

# Slovenian election posters as a medium of political communication: An informative or persuasive campaign tool?<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Election posters are a visual means of communicating political messages to a large audience, and they are an important print medium for political communication that is directly controlled by political actors. Posters have played a large role in election campaigns for the past two centuries, and as a result, this trend continues in many countries today. The legacy of socialism and the rule of the Communist Party made posters even more important in Slovenia, due to the medium's significant function in the propaganda machinery. By employing the informative-persuasive framework (Mueller & Stratmann 1994), we analysed the nature of electoral competition in Slovenian poster campaigning as well as the extent of its (dis)continuity with posters from the period of communist monism. Based on the content analysis of 841 posters from the communist and non-communist periods, we observed that Slovenian posters in the post-1991 democratic era reflect patterns of poster campaigning characteristic of liberal democracies and demonstrate a clear break with posters from the communist regime. Those patterns confirm the general assumption that dominant political actors employ more persuasive poster campaigning, while the less established devote more attention to informative activities.

Keywords: election posters, Slovenia, communism, political communication, persuasion.

## **Introduction**

Sovereignty vested in every citizen not only having a voice in its exercise, but also being called on to take an actual part in the benefits of freedom, is the best form of government (Mill 2003, p.312). Since not everyone can participate personally in all public business, the ideal type of perfect government is representative (ibid). Elections are therefore a hallmark of the exercise of popular sovereignty in modern liberal democracies and are a prerequisite of free societies based on equality. Public prosperity, the preservation of the state and the preservation of the basic principles upon which society is grounded (Condorcet 2003, p. 315) profoundly rest on free and fair elections. Factors shaping citizens' preferences regarding potential governors have an instrumental role in systems of representative government, election campaigns being one of them. The fact that campaigns matter has been confirmed by a number of seminal works (e.g. Holbrook 1996; Swanson &

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Mancini 1996; Farrell & Schmitt-Beck 2002; Vavreck 2009) that highlight the importance of getting the message out and the process of persuading potential voters. Actually, the significance of election campaigns has been acknowledged by political actors since the beginning of political campaigning and is in ascendance (see Kavanagh 1995).

Political actors make use of different campaign strategies in order to maximise their electoral success, thus producing variations in the application of campaign tools, content and channels of communication with the electorate (Farrell & Wortmann 1987). One of the dominant tools of political campaigning, though very traditional and in use from its beginnings, remains election posters (see Norris 2002; Farrell & Webb 2000; Van den Bulck 1993). Generally accompanied by the provision of a limited amount of free public spaces for political posters of competing political actors, the posters still represent a substantial part of every major campaign (see Bergman & Wickert 1999, p. 469; Plasser & Plasser 2002, p. 298; Dumitrescu 2010, p. 20; Teer-Tomaselli 2006, p. 437). As an indispensable channel for spreading information to voters, posters are a logical source for studying the patterns of the competition between political actors (Dumitrescu 2010, pp. 20–21; Plasser & Plasser 2002). In keeping with their campaign strategies, political actors thus employ posters in order to be more competitive *vis-à-vis* their rivals, which results in different utilisations of this tool. Political actors approach the use of posters in a number of ways in order to overcome structural deficiencies in their campaigns or promote advantages they have compared to competitors (Dumitrescu 2010, p. 31). This is also true for political communication overall (see Kavanagh 1995).

Based on their analysis of campaign expenditures, Mueller and Stratmann (1994) distinguish between informative and persuasive campaigning of political actors. The *informative-persuasive* distinction reveals strategies political actors use to promote their comparative advantages or to reduce various gaps compared to other competitors. Drawing on the advertising literature, the distinction differentiates between campaign approaches aimed at informing voters about candidates' positions on certain issues, and persuading voters to vote for them independent of the candidate's position on the issue (*ibid.*, p. 73). Since contemporary campaigns increasingly employ persuasive campaigning—this observation is supported by the substantial increase of campaign budgets (*ibid.*, p. 65) and the application of campaign tools suitable for persuasion (e.g. television)—political actors vary in their approaches to persuasion. Those who lack 'brand recognition' try to bridge the gap with well-established brand names,<sup>2</sup> while the latter generally try to make use of their political capital and maximise their chances of success by emphasising their strengths along the lines of integrity, competence, leadership, honesty, etc. (Kinder et al. 1980). In line with this framework, lesser-known political actors (this generally implies those who are minor players, less institutionalised and inferior in terms of resources) will push for their names to be heard, while well-known competitors will try to build on that advantage and focus more on their qualities. Dumitrescu (2010, p. 31) identified similar patterns of poster campaigning in the case of major and minor parties in French national elections.

As a traditional campaign tool, posters remain an extensive feature in post-communist campaigns (Seidman 2008, pp. 198–205; Deželan et al. 2010, p. 66); thus, they provide a valid and valuable source of information about the nature of political communication in these environments. Because posters cannot provide extensive information about the details of a candidate's platform on specific policy issues, they appear to be more suitable for persuasive campaigning (Shea 1996, pp. 210–16; Cheles 2001, p. 125). This is particularly well demonstrated by the use of posters in propaganda activities (see Lincoln 1976; Erickson 1994; Aulich & Sylvestrová 1999; Seidman 2008). In this paper, we are inclined to investigate the nature of Slovenian poster campaigning according to the informative–persuasive framework, which promises to reveal the dominance of either the informative or persuasive dimension, the extensiveness of 'brand building' compared to 'strengths emphasising' and potential elements of idiosyncrasy possibly linked to the country's communist past. We argue that Slovenian poster campaigning reflects patterns of poster campaigning characteristic of liberal democracies, despite its short tradition of organising free and fair elections and the intensive propaganda period that preceded the advent of those elections. In addition, we believe that dominant political actors employ more persuasive poster campaigning, while less established ones devote more attention to informative activities.

