

2026 Parliamentary Elections in Slovenia

Polarisation, democratic strain, a bandwagon effect, and the challenges of coalition arithmetic

Executive Summary

- The 2026 parliamentary elections were largely seen as a defining moment of whether Slovenia will continue with a liberal, pro-European political model or adopt a more majoritarian style of politics.
- The elections underscored the continued fragmentation and polarization of Slovenia's party system.
- The campaign was characterized by heightened antagonism, scandal-driven mobilization, and visible pressure on democratic norms.
- The 2026 elections also represent the end of an era of highly successful newly formed parties at Slovenian elections.
- While the Gibanje Svoboda (Freedom Movement – GS) led by Prime Minister Robert Golob remained the largest party, its electoral mandate is significantly weaker than in 2022.
- Janez Janša's Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party – SDS) consolidated its position as the principal actor on the right side of the political spectrum, despite again falling short of outright victory.
- The election produced no clear majority, making coalition formation problematic in the post-election period.
- The post-electoral settlement will be consequential for both Slovenia's democratic development and its future positioning within the EU.

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Introduction

The parliamentary elections held in Slovenia on 22 March 2026 were regular elections conducted in a proportional parliamentary framework, with a party needing to cross a 4% threshold to enter the National Assembly. President of the Republic Nataša Pirc Musar officially called the elections in early January 2026.

Altogether 7 parties entered into parliament. The 2026 election winner was the same party that had attracted the most votes at the last elections in 2022: Gibanje Svoboda (Freedom Movement – GS). Moreover, leader of GS Robert Golob became the first sitting prime minister since 1996 to see his party win the highest electoral support. Still, the three centre-left coalition partners combined failed to win enough seats in parliament to once again form a majority coalition, notwithstanding they all sent a clear message that they wished to continue the coalition. The optimism with Robert Golob's government had noticeably dropped by the end of his mandate and the government was faced with reform tiredness and growing criticism of weak implementation in several key policy areas. Parallel to this, Janez Janša's Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party – SDS) remained the most durable and organisationally strong political force on the right, well capable of converting dissatisfaction with the government into a fresh attempt to form a centre-right coalition government.

Like in earlier parliamentary elections, the 2026 elections once again revealed that the Slovenian party system is fragmented, coalition-dependent, and highly sensitive to personal leadership. Ever since the late 2000s, Slovenian politics has revolved around a contest between liberal-centrist and conservative-populist camps, with governments often being built on unstable coalitions and frequently led by political newcomers. Over the last two decades, elections in Slovenia also essentially required voters to decide if they want Janez Janša from SDS to resume the helm as the head of the government or not. This pattern was again apparent at the 2026 elections, but in an even sharper form. At stake was not only who would hold office for the next term, but the elections

were largely seen as a defining moment of whether Slovenia will continue with a broadly liberal, pro-European political model or adopt a style of government closer to Janša's colleague Viktor Orbán and his majoritarian style of politics. Before the elections, Janša had even called for a "constitutional majority of wisdom", saying this majority was needed for making certain necessary amendments to Slovenia's constitution.¹ The notion that the elections were a decisive moment for Slovenia was reinforced during the campaign itself, which became extremely polarised, personal, and driven by scandals.

Another striking feature of the country's party politics is that since 2011 it had been characterised by very successful new parties that were formed months or even just weeks before the elections. GS was a striking example of this trend, as it was established only three months before the 2022 elections, when Golob decided to take over the small, non-parliamentary green party, Party of Green Actions, in agreement with the party's leadership. The newly formed GS won the most votes in 2022 and formed a government coalition with the Socialni demokrati (Social Democrats – SD) and Levica (The Left). The fact that GS also in 2026 attracted the most votes thus marked the end of the period of newly formed parties being highly successful at elections in Slovenia.

The Changing Slovenian Party System

Before 2011, the Slovenian party system was, together with the Hungarian and the Czech party system, regarded as one of the most stable² in terms of parties and the main lines of competition. Despite stable electoral rules including a proportional electoral system³ with a relatively low threshold of 4% of votes since 2000, the party system has shown to be dynamic.⁴ While in the 1990s three ideological pillars were mostly seen – conservative, social democratic and liberal – with all parties then generally advocating social-democratic-oriented economic policies, the situation changed by the turn of the century, which means larger differences in economic terms became evident. Alongside this, the socio-cultural line of party competition (known also as the concept of the GAL-

1 See "Janez Janša": Za ustavno večino razuma [For a reasonable/wise constitutional majority]: <https://www.sds.si/novica/janez-jansa-za-ustavno-vecino-razuma/> (accessed 06.04.2026).

2 Lewis, G. P. ed. (2001): *Party Development and Democratic Change in Post-Communist Europe. The First Decade*. London and Portland: Frank Cass & Co Ltd; Casal Bertoa, F. (2014): Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited: A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe. *Party Politics* 20 (1): 16–36; Haughton, T. and Deegan-Krause, K. (2015): Hurricane Season: Systems of Instability in Central and East European Party Politics. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 29 (1): 61–80.

