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## Personalization in Croatian Presidential Election in 2000: How Personal Did the Candidates Go and What Did the Press Cover?

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### Summary

Using content analysis methodology this study of three Croatian daily newspapers investigated the 'personalization' in Croatian presidential elections in 2000. The research conceptualised personalization on two different levels – as a media phenomenon and as a candidate's strategy. Using two different units of analysis – the article and the statement – the research first examined the attention newspapers in their election coverage devoted to candidates' personal profiles as compared to other contents. In the second part, the study examined to what extent and in which form each of the two front-running candidates relied on some personal cues to communicate with the press and voters. The findings revealed that the press interest in candidates' personalities in presidential elections in Croatia in 2000 was relatively high. However, individual traits that came to the forefront of the newspaper reports remained mostly within the realm of their political profiles. Findings from the second part concluded that there were significant differences in the way candidates communicated their messages to the press and the voters.

*Key words:* Croatia, presidential election in 2000, Stjepan Mesić, Dražen Budiša, personalization, content analysis, newspapers



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### *Introduction*

In 1999 Franjo Tuđman, Croatian president and the wartime leader died leaving Croatia in a rather devastated condition. Ten years of HDZ's<sup>1</sup> rule had ruined an already

<sup>1</sup> HDZ – Croatian Democratic Union, the leading party of the right. It was the ruling party in Croatia from 1990 to 2000. Franjo Tuđman was its uncontested leader until his death in 1999.

depressed post-war economy, international organizations were concerned about the state of human rights and the country was already experiencing first signs of international isolation.

Major changes came with parliamentary elections in January 2000 when the opposition parties joined together to defeat HDZ. Victory was won by a high margin and the Social Democrat Ivica Račan was appointed the Prime Minister.

In the presidential elections that followed later on in January, the media predicted a landslide victory for the liberal Dražen Budiša, who along with Ivica Račan was the pillar of the winning coalition. Surprisingly though, the election was won by Stjepan Mesić who entered the campaign with only 9,1% support in the electorate according to the polls and was predicted a third place at best. As his political platform didn't differ much from the one promoted by the predicted winner, his success was broadly claimed to his personality.

Motivated by the unexpected victory of Stjepan Mesić, the objective of this paper is to examine personalization in the Croatian presidential election in 2000. The rationale for choosing this particular election – apart from the 'Mesić phenomenon' – stems from its particular historical circumstances. It was the first presidential election in Croatia without the strong and uncontested authority of the war-time leader Franjo Tuđman. In that respect, it was challenging to examine how justified is it to project Western trends (personalization in this particular case) to a newly established democracy.

The phenomenon of personalization in politics has been extensively used to describe recent developments in political communication. However, it is often left unclear what is actually meant by *personalization*. While the theoretical section of this dissertation touches upon a few interpretations of the term, the analytical part conceptualises personalization on two different levels. In the first part of the research personalization refers to the media phenomenon in the sense of attention that media in their election coverage devoted to candidates' personal profiles as compared to other contents. In the second part the concept relates to the systematic tendency of the candidates themselves to use personal cues to communicate with media and voters in the election period.

Using content analysis this study examines articles published in three Croatian dailies – *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list* and *Novi list* – throughout the official period of the campaign. To be able to examine personalization on both mentioned levels, it uses two different units of analysis – the article and the statement.

The structure of the study is broken down into six parts. The second part of the study provides a theoretical background on personalization. The third part is an insight into contextual factors surrounding the election in 2000. The fourth part addresses the methodology used in the research. The fifth part expounds the results of the analysis, discusses findings and offers some suggestion for further improvements. The final part of the research contains conclusion.

## *Theoretical overview*

### *Introduction*

Apart from conceptualising personalization as a predominantly political phenomenon (impersonation of political power), the term has been extensively used in popular and academic literature to describe recent developments in political communication. In its very broad and general meaning, personalization refers to increased media interest in personalities of the politicians and rise to prominence of these politicians within the party structures and election campaigns. But aside from this general point of reference the term has come to encompass more than a few phenomena, with three dimensions being of particular concern to theorists, and representing the bulk of the literature on the topic. The definition offered by Van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha (2000: 47) touches on these most relevant aspects in stating that personalization consists of a ‘complex interplay between personal characteristics of politicians and their mediation through various institutional practices such as campaign strategies and media coverage, from which voters will build their perceptions of politicians’.

The first aspect of the problem is the ‘media coverage’ referred to in Van Zoonen’s definition – how, why and in what ways has media attention come to focus on the personal traits of politicians? It looks at the growing central role candidates’ personality plays in media coverage of elections and with the accent lately shifting more towards the private aspect of their personality. In terms of ‘campaign strategies’ analysis of personalization looks in general at the increasing ‘visibility’ of the candidates and in particular at the way in which the ‘private’ is used for political gain, and the tactics deployed in the disclosure of privacy – private selves, private lives, etc. Finally, the problem addresses the issue of voting behaviour, that is, it wants to determine what proportion of the vote is influenced first by personality of the candidate and then by its mediated ‘creation’.

However, each of these strands of analysis must have as their starting point the question of why personalization has come to such prominence, both in the way voters approach politics, the media cover them and politicians play them. In this paper I will focus mainly on three aspects of the term. First, I will use it in a more general sense to explain the importance of political personality in different systems of government. Second, by personalization I will understand the discussion about growing media interest in candidates’ personalities. Finally, I will refer to personalization as a phenomenon that describes how politicians strategically use their personal, and moreover, private traits, to communicate with voters in the election period.

