

**MODELS OF VOTER BEHAVIOR:  
THE 2000 SLOVENIA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

by

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## **Introduction**

This study reports on one of the three applications of a predictive model of voter behavior executed in a cross-cultural study in 2000. The first was carried out on the presidential elections in Poland (Falkowski and Cwalina 2001), the second in the USA (Newman 2001) and this, the third one, on the parliamentary elections in Slovenia. The model in this study was operationalized at both the candidate and party level (as it was in the USA; see Newman 2001). The study sought to identify those questions that were unique to both candidates and political parties that drove behavior of the voters in this election.

While Newman's (2001) study in the USA indicated that the used model of voter behavior works equally well on candidate as on the party level, this was impossible to test in Slovenia. Similarly to Odescalchi's (1999) experience in Hungary, we found such a low visibility (Rein, Kotler and Stoller 1997) of candidates among their potential voters that it was impossible to measure data with any accuracy separately for candidates and parties. Since voters were generally capable of identifying parties only, we tested the model on the party level.

### **A model of voter behavior in evolving democracy**

A model of voter behavior was developed and tested by Newman in the USA. "The fundamental axiom of the model is that voters are consumers of service offered by a politician, and similar to consumers on the commercial marketplace, voters choose candidates based on the perceived value offered to them. The model proposes that there are five distinct and separate cognitive domains that drive voters' behavior" (Newman 1999b: 260): political issues, social imagery, candidate personality, situational contingency, and epistemic value (for review of the model and some of its tests see Newman 1999b; Newman and Seth 1985; Newman and Seth 1987; also Newman 2001; Falkowski and Cwalina 2001; Verčič 1999).

It can be claimed that nowhere are politicians "in the business of selling hope to people" (Newman 1999a: 7) more than in evolving democracies. "Obviously, the collapse of the communist ideology has eliminated communism as a political governance option. The only acceptable alternatives are political anarchy and the threat of civil wars or the embracement of a democratic form of government. Since political anarchy is not in the self-interest of the politicians, it is more likely that a market-oriented approach to getting elected and reelected will be embraced in most emerging democracies." (Sheth 1994: ix.)

It looks like contemporary emergence of democracy is corresponding to emergence of political marketing: in emerging democracies it is not a candidate that behaves as "service provider" (Newman 1994: 9), but his political party (cf. Odescalchi 1999). This is even more so in countries, like Slovenia, with proportional electoral systems.

A primer gives the following description of Slovenian electoral system:

"The Slovenian electoral system is essentially proportional – meaning that each party get a number of deputies equal to the share of votes they received at the polls – but it also has elements of a majority system. Namely, voters are divided into 88 electoral districts and voters within each district vote for individual candidate. Electoral districts are integrated into eight electoral units. The personalization of candidates is guaranteed by the fact that candidate lists are comprised of those candidates who received the highest share of votes in the

electoral units in which they ran. Because of this, candidates within the same party also compete against each other which creates a great deal of uncertainty in elections. According to this system, which remained valid until 2000 – parties could participate in dividing the remainder of votes if they obtained at least three deputies i.e. more than 3.3% of votes. Parties were also allowed to form a national list creating an advantage for certain candidates.“

In 2000, a new constitutional law introduced a 4% electoral threshold for entry into the National Assembly and that “the lists of candidates who received less than 4% of votes will not be taken into account. Instead, the Droop quotient will be used in allotting mandates per electoral units. In addition, the law determined that assigning mandates to party lists on the state level should equal those which would have been assigned based on the sum total of votes in all the electoral units. The last provision means that beside direct mandates, which lists can get in an electoral unit for every 8.33% votes, additional mandates that account for the difference to the actually reached percentage of the votes on the state level belong to lists, too. According to the new law, there are no additional direct mandates if a party list does not receive more than 4% of the vote on the state level. This new regulation enables each electoral unit to have 11 electoral deputies; this regulation did not apply in the previous system because of the national lists.” (Lukšič 2001: 41-42.)

If the above explanation looks complicated, it is only because the electoral system is complicated. It is therefore easy to understand why voters don't care to learn about the individual candidates and focus their attention to parties instead.