3 There are 8 constituencies with 11 MPs elected in each constituency.

4 Fink-Hafner, D. and Novak, M. (2022): Party Fragmentation, the Proportional System and Democracy in Slovenia. *Political Studies Review* 20 (4): 578–591.

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TAN dimension⁵), has been profound since the 1990s in Slovenia.

After the long prevailing Liberalna demokracija Slovenije (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia – LDS) began to fall apart following its loss at the elections in 2004, a new phenomenon in Slovenian politics emerged: the setting up of new centre-left-oriented political parties just prior to elections in an attempt to occupy the position LDS once enjoyed.⁶ Such newly formed parties were often able to attract the biggest share of votes: Lista Zorana Jankoviča – Pozitivna Slovenija (List of Zoran Jankovič – Positive Slovenia) in 2011 (28.5% of votes), Stranka Mira Cerarja (the Party of Miro Cerar) in 2014 (34.5%) as well as Gibanje Svoboda (Freedom Movement) led by Robert Golob in 2022. One might also add Lista Marjana Šarca (List of Marjan Šarec) which in 2018 received only the second-highest support with 12.6% at the elections, but formed the government coalition.⁷ Furthermore, a few other newly formed parties also successfully entered parliament in this period. However, usually such new parties had to make space for even newer parties at the following elections, with Slovenia thus being a clear example of the new party subsystem pattern in which newcomers are rapidly losing out to even newer parties.⁸ To be clear, this does not mean that in the period from 1992–2008 the country did not see new parties enter parliament at all. Nonetheless, before 2011 in each elections just one new party managed to enter parliament (in 2004 no new party entered the parliament) and none of them ever attracted more than 10% of votes.

The described pattern of very successful new parties was no longer visible at the 2026 elections. In 2026, only one newly formed party was able to cross the parliamentary threshold with 6.7%: the centre-right Demokrati. Anžeta Logarja (Democrats. of Anže Logar), established in 2024 by a former long-term MP of SDS. In contrast, at the end of 2025 also a new centre-left party was established, Prerod – Stranka Vladimirja Prebiliča (Rebirth – Party of Vladimir Prebilič), yet it failed to enter parliament.⁹ Another newcomer to the

Slovenian parliament is the party Resni.ca (Truth), founded in 2020 in the circumstances of COVID-19 as an anti-vaxxer/anti-system actor, which proved to be populist by essentially conveying two demands: lower taxes, and sovereignty. Although the party attracted 2.8% of votes in 2022, it was more successful in 2026 and obtained five seats.

Among previous newcomers, Levica must also be mentioned. The party first entered parliament in 2014 as part of the Koalicija združena Levica (United Left Coalition), after three parties had joined forces. This more radical left-oriented three-party coalition saw its formation accelerate following the mass protests or times of popular uprising in Slovenia during 2012/2013¹⁰ while opposition to the economic policies advocated by the EU in the 2008 crisis acted as an important push to found the most prominent party Inicijativa za demokratični socializem (Initiative for Democratic Socialism) in this coalition.¹¹ This coalition and the party experienced a few mergers and splits. In 2026, Levica formed a joint candidate list with Vesna (a green party).

Apart from these newer parties, there are also some established parties: the former Zveza komunistov (Alliance of Communists) which in the democratic transition was transformed (and renamed several times) to become the centre-left SD (Social Democrats). At the end of the 1980s, SDS was established first as Socialdemokratska stranka Slovenije (Social Democratic Party of Slovenia), but over the years transformed into a conservative and right-oriented party. The centre-right Nova Slovenija (New Slovenia – NSi) emerged in August 2000. In spring 2000, Slovenska ljudska stranka (Slovenian People's Party – SLS) and Slovenski krščanski demokrati (the Slovenian Christian Democrats – SKD) merged into a joint party officially called SLS+SKD – Slovenska ljudska stranka. However, a few months later, in the same year, a split occurred within this newly formed party, which led to the formation of the NSi. The SLS+SKD party was renamed again to SLS in 2001. During the 2026 elections, NSi and SLS (together with the new party Fokus Marka Lotriča – Focus of Marko Lotrič) established a pre-electoral coalition.

5 GAL-TAN is a common political-science shorthand for a socio-cultural value dimension in party competition. In practice, the GAL-TAN dimension captures conflicts over issues such as immigration, environmentalism, and traditional values.

6 Fink-Hafner, D. (2024): Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy: Slovenia in Comparative Perspective. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

7 Election results for past elections are available at <https://www.dvk-rs.si/volitve-in-referendumi/drzavni-zbor-rs/>

8 Haughton, T. and Deegan Krause, K. (2020): The New Party Challenge. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9 Krašovec, A. and Haughton, T. (2026), A New Script Without New Party Success: Slovenia's Parliamentary Elections: <https://whogoverns.eu/a-new-script-without-new-party-success-slovenias-parliamentary-elections/>

10 Toplišek, A. and Thomassen, L. (2017): From Protest to Party: Horizontality and Verticality on the Slovenian Left. *Europe-Asia Studies* 69 (9): 1383–1400.

