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Final Report of Elections Media Monitoring 2016-2018





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წინამდებარე ანგარიში მომზადებულია ევროკავშირისა (EU) და გაეროს განვითარების პროგრამის (UNDP) ხელშეწყობით. მის შინაარსზე პასუხისმგებელი არიან ავტორები. ანგარიშის შინაარსი შეიძლება არ ასახავდეს ევროკავშირისა (EU) და გაეროს განვითარების პროგრამის (UNDP) პოზიციას.

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Introduction

Media monitoring for the 2016 Parliamentary Elections, the 2017 Local Self-Government Elections and the 2018 Presidential Elections was carried out within the framework of the EU-UNDP supported projects.

Media monitoring in the pre-elections periods was carried out by civil society organizations:

- Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics – Monitoring of TV news and TV talk shows;
- Internews Georgia – Monitoring of radios;
- Civic Development Institute (CDI) – Monitoring of online and print media;

This report unites the results of the studies conducted in 2016-2018. The report presents how the coverage of electoral processes in different types of media outlets has been changing during these three years and describes the key challenges of the media.

Monitoring of TV Channels



Introduction

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics has conducted media monitoring in the framework of the projects supported by the European Union and United Nations Development Programme during the pre-election periods in 2016-2018. The monitors observed major news programs and political talk shows aired in the prime time of broadcasters.

Each year, before the start of the pre-election period, a survey is conducted defining most popular media outlets. Based on this research, the broadcasters to be monitored are selected. During the three years the following channels have been monitored:

- 2016 Parliamentary Elections: Public Broadcaster (GPB), Rustavi 2, Imedi, Maestro, GDS, Tabula, Kavkasia, TV Pirveli, Obiektivi, Ajara TV, TV Channel 25.

Monitoring period: News releases - May 20 - November 2; talk shows - July 1 - November 2

- 2017 Local Self-Government Elections: Public Broadcaster (GPB), Rustavi 2, Imedi, TV Pirveli, Obiektivi, Ajara TV, TV Channel 25, Rioni, Gurjaani, Guria, Kvemo Kartli, Trialeti, Odishi and Channel 9.

Monitoring period: News releases - June 19 - November 19; talkshows - August 19 - November 19

- 2018 presidential elections: Public Broadcaster (GPB), Rustavi 2, Imedi, TV Pirveli, Iberia, Maestro, Obiektivi, Ajara TV.

This report summarizes the results of the three years of monitoring and analyzes the main trends that characterized the media coverage in the pre-election period.

Methodology

The following subjects were selected for monitoring:

- President
- Government
- Political parties

Media monitoring of news includes quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component includes the time allocated to the subjects, direct and indirect speech¹ and coverage tone. The qualitative components are: balance, accuracy, fact-based reporting, manipulation with video footage and music. The coverage tone applies to the subject when somebody speaks about him indirectly and also when he speaks about himself, other subjects or general issues.

The diagrams show three types of tone: positive (green), neutral (yellow) and negative (red). When the time allocated to the subject is counted, the tone of allocated time is evaluated as well. Attention is paid both to the text of the journalist and the respondent, as well as the whole context of the story. During the qualitative monitoring, balance is evaluated, which means whether or not different opinions about the covered issue are presented in the story; accuracy is also assessed; the monitor evaluated whether the journalist's conclusions and materials used in the story (footage, respondents comments) are in compliance with each other.

As regards the talk shows, the monitors observe how the subjects of the monitoring appeared in the programs. Each talk show was evaluated according to the following criteria: whether the topic was relevant, to what extent the invited guests' qualifications corresponded with the topics to be discussed, whether there was bias when selecting guests, how the discussion was held, how well the discussion was led by hosts, what were their questions, and how well they were prepared, how well they managed to prevent the dissemination of false information during the discussion, whether or not the program was used to disseminate hate speech; overall, whether or not the viewers received any additional information, which could help them in making an informed choice.

Short Summary

TV stations are important actors in the pre-election period. The form and manner in which the electorate receives information about election candidates depends on their editorial policy. The observation of talk shows and news releases over the course of years made it clear that since 2016 the polarization has been increasing - television was becoming bipolar. One part of the broadcasters was biased in favor of the Govt' and the other in favor of the Opposition. In 2018 this polarization reached its peak, especially during the 2nd round. In 2016 and 2017, the partisan approach was expressed in the positive coverage of a candidate, while in 2018 the bias was revealed in the negative coverage of unwanted candidates that was accompanied with cases of violation of professional ethics and manipulation with facts. On one side there was Rustavi 2 involved in the negative coverage of Salome Zurabishvili, the candidate supported by the ruling party; whereas on the other side there were Imedi, Public Broadcaster and Obiektivi, involved in negative coverage of Grigol Vashadze.

For three years Rustavi 2 has been sharply critical of the government and the ruling party. During the presidential elections of 2018, it got openly involved in the campaign against Salome Zurabishvili. Contrary to that, the editorial policy of Imedi was directed against National Movement's candidate Grigol Vashadze. In 2016 and 2017, the partisan editorial policy of Imedi was revealed in the loyalty to the government, and unlike 2018, it was not oriented towards discrediting anyone.

¹ Direct speech is when the subject, in this case the candidate, speaks himself and indirect is when somebody speaks about him

In 2017 and 2018 the editorial policy of GPB was similar to that of Imedi TV. It was not critical of the government, and in some cases it voiced the narrative desirable for the ruling party, positively presenting the government. If no significant bias was revealed on the channel in 2016, in 2017 and 2018 the negative coverage of the opposition and the positive coverage of the ruling party has increased. Furthermore, the talk shows where candidates had to answer tough questions disappeared from the channel. The opposite tendency was noted on the Ajara Public Broadcaster. Compared to 2016, in 2017-2018, the channel established itself as an impartial broadcaster, but the in-depth coverage of the events remained a problem. In this polarized environment, TV Pirveli has been trying to establish itself as an impartial broadcaster. No particularly biased coverage of any election subject was revealed on this channel.

The TV stations have been providing less and less space for discussion. In 2016 a lot more programs were devoted to the debates among candidates and their supporters; thus, more information on their vision was provided to the audience. During the 2018 presidential elections, most of the channels did not even air any debates. In general, this year's coverage was distinguished by the fact that the elections were not the main topic of discussion, especially in the pre-election period of the first round, and were overshadowed by other ongoing events.

In general, in-depth coverage of current events and low-quality analysis in talk shows remains a challenge to Georgian TV media. Most of the broadcasters find it difficult to select topics, identify problems, research them and offer their own agenda to the audience. The topics are discussed a bit superficially in talk shows which prevents the viewers from getting comprehensive information, analyzing the vision of the candidates and taking an informed decision on the voting day.

In 2016-2018 a positive trend was observed in terms of decreased usage of hate speech, especially in news programs. It seems that the broadcasters were trying their best not to be the source of dissemination of such expressions. Moreover, in the news programs in 2018, those public figures who used hate speech were severely criticized. Though not exactly the hate speech, but insulting statements were used in the negative coverage of 2018 presidential candidates. In this regard, Rustavi 2's program Kviris Aktsentebi stood out since one of the anchors used very offensive language. Hate speech and insulting statements remain an unsolved problem in the TV company Obiektivi, which has been a platform for the Alliance of Patriots for three years.

Polarization

The three-year monitoring clearly shows how the polarization among the broadcasters has been enhancing. During this time, the editorial policy of the most of the broadcasters has been forming in opposite directions and two poles were clearly identified - in favor of the government and in favor of the National Movement. In 2016, the choice of broadcasters was already manifested. On one hand, there were Imedi, Maestro and GDS with the similar editorial policy. In the news programs they sometimes placed the government, the Prime Minister and the ruling party Georgian Dream in the privileged position and dramatically criticized the National Movement.² The talk-shows on these channels frequently invited representatives of the Georgian Dream and devoted much time to them; furthermore, they systematically discussed possible destabilization³ expected from the National

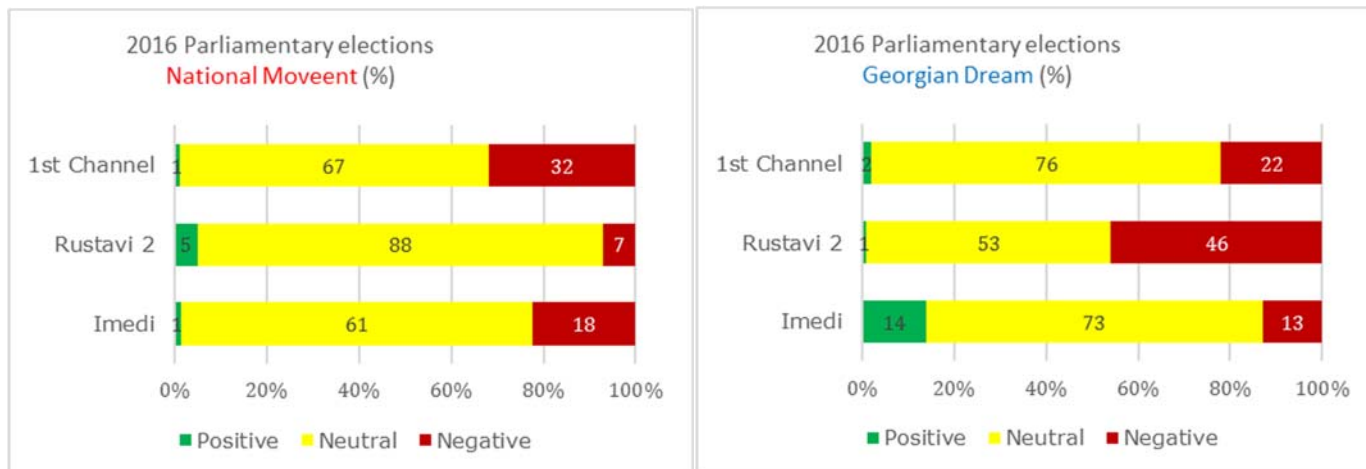
² Monitoring data of 2016 parliamentary elections , p. 6. [http://mediamonitor.ge/files/MM%20Final%20Report%20\(Geo\).pdf](http://mediamonitor.ge/files/MM%20Final%20Report%20(Geo).pdf)

³ Ibid. p.20

Movement, even though they did not provide any specific evidence proving the possibility of the expected disorder. With such coverage, they strengthened the government's narrative as if the opposition was striving to destabilize the country. This way these channels ensured that the topic stayed high on the agenda. In addition, the loyal attitude of the anchors towards the authorities was obvious. In contrast, in 2016 Rustavi 2 was critical to both the government and the ruling party, which is confirmed by quantitative data. 66% of the time allocated to the Government was devoted to negative coverage. In parallel with this, the positive coverage of the National Movement was evident. However, the time allocated to positive coverage did not exceed 5%.

The same editorial policy was observed in the talk shows of Rustavi 2, where the hosts tried to ask tough questions to the representatives of the ruling party. They allowed the respondents who were critical to the government to blame the authorities without presenting the concrete evidence, and to voice unjustified allegations against them.

On the background of such opposing editorial policies of private broadcasters, the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster looked unbiased in 2016; however, in some cases, the Georgian Dream was presented in a more favorable position on this channel. The quantitative data show that although the government was more positively covered on the 1st Channel (10%) compared to other channels, negative coverage (24%) overwhelmed the positive coverage. In total, the explicit trend of biased coverage of any of the subjects has not been identified. Similar to news programs, the talk shows looked balanced as well. In 2016 the broadcaster offered three talk shows to the audience. Among them was the program Inter-View which in the format of the hard talk asked tough questions to all the respondents.



After the end of the 2016 elections, significant changes took place in the Georgian media environment: Imedi, GDS and Maestro⁴ merged. In turn, GDS has suspended social and political programs and turned into an entertainment channel. Giorgi Baratashvili left the position of Director General of GPB and was replaced by Vasil

⁴ Four main events in the media in 2017, mediachecker.ge
<https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/mediagaremo/mimokhilva/article/49494-gasuli-tslis-4-mnishvnelovani-movlena-mediashi>

Maglaperidze⁵, former chief Producer of GDS. He suspended the programs and employed the former GDS staff without open competition⁶. This change was instantly reflected on the broadcaster's programming and the editorial policy, which became visible during the monitoring of the coverage of local self-government elections in 2017. The Public Broadcaster has completed the pre-election period this year without offering the discussion space either to the candidates or to other members of the society. The program, where the candidates answered formal questions in the strictly defined time, was the only one that was aired by the broadcaster.⁷ After the completion of the first round of the 2017 elections, the broadcaster offered two talk shows to the audience. One of them was Kviris Interviu and another Aktualuri Tema, led by former GDS anchor. The latter was not distinguished by critical questions. However, the bias towards the government seemed to be more visible in the news program than in the talk shows. One of the reasons for this may be that the talk shows discussed more general topics and the in-depth analysis of the problematic issues was less present.

The newscast of the 1st Channel Moambe almost never offered exclusive materials to the viewers, the program never revealed the facts of corruption and human rights violations. Instead, it aired 6-7 minute-long positive news⁸ stories about government representatives where journalists used positive epithets. The main respondents of the TV stories were members of the ruling party. At the moments critical for the government, Moambe demonstrated bias in favor of the government and violated ethical principles. For example, long positive stories were prepared about Kakha Kaladze, which comprised of only by Kakha Kaladze's comments and texts of the anchor.

Along with the 1st Channel, Imedi was not a watchdog during the entire pre-election period of 2017. After the elections, the editorial priorities of these two channels came critically close to one another. In some cases, positive reports about the government prepared by these two channels were especially similar⁹.

In 2017, bias was more evident in news releases of Imedi than in talk shows. Kronika, the newscast of Imedi, almost never criticized the ruling party, was less favorable towards the current president, and had especially negative coverage of Mikheil Saakashvili and the National Movement. After the elections a number of positive stories were dedicated to the newly elected Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, and new members of the government. In this regard, the program Imedis Kvira¹⁰ was especially distinguished. The anchor's bias in favor of the ruling party was noticeable in the part of Kronika which hosted guests for interviews. The journalist was asking critical questions not to the authorities, but to the representatives of the opposition. It is noteworthy that according to the quantitative analysis, 46% of the coverage of Tbilisi mayoral candidates was dedicated to Kakha Kaladze.

⁵ Vasil Maglaperidze was the only one among 15 candidates participating in the competition for the position of the Broadcaster's Director whose political impartiality was questioned since in the past he was the member of the "Citizens' Union", member of the Parliament of two convocations, under " National Movement "occupied the governor's position, later worked at owned by the Chairperson of the Georgian Dream Channel 9 (deputy director) and "GDS" (General producer of the program "2030")

⁶ Non-transparent Policy of Employment at Public Broadcaster, Transparency International Georgia

<https://www.transparency.ge/ge/blog/dasakmebis-gaumchvirvale-politika-sazogadoebriv-maucqebelshi>

⁷ Results of Media Monitoring of Local Self-Government 2017 elections, pp.10-14.

http://mediamonitor.ge/uploads_script/accounts/MM_FINAL_REPORT_2017_GEO.pdf

⁸ Ibid. 10-14

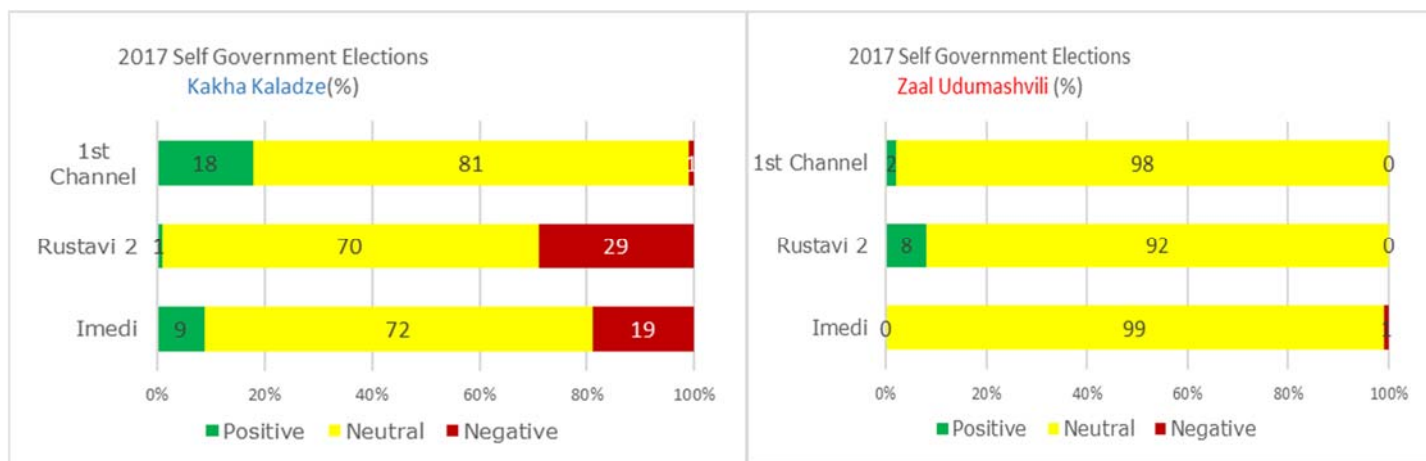
⁹ Ibid. p.20

¹⁰ Results of Media Monitoring of Local Self-Government 2017 elections, pp 19-21.

http://mediamonitor.ge/uploads_script/accounts/MM_FINAL_REPORT_2017_GEO.pdf

Overall, it was obvious that if in 2016 the editorial policy of Imedi and GDS was similar, in 2017, after GDS turned into an entertainment channel, the editorial policy of the Public Broadcaster became similar to the editorial policy of Imedi, replacing GDS. In the same period, the Maestro TV programs were virtually stopped and the channel became an add-on to Imedi TV. Maestro lost its audience, which is why in 2017 this media outlet was not selected for monitoring.

Similar to 2016, Rustavi 2 was critical to the government in 2017 as well, and its loyalty towards the National Movement became even more evident. Zaal Udumashvili, who used to be the anchor of the news program of Rustavi 2 for years, was nominated as Tbilisi Mayoral Candidate from this party. He said farewell to the audience during the news program and his co-anchor called on the viewers to support him, which contradicted the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, because the host is prohibited from expressing support to a specific party. The channel started to present Zaal Udumashvili positively from this very day. The intensity and positive tone of his coverage went beyond the impartial, balanced, ethical journalism. Mikheil Saakashvili's activities in Ukraine were positively covered as well. The United National Movement received the most of coverage in comparison to other political parties. While reporting on various events or news, the channel mostly used the comments of the leaders of the UNM¹¹.



The National Movement was positively presented in the talk show (Archevani) as well, where in some cases the party representatives were given the opportunity to blame the authorities without presenting any arguments. Alongside with Archevani, the program Ganskhvavebuli Aktsentebi was broadcasted, which presented the interviews with respondents in the format of hard talk, but as the anchor noted, the ruling party refused to participate in the program.

This program underwent substantial changes in 2018 and, in fact, became an expression of Rustavi 2's editorial policy; the director general of Rustavi 2 Nika Gvaramia became its anchor along with Eka Kvesitadze, and it was named Kviris Atsentebi. The program also changed the format. The anchors had informed the audience that they would present their opinions on the current events. This program made it clear that the editorial policy of Rustavi

¹¹ Ibid. pp.15-17

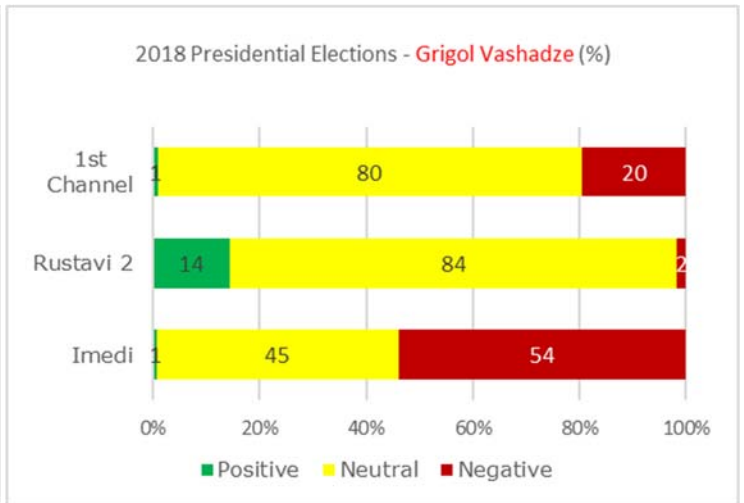
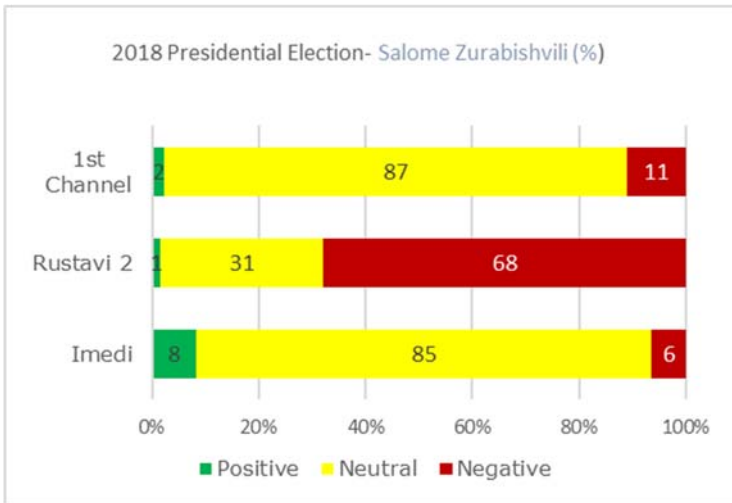
2 during this elections was directed towards negative presentation of government-backed independent candidate Salome Zurabishvili. They referred to her as a “traitor” and openly called on the public not to vote for her because they believed that the elections were a referendum on the foreign policy of the country. In the program, one of the anchors used insulting phrases and very harsh vocabulary. There were frequent accusations not based on arguments against government officials who did not participate in the program in contrast to the representatives of National Movement, European Georgia and other parties. Mikheil Saakashvili has also been involved in the program several times and was in fact provided with a tribune for voicing his own opinions, sometimes accusations, xenophobic statements. The opinions different from that of hosts were not heard in the program.

The position voiced by the hosts of the program that they voice their opinions does not exempt the media from the obligation to adhere to the principle of impartiality. According to the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, "The author's program should offer the audience a wide variety of views, avoid any distortion of facts and misinterpretation of an opposing view. Authors of the programs should not use their position to report opinions in a way that may violate the impartiality of the program." It is inadmissible to use such a format for spreading of inaccurate facts, unspecified information or accusations.

