

Norway's political parties ahead of the elections

On 11 September 2017, Norwegian voters will be heading to the polls amid concern over weak growth, an increasingly assertive Russia, as well as the impact of Brexit on the country's economy.

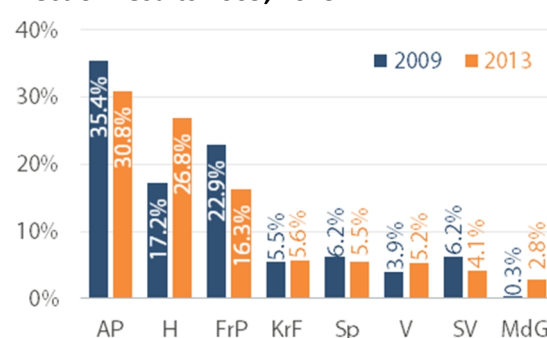
Norway and its political system

Norway is a well-functioning [welfare state](#) with a high degree of public [confidence](#) in authorities and institutions. A parliamentary [democracy](#), the country is governed by a prime minister, a cabinet and a 169-seat parliament, the Stortinget. The country's [king](#) has very limited political power. Norway's electoral system is based on the principles of direct election and proportional representation. Norway is divided into 19 parliamentary [constituencies](#) which correspond to the country's counties, including the municipality of Oslo. Members are allocated to their constituencies according to the area of the county and the size of its population. Of the 169 members, 150 are elected as constituency representatives while 19, one seat from each constituency, are elected as members at large. The threshold for the extra 19 seats is 4%.

2013 shift to the right

The last Stortinget election of 2013 resulted in the defeat of the 'red-green' centre-left coalition of Labour (AP), the Centre Party (Sp) and the Socialist Left (SV), which had formed coalitions in 2005 and 2009. The 2013 parliamentary election also marked the first vote since the right-wing extremist terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011, which claimed [77 lives](#) and deeply affected Norwegian society. However, the calm, consensual [approach](#) of then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, the political elites and citizens prevented politicisation of the attacks. Although AP remained the largest party, the centre-left coalition lost its majority. The Conservative Party (H) formed a minority government with the right-wing populist Progress Party (FrP). A cooperation agreement with the Christian Democrats (KrF) and the Liberal Party (V) gave it 96 out of 169 seats.

Election results 2009, 2013



Source: stortinget.no.

Key questions for Norway's leaders

Key domestic [questions](#) include how to curb economic [growth](#) despite the declining oil sector; how to integrate the growing number of immigrants; how to tackle climate change; and how to balance the country's welfare system with an aging population. At the same time, uncertainty stemming from Norway's neighbour Russia, the United States and the EU (the unknown effects of Brexit) – the global players dominating Norway's external foreign policy [triangle](#) – is sparking concern.

Ruling coalition parties and supporting parties

Høyre (H, Conservative Party): 'Believe in Norway':

Led by Prime Minister Erna Solberg, the liberal-conservative Høyre, founded in 1884, is the senior coalition partner in the ruling government. According to H's 2017 [mission statement](#), the party pursues a conservative progressive policy based on Christian cultural values and democracy, promoting personal freedom and social responsibility, and a binding commitment to international cooperation. H emerged as the big [winner](#) of the 2013 election, winning 48 seats (up from 30 in 2009). H favours EU membership but respects the public will to remain outside. It is an associate member of the [European People's Party](#) (EPP).

Fremskrittspartiet (FrP, Progress Party): 'For most people'

Founded in 1973 and led by Siv Jensen, the FrP represents the right wing in Norwegian politics and describes itself as a [libertarian party](#) that believes in freedom for the individual, lower taxes, prosperity and limited



government services. It advocates a strict immigration policy to 'ensure sustainable public services'. The FrP lost support in the 2013 election, gaining 29 seats, down from 41 seats in 2009. The FrP supports voters' right to a referendum on possible membership of the EU. The party has no European affiliation.

Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF, Christian Democrats): 'Human dignity at the centre'

The [Kristelig Folkeparti](#) was founded in 1933 and pursues conservative, Christian values. The KrF is currently led by Knut Arild Hareide, who is steering the party towards a more liberal [direction](#), feeding [speculation](#) that it could end its support for the Conservative-Progress coalition. In the 2013 election, the KrF retained its 10 seats, the same number as in 2009. The KrF is an observer member party of the EPP.

Venstre (Liberal Party): 'Teamed up with tomorrow'

Formed in 1884, [Venstre](#) is Norway's oldest political party. Led by Trine Skei Grande, the centrist and social-liberal gained 9 seats in 2013, up from 2 in 2009. Venstre combines 'personal freedom with responsibility for the community', focusing on education, environment, jobs and welfare. Venstre opposes Norwegian EU membership and is a member of the [Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe](#).

Major opposition parties

Arbeiderpartiet (AP, Labour Party): 'Everyone participates'

Founded in 1887, the [Arbeiderpartiet](#) is a social democratic party and was the [ruling party](#) from before World War II until the mid-1960s. The [biggest party](#) since 1927, the AP lost 9 seats in 2013, but remains the biggest party in the Stortinget. Former foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre succeeded current NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as the chair of the AP in 2014. The AP supported Norwegian membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1972 and the EU in 1994. It is a full member of the [Party of European Socialists](#).

Senterpartiet (Sp, Centre Party): 'Make use of all Norway'

Founded in 1920 as an agrarian party, the [Senterpartiet](#) promotes decentralised economic development and decision-making. Led by Trygve Slagsvold Vedum, the Sp opposes EU membership and the European Economic Area Agreement, but wants stronger NATO ties. As a centrist party, the Sp has cooperated with parties on [both sides](#) of the political spectrum. It won 10 seats in 2013, down from 11 in 2009, and has no European affiliation.

Sosialistisk Venstreparti (SV, Socialist Left Party): 'Join the fight for a warm society'

Founded in 1975 and led by Audun Lysbakken, the SV is a socialist party on the [left wing](#) of the Norwegian political spectrum. The SV was junior partner in the AP-led red-green alliance formed in 2005 and 2009. The SV lost four seats in 2013 and currently holds seven. The [SV](#) wants to cut carbon emissions and increase the number of teachers. It supports EU and NATO membership and is affiliated to the [Nordic Green Left Alliance](#).

Miljøpartiet de Grønne (MdG, Green Party): 'Take care of diversity'

Founded in 1988, the [MdG](#) has no formal chair, but two joint spokespersons Une Aina Bastholm and Rasmus Hanson. The 2013 election was the national breakthrough for the MdG, earning the party one seat. It supports organic farming, innovation and sustainable industry and is a member of the [European Green Party](#).

Norway-EU relations

The European Parliament's [Delegation](#) for relations with Norway was established in 1982. Norway rejected EEC/EU membership in [referendums](#) in 1972 and 1994, but maintains close ties with the EU through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement and bilateral agreements, and is part of the Schengen Area. Signed in 1994, the EEA expands the EU's Single Market to Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Norway is the EU's largest supplier of fish, with the EU importing Norwegian seafood worth €6.5 billion in 2016. After Russia, Norway is the EU's largest supplier of energy products, including crude petroleum and natural gas amounting to almost half of EU imports from Norway, worth €30.7 billion in 2016.

Norway and Brexit

In May 2017, Erna Solberg stressed the [importance](#) of close EU-Norway dialogue in view of the Brexit talks, amid [concern](#) over the impact of a 'hard Brexit' on Norway's economy (the UK is one of Norway's biggest trading partners). Norway's European affairs minister, Elisabeth Vik Aspaker, said in [August 2017](#) that a UK attempt to rejoin the European Free Trade Association EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), which regulates trade among the EFTA countries as well as their participation in the EEA and their global network of free trade agreements, may not be in Norway's interest, as it could disturb the balance within EFTA. A UK membership bid would require a unanimous vote among existing EFTA members, enabling a Norwegian veto. Oslo has set up a task force to evaluate the [consequences](#) of Brexit on Norway.