11 Fink-Hafner, D. (2024): Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy: Slovenia in Comparative Perspective. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Despite being a parliamentary political systems with a proportional electoral system, Slovenia has obviously not avoided the presidentialisation and/or personalisation of politics in recent years.¹² Analyses of the formal party structures and rules of Slovenian parties established in the 1990s have revealed that party leaders formally held no special roles under parties' internal rules, except for the Slovenska nacionalna stranka (Slovenian National Party – SNS)¹³ and partly SDS.¹⁴ Yet, in several of these established parties, the *de facto* central role of party leaders was developed in practice without any changes being made to their structures, akin to the idea of Poguntke and Webb¹⁵ concerning the presidentialisation of politics. On the other hand, the centrality of party leaders was clear in formation stages of the successful new parties, and their centrality has even been reflected in formal party rules.¹⁶ Among post-2011 new parties, one may speak about the importance of the founding fathers' charisma in the forming of these parties,¹⁷ with their importance also shown in the names of the parties themselves.

The 2026 Electoral Campaign: Polarized and Aggressive

In many ways, the 2026 campaign resembled several earlier Slovenian parliamentary elections as it was very personalised and (social) media driven. Yet, it was also considerably more antagonistic than past campaigns. What began as a contest based on the Golob government's record and the policy alternatives offered by the opposition soon became a struggle over legitimacy, corruption, and the integrity of democratic competition. Election coverage provided by both the

Slovenian public broadcaster and POP TV (the biggest commercial TV station in Slovenia) highlighted the extent to which major campaign moments revolved around highly conflictual TV confrontations and agenda-setting clashes rather than conventional programmatic persuasion alone.¹⁸

Irrespective of the pluralism of actors outlined in the previous chapter, the campaigns have never ceased to be structured by the familiar left–right cleavage and, specifically, the Janša vs. anti-Janša logic that has held sway over Slovenian politics in the last 15 years. Janez Janša, the leader of the SDS since 1993 and a three-time prime minister, is one of the most influential but also most divisive figures in post-independence Slovenian politics. Over the last two decades, political competition in Slovenia has thus increasingly been structured around attitudes towards Janša himself, with voters, parties, and coalition strategies often aligning along a pro-/anti-Janša divide. His polarising role stems not only from his longevity and centrality on the right side of the political spectrum, but also from his confrontational political style and recurring concerns about his stances towards respecting democratic norms, media pluralism, and the rule of law. Janša does sometimes emphasize his role as a victim in the struggle against Communist Yugoslavia, pointing out that a real rupture from the communist system has not been made. His supporters point to his strong leadership, competent government and delivery of promises. In contrast, critics highlight corruption scandals, democratic erosion under his rule, friendship and support for illiberal politicians like Viktor Orbán, and the early signs of what some dubbed the “Orbánization” of Slovenia.

- 12 Poguntke, T. and Webb, P. (2005): The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies: A Framework for Analysis; In: Poguntke T. and Webb P. (eds.): The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–25; Karvonen, L. (2010): The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies. Colchester: ECPR Press; Passarelli, G. (2015): Parties' Genetic Features: The Missing Link in the Presidentialization of Parties; In: Passarelli G. (ed.): The Presidentialization of Political Parties. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–25.
- 13 SNS represents an eclectic combination of left and right political values and policies, but is nonetheless mainly characterised as a right-wing nationalist party closely associated with its leader Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti. It was represented in parliament from 1992–2011, and returned to parliament during the 2018–2022 term.
- 14 Krašovec, A. (2016): Almost Without Any Innovations: Organizational Structures in Slovenian Parties; In: Sobolewska-Myślik, K., Kosowska-Gąstoł, B. and Borowiec, P. (eds.): Organizational Structures of Political Parties in Central and Eastern European Countries. Jagiellonian University Press, pp. 419–440.
- 15 Poguntke, T. and Webb, P. (2005): The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies: A Framework for Analysis; In: Poguntke T. and Webb P. (eds.): The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–25.
- 16 Krašovec, A. (2016): Almost Without Any Innovations: Organizational Structures in Slovenian Parties; In: Sobolewska-Myślik, K., Kosowska-Gąstoł, B. and Borowiec, P. (eds.): Organizational Structures of Political Parties in Central and Eastern European Countries. Jagiellonian University Press, pp. 419–440; Krašovec, A. (2017): A Hint at Entrepreneurial Parties? The Case of Four New Successful Parties in Slovenia. Czech Journal of Political Science 24 (2): 158–178; Fink-Hafner, D. (2024): Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy: Slovenia in Comparative Perspective. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 17 Panebianco, A. (1988). Political Parties: Organization and Power. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 18 See “RTV Slovenija, Volitve 2026” [RTV Slovenia, Elections 2026]: <https://365.rtvlo.si/oddaja/volitve-2026/173252067>; “24ur Slovenija odloča”: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija-odloca>; “Prvaki strank o davkih, zunanji politiki, zdravstvu, integriteti in povezovanju” [Party leaders on taxes, foreign policy, healthcare, integrity and connectivity]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija-odloca/prvo-veliko-soocenje-avtobus-24ur-odhaja-v-koper.html>; “Novi akterji na političnem parketu pod drobnogledom. Kdo govori resnico?” [New actors on the political scene under scrutiny. Who is telling the truth?]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/dejstva/novi-akterji-na-politcnem-parke-tu-pod-drobnogledom-kdo-govori-resnico.html> (all links accessed 06.04.2026).

