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POLITICAL NEUTRALITY OR EDITORIAL SLANT? COMPARING COVERAGE AND  
CONTENT OF ESTONIA'S LARGEST NATIONWIDE DAILY NEWSPAPERS.

MA thesis

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## Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis studied whether there exists a form of media bias in the two of the largest news outlets Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht in Estonia. The study coded a combination of 258 editorials that were taken from the timeframe between 26<sup>th</sup> of October of 2020 to 26<sup>th</sup> of April of 2021. The found data was used to compare the outlets differences in issue bias and framing bias. Issue bias consists of the coverage of policy issues, policy actors, and an ideological leniency. Framing bias consists of an outlet providing either positive or negative opinions and statements on political actors that would show either preferences towards political actors or a strong deviation from media neutrality. The analyses showed differences in policy issue coverage but not in political actor coverage. Furthermore, an ideological leniency was not detected for either outlet. Both outlets showed a deviation from media neutrality with average negative scores towards both political actors and respective coalitions in the timeframe. Moreover, Eesti Päevaleht was found to be much more negative and likely to criticise political actors whilst the attitudes of Postimees were comparatively less often and milder.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is a study that addresses the questions concerning whether media bias exists in the largest newspaper outlets in Estonia. The importance of this topic manifests itself in the wider topics of democracy, media freedom, political communication and how a slanted or biased media can influence the consumers' political behaviour (Min et al., 2020: p.160; Galston, 2001: pp.223-224; Hayward & Rudd, 2017: p.18). Furthermore, prior research on the specifics of this field has not yet been covered in academical works on the case of Estonia which provides an exceptional opportunity to gather new information on the country's respective news outlets and study the existence of the chosen variables.

This thesis gives an understanding on the media landscape of Estonia, what types of editorial bias exist, what sort of prior academic work has been done on this topic, how media has been studied in Estonia, and eventually the methods of data gathering and analysis that will be used to prove whether they exist in the chosen news media outlets of Estonia. The research question is constructed as "Does a form of media bias exist in Estonia's most consumed news media outlets?". Although there is not a lot of information which to base an expectation on, it is likely that at least some forms of bias exist in both outlets as in a highly competitive setting of the modern online news provision there needs to be a reason as to why to prefer an outlet over the other (Opermann, 2014: p.109). Examples of this could be providing news based on the topics and opinions that the outlet knows their readers prefer and therefore outlets would fit their news agenda for a select audience or because of the high amount of freedom the outlets possess they are likelier to criticise and hold political actors accountable (Kõuts-Klemm, 2017: 365; Lauk, 2008: p.63).

Gaps of knowledge still exist in this field and concerning this concept in form of the number of previous studies done on this specific research question and it is lacking a definitive answer on how news media influence should be studied. This is due to the topic being a combination of media and communication studies and political science which requires an understanding of both the fields to be correctly executed (Asp, 2007: p.32; Strömberg, 2015: p.175). Based on these circumstances, this thesis will focus on uncovering the existence of editorial bias, which has had more consistent and reproduceable prior research rather than studying the effects of news media on consumers which provides prior work which greatly differs between cases, approaches and the data used. Furthermore, prior research on political communication and the proven effects of news consumption is considerably wide, which provides a sufficient

theoretical basis to flesh out necessary concepts construct variables, and explain why there is a need to study this field. An example of the latter is that a biased news media can negatively affect readers as instead of neutral information they would be consuming information that is expressing certain opinions and attitudes towards a policy issue or actor (Strömberg, 2015: pp.175-176).

The thesis consists firstly of the theoretical background which explains the evolution of the media, the influence that media can have, and how media outlets can turn away from a neutral provision of information and news. This is followed by the conceptualizing of bias which is structured around previous studies as they help form an understanding of the range of the concept and can give useful insight on how the concept should be measured. Subsequently comes the subchapter concerning methods and research design which explains the general approach that is needed to be taken in order to get most information for the analyses. Ensuingly, approaches to analyses are discussed that cover the different forms of media bias chosen for this particular study.

The thesis is built on both a qualitative and quantitative content analyses on the editorials of both of the Estonia's largest news outlets. The respective articles were taken from a 6-month time period that contained a shift in governmental power which adds the layer of comparison to whether provision of news is dependent on the parties in the coalition. Articles were turned into rows where each row consisted of a statement and then given a code corresponding to a specific policy issue based on the Manifesto Project Codebook and its ruleset (Burst et. al., 2021). Using the approach of coding the editorials allowed for the dividing of all of the information contained in the articles into corresponding categories which consequently provided the ability to compare topic coverage and made it easier to take a closer look at editorials which contained information about politics, parties and political actors. The thesis concludes by giving an overview of both of the news media outlets and their levels of bias, comparing them to one another, and evaluating how far from neutral can their provision of news be considered. All details, explanations and reasonings for these concepts and parts of the thesis are covered in their respective subchapters.

I will also note that throughout the following thesis, bias will be referred to as media partisanship, media bias, editorial bias, and as the media being slanted, which in this topic's context will be used as interchangeable synonyms to express the phenomenon of an outlet having or showing any political preference.

# **1. Theoretical background**

## **1.1 Role of the media**

Democratic rule is based on two fundamental values which are the power of the people and the free exchange of ideas (Asp, 2007: p.32). Without one or either of these being realised, there is no possibility of speaking of a true democratic rule. Media plays a major role in the provision of information and therefore also can be a key actor that helps achieve one of these democratic fundamental values. Media has the ability to contribute to the formation of opinions, but can also be used to facilitate the will of the people and make heard the voice of the people (Asp, 2007: 32). Citizens, especially of a democratic state, are seen as individual decision-makers that can contribute to improving the quality of life by voicing and supporting interests, using their vote to choose their representatives, and taking action in civil life. Based on this it should be the purpose of the media to provide enough information to these citizens so their decisions can be rational and justified through political knowledge (Asp, 2007: p.33).

The role of the media has changed between the last eras and decades. It has been but a way of communication, a medium for conversation, a transmitter of political ideology, a watchdog of the government, an educator of the people, and a speaker for the people who struggle and whose problems need to be heard (Carey, 1997: p.3). The understanding and practice of a watchdog media is more typical the modern understanding of media, where it has become more independent on the state and has begone to more commonly represent the interests of the people with the slogan “The public’s right to know” describing specifically modern journalism (Carey, 1997: pp.4-6). Throughout the twentieth century the forms of media began to break away from the state by cutting their loyalties to either institutions, parties, politicians or even the government as a whole (Carey, 1997: p.13). Until there was only the loyalty to an abstract truth and public which is later referred to as the emergence of the concept of objectivity in journalism (Carey 1997: p.13).

Media itself is but a wide definition given to sources that communicate to a large public and that provide information which are most commonly associated with the press, television, radio, and cinema (Pavel, 2010: p.106). Modern mass media is largely based on four functions where understanding these functions allows to understand the scope of media. Firstly, the function of surveillance that describes what is happening to who, when and where which is commonly known as descriptive journalism (Pavel, 2010: p.109). Secondly, the function of providing alternative views to consumers which is illustrated by both the large choice of media outlets

and also contrast between the views of the state and those of the people (Pavel, 2010: p.110). Thirdly, the function of transmitting social values onto the public by the media's ability to educate through voicing the accepted social norms, rules and values which are to be protected and held on to (Pavel, 2010: p.111). Lastly, the function of providing entertainment to consumers whether it be through message that make the readers feel pleasant or peak their interests (Pavel, 2010: p.111).

## **1.2. Dangers of media**

With such a great power through education of the media, there also exist fears and dangers of providing information that leaves topics and issues unfavoured or discounted. An exceptional example of one of these dangers is however not the fault of the media's functions, but rather connected to patterns of news consumption itself. Although having discussed what values media is able to provide through their functions, the value remains low if the relative consumption remains low. Studies have shown that even if the media choice becomes higher with a growing count of outlets, variation between views, and a general increase in accessibility, it is more likely to have an effect on those who are already invested and interested in consuming news with those who are informed become more informed and those who are uninformed will still remain uninformed (Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2019: p.1). This is even more true in the case of online news becoming more popular where those who have made it a part of their routine can find new information relatively instantly due to the high accessibility in the digital age (Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2019: p.1).

A debated topic concerning the media is whether and to what degree it should be neutral. Should the media scrutinize those who govern, call out acts of misconduct, and hold in the spotlight those whose conduct has been exceptional and stainless? A position taken pro this approach is based on the claim that for democracy to work properly, citizens need accurate information about politics, whether it be positive or negative the importance lies on it being true (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p.4). The only way for a citizen's decisions to be well-informed, is for the citizen to acquire knowledge over the policy issues and the actors concerning them. The more political information that is openly available and accessible, the likelier it is that citizens will be exposed to it and also learn from it (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p.5). However, depending on the overall quality of this accessible information, having a higher choice of which

information to consume can also cause a diminishing effect on political knowledge as the importance of the media or outlet preference starts to matter more (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p.7).

With the changes in media functions and them becoming more independent, media coverage has become much more biased, especially in the form of online news media (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p. 14). As online news is for most people the largest source where they get their political information from, it largely comes down to whether the consumer chooses the outlet based on their political beliefs (specifically looks for information that they can identify with) or their political interest (looks for highest quality and/or diversity of information) (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p. 16). Furthermore, due to the overwhelming availability of online sources for news, consumers have begun to dismiss facts that they feel challenge their political beliefs and instead look for a source that they feel themselves better aligned with (Van Aelst et. al., 2017: p.16). Lastly, prior works such as that of Vreese and Semetko shows that the coverage and attitudes given by news outlets can have effects on the electorate, especially in cases where a country's elections and referendums are close, by helping facilitate existing opinions or by providing (depending on the topic) either positive or negative information that forms and influences the voter's attitude (2004: pp.712-713).

News media has for long existed as a source of information for citizens to help form their opinions and to stay informed, however, depending on its realization, it can also have varying negative effects on their world views and political behaviour. These instances of negative effects may be in form of propaganda that puts readers in a vacuum, manipulation that intentionally influences and shapes voters' world views, or in form of miseducating citizens by providing inaccurate information (Strömberg, 2015: p.175). Such forms of negative effects have become ever more common with examples of the circulating of fake news during the US presidential elections in 2016 and outlets using misleading titles to spark interest and obtain higher readership (Budak, 2016; Ecker et. al., 2014). News media can also have the power to influence political topics through emphasizing issues to bring them to the attention of voters and affect how certain issues are understood by the consumers (Strömberg, 2015: p.176). A widely proposed standpoint is that the media should provide information which allows citizens to make decisions independently and construct their own opinions rather than providing the opinions themselves to citizens (Asp, 2007: p.36). In a time of changes in news provision and high accessibility to consumers, more research has been focusing on the existence of and effects of new problems accompanying the innovations in media such as the 2021 article of Watts, Rothschild, and Mobius who focus on exposing and measuring misinformation and its

repercussions on democracy or the 2021 work of Garz and Martin who try to determine how strong of an affect issue coverage and being exposed to either negative or positive information on political actors has on the outcomes of elections.

In general terms a group of this kind of negatives influence in news media is called either the media being slanted or partisan where the news outlet has its reasons and actions by which it prefers a political party or actors over others. This has become more common with technological advancements which has brought with it the rise in number of available news sources and providing consumers with a wider variety of alternatives where to gather information from (Morris, 2007: 710). Although choice is not inherently bad, readers are more likely to choose an outlet that shares similar ideological positions with them and consume information that sates their beliefs which consequently can bring with it a polarization of opinions (Prat & Strömberg, 2013: p.37).

The influence of information from the media and how the media is used can become a significant problem due to news media being one of the primary sources, where citizens acquire their political information from. Information from the news media forms the basis for citizens' civic and political knowledge that determines how well they understand individual and group interests, forms a universal understanding of how political processes work, helps mould views on specific political issues, and ultimately determines the quality of political participation (Galston, 2001: pp.223-224). This is further emphasized by news consumption being seen as a prerequisite to be knowledgeable in civil and political matters in order to participate in politics and/or elections (Min et al., 2020: p.160).

