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The golden Lego brick

Denmark's upcoming election could hinge on centrist kingmakers

The snap general election in Denmark on 24 March 2026 comes as no surprise. This is a strategically calculated move by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Following poor results in the European and local elections, the parties in the grand coalition, often described by Frederiksen herself as 'peculiar' and politically difficult to explain, consisting of the Social Democrats, the liberal Venstre and the centrist-conservative Moderates, have now switched to election campaign mode. Their poll ratings had been stagnating for months anyway. This is despite the economy performing well, the unemployment rate remaining at a record low, and one of the biggest problems in the labour market being a shortage of skilled workers.

The political low point came in November 2025. For the first time in 87 years, it was not a Social Democrat but a representative of the green-left Socialist People's Party who took the mayor's office in Copenhagen. Above all, the high cost of living and a failed Social Democratic housing policy had disappointed the party's core electorate. Within the party, questions rained down as to how it could sound more 'Social Democratic' again. A downward trend ensued. By the end of the year, the Social Democrats stood at 16.5 per cent, their lowest level in over a decade.

The turnaround came, of all places, from outside: Donald Trump once again threatened to take over Greenland, drawing the best out of Frederiksen once more. Trump's threats spurred the Prime Minister to peak performance and propelled the Social Democrats up the polls. From the pandemic, through the Russian invasion of Ukraine and drone crises, to the Greenland conflict with Trump: when it comes to crisis management, her political rivals are miles behind her. To capitalise on the Greenland effect, Frederiksen is focusing on strengthening the Social Democrats' profile, coupled with her hardline stance on migration policy. The pragmatic Prime Minister is thus adapting to the new reality of Danish politics, in which the political blocs are increasingly fragmenting into many individual parts, similar to the Danish export hit Lego, and

everyone is trying to cater to their own constituency.

A strategic shift to the left

Mette Frederiksen is gathering the building blocks that can anchor the Social Democrats in a position conducive to forming a coalition, whilst also focusing on her own image. There are many indications that most of the connecting pieces could be added from the centre-left this time. Compared to the last Folketing election in 2022, the Social Democrats are losing the most voters to the left. Early in the campaign, the party therefore established education as a key issue. With the proposal to reduce primary school class sizes from 26 to 14 pupils and to invest around 700 million euros in doing so, it scored points and promptly reaffirmed its traditional image as a welfare party.

The strategic shift to the left has struck a chord with the electorate, and the Social Democrats claim to have brought distributive justice back into focus. The public debate gained tremendous momentum when the business-friendly Frederiksen called for the introduction of a wealth tax to cover planned investments in education, in her speech announcing the election. The 0.5 per cent tax would be levied on assets exceeding 25 million Danish kroner (around 3.35 million euros). 'Those with the broadest shoulders must bear more,' and Denmark was 'too small for such inequality,' the Prime Minister asserted in campaign mode. She was referring to the fact that 25 per cent of wealth in Denmark is held by one per cent of the population. He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind, as last year's election campaign in neighbouring Norway already demonstrated, albeit under different circumstances. There, however, the Social Democrats, led by Finance Minister Stoltenberg, withstood a record campaign for the abolition of an existing wealth tax. Stoltenberg therefore intervened in support of the Danish election campaign and told the press that it was a 'myth' that the wealth tax was harming Norway. His Danish Social Democratic counterpart expressed his gratitude.

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Business associations and the blue right-wing bloc naturally reject the proposal and rail against it, claiming Frederiksen wants to make Denmark poorer. Lego CEO Niels Christiansen also showed little enthusiasm for the Social Democrats' proposal. The coalition partners ruled out renewed participation in government should the Social Democrats not back down from the demand. Mette Frederiksen now, however, has countless opportunities to sharpen

her left-wing profile, which has suffered massively under the grand coalition. This strategic shift to the left clearly strikes a chord with the electorate, as the Social Democrats claim to have brought distributive justice back into focus even as criticism of their willingness to implement this proposal persists. It is difficult to imagine how such demands could be implemented, other than through a left-wing coalition.

Frederiksen's Social Democrats moved seamlessly on to the next traditional issue: pension reform. From 2040, the retirement age is to rise by just six months every five years, rather than by a full year. In the long term, the retirement age would thus stand at 74 instead of the current 77. Arne, the brewery worker who took early retirement in 2025, is once again omnipresent. This crown jewel of social policy is being carefully polished further. The Social Democrats plan to freeze the maximum age for taking early retirement at 66. This is almost identical to the demands of the Danish trade union confederation, which is why Frederiksen met with the chairman for a 'genuine workers' lunch' in a move designed to attract media attention.

The climate issue does not in itself play a central role in the election campaign, yet in recent days people-centred environmental issues have come to the fore as winning themes for the left. The focus is on groundwater, which is heavily polluted by nitrates and pesticides from agriculture. The left-wing opposition parties accuse the government of inaction and are thus finding great resonance among the population. Admittedly, the Social Democrats can certainly be accused of inaction — but only from the left. Accusations from the right, such as those from Venstre Deputy Prime Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, appear implausible by contrast. The parties of the blue bloc, particularly Venstre, maintain close ties with the agricultural sector. Now, however, almost all parties to the left of centre are calling for comprehensive bans on pesticides. In this context, the regulation of excessive and increasingly criticised pig farming is also playing a role in the Danish election campaign.

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The Danish Social Democrats are said to have cornered the debate on migration. The figures are now negligible. Nevertheless, in 2025, the far-right Danish People's Party, long written off, made a strong comeback in the local election campaign. However, it scored points less on migration policy and more on issues such as the

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cost of living and the revitalisation of rural areas. Now that the national election campaign has begun, however, the Danish People's Party (DF) is polarising opinion with the issue of 'remigration': 'There must be a net emigration of Muslim fellow citizens,' demanded DF leader Morten Messerschmidt, accusing the Social Democrats of being too soft. The Social Democrats remain firm: under the slogan 'We don't want those who don't want Denmark', they published 18 new measures, including the deportation of criminal asylum seekers (those sentenced to over a year in prison), centres outside the EU, and the withholding of healthcare in cases of violence against staff. However, they actively oppose the DF and others' calls to withdraw from the European Court of Justice and terminate international treaties. Nor do they wish to cut development aid, 0.7 per cent of Denmark's GDP is to remain the benchmark here.

The latest polls show that the trend favours the Social Democrats, though they remain well below their 2022 election result (27.5 per cent). They will likely need the support of the entire left-wing bloc to form a left-wing government. A revival of the grand coalition is unpopular. Whilst the liberal Venstre is struggling, the Moderates, led by Lars Løkke Rasmussen and defining themselves as a 'block-breaking' centrist party, currently find themselves in a dream position. They are, in a sense, the golden brick in the coalition Lego set, for without the Moderates there is unlikely to be a majority government. Yet, especially given recent experience, minority governments remain the norm in Denmark. Until the deadline, the crisis-tested Mette Frederiksen will continue to focus on her core business, giving it her all and attempting, through her left-wing agenda-setting, to force her opponents to react on the one hand and to facilitate a return to the red bloc on the other. Until the vote on 24 March, it remains to be seen who will call the shots in the kingdom afterwards, and where Løkke will place his golden Lego brick.



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