



INSTITUTE FOR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SLOVAKIA BEFORE ELECTIONS 2006 – CITIZENS' VIEWS

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Between April 13 and 25, 2004, the Institute for Public Affairs conducted a survey that mapped the social and political climate in Slovakia before the upcoming 2006 parliamentary elections as well as basic patterns of electoral behaviour.

The data were gathered by the FOCUS agency through its network of trained interviewers from a representative sample of 1,242 Slovak citizens older than 18, using the method of face-to-face interviews.

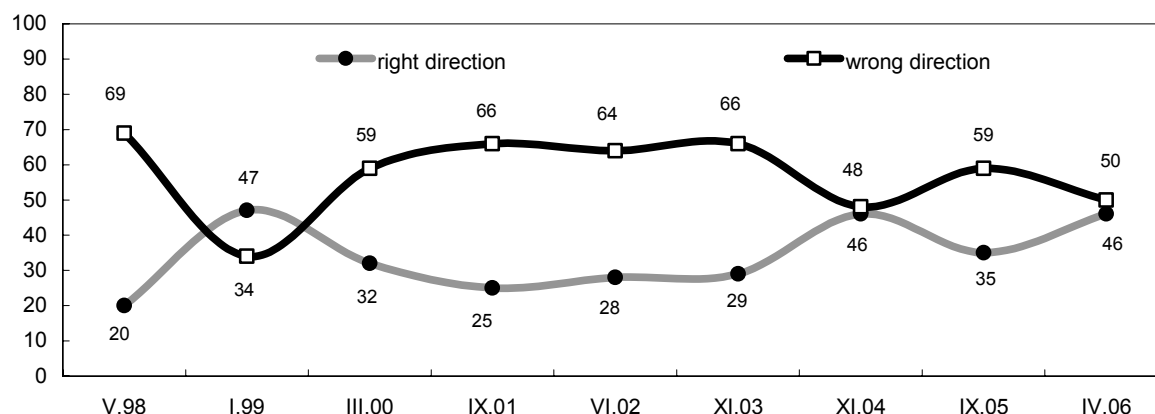
The survey was supported by the Open Society Foundation.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE BEFORE ELECTIONS 2006

How does the public perceive the direction in which the Slovak society is heading?

Is the Slovak society heading in the right or wrong direction? This key 'evaluation question' that examines past developments but simultaneously anticipates future ones, split respondents almost evenly, as 46% of them answered positively and 50% negatively (please see Graph 1). This ratio of views should not be taken for granted. **Compared to previous two parliamentary elections, citizens' perception continues to improve;** before the 1998 parliamentary elections, the ratio of positive and negative responses was

Graph 1: "Do you believe that the Slovak society is heading in the right or in the wrong direction?"

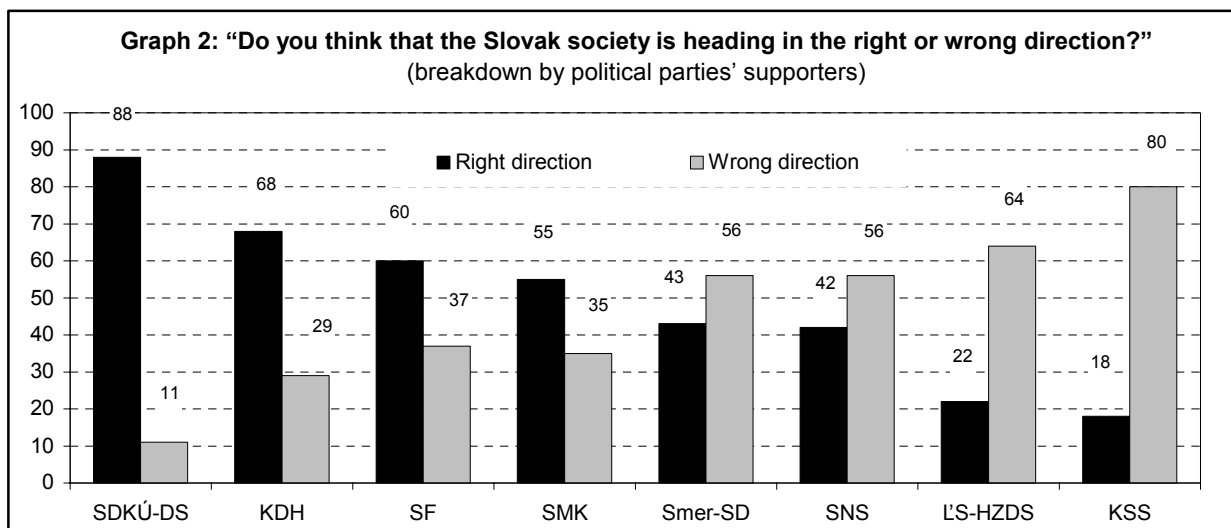


20%:69% while four years later it was 28%:64%.

Citizens' opinions regarding the overall direction of Slovakia's development are significantly determined by their **social profile**. Particularly satisfied are people with higher education; people with qualified jobs; younger people; people who do not suffer from material shortage; finally, people who identify themselves as members of the higher middle or even the middle class.

positively view Slovakia's development direction. Even more such respondents (32%) sympathize with 'hardcore' opposition parties (i.e. SNS, Smer-DS, KSS, and LS-HZDS). The remainder comprises voters of other parties, undecided voters and non-voters.

When taking a look from the reversed perspective, we see that Slovakia's overall development is viewed positively by most supporters of the SDKÚ-DS (88%), KDH (68%),



Positive perception of Slovakia's general development is closely interconnected to unambiguous endorsement of Slovakia's EU membership.

The category of respondents with positive views of the country's overall development is much more numerous than the category of those who trust the incumbent Mikuláš Dzurinda administration (for quite a long time, their total share has been lower than 25%) or those who favourably evaluate its performance (of all respondents who said they were satisfied with Slovakia's overall development, one in four would mark the government with an A or B, almost one in two would award it with a C while one in three would use a D or E).

Satisfaction with Slovakia's overall development is not an exclusive feature of the outgoing ruling coalition's supporters, as SDKÚ-DS, SMK and KDH voters make up less than one third (31%) of all people who

SF (60%) and SMK (55%). On the other hand, most sympathizers of Smer-SD and SNS (56% each), LS-HZDS (64%) and KSS (80%) presented opposite views (please see Graph 2).

How do citizens perceive reforms currently underway?

As we observed toward the end of 2005, **most ongoing reforms – except the health service reform – do not provoke fundamental refusal and opposition on the part of citizens** (please see Table 1).

Since November 2005, citizens' perception of ongoing reforms has not changed almost at all. Again, the most positively evaluated was decentralization of public administration as 61 % of respondents said it was basically good (50%) or did not have any reservations (11%). Majority of respondents also endorsed taxation (58%) and pension (53%)

	Good reform, it should be left as it is	Basically a good reform, but it should be adjusted in details	Bad reform, it should be changed thoroughly	I don't know
Decentralization of public administration	11	50	26	14
Taxation reform	12	46	31	11
Pension reform	7	46	37	10
Changes in welfare benefits	7	40	46	7
Health service reform	3	22	72	3

reforms, while changes in welfare benefits were supported by almost one in two respondents (47%). As we see, none of the examined reforms is endorsed without reservations; citizens tend to support their basic philosophy while suggesting adjustments. The only reform opposed by a vast majority of citizens is the health service reform that should be thoroughly revised according to three in four respondents (72%). The reform's negative perception was reiterated by the list of the most pressing social problems where quality of provided health care ranked second overall as almost one in three respondents (31%) cited it among three most pressing problems.

