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## ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN ALBANIA

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### Abstract

*The political discourse used during the electoral campaigns is one of the most essential indicators for the measurement of the level of democracy in a country. The analysis of such discourses is inevitable, since the communication of the candidates is to generate trust in the voters and create increase of the number of supporters. This study aims at analyzing the political discourse that dominated during the pre-election period in Albania, in the framework of recent local elections for Mayor of Tirana during 2015. The study was carried out in April, May and June 2015. All the statements made during this period by the two main candidates are in the center of this study. This study was focused only on the two leading figures - Erjon Veliaj, representative of the Socialist Party (SP) and Halim Kosova, representative of the Democratic Party (DP) - and not on other candidates, because of the number of the votes collected by them during the electoral process, by demonstrating the highest degree of the attention by the Albanian voters. The results show that both candidates used negative discourse throughout their campaign and through this were endeavouring to diminish the trust towards their opponents.*

**Key words:** elections, political discourse, elections, trust, Albania

**JEL classification:** D72, Z13, A13, C31

### Introduction

Without trust the most basic functions of our everyday life would be harmed and no social ties could be established. However, it was not sooner than 1999, when researchers of political science have paid a special attention to how trust might be of relevant influence on political systems (Warren, 1999). Although, when we consider political formations it is easy to pinpoint the relevance of trust. Liberal democracy for example is a product of the people's distrust in traditional political and clerical authorities (Dunn, 1988). Trust is a relation, where one accepts a certain amount of uncertainty and risk in exchange for potential benefits received from the other party, such as collaboration or other financial and non- financial gains. Trust in the state and its institutions is often conceptualized as a situation, where mistrusting discourses are dominated and conquered by trusting images (Brugger, 2015).

According to Warren (1999) trust is often misplaced and sustains exploitative, paternalistic behaviors rather than creating situations of mutual trust where solidarity and reciprocity are core values. In line with his reasoning democratic institutions, such as freedom of speech and association or the system of elections itself are forms expressing conflicts of interest and limit the discretion of the trusted. Nonetheless - as emphasized above, trust is a fundamental notion of social functioning, hence is prevalent in every social and political systems - in democracies as well.

Parties and their candidates endeavor to use a vocabulary that articulates likeness with the potential voters and through this supports the creation of trust. The promises made during the electoral campaign also serve the same purpose – creating trust through inducing future expectancies in the potential supporters. While doing so, political parties create potential scenarios that reduce complexity for the individuals and provide them with a (false) sense of safety and security (Giddens, 1990). What is more, these scenarios make individuals accept political declarations as axioms, upon which a whole new realm of future promises can be built (Donati, 1992).

Politicians and political discourses however also work on mistrust. Discourses accessible for the wider public are often intended to feed and fuel certain emotions that create mistrust in the opposing party, its promises and actions. Such discourses emphasize incidents that can deepened fear, or increase suspicion and anxiety, while creating a sense of dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Allen 2017).

All in all, sustaining and encouraging good relationships with voters in political discourses by communicating participation and apprehension are important for securing cooperation and acquiring power (Kampf, 2016). Hence, when exploring political systems, one has to be aware of the processes and political discourses and needs to understand how they feed into and reinforce cognitive, as well as emotional messages.

## **Overview of the research literature**

The political discourse used during the electoral campaigns is one of the most essential indicators for the measurement of the level of democracy in a country. It impacts not only the trust of voters, and through it the voting behavior or the outcome of elections, but also at the same time the quality of democracy, in particular in countries with unconsolidated democracy such as Albania (Ramet, 1998). From this point of view, the effect of the electoral strategies exceeds primary goals, such as winning of elections, and has a direct effect on the quality of democracy and as a consequence in the quality of citizens’ life. In reference to one of the well-known figures in this field, Thomas Holbrook (1996: 1), electoral campaign and used “language” do not have any extraordinary effect on the voting behavior compared to the effects on “political stance” in the long-term.

From this point of view, the “language” used during the electoral campaign is a significant indicator in order to predict how the future directors of the state administration are going to lead and administer (Pinchevski, 2005). It already shows itself in the greetings of the leading politicians. While some use greetings as gate-openers fostering trust and respect, connecting the candidate and the potential voters, other emphasize the distance and paternity of the system, hence creating an upper hand for themselves emphasizing their future role in decreasing uncertainty for the voters (Young, 2000).

