

SLOVENIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS FROM 1994 TO 2022: DOMINANCE OF NON-PARTISAN LISTS AND MAYORS

Miro HAČEK¹

Elections to representative bodies are the basic tool for exercising power in democratic countries and the most recognizable external sign of democracy. Much ink has already been spilled about the institute of local elections and many scientific contributions have been written, which also applies to Slovenian local elections. In the analysis of the previous eight local elections, which have been held since 1994, the conclusion that local elections are somewhat underestimated and neglected compared to parliamentary elections is emphasized, as political parties have had lot less success at the local levels of authority. At the same time, it remains relatively unnoticed that local elections have a similar role and meaning to parliamentary elections, except that they are held on a significantly smaller territory, in significantly smaller communities and have a different substantive sign. However, local elections represent the most important influence of the inhabitants of the local community on the operation of the local self-government, therefore they represent the fundamental element of local democracy. In this article, we analyse the essential characteristics of the eight local elections in independent Slovenia so far, with an emphasis on the most recent elections, which took place in late November 2022.

Key words: elections; local government; non-partisanship; political parties; Slovenia.

1 THE VIBRANCY OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY²

There is a growing tendency to strengthen local democracy whereby citizens or residents are placed at the centre of all the activities of local communities. It is a question of citizens' quality of life, and the responsiveness of public services to

¹ Miro HAČEK, PhD, is professor at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Contact: miro.hacek@fdv.uni-lj.si

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their needs and interests (Prebilič and Kukovič 2021, 539). Local democracy is therefore a mix of direct decision-making by citizens and representative democracy. With *indirect local democracy*, the decision-making process takes place through bodies elected in local elections. Another participatory form is *direct local democracy*. In addition to these traditional forms of local democracy, there are also newer, more modern forms of local democracy and political participation. The traditional forms of local democracy and participation are in fact the prerequisites and the basis for the more modern forms. In the Slovenian local government system, municipality residents exercise indirect local democracy by electing mayors, municipal councillors, and members of the councils of municipal subdivisions.

The assumption of some political parties that the increasing number of electoral units (municipalities) will help them obtain a larger share of votes was not unrealistic. However, from one local election to the next, the significance of this assumption has steadily declined, because non-party candidates have come to the forefront. Before analysing the election results it should be noted that the increase in the number of municipalities from 62 before 1994 to the current 212 is, above all, the result of an increasing number of small municipalities with a relatively small number of voters and in which one vote has a significantly greater impact than in large municipalities. Moreover, a different (majority) voting system has been established in these municipalities, where people and candidates are elected first and foremost, and where political parties, *a priori*, do not have much influence. Therefore, since the first local elections after the introduction of local government in 1994, analysts of local elections have been asking themselves whether a victory in a host of small municipalities can outweigh an electoral victory in a single city municipality with more voters than thirty of the smallest municipalities combined. Table 3 shows voter turnout in all local elections to date.

Voter turnout at local elections in the early period after the re-establishment of a local government (1994 to 2002) was higher than in the latter period (2006 to 2022), although, at the 2002 local elections, it should be noted that they were held simultaneously to the presidential elections, which undoubtedly had a positive effect on the higher turnout. The turnout at local elections in the last decade has consolidated at about fifty percent with a negative bottom in 2014, an unexpected six percent turnout increase at the local elections in 2018³ (Haček 2019) and slight drop below 50 percent margin again in 2022. Turnout has traditionally been higher in smaller municipalities; for comparison, at the local elections in 2018, the voter turnout was 67,6 percent in municipalities under a thousand inhabitants and only 46,8 percent in municipalities over twenty-thousand inhabitants. When electoral (non-)participation is analysed, an interesting question regarding the reasons for non-participation arises. Electoral participation research tends not to examine people who do not participate in elections, abstainers, or apathetic people, i.e., those who do not participate in elections at all. This group exacerbates the problem of social exclusion. Apathetic people who do not participate in the political (electoral) life are excluded from the usual ways used by citizens to collectively form their society. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) have established that non-participation is the result of the following reasons: people do not participate, because they cannot (a lack

³ As comparison we add voter turnout at parliamentary elections in the period of 1992–2018: 85,6 percent (1992); 73,7 percent (1996); 70,1 percent (2000); 60,6 percent (2004); 63,1 percent (2008); 65,6 percent (2011); 51,7 percent (2014) (Haček, Kukovič and Brezovšek 2017, 144); 52,6 percent (2018) and 71,0 percent (2022) (State Electoral Commission 2022).

of time), do not want to (disappointed in politics) or are isolated from social networks that could help them get involved in the political situation.

