

3/24/06 Slovak Election Update

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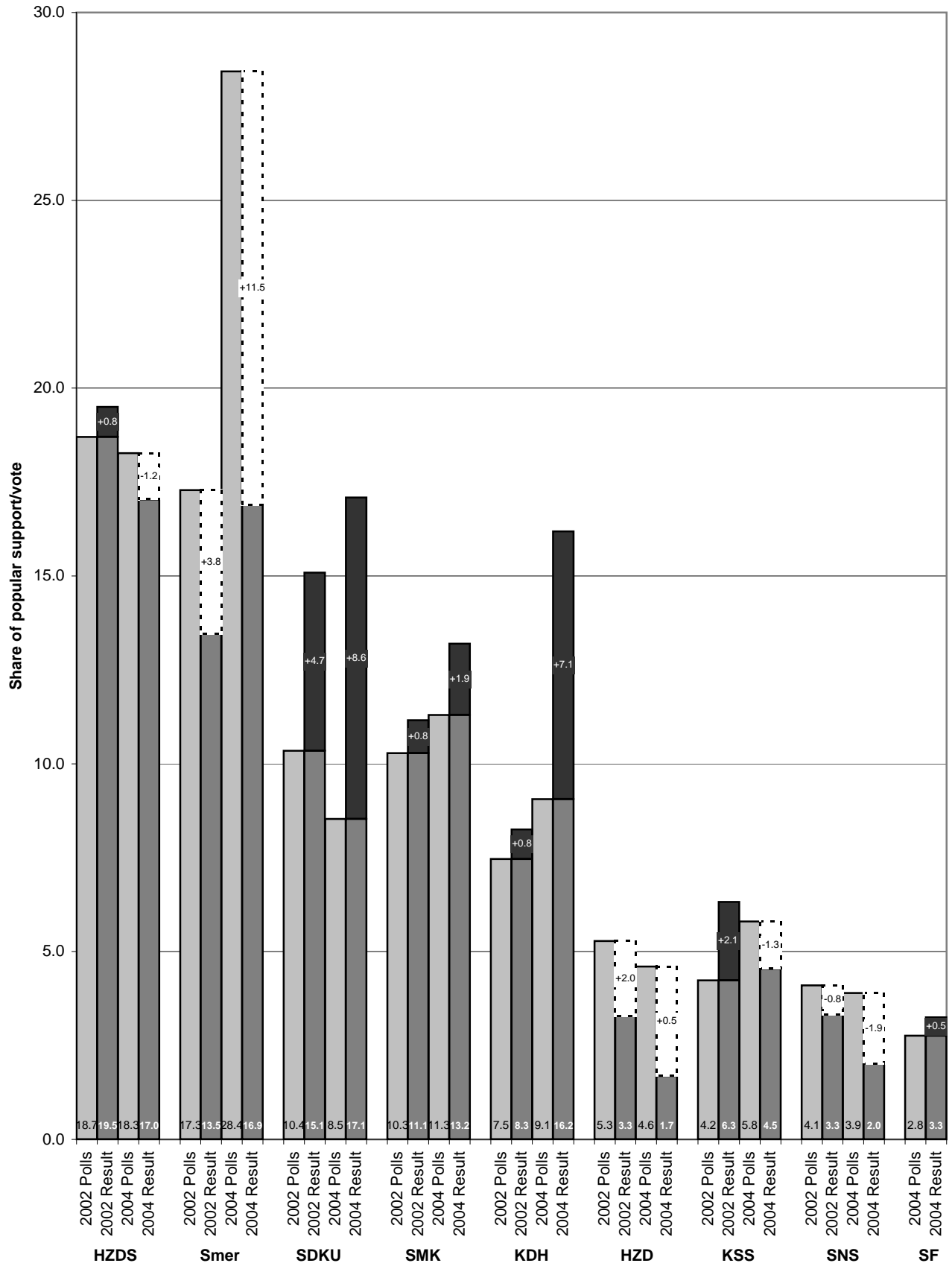
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Voting and Turnout

Last week's post addresses recent trends in polling according to party and bloc and the way those poll numbers would translate into party seats. However it also begins to address the problem that polling numbers have not automatically translated into seats: some parties have gotten more votes than polling would suggest while others have gotten less. This week, I attempt to take what little data is publicly available and attempt to figure out what current polling numbers suggest for the final tally of votes.

Polls, Votes and Parties

There are a variety of ways in which we can attempt to predict actual votes on the basis of polls. The most direct, though not necessarily the most accurate, is to use past elections as a baseline. Because of the significant change in Slovakia's party system in the past six years, and the unusual configurations of coalitions in elections to regional councils, only two elections—the 2002 Parliamentary Election and the 2004 European Parliament Elections—are plausible objects of comparison. Each of these have their problems, furthermore, since the rapid change of Slovakia's political scene makes 2002 ancient history (the parties Smer and ANO were relatively new at the time) and since the *very* low—17%—turnouts of the 2004 Europarliament election give that election a rather different character. Nevertheless, this is the only electoral data we have to work with and so like the drunk under the lamppost, I will look for keys where there is the most light. The table below compares the results of elections in 2002 and 2004 with the results of public opinion polls from major polling firms that immediately preceded the elections:

