A Multimodal Analysis of the Iraqi Candidates' Strategies of Persuasion: The Provincial Elections as a Sample

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Salam Abbas Mahmood
Al-Muthanna University, Iraq

Mazura Jamali
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

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Abstract: Political persuasion is a complex phenomenon, particularly evident in the realm of election campaigns. This article focuses on the intricate art of persuasion employed in the posters of Iraqi elections. Election posters are not merely informative, but are meticulously designed pieces of propaganda that aim to influence, persuade, and shape the voting behavior. To explore this capacity, six posters are investigated according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) and Chilton's (2004) frameworks. The aim is to dissect the multimodal persuasion strategies employed in Iraqi electoral posters. The capacity of these posters lies in their multimodality, a strategic combination of various semiotic resources such as text, color, and imagery. In the context of Iraqi elections, these elements take on a unique cultural and political impact. The findings of the study show that the visual and textual content of the posters aim to provide a sense of shared identity and promise of change contributing to shaping the understanding of the contemporary political communication.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, elections, multimodality, persuasion, posters

1. Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged among linguists, academics, and political experts that language and politics are closely related. Therefore, language structure is necessary for political interaction to exist (Esposito 2021). Language should be there whenever a political activity is done. The investigation of political discourse, as Wilson (2015) argues, has always existed alongside politics.

A major aim of analyzing a political discourse is to investigate how language is employed to achieve certain effects in politics (Wilson 2015). Manipulation is a type of persuasive approach aiming at persuading listeners in the best interests of the speakers (Abrahamyan 2020). In the political sphere, it is clearly noticed that political persuasion permeates through all layers of political life in well-established democracies (Gil de Zúñiga, González-González and Goyanes 2025). Communication in politics, as viewed by McNair (2017), is devoted for the purpose of persuasion. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2015), propaganda and persuasion have been used indiscriminately in daily conversations. Persuasion is thought to be a personal psychological operation, while propaganda is typically associated with activities within a society.

In terms of both technical and creative merits, posters are an extremely vital tool for visual communication since they effectively transmit visuals as well as significant textual and graphic elements that have deeper significance. Political posters are created specifically to convey the goals and objectives of the candidates to the general public, particularly in an effort to persuade voters during political campaigns. Politicians utilize posters to endorse their candidates and sway the audience's perceptions to support their programs and disregard those of their rivals (Cristobal 2022). Within a socio-political context, the present study seeks to explore how Iraqi politicians devote their electoral posters to persuade their people. It examines the discursive and semiotic aspects of these posters adopting Chilton's (2004) PDA and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2021). These two frameworks provide a comprehensive view of the employed persuasive strategies by Iraqi politicians in their campaigns within the provincial elections of 2023. What is special about the data of this study is that this type of elections has been conducted after about a decade from the previous one. In addition, such elections are considered as the seed for the parliament elections as the parties and coalitions attend this election to gain more supporters by presenting services and making sure that the provincial councils would not oppose their decisions in the parliament.

This study examines the integration of slogans, images, and discourses within intentionally selected posters from different provinces in Iraq for the aim of patterning the types and nature of persuasive strategies adopted by Iraqi politicians. These posters have been selected since they reflect different campaign strategies across parties, coalitions and candidates besides their wide visibility on social media which reflects that they have succeeded in persuading the voters. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do election posters construct political identity?
2. What are the persuasive strategies that are communicated through these posters?
3. How do candidates shape themselves distinctively from other candidates?

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution of providing insights into the socio-political persuasion strategies adopted within the Iraqi setting especially on the provincial level. As previous studies shed light on parliamentary elections, the present one aims to shed light on the provincial elections whose political sentiment remains unexplored well. The present study brings together multimodal elements provided by local Iraqi politicians from different areas for the sake of encouraging their audience to elect them. The findings of the present study are anticipated to be useful for voters, politicians, scholars, and political coalitions and parties through presenting detailed analysis of an important campaign tool, posters. It is also anticipated that this study enriches the understanding of power dynamics in Iraq focusing on how political parties and coalitions in a wider view and local political candidates in a closer one represent themselves in these posters.

2. Literature review

The election campaigns received great attention from the researchers to examine different aspects. Several studies are based on multimodal analysis of elections posters due to their importance in political communication.

A study by Makinde and Adejumo (2024) investigated the Linguistic Appeals multimodally in presidential election billboards and posters in Nigeria. It examined the linguistic strategies used in political discourse to appeal to voters employing Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal framework.

In Iraq, the posters emphasize the various strategies adopted by political candidates of Iraqi parliament elections of 2018 and 2021. They examined the way the sample candidates previewed themselves for the sake of convincing their audience to elect them.

Jamil and Al-Tameemi (2022) conducted a multimodal analysis for the Iraqi Parliament elections posters of 2018 exploring the ideological, and religious beliefs by employing Kress and van Leeuwen and Fairclough's frameworks. They argued that the candidates employed their dressing (Arabic outfit/al-eiqal) or (hijab) to express their socio-cultural backgrounds as well as their ideological tendencies. Parallelly, a thesis presented by Rashid (2022) investigated the pragma-semiotic elements of the photos of the Iraqi Parliament elections 2021. The study examined the propaganda posters of the candidates for the Iraqi parliament elections in which they employed semiotic and pragmatic aspects to convince the voters to elect them.

