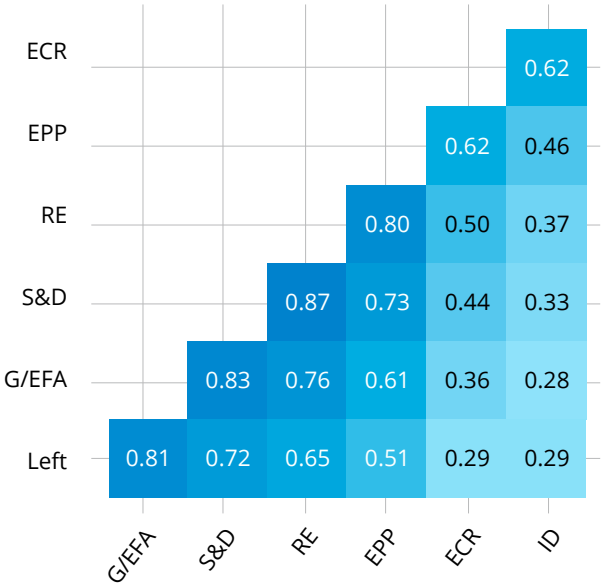
To illustrate how the change in the location of the median MEP will be significant, consider the changing power of the "centre-left coalition", which occurs when RE votes with the three groups to their left. In the 2019-24 Parliament, this coalition just about commanded a majority of seats, but is now likely to fall below 50 per cent of the seats for the first time. Against this centre-left coalition, a "populist right coalition" (of EPP, ECR, ID and *Fidesz*) is expected to grow from 44.7 per cent of the seats to 49.6 per cent. So, on policy issues in which the centre-left groups used to be able to vote against the EPP and win, they will no longer be able to do so. Instead, the EPP will be the pivotal player, knowing that they may be able to win key votes by "leaning rightwards", and voting with ECR and ID instead of voting with RE and S&D. This shift of power is likely to have major implications for the direction of EU politics and policy in the coming years.

4. Policy Implications

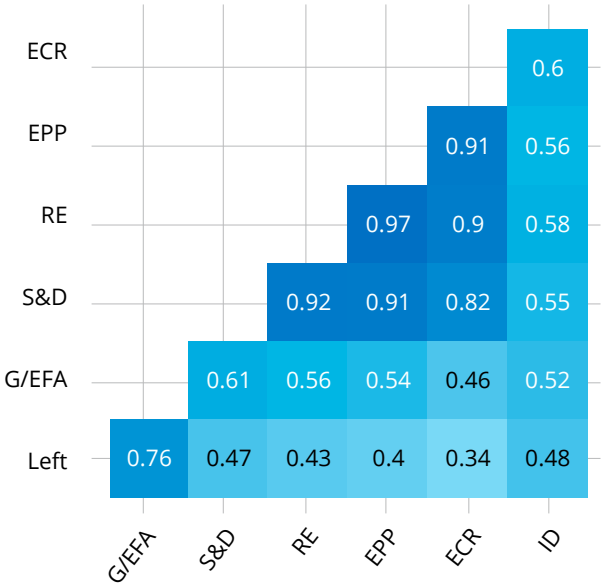
To analyse how these changing coalition sizes will shape policy, we will look at how coalition patterns vary by policy area in the current (2019-24) European Parliament. A **super grand coalition**, between EPP, S&D and RE, has generally formed and won in votes on foreign affairs; international trade; economic and monetary affairs; internal market and consumer protection; budget; industry, research and energy; culture and education; legal affairs; and transport and tourism. A **centre-left coalition**, of RE voting with S&D, G/EFA, and the Left, has generally formed and won votes on environment, public health and food safety; civil liberties and justice and home affairs; development; employment and social affairs; constitutional affairs; and women's rights and gender equality. And a **centre-right coalition**, of RE voting with EPP, RE, and ECR (and often with ID as well), has generally formed and won only on agriculture and rural development; and fisheries.

Figure 3. **Coalition Patterns in the 2019-24 Parliament**

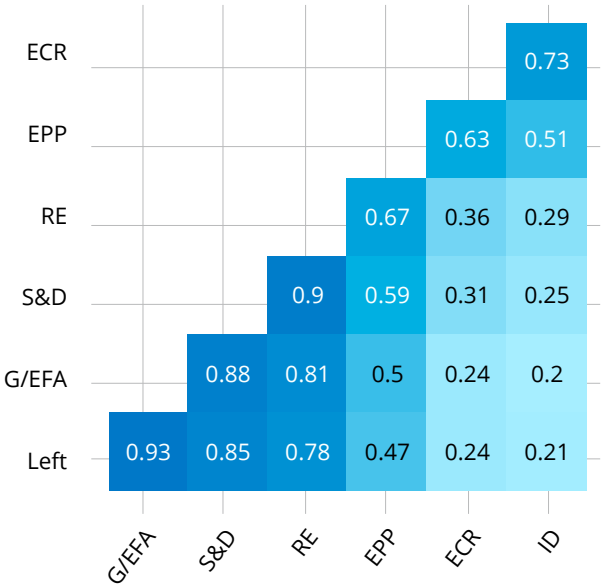
3a. All issues (17,428 votes)



