

Smaller, Diverse, United: Greens after the European Elections

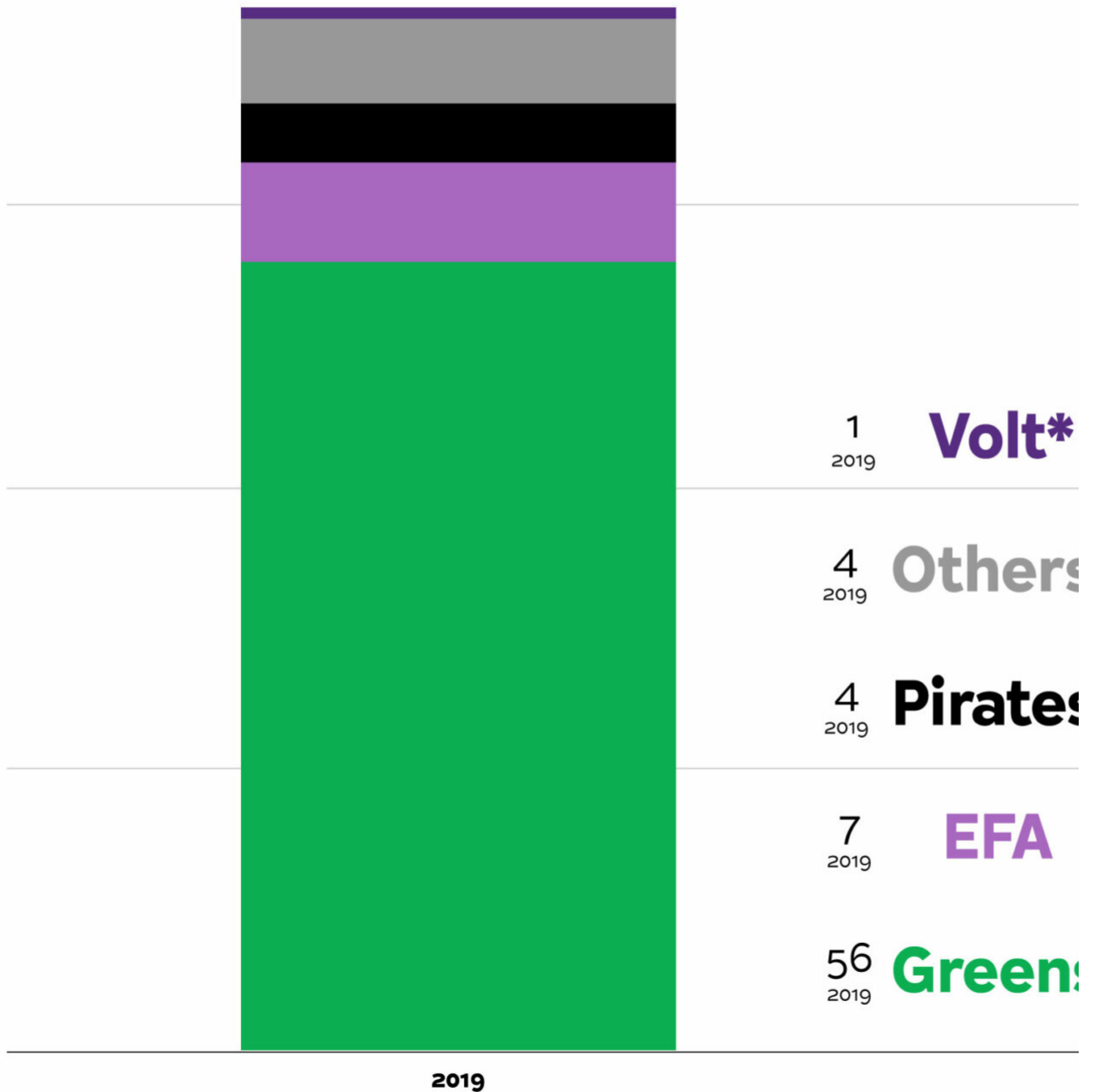
Article by Filipe Henriques
June 20, 2024

In the new European Parliament, Greens will be a more diverse yet ideologically coherent group. Though their ranks are smaller, they can be a reliable partner to build a solid pro-European majority. But they should use their strategic weight wisely, retaining their role as a progressive force pushing for change.