In case the political discourse is based on negative tones, this means that in the long-term, the role played by the newcomers into power, in regard to the further development, will not be positive (Johnston et al., 2004: 1). Negative discourse per se consists on the use of criticism about the achievements and the work of government and opposition, being a necessity in a free and democratic society. The purpose of such discourse is to undermine the voters’ trust in

the opposing party and its candidate and create mistrust in whatever they would say or promise. This is a natural phenomenon when the language is assertive and communicates on a cognitive level enumerating facts and numbers about the deeds of the opponents, however, it is a problem when the negative discourse is not constructive, but personal, aggressive and emotional. Therefore, studies of this nature are increasingly in the focus of the researchers of this field, in particular for countries with fragile democracy.

Following the electoral campaign and analyzing the electoral strategies used by the two main candidates for the local elections in Tirana, it is important to mention the way the media has spread the news or the declarations of these candidates. It is also essential to emphasize that this study does not focus on the analysis of the media per se, as an actor that can or cannot influence the voting behavior or contribute or not to the improvement of the political public debate. But, because the media is used as principal instrument for the data collection for this study, some important elements were put in the spotlight which are directly connected with the reflection of the political discourse of the candidates (Fairclough, 1988).

After the processing and analysis of the data, it was concluded that the political discourse used by the political actors involved in the study, before and during the electoral campaign for the local elections in Tirana, was characterized mainly by negative tones. Their discourse was led by direct insults or non-direct personal insults against each other, accusations without evidence, as well as, comparing the political opponent with political traits of the past. However, the frequency of the usage of “negative language” from each of them is different. Detailed data on each of the candidates are described further in this study.

However, the goal of this study does not consist on explaining the why of this discourse, in other words, the reasons of using this language; but, only the presentation of some data which describe in an objective way the type of discourse and the frequency of the usage of certain words in each of the used categories for this study for the measurement of political discourse. This means that the study itself might be considered as an instrument that denounces or upraises the used language by the political actors during a delicate period, such as the period of electoral campaign where the public’s attention towards politics is at high levels. For this reason, political dialogue must be moderated and constructive, in order to transmit not only the political message with the aim at winning the elections, but with a high level of political communication in respect to citizens and country’s prosperity.

## **Methodology**

From a methodological point of view, this study has used content analysis of documents that are used as a source of data collection (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013). This analysis was carried out through a software. The selected method helped in identifying the model of political communication used by candidates Veliaj and Kosova, before and during the electoral period in local elections 2015 for Tirana mayor. The applied model for this study confirmed that the political language was characterized by negative tones, however the frequency of the usage of the “negative language” from each of them is different.

Some of the most popular newspapers in the country were used as sources for data collection. Their selection was not random and the reasoning behind their selection was based on: (i) the high number of sales that they have in the country, and (ii) on their profile. This means that in this study are involved newspapers that are classified as left wing, right wing or centrist. The selection was done in such a way as to make possible the balance of the distribution of news. The involved newspapers in this study are: Mapo, Panorama, Gazeta Shqiptare, Shqip dhe Shekulli.

From these newspapers, the statements of the two candidates for mayor of Tirana were taken. The selected time segment included April, May and June. Through this period, the study

generated data in relation to the used language before the election period, during the campaign and a few days before the election day, where it was realized that in May and June, the political communication was aggravated in comparison to April.

The selected analysis for this study, initially requests the fulfillment of a technical condition which is the establishment of a preliminary vocabulary. In order to accomplish the goal of this study, it was used the same vocabulary constructed previously by some experts of the field, in the framework of a similar study accomplished during 2012 by Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA, 2012). The decision to use the same vocabulary came from several reasons, first (i) insufficiency of funds; (ii) the nature of the study, very similar with the one carried out a few years ago by OSFA. The preliminary establishment of the vocabulary as well as of the categories for the measurement of the political discourse was very helpful for the success of this study.

As in the previous study, in this study was used “computer-assisted textual analysis” (CATA). The selection of this technique increases the reliability of the study since it eliminates the possibility of “human error”. This means that in the study are not involved codes to count the frequency of words/expressions in the designed category. The analysis requires several stages and includes a number of techniques, starting with the analysis of statements through the vocabulary constructed before (vocabulary used by OSFA, 2012) and, later on, their processing through the computer, in a software that enables the analysis.

In the first steps of the establishment of the vocabulary, the definition of the categories was made possible, because based on that the observatory of the words would be constructed, in other words, the vocabulary. Each of the category contains defined words/ expressions, which express a certain idea: for instance, a category for intelligence, would include words such as “intelligent, wise, smart” etc. The analysis with the computer measure the frequency of these categories in a particular document. In this case, the categories contain the descriptions of Veliaj and Kosova for each other, and the computer analysis compares which of the two statements contains more of such categories.

