

TATIANA LUPACHEVA

Voice, Visibility, and Viability:
Connecting Parliamentary Speech,
Media Coverage, and
Electoral Performance of MPs in Estonia



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CONTENTS

List of original publications	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Theoretical background	10
2.1. Political behavior through party and personal representation	10
2.2. The role of media for democratic representation	14
2.3. The politics of parliamentary speech: vote- and visibility-seeking perspectives	16
3. Research design and case description	19
3.1. Overview of methodology	19
3.2. Estonian context	21
4. Empirical results	24
4.1. Article I: Parliamentary speech and media visibility	24
4.2. Article II: Parliamentary speech and electoral performance	26
4.3. Article III: Media coverage and citizens' information-seeking . . .	27
4.4. Connecting the arenas	29
5. Implications and conclusions	31
5.1. The accountability chain reconsidered	31
5.2. Generalization	33
5.3. Limitations and future research	34
References	37
Summary in Estonian	46
Acknowledgements	50
Publications	51
Curriculum Vitae	131
Elulookirjeldus	132

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I Lupacheva, T. and M. Mölder (2024). “A place to speak and be heard? Parliamentary speech and media attention in Estonia, 2011–2019”. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 49.4, pp. 905–924.
- II Lupacheva, T. (2026). “No I in team? parties’ and voters’ gendered response to pronominal choice in parliamentary speechmaking in Estonia”. In: *East European Politics* 42 (1), pp. 171–194.
- III Lupacheva, T. (2025). “Media Visibility and Information-Seeking: Analyzing the Impact of News Coverage on Wikipedia Pageviews of Estonian MPs (2015–2023)”. In: *Social Science Computer Review* 0 (0), pp. 1–28.

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- I The author of the dissertation is the lead author of the article and was responsible for developing the conceptual framework and hypotheses, contributing to data collection, pre-processing, and analysis, and writing the article.
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- III The author of the dissertation is the sole author of the article.

1. INTRODUCTION

Common understandings of representative democracy frame it as a delegation chain. Citizens, constrained by time and expertise from crafting the policies that govern their polity, select representatives for a limited term in Parliament and delegate this authority to them. These elected officials then do their best – or not – to translate the preferences of their constituents into the laws they draft and adopt. At the end of the term, voters assess how well their representatives have performed and decide whether to return them to office.

It is no secret that empirical reality is far more complicated. Voters and politicians rarely interact directly and instead rely heavily on media coverage to communicate and learn about one another. The media, however, is not a neutral mirror of political and social life but an actor with its own editorial preferences and market goals (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Voters, for their part, are human and therefore imperfect in their judgments. Some may lack interest in or factual knowledge on political affairs (Lupia, 2016). Others may evaluate politicians using criteria that diverge from the rational standards imagined by political theorists (Achen and Bartels, 2017). And often, cognitive biases rooted in how people process information may influence their assessments (Valentino et al., 2008; Stroud, 2008). Politicians, in turn, do not operate in a vacuum but act strategically, seeking to navigate – and at times exploit – media dynamics and voter biases in order to secure electoral success (Strömbäck, 2008).

In such an environment, the chain of delegation and accountability may no longer operate as a neutral channel between representatives and voters. If communication between citizens and representatives is mediated and selective, electoral accountability may come to depend less on the substance of policy performance and more on who becomes visible, how information is framed, and how it is received. Such dynamics raise the possibility that representation is not simply imperfect, but, worse, uneven: some actors may be better positioned to translate parliamentary work into public recognition and electoral reward than others. The danger, then, is not only that citizens are imperfect judges, but that the structure of mediated politics may condition whose parliamentary work is effectively translated into public recognition and electoral consequence.

With politicians, voters, and journalists all contributing to the gap between normative ideals and political reality, how does modern representation work? This dissertation joins this conversation by examining three aspects of the accountability link in representative democracy. The three articles that make up the work look at the parliamentary, electoral, and media arenas, as well as the interplay between them. Rather than treating these arenas separately, the dissertation traces them as a connected chain. **Article I** investigates how the amount and, in particular, the style of parliamentary speech are related to politicians’ media visibility – a key condition for accountability to function. **Article II** analyzes whether self- and collective references in parliamentary speech are rewarded or sanctioned by parties

and voters during re-election, providing an important window into accountability. Finally, **Article III** examines whether and what kind of media coverage prompts citizens to seek further information about politicians, thereby demonstrating the media's role in how voters learn about their representatives.

Theoretically, the dissertation advances understanding of democratic accountability by addressing several gaps. In parliamentary democracies, accountability is better understood at the party and government-opposition levels. Yet personal representation – the direct connection between legislators and voters – can improve representation quality by assigning individualized responsibility and establishing direct connections to communities (Colomer, 2011; Papp, 2023). Following Carey and Shugart (1995), an extensive literature has examined how institutional incentives shape whether Members of Parliament (MPs) seek personal recognition or prioritize party reputation. However, scholarship has been skewed toward single-member district plurality systems, where personal vote-earning is institutionally paramount. Despite growing research in other contexts (e.g., Däubler et al., 2016; Däubler et al., 2018; François and Navarro, 2019; Papp and Russo, 2018), less is known about individual accountability in open-list proportional representation systems where MPs must simultaneously cultivate personal reputations to attract preference votes while maintaining party loyalty, creating specific dynamics of accountability.

Moreover, the dissertation studies personal and party representation as revealed in how politicians speak rather than what they do. Recent scholarship applying computational methods has argued that communication style – such as sentiment, emotionality, linguistic complexity, or pronominal choice in parliamentary speaking – reflects personal vote-seeking and visibility strategies (e.g., Lin and Osnabrügge, 2018; Slapin and Kirkland, 2020; Osnabrügge et al., 2021). By focusing on the rhetorical rather than the substantive content or volume of parliamentary work, the dissertation contributes to the computational strand of parliamentary research and expands it by examining the consequences of how politicians communicate. Specifically, by examining these consequences, the dissertation tests whether the rhetorical strategies identified by these studies actually generate the visibility and voter engagement that they assume.

In addition, this dissertation advances scholarship on political information and accountability in the digital age. Digitalization of politics has in principle reduced the informational distance between politicians and citizens by making parliamentary activity and media coverage of politics more directly accessible than ever before (Saalfeld et al., 2022), yet whether citizens actually use these affordances and under what conditions they do so, remains largely assumed rather than tested. Addressing this gap matters because the informational preconditions for accountability depend not just on whether coverage of individual legislators exists but on whether and how citizens engage with it.

The distinct contribution of this dissertation is that it frames individual accountability as a multi-stage, mediated process requiring integration across traditionally

separate arenas. By adopting a single-case study approach, this dissertation provides a comprehensive account that looks at how the connections between politicians' work, media, and voters unfold and reinforce each other. Estonia provides a well-suited context for examining the accountability chain linking parliamentary behavior, media coverage, voter attention, and electoral outcomes. The country's open-list proportional representation system creates institutional incentives for MPs to cultivate personal visibility while retaining the option of receiving a legislative mandate via closed party lists. In addition, Estonia's small size (101 MPs, approximately 1.3 million people) offers theoretical and practical advantages: the political system remains cognitively manageable for citizens, national media can feasibly cover a significant proportion of MPs rather than exclusively leaders, and comprehensive data collection is feasible. Thus, the single-case design enables the depth necessary to trace complete accountability chains: observing the same politicians across parliament, media, and on the voter side reveals connections that cross-national studies cannot easily capture.

The dissertation leverages data availability in Estonia's case to conduct analyses offering several strengths. Empirical data spans multiple sources: complete parliamentary transcripts covering all speeches by all MPs across three terms (2011–2023), approximately 2.7 million newspaper articles from major media outlets, daily search data on MPs, as well as electoral results including individual vote counts and list placements. Another special feature is that the dissertation employs daily-level data, which provides finer temporal granularity compared to most previous studies that aggregate data weekly, monthly, or annually. This precision allows identifying same-day effects of parliamentary speech on media coverage and of media coverage on information-seeking, strengthening confidence in proposed causal mechanisms. At the core of the dissertation are computational text analysis methods that analyze entire populations of texts rather than samples. The combination of comprehensive coverage, daily-level temporal structure, and multi-dimensional measurement of communication style creates an empirical foundation for testing theoretical claims with considerable detail.

The remainder of this chapter develops the broader theoretical framework that situates the dissertation within debates on representation, personalization, and mediatization. It outlines the Estonian institutional context, details the data and methodological approach, and synthesizes the central empirical findings. It demonstrates how parliamentary behavior becomes politically consequential through a chain of mediated interactions linking legislators, journalists, and citizens. By tracing this full pathway – from speech in parliament to media visibility, voter attention, and ultimately electoral outcomes – the dissertation shows that accountability is neither direct nor uniformly accessible. Instead, the findings reveal a more complex and unequal process than democratic theories suggest.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Political behavior through party and personal representation

Modern representative democracies presume that elected officials act on citizens' behalf and that voters can reward or punish them at the ballot box. In the standard political-economic principal–agent view, citizens (principals) delegate authority to elected officials (agents) because they cannot directly decide every issue themselves (Strøm, 2000). Accountability is normatively meaningful only to the extent that principals can monitor and sanction agents, and that agents accept obligations to act on behalf of principals rather than purely in their own interest (Fearon, 1999). Parliamentary systems illustrate how layered and interdependent these delegation relationships can become. Voters delegate to political parties, parties nominate and monitor MPs, and MPs in turn are accountable to both the party and their constituents, producing overlapping and sometimes conflicting lines of accountability (Müller, 2000; Strøm, 2000). Technological change, media expansion, and the erosion of partisan loyalties have further reshaped these delegation relationships, complicating the mechanisms through which citizens can monitor and reward representatives. As delegation chains lengthen and accountability becomes diffused across multiple principals, the direct link between citizens' preferences and policy outcomes has become more complex. Consequently, politicians must navigate competing incentives to demonstrate both partisan loyalty and personal responsiveness, a tension that reflects the institutional trade-offs at the heart of parliamentary democracy.

