

A Race of Weird Campaign Slogans

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Предвыборная гонка: electoral race

This presidential race sure is exciting. The suspense is killing me. In fact, I got so caught up with the race that I forgot to rate the campaign slogans and posters.

Ratings methodology: Get into car to do errands around town. Get stuck in traffic jams. Stare out the window at campaign billboards.

Ratings criteria: Do the ads convey the essence of the candidate and his platform? Can you recall them five minutes after you've seen them? Do they make you want to vote for the guy?

Summary conclusion: A weirder batch of campaign ads is hard to imagine.

The award for the most grammatically challenged slogans goes to Vladimir Zhirinovsky. One black billboard reads: Жириновский или будет хуже (Zhirinovsky or it will be worse). Another white billboard reads: Жириновский и будет лучше (Zhirinovsky and it will be

better). No comma, no verb, no grammar as we know it. On the other hand, you get the message — even if it is a bit short on detail.

The award for the strongest visuals goes to Gennady Zyuganov. In one retro-style poster, the candidate stands in shirtsleeves in front of a montage of a Kremlin tower and the Monument to Minin and Pozharsky. Blue skies, white clouds and a red banner evoke both the Russian tricolor and the symbol of communism. One sheet of a Soviet-era calendar has the Communist Party emblem, and another shows March 4 as a red-letter day. The simple slogan, Выбираем Зюганова (We're voting for Zyuganov), is next to a checked election ballot box. The whole package is out of a Soviet propaganda textbook — perfectly on target for his core electorate but totally out of touch with everyone else.

Mikhail Prokhorov's campaign slogans win the award for understated style — understated to the point of obscurity. One is: Требуйте большего! (Demand more!) More what? From whom? And then there's: Прохоров — наш президент (Prokhorov — our president). OK, but is he everyone's president?

Another Prokhorov slogan, Новый президент — новая Россия (A new president — a new Russia), conveys, albeit obliquely, the need for change. And Управлять, а не царствовать (Lead, don't reign) implies, I guess, a different approach to governance and muted criticism of the current regime. Too bad the whole campaign is like a dissident Soviet-era play: You have to read between the lines to get the message.

The award for most illusory ads goes to Sergei Mironov. If they exist in Moscow, I didn't see them. Nor do they appear to be on his website, which shows a curious lack of brand consciousness. As far as I can tell, one slogan is: Миронов — честный выбор! (Mironov — an honest choice!). Another seems to be: Твой голос изменит страну! (Your vote will change the country!). Is he kidding? Ten points off for a slogan that no one in his right mind believes.

Vladimir Putin's ads win the bland award. They're like a campaign for Mr. Nice of the Year. One billboard reads, Владимир Путин 2012 (Vladimir Putin 2012), with the tiny tagline: Счастье народу (Happiness for the people). Another is: Слышать людей, работать для людей (Hear the people, work for the people). Only the slogan, Великой стране — сильный лидер (A strong leader for a great country), conveys something of his leadership style and worldview. But what's with the poster, За Путина и всё (For Putin and that's it)?

That's it?

Well, I guess that's it. End of conversation.

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