



**INATSIARTUT**  
THE PARLIAMENT OF GREENLAND  
An introduction



*The House of Inatsisartut with the Great Northern Loon sculptures behind the speaker's podium.*

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## WELCOME TO INATSIARTUT

Visitors to Inatsisartut often remark that the parliamentary assembly room ("the House") is much smaller than they had expected; not that its small size precludes decisions of great importance for Greenlandic society.

Behind the Speaker's Podium, the House is decorated with Jens Rosing's beautiful stoneware sculpture of two Great Northern Loons. By tradition, this water bird is said to have served as the model for our kayak design. Greenlandic fishermen kept the skins of the Great Northern Loon in their kayaks as an amulet. With its sonorous voice, the Great Northern Loon is a powerful Greenlandic symbol of eloquence. The bird also has incredibly keen sight and is acutely alert which makes it difficult to catch unaware. It was therefore the obvious choice to decorate the wall behind the speaker's podium.

We hope that this folder gives visitors a basic understanding of parliamentary procedures at Inatsisartut and meetings conducted in the House.

### The Presidium of Inatsisartut

## VISIT INATSIARTUT

Everyone has access to witness debates in the House. The debates in Inatsisartut can be followed in both Greenlandic and Danish (translated by simultaneous interpreters).

During sessions, the national TV station KNR usually transmits directly from the House. Debates are available to stream on the internet (in Greenlandic and Danish only).

When Inatsisartut is not in session, visitors are welcome to visit the House at 1 p.m. on weekdays. For further details, see [inatsisartut.gl/visit](https://inatsisartut.gl/visit)

## FROM PROVINCIAL COUNCILS TO PARLIAMENT TO INATSISARTUT

The history of Greenlandic sovereignty dates back to 1862 in South Greenland and 1863 in North Greenland, when so-called Boards of Guardians were established in an attempt to raise living standards. The Boards of Guardians were intended to serve as representative bodies in the Greenlandic provinces with a view to resolving local disputes and social problems.

To curb the power enjoyed by The Royal Greenland Trading Company (KGH) which had hitherto escaped any form of parliamentary control, trade matters were separated from public administration with the enactment of the Danish Act concerning the Governing of the Colonies in Greenland etc. of 27 May 1908. Greenland was split into two administrative units: one stretching southwards from Aasiaat and one northwards from Ilulissat.



*The cups of the North and South Greenland Provincial Councils. A. Dragsted, Copenhagen, 1936. Silver.*

Municipal Councils and two Provincial Councils were also established. While the Municipal Councils served as local administrative agencies in Greenland's municipalities, the two Provincial Councils of North Greenland and South Greenland were an innovation that was intended to wield greater powers.

The Provincial Councils met for the first time in 1911 and subsequently once a year to discuss matters concerning their respective parts of the country and

table proposals to the government in Denmark. The Provincial Councils had no decision-making powers as such.

After the Second World War, during which Greenland was isolated from the outside world, Greenlandic society was in need of development. A visit by the Danish Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft in August 1948 resulted in the G-50 report, which paved the way for eight new laws on the administration of Greenland. On their enactment on 27 May 1950, the two Provincial Councils were merged into a single council based in Nuuk, which would meet once a year.

Following the implementation of the so-called "New Order" in Greenland, men and women over the age of 23 were entitled to vote. They were able to exercise their right to vote for the first time on 29 June 1951, when elections to the new Provincial Council were held. There were no political parties. Individuals put themselves forward as candidates for election.



*The first elected Provincial Council in 1951. Note the Provincial Council cups on the table. Image: Arctic Institute*



On 23 May 1967, Erling Høegh was the first chair to be elected by members of the Provincial Council, rather than appointed by the Danish administration.