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For SDS and its supporters, the 2026 election was framed as an opportunity to remove a reform-tired and scandal-prone government and restore political decisiveness. For the centre-left and liberal camp, the central mobilising goal was not simply to support Golob or particular coalition partners, but notably to (again) stop Janša from returning to power. Voters were thus encouraged to think not simply about political programmes and policy choices, but the broader democratic direction of the country as well. In this respect, anti-Janša mobilisation has remained a crucial force in the elections, even if a few voices on the centre-left warned that on its own this would be insufficient to win.

In any case, the campaign did have a substantive agenda. Healthcare was in the centre of public debate, especially the waiting times experienced in the healthcare system, shortages of medical personnel, as well as the issue of privatization of the health-care system, and the credibility of the government's health reform. Other salient issues included taxation and the general state of the economy, the affordability of housing, pensions and long-term care, energy prices, corruption, and questions of security and foreign policy. The leading campaign debates shown on POP TV dealt explicitly with taxes, healthcare, foreign policy, integrity, staffing, and possible post-election cooperation, while the election package of RTV Slovenia similarly organised coverage around issue-based confrontations on healthcare, long-term care, foreign and security policy, and the cost of living. EU topics again did not feature strongly given that the EU does not represent a major dividing line in Slovenian party politics.¹⁹ In substantive terms, the campaign was therefore not empty and focused on a set of social and institutional concerns which had accumulated during Golob's time in office.

However, like in past parliamentary elections in Slovenia, the party leaders and their symbolic roles mattered even more than the programmes. The campaign was marked by a leadership duel between Golob and Janša, while parties positioned around that antagonism calibrated their messages with coalition bargaining already in mind. Such personalisation was no acci-

dent as it reflected the structure of Slovenian party competition itself. Many voters regarded the campaign less as a comparison of policy platforms and more as a decision on which leader could be trusted to lead the next government.

The campaign's most disturbing characteristic was the level of rudeness and confrontational political culture, with symbolic aggression crossing any acceptable lines. This included, for instance, the hanging of an animal cadaver from a GS campaign poster in Vrhnika (a town in Slovenia), and later the appearance of a dead pigeon (the surname Golob of the prime minister means "pigeon") attached to another poster. The campaign was also marked by torn posters, slashed tyres, and a general atmosphere of aggression and degradation. These incidents were not simply viewed as isolated acts of vandalism. They became emblematic of a wider environment in which dehumanisation, menace, and political hatred were increasingly being normalised. In a small parliamentary democracy that relies heavily on coalition-making and political competitors being able to work together at least on some level, such symbolic violence holds broader significance for democracy.²⁰

The final week of the campaign was dominated by the publication of secretly recorded conversations along with allegations of foreign involvement. A sequence of leaked recordings involving politically connected figures from the centre-left camp was published on a newly established Webpage.²¹ The affair quickly escalated into claims that a foreign-linked operation was attempting to influence the election process. Here, close attention was paid to Israeli intelligence firm Black Cube, whose alleged activities in Slovenia became a major campaign issue.²² During the campaign, the leaked recordings were used by different actors in sharply opposite ways: for critics of the centre-left, they appeared to expose networks of influence, corruption, and political trading of the government; while for Golob's camp and allied actors the recordings raised an alarm about foreign interference, unlawful surveillance and the manipulation of democratic competition for the benefit of a single party (SDS was mentioned). The issue

19 Krašovec, A. and Lajh, D. (2009): The European Union: A Joker or Just an Ordinary PlayingCard for Slovenian Political Parties? *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25 (4): 491 – 512.

20 "Je tokratna predvolilna kampanja najbolj brutalna doslej?" [*Is this election campaign the most brutal yet?*]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/je-tokratna-predvolilna-kampanja-najbolj-brutalna-doslej.html>; "Na plakat Gibanja Svoboda obesili živalski kadaver" [*Animal cadaver was applied to Freedom Movement poster*]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija-odloca/grotesken-prizor-na-vrhnik-na-plakat-gibanja-svoboda-obesili-mrtvega-psa.html>; "Mrtev golob visel s plakata Gibanja Svoboda" [*A dead pigeon hung from a Freedom Movement poster*]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/mrtev-golob-visi-s-plakata-gibanja-svoboda.html>

21 Leaked recordings are published on the Webpage entitled "Anti-corruption 2026": <https://www.anti-corruption2026.com/>

22 "Slovenia asks EU to Investigate Alleged Election Interference": <https://sloveniatimes.com/46971/slovenia-asks-eu-to-investigate-alleged-election-interference>

