



## **Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for 2016 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia**

### **Election Monitoring of Radios**

**31 August – 25 September**

**2016**

Internews-Georgia is monitoring radio channels within the frameworks of the EU-UNDP funded project “Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for Parliamentary Elections in Georgia”. The monitoring started on May 20 and will last through December 19, 2016. Evening news releases of 12 radio broadcasters are monitored. The list of broadcasters includes Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster), Imedi, Fortuna, Radio Liberty, Palitra, The First Radio, City, Maestro, Hereti (Lagodekhi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi) and Ajara (Batumi).

The monitoring of the radio channels for the period of 31 August through 25 September has revealed the following **key findings**:

- Most broadcast time was allocated to the “Georgian Dream” party and the “United National Movement”;
- Radio is not a polarized media segment. Therefore, significant time was allocated to the coverage of activities of opposition parties, including the non-parliamentary ones;
- Meetings of politicians with their electorate were actively reported. However, election programs have not been discussed;
- All important developments related to specific political parties were reported by all radio channels;
- No cases of deep analyses of election programmes and political visions were identified during the reporting period;
- Radio journalists were properly separating facts from opinions. News were not reported based on anonymous, unidentified sources;
- Radio journalists were unbiased and refrained from openly expressing their sentiments towards particular political groups.

#### **Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster)**

***Biased attitude towards any political team was not observed in the news programs of “Radio 1”. The journalists worked in accordance with ethical standards and never made subjective***

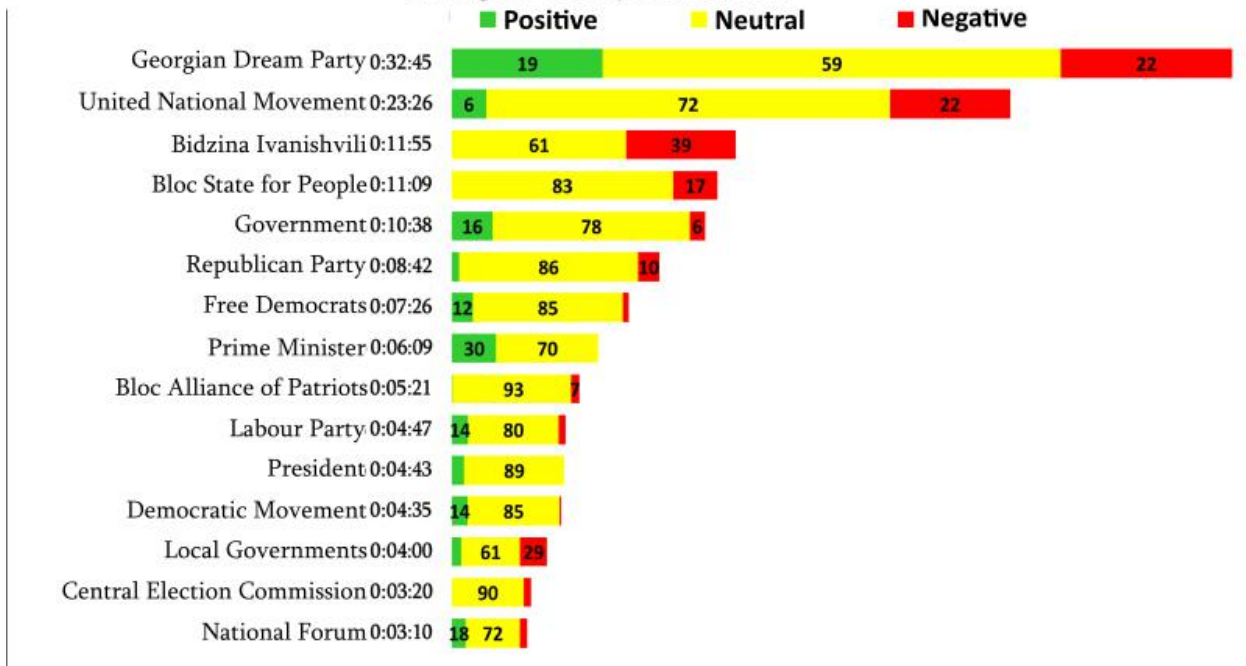
***assessments. However, the news releases were brief and superficial. Although, it was expected that Public Broadcaster would be more proactive and cover the topics never broadcasted by other radio channels, that was not the case. The journalists dedicated less attention to social issues and the problems of minorities.***

In total the radio broadcaster allocated 2 hours and 35 minutes to the monitoring subjects. Out of that the most time (21%) was given to the party “Georgian Dream”, next ones were “United National Movement” with 15% and Bidzina Ivanishvili with 8%. First two subjects got equal amount of negative tone (22-22%), while positive tone indicator was low in general. For example, no time was allocated in positive context to Bidzina Ivanishvili and the bloc “State for People”. The mentioned can be explained by the lack of face to face dissuasions. Besides, major part of the news was based on one source, where the politicians were criticizing their opponents, but the other party had no chance for presenting its position.

Public Broadcaster dedicated a lot of time to the coverage of pre-election campaign. The journalists also covered regional meetings of the parties, however elections programs were not viewed deeply.