In another study, Majeed and Faiq (2023) approached the Kurdish political billboards in the Iraqi Parliament elections of 2021. This multimodal study examined the ideological aspects that these billboards presented. The study revealed that they are designed in a way that aims at persuading the voters by focusing on positive and promising views. In the same way, Sharhan, Mahawi and Al-Ābedi (2023) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis for the posters of the Iraqi parliament candidates of 2018. This study investigated the way those candidates presented themselves as well as their programs for their audience. Its results show that some candidates have changed the logos, slogans and coalitions while others have kept the previous ones. Such changes and maintenances are due to their failure/success politically. Another tendency grown in this election is that some candidates presented themselves as alternatives for the religious parties that failed in running the country previously.

Qadir (2023), on the other hand, analyzed the visual semiotics of elections posters of the Iraqi parliamentary election in Kurdistan 2021. The study employed eclectic model to explore the rhetorical strategies to reflect positive assumptions about the candidates.

The cited local literature paid significant attention to the multimodal analysis of the political posters of the Iraqi parliament elections. This is due to the importance of parliament elections as the members would represent the whole country in the legislative and executive sides. However, provincial elections have no less importance. The provincial committees are responsible for choosing the governors of the provinces in addition to their legislative and executive duties at the provincial level.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, suitable for examining the multifaceted and multimodal aspects of political discourse as manifested in campaign posters (Greiz 2026). The chosen design corresponds with the objective of the study to comprehensively investigate the persuasive strategies used in these posters to influence the electorate. Qualitative research, based on interpretivist principles, enhances comprehension of the connections between textual and visual elements in constructing political narratives (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021).

The data for this study consist of six electoral posters from the 2023 Iraqi provincial elections. These posters, for the best knowledge of the researchers were purposively selected due to their high amount of interaction on social media besides the variation of campaign strategies across parties, coalitions and candidates. The scope of the study is narrowed down in order to achieve accuracy; hence, this paper is limited to posters rather than other means of propaganda. Moreover, the political posters selected for the purpose of analysis are only those of Hassan Thabit Al-Abbasi (from Nineveh) (Figure 1), Mazin Muhammad Mustafa (from Baghdad) (Figure 2), Rakan Saeed Al-Jubouri (from Kirkuk) (Figure 3), Khairallah Muhammad Ghadib (from Kirkuk) (Figure 4), Zeinab Hassan Mohammad Al-Tubi (from Al-Muthanna) (Figure 5) and Baydaa Mudhar Al-Hachami (from Basrah) (Figure 6). The selection of posters was additionally guided by the notion of representativeness, providing diversity in regional, cultural, and political affiliations. The posters were obtained directly from the official accounts of the candidates, ensuring authenticity and contextual relevance.

In reference to the data analysis procedures, the present study employs Kress and van Leeuwen's framework (2021) and Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis (2004) to dissect the multimodal and textual elements of the posters. The data analysis includes the following:

1. Firstly, the posters were analyzed individually, initially concentrating on their visual components through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's framework. The principal findings were classified into representational, interactive, and compositional dimensions.
2. In the meantime, the textual content was analyzed for rhetorical strategies by utilizing Chilton's PDA. This involved recognizing patterns in linguistic manipulation and their correspondence with visual narratives.
3. Lastly, cross-poster comparisons were performed to identify recurring tactics and distinct approaches among various political groupings.

This structured and integrated analysis aims to explain how multimodal and textual elements collaborate to generate persuasive political statements.

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the data, cautious procedures were conducted to uphold the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings in this study. Concerning the reliability of the dataset, consistency in data collection is the first step where all posters were obtained from the official social media accounts of the candidates, ensuring a consistent and validated data source. This reduces inconsistencies or differences that may occur from utilizing secondary or

unconfirmed sources. The next step was setting structured analytical frameworks when the researchers used the established analytical models, namely Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Chilton's PDA. This confirms that the analysis follows systematic and replicable methodologies. A further step was to conduct the inter-coder reliability by which the coding and analysis of the posters were separately evaluated by two researchers to improve interpretative consistency. Discrepancies in the analysis of the posters were addressed through discussions in order to ensure conformity with the selected frameworks.

In terms of data validity, the researchers performed a content validity by which the posters were intentionally chosen to represent various political alliances and geographic regions of Iraq. This guarantees that the results represent a varied and thorough comprehension of the tactics utilized in different circumstances. Moreover, construct validity was done when the study utilized established theoretical frameworks that have been extensively validated in multimodal discourse and political communication research. This enhances the alignment between the study objectives and the employed methodologies. Subsequently, in completing the data validity, peer debriefing was executed. Drafts of the analysis were shared with two colleagues specializing in critical discourse analysis and multimodality for the sake of feedback. Finally, the study utilized methodological triangulation by integrating textual and visual analysis to substantiate findings across multiple dimensions of the data. Data triangulation was accomplished by analyzing posters from distinct locations and political coalitions, thus, enhancing the credibility of the conclusions drawn.

