

The rightwing opposition might return to office thanks to the Norwegian general elections

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Analysis

3.5 million Norwegians will be re-electing their parliament on 9th September next (local councils can open the polling stations on 8th). The time for political alternation may have come to this country which does not seem to have been greatly affected by the international economic crisis. Indeed Oslo has vast natural resources at its disposal which the State manages scrupulously. Norwegians also have one of the most generous social models in the world. However the country was terribly disrupted by the terrorist attacks committed by Anders Behring Breivik on 22nd July 2011.

Just weeks before the general elections the rightwing opposition led by Erna Solberg (Conservative Party, H) seems to be on course to return to office after 8 years of Labour led government. In power since 2005 outgoing Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour Party, DNA) is vying for a third mandate. His victory would comprise a first in Norwegian history.

Early voting started on 10th August last and will go on until 6th September. Ten TV debates have been programmed between 7th August and 8th September, five of which will be between the outgoing Prime Minister and opposition leader Erna Solberg.

1 – PARADISE THREATENED?

a) The political situation

Norway is an extremely homogenous society focusing on the principle of equality (likhet), which means similarity between citizens and the acceptance by all of a specific cultural identity. *"For a long time survival has meant belonging to the group, which had to be united. To succeed you always have to show that you are like the others. Norway is a small country, social control is strong there, transparency is therefore inevitable, hence it is difficult for the individual to exist,"* analyses political expert Knut Heider. The Welfare State forms the country's base and therefore reduces differences. *"For many years Norwegians did not have to counter the enemy but rather a hostile environment. Hence this meant standing together rather than fighting each other,"* writes André Grjebine, research director at CERI Sciences Po.

The principle of equality (laid out in the Jante bill – Janteloven) written by Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose in 1933 in his novel *"A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks"* (*En flygtning krydser sit spor*) merges with the principle of individual freedom which might be explained by the autonomy of the Norwegian peasantry, who for a long time comprised smallholders, who enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Marie Demker, teacher of political science at the University of Göteborg, describes Norway as a country divided between the working class (split into a radical/revolutiona-

ry group and a moderate/reformist group) and the bourgeoisie (split into agrarians, conservatives and liberals). Political Norway is structured around six parties which all support the Welfare State model and which differ little from an ideological point of view. Just like all other European States after a long period of stability, the country experienced electoral erosion in the 1970's. The political parties' hold on the electorate has weakened and new parties like the Progress Party (FrP), which is critical of the Welfare State and the tax increases undertaken by various governments, have emerged, leading to a new distribution of votes and modifying the way the traditional parties govern. The Norwegian partisan system has polarised; the "small parties" in the centre have gradually lost votes with each national election.

The Labour Party is still the country's leading political party but Oslo has experienced many minority governments in the past since the Norwegian parliament is specific in that it cannot be dissolved. Disagreement within the government coalition has led to the resignation of the government in office three times in the past – this was then replaced by a minority government. The outgoing government coalition led by Jens Stoltenberg comprises the Labour Party (DNA), the Centre Party (Sp) and the Socialist Left Party (SV).

On 22nd July 2011 Norway was deeply affected by the terrorist attacks undertaken by Anders Behring Breivik,

which led to the death of 77 and injured 151. Breivik set off a bomb in the centre of Oslo which destroyed part of the government building. After this he proceeded to the island of Utoya where he murdered 69 people who were taking part in a camp organised by the Labour Party's youth league. He justified his acts saying that he wanted to counter Islam and multi-culturalism. On the same day he broadcast a manifesto on the internet comprising 1,518 pages in which he defended an ultra-nationalistic, Christian fundamentalist ideology. Breivik had previously joined the populist Progress Party in 1999 before being banned seven years later. From 2002 to 2004 he managed the party's youth movement in his home town.

These attacks were the bloodiest catastrophe that Norway had witnessed since the Second World War. On 24th August Breivik was found responsible for his acts and sentenced to the maximum sentence in Norway – 21 years (with a possibility of the sentence being extended).

In August 2012 an independent committee concluded that the attacks might have been prevented and the terrorist arrested earlier if the government had applied security measures which had already been approved. Several years prior to this it was decided to close Grubbegata Street to traffic since it runs alongside the government's headquarters.

