ევროკავშირი საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia

# Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2021 Municipal Elections in Georgia

## Social Media Monitoring

## Final Report

15 July - 30 October 2021

THE GEORGIAN CHARTER OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

This report was prepared and published by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics with the support of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is solely responsible for the content of this report, which may in no way be taken to reflect the position of the EU or the UNDP.

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# The Goal of the Research

The primary aim of the monitoring of social media that was carried out for Georgia's 2021 local self-government elections was to find out what kind of information on ongoing political events social media users had access to on a daily basis. Given that Facebook is the most popular social network in Georgia, the monitoring focused upon finding out a) how the network is used by traditional media and electoral subjects as well as b) what type of content has had the greatest reach in open groups and on popular pages with hundreds of thousands of members or followers during the electoral period.

# Observation Method and Sampling

During the monitoring period, both quantitative and qualitative observations were carried out:

**Quantitative observation:**

- The Facebook pages of 6 TV channels
- The Facebook pages of 17 online media outlets

Qualitative observation:

- The Facebook pages of 22 government agencies
- The Facebook pages of 63 municipal authorities
- The Facebook pages of 18 parties and 15 party leaders

Qualitative and quantitative:

- 307 public Facebook pages
- 167 open Facebook groups

# Subjects of the Monitoring

- Various electoral subjects (parties, politicians and independent candidates running in the 2021 local elections)
- The Government (central, local, Adjara Autonomous Republic)
- The President
- Bidzina Ivanishvili
- Mikheil Saakashvili

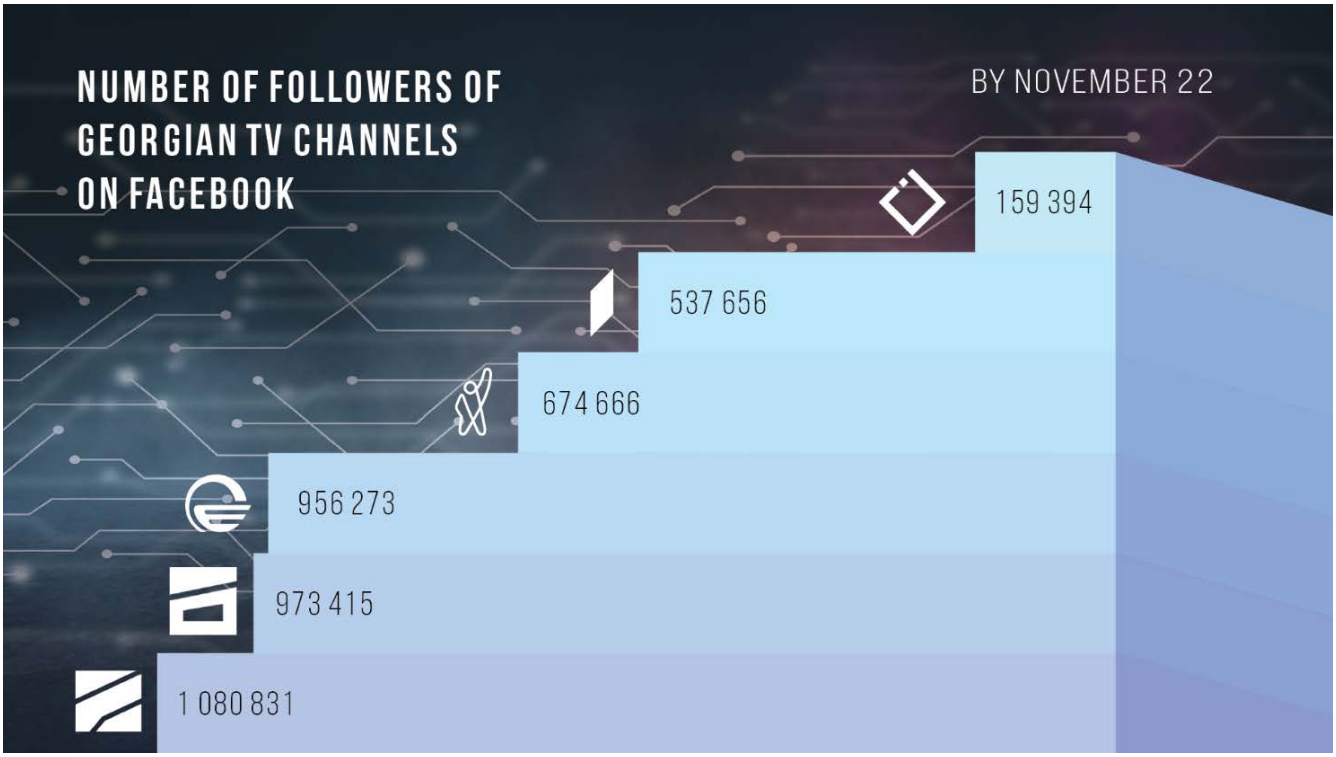
# Key Findings

- The information on political issues that TV channels disseminated on their Facebook pages was extremely polarized;
- The tone of the coverage of various electoral subjects published on the websites of online media outlets was relatively more neutral than that published on Facebook pages;
- Government agencies and members of the government mainly used Facebook pages to publicize their work and that of the government. There were also cases when high-ranking officials discredited the opposition on Facebook pages;
- The Facebook pages of political parties and individual politicians often featured insults or mockery of their political opponents;
- Entertainment, religion and sports had the greatest reach among materials shared on popular websites and open groups. Highly interactive materials were rarely available on political or electoral issues.

## Monitoring the Facebook pages of TV channels

The Facebook pages of 6 TV channels were selected for monitoring. The criterion according to which these national broadcasters were selected was their possession of a website from which they would actively share materials on their Facebook page with over 100,000 subscribers.[1]

1 For example, the Facebook page of TV Pirveli was not monitored because when monitoring began this channel did not have its own website from which it could share articles on its Facebook page.



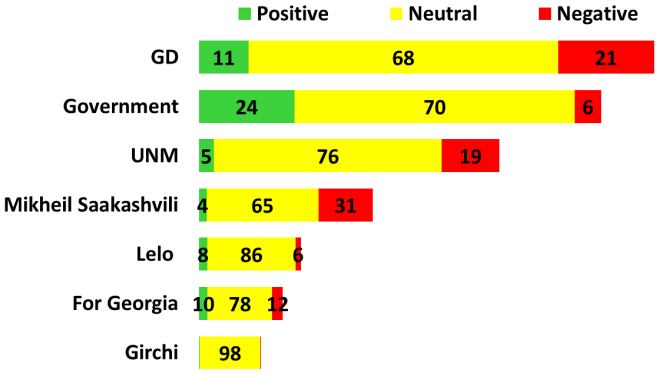

The monitoring of the Facebook pages of these TV channels revealed that, as was the case with their broadcasting, the information on political issues that they disseminated over Facebook was extremely polarized.

Extremely negative attitudes towards the ruling team were evident on the Facebook pages of Mtavari Arkhi and Formula 1, whereas a positive attitude towards the government (and a sharply negative one towards the opposition) was apparent in the information published on the Facebook pages of Imedi, Rustavi 2 and the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster (see appendix: Diagrams).

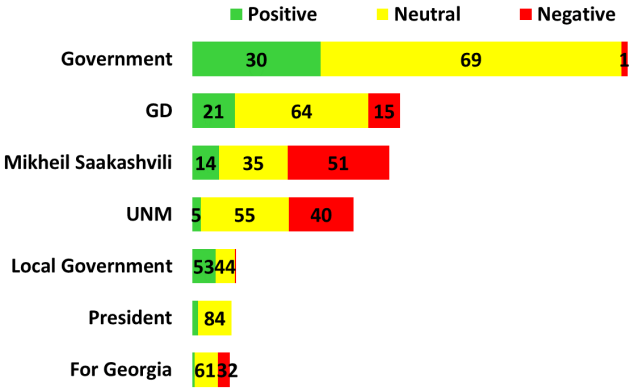
In the case of the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster and Adjara Television, quantitative monitoring revealed that, compared to broadcasting, the materials posted on their Facebook pages displayed a more positive attitude towards the central and local government and a more negative attitude towards the representatives of opposition parties.