Compared to December 2005, there have been some **faint but significant** shifts in reforms' perception by particular political parties' supporters. Their greatest advocates continue to be SDKÚ-DS supporters, followed by SF sympathizers (please see Table 2). On the other hand, potential voters of KDH and partly SMK show a more critical attitude to reforms and emphasize the importance of adjusting them. Supporters of Smer-SD have grown slightly more critical of most reforms, which brought them more

in line with the critical rhetoric presented by Smer-SD Chairman Robert Fico.

Based on their supporters' prevailing attitudes to examined reforms, political parties may be divided into **three basic categories**: A – parties whose supporters show above-average support for all examined reforms (SDKÚ-DS and SF); B – parties whose sympathizers show above-average criticism regarding all examined reforms (KSS, ĽS-HZDS and Smer-SD); C – parties whose adherents present rather average or inconsistent attitudes (for instance the KDH that inclines to category A or the SMK and SNS that incline to category B).

Which problems are viewed as the most pressing by citizens?

The respondents were asked to select the most pressing social problems (please see Table 3) from a list. The **most frequently identified problems** included unemployment (50%), quality of health care (31%), poverty (29%) and the standard of living (27%). The **second group** comprised the following problems: status and opportuni-

	Taxation reform	Pension reform	Decentralization	Changes in welfare benefits	Health service reform
SDKÚ	31 : 52 : 12	16 : 63 : 15	19 : 59 : 15	16 : 52 : 23	9 : 37 : 51
SF	12 : 61 : 24	10 : 55 : 32	14 : 58 : 20	3 : 58 : 43	3 : 34 : 61
KDH	12 : 47 : 29	11 : 54 : 29	7 : 48 : 29	8 : 41 : 44	5 : 27 : 67
SMK	12 : 51 : 14	8 : 41 : 46	17 : 47 : 33	12 : 32 : 48	3 : 18 : 77
SNS	16 : 46 : 34	6 : 41 : 46	17 : 47 : 33	12 : 32 : 48	4 : 18 : 77
Smer-SD	10 : 43 : 42	7 : 46 : 42	8 : 47 : 34	6 : 38 : 51	3 : 15 : 81
ĽS-HZDS	5 : 42 : 43	5 : 34 : 57	3 : 50 : 35	1 : 39 : 54	3 : 15 : 80
KSS	9 : 35 : 46	5 : 41 : 50	7 : 37 : 43	2 : 38 : 60	0 : 13 : 85
Slovakia average	12 : 46 : 31	7 : 46 : 37	11 : 50 : 26	7 : 40 : 46	3 : 22 : 72

Unemployment	50
Quality of health care	31
Poverty in Slovakia	29
Living standard of people like you	27
Status and opportunities of young people	17
Prevalence of corruption and bribery	16
Criminality, organized crime	15
Economic and social disparities between regions	14
Abuse of power	14
Performance of the judiciary, enforceability of law and justice	9
Status and opportunities of elderly people	9
Performance of national economy	7
Protection of rights of private firms' employees	5
Environmental protection	5
Status and opportunities of women	4
Quality of democracy in Slovakia	4

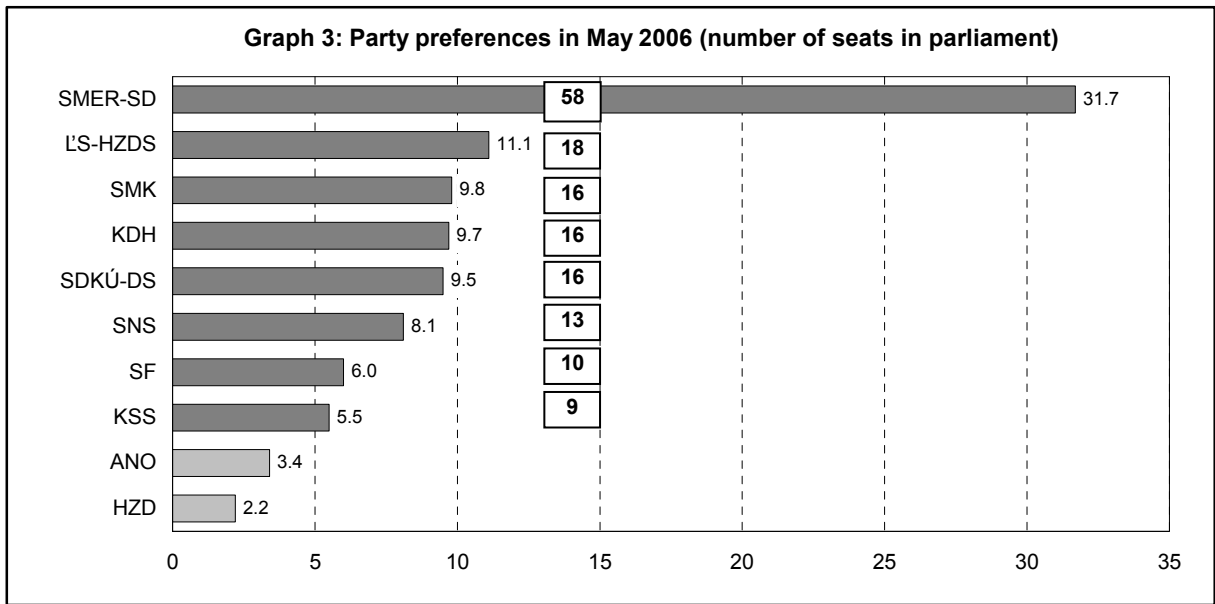
Note: This was an open question, respondents could name three problems.

ties of young people (17%), prevalence of corruption and bribery (16%), criminality and organized crime (15%), economic and social disparities between regions (14%) and abuse of power (14%). All these problems were cited by over 10% of respondents. **Other problems** were chosen by more than 4% of respondents: status and opportunities of elderly people (9%); performance of the judiciary, enforceability of law and justice (9%); performance of national economy (7%); protection of rights of private firms' employees (5%) and environmental protection (5%); status and opportunities of

women (4%); quality of democracy in Slovakia (4%).

What are the **differences in perception of pressing social problems between particular parties' supporters**? As Table 4 shows, all relevant parties' supporters labelled unemployment as the most pressing problem. The closest to the Slovakia average are **KDH, Smer-SD** and **SNS** supporters whose lists of nine most pressing problems are identical with the one identified by the entire population; furthermore, the rank of the problems did not essentially differ from

	Slovakia total	KDH	KSS	ĽS-HZDS	SDKÚ-DS	SF	Smer-SD	SMK	SNS
Unemployment	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Quality of health care	2	2	3	3	2	8	2	2	2
Poverty in Slovakia	3	3	4	4	4	2	4	4	3
Living standard of people like you	4	4	2	2	9	6	3	3	4
Status and opportunities of young people	5	5	11	8	3	7	5	7	5
Prevalence of corruption and bribery	6	7	9	12	6	4	6	9	6
Criminality, organized crime	7	9	5	7	7	3	9	6	9
Economic and social disparities between regions	8	6	6	6	5	9	7	5	7
Abuse of power	9	8	8	11	13	5	8	10	8



the overall list. Sympathizers of the **SDKÚ-DS** are less worried about abuse of power and their own standard of living; instead, they emphasized the need to eliminate regional disparities, improve effectiveness of the judiciary and law enforcement and enhance performance of national economy. Supporters of the **SMK** also stressed the importance of eliminating regional disparities. Potential voters of the **SF** are more sensitive to issues of criminality and organized crime, corruption and bribery and abuse of power; on the other hand, they are not as much worried by the quality of health care. Supporters of **LS-HZDS** and **KSS** pay close attention to problems of elderly people but do not care much about the status and opportunities of young people or the prevalence of corruption and bribery; on top of that, potential voters of the LS-HZDS attach less importance to abuse of power.