## **Overview of the study**

### **Setting**

The 2000 parliamentary elections were the third elections after the adoption of the Constitutional Charter on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Slovenia in 1991, when Slovenia transformed itself from a Yugoslav socialist federal republic into an independent, open and democratic country. Slovenian parliament consists of 90 members. The country is divided into 8 electoral units and each of these consists of 11 electoral districts. (2 seats are reserved for members of constitutionally recognized national minorities in Slovenia, Hungarians and Italians, who vote separately.)

The election date was October 15, 2000. Electoral body consisted of 1.5 million voters. Participation on parliamentary elections was around 70 percent.

The study was carried out approximately 2 weeks before parliamentary elections in electoral district Vrhnika, a suburban area near Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. This district was selected based on similarity of its electoral result (on the party level) to previous (1996) parliamentary elections. Based on pre-election polls by several research institutions, three political parties predicted to win the most votes were selected for study. They were LDS (Liberal Democrats of Slovenia), ZLSD (United List of Social Democrats), and SDS (Social Democrats of Slovenia).

Respondents were interviewed via telephone. Interviewing started two weeks before elections and was completed in four days. The Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was used to obtain respondents' intentions regarding voting. One

day after elections a post-election contact was made with the respondents of the study to obtain information on the electoral decision of the respondents a day earlier.

### **Sample**

The study was to be carried on samples of 200 voters per each selected political party. Random sampling was based on households and of respondents within them. 4,564 contacts and 617 interviews were made in accordance with the sampling procedures before elections.

The day after elections 87.5 percent of the original sample (N=617) was interviewed to obtain data on the actual voting decision.

### **Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire included statements that were operationalized along the lines of the components of the model of voter behavior. A total of 230 questions were included in the survey. Of the total number of questions, approximately one-half dealt with the candidates and one-half dealt with the parties.

### **Data Analysis**

Following Newman's (cf. 2001) suggestion, the principal technique used in data analysis was discriminant analysis. Three sets of pairwise discriminant analyses were carried out between correspondents who indicated that they preferred each party (LDS, ZLSD and SDS). In these analyses, the criterion variable was the respondent's preferred political party. The predictor variables were questions generated for each of the components in the theory using a series of pairwise T-tests between respondent groups (LDS versus ZLSD, LDS versus SDS and ZLSD versus SDS).

### **Discussion**

#### **LDS vs. ZLSD**

The data results in Table 2 report on the discriminant analysis carried out between respondents who said that they will vote either LDS or ZLSD. Specifically, the respondents indicated likelihood that they would vote for each of these parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as LDS supporters were, in order of importance:

1. Future-orientation
2. Support for the poorest
3. Higher salaries
4. Quality education.

A review of the top four issues shows why is LDS capable of being a party of a relative majority in the parliament throughout the first decade of democracy in Slovenia and why it was the pivotal player in nearly all governments in that period: because voters perceive it as being capable of thinking and bringing about future. At the same time it is perceived as being compassionate, considerate of government and public services employees and investing in educational system. It is no wonder that with a such profile, the party won these elections.

The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as ZLSD supporters were, in order of importance:

1. Woman rights
2. Situational contingency – switch if taxes rose
3. Situational contingency – switch if party's leaders were caught drinking while driving
4. Situational contingency – switch if party's leaders evaded taxes.

These four values show a high level of situational contingency involved in voter behavior in Slovenia. This can partly be explained by a lack of profound political choices European emerging democracies face which forces all political parties that compete for the central stage to support the same policies: liberalization and privatization (domestic policies), and EU and NATO membership (foreign policies). The discriminant model predicted respondents' voter behavior with 90.4% level of accuracy, which is less than found in Newman's (cf. 2001) study in the US, but still very good.

### **LDS vs. SDS**

The data results in Table 3 report on the discriminant analysis carried out between voters who predicted that they will vote either LDS or SDS. Specifically, the respondents indicated likelihood that they would vote for each of these parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as LDS supporters were, in order of importance:

1. Situational contingency – switch if inflation rose significantly
2. Situational contingency – switch if party's leaders were involved in an economic/business scandal
3. Vote for my party because of the personalities that endorse it
4. The party will lower crime rate.

An examination of these data shows that in the selected choice between LDS and SDS, LDS supporters choose it over SDS because of its leaders on the national level. This result also confirms that voters in the selected electoral district were voting based on national party preferences and not for their local candidates. It looks like these voters were satisfied with the way LDS was running economy and would switch if inflation significantly rose (a demon from Yugoslav past, when people learned how to live with inflation above 1000 percent).