4. Visual and textual analysis

4.1 The first poster

Figure 1 is an electoral poster of the candidate Hassan Thabit Al-Abbasi, who is a member of the coalition of ' نينوى لاهلها ' *' Ninawa li-ahliha '* (Ninevah for its people) in Ninevah city, running for the 2023 provincial elections in Iraq.

Concerning the visual elements, this poster consists of a photograph which takes a large portion of the poster. Hassan and his father, Thabit Al-Abbasi, who is the minister of defense, are shown in the poster, with a crowd behind them and the party's political posters in the background. The poster consists of a written text occupying the bottom part. Hassan's social media accounts and the title of his media office appear below the written text. Moreover, the party's code, accompanied with its logo (a tick mark), occupies the top left corner. There are dominant green and white colors in the poster, with a black color for the code.

Regarding the compositional dimension, this poster is to be viewed from top to bottom as Hassan and his father are foregrounded in the photograph. This gives much importance to the candidate and his father as they appear as leaders standing ahead of the crowd. Due to its big size and the fact that the politician and his father are foregrounded, the photograph is the salient element in the poster. Moreover, the space given for the text creates a dividing line which gives a relative importance for the written text. Also, the tick mark, the party's logo, is framed with a black circle highlighting its presence in the composition as it suggests a sense of approval that

Hassan is the right candidate to vote for. The camera angle depicts Hassan's father in the right side of the photograph as he represents the current generation of politicians supporting his son, Hassan. Moreover, the upper half of the photograph features the goal or vision of the poster, which is represented by the coalition, as if the individuals in the photograph are looking forward to reach that goal.



Figure 1. Hassan Thabit Al-Abbasi (Nineveh for its people)

Concerning the representational dimension, the main participants' body language indicates their serious attitude. In the upper half of the poster, the picture captures a grouping of people representing a community, which indicates solidarity and unity of purpose. Moreover, the grouping is portrayed in a way that makes it an event of high significance showing the trust and support given to the candidate by the people behind. The sunglasses, worn by the candidate and his father, give a sense of anonymity, focusing more on the idea that they represent a whole community and idea rather than themselves as individuals. The picture involves people wearing official, casual, and traditional attire. Thus, it symbolizes inclusivity, which indicates that the event has relevance to people from various walks of life. It is a way of showing that the candidate is supported and trusted by all people. The social media icons in the bottom right corner of the poster can reflect modern, or digital communication in attempt to reach out for wider range or

younger demographic audience. The dominant green and white colors are not chosen arbitrarily. Nineveh, the city which the party represents and seeks to win the votes of its people, is often nicknamed ‘ام الربيعين *"Aum alrabee'ain'* (the City of the Two Springs) due to its mild climate that causes the plants to grow and cover the soil with green color. Therefore, the green color is symbolically used to create unity and connection between the candidate and the city of Nineveh. The white color, on the other hand, possibly suggests a new beginning as it appears on the stole worn by the candidate.

In relation to the interactive dimension, a sense of solidarity and unity is reflected in the poster as Hassan and his father are standing ahead of a crowd, which also implies that he follows his father as role model. Doing so, Hassan counts on his father's reputation for the purpose of persuasion. Moreover, the gaze of the represented participants, Hassan and his father as well as the crowd, are directed away from the viewer. This makes the poster represents an offer rather than a demand (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021). Thus, this is symbolically interpreted as a way of looking ahead to leading people in the future. Moreover, the participants are depicted at a medium distance from the viewer suggesting a balance between the personal connection and the professional one. Depicting a real event in the picture is a persuasive technique to give the poster high modality, which in turn makes the message of the poster seems more credible and authoritative to the viewers.

Regarding the textual content, the written text below translates to ‘I have learned a lot from my father about the importance of serving the country and the citizen, and I will do my best to continue his path in serving my people in Nineveh Governorate.’ The candidate highlights that he has the experience to run for the provincial council as he has learned a lot from his father, which is an encouraging motivation for voting for him. The mention of ‘my father’ adds to the reputation of the candidate as his father is the minister of defense. Hassan is running for the provincial council to serve ‘the country and the citizen’, not anything else. This helps restore faith in the electoral process. Moreover, the word ‘citizen’ has a sense of formality that adds to the professionality of the candidate. Moreover, the candidate is willing to be as good as his father by ‘following his path’. The pronoun ‘my’, in ‘my people in Nineveh Governate’, adds a sense of relatedness and closeness between the candidate and the voters. As a result, voters feel that they are urged to vote for Hassan since they are related.

4.2 The second poster

Figure 2 is an electoral poster of Mazin Muhammad Mustafa, a candidate in the Iraqi provincial elections of 2023 who is a part of ‘Civil Qiyam Coalition’ in Baghdad.



Figure 2. Mazin Muhammad Mustafa (Civil Qiyam Coalition)

This poster consists of the candidate in a medium close shot photograph. The name and code of the politician appear in a big size text in red color. The name and logo of the coalition are set in a pale green color. At the bottom, the motto of the coalition appears in a white thin font. The Iraqi flag occupies the bottom right corner. On the bottom left corner, the name and logo of the movement the politician represents appears in a white color.