During the collection of the declarations for each of the candidates, from the newspapers selected for the study, it was realized that almost each of the newspapers had equal number of the declarations of each candidate, at least for the time period of study. However, the length of the news was not the same. But this does not influence the analysis of this study, as part of the analysis is not the comment of the newspapers itself, but the declarations of candidates. Hence, in the analysis, only the declarations of the candidates are included. Technically, in order to carry out the selection from the text of the newspaper overall it was easy, by taking into consideration that in each used newspaper, the declarations of the two candidates was detached from the comment part of the journalist. Their declarations were transcribed in the text, as they had declared. This was easily proved since all the newspapers in the study reflected almost the same thing.

In total 75 declarations of Veliaj and 72 declarations of Kosova were analyzed. As it was expected, the biggest number of declarations presented in the written media belonged to June, when the elections would be carried out. The lowest number of declarations included in the study derives as a result of the study focusing only on the declarations during the electoral period and only on the declarations reflected on the written media. However, the number of declarations meets the statistical reliability measures (Krippendorff, 2003). The declarations are focused mainly on the speeches that candidates have held in Tirana district areas when they went to meet the citizens.

As it was confirmed above, this study had some easiness since the categories and the vocabulary were built previously from a group of experts. The vocabulary was built by the programme Concordance 3.0, a suitable programme for the analysis of text that allows the

researchers to carry out a research of the key words in the context (KWIC). Through the research of the words in the context, the software searches a word, or group of words in all the registered in advance declarations in the programme. What is important in the usage of this format is related to the fact that words are not searched detached from the context, something that allows the researcher to see the words which the key words is accompanied with the text. These words serve later on to build categories based on the values transmitted. More specifically, the words which Veliaj and Kosova refer to each other- for instance, Veliaj, Kosova, civil society leader, doctor, party representative etc.j. – are the main key words for which are found the descriptive words (positive or negative). The search of the key words in the context offered the opportunity to study the descriptive words that were found about these words, for instance: coward, irresponsible, slanderous, sheep, etc. According to what is reported in the study carried out by OSFA, based on the variations of these descriptive words, it was created a vocabulary with different categories, which measures the difference between professional critiques and those personal or without base.

After the words were found in the selected texts for analysis, they were classified based on their content in three categories established to measure the political discourse Veliaj-Kosova before and the election period for local elections in Tirana for 2015. The categories that were used to measure the tones of their political discourse are: (i) character (ii) performance (iii) relevance. Hence, in the study the same measurement categories were decided to be used which were previously used in the study carried by OSFA, since in the actual case, the political discourse of the two candidates was characterized by tones mainly negative in the way they referred to each other, before and during the election period for the local elections in Tirana.

Each of these three categories contains the descriptive words that Veliaj dhe Kosova used for each other and as confirmed above all were negatives. This does not make up any novelty in terms of improvement or moderation of political communication used by Albanian political figures, since even in the study realized by OSFA in 2012, it resulted that the political discourse of Rama and Berisha was dominated by negative tones, In the actual study, the category of Character includes 103 negative descriptive words for the candidate Veliaj and 63 negative descriptive words for candidate Kosova (such as coward, big loser, he has no vision etc.); the Category of Performance includes 123 negative words for candidate Veliaj and 78 negative words for candidate Kosova (such as invades, rules, misgovernment, theft, problem, attacks, etc.); Category of Relevance, which consists in the way candidates have associated each other with a stereotypic group with negative cultural resonances, includes 34 negative words for candidate Veliaj and 26 for candidate Kosova (for instance old knack, typical politician of the old system, family, etc).

The comparison of the declarations of Veliaj and Kosova as well the differences within their declarations from April till June it was realized through the programme of text analysis called Yoshikoder. Yoshikoder is one of the latest software of text analysis developed in the University of Harvard. His advantage over other existing programmes is that it allows the establishment of the vocabulary by the researcher, as well as the usage of letters and symbols in different languages, which was a necessity in the case of the Albanian language. Whereas in order to understand if the differences in the declarations had a statistical significance it was used Welch two sample t-test. This is because the used words by each candidate are not equal in total and in each category as well.

