



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

Interim Report on the Monitoring of Online Publications

15 June - 31 August 2020



საქართველოს
ჟურნალისტური
ეთიკის ქარტია

This report is prepared and published with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Contents of the report are the sole responsibility of the Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union (EU) and UNDP.

Contents

About the project	3
Methodology of the research	3
Analysis of online media selected for monitoring:	4
interpressnews.ge	4
ambebi.ge.....	6
kvira.ge	7
mpn.ge	9
netgazeti.ge	10
news.on.ge	12
primetime.ge.....	13
publika.ge	14
radiotavisupleba.ge	16
reginfo.ge	17
sknews.ge	18
sputnik-georgia.com.....	19
tabula.ge.....	21
Gender stereotypes in online media	22
Conclusion	23

About the project

“Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics” is conducting monitoring of online publications within the framework of the project “Study and Research on Elections Media Coverage for 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia” funded by European Union (EU) and implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This research covers the period from 15 June through 31 August 2020 and the following 13 online publications: ambebi.ge, interpressnews.ge, kvira.ge, mpn.ge, netgazeti.ge, news.on.ge, primetime.ge, publika.ge, radiotavisupleba.ge, reginfo.ge, sknews.ge, sputnik-georgia.com, tabula.ge.

Methodology of the research

Media outlets selected as part of media monitoring are monitored in terms of both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative research is focused on the frequency with which this or that subject is covered in the selected media and the tone in which the subject is covered. Qualitative observation is focused on the extent to which the selected media outlet adheres to journalistic ethics standards, such as: accuracy of fact, diversity of sources, balanced coverage, encouragement of discrimination on any grounds, replication of gender stereotypes, any kind of manipulation, and so on.

Monitoring is not done on promotional articles accompanied by proper references.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the materials revealed the following key findings:

- The biggest challenge for online media is the improper distinction of articles prepared under a commercial contract from editorial materials. Some of the websites selected for monitoring do not provide any relevant reference to such materials; some do, but the way these references do not comply with the standard. Consequently, the readers of most of the websites are not given the opportunity to distinguish which of the published articles is paid and which is the journalistic work prepared by the editors;
- Lack of critical and in-depth analysis remains a challenge. Most of the websites selected for monitoring cover issues superficially, limited to the day-to-day activities and statements of government officials and politicians. Only a small fraction of websites tries to cover issues in depth and offer readers a critical analysis of current events;
- In case of 4 out of 13 websites, on the one hand, an attempt to constantly portray the government in a positive light, and on the other hand, an attempt to discredit opposition politicians, was obvious;
- None of the online media outlets selected for monitoring had a particularly positive attitude towards any of the opposition parties;
- Compared to the monitoring conducted in the past years, there is a slight improvement in terms of pluralistic coverage of the political spectrum. Although the coverage of the ruling party pre-

dominated on the websites, attention was also paid to the activities and statements of the representatives of different parties;

- There were almost no cases of using hate speech and discriminatory terminology in the texts of journalists. However, it is problematic that some online media outlets invariably and without comment cover the statements of politicians or other public figures that contain such terminology and content;
- The most common cases of violation of journalistic standards in online media are such as one-sided coverage of facts and serious allegations. Most of the websites selected for monitoring showed no attempt by journalists to verify the specific allegations made against the individuals in the materials or to seek the comments of the accused parties;
- During the monitoring period, there were numerous cases in the online media where statements containing gender stereotypes and gender discrimination, which deliberately diminished the role of women in politics, were covered invariably and without comment;
- The coverage of the government plan, to address the economic crisis caused by the COVID 19 pandemic during the pre-election period was translated into all selected websites' high percentage of positive coverage of the Prime Minister; even of the websites that were particularly critical of the government team. This circumstance led to the fact that information about government financial aid was provided to the public by the Prime Minister, which was accordingly reflected in his positive media coverage.

Analysis of online media selected for monitoring:

interpressnews.ge

Improper distinction of editorial materials from the articles, prepared under the commercial agreement is a serious challenge for interpressnews.ge. More than one third of the materials prepared on the activities of state agencies and politicians are published under a commercial agreement, however they are not clearly separated from the editorial materials.

The articles prepared under the commercial agreement on interpressnews.ge are in most cases accompanied by the Latin symbols NS in a circle, which is confusing for the reader, as it is not clearly stated that the material is sponsored and promoted.

Most of such advertising materials are related to the coverage of state activities, which is reflected in the quantitative data of monitoring: on interpressnews.ge more than 70 percent of the total coverage of monitoring entities was dedicated to the coverage of the government team. The rates of positive tone of coverage of the mentioned subjects are quite high; For example, the Prime Minister received 52% of the positive tone, the Government 54%, the local self-government 64%, and the Adjara government 50%. Besides, NS marks material that accuses or blames specific individuals or companies and does not represent the position of the accused party. For example, the publication under the NS

mark published the news with the headline -Davit Chichinadze - Giorgi Vashadze asked the “Nationals” for quotas in exchange for money, but they were reasonable and did not agree to this dishonest proposal. The material contains allegations against Vashadze that are unsubstantiated and at the same time, the position of the “accused” party is not presented, which does not meet journalistic standards.

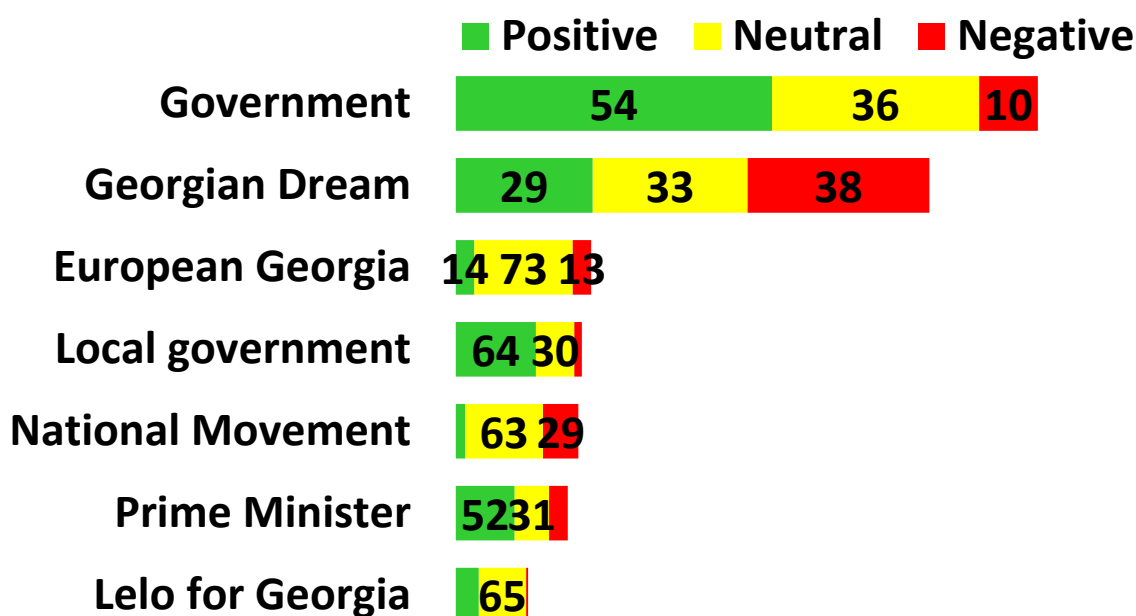
As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that the readers of *interpressnews.ge* cannot have clear understanding which articles are prepared by the editorial board and which are published as advertisements. For example, when a website basically publishes with NS mark the news, telling that a road is under construction or a square is being rehabilitated, the audience fails to get comprehensive information on how the tender was announced or how the contractor company was selected, whether there were any signs of corruption, and so on. The abundance of similar types of advertising materials obscures the role of the news agency as of provider of impartial coverage of the events ongoing in the country.