Our research is based on a content analysis of posters collected from local, national and European elections between 2004 and 2010. In addition, a selection of propaganda posters from two periods of Slovenia's communist past and posters from incipient democratic elections were included in the analysis. In the following section we explain the role of posters in election campaigns by classifying them in the general toolbox of a political actor. We move on, in the following sections, to describe the genealogy of poster campaigning in Slovenia, primarily uncovering the features of the propaganda period under Communist Party monism and the period immediately after its collapse—democratic transition. We also relate Slovenian poster campaigning to both periods and to the post-communist region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). We summarise the empirical results of our study of posters in Slovenia and provides the necessary findings to confirm or reject our argument. We conclude by revealing the most dominant features of poster campaigning in Slovenia.

## The role of posters in election campaigns

An election campaign is the time when political actors try to inform the electorate about their positions on certain issues and persuade them to go to the polls and vote for them. Regardless of their duration, election campaigns are a distinct type of information campaign designed to influence voters' preferences and, on the other hand, a good opportunity for voters to gather politically relevant information in order to make a decision (Popkin 1994). Information available to the electorate and employed communication channels are a matter of campaign strategy (Schmitt-Beck & Farrell 2002, pp. 6–7) and are designed to generate shifts in public opinion and influence election results (Holbrook 1996).

Election posters are a dominant medium of political advertising in many countries around the world (Plasser 2009, pp. 35–36). They are an important visual

medium of political communication that is directly controlled by political actors (Maarek 2011, p. 108). Political actors are limited by the size of the campaign budget, the attentiveness of voters (Schmitt-Beck & Farrell 2002, p. 8) and other possible legal limitations (see Lewis & Masshardt 2002, pp. 382–5). Within the existing regulatory framework, political actors are free to decide on the manner of application of posters, which results in a myriad of practices. Excluding differences in the content and design of the posters, which will be the focus of our attention later, vast variations are also observed in terms of poster posting as a consequence of campaign professionalisation (e.g. avoiding commercial areas by posting on trees, poles, etc.; and eliminating distribution costs by engaging a network of sympathisers). As a result, some sites of poster campaigning reflect ‘poster wars’ between political competitors (Cheles 2001), while others mark the ‘territory’ of individual parties or candidates (Dumitrescu 2010, p. 24).

As a low-tech and inexpensive medium, posters represent a very cost-effective campaign tool, with their impact stemming from accessibility, inescapability, relative permanence and the dominance of the visual over the verbal. Described even as a ‘mass art form’ (Lincoln 1976, p. 302), posters consist of verbal and non-verbal (visual)<sup>3</sup> elements. Verbal elements generally encompass election slogans, which typically entail promises of the candidates or their positions on particular issues. On the other hand, non-verbal elements by and large transmit information about the personal qualities of an individual and his or her emotions and personal relationship with the environment (Schweiger & Adami 1999). By analogy with the informative-persuasive framework, verbal elements have the capacity to both inform and persuade potential voters, while non-verbal elements predominantly target persuasion.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, in his analysis of poster campaigning in US presidential elections, Müller (2008, p. 628) distinguishes nine strategies, from which only two could be considered to have potential for informative campaigning (educational and economic strategy); all others are being dominated by a persuasive component.

The purpose of campaign posters is, therefore, to inform voters by providing information about a party or candidate, policy issues and the image of the candidate, as well as to assist and persuade voters when they are making an electoral decision (Seidman 2008).<sup>5</sup>

### **Poster propaganda in the communist era**

Propaganda is a very important mode of persuasion and is pervaded by non-democratic values. Though some authors (e.g. Maarek 2011, p. 36) treat propaganda as a form of political advertising that does not have inherently negative connotations, the majority of them link propaganda to lying, manipulation, distortion and deception (see Jowett and O'Donnell 1999, p. 27). Regarded as a form of communication by which senders consciously, intentionally and purposefully form messages in order to mould opinions and viewpoints of individuals (ibid.), propaganda can generally be conceived as manipulative communication that includes a large element of ‘fake’ in it (Lasswell 1995) and is charged with irrationality and emotion, which is generated by various techniques promoting stereotypes and the viewpoints of the elites that are in command of the

propaganda machine (Vreg 1992, pp. 830–32). As deceptive and distorted information is systematically spread by the governing elite primarily in totalitarian regimes (Seidman 2008, p. 7), propaganda has become a synonym for ideological warfare (Erickson 1994). Posters represented an integral part of propaganda activities since their intention was not to fully inform or educate the population but rather to mislead them in order to change or solidify attitudes, ideology or behaviour (Seidman 2008, p. 8).