This, however, doesn’t exhaust the discussion about personalization nor does it cover all interpretations of the term that go far beyond the scope of this paper.

### *Personality as a voting cue*

Sennett (1996: 153) defines personality as a ‘direct expression of the inner self’ or ‘immediate impressions different people produce’. And so, the issue of personalization comes to be a question of how far these ‘impressions’ shape the election outcome or

what proportion of a single vote is based on individual identity of the candidate as opposed to his stands on issues or other elements that affect voters' decisions (party loyalty, ideology or similar).

McAllister (1996) for instance, supports the idea that voters are in general more willing to associate political power and authority with a 'visible', identifiable person than with an abstract institution or political idea. Cain and others (1987) similarly insist on the importance of the so-called 'personal vote'. It refers to that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities and record: 'there is much to be said for tempering cold bureaucratic rationality and anonymous universalistic policy-making with the warm, humane interventions of elected representatives' (Cain et al., 1987: 229).

A concern that accompanies this phenomenon is the worry that personality-based voting is susceptible to manipulations of spin doctors and image makers. This view is based on a premise that voter's reactions to candidates are irrational, that they are based on a leader's style or outlooks, rather than on his capability to run the office: 'Modern politician running for office, or more accurately their advisors, spend a great amount of time and resource in crafting a package that they hope will appeal to the electorate' (Stanyer/Wring, 2004).

However, Samuel L. Popkins (1991: 65) claims that there is nothing irrational about making personality-based choices. It is just another 'information shortcut' for 'reasoning voters' to learn about politics: 'We want to hire competent people, but without time and resources to evaluate their past performance, we must make a judgement based largely on clues to personal character'. The logic of human psychology teaches us that people find it easier to develop a 'personal narrative, and then asses political character from personal character' (ibid: 78) than to learn about complex issues or institutions.

Basically, all these accounts rest on a premise that it's easier to evaluate people than policies. But this premise will not necessarily universally be found to be true or manifested to the same degree – it is affected by external factors, meaning that there is no general answer to how much the personal will affect voter's calculations. Interest in political personalities varies with long term conditions, such as the system of government, the election system, political and media culture and short term circumstances, such as the context of very elections.

Looked at on the level of systems of government, the candidate as the future 'leader' has been seen as the most influential in determining the votes in presidential systems. Interestingly, despite common belief that this is a unique feature of contemporary elections, Wattenberg (1991: 34) reports that even in 1956, when most voters were in fact voting straight tickets (which would be an indication of voting on the basis of party loyalty), 74 percent of respondents in a Gallup poll agreed that one should vote for the candidate, not the party. By 1968 this figure had risen to 84 percent. But by 2000, the individual character and personal style of leaders had come to dominate considerations. Renshon (2001: 4) reports that a Gallup Poll taken in January 2000 found that America was more interested in style and leadership capabilities of the presidential candidates than their stands on the issues. Voters required to know not only where the candidates stand but who they are.

Wattenberg (1991: 80) claimed that there were obvious reasons for voters to be interested in candidate's personality, that stem from the nature of that particular system of government: 'Because so much power is vested in one person alone, the personal attributes of the candidates are clearly relevant factors to be discussed in a campaign.'

Hence, the concentration of power in the hands of one person and a direct electoral system provide sufficient alibi for media and voters to focus on personality in presidential elections. In contrast, in parliamentary elections collective choices about parties are considered to play a decisive role and the effects of the major party leaders is thus seen to be only indirect (LeDuc et al., 1996: 283). Survey-based studies conducted in the 1950s in UK concluded that party leaders did not matter – people voted for the party regardless of who was at the head (Mughan, 2000: 22).

Yet the situation today seems somewhat different. Mughan (2000) argues that the trend of 'presidentialisation' has affected parliamentary elections. This new trend departs from a traditional notion of parliamentary politics as party politics in which individual politicians are of no importance. The presidential-style of competing between individuals who may be supported by a party organization has been increasingly penetrating parliamentary elections world wide: 'leaders matter; they emerge as a political force able in their own right to help shape the outcome of elections' (Mughan, 2000: 11). Yet in a further impact of 'presidentialisation' those who run for office do so less on the basis of their issues they support and more on 'qualifications, experience, personality and promise' (ibid: 1).

And thus, no matter what the system or nature of elections, personality traits seem to have become a somewhat more important cue. Because as Sennett argues, 'a political leader running for office is spoken of as "credible" or "legitimate" in terms of what kind of man he is, rather than in terms of the actions or programs he espouses' (Sennett, 1996, quoted in Jamieson 1988: 62).

What accounts for both the increased importance of individual candidates in the political process and for the increased focus on their personalities over their platforms?

#### *The rise of the candidate*

The process of 'modernization', characterized by 'increasing social complexity' (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 9) led to a break with the traditional social ties. Party affiliation, which was previously related to the class, became the matter of personal preference. 'In many democracies', write Swanson and Mancini (ibid.: 250) 'voting seems to have been transformed from an expression of solidarity with one's group and its institutions to, today, an expression of one's opinions'. Transformed parties had to turn to an individual voter abandoning their strong ideological positions and becoming what Kirchheimer calls (1966) 'catch-all' parties. Thus changes in the political environment affected the practices of both campaigning and governing. Parties became largely susceptible to alternative forms of gaining voters' support. Solutions came from the media and the emerging new 'customer-oriented' (Scammell, 1999: 724) business philosophy.

