

## Parliamentary elections in Slovakia 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020

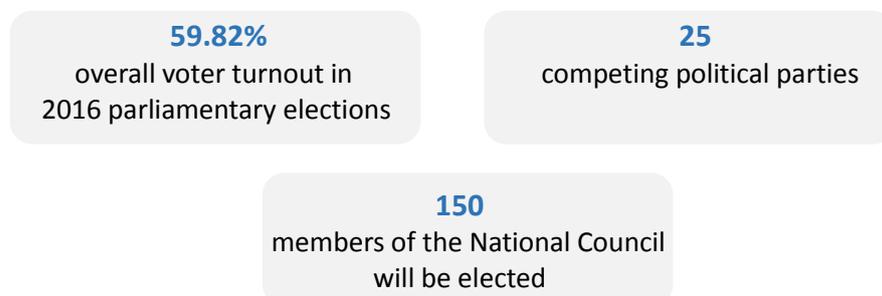
Daniel Martínek, IDM

### Murder of Ján Kuciak

The 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia take place under relatively turbulent circumstances. This is mainly due to the ongoing, by public and media closely monitored, trial in relation with the cold-blooded murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová from February 2018. The murder, which triggered anti-government demonstrations and resulted in the resignation of several government members, including the prime minister Robert Fico, two years ago, uncovered not only the shady practices of some Slovakian entrepreneurs, but, more importantly, the connection of these to government structures, specifically to the ruling party *DIRECTION–Social Democracy (SMER–SD)*. As a result, this process has brought about a revelation of high level of corruption, frauds and abuses of power within the state and, consequently, caused a dramatic decline of public confidence in the functioning of the state as such. For many Slovaks, the penetration of organized crime into fundamental state institutions indicates the failure of the overall system, upon which purification they are now calling for. Moreover, the social deprivation and frustration in society caused by the ever-revealing linkages between organized crime and government leaders are significant elements of the pre-election landscape in Slovakia and, at the same time, the pivotal factors affecting the outcome of the elections.

### Regional disparities

Although the pre-election environment is characterized by the above-mentioned circumstances in particular, local affairs and regional disparities also play an important role in the electoral campaigns, with the issue of the healthcare system, socially marginalized groups or Hungarian minority to be on top of the agenda. On the one hand, the high shortage of doctors and medical staff (mainly due to the brain drain), underfunding of hospitals and medical facilities or inadequate access to the healthcare system, on the other hand, inclusion of excluded groups into society, above all the Roma communities or the relationship with the Hungarian minority – these are the hot-button issues which are used by political parties to win the favour of the electorate.



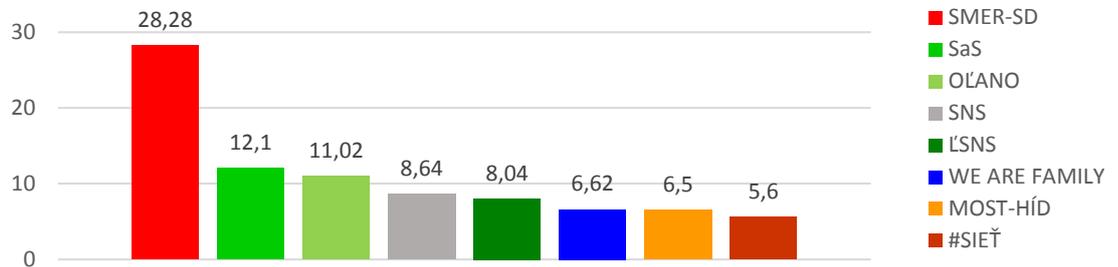
### Bad governance

From a broader regional perspective, the pre-election situation in Slovakia does not differ from the current socio-political trends in Central Eastern Europe. Disaffection with the corrupted governance system, mistrust in the judiciary, oligarchization of politics, or media ownership by politicians and/or businessmen are discussion-drivers in the present-day debate also in Slovakia.

