



CONCEPTUAL DIRECTIONS OF COVERING
PARLIAMENTARISM REFORMS IN THE MASS
MEDIA OF NEW UZBEKISTAN

Mukhiddinova Aziza Fazliyevna

SamSIFL, Faculty of Oriental Languages, 3rd year student
of group 2408, "International Journalism" program

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ABSTRACT

The article examines, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, how parliamentary reforms in New Uzbekistan are covered by the mass media. Drawing on agenda-setting, framing and deliberative democracy theories, the study considers how the expansion of the powers of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis under the 2023 Constitution, the strengthening of parliamentary oversight and the transition to a mixed majoritarian and proportional electoral system are communicated to the public. Five conceptual directions of parliamentary coverage are identified, namely the informational and educational, analytical and expert, oversight and critical, interactive and dialogic, and digital multimedia directions, and practical recommendations for their development are proposed.

In recent years, the process of democratizing the system of state power in Uzbekistan has reached a qualitatively new stage, with raising the role and responsibility of representative bodies in the life of society standing at its core. The Constitution in the new edition, adopted through a nationwide referendum on April 30, 2023, created a solid legal foundation for changes in this direction, as it expanded the exclusive powers of the Legislative Chamber from five to twelve and the exclusive powers of the Senate from fourteen to eighteen [1]. Evaluating such a change as a mere technical redistribution would be inaccurate, since it demonstrates that the parliament's opportunities to oversee the activities of the executive branch, monitor the implementation of the state budget, and participate in appointments to critical state positions



have expanded in substance. The essence of parliamentarism is not limited solely to the legislative procedure, because the representative body derives its power from the trust of voters, and this trust directly depends on how fully and objectively citizens are informed about parliamentary activities. As long as a citizen does not know which issue a deputy or senator is raising, why a particular law is being enacted, or how government reports are being heard, their attitude toward parliament will be formed on the basis of superficial impressions. Precisely for this reason, the mass media, acting as an intermediary between parliament and society, becomes one of the main institutions ensuring the social acceptance of reforms.

The logic of reforms also encompassed the electoral system. By Decree No. UP-67 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated May 8, 2023, proposals to introduce a majoritarian-proportional system for electing deputies to the Legislative Chamber and local Councils were approved [2], and in October 2024, parliamentary elections were held for the first time on the basis of this mixed system. This innovation, while increasing the responsibility of political parties in parliament, also requires voters to understand the distinction between party programs and the activities of a constituency deputy; consequently, the task of shaping this understanding rests largely on journalists.

At the same time, observations show that a significant portion of materials on parliamentary topics is still prepared in the form of official announcements that is, as brief information stating that a meeting was held or a law was passed. Under such an approach, the content of the reform, its impact on the life of a citizen, and its consequences for various social groups remain in the shadows, resulting in an incomplete picture of parliamentary activity among the audience. The purpose of this article is to scientifically substantiate the conceptual directions of covering parliamentary reforms in New Uzbekistan in the mass media and to formulate proposals for their improvement. To achieve this goal, tasks were set to analyze the legal foundations of the reforms, generalize theoretical approaches to parliamentary journalism, identify key practical directions, and highlight the factors impeding their development. In studying the relations between parliament and the mass media, several theoretical traditions have emerged, each illuminating a specific aspect of the issue. According to J. Habermas's concept of the public sphere, the legitimacy of democratic decisions relies on the existence of an open space where citizens can deliberate freely, and the press is the primary tool that shapes this space and imparts substance to it [6]. This approach allows us to view parliamentary journalism not merely as information dissemination, but as a means of ensuring a deliberative process grounded in evidence and debate within society.

