

COALITIONS, AT LAST

THE SUREST WAY TO KILL A BLOG, I have heard it said, is to miss regular postings. By that standard, this blog is firmly planted in the grave. Maintaining this page did not prove to be consistent with shepherding students around Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, there is a month left before Slovakia's election and a lot of analysis that has been left undone by Slovakia's popular press.

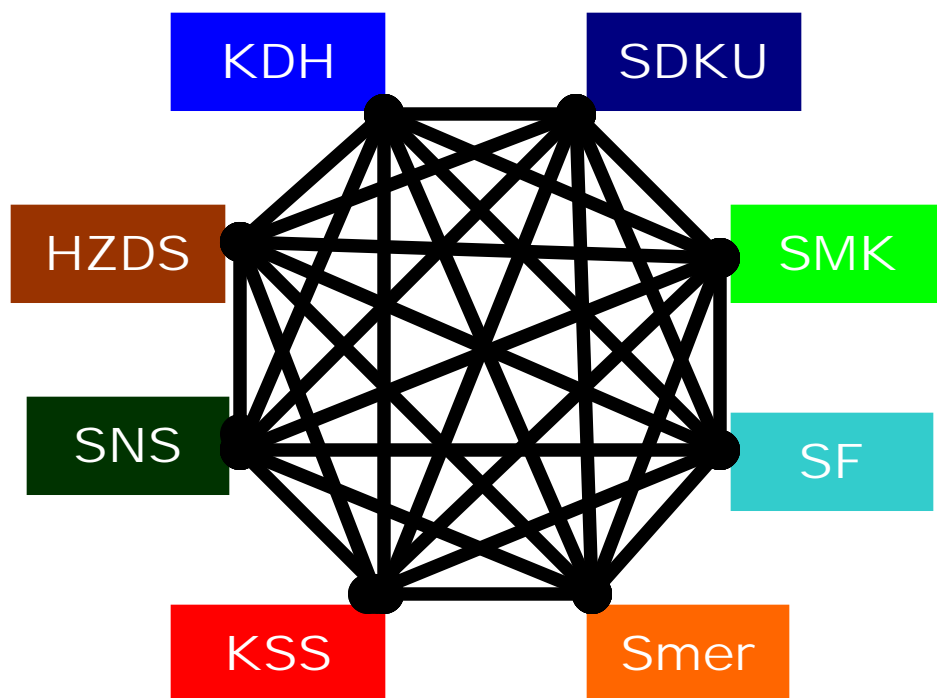
In the last posts, I discussed trends in overall support for parties and how that might translate into actual seats in parliament. (Since the last posts in April, we now have a variety of new polls and other data for estimating election results. I hope this week to post some revised estimates.) The final major question is how parties might combine those seats to form a government. This is a realm of great uncertainty, not only because it depends on polling data allows for a wide range variance in the partisan composition of parliament, but also because the decisions of political leaders to form coalitions can be abrupt and highly idiosyncratic. It is also the kind of insider realm in which an American writing from across the Atlantic is most limited in divining the future.

COALITION POSSIBILITIES

Nevertheless, certain kinds of quantitative analysis can offer certain insights which may not predict what the next coalition will be but might at least draw certain lines which coalitions may have more favorable conditions than others. The two key questions are the likelihood that a particular coalition combinations will dispose of enough seats to form a government and the likelihood that the members of that coalition can actually agree to work together. The first of these we can assess from public opinion polling data, as modified by guesses about partisan turnout; the second we cannot assess directly, but we can look at incomplete and indirect measures such as the statements of party leaders and the opinions of parties' supporters about other parties.

Given the sources of my data, I would like to begin not with the coalitions assessed as most likely but rather with the full set of possible coalitions. Six parties will almost assuredly pass the 5% threshold (Smer, HZDS, SMK, SDKU, KDH and SNS) and another two have a strong chance (SF and, to a lesser extent, KSS). With eight parties in parliament, there are actually 2^8 or 256 possible coalitions (including one coalition consisting of "no parties" and another consisting of "all parties"). The helpful figure below begins to hint at the complexity.

Figure 3.1. Set of Potential Coalition Relationships in Slovakia



Not all of these coalitions are possible. Some are too small to muster a majority, while others could shed one or more parties without losing a majority. Using the best- and worst-case scenarios for parties that I derived from the various turnout models discussed previously, I calculate that 40 of the possible coalitions would be larger than necessary even under all the respective parties' worst-case scenarios. Another 93 would be insufficient even under all of the respective parties' best-case scenarios. Notably, this includes a variety of governments that are sometimes talked about because they might be able to muster some sort of ideological consistency: Smer alone, Smer with KSS, Smer with SNS, Smer with SF, and HZDS with SNS and KSS.

WHAT PARTIES SAY ABOUT COALITIONS

This analysis still leaves us with 123 coalitions that might in some or all circumstances be the right size to form a government. Many of these are highly unlikely, however, because of lingering antipathies between parties along ideological grounds.