Regarding the compositional dimension, the contrast in color between the white background and the politician's black suit gives salience to the politician in the poster. That picture is the 'new' information in the poster. It draws attention to itself. The phrases 'your candidate, the artist Mazin Muhammad Mustafa' and 'Civil Qiyam Coalition' appear at the upper section of the poster, which makes them the most important textual content in the poster. The phrase '*جايين نغيّر* ' *Jayeen Nughayyer'* (We are coming to make change) is used as a hashtag. The name and logo of the movement of the politician appear as extra information or details as they are located in the lower section of the poster in a framed pale green space. The codes of the politician and coalition with the coalition's logo in-between, appear in the middle section of the poster in a large size. Thus, they are given relative importance. The Iraqi flag creates a dividing line giving a space for itself to take a relative portion in the poster. This suggests, in a clear way, a sense of patriotism.

Concerning the representational dimension, crossing hands while smiling and looking directly at the viewer is a way of creating a sense of confidence, leadership, and power while keeping the photograph friendly. The Iraqi flag appears like a stage curtain in a realistic shape. This is quite identifiable since the candidate is a well-known actor in Iraq. The special choice of the black and red colors for the suit

and bowtie, in addition to the white floral pattern in the background reflect the candidate's professionality, sophistication, and elegance as an artist. In addition, the color scheme of the poster reflects the colors of the Iraqi flag, giving a sense of nationality and feeling of pride. Moreover, the body of the candidate is a source of vectors that leads the attention of the viewer towards the space of the given information on the right.

Relevant to the interactive dimension, the candidate, in this poster, gazes directly at the viewer. There is an eye contact between the represented participant (the candidate) and interactive participant (the viewer). He is encouraging or requesting a vote. Moreover, the red color of the bowtie, party code, and the candidate's name creates a unity of colors in the poster. As a result, there is harmony in the choice of colors. The same can be said about the phrase, 'Your candidate', coalition's name, and the space at the bottom; they are unified in color. Furthermore, the movement's motto, 'we are coming to make change', which appears in a hashtag, and the Iraqi flag are in the same level. This makes the viewer relates the phrase with the flag in the sense that the candidate will make change in Iraq, a change for a better future. The poster features a medial level of modality when it comes to realistic representations such as the realistic shape of the Iraqi flag, and the colloquial language used in order to relate to people in real life situations.

Concerning the textual content, the phrase 'your candidate' is highly persuasive. Through the use of the pronoun 'your', the candidate establishes relatedness between himself and the voters. Therefore, there is urgence that the voters should vote for Mazin as he is their candidate. In addition, the phrase 'the artist Mazin Muhammad Mustafa', which is the name of the candidate preceded by the title of his profession, is put for persuasive purposes. The candidate counts on his popularity as an artist to win votes in the elections. Furthermore, the use of the colloquial language rather than formal one, helps the candidate to get closer to the voters.

4.3 The third poster

A poster from Rakan Saeed Al-Jubouri's election propaganda is shown in Figure 3. Al-Jubouri is a candidate in the 2023 Iraqi provincial elections. He is a member of 'The Arab Coalition in Kirkuk' in the city of Kirkuk.

The poster consists of a medium close shot photograph of the candidate, Rakan, on the left side of poster with his name in the bottom written in a white color and highlighted with a red rectangular shape. The background features multiple pictures of different events put in a rhombus–like shapes with different transparency levels. On the lower–right side, there is an underlined writing in Arabic that translates to "The dream has become true" in black font. Below that, the code and logo of the coalition (The Arab coalition in Kirkuk) appear in a combination of white and red colors.

As regards the compositional dimension, the viewer's attention is drawn by the photo of the politician as it is placed on the left. Moreover, the photograph is foregrounded; the fading photos in the background give salience to the politician's

photo. The lower section is occupied by the coalition's logo as well as by the politician's name, motto, and code. As a result, these are treated as specific details and information that are less attractive to the viewer. However, the motto' الحلم اصبح حقيقة' *'Al-hilm asbah haqeeqa'* (The dream has become true) is underlined by a dividing line, which means that it has relative importance. The six different photos, which show the candidate's accomplishments in his job, have different levels of visibility. While the faded photos are on the left side of the poster, the ones with high clarity are on the right side. Hence, they are treated as known by the viewer. The viewer is assumed to be aware of his accomplishments. Frames, as they function to highlight the features of the poster, seem ubiquitous. The name and code of the politician, coalition's logo, and the six different pictures in the background are all framed.



Figure 3. Rakan Saeed Al-Jubouri (The Arab coalition in Kirkuk)

Regarding the representational meaning, the slight smile indicates confidence and leadership. Likewise, the candidate's right hand on his chest functions as a vector directing the viewer's sight towards the right side of the poster. The act of putting the right hand on the heart is symbolically interpreted as showing respect and honor since the context is formal. The photos in the background function as representation of the contributions and activities of the candidate in his community. The combination of red and white colors within the poster and the candidate's attire gives a sense of strength, passion, and confidence as well as purity and elegance while maintaining unity with the Iraqi flag colors symbolizing patriotism.