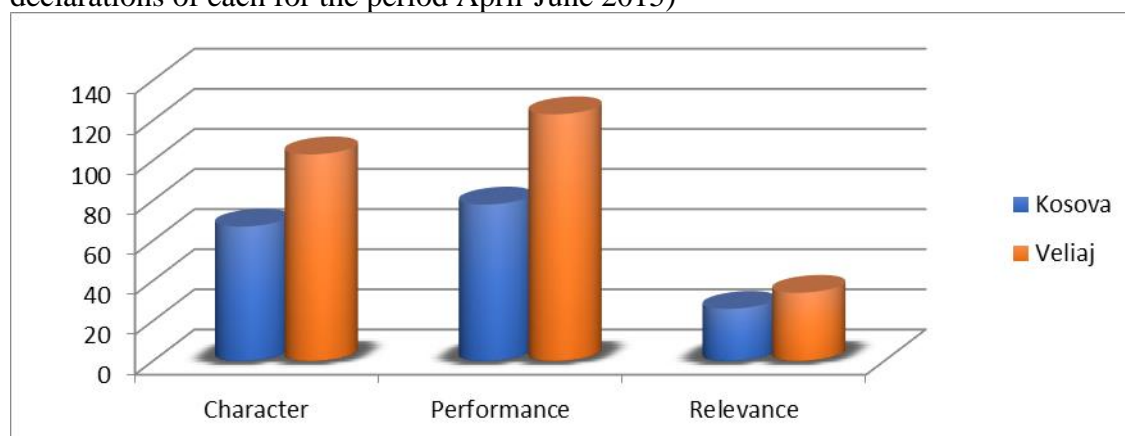
### **Analysis of the results**

In the last steps of the establishment of the political discourse vocabulary in each category, it was witnessed easily that the two candidates for mayor in Tirana, used words with negative

tones when referred to each other. Hence, each category- Character, Performance, Relevance- is built only with negative words. However, the frequency of the usage of these words by each candidates is different and fundamentally noticeable.

In the following graph, the comparison between all the declarations included in this study is illustrated; the declarations of candidate Kosova, as well as those of candidate Veliaj by relying on the preliminary identified categories. The data illustrated in the graph testify that candidate Veliaj uses more critiques and negative descriptions towards his political adversary in the three categories. This means that all the received declarations in the study for the three months. April till June 2015, Veliaj has used in total a language with negative tones, with a high frequency in comparison to candidate Kosova.

**Graph 1:** Comparison of negative discourse of Veliaj and Kosova (with the total number of declarations of each for the period April-June 2015)



**Source:** Own compilations

In order to understand whether this comparison is statistically significant, it was considered to be tested the difference between two political discourses for each candidate. Therefore, Welch Two Sample t-test was applied. The selection of this test and not of another statistical test derived as a result of the absence of an equal variance between the discourses of two candidates. This means that the number of words included in each category is not the same for the two candidates. Hence, in order not to violate any statistical rule, it was selected the Welch correction. The number of words used by each of the candidates for each category is illustrated in Table 1 for candidate Veliaj and Table 2 for candidate Kosova

**Table 1:** Number of negative words used by Erjon Veliaj

Erjon Veliaj	Panorama	Shqip	Gazeta Shqiptare	Mapo	Shekulli	Total
Character	64	9	18	5	7	103
Performance	72	23	21	4	3	123
Relevance	15	4	5	6	4	34
<b>Total</b>						<b>260</b>

**Source:** Own compilations

**Table 2:** Number of negative words used by Halim Kosova

Halim Kosova	Panorama	Shqip	Gazeta Shqiptare	Mapo	Shekulli	Total
Character	24	15	12	12	4	67
Performance	17	16	28	10	7	78
Relevance	6	4	2	1	13	26
<b>Total</b>						<b>171</b>

**Source:** Own compilations

In order to carry out this test, the political discourse of each candidate was separated in two categories. In the first category, titled “0” all the words in total (260) were included, used by candidate Veliaj’ and in the other category titled “1”, all the words in total (171) were included, used by candidate Kosova. Based on the data included in Table 3, the study can confirm by 95% level of confidence that a significant difference exists between the negative political discourse of Veliaj and Kosova.

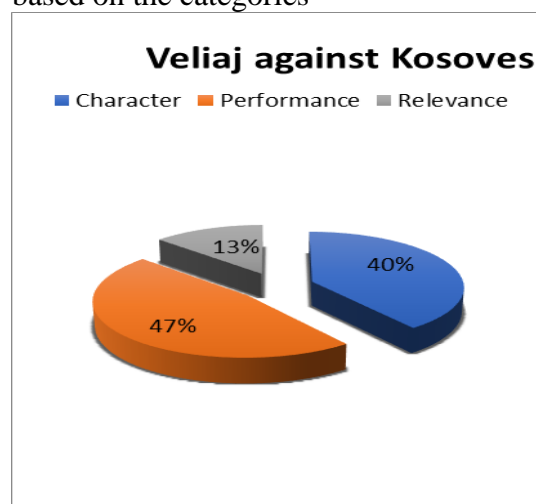
**Table 3:** Welch Two Sample t-test

t-value	df	p-value	95% Interval of confidence	Valuation of sample: Mean in group 0 and 1
<b>t=5.4504</b>	df=40.216	p-value=3.177e-06	] 9.773943; 21.321226[	Mean in group 0= 131.48038 Mean in group 1=89.93280

