



**DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND
COMMUNICATION**

HOW DOES THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNS INFLUENCE HOW ELECTION BILLBOARDS LOOK?

Content Analysis of a Decade of Slovak Election Billboards

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Abstract

The concept of professionalisation is frequently assessed by examining the extent to which political parties utilise techniques such as polls, focus groups and then employ expertise in their communication strategies. However, more is needed to know about professionalisation's effects on campaigns' outputs. Therefore, this work uses a different approach and analyses the consequences of professionalisation for the content of the campaign materials. As there are many types of campaign materials, campaign posters are selected as an object of study. There is significantly less literature studying post-communistic democratic countries in Eastern Europe. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Slovak first-order elections, specifically elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. As the most important format of posters in Slovakia are billboards, this study focuses on them solely.

This thesis has one research question: How does the professionalisation of election campaigns in Slovakia influence the way election billboards look, do they indicate rising professionalisation and are there any other visual features that develop over time? Five hypotheses were developed to answer these research question. In order to test hypotheses, quantitative content analysis was conducted on 483 billboards from 4 different elections that happened within the last decade (2010, 2012, 2016, 2020). As there was no database of Slovak election materials, own codebook and dataset were created.

Results of the analysis show that there is rising professionalisation of campaign communication in Slovakia. Slovak election billboards became more personalised as a result of professionalisation. They display fewer symbols of ideology and they refer to ideology less. Instead of ideology, they tend to refer to policy more often. They display their logos more often and their encouragement to come and vote is less frequent. These results are even more significant among parties with bigger budgets and better-established parties. This adds to systematic evidence that connects these characteristics with professionalisation.

The study also finds a systematic decrease in formal attire and neutral facial expression. Instead, politicians wear less formal clothes and tend to smile more often. These findings

require an investigation into whether they are connected with professionalisation or are the results of other processes.

This study is important mainly because its results add to the small body of literature that deals with the question of how the professionalisation of election campaigns influences the way election materials look. It also tests previous theories in a different media system and on a slightly different type of political poster.

Keywords: professionalisation, elections, poster, billboard, campaign, political marketing, Slovakia, Eastern Europe

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1. Introduction

This study aims to find out how campaign professionals influence the way campaign materials look. Firstly it requires a choice of the country of study, campaign material type and methods of analysis. The literature review discovered that there is an insufficient amount of studies that cover Eastern Europe. Therefore Slovakia was selected as the country of study.

Imagine that you are travelling by train or car. Sooner or later, in most parts of the world, you will come across the billboard. Billboards are a very popular tool of political communication in Slovakia. Huge resources are spent on outdoor advertisements that are seen just for a few moments when voters are passing by. Billboards are used as means of campaign communication in other countries of the former Eastern bloc as well as in Western countries like Germany, France or the UK. Therefore the billboard is selected as a campaign material that will be studied.

This thesis started with the question “How does the professionalisation of election campaigns influence how election materials look?” The aim of the thesis is to address how professionalisation actually influences the design and content of campaign materials. It was the further literature review that narrowed down this thesis to two one question: How does the professionalisation of election campaigns in Slovakia influence the way election billboards look, do they indicate rising professionalisation and are there any other visual features that develop over time?

The fundament of this study consists of the theory and methodology of Vliegthart's (2012) study and the studies that followed him – Gattermann & Vliegthart (2019) and Venema & Steffan (2020). In order to execute a successful study, a sufficient database that would allow studying the collected materials is required. As there was no database of Slovak election billboards, the author of this thesis collected nearly 500 billboards and created a database that was analysed and coded into the dataset. Data were then analysed and tested for hypotheses. The main characteristics that are followed in the analysis are the occurrence of the party logo and call to vote, the occurrence of the party leader's image and reference to him in the text, the occurrence of ideology and policy in text and image and negativity.

This thesis answers how professionalisation looks on Slovak election billboards, connects findings with previous research and outlines possible future research.

2. Background

From the point of physics, it is debatable whether the time is real. Time is rather a psychological and social construct. For our minds, this endless string accompanies all processes of human history, including the professionalisation of political communication. Thanks to time, Vliegenthart (2012), Venema and Steffan (2020), and others could study the professionalisation of campaign posters. The morphology of the word “professionalisation” may lead us to think about it as a process. This guide towards the misjudgement that professionalisation as a subfield faces. Campaign professionalisation is sometimes wrongly confused with progress towards more advanced campaigning methods or improving campaign communication. Campaign professionalisation is rather a combination of material practices and techniques with the aim to maximise electoral goals in a changing political and media environment (Tenscher & Mykkänen, 2014; Negrine & Lilleker, 2002). This means that Vliegenthart (2012) and other authors used timelines in their studies differently. They tracked the changes in the occurrence of factors specific to professionalisation. Those factors are de-ideologization, personalisation and a rise in negativity (Vliegenthart, 2012; p. 137-138)

Holtz-Bacha (2002) defines professionalisation similarly. In her article, she describes professionalisation as a concept that better encompasses the process of change that can be observed in electoral communication. Professionalisation is regarded as a process by which the political actors adapt their strategies to changes in society, the political system, and the media system (Holtz-Bacha, 2002, p. 23). Despite describing it as the “process of change,” Holtz-Bacha (2002) analysed only one case - the SPD campaign in 1998. Considering existing research, the professionalisation of election campaigns offers multiple research approaches. It may be studied with a longitudinal approach as well as with a case study approach.

Another difference in campaign professionalisation research lies in the subject of study. Some studies, like the above-mentioned Vliegenthart (2012), dealt solely with campaign material. The professionalisation was assessed via indicators and their change over time. Other studies were aimed at campaign professionals solely, e.g. Waismel-Manor (2011). The last and smallest group of studies is the one which studies campaign material with regard to campaign professionals, e.g. Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2020). This small number of studies covering the

input and output sides of campaign professionalisation represents the research gap this thesis initially wanted to cover. The campaign professionals are the core part of the professionalisation; therefore, I believe they may bring important insights. However, the 2023 snap elections in Slovakia and the scope available for this thesis limited my work to the visual analysis of election billboards.

Most of the studies on campaign professionalisation and its impact on campaign materials are based in countries that Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorise as countries with a democratic corporatist media model. Countries that were categorised to have democratic corporative media and politics models are, for example, Germany, Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 68). To name some of the studies from my literature review Vliegenthart (2012) studied the professionalisation of election posters in the Netherlands; Gattermann and Vliegenthart (2019) studied European parliamentary election posters in the Netherlands and Italy; Venema and Steffan (2020) studied election posters in Germany, Grussel and Nord studied professionalisation and digitalisation of election campaigns in Sweden. This focus of research on a specific group of countries represents another gap in research that this thesis would like to tackle. Hallin and Mancini's Three media and politics models are an old tool for classification. Despite having some disadvantages in classification, it is still a functional and useful tool for general classification. In the follow-up to their book (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Hallin & Mancini et al. (2012) compared media systems beyond the Western World. Two chapters of the book are devoted to democratic Eastern European countries. One to Poland (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2011, pp. 26-50) and one to the Baltic states (Balčytienė, 2011, pp. 51-71). Both articles concluded that all four countries tend to have polarised pluralist (Mediterranean) models mixed with other models (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2011, p. 49; Balčytienė, 2011, pp. 68-69). Countries from the former eastern block are rarely the subject of election campaign research. Even though the region has more than 150 million inhabitants and regular democratic elections that are accompanied by election campaigns. This region is globally important for social, economic and security reasons.

Nevertheless, why is this region rarely a subject of research? Firstly, it is still a less developed academic sphere in this region that needs to evolve and bring the attention of the broader professional public. Secondly, there are still cultural differences caused by years of life under

totalitarian regimes. These differences have been influencing today's domestic politics of Eastern European countries. Therefore, these countries cannot be considered to have the same attributes as Western European countries. However, over half of the 20th century changed only some of the cultural similarities and bonds created hundreds of years before. Lastly, human nature is the same all around the world. This means there will be certain similar or identical attributes of political campaigning. However, what are the differences, and what are the implications of those differences?

The Slovak Republic is selected as a country of study for this thesis. Slovakia has a multi-party system. This political system is typical for most countries where similar studies have been carried out. This plays in favour of the successful realisation of this study. Holtz-Bacha and Johansson (2016) have found that a multi-party system has a low presence of negative campaigning. This study may confirm or indicate if this does or does not also apply to Slovakia. From the broader perspective, the findings of this study may indicate traits that may also be present and tested in other countries of the former Eastern Block. The Slovak media system can be described as a polarised pluralist media system, which is also typical for the region of former Eastern Block countries (Herrero, Humprecht & et al., 2017, pp. 4809-4810). As democracy in Slovakia was re-established in 1990, my findings can also contribute to the research on establishing democracies. This study may give us better insight into how the professionalisation of election posters looks in the region and from a global perspective.

Previous research found that the bigger parties are more professionalised. This is because they have more resources for campaigning and staff (Tenscher & Mykkänen, 2014, p. 38). However, this research was conducted in countries that we may consider to have democratic corporatist media models with stable parties and high citizen trust. Is this also a case of countries with more of a polarised pluralist model? For countries with relatively low trust in political parties? Is it also true in Slovakia that the biggest political parties are the most professionalised? Are better-established parties more professionalised in election campaigns? This points my problematisation towards another attribute of campaign professionalisation research. To answer these questions, different degrees of professionalisation should be distinguished. The size of the party (or resources) is one factor that influences the appearance of professionalisation of the election campaign. Another thing

that influences the degree of professionalisation is the country's specific social and political structure and processes (Negrine, Holtz-Bacha & Papathanassopoulos, 2007 a), p. 10, p. 28). This means that the degree of professionalisation may differ. Something considered a normal level of campaign professionalisation in Germany may be the highest level of professionalisation in Slovakia, or vice versa. However, I assume that the former is more plausible than the latter.

This leads to another issue related to the degree of professionalisation. How does one determine which practices or processes are more or less professional than the other? In looking at a long period of change, such issues reoccur and force us to question our interpretations of change within political parties and how they interface with the electorate (Negrine, 2007 b), p. 50). One solution for this is to assess the degree of professionalisation according to the number of tools and professionals used in the campaign with respect to the size of the party and its budget. However, further assessment may be done by deeper examination of campaign professionals, their education and the advancement and progressivity of the tools they used.

Lastly to the object of study. Posters have been used as a way of communication for millennia. Evidence of the use of posters for commerce and politics stretches as far as the era of the roman empire. The real boom of posters came at the end of the nineteenth century when the lithographic process advanced and printing costs went down (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2016, pp. 1-3). The spreading of literacy also enhanced this boom, and more and more people could absorb the textual part of posters.

The rise in the popularity of posters happened in both commercial and public sectors. It took a short time while the first laws on posters were introduced and the first companies that specialised in them and what we would nowadays call PR or marketing companies emerged. Posters gained more popularity during World War I. when they were used for recruiting conscripts. To name just one example for all, I can mention Lord Kitchener, pointing his finger directly towards the observer, saying, "Britons. [Lord Kitchener] wants you. Join your country's army! God save the King." (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2016, p. 3) As in the war, the posters played an important role in every regime and revolution. They were important in

Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Nazi regime in Germany, communist China but also for the presidential election in the United States (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2016, pp. 3-7).

One can conclude that posters have played their relevant role around the world regardless of the regime. The same without surprises applies to Eastern Europe. Socialist totalitarian regimes used posters for communication, and people were used as anywhere else to receive information from their politicians via this medium. With the fall of the iron curtain, the democratic election came to this part of the world and they brought election campaigns with them. Posters of all shapes and sizes became everyday weapons in the political arena, and as “no other medium symbolises election campaigning as well as the poster” (Lessinger et al., 2003, p. 216 in Geise & Vigsø, 2017, p. 34).

In this thesis, I am analysing one certain kind of political poster - billboards. These maximised posters flood the country before the election. In my thesis interest how the professionalisation of political communication influences how billboards look.

Election campaigning represents a huge industry that influences the lives of billions of people all around the globe. In the 2020 US federal elections solely, candidates spent more than 14 billion dollars on campaigning. It is campaign professionals who are responsible for campaigns in most cases. This creates a public and academic need for studying their activities and their effects on campaigns and society.

The problematisation above leads towards the research question of this thesis. Firstly, it would be good for the broader picture of the analysis to assess the general degree of the professionalisation of election campaigning in Slovakia. Because there is little evidence of what are the traces of consequences of the professionalisation of campaign communication in campaign material this research question grapples with this issue as well. Based on the existing theory, methods and results of my analysis, this thesis can give insights into the trends of professionalisation of campaign communication in Slovakia.

RQ: How does the professionalisation of election campaigns in Slovakia influence the way election billboards look, do they indicate rising professionalisation and are there any other visual features that develop over time?

