



Making Identity Count: Estonia 2020¹

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June 19, 2025 (10,526)

Introduction

The year 2020 in Estonian politics and society, like elsewhere around the world, was dominated by the COVID crisis, which, especially during the spring and autumn of the year, set the tone for much of public debate. The domestic political situation was fraught with diverse issues as the governmental coalition was struggling with public/elite opposition to the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE), a populist party that was included in the governing coalition following the 2019 elections. Concurrently, Estonia achieved a foreign policy milestone, serving a term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. In the context of the COVID crisis, Estonia's economy did see a 2.5% downturn (Bank of Estonia 2025), but, overall, the government handled the crisis well as the following years demonstrated Estonia's swift recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

The current report examines the construction of Estonian national identity in 2020. Drawing from a dataset of 2294 coded references to aspects of what constitutes being Estonian from political speeches, newspapers, letters to editors, films, novels, and history textbooks, the analysis reveals a public sphere characterized by distinct patterns of discourse distribution: elite sources monopolize discussions of politics, international relations, and formal national identity construction with predominantly positive valences while mass sources set the tone for this discourse around social structure, gender roles, and everyday life experiences with more critical and ambivalent emotional tones. The context of the pandemic provides a unique lens for examining how crisis conditions define discursive divisions, with elite sources framing government responses positively while mass discourse, conversely, expresses more scepticism and criticism. The analysis identifies five major thematic clusters – Politics/Economy, Social Structure, Estonianness, Historical Others, and Significant Others. The categories Education and Estonian language emerge as rare points of convergence between elite and mass discourse.

1. Text selection and classification of sources

For the 2020 archive (see 'Sources' below for a comprehensive list of sources), the sample of leadership speeches included the Independence Day Speech of President Kersti Kaljulaid (24 February 2020) and a speech by Prime Minister Jüri Ratas regarding the COVID-19 situation in Estonia. In 2020, the daily papers with highest circulation numbers were *Õhtuleht* with 38,500 and *Postimees* 34,700 (Meedialiit).

For 'opinion-editorials', we scanned for identity-related content in all opinion articles, as well as articles by editors and journalists, from the issues of the 15th of every month² from *Õhtuleht* and *Postimees* as well. As a result, 138 op-ed articles were selected (47 from *Õhtuleht* and 91 from *Postimees*) with 680 initial codes (139 from *Õhtuleht* and 541 from *Postimees*), of which 569 codings were included in the final matrix based on the list of most prominent categories.

¹ This national identity report was completed as part of the *Making Identity Count (MIC) Estonia* project (PRG1052 – *National Identity and Estonian-Russian Relations: A Longitudinal Study of Elite and Mass Discourses*). The sampled material was coded using the standard MIC procedure (Allan 2016). The full collection of MIC Estonia national identity reports is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/108183>.

² If newspaper was not published on the 15th of the month, the issue of the 16th (or the issue closest to the 15th) was selected.

The sample included letters from readers published in the same newspapers during the entire year. In total, 226 letters were scanned (130 from *Õhtuleht* and 96 from *Postimees*), resulting in 574 codes (294 from *Õhtuleht* and 280 from *Postimees*), of which 510 codings were included in the final list of most prominent categories.

For films, we selected the most watched Estonian-produced film for 2020 – “Where the Heart Is” [“Talve”], directed by Ergo Kuld and the most popular film from previous year, Tanel Toom’s “Truth and Justice” [“Tõde ja õigus”]. “Where the Heart Is” was released in February 2020 and was watched by 151,137 people (Estonian Film Institute 2020). “Truth and Justice” was released in February 2019, became with just four weeks of screening the most watched film since Estonia regained independence in 1991 and reached an overall cinema attendance of 267,588 by the end of 2019 (Estonian Film Institute 2019). In 2020, “Truth and Justice” received Estonian Film and Television Awards in seven categories including best feature film, best screenplay, and best film director.

The overall sales numbers for novels by Estonian authors were unusually low in 2020: not because of the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, but because most famous authors did not publish novels during that year. We selected the two most sold novels – “Girlful” [“Tüdrukune”] by Eia Uus (2658 copies sold) and “Of Woodfolk and Barkfolk” [“Puulased ja tohtlased”] by Andrus Kivirähk (1370 copies sold) (Estonian Publishers Association). Besides sales, the novels chosen addressed highly contemporary social and political controversies: “Girlful” addressed the themes of gender relations, the challenges women face in a masculine society, and taboos related to gender and sex; “Of Woodfolk and Barkfolk” was a humorous folklore fantasy dealing with Estonian nationalism and ‘true Estonians’ since the restoration of independence in the beginning of 1990s.

The sample of Estonian history textbooks for secondary schools was limited to the most recent books available (Vahtre and Laar 2013; Piirimäe *et al.* 2015) for that calendar year. Both textbooks dealt with a period of Estonian history from the period of the Duchy of Estonia (1561-1721) – also referred to as the period of Swedish rule – until the 20th century.

2. Raw identity categories

We calculated the percentages normalized by genres to show the relative prominence of raw codes within genres. The categories with average prominence below 1.05% were eliminated, which resulted in a list of 33 categories and 2,294 codings. Table 1 (at the end of the report) lists the raw counts of top identity categories by genre for 2020. Table 2 presents the topography of identity categories based on valences (+ for positive and aspirational, - for negative and aversive, ~ for ambiguous, and / for neutral).³ The identity categories were sorted into five groups: **Politics/Economy**, **Social Structure**, **Estonianness**, **Historical Others**, and **Significant Others**. The following analysis will first give an overview of the distribution of valence symbols in the topography of identity categories, which in turn give an indication of where a particular discourse and its emotional centre of gravity are located. Thereafter, the current section will focus on a description of the five aforementioned groups and their content.

In terms of how the valence evaluations were distributed across the genres or, to some extent even, the overall mass-elite divide, there is one particular pattern that is visible from the outset: there is a notable concentration with some genres over-represented and others empty. The

³ If a type of valence given to a code (e.g., independent “+”) occurred in proportion more than 1% within all code-valence pairs (where code “independent” with other valences have their own score) in a given genre (e.g., political speeches), then in Table 2 one symbol of valence was attributed to the related category. The number of valence symbols followed the scale: 1.0–2.0 (1 symbol); 2.0–5.0 (2 symbols); 5.0–7.5 (3 symbols); 7.5–10.0 (4 symbols); above 10.0 (5 symbols).

highest number of valence symbols (but not the highest when one looks at just emotional valence symbols) was recorded for the category of **gender roles and identity** (32), which appeared almost exclusively in mass (or popular) discourse, i.e., in novels, movies, and letters. In addition, as mentioned above, the higher count in novels was due to the particular subject matter of one of the novels chosen. **Politics**, on the other hand, which addressed the day-to-day issues related to statecraft, received the second highest count (29) of valence symbols (and the highest if solely looking at affective categories) and appears in both elite and mass discourses, but not in all genres. It is missing (almost by definition) from textbooks and from movies as well. In general, speeches and newspapers tend to follow a similar distribution of valence symbols in terms of overall counts across the categories, and textbooks and movies also stand out with a particular distribution that is not echoed in other genres. This dynamic reflects the fact that both movies for the year in question were also reflecting historical subject matter.