In addition to Nazi Germany and other fascist regimes, the concept of propaganda frames the political communication of communist regimes particularly well. In the post-WWII period, 'propaganda' was increasingly employed to describe the activities of the dissemination of communist ideology (Aulich & Sylvestrová 1999, p. 3). The Communist Party attempted to maintain complete control over the means of communication,<sup>6</sup> since the manipulation of the masses represented one of the main mechanisms of preserving the regime, which imposed persuasion in an even more coercive manner in times of economic and political crises (Griffith 1980, p. 241). The poster was assigned the utilitarian role of a medium of agitation in the service of the one-party system (Lincoln 1976)<sup>7</sup> and was a very important propaganda tool due to its attributes (technological, persuasive and disseminative). It served as a propaganda tool for emotional manipulation and extortion and changed into a closed and stereotypical ideological weapon of the rulers in a system of political monism (Požar 2000, pp. 4–5).

### *The Yugoslav experience*

Following the Soviet model, Yugoslavia set up federal committees for agitation and propaganda, known as *agitprops*. Their main task was to take care of the ideological elevation of the party staff and the political education of the Yugoslav people, as well as their values, morals, goals, aesthetics and social behaviour (Lilly 1994, pp. 396–7). After 1952, *agitprops* were replaced with ideological commissions, which continued with monitoring until the late 1980s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the political poster was an important propaganda tool of the League of Yugoslav Communists, with strong and clear symbolism that linked people to each other and reinforced their identification with the state (Predan et al. 2006). Political posters were designed by graduate painters and the content was connected to important state holidays and events. The colours of the republics and federation prevailed in these posters, which also predominantly accommodated communist symbols: the red star, the hammer and sickle, and portraits of President Tito (ibid., pp. 41–2).

As a Yugoslav propaganda tool, the poster encompasses a wide range of societal activities with its distinct iconography, socialist realism and faith in progress and a better future. The common denominator of the Yugoslav posters was persuasion (Predan et al. 2006, p. 39), while their diversity and substance corresponded to the level of tolerance of the communist regime at the time (Požar 2000). Despite party monism and the absence of political pluralism, the 'election poster' proved to be a significant type of political poster and served as an ideological tool of agitation. It entailed topics such as ending war horrors and fratricide, victory over the oppressor and vengeance for collaborators, thus functioning as a threat to non-supporters that could be classified as coercive persuasion (see Griffith 1980). In addition to regime

iconography, Yugoslav posters allowed some (ethno)national/republican symbols (Požar 2000, p. 16), which proved to be one of the foundations of the nation- and state-building processes in the late 1980s.

Communist election posters gradually lost their persuasive function since the race to attract voters was not present. Instead, election posters attempted to create an atmosphere of festivity and of the celebration of the right to vote (see Example 1, Appendix 1). The existence of internal/liberal opposition within the Communist Party during the late 1960s and early 1970s only reinvigorated authoritarian propaganda and the omnipresence of the regime's symbols and colours. Economic and political crises in Yugoslavia during the eighties, accompanied by intense friction between its constitutive nations, led to calls for sociopolitical change from new social movements<sup>8</sup> and communist youth (Vurnik 2005). With posters being an affordable and influential medium, opponents of the regime made them an arena of political struggle. Contrary to the regime's posters, opposition posters targeted the prevailing regime norms and became one of the main channels of criticism and popular discontent (Požar 2000, pp. 41–61).

Though the communist propaganda posters performed different functions and entailed a distinct mode of persuasion, the communist experience determined that of the post-communist era to a large extent. Successor parties of the former regime started to avoid the former regime's colours and ideological symbols and discontinued their visual appearance (Predan et al. 2006, p. 43). As a result, certain features of poster campaigning became *terra non grata* for some political actors in the democratic era.

### Post-communist poster campaigning

With the introduction of political pluralism and the development of political parties, the need for a holistic image of parties began to emerge. As part of integral campaign strategies, posters began to play a predesigned role in the attempt to disseminate the desired image of political actors. The latter started to formulate campaign strategies according to their financial and organisational resources, which were hugely in favour of the already institutionalised parties.

Most of the parties in the process of transition from political monism could be regarded more as societal actors and not so institutionalised (Agh 1994, pp. 235–6); however, vast differences between parties began to emerge, which were also a consequence of the nature of democratic transition. A divide between new and old parties corresponded to the structural differences between two clusters of parties at the beginning of democratic pluralism (see Fink Hafner 1997; Millard 2004; Lewis 2001). New parties encompassed movement initiatives that mostly came from civil society and that protested against the communist regime. The new parties' organisational capacity was embryonic, their actions uncoordinated and their operation pervaded by difficulties in their attempts to widen their membership base, and overcome a lack of resources (Millard 2004, pp. 47–48). The old parties transformed from sociopolitical organisations that were already institutionalised and inherited organisational knowledge and networks as well as human and financial resources (see Examples 2 and 3, Appendix 1).

With better infrastructure and more resources at their disposal, the ability of the already institutionalised parties to communicate their designed image to the public was generally greater, which is documented across CEE countries (see Millard 2006; Racz 2003). Immediately after the fall of communism, the dominant parties in the new democracies employed state-dependent media as their party campaign tools (see Popescu & Tóka 2002), while minor parties began to lag further behind. Odescalchi (1999) identified poor communication infrastructure and deficient institutionalisation of the new political parties, which resulted in poor candidate recognition. Bojcun (1995, pp. 232–7) explained that the ability to lead a proper election campaign was exclusive to more established parties since they were able to organise activities outside the framework guaranteed by state legislation.

