



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

Election Monitoring of Radios

26 September – 2 November

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 26 September through 2 November 2016 has revealed the following **key findings**:

- Most of the radio broadcast time was allocated to “Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia” and “United National Movement”. However, journalists paid little attention to their majoritarian candidates in single-member constituencies;
- The coverage of “Patriotic Alliance” - the third political group, which won the parliamentary seats - was limited and largely negative;
- The independent majoritarian candidates did not get any coverage;
- A number of radio channels covered election programmes of political parties. However, their comprehensive analysis was not offered;
- The radio channels were actively covering the election days (8 and 30 October) identifying voting irregularities, broadcasting statements of politicians, observers, central election commission, and civil society organisations;
- The number of exclusive news was limited on the radio channels;
- The number of critical questions asked by radio journalists was small. They also did not attempt at finding additional information;
- Radio journalists were unbiased and did not manipulate with voice or music. No cases of the use of offensive language were identified.

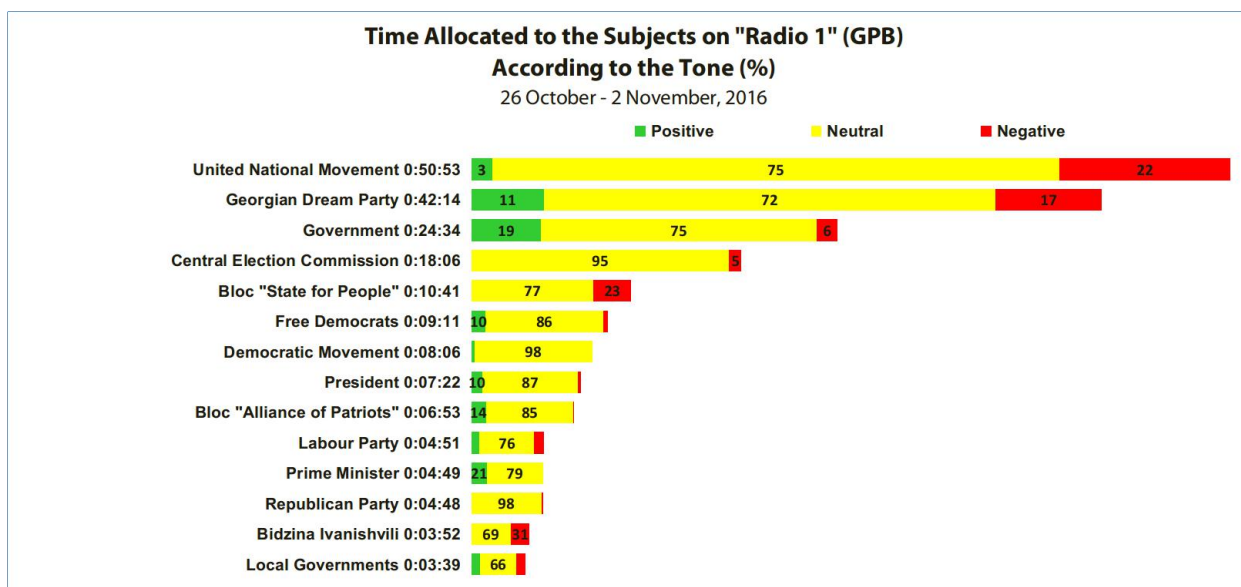
“Radio 1” (Public Broadcaster)

“Radio 1” actively covered political events and processes developed in the country during first and second rounds of the elections. On air of Public Broadcaster significant time was dedicated exactly to the coverage of the election day events. However, the lack of critical questions and proactivity of the journalists still remained a problem.

The radiobroadcaster allocated 3 hours and 35 minutes to the monitoring subjects, out of which 24% was dedicated to “United National Movement”, 20% - to the party “Georgian Dream” and 11% - to the government. The anchor was quoting, without giving time to direct speech. Superficial coverage, lacking analyses still remained a problem, which is demonstrated by 80% of neutral tone.

Time dedicated to the CEC in reporting period was increased significantly. Attention of the radiobroadcaster was focused on the elections: journalists covered statements of the CEC, situation on election precincts and the assessments of the observers and NGOs. However, some cases were reported when the radiobroadcaster covered with delay or did not at all the issues actively discussed by other media sources. For example: Davit Usupashvili’s statement about leaving the Republican Part was not covered at all; the voice of minorities or different marginalized groups still was not heard on air of Public Broadcaster, consequently the audience was not able to get the politicians’ opinions with this respect.

The radiobroadcaster was not biased to any of political teams. However, similar to previous years the journalists still did not prepare analytical news.