If a coverage of a news outlet or a country's news media can be called biased, it means that those consuming that information are without alternative opinions or ideological viewpoints (Hayward & Rudd, 2017: p.18). Consequently, those readers will have to either form opposing thoughts on a policy issue on their own or more likely will adopt the attitude proposed by the source that they consume information from (Hayward & Rudd, 2017: p.18). This can only be made worse when the focus of the news' content is superficial by emphasising people, parties, personalities, etc. over the policy issues and the quality of politics (Hayward & Rudd, 2017: p.18). On these forenamed grounds, a slanted media can therefore have major consequences on a country's political processes such as degrading the quality of democratic processes and party competition.

The focus of this study being solely on print media or news media and not other forms of media is further derived from the alternatives providing comparatively low amounts of relevant and/or political information (McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996: p.479). Furthermore, news articles and news outlets provide a provide news, opinions and proposals based on a stable and uniform set of views (McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996: p.496). The importance lies in stability which provides the opportunity to look at attitudes and opinions given by one outlet across time and comparing them to those of another outlet. Moreover, stability enables the examining of determining what exactly those underlying sets of views are even when a news media outlet hasn't openly stated them.

There has been various prior research done on the effects of media bias, on voter behaviour, and influencing political opinions, which provide ample information for producing similar works (Druckman, & Parkin, 2005; Eberl et al., 2017; Gerber et al., 2009). However, this study will entirely focus on identifying the existence of media bias and not the affects themselves due to a lack of time and resources this kind of research would usually require with usually needing to gather and analyse additional survey data or forming focus groups to view effects of new consumption (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Gerber et al., 2009). Therefore, the alternative that is prevalent in numerous works is to focus entirely on a type of or a general existence of slant in a form of media (Eberl et al., 2017; Langsaether et al., 2019; Prat & Strömberg, 2013).

### **1.3. Media landscape of Estonia**

Although there is prior research that can be either called similar or connected to the topic that has been done in Estonia, I have chosen to conduct such a study in this country because there is research missing specifically when it comes to topics of media choice and media bias, which as explained, can influence a country's political and democratic life. Prior works studying news media in Estonia and works relevant to this study are low in quantity, but fitting examples still exist such as that of Karen Kuldnook whose object of analysis was comparing the views and statements provided in two of the largest news outlets through critical text analysis of articles (2012: pp.40-41). An additional example is another critical text analysis from Kathy Sarapuu's 2008 thesis who focused on dissecting editorials of Estonia's news outlets to show how choice of wording and vocabulary can change or depict certain attitudes. Based on this, I claim that there is still a large variety of topics and general gaps related to media bias and coverage in Estonia that would require research which this thesis seeks to fill.

Estonia's media landscape can be described as varied and high of choice due to the availability of different media platforms and competition between them (Opermann, 2014: p.109). Although Estonia is one of the smallest countries in Europe, it provides a proportionally high number of mediums and choices between them from which to choose to get information from (Kõuts-Klemm, 2017: 365). The largest outlets can be considered to have high competition between one another as news from the domains of Postimees and Delfi is consumed by two-thirds of the population (Kõuts-Klemm, 2017: p.365). A relevant part of Estonia's media in general is the availability and the journalistic articles on the web often being free of charge with the exceptions being rather the print media (Opermann, 2014: p.121). This is further illustrated by the fact that obtaining information from online and reading news online is becoming increasingly popular while paper press is decreasing in readers (Opermann, 2014: p.118).

An important characteristic is also the high level of news consumption within Estonians with about three quarters of the population doing it on a regular basis (Loit, 2007: p.351). The news media outlets themselves are independent from the state and also claim to be completely independent from all parties (Loit, 2007: p.352). The level of freedom of press is considered to be high with also a proportionally high level of trust towards news media outlets (Kõuts-Klemm, 2017: p.365). Moreover, the Estonian media landscape strives for good journalism by practicing under a set standard of code of ethics (Lauk, 2008: p.61). However, with the freedom that the press has also comes with it the ability to criticise both public and political actors and their respective policy issues (Lauk, 2008: p.63). This provides a basis on which to claim that exploring the neutrality of news provision in Estonia is necessary and may prove to show differences in attitudes between the competing large news outlets.

Based on the information available to me and the guidance of prior works, the research question for a study on media bias will be formulated as such: "Does a form of media bias exist in Estonia's most consumed news media outlets?". Due to the focus not being on studying the effects of media slant itself, I see no need to establish a hypothesis for this theses as there is no relevant information on which to base a prediction whether the existence of slant is prevalent in Estonia's mass media.

## **2. Conceptualization of bias**

To conceptualize media bias, I will be going over earlier works that have been connected to the concept or that have tried to measure it themselves. Over a wide range of countries and authors, media bias or slant has been categorized, divided, defined and measured rather differently, making it a tricky topic to tackle as including only one part of the understanding or one authors definition can cause problems such as inadequately quantifying and measuring concept which consequently leads to observing only a single part of the concept.

The first example to be shown is the work of Balázs Sipos who refers to news media bias as the media's loyalty to the government (2013: p.94). This is done in the context of Hungary, where journalism in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defined by a split in approaches when it came to the provision of news (Sipos, 2013: p.94). Although there existed regulations and ethical codes that supported and endorsed the impartiality and objectivity of the news media, the Hungarian media produced numerous outlets and journalists who could be considered 'biased' as they defended the actions of political actors (Sipos, 2013: p.100). This was explained to be the occurrence due to Hungary having a relatively small political media which could keep itself sustainable by only having monetary funding provided by the political parties that they supported (Sipos, 2013: p.100). As the same can be said for Estonia, it provides reasoning to check the presence of media bias in that country as well.

However, the work of Balázs Sipos (2013) only talked of media bias as a general form of political loyalty, whereas the ideas and definitions from the following authors both take the concept deeper and wider. For example, the article from Wring and Deacon emphasises that is important to look at the partisan support (loyalty to a political party) from the media not as it being dichotomous (either existing or not), but instead to look at the degree of bias and the strength of commitment to either the party or to an ideological viewpoint (2010: p.452). By this definition media bias shouldn't be measured as either an outlet being neutral or not, but rather try and determine the level of leniency or strength of attitudes. Moreover, Hayward and Rudd distinguish next to partisan bias (support and allegiance to a party) there being also structural bias in news provision (2017: p.5). This form of bias is strictly embodied by how much political actors are covered in the news in relation to one another or in relation to that of another outlet (Hayward & Rudd, 2017: p.5). The importance of this is illustrated by the fact that it is not only the attitudes and opinions that matter when it comes to news coverage but also the amount consumers see or hear about either a political issue, actor or party. The

relevancy of a topic influences helps readers make a connection between for example a politician and an event. Whether it be positive or negative, the more a citizen knows about a political actor, the more they can use to formulate an opinion about them.

Moving on, Robert M. Entman call media bias by the name of framing bias which he believes can be further divided into distortion bias, content bias, and decision-making bias (2007: p. 163). As in the respective order just named in, they accordingly describe media that on purpose provides misinformation, provides news coverage that is not equivalent in amount compared to others, or a media that either more favourably or less positively covers certain actors due to their own purposes (Entman, 2007: p.163). Therefore, a new side to the concept is that the provision of news can be for whatever reason deliberately distorted which is once again connected to as already discussed the main problem and fear behind accompanying a biased media, which is that citizens ability to make knowledgeable and unaffected opinions and decisions concerning politics, policy issues, and politicians. Entman himself also emphasises this by adding the following “When news clearly slants, those officials favoured by the slant become more powerful, freer to do what they want without the anticipation that voters might punish them and those who lose the framing contest become weaker, less free to do or say what they want” (2007: p.170).

However, in order to form a definition that is less ambiguous and more uniform by which to find and analyse media attitudes by, I will heavily rely on the explanations and framework provided by the respective works and articles of Eberl, Boomgaarden and Wagner (2015), Prat and Strömberg (2013) and Gans and Leigh (2012). Specifically, the articles of these authors were chosen as they tackle a similar research question and resemble in terms of methods, as the focus is on the content of news outlets and uncovering the existence of bias, rather than trying to reprove their effects. Furthermore, they share a similar understanding of what can be considered slant or bias and cover almost all forms of it. This helps construct a reliable concept that shows what can and should be in the focus of this study.

To understand what can be considered media bias and determine the severity of it, the Eberl, Boomgaarden and Wagner firstly define an unbiased article or piece of news media as one that does not favour any political side (2015: 1127). By their definition, bias itself can be divided into three sub-types – **visibility bias**, which is determined by comparing where one actor’s coverage was significantly higher or lower than those to other actors’, **tonality bias**, which is determined by how positively or negatively actors were framed compared to others, and

**agenda bias**, which is determined by whether an outlet decided to or not to cover stories on certain actors their policy positions or some policy issues in general (Eberl et al, 2015: 1126-1128).

Prat and Strömberg share a relatively similar classification of bias as they categorize them as issue bias, facts bias, framing bias, and ideological stand bias (2013: 33). **Issue bias** referring to when a news outlet is selective of the issues that it covers, **facts bias** being when an outlet chooses to include or exclude specific information from the news, **framing bias** being connected to how or with what tone the media presents the information, and lastly **ideological stand bias** existing in occasions where news outlets select or proclaim their ideological positions and then provide news only according to those set of views and preferences (Prat & Strömberg, 2013: 33-37).

Although the labels are different, most of them can be paired together. Visibility and issue bias both focus on the amount a political actor or its topics are covered in the news. Framing and tonality bias deal with the presentation of information and how political actors are depicted. Agenda and facts bias concentrate on what specifically has been included or excluded in the news articles. For the sake of clarity, I will opt to use the labels provided by Prat and Strömberg as they more accurately and clearly depict what every respective sub-category of bias is connected to.

Although the overlap of similar categorization in different works would seem to prove the validity of these definitions and therefore sticking to measuring all of the proposed forms of media bias, Gans and Leigh claim that fact bias is unlikely in large outlets that have competition as it has a high risk of attaining readers by providing misleading or false information which lowers the outlets credibility and trustworthiness (2012: p.130). The content of such outlets is mostly targeted towards readers who are looking for specific information that they would want to agree with and the loss of credibility for a large news outlet would make most (interested and knowledgeable) readers opt for the competing sources. Furthermore, the authors claim that this kind of bias can only exist in a setting that is either not demanding of truth or purely profit-driven (Gans & Leigh, 2012: p.130). Lastly, Prat and Strömberg themselves claim that distorting news and making it less informative is not likely to be connected to mainstream national news media which makes this bias either a rarity or connected to specific exceptions and examples (2013: 33). Due to these statements, I will opt to exclude fact bias as a variable for this study as it will not be relative to the case.

Lastly, I have also decided to exclude ideological stands bias as the existence of this would be a clear sign that a mass media outlet has taken a certain political position and therefore would be inherently providing news from a 'biased' or ideologically orientated standpoint. Although this form of bias is easiest to prove and distinguish, making it a party of this study would however add nothing of value to from a research perspective if I were to prove something that the outlet itself has already openly stated. Therefore, in the coming analysis of news outlets I will be focusing on only issue bias and framing bias. The following sub-chapter will cover how these forms of slant will be identified and measured.

### **3. Research design and methods**

#### **3.1 General approach and overview of prior works**

I have opted for a case study approach which composes of gathering of data, data analysis and comparison of outlets to evaluate the types and level of bias present. This approach allows for in-depth analysis and provides means for both detecting and evaluating the intensity of bias. In this chapter I have given an overview of the specific methods that have been chosen and explain why they are fitting for the measuring of bias.

The data to be used for the underlying analyses will be in the form of news outlet's editorials. The importance of editorials in provision of news is expressed through their ability to hold a dialogue with political actors and shine light on important matters as they are the voice of every news outlet, which are not based on a singular author or writer's thoughts and ideas but rather a cross-cutting ideological views that are shared by the entire organization or at the bare minimum the newspaper's editorial board (Mont'Alverne & Marques, 2022: pp.124-125). Furthermore, they guide their readers by informing them of events and policy issues that the outlet deems to be important, whilst also creating and reflecting a brand by the same logic of letting their readers see what the outlet cares most about (Mont'Alverne & Marques, 2022: p.125). Both from a research perspective but a consumer's perspective editorials provide the easiest and clearest way to see what kind of attitudes and what kind of content could be expected. Editorials are also through which an outlet can (if they choose to) fulfil their role as a watchdog of the state by being vocal about topics that the public should know and pay more attention to (Ragragio, 2020: p.2). Lastly, a considerably large portion of prior work shows that media outlets both draw in authors and writers who share similar views as the organization and/or also make their authors write from a relatively similar standpoint in order to reflect the beforehand mentioned brand of the organization (Mont'Alverne & Marques, 2022: pp.142-143). The implication for this fact is that focusing purely on editorials is enough to evaluate the outlet's issue coverage and attitude range as a whole.

