



Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics

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

TV News Monitoring Report

26 September – 2 November, 2016

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is implementing the monitoring of TV news broadcasts within the framework of the project entitled “Study of the Media Coverage of the 2016 Parliamentary Elections” funded by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The monitoring is carried out from 20 May to 19 December, 2016 and covers main news programs on the following 11 TV channels: “1st Channel” of the public broadcaster, “Rustavi 2”, “Maestro”, “GDS”, “Tabula”, “Kavkasia”, “TV Pirveli”, “Obieqtivi”, “Ajara TV”, and “TV 25”.

This report presents the media monitoring results for the period of 26 September through 2 November, 2016.

The quantitative and the qualitative analysis of the monitoring data has revealed the following **key findings**:

- At the outset of the monitoring a large number of TV channels devoted their primary attention to the activities of the Government of Georgia. During the last two monitoring rounds, however, this trend has been altered and TV channels started to actively cover political groups. During this round of monitoring “United National Movement” received the highest coverage among all political subjects at the nine monitored TV channels;
- As during the previous round of monitoring, activities of the Government of Georgia were most positively covered by “GDS” with 11% of positive tone indicators. “Rustavi 2” was again most critical of the government with 50% negative coverage;
- Activities of “Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia” were again covered most favorably on “GDS” (5% of positive tone indicators), and most negatively on “Rustavi 2” (45% of negative tone indicators);
- “United National Movement” had only 1-1% of positive tone indicators on the four TV channels under monitoring (“1st Channel”, “Rustavi 2”, “Kavkasia”, and “TV Pirveli”) , while “Obieqtivi” TV was the most critical to this political group with 44% of negative coverage;
- Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the monitoring data reveals the clearly positive sentiments of “Obieqtivi” towards the election bloc of “Patriotic Alliance”;

- The content analysis of the TV news programmes indicates that the channels cover election subjects mostly in accordance with ethical standards. However, as during the previous monitoring rounds, their coverage remains unbalanced.
- As during the previous rounds of monitoring, unbalanced footages with soundbites, often based on only one source of information, remain a challenge for TV channels.
- As during the previous round of monitoring, a number of xenophobic statements by election subjects were observed. Sadly, TV broadcasters revealed the lack of proper knowledge of the Code of Conduct and could not or did not distance themselves from such statements.
- The decrease of level of positive coverage remained the trend for the last two rounds of monitoring.

Results by TV channels

Charts provided below show the data of qualitative analysis by the time allocated to and the tone of the coverage of seven subjects on 11 TV channels. These subjects were selected by two criteria: the frequency of coverage and the popularity of subjects. Seven subjects are the same for all monitored channels save Adjara TV and TV 25. The charts of the last two channels additionally include the data on the government of Adjara as these broadcasters mainly focus on the developments in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

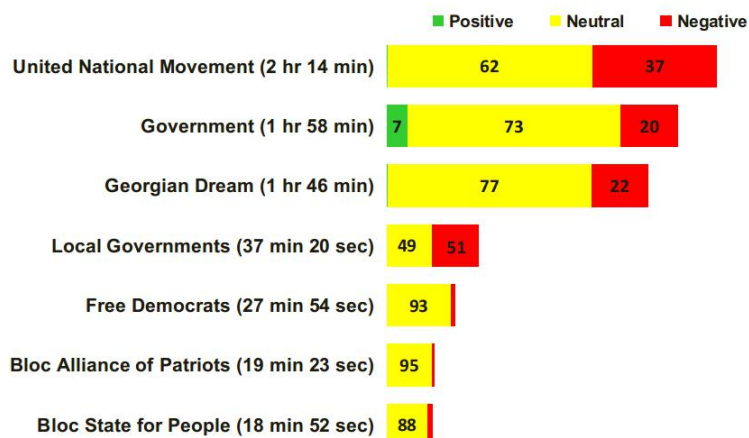
1st Channel

In the reporting period, monitors studied a daily primetime news program “Moambe at 20:00” and “Kviris Moambe” (Moambe on Sunday).

Quantitative analysis

Time Allocated to the Subjects on "1st Channel" (GPB) according to the tone (%)

(25 September- 2 November, 2016)



Similarly to the previous reporting period, the news program Moambe of Public Broadcaster's 1st Channel allocated the largest amount of time to the coverage of UNM. The most favorable coverage was received by the government, with the indicator of positive tone in the total reporting on this subject comprising 7%. The most unfavorable coverage was seen in the reporting about the self-government (51%). The most neutral in tone was the coverage of the election bloc Alliance of Patriots – 95% of the entire time allocated to this subject.

The 1st Channel reported on a wide spectrum of electoral subjects; reports covered election activities of the subjects and mainly conformed with ethical standards though instances of unbalanced reporting as well as incomplete information were observed.

