

ICELAND

Date of Elections: June 25, 1978

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament on the normal expiry of their term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Parliament of Iceland, the *Althing*, is divided into two Houses: the *Eefri deild*, or Upper House, and the *Nedri deild*, or Lower House. When, as often happens, both Houses work together, Parliament is known as the *United Althing*.

The Upper House consists of one-third of the members whom the *Althing* chooses from amongst the newly-elected representatives, the remaining two-thirds forming the Lower House. Each House and the *United Althing* elects its own Speaker.

The *Althing* comprises 60 members, all elected for a 4-year term.

Electoral System

All Icelandic subjects who are at least 20 years of age and have been domiciled in the country for no less than five years prior to the elections have the right to vote. Electors must furthermore be of unblemished character and financially responsible.

Electoral registers are drawn up by municipal councils at the latest two months before the election date. Voting is not compulsory.

Every citizen qualified to vote is eligible for the *Althing*, with the exception of judges who do not hold administrative office. Civil servants do not require governmental permission to stand for election. However, once elected, they must ensure that, throughout their term of office, their duties are carried out in a satisfactory manner and at no additional cost to the Treasury.

Of the 60 popularly elected members of the *Althing*, 25 are elected according to the d'Hondt method of proportional representation in five constituencies of five members each; 12 are elected in two constituencies of six members each; 12 are elected in the city of Reykjavik; and 11 supplementary members — deemed nationally elected — are chosen for equalization between those parties which have obtained at least one constituency seat, so that each of them is represented in Parliament as nearly as possible in proportion to the number of votes obtained in the general election.

Candidates for Parliament appear on party or non-party lists in all constituencies. Each list generally contains twice the number of members to be elected in the constituency.

Deputy members elected at the same time as fully-fledged members fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections, in the order of their appearance on the list concerned.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Subsequent to the previous general elections of 1974, the centre-right governmental coalition of Independence and Progressive Parties faced mounting opposition from the Communist-dominated People's Alliance. In 1978, inflation — caused by the 1973 oil crisis and perpetuated by an index system automatically adjusting wages after price increases — proved once again to be a principal issue in the one-month campaign. To combat it, the Government called for wage restraint, while the opposition parties claimed that the Government put too much pressure on wage earners; inflation could be stemmed through successive lowering of prices and wages, the latter said.

On polling day, the left-wing (People's Alliance and Social Democratic Party) made impressive gains and outgoing Prime Minister Hallgrímsson of the conservative Independence Party resigned on June 27. With results being so close, however, formation of a new Government took much time and negotiation. After the Social Democratic leader and Mr. Hallgrímsson had each been asked and failed to do so, the Progressives, Social Democrats and Communists announced on August 31 that they had agreed to rule jointly, each of the parties to hold three Cabinet posts. Progressive Party leader Ólafur Jóhannesson was designated as the new Prime Minister.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the Althing*

Number of registered electors.	139,267
Voters.	124,263 (89.2 %)
Blank or void ballot papers.	2,045
Valid votes.	122,218

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Independence Party.	39,973	32.7	20 (—5)
People's Alliance.	27,962	22.9	14 (+3)
Social Democratic Party.	26,912	22.0	14 (+9)
Progressive Party.	20,661	16.9	12 (-5)
Union of Liberals and Leftists.	6,710	5.5	- (- 2)
			60