## Time Allocated to the Subjects on "Radio 1" (GPB) according to the tone (%)

31 August - 25 September, 2016



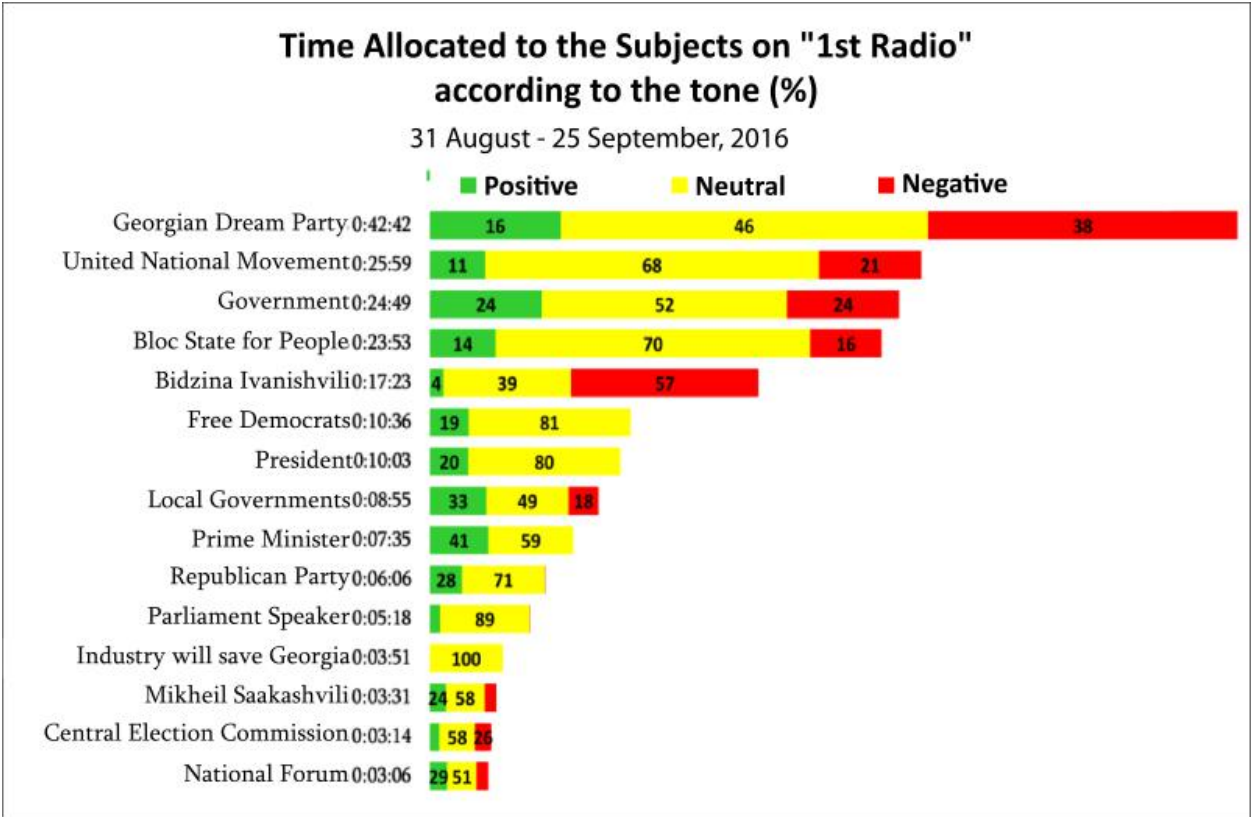
### The First Radio

***“The First Radio” prepared short and superficial news releases with no balanced information. The journalists less worked on so called exclusive stories, with no attempt to obtain additional information. A lot of time was allocated for covering political parties, while discussions of elections programmers with population, were limited to coverage of the promises given to people during the meetings.***

The radio broadcaster allocated to monitoring subjects 3 hours and 32 minutes. 20% of this time was given to the party “Georgian Dream”, the next were “United National Movement” and government (12-12%). During the elections period, negative attitude was observed towards Bidzina Ivanishvili (58%) and ruling party (38%). Besides the tones distribution, misbalance was reflected in the indicator of direct speech. In average 51% of time was allocated to other subjects for direct speech, while the voice of the representatives of Bidzina Ivanishvili (23%) and party “Georgian Dream” (38%) was relatively less heard.

Similar to previous reporting periods, the cases of irrational distribution of time were reported this time as well, which still was associated with briefings of the director general of TV company “Rustavi 2”. The news releases of September 6 and 8 were dedicated just to the issues of Rustavi 2. For example, on 8 September Nika Gvaramia’s briefing was the only news broadcasted live for 12 minutes. Although, this day was full of political events the radio broadcaster did not cover any other news. At the same day, other radio broadcasters allocated sufficient time for finalizing submission of the electoral lists to the CEC, submission of the lists of “Georgian Dream” and the meeting of the Minister of Defense with NATO delegation.

The journalists of First Radio did not make subjective assessment, they covered political stories as well, however together with coming closer of the elections, the balance problem was identified.



**Radio Palitra**

*Diversity of the sources was felt in the stories prepared on hot topics of the day, by the journalists of Radio Palitra. Compared with previous reporting period, the number of in -depth*

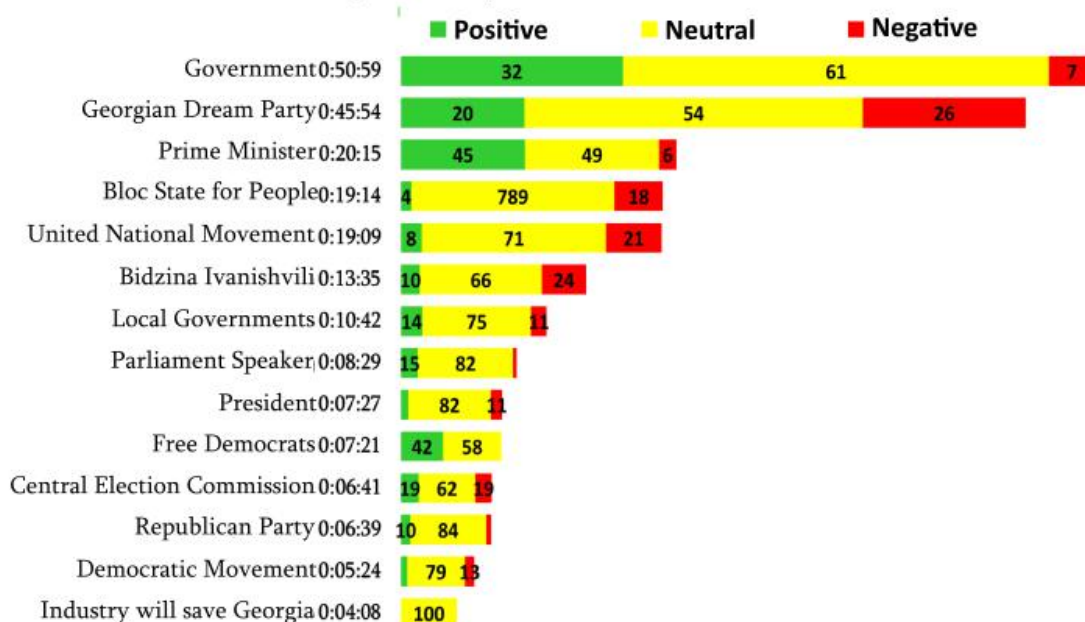
***stories was also increased, However, this did not apply to the process of covering pre-election period, which was as empirical so in case of the majority of other broadcasters.***

The radio broadcaster allocated 4 hours to the monitoring subjects. Despite of the fact that the stories prepared on hot topics of the day were balances, in general misbalance in favour of the government was identified. Part of the time (49%) was given to the government and ruling political team. Opposition parties got relatively less time. Besides, the government and the party “Georgian Dream” gained much more positive tone, than the subjects covered more frequently. However, the journalists were not biased to any political force. This is evidenced by the fact that the opportunity for direct speech was equally provided to the representatives of government and opposition. It is noteworthy that the ruling party had higher indicator of negative tone (26%) compared with others.

The Radio Palitra actively covered the events ongoing in the country. Besides, compared to other radio broadcasters, the Radio Palitra provided time to the assessments of non-governmental sector and specialists. However, the coverage of pre-election campaign still remained a problem. The journalists did not ask tough questions regarding election programs, they were not interested in the ways in which the politicians planned to keep their promises, given to people during the meetings.

