



## Notes on recent elections

## The 2010 parliamentary elections in Slovakia

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Citizens of Slovakia went to the polls on 12 June 2010 for the seventh parliamentary elections of the post-communist era. The 2010 contest changed the balance of power in parliament and continued the pattern of alternation between rival party blocs. In addition to inaugurating Slovakia's first female prime minister, Iveta Radičová, 2010 also marked significant change within Slovakia's party system including the entrance of two new parties into parliament and the exit of two hardy perennials. Yet these changes in parties and personnel did little to alter the overall shape of party competition or the centrality of electoral appeals related to nationalism, socio-economic reform and corruption.

## 1. Background

Party politics in Slovakia during the first two post-communist decades turned largely on two axes of competition: the role of national identity and the role of the market. During the 1990s the dominant figure of Slovakia's politics was Vladimír Mečiar, who served as prime minister for much of the decade, and whose illiberal policies and use of nationalism helped to divide Slovak party politics into two rival camps. Mečiar's ousting after the 1998 elections permitted new kinds of competition, the growing neo-liberal emphasis under Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's governments between 1998 and 2006 coupled with the

emergence of a left-leaning rival—Robert Fico's Direction (in Slovak, Smer; later Direction-Social Democracy, Smer-SD)—pushing socio-economic issues to the center of the 2006 election battle (Haughton and Rybár, 2008).

Smer-SD's substantial margin of victory in the 2006 election allowed Fico to form a government. He chose not to partner with any members of the Dzurinda governments but instead to opt for coalition with Mečiar's People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HZDS) and with the xenophobic Slovak National Party (SNS) which had joined Mečiar in government between 1993 and 1998. The decision not only provoked howls of discontent in international circles, but also deepened the divisions between the rival camps of Slovakia's politics.

Once in power Fico continued to attack neo-liberal principles but scholars regard the actual redistribution produced by his policies as 'slight' (Gould, 2009: 16). Aside from some changes in the labor code, Fico's government did not alter the fundamental structure of Dzurinda's economic reform. Even Dzurinda's flat tax received only minor modifications: a largely symbolic millionaires' tax and exemption of certain basic goods and services from value added tax. Fico's main redistributive efforts focused on relatively minor but highly visible gestures of government largesse such as the abolition of doctors' fees and the provision of additional payments to pensioners and new parents. The efforts proved popular and the parties of Fico's government, buoyed also by rapid economic growth through the end of 2008, retained a significant lead in opinion polls.

The government's popularity began to decline in the second half of 2009 in tandem with the decline of Slovakia's

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export- and foreign-investment-driven economy and with a growing number of scandals and ministerial resignations that highlighted the incompetence and corrupt behavior of ministers. The emergence of high levels of clientelism and politicization of the judicial system helped further to polarize the government and opposition camps, as did a turn toward nationalist rhetoric by Fico's government and a rise in tensions with Hungary provoked by leaders in both countries.

Despite an ever more coherent battle between rival camps, the institutional basis of Slovakia's individual parties remained fluid. Of the eight political parties with a realistic chance of election in 2010, only two had participated in the first democratic elections twenty years earlier, while two of the others emerged less than eighteen months before the 2010 election. One of the latter was Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), a party formed by Richard Sulík, (one of the architects of the flat tax, which projected itself as a party of experts with a commitment to both economic and cultural liberalism. SaS was also the first party in Slovakia to make effective use of social media, especially blogs and Facebook, and raised its profile by campaigning for referenda on popular proposals such as reducing the number of parliamentarians and limiting the amount of money spent on government limousines. The other 'new' party—Most-Híd—emerged as a project of Béla Bugár, the former long-time head of the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK). With a name that combined both the Slovak and Hungarian words for "bridge," Most-Híd took a moderately pro-Hungarian position while also actively inviting ethnic Slovaks onto its electoral list. The emergence of a second Hungarian party appealed to some disillusioned Hungarian voters, but also threatened to split the Hungarian vote and to reduce the Hungarian representation in parliament.

Finally, even some of Slovakia's middle-aged parties continued to experience internal turmoil. In addition to the splinter of Most-Híd from SMK, in early 2010 the leading figure on the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party's (SDKÚ-DS) electoral list Mikuláš Dzurinda withdrew his name in response to evidence that SDKÚ-DS received unregistered donations when it was formed under Dzurinda's leadership in 2000.

## 2. Electoral system

There were no significant changes to electoral law, so the 2010 elections were conducted under a proportional representation system with a single national constituency, a 5% threshold for parliamentary representation and a semi-open party list which allowed voters to cast up to four preference votes for individual candidates on their party's list. Both the threshold and the preference voting proved significant in the election results and subsequent government formation process.