If we forgot everything that has happened in European politics over the past five years and just looked at the results of the European elections, we would conclude that not much has changed. The grand coalition of the centre-right European People's Party, Socialists, and Liberals went from 59 to 56 per cent of the seats in the European Parliament – an overall loss of 43 seats. This is not a major drop, especially in light of the departure of the 27 British labour and liberal-democratic MEPs due to Brexit, and the exit from their respective parliamentary groups of Hungary's Fidesz (13 MEPs) and Slovakia's Smer (3 MEPs) due to their radicalisation. The forces to the left of the grand coalition – Greens, Left, and left-wing independents – went from 18 to 17 per cent of the seats, and those to the right – ECR, ID and right-wing independents – increased their representation from 23 to 27 per cent of the parliament compared to 2019.

Green Group in the European Parliament

Members by subgroup in 2019 and 2024



The changes brought about by these elections are more in terms of substance than of numbers. The radical right has been normalised, the mainstream right has radicalised itself, progressive forces have lost radicality, and a new nationalistic, anti-establishment, and anti-immigration left has gained representation.

A significant challenge to the status quo of European politics would be the formation of two new nationalist, extremist, pro-Russian, German-led groups in the European Parliament: one on the left, headed by Sahra Wagenknecht's BSW (together with Italy's Five Star Movement and Slovakia's Smer), and one on the right, led by Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). 23 MEPs from at least seven member states are needed to form a parliamentary group. If these groups were to materialise (something

that is far from certain, especially on the left), they would contribute to normalising the established far right – the ECR and ID Groups – by making it appear less extreme. Worse, they would further radicalise the migration and peace debates in the European Parliament.