## Time Allocated to the Subjects on Radio "Palitra" according to the tone (%)

31 August - 25 September, 2016

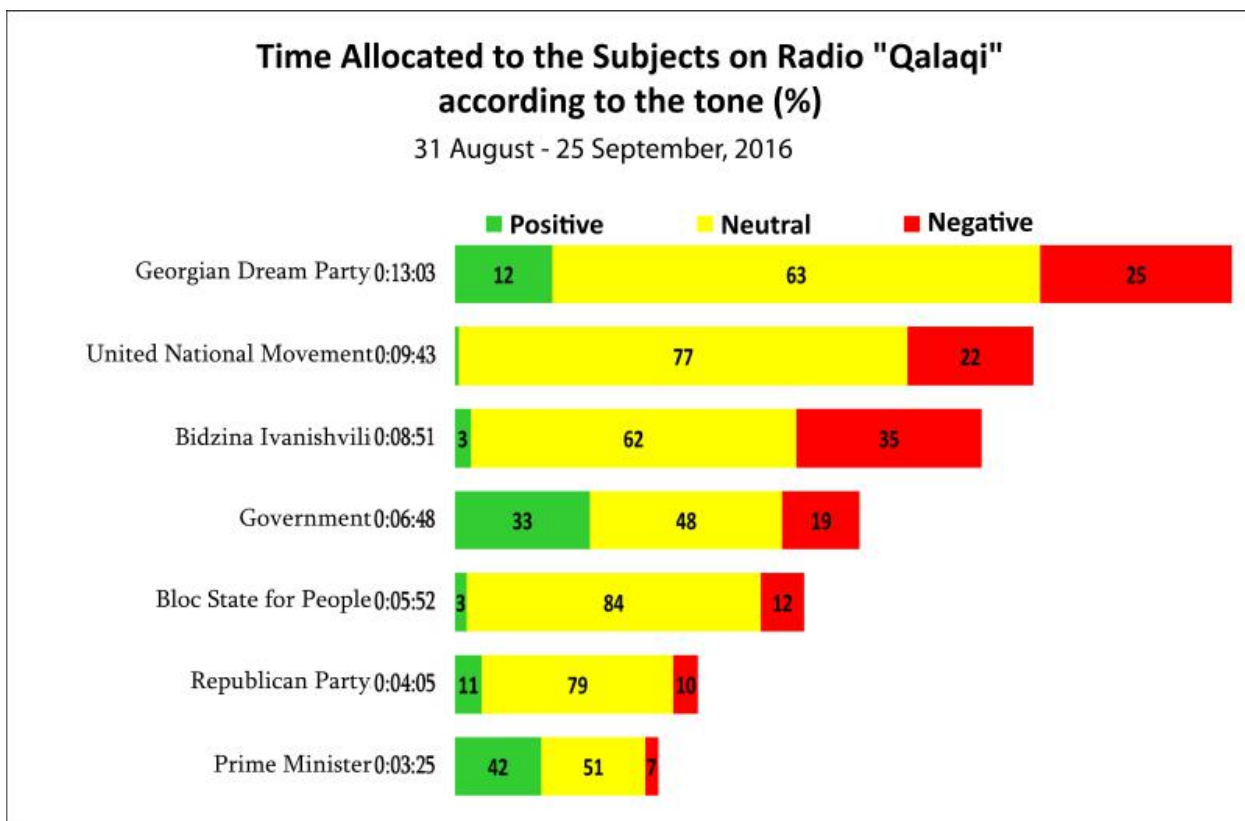


### Radio Qalaqi (City)

*The Radio Qalaqi used to prepare short news releases, covering hot topics like information agency. Analytical information was not provided in news programs and journalists never tried to obtain more information, they just gave floor to respondent politicians.*

In total 1 hour and 8 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The party “Georgian Dream” was covered for the most of time (19%), the next were “United National Movement” (14%) and Bidzina Ivanishvili (13%). The respondents did not have opportunity for direct speech, the anchor was quoting their statements. Relatively more positive tone was gained by the government and ruling team. However, the same subjects got time in negative tone as well. The journalists did provide in depth coverage of different topics and progress of election campaign. They broadcasted the politician’s statements without changing and never made subjective assessments.

The radio broadcaster was not biased to any political force. It broadcasted critical views, towards both government and opposition. However, short and superficial coverage of news, could not give to audience the opportunity for making decision.



### Radio Liberty

*The Radio Liberty prepared analytical and in-depth stories during the reporting period; the journalists used to work on exclusive stories and covered the topics, not broadcasted by other channels. However, we cannot say the same about the coverage of pre-election campaign.*

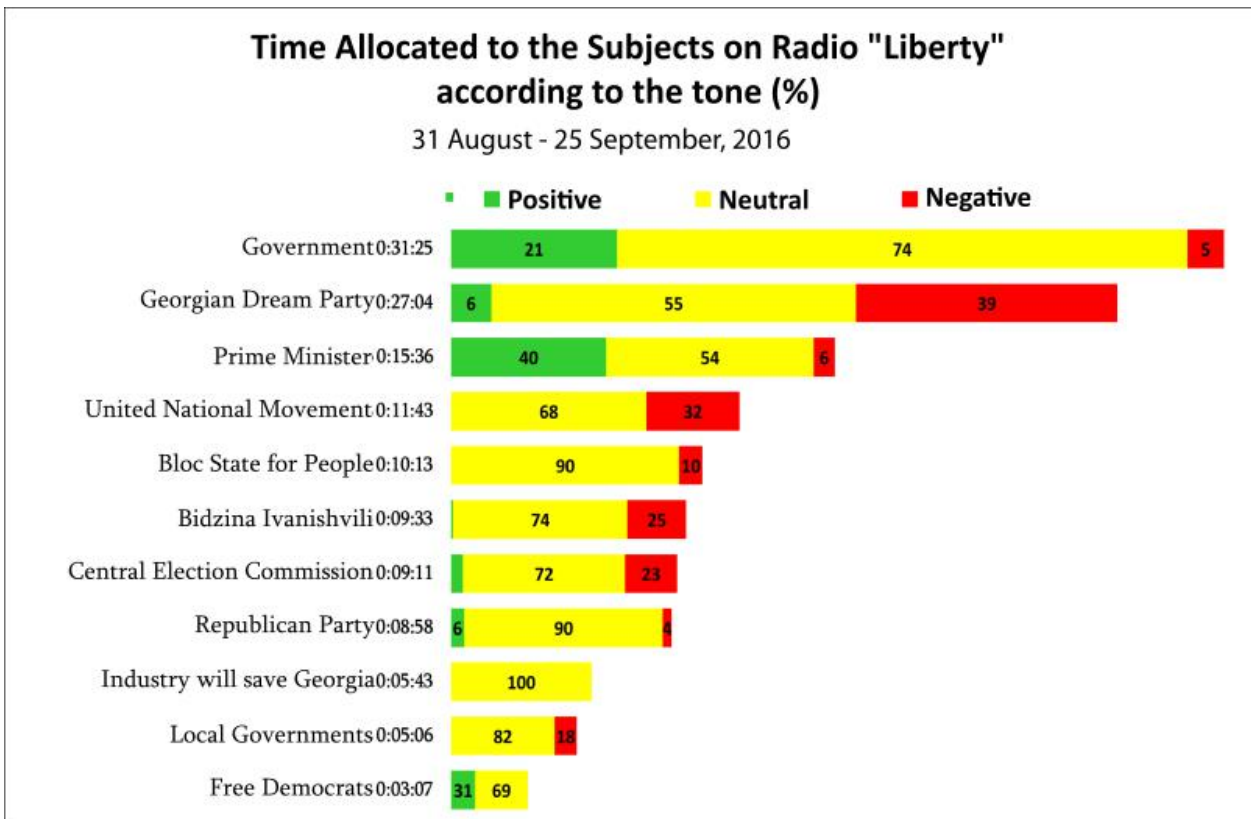
The news releases were not distinguished with the abundance of the stories. However, diverse information was prepared on selected topics, where voice of politicians, nongovernmental sector, observers of elections, specialists and ordinary citizens was heard. 2 hours and 34 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects, the most time (20%) was given to the government, the next were the party “Georgian Dream” (18%) and prime minister (10%). The government and its head got the highest indicator of coverage in positive context. However, the journalists were not biased towards the government and covered the events in balanced