The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as SDS supporters were, in order of importance:

1. Blue collar's worker support
2. The party will stop worrying about the world problems and start worrying about domestic problems
3. I want change in the administration
4. Farmer's support

These values confirm positioning of SDS as the main opposition to LDS. Its supporters are from lower social strata and non-urban areas, parochial and demanding more radical changes in the evolution of new Slovenia. The discriminant model predicted respondents' voter behavior with 85.4% level of accuracy.

## **ZLSD vs. SDS**

The data results in Table 4 report on the discriminant analysis carried out between potential voters of ZLSD or SDS. Specifically, the respondents indicated likelihood that they would vote for each of these parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as ZLSD supporters were, in order of importance:

1. The party will offer job security
2. I believe the party is sincere
3. Situational contingency – switch if economic results aggravated
4. Vote for the party because of the personalities that endorse it.

Of all the parties in Slovenia, ZLSD is generally perceived as being representing continuity and moderation in its support to social, economic and political transformations. Little change to many people means little insecurity. This would change only if economic results aggravated. Also this result confirms that voters in the selected electoral district were voting based on national party preferences and not for their local candidates.

The four most important values to voters who identified themselves as SDS supporters were, in order of importance:

1. I believe that the party will raise salaries
2. Foreign born voters will most likely vote for this party
3. Situational contingency - switch if party's leaders were not healthy enough to go through their mandate
4. Situational contingency - switch if inflation rose significantly

Foreign born voters in this context means descendants of political emigration that was forced to leave Slovenia when communists were in power. The support of descendants of Slovenian political Diaspora for SDS was communicated well and the potential voters noticed that. In this pair between the two social-democratic parties (which ZLSD and SDS are – at least by their names) it is interesting to note what their potential voters expect from them in labor-related terms. As seen above, ZLSD supporters expect job security (which confirms that ZLSD is more middle class social democratic party), while SDS supporters would like to get higher salaries (with SDS being more blue collar social democratic party). The discriminant model predicted respondents' voter behavior with 87.7% level of accuracy.

## **Conclusion**

This study reported on a test of a predictive model of voter behavior in Slovenia. This is one of the tests that were simultaneously done in three countries – Poland, the US and Slovenia. The purpose of the test reported in this study was to test the model in a different cultural and political setting from the one in which it was designed, and also in a different electoral setting – in a proportional instead of majority system of voting.

The model proved itself as working in Slovenia. Its classification results, reported in Tables 2, 3 and 4 are not as high as originally reported by Newman, but they are nevertheless high enough to make a predictive model of voter behavior viable also beyond the nation boundaries of its conception.

The 2000 parliamentary elections viewed through the glasses of the model used here show that voters selected LDS for its future orientation, ZLSD for stability and SDS for

change. This makes the top three choices of Slovenian electorate a balanced selection that proves that democracy gained its ground in Slovenia the past decade. The balance between stability and change with a view to the future is an indication that democracy in Slovenia is transforming itself from evolving into evolved.

Although it was not in the focus of this study, similarly to Odescalchi's experience in Hungary we found low visibility of individual local candidates in parliamentary elections in Slovenia. Although this may be partly explained by a proportional electoral system, it also demonstrates low effort on the side of individual politicians – first as candidates, but maybe even later, if elected, as officials. The further adoption of political marketing models and methods in evolving democracies may well be linked to the question of individual responsibility of politicians.

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**TABLE 1: GENERAL PROFILE OF SAMPLE**