For example, a report about the construction of the Gardabani thermal power plant contained comments of the Prime Minister, the Energy Minister and several experts of the energy sector. Based on these comments, the thermal power plant was the best state-of-the-art project which would only benefit the country.

The report did not provide an opposite view of environmentalists (environmentalists criticized the construction of the thermal power plant in a number of online editions¹). There was no discussion of the amount of harm the new thermal power plant may cause to the environment; this was a substantial shortcoming of the report. Media and especially the public broadcaster have the obligation to provide society with comprehensive information about their living environment and risks in this environment.

Another item, a short footage with soundbite, concerned the fact of text messaging and phone calls to voters by a single seat candidate from the Mtatsminda constituency Nika Rurua. However, nothing was said whether the same was practiced by other candidates. It is well known that Salome Zourabichvili, the direct rival of Nika Rurua, also applied the method of making phone calls to voters. The public broadcaster should have covered this fact in a more comprehensive manner by seeking similar examples of other political parties and providing assessments of lawyers whether text messaging was the violation of citizens' rights, et cetera. Instead, the story was reported narrowly, making unclear whether the law was breached or not, by whom and towards who.

Rustavi 2

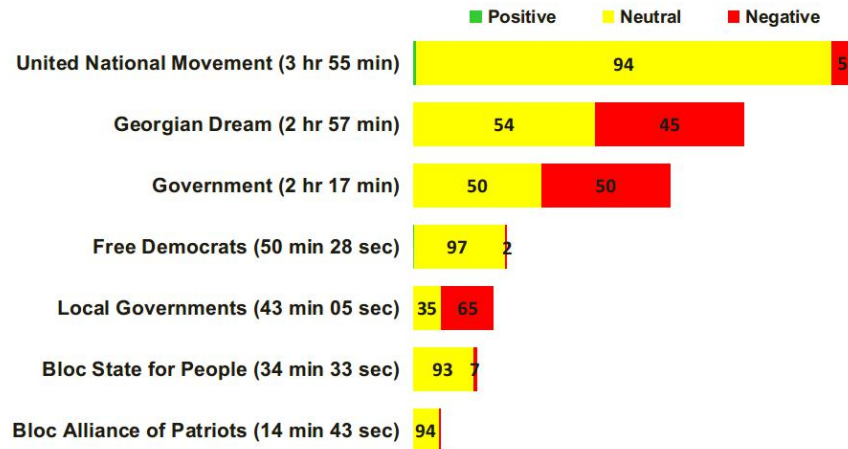
In the reporting period, monitors studied a daily primetime news program “Kurier” (aired every weekday at 21:00), “Shabatis Kurieri” (at 21:00 every Saturday) and “P.S.” (at 21:00 every Sunday).

Quantitative analysis

¹ <http://netgazeti.ge/news/12807/>

Time Allocated to the Subjects on "Rustavi 2" according to the tone (%)

(25 September- 2 November, 2016)



Much like the previous reporting period, Rustavi 2 allocated the largest amount of time of its news broadcasts to the UNM. The most favorable coverage was received by the UNM and the Free Democrats, though the indicator of positive tone did not exceed 1% of the total coverage. Similarly to the previous period as well, the most negative tone was observed in the reporting on the local government (65%). The most neutral in tone was the coverage of Free Democrats (97%). Rustavi 2 continued to be overly critical about the government.

Instances of unbalanced reporting remained the problem. An almost 17-minute-long report, assessing the four years of the Georgian Dream in power, was saturated with the criticism, often unfounded, of the Georgian Dream. Leaders of the Georgian Dream were accused of a number of crimes, though the report did not provide any compelling evidence to prove the accusations.

For example, the Georgian Dream was accused of killing a toddler, Barbare Rafaliants, on the eve of 2012 parliamentary election; the report also presented as a proved fact that Vano Merabishvili was removed from the prison cell “with a sack pulled over his head” by Georgian law enforcement entities of the Georgian Dream government, although this fact has not been proved by any evidence. A journalist in the report openly accused the Interior Ministry of tampering with crime statistics. The state security service was accused of secretly recording opponents to the government and releasing those recordings. The author of the report accused the “entire state apparatus” of fighting against Rustavi 2.

According to the same report, socially vulnerable people “were doomed to death by a social policy of the government;” it showed emotional footage of and interviews with people experiencing hardships.

The report also touched upon the problem of Saqdrisi mine: “the entire state apparatus was mobilized when the Saqdrisi mine was blown up. On a personal decision of Bidzina Ivanishvili the

ancient mine, which German experts granted the status of monument of cultural heritage, was almost entirely destroyed.”

The entire report was built on unverified facts. Manipulation of footage and audio effects were also used; archive comments of the ruling team and Ivanishvili were placed only in a negative context. The 17-minute report did not contain replies of the Georgian Dream to accusations voiced therein; nor was the attempt seen of seeking such comments. It is worth noting that the report was aired on the eve of election and the Georgian Dream was not given an opportunity to respond to accusations right before the elections.

