



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SLOVAKIA'S SNAP PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Third-place party of centre-left ex-PM to decide country's next governing coalition

2 October 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The populist Smer-SSD party of ex-PM Robert Fico has won Slovakia's snap parliamentary elections, defeating its main electoral rival, the pro-EU Progressive Slovakia (PS) movement of liberal MEP Michal Šimečka. Fico's Smer secured 23% of the popular vote against PS' 18%, winning the snap election with a higher-than-expected margin at a turnout of 68.5%.

Five other parties made it into parliament: the Hlas-SD party of centre-left ex-PM Peter Pellegrini, the centre-right OL'aNO-Za L'udi alliance of ex-PM Igor Matovič, the Christian democratic KDH, the liberal SaS and the nationalist SNS. Simultaneously, the snap election brought tectonic changes to Slovakia's multi-party politics, with more than half of the incoming MPs coming from recently founded or extra-parliamentary parties.

Taking the election results and the coalition preferences into account, Aretera's baseline scenario assumes a Smer-led government coalition with Pellegrini's Hlas and the nationalist SNS. Should Fico's Smer fail to form a governing majority, the second option is a PS-led centrist coalition that includes Hlas, the KDH and the SaS. For Smer and Hlas, the KDH might also be a potential coalition partner, although this is less likely. In any case, the final decision will come down to Pellegrini's Hlas, which remains in the unique position of potentially cooperating with either Smer or PS.

Below, Aretera takes a deeper look at the aftermath of this crucial election.



This memo will cover:

- an overview of the post-election landscape,
- a breakdown of the snap election results,
- the possible forward scenarios,
- short-term political and policy implications.

POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

On 30th September, Slovak voters went to the polls to elect the 150 members of the country's unicameral parliament, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, in a snap parliamentary election called for by parliament in January.

With 99.99% of the votes counted and at a turnout of 68.5%, the centre-left-turned-populist Smer-SSD party of longtime former Prime Minister Robert Fico has won the snap elections. Smer secured 23% of the popular vote, comfortably defeating its main electoral rival, the centrist-liberal Progressive Slovakia (PS) movement of liberal MEP Michal Šimečka. While [the last pre-election surveys predicted a neck-and-neck race](#) between Smer and its main electoral rival, Šimečka's party eventually finished 5% behind its main competitor.

In addition to Fico's Smer and the Šimečka-led PS, five additional parties gained enough votes to enter parliament. Founded in 2020 after breaking away from Smer, the centre-left Hlas-SD party of fellow ex-PM Peter Pellegrini finished third with nearly 15%. Also among the incoming parliamentary parties is the centre-right multi-party alliance led by the OL'aNO movement of fellow ex-PM Igor Matovič, the centre-right Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), the centrist-liberal Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS).

ELECTION RESULTS

Parliamentary Election Results Breakdown			
Party/Alliance	Popular Vote – February 2020 (%)	Popular Vote – September 2023 (%)	Number of MPs
Smer-SSD (centre-left-turned-populist, soft Eurosceptic)	18.3	23	42
Progressive Slovakia (pro-EU, liberal)	ran in a coalition	18	32
Hlas-SD (centre-left, pro-EU)	did not run	14.7	27
OL'aNO & Za L'udi (pro-EU, multi-party alliance)	ran separately	8.9	16
KDH (centre-right, pro-EU)	4.7	6.8	12
SaS (centrist-liberal, pro-EU)	6.2	6.3	11
SNS (nationalist, Eurosceptic)	3.2	5.6	10
Republika (far-right, anti-EU/NATO)	did not run	4.8	0
Alliance (Hungarian minority party)	ran separately	4.4	0
Demokrati (centre-right, pro-EU)	did not run	3	0
Sme Rodina (conservative, soft Eurosceptic)	6.6	2.2	0
(...)			
Total			150

(Source: [SEC of Slovakia](#). Threshold for single parties: 5%. Threshold for alliances: 7%. Turnout: 68.5%)

TECTONIC CHANGES IN SLOVAK POLITICS

The snap parliamentary elections have resulted in tectonic changes in Slovakia's multi-party politics¹.

Support for the winner of Slovakia's last parliamentary election, the centre-right OĽaNO movement, which this time ran on a joint ticket with the centre-right Za Ľudí and Christian Union parties, dropped to single digits, down from 25% in 2020. Other parties in the country's previously ruling centre-right coalition government have also underperformed.

The centrist-liberal SaS also expected a much better result, while the conservative Sme Rodina party of businessman-turned-politician Boris Kollár fell out of parliament. However, OĽaNO performed slightly better than expected, while another centre-right party, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), gained nearly 7% and returns to parliament following a four-year absence.

The election dealt a similar blow to a part of the Slovak far-right, as well as to many of the recently founded (and mainly centrist) political parties. While [most polls predicted](#) that the right-wing extremist Republika, which was founded after splitting from the neo-fascist L'SNS party, would be among the incoming parliamentary parties, it narrowly fell short of the 5% threshold for single parties. The L'SNS, which came in fourth during the last election with 8%, also fell out of parliament. At the same time, the nationalist and pro-Kremlin SNS, which received only 3.2% in the last election, is now on course to become a parliamentary party once again.

The centre-right Democrats party of ex-Prime Minister Eduard Heger and the Hungarian minority Alliance party also fell short of the 5% threshold. Former centre-right Slovak PM Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998-2006) also hoped for an electoral comeback with the Modrí-Most-Híd alliance, however his party garnered only 0.3% of the vote.