The two most numerous groups of identity categories were **Social Structure** (834 codes) and **Politics/Economy** (823 codes), and with **Estonianness** (349 codes) trailing far behind. Mentions of other countries either in the historical (214) or in the contemporary (74) sense were much less frequent among the categories that were included in the final analysis.

Politics/Economy

This group contains 10 coding categories that address matters related to the state and society, including the economic activities of companies and individuals. Overall, this group is much more prevalent in elite discourse (554 codes) than in mass discourse (269 codes), although there are also particular codes like **politics** and **education** which receive attention across this divide.

Politics is clearly a divisive topic, which contains references to politician's activities in parliament and the government and evaluations of the functioning of the Estonian state (predominantly on the national, but to some extent on the local level as well). While in politicians' speeches this category is treated in a predominantly positive fashion, negative emotions in relation to this category are more prominent in newspapers and letters. Within this category, there are clear hints of concerns about the governing coalition that was in power at that time, which contained the populist Estonian Conservative People's Party in addition to the Centre Party and Fatherland, which is especially evident in letters and op-eds. The latter also contain criticism of the other side of the political spectrum. These quotes reveal concerns about democratic institutions, government accountability, and political culture spanning from the local to national levels. One dominant theme is institutional breakdown and political irresponsibility. The quotes also capture widespread citizen disillusionment: "The time when politicians are not responsible for anything has already lasted too long" (Tõnspöeg, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04260}).⁴ There was also a particular concern about Estonia's drift away from its image as a poster-child democracy, which was paired with warnings about the perils of following Hungary's path and undermining democratic norms through crisis exploitation and attacks on institutional politics.

Education, in contrast, is almost exclusively a positive topic across almost all elite and mass genres. The only genre in which it is absent is in political speeches, but this is likely a function of source selection. Education and the importance of education in 2020, like before and like after, has occupied a noticeable position within the Estonian political agenda. This category is placed under that of **Politics/Economy** because most of the discourse around education was related to the role of the state in this process. The quotes here span from classical literature depicting the value of literacy to contemporary debates about teaching methods, from historical

⁴ References indicate to the original source (can be found in lists of 'Sources' and 'References' below) and, in braces ({...}) the code ID used in the coding table (stored in the National Identity Database).

accounts of Estonia's educational foundations to modern concerns about digital learning and teacher shortages. A key theme is the tension between educational ideals and practical challenges, which was captured in quotes such as, "In a free Estonia, we need educated people" (Kivirähk, 2020, p. 27; {2020_N_KIVI_00240}), and the contemporary concern that "The salt of the earth, those are the teachers. How to defuse the ticking time-bomb of our basic education, the average age of teachers approaching retirement age?" (Hektor, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04690}). The quotes also reveal Estonia's proud educational heritage, noting how, "According to the 1897 census, the level of education in Estonia was higher than in any other region of the Russian Empire: 95% of the population could read and 78% could write" (Piirimäe *et al.* 2015, p. 114; {2020_T_PIIR_02480}), while simultaneously expressing modern anxieties about maintaining the quality of education and adapting to technological change.

A separate category that is also closely related to politics, but which was kept as a distinct category, is related to the COVID crisis (**COVID reactions**). This was due to that the fact that government reactions to this crisis especially coloured this category, but it also contained references to societal unity and the role of the civil society in overcoming the crisis. This is a discourse that is most prominent in politicians' speeches and has there a clearly positive valence. To a lesser degree, this can also be viewed in op-eds and letters to the editor, but it has a much more nuanced connotation or even constitutes a negative discourse in these genres. The quotes capture everything from individual experiences of lockdowns and mask-wearing to government policy decisions and public compliance with health restrictions. A dominant theme is the tension between the necessity of provisioning public health and personal freedom, illustrated by contrasting attitudes such as, "Let's take these few basic steps to make us all safer" (Tõnis, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00550}) contraposed against the resistance exemplified by, "Look at the fool! With a mask?! Everybody is saying that they are of no use." (Signe, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01830}). These quotes also reveal broader concerns about the competence of the government and the effectiveness of its crisis communication with criticism that "Concerning the government and those who give scientific advice, there is not a single epidemic practitioner among them." (Strandberg, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04390}), while simultaneously documenting Estonia's relatively measured response compared to other European countries during the pandemic.

Two other coding categories that set the tone in this class and especially in politicians' speeches were the **economy** and **international relations**. Both are categories that held strong positive valences. Politicians' speeches, as well as newspapers (op-eds), reflect an explicitly positive outlook on Estonia's economic perspectives. These quotes in **economy** focus on economic challenges, industrial development, and the tension between traditional and modern economic structures in Estonia. The passages span from historical accounts of 19th-century industrial growth to contemporary concerns about energy policy, labour conditions, and economic competitiveness. A central theme is the ongoing economic transition and its human costs, epitomized in quotes such as, "You can make an effort, but there is no point. Prices go up so quickly. I only see the children on public holidays or during holidays, because otherwise I'm just busy working" (Oskar, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00260}), and "According to Kristi, her salary is barely enough to pay her taxes and put food on the table" (Kristi, 2020: {2020_L_OHTU_02360}). The quotes also reveal debates about Estonia's economic future, particularly regarding energy independence and innovation. It should be noted that there was also one coding category that reflected in an almost exclusively positive sense, Estonia's IT sector and reputation, but this was present only in elite media discourse and thus remained below the threshold of selection.