The abovementioned report is a flagrant example of subjective, biased, unbalanced reporting. This is an example of media outlet making largely unfounded accusations against a concrete political subject, thereby discriminating it; this is something that goes far beyond ethical principles of news production.

One report was dedicated to problems of businessman Giorgi Korakhashvili who claimed that the current government destroyed his business. At the very beginning of the report, the journalist said: “the government of Georgia launched the operation for strangling Algorhythm in 2013.”

In the report, businessman Giorgi Korakhashvili accused the investigative service of the Finance Ministry and the Prosecutor’s Office of exerting pressure and intimidating him. According to the report, the government bankrupted Korakhashvili’s companies. The recount of facts by the journalist in an affirmative manner was based on the narrative of the businessman alone. The journalist raised questions in the report without trying to seek answers to them; the journalist questioned the removal of lien on a concrete property by the court, but did nothing to inquire into the fact. Many grave accusations were made against the government in the report. Chief Prosecutor Irakli Shotadze was blamed of committing a concrete crime, but no comment in response to this accusation was provided in the report, nor was an attempt seen of reaching Shotadze or his press office for a comment. The entire report relied on the recount of businessman Korakhashvili; efforts to double check the facts with various sources were not obvious and unverified facts were presented as something which really happened. The report was one-sided and unbalanced.

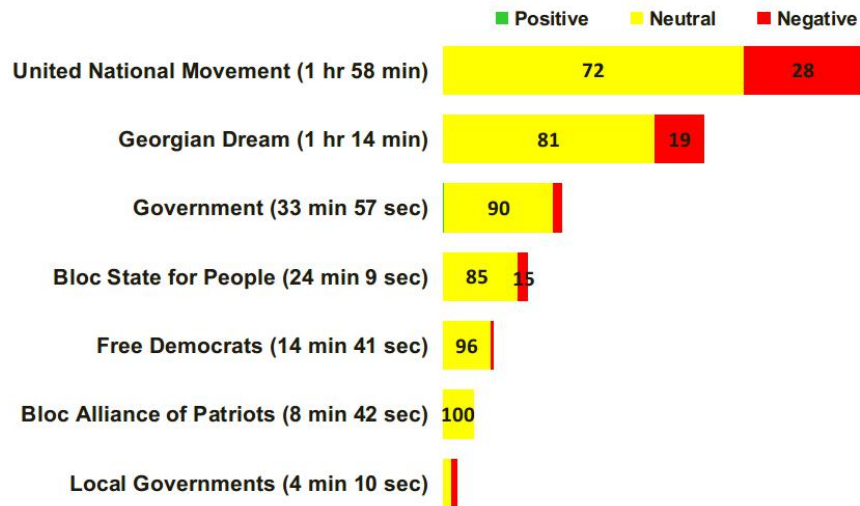
Imedi

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “Qronika” (aired every weekday at 20:00), “Qronikis Studia” (at 20:00 every Saturday) and “Imedis Dro” (at 20:00 every Sunday).

Quantitative analysis

Time Allocated to the Subjects on "Imedi" according to the tone (%)

(25 September- 2 November, 2016)



Imedi TV allocated most of its news broadcast time to the UNM, in contrast to the previous reporting period when the Georgian Dream was in the lead. The most positive coverage on the TV channel was received by the Georgian Dream (1%) whereas the most negative coverage, alike the previous reporting period, was received by the UNM (28%). The highest indicator of neutral coverage was seen in the reporting about the Alliance of Patriots (100%).

The major shortcoming on Imedi TV was unbalanced reporting.

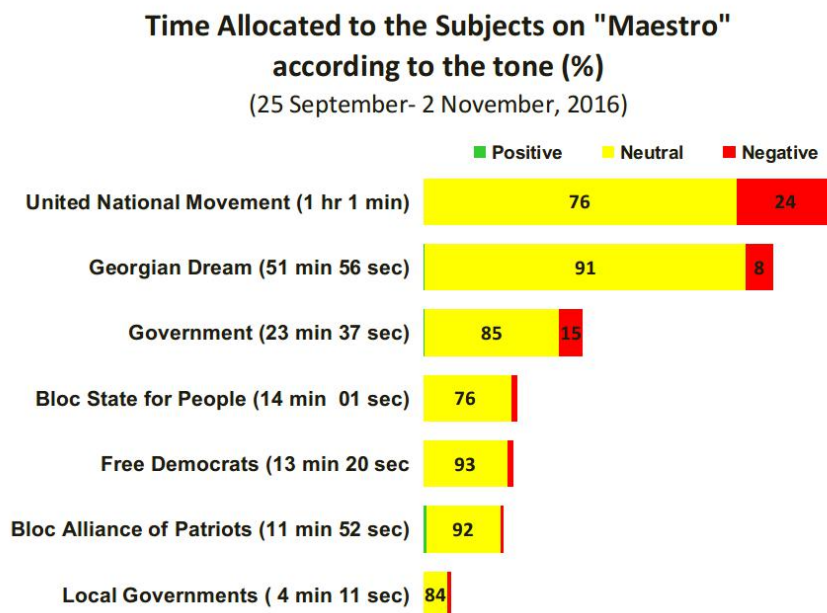
A report aired on 26 September covered the story of withdrawal of a segment of Free Zone members from the organization and accused the UNM and Mikheil Saakashvili of planning destabilization. Towards the end, the report contained a comment by Soso Shatberashvili, a representative of Leftist Alliance and former member of Shalva Natelashvili's political party, who accused Shalva Natelashvili of receiving black money and intending to participate in a coup scheduled for 8 October. Despite such a grave accusation, the report did not provide a comment of Shalva Natelashvili or a Labor Party member, nor was an attempt to obtain such a comment seen in the report.

