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საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



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

Radio Media Monitoring

Interim Report

15 June - 31 August 2020



INTERNEWS GEORGIA

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Project background

“Internews – Georgia”, within the framework of the project ““Study and Research on Elections Media Coverage for 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia” funded by European Union (EU) and implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)”, is conducting the monitoring of evening newscasts of radio stations. The monitoring started on June 15, 2020 and it covered the following radio stations: “Radio 1” (Public Broadcaster), “Tavisupleba” (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, programmes in Georgian language), “Imedi”, “Maestro”, “Palitra”, “Pirveli Radio”, “Hereti” (Kakheti region), “Marneuli” (Kvemo Kartli region), “Dzveli Kalaki” (Radio “Old City”, Kutaisi, Imereti region) and “Samkhretis Karibche” (Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti region).

Monitoring Methodology

Purpose of the monitoring of evening news programmes on radio channels is to establish the extent of equal conditions created while reporting on the activities of political subjects during the run-up to the elections, and the degree of adherence to journalism standards.

The monitoring consists of quantitative and qualitative research components. The quantitative monitoring determines the indicators, which can be quantified and measured: time allocated to the subjects, tone of coverage (positive, neutral, negative), direct/indirect coverage (when subjects are speaking themselves, of when others are speaking about them), gender of subjects (male or female). The quantitative monitoring is focused on indicators that are difficult to quantify: timely coverage of facts, distortion of information, unbalanced coverage, bias, facts-based coverage, diversity of sources of information, manipulation with sound/music, adherence to ethical or professional standards, also any other facts, which are important for assuring the quality of information.

The monitoring is focused on the qualified and non-qualified electoral subjects, parties and politicians, which are taking part in the 2020 parliamentary elections. The monitoring subjects are: the government (central, local, Adjarian), Prime Minister, President and electoral administration.

The monitoring methodology takes into consideration that some politicians may change the party, political parties may merge, or leave the coalition /bloc, or register under another name.

The monitoring is carried out not only in connection to the stories prepared on the topic of elections, but also regarding all the stories, where the monitoring subjects are spoken about.

This report covers the results of the monitoring of evening news programmes for the period from June 15 to August 31.

Findings of monitoring of radio channels:

- Most of the time was allocated to the Government, local authorities, and the following parties: the “Georgian Dream”, the “United National Movement” and “European Georgia”;
- Compared to previous years, the share of indirect coverage has increased significantly. Most part of the news comprised of the quotes from the public statements of politicians;
- The contents of news programmes on public broadcaster was dry and superficial;
- Actuality of topics was defined by the statements of politicians and not based on the information obtained by journalists;
- Like previous years, the lack of sources of information and critical questions remains to be a problem for the majority of radio channels - the journalists tried little to doublecheck the facts;
- As before, there was less focus made on social topics, problems of regions and minorities;
- Radio broadcasters did not contribute to the dissemination of gender stereotypes, there were no sexist, homophobic or other statements containing gender-based hate or danger heard in the air;
- Standards of journalism ethics were not grossly violated: no cases of manipulation with sound/music or hate speech were revealed.

“Radio 1”

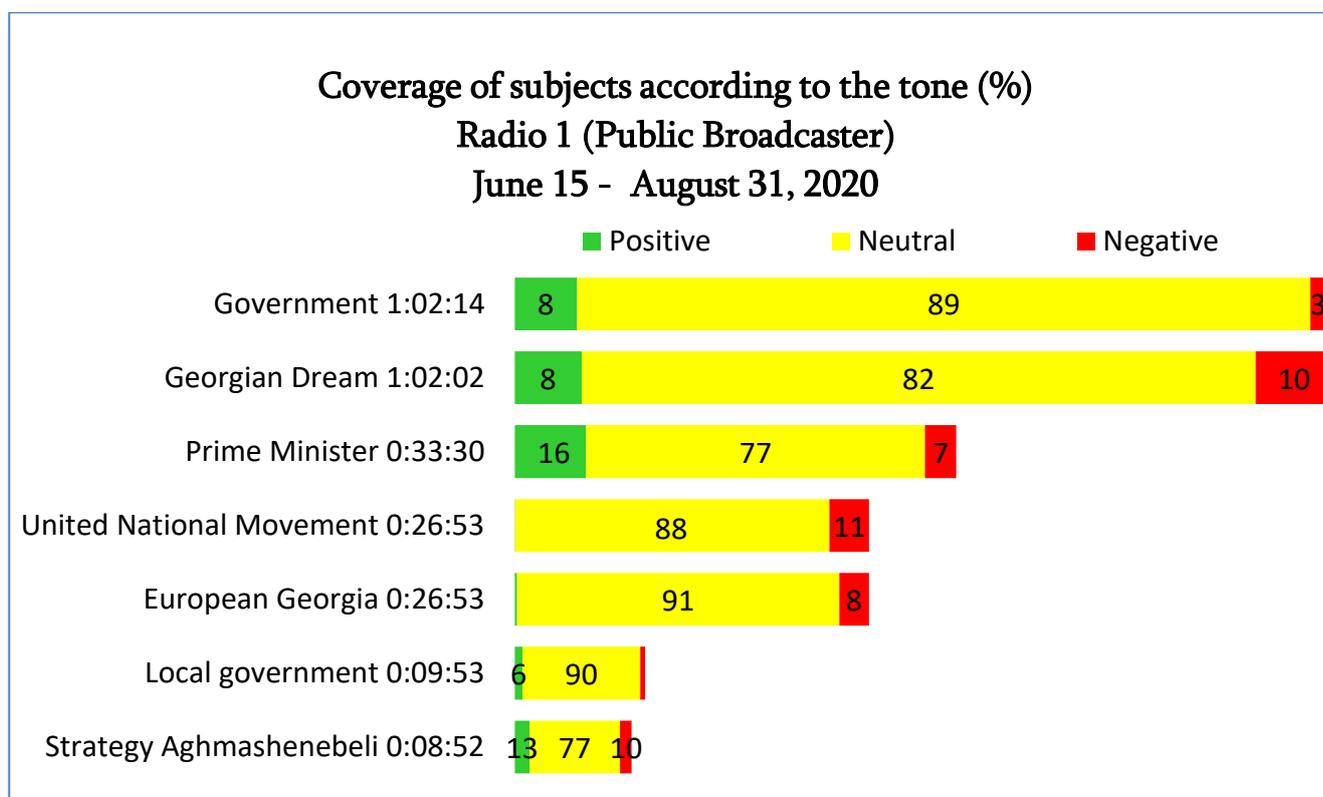
Like previous years, news programmes of the public broadcaster were dry and superficial. The journalists did not live up to the expectation that they would provide more in-depth coverage of events or pay more attention to social topics or minority problems than other radio broadcasters.

In total, 4 hours and 44 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects, from which 20-22% of the time was allocated to the Government and to the “Georgian Dream”, and 12% to the Prime Minister. The coverage time was equal in case of the “United National Movement” and the “European Georgia”. The journalists quoted the statements of politicians mostly by themselves (on average, 90%).