Prior works that have analysed editorials or news articles tend to deviate quite a bit in terms of their approaches. Bringing three examples from previous studies, the first of these opted to study the content of editorials through the framing of central ideas and assessing the tonality (Ragragio, 2020: p.5). The approach of this is to strip the articles of all unnecessary information and leaving only that which constitutes facts, opinions and forwarding of any kind of information. Therefore, framing of central ideas helps highlight what policy issues are covered

and looking at the accumulated information of one outlet in a certain timeframe gives an overview of patterns reflecting such as political preferences (Ragragio, 2020: p.5). In the case of the study conducted by Jefferson Lyndon D Ragragio, the editorials were distributed by their central topic, had their actors who were described and connected to the issue identified, and lastly were evaluated based on the severity and range of the tone that was used when referring to issues and actor through marking of words and phrases that deviated from neutral (2020: p.5).

The second example comes from the work of David McKnight's 2010 article who used the analysis of editorials to determine the portrayal of human-caused climate change. The chosen method was to outline editorials with the corresponding topic, identify all mentions and opinions given on it, and use them to make generalizing thoughts on a single outlet to use later in a comparison of other major news outlets (McKnight, 2010: p.703). For maximised validity, the choice of outlets comprised of ones that were under a single larger organization, but were different in either the location, audience, or even country (McKnight, 2010: p. 703). This approach was successful in the sense that it was indeed able to show similar sets of views on a particular issue within a single outlet and that the comparison showed that different branches of the larger organization held differing attitudes even though they conducted based on the same corporate policy (McKnight 2010: pp.703-704).

The last example is the study composed by Dominic Wring and David Deacon who in their 2010 article attempted to assess press partisanship during times of election. Once again, they used editorials as a way to look at the preferences of an outlet. Topics of editorials were determined and were analysed to gather data on how every competing party was portrayed (Wring & Deacon, 2010: 440). The method consisted of scoring editorials based on whether it was possible to determine an allegiance to a political party and how evident it was (Wring & Deacon, 2010: 440). Although their method could be called somewhat subjective, it validated that it is possible to show differences in how information of parties is differently presented.

Although these prior articles show that there are ways of determining the existence of all different forms of bias, what all of these aforementioned methods or approaches lack, is the ability to in a consistent and objective way to organize and categorise the content of the editorials when wanting to look at more than a single form of slant. Due to this I have opted to choose for the general approach for this particular study a combination of a quantitative and qualitative content analysis, as it is best suited for examining political communication and has

been prevalent in numerous prior research that deals with media framing, media coverage, and media bias (Cissel, 2012; Dotson et al., 2012; Eberl et al., 2017, Prat & Strömberg, 2013). Quantitative content analysis includes producing categories, identifying a sample of texts, turning the texts into statements and applying corresponding codes, which in this study's context will be used to turn the textual data of sentences and statements of editorials into numeric data such as count of statements attributable to politics to see and measure prevalence of bias. The choice for this approach comes from the clear need to obtain as much valuable information as possible from each editorial. Furthermore, coding itself provides both an overview of the count and distribution of topics and the possibility to look at information in the content only connected to a specific topic for example 'Politics'.

The basis of comparison between outlets will be using the newfound numerical data to state the variation from a neutral/unbiased outlet that would hold a value of "0". A significant distinction from this value can therefore be considered a presence of a form of bias. As defined beforehand, an unbiased outlet would not significantly cover more or less of a certain topic, a political actor, or would not provide information of either of the previous in a negative or positive tone. Furthermore, an unbiased outlet will not take or proclaim ideological positions and provide information from a neutral standpoint. However, not any variation from "0" can be considered bias, as not every actor and instance will always be topical, therefore there must also exist a level of error when assessing the chosen news outlets. A 'soft' range of error or small deviation from '0' could best be linked to what was in the theoretical background and previous studies referred to as a news outlet's role of watchdog. The reasoning for this assumption would be that a general neutrality across the timeframe with at times being critical towards those in positions of power is used to hold the government or politicians accountable rather than using criticism and negative as a mean of undermining political actors who do not share views of the outlet.

Based on prior works and the conceptual background, issue bias will focus on how a news media outlet has covered policy issues and political actors (both quantitatively and proportionally) in comparison to another news outlet and framing bias will focus on the tone and attitude which political actors were covered with.

These will be the main aspects that this study and its analyses will be built on. The description and explanation for choice of analyses will be covered in the data analysis subchapter. To

ensure the validity of the analyses themselves, I will once again be relying on previous similar research when producing both categories and a codebook for the content analysis.

### **3.2. Content analysis and the process of coding editorials**

As mentioned beforehand, this study will focus on both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. To obtain the data necessary for this, editorials were chosen from Estonia's two largest news outlets (to be further deliberated on in the empirical data sub-chapter) and will be coded based on the Manifesto Project codebook.

The Manifesto Project analyses the policy positions of parties and political candidates through coding their respective manifestos in order to determine their preferences at a certain point in time (Burst et. al., 2021: p.2). As proclaimed by the organization itself:

“The project aims to substantively analyse the role of parties at different stages of the political process and it specifically examines the quality of programmatic representation. It studies the programmatic supply of parties, the relation between parties and voters, the role of parties in parliament, and the translation of party programmes into policy output.” (Manifesto Project, n.d.).

The specific codebook was chosen as its categories and subcategories cover a wide variety of policy areas that are designed to be comparable between parties, countries, elections and across times (Burst et. al., 2021: p. 6). Although it is meant to code political party manifestos and their preferences, it is fitting for the study of news outlets as it provides the ability to code almost every important statement in the articles and divide them into relevant policy areas. Moreover, even though it does not cover every topic that a news media outlet can cover in their editorials, for this specific study which is mostly structured around measuring the level of political bias those niche topics that for example cover non-political public actors or entertainment provide little to no input and can therefore be dismissed. Based on this I have opted to only use the range of categories as provided by the codebook and not add any further coverage topics to it, however it could be something to take into account when wishing to use the Manifesto Project codebook for analysing news media content.

After the coding of statements and categorizing the data, the coded information can be used to both compare topic coverage of the outlets, but can also be used to determine the political leniency of an outlet. Furthermore, it allows for the assessment of the outlet's attitudes by

comparing the opinions given on a topic or policy issue that were coded under the same category.

The codebook consists of the following 56 categories with added divisions into subcategories to cover all possible political policy areas that might be mentioned in party manifestos (Burst et. al., 2021: p.7):

**Domain 1: External Relations**

- 101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive
- 102 Foreign Special Relationships: Negative
- 103 Anti-Imperialism: Positive
  - 103.1 State Centred Anti-Imperialism
  - 103.2 Foreign Financial Influence
- 104 Military: Positive
- 105 Military: Negative
- 106 Peace: Positive
- 107 Internationalism: Positive
- 108 European/Regional Integration: Positive
- 109 Internationalism: Negative
- 110 European/Regional Integration: Negative

**Domain 2: Freedom and Democracy**

- 201 Freedom and Human Rights: Positive
  - 201.1 Freedom
  - 201.2 Human Rights
- 202 Democracy
  - 202.1 General: Positive
  - 202.2 General: Negative
  - 202.3 Representative Democracy: Positive
  - 202.4 Direct Democracy: Positive
- 203 Constitutionalism: Positive
- 204 Constitutionalism: Negative

**Domain 3: Political System**

- 301 Decentralisation: Positive
- 302 Centralisation: Positive

- 303 Governmental and Administrative Efficiency: Positive
- 304 Political Corruption: Negative
- 305 Political Authority: Positive
  - 305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence
  - 305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence
  - 305.3 Political Authority: Strong government
  - 305.4 Pre-Democratic Elites: Positive
  - 305.5 Pre-Democratic Elites: Negative
  - 305.6 Rehabilitation and Compensation

**Domain 4: Economy**

- 401 Free-Market Economy: Positive
- 402 Incentives: Positive
- 403 Market Regulation: Positive
- 404 Economic Planning: Positive
- 405 Corporatism: Positive
- 406 Protectionism: Positive
- 407 Protectionism: Negative
- 408 Economic Goals
- 409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive
- 410 Economic Growth
- 411 Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
- 412 Controlled Economy: Positive
- 413 Nationalisation: Positive
- 414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
- 415 Marxist Analysis: Positive
- 416 Anti-Growth Economy: Positive
  - 416.1 Anti-Growth Economy: Positive
  - 416.2 Sustainability: Positive

**Domain 5: Welfare and Quality of Life**

- 501 Environmental Protection: Positive
- 502 Culture: Positive
- 503 Equality: Positive
- 504 Welfare State Expansion
- 505 Welfare State Limitation
- 506 Education Expansion
- 507 Education Limitation

**Domain 6: Fabric of Society**

- 601 National Way of Life: Positive
  - 601.1 General
  - 601.2 Immigration: Negative
- 602 National Way of Life: Negative
  - 602.1 General
  - 602.2 Immigration: Positive
- 603 Traditional Morality: Positive
- 604 Traditional Morality: Negative
- 605 Law and Order
  - 605.1 Law and Order: Positive
  - 605.2 Law and Order: Negative
- 606 Civic Mindedness: Positive
  - 606.1 General
  - 606.2 Bottom-Up Activism

- 607 Multiculturalism: Positive
  - 607.1 General
  - 607.2 Immigrant Integration: Diversity
  - 607.3 Indigenous rights: Positive
- 608 Multiculturalism: Negative
  - 608.1 General
  - 608.2 Immigrant Integration: Assimilation
  - 608.3 Indigenous rights: Negative

**Domain 7: Social Groups**

- 701 Labour Groups: Positive
- 702 Labour Groups: Negative
- 703 Agriculture and Farmers
  - 703.1 Agriculture and Farmers: Positive
  - 703.2 Agriculture and Farmers: Negative
- 704 Middle Class and Professional Groups: Positive
- 705 Minority Groups: Positive
- 706 Non-Economic Demographic Groups: Positive
- 000 No meaningful category applies

The coding is done as close to the rules proposed by the Manifesto Project codebook in order to ensure the highest level of reliability of data.

The used coding unit is a quasi-sentence, which equals one single statement, but may include examples, reasoning, or explanations as they are part of the main statement and not their own argument (Burst et. al., 2021: p.5). However, one quasi-sentence can't be longer than one sentence (Burst et. al., 2021: p.5).

Post splitting an article into quasi-sentences, they are each put into a table where each row represents one quasi-sentence. Subsequently, each quasi-sentence is given no more than one code that best represents the purpose or idea of the statement (Burst et. al., 2021: p.5). In the case of ambiguity of which code to use, the goal of the sentence will be taken as the main purpose of the statement and coded as such (Burst et. al., 2021: p.9). If one of the intended codes has subcategories, then one of those subcategories must be used instead (Burst et. al., 2021: p.7). An additional category that was used but slightly modified was the category 'H'

which was used to code every title or header of every article. Lastly, if either the quasi-sentence did not represent any policy issue covered by the categories or did not relay any valuable or meaningful information, it was to be coded by the category '000' (Burst et. al., 2021: 10).

The following examples and examples throughout the coming study will be rough translations of statements taken from their respective outlets and articles with the aim of the translation being to foremost forward the idea of the sentence. Examples of quasi-sentences that could be encapsulated by the code '000' were the following:

- “What could be needed?” (Postimees, 2021a)
- “However, emotions have a place in this debate as well” (Postimees, 2021b)
- “What to do in order to stay healthier longer in order to bring happiness yourself, your family and perhaps even the whole world?” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2020a)

However, some adjustments were needed to be done to the general rules and categories to better fit this study. This was done because the content of party manifestos and news outlet articles differs quite noticeably. Firstly, due to the nature of content of the articles being more descriptive and covering facts rather than ideas or proposals, codes concerning 'growth', 'expansion', 'positive', etc., will also be used on statements which describe problems, deficiencies, shortcomings, and so on as the purpose of that specific sentence is still connected to there being a need for improvement. Therefore, categories with words such as 'negative', 'limitation', etc., will be reserved only for statements where an opinion is strictly stated that there should be for example less funding concerning a policy issue.