Particularly positive attitudes towards the central government and local authorities were evident on the Facebook page of the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster:

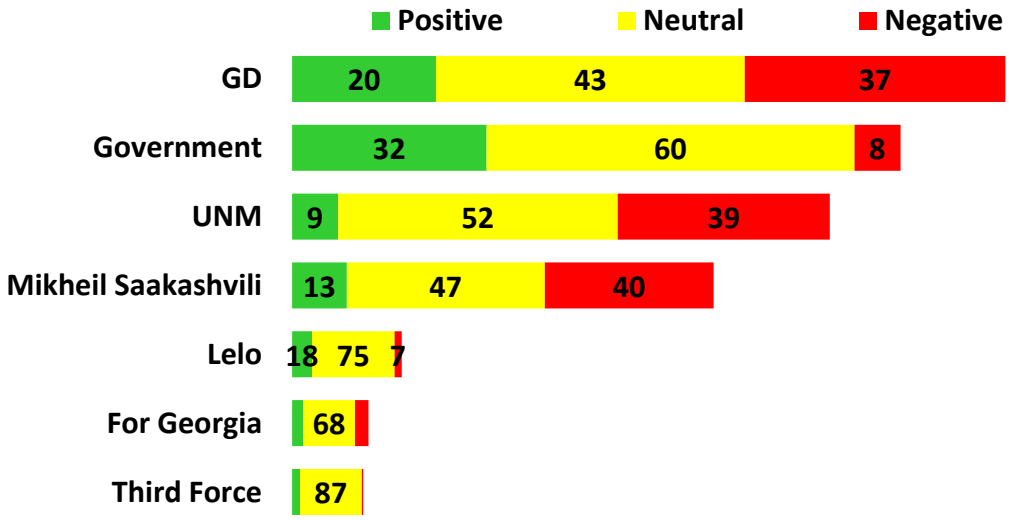
Tone of Coverage (%)
**GPB First Channel Broadcast**
(Main news programmes)
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage(%)
**GPB First Channel Facebook Posts**
15 July - 30 October, 2021

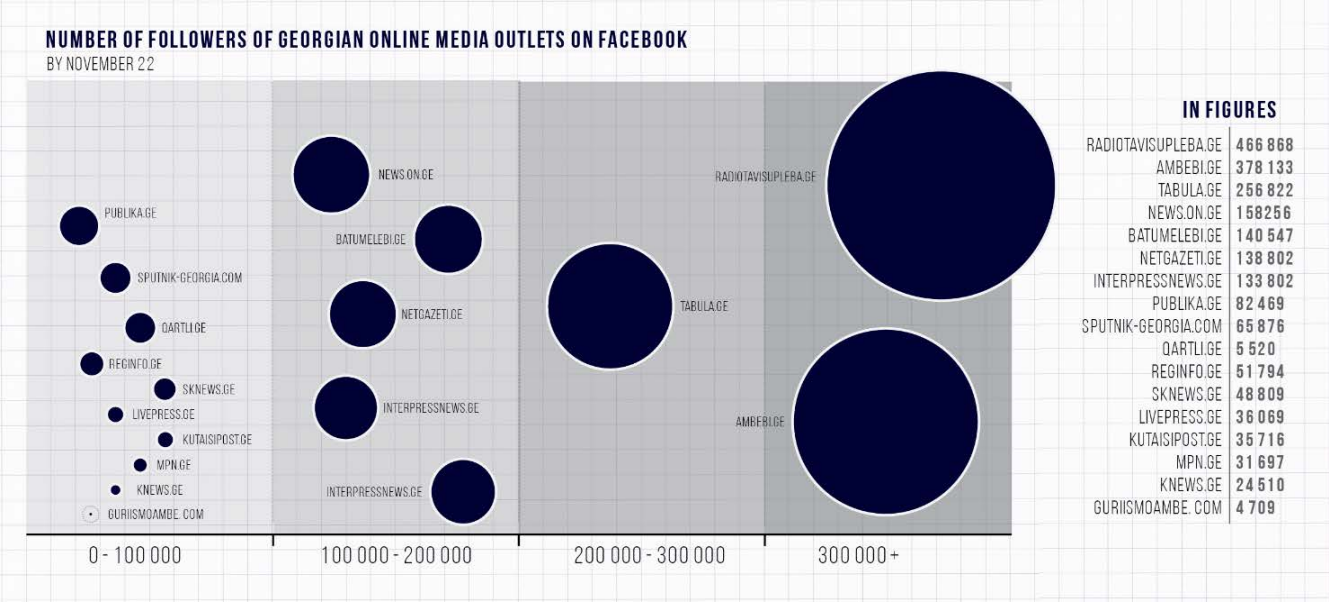



Tone of Coverage (%)
**GPB Channel One Facebook Videos**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



# Monitoring the Facebook pages of online media outlets

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics selected the Facebook pages of 17 online media outlets for monitoring.




When comparing the results of the monitoring of a) the information that online media outlets shared on their Facebook pages and b) of the articles that they simultaneously published on their websites, in most cases no significant difference could be detected.

Some media outlets frequently adopted a more neutral tone on their websites when discussing various subjects than they did on their Facebook pages.

The monitoring of Interpressnews.ge revealed that the website covered in the highest positive tone (48%) the local government, while the local government was not found among the 7 subjects, the most frequently covered by this page on social media. This may be due to the fact that Interpressnews.ge often places advertisements on the activities of the local government without proper marking, and does not share them through the social network.

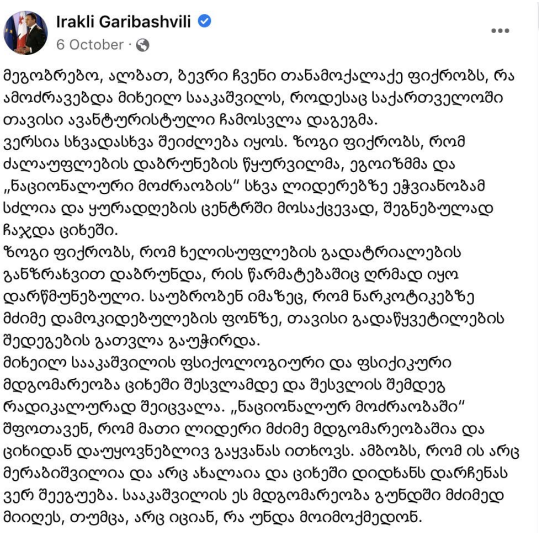
Despite slight differences, online media outlets could be said to have covered politicians and political issues on their Facebook pages much as they did on their own websites, particularly as most of what they published on Facebook were their own articles. (See also Georgian online media monitoring results in the report of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics on the website Mediamonitor.ge.)

# Monitoring the Facebook pages of members of the government and government agencies

The Facebook pages of the President of Georgia; of the Prime Minister; of the Speaker of Parliament; of the Government Administration; of 11 Ministries; of the Government of the Adjara Autonomous Republic and of its Head; of Tbilisi City Hall; of the Mayor of Tbilisi; and of 63 municipal administrations were selected for monitoring (as well as the pages of 3 ministers that were verified by Facebook during the monitoring period).

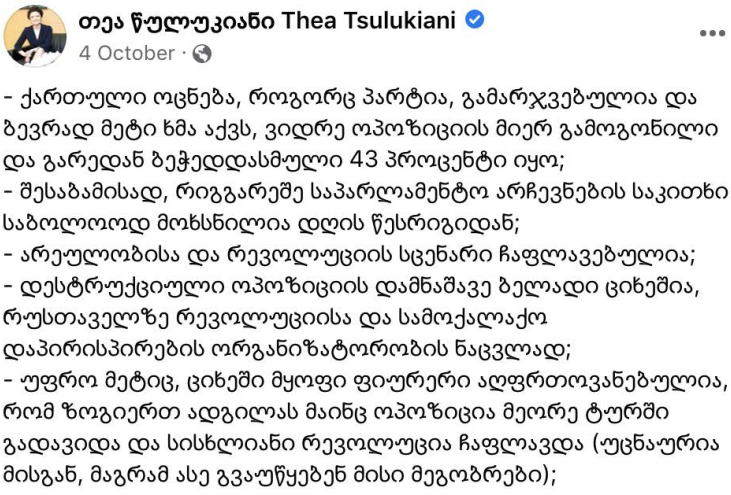
Government agencies and members of the government mainly used Facebook pages to publicize their work and that of the government, and mostly shared information on completed or ongoing infrastructural or social projects in various municipalities.

There were some instances of materials being published on the Facebook pages of the Prime Minister, of the Head of the Government of Adjara, and of the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth that contained hate speech or inaccurate information or sought to discriminate against or discredit the opposition and their leaders. For example, in an item posted on his Facebook page, the Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, accused Mikheil Saakashvili of suffering from mental health issues. On her own Facebook page, the Minister of Culture, Tea Tsulukiani, referred to Saakashvili as 'The Führer'.



Irakli Garibashvili
6 October ·

მეგობრებო, ალბათ, ბევრი ჩვენი თანამოქალაქე ფიქრობს, რა ამოძრავებდა მიხეილ სააკაშვილს, როდესაც საქართველოში თავისი ავანტურისტული ჩამოსვლა დაგეგმა.
ვერსია სხვადასხვა შეიძლება იყოს. ზოგი ფიქრობს, რომ ძალაუფლების დაბრუნების წყურვილმა, ეგოიზმმა და „ნაციონალური მოძრაობის" სხვა ლიდერებზე ეჭვიანობამ სძლია და ყურადღების ცენტრში მოსაქცევად, შეგნებულად ჩაჯდა ციხეში.
ზოგი ფიქრობს, რომ ხელისუფლების გადატრიალების განზრახვით დაბრუნდა, რის წარმატებაშიც ღრმად იყო დარწმუნებული. საუბრობენ იმაზეც, რომ წარკოტიკებზე მძიმე დამოკიდებულების ფონზე, თავისი გადაწყვეტილების შედეგების გათვლა გაუჭირდა.
მიხეილ სააკაშვილის ფსიქოლოგიური და ფსიქიკური მდგომარეობა ციხეში შესვლამდე და შესვლის შემდეგ რადიკალურად შეიცვალა. „ნაციონალურ მოძრაობაში" შფოთავენ, რომ მათი ლიდერი მძიმე მდგომარეობაშია და ციხიდან დაუყოვნებლივ გაყვანას ითხოვს. ამბობს, რომ ის არც მერაბიშვილია და არც ახალაია და ციხეში დიდხანს დარჩენას ვერ შეეგუება. სააკაშვილის ეს მდგომარეობა გუნდში მძიმედ მიიღეს, თუმცა, არც იციან, რა უნდა მოიმოქმედონ.