3. Theory

Nature is constantly changing and humankind and our society as parts of nature are also changing. Vliegenthart (2012) stated that political communication in Western democracies has fundamentally changed since the Second World War (Ift 2012, p. 135). I want to broaden his statement. Political communication has also undergone fundamental changes in the former Eastern Block countries. Without a doubt, the objectives of this communication were diametrically different. It has to be also noted that the progress was much more significant in the West thanks to the freedom of information, education and business. After the fall of the iron curtain, the newly established democracies jumped on the running train of political campaigning and started adaptation to changes brought by democracy. The processes of professionalisation of politics and journalism with the technological developments and market changes led to a new way politics are covered and, consequently, how elections are led (Vliegenthart, 2012, pp. 135-136).

Despite the emergence of newer campaigning tools like TV spots, online spots and other online tools, campaign posters and especially billboards keep a significant role as a visual campaigning tool in Slovak election campaigns. Similarly, as in Germany or some European countries, parties face stricter televised advertising regulations than in the US (Venema & Stefan, 2020, p. 98).

3.1 Theory of Professionalisation of political communication

The decision-making process behind the voting of the people fundamentally changed in the past 100 years. Therefore the campaigning changed as well. It was until the 60s that many of the Western societies had strong cleavages that divided their electorates into groups with different political and ideological preferences with low electoral volatility. At that time, political parties set the agenda and the media and public followed (Lijphart, 2012, p. 36). The main objective of the election campaign at that time was to persuade people to turn out to vote. In this era, the primary source of mass media communication was still newspapers, which were still partisan in some countries. The radio played a more minor role (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 137).

At the turn of the 60s and 70s, Western societies went through a change in the organisation of the political processes that was caused to a large extent by the rise of television and the disappearance of cleavages. The secularisation with modernisation brought a change in voting behaviour. Mass membership parties, as described by Sartori (1976), came to an end. Electoral volatility increased and election campaigns became more important (Krouwel, 2003, p. 24). The rise of television also changed the requirements for political candidates. Good physical appearance became fundamental for impressing the voters. The first and one of the most notable examples is the 1960 presidential debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, where the opinions on who won the debate differed between those who listened to the radio and those who watched TV. The rise of the popularity and importance of communication professionals in politics also characterises this period. These advances bring several changes that are important for this thesis. The communication became more personalised and the leader became more important in the campaign; parties focused less on ideology and attacks on other parties and candidates, and so-called negativity became more prevalent (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p. 215). The arrival of the Internet intensified the processes mentioned above. Online means of communication allow politicians and their teams to bypass journalists and communicate with voters directly. Such direct communication will be more personalised as a consequence of the characteristics of online media. To attract even more attention and to provide denser information, a rise in negativity and a decrease in ideology are expected as well (Vliegenthart 's 2012, p. 138)

Technological progress played an essential role in the socio-political processes of the 20th and 21st centuries. This significance of technology leads to the misunderstanding of the concept of professionalisation. Professionalisation is often mistaken for digitalisation or other processes. These processes deal with some sort of progress and development. So, what do we mean by professionalisation? The concept of professionalisation is an entry point into the analysis of change in political communication. It captures the process of adaptation to changes in a media system.

From a broader perspective, professionalisation can also be treated as a concept that allows examining issues beyond electoral political communication. Issues such as centralisation of

communication or communication strategies (Davies, 2002; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994 in Negrine et al., 2007a, p. 11) or relationships between political parties, candidates, media, public and other actors (Negrine et al., 2007a, pp. 11–12)

To get a little bit deeper, professionalisation signifies a transformative process, prevalent not only in politics and communication but also in other domains. This process entails a conscious or implicit effort to optimise resource allocation and skill utilisation for the achievement of desired objectives, regardless of their nature. In the realm of political communication, professionalisation suggests several key aspects:

- It implies the establishment of a more rational and efficient organisational structure and practices. This can be the utilisation of communication tools, campaign strategies (such as utilisation of polling data and targeted voter outreach), reorganisation within political parties (e.g., centralising communication coordination), and even the dynamics of media-politics relations (e.g., techniques for managing news coverage) (ibid., pp. 27-28).
- It suggests an ongoing process that unfolds within societies undergoing modernisation and secularisation. It underscores the emergence of various sources of information and reduces dependence on a single source for information or persuasion across various domains.
- It has diverse reasons for its occurrence. In the context of political parties, these reasons may include adapting to a changing and non-aligned electorate, as well as the need to persuade and mobilise them. This evolution may also be linked to technological advancements, such as the use of television or internet technologies, or broader developments in the scientific field.
- It signifies the emergence and growth of specialised skills and expertise employed in persuading and mobilising individuals as citizens, voters, and consumers (ibid., pp. 11-12)

The professionalisation of political communication is a shift from traditional election campaigning methods to more contemporary approaches. Furthermore, it is deeply intertwined with media developments. The purpose of media is not to be just a channel of

communication between politics and the public. They actively shape politics. Political leaders and communicators acknowledge the media's influence and anticipate how messages will be selected and processed. (ibid., p.12)

So how do we study the professionalisation of political communication in regard to election posters? Changes in political communication can be observed. From these observations, patterns and relationships can be determined. Therefore explicit expectations can be formulated regarding the alteration of the content and features of campaign posters (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 137). Results of Vliegenthart's (2012) analysis indicate transformations in the use of visual elements with an increased use of the party logo, an increasing presence and prominence of the party leader, and a decreasing focus on ideology and visual stereotypes, while the textual elements revealed nearly no trends (Vliegenthart 2012 in Geise & Vigsø, 2017, p. 43)

3.1.1 What to track? Previous findings on relationships between professionalisation and analysed factors.

In order to assess and comprehend the results of the analysis, further explanation of the theory behind the tracked factors is needed. One of the definitions of the professionalisation of campaign communications is to track the campaign professionals. The number of professionals employed, their qualifications, sophistication of methods etc. This approach pushes the research towards qualitative research. The limitation of such research is its bigger focus on specific cases rather than the overall state of the field. This thesis wanted to bridge this gap with mixed methods but this was not attainable due to the scope of the work and time scarcity caused by the upcoming snap elections in Slovakia. The solution to conducting a quantitative study on how the professionalisation of campaign communication influences the appearance of election billboards can be found in previous research that engaged with analogous challenges.

Vliegenthart (2012) constructed hypotheses regarding the anticipated evolution of campaign posters, conceptualising them as linear progressions that extend throughout the entire research duration. Therefore, I also anticipate that the degree of professionalisation will

steadily rise over time. This increasing professionalisation is expected to manifest in multiple ways.

Among them, there are two distinct ways outlined by Farrell and Wortmann (1987). Firstly, in the growing alignment between images and written text concerning their content and campaign poster's focus, and secondly, in the enhanced uniformity of design, particularly in the utilisation of the party logo (*ibid.*, p.314). The postmodern era brought significant changes. Among them are changes in voting behaviour and media coverage. Voters started to exhibit increasing volatility and party identification decreased. This led voters to put greater emphasis on particular campaign issues and fleeting aspects like the image of leaders and the party logo. Simultaneously, media coverage is amplifying the significance of party leaders' personalities and the election campaigns' competitive dynamics. The authors found that the answer of campaign professionals to these changes is an increase in political marketing and emphasis on more effective use of party symbols and the image of the party leader (Farrell & Wortmann, 1987, pp.313-316).

A stronger connection of professionalisation and personalisation was found by Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans (2011). A new quality of the link between political actors, institutions and the mass media was created by the professionalisation of politics. This significantly affected the way politics are covered in the media (*ibid.*, p.92). The authors were able to assess that due to the increased use of campaign professionals the over-time tendency of party communication and media coverage became more personalised, negative and conflict-focused (*ibid.*, p. 93).

Based on these and other previous findings, Vliegthart (2012) and, Gattermann & Vliegthart (2019) and Venema & Steffan (2020) and consequently, I formulated hypotheses to track the appearance and prominence of party logos and party leaders.

As mentioned above political development brought an increase in voter volatility and party identification decreased. This brought a change in party motivation during campaigning. It is no longer aimed to persuade your party voters to turn out but to persuade swing voters. Vliegthart (2012,) explains that initially there was high use of "call to vote" and over time this call decreased (*ibid.*, p. 139). However, I miss more specific reasoning of the connection

between decreasing call to vote and professionalisation. I found the theoretical explanation by Slovak sociologist and former prime minister Iveta Radičová. She describes that parties are less and less interested in mobilising voters because calls to vote may mobilise other voters as well. Higher voter turnout is not just bad in the sense that the other party gets plus one vote but your party gets a smaller proportion or in other words, you are losing your share of voters. As a result, campaign professionals rather focus on the persuasion of undecided voters without calling anyone to “come and vote” (Radičová & Závodský, 2023). This fits the definition of professionalisation in the sense of adjustment of campaign professionals and using communication tools to respond to ongoing societal changes. Therefore I will also track the development of the use of call to votes on campaign billboards.

Professionalisation also brought changes in the decreased use of ideology references. Stamper & Brants (2011) conducted a qualitative analysis of politicians of different political denominations and ages from the UK and Netherlands. They studied how professionalisation influenced communication and media coverage and how it influenced them personally (ibid.,p.112). They found out that since half of the 1960s, politics began to “de-confessionalize” and “de-ideologize”. The parties started to refer to ideology and religion less (ibid. pp.114-115). In my analysis, same as in Vliegthart (2012) and Venema and Steffan (2020), I will consider the reference to religion as a reference to ideology.

The shift away from ideology due to professionalisation was also described by Gibson and Römmele (2009). Their “Measuring the professionalisation of political campaigning” discusses different ways of what and how to measure when it comes to the professionalisation of campaign communication. In their research overview, they found that the more professionalised parties are less ideologised and parties are becoming more professionalised over time. Thus the ideology decreases (ibid.pp.284-284).

But what exchanged ideology? The answer is policy and negativity (Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011, p.99). With decreasing ideology, the policy stances of the parties became blurred. Therefore parties have to make more effort and use more sophisticated methods to explain their policy stances on matters (Negrine et. al. 2007, p.99).

In his paper, Vliegenthart (2012) ends with open encouragement for future research. His analysis of campaign posters only focused on those elements that were considered relevant in the light of the discussion of the professionalisation of political communication. A more in-depth analysis can help pinpoint variations among political parties and provide insights into the underlying strategies guiding the creation of these posters (ibid., p.148). This analysis intended to connect the findings on other analysed factors with outputs from campaign professionals. Therefore the findings are limited but still worth considering.

There are multiple studies on other visual factors of posters. For example, there is research that studied the visual appearance of politicians displayed on the posters. For instance, Johansson & Vigsø (2020) researched Swedish politicians' visual rhetoric and found that over time, the politicians started to smile more. They attributed this shift in a visual presentation to the personalisation and intimisation of politics primarily brought by the emergence of television. They stated that it is also likely that a growing scepticism towards authorities and the push for greater societal equality have played important roles in this process. Their research shows signs of similar developments in other countries and suggests further research (Bengt Johansson & Orla Vigsø, 2020, pp. 87-88). The link with intimisation and personalisation may be relevant for professionalisation, therefore I intend to examine its development.

Another feature that is connected with intimisation and personalisation is outfit of the politicians. Carlson & Håkansson (2022) studied smiling politicians and their clothing. The research focused at the 2019 European election. Carlson & Håkansson (2022) analysed posters and social media content (web cards and images). The authors measured levels of visual personalisation and found differences in visual styles in different regions of Europe, genders and ideological leaning of the parties (Carlson & Håkansson, 2022, pp. 77-79). Therefore I will also look into the development of outfits used for posters.

Lastly, I will analyse the hard data. The length of the text, types of word structures, number of people on billboards, colours and the display of politicians' bodies. In this way I'll be able to track and assess if there is significant development of one of those factors.

3.2 Aims, research question and hypotheses

This thesis has several aims. The first one is to test how the professionalisation of political communication influences how election materials, in my case maximised posters or billboards look. The second aim is to examine if there are other features of billboards developing over time. The third aim is to test methods used to analyse the professionalisation of election posters outside the previously tested settings. The fourth aim is to test the existing theory that had focused on “normal” size posters on the maximised posters. The thesis aims to answer the previously mentioned research question:

RQ1: How does the professionalisation of election campaigns in Slovakia influence the way election billboards look, do they indicate rising professionalisation and are there any other visual features that develop over time?

To answer the research question, I use the hypotheses borrowed from Vliegenthart (2012) and Gattermann & Vliegenthart (2019). According to Vliegenthart 's (2012, pp. 138-140) findings, various traits can be used to measure the degree of professionalisation of election posters. He anticipates that these traits will evolve over time. Or in other words, parties will be more professionalised. These traits comprise increasing consistency in the design of the posters, fewer explicit calls to vote, increased personalisation, a shift from abstract political values and ideology towards concrete policy issues, and more negative references.