In March 2013 a parliamentary report on the fight to counter terrorism advocated the creation of an operational emergency management centre as well as an increase in the number and training of police patrol forces. In this area of tranquillity which Norway embodies (31 murders amongst a population of 4.7 million in 2010), the police are not armed. In all an exceptional package of 109 million kroner were approved in response to the criticism made of the government. On 5th March last the Norwegian Parliament unanimously adopted a text criticising the attitude adopted by the authorities during the attacks on 22nd July 2011: *"the Storting (parliament) deems that criticism of the authorities before and after the attacks is justified in that they did not implement security and intervention measures that might have prevented the attacks and protected the people who were present at the government's HQ and on the island of Utoya."*

The Norwegians understood that one of their fellow countrymen wanted to destroy the Norwegian model. Anders Breivik said that he also wanted to kill Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former Prime Minister (1981-1989 and 1990-1996), who is considered in Norway to be the mother of the nation. She was on Utoya where she delivered a speech to the young Labour supporters just hours before the terrorist's arrival. 27 survivors of the massacre are standing in the elections on 9th September and 3 are electable.

"Norway represents a tolerant, consensual model of so-

ciety. On the other hand however the underlying conformism prevents any other opinion from being heard. It was impossible to foresee the Breivik phenomenon but it is clear that in this country which is reputed for its peaceful tranquillity the tension expressed is all the stronger since it has been repressed for so long," analyses André Grjebine.

b) The Socio-Economic Situation

With a population of 5 million and a GDP per capita of 41,416 € (IMF figures 2012), Norway is the fourth wealthiest country in the world. National macro-economic statistics are stable: GDP growth of 3.5% last year (3% forecast this year), unemployment lies at 3.4% (May 2013) and the average annual income is 42,160 €. Since 2000, the latter figure has literally rocketed: + 63%. It is 60% higher than the European average.

The explanation for this miracle lies in part in the natural hydrocarbon reserves which the country possesses. It is the seventh biggest oil export country in the world and Western Europe's leading supplier of oil and gas. Norway has the highest amount of sovereign funds in the world (around 550 billion €) which is divided in two: the Government Pension Fund-Norway, which invests in local companies and supports the national economy and the Government Pension Fund-Global, which invests in many companies on the international financial markets according to strict ethical principles, which proscribe for example participation in businesses which infringe environmental laws or which are involved in the production and sale of arms, tobacco and even those which employ children. These sovereign funds comprise a reserve for the country's future requirements.

The 4% rule (*handlingsregelen*) prevents the government in office from using more than 4% of the value of the funds per year. The outgoing coalition has in the past rejected a draft bill that planned to reduce this cap to 3%. In all only 11% of the public spending budget relies on the money produced by hydrocarbons.

A committee was launched on 9th August last to look into existing investments and the ways to improve their productivity. Since 1998 the annual yield of the sovereign funds has been 3.17%, which is below the 4% goal set by Parliament.

The Norwegian economy is boosted by the vigour of the oil services sector. Its good health fosters wage increases and reductions in working hours which *in fine* leads to a loss of competitiveness. The country's employment level is extremely low (61%). The sharp rise in wages and the decrease in the number of hours worked (270 less per year since 1974) has led Norwegian businesses to raise their prices in compensation for these two phenomenon. The government has also threatened to use the sovereign

funds if productivity did not increase by 10%. The IMF has warned Oslo. The country has to rise to four major challenges: rising unemployment, the danger of a collapse in growth in the country's two main economic sectors (oil and real estate – the price of the purchase of an apartment has more than doubled in Oslo since 2000), rising wages, which are driven along by the oil sector thereby threatening the competitiveness of other industries and finally the burden of public spending notably that related to the ageing population. Norway is now calling on immigration to fill certain positions but this is not enough to compensate for staff shortages. According to some economic analysts around 6000 engineering positions might still be vacant in 2016.

Political and economic stability has always been one of the country's main assets and has always enabled it to attract foreign investments. But Oslo is still greatly dependent on the world economy and is suffering because of the debt crisis in the European Union. *"Norway cannot cut itself off from external events. The best option is to keep our house in order. I agree with the IMF that we have to spend the revenues produced by oil carefully to help those sectors that are vulnerable,"* declared Finance Minister Sigbjorn Johnsen (DNA).