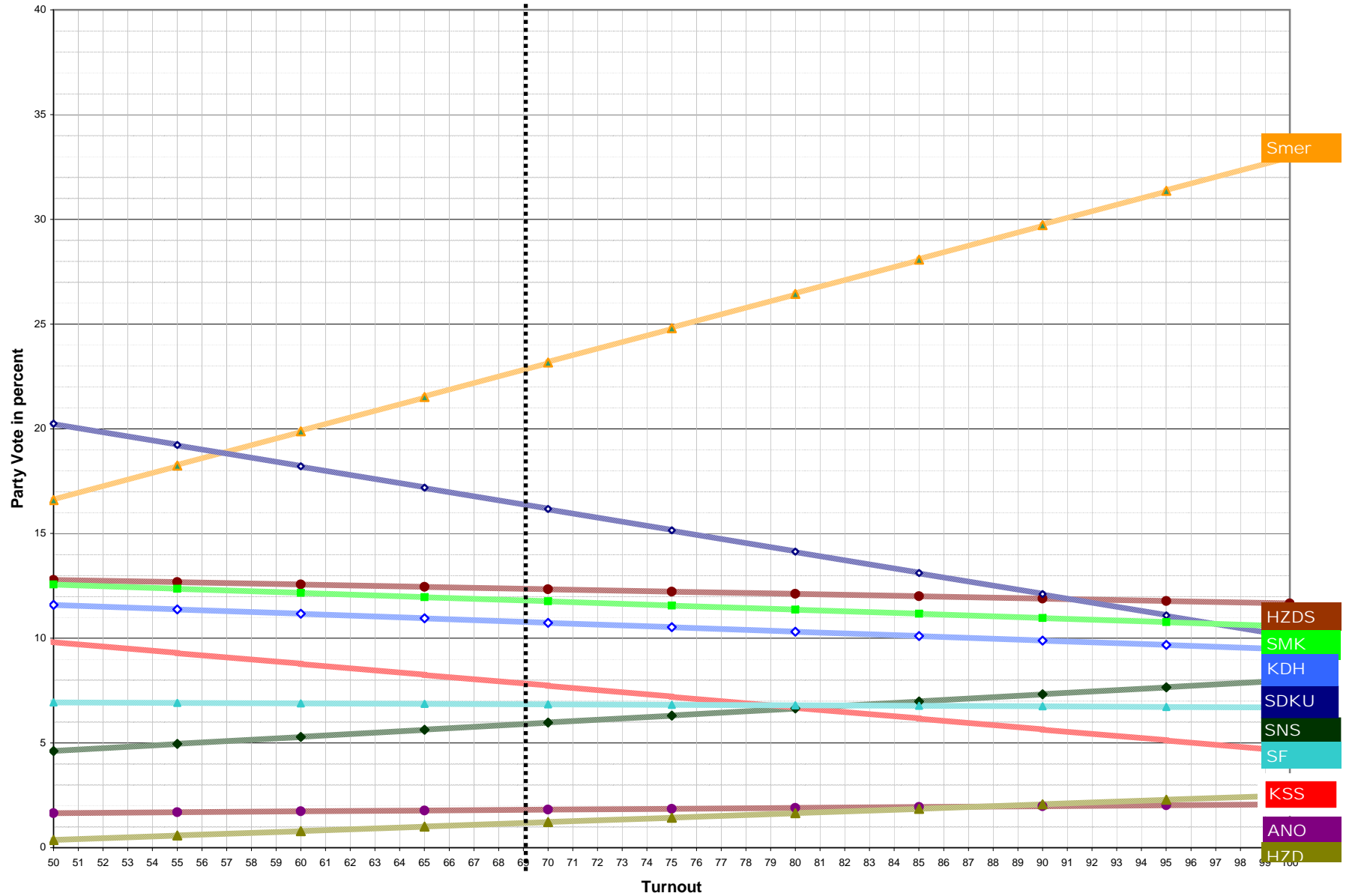


The results show better-than-expected performance in black and worse-than-expected performance in white. Some parties consistently received more votes than polls would suggest (SDKU, KDH, SMK) while others consistently received less (Smer, HZD, SNS), while for others the polls tended to produce fairly accurate results (HZDS, SF) and another was uneven (KSS). It would appear that despite their stated preferences, voters from some parties are less likely actually to go and vote (polling evidence suggest that last-minute vote switching does occur but that it neither has a systematic bias in favor of any party, nor is it predictable, so it would be difficult to build it into a model in any case). From these election baselines, it is possible to construct a variety of models for actual performance.. For the purposes of this post, I have created a simple model that takes poll results as the baseline for 100% an election with turnout and then calculates the drop in turnout for each party necessary to produce the actual results with the actual turnout (69.1% in 2002, 16.6% in 2004). By these calculations, every 1% drop in overall turnout in 2002 translated into a loss of nearly 1.5% of turnout among Smer supporters but only a 0.8% drop of turnout among KDH supporters and no drop at all among SDKU supporters. Because of the very low overall turnout rates for 2004, the drop-per-percentage is actually smaller but with pretty much the same patterns. To draw out the implications of these calculations, the graphs below extrapolates from the most recent polls to estimate levels of actual electoral support for all parties at any given level of overall turnout between 50% and 100%. To read the graph, simply guess the level of turnout for 2006 and trace upward from that number to see what share of the vote your party is likely to get. Because the 2002 and 2004 models produce estimates that are different in degree (though not in direction), I have included both models here as well as a “combined” model that averages the two.

Notable here is the weakness Smer in all three models surveys: at rates of turnout comparable to 2002 its current 33% estimate translates into a range no higher than 30% and as low as 23% depending on the model. By the same standards, SDKU’s current 11% looks more like 12% to 16%.

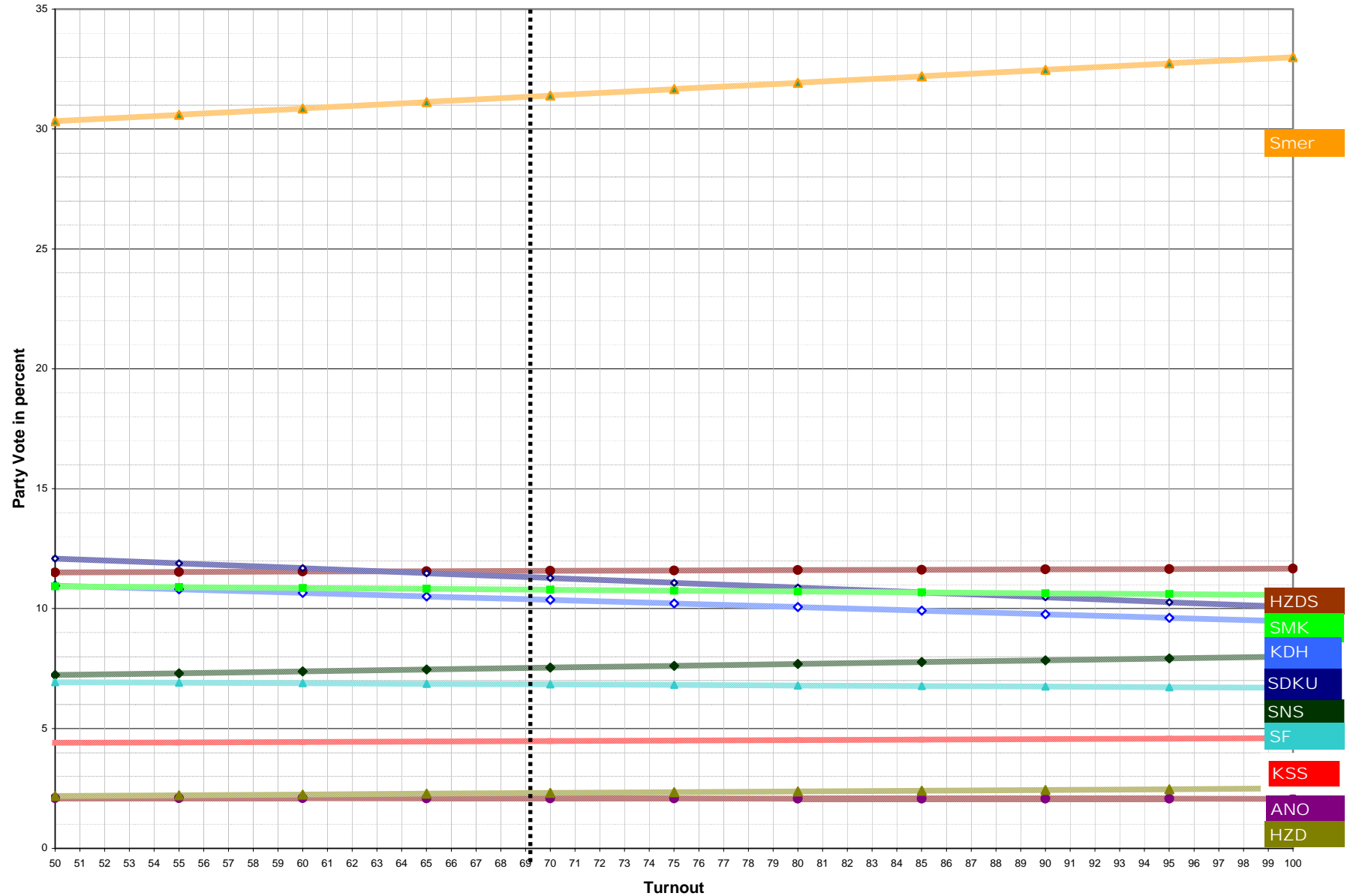
Slovakia Turnout Model: 2002 Parliamentary election as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002 turnout.



