

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The [European Parliament](#) (EP) is the only directly elected institution in the European Union. The first European Parliament elections took place in 1979 and they are now held every 5 years. The 2009 EP elections took place in every EU member state on 4th–7th June 2009. EU citizens voted for 736 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Any EU citizen can vote in the member state where they live, even if it is not their home country. For the election in the UK, the country was divided into 12 ‘*electoral regions*’ and UK voters elected 72 MEPs.

How are MEPs Elected?

In every EU member state, the electoral system used for the EP election must be based on the principle of **Proportional Representation** (PR). Smaller parties are often more successful in European elections than at national elections due to the use of PR. There are many different systems of PR and member states can choose which system to use:

The UK ‘closed list’ system of PR:

Under the UK’s ‘*Closed list system*’, the country is divided into 12 voting regions (constituencies). In each electoral region, political parties submit a list of candidates and then the electorate votes for a particular party. Voters cannot choose to vote for an individual candidate, they can only choose between parties. If, for example, a party wins a big enough proportion of the vote to win two seats, then the two candidates at the top of that party’s list are elected. **Closed-List systems are criticised** for reinforcing the power of political parties because a candidate’s position on the list is decided by party leaders and if a candidate is higher up the list, they are more likely to be elected. Closed-lists are also criticised for making it difficult for voters to reject an individual representative if they feel that he/she has done a bad job in office. This can encourage candidates to prioritise loyalty to their party rather than concentrating on their relationship with the voters who elected them.

Ireland’s Single Transferable Vote (STV) system of PR:

Ireland uses a totally different method to the Closed-List known as the *Single Transferable Vote (STV)*. Under STV, instead of marking an ‘X’ in the box beside a party’s name, voters choose the individual candidates they prefer. Voters indicate their order of preference by writing 1, 2, 3, etc., in the box beside the candidates’ names. Each constituency sets a quota to determine how many votes a candidate needs to be elected. If a candidate gets more votes than the quota, they are elected and their extra votes are transferred to the remaining candidates in the order of preference that voters had indicated on the ballot papers. Candidates with the fewest votes are progressively eliminated and their votes are also transferred to the more popular candidates. STV creates strong competition within political parties because representatives can lose their seat to a more popular candidate from their own party. Critics of the system argue that this can lead to divided parties and that it encourages representatives to focus too much on *local /national* issues to improve their chances of re-election, rather than *European* issues. The huge differences between the British and Irish systems show the variety of election method used across Europe.

Parties and Groupings in the EP

Once MEPs are elected from the 27 member states they do not form political parties in the European Parliament based on their nationality (for example, there is no ‘British Party’ made up of MEPs from the UK). Instead, MEPs from many member states form parties (or groupings) in the EP based on their political stance (e.g. the centre-right European Peoples Party (EPP) and the centre-left *Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)*). Creating EU-wide groupings is meant to encourage MEPs to represent voters on a European level, rather than concentrating on national issues. EP parties are often very loose groupings with, for example, pro-European and Euro-sceptic parties sitting in the same group.

No **EP grouping has an overall majority**, but political groupings need to build a majority to influence law-making in the parliament. This is why the two largest groupings – the EPP and the S&D - build coalitions with smaller groups to pass or block legislation.

What is PR?

Proportional Representation is a principle of election which tries to match the percentage of the vote that a party gets in an election to the percentage of seats the party receives.

For national elections, political parties set out a proposed government programme (laws and proposals that they would introduce if elected) in an *election manifesto*. But because the European Parliament does not propose laws, the parties and groupings of the EP cannot offer a concrete programme of laws and initiatives that they would implement if they were elected.

Since 2004, EU political parties have received funding from the EU budget. In 2009, the rules governing the funding of EU political parties changed so that to form a political grouping and receive funding, a group needs 25 MEPs from a minimum of seven member states. Those in favour of the new rules want to make sure that extreme parties (which often have fewer members) are not eligible for funding from the EU budget, but the new rules have been **criticised as undemocratic** because they discriminate against small parties.

2. 2009 Results

The 2009 EP election in the UK

In Britain, the 2009 EP election campaigns were overshadowed by a scandal in Westminster (some UK MPs were alleged to have manipulated the parliament’s expenses system to claim money that they were not entitled to). The MPs ‘expenses scandal’ dominated headlines before the election and the EP campaigns receiving little coverage.