International relations is a category that is mostly just present in political speeches and underscores Estonia's positive role interstate politics, the importance of allies, and international cooperation. These quotes explore Estonia's membership in NATO and the European Union, its historical trading relationships, and contemporary foreign policy challenges. A key theme is the positioning of Estonia as a small but strategically important nation that has earned international trust and recognition is exemplified by quotes such as "During these almost 29 years, trust has been built up towards us. Last year, the countries of the world jointly decided that Estonia deserves the highest possible level of trust" (Kaljulaid, 2020; {2020_S_KALJ_00280}) and "16 years in the European Union have changed the standard of living of the Estonian people and belonging to NATO has increased the sense of security" (Vään, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04140}). The quotes also reflect the challenges of being a small state that must be "especially fast, open, and smart because we have no other competitive advantages over other countries" (Altoaar, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00590}) while maintaining a delicate balance between international commitments and national sovereignty in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

The rest of the categories in this class – civic society, law and justice, defense/military, environment/climate, and work – have much lower relative importance and are present in only a few of the genres. In textbooks, **civil society** is closely related to the national awakening category in the group Estonianness and reflects the role of the Estonian civil society in establishing Estonia's independence. In letters, inversely, this is reflected in contemporary perception of the importance of civic initiative, a sense of social and collective responsibility, and the importance of cooperation. A central theme is the strength of Estonian communities and their capacity for collective action, exemplified by quotes such as, "At the same time, Estonian communities are strong, caring and cooperative associations of free and culturally aware people" (Nurmoja, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01620}), and the touching story of a stranger paying someone's bill: "Kaido Höövelson took out his wallet and said that he would pay my bill; he didn't even ask how much it was" (Pitimirov, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01980}).

The category of **law and justice** appears in movies and op-eds, and a common theme among the instances of this category is a tension between the ideal expectations and actual functioning of the legal system, perceived injustices, which are parallel with broader concerns regarding the maintenance of the rule of law in Estonian society. A noticeable theme is frustration with institutional failures and inconsistent application of justice, exemplified by quotes like, "Vandalism is quite frequent in Annelinn, but there have been no reports of these villains being caught. Instead, they say that it is pointless to turn to the police" (Urb, 2020; {2020_L_POST_00670}) and a critique of punishment disparities: "If, for example, a person convicted of manslaughter is currently punished with six to fifteen years' imprisonment, then in the case of a traffic offence of the same nature, which is committed while intoxicated, only three to twelve years of imprisonment is the punishment." (PM, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00110}). The quotes also reveal deeper philosophical questions about the effectiveness of punishment and institutional accountability while acknowledging that "The fear of punishment actually affects a large number of people and ensures justice in our society" (Sirk, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00490}).

Defense/military is present in both speeches and newspapers (op-eds and letters) and reflects both the positive historical as well as contemporary role of the military, with a noticeable focus on the Estonian Defense League, a voluntary defense organization. Across the codes in this category, the necessity and importance of national defense is paramount. A noticeable theme is the continuity of the Estonian commitment to defense and the evolution from forced military service to voluntary national defense, exemplified by quotes like "The members of the Defense League have always assisted the population and been one of the pillars of national defense,

playing an important role already in the War of Independence” (Pansin, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01760}) and an ironic observation that “It was even joked that the Defense League should award Putin a medal of merit for supporting the development of the organization, as such a number of new members had never been seen before” (Lill, 2020; {2020_P_POST_03650}). The quotes also emphasize Estonia’s strategic positioning within international alliances: “When it comes to the foundations of Estonia’s national defense, in addition to independent defense capability, we always talk about NATO, the European Union, and our allies around the world” (Metsoja, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01120}) while maintaining that “national defense starts with us” (Metsoja, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01150}), reflecting the balance between self-reliance and collective security in Estonia’s defense philosophy.

In a similar way, **environment/climate**, is a category that appears across the mass-elite divide and in several – but not all – genres and does so not most prominently, but with a distinctly positive undertone. Codes in this category centre on environmental concerns and climate change, covering both individual lifestyle choices and broader policy debates about Estonia’s environmental future. A dominant theme is the gap between environmental aspirations and everyday compromises, exemplified by quotes such as, “The man still sorts garbage at home, but believes he’s not the only one who later throws the garbage into the big container anyway” (Mart, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00720}). The quotes also reveal deeper concerns about Estonia’s environmental future, with warnings such as, “Our generation must work like Andres, so that the next generations won’t have to ask: ‘How did you dare?’” (Kaljulaid, 2020; {2020_S_KALJ_00360}) and acknowledgment that “Climate change is here, it’s transboundary and humanity must find ways to reduce and capture greenhouse gases” (Anger-Kraavi, 2020; {2020_P_POST_05060}), reflecting both the urgency of environmental challenges and the complexity of transitioning to sustainable practices.

Finally, **work** is the least frequent category in this class. This is part of this classification because it relates to the economic dimension of social life and emphasises mostly the work ethic and challenges of work for Estonians. A dominant theme is the persistent struggle and dignity of Estonian workers, from the exhausting farm labour described in classic literature – “When did you last take a breath? We’re in the fields even on Sundays” (Toom, 2019, 01:00:16-01:00:37; {2020_M_TRUT_00360}) – to modern workplace challenges. The quotes also reveal strains within the contemporary healthcare system: “Even the strongest among us are tired of the grasshopper’s chirping, as the shortage and overwork of nurses is not treated as an Estonian security issue” (Eesti Õdede Liit, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_00580}). There’s also recognition of changing work patterns, with nearly half preferring “dividing time between office and home work” (Jostov, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04110}), suggesting that Estonian workers are adapting to new realities while maintaining their historical work ethic.

Social Structure

In a broad sense, this is a grouping that is reflected more markedly within popular culture – i.e., novels as well as movies – and to some extent also letters in newspapers, but not within elite discourse. Strictly speaking, this group is the most numerous in terms of codes that belong here. However, it is presented second, as much of this group comes from a single category – **gender roles and identity** – being frequent in one of the novels selected for 2020. 137 codes from this category come from the novels genre, and all of them come from one of the two novels that was coded. The quotes in this category span from traditional rural narratives to contemporary discussions about women’s rights and gender equality, revealing tensions between traditions and modern feminist perspectives. A dominant theme is the policing and control of women’s bodies and sexuality, exemplified by quotes such as, “Good girls serve men, accommodate them, gracefully endure” (Uus, 2019, p. 71; {2020_N_UUST_01060}) and “I was raised knowing that gonorrhoea and chlamydia are things that definitely come with sex”

(Uus, 2019, p. 249; {2020_N_UUST_03080}). Another prominent pattern concerns women's struggle for political and professional recognition, as seen in "A woman in politics is clearly either someone's wife, someone's mistress, or someone's daughter" (Uus, 2019, p. 63; {2020_N_UUST_00890}) and the observation that female politicians face constant scrutiny over their appearance while "I haven't seen a single article about male politicians' watches" (Uus, 2019, p. 190; {2020_N_UUST_02490}). The quotes reveal persistent double standards due to which women must repeatedly prove themselves while managing expectations about motherhood, appearance, and traditional domestic roles. The categorization also captures generational shifts in Estonian society, contrasting traditional gender expectations with contemporary feminist consciousness, highlighting the ongoing struggles with body image, sexual autonomy, and the challenge of achieving genuine equality in both personal and professional spheres.