Philip and Neil Kotler (1999: 13) argue that ‘the first rule of effective campaigning is for the campaign to reflect the interest of the voters’. Bruce I. Newman (1994) suggests that the old concept of parties pursuing their ideologies has now been replaced by the marketing concept that segments the electorate, creates the candidates image accordingly and targets voters with specific, finely brushed messages. And hence, unlike a monolithic party, the candidate becomes the carrier of the party message, targeting his audiences in ways that will maximize their support, and serving as the factor around which alienated voters and disparate social groups, no longer aligned along party lines, will form the transitory support base that will ensure the next electoral victory.

#### *The rise of private persona*

The changes in the political environment went hand in hand with changes in the media environment. As the mediating function of partisanship faded, media has arisen as the most important source of political information. Television imposed new rules of coverage and forged a new presentation style that favoured visible personalities over abstract and complex issues. The public discourse became more ‘personalized, self-disclosive and autobiographical’ (Jamieson, 1988: 44). Accordingly, political parties and candidates had to adjust ‘tailoring more of their activities and decisions to the demands of media logic, engaging in highly visual events staged for television, scheduling activities to meet media deadlines, pushing telegenic candidates and spokespersons to the front’ (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 252). Hence, the need for personal ‘branding’ (Corner, 2000: 387) or strategic management of self-presentation became even grater.

These then, are the underlying forces that have fostered growing interest in personalities of the politicians and encouraged politicians to tactically use their personality features for political gains.

However, the development wasn’t solely towards increased candidate’s ‘visibility’ (Kaas, 1994) in terms of growing media interest in candidates or parties’ willingness to focus campaign on political qualities of one person. It was the private profile of the candidate that penetrated the realm of political.

Critics immediately panicked that concentration on the candidates’ private life will overshadow substantive issues and the real complexity of political events. Hart (2000: 15) reminds how Clinton’s alleged affair with intern Monica Lewinsky drove the historic meeting of Fidel Castro and Pope John Paul II off the front pages. Stromer-Galley and Jamieson (2001: 182) similarly report that in March 1998 *New York Times* published 220 articles about Clinton’s sexual misdemeanour and only five about health legislation that was one of the hottest political issues at the time. Not only does the phenomenon detract from ‘real issues’ it tends to create a whole new sphere into which to divert public attention, by turning politicians into celebrities on top of which their wives, kids and pets get celebrity treatment as well – thus the media not only spotlight the personal side of this public figures, but their ‘private’ side as well.

Whether in response to such developments, or indeed, occurring simultaneously alongside them, politicians have adapted their campaign strategies to take full advantage of the ‘personalization’ phenomenon. This happens not only in that they accentuate their

personalities, but that they tend to include their ‘private personas’ into such discourse. Richard Sennett argues that (1996: 270) ‘Suicide in modern politics lies in insisting that “you need know nothing about my private life; all you need to know is what I believe and the programs I’ll enact”’.

Holz-Bacha (2004) similarly suggests that ‘humanization’ or ‘privatization’ is a classic image strategy politicians resort to when they try to appear more ‘personable’, more familiar and closer to ordinary people. In their study of German and Dutch talk shows, Van Zoonen and Bacha (2000) argue that private discourse has irreversibly infiltrated political persona: ‘Politicians need to be able to operate smoothly in personal discourse in order to construct themselves as likable individuals which is a necessary part of the political persona’. It is not necessary for them to completely step out of their political discourse. They speak from political positions but do so in a private language which then ‘personalizes’ the discourse. Put in another words, political discourse had been personalized or ‘privatized’ on many different levels, from the rise of ‘celebrity-style’ politicians (Stanyer and Wring, 2004: 4) to a very subtle infiltration of private cues into political discourse.

Hence this brief definition of personalization as conceptualized on three different levels: as the discussion on the roots of the interest in personality, as a media phenomenon, and as a candidate’s intentional strategy, will serve as the starting point from which to observe the developments in the Croatian political scene.

### *Personalization in Croatian presidential election in 2000*

Motivated by the unexpected victory of Stjepan Mesić whose success was broadly claimed to his personality, the objective of this paper was to investigate personalization in Croatian presidential elections in 2000. The analysis will rely on Van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha’s definition of personalization given above, in particular in terms of ‘media coverage’ and as a candidate’s strategy. In doing so, it will make another important distinction between invocations made by both media in their coverage and politician’s in their campaigns of the *political* and *private* personas as distinguished above. The former relates to personal qualities with an obvious political dimension (Wilke/Reinemann, 2001: 293) such as competence, reliability and integrity or leadership style, while the latter refers to politician’s personal profile with no obvious political dimension such as appearance, family or habits.

Using content analysis methodology, this study was set to answer the following questions:

Q1: To what degree was the attention of the newspapers directed to candidates’ personalities and in which aspect of their personality were the newspapers particularly interested in?

Q2: Was it possible to observe the systematic use of personality cues by the two front running candidates, Stjepan Mesić and Dražen Budiša, in their communication with the press and voters?

Apart for the 'Mesić phenomenon' the Croatian election in 2000 was interesting for several reasons. First, as mentioned already, it was the first presidential election not dominated by Tuđman. Second, due to Tuđman's death, this election wasn't the classical run between the incumbent and the challenger so none of the candidates had the burden or advantage of the past years in office. Third, Croatia is a transitional country with only a very young history of political communication so it was challenging to see how apt it is to employ an analysis of Western trends (personalization in this particular case) in the context of a newly established democracy.