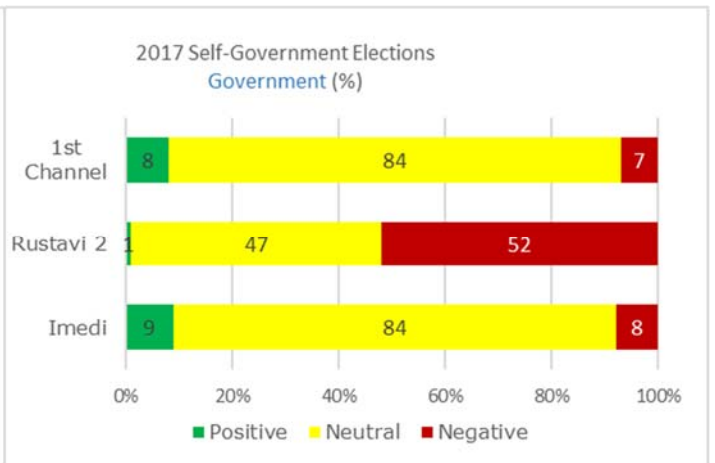
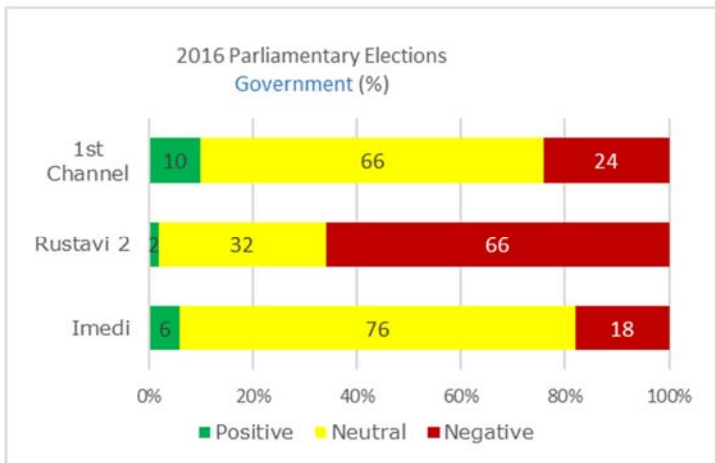
The main characteristic of the 2018 elections was negative coverage of the undesirable candidate. If 2016 and 2017 were biased in terms of positive presentation, the main characteristics of the channels' editorial policy in 2018 was negative coverage, not only in talk shows but also in news programs. This was especially evident on Rustavi 2 and Imedi. The stories prepared by them were distinguished by violation of ethical principles and manipulation. Even in the materials aired in the news programs about Salome Zurabishvili, Rustavi 2 journalists used especially critical texts, were in cases cynical and ironic. In addition, the loyal attitude towards the United National Movement, Mikheil Saakashvili and presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze was apparent. For example, 46 minutes were devoted in Kurieri to Grigol Vashadze's official nomination, whereas, 4 days later less than two minutes were allocated to his competitor Davit Bakradze .

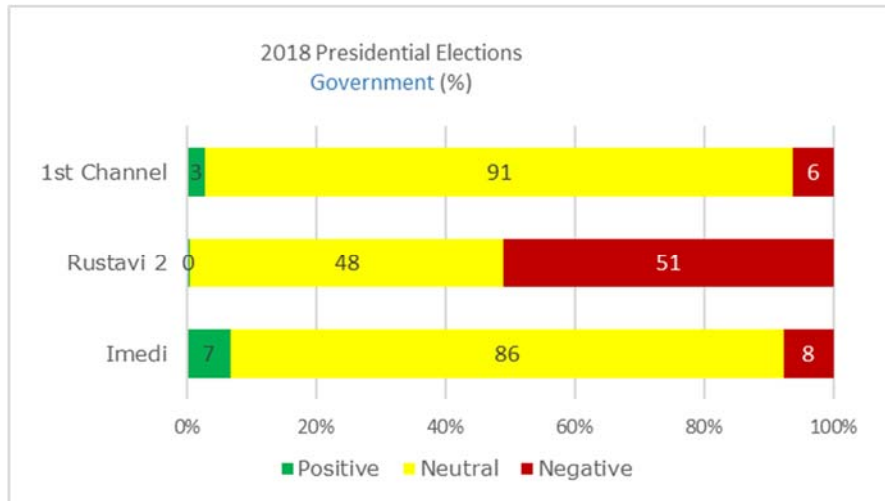
The number of manipulative stories produced in violation of ethical standards in news programs especially increased during the second round. If Salome Zurabishvili was presented as a traitor by Rustavi 2 and accused of acting in favor of Russia's interests, Grigol Vashadze was presented as Putin project on Imedi. Overall, the main line of negative coverage of both candidates was on the cooperation with Russia and the announcements related to the 2008 war. This discourse was maintained and enhanced in talk shows. In parallel to the negative coverage of the candidates, Rustavi 2 became even more critical towards the ruling party and all the branches of the government. The channel accused them of corruption, nepotism, human rights violations, etc. In some cases these allegations were not supported by evidence.

Imedi had an editorial policy completely opposite to Rustavi 2, which was characterized by a particularly negative coverage of Grigol Vashadze and by attempts to present Salome Zurabishvili in a positive context. Mikheil Saakashvili and the entire National Movement were covered negatively. The attitude and the main messages in news releases of Imedi TV resembled the news releases of Moambe of the Public Broadcaster. For example, in newscasts of both channels , the appointment of Mamuka Bakhtadze to the post of the Prime Minister and his activities were covered especially positively. The editorial policy of the 1st Channel towards the government was again more loyal rather than critical. The critical tone towards the government in the quantitative component of the monitoring was mainly presented by the comments of the parliamentary opposition.



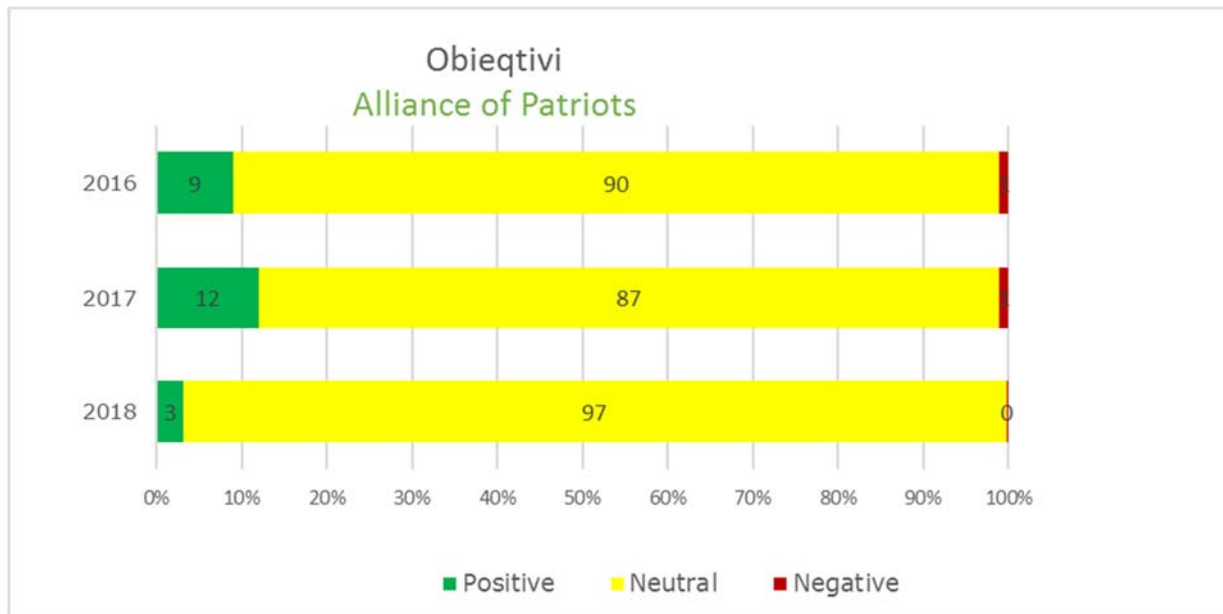
There was an impression that Imedi and the 1st Channel tried to propagate the government's narrative. This was especially felt in the talk shows. Instead of inviting the ministers or other officials, or having hot discussions and asking critical questions, the hosts offered to talk about general topics, which allowed the guests to guide the discussion and to disseminate their own opinions. The anchors asked about the existing problems in a way as if they were questioning their existence, saying for example, "NGOs say," "your opponents said," and so on. The questions were less based on facts. Accordingly, the officials who have to answer tough questions in the course of the program instead felt comfortable vis-a-vis journalists. The broadcasters' attitude towards the authorities was clearly visible in the talk show organized for Bidzina Ivanishvili, the chairman of the Georgian Dream, with participation of the journalists of Rustavi 2, Imedi and TV Pirveli. Whereas Rustavi 2 and TV Pirveli journalists were trying to ask Bidzina Ivanishvili critical questions, the journalist of Imedi got involved only 40 minutes after the start of the talk, his questions were intended to neutralize the interview and to allow the respondent to speak in the desired direction.





In fact, polarization reached its peak in 2018. Imedi and Rustavi 2 became the main actors of the election campaigns. The Public Broadcaster still turned out to be on Imedi’s side and once again failed to create the impartial editorial policy tailored to public interest, as imposed by the law.

Obieqtivi is another broadcaster in the Georgian media with a strongly biased editorial policy. It was a platform for the political party Alliance of Patriots during all the monitoring periods. The members of this party are at the same time the founders of the television. Accordingly, they were positively presented both in the news programs and talk shows. The members of the party participated in the programs sometimes as guests and sometimes as anchors. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the channel's anchor became majoritarian candidate, and after the loss of elections returned to the channel. A different opinion in the talk shows was never voiced and the voters were openly urged not to support the National Movement and European Georgia.

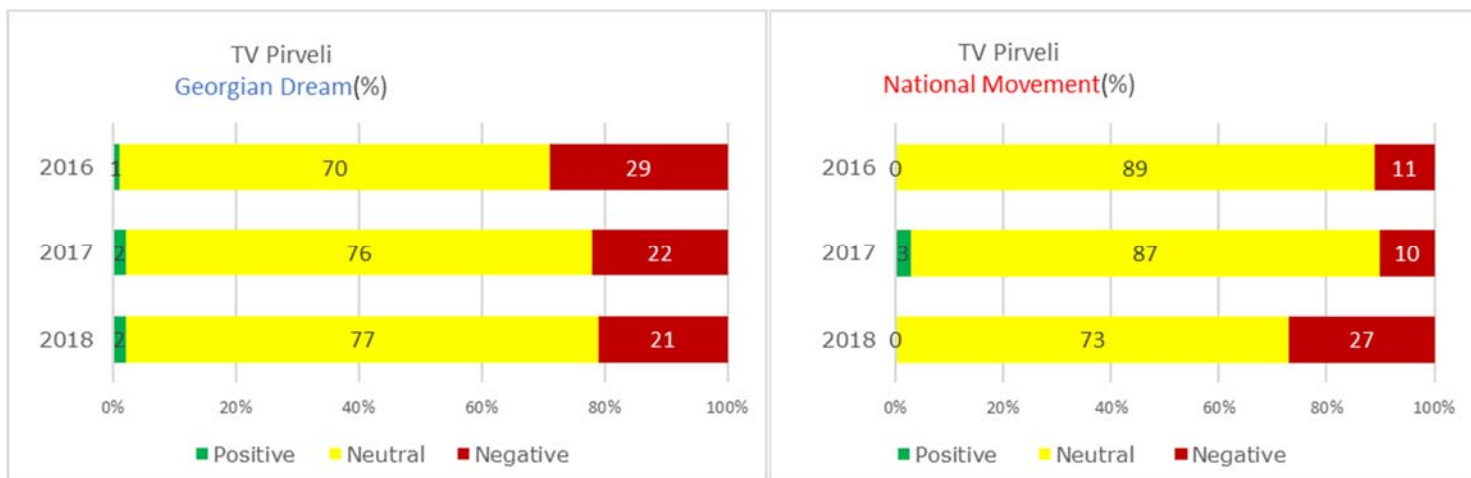


It was clear that the channel was used for the political purposes of the Alliance of Patriots, such as for organizing their rallies. They were especially active when they themselves participated in the elections. For example, in 2018

they did not have a presidential candidate and, thus, the members of this party appeared in the talk shows less frequently than in 2016-2017. Their coverage in news programs this year was low, however, they expressed their support to Salome Zurbashvili before the second round. Consequently, Obiektivi’s editorial policy changed and the campaign against the National Movement was launched. The reports often breached the ethical principles.

The polarized media environment and biased coverage threaten the voters' interest to receive information that will help them in making decisions. The voter should have the opportunity to analyze the visions of the candidates and their attitude towards different issues. Instead of reviewing all the issues from the standpoint of mutual accusations, the media should be able to review the problems properly, for example, to explain to the audience what are the authorities of the president, the parliament, the local self-government, how well the candidates understand their mandate. This function can not be fulfilled by media through discussing the issues from the standpoint of biased editorial policy and mutual accusations.

In this polarized environment, TV Pirveli and Ajara TV were seen as comparatively balanced and impartial. TV Pirveli tried to have an impartial editorial policy. Since 2016 the channel has been slowly progressing and has tried to offer equal coverage of election subjects. For three years neither positive nor negative attitude towards any political force was expressed, the channel did not shun away from airing critical materials on the ruling party. However, in the process of election coverage, there was a lack of in-depth stories aimed at providing the voter with comprehensive information. The channel was not able to create its own agenda, had problems in raising new topics, preparing different in-depth research materials and, mostly, it followed the agenda of other media outlets. TV Pirveli was unable to be an equal competitor to Rustavi 2 and Imedi and therefore, it was difficult for the channel to fully occupy the niche of a balanced, impartial broadcaster in this polarized environment. The talk shows of TV Pirveli aired on every week day and appeared to be comparatively stronger. The channel managed to bring representatives of all the political forces to the studio and ask tough questions.



It is also noteworthy that the Ajara TV Public Broadcaster, unlike the Tbilisi-based public broadcaster, has been showing progress in these three years. The channel was impartially covering political forces, however, superficial covering of the news remained an unresolved problem.

During the three-year monitoring, for the first time the TV station was virtually closed down during the pre-election period. As a rule, such changes to the media market took place after the completion of the elections, but TV company Iberia stopped broadcasting two weeks before the elections in 2018. Before that, during the whole month, the main topic of news releases and talk shows were the developments around Iberia¹². Iberia got fully involved in the business dispute between the government and the family of the owner of the channel. The journalists themselves were the participants of the process and it was difficult to evaluate their products by professional standards. Iberia was the side, the interested party and its coverage of the dispute between the founder and the state, in most cases, was biased, unbalanced and unethical. Iberia devoted less time to coverage of other ongoing events in the country.

Most importantly, the founder of this channel Zaza Okuashvili publicized the secret recordings on another broadcaster, Rustavi 2. The same channel disseminated interview with Okuashvili, where he made important allegations against the authorities. Iberia had to disseminate this exclusive information about the founder of its own channel based on Rustavi 2. The factory in possession of the owners of the TV Company resumed functioning before the elections¹³. Despite the fact that the main reason for the financial crisis and closure of Iberia was the suspension of the functioning of this factory, after its opening, only the notice was changed on the screen and instead of the phrase "Government has shut down Iberia" the announcement "Reorganization of the channel" appeared.

Second Round

In the second round of the Parliamentary Election in 2016, run-offs were appointed in 50 majoritarian districts. Broadcasters maintained electoral formats up to the second round, but in some cases the candidates themselves refused to participate in the programs. For example, Georgian Dream members did not participate in the talk shows in Ajara. They did not come either to Ajara TV or Channel 25, so the debates could not be held and only members of the National Movement talked about their program. Georgian Dream and National Movement did not participate in the debates between the first numbers of the party lists held on the 1st Channel of the GPB¹⁴ before the first round.

In 2017, the second round was held only in seven districts; therefore, there was less interest from the media. Broadcasters focused mostly on the first round of elections. After its completion, they evaluated the results of the elections. The second tour and candidates participating were paid almost no attention in the talk shows. Discussions between candidates participating in the second round were not held either on regional channels where the competition between candidates in the second round was intense, for example, in Ozurgeti. The local Guria TV's talk show was broadcasted only once in the period from the first to the second round and only the city council members participated in it. The only channel that devoted a lot of time to the second round was Obiektivi

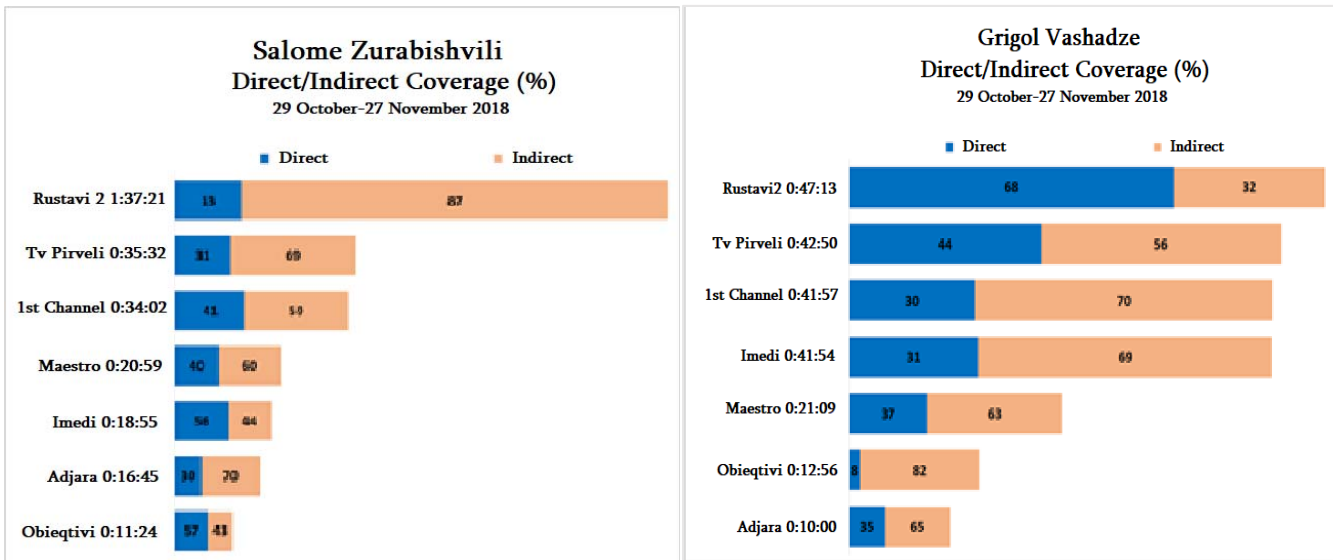
¹² On September 7, the journalists stated that the pressure on the TV company is being carried out by the authorities via creating problems for the company funding the channel. Later the secret recordings of telephone conversations between the founder and former senior officials began to be publicized, which raised suspicions in the society regarding the existence of the so-called elite corruption.

¹³ "Omega" tobacco factory resumed working. Liebrali.ge <http://liberali.ge/news/view/40464/omegas-tambaqos-qarkhanam-mushaoba-ganaakhla>

¹⁴ Results of Monitoring of 2016 Parliamentary elections, p. 32. [http://mediamonitor.ge/files/MM%20Final%20Report%20\(Geo\).pdf](http://mediamonitor.ge/files/MM%20Final%20Report%20(Geo).pdf)

because the representative of the Alliance of Patriots was participating in the run-off in Borjomi. In addition, the program was used to mobilize people to participate in the rallies organized by the Alliance of Patriots.

There was a completely different situation during the second round of the 2018 presidential elections. After the first round, two candidates, Salome Zurabishvili and Grigol Vashadze had almost equal votes. Accordingly, their coverage was of great importance. Polarization of broadcasters became even stronger. The change of coverage tone of presidential candidates on some channels became apparent. For example, negative coverage of Salome Zurabishvili sharply increased (56% to 89%) on Rustavi 2. The direct and indirect indicators regarding the coverage of presidential candidates participating in the second round are also interesting. These indicators allow us to understand whether the channel gives the tribune to a specific candidate or others talk about him/her. Salome Zurabishvili spoke for about half of the time allocated to her (the direct coverage) on Obiektivi (57%) and Imedi (56%), and the least on Rustavi 2 (13%). Grigol Vashadze had the highest percentage of direct coverage (68%) on Rustavi 2 and the lowest (8%) on Obiektivi.



Two days after the first round of the elections was over, Imedi officially moved to the "emergency mode"¹⁵. In the statement released by the channel it is stated: "Pre-election period promises to be particularly heavy ahead of the second round, since on one side of the polls we have the UNM. Imedi TV and its owners have experienced what it means to have the UNM govern the country. Therefore, Imedi is changing its regular broadcasting schedule, so that the regime does not return."

Transfer of Imedi to a special regime of broadcasting envisaged the increase of the number of talk shows and negative coverage of the National Movement in the newscasts. The number of manipulative stories produced in violation of ethical standards has also increased. Rustavi 2 did not declare a state of emergency, but during the entire pre-election period, Salome Zurabishvili and Georgian Dream were criticized fiercely.