In 2013, according to the Finance Bill approved on 7th May last, the government is to use 3.3% of the sovereign fund. But the country must diversify its economic activities to reduce its dependency on natural resources which are on the decline: the exhaustion of deposits in the North Sea will reduce oil production to its lowest level in 25 years this year. On 21st April last Labour gave the go-ahead to the launch of a study on the impact of new oil drilling off the protected islands of Lofoten, Vesteraalen and Senja, 200km to the north of the Arctic Circle.

All of the "big" political parties support oil drilling on the Lofoten Islands (*"You cannot light or extinguish the oil industry. It needs stable access to new regions. We think it is possible to combine oil interests with those of the fishermen;"* declared the leader of the Conservative Party, Erna Solberg) whilst the small parties are against it. They maintain that oil production will damage the region's fishing industry and threaten several thousand jobs. They also say that oil and the chemical waste might damage fish stocks (the Lofoten Islands have the biggest stock of cod in the world). Moreover opponents to the drilling project highlight that working conditions in the Arctic waters are difficult and costly. Finally the Lofoten Islands are unique reefs which attract many tourists yearly. Oil production would also threaten many jobs in this sector.

The main criticism made by the Norwegians of their government involves the low rate of public investment. Indeed although the country is wealthy this is not always visible either in its infrastructures or in its public services.

Many citizens think that the authorities have not invested enough in the country and complain of the poor quality of the roads, the poor functioning of the railway system, of the time it takes to access healthcare likewise the lack of investment in schools and universities.

2 – HAS THE TIME COME FOR THE RIGHTWING?

"A chance for all", "New ideas, better solutions," these are two of the slogans launched by the main Norwegian opposition party. Over the last few years the Conservative Party has repositioned itself and Erna Solberg has fought to modernise his party which is suggesting a reform of the country, notably from a fiscal point of view, whilst maintaining budgetary rigour without sacrificing the Norwegian social model. The Conservatives also support the European Union even though their leader has said that she would not organise another referendum on this issue if she became Prime Minister. They are campaigning against the poor state of the public health and education services. They would like to develop nurseries and private schools but maintain that they do not want to privatise the health-care system. They do however want patients to have the choice between public and private care. In terms of infrastructures they want to develop public transport and support the building of a high speed train in the Oslo region (to link Lillehammer to Halden and Skien) as well as new roads thanks to funding that includes both public and private sources. *"We invest too little in research, development, infrastructures and all other things which we need economically,"* indicated Erna Solberg who warned against relying too much on the hydrocarbon industry.

The opposition is considering the division of the Government Pension Fund-Global into several different funds which might invest in the country's infrastructures. Jan Tore Sanner (H), the leader of the Conservative Party's parliamentary group and spokesperson for finance suggested this in an interview with the British daily The Financial Times on 30th June last

Erna Solberg expressed similar thoughts on this. *"We are a party which believes in competition. If you align several runners you would have more competition and this would help us see who achieves the better result,"* she declared. The structure of the sovereign fund was created in 1996 and has barely changed since then (investments on the emerging markets started in 2000 and in real estate in 2011). The Conservative Party is also suggesting a 51% reduction of State involvement in Statoil, the country's biggest energy company. It supports tax reductions (to a total of 25 billion krone, ie 3.17 billion €) and the relief of the burden that weighs on businesses. It wants to reduce or do away with controversial taxes on business assets which discourage property and savings and damage competitiveness and also inheritance taxes deemed to be

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unfair.

The Conservatives are suggesting a reduction on wealth tax to protect small companies and house owners: they want to raise the threshold as of which a person has to pay this tax to 25 million krone (870,000 krone at present). With this new threshold almost all of the present tax payers (99%) would be exonerated. Erna Solberg's party also wants Norwegians who belong to a union (i.e. 54.6% of the population in 2011 according to OECD figures) to be able to deduct their membership fees from their taxes. It supports a more active European policy and a change to the international development policy. It would like to reduce the number of recipient countries, notably highlighting the respect of Human Rights.

Finally the Conservatives want to make the employment of temporary workers easier and to foster the merger of town councils in order to reduce bureaucracy and improve the effectiveness of the Norwegian civil service.

If the right wins on 9th September Svein Tore Marthinsen, a political expert forecasts three possible coalitions: the first bringing together the Conservative Party, the Progress Party and the Christian Democratic Party (KrF) and the Liberal Party (V); a second would bring together the Conservative Party and the Progress Party or a government comprising Conservatives only. The last possibility is the least credible. Many analysts think that the Conservative Party and the Progress Party will not win enough votes together to form a majority.