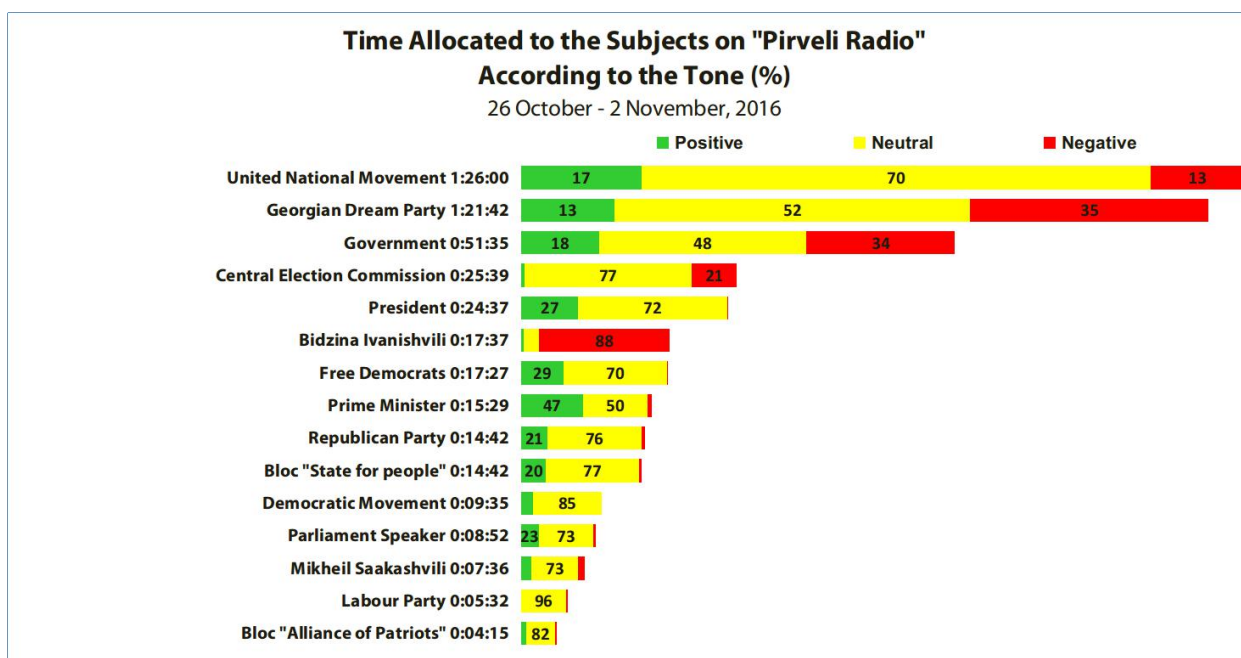


“First Radio”

First Radio” paid special attention to the topic of election. however, news was covered empirically, exclusive materials were not provided in the news programs and the audience did not have opportunity to hear analytical stories.

During the reporting period, in total 6 hours and 34 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. The most time was allocated to “United National Movement” (22%), the party “Georgian Dream” (21%) and the government (13%). Almost equal time (in average 47%) was given for direct speech to the monitoring subjects. However, single stories were still not balanced and similar to previous reporting period presented the ruling team in negative context. Although, the representatives of opposition criticized the government, the comments made in response to that were not often covered. For example: on the day of first round of the elections, four news stories were prepared on the events developed in Marneuli and detected violations, where the members of “United National Movement” accused the government in election fraud, but no responses of the CEC or the ruling team were provided in the stories. Consequently, the ruling party, the government and Bidzina Ivanishvili gained high indicators of negative tone.

The radiobroadcaster dedicated a lot of time to the coverage of political processes, however the journalists did not try to collect additional information and discuss the issues from different prospective. The news stories were limited to the review of the politicians' statements.



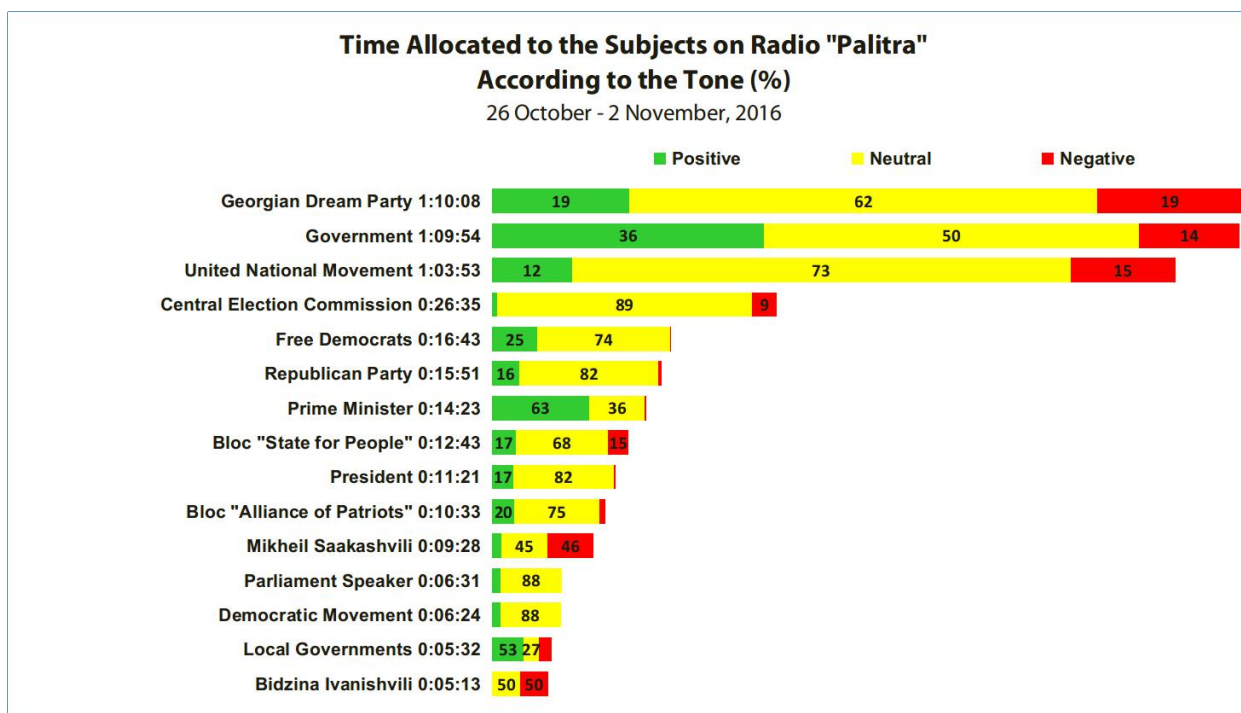
Radio "Palitra"

The Radio "Palitra" was distinguished by diversity of the topics and analytical stories, compared to the majority of other broadcasters; and the journalists worked on collection of additional information.

