

Denmark's 'kingmaker' could decide government leader

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COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark's foreign minister and his centrist party are expected to decide who will lead the Scandinavian country's next government after Tuesday's parliamentary elections ended without a clear majority for any party or bloc.

Center-left Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen could survive for a third term, despite a disappointing result. But she will need to negotiate a deal with the kingmaker, Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, if she is to lead a new coalition.

"The Danes have spoken. They have given us a playing field that, to put it mildly, is a bit tricky to handle when it comes to forming a government," Frederiksen said Wednesday. "But a government must be formed. The world out there doesn't wait for us, and it has only become even more unsettled than when the election was called."

The campaign focused on bread-and-butter issues rather than the crisis over President Trump's ambitions toward Greenland.

The outgoing government resigned Wednesday. Leaders from each party debated their positions in a



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DANISH Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen.

roundtable setting and met with Danish King Frederik X to discuss the country's future.

Denmark's single-chamber parliament, the Folketing, is elected for a four-year term. Lawmakers from Denmark hold 175 of its seats, while two each go to representatives from thinly populated Greenland and the kingdom's other semiautonomous territory, the Faroe Islands.

More than 4.3 million people were eligible to vote in a country of 6 million people. Nearly 84% of the electorate cast their ballots.

Here's what to know:

No party achieved a majority

Official results showed that Frederiksen's center-left Social Democrats lost

ground compared with the last election in 2022, as did her two partners in the outgoing government.

No single party won a majority in parliament, which was expected. Denmark's system of proportional representation typically produces coalition governments, traditionally made up of several parties from either the "red bloc" on the left or the "blue bloc" on the right, after weeks of negotiations.

Frederiksen's outgoing administration was the first in decades to straddle the left-right divide, and she said she is ready to stay on as prime minister for a third term. Her Social Democrats remained the biggest single party by some distance but Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, the best-placed center-right chal-

lenger to Frederiksen, made clear that he and his Liberal party don't intend to go into government with the Social Democrats again.

Still, Danish election expert Rune Stubager believes Frederiksen will survive as prime minister.

"Whether it will be in a new centrist coalition or a government based mostly on votes from the red bloc, that is up to the negotiations," Stubager, who co-heads the Danish National Election Study, said Wednesday.

The 48-year-old Frederiksen is known for strong support of Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion and for a restrictive approach to migration — continuing what has become a tradition in Danish politics.

'Kingmaker' decides the next steps

Because neither the left-leaning nor right-leaning blocs won a majority, Lokke Rasmussen is now in the role of kingmaker. His centrist Moderate party, with 14 lawmakers in the 179-seat parliament, is in a position to determine whether Frederiksen can serve a third term at the helm of the European Union and NATO country. It takes 90 seats to form a majority.

Lokke Rasmussen called on rivals on the left and right to climb down from some of

the positions they staked out in the campaign, and "come and play with us."

Neither of the blocs are able to form a majority without the support of the Moderates, making them the election's only real winner.

"I offered the other day — and it remains our position — to take responsibility for sitting down with parties on both sides of the political center line to see whether a political platform can be created, on which a government agreement could then subsequently be established," Lokke Rasmussen said Wednesday.

Stubager said they should be able to force concessions from each party's campaign promises to reach their goal — a centrist government.

"As far as I can see it, it's not possible to form a government if all these tripwires are intact," Stubager said. "So somebody will have to go back on a promise in order for there to be a government."

Foreign minister's work won a stage

Part of the Moderates' success can be attributed to Trump and Greenland, Stubager said. Late last year, the party was polling poorly, but then got a major bump from Lokke Rasmussen, the government's foreign minister, through his

diplomatic work to calm the tensions with the U.S. that included a headline-grabbing trip to Washington.

"Donald Trump put up a stage on which Lars Lokke could perform, and he performed well in the eyes of most Danes," Stubager said.

Frederiksen also was banking on Greenland. Her own polls earlier this year showed an increase in support, prompting her to call the election in February — several months before she had to. She apparently hoped that her resolute image in the standoff would help her with voters.

The early election was not necessarily a failed gamble, as the Social Democrats' support had been lower before the crisis spiked.

Frederiksen warned in January that an American takeover of Greenland would amount to the end of NATO. But the crisis has calmed, at least for now.

Trump backed down on threats to impose tariffs on Denmark and other European countries that opposed the U.S. taking control of the vast Arctic island, and the U.S., Denmark and Greenland started technical talks on an Arctic security deal. The discussions are ongoing.

Manenkov, Dazio and Brooks write for the Associated Press. Dazio reported from Berlin.