

After the “Oligarchs”: Argumentation Strategies in the Parliamentary Elections Campaigns

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During the period of time starting from 9th Saeima Latvian political scene changed significantly. Emergency parliamentary elections in autumn 2011 completely changed Latvian Republic's political scene. So-called “oligarchs” parties disappeared from the scene and since the elections government leader is liberal-conservative, center-right party. Changes in political discourse were expected also viewing parties election programs. Whether the discourse changed not only theoretically, but practically? Communication with electorate provides citizens information to be able to vote for the appropriate candidate. Argumentation and speakers interaction are important aspects in the context of political discourse. Unlike more empirical discourse analysis, argumentation theory and its descriptive and evaluative elements intend critical dimension. In the study presented argumentation analysis of media materials is made according to Walton's argument classification model. Conclusions about political culture in Latvia are made based on the arguments used by political actors. In the big picture results of the study are related to democratic state order.

Keywords: political communication, argumentation strategies, discourse analysis, argumentation analysis

In May 2011 the President of Latvia, Valdis Zatlers, disbanded the 10th convocation of Saeima (parliament) which was only in seventh month of its mandate. The extraordinary elections held in Autumn 2011 changed the country's political scenery completely. The former political heavyweights, dubbed “parties of oligarchs”, were swept away from the politics. From late 1990s conservative People's Party and Latvia's First Party led by wealthy businessmen Andris Šķele and Ainars Šlesers accordingly shaped the decision-making in legislative and executive power. For the purpose of this study, the concept of “oligarchy” is reduced to running political office in the interests of one's private business. In 2011 the population entrusted the country's leadership to liberal-conservative center-right party *Vienotība* (“Unity”) whose members had a reputation of keen advocates of civil society and enemies of political corruption. How this tectonic shift changed the political discourse? This study compares the argumentation of parliamentary candidates during the elections of the 9th and 12th Saeima in 2006 and 2014. In the 9th Saeima the “oligarch” parties – People's Party, Latvia's First Party and Union of Green and Farmers – held 51 mandate of 100. In the 12th Saeima the largest share of mandates (40) went to *Vienotība* and National Union. This self-defined “justice coalition” opposed the corruptive methods of “oligarchs” leaving in opposition the only one survived conservative party – Union of Green and Farmers (21 seats).

Research Method

Empirical data for this research is gathered from the National public radio *Latvijas Radio 1* current affairs broadcast *Krustpunktā*. Before the elections this programme serves a platform for the debate among politicians running for the Parliament. The aim of public media is to strengthen the ideals of democracy in the public sphere (Pfetsch, 2014, p. 132). It is reasonable to expect that *Krustpunktā* would have promoted the principles of transparency and dialogue supported by the liberal *Vienotība*. Also the interactivity of *Krustpunktā* should be pointed out. The members of audience can interfere in the discussion with their own questions; the way the candidates react to alternative political agenda demonstrate the meta-communication skills.

Table 1

The Sample of Krustpunktā Broadcasts

September 4, 2006	Rinalds Muciņš (<i>Tautas partija</i>).
September 8, 2006	Ingrīda Ūdre (ZZS), Jānis Straume (TB/LNNK).
September 15, 2006	Guntars Jirgensons (LSDSP), Tatjana Ždanoka (PCTVL).
September 22, 2006	Nils Ušakovs (<i>Saskaņas centrs</i>), Gundars Bērziņš (<i>Tautas partija</i>).
September 29, 2006	Ainārs Šlesers (LPP/LC), Sandra Kalniete (<i>Jaunais laiks</i>).
October 2, 2006	Aigars Štokenbergs (<i>Tautas partija</i>).
September 8, 2014	Raimonds Rublovskis (<i>Saskaņa</i>), Ilmārs Latkovskis (VL/TB-TNNK), Ringolds Balodis (<i>No sirds Latvijai</i>), Miroslavs Mitrofanovs (<i>Latvijas Krievu savienība</i>), Jānis Tomels (<i>Jaunā konservatīvā partija</i>).
September 15, 2014	Ilze Viņķele (<i>Vienotība</i>), Ivars Godmanis (<i>Vienoti Latvijai</i>), Einārs Repše (<i>Latvijas attīstībai</i>), Aija Barča (ZZS), Mārtiņš Šics (<i>Latvijas Reģionu apvienība</i>).
September 17, 2014	Ainārs Šlesers (<i>Vienoti Latvijai</i>), Jānis Bordāns (<i>Jaunā konservatīvā partija</i>).
September 19, 2014	Nils Ušakovs (<i>Saskaņa</i>).
September 24, 2014	Einars Repše (<i>Latvijas attīstībai</i>), Andris Skride (<i>Izaugsme</i>), Solvita Āboltiņa (<i>Vienotība</i>).
September 30, 2014	Lolita Čigāne (<i>Vienotība</i>), Juris Pūce (<i>Latvijas attīstībai</i>), Aigars Kalvītis (<i>Vienoti Latvijai</i>), Ivars Zariņš (<i>Saskaņa</i>), Mārtiņš Bondars (<i>Latvijas reģionu apvienība</i>).