During the reporting period, the Radio "Palitra" allocated 5 hours and 52 minutes to the monitoring subjects. The most of this time was dedicated to the Party "Georgian Dream" (19%), the next were the government (19%) and "United National Movement" (18%). The monitoring subjects had almost equal time (in average 30%) for direct speech.

Great deal of the broadcaster's attention was paid to the elections issues. In contrast to previous reporting periods, the number of stories prepared about the programmes of political parties got increased, providing the audience with the opportunity to learn about healthcare and economic programmes. The stories presented the assessments of politicians, political analysts, as well as of non-governmental sector.

Compared with previous reporting periods, the journalists worked more proactively, found topics independently and prepared exclusive stories.

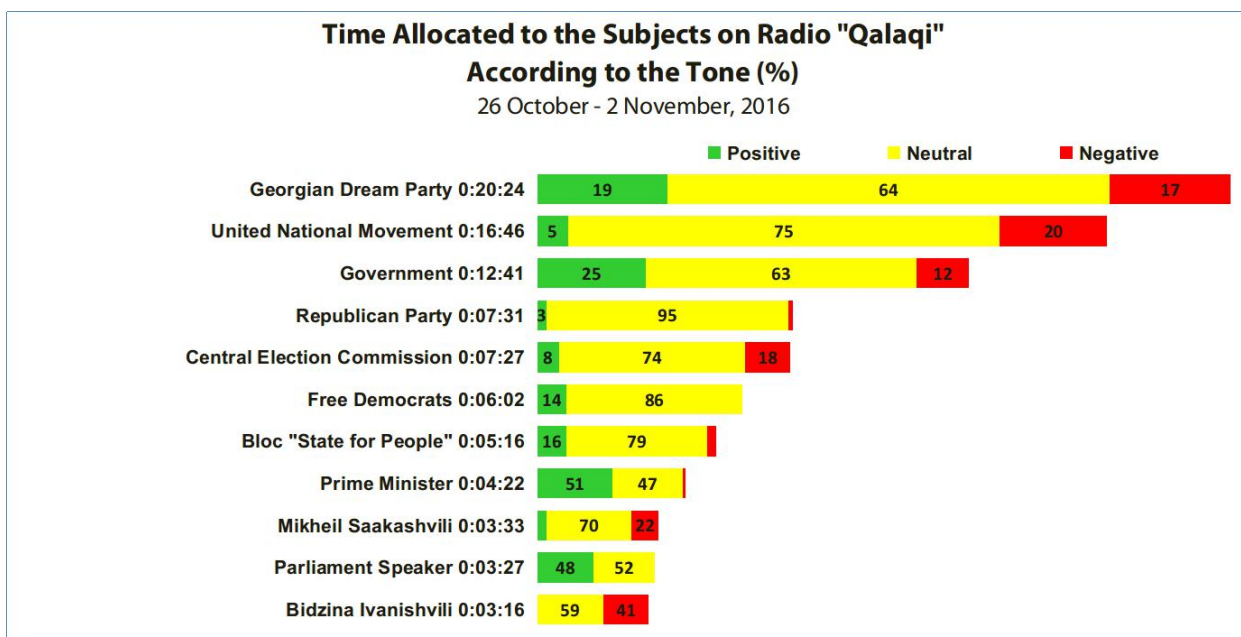


Radio "City"

The Radio City provided 4-5 minutes' news releases, where the news similarly to previous reporting periods were covered shortly and superficially, limited to the coverage of review of the politicians' statements.

In reporting period, the radiobroadcaster allocated one hour and 46 hours to the monitoring subjects. The most of the time was dedicated to the party "Georgian Dream" (20%), "United National Movement" (16%) and the government (12%). Single stories were unbalanced. However, the journalists did not express subjective attitude to any of the subjects and no trend of coverage of any political party in positive or negative context was identified.

The anchor was still quoting the respondents' statements. There was an impression, that the radiobroadcaster was reading the information distributed by the information agencies and the journalists did not try to collect additional information or extension of the topic.



The Radio "Liberty"

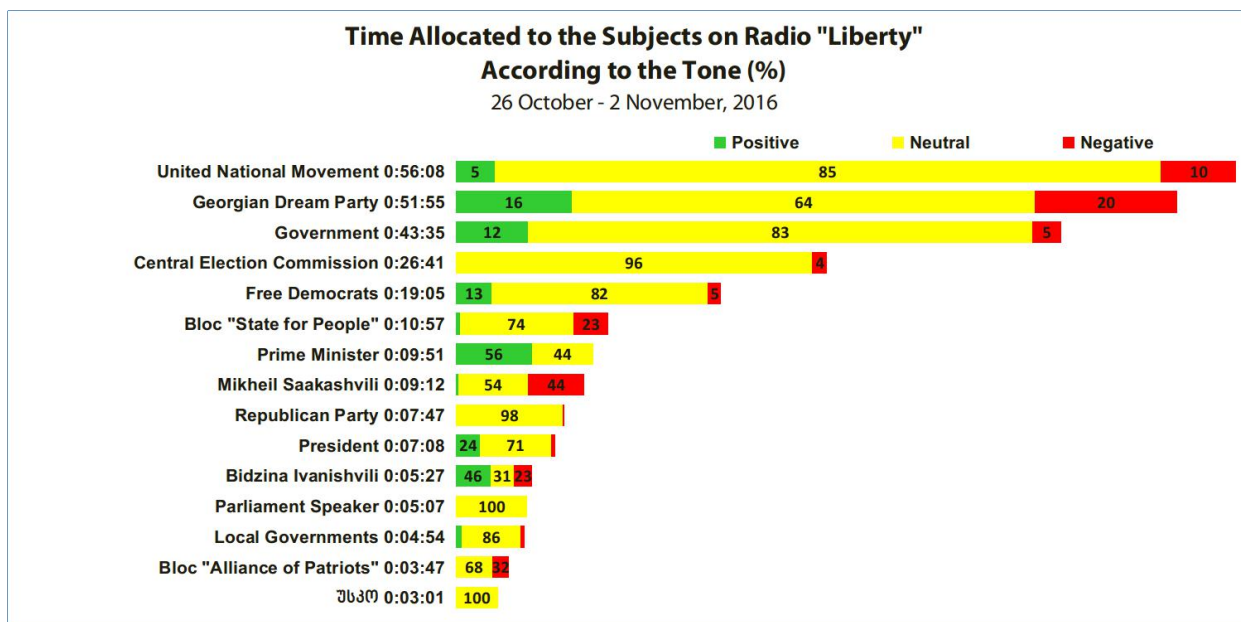
In the reporting period, the Radio Liberty increased the number of stories prepared on election issues. The election environment established in the regions and their problems were covered actively, besides significant time of the time was dedicated to economic, agricultural and social issues, analytical programmes were prepared and different topics were covered deeply.