Erna Solberg has said that she would like to form a government with all of the right. *"I would prefer a four party coalition which has a majority in parliament,"* she declared. The Christian Democratic Party and the Liberals are still reticent however about an alliance with the populist party. On 12th August last the Christian Democratic Party leader, Knut Arild Hareide, indicated that in his opinion a government rallying the Conservatives to the Progress Party alone would be "worse" than the outgoing government.

The preference of the Christian Democratic Party which is divided between a liberal and a more conservative wing leans towards a coalition with the conservatives alone. The party's leader is too distant from the Progress Party regarding many issues in order to govern with the populists. However according to former Christian Democratic Party Prime Minister (1997-2000 and 2001-2005) Kjell Magne Bondevik, the most important matter would be to influence the policy undertaken even if this means sharing power with the Progress Party.

As usual the Christian Democratic Party is campaigning on the defence of family values. They want to a reorganisation of parents' working hours and are asking for example that parents of children under three might stay at home

one day per week. They are also campaigning for the protection of the healthcare system and a reduction in the production of oil and gas.

3 – IS THE LABOUR PARTY A VICTIM OF ITS TIME SPENT IN OFFICE?

Congratulated for his management of the crisis after the attacks on 22nd July 2011, Jens Stoltenberg has become increasingly unpopular in the polls over the last few months. The outgoing Prime Minister has been criticised for his inefficacy before the massacre which, according to a parliamentary report, might have been prevented in part. His name has also appeared in several affairs, he has also committed some faux-pas. The other two parties in government, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party – suffered the same fate as they have fallen in the polls and this led to tension between the three parties in the government coalition.

The government is especially being criticised because of the state of the country's infrastructures notably in terms of transport (the delay in building roads and railways) and in the healthcare sector (little progress in the reform of the hospital sector), but also because of the rise in taxes on imported products such as meat and cheese.

Jens Stoltenberg decided to reduce corporate tax by one point on companies domiciled in Norway – a first since 1992. He announced that this action was the start of a major restructuring of corporate tax. He also said that he wanted the wage negotiation process to be modified. In his opinion the hydrocarbon industry cannot and should not set the standard in terms of wage negotiations in the country.

With the slogan "Alle skal med" (We shall take care of each of you) the outgoing Prime Minister intends to achieve a third term in office. He is highlighting his experience. Falling behind in the polls the outgoing Prime Minister dressed as a taxi driver and drove a few people, who did not know who their driver was, from one point in Oslo to another. The video of this original campaigning method was posted on the internet on 11th August last. The idea was to "listen to what people really thought". There was a slight hiccup though. It was later revealed that the Jens Stoltenberg's passengers had been selected during a casting and paid (500 krone, around 63€). They did not know what they were going to experience but they had accepted to take part in a video for the Labour Party. The latter defended itself by saying that the use of a casting had proven vital in order to be able to represent the diversity of the population.

Unlike in the previous general elections in 2005 and 2009 the Socialist Left Party (SV) led by the Minister for Childhood, Equality and Social Insertion, Audun Lysbakken,

chose not to campaign alongside the Labour Party. The outgoing Prime Minister did however say that there was no problem between the two parties. The Labour Party's strategy undoubtedly aims not to scare off any voters who might be hesitating.

The Socialist Left Party wants the sovereign funds to end investments in hydrocarbon companies and to place them in renewable energies. It has chosen to promote Norwegian values to show that they can be assimilated by everyone, whatever their skin colour or religion.

The Centre Party led by Local Affairs Minister, Liv Signe Navarsete supports Oslo's withdrawal from the Schengen Agreements and is asking for greater powers to control criminal groups on the Norwegian border as well as tighter controls in airports. According to the Centrists, one third of the prisoners held in the kingdom are foreigners. The authoritarian policy put forward by the party is attracting less and less voters however.

The centrists are also fighting for greater support for rural regions and more local autonomy. They support development aid for the sick and the elderly. The traditional core of the centrist electorate – many of them farmers – distanced themselves from the party when Jens Stoltenberg's government reduced the aid they had been granted. Some joined the Christian Democratic Party.

4 – AND WHAT ABOUT THE POPULIST FAR RIGHT?

