Referencing the Public by Populist and Non-populist Parties in the Slovene Parliament

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The present moment raises many questions about the workings and resilience of parliamentary democracy in Western-type democracies, including the former socialist states of the East Central European region, where various forms of populism and illiberal democracy are taking shape. Among these, Slovenia is taken as a case study, since it is not only a former socialist state, but was also for a long time acknowledged as a post-socialist success story. Focusing on the central state institution in systems of parliamentary democracy, i.e. the parliament, and its members (MPs) this paper considers speech as performed during parliamentary sessions by MPs from populist and non-populist political parties between the years 1992 and 2018, the period of a fully democratic Slovene national parliament. It combines the methodological approaches of cultural history with corpus linguistics in order to map any possible differences in populist and non-populist discourse of MPs. Special attention is given to situations where MPs mentioned the public, thus testing the hypothesis that populist MPs engage more with the public as a part of their populist political style.

Keywords: political parties, populism, life-world, parliament, Slovenia

1   Introduction

In the last two decades, the political scene in many democratic countries in Europe as well as around the globe has witnessed an increase in active populist political parties and a rise in their popularity among voters. Interpretations of this phenomenon vary from populism and illiberal democracy as serious threats to parliamentary democracy, to those who see it as a transitory phase of the otherwise firm rule of democracy.[1] Parallel to the spread of populism, many research fields have started to dedicate some of their attention to the phenomenon itself: its origins, developments, varieties, meanings and possible consequences. They attempted (and are still attempting) to map out populism in a variety of the spaces in which it appears, from media landscapes to popular and policy responses. Political science and sociological analyses pay special attention many of these, mainly through a lens of discursive practices of the most visible members of populist political parties.[2] By doing so, recent research has noted a clear difference between the discourses of members of populist and non-populist parties, especially when using social and other media.

However, much less is known about the relationship between populist and non-populist discourse in the speeches of members of parliament (MPs) in political systems of parliamentary democracy, in which parliaments are the central representative, legislative, and controlling state institutions. One of the most common interpretations of populism, especially combined with illiberal democracy in the area of East Central Europe, is the idea of the unfinished transition from state socialism to parliamentary democracy and market economy.[3] Inefficient, incomplete breaks with the past systems, the socialist mentality of the population and the corruption of political and economic elites stretching from the time of socialism to the present, are often

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1   As one of the most resounding discussions on this topic, see: Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: A Reckoning*. London: Penguin Books, 2019.

2   Emanuela Fabijan in Marko Ribać, "Politični in medijski populizem v televizijskem političnem intervjuju," *Social Science Forum, Vol. 37*, Nr. 98 (2021), pp. 43–68.

3   Joachim von Puttkamer, Włodzimierz Borodziej and Stanislav Holubec (eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty: The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe*. London: New York: Routledge, 2019. Rudi Rizman, *Uncertain Path. Democratic transition and consolidation in Slovenia*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006.

used as an explanations for current deviations from parliamentary democracy.

However, a great deal of research stresses the lack of empirical evidence to support such claims and has long been criticizing the general view underlining such an interpretation,[4] and this paper aims at contributing to this literature. The analysis conducted here is localized to the case of Slovenia as one of the former socialist states that has not (thus far) completely submitted to populism and illiberal democracy, yet its political and media space clearly exhibits some populist tendencies. To bring further nuances and critical understanding to the existence of modern-day populism, this paper is embedded around two key concepts.

This paper is an extended version of the conference paper of a conference contribution.[5] Here, we widened the methodological framework and strengthened the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis, embedding digital humanities deeper into historical interpretation. To achieve this, we first used the concept of the life-world to acknowledge the existence of a specific reality of MPs in which their speech, as analysed in this paper, is made. Second, we draw on the existing typology of populist and non-populist parties created by political scientists and sociologists to see how MPs from two different groups of political parties, i.e. populist and non-populist, construct their view of the public, thus taking into account the existing indications of populists' and populisms' unique connection to a public it perceives as its own.[6] The goal of this analysis is to detect any differences between populist and non-populist discourse, as observed through the lens of references to the general public.

2   Approach and methodology

To further investigate the connection between the speech of MPs, their image of the public, and their populist or non-populist origin, we

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4   Valeria Bunce, "Should transitologists be grounded?", *Slavic Review, Vol. 54*, Nr. 1 (1995), pp. 126—127. Thomas Carothers, "The end of transition paradigm", *Journal of Democracy, Vol. 13*, Nr. 1 (2002), pp. 17—20.