In empirical studies of political behavior, the concepts of personal and party representation capture distinct but interrelated dimensions of democratic linkage. Party representation refers to responsiveness through collective platforms and partisan accountability, where elected officials act primarily as agents of their party's program and ideology. Personal representation, by contrast, emphasizes the relationship between individual representatives and their constituents, grounded in personal credibility, constituency service, and perceived integrity. The growing relevance of the latter has become a central focus of research on personalization – a process in which individual actors become increasingly salient relative to political parties (Rahat and Sheaffer, 2007). For political actors, personalization manifests itself in personal vote-seeking strategies such as individualized parliamentary activity or candidate-centered campaigning (Friedman and Friedberg, 2021; Pedersen and Rahat, 2021). For voters, personalization increases the importance of individual politicians over parties and politicians' personal qualities and their perceived ability to deliver on promises (Colomer, 2011). Earlier works emphasized the politics–media–politics principle (Wolfsfeld, 2004) that highlights how these dynamics circulate among the various arenas of representation. First, electoral institutions shape incentives for personalization, then media coverage amplifies individual visi-

bility, resulting in elites and citizens responding in kind by adapting their strategies and expectations to increasingly personalized forms of politics (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007). Several decades of research have addressed and specified various aspects related to the measurements, trends, causes, and consequences of personalization, revealing complex patterns that are discussed in this section.

The dominant strand of research on the determinants of personal and party representation-seeking focuses on formal institutional factors. It examines how specific features of electoral systems – particularly candidate selection methods, ballot structure, district magnitude, and the electoral formula – shape the behavior of parties, politicians, and voters. These institutional elements determine the degree to which candidates depend on personal reputation or party label for reelection. Party representation reflects rules that allocate seats to parties and emphasize collective accountability, whereas personal representation arises when ballot structures enable voters to reward individual candidates (Colomer, 2011). Building on seminal works on the electoral connection (Mayhew, 1974) and the logic of personal and party vote-seeking (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Carey, 2007), parliamentary literature assumes that politicians are motivated by reelection and strategically balance party loyalty with personal appeals. Observational studies, often based on single-country data, show that where electoral systems grant stronger incentives to cultivate a personal vote, MPs engage more in constituency service, individualized parliamentary activity, and constituency-oriented communication (e.g., Chiru and Enyedi, 2015; Viganò, 2024; Bradbury and Mitchell, 2007; Papp and Zorigt, 2016; Schürmann and Stier, 2023). Experimental evidence also suggests that institutional settings that allow personal votes increase representatives' responsiveness to citizens' requests (Bol et al., 2021).

In a broader perspective, recent studies are shaped by debates over which electoral elements and contexts influence personal and party representation (e.g., André et al., 2015; Selb and Lutz, 2015; Fernandes et al., 2019) and how personal vote-seeking should be measured (e.g., Pedersen and Rahat, 2021; Wauters et al., 2021). Moreover, cross-national research reveals that institutional incentives interact with contextual factors such as party competition, electoral volatility, and voter partisanship. Once such differences are accounted for, shifts toward more personalized electoral rules often have modest behavioral effects (Tromborg and Larsen, 2025). Complementing this critique, Louwse and Otjes (2016) argue that personalized behavior can also occur without electoral incentives and instead be driven by party-controlled reselection and promotion. Other studies suggest that declining partisanship and weakening party brands encourage politicians to cultivate personal reputations independently of formal incentives (Däubler and Muineacháin, 2024; Fleming, 2022a). Similarly, Garzia et al. (2022) show that an increase in personalization over time has occurred primarily due to decline in party identification. Finally, surveys of legislators reveal that MPs' perceptions of personal versus party representation vary widely and are not always in line with theoretical expectations (André et al., 2016). These findings underscore that the

effects of electoral institutions on personal and party representation are contingent on broader political contexts.

Alongside institutional factors, MPs' socio-demographic characteristics have emerged as a dimension shaping legislative behavior and representation. Personal attributes such as gender, religious denomination, or migrant background influence MPs' policy stances and activity in parliament (Baumann et al., 2015a; Baumann et al., 2015b; Bäck et al., 2014; Bäck and Debus, 2020), driven both by MPs' own preferences and by parties' strategic use of social role expectations – selecting speakers who align with the issues their background is associated with in order to appeal to particular electorates. Gender represents a particularly salient dimension of legislative representation. Electoral incentives condition female MPs' representational choices differently than their male counterparts: female MPs are more likely to advocate for women's interests when reelection is secured through closed party lists or non-competitive districts (Höhmman, 2020), and increased speechmaking has been shown to harm female legislators' reselection prospects while benefiting men in closed-list systems (Yildirim et al., 2021). This asymmetry is embedded in a broader context shaped by gendered expectations, where agentic self-promotion and power-seeking behavior generate more negative evaluations for women than men (Okimoto and Brescoll, 2010; Schneider et al., 2022; Bauer, 2024), constraining the behavioral strategies female MPs can effectively pursue. These findings underscore that personal representation strategies are not uniformly available or equally effective across all MPs, but are moderated by individual characteristics that intersect with institutional contexts.

Parties' responses to MPs' behavior as gatekeepers of political office form an important link for both the causes and consequences of MPs' efforts at personal or party representation. Legislative effort has been shown to improve career prospects, including renomination and placement on electorally promising list positions, with selectors appearing to reward MPs according to how well they fulfill the tasks assigned to their group (Louwerse and Van Vonno, 2022; Yildirim et al., 2019; Papp and Russo, 2018). Some evidence suggests that MPs who attract personal votes are more likely to defect from the party line, implying that party leadership tolerates dissent from those contributing to electoral success (Tavits, 2009; Crisp et al., 2013), although another work finds that preference vote-elected MPs are no more likely to individualize their behavior or cast dissenting votes, and in fact face more restricted access to reelection and senior positions (Smrek, 2023). In mixed systems, parties show different expectations depending on MPs' mandate type, such as punishing dissent among closed list candidates while rewarding the levels of activity among district candidates (Schmuck and Hohendorf, 2023). Overall, parties balance rewarding personal reputations and enforcing party loyalty, resulting in observable, although context-dependent, responses to MPs' behavior (Dodeigne et al., 2019).

While extensive research has examined factors shaping politicians' behavior, less is known about the demand side of personalization, specifically, how voters

weigh individual politicians against parties and whether they reward personal vote-seeking efforts. Scholars distinguish between centralized personalization, centered on party leaders, and decentralized personalization, focused on individual politicians outside of leadership roles (Balmas et al., 2014). Most evidence concerns the former, indicating that voters' attention gravitates towards leaders rather than rank-and-file politicians (Van Holsteyn and Andeweg, 2010; Wauters et al., 2018). Comparative analyses across more than thirty democracies show that about one in five voters primarily base their choice on their preferred leader rather than party, though party attachments remain dominant (Quinlan and McAllister, 2022). Based on a broad cross-national longitudinal data, Garzia et al. (Garzia and Silva, 2021) show that it is specifically negative attitudes towards leaders of opposing parties that have increased in their effect on voters' choice over time, thus suggesting the need to differentiate between positive and negative personalization. Personalization also extends to turnout: evaluations of party leaders increase participation, particularly among citizens with television-dominated media diets (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021). On the role of media, Takens (2015) likewise notes that personalized media coverage leads voters to weigh leader evaluations more heavily in their vote decisions. Beyond leadership effects, evidence from Ireland's candidate-centered system shows that voters rely on party cues yet also respond to personal qualities (Marsh, 2007). Thus, the demand side literature is skewed towards centralized rather than decentralized personalization, providing opportunities for addressing the mechanisms linking rank-and-file politicians' efforts and voters' responses.

Existing research on the electoral payoffs of individualized legislative behavior suggests that politicians' efforts yield modest and context-dependent rewards. Analyses of private-member-bill activity provide the clearest evidence: in the UK's single-member plurality system, MPs introducing these bills gain small but statistically significant vote-share increases, particularly in marginal constituencies (Bowler, 2010). Similar effects appear both in Canada's plurality and Finland's open-list proportional systems (Loewen et al., 2014; Sevi and Green, 2025; Poyet, 2021), though their magnitude depends on party performance and electoral competitiveness. Beyond legislative activity, behaviors such as parliamentary questioning and speechmaking also appear to generate electoral gains (François and Navarro, 2019; Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier, 2019; Däubler et al., 2018). The effectiveness of personal vote-seeking has been shown to depend on voter partisanship: personalized efforts resonate most with weak partisans (Fleming, 2022b). When it comes to underlying mechanisms, voters may reward or overlook parliamentary work because individualized behaviors can enhance MPs' recognition, perceived representational fit, or integrity (Campbell et al., 2019). Taken together, these studies indicate that individualized parliamentary behavior offers modest and context-dependent but measurable electoral advantages.

To sum up, scholarship on personal and party representation has traced how institutional arrangements, MPs' strategies, and voter preferences jointly shape the balance between collective and individualized forms of democratic representation.

Existing work demonstrates that electoral rules influence MPs' incentives to pursue personal or party-centered strategies and that voters, to some extent, incorporate personal evaluations into their choices. Yet, despite these advances, important gaps remain. Most notably, the media dimension of representation – how politicians' behavior becomes visible and, consequently, relevant to voters, remains underdeveloped. New approaches drawing on large-scale behavioral and media data have begun to extend analysis beyond traditional indicators of personal vote-seeking such as private member bills. As such, studies of emotional expression, linguistic style, and digital communication illustrate how personalization unfolds through language and media interaction (Metz et al., 2020; Crisp et al., 2021; Casey, 2025; Huwyler et al., 2025). Integrating these perspectives would allow scholarship to capture personalization as a process spanning multiple arenas – parliamentary, media, and electoral – rather than as a single behavioral outcome.

2.2. The role of media for democratic representation

The media play a key role in informing citizens about political affairs and mediating representation between voters and politicians (Besley et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2008). As Strömbäck and Esser (2014, p. 4) put it, “no political actor or institution can afford not to take the media into consideration”. Extensive research demonstrates the political implications of media coverage, showing its influence on party and coalition preferences (Dewenter et al., 2019; Hopmann et al., 2010; Eberl and Plescia, 2018), perceptions of issue ownership (Tresch and Feddersen, 2019), and the success of far-right and populist actors (Walgrave and De Swert, 2004; Murphy and Devine, 2020). Media reporting has also been linked to shifts in public attitudes toward immigration and the European Union (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart, 2009; Foos and Bischof, 2022). While this scholarship has primarily focused on parties, leaders, and issue framing, it has paid far less attention to how ordinary legislators, who make up the bulk of democratic representation, gain and benefit from visibility in the media.