Yet another material worth mentioning was a short footage with soundbite in which a Labor Party member (Zurab Sepiashvili) criticized Shalva Natelashvili. The leader of the Labor Party was portrayed unfavorably in the text of the presenter as well as in an interview of the respondent. Nevertheless, the material did not contain a comment of Natelashvili or his representative; nor was an attempt to obtain comment seen.

Maestro

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “Kontakti at 8 o’clock” (aired every weekday at 20:00).

Quantitative analysis



Maestro allocated most of its news broadcast time to the UNM. The most favorable coverage was received by the Alliance of Patriots – 4% of the time allocated to this subject. The most unfavorable coverage was received by the UNM (24%). The highest indicator of neutral tone – 93% of the allocated time - was observed in the coverage of Free Democrats.

The major problem in terms of ethical standards was unbalanced reporting.

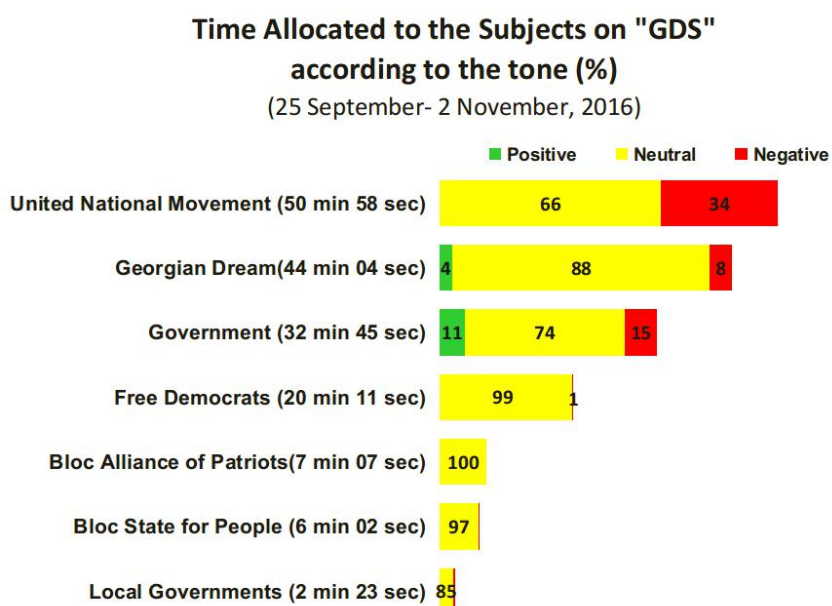
For example, a report introduced by the presenter as “Shalva Natelashvili’s UNM policy” contained comments of respondents alleging that Shalva Natelashvili cooperated with Mikheil Saakashvili; this was presented as a real fact without providing any proof save allegations of the opponents of Natelashvili. The report showed that during three years, Natelashvili’s wife was transferred around 100 000 Euros annually in one of European banks. The report did not contain a comment by Natelashvili’s wife, Bela Alania; nor was an attempt to obtain the comment seen although she was accused of committing an offence. The report only remarked that Natelashvili declined to comment, though for this particular report, such a remark cannot be considered sufficient to achieve a reasonable balance in the reporting.

In another report assessments were provided of disturbance and confrontation at one of polling stations in Marneuli on 8 October. In the report a representative of Paata Burchuladze’s political party accused the UNM in provoking the Marneuli incident and inciting religious conflict. The report neither contained a comment of the UNM nor showed an attempt to obtain one.

GDS

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “2030” (aired every weekday at 20:30).

Quantitative analysis



GDS allocated the largest amount of time to the UNM. It covered the government most favorably (11%). The leader among the political parties by unfavorable coverage was the UNM again, with the negative tone indicator standing at 34% of total reporting on this subject. The neutral tone was the highest – 100% of allocated time - in the coverage of Alliance of Patriots.

Instances of incomplete and unbalanced coverage were observed on GDS too:

“Revolutionary scenario; the mobilization of people and installation of tents – this is the plan discussed by Saakashvili and UNM members in the audio recording” – this is how the presenter of 2030 introduced the audio recording which was released on the Internet. The journalist mentioned only lightly that “the authenticity of this recording” was being studied by the state security service.