*The first popularly elected Chairman of the Provincial Council, Erling Høegh. Portrait by Lars Bror Larsen, 1987.*

Home Rule was introduced in 1979. Greenland got its first government, Landsstyret, which was entitled to legislate and manage almost all parts of the administration. At the same time, the Provincial Council was given the title of Parliament, or Landsting. During the first years of Home Rule, the speaker of parliament also chaired the government. This arrangement would only change in 1988, when the parliament and the government first appointed separate chairs. The 1988 amendment, which separated the



*HM Queen Margrethe II of Denmark presents the Act on Self-Government to the Chairman of the Provincial Council on 1 May 1979. Painting by Bodil Kaalund, 1989*

seats of legislative and executive power, is often seen to represent the introduction of de facto parliamentarism in Greenland.

The introduction of self-government on 21 June 2009 allowed additional fields of responsibility to be assumed by the Greenland Self-Government authorities. Only a few fields of responsibility are excluded, such as judicial, defence and monetary policy. The Act on Greenlandic Self-Government introduced the Greenlandic word “Inatsisartut” for the parliament in place of the Danish term “Landstinget”.



*Presentation of the extended Self-Government Act on 21 June 2009. Image: Leiff Josefsen*

## SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT

- 1979-88 Jonathan Motzfeldt (Siumut)
- 1989-91 Lars Chemnitz (Atassut)
- 1991-95 Bendt Frederiksen (Siumut)
- 1995-97 Knud Sørensen (Atassut)
- 1997 Jonathan Motzfeldt (Siumut)
- 1997-99 Anders Andreassen (Siumut)
- 1999 Johan Lund Olsen (Inuit Ataqatigiit)
- 1999-2000 Ole Lyngø (Inuit Ataqatigiit)
- 2001 Anders Andreassen (Siumut)
- 2001-02 Daniel Skifte (Atassut)
- 2002-08 Jonathan Motzfeldt (Siumut)
- 2008-09 Ruth Heilmann (Siumut)
- 2009-13 Josef Motzfeldt (Inuit Ataqatigiit)
- 2013-18 Lars-Emil Johansen (Siumut)
- 2018 Hans Enoksen (Partii Naleraq)
- Since 2018 Vivian Motzfeldt (Siumut)



Portrait by Tikkiil Pjetursson, 2003

Ole Lyngø



Portrait by Tikkiil Pjetursson, 2009

Daniel Skifte



Ruth Heilmann



Josef Motzfeldt



Lars-Emil Johansen



Hans Enoksen



Portrait by Bror Larsen, 1986

Jonathan Motzfeldt



Portrait by Bror Larsen, 1986

Lars Chemnitz



Portrait by Hans Berg, 1999

Bendt Frederiksen



Vivian Motzfeldt



Portrait by Tikkiil Pjetursson, 2002

Knud Sørensen



Portrait by Tikkiil Pjetursson, 2003

Anders Andreassen



Portrait by Tikkiil Pjetursson, 2003

Johan Lund Olsen

## INATSIARTUT AND NAALAKKERSUISUT - The cornerstones of the parliamentary system

Inatsisartut means "those who make laws". Inatsisartut is Greenland's Parliament. Naalakkersuisut means "those who govern". Naalakkersuisut is Greenland's Government. Inatsisartut and Naalakkersuisut are both integral parts of Greenlandic Self-Government.

Inatsisartut's most important task is to pass laws, exercise parliamentary scrutiny over Naalakkersuisut, elect its chair and debate the Finance Act.

Inatsisartut is therefore the legislative authority while Naalakkersuisut has authority to implement the laws. Inatsisartut is essentially Naalakkersuisut's employer.

The parliamentary system is based on the division of responsibility and power between the parliament (Inatsisartut) and the government (Naalakkersuisut). The Premier (president of Naalakkersuisut) is elected by Inatsisartut, which must also approve the government, the members of which are appointed by the Premier. If Inatsisartut is dissatisfied with the government or an individual member, Inatsisartut is entitled to dismiss the government or member in question. The Premier may then call an election, thus dissolving the Inatsisartut.

## ELECTIONS TO INATSIARTUT

Inatsisartut is elected by the citizens of Greenland. This form of government is called "representative democracy". Greenlanders elect 31 members to the Inatsisartut at least once every four years. Members of Inatsisartut are elected by a general, direct, free, equal and secret vote.

