

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR THE SLOVENIAN ELECTIONS

Analysis & implications of the upcoming parliamentary vote

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Slovenia will hold much-anticipated parliamentary elections this weekend; a crucial vote that will redraw the country's political landscape for the next legislative term. The parliamentary vote on Sunday signifies a tough electoral challenge for the ruling SDS party of Prime Minister Janez Janša, which is polling neck-and-neck with the Freedom Movement, an emerging green party led by former state energy executive Robert Golob, whose popularity has skyrocketed in recent months.

With both SDS and Golob's Freedom Movement in with a chance of winning Sunday's vote, Aretera provides further insight into the Slovenian political landscape, the factors shaping the election campaign, as well as into the likely post-election scenarios.

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PRE-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

On 24 April, Slovenian citizens will head to the polls to elect the 90 members of the country's National Assembly for a four-year legislative term in a much-anticipated parliamentary vote¹, ahead of Presidential and local elections scheduled for later this year.

Less than a week from the election, the outcome remains hard to predict. The two frontrunners – the conservative populist Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of Prime Minister Janez Janša and the green-centrist Freedom Movement (GS) of businessman and ousted state energy executive Robert Golob – have been polling neck-and-neck, with popular support for both parties at around 20-25%.

As during the current parliamentary cycle, the elections will produce another multi-party parliament, with several other incoming political forces. These include current opposition formations such as the centre-left Social Democrats (SD), led by Slovenian MEP Tanja Fajon, the radical left-wing Levica and the minor governing New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (NSi) formation.

Making the post-election landscape even more uncertain, a number of parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties are also either polling around the parliamentary threshold or have the potential to produce a surprising result at the polls. Among these are the centre-right Let's Connect Slovenia movement (PoS), the LMŠ party of former Slovenian Prime Minister Marjan Šarec (2018-2020), the anti-vaccination and conspiracy theorist Resni.ca movement, the nationalist SNS, the agrarian Our Country and the Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB), another former Slovenian PM (2013-2014).

ISSUES AT STAKE

As in the case of recent parliamentary elections in Hungary² and Serbia³, the Slovenian parliamentary vote is being closely followed internationally. Much like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister Janša is seen by many of his critics as an illiberal and Eurosceptic leader, who has also been accused of eroding democracy and media freedom.

As evidenced by the campaign on the ground, Sunday's parliamentary elections will ultimately be seen as a vote on the Eurosceptic populism pursued by SDS. While opposition parties hope to frame the vote accordingly, SDS is campaigning with the promises of stability and its anti-crisis policies in times of socio-economic uncertainty.

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and its consequences for Europe has necessarily taken centre stage during the election campaign. In a strong show of support to Ukraine that could also impact his electoral performance, PM Janša recently joined Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki and Czech PM Petr Fiala on a visit to war-torn Kyiv and presented an action plan to stop Russia's war.

Resulting from the war, rising prices and securing energy supplies have become among the most important challenges to tackle. Most notably, PM Janša has said his plan is to supply half of all

¹ Under the Slovenian election system, 88 of the 90 members of the National Assembly are elected through proportional representation eight 11-seat constituencies for a four-year term. The remaining two MPs are the Italian and Hungarian minorities, with individual candidates ranked on the ballot paper.

² See [here](#) for our overview of the Hungarian parliamentary elections held on 3 April

³ See [here](#) for our overview of the Serbian parliamentary elections held on 3 April

households with solar power electricity in the next decade, with most parties supporting the extension of nuclear energy production in the country.

In a surprise move, however, Slovenia's top anti-corruption agency (KPK) found that PM Janša acted under a conflict of interest in 2021 when he voted on the appointment of Franci Matoz, the lawyer of both the PM and SDS, as a non-executive director of the Slovenian Bank Asset Management Company. Responding to the KPK, the PM hit back by accusing the anti-corruption body of failing to investigate alleged cases of corruption that are associated with the opposition.

SCENARIOS FOR SUNDAY'S VOTE

With both frontrunners – SDS and the Freedom Movement – polling “only” around 20-25% in terms of popular support, the elections on Sunday are poised to produce another hung parliament with multiple parties. Taking a number of possibilities into account, we outline the following post-election scenarios for consideration at the time of writing:

- **Our baseline scenario assumes that the Freedom Movement will win the elections.** Support for the Freedom Movement has skyrocketed after Golob became the Chairman of the quasi⁴ non-parliamentary Green Actions Party, which he rebranded as the Freedom Movement in late January. Since then, his party has continuously gained momentum, with Golob being among the most popular politicians in Slovenia at the same time as public support for the Janša Government has been on the wane.
- **Equally possible, however, is a victory by the ruling SDS.** Despite the surprise emergence of a rebranded green party led by a popular challenger, the ruling SDS retains a strong and dedicated voter base that can still propel it to victory on Sunday. As most recent polls suggest, Janša's party also appears to have caught up with the Freedom Movement, with the two formations running neck-and-neck just a few days ahead of the parliamentary vote.
- **The greatest variable regarding the election results will be the performance of the smaller parties.** As noted above, numerous parties are polling around the parliamentary threshold, making the next composition of Slovenia's parliament difficult to predict. If tasked with forming a government by Slovenian President Borut Pahor, the Freedom Movement could form a left-green-liberal coalition with the Social Democrats and the left-wing Levica, while SDS could rely on its current coalition partners, the centre-right NSi and Let's Connect Slovenia formations. At the same time, the Freedom Movement might choose to establish a grand coalition that includes the current SDS-ally NSi and excludes the radical left Levica, as both Golob's party and the NSi's leadership expressed openness towards such a coalition.
- **It is unlikely that Slovenia will be without a(n elected) government.** Given the multi-party composition of the upcoming Slovenian legislature, it is probable that neither the SDS nor the Freedom Movement will be able to fully secure an absolute governing majority in parliament. Public pressure and the current socio-economic challenges will likely push the winner of the election to negotiate a new cabinet instead of returning a governing mandate, regardless of whether it is able to secure a desired governing majority. Slovenia has a history of minority governments, with the current Janša Government itself also relying on outer support in parliament. At the same time, a minority government remains an instability factor in the long run.

⁴ While the Freedom Movement, in its current composition, was formed only in late January, the party currently has two affiliate MPs in the Slovenian parliament.

LOOKING AHEAD

With both the ruling SDS and the Freedom Movement running neck-and-neck in the polls, both parties have the chance of winning Slovenia's parliamentary elections this Sunday. Taking the future composition of the parliament into account, however, both parties will almost certainly have to rely on coalition partners, making the performance of the smaller parties on both sides of the aisle crucial. It remains to be seen whether like-minded parties will be able to secure an absolute parliamentary majority, meaning Slovenia will likely continue with a minority government whichever of the two frontrunners comes out on top.

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*If you would like to schedule a discussion of this paper, please contact:
Dominik Istrate, Advisor for Central and Eastern Europe at d.istrate@areterapa.com*



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