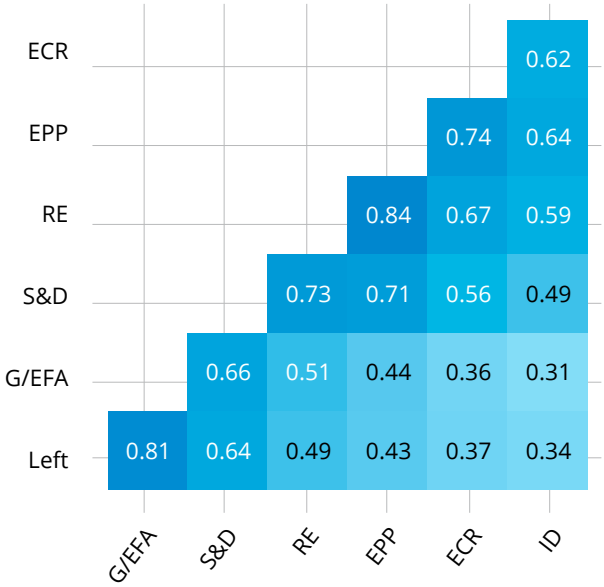
3b. International Trade (132 votes)



3c. Environment, Public Health & Food Safety (2,039 votes)



3d. Agriculture & Rural Development (887 votes)



Note: Entries indicate the proportion of times the majority of MEPs in each pair of political groups voted the same way in a set of votes. Compiled by the authors from voting data available on the European Parliament website.

To illustrate these patterns in more detail, Figure 3 shows the proportion of times the majority of MEPs in each pair of political groups has voted the same way in all votes in the current Parliament and in three key policy areas – the Appendix shows the coalition patterns in all the other policy areas.

First, Figure 3a (the top-left panel) shows the coalition patterns for all roll-call (recorded) votes in the 2019-24 Parliament (until the end of January 2024). Many votes are not contentious, so the baseline proportional matches between groups is high compared to most national parliaments.

Nevertheless, the data show that, on average, EPP and S&D voted the same way 73 per cent of the time. RE voted 87 per cent of the time with S&D, 76 per cent of the time with G/EFA, and only 80 per cent of the time with EPP. This suggests that, on average, the pivotal group in the 2019-24 Parliament (Renew Europe) has slightly tended to "lean left". Meanwhile, EPP voted with ECR only 62 per cent of the time. Recall, that the bloc of RE, S&D, G/EFA and the Left command a majority of seats in the current Parliament.

Figure 3b (the top-right panel) shows the pattern of votes on international trade, where there has been a clear super grand coalition: with EPP voting 91 per cent of the time with S&D, and RE voting 97 per cent of the time with EPP and 92 per cent of the time with S&D.

Figure 3c (the bottom-left panel) shows the pattern of votes on environment, public health and food safety. In this policy area, the centre-left coalition is clearly evident: with RE voting more frequently with S&D, with G/EFA and with the Left than with EPP. Significantly, there have been over 2,000 roll-call votes on these issues in the current Parliament (almost 12 per cent of all recorded votes), which reveals how environmental issues – for example on the various aspects of the European Green Deal – have been a major focus of EU legislation over the past five years.

Finally, Figure 3d (the bottom-right panel) shows the pattern of votes on agriculture and rural development. In this policy area, a centre-right coalition is more evident: with EPP voting more frequently with ECR than with S&D, although RE voted slightly more frequently with S&D than with EPP on these issues as well. Given the widespread farmers protests across Europe in recent weeks, the salience of agriculture issues – particularly in combination with environmental regulations as they affect agricultural production – is likely to increase in the next European Parliament.

5. How Party Cohesion Will Matter

It is important to note, though, that whether a group or coalition of groups wins on a particular policy issue crucially depends on how far the group or the coalition is able to hold together in vote: in other words, the level of "voting cohesion" of the group or coalition. In general, the political groups in the European Parliament have relatively high levels of cohesion in roll-call votes; somewhere between the very high levels of cohesion in most national parliaments in Europe, and the moderate levels of cohesion amongst the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress. Also, voting cohesion in the European Parliament has grown over time, as the powers of the European Parliament have grown and as the political groups have rewarded voting loyalty and punished voting rebellion – for example by promoting loyal MEPs to key committee or report-writing positions, and demoting less loyal MEPs.

Nevertheless, voting cohesion in the European Parliament varies across political groups and policy areas, as Table 1 shows. On average, G/EFA has been the most cohesive group in votes in the 2019-24 Parliament, followed by S&D, and then EPP, RE, and the Left with similar, lower levels of cohesion. In contrast, the two groups to the right of the EPP have been the least cohesive, with ID deeply divided in most votes.

> "In short, the increased size and power of ECR and ID may lead to higher voting cohesion of these groups."