The electability requirements are as follows:

- The candidate must be eligible to vote.
- The candidate must not have committed criminal offences of a nature that would generally be regarded as making him unworthy of Inatsisartut membership (the "integrity requirement").

The extent to which the candidate meets the integrity requirement is determined by Inatsisartut on the recommendation of the Committee for the Scrutiny of Eligibility after the election has been held.



*Electoral posters.*

To take part in an election to Inatsisartut, candidates must be registered on the electoral roll. The registration requirements – electoral roll – are as follows:

- The voter must have Danish citizenship.
- The voter must be at least 18 years of age on the election date.
- The voter must have permanent residence in Greenland on the election date and, immediately prior to the election date, have held permanent residence in Greenland for a period of at least six months.
- The voter must not have been declared incapable of managing his/her own affairs.

Election results are counted using the D'Hondt system, also known as proportional representation.

Greenland ceased to be subdivided into electoral districts in 1998. The entire country is now a single constituency, a fact that reflects the democratic principle of universal suffrage. This electoral structure also reflects a desire to encourage general and national focus in the work of the Inatsisartut. Members of Inatsisartut are intended neither to engage in local politics or to promote or represent regional interests, but rather to work to the good of Greenland as a whole.

### Allocation of seats

General elections have been held 13 times since 1979. Based on the most recent election on 24 April 2018 and subsequent changes due to member defections, the seats are allocated as follows:

Siumut	10	members
Inuit Ataqatigiit	8	members
Demokraatit	6	members
Partii Naleraq	3	members
Atassut	2	members
Nunatta Qitornai	1	member
Suleqatigiissitsisut	1	member



*Newly elected members of Inatsisartut at the inaugural session on 15 May 2018.*

## PARTIES

The following parties are currently represented in Inatsisartut:

### Atassut

Atassut was founded in 1978. The party is a liberal conservative party. When the idea of independence arose, Atassut fought to retain links with and cooperation in the Danish Realm. Since its foundation, Atassut has been an ardently proponent of the people. Atassut believes it is important to provide social security for families and senior citizens. Atassut promotes the interests of private business ownership and seeks to ensure that the people of Greenland can support themselves.

### Demokraatit

Demokraatit is a liberal party that seeks to provide conditions under which the individual is guaranteed as much personal free-

dom as possible. For this reason, Demokraatit believes that taxes and duties should remain low so that citizens and businesses are free to spend and invest as they think fit. The party also believes that Greenland politics should focus on reducing social problems, improving standards of education and creating the best possible conditions for the business community.

### **Inuit Ataqtigiit**

The objective of Inuit Ataqtigiit is to achieve financial and national independence for Greenland. The political and financial development of the country must be sustainable, humanitarian, socially and environmentally responsible and respect our Greenlandic culture. Society and its institutions must be built on democratic principles and values, and respect universal principles of human rights. We must ensure that the values created in our society benefit everyone. Mutual respect, gender equality, and social justice and solidarity among Greenlanders are the cornerstones of the party's political endeavours.

### **Nunatta Qitornai**

Nunatta Qitornai (translates "our country's inheritors") was founded as a political party in Nuuk in March 2018. The party describes itself as an independence movement. The cornerstones of its political activities are liberty, prosperity and growth. The party's most important goal is Greenlandic independence. Nunatta Qitornai believes that comprehensive self-sufficiency is an important precondition for Greenlandic independence. Nunatta Qitornai has positioned itself at centre-right on the political spectrum. The party seeks to encourage compromise and cooperation in Greenlandic politics.

### **Partii Naleraq**

Partii Naleraq was founded in 2014. The party's political goals are the formation of a Greenlandic state; respect for the individual in society and it believes that there is a will to create

equal opportunities for all; a self-supporting economy, and that the country should be governed as an accountable democracy. The party insists that the mining industry should employ local Greenlandic workers and preserve the natural environment, and that the government should work towards creating better social conditions for the poor.