In that respect, this study is a contribution to comparative analysis of personalization which is for the purposes of this research defined as the increased media interest in candidates' personalities as compared to other contents and then as the way candidate chooses to communicate with voters in modern election campaigns.

Since each election is shaped by structural conditions (Swanson and Mancini, 1996), before turning to a detailed discussion of the presidential election in 2000 it is essential to provide a brief overview of the national context at the time.

#### *Political circumstances preceding the election in 2000*

Until 2000, the ruling HDZ kept reconfirming its dominant position in all parliamentary elections (to the House of Representatives in 1992 and 1995 and to the House of Counties in 1993 and 1997). Franjo Tuđman, the unprecedented war-time leader won both presidential elections by high margin (56,7% in 1992 and 60,3% in 1997). Semi-presidential system of government furnished him with significant powers. Combined with authoritarian political style, these constitutional authorities resulted in a concentration of 'personalized political power' (ibid: 454).

Franjo Tuđman died in 1999. Following his death, the Freedom House issued a report which ranked Croatia among 'partly free' countries rating it 4 on the scale from 1 to 7<sup>2</sup>. A number of political parties that managed to position themselves across the political spectrum now formed the core of the political opposition: SDP, the reformed communists, HSLS, the right-leaning liberals, HNS, liberal party, HSS, IDS and LS. They joined into a large coalition to defeat HDZ in the parliamentary election on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2000. The coalition won by a high margin<sup>3</sup> and the Social Democrat Ivica Račan was appointed Prime Minister. Presidential election was only two weeks ahead. Despite loud requests for constitutional reform that should transform the country's system of government, on 24<sup>th</sup> January Croatia still had a semi-presidential system, which granted extensive authorities to the elected candidate.

<sup>2</sup> 'One' stands for a completely free country, 'seven' for a country that is not free at all. For detailed methodology and survey see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/countries.htm>

<sup>3</sup> SDP/HSLS – 40,8%, HSS/LS/HNS/IDS – 15,6%, HDZ – 24,4%, Other parties – 19,3%.



### *Presidential Election in 2000*

Out of nine candidates, Dražen Budiša and Mate Granić were estimated to have best chance to win. Mate Granić used to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the HDZ government and adherent to the party's more liberal wing. Dražen Budiša was the leader of HSLŠ, which together with SDP won the parliamentary election. Although only in his fifties, he has long been present in Croatian politics. In the early 1970s he was one of the most prominent student rebels. During the so called 'Croatian spring' he agitated for greater autonomy of the Republic of Croatia within the state of Yugoslavia. After opposition's landslide victory in parliamentary election, he was the biggest favorite of the 2000 presidential election.

The third place in the opinion polls was most commonly reserved for Stjepan Mesić, known to many as the 'last president of Yugoslavia'. In the early 1970s he was sentenced to one year in prison for his participation in 'Croatian Spring'. In the early 1990s he entered the HDZ and became the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia and also Croatia's member in the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1997 he joined HNS. As the third person on the HNS list he failed to gain the seat in the parliament in 2000. He entered the presidential campaign with the 9,1% support in the polls (*Jutarnji list*, 07-01-00). Within just a week he rose to 31,1% (*Jutarnji list*, 15-01-00). Just before the end of the first round there appeared allegations accusing him of receiving suspicious money to support his campaign and collaborating with UDBA, the communist secret service. He won the first round with 41,11% of votes. Dražen Budiša followed with 27,71% of votes.

Two days before the final election day Davor Butković, columnist in *Jutarnji list*, wrote: 'It is interesting to remark (...) that most opinion makers in the leading Croatian magazines, from Slobodan Šnajder on the far left to the nationalist Ivan Starčević, declared themselves against Stjepan Mesić' (*Jutarnji list*, 05-02-00). Stjepan Mesić won the election with 56 % of votes.

### *Methodology*

#### *Why content analysis?*

Since the intention of this study was to detect frequency of references to certain contents in newspapers reports and to identify recurring patterns in mediated statements of the candidates, content analysis was decided to be the most adequate methodology to achieve the set goal.

#### *Choice of data and sampling rationale*

Based on similar researches (Kaase, 1994; Schonenbach, 1996; Wilke/Reinemann, 2001) and the judgment that television was inappropriate due to the heavy state control, the decision was made to analyze newspapers. Being the newspapers with the largest

readership share (28% and 41% respectively)<sup>4</sup>, the choice of *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list* seemed rational. Privately owned *Jutarnji list* is closer to ‘tabloid’ style, while *Večernji list* is a broadsheet, and it was state-owned at the time of election and consequently, subject to government influence. The third newspaper, *Novi list*, was chosen for the sake of balance. Throughout the years of the HDZ regime, it was the only daily that was considered independent.

In order to answer both research questions, the analysis was conducted on two levels using two different units of analysis: the article and the statement. The first sample included all articles related to Dražen Budiša and Stjepan Mesić published in the following sections: editorials, news of the day, internal affairs, foreign affairs, lifestyle, weekend supplements, entertainment, culture and special section or supplement on election.

The second sample comprised all Budiša’s and Mesić’s statements published in the articles from the first sample whereas statement was defined as the totality of words within article that was reported as having been said by the candidate. Thus the sampling unit here was the *statement*. The research covered the period of official campaign which is defined ‘to begin on the day the list of candidates was published and to finish 24 hours before the election day, that is from midnight of 8<sup>th</sup> January 2000 until the midnight of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2000’ (Obligatory Instructions I. On the Order of Deeds and Deadlines, According to the Presidential Election Law, *Narodne novine*, 23.12.1999<sup>5</sup>).