## 3. Campaign

At the heart of the election campaign was the personality and ruling style of Robert Fico. Although his government had delivered record levels of growth in the first two years of its existence and promised stability in difficult

times, Fico's willingness to jump into coalition with nationalists and his aggressive attitude toward the media and political opponents entrenched the prime minister's position as a divisive love-me-or-hate-me figure. Fico became a focal point of opposition campaign efforts, particularly those targeted at young voters. The youth wing of SDKÚ-DS, for example, distributed a "Fico red card," akin to those used by football referees to eject a candidate from a match. Meanwhile an independent campaign purchased billboards throughout the country bearing a cartoon caricature of a red-faced, angry Fico with the caption "Had enough?" Furthermore, although Fico had mostly avoided personal scandal, he found it necessary several days before the election to respond to recordings implicating him in deals with rich backers in 2002.

Outside the realm of personality, one of the most important issues in the campaign itself related to the place of the ethnic Hungarian minority in Slovakia. These ever-present struggles in Slovakia's politics were heightened by events to the south in Hungary, where recently elected Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán had extended the offer of citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia and publicly rejected the Treaty of Trianon which had transferred control over the territory of Slovakia from Hungary to Czechoslovakia. In response, Fico's Smer-SD ran newspaper advertisements emphasizing its defence of national interests against 'Greater Hungarian' politics, while SNS plucked at xenophobic and nationalist heartstrings with one of its billboards declaring the party's desire to ensure "that our borders remain our borders".

Socio-economic issues also played a role though the election lacked the ideological coherence of 2006. Fico emphasized his party's role in Slovakia's economic development and, in a clear echo of Mečiar's 1998 campaign, Fico opened a new terminal at the capital's airport and new highways even though these were either barely functional or incomplete (Henderson, 2010). In light of the economic downturn provoked by the global credit crunch and the tensions within the eurozone (which Slovakia had joined in 2009), the most pressing policy issue of the campaign was the danger of Slovakia following the Greek route and whether Slovakia should be involved in bailing out Greece. Although debt was frequently mentioned in campaigning, it was more often used as a tool with which to attack opponents than as a means of outlining a credible plan for ensuring that Slovakia would not take the Greek path.

The remaining significant issue concerned the elections themselves, as parties fought with one another over who would pass the 5% threshold. Four parties hovered consistently around the 5% mark and competition was particularly intense because they formed two distinct dyads, each appealing to the same relatively small constituency with similar programmatic appeals: ĽS-HZDS and SNS focused on Slovakia's national identity and threats to its statehood, while Most-Híd and SMK competed for the Hungarian vote. SMK leader Pál Csáky appealed to ethnic Hungarians by claiming that Most-Híd had only a minimal chance of crossing the threshold and would waste Hungarian votes, while Bugár stressed that a centre-right government could be formed *only* if his party were elected to parliament.

#### 4. Results

Turnout in the 2010 election was nearly 59%, up four points on the previous election. As Table 1 shows, Fico's Smer-SD won a clear plurality and significantly increased its share of the vote, but did so while losing its ability to form a government. Smer-SD garnered the most votes in all but five of Slovakia's 73 electoral districts, amassing nearly 35% of the national vote and 42% of the parliamentary deputies. However, its coalition partners collapsed. The eighteen-year slide of Mečiar's ĽS-HZDS continued and the party's vote share dipped below the 5% threshold; meanwhile, repeated scandals cut support for SNS to just a fraction above the 5% threshold. Thus, Fico in 2010 could justifiably claim it was his partners who lost the election. Yet it is also apparent that Smer did little to support its coalition partners and indeed actively sought to raid their electoral bastions.

Nor did Fico have a viable plan for an alternative coalition. His confrontational behavior had increased cooperation among his political opponents, and the task was made more difficult because four of those opposition parties—SDKÚ-DS, SaS, Most-Híd and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)—together mustered a slim parliamentary majority. Since these parties shared pro-market orientations and relatively moderate views on intra-ethnic cooperation between Slovaks and Hungarians (although there were some stark differences on moral questions) they were able to agree on cooperation even before receiving the formal presidential invitation to begin negotiations.

Preference voting also played a significant role. Support for both SaS and Most-Híd owed much to pre-election deals struck with smaller groupings, but preference voting gave those groupings unexpected clout. Four of the deputies elected on the SaS ticket were members of a civic

movement, Ordinary People (OĽ), led by publisher Igor Matovič. Although OĽ candidates received the last four places on the 150-name party list, they won large numbers of preference votes and were boosted into electable positions thanks in part to the publicity accorded them by Matovič's widely-distributed free regional newspapers. Most-Híd experienced similarly mixed results from its inclusion of four well-known ethnic Slovaks from the small Civic Conservative Party (OKS) on its list. Preference votes indicate that these candidates lent Most-Híd the support of some ethnic Slovaks, but their preference voting also elevated all four Slovaks to electable positions, and left Most-Híd itself with only ten of the seats. The election of OĽ and OKS deputies on other party lists posed a significant challenge for an already complex partnership—creating in effect a six-party coalition—and OĽ in particular demonstrated an independence that threatened the government's stability.

