

Rightwing posts record result in elections

Urs Geiser, 22 October 2007

The rightwing Swiss People's Party and the Greens have made the biggest gains in Sunday's parliamentary elections.

Near-final results show the rightwing posted a record result, while the centre-left Social Democrats suffered a major defeat. The four main parties pledged to



Green Party members had reason to celebrate (Keystone)

continue their long-standing cooperation despite an unusually heated election campaign.

Final results as well as a breakdown of seats for the House of Representatives are not expected until Monday morning.

The People's Party took 28.8 per cent of the vote in the elections for the House, up 2.1 per cent on 2003, according to the gfs.berne polling institute.

If confirmed the People's Party posted the best result among the four governing parties since 1919 and could win up to 62 of the 200 seats in the House.

The Social Democrats appear to have suffered the biggest loss, dropping up

to nine seats and taking 19.3 per cent of the vote, down by four per cent on 2003.

The Radicals lost five seats as their share of the vote dropped 1.5 per cent to 15.8 per cent, while the other centre-right party, the Christian Democrats, recorded slight gains, winning three seats and 14.7 per cent, up 0.3 per cent.

These four parties have held more than 75 per cent of the seats in parliament for decades.

Greens

The true winners of the 2007 elections could be the Greens. They are forecast to boost their number of seats in the House to 19, from 14. Their share of the vote increased to 9.6 per cent from 7.7 per cent.

The Greens also won their first seat in the 46-member Senate. Run-off elections will be held in eight of the country's 26 cantons next month.

The president of the People's Party, Ueli Maurer, said his party was committed to working for consensus in the cabinet in an apparent reversal of its confrontational style in the election campaign.

The Social Democratic Party admitted defeat, after

posting their worst result since 1991. Party leaders said they had failed to convince voters with a programme of social and environmental issues.

Mud-slinging in the run-up to election day increased voter interest slightly, and turnout was estimated at an above-average 48 per cent.

Campaign

The campaign was dominated by controversy over Justice Minister Christoph Blocher and his People's Party which ran on a nationalist, anti-crime and anti-welfare ticket.

A controversial People's Party poster campaign depicting white sheep kicking a black sheep off a Swiss flag drew worldwide media attention and criticism from the United Nations.

Other issues, such as climate change, taxes, social security and unemployment were pushed into the background.

The increasingly aggressive campaign escalated into violence at a rally in the capital, Bern, two weeks ago.

The campaign in the run-up to the 2007 election was the most expensive in Swiss history with parties spending an estimated SFr50 million (\$42 million).

No detailed figures are available, and Switzerland does not have a transpar-

ency law on the financing of political parties.

More than 3,100 candidates, including 44 Swiss expatriates, ran for seats in parliament for the next four-year term.

The two chambers will choose the new cabinet at a joint meeting in December.

2007 ELECTIONS

House of Representatives
(based on near final results)

People's Party (SVP):
62 seats (+7)

Social Democratic Party (SP):
43 seats (-9)

Radical Party (FDP):
31 seats (-5)

Christian Democrats (CVP):
31 seats (+3)

Greens:
19 seats (+5)

Others:
14 seats (-1)

Total: 200 seats

Results from the elections to the Senate are incomplete.

The Green Party won its first seat in the 46-member chamber.

Run-off elections are needed in eight of the country's 26 cantons.