The Progress Party is in a paradoxical situation. Its rapprochement to the Conservative Party has been to its detriment and has led to a loss of votes in the polls. According to the polls a quarter of the party's former voters were about to vote for Erna Solberg's party on 9th September next. However the Progress Party has never been as close to power as this. Indeed it might make its debut in government if the rightwing win these general elections. Its leader Siv Jensen, who is targeting the post of Finance Minister, maintains that her party would not support a rightwing government of which it was not a member. For the time being she is trying tempt back her electorate to the fold with the slogan "*Let's revive Norway.*"

The Progress Party stands apart from the other Norwegian political parties in that it is suggesting greater use of the sovereign funds to "*invest in the country's infrastructures*

rather than on foreign financial markets" according to Siv Jensen. She wants to create an independent public fund for infrastructures and increase spending on the police forces, care for the elderly (the latter may enjoy the right to a place in a retirement home) and schools. She wants however to reduce international aid, aid granted to farmers and to cultural activities and finally to privatise the national railway company (NSB) and the national radio-TV company (NRK).

The Progress Party's programme also suggests a reduction in taxes (around 100 billion krone ie 12.68 billion €) because 57% of its supporters believe that the taxation level is too high in Norway lying at a national average of 28% – a reduction in taxes on imports set by the government, a reduction in immigration and action to counter what Siv Jensen calls the *snikislamiering* (the rampant Islamification of society). "*Jens Stoltenberg speaks freely of the Norwegian model. The Progress Party speaks of the Norwegian people,*" stressed Siv Jensen during the party's annual congress in Gardermoen.

5 – THE NORWEGIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Norwegian Parliament (Storting) has been monocameral since the general elections on 14th September 2009 (amendment of the Constitution of 20th February 2007) and comprises 169 members. MPs are elected every four years from a proportional list of seats according to the modified Sainte-Laguë system. 150 MPs are appointed within 19 fylker (counties) which form as many constituencies each electing between 5 (Finnmark and Sogn og Fjordane) and 17 representatives (Oslo) depending on their size and the number of inhabitants. To bring representation in line as much as possible with the vote of the people, 19 MPs (one per constituency) are appointed nationally and are from the political parties which are under-represented in the constituencies. These are called compensatory seats. A political party has to win at least 4% of the votes cast nationally in order to take part in the distribution of compensatory seats. The Norwegian electorate has the right to modify the order of the candidates featuring on the electoral lists; the order of the candidates decided previously by the party remains decisive most of the time.

To take part in the general election in a constituency all political parties must win 500 votes (or more than 5 000 nationally) and present the signature of two members

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of the board of the local branch of the party. The parties which do not fulfil criteria have to collate the signature of 500 voters enrolled in the constituency. A candidate can run in several constituencies.

The King of Norway who is not considered a citizen is not allowed to vote. The queen and the prince can vote but generally prefer not to.

At present seven political parties are represented in the Storting;

- The Labour Party (DNA) created in 1887 and led since 2002 by outgoing Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, has 61 MPs;
- The Progress Party (FrP), founded on 8th April 1973 and led by Siv Jensen since 2006, is a far right party. It has 41 seats;

- The Conservative Party (H) created in 1884, an opposition party chaired by former Local Affairs and Regional Development Minister (2001-2005), Erna Solberg, has 30 MPs;

- The Socialist Left Party (SV), founded in 1975 and an outgoing government member led since 11th March 2012 by Childhood, Equality and Social Insertion Minister, Audun Lysbakken, has 11 seats;

- The Centre Party (Sp), a former agrarian party founded in 1920, chaired by Local Affairs Minister Liv Signe Navarsete, member of the government coalition has 11 seats;

- The People's Christian Party (KrF), founded in 1933, an opposition party led by Knut Arild Hareide has ten seats;

- The Liberal Party (V), founded in 1884, is the oldest party in Norway. Chaired by Trine Skei Grande, it has 2 seats.

Reminder of the general election results of 14th September 2009 in Norway

Turnout: 76.40%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
Labour Party (DNA)	949 049	35.4	64
Progress Party (FrP)	614 717	22.9	41
Conservative Party (H)	462 458	17.2	30
Socialist Left Party (SV)	166 361	6.2	11
Centre Party (Sp)	165 006	6.2	11
Christian Democratic Party (KrF)	148 748	5.5	10
Liberal Party (V)	104 144	3.9	2
Others	85 985	2.7	0