The agenda-setting theory developed by M. McCombs and D. Shaw proved that the mass media do not tell the audience what to think, but rather what topics to think about [7]. In a parliamentary context, this conclusion implies that if journalists consistently pay attention to discussions of draft laws, parliamentary inquiries, or hearings of government reports, these issues will gain priority status in the public eye as well. Conversely, if parliamentary activity is



presented solely through ceremonial events, citizens will develop a distorted perception regarding the real impact of the representative body. The framing concept proposed by R. Entman explains that by selecting certain aspects of reality and emphasizing them in a text, the definition, causes, moral evaluation, and solution of a problem are consciously or unconsciously presented to the audience [8]. H. Semetko and P. Valkenburg identified conflict, human interest, economic consequences, moral evaluation, and responsibility as the most common frames in political news [9]. This classification is very convenient when analyzing materials on parliamentary reforms, because the same legislative act can be covered both from the standpoint of economic consequences and its impact on a citizen's personal life, and each choice shapes audience perception differently.

J. Blumler and D. Kavanagh, in their views on the third age of political communication, emphasized that under conditions where information sources have proliferated, political institutions transition to professionalized communication strategies, and the mass media are forced to compete with them for audience attention [10]. D. McQuail categorizes the normative functions of mass media in society into monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative roles [11], which serves to theoretically differentiate various directions of parliamentary journalism. In national academic literature, the issue of parliamentarism has been studied primarily from the perspective of state-building and constitutional law. In Sh. M. Mirziyoyev's work 'Strategy of New Uzbekistan', enhancing the role of parliament in public life, strengthening the responsibility of deputies to voters, and ensuring the transparency of state bodies' activities are highlighted as priority directions of reforms [3]. These ideas were consistently continued in the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026 and the 'Uzbekistan 2030' Strategy in the form of openness in state governance and strengthening the role of civil society institutions [4; 5]. Within journalism theory, D. R. Abdullayeva analyzed the development trends of parliamentary journalism in Uzbekistan, substantiating the role of journalists in increasing parliamentary transparency and strengthening deputies' relations with the public [12]. However, it should be noted that a holistic conceptual model for covering parliamentary reforms following the Constitution in the new edition has not yet been sufficiently developed in existing research, and this gap determines the scientific novelty of this study.

The methodological foundation of the research is formed by a systems approach, as parliament, mass media, and the public were considered as elements of an integrated communication system where changes in one affect the others. Such an approach made it possible to explain problems in parliamentary journalism not merely through editorial processes, but to evaluate them in conjunction with the legal environment, the level of institutional openness, and audience needs. In the first stage, the normative-legal analysis method was applied to study the Constitution in the new edition, the laws 'On Mass Media', 'On Transparency of the Activities of State Power and Governance Bodies', 'On Parliamentary Control', and 'On Guarantees and Freedom of Access to Information', as well as presidential



decrees related to the reforms. This stage was aimed at determining how journalists' right to obtain information on parliamentary activities is guaranteed and what openness obligations the parliament itself has undertaken.

In the second stage, materials on parliamentary topics published between 2023 and 2026 on the official websites and social media pages of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis, on national television and radio channels, and in leading online publications were examined using qualitative content analysis. The main criteria in the analysis were the genre of the materials, information sources, frames used, presence of expert opinion, and forms of feedback with the audience. It should be emphasized that the study is qualitative in nature, and its goal was not to count materials, but to identify stable approaches and recurring trends within them.

In the third stage, comparative analysis, induction and deduction, generalization, and typology methods were used. The identified trends were compared with the theoretical concepts discussed above, and conceptual directions of covering parliamentary reforms differing from one another in function, genres, and mechanism of impact on the audience were delineated. The conducted analysis showed that five conceptual directions can be distinguished in covering parliamentarism reforms in the mass media. They are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, when applied in a balanced manner, they complement each other to create a comprehensive understanding of parliamentary activity.