The party logo is one of the key visual features of the election poster that indicates professionalisation (Vliegenthart, 2012). Parties mainly display their logo on posters to imprint it on a voter's memory (Willnat et al. in Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2016, p. 183). As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis the rise in the occurrence of party logos is an indicator of professionalisation (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 139; Gattermann & Vliegenthart, 2019, pp. 766–767). Based on previous research, I use the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Over time, parties' logos are likely to appear more often.

As mentioned before, the aim of party communication changed over the years. In the early years, campaigns aimed to motivate people to come and vote. This aim changed over time and now parties target swing voters. Therefore the second hypothesis expects a decrease in the explicit call to vote. (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 139).

Hypothesis 2: Over time, the presence of explicit calls to go and vote on campaign posters decreases.

The third hypothesis focuses on another indicator of professionalisation and that is personalisation. Personalisation can be most concisely defined as a change or a shift of attention from a political party to a political leader. The relationship between professionalisation and personalisation is in the processes brought by the extensive use of campaign professionals and in the shift from mass parties to catch-all (Vliegenthart et al., 2011, p. 94). In other words, the face works similarly to the party logo. It is a tool for imprinting that brings recognition. The rise of personalisation can be observed in the increase in the use of the party leader's image, the increase of mention, and his prominence in the poster. Based on theory and previous research, I set the following sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: Over time, the use of pictures of political leaders in campaign posters increases.

Hypothesis 3b: Over time, the mentioning of political leaders in the texts on campaign posters increases.

The process of professionalisation is also connected with deideologization. Parties are changing direction and focus. People are not that interested in abstract ideologies like communism or fascism. People want concrete policies. Campaign professionals know that. Therefore I expect that this shift will be reflected in the image and the text.

Hypothesis 4a: Over time, the number of images that refer to ideology and abstract values decreases at the expense of images that refer to concrete policy issues.

Hypothesis 4b: Over time, the number of in-text references to ideology and abstract values decreases at the expense of in-text references to concrete policy issues.

As the political landscape and society were changing in light of new technology and the implementation of new processes and knowledge into campaigning, one phenomenon started to rise – negative campaigning. The most straightforward logic behind negativity is that an attacker will gain voters after the attack, either undecided voters or those in favour of the target if the target is a politician. Vliegenthart (2012, p. 147) expected a rise in negativity but found none. Hansen & Pedersen (2008) found low levels of negativity in the multi-party system. However, the settings in the post soviet block may differ because the society has a low level of trust in politicians, I expect this may be misused in the campaign. Therefore I will use the original hypothesis of Vliegenthart (2012)

Hypothesis 5: Over time, the level of negative references to political opponents increases.

3.3 The Slovak Case

The Slovak Republic is a small country in Central Europe with a population of around 5,5 million. Slovakia is a parliamentary democratic republic with a multi-party system. The formal head of state is a president who has very limited powers. The Slovak political system is unicameral. The parliament is called National Council and has 150 members. MPs are elected for four years, voted directly by the population and selected based on proportional representation and an open list system. People may vote for candidates who belong to a specific political party. If the respective candidate receives the required number of preferential votes, he/she is elected to the parliament. Since the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993, 8 elections have taken place with eight parties making it into parliament on average.

The most significant cleavage in Slovakia is nationality. Slovakia is a multiethnic country with big Hungarian and Roma communities. However, politically relevant are just the Hungarian political parties. Hungarians are the only community that has its own schools. Other institutions are used regardless of affiliation. The major religion in Slovakia is Catholicism (55,7%), followed by Protestantism (5,2%), Greek Orthodox (4%) and other religions are

represented just marginally. 23% of the population is unaffiliated. Religious affiliation still plays a role in party selection among some voters.

Studies show that voting behaviour in Slovakia is volatile. Slovakia has had very high volatility in all elections. Exit polls show that individual volatility is higher with every election (Gyárfášová et al., 2017; Gyárfášová & Slosiarik, 2020).

Posters are widely used in Slovak elections. Every election, streets and motorways are flooded with posters from which billboards stand out the most. It would be useful to know the exact number of them. However, there is no data or estimate of the number of billboards in Slovakia. We know that in Bratislava region, the most densely populated region of Slovakia, which has 2000 square kilometres and roughly 720 000 inhabitants, there are about 10 000 billboards. This means that, on average, there are five billboards per square kilometre or one billboard for 72 people in the Bratislava region. Therefore the study of this particular means of political communication is relevant.

4. Methodology

4.1 Methods of Content Analysis

Standardised content analysis is considered the key tool of communication analysis and is often used for analysing election posters. Its popularity comes from analytical logic that can be easily described. Content analysis may capture and enumerate textual and visual messages into analysable data. It reduces complexity by highlighting and aggregating central patterns and structures of content from the overall corpus of election posters. The depth of the analysis is mainly obtained through comparative content analysis, such as content analysis of election posters across different countries or, in my case, times and parties. Implementing content analysis often requires the researcher to understand the communicator, the recipient, and the historical, political and social context (Geise & Vigsø, 2017, p. 42). This was also the case with this thesis and it required the knowledge and expertise that I gained during

my undergraduate studies and during writing my bachelor's thesis on a topic of Slovak political parties in the election.

I build my methodology mainly on the research of Rens Vliegenthart (2012), who conducted a standardised, longitudinal analysis of textual and visual elements on Dutch election posters from 1946 to 2006. In his analyses, he examined 225 posters in 19 elections. Vliegenthart (2012) studied the professionalisation of election posters, and his paper gave a more narrow subject for this thesis. His studies (Vliegenthart, 2012; Gattermann & Vliegenthart, 2019) also gave impulse to Venema & Steffan (2020). All the papers mentioned above focused on overtime changes in the prominence of the party leader and party logos and references to specific political issues and ideology. The codebook developed by Vliegenthart (2012) is focused mainly on structural features rather than specific information or meaning (Geise & Vigsø, 2017, p. 43).

However, to assess these features, the meaning or the content that was the main objective of Venema & Steffan (2020) is required. The authors enriched their analysis with the political history of Germany. This “context matters” method was also used during the analysis of this thesis. It was essential for assessing negativity towards other politicians or assessing ideology. To assess negativity, context is needed. For example, when the politicians were criticising or making fun of gorillas, they were not talking about animals. The Gorilla is a cover name for the operation of the Slovak Intelligence Service when they wiretapped and bugged the flat where allegedly the second richest person in Slovakia was meeting politicians from the governing coalition and the opposition trying to bribe or influence them.¹ The tapes were stolen and leaked. With ideology, the case is different. And it is one particular ideology that is especially problematic – nationalism. Political science knows that nationalism as an ideology is not narrow enough. In messaging the same applies. It is easy to assess nationalism from the image point of view and the help also came from Venema & Steffan (2020), who identified nationalism through the state symbols. I applied their procedure in my analysis. In the text, it is more complicated. I search for words of deep affection. It was also essential to determine who is the sender of that message. If the party is known for its nationalism or patriotism, then

¹ As there is no verdict, the people whose voices are the same as the voices on the tape are mentioned as „alleged“.

the same message may be perceived differently than the same message from another type of party.

Lastly, I will have a closer look at the bigger or better established political parties. These parties are all the parties that gained in all followed elections above the 3% of votes that guarantees them support from the state. It has to be noted that they get extra financial support for successful second-order elections as well. The reason why I want to look closely at those parties is explained in the theory section. Better-established parties with bigger resources are more professionalised. Therefore the factors in the analysis should be, at least theoreticly, even more emphasised. The factors that going to differ from the general sample should be reexamined if they are still relevant and if they really tell something about professionalisation.

4.2 Strengths and weaknesses

One of the limitations of my study is its focus on only one means of communication while leaving other ones unresearched. It is difficult to draw broad conclusions when other channels like party websites or social media are omitted.

Billboards were selected because of their social relevance in Slovakia. They are the popular means of election communication in Slovakia. Theoretically, there should not be other than technical differences with the poster (Juárez-Gámiz, 2017, p.258). This thesis wants to test that.

The sourcing of the material took more work. The election rounds in 2010 and 2012 were collected by professionals, academics, students and enthusiasts from the websites of the Slovak Press Agency or photographed on the streets. The rest of the material was collected from news media websites, political parties, and politicians. Most of the material had a place, date or other reliable identification (e.g. ballot number). Billboards without reliable identification were not included in the analysis. The sample is not skewed. The number of visuals used in the election varies. There is no party that would use significantly more billboard visuals.

One issue with billboards is that they are placed in the space. That means that billboard A is placed on place A. The question is, Is that billboard placed there strategically or is the party paid for the fixed amount of the billboard? This is something that is considered as a know so we cannot find out. The second issue is that we don't know how many billboards were used. Therefore is it more professional to use 2 visuals printed 10,000 times each or 10 visuals printed 2,000 times each? Or we can assume that it is that way precisely because of professionalisation and we can ignore it? This is also something worth looking into in the future.

The main strength of my selected methods is that they were tested several times. There are hundreds of election poster designs. The quantitative content analysis allows the posters, or in my case, billboards to be studied in a large scale and literally include every poster in the analysis. I considered using mixed methods and including interviews with campaign professionals, where the campaign professionals would be asked questions regarding the conduction of an election campaign but also regarding the trends of campaign professionalisation including those from the results of my analysis. The question is if the case could not be vice versa and to conduct the interviews with campaign professionals. As I stated earlier this method might end up as a case study and for purposes of the thesis and to ensure the availability of the data I relied on the quantitative methods.

The coding of the data was already tested by previous research (Vliegthart, 2012; Gattermann & Vliegthart, 2019; Venema & Steffan, 2020). On the same basis, the codebook with coding instructions was developed. The data are coded mostly as nominal data. Final data were tested by inter-rater reliability test. Inter-rater reliability test was satisfactory. The test was conducted with the official SPS plugin. The analysis was conducted in SPS Statistics

4.3 Inter-rater reliability test

The analysis is executed in the SPSS Statistic. The original datasets were built in Microsoft Excel due to their practicality and cloud functions. Further on, the datasets were merged and uploaded into the SPSS Statistic. A single coder, the author of this thesis, a native speaker with considerable knowledge of Slovak politics, coded the campaign billboards. To check the reliability of the codings, a second person, a native speaker with considerable expertise in

Slovak politics, coded a random sample of 35 posters. The pairwise agreement score for all items is 99.212% and for individual items, it ranges from 91,429% to 100%. Krippendorff's alpha score for all the 2030 coding decisions combined was 0.986, which is considered a good score (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

4.4 Dataset of Billboards

The standard billboard is horizontally oriented with a width of five meters and a height of two and a half meters. These proportions may vary. Therefore, bigger billboards are also included in the analysis. Also, bigger billboards with a different side size ratio than 2:1 are included in the data set. The size and proportions did not play a crucial role as the visuals used were similar to the regular billboard. Due to their size, billboards are more likely to be noticed. They should carry very condensed messages that are easy to understand. I expect the text on them to be shorter compared to posters. Otherwise, regular-size posters and billboards have no other technical or cognitive differences.

There was no single database of political billboards used in elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic that would be suitable for my analysis. In order to conduct the analysis, I created the database. Several sources were used for its creation. These sources are traditional media, official channels of political parties, communication channels of running candidates, public institutions, academic articles, communication channels of private entities and private archives. A significant part of the material used in the 2010 and 2012 elections was gathered by page infovolby.sk. This online platform gathered academics, students and professionals interested in Slovakia's election campaigns. They managed to create and analyse campaigns and materials used in multiple elections. As they state on their website, the primary source of visual material comes from SITA – Slovak News and Press Agency, which is run by the government. Unfortunately, this page became inactive after the 2012 election and no longer conducts photo documentation of election posters.

Other significant sources of visual materials for this analysis are online archives of media outlets. For media outlets, political billboards represent illustration that is easily relatable to

the main news event— elections. Besides that, political posters represent a vast repository of topics for reporting. Regional variations of media outlets are adding local dimensions to my dataset. One specificity of the regional media outlets is that they sometimes added to the content with locally oriented posters, often with local politicians. The benefit of media outlets is that the exact dates of publishing and location are often stated with a billboard image. The following source used for data gathering are official pages of political parties and candidates. However, sometimes the parties and candidates published only a billboard visual. These materials were used only when another image of the exact “real life” billboard was available but in lower image quality. Regional and municipal authorities gathered some of the billboards used for the analysis. Private archives were predominantly used as a data-gathering source in the 2020 parliamentary election campaign. I reached out to either randomly selected candidates or to higher-ranking party members.

For the sample selection, I intended either to select billboards without politicians or with the party leader only. The argument for this method of selection was that these billboards were part of the main campaign activity of the party. However, I decided to include billboards also with other party members. There are three main reasons for this decision. Firstly, other party members are often part of the party's main campaign due to their recognisability. Secondly, regardless of the party status, the design and template of the billboards were set and approved by the people responsible for the campaign. Thirdly, regional candidates are often placed on the billboard with the party leader.