Values is a general category that contains references to mostly abstract principles or other intangibles that are salient to individuals. Quotes in this category span from historical references to contemporary issues like internet culture, LGBT rights, and behaviour on social media. A noticeable theme is a struggle between tradition and modernity. The quotes also capture individualistic tensions, as seen from the quote, "We are not generations, we are individuals! We are different! Not everyone wants the same things!" (Uus, 2019, p. 255; {2020_N_UUST_03150}). Another prominent pattern concerns social responsibility and civic duty, reflected in statements such as, "Rules only work when they are honestly followed" (Kai, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00030}) and "We must take responsibility as citizens ourselves when the system doesn't work" (Tuisk, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_01330}). The collection reveals anxiety about declining social standards with observations about online discourse: "We live in a time where insults and crude abuse are the new normal" (Rossmann, 2020a; {2020_L_POST_01800}). These quotes also address contemporary political tensions, particularly around minority rights and social tolerance, as evidenced by discussions of LGBT+ issues and references to political polarization.

Popular culture and **arts and culture** reflect an interesting pair of categories. The first refers to aspects of culture, in a very broad sense of the term, that rather pertain to that of the common person while the second relates more to those aspects of culture that are closer to the social elites. In general, newspapers and novels are the venues for both. **Popular culture** focuses on consumerism, lifestyle choices, and the tension between material desires and authentic values. The quotes explore everything from luxury shopping and gift-giving pressures to culinary culture. A key theme is the struggle between overconsumption and mindful living, as captured in quotes like, "After all, we are already struggling with this overconsumption. At the same time, we have families who need help" (Ketlin, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_02420}). The quotes also reveal a growing appreciation for local Estonian products and authentic experiences over imported goods, suggesting a cultural shift toward more conscious consumption: "People are more willing to buy the produce of small farmers than before and do not dully stack foreign garden crops in baskets in the shops" (Harju, 2020; {2020_P_POST_03550}). The quotes in **arts and culture**, in contrast, explore cultural education, artistic taste-making, and the role of high culture in Estonian society. The passages range from contemporary cultural gatekeeping and intellectual posturing to historical perspectives on Estonian cultural development. A dominant theme is cultural elitism versus accessibility, exemplified by the somewhat pretentious declaration: "If it weren't for people like me, where would people like Mona learn from phenomena like Federico Fellini, or Serge Gainsbourg, or Nick Cave, Allen Ginsberg, Jean-Luc Godard or Georgia O'Keeffe?" (Uus, 2019, p. 255; {2020_N_UUST_01370}). This contrasts with more democratic cultural appreciation shown in quotes about community theatre and folk traditions.

Diversity/integration contains quotes that explore the tensions between Estonian identity and multiculturalism, revealing complex attitudes toward foreign workers, Russian-speaking minorities, and newcomers, thus also reflecting some of the themes that are part of the categories grouped under Estonianness. The dominant themes include debates over labour migration and cultural assimilation, linguistic and cultural boundaries between communities, and anxieties about preserving Estonian identity while managing demographic change.

A notable theme is the debate over labour migration and cultural assimilation, exemplified by quotes such as, “Irresponsible politicians don’t want 1,500 capable Ukrainians to help harvest this crop and deliver it to Estonian consumers. Rather let it rot in the fields” (Lillemets jt, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01000}) and “Some Estonian politicians don’t like Ukrainians. We farmers, however, like them very much. They are capable, honest, and diligent – good workers” (Lillemets jt, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00980}). The quotes also reveal historical patterns of integration, noting that “Most of them melted into the Estonian population within a couple of generations, adopting the Estonian language, customs, and clothing” (Vahre and Laar 2013, p. 21; {2020_T_LAAR_00340}).

This collection also captures anxieties about preserving Estonian identity while managing demographic change, with statements such as, “It’s an illusion that we can force our truths on people from other cultures. The result is only hatred and enmity, nothing else” (Rossmann, 2020b; {2020_L_POST_02330}). Throughout this discourse, there is a persistent struggle between practical economic needs for foreign labour and concerns about cultural preservation and social cohesion.

Rural/regional and **city life** form a pair of categories that together illustrate some of the developments in Estonian society over the decades prior to 2020, as the country had seen a growing concentration of people and wealth in urban areas, especially around Tallinn, which was conversely paired with a decline in those living in rural areas.

Rural/regional grouping contains quotes that address concerns about the depopulation of rural areas, agricultural challenges, and efforts to maintain viable communities outside major cities. A dominant theme is the struggle to preserve rural communities and their economic viability, exemplified by “As long as your village still lives, you live too” (Kivirähk, 2020, p. 32; {2020_N_KIVI_00300}) and concerns that “journalism has taken up the goal of scaring away the last people from Estonia’s small towns and rural areas” (Männik, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01510}). Another prominent pattern concerns agricultural policy and related support systems, with farmers expressing frustration: “Interior Minister Mart Helme’s talk of preferring slave labour is offensive to farmers” (Lillemets jt, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01020}) and calls for better government support for rural enterprises. Throughout, there is a tension between nostalgia for traditional rural life and recognition that modernization and connectivity are essential for rural areas to remain viable in contemporary Estonia.

City life focuses on urban development, city planning, and the contrast between urban and rural life. The quotes address concerns about modernization, historical preservation, and creating liveable urban spaces. A dominant theme is a tension between development and preservation, exemplified by concerns about “stone and concrete” replacing natural elements: “How long will we continue to be fascinated by stone and concrete? Leave us our rural closeness and vegetation; there is already little of this in Europe” (Suitsmart, 2020; {2020_L_POST_00050}). Another prominent pattern concerns urban planning challenges, including vandalism problems where “it’s pointless to turn to police because they can’t solve these cases” (Urb, 2020; {2020_L_POST_00660}) and infrastructure issues like improperly parked rental bikes disrupting the cityscape (Oliver, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01210}). Throughout, there is an ongoing negotiation between preserving historical character and

creating modern, attractive urban environments that serve both residents and tourists while maintaining liveability and community identity.