So, despite the likely significant increase in the size of the two groups to the right of the EPP, their lack of cohesion may undermine their ability to influence policy outcomes. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that there is a mutual relationship between internal party cohesion and political group power. In previous sessions of the European Parliament, the more powerful a political group became, the more it had an incentive to set up internal mechanisms to enforce cohesion, such as appointing "group whips" and establishing procedures for issuing voting instructions ahead of key votes and for monitoring how their MEPs vote. For example, as the G/EFA group increased its size and its pivotality on several key policy issues, the cohesion of the group also increased. In short, the increased size and power of ECR and ID may lead to higher voting cohesion of these groups.

Regarding cohesion patterns on some of the major policy issues in this Parliament, on **environment,**

Table 1. **Political Group Cohesion by Policy Area in the 2019-24 Parliament**

Policy Area	Left	G/EFA	S&D	RE	EPP	ECR	ID
Agriculture and Rural Development	70.5	89.6	82.8	75.3	76.7	62	49.6
Budgets	72.1	96.3	71.1	67.5	83.2	45.1	51
Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	68	91.2	83.2	78.1	81	55.7	50.3
Constitutional Affairs	78.7	93.8	90.8	84.1	77.6	55.2	63.3
Culture and Education	38.2	86.7	66.4	60.3	56	67.3	64.2
Development	63.2	94.2	90.1	78.2	81	47.8	51.2
Economic and Monetary Affairs	89	92.7	87	55.3	45.9	39.4	36.3
Employment and Social Affairs	72.1	87	84.9	72.9	83.8	62.4	40
Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	67.5	92	83.5	44.6	61.1	56	40.4
Fisheries	80.3	95.3	79.3	61.5	72.2	64.8	53.5
Foreign Affairs	39.5	90.5	73.3	63.5	76.9	58.9	49.4
Industry, Research and Energy	63	90	82.4	83.1	79.7	64.3	40.5
Internal Market and Consumer Protection	78.9	94.8	80.5	69.3	81.8	69.7	54.3
International Trade	71.9	90.7	77	69.6	80	55.8	36.6
Legal Affairs	66.6	77.1	73.7	77.5	81.9	66.2	40.1
Petitions	74.4	96.1	87.2	77.6	76.3	51.4	53.5
Regional Development	74	91.8	84.9	79.9	82	42.5	46.9
Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age	78.4	91.4	61.5	63.5	56.8	57.9	65.7
Transport and Tourism	75.5	93.4	82.3	81.9	72.5	52.1	33.8
Women's Rights and Gender Equality	63.3	81.7	81.5	87.2	91.8	68.3	17.9
All Votes	71.1	91.6	81.9	72.8	75.3	60	50

Note: Entries are Krippendorff's alpha for nominal data (Krippendorff 2004). This statistical indicator measures the observed agreement between all members of a given political group above the expected agreement by chance. It ranges between 0 and 100, where a value closer to 100 indicates perfect agreement among the members of the political group, while a value closer to 0 indicates agreement no better than chance. The authors calculated the figures from the MEP voting data available on the European Parliament website.

public health and food safety – such as the large volume of votes on the European Green Deal legislation – EPP, RE and ECR have been internally divided while the three groups on the left have been more united. On **foreign affairs** – such as the votes on EU support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia – EPP, S&D, RE and G/EFA (the main coalition on these issues) have been united, while the Left, ECR and ID have been divided. The picture is similar on **civil liberties and justice and home affairs** – such as the votes on the EU Migration and Asylum Pact – where EPP, S&D, RE and G/EFA have been generally united, while the Left, ECR and ID have been more divided. And, in the area of the special committee on **Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age** – which was set up during the 2019-24 Parliament to address growing concerns about the impact of AI on society – only G/EFA and the Left were cohesive in the small number of voters (35) on these issues, while the three centrist groups (S&D, RE, and EPP) were as divided as ECR and ID. In general, in votes on this new set of issues thus far, national positions have dominated European party positions.

These cohesion patterns mean that the coalitions discussed in the previous section are not always stable. For example, in votes on environmental issues, a centre-left coalition can only command a majority in the Parliament if RE, S&D, G/EFA and Left MEPs all vote together, with high cohesion. So, the low level of cohesion of RE on environmental issues means that centre-left majorities on environmental issues have been quite

unstable. The shift in the balance of power after the 2024 elections, with the pivotal party moving from RE to EPP, combined with the low level of cohesion for RE in this policy area, means that a more anti-environment EPP-led populist right coalition is likely to be more dominant on these issues in the next Parliament. This could have significant implications for the European Green Deal, as the majority of MEPs after June 2024 are likely to oppose ambitious actions to achieve the transition to a low carbon emissions economy.

6. Coalition and Cohesion Patterns on Specific Votes

To illustrate the patterns of coalitions and cohesion on key issues in the 2019-24 Parliament, we look at the vote-splits in four roll-call votes – see Figure 4. While these four votes are only a selection of the many thousands of recorded votes in the European Parliament, they nicely illustrate the coalitions that tend to form in each policy area as well as the internal party splits.