In-depth and balanced coverage of events is also a challenge for *interpressnews.ge*, as mostly news is published and in fact there are no analytical materials. However, news about events that take place over a period of time or contain allegations, are published the way that they are not linked to each other appropriately. Consequently, the reader fails to obtain complete, balanced information about this particular charge or event.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

interpressnews.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



ambebi.ge

ambebi.ge covered the activities of different political parties less frequently. More than 80 percent of the coverage of monitoring subjects was dedicated to the government team.

The highest rate of positive tone on ambebi.ge was given to the Prime Minister (35%), and the highest rate of negative tone was given to Georgian Dream (43%). High levels of negative tone were found in the coverage of opposition parties, the United National Movement (38%) and European Georgia (19%).

In the case of ambebi.ge, as a result of the monitoring, we came across a number of articles in which the problems of accuracy and balance were revealed. For example, in the article published on 15 July “31 years old chairperson of the Adjara Government, with Kaladze’s support and father’s influence - what property does Tornike Rizhvadze own?” The career advancement of the head of the government of Adjara was related to the influences of his father, while specific accusations were voiced against his father in connection with his past activities. There was no attempt in the article providing the reader with the explanations of the head of the Adjara government or his father regarding the allegations. Besides, in the article published on 20 July “If children do not receive books this year, it will be the first and unprecedented case ... students may be left without textbooks!” The conclusion in the title that schoolchildren may be left without textbooks is based on information provided by anonymous sources, according to which the company with which the state has signed a contract for printing textbooks will not be able to fulfill the terms of the contract because it offers unrealistically low prices and its print shops do not have respective technical capacities. No attempt to verify this information is made in the article: the journalist has not contacted either the winning company, government officials or competing printers. Consequently, the reader could not obtain any confirmed or accurate information, about the allegation.

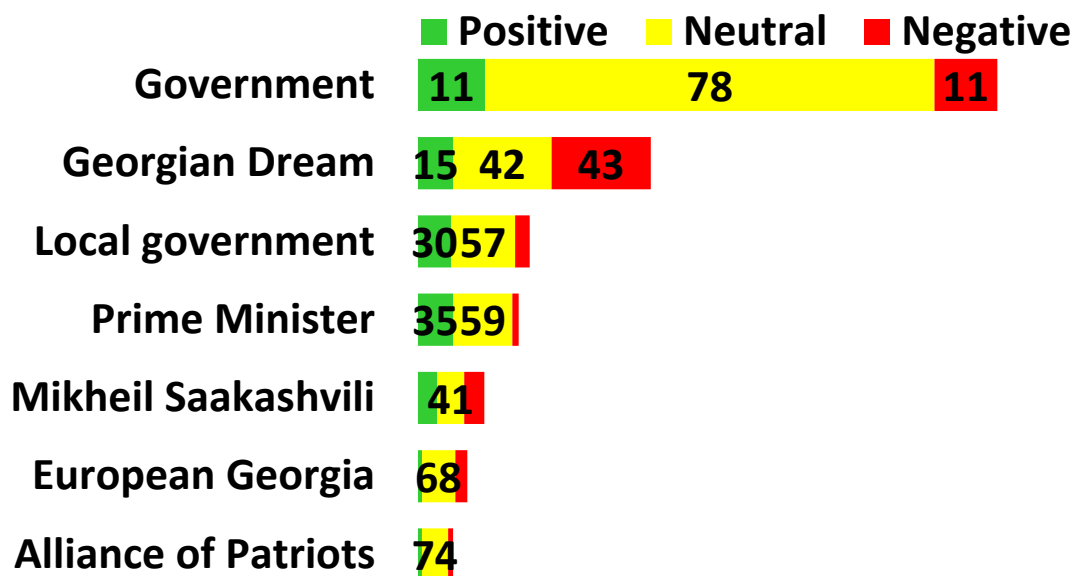
ambebi.ge also improperly distinguishes between the advertising and editorial materials. For example, on August 16, the website published an article as an editorial - “Levan Koberidze – With the amendments to the Law on Communications, the government legalized violence against business, done by the National Movement through terror and racketeering”, which on the same day, with exactly the same text, but different title and promotion mark was published on netgazeti.ge.

In addition, ambebi.ge releases some of the material prepared under the commercial agreement with an R at the end of the article, which, like NS, is confusing for the reader, as it does not explicitly indicate that the material is sponsored and promoted.

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that the acute challenges of ambebi.ge are to maintain the balance of information sources in separate articles and the attempts of journalists to verify the information on the allegations, which makes difficult for readers to obtain accurate information.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)**ambebi.ge**

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)

**kvira.ge**

kvira.ge was mainly busy, on the one hand, trying to portray the government team positively, and, on the other hand, - to discredit opposition politicians. The website contained cases of serious violations of journalistic standards, such as one-sided coverage of events, frequent coverage of unsubstantiated allegations against specific individuals, unchanged publication of hate speech and discriminatory terminology, and so on. Extremely high percentage of positive tone indicators were revealed during the ruling team coverage; For example, the Prime Minister got 70% of the positive coverage, the Government of Adjara 80%, the local self-governments 75%, the government 57%, and the Georgian Dream 50%. On the other hand, the unprecedented high rates of negative tone were revealed in the coverage of the United National Movement (88%), European Georgia (80%) and the Labor Party (76%).

During the monitoring period, all current issues were covered on kvira.ge in a positive tone towards the government. Most of the published articles were press releases prepared by government agencies, although the website did not provide relevant references to such articles. At the same time, on important current issues, causing criticism of the government, kvira.ge only provided the audience with the assessments of government officials or their justifications. This was especially noticeable when covering the dispute between Frontera and the government, when the publication offered the coverage supportive to the government and did not present the assessments of either Frontera, opposition or the experts critical to the government.

One-sided coverage of the issues was systematic, including often very serious allegations being made against specific individuals without any attempt to verify them. Such articles were usually about opposition politicians and aimed at discrediting them (for example, in the articles “How TBC Bank and

Mamuka Khazaradze Bankrupted Businessman Jemal Leonidze - Video Interview with the Former Owner of Magnat”, August 10, 2020; Vashadze’s party employs minors illegally” (August 12, 2020). Specific allegations against opposition politicians were systematically covered on kvira.ge, and there was no attempt by the editorial staff to verify the allegations.

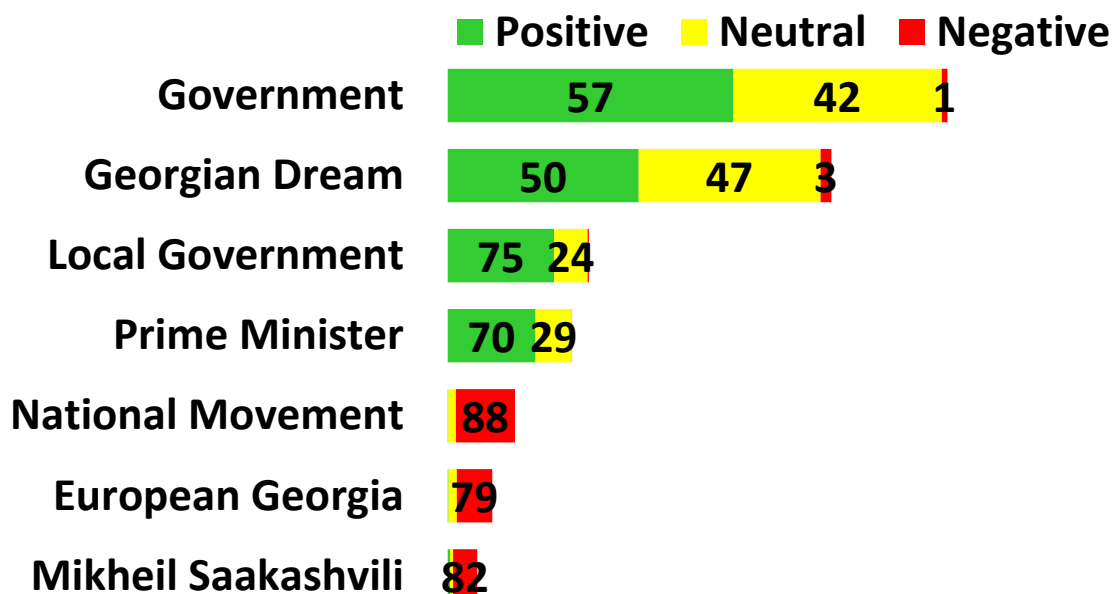
In the course of the monitoring, we found cases of hate speech containing extremely hateful, extremely offensive and discriminatory terminology and unsubstantiated serious allegations. For example, on July 30, kvira.ge dedicated its press club to the leaders of the far-right Georgian March party, whose homophobic, hateful language statements have remained unchanged so that the editorial board did not separate itself of the statements encouraging discrimination.