Even though Estonia in general is at best indifferent to religion, references to religion, especially in the historical sense as depicted in films, were quite common, reflecting the Christian history of the country. **Religion** as a category here contains quotes that span from the medieval period of Christianization to modern debates about Church-state relations. A dominant theme is the complex relationship between organized religion and personal faith and character, exemplified by tensions like “Scripture makes your heart proud and angry, neighbour” (Toom, 2019, 02:09:14-02:09:28; {2020_M_TRUT_00690}). Another prominent pattern concerns the historical evolution of Estonian Christianity, from early Lutheran influence that “had a two-way effect on Estonian culture” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 26; 2020_T_LAAR_00440) to 19th-century religious awakening movements and Orthodox conversion attempts. The dynamic shows how religion served both as a cultural bridge and a source of conflict. Contemporary quotes address modern Church-state tensions, questioning governmental funding of new churches during economic crisis (Juhtkiri, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_01040}) and noting that despite declining Church attendance, “the Church’s social and political influence hasn’t been as great for almost a hundred years as it is now” (Koutchoukali, 2020; {2020_P_POST_05000}). Throughout, there is an ongoing negotiation between traditional religious values and secular modernity.

The category **Family** focuses on familial relationships, marriage, and parenting in contemporary society. The quotes reveal tensions between traditional family expectations and modern realities of relationships and child-rearing. A dominant theme is the complexity of modern relationships and parenting pressures, exemplified by concerns about finding a good partner and observations about relationship pressure keeping people “trapped with a partner with whom there’s no longer love, respect, or closeness” (Konstabel, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_00120}). The quotes also address generational conflicts over domestic roles, such as disputes over ironing clothes and other household expectations (Elina, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00060}). Another prominent pattern concerns changing family structures and social expectations, including debates over marriage referenda during economic crises (Neithal, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_02260}) and the recognition that “our reality includes single mothers, blended families, cohabitation, and separations” (Neithal, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_02260}). The category captures anxieties about parenting decisions, from concerns about having children later in life to managing children’s internet use and relationship education.

Health collects quotes focusing on health, medicine, and mental wellbeing in contemporary society. The quotes address both physical healthcare challenges and a growing awareness of mental health issues. A dominant theme is the evolving understanding of mental health and its treatment, exemplified by observations that “it’s great that nowadays ‘therapists’ sound so innocent and normalized through foreign TV, even perhaps trendy. Unlike ‘psychiatrists,’ to see whom you had to have death before your eyes” (Uus, 2019, p. 108; {2020_N_UUST_01610}) and calls for mental health first aid skills since “contact with people having suicidal thoughts is much more likely than needing to resuscitate someone having a heart attack” (Oidermaa, 2020; {2020_P_POST_02610}). The quotes also reveal stigma around mental health, with some people believing “depression doesn’t exist” (Oidermaa, 2020; {2020_P_POST_02600}). Within this category, there is a recognition of mental health as a resource that “can be lost or grown” and emphasis on the need for proactive care and support systems in both physical and psychological wellbeing.

Quotes in the category **Youth** focus on youth culture, generational differences, and concerns about modern youth behavior and values, often in a critical sense. The quotes reveal tensions between older and younger generations regarding the use of technology, social skills, and life priorities. A dominant theme is adult anxiety about the youth's relationship with technology and social media, exemplified by concerns that "the child is anxious and very upset when not allowed on the computer" (Eduard, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_02340}) and observations that young people "post 'snaps' only when something happens with friends, so her whole social media flow seems like endless nonsense" (Uus, 2019, p. 86; {2020_N_UUST_01180}). The quotes also address educational challenges where "it's increasingly difficult to capture young learners' attention with traditional teaching methods" (Aru, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04810}). Another prominent pattern concerns perceived superficiality and lack of knowledge among young people, with adults noting that "maybe she doesn't even know what the word 'objective' means" (Uus, 2019, p. 90; {2020_N_UUST_01300}) and observing young people's shopping habits wherein they "don't understand price policies" and "haven't heard of price per kilogram" (Laura, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01650}). Across the quotes in this category, there is a mix of criticism and concern for young people, with adults struggling to understand contemporary youth culture while worrying about their preparedness for the responsibilities and duties of adulthood.

Finally, the quotes that were ultimately categorised under **equality** focus on social inequality, class differences, and economic disparities across different historical periods and contemporary Estonia. The quotes reveal persistent concerns about fairness, social mobility, and the treatment of marginalized groups. A dominant theme is economic inequality and its social consequences, exemplified by observations that "over 300,000 pensioners live in Estonia, most in relative poverty, barely making ends meet each month" (Kotka, 2020; {2020_L_POST_00890}) and contemporary wage gap concerns wherein women argue that "we want equal pay when women spend many times more money to make themselves acceptable before leaving the house than men do" (Uus, 2019, p. 208; {2020_N_UUST_02910}). The collection captures class consciousness through observations about wealth concentration and the difficulty of accessing elite spaces. Throughout this category, there is a tension between ideals of equality and the reality of persistent social stratification, with calls for practical solutions such as redirecting money for fireworks to food banks rather than "wasting money and shooting it into the air" during difficult economic times (Ester, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_02650}).

Sexual violence as a category emerges solely because it was one very prominent theme in one of the novels that was selected for coding.

Estonianness

This is a group of coding categories that contains direct references to what it means to be Estonian, both in the historic and in the contemporary sense. Even though such themes were echoed elsewhere as well (e.g., under **diversity/integration**), the categories here maintain the most direct references to the Estonian people and an independent Estonian state. This is a discourse with a clearly positive valence – almost no other valence categories are present in the topography map for this group – and it is clearly an elite discourse. Even though some elements of it are present in novels, films, and letters, the bulk of this discourse appears in speeches, textbooks, and op-eds in newspapers. It is an elite discourse, with the exception of the categories freedom/independence and Estonian language, which appear in mass discourse as well, reflecting matters of more contemporary relevance to Estonian national identity.

The quotes under **nation/national** focus on national identity, the Estonian national awakening, and patriotic consciousness from the 19th century to the present. The quotes trace the development of Estonian self-awareness from an identity of a rural “country people” to modern conception of nationhood. One notable theme is the 19th-century Estonian national awakening, exemplified by the shift of “instead of calling themselves country people, Estonians took on the concept of ‘Estonian’” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 156; {2020_T_LAAR_02280}) and the recognition that “Estonians are equal to other nations in their abilities and characteristics” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 156; {2020_T_LAAR_02310}). The quotes also address cultural preservation efforts, noting how “folklore collection was a legal form of expressing national sentiment during Russification” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 178; {2020_T_LAAR_02750}). Contemporary quotes reflect ongoing concerns about cultural preservation and national pride. Throughout this category, there was a continued emphasis on cultural continuity and national symbols, from the creation of the blue-black-white flag as a symbol of Estonian identity to calls for displaying the Estonian flag on national holidays as “a simple but heart-warming and unity-creating way” (Pajula, 2020; {2020_L_POST_01040}) to show dedication to freedom and country.