TABLE 1: VOTER TURNOUT AT LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE PERIOD FROM 1994 TO 2022 (IN PERCENT)

Year of local elections	Voter turnout (first round of local elections)
1994	62,7
1998	58,3
2002	72,1
2006	58,2
2010	51,0
2014	45,2
2018	51,2
2022	47,6

Source: Data of the State Electoral Commission (Haček 2019); data for local elections 2018 (Kukovič and Haček 2019) and 2022 (State Electoral Commission 2022).

2 TRADITIONS OF (NON-)PARTISANSHIP IN SLOVENIA

Political parties tend to form due to social, cultural, and other inequalities (Bibič 1992) and play at least a dual role as organizations. On the one hand, they have a social role and are social actors since they develop social ties with society. In this manner, they interconnect voters and sympathizers, include citizens in the political system via their mobilization function, and attempt to represent the interests of society in institutions where policies and other decisions are formed. On the other hand, political parties are institutional actors, meaning that they perform tasks pertaining to governmental and parliamentary actors, especially in the sense of regulating colliding social interests, forming political institutions, and organizing governmental and parliamentary life (Van Biezen 1998).

Political parties first appeared in Slovenian territory in the second half of the 19th century and were mainly representatives of two large blocks (clerical and liberal) and one minor (socialist). Political parties disappeared prior to World War II and were even prohibited after the war (Lukšič 2001, 37). One can only identify two periods in Slovenian history during which partisanship flourished: the early 1920s and the early 1990s (Lukšič 1994, 23). Instead of witnessing the rise of partisanship, Slovenian politics were harshly criticized by partisanship, which developed new forms of political and social organizations instead of parties. An anti-party trend is – on the other hand – one of the more recent phenomena in contemporary democracies around the world (Bale and Roberts 2002, 1).

In different periods of the 20th century in Slovenia, the Catholic side offered a corporatist state featuring the strong role of the Church, while the socialist side offered a corporatist state with the stressed role of a single class (Zver 1990, 154). The tradition of the non-partisan organization was first enhanced by *Ljudska fronta* – the People's Front – and even more so by *Osvobodilna fronta* – the Liberation Front. However, the Catholic side opposed the Liberation Front and, in so doing, opted against the non-partisanship type of organization, and strived towards the old-party structure in which it had played a hegemonic role. Thus, during the war, a battle for the type of post-war political organization to be put in place was also being fought: a battle between partisanship and non-partisanship. The non-partisanship won. The People's Front, which later evolved into *Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva* – the Socialist League of the Working

People, was deeply entrenched in a non-partisan sentiment of Slovenian polity; therefore, we can argue that it was a non-partisan party or a party of non-partisans (Lukšič 1994, 24).⁴

It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that political parties were revived, with the democratization of political life, culminating in the first post-war democratic elections, which were held in the spring of 1990. Thus, in Slovenia (only), an era of modern partisanship began in the early nineties. The end of the 1980s saw the formation of new political parties while the old socio-political organizations, which had, until then, enjoyed a guaranteed monopoly status in organizing and leading all political interests and activities, were transformed into new political parties (Krašovec 2000, 23). The first parties were able to register after The Societies Act had been amended, and during the 1990–1992 period 131 parties were registered. However, far fewer had made their appearance by the time of the 1992 elections. At first, parties were based on the protection of the interests of some social groups (peasants' party, intellectuals' party, pensioners' party, craftsmen's party, workers' party, etc.), and only later did they widen their profiles to become political parties as we know them today (Lukšič 2001, 38).

The commentary on the Political Parties Act (1994) mainly talks about the situation of parties in the legal system and not about parties in the political system. Political parties were defined as “a form of organization with a clearly defined ideology (a party's program is mentioned), whose goal is to contest or maintain political power through democratic elections. That is the reason political parties are organized groups with political goals that are distinguishable from other political organizations, whose members come together for the purpose of protecting defined interests with political means... political parties exercise their active role on all levels of public life.” During the years Slovenia was seeking its independence, the newly established parties were primarily a vehicle of mass protest against the former regime and a form of striving for a more sovereign status of Slovenia, but they did not have any more precisely elaborated programs encompassing the most important spheres of life. The consequence of this was a low level of ideological differentiation, as the newly established political parties, though exhibiting greater ideological differences, had a single common goal for whose attainment they were prepared to push aside their ideological differences for some time (Krašovec 2000, 24).