manner. This is evidenced by the fact that the most of negative tone was gained by the ruling team. While, opposition parties had much more opportunity for direct speech (in average 40%) than the government (in average 23%).

The radio broadcaster prepared the stories about Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic course and its importance; as well as challenges and social issues in cross border villages. However, the coverage of pre-election campaign still remains a problem. The channel allocated almost no time to pre-election programs and activities of political unions. The story of the program of September 13 was an exception, which was dedicated to the coverage of the meetings with population of independent majoritarian candidate of Mtatsminda district – Salome Zurabishvili. Since the other candidates' activities were not covered at all, the mentioned story made ambiguous the context of its coverage and the program was imbalanced in terms of coverage electoral issues. However, broad coverage of preparation of district elections commissions for elections, setting up elections precincts and so on were covered in the same program.

In news releases, much more time was dedicated to foreign news, than to pre-election campaign ongoing in Georgia. Thus, neither news releases of the Radio Liberty provided the audience with information regarding elections programs or future visions of the politicians.



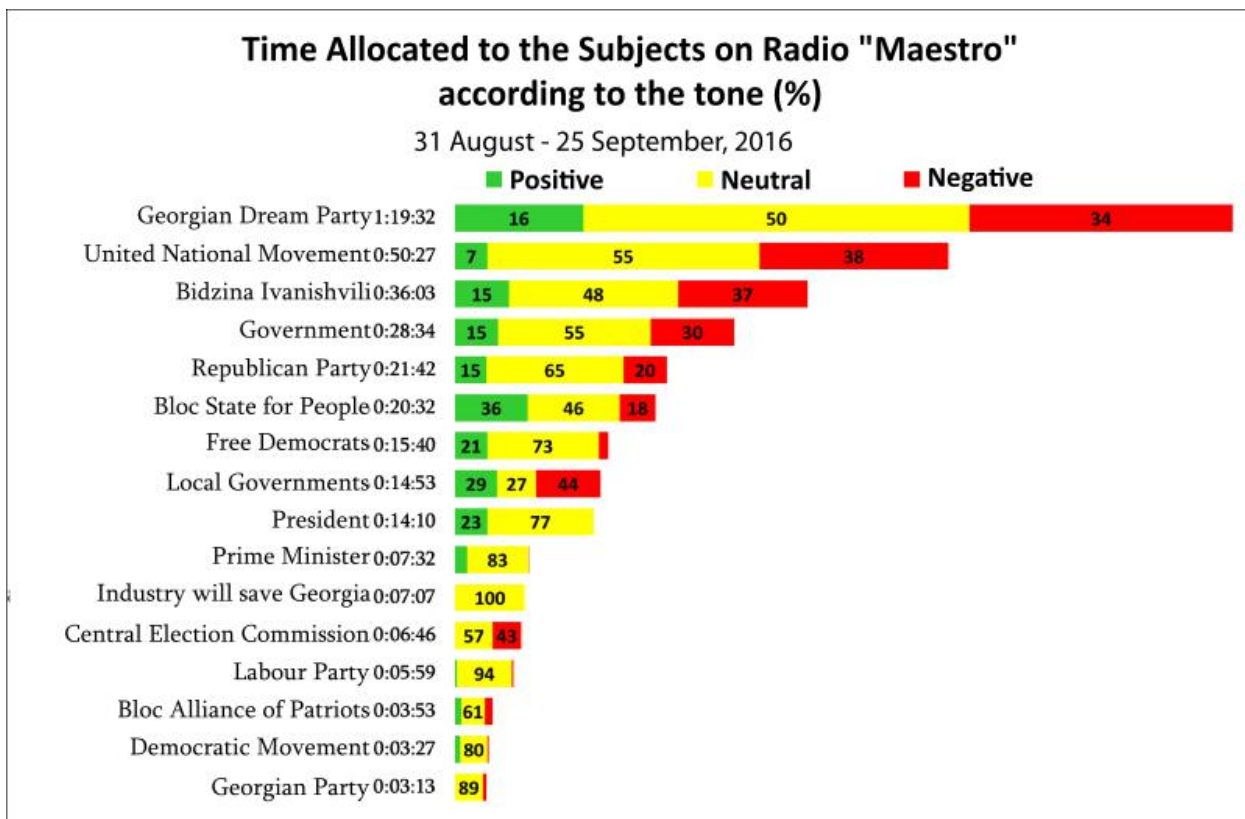


## Radio Maestro

*Compared to the previous reporting periods, the Radio Maestro prepared more balanced stories and better presented different views regarding the issues. However, the lack of analyses and tough questions regarding the elections programs, besides almost no time was allocated for coverage of the problems of minorities and those existing in regions.*

During the reporting period, 5 hours and 28 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. Out of this 24% of time was given to the party “Georgian Dream” 15% - to “United National Movement” and 11% - to Bidzina Ivanishvili. Improved balance of the stories led to diversity of tones: the indicator of positive tone was decreased and negative tone was increased; while the opportunity for direct speech was provided almost equally to all parties. For example, the most frequently covered three subjects got exactly 33-33% for direct speech. However, the CEC’s voice was heard relatively seldom. The news, where the party “Industry Saves Georgia” criticised the CEC, were based on one source and presented the CEC in negative context (43%).

The journalists did not make subjective assessments or summarise the views and facts regarding the events. Despite of extensive running time, pre-election campaign was not covered in -depth and basically limited to empirical review of the parties' with population.