Secondly, the largest changes in categories were concerning codes '305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence', '305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence', and '305.3 Political Authority: Strong government'. As these categories are meant to include the party's own opinions and judgements of their own party's or singular actor's competence to govern, they were accordingly changed to represent when a political party or political singular actor or their activities were mentioned in an article. Furthermore, to reduce overlap between the categories '305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence', '305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence', and '305.3 Political Authority: Strong government', the latter was changed to only include mentions of the government or parliament as a whole with no reference to any particular party or actor. The choice to change these categories was made to further down the line be able to look at rows of specifically these codes which may or may not display opinions and attitudes of outlets towards political actors.

#### **4. Empirical data and their sources**

For the sources of empirical data, or in this case news articles, I have chosen to analyse Estonia's largest nationwide daily newspapers Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees as they both have necessary segments for opinion articles and include editorials, which will be used as data to analyse an outlet's level of editorial slant. These mentioned nationwide daily newspapers have the largest readerships and therefore would also have the largest possible influence on political behaviour and opinions if any editorial bias were to exist (Eesti Meediaettevõtete Liit, 2021). I will strictly be focusing on the editorials found in the outlets' online sources as they are both easier to gather and analyse, but also because online news has become synonymous with national news in the digital age due to its availability, accessibility, and constant updates (Min et al., 2020: 168-169). Therefore, as already previously established, as editorials represent the positions of the news outlets in general, they have the best reasoning to be used for analysis due to their likeliness of having influence on their respective readers.

I have chosen to focus on editorials from the newspapers' online outlets as they are the most accessible (free to read) for consumers and they most clearly state the newsletters' political standings and also their possible allegiances. Editorials are written by journalists who reflect the newspaper outlets' opinions by selecting and covering topical issues that they find to deserve the focus and therefore also shape opinion-making processes for consumers and in the country's public debates in general (Drewski, 2015: 267). An added fact that hasn't yet been brought up is that partisanship is much more commonly found in opinion articles rather than general descriptive news articles and as regular opinion articles only represent the attitudes of a singular author, the choice what to use as data grows ever simpler (Budak et. al., 2016: p.259).

Data will be taken in the timeframe of half a year beginning from 26th of October of 2020 to 26th of April of 2021. This is due to Estonia's parliament having a change in government coalition on the 26th of January in 2021 due to an act of resigning by one coalition. This should provide a possibility to see if news outlets' opinions and topical coverage change with a shift in governmental power. Changes in attitudes can be explained by the outlet having either a party or a coalition preference, whilst changes in coverage are not to be expected if an outlet were to be loyal to the previous coalition's political views or policy domains. This also adds a level of analysis by the ability to compare data from the first 3 months with the latter 3 months to identify if there has been change. As the government coalition changed from the parties of Keskerakond, Isamaa, and Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond to Reformierakond and

Keskerakond, these will be the parties and their ideological positions I will be looking for in the chosen texts. If there were to be an ideological shift in covering topics, it would be most likely to be one from conservative to liberal due to Isamaa and Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (both conservative parties) no longer being in the coalition.

In the timeframe from 26<sup>th</sup> of October of 2020 to 26<sup>th</sup> of April of 2021, Eesti Päevaleht has produced 124 which were coded into 2756 quasi-sentences and Postimees 134 editorials which were coded into 4163 quasi-sentences. The large difference in quasi-sentences comes from the Postimees articles being a lot longer than those of Eesti Päevaleht.

Out of all the available categories and subcategories in the Manifesto Project codebook, 43 (including H and 000) were used to code every quasi-sentence. Table 1. provides an overview of the distribution of codes as percentage of total count of quasi-sentences that were used for both outlet's articles in the timeframe from 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 to 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2021. A large majority of both outlet's quasi-sentences were coded as '000' due to the articles descriptive nature and also covering topics such as sports, public figures, or international news that couldn't always be categorized under this framework.

Another category that might need explaining is that of '504 Welfare State Expansion' that also had a relatively high distribution of codes. This can mostly be explained by the prevalence of the COVID-19 crisis, its effects on the healthcare system, and the then on-going vaccine debate in Estonia.

Table 1. Overview of distribution of codes.

Category	Eesti Päevaleht	Postimees
H Header	4,5%	3,2%
000 No meaningful category applies	59,0%	48,7%
101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive	2,3%	2,7%
102 Foreign Special Relationships: Negative	0,9%	2,1%
103.1 State Centred Anti-Imperialism	0,1%	0,0%
107 Internationalism: Positive	0,6%	1,3%
108 European/Regional Integration: Positive	0,0%	0,5%
109 Internationalism: Negative	0,3%	0,0%
201.1 Freedom	0,4%	0,4%
201.2 Human Rights	0,0%	0,0%

202.1 Democracy, General: Positive	0,1%	1,4%
202.2 Democracy, General: Negative	0,0%	0,0%
304 Political Corruption: Negative	1,7%	1,5%
305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence	6,6%	6,6%
305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence	3,8%	2,4%
305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government	0,1%	0,4%
402 Incentives: Positive	0,3%	0,0%
403 Market Regulation: Positive	0,1%	0,0%
404 Economic Planning: Positive	0,8%	0,0%
405 Corporatism: Positive	0,4%	0,0%
406 Protectionism: Positive	0,1%	0,0%
408 Economic Goals	0,3%	0,8%
409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive	0,6%	0,2%
410 Economic Growth	0,5%	1,6%
411 Technology and Infrastructure: Positive	0,9%	1,4%
414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive	0,1%	0,0%
416.2 Sustainability: Positive	0,3%	0,6%
501 Environmental Protection: Positive	0,4%	2,1%
502 Culture: Positive	0,4%	1,4%
503 Equality: Positive	0,6%	0,5%
504 Welfare State Expansion	8,5%	10,6%
505 Welfare State Limitation	0,0%	0,0%
506 Education Expansion	1,3%	0,6%
601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General	0,3%	1,3%
601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration: Negative	0,0%	0,2%
602.1 National Way of Life: Negative General	0,0%	0,4%
602.2 National Way of Life: Negative, Immigration: Positive	0,0%	0,1%
603 Traditional Morality: Positive	0,1%	0,0%
604 Traditional Morality: Negative	0,2%	0,0%

605.1 Law and Order: Positive	0,7%	1,7%
606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive, General	1,3%	3,0%
608.1 Multiculturalism: Negative, General	0,0%	0,0%
705 Minority Groups: Positive	0,4%	0,5%
706 Non-Economic Demographic Groups: Positive	1,0%	1,5%

The following chapter will discuss how the data from editorials will be analysed.

## **5. Methods of data analysis**

Issue bias will be measured by categorizing the outlets' editorials based on their topics and comparing them to one another to estimate how much they differentiate. This is done because with a motive to support a political party, the outlet will prefer covering topics that the party deems important or topics that party is more competent at (Prat & Strömberg, 2013: 36). This comparison would be best done with an added outlet that could be considered to have a neutral a distribution which would give the ability to see how much the other chosen cases differ from it. However, since news is dependent on ongoing topical events and a need to prioritize on only a few issues due to limited count of editorials, I will have to rely on seeing differences in just the coverage of Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees.

As all editorials have already been categorized through the coding process, it is relatively easy to see if any area or field has received more coverage than others. Even if some issues might be more topical than others, comparing the results of the outlets should show similar patterns if that were to be the case.

In order to compare whether an outlet's coverage pattern matches or is significantly closer to the other outlet, I have chosen to approach this through a pairwise analysis which allows for measuring relative difference of two variables. It can also be called a variation of the taxicab or Manhattan distance approach that uses pairwise comparison to measure and determine the distance between two or more points in space or most commonly the positioning of political candidates on and their leniency (Ratliff, 2010: pp. 309-310). For this study all values (quasi-sentences in each category) in one set will have to be made proportional with the other as the difference in coded sentences between outlets was rather substantial considering the relatively similar count of editorials. The two sets of data will show a difference in coverage when respective values of either outlet are subtracted from one another (Coverage difference = Postimees Category1 - Eesti Päevaleht Category 1), then taking the sum of each equation's absolute values to determine total difference in coverage. An added measure will be taken for this study which is lastly to also divided the absolute value margins by two to get a value from 0-1 in order to have the differences in coverage shown in percentages. I have chosen this approach as it also been used in prior works that have used the Manifesto Project dataset (Mölder, 2019: p.205).

To put this approach into the context of this study, all valid categories (excluding both '000' and 'H') were divided by the total number of quasi-sentences (100%) (once again excluding

rows from '000' and 'H') and got their value proportional to the other categories. Then all categories were subtracted their corresponding category from the opposing outlet, taken absolute values of the results, and lastly divided by two and summed together.

Additionally, as brought to attention in previous works, there is a need to determine whether an article mentioned more of a specific political actor than others (Hayward & Rudd, 2017). For this the categories associated to politics and political actors ('305.1', '305.2') will be searched for mentions of government parties and their respective members. The category '305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government' will not be included as it was coded to only contain sentences where it can't be discerned which singular political actor or party it was referring to. The sum of each government party mention will be shown as a proportional value of all of the coded quasi-sentences of '305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence' and '305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence' and compared inside one outlet and also compared to the distribution of the other. Mentions of the parties in government who will be searched for in this timeframe were 'Eesti Reformierakond', 'Eesti Keskerakond', 'Eesti Konservatiivne Erakond', 'Isamaa' and 'Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond' (Riigikogu, 2020). The level of coverage of a political party is assumed to be connected to whether they were part of the coalition or not. Therefore, those who held more power and were likelier to be the focus of the news should respectively have higher coverage such as Eesti Konservatiivne Erakond, Isamaa, and Eesti Keskerakond obtaining higher coverage in the first 3 months and Eesti Reformierakond and Eesti Keskerakond receiving higher coverage in the latter 3 months.

Moving on, to also measure not only if the outlets differ in issue bias but also how they differ, I have opted to include assessing the position of the outlet's Left-Right leniency. An example of how this has been done in a similar study is the work of Daniel E. Ho and Kevin M. Quinn who claim that a large majority of editorials are written to in some way contrast the actions or inactions of the government or politicians (2008: p.355). Their approach looked at criticism towards a policy issue in the editorial being a vote against the action and positive coverage being a vote for the action taken (Ho & Quinn 2008: p.355). Thereafter, all of the policy issues and the positions of the outlet were accumulated to look for trends in what wider topics were supported and covered more (Ho & Quinn, 2008: pp. 361-362). The level of political leniency was determined by comparing the attitudes and coverage of an outlet with decisions made in Supreme Court by applying item response theory with the idea being as they stated: "relying on Supreme Court cases as substantive anchors to provide a direct and clearly interpretable

scale” (Ho & Quinn, 2008: p.356). Although it proved to be a valid approach, composing such a scale in this study for just one separate part of the analysis would be too time-consuming.

Thankfully however their method of analysing editorials quite well overlaps with the use of coding in this study and therefore only an alternate scale is required on which to compare leniency on. Such a suitable scale could be found in the 2011 article of Detlaf Jahn who used a deductive approach on the Manifesto Project data to find which of the proposed categories could be compared to evaluate a Left-Right position. With the added benefit of Jahn using the same approach to coding, choice of using a similar approach was fitting. He bases his approach on the Left and Right being divided by different attitudes towards equality, where Socialism (Left) tries to provide and ensure equality, whilst Conservatism and Liberalism (Right) aim to justify inequality being part of society (Jahn, 2011: p.751). This is grounded on the fact that the Left tries to make those who are unequal more equal by supporting the welfare state and the right to education (Jahn, 2011: p.751). Furthermore, the Right either sees inequality as a consequence of the nature of humanity (Conservatives) and therefore supports traditions and social harmony, or sees inequality as artificial (Liberalism) and therefore supports all forms of an individual’s freedoms (Jahn, 2011: p.751).

Applying these understandings of equality to the categories of the Manifesto Project, Detlaf Jahn was able to determine the following categories that best describe each leniency as shown in Table 2 (2011: p.753). These categories are purposely not in numerical order, but higher in their respective column based on their importance in the respective ideological views (Jahn, 2011: p.751). For example, there could be high coverage in the categories ‘Market Regulation: Positive’ and ‘Economic Planning: Positive’, but it would be unlikely that they are part of Socialist views if the same cannot be said for ‘Nationalisation: Positive’ and ‘Controlled Economy: Positive’.