Political parties are organizations that, in society and in the state, perform several different functions. According to the law, they have the right to participate in the formation of bodies of power, whereas other organizations do not possess this privilege (Lukšič 1994, 26). Through historical development, political parties have become actors that play key roles during elections to politically representative institutions and in candidate-selection processes for elections (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2000, 143). The latter is corroborated by the currently valid Political Parties Act (2005, orig. 1994), as it stipulates in Article 1 that a political party is “an association of citizens who realize their political goals, adopted by a party's program, by means of a democratic formation of political will of citizens and by proposing candidates at elections to the National Assembly, for the President of the Republic and to the bodies of local communities”. Political parties are organizations that assist candidates in entering politically representative institutions; in exchange, the selected candidates are expected to be loyal to their political party and act in accordance

⁴ For similar processes in other countries in the region, please see Turska-Kawa et al (2022, 22–25) and Janas and Jánošková (2022, 56–60).

with the party's expectations. As a reflection of the thesis that political parties are the main actors during parliamentary elections, we only see a relatively small number of independent candidates and an even smaller number of successful independent candidates. But this description does not apply equally to the local levels of government, as will be discussed a little later.

A relatively strong resistance to party politics can be recognized in the constitution since it only mentions political parties in a negative context (Lukšič 1994, 26). Article 42 of the Constitution states that membership in political parties is forbidden for professional members of police and the armed forces. The Constitution consistently reveals its liberal, anti-partisan nature, including an article that states that members of Parliament are representatives of the nation and are *not obliged to follow any directions*. The drafters of the Constitution realized that political parties exist, and that Parliament will always be a partisan institution, but political parties were still not given a natural right to be included in the Constitution (ibid., 27). Moreover, the apex of Slovenian distrust of parties is represented by a corporatist body – *Državni svet* – the National Council. It was supposed to be beyond the influence of political parties since the candidates for it are chosen by associations, social organizations and unions, chambers, and universities; that is, non-partisan organizations. However, half of its members, namely 22 representatives of local interests, are also elected to the National Council for each term of office, and these candidates appear on party lists. One, therefore, cannot say that the operation of this body is absolutely non-partisan. Despite all this, the National Council, besides the President of the Republic, still represents a certain locus within the Slovenian Constitution that deserves to be protected and cultivated to prevent the parties from completely dominating Slovenian politics (Lukšič 1994, 28).

Alenka Krašovec (2000, 26) states that a common problem of all Slovenian political parties is the problem of unsatisfied structural connections to society, as indicated in the negative public opinion of Slovenian political parties. Even though Slovenian public opinion strongly supported the pluralization of political space back in the early 1990s, which was somehow expressed in the 1990 plebiscite, the trust in political parties began to decline significantly soon after the multiparty system had been established. Trust in political parties has declined rapidly since 1991; in 1991, 12.1 percent of voters had high or moderate levels of trust in political parties; in 1995, this description only applied to 4.5 percent of voters (Toš in Krašovec 2000, 26), and in 2001 (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2001), to 9.3 percent of voters. At the end of 2008 (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2008), 9 percent of voters had high or moderate levels of trust in political parties, although 43 percent of voters had extensive levels of distrust. If we compare these data with the most recent ones (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2010), we see that the percentage of respondents who trust political parties has been constantly decreasing (now only 6 percent), whereas the share of those who express an open distrust in political parties has been on the increase (half of the respondents). As an interesting fact, we can also mention the data of the public opinion poll called *Slovenski utrip* (School of Advanced Social Studies 2010), as it shows that the question “*Which party would you vote for if parliamentary elections were held this Sunday?*” was answered with “*none*” by the largest percentage of respondents (24.7 percent).

To some degree, the distrust in political parties originates from the installation of parliamentary polity in Slovenia. Following many years of the single-party system, the citizens were not ready for parliamentary debates that publicly

exposed social controversies. Unfortunately, these controversies have not been interpreted in the spirit of a democratic confrontation of dissenting opinions, but as rows, and, hence, a view has emerged that the parliament is an unnecessary institution and that political parties are generators of quarrels. It has been the open representation of differing interests, which is otherwise typical of a developed parliamentary democracy that has earned political parties a negative label. However, the political elite has also contributed its fair share, viewing rejection of and disagreement with their positions in the context of political debates as personal assaults rather than as an ingredient of a political debate. The lack of trust in political parties is regarded because of the visible egoistic and ideologically burdened activity of political elites (Fink-Hafner 1997, 152). Politbarometer research (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2003a) ascertained that Slovenian political parties are among the least trusted institutions; moderate levels of trust in political parties could only be seen in 10 percent of voters, but, on the other hand, 42 percent of them had high levels of distrust.⁵ The Politbarometer research (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2008) found that political parties are the least-trusted political organization among 24 listed political institutions and organizations.⁶ The later data from the Politbarometer research (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2010) places political parties in the last position among the nineteen institutions, such that only 6 percent of people expressed trust and 50 percent expressed distrust. If we consider the different Politbarometer surveys conducted from 1996 onwards, we can comprehend that political parties are, among the five most important political institutions,⁷ constantly the foci of most of the voters' distrust. The level of membership in political parties in Slovenia is quite low, especially in comparison with older EU members.⁸ According to various sets of available data, around 10 percent of voters were members of a political party at the end of the previous decade (Krašovec 2000, 26),⁹ just under 5 percent of voters were members of a political party in 2005 (Slovenian public opinion 2005),¹⁰ and 6.5 percent of all voters were members of a political party in 2007 (Brezovšek et al. 2008, 148). The trend of non-partisan lists at the local level, which have been gaining ever-greater weight at local elections due to the present distrust in political parties, is also displayed by the data of the *Slovenski utrip* opinion poll (School of Advanced

