

The centre-right (KOK) wins the general elections in Finland, followed by the nationalist populists (PS)

The National Coalition Party (KOK), led by Petteri Orpo, came out ahead in the general elections held on 2 April in Finland. It won 20.82% of the vote and 48 seats in the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the single chamber of parliament, which is 10 more than in the previous general elections on 14 April 2019. It is slightly ahead of the Finns Party (Perus S), a right-wing populist, nationalist and eurosceptic party led by Rikka Purra, which scored the best result in its history: 20.05% of the vote and 46 elected members (+7). Its leader even received the highest number of votes for her name, around 38,000, and 35,000 for the outgoing Prime Minister Sanna Marin, whose Social Democratic Party (SDP) came third with 19.93% of the vote and 43 seats (+3).

The three parties were really running neck and neck. In Finland, however, it is up to the leading party to form a government.

The leading trio is followed by the Centre Party (KESK), led by outgoing Finance Minister Annika Saarikko, which

fell sharply with 11.3% of the vote and 23 seats (-8); the radical left-wing Alliance of Lefts (VAS), led by outgoing Education Minister Li Andersson, got 7.06% and 11 seats (-5); the Green League (VIHR), led by outgoing Interior Minister Maria Ohisalo, also suffered a setback: 7.03% and 13 seats (-7); the Swedish People's Party (SFP), representing the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority and led by outgoing Justice Minister Anna-Maja Henriksson, got 4.31% and 9 seats (=); the Christian Democratic Party (SKL), led by Sari Essayah, got 4.25% of the vote and 5 MPs (=) and finally the Movement Now (LN), a liberal party founded in 2018 by Hjallis Harkimo after his departure from the National Coalition Party, got 2.42% and kept its seat.

The turnout was +3.17 points higher than in the elections of 14 April 2019 and amounted to 71.90%.

General elections in Finland

2nd April 2023

02

Results of the 2 April 2023 general elections in Finland

Turnout: 71.90%

Political parties	Number of votes obtained	Of votes cast	Number of seats
National Coalition Party (KOK)	643 877	20.82	48
Finns Party (PS)	620 102	20.05	46
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	616 218	19.93	43
Centre Party (KESK)	349 362	11.30	23
Alliance of the Lefts (VAS)	218 290	7.06	11
Green League (VIHR)	217 426	7.03	13
Swedish People's Party (SFP)	133 318	4.31	9
Christian Democratic Party (SKL)	131 368	4.25	5
Movement Now (LN)	74 962	2.42	1
Others	86 942	2.81	1
Independents	553	0.02	0

Source : https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/EKV-2023/fi/tulos_kokomaa.html

"This is a great victory. Our message is out there, the support is there and the Finns believe in our party," said Petteri Orpo after the results were announced. The Kok leader acknowledged the work of the outgoing Prime Minister. "Sanna Marin has been very good on international issues but the situation at home in Finland is very difficult and I promise to do something about it," he said.

Indeed, the key issues in Finland are not - or no longer - strategic (the Finnish parliament approved Finland's entry into NATO on 1 March by 184 votes to 7) but economic. "NATO membership and foreign policy, after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, enjoy a broad consensus in the country," said Teivo Teivainen, professor of political science at the University of Helsinki. "National defence issues and the war in Ukraine were hardly discussed during the election campaign. These issues have a consensus among the Finnish population and the parties," said Minna Ålander, an analyst at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. "I am very proud because the National Coalition Party was the first and only party to advocate NATO membership in the last twenty years and now, we are almost there," said Petteri Orpo.

"The debate in the election campaign has been relatively straightforward between those who want a more disciplined fiscal policy and budget cuts, and those who want to maintain social spending," analysed Teivo Teivainen.

The opposition accuses the Social Democrats of having increased the public debt, which rose during the last legislature from 65% to 73% of GDP. Finland has also entered an economic recession and is expected to post negative growth in 2023. Petteri Orpo criticises the Social Democrats for wanting to "solve all problems by using debt and raising taxes". Instead, he wants to implement a €6 billion austerity plan and recommends cutting some social spending to bring the accounts back into balance. "The forecasts are very bad. Our public finances will collapse, and this will lead to the erosion of the foundations of our welfare state. Finland needs to cut spending on unemployment benefits and other social programmes to prevent the public debt from rising. We want to stimulate the economy, stimulate economic growth. More jobs for people, more income for people", said Petteri Orpo, adding "The biggest change between Sanna Marin's government and my future government is the type of economic policy we will pursue".

Petteri Orpo is 53 years old and comes from Köyliö (south-west Finland). He graduated in political science from the University of Turku. He worked for the Minister of the Interior Ville Itälä (KOK) in 2002 before being appointed Deputy Party Secretary the following year. Two years later he became a business manager at an adult education centre in Turku.

He was elected as a Member of Parliament for the first time in the general elections of 18 March 2007 and five years later he was appointed as the chairman of the parliamentary group. In 2014, Petteri Orpo was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Forestry in the government led by Alexander Stubb (KOK). The following year, he was appointed Minister of the Interior in the government of Juha Sipilä and in 2016, Minister of Finance.

On 11 June 2016, he was elected chairman of the National Coalition Party in the second round of voting by 441 votes to 361 for the incumbent leader Alexander Stubb.

WHICH COALITION?

The negotiations to form the future Finnish government could be long. In the Nordic Republic, government coalitions are often broad and may include a large number of parties. Consensus-building is an important part of national politics.

Petteri Orpo said that he would talk to all political parties. "*With the Finns Party, we have differences on EU membership, immigration and policy to reduce global warming, but there are many things that unite us,*" he said. The Finns' Party was a member of the government coalition led by Juha Sipilä (KESK) who led Finland between 2015 and 2019 which also included the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party.

Petteri Orpo could also choose to ally with the Social Democrats but the two parties will have difficulty finding a government agreement as their respective views on the country's economic situation as well as the tensions of the election campaign (the opposition having campaigned against the "*fiscal irresponsibility of the government*") separate them.

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