### **Suleqatigiissitsisut**

Suleqatigiissitsisut's vision for Greenland: We are stronger when we are united. Suleqatigiissitsisut will work in pursuit of justice and improving quality of life, and it will support policies that are founded on broad-based political compromises and respect for the democratic system.

### **Siumut**

Siumut was founded in 1977. This party's objectives are to encourage and implement the development of a non-persecuted society where Greenlanders can develop collectively, a society in which we spread and recognise the concept of developing a capacity to help each other, and where this philosophy is in turn spread and accepted based on this party's policies and interests. Bearing these fundamental objectives in mind, the party will formulate essential financial and cultural goals and opinions.

*Party descriptions are provided by the parties themselves.*





*Procession in connection with the opening of the autumn session on 3 October 2018.*

## HOW INATSIARTUT WORKS

The legislative powers invested in Inatsisartut imply that Inatsisartut exercises absolute power over the nation's economy. No outlay is made and no tax or duty levied without Inatsisartut's approval.

An act of law passed by Inatsisartut must not contravene the Danish Constitution, the Self-Government Act or international conventions. Furthermore, acts of law must be consistent with the applicable legislation and best administrative practices.

### **The parliamentary year**

The parliamentary year starts on the second Friday in September and lasts one year.

Inatsisartut meets at least twice a year for regular sessions, once in autumn and once in spring. A session usually lasts 2-3 months. If special circumstances so require, Inatsisartut is also called for extraordinary sessions.

Periods outside of the sessions are used for political work and to prepare for upcoming sessions. Moreover, the work of the committees is spread over the entire year, i.e. also outside the sessions.

### **Presidency of Inatsisartut**

Immediately after an election and then annually at the beginning of the autumn session, Inatsisartut elects a speaker and four vice-speakers, who together constitute the Presidency of Inatsisartut. The Presidency represents Inatsisartut externally and ensures that the work of Inatsisartut is properly organised and run.



*The Presidency of Inatsisartut with Speaker Vivian Motzfeldt in the centre, November 2018.*

### The legislative process

The business conducted in parliamentary sessions may include the following:

- **Bills** which may be proposed by members of either Inatsisartut or Naalakkersuisut. Each bill is subject to three readings in the House before it can be finally passed.
- **Motions**, i.e. proposals requiring Naalakkersuisut to take the initiative to amend current rules. Motions may be tabled by either Naalakkersuisut or members of Inatsisartut and are subject to two readings in the House before they can be finally adopted. Also treated as motions are proposals for opinions from Inatsisartut concerning the entry into force of Danish statutes on Greenland or concerning ratification of international treaties. However, such proposals may only be tabled by Naalakkersuisut.
- **Statements** presented by Naalakkersuisut for debate or discussion in the House. Statements are debated only in special instances.
- **Enquiry debates** which aim to submit a public issue for debate and require a pronouncement from Naalakkersuisut. Enquiry debates can be raised by members of Inatsisartut.

### Parliamentary committees

The work of the parliamentary committees is an important part of Inatsisartut's legislative and decision-making processes. Each committee has five or seven members. The primary task of the parliamentary committees is to review and put forward recommendations regarding bills referred to them for review at committee level.

Moreover, the parliamentary committees must ensure that they are consistently well-informed about their remit and exercise parliamentary scrutiny, i.e. ensure that Naalakkersuisut governs within the confines of the law. The parliamen-

tary committees are therefore important bodies that monitor Naalakkersuisut's work.

### IF YOU WISH TO LEARN MORE

If you wish to learn more about the Greenlandic Parliament in addition to the topics described in this folder, visit Inatsisartut's website [inatsisartut.gl](http://inatsisartut.gl)

The website contains information about the current distribution of seats in Inatsisartut, the Presidency and the bills and motions that are scheduled for debate or decision in the next session.



*The Inatsisartut bell (originally the Provincial Council's bell). Georg Jensen Silversmithy, 1975. Greenlandic silver.*



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