A central concern in this literature is that journalists act as gatekeepers and agenda-setters, shaping which political issues and actors gain public visibility and, ultimately, what voters can learn about politics (McCombs et al., 2018; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). As Tresch (2009) summarizes, media coverage may mirror political reality, follow general news values, or reflect editorial preferences. Of these, news values form the dominant framework, emphasizing competition for audience attention and a preference for stories that are emotional, conflict-driven, or focus on powerful individuals (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). Such selection criteria inherently privilege some political voices over others. Beyond the decision on which stories to cover, journalists also frame stories in particular ways, highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others (e.g., Entman, 2010). Hence, the media's democratic contribution lies in both providing information and shaping the scope and tone of political representation.

Visibility functions as a mechanism of accountability, as politicians who appear frequently in the news are more easily recognized and monitored by voters. However, access to media attention is not evenly distributed. Research indicates that certain factors systematically shape who receives coverage. Experience and leadership roles enhance a politician's visibility, as do the salience of issues they address and the electoral cycle timing (Irer and Ochieng, 2020; Tresch, 2009; Haselmayer et al., 2017; Green-Pedersen et al., 2017). Personal characteristics such as gender and personality traits also influence the likelihood of media attention (Lühiste and Banducci, 2016; Amsalem et al., 2020). Consequently, while visibility offers a channel for public monitoring, it also reproduces inequalities, shaping public perceptions and reinforcing existing hierarchies in political recognition.

Despite these biases, political actors can actively navigate media environments to increase visibility. Strategic behaviors such as issuing press releases or employing professional communication staff reflect the growing mediatization and professionalization of politics (Aelst et al., 2010; Ketelaars and Van Aelst, 2021). Under these conditions, political communication is increasingly guided by media logics, emphasizing newsworthiness and audience appeal alongside policy substance (Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009; Strömbäck, 2008). By shaping both the content and presentation of political messages, representatives can influence how responsiveness is performed and interpreted by voters. While media exposure clearly functions as a tool for managing public perception, gaps remain in our understanding of the mechanisms through which intentional visibility-seeking behaviors actually translate into media coverage.

From the voters' perspective, the media are crucial for political learning and accountability. Yet, we know that many citizens possess limited political literacy and interest (Lupia, 2016). In this light, research demonstrates that media exposure can improve awareness and preference formation: factual information can shift party support (Fowler and Margolis, 2014), and politically knowledgeable citizens seek more targeted information about candidates (Bernhard and Freeder, 2020). Exposure to political coverage also enhances candidates' name recognition required to make meaningful electoral choices (Gattermann and De Vreese, 2017). Experimental evidence shows that when voters receive policy information, they choose candidates closer to their preferences and rely less on demographic cues (Quoß et al., 2024). Studies from lower-income democracies find that information campaigns increase electoral turnout and reduce malpractice (Pande, 2011). However, because media and voters are both selective in how they produce and process information, media exposure can also amplify existing biases rather than correcting them, underscoring the need to better understand how information environments shape accountability.

Despite extensive research on media effects, important gaps remain in understanding how visibility operates at the level of individual legislators and how it connects to democratic accountability. Existing studies have predominantly focused on parties, leaders, and elections, overlooking how rank-and-file politicians

navigate and are shaped by media attention outside campaign periods. While scholarship has illuminated the biases that affect who gains coverage, we know less about how politicians' communication styles interact with journalistic news values to generate visibility. Likewise, while media exposure is known to shape public awareness and preferences, its role in prompting citizens' political learning and evaluation of individual representatives remains underexplored. Addressing these gaps is crucial for understanding how media logic affects the visibility, evaluation, and recognition of political actors beyond high-profile contexts. Developing such understanding will enrich theories of personalization and mediatization by linking the communicative behavior of politicians, the selection practices of journalists, and the responses of citizens.

2.3. The politics of parliamentary speech: vote- and visibility-seeking perspectives

Parliamentary speechmaking has emerged as a valuable source of data for understanding political behavior and representation (Fernandes et al., 2021) due to recent advances in data availability and computational methods for text analysis. In a broader perspective, parliamentary scholars distinguish speech as activity (e.g., who speaks and how often), speech as measurement (e.g., inferring ideological stances from text), and speech as content (e.g., policy issues) (Goplerud, 2021). Treating speech as activity, researchers look at the frequency of speaking (Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier, 2019; Yildirim et al., 2021) or who is granted access to the floor (Bäck et al., 2014; Bäck et al., 2019; Imre and Ecker, 2025; Mickler et al., 2025; Van Kleef et al., 2024). As measurement, speeches are used to estimate party positions (Proksch and Slapin, 2010) and intra-party heterogeneity (Schwarz et al., 2017). As content, parliamentary speech offers insights into political agenda and discussed policy issues (Greene and Cross, 2017), appeals to social groups (Licht and Szczepanski, 2025), government-opposition dynamics (Karlsson et al., 2024). Beyond substantive content, scholars have looked at characteristics such as the sentiment and emotionality of speaking (Osnabrügge et al., 2021; Gennaro and Ash, 2022; Poljak, 2024; Yildirim, 2025), complexity of speech (Lin and Osnabrügge, 2018; Bischof and Senninger, 2018; Kittel, 2025; Hjorth, 2025), gendered rhetoric (Wäckerle and Castanho Silva, 2023), pronoun choice (Slapin and Kirkland, 2020; Vuković, 2012), or the concreteness of speaking (Khokhlova, 2025).

Theoretical approaches underpinning this broad variety of empirical indicators usually focus on how parliamentary speech reflects inter-party competition and intra-party dynamics. A central question in the latter regard is whether parliamentary speech can serve as indicators of personal vote-seeking strategies, given that parties exercise considerable control over access to the parliamentary floor. This gatekeeping role suggests that speeches could function as instruments of party cohesion rather than platforms for individual expression. Yet, as Proksch and Slapin (2012; 2014) argue in their intra-party model of parliamentary speech,

both the allocation of floor time and the degree of party unity are shaped by institutional and electoral incentives, aligning with the broader literature that links parliamentary behavior to electoral systems rewarding personal votes (Carey and Shugart, 1995). In such contexts, speech constitutes a low-cost arena for MPs to signal individuality and responsiveness while maintaining party discipline in other venues such as roll-call voting. Recent research extends this logic by examining how MPs speak rather than what they say, as attention to stylistic choices such as emotionality or rhetoric can reveal MPs' attempts to cultivate personal visibility and distinctiveness even under tight agenda control. Thus, the style of speaking emerges as a meaningful dimension of intra-party competition.

It is increasingly assumed that parliamentary speech is strategically oriented toward external audiences such as journalists and voters (Laver, 2021). Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that MPs adjust their rhetoric to changing communication environments and audience incentives. Historically, the expansion of suffrage in the United Kingdom encouraged ministers to simplify their language to reach a broader electorate (Spirling, 2016). Gennaro and Ash (2022) further demonstrate that emotionality in U.S. congressional speeches has increased markedly with the rise of television. Likewise, Nieminen et al. (2024) show that when parliamentary proceedings became televised in Finland, MPs increased attendance. Osnabrügge et al. (2021) find that MPs use more emotive language during high-profile debates likely to attract journalistic attention. Beyond media, Hjorth (2025) shows that governing responsibilities make MPs employ more complex rhetoric, whereas Poljak (2023) finds that negativity in parliamentary speech intensifies as MPs' party approval declines. Taken together, these studies trace a consistent pattern: as audiences widen and media exposure becomes more consequential, parliamentary speech increasingly reflects strategic adaptation to visibility incentives, raising questions on how MPs balance strategic visibility with representative responsibilities.

If MPs aim to speak beyond the walls of parliament, the question of whether the media and the broader public pay attention to their speeches appears. Equally important is how biases embedded in news values shape the coverage of parliamentary activity and, consequently, what voters learn about their representatives. Addressing such questions with methodological rigor requires extensive media data, which makes research in this area challenging. Nevertheless, some existing studies suggest a link between parliamentary speechmaking and media visibility. Yildirim et al. (2023) find that MPs who speak more frequently in parliament tend to receive greater media coverage, particularly senior and coalition MPs. Poljak (2024) shows that MPs using negative rhetoric are more likely to appear in television news, and once they gain coverage, they continue employing negativity, illustrating how media's preference for negativity further amplifies politicians' use of it. Beyond the media, Imoto (2025) documents that MPs receive substantially more attention via online sources when they speak in parliament, especially when using simpler, more negative language. Despite these valuable insights, research

remains limited to a handful of contexts and narrow indicators of visibility, leaving open questions about which types of speeches and under which conditions attract coverage.

As in legislative scholarship more broadly, research on parliamentary speech has focused more on its electoral causes rather than its consequences. Yet, understanding whether and how speechmaking influences electoral outcomes remains an important question for linking parliamentary behavior with representation. Existing studies are scarce and offer mixed evidence. Marcinkiewicz (2019) finds that MPs who speak more frequently in parliament tend to perform better electorally, suggesting that visibility in the legislative arena can strengthen personal support. In contrast, Imoto (2025) shows that while parliamentary speaking increases online searches about MPs, this attention does not translate into electoral gains. Hjorth (2025) provides experimental evidence that voters do not find more complex speech appealing, which could partially explain why government parties that are pressured to use more complex language typically lose electoral support. While limited in scope, these findings provide important signs of the consequences of parliamentary speechmaking for accountability mechanisms, prompting further examination of which aspects of speechmaking, under what conditions, and through which channels, translate into voter support.

Computational analysis of parliamentary speech has rapidly expanded the empirical frontier of legislative research. Despite growing evidence that rhetorical style adapts to media and electoral incentives, we know relatively little about how these adaptations translate into tangible political outcomes such as media visibility, public recognition, or electoral performance. Bridging theories of personal vote-seeking, mediatization, and political communication could clarify when parliamentary speaking signals strategic self-promotion versus party-driven coordination. Integrating these perspectives would allow the scholarship to explain more fully how parliamentary speech functions simultaneously as an instrument of representation, a medium of visibility, and a communicative channel linking politicians and voters.

Together, the theoretical discussion provided here underscores that the study of representation increasingly extends into the communication and media domains through which political behavior becomes visible to citizens. Because citizens largely perceive politics through the media, politicians' ability to communicate effectively in this environment has become a central determinant of how representation operates in practice. In this context, the content and style of parliamentary speech shape how representatives are portrayed and recognized in the media and can also influence their standing with voters, linking rhetorical behavior inside parliament to electoral outcomes outside it.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND CASE DESCRIPTION

3.1. Overview of methodology

The dissertation poses three complementary research questions related to the interplay between different arenas of representation, which are addressed correspondingly in the three articles. Article I taps into the connection between political personalization in the parliamentary and media arenas and asks: How does the amount and particularly the style of parliamentary speechmaking impact the media visibility of MPs? Article II examines the connection between the focus of speaking in parliament and electoral benefits: How does self- and we-referential parliamentary speech impact MPs' prospects during the reselection and reelection processes? Finally, Article III connects MPs' media visibility and voters' interest in them: Does the media visibility of MPs lead to online information-seeking about them? What is the role of policy context and sentiment of media texts?