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did not however remain on the level of rumour alone: just prior to the elections and after SOVA (the Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency) confirmed there was foreign influence on the electoral process and had already passed evidence on to law enforcement authorities. Even without resolving all of the factual and legal questions, the affair transformed the campaign by shifting attention away from policy-oriented competition to the vulnerability of the country's democracy.²³ It also mobilised voters and even boosted the bandwagon effect, with many voters centering around the two bigger political parties, otherwise already known from previous elections.²⁴

It is also important to consider the 2026 election's integrity. OSCE-ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission, focusing on campaign financing, media conditions, preparedness against hybrid threats, and the general campaign environment. At the time of writing, however, the report has yet to be published. There is no persuasive evidence that voting day itself was characterised by systemic administrative failure despite Janša complaining about multiple irregularities. The State Electoral Commission reviewed and rejected several appeals lodged by the SDS.²⁵ There are serious concerns with the campaign environment however: the use of secret recordings, the possibility of organised influence operations, and the broader deterioration of norms in public debate. The controversy surrounding the elections did not primarily concern ballot-box fraud or the counting of votes (Slovenia has recorded good results/high integrity in the state of the electoral integrity for years),²⁶ but whether formal electoral integrity had been undermined by the distorted informational/media and political environment during the campaign.²⁷

In a comparison to previous elections, this mix of political polarisation and extraordinary scandals made

the 2026 campaign quite distinct. Although Slovenia has seen leadership-centred elections, anti-Janša mobilisation, and corruption allegations before, what was new was the intensity with which these elements accumulated. Accordingly, the campaign cannot merely be understood as the run-up to voting day, as it revealed not only the persistence of a polarised political sphere but the growing fragility of the democratic system in the country's public sphere.

Electoral Winners and Losers

Robert Golob's Gibanje Svoboda (GS), which public opinion polls had for a long time shown trailing behind Janez Janša's SDS, in the campaign's last week caught up to SDS,²⁸ ultimately finishing first with 28.66% of the votes and 29 seats in parliament, narrowly ahead of SDS with 27.88% and 28 seats. The remaining parties which cleared the 4% threshold are the NSi-SLS-Fokus list with 9 seats, SD with 6, Demokrati with 6, Levica-Vesna with 5, and Resni.ca with 5, along with the 2 minority MPs (see Table 1 below). Turnout reached 70.25%,²⁹ which is almost the same level seen in 2022 – in the last week the mobilisation of voters was evident with the strongest public efforts in that regard being made by the centre-left parties.

It appears that some lessons from the 2022 elections had been learned – a few pre-electoral coalitions were formed to improve the electoral chances of some parties and avoid the high percentage of 'lost votes' (namely, those for parties which did not manage to pass the threshold to enter parliament), which at the 2022 elections amounted to 24% and in 2026 was only 9.6%. Besides the above-mentioned parties, a further 7 parties (or joint candidate lists) competed in 2026, which did not make it into parliament (counted under "others" in Table 1).

23 "Novi posnetki, nekdanja ministrica: Nekdo je postavil celo lažno spletno stran" [*New footage, former minister: Someone even set up a fake website*]: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/posnetki-svarc-pipan-sklad-stockard-capital.html>; "Slovenia says it has confirmed foreign influence on last weekend's election": <https://apnews.com/article/slovenia-election-influence-allegations-black-cube-jansa-af8c-08450f922a669e9b22f146a1026f>

24 Houghton, T., Krašovec, A. and Cutts, D. (2024): Jumping on the New Party Bandwagon: The 2022 Elections and the Development of Party Politics in Slovenia. *Europe-Asia Studies* 76 (10): 1526–1550.

25 "Opposition Party to Challenge Part of General Election Results": <https://sloveniatimes.com/47024/opposition-party-to-challenge-part-of-general-election-result/>; "Pirc Musar: Zavračam karšne koli dvome o legitimnosti teh volitev" [*Pirc Musar: I reject any doubts about the legitimacy of these elections*]: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/parlamentarne-volitve-2026/pirc-musar-zavracam-kakrsne-koli-dvome-o-legitimnosti-teh-volitev/777957>; "Election Results Now Official, New Parliament About to Convene": <https://sloveniatimes.com/47177/election-results-now-official-new-parliament-about-to-convene>.

26 See Electoral Integrity Project: <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/reports>

27 "Slovenia, Parliamentary Elections, 22 March 2026": <https://odihr.osce.org/node/661921>.