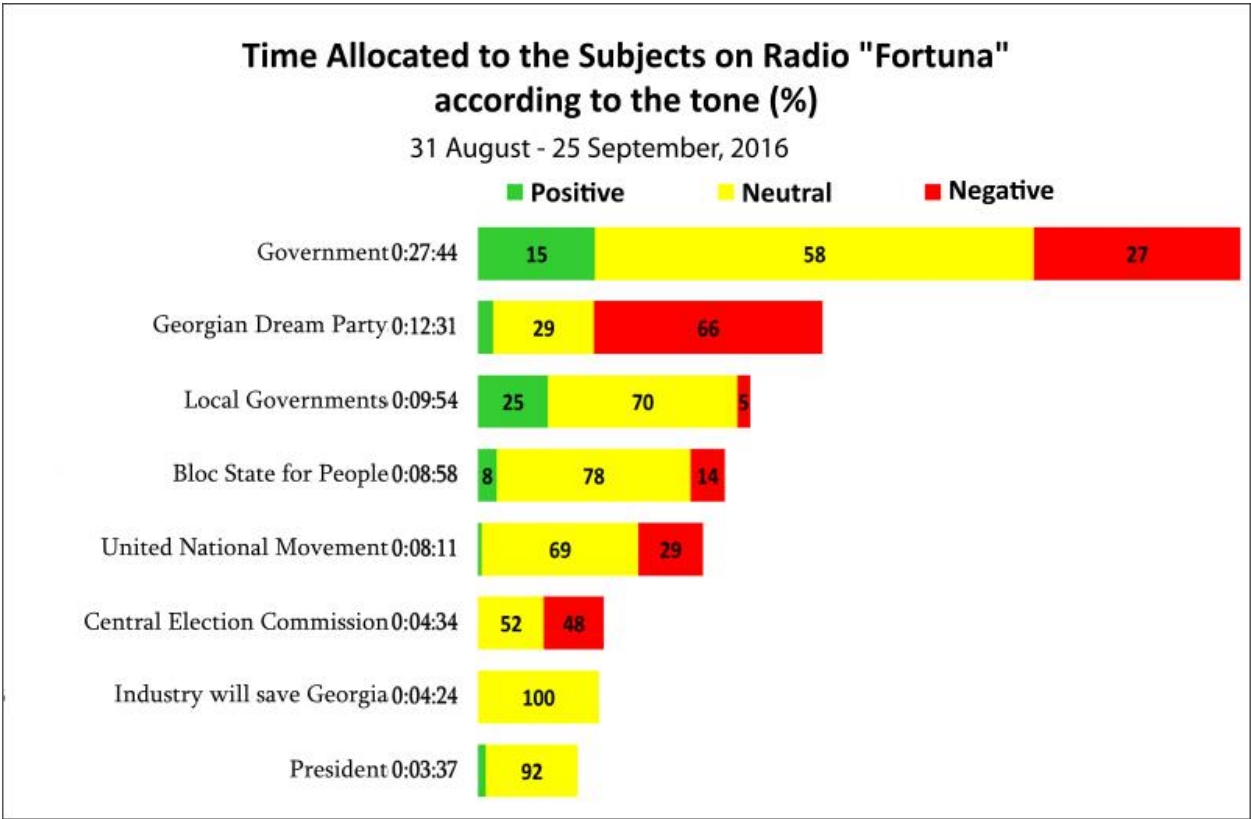
## Radio Fortuna

*The Radio Fortuna dedicated the most of the time in the news releases under observation to the interviews with the guest and almost no time was left for covering the news. The journalists were just briefly quoting one or two events developed during the day and then discussed the hot topic of the day with invited guest. Pre-election campaign was almost not covered in the form of interview, if not considering the program when palynologist – Gia Khukhashvili was invited to discuss electoral lists of political parties.*

In total 1 hour and 27 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 31% of this time was given to the government, 14% - the party “Georgian Dream”, 11% - local government. Opportunity for direct speech was given unequally to different political parties. For example: the member of “United National Movement” was invited to the studio and in total 41% of time

was given to the party for direct speech, while the voice of the party “Georgian Dream” was not heard at all. The party gained 66% of time in negative tone. The opportunity for direct speech was not given to the CEC as well, which was criticised by the representatives of particular parties (48% negative tone).

The Radio Fortuna dedicated time for viewing important issues such as education system, problems existing on the roads and so on. However, the main problem for the radio broadcaster still was the lack of balance, especially regarding political parties. Besides, the time was not allocated for the issues, widely covered by other radio broadcasters.