In total 4 hours and 33 minutes were dedicated to coverage of the monitoring subjects, 21% of this time was allocated to "United National Movement and 19% - to the party "Georgian Dream". Majority of the time was given in neutral tone to the subjects. In positive context was covered prime minister, in negative – former president – Michael Saakashvili – using the most of the time dedicated to him for criticizing ruling team, while the prime minister was presenting positively the government's operation. The representatives of all political parties got equal time for direct speech.

In reporting period, the journalists did not prepare in depth stories on the programmes of political parties. However, the radiobroadcaster paid great attention to review of election environment and coverage of the events developed on election day. The journalists instead of quoting general statements of the politicians, tried to receive the answers on particular

questions and included the opinions of non-governmental sector, observers and specialists in the analyses of certain issues.

The radiobroadcaster still was distinguished by the preparation of exclusive stories. The journalists still tried to cover the issues related to the problems of farmers growing potatoes in Akhaltsikhe or winegrowers in Kakheti. The audience had opportunity to hear positions of different political teams regarding identified problems.

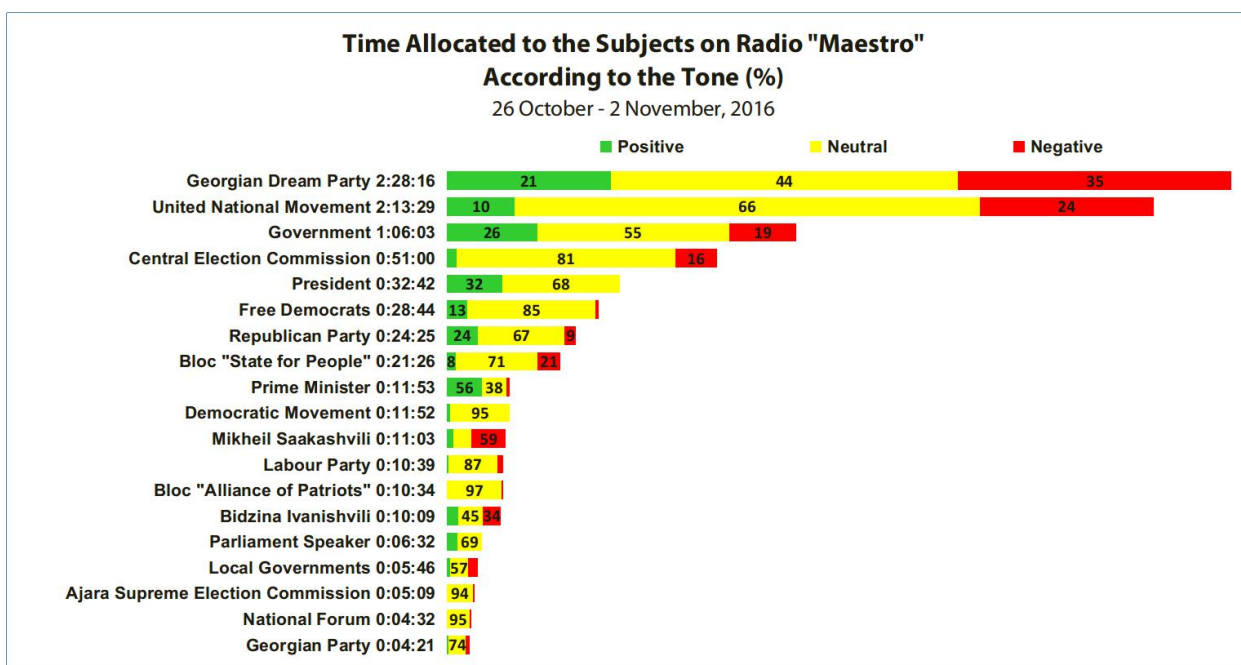


Radio "Maestro"

The Radio "Maestro" was not biased to any of the political subjects. Although the journalists mostly prepared balanced stories, analytical material was prepared neither in current reporting period.

The radiobroadcaster prepared broad news releases and in total 10 hours and 9 minutes to the monitoring subjects. The most frequently were covered the Party "Georgian Dream" (24%), "United National Movement" (22%) and the government (11%). Other political parties were also covered actively, dedicating the most of the time to the criticism of ruling teal (35%). However, the members of "Georgian Dream" had opportunity for making the statements in response, consequently 21% of the time was allocated to them in positive context. One third of the time was dedicated to direct speech of the respondents.