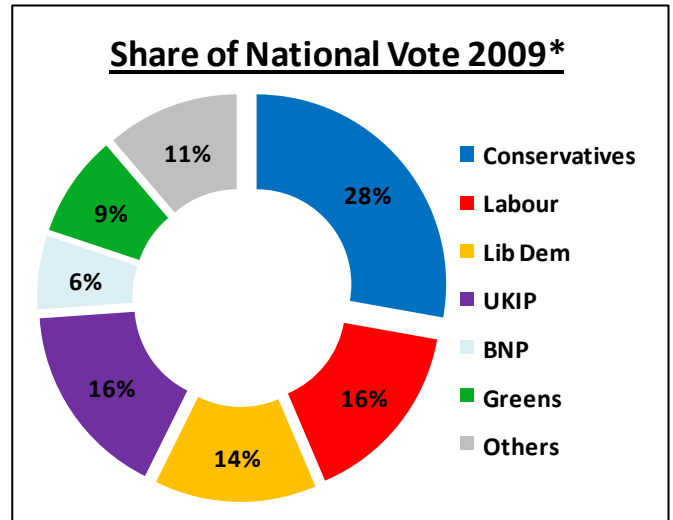
In the UK’s EP election, the **UK Conservative Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) together received over 40%** of the vote. While the UK Conservatives do not share UKIP’s view that the UK should leave the EU altogether,

2009-2014 UK MEPs by Party*	
Conservatives	25
UKIP	13
Labour	13
Lib Dem	11
BNP	2
Greens	2
SNP	2
Plaid Cymru	1
*Excludes Northern Ireland	

the Conservative Party believes that many of the EU’s powers should be returned to the UK. In spite of their fierce opposition to the EU’s [Lisbon Treaty](#), the Conservatives were not able to reduce UKIP’s share of the vote. The Conservative Party campaigned on their promise to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in Britain (Ireland was the

only EU member state to hold a referendum on the EU’s latest Treaty) but this failed to provoke a significant national debate.

Looking at the [voting figures from the 2009 election](#) in the UK, smaller UK political parties received more votes compared with 2004; the Green Party gained 300,000 votes while the British National Party (BNP) gained 135,000. (See table below). The main UK political parties received fewer votes than in 2004: the Conservative Party lost nearly 250,000 votes, and the Liberal Democrats lost nearly 400,000. The biggest loser was the Labour Party, which lost over 1.3 million votes compared to 2004. In Wales, the Labour party lost its position as the largest party for the first time since 1918! For example, in the Yorkshire & Humber



Votes Cast in the UK - 2004 & 2009				
	2004	2009	Change	Change 04-09
Con	4,397,090	4,198,394	-198,696	-5%
Lab	3,718,683	2,381,760	-1,336,923	-36%
Lib Dem	2,452,327	2,080,613	-371,714	-15%
UKIP	2,650,768	2,498,226	-152,542	-6%
BNP	808,200	943,598	+135,398	+17%
Green	1,028,283	1,303,745	+275,462	+27%
Total Votes Cast	16,853,249	15,000,275	-1,852,974	-11%

region – where the BNP gained an MEP - the total number of votes cast decreased by nearly 20% but specifically, the number of votes received by the Labour Party was down by over 40%, compared to the 2004 election.

To find out which MEPs were elected in your area, please visit the [website of the European Parliament’s UK office](#).

The 2009 EP election across the EU:

Small, extreme-right political parties did well in the European Parliament elections across the EU. In addition to the British National Party (BNP) in the UK, the far right Dutch Freedom Party (PvdV) won 17% of votes, which meant it won 4 of the Netherlands' EP seats. PvdV leader Geert Wilders was banned from entering Britain in February 2009 for posing a threat to 'community harmony and therefore public security'. In Hungary, the far-right nationalist party *Jobbik* – accused of extreme anti-Semitism and xenophobia – received 15% of the vote. Nationalist and anti-immigration parties were also successful in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Romania and Italy. These parties might try to form an extreme-right group in the EP so that they can receive EU funding and other benefits. However, the parties have very different priorities and may find it difficult to cooperate enough to form and maintain a grouping.

The failure of the centre-left

The most significant electoral trend across the EU was the defeat of centre-left parties. In the UK, many voters used the European Parliament election to protest against the Labour Government by voting for smaller parties instead, and similarly in Spain, the governing Socialist Party lost the EP election to the centre-right opposition. But not all governing parties in government suffered the same defeat. Centre-right governments currently hold power in the majority of EU countries and in France, Italy, Poland and Germany – all countries with centre-right governments – the governing parties won the largest share of the vote.

It is surprising that centre-left parties were not able to gain support as a result of the global economic crisis which led many countries into recession before the election. Many Europeans blamed governments for causing the recession by allowing weak supervision of international banking. This type of light government regulation of business is a key element of '**neo-liberal**' economics, an economic policy often associated with centre-right parties over the last 20 years.

The rejection of centre-left parties by voters across Europe means that the European People's Party (EPP) remains the largest party in the EU Parliament. The EPP may be weakened because the UK Conservative Party will leave the EPP to form a new euro-sceptic grouping with parties from other EU member states. This would not alter the 'left-right' balance in Parliament, but it would be a further fragmentation of parties in the EP so it will become even more important for EP groupings to **build coalitions** with a number of parties.