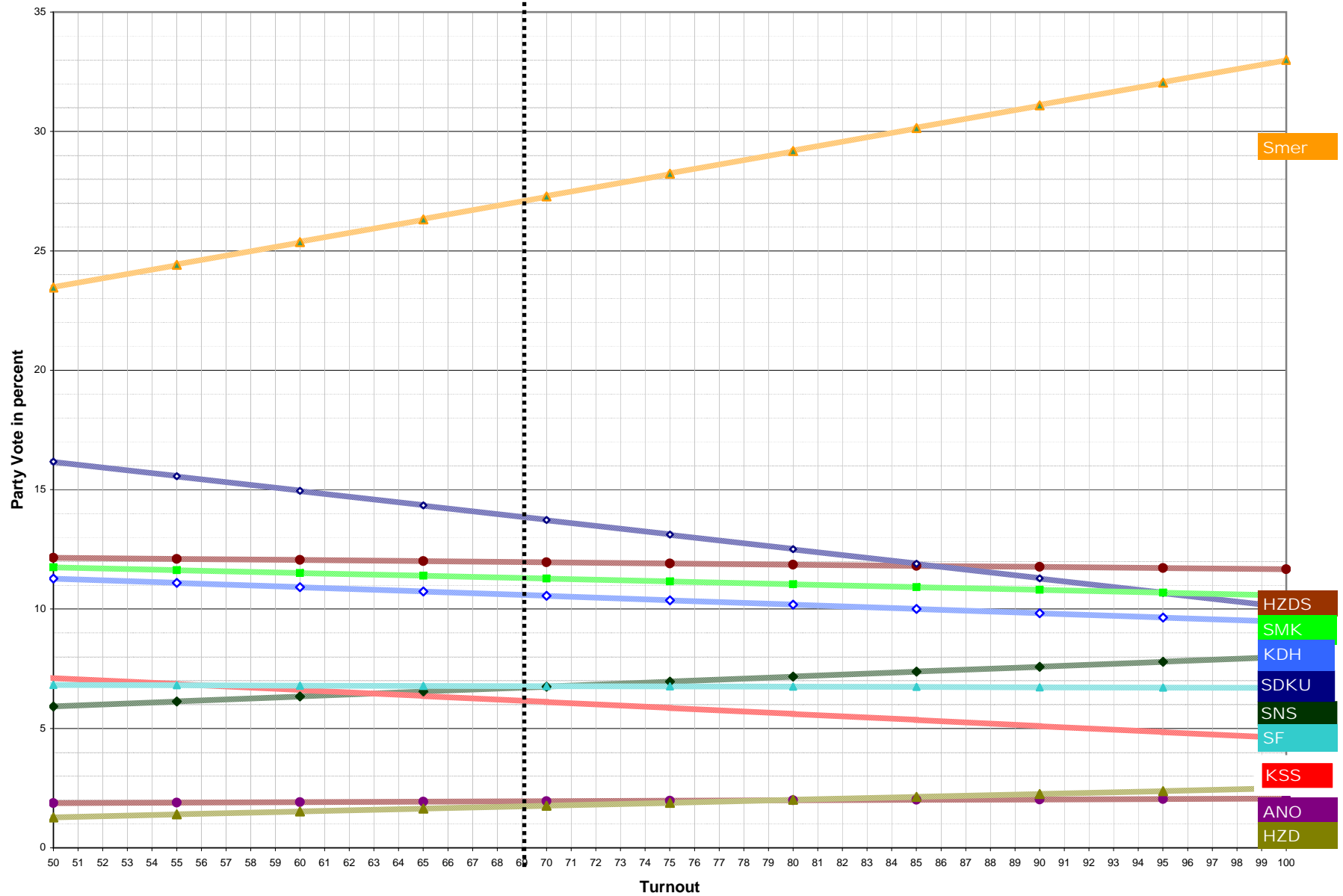
Slovakia Turnout Model: 2004 Europarlament election as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002 turnout.



Slovakia Turnout Model: Combined 2002/2004 elections as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002



Polls, Votes and Blocs

Because the parties of the current coalition tend to benefit from lower turnout, the combined effect for the entire coalition is even greater, and the three graphs below show the overall effect for ideological blocs, again according to the three models. I use the “bloc” notion as shorthand for the time being and do not suggest that parties within these blocs are more likely to seek each other out as future coalition partners (though their voters do seem to cluster together in patterns something like these, but that is a story for next week).

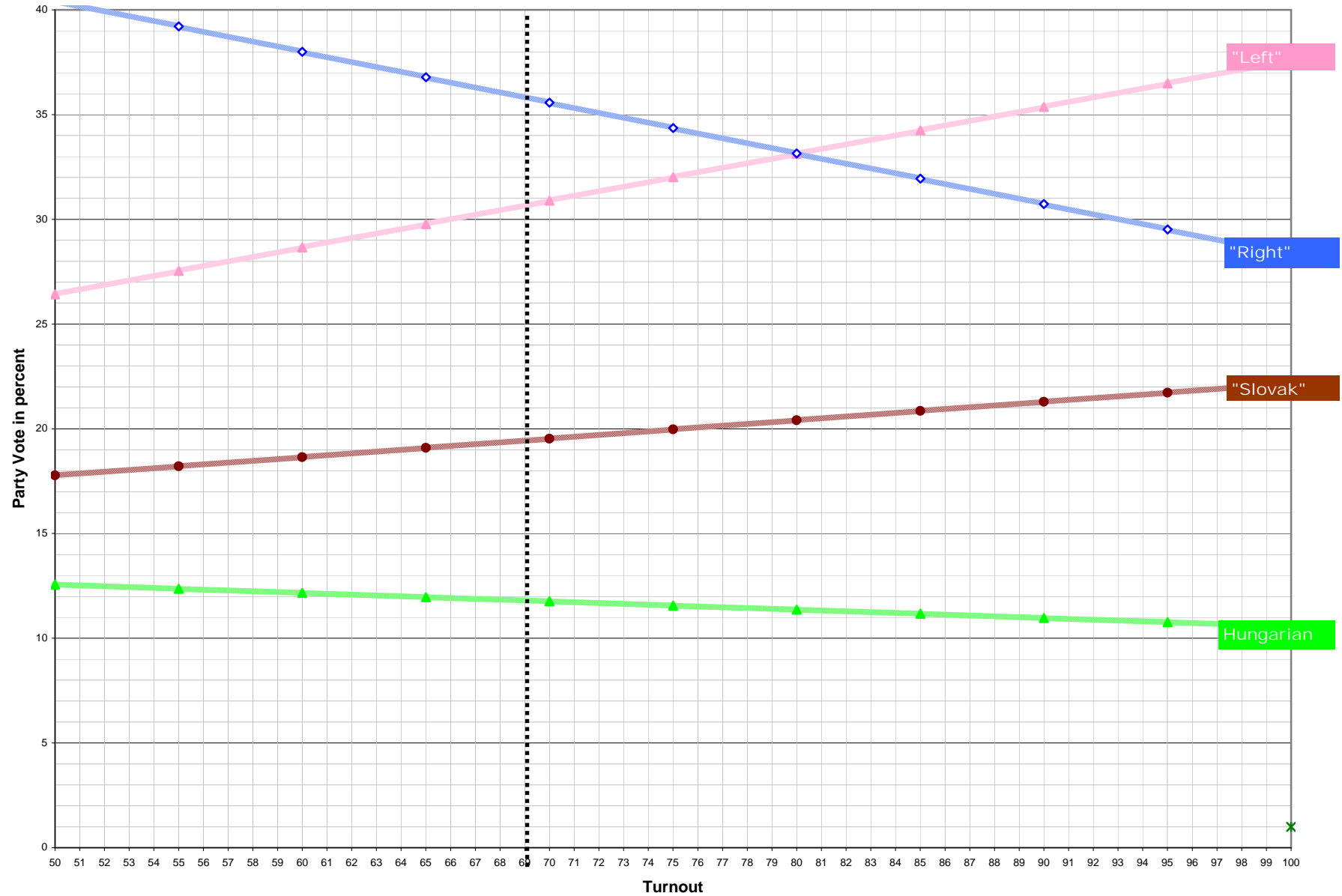
In the most extreme of the models, any turnout lower than 80% actually produces a numerical advantage for Right (SDKU, KDH, SF, ANO) over Left (SMER, KSS) with the Slovak (HZDS, SNS) and Hungarian parties relatively unchanged. It is noteworthy, however, that even in this fairly extreme model the current coalition and its offshoots would require an exceptionally low turnout--below 60%--to have a chance at an electoral majority.