The radiobroadcaster actively covered the events developed around the electoral processes. The audience had opportunity to hear the assessments of non-governmental sector and observers, besides the politicians. Despite of this the news releases were lacking the journalists' critical questions and diversity of the topics. The information broadcasted on air was not distinguished by exclusivity and they could be heard on the air of other broadcasters as well.



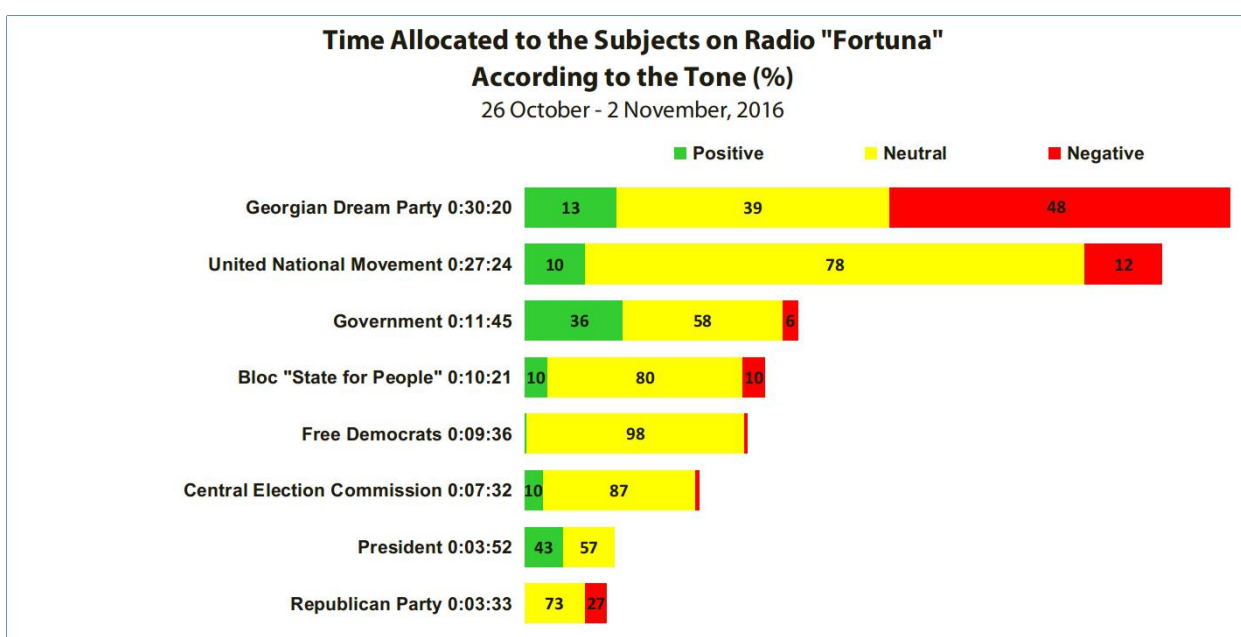
The Radio "Fortuna"

The news releases of the Radio Fortuna were short and superficial. Their great part was still dedicated to the interviews with guests. Part of the interview was informative and often related to the topics not covered by other broadcasters. For example, the journalist tried to sort out at what extent the election programmes of the parties were realistic or their donations – transparent. However, on this background less attention was paid to the coverage of news. For example, on 6th of October, two days before the elections the journalists prepared just one story just about the processes ongoing abroad.

The Radio Fortuna allocated one hour and 52 minutes to the monitoring subjects. The most frequently were mentioned the party "Georgian Dream" (27%) and "United National Movement" (24%). Similar to previous reporting period, negative attitude towards the ruling party was noticeable. 48% of the time was dedicated to them in negative context, while this

indicator was just 12% in case of “United National Movement”. Besides, time for direct speech still was not given to the party “Georgian Dream” (just 2%). In part of the interview the government was criticised severely, however the format did not give opportunity for hearing the statements in response. The representatives of ruling team were not invited to following programmes, to ensure balance.

Compared to previous periods, the problem of balancing the news was acutely observed. Besides, there was not an impression that journalists prepared diverse, verified and in depth stories.



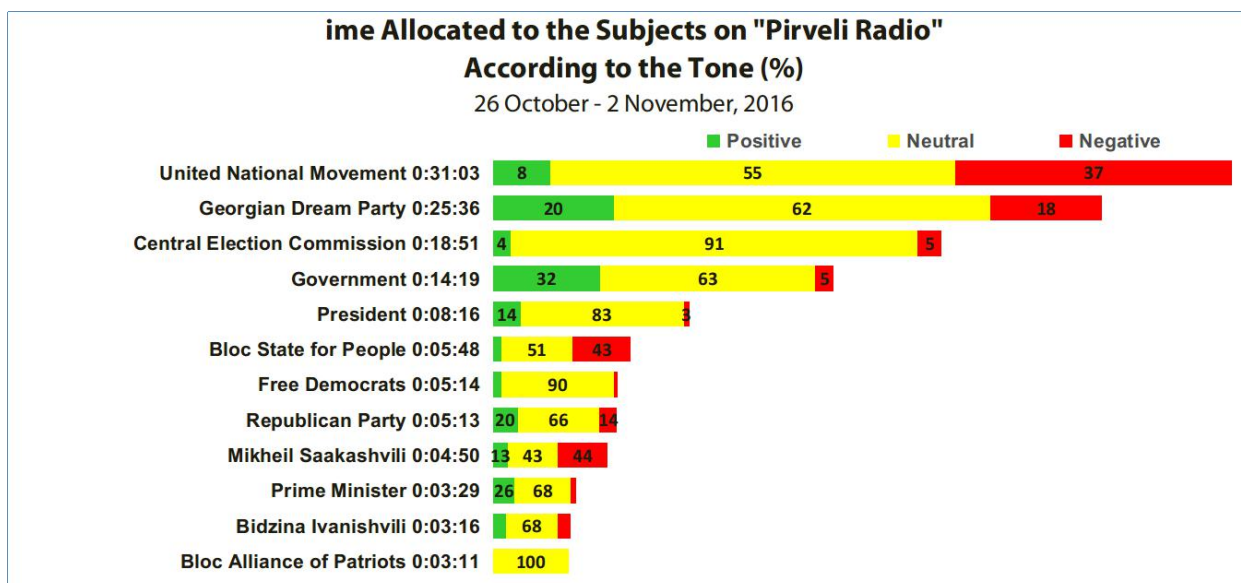
The Radio “Imedi”