Only relevant parties were selected. In contrast to Vliegthart (2012) and Gattermann and Vliegthart (2019) I do not include just the parties that made it through the threshold (5%) and got to the parliament. The relevant parties in this analysis gained at least 3% of the votes. My research includes just four elections, a smaller time scale than my colleagues studied. The 3% threshold is important for a particular reason. Parties that gained over 3% qualify for state subsidies crucial for party survival. This means these parties conducted a successful campaign and can make it to the next election (Vlčej, 2016, p. 80). This is important for minority parties that are significant on the local and regional levels. My smaller timescale also allows me to include all the available billboards in my analysis and not just a few per party per election like

Vliegenthart (2012) and Gattermann and Vliegenthart (2019), and Venema & Steffan (2020) did.

My dataset consists of 483 billboards used in 4 national elections over a decade. In 2020 N=126; in 2016 N=84; in 2012 N=129; in 2010=144. Only five parties participated in all four elections and gained over 3%. Together they represent 270 out of 483 billboards in my sample. In my thesis, I will analyse four consequent elections and compare the professionalisation of election billboards. Further in the analysis, I will scrutinise these five successful parties and test hypotheses on them.

4.5 Codebook

This thesis aims to push the current knowledge about how the professionalisation of election posters looks. A codebook (Appendix 1) developed for this analysis builds on the previous research. It contains basic information about the poster and a whole range of items that deal with the visual and textual characteristics of the poster. As this study focuses on the professionalisation of the election billboards and how this professionalisation looks, I had to analyse the billboards deeper than Vliegenthart (2012) did. His and the subsequent studies helped to describe how professionalisation looks. As a result, the codebook used also encompasses some existing research which studied how the posters look from visual and textual perspectives. The items that were analysed can be divided into three sections. In the first section are variables that record the general features of the billboard. These variables are mainly relevant for systematising the dataset and the second research question.

- Dominant colour:
- Length of the text :
- Does the billboard contain a phrase or a sentence?
- Does the billboard contain an affirmative declarative sentence / negative declarative sentence / interrogative sentence / imperative sentence?

The first analysed item is colour. The value of this variable is nominal. The value indicates the predominant colour of the billboard; if not applicable, the prevailing colour is indicated. I expect the dominant colours to be either party or highly reflective, such as shades of white. I expect that the trend will be that the party colour will be less used as a dominant colour and white will be the dominant colour most often. The reason for this may be the application of the maximum contrast that the party logo and other parts of the billboard are the most visible.

The second analysed item is the length of the text. The text is measured in the number of words and signs. The length of the text is important for the cognitive load of the recipients (Druckman & Green et al. 2011, p. 253). Low cognitive load, or in other words, easy and short text, is especially important for billboards when a recipient might have just a few moments to get the message. Cognition plays a vital role in items measured in the following variables. Assessing whether the billboard contains just a phrase or more complex constructs like sentences is important. Then, the type of sentences used is also essential from a cognitive point of view. Is the sentence declarative, interrogative or imperative? This is important for messaging. Imperative sentences will be more present when the call to vote is present. As I expect the decline in call to vote I also expect the lower and lower use of imperative sentences.

4.5.1 Application of Vliegenthart's Methods on Slovak Case

Vliegenthart's (2012) analysis of election billboards is a cornerstone of multiple studies, including this one. He selected ten items to test his hypotheses regarding the professionalisation of election billboards and their effects on the visual and textual features of billboards. As I used his and Gattermann's (Vliegenthart, 2012; Gattermann & Vliegenthart, 2019) hypotheses adjusted and applied for the purposes of this thesis, I will analyse the following items in the analysis. Marks in the brackets point to the respective hypothesis.

- Does the billboard contain a party logo, or is the name of the party portrayed in a stylised manner? **(H1)**
- Does the text on the billboard contain an explicit call to vote? **(H2)**

- Does the billboard contain an image of the party leader? **(H3a)**
- Does the text on the billboard refer to the party leader? **(H3b)**
- Does the image on the billboard refer to ideology or more abstract political values? **(H4a)**
- Does the image on the billboard refer to concrete policy issues or policy stances? **(H4a)**
- Does the text on the billboard refer to ideology or more abstract political values? **(H4b)**
- Does the text on the billboard refer to concrete policy issues or policy stances? **(H4b)**
- Does the text or/and image on the billboard refer to other political parties, politicians, or the previous government in negative terms? **(H5)** (Vliedhart, 2012, p. 142; Gattermann & Vliedhart, 2019, pp. 766-771)

The presence of the party logo or its name in a stylised manner is a relatively straightforward variable. The value is coded binary. The same applies to the presence of an explicit call to vote, an image of the party leader. The position of the image of the party leader is coded as an ordinal value. When assessing the text, knowledge of Slovak politics was necessary. For example, it was used when assessing the textual reference to the party leader. The variable was coded binary.

I used the same method as Venema & Steffan (2020) to assess the image's reference to the ideology. Variable indicates whether the image on the campaign poster showed ideological symbols representing the political ideologies of socialism, communism or social democracy (hammer and sickle, red star, red rose, red carafes, red fist), nationalism (Slovak flag, coat of arms, folk symbols, double cross, peak Kriváň), fascism (double cross of Hlinka's Guards) or religion (crucifix). In contrast to these prevalent symbols, there are no general symbols for liberalism, conservatism, or ecologism (Venema & Steffan, 2020, p. 104). Similarly, the textual presence of ideology was indicated when the ideologies were explicitly mentioned (Venema & Steffan, 2020, pp. 104-105). However, I differ from Venema and Stefan (2020) in the determination of nationalism. No nationalistic politic is going to mention it explicitly. Instead, they use words that show deep emotional affection for the country or express fear and indicate outside or inside enemies of the state. In this sense, the context and sender are essential to assess the contextual reference of the text to the ideology. Besides nationalism, the same approach is used with other ideologies. However, the contextual presence of ideology is negative with other ideologies.

A considerable knowledge of Slovak politics is required to assess negativity. Slovakia has a multiethnic society. The most populous ethnic groups are in the following order Slovak (83,8%), Hungarian (7,7%) and Roma (1,2²) (Statistical Office Of The Slovak Republic, 2021). However, the official and administrative language is only a Slovak language. The Official Language Act was the reason for the conflict between nationalistic and ethnic parties in the 2012 election. These conflicts are often communicated with metaphors. For example, Slovak National Party published a billboard with the text: “From Tatras to the Danube in the Slovak language (tongue)”. The Party of Hungarian Community responded with the billboard of the same mouth biting its tongue. The majority of the negative references are connected with political scandals. Numerous political scandals of Slovak politicians are easily accessible ammunition for negative campaigning. The variables that deal with ideology, policy and negativity are coded binary.

² The real number differs because a considerable portion of Roma proclaims Slovak nationality.

4.5.2 Professionalisation or not? Other features of the billboards in the data set

This codebook contains several items that deal with the visual characteristics of the billboard (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 141). The presence of these items in content analysis requires further research and discussion of the analysis results with campaign professionals. The assumption is that campaign professionals have reasons for who, what, and how they want to show voters. I am interested in understanding the process they went through to decide to use specific campaign communication approaches. The items measured in this part may help me to answer the second research question. The items tracked are the following:

- Is a politician alone or with people?
- Style of clothing of a politician?
- Is a politician smiling?
- Display of politician's body.
- Presence of the politician's name tag.

The number of people displayed on the billboard may also be important from the point of personalisation, and therefore it is also in alignment with theoretical arguments about personalisation (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 139).

The variable on facial expression distinguished three facial expressions. The first is a wide smile with exposed teeth or a grin. The second is a smile. The third is neutral, angry or unidentified facial expression.

In the analysis, I sorted the politicians into three groups according to their attire. The first is a formal outfit. The formal outfit is considered a suit with a shirt and tie/bowtie, all with no or subtle patterns, a formal dress or a formal costume. The second is a smart casual outfit. The smart casual outfit is a semi-formal outfit that does not fulfil the requirement for a full suit. The third is an informal outfit. The informal outfit is when a politician does not wear a shirt, a jacket or a blazer.

Another visual feature of the billboard included in the analysis is a display of a politician's body. This variable is ordinal and the values measure if the body of a politician is fully visible, if the image is showing a politician from the waist up or if we can see just a politician's shoulders and head. The last variable in the codebook is a name tag. This variable was added during the analysis. The name tag is not considered a textual reference to the party leader. However, it is widely used across the party spectrum and is present on many billboards. There is also a specific situation when other displayed candidates' names are present, but the party leader's name tag is not. These situations are coded and recorded in the dataset.

5. Results

5.1 Content analysis

There are nearly 500 billboards in the dataset with more than. *Figure 1* presents four examples from each election round. The first one, on the top left, presents one of the campaign billboards of the minority party Most-Híd³ for the 2010 elections. The focus of the poster is on the text. The main bigger text is in Hungarian. Under the Hungarian text, there is a Slovak translation. According to Slovak law, every advertisement other than in the national language has to be translated. The text says, „IN HUNGARIAN. BOLDLY.“ It refers to the political debate at that time about the national language, and it was a response to the attacks from Slovenská Národná Strana⁴ (SNS). The billboard also carries the party logo and their ballot number in the 2010 elections. The second one, on the top right, presents one of the campaign posters of the liberal/libertarian party Sloboda a Solidarita⁵ (SaS) for the 2012 elections. The text on the billboard says: „FUTURE IS: NO MORE RISING OF TAXES.“ In the background, there is an image of scissors cutting the grass, which refers to „cutting taxes“. In the bottom, right part of the billboard is the text „The Future is ...“, followed by the party logo. Billboard also carries the call to vote and the ballot number of the party on the left in the form „VOTE 6“.

³ MOST („bridge“ in Slovak)- HÍD („bridge“ in Hungarian); the name refers to the bridge that connects Slovak city Komárno and Hungarian city Komárom. The city was divided after the separation of Czechoslovakia from Austro-Hungary in 1918.

⁴ Slovenská Národná Strana means „The Slovak National Party“

⁵ Sloboda a Solidarita means „Liberty and Solidarity“



Figure 1: Examples of Slovak campaign billboards — Top left: Most-Híd 2010; Top right: Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS) 2012; Bottom left: Marián Kotleba Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS) 2016; Bottom right: Smer Sociálna Demokracia (SMER-SD) 2020; Sources: in Appendix.

The third billboard, on the bottom left, presents one of the campaign billboards of the far-right nationalistic party Marián Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko⁶ (ĽSNS) for the 2016 elections. The text on the billboard says: „The same meter (Hold the scales even) for the whites and Gypsies (the Romani)!“ The person in the image is the party leader, who wears a brown⁷ jacket. Lastly, in the left part of the billboard, there is a party logo that consists of a double cross of Hlinkas Guards. The symbol is considered to be a symbol of fascism in Slovakia. It is prohibited by law.⁸ The fourth billboard, on the bottom right, is a campaign billboard of the social-democratic party SMER-Sociálna Demokracia⁹ (SMER-SD) for the 2020 elections. The text on the billboard says: „We will protect the social state“. The image shows a multigenerational happy family spending time in nature which is an attempt to illustrate who they are protecting. No person in the picture is a party member. There is a party logo in the bottom corner.

⁶ Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – means „Peoples party Our Slovakia“, Marian Kotleba is a party leader's name. Party proclaims that it is a successor of the Hlinkas Slovak Peoples Party (HSĽS). HSĽS was in the power of the Slovak State, a puppet state of Nazi Germany, and its politicians were responsible for participation in Holocaust and war crimes.

⁷ A brown was a colour of NSDAP and was worn by members of SA.

⁸ After the election, the highest court ordered to change the party logo.

⁹ Smer – Sociálna Demokracia – means „Direction – Social Democracy“

Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate the over-time development of the traced characteristics of billboards.