In the category related to the **Estonian language**, the quotes focus on language development, Estonian language policy, and the historical evolution of Estonian as a literary and educational language. The quotes focus on different periods and contexts, spanning from early Estonian writing to contemporary language challenges. A notable theme is the historical development of Estonian written language, typified by efforts where “Lutheran pastors began systematically developing Estonian written language so that every Christian could read God’s word in their mother tongue” (Piirimäe *et al.* 2015, p. 38; {2020_T_PIIIR_00770}) and the significance of the 1739 Bible translation which “remained the norm for Estonian written language until the early 19th century” (Piirimäe *et al.* 2015, p. 72; {2020_T_PIIIR_01360}). Another pattern concerns contemporary language policy challenges, particularly regarding Estonian-Russian bilingualism and education. The quotes reveal concerns that “despite years of resistance to Russian-language schools transitioning to Estonian, now when parents voluntarily take children to Estonian schools, political and financial support is lacking” (Kusma, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_00210}) and observations about language immersion programs that “haven’t produced the expected benefits” (Lasting, 2020; {2020_L_POST_02600}). Throughout this category, there is a tension between conserving the purity Estonian language and managing practical multilingual realities, with calls for “love for language, not state obligation” to be shared with newcomers (Kaljulaid, 2020; {2020_S_KALJ_00020}) while maintaining that “Estonia should be clearly a national-language country, meaning Estonian-speaking” (Vaino, 2020; {2020_P_POST_03780}).

National awakening is a category that is exclusive only to textbooks on Estonian history. It contains quotes that focus on the Estonian national awakening movement and the development of Estonian intellectual and cultural leadership in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The quotes trace the evolution from the early thoughts Estonian scholars to later organized political movements. A dominant theme is the emergence of Estonian intellectual leadership and cultural institutions, represented by how “the first group of Estonian intellectuals entered public life in the second half of the 1830s” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 144; {2020_T_LAAR_02000}) and developments wherein “Estonians managed to create numerous mother-tongue officials who filled an increasingly large share of available positions” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, pp. 204-205; {2020_T_LAAR_03370}). The quotes also highlight cultural achievements like Jakob Hurt’s folklore collection campaign, which was “the first truly nationwide, country-wide national undertaking” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 178; {2020_T_LAAR_02730}). Another

prominent pattern concerns the strategic development of Estonian political consciousness, including the formation of the first Estonian political party in 1905 and remarks that “different trends in the national movement were natural, as they were in other countries” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 169; {2020_T_LAAR_02530}). The collection shows how cultural activities like song festivals became expressions of national unity, with an observation that “it’s an exaggeration to say Estonians sang themselves into a unified nation at the general song festival, but there’s truth in it” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, pp. 160-161; {2020_T_LAAR_02380}). Throughout this category, there is a stress on the gradual but persistent growth of Estonian self-confidence and organizational capacity.

The category **freedom/independence** focuses on independence, freedom, and the challenges of maintaining democratic values in modern Estonia. The quotes address both historical struggles for independence and contemporary concerns about preserving democratic institutions. A dominant theme is the fragility of freedom and democracy, exemplified by warnings that “freedom does not disappear in one moment. It seeps away over time” (Kaljulaid, 2020b; {2020_P_POST_01790}) and observations that “30 years of peaceful and consistent development has created the impression that our personal end of history is somehow at hand or within reach” (Kaljulaid, 2020; {2020_S_KALJ_00100}). Another prominent pattern focuses on the legacy of Estonia’s independence movement and its meaning for contemporary society. These quotes reflect on the Singing Revolution and peaceful transition to independence, observing that “we held our breath wondering if Estonia would gain independence, it seemed so impossible. It happened” (Uus, 2019, p. 262; {2020_N_UUST_03170}). However, there is also a concern about whether current struggles match the sacrifices of previous generations: “Is this then the life for which our ancestors died and suffered?” (Oskar, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_00280}). Throughout this category, there is a tension between appreciating those achieved freedoms and vigilance against their erosion, with a prominence afforded to the ongoing responsibility to maintain democratic values and national independence through daily civic engagement and institutional protection.

Estonian history is a general category almost exclusive to textbooks that mentions various aspects of Estonia’s past. It is noted within this report as an ultimate category, as the references to the history of the country are what tie the quotes together rather provide any sort of substantive theme. The quotes focus on historical power relations, social hierarchies, and the legacy of foreign domination in Estonian lands. These quotes span from references to medieval times to the 20th century as well, examining the dynamics between different ruling classes and the Estonian people.

Historical Others

The group **Historical Others** contains references to Russia (historical references to the Soviet Union were considered separately, but remained below the threshold), Sweden, and Germany. The latter also contains references to the German nobility that played an important role in Estonia’s history since Estonia was subdued in the 13th century until gaining independence in the beginning of the 20th century. This is a group of categories that is present in mostly textbooks and films due to the historical subject matter of films that were coded for 2020.

Historical references to **Russia** focus on Russian imperial rule and Russification policies in Estonia from the 18th to early 20th centuries. These quotes examine the complex relationship between the Russian central authority and the Estonian peasants subject to imperial rule. A dominant theme is the destructive impact of Russian military campaigns and policies, exemplified by the devastation wrought by the Great Northern War when “Russian forces

began mercilessly devastating eastern Estonia, reaching as far as Järva and Viljandi counties with their raids by 1703” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, pp. 65-67; {2020_T_LAAR_00810}) and later policies where “Peter I gave the order to deport all Tartu residents to Russia and completely destroy the city” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 68; {2020_T_LAAR_00850}). Another prominent pattern concerns Russification attempts and their limited success, with observations that “unlike Germanization, Russification never became attractive to Estonians” (Piirimäe *et al.* 2015, p. 109; {2020_T_PIIIR_02350}) and that “Russian officials hoped to Russify Estonians and believed that after some time Estonian mothers would lull their children to sleep with Russian lullabies” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 176; {2020_T_LAAR_02660}). Throughout these references to Russia, there is a recognition of a persistent Estonian resistance to foreign rule, from collective memories of preferring Swedish rule to hopes for future liberation, culminating in the observation that “today, freedom seems almost self-evident” after independence was achieved, while nonetheless the Russia that emerged from the wreckage of the Soviet Union still presents a threat (Uus, 2019, p. 262; {2020_N_UUST_03180}).