#### *Final research sample*

The final number of 147 articles was included in the first sample (58 from *Jutarnji list*, 51 from *Novi list* and 38 from *Večernji list*) and the total of 80 statements in the second sample (45 from Stjepan Mesić and 35 from Dražen Budiša).

#### *Reliability test*

Using Holsti’s method for agreement, inter-coder reliability test was conducted with two independent coders on 30 randomly chosen articles from the first sample and 20 randomly chosen statements from the second sample. Achieved reliability score for articles was 0,87 and for statements 0,90<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> This figures were obtained directly from the *Puls* agency (<http://www.puls.hr>).

<sup>5</sup> Official government bulletin, [www.nn.hr](http://www.nn.hr)

<sup>6</sup> Holsti’s (1969) method of agreement is calculated as  $2A / (N1+N2)$  whereas A is the number of units in which coders agree and N1 and N2 are the number of units coded by each of the coders.

## *Research design*

### *Articles*

The first part of the research was designed to assess the attention devoted to personal profiles of the candidates as compared to other contents. Moreover, it was set to determine in which aspect of personality newspapers were particularly interested in.

The coding book was divided into three sections. The introductory section focused on structural details, the middle section was created to examine the overall interest of the article and the final section was constructed to provide layered results of the coverage of candidates' personalities.

### *Statements*

The second part of the research was designed to determine if and to what extent the candidates relied on personal elements to communicate with voters. The major problem with this part of the analysis was that it had to be anticipated from the very beginning that all statements are mediated and as such are subject to editing and rephrasing. However, it was assumed that if some results persisted and were repeated across all newspapers, they might be taken as the proxy of candidate's real behaviour. Nonetheless, both the researcher and the reader must be aware that the main analytical corpus of this study is the *press representation* of candidates' statements.

Four groups of questions were designed to detect recurrent elements in candidate's communication to press and voters. The first group pertained to structural elements and the second was constructed to determine overall focus of the statements. The third group was designed to reveal candidate's level of individualism and the final group was produced to analyse the linguistic style of the candidates.

Individualisation was examined by counting the number and nature of references to candidates' party or political partners (distancing vs. identification) and by questioning candidates' vision of governing (individual vs. collective activity).

Questions related to language comprise the largest portion of this part of research. Reasons for that lie in the assumption that the power of language is magnified during elections (Hart, 2000) and more specifically, in the notion that personalization can be 'imprinted' into language. In their study about politicians' performance in German and Dutch talk shows Van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha, (2000: 54) conclude: 'Politicians overwhelmingly speak from their political position but sometimes do so in a more private language by which political discourse is personalized'. Humour, irony, jargon and derogatory language were taken as indicators of conversational style which points to simplification of issues which again Swanson and Mancini (1996: 269) suggest is the indicator of personalization. On the other hand, the use of numbers was taken to point to accuracy and administrative style. 'Negotiation' as a specific and pertinent way of communicating with voters was identified in the pilot analysis and was included as a category.

The pilot research detected four groups of words that were quite common in candidates' statements. Three of them were recognized as arousing positive emotions (of justice, prosperity and humanity). Words in the fourth group were taken to be rational and administrative in nature (institutional words). The results are supported by illustrative examples wherever possible.

## *Findings*

### *Articles*

The first part of my research focused on the newspaper coverage during the official campaign period. The sample consisted of 147 articles from three Croatian dailies: *Jutarnji list* (58 articles), *Novi list* (51 articles) and *Večernji list* (38 articles). Its primary interest was to observe how much attention was attributed to the personalities of the two candidates as compared to other contents. Another goal was to determine in which aspect of personality newspapers were particularly interested.

### *Structure*

In 68 articles (46,3 %) Stjepan Mesić was recognized as the main actor. Dražen Budiša was central figure in 51 articles (34,7%) while 23 articles (15,6%) focused equally on both of them. This uneven attention might have been the consequence of the unexpected events or accounts that emerged during campaign. Allegations about suspicious investments into Mesić's campaign and his alleged conspiring with the communist secret service UDBA were certainly among them. This research however is not designed to investigate the editorial policies or bias of the newspapers and therefore can not prove this assumption. The news report was the prevailing format in the sample, followed by interview and editorial or commentary with no major differences between the candidates. Journalists' statements dominated most of the articles (24,5%). Mesić followed with 23,1% but interestingly, the third highest score did not account for his opponent but for the party representatives, predominantly coalition officials who spoke on Budiša's behalf.

### *Overall focus*

The data indicate that the campaign itself was the main topic in 27,9% of the articles. Suspicious inflow of money to Mesić's campaign – and consequently campaign financing – was dominating newspaper agenda throughout the second round. Interestingly enough, both candidates resolutely claimed not to have launched the story: 'Discussion about financing was not initiated by either one of the headquarters. It first appeared in the newspapers and it has been drawing attention away from important things, such as the different issue stands of the candidates' (Dražen Budiša in *Jutarnji list*, N.B., 05-02-00). Candidates' personal profile came right next with 24,5% which is slightly higher than the percentage of articles that reported predominantly on issues (21,1%). The remaining percentage of articles focused on activities of the candidates (17,7%), rebuttals

(8,2%) and other (0,7%). The abolition of presidential privileges and revision of authorities was the most extensively covered issue (29,7% of articles that made some reference to issues). As for activities, both candidates were predominantly described as taking part in rallies (28,9% Mesić and 30,0% Budiša). Another interesting finding is that 10% of articles that registered Budiša's activities featured him meeting celebrities. On the other hand, not a single record was made for Mesić in this category.