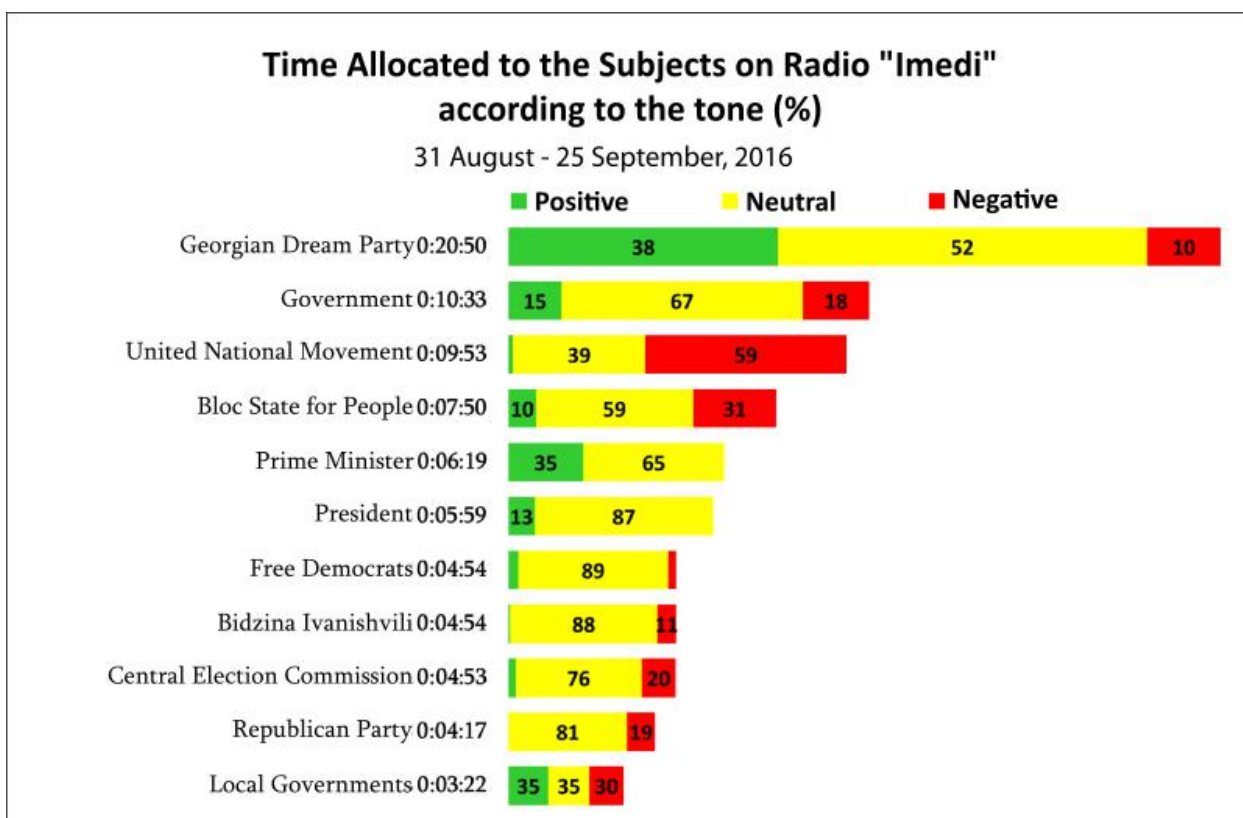


**Radio Imedi**

*The problem of balance was observed in Radio Imedi. The ruling team was covered in dramatically positive context, while the next opposition party – “United National Movement” - in negative context. The journalists did not ask critical questions and the news often were based on one source.*

In reporting period, the running time of the news releases was reduced from 15-20 minutes to 5 minutes. 23% of this time was allocated to the ruling team, 14% -to the government and 11% - “United National Movement”. Although, the journalists did not make subjective assessments, misbalance in favour of the party “Georgian Dream” was obvious in the news releases. Similar to the distribution of tones, this is evidenced by the indicator of direct speech. Just the representatives of ruling party were heard on air (30%), while no time was given to “United National Movement” for direct speech. Pre -elections campaigns of other political parties were covered superficially.

The respondents were introduced on air of Radio Imedi and it was clear whose voice was heard. Thus, the mentioned gap is filled, but the Radio Imedi was facing more pressing problem, associated with positive presentation of ruling political force together with approaching the elections.

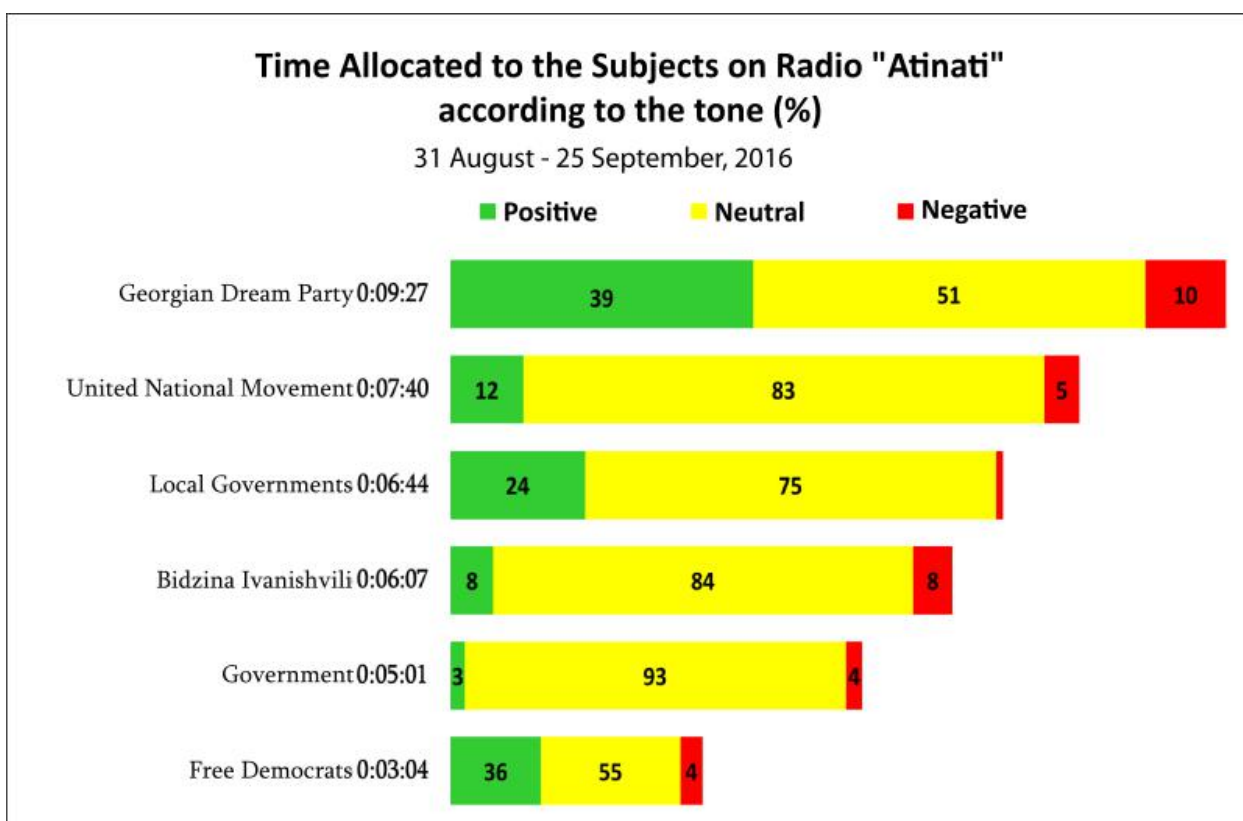


## **Radio Atinati (Zugdidi)**

***The Radio Atinati prepared short news releases, providing information like information agency. However, compared to previous, longer reporting periods in period of 31 August – 25 September the monitoring subjects got more time. Main focus was made on the events developed in Samegrelo Region and the activities of the candidates for majoritarian MPs were covered as well, but the news still were superficial.***

In total 47 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The party “Georgian Dream” was discussed the most frequently (19%). The next “United National Movement” (14%) and local government (11%). During reporting period, small part of the time (in average 11%) was allocated for direct speech. Although, the journalists were active in covering different opinions, they were not prepared respectively to ask tough questions to the respondents. Thus, about 39% of time was gained by the ruling party in positive tone. Local government was also presented positively, which almost never was mentioned in negative tone.

Compared to previous reporting periods, the news releases were improved. More attention was paid to the events being developed in the regions. However, lack of scepticism of journalists, gives opportunity to political subjects, especially to ruling team to present positively their actions. Although, the coverage of the candidates for majoritarian MPs, nominated in Samegrelo region was also improved, information was still superficial and it was not clear how particular candidate planned to solve the problems facing the population.