The first direction is the informational-educational direction, whose task is to convey the essence of reforms to a broad audience in accessible language and to raise the legal and political literacy of the population. For instance, the fact that under the new Constitution each chamber is empowered to self-dissolve, or that the Senate is formed under a new procedure comprising members elected from regions and appointed by the President, remain complex legal categories for an ordinary citizen. If a journalist merely records such a norm, the audience will not grasp its significance; however, if they provide a consistent explanation of the circumstances under which this norm is applied and how it affects the balance between branches of power, the reform acquires vital meaning for the citizen. Analysis demonstrated that in this direction, infographics, Q&A materials, and glossaries of terms prove to be the most effective tools, as they break down complex information into parts and enable step-by-step understanding.

The second direction is the analytical-expert direction, aimed at revealing the causes, alternative options, and long-term consequences of reforms. This direction involves engaging opinions from lawyers, political scientists, and economists, conducting comparative analysis with the parliamentary experience of foreign states, and openly discussing the strengths and weaknesses of decisions being made. For example, the economic significance of transferring the power to establish the maximum amount of state debt to the parliamentary chambers can only be fully explained through analytical material involving specialists. Observations revealed that such materials appear mainly in major online publications and certain analytical projects, while



being virtually absent in regional mass media, which points to a territorial imbalance in the information space.

The third direction is the oversight-critical direction, which relies on the classical function of mass media as a watchdog over the actions of authorities. The Law 'On Parliamentary Control' specifies forms such as parliamentary inquiries, deputy inquiries, hearing government reports, and parliamentary investigations [15], while the new Constitution specifically consolidated parliamentary investigation as a joint power of the chambers [1]. The effectiveness of these mechanisms depends largely on whether information about them reaches the public, because a publicly covered parliamentary inquiry becomes an additional responsibility factor for executive bodies. Results showed that materials on parliamentary control have increased significantly in recent years; however, most of them are limited to announcing that a control event took place, while follow-up materials tracking how the raised issue was subsequently resolved are rarely prepared.

The fourth direction is the interactive-dialogic direction, serving to create conditions for citizens' direct participation in parliamentary processes. With the introduction of the mixed electoral system, deputies elected from single-mandate constituencies were compelled to maintain closer contact with their voters, creating an opportunity for regional mass media to regularly monitor constituency deputies' activities, cover their meetings with voters, and analyze the fulfillment of promises made. Furthermore, submitting draft laws for public discussion assigns journalists the task of gathering public opinion, generalizing it, and conveying it to lawmakers. The analysis revealed that this direction is one of the least developed, as in many cases, even if the discussion process is reported, its outcomes and how the submitted proposals were taken into account remain uncommunicated to the audience.

The fifth direction is the digital-multimedia direction, associated with the shift of information consumption to social networks and mobile devices. Under conditions where the chambers of the Oliy Majlis and political parties have begun addressing audiences directly through their official channels, traditional mass media are required to maintain their competitiveness through formats such as live streams, short video clips, data visualization, and podcasts. Considering that the young audience receives information about parliamentary activity primarily through social networks, the importance of this direction grows year by year. Results showed that although the volume of parliamentary-themed content on digital platforms has increased, a large portion of it consists of reposted official press releases, whereas multimedia materials subjected to independent editorial processing remain insufficient.

When assessing general trends across directions, four systemic problems were identified in covering parliamentary topics. First, official and protocol-style materials predominate, which dampens the audience's interest in parliamentary activity. Second, legal terminology is frequently used without explanation, making texts understandable only to a narrow circle of specialists. Third, the number of journalists specializing in parliamentary topics is limited, and



in most newsrooms, this topic is covered within general political news. Fourth, regional mass media exhibit insufficient activity in covering the work of deputies elected from majoritarian districts, despite the fact that they ought to be the closest intermediaries between deputy and voter.

Comparing the obtained results with theoretical concepts leads to a number of important conclusions. From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, the dominance of protocol-style materials reinforces parliament in the public agenda solely as an official institution, while its image as an active subject protecting citizens' interests remains unformed [7]. In other words, no matter how much the mass media write about parliament, if they do not demonstrate the practical substance of reform, the audience will not connect this topic with their own lives and will maintain an indifferent attitude toward it. Evaluated through framing theory, materials on parliamentary reforms primarily employ the responsibility frame presenting reforms as a result of state initiative and political will [8; 9]. Although this frame correctly identifies the source of reforms, the sparse use of economic consequences and human interest frames prevents the audience from perceiving reforms as a process directly concerning them personally. For this reason, journalists are advised to illustrate parliamentary decisions through the real-life situation of a specific person, family, or entrepreneur, as such an approach transforms an abstract legal norm into a concrete life example, facilitating retention and understanding.