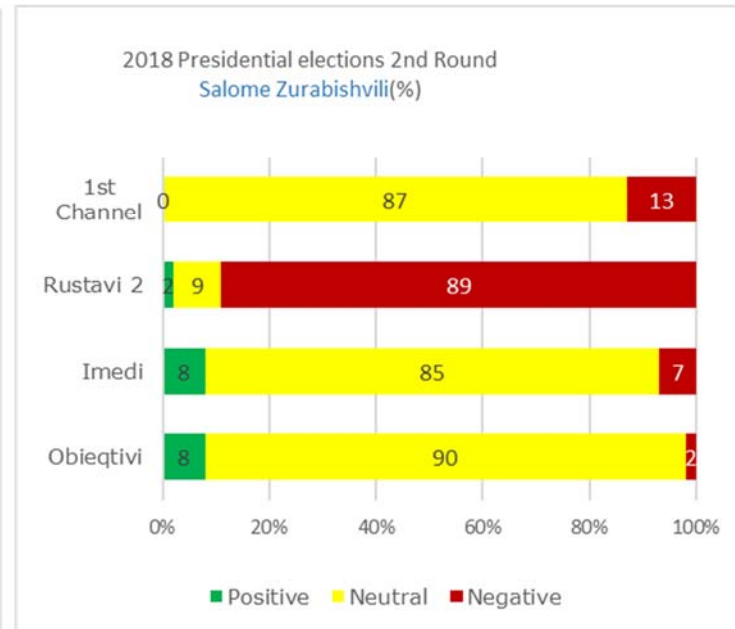
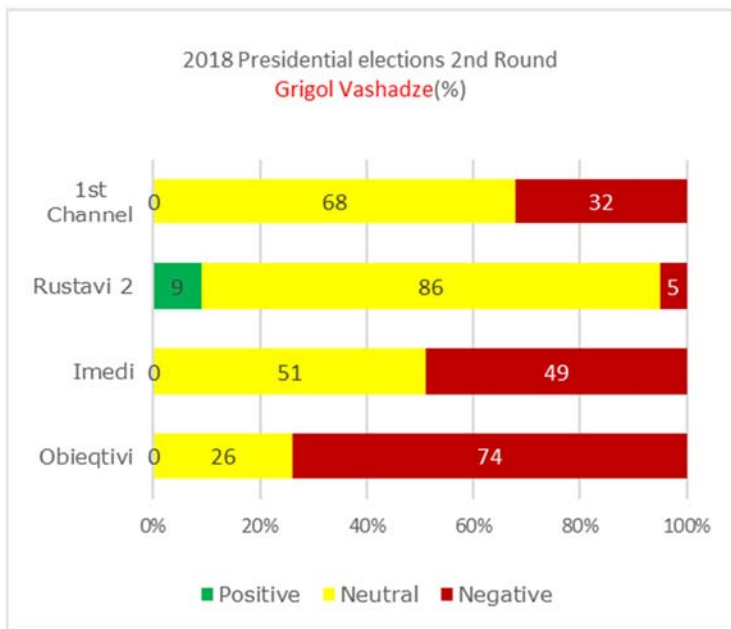
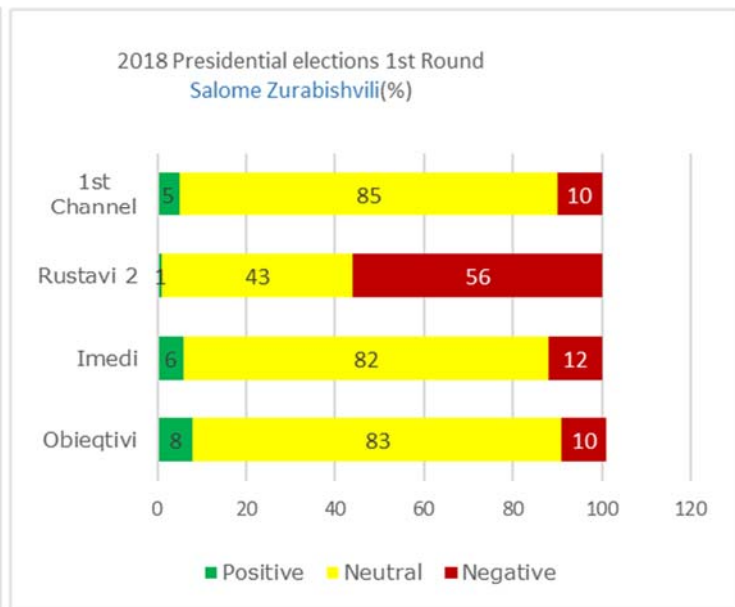
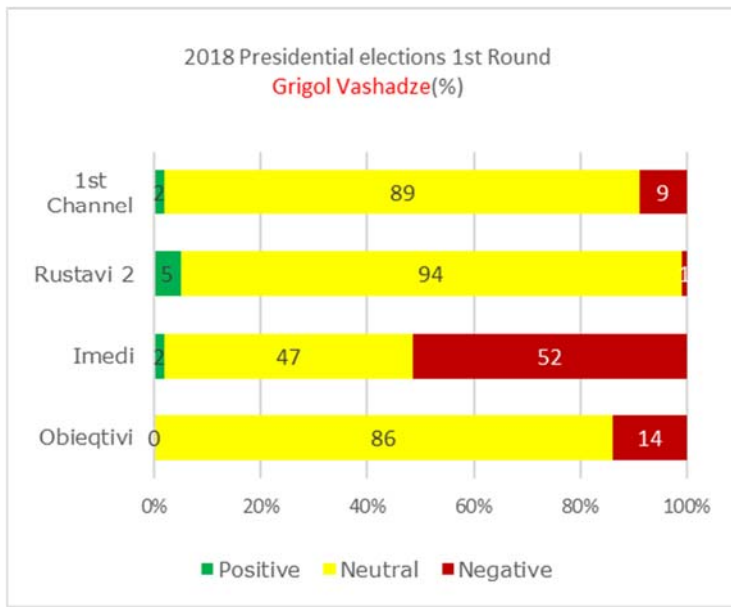
¹⁵ "Imedi" moves to emergency regime "Imedi"news.ge
[https://www.ledi"news.ge/ge/saqartvelo/83392/"Imedi"-mushaobis-sagangebo-rejimze-gadadis](https://www.ledi)

Both channels put aside the majority of ethical principles and replaced journalism with propaganda. The journalists openly criticized the targeted subjects voicing their own biased texts, sometimes containing insults.

The broadcasting schedule of the Public Broadcaster was also altered. The program Dghis Tema created before the first round of elections, as well as Kviris Interviu and Aktualuri Tema disappeared from air before the second round. They were replaced with the talk show Elections 2018, which mostly followed the government's narrative. For example, they were not interested in the mistakes of the ruling party. The hosts were discussing the cohabitation that was in place years before. Kaladze was the first to start a discussion on this issue on Imedi TV, and then other members of the ruling party followed the same narrative. The program's main line was that the violent government should not return. The guests and the hosts kept repeating this message. Before the second round the stories regarding the crimes of high-ranking officials committed under the rule of the National Movement prevailed. The coverage of topics where the current government could have appeared in the negative light has further reduced. The television became factually bipolar, where Rustavi 2 took one side, whereas Imedi, Obiektivi and Public Broadcaster - the opposite side. Rustavi 2 mainly discussed why electing Salome Zurabishvili would be bad. Obiektivi, Imedi and the Public Broadcaster presented the victory of Grigol Vashadze as an opportunity for the National Movement, an abusive power, to return.

As mentioned above, TV company Obiektivi was actively involved in the campaign against Grigol Vashadze, the candidate of the National Movement and Strength Is in Unity before the second round, because the Alliance of Patriots decided to support Salome Zurabishvili and fight against Vashadze. In contrast to the first round, the leaders of the Alliance of Patriots Irma Inashvili and Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi often participated in the programs.

Debates between presidential candidates had not been held before the second round. Despite the offers from the channels, the candidates did not agree to have a face to face discussion.



Debates

According to the Law on Broadcasting, all general broadcasters are obliged to broadcast debates with participation of qualified election subjects during the pre-election period. The fulfillment of this obligation was of a formal character. There was an impression that the broadcasters were organizing the election debates, in which the time for the answers was strictly determined, only for the sake of the protection of the law. The reason for stating this is that such debates, which were held for three years, did not actually provide additional information to viewers. Questions posed by the hosts were very general, less likely to be derived from the candidates' electoral program.

The candidates were practically repeating what they had been saying in other programs or public speeches before the debate.

During the three years of monitoring, the public broadcaster provided debates of election subjects where the candidate had strictly determined time for each question. In all three cases, the host was only an arbiter who was oriented more on asking preliminary defined questions and ensuring that the time limit was kept rather than having actual debates. In 2016 the program *Realuri Sivrtse* was aired in this format, and in 2017 a separate program *Self-Government 2017* was created. The program arrived in the cities where the mayors were elected and held the debates in the open air. The questions were almost identical in every city and were related to the problem of municipal transportation, water supply and constructions. Apart from these general issues, there are still other problems inherent for specific municipalities. For example, the problem of the Asian stink bug in Zugdidi; the functional importance of Kutaisi - parliamentary city, university city, or tourist center attached to the international airport, etc. The local specifics were not covered by the questions asked in the programs.

The participants had no opportunity to ask questions to each other. As a result, the candidates were disseminating desired opinions, promising the community to solve the problems, however, in the absence of the possibility to ask additional questions, it was impossible to specify how real their promises were. The debates in 2017 were distinguished by the fact that due to meteorological conditions the programs held in the open air had additional problems. For example, in Kutaisi, the Mayoral candidates and journalists had to conduct a few-hour discussion in the conditions of strong wind. This also caused technical problems - the sound was disrupted, the camera was shaking, and so on.

In terms of the content, the discussions with Tbilisi Mayoral candidates on Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV talk shows in 2017 resembled those held on the Public Broadcasting. In total, these candidates had to repeat the same on all three channels, because the anchors did not ask critical questions based on candidates' election programs. They asked candidates to present their views on different topics, which they had repeatedly stated in other programs as well as in the aired advertisements. TV company Imedi did not invite Tbilisi Mayoral candidates from the Movement for Development and Labor Party to participate in debates. One of the journalists said that the Labor Party's candidate was not invited because of his insulting statements against Imedi TV. It is noteworthy that journalists are often the targets of criticisms of politicians, but this should not affect the process of selecting of respondents, especially during the pre-election period.

In 2018, debates of presidential candidates were aired only by the 1st Channel of the GPB and Ajara TV. However, only once on the 1st channel of GPB it was possible to organize debates with participation of all the major candidates - Salome Zurabishvili, Grigol Vashadze and Davit Bakradze. Nevertheless, the broadcaster failed to ask critical questions and lead debates in such a way that would provide additional information to the audience. The journalist in this program had only a limited role of the moderator distributing time among the guests. The most tough questions were put by the representatives of the opposition to Salome Zurabishvili, but due to the fact that Zurabishvili did not ask her opponents questions, the opposition's representatives did not have to answer any tough questions. This actually was disadvantageous for the viewers who failed to receive critically important information as a result of these debates.

Furthermore, when asking Grigol Vashadze a question, the anchor made mistake mentioning the director general of TV company Rustavi 2 as his supporter. Vashadze asked him to substantiate why he considered Gvaramia to be

his supporter. Although the questions were prepared in advance, the anchor failed to submit the relevant argument. As a result, Nika Gvaramia filed a complaint against Giorgi Gvimradze in the Charter. The Charter Council has established a violation of the principles of Accuracy (First) and Rectification (Fifth)¹⁶.

Pre-election Environment and Coverage of Election Programs

The main task of the media during the pre-election period is to provide information to society that will enable them to make a conscious choice. The coverage of activities of election subjects serves this purpose. According to the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, the broadcaster shall cover programs of qualified election subjects during the pre-election period and shall not be limited to the coverage of current developments and statements of political parties or their candidates.

Three-year monitoring of TV media in the pre-election periods shows that the topic of the elections was mainly covered by airing a live stream from the party congress or presentation of candidates; the fragmented materials regarding the activities of the candidates and their meetings with population were prepared mostly in the format of short footages with sound bites.

In 2016 several channels created special rubrics in their newscasts to cover activities of electoral subjects where equal time was allocated to each subject. The stories aired in the rubrics according to the modern standards were too lengthy, the activities of the election subjects were aggregated mechanically, without a clear storyline, which made the programs not interesting for the viewers. Equal distribution of time with the mathematical precision left the impression that such rubrics were produced to achieve equal coverage in media monitoring rather than to serve voters' needs.

In the pre-election period of 2017, there was no such a formal rubric for covering of election activities, but in terms of content, the in-depth coverage of candidates' programs did not improve.

The same trend continued in 2018. Only the Public Broadcaster had a 10-minute rubric, where the presidential candidates were presented. In general, compared to 2017, candidates' activities, their election programs almost never were discussed in the newscasts of broadcasters. Instead, the main issues of discussion were the secret recordings or other ongoing events. While covering these issues, Rustavi 2 always viewed the recordings as authentic and focused mainly on their content, whereas Imedi and the 1st Channel devoted their time to discussing who spread the recordings which was closer to the government's rhetoric.

In the period from the first round to the second round, the main topic of discussion was which of the candidates was closer to Russia. Rustavi 2 tried to prove that Salome Zourabichvili was a traitor and Imedi tried to demonstrate that Grigol Vashadze cooperated with the Russians.

Contrary to news releases, more time is allocated to talk shows and, thus, it is a relevant format for analyzing the pre-election environment, election promises and programs. However, the broadcasters did not use these

¹⁶ Decision on the case Nika Gvaramia vs Giorgi Gvimradze, Charter of Journalistic Ethics of Georgia, <http://qartia.ge/ka/gadatsyvetilebebis-dzebna/article/62617-gadatsyvetileba-saqmeze-nika-gvaramia-giorgi-gvimradzis-tsinaaghmdeg>

programs for in-depth analysis either. Most of the discussion topics here were the current news and mutual accusations voiced by politicians.

If we compare pre-election periods of the monitored three years, the national broadcasters aired the talk shows aimed at providing to the audience the information on the visions of the election subjects mostly in 2016. For example, the program Inter-View on the Public Broadcaster: the host had studied almost all significant actions and statements of the respective political party which she used as counter-arguments, when needed, trying to demonstrate to the audience who intended to come to power.

Rustavi 2 broadcasted Archevani 2016. In the first block of the program the election subjects were given the possibility to talk about their own views in response to general questions. In the next blocks the journalists asked them critical questions, and in the last block the thematic debates were held. Since the program managed to bring the party leaders, this block was the most interesting. The audience received considerable information on the challenges in the field discussed and had the opportunity to compare the positions of parties and their ways of solving problems.

Discussions useful for the voters were also held on regional broadcasters. The anchor of TV program Dialogi was well prepared and held the discussion with invited electoral subjects so that the voter had the opportunity to get information about the views of candidates. The level of preparedness of anchors, planning of the programs and formats did deserve criticism in general; however, overall, channels were trying to invite candidates to the studio and present their opinions.

Next year, during the local self-government elections in 2017, the debates of the leaders on the election topic were no longer held. Both national and regional channels offered strictly structured talk shows to the audience in which all the candidates had to answer the same general questions. In such shows the major attention was paid to the format and not the content. Hosts were rather passive. They only gave general directions for conversation and did not ask follow-up questions even when candidates went off the topic. As a result, the audience listened only to the monologues and promises of candidates which they repeated on various channels during the pre-election period.

Some channels (e.g. TV Pirveli and Imedi) held presentations of the election subjects where they presented their own vision and election program.

In 2018, similar to the news programs, the election topics were moved to the rear flank in talk shows. Most of the presidential candidates or their supporters had mostly to talk about the current topics rather than about election programs or their views on various issues. Consequently, not only in-depth subject discussions among the candidates were lacking, even presentations of their views on various issues were not held. The only exception was TV Pirveli, which held the presentations of only four presidential candidates. In this program they were presented together with their team and talked about why they should be supported by the population. The discussion topics were the ongoing events instead of election programs or views. Presidential candidates participated in the talk shows only in the context of these topics. Before the second round, as mentioned above, the main topic of discussion was who was a traitor - Salome Zurabishvili or Grigol Vashadze; which was the worst government - the current or National Movement. Prior to the second round of 2018 elections, Grigol Vashadze's

presentation (without critical questions) was offered to the audience by Rustavi 2. As the anchor stated, Salome Zurabishvili refused to participate in the program.

In general, a large part of the talk shows was going on in the mode of mutual accusations, giving politicians full freedom to lead the discussion in the desired direction. Consequently, the voter's interest - to get more information about the views and programs of election subjects was not satisfied. In addition, the society did not hear the analyses on how realistic were the promises given by the candidates or whether the strategy set by the candidates could actually solve problems, how well they understood their responsibilities and whether they were fully aware of the responsibilities and obligations they assumed.

One of the reasons for less focus of media on election topics and on candidates' programs may be the campaigns conducted by the election subjects themselves since, in many cases, the candidates themselves do not have election programs; however, if the media requires more in-depth discussions, analyzes their visions, the candidates will feel more responsibility and will get prepared.

Lack of In-depth Materials

Lack of in-depth materials remains an unresolved problem for the Georgian TV media. Their coverage of current events is fragmented and they mostly follow the agenda proposed by politicians, the prepared stories are mainly based on their statements and assessments. In many cases the problem is the technique of telling the story, because the story is narrated in a way that makes it difficult for the viewers to understand its essence. The exception is Rustavi 2, which is always trying to find exclusive information, concrete facts of human rights violations, corruption and other important issues and to create its own agenda.

This trend has remained unchanged for three years.

The end of the monitoring period in 2017 coincided with the change of the time and format of the newscast Moambe of the Public Broadcaster. The new format envisaged shorter time allocated for each story. The main topics of the day were covered mostly in the format of the so-called short footages with sound bites which is a bit irrelevant for the main news releases. The viewers expect a thorough, comprehensive coverage of the important story which is often not possible in the 30-50 seconds. This trend continued in 2018 as well.

The problem of covering in-depth materials is especially evident on TV Pirveli which seeks to cover all the topics, but most of them are covered with short footages with sound bites; it is apparent that the channel is incapable of finding and raising the topics independently. They may offer to viewers the position of all the parties involved in the process, but the essence of the story still remains unclear. The stories lack the depth, the detailed narrative which is damaging for the viewers.

This problem is also unresolved on Ajara TV. The stories are often based only on the mutual accusations of the parties and are devoid of journalist's attempts to provide the audience with comprehensive information. There are cases when the opposition representatives make serious charges against the government on the topic important for the public; however, the journalists do not study this topic, they do not go into the depths and do not provide the viewers with comprehensive information.

Overall, shallow discussions of issues are characteristic not only for the news program but for social -political programs as well. Instead of in-depth discussions and versatile themes, talk shows are mostly conducted on the background of mutual accusations and discuss the statements or actions of others. There are no attempts to present the issue from a different angle. There was an impression that in the talk shows the respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on the topic regarding which they made just a short comment on news programs. This problem can be related to the planning of the program. Sometimes the hosts asked the respondents to name such factual information which the program crew had to seek before the start of the program. Stemming from the host's questions, it was evident that no preliminary research had been conducted by the crew. The host was not prepared and did not have at hand the quotations, comments made by the respondents in the past, various surveys, factual data, in order to be able to oppose the respondent with substantiated remarks.

For example, in 2018, the draft law on cultivation of cannabis was not thoroughly discussed in economic and social context in any program. The main emphasis was made on the controversy between the church and the ruling team. Moreover, in some programs it was obvious that neither the anchor nor the guests understood the difference between the cultivation of medical cannabis and the cannabis for personal consumption.

The anchors were trying to conceal the fact that they were unprepared themselves by asking participants to comment on the statement made by the respondents using the following wording - "How would you evaluate" or "What would you say about this assessment?" Or by asking the guests to answer the accusations made by the opponent.

Irrelevant Guests, Managing of Discussion

It is sometimes difficult to lead the heated debates in social-political talk shows where the opposing sides are invited. During the three years of monitoring, there was a number of examples when the hosts failed to conduct proper moderation and the arguing of the guests grew into fights and insults, which ultimately hindered the viewer from receiving information. Besides the fact that the culture of political debates in the country is rather low and the opponents prefer the discussion with each other based on accusations rather than facts, the unmanageable situation in the studio may be caused by the shortcomings in the planning of the program.

The three-year monitoring of programs shows that such an unpleasant situation occurs when:

- **The topic to be discussed in the program is not specified** - in such a situation the opponents are able to talk about many issues and remind each other of all the accusations. The host does not try to concentrate the dispute around a specific issue and prefers to take up a passive role.
- **Irrelevant guests** - people who are invited to the program do not possess any additional information on the topic to be discussed, their presence in the studio is aimed only at creating intense controversy.
- **Conflicting respondents** - sometimes people who always confront each other are invited to the studio. If both of them are to participate in the discussion, it is advisable to invite them separately to the studio or switch them from different locations.

- **Large number of guests** - a large number of guests invited to discuss a particularly sensitive topic complicates the task of the host to control the situation. The situation is even more difficult when the audience is participating in the program. Consequently, it is more important to select guests according to the criteria of relevance, based on the analyses of whether their participation will be valuable, what their contribution to the discussion will be, how they will benefit the program and what additional information or analysis their participation will provide to the audience.

During the monitored period, unmanageable debates had place in the talk shows of TV Pirveli. In 2016 physical confrontation occurred between guests. It is true that since then such a confrontation has not happened, however, insults and uncontrolled situation in the studio have taken place repeatedly in 2018. There were several such cases in the programs of Iberia. Iberia was under monitoring only in 2018 and that is why many programs have not been included in the report.

Hate Speech

The three-year monitoring shows that there is a significant progress in the news programs in terms of using hate speech and inappropriate terminology¹⁷.

In 2016, homophobic and xenophobic statements of respondents were detected in the programs of several channels. There were cases on some channels when the respondents used discriminatory language, hate speech, and inappropriate terminology; in such cases the journalist has two options: if the author of discriminatory and hate speech is a private person, not to disseminate his statements, and if he is a public person, a politician, it is possible to show to the viewer his quotation. However, the journalist must immediately explain that this is unacceptable, that the editorial staff of the program condemns such actions and issue is covered only to show to the public what kind of unacceptable language is used by a public figure. The journalist must explain to the viewer that the statement is xenophobic, homophobic and inadmissible. Modern ethical standards oblige journalists to express their position and criticize intolerant, xenophobic statements and their authors.

Such cases were rare in 2017 and 2018. In 2018 several channels prepared critical materials when a politician used hate speech. For example, Mikheil Saakashvili's discriminatory statements were criticized by Imedi and Maestro.

From the point of view of usage of the hate speech, the improvement, though not of a similar extent, is also noted in the talk shows. here the respondents are more likely to use hate speech and which can not be edited because of live broadcasting. Unlike 2016, the hosts in the 2017 expressed their sharp negative position regarding the hate speech used by respondents. In 2018, there were almost no cases when people notorious for homophobic and xenophobic statements were invited to talk about current social-political issues. It is the responsibility of the anchor to select the guests so as not to turn their own program into a hate speech platform. In case those persons

¹⁷ Hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including nationalism, ethnocentrism, discrimination, and hostility expressed towards minorities or migrants. Council of Europe, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe No.R (9) 20,1997 [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other_committees/dh-lgbt_docs/CM_Rec\(97\)20_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other_committees/dh-lgbt_docs/CM_Rec(97)20_en.pdf)

who use hate speech are still invited, it is the obligation of the anchor to oppose them and not to provide the tribune for discrediting of others and distributing factual inaccuracies.

However, as it was noted, 2018 was distinguished by negative election campaign and coverage that was accompanied not so much with hate speech but with insulting phrases, indecent vocabulary and even swearing, including that coming from the host. In this regard Rustavi 2's program Kviris Aktsentebi stood out since one of its anchors, Nika Gvaramia did not refrain from using obscene vocabulary.

The TV company Obiektivi is a separate case. There is a tendency on this channel of using the hate speech. The Turks, Iranians, Arabs, and Indians are seen as a threat to the Georgians. Turkey is presented as an invader to counter the occupation by Russia, and to strengthen this stance the hosts and respondents refer to historic events. By using this approach, the program tries to show that not only Russia is an occupant and creates some kind of alternative narrative in the society. As to the newscasts, the hate speech cases were observed only on Obiektivi.