⁵ For comparison reasons, we should mention that political parties are the least-trusted political institution (10 percent of voters have at least moderate levels of trust; answers 1 and 2 combined); other institutions included in this survey: general courts (13 percent), the Catholic Church (21 percent), the Constitutional Court (23 percent), etc. In the case of the answer "I don't trust", results worse than those of political parties (who are not trusted by 42 percent of respondents) were achieved by the Catholic Church (47 percent) and legal courts (53 percent). The average mark (on a scale ranging from 1 - "trust the least" - to 5 - "trust the most") - for political parties in November 2003 was 2.52, a result that placed political parties in the second-to-last place among all the institutions.

⁶ On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "I trust the least" and 5, "I trust the most". For comparison, we can state that political institutions received an average grade (from three surveys conducted in April, June and December 2008) of 2.46, the Catholic Church received 2.47; general courts, 2.50; the government, 2.77.

⁷ The President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the National Assembly, the Government of the Republic and political parties.

⁸ See also Mair and Van Biezen (2001).

⁹ Membership in political parties as a percentage of eligible voters is calculated based on data available from political parties and the official number of eligible voters for 1998. The Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), at the time, had (according to its own data) 5,342 members; the Slovenian People's Party (SPP), around 40,000; the Social Democratic Party (SDP), around 20,000; the Slovenian Christian Democrats (SCD), 36,576; the United List of Social Democrats (ULSD), around 23,000; the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DPP), 26,000; and the Slovenian National Party (SNP), 5,783 (Krašovec 2000, 26).

¹⁰ Question 7.17: "Are you a member of a political party?" There were 42 "yes", 948 "no" and 12 "I do not know" answers.

Social Studies 2010), conducted in August 2010, when non-partisan (local) lists were recognized as the most popular among survey respondents – gaining theoretical voters' support of 42.9 percent. However, in the following section, we present the actual success of non-partisan candidates and lists at the recent local elections, whereby we also analyse in greater detail the results of the five consequent local elections, with an emphasis on the (growing) rates of success of non-partisan candidates and lists.

2 ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON SLOVENIAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY

This chapter adopts the supposition that electoral systems have a strong influence on both the possibility of the candidacy of non-partisan candidates and lists and on the actual chances of being elected. The electoral system that is used for elections to the National Assembly discriminates in favour of established political parties; according to empirical evidence gathered from all five parliamentary elections carried out so far, non-partisan candidates and lists only have a slim chance of being elected. Since the country's attainment of independence in 1991, no non-partisan candidate has come even close to being elected to the National Assembly and, in addition, the number of such candidatures has always been small or even non-existent. During the National Assembly election in 2000, there were seven non-partisan candidates, but not even one managed to gather more than one percent of the votes; in 2004, there were three non-partisan candidates, and none even managed to attract more than 0.1 percent of the votes; and worse, at the subsequent elections for the National Assembly (2008 to 2022), there were no non-partisan candidates at all.¹¹ However, the situation is quite different at the local level of government. At mayoral elections, Slovenia applies a two-round absolute electoral system,¹² whereas, at municipal council elections, both a one-round relative majority and a proportional electoral system are used depending on the size of the municipality.¹³

We will focus our analysis initially on mayoral elections where we can state that candidates can be put forward by either (registered) political parties or groups of voters. Non-partisan candidates can only run with the support of a group of voters; the size of the groups again depends upon the size of the municipality in which the candidature is lodged.¹⁴ This allows non-partisan candidates to realize their passive eligibility in a relatively undemanding way.

¹¹ State Electoral Commission (2022).

¹² The candidate is elected mayor if he receives most of the votes. If no candidate receives most of the votes, a second-round election involving the two candidates with the most votes is performed. If several candidates receive the same number of votes, the selection for the second-round election is performed by lot. Both candidates are listed on the ballot paper according to the number of votes they received in the first-round election. If the number of votes received is the same, the order on the ballot is determined by lot.

¹³ If a municipal council has between 7 and 11 councillors inclusive, its members are chosen by a relative one-round majority electoral system. If a municipal council has 12 or more councillors, the members are chosen by a proportional electoral system involving the use of preferential voting (Local Elections Act 2017, Article 9).

¹⁴ When a candidate for mayor is proposed by a group of voters, they need to accumulate at least two percent of the signatures of voters in the municipality who had universal suffrage at the last local elections, but no less than 15 and no more than 2,500 signatures (Local Elections Act 2017, Article 106).