First, there is the question of Slovak and Hungarian nationalism. Even though the underlying basis of Slovakia's politics has begun to shift away from this question, the antipathies between the Hungarian party and the two more nationally oriented Slovak parties, HZDS and SNS, remains extremely high. It is difficult to imagine Hungarian and Slovak nationalist parties in common coalition and the SMK has explicitly rejected the possibility of coalition with SNS or with HZDS under the leadership of Vladimir Meciar (a circumstance that looks unlikely to change). SF also rejected coalition with either SNS or a Meciar-led HZDS, and KDH has rejected coalition with HZDS as well. After seeming to reject HZDS, SDKU appears to have backed off from outright rejection.

Second, there is also the question of socio-economic policy. Distributional issues are often more amenable to compromise than identity issues, but in the case of the Communist Party of Slovakia, a redistributionist policy is paired with an "unreconstructed" Marxist-Leninist identity (or at least the image of one) which evokes strong mutual antipathies. The parties of the current coalition explicitly rejected post-election cooperation with KSS and the feeling appears largely mutual. All major right wing parties (SDKU, KDH, SMK and SF) have explicitly rejected cooperation with KSS, as has SNS. Alone among the coalition parties, SMK also seems to reject cooperation with Smer.

In light of these statements—full text of which can be found in the appendix at the end of this post—it is possible to redraw the octagon above with colored lines highlighting the impossible coalition combinations and with black lines highlighting the remaining possibilities, a rather simpler set of relationships to work with.

Figure 3.2. Unlikely Coalition Relationships According to Party Statements

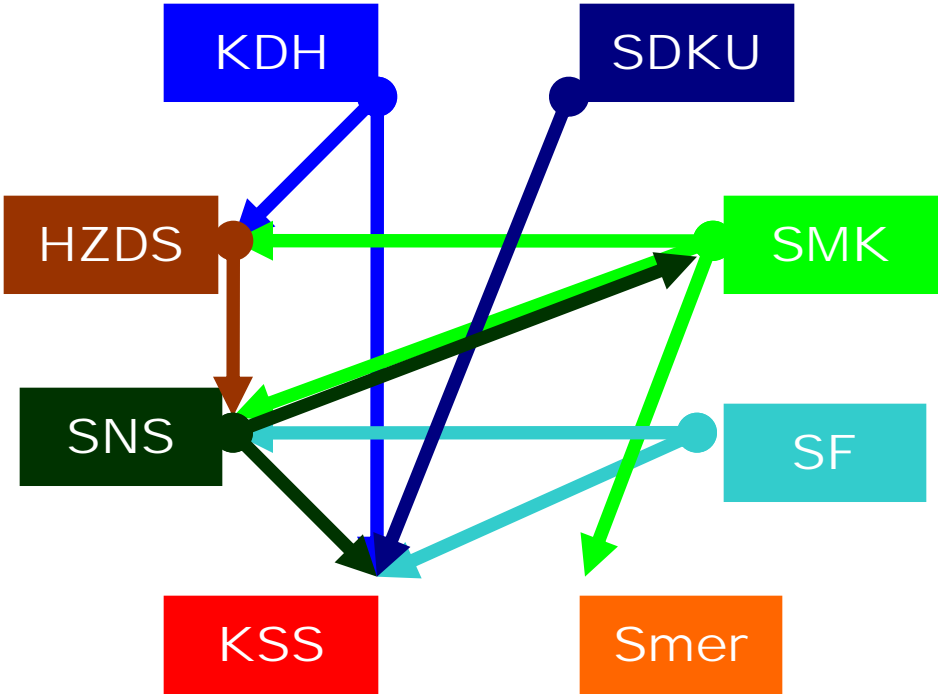
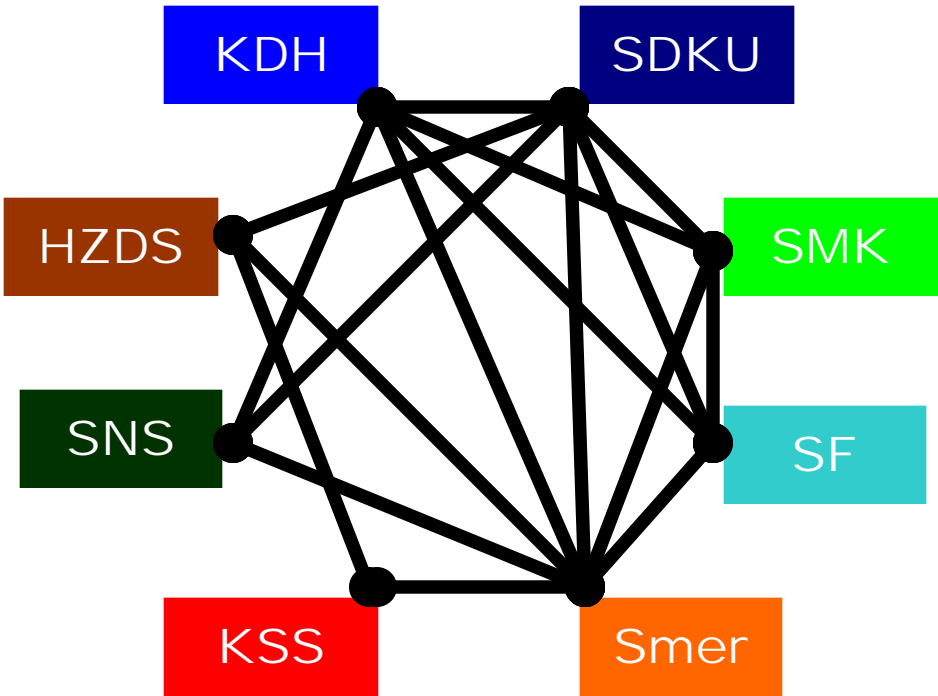


Figure 3.3. Revised Set of Coalition Relationships



WHAT VOTERS SAY ABOUT COALITIONS

Of course pre-election statements by party leaders are often poor guides to post-election behavior but politicians face coalition constraints other than their own promises.