**Source:** Own compilation.

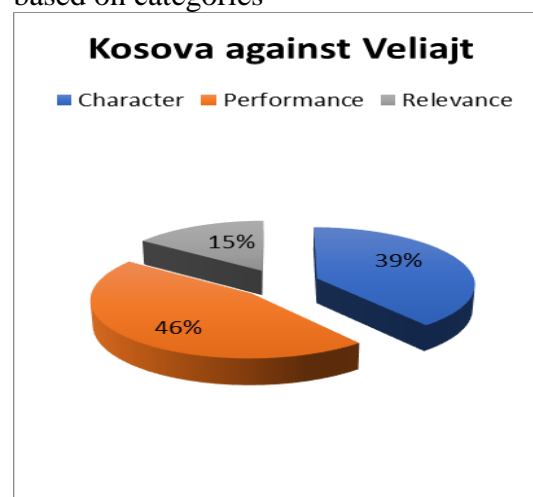
For more details on the distribution in percent of the language that each candidate has used when referred to each other, based on the categories of analysis, it was carried out a comparison between the two and the data are illustrated in the above graphs.

**Graph 2:** Negative discourse of Veliaj based on the categories



**Source:** Own compilations

**Graph 3:** Negative discourse of Kosova based on categories



**Source:** Own compilations

As it is easily noticed, graphs testify that the two politicians are approximately equal on percentages when criticize relying on Character, Performance and Relevance of their adversary. In their declarations, the two focus more than 45% of the critiques on the performance of adversary as political actor, whereas the other part is personal critique of character or comparison of the adversary with groups and political images with negative resonances.

In fact, these results were surprising by taking into consideration that Kosova has not been a political active actor and his figure as politician has not been in focus in comparison to Veliaj. This is also related to their past as political figures and not public figures. However, as it was clarified at the beginning of this study, the goal is not to analyze why but to present empirically what has happened before and during the electoral campaign for local elections in Tirana, for 2015.

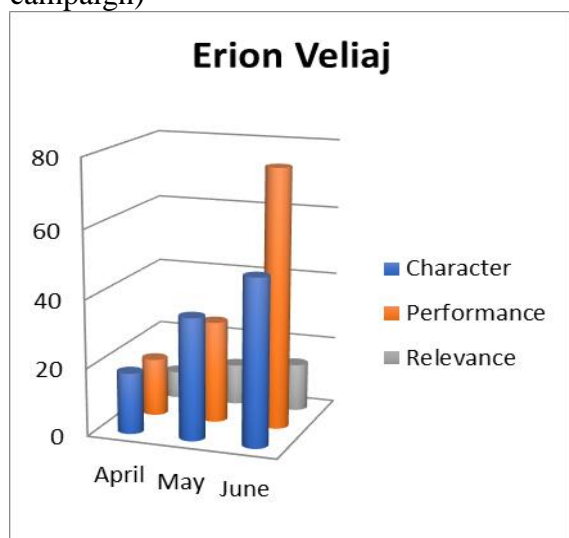
Meanwhile, Graphs 4 and 5 compare the differences in the discourses of Veliaj and Kosova from the period before the campaign, in April, when the official introduction of candidates for



mayor in Tirana district was done until one day before the official completion of the electoral campaign in 19 June 2015.

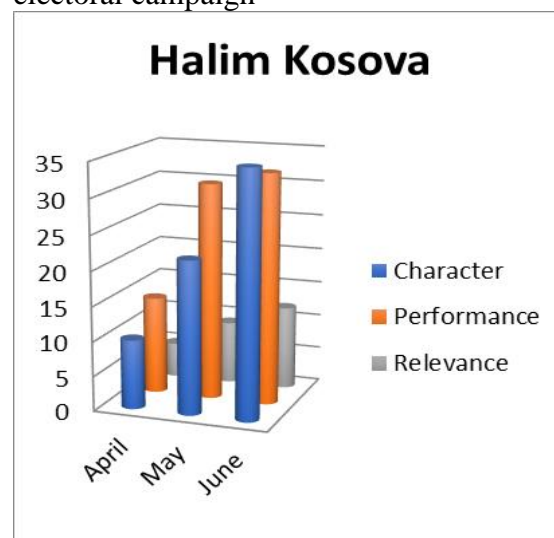
As it is visible in these graphs, the negative discourse of Erjon Veliaj towards Halim Kosova has increased in all categories. During June, the negative discourse of him has considerably increased by focusing mainly on the category of performance. These data reinforce one more time what was realized above. Halim Kosova has not been a political active figure and his position as a leader in the state administration is only related with the time period when he led Mother Teresa Hospital Center in Tirana. However, political discourse of his political adversary is mainly focused on the category of performance.