The first panel, Figure 4a, shows how the MEPs voted on 25 November 2020 on a motion calling on the EU member states to intensify measures to resettle asylum-seekers, which included introducing "humanitarian corridors" for refugees. There was a clear left-right split in the vote, with RE voting with S&D, G/EFA and the Left, against EPP, ECR and ID. The vote passed by 350 votes in favour, 313 against, and 31 abstentions. RE and EPP were less cohesive in the vote than the other groups, with some RE MEPs voting with the right and some EPP MEPs voting with the left. These patterns were similar in many other votes in the 2019-24 Parliament on migration-related issues, where a centre-left majority won most votes, but RE and EPP were often internally divided. In the next Parliament, with a smaller centre-left bloc and more MEPs in EPP, ECR and ID, the majority on migration issues is likely to be on the right rather than on the left.

The second panel, 4b, shows the vote-split on 7 April 2022, on the first package of EU sanctions against Russia at the start of the Ukraine war. There was an overwhelming majority supporting the package of measures (413 in favour, 93 against, and 46 abstentions), with the majorities in all the groups, except for the Left, voting in favour. Nevertheless, the Left and ID were deeply split on this issue, and many S&D MEPs and a significant proportion of EPP MEPs voted against their groups' positions in the vote. Overall, though, in most votes relating to the EU's position on the Ukraine war and towards Russia, the European governments and the Commission have been backed by a large majority of MEPs, from the three centrist groups, G/EFA and most of ECR.

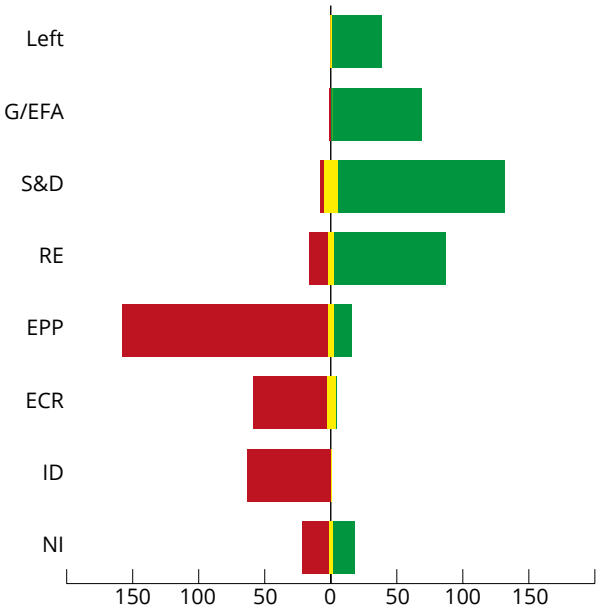
"Overall in most votes relating to the EU's position on the Ukraine war and towards Russia, the European governments and the Commission have been backed by a large majority of MEPs, from the three centrist groups, G/EFA and most of ECR."

The third panel, 4c, shows how the MEPs voted on 14 June 2023 on the proposed EU Artificial Intelligence Act, which sets out a new set of European-wide rules regulating the use of artificial intelligence. The position on the legislation from the EP's committee on Civil Liberties and Justice and Home Affairs called for tighter restrictions on the use of AI, to ensure that the technology would be "human-centric" and to restrict its use in policing and criminal justice. A group of centre-left MEPs proposed an amendment to restrict the usage of AI even further, but it was narrowly rejected, by 277 in favour, 306 against, and 38 abstentions. There was a clear left-right split in this vote, as there was on several issues in the vote. Interesting to note about this vote was also the deep split within the populist right, with cohesion in both ECR and ID breaking down. This is one of the key issues on the EU policy agenda on which the populist right MEPs in the European Parliament do not yet have a coherent position.

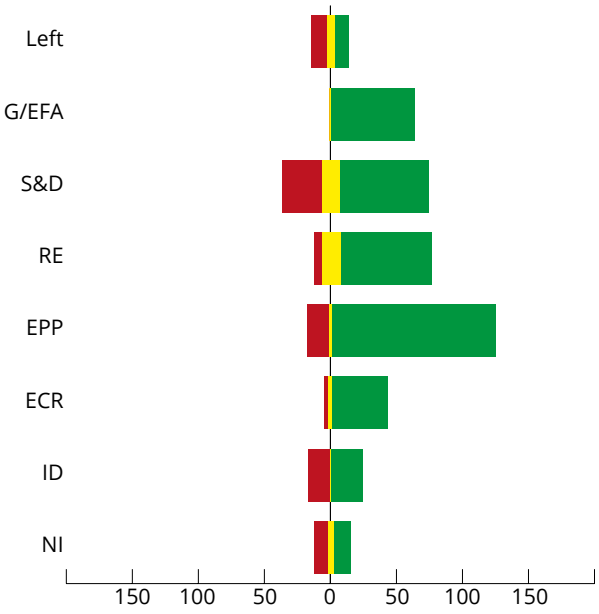
The fourth panel, 4d, shows the vote-split on 27 February 2024 on the final approval of the EU's nature restoration package – a key pillar of the European Green Deal. There were several tight votes on different aspects of the legislation, but the final act passed by 335 votes in favour, to 266 against, with 24 abstentions. As on many