Fortunately, Slovakia's Institute for Public Affairs (<http://www.ivo.sk>) a series of excellent reports (see www.ivo.sk/vyskum_slovensko2005.pdf, http://www.ivo.sk/vyskum_maj_2006.htm and http://www.ivo.sk/vyskum_maj_2006.ppt) on polls that ask supporters of each party what they think of all other parties. The IVO reports list the share of supporters in each party who express either sympathy or antipathy toward every other party. In the tables below, I have simplified this into a single table by subtracting the share of antipathy from the share of sympathy (thus a party with more sympathy than antipathy will have a positive score while greater antipathy produces a negative score).

Table 3.1 Sympathy/ Antipathy of Party Voters toward Other Parties, Dec. 2005

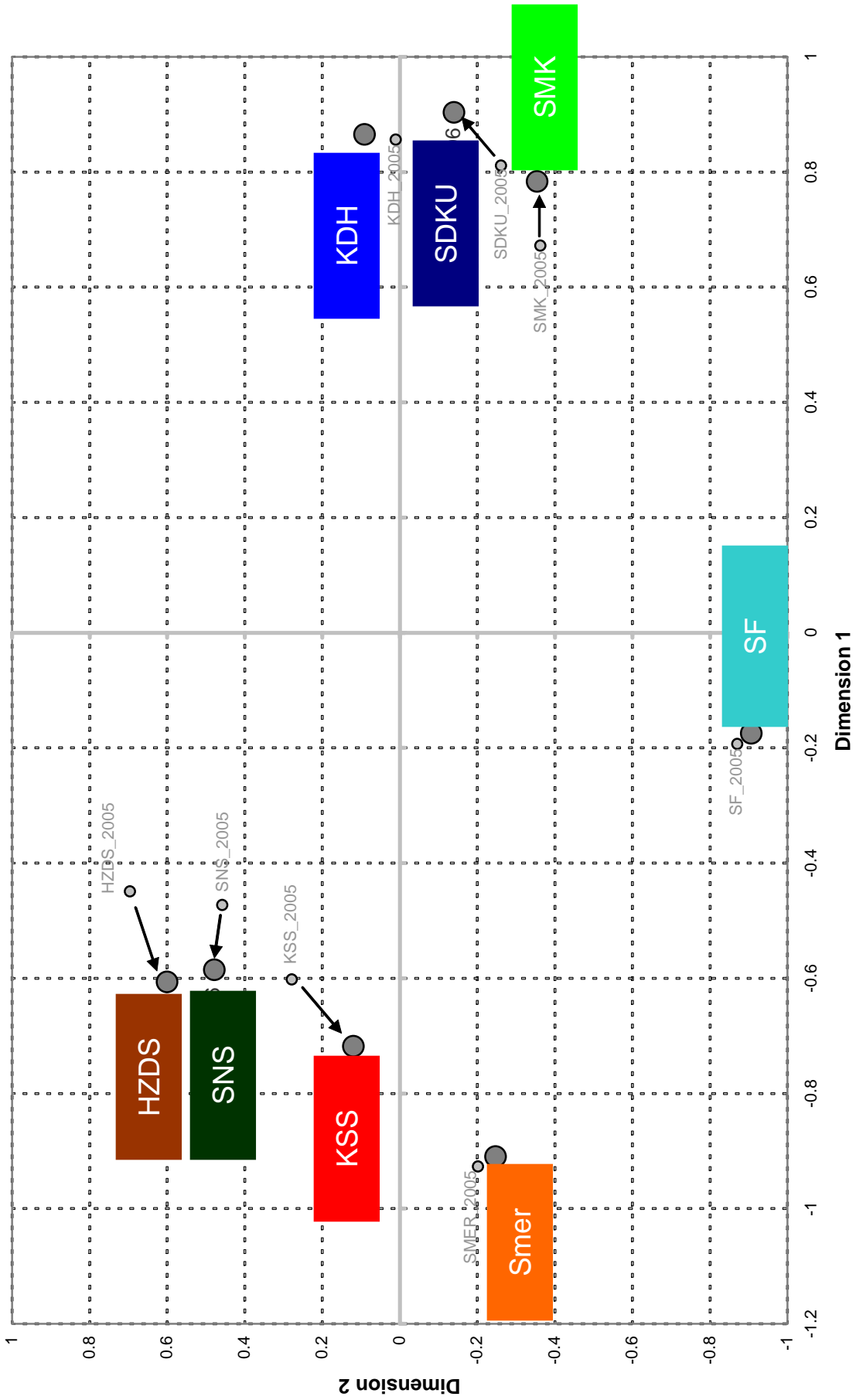
		...feel positively or negatively toward this party							
		SDKU	KDH	SMK	SF	SNS	SMER	HZDS	KSS
Partisans of this party...	SDKU	-	4	-2	2	-55	-56	-75	-81
	KDH	-7	-	-35	-27	-60	-68	-86	-90
	SMK	-13	-5	-	-17	-93	-58	-92	-59
	SF	-60	-34	-50	-	-50	44	-66	-52
	SNS	-84	-50	-75	-29	-	27	-31	-45
	SMER	-74	-70	-59	-2	-28	-	-54	-44
	HZDS	-91	-45	-87	-45	-12	1	-	-1
	KSS	-94	-78	-50	-29	-54	27	-46	-