Finally, if we take a look at the frequencies, we can see that the ratio of articles that focused predominantly on personalities to all other articles is 36:111 or 1:3,1 which means that one story on personality came in 3,1 on something else (campaign, issue, activities, rebuttal or other).

#### *Personal profile*

The next stage of the research was to determine in which aspect of candidates' personal profiles the newspapers were particularly interested. For this purpose, personal profile was divided into two main subcategories: political persona which consists of personal qualities with an obvious political dimension (Wilke and Reinemann, 2001: 293) and private persona which includes personal qualities with no obvious political dimension (to illustrate, 'Dražen Budiša is intellectually so well equipped as if he was not preparing to become president of Croatia but Plato's *Politeia*', S. Š., *Novi list*, 17-01-00, and 'Mesić and Budiša used to be nudists, they do not smoke any more, they do not drink and they did not beat their children', S. M., *Jutarnji list*, 05-02-00). The data revealed that newspapers were in general more interested in political than in the private persona of the candidates. In 38,8% of all articles some remark was made regarding Mesić's political profile. This figure is much lower for his private profile (19,7%). The result is similar for Budiša whose political persona was mentioned in 27,2% of all articles while reference to his private persona was made in 17% of all cases. So the overall ratio of private persona to political persona for Stjepan Mesić and Dražen Budiša was 29:57 or 1:1,97 and 25:40 or 1:1,6 respectively.

The next step was to establish what features from the realm of political persona were particularly interesting for newspapers and what were the evaluative tendencies in that respect. Integrity scored the highest for both candidates but interestingly, Budiša was more likely to be mentioned as man of honour (positive score in 13,6% of cases as opposed to twice lower negative score) while Mesić was apparently more often referred to as untrustworthy, dishonest or inconsistent (positive score of only 8,2% and the negative score of 23,1%). As for the second highest score, the situation is exactly the opposite. The communication skills of Stjepan Mesić were assessed positively in 13,6% of cases and negatively in only 2%. On the contrary, negative remarks about Budiša's communication skills were observed in 10,9% of articles compared to extremely low score of positive remarks (0,7%).

Table 1: Assessment of candidates' political persona

		Dražen Budiša	Stjepan Mesić
Integrity	Positive	13,6%	8,2%
	Negative	6,8%	23,1%
Reliability	Positive	4,1%	4,1%
	Negative	4,1%	4,8%
Competence	Positive	6,8%	5,4%
	Negative	4,1%	8,2%
Charisma	Positive	3,4%	0,7%
	Negative	0,0%	1,4%
Communication	Positive	0,7%	13,6%
	Negative	10,9%	2,0%

### Statements

The second part of my research was set to trace recurring and consistent patterns in candidates' communication to media and voters. All statements contained in 147 articles from the first sample were included in this part of research. The sample comprised 80 statements, 45 from Stjepan Mesić and 35 from Dražen Budiša.

### Overall focus

The first set of questions analysed the content of the statements. Both candidates focused predominantly on issues (Mesić 37,8% and Budiša 40,0%) . However, it is interesting to investigate more closely the second highest score: while Dražen Budiša focused on the course of campaign (31,4% of the statements), Stjepan Mesić insisted on attacking former government ( 24,4% of the statements). The analysis made no record whatsoever of Dražen Budiša attacking the former government. The candidates did not attribute a lot of attention to their personal profile. Personal traits were the prevailing feature in 8.9% of Mesić's statements and in 8.6% of Budiša's. This score is mostly the result of candidates' attempts to answer journalists' questions regarding past political experience or private habits ('What's your favourite meal? (...) Did you buy flowers to your wife lately? (...) Do you dance?', S.M., *Večernji list*, 14-01-00). Within the issues that were extensively mentioned in the statements – although 'issue' wasn't necessarily the sole primary focus of the statement – Mesić was mostly preoccupied with revision and abolishment of presidential privileges and authorities (35,3%) while Budiša was primarily concerned with economy (37,0%) which, interestingly, scored only 5.9% in Mesić's statements. Corruption accounts for the second highest score with Mesić and presidential privileges with Budiša.

### *Individualization*

There is a significant difference between the positions candidates take to their parties. While Budiša insisted on presenting himself in the context of partisanship, Mesić insisted on individual style, distancing himself from his party whenever possible. A high percentage of Budiša statements (71,4%) contains a reference to either his party or the governing coalition: ‘One of my biggest advantages is that I’m supported by the winning coalition’, (V. Hudolin, *Jutarnji list*, 15-01-00). Mesić referred to his party in only 20% of the statements and even then in most of the cases he did so to dissociate himself from the party: ‘I have no obligations to any party. I am responsible only to Croatian citizens’ (Ka.S., *Jutarnji list*, 12-01-00).

### *Linguistic style*

#### *1. Negotiation*

Another interesting finding is a relatively high level of ‘negotiation’ in Budiša’s statements. It refers to direct appeal to voters to cast their ballot for the candidate either because they will get something in return or because they will lose a great deal if they do not: ‘It would be good for Croatia that I win in the first round, so elect me president of the state and let’s finish it in this round’ (Hudolin, *Jutarnji list*, 15-01-00) or respectively ‘if I won’t be elected, the Prime Minister and the government won’t be able to fulfil their promises’ (Butković, *Jutarnji list* 22-01-00). This tendency was recognized in 57,1% of his statements.