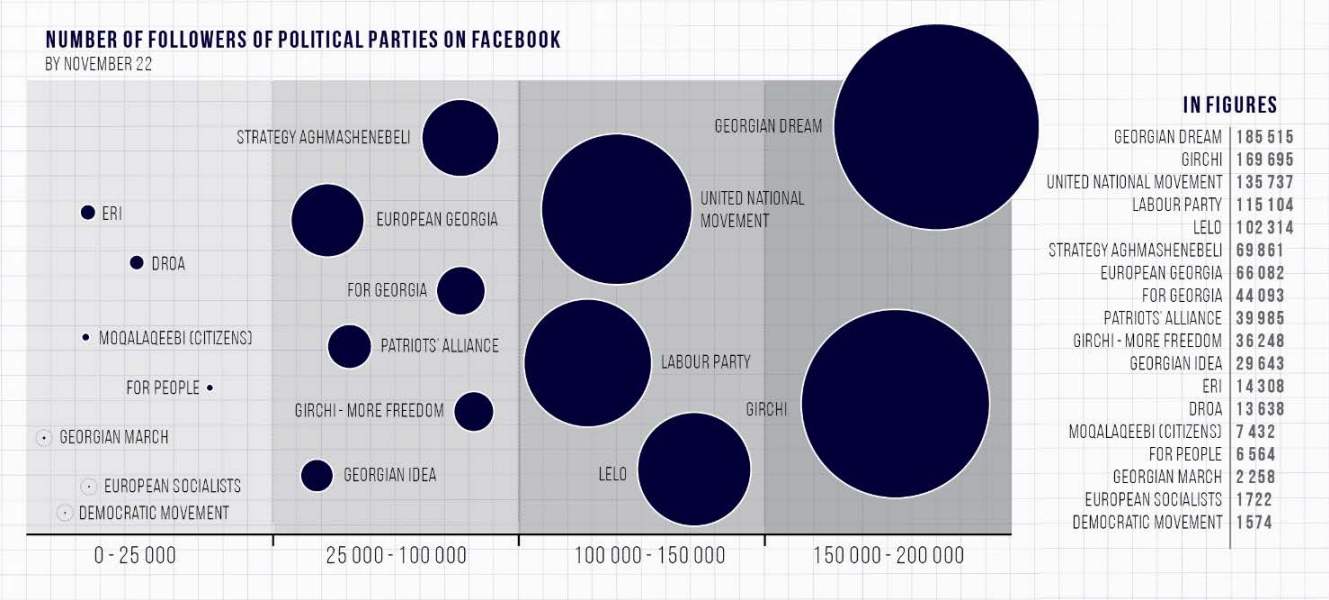


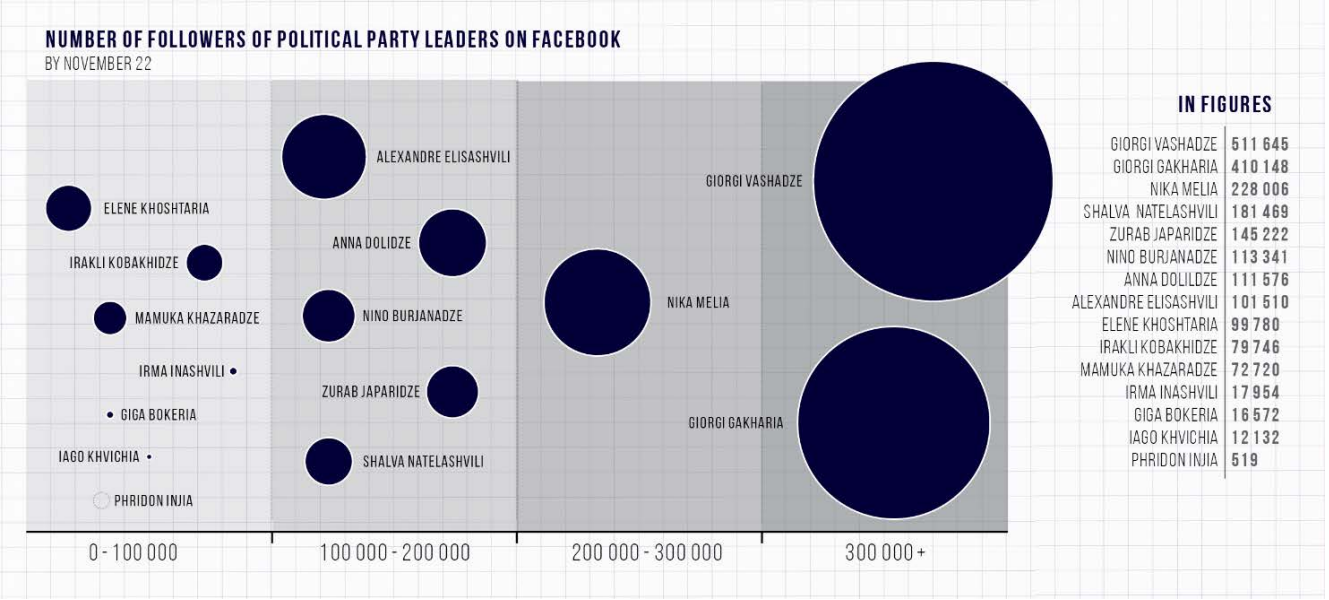
თეა წულუკიანი Thea Tsulukiani
4 October ·

- ქართული ოცნება, როგორც პარტია, გამარჯვებულია და ბევრად მეტი ხმა აქვს, ვიდრე ოპოზიციის მიერ გამოგონილი და გარედან ბეჭედდასმული 43 პროცენტი იყო;
- შესაბამისად, რიგგარეშე საპარლამენტო არჩევნების საკითხი საბოლოოდ მოხსნილია დღის წესრიგიდან;
- არეულობისა და რევოლუციის სცენარი ჩაფლავებულია;
- დესტრუქციული ოპოზიციის დამნაშავე ბელადი ციხეშია, რუსთაველზე რევოლუციისა და სამოქალაქო დაპირისპირების ორგანიზატორობის ნაცვლად;
- უფრო მეტიც, ციხეში მყოფი ფიურერი აღფრთოვანებულია, რომ ზოგიერთ ადგილას მაინც ოპოზიცია მეორე ტურში გადავიდა და სისხლიანი რევოლუცია ჩაფლავდა (უცნაურია მისგან, მაგრამ ასე გვაუწყებენ მისი მეგობრები);

# Monitoring the Facebook pages of political parties and politicians

The official Facebook pages of the 18 political parties that were most frequently covered by the Georgian media during the 2020-2021 monitoring period, as well as those of their leaders, were selected for monitoring.[2]




The Facebook pages of political parties and individual politicians often published insulting and mocking materials against their political opponents. The monitoring repeatedly encountered cases of severe personal harassment of opponents, but it should be noted that instances of hate speech, incitement to violence or intentional misinformation were rare.

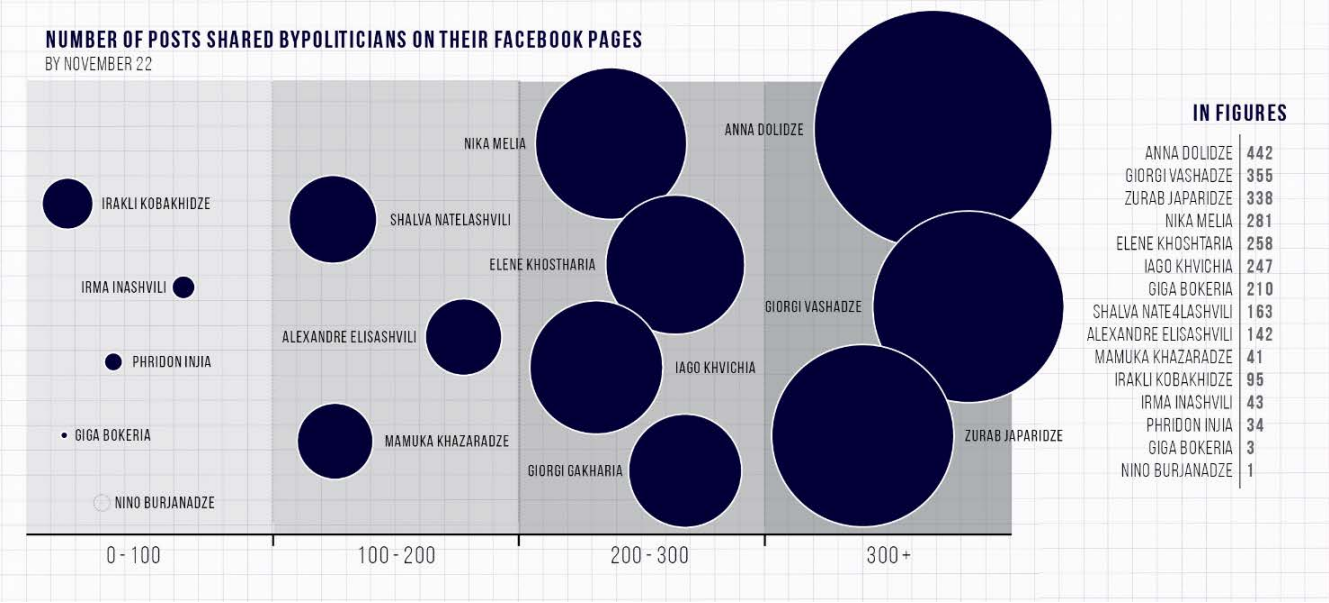
2 Note: Only the Facebook pages of the leaders of 15 of these 18 parties were selected, as the leaders of the Eri, Georgian March and Georgian Idea parties had no officially verified public Facebook pages during the monitoring period.