The dissertation is a large-N study based on data from a single country. Single case studies are often viewed as less robust than comparative designs, which are traditionally seen as providing stronger grounds for generalization and broader theoretical insights. However, this perception overlooks the distinctive strengths of single case research. By concentrating on one country or context, researchers can explore complex connections, causal mechanisms, and context-specific dynamics that are often obscured in multi-case or cross-national analyses. The depth and granularity of a single case approach enable a richer understanding of processes that may be too nuanced or data-intensive to capture comparatively. This is particularly relevant in recent computational studies, where the vast scope and complexity of available data make it more practical, and often more illuminating, to focus intensively on a single case rather than to sacrifice depth for breadth. Nonetheless, the trade-off remains that findings from single case studies may have limited generalization. At the same time, the dissertation adopts a theory-driven approach to hypothesis development, allowing for generalizable insights to inform broader debates on representation.

In terms of time frame, each article covers two-three recent parliamentary terms in Estonia (2011-2019 for Article I, 2011-2023 for Article II, and 2015-2023 for Article III). This period includes multiple national elections and stable institutional conditions, providing sufficient temporal and behavioral variation to examine visibility and accountability dynamics. Articles I and III employ MP-day observations, allowing fine-grained analysis of the short-term responsiveness between parliamentary speech, media coverage, and online attention. Article II uses MP-term observations, which aligns with the slower rhythm of reselection and electoral processes.

In contemporary social science research, computer-assisted methods for data collection and analysis have fundamentally transformed the potential scope of research questions available to scholars. As such, researchers of computational social

science can draw on national parliamentary debates spanning decades, digitized newspaper repositories, and massive media data. Beyond traditional media and institutional records, digital trace data, such as search engine or website viewership traffic, broaden the methodological toolkit by offering user-generated insights into political behavior. As a contribution to computational strands of political science research, the dissertation draws on transcripts of parliamentary speeches and online archives of media outlets, pairing these textual data with electoral statistics and MP- and party-related information. All data used in this dissertation have been gathered from publicly available sources, such as the websites of the Estonian Parliament, Estonian National Electoral Committee or media outlets, with the use of manual or automated data collection techniques. These include:

1. Parliamentary speech transcripts, accessed via the official search interface.
2. Media data from the online archives of Postimees, Eesti Päevaleht/Delfi, Õhtuleht, and the public broadcaster ERR.
3. Electoral and MP-level data from the Estonian National Electoral Committee, parliamentary application programming interface (API), and official party registry, providing information on MPs' demographics, experience, and party affiliation.
4. Digital trace data on MPs' Wikipedia page traffic, collected via the pageviews R package (Keyes and Lewis, 2020).

The core methodological approach of the dissertation is the computational analysis of large-scale textual data. Automated text analysis methods encompass a rich variety of techniques, the essence of which is treating *text as data* as opposed to *text as text* (Benoit, 2020). Such techniques allow for systematic quantification of linguistic patterns that would be impossible to code manually at scale. Three families of text analysis techniques are employed throughout the dissertation. First, dictionary-based methods (Articles I and II) use predefined word lists (e.g., sentiment or pronoun use) to count word frequencies in specific categories. Second, complexity measures (Article I) assess linguistic sophistication through metrics such as average word or sentence length, lexical diversity, and readability indices (e.g., Flesch–Kincaid). Third, pre-trained transformer models for sentiment and topic classification (Article III) leverage large-scale unsupervised language modeling to learn contextual representations of text, which can then be fine-tuned on specific datasets, resulting in substantial performance gains over traditional text analysis approaches. In all articles, the validation of computational measures combined quantitative and qualitative checks.

Altogether, key concepts were captured in the following way:

1. Parliamentary speech characteristics: total words spoken, Flesch reading ease score, sentiment, and the proportion of first-person singular (“I”) and plural (“we”) pronouns and verbs, computed using EstNLTK Python library (Laur et al., 2020).

2. MPs' media visibility: the number of online news articles mentioning each MP's full name.
3. Sentiment and topics of media articles: EstBERT (Tanvir et al., 2021) (positive, negative, neutral) and ManifestoBERTa (56 topic scheme) (Lehmann et al., 2024).
4. Electoral outcomes: MPs' individual vote share (logit-transformed), open list leadership (binary), and closed list rank (rescaled 0–1).
5. Online information seeking: daily Wikipedia page views of MPs.

To estimate associations between parliamentary behavior, media visibility, and electoral outcomes, the dissertation uses a range of regression models selected to match data structure and inference goals. These include OLS, logit, and negative binomial models, supplemented by fixed effects and clustered standard errors to account for unobserved heterogeneity and within-unit correlation. Across all analyses, the emphasis is on identifying the direction, magnitude, and robustness of relationships rather than making causal claims beyond what observational data permit. Limitations such as potential endogeneity and measurement noise are acknowledged and mitigated through model choice, temporal ordering, and validation procedures.

3.2. Estonian context

This dissertation uses Estonia as its empirical setting. Estonia represents a theoretically and empirically valuable case for studying how parliamentary behavior, media visibility, and citizen engagement intersect in contemporary democracies. Three features make Estonia particularly suitable for the research questions posed in this dissertation. First, Estonia's open-list electoral system provides incentives for personal representation while retaining party-centered features, making it an acceptable setting for analyzing MPs' personal representation from various angles. Second, Estonia is one of the world's most digitally advanced societies, offering compelling opportunities to observe how political information travels through online environments. Third, Estonia provides rich, high-quality, and easily accessible digital data on parliamentary speech, media coverage, and online information-seeking that are rarely available with similar completeness in comparative contexts. In addition, Estonia remains under-researched relative to Western European parliamentary democracies, allowing this dissertation to expand the geographic and institutional scope of parliamentary and communication research.

The Estonian parliament (*Riigikogu*) consists of 101 members elected for a four-year term through a proportional representation system that combines open and closed list elements. The country is divided into 12 multi-member districts, where voters cast a single vote for an individual candidate on a district party list or for an independent (Riigikogu, 2017). Seat allocation occurs in three stages, producing three types of mandates: personal, district, and compensatory. Personal mandates

are awarded to candidates who meet the district's simple quota (typically 9–14% of seats), while district mandates (about two-thirds of all seats) go to those with the highest individual votes among parties surpassing the 5% national threshold. Remaining seats are filled as compensatory mandates based on national party vote shares and distributed according to candidate rank on closed national lists.

When it comes to candidate selection, as Aylott (2014) highlights, party statutes exhibit a notable degree of ambiguity regarding these processes, which gives party leaders considerable flexibility to adapt their strategies for particular elections. Typically, Estonian parties do not impose strict formal requirements for candidacy, such as mandatory party membership, which broadens the pool of potential candidates. The nomination process is primarily managed by party committees, who consider the preferences and strategic priorities of both national and regional leadership. These committees are also responsible for determining the ranking of candidates on district and national lists, a factor that can significantly influence electoral outcomes. In the framework of Rahat and Hazan (2001), the candidate selection procedures in Estonia can be classified as moderately exclusive, reflecting a substantial degree of party leadership influence over both access to candidacy and placement on ballots (Pettai et al., 2005).

With such settings, Estonia's electoral rules provide mixed incentives for cultivating a personal vote. On the one hand, success in obtaining personal or district mandates depends heavily on individual popularity and campaign visibility, driving candidates to seek personal recognition. On the other, party leaders retain substantial influence over candidate ranking, creating incentives for loyalty to party elites. Thus, candidates balance between emphasizing their personal appeal and maintaining favorable relations within their party. Empirical studies confirm that those with local political experience or higher campaign spending tend to perform better electorally (Tavits, 2009; Trumm, 2016). Earlier studies have also shown that the type of mandate matters for parliamentary behavior: those elected solely through personal votes are more active in individualized parliamentary activities (Solvak, 2013), whereas those elected under conditions in which personal votes are less central become less active as the size of their electoral district increases (Solvak and Pajala, 2016). As a result, Estonian politicians operate within a dual incentive system that rewards both individualized behavior and party reputation.

Between 2011 and 2023, Estonia's political landscape saw shifts in party competition and coalition dynamics. During the 12th Riigikogu (2011–2015), four parties held seats: the liberal Reform Party, the centrist Centre Party, the national-conservative Isamaa (then Pro Patria and Res Publica Union), and the Social Democrats. Reform led the government in coalition first with Isamaa and later with the Social Democrats. The 2015 election brought two new parties into parliament – notably, the far-right populist EKRE and the centrist Free Party, expanding representation to six parties. Reform initially led the government, but in 2016, a coalition of the Centre Party, Isamaa, and the Social Democrats took office. In the 2019–2023 term, five parties were represented and three different governments

took office. Although Reform won the election, Centre first formed a coalition with Isamaa and EKRE. Reform's Kaja Kallas later became prime minister, leading a coalition with the Centre Party, and then with Isamaa and the Social Democrats after a government reshuffle in 2022.

Parliamentary activity in Estonia is organized around spring and autumn sessions, with work conducted through permanent and temporary committees, typically chaired by governing coalition members, with opposition MPs as deputies. Party groups, formed along electoral lists, structure parliamentary work, and MPs cannot join another group once they leave. Floor access is partly hierarchical: during the first and third readings of bills, only designated committee or party representatives speak, while during second readings, "free microphone" sessions, and interpellations, all MPs may participate. Speaking time is allocated to ensure group representation, although committee chairs, opposition MPs, and MPs with strong personal mandates are more active speakers (Sikk and Vinkel, 2021). Compared cross-nationally, Estonia falls in the "intermediate" group for individual versus party-controlled floor access (Bäck et al., 2021, p. 828). This dissertation analyzes speeches from all session types. Such an approach captures communication across both more restricted and more open settings. However, this means the results aggregate across contexts where MPs have varying autonomy over access to the floor and the substantive content of speeches.

Estonia's media system is pluralistic and professionalized, reflecting the Nordic model on which its institutions were originally based (Lauristin and Hansson, 2019). The country consistently ranks among the highest in press freedom globally (Reporters Without Borders, 2022a). A mix of public and private outlets provides a diverse, though somewhat concentrated, media landscape, where market pressures coexist with strong journalistic norms (Reporters Without Borders, 2022b).