Figure 4. **Splits on Four Key Votes in the 2019-24 European Parliament**

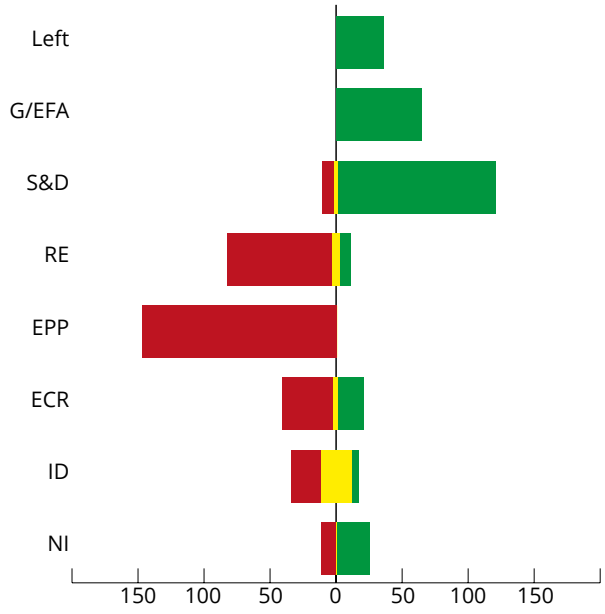
4a. Resettlement of refugees 25/11/2020



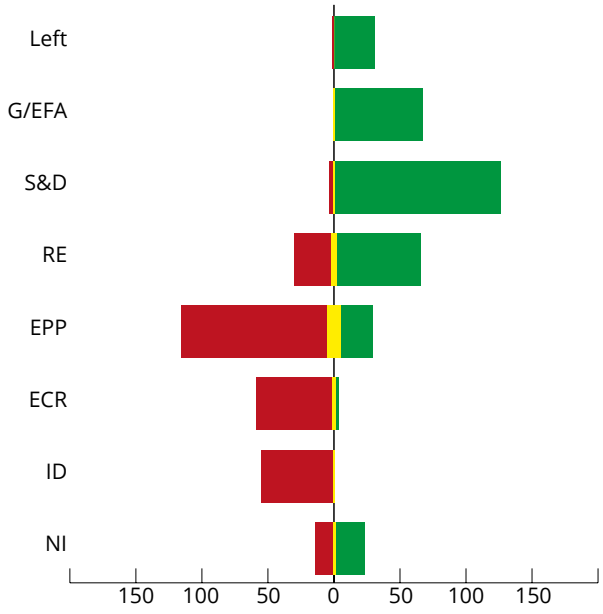
4b. Ukraine and the EU sanctions against Russia 07/04/2022



4c. Artificial Intelligence Act 14/06/2023



4d. Nature Restoration 27/02/2024



Note: In each vote, the bars on the left of the line (in red) show the number of MEPs in a group who voted No in a vote, the bars on the right of the line (in green) show the number of MEPs in a group who voted Yes, and the bars in the middle (in yellow) show the number of MEPs in a group who voted to Abstain. The vote-splits were as follows: Resettlement of refugees: 350 Yes, 313 No, 31 Abstain; Ukraine: 413 Yes, 93 No, 46 Abstain; Artificial intelligence: 277 Yes, 306 No, 38 Abstain; and Nature restoration 335 Yes, 266 No, 24 Abstain.

environmental votes, there was a general left-right split, with the majority of RE voting with the three groups to the left and EPP voting with ECR and ID. Nevertheless, RE and EPP were less cohesive, with a significant minority of RE voting with the right, and a significant minority of EPP voting with the left. With more MEPs on the right of EPP and a larger representation of ECR and ID, and with few MEPs in S&D, G/EFA and the Left, a "populist right" coalition is likely to command a majority in most votes on environmental issues.

In general, these votes illustrate a pattern of left-right splits on migration and environmental issues, where a centre-left majority has tended to win in the current parliament, in part because some EPP MEPs have tended to vote with the left on these issues. They also show a clear majority on the EU's support for Ukraine. The picture is more mixed on new technologies. The vote we highlight showed a left-right split, with clear divisions amongst the two groups on the radical right. Nevertheless, in other votes in this new policy area, a grand coalition came together to win, as they did to support the Artificial Intelligence Act as a whole.

7. Political Implications: The Election of the new Commission President

Moving beyond policy to broader political implications of the changing composition of the European Parliament after June 2024, the first decision of the new Parliament will be to "elect" the next Commission President. This vote will be taken by secret ballot, and to be elected the candidate must win the positive backing of an "absolute majority" of all MEPs (361 of the 720 MEPs) and not just a "simple majority" of those MEPs expressing a Yes or No vote. These two factors might be highly significant in the vote on the new Commission President. The secret ballot will reduce the ability of the political groups to enforce party cohesion in the vote. And, if a significant number of MEPs abstain in the vote, then the candidate will need to win a larger proportion than 50 per cent of those MEPs who participate in the vote to secure the support of an absolute majority of MEPs.