“Radio 1” mostly covered the events in a balanced and impartial manner; however, the lack of critical questions remains to be a problem. The news reporting was dry and superficial. The journalists asked very few hard questions about the activities of authorities and politicians.

Neither were the news programmes distinguished with the diversity of topics or in-depth coverage.

It is important that the Public Broadcaster provides better quality information to the audience during the run-up to the elections: they should not be limited only to reporting about the meetings of politicians with the population and about the promises made there. It is necessary to break stories about social issues that are important for the population, or about the problems of various vulnerable groups in the elections context, which will help the population to understand the opinions of politicians regarding the concerned topics, and therefore, to make an informed decision.



Radio “Maestro”

The Radio “Maestro” was producing extensive news programmes, which made it possible to provide in-depth coverage of events taking place in the country, including the political processes. However, the aired information was not significantly different from the news of other radio broadcasters.

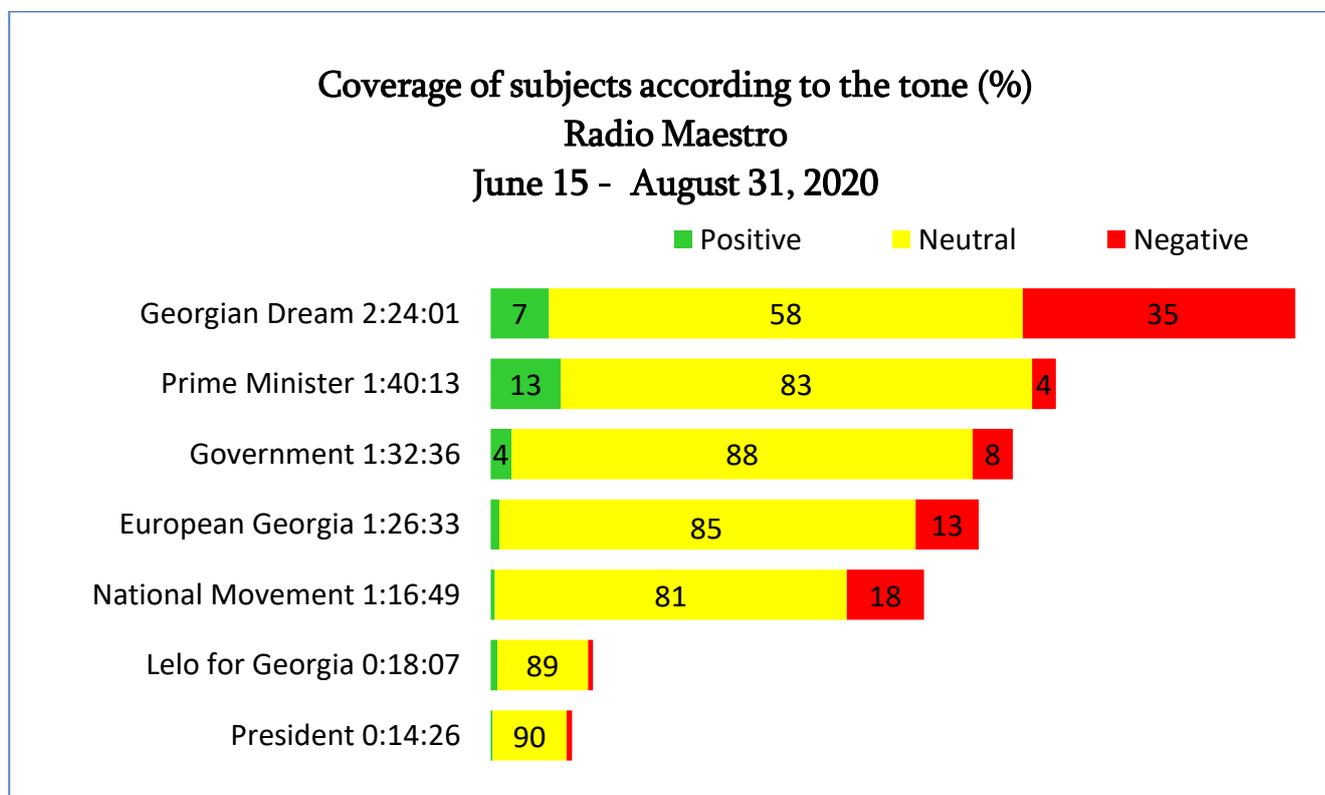
In total, 10 hours and 37 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. 23% of this time was allocated for reporting about the “Georgian Dream”, 16% - the Prime Minister, and 15% - the Government. More than an hour was dedicated to the “European Georgia” and the “United

National Movement”. On average, 50% of the time was allocated to the subjects for direct speech. Their coverage tone was mostly neutral.

The radio “Maestro” extensively reported about the political processes developed in the country, and covered the activities of specific parties; however, the stories were limited to the dry reporting of facts. Despite a longer runtime, the news was based on general statements of politicians. Criticism of the government was often heard on the radio, which was mostly due to the opposition statements rather than due to the in-depth or analytical coverage of events. The reporters followed the agenda suggested by political parties and did not really ask hard questions.

News programmes of the radio broadcaster were basically balanced, however some problems with balance was observed in certain stories. For example, there was only one short comment in response to 5-6 critical statements and allegations made by the representatives of various opposition parties against the initiator of the amendment - the ruling team, in the stories about stiffening the legislation on vote buying and on the violation of confidentiality.

The performance quality of radio channels would improve even more if the journalists showed more interest in the election programs of political parties, as the pre-election processes enter the active phase, and if they dedicated more attention to social issues that are important for the population, and to the problems in the regions as well.



“Pirveli Radio”

“Pirveli Radio” provided an active coverage of events taking place in the country, though in a superficial manner. The radio broadcaster produced the balanced news programmes; however, despite extensive runtime, the coverage was not deep, and the topics were similar to those aired by other radio broadcasters.