Reference to **Sweden** is afforded a slightly more positive or neutral connotation and focuses on Swedish rule in Estonia, primarily during the 17th century, and its complex legacy in Estonian historical memory. A notable theme is the idealization of Swedish rule in Estonian collective memory, exemplified by the remark that “our historical memory has never forgotten this, for example the 17th century has remained in folk tradition as the ‘good old Swedish time’” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 12; {2020_T_LAAR_00050}). Another pattern concerns the administrative and economic changes under Swedish rule, including the establishment of schools and universities, the reduction policy that returned estates to the crown, and efforts to regulate serfdom. Throughout this engagement with Sweden, there is a recognition that Swedish rule represented a transitional period where “instead of the medieval patriarchal power relationship between peasant and master, a new one was emerging that bound person and state and hinted at a person’s certain essential equality independent of class boundaries” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 22; {2020_T_LAAR_00380}). The collective engagement shows how this period became mythologized as a golden age primarily in contrast to later Russian rule.

The quotes concerning **Germany** focus on German cultural influence and presence in Estonia across different historical periods, from the hegemony of the Baltic German through the period of Nazi occupation. The quotes examine the complex relationship between Estonian, German, and Baltic German cultures and identities. A dominant theme is the pervasive German cultural influence on Estonian society, exemplified by observations that “Estonia became primarily a periphery of the German cultural space, and later ideas spreading in Europe reached here mainly through Germans” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, p. 27; {2020_T_LAAR_00450}) and that “culturally, Estonian peasants and Baltic German estates each formed separate societies, very clearly separated from each other” (Piirimäe *et al.* 2015, p. 70; 2020_T_PIIIR_01280). The quotes also address the phenomenon of Germanization, noting how “most Estonians who achieved better positions switched to German language, hoping to appear more refined and cultured this way” (Vahtre and Laar 2013, pp. 130-131; {2020_T_LAAR_01710}). Throughout this expression of Germany, there is a tension between encroaching German cultural dominance and inverse Estonian efforts to maintain their own identity and language.

Significant Others

This group is the least prominent across all genres, as contemporary references to other countries in a way that would be revealing about Estonian identity are scarce. The only two actors that overcome this threshold are Europe/EU and the United States, with the first more prominent in elite discourse and the latter more prominent in mass discourse.

The quotes related to **Europe/EU** focus on Estonia's relationship with the European Union and its place in contemporary European politics. The quotes address both the benefits and challenges of EU membership from an Estonian perspective. A dominant theme is Estonia's strategic positioning within the EU, exemplified by observations that "the EU is a historically unique international organization that places restrictions on the dominance of large countries and establishes rules that ensure a relatively strong position for small countries" (Raik, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00440}) and a recognition that "Estonia must defend its interests in the EU by playing its cards wisely" (Raik, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00300}). The quotes also highlight Estonia's active role, noting how "Estonia works consistently to create decisions that have a good effect on the entire European Union" (Raik, 2020; {2020_P_POST_00200}). Another prominent pattern relates to the practical challenges of EU membership, including border responsibilities where "1.3 million inhabitants of Estonia must build and guard a border for 500 million inhabitants of Europe" (Vään, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04150}) and concerns about maintaining sovereignty while following EU directives. This discursive formation around Europe/EU also addresses economic cooperation, the impact of Brexit on EU dynamics, and Estonia's aspirations to remain "an important EU member and a small but diligent trailblazer" (Olgo, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_00900}). Throughout this engagement with the European significant Other, there is a recognition of the EU's importance for Estonia's security and prosperity, with an appreciation of how "16 years in the European Union has changed Estonian people's living standards and membership in NATO has increased the sense of security" (Vään, 2020; {2020_P_POST_04130}), while also acknowledging the enduring tensions between national interests and European integration.

The quotes in **USA** focus on US politics and culture as viewed from an Estonian perspective. The quotes reveal engagement with and commentary on contemporary events in the United States and other cultural phenomena. A notable theme is Estonian reactions to major US political events, particularly the protests for racial justice that followed the death of George Floyd, which was exemplified by observations that "such a widespread reaction is actually a rare phenomenon in today's world and shows that the topic touches many people significantly. What if only 'one man' died: that one was apparently a symbol of something more important" (Kippen, 2020; {2020_L_OHTU_01270}). The quotes also address Trump's presidency and US political dynamics, noting how "America's development is clearly hindered by the age of its leadership" (Alatalu, 2020; {2020_P_OHTU_00790}). Another prominent pattern concerns US cultural influence on Estonian youth and society, including references to US pop culture, the #MeToo movement, and social media trends. The quotes capture generational differences in understanding references to US culture, such as young people saying "omg" as a word rather than spelling out the letters (Uus, 2019, p. 22; {2020_N_UUST_00280}) and exposure to American cultural figures and political developments. Throughout, there is a mixture of fascination and critical distance toward US society, with observations about both American achievements and problems viewed through an Estonian lens that values stability and social cohesion while recognizing the global influence of the United States on political discourse and cultural trends.

3. The Predominant Discourses and its Challengers

Several categories demonstrate broad presence across both elite (speeches, textbooks, newspapers) and mass (novels, movies, letters) discourse, suggesting shared societal concerns that transcend these boundaries. **Education** emerges as the most unified positive theme, appearing consistently across textbooks, newspapers, novels, movies, and letters with overwhelmingly positive valence. This universal valorisation of education reflects deep-rooted consensus about the importance of education. Similarly, **Estonian language** and

freedom/independence appear in both elite and mass sources, indicating that these core elements of national identity remain touchstones for all Estonians regardless of their social position.

The analysis reveals that elite genres – those reflected in speeches, textbooks, and newspapers – focus on several discursive categories, particularly those related to governance and the state apparatus. **Politics** appears overwhelmingly in elite sources with highly polarized emotions – extremely positive in political speeches but increasingly negative in newspapers, reflecting an institutional critique. This category is also present in letters, with a distinctly negative connotation. **International relations** and the **economy** remain almost exclusively elite concerns, which might suggest that foreign and security policy are constructed as domains of expert knowledge rather than popular engagement.