Monitoring of Radios



About the Project

Internews -- Georgia performed monitoring of main newscasts of radio broadcasters under the projects funded by the European Union and United Nations Development Programme in 2016-2018:

- **May 20 – November 2, 2016:** 12 radio channels were monitored as part of the project Media Monitoring of 2016 Parliamentary Elections. These outlets are: Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster), Imedi, Fortuna, Tavisupleba, Palitra, Pirveli Radio, Kalaki, Maestro, Hereti (Tbilisi/Lagodekhi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi) and Ajara (Batumi, Ajara Public Broadcaster);
- **June 19 – November 19, 2017:** As part of the project Media Monitoring of 2017 Local Self-Government Elections in Georgia, 14 radio broadcasters were monitored: Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster), Imedi, Fortuna, Tavisupleba, Palitra, Pirveli Radio, Maestro, Apkhazetis Khma, Zveli Kalaki (Kutaisi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi), Hereti (Tbilisi/Lagodekhi), Marneuli, and Ajara (Batumi, Public Broadcaster of Ajara).
- **June 18 – November 28, 2018:** 11 radio broadcasters were monitored as part of the project Media Monitoring of 2018 Presidential Elections. These radio channels are: Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster), Radio Ajara (Public Broadcaster of Ajara, Batumi), Radio Tavisupleba (Radio Liberty), Imedi, Maestro, Palitra, Pirveli Radio (the First Radio), Fortuna, Radio Apkhazetis Khma (Radio Voice of Abkhazia), Radio Atinati (Zugdidi), Radio Hereti (Tbilisi/Lagodekhi).

The present report describes main trends identified in the course of monitoring of evening newscasts of radio broadcasters during 2016-2018 and provides an analysis of quantitative and qualitative monitoring results.

Monitoring methodology

The goal of the electoral monitoring of main newscasts of radio channels is to determine to which extent equal conditions are offered to political subjects with respect to air time as well as to assess the compliance with journalistic standards in their coverage during the pre-election period.

The monitoring consists of quantitative and qualitative assessment stages. The quantitative monitoring employs quantifiable indicators such as time dedicated to subjects (seconds), tone (positive, neutral, negative) and direct/indirect coverage, i.e., whether it is a subject or another person talking about the subject. While qualitative monitoring is used to assess the effectiveness of media outlets with respect to such indicators as ethical or professional standards, which are difficult to quantify; here the focus is placed on distortion of information, unbalanced coverage, bias and any other fact that is important for the quality of the content.

Monitoring covers qualified and non-qualified electoral subjects, parties and politicians. The Government (Central, local, Ajara) and the President are also subject of monitoring.

Main trends

Quantitative monitoring results

In evening newscasts radio broadcasters tried to cover all events and actively report on political processes. Longest time was dedicated to the Government, Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, the United National Movement and European Georgia (2017-2018). In 2016, compared to 2012-2014, time dedicated to opposition parties, including non-parliamentary ones, was increased. Although this trend was not maintained during 2017-2018: time dedicated to oppositional parties in newscasts of radio broadcasters decreased, yet without any polarization observed in broadcasts. Moreover, there has not been any case when a radio broadcaster did not cover a political union that was reported on other channels.

In 2018, compared to previous years, some radio broadcasters dedicated more time to direct speech of the subjects of monitoring. If before, it was mostly journalists who cited statements of politicians and on average 25-30% of total time was time dedicated to direct speech, this year the share of direct speech was higher (on average, 45%). Although, on channels with brief newscasts (Fortuna, Apkhazetis Khma), 100% of time dedicated to subjects was still indirect coverage. On several radio channels (Imedi, Ajara) identification of respondents was also an issue, since, in some cases, journalists did not indicate their identity and often listeners were unaware of who the respondents were.

The coverage of the pre-election campaign

Usually, pre-election campaign intensifies with the approaching of the election day and, respectively, time dedicated to electoral subjects increases. Although, time was dedicated predominantly to the meetings of candidates with population (with whom they met, where they met, the promises they offered). Information was dry and sketchy, without in-depth reporting on electoral programs. Hence, only general promises of politicians were reported on and an attempt to provide to the listeners more analytical and diverse information was lacking. Offering the coverage of only general statements of candidates is not sufficient for supporting informed choice of voters.

In 2016, overwhelming majority of radio broadcasters were characterized by the diversity of tones, although, since the coverage was superficial, dry and lacked critical questions from journalists towards the ruling team as well as the opposition, on average 65% of total time was neutral tone. In-depth reports about electoral programs of political parties or visions for the development of the country have not been produced. Time dedicated to majoritarian candidates was little and reports were mostly confined to party belonging of the candidates, as for independent majoritarian candidates, almost no time was dedicated to them.

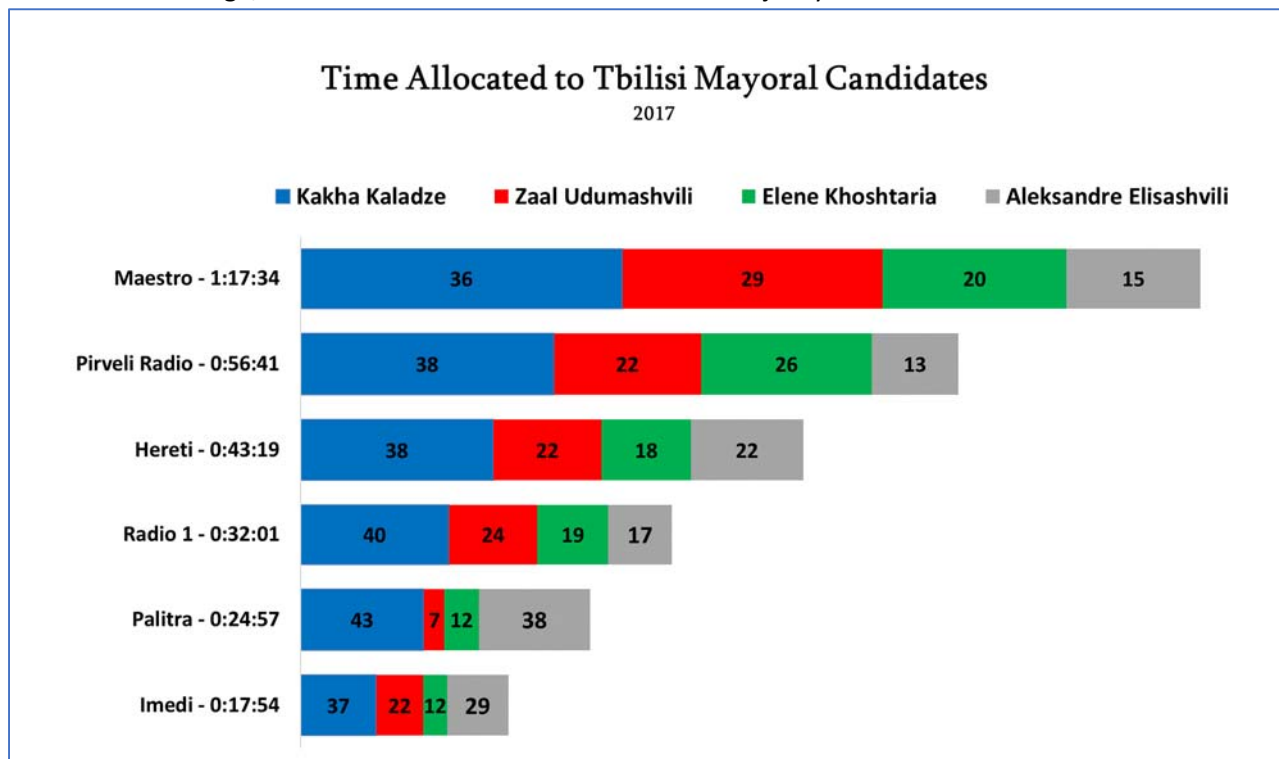
Radio broadcasters worked actively during election days (8.10.2016 and 30.10.2016): they reported on violations, the positions held by politicians, the CEC, observers and the NGO sector. Although, majority of radio channels dedicated little time to election campaign during the period up to the second round of Elections; they primarily covered the activities of political parties, rather than those of majoritarian candidates of those political parties contesting in the second round.

In the following years, only few radio broadcasters produced extensive and analytical newscasts during election days (21.10.2017 and 28.10.2018). the coverage of the Election Day by the majority of channels was superficial like in case of the entire pre-election campaign. In 2018, several channels that have a day off on Sunday (Fortuna, Apkhazetis Khma, Tavisupleba), did not produce a newscast even on October 28, on the day of the first round of Elections. Although, they covered the second round of Elections actively: news from polling stations, comments of the CEC and observers, etc. were aired. Radio Maestro was an exception; it did not produce its own newscast and it was broadcasting TV 1 on election days (October 28 and November 28).

The majority of radio broadcasters effectively did not dedicate time to the coverage of the second round of Elections in 2017; this, presumably, was due to the fact that mayors of the capital city and other self-governing cities were elected during the first round.

In 2017-2018, dedicated monitoring of time allocated to the mayoral candidates of self-governing cities and to the presidential candidates started from the beginning of monitoring, after the nomination of the candidates by parties or groups. Radio broadcasters did not focus much attention to other candidates than the mayoral and presidential candidates supported by Parliamentary parties.

In 2017, out of mayoral candidates of five self-governing cities, primarily the activities of Tbilisi candidates were covered. On average, 70% of time dedicated to them on the majority of outlets was neutral tone.

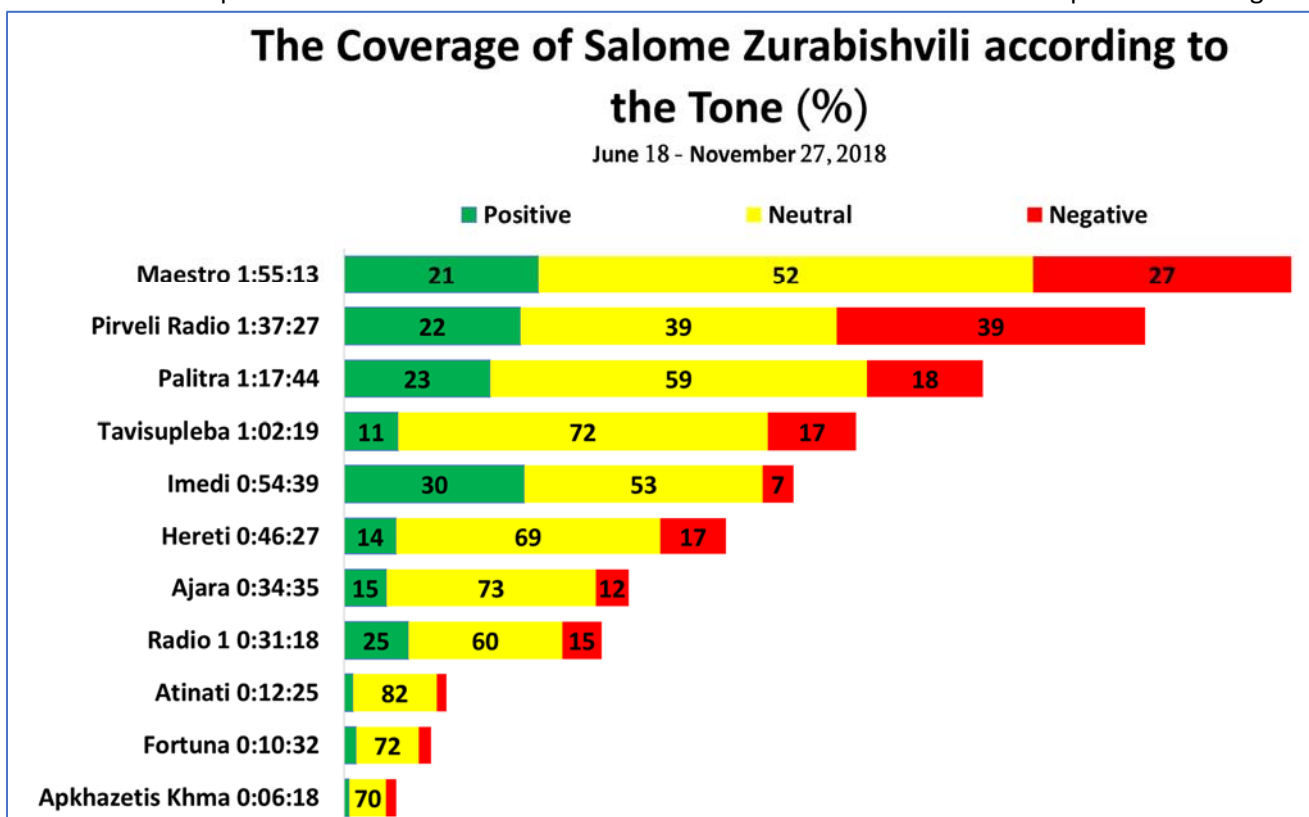


Radio channels actively reported on the developments during the period up to the second round of Elections in 2018, yet, significant changes could not be observed in their work. Journalists presented electoral promises of candidates to listeners, although they did not look into how capable they were to fulfil those promises and in general, whether various promises were beyond the powers of the future president.

The time dedicated to presidential candidates on the large majority of radio broadcasters on average was not higher than 7%. The following were covered the most: Salome Zurabishvili, Davit Bakradze and Grigol Vashadze.

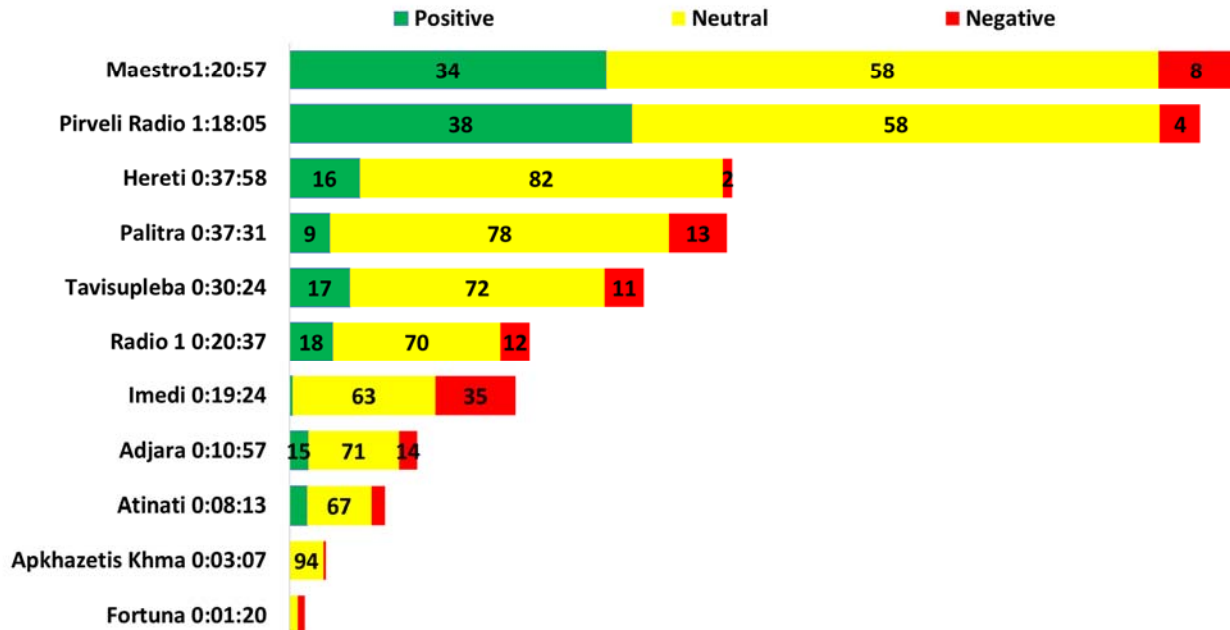
Considerable amount of time dedicated to candidates was in neutral tone. Relatively high positive as well as negative tone was identified only towards Salome Zurabishvili. She was often criticized by opponents and broadcasts primarily focused on the comments made by the opposition and the Georgian Dream representatives about statements made by Salome Zurabishvili. Grigol Vashadze had highest (35%) negative tone on Radio Imedi, while positive – on Pirveli Radio (38%) and on Maestro (34%).

During the election campaign for the first round, relatively more time (on average 2% of total time dedicated to subjects) was dedicated to Davit Bakradze (among presidential candidates) as well, and 70% of this time was neutral tone. Exception was Pirveli Radio where 51% of 53 minutes dedicated to him was positive coverage.



The Coverage of Grigol Vashadze according to the Tone (%)

June 18 - November 27, 2018



Qualitative monitoring results

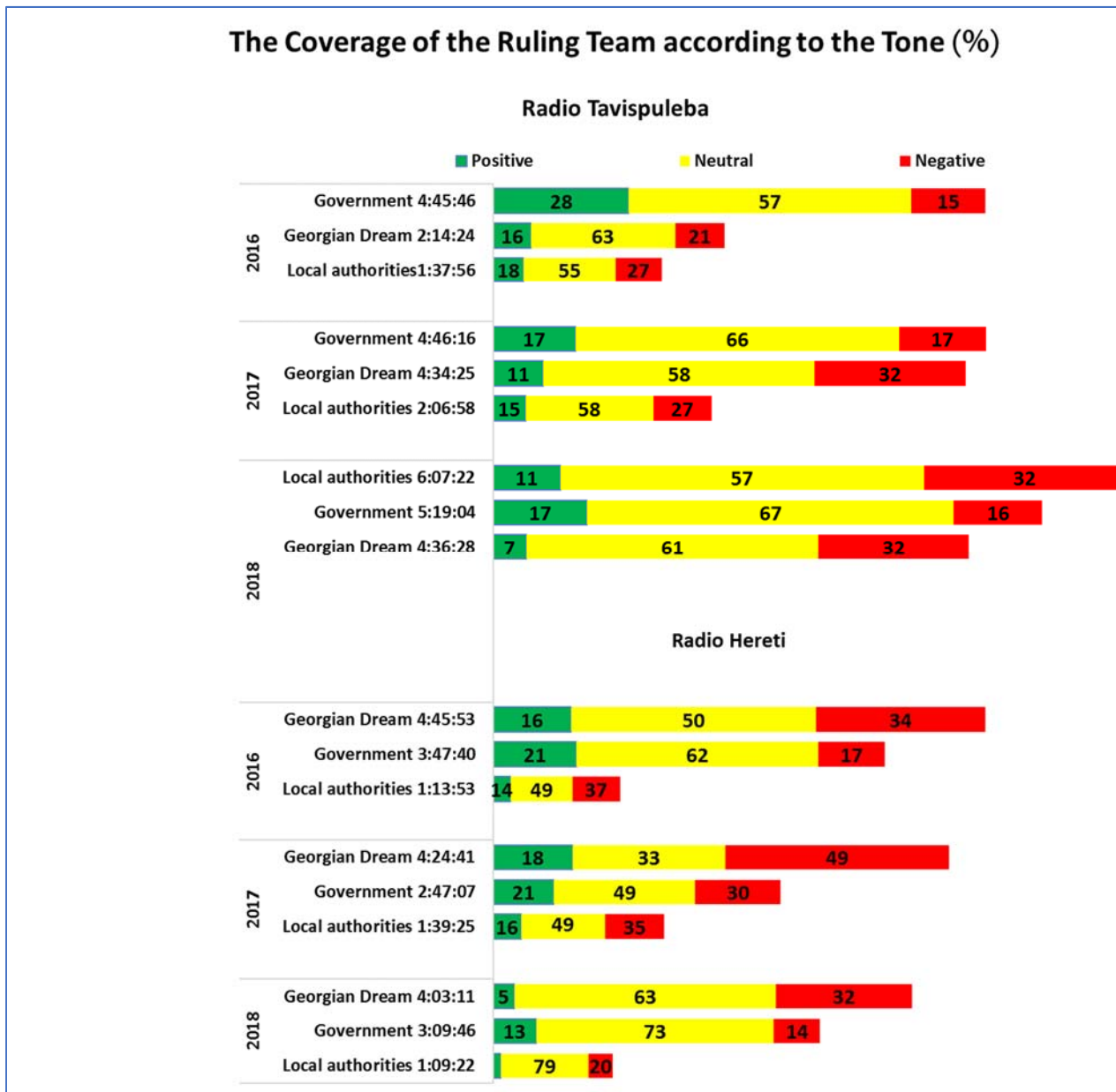
In-depth coverage and exclusive topics

The length of newscasts of majority of radio broadcasters (Maestro, Pirveli Radio, Palitra, Imedi) allows them to provide more in-depth coverage of topics; so that aired news are not primarily determined by general statements of politicians, but rather, by the issues identified and raised by journalists. The length of newscasts also allows them to cover national as well as regional news, problems of minorities or various vulnerable groups; still, the majority of radio channels did not particularly use this possibility in 2018. In 2016-2017, too, little time was dedicated to these topics; in 2018, in majority of newscasts of radio broadcasters these issues were mostly overlooked and naturally, opinions of politicians around these problems were not aired either. Radio Tavisupleba and Hereti were an exception (and not only in 2016-2018, but during 2012-2014 as well).

During the coverage of local news, instead of focusing on general statements of politicians, Radio Hereti (Lagodekhi/Tbilisi) focused on specific social and economic topics. Journalists produced relatively in-depth and analytical reports on problems and social topics in the Kakheti region.

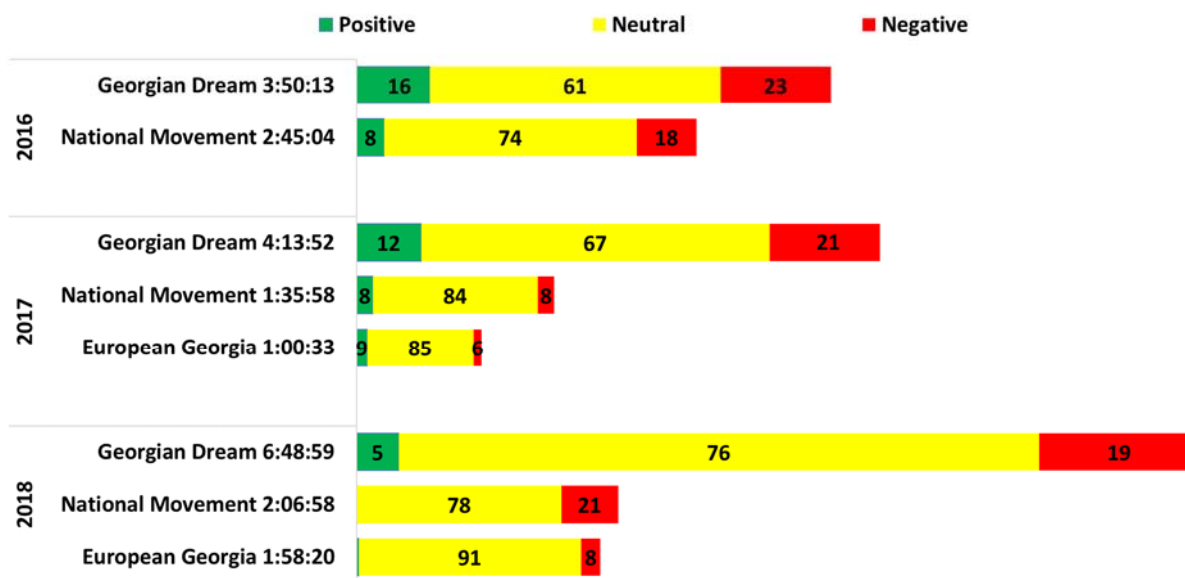
Journalists of Radio Tavisupleba worked on exclusive stories and covered the topics (economy, agriculture, gender, ecology, social issues, infrastructure problems, etc.) that were not covered by other radio broadcasters. The channel focused great attention to the developments in the regions and often produced more stories in this area than regional radio broadcasters, although less time was dedicated to the coverage of pre-election campaign.