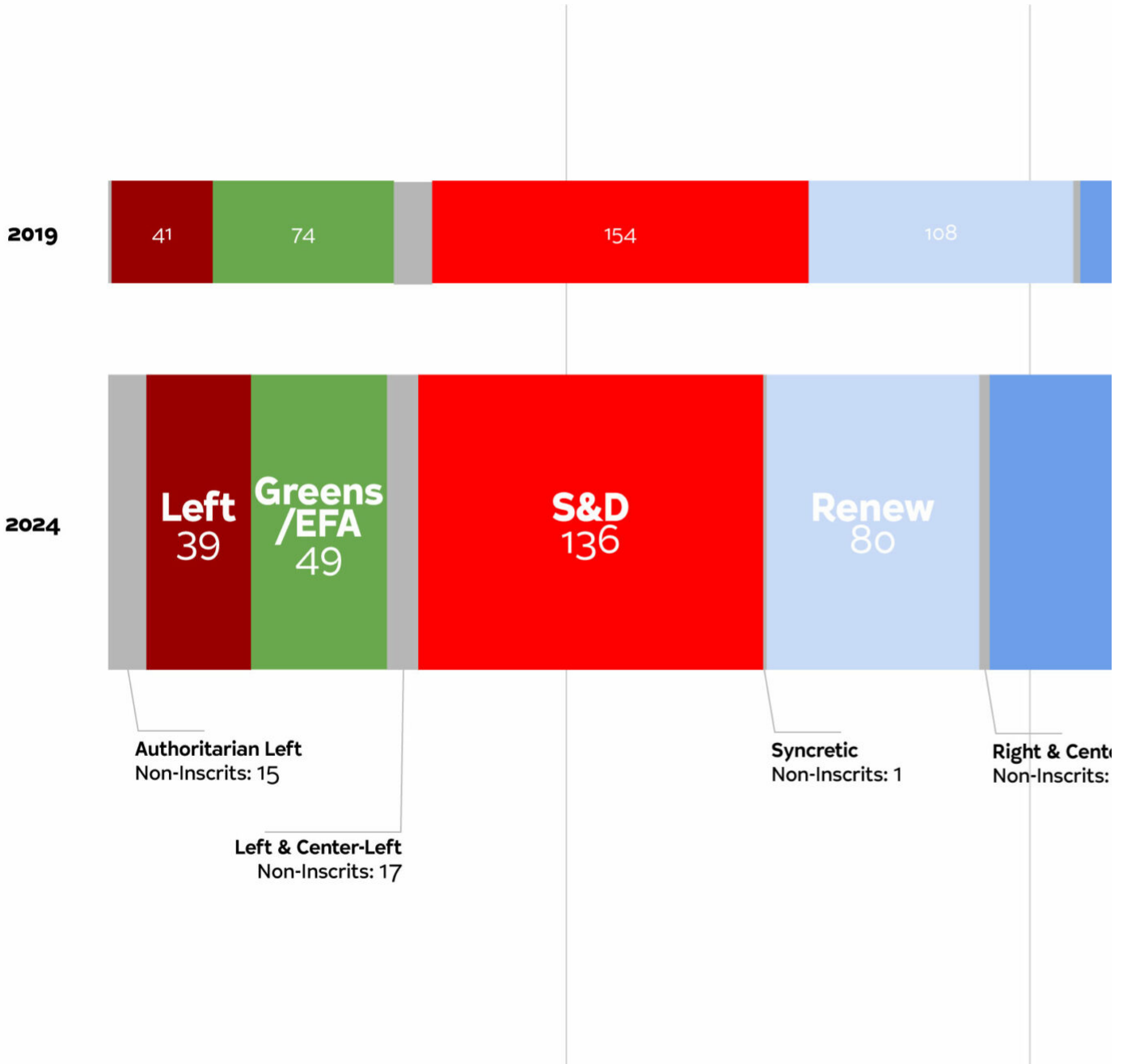
The new Green group

While the vote share of far-right parties did not increase to the extent that some feared, the elections did not go well for progressives. The Greens in particular lost 22 MEPs compared to 2019: nine in Germany, five in France, two in Ireland, one in Belgium, and seven in Britain due to Brexit.

The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament seems likely to return to 2014 numbers, making up around 7 per cent of the seats. This is not only due to the results of the Greens but also of their allies in the group: the European Free Alliance lost four MEPs, and the European Pirate Party. The group's numbers could still change as negotiations with independent parties and elected MEPs are ongoing. Importantly, the five MEPs elected with Volt Europa have yet to decide which group to join.

Composition of the European Parliament

By Group in 2019 and 2024



Brexit aside, the Greens' losses in these European elections are mainly due to their result in France and Germany. In France, the polarisation between Macron and Le Pen's supporters, as well as the infighting of the Left, has played against the Greens. On the progressive front, fragmentation was visible not so much in the absence of a common list for the European elections, but mainly in the lack of the parties' mutual recognition as part of the same political bloc. This benefited Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise and Raphaël Glucksman's PS-PP list, the largest and more polarising forces in the left camp. This disunity has so clearly damaged the French Left that a few days after the European elections, progressives formed a "nouveau front populaire" for the upcoming snap legislative ballot.

