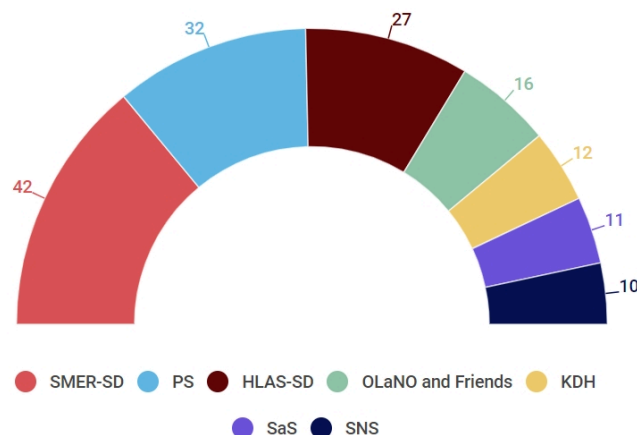


SLOVAKIA: SMER-SD favorite to lead the next government

- Following a clear victory in the 30 September parliamentary elections, the populist SMER-SD party holds the best chance of forming the next government.
- On the domestic front, the return of a SMER-SD-led government would likely bring setbacks in tackling corruption, pose a risk of democratic erosion, and heighten risks to foreign investors.
- On the foreign policy front, Bratislava would take a Euroskeptic and pro-Russian turn, which would strain relations with its key Western partners.

With nearly all votes counted, the populist Direction – Social Democracy (SMER-SD) party has won the snap parliamentary election with 22.9%, outperforming its key rival liberal pro-Western Progressive Slovakia (PS) by around five percentage points. As expected, center-left Voice-Social Democracy (HLAS-SD) came in third with 14.7%, followed the conservative alliance led by the 2020 election winner Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) in fourth with 8.9%. Three other electoral lists that won seats in parliament include the center-right Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), liberal Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS). The State Election Commission is expected to announce the official results on Sunday, 1 October.

Preliminary seat allocation in parliament



Although the constitution does not oblige president to hand the mandate to the leader of the winning party, this has become customary in the past few decades. In addition, a clear victory by SMER-SD leaves President Zuzana Caputova (independent, linked to PS) few options but to appoint Robert Fico as Prime Minister despite personal animosity between the two. Following the appointment, the prime minister would have 30 days to present the cabinet and its governing program

for an approval in parliament by an absolute majority (76/150 votes). If unsuccessful, the process can be repeated multiple times.

Post-election scenarios

- **A SMER-SD-led government (55% probability):** A strong electoral performance gives SMER-SD multiple options of forming a majority government, with its potential coalition partners being HLAS-SD, SNS and/or KDH. However, all options require HLAS-SD as the main partner, putting the latter in a strong negotiating position. So far, the head of HLAS-SD Peter Pellegrini has not outlined his demands for supporting a SMER-SD government, and this presents the greatest source of uncertainty for Fico. Negotiations might get complicated if Pellegrini demands the prime ministerial position in exchange for cooperation.
- **A HLAS-SD-led government (25% probability):** As a kingmaker, HLAS-SD might succeed in negotiating itself a prime ministerial position, especially with President Caputova being more comfortable to nominate Pellegrini than Fico. Although the election winner SMER-SD would be reluctant to give up the leadership role, such a scenario cannot be completely ruled out. If for any reason negotiations between SMER-SD and HLAS-SD break down, the latter might enter talks with PS, KDH and SaS. However, forming such a wide and ideologically diverse coalition would be challenging.
- **A PS-led government (15% probability):** At this point, it is difficult to see PS succeeding in forming a majority government without giving up a prime ministerial position. However, in theory, a majority coalition between PS, HLAS-SD, KDH and SaS is possible.
- **A technocratic government and new elections (5% probability):** If no nominee wins the parliament's confidence within six months, the president may appoint a technocrat cabinet and call new elections. In such a case, the current cabinet led by Ludovit Odor (independent) would likely continue in office until the next vote.

What would the return of Fico mean?

On the domestic front, a government led by SMER-SD would likely seek to wield greater influence over internal power structures, the judiciary and anti-corruption institutions, which have been engaged in investigating multiple members of the party. Similar to nationalist governments in Hungary or Poland, it might also attempt to exert greater control over the media and civic organizations thereby weakening democratic institutions. Such moves could trigger mass protests and strain relations with Brussels over corruption and rule of law matters.

Regarding economic policies, SMER-SD favors a greater role of domestic capital and the state in the economy, particularly in sectors deemed as strategic. Its program also mentions taxes on industries with "excessive profit." The SMER-SD's electoral promises to introduce the 13th pension to all senior citizens or subsidize interest rates on mortgages raise questions about the party's commitment to "reasonable consolidation" in public finances.

In foreign relations, a SMER-SD cabinet would take a turn towards Moscow, the degree of which would be shaped by coalition partners, with HLAS-SD and KDH being more pro-Western and SNS leaning more towards Russia. While SMER-SD does not question the country's membership in the EU or NATO, it would likely seek to halt direct military supplies to Ukraine and join Hungary in questioning the effectiveness of the EU sanctions on Russia. This reflects the views of a significant part of the Slovak population, which traditionally have held a more favorable view towards Russia compared to most regional peers in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, if the Law and Justice (PiS) party remains in power after this month's [parliamentary election in Poland](#), the Euroskeptic axis between Warsaw, Bratislava and Budapest might complicate decision-making at the EU level on issues that require consensus.

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