The diversity of tones was observed on these channels, which was due to diverse coverage of issues from a variety of angles. For the majority of subjects, considerable time of coverage was in negative tone, which is explained by critical attitude of journalists in their reporting on pressing topics; while, positive coverage of the same subjects - through balancing reports, since the parties were given the possibility to present own positions – on average 40% of time was direct speech.



In this respect, Radio Palitra was also distinguished in 2016 (in-depth, signature reports, diversity of sources, multitude of critical questions); analytical stories were produced around main topics of the day, there were visible attempts of journalists to provide exhaustive coverage and offer various perspectives. Although, this trend was not sustained during 2017-2018: the number of exclusive topics decreased, journalists did not show significant proactiveness and they rarely asked critical questions; thus, the neutral tone was increased.

The Coverage of Political Parties according to the Tone (%) Radio Palitra



During 2016-2018, several radio channels subject to monitoring (Fortuna, Apkhazetis Khma, Kalaki) produced 3-5 newscasts, with brief and sketchy coverage of main news of the day. Content produced in the style of news agencies did not allow for analysis and in-depth reporting.

Radio Maestro, over years, produced the longest newscasts, offering intensive coverage of political processes, including the activities of parties and candidates engaged in the election campaign. Although, aired content did not differ significantly from news of other radio broadcasters. Journalists did not try to identify new topics, verify statements and diversify content as much. On the channel, the criticism of the government was aired frequently; this was associated with the statements of the opposition and not in-depth or analytical coverage of events.

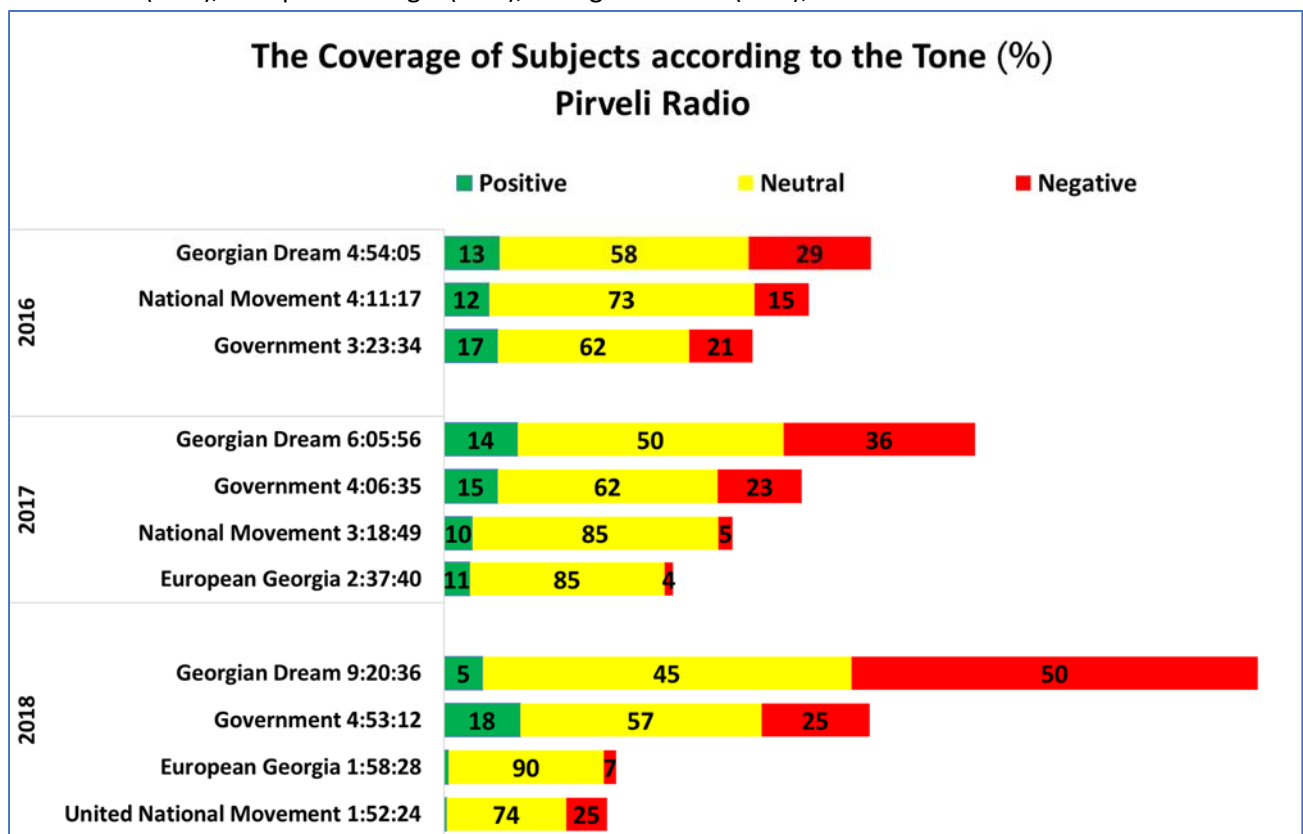
Balance

In 2018, compared to prior years, newscasts on the majority of radio channels were relatively more balanced: broadcasts included opposing statements of politicians, as well as criticism towards the Government; they were also given the possibility to talk about their own achievements, but like previous years, the lack of the sources of information and critical questions could be observed this year as well. News have not been produced based on anonymous sources, although journalists did not particularly attempt to verify facts and inconsistent statements. The relevance of topics aired by radio broadcasters was determined by the statements of politicians rather than by the information obtained by journalists: journalists followed the agenda of politicians, they lacked proactiveness, the attempt to identify problem themselves and offer it as the discussion topic could not be observed.

There is a lack of competition among radio channels, they are not able to develop exclusive content. News broadcast by various radio stations during 2016-2017 was mostly similar: news texts often the same, the same syncs were broadcast. This trend was especially prominent in the coverage of pre-election activities of parties and candidates. In 2018, broadcasters did not start to produce in-depth or exclusive reports, although during the

coverage of some of the topics (e.g., alleged elite corruption, covert surveillance, the work of the investigative commission on the Khorava Street case, the protest rallies of fathers with murdered children) the events were covered without bias, but from a variety of angles: reports contained the opinions of both parties; yet, on some broadcasters (Radio 1, Imedi) focus was placed on government position, their comments were more extensive, while the criticism expressed by the opposition was succinct and sometimes toned down.

Certain reports aired by Pirveli Radio were also unbalanced; here, the speech of respondents that were critical towards the government was prevalent. As a result, considerable time dedicated to the ruling team was in negative tone. In 2016, higher amount of reports of this broadcaster were unbalanced, the cases of irrational use of newscast time were identified; when 8 minutes of several, on average 12-minute programs were dedicated to just a single news story (Confrontation incident by N 53 Polling Station in Village Kortskheli, briefings of Nika Gvaramia, General Director, TV Company Rustavi 2). 2017-2018 In 2017-2018, radio broadcasters produced more balanced newscasts, although in certain reports containing government criticism by the representatives of the opposition, often the government was not given air time for response; hence, Georgian Dream had the highest indicator of negative coverage. Respectively, uneven distribution of time allocated to direct speech was identified – 2017: United National Movement (62%), European Georgia (65%), Georgian Dream (30%); 2018: United National Movement (53%), European Georgia (70%), Georgian Dream (32%);

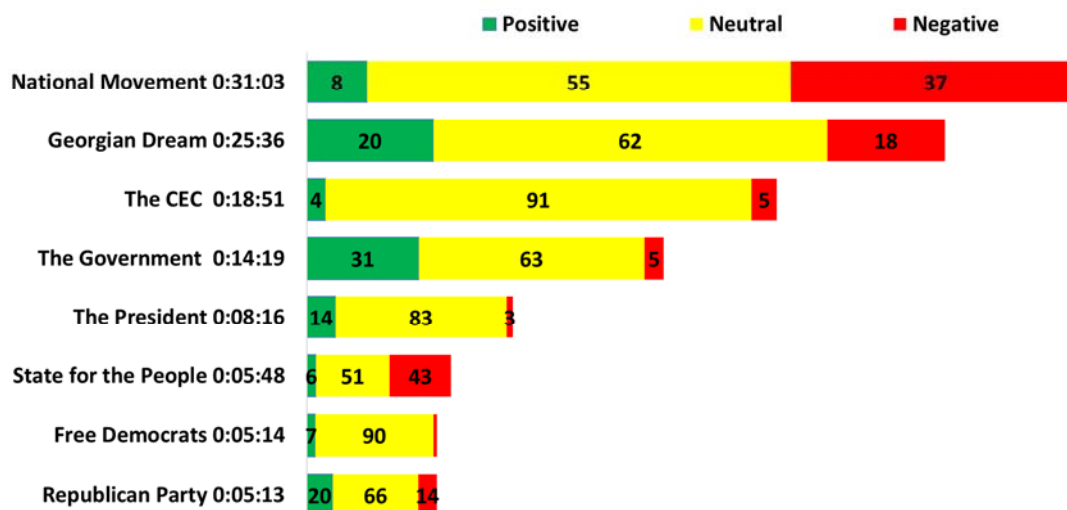


In 2016, certain newscasts were even more unbalanced on Radio Imedi as well. In some cases, content was produced based on a single source. For example, in 2016, with the approaching of elections, reports became unbalanced and along with the increase of positive tone towards Georgian Dream (from 22% to 37%), negative tone of the United National Movement spiked sharply (from 17% to 59%). Almost no time was allocated to the latter for direct speech, while direct speech of other subjects was aired often (on average, 40%).

The Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

Radio Imedi

September 29 - November 2, 2016



In 2017, formal balance was better maintained in reports. Although the scarcity of sources could be observed, and, in some cases, balance shifted in favor of the ruling team, although, reports became balanced and the overall share of direct speech of respondents, too, was increased on average up to 40%.

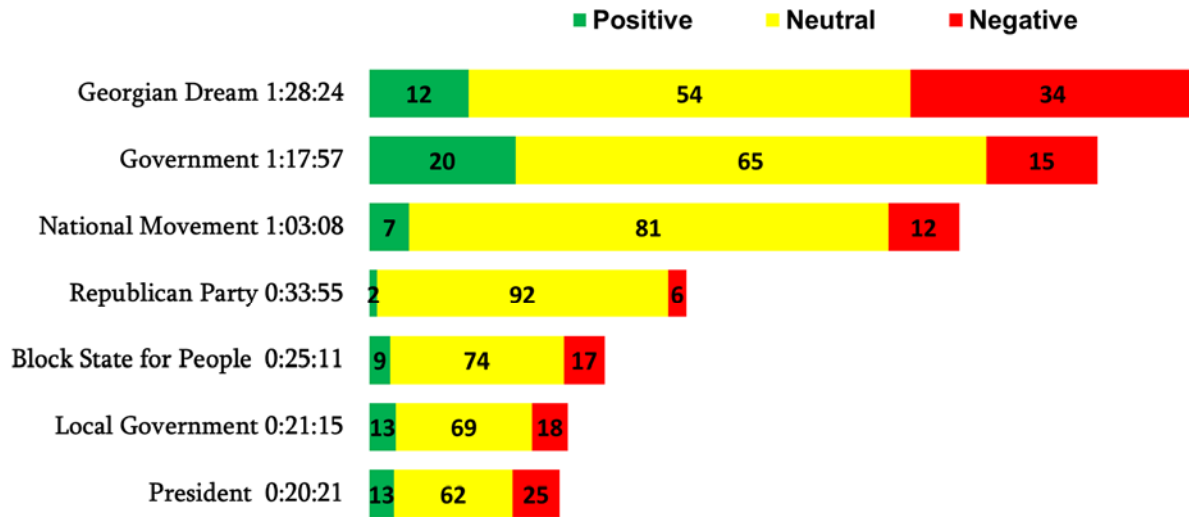
In 2018, too, main challenge of Radio Imedi still were: higher proactiveness of journalists and showing more scepticism towards the statements of politicians. News were mostly covered impartially, although, in certain cases, balance was leaning in favour of the ruling team and Salome Zurbishvili, presidential candidate supported by the ruling team. This trend was especially noticeable during the period prior to the second round of elections.

In 2016, unbalanced coverage of events was identified on Radio Fortuna as well. In newscasts, less focus was on news, major part was dedicated to interview with guest, where current topics were discussed. Invited guests often criticized the ruling party, and the latter was not given the possibility of a response. In 2017-2018, newscasts were fully dedicated to news. Although no biased attitude has been identified towards any of the subjects, sometimes individual news stories were unbalanced and often were based on a single source.

The Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

Radio Fortuna

20 May - 2 November, 2016



Regional broadcasters

Monitoring also covered regional radio broadcasters: Dzveli Kalaki (Kutaisi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi), Hereti (Lagodekhi), Marneuli. They focused on the developments in the region, on social problems, as well as national news stories.

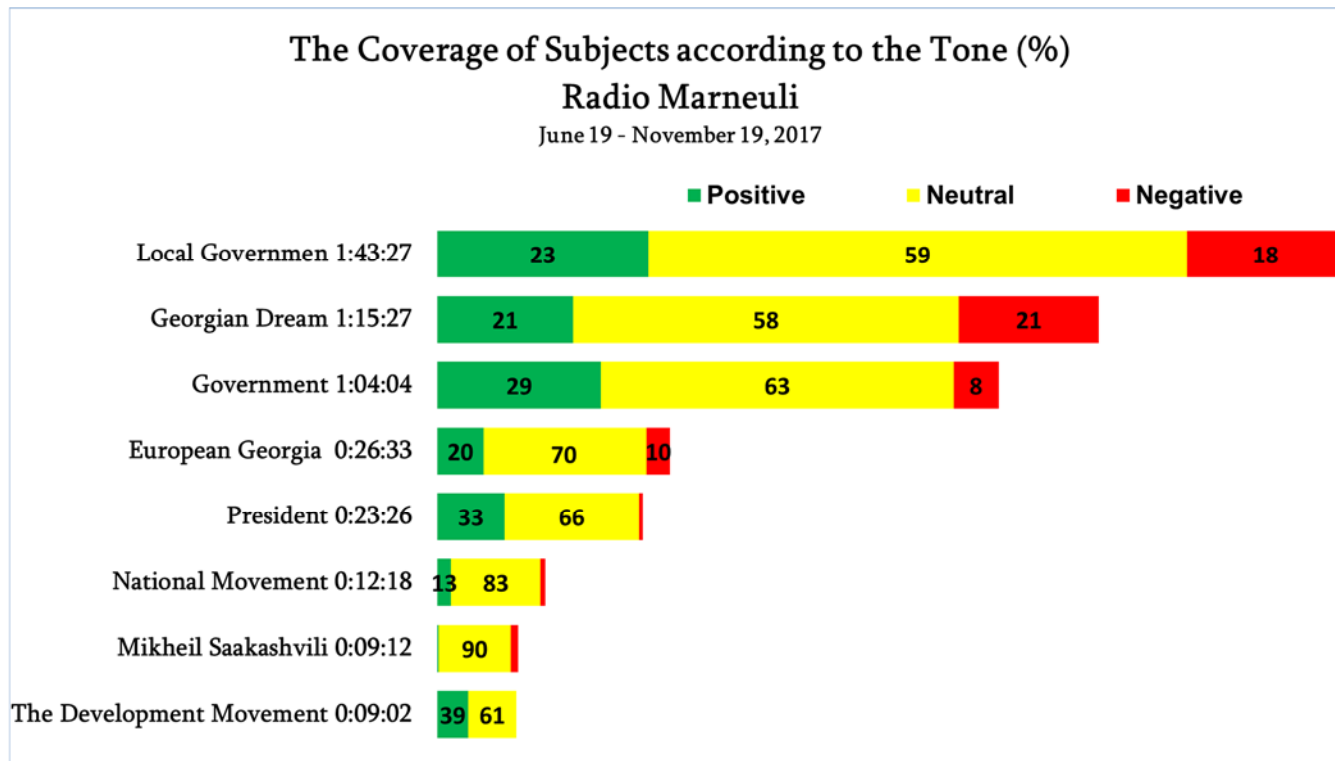
The coverage of local authorities was especially problematic at the regional radio broadcasters: the questions of journalists were not very critical and politicians were able to present themselves in a positive context. While, it is the pre-election period when reports produced on social problems and critical attitude towards local authorities are especially important. In 2016, politicians, especially representatives of local authorities, were actively covered during the events (sports, cultural, religious, educational) that were not particularly directly associated with them and presented them clearly positively. The number of such cases decreased sharply during the subsequent years.

Main problem of regional broadcasters was dry and sketchy coverage, less proactiveness of journalists. They worked without bias, although they reported on activities of politicians without analysis and verifying facts and did not ask critical questions as much either, therefore, government, as well as opposition was covered more positively and neutrally, rather than critically. In this respect, radio Marneuli was an exception, along with radio Hereti.

Radio Marneuli offered critical coverage of the developments in Kvemo Kartli. Journalists would return to the topics they had covered before. The channel was distinguished by the diversity of topics, raising the problems of various vulnerable groups, environmental or economic problems. Journalists covered such topics as early marriages, women participation in politics, minority rights. Sometimes problems identified by them attracted attention of other mass media outlets as well and an issue that could have remained at the local level became a

main national topic (E.g.: why women did not attend the meeting of newly elected Marneuli Mayor with the citizens).

Election campaign was also intensively covered on the channel, journalists did not restrict their coverage by the meetings of candidates with population and tried to also report on the programs of subjects contesting in elections.



It is important for regional radio broadcasters to dedicate more time to the coverage of current events and present multi-faceted and exhaustive information to listeners through maintaining balance in reports and in-depth coverage of exclusive topics.

Public broadcasters

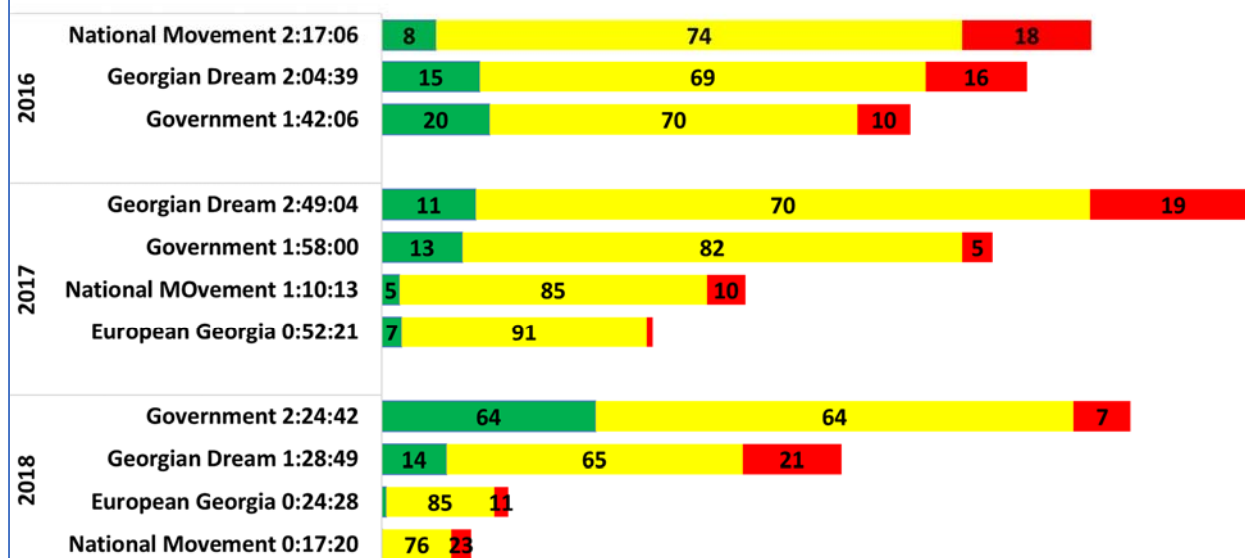
Public broadcasters (Radio 1, Ajara) did not meet expectations: journalists did not produce in-depth, exclusive reports, newscasts content was dry and sketchy.

In 2017, length of newscasts of Radio 1 increased by several minutes compared to the previous year; this has enabled journalists to make news relatively diverse and present divergent opinions around the topics. Although, the following problems was still relevant: verifying of respondents’ comments by journalists, obtaining additional information and the lack of critical questions. In 2018, Radio 1 primarily remained unbiased, although in certain cases aired news (e.g., declaring confidence to the Government, drop of the Lari exchange rate, alleged elite corruption, delivery of damaged grapes, session of the investigation commission on the Khorava Street crime, protest of fathers with murdered children, covert surveillance, October 30 incident in Akhalkalaki) raised suspicion that journalists avoided criticizing the government. During the period until the second round of Elections (October 29-November 27) the broadcaster was dedicating relatively more time to the statements of the government or the coverage of the activities that presented the ruling team positively, as a result, 39% of coverage of the government and local authorities was in positive tone.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

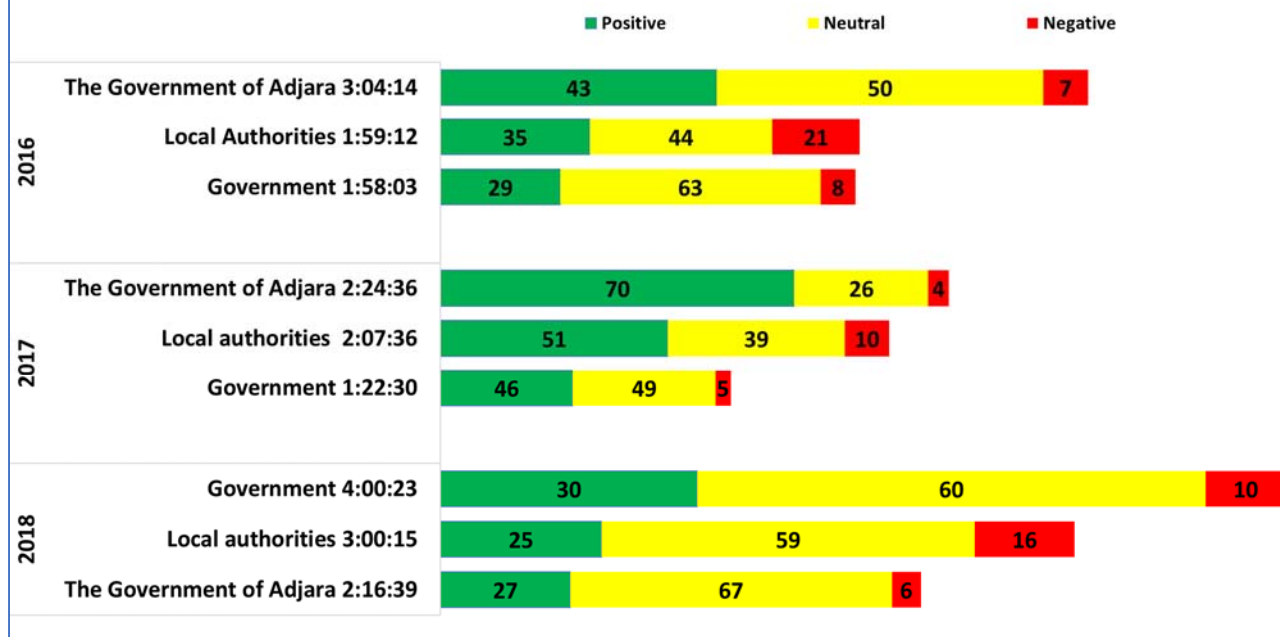
"Radio 1"

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative



During 2016-2017, Radio Ajara covered the government in a distinctly positive context. The coverage of the Ajara Government and local self-government authorities was especially positive. Journalists emphasized successful implementation of various governmental projects. They did not ask critical questions in response to positive statements made by government representatives. In 2018, the trend of positive coverage of the ruling team decreased, although positive indicator remained high, since journalists mostly did not raise critical questions towards the government. While, during the period after the first round of Elections, implemented or planned projects of the local authorities that presented them positively were covered more actively, and it has resulted in the increase of positive tone from 22% to 37%.

