

# Victory for the centre-right opposition (ER) in the general elections in Estonia

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## Results

The Reform Party (ER), the main opposition party, led by Kaja Kallas, came out ahead in the general elections on 3rd March in Estonia. It won 28,8% of the vote and 34 of the 101 seats in the Riigikogu, the only house of parliament, i.e. +4 in comparison with the previous elections on March 1st 2015.

The Centre Party (K), led by the outgoing Prime Minister came second with 23.1% of the vote and 26 seats (- 1). According to geopolitician and Estonia specialist Vincent Dautancourt, the result of the Centre Party can be explained by the low turnout of voters living in the Russian-speaking regions (Ida-Virumaa et Tallinn), who have undoubtedly been disappointed by the policy undertaken by the Centre Party since 2016.

As forecast in the polls the People's Conservative Party (EKRE), a populist movement led by Mart Helme, made a breakthrough in the ballot box: 17.8% of the vote and 19 seats (+ 12).

Pro Patria (Isamaa, I) led by Helir-Valdor Seeder, won 11.4% of the vote and 12 seats (- 2); it drew ahead of the Social-Democratic Party (SDE) led by Jevgeni Ossinovski, which won 9.8% of the vote and 10 seats (- 5). The leader of the SDE explained its decline by the breakthrough of the right-wing populists and by the presence of Estonia 200 (Eesti

200), founded on 3rd November last and led by Kristina Kallas and who in his opinion certainly attracted some social-democratic supporters.

The other parties won under 5% of the vote i.e. a result below the minimum threshold to be represented in parliament.

Kaja Kallas (ER) and Mihhail Kolvar (K) won the most votes (the Estonian political system allows voters to choose the order of the candidates on their voting slip). The two candidates each won respectively 20 083 and 17 075 votes.

Turnout was slightly below that recorded in the previous election on 1st March 2015. It totalled 63.1% i.e. -1.10 point.

E-voting or early voting in polling stations hit record levels this year. 247, 232 Estonians fulfilled their civic duty via the Internet and 99,163 in the polling stations i.e. 39.3% of all voters. This figure lay at 33% in the previous election on March 1st 2015.

**Results of the general elections on 3rd March 2019 in Estonia**

Turnout: 63.10%

Political parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
<b>Reform Party (ER)</b>	162 332	28,80	34
<b>Centre Party (K)</b>	129 823	23,10	26
<b>People's Conservative Party (EKRE)</b>	100 439	17,80	19
<b>Pro Patria (I)</b>	64 239	11,40	12
<b>Social Democratic Party (SDE)</b>	55 214	9,80	10
<b>Estonia 200</b>	25 317	4,50	7
<b>Others</b>	24 153	4,30	0
<b>Independents</b>	1 590	0,30	0

Source : <https://rk2019.valimised.ee/en/election-result/election-result.html>

The Reform Party has therefore succeeded in making its comeback, winning by a relatively wide margin, which the pollsters had not foreseen. It will however have to govern in coalition with other parties. Kaja Kallas's first choice would be a government including her party, Pro-Patria and the Social-Democratic Party.

An alliance with the People's Conservative Party has already been ruled out by the party's leaders. One of them, Kristen Michal also declared that a coalition with the Centre Party was not a "first choice" and rejected this option, unless this alliance became, to quote her, "inevitable". Both parties have not governed Estonia together since the government of Siim Kallas, Kaja Kallas's father, between 2002 and 2003.

Both parties differ over three main points: the tax system, the demand that all Estonian citizens speak Estonian and the language's use in the education system.

The centrist leader Juri Ratas declared that he would fight for his party to participate in the next government. *"It is our task to maintain the values that we have defended and to fulfil the promises that we made to our*

*electorate and we are going to continue along our path,"* the outgoing Prime Minister indicated.

Another lesson to be learnt from the election: the breakthrough made by the People's Conservative Party which defends conservative values, Estonian identity and which is against the refugee quotas approved by the European Union for the reception of people fleeing Syria, Ethiopia or Sudan, as well as the Global Compact for safe, orderly, regular Migration (also called the Marrakech Pact), adopted on 19th December 2018 by the UN's General Assembly.

With this election Estonia is no longer an exception and joins the majority of European countries which are witnessing the rise of populist parties election after election. Political expert Tonis Saarts, from the University of Tallinn believes that its programme of generous social spending and the resentment of the rural population after years of austerity explain the breakthrough by the People's Conservative Party in the ballot box.

Aged 41 Kaja Kallas is a graduate in law from the University of Tartu and in economics from the Estonian

Business School. She has worked as a lawyer. In 2010 she was elected MP in the Riigikogu and in 2014 she became an MEP. She returned to Estonia in 2018 to be elected in April to lead the Reform Party, which she has just brought to victory and which is therefore going to recover office after having spent just over two years on the opposition benches.

Kaja Kallas, is also the daughter of former president of the Central Bank of Estonia and former Prime Minister (2002-2005) Siim Kallas and is due to become the first woman to occupy the position of Prime Minister in Estonia. With its president of the Republic, Kersti Kaljulaid, elected on 3rd October 2016 as head of the country, Estonia will now be led by two women.

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