In reference to the interactional meaning, the candidate's direct eye contact makes the poster a demanding one. Additionally, there is a connection between the candidate and the six photos in background made by the vector that emerges from the candidate's right hand. Rakan's medium close shot photograph and his direct smile give a sense of familiarity, in addition to the fact that he is actively interacting with the viewers as he shows respect by his hand placement on his heart. The creative presentation of modality in the poster is conveyed by the photograph of the candidate, the multiple real photos in the background, and the vibrant combinations

of red and white colors and shapes all contribute in giving an artistic touch to the poster and making it more appealing to the viewers.

Regarding the textual content, there is a minimal amount of textual material within this poster when compared to its visual elements, but it does not fall short in conveying deep persuasive meaning. The sentence on the bottom right translates to 'The dream has become true', which is highly persuasive for the ideas it signifies. The word 'dream' holds a significant amount of importance as it represents a long–awaited goal that is once believed to be impossible and has finally been achieved. The motto gives a comforting sense to the viewers of reaching the goal, and suggests that the candidate is up to the task of making dreams come true as a future leader. The utterance is underlined and in a contrastive color with a large font. This gives an extra importance as it draws much attention.

4.4 The fourth poster

Figure 4 features a poster from Khairallah Muhammad Ghadib's election propaganda running for the Iraqi provincial elections in 2023 in the Kirkuk city as a member of 'Taqadum party'.



Figure 4. Khairallah Muhammad Ghadib (Taqadum party)

The poster consists of several visual elements, starting with a medium shot photograph of both the candidate (Khairallah Muhammad) on the left, and the deputy leader of Taqadum party (Dr. Muhammad Tamim) on the right side of the poster in matching dark blue suits and red ties. The top-middle part of the poster features the coalition's name (Al-Qiyada) and the logo under it in green, Taqadum party accompanied by its logo on the left in a combination of white and orange colors, and the party motto 'نسابق الزمن لنتقدم' *'Nusabiq al-zaman linataqaddam'* (we race time to proceed) in a grey font under it. The orange and grey rectangular shapes in the middle feature the names of the deputy leader in the party (Muhammad Tamim), proceeded by the phrase (The candidate of), and the name of the candidate (Khairallah Muhammad) both written in white fonts. The bottom side of the poster features an orange square shape with a blue tick mark inside, followed by the phrase (You must choose) in a combination of blue and orange colors. While the upper margin shows Al-Qiyada's logo. The bottom margin consists of the party's social media accounts on different platforms, namely YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. The poster's background features a combination of different shades of orange and beige.

Regarding the compositional dimension, the composition of this poster is not polarized; it is symmetrical. A sense of harmony and stability is achieved by having balanced arrangement of the visual elements. While Ghadib and Dr. Tamim appear on either side of the poster, the text in between, the names of the two politicians, seems to be the focal point. This highlights the dependence on the popularity of the names of the politicians in the poster, especially the name of Dr. Tamim as it appears on the top. Moreover, the logos and the text appear in a relatively large size. Thus, they have considerable importance in the poster. The very small size of the social media accounts in the lower part of the poster indicates their nature in the poster as being additional details that have less importance than the other elements.

Regarding the representational meaning, it is quite noticeable that there are two individuals on either side of the poster, both work as vectors to attract the viewers' attention to the information in the middle. The poster featuring two individuals gives the sense of support, unity, and cooperation between the coalition members, which is one of the essentials of a prominent leadership. Also, the politicians are seen professional and sophisticated at their profession by the way they dress. The facial expressions also add to the professional appearance and dedication to their political work. The hand placement of the candidate, Khairallah, adjusting his suit symbolizes seriousness, rigidity, and also readiness to lead the people to the future. The color combinations contribute as additional persuasive techniques. The overall orange coloring gives a sense of relatedness to the coalition that the candidate represents. Moreover, the presence of the coalition logo adds to the already established sense of unity, cooperation, and strength. The tick mark inside a square with the phrase, 'You must choose', works as a general strong invitation to participate in the elections, and to vote for Khairallah specifically.

In reference to the interactional meaning, the obvious feature of both figures is their direct eye contact with the viewers, hence, gives a demanding impression

rather than an offer. The participants standing side by side can highlight the mutual supportive relationship between them. The slight smile with the hand placement of the figure on the right, Dr. Muhammad Tamim, are interpreted as signs of the confidence and familiarity to the viewers, while the hand placement and serious–like facial expression of the figure on the left, Khairallah Muhammad, gives a sense of proficiency and formal relationship with the viewers. Therefore, there is a balance established within the poster between familiarity and formality represented by the politicians on either side of the poster.

In reference to the textual analysis, the motto of the coalition is translated to 'We race time to proceed', which holds a significant value being the modal the coalition follows. Using the pronoun 'We' emphasizes unity and solidarity among the coalition members. It also gives an enormous amount of credit to the community for supporting the coalition, resulting in a cooperative and cumulative effort in supporting not only by members within the coalition, but by the community as a whole. The word choice of 'race time' conveys a competitive sense, highlighting the trust they have in the community supporting their project. The poster creatively introduces the candidate using Dr. Muhammad Tamim's name preceded by the phrase 'The candidate of' as means of using the latter's reputation to qualify the candidate. It also confirms that the candidate, Khairallah, is ready to occupy this political position. The writing at the bottom with the box with a tick above it translates to 'You must choose' can be realized as a direct invitation for the viewers to vote for the candidate.

