

## Denmark 2022: A landslide election

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*The leaders of Danish political parties follow one another before Queen Margrethe II to present their positions with a view to forming a government. Mai Villadsen leader of the far left Enhedlisten party arrives by bicycle for her interview with the Queen*

FOTO: IMAGO / LE PICTORIUM

The Danish election of 1 November 2022 was truly historic: consolidated parties have fallen from grace, new ones have stormed into parliament, and never before have so many **voters shifted their alliances between parties** in the months leading up to the election.

Entering the voting booth last Tuesday, Danish voters were presented with no less than fourteen different parties to choose from. New parties on the right presented old populist positions, but with a more popular visage. Led by well-known politicians, these parties have matched different policies anew and focused their public appeal on these selected issues, while declining to unveil their position on other matters.

This divided political landscape left the right fractured, and facilitated an historic victory for the Social Democrats, who secured their best election result in two decades, taking 27.5 percent of the vote, gaining seats, and becoming twice as big as their closest contender.

The traditional bourgeois parties received a smaller share of the votes than ever before, and the three parties on the extreme right received only 14 percent of the vote combined, far

from the shocking 21 percent the nationalist Danish Peoples Party secured for itself in 2015.

The left generally experienced a small decline. The Socialist Peoples Party gained some new voters, while the Red-Green Alliance lost four out of 13 seats. Surprisingly, the green party the Alternative, which was expected to be voted out of parliament, bounced back and ended receiving a small gain in votes compared to the last election.

### Social Democrats clear the table in tight Danish elections

The Danish election, held half a year before the expiration of the government's term, had been expected for some months. Following a report criticising Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen for the way the government liquidated the mink fur industry during the Covid pandemic, (**a cull meant to stop the virus from mutating faster**), the Social Liberals – who had supported the government throughout the term – demanded new elections be announced before the opening of parliament.

The Social Liberals hoped to force the hand of the Prime Minister after the elections: gambling on the weakness of the right, they hoped to see the Social Democrats re-elected, and themselves enter government with them, thereby ending the last three years of one-party government.

This cynical calculation resulted instead in outright disaster for the party. Popular opinion swiftly swung against their strategy, and the Social Liberals were soon damned if they proceeded with their demand of toppling the Prime Minister only to appoint her again, and equally damned if they sought to retract their miscalculated demands.

Come election night, the Social Liberals' support was cut in half – the party receiving only 3.8 percent of the vote. It has now been reduced to one of the smaller parties – albeit still in a position to negotiate about a coming government.

### The absolute power of government?

For the Social Democrats, the demand for elections – also voiced strongly by the bourgeois opposition – did not come at the worst of times. Calling elections early is an accepted part of the Danish political game, and the Prime Minister had clearly held the option of an autumn election open. This would give her a chance to be re-elected before this winter's soaring utility bills need to be paid and paved the way for an informal election campaign dragging on for months – a situation usually favourable for the ruling party.

Having been elected in the summer of 2019, the majority of the outgoing government's time in power has been marked by the corona pandemic. Prime Minister Frederiksen, and many of her colleagues, experienced a surge in popularity at this time. Tightening the leashes of the state apparatus, she and her close advisors tried to steer Denmark through the health crisis by way of extensive but short lockdowns, with relative success.

Nonetheless, her many press conferences, instructing the public in great detail how to behave, created a public impression of the

Prime Minister that she has struggled to shake. Taking personal responsibility for the lockdown decisions, and forcing through the legally questionable culling of the mink, gave her an air of arrogance.

Approaching the expected election, the parties of the right increasingly tried to paint the Prime Minister as authoritarian, seeking full control of the state apparatus – even bordering on having dictatorial tendencies. This narrative, while hiding a kernel of truth, was a massive exaggeration, serving primarily to disguise the fact that the right had no convincing alternative to the government's policies.

When her hand was finally forced by the Social Liberals, ending speculation and announcing the election date for November 1, Mette Frederiksen surprised many commentators by expressing the desire for a coming government to span 'across the middle', including both her own party and parts of the opposition. Undoubtedly the gesture was also meant to puncture the critique of her government as having centred too much power around itself.

