

Denmark Shifts in Elections

Leader's party suffers worst results in over 120 years, but she sees path to victory

BY SUNE ENGEL RASMUSSEN

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen led her party to its worst election in more than 120 years on Tuesday, a vote that forces one of Europe's most prominent leaders into difficult negotiations to secure a third term.

The Social Democrats received roughly 22% of the vote, down from 27.5% in 2022, their worst result since 1903. The party is still Denmark's largest, and Frederiksen may retain power, but she falls short of being able to form a center-left coalition.

Frederiksen said seven years in government had worn on her party's popularity.

"We have handled coronavirus, dealt with war, and been threatened by the U.S. president," she said in a televised speech on election night. "I would have preferred a better result, but this is OK."

The election result belies Frederiksen's international status. She earned plaudits from European and U.S. colleagues for driving Europe's efforts to arm Ukraine. Her defense of Greenland made her one of the first European leaders to publicly confront President Trump, a policy Danes overwhelmingly supported.



Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen spoke after Tuesday's disappointing election.

However, voters were largely unswayed at the polls. Many are still angry about her government's 2023 cancellation of a public holiday and the 2020 order to cull all of the roughly 17 million farm-raised mink in Denmark to stop the spread of a coronavirus mutation. The government later admitted the order had no legal grounds.

Frederiksen, who became Denmark's youngest-ever prime minister in 2019 at age 41, campaigned on her ability to stand up to Trump and provide stable leadership in a turbulent world. She also ran on proposals to introduce a wealth tax, improve welfare

for retirees and deport more migrants convicted of violent crimes.

Frederiksen may secure a majority coalition and hold on to power through tough negotiations ahead. With this election, the 179 seats in the Danish parliament will be distributed among 12 political parties.

In that process, a likely kingmaker will be former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, whose centrist party, the Moderates, now holds decisive seats that prevent either the center-left or the center-right from forming an outright majority coalition. Rasmussen was foreign

minister in the departing government, a coalition of three parties across the political center.

Frederiksen suffered because of a shift by voters toward the political poles. The left-wing Socialist People's Party surged to become the second-largest in the country, with nearly 12% of the vote. The right-wing Danish People's Party, which campaigned on restricting immigration, increased its parliamentary seats from five to 16, contradicting a widespread notion in Europe that Frederiksen had cracked the code for stopping the surge of right-wing populists.

REINHOLD FORBERG/REUTERS