In terms of citizens' use of the Internet, Estonia stands out as one of the most digitally advanced societies in the world, characterized by a comprehensive e-governance system and high levels of online engagement. By 2023, 93.2% of households had internet access, 98% of tax declarations were filed online, and over half (51%) of all parliamentary votes were cast on the internet (Statistics Estonia, 2023; E-Estonia, 2023; ERR News, 2023).

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Table 1 presents the key results of the empirical analyses covered in this dissertation. The contribution of each article is summarized below.

Table 1: Overview of research articles

Research question	Data and methods	Key findings
Article I: How does the amount and style of parliamentary speechmaking impact media visibility of MPs?	All transcripts of parliamentary speeches from the Estonian Parliament, 2011–2019 All online media content from four largest newspapers, 2011–2019 Computational text analysis + regression analysis	MPs who speak more in parliament receive greater media visibility on a day-to-day basis. The style of speech also matters: rank-and-file MPs attract more coverage when they use more negative, complex, and self- and we-referential language.
Article II: How does self- and we-referential parliamentary speech impact MPs’ prospects during the reselection and reelection processes? Additionally, what is the moderating role of gender?	All transcripts of parliamentary speeches from the Estonian Parliament, 2011–2023 Electoral statistics on MPs Computational text analysis + regression analysis	Self-referential speech benefits prominent female MPs in personal votes and open list placement but harms rank-and-file women. We-referential speech also benefits prominent female MPs in closed list placement. Male MPs’ prospects are largely unaffected by self-references, but the effect of we-referential speech varies by leadership roles.
Article III: Does the media visibility of MPs lead to online information-seeking about them? What is the role of policy context and sentiment of media texts?	All online content from four largest newspapers, 2015–2023 MPs’ Wikipedia page views statistics Computational text analysis (BERT-based sentiment and topic modeling) + regression analysis	Media coverage increases same-day online information-seeking about MPs. Negative news generates stronger search than positive or neutral coverage, especially for external relations and political system domains. The effect is dependent also on the interaction between the policy context and MPs’ party affiliation.

4.1. Article I: Parliamentary speech and media visibility

Article I examines the relationship between parliamentary speech and media attention in Estonia between 2011 and 2019, analyzing how the amount and, particularly, the style of speech delivered by members of parliament influence their visibility in the news. The article is situated within the broader framework of political

personalization, focusing on how politicians seek individual recognition in a media-driven environment. By connecting what MPs do in the parliamentary arena with how the media covers them, the study contributes to understanding the interplay between parliamentary behavior and media coverage of politics, and democratic representation in a broader perspective.

Theoretically, the article combines institutional perspectives on legislative behavior with communication theories on media visibility. It conceptualizes parliamentary speaking primarily not as a policymaking activity but rather as an opportunity that MPs can use strategically to attract journalistic attention. Further, the article theorizes that journalists select parliamentary speech according to news values that prioritize certain aspects of speech. Specifically, negativity, linguistic simplicity, and pronoun choice in parliamentary speech are expected to increase MPs' media visibility by aligning with journalists' preference for person-oriented, comprehensible, and negative content. Negative language is expected to attract attention due to its inherent news value and audience appeal, signaling conflict and drama. Simple, accessible speech enhances newsworthiness by ensuring comprehensibility for a broader public. Finally, the frequent use of singular first-person pronouns personalizes political communication, highlighting individual agency and, potentially, party dissent, all of which appeal to media logic. Thus, two broader expectations were tested: 1) quantity matters – MPs who speak more should receive more media coverage; and 2) style matters – certain speech features such as negative tone, linguistic simplicity, and the use of singular pronouns detected in parliamentary speeches should be more newsworthy and therefore more likely to translate into media mentions of MPs.

Empirically, the article relies on an original dataset that merges all floor transcripts from two Estonian parliamentary terms (2011–2015 and 2015–2019) with a comprehensive corpus of approximately 2.7 million online media articles from four major national outlets: Postimees, Eesti Päevaleht/Delfi, Õhtuleht, and ERR. The dataset is structured as a daily panel at the MP level, combining detailed linguistic measures of speech, including frequency, sentiment, complexity, and the use of first-person singular and plural pronouns with corresponding counts of media mentions. Text processing was conducted using the EstNLTK Python library (Laur et al., 2020), applying dictionary-based sentiment detection from the Estonian Valence Dictionary (Pajupuu et al., 2016) and automated parsing for pronoun and verb forms. The data were standardized within parliamentary days to account for topic variation. Media visibility was operationalized as daily counts of articles mentioning MPs by full name, with attention to name variations. To test the expectations, regression models with MP and party fixed effects, estimated using negative binomial specifications, were used. Overall, this approach enables a fine-grained, temporally sensitive analysis of how speech style impacts media visibility of MPs.

The core empirical findings are threefold and underscore how both the quantity and style of parliamentary speech shape MPs' media visibility. First, speaking

in parliament has a clear positive association with media attention: MPs who speak at all receive more coverage than those who remain silent, and the more they speak, the greater their media presence. Temporally, the relationship between speech and media coverage is most pronounced on the same day, reflecting rapid online news dynamics. Second, speech style matters, particularly for rank-and-file MPs. The media is more likely to report on MPs whose language is more negative in tone, linguistically complex, and self- and we-referential. It is worth noting that the positive effects for complex and we-referential speech run counter to initial expectations. This suggests that journalists may privilege articulate or party-oriented voices as markers of credibility and expertise. Third, these stylistic effects are strongest for rank-and-file MPs, whereas leaders and committee chairs gain less from the rhetoric of speaking.

4.2. Article II: Parliamentary speech and electoral performance

Article II examines the electoral consequences of pronominal choice in parliamentary speechmaking. Using Estonia as a case, it investigates how individual (the use of “I”) and collective (the use of “we”) language in speeches connects to MPs’ reelection and reselection outcomes. The study addresses the underexplored question of whether personal- or party-vote seeking behavior in parliament, shaped by electoral incentives, eventually produces electoral rewards. Estonia’s electoral system that combines open lists in districts with a nationwide closed list enables an examination of both voter and party responses to personal and collective forms of speech. By focusing on how linguistic self-emphasis interacts with institutional incentives and social norms, the article provides a new lens on the complex chain linking parliamentary behavior, party selection, and electoral outcomes.

The research draws on two main theoretical foundations. First, it builds on the literature on electoral incentives for personal versus party representation (Carey and Shugart, 1995), positing that institutional rules shape MPs’ strategic behavior. Second, it incorporates role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) to account for gendered expectations in political communication, distinguishing agentic (self-oriented) from communal (group-oriented) behavior. The theoretical section discusses that MPs’ choice of pronouns in speeches signals whether they are emphasizing individual or collective orientation, and these signals consequently shape both party leaders’ placement decisions in terms of open and closed lists as well as voters’ support. From the voters’ perspective, self-referential speech signals credit-claiming, individualized behavior, and contributes to name recognition, which are expected to boost MPs’ personal image. On the party leadership side, self-referential language is expected to earn MPs high open-list positions as it signals personal-vote earning attributes, and such MPs are expected to bring in votes for the party. In contrast, we-referential speech shows party cohesion and group-oriented behavior that are necessary in the context of parliamentary democracies, and such behavior is expected to be rewarded with safer closed-list

placements that are based on the overall party vote. Furthermore, gendered perceptions and norms are expected to moderate these effects: agentic expression may benefit men or prominent women but harm rank-and-file female MPs.

Empirically, the article tests these expectations using a comprehensive dataset covering all parliamentary transcripts from three Estonian legislative terms (2011–2023), matched with electoral results and candidate list data. The full corpus of parliamentary speeches was processed computationally with the use of text-as-data methods, employing the EstNLTK toolkit (Laur et al., 2020) to calculate the proportion of self- and we-referential pronouns and corresponding verb forms. These measures were first aggregated daily and then averaged per parliamentary term. For the dependent variables that capture electoral outcomes, the analyses consider three complementary indicators reflecting both voter and party evaluations: 1) the individual share of district votes, logit-transformed to address skewness; 2) being placed first on the open district list; and 3) ranking on the closed national list, rescaled between 0 and 1 to ensure directional comparability. Ordinary least squares and logistic regression models were employed to estimate the association between self- and we-referential parliamentary speech and subsequent electoral performance, while controlling for MP prominence, media visibility, demographic characteristics, and coalition membership.

The results reveal nuanced patterns. Self-referential language benefits prominent female MPs by increasing their personal votes and likelihood of leading open district lists, indicating that agentic speech benefits women already established in leadership. However, for rank-and-file female MPs, self-referential speech has the opposite effect, reducing prospects of open-list leadership and electoral success, consistent with role congruity expectations. Male MPs' outcomes are largely unaffected by self-reference: prominent men gain from less we-referential speech, while rank-and-file men benefit from more communal language. Parties, in turn, reward we-referential female leaders with higher placement on closed lists, suggesting that collective rhetoric signals party loyalty valued in candidate selection. The findings thus underscore the gender-conditioned nature of rhetorical strategies and their varied effects across parliamentary roles. In addition, the analysis shows that MPs' media visibility is positively associated with votes and open-list leadership, but negatively with closed list position, highlighting the benefit of greater public visibility for candidate-centered electoral consequences.

4.3. Article III: Media coverage and citizens' information-seeking

Article III investigates how the media visibility of members of parliament (MPs) influences citizens' online information-seeking behavior. Focusing on Estonia between 2015 and 2023, it examines whether and how MPs' appearances in daily news coverage prompt individuals to seek additional information about them on Wikipedia. By considering media coverage both as a source of political knowl-

edge and as a trigger for further engagement, the article provides insight into the mechanisms through which media visibility can shape democratic accountability.

The study builds on scholarship on media effects and information-seeking behavior, drawing on insights from political communication and psychology. It argues that MPs' appearances in the news function as cues that prompt citizens to seek further information about political actors. Building on theories of negativity bias and motivated reasoning, the study expects that negatively framed coverage generates stronger information-seeking responses, as such content is more emotionally salient, attention-grabbing, and perceived as relevant. At the same time, issue salience theory suggests that the effect of media coverage depends on the policy context: coverage of economic issues should stimulate searches when it diverges from party expectations, whereas socio-cultural topics, due to their inherent uncertainty and emotive resonance, are likely to elicit broader attention across partisan lines. Based on these theoretical expectations, the article tests three main hypotheses: (H1) MPs' appearances in the media increase online information-seeking about them; (H2) negatively framed media coverage of MPs prompts stronger information-seeking than positive or neutral coverage; and (H3) the effect of media appearances varies across policy domains, with economic coverage generating more searches when it deviates from party positions (H3a) and socio-cultural coverage prompting searches regardless of ideological alignment (H3b).