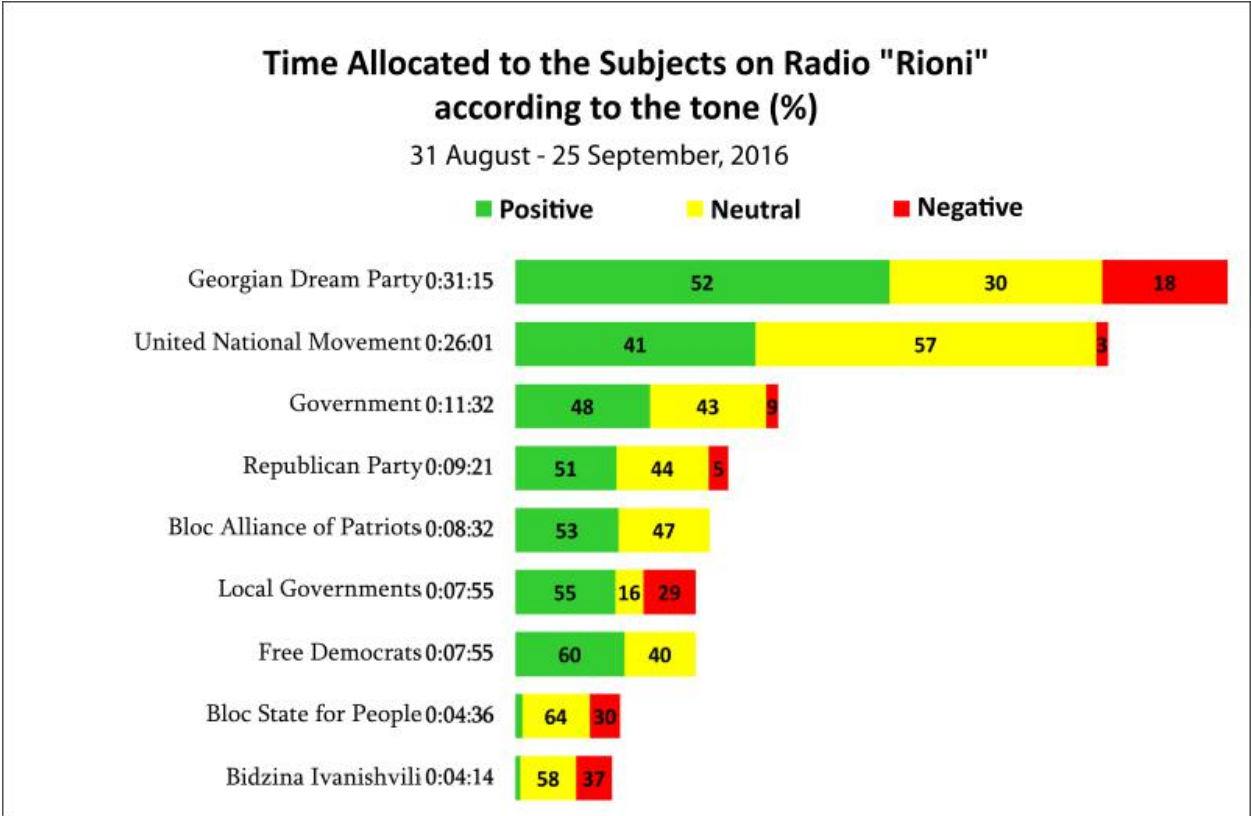


#### Radio Rioni (Kutaisi)

*The Radio Rioni actively covered both central and local news. Sufficient time was allocated to coverage of political issues, however the lack of critical questions and scepticism to to the politicians' statements still remained the problem.*

Total time allocated to the coverage of the monitoring subjects on the radio broadcaster compiled 2 hours. The most of the time (26%) was dedicated to the party "Georgian Dream". The next were "United National Movement" (21%) and the government (9%). Almost half of the time (47%) was dedicated to direct speech of the monitoring subjects. However, tough questions regarding particular social, infrastructural, educational or other problems existing in the region were not asked by the journalists. Consequently, the politicians made general questions and presented positively their political teams. Thus, the indicator of positive tone is higher on the chart in case of almost all subjects. The journalists did not express biased attitude: the indicator of positive coverage is equally high in cases of the government and opposition parties.

The radiobroadcaster superficially covered the candidates for majoritarian MPs. It is noteworthy that the journalists allocated great attention to pre-election processes, however without the journalists' preparation for the interviews and highlighting critical problems, the politicians can use the time allocated for them as free pre-election advertising.



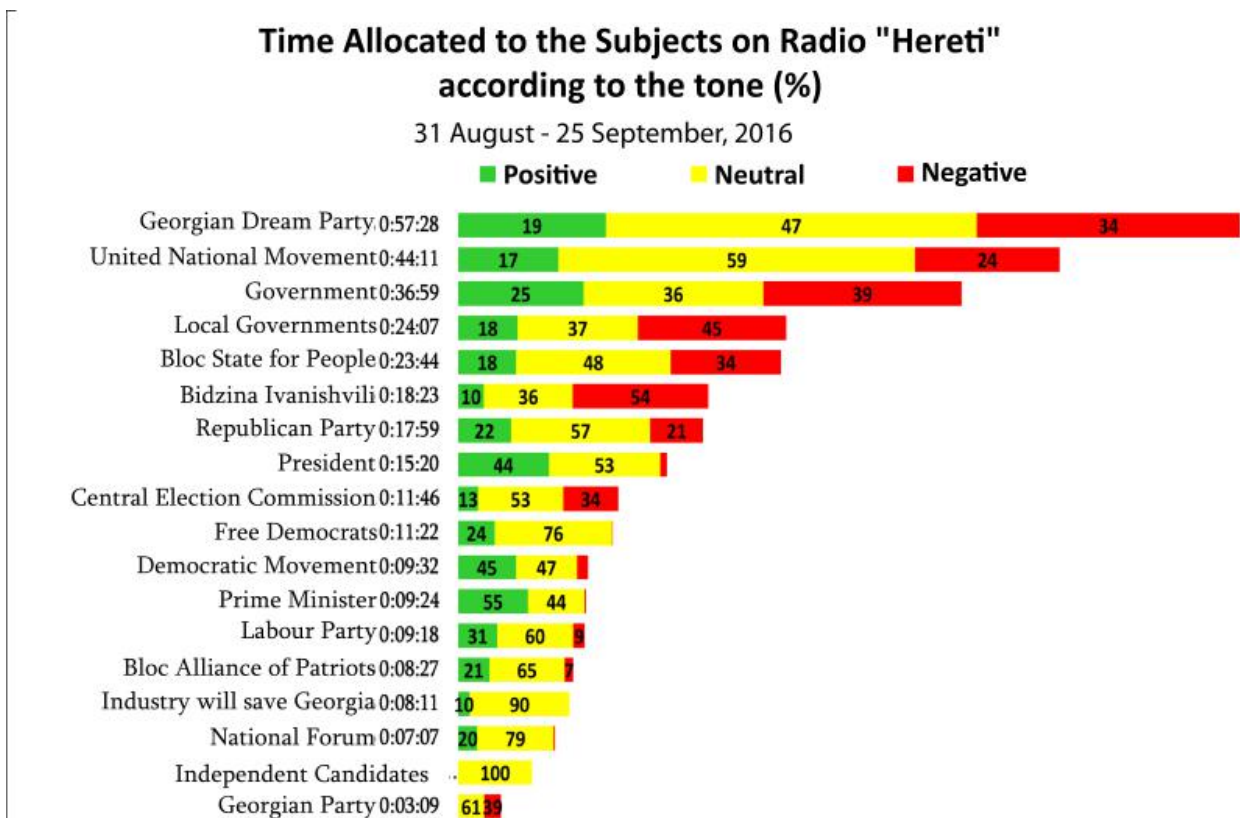
**Radio Hereti (Lagodekhi)**

*The Radio Hereti covered the event in balanced and unbiased manner. The journalists adhere journalistic standards. In current reporting period the number of so called exclusive stories was reduced and less attention was paid to the event developed in regions, than to central news.*