Table 3.2 Sympathy/ Antipathy of Party Voters toward Other Parties, April 2006

		...feel positively or negatively toward this party							
		SDKU	KDH	SMK	SF	SNS	SMER	HZDS	KSS
Partisans of this party...	SDKU	-	-3	7	4	-66	-58	-91	-98
	KDH	14	-	-29	-21	-15	-57	-84	-88
	SMK	9	12	-	-12	-91	-55	-91	-81
	SF	-58	-55	-34	-	-29	30	-69	-60
	SNS	-81	-60	-88	-20	-	22	-21	-45
	SMER	-75	-73	-56	21	3	-	-35	-29
	HZDS	-81	-74	-74	-37	10	-3	-	-33
	KSS	-90	-86	-73	-17	-18	44	-20	-

It is possible further to reduce this array of numbers to a more accessible image depicting the degree of sympathy or antipathy in terms of distance. A completely accurate image of this nature would require eight dimensions, but two dimensions proves to be enough to capture basic relationships without too much distortion. The dimensions do not measure anything in themselves, but the distance between any two points on the graph is roughly proportionate to the degree of overall antipathy. It is worth noting, furthermore that two surveys separated by nearly six months produced nearly identical results.

Figure 3.4 Spatial Relationships among Parties, Dec 2005 and April 2006

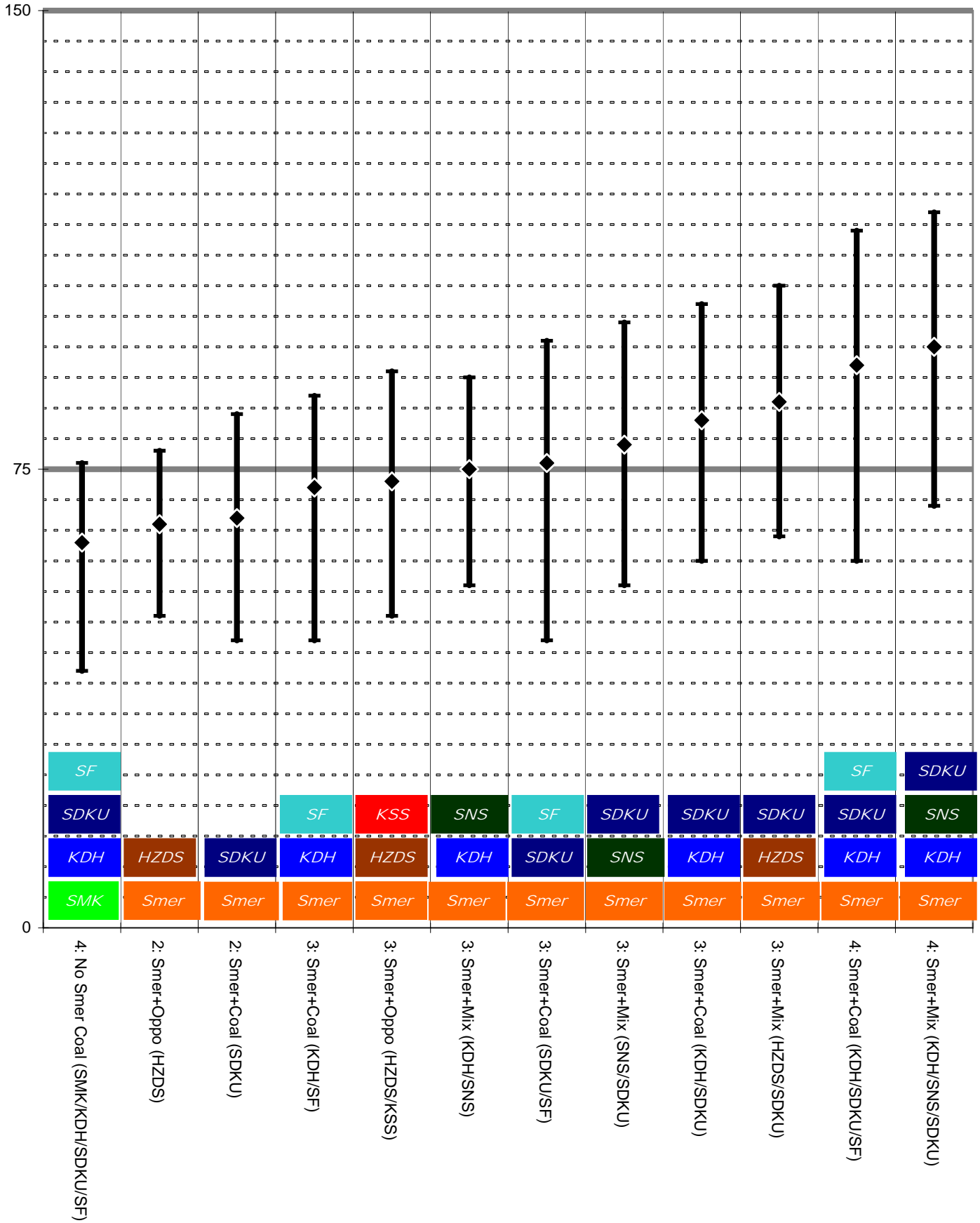


In most cases, party supporters' views about coalition partners correspond with the statements of party leaders (the cause and effect in that relationship warrant a much longer and more detailed discussion elsewhere. See <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/apworkshop/carsey-layman-oct04.pdf> for starters). Many of the relationships with greatest spatial distance are also those with explicit (sometimes mutual) rejections of cooperation: SDKU-KSS, KDH-KSS, SMK-KSS, SMK-SNS, SMK-HZDS. The combination of high distance among leaders and voters makes these the least likely combinations. A few other relationships have a high degree of leadership antipathy but less among partisans (SNS-HZDS, SNS-KSS and, by the direct measures of distance, SMK-Smer); in such cases the party membership at least will not present a barrier to coalition if the chance for political gain (and the lack of alternatives) force elites to change their minds and seek accommodation. In other cases, a high degree of voter antipathy has not produced an official rejection of cooperation (SDKU-HZDS, SDKU-SNS, KDH-SNS, KDH-Smer, SDKU-Smer) as political leaders attempt to keep their options open. Although parties tend to remain fairly close to their bases on important issues, pressures remain fairly indirect and slow moving and may not prevent such coalitions from coming into play in the short run. A KDH-DU-SDE coalition was equally unlikely in 1994 but party leaders managed to make it work in the short run.

SLOVAK ROULETTE