Source : <http://www.regjeringen.no/krd/html/valg2009/bs5.html>

The poll undertaken by the VG institute is forecasting a clear lead for the rightwing. According to the survey the Conservative Party is due to win 31.9% of the vote ahead of the Labour Party with 27.5% of the vote. The Progress Party is due to come third with 14.2% of the vote. Far behind the Liberal Party is due to win 5.6% of the vote; the Christian Democratic Party 5.5% and the Centre Party 5.3%. Finally the Socialist Left Party would be excluded from Parliament since it is due to win 3.3% of the vote. Together the rightwing would win 57.2% of the vote (43% without the Progress Party) against 36.1% for the leftwing forces. It remains to be seen whether the four rightwing parties will accept to join forces and succeed in forming a government together. Outgoing Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg is not hesitating to use the confusion that sometimes reigns within the opposition involving post-electoral alliances

and loves to repeat to the electorate that Labour allied to the Centrists and Socialists are perfectly capable of governing the country.

The Conservative Party pulled ahead of Labour in the polls for the first time in May 2012. It is the leading party amongst the young (the under 30 year olds): 31.3% of them say they will vote for Erna Solberg's party whilst 23% say they will vote for Labour. Nearly half of the electorate under 30 did not turn out to vote in the last general election on 14th September 2009.

"The Norwegians are ready to dismiss Jens Stoltenberg because they want change. They are not disappointed, they are rather tired of the present government," analyses Johannes Berg, a political expert at the Social Research Institute in Oslo. *"There has been a turn to the right over the last ten years. People want to try something out with the parties on the right,"* he adds.

The rightwing wins the general elections in Norway

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The rightwing forces won the general elections that took place in Norway on 9th September. The Conservative Party (H) chaired by former Local Affairs and Regional Development Minister (2001-2005), Erna Solberg won 26.8% of the vote and 48 seats (+ 18 in comparison with the previous elections on 14th September 2009). The Progress Party (FrP) a populist party led by Siv Jensen won 16.4% of the vote and 29 seats (-12). The Christian Democratic Party (KrF), led by Knut Arild Hareide won 5.6% of the vote and 10 seats (=); the Liberal Party (V) chaired by Trine Skei Grande won 5% of the vote and 9 seats (+ 7).

Together the rightwing won 54% of the vote and 96 of the 169 seats in the Storting the only chamber of parliament.

Results

The Labour Party (DNA), led by outgoing Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg who can be pleased at having retained its position as the country's leading party won 30.8% of the vote and 55 seats (-9). The Centre Party (Sp), a member of the outgoing government coalition, led by Local Affairs Minister Liv Signe Navarsete won 5.5% of the vote and 10 seats (-1) and the Socialist Left Party (SV) also a member of the outgoing govern-

ment coalition chaired by Childcare, Equality and Social Integration Minister Audun Lysbakken won 4.1% of the vote and 7 seats (-4).

The last seat went to the Green Party (MDG) which won 2.8% of the vote.

Turnout totalled 71.4% i.e. -5 points in comparison with the general election that took place on 14th September 2009.

General Elections on 9th September 2013 in Norway

Turnout: 71.4%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
Labour Party (DNA)	869 279	30,8	55
Conservative Party (H)	755 567	26,8	48
Progress Party (FrP)	460 869	16,4	29
Christian Democratic Party (KrF)	157 705	5,6	10
Centre Party (Sp)	154 588	5,5	10
Liberal Party (V)	146 997	5,2	9
Socialist Left Party (SV)	114 987	4,1	7
Green Party (MDG)	78 224	2,8	1
Others	79 621	2,7	0

Source : (<http://www.valgresultat.no/bss.html>)

The leader of the Conservative Party Erna Solberg qualified the rightwing result as "an historic electoral victory" and promised to "give Norway a new government". "Voters have given us a mandate to implement a new

policy: better schools, better roads and better competitiveness so that Norway can maintain its Welfare State," she declared. "It is an historic result. For the first time in 24 years Norway will have a Conservative

Prime Minister," indicated Jan Tore Sanner, chair of the conservative group in the Storting.

During the electoral campaign Erna Solberg repeated that she wanted to form a government with the four rightwing parties. She will therefore start negotiations with the Progress Party, the Christian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. Both of the latter do not seem prepared however to accept an alliance with the Progress Party. Trine Skei Grande (V) and Knut Arild Hareide (KrF) even warned against a government formed with the Conservative Party and the Progress Party alone in the daily *Dagsavisen*. Both parties put forward a list of 15 measures they wanted to see introduce in the event of a rightwing victory and said that the Progress Party was against 11 of the 15 measures (the refusal to drill for hydrocarbons on the (protected) islands of Lofoten, Vesteraalen and Senja, the introduction of taxation in support of the environment and a more human asylum policy amongst others).