In total 5 hours and 32 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. Out of this 17% of the speech was about to the party “Georgian Dream”, 11% - to “United National Movement” and 11% - to the government. The Radio Hereti presented different opinions regarding the topic. Critical attitude was equal towards all political teams, due to that negative tone was dedicated to all subjects, which gained significant amount of time. Besides, all subjects got opportunity for

direct speech. This time was almost equally distributed to different political teams and in average compiled 43% of total time. The subjects got time in positive tone as well.

The journalists of the Radio Hereti ensured balance and major part of the stories was distinguished with diversity of the sources. Similar to other broadcasters, the coverage of pre-election campaign was limited with quoting the politicians and in depth stories were not prepared with the regard to the election programs.



### Radio Ajara (town Batumi)

*Compared to previous reporting period the trend of covering local government in positive tone was reduced on air of the Radio Ajara, however positive tone still prevailed. The radio broadcaster actively covered the events ongoing in Ajara, however the analyses of news, critical questions and diversity of the sources were still lacking.*

In total 3 hours were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most of the time was dedicated to “United National Movement” (14%) and the party “Georgian Dream” (13%). The Radio



Broadcaster provided the monitoring subjects with almost equal opportunities for direct speech (33% of total time). In previous elections period the government of Ajara (61%) and local government (51%) had sufficient positive coverage. In given reporting period this indicator was reduced dramatically. This time the government of Ajara gained 30% of time in positive context, and local government got – 17%.

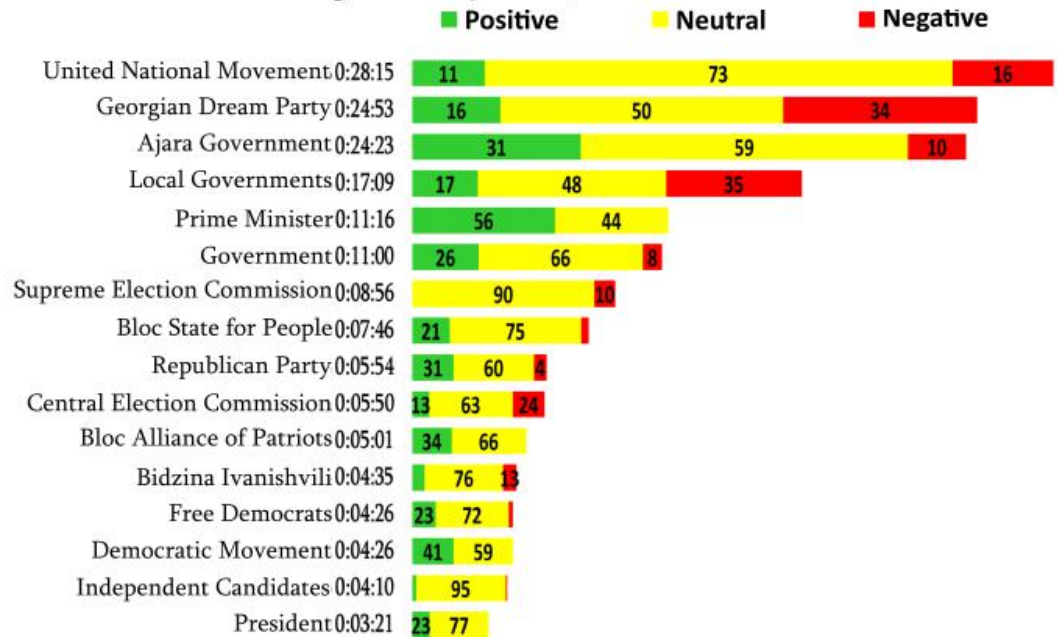
The coverage of opposition parties was increased. They used significant part of the time allocated to them, for criticising the government, consequently the later got time in negative context as well.

The activates of the CEC and SEC was covered more frequently with approximation of the elections, through direct and indirect coverage. However, similar to previous reporting periods the stories about the elections programs of political parties were not prepared. The radio broadcaster broadcasted just the information declared by the politicians during the meetings with population. The journalists did not ask critical questions and were not interested in how the politicians planned to keep the promises given to people during pre-election period. Besides, introduction of the respondents still remained the problem, due to which it was often unclear who was speaking on air.

Although it seems there is relative improvement compared to previous reporting period, several problems still need to be resolved. There is higher expectation towards public broadcaster, that it will cover diverse topics, ask critical question and state the problems those might not be on air of private broadcasters.

## Time Allocated to the Subjects on Radio "Ajara" according to the tone (%)

31 August - 25 September, 2016



### Conclusion

With approaching of the elections, the radio broadcasters covered current political events more and more actively. Significant period of time was dedicated to the coverage pre-election campaign of the parties. There was no case recorded when any of the radio broadcasters did not give time to political party widely covered by other channels. However, the pre-election campaign still was covered superficially. Majority of the news prepared on this topic was limited with quoting the statements of politicians made during the meetings with population. The journalists never asked politicians, how they planned to keep the promises made. Majority of radio broadcasters paid less attention to the event ongoing in the regions, and the minority issues almost were not covered. The politicians basically responded to the statements of opponents and less attention was paid to particular issues of the public's concern. The mentioned can be considered as one of the key features of current pre-election period, due to which the content of the news releases less and less refers to ordinary voter. There is impression that the type of information provided in the news programs of the radio broadcasters rather depends on the activities planned by politicians, press conferences and the

statements made there, than on active journalists, who would detect the problems and put these issues in the politicians' agenda.

In general, the performance of radio broadcasters is improved compared with the results of monitoring of last year: the number of news prepared based on one source is reduced, the journalists worked in more transparent manner, without mixing facts and opinions and the stories prepared based on anonymous sources were not recorded. However, there are still several problems: the journalists did not try a lot to obtain additional information, they did not prepare so called exclusive information and rarely expressed scepticism towards the politicians' statements. Regrettably, without solving this problem the news releases will not do a lot for promoting informed choice of the population.