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# Local elections in Slovakia: opposition retains its lead

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On 24 October, Slovakia held local and regional elections, *with both taking place simultaneously for only the second time in the country's history*. Voters also directly elected regional governors (*župans*), mayors and heads of municipalities, with each contest decided in a single round by a plurality of votes.

In the local elections, independent candidates secured the largest number of posts as mayors and heads of municipalities – 1,560, or 54% of the total. Among political parties, three performed particularly well: two members of the governing coalition – the centre-left Hlas (9% of those elected stood as its candidates, while a total of 19.7% received its endorsement) and Prime Minister Robert Fico's left-wing nationalist Smer (7% and 17%, respectively) – and the opposition Christian Democratic Movement (KDH, 5.4% and 7.5%, respectively). However, in most cases their performance was weaker than four years ago. Of Slovakia's ten cities with populations exceeding 50,000, six will be led by opposition mayors and four by independents. Among political parties, KDH will hold the largest number of local council seats, followed by Hlas and Smer, although all three will have fewer councillors than before. Turnout reached 48.4%, up 2.3 percentage points from the previous elections.

In the regional elections, all eight incumbent governors retained their posts. This means that the current governing coalition will keep two of these posts, while the opposition will hold four; the remaining two governors are independents. Opposition representatives also dominate the regional assemblies. The Trenčín Region is the only administrative entity of this kind (*kraj*) where the governing coalition will hold a majority in the assembly – as well as the governorship. Turnout reached 46.5%, the highest since regional elections were first held in 2001.

Although the results of the local and regional elections cannot be directly extrapolated to national politics, the parliamentary opposition's retention of most key posts and frequent cooperation among its parties (albeit largely resulting from the first-past-the-post electoral system) bode well for the opposition a year ahead of the crucial 2027 National Council elections.

**Commentary**

- **The results of the local and regional elections have limited predictive value for next year's National Council elections, but they provide another encouraging signal for the opposition.** Its strong showing could help mobilise voters who view the government's performance negatively, particularly as *support for the governing parties has fallen in*

*opinion polls since the last parliamentary elections*. The opposition has also benefited from cooperation between its parties in fielding joint candidates. However, this cooperation is largely driven by the first-past-the-post system used to elect mayors and regional governors. So far, it has not translated into extensive, regular policy consultations at the national level. Another reason for caution when drawing far-reaching conclusions from the local and regional elections is that turnout in the parliamentary elections, most likely to be held in September 2027, will be considerably higher – it reached 68.5% in 2023. Parliamentary elections also have a different dynamic: each party (or electoral coalition) fields a single nationwide list, which favours those with prominent, popular leaders. Moreover, several parties with considerable influence in national politics have relatively weak regional structures and therefore play only a limited role in local and regional elections.

- **A persistent trend in Slovak local and regional elections is the waning importance of party-affiliated candidates and the growing role of independents.** In 2014, for example, independent mayors and heads of municipalities held 38% of these posts, but their share has risen steadily in subsequent elections, reaching 54% this year. This may reflect disillusionment with party politics. Voters often associate the left-wing nationalist governing camp with the capture of state institutions and systemic corruption, while viewing its political opponents as a source of chaos and bitter disputes over personnel and policy. The last centre-right government to complete a full term was in office from 1998 to 2002.
- **The elections revealed electoral cooperation between the governing camp and the far-right Republika party, which is not represented in parliament but could help the ruling coalition remain in power next year.** In the most striking example of this collaboration, Smer withdrew its candidate for governor of the Prešov Region, Slovakia's most populous, to boost the chances of Republika MEP Milan Mazurek; Fico even explicitly encouraged voters to support Mazurek. Similarly, Republika withdrew its candidate from the race for governor of the Žilina Region to improve the prospects of Igor Choma, a deputy transport minister representing Smer. Both candidates lost, but the strong showing by Mazurek (35.2%), who hails from Kežmarok in the Prešov Region, demonstrated that a substantial proportion of Smer voters had followed the party leadership's recommendations. This effort to familiarise the electorate with the prospect of cooperation with Republika is necessary, given that many of its members come from extremist circles with ambivalent attitudes towards the Slovak state that collaborated with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Meanwhile, Smer frequently emphasises anti-fascist themes in its historical narrative.

- **Progressive Slovakia (PS), which leads in opinion polls, saw the local and regional elections as a chance to shake off its image as a party centred on the capital city, but failed to do so.** Nationwide support for the liberal party has remained close to the 18% it secured in the 2023 parliamentary elections, with recent polls putting it at 17.4–18.9%. On the one hand, PS-backed candidates retained the mayoralty of Bratislava and governorship of the Bratislava Region, while a broad liberal coalition maintained its majority in the regional assembly. A PS governor also heads the Trnava Region, the only *kraj* bordering the Bratislava Region. Elsewhere, however, despite high expectations and

considerable support from the party leadership, PS-backed candidates lost the races for mayor of Košice (Slovakia's second-largest city), governor of the Košice Region and mayor of Banská Bystrica.