VOTER SUPPORT FOR PARTICULAR POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROFILES OF THEIR SUPPORTERS

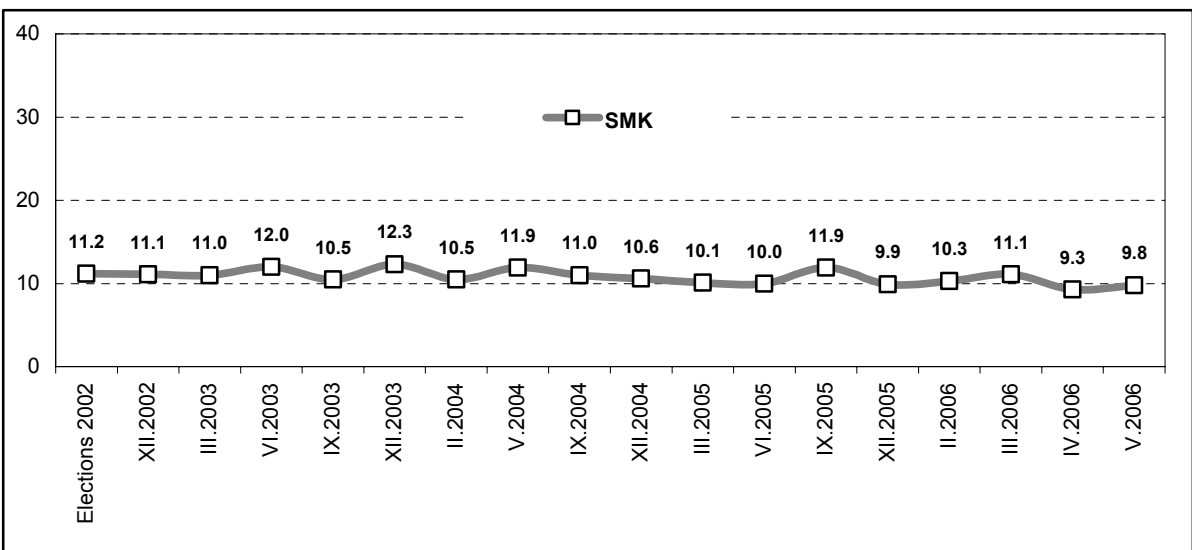
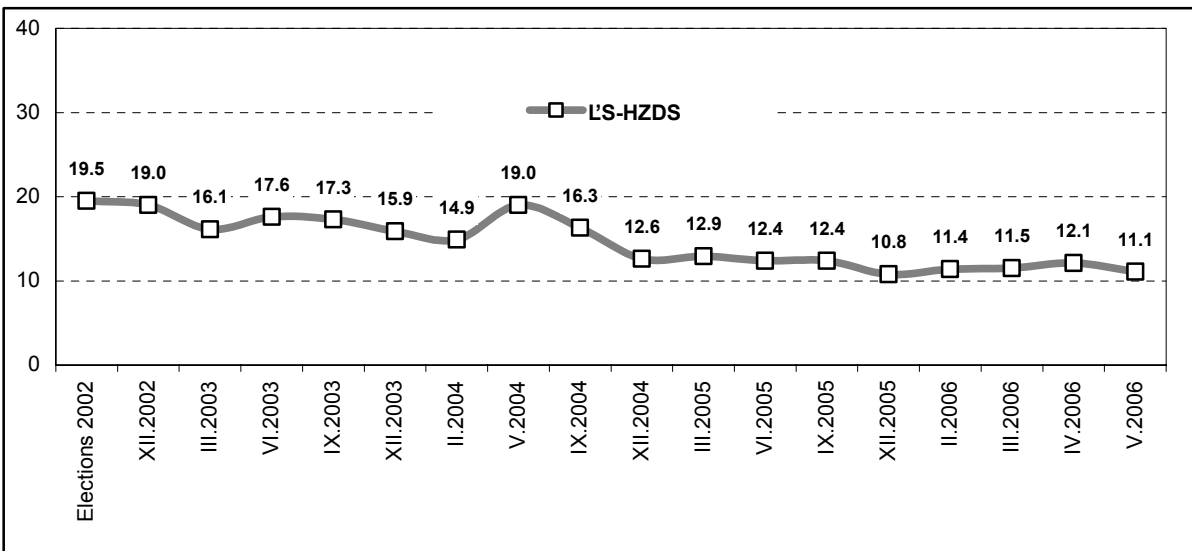
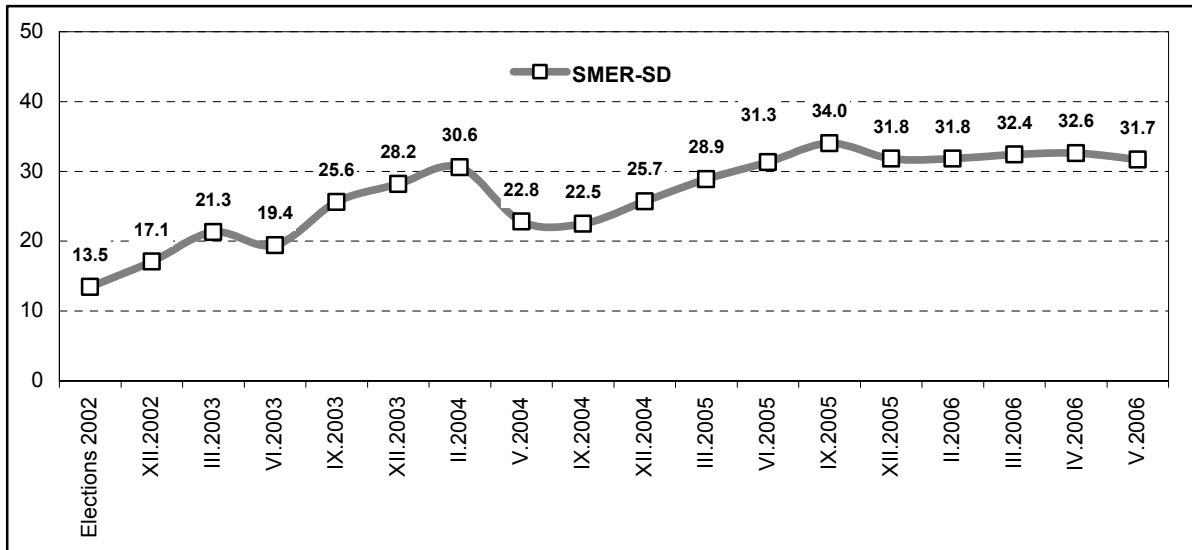
In mid-May 2006, i.e. approximately one month before parliamentary elections, the strongest party in terms of voting preferences was Smer-SD, which would receive over 30% of the popular vote according to surveys carried out by FOCUS agency but also other agencies. After a significant gap,