Empirically, the study leverages a large-scale dataset combining media coverage and digital traces of information-seeking to test the proposed hypotheses. It includes approximately 140,000 articles mentioning MPs from the full archives of Estonia's four major online news outlets between 2015 and 2023, paired with MPs' daily Wikipedia page view statistics as a measure of voters' online information-seeking. The media data are analyzed using pre-trained transformer models: an XLM-RoBERTa manifestoberta model classifies the policy topics of each article into 56 categories, later aggregated into policy domains, and a fine-tuned EstBERT model classifies article sentiment as positive, neutral, or negative. The media data are matched with daily Wikipedia views to detect the effects of media visibility on information-seeking, controlling for MP characteristics such as party affiliation, leadership roles, age, and gender. By combining high-granularity media data with precise behavioral measures, the study advances methodological approaches for linking media content, sentiment, and policy context to citizens' engagement with political information.

The results provide empirical support for the study's hypotheses, albeit mixed for the policy congruence hypotheses. Temporal analyses indicate that MPs' media visibility is positively associated with same-day information-seeking, as measured by Wikipedia pageviews, confirming H1. Analyses of sentiment show that negatively framed media appearances generate stronger information-seeking responses than positive or neutral coverage, supporting H2 and highlighting the role of negativity as a salient news value that engages citizens. The larger impact of

negative sentiment relative to positive or neutral, however, varies across the policy domains and is most evident for external relations and political system. Finally, the impact of visibility varies across policy contexts and interacts with party affiliation. In the economic domain, media coverage that is ideologically incongruent with an MP's party profile, particularly right-wing economic content for MPs from more left-leaning parties, elicits higher levels of information-seeking. Similarly, in the socio-cultural domain, appearances in more conservative content for MPs from more culturally progressive parties prompt stronger information-seeking, while the impact of progressive coverage remains consistent across the ideological profiles. Overall, the results hold across multiple fixed-effects specifications, suggesting robustness to controls for MP characteristics, party affiliation, leadership roles, and electoral timing.

4.4. Connecting the arenas

The three articles form a chain that traces how parliamentary speechmaking ultimately shapes electoral accountability. While each article addresses a distinct research question, they share theoretical foundations and build on each other's findings in ways that reveal the broader architecture of the politics–media–voter relationship. This chain is assumed to operate as follows: certain speaking styles attract media attention (Article I), media coverage increases voter learning about MPs (Article III), and through this pathway parliamentary communication becomes electorally consequential (Article II). This logic requires all three links to hold simultaneously – and the empirical evidence supports each while revealing important caveats at every stage.

Article I establishes the foundational mechanism of the dissertation: that parliamentary speech affects how much media coverage individual MPs receive, and that certain styles of speaking, particularly more negative, complex, and self- and we-referential speech, increase media visibility of rank-and-file MPs. This demonstrates that MPs have strategic tools for cultivating the media visibility that Article II assumes to be necessary for electoral effects. Article III then asks what consequences that media visibility has for voters, confirming the second assumption of the chain: media coverage triggers information-seeking behavior, connecting MPs' parliamentary performance to citizens' political learning, with media functioning as the critical intermediary. Article II closes the loop by examining whether speechmaking ultimately translates into electoral rewards, and its findings on electoral consequences can be interpreted as operating through this theorized pathway.

Yet the findings across Articles I and II produce a nuanced and sometimes counterintuitive picture, particularly regarding the effects of pronominal choice on media visibility and electoral outcomes. For rank-and-file female MPs, the media visibility pathway identified in Article I should be activated by self-referential speech, yet Article II shows this same behavior reduces their chances of leading an open district list – suggesting that party leadership may not value the visibility

it produces for female MPs. For rank-and-file men, increased media visibility from self-referential speech yields neither gains nor penalties electorally. For prominent female MPs, electoral benefits from self-referential speech appear to operate independently of the media pathway, as Article I finds speech style irrelevant for leaders' coverage. Article I's finding that we-referential speech also boosts visibility for rank-and-file MPs similarly helps explain why communal speaking improves open list placement for rank-and-file men in Article II. This gendered asymmetry implies that the media visibility pathway does not deliver uniform returns – the value of visibility depends on who is visible and in what light, a dimension further reinforced by Article III's finding that negatively framed coverage is disproportionately attention-grabbing.

Finally, it is worth situating the empirical findings of this dissertation against closely related work, some of which appeared while it was being completed. On parliamentary speech and media visibility, Yildirim et al. (2023) similarly find, using monthly data from the UK and Norway, that MPs who speak more frequently receive greater media coverage, though this effect is concentrated among senior and coalition MPs. On negativity, Poljak (2024) likewise shows that Belgian MPs using negative rhetoric in question time are more likely to appear in same-day television news. Regarding the media-to-voter pathway, a working paper by Yildirim and Thesen (2024) based on six Western European countries (including Norway and the UK – the countries covered by their parliament-media study mentioned above) confirms that MPs who appear in the media are searched more frequently on Google, but finds no effect of negativity on search intensity – a result that diverges from the findings of Article III. This discrepancy may reflect methodological differences, as Yildirim and Thesen rely on monthly aggregates and measure negativity with different tools, or it may reflect country-specific dynamics, given that the Estonian context includes the parliamentary entry of a far-right populist party, which may heighten the salience of negative coverage in ways less present in the older Western European democracies they examine. Notably, their results also show that the association between media visibility and search popularity is stronger for female and ethnic minority MPs, suggesting that voters may be particularly motivated to seek information about underrepresented groups when they appear in the news. This finding resonates with Article II by showing that the consequences of media visibility are not uniform across gender, and raises the question of whether the visibility generated by certain speaking styles documented in Article I carries different informational value for voters depending on who the MP is.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. The accountability chain reconsidered

Democratic representation requires politicians who translate citizens' preferences into action, journalists who provide fair coverage of political behavior, and voters who are sufficiently interested and knowledgeable to make informed electoral decisions. This dissertation sheds light on some of these foundations by examining how they interconnect in practice. Altogether, the dissertation reveals a complex picture: the chain of accountability exists and functions in important ways, but it is mediated by journalistic gatekeeping, moderated by social norms (particularly around gender), and shaped by the choices MPs make about how to communicate.

Returning to the principal-agent framework introduced at the outset, the findings offer some good news about the informational foundations of democratic accountability. The core challenge for delegation and accountability is information asymmetry: voters cannot directly observe their representatives' behavior and must rely on intermediaries to learn about them. For the sanctioning mechanism of accountability to function, two conditions must be met: media coverage must translate parliamentary work into public visibility, and citizens must engage with that information when it reaches them. The present dissertation provides direct empirical evidence that both conditions hold. MPs' parliamentary speech is measurably connected to same-day media coverage, demonstrating that the parliamentary floor – the central arena of democratic representation – is not invisible to the public sphere. Equally, citizens respond to media coverage by actively seeking additional information about MPs, challenging narratives of widespread voter apathy and suggesting that mainstream journalism can function as a gateway to political engagement. The connection between parliamentary speech and electoral outcomes further demonstrates that accountability mechanisms do, in principle, function across the full chain. Parliamentary speech is recognized and responded to by both party leadership and voters, and the dissertation documents multiple pathways through which this occurs: via open-list vote shares, closed-list placement, and open-list leadership positions. Thus, parliamentary work is not disconnected from electoral accountability even under the demanding conditions of mediated political communication.

However, whether some of the patterns revealed by the dissertation are normatively desirable becomes less clear when examining the asymmetries captured in the findings. This dissertation demonstrates that role congruity theory, used to explain evaluative penalties for women who display agentic behavior, extends to parliamentary communication and the consequences of personal vote-seeking. Communicative behaviors that signal individual agency and credit-claiming, theorized as tools for cultivating personal visibility and electoral support, do not operate uniformly across the legislature: their electoral consequences are conditioned by gender and hierarchical position in ways that institutional accounts of personal

representation do not anticipate. This asymmetry reveals a fundamental tension between institutional incentives and social norms. Estonia's open-list electoral system creates formal opportunities for all MPs to benefit from personal reputation, but informal gender expectations constrain who can successfully employ which strategies, meaning that institutionally available pathways to personal representation are not equally accessible in practice. This dissertation therefore invites broader reflection on what personal representation requires and who can deliver it. Personal representation is valued precisely because it creates tighter accountability links between individual MPs and voters, enables diverse interests to be represented within parties, and makes individual legislative contributions more publicly visible. If exercising personal representation effectively requires MPs to emphasize individual contributions and distinguish themselves from collective party messaging, but this behavior is penalized for rank-and-file female MPs unless they have already achieved prominence, then the pool of legislators capable of engaging fully in personal representation is unnecessarily restricted along gender lines – and with it, the overall quality and diversity of democratic representation.

A further finding with implications for both mediatization theory and democratic representation is that media coverage does not simply mirror parliamentary reality by proportionally reflecting MPs' speaking activity. Instead, this dissertation shows that journalists selectively amplify certain types of speech – negative, linguistically complex, and more individually or collectively referential – demonstrating that the media operates as an active filter rather than a neutral relay between parliament and the public. This contributes to mediatization theory by specifying how media logic operates within legislatures. The implications for representation are contradictory. On the one hand, this filtering can counteract institutional hierarchies: rank-and-file MPs, not only those in leadership positions who already command visibility, can leverage rhetorical adaptation to reach the public sphere. The finding that, in the Estonian context, linguistic complexity attracts coverage may also offer some defense against oversimplification and populist appeals in political communication (Bischof and Senninger, 2018; Decadri and Boussalis, 2020). On the other hand, the prominence of negativity as a selection criterion risks distorting the informational content of political coverage, systematically privileging conflictual and critical messaging over consensus-building or substantive policy discussion, and shaping what voters learn about their legislators accordingly.