4.5 The fifth poster

This electoral poster is of Zeinab Hassan Mohammad Al-Tubi, a candidate from 'The State of Law Coalition' running for the 2023 Iraqi provincial elections in Al-Muthanna.

The poster is composed of a close shot photograph of the candidate, Al-Tubi, on the left side of the poster with her name on the bottom of the poster written in a large red on a light green background. The number of the candidate is written below her photo in red also and enclosed in a white box. The left side of the poster is featured by the motto of the coalition on the upper part 'قوة القرار' 'quat alqarar' (decision power). The logo of the coalition is placed in the right middle part of the poster followed by the name of the coalition and its code written in red. The background of the upper part of the poster is set in a sky-like shape.

Regarding the compositional dimension, the viewer's attention is drawn by the photo of the candidate as it represents the major part of the poster. The photo is foregrounded; the sky-like background gives prominence to the candidate. The right part of the poster is devoted to the motto, logo, name, and code of the coalition. These details are promoted as they have high importance to the candidate. The full name and the number of the candidate in a relatively large font shed a great importance on these details.



Figure 5. Zeinab Al-Tubi (The State of Law Coalition in Al-Muthanna)

Concerning the representational dimension, the close shot photo of the candidate creates a sense of familiarity and relatedness with the viewer as an indication that the candidate is close to the voters and she is one of her people. The choice of wearing Iraqi abaya reflects the socio-cultural background of the candidate as being decent, religious, and modest. In addition, the color scheme of the poster, a sky-like background, initiates an impression of superiority and highness while the light green color creates a sense of comfort and renewal.

In relation to the interactive dimension of this poster, the candidate gazes directly at the viewers. This eye contact creates a sense of demand, requesting the viewers to vote for her. Moreover, the right side of the poster includes the details of the coalition: its motto, logo, name and code in a red large font that creates a contrast in colors which helps to sharpen the details of the poster. The logo of the coalition, balanced scales of justice, symbolizes the name of the coalition, 'the state of law'. It indicates that the coalition, through its candidates and members, seeks to establish and maintain the principles of justice.

Concerning the textual dimension, the motto of the coalition ' Decision power' which appears up side by side with the face of the candidate reflects the idea that the candidate has the willingness and power in making decisions that promote the supervisory role of the provincial council. This aims to rise trust and confidence

that this is the right choice to make. In addition, the full name of the candidate with the name of her tribe that occupies the lower part of the poster presents a clear and full identification of the candidate to maintain the sense of familiarity.

4.6 The sixth poster

Figure 6 features a poster from Baydaa Mudhar Al-Hachami election propaganda, which shows Al-Hachami running for the Iraqi provincial elections (2023) in Basrah as a member of 'Tasmeem coalition'.



Figure 6. Baydaa Mudhar Al-Hachami (Tasmeem coalition in Basrah)

The poster contains several visual elements, basically a top shot photograph of both the candidate (Baydaa Mudhar Al-Hachami) on the left and the head of the coalition and the governor of Basrah (Asaad Al-Idani) on the right side. Al-Hachami appears in a pink dress with white top and beige hijab while Al-Idani appears in a black suit, white shirt, and purple tie. The top-middle part of the poster features in white color the job title of the candidate (The judicial investigator) and followed by her name, Baydaa Mudhar Al-Hachami. In the middle of the poster, the logo and the name of the coalition (Tasmeem coalition) appear in golden color, the candidate's number on the left and the coalition's code on the right. The middle lower part of the poster features the motto of the coalition 'استمرار النجاح' 'istimrar al-najah' (continuity of success).

Concerning the compositional dimension, the composition of the poster is symmetrical, having harmony in the visual elements as the photos of Al-Hachami and Al-Idani on the either side of the poster. The text in the upper middle part focalizes the job title and the name of the candidate with the number of the candidate and coalition that appear in a relatively large size with the logo to represent important components of the poster.

In relation to the representational dimension, the photos of both the candidate and the head of the coalition represent attractive elements in the poster to pay the

attention of the viewers to the information in the middle. The image of Al-Hachami with the governor of Basrah and the head of the coalition provides a sense of similarity, support and solidarity between them. In addition, the light smile of the candidate helps to initiate familiarity and trust with the voters. Coloring the background with dark blue in most of the poster and a lighter one around the photo of the candidate sheds more light on her image which helps to trigger more attention.

Concerning the interactional dimension, the candidate has a sideways look which symbolizes a look for the future while Al-Idani has a direct eye contact with the viewers indicating a demand rather than an offer. The logo contains a fist that symbolizes firmness and seriousness, a high building that symbolizes progress and development, and a date palm which indicates originality and relatedness to the city nature.

In reference to the textual analysis, the job title of the candidate (judicial investigator) has a considerable value as it indicates that the candidate has an experience in following up cases including those related with corruption, which helps her to be a successful member in the provincial council. In addition, the motto of the coalition, which is translated to (continuity of success), also holds a significant value as it indexes the success and popularity of the governor and the head of the coalition, inviting the voters to support Al-Idani by electing her to help him to continue the success that he has achieved.