There were also manipulative titles on kvira.ge. For example, with the title - “How many men have you killed, you bust....” - Footage of Giorgi Rurua being extradited from the United States was spread on the Internet - the publication gave the impression that a number of murders committed by Rurua were confirmed, which was not proved by the article. Also, the headline - “Gvaramia confirmed that Rurua would control the street before the elections” manipulated Gvaramia’s quote, which did not say anything and did not confirm that Rurua would “control” the street.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

kvira.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



mpn.ge

On mpn.ge, on the one hand, there was a very positive attitude towards the ruling team, and on the other hand, an extremely negative attitude towards the opposition parties. Cases of gross violations of journalistic standards were systematically found on the website. The publication does not distinguish advertising and editorial materials.

The highly positive attitude towards the government team was clearly reflected in the quantitative monitoring data as well; for example, 63% of the positive tone was revealed in the coverage of the Prime Minister, 70% in the coverage of local self-governments, and 50% in the coverage of the Georgian Dream. Extremely high rates of negative tone were revealed in the coverage of opposition parties; For example, the United National Movement got 71% of the negative tone, European Georgia 65%, and the Labor Party 56%.

The biased coverage of the government was also evident in the observations of the materials published on 20 June. mpn.ge dedicated a number of news to the government supportive coverage of the June 20 protests justifying the dispersal of the rally and published the same Georgian Dream statement three times at different parts of the day, with different headlines accusing the former government of organizing violent overthrowing the government on June 20.

On mpn.ge we have repeatedly encountered cases of selecting inappropriate or manipulative titles for articles; For example, a critical study prepared by the non-governmental organization IDFI, which found that the Georgian government has not taken significant steps to improve the standard of proactive disclosure of information since 2013, mpn.ge published the headline “In 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs Had Fully (100%) Published Information - IDFI Survey” (June 18, 2020). It should be noted that this phrase was indeed part of a published study, although it was the only positive assessment in a fairly large, critical survey.

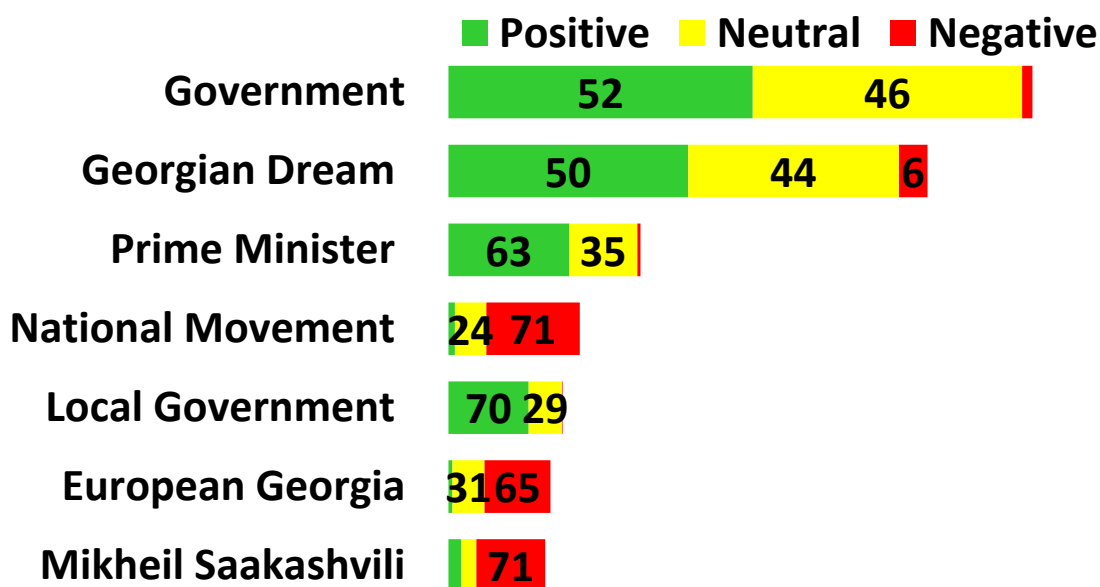
mpn.ge often publishes Facebook statuses of celebrities, which contain unsubstantiated allegations, mainly against the opposition, as well as insulting, hateful terms. (For example, articles: “Maniacs Fear of Decryption - Saakashvili and His Sect Sacrificed a Famous TV Host to Destabilize!” (June 17, 2020), “Zhvania’s son has a shaken psyche - in exchange for money his father’s butt was turned into a banner - Megi Gotsiridze” (August 3, 2020), Jump on the lying Gubaz Sanikidze and fly to Megia Gotsiridze - Rezo Amashukeli (August 7, 2020).

mpn.ge often uses photo-manipulation of opposition leaders (for example, “I told you it will become hot and sweat will spill to your brain again? - Did you jump ...? - Zedelashvili”, June 24, 2020; “Take care of Saakashvili’s mother’s Poodle – Bondo Mdzinarishvili” 4 June 2020; “Bidzina Ivanishvili gives Shalva Natelashvili one-room apartment in Nakhlovka - he feels great in the so-called opposition” June 20, 2020; “We are going to fight to release Giorgi Rurua” - Elene Khoshtaria, July 30, 2020). Similar types of materials give the impression that the attached photos serve to tease specific subjects.

As a result of the monitoring, the impression is created that the purpose of mpn.ge is not to cover the current events objectively, but to form public opinion in favor of the ruling party.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)**mpn.ge**

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)

**netgazeti.ge**

netgazeti.ge was distinguished by its high level of journalistic standards and in-depth and impartial coverage of the ongoing political processes in the country.

There were no particularly positive or negative attitudes towards any political force on netgazeti.ge. The highest rates of negative tone were revealed in the coverage of the Georgian Dream (44%) and ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili (38%). The highest rate of positive tone was given to the Prime Minister (28%).

In the course of monitoring, netgazeti.ge often used to offer the readers an in-depth analysis of the issues covered. For example, in the articles “What was (not) investigated on the 20 June Case” (June 20, 2020); “Signal - What does the US project on foreign operations funding mean for Georgia?” (July 12, 2020) A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the issues covered was presented.

It should be noted that netgazeti.ge, in accordance with the standards for the distinction of advertising materials, marks the articles prepared under the commercial agreement and makes this clear for any reader.

During the monitoring period, we also encountered a high level of compliance with the correction of inaccuracy standard; the article “It will be known in the nearest future, whether Wizz Air will

temporarily cancel its existing base in Kutaisi “ (July 1, 2020) in the end contained the caption in a specially enlarged and bold font that the original version of the article contained inaccuracies.

In order to ensure the diversity of sources, Netgazeti offers on important issues the assessments, of representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations as well. For example, Netgazeti offered various assessments on the initiative of “Girchi” on the Tesla car lottery for voters, as well as an extensive analysis of the NGO working on election issues.