Throughout the entire report the journalist spoke affirmatively, presenting the audio recording and participants in it as a proven fact. The journalist never said who released the recording and where it was released. The journalist did not say that the recording was obtained illegally and that surreptitious recording of others’ conversations was a crime punishable under the law. The report did not provide an assessment of even a single impartial person, say, a lawyer, who would speak about the legality and the content of such recording. Nor did it say that it was the duty of the

government to establish who made such a recording and who released it. The report recalled other secretly recorded conversations which were released earlier, but it did not say that all those recordings were of conversations between members of political opposition.

The report was biased, presenting the UNM and Mikheil Saakashvili in a negative light. Mentioning lightly that the state security service was investigating the authenticity of the recording was not sufficient to make the report balanced, leaving the impression that such a mention was made for the sake of formality.

On 27 September, 2030 provided an extensive coverage of Bidzina Ivanishvili's meeting with journalists, which was held in Rustavi. Ivanishvili criticized Mikheil Saakashvili and the UNM; also made accusations against specific politicians:

“Machavariani is a member of this team and he had no other task but to steal votes, to steal them mainly from the population.”

“Natelashvili is a typical Kvarkvare, he received money from spies and traitors of Georgia; he was hiding in a basement for three days as he was threatened to be arrested and when, at the end of the day, I inquired about him, he was embraced and since then they are playing with Natelashvili.”

Although Ivanishvili openly accused the politicians of committing crimes, the report did not provide comments of either Mikheil Machavariani or Shalva Natelashvili in response to these accusations. The journalist did not say either that he made efforts to obtain comments from them. This report violated the balance as it is a serious problem when a concrete person is accused of committing a crime and media does not give that person an opportunity to use the right of reply.

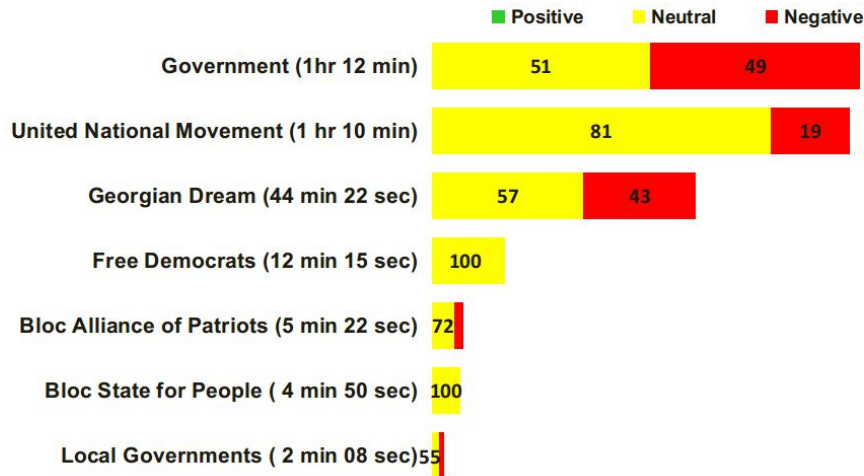
Tabula

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “Focus” (aired every weekday at 19:00).

Quantitative analysis

Time Allocated to the Subjects on "Tabula" according to the tone (%)

(25 September- 2 November, 2016)



Tabula allocated the largest amount of time to the government. Similarly to the previous reporting period, it did not provide favorable coverage to any of the subjects. In terms of negative tone, the leader was the government, with the indicator standing at 49% of total coverage of the subject. The neutral tone was most extensively used in the coverage of Free Democrats and the election bloc State for People (100% each).

Instances of unbalanced reporting were observed on Tabula.

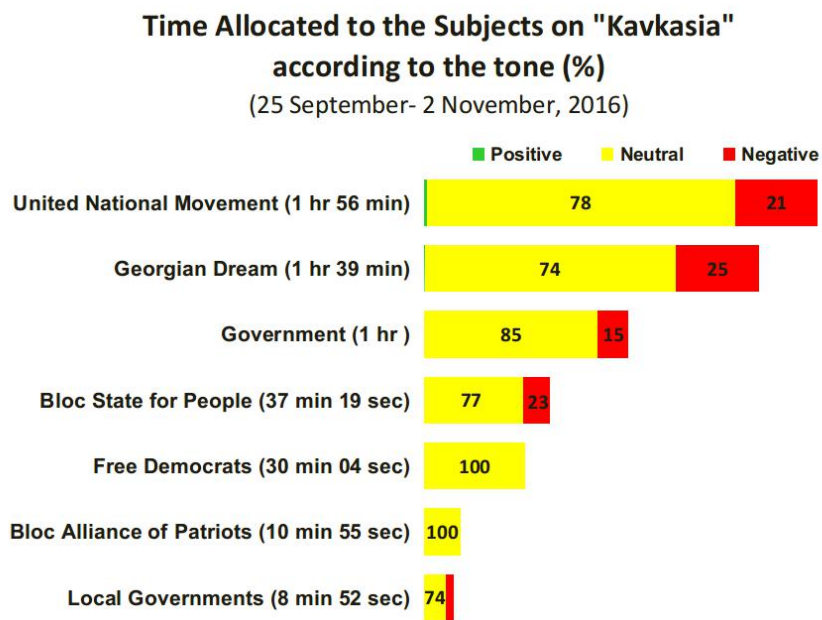
A short footage with soundbites, aired on 28 October, was dedicated to the interrogation of a UNM member who was accused of beating the governor of Samtskhe-Javakheti. It was recounted that the governor and persons accompanying him seized video camera from the UNM member and physically abused him. One of the leaders of the UNM accused the Georgian Dream of persecuting political opponents. Despite the accusation, there was no comment of Georgian Dream or the governor provided in the material; nor was the attempt of obtaining a comment seen.