5   Darja Fišer, Tjaša Konovšek in Andrej Pančur, "Referencing the Public by Populist and Non-Populist Parties in the Slovene Parliament," Darja Fišer and Tomaš Erjavec (eds.), *Proceedings of the Conference on Language Technologies and Digital Humanities*. September 15 – 16 2022. Ljubljana, Slovenia. Ljubljana: Inštitut na novejšo zgodovino, 2022, pp. 243–247. https://nl.ijs.si/jtdh22/pdf/JTDH2022_Proceedings.pdf (January 6 2022).

6   See further text below for references.

combine the methodological framework of cultural history of parliamentarianism with corpus linguistics.

From a historical perspective, we draw on recent developments in political history, focusing on the cultural side of the history of parliamentarism. This includes topics such as: the ideal image and workings of parliaments as an institution in the modern period as proposed by prominent scholars, thinkers and writers, the image of parliaments as architectural settings and as communicated by the media, parliaments as a space of specific communication, and – last but not least – parliament(arianism) as a concept in its own right.[7] In this paper we build on the concept of life-world (or *Lebenswelt*), which has to a small extent already been used in relation to parliamentarism – or, better, the people who shape it.[8]

The concept of life-world originated in philosophy, where it stressed that subjective experience of parliamentarism was identical with the reality of parliamentarism as such. In this respect, the life-world of MPs consists of their own experiences but also to a significant degree of how parliamentarism is seen by others.[9] The concept of life-world has been used in historiography to emphasize the circumstances in which parliamentarianism is experienced, focusing on MPs as historical actors.[10] In this case, this approach brings to the fore research questions about MPs' perceptions, education, and expectations; their political socialization, prior experiences, and everyday life; and the influence of collective opinions, public images, and the media on their work. In this paper, we focus on one of the aspects of MPs' life-world as used in historiography, namely the MPs' relationship with the public, through

7 Remieg Aerts, *The Ideal of Parliament in Europe Since 1800*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. Jure Gašparič, *Državni zbor 1992-2012: o slovenskem parlamentarizmu*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2012. Andreas Schulz and Andreas Wirsching (eds.), *Parlamentarische Kulturen in Europa. Das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum*. Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2012. Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, and Kari Palonen (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism. A Comparative History of a European Concept*. Berghahn, 2016.

8 Adéla Gjuričová and Tomáš Zahradníček, *Návrat parlamentu. Češi a Slováci ve Federálním shromáždění*. Praha: Argo, 2018.

9 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: eine Einleitung und die phänomenologische Philosophie*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1996 (1962). Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2, Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

10 Adéla Gjuričová, Andreas Schulz, Luboš Velek and Andreas Wirsching (eds.). *Lebenswelten von Abgeordneten in Europa 1860–1990*. Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2014.

the words they choose to refer to them. This, in turn, reveals a part of their self-understanding, including their intentionally or unintentionally expressed relation to populism.

Within the framework of life-world we further distinguish between Slovenian populist and non-populist parties on two axes. First, based on the profile of political parties, we draw on existing research for the criteria to determine which Slovenian political parties qualify as populist. Second, on the temporal axis, we acknowledge the profound political changes of 1990 (Slovene independence and the democratization and pluralization of political space), when the MPs of the Slovene assembly were freely elected for the first time; and the political changes of 2004 (when Slovenia joined the EU and NATO) as a year that witnessed the active beginnings of modern populism in the Slovene political space. We take into account the difference between modern populist parties, as they emerged in the last decade and a half, and their immediate precursors, which have existed since the early 1990s. Therefore, the analysis treats the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and its predecessor, the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (SDSS), along with the New Slovenia (NSi) and the Slovenian National Party (Slovenska nacionalna stranka, SNS), as populist parties, while all others were classified as non-populist.