The Coverage of the Government according to the Tone (%) Radio Adjara



There is an expectation towards public broadcasters that they will ask critical questions, will cover the topics and problems that may not be reported by private radio broadcasters.

Conclusion

During 2016-2018, radio broadcasters actively covered political developments in their newscasts and also focused considerable attention to pre-election campaign. Although, in-depth coverage of pre-election programs was not offered, reports contained only general promises of politicians and journalists rarely raised questions around electoral programs.

The observation has revealed that radio is not a polarized media segment and provides unbiased coverage of events; still, in some cases in 2018, several broadcasters covered certain events from diverse angles. Overall, balance was better maintained in 2017-2018, as compared to 2016. Nevertheless, despite unbiased work of radio broadcasters, due to the lack of in-depth, analytical reports and critical questions, listeners would be unable to draw justified conclusions. Journalists were primarily following the agenda set by politicians, covered the events without analysis and without obtaining additional information. As a result, there were many unanswered questions around topics; and this would not help voters in making informed choice. Informing of voters would be enhanced if radio broadcasters would focus on social topics, issues of regions and various minorities, and if they would present the positions of political parties around these topics. Although, in 2018 the coverage of such topics decreased sharply and reports were based not on journalists' choice, rather, they were produced only when such topics were raised by politicians.

The problem of superficial coverage of events by radio channels is still a main issue. In 2016-2018, only several radio broadcasters managed to offer in-depth coverage of events in their newscasts, to produce exclusive content

and focus on the problems of the regions. Public broadcasters have also failed to meet expectations. The content of their newscasts was dry and sketchy, journalists did not produce exclusive stories. Furthermore, in 2018, in some cases aired news raised suspicion that journalists avoided criticizing the Government.

Some of radio broadcasters did not avoid sharp criticism of the government in 2018; and stories contained the positions of various parties, but the majority of radio outlets did not endeavour to verify the statements of respondents. They were primarily airing only opposing comments of politicians.

It is beneficial for media freedom when radio broadcasters do not refrain from criticizing the government and when they are dedicating time to opposition, when journalists are not making biased assessments and no cases of manipulating by sound/music or the use of hate speech have been observed; although, at the same time, it is necessary to further emphasize the role of journalists: to demonstrate that they are not relying on the statements of the opposition alone and that they are endeavouring to verify facts, identify new topics and enhance content. The results of the monitoring of newscasts of radio broadcasters in 2016-2018 evidence that listeners will still have to listen to various radio broadcasters in order to obtain balanced and multi-faceted news.

Monitoring of Online Media



During 2016 parliamentary, 2017 local self-governance and 2018 presidential election Civic Development Institute with the support provided by European Union and United Nations Development Programme has carried out monitoring of Georgian online media outlets.

Monitoring of the selected websites was carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods. During quantitative observation major attention was paid to how often and by application of which tone were the monitoring subjects covered by online media. During qualitative observation major attention was paid to preservation of journalistic standards, such as diverse and impartial coverage, dissemination of verified and approved information, reliability and diversity of information sources etc.

Websites selected for monitoring are as follows:

During 2016 parliamentary elections (May 20- November 2, 2016): allnews.ge, ambebi.ge, droni.ge, etanews.ge, info9.ge, interpressnews.ge, marshalpress.ge, netgazeti.ge, newposts.ge, news.ge, palitratv.ge, pirveli.com.ge, presa.ge, reportiori.ge, tabula.ge, civil.ge, dfwatch.net.

During 2017 local self-governance elections (June 19- November 19, 2017): adjaraps.com, ambebi.ge, batumelebi.ge, chemikharagauli.com, for.ge, inforustavi.ge, interpressnews.ge, knews.ge, kutaisipost.ge, livepress.ge, medianews.ge, netgazeti.ge, news.ge, on.ge, presa.ge, qartli.ge, reginfo.ge, sknews.ge, tabula.ge, telegraph.ge.

During 2018 presidential elections (June 18- November 27, 2018): ambebi.ge, interpressnews.ge, ipress.ge, liberali.ge, marshalpress.ge, netgazeti.ge, news.ge, on.ge, palitravideo.ge, reportiori.ge, tabula.ge.

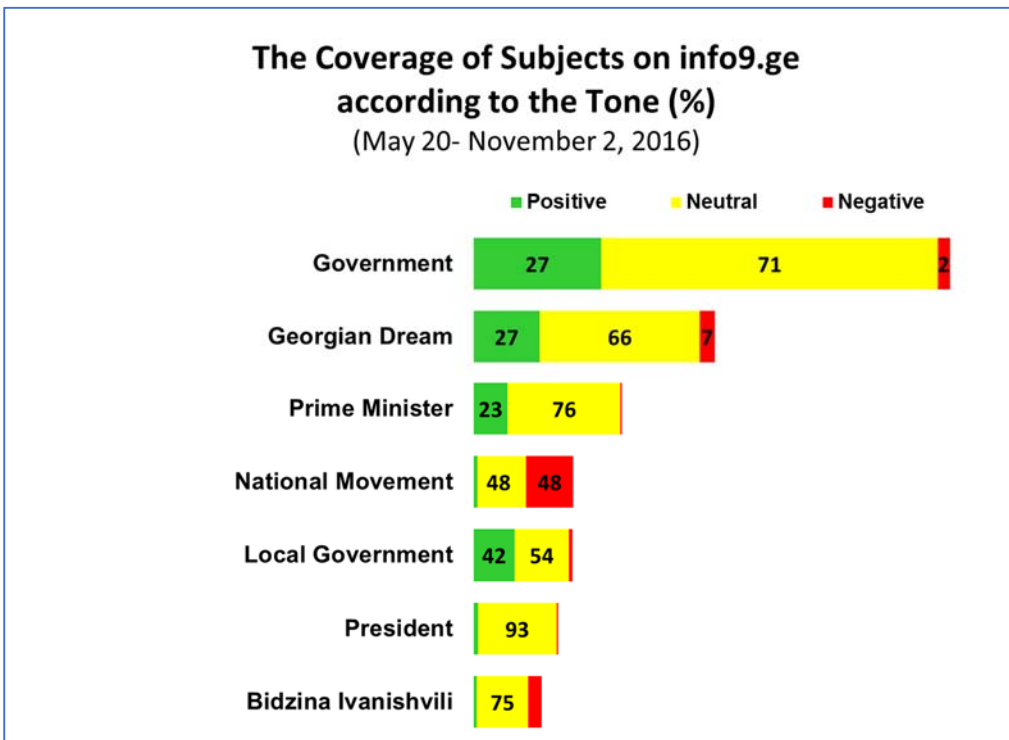
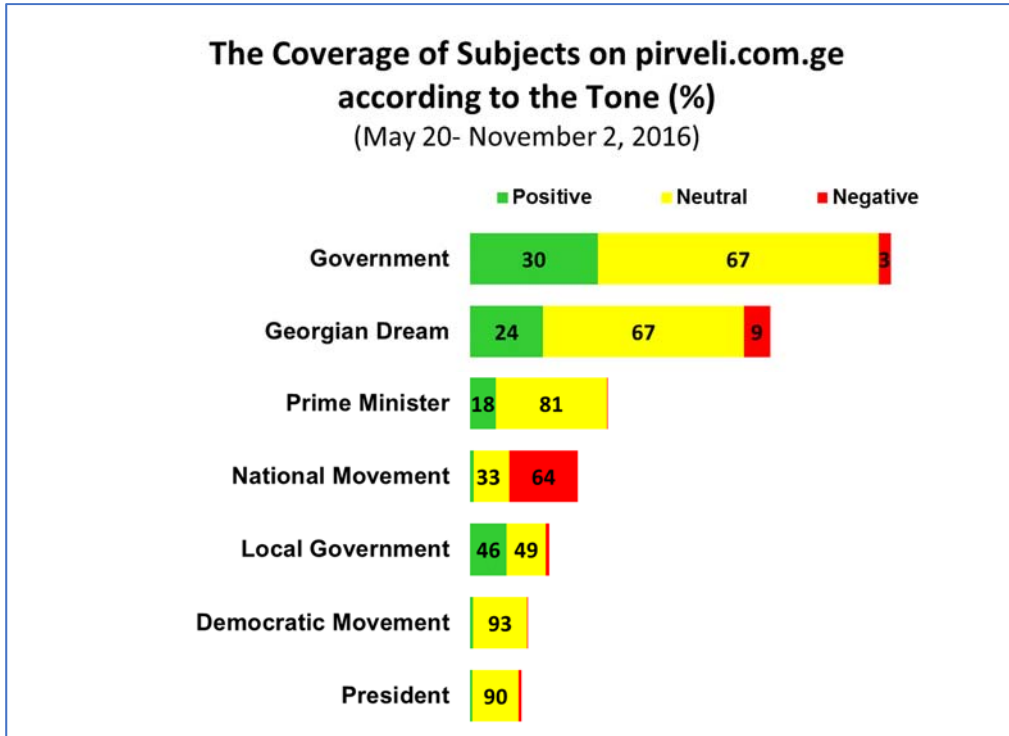
During the monitoring period monitoring of all articles on the websites selected for the process was carried out.

Based on the three-year monitoring process it was identified, that polarization of Georgian online media is gradually decreasing. Large majority of websites selected for monitoring of 2017 and 2018 did not demonstrate positive or negative attitudes towards any political power. Majority of online editions try to and ensure compliance with journalistic standards. In online media it is almost impossible to come across offensive and discriminatory terminology in journalistic texts. The biggest challenge for Georgian online media is improve segregation of commercial articles from editorial materials, as well as lack of in-depth reporting.

Decreased Polarization in Online Media

Polarization is gradually decreasing in Georgian online media. According to quantitative data of 2016 monitoring, in more than half of selected websites indicators of negative tone were high when reporting on United National Movement, while positive tone was prevailing when reporting on Georgian Dream. However, in large majority of these websites clear positive or negative attitudes towards specific political parties have not been observed, and

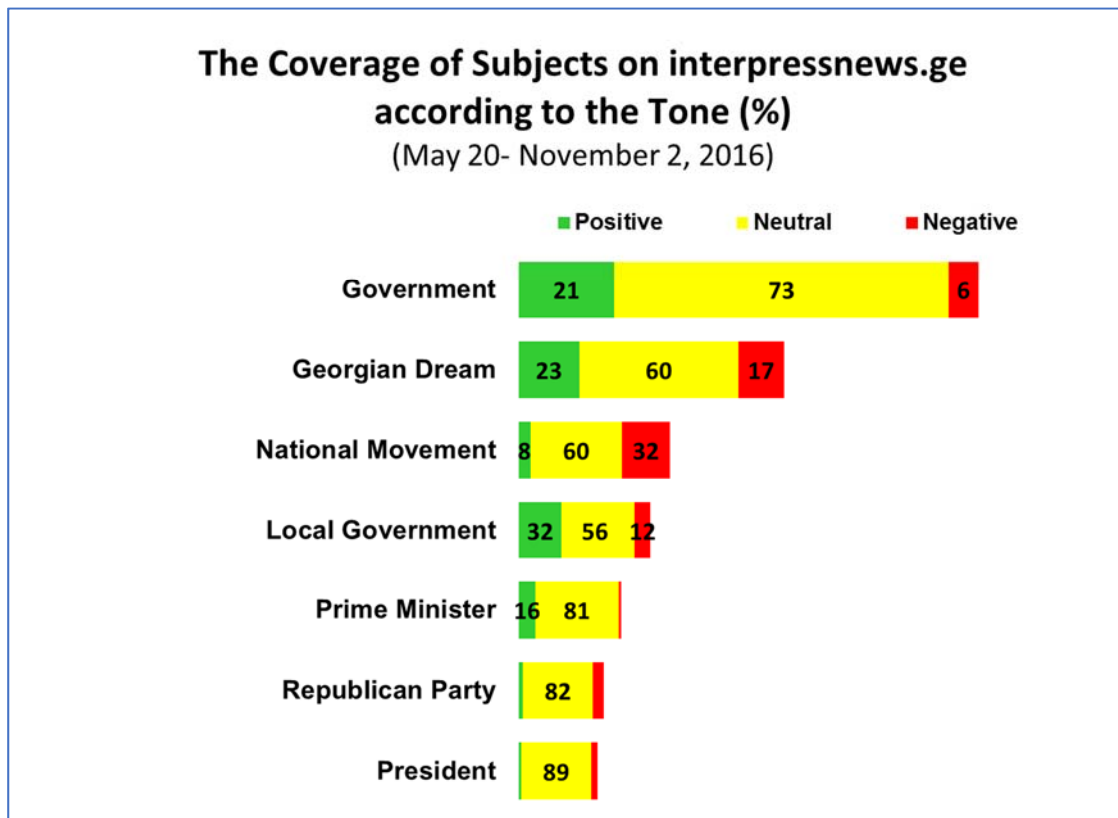
the respective tone indicators were identified only during the quantitative analysis. For example, in the specific articles of some informational agencies and web portals, positive or negative attitudes towards specific political parties were not observed. However, positive or negative tones were revealed as a result of long-term quantitative analysis:



This quantitative data is based on positive or negative statements of the respondents regarding politicians and other political powers, or daily activity of state agency representatives. Accordingly, it can be said that, during 2016 monitoring, clear polarization and positive or negative attitudes of the websites towards different political powers is mainly identified based on long-term observation and not based on particular articles.

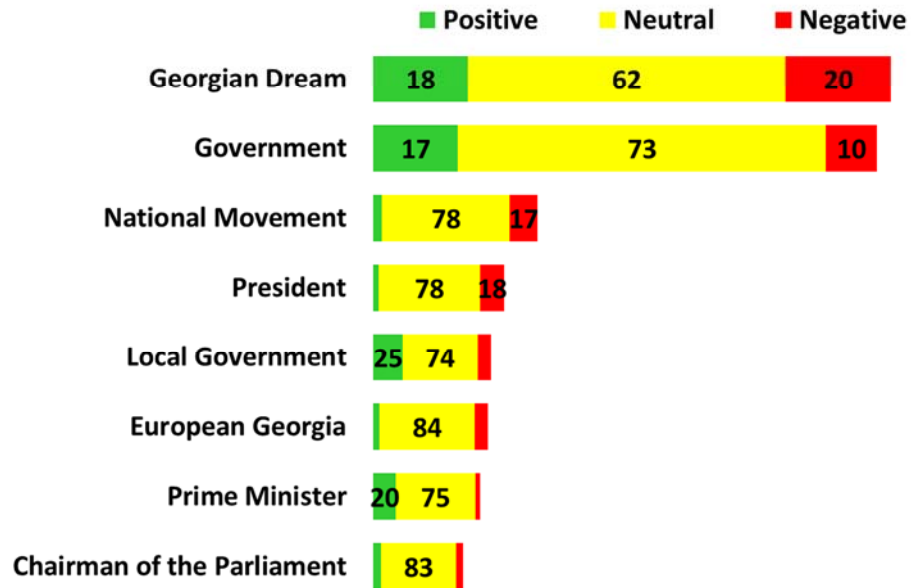
This tendency has significantly improved during 2017 and 2018 monitoring periods. Except for couple of exceptional cases, during 2017 and 2018 no positive or negative attitudes towards specific political powers has been observed in Georgian online media.

It is true, that during 2016, 2017 and 2018 different online editions have been monitored. However, the above-mentioned positive tendency was observed in case of the websites, which underwent the monitoring process during all three years. For example, in 2017 more balanced coverage of government and United National Movement was observed on interpressnews.ge.



The Coverage of Subjects on interpressnews.ge according to the Tone (%)

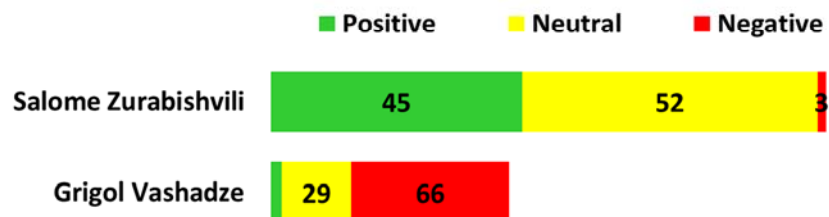
June 19- November 19, 2017

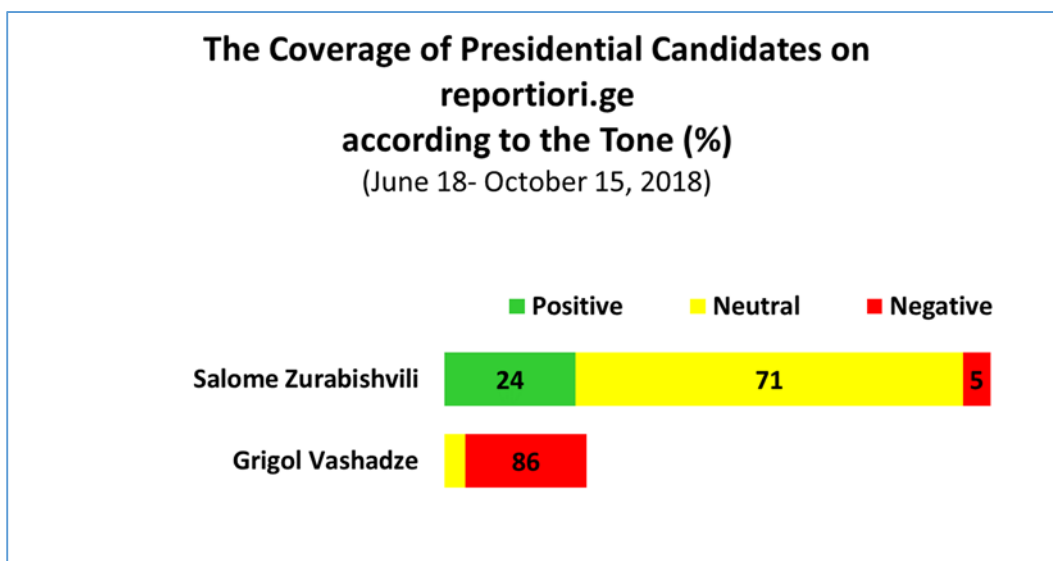


During 2018 monitoring process, no positive or negative attitudes towards specific political powers have been observed, except for reportiori.ge and marshalpress.ge. On these two websites, exclusively positive attitude toward Salome Zurabishvili and extremely negative attitude towards Grigol Vashadze have been observed:

The Coverage of Presidential Candidates on marshalpress.ge according to the Tone (%)

(June 18- October 15, 2018)





It shall be highlighted that, during 2017 local self-governance elections, none of the regional websites selected for monitoring purposes have demonstrated extremely positive or negative attitude towards any political power.

Journalistic Standards in Online Media

Journalistic standards and norms of ethic are upheld better in Georgian online media from year to year. Almost no offensive and discriminatory terminology is observed in journalistic texts. The frequency of disseminating unverified information has been decreasing as well.

The cases of publishing unsubstantiated allegations and unverified information were already few during 2016 monitoring. However, number of such cases have significantly decreased during 2017 and 2018 monitoring periods. Changes have been observed not only in general picture, but also in case of individual websites, which have been under observation for three years; for example, during 2016 monitoring period, cases of unjustified allegations and publication of unverified information have been observed on ambebi.ge (in particular articles *“National Movement” Obituary*, November 1st, 2016; *“How Kezerashvili took away “Senta Petroleum” from the owners- details from high-profile court case”*, May 19, 2016). During 2017 and 2018 monitoring periods, no cases of insolent violation of journalistic standards have been observed on this website.

During 2018 monitoring period, cases of violation of journalistic norms were observed on two websites: reportiori.ge and marshalpress.ge. These two editions covered events with in a single-sided manner, violating journalistic standards. Unjustified allegations, use of offensive and discriminatory language was observed. Also, unusual tendency has been observed in case of both websites: social media posts from publicly recognizable people were published. These posts were mainly related to statements made in regards with United National Movement and their candidates and in most of the cases the content was very offensive and critical (for example, *“Gia Gabrichidze: Gogorishvili is showing off her frog-like eyes, Kakhidze is texting someone, Khoshtaria is quiet...”* reportiori.ge, September 7, 2018; *“Davit Liluashvili to “National Movement”: You and your propagandist television will not be able to do anything!”*, reportiori.ge, October 13, 2018; *“Making Misha’s footman Vashadze to president*

has become the only hope- Buba Khotivari”, marshalpress.ge, September 24, 2018; „*With these results I will punish you all- no way this mustachioed, Russian fed seal is going to win!*”, marshalpress.ge, October 2, 2018).

During 2018 monitoring period, classic fake news has been detected on reportiori.ge. According to the article published on August 10 (“*During the visit to the USA Georgian president was charged for smoking weed at the hotel!*”), Washington Daily reported that president of Georgia got fined for smoking marihuana at the hotel during his visit to the USA. Washington Daily does not exist in internet world at all and accordingly, it is less likely for this article to exist. In addition to publishing the fake news on the president, on the same day reportiori.ge published statement of the expert Mamuka Areshidze (“*Mamuka Areshidze: the main function of the president is to represent state abroad*”, August 10, 2018), where respondent speaks of president’s above-mentioned misconduct and criticizes him for such actions. It appeared that reportiori.ge put no attempt to verify this information.

Commercial Articles

The most severe challenge of Georgian online media is improper segregation of commercial articles from editorial materials. During the three-year monitoring process articles without any specific indications are observed systematically. There were cases when websites selected for the monitoring process were publishing identical articles simultaneously. For example, on October 12, 2016, five online editions have simultaneously published the information earlier published on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding opening of new firefighting-rescue service facility. It shall be highlighted that the same article was published on interpressnews.ge with advertisement signs. On September 5, 2017, six websites selected for monitoring process have published identical article on Kakha Kaladze’s meeting with British ambassador. From the above-mentioned six websites, some had attached advertisement symbols, and some did not indicate that the article was commercial at all. During 2018 monitoring period similar cases were often observed on the websites news.ge and ipress.ge.