Polls, Votes and Seats

The other graphs below translate these vote estimates into seat estimates.

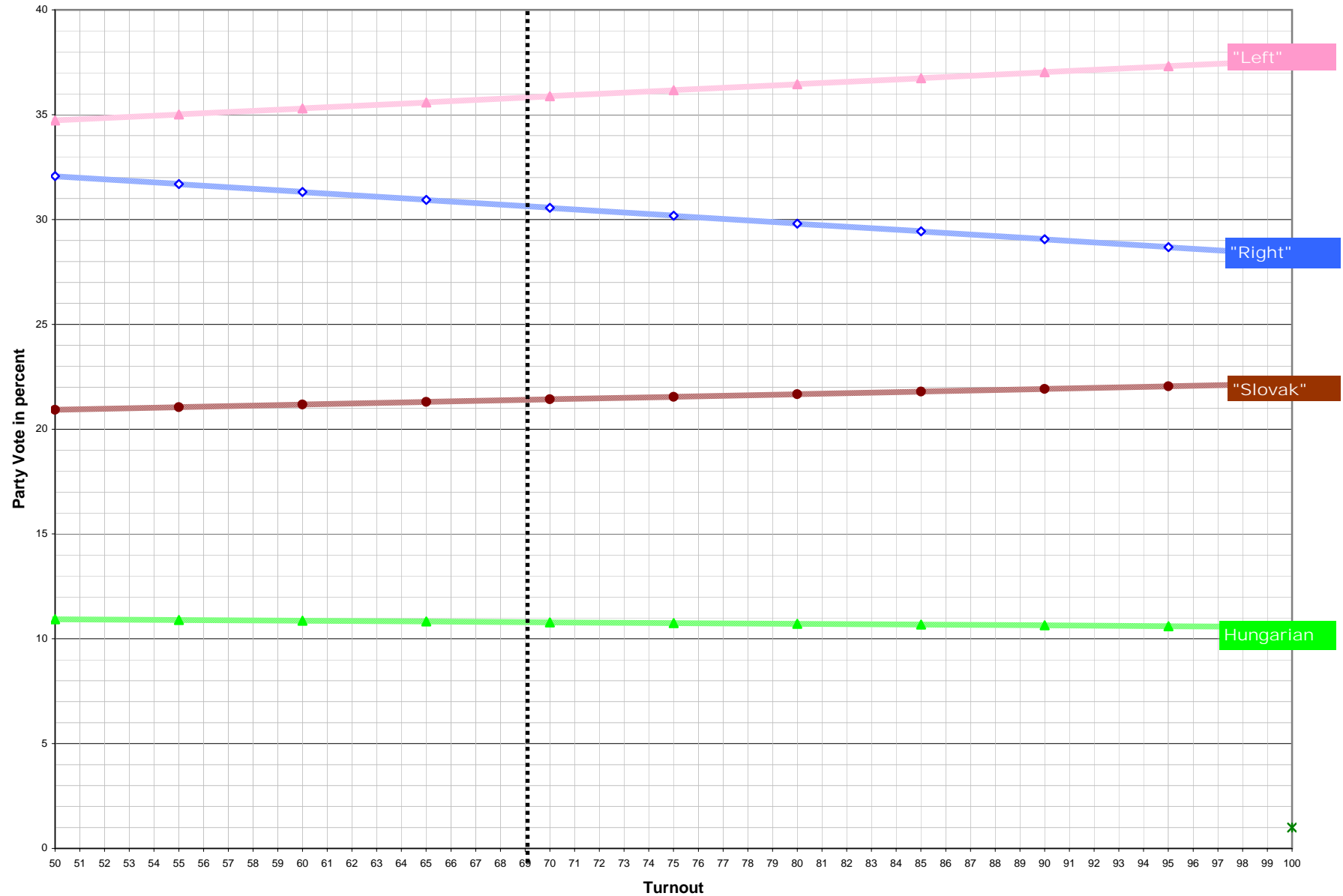
Slovakia Turnout Model: 2002 Parliamentary election as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002 turnout.



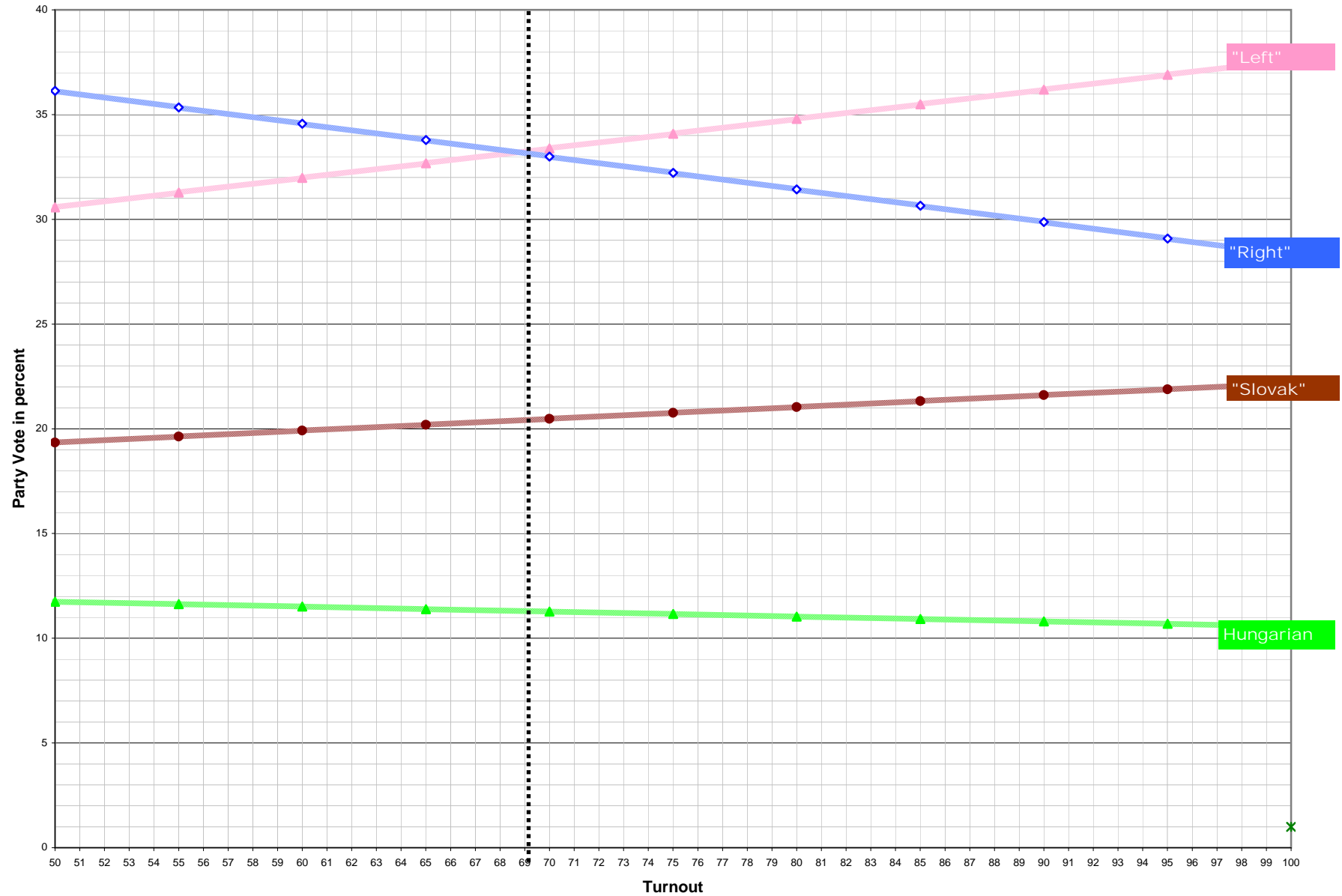
Slovakia Turnout Model: 2004 Europarlament election as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002 turnout.

