

Narrow victory for the left, followed closely by the populist right in the Swedish general elections.

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Results

Abstract :

2014 is a major electoral year for the Swedes. Indeed on 25th May last they elected their MEPs, as did all European citizens; on 14th September they will be electing the 349 members of the Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) as well as the local representatives (town councillors and county councillors). Swedes living abroad are allowed to vote in the general elections. In 2010 one quarter of them were registered on the electoral rolls but only one fifth of them turned out to vote.

The return of the left after 8 years in the opposition

The Social Democratic Party (SAP) won the general elections organised on 14th September in Sweden. Led by Stefan Löfven it won 31.2% of the vote and 113 seats of the 349 in the Riksdag (Parliament) (+1 in comparison with the previous elections on 19th September 2010). With 6.8% of the vote and 24 MPs (-1) the Environment Party/Greens (MP) achieved a result that was well below that forecast by the polls. Finally Jonas Sjöstedt's Left Party (Vp) won 5.7% of the vote and 21 seats (+2).

Together the three left-wing parties won 43.7% of the vote and 158 MPs which is far from the absolute majority (175).

The SAP failed to reach the 35% voting goal that it had set itself (a result that it achieved 26 consecutive times between 1921 and 2006) and Stefan Löfven may become the worst elected Social Democratic leader in the country's history. "This might be a problem for his leadership" indicated Mikael Sundström, a professor of political science at the University of Lund.

The issue of the future government coalition remains therefore. The modification to the electoral law approved in November 2010 obliges the person appointed to be Prime Minister to win the confidence of parliament and therefore to form a majority within the two weeks following the general elections. Negotiations are due to be tough. The SAP might

turn to a party from the outgoing government led by Fredrik Reinfeldt (Moderate Assembly Party M), the People's Party-Liberals (FpL) or the Centre Party (C) - to form a government.

With the slogan "A better Sweden for all" the SAP promised taxation to help modest households, investments in infrastructures and improvements in the education system. The party promised to devote 40 billion krona (4.3 billion €) to social and education spending.

Who is Stefan Löfven?

Aged 57 from Hägersten, a town in the suburbs of Stockholm Stefan Löfven started his career as a welder in the company Hagglund&Sons. He became an elected union member in 1981. In 1995 he was appointed as the main ombudsman for the Swedish Metal Workers Union (Metall); three years later he became the union's international secretary and Federal Vice-President before being elected to head the union at the end of 2005. Stefan Löfven occupied this post for 6 years.

On 27th January 2012 he was elected to lead the Social Democratic Party taking over from Hakan Juholt, who was forced to resign after being involved in some scandals. Stefan Löfven, who comes from a working class background, has never been elected or appointed to a political office and has no international experience, but his image is that of a traditional social democratic leader.

General Election results on 14th September 2014 in Sweden

Turnout: 83.3%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats won
Social Democratic Party (SAP)	1 886 473	31.2	113
Moderate Assembly Party (M)	1 403 630	23.2	84
Swedish Democrats (SD)	781 120	12.9	49
Environment Party/Greens (MP)	408 365	6.8	24
Centre Party (C)	370 834	6.1	22
Left Party (Vp)	344 514	5.7	21
People's Party-Liberals (FpL)	326 055	5.4	19
Christian Democratic Party (KD)	277 227	4.6	17
Feminist Initiative (FI)	184 230	3.1	0
Others	57 069	0.9	0

Source : <http://www.val.se/val/val2014/valnatt/R/rike/index.html>**The right suffers after being in power too long**

The Moderate Assembly Party (M) led by outgoing Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt won 23.2% of the vote and 84 seats in parliament i.e. -23 in comparison with 2010. The Centre Party led by Annie Lööfle won 6.1% of the vote and 22 seats (-1) ; the People's Party-Liberals (FpL) led by outgoing Education Minister Jan Björklund won 5.4% of the vote and 19 seats (-5); Finally the Christian Democratic Party (KD) led by Göran Hägglund won 4.60% of the vote and 17 seats (- 2).

The parties in office have suffered from being in power too long and also for the weakness of growth (2.7% planned this year) and due to the level of unemployment which is still high at 8,2%. Over the last eight years taxes have been reduced by 14 billion € and obligatory contributions have dropped from 49% to 45% of the GDP. But these measures have weakened the Welfare State (Folkhemmet, the literally the "the people's home"): the unemployment rate has increased and public services have suffered (education, healthcare etc.). After two terms in office led by the centre right the Swedes have manifested their desire for change.

"In 2006 the Alliance coalition won the general elections on tax reductions and in 2010 on the way it had managed the crisis. Today the Swedes think that things have gone too far in terms of tax reductions and that this has downgraded our

social system," stresses editorialist Tobias Wikström of the Dagens Industri.

The Swedes are also very sensitive to inequality. A study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently revealed that Sweden was the developed country in which inequality has increased the most over the last 25 years: the Gini coefficient that measures a country's income inequality has increased by 25% within one generation.

The far right populists continue to gain ground

These general elections have revealed the progress made by the populists – the Swedish Democrats – who won 12.9% of the vote and 49 seats (+29). Led by Jimmie Akesson they succeeded beyond their expectations in asserting themselves at the country's third most important political force.

"We are the masters of the game now (...) we can no longer be ignored as other parties have over the last four years. It is clear that the others will now have to take us into consideration (...) This country has to be governed and it will be difficult if they do not want to talk to us," declared Jimmie Akesson.

"There will be no cooperation with them. Let us bear in mind that 87% of the Swedes did not vote for them," indicated the Social Democratic leader, Stefan Löfven.

Swedish Democrat voters deem that they have been left behind by the traditional parties both on the left and the right and are asking for the reform of the immigration policy. Stockholm has a tradition for welcoming political refugees dating back to the 1980's and 1990's but immigration is a recent phenomenon. *"The Swedish Democrats are the only party that want to stop immigration (reduce it by 90%). All of the others are unanimous and favour a generous immigration policy. But half of the Swedes want their country to take in fewer foreigners,"* indicates political scientist from the University of Lund, Anders Sannerstedt.

The Populist Party mainly attracts those disappointed by Swedish social democracy – in other words the poorest and many young people who are struggling to fit into society *"At base voters come from the working classes, they are of all ages and 2/3 of them are men. They are not excluded but ordinary Swedes,"* adds Anders Sannerstedt.

The result of 14th September is a personal victory for Jimmie Akesson who at the party's congress in November 2011, launched a new social-conservative trend to tone down the party's nationalist image. In November 2013 he said that the party wanted to put forward other themes, not just immigration (like the lack of labour in certain sector and working hours) in order to improve its profile and its influence.

Finally Feminist Initiative (FI) led by former leader of the Left Party (Vp) (1993-2003) Gudrun Schyman, did not manage to reach the 4% threshold that is obligatory for a party to enter parliament.

Turnout totalled 83.3% and was almost the same level as registered in the last general elections on 19th September 2010 (- 1.33 points).

"The new government will have to respond to the concern and fear reflected in the score achieved by the Swedish Democrats," declared Jesper Bengtsson of the Research Centre Tiden. *"Victory turns into defeat"* read the editorial and in the daily Dagens Nyheter.

"Stefan Löfven and his team have re-established respect for Swedish social democracy but that is not enough. He will have to do what his predecessors have not succeeded into doing and create a new kind of social democracy," writes Katrine Kielos, editorialist for the daily Aftonbladet, before the elections.

It might be said that Stefan Löfven has a difficult task ahead and that the next government's mandate will be decisive for the country.

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