On the basis of elite-level and mass-level party antipathy, we can create a list of possible coalitions and then revisit their actual chances for success. The considerations above actually suggest two lists: a "strict" list that includes only coalitions in which neither the parties nor the party voters have expressed strong opposition, and a second, looser list which recognizes that party statements may only reflect political posturing and therefore only excludes the Slovak nationalist-Hungarian, and right-Communist combinations. Application of the "strict" conditions actually cuts the number of potentially viable coalitions from 123 to a more manageable 12. These are listed below, ranked according to the potential size of the coalition in parliament (according to the previously calculated best-, worst-, and intermediate-case scenarios).

Figure 3.5. Coalitions Possible under “Strict” Conditions Organized by Likely Coalition Size



Most notable about this list is that only one of the twelve does not contain the party Smer and that this coalition (essentially replicating the coalition of 2002 with SF substituting for ANO) receives a parliamentary majority only in the best-case scenario. Almost as unlikely are any coalitions of Smer with only one other party. In best-case scenarios using April data it is just barely possible that Smer could partner with HZDS or SDKU, but the chances remain relatively small. (A Smer-KDH coalition falls just short of a majority in even the best-case scenario, though the margin is quite narrow). More viable in numeric terms are a variety of 3 and 4 party coalitions that including Smer along with some combination of members of the current coalition (SDKU-KDH, KDH-SF or SDKU-SF), members of the current opposition (HZDS and KSS), or a mix of (KDH-SNS, SDKU-SNS, HZDS-SDKU).

The problem with these larger coalitions, however, is that they introduce greater potential for intra-coalition conflict. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 rank the potential “strict” coalitions both according to seat potential and the degree of likely intra-coalition strife as measured by the opinions of party supporters about their potential coalition partners. (Equivalent figures for the 42 party “loose” standard for possible coalitions are available in the appendix below.). The first graph measures internal cohesion as an average of the degree of sympathy held by supporters of each coalition member toward every other coalition member. The second graph begins from the notion that coalitions are only as strong as their weakest internal link and therefore measures internal cohesion as the lowest-level of mutual sympathy among any pair of potential coalition members.

Figure 3.6
Coalition Vote Potential According to Antipathy Among Potential Members' Voters