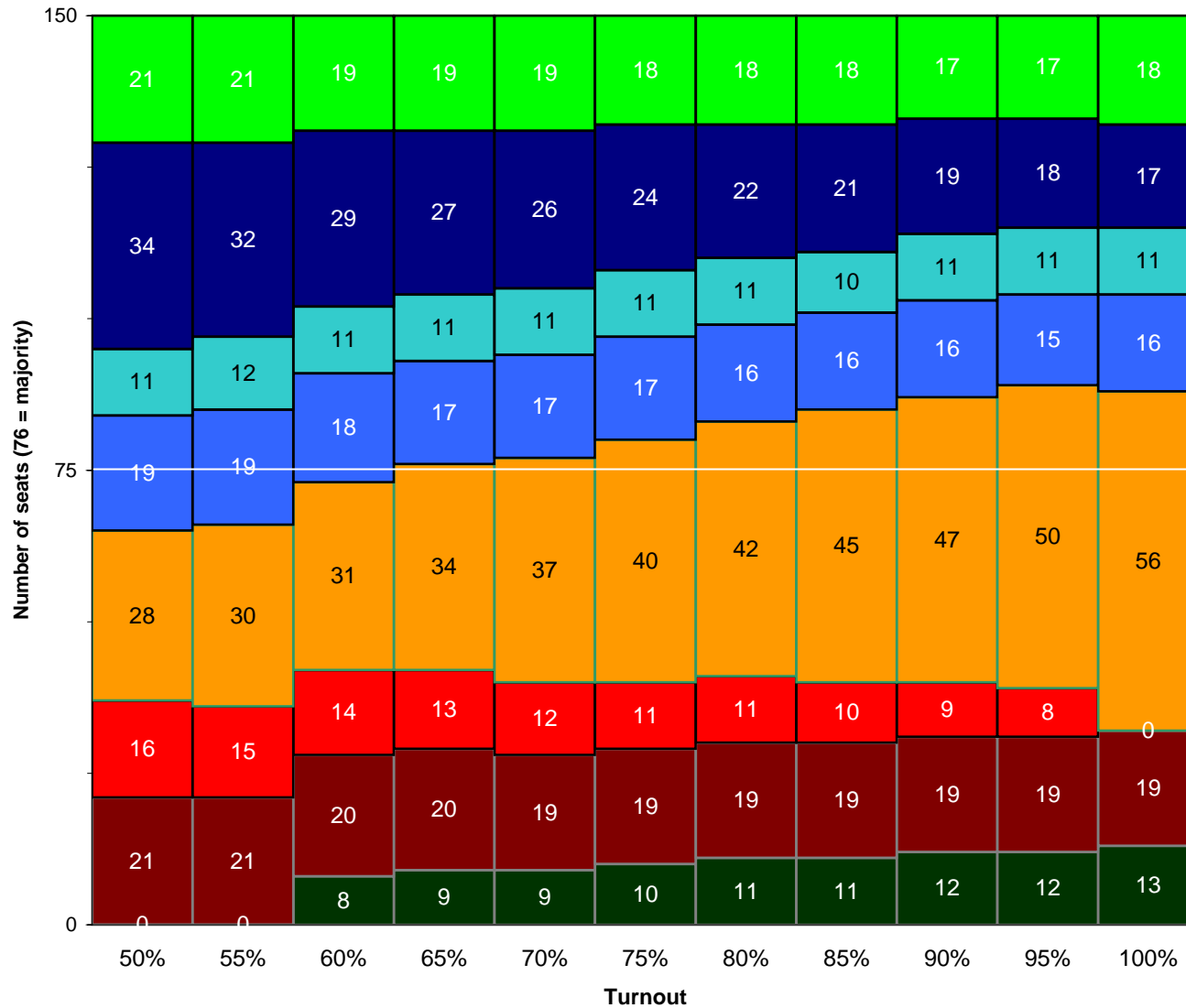


Slovakia Turnout Model: Combined 2002/2004 elections as baseline

Colored lines show estimated levels of party support based on most recent polls at various levels of turnout. Dashed vertical line marks 2002 turnout.