<b>Study Timing</b>	approx. 10 days before General Elections	
<b>Sample Size</b>	617 cases, at least 200 for each candidate	
<b>Method</b>	CATI	
<b>Age of Sample</b>		
	18 – 30 y.	20.1 %
	31 – 54 y.	42.8 %
	55 and more	37.1 %
<b>Education of Sample</b>		
	Primary School or less	12.0 %
	Trade School	8.8 %
	Secondary School	55.9 %
	2 years of University	11.8 %
	University level or more	11.3 %
	missing	.2 %
<b>Social Class of Sample</b>		
	Lower Class	4.5 %
	Lower Middle	18.2 %
	Middle	61.9 %
	Upper Middle	13.0 %
	Upper	1.1 %
	missing	1.3 %
<b>Questionnaire</b>	approx. 230 questions; 2 levels (Party and Candidate level)	
<b>Party Preference</b>		
<b>Will Vote</b>	LDS	33.5 %
	SDS	31.4 %
	ZLSD	31.9 %
	missing	3.1 %
<b>Did Vote (collected after the elections)</b>	LDS	33.2 %
	SDS	18.0 %
	ZLSD	22.5 %
	missing	26.3 %
<b>Party Loyalty</b>		
	1.0 % of LDS voters are also members of the Party	
	6.3 % of SDS voters are also members of the Party	
	7.9 % of ZLSD voters are also members of the Party	
<b>Level of Interest/Concern in Election</b>	20.4 % of total sample very concerned about elections	

**TABLE 2: DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR PARTY SUPPORTERS  
LDS vs. ZLSD – Four Most Important Variables Listed for Each Party**

A. LDS

I believe that my party is future-oriented.	.898
I believe that my party will make living easier for the poorest.	.776
I believe that my party will rise salaries.	.521
I believe that my party will assure quality of the education system.	.518

B. ZLSD

I believe that my party will assure equality of women's rights.	- .672
I would switch my vote if taxes rose.	- .618
I would switch my vote if my party's leaders were caught drinking while driving.	- .524
I would switch my vote if my party's leaders evaded taxes.	- .488

Eigenvalue	1.898																														
Wilks' Lambda	.345																														
Chi-squared	85.127																														
df	64																														
Significance	.040																														
<b>Classification Results</b>																															
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3" rowspan="2"></th> <th colspan="2">Predicted Group Membership</th> <th rowspan="2">Total</th> </tr> <tr> <th>1,00</th> <th>2,00</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Original</td> <td>Count</td> <td>LDS</td> <td>59</td> <td>8</td> <td>67</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>ZLSD</td> <td>3</td> <td>44</td> <td>47</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2">%</td> <td></td> <td>LDS</td> <td>88,1</td> <td>11,9</td> <td>100,0</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>ZLSD</td> <td>6,4</td> <td>93,6</td> <td>100,0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					Predicted Group Membership		Total	1,00	2,00	Original	Count	LDS	59	8	67		ZLSD	3	44	47	%		LDS	88,1	11,9	100,0		ZLSD	6,4	93,6	100,0
					Predicted Group Membership			Total																							
			1,00	2,00																											
Original	Count	LDS	59	8	67																										
		ZLSD	3	44	47																										
%		LDS	88,1	11,9	100,0																										
		ZLSD	6,4	93,6	100,0																										
Correctly classified:	90.4 %																														

**TABLE 3: DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR PARTY SUPPORTERS  
LDS vs. SDS – Four Most Important Variables Listed for Each Party**

A. LDS

I would switch my vote if inflation rose significantly.	- .692
I would switch my vote if my party's leaders were involved in an economic/business scandal.	- .459
I am voting for my party because of the personalities that endorse it.	- .447
I believe that my party will lower crime rate.	- .400

B. SDS

Blue-collar workers will most likely vote for my party.	.400
I believe my party will start worrying less about the world problems and more about our domestic problems.	.382
I will vote for my party because I want a change in the administration.	.350
Farmers will most likely vote for my party.	.333

Eigenvalue	1.177																														
Wilks' Lambda	.459																														
Chi-squared	96.845																														
Df	63																														
Significance	.004																														
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Correctly classified:	85.4 %																														

**TABLE 4: DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR PARTY SUPPORTERS  
ZLSD vs. SDS – Four Most Important Variables Listed for Each Party**

A. ZLSD

I believe my party will offer me a job security.	- .656
I believe my party is sincere.	- .497
I would switch my vote if economic results aggravated.	- .413
I am voting for my party because of the personalities that endorse it.	- .400

B. SDS

I believe my party will rise salaries.	.605
Foreign born voters will most likely vote for my party.	.549
My party's leaders were not healthy enough to go through their mandate	.490
I would switch my vote if inflation rose significantly.	.488

Eigenvalue	1.113																														
Wilks' Lambda	.473																														
Chi-squared	77.797																														
df	64																														
Significance	.115																														
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					Predicted Group Membership			Total																							
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