

Election reaction: Norway's government secures a fragile second term



Norway's government, led by Erna Solberg, is set to remain in power following the country's parliamentary election on 11 September. Although the Norwegian Labour Party emerged with the largest number of seats, it lost support in the latter stages of the campaign and fell short of the mark required to regain control of the government. [Sveinung Arnesen](#) reacts to the result, noting that the main consequence of the election is that power has shifted from the executive to the legislature, with the Conservative Party and Progress Party aiming for four more years without solid majority support in parliament.



Norwegian PM Erna Solberg, Credit: [Stortinget](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Breaking the pattern of single term office for non-socialist governments, Erna Solberg, the leader of Norway's Conservative Party, is set to remain as Norwegian prime minister following the country's general election on Monday. The two governmental parties successfully held onto their voters, and won about forty percent of the votes. Their supporting liberal and Christian democratic partners that have ensured a majority in parliament over the last four years, however, barely surpassed the four percent threshold needed for representation.

These parties have paid a costly price at the polls for their formal partnership with the right-right minority government. The Christian Democrats performed particularly poorly, and have not seen a lower vote share since before the Second World War. Looking to change strategy, their leader, Knut Arild Hareide, has already stated that they will not actively support a government which includes the Progress Party. The liberals are more eager to continue the collaboration, and might even end up in government when the negotiations have settled.

This minority government will still depend upon the votes of the Christian Democrats, and is likely to need to fight for them on a case-by-case basis in parliament. The tactical position of the government has weakened, as all four parties need to agree to have a majority in parliament whereas in the last parliamentary period the governing parties only needed backing from one of the supporting parties. Add some bitterness among the Christian Democrats over the election outcome, and it is evident that Solberg, though a popular prime minister, will have to work harder in the coming period than she has in the previous period to stay in office for the full term.

Table: Results of the 2017 Norwegian parliamentary election

Party	Vote share (%)	Vote change (%)	Seats won	Seat change
<i>Labour Party (AP)</i>	27.4	-3.4	49	-6
<i>Conservative Party (H)</i>	25.1	-1.7	45	-3
<i>Progress Party (FRP)</i>	15.3	-1.1	27	-2
<i>Centre Party (SP)</i>	10.3	+4.8	19	+9
<i>Socialist Left Party (SV)</i>	6	+1.9	11	+4
<i>Liberal Party (V)</i>	4.3	-0.9	8	-1
<i>Christian Democrats (KRF)</i>	4.2	-1.4	8	-2
<i>Green Party (MDG)</i>	3.2	+0.4	1	0
<i>Red Party (R)</i>	2.4	+1.3	1	+1

Note: These are preliminary results and could change. **Source:** [Valgresultat.no](http://valgresultat.no)

Perhaps the biggest loser on Election Day was the Labour Party. Witnessing depreciating support throughout 2017, Jonas Gahr Støre in his first election campaign as party leader only just held his party onto the position as the largest party in Norway. It is still early to diagnose the sources of the failure, but it is clear that many voters did not think it was time for a change. And those who did want change, did not want Labour.

The results show that all of the opposition parties apart from Labour managed to gain votes in comparison with 2013. Data from The Norwegian Citizen Panel – a research-purpose probability-based survey panel – indicates that the government lost votes to the opposition during the first couple of years they were in power. In autumn 2015, this loss of support stopped, around the time of the European refugee crisis. Also, the economy that had slowed due to a plummeting oil price did not turn into an economic crisis, and thus was not an issue on which Labor could capitalise.

The latent centre/periphery cleavage resurfaced with full force in this year's election, mainly due to a series of government reforms that aim to centralise public service sectors such as health, education, and the police. However, the voters who were concerned with these issues went not to the Labour Party, but rather to the agrarian Centre Party, who experienced their most successful election since the 1993 "EU referendum" election.

Ultimately, the main consequence of the election is likely to be that power will shift from the executive to the legislative branches of power. The Conservative Party and Progress Party will aim for four more years in office, but without solid majority support in parliament.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics.

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