Disregarding the privileged position of the dominant parties, the weak resource capacity of the new parties and the modest electronic infrastructure in these states resulted in nonprofessional election campaigns that relied on pre-modern campaign tools. Although campaigns in CEE countries modernised and professionalised with time (Swanson & Mancini 1996), and increasingly employed television and other electronic media, Plasser & Plasser (2002, pp. 272–5) described election campaigns in CEE countries as ‘hybrid’. Hence posters remained one of the core campaign tools throughout the democratic transition, since they provided a solution to the infrastructure limitations and the usurpation of the state-controlled media, as well as complemented television campaigns (Seidman 2008, p. 204; Roka 2004, p. 104).

### *Poster campaigning in Slovenia*

Slovenian election campaigns may generally be classified as modern campaigns<sup>9</sup> with the application of certain pre-modern elements in terms of organisation and campaign tools (Deželan et al. 2010). Various authors have identified the relevance of poster campaigning for diverse political actors across local, national and European levels of elections (see Spahić 2000; Deželan et al. 2010). As a short-term campaign tool, posters represent one of the most important and useful mediums of political communication in Slovenia, since election campaigns usually correspond to the official time frame set in legislation: 30 days (ibid.). The relevance of poster campaigning in Slovenia is reflected in normative as well as factual terms. In addition to the fact that poster campaigning amounts to more than a quarter of the total campaign budget on average (CoARS 2011), the Elections and Referendum Campaign Act classifies poster campaigning as one of the three core activities during the election campaign (Art. 1–3).

Posters were already an important campaign tool during the first democratic elections in 1990 (Spahić 2000, pp. 41–6). Poster campaigning at the time revolved around the communist legacy and entailed a great deal of negative rhetoric, primarily in slogans. Negative campaigns concentrated on issues of credibility, honesty, greediness and the structural advantages of the former communist regime. An example of such a campaign is presented in the case of Example 2 in Appendix 1, in which the campaign team of a candidate decided to attack a former communist with the apparent oxymoron ‘honest communist’ (Pošten demokrat 1990). In combination with the trivial design and production attributes (e.g. quality of paper and colours), this poster is a typical election poster of the new parties and

independent candidates during the era of transition to democracy. Nevertheless, even at the time, some poster campaigns had been led by hired professionals (ibid.). As the new parties were still in a more or less embryonic state in the early nineties, the already institutionalised old parties tried to make use of their advantages during the campaign (Medjugorac 1993, p. 63). An example of a professional poster campaign is Milan Kučan's presidential campaign in 1990, when the accumulated knowledge, resources and other structural advantages became evident to the naked eye (see Example 3 in Appendix 1).

Since commercial space for poster posting was quite expensive, new parties relied on officially guaranteed free space, which resulted in low brand recognition as well as the nonprofessional and 'cheap' appearance of posters (ibid.). On the contrary, the well-off old parties managed to afford expensive and sophisticatedly designed and produced posters.

The trend of professionalisation across the political field became apparent after the 1996 national elections when a number of domestic and foreign consultants were hired for poster campaigning (Spahic 2000, p. 137). Vreg (2001) identified many patterns of professionalisation (see Mancini 1999, p. 236) in Slovenian poster campaigning in the new millennium, since the majority of the main political actors focused on the aspects of personalisation and persuasion. According to some, posters became dominated by professionals focused on persuasion. Focus on the brand of the political party or the brand of the politician who personified the party in the sense of *Le parti, c'est moi!* became the *modus operandi* of poster competition. Poster Examples 5 and 6 (in Appendix 1) are an indication of such a trend. The first, visualising Borut Pahor, the president of the Social Democrats, puts him forward as the embodiment of the party. He did not need to be introduced (hence no name), the dominance of red indicated the colour of the party (former communists) and the Slovenian flag in the background indicated his statesmanship, which was one of his major attributes in the race. This has been a common pattern since the dominance of television, which focuses on individual politicians who personify the party (Deželan et al. 2010), began to drive the parties into this mode of campaigning. The second poster is an additional indication of party personalisation and how parties cope with the potential lack of public recognition of their candidates. To overcome this deficiency, the Slovenian Democratic Party decided to reinforce the candidacy of an otherwise quite well known candidate by putting him next to the charismatic party leader. In addition to acquiring the brand of a well-ranking party, individual candidates also frequently get additional backing from the brand of their leader.

### **Analysis of poster campaigning in Slovenia**

For the purposes of analysing the Slovenian mode of poster campaigning, we applied standard quantitative content analysis, which offers a conventional method for analysing political advertisements (see Johnston 2006). We analysed a set of 841 posters, composed of 701 election posters from local, national and European elections between 2004 and 2010<sup>10</sup>; 67 election posters from the incipient democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in 1990; 23 election posters from the era of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) between

1946–1973; and 50 political<sup>11</sup> posters from the 1974–1989 SFRY period. In our purposive sampling procedure we selected all election posters for the analysed campaigns between 2004 and 2010 available at the officially provided free-of-charge and commercial posting areas within the official 30-day election campaign time frame. The posters from the incipient democratic elections and the two periods of the former SFRY were acquired through the archival services of the National and University Library, which has its poster database also available online via Dlib.si.<sup>12</sup>

The set of selected posters was coded based on a prepared codebook consisting of 62 theoretically determined variables, which identify the presence and character of certain elements in each poster. Based on positive tests for intra- and inter-coder reliability<sup>13</sup>, the posters were coded by two trained, independent coders between January and April 2011. In accordance with the seminal literature in the field, the set of variables covers verbal and non-verbal dimensions of selected posters (see Ottati & Dieger 2002).<sup>14</sup> Bearing in mind the verbal versus non-verbal divide, a total of forty variables measuring the explored dimensions of poster campaigning were selected. Twenty-one variables measured the presence of an informative component, while nineteen variables measured the presence of a persuasive component in selected posters. Within the latter group, eleven concentrated on brand building and eight on strengths emphasising aspects of persuasion.