Some websites make indications on the articles elaborated in the scope of commercial agreements, however indications are made in improper manner. For example, different from other online publications, interpressnews.ge attaches special indications to the commercial materials. However, these indications are not easy to understand for readers, as indications are made with Latin symbols (circled “NS”, and if user brings the mouse to this sign, he/she will see “News from Subscriber”). Commercial articles on the website inforustavi.ge, had a Latin sign- R. for the above-mentioned articles, it is important for the websites to use the symbols and signs that are easier to understand for readers.

Elections Coverage

Election related processes are actively broadcasted by Georgian online media and in majority of cases, coverage is impartial. During the election period, most of the websites tried to and did provide relevant attention to representatives of different political powers. Vote-counting and announcement of results were actively covered as well.

The major problem observed on the websites was lack of in-depth coverage. For example, large number of websites published statements and daily activities of election candidates, however minor attention was paid to election programmes of the candidates.

Lack of critical analysis of election promises has been a notable problem in online media. Large majority of websites covered pre-election confrontations among political groups without any commentary and did not provide the readers with further analysis of such confrontations.

During 2016 parliamentary elections, there was a case when the website covered the promises made by the governing party as actual facts; for example, “Georgian Dream will establish 200 000 new working places” (reportiori.ge, September 9, 2016); “Unbelievable Changes in Infrastructure of Georgia - where will the new roads, bridges and tunnels be constructed during the following 4 years” (reportiori.ge, September 17, 2016); „Construction of 50 tunnels is planned in following 4 years” (allnews.ge, September 17, 2016). The above-mentioned examples are from the actual websites, where during the pre-election period the support of the governing team was observed. However, the coverage of elections promises without commentary and analysis was also the major problem in case of websites which did not demonstrate any positive or negative attitudes towards any party.

On the other hand, number of online editions have provided impartial and in-depth coverage of election related topics. Websites netgazeti.ge, civil.ge, on.ge, liberali.ge and often tabula.ge managed to provide readers with not only superficial, but also in-depth analysis on election processes, candidates’ programs, their funding and election results.

Lack of in-depth Coverage

Severe challenge of Georgian online media is lack of in-depth coverage. Part of websites tries to and provides the readers with diverse and in-depth analysis. However, large majority of websites, most commonly, limits its activities with covering daily events and publishing statements from politicians, state representatives or public figures. Consequently, in large majority of websites diversity of information sources and representation of new opinions in articles is a rare case. It is rare for journalists to research on exclusive topics and we can say that, large majority of online media covers current events in a somewhat automatic mode. Statements made by politicians, including allegations against certain individuals, are mostly covered without verification of the sources and attempt to find counter opinions.

During the three-year monitoring process only several websites - netgazeti.ge, civil.ge, on.ge, liberali.ge and sometimes tabula.ge - managed to provide readers with in-depth analysis, variety of opinions in separate articles and original materials. Other websites had extremely superficial approach to most topics.

Regional Online Media

During 2017 self-governance elections 11 regional websites were under observation. Based on the monitoring results it was identified that regardless number of shortcomings, large majority of regional editions managed to provide the readers with objective information during the elections period.

It should be highlighted that, in regional online media, commercial articles were strictly differentiated from editorial materials. For example, on September 5, 2017, six websites selected for monitoring process have published identical article on Kakha Kaladze's meeting with British ambassador. From the above-mentioned six websites, only two had attached advertisement symbols easily understandable for the readers, and these two were regional livepress.ge and kutaisipost.ge.

Regional media was not polarized and none of the regional editions selected for the monitoring has demonstrated positive or negative attitude towards any political power. It should be highlighted that, large majority of regional websites was very actively and impartially covering social, economic or other types of problems existing in the region. Also, during pre-election period mayoral candidates of different political parties were covered objectively. Especially, batumelebi.ge, reginfo.ge and sknews.ge shall be highlighted, which provided the readers with exclusive materials and diverse and critical analysis of the issues.

Conclusion

In the process of three-year monitoring, it became clear that, polarization is decreasing annually, and large majority of websites provides readers with more or less objective information on election process. Also, cases of violating journalistic standards and norms of ethics in online media is decreasing annually.

The most severe challenge of Georgian online media is improper segregation of commercial articles from editorial materials. Articles published without any specific indications were a common issue observed during the three-year monitoring process.

Also, superficial coverage and lack of critical analysis is a severe challenge as well. Large majority of websites, most commonly, limits its activities with reporting on daily events and publishing statements from politicians, state representatives or public figures. It is rare for journalists to research on exclusive topics, verify facts, look for additional sources of information and etc.

Superficial coverage of the topics is observed during the elections as well, when large number of websites publishes information on daily activities of the election candidates and their election promises without commentary and analysis; minor attention is paid to in-depth analysis of candidates' programmes.

As a result of monitoring, we can conclude that, Georgian online media is capable of informing readers on ongoing political and election processes. However, it is desired to pay more attention to in-depth and critical analysis of the topics.

Monitoring of Press



Civic Development Institute with the support from the European Union and United Nations Development Programme has conducted the monitoring of Georgian printed media during the period of 2016 Parliamentary Elections, 2017 Local Self-Government Elections and 2018 Presidential Elections.

Quantitative and qualitative monitoring was carried out on the media outlets selected for monitoring. Quantitative research focused on the frequency and tone of coverage of monitoring subject in selected media outlets. Qualitative research focused on whether the selected media outlet protected the journalistic standards, such as: multilateral and impartial coverage of the events, coverage of double-checked and verified facts, diversity and reliability of sources of information and etc.

The following media outlets have been selected for monitoring:

For the period of 2016 Parliamentary Elections (20 May – 2 November, 2016) - Alia, Asaval-Dasavali, Akhali Taoba, Guria News, Kviris Palitra, Rezonansi", Kronika +.

For the period of 2017 Local Self-Government Elections (19 June – 19 November, 2017): Asaval-Dasavali, Akhali Gazeti, Borjomi, Guria News, Guriis Moambe, Trialetis Express, Kviris Palitra, Mtavari Tema Samegreloshi, Postscriptum, Rezonansi, Svaneti, Spektri.

For the period of 2018 Presidential Elections (18 June - 27 November, 2018): Alia, Asaval-Dasavali, Akhali Taoba, Kviris Palitra, Rezonansi, Kronika +, Sakartvelo da Msoplio.

During the monitoring period, all articles of the selected media outlets were monitored.

Three-year monitoring of printed media revealed the various violations of journalistic standards and ethical norms in the vast majority of Georgian newspapers. The most gross violations are offensive and discriminatory terminologies used in the journalists' texts, dissemination of the unverified information and unsubstantiated accusations, disclosure of the information obtained from dubious sources, the one-sided coverage of events, and in some cases, improper separation of advertising articles from editorial materials. The given violations were regularly observed in the monitoring periods of 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Dissemination of Unverified Information

The most pressing challenge of the Georgian press is the frequent publication of unverified information, unconfirmed facts and unsubstantiated accusations. As a result of the monitoring, there is an impression that a large part of Georgian printed publications do not care about the correctness of the information published by them. Unverified information and unsubstantiated allegations are often found in the texts of the journalists. There were frequent cases when journalists were discussing the most important issues the accuracy and reliability of which has not been respectively verified. For example, three articles published in the July 18-24 issue of the newspaper Sakartvelo da Msoplio, ("They Have Not Mentioned Georgia...", p 4; "Moscow: France Croatia - 4: 2, Helsinki: Trump-Putin - ?", "Trump, Russia and Globalists", p. 7), disseminated information that during the NATO

Summit the US President, Donald Trump demanded the expulsion of the President of Georgia from the assembly hall: "US President Donald Trump requested the list of the Brussels Summit participant delegations from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and was surprised to see drunkard Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and idler Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili on the list. Both presidents were forced out of the assembly hall (p. 5). These articles didn't indicate the source of the information that the President of Georgia was expelled from the hall upon demand of US President.

The dissemination of the important information obtained from suspicious sources was observed in many media outlets. There were frequent cases when the journalists did not mention their sources of information and simply used phrases "Reportedly...", "According to the source..." etc. For example: "Rumours say that the idea of creating a Messiah from Gharibashvili was the main leitmotif of Supra..."; For example: "Rumours say that the idea of creating a Messiah from Gharibashvili was the main leitmotif of Supra..."; "According to the source, the same rumors were heard at the restaurant" ("Akhali Taoba", "Gharibashvili Returns to Politics", 19 July, 2016, p. 4); "According to unverified information, the list has been drawn up, but it was not approved by Bidzina Ivanishvili"; "Reportedly, the former member of the National Forum will be included in the list ..."; "According to the disclosed information, Zakaria Kutsnashvili will reliably make it to the list ..."; "Reportedly, "Georgian Dream" had negotiations with the Republicans regarding majoritarian MPs" ("Akhali Taoba", *GD Members Left out of the List Ramp About the Scandalous Statement*", July 12, 2016, p. 3). Obviously, in journalism, in some cases it is allowed for the journalists not to disclose the source of information, but in Georgian print media the cases of dissemination of the information collected from the suspicious sources is too often.

In addition to the frequent use of dubious sources of information, in Georgian media there are numerous cases of publishing unsubstantiated allegations against the person, unilaterally without a relevant verification. In the vast majority of Georgian newspapers, we observe no attempt of the journalists to verify the information disseminated by respondents. The problem is particularly acute when the respondents are reporting a particular crime against a particular person and the journalists do not seek to obtain any kind of evidence from them or try to verify the facts. For instance, in the Akhali Taoba Article of September 6, 2018 -"Levan Khabeishvili:" If we won't raise our voice, they will eat us alive too"(P. 2), the respondent's statement on Tbilisi Mayor's spending 45,000 GEL at restaurants in 20 days was not followed by the journalist's attempt to verify the accuracy of this information; On September 21, 2018, in the article of "Rezonansi" - "Levan Khabeishvili -Unified National Exams Are Planned to Be Cancelled" (p. 12) respondent expressed serious allegations against the authorities, as he said, that it was planned to cancel the national exams in Georgia. The article did not show the journalist's attempt to verify the accuracy of the information at any state agency.

There were frequent cases when the source of the information was clear, but the harder accusations and the suspicious opinions expressed by him were not followed by the proper reaction of the journalists. Moreover, the journalists often entered into the discussions themselves and used the allegations of the respondents against other person as the headlines to their articles, without its proper verification and justification. A good example of this trend is the article published in the Asaval-Dasavali regarding the fires on the territory of Georgia in which the United National Movement (UNM) was accused of arson on the territory of Georgia. "Fire has become a weapon of political fight" (21-27 August, p.2); "August Borjomi" (28 August - 3 September, p. 2); "UNM Arsoned Georgia" (September 4-10, p. 8). Respondents' statements in these articles regarding the United National Movement ordering arson on the territory of Georgia have not been followed by the journalists' request of any evidence proving these allegations.

In general, a serious challenge to the Georgian media is the tendency that journalists normally agree with the allegations made by the respondents as undisputable facts. Such cases are often found in many media outlets. For instance: In the Article of Akhali Taoba of September 28, 2018, "Kaladze Hires Sergeenko's Brother for 3.000 GEL Job" (page 2), the respondent's statement on appointment of the Health Minister's brother on the high-salaried position by skipping hiring contest was followed by journalist's comment "Well, how could they leave Labor Minister's brother unemployed" instead of verifying the above-mentioned fact. Also, on August 7, 2018, in the Akhali Taoba article - "Bidzina Ivanishvili has bribed the members of the government" (p.2), the respondent's statement regarding unlawful remuneration of the members of the government was not followed by the journalist's request of any evidences in this regard, instead the journalist asked the respondent "Is the black cash accessible only for the Ministers or members of the parliament as well?"; In "Kronika +" article of September 25, 2017 - "Salome Zourabichvili is no good than a stick, the stick is worth zero while she is worth below zero, people hate her"(pp. 14-15), the respondent's statement that the CEC chairperson will "correct" the results of election, is followed by the journalist's question: "Why wouldn't she "correct" the results, as she received 20 000 GEL salary in August. With 20 000 GEL salary she could even make Tutankhamun a President, not only Salome?" It is very important that the journalists are more critical to the serious allegations made by the respondents towards public figures or public agencies. Especially in cases where these allegations contain violations of the law.

In addition to the respondents' statements, we often encountered unsubstantiated allegations in the texts of journalists. For example, in the issue of September 11-17, 2017 of "Kviris Palitra", the journalist wrote: "Temur Makhauri, the same Ruslan Papaskiri, was involved in the attempt to murder businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili in 2007. Back then the special services "assigned" this task to Gia Dgebuadze, nicknamed "Mastera". It was said that "Mastera" met with Uva Akhmedov in Dubai to negotiate this issue. Ruslan Papaskiri was ordered to be a killer"("According to one version, "Zooni" was loyal to Saakashvili and he was liquidated by Ukrainian special services", p. 3). The article did not indicate the source of the information and whether it was reliable.

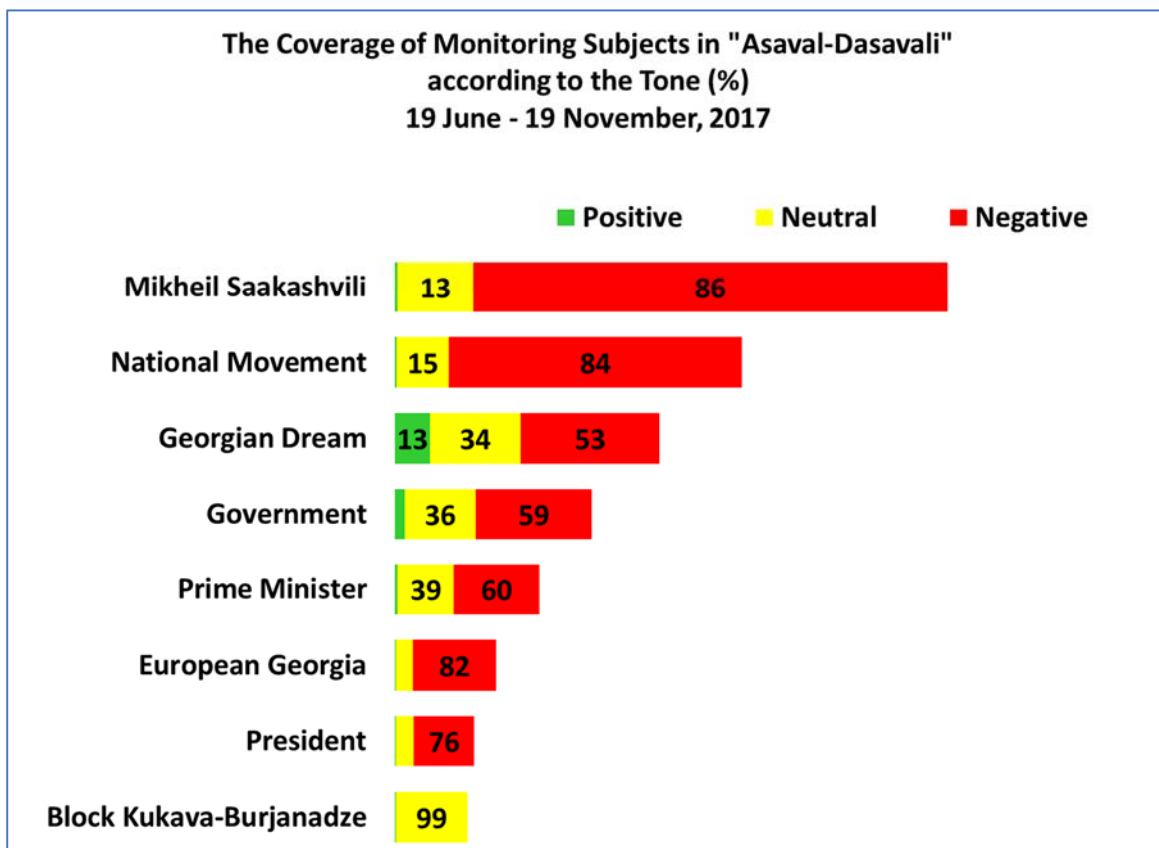
There were frequent cases when newspapers published information disseminated by other media outlets without proper verification. Such articles were often found in the newspaper "Rezonansi". For example, the "Rezonansi" article published on June 25, 2018, "Working experience at the Company "Center Point" is erased from Bakhtadze's biography" (p. 2) provided the serious allegations against the Prime Minister which were not backed up with relevant facts. In the article, TV Channel Rustavi 2 was presented as a source of information, but the source of Rustavi 2 itself was not indicated anywhere. Also, the article did not show the journalist's attempt to present evidence of these allegations. Also, on November 12, 2018, "Rezonansi" published an article titled "Wood Voucher by political grounds - only GD supporters received vouchers in Kaspi" (p. 9). The source of information in the article was only Pirveli Radio and it was not clear how Pirveli Radio obtained the information in the first place. Also, there was no attempt of the journalist to obtain additional information on the facts presented in the article.

Biased Coverage

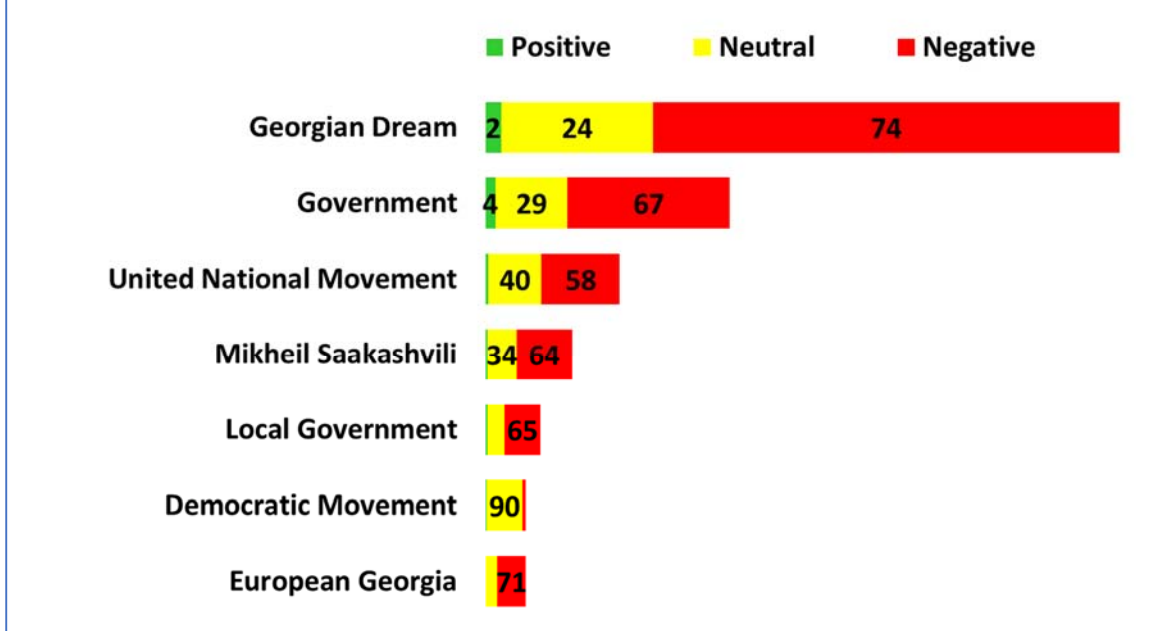
In Georgian printed media, the positive or negative attitude towards different political forces was also frequently observed. Negative coverage of politicians was not often a constructive criticism and judgement, but serious personal insult and unsubstantiated allegations. During the monitoring period, the most severe offensive and discriminatory terminology was systematically encountered in the newspapers Asaval-Dasavali and Alia. Journalists of these media outlets often used extremely insulting terminology when covering politicians; For example: "Do you know, why Nodar Khaduri doesn't have hair on his head? He has used so much Vaseline, that not a single hair can grow on his scalp"("Alia", "Georgian dream has lied to you", issue of 15-21 August, 2016, p

9); "Be sure that if this composition passes, all anti-Georgian activities initiated by Usupov's three-percent parliament will succeed including the same-sex marriage, incest, pedophilia and all other lewdness that are spread in the West today ..." ("Alia", "Conspiracy against Georgia", issue of 1-7 August, 2016, p. 12); "Imagine how the so called Republic Party should have fallen to be left only with this male lesbian as the main supporter in political, public elections" ("Asaval-Dasavali", „Republicans are supporting Lesbian candidate for the Mayor of Tbilisi!", issue of 21-27 August, 2017, p. 8); "Even if Nika Gvaramia and other representatives of UNM sect not only have eaten bitter peppers, but also used them as toilet papers, Grigol Vashadze-Ananiashvili would not become the President of Georgia" (Asaval-Dasavali, "They eat poop and then peppers!", 24-30 September, 2018 11).