28 "Anketa: Sedem strank čez parlamentarni prag, sestavljanje koalicije bo težavno" [*Poll: Seven parties cross parliamentary threshold, forming a coalition will be difficult*]: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/parlamentarne-volitve-2026/raziskave-javnega-mnenja/anketa-sedem-strank-cez-parlamentarni-prag-sestavljanje-koalicije-bo-tezavno/776371>; "Zadnja v nizu anket: Gibanje Svoboda in SDS izenačena na vrhu" [*Latest in a series of polls: Freedom Movement and SDS tied at the top*]: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/parlamentarne-volitve-2026/raziskave-javnega-mnenja/zadnja-v-nizu-anket-gibanje-svoboda-in-sds-izenacena-na-vrhu/776875>

29 Official DVK results and turnout for the 2026 parliamentary elections: <https://volitve.dvk-rs.si/dz2026/>.

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Table 1: Competing Parties in the 2026 Elections and Results

Party Acronym	Party Name (Original)	English translation	President of the Party	% of votes	Number of Seats	European Party Family
GS	Gibanje Svoboda	Freedom Movement	Robert Golob	28.66	29	ALDE
SDS	Slovenska demokratska stranka	Slovenian Democratic Party	Janez Janša	27.88	28	EPP
NSi, SLS, Fokus	Nova Slovenija, Slovenska ljudska stranka, Fokus Marka Lotriča	New Slovenia, Slovenian People's Party, Fokus of Marko Lotrič	Jernej Vrtovec (NSi), Tina Bregant (SLS), Marko Lotrič (Fokus)	9.26	9	EPP
SD	Socialni demokrati	Social Democrats	Matjaž Han	6.71	6	PES
Demokrati.	Demokrati. Anžeta Logarja	Democrats. Of Anže Logar	Anže Logar	6.69	6	
Levica in Vesna	Levica in Vesna	The Left and Vesna	Luka Mesec and Asta Vrečko (co-coordinators of Levica); Uroš Macerl and Urška Zgojznik (co-presidents of Vesna)	5.69	5	European Left (Levica) / European Greens (Vesna)
Resni.ca	Državljsko gibanje Resni.ca	Citizen Movement Resni.ca	Zoran Stevanović	5.49	5	
Prerod	Prerod – Stranka Vladimirja Prebiliča	Rebirth – Vladimir Prebilič's Party	Vladimir Prebilič	3.05	–	
Pirati	Piratska stranka Slovenije	Pirate Party of Slovenia	Jasmin Feratović	2.36	–	
SNS	Slovenska nacionalna stranka	Slovenian National Party	Zmago Jelinčič	2.24	–	
Representatives of Hungarian and Italian Minority					2	
Others				1.97	–	

Source: Državna volilna komisija (DVK); see footnote 29.

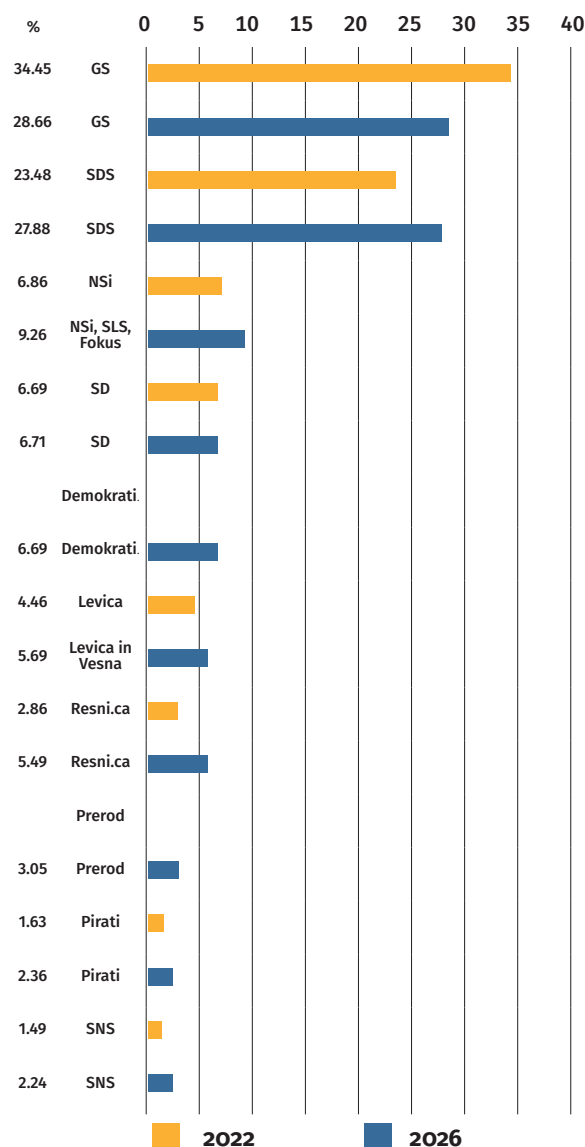
For the incumbent camp, the result was a success and a warning at the same time. **Gibanje Svoboda (GS)** remained the largest party and hence will have the first opportunity to structure the coalition negotiations. In a parliamentary system, this matters symbolically and strategically. Still, compared with the 2022 elections, the scale of the party's decline was obvious. From 41 seats and 34.45% in 2022 it had dropped to 29 seats and 28.66% by 2026 (see Figure 1 on the next page). This is a substantial reduction of votes; while Golob succeeded to avoid outright defeat, he failed to recreate the broad anti-Janša electoral coalition that had underpinned his rise four years earlier. In addition, the incumbent three parties of the centre-left government coalition now only account for 40 seats in the 90-seat parliament, compared to 53 seats after the last elections, despite having sent a clear message that they wished to continue with their work.