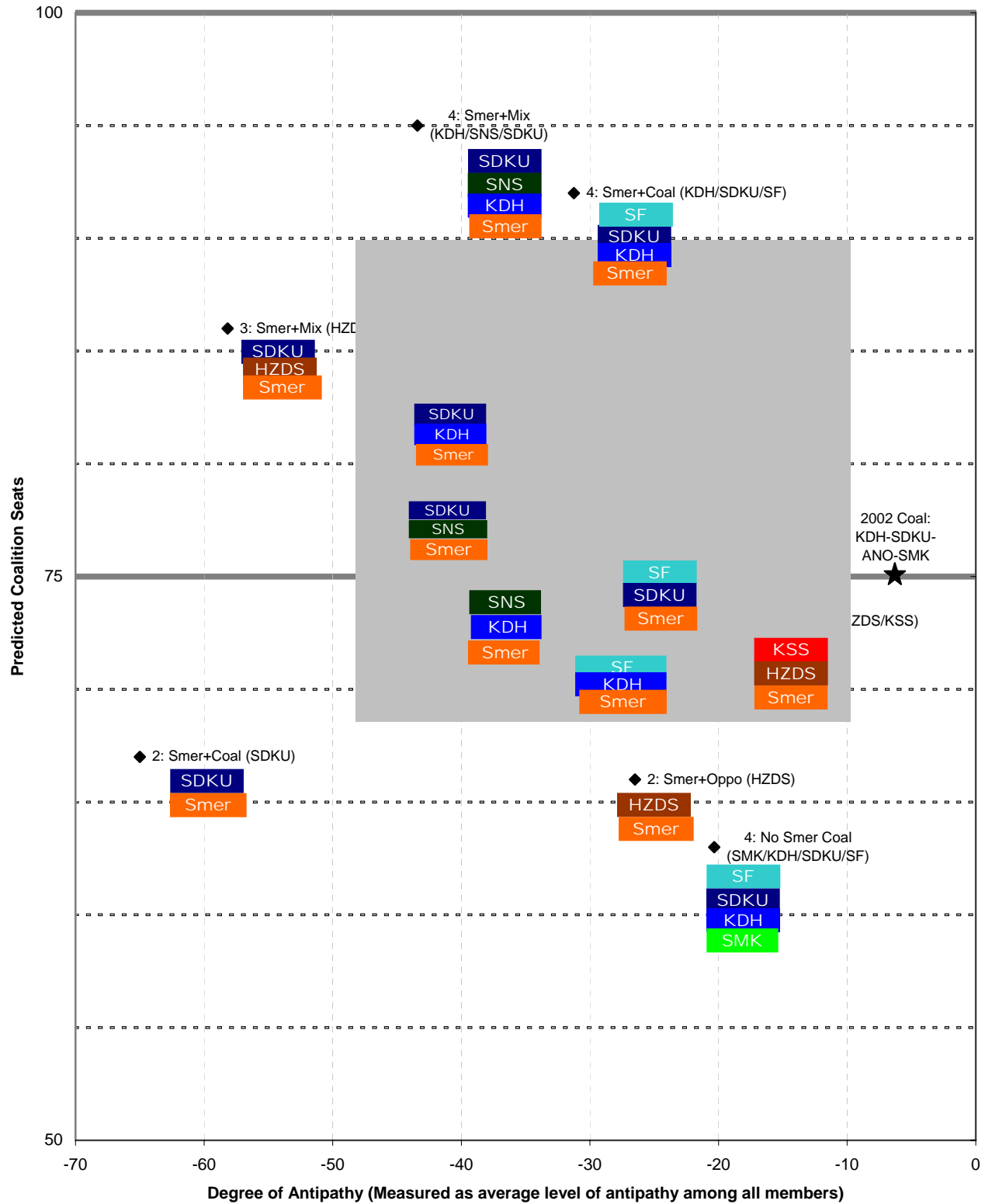
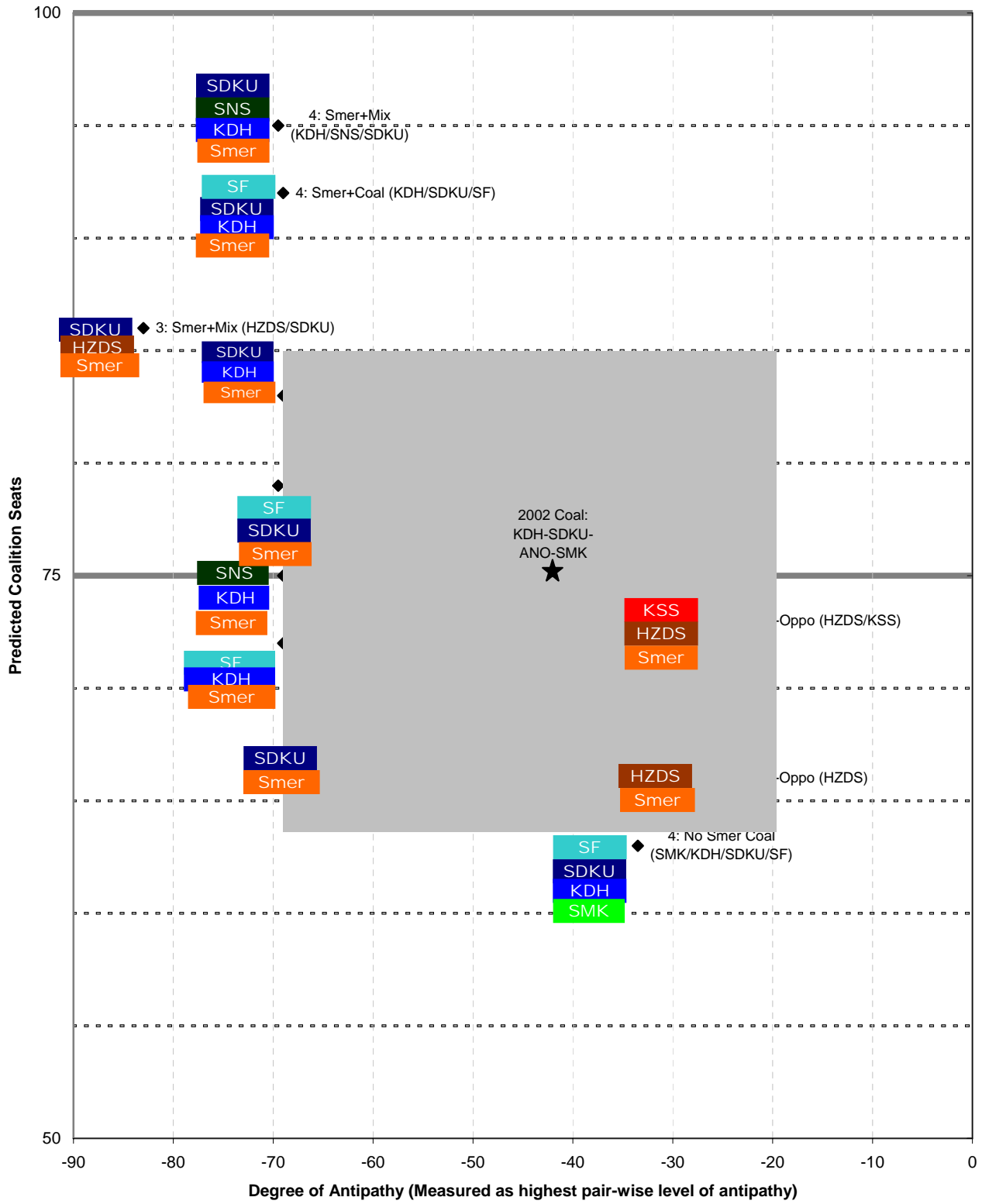