Erna Solberg could lead a minority government with just the Progress Party, which is a frequent situation in Norway whose parliament is specific – unique in Europe – in that it cannot be dissolved. This government could enjoy the parliamentary support of the Liberal and the Christian Democratic Parties.

The Conservatives have promised reductions in taxes and the privatisation of certain public services. Erna Solberg's party disagrees with Siv Jensen over the 4% rule (*handlingsregelen*) which bans the government in office from using more than 4% per year of the value of the country's sovereign funds, which are the wealthiest in the world (around €550 billion) The populists are suggesting greater use of the country's reserves to invest in infrastructures. Political analysts believe however that both rightwing parties should come to agreement on a more flexible interpretation of the 4% rule. The future government will be a unique coalition in Norway's history.

The probable accession to office by the Progress Party is a deceptive victory for the populists. Indeed the party recorded a clear regression in comparison with the elections of September 2009 (-12 seats) dropping from second to third place and now the Conserva-

tives have pulled ahead of them. Their result does not reveal a breakthrough for populism as such but rather the desire for change on the part of the Norwegians. *"The Progress Party has become respectable,"* stresses Bernt Aardal, a political expert at the University of Oslo. *"To date the Progress Party was never able to govern because it was isolated. No one wanted to form a coalition with it. But its leader Siv Jensen has made some concessions by insisting less for example on its anti-immigration positions. The Conservatives know that their leader will become Prime Minister. They have more influence and are ready to work with this moderate far right,"* indicates Johannes Berg of the Social Research Institute of Oslo. *"In the 1990's the Progress Party caused a scandal when it asked for a calculation of the cost of immigration believing that the Welfare State was suffering because of it. This is no longer shocking and an official committee was asked to make the calculation. On this point at least the party won the day,"* indicates Kristin Clemet, manager of the think-tank Civita. Indeed during the electoral campaign all of the political parties promoted the need to introduce a more "responsible" immigration policy.

"Nearly no one has succeeded in winning the general elections three times in a row. We can say that it was too hard," declared outgoing Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg who acknowledged his defeat when the results were announced. The Labour Party clearly fell victim to an erosion of power after eight years as head of the country, a record in terms of longevity in Norway. *"Few people criticise the policy undertaken by Labour because the economy is doing well. But the Norwegians just want a change,"* maintains Johannes Berg.

"The wave of sympathy that Labour enjoyed after the attacks on 22nd July 2011 has fallen flat. Even if the economic indicators are good the electorate are tired of their government, in office for the last eight years. They want new faces, a slightly different policy," analyses Bernt Aardal. *"The attacks of 22nd July 2001 by Anders Behring Breivik were almost absent from the electoral campaign that was mainly focused on social issues, health, education, taxation and transport. The 22nd July 2011 is fading from our memory. We live with it but we want to move on. It was important to*

return to normal so that Anders Behring Breivik, could not rejoice at being at the heart of the campaign from the depths of his prison cell," repeated the political analyst.

Erna Solberg will therefore be the next Prime Minister of Norway. In 2013 when Oslo will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's vote – she will be the second woman to undertake this function after Gro Harlem Brundtland (DNA), nicknamed the Mother of the Nation, Prime Minister from 1981 à 1989 then from 1990 to 1996.

Aged 52 Erna Solberg was born in Bergen and is a graduate of political science and economy from the university in that town. Elected to the Storting in 1989 she became the Local Affairs and Regional Develop-

ment Minister in 2001 in the government led by Kjell Magne Bondevik (2001-2005). Nicknamed *Jern-Erna* (Iron Erna), this admirer of German Chancellor Merkel (*"Angela Merkel is a talented woman, a model,"* declared Erna Solberg) has modernised the party she has led since 2004. *"Erna Solberg has transformed the Conservative Party which was used to an extremely ideological discourse focused on the financial markets. She has turned the party shaped by the Oslo elite into a movement that is focused on the west of Norway where most of the country's industry is concentrated,"* indicates political analyst Frithjof Jacobsen.

Erna Solberg has said that education, the improvement of access to healthcare and investment in infrastructures would comprise her government's priorities.

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