**Graph 4:** Comparison of Veliaj's discourse from April in June (time segment: period before, during and in the end of the electoral campaign)



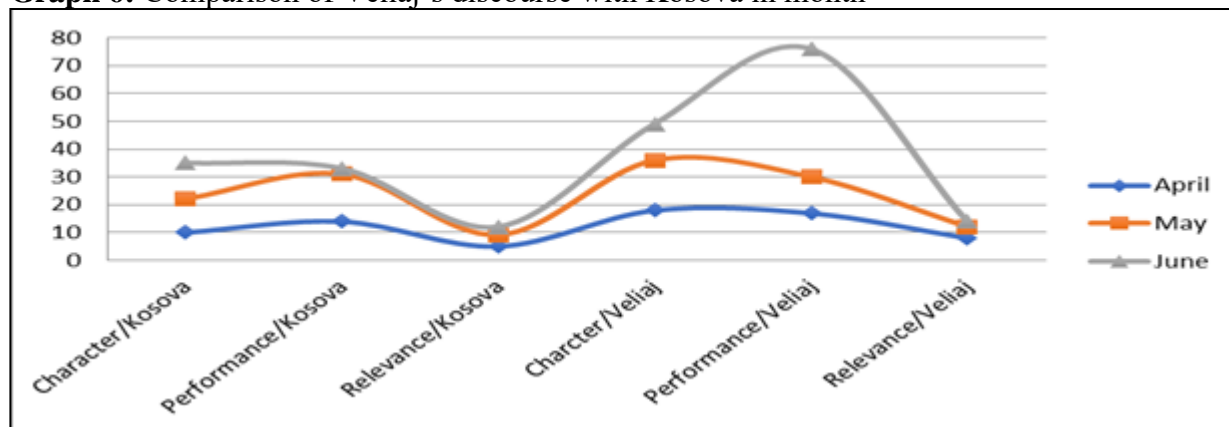
Source: Own compilations

**Graph 5:** Comparison of Kosova's discourse from April in June (time segment: period before, during and in the end of the electoral campaign)