5. Results and discussion

In Iraqi provincial election campaigns, multimodal posters emerge as critical political persuasion means. By combining skillfully created visuals and text, these posters captivate voters of all reading levels. The visual design and verbal content are carefully choreographed to catch attention and impact public opinion simultaneously, demonstrating how multimodal discourse may successfully transmit political messages.

In relation to visual and textual persuasive strategies, the examined candidates utilize visual indicators of credibility and authority in conjunction with textual appeals to identity and hope. The posters visually represent the candidates with a highly esteemed character or symbol of authority such as an admired party leader or a clan patriarch. This strategy exploits Iraq's socio-political tradition of patronage and lineage, obtaining credibility by association (Aziz 2024). Most of the candidates choose sophisticated Western-style professional clothes, which notably contrasts with the traditional attire highlighted in previous campaign posters (Jamil and Al-Tameemi 2022). This transition to suits and professional attire conveys modernity and competence, indicating that provincial candidates aim to present themselves as proficient administrators prepared to lead within formal institutions. This visual self-presentation expands the range of identification signals beyond the cultural or religious symbols emphasized in prior studies of Iraqi parliamentary elections, suggesting a developing strategy of conveying professionalism alongside local authenticity.

Another important facet is the interpersonal visual tactics utilized in these posters. Almost all candidates maintain direct eye contact with the viewers, fostering a sense of personal engagement and urgency. A direct frontal position accompanied by a steady glance serves as a visual communicative act, indicating transparency and urgency as it implicitly conveys, "I am talking to you, and it is the time to take an action now." This strategy corresponds with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) concept of visual grammar, specifically regarding interactive meaning, wherein the gaze of the represented participant captivates viewers and invites their support. The images, which are characterized by confident yet approachable facial expressions and body language, seek to establish trust and familiarity while retaining formality. The meticulous arrangement of poster components strengthens persuasion by which the candidate's portrait is generally the most prominent piece, strategically placed and proportioned to instantly attract attention. Additionally, auxiliary components such as party emblems, mottos, and visuals of accomplishments or supporters are organized to sequentially guide the viewer's focus. This arrangement guarantees that audiences comprehend the intended storyline sequentially, reinforcing the campaign's messages. In overall, the visual elements of the posters portray the candidate as credible, approachable and prepared for leadership.

Furthermore, the textual components of the posters enhance a sense of personal connection and assurance. Candidates often employ inclusive and dialogic language, such as addressing the audience with second-person pronouns like "you" or possessive forms like "your." This phrasing diminishes the gap between politician and voter, positioning the audience as an engaged participant in the campaign's agenda. Utilizing the phrases "your province" or "your future," the text frames the campaign as a communal initiative, suggesting that the candidate's objectives are closely intertwined with the people's needs. This strategy aligns with Chilton's (2004) observation from political discourse analysis that personal pronouns serve as instruments of alignment, fostering an in-group dynamic in which voters perceive themselves as represented and included. The language employed is frequently colloquial or in a dialect recognizable to local audiences, a deliberate decision to improve relatability and openness. This echoes findings of Middle Eastern political discourse, indicating that the use of colloquial language helps minimize hierarchical barriers between politicians and the general public.

In addition to fostering identification, the textual contents convey a forward-looking, change-oriented message that speaks to voters' ambitions. Slogans and mottos on posters emphasize themes of progress, reform, and hope, such as promises to "we race time to proceed" or commitments to "change" and "development." These words were carefully chosen to be relevant in Iraq, where citizens frequently desire for visible progress following years of political instability. The use of active verbs, as well as a combination of past achievements and present and future tense constructs, is particularly noteworthy. Candidates create a believable narrative of change by highlighting past accomplishments ("we have built…', "we delivered…") and promising future action ("we will continue…", "towards a better…"). This demonstrates a proven track record while

simultaneously demonstrating an inspirational vision. This dual temporal appeal, which anchors promises in past performance, goes beyond the generic optimistic rhetoric seen in previous studies of campaign language. For instance, Majeed and Faiq (2023) and Sharhan et al. (2023) discovered that in Iraqi election campaigns, candidates frequently express upbeat, hopeful attitudes. Our data confirm this pattern of optimism while showing an additional strategy by which many provincial politicians back up their hopeful slogans with references to familiar identities or recent accomplishments, giving substance to their pledges of change. In doing so, the textual discourse not only corresponds with voters' desire for progress, but it also addresses a culturally embedded expectation that leaders should demonstrate their worth via actions rather than just words.

Crucially, the visual and textual modalities work together to form a cohesive persuasive ensemble. Rather than acting independently, the images and language in these posters reinforce one another. Textual cues of affiliation and shared mission enhance the visual authority given by a candidate standing near a renowned figure (e.g., slogans emphasizing unity, "we" and "together"). Similarly, the emotional relevance of a slogan promising transformation is enhanced by the poster's imagery, which includes confident images and dynamic layouts that convey energy and credibility. This multimodal interaction supports the fundamental idea of social semiotic theory that meaning in political communication is formed not by text or image alone, but by their interaction in a cultural context. As stated by Systemic Functional Linguistics and related frameworks, the posters perform numerous metafunctions at the same time. Visually, they establish an interpersonal connection (via gaze and demeanor) and convey ideational content about the candidate's identity and alliances, textually, they achieve the same thing by engaging readers interpersonally through inclusive language and conveying ideological propositions about change and progress. The result is a synchronized message in which design and diction work together to persuade. This study emphasizes the importance of a multimodal analytical approach (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021) in political discourse studies, since it reveals how semiotic resources across modes are used to influence views and conform with voters' values in a given cultural setting.