The sample of the research comprises 12 broadcasts representing two election campaigns proportionally. Political discourse analysis is concentrated on the analysis of argumentation schemes drawn from Douglas Walton theory of argumentation (Walton, 1998a, 1998b, 2004, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008). During argumentation process it is not always easy to see the structure of argument because it tends to be ambiguous; arguments and points of view tend to be hidden in the speech acts, paraphrases and repetition. In debates and interviews the conversation has a form of questions and answers, so the argument is even more difficult to reconstruct. Argumentation and speakers interaction are important aspects in the context of political discourse. Argumentation analysis helps to find out which arguments are used and whether they conform to the speaker's point of view. Unlike more empirical discourse analysis, argumentation theory and its descriptive and evaluative elements intend critical dimension. While analyzing argumentation, two aspects should be kept in mind: How speakers prove their views and how consecutive argumentation chains are? (Fetzer, 2013). The study focuses on rational and emotional arguments use assuming that the change of the political elite will stimulate the increase of rational argumentation. Aristotle distinguished between rational and emotional arguments naming the latter “pathos”. O’Keefe (2012) uses the term “persuasion” for emotional effect while rational explanation is called “conviction”. Walton calls emotional arguments as “plausible”. Direction of the study is shaped by three ideas. (1) The argument structure consists of premise and conclusion; (2) Argument is a type of interaction where words make clear differences of opinion between two speakers (van Dijk, 2011, p. 95); and (3) The dialogical schemes of plausible argumentation consist of a representation of argument by

speaker and a set of critical questions posed by opponent (Walton, 2007, p. 28). The speaker’s expressed idea with its proof is considered as argument in this research. Political argumentation strategy is the speaker’s use of argumentation schemes to prove a particular viewpoint, as well as interpretation of these schemes in the context of political discourse. Except deductive and inductive arguments, the argumentation schemes are ranged according to Walton’s classification: argument from sign, argument from commitment, appeal to expert opinion, argument against the person (*ad hominem*), argument from analogy, argument from precedent, appeal to popular opinion (*ad populum*), argument from verbal classification, argument from ignorance, argument from correlation to cause, argument from positive or negative consequences, appeal to force (*ad baculum*) and appeal to pity (*ad misericordiam*).

Results

Contrary to expectations, the share of rational arguments has not increased as the political elite changed (Figures 1 and 2). In the elections campaign in 2006, 12% (4 of 34 arguments) of arguments were rational; eight years later their share increased to 14% (6 of 43 arguments) only. The breakdown of plausible arguments experienced a dramatic shift. The new political elite used arguments against person (*ad hominem*) more often than before: 37 and 15 percent (16 and 5 arguments) in 2014 and 2006 respectively. *Ad hominem* is the most popular argument of the new elite. The old elite preferred arguments from consequences (21% or 7 arguments) and arguments from ignorance (21% or 7). The government parties in this way controlled their agenda: they presented their political initiatives as bringing positive results in the future, while excluded alternative opinions from discussion arguing that no precise information is known about them.