The role of negativity documented in this dissertation merits particular attention. From one perspective, journalists' greater coverage of MPs who use negative language may serve the media's watchdog function. Critical voices and oppositional stances deserve amplification to ensure that power is scrutinized. Similarly, if negative coverage triggers increased information-seeking, this may signal healthy democratic engagement. For instance, the existence of clear differentiation between political parties, reflected through the sentiment used in the news, can improve citizens' satisfaction with democracy (Ridge, 2022). However, the dominance of negativity in shaping both media visibility and voter attention raises concerns

about the incentive structures governing political communication. If negativity consistently outperforms positive or neutral messages, MPs face strong incentives to adopt conflictual or attack-oriented rhetoric regardless of whether this serves substantive deliberative purposes. This could lead to a spiral where increasingly negative political communication becomes necessary to break through the noise (e.g., Poljak, 2024). If the negativity rewarded by media coverage and voter attention consists primarily of personal attacks or uncivil disagreement rather than substantive policy criticism, the implications for democratic discourse, political participation, and trust are potentially troubling (Brooks and Geer, 2007; Mutz and Reeves, 2005).

In summary, the dissertation supports the claim that democratic accountability in mediated political systems is present but filtered. The pathway from parliamentary work to electoral consequence exists, but this pathway operates through a sequence of selection processes, each governed by its own logic. Journalists select according to news values that privilege certain styles of speaking; citizens respond more strongly to coverage that is emotionally salient or ideologically surprising; and parties and voters evaluate identical communicative behavior differently depending on gender and role. The result is not that accountability fails, but that it is differentially accessible – some MPs are better positioned than others to translate parliamentary work into public recognition and electoral reward, and this positioning is determined at least partially by their capacity to navigate these accumulated filters. This is a more pessimistic picture than democratic theories typically assume, but also a more precise one: it locates the sources of accountability failure not in voter apathy or media biases alone, but in the interaction between journalistic selection, voter response, and social evaluation.

5.2. Generalization

How specific are these results to Estonia in 2011-2023? The temporal and cross-national generalizability of these findings depends on which mechanisms and contextual features are considered. Looking backward in time, the core mechanisms linking parliamentary behavior to media visibility and electoral outcomes likely operated in Estonia before 2011, though with important differences. The electoral system has remained essentially unchanged since 1992, meaning institutional incentives for personal representation have been stable. However, the earlier re-independence period featured weaker party institutionalization and less mature media professionalization, potentially altering how these mechanisms manifested. The media and online information-seeking connections documented in Article III reflect digital affordances that simply did not exist before the early/mid-2000s, though the underlying motivation to seek information about politicians likely operated through different channels.

Cross-nationally, the strongest generalizability likely applies to electoral systems that combine proportional representation with opportunities for voters to

express candidate preferences. Several specific institutional features matter for whether the mechanisms identified here can be theorized to operate similarly. Ballot structure permitting candidate choice is crucial: in systems where voters can select individual candidates from party lists (open or flexible lists), MPs face incentives to cultivate personal visibility that should activate the parliamentary speech-media-voter attention chain documented here. The strength of these incentives varies with how much candidate preferences affect outcomes – systems with mandatory preferential voting create stronger incentives than optional preference systems, while fully flexible lists create even stronger pressures than partially open lists. District magnitude shapes whether individual MPs can realistically gain sufficient media visibility: in small-to-medium magnitude districts, the number of viable candidates remains manageable for voters and media, while very large districts or single nationwide constituencies may concentrate coverage on party leaders. The relationship between list placement and personal votes also matters: pure open-list systems make voter attention most directly consequential, flexible-list systems require navigating both party and voter evaluation, while compensatory mechanisms create mixed incentives. In closed-list PR systems, the direct media-voter-electoral connection would not operate, though media visibility might still matter for party selectors and careers outside of parliaments. Mixed-member systems present intermediate cases where mechanisms should apply most strongly to constituency-elected MPs. Single-member district systems create strong personal vote incentives but lack the intra-party competition dynamic central to these findings.

Beyond institutional factors, country size and media landscape characteristics likely moderate mechanism strength. Estonia's small population and parliament size means that national media can reasonably cover most MPs occasionally. In larger democracies with hundreds of MPs, rank-and-file legislators may face much higher barriers to media visibility. Additionally, Estonia's concentrated media ownership differs from countries with more fragmented and ideologically segmented news ecosystems. As research has documented gender penalties for agentic political behavior across diverse contexts, the gender mechanisms are likely to operate broadly, but contextual factors related to women's representation in politics and gender equality can matter. The negativity findings should have broad applicability given psychological foundations of negativity bias and widespread journalistic news values prioritizing conflict. However, strength may vary with political culture; for instance, consensus-oriented systems might respond differently to negative rhetoric.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the valuable contributions of this dissertation, several limitations are worth discussing. Although the analyses for Articles I and III incorporate temporal sequencing between speech and media attention, and media visibility and

information-seeking, observational data cannot fully rule out endogeneity. Unobserved factors such as campaign activity or social media presence may simultaneously shape speechmaking, visibility, and electoral results. Addressing these limitations requires complementary experimental designs that can isolate causal mechanisms more precisely. Nevertheless, the presence of consistent associations across multiple stages of the accountability chain, grounded in established theoretical frameworks, strengthens the plausibility of the mechanisms identified in the articles.

The articles analyze all parliamentary speeches without distinguishing between session types, though speaking patterns and their consequences may vary across contexts. As shown in other studies (Karlsson et al., 2024; Osnabrügge et al., 2021), depending on session type, MPs may adopt different rhetorical strategies and parties may hold different expectations. Voters' learning depends partly on which sessions receive media coverage, and if journalists selectively cover certain session types, aggregating across all speeches may obscure context-specific dynamics. For instance, negative rhetoric during high-profile debates may serve different strategic purposes and carry different consequences than negativity during other types of sessions. Similarly, self-referential speech during high-profile debates with extensive media coverage may have different visibility and electoral effects than identical language use in more technical proceedings. It is worth exploring how speaking style effects vary across session types to better understand when and how strategic speech translates into visibility and electoral rewards.

The measurement approaches also involve important trade-offs. Automated text analysis enables comprehensive coverage of all speeches and articles but introduces measurement error that manual coding might avoid. Sentiment classification and topic categorization, while relying on validated models with reasonable accuracy for the Estonian language, cannot capture all the nuances of political communication. For instance, these methods do not distinguish constructive criticism from personal attacks, which may have consequences for the media and voters. The pronoun-based measure of personalization captures only one dimension of individualized behavior – linguistic self-emphasis – while MPs can also distinguish themselves through other means including policy positions or constituency service. Thus, whether the effects documented here extend to other forms of personalization remains unexplored.

The research focuses on traditional media and parliamentary communication, leaving aside social media's rapidly evolving role in politics. While mainstream media remain central to agenda-setting and reaching broad audiences, online platforms provide direct channels where MPs can communicate without journalistic filtering. Social media may amplify or counteract traditional patterns: MPs who struggle to gain mainstream coverage might build followings online, or social media presence might enhance the newsworthiness that attracts traditional media attention. Whether the rhetorical styles effective for gaining traditional media coverage also succeed on social media, and whether MPs adopt consistent communication

strategies across platforms or tailor their approaches to different audiences (e.g., Silva and Proksch, 2021), can merit more attention in this context. Future research examining how MPs navigate multiple communication arenas simultaneously would provide a more complete picture of contemporary political representation in modern democracies.

Finally, the substantive policy consequences of the patterns presented here can constitute an important direction for research. For instance, if negative speech attracts media coverage and voter attention but incentivizes conflict over compromise, this could have implications for legislative effectiveness and policy outcomes. Does the media visibility gained through strategic communication translate into policy influence, or do MPs who prioritize visibility-seeking behaviors become less effective at advancing legislation? The gender asymmetry in personal representation may also translate into differences in policy influence or substantive representation of women's interests. Understanding whether the communication strategies that produce electoral success also facilitate or hinder policy achievement would provide important insight into representation quality beyond electoral accountability.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Riigikogu liikmete sõnavõtude, meediakajastuse ja valimistulemuste seosed

Kaasaegsetes demokraatias sõltub edu poliitikas sellest, kuidas poliitikud suudavad oma valijatele meeldida. Selleks, et valitsejate vastutus tõhusalt toimiks, peavad poliitikud oma tegemisi valijatele edasi andma ning viimastel peab olema juurdepääs sellele infole usaldusväärsel ja arusaadaval kujul. Enamasti ei jälgi kodanikud aga poliitilisi institutsioone otse, vaid tuginevad meedia kaudu kättesaadavale teabele. Varasemad uurimused näitavad, et see, kes saab meedias nähtavaks ja kuidas poliitikuid selle põhjal hinnatakse, sõltub sellest, kuidas seadusandjad suhtlevad, kuidas ajakirjanikud valivad edastatavaid poliitilisi signaale ning kuidas avalikkus reageerib. Sellisest uuest teadmisesest hoolimata uuritakse ülaltoodud parlamendi-, meedia- ja valimisareenil toimuvaid protsesse tavapäraselt üksteisest eraldiseisvalt. Käesolev doktoritöö ühendab need valdkonnad, luues tervikliku ülevaate esindatuse kujunemisest ühe riigi kontekstis. Tuginedes Eestist aastatel 2011–2023 kogutud ainulaadselt üksikasjalikele ja laiaulatuslikele andmetele, uuritakse väitekirjas esindatuse kolme aspekti, seostades parlamendiliikmete sõnavõtte parlamendis, pälvitavat meedia tähelepanu ning eelmise kahe mõju valimistulemustele ja valijate huvile poliitikute vastu.

Teoreetiliselt tugineb väitekirja mitmele parlamentaarse käitumise ja kommunikatsiooni uurimissuunale, panustades ka ise teoreetilisse debatti. Klassikalised parlamendiga seotud uurimused on väitnud, et parlamendiliikmeid motiveerib tagasivalimine ja nad käituvad strateegiliselt, kasvatades isiklikku või partei profiili sõltuvalt sellest, kes kontrollib tagasivalimist. Juhul kui poliitik on motiveeritud valimistel isiklikku häälatesaaki suurendama, peaks parlamendiliikmete tegevus parlamendis olema suunatud oma isikliku maine loomisele ning nähtavuse ja tunnustuse saavutamisele avalikkuses. Uuemates uurimustes on kasutatud üha kättesaadavamaks muutuvaid suurandmeid istungite protokollidest ning tava- ja sotsiaalmeediast, et neid väiteid ja tingimusi süstemaatiliselt hinnata. Käesolev doktoritöö panustab otseselt neisse debattidesse teemadel nagu milliseid parlamentaarse kommunikatsiooni mustreid võib käsitleda isikliku häälte kogumise eesmärgil toimuvaks, kui suur on hääli ja nähtavust suurendava käitumise tõhusus, ja kuidas parlamendi töö üldiselt seostub valitsemisvastutuse ja esindatuse mehhanismidega. Kommunikatsiooniuringute seisukohalt panustab väitekirja uurimustesse, mis käsitlevad poliitikute meedias nähtavust määravaid tegureid ning selle nähtavuse tagajärgi, keskendudes iseäranis parteide reaaliikmetest parlamendiliikmetele, kes on harva olnud eelnevate uurimuste fookuses.