Figure 3.7
Coalition Vote Potential According to Antipathy Among Potential Members' Voters



The goal for any coalition is the upper-right quadrant (high internal sympathy and sufficient numbers for a majority), but it is apparent that none of the current possibilities come particularly close to achieving that goal. Coalitions are either large enough to have a majority but highly fractious (at least as measured by party voters' opinions) or relatively more coherent but too small. A comparison between the 2006 data and equivalent data for 2002 offers an even more troubling sign. A star on Figures 3.6 and 3.7 marks the viability and internal cohesion of the potential SDKU-SMK-KDH-ANO coalition about two months before the 2002 election. As the graphs show, this fractious coalition performed considerably *better* in terms of internal coherence than any of the coalitions that *now* seem viable. Slovaks might be advised to fasten their seatbelts. (Yet for those of us conditioned by the politics of Slovakia in the mid-1990's, a bumpy coalition is better than one that smoothly steers the country toward authoritarianism.)

PLANS FOR FUTURE POSTINGS

Having created a system for tracking opinion polls, estimating the effects of turnout on relative party vote and assessing the viability of party coalitions, there still remains work to be done. The next posts will assess the impact of the most recent set of polls—late April and early May—and use these to track both individual party and potential coalition performance over time. Another post will use data on voters' decision-making process to refine the turnout-based model of party electoral performance.

Appendix A: Party Statements Rejecting Potential Coalition Partners

The following is a not-yet-exhaustive list of ways in which parties refused the possibility of cooperation with other parties. If readers are aware of any other exclusions, I would encourage them to let me know.

- **KDH rejects HZDS:**
zostavovaní novej vlády po parlamentných voľbách nebude
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH) rokovat' s Ľudovou stranou - Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (ĽS-HZDS). Svojmu duelantovi Vladimírovi Mečiarovi povedal, že spolupráca s ním nie je možná.
(http://spravy.pravda.sk/sk_domace.asp?r=sk_domace&c=A060224_073946_sk_domace_p02 and http://spravy.pravda.sk/kdh-nezostavi-vladu-s-ls-hzds-djn-/sk_domace.asp?c=A060409_151118_sk_domace_p23)
- **SDKU rejects KSS:**
Jediná politická strana, s ktorou nie je SDKÚ-DS ochotná ísť do budúcej vlády, je KSS. Podpredseda strany a minister dopravy Pavol Prokopovič v relácii TV Joj Sedmička povedal, že so všetkými ostatnými stranami si SDKÚ vie predstaviť spoluprácu, ak bude vedieť nájsť s nimi styčné body v programoch.
(http://spravy.pravda.sk/sdku-nebude-spolupracovat-s-kss-dad-/sk_domace.asp?c=A060507_134638_sk_domace_p12)
- **SF rejects KSS, SNS and HZDS with Meciar**
Slobodné fórum nebude po voľbách spolupracovať s KSS, ani s "extrémnymi" stranami ako je SNS, či s Vladimírom Mečiarom. "Slobodné fórum nebude účastníkom vo vláde, ktorú by viedol súčasný premiér Mikuláš Dzurinda," povedala predsedníčka SF Zuzana Martináková. (http://spravy.pravda.sk/sf-hovori-nie-kss-sns-aj-meciarovi-drd-/sk_domace.asp?c=A060503_141208_sk_domace_p12)
- **MKP/SMK rejects SNS and KSS:**
Slovenská národná strana a Komunistická strana Slovenska by nemali byť podľa vicepremiéra a podpredsedu SMK Pála Csákyho v budúcej vládnej koalícii a nemali by mať ani reálny vplyv na budúcu vládnu politiku (http://spravy.pravda.sk/csaky-nechce-vo-vlade-sns-a-kss-dei-/sk_domace.asp?c=A060520_004134_sk_domace_p12)
- **MKP/SMK rejects HZDS:**
Of the governing parties the MKP (Hungarian Coalition Party -- SMK in Slovak) has presented the clearest stance. Gyula Bardos, the head of the MKP deputies group, has said that the MKP would not differentiate according to whether Meciar is or is not head of the HZDS. "For the MKP what is important is the politics carried out by the HZDS in the years from 1994 until 1998, and also the policies that it wants to carry out in future," said Bardos. (Sme, Wednesday, February 22, 2006 T13:49:47Z.; Translated by World News Connection)
- **MKP/SMK rejects Smer:**
According to MKP (Hungarian Coalition Party -- SMK in Slovak) Chairman Bela Bugar, coalition cooperation between the MKP and Direction in the next election period is made impossible by the parties' different programs. According to Bugar, Direction's program -- -- is impossible to realize. Bugar did not rule out post-election cooperation with the HZDS (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia), but Vladimir