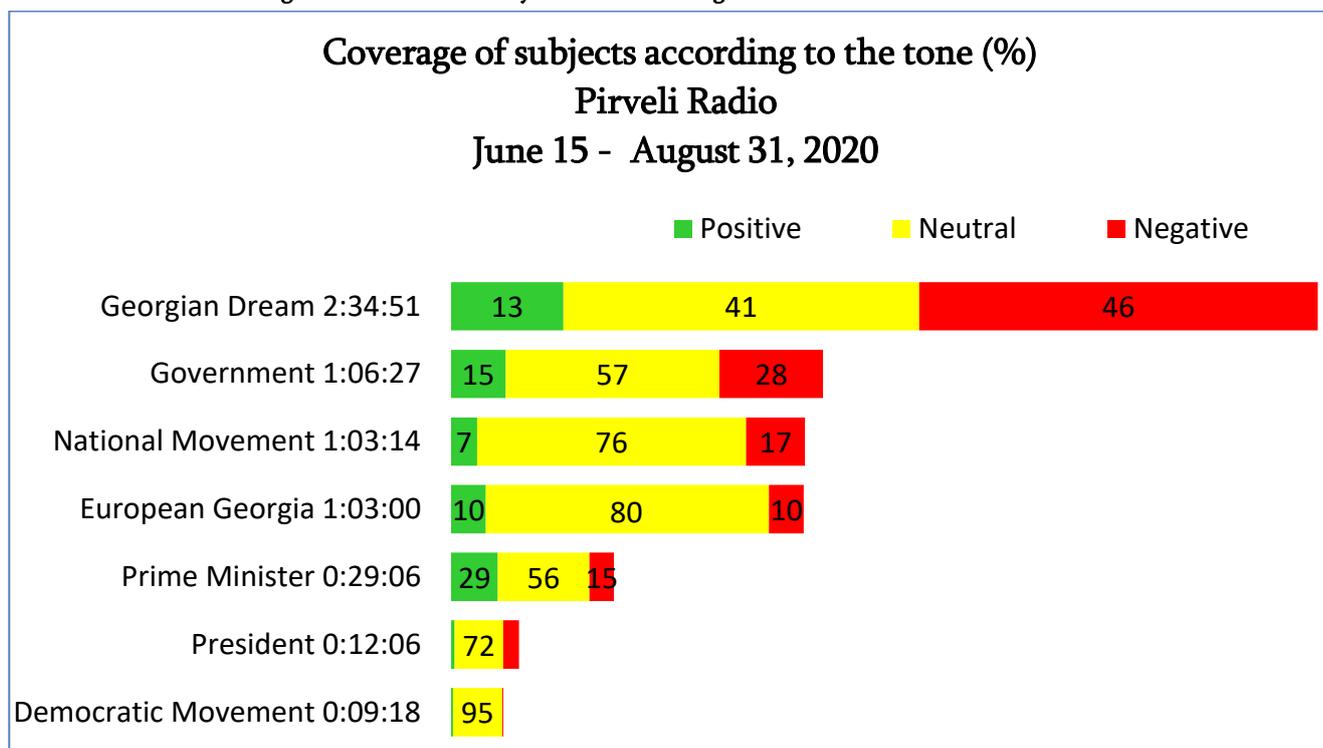
During the reporting period, 8 hours and 4 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. 32% of this time was allocated to the coverage of the “Georgian Dream”, 13-13% - to the Government, the “United National Movement” and the “European Georgia”. On average, the subjects were given 45% of the time for direct speech. The exceptions were the “Georgian Dream” and the Government, as the indirect speech amounted up to 70% of their coverage time. Overall, more time was given to the opposition for direct speech than to the authorities, which resulted in the increased rate of negative tone for the ruling team.

News often contained criticism of the authorities and the opposition. However, these were the voices of respondents who were critical to one another. These were not the hard questions of journalists that would assist the audience to establish truth after hearing the conflicting statements. The news was mostly balanced; however, the journalists tried little to doublecheck the facts and to look for additional information.

Although the election campaign has not started yet officially, the broadcaster engaged in an active coverage of election topics, including the election meetings. However, like other stories, the election topics were covered in a dry and superficial manner.

There were cases observed when the aired soundbites were cut off without having the respondent finish the statement - the journalists should be more careful while editing the soundbites. In many cases, the host would not identify the respondent, or they would air soundbites of more people than introduced. This is why information may not reach the audience in full; as a consequence, it was not possible to identify the respondents and to assign them to specific monitoring subjects. This is why they could be left out the research scope.

Journalists of the “Radio 1” did not express any bias to a certain political force. However, the programs could have been more diverse and interesting if they contained exclusive materials, and if more emphasis were laid on the regions and social topics.



Radio “Tavisupleba” (Radio Liberty)

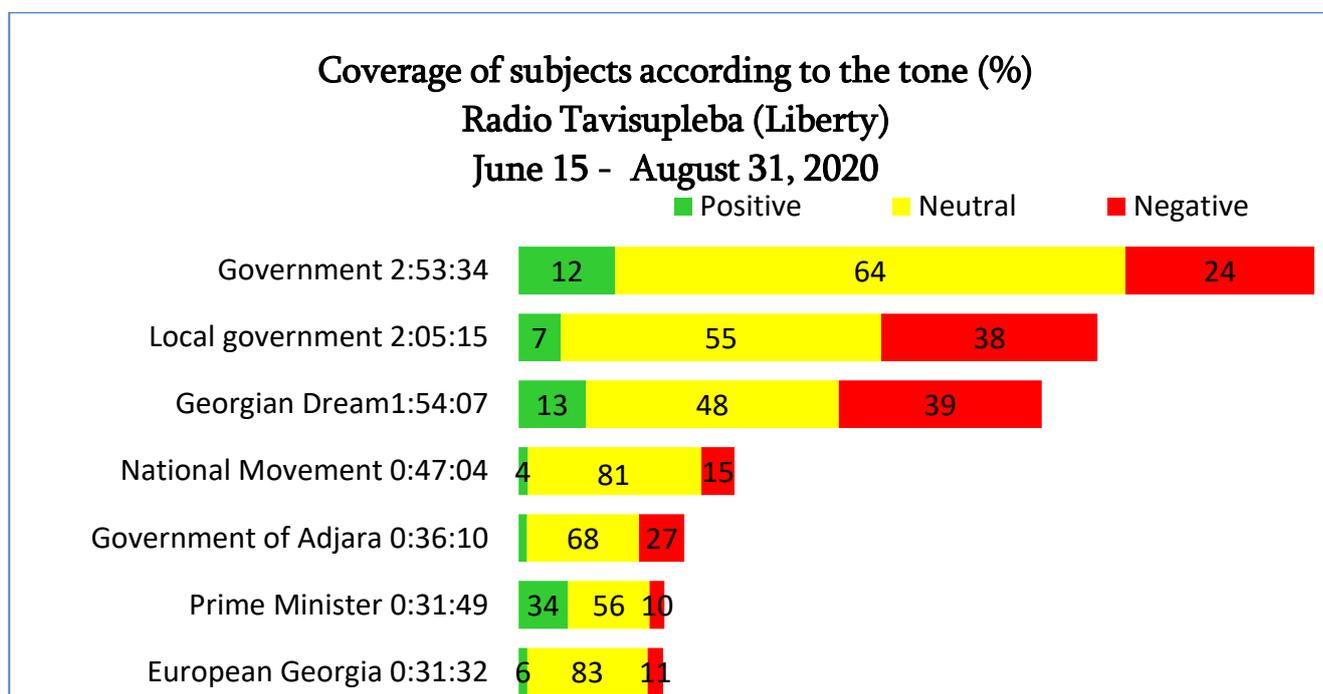
The Radio “Tavisupleba” provided a short coverage of news of the day. Most portion of time in the news programmes were dedicated to the stories about the problems and processes taking place in the regions. The journalists tried to find and cover interesting topics for the audience. This is why their contents were significantly different from those of the newscasts on other radio broadcasters.

In total, 10 hours and 40 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most frequent coverage was provided for the Government (27%) and the local government (20%). Among the political parties, the most time was dedicated to the “Georgian Dream” (18%), followed by the “United National Movement” (8%) and the “European Georgia” (5%). On average, the subjects were covered indirectly in 85% of time. The balance was observed in the reports and the events were covered impartially. The journalists asked hard questions and did not try to avoid the scrutiny of authorities. The news was distinguished with the diversity of sources, and the opinions of specialists and the NGO sector were often heard on the radio.

The radio broadcaster covered the actualities, which were seldom aired by other broadcasters. The journalists were interested in the progress of infrastructure projects, problems of local population and the protests demonstrations, also the situation developed in the regions as a result of the coronavirus, challenges in the tourism sector; severe situation at the occupation line was covered in depth, including the facts of citizen abduction and borderisation process; there were interesting stories prepared about the elections: unkept promises of the majoritarian candidate

from Signaghi-Dedoplistskaro; nominations of majoritarian candidates in the regions; having the mayors, chairpersons of local councils (Sakrebulos) and high-ranking officials at services of the ruling party team. Such diverse and in-depth coverage will greatly help the voters to make informed decisions.

However, we observe the cases when the airtime was not used effectively: there were stories in the news programmes that were often repeated or had some slight changes, which did not really affect the contents. For example, there were stories aired on 28th of August, where two out of three pieces were old and did not say anything new to the audience. It would have been better to dedicate this time to the news and not to the stories that have already been reported.



Radio “Palitra”

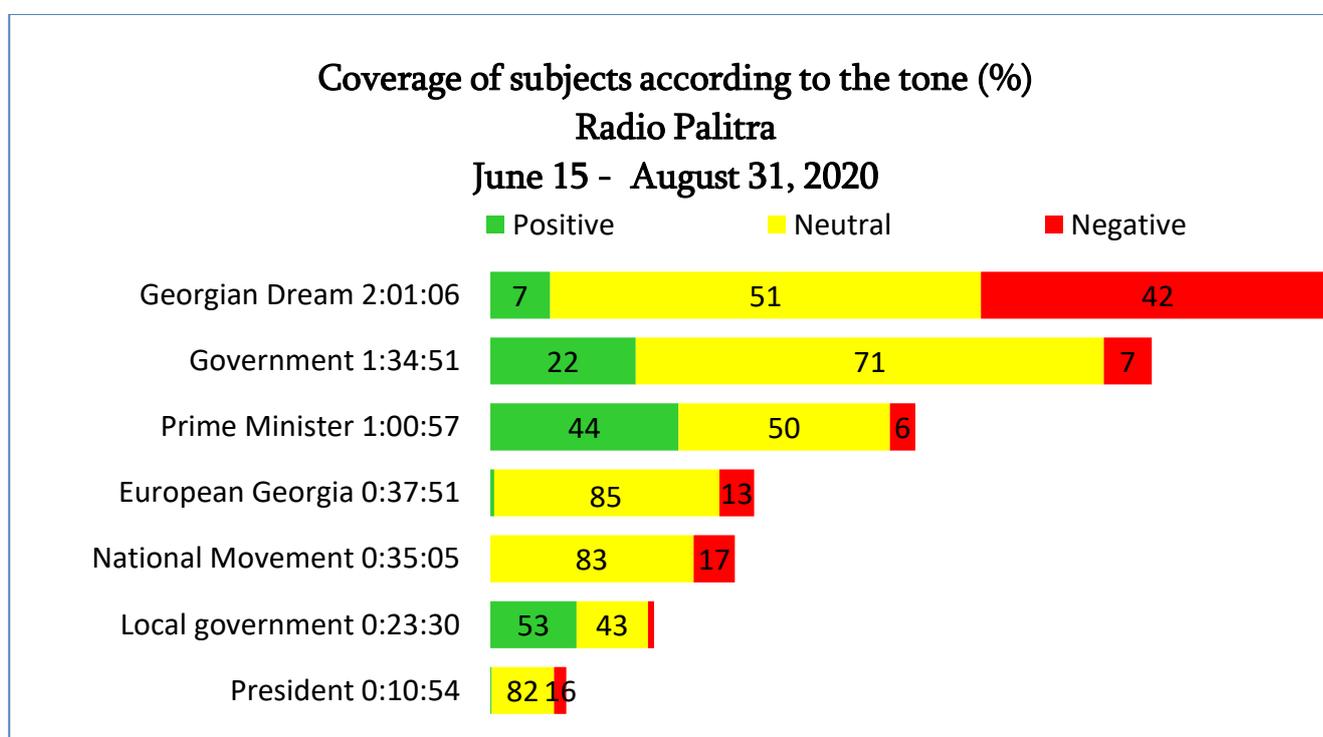
The Radio “Palitra” provided a dry and superficial coverage of events. The journalists did not express any bias to any political force, however neither did they ask critical questions or broke exclusive stories. In this respect, the quality of news programmes on the radio has not improved significantly since 2018, and the main trends and problems are similar to those of previous years.

In total, 7 hours and 23 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. Most part of this time was dedicated to the authorities: 27% to the “Georgian Dream”, 21% - to the Government, and 14% - to the Prime Minister. The journalist did not ask critical questions about activities of the authorities; however, they were not reluctant to report critical opinions of the opposition.

Therefore, the ruling team accumulated negative tone, but eventually the authorities were covered more positively rather negatively.

As observed, the main problem of the channel was that the journalists were passive. It was not possible to feel that the journalists were trying to help the audience establish the truth by obtaining additional materials, and to act proactively on the radio.

It is important for the radio broadcaster to enrich the broadcasted information with feedback from specialists, statistics, archives or additional sources. By relying upon the empirical materials and fact-based coverage, the journalists would have been able to confront the ungrounded and conflicting statements of politicians with their counter arguments and hard questions.



Radio “Imedi”

The Radio “Imedi” provided short and superficial coverage of events. A trend of positive reporting about the ruling party was observed on the radio: on the one hand, the journalists were reluctant to criticize the “Georgian Dream” and did not provide time for negative feedback; on the other hand, they reported about the statements, projects and activities of the ruling team without any scrutiny.

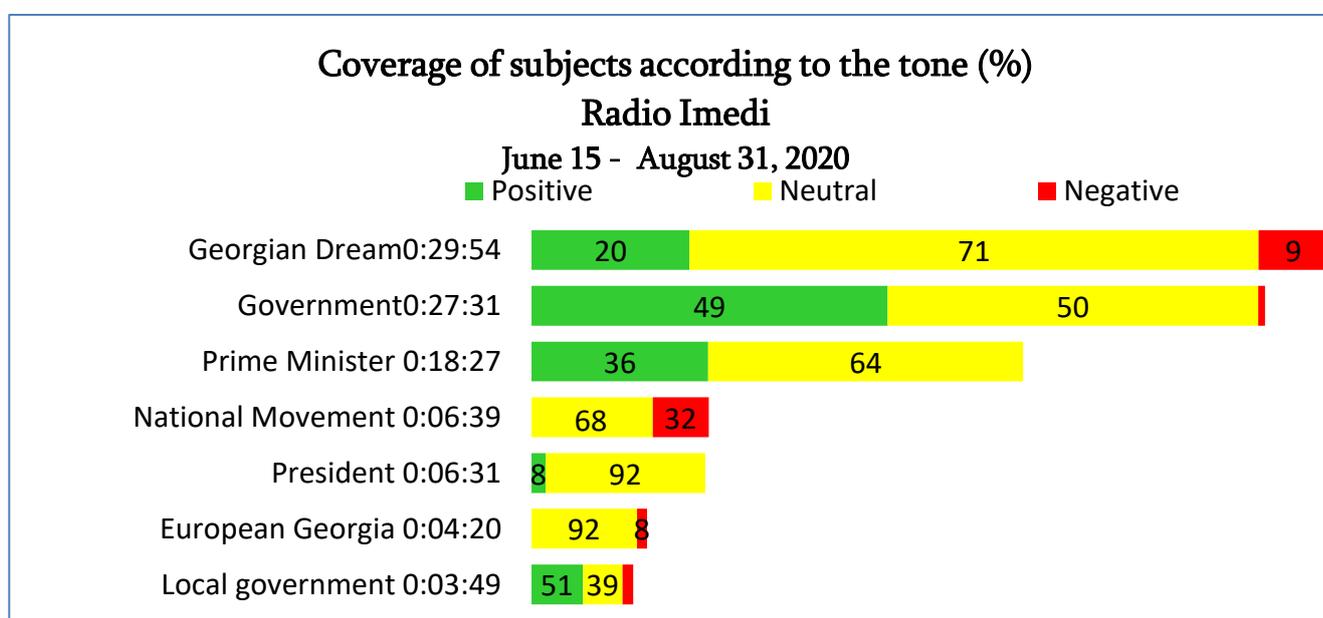
In total, one hour and 41 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. 86% of this time was allocated to the subjects from the authorities: 30% - to the “Georgian Dream”, 27% - to the Government, and 18% - to the Prime Minister. The radio broadcaster actively covered the

election campaign of the “Georgian Dream”, their candidates and promises. Representatives of the ruling party were often covered in a positive context, whereas little time was dedicated to the opposition, and criticism toward them was heard more frequently.

Media monitoring reports from previous years also indicate that the balance on the radio “Imedi” used to be distorted for the favor of the ruling team. However, the situation has become much worse during the reporting period – “Imedi” was repeating the messages of the “Georgian Dream” without any scrutiny, they did not ask hard questions about the activities of the authorities, neither did they cover negative comments made by the opposition politicians or NGO representatives.

For example, one of the main topics for the media on 30th of July was a letter sent by the American congressmen, where Bidzina Ivanishvili was referred to as being an oligarch. However, while breaking the news, “Imedi” omitted this and other critical evaluations, and instead pointed out that the members of the ruling team found some factual inaccuracies in the letter (however, they did not follow up on these inaccuracies). Such stories are not an exception.

It is important that the media does not turn into a PR service of a certain political force during the run-up to the elections. It is necessary that the journalist of “Imedi” ask hard questions and perform in adherence to professional ethical standards: to keep balance, doublecheck the facts and make efforts for establishing the truth.



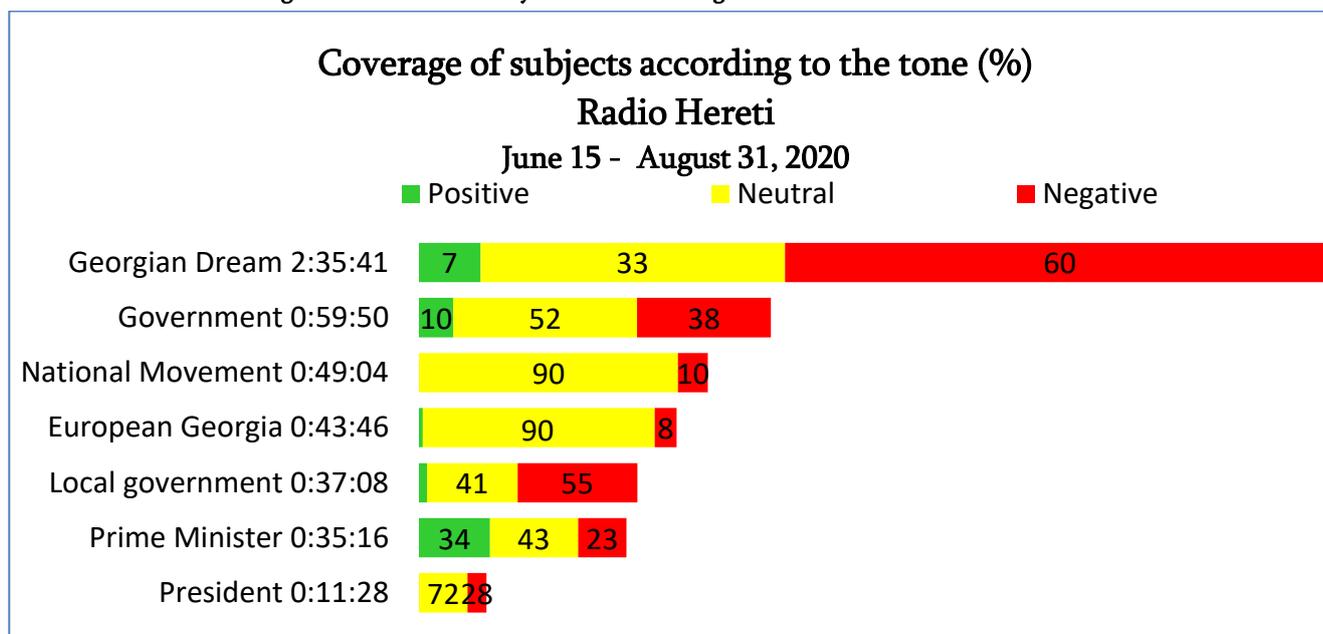
Radio “Hereti”

The Radio “Hereti” prepared extensive news programmes. The radio broadcaster was often interested in the problems of villages and towns, and aired the voices of almost all the regions. The journalists asked critical questions and also broke exclusives stories. However, compared to previous years, some stories were less analytical and balanced, if taken separately.

There were seven hours and 40 minutes dedicated to the monitoring subjects. The most coverage time was given to the “Georgian Dream” (34%), to the Government (13%), to the “United National Movement” (11%) and to the “European Georgia” (10%). Far more time was allocated to the opposition parties for direct speech (on average 72%), than to the ruling party (on average 22%), which means that there was a problem of balance in individual stories, and the ruling team did not always have an opportunity to respond to criticism. Consequently, the rate of negative coverage of the “Georgian Dream” reached 60%.

Sharp scrutiny of the ruling team prevailed on the radio; however, the journalists did not express any explicit bias towards any political subject. It is an obligation of the media to put some question marks about the activities of the authorities, and it is appreciated that “Hereti” has maintained its critical stance for years. However, the share of criticism increased based on vox populi and subjective evaluations of politicians during the reporting period. It is desirable that the journalists corroborate such stories with additional materials, opinions of specialist and empirical data; besides they should allocate more time to the representatives of the authorities to let them respond to the criticism expressed by their opponents.

Overall, “Hereti” remains one of the most critical and diverse broadcasters, which is sensitive to the problems or vulnerable groups. However, the positive trend, which has accumulated for years, raises the bar for “Hereti”: the radio broadcaster should have an ambition to offer higher quality, analytical and facts-based reporting to its audience.



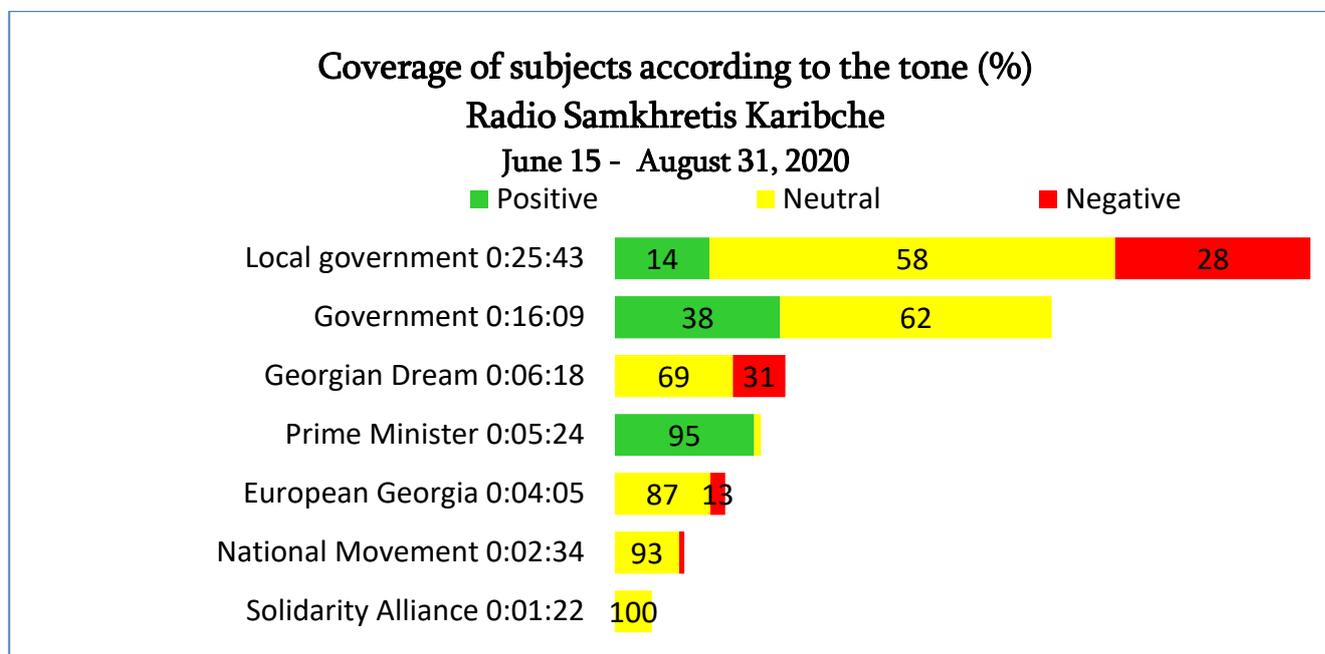
Radio “Samkhretis Karibche” (Akhaltzikhe)

The Radio “Samkhretis Karibche” produced short news programmes, which reported about the events taking place mostly in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The news was dry and superficial, the journalists did not try to doublecheck the facts, look for additional materials and offer an in-depth, diverse and interesting media products to the audience about the processes taking place in the region.

In total, one hour and 7 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subject, out of which the most frequently spoken ones were the local government (38%), the Government (24%), the “Georgian Dream” (9%) and the Prime Minister (8%). The journalists were citing the comments, and no time was allocated for the direct speech of respondents. The journalists did not make biased or subjective evaluation; however, they did not ask questions, which made it easier for politicians to promote themselves positively. This is indicated by the rates of positive tone, which was 95% for the Prime Minister and 38% for the government.

During the reporting period, there were events taking place in Samtskhe-Javakheti that drew attention of central or other regional media. Main topics of the day were: appearance of Enzel Mkoian, majoritarian MP of the “Georgian Dream” in Akhalkalaki with a firearm, then the murder of a young man in a few days, and burning of houses as a response to this incident. However, “Samkhretis Karibche” did not manage to obtain an exclusive or additional materials regarding the events developed in their region: despite being a local broadcaster, they did not manage to learn more than other radios knew.

It is important for the regional radio broadcasters to have an ambition to develop as the main source of information regarding the events taking place in the region. Besides, quite often there were technical glitches during live broadcasts, which made it difficult to listen to the news programmes and to understand information.



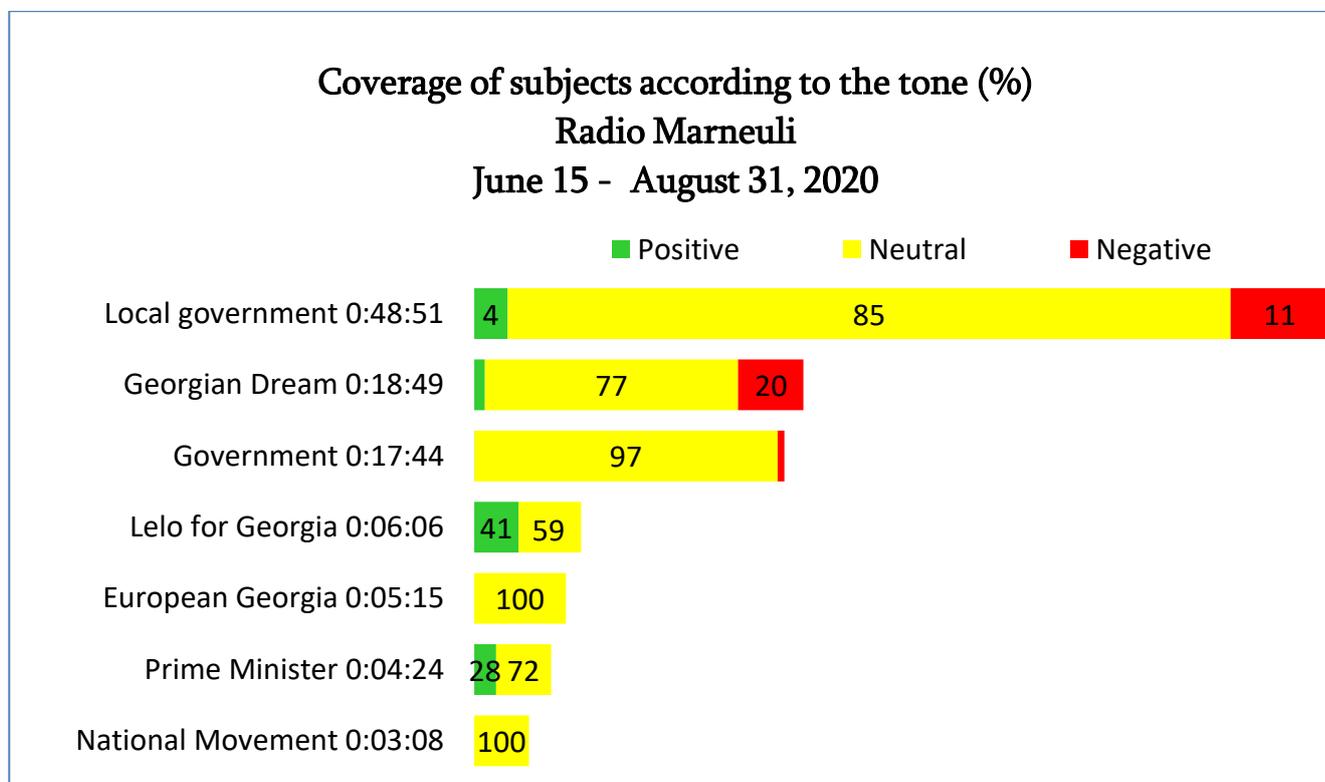
Radio “Marneuli”

