Election Posters as a Medium of Political Communication in Slovenia: An Informative or Persuasive Tool?

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Posters as election campaign tool

- Though being a traditional campaign tool, still one of the dominant tools of political campaigning (Plasser, 2009)

- A visual mean of communicating political messages to a large audience that is directly controlled by the political actors

- Low-tech, inexpensive, cost-effective medium with its impact stemming from accessibility, inescapability, relative permanence and the dominance of the visual over verbal

- Informative, persuasive and mobilising function (Seidman, 2008)

- Good source for studying the patterns of political competition
Theoretical background

- study based on Mueller and Stratmann's (1994) informative-persuasive framework
- the campaign approaches aimed at informing the voters about candidates' positions on certain issues and persuading the voters to vote for them independent of the candidate's position on the issue
- contemporary campaigns increasingly employ persuasive campaigning and political actors vary in their approaches of persuasion:
  - "brand building and recognition"
  - "strengths emphasising"
- posters appear to be suitable for persuasive campaigning due to characteristics of the tool (Cheles, 2011)
Poster propaganda and its impact on the post-communist polity

- propaganda as a tool of persuasion in order to mould opinions and viewpoints of individuals

- posters were an important part of the propaganda machinery due to their technological, persuasive and disseminative characteristics

- in former Yugoslavia, posters were a part of activities of agitprops in order to take care of ideological elevation of the party staff and politically "educate" citizens

- posters were designed with a common denominator in persuasion (Predan et al., 2006)

- the communist propaganda determined the post-communist era primarily in terms of strong discontinuity in poster campaigning

- posters have remained an extensive feature of the post-communist era despite the vast structural differences between parties in the newly emerged regimes
Argument of the paper

Slovenian poster campaigning reflects patterns of poster campaigning characteristic for liberal democracies despite its short tradition with organizing free and fair elections and the intensive propaganda period that preceded them.

Dominant political actors employ more persuasive poster campaigning while less established ones devote more attention to informative activities.
Data and methodology

- performed a content analysis based on a prepared codebook consisting of 62 theoretically determined variables (verbal and non-verbal) of a set of 841 posters
  
  - 701 election posters from local, national and European elections between 2004 and 2010; 67 election posters from 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 posters from the 1974-1989 SFRY period

- a total of 40 variables measuring explored dimensions

- purposive sampling combined with the "mining" of archives for the posters from the communist
Results

- vast dissimilarities between poster campaigning in the communist era and post-communist era confirm different nature of poster campaigning
- posters from the incipient democratic elections in 1990 reflect similar levels of explored dimensions to communist posters
- higher levels of explored dimensions for "better-off" parties
- higher levels of the informative dimension for new parties and independent candidates
- the highest levels of "branding" is identified for major parties
- independent candidates do not target branding
- "strengths emphasising" is less present in Slovenian poster campaigns
- Extraparliamentary parties demonstrate the lowest levels of "strengths emphasising", while dominant the highest
Conclusion

- poster campaigning is tilted in favour of verbal component
- Branding seems to be the most important aspect of poster campaigns for major parties
- trend of personalisation of posters visible
- posters tilted in favour of verbal component

Slovenian post-communist poster campaigning reflects patterns different for communist poster campaigning and in consonance with campaigning identified for other established liberal democracies.

Dominant political actors employ more persuasive poster campaigning and less established devote more attention to informative activities.