

Right and left running neck and neck two weeks before the Danish early general elections

On 5 October 2022, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of the Social Democratic Party (SD) announced that early general elections (of seven months) would be held in the Scandinavian kingdom on 1 November, the first Tuesday in 15 years. The Faroe Islands have unsuccessfully requested a postponement of the election, as 1 November is a day of remembrance for those who have died at sea. 4.2 million Danes are expected to vote. Denmark usually has a high turnout.

The Prime Minister was under threat of a no-confidence motion after the Social Liberal Party (RV), which supports the government in the Folketing (the single chamber of parliament), gave her an ultimatum to call elections after the summer recess, at the latest at the opening of the parliamentary session on 4 October. This motion of no confidence was largely a consequence of the handling of the "mink scandal".

In the past, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, several prime ministers have been forced to call early elections by the threat of a no-confidence motion, but this has not happened in the last 30 years.

The current Danish government is a minority government comprising only social democrats. However, it is supported by Pia Olsen Dyhr's Socialist People's Party (SF), the Social Liberal Party (RV) led by Sofie Carsten Nielsen and the Unity List-Red-Green Alliance (E) whose spokesperson is Pernille Skipper.

"Danish voters are more volatile than ever. 45% of them have switched parties since the general elections on 5 June 2019," said Kasper Hansen,

professor of political science at the University of Copenhagen.

According to the latest opinion poll by the Gallup Institute, the Social Democrats are expected to lead the general elections on 1 November with 27.4% of the vote. The Socialist People's Party would get 8.5% of the vote, the Social Liberal Party 5.1% and the Unity List-Red-Green Alliance 6.1%. On the left, the Independent Greens-New Left Wing (FG), a party created in 2020 and led by former Alternative member Sikandar Siddique, would get 0.7% of the vote.

The "Red Bloc", bringing together the left-wing parties, would then obtain 47.8% of the vote.

On the right, the Liberal Party (V) is expected to get 12.9% of the vote, followed by the Conservative People's Party (KF) 9.9%, the Liberal Alliance (LA) 5.5%, the New Right (D) 4.5% and the People's Party (DF) 3.1%. The Danish Democrats founded by the former Minister of Immigration and Integration (2015-2019) in the government of Lars Lokke Rasmussen (V), Inger Støjberg (former member of the Liberal Party), expelled from Parliament in 2021 after being found guilty of violating the rights of migrants by separating couples of asylum seekers, are credited with 8.7% of the vote.

The "Blue Bloc", bringing together the right-wing parties, would then garner 44.6% of the vote.

Finally, the Moderates (M), a party created by former Prime Minister (2015-2019) Lars Lokke Rasmussen, then leader of the Liberal Party (V), not belonging to either bloc, is expected to win 6.1% of the vote.

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However, Mette Frederiksen remains the Danes' favourite Prime Minister: half of them (49.4%) would like to see the outgoing head of government continue in her post. 27.4% would prefer her to be replaced by Soren Pape Poulsen, leader of the Conservative People's Party and 23.3% by Jakob Ellemann Jensen, leader of the Liberal Party.

MINK SLAUGHTER SCANDAL SPARKS SNAP ELECTION

In autumn 2020, a variant of the coronavirus was identified in mink farms. 11 people were infected. Without any certainty about the dangerousness of this variant, the government decided to slaughter all mink, both infected and healthy. On 4 November 2020, around 16 million animals were killed. Denmark is the world's largest exporter of mink fur.

In the following months, law professors criticised Mette Frederiksen's decision as illegal and claimed that the government had exceeded its powers in taking the decision to cull the mink because it had no legal basis to impose it on mink farmers. According to the existing regulations, the authorities were only allowed to kill mink on seven farms in northern Jutland. After the cull, the government passed an emergency law to legalise its action. The Folketing then opened an enquiry and a majority of MPs voted on 10 December 2020 to set up a committee of enquiry to investigate the mink cull.

The scandal weakened the government. On 30 June 2022, the commission of enquiry delivered its report, which stated that Mette Frederiksen had deliberately misled her compatriots, but also that the Prime Minister was unaware that the mink cull was an illegal action. The Prime Minister emphasised the risk factor, arguing that she had a duty to protect the public; she also apologised, but did not admit that she had made a mistake. On 2 July, the Social Liberals demanded early elections.

On 5 July, Mette Frederiksen was reprimanded by the MPs who considered her action "highly critical". The opposition MPs did not participate in the debate. In September, the right-wing and far-right parties wrote a letter demanding a snap vote.

"This is the first time that a legal scandal has led more or less directly to an election, even though the fall of the government is happening in slow motion," said Frederik Waage, a law professor at the University of Southern Denmark but currently acting judge of one of Denmark's two high courts.

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Mette Frederiksen therefore agreed to call early general elections despite the fact that *"Denmark is in the middle of an international economic, security and energy crisis"*. On 1 June, three quarters of Danes (66.87%) chose to answer "yes" to the question *"Are you in favour of or against Denmark's participation in European security and defence cooperation and the abolition of the option to withdraw from the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy?"* 33.13% of voters voted against; 65.77% of Danes took part in the vote.