During the second round of the elections, the sharing of particularly insulting and discriminatory posts against political opponents under the hashtag 'natsobasirtskhvilia' (Supporting UNM is shameful) became more frequent on the ruling party's Facebook page.

Statements containing hate speech, homophobic terminology or deliberate misinformation, including anti-vaccination propaganda, were found on the Facebook page of the Georgian Idea party. Homophobic and anti-Western messages and video addresses by Levan Vasadze, chairman of the Eri party, were shared on the latter party's Facebook page.

Ana Dolidze, the leader of the 'For the People' party, accused the UNM of being behind attempts to troll her online and posted screenshots of various insulting and misogynistic comments she had received on her Facebook page. (Dolidze did not, however, provide any evidence of the alleged connection between the authors of these comments and the UNM.)

On his Facebook page, the leader of the Labour Party, Shalva Natelashvili, posted a sexist statement of female MEPs ('trembling as if they had just had an orgasm').

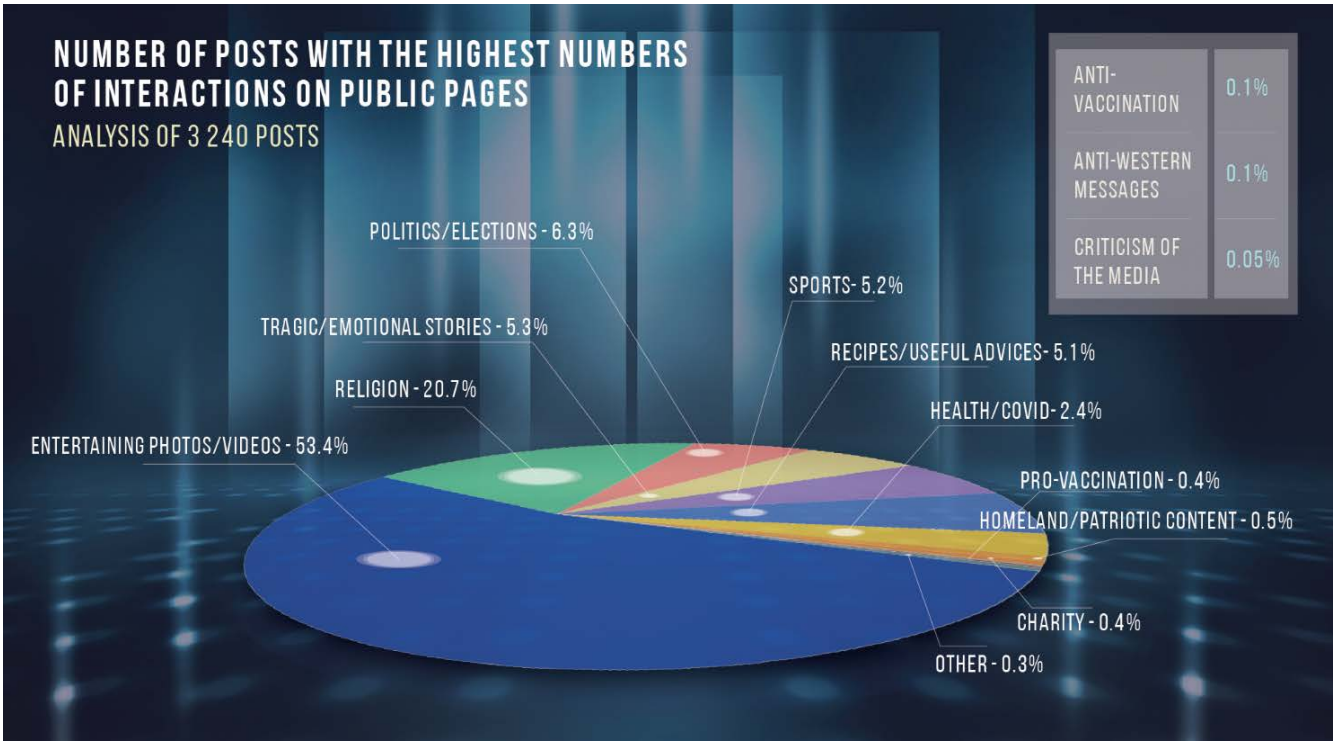



## Monitoring popular Facebook pages and open groups

Various Facebook pages that were popular with a large number of users and yet did not belong to someone or to a commercial or legal entity were also selected for monitoring. The analytical program 'Crowd Tangle' found 307 popular pages with over 40,000 followers when monitoring began, most of which turned out to be pages on entertainment, humour, religion or sport.

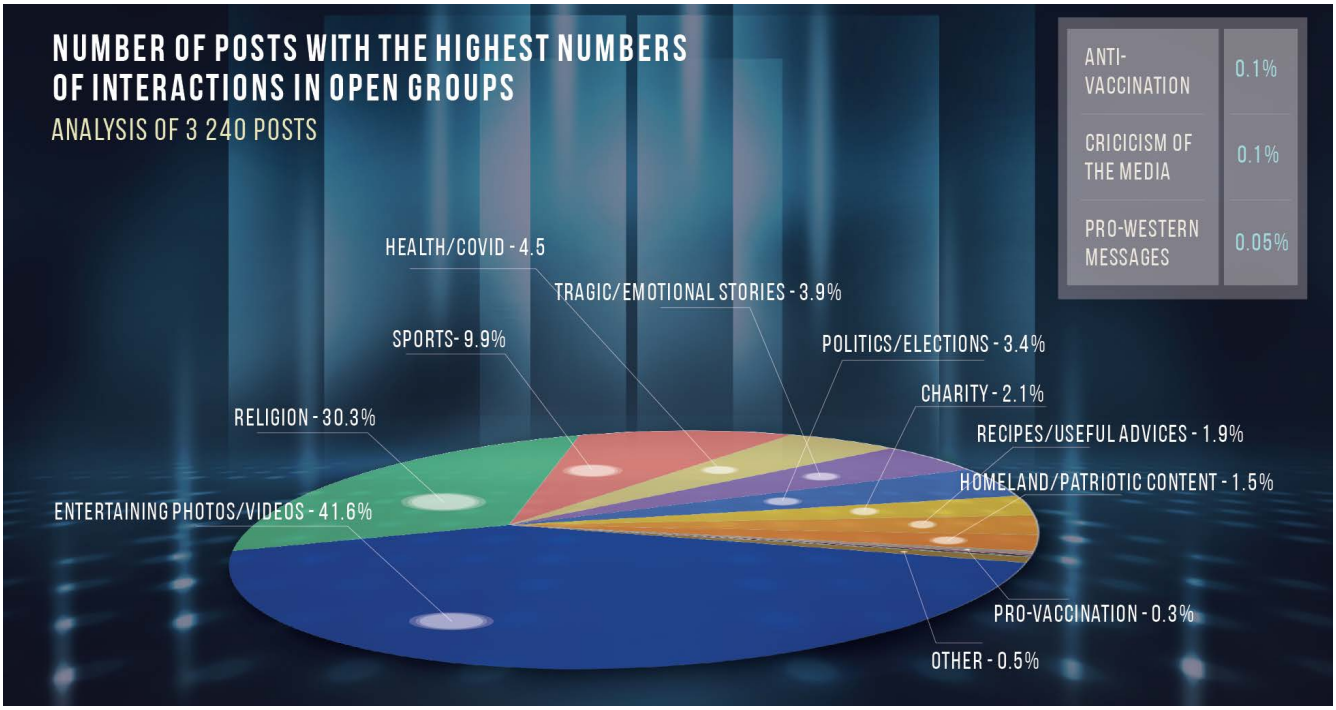
In addition to these popular pages, several open Facebook groups were also selected for monitoring. 'Crowd Tangle' found 167 open groups with over 40,000 followers when monitoring began, some of which were political in nature but others also thematic or non-thematic.