The **Estonianness** group (including categories relating to the nation/national, the national awakening, and Estonian history) demonstrates pronounced elite dominance, appearing primarily in textbooks and political speeches. This pattern indicates that formal national identity construction remains largely a top-down process, with the elite serving as primary source of transmission of historical narratives and national mythology. The positive valences throughout these categories suggests an elite investment in maintaining cohesive national narratives.

Conversely, mass genres (i.e., those of novels, movies, letters) dominate those discourses related to social structure and everyday life. **Gender roles and identity** appear overwhelmingly in fields relating to popular culture, particularly those of novels, with complex emotional valences ranging from highly negative critiques of traditional gender norms to ambivalent explorations of contemporary gender politics. This concentration suggests that popular culture serves as the primary field for working through contentious social transformations that elite discourse attempts to evade.

Emotional valence patterns reveal some differences in how elites and masses engage with shared topics. Elite discourse demonstrates remarkable positivity when discussing politics and state institutions, while mass discourse reveals criticism and ambivalence about these topics. The COVID-19 response exemplifies this pattern: political speeches frame government actions in an overwhelmingly positive fashion while letters and op-eds express significant criticism and scepticism. This emotional divergence suggests a disconnect between elite confidence in institutional structures and the vernacular experience of their practical limitations.

The observed patterns raise important questions about democratic participation and discursive accessibility in Estonia. The elite focus on discussions of international relations, defence, and formal national identity construction and the lack of these categories in mass sources suggests limited popular input into crucial policy domains. Conversely, the relegation of gender politics, family concerns, and youth issues to mass culture indicates that elite discourse does not engage substantively with lived social realities that profoundly shape the daily experiences of the citizen.

The analysis reveals a bifurcated public sphere wherein elite discourse projects confidence, positivity, and control while mass discourse processes anxiety, critique, and social transformation. This structure potentially limits democratic deliberation by segregating different types of concerns into separate discursive domains with limited interaction. The few areas of genuine convergence – education and language – suggest that expanded elite-mass dialogue might be possible around shared values and experiences that would nonetheless require elite acknowledgment of critical perspectives and lived experiences that currently find expression primarily in popular culture and citizen forums.

Conclusion

The most outstanding finding in this report is the emotional divergence between elite and mass discourses on certain prominent classes of topics. While political elites project confidence and positivity about state institutions, international relations, and Estonia's economic trajectory, mass discourse reveals underlying anxieties, critique, and ambivalence about elements of social structure. The COVID-19 crisis served as a catalyst to crystallize these differences, with government officials framing their response as unified and effective while citizens expressed frustration with institutional failures and a breakdown of communication.

The monopolization of certain discourses by elite sources – particularly those concerning international relations, defence policy, and formal constructions of Estonianness – raises questions about popular input into national identity formation. When discussions of Estonia's place in the world, its security arrangements, and its historical narrative remain confined to expert domains, ordinary citizens may look to a different direction rather than shape the very frameworks that define their collective national identity.

The few areas of genuine convergence – education and Estonian language – offer instructive examples of how shared values can bridge the elite-mass divide. The universal positive valences attached to education across all sources suggests a cultural consensus about its importance in Estonian society. Similarly, concerns about Estonian language preservation resonate across all social strata.

A healthy democracy requires robust exchange between those who govern and those who are governed, between those who shape official narratives and those who live their consequences. The current structure, in which elite discourses project stability and control while mass discourses process more concern and critique, potentially weakens the feedback mechanisms essential to responsive governance.

Ultimately, this study reveals that Estonian national identity in 2020 was not a singular construct but a contested terrain where different social groups advanced competing visions through separate channels. The challenge for Estonian democracy lies not in resolving these differences but in creating spaces in which they can be productively engaged.

Table 1. Raw counts

Category	Total codes	Speeches	Textbooks	Newspapers	Novels	Movies	Letters
politics	278	27		145	16		90
gender roles and identity	237			21	137	24	55
education	157		48	63	4	6	36
Estonian history	110		88	4	10	2	6
HO: Russia	110		98		1	11	
COVID reactions	100	32		38			30
values	93	5	2	20	6	21	39
economy	88	17	20	36	2	3	10
rural/regional	78	6	15	22	2	5	28
religion	72		29	11	3	25	4
nation/national	72	2	48	5	11		6
Estonian language	72	6	42	14		2	8
HO: Sweden	71		70			1	
family	59	1		8	15	5	30
popular culture	50			17	10		23
national awakening	49		49				
freedom/independence	46	5	10	14	6		11
diversity/integration	46		5	20	5	1	15
SO: Europe/EU	45	6		30	3		6
arts and culture	39		7	4	20		8
sexual violence	38				38		
international relations	38	13	4	20			1
civil society	38	1	14	6	3		14
health	35	2	2	12	5		14
law and justice	35	1	2	20	3	5	4
HO: Germany	33		17	1		15	
defense/military	32	5	6	9			12
youth	31			2	19		10
equality	30		8		8	5	9
SO: USA	29			7	14		8
environment/climate	29	4	1	8	4		12
work	28	2	4	8	1	5	8
city life	26		3	4	1	5	13
Totals	2294	135	592	569	347	141	510

Table 2. Topography of Estonian identity

	Speeches	Textbooks	Newspapers	Novels	Movies	Letters
Politics/economy						
politics	+++++--		-----+~	--		-----+~
education		+++	+++--~	+	++	++
COVID reactions	+++++///-		+++~			--+
economy	+++++~	++	++-		~	
international relations	++++		+			
civil society		++				++
law and justice			+~		~-	
defense/military	++		+			++
environment/climate	++		+			+
work	+				~	
Social structure						
gender roles and identity			-+	-----+///~	-----+~	-----+~
values	++		++		~+~+~/-	++-
rural/regional	--+	+	++		+	++-
religion		+~/	-		~+~+~///++	
family			-	--~	++	--+~
popular culture			+	/		--+
diversity/integration			+/			+
arts and culture		+		++		+
sexual violence				----		
health	+		+			-
youth				--/		-
equality		+		+	+	+
city life					~-	+
Estonianness						
Estonian history		++--~	/	-		
nation/national	+	+++		~+		
Estonian language	++	+++	++		+	+
national awakening		++++				
freedom/independence	++	+	+	+		+
Historical others						
HO: Russia		-----+~	/		--~	//
HO: Sweden		++//--~				
HO: Germany		+			//++~-	
Significant others						
SO: Europe/EU	++		++-			
SO: USA				++/		-

Salience of categories is measured on the following scale: 1.0-2.0 (1); 2.0-5.0 (2); 5.0-7.5 (3); 7.5-10.0 (4); above 10.0 (5).

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