The patterns discovered in this study demonstrate both continuity and originality when contextualized within the framework of prior research on Middle Eastern political discourse. The current results support what has been shown in previous studies of Iraqi election posters on the other hand. For instance, Jamil and Al-Tameemi (2022) reported on how candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections used traditional cultural symbols, including ethnic clothing or revered religious figures, to connect with voters. The current study further discovers that cultural and social cues are still quite important. For example, some candidates wear Western suits while others use traditional or familial images. This shows that cultural resonance is still a powerful strategy to persuade people. The hopeful and positive messages in campaign slogans are similar to what Sharhan et al. (2023) found about Iraqi parliamentary posters and what Majeed and Faiq (2023) found in the Kurdish regional context. This points to a tendency in the region where political messaging tends towards uplifting narratives as a means of persuasion. This is

probably because positive messages are more appealing to voters who are weary of conflict and stagnation.

On another note, the findings of the current study distinguish themselves from existing literature by introducing novel perspectives, particularly through the emphasis on the 2023 provincial elections, a situation or context which had little in-depth investigation previously. In contrast to national-level campaigns, where focusing on broad ideological themes and cultural identification symbols could be the main focus, the provincial posters reveal a wider range of self-representation. The apparent shift towards professional iconography (Western-style suits, formal postures) is one such divergence, suggesting to an adaptive strategy where local candidates aim to match with global standards of political professionalism and legitimacy. This could show that Iraqi voters are starting to anticipate more technocratic competence at the provincial level, beyond the usual appeals that have been studied before. Further, by emphasizing on candidates' personal accomplishments and specific service records, the posters indicate that they are trying to base their arguments on real proof of performance. This strategy goes beyond the primarily hopeful messages that Sharhan et al. (2023) presented concerning the 2018 campaigns. It reveals that in the 2023 provincial setting, persuasion is partly based on real evidence of past governance successes. This new information adds to the body of literature by demonstrating that political persuasion in Iraq is not static as it changes based on the political situation and the audience's expectations, combining old strategies (like using respected figures and collective identity) with new ones (like stressing professionalism and accountability).

This study makes theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of political persuasion and multimodal discourse. Theoretically, it emphasizes the importance of analyzing political communication using a multimodal framework that combines Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Chilton's (2004) political discourse theory. This synthesis shows how textual and visual elements interact to reveal the interpersonal (trust-building, identification) and ideational (policy and values) dimensions of persuasion. By focusing on how imagery, layout, and design interact with language, the study applies multimodal discourse theory to a Middle Eastern context, demonstrating how cultural factors such as familial symbolism or attire shape persuasive meaning. It emphasizes that any comprehensive theory of political rhetoric must include visual communication, especially in societies where posters, billboards, and online visuals are central to public engagement.

Empirically, the study closes a gap in Middle Eastern political studies by examining Iraq's 2023 provincial elections, an understudied but revealing setting for localized persuasion. The analysis of six widely shared posters reveals how provincial candidates balance local identity with modern governance by appealing to community values through family icons, cultural motifs, and linguistic strategies. The findings also show a growing correlation between traditional campaign visuals and social media virality, demonstrating how digital dissemination increases persuasive reach.

Nevertheless, the study's limitations provide suggestions for future research. The small purposive sample limits generalizability; larger comparative analyses across regions or election cycles could provide more detailed insights. Furthermore, the lack of audience reception data limits our understanding of actual voter interpretation. Future research should use audience-based methods and broaden the scope of analysis to include other modalities such as television and social media. Incorporating perspectives from cognitive psychology or sociolinguistics could improve our understanding of multimodal persuasion in Iraqi politics.

6. Conclusion

The 2023 Iraqi provincial election posters demonstrate how powerful multimodal political persuasion can be in a setting that is both local and globally conscious. Candidates create narratives of trustworthiness, unity, and optimism that connect with the experiences and hopes of their people by using a mix of textual and visual messages. The thorough analysis and critical discussion in this paper have not only shown what strategies are used, but also why and how they work in Iraq's political and cultural setting. The researchers have placed the study in the ongoing academic conversation about political discourse in the Middle East by connecting the findings to larger theories and past research. In the end, the research provides a more complex view of multimodal persuasion. It takes into account traditional influences while also pointing out emerging ones. It offers a foundation for more research into the dynamic art of political communication in Iraq and other regions.

Salam Abbas Mahmood (Assistant Professor) – Corresponding Author
College of Education for Humanities
Al-Muthanna University, Iraq
ORCID: 0000-0003-1943-9278
Email: salamabas@mu.edu.iq
Mobile Number: +9647808299376

Mazura Jamali
School of Languages, Civilization and Philosophy
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
ORCID: 0000-0003-4837-4274
Email: jmazura@uum.edu.my

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