



PM's bloc fails to secure majority as Denmark faces weeks of coalition talks

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Mette Frederiksen's Social Democrats and Denmark's other left-leaning parties appear to have failed to win enough votes to gain a clear mandate to form a government in an election fought amid geopolitical tensions with the US over Greenland.

With 100% of the vote counted, the prime minister's party won the most votes but performed worse than expected, garnering 22% of the vote, leaving the Social Democrats and the other left-leaning parties that form the "red bloc" with 84 seats, short of a majority in the 179-seat parliament.

The right-leaning parties of the "blue bloc" also fell short, with 77 seats, giving the foreign minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, the leader of the non-aligned centre-right Moderates, with 14 seats, a role as kingmaker. Denmark now faces weeks of coalition talks, with a centre-left coalition likely to emerge.

Rasmussen emerged at the Moderates party late in the night to give a speech to jubilant supporters.

He urged Frederiksen and Troels Lund Poulsen, the leader of Denmark's Liberal party, with whom he has been in coalition for more than three years, to "come down from the trees" and join him in the centre ground. "What is clear - with all conceivable reservations - I think is that there is no red majority to the left of us and there is no black-blue majority to the right of us," he said to cheers.

At around midnight, Poulsen said he was still a candidate for prime minister and ruled out forming a coalition with the Social Democrats. He told supporters: "We need a new government. And that's also why I'm happy that Venstre [Denmark's liberal party] has become the largest blue party."

Frederiksen's prospects for a third term as prime minister were not looking good after disastrous municipal elections in November, when her party took a severe hit nationally and lost control of Copenhagen for the first time in more than 100 years.

The 48-year-old had called an early election hoping to benefit from a "Greenland bounce" in response to her robust handling of Donald Trump's threats in January to invade the largely autonomous territory that is part of the Danish kingdom.

Discussions between the US, Nuuk and Copenhagen are still taking place but tensions have receded. The crisis appears to have had a lasting effect on Danish voters nevertheless.

"I know that sometimes I express myself a bit bluntly," Frederiksen said during a recent event. "But given the

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Jens-Frederik Nielsen
Greenland PM

▲ Mette Frederiksen, Denmark's prime minister, greets people in Nytorv yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: HENNING BAGGER/EPA

times we live in, it is perhaps very good that there are some things that cannot be misunderstood: that Russia should not be allowed to win or that Greenland is not for sale."

Yesterday the Greenlandic prime minister, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, described the vote as the most important for the Danish parliament in the Arctic island's history. "We are in a time where we have a superpower trying to acquire us, take us, control us," Nielsen told AFP. "They have a desire to do it, so we are still in a very tense situation."

Frederiksen met Greenlandic people living in Aalborg yesterday and said she could never have imagined that as prime minister she would become involved in "defending you against anyone from outside".

Although it grabbed the international headlines, the Greenland issue did not dominate the election, which was largely fought on domestic issues, including a Social Democrat pledge for a "wealth tax" to fund smaller class sizes in primary schools, as well as the cost of living crisis, the tightening of Denmark's already headline immigration laws, animal rights and clean drinking water.

The wealth tax, a 0.5% tax on assets held by an individual worth more than 25m kroner (nearly £3m), was welcomed by many on the left but not by Denmark's super-rich.

Henrik Andersen, the chief executive of the wind turbine firm Vestas, declared "enough is enough" and suggested he may leave the country if it were introduced. The shipping magnate Robert Mærsk Uggla, who is the chair of the board of directors of Maersk and the chief executive of AP Møller Holding, said the tax would be "harmful to Denmark".