According to a report aired on 3 October, a nongovernmental organizations presented a Report on Media Freedom in Georgia. The report covered the period from 2012 to 2016. The government was accused of closing down programs of the Public Broadcaster on political ground and exerting pressure on the TV channel. It was also said that the government was fighting against Rustavi 2 and “has managed to influence editorial policies of almost all large broadcasters, save Rustavi 2.” Despite this and other accusations, the report did not contain even a single comment of government representatives; the report relied only on one source; the balance in reporting was violated.

Kavkasia

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “Dghe” (aired every weekday at 20:30).

Qualitative analysis



Kavkasia spent the largest amount of time on the UNM. The most favorable coverage was received by the UNM and the Georgian Dream, with the indicator of positive tone at 1% of the total reporting on the subjects. The highest negative tone, alike the previous period, was observed in the reporting on the local government (26%). The most neutral tone was applied in the reporting on Free Democrats and Alliance of Patriots (100% each).

The major problem on Kavkasia was also a lack of balance:

“The UNM accuses the Georgian Dream and an employee of local executive body of committing a crime” – this is how the journalist introduced the statement by a UNM member, in which an employee of one of Tbilisi local bodies was accused of wrongdoing and agitating in favor of the Georgian Dream. According to the story, the employee (with the name and surname identified) presented his office with a forged medical certificate that he was ill while, in reality, participating in the election campaign of a Georgian Dream candidate.

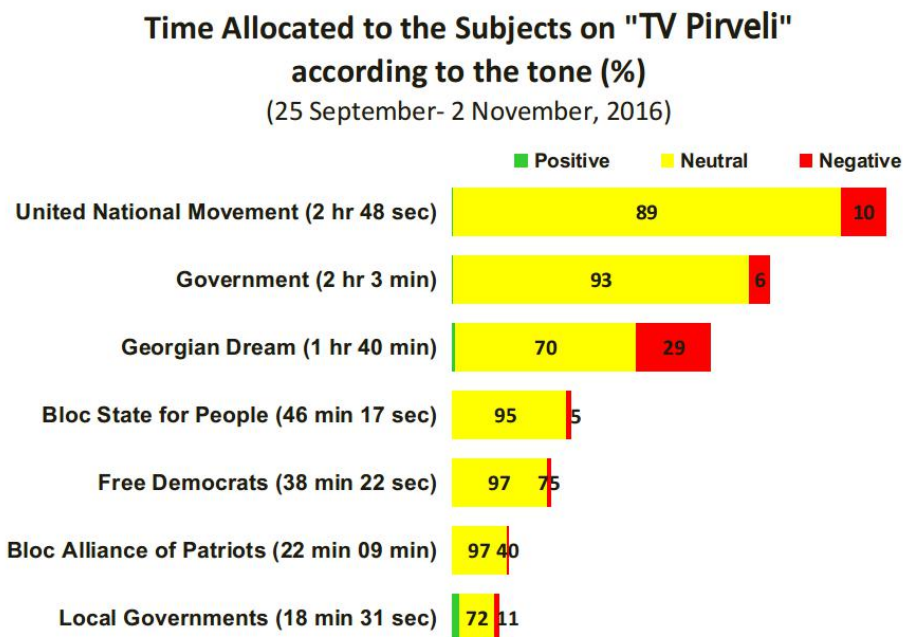
The employee was accused of committing a criminal offence – forging a document, while Tbilisi Mayor Davit Narmania was accused of using administrative resources in the election campaign. Kavkasia did not provide the audience with a reply to the accusations; the material did not contain a comment of the employee of local body or a representative of Tbilisi Mayor’s Office. The story was one sided and unbalanced.

In another material, at a news briefing, the head of local executive of Marneuli and a single-seat candidate from the Georgian Dream in Marneuli accused the UNM of staging provocations. These accusations were aired without any response from the UNM. The story was one sided and unbalanced.