Table 2. Categories representing Left-Right leniency.

Left	Right	
Socialism	Liberal	Conservative
413 Nationalisation: Positive	505 Welfare State Limitation	603 Traditional Morality: Positive
412 Controlled Economy: Positive	401 Free-Market Economy: Positive	606 Social Harmony (Civic Mindedness: Positive)

404	Economic Planning:	414	Economic Orthodoxy:	601.1	National Way of Life:
Positive		Positive		Positive, General	
403	Market Regulation:			601.2	National Way of Life:
Positive				Positive, Immigration	Negative

Additionally, to the approach of Detlaf Jahn, another can be applied to help verify the scope of a political leniency in news outlets. This comes in the case of the article of Atkinson, Lovett, Baumgartner who state that a factor by which to determine political leniency is by look at the coverage consistency of specific policy issues (2014: p.374). Based on their work, if an outlet's policy issue's coverage is proportionally different of another's (therefore not being a case of topicality or "copycat" behaviour), then the consistency of coverage shows that the policy issue is part of the news outlet's ideological views and/or agenda (Atkinson, Lovett & Baumgartner, 2014: p.375). The only danger that the authors expressed is that due to the limited number of editorials and limited space in them, topic preference can be varying due to coincidence (Atkinson, Lovett & Baumgartner, 2014: p.356). However, in a country as small as Estonia, the deviation between coverage on a daily basis for editorials is expected to be much lower due to there being a lower competition of relevant topics and events to cover.

Therefore, the added analysis will view whether either outlet's coverage shows preference in any group of categories. To assume that a leniency is true, the set of categories would have to have a relatively higher coverage whilst the other sets of categories remain low. Although, there might be examples where either outlet has high coverage of a certain policy issue while that of others in the same group remain low, due to the low number of categories depicting either leniency towards Socialism, Liberalism, or Conservatism, it is more likely that the outlet prioritises the issue itself and it isn't connected to leaning towards any ideological standpoint. Furthermore, a way of confirming the topic being part of the news outlet's political agenda is to determine how consistently it has been covered throughout the viewed timeframe with it having to be relatively similarly covered in each month.

Measuring framing bias will be done by dissecting the text itself. Choosing a qualitative approach for this analysis was done as the ability to attribute meaning to text provides a chance to see how different political actors are portrayed by the outlets, whereas just comparing distribution of categories can gloss over important nuances (Benoit, 2010: 275). This

preference is chosen due to framing bias being more contextual than the other form of bias and it can be more ambiguous or vague. As aforementioned, the data for this analysis will be comprised of the categories '305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence', '305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence', and '305.3 Political Authority: Strong government'. The analysis is again two-fold.

Firstly, editorials will be given a score according to whether the article was neutral or had anyways slanted statements towards the coalition at that timeframe (Kleinen-von Köningslów et al., 2019: 525). This will be on the scale from -1 to 1 with 0.5 intervals where they respectively represent a very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, or positive attitude (Wring & Deacon, 2010: p.440; Budak et.al., 2016: p.255). An example of framing bias would be the framing of coalition members as incompetent which consequently can affect readers opinions and might give opposition political actors more support (Langsaether et al., 2019: 143). The distinction between 'very' and 'somewhat' positive or negative will be based on whether the statement is subjective and uses strong vocabulary ('very') or whether the statement is describing either positive or negative events connected to a political actor ('somewhat'). A statement will be considered to be neutral when it is of descriptive nature but does not forward information which neither provides new knowledge about the political actor or would not either positively or negatively affect the judgement of a reader. The scores of an outlet will then be summed in the first and last three months and divided by the respective number of editorials to receive an average score of slant towards the coalition during that time.

Secondly, the same method will be used to score all of the quasi-sentences in the same categories to determine overall attitudes towards political actors in general. This will be done in the same timeframes. Combined with the prior method, these analyses will provide information for comparison on whether an outlet contains framing bias and whether it is dependent on the coalition in power.

For both parts of the analysis of framing bias, a significant help is the work of already mentioned Kathy Sarapuu who explains what kind of meaning can be associated to a certain choice of vocabulary and wording. As the study brings examples from analysed editorials of both of the news outlets also used in this study (Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht), it gives an opportunity to use the same provided baseline when giving an evaluation on either singular statements or entire articles concerning coalitions and/or political actors.

As she deliberates, editorials can explain, convince, warn, criticise, teach, predict, or give praise based on the structure of statements (Sarapuu, 2008: p.18). Editorials may widely vary based on their structure and content and, not per se in the topic or policy issue discussed, but rather in the frequency of the statements that are meant to communicate a certain ‘command’ to the readers (Sarapuu, 2008: pp.23-31). Examples of this can be seen on a range of words or phrases such as ‘should/should not’, ‘necessary’, ‘unacceptable’, ‘reasonable’, ‘obliges’, ‘needs’, ‘we want’. ‘a need to’, etc. (Sarapuu, 2008: pp. 28-33). The importance of the range of vocabulary used stems from it showing what is being brought to the reader’s attention.

These sorts of differences can approximately be divided as positive and negative value assessments corresponding to either of them giving praise or criticism. A value assessment can be in form of something being (or being not) recommended, satisfactory, surprising, appropriate, right, or reasonable (Sarapuu, 2008: p.38). An example of a statement from an editorial that can be considered to possess a somewhat negative value assessment is the following: “What is the point of lowering the income tax if Eesti Keskerakond will adopt a progressive income tax anyways” (Sarapuu, 2008: p.41). It includes giving a negative opinion and a justification as to why it is given through explaining the lack of thought put into a political decision. However, the tone in “Otherwise political parties will lie like there is no tomorrow” is comparatively much more negative as it calls out political actors and further illustrates and emphasises it with an added proverb (Sarapuu, 2008: p.47).

The numeric values the outlets receive according to their identified bias will be compared to evaluate how comparatively neutral their provision of news is. The data connected to attitudes towards political actors will be presented both as a representative of attitudes across a whole outlet, but also only across the categories connected to political actors. The reasoning for this is that showing attitudes towards political actors as part of all editorials in the timeframe conveys how likely a reader is to find information that might affect his or her opinions and prejudices. Furthermore, showing the attitudes as an average of only the statements that mentioned political actors gives an overview of how positive or negative the outlet is when only speaking on the topic of politics. The importance of this is similar to the latter with the difference being that there are people who only reading news connected to political content and therefore comparing just this selection between outlets provides value as well. As established in the theoretical background, identifying the neutrality of news outlets is important and relevant to verify whether the published information is influencing consumers through means other than informing and educating.

## **6. Data analysis**

### **6.1 Issue bias and pairwise analysis**

A pairwise analysis was done on both the policy issue coverage data of comparing outlets by months and comparing it by the total timeframe. Each policy issue was given their proportional value in percentages based on the quasi-sentences in a category divided by the total amount of quasi-sentences coded. Coverage mismatch was measured by taking the proportional value of category '1' of outlet '1' and subtracting from it category '1' of outlet '2' and repeating it with each category. Table 3 shows issue coverage mismatch for every month with for example subtracting from the proportional values of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Postimees the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Eesti Päevaleht which represents the difference in coverage for the time period from 26<sup>th</sup> of October to 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

Table 3. Differences between policy issue coverages between Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht according to months.

	Coverage mismatch 26.10- 27.11	Coverage mismatch 27.11- 26.12	Coverage mismatch 27.12- 26.01	Coverage mismatch 26.01- 27.02	Coverage mismatch 27.02- 26.03	Coverage mismatch 27.03- 26.04
101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive	-0,050	-0,001	-0,015	0,015	0,032	0,021
102 Foreign Special Relationships: Negative	0,000	0,019	0,028	-0,024	0,017	0,035
103.1 State Centred Anti- Imperialism	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,012
107 Internationalism: Positive	0,005	0,018	0,004	0,010	0,017	-0,022

108 European/Regional Integration: Positive	0,000	0,003	0,000	0,016	0,014	0,000
109 Internationalism: Negative	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,020
201.1 Freedom	0,003	-0,003	0,003	-0,002	0,001	-0,012
201.2 Human Rights	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,004	0,000	0,000
202.1 Democracy, General: Positive	0,012	0,019	0,027	0,006	0,005	0,015
202.2 Democracy, General: Negative	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,002	0,000
304 Political Corruption: Negative	-0,001	-0,015	0,001	-0,004	0,002	-0,026
305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence	-0,025	-0,006	-0,057	0,012	-0,025	-0,015
305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence	-0,051	-0,060	-0,005	0,022	-0,024	-0,034
305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government	-0,008	0,000	0,030	0,000	0,000	0,000
402 Incentives: Positive	0,000	0,000	-0,020	-0,004	0,000	0,005
403 Market Regulation: Positive	-0,003	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,008	-0,003

404 Economic Planning: Positive	-0,014	-0,013	-0,015	-0,013	-0,004	-0,004
405 Corporatism: Positive	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,010	-0,031	0,000
406 Protectionism: Positive	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,004	0,002
408 Economic Goals	0,023	0,006	0,003	0,000	-0,019	0,000
409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive	-0,005	-0,013	-0,001	-0,010	-0,018	0,009
410 Economic Growth	-0,007	0,019	0,002	-0,002	0,032	0,014
411 Technology and Infrastructure: Positive	0,020	0,013	-0,020	-0,024	0,022	-0,003
414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,004	-0,004	0,000
416.2 Sustainability: Positive	0,000	0,000	-0,003	0,002	0,008	0,007
501 Environmental Protection: Positive	0,003	0,026	0,007	0,015	0,017	0,047
502 Culture: Positive	0,000	0,000	0,005	0,013	0,040	0,006
503 Equality: Positive	0,024	0,000	-0,020	-0,010	-0,023	-0,003
504 Welfare State Expansion	0,025	-0,016	0,009	-0,020	-0,060	-0,004

505 Welfare State Limitation	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,003
506 Education Expansion	0,008	-0,037	0,003	-0,001	-0,014	-0,021
601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General	0,036	0,009	0,002	-0,006	0,002	0,003
601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration: Negative	0,000	0,000	0,012	0,000	0,000	0,000
602.1 National Way of Life: Negative General	0,012	0,000	0,009	0,000	0,000	0,000
602.2 National Way of Life: Negative, Immigration: Positive	0,000	0,002	0,000	0,005	0,000	0,000
603 Traditional Morality: Positive	0,000	-0,006	0,000	0,000	-0,008	0,000
604 Traditional Morality: Negative	-0,003	-0,008	0,000	0,000	-0,004	0,000
605.1 Law and Order: Positive	-0,004	0,005	0,000	0,018	0,025	0,014
606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive, General	-0,007	0,054	0,006	-0,007	0,004	0,020
608.1 Multiculturalism: Negative, General	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	-0,003

705	Minority						
Groups: Positive		0,002	0,000	0,011	0,000	-0,017	0,001
706	Non-						
Economic							
Demographic							
Groups:							
Positive		0,005	-0,012	-0,002	0,009	0,025	0,016

The absolute values of issue coverage differences in a month were summed to get a number between 0 (that would represent a total match) and 2 (which would represent a total mismatch). This sum was further divided by two for the value to represent the match from 0 to 1 (0%-100%). Therefore, taking any slot in Table 3 will show the percentage difference in coverage for that specific policy issue with a positive value showing outlet '1' (Postimees) having a higher coverage and a negative value showing outlet '2' (Eesti Päevaleht) having a higher coverage. Figure 1 shows the level of issue coverage (mis)match distribution based on every month.