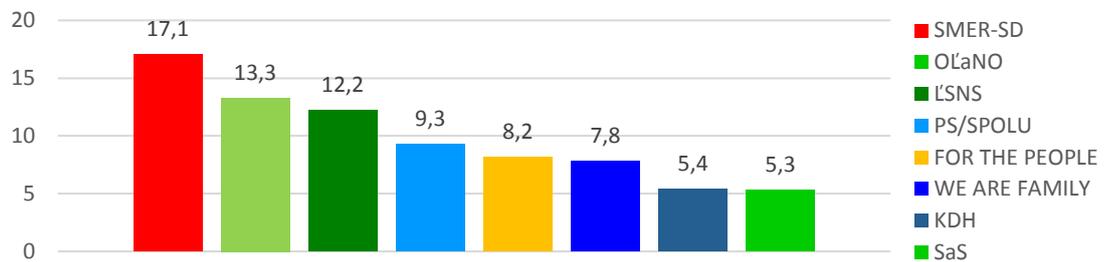
**Between East  
and West**

Equally importantly, geopolitical affiliation of Slovakia remains a discussed topic in the pre-electoral discourse, where disinformation channels influence public opinion and further promote fierce debate among the population about the pro-European (transatlantic), pro-EU-integration direction and, on the contrary, more nationally-oriented future course of the country. From many attacks on Zuzana Čaputová, the Slovakia's first female and clearly pro-European and pro-EU oriented president, one can observe that the Slovak society is everything else but united when it comes to the orientation of the country's foreign policy. In this respect, the most radical variation represents the *People's Party – Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)*, that advocates for Slovakia's departure from the European Union and NATO, as well as favors for closer ties with the Russian Federation.

**2016 Slovak parliamentary elections results**



**2020 Slovak parliamentary elections opinion pools**



Source: Aggregate of opinion polls – February 2020

When it comes to – this time highly fragmented – political spectrum, the momentous political party represents Marian Kotleba's *ĽSNS*, which maintains anti-immigrant and anti-Romani attitudes and is described as a far-right populist entity with pro-fascist elements (although the party fundamentally dissociates itself from this designation). Against the *ĽSNS* stand all other political actors, be it the strongest government party *SMER-SD* with the current PM Peter Pellegrini or highly fragmented opposition represented by various mostly non-parliamentary formations. Although *SMER-SD* continues to be the strongest political party in Slovakia, its popularity is gradually declining, as a result of the aforementioned revealed links with organized crime.

**ĽSNS**

**SMER-SD**

**“Opposition”**

Rejecting any cooperation with both the ruling *SMER-SD* and the anti-system *ĽSNS*, the third pre-electoral fraction is represented by non-parliamentary parties and opposition movements: the party *Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO)*, the coalition *Progressive Slovakia/TOGETHER-Civic Democracy (PS/SPOLU-OD)*, the party *For the People* and the party *We are Family*. However, the high number of opposition parties and their diversity of opinion lead to the weakening of this “third” bloc and ultimately reduce its potential to be a strong opposition force.

## Outcome of the elections

Whatever the outcome of the elections will be, one thing is certain: the formation of the new government will be difficult for any party. As never before, there are too many dividing lines between political actors. With the *ĽSNS*, all other political parties refuse to join the coalition, with *SMER-SD*, representing the political environment of more than a decade associated with corruption and shady practices, also rejects to cooperate the majority of the political spectrum. Finally, the opposition will find it difficult to seek pro-coalition consensus due to their confrontational policy amongst themselves. Thus, given the high degree of fragmentation, the most important factor for the post-election formation of the government will be the voter turnout, which can provide some of the parties with the desired support and, ultimately, the strongest position in the negotiations. In addition, which party will eventually pass the 5% threshold must also be seen as a key factor in the formation of the future government.

## SMER's struggle for political survival

Recent developments have also shown us how severe are the consequences of the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée for the still ruling party *SMER-SD*, that is facing a strong outflow of its voters. The party is aware of this fact and, with rather hollow election program, has been struggling in recent days for political survival in the form of approval of the so-called “social package” amounting to 800 billion Euros (that would overburden the Slovakian state budget). For the same reason, it is also possible that *SMER-SD* will abandon its promises and overcome its principles in order to form a coalition with *ĽSNS*. Ultimately, highly aggressive pre-election campaigns of some parties, omnipresent frustration of voters, new revelations about the *SMER-SD* party coming to the surface and as never before highly fragmented political setting will be determinative for the election result.

Party	Main candidate	Political ideology (Affiliation EP)
DIRECTION-Social Democrats	Peter Pellegrini	centre-left social-democratic (S&D)
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	Igor Matovič	centre-right conservative (EPP)
Kotlebists – People's Party Our Slovakia	Marian Kotleba	far-right extremist (NI)
Progressive Slovakia/ TOGETHER–Civic Democracy	Michal Truban	social-liberal, progressive (EPP)
For the People	Andrej Kiska	centrist conservative-liberalist (-)
We are Family	Boris Kollár	right-wing populist (ECR)
Christian Democratic Movement	Alojz Hlina	Christian democratic (EPP)
Freedom and Solidarity	Richard Sulík	liberal/ libertarian (ECR)
Slovak National Party	Andrej Danko	nationalist right-wing (NI)

This report on the current pre-election situation in Slovakia takes into account the panel discussion “[Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia](#)” held at the Presseclub Concordia on 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 with:

- Beata BALOGOVÁ, MA MSc, Editor in chief, SME (daily newspaper), Bratislava
- Prof. Dr. Oľga GYÁRFÁŠOVÁ, Director Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Comenius University Bratislava
- Dr. Ivana KOHUTKOVÁ, Environmental and Civil Society expert, VIA IURIS, Pezinok
- Dr. Tomáš STRÁŽAY, Director of the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava