



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Research on the Media Coverage of 2020 Parliamentary Elections

Online Media Monitoring Final Report

15 June - 21 November 2020



საქართველოს
ჟურნალისტური
ეთიკის ქარტია

This report was prepared by the Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its contents are the sole responsibility of its authors, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views or positions of the EU and the UNDP.

About the Project:

As part of the UNDP ‘Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia’ project, and with the financial help of the European Union, the Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics is monitoring online media coverage of Georgia’s 2020 parliamentary elections.

This monitoring, which began on the 15th of June 2020 and ended on the 21st of November 2020, focused upon the 13 following online media platforms: Ambebi.ge, Interpressnews.ge, Kvira.ge, Mpn.ge, Netgazeti.ge, News.on.ge, Primetime.ge, Publika.ge, Radiotavisupleba.ge, Reginfo.ge, Sknews.ge, Sputnik-georgia.com and Tabula.ge.

Research Methodology:

The monitoring of the media platforms and outlets selected for research involves both quantitative as well as qualitative components. During quantitative observation, particular attention is paid to the frequency and the tone with which individual media cover political or electoral stories. Coverage is considered as positive or negative if 1) a journalist or respondent evaluates the political or electoral subjects as positive or negative, or 2) if the topic’s coverage encourages a positive or negative attitude towards the subject. During qualitative observation, attention is paid to the extent to which media platforms or outlets respect ethical standards of journalism such as: accuracy of facts, diversity of sources, balanced coverage, not encouraging any kind of discrimination, not disseminating gender stereotypes, no manipulation of any kind, etc.

The monitoring focused upon parties and politicians taking part in Georgia’s 2020 parliamentary elections. Subjects also included the Georgian Government (central, local, of Adjara), the Prime Minister and the President.

Monitoring was not carried out on promotional articles, which are marked as such.

Main Findings:

- The separation and clear demarcation of advertising and editorial materials remains an acute challenge for online media. Some of the top-rated websites do not enable their readers to clearly distinguish which published materials are advertising and which are journalism prepared by the editorial team.

- The frequent violations of journalistic standards in online media are due to a lack of precise facts and to the unilateral and unbalanced coverage of accusations. In most of the websites selected for monitoring, journalists did not attempt to verify specific accusations published against individuals or to seek out the latter for comment.
- Polarization was less noticeable among online media outlets, but in 4 of the 13 websites selected for monitoring, constant attempts were identified to present the Government in a positive light and to discredit opposition politicians. Indeed, none of the selected online outlets showed a particularly positive attitude towards any opposition party.
- Compared to last years' monitoring results, a slight improvement was detected in terms of the pluralism of coverage of the political spectrum. Although positive coverage of the ruling party was excessive, attention and coverage were also given to the activities and statements of members of other political parties.
- During the pre-electoral period, the tone of the coverage of the Government's attempts to fight the economic crisis caused by the pandemic was excessively positive when writing about the Prime Minister on every website selected for monitoring—even on those websites which are normally critical towards the ruling party. This positive media coverage was primarily due to the fact that the Prime Minister was informing the public of the financial aid that the Government was granting them.
- There were almost no cases of journalists using hate speech or discriminatory terminology. That said, some media outlets published statements made by politicians or other prominent members of the public containing such terminology without amending them or without accompanying comments.
- The main problem of online media remains the superficial nature of their coverage of various issues. Most of the websites selected for monitoring did not offer their readers in-depth or critical analyses of current events in Georgia.
- During the monitoring period, several cases were detected in online media when statements containing gender stereotypes or discriminatory content that intentionally aimed to diminish women's role in politics were republished without amendment or comment. It is noteworthy, however, that the number of such statements in online media being published without comment significantly decreased following the publication of the first monitoring report.

Gender stereotypes in online media

During the 2020 election monitoring period, special attention was paid to observing the extent to which online media outlets in Georgia maintained standards when covering statements made by politicians or public figures containing gender stereotypes or discriminatory content.

The monitoring revealed that the frequent neglect of standards when covering statements containing gender stereotypes or sexist wording remains a problem. The majority of websites publish such statements unchanged and without accompanying them by comments or other statements, thereby encouraging gender discrimination in the media.

Examples:

- Ambebi.ge not only covered Aleksandre Elisashvili referring to an opponent using a comparison full of gender stereotypes, but also used this expression in the title of an accompanying article: “What’s wrong, Giga? You failed to manipulate everybody and now you, being such a grand ‘politician’, have begun cursing like a cheap woman?!” Elisashvili is responding to Bokeria’ (24 June 2020). The same media platform (Ambebi.ge) also used the following statement by Irakli Kobakhidze as a title: ‘Nikanor Melia claimed that we contacted the opposition. This is a lie, he lied, which is not acceptable behaviour for a man’ (8 November).
- Comments published by Kvira.ge discriminated against female opposition leaders by republishing the words of majority MP Mikheil Kavelashvili, who said ‘You are a “family woman” and have children. Aren’t you ashamed of what you have done?’ MP Ada Marshania also remarked upon the appearance of another female MP, Salome Samadashvili, saying: ‘Your hair looks very beautiful, clearly you have had it done since you were preparing to make this ardour speech here. Television cameras would surround you and you prepared for that specially. I am paying you an honest compliment, you have a hairstyle of high standard, but you have no moral or ethical right to speak about human rights and you certainly should not be mentioning political prisoners.’
- Tabula.ge republished a gender-based attack by Mikheil Saakashvili on Minister Tea Tsulukiani word for word—and not only in the title but also in the news itself: ‘Mikheil Saakashvili referred to Tsulukiani as “ugly”.’
- Primetime published a sexist, misogynist and gender-discriminative statement by Shalva Natelashvili unchanged. Natelashvili described as ‘Female Kotsis’ the young civil activists who denounced him to the Public Defender in order to investigate cases of gender discrimination against women. Natelashvili also referred to Nino Lomjaria as ‘the so-called “Public Defender” of unknown origins’, and attributed the success of her career as a woman to the links and influence of her father. Natelashvili also criticized the draft law of the Criminal Code of Georgia which

would qualify non-consensual sexual intercourse as rape and would also apply to married couples, stating that this new law would enable women to ‘invent’ a rape in order to force a man to marry them—a misogynous attitude that serves to strengthen stereotypes.

- Mpn.ge published an article on the 26th of July under the title ‘I would take all the women out of politics. Georgia has become a parade of rudeness to me’ which included a sexist and misogynous statement of stage director Robert Sturua: ‘What really annoys me is Georgian women. I would take all the women out of politics. They swear, they berate, and we have to deal with this abomination.’
- Ambebi.ge chose the following title for an article written about the presentation of a female majoritarian candidate: ‘4 children and experience of public service: Who is the only woman in the majoritarian candidate list of the Georgian Dream?’ (20 July 2020).
- Sexist statements filled with gender stereotypes made by Lasha Natsvlishvili, who acts as consultant to the ruling party, were published unamended by Kvira.ge, Mpn.ge and Primetime.ge. In the quotations that these media platforms published, Natsvlishvili refers to a member of the opposition as ‘full of the invincible passion for revenge of an abandoned woman’, which disseminates the stereotype that revenge is characteristic of abandoned women (when femicide statistics prove how frequently cases of revenge can be attributed to the man seeking revenge). According to Natsvlishvili, ‘power resembles an attractive but difficult woman whom one should physically possess, [whom one should] just go and take’. His statement reduced women to the role of a sexual object to be seized (in this case by a male politician, Mikheil Saakashvili). Natsvlishvili also berated his opponents with epithets in which he linked women with sex and prostitution: ‘Our renowned cohort of progressive intellectuals. On one hand, they shamelessly keep repeating that the “Red Intelligentsia” was servile—they who were themselves Misha’s “servants” and cheap “escort girls”.’

On the other hand, there were also cases when online publications successfully covered sexist and discriminatory statements made by politicians according to journalistic standards.

For example:

- Netgazeti.ge, New.on.ge and Ambebi.ge dedicated separate articles to the story of former President Mikheil Saakashvili insulting Minister Tea Tsulukiani. These articles—entitled ‘Saakashvili called Tsulukiani “ugly”, which was seen as a gender-based attack’ (Netgazeti.ge, 18 August 2020), ‘Mikheil Saakashvili referred to Tsulukiani with insulting words’ (News.on.ge, 18 August 2020) and ‘Mikheil Saakashvili called Tea Tsulukiani “ugly”. The former President is bitterly criticized on social media’ (Ambebi.ge, 18 August 2020)—explained why the former President’s expressions were discriminatory and unacceptable.

- News.on.ge, in an article entitled ‘Khvichia: “Women are less interested in politics, this activity requires more courage”’, indicated at the beginning of the article that this statement by Iago Khvichia, one of the leaders of Girchi, was sexist.
- Tabula.ge published an article on the 26th of September entitled ‘Shalva Natelashvili presented female candidates as a “scrumptious snack”’ in which the platform stated that critics have evaluated his statement as sexist.
- Netgazeti.ge, Reginfo.ge and Publika.ge assessed Irakli Kobakhidze’s description of Nika Gvaramia as a ‘sissy’ as a sexist statement.

Conclusion

The monitoring revealed that the lack of a clear separation between advertising and editorial materials on online media platforms remains an acute problem. The readers of most of these platforms are not given the opportunity to distinguish between independent journalism, coverage commissioned by Government institutions or the PR campaigns of political parties. The systematic publication of such materials in news sections without clearly marking them as advertisements casts doubt upon the role of these platforms, since in many cases the line between journalism and PR becomes vague.

The superficial coverage of issues by online media also remains a problem. Although some of the media platforms selected for monitoring occasionally succeeded in offering in-depth and multilateral analyses of issues, most of Georgia’s top-rated websites limit themselves to only superficial coverage. Due to this, maintaining an adequate balance of sources of information remains a problem. Articles also often contain accusations made against politicians or public figures without journalists seeking to substantiate these accusations or to offer their readers the reactions or response of the person accused. As a result, readers are often presented with one-sided and unsubstantiated accusations.

No acute political polarization among online media was detected during the monitoring period. Although some media displayed unilateral support for the ruling party and attempted to discredit opposition politicians, none of the websites selected for monitoring showed a unilaterally positive attitude towards any opposition political party.

During the pre-electoral period, the activities of politicians, electoral programmes and reactions to various issues were covered quite actively and impartially by most of the websites, but 4 of the 13 selected media platforms were systematically casting the ruling party in a positive light.

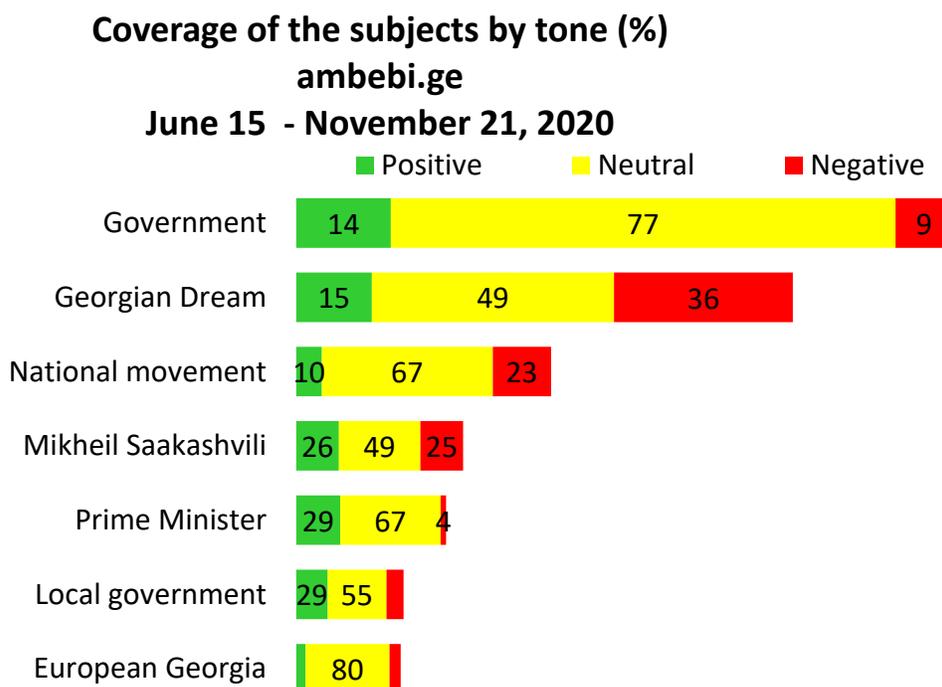
In the run-up to the elections, the tone of the coverage of the Government’s attempts to fight the economic crisis caused by the pandemic was excessively positive when writing about the Prime Min-

ister on every website selected for monitoring—even on those websites which are normally critical towards the ruling party. This positive media coverage was primarily due to the fact that the Prime Minister was informing the public of the financial aid that the Government was granting them.

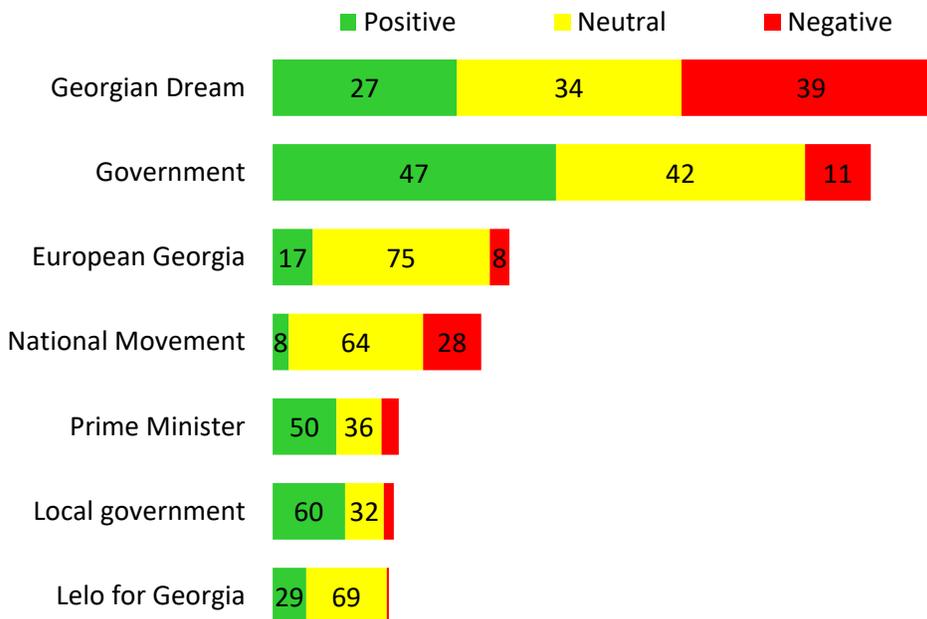
Compared to the first period of monitoring, fewer violations of journalistic standards were detected on websites that normally try to meet high standards of journalism. Some violations were detected during the first period of monitoring, as an exception, but during the second period the number of such cases decreased significantly, as did instances of gender stereotypes and sexist statements being published.

Particularly promising is the fact that, compared to the results of monitoring over the past years, many online media were identified during the 2020 monitoring period which aim to work according to high standards of journalism and to provide impartial and in-depth coverage of issues. Accordingly, and despite many problems, during the 2020 electoral period Georgian readers enjoyed more opportunities to access trustworthy information on Georgian politics through online media.

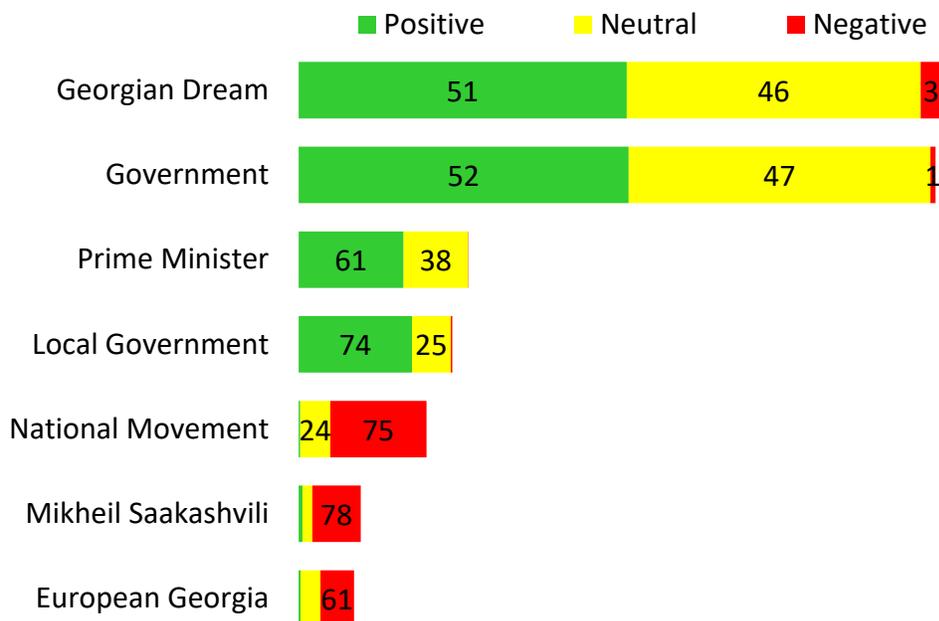
ANNEX. Charts.



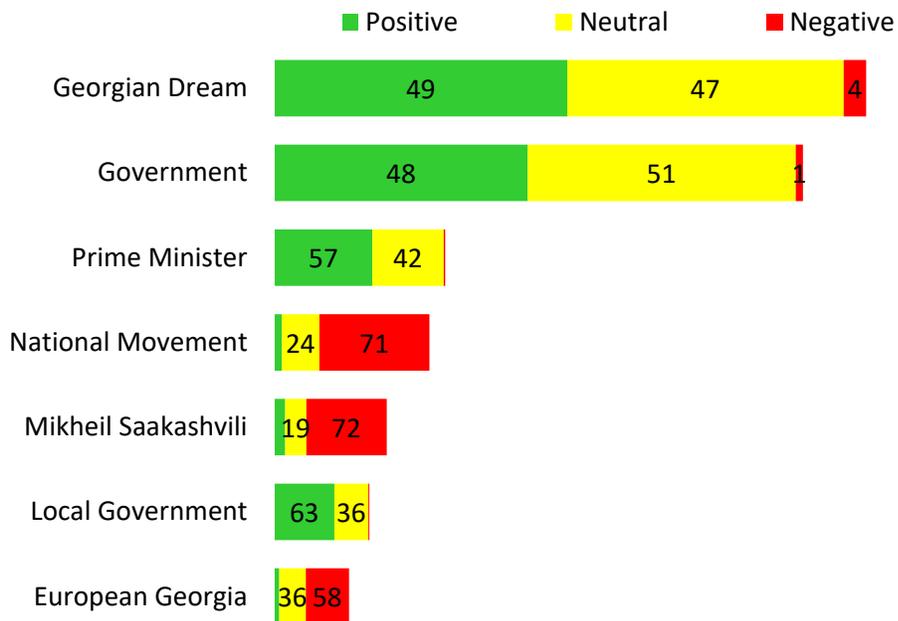
Coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
interpressnews.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020



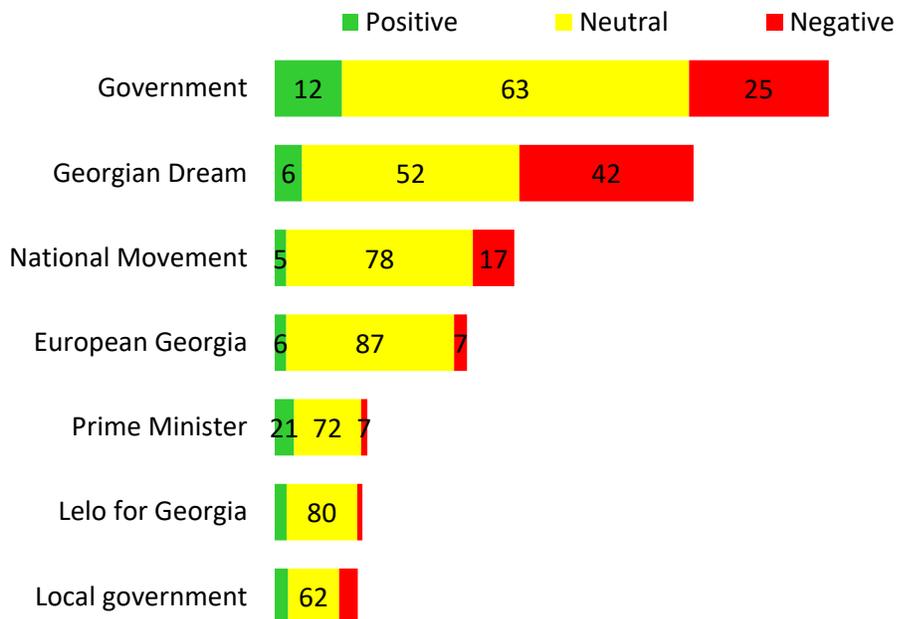
Coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
kvira.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020



Coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
mpn.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020



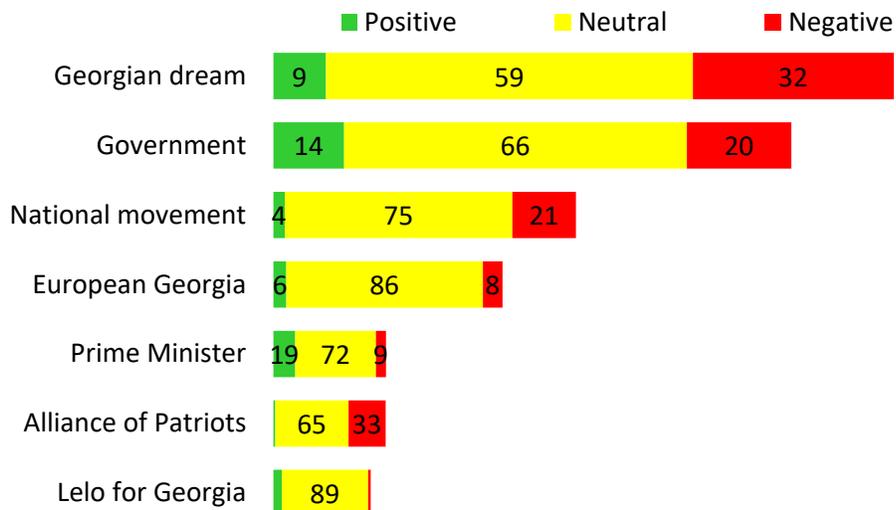
Coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
netgazeti.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020



Coverage of the Subject by Tone (%)

news.on.ge

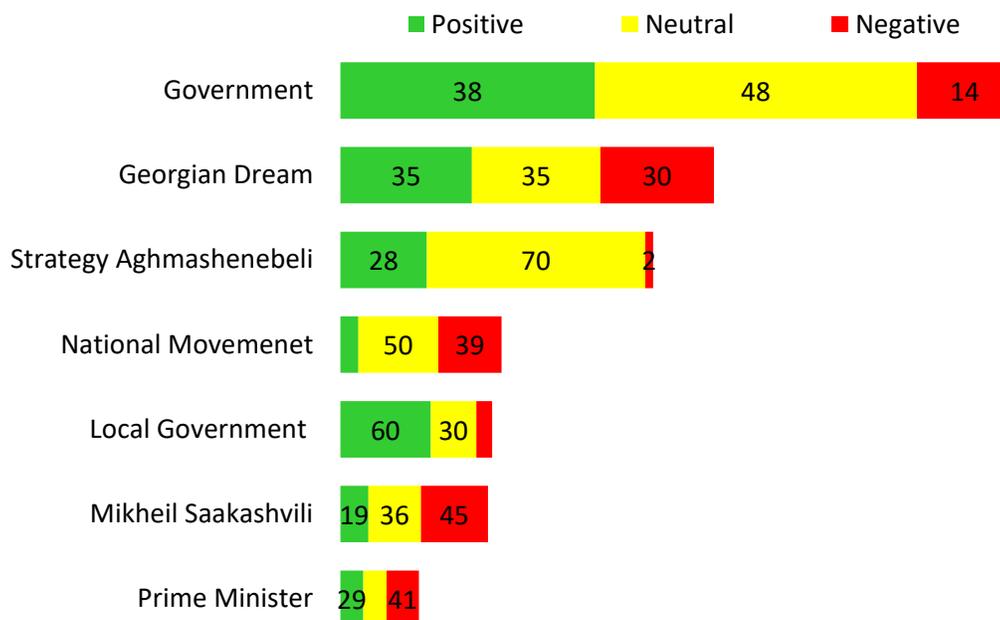
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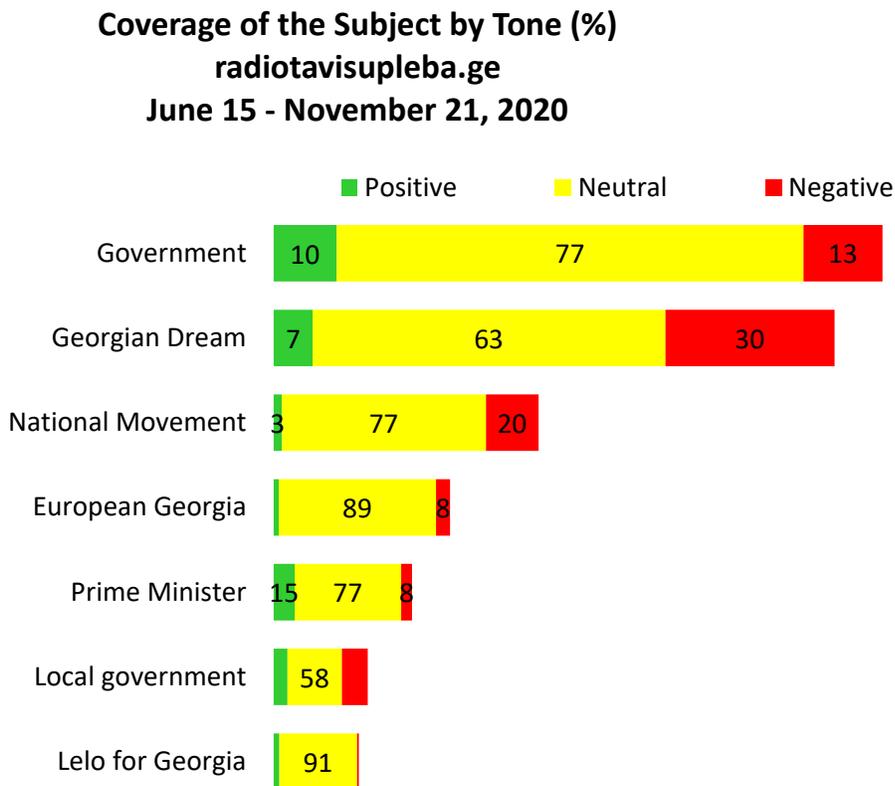
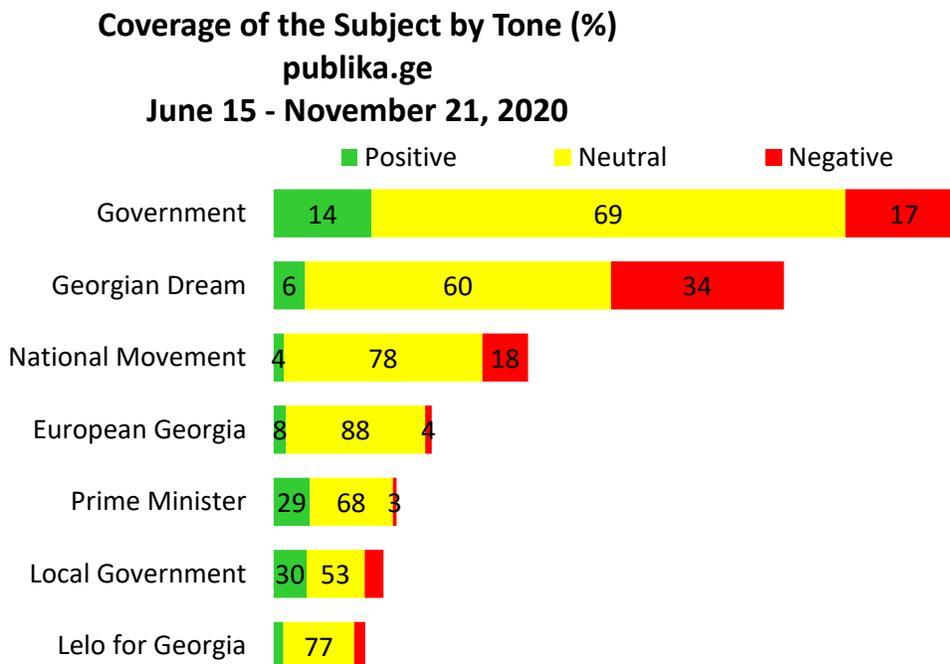


Coverage of the Subject by Tone (%)

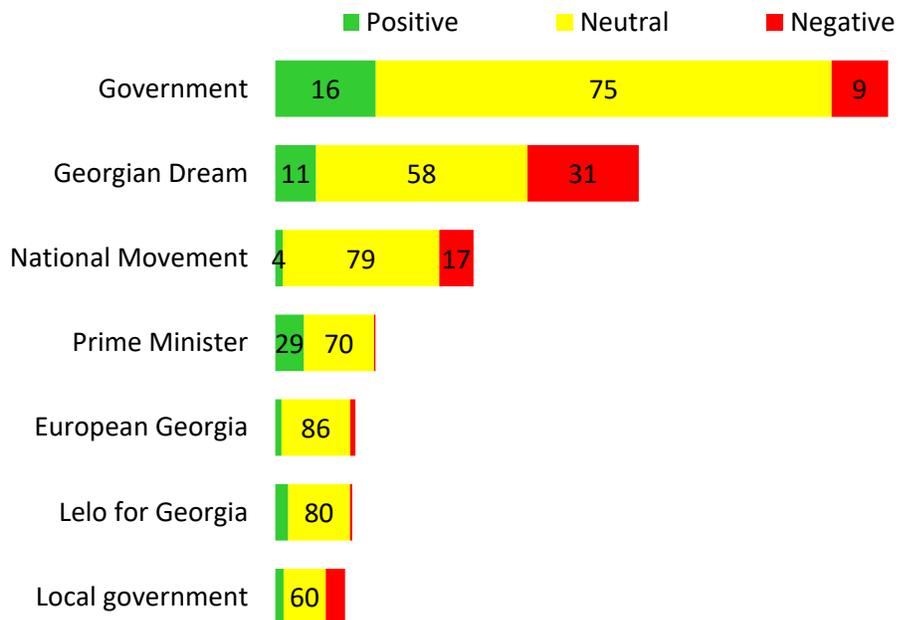
primetime.ge

June 15 - September 30, 2020

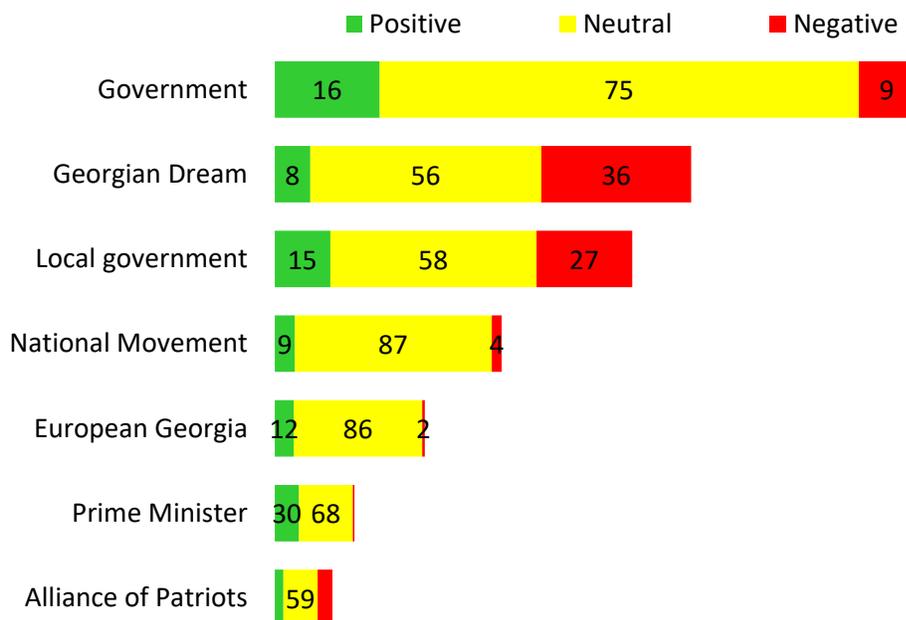




Coverage of the Subject by Tone (%)
reginfo.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020

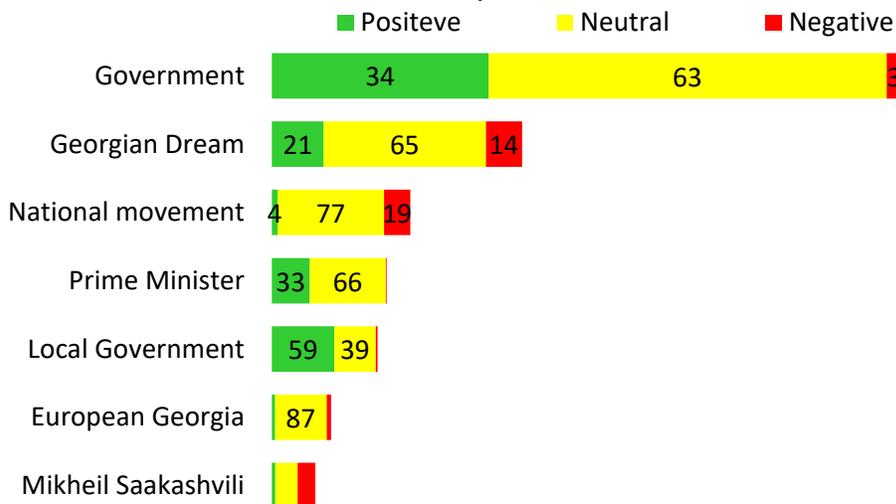


Coverage of the Subject by Tone (%)
sknews.ge
June 15 - November 21, 2020



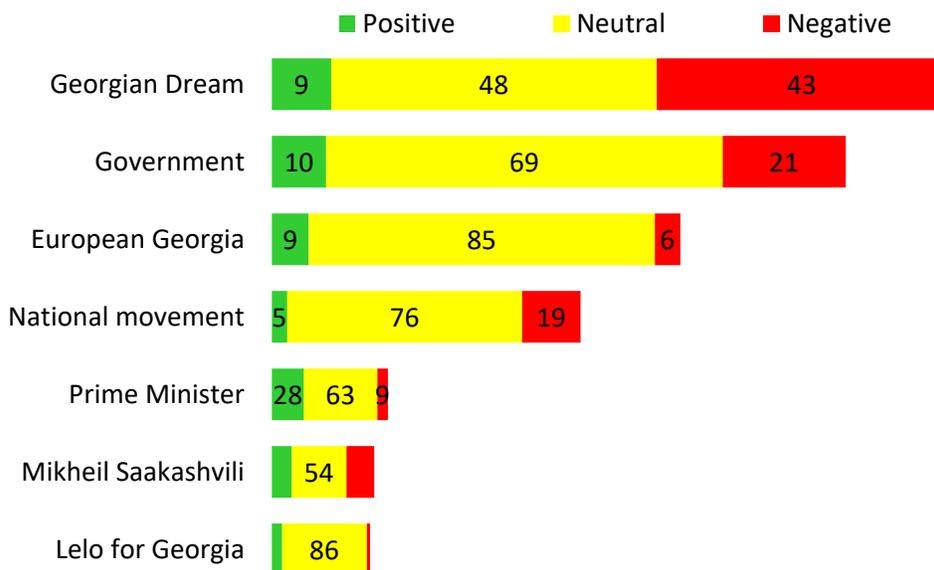
Coverage of the Subject by Tone % sputnik-georgia.com

June 15 - November 21, 2020



Coverage of the Subject by Tone (%) tabula.ge

June 15 - November 21, 2020



Coverage of Subjects in Online Media by Gender (%)
15 June - 21 November, 2020