Compared to previous reporting period, the Radio Imedi actively covered political events. The problem of balance was partially improved, however “Imedi” was the only broadcaster on air of which the criticism towards opposition parties significantly exceeded to the criticism towards ruling party.

The radiobroadcaster dedicated 2 hours and 17 minutes to the monitoring subjects. More than 3 minutes was dedicated to six political parties. Negative tone of “United National Movement” and positive tone of ruling team still were high. However, after the first round of the elections the picture was changed and the news releases became relatively balanced. Besides, the

journalists prepared extensive stories regarding the violations observed on election day: the assessments of the CEC and well as of non-governmental sector and observers were heard.

The journalists of radiobroadcaster did not ask critical questions and less tried to collect additional materials or verification of the respondents' statements.



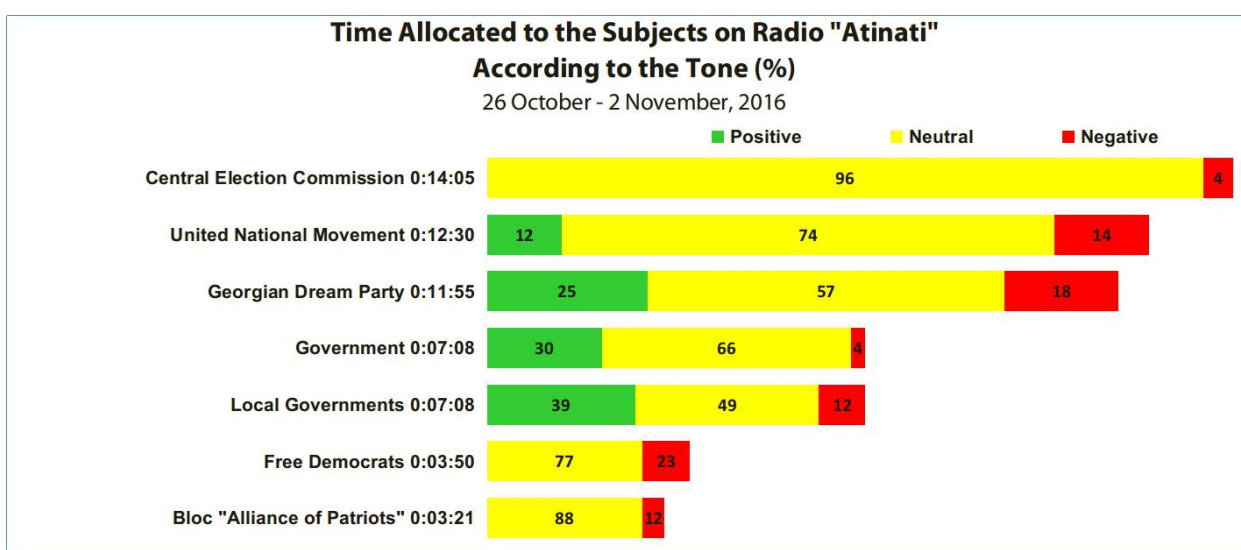
Radio "Atinati" (Zugdidi)

Short news releases of the Radio Atinati, basically referred to the events developed in the region. The journalists actively covered political, cultural and educational activities. However, superficial coverage of the events still remains serious problem.

Total time of covering the election subjects on Atinati compiled one hour and eight minutes. Major part of this time was dedicated to coverage of the CEC (20%), which can be explained by the fact that the broadcaster distributed information about first and second based on the statements of the CEC. Equal time was dedicated to the representatives of "United National Movement" (18%) and the Party "Georgian Dream" (18%). Compared with previous reporting periods, the share of direct speech was slightly increased and compiled 17%. However, the lack of critical questions was obvious. High positive tone of the governmental subjects is associated to this problem. Although, the situation is improved compared with previous reporting period the journalists quote still the respondents' statements, without trying to collect additional

information or asking tough questions, due to which the politicians present their teams positively.

The radiobroadcaster more and more frequently covered the problems of population. However, without collecting additional information and ensuring balance diverse and comprehensive information was not provided to the audience.