We followed three basic and pre-established criteria in determining which political party may be considered populist in a present-day sense. First, a populist political party and its members must address the public as an exclusive group and reinforce their identity by emphasizing an external threat. Second, such politicians or political parties claim to be the only true representatives of the public, the best representatives of their interests, non-corrupt, and their guardians from the (real or imaginary) external threat. Third, populists actively undermine the central state institutions, the rule of law and the wider democratic mechanisms, such as the media.[11] In a historical sense, some uncer-

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11   Danica Fink Hafner, *Populizem*. Ljubljana: Založba FDV, 2019. Ana Frank in Iztok Šori, "Normalizacija rasizma z jezikom demokracije: primer Slovenske demokratske stranke," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, Vol. 43*, Nr. 260 (2015), pp. 89–103. Giovanna Campani in Mojca Pajnik, "Populism in historical perspectives". In Gabriella Lazaridis and Giovanna Campani (eds.), *Understanding the Populist Shift: Othering in a Europe in Crisis*. London: New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 13–30.
Iztok Šori, "Za narodov blagor: skrajno desni populizem v diskurzu stranke Nova Slovenija," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, Vol. 43*, Nr. 260 (2015), pp. 104–117. Jurij Hadalin, "Straight

tainty arose when deciding which predecessors of later or currently existing political parties to include in the analysis under populist. While there is no general criteria on how to measure the (dis)continuity of political parties through longer periods of time, we chose to take into consideration only those pairs of political parties and their predecessors that have a very strong continuity in their leadership and prominent tendencies towards populism or populist style of activity as described by the three criteria above. For example, the NSi party that has existed since 2000 on the one hand maintains strong continuity towards the Slovene Cristian Democrats (SKD), Slovene People's Party (SLS), and later towards the united Slovene People's Party and Slovene Christian Democrats (SLS+SKD); but on the other a much weaker one both in the sense of policymaking, political leadership, and public perception.

From a historiographical point of view, there is one more issue that needs to be addressed, namely the question of how to include breaks in historical development – usually clearly visible and often the centre of attention in qualitative analysis – into quantitative analysis in an interdisciplinary environment. In order to take advantage of a large dataset available for this analysis, some breaks in political history (such as the year 2004) are only indicated as points of change and not as full endpoints of a period. While searching for additional context for interpretation of the results of the present analysis in wider domestic as well as international political developments would certainly add value, we decided to maintain our focus on the Slovene parliament. Each parliamentary lifespan has its own specific periodization, stretching from one election to other, from one coalition formation to the next, and on the smaller scale from session to session. This remains the basic time frame of the present analysis which, at the same time, allowed us to make only limited assumptions about the possible outside influences on the Slovene parliamentary life before the analysis was carried out.

Talk. The Slovenian National Party's Programme Orientations and Activities," *Contributions to Contemporary History, Vol. 60*, Nr. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.60.2.10. Jurij Hadalin, "What Would Henrik Tuma Say? From The Social Democratic Party of Slovenia to the Slovenian Democratic Party," *Contributions to Contemporary History* Vol. 61. Nr. 3 (2021), https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.61.3.10. Marko Lovec (ed.), *Populism and attitudes towards the EU in Central Europe*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, 2019. Mojca Pajnik, "Media Populism on the Example of Right-Wing Political Parties' Communication in Slovenia," *Problems of Post-Communism, Vol. 66*, Nr. 1 (2019), pp. 21–32.

3   Analysing MPs' speech

Using corpus linguistics has, in this case, proven vital for managing an enormous set of data, i.e. the minutes of the parliamentary sessions of the Slovene assembly (formally named as the parliament in the 1991 Constitution) that were collected and made available for use through the CLARIN repository.[12] The analysis is based on the *Slovenian parliamentary corpus (1990-2018) siParl 2.0*, which contains minutes of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia for 11th legislative period 1990-1992, minutes of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia from the 1st to the 7th legislative periods 1992-2018, minutes of the working bodies of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia from the 2nd to the 7th legislative periods 1996-2018, and minutes of the Council of the President of the National Assembly from the 2nd to the 7th legislative periods 1996-2018. The corpus comprises over 10,000 sessions, one million speeches or 200 million words.[13]

In our analysis we take into account the time span from 1992 when the first term of the Slovenian parliament started until 2018 when the seventh term ended. The time frame thus includes some important events that affected the development of Slovenian political parties, their governing style and, by extension, the actions of MPs, such as Slovenia's accession to the European Union in 2004,[14] the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008, and the migrant crisis in 2015.[15] Using the typology advocated by sociologists and political scientists (see Section 2), we created subcorpora of populist and non-populist political parties for each parliamentary term, resulting in a total of 14 subcorpora. The subcorpora ranged between just under a million tokens in Term1 to 12 million tokens in Term7 for populist parties, and between 7 million tokens in Term1 to just under 15 million tokens in Term7 for non-populist parties.

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12   *CLARIN Slovenia. Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure.* http://www.clarin.si/info/about/ (December 28, 2022).