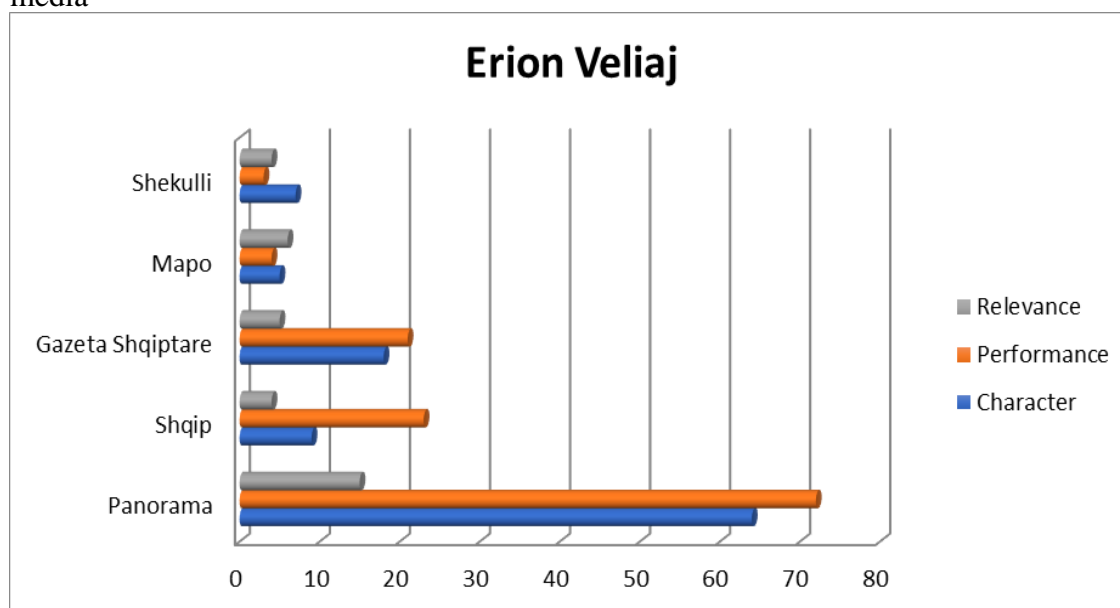
Source: Own compilations

In order to understand in what period, the discourse of each candidate is more negative, it was also carried out a discourse analysis according to months. As it understood, the negative discourse is considerably increased in the period before elections. However, this increase is not the same for the two candidates. As it is noticed in graph 6, this increase is not the same for the two candidates. As it appears in graph 6, candidate Veliaj has increased with over 50% the frequency of using the negative political discourse towards political adversary in the category of performance during the month of June. However, also in the other categories it appears a considerable increase in the negative discourse of Veliaj against candidate Kosova. Hence, in the last month until a few days before the election day, candidate Veliaj showed a clear and obvious tendency in relation to the increase of frequency of the usage of negative terminology in his political communication when referred to the candidate Kosova.

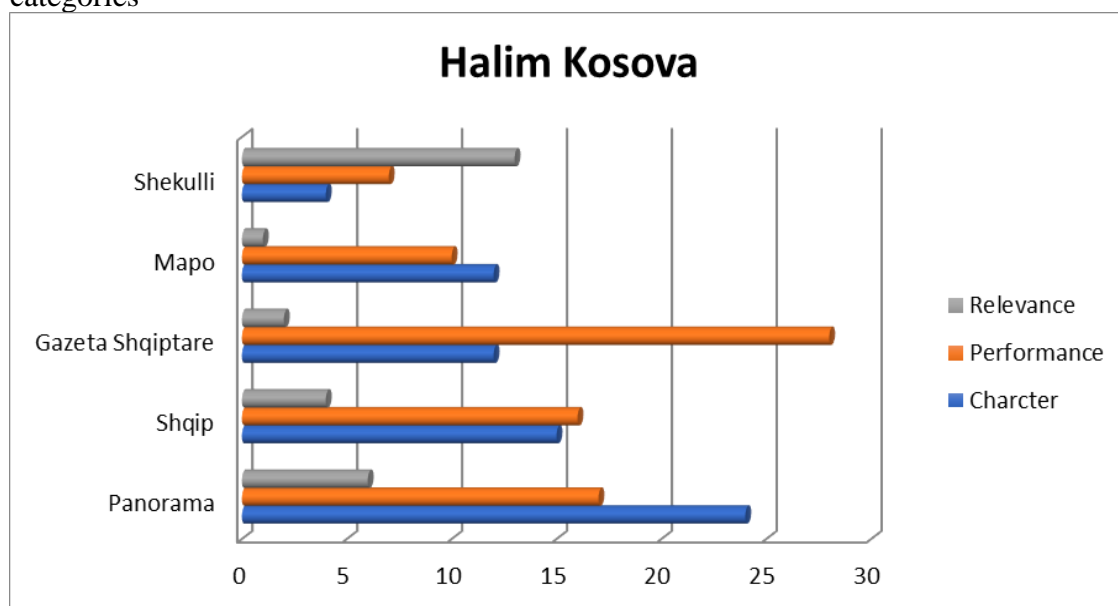
**Graph 6:** Comparison of Veliaj's discourse with Kosova in month

**Source:** Own compilation.

In the following graphs, graph 7 and 8, the frequency of the usage of the political negative discourse is illustrated for each of the categories from both of the candidates for mayor of Tirana, reflected in the selected newspapers as the source of collecting the data for this study. As it is noticed in the graphs no. 7 and 8, newspapers: Shekulli, Mapo and Gazeta Shqipëtare have reflected more negative declarations of the candidate Kosova, Shqip has reflected equally the negative colors of the political discourse of each candidate, whereas gazeta Panorama is the one that has differed from others, since it has reflected more than 50% of times the declarations with negative colors of the political discourse of the candidate Veliaj towards Kosova.

**Graph 7:** Reflection of political discourse of Veliaj based on the categories in the written media

**Source:** Own compilations

**Graph 8:** Reflection of political discourse of Kosovo based on the media categories

**Source:** Own compilations

In order to make it more easy to understand the reflection of their declarations in the written media selected for the study, the data are reflected summarized in the following table