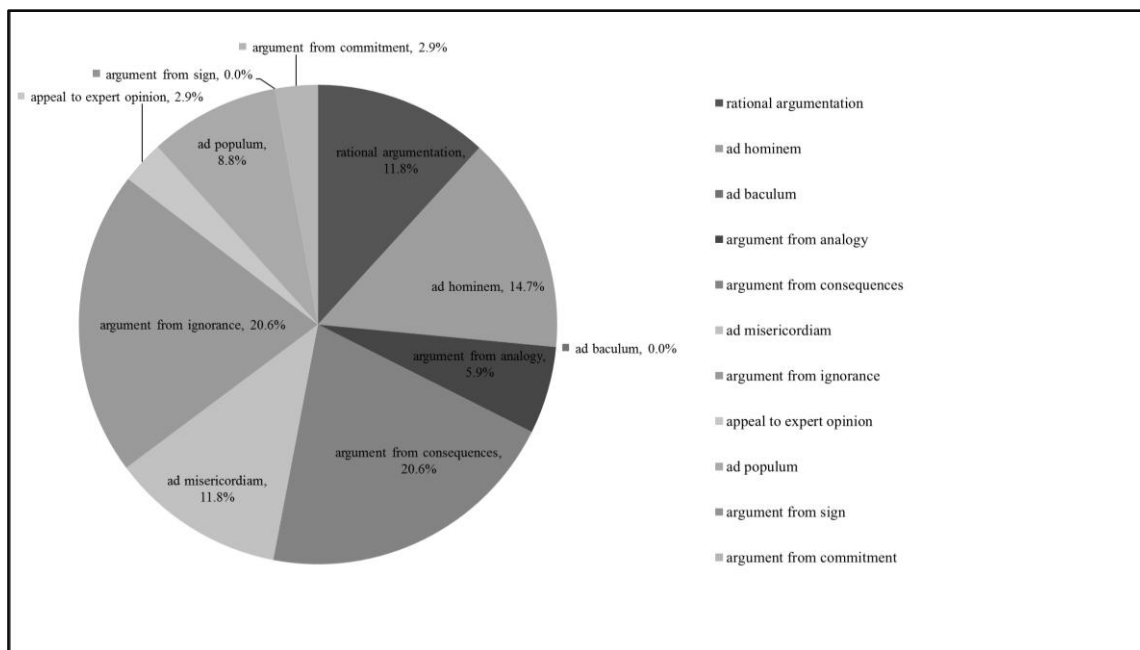


Figure 1. Arguments used by the parliamentary candidates in *Krustpunktā* broadcast, 2006.