TV Pirveli

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program (aired at 22:00).

Qualitative analysis



TV Pirveli covered the UNM most extensively. The most favorable coverage was received by the local government, with the indicator of positive tone at 17% of total reporting on the subject. The most negative tone was observed in the reporting on the Georgian Dream - 29% of the total coverage of this subject. The most neutral in tone was the reporting on Free Democrats and the election bloc Alliance of Patriots (97% each).

In the reporting period, TV Pirveli covered news mainly in the format of short footage with soundbites. Lack of balance in the coverage was the major problem on this TV channel. For example:

In a short footage with soundbites, a leader of National Forum, Ani Mirotadze, declared that the Georgian Dream, the UNM and the Free Democrats paid money for voted in Chiatura. According to Mirotadze, the company Georgian Manganese was behind all that endeavor. No comment of any of those accused was provided in response to the grave accusation voiced by Mirotadze; nor was

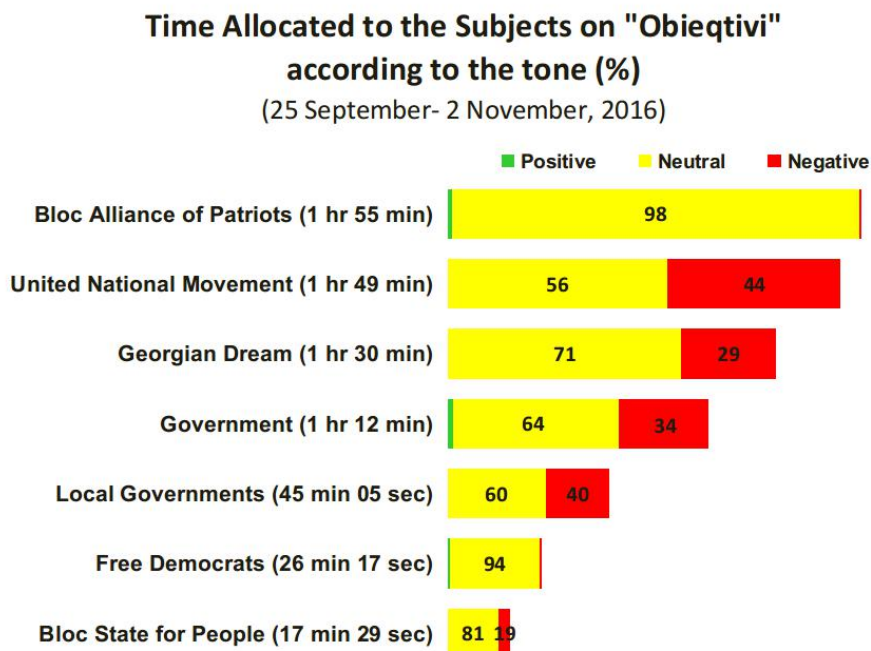
an attempt to obtain such comments seen. The story relied on one source; it was unverified and unbalanced.

Another short footage with soundbites, dedicated to depreciation of the national currency lari, contained a comment of UNM representative alone. Zurab Chiaberashvili put the blame on the Georgian Dream and its wrong policy for the depreciation of lari. He said that lari will continue to depreciate until the Georgian Dream is in power. It is unclear why the TV channel chose a politician from opposition to speak about the depreciation and why the viewers were not provided with a comment in response to the accusation or why was the UNM selected for the comment alone. The material was one sided and unbalanced.

Obieqtivi TV

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program (aired every weekday at 19:30).

Quantitative analysis



Much like the previous reporting period, Obieqtivi allocated the largest amount of time to the Alliance of Patriots. Let us recall that one of the leaders of this bloc, Irma Inashvili, is a co-founder of the Media Union Obieqtivi. The highest positive tone was applied in the reporting on Free Democrats (3%). The highest negative tone was applied in the coverage of the UNM (44%). The neutral tone was the highest in the reporting on the election bloc Alliance of Patriots (98%).

Frequent and positive coverage of members of the Alliance of Patriots by the channel was apparent.

A news program aired a 224-second-long soundbite of Davit Tarkhan Mouravi, something absolutely unsuitable for the news format, in which he, standing against an election banner, addressed the viewers and complained about the black PR launched against him. He criticized the UNM and the government with regard to surveys on party ratings. The material did not contain any comment in response to the accusations; the information was reported in an unbalanced way.

According to another short footage with soundbites, the UNM candidate for Mtatsminda single-seat constituency, Nika Rurua, accused the government of election fraud. According to him, the government tampered with votes to support its favorite candidate Salome Zourabichvili. The material did not provide comments of either Zourabichvili or the government. The story was unbalanced.