The incumbent Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has announced that she is running for re-election, and will be the EPP's "lead candidate" (*Spitzenkandidat*) ahead of the elections. Most of the other political groups have chosen their own lead candidates to stand against von der Leyen. As in 2019, Renew Europe has nominated a "team" of candidates. ECR has not nominated a candidate for Commission President but will participate in the debates between the candidates. At the time of writing, though, it remains unclear whether ID will nominate a lead candidate. Following the election, the European Council is likely to propose to the European Parliament the candidate from the largest political group in the European Parliament. Since we expect the EPP to be the largest party, the European Council is likely to propose von der Leyen.

> "Since we expect the EPP to be the largest party, the European Council is likely to propose von der Leyen."

After the 2019 elections, von der Leyen was elected in the European Parliament with 383 voted in favour, 327 against, and 22 abstentions (19 MEPs did not take part in the vote). So, she won 51 per cent of the absolute number of MEPs (751 at that time). Although it was a secret ballot, it was clear from the speeches ahead of the vote that von der Leyen won the vote with the backing of the three centrist groups: EPP, S&D and RE. Because the combined size of these three groups will be smaller after June 2024 than in 2019, and because they will not be able to enforce cohesion in the secret ballot, it is likely that von der Leyen will need a larger bloc this time if she is to be re-elected for a second term.

Because of this, and because of the likely rightward shift in the new Parliament, it is not surprising that President von der Leyen has been making overtures to parties to the right of her EPP group. For example, in response to the recent farmers' protests against the costs of implementing EU environmental regulations, President von der Leyen announced that she would be willing to water down some key pieces of the European Green Deal. She has also indicated that she is willing to "do business" on policy questions with the groups to the right of the EPP; a move which was welcomed by ECR.

Von der Leyen faces a delicate balancing act, though. Her recent actions and signals may lead to ECR and even ID being willing to support her

for a second term. However, on the other side of the chamber, these actions will alienate S&D and G/EFA and even many national parties in RE. If these groups refuse to support von der Leyen for a second term, it is unlikely that she will be able to win an absolute majority of MEPs. If EPP, ECR, ID, and *Fidesz* support von der Leyen, these groups could – on the basis of current opinion polls – together control 357 seats – slightly below the 361 required for an absolute majority. The low level of cohesion in ECR and ID combined with the secret ballot in the Commission President vote – which could allow several of the more socially-liberal MEPs in EPP to vote against her – is likely to mean that von der Leyen will need more than EPP, ECR and ID if she is to be re-elected as Commission President.

Put another way, von der Leyen's election for a second term is perhaps not as certain as one might have expected several months ago, and we may end up with a different Commission President after July – with someone who can command broader support across the Parliament.

That said, the election of the Commission President will also be part of a broader package deal covering all the senior posts that will need to be filled: the Commission President, the European Council President, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Parliament President, and even the key Vice-President positions in the Commission. So, the fate of von der Leyen will depend on what positions in the package deal are offered to other key political groups, including S&D, RE, and perhaps even ECR (Kreilinger 2024). Nonetheless, with a more fragmented and polarized European Parliament, a package deal may be more difficult to piece together than in previous periods. Also, we expect deep divisions in all the political groups on the left over whether to accept the package deal if the deal means accepting a Commission President who is intent on governing with the backing of a populist right bloc in the new Parliament.

8. Conclusion

The June 2024 European Parliament elections are likely to produce the most right-leaning European Parliament in the history of the European Union. One quarter of the MEPs are set to be on the radical right, and the average member of the chamber is likely to be a member of the centre-right EPP rather than the centrist Renew Europe group.

> "For the first time, a right-wing majority of MEPs could set a new direction of policy on several key issues."

These shifts could have major policy and political implications for the direction of the EU over the next five years. For the first time, a right-wing majority of MEPs could set a new direction of policy on several key issues. Looking at MEP and group voting patterns in the current Parliament, we expect that the majority in the next European Parliament will be more critical of the EU's ambitious environmental policy, choosing to support producer interests (like farmers) rather than consumers and future generations of Europeans. Similarly, we expect the new majority to support restrictive rather than liberal migration policies. Nevertheless, on other issues, where the centrist groups in the Parliament have so far been united, such as on European support for Ukraine, the majorities in the new European Parliament are likely to remain stable.

Finally, with a more politically fragmented Parliament, and with internal divisions in several of the groups on some key policy issues, majority coalitions may be unstable. This has been the case, for example, in votes on new technology issues, such as the regulation of artificial intelligence, where coalitions have shifted vote-by-vote and party cohesion has tended to be low, particular in the groups on the right. Unstable coalitions and weak internal party cohesion, particularly in EPP and RE, could also mean that the vote to re-elect Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President might be closer than she might have expected a few months ago.