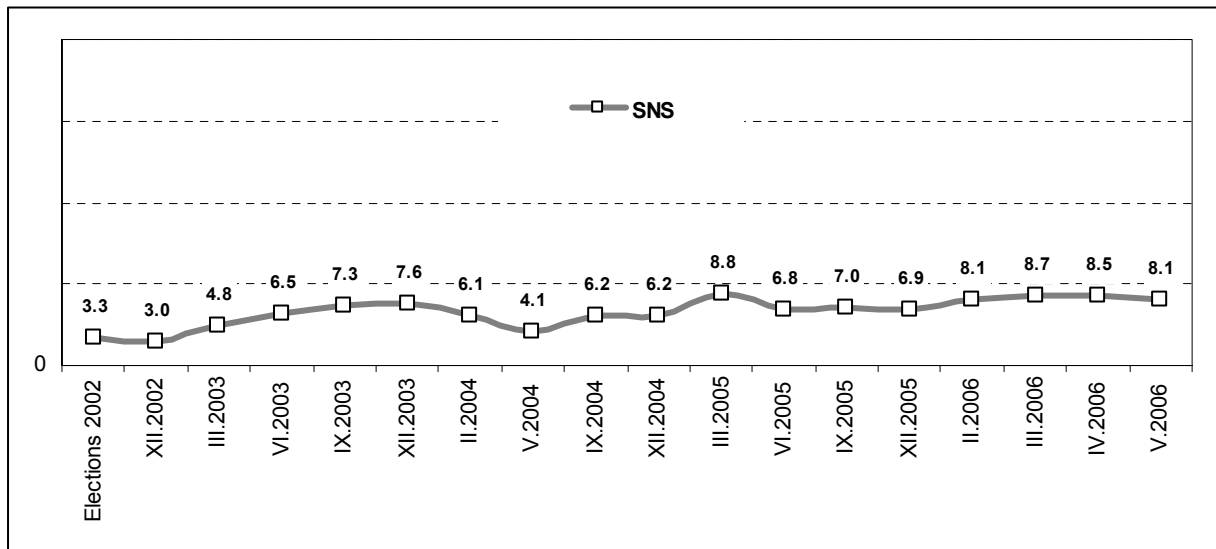
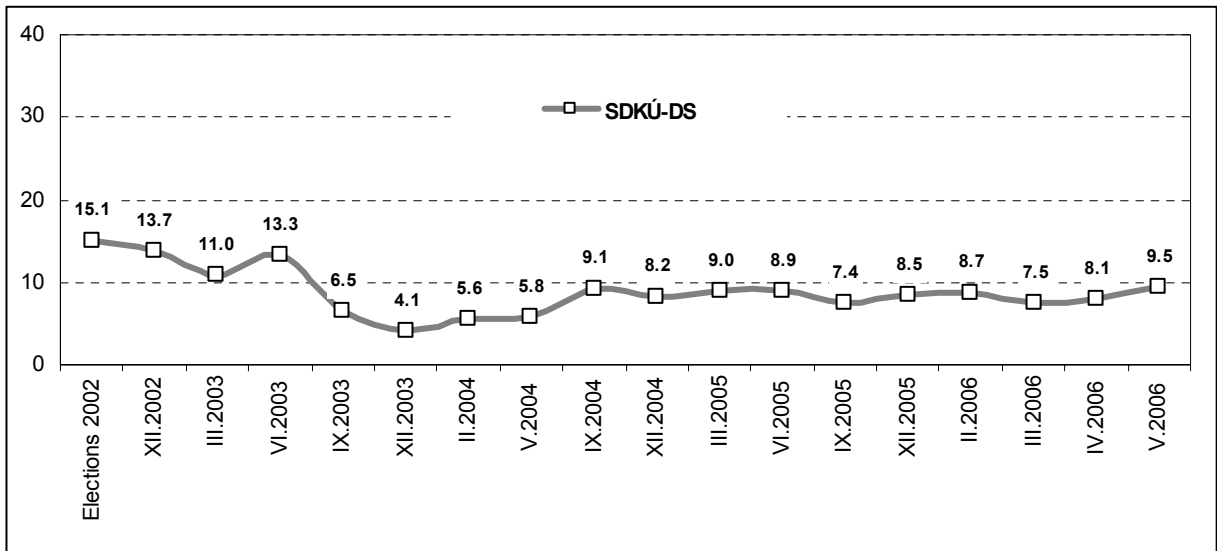
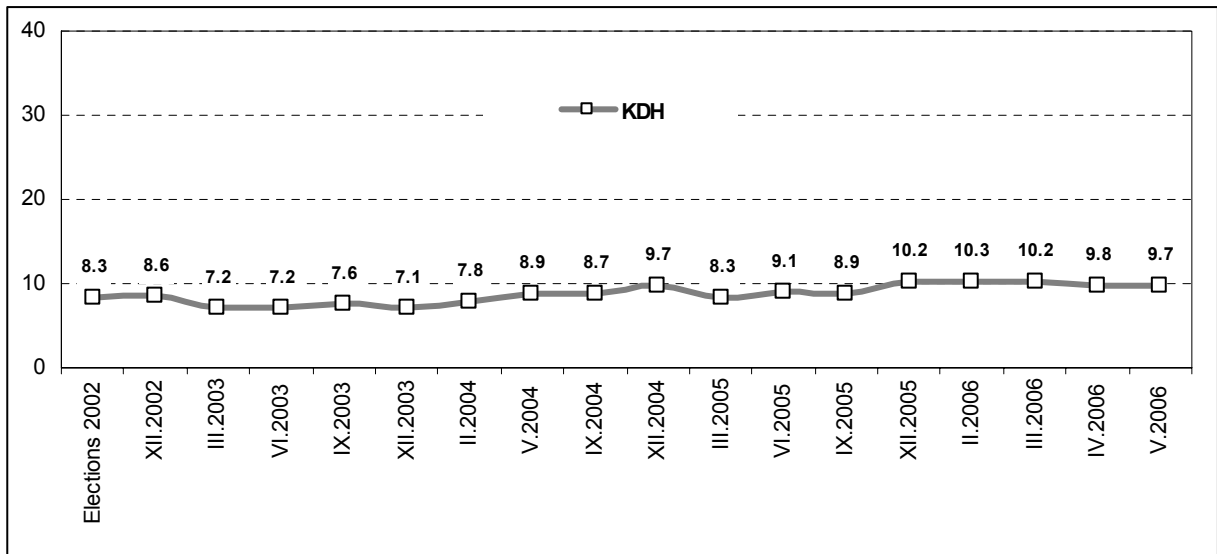
Smer-SD is followed by the LS-HZDS (11.3%) and three parties of the outgoing ruling coalition, namely the SMK (10.0%), SDKÚ-DS (9.8%) and KDH (8.7%). Voter support for the SNS, which is currently outside parliament, hovers at approximately the same level (9.6%). If parliamentary elections were held in mid-April 2006, parliamentary seats would be clinched also by the SF (6.8%) and the KSS (6.3%).