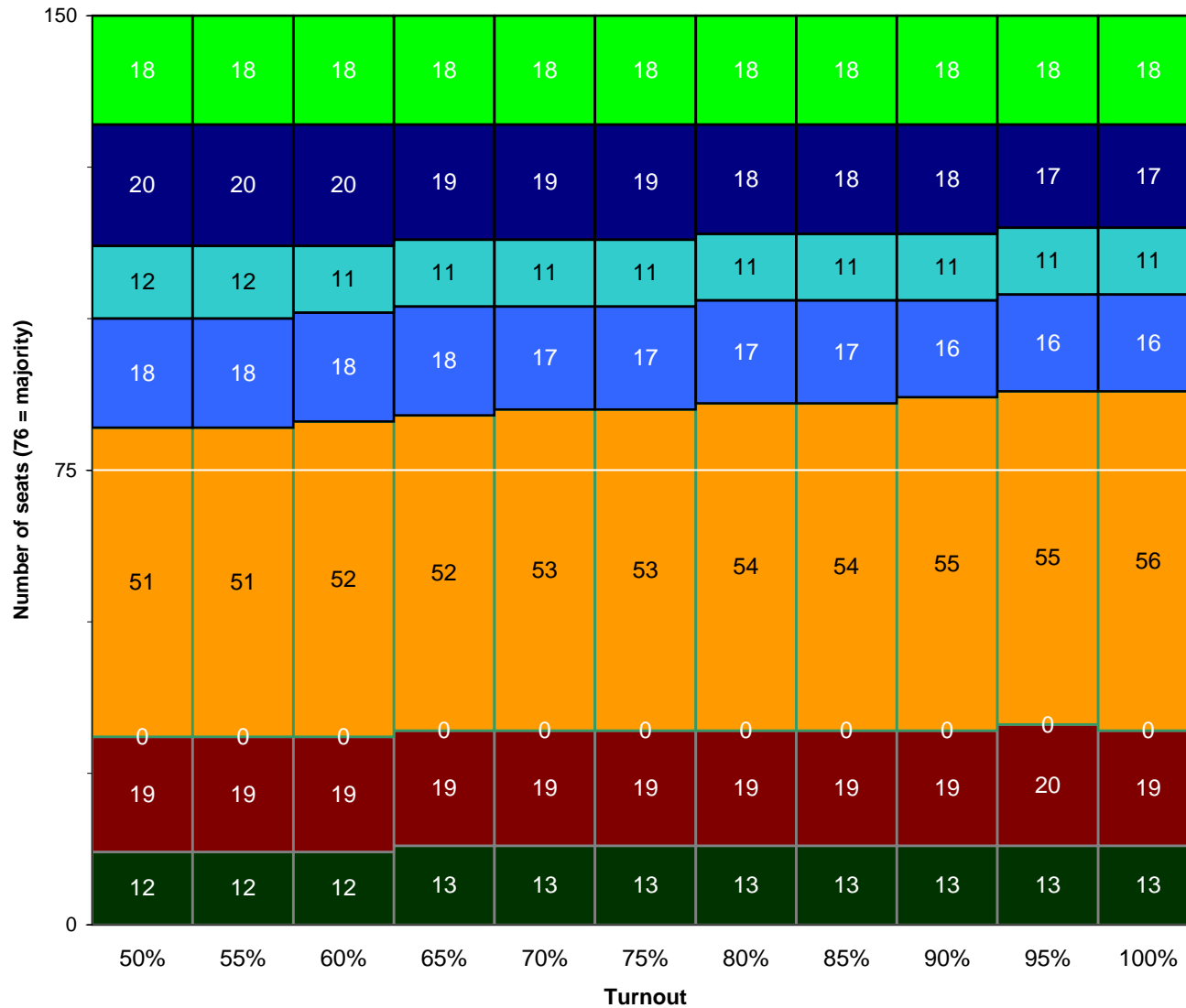


Slovakia Turnout Model: 2002 Parliamentary election as baseline



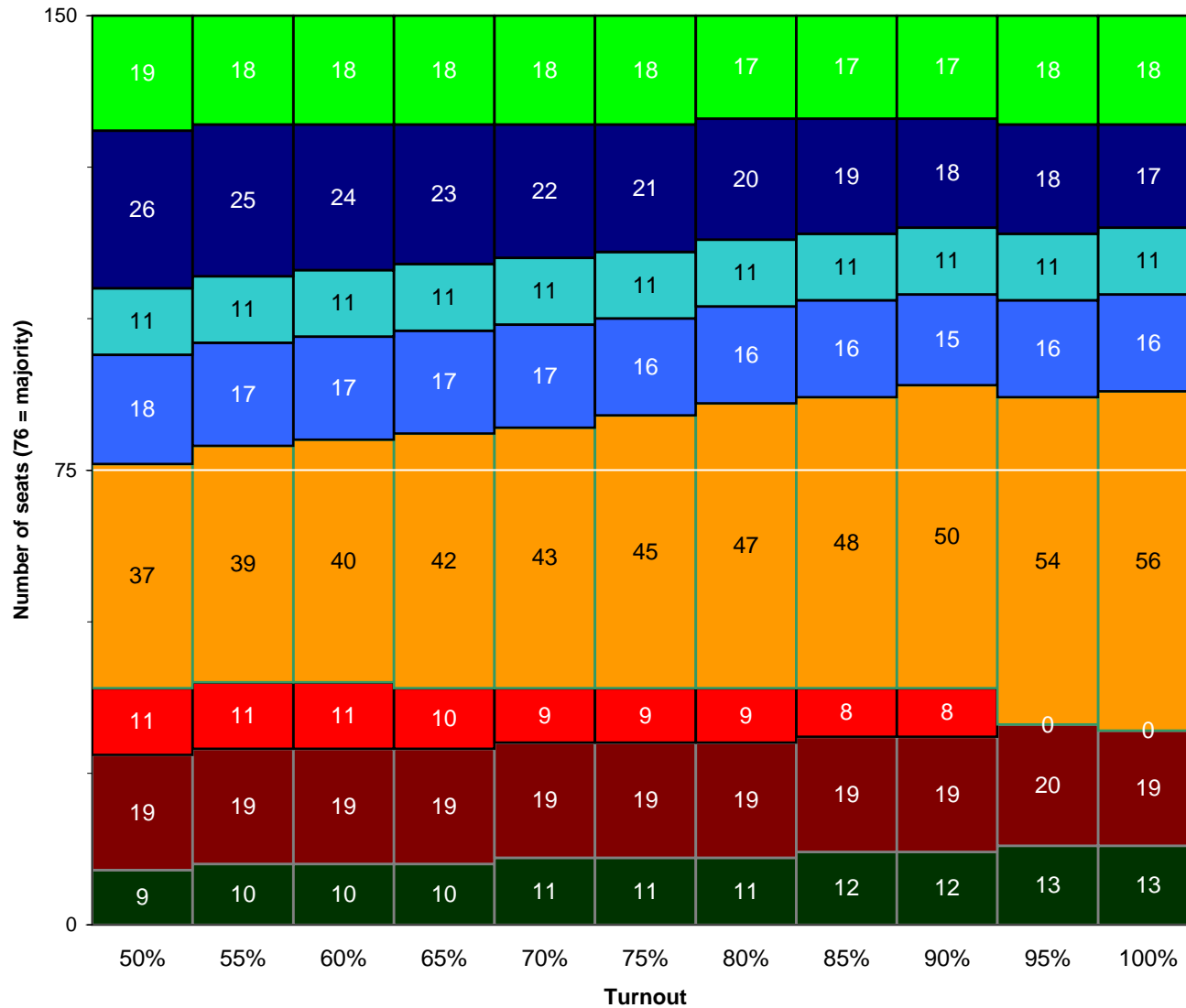
- SMK
- SDKU
- SF
- ANO
- KDH
- Smer
- HZD
- KSS
- HZDS
- SNS