#### *2. Institution, justice, democracy and people*

Words that stand for institutions such as *state, government, ministry* are significantly more traceable with Budiša (48,6%) than with Mesić (11,1%). On the other hand, Mesić was more likely to make use of words that remind of prosperity, such as *Europe, modernization, democracy* (48,9%) and those that evoke the atmosphere of justice, such as *fair, fairness, law* (35,6%). As for the use of human interest terms (*children, women*) there is no significant difference between the candidates.

#### *3. Conversational vs. administrative style*

The data point to significant difference in candidates’ inclination towards humour, irony, derogatory language or colloquialisms. Colloquial expressions seem to be quite common in Mesić’s discourse. They could be traced in 55,6% of his statements. Another frequent element is irony which occurs in 44,4% of the cases. Slightly lower is the percentage of statements in which he used derogatory language (37,8%), most commonly again in reference to the former government (‘robbers’ (*Novi list*, 14-01-00) ‘war profiteers, mobsters’ (*Novi list*, 15-01-00) ‘knaves’ (*Novi list*, 17-01-00). Humour is a pertinent element in 28,9% of his statements. To make another illustration, this is what Stjepan Mesić came up with to answer one of many accusations regarding the financing

of his campaign: ‘I am really surprised that Đurđa Adlešić [member of Budiša’s HSLŠ ] still hasn’t discovered that I am being financed by Osama bin Laden and the people of Madagascar who decided to redirect one per cent of their state budget to my campaign headquarters’ (J.K., *Novi list*, 21-01-00).

All these scores are significantly lower for Dražen Budiša. Mesić’s insistence on joke and wittiness contrasted strongly to Budiša’s language of numbers and accuracy. In 54,3% of his statements Budiša used precise numbers: ‘New government would decrease the unemployment rate from the present 21% down to 8%’ (S. S., *Novi list*, 02-02-00); ‘We aim to go for 17% decrease in budget and 5% decrease in public spending’ (D. B., *Jutarnji list*, 22-02-00). In this category Mesić scored only 8,9%.

## *Discussion*

### *Articles*

The analysis of articles published in three Croatian dailies during the official campaign revealed that the newspapers were mainly concerned with the campaign itself, particularly with its financing. All the more so, it was the media not the candidates that came up with the story about suspicious funds behind Mesić’s campaign, which then dominated the agenda for the most of the second round of the campaign. Although it is not the scope of this paper, this result speaks in favour of the ‘horse-race journalism’ that takes over during election campaigns.

A look at individual categories revealed that the newspapers were more concerned with candidates’ personalities than with their issue stands. However, when the scores of all other contents are added together, candidates’ personalities account for about one third of the coverage. Results obtained by segmenting personality into *private* and *political* persona and counting references on both sides support the notion that although significant attention was dedicated to candidate’s personalities, it overwhelmingly remained within the boundaries of political persona. As for political persona, Dražen Budiša was most prominently portrayed as a man of integrity and lousy communication skills while Stjepan Mesić was presented as a good communicator and a man of suspicious integrity.

As the logic of presidential elections suggests, media interest in candidates’ personalities in presidential election in Croatia in 2000 was relatively high. However, individual traits that came to the forefront of the newspaper reports remained mostly within the realm of political.

### *Statements*

The second part of the research revealed that there are significant differences in the way candidates communicated their messages to the voters. Although we have to bear in mind that all statements are mediated and as such are subject to editing and rephrasing, some results are so persistent and recurring across all newspapers that we may take



them as a real demonstration of candidate's behaviour. The results for both candidates may be summarized as follows.

### *1. Stjepan Mesić*

First, Stjepan Mesić in his statements focused primarily on issues, most prominently on abolition of presidential privileges and revision of authorities. However, attack on the former government was the real backbone of his speeches. Second, Mesić insisted on individualisation. He distanced himself from the party to familiarise with the citizens: 'President is just one of you who is at a certain time appointed for a certain job' (*Novi list*, 16-01-00). He acted as a citizen-politician, people's ombudsman: I am one of you and they are the government. Accordingly, this tendency was transferred to the vision of governing as activity of an individual who is responsible solely to the people. Third, he used very specific language to communicate with the press and voters. Mesić's statements were characterised by colloquial expressions, witty anecdotes and irony. His language abounded with ordinary, everyday phrases. In addition, he seemed to have been very skilful in using memorable phrases and slogans. 'A talent for digesting a speech into a memorable phrase is a characteristic of eloquent person', argues Jamieson (1988: 90). Slogans are very powerful rhetorical devices and the talent to create them is today more important than the capacity to expose comprehensive arguments.

However, if we go back to results it can be seen that that Mesić might have been long on anecdotes but short on substance. He was mostly concerned with issues that had more emotional than pragmatic appeal after exhausting regime of HDZ (abolition of presidential privileges and corruption). If we take a look at groups of words that in the pre-analysis were identified as being quite common in candidates' statements, we shall notice that Mesić quite often used words that aroused positive emotions (of justice and prosperity). On the contrary, very low number of references was registered in the category of numbers, which indicates lack of accuracy. This is further supported by a very low percentage of references related to economy.