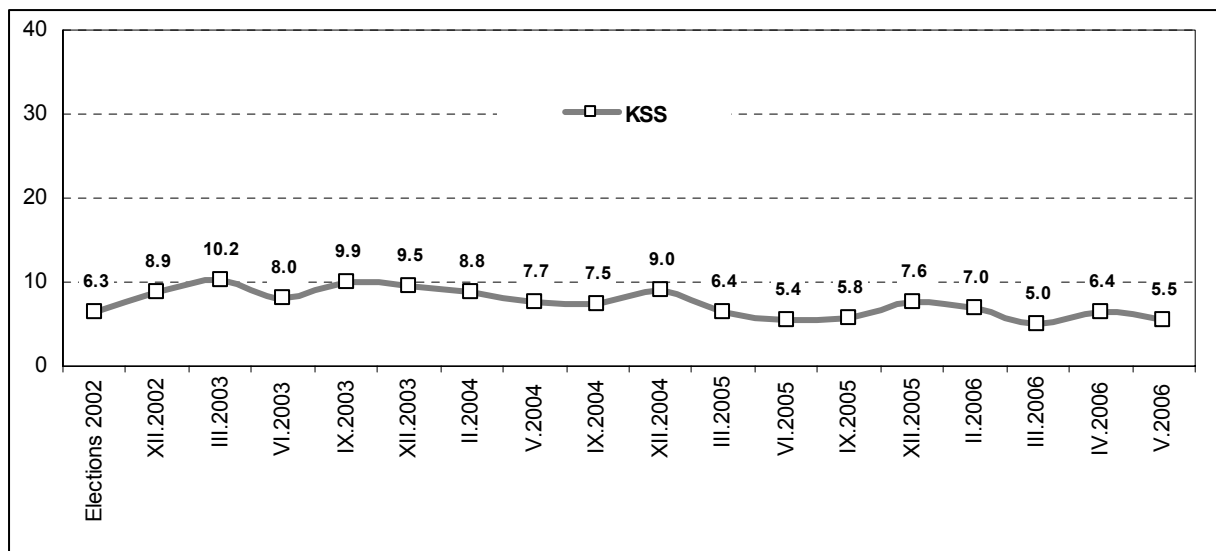
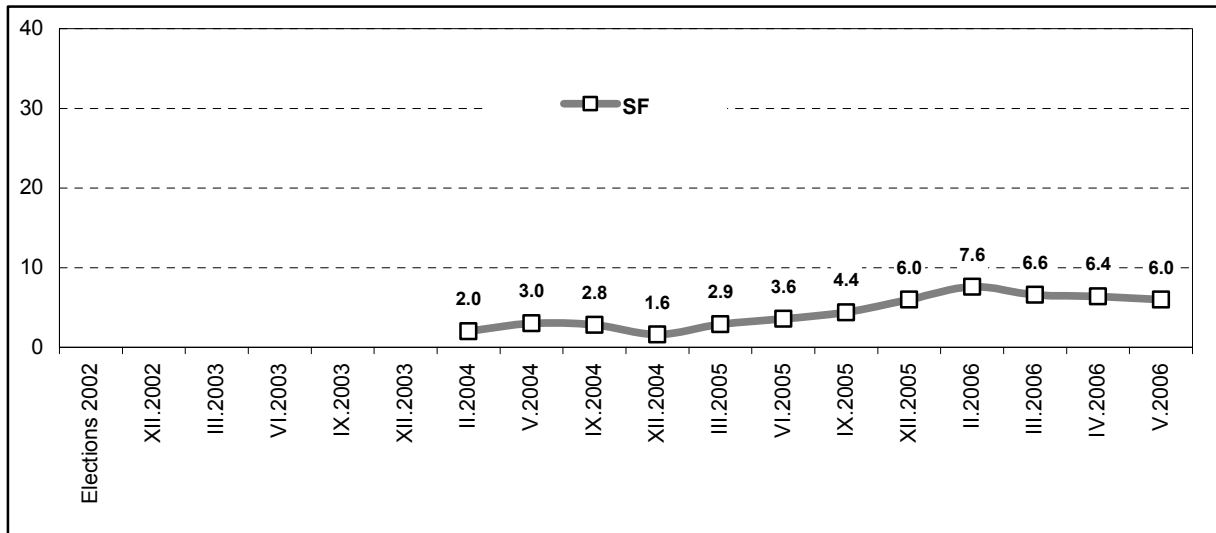
One in nine eligible voters (11%) has not yet decided and/or refused to state any preferences. This category of voters is dominated by first-time voters (18% of all undecided voters), former non-voters (18%) and former SDKÚ-DS voters from 2002 (10%).

Since the most recent parliamentary elections in 2002, voter support for particular political parties has seen some interesting developments. While the current opposition leader (i.e. Smer-SD) boosted its electoral potential from 13% to over 30%, preferences of the previous opposition leader (i.e. HZDS) dropped from 19.5% to 11%. Voter support for once ruling party, namely the ANO, has plunged below the 5% threshold. Parties that can boast with relatively stable the SMK, KDH and also the SKDÚ-DS that has managed to bounce back following a temporary crisis in summer 2003.

Graphs 4-11: Development of relevant political parties' voting preferences since the 2002 parliamentary elections



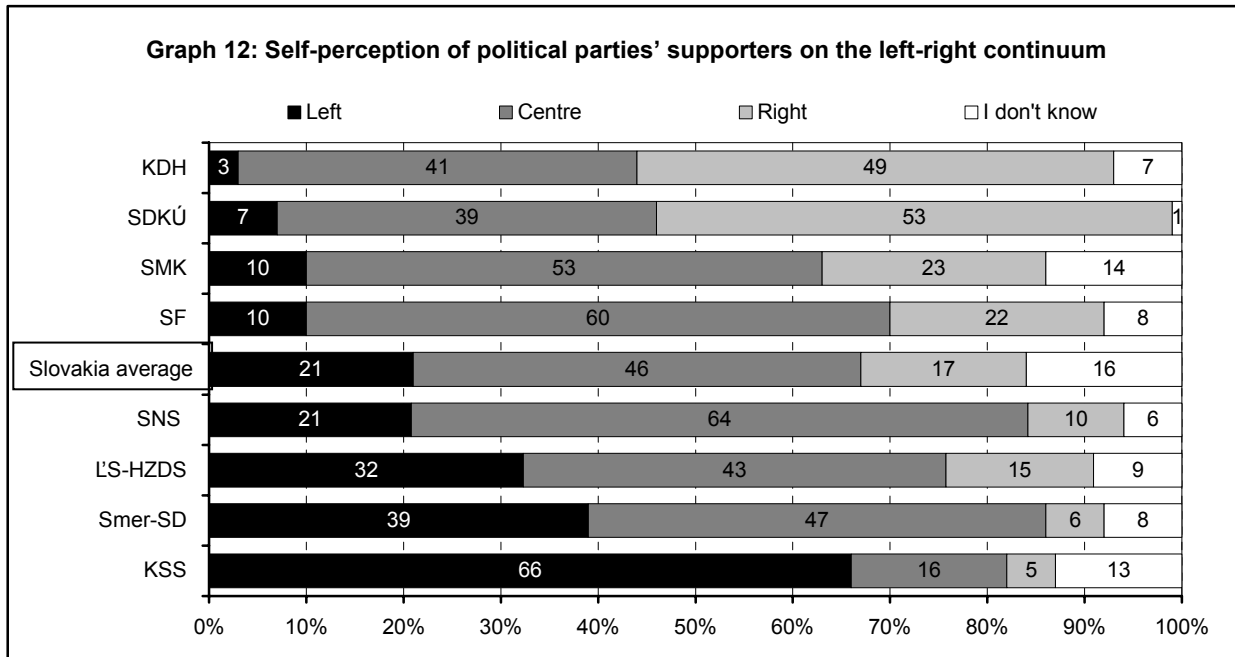




In terms of socio-demographic structure, political parties' electorates show the following long-term characteristics:

- the SDKÚ-DS is a party with above-average support among urban (34% live in towns with population over 50,000) and educated voters (22% have completed university education) with a higher social status (72% perceive themselves as members of the higher middle class or the middle class while the national average is 60%); consequently, they are more affluent than the average Slovak voter;
- the electorate of Smer-SD closely copies the average Slovak voter in terms of virtually all socio-demographic categories/characteristics;
- the typical supporter of the LS-HZDS and KSS is an elderly and less affluent resident of a smaller village;
- the SMK remains primarily the party of ethnic Hungarians who make up 91% of its electorate;
- the KDH electorate features the highest share of deeply believing people – 75% compared to 11% in the entire adult population;
- the greatest strongholds of the SNS are Banská Bystrica and Žilina regions.

From the viewpoint of voters' self-perception on the left-right continuum, we may draw a conclusion that – like in autumn 2005 – most Slovak voters perceive themselves as centre-oriented. Despite amplified



intensity of disputes over ongoing socio-economic reforms, the total share of voters who declare centrist orientation slightly increased from 41% to 46% (please see Graph 12). The centrist orientation is the most frequent among supporters of Smer-SD (47%). The overall proportion of people declaring leftist orientation and ambiguous attitudes saw a slight decline; two in three (66%) KSS adherents and two in five (39%) Smer-SD supporters declared leftist orientation. On the other hand, the rightist self-perception of SDKÚ-DS and KDH sympathizers has strengthened compared to November 2005.

Voter participation

Several surveys indicate that total voter participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections may well be lower than in 2002. According to a detailed seven-degree scale of position on participating, two in three (64%) respondents declared that they will likely come to the polls (21% will take part certainly, 14% almost certainly and 29% probably). On the other hand, almost one in four (22%) respondents representing eligible voters stated that they will probably not participate. At this point, almost one in eight eligible voters (12%) have not yet made up their minds about participating.