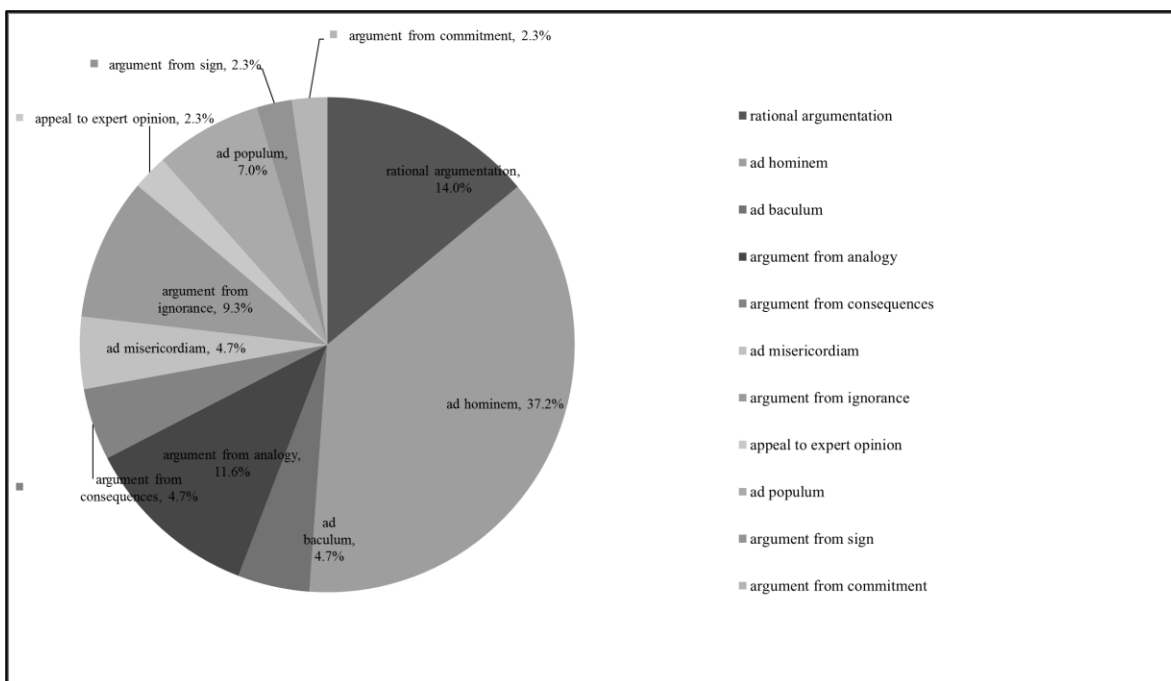


Figure 2. Arguments used by the parliamentary candidates in *Krustpunktā* broadcast, 2014.

The usage of rational arguments was not very popular amongst politicians in both Saeima, but took place anyway. Einārs Repše (*Latvijas attīstībai*) used rational argument alongside with logical assumptions and conclusions to prove his point of view:

Remember that taxes should not be counted linear. We cannot expect that the raise of taxes by 1% will increase budget revenues and tax reduction by 1% will decrease it. So at the moment employment tax in Latvia is too high and it forces lots of businessman to switch at least partly to shadow sector. If government has promised to reduce employment tax, it should be done. Just think of it, today to pay 100 euros you should have 185 euros [...]. In this case the amount is too high.

Lolita Čigāne (*Vienotība*) used rational argumentation to clarify the possibilities for increase of non-taxable minimum mentioning actual calculations:

Vienotība offers to differentiated non-taxable minimum, where non-taxable minimum is not applicable for people whose salaries are higher than 1500 euros per month. For these people it would cost only about 18 euros a month, but it would give a contribution to the budget which raises non-taxable minimum wage significantly to 110 euros. At the same time it is clear that for the small wage earners the steps we took in 2014, as dependant person allowance of 165 euros, at the moment does not give required contribution. Therefore, our proposal is that we set up additional 40 euros as a relief for each kid, in order to push families to have second and third kid, which, of course will deal with our birthrate problem.

Nils Ušakovs (*Saskaņas centrs*) uses rational argument speaking of the differences between his party and competitors. He does not offend the competitors or indicate any failures, but highlights his party's best features:

Anchorman: What is that makes you better than competitors? Why voters should vote for you, not for PCTVL?

Ušakovs: I would not want to talk in terms of better or worse, I would emphasize why we differ, as there's a difference. The first difference is that *Saskaņas centrs* is multi-ethnic union. We have both Latvian and Russian politicians. And at the moment such party is one of a kind, where there is equal representation of all nationalities. [...] The second, when we talk about national problems, about Russian-speaking people's problems, our aim is not to defend human rights

of Russian-speaking people, it serves as a tool, a tool which we use to achieve the main goal – to increase the welfare of Latvia as a state. We believe that while we are having national problems, there will be welfare problems, too.

The research indicates some significant difference between argumentation schemes used by conservative *Tautas partija* and liberal *Vienotība*. In *Krustpunktā* broadcast *Tautas partija* was represented by Gundars Bērziņš, Rinalds Muciņš and Aigars Štokenbergs, while *Vienotība* representatives were Solvita Āboltiņa, Lolita Čigāne and Ilze Viņķele. Conservatives used plausible arguments *ad misericordiam*, *ad hominem* and *ad populum*, as well as rational arguments. Bērziņš and Štokenbergs avoided direct answers so that the anchorman had to repeat his questions demanding a concrete answer. Muciņš used repetitions to reinforce positive effect of his arguments and improve the party's image. Conservatives did not justify themselves when a question containing critic of the party was put. Bērziņš used to switch to a different topic or attacked opponents; but he avoided to clarify the party's position. Muciņš used *ad populum* argument to please the audience and recalled positive trends using argument from positive consequences. Candidates of *Tautas partija* were self-confident, they were active participants in conversation. In stark contrast members of *Vienotība* had a difficulty to respond to opponents' critical remarks. They paused reflecting an answer and rejecting the critic using *ad hominem* arguments. Čigāne and Viņķele resorted to rational arguments also but less frequently than to plausible arguments. Āboltiņa, the president of *Vienotība*, had to face critic of her party as the leader of the government coalition. She responded with *ad populum* arguments, tried to justify herself.