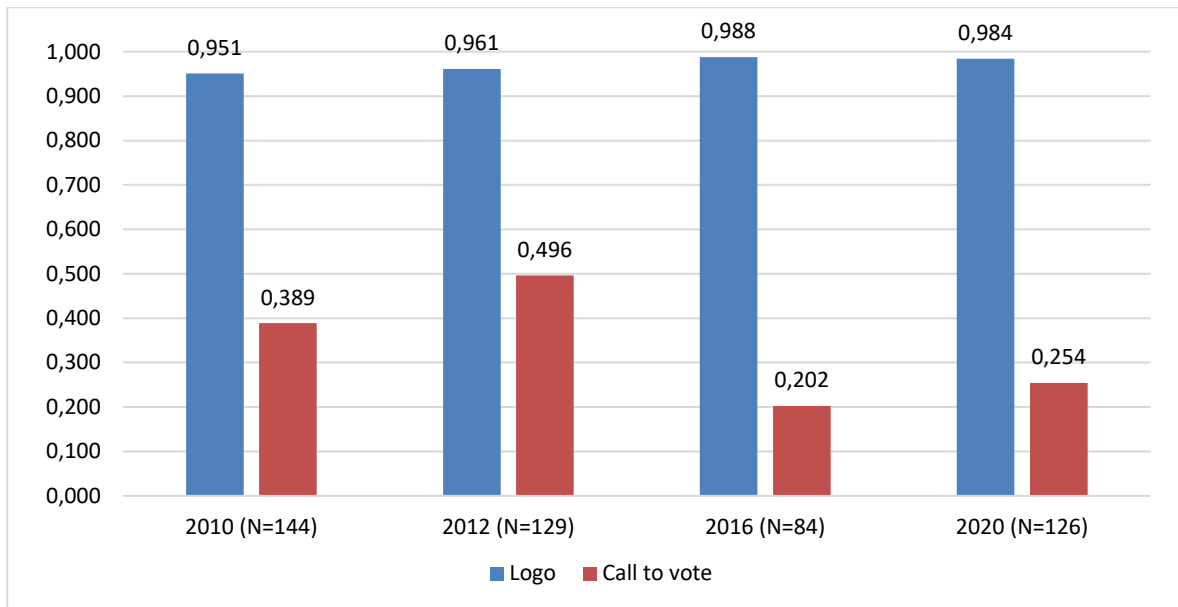


Figure 2: Over-time presence of party logo and call to vote. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

In Hypothesis 1 I expect increasing use of the party logo (H1). *Figure 1* shows that parties' logos were used heavily in 2010 already. With every upcoming election bigger share of billboards had their party logos displayed. These changes are small but present. The only very small fluctuation happened between the 2016 and 2020 elections. Hypothesis 1 is therefore confirmed

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the presence of explicit calls to vote will decrease over time (H2). Data presented in *Figure 1* shows a rise in call to vote between 2010 and 2012. It has to be noted that in 2012 snap elections took place, which could influence the efforts of participating parties to persuade voters to turn out. Four years later, in 2016, a more significant decrease in calls to vote can be observed. As the overtime decrease in the call to vote is present, hypothesis 2 can be confirmed.

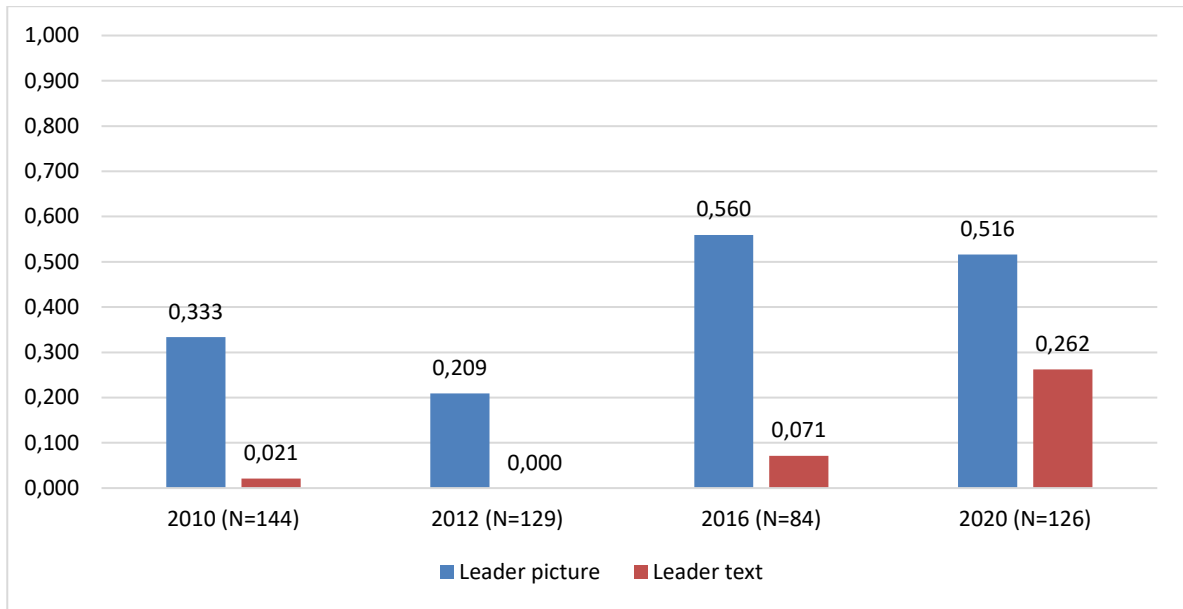


Figure 3: Over-time presence of image and text reference to the party leader. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year).

Figure 3 gives the information required to solve Hypothesis 3 (H3). As to the image reference to the party leader, again, the data indicates a decrease between the 2010 elections and the snap elections in 2012. I'll discuss this de-personalisation further in the discussion section on page n.43 The fall in professionalisation is followed by its rise in 2016. Very small levels of textual reference to the party leader can be observed in the 2010 and 2012 elections. As time progressed, textual references became more prevalent. The sub-hypotheses 3a and 3c are confirmed.

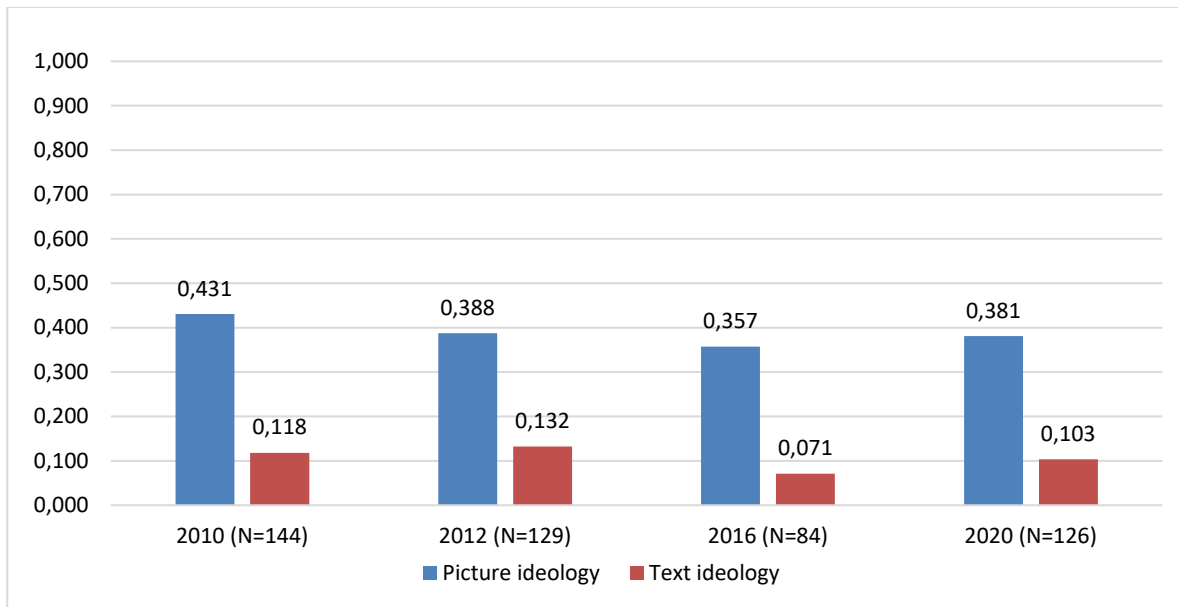


Figure 4: Over-time presence of ideology in picture and text. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

Hypothesis 4 with its sub-hypotheses focuses on ideology and policy. Figure 4 displays data on ideology. My hypothesis expects that there will be a decrease in ideology in both text and picture. As the previous studies work within a broader time frame and my thesis captures a decade in the post-ideology era, the changes should not be that significant. This is also demonstrated in Figure 4. Over time the number of images that refer to ideology decreases. It is noteworthy that in 2016 a new far-right nationalistic party emerged, similar to Venema and Steffan's (2020) case. However, it did not influence the overall decrease in ideology. Regarding the textual reference to ideology, the share of textual references to the ideology was even smaller. Despite these small numbers, Figure 4 shows an overall decrease in textual reference to the ideology with fluctuation and small rises in 2012 and 2020.

Figure 5 presents data on visual and textual references of policies on billboards. Textual references of policies are much more common than visual ones. However, the data indicates an opposite trend than the sub-hypothesis expected. Over time, the share of references to concrete policy issues decreases. According to the chart in Figure 5, visual references to policies are not popular in Slovak election campaigns. There were nearly no visual references to policies in elections 2010, 2016 and 2020. The only exception is the year 2012. The SNS

party mainly caused this spike in visual reference to policy because they used billboards with policy illustrations. However, some of the other parties used visual policy references as well. This represents a more significant share than what parties used in other years. Overall, 2012 was the only election when parties used pictures to communicate policies.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 give clear data that Hypothesis 4a and Hypothesis 4b can be partially confirmed. There are fewer visual and textual references to ideology but no rise in policy. On the contrary, over time, parties use textual references to policies less often.

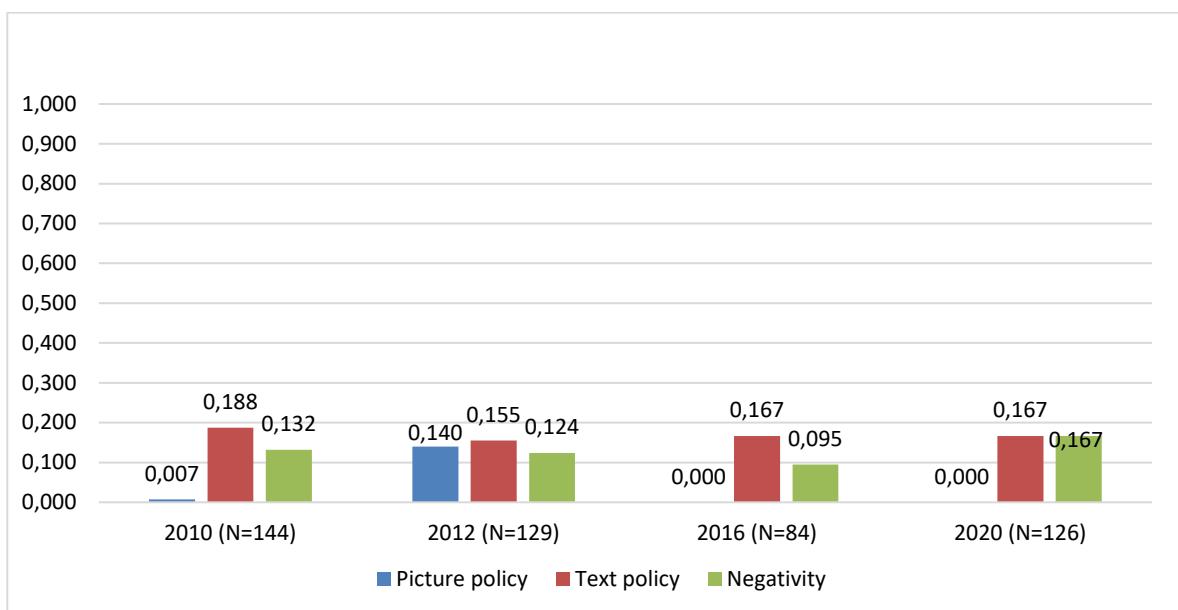


Figure 5: Over-time presence of negativity and policy references in pictures and text. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

The last hypothesis, Hypothesis 5 (H5), focuses on the rise of negative references to political opponents. The data indicates low levels of negativity with decreasing tendencies. Only in 2020 there was a rise in negativity. The findings are in alignment with the findings of previous studies that the multi-party system is specified by low levels of negativity. Therefore Hypothesis 5 cannot be confirmed.

5.2 Test on bigger parties

In this part of this thesis, I look closer at bigger parties. A bigger party is a party with a more extensive reach and establishment. As the mass membership parties shrank, the size of the party is not rooted in its membership. A more effective indicator is the party budget, the number of representatives in public institutions and effectiveness in elections. In the following part, we will look closer at five parties that were successful in all five elections. These five parties are Christian Democrats (KDH), Social Democrats (Smer-SD), Liberty and Solidarity (SAS), Party of Hungarian Community (SMK, later renamed to MKS) and Slovak National Party (SNS).

Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9 illustrate the over-time development of the traced characteristics of billboards among the selected five parties that represent 270 billboards from the whole dataset.