Besides objective reasons for not taking part in the upcoming elections (e.g. travelling abroad, health problems, etc.), our respondents cited a variety of subjective reasons that may be divided into **three basic categories**:

- Lack of trust in politicians (who mind only their own interests) and political parties (e.g. *"I don't trust any party"...* *"All of them just promise"...* *"Because all they do is lying"...* *"It's always the same people trying to seize power using unfair methods"*);
- Feeling of helplessness and futility (e.g. *"Nothing will change anyway!"...* *"It will be pointless anyway"...* *"My vote cannot make a difference"*);
- Cognitive disorientation, absence of viable alternatives (*"I cannot make up my mind because every political party claims something else"...* *"I have never experienced a chaos like in our current politics"*).

All in all, the reasons cited by potential non-voters are a blend of frustration and apathy brought about by cognitive disorientation and alienation from politics.

I will certainly take part	21	64
I will almost certainly take part	14	
I will probably take part	29	
Maybe I will take part, maybe I will not	12	12
I will probably not take part	8	22
I will almost certainly not take part	5	
I will certainly not take part	9	
I don't know	2	2

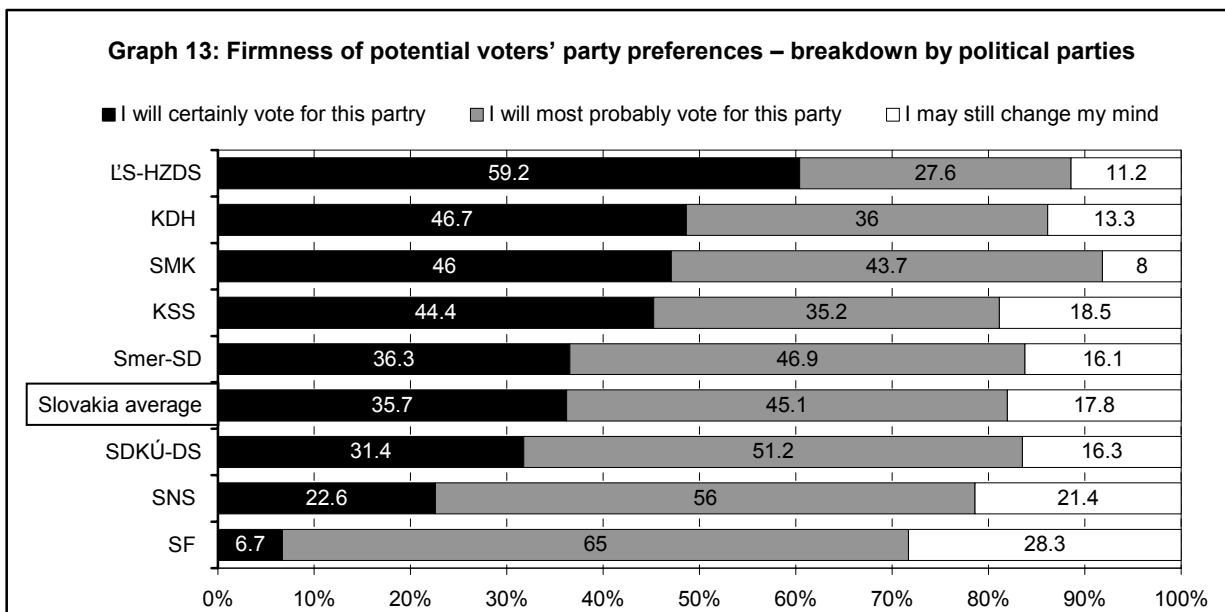
Firmness of voting preferences

A typical feature of citizens' voting preferences is the high rate of hesitancy and ambiguity. Even among voters who identified their favourite party, many were not yet fully identified with their preference. While **36% of potential voters said they would "certainly"** and **45% of them said they would "most probably"** vote for their favourite party, **18% of them said they might still change their mind.**

The share of voters with firm voting preferences differs greatly from one electorate to another (please see Graph 13). Above-average shares of firmly determined voters are in ES-HZDS, KDH, SMK and KSS electorates; while SDKÚ-DS and Smer-SD electorates are near the national average. Among the SNS and SF electorates the

share of firmly determined voters is below-average.

We asked the respondents to describe themselves from the viewpoint of **stability of voting pattern and timing of voting decision.** More than two in five of them (42%) who had taken part in more than one elections in the past said they "tend to change their preference" from one elections to another. Again, we were able to establish substantial differences between individual parties' electorates. The SMK, LS-HZDS and KDH can rely on particularly loyal electorates. SDKÚ-DS and KSS sympathizers also declared relatively high stability of their voting patterns. On the other hand, Smer-SD and SF supporters admitted their voting pattern was rather unstable. About one in four respondents said they tend to **make up their mind "in the last moment"**.



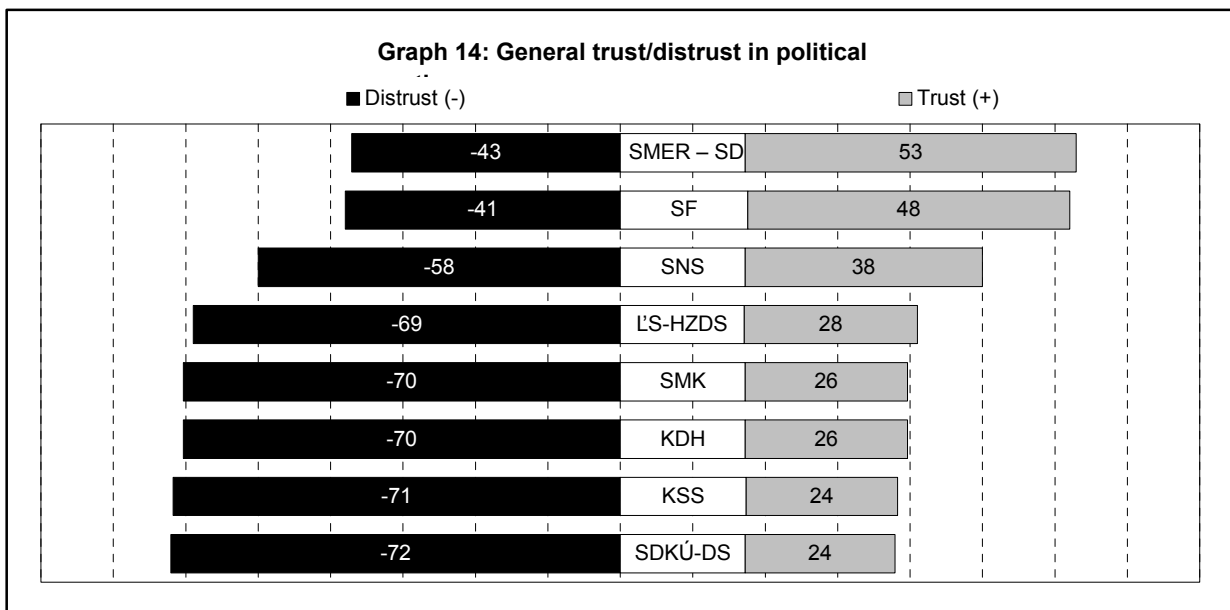
All these findings indicate a **high rate of uncertainty** as far as election results go.

other relevant parties, distrust of citizens prevails over trust (please see Graph 14).