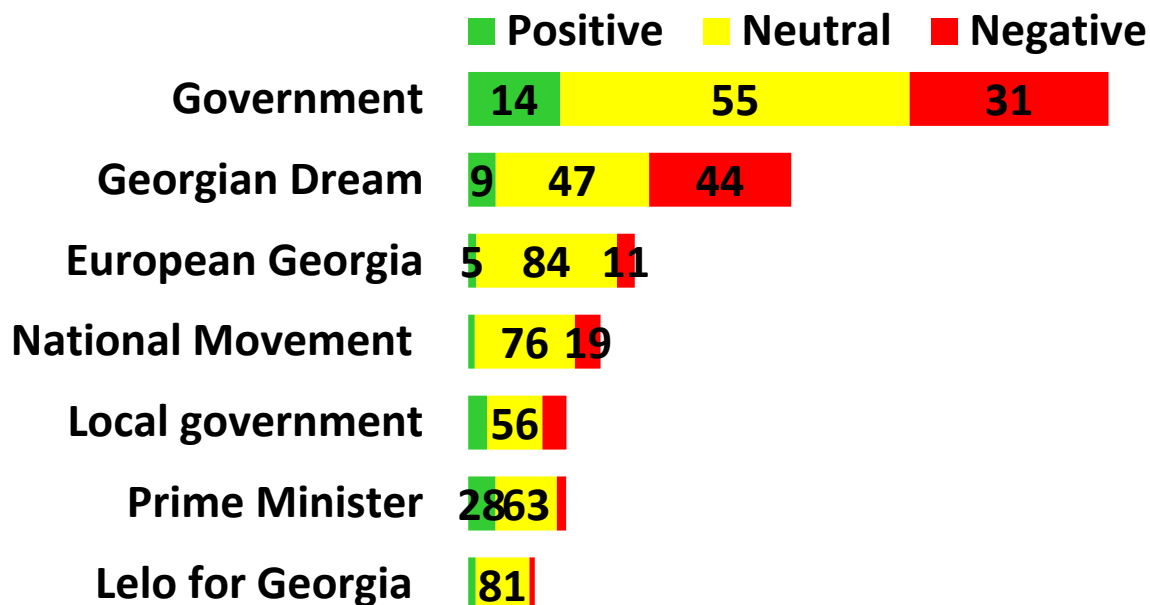
In the course of the monitoring, there were single cases when the material was based on a research of a specific organization, or a statement that revealed or criticized the activities of other persons or organizations, while the position of so called “revealed” party was not presented (for example, the network working for the “Alliance of Patriots “ is also observed on FB - ISFED “, 14 August, 2020; broadcasters request a moratorium on the responsibility under the “Child Rights Code “August 19, 2020).

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that netgazeti.ge is focused on maintenance of high level of journalistic standards and provision of impartial and in-depth information to readers.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

netgazeti.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



news.on.ge

news.on.ge paid attention not only to the ruling and rated opposition parties, but also to the activities of other parties participating in the elections.

Accordingly, it offered the reader pluralistic information about the parties participating in the elections.

No particularly positive or negative attitudes towards any political force were revealed on the website. The highest percentages of positive tone were revealed towards the Prime Minister (29%) and local governments (38%). The Georgian Dream (40%), the Alliance of Patriots (45%) and the United National Movement (28%) had high rates of negative tone.

When covering the political processes, ongoing in the country, news.on.ge tries to follow the journalistic standards at a high level. There is little in-depth or exclusive material on the website, though each piece of news is accompanied by the background and thorough description of the facts.

Advertising and editorial materials are clearly distinguished on news.on.ge.

During the monitoring period, isolated cases were identified when the problem of information accuracy and balance was identified.

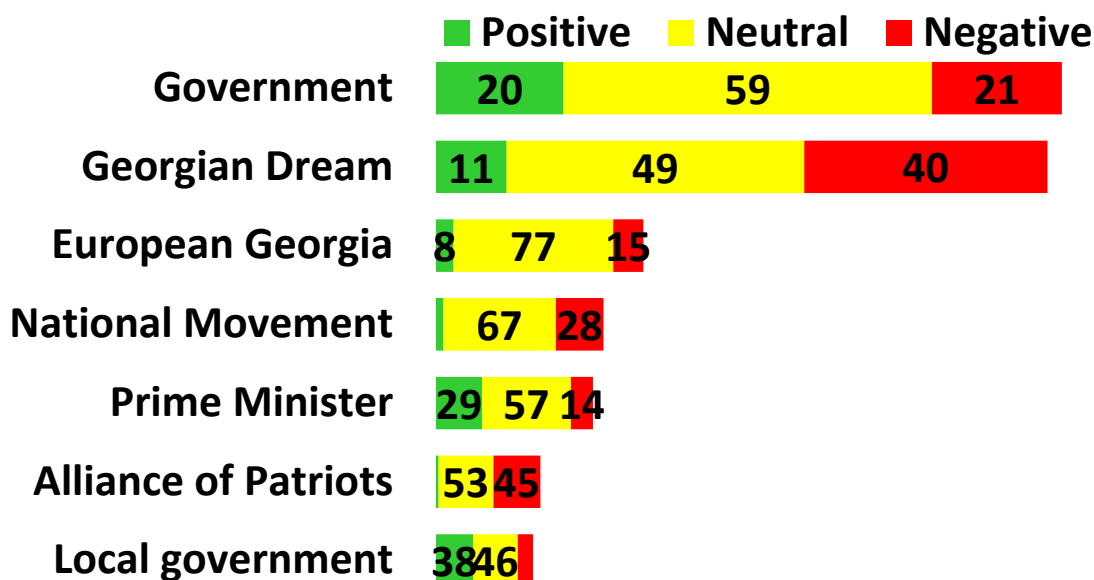
For example, an article published on June 26, “The UNM office in Gori was attacked” presented the opinion of Roman Gotsiridze, a member of the Parliament from the United National Movement, that the attack was organized by the Georgian Dream. On the same day, another article was published, “One person was arrested for attacking the UNM office in Gori,” and this article reiterated Roman Gotsiridze’s statement accusing the Georgian Dream. news.on.ge did not make any attempt to verify the allegations or to ask for comment either Georgian Dream representatives or the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is very important that the media take more responsibility for the one-sided coverage of statements, containing blames in specific criminal offences against particular person or group of persons.

Also, during the monitoring period, there was a case when the website attached a clearly irrelevant photo to the article. The article published on August 17 “Tsulukiani called Davit Bakradze a ‘talking bear’” was accompanied by an inappropriately laughing photo of Minister Tea Tsulukiani and it is unclear why the editorial office chose namely this photo while covering the statement.

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that news.on.ge mostly covered the news ethically and in a balanced way.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)**news.on.ge**

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)

**primetime.ge**

primetime.ge, on the one hand was trying to present the ruling team positively, and on the other hand, trying to discredit opposition politicians. There were cases of violations of journalistic standards related to the distinction between editorial and advertising materials, the accuracy of the fact and the maintenance of balance.

Extremely positive attitude towards the government team was clearly observed on primetime.ge. Especially high percentages of positive tone were found in the coverage of Adjara government (74%), local self-government (69%), president (60%), prime minister (52%) and government (49%). On the other hand, high rates of negative tone were revealed in the coverage of the United National Movement (47%), European Georgia (42%) and former President Mikheil Saakashvili (46%).

Primetime.ge regularly published materials that were not prepared by the editorial board and positively portrayed the activities of the government, although the relevant reference was not attached to the articles. For example, on June 20, news was published on the website as editorial material - "Asphalt paving is ongoing on 9 April Street in Akhaltsikhe", which was published by sknews.ge with identical title, illustration and text as advertising material.

Some advertising materials are placed by primetime.ge in such a way that Latin R is written at the end of the article, however, this mark is confusing for the reader and does not clearly distinguish it from the editorial materials.