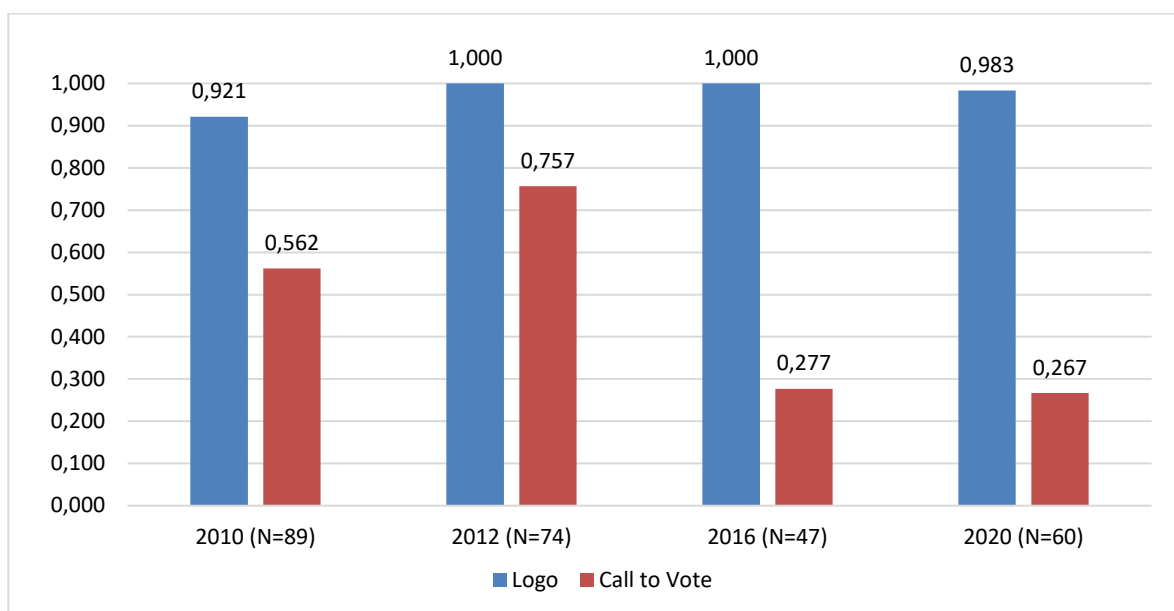


Figure 6: Over-time presence of party logo and call to vote among the five biggest parties. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

Figure 6 displays data similar to Figure 2 but more amplified. Party logos were present nearly all the time. The only exception was the biggest and the most successful party in Slovak electoral history, Social Democrats (Smer-SD), which is the only party which did not use the party logo on some of their billboards in the 2010 elections and on one billboard in the 2020 elections. Regarding the call to vote, bigger parties encouraged voters to turn out more, especially in the 2012 snap elections, when nearly 75% of their billboards contained a call to vote. However, their use plummeted in the 2016 elections. Over time their presence decreased. When tested only at the five biggest parties, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 can be confirmed.

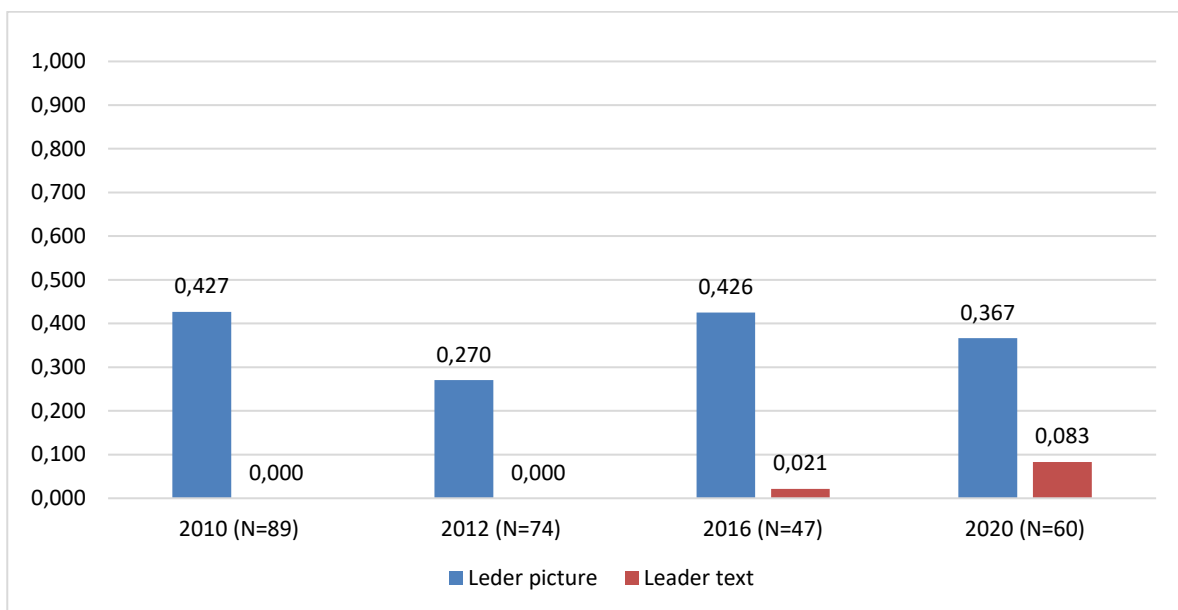


Figure 7: Over-time presence of image and text reference to the party leader among the five biggest parties. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

Figure 7 displays a different trend from Figure 3. The over-time presence of image references to party leaders among the five biggest parties is decreasing. There is a significant fluctuation in the share of billboards that contain a visual reference to the party leader. Figure 7 also displays the presence of textual references to the party leader. The number of these is very low. There is some slow-rising tendency in the 2016 and 2020 elections, corresponding to the

overall data in Figure 3. Thus sub-hypotheses tested on big parties have the following results, 3a cannot be confirmed and 3b can not be confirmed due to the small sample.

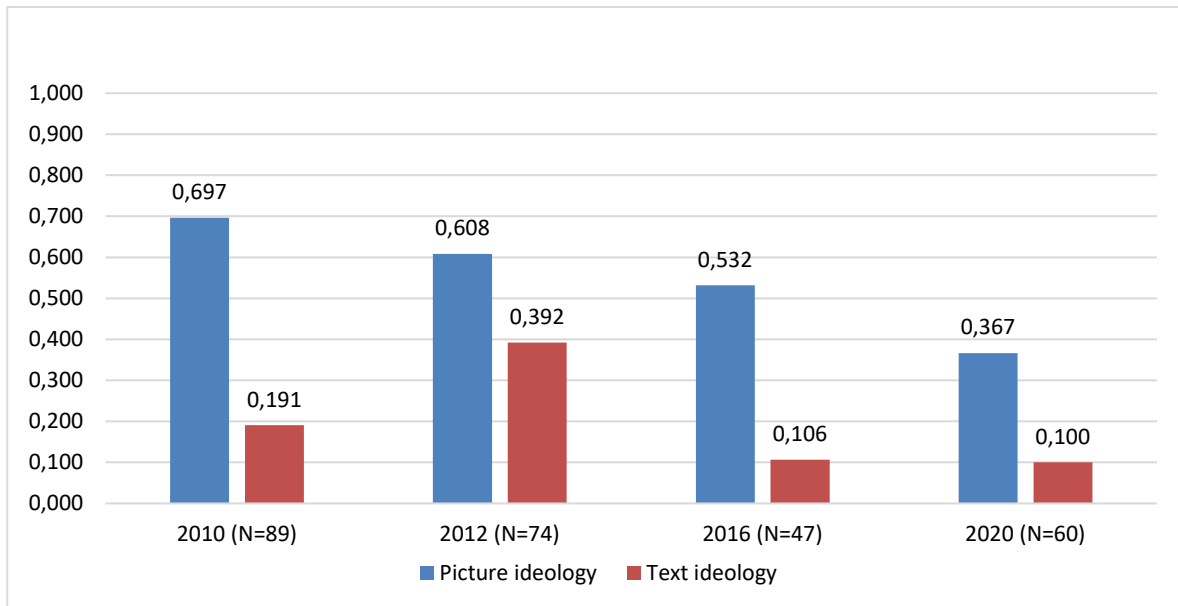


Figure 8: Over-time presence of ideology in picture and text among the five biggest parties. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the given election year).

Figure 8 shows the over-time decrease in ideology and text with a spike in textual reference to ideology in 2012. Big parties demonstrate a clearer decrease in the use of ideology in electoral billboards. This is highlighted by the fact that these big parties used ideology references in campaigns more often.

Figure 9 shows the over-time development of using policies on billboards. Data look similar to data of the whole sample. Using an image of policy was only popular in the 2012 elections, here the higher share is caused mainly by before mentioned party SNS. On the other hand, there is an over-time rise in the use of textual policy reference among the big parties. Thus, Sub-hypotheses 4a and 4b can be partially confirmed but to a larger extent than their test on the whole dataset

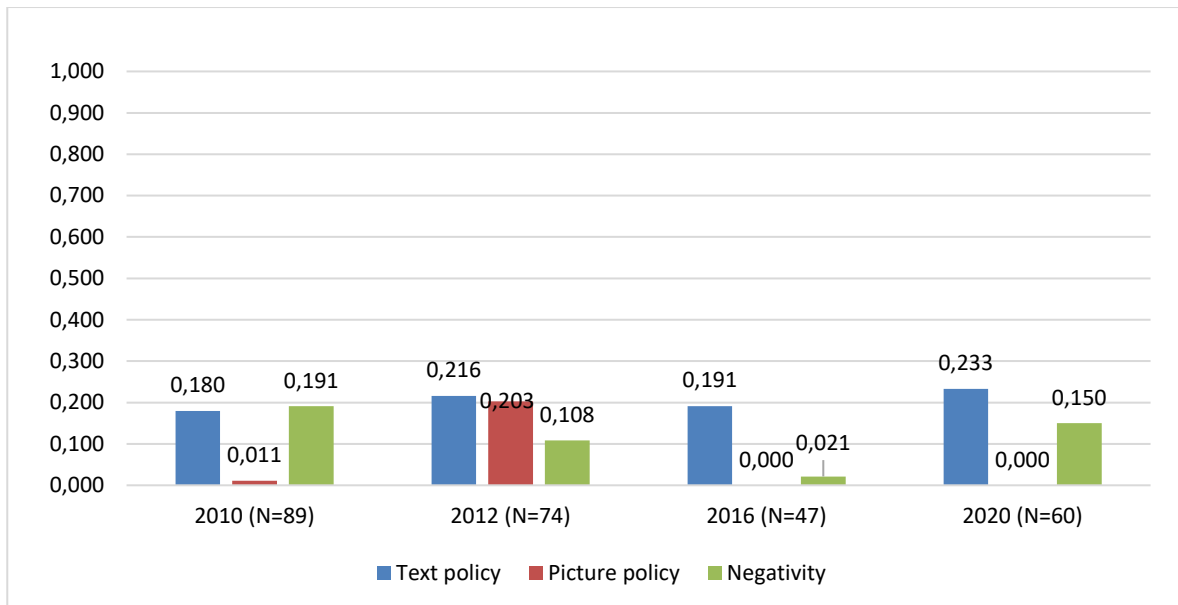


Figure 9: Over-time presence of negativity and policy references in pictures and text among the five biggest parties. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year).

Figure 9 also provides data on the use of negativity in campaign billboards. Data are similar to the data in Figure 5. The result of the test of Hypothesis 5 is that hypothesis is rejected.

To sum up, the general notion is that bigger parties are more professionalised. The results of my analysis show a similar pattern to the analysis of the overall dataset with more vigorous changes in traced characteristics among the big parties. This points to the direction of bigger professionalisation.

5.3 Analysis of Other Elements

This part is devoted to other elements that can be included in the content analysis but their use and development are not connected with a professionalisation. As professionalisation is a set of processes that reacts to the development of society, I believe that this part of the analysis may shed light on some trends and be useful in the discussion.

The first and very obvious element of the billboard is the number of people displayed. In 2010 (N=144) there were 1,61 people on the billboard. In 2012 (N=129) 1,7; in 2016 (N=84) 1,39

and in 2020 (N=1,51) 1,51 people on the billboard. Over time the average number of people on the billboard decreased. This change points towards a bigger focus on fewer people which may indicate personalisation.