References

Cunningham, Kevin, Simon Hix, Susie Dennison, and Imogen Learmouth. 2024. A Sharp Turn Right: A Forecast for the European Parliament Elections, European Council on Foreign Relations, 23 January 2024.

Hix, Simon, Abdul Noury and Gérard Roland. 2006. Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament. *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2) 494-520.

Hix, Simon, Abdul Noury and Gérard Roland. 2007. *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

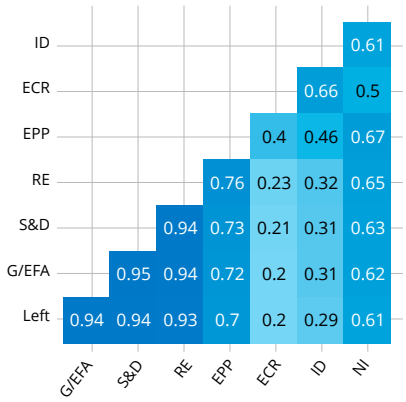
Kreilinger, Valentin. 2024. Procedures, Politics, Policies: The Pieces of the Puzzle for the Next Institutional Cycle of the EU, SIEPS, March 2024:6epa.

Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. Reliability in Content Analysis: Some Common Misconceptions and Recommendations. *Human Communication Research* 30(3) 411-433.

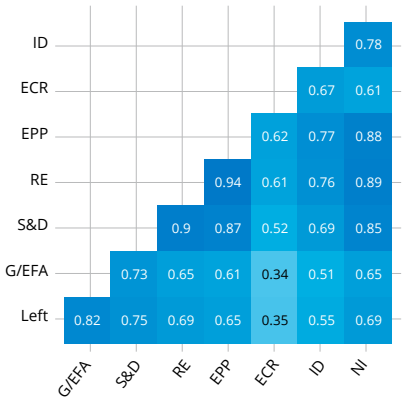
Appendix

Coalition Patterns in the 2019-24 European Parliament in Other Policy Areas

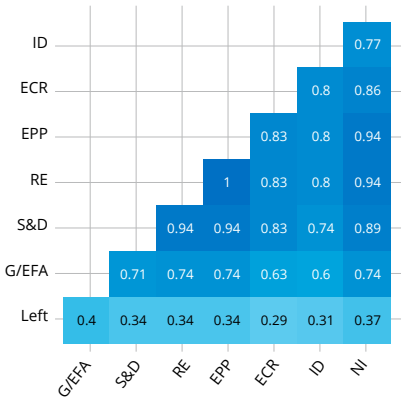
Women's Rights and Gender Equality (379 votes)



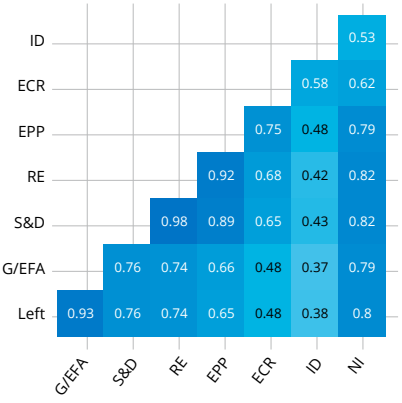
Transport and Tourism (310 votes)



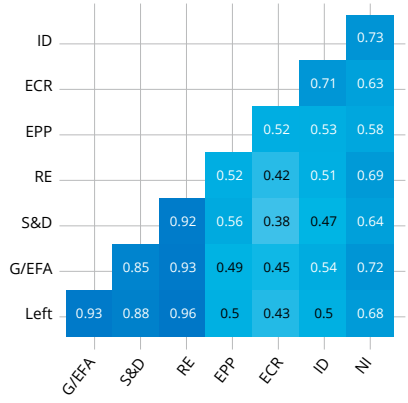
Special Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age (35 votes)



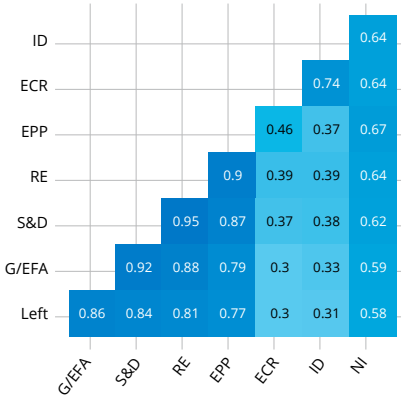
Regional Development (132 votes)



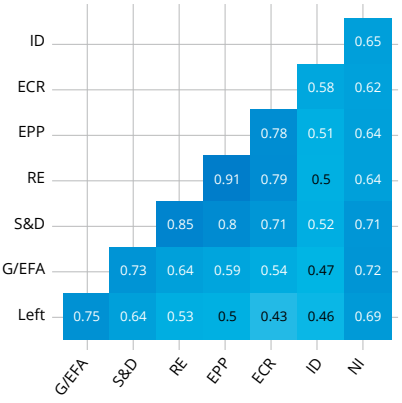
Petitions (310 votes)