### *2. Dražen Budiša*

The findings for Dražen Budiša are also three folded. First, a glimpse at the categories of an overall focus and 'negotiation' demonstrates that Budiša was quite concentrated on campaign conduct and appeal to voters to cast their ballot for him. While Mesić seemed quite relaxed about presidency, Budiša left an impression of a man fixated on being elected. His tendency to 'negotiate' with voters in the second round of campaign turned almost into blackmail. Reluctant to accept the possibility of actually losing the election, Budiša resorted to bargain ('If you do not vote for me, the coalition parties will not be able to fulfil their promise') and belittling the opponent ('Voters played a joke on Mesić, now it's time for the real voting'). Second, Budiša relied entirely on party support which was recognized not only in the vast majority of his statements but also in the article sample which revealed how frequently representatives of the winning coalition spoke on his behalf, either to praise him or to attack his opponent: 'Our candidate's campaign is fair and not negative as the campaigns of some of his op-

ponents who have not only falsely accused Dražen Budiša but have also ascribed his honourable characteristics to themselves (...) If Budiša doesn't become president, we won't be responsible for what we've promised in the last election' (Zdravko Tomac, SDP, M.F., *Jutarnji list*, 18-01-00). The support of the winning coalition was his major argument. Third, Budiša never used conversational style of communication as Mesić did. His rhetoric was formulaic and his style technocratic. Even if we take a look at groups of words that were identified as well represented in the statements, we can observe that Budiša was the most comfortable with words that refer to institutions (state, government). On the other hand, Budiša's language was abundant in numbers, accurate and substantiated. His focus on economy additionally supports this finding.

In the second week of the campaign Davor Butković (*Jutarnji list*, 15-01-00) commented: 'Because of his stiff look, inability to smile naturally and conservative system of values that is, supposedly, immanent to him, Budiša is simply not acceptable to one part of younger voters who strongly supported the coalition of SDP and HSLS'. Even the Prime Minister Ivica Račan remarked that for voters it might be more attractive to elect the charming and eloquent Mesić than the 'political option that is deadly serious and dealing with high politics' (*Novi list*, 27-01-00). The images of Budiša playing saxophone or discussing problems of rock musicians appeared shortly afterwards to change this public impression of him as formal and rigid person (if we go back to articles, we'll see that 10% of articles that registered Budiša's activities featured him meeting celebrities). 'Humanization', notes Holz-Bacha (ibid: 49) is popular with stiff or cold politicians to help them refute popular impression about them.

### 3. Comparison

Going back to the research question, this study revealed that Stipe Mesić based his campaign communication on his personality. Stjepan Mesić presented himself as a candidate whose credibility is measured in terms of what kind of man he is. Although he wasn't explicitly referring to his private life, Stipe Mesić used other subtle private cues to communicate his messages – individual style and conversational language which he used to familiarize with citizens. Therefore, even if he significantly stuck to issues, Mesić's talk was framed into personal discourse (Van Zoonen and Bacha, 2000).

On the other hand Dražen Budiša completely relied on his party and the winning coalition; the strategy that seemed better suited for parliamentary election. He used bureaucratic, educated but stiff language of political diplomacy, and was quite pretentious in trying to prove his political competence. The only trace of 'personalization' for this candidate could be detected in the very few articles from the previous sample which reported about activities that touch on Budiša's human side.

This research proved the existence of consistent differences in presentation styles between the two candidates. Mesić's personality seemed extraordinarily well suited to the context of presidential elections in 2000. After years of Tuđman's authoritarian and pompous government, public was apparently more in favour of the option that was impersonating completely different style of governing. However, even if it was assumed along the way that there is a relationship between 'personalization' – departing from

either of the two interpretations presented in this research – and voters' behaviour, such causality is far from firmly established. This paper was designed to investigate whether the weather phenomenon can be traced and in which form, yet, it was not equipped with methodological tools to conclude how this might have affected voters.

### *Conclusion*

This paper had two main interests: first, to find out how much attention the newspapers devoted to candidate's personalities as compared to other contents and second, were there any systematic differences to be traced between two candidates in regard to their self presentation, articulation of politics, positions they speak from and the language they use. Personalization was therefore conceptualised on two levels – as a media phenomenon and as a candidate's strategy – each of them using a different unit of analysis.

In the light of discussion about increased media attention that is directed towards private profiles of the candidates and the candidate's willingness to disclose their privacy for political gains, the research made a distinction between the private and political profile of the candidates.

The first part of the research revealed that the newspapers' interest in candidates' personalities in presidential elections in Croatia in 2000 was relatively high. However, personal traits that came to the forefront of the media remained mostly within the realm of political. Findings from the second part led to the conclusion that there were significant differences in the way candidates communicated their messages to the press and the voters. Although in his statements he wasn't explicitly referring to his personal features, Stipe Mesić systematically used other subtle private cues to communicate his messages, most prominently conversational and ordinary language to familiarise with voters. Dražen Budiša on the contrary remained within the realm of political discourse, completely relying on the winning coalition as a source of credibility and communicating in the comprehensive and accurate language of the political administration.

Although the results and the discussion might suggest that personality *is* an important voting cue, the goal of this study was not to investigate how much it actually influenced voters in 2000. Increased attention to candidates' personalities does not show how much it really matters and what proportion of the vote does it take. 'Personality is a variable', argues Mughan (2000: 51) 'and its impact can not be taken for granted'. It is always a combination of factors that determine the outcome of elections. Yet, this is the direction in which this research could be taken further.

The phenomenon of personalization seems set to enter the political processes of young democracies, regardless of the impact it has yet to be proven to have. Thus, a fruitful avenue of research would also be a comparative investigation of trends of personalization as they occur in other post-communist countries. This would help reveal the extent to which such processes are influenced by contextual factors specific to each of these countries, and hence provide further insight into the nature of the phenomenon.

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