It should be noted that in these media outlets the insulting terminologies were used while covering both the ruling and opposition parties. However, severe insults were used while covering the United National Movement, ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili, European Georgia, Republican Party and the President of Georgia. The most negative attitude towards the ruling and the opposition forces was also reflected in quantitative data:



The Coverage of Monitoring Subjects in "Alia" according to the Tone (%) (18 June - 27 November, 2018)

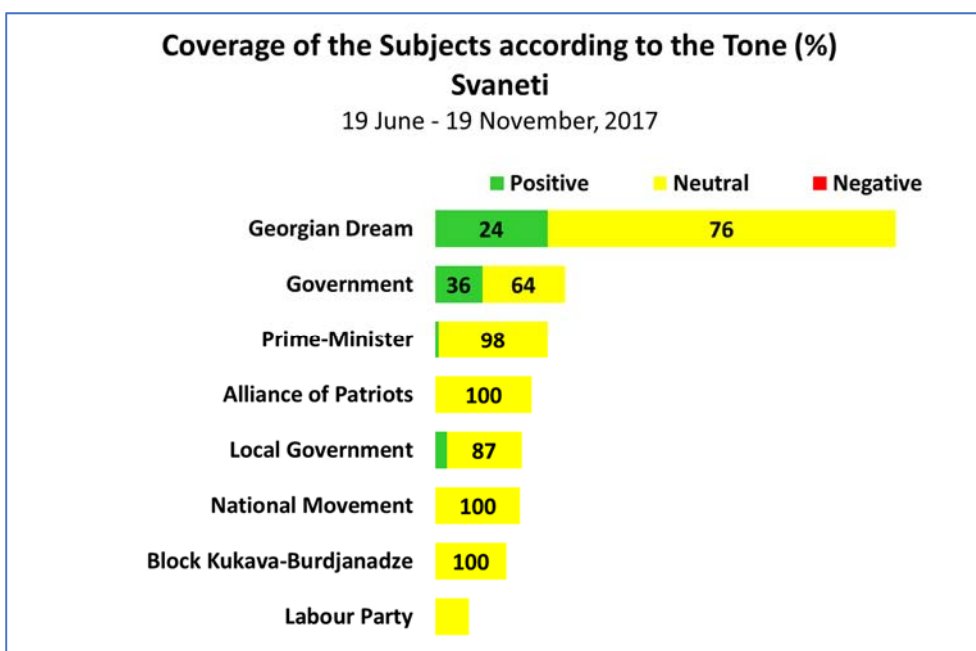
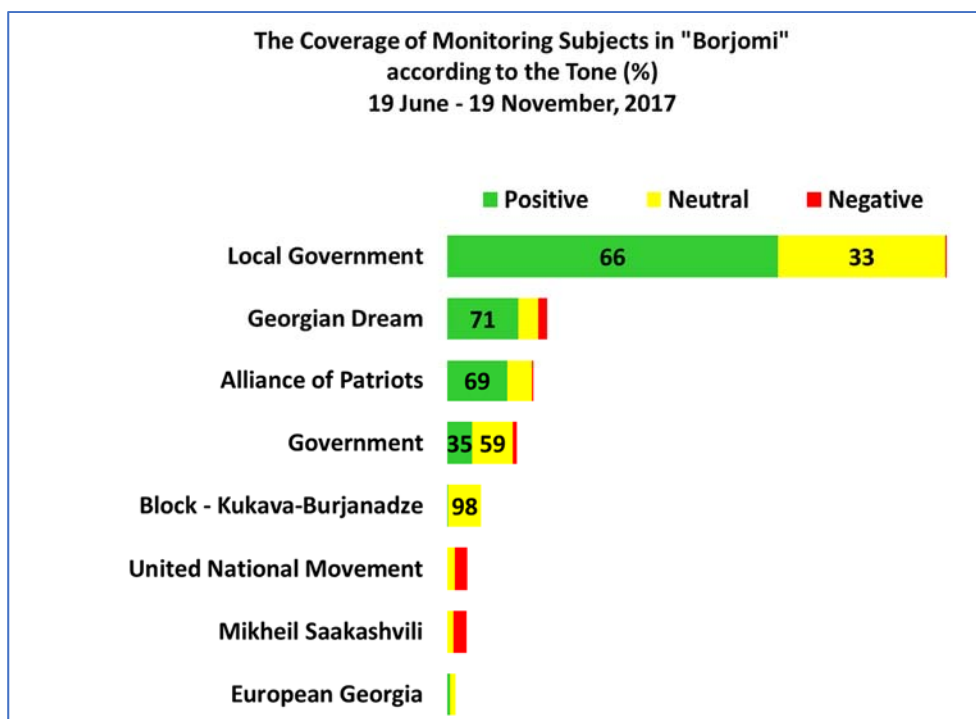


In addition to the texts of journalists, we often encountered insulting terminologies in the respondents' statements and there was no attempt of the journalists to dissociate themselves from these statements. Moreover, in most of the cases the journalists themselves were involved in such discussions. For example, the journalist of Alia was not trying to separate his opinion from the extremely insulting statement of one of the leaders of the Georgian March, Giorgi Korkotashvili towards the presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili: "With the existing collapse Georgian Dream offers us the candidate who can literally fit any hole!" ("I'm serious, I smell the revolution", September 30, 2018, p. 3).

The insulting phrases were used in the headlines of the articles; for example: "Male and Female Suns of GDstan" (Kronika +, issue of 24 July - 6 October, 2018, p. 13); "Rude, ribald, impolite woman with her anti-state thinking who doesn't love Georgia and is seeking to become the President" (Alia, issue of September 23-29, 2018, p. 19).

It is noteworthy that the use of insulting terminology by journalists has not been observed in regional publications. During the local self-government elections in 2017, 9 regional newspapers were monitored and no use of the insulting terminology by the journalists was observed in the above-mentioned newspapers.

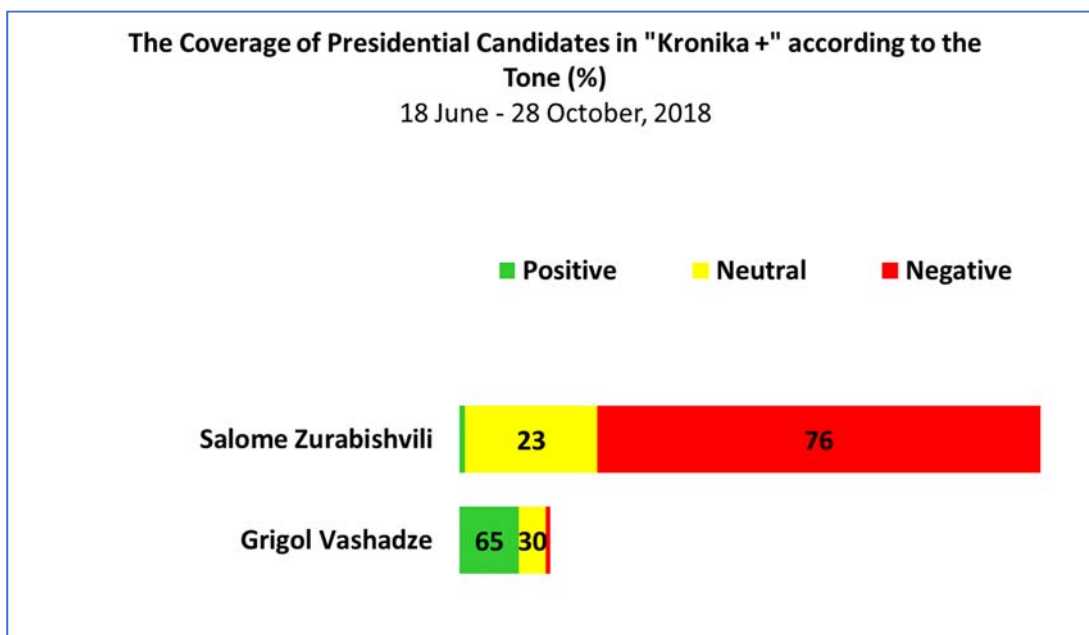
During the three-year monitoring period there were in total two media outlets that clearly supported the governing team. In the regional newspapers Borjomi and Svaneti, as a result of quantitative observations the most positive attitude towards the government was observed:



And as a result of qualitative observations as well. The government's activity and situation in the regions have been covered only in positive perspective by the given media outlets and existing social, economic or other kinds of problems have not been covered at all. The most positive attitude towards governing party was clearly observed in the articles of journalists of the newspapers Borjomi and Svaneti; For example, on July 13, 2017, the newspaper Borjomi published an article under the headline "Tired from Caring for the Voters" (p.2), concerning the local government representative. It should be noted that the headline of the newspaper Borjomi was - "Be always

informed about our work. Borjomi Municipality ". If the newspaper is financed from the budget funds, in such a case it is very important for the newspaper to state in more clearly and inform the reader about it.

The only publication, in which certain cases of support to opposition party, in particular to the United National Movement was observed is Kronika +. During the 2018 presidential elections, as a result of quantitative observations, positive attitude was clearly observed to the presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze and extremely negative attitude towards Salome Zurabishvili, a candidate supported by the ruling party:

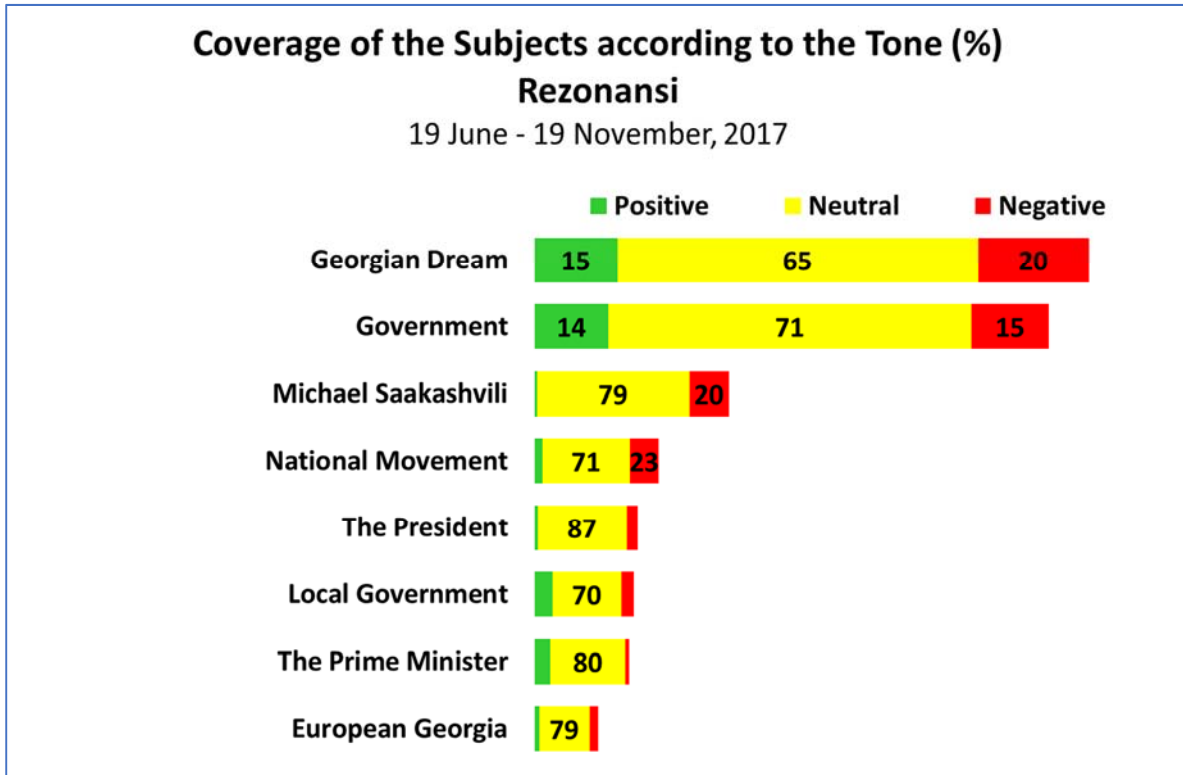


The positive attitude towards the given party was also revealed during the monitoring period of 2016 when the journalist of “Kronika+” wrote about one of the leaders of the party: "Levan Vashalomidze looks quite academically and self-confident, and the voter seems to want such fearless and motivated people in the power not the ones simply occupying chairs” ("Chairs will be unloaded in Batumi, or Misha’s Test # 1", 5 July, p. 15).

An interesting case of positive coverage of election candidates were observed in Alia. During the 2016 parliamentary election, Alia published three articles about majoritarian candidates in which the journalist was unusually positively characterizing these candidates; For example: "When you meet Tsezar Chocheli you somehow get in the turbulent zone, he is an extraordinary person with great energy. This man’s life reminds me a mythological fiery bird - Phoenix, who has an ability to burn itself down. Tsezar Chocheli has always risen from the ashes." ("Worked, Fought, Got Convicted, Got Acquitted and Won", September 12-18, p. 8); "The committed, risk-taker, dynamic, bold, optimistic, who sees a new opportunity for development in every difficulty, is maximalist, fights till the end and is always open to changes"" ("Gocha Enukidze:" We will win together and we'll get back to life! ", 19-25 September, p. 6). It is noteworthy that such unusual positive assessments of majoritarian candidates were observed in Alia, which is always distinguished with its very negative attitude towards both the ruling and opposition parties.

Insufficient Separation of Advertising Articles from Editorial Materials

During the monitoring period, there were also publications that did not have any positive or negative attitude towards any political force as a result of quantitative observations, but there were different types of violations of journalism standards. For example, the results of quantitative monitoring in the newspaper "Resonance" are usually quite balanced:



However, the serious challenge with this newspaper was improper separation of the editorial materials from the articles prepared within the commercial contract. During the 2016 monitoring period such articles were put in frames and on the last page of the newspaper it was written with very narrow script that the articles in the frame were advertising ones. In the course of the monitoring of 2017, such advertising articles were not put in the frame and the articles were initially printed in the same format as the other rubrics. Consequently, the reader was less likely to find the difference between advertising and editorial materials. This tendency continued during the monitoring period of 2018.

This problem was particularly acute when advertising articles prepared about the election topic were published without proper reference. Two rather extensive articles were published in Rezonansi about Georgian Dream and Tbilisi Mayoral candidate Kakha Kaladze ("For Loyalty and Love of Tbilisi- 25 candidates united under single number", September 4, p 3. "7 Directions leading to the City full of Lives ", September 6, p.3), which did not indicate the advertising reference.

Inadequate separation of advertising articles from the editorial materials was observed in a number of media outlets during the monitoring period of 2018. For example, the article "Nikoloz Gagua: Georgia's Economic Growth is one of the most sustainable in the region", with the same text, similar letters and attached photographs simultaneously was published in two newspapers selected for monitoring (Akhali Taoba and Rezonansi) and two

online publications (ipress.ge and interpressnews.ge). It should be noted that this article was posted on the website interpressnews.ge with indication that it was advertising.

It should be noted that in almost all regional media outlets selected for monitoring, the advertisements have been adequately clarified for the readers with clear and bold indications.

Systematic Criticism

In Georgian media outlets we have also encountered occasions when there was a systematic and deliberate criticism of one particular person in the publication that created the impression that the goal of the publication was not the objective coverage and evaluation of the activity of the person, but his/her discreditation. For example, in the course of the monitoring of 2016, in almost all publications of Kronika +, a wide range of articles were published about one particular person, Deputy Head of the State Security Service, Ioseb Gogashvili. In the criticism of the above-mentioned subject we often encountered journalists' insulting statements. For example, in the articles "Soso Nicknamed Rib-Eye" (May 28, p. 7); "Joseph, special groups will lead you to an end" (July 5, p. 7); "Soso's Dream" (September 27, p. 7); "The country in which „Rib-Eye” is conducting elections ..." (October 4, p. 7); "Even the crisis of the country is called Soso!" (October 18, p. 7). Such a tendency was observed during the monitoring period of 2018, in the newspaper Kviris Palitra, which was regularly criticizing the Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani. These criticisms were presented unilaterally, often through unreasonable accusations, and there was no attempt from the journalists to present different opinions in response to these accusations (for example, in the articles: "Tsulukiani does not fulfil the judgment of the court that she has "reformed" herself?!", 18-24 June, p. 6; "Tea Tsulukiani will do anything to keep her ministerial position", 25 June - 1 July, p 6; "Tsulukiani will become government's own dirt" 16-22 July, pp. 6-7; "Your property is absolutely unprotected in the registry, "9-15 July, pp. 10-11 "Lia Mukhashavria:" Today the Court is running according to the principle of "Cosa Nostra", 13-19 August, p. 7). Apart from the respondents' allegations and criticism in these articles, the journalists' texts also included a clear negative attitude towards the Minister.

Coverage of the Elections

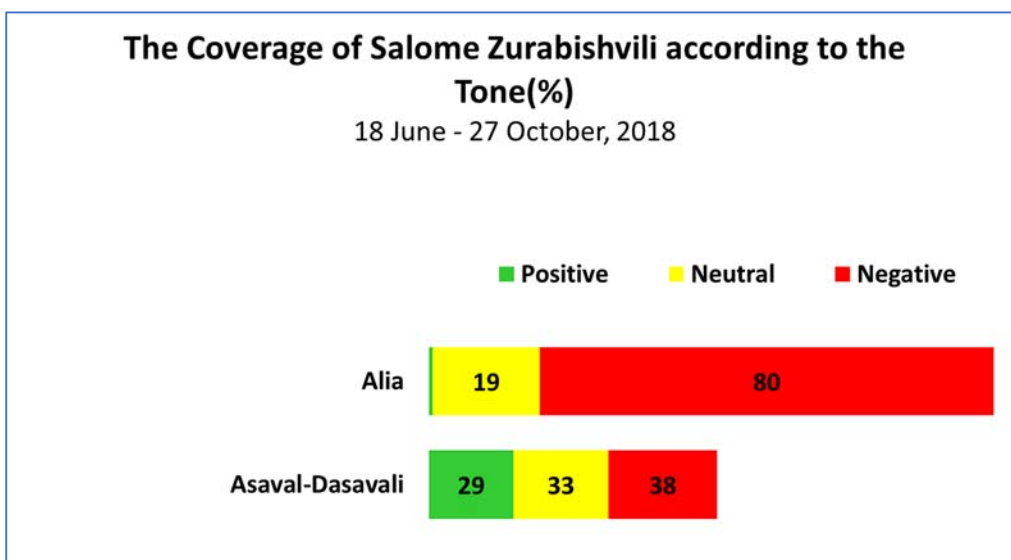
The coverage of the issues related to the elections in the Georgian press, in many cases, was similar. During the election period, some media outlets were trying to cover the various representatives of political parties, but a large part of the coverage was unequivocal and biased. Less attention was paid to their election programs and visions. Often there were attempts to discredit election candidates by different media outlets, which, in many cases, was done through the personal insult and the unsubstantiated accusations of those candidates.

Some newspapers (e.g. Rezonansi, Kviris Palitra and Akhali Taoba) offered readers the opinions of different political forces during the election period. While others (for example, Alia, Asaval-Dasavali, Kronika +), in most of the cases, gave less space to the representatives of the political forces themselves, and were inviting respondents who criticized the candidates that were less likable for the given media outlets.

There is an impression that for the majority of the newspapers the main objective is having the impact on the voters in favour of one of the candidates, instead of provision of objective information to the public.

It should be noted that the regional newspapers are exceptions here. In the vast majority of regional newspapers selected for monitoring during the local self-government elections in 2017, there was no unequivocal positive or negative attitude towards any election candidate.

As a result of three-year monitoring, some media outlets have revealed some changes in their attitude towards the political forces. For example, Alia and Asaval-Dasavali were distinguished in 2016, 2017 and 2018 by criticism of the ruling party as well as the opposition party - United National Movement; However, the criticism of the opposition party was much acute in both publications. Especially in Asaval-Dasavali, which always openly called the reader not to vote for the United National Movement or European Georgia. During the monitoring period of 2018 it was revealed that both of these newspapers were also critical towards the presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili, who was supported by the ruling party. Criticism of the given candidate in the given newspapers was frequently through the grave personal insult and one-sided criticism. This trend is well-observed in quantitative data:

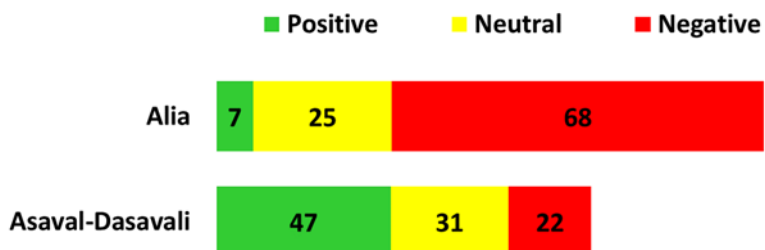


And as a result of qualitative observations as well; For example, during the presidential elections, the large photo was printed on the first page of Alia, with the headline "Salome's Curse", on the photo Salome Zurabishvili was presented as one of the famous horror genre characters. Asaval-Dasavali covered the given candidate on the backdrop of serious insult; For example, the journalist of Asaval-Dasavali wrote in the issue of 13-19 August 2018: "Even the child in Georgia knows about Liberate predictions and opinions of the Parisian lady Salome, but this "analyst" comment is obviously too much! What does the Analyst mean? The persons who constantly have their heads in someone's anal hole or the ones who have just left the anal hole?!" ("What does the Analyst mean?", August 13-17, p 19).

It is also interesting that after the first round of elections, the negative tone has reduced and positive tone has increased in Asaval-Dasavali and Alia:

The Coverage of Salome Zurabishvili during Second Round of Elections

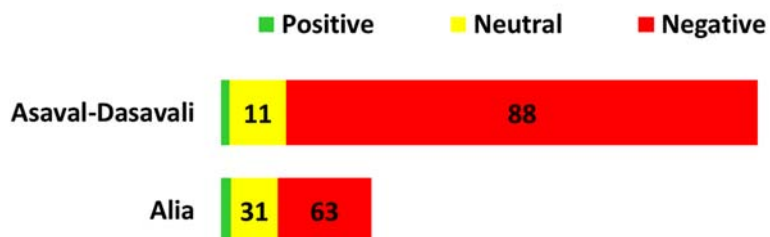
29 October - 27 November, 2018



At the same time, both during the pre-election period and second round of elections, the extremely high percentage of negative tone was observed in Alia and Asaval-Dasavali while covering Grigol Vashadze:

The Coverage of Grigol Vashadze according to the Tone (%)

18 June - 27 November, 2018



Regional Publications

The regional media outlets were monitored during the local self-government elections in 2017. As a result of the observation, the number of technical shortcomings were revealed, presumably due to financial problems; For example, some newspapers were unable to print new publication in time, some newspapers noticeably lacked the articles, and etc. It should be noted that most regional publications tried and managed to comply with the journalistic standards. Unlike the central newspapers, we have not observed the use of any offensive and

discriminatory terminology in any regional newspaper. Also, except the two media outlets (Svaneti and Borjomi), none of the regional publications have explicitly expressed positive or negative attitude towards any political force. In all regional editions selected for monitoring the advertising materials were explicitly separated from editorial materials.

We can conclude that in regional publications there are no cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms that are systematically encountered in the central newspapers. However, in regional newspapers there are some flaws, such as the lack of exclusive materials.

Conclusion

As a result of the monitoring, we can conclude that ignoring the journalistic standards and ethical norms is one of the most pressing challenges of the Georgian press. There is an impression that the majority of printed publications do not even care about the accuracy of the information they disseminate. We systematically encounter unreasonable discussion of the facts and dissemination of unverified information by the journalists.

We systematically observe the dissemination of unverified statements of the respondents. Instead of requesting further evidences for their statements, which often contain accusations against politicians or state agencies, the journalists often in fact agree with their respondents and share their opinion. There are almost no attempts observed from the journalists to verify the accuracy of the information, disseminated by their newspaper. This problem is particularly acute when the reported information contains the accusations of serious crime towards some other person. Also, a serious problem in the media is publishing the information disseminated by other media outlets, without proper verification.

The frequency of discriminatory and insulting statements in the Georgian press is also worse mentioning. Journalists of the media outlets selected for the monitoring systematically used insulting terminology to cover politicians or other public figures. The insulting terminology is also often used in the texts of the respondents and it should be noted that the journalists never try to distance themselves from the respondents' insulting statements. In addition, most frequently offensive statements of respondents are printed as the headlines of articles.

The lack of sources of information is a serious problem in Georgian publications. Most of the articles were based on a single source of information and we rarely came across different opinions in separate articles. As a result, the issues are covered unilaterally, and the readers do not have the opportunity to get acquainted with variety of views on different issues.

The problem is also the lack of exclusive materials in the press as well as the abundance of the experts as the sources of information instead of politicians and decision-makers. Especially noteworthy is the uniformity of experts in Georgian media outlets. There are frequent cases when experts selected by the publications can evaluate almost all topics.

These tendencies have a negative impact on coverage of election processes. In most cases, the election subjects are covered against the background of severe personal insult and discretisation. The impartial, justified reasoning of candidates' programs and visions are rarely observed. Accordingly, most of Georgian printed publications are not able to provide the reader with objective and multilateral analysis of the current electoral processes in the country. Unfortunately, this tendency was observed during all three years of monitoring.