The Radio “Marneuli” broadcasted bilingual news programmes (in the Georgian and Azerbaijani languages), where they mostly covered the events of Kvemo Kartli region. However, they dedicated time to the central news as well. The reporting was balanced and impartial.

In total, one hour and 45 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. 46% of the reporting time was allocated to the activities of the local government, 18% - to the “Georgian Dream”, and 17% - to the Government. On average, 90% of the time dedicated to the subjects was direct speech, and the coverage tone was mostly neutral.

The Radio “Marneuli” intensively reported the news about Kvemo Kartli. The journalists worked impartially; the stories were balanced most of the time, and the positions of various sides were highlighted. While reporting about local problems, it was possible to feel the critical attitude towards the performance of the authorities. The journalists tried to prepare materials on various issues and to get some answers from the individuals responsible for addressing the problems. For example, they inquired public information about expenditures from the local budget, and the audience had an opportunity to hear in particular what infrastructure projects were financed.

The journalists would get back to the topic they covered before, and tried to follow up on the issues that were important for the local population. In this respect, positive trends have been observed on the radio, which needs to be maintained and the reenforced during the runup to the elections.



Radio “Dzveli Kalaki” (Radio Old City, Kutaisi)

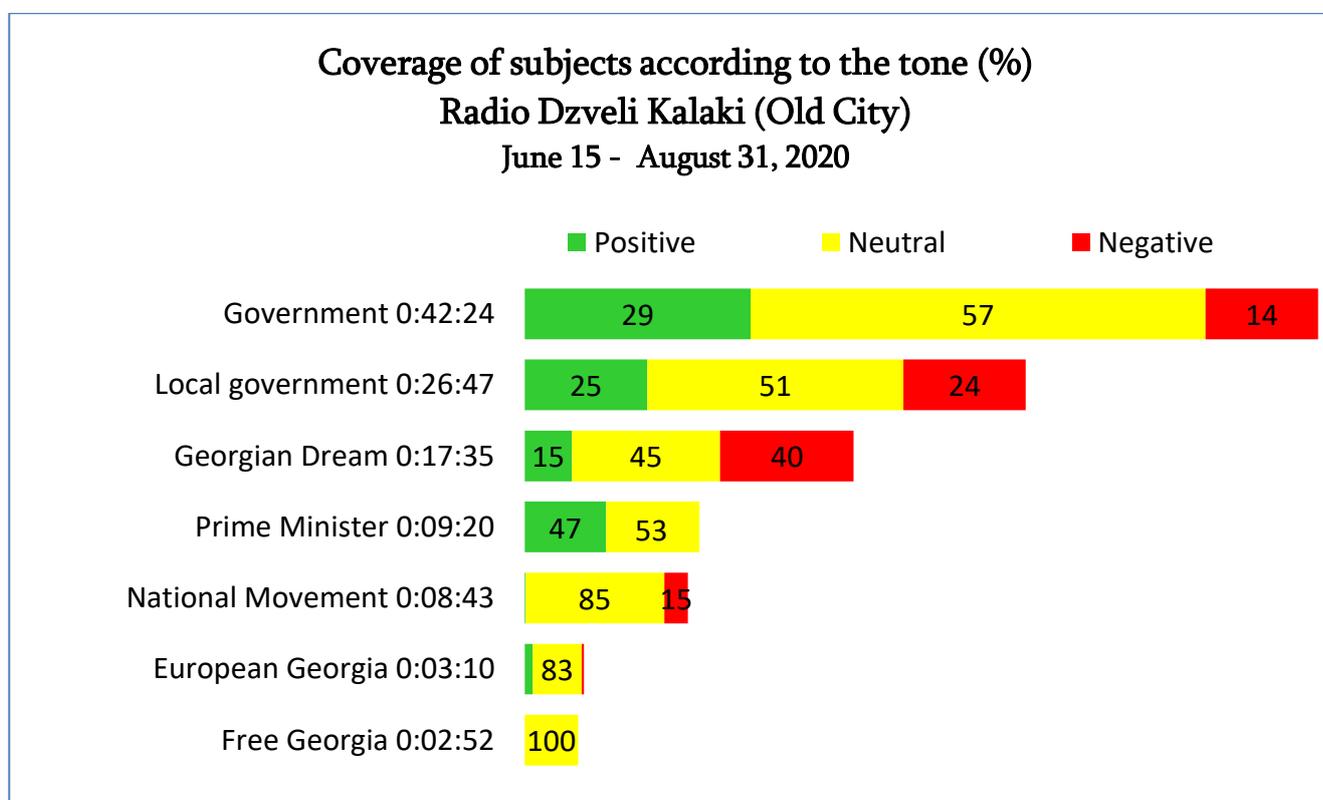
The Radio “Dzveli Kalaki” mostly reported the news about the events in the Imereti region. However, it also allocated time to the important central news. The broadcaster reported the news briefly and superficially. In some cases, the news was the imbalanced and did not present the positions of the sides.

In total, 2 hours were allocated to the monitoring subjects during the reporting period. The most frequently covered ones were: the Government (35%), the local government (22%) and the “Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia” (15%). While breaking the news, the host was mostly quoting the respondents. Correspondingly there was a very little time allocated for the direct coverage of the monitoring subjects.

The journalists rarely asked hard questions. The high rate of negative tone (40%) for the “Georgian Dream” was attributed to the statements of their opponents. In some cases, the criticism and allegations expressed against the ruling team were covered unilaterally, because the journalists were not interested in the counter comments of the scrutinized subject.