The referendum followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, which led Denmark to review its defence policy. The withdrawal option was lifted on 1 July.

"Mette Frederiksen will continue to present herself as a safe card to play in times of crisis. She is using the argument that she may not be perfect, but that the alternative to her leadership is untested, unprepared and unsuited to crises," said Robert Klemmensen, professor of political science at the University of Southern Denmark.

The Prime Minister said she wanted to form an enlarged government *"because times are difficult and the crises are intertwined"*. She said she was ready to form a mixed government in a move that would break the traditional system of two-block politics. *"The time has come to try a new form of government in Denmark. We want a broad-based government, consisting of parties from both sides of the political spectrum,"* she stressed.

Mette Frederiksen first made this proposal on Constitution Day (5 June). *"With the exception of the Social Liberal Party and the Moderates, no other party wants to participate in such a government. The two*

big parties that are needed to form such a coalition, the Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party, are absolutely against such a proposal," said Rune Stubager, Professor of Political Science at the University of Aarhus.

THE DANISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Folketing comprises 179 members elected for four years by Danes resident in the Kingdom on the basis of proportional representation using the Sainte-Laguë method. Voters may choose to support a party list or an independent candidate. Parties represented in parliament are allowed to present lists of candidates, while parties not represented must collect a number of signatures corresponding to 1/175th of the valid votes cast in the previous general elections, i.e. 20,182 voters this year. Finally, independent candidates must collect signatures from at least 150 voters in the constituency in which they wish to run.

The provinces of Greenland and the Faroe Islands each have two seats. The remaining 175 seats are divided between three regions - Copenhagen, Jutland and the Islands - divided into 3 urban and 7 rural constituencies. The number of seats allocated to each of these constituencies, proportional to the number of inhabitants, is reviewed every 5 years. The calculation (population, number of voters in the last general elections and the area of the constituency in km² multiplied by 20, then divided by 175) favours the most sparsely populated regions.

The distribution of seats in Parliament is done in two stages, first by party and then by candidate. 135 of the 175 seats in the Folketing are constituency seats, the remaining 40 are called compensatory seats. They are distributed according to the number of votes obtained by the parties at national level. This distribution method helps to ensure a fairer national representation of the 'smaller' parties. To qualify for the distribution of compensatory seats, a party must have obtained a minimum number of seats in a given constituency or a number of votes equal to or greater than the number of votes needed to obtain a seat in

at least 2 of the 3 regions of the kingdom or at least 2% of the votes cast at national level.

10 political parties are represented in the Folketing:

- The Social Democratic Party (SD), founded in 1871 and led since April 2015 by outgoing Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, has 48 seats;
- The Social Liberal Party (RV), a centre-left party founded in 1905 after a split from the Liberal Party. Led by Sofie Carsten Nielsen, it has 16 seats;
- The Socialist People's Party (SF), an opposition party created in 1959 by a former president of the Communist Party who was expelled for criticising the USSR's intervention in Hungary in 1956. It is a socialist and environmentalist party led by Pia Olsen Dyhr and has 14 seats;
- The Unity List-Red-Green Alliance (E), founded in 1989 as an alliance of the Communist Party (DKP), the Socialist Workers' Party (SA) and the Socialist Left (VS). It is led by a 25-strong executive committee and its spokesperson, the leader of the party's parliamentary group, is Pernille Skipper. The party has 13 MPs.

These 4 parties make up the Bloc Rouge/

- The Liberal Party (V), a liberal and agrarian party founded in 1870 and led by Jakob Ellemann-Jensen, has 43 seats;
- The People's Party (DF), a right-wing populist party founded in 1995 and led by Morten Messerschmidt, has 16 seats;
- The conservative People's Party (KF), founded in 1915 and led by Soren Pape Poulsen, has 12 seats;
- The Liberal Alliance (LA), founded in 2007 by dissidents from the Social Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party. Led by Alex Vanopslagh, it has 4 seats.
- The New Right (D), a nationalist party founded in 2015 by two former members of the Conservative People's Party, Pernille Vermund and Peter Seier Christensen, has 4 seats.

These 5 parties form the Blue Bloc.

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- The Alternative (A), an environmentalist and pro-European party created in 2013 by the former Minister of Culture (2011-2012) in the government led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SD), led by Franciska Rosenkilde, has 4 MPs.

Reminder of the results of the general elections 5 June 2019 in Denmark

Turnout: 84.54%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
Social Democratic Party (SD)	915 393	25,93	48
Liberal Party (V)	825 486	23,39	43
People's Party (DF)	308 219	8,73	16
Social Liberal Party (RV)	304 273	8,62	16
People's Socialist Party (SF)	272 093	7,71	14
Unity List-Red/Green Alliance (E)	244 664	6,93	13
Conservative People's Party (KF)	233 349	6,61	12
The Alternative (A)	104 148	2,95	5
The New Right (D)	83 228	2,36	4
Liberal Alliance (LA)	82 228	2,33	4
Others	125 639	4,44	0

Source : [Statistics Denmark](#)

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