## Liberal splintering

Much of the bourgeois disarray can be explained by the emergence of two new parties, but the right has simultaneously been challenged on its two core components, xenophobia and neoliberalism. The latter has lost much of its persuasive power following the pandemic and the following shortage of labour power, while the first has been embraced thoroughly by the Social Democrats.

Recent years have been marked by a splintering of the Liberals, by far the most dominant bourgeois party. After a disappointing election result in 2019, former prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen was forced to resign as head of the party he had led for a decade. The dethronement came as a result of what was seen within the party as a strategic miscalculation on his part, namely voicing the demand for a government across the middle.

After much wrangling, and the participation of Løkke Rasmussen in a couple of tv-shows, he decided to leave the party, first becoming an independent, then later presenting his new party project: the Moderates. The party was founded on the same premise that got Løkke Rasmussen ousted: a government bridging the gap between the Social Democrats and the bourgeois parties, consolidating the centre and isolating both the left and the extreme right.

Playing into the expressed desires of Prime Minister Frederiksen, and building on Løkke Rasmussen's personal charisma, this strategy has been a resounding success. Founded only in June, the Moderates have gone from being a one-person group to becoming the third biggest faction in parliament with 9.3 percent of the vote.

Løkke Rasmussen's former Integration Minister, Inger Støjberg, was responsible for the Liberals' second split. Having received a two-month prison sentence for neglecting her responsibilities as a minister, and with her own party ousting her as vice-chair before voting to allow her impeachment, Inger Støjberg decided to break with the Liberals in order to create a new extreme-right party: the Danish Democrats.

The new party seemed unwilling to go public with any opinions, however, other than professing a dislike of Muslim immigrants and of the 'elite' in the capital Copenhagen, and a touting of the rule of law. The new party quickly attracted a sizable part of MPs from the crisis-ridden Danish Peoples Party.

Støjberg's high personal popularity has carried the Danish Democrats to a strong result. With 8.1 percent of the vote, her party ended up twice the size of the New Right and three times the size of the Danish Peoples Party. That once-dominant nationalist party only narrowly crossed the 2 percent threshold required for parliamentary representation.

## Conservative hubris

This summer, while the Liberal party fractured, bourgeois voters tired of the extreme right's rhetoric sought a new safe haven. The Conservative party, a junior partner on the right since the late nineties, saw a sudden rise in the polls, and party chair Søren Pape Poulsen emerged as the most likely candidate for prime minister on the right wing of the political spectrum.

Dwarfing his allies, not least the Liberals, Pape Poulsen seemed the secure winner of this election as the summer came to its end. The party was soaring in the polls, and its leader was seen as the most reliable. But oh, how the mighty have fallen!

In a series of well executed articles, the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* revealed one scandal after the other. The whole ordeal centred around a private trip to the Dominican Republic by Pape Poulsen and two other ministers back in 2018.

Pape Poulsen, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, met with representatives of the Dominican government without notifying his own ministry. The discussions at the meeting are still undeclared, but at the time of the revelations Pape Poulsen argued that the meeting had been set up by his husband, Josue Medina Vasques Poulsen, a Dominican national.

Pape Poulsen had earlier claimed that his husband both had Jewish roots and was the nephew of former Dominican Republic president Danilo Medina. Both of these claims were easily proven false. Vasques was raised in a prominent evangelical family in the republic without any ties to the former Dominican president.

Embarrassed by these lies, Pape Poulsen ended his marriage, lost his credibility, and, in hindsight, any hopes of claiming the title of prime minister for his party. Polling as the second biggest party this summer the conservatives ended receiving 5.5 percent of the vote.

# The green swamp

Leading up to the elections, Denmark's political scene could boast a number of small green parties, none with any apparent chance of representation. Most important among them is the Alternative, a splinter party from the Social Liberals in 2013 which – together with its leader, former minister of culture Uffe Elbæk – had attracted notable enthusiasm from urbanites at the time.

After failing to deliver on its promise of a new political culture, however, the party fared quite poorly in the 2019 election. It disintegrated further as the party leader stepped down, appointing his own successor, only for the appointment to be corrected by the members of the party. Uffe Elbæk then split the party, taking with him most of the party's MPs.

His new party, the Independent Greens, set out to carve a niche for themselves in the political landscape. Turning over leadership to the charismatic politician Sikkandar Siddique, the party positioned itself as the new voice of the left. Strangely claiming to be inspired by anarchism, the party's leadership framed itself as the most outspoken voice of antiracism, with an uncompromising green agenda.