Although the election campaign has not officially started yet, several parties already nominated their majoritarian candidates in the Imereti region. The broadcaster reported about their nomination briefly. It would be desirable that the newscasts provide more information to the audience about the candidates, as the elections are approaching. Such kind of information is especially important for the regional population, because other broadcasters will probably speak less about their candidates.

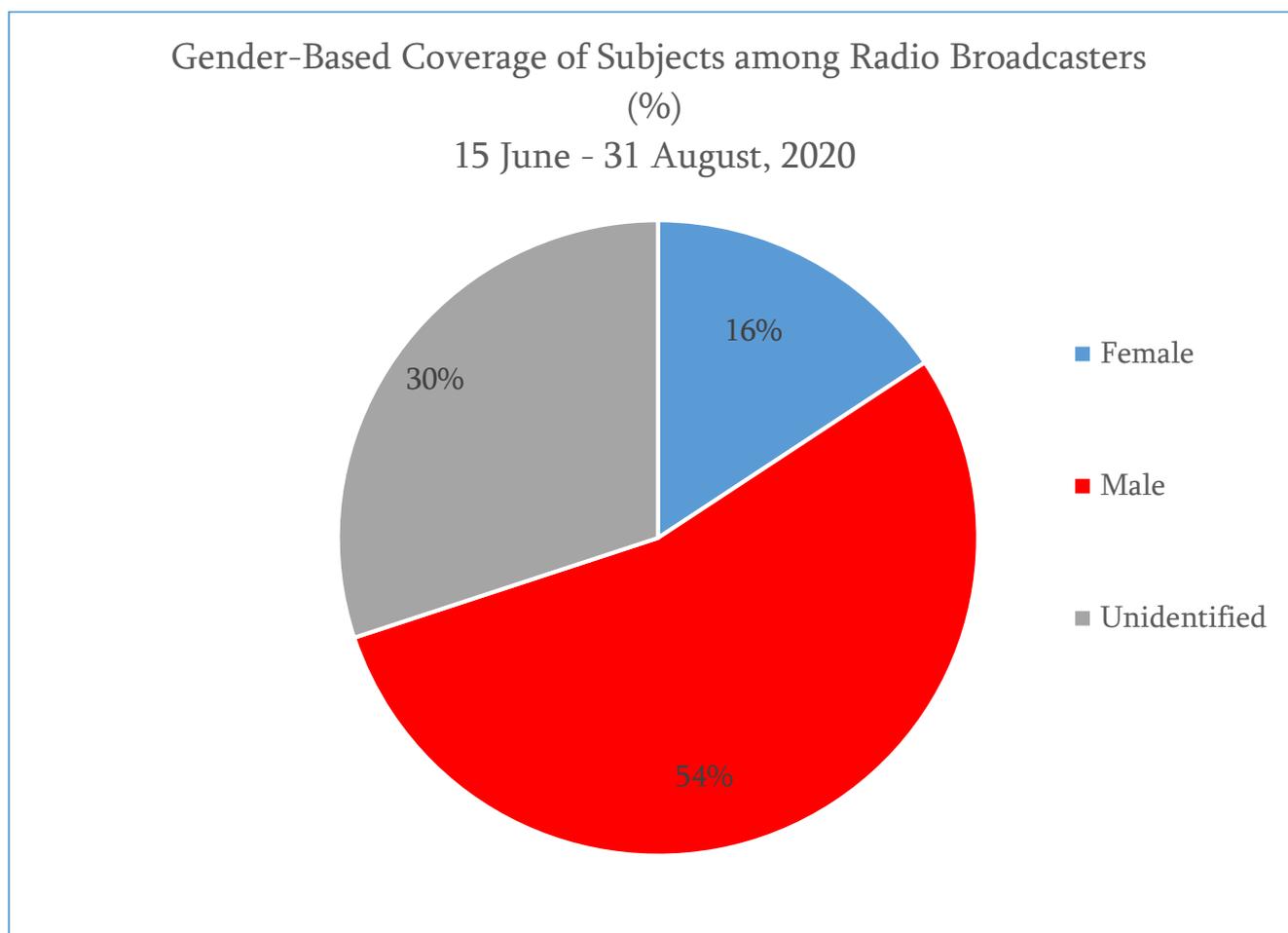
The audience of the “Dzveli Kalaki” had an opportunity to get information about various protest demonstrations taking place in the region, also about the infrastructural projects, sports and cultural activities. However, the broadcaster did not manage to look for interesting topics and exclusive materials for the news. This is why the diverse and in-depth coverage of events remains to be the main challenge.



Gender Sensitive Coverage

While monitoring the election topics among the radio broadcasters within the framework of the projects, the gender sensitive coverage was also observed. Attention was paid to the coverage and usage of terminology, which would intensify the gender stereotypes established within the society.

The radio channels allocated little time for the coverage of female politicians and female candidates in their news programmes.



The monitoring of the gender equality coverage aimed at identifying the cases that contributed to the establishment of gender stereotypes directly or through covert ways.

The monitoring results suggest that the radio broadcasters did not support the dissemination of gender stereotypes. We did not observe any sexist or homophobic statements or other expressions containing hate or threat to any gender during the broadcast. However, the journalists did not manage to promote gender issues while reporting on various topics.

Conclusions

The radio broadcasters are unable to produce exclusive content. Most of the programmes circulated one and the same topics.

Majority of channels did not demonstrate any bias to any political team. While breaking the news, the journalist did not make subjective evaluations. The news was reported in a balanced manner, though the coverage was dry and superficial.

Some part of radio broadcasters were not reluctant to engage in severe criticism of the authorities, and it was also possible to hear stories with conflicting comments of politicians. Majority of the

radios did not try to doublecheck the statements of respondents. It was not possible to see the role of journalists in obtaining factual materials to rely upon instead of referring to the overall assessments of politicians. For example, dozens of stories about the increased crime rate or road accidents would be prepared in a way that journalists would never try to refer to statistics at all, in order to establish whether the rates of crime and road accidents really increased, remained the same or decreased. The stories were constructed based on the feedback of respondents and it did not leave any room for the audience to observe clear-cut inaccuracies, and to draw conclusions themselves based on the facts.

Passive coverage of events remains to be the major problem for news releases of radio broadcasters: politicians often have an opportunity to use the radio air as their own tribune, and they are not afraid of being confronted with hard questions by well-prepared journalists.

Another remaining challenge is the coverage of social problems of regions and villages, inequalities or the needs of various vulnerable groups. Stories on these topics are hardly ever produced. Although the radio broadcasters do not refer to hate speech and we did not observe the cases of using discriminatory expressions against any of the groups, still, the journalists are unable to promote the problems or to raise the issues high on the agenda of politicians, or to ask questions to the people in charge, to try to get exhaustive answers, to doublecheck the facts and, most importantly, to follow up on the topic.