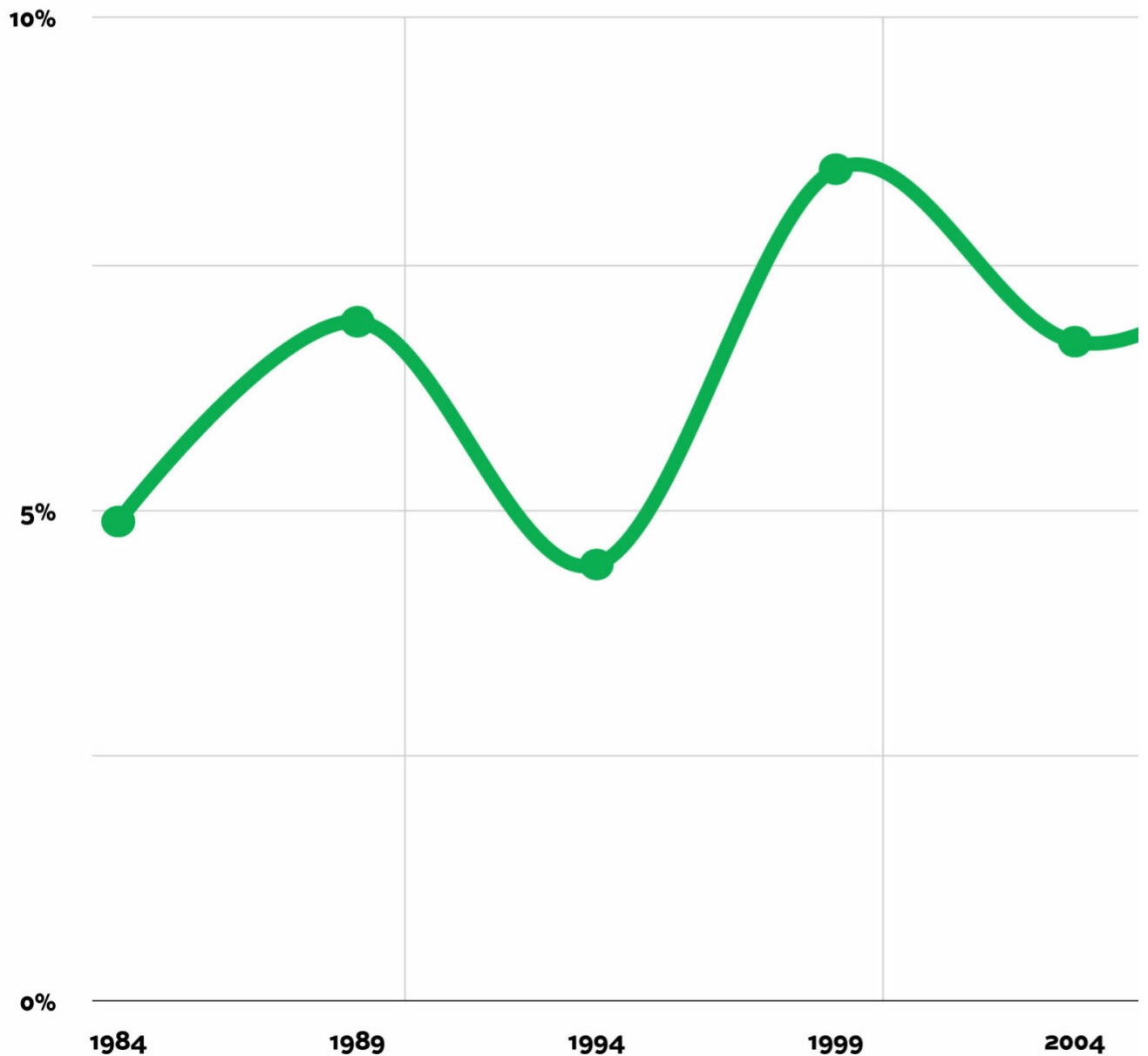
In Germany, the Greens' electoral performance is in line with those of other Green parties that are part of national coalition governments, such as in Belgium and Ireland. In these countries, Greens have not been able to prove to their voters that they have achieved enough positive change to justify being in government. In Germany, voters punished not just the Greens but also their partners in the "traffic light" coalition, the centre-left SPD and the neoliberal FDP.

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As a result, the new Green group in the European Parliament will be one of the least German, least Franco-German, and least Western European Green groups ever. But also one of the most Nordic, Southern, and Eastern European – all at the same time. Finally, the group is likely to be more "purely" Green compared to the previous term: apart from three EFA MEPs, one Pirate, and two independents (and pending the decision of the five Volt MEPs), all its MEPs are members of the European Greens.

Green Group in the European Parlia

Size in percentage of the European Parliament from 19



The Greens/EFA Group has traditionally been the most united in the European Parliament. Green negotiators can usually count on the vast majority of their group to back their decisions. This is unlikely to change in the new Parliament: despite its increased geographic diversity, the group is set to remain ideologically coherent. The German Greens might oppose a strong condemnation of Israel, the Italian Greens may vote against military support to Ukraine, and the Lithuanian Democrats could refuse to back more humane drug laws, but these are expected to remain minority positions within the group.

Across Eastern Europe, the Greens have managed to establish solid national parties that have won seats in both the European and national parliaments, and are now

strong progressive voices. In Slovenia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Latvia, Greens have elected new MEPs by focusing their campaign on climate and social messaging, presenting themselves as credible progressive alternatives to the status quo. In Denmark and Sweden, the Greens' strong opposition to far-right policies – whether pushed through by the far right or by radicalised “centrist” forces – brought them historic results. In Italy and the Netherlands, the results of progressive green-left alliances exceeded expectations.

New reality

In the new term, the Greens will be numerically weaker but more diverse and representative of Europe's complexity. Most importantly, they will be more relevant than ever to build majorities in the European Parliament. What they have achieved in European politics since 2019 is notable, but it is not irreversible. In the second part of the previous term, the EPP started backtracking on climate policies and reaching out to its right. This radicalisation of the centre right will not disappear, but if the grand coalition of EPP, Socialists, and Liberals wants a stable pro-European majority, it will have to rely on the Greens.

Greens will have to use their strategic weight wisely. Working towards compromise and being a reliable partner of the new majority is a positive role to play, but standing up for human rights and the climate is equally important. For this reason, they should draw clear red lines for cooperation with the majority coalition. The election results show that voters across Europe still see them as a credible alternative to the status quo, especially when they push for progressive change.



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