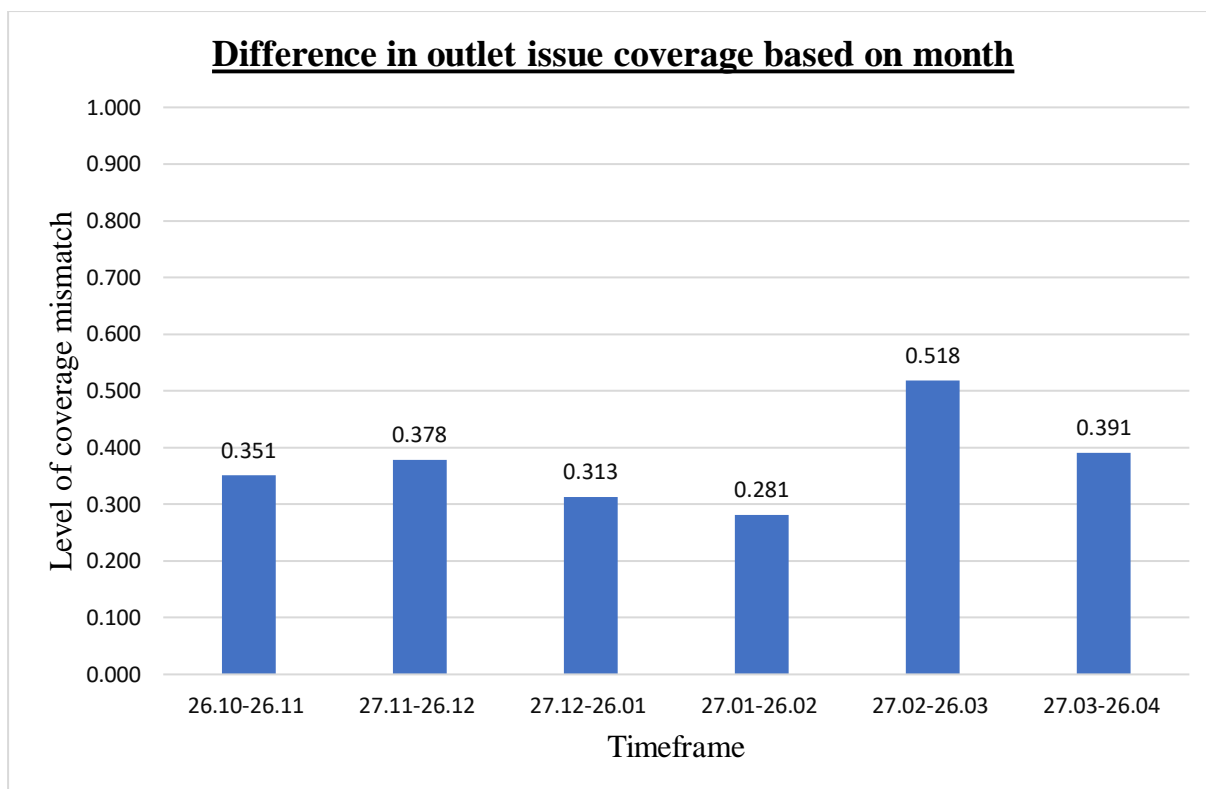


Figure 1. Differences in issue coverage of outlets based on month.

The levels of coverage mismatch (in chronological order) were 0,351 (35,1%), 0,378 (37,8%), 0,313 (31,3%), 0,281 (28,1%), 0,518 (51,8%) and 0,391 (39,1%). Considering that the main policy issues that had the most quasi-sentences coded for this timeframe had relatively proportional coverage (e.g., 305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence, 305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence, and 504 Welfare State Expansion as depicted in Table 1), the analysis still showing a stable coverage mismatch of almost 30% or even more is considerably high. The clear stand out is the 5<sup>th</sup> month (27.02-26.03) which had over half (51,8%) of an outlet’s policy issues or the amount they were covered not match with the other outlet.

Explanations for this can be found in Table 3, where we see large comparative differences in the policy issues ‘101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive’ with a score of 0,064, ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’ with -0,050, ‘405 Corporatism: Positive’ with -0,061, ‘410 Economic Growth’ with 0,063, ‘502 Culture: Positive’ with 0,079, and ‘504 Welfare State Expansion’ with -0,120. Since for this specific approach and set of data the coverage of Eesti Päevaleht was subtracted from the coverage of Postimees, a positive value shows higher coverage on the side of Postimees, whilst a negative value represents Eesti Päevaleht having had a higher coverage for that particular policy issue.

The divided absolute scores of all these pointed out categories show a coverage difference from the total by at least 0,025 (2,5%) or with up to even 0,06 (6%) in the case of the category '504 Welfare State Expansion'. Therefore, we can see that a clear difference exists in issue coverage by looking at which topics were prioritised by either outlet and how much proportional space of articles was committed to a single issue.

Taking a look at the whole 6-month timeframe (Figure 2) we see that these differences of proportional coverage based on policy issues also exist across a longer period of time. Notably Figure 2 shows the absolute values of coverage differences with the colour red representing higher coverage by Postimees and the colour blue representing higher coverage by Eesti Päevaleht. The most noticeable categories that Eesti Päevaleht covers more than Postimees are categories '305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence' and '305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence' which both are categories that cover both the political parties and individual party politicians or political actors. From this aggregated data it is possible to infer that Eesti Päevaleht has put a higher emphasis on politics, sharing descriptive or opinion-based information on politicians and parties, and opting to reflect on how parties and politicians are connected to different policy issues and what they can, should or didn't do regarding them (to be further dissected in qualitative analysis portion). Although most groupings of topics are quite mixed on which outlet they were covered more by, some other correlations between differences can be seen in form of differences existing in the domains of external relations, freedom and democracy, and social groups (illustrated in Coding subchapter), where Postimees had higher proportional coverage in the majority of their categories.

The sum of the absolute values an overall issue coverage mismatch of 0,250 (25%). Although it is considerably lower than in the case of pairwise comparing coverage by months, a quarter of all issues and their amounts covered differentiating from the opposing outlet's coverage is still moderately high.

Coverage on how large of a proportion of an article or to what length a policy issue was covered is presumed to be different as two outlets and their writers are not expected to produce equal or relatively similar articles. However, coverage based on what policy issues one outlet covered and the opposite outlet did not cover should be taken a look at as it shows more clearly what an outlet has deemed to be important enough to be discussed in an editorial.

Examples of this can best be seen in Table 3 where all months show only either a positive or negative value which means that an outlet has constantly brought more attention towards a

topic compared to the other outlet. The preference to view the content from Table 3 comes from the possibility of Figure 2's data being misleading. For example, when a single month has a very large difference in coverage, it has the possibility of creating a difference in the total timeframe average, when realistically, all the other months shared quite a similar coverage on the corresponding policy issue.

Table 3 shows that the policy issues '108 European/Regional Integration: Positive', '202.1 Democracy, General: Positive', '304 Political Corruption: Negative' (with the close exception of 0,003 in the 5th month), '404 Economic Planning: Positive' and '501 Environmental Protection: Positive' (almost) all had higher coverage in either of the outlets. Categories '304 Political Corruption: Negative' and '404 Economic Planning: Positive' held consistent negative values which means throughout this time period Eesti Päevaleht prioritised these topics more than Postimees. While categories '108 European/Regional Integration: Positive', '202.1 Democracy, General: Positive', and '501 Environmental Protection: Positive' had constant higher coverage by Postimees. Whilst it is difficult to make assumptions based on these categories alone as they do not all fall under a single domain of policy issues, it shows that both outlets have policy issues that they either prioritise or don't see as important in order for it to be covered in editorials.

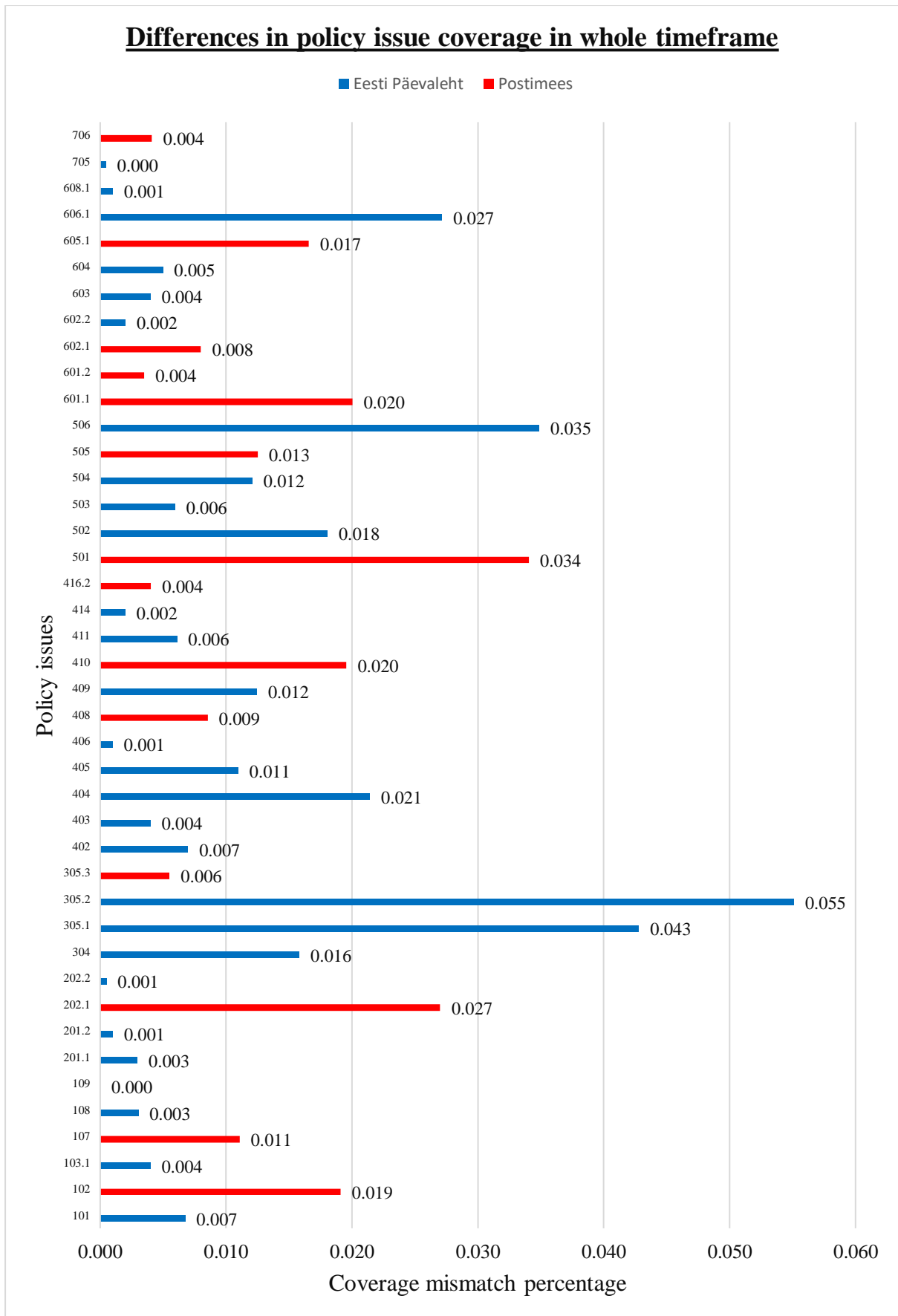


Figure 2. Differences in policy issue coverage of both outlets overall

Moving on from the coverage of topics to the coverage of political actors, Table 4 shows the distribution of party and political actor mentions in first and latter 3 months of the time period. The data is shown as a percentage of all quasi-sentences coded under the categories ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’ and ‘305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence’.

Examples of attributing a coded row to a party or its member were as follows:

- Party - “The negotiations are comfortable for Reformierakond, because they know their voters are happy due to the coalition of ‘EKREIKE’ ending” (Postimees, 2021c)
- Party - “Same could be expected from the third coalition member Isamaa, whose variegated history shows a stable trend of fighting against corruption” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021b)
- Party member - “The party’s previous chairman Mart Helme is turning to the citizens of Ida-Virumaa and telling them that a ‘green’ turn could be bad for them as they could lose their jobs” (Postimees, 2021d)
- Party member - “And so is Martin Helme a minister for all of us and therefore needs to also answer to those who did not vote for him” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021c)
- Not attributable - “We need to hope that not only our society, but also our politicians and leaders in health care do not let chances waste away and keep learning from them” (Postimees, 2021e)
- Not attributable- “Even in an evolutionary tempo would Estonia already have converging Estonian and Russian school systems if politicians had engaged in the issue and not had not been hypocritical” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021d)

As expected, for both news media outlets, the coverage increased when a party that wasn’t in the coalition beforehand got into coalition (e.g., Eesti Reformierakond), and coverage decreased when a party that was in the coalition at first, was no longer in the coalition (e.g., Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond). Small changes in both outlets can be seen across time, but not much that either seems out of the ordinary or not explained by being a member of coalition. An exception is definitely the coverage of the party Isamaa which although was part of the first coalition, only had a low 2% of all quasi-sentences directly attributed or mentioning them. Which makes it even more odd that their coverage actually increased for both of the news media outlets once they actually left the coalition. No clear explanation as to why this is the case can be said according to the data. A likely guess would be the increase in topics that they

are more competent at in the latter 3 months as that would most likely cause an increase of coverage for both the outlets.