The items shared on these popular sites and open groups that enjoyed the highest levels of interaction were rarely about politics or the elections. On popular pages, daily only 6.3% of the most interactive material concerned politics or politicians—and in the case of open groups, barely 3.4%.




Entertainment, religion, sport and other topics attracted the greatest numbers of users to popular sites and open groups during the monitoring period.

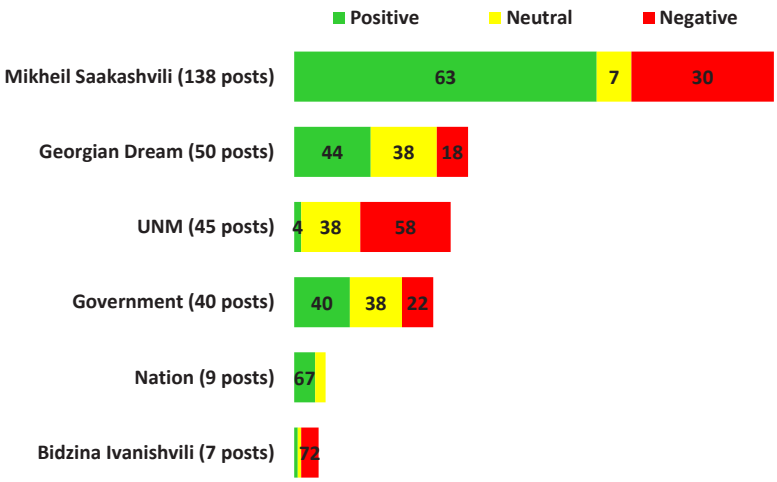
Materials on politicians were shared fragmentarily and mostly neutrally. Among the political pages, only a few outspoken supporters of the ruling party were identified (e.g. 'Mikhail Ukrainologist', 'Bidzina Ivanisvhili for Georgia'), often publishing critical and often offensive materials against opposition politicians. However, the materials they shared were quite rare among the most interactive materials.




It is noteworthy that the posts shared by these pages reached a greater number of users during the second round of the elections—a period during which the sharing of posts related to politicians, especially former President Mikheil Saakashvili, became more frequent among users on various popular pages.

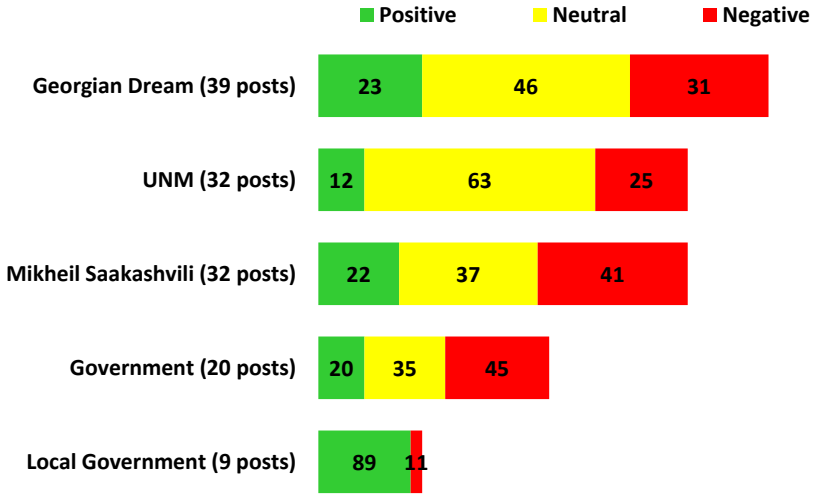
Materials related to politics and politicians tended to be fragmentary and inconsistent, a trend that was reflected in the tone of coverage of the monitored subjects: despite there being many positive posts about ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili, there were at the same time many negative ones about the United National Movement; and just as there were many positive items about the Georgian Dream, there were also many negative ones about Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Tone of Coverage (%)
**in media products shared on 307 most popular pages**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Items criticizing politicians were relatively prevalent in open groups. Only the Tbilisi municipal authorities enjoyed a high level of positive coverage, as users repeatedly shared posts about the Mayor, Kakha Kaladze, referring not to his political but to his personal life and creating a positive attitude towards this electoral subject of the monitoring.

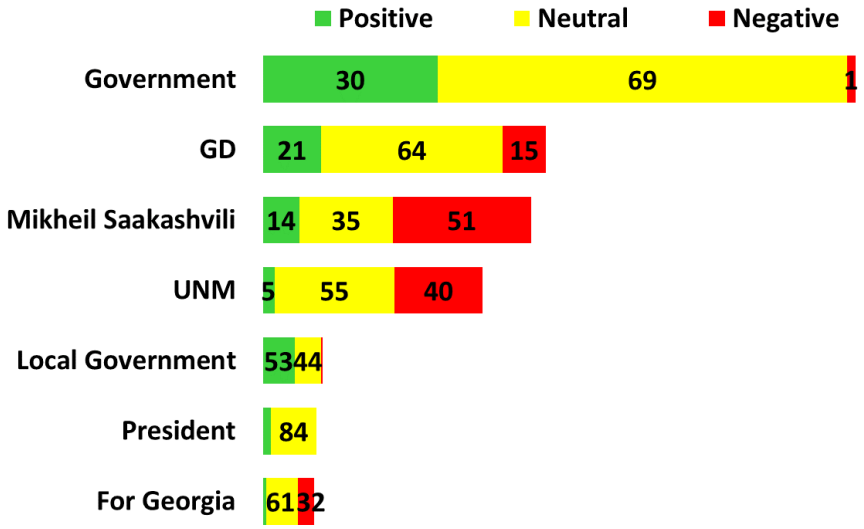
Tone of Coverage(%)
**in media products shared on 167 open groups**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



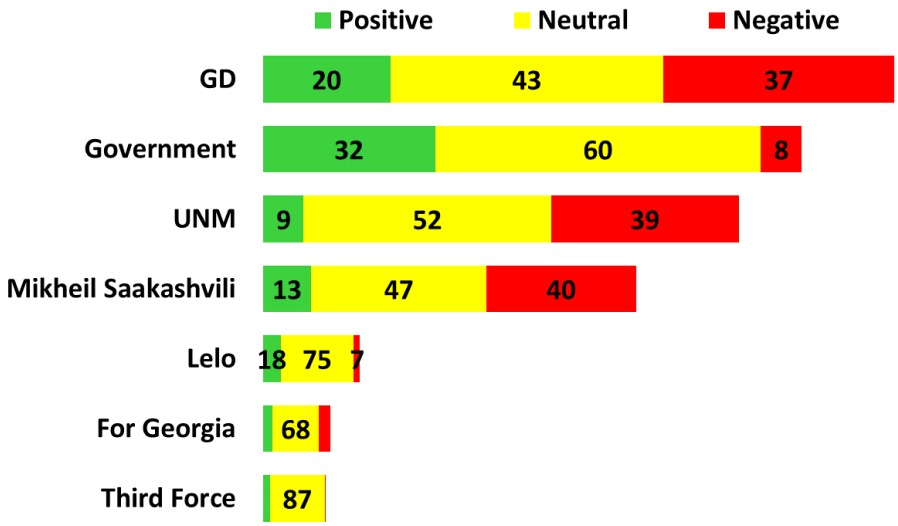

Among the materials that enjoyed the highest reach among users on public pages and open groups, almost no hate speech, calls to violence or deliberate misinformation was observed.

# Charts

Tone of Coverage(%)
**GPB First Channel Facebook Posts**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



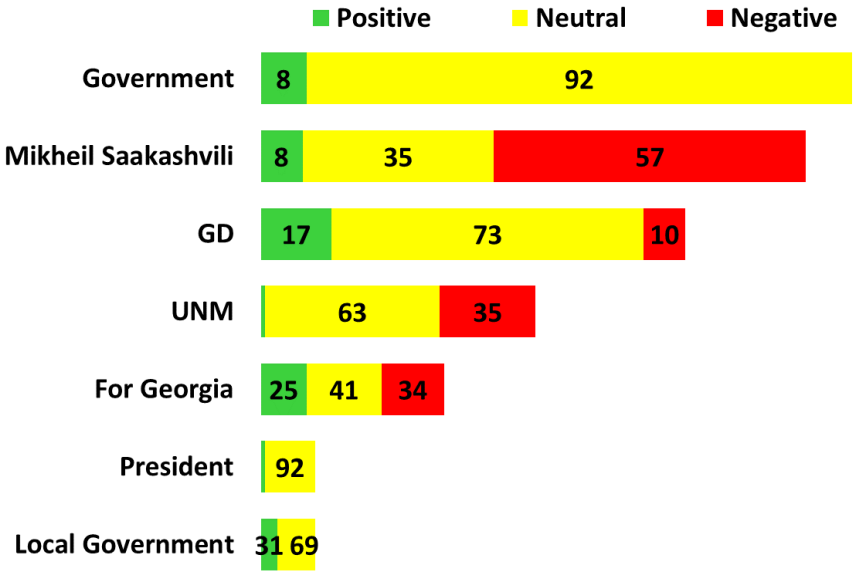

Tone of Coverage (%)
**GPB First Channel Facebook Vodeos**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage(%)