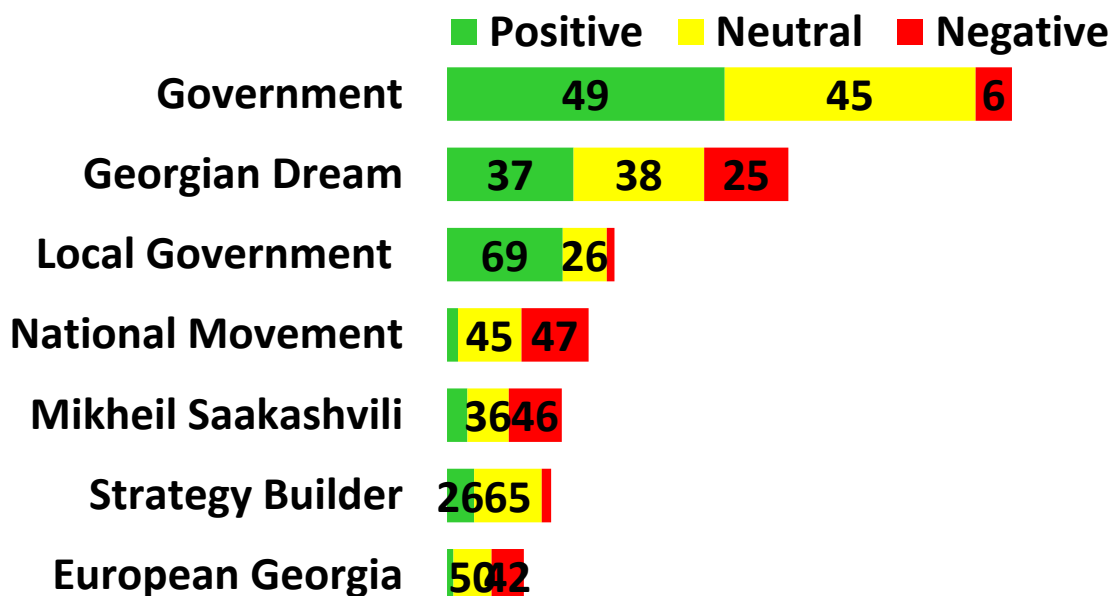
One-sided coverage of serious allegations against particular individuals on primetime.ge was a serious

problem. For example, the articles “Which Telephone Record was Reminded to Natelashvili - Harry Potter Books Instead of Money” (July 17, 2020), “TBC Bank was a conductor of criminal activities of the Prosecutor’s Office of previous government - Chkhartishvili” (July 16, 2020). Serious allegations were presented against the opposition politicians, however, in the articles appeared no attempt of editorial office to present the comments of the accused politicians regarding the allegations.

There are signs of neglecting the principles of the accuracy of facts in one more material of prime-time – “Shouted in the bed at Republican Hospital”, which based on anonymous source distributes information as if former minister of interior – Kakha Targamadze sent to the prosecutor by that time, the list of particular criminal cases with participation of Giorgi Rurua, the representative of opposition. The list includes facts of murder, kidnapping, robbery. There is no attempt to verify these facts in the material - the journalist did not contact Kakha Targamadze, with whom he could verify whether the letter from an anonymous source really belonged to him, did not contact the addressee of these accusations - Giorgi Rurua’s lawyer, to offer his position to the reader.

Such violations were systematically observed in the coverage of opposition politicians.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)
primetime.ge
 (15 June - 31 August, 2020)



publika.ge

Publika.ge did not show any positive or negative attitudes towards any political force. publika.ge tried to adhere to a high level of journalistic standards when covering ongoing events.

The highest percentage of positive tone on publika.ge was given to the Prime Minister (45%), while the highest percentage of negative tone - to the Georgian Dream (37%), the United National Move-

ment (23%) and the Alliance of Patriots (39%) got the highest rates of negative tone.

publika.ge clearly distinguishes between advertising and editorial materials.

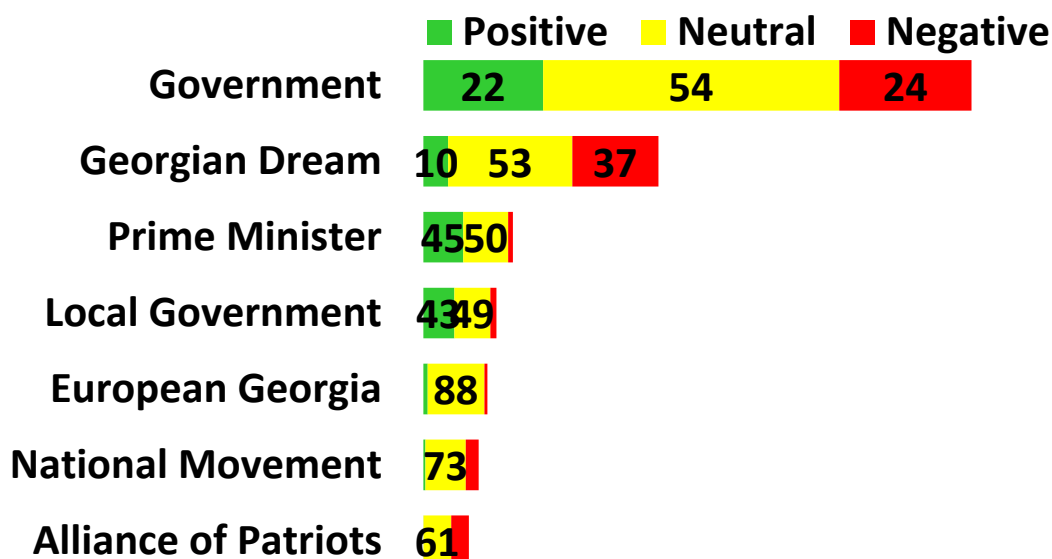
publika.ge provides the audience with a variety of information on important legislative issues or political processes and tries to provide the readers with the assessments of not only the parties, but also specialists of the field. However, mostly, the readers of publika.ge receive information on political issues in the news mode and have little opportunity to read analytical or in-depth articles.

publika.ge always tries to keep the balance, however, there are some cases when the website covers the opinions of the opposing parties in separate articles so that the reader who reads the originally published articles cannot understand the articles, published later. For example, on July 16, the statements of two organizations against the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality were posted on a website, which did not state the ministry's position. The Ministry's response was published on the website later; however, readers who have read the first two news items on publika.ge do not have the opportunity to understand the Ministry's position on the allegations. It is important that the individual news items containing the allegations published on the website are linked together in a way giving the reader access to complete information. A similar case was revealed on July 23, when an article was published "According to Bachaliashvili's father, the body could not be transferred because the Bureau of Expertise has no ice." Later that day, the Bureau of Expertise published an explanation in the article "Information regarding the ice is not true - Bureau about Bachaliashvili's family." In this case as well, the overall balance is maintained, although the first article technically is not connected with the second, and therefore the accusation is presented unilaterally and does not show the journalist's attempt to verify the allegation. As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that publika.ge covers the events ongoing in the country objectively and tries to comply with high level of journalistic standards.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

publika.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



radiotavisupleba.ge

radiotavisupleba.ge was distinguished by critical and in-depth coverage of issues. The most of the articles adhered to journalistic standards.

There was no particularly positive or negative attitude towards any political force on radiotavisupleba.ge. The high percentage of positive tone went to the Prime Minister (20%), while the high percentage of negative tone went to the Georgian Dream (31%), the United National Movement (21%), the Alliance of Patriots (38%) and the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili (25%).