Polls suggested for a long time that **Slovenska demokratska stranka (SDS)** would win the highest electoral support, but eventually the party came out second. However, it improved its numerical gains as compared to 2022. The party again demonstrated its exceptional organisational resilience and again established itself as the core of the Slovenian right.

Among smaller parties, **Demokrati** (entering parliament with 6 seats in this election) was relatively successful, even though during the campaign the party leader Logar had forecast a much better result – up to 20 seats (public opinion polls weeks before the elections also showed higher support than the party ultimately received). After the elections, Logar admitted the result was somewhat disappointing. The result of Demokrati reflects a broader search among some voters for a more moderate, coalition-capable centre-right option: one that is not identical to SDS, yet not wholly outside of the right-of-centre camp either. The **NSi-SLS-Fokus** list also performed solidly, winning 9 seats and thereby strengthening the moderate conservative segment of the party system. The pre-electoral coalition of the three parties strongly celebrated the result it had achieved, but in reality at the previous elections NSi by itself had obtained just one seat less than the pre-electoral coalition in 2026. The entry of **Resni.ca** with 5 seats was one of the election's more noteworthy developments. It signals the continued presence of anti-establishment, protest-oriented and system-critical sentiment in Slovenian politics. While the party was not among the central protagonists of the campaign, its entry into parliament gives it visibility and bargaining leverage which is disproportionate to its size.

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Figure 1: Comparison of Election Results from 2022 and 2026



Source: Državna volilna komisija (DVK); see footnotes 7/29.

By contrast, on the centre-left, **Socialni demokrati (SD)** stayed with almost the same support (7 seats and 6.69% in 2022 compared to 6 seats and 6.71% in 2026), albeit it clearly expected more. Given GS's losses, one may have expected SD to attract at least a few disappointed centre-left voters. The fact this did not happen on a larger scale shows the party's continuing difficulty in reasserting itself as the main centre-left alternative. A more ambiguous case is **Levica**, which ran in an alliance with **Vesna** (a green party) and secured 5 seats. The outcome matched Levica's 2022 seat total, although the alliance format makes an exact comparison less straightforward. Still, Levica remains in parliament and thus cannot be called a loser in existential terms. However, it was con-

ceded that the party had expected a better result. SD and Levica-Vesna had received stronger support in public opinion polls conducted weeks before the elections. It is obvious that the two parties were victims of a bandwagon effect around the two bigger parties in an environment of low party identification, as during the final moments of the campaign some centre-left voters clearly decided to support GS for strategic reasons.

If one takes a step back from the perspective of individual parties, the overall loser is arguably the governing centre-left coalition (GS, SD and Levica-Vesna). The previous election produced a relatively clear centre-left mandate built around a dominant then new party and two smaller coalition partners. By 2026, this configuration has visibly eroded. GS lost heavily, SD and Levica stagnated, while the broader centre-left no longer possesses the expansive momentum that once seemed to stabilise the political field. However, the elections did not produce a right-wing takeover either, yet it did expose a certain level of exhaustion of the broad anti-Janša coalition which had defined previous cycles.

The Battle for Government and Coalition Arithmetic

Since the elections produced no parliamentary majority for either centre-left or centre-right parties, the forming of a coalition becomes the decisive stage in the political process. With GS winning 29 seats and SDS 28 seats, both parties are far from the 46 votes needed for a majority. The outcome will thus depend on coalition compatibility, sequencing, and the strategic calculations made by some smaller actors. President of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar responded by urging the parties to begin negotiations as soon as possible.³⁰ Already before the elections, she had announced she would propose a candidate for prime minister for whoever will bring her 46 votes in support, and reiterated this position after the elections. This represents a departure from previous practices as her predecessors in the office of president gave the first chance to be elected prime minister to the candidate from the party with the biggest share of votes at the elections.

At first glance, Robert Golob appears somewhat better placed than Janez Janša to lead the coalition talks, and not just because GS came narrowly first in the elections. It is also because Janša remains a deeply polarising figure, making it difficult for certain prospective coalition partners to support him without incurring

30 "Slovenian president urges talks on government after tight election outcome": <https://apnews.com/article/slovenia-election-count-parliament-robert-golob-8267b0854e9863a5a383b4odb35af71d>

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substantial reputational and strategic costs. A purely centre-left formula is insufficient for putting together a coalition on its own: the former coalition parties GS, SD, and Levica (with Vesna) together only have 40 seats. Adding Demokrati would bring such a coalition up to the minimum majority of 46. However, Anže Logar (the leader of Demokrati) as well as Zoran Stevanović (the leader of Resni.ca) announced they are unwilling to participate in a coalition with Levica³¹ as the party is by (centre-)right parties frequently described as too radically left. In addition, GS, SD, Levica-Vesna, and Demokrati do not form a naturally cohesive bloc when looking at the party programmes.