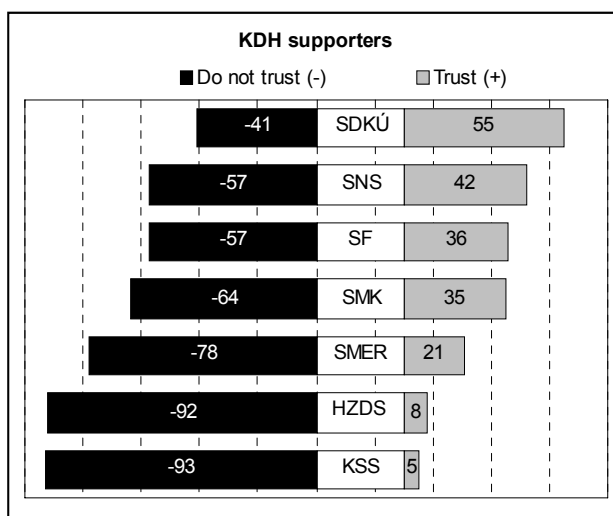
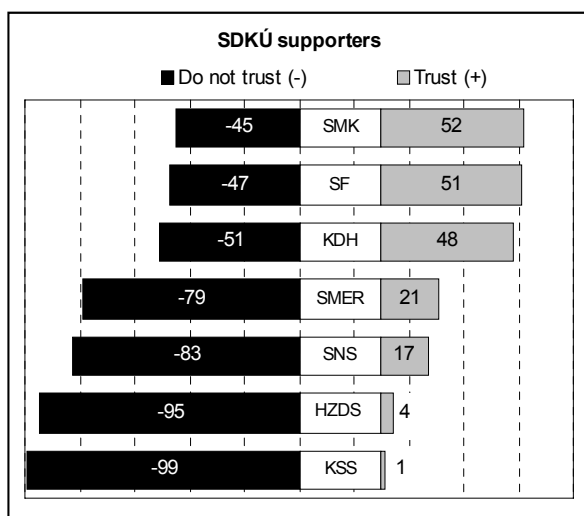
What are the mutual sympathies and antipathies between particular parties' supporters?

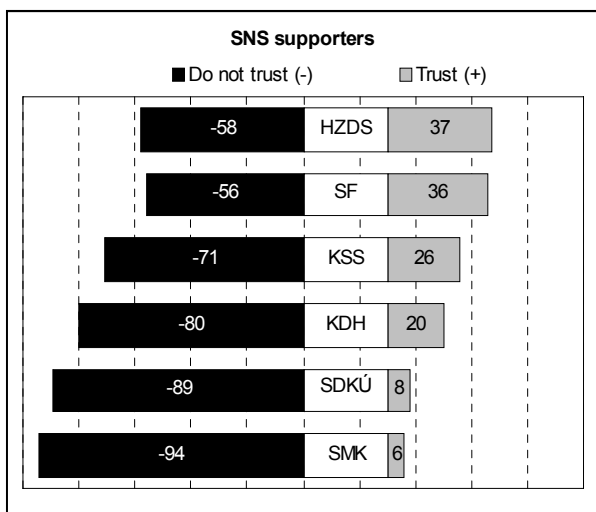
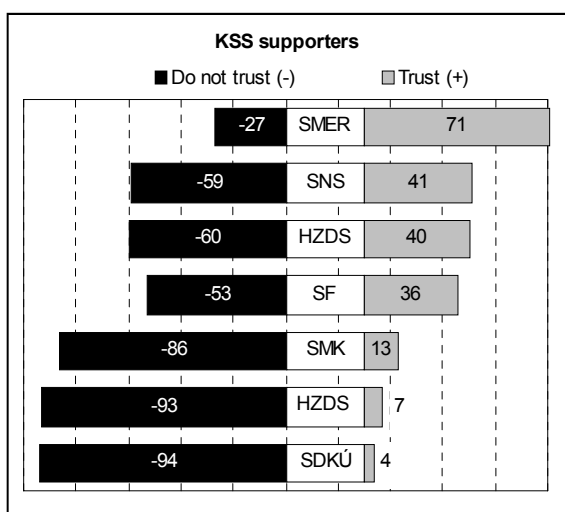
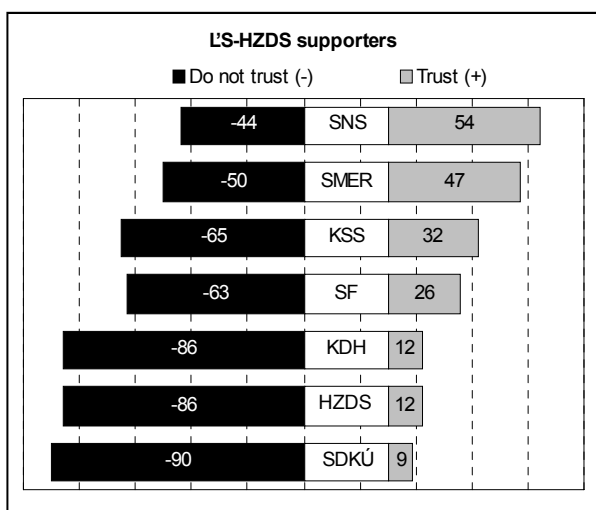
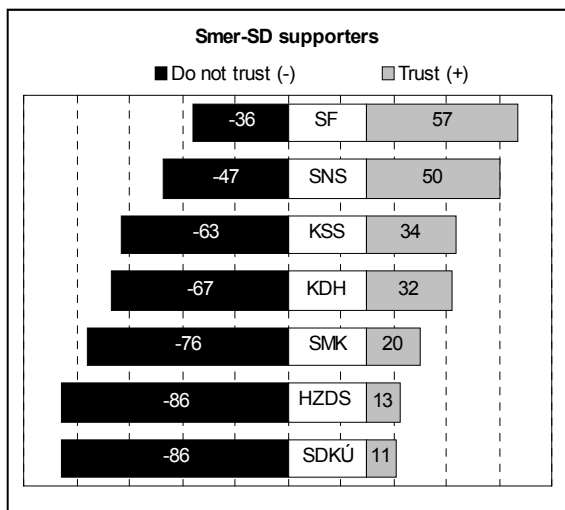
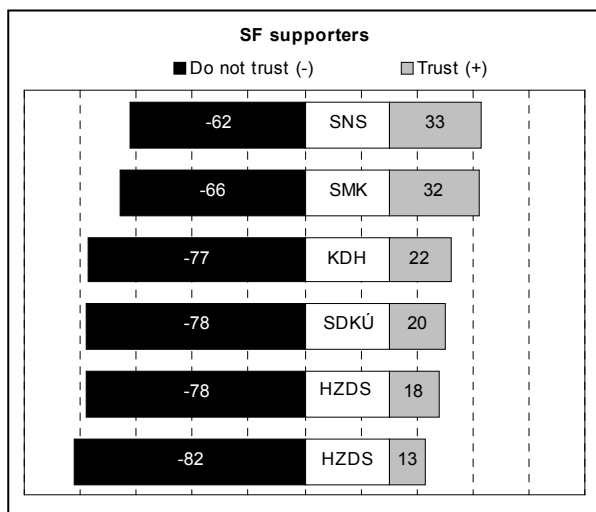
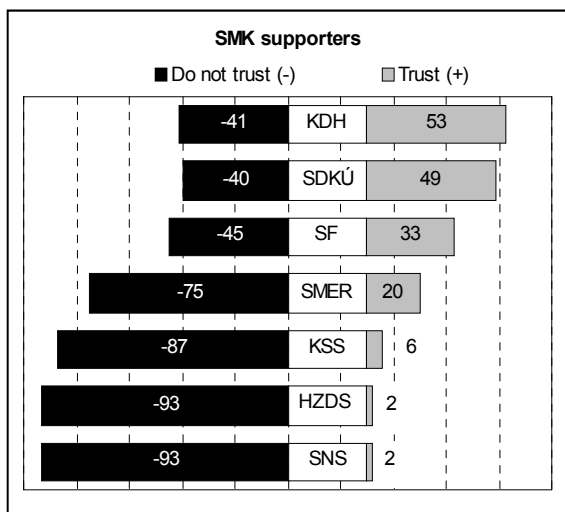
Smer-SD and the SF are on top of the credibility list of political parties. In fact, they are the only relevant parties that are trusted rather than distrusted. As for all other

We may also take a look at political parties' credibility through the eyes of other parties' supporters. Mutual 'closeness' or 'distance' between parties measured by the rate of their supporters' trust or distrust in other parties allows us to draw a specific map of Slovakia's political scene (please see Graphs 15 – 23).



