

# Election result leaves Danish PM in limbo

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Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has led her party to its worst election result in more than 120 years, 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 per cent of the vote, down from 27.5 per cent in 2022, their worst result since 1903. The party is still Denmark's largest, and Ms Frederiksen may retain power, but she falls short of being able to form a centre-left coalition. Ms 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 US President," she said in a speech on election night. "I would have preferred a better result, but this is OK."

The result belies Ms Frederiksen's international status. She earned plaudits from European and US colleagues for driving Europe's efforts to arm Ukraine. Her defence of Greenland made her one of the first European leaders to confront Donald Trump, something Danes overwhelmingly supported.

Danish voters were largely unswayed. Many are still angry about her government's 2023 cancellation of a public holiday and a 2020 order to cull all of the roughly 17 million farm-raised mink to stop the spread of a coronavirus mutation. The government later admitted the order had

no legal grounds. Ms Frederiksen, who became Denmark's youngest-ever prime minister in 2019 at the age of 41, campaigned on her ability to stand up to the US President 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.

Ms 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 king-maker will be former prime minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, whose centrist party, the Moderates, now holds decisive seats that prevent either the centre-left or the centre-right from forming an outright majority coalition. Mr Rasmussen was foreign minister in the departing government, a coalition of three parties across the political centre.

Ms 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 per cent of the vote. The right-wing Danish People's Party, which campaigned on restricting migration, increased its parliamentary seats from five to 16, contradicting a widespread notion in Europe that Ms Frederiksen had cracked the code for stopping the surge of right-wing populists.

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