

Social-Democrats and populists run neck and neck in Finland

Corinne Deloy



Results

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) came out ahead in the general elections in Finland on 14th April. With 17.7% of the vote and 40 seats (+6 in comparison with the previous election on 19th April 2015), the SDP led by Antti Rinne was only just ahead of the True Finns (PS), a populist, nationalist, Eurosceptic party led by Jussi Halla-aho, which won 17.5% of the vote and 39 seats (+1). The Conservative Assembly (KOK) led by Petteri Orpo, follows them closely with 17% of the vote and 38 seats (+1).

"For the first time since 1999 we are the leading party in Finland," said the Social Democratic leader, who had hoped however for a higher result for his party.

The real loser in the election is the Centre Party (KESK), led by outgoing Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, the only party to have lost seats. It came fourth with 13.8% and 31 seats (-18), the poorest result in its history. "We are the biggest losers in these elections," admitted the outgoing head of government when the results were announced. The Centre Party was sanctioned for its austerity policy which did however help Finland recover growth, control its public debt and reduce unemployment rates.

The Green League (VIHR), led by Pekka Haavisto (interim leader since November 2018) gained ground and has risen for the first time beyond the 10% vote threshold with 11.5% and 20 seats (+ 5). The Left Alliance (VAS), the

far-left party led by Li Andersson won 8.2% of the vote and 16 seats (+4). Finally, the Swedish People's Party (SFP), representing the interests of the Swedish minority, led by Anna-Maja Henriksson did not win its wager to increase the number of its seats in the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the only house of Parliament. With 4.5% of the vote it now has 9 seats. The Christian Democratic Party (SKL), led by Sari Essayah won 3.9% of the vote and 5 seats (=).

Turnout totalled 68.7% i.e. slightly higher than in the last elections on 19th April 2015 (+1.85 points). More than one third of the Finns (1.5 million) vote early i.e. 36.2% of the electorate. Only 32.3% did so five years ago.

General Election Results dated 14th April 2019 in Finland

Turnout : 68,7%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	545 544	17.7	40
True Finns (PS)	538 731	17.5	39
National Coalition Party (KOK)	523 446	17	38
Centre Party (KESK)	423 352	13.8	31
Green League (VIHR)	353 654	11.5	20
Left Alliance (VAS)	251 254	8.2	16
Swedish People's Party (SFP)	139 428	4.5	9
Christian Democrats (KD)	120 039	3.9	5
Others	2 895 448	5.9	2

Source : https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/EKV-2019/fi/tulos_kokomaa.html

General Elections in Finland 14th March 2019

"The Social Democratic Party is the party of the Prime Minister," declared Antti Rinne when the results were announced. The SDP's narrow victory, likewise, for the first time in Finland's history no party has reached the 20% mark of votes cast, will make it difficult for the party to form the future government coalition.

The Finns punished Juha Sipilä's outgoing government by voting for the opposition parties, like the Social Democratic Party, but also by voting in support of the right-wing populists. The latter also seem to have attracted the young voters. Indeed, in a survey undertaken amongst 877 schools in Finland, the True Finns came second amongst the youngest votes just behind the Green League. The Social Democrats only came fifth behind the Centre Party.

The Social Democrats campaigned to end the austerity policy, a widening of the tax base (without increasing taxes) and to counter inequality. They promised to create jobs in the social sector and to increase retirement pensions below 1,400€ a month by 100€.

"I was not expecting a result like this, no one was expecting it," stressed the populist leader Jussi Halla-aho, who also personally won 30,500 votes, i.e. the biggest number of votes in the country. The True Finns success is all the more notable since the party suffered a split in June 2017 when 20 of the party's MPs, including three ministers who broke away after Jussi Halla-aho's accession as the party's chairman. They founded Blue Reform (SIN), which became a political party on 15th November 2017. They only won 1% of the vote on 14th April.

According to political expert Sami Borg, the True Finns owe their high score to the sex crimes that took place in Oulu, a town situated in the north-west of Finland¹, but also to the debate over the political climate of which they have a specific opinion. Indeed, the party is denouncing the "climate hysteria" of its rivals and rejects the idea of the Finnish paying for more measures to counter climate change. "The climate was the focus of the general elections: strong criticism was made of eating meat, the use of the car, and taking planes," indicated Thomas Kary, a political expert from

the University of Abo Akademi. "According to the True Finns what is done in Finland does not count, what is really important is what the USA and China are doing. They are against the way things are managed and the way that ordinary people are made to feel guilty." The predominance of global warming in the electoral campaign also benefited the Green League, defender of positions that are opposite to those of the True Finns. "We are suffering a cultural shock in Finland. A share of the population is in a state of shock given all of these changes, and as a result it is seizing the hand held out to them by the True Finns," declared Karina Jutila, director of the research centre e2.

Social Democratic leader Antti Rinne hopes to form a government "before the end of May".

We should recall that Finland is due to take over the sixth monthly presidency of the Council of the European Union as of 1st July.

Antti Rinne has certainly not dismissed the possibility of governing the country with the True Finns, of whom he would like to "ask some questions". "Some of these will focus on values that are important for the Social Democratic Party and which will be the mortar that will hold the government together," indicated Antti Rinne. True Finn leader Jussi Halla-aho said he was prepared to participate in a government coalition "but not at any price". "We want to be in government, but on condition that progress is made in areas which are important to our electorate," he declared.

It is still possible that the Social Democrats will rally to the National Coalition Party, the Green League, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party. In this case the True Finns will be in the opposition.

In the context of an ageing population (a fifth of Finns (21.4%) are aged 65 and over, they are due to form a quarter of the population by 2030) and a declining birth rate, the reform of social protection will be one of the priorities of the next government. A

Aged 56, from Helsinki, Antti Rinne is a law graduate. He has led several unions: ERTO from 2002-2005, the

Union of Salaried Employees from 2005 to 2010 and Pro from 2010 to 2014. In that year he took over the chairmanship of the Social Democratic Party. The party came fourth in the general elections on 19th April 2015 with 16.5% of the vote.

At the end of 2018, Antti Rinne contracted pneumonia during his holidays in Spain, then he caught a nosocomial infection whilst in hospital. When he returned to Finland doctors detected a coronary embolism. The Social Democratic leader was on sick leave until the end of February and he made his return to public life just a month and a half before the elections.

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.