Graphs 15 – 23: Potential voters' degree of trust/distrust in other political parties





Distance from other parties

Based on the **highest rate of distrust** (please see Graphs 15 – 23), we may conclude the following regarding the distance between particular parties' electorates:

- supporters of the SDKÚ-DS and KDH distrust especially the KSS;
- KSS, ĽS-HZDS and Smer-SD sympathizers distance themselves especially from the SDKÚ-DS;
- SF supporters distance themselves especially from the ĽS-HZDS;
- SMK and SNS supporters show a high rate of mutual distrust.

Among undecided voters and especially non-voters distrust prevails over trust with respect to all relevant political parties.

Least likely coalition bonds according to parties' supporters

Potential coalition cooperation after elections is the acid test of mutual closeness and distance between political parties. Therefore we asked our respondents to identify their favourite parties' **least likely coalition ally** (please see Table 6). Their responses allowed us to make the following conclusions:

- SDKÚ-DS supporters were the most negative about the KSS; also, they were more negative of their party's future cooperation with the Smer-SD than ĽS-HZDS;

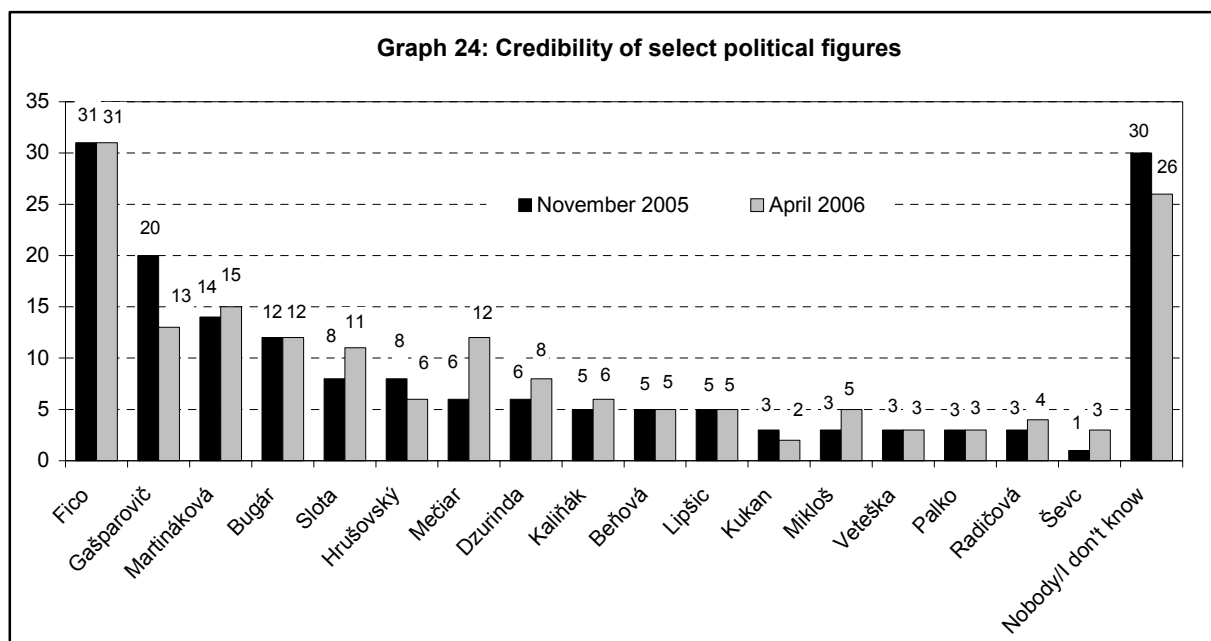
- KDH sympathizers excluded especially the KSS, ANO and ĽS-HZDS and were less reluctant regarding Smer-SD and the SNS;
- potential voters of the SMK clearly excluded their party's future cooperation with the SNS, KSS and ĽS-HZDS but were far less negative about Smer-SD;
- Smer-SD and KSS supporters most frequently excluded parties of the outgoing ruling coalition, particularly the SDKÚ-DS;
- ĽS-HZDS sympathizers were more negative about the KDH and SMK than about the SDKÚ-DS;
- potential voters of the SF named the KSS, ĽS-HZDS and SDKÚ-DS as the least acceptable while being more open to their party's cooperation with Smer-SD;
- SNS supporters excluded especially the SMK, followed by the SDKÚ-DS and KSS but were not as negative with respect to the KDH.

Credibility of politicians

In the long term, the credibility list of Slovak politicians is led by Smer-SD Chairman Robert Fico. In an IVO survey from April 2006, almost one in three respondents (31%) indicated him as trustworthy (please see Graph 24). Fico was followed by SF leader Zuzana Martináková (15%) and President Ivan Gašparovič (13%). Several

Table 6: "In your opinion, which party is the least likely coalition ally of your favourite party?"

Supporters of:	Least likely coalition allies					
	First		Second		Third	
	Party	%	Party	%	Party	%
SDKÚ-DS	KSS	72	Smer-SD	52	ĽS-HZDS	32
KDH	KSS	67	ANO	38	ĽS-HZDS	34
SMK	SNS	75	ĽS-HZDS	50	KSS	48
Smer-SD	SDKÚ-DS	57	KDH	44	SMK	37
ĽS-HZDS	KDH	48	SMK	40	SDKÚ-DS	38
KSS	SDKÚ-DS	62	KDH	47	SMK	36
SF	KSS	46	SDKÚ-DS	42	ĽS-HZDS	27
SNS	SMK	81	SDKÚ-DS	36	KSS	35



Note: This was an open question. Respondents could name three politicians.

party leaders strengthened their positions compared to November 2005, especially Vladimír Mečiar and Ján Slota but also Mikuláš Dzurinda; on the other hand, the position of President Gašparovič slightly weakened.

Politicians' credibility can also be measured through their popularity among their own parties' supporters. As Table 7 shows, party leaders are natural leaders within all relevant political parties' electorates. The most trustworthy party leaders are Vladimír Mečiar and Robert Fico whose credibility rate hovers at approximately 90% followed by Zuzana Martináková and Béla Bugár (79% and 78 %, respectively). Compared to No-

vember 2005, KSS and SNS chairmen Jozef Ševc and Ján Slota strengthened their positions along with Ivan Mikloš (SDKÚ-DS), Daniel Lipšic (KDH) and Róbert Kaliňák (Smer-SD), all second-seeded on their respective parties' tickets.

The overall share of people who do not trust any politician has declined before the upcoming elections as voters tend to identify with their favourite parties' leaders.

Electorate/ politician	Rating (%)	Electorate/ Politician	Rating (%)	Electorate/ politician	Rating (%)	Electorate/ politician	Rating (%)
SDKÚ		SMK		KDH		SF	
Dzurinda	62	Bugár	78	Hrušovský	62	Martináková	79
Mikloš	46	Csáky	30	Lipšic	47	Fico	34
Bugár	20	Dzurinda	13	Palko	22	Gašparovič	18
Smer		HZDS		KSS		SNS	
Fico	90	Mečiar	89	Ševc	47	Slota	67
Martináková	23	Veteška	26	Fico	38	Fico	38
Kaliňák	20	Gašparovič	21	Nobody	21	Gašparovič	19