**Rustavi-2 Facebook Posts**

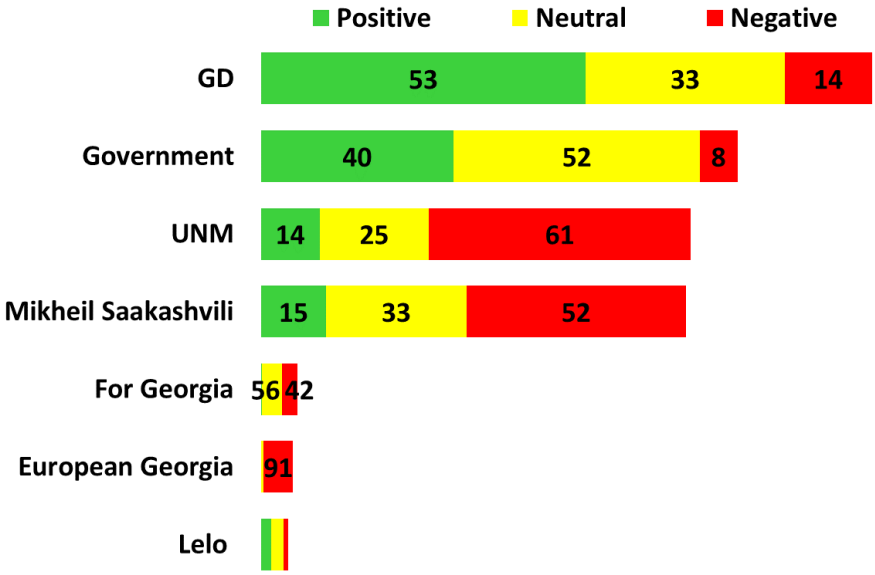
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage (%)

**Rustavi-2 Facebook Videos**

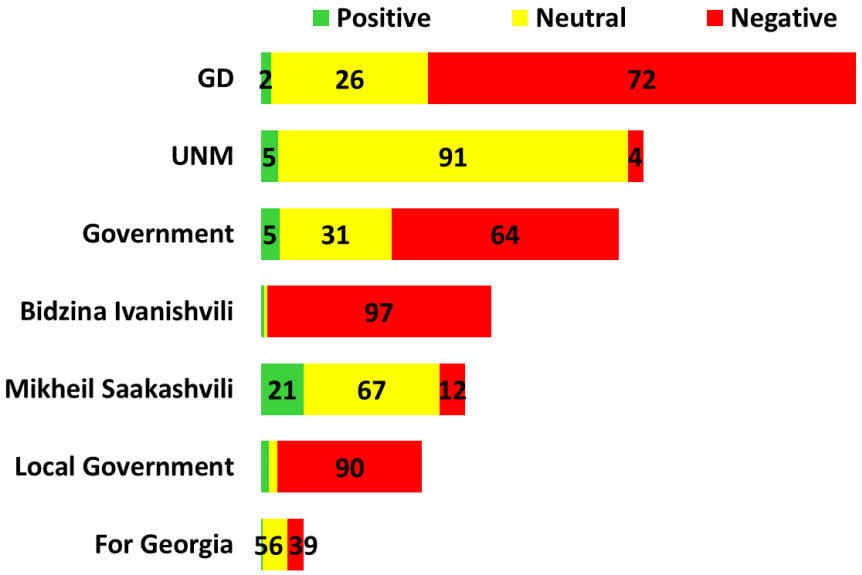
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

**Mtavari Arkhi Facebook Posts**

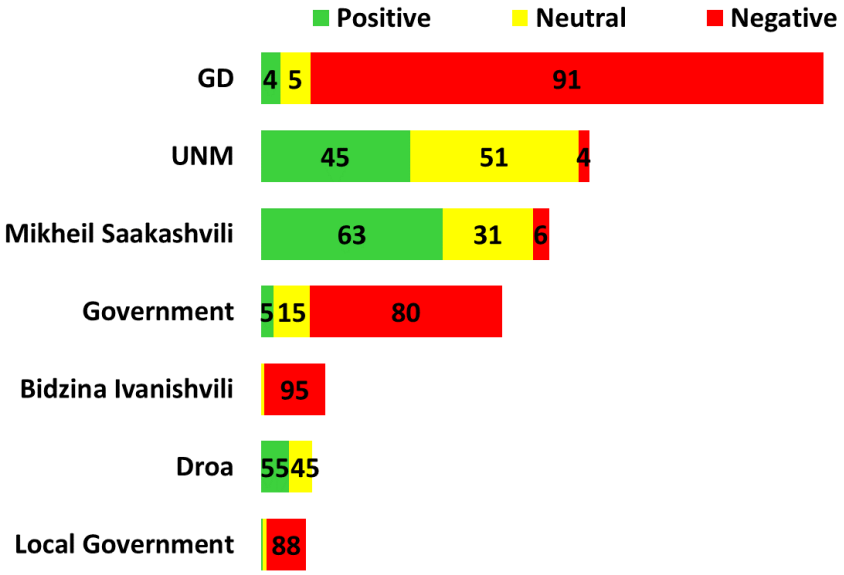
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage (%)

**Mtavari Arkhi Facebook Videos**

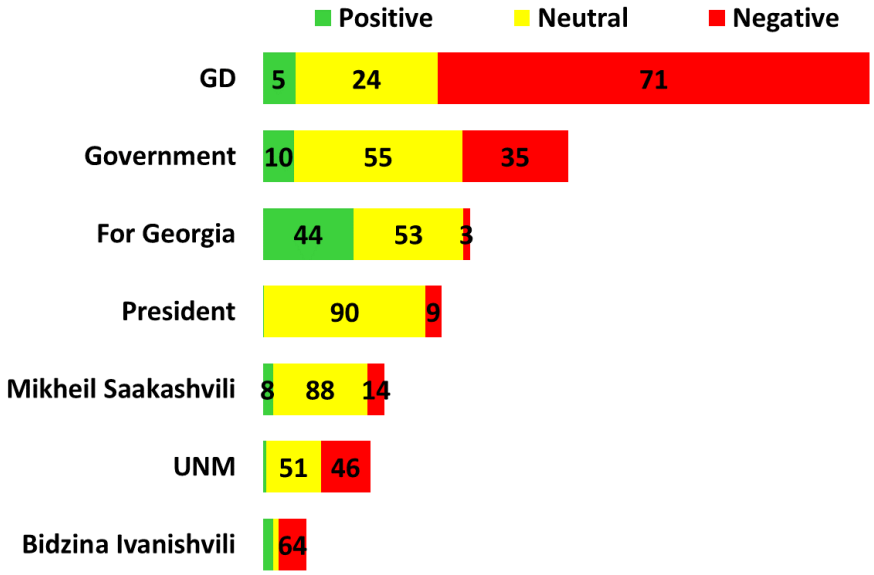
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

**Formula TV Facebook Posts**

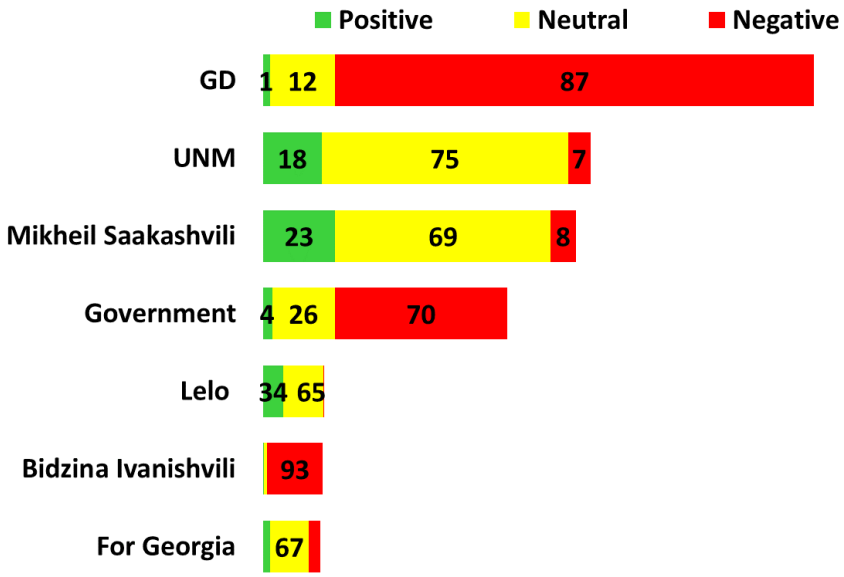
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage (%)