The analysis of mayoral elections is relatively simple. Since the late 1990s, mayoral elections within the Slovenian local government system have been characterized by two complementary phenomena: the growing success of non-partisan candidates and the declining influence of political parties. As can be seen from Table 2, non-partisan candidates have won local elections by a relative majority ever since the first local elections in 1994. In 2014, non-partisan candidates also won local elections by an absolute majority, as for the first time, the mayors in more than half of the municipalities were non-partisan candidates. The number of non-partisan mayors only further increased at the local elections in 2018 (123) and yet again in 2022 (141). At the same time, however, it can be noted that at the level of local government only four political parties are constantly present and successful: three centre-right parties (Slovenian Democratic Party – SDS, Slovenian People's Party – SLS and New Slovenia–Christian Democrats – NSi) and the centre-left Social Democrats (SD). During the 2010–2014 period, the first party to lose support and then *de facto* disappear from the Slovenian political scene was the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS). At the same time, the most successful political party in Slovenian local elections to date, the Slovenian People's Party (SLS), faced some difficulties, as it became a non-parliamentary party following the underwhelming results at the 2014 parliamentary elections. At the 2018 local elections, only 69 mayors were members of the four strongest political parties (32 percent). A further 20 mayors (10 percent) were members of other political parties and various coalitions, while the remaining mayors (123 or 58 percent) were non-partisan. At the most recent local election, held in November 2022, only 52 mayors were members of the four strongest political parties (25 percent), which is lowest percentage since the independence of Slovenia; a further 18 mayors (8,5 percent) were members of other political parties and various coalitions, while remaining mayors (141 or 66,5 percent) were non-partisan. It is also interesting that all parliamentary parties represented in the National Assembly managed to get only 40 mayors, among those only 17 were members of the national ruling coalition.

TABLE 2: MAYORAL ELECTION RESULTS AT LOCAL ELECTIONS BETWEEN 1994 AND 2022

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Non-partisan candidates	29	46	60	67	71	115	123	141
Slovenian People's Party (SLS)	27	39	45	49	41	31	26	15
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	23	22	28	17	13	2	1	1
Social Democratic Party/Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	18	21	16	27	33	19	17	12
United List of Social Democrats/Social Democrats (SD)	13	10	13	13	20	20	16	14
Slovenian Christian Democrats/New Slovenia (NSi)	21	21	4	10	8	7	10	11
Various coalitions	13	26	23	19	14	8	8	9
Other political parties	3	6	4	8	10	10	11	9
TOTAL	147	192	193	210	210	212	212	212

Sources: Haček (2020) and own calculation based on data of the National Electoral Commission (2022).

It is a different story whether the candidates who ran for office with the support of the electorate are truly independent candidates, and to what extent are these candidates distinctly political. A greater analytical challenge is thus posed by formally non-partisan candidates who have had clear political affiliations in the past, some of them were even elected to office with the support of a particular political party or a group of political parties, and who have later, for one reason

or another, decided to run as non-partisan candidates in the local elections. This phenomenon is not unknown to Slovenian local elections. It has been occurring to a greater or lesser extent since the first local elections in 1994 (Kukovič and Haček 2011, 17; Kukovič et al. 2015; Kukovič 2018a, 85; Kukovič 2018b, 190), gaining some momentum at the latest local elections in 2022.

Three groups of political parties can be identified in the analysis of municipal council election results during the 1994–2022 period: a) parties that have been steadily losing their share of votes (and thus their share of elected municipal councillors) since the first municipal council elections in 1994, b) parties with fluctuating election results, and c) parties that have not stood in all the local elections so far. The Slovenian People's Party (SLS) belongs primarily to the first group. The Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), New Slovenia–Christian Democrats (NSi), Social Democrats (SD), Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), and Slovenian National Party (SNS) fall within the second group. The third group is composed of various parties that were formed and disappeared during the 1994–2022 period, among which the party that won the most votes in the 1998 and 2002 municipal council elections, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), particularly stands out. The Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) undoubtedly experienced the biggest percentage drops compared to previous local elections. At the 2006 local elections, it received approximately eight percent fewer votes compared to the 2002 local elections and history then repeated itself in the 2010 and 2014 local elections, with the party virtually disappearing from the Slovenian political scene. Non-party lists fall into a separate category. Since the local elections in 1994, non-party lists have been seeing growing support and an increase in the share of votes. Note that the support of the two largest and best organized political parties in the country (SDS and SD) has been stable since the 1994 local elections (SD between 10 and 13 percent, SDS between 13 and 18 percent), which also indicates they have the most loyal and consolidated electorate. While Social Democrats (SD) have never been the political party with the most votes in municipal council elections, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) received the highest share of votes in the 2014, 2018 (Haček 2020) and 2022 municipal council elections among registered political parties.