Slovakia Turnout Model: 2004 Europarlament election as baseline



- SMK
- SDKU
- SF
- ANO
- KDH
- Smer
- HZD
- KSS
- HZDS
- SNS

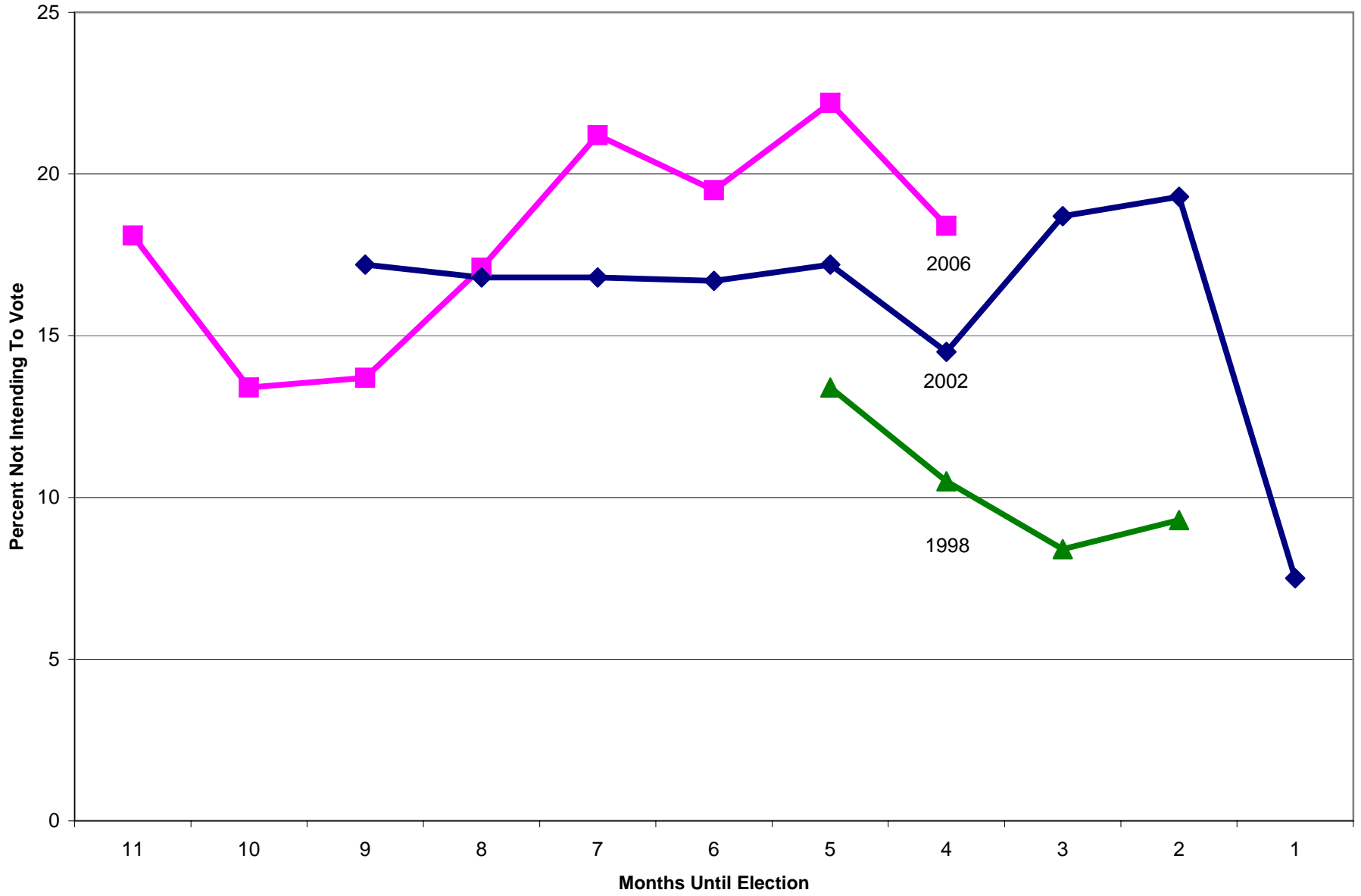
Slovakia Turnout Model: Combined 2002/2004 elections as baseline