Another curious fact is the quite equal distribution of coverage dedicated to both parties across the two news outlets as such similarities have not been the case so far. Small differences exist between parties in the first 3 months where coverage differs from 1% to up to 4%, but due to some coincidence both news outlets share the exact same coverage percentages during the latter 3 months. The coverage on Eesti Keskerakond was quite stable for both outlets which is logical as it was part of both the coalitions and consequently the low coverage of the Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond was low as it was part of neither of these observed coalitions.

As there are no substantial differences in political party coverage exist between the two outlets, a credible claim would be to assume that no issue bias exists when it comes to providing certain political parties more or less attention to others.

Table 4. Political actor coverage based on month and party according to categories 305.1, and 305.2

	Postimees 26.10-26.01	Eesti Päevaleht 26.10-26.01	Postimees 27.01-26.04	Eesti Päevaleht 27.01-26.04
Eesti Reformierakond	5%	4%	13%	13%
Eesti Keskerakond	11%	14%	14%	14%
Isamaa	2%	2%	8%	8%
Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond	1%	2%	4%	4%
Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond	16%	20%	11%	11%
Quasi-sentences not attributable to a political party or their member	65%	56%	50%	50%

## **6.2 Issue bias and Left-Right and ideological leniency**

This following analysis however tries to prove what the concluding thoughts of the latter one could not which is whether either of the news outlets has a clearly distinguishable political leniency. For this, categories were taken based on prior work with the Manifesto Project data on using it to determine Left-Right leniency. Categories ‘413 Nationalisation: Positive’, ‘412 Controlled Economy: Positive’, ‘403 Market Regulation: Positive’, and ‘404 Economic Planning: Positive’ best represented Socialist views, categories ‘505 Welfare State Limitation,’ ‘401 Free-Market Economy: Positive’ and ‘414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive’ represented Liberalist views, and ‘603 Traditional Morality: Positive’, ‘606 Civic Mindedness: Positive,’ ‘601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General’, and ‘601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative’ represented Conservatist views. These respective categories and their row distribution based on outlet are shown in Table 5.

The logic of distinguishing whether an outlet holds an idealistic leniency was based on an outlet having high higher exposure of one grouping of categories, while holding low or no exposure in the other two. For the first two groupings of Socialist and Liberalist categories we see a very low count of statements coded by either outlet, with a small exception being Economic Planning: Positive for Eesti Päevaleht. However, as explained in the method portion beforehand, it is therefore more likely for it to be a policy issue that the outlet deems to be relevant or important, rather than it being a part of their set of ideological views they may have. In spite of that, a significant increase of statements coded can be seen for both outlets in the set of categories linked to Conservatist views. For Eesti Päevaleht, when taking into consideration that they have fewer quasi-sentences coded in total than Postimees, even then they still have comparatively much lower coverage in the categories that are connected to Conservatist views.

However, much more can be said about the Conservatist policy issues covered by Postimees. When taking into account that categories ‘601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General’ and ‘601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative’ cover relatively the same topic (with the latter category being used for more specific statements), it is possible to say that two-thirds of the policy issues connected to Conservatist views have rather high coverage in the case of Postimees. ‘606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive’ making up 6.2% of all coded quasi-sentences (excluding ‘000’ and ‘H’), and ‘National Way of Life: Positive, General’ and ‘National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative’ making up 3.15% of all coded quasi-

sentences (excluding ‘000’ and ‘H’). Based on this I deem it hard to deny that Postimees prefers covering Conservatist topics over those connected to either Socialist or Liberalist views.

Nevertheless, as set up in the methods section, the importance of a category in ideological leniency increases with its position in the column of policy issues, which makes ‘Traditional Morality: Positive’ a relatively crucial category when assessing Conservatist views. Therefore, Postimees having 0 statements coded under ‘603 Traditional Morality: Positive’ makes it less likely to be strongly advocating Conservatist views or being biased towards Conservatist parties.

Table 5. Distribution of codes based on Socialist, Liberalist, Conservatist categories.

Category	Postimees	Eesti Päevaleht
413 Nationalisation: Positive	0	0
412 Controlled Economy: Positive	0	0
403 Market Regulation: Positive	0	4
404 Economic Planning: Positive	1	22
505 Welfare State Limitation	0	1
401 Free-Market Economy: Positive	0	0
414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive	0	2
603 Traditional Morality: Positive	0	4
606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive	124	34
601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General	54	7
601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative	7	0

To confirm whether the categories ‘606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive’ ‘601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General’ ‘601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative’ are part of the news agenda of Postimees, as discussed in the analysis method, it is needed to look at how consistently these policy issues were covered over the 6-month time period. The data concerning this is provided in Table 6 as proportional values. Based on this it is possible to see that the majority of quasi-sentences is concentrated within only a select number of months with ‘606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive’ being most topical during the first two months between 26<sup>th</sup> of October to 26<sup>th</sup> November and 27<sup>th</sup> November to 26<sup>th</sup> December, ‘601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General’ being mostly discussed during the month of 27<sup>th</sup> November to 26<sup>th</sup> December, and ‘601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative’ due to its low

number of statements that it was mentioned in being only relevant in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month between 27<sup>th</sup> of December and 26<sup>th</sup> of January. Therefore, it is relatively safe to say that Postimees does not hold any of these Conservatist policy issues as part of their consistent news agenda, but rather opts to cover it when it is more relevant. Consequently, this means that Postimees does also not share a certain ideological leniency when it comes to providing news, opinions, and attitudes concerning topics of politics.

Table 6. Distribution of coded statements of Conservatist categories for the Postimees news outlet.

	Postimees 26.10- 27.11	Postimees 27.11- 26.12	Postimees 27.12- 26.01	Postimees 26.01- 27.02	Postimees 27.02- 26.03	Postimees 27.03- 26.04
606.1 Civic Mindedness: Positive	34%	46%	5%	2%	2%	11%
601.1 National Way of Life: Positive, General	63%	20%	4%	4%	2%	7%
601.2 National Way of Life: Positive, Immigration Negative	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%

### **6.3 Framing bias and qualitative content analysis**

The first part of the analysis of framing bias is solely focused on how the corresponding current coalition, its parties, and its members were presented, described, and covered. The analysis was based on statements from categories ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’, ‘305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence’, and ‘305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government’ that contained mentions of the previous political actors. Each article was given a score of ‘-1’, ‘-0,5’, ‘0’, ‘0,5’ or ‘1’ depending on how positive or negative the depiction of coalition was based on quasi-sentences containing ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, ‘305.3’.

If the article did not contain any of the previously mentioned categories, references to the coalition or its political actors, or if it the statements could be considered as neutral, the article received a score of ‘0’.

Some examples of evaluating attitudes towards the coalition in the respective timeframe are as follows:

- -1 (Very negative) – “It is extremely inappropriate if we let EKRE politicians with their radical views blemish our security architecture, that Estonia has built since re-independence” (Postimees, 2020)
- -0,5 (Somewhat negative) – “Unfortunately has [politician] Ratas given inadequate explanations” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021e)
- 0 (Neutral) – “Whether the government’s plan works in reality, we will find out in due time” (Postimees, 2021f)
- 0,5 (Somewhat positive) – “The new coalition is significantly more environmental which is strategically the right choice” (Postimees, 2021g)
- 1 (Very positive) – “For a change, we wish success for the coalition” (Postimees, 2021h)

The differentiation between somewhat and very positive or negative was made depending on how ‘strong’ the used vocabulary was and whether the statement could be considered objective (justified/explained = somewhat) or subjective (unjustified/opinion-based – very). This distinction was made as higher subjectivity and harshness of wording would correspondingly reflect either an opinion-based position towards a political actor or draw more positive/negative attention to the named political actor.

Table 7 shows the score of every single article by the two outlets between the two timeframes 26-10-26.01 (previous coalition) and 27.01-26.04 (following coalition). A large majority of both outlet’s articles were coded as ‘0’ due to them being neutral or having no appropriate content.

Table 7. Outlet attitudes towards coalition across all articles.

Score	Postimees	Postimees	Eesti Päevaleht	Eesti Päevaleht
	26.10-26.01	27.01-26.04	26.10-26.01	27.01-26.04
-1 (Very negative)	7	2	9	4
-0,5 (Somewhat negative)	5	6	13	14

0 (Neutral)	57	55	38	43
0,5 (Somewhat positive)	0	2	2	1
1 (Very positive)	0	0	0	0

Table 8 shows the average scores for both outlets and both coalitions. Although a large majority of evaluated articles were neutral, it is already possible to say that both outlets are far from neutral when it comes to presenting news concerning the current coalition. A considerable difference can be seen between Posimees and Eesti Päevaleht where the latter has a considerably more negative score towards both coalitions. However, a noteworthy similarity is that both outlets were more negative towards the first coalition (26.10-26.01) than the second coalition (27.01-26.04). The simplest explanation for why the first coalition was perceived more negatively is that the change in coalition did not come through a parliament election but, through a resignation of the first one due to internal struggles such as criminal and corruption scandals concerning some of the respective political party members (Mäekivi, et. al., 2021; Nael & Hindre, 2021).

Table 8. Average attitudes towards coalition across all articles.

	Postimees	Eesti Päevaleht
Articles	134	124
Average attitude 26.10-26.01	-0,14	-0,28
Average attitude 27.01-26.04	-0,06	-0,17
Average attitude total	-0,10	-0,20

Although including the articles that did not contain mentions of categories ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’, ‘305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence’, and ‘305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government’ gave an overall score on the likeliness of how much positivity and/or negativity towards the coalition would a reader of either outlet encounter during the respective timeframe, it does not realistically depict the level of framing bias and neutrality of the outlet itself. Therefore, as mentioned in the analysis method, a second set of averages is needed to be taken to show the level of neutrality when just looking at all of the opinions and information given about political actors.

For this, all articles that did not contain the relevant categories were removed from the equation. This included 25 articles for Postimees and 22 articles for Eesti Päevaleht from 26<sup>th</sup> of October to 26<sup>th</sup> of January, and 19 articles for Postimees and 35 articles for Eesti Päevaleht from 27<sup>th</sup> of January to 26<sup>th</sup> of April.

Table 9 contains the adjusted averages for only articles containing corresponding categories of ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, and ‘305.3’. As expected, the average rating has become much more negative for all cases. However, the most notable differences are the changes of Eesti Päevaleht in their overall attitude and their attitude towards the second coalition which both decreased by respectively -0,17 down to -0,37 and by -0,22 down to -0,39. On the other side the changes for Postimees were only by -0,05 to -0,15 and by -0,03 down to -0,09. Comparing the two outlets we see relatively the same trend as depicted in Table 8 of the attitudes of Postimees being considerably more neutral than those of Eesti Päevaleht.

Table 9. Average attitudes towards coalition in only articles containing categories ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, or ‘305.3’.

	Postimees	Eesti Päevaleht
Articles	90	67
Average attitude 26.10-26.01	-0,22	-0,36
Average attitude 27.01-26.04	-0,09	-0,39
Average attitude total	-0,15	-0,37

The second part of this analysis focuses on all mentions of the categories ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’, ‘305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence’ and ‘305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government’, with the intent to examine the attitudes towards all political actors, not just the coalition members. Table 10 encapsulates data of all corresponding coded statements in the same timeframes. The purpose for an additional part to this analysis is foremost that framing bias is not fully grasped by only looking at attitudes towards the coalition. Moreover, it allows for comparison between attitudes towards coalition and all political actors to see whether an outlet was similarly opinionated towards both.

Table 10. Number of statements coded with categories ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, and ‘305.3’.