Another characteristic observed in every local election since 1994 is the slightly better performance of centre-right political parties in smaller municipalities and, vice versa, a slightly better performance of centre-left political parties in larger municipalities (Kukovič and Haček 2018). It is also interesting to note that throughout the local government reform project, the centre-left political parties have consistently advocated for the establishment of larger municipalities and have largely opposed the fragmentation of municipalities, while centre-right political parties have mainly promoted establishing new (and generally smaller) municipalities.

TABLE 3: MUNICIPAL COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS AT LOCAL ELECTIONS BETWEEN 1994 AND 2022 (IN PERCENT)

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Non-partisans	9	12	17	20	22	29	32	37
Slovenian People's Party (SLS)	13	12	11	9	9	8	6	7
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	17	23	23	15	7	-	-	-
Social Democratic Party/Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	14	16	13	17	18	14	17	18
United List of Social Democrats/Social Democrats (SD)	13	11	10	12	12	10	10	9
Slovenian Christian Democrats/New Slovenia (NSi)	18	12	8	6	6	7	6	9
Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)	4	5	5	5	9	7	5	-
Modern Centre Party (SMC)	-	-	-	-	-	11	4	-
Freedom Movement (GS)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
Slovenian National Party (SNS)	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	-
Youth Party of Slovenia (SMS)	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-
Zares Party	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
Left Party (Levica)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1
List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-

Note: only municipalities using proportional electoral system are included.

Source: Haček (2020) and own calculation based on the data of the National Electoral Commission (2022).

Researchers have found that the performance of political parties in the first and second local elections in 1994 and 1998 (Haček 1999) was also largely dependent on the level of development of the organizational network of municipal and local committees, which were (un)able to find suitable candidates, draw up lists of candidates and file for candidacies. In the quarter of a century since the reintroduction of local government in Slovenia, a group of political parties that have stood for all local elections so far has managed to build an organizational network throughout Slovenia. Therefore, other performance factors have come to the forefront. In the last decade, a particularly important factor was voters' general distrust of political parties. This makes it difficult for the parties to find a set of suitable candidates that are indispensable in local elections, and it negatively affects their performance in local elections. Non-partisan candidates and local non-party lists have been steadily gaining support in municipal councillor elections.

When analysing Slovenian election results, however, one should not overlook gender representation in elected local government bodies. An analysis of the nominations shows that there were 102 female mayoral candidates in the local elections in 2018. Women ran for mayor in 83 municipalities in total and were victorious in 22 municipalities; female mayors are most successful in smaller municipalities (Kukovič 2019, 118; Prebilič and Kukovič 2021, 335).

An analysis of the nominations shows that there were even a bit more (107) female mayoral candidates in the most recent local elections in 2022, and they were also more successful, as 23 were elected in the first round, and additional six in the second. Women ran for mayor in 84 municipalities in total and were victorious in 29 municipalities; for the first time ever there was municipality with at least two candidates that were all female. Table 4 shows the statistics of female mayoral candidates in local elections in the period from 1994 to 2022.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF FEMALE MAYORAL CANDIDATES AT LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE PERIOD FROM 1994 TO 2022

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Number of municipalities	147	192	193	210	211	212	212	212
Number of all mayoral candidates	635	750	724	847	783	811	794	618
Number of female mayoral candidates	31	53	77	91	94	108	102	107
Percentage of female candidates	4,9	7,1	10,6	10,7	12,0	13,3	12,8	17,3
NUMBER OF ELECTED FEMALE MAYORS	2 (1,4%)	8 (4,2%)	11 (5,7%)	7 (3,3%)	10 (4,7%)	16 (7,5%)	22 (10,4%)	29 (13,7%)
Percentage of female municipal councilors elected at local elections	10,7	11,9	13,1	21,5	22	31,7	33,2	33,9

Sources: Kukovič and Haček (2022, 482) and own calculation based on the data of the National Electoral Commission (2022).

The number of females is also steadily increasing in the municipal councils; at the most recent local elections (2022), 1,168 female municipal councillors¹⁵ were elected, representing a share of 33.9 percent. The increase in the number of female council representatives from 2006 onward is most likely a result of the 2005 legislative change that introduced a clause on equal opportunities of both genders to the electoral legislation (see Kukovič and Haček 2018; also see Kukovič 2019).

In the most recent completed term from 2018 to 2022 there were 65 municipalities with a majority electoral system with 594 municipal councilors, of which 136 (22.9 percent) were women. There were four municipalities with a majority principle that had all male representatives on the municipal council; however, there were no municipalities with all female representatives. In 147 municipalities with a proportional election, there were in total of 2,740 municipal councilors, of which 974 (35.5 percent) were female and 1,766 (64.5 percent) were male. The latter confirms the thesis that the proportional electoral principle gives women a greater opportunity for election. Compared to municipalities with a majority electoral principle, the proportion of women elected in municipalities with a proportional electoral principle was higher by 12.6 percent (Kukovič 2019). If we compare this data with the share of females elected to the national parliament at the most recent parliamentary elections in 2022 (40 percent),¹⁶ we can observe that the share of females in municipal councils is on a bit lower level.

The institute of positive discrimination has been introduced in some Slovenian municipalities, which means that voters in those municipalities also elect local representatives of the Italian and Hungarian national minorities and Roma community, slightly increasing the size of the council. Twenty-one candidates ran for nine local representatives of the Italian national minority in four coastal municipalities in 2022; out of nine elected, there are three females. For seven local representatives of the Hungarian national minority in five municipalities in Pomurje, there have been just nine candidates in total in 2022, and a single female was elected.

¹⁵ Seven out of 1,168 female councilors are female representatives of Italian and Hungarian national minorities and Roma community.

¹⁶ Gender structure of the National Assembly has changed quite a bit since independence, as follows: National Assembly elections 1992 (14 female MPs), 1996 (7), 2000 (12), 2004 (11), 2008 (12), 2011 (29), 2014 (31), 2018 (22) and 2022 (36) (State Electoral Commission 2022).

The number of candidates for the local representative of the Roma community has been slowly declining since 2006 and has reached the bottom at the most recent local elections in 2022 (twenty-four candidates for eighteen council seats in eighteen municipalities) with two municipalities where elections had to be recalled due to lack of candidates.

3 So, Why Are Non-Partisan Candidates and Lists So Successful?

When considering all the local elections held thus far in the country, we face the inevitable question of why non-partisan candidates and lists are (increasingly) successful. Because of ongoing debates and empirical research projects, we can assert that the phenomenon of the relative success of non-partisan candidates and lists at the local level¹⁷ has at least three origins.

First, at the national level, non-partisan candidates have literally no chance of being elected to the national parliament due to the existing electoral system and the explicitly emphasized role of political parties. Accordingly, their only viable option for successfully realizing their passive suffrage is to stand as candidates at local elections. There, the majority electoral system, which is used for mayoral elections and elections of the municipal council in small municipalities, is more supportive of non-partisan candidates and lists than the proportional electoral system applied at parliamentary elections or the municipal council elections of bigger municipalities. Yet, notwithstanding this and despite the proportional electoral system, we can (at the local elections in 2006 and subsequent years) see that non-partisan candidates and lists are gaining ground also in bigger municipalities and even the big cities. Especially notable were the successes of some non-partisan lists in the largest municipalities. Second, one can detect in Slovenia a strong tradition of non-partisanship; or, in other words, Slovenian political parties constantly attract some sort of distrust or criticism (Lukšič 1994), which has, due to the deepening of the economic crisis in the last two years, achieved a new negative peak. While Slovenian public opinion is clearly not in favour of political parties, it is also true that for quite some time levels of trust in political parties are lower than in other political institutions. Finally, local elections are also more suitable for realizing the passive suffrage of non-partisan candidates due to their narrower scope. Namely, at local elections, voters choose candidates who come from the same place they themselves originate from and live in and so party allegiance does not play as important a role as it does on the national level. It is often the case that voters know the candidates personally, especially in very small municipalities. The candidacy and election of someone not linked to a party can contribute to local inhabitants' perception that in their own municipality they can exercise their right to local government, as guaranteed by Article 9 of the Slovenian Constitution. The analysis of electoral results at local elections indicates the relative improvement of political parties' results with an

¹⁷ It is important to hereby emphasise that the phenomenon of the growing successfulness of non-partisan candidates and lists is not an exclusively Slovenian peculiarity that would be determined by the specificities of a Slovenian setting, but it is a phenomenon many foreign authors expose in their analyses as well. For instance, Ylönen (2007, 7) and Wörlund (2007) find in the cases of Finnish and Swedish local elections, respectively, a several-fold increase of voters' support of Finnish or Swedish non-partisan lists over the recent decades, whereby it needs to be stressed that non-partisan lists have not yet become the key political force in either of the two countries. However, an altogether different picture is valid, e.g., for the Netherlands (Boogers 2007), where non-partisan lists are the strongest local-level political force that won a quarter of all votes during both the 2002 and 2006 local elections.

increase in the size of a municipality, but, despite this, in bigger municipalities, non-partisan candidates and lists are also at least equally successful as political parties (Kukovič and Haček 2011).