Meciar remains an obstacle to this. (Sme, Wednesday, January 18, 2006 T12:28:53Z, Translated by World News Connection)

- **SNS rejects KSS and SMK:**

We clearly reject only the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) and the SMK. It would be morbid if the Communists were in the government. This perverse ideology was already dead for me when I started to perceive the world. But we do not rule out cooperation with anyone else. As far as the SMK is concerned, we will try to have this political entity disbanded. (Hospodarske Noviny, Sunday, April 23, 2006 T16:22:05Z, Translated by World News Connection)

- **HZDS rejects SNS:**

Meciar only ruled out post-election cooperation with the Slovak National Party (SNS). "This is because of its low political culture, vulgarism, and inclination toward unethical behavior, and I cannot cooperate with Jan Slota (SNS leader)." (Sme, Tuesday, April 11, 2006 T08:49:17Z, Translated by World News Connection)

Appendix B: Data for the Full “Loose” List of Potential Coalitions

Constituent Parties	Total Seats (76= majority)			Internal Antipathy	
	Worst-case scenario	Intermediate-case Scenario	Best-case Scenario	Weakest Link	Overall Average
Smer/HZDS	51	66	78	-27	-27
Smer/SMK	50	65	76	-59	-59
Smer/SDKU	47	67	84	-65	-65
Smer/HZDS/KDH	64	82	96	-69	-54
Smer/HZDS/SNS	60	78	93	-27	-16
Smer/HZDS/SDKU	64	86	105	-83	-58
Smer/HZDS/SF	51	75	90	-56	-25
Smer/HZDS/KSS	51	73	91	-27	-20
Smer/SMK/KDH	63	81	94	-69	-49
Smer/SMK/SDKU	63	85	103	-65	-44
Smer/SMK/SF	50	74	88	-59	-28
Smer/SMK/KSS	50	72	89	-59	-41
Smer/KDH/SNS	56	75	90	-69	-42
Smer/KDH/SDKU	60	83	102	-69	-45
Smer/KDH/SF	47	72	87	-69	-31
Smer/SNS/SDKU	56	79	99	-70	-45
Smer/SNS/SF	43	68	84	-40	-11
Smer/SNS/KSS	43	66	85	-50	-20
Smer/SDKU/SF	47	76	96	-65	-29
Smer/SDKU/KSS	47	74	97	-41	-14
Smer/HZDS/KDH/SNS	73	94	111	-69	-40
Smer/HZDS/KDH/SDKU	77	102	123	-83	-41
Smer/HZDS/KDH/SF	64	91	108	-69	-41
Smer/HZDS/SNS/SDKU	73	98	120	-75	-39
Smer/HZDS/SNS/SF	60	87	105	-65	-35
Smer/HZDS/SNS/KSS	60	85	106	-50	-22
Smer/HZDS/SDKU/SF	64	95	117	-83	-42
Smer/HZDS/SDKU/KSS	64	93	118	-59	-36
Smer/SMK/KDH/SDKU	76	101	121	-69	-37
Smer/SMK/KDH/SF	63	90	106	-69	-34
Smer/SMK/SDKU/SF	63	94	115	-65	-31
Smer/SMK/KDH/SF	63	90	106	-59	-31
Smer/KDH/SNS/SDKU	69	95	117	-70	-43
Smer/KDH/SNS/SF	56	84	102	-69	-31
Smer/KDH/SDKU/SF	60	92	114	-69	-31
Smer/SNS/SDKU/SF	56	88	111	-84	-40
Smer/SMK/SDKU/SF	63	94	115	-50	-22
HZDS/KDH/SNS/SDKU	52	67	81	-83	-49
HZDS/KDH/SDKU/SF	43	64	78	-83	-44
SMK/KDH/SDKU/SF	42	63	76	-34	-20
HZDS/KDH/SNS/SDKU/SF	52	76	93	-83	-45
Smer/KDH/SNS/SDKU/SF	69	104	129	-70	-39
Smer/SMK/KDH/SDKU/SF	76	110	133	-83	-34
Smer/KDH/SDKU/KSS	60	90	115	-65	-33
Smer/HZDS/SNS/SDKU/SF	73	107	132	-75	-39
Smer/HZDS/KDH/SNS/SF	73	103	123	-69	-36