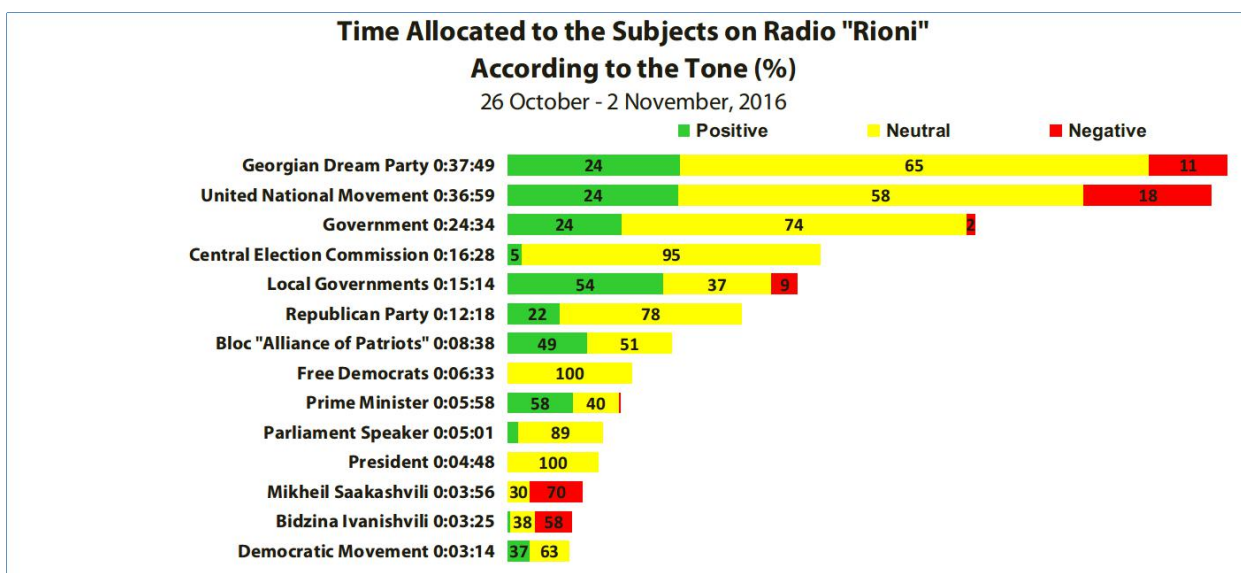
Radio "Rioni" (Kutaisi)

The Radio Rioni actively covered local as well as central news. The radiobroadcaster was focused on the elections. Besides, the stories were more balanced, however the lack of critical questions was once more identified as key problem of the radio channel.

In total 3 hours and 13 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 20 % of the time was dedicated to the coverage of the Party "Georgian Dream", 19% - "United National Movement" and 13% - the government. 24% of the time was provided in positive tone to all three subject. "United National Movement" got the most of negative time (18%). Compared with previous reporting periods the indicator of positive coverage of the ruling party was decreased, which was the result of the balancing of the stories. However, local government was still presented in positive context. Whilst other subjects got in average 20% of time for direct speech, this figure was three times more in case of local government.

The radiobroadcaster covered pre-election environment mostly based on the politicians' assessments, without collecting additional information. However, on election days the journalists became more active and covered detected violations as well as the comments of the CEC, non-governmental sector and observers.

Compared to previous reporting periods, the news releases were more diverse, however more criticism towards the politicians' statements still remained a key challenge.



Radio "Hereti" (Lagodekhi)

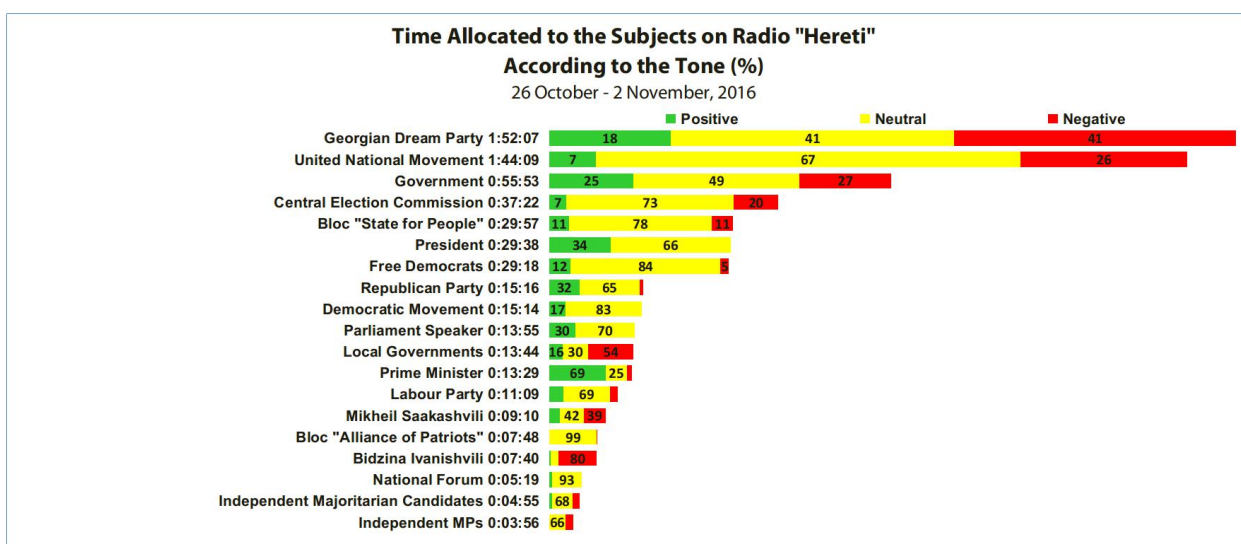
The Radio Hereti covered the events on going in the country critically and in balanced manner. The journalists worked on relatively diverse topics and prepared the stories on the issues not covered by other broadcasters. However, the elections period passed without in depth coverage of the parties' programmes. The statements of observers, the CEC and non-governmental sector regarding the elections were often heard, but the analyses were lacking in this case as well.

The radiobroadcaster allocated 8 hours and 47 minutes to the monitoring subjects. 21% of this time was given to the Party "Georgian Dream", 20% - "United National Movement", and 11% - to the government. Negative tone exceeded positive in all three cases, especially with the government (41%), which could be explained by the journalist's critical questions and time allocated to opposition parties. Representatives of the government had opportunity to respond

to the criticism of the opponents and to express their opinions. The only person, whose direct speech was not heard was Bidzina Ivanishvili, which was reflected on the misbalance of tones (80% negative).