Kokkuvõttes uurib see kolmel artiklil põhinev väitekirja demokraatlikku esindatust ja selle vahendamise mehhanisme, põimides parlamendikäitumise-, valimispoliitika- ja meediakommunikatsioonialased uurimused. Esimeses artiklis uuritakse, kuidas parlamendis tehtud sõnavõtude arv ja stiil on seotud

parlamendiliikmete nähtavusega meedias – viimane on oluline, sest valijad saavad sel moel teada parlamendiliikmete tegevuse ja seisukohtade kohta. Uurimuse aluseks on teooria, et ajakirjanikud seavad sõnavõttude tähtsuse järjekorda vastavalt nende uudisväärtusele, ning et parlamendi liikmed saavad strateegilise keelekasutuse kaudu endale tähelepanu tõmmata. Teises artiklis analüüsitakse, kas enesele või kollektiivile viitamine parlamendi sõnavõttudes toob tagasisivalimise kontekstis parteide ja valijate poolt kaasa tunnustuse või sanktsioone, pakkudes olulist sissevaadet isiklike ja parteile hääli püüdva käitumise tagajärgedest. Individuaalne tunnustuse taotlemine võrreldes parteikeskse käitumisega, mida väljendab asesõnade valik, omab teoreetiliselt erinevat mõju tagasisivalimise ja uuesti kandidaadiks seadmise tulemustele. Need erisused on seotud isikliku ja partei kuvandiga, kuid neid vahendavad ka soolised normid. Lõpuks keskendub kolmas artikkel sellele, kas ja milline parlamendiliikmete meediakajastus ajendab inimesi otsima nende kohta lisateavet Vikipeediast, kinnitades seeläbi meedia rolli selles, kuidas valijad oma esindajate kohta teavet saavad. Lisaks meediatähelepanu mahule eeldatakse, et negatiivne ja ideoloogiliselt vastuoluline kajastus tekitab negatiivsuse kalduvuse (negativity bias) ja motiveeritud arutluse (motivated reasoning) tõttu tugevama ajendi lisainformatsiooni otsimiseks.

Nende küsimuste uurimiseks tugineb väitekiri Eesti näitele, mis on teoreetiliselt ja empiiriliselt väärtuslik juhtum uurimaks, kuidas rahvaesindajate käitumine parlamendis, nähtavus meedias ning kodanike kaasatus tänapäeva demokraatiates ristuvad. Kolm tunnust muudavad Eesti juhtumi käesolevas väitekirjas tõstatatud küsimuste uurimiseks eriti sobivaks. Esiteks pakub Eesti avatud nimekirjadega valimissüsteem stiimuleid isikupõhiseks esindamiseks, säilitades samal ajal parteikesksed jooned, mistõttu on see sobiv keskkond parlamendiliikmete isikupõhise esindamise analüüsimiseks erinevatest vaatenurkadest. Teiseks on Eesti üks maailma digitaalselt arenenumaid ühiskondi, pakkudes huvitavaid võimalusi poliitilise teabe levimise jälgimiseks veebikeskkonnas. Kolmandaks pakub Eesti rikkalikku, kvaliteetset ja kergesti kättesaadavat digitaalandmestikku parlamendi sõnavõttude, meediakajastuse ja internetis teabe otsimise kohta, mida on võrdlevas kontekstis harva võimalik sama täielikkusega leida. Ehkki empiiriline uurimistöö disain põhineb ühe riigi juhtumile, võimaldavad teooriapõhised hüpoteesid ja läbipaistvad mõõtmismeetodid tõlgendada tulemusi laiemates aruteludes poliitilise esindatuse, nähtavuse ja valitsemisvastutuse teemadel.

Metodoloogiliselt kasutab väitekiri laia valikut allikaid alates parlamendiistungite stenogrammidest ja veebimeedia arhiividest, valimisstatistika ja digitaalsete jäljeandmeteni. Analüüsi eripäraks on päevapõhiste andmete kasutamine, mis tagab suurema ajalise täpsuse võrreldes varasemate uurimustega, mis tuginevad tavaliselt nädala- või kuupõhiste koondandmetele. Parlamendi sõnavõttude tekstiandmeid ja nähtavust meedias analüüsitakse arvutuslikult, võimaldades põhinäitajate üksikasjalikku ja järjepidevat mõtmist. Kasutatakse kolme tekstianalüüsi lähenemist: sõnastikupõhised meetodid sentimendi ja asesõnade kasutamise mõõtmiseks, lingvistilise keerukuse mõõdikuid nagu loetavuse indeksid, ning eel-

treenitud transformer-mudelid teemade ja sentimendi klassifitseerimiseks. Need tekstilised mõõdikud kombineeritakse seejärel parlamendiliikmete ja erakondade tasandi tunnustega ning seotakse tulemustega, sealhulgas meedianähtavuse, valimistulemuste ja veebipõhise teabeotsinguga Vikipeedias. Nende seoste uurimiseks kasutatakse väitekirjas tulemuste tüübile sobivaid regressioonimudeleid, sealhulgas lineaarseid, logit- ja negatiivse binoomjaotuse spetsifikatsioone, koos fikseeritud efektide ja klasterdatud standardvigadega, võtmaks arvesse varjatud heterogeensust (unobservable heterogeneity) ja üksusesisest korrelatsiooni.

Empiiriline analüüs annab kolme sorti tulemusi. Esiteks, I artikli põhjal on parlamendi sõnavõtude arv ja stiil seotud parlamendiliikmete esinemisega meedias. Täpsemalt on parlamendis sõna võtmine positiivses korrelatsioonis parlamendiliikmete kajastamisega sama päeva uudistes. Lisaks sellele pälvivad negatiivsemad, keeleliselt keerukamad ja rohkem viiteid enesele („mina”) või rühmale („meie”) sisaldavad sõnavõttud ajakirjanike suurema tähelepanu, iseäranis parlamendi reaaliikmetele. Seega toimib kõnestiil juhtrollidest kõrvale jäänud parlamendiliikmete jaoks nähtavuse suurendamise vahendina.

Teiseks on II artikli analüüsi põhjal parlamendi sõnavõttud seotud ka järgmiste valimiste tulemustega, kuid viisil, mis peegeldab soolisi arusaamu individualiseeritud ja kollektiivsest kõnest. Enesele viitav kõne on seotud silmapaistvate naissoost parlamendiliikmete individuaalse hääletesaagi ja paigutusega avatud nimekirjas, kuid parlamendi reaaliikmetest naiste jaoks toob selline kõnestiil kaasa negatiivseid tagajärgi avatud nimekirja paigutamisel. Seevastu kogukondlik käitumine, mis väljendub „meie“ kõnes, aitab tuntud naisi suletud parteinimekirja kontekstis, kuid kahjustab tuntud mehi.

Kolmandaks, III artikli põhjal näitavad tulemused, et parlamendiliikmete nähtavus meedias suurendab avalikkuse huvi nende vastu, mis kajastub teabeotsingu mustrites internetis. Lisaks meedianähtavuse üldisele mahule tekitavad negatiivsed uudised tugevama otsinguhuvi kui positiivne või neutraalne kajastus, eriti välissuhete ja (sise)poliitilise süsteemi teemade puhul. Nähtavus mõjutab parlamendiliikmeid erinevalt sõltuvalt poliitikavaldkonnast ja partei ideoloogiast: ideoloogiliselt vastuoluline mediakajastus, näiteks parempoolse majandusliku või konservatiivse sotsiaalkultuurilise sisuga lood, milles esinevad vasakpoolsed või progressiivsed parlamendiliikmed, suurendab teabeotsingu aktiivsust. Seega joonistub tulemuste põhjal üldpilt, milles seadusandjate ja ajakirjanike poliitilise kommunikatsiooni stiil ja retoorika omavad jälgitavaid ja omavahel seotud tagajärgi meie arusaamale demokraatlikust esindatusest ja vastutusest.

Normatiivsest vaatenurgast näitavad tulemused nii Eesti esindusdemokraatia toimimise tugevusi kui ka pingeid, mis ulatuvad kaugemale käesolevast juhtumist. Ühelt poolt viitavad tulemused sellele, et parlamenditöö võib üle kanduda meedianähtavuseks ja avalikkuse kaasatuseks, osutades, et vastutuse mehhanismid jäävad aktiivseks ka meedia poolt vahendatud poliitilises keskkonnas. Mediakajastus võib suurendada kodanike huvi üksikute rahvaesindajate vastu, luues võimalusi õppimiseks ja hindamiseks. Teisalt on protsess osaliselt valikuline ja kallutatud.

Negatiivsus mängib keskset rolli nii meedia tähelepanu äratamisel kui ka kodanike kaasamisel, potentsiaalselt süvendades konfliktsete suhtlemisviiside eelistamist kaasavatele aruteludele. Lisaks toovad erinevused selles, kuidas hinnatakse kõnesteile erinevate poliitiliste ja sooliste rollide kontekstis, esile ebavõrdse mõju isikute nähtavuse ja võimaliku valimiskasu osas. Need mustrid viitavad poliitika meediastumisega seotud laiematele riskidele, sealhulgas afektiivse polariseerumise tugevnemisele ja valitsemisvastutuse surve ebahütlasele jaotumisele. Seega viitab väitekeri, et meedia vahendatud esindatus võib ühtaegu suurendada reageerimisvõimet kui ka moonutada demokraatlikku võrdsust, rõhutades vajadust kaaluda, kuidas poliitiline konkurents peegeldub kommunikatsioonikanalites ja -praktikates, mis ühendavad esindajaid, meediat ja kodanikke demokraatia toimimise hindamisel.

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Publikatsioonid

Lupacheva, Tatiana ja Mölder, Martin (2024). A Place to Speak and be Heard? Parliamentary speech and media attention in Estonia, 2011–2019. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 49(4), 905–924.
Lupacheva, Tatiana (2026). No I in team? Parties’ and voters’ gendered response to pronominal choice in parliamentary speechmaking in Estonia. *East European Politics*, 42(1), 171–194.

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