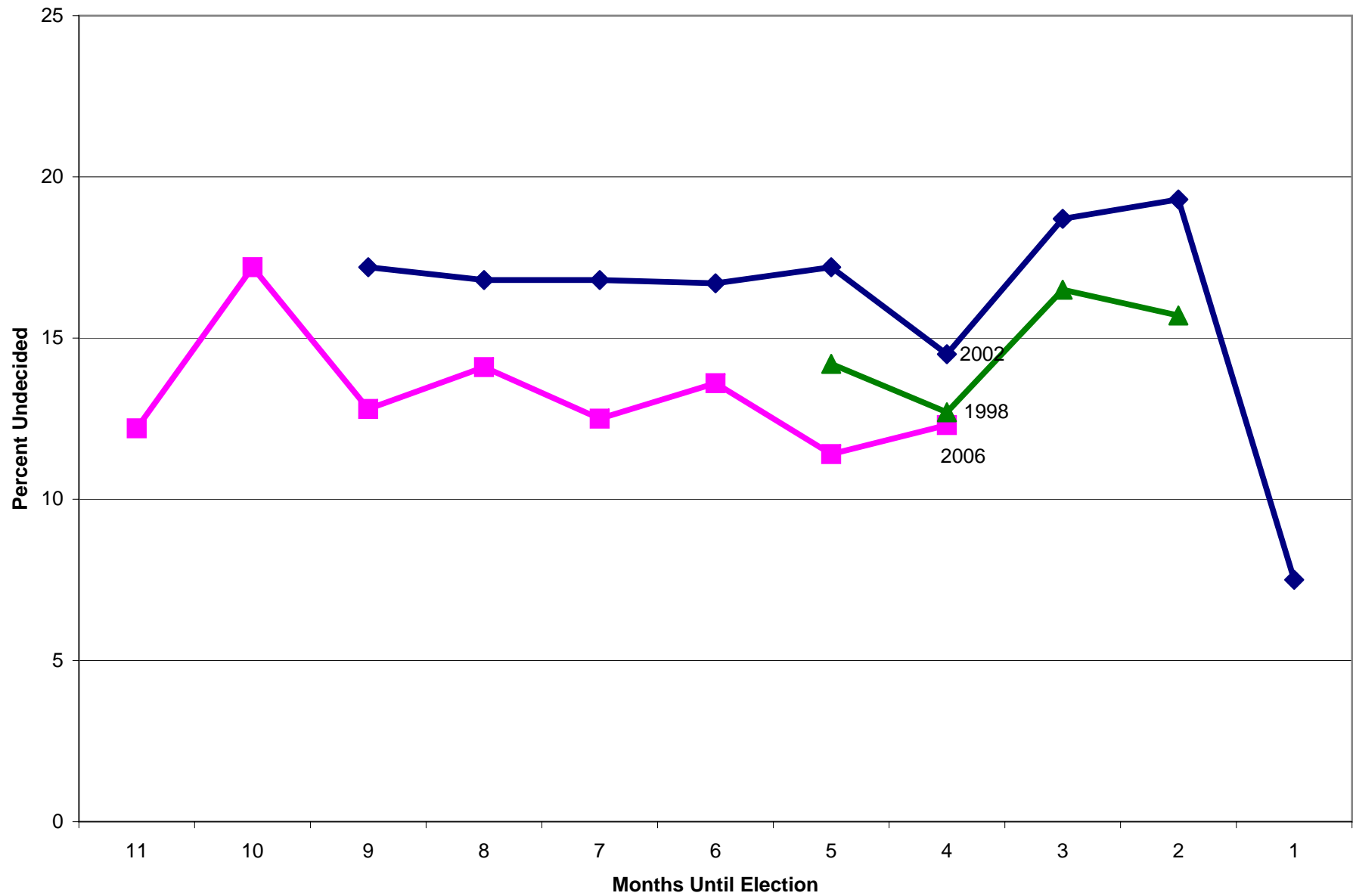


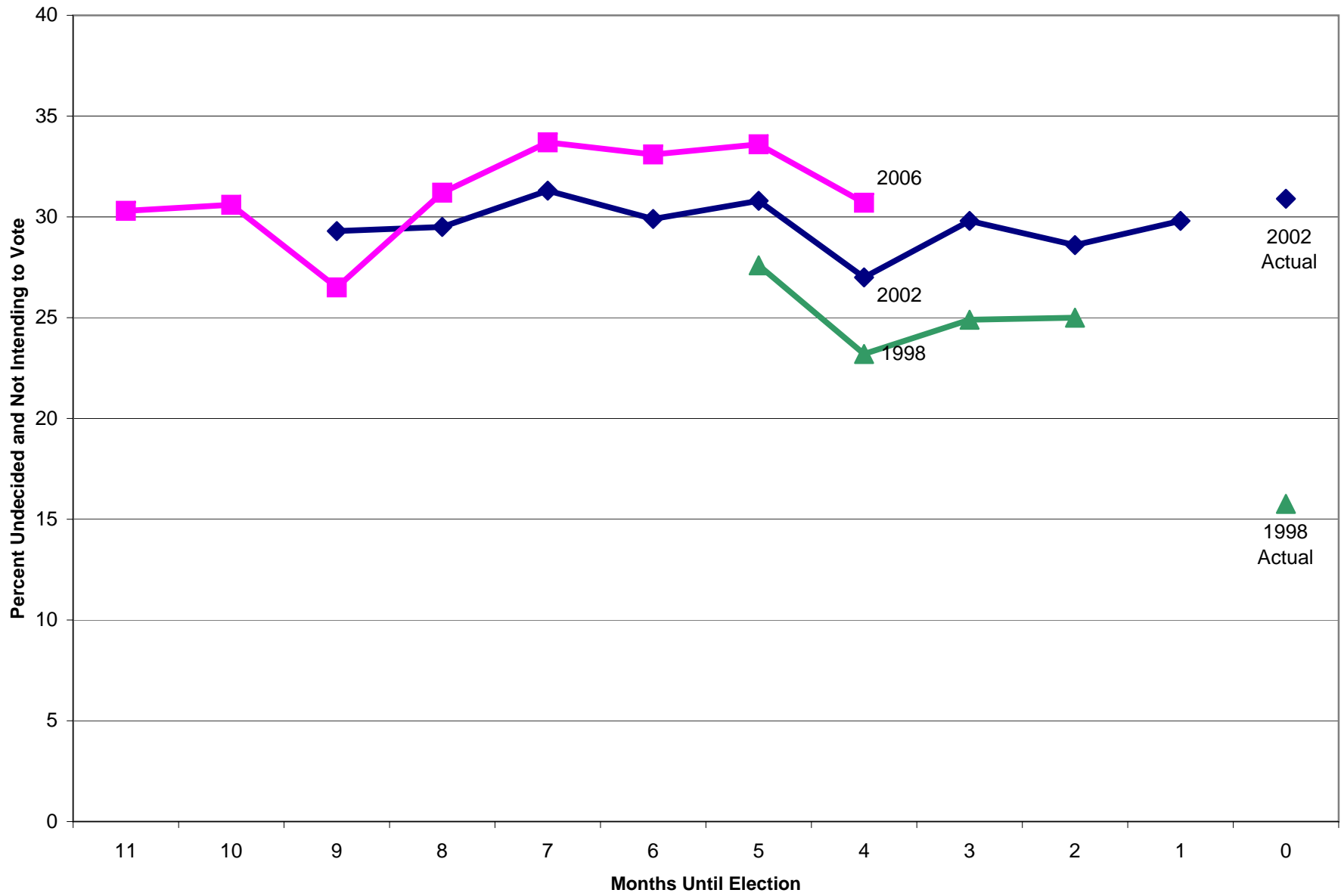
- SMK
- SDKU
- SF
- ANO
- KDH
- Smer
- HZD
- KSS
- HZDS
- SNS

The Question of Turnout

Not only are the estimates in the graphs above fairly crude and based on only one source of information, but they are dependent on a second set of estimates regarding turnout. This, too, is an highly inexact science, but it is possible to make some rough assessments. The first graph below suggests that on similar polls conducted by UVVM in 2002 and 2006, the percentage of the population that is not interested in voting in 2006 exceeds the percentage in 2002 by an average of nearly 6 points. As the second graph suggests, however, the share of undecided voters is actually smaller than in either of the two previous election cycles. The third graph below suggests that the sum of survey respondents who had decided not to vote or had not decided on a party was an excellent predictor of turnout in 2002, but that this measure significantly underpredicted turnout in 1998. In either case, however, the total number of undecideds and non-voters for 2006 has exceeded those for 2002 by approximately 2%. Using 2002 as a baseline would therefore suggest a turnout of around 67%. This is not a very well-grounded estimate but it as good as the available public resources allow.

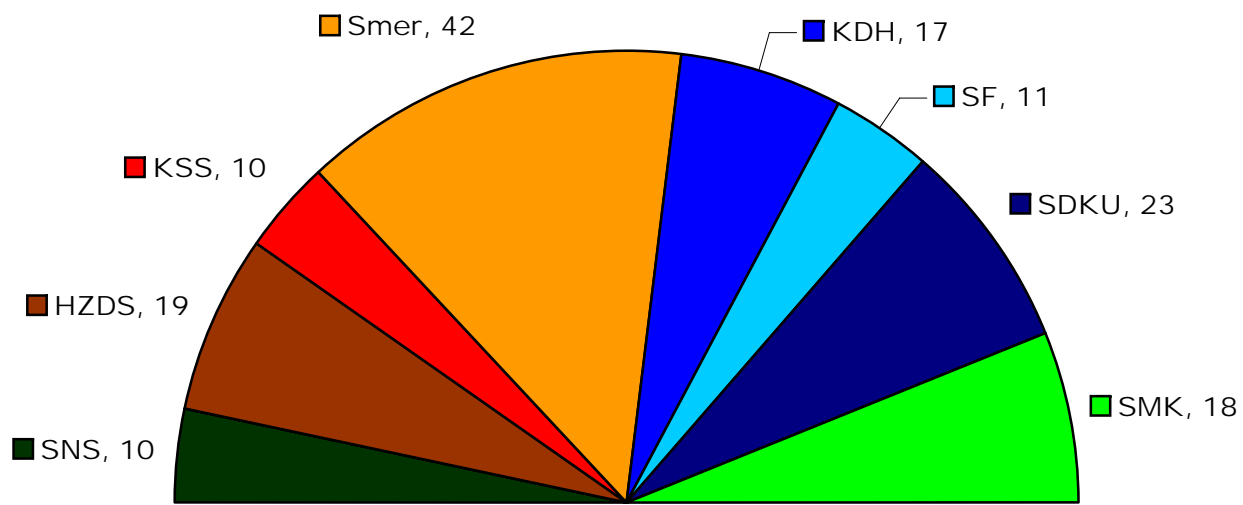






What Kind of Parliament?

Using the most recent polling data along with a turnout of 67% and the “combined” model above--a “best guess” given the information available--would yield parliament that looks like the one below. While this does not tell us directly about probable governments, it does tell us that the options for government formation are manifold. There is virtually no possibility for any ideological bloc to form a government on its own, and limited chance that any *two* blocs could form a government (the fairly ungainly combinations of Left-Slovak [Smer+KSS+SNS+HZDS] or Left-Right [Smer+KDH+SDKU+SF], suggesting the strong possibility of a combination of parties within three ideological blocs (Slovak-Left-Right or Left-Right-Hungarian) or a minority coalition that involves parties two blocs with a party from the third other as a silent partner. Data does allow for closer scrutiny of the cohesion and electoral chances of particular coalition combinations and these will be the subject of the next post.



Parliament,
150 seats