	Postimees 26.10-26.01	Postimees 27.01-26.04	Eesti Päevaleht 26.10-26.01	Eesti Päevaleht 27.01-26.04

305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence	100	174	63	118
305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence	43	56	32	73
305.3 Political Authority: Strong Government	0	16	0	3
Total	143	246	95	194

Statements coded as ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, or ‘305.3’ regarding mentions of all political actors were given scores between ‘-1’ and ‘1’ with the exact same rules as the scoring of articles. Examples of evaluated statements and their attitude towards all political actors are as follows:

- -1 (Very negative) – “It is absurd that the country is ready to take drastic measures in order to enforce restrictions” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021f)
- -0,5 (Somewhat negative) – “The government should communicate the [COVID-19] crisis better” (Postimees, 2021i)
- 0 (Neutral) – “The new coalition should keep holding good relations with our main allies” (Postimees, 2021j)
- 0,5 (Somewhat positive) – “Keep on with the previous coalition’s approach of not exaggerating with the restrictions” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021g)
- 1 (Very positive) – “Good job, finally a small step made by ‘thinking outside the box’” (Eesti Päevaleht, 2021h)

All scored statements of the chosen categories are represented in Table 11 based on outlet and occurrence in the timeframe. The most perceptible pattern is that both outlets have expressed much more negative opinions and descriptions of political actors than politicians. Comparing both sides of positives and negatives, it is clear that both outlets are reluctant to give political actors positive feedback and/or coverage. Furthermore, a significant number of statements (29 and 27) that were scored as ‘very negative’ were taken from the time period between 26<sup>th</sup> of October and 26<sup>th</sup> of January during the time of the first coalition, whilst only a few (2 and 6) were scored during the second period between 27<sup>th</sup> January and 26<sup>th</sup> April.

Although a large margin of statements is contained in the neutral section, a remarkable allocation of statements was scored as ‘somewhat negative’ meaning a large share of information connected to political actors was forwarded as constructive criticism.

Table 11. Category ‘305.1’, ‘305.2’, and ‘305.3’ quasi-sentence distribution based on their attitudes towards political actors.

	Postimees 26.10-26.01	Postimees 27.01-26.04	Eesti Päevaleht 26.10-26.01	Eesti Päevaleht 27.01-26.04
-1 (Very negative)	29	2	27	6
-0,5 (Somewhat negative)	42	41	73	42
0 Neutral	176	86	80	38
0,5 (Somewhat positive)	0	11	14	7
1 (Very positive)	0	3	0	2

The scores of a column in Table 11 were summed and divided by the total number of scores given (total number of quasi-sentences) to obtain average attitudes towards all political actors. Table 12 illustrates this data and dividing it based on timeframe, averages of the timeframes, and the outlets they represented to allow for comparison with the first part of the qualitative analysis.

The aggregated average attitudes towards all political actors again show a negative reflection across all time periods and both outlets. Furthermore, Eesti Päevaleht once more shows a greater negative coverage of political actors through all variables compared to Postimees.

Table 12. Average attitudes of both outlets towards all political actors based on timeframe.

	Postimees	Eesti Päevaleht
Average attitude 26.10-26.01	-0,20	-0,29
Average attitude 27.01-26.04	-0,10	-0,23
Average attitude total	-0,16	-0,27

To ease comparison and the making of all-encompassing assessments between the two outlets, data from Tables 9 and 12 were put side to side in Table 13. Comparing the coverage of attitudes towards political actors and attitudes towards the coalition in case of Postimees the differences are quite small ranging from 0,01 to 0,02. However, differences in the coverage of

Eesti Päevaleht are much clearer. Political actors in general were covered less negatively than the effective coalition with differences ranging from 0,07 to 0,13.

Table 13. Outlet attitudes towards all political actors and coalitions in respective time periods.

	Postimees political actors	Postimees coalition	Eesti Päevaleht political actors	Eesti Päevaleht coalition
Average attitude 26.10-26.01	-0,20	-0,22	-0,29	-0,36
Average attitude 27.01-26.04	-0,10	-0,09	-0,23	-0,39
Average attitude total	-0,16	-0,15	-0,27	-0,37

Therefore, it is fair to assume based on the information at hand that the news outlet Postimees, although still providing a more negative leaning coverage of information on all political actors, provides opinions and news on a relatively similar set of standards throughout all of their editorials. The outlet Eesti Päevaleht however, is comparatively much more open to criticise all political actors whilst also not being afraid to voice their opinions when they are discontent with those in decision-making or governing positions. Therefore, the difference between a stronger negative reflection of attitudes towards coalition could be a case of coalition members being more prompt to being held accountable for political actions.

## **7. Results**

This subchapter will provide an overview of all the valuable data obtained from the analyses and use it to evaluate the level of issue bias and framing bias for both the news outlet Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht.

Starting in the same order as the analyses, the first form of bias observed was issue bias and specifically the coverage of topics, policy issues and how the coverage differs between the two outlets. The comparison of coverage a variety of differences is policy issue coverages with an overall mismatch of 25% of all of the topics covered in the half year time period. This difference was even more noticeable and extreme when looking at coverage for every month separately where the period from 27<sup>th</sup> of February to 26<sup>th</sup> of March showed a discrepancy of 51,8%. Differences per domain and topic were most discernible in external relations, freedom and democracy, and social groups for the outlet Postimees, and the categories ‘305.1 Political Authority: Party Competence’ and ‘305.2 Political Authority: Personal Competence’ that dealt with the political landscape for Eesti Päevaleht. Therefore, issue bias in term of policy issue coverage does exist for both of Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees as they have clear comparative preferences for policy issues.

The second part of issue bias analysis focused on the coverage of political parties in Estonia. This was done by looking at the distribution of mentions of political party and political party member in the two 3-month time periods. As predicted the coverage was indeed higher for the parties who were part of the coalition and lower for those in the opposition. An interesting finding is that even though there were large differences in topic and policy issue coverage, the coverage of political parties and members had small differences from 26<sup>th</sup> of October to 26<sup>th</sup> of January and the same proportional distribution from 27<sup>th</sup> of January to 26<sup>th</sup> of April. Minor differences exist in comparing timeframes and outlets to one another which leads to the claim that issue bias does not exist when it comes to the coverage of political actors in the case of Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht.

The third part of issue bias was based on whether the policy issues covered showed patterns of belonging to a group of ideological views categorised as either Conservatist, Socialist or Liberalist. The analysis was based on looking at whether an outlet had higher coverage in one of the defined groups of policy issues whilst the others stayed low. Eesti Päevaleht showed no allegiance to any group of political views and had equally low coverage in all topics concerning the respective Conservatist, Liberalist, and Socialist topics. Postimees however had a

comparatively high coverage of Conservatist policy issues. Although, the policy issue that was described as most important for Conservatist views (603 Traditional Morality: Positive) lacked in coverage, the others were high. This provided a basis to take a closer look on whether it is coincidence or not which could be determined by looking at the consistency of the other Conservatist issues that were covered. Nevertheless, as the coverage was obviously inconsistent with it being substantially topical in only two months and having very low in the others, it led to the conclusion that an ideological leniency for the news agenda of Postimees did not exist.

Therefore, it can be summarised for issue bias that in neither outlet did there exist a slant when covering either political actors or policy issues that would refer to political leniency, but there did exist issue bias in form of quite considerable differences in policy issue coverage meaning that the respective readers of only either one of the news outlets will be exposed to quite different topics and information than the other. As already brought as an example, in the most extreme cases, the exposure to news in a single month can differ by over 50%.

Moving on to the second form of studied media bias, framing bias was analysed through a qualitative approach in terms of average attitude towards coalition across the outlet, average attitude towards the coalition across only the text targeted at politics, and average attitude towards all political actors across only the text targeted at politics. This was done by evaluating statements coded under categories related to either political actors or politics.

The successive finding across these comparisons is that neither news outlet is open to give political actors praise with only a few of both 'somewhat' and 'very' positive opinions being shared across all months. A sizeable count of statements was evaluated as 'somewhat negative' which was equivalent to giving negative feedback based on an objective reasoning. Therefore, both outlets weren't afraid to express their opinions and give political actors constructive criticism when by their set of views, the political actors were not acting up to standard. The last similarity between both outlets is that for this time period, both of them expressed similarly more negative opinions towards the coalition in power in the first three months and more relaxed opinions towards the second coalition.

Nevertheless, many differences were found across framing bias. One that most stuck out is the overall higher negativity (true for the whole time period) projected by Eesti Päevaleht when compared to Postimees. Looking at the comparisons of attitudes in only the data concerning politics, Postimees showed average an attitude score of -0.15 towards the coalitions and an

average attitude score of -0,16 towards all political actors. Therefore, the opinions and attitudes of Postimees were quite stable across all 6 months with even the tendency to be more neutral than negative. Eesti Päevaleht however showed an average attitude score of -0,37 towards the coalitions and an average attitude of -0,27 towards all political actors across 6 months. Eesti Päevaleht was comparatively much more negative towards political actors than Postimees and was likelier to be negative than neutral when forwarding information about political actors (especially coalition members). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the attitude score is from '-1' to '1' which means that the scores shown are not only a level of negativity, but also take into account the positive feedback that is given to parties which can make the scores look more positive than they actually are.

Based on the high received scores it would be fair to assume that framing bias exists in Eesti Päevaleht for both attitudes towards those in coalition but politicians and parties overall. Due to the fact that Postimees was much closer to a value of '0' than that of '-0,5', although not possible to deem as a neutral news outlet, but one that provides information on parties and politicians whilst also giving constructive criticism when there is a need for it.

## **Conclusion**

This study shines light on topics such as media effects on consumers, media bias and neutrality, and what constitutes a media landscape and how it has evolved over time. For this study specifically the case of Estonia was taken into focus. The viewed variable was to be the content of news provided by mass media news outlets as they provide the highest amount of information, remain as the most accessible form of news media, and hold a high level of regular consumption. The thesis narrowed the effects of media down to its neutrality and topical reach as they are the most common ways news content can differ and consequently then effect consumers differently. These variables were specified as issue bias and framing bias that tackle the topics of depth and reach of coverage and the tone and meaning attributed to the information in articles such as attitudes towards political actors.

Data was collected by collecting editorials from two of Estonia's largest news providers Postimees and Eesti Päevaleht, turning them into rows of statements, and giving each row a policy issue code based on the Manifesto Project Codebook that provides codes and subcategories for every topic that might be covered in politics. Data was grouped based on the policy issue, time, and attitudes comparing it with either one another or with the same data from the competing news outlet.

The research question tried to answer whether a form of media bias exists in Estonia's most consumed news media outlets. The findings showed differences in policy issue coverage between outlets but not in coverage of political actors. Postimees put higher emphasis on topics of freedom and democracy, external relations, and social groups, whereas Eesti Päevaleht preferred providing information concerning politics. Furthermore, both outlets were rather negative when commenting on politics where it was more rare for Postimees but more common and more intense in the case of Eesti Päevaleht. Therefore, noticeable and relevant differences in news provision exist between the two large outlets of Estonia meaning that two readers who only consume either of the respective outlets will be exposed to varying information and opinions. This leads to the conclusion that types of both issue and framing bias both exist in news media outlets of Estonia.

In the opinion of the author, this study can most certainly be further expanded and built on. Although the approaches are already mostly structured on prior concepts and prior methods that have been used to prove and measure variables, the scope is relatively low when talking of all of the possibilities at hand when it comes to analysing media or even just in the case of

Estonia. This study has only analysed and compared two of the biggest news media outlets of Estonia and done it whilst looking at only the scope of 6-months. Although this was done due to the time restraints as adding another outlet or expanding the time period greatly increases the time and resources needed to carry out these approaches and analyses, the amount of new information and added layer of validity that increasing the range would do is considerable. Furthermore, as pointed out when talking about the Manifesto Project Codebook, expanding the list of categories so that it would better encompass all of the areas of life might provide new and relevant information when either analysing attitudes in news outlets or determining the existence and strength of a bias. Furthermore, the possibility for a follow-up study exists which is used to classify how and if these forms of media bias actually affect the outlets' readers.

Although imperfect, this study provides value for coming studies on media neutrality and analysing the media landscape in Estonia. It does so by providing a way to use the Manifesto Project Codebook with the intent to analyse the content of media outlets. Furthermore, it provides an extensive overview on what types of bias exist in media and which of them can and should be analysed when studying news media outlets. Lastly, it shows numerous different approaches of how to compare and analyse the data as to get the most out of the coded editorials.

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