### *General characteristics of posters*

When deliberating on the general characteristics of poster campaigning in Slovenia, we can easily identify vast dissimilarities in poster campaigning in liberal democratic Slovenia and Slovenia under Communist Party monism. Communist election and political posters reveal lower levels of three explored dimensions of informative and persuasive activities common to the campaign tools of political marketing in plural liberal democracies. Political posters from the communist era demonstrate the most disparate values regarding the presence of the three dimensions, since only for one-third was the presence of at least one element within each dimension identified. Clearly there was no need to promote the brand of the Communist Party since it was *de facto* the only existing and functional party. There was a much higher need to promote communist ideology and iconography; thus communist election posters demonstrated a significantly higher imbalance in favour of the non-verbal communication famous for its socialist realism. The example of such a poster in Appendix 1 (Example 1) demonstrates the tendency toward non-verbal promotion of the party's platform by putting forward the ideals of communist ideology and Yugoslav symbols.

Posters from the incipient democratic elections in 1990, at the very beginning of the new era, reflect similar lower levels of all three dimensions to those of the communist election posters. The biggest difference is in the focus on political actors themselves, since *pro forma* political pluralism was no longer in place. In addition, with the first democratic elections in 1990, verbal content became the main carrier of information, with images having the function of distinguishing the candidate from the field. Hence much textual information about them and the seat they were

running for was provided—for example, year of birth, education, electoral unit, other candidates on the list and type of elections (see Example 4 in Appendix 1). Although election posters of the 2004–2010 era reflect significantly higher levels of explored dimensions, with more than two-thirds of them having the elements of all three dimensions, the absolute highest levels—primarily for branding—were identified for major parliamentary parties. These posters put forward the well-established public image of the party by frequent reference to party colour, charismatic leader, logo, abbreviation, website address and the party's full name (see Examples 5 and 6 in Appendix 1).

A closer look at the three dimensions additionally reveals several patterns of poster campaigning Slovenes have witnessed in the last half-century. For the informative dimension, posters across different groups reflect very high levels of informative elements, with very little variation between groups. Election posters from the communist era and 'transitional' posters from the incipient elections demonstrate somewhat lower levels regarding this dimension, the former due to the virtual nonexistence of political opposition and the latter due to the focus on disqualification of former communist adversaries as well as inexperience with proper political marketing. On average, three-quarters of the posters of the latter group had an informative element present, while the share for the 2004–2010 election posters was more than 96 per cent. The informative dimension is, therefore, generally present in almost every election poster in Slovenia. We can also identify marginally higher levels of non-verbal informative content for minor, new and extraparlimentary parties, which is in consonance with the theoretical presumption that less recognised political actors try to 'bridge the gap' by providing more information to voters about their issue positions. In the case of these parties this is usually done by including visual elements or images representing their platform and ideological standpoints (see Example 7 in Appendix 1).

The brand-building dimension of poster campaigning—one of two modes of persuasion we explore in the paper—reflects similar results to the ones gathered for the informative dimension. A large majority of posters sampled in our analysis contained at least one brand-promoting element. With exceptions in communist posters, the share of posters with at least one such element within other groups is around 90 per cent, and in the case of major parties, even close to 100 per cent. Apart from the communist posters, somewhat lower levels for the observed dimension—primarily for non-verbal content—are identified in cases of independent candidates, 1990 elections and smaller parties. Since independent candidates inherently lack a party brand, such results were expected.<sup>15</sup> However, their strategy in overcoming this disadvantage was to obtain the support of various parties, which became evident from the inclusion of their logos on posters. Hence, the above-mentioned three groups of political actors approached voters less frequently by designing posters with the inclusion of party symbols and images of a party leader or members of a party elite. On the other hand, structurally advanced major parties clearly do not leave verbal or non-verbal brand-promoting strategies out of their poster campaign arsenal (see examples 5 and 6 in Appendix 1).

The second observed mode of persuasive poster campaigning—strengthening emphasising—is comparatively less omnipresent in posters than are the other two

dimensions. On average, only around three-quarters of posters have a strengths-emphasising element in their posters.<sup>16</sup> Again, the most dissimilar group proved to be the communist posters, which included symbols of the federation or a republic to mobilise support for it. Contrary to this strategy, in the era of political pluralism, political actors put forward state, (ethno)national and local insignias to attest to their loyalties and assets—that is, their personal qualities (see Examples 5 and 6 in Appendix 1). Of the 2004–2010 election posters, the posters of extra-parliamentary parties demonstrate the lowest levels of strengths-emphasising elements present (65 per cent). In accordance with the informative-persuasive framework, they seem to face a dilemma of either non-verbally promoting their platform or their qualities. Since the citizenry tends to be less acquainted with them compared to the more established political actors, extraparliamentary parties tend to opt for the promotion of their platform (see Example 7 in Appendix 1). Until recently, the dimension of emphasising strengths relied mostly on the promotion of the alleged virtues of candidates that are very abstract and difficult to test. However, several entrepreneurial political actors with concrete results in politics or business started to promote their strength in ‘getting things done’ (i.e. their track record). These politicians increasingly include primarily verbal references to their successful projects in their posters (see Example 8 in Appendix 1).