As for the social democratic parties, the election result is a major boost for both Smer and Hlas. Fico's Smer fell out of power after his last government (2016-2018) was shaken by a series of mass anti-corruption protests spurred by the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak. Since the last election in 2020, Smer has turned increasingly populist and has often used nationalist rhetoric, accompanied by calls for stopping military and financial aid to war-torn Ukraine and campaigning on an anti-immigration platform. This time, Smer has not only increased its share of votes, but has defeated its main electoral rival by a larger-than-expected margin.

Founded in 2020 after Pellegrini broke away from Smer, Hlas comfortably led the polls throughout much of 2022, however Fico's party has managed to regain its leading position in spite of multiple investigations and allegations of institutional corruption against the ex-PM and his associates during their rule. Despite finishing third at the polls, Hlas also has reasons to celebrate, since Pellegrini's party now has the power to decide on the final composition of the incoming government.

While the Smer-rival Progressive Slovakia has achieved its best ever result, the election outcome is bittersweet for them. Co-founded by incumbent Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová in 2017, the pro-EU PS, which at the time ran in a coalition with the centre-right SPOLU, fell short of entering parliament in the 2020 elections. Under Šimečka's leadership, the party has capitalized on the public dissatisfaction with the outgoing centrist parliamentary parties, helping it become the leading pro-EU force in Slovak politics. Šimečka even hoped to overtake Smer at the polls, however has eventually fallen short. Both [the last pre-election polls](#) and [the exit polls](#) indicated a PS victory over Smer, fueling the pre-election optimism.

¹ See [here](#) for Aretera's pre-election overview and additional details about the Slovak political environment

POSSIBLE FORWARD SCENARIOS

On 2nd October, President Čaputová officially tasked Robert Fico with forming the country's next government. While the Smer leader has high hopes for returning to government, the rival PS has vowed to do ["whatever it takes"](#) in order to prevent this scenario. The coming days and weeks will see tough coalition talks between various parliamentary formations, potentially resulting in a new coalition government.

Aretera's baseline scenario suggests a Smer-led coalition government. Taking pre-election statements into account, a Smer-Hlas-SNS coalition is the most likely scenario. Fico, who stands a good chance of returning as PM, has a history of governing with nationalists, while Hlas seems a natural ideological partner. However, Fico and Pellegrini have a troubled personal relationship, while some in Hlas' leadership are against teaming up with SNS since some of their incoming MPs are previous members of the neo-fascist L'SNS, a waning far-right movement. Combined, the three parties would control 79 of the 150 seats in parliament.

For Smer and Hlas, an alliance with the centre-right KDH remains an alternative potential route to a majority. While KDH leader Milan Majerský has repeatedly [confirmed](#) he would not team up with Smer, he has also underlined that the final decision on joining any future coalition will be made by the KDH's leadership council, set to convene on 14th October. A Smer-Hlas-KDH coalition would control 81 of the 150 seats in parliament, however given Majerský's recent statements about Smer, this looks less likely, as does a Smer-led constitutional majority involving both KDH and SNS.

Should Fico's coalition talks fail, the Šimečka-led PS would then be tasked with forming the new government. Under this scenario, PS would join forces with the fellow centrist KDH and SaS parties, as well as with Pellegrini's Hlas. The combination of these four parties would deliver 82 of the 150 MP seats. Given Hlas' unique position of allying with either Smer or PS, the second-placed PS would likely need to make a generous political offer to Hlas, which could even result in Pellegrini returning as Prime Minister. Although Pellegrini has expressed openness towards the PS, a part of Hlas' leadership would be against such an alliance, while the ex-PM himself admitted that such a governing coalition would likely be more unstable in the long run.

POLITICAL & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A Smer-led government would mean Slovakia's pro-Western orientation may be weakened. Over the years, Smer has turned increasingly populist, building on the use of pro-Kremlin disinformation and historically strong pro-Russian and pan-Slavic sentiments among the electorate. As PM, Fico would likely join Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in calls to abandon or scale down the EU's sanctions regime against Moscow, as well as its financial and military support for Kyiv.

At the same time, Hlas leader Pellegrini has called maintaining Slovakia's Euro-Atlantic orientations as one of the main prerequisites of joining any future government, while Fico himself, speaking after the elections, also said that the country's foreign policy orientation would not be changed. Should Fico fail to form a government, a cabinet led by Šimečka's PS would aim to maintain and strengthen the country's positions in the EU and NATO, while maintaining support for Ukraine.

Furthermore, fears are growing that the rule of law may also be undermined after Fico's return as PM and that the new government might intervene in ongoing anti-corruption investigations against Smer-linked figures. Fico, whose critics believe the ex-PM formed a ["mafia state"](#), [narrowly escaped](#) the lifting of his immunity in parliament in May. Responding to the charges, Fico said these actions are equal to political persecution, with Smer possibly considering personnel changes in the leadership of Slovak law enforcement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES

Regardless of whether Smer or PS leads the next governing coalition, political stability will be a key issue to monitor for public, private and non-profit actors. Slovakia has a history of short-lived and unstable multi-party governments, especially during centre-right rule, as the experience of the past three years suggests². The upcoming weeks will be crucial in deciding the composition of the country's next ruling bloc and coalition government, as well as the stability of the political environment.

For international businesses, an additional element to monitor is the potential inclusion of the nationalist SNS in a Smer-led coalition government. Led by former speaker of parliament Andrej Danko, the SNS called for imposing special taxes on tech companies and banks during the election campaign. This could mean that the new Slovak government could push for increased oversight and additional costs for businesses in certain sectors.

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² See [here](#) for Aretera's overview of the formation of Slovakia's incumbent caretaker government and the political instability of recent years