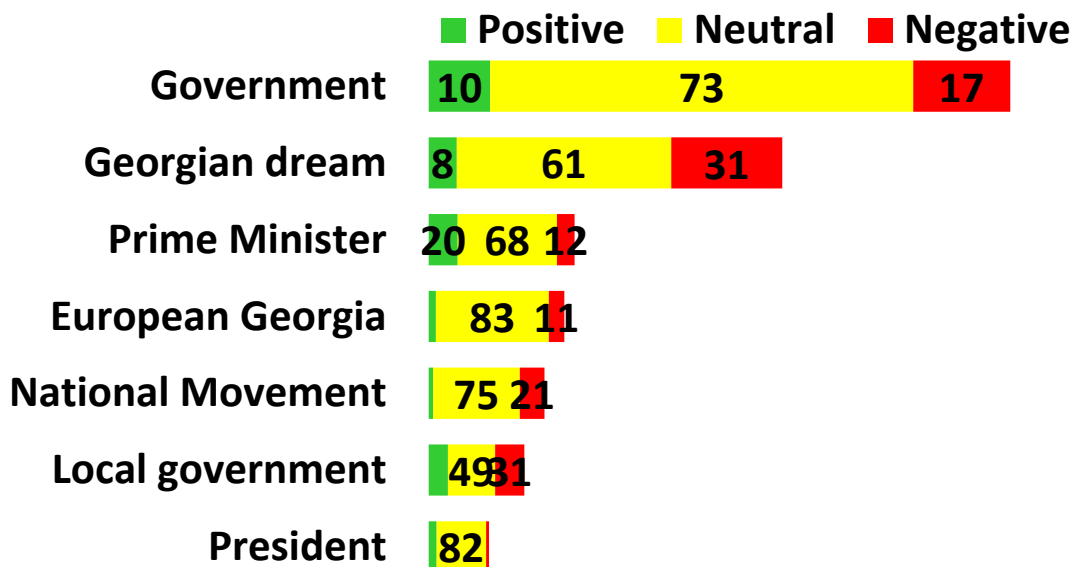
The website often offered readers in-depth analysis of the issues. For example, an article published on August 3, “Sighnaghi people were falsely promised to restore the ropeway,” presented an unfulfilled promise made by the ruling party majoritarian in 2016 to restore the ropeway, as well as his various statements related to this issue and the history and significance of the ropeway.

The website corrects the mistakes in accordance with the standard, for example, the material published during the monitoring period - “Buses will run in test mode on Chavchavadze for 3 nights”, is accompanied by an update: “the original version of the material provided that the buses will practice on moving with new scheme, which was changed to avoid misinterpretation.”

radiotavisupleba.ge mostly tried to maintain a high level of journalistic standards, however, during the monitoring period several articles were published in which the balance of sources was not maintained and, consequently, events and allegations were covered unilaterally. For example, in the article published on 18 June, “State Security Service and Prosecutor’s Office are called to get interested in winning the tenders by Ivanishvili’s relatives” was presented a study carried out by Transparency International Georgia, revealing possible corruption scheme. With participation of close relative of Bidzina Ivanishvili – chairperson of “Georgia Dream”. The article showed no attempt of the journalist to present the position of the accused person on this matter. Also, in the article published on July 16, “The Bishop of Marneuli demanded the dismantling of Narimanov’s monument at the protesting meeting” presented the bishop’s accusations against the chairman of the Marneuli Sakrebulo and the article did not show any attempt to present the comments of the respondent. The article published on July 20 entitled “Conflict between Giorgi Ushikishvili and Aspindza Vice-Mayor ended” presented singer Giorgi Ushikishvili as saying that the local authorities were artificially creating problems for him during the concert and there was no attempt in the article to present any comments of the local government officials.

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that radiotavisupleba.ge offers readers a critical and in-depth analysis of ongoing events, however, in some cases, there is a problem with the balance of sources.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)
radiotavisupleba.ge
 (15 June - 31 August, 2020)



reginfo.ge

There was no particularly positive or negative attitude towards any political force on reginfo.ge. However, the website less frequently covered the activities of various political parties, and the coverage mostly concerned the ruling team. More than 80 percent of the total coverage of the monitoring subjects was dedicated to the coverage of the ruling team.

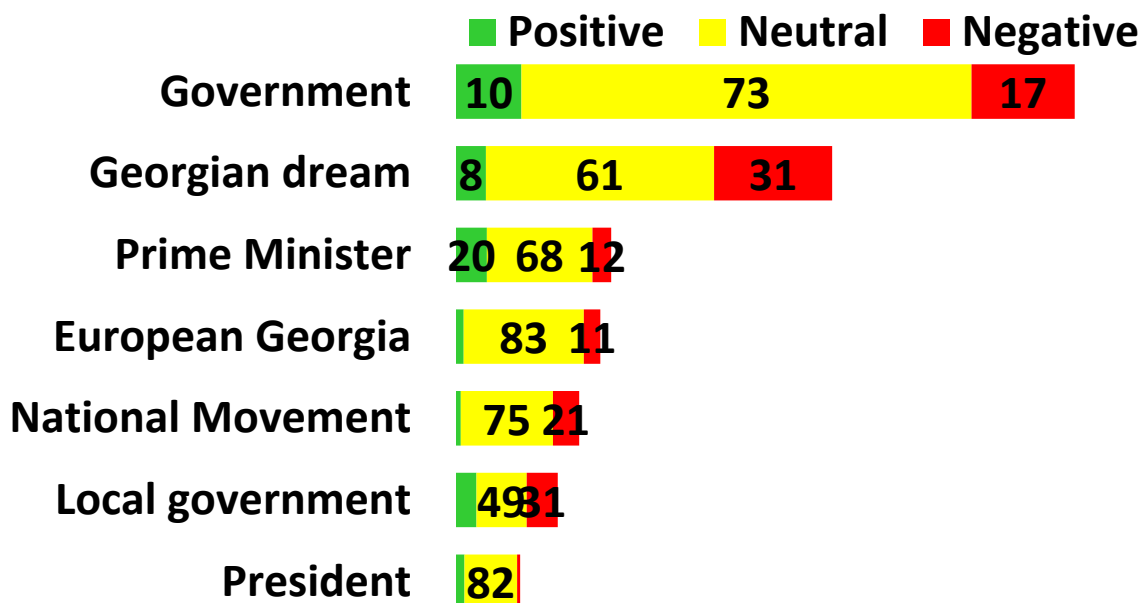
Journalistic standards were mostly observed on reginfo.ge, however, during the monitoring period we encountered cases of one-sided coverage of events when the balance was not maintained. For example, on July 3, the website extensively covered a study published by Transparency International Georgia on a possible corruption scheme of budget procurement contracts signed with the companies of Georgian Dream MP Viktor Japaridze. This information was provided to the reader unilaterally and there was no attempt on the part of the editorial office to present the MP's explanations while covering this issue. In the article, published on 17 July "This is warning speech – Bishop Giorgi about the demonstration held in Marneuli", no comments of the Mayor of Marneuli or representative of Sakrebulo were presented, while in the article the bishop voiced grave accusations against them. Also, in the article published on 17 July, "TI wins TV Tenders of the Deputy chair of Ninotsminda Sakrebulo" Transparency International Georgia's allegations for possible corruption activities of the chairperson of Ninotsminda Sakrebulo, were unilaterally covered, and no attempt was made to present the position of the Sakrebulo chairperson or his deputy.

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that the activities of different political parties are covered less frequently by reginfo.ge. In case of critical coverage of the ruling team sometimes evens are covered one-sided.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

radiotavisupleba.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



sknews.ge

sknews.ge covered the ongoing events in Samtskhe-Javakheti especially actively. No particularly positive or negative attitudes towards any political force were observed on the website. In some articles, journalistic standards were adhered to at a high level.

The highest rate of positive tone on sknews.ge was revealed during the coverage of the Prime Minister (46%), while the highest rate of negative tone was revealed during the coverage of the Georgian Dream (31%). Particularly high rates of positive or negative tones were not detected when covering other parties.

During the monitoring period, sknews.ge was distinguished by in-depth and comprehensive coverage of the issues. The balance of information sources was mostly well maintained in the articles. It is especially noteworthy that the website actively covered the problems of the local population, and in this type of articles presented the positions of both the local population and the responsible persons (for example in the articles “Money is spent and we have no water - contradiction in Atskuri, be-

cause of irrigation water”, 5 August 2020; “Mistake of the Mayor of Akhaltsikhe or the land legalized with the influence of the MP, 11 August 2020.