As the elections approached, none of these small green parties seemed to have a chance at representation. Naturally calls went out for unification, both from the climate movement, but also from the left, which saw the chances of a Social Democratic government diminishing if too many votes were squandered on parties not clearing the threshold of 2 percent.

In September, the Alternative and some smaller parties merged, but the Independent Greens dismissed the call for unity, despite pleas by their founder Uffe Elbæk, and instead went on the attack, criticizing the Alternative for having accepted political compromises on the green agenda. Uffe Elbæk subsequently left the party and returned to the Alternative. The salvage operation succeeded and the Alternative got 3.3 percent of the vote, while the Independent Greens scored under one percent.

## The price of loyalty?

While much of the political spectrum has been through some hard weather, the left saw a largely stable term and steady election campaign. Both the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance have been sturdy supporters of the Social Democratic minority government, securing small advances in the transition to renewable energy and small improvements to the welfare state at the cost of a continued racist rhetoric. This included the continued implementation of Denmark's racist "ghetto laws" (now renamed "parallel societies") and a Social Democrat drive to establish a refugee camp in the dictatorship of Rwanda.

The push for a government across the middle from both the Social Democrats and the Moderates also provided an opening for the left to campaign for a returned Social Democratic government reliant on their votes. The Socialist People's Party was best able to play this card, positioning itself as the obvious choice for voters wanting to pull the Social Democrats to the left, and 8.3 percent of voters chose to support them.

The Red Green Alliance, on the other hand, has struggled with this strategy, being seen by its electorate as having compromised too much in the latest term. While scoring some wins on welfare policy, the party has been seen as supporting a government unwilling to take decisive action against climate change and upholding the racist policies inherited from the former government.

The party has clearly lost voters content with this strategy to the Socialist People's Party, while voters wanting more radical change have backed the Independent Greens. Notably the party has lost heavily in immigrant dominated neighbourhoods, where the Independent Greens in some places received one out of three votes.

## The government to come

With 99.8 percent of the vote counted, it seemed that a new government of either the left or the right would need the support of the Moderates, but the very last votes counted proved decisive in changing this picture, and the left-wing narrowly reached a majority.<sup>[1]</sup>

Nonetheless the most widely expected outcome from the coming negotiations is a minority government consisting of the Social Democrats and the Moderates. In this way, Løkke Rasmussen and his bourgeois backers will have achieved their goal of a government of the centre – a government expected to balance between the left and right wings of parliament, drawing support from either side on different issues.

This would leave the left in a more marginal position than it has become used to. As the result stands, it will become harder to gain even the small concessions which the last parliamentary term has yielded. The coming days will see frantic lobbying from the left trying to persuade Mette Frederiksen not to uphold her promise of governing across the centre.

## Result

Party	Result	Change
Socialdemokratiet ("Social Democrats")	27,5%	+1,6
Venstre ("Liberals")	13,3%	-10,1
Moderaterne ("The Moderates")	9,3%	+9,3
Socialistisk Folkeparti ("Socialist People's Party")	8,3%	+0,6
Danmarks Demokraterne ("Danish Democrats")	8,1%	+8,1
Liberal Alliance ("Liberal Alliance")	7,9%	+5,6
Konservative ("Conservatives")	5,5%	-1,1
Enhedslisten (Red Green Alliance)	5,1%	-1,8
Radikale Venstre ("Social Liberals")	3,8%	-4,8
Nye Borgerlige ("New Right")	3,7%	+1,3
Alternativet ("The Alternative")	3,3%	+0,3
Dansk Folkeparti ("Danish People's Party")	2,6%	-6,1
Frie Grønne ("Independent Greens")	0,9%	+0,9
Kristendemokraterne ("Christian Democrats")	0,5%	-1,3

In the Danish election system, the areas of Greenland and the Faroe Islands choose two representatives each. Greenland usually elects a socialist and a social democrat; the Faroe Islands splitting their representation between the Social Democrats and a bourgeois party allied with the Liberals. The three seats supporting the left-wing are crucial for the continuation of a government backed by the left.

#### About the author

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Quelle: <https://www.rosalux.eu/en/article/2173.denmark-2022-a-landslide-election.html>