Despite of the fact that the majority of radiobroadcasters was focused on the elections topic, the Radio Hereti did not leave without attention the problems of population. The journalists asked tough questions, which led to negative coverage of local government (54%).

Journalists of the radiobroadcaster were more proactive. They were not limited just by the politicians' statements and tried to collect additional materials and clarify the issues. However, empirical coverage of the campaign remained acute problem until the end of the elections.



Radio "Adjara" (Batumi)

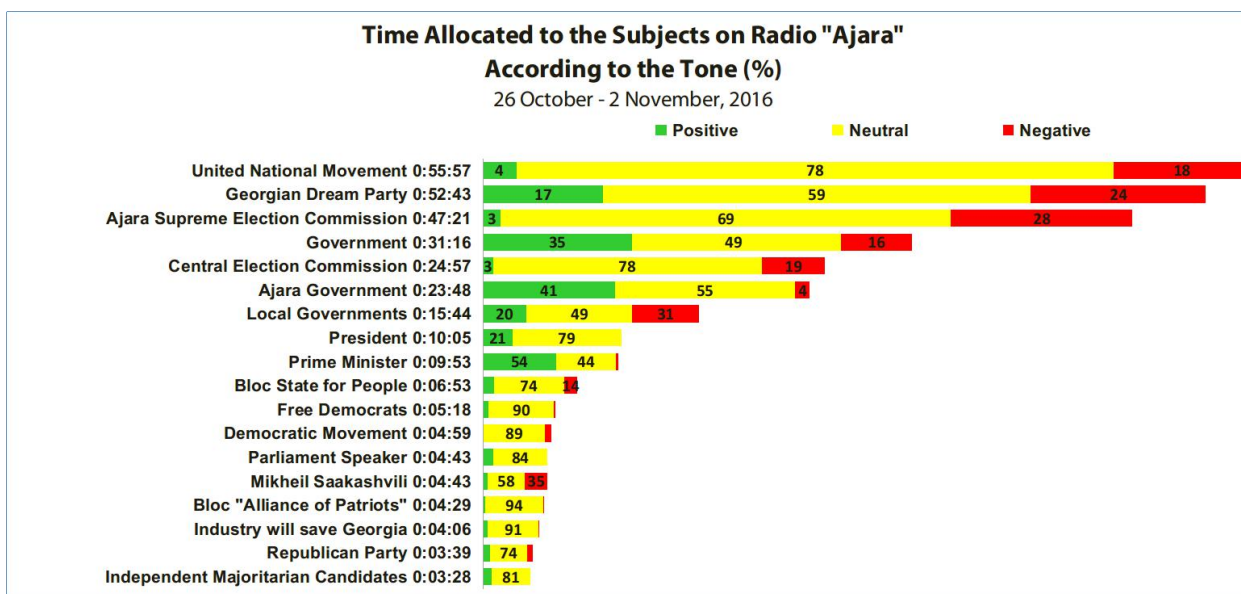
The Radio Adjara prepared extensive news releases, providing information regarding the events developed in Adjara and on central level. Despite of the length of the programme, the news still was covered briefly and empirically, similar to other radiobroadcasters having short running time. Consequently, the lack of in depth stories was key problem of the releases.

In reporting period, 5 hours and 30 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most of the time was dedicated to "United National Movement" (17%), the Party "Georgian Dream" (16%) and the SEC (15%). The radiobroadcaster allocated almost equal time (31%) to the monitoring subjects, for direct speech. Although, positive tone towards governmental

subjects was decreased compared with previous reporting periods, it still remained high. The journalists did not ask critical questions and the representatives of ruling team were covered in positive context respectively. This especially applied to the government of Adjara (41%), which was mentioned in previous reports as well.

The radiobroadcaster was not distinguished by reviewing election programmes, however compared with other radiobroadcasters the provided the broadest coverage of events on election days. During these days, twice longer news releases were prepared by the Radio Adjara. The radiobroadcaster provided the audience with the details of election processes ongoing in the region and in the country in general. In the course of the news releases the journalists were informing audience from Tbilisi, election precincts of Batumi as well as from election districts of Khulo, Khelvachauri and Kobuleti. On this day, the assessments of non-governmental sector were also covered actively and the news releases were distinguished by diversity of the sources.

Compared with previous reporting period, the stories were more balanced. However, the journalists covered just the information provided by the politicians during the meetings with population, without asking critical questions.



Conclusion

In the course of reporting period, the radiobroadcasters were focused on the elections and events associated with it. Although, the election programmes were not covered in depth and

the audience was not informed about future vision of the parties, on election days (October 8 and 30) the journalists actively covered violations revealed during voting process, the politicians' assessments and positions of non-governmental organizations and observers. During these days, the majority of radiobroadcasters prepared balanced stories, distinguished by diversity of the sources and live broadcasts. The mentioned especially applied to the Elections of October 8.

The majority of radiobroadcasters did not present any of political teams in distinctively positive or negative contexts. However, empirical coverage of the events still remains the key problem. Information broadcasted on air, as a rule was limited by the statements made by the politicians in public speeches. Sceptic attitude of the journalists was not observed: they never tried to verify the compliance of the respondents' statements with real facts and did not ask tough questions. Consequently, the audience did not have opportunity for making reasoned conclusions based on contradictory and general statements of the politicians.

The majority of radiobroadcasters leaves no question marks regarding impartiality. No cases of manipulating with voice/music or using hate speech were recorded.