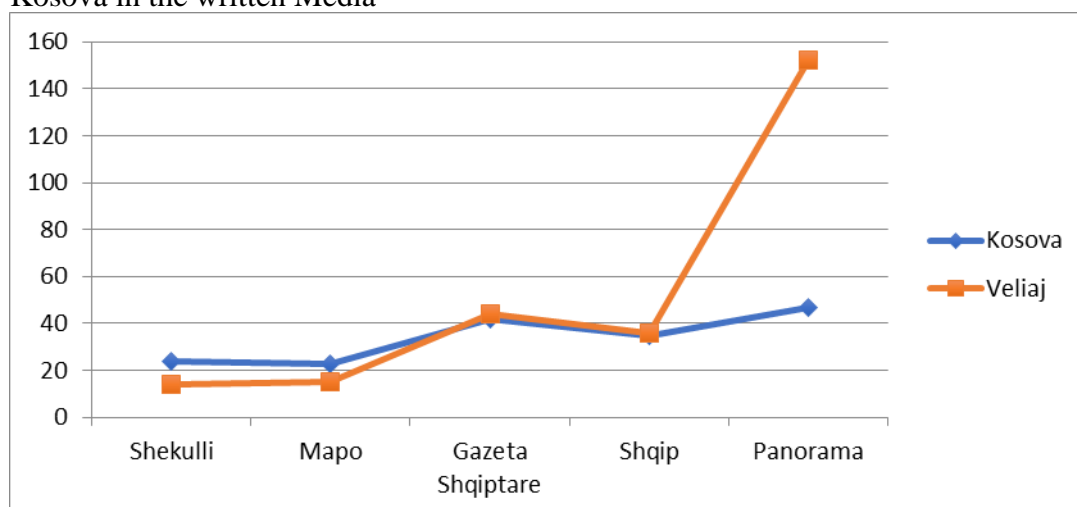
**Table 4:** Political discourse in total for both the candidates (included the total number of the words for the three categories)

	Veliaj/political discourse in total (included the total number of words for the three categories)	Kosova/ political discourse in total (included the total number of words for the three categories)
Shekulli	14	<b>24</b>
Mapo	15	<b>23</b>
Gazeta Shqiptare	44	<b>42</b>
Shqip	36	35
Panorama	<b>151</b>	47
Total number of negative words used	<b>260</b>	<b>171</b>

**Source:** Own compilation.

From the data of the table, it is concluded that Erjon Veliaj has used almost 20% more negative words towards the adversary in total during the period before and during the electoral campaign for the local election for mayor of Tirana 2015. The data of the table are reflected in the graph 9, in order to understand the distribution of the used vocabulary in the written media.

**Graph 9:** Reflection of total discourse (used words in the same categories) of Veliaj and Kosova in the written Media



**Source:** Own compilations

Based on what is reported in graph 9, newspapers such as Shekulli and Mapo have had similar frequency in covering the statements of the two candidates, hence the dispersion of the used vocabulary in each of the three categories appears with a small difference. Meanwhile in the newspapers such as Gazeta Shqiptare and Shqip, it is a different situation. Based on the graphic representation (but also based on the data of table no. 4) these two newspapers have had a similar coverage in terms of political discourse used by each of the two candidates before and during the electoral campaign in Tirana. These data do not show the media coverage that each selected newspaper in the study has carried out for each candidate, but the frequency of the usage of words for each defined category. This means, that further studies might have as a focus the media coverage in order to generate further data in relation to the media as an instrument during delicate periods, such as periods before or during electoral campaign. In reference to the data of the above-mentioned graph, it is easily noticeable that in the Panorama newspaper, the elements of the negative political communication of the candidate Veliaj are separated in distance from the opponent candidate. It must be emphasized that these data do not show the stance of each newspaper in transmitting the news for each candidate, but the differences appeared in each of them, which might be of interest for further detailed study.

## Overall conclusions

In the end of this study it was realized that as four years ago, in the study carried out by OSFA, the used language by the political actors at least before and during the electoral campaign is dominated by negative harsh tones in the moment when referred to the political opponent. However, it must be emphasized that the frequency of negative words used in the political discourse of the candidate Erjon Veliaj is 20 % higher compared to candidate Kosova in the three levels of categories.

The categories of analysis that were used in this study were: (i) Character; (ii) Performance; (iii) Relevance. It was expected that their political discourse would be focused mainly in the category of performance, as this is an element that is directly connected with their image as political persons. But, as it resulted in the published data in 2011 from the study of OSFA (at that time the study was carried out on candidates Rama and Berisha) and in this study, it resulted that the axis of political discourse was not focused on the performance category. About 25% of political discourse was focused on the character and around 12.5% on the category of relevance (for more details refer to graph 6).

In reference to these data it is difficult to analyze whether each of these candidates would enjoy the ability to include in the discussion agenda, mainly issues that are related to the local concerns, since the elections had a local character and it was supposed that the daily subject in each of their public appearance was assumed to be related with the actual problems of the city and not with the political relevance or personal insults. However, this study aimed at presenting an overview of the political discourse of the two candidates Veliaj and Kosova and not go in-depth analysis about the factors that influence the candidates in the usage of the political discourse with obvious negative tones.

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