### *Patterns within the explored dimensions of posters*

The overview of poster characteristics across three dimensions revealed several general patterns in Slovenian poster campaigning. In general, we screened the intra-dimensional characteristics by applying the widely accepted categories of verbal vs non-verbal elements (see Dumitrescu 2010).

The informative dimension is tilted in favour of the verbal component. Hence we may acknowledge that Slovenian political actors do not fully recognise the visual value of posters as a channel of political communication. The most dissimilar group is that of the communist election posters, which demonstrate higher levels of non-verbal informative messages and much lower levels of verbal messages (see Appendix 2). These posters exhibit motives and elements typical of communist ideology. Surprisingly high levels of non-verbal elements are also present in posters of extraparliamentary parties, which communicate their issue position through the poster background and elements appended to the poster, thus trying to reduce the number of voters who are uninformed about their standpoints. Somewhat different are the posters from the incipient 1990 democratic elections, which reveal a very moderate presence of informative non-verbal messages. As a general rule, posters mainly differ along the non-verbal component, since less established parties (i.e. extraparliamentary or new) include non-verbal informative messages more frequently than more established ones.

The brand-building mode of persuasion in Slovenian posters is also slightly skewed in favour of verbal components. Verbal branding appears to be a necessity across most of the groups, while the non-verbal component is less present. Apart from communist political and election posters, which reflect low levels of primarily verbal branding, the posters of independent candidates seem to target the brand the least. For the reasons stated in the previous section, they focus primarily on their

strengths and informative messages. To a degree, a similar pattern is recognised for minor parties and 1990 transitional elections, while the most dominant parties clearly persuade voters with the promotion of their well-recognised brand verbally and non-verbally. The balance between verbal and non-verbal persuasion in terms of strengths emphasising has not been sufficiently explored to make solid conclusions regarding this dimension due to previously explained exclusion of poster slogans from the analysis.

Based on levels of the non-verbal aspect of posters (see Appendix 2), we determined that the visual facet of Slovenian posters is primarily utilised for persuasive, not informative, messages, as was theoretically anticipated. With the exception of the communist posters, which clearly stand out compared to the others, photography of a candidate is a dominant feature of non-verbal persuasion and is employed in order to promote party leadership (i.e. brand) or personal qualities of the candidate (e.g. cheerfulness, popularity with voters, courteousness, approachableness, diligence, etc.). To a high degree, Slovenian election posters in the era of political pluralism and the dominance of political marketing tools therefore build on strengths that may be grasped from their visual presence (Seidman 2008), primarily through photography. Posters from the 1990 elections indicated a transitional period between communist and non-communist campaigning in this sense, since the use of photography was less frequent and sometimes without a clear strategy. That being said, it is clear that contemporary poster campaigning in Slovenia rarely breaks the framework of visual poster design with more than a photo of the candidate or a party leader accompanied by some state and party insignias.