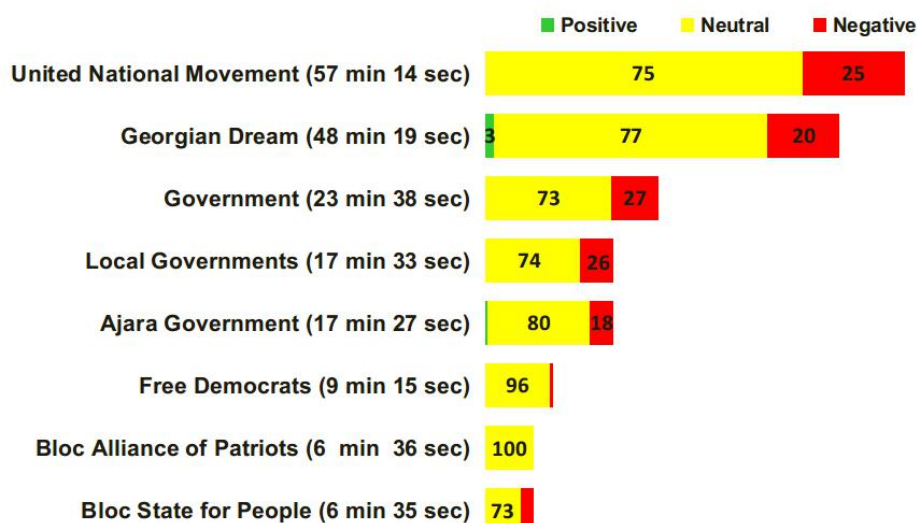
Adjara TV of Public Broadcaster

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program (“Main News at 21:00”).

Quantitative analysis

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

(25 September- 2 November, 2016)



Adjara TV covered the UNM most extensively, in contrast to the previous period when the Georgian Dream was in the lead. The highest positive coverage was received by the Georgian Dream with the indicator at 3%. The highest negative coverage was received by the government

and the election bloc State for People – at 27% each. Most neutral in tone was the coverage of the Alliance of Patriots – at 100%.

Alike other TV channels, the major shortcoming of Ajara TV was an unbalanced reporting:

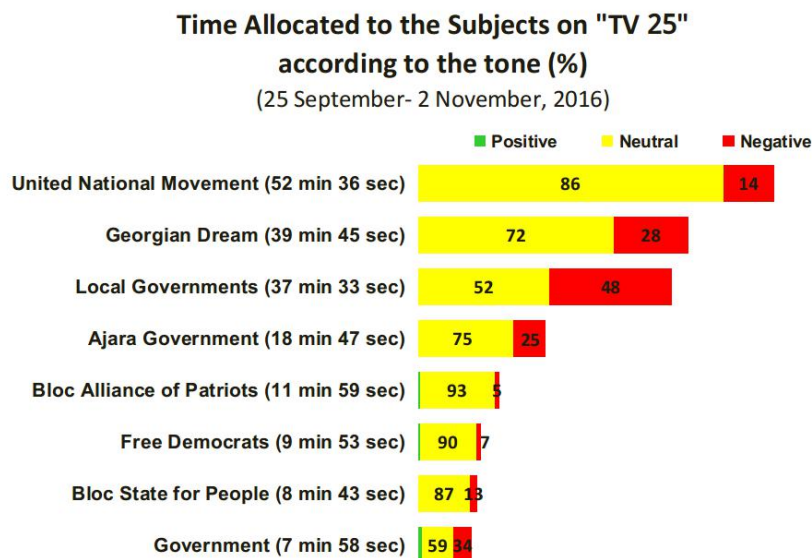
In a report aired on 29 September, the Young Lawyers’ Association criticized the local self-government of Ajara and accused it of spending monies for a concrete project in the run-up to the election. Although being accused of wrongdoing, representatives of neither the Mayor’s Office nor the City Council were given an opportunity to respond to the accusation.

A short footage with soundbites aired on 28 October was dedicated to a meeting of acting chairman of Batumi city council with population. During the meeting, the acting chairman of city council criticized the UNM and accused it of misleading the population. The comment of the UNM was not provided, nor was the attempt to obtain one seen.

TV25

In the reporting period, monitors studied the primetime news program “Matsne” (at 19:30).

Quantitative analysis



Alike the previous reporting period, TV 25 allocated the most of its time to the coverage of the UNM. The central government was covered most favorably (7%). The most unfavorable coverage was received by the local government (48%). The highest indicator of neutral tone was observed in the reporting on the election bloc Alliance of Patriots (93%).

This reporting period did not see unbalanced reporting on TV 25; though, there was an instance of violating ethical standards.

A short footage with soundbites covered a meeting of a member of Alliance of Patriots with residents of Makhinjauri, during which the single-seat candidate made a xenophobic statement: “Foreign citizens who come here and occupy our territories not with tanks but with money, such expansions – be they humanitarian or other - shall be prohibited.” TV 25 aired this quote without any explanation although the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters and in general, ethical standards call on media to fight against any phobia and if such statements are aired, to explain to society that this is bad and unacceptable.