**Formula TV Facebook Videos**

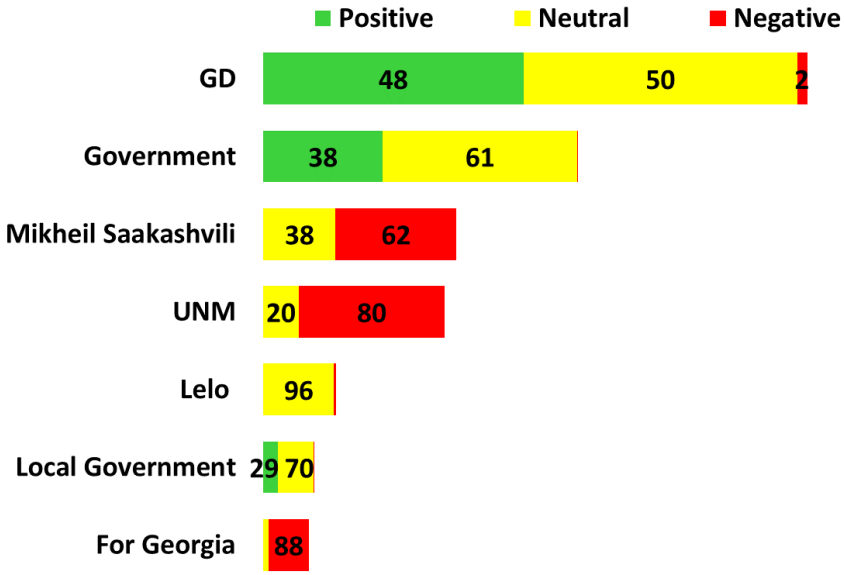
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

**Imedi TV Facebook Posts**

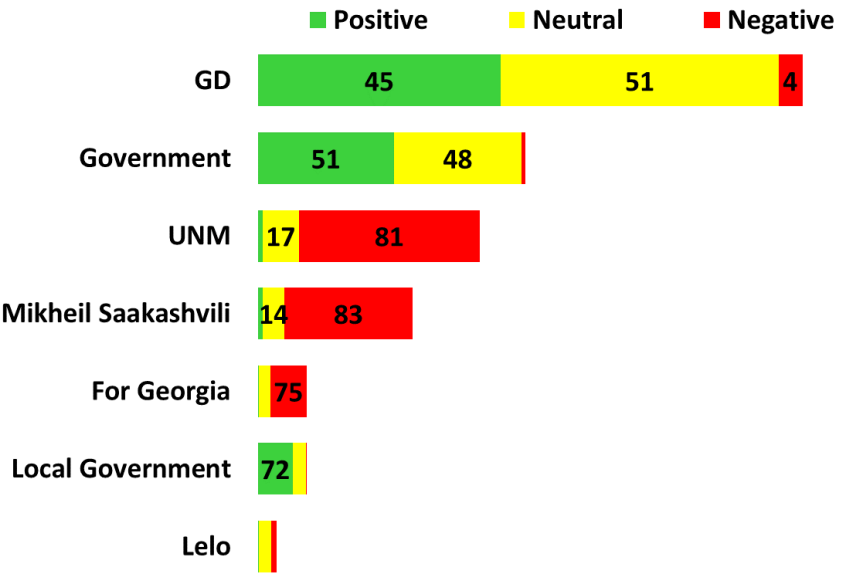
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage (%)

**Imedi TV Facebook Videos**

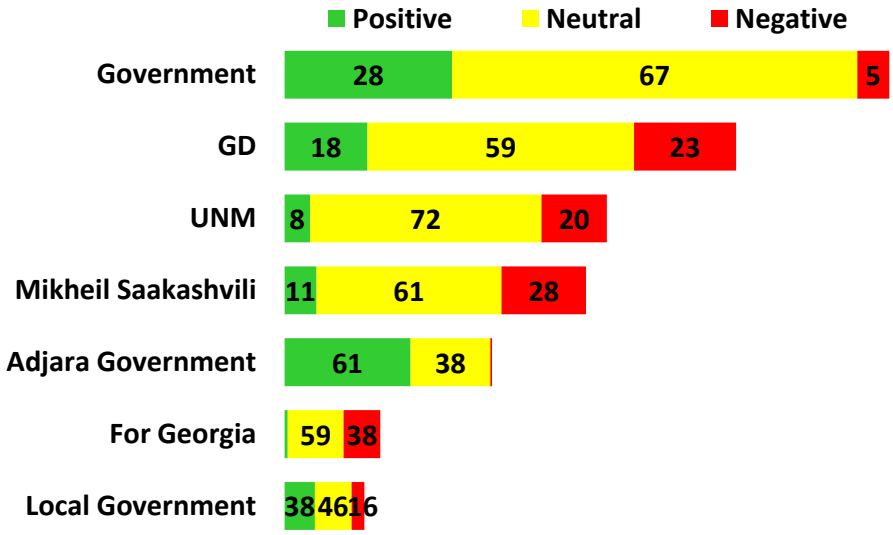
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

**Adjara TV (GPB) Facebook Posts**

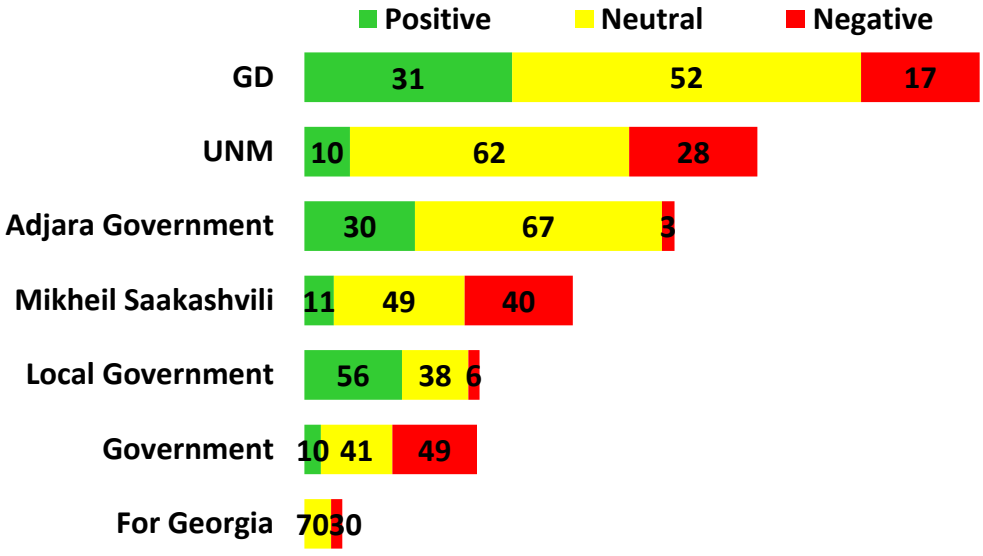
15 July - 30 October, 2021



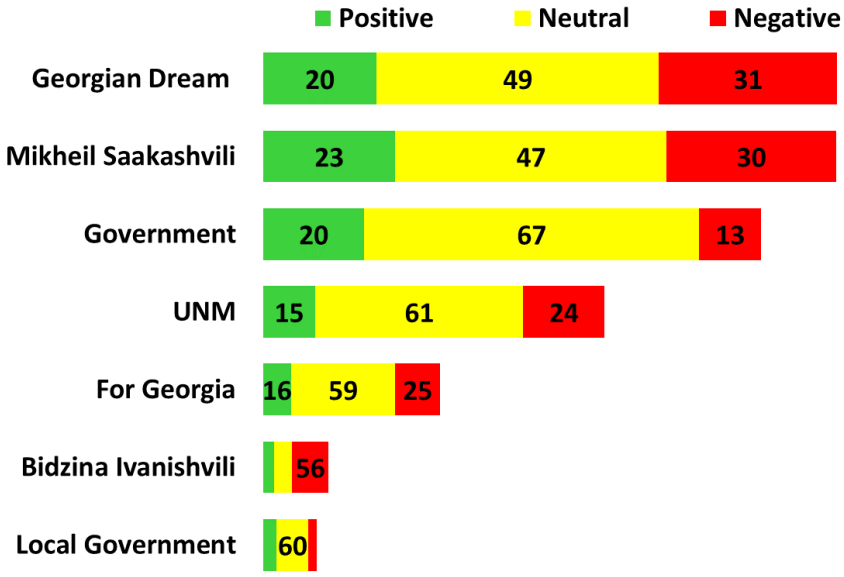

Tone of Coverage (%)