## Conclusion

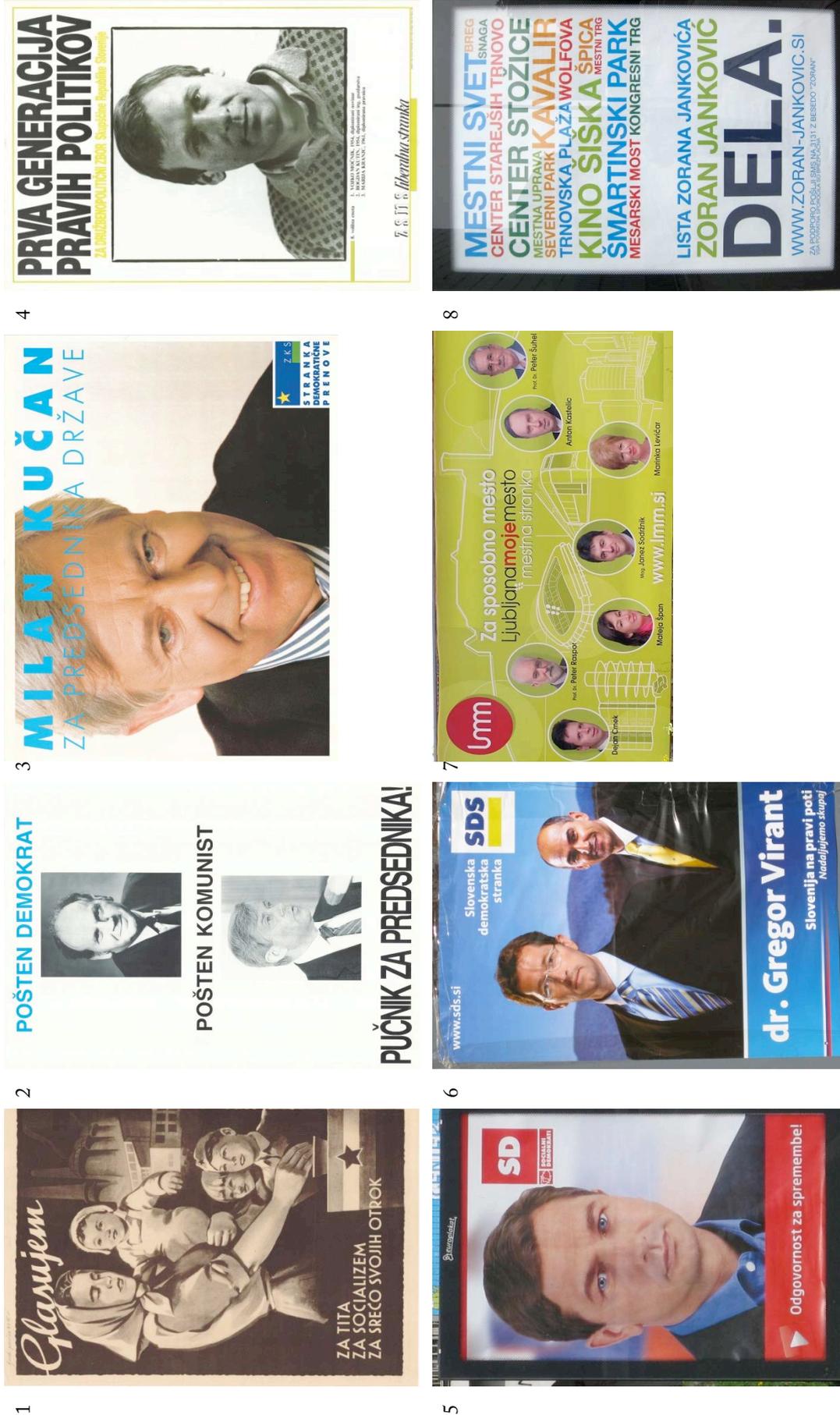
On the basis of the results of the analysis of the content of Slovenian election posters, we are able to put forward several characteristics of political actors' use of this medium. First, we have identified a clear gap between the application of posters in the communist regime and the practice of poster campaigning in a fully functioning democracy. The conditions of political pluralism changed the function of posters since the mode of persuasion during political monism clearly does not fit into the framework of a plurality of competitors for a certain office. If party branding was redundant in the former regime, it appears to be very important in poster campaigns in present-day Slovenia, particularly for political actors whose main programmatic points are well known to the majority of the electorate. With elections in 1990 serving as a time of transition from the communist poster to the liberal democratic poster, a change in strategy became evident. Second, as was already identified by others, there has been an obvious trend of personalisation of poster campaigning, which corresponds to the increased use of professionals in poster campaigns, and increasing focus on photos of political actors. Third, contrary to theoretical expectation, the posters' messages to the electorate are tilted in favour of verbal communication, which may be primarily explained by two reasons: (a) the need to create a clear departure from posters of the former regime and/or (b) the strategy of using posters as an extension of the platform, which was also the initial function of posters in traditional election campaigns. Fourth, after the 1990

elections negative poster campaigns proved unacceptable to voters since the targets of the negative campaigning ended up winning the elections with a landslide on numerous occasions. Hence, despite the sporadic attempts of parties that were rapidly trying to improve their ratings, negative campaigning proved to be absolutely unacceptable (e.g. campaigns of the Slovenian People's Party, the Slovenian Democratic Party and Zares). Overall, though identifying certain peculiarities, we confirmed that there is a clear gap between communist and liberal democratic poster campaigning that was evident along the three explored dimensions of the informative-persuasive framework.

The answer to the second assumption of this paper regarding the tendency of dominant political actors to persuasive campaigning and, on the other hand, the tendency of minor political actors to informative campaigning is affirmative as well, and also adds to the validity of the informative-persuasive framework. The posters of independent candidates and extraparliamentary parties do devote more attention to informing the electorate about themselves and their positions on key issues that became evident in their greater tendency to focus on the visualisation of programs rather than the party leader or the personal qualities of candidates. On the other hand, it appears that dominant political actors persuade voters by verbal and visual promotion of the party brand as well as visual representation of their individual personal qualities. Building campaigns on an established party brand is clearly favoured by established political parties due to the frequently questionable strengths of politicians. Nevertheless, certain examples demonstrated that building on the tangible strengths (e.g. an impressive track record) of a candidate could make a difference.

Our study provides a valuable framework for future studies of poster campaigning from both national and cross-national perspectives. The results we obtained indicate a clear distinction between communist and post-communist poster campaigning in Slovenia and present a unique exploration of the field of poster campaigning. The findings regarding the operation of Slovenian political actors proved promising; however, they should be further explored with the inclusion of poster slogans in the analysis. This could eventually lead to stronger conclusions on the rationale of Slovenian poster campaigns and improve the significance of our findings.