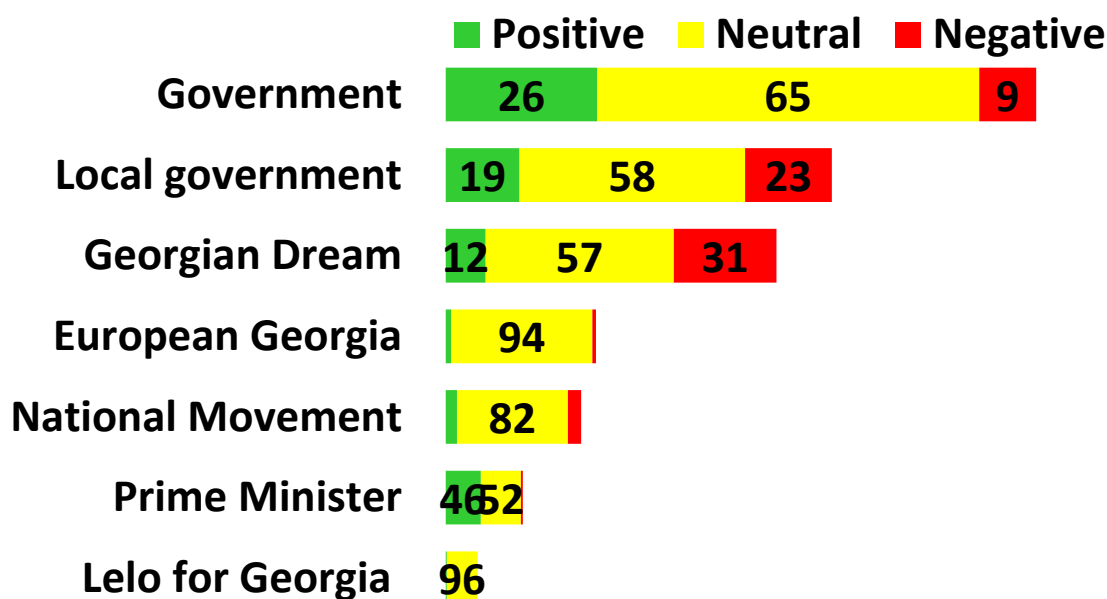
Unlike most of the websites selected for monitoring, sknews.ge adhered to a high standard of research coverage. For example, sknews.ge dedicated separate article to the survey of Transparency International Georgia on incompletely filled declaration of MPs of Akhaltsikhe and separate – to the explanations of the MPs mentioned in the survey (What is the answer of the MPs of Akhaltsikhe regarding the declarations, filled incompletely, 24 July 2020).

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that sknews.ge covers the events, ongoing in the country, mostly in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, in depth and impartially. The website adheres to a high level of journalistic standards. It should be noted that sknews.ge clearly distinguishes between advertising and editorial materials.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

sknews.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



sputnik-georgia.com

During the first period of monitoring, sputnik-georgia.com was mainly engaged in positive coverage of the ruling team and paid less attention to the activities of other parties. More than 80 percent of the total coverage of the monitoring subjects was dedicated to the ruling team. High rates of positive tone prevailed in the coverage of these subjects; for example, the Prime Minister got 40% of the positive tone, the local governments 58%, the President 29%, and the government 37%. The highest rates of negative tone were found in the coverage of former President Mikheil Saakashvili (62%) and the United National Movement (28%).

Often, there were articles on sputnik-georgia.com in which statements by government officials or various government agencies were presented as corroborated facts and there was no attempt by journalists to find additional information and cover the issue in depth (for example, in the articles “More Credit, More Help”: Doing Business becomes easier in Georgia”, June 25, 2020; “Attractive Conditions: what is offered to foreign companies in Georgia, ”June 24, 2020; “Georgian peaches and nectarines on export: where and how much they were exported”, August 3, 2020).

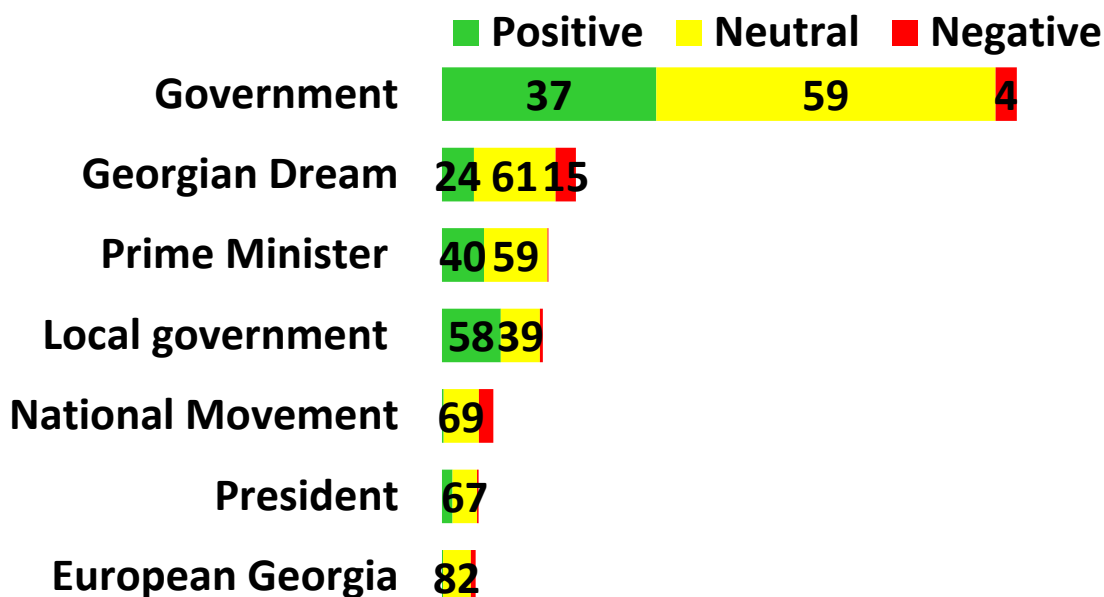
sputnik-georgia.com periodically publishes analytical materials, which are less based on facts and rather express personal impressions of the journalists. For example, the article, about the chances of majoritarian candidates of opposition - “Elections 2020: what happens in opposition parties”, the journalist calls “kind man” Givi Chichinadze – the candidate of “Georgian Dream” in Vani, Khoni and Samtredia districts and “evergreen MP” – Gigi Tsereteli, opposition candidate. In the article, the journalist provides own forecasts, which candidates have what chances, however no explanation is given of the facts or surveys on which these forecasts are based; the positions of the candidates or political parties were not shown. Therefore, it is unclear what is the basis of the journalist’s assessments that the opposition is fighting for the second place and that the “Nationals” and “European Georgia” have a more dangerous rival - Irma Inashvili’s “Patriots”: “They [patriots] are silent, they work a lot, I don’t know what to say about Nationals, but they will have a much better result in the elections than Lelo and Bokeria,” the journalist concludes.

As a result of the monitoring, the impression is created that the purpose of sputnik-georgia.com is not to impartially and critically analyze the events, ongoing in the country, but to create a positive attitude towards the ruling team.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

sputnik-georgia.com

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



tabula.ge

tabula.ge was critical to the government. On the other hand, special attention was paid to the party “European Georgia”. This party received twice as much coverage as all other parties combined, with the exception of the ruling party. In a number of cases, the violation of journalistic standards was observed.