**Adjara TV (GPB) Facebook Videos**

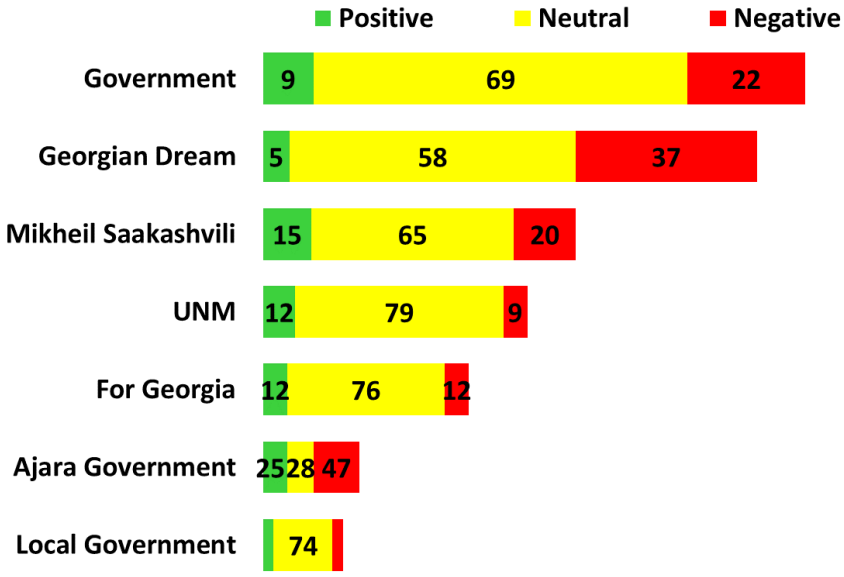
15 July - 30 October, 2021



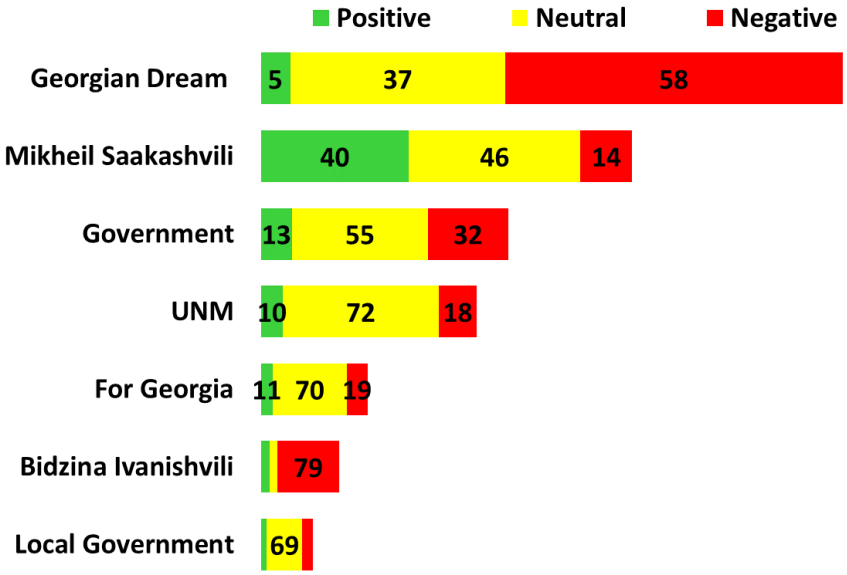
Tone of Coverage (%)
**ambebi.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



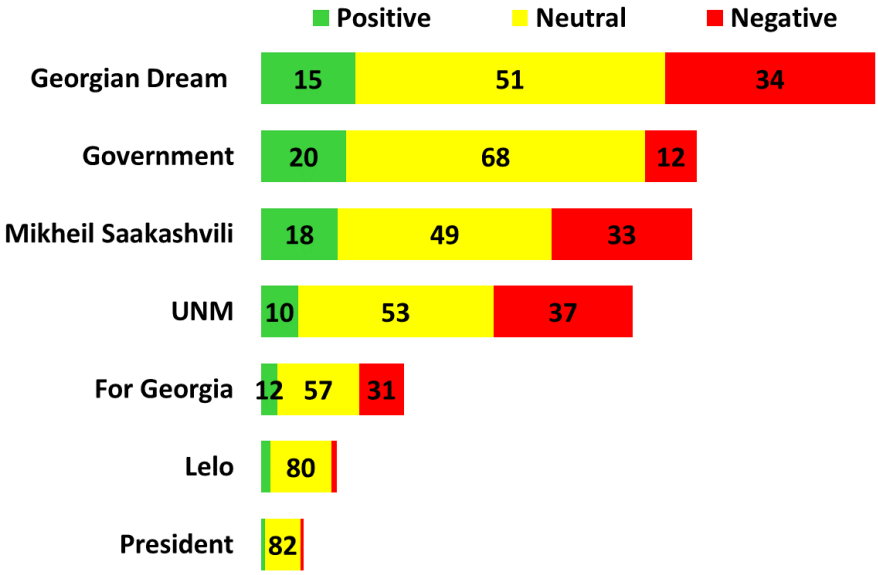

Tone of Coverage (%)
**batumelebi.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)
**guriismoambe.com Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



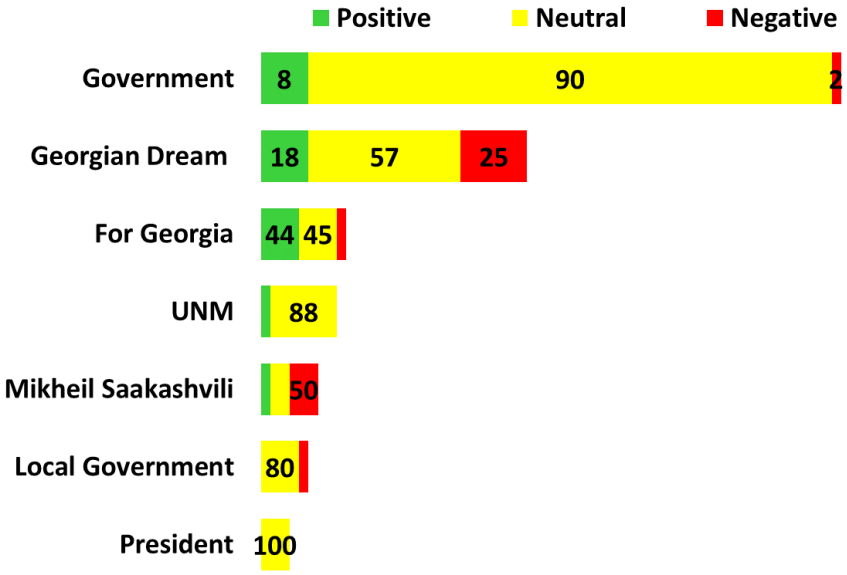

Tone of Coverage (%)
**interpressnews.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

**knews.ge Facebook Page**

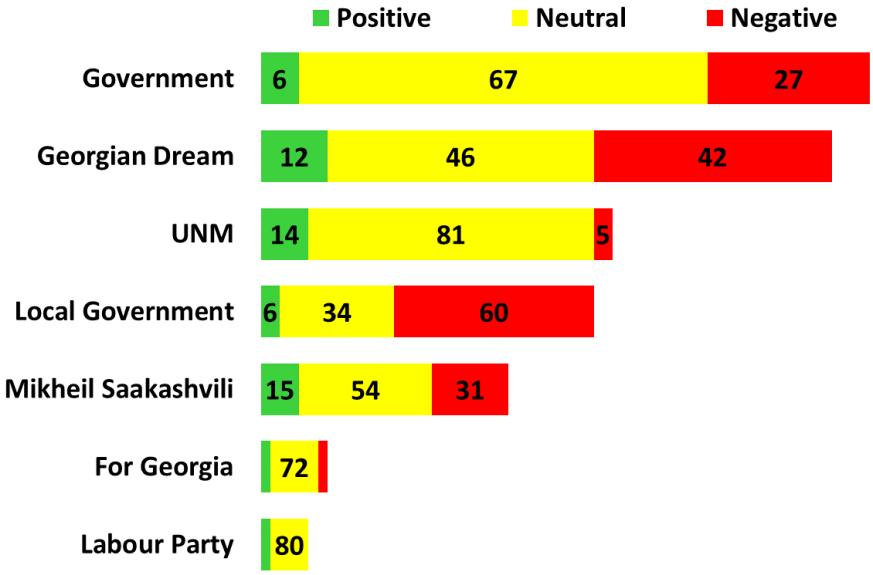
15 July - 30 October, 2021



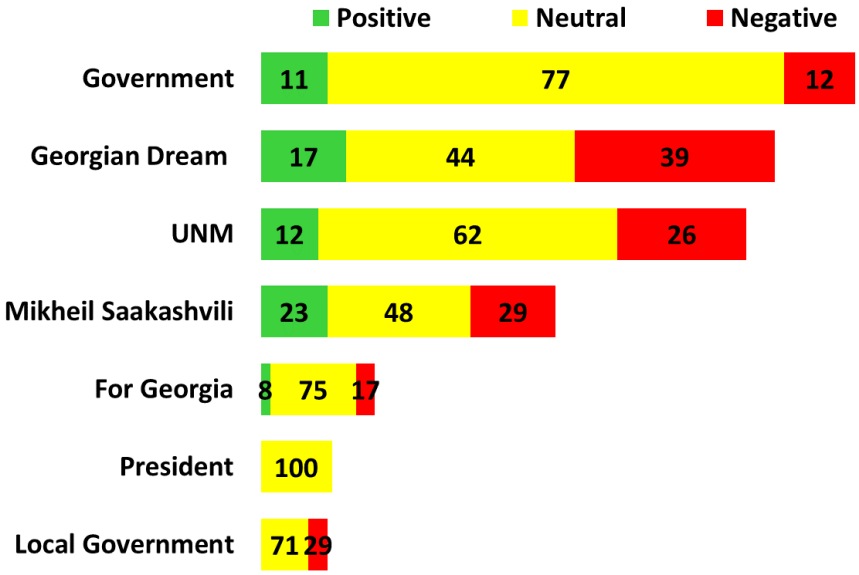

Tone of Coverage (%)

**kutaisipost.ge Facebook Page**