Appendix 1: Examples of Slovenian election posters (in historical order)



Sources: (1) Glasujem za Tita, za socializem, za srečo svojih otrok (1950); (2) Pošten demokrat (1990); (3) Bavčer (1990); (4) Vipotnik and Stojko (1990); (5) (6) (7) (8) Maksuti & Deželan (2010)

Appendix 2: Averages of three observed dimensions by groups of posters

	Mean 2004–2010	Parliamentary parties	Extraparliamentary parties	Independent candidates	Elections 1990	Communist elections	Communist political posters <sup>a</sup>	Governmental parties	Oppositional parties	New parties	Old parties
Absolute number of elements of a dimension on poster											
Informative	2,588	2,543	2,590	2,750	2,045	2,130	1,820	2,742	2,339	2,699	2,354
Persuasion branding	2,971	3,307	2,983	1,718	2,701	0,696	1,120	3,155	3,463	2,796	3,341
Persuasion strengths	1,284	1,463	0,983	0,903	1,090	1,261	0,700	1,352	1,577	1,381	1,080
Presence of at least one element of a dimension on poster (0 – not present; 1 – present)											
Presence of elements from all three dimensions	<b>0,716</b>	<b>0,759</b>	<b>0,632</b>	<b>0,637</b>	<b>0,522</b>	<b>0,522</b>	<b>0,340</b>	<b>0,725</b>	<b>0,793</b>	<b>0,726</b>	<b>0,695</b>
Informative	<b>0,966</b>	<b>0,965</b>	<b>0,974</b>	<b>0,960</b>	<b>0,761</b>	<b>0,870</b>	<b>0,920</b>	<b>0,974</b>	<b>0,956</b>	<b>0,964</b>	<b>0,969</b>
Informative non-verbal	0,281	0,239	0,444	0,282	0,104	0,696	0,400	0,305	0,172	0,358	0,119
Informative verbal	0,943	0,946	0,940	0,935	0,687	0,522	0,880	0,953	0,938	0,937	0,956
Persuasion branding	<b>0,974</b>	<b>0,998</b>	<b>0,991</b>	<b>0,871</b>	<b>0,955</b>	<b>0,565</b>	<b>0,680</b>	<b>0,996</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>0,964</b>	<b>0,996</b>
Persuasion branding non-verbal	0,632	0,930	0,863	0,435	0,657	0,522	0,540	0,867	0,996	0,798	0,903
Persuasion branding verbal	0,964	0,993	0,991	0,831	0,940	0,174	0,340	0,991	0,996	0,954	0,987
Persuasion strengths	<b>0,753</b>	<b>0,776</b>	<b>0,658</b>	<b>0,758</b>	<b>0,731</b>	<b>0,696</b>	<b>0,400</b>	<b>0,734</b>	<b>0,819</b>	<b>0,775</b>	<b>0,708</b>
Persuasion strengths non-verbal	0,743	0,770	0,624	0,758	0,701	0,652	0,400	0,725	0,815	0,766	0,695
Persuasion strengths verbal	0,081	0,096	0,077	0,032	0,075	0,043	0,000	0,069	0,123	0,088	0,066

<sup>a</sup> Posters prepared for various sociopolitical organisations, holidays, etc., that promoted the communist system and its ideology

## Notes

1. The study was conducted as part of the basic scientific project 'Capital of election campaigns and democratic evolutions of state and society' (JP-2289) funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.
2. Supported by their advertising research conclusions, Mueller and Stratmann (1994, p. 60) put forward the notion that the probability of electoral success may be a function of the campaign messages to which the voter has been exposed. In cases of insufficiently informed voters, the electoral choice may be consequently taken on the basis of familiarity (Stokes & Miller 1962).
3. Photos, colours, ideological and political symbols, etc.
4. Shea (1996, pp. 210–11) found that billboard and yard sign campaigning in the US predominantly focuses on name recognition.
5. Researchers recognise other functions of election posters as well. For example, Fourie (2008) identifies the influence of posters on democratic values since a society's democratic or undemocratic discourse is well reflected in posters.
6. E.g. the use of Soviet political posters as a tool of mass communication was determined by state policy (Aulich & Sylvestrová 1999; Lincoln 1976).
7. Visual and verbal rhetoric was used with the intention of instilling and consolidating the concept of 'peopleness' to display 'classness' as the engine of struggle and historical progress and to strengthen awareness of 'partyness' in order to identify people with the party and its aims (Aulich & Sylvestrová 1999, p. 8).
8. A clear example of the importance of the poster as a medium of dissent is the so-called 'poster affair', in which members of the design group New Collectivism designed a poster for an important communist holiday (Day of Youth). They employed Richard Klein's famous Nazi iconography, thus mocking the regime's decaying character and values (Krečič et al. 2009).
9. On the typology of election campaigns, see, for example, Norris (2002); Farrell & Web (2000); Schmitt-Beck & Farrell (2002).
10. We included election posters from the 2004 and 2009 elections to the European Parliament, 2008 elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, and 2006 and 2010 elections of mayors and representatives to municipal councils.
11. Contrary to the criteria for election posters, the selection of political posters encompassed the posters prepared for congresses of the Communist Party, national holidays, and events of sociopolitical organisations.
12. Accessible at <http://www.dlib.si/v2/Browse.aspx?type=plakati>. Last accessed on 15 July 2011.
13. Scores on intra- and inter-coder reliability for each selected variable surpassed the 0.7 value of the Klippendorf alpha reliability measure.
14. The verbal dimension is focused on elements written on the poster (e.g. name of the candidate and party, party slogan, issue position, contextual information), while the non-verbal part concentrates on photography, background elements and the symbols pinned to a poster.

15. The Slovenian political system is very party-centric and prevents successful campaigns of independent candidates. Successful independent candidatures are *de facto*, feasible only at the local level and in presidential races.
16. We should note that the analysis of slogans written on posters was not performed.

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