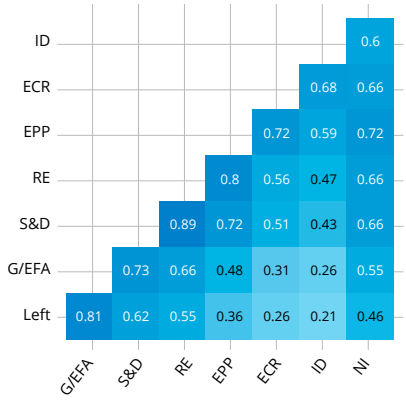
Legal Affairs (316 votes)



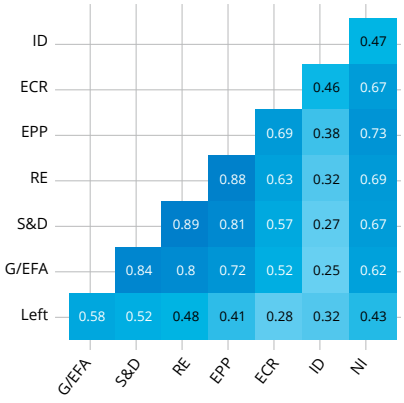
Internal Market and Consumer Protection (401 votes)



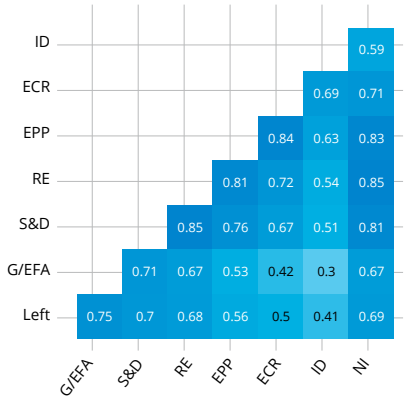
Industry, Research and Energy (466 votes)



Foreign Affairs (1,777 votes)

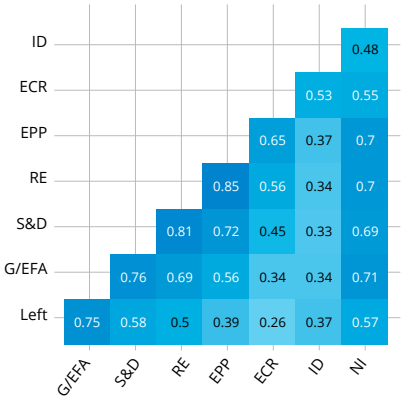


Fisheries (270 votes)

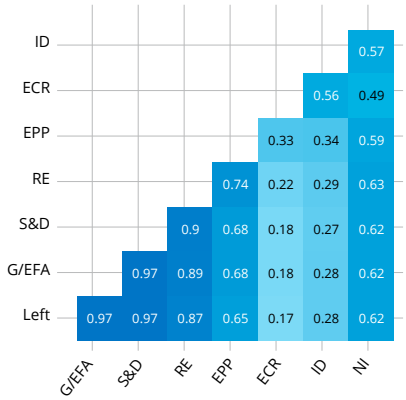


Employment and Social Affairs (851 votes)

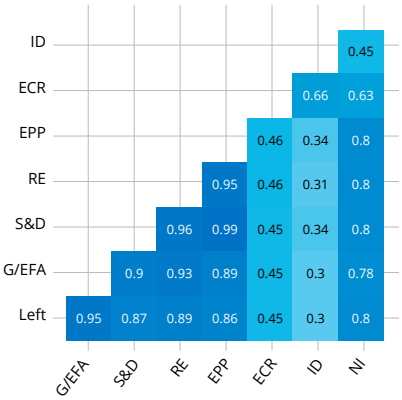
Economic and Monetary Affairs (718 votes)



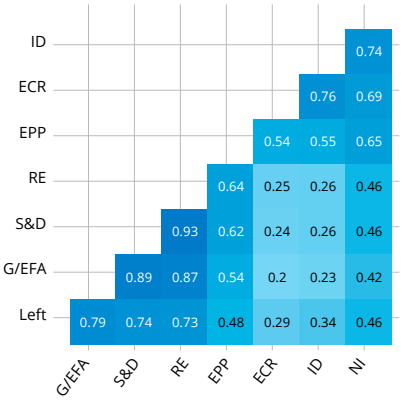
Development (236 votes)



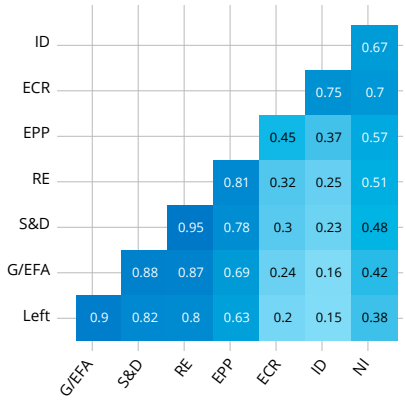
Culture and Education (129 votes)



Constitutional Afffairs (687 votes)



Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (959 votes)



Budgets (2,122 votes)