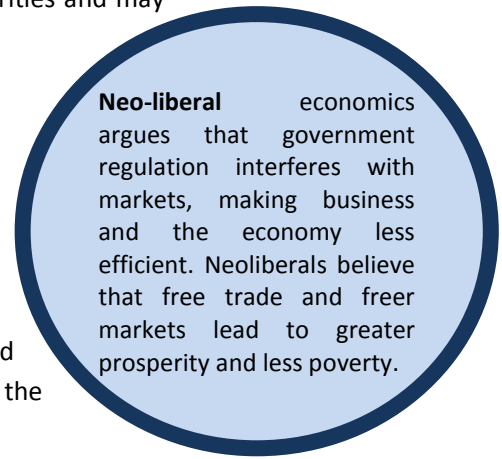
Increased support for 'single-issue' parties

The use of **proportional representation** systems and decreasing turnout for EP elections has led to more unpredictable results. 'Single-issue' parties - campaigning on one issue, such as the environment – are often quite successful. For example, in 2009 there was **increased support for Green Parties** across Europe and the *Greens Grouping* in the EP gained 9 seats, which could make it a crucial coalition partner for the larger groups seeking to influence legislation. The Swedish [Pirate Party](#) – which campaigns on internet privacy – caused an upset in Sweden by winning a seat in the EP. Smaller 'fringe' parties can often use EP election success as a springboard for national campaigns. In France, for example, the extreme-right *National Front* emerged as a national party largely due to its successes at EP elections. Similarly in Britain, mainstream political parties fear that European elections give a platform to extremist parties, such as the *British National Party* (BNP) which gained 2 MEPs in the 2009 EP election.

Falling voter turnout:

Overall voter turnout at EP elections has consistently fallen from 63% in 1979 to a **low of 43% in 2009**. **Voter turnout in the UK's 2009 election was only 35%**. The lowest turnout in the EU was in Slovakia (20%), closely followed by Lithuania (21%) and Poland (25%). Low participation at EP elections appears to indicate a decreasing interest in European elections across the EU.

A number of factors could explain voters' apathy towards EU election:



- i. **The European Parliament has no power to propose laws** and in most matters the EP can only vote to amend or accept/reject a law proposed by the European Commission. Whilst EU reforms over the last 20 years have given the EP a greater say in EU law-making, this is a problem because people are less likely to vote at EP elections if they feel that the European Parliament has limited power and that it doesn't affect them.
- ii. **EP election campaigns tend to focus on national issues rather than European issues.** This encourages voters to use European Parliament elections to express a 'protest vote' against national governments, ignoring the European issues. In an **attempt to increase interest in the 2009 election**, the EP launched an €18 million (£16m) campaign entitled **'It's Your Choice'** to send a "single message about choice". The campaign used television ads, billboards and (in an attempt to connect with younger voters) internet sites such as *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Flickr*. Despite this campaign, at the 2009 EP election the trend of national campaigning continued and the National parties' campaigns did not concentrate on European Issues.
- iii. **The cost of the EP:** In 2007, the **European Parliament cost over €1.3bn** (£1.14bn) and had a staff of about 5,000 people. €1.3bn represents around €2.60 (£2.20) per citizen of the EU (the UK Parliament costs around £3.60 per UK citizen). From 2009, MEPs will be paid a **monthly salary of €7,000** (£6,100) from the EU budget. The majority of MEPs' work takes place in Brussels; however, the EPs must meet 12 times a year in Strasbourg. The Strasbourg sessions have been criticised as a waste of taxpayers' money. The cost of moving the EP once a month is estimated at around £175m per year.

3. WHAT THE NEW PARLIAMENT WILL DO

The European Parliament's **formal powers** include:

- Approving the annual [EU budget](#)
- Approving the appointment of Commissioners and the Commission President
- Forcing the whole Commission to resign by voting for a 'motion of censure'

Co-decision: an EU Commission proposal must be approved by both the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers before it can become law.

On a day-to-day basis, the EP has an important role in [EU decision making](#). The 'co-decision' procedure is used across a wide range of EU law-making, from telecoms regulation to immigration policy, environmental measures and consumer protection. In this way, decisions of the EP impact upon the daily lives of all EU citizens. If the EU Lisbon Treaty comes into force during the next Parliamentary session (2009-2014) the EP would have co-decision powers over almost all EU legislation, including increased power over [co-operation in law enforcement to combat crime](#).

Key decisions made by the last European Parliament (2004-2009) include:

- **The EU 'Services Directive':** allows organisations providing services (e.g. postal services, insurance and media) to operate freely across the EU. Controversial measures in the Directive were significantly altered by the European Parliament, for example certain services (social, financial and transport) are excluded.
- **"Eurotariff":** a mobile phone price cap was negotiated on 'roaming' charges for international calls.
- **'20-20-20 Targets'** aim to tackle global warming with a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions, a 20% improvement in energy efficiency and a 20% share for renewable energy in the EU by 2020. Some businesses have criticised that the measures will make EU industry less competitive

The 2009-2014 European Parliament will vote on a number of important issues:

- New laws to increase the **regulation of banks and financial services** as a result of the global financial crisis
- A deal resulting from the **Copenhagen climate change conference** in December 2009, which is supposed to agree a replacement for the current Kyoto agreement
- Any new **international trade agreement** resulting from the WTO 'Doha' negotiations
- The EP will have to **approve the new President and Commissioners of the new European Commission** which will serve between 2009-2014