In contrast, an SDS-led coalition with the NSi-SLS-Fokus list and Demokrati would only have 43 seats, meaning that Janša would still need further support, most plausibly from Resni.ca. In any case, Stevanović announced his party is not willing to participate in a coalition where Janša is present.³² In that sense, the likely coalition arithmetic of 2026 resembled Slovenian patterns seen already in the 1990s. Governments in that period were often formed less through deep programmatic convergence but rather by the mutual recognition that certain alternatives were even less desirable. LDS under Janez Drnovšek for instance formed more ideologically heterogeneous governmental coalitions in the first decade of the independent state (while the opposition was also more varied then), yet starting with the 2008 elections this pattern changed into the forming of more ideologically homogeneous coalitions.³³

The substantive obstacles to establishing a coalition are therefore serious. Any Golob-led coalition spanning the centre-left and a more moderate centre-right actor would find it difficult to negotiate on healthcare reform, public spending, taxation, institutional reform, and the political handling of corruption allegations and the more recent secret influence claims. A Janša-led coalition would encounter a different but equally consequential problem: even if arithmetically possible, it would struggle to escape the perception that it would represent the victory of the most polarising camp ever in Slovenian politics at a time when demo-

cratic norms were already under serious pressure. The formation of a coalition in 2026 thus raises the question of what kind of democratic style will be seen in the next term of government.

The implications this holds for Slovenia's democratic development and its relationship with the European Union are especially important. A Golob-led coalition would most probably imply a continuation of the country's broadly liberal, pro-EU orientation. It would signal support for a pluralist coalition, continued engagement with EU institutions, and a preference for governing within the established norms of parliamentary compromise, even if such norms had been tested during the campaign. A Janša-led government would not automatically bring a formal rupture with the EU as Janša himself has never advocated anti-EU sentiment. Still, such an outcome would be perceived as a shift toward a more confrontational and illiberal style of governance, particularly when one notes Janša's longstanding proximity to Viktor Orbán and the concerns that keep surfacing around media pluralism, civil society, and the rule of law in Slovenia. In this respect, the question is not whether Slovenia will remain in the EU, but which political model of Europeanness it will embody.

Conclusion

The 2026 parliamentary elections in Slovenia confirmed both the persistence of known structures and emergence of more disturbing new dynamics. On the level of institutions, the elections took place within a stable constitutional framework and mobilised a considerable share of the electorate. On the level of political practice, it revealed a public sphere under severe strain. The campaign reproduced long-standing features of Slovenian politics, i.e., coalition dependence, polarised competition, personalisation, and the continuing salience of the pro-Janša vs. anti-Janša divide, but this time it appeared in a harsher and less restrained form than before. The 2026 electoral campaign was hence marked by a mix of intense polarisation, highly confrontational political culture, politics of scandal, and allegations of secret manipulation.

31 "Ne Logar ne Stevanović se ne vidita v koaliciji z Levico, NSi zavrnil udeležbo na petkovem sestanku" [*Neither Logar nor Stevanović see themselves in a coalition with the Left, NSi refused to participate in Friday's meeting*]: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/parlamentarne-volitve-2026/ne-logar-ne-stevanovic-se-ne-vidita-v-koaliciji-z-levico-nsi-zavrnil-udelezbo-na-petkovem-sestanku/777536>.

32 "Stevanović: Z SDS ne gremo, zanima pa nas notranje, zunanje in finančno ministrstvo" [*Stevanović: We are not going with the SDS, but we are interested in the interior, foreign and finance ministries*]: <https://n1info.si/volitve-2026/stevanovic-ponovil-da-v-vlado-z-janso-ne-gre-zagotovil-ne-bomo-preksili/>

33 Krašovec, A. and Krpič, T. (2019): Slovenia: Majority Coalitions and the Strategy of Dropping out of Cabinet; In: Bergman T., Ilonszki G. and Müller W. C. (eds.): *Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 475–521; Krašovec, A. and Krpič, T. (2024): Slovenia: Newcomers as Prime Ministers. A New Mode of Coalition Governance; In: Bergman T., Ilonszki G. and Hellström J. (eds.): *Coalition Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Governing in Times of Crisis*. London: Routledge, pp. 263–287.

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The result is simultaneously clear and indecisive. While GS was the relative winner, it holds a much weaker position than it did in 2022. SDS again failed to secure outright victory, but has reasserted itself as the central force on the right of the political spectrum. Smaller parties were victims of a bandwagon effect, with many voters centering around the two bigger political parties. At the same time, these smaller parties also acquired disproportionate importance due to the fragmented parliament allowing them to tip the balance between rival coalition possibilities. The election therefore did not settle the bigger question of the country's political direction, but merely postponed it to the post-electoral period. It is expected that coalition talks will take a long time, but Slovenia has already experienced such situations. While Slovenia has experienced some early elections in the past (elections in 2011, 2014 and formally also the elections in 2018), until now it has not yet happened that early elections would follow (almost) immediately after the parliamentary elections and without a government being formed in the first place.