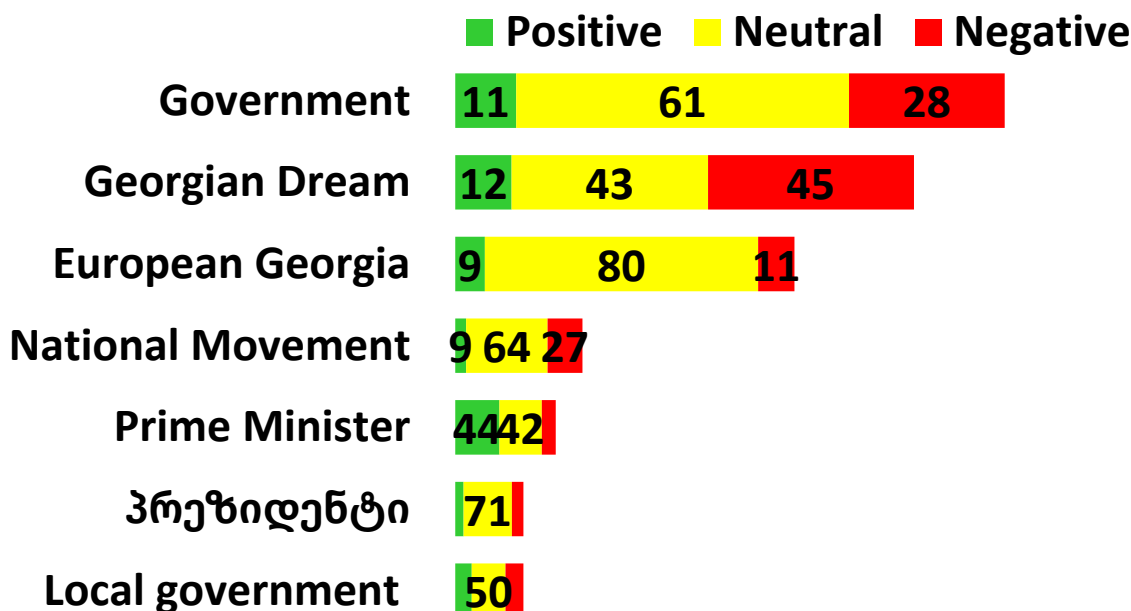
It is noteworthy that during the monitoring period, the founder and editor-in-chief of tabula.ge, according to her, was out of editorial activity for three months in order to be involved in the pre-election campaign of “European Georgia”. It should be noted that there were no particularly high levels of positive tone towards this party, however, as mentioned above, twice as much coverage was given to “European Georgia” on tabula.ge than to all other political parties together, with the exception of the ruling party.

Cases of violations of journalistic standards during the coverage of the ruling party were revealed on tabula.ge, in some cases by the inclusion of inappropriate photos in articles about members of the Georgian Dream. For example the article “Talakvadze: We are ready to accept responsibility for future and continue development of the country” (18 August 2020); Volski: I don’t think Bokeria can compete with me in vision of the state, its values and future (10 August 2020); “Kobakhidze: We shall not allow the possibility for renewal of the war, peace has no alternative” (8 August 2020); “Mdinardze: Contracotr of IRI, whose identity is unknown put fake data” (12 August 2020); “Ivanishvili: People felts hand of caring government and united around it” (20 July 2020) were accompanied by the photos of the leaders of “Georgian Dream”: Archil Talakvadze, Giorgi Volski, Irakli Kobakhidze, Mamuka Mdinaradze and Bidzina Ivanishvili, on which they looked funny or inadequate.

Tone of coverage of subjects (%)

tabula.ge

(15 June - 31 August, 2020)



Gender stereotypes in online media

In the course of the monitoring 2020, special attention was paid to the observation of the extent to which Georgian online media outlets cover the statements, of politicians or other public figures, containing gender based discrimination or gender stereotypes.

The monitoring demonstrated that the problem in the media is the frequent disregard for the standard of coverage of gender stereotypes or sexist statements, which is reflected in the fact that most websites publish such statements unchanged, without appropriate editorial comments or other evaluations, which encourages gender-based discrimination by media.

Examples

- The address of Alexander Elisashvili to his opponent, saturated with gender stereotypes, was not just covered by ambebi.ge, but also was published as the title of the article – “What Giga, failed to make everyone dance under your music and switched to coursing, like village woman, such an important “politician”? – Answers Elisashvili Bokeria” (24 June 2020).
- Some of the comments published by kvira.ge, contain gender based discrimination, for example: the majority MP Michael Kavelashvili stated: “You are family women, having children and aren’t you ashamed of what you did?”; while MP Ada Marshania, applying to MP Salome Samadashvili, made focus on her appearance: “You have nice hairstyle today, seems you were preparing for this passionate speech, expecting TV journalists to be around you and got ready specially. My compliment is sincere, but you have no moral right to speak about human rights, especially about political prisoners”.
- tabula.ge not just published Michael Saakashvili’s attack on Tea Tsulukiani, without any changes, but used it as a headline – “Mikheil Saakashvili called Tsulukiani ugly”.
- Shalva Natelashvili’s sexist, misogynistic and gender-discriminatory statement was published unchanged by primetime.ge. Shalva Natelashvili called the young civil activists “female Kots (Georgian Dream supporters)” who complained to the Public Defender for detection of the facts of discrimination against women. Natelashvili says that Nino Lomjaria is a Public Defender of ambiguous origin, connected her (of a woman) success with the influence of her father (man). In addition, Natelashvili criticizes the bill, which adds to the article on rape in the Criminal Code, having sex without the consent of the partner, also applying to married partners. According to Natelashvili, this norm will allow women to “invent” the crime of rape, to force men into marriage, which is misogynistic reasoning and serves to the strengthening of false stereotypes.
- On 26 July mpn.ge published an article “I would take all Georgian women out of politics altogether - Georgia has become an obscenity parade for me “, presenting Robert Sturua’s sexist and misogynistic statement: “I am most nervous about a Georgian woman would exclude all Georgian women from politics. Then they swear, then they curse, we are dealing with something terrible. “
- Especially noteworthy is the case when ambebi.ge selected the title for the article prepared on nomination of woman candidate for majoritarian MP, “Four children and experience in civil service – who is the only woman in majoritarian list of Georgian Dream?” (20 July 2020).

In the course of the monitoring we came across of some cases, when media outlets covered respectively the politicians' statements containing gender stereotypes and discrimination. For example: netgazeti.ge, new.on.ge, and ambebi.ge dedicated separate articles to the insult of Minister Tea Tsulukiani by ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili. The articles: "Saakashvili called Tea Tsulukiani ugly, which was assessed as gender discrimination (netgazeti.ge, 18 August, 2020), Mikheil Saakashvili insulted Tea Tsulukiani (news.on.ge, 18 August, 2020) and Mikheil Saakashvili called Tea Tsulukiani ugly – president is severely criticized in social network (ambebi.ge, 18 August, 2020) provided assessments of why the ex-president's statement turned out to be discriminatory and unacceptable.

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that the main problem in the Georgian online media is the unchanged and non-commentary coverage of the statements, containing gender stereotypes and gender based discrimination. It is especially noteworthy that such statements are often published by politicians or celebrities that deliberately diminish the role of women in politics.

Conclusion

As a result of the monitoring, it was identified that the most acute problem in online media is the inadequate distinction between advertising and editorial materials. Readers of the most of websites are not allowed to distinguish which articles are independent journalistic work and which are part of PR campaigns of the state structures or political parties. Systematic publication of advertisements without appropriate references even in the news category casts doubt on the role of these media outlets themselves, as, in many cases, the line between journalism and PR services becomes blurred.

Superficial coverage of the issues also remains an acute challenge in online media. Several media outlets selected for monitoring tried and were able to analyze the issues in depth and comprehensively, but most of the ranked websites were limited to only superficial coverage. Due to these circumstances, we often have the problem of covering the sources of information in a reasonable balance. There are systematic allegations made by politicians or other public figures, against particular persons, and in such articles there is no attempt of journalists to seek additional evidence about these allegations or to inform the reader of the views of the accused parties. Consequently, the reader is often informed of such allegations unilaterally and without any verification.

In the course of the monitoring sharp political polarization was observed in the online media. It is true that several websites clearly demonstrated support to the ruling team and attempts to discredit opposition politicians, but on the other hand, none of the websites selected for monitoring showed a clear positive attitude towards any of the opposition political parties.