Blumler and Kavanagh's views on the third age of political communication are also confirmed in contemporary Uzbekistan's practice [10]. The direct outreach of parliamentary chambers and political parties to audiences through their own information channels alters journalism's intermediary function; now the primary value of a journalist lies not in being first to deliver information, but in verifying, contextualizing, and analyzing it. This situation further elevates the significance of the analytical-expert and oversight-critical directions, since official channels cannot fulfill the task of critically evaluating their own activities, and this void can only be filled by independent journalism. Another issue requiring discussion concerns the balance between propaganda and objective coverage. The necessity to explain and support reforms sometimes prompts mass media to present parliamentary activities solely in a positive light; however, such an approach erodes audience trust in the long run. According to McQuail's classification of normative roles, the media's collaborative role yields beneficial results for society only when balanced with the monitorial role [11]. Thus, parliamentary journalism, while explaining the objectives of reforms, must also highlight shortcomings in their implementation, because it is precisely critical feedback that provides the necessary input for refining reforms.

From a legal standpoint, the laws 'On Transparency of the Activities of State Power and Governance Bodies' and 'On Mass Media' have created a sufficient foundation for journalists to access information on parliamentary activities [13; 14]. However, the existence of a legal norm does not imply its full realization in practice, as committee meeting materials, voting results, and alternative proposals submitted for draft laws are not always published in an open-data



format. Systematic publication of this information in machine-readable formats is an essential condition for developing data journalism and objectively evaluating deputies' performance. Limitations of the research must also be acknowledged. Since the conducted analysis was qualitative, quantifying the prevalence of identified trends remains a task for subsequent studies. In the future, conducting quantitative content analysis on a large sample of parliamentary-themed materials and surveying audiences to measure the impact of different directions on public opinion would be advisable.

The results of the conducted research demonstrate that the success of parliamentarism reforms in New Uzbekistan depends not only on the quality of legal norms, but also on how deeply they are understood by society. Mass media play a decisive role in this process as an intermediary between parliament and citizens, as it is through them that the representative body's activities enter the public agenda and undergo evaluation.

In the course of the study, the informational-educational, analytical-expert, oversight-critical, interactive-dialogic, and digital-multimedia directions of covering parliamentary reforms were substantiated. When applied as a holistic, mutually reinforcing model, these directions form a complete and objective understanding of parliament among the audience, whereas the dominance of any single direction leads to one-sided coverage. Current practice shows that while the informational-educational direction is relatively developed, the interactive-dialogic and oversight-critical directions require substantial strengthening.

Based on the results obtained, the following proposals are put forward. First and foremost, introducing specialized training courses and professional development programs in parliamentary journalism within the journalism education system is advisable, as only a journalist with specialized knowledge can explain complex legal processes in simple, precise language. Additionally, it is recommended to systematically publish materials related to Oliy Majlis committee activities, voting results, and parliamentary control outcomes in open-data formats, providing journalists with reliable sources for analytical and watchdog reporting. Furthermore, establishing dedicated columns and projects in regional media to regularly cover constituency deputies' activities will serve to strengthen ties between deputy and voter. Finally, compiling an explanatory glossary of core parliamentary terms designed for a broad audience and utilizing it in newsroom practice will help elevate coverage quality.

In conclusion, covering parliamentarism reforms in the mass media must not be limited to mere information delivery; rather, it should aim to build a dialogue platform enabling citizens' conscious participation in political processes. Only then will parliament rely on public trust as a true representative body of the people, and the mass media will become an active participant in democratic reforms.



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