#### 5. Implications

In the 2010 elections, political competition in Slovakia continued to manifest change at the level of the party system but an underlying stability of competitive dimensions. The roster of parties changed but what they fought—and what voters voted—about remained the same. That underlying stability of preferences is even evident in those parties which suffered the greatest gains and losses. Most-Híd, for example, made its debut on the political scene with more than 8% of the vote, but nearly all Most-Híd voters came from SMK. Fico's Smer-SD gained nearly 6% over its previous result, but preliminary research on the ebb and flow of voters (Gyárfášová et al., 2010) suggests that Smer-SD's gain came directly at the expense of ĽS-HZDS and SNS which together lost an 11% point share of the electorate. But, to the extent that Smer had adopted a soft-nationalism almost indistinguishable from that of HZDS and more moderate representatives of SNS, the shift actually suggests a high degree of attitudinal continuity.

The final and most significant shift benefited SaS, which achieved a 12% result in its first election. According to surveys, the market-liberal SaS attracted voters not only from other pro-market parties and first-time voters but also from Smer-SD. The cause of this otherwise unexpected shift appears to depend on SaS's appeal as a party free from—and strongly opposed to—corruption. Fico's party attracted a significant share of the anti-corruption electorate in 2002 and 2006, lambasting both the Mečiar and Dzurinda governments for their dubious behavior (Haughton, 2003; Haughton and Rybář, 2008). However, as many parties in Slovakia and elsewhere have discovered, the problem with an anti-corruption message is that is hard to maintain while in office. Indeed, the anti-corruption party of one election may become the corrupt-but-experienced party of the next election, causing voters who are drawn to anti-corruption appeals to look elsewhere—often to new parties. For voters without strong national sentiments, the anti-corruption magnet of 2010 was SaS.

The results in 2010 thus do not reflect a fundamental shift from left to right but only a left-to-right shift in the votes of those most highly sensitive to corruption, a shift

**Table 1**  
Results of the parliamentary elections in the Slovak Republic, 12 June 2010.

Party	Votes (%)	Change (2006)	Seats	Change (2006)
Smer-SD (Direction-Social Democracy)	34.8	+5.7	62	+7
SDKÚ-DS (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party)	15.4	–2.9	28	–3
SaS (Freedom and Solidarity)	12.1	12.1	22	+22
KDH (Christian Democratic Movement)	8.5	+0.2	15	+1
Most-Híd (Bridge)	8.1	+8.1	12	+12
SNS (Slovak National Party)	5.1	–6.7	9	–11
SMK (Party of the Hungarian Coalition)	4.3	–7.4	0	–20
ĽS-HZDS (People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia)	4.3	–4.5	0	–15
SDĽ (Party of the Democratic Left)	2.4	+2.3	0	0
KSS (Communist Party of Slovakia)	0.8	–3.0	0	0
Other parties	4.0	–4.1	0	0
Totals	100.0		148	
Share of vote for parties not crossing threshold	15.9	+3.9		
Turnout	58.8	+4.2		

Source: Slovak Statistical Office (2010).

that is likely to endure only until the emergence of a new anti-corruption party in a future election cycle. Nor do they reflect a fundamental decline in the strength of Slovak nationalism but rather a shift of Slovak nationalist voters from the smaller parties, with their stronger emphasis on national questions, to Fico's larger and more diffuse but sufficiently nationalist alternative. Whether *that* shift will endure depends on the emergence of a new national alternative, either through the formation of a new party or the reformation of the Slovak National Party. The processes of party birth, death and change thus mask Slovakia's deeper stability. Nonetheless, it is worth asking whether the unprecedented speed of those processes in Slovakia, as in other post-communist countries, affects processes of democratic accountability and party competition in important ways many of which scholars are just beginning to consider.

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# The 2010 elections in Brazil

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## 1. Background

On October 31, 2010 Dilma Rousseff won Brazil's presidential election. On January 1, 2011 she became the country's president, succeeding two-term executive officeholder Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2006, 2007–2010). Rousseff's election represented the first time since 1989 in which Lula's name did not appear on the ballot. It begins the third consecutive administration of a candidate from the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT). In Brazil's majority runoff system, Rousseff secured 56% of the vote in the second round against the 44% garnered by opponent José Serra from the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileiro* or PSDB). It was the fifth straight presidential contest (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010) in which the two parties – PT and PSDB – represented the top two vote getters. With only a 47% vote share, Rousseff had failed to win outright in the

first round election of October 1. In that election, second place finisher José Serra attracted 33% of all votes. The remaining share went to a third candidate, Marina Silva of the Green Party (*Partido Verde* or PV). In a pattern strikingly similar to that of Lula's 2006 election, Rousseff eventually swept many states in the poorer regions of the country, namely, the North and Northeast, and lost in many of the more developed states in the South and Southeast. Winning sixteen states in all, she garnered over 70% of all valid votes in Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão and Pernambuco. In the more developed states, support for Rousseff was strong among public sector employees. The most affluent and best-educated Brazilians, found in higher concentrations in the South and Southeast, tended to vote for Serra (Table 1).

## 2. Candidates

So, who were the principal presidential contenders, what did they stand for, and what was their appeal? Dilma Rousseff, the 62 year-old daughter of a Bulgarian immigrant, was a 1960s radical who took a technocratic

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