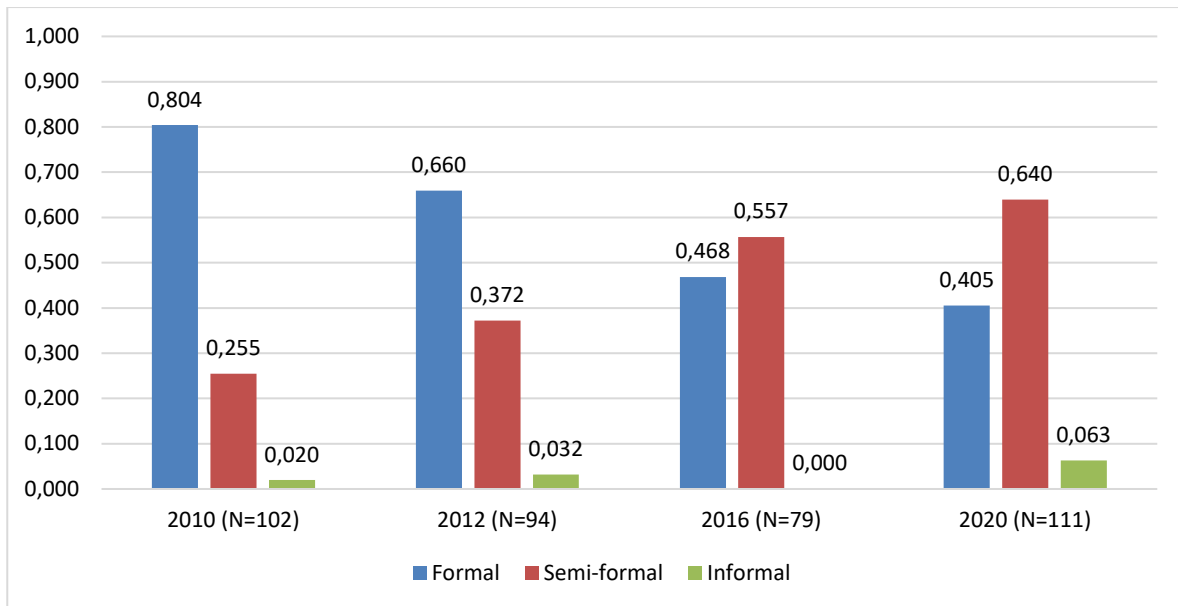


Figure 10: Over-time presence of visual rhetoric through clothing, tracking formal, semi-formal and informal outfits of politicians. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year). Note that the number of cases (N) differs because the cases included in the analysis are only the billboards that contain politicians. Note that the total sum exceeds 1 because sometimes more politicians with different outfits were displayed. Each column represents the share of N independently from other columns.

Figure 10 clearly shows an over-time decrease in the use of formal outfits in campaign posters and the rise of semi-formal outfits. Informal outfits increased as well but they do not consist a significant share of the sample. Based on the results of my analysis, Slovak politicians are becoming less formal in billboard campaigns.

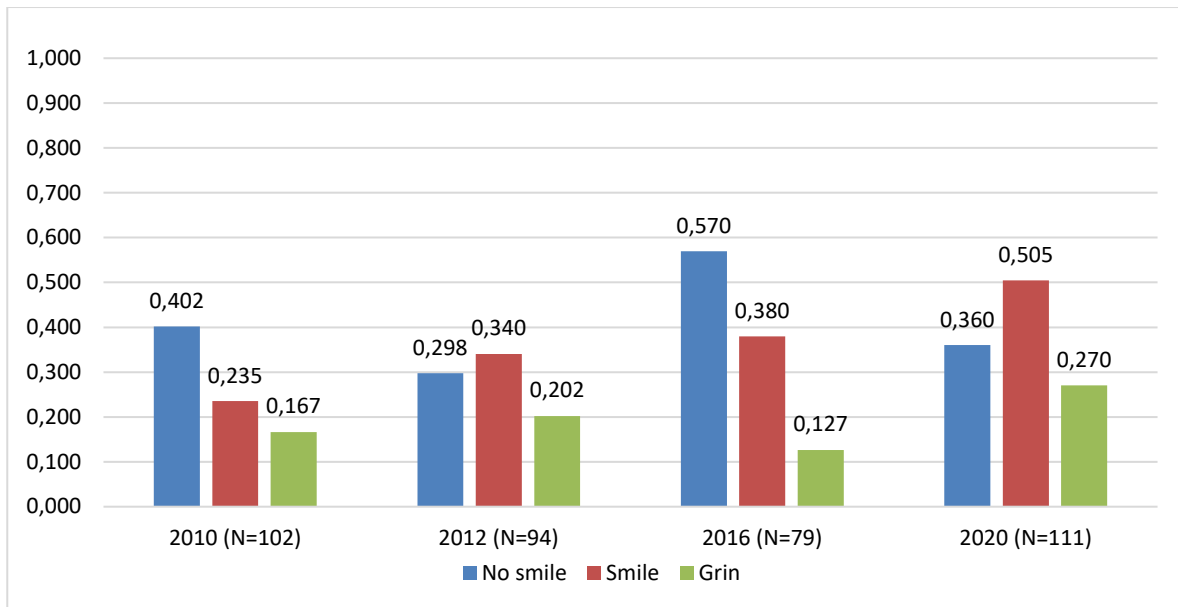


Figure 11: Over-time presence of visual rhetoric through neutral facial expressions, smiles and grins of politicians. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year). Note that the number of cases (N) differs because the cases included in the analysis are only the billboards that contain politicians. Note that the total sum exceeds 1 because sometimes more politicians with different expressions were displayed. Each column represents the share of N independently from other columns.

Figure 11 illustrates the over-time development of smiles on billboards. There is an overall decrease in neutral facial expressions with a spike in the 2016 elections. On the other hand, there is a continuous rise in the use of smiles with its peak in the 2020 elections. A similar trend can be observed with teeth-exposed grins. The analysis proves that over time, Slovak politicians are smiling and grinning more.

During the analysis of how much of a politician's body is displayed, I found out that only two billboards from the whole dataset displayed a full politician's body. Both are from 2010 from different politicians from two different parties. The most numerous are so-called headshots of politicians taken from shoulders up. Then there are shots from the waist up, which are popular when more politicians are displayed. Data do not indicate any pattern or trend over time. No pattern was discovered in a closer examination of name tags on billboards.

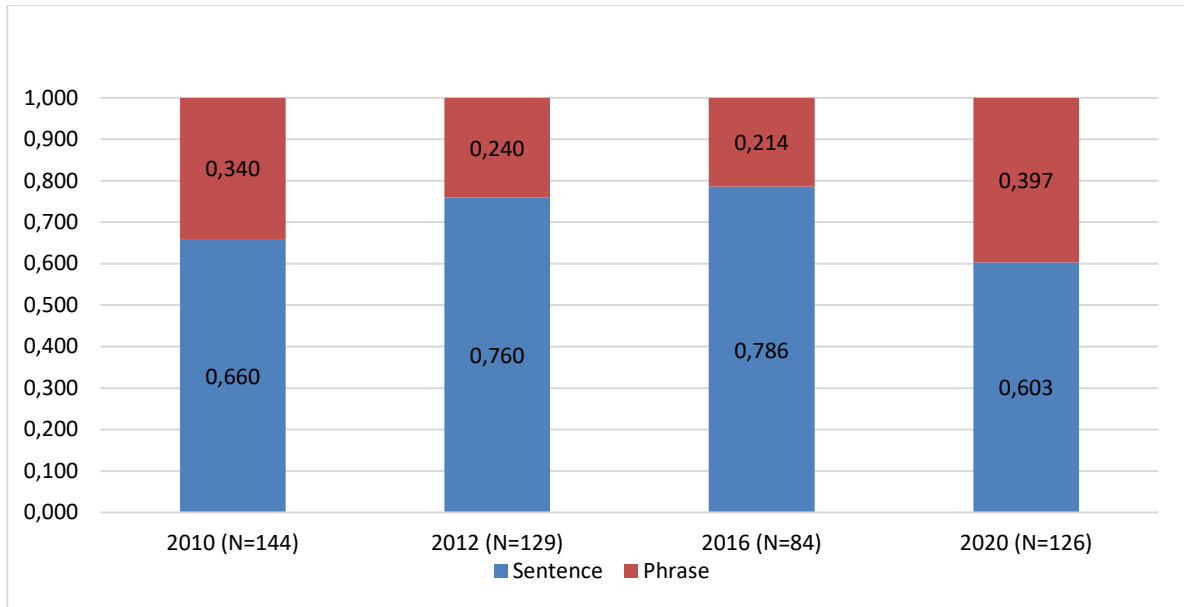


Figure 12: Over-time development of rhetoric through the use of sentences and phrases. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year).

All posters in the dataset contained either phrases or sentences. This confirms that text is considered to be important in election messaging. Data in Figure 12 shows the rising tendency to use sentences rather than phrases. This means that politicians prefer to use more concrete and complex language structures. Rather than a rise in policy references, this may indicate a rise in political promises.

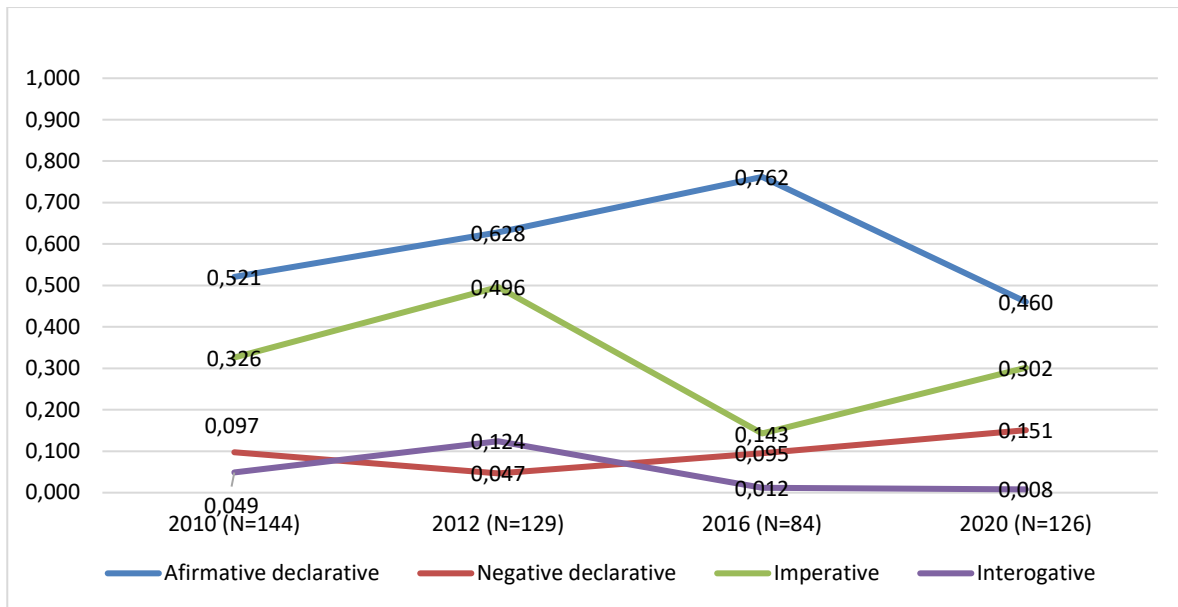


Figure 13: Over-time development of rhetoric through the types of sentences used. Score range from 0 (present on none of the electoral billboards in the election year) to 1 (present on all election billboards in the election year). Note: There can be more types of sentences on one billboard.

As illustrated in Figure 13, the least used type of sentences on billboards are Interrogative sentences. The chart indicates the rise in the use of negative declarative sentences, which can be linked with overall negativity in campaigning. There is also a decrease in the use of imperative sentences, which means that parties try to pressure voters less. The most numerous are affirmative declarative sentences. Their use decreased in the 2020 elections.

The average number of words and signs was relatively the same during all elections. On average parties used 12,61 words (N=483) or 71,61 signs (N=483) per billboard. The median value is 11 words (N=483) or 62 signs (N=483) per billboard. These numbers fluctuated very little in different election years.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter will discuss the results of the analysis and relate them to the research question of this thesis. It will relate the finding with the theory and findings of previous studies. It will lay out possibilities of future research on how professionalisation looks.

6.1. Professionalisation through the lens of personalisation, deideologization and negativity

There are very few studies that deal with the question of how the professionalisation of communication influences the way campaign materials look. This simple question has no short or simple answer because researchers can study different campaign materials with different approaches. I decided to use Vliegenthart's(2012) study as a fundament for my research. Then I also included the following studies that used Vliegenthart's(2012) theory as a fundament. Those studies are Gattermann & Vliegenthart (2019) and Venema & Steffan (2020). All of the previous studies studied different countries with different media systems and a bit different format of election posters.

This study attempts to answer one research question: How does the professionalisation of election campaigns in Slovakia influence the way election billboards look, do they indicate rising professionalisation and are there any other visual features that develop over time?

Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 focus on the increase in the use of party logos and decreasing calls to vote are confirmed. Very similar results for Hypothesis 1 were found by Vliegenthart (2012) who confirmed the increase in the use of party logos. On the other hand, H1 was rejected by Gattermann & Vliegenthart (2019). With Hypothesis 2 the case is the opposite, Vliegenthart (2012) rejected H2 and Gattermann & Vliegenthart (2019) found limited support for it.

Both Sub-hypotheses 3a and 3b are confirmed and references to the party leader are more common over time. c confirmed just the rising visual presence of party leaders and not textual. Similar results in personalisations were confirmed by Venema & Steffan (2020). In my analysis, there was an interesting decrease in personalisation in the 2012 elections. 2012 were snap elections. So the campaigning is not as usual and the time span between elections is significantly shorter. Snap elections are also accompanied by chaos and negativity. This is what Slovakia is facing now. Snap elections and election campaigns in the shadow of chaos caused by the fall of the government. Storie repeats itself. Many campaign billboards are again without the faces of politicians same as it was in 2012. This may be something worth

looking into. One of the characteristics of the professionalisation of political communication is that it is able to adjust to changes in society and communicate efficiently.

Sub-hypothesis 4a is confirmed just partially and 4b is confirmed. The analysis shows an overall decrease in ideology references but also a decrease in policy references. Vliegenthart (2012) and Venema & Steffan (2020) found similar results in a decrease in ideology. There were very few policy references in other studies. My data set also have very few billboards with visual policy reference. This difference between ideology and policy in visual use is embedded in the power of symbols. While ideologies have very strong symbols, it is much harder to express policy visually. It is different with textual references, which is confirmed by finding in the rise of textual policy references.

Hypothesis 5 is not confirmed what is in alignment with findings Vliegenthart (2012) and Venema & Steffan (2020). Although there has been some negative campaigning their levels were relatively small. The multi-party system is specific with its low levels of negative campaigning. One theory is that it is caused by the fact that parties might collaborate after the elections. More specifically, parties that are close to each other and are competing for voters are parties that may collaborate after the elections. As a result, the only parties that may attack each other are parties that will not collaborate after the election and whose voters would not vote for the other party. This also means that you have one less reason to attack that party. There is also previous research that suggests that when parties are not directly confronted by opponents, they tend to go less negative (Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010). In other words, billboards are static ad materials that don't usually change during the campaign. When parties are preparing billboards, they don't have a reason to go negative. However, this is different from TV debates or social media posts.

To conclude, my analysis offers evidence for some of the changes that are ascribed to the professionalisation of political communication in the literature. Those changes are an increase in the use of party logos, a decrease in the call to vote, an increase in personalisation, a decrease in ideology and a partial increase in policy references. To answer my first research question (RQ1), billboards used in elections to Slovak National Council indicate rising professionalisation of election communication.

The second research question (RQ2) is harder to answer. The answer is of course also embedded in the results of the content analysis and the literature. More are campaigns professionalised more they use a party logo, the more often there is a party leader, the less they use ideology and their text addresses concrete policy issues more frequently. Usually, better-established parties with bigger budgets are also more professionalised. Therefore, in my analysis, I zoomed on five big successful parties. I found out that in Hypotheses 1 and 2 the results were amplified. Sub-hypotheses 3a is rejected and 3b cannot be estimated due to the small sample. Regarding the Sub-hypotheses 4a and 4b results are the same but amplified. Here is noteworthy that of the 5 five selected parties, four are very ideological. Hypothesis 5 is rejected with similar results.

The bigger parties and most probably more professionalised parties indicated a bigger shift in some of the traced components. This shift is guiding us that professionalism is more probably causing higher use of party logo, a decrease in call to vote, de-ideologisation and use of policies. To answer the question of how professionalisation influences the way how election materials look I also ran an analysis of other features of billboards that I gather. I found a progressive decrease in the use of formal outfits and neutral facial expressions on billboards and an increase in the use of semi-formal outfits and smiles. These are most probably an adaptation to social changes. This change in visual rhetoric should be studied deeper and especially in connection with professionalisation.

The analysis of the use of sentences shows that parties are inclined to use more complex word structures than simple phrases. This can be bridged with political pledges and policy references. A theory that could link the actual content with professionalisation is needed, but such a study would be qualitative.

To sum up, besides the factors confirmed by tests of my hypotheses, the professionalisation of the election campaigns changes the outfits of Slovak politicians from formal to less formal and makes them smile more. It is a systematic change that can be most probably ascribed to professionalisation as a response to societal changes.

6.2. Limitations of the study

Data in the study have good inter-rater reliability scores. It is a considerably big dataset but small interpretation issues occur when there is a lot of filtering needed. Then the analysis is run on a relatively small population which can skew the data. Then the time span of the study falls behind the previous literature. My thesis studies just ten years, while Vliegenthart (2012) studies 60.

One of the weak spots of this study is its limited focus on posters/billboards. This leaves other channels of party communication uncovered and the generalisation of findings more difficult. More extensive comparative studies between countries could be beneficial. So far, similar studies that have been published focused on Netherlands and Germany. Interestingly, similar findings apply to the Netherlands, Germany and Slovakia. There should be no limit to why this test cannot be performed in other countries (Vliegenthart, 2012, p. 148)

6.3. Conclusion

This thesis contributes to the body of literature on the professionalisation of political communication. However, when writing this thesis and working with theories of professionalisation, I started to get the impression that this concept may be outdated. Parties today are professionalised to the extent that it becomes hard to distinguish what is more or less professionalised. I see the future of professionalisation studies in analysing the processes behind the decisions of campaign professionals. This would also mean a shift from quantitative studies towards more qualitative studies. This thesis had the original goal to include qualitative analysis in the form of interviews with campaign professionals and ask them about the creation of election billboards. Adding the qualitative analysis would exceed the scope of this thesis. Therefore the study opted for quantitative analysis.

This work also contributes to the body of literature that focuses on the region of former Eastern Europe and the body of literature on election posters. The aim of this thesis was to find how the professionalisation of election communication looks in regard to campaign materials. The material studied was the election billboard (poster). The study finds that despite differences in media systems, Slovakia, as a young democracy, follows similar trends

as previously studied countries. Election posters in the Netherlands, Italy and Germany have some similar features to election posters in Slovakia. To mention some, it is the extensive use of party logos, a decrease in the use of the call to vote, an increase in personalisation and de-ideologisation.

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Appendix 1 – Coding Instructions

WITH AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Billboard:

Insert the billboard picture.



1. **Party name:** PS/SPOLU.

name

Write the party name or its abbreviation, if such exists.

2. **Election year:** 2020

year

Write the year of elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic for which the billboard was used.

3. **Sequence:** 1

number

Write the sequence of the billboard for this party in this election year.

4. **Code name:** PS-2020-1

code

Generate a code name in the format “party name or abbreviation-election year-sequence”.

5. **Source:** <https://zilina-gallery.sk/picture.php?/89880/category/5629>; 06.04.2023

Cite the source of the picture in the format “URL; date of citation”.

6. **Predominant colour:** blue

colour

Write the predominant colour of the billboard, if not applicable, indicate the prevailing colour.

7. Text in original language: MLADÁ SILA POĎME DO NICH

Write the text that the billboard contains preserving the original casing. Do not include text within the party logo or the party name in a stylised manner.

8. Translation of the text: YOUNG FORCE LET'S BEAT THEM

Write the translation of the text from the answer to the question number 7 into English preserving the original casing.

9. Number of words: 5

words

Indicate the number of words from the answer to the question number 7. Digits, shortcuts, or signs such as %, # etc count as words.

10. Number of signs: 20

signs

Write the number of signs, including punctuation and excluding blank spaces.

11. Does the billboard contain only word units that are not sentences? 0

phrase

Indicate if the billboard contains one or more group of word or words that do not have a subject and a predicate. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". If the indicated value is "1", write the value "0" in questions 10-14 including.

12. Does the billboard contain a sentence or more sentences? 1

sntnc

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one group of words that has a subject and a predicate. If such group of words does not have an ending mark, it will count as a sentence. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". If the indicated value is "1", proceed to questions 13-17, including. Note: The unit containing the word "voľte (vote)" is a sentence since the subject "vy (you)" is omitted in the Slovak language.

13. Does the billboard contain an affirmative declarative sentence? 0

sntncafd

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one group of words that has a subject and a predicate that affirms a proposition. If such group of words does not have an ending mark, it will count as a sentence. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

14. Does the billboard contain a negative declarative sentence? 0

sntncned

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one group of words that has a subject and a predicate that negates a proposition. If such group of words does not have an ending mark, it will count as a sentence. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

15. Does the billboard contain an interrogative sentence? 0

sntncint

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one group of words that has a subject and a predicate and contains a question mark. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

16. Does the billboard contain an imperative sentence? 1

sntncimp

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one group of words that has a subject and a predicate in the imperative voice. If such group of words does not have an ending mark, it will count as a sentence. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". Note: The unit containing the word "voľte (vote)" is an imperative sentence since the subject "vy (you)" is omitted in the Slovak language.

17. Does the text on the billboard contain an explicit call to vote? (H2) 0

vote

Indicate if the billboard contains a phrase that can be perceived as a call on people to participate in elections. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

18. Does the text on the billboard refer to ideology or more abstract political values?

(H4b) 0

txtideo

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one word that mentions ideology, such as nationalism, communism, democracy, oligarchy, Christianity etc. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

19. Does the text on the billboard refer to concrete policy issues or policy stances?

(H4b) 0

txtpol

Indicate if the billboard contains text referring to a concrete policy or policy-related topics such as taxes, international agreements, health, education, etc. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

20. Does the text or image on the billboard refer to other political parties, politicians, or the previous government in negative terms? (H5) 0

txtneg

Indicate if the billboard contains text that literally or figuratively refers to other political parties, politicians or the previous government in negative terms. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

21. Does the billboard contain a party logo, or is the name of the party portrayed in a stylised manner?

(H1b) 1

logo

Indicate if the billboard contains a party logo or graphically designed party name. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

22. Does the billboard contain an image of the party leader? (H3a) 1

piclead

Indicate if the billboard contains an image of the party leader. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". If the indicated value is "0", write the value "0" in question 23.

23. Which part of the billboard is used for the image of the party leader? (H3b) 2

picleadpart

If the billboard is imaginary split into three equal vertical parts, which are left, central and right, indicate in which of these parts the image of the party leader is positioned. Indicate the value "1", "2" or "3", where "1" means that the party leader is positioned in the left part, "2" in the central part and "3" in the right part.

24. Does the text on the billboard refer to the party leader? (H3c) 1

txtlead

Indicate if the billboard contains text that literally or figuratively refers to the party leader. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". Note: The name tag of the party leader does not count as a reference to the party leader.

25. Does the image on the billboard refer to ideology or more abstract political values?

(H4a) 0

picideo

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image referring to ideology or abstract political value such as national symbols, a crucifix, a double cross, a hammer and sickle, a rose, a carafe, a dove of peace etc. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

26. Does the image on the billboard refer to concrete policy issues or policy stances?

(H4a) 0

picpol

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image referring to a concrete policy or policy-related topics such as taxes, international agreements, health, education, etc. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

27. How many people does the billboard depict? 1

numppl

Indicate "0" if the billboard depicts no people. For all other cases, indicate the number of people. If the number of people exceeds 12 or is unclear, write "99". The party leader or the politician counts as a person. If the indicated value is "0", write the value "0" in questions 28-31 including.

28. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician alone, with another party member, with a family member or with another person? 1

picpolppl

Indicate "0" if the billboard depicts no politicians, "1" if the politician is shown alone, "2" if the politician is depicted with at least one other party member, "3" if the politician is depicted with at least one family member, "4" if the politician is depicted with at least one unknown or undefined person. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1". If the indicated value is "0", write the value "0" in questions 29 – 35 including.)

29. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who wears formal clothes?

picpolfo

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician who wears a shirt with a tie, a formal dress or a formal costume. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

30. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who wears smart casual clothes?

picpolca

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician who wears a shirt without a tie, a jacket, a blazer or a less formal dress. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

31. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who wears informal clothes?

picpolinf

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician who does not wear a shirt, a jacket or a blazer. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

32. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who grins? 1

picpolgrin

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician who does not wear a shirt, a jacket or a blazer. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

33. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who smiles? 0

Picpolism

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician whose facial expression can be described as a smile – a curved up mouthline. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

34. Does the billboard contain an image of a politician who does not grin or smile? 0

Picpolother

Indicate if the billboard contains at least one image of a politician whose facial expression cannot be described as either grin or a smile. If no, indicate "0"; if yes, indicate "1".

35. What is the body display of a politician/s? Full body/ from the waist up/ shoulders and above

picpolbody

Indicate "1" if the politician/s is depicted in full body, "2" if the politician is depicted from the waist up, "3" if the politician is depicted from the shoulders and above them.

Appendix 2 – Codebook

Due to the size of the file, it is available upon request. Write your request to:
lukassvana@gmail.com

Appendix 3 – Dataset

Due to the size of the file, it is available upon request. Write your request to:
lukassvana@gmail.com

Appendix 4 - Inter-rater reliability test

Due to the size of the file, it is available upon request. Write your request to:
lukassvana@gmail.com

