

Sweden's snap election

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Image: News Oresund

Last week, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven announced that there was to be a snap election in the country in March 2015, the first such election since 1958. As Sweden is typically seen as one of the more stable democracies in the EU, and the western world as a whole, this news has been received with alarm and surprise.

Sweden has a unicameral parliament called the Riksdag, to which 349 representatives are elected, usually every four years. Of these seats, 310 are elected via a method of proportional representation known as the Sainte-Laguë method and 49 are held independently of a constituency and are assigned to parties in proportion to the amount of votes received. In order for a party to receive any seats in the Riksdag at all, it must secure more than 4% of the vote. This means that, as long as a party receives more than 4% of the vote, it will more or less be proportionally represented in parliament, which means coalitions are incredibly common. Sweden has not had a majority government since 1968.

Despite this tradition of co-operation between parties, tensions have been rocking the country for the past few years. One of the main political issues in Sweden is immigration. In 2010, 14.3% of all Swedish residents were foreign born. Given that the government voted last year to give automatic asylum to any Syrian refugees that managed to get to the country, this figure is only set to rise. But whilst this statistic may be met with horror in Britain, there was a consensus of widespread support in Sweden towards immigration. It may perhaps be compared with the 1990s-mid 2000s broad support for immigration in the UK. However, like the UK, the nation is becoming increasingly fractured on the issue. That's why the far-right Swedish Democrats secured 12% of the vote in the last election and managed to bring the parliamentary machinery to a complete halt.

The current government consists of a minority government between the Social Democrats and the Greens, who between them comprise 138 seats, which is 37 short of the 175 needed to secure a majority.

This has caused the government to be dependent on the Moderate Party and the Sweden Democrats, who hold 84 and 49 seats, respectively. When the Sweden Democrats voted alongside the opposition, Prime Minister Lofven's budget was rejected, leading to a breakup of the government and the call for new elections.

It is likely that next year's vote will be seen as a bellwether for the right-wing in Europe. There's been a sustained rise of anti-EU parties across the EU, from the more moderate UKIP and Sweden Democrats to the militant Jobbik and Golden Dawn. If the Sweden Democrats - a party with no parliamentary representation prior to 2010 - are continually able to obstruct the parliament of the EU's 8th largest economy, the repercussions will be felt across the continent. Similarly, if they are able to enter government, it will represent a key turning point within the EU; the point at which a member state may hold its first exit referendum.

It is still highly within the realm of possibility that the Sweden Democrats' election success was a flash in the pan, and that the Social Democrats will be able to form a majority coalition in 2015. But this is far from a safe bet, and whatever the result, Sweden's first snap election in over 50 years is guaranteed to be one of the most significant political events in Europe this decade.

Update: This election has now been abandoned as Prime Minister Löfven has managed to organise a six party coalition.



One comment

The Sweden Report

8 Dec '14 at 8:47 pm

As an American living in Sweden for 6 years, I am convinced that the unique - and extreme - immigration of primarily low-educated people from a very different culture is going to have dire consequences for Swedish society in the years ahead regardless of the March election outcome. This has also triggered a massive white flight phenomenon that in turn has inflated the housing market in a way that reminds me of USA in 2006-2007. Add rampant islamism in the no-go zones and you have quite the volatile cocktail. <http://swedenreport.org>

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