Argumentation style of the deceased *Tautas partija* revived in the discourse of social-democratic *Saskaņa*. Its candidates Raimonds Rublevskis, Nils Ušakovs, Ivars Zariņš were assertive and did not explain themselves when asked critical questions. Mostly they used *ad hominem* and *ad populum* arguments alongside rational argumentation. Ušakovs in some cases offended *Vienotība* by comparing his political party's activities with competitors using *ad hominem* argument:

We are a party with a strongly defined ideology. Well, let's say, we can make a debate whether *Vienotība* is a centrist, conservative or right-wing party. Speaking on some issues the ideology of ZZS and TB/LNNK cannot be understood. We are very strictly defined left-wing social-democratic party.

Members of *Saskaņa* refused to answer some questions because they had been not discussed within the party. Speaking on behalf of the party rather than expressing personal opinion was a widespread tactics in 2014. In was otherwise in 2006. When asked a sensitive or controversial question candidates used to dissociate themselves from their party in order to meet the expectations of the audience. This is how Ingrida Ūdre (ZZS) answered the question about the increase of retirement age. Using argument from consequences, she mentions that retirement age can be increased if senior's state of health will improve and they will be able to work:

Ūdre: “I would not want to raise retirement age, because I think that people who are already 62 years old maybe have worked 40 years and more. Whether it is meaningful, especially...”

Anchorman: “You will be against it, won't you?”

Ūdre: “...especially, talking of state of human health. If in our society health status improves and people are able, normal, physically healthy, they are able to work, maybe it will happen. But I personally do not support it.”

Gundars Bērziņš (*Tautas partija*) immediately refused to speak on behalf of the party despite the listener's demand to express the party's opinion. Bērziņš used argument from analogy by comparing two similar situations and formulated his private viewpoint.

Listener: “Why *Tautas partija* does not care about national interests, which are the interests of Latvian people?”

Bērziņš: “In my opinion that is a very complex issue, but I think I will speak of it in a very clear language, but in my personal opinion...”

In contrast, in 2014 even questions about politician’s personal opinion were answered on behalf of the party.

Anchorman: “Do you support Putin’s policy in Ukraine or not?”

Ušakovs: “We have defined our position immediately after the conflict in Crimea, it was the position of the government party and we are categorically against of any form of violence that is used in Ukraine, including Russia. Our position remains unchanged since March.”

Candidates of *Saskaņa* eschewed controversial and contentious questions. Asked about legalization of marijuana, Ušakovs replied: “I will definitely discuss this issue with my colleagues, party’s colleagues, and then we will be able to define our opinion after careful discussion”. Similar strategy was used along with populist phrases and argument from ignorance by Andris Skride (*Izaugsme*):

Listener: What are you planning to do with family benefits?

Skride: Yes, one of socially vulnerable in the country, one of the most socially vulnerable groups are families with kids and for sure for those people who have dependents non-taxable minimum should be increased and benefit for families with kids certainly should be increased.

Anchorman: How much are you going to promise?

Skride: At the moment the following specific calculations we, of course, have not made.

Earlier research demonstrated that the political parties were not able to define their ideological position and to use suitable arguments (Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006, pp. 53-55). The change of political elite has not changed the argumentation strategies: the parliamentary candidates do not relate their arguments to broader ideological positions of their parties. Politicians prefer to offend and insult opponents, or pretend that the issue had not been discussed within the party.

The overall conclusion is that the change of political elite has not led to changes in political discourse. In public discussions politicians are trying to gain emotional superiority over opponents instead of offering their rational description of political actions addressed to national level problems.

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