When comprehensively analysing local elections, one should not forget another crucial issue, namely the problem of the actual political independence of non-partisan candidates. We have clearly found that the trends during Slovenian local elections have been and still are in favour of non-partisan candidates, which is peculiarly true of mayoral elections. For the average Slovenian voter, a candidate's independence is his second-most important quality, immediately after their previous experience.¹⁸ Further, the average voter puts a candidate's independence before their affiliation to a political party and before personal familiarity with a candidate (Kukovič 2018b, 188–189). In comparison with parliamentary elections, in local elections, a candidate's party affiliation is far less important to the average voter.¹⁹ It is obvious that on the local level, there must be a ubiquitous anti-party frame of mind that is ultimately verified when looking at the results of numerous public opinion polls.²⁰ On the other hand, it is particularly interesting to consider the actual independence of many non-partisan candidates. If we only take the mayoral elections in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 into consideration, when 71, 115, 123 and 141 non-partisan mayors were elected, respectively, and we simply superficially browse through the list of names of the elected mayors, we can easily find names that are not only clearly (known) members of a major political party, but also former members of the national parliament. There were even instances, when established political parties and their leaders congratulated to elected non-partisan mayors just hours after elections were concluded, declaring them as "our members". This simple, non-scientific finding should by itself be sufficient to allow some doubt in the true independence and anti-partisanship of several of these elected officials. An equally important indicator of the actual independence of the candidates is their post-election coalition building since non-partisan candidates and lists tend to form coalitions with political parties just as frequently as candidates and lists proposed by political parties (see Haček et al. 2017, 167). Or, as Gramsci (1977, 1573) wrote a long time ago, "in a certain society no one is disorganized and without a political party..., parties can act under different names and labels, even as "anti-parties" but even so-called individuals are actually people-parties, they only want to be party leaders in acknowledgment of God and of the imbecility of those following them".

As a matter of fact, the 2022 local elections can be designated as elections during which trends from the preceding local elections continued and fortified; as

¹⁸ The research project "Viewpoints on local democracy" (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2003b), question 3.20: "How important for you are the following characteristics of individual candidates when voting at local elections? For each statement, choose a figure between 1 and 5, where 1 means it is not important at all, and 5 means it is essential." The average values of the answers were: a) affiliation to a political party, 2.90; b) political experience, 3.90; c) gender of the candidate 1.78; d) I know the candidate personally, 2.56; and e) independence of the candidate, 3.23.

¹⁹ The research project "Viewpoints on local democracy" (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2003b), question 3.21: "Is the party affiliation of a candidate more important for you at parliamentary or local elections?" Scores of answers: it is more important at parliamentary elections (26.2 percent); it is equally (in)significant at both elections (49.9 percent); it is more important at local elections (6.8 percent); do not know, cannot decide (17.2 percent).

²⁰ For instance, the research project "Viewpoints on local democracy" (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2003b), question 3.40: "Who do you trust most in your municipality?". Scores of answers: the mayor (45.5 percent); the municipal council (21.5 percent); the municipal administration (5 percent); political parties (2.7 percent); do not know (25.2 percent).

elections at which the only true and undisputed winners were the voters, who, by virtue of their electoral choice, once again, but this time in the most explicit manner thus far, expressed their dissatisfaction and distrust with political parties and their ways of managing municipalities.

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SLOVENSKE LOKALNE VOLITVE OD 1994 DO 2022: KRALJESTVO NESTRANKARSKIH LIST IN ŽUPANOV

Volitve v predstavniška telesa so v demokratičnih državah osnovno orodje uresničevanja oblasti in najrazpoznavnejše zunanje znamenje demokracije. O institutu lokalnih volitev je bilo prelitega že mnogo črnih in tiskanih že mnogo znanstvenih ter strokovnih prispevkov, kar velja tudi za slovenske lokalne volitve. V analizi dosedanjih osmih lokalnih volitev, ki so potekale od leta 1994 naprej, bila velikokrat poudarjena ugotovitev, da so lokalne volitve napram parlamentarnim volitvam nekoliko podcenjene in zapostavljene, pa tudi mediji jih pogosto obravnavajo kot priročno sredstvo za ugotavljanje volilnega razporeda v času med zaporednimi parlamentarnimi volitvami. Ob tem je ostalo relativno neopaženo, da imajo lokalne volitve podobno vlogo in pomen kot parlamentarne volitve, le da se izvajajo na bistveno manjšem ozemlju, v bistveno manjših skupnostih in imajo drugačen vsebinski predznak; pomenijo pa najpomembnejši vpliv prebivalcev lokalne skupnosti na delovanje lokalne samouprave, zato predstavljajo temeljno prvino lokalne demokracije. V prispevku analiziramo bistvene značilnosti dosedanjih osmih lokalnih volitev v samostojni Sloveniji s poudarkom na zadnjih, ki so potekale novembra 2022.

Ključne besede: volitve; lokalna oblast; nestrancarstvo; politične stranke; Slovenija.