13   Andrej Pančur, Tomaž Erjavec, Mihael Ojsteršek, Mojca Šorn and Neja Blaj Hribar, *Slovenian parliamentary corpus (1990-2018) siParl 2.0*, Slovenian language resource repository CLARIN.SI (2020), ISSN 2820-4042, http://hdl.handle.net/11356/1300.

14   Gašparič, *Državni zbor*, pp. 108–151.

15   Benjamin Moffitt, "How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism," *Government and Opposition, Vol. 50*, Nr. 2 (2015), pp. 189–217.

The next step of the analysis presented a challenge, as there are no pre-existing wordlists of references to the general public that we could rely on. We therefore generated frequency lists of nouns for each subcorpus and manually selected those that refer to the public in the broadest sense (e.g. *person, citizen, inhabitant*) from the 1,000 most frequent nouns in each subcorpus. We only took into account the nouns that can only refer to people (groups or individuals), disregarding those that can also be used for institutions (e.g. *association*) or objects (e.g. *school*). We also checked their usage via a concordance search and discarded the expressions that could potentially be used for the general public but in this specific corpus predominantly refer to the MPs, the government or their staff (e.g. *proposer*).

As can be seen in Table 1, this yielded a total of 86 unique nouns with the total absolute frequency of 359,320 and relative frequency of 7,322.53 for the populist parties, and the total absolute frequency of 524,195 and relative frequency of 6,788.74 for their non-populist counterparts. Most (69) of the nouns are shared between both party groups (coloured in white, e.g. *victim, neighbour, human, Roma, patient*), in addition to 10 that are unique for the populist MPs (coloured in pink, e.g. *Croat, wife, Austrian*) and seven that are specific to non-populist MPs (coloured in blue, e.g. *stakeholder, recipient, tenant*).

Table 1: *List of specific and joint public-related words identified in the subcorpora of populist and non-populist speeches with their absolute and relative frequencies as well as the usage ratio*

		POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
	#tokens	49,070,504		77,215,381		
	#lemmas	76		74		
	LEMMA	AF	RF	AF	RF	P:N ratio
P-ONLY	Hrvat *Croat*	1,341	**27.33**	0	0.00	/
	žena *woman*	397	8.09	0	0.00	/
	Avstrijec *Austrian*	318	6.48	0	0.00	/
	Diplomant *graduate*	300	6.11	0	0.00	/

		POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
	#tokens	**49,070,504**		**77,215,381**		
	#lemmas	**76**		**74**		
	LEMMA	**AF**	**RF**	**AF**	**RF**	**P:N ratio**
P-ONLY	storilec *perpetrator*	232	4.73	0	0.00	/
	volivec *voter*	161	3.28	0	0.00	/
	delojemalec *employee*	36	0.73	0	0.00	/
	Neslovenec *Non-Slovenian*	31	0.63	0	0.00	/
	svojec *family member*	27	0.55	0	0.00	/
	delavka *worker (female)*	0	0.00	0	0.00	/
N-ONLY	deležnik *stakeholder*	0	0.00	1,784	**23.10**	/
	prejemnik *recepient*	0	0.00	1,191	15.42	/
	najemnik *tenant*	0	0.00	983	12.73	/
	dolžnik *debtor*	0	0.00	752	9.74	/
	vajenec *apprentice*	0	0.00	444	5.75	/
	kadilec *smoker*	0	0.00	290	3.76	/
	krajan *townsman*	0	0.00	172	2.23	/
JOINT	oče *father*	929	18.93	329	4.26	**4.44**
	obrtnik *craftsman*	1,187	24.19	540	6.99	**3.46**
	davkoplačevalec taxpayer	4,762	97.04	2,178	28.21	**3.44**
	migrant *migrant*	2,627	53.54	1,255	16.25	**3.29**
	vlagatelj *investor*	426	8.68	260	3.37	2.58
	podjetnik *enterpreneur*	3,880	79.07	2,671	34.59	2.29

		POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
	#tokens	**49,070,504**		**77,215,381**		
	#lemmas	**76**		**74**		
	LEMMA	**AF**	**RF**	**AF**	**RF**	**P:N ratio**
JOINT	moški *man*	827	16.85	619	8.02	2.10
	ljudstvo *people*	3,089	62.95	2,376	30.77	2.05
	Italijan *Italian*	272	5.54	216	2.80	1.98
	Slovenka *Slovenian (female)*	1,432	29.18	1,143	14.80	1.97
	pacient *patient*	1,619	32.99	1,452	18.80	1.75
	zamejstvo *autochtonous Slovenian region*	1,067	21.74	966	12.51	1.74
	kmet *farmer*	6,839	139.37	6,739	87.28	1.60
	prijatelj *friend*	1,024	20.87	1,012	13.11	1.59
	naročnik *subscriber*	517	10.54	516	6.68	1.58
	Slovenec *Slovenian*	10,103	205.89	11,090	143.62	1.43
	dijak *student*	2,403	48.97	2,670	34.58	1.42
	kupec *buyer*	1,216	24.78	1,357	17.57	1.41
	državljan *citizen*	21,570	439.57	24,828	321.54	1.37
	priča *witness*	4,061	82.76	4,701	60.88	1.36
	državljanka *citizen (female)*	6,902	140.65	8,372	108.42	1.30
	narod *nation*	4,952	100.92	6,035	78.16	1.29
	žrtev *victim*	3,945	80.39	4,810	62.29	1.29
	sosed *neighbour*	738	15.04	928	12.02	1.25

	POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
#tokens	**49,070,504**		**77,215,381**		
#lemmas	**76**		**74**		
LEMMA	AF	RF	AF	RF	P:N ratio
človek *human*	68,517	**1,396.30**	86,824	**1,124.44**	1.24
Rom *Roma*	627	12.78	808	10.46	1.22
bolnik *patient*	1,279	26.06	1,717	22.24	1.17
prosilec *applicant*	343	6.99	468	6.06	1.15
javnost *public*	16,248	331.12	22,367	289.67	1.14
starš *parent*	5,732	116.81	7,893	102.22	1.14
oseba *person*	16,836	343.10	23,762	307.74	1.11
subjekt *subject*	3,406	69.41	4,866	63.02	1.10
družina *family*	11,120	226.61	16,298	211.07	1.07
otrok *child*	18,205	371.00	26,762	346.59	1.07
gost *guest*	966	19.69	1,438	18.62	1.06
begunec *refugee*	1,247	25.41	1,879	24.33	1.04
mladina *youth*	1,384	28.20	2,101	27.21	1.04
delničar *shareholder*	444	9.05	684	8.86	1.02
tujec *foreigner*	3,169	64.58	4,908	63.56	1.02
zavarovanec *insurance holder*	896	18.26	1,394	18.05	**1.01**
volivec *voter*	3,478	70.88	5,544	71.80	**0.99**
lastnik *owner*	8,031	163.66	12,814	165.95	**0.99**
mati *mother*	320	6.52	512	6.63	0.98

(Left vertical label spanning rows: JOINT)

		POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
	#tokens	**49,070,504**		**77,215,381**		
	#lemmas	**76**		**74**		
	LEMMA	**AF**	**RF**	**AF**	**RF**	**P:N ratio**
JOINT	družba *society*	23,431	477.50	38,532	499.02	0.96
	študent *student*	4,973	101.34	8,202	106.22	0.95
	posameznik *individual*	7,367	150.13	12,307	159.39	0.94
	zavezanec *person liable*	2,437	49.66	4,096	53.05	0.94
	uporabnik *user*	3,441	70.12	5,866	75.97	0.92
	nosilec *holder*	2,211	45.06	3,812	49.37	0.91
	občan *resident*	1,558	31.75	2,688	34.81	0.91
	prebivalec *inhabitant*	5,318	108.37	9,404	121.79	0.89
	partner *partner*	4,580	93.34	8,312	107.65	0.87
	potrošnik *consumer*	1,657	33.77	3,060	39.63	0.85
	generacija *generation*	2,279	46.44	4,215	54.59	0.85
	delavec *worker*	10,768	219.44	20,055	259.73	0.84
	invalid *disabled person*	3,032	61.79	5,760	74.60	0.83
	prebivalstvo *population*	2,727	55.57	5,452	70.61	0.79
	manjšina *minority*	2,742	55.88	5,518	71.46	0.78
	učenec *pupil*	1,437	29.28	3,071	39.77	0.74
	ženska *female*	2,941	59.93	6,517	84.40	0.71
	upokojenec *retiree*	3,547	72.28	8,097	104.86	0.69
	skupnost *community*	16,208	330.30	38,163	494.24	0.67

		POPULIST1-7		NON-POPULIST1-7		
	#tokens	**49,070,504**		**77,215,381**		
	#lemmas	**76**		**74**		
	LEMMA	**AF**	**RF**	**AF**	**RF**	**P:N ratio**
JOINT	pripadnik *member*	1,375	28.02	3,238	41.93	0.67
	upravičenec *beneficiary*	1,673	34.09	4,523	58.58	0.58
	upnik *creditor*	566	11.53	1,725	22.34	0.52
	podpisnik *signatory*	465	9.48	1,460	18.91	0.50
	udeleženec *participant*	500	10.19	1,685	21.82	**0.47**
	porabnik *consumer*	129	2.63	540	6.99	**0.38**
	populacija *population*	480	9.78	2,179	28.22	**0.35**
	Total	359,320	7,322.53	524,195	6,788.74	1.08

The list of populist-specific nouns contains words describing people according to their ethnic background (e.g. *Austrian, non-Slovenian*), family role (e.g. *relative, wife*) and employment status (e.g. *female worker, employee*). Non-populist-specific nouns contain expressions which describe the role or status of a person in an administrative or legal procedure (e.g. *stakeholder, recepient*), business transaction (e.g. *tenant, debtor*), origin (e.g. *local*), education (e.g. *apprentice*) or health status (e.g. *smoker*). Among the joint nouns, *father, craftsman, taxpayer* and *migrant* are used three times more frequently by populist MPs, whereas *beneficiary, participant, consumer* and *population* are used more than twice as frequently by non-populist MPs. *Insurance holde*r, *voter* and *owner* are used nearly identically by both groups of MPs. This might reflect a difference between the populist and non-populist parties and their focus in their political base: while the first usually rally voters from rural areas, the latter are traditionally more successful in urban ones.

Table 2: *Absolute and relative frequencies of public-related words as used by populist and non-populist MPs per parliamentary term and with the statistical significance tests*

|	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	Total
Populist #tokens	950,851	4,917,224	7,291,606	8,607,268	8,598,006	6,622,380	12,083,169	49,070,504
Populist "public" AF	6,204	27,738	49,606	68,971	57,041	48,881	100,879	359,320
Populist "public" RF	6,525	5,641	6,803	8,013	6,634	7,381	8,349	7,323
Non-populist #tokens	7,323,569	11,387,486	8,838,299	14,394,700	11,452,223	8,869,712	14,949,392	77,215,381
Non-populist "public" AF	48,446	58,100	52,118	91,254	84,878	67,310	122,089	524,195
Non-populist "public" RF	6,615	5,102	5,897	6,339	7,411	7,589	8,167	6,789
P-value	0.3059	2.54E-43	6.61E-116	0	8.25E-94	2.81E-03	2.01E-07	1.41E-269
X^2 test	1.0482	190.4453	523.7064	2,181.3538	422.1633	21.9444	27.0286	1,230.5394
Statistical significance	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
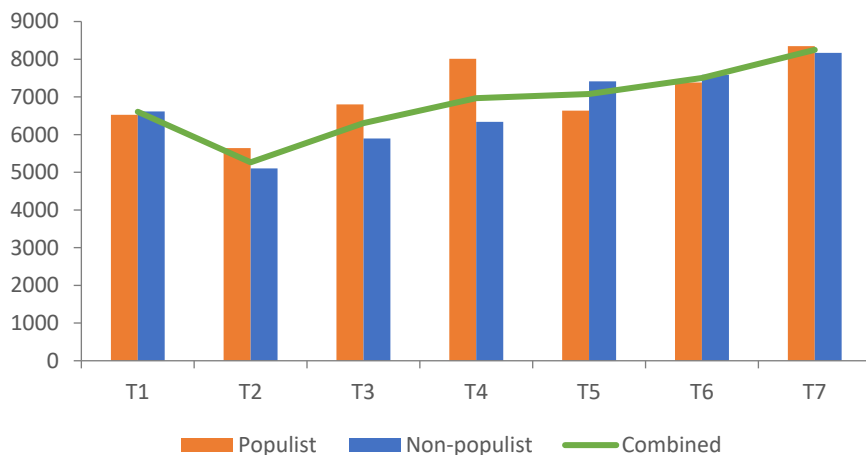
Figure 1: Relative frequency of nouns (y axis) referring to the public in speeches of MPs from populist and non-populist political parties in the Slovene parliament 1992–2018, by parliamentary term (x axis).

As can be seen from Table 2 and Figure 1, we observe a steady general upwards trend in the use of nouns, describing the public in both populist and non-populist parties over time. For all terms combined, populist MPs refer to the public statistically significantly more frequently than their non-populist counterparts (P-value 1.41E-269, X^2 test 1230.5394[16]), which confirms the main hypothesis. For all the MPs combined, the only, and quite substantial, drop in the frequency of references to the public can be observed from Term1 and Term2, which could be contributed to the early stages of the formation of the Slovenian political space. A lot of the discussions in parliament in these years were dedicated to shaping the new political system and (somewhat) changing the political culture, at the very least accepting newcomers to the parliamentary life and acquainting them with the work of an MP. However, this does not extend to a claim that the public was not important. On the contrary – already in the 1980s, before democratic changes took place, Slovenia was a stage for an active civil society that contributed towards legal and political democratization as well as proposed many possible solutions for the various political crises at the time, including drafts for a new constitution.[17]

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16   *Calc: Corpus Calculator*. https://www.korpus.cz/calc/ (December 27 2022).

17   Božo Repe, *Slovenci v osemdesetih letih*. Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2001.

Especially in Term1, the MPs had to face many questions of establishing the working of the new parliament itself. It took time before a new normality of the parliamentary work was established, before the MPs began to address the public more. While the early Slovene political transition exhibited a general consensus about the need to strengthen parliamentary democracy, the year after were and remain much less clear. In the years leading up to 2004, a new political aim became central, i.e. Slovenia's integration into the European Union, which to a certain extent offered a new common political goal for all the parliamentary parties. Nonetheless, the seemingly simple aim – to join the EU – contained a variety of different visions of how to actually achieve it, and political parties turned more and more to the public to try and gain (or maintain) their support throughout each voting cycle.[18]

After 2004, another major political shift took place. Slovenia was still an independent and sovereign state, but not as much as it has been in the previous years. Some of the state institutions had to adjust their functions and transmit a part of their decision-making process and jurisdictions on the supranational level of the EU.[19] With this earlier goal successfully achieved (Slovenia joined the EU on May 1 2004), the Slovene political space faced further polarization. This was reflected in the frequency and content of references of the public by the MPs, since they had to search for new contents of policy-making and ways of addressing their voters in an absence of a clear political goal.

As for individual terms, populist MPs refer to the public statistically significantly more often in Terms2-4 (1996–2008) and 7 (2014–2018) with Term4 as the biggest outlier, while the opposite is true of Terms5-6 with Term5 as the biggest outlier. In Term1, non-populist MPs use more public-denominating expressions but the difference is not statistically significant. Terms2-3 can be interpreted as the period of formation of populist parties (1992–2004), with Term4 (2004–2008) being the first parliamentary term working with a populist (SDS-led) government. The

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18   Božo Repe, *Jutri je nov dan: Slovenci in razpad Jugoslavije*. Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2002, p. 7. Gašparič, *Državni zbor*, pp. 124–143.

19   Danica Fink-Hafner and Damjan Lah, *Proces evropeizacije in prilagajanja političnih ustanov na nacionalni ravni*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2005, pp. 82-83. Danica Fink-Hafner and Damjan Lah, *Managing Europe from Home: The Europeanisation of the Slovene Core Executive*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2003, p. 36.

switch towards more populist tendencies of SDS was at this time re-flected in a new name (the party renamed itself from SDS – Social-demokratska stranka/Social Democratic Party to SDS – Slovenska demokratska stranka/Slovene Democratic Party) and its succession to the European People's Party (EPP).[20] In turn, Term7 (2014–2018) could suggest the emergence of the second-wave growing power of populist parties in the face of the crisis of the non-populist parties – not only in Slovenia, but all across Europe.[21]

In Terms5-6 (2008–2014), when references to the general pub-lic prevailed in what sociologists and political scientists refer to as the non-populist discourse, the Slovenian political space witnessed an emergence of numerous new political parties, many of which entered parliament, which influenced the relation between populist and non-populist discourse.[22] Due to the safe-guards in parliamentary proce-dures which ensure equal opportunity of participation for opposition MPs regardless of their number, the speeches of MPs might also be influenced by the existence of populist and non-populist led govern-ments and the strength of the populist and non-populist parties in the parliament at the time. While party strength is usually counted by the number of seats taken in the parliament, there are many more fac-tors that influence it and make the correlation between the number of seats, coalition and opposition roles, and party strength.[23] Many of the parliamentary debates were influenced by the impact of the global economic crisis.[24]

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20 Thomas Jansen, *At Europe's Service: the origins and evolution of the European People's Party*. Berlin: Heidelberg: New York: Springer, 2011.

21 James F. Downes and Edward Chan, "Explaining the electoral debacle of social democratic parties in Europe," *EUROPP. European Politics and Policy. London School of Economic*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/06/21/explaining-the-electoral-debacle-of-social-demo-cratic-parties-in-europe/ (December 29, 2022). Stuart A. Brown, *The European Commission and Europe's Democratic Process. Why the EU's Executive Faces an Uncertain Future*. London: Palgrave Pivot, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50560-6.

22 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Observation of early parliamentary elections in Slovenia, 4 December 2011: OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Re-port*. https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/Slovenia/87786 (December 29 2022).

23 Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and party systems: a framework for analysis*. Colchester: ECPR, 2005. Alenka Krašovec, *Moč v političnih strankah: odnosi med parlamentarnimi in central-nimi deli političnih strank*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2000.

24 Gašparič, *Državni zbor*, pp. 144-145.

4   Concluding remarks

While the results do confirm our initial hypothesis that populist parties refer to the public more, the difference between the two groups – populist and non-populist – appears to be smaller than the current findings of studies in sociology and political science suggest. Where research from these two fields mainly focuses on the speech of members of populist parties in (selected) television interviews, on social media, and other, less rigid environments, this contribution focused on taking into account all the speeches of MPs throughout the Slovenian parliament, which is a highly institutionalized and regulated environment that probably allows for less differentiation between MPs of different political orientation. Our results show that the same life-world of MPs, marked by their shared experience, social forms, norms, and a shared dialogue in plenary sessions, provides an environment with a strong unifying factor. Although there is little doubt that political parties themselves differ decisively from one another, the power of the institution, its rigidity and specificity, as well as MPs awareness of the target audience and reach of their speeches, proved to be decisive factors in MPs speech when speaking about the public.

According to political scientists and historians, the political space in Slovenia has been increasingly polarized since 1992. Again, our results show a somewhat more nuanced picture: while a growing difference between populist and non-populist discourse can be observed in Terms2-4, the gap narrows in Terms5-7. This challenges the dominant narrative of the Slovenian political space. The record high frequency of references to the public by populist MPs in Term4 coincides with the SDS winning the 2004 election for the first time after 1992, which happened immediately after the party went through its populist transformation in 2003. In Term5 the SDS witnessed a backlash with the non-populist coalition prevailing, while one of the populist parties, the NSi, did not even reach the parliamentary threshold.

The general public as well as the media frequently also refer to several of the more recent parties, such as Levica (The Left), as populist. While these parties do exhibit a certain populist appeal, their content, attitudes towards experts and state institutions, as well as their actions

in the parliament place them in the non-populist spectrum, with Levica gravitating more towards the democratic socialism[25] than to the same category of populism as defined by Mudde[26] which was the theoretical framework of this study. Another methodological issue is temporality: the modern populist shift is a phenomenon belonging to the 21st century; as such, the decade after 1992, included in our analysis, requires a separate interpretation and can only be understood as a preface to the later populist shift.[27]

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Sklicevanje populističnih in nepopulističnih strank na javnost v slovenskem parlamentu

Prispevek se posveča raziskovanju vprašanja različnih oblik in odstopanj od parlamentarne demokracije, pri čemer kot študijski primer jemlje Slovenijo med letoma 1992 in 2018. Osredotoča se na osrednjo institucijo parlamentarne demokracije, parlament, ter analizira delovanje poslancev oziroma njihovega govora v parlamentu vse od začetka prvega parlamentarnega mandata do izteka leta, ko so še na voljo podatki za analizo celotnega državnozborskega mandata. Skladno z domnevo, da je populizem svojevrsten politični slog, ki vzpostavlja posebno povezavo z množicami, torej javnostjo, si prispevek zastavlja vprašanje, ali so poslanci populističnih strank v primerjavi s poslanci nepopulističnih strank v svojem govorjenju kako drugače naslavljali splošno javnost. Rezultati empirične analize so pokazali, da so člani populističnih strank javnost naslavljaji pogosteje. Vendar je razlika med njimi in poslanci, ki so prihajali iz nepopulističnih strank, izrazito majhna, kar je moč pojasniti z močjo parlamenta kot institucije. To opozarja na pomembnost okolja, pričakovanj in navad (*Lebenswelt*), v katerem delujejo poslanci še tako različnih si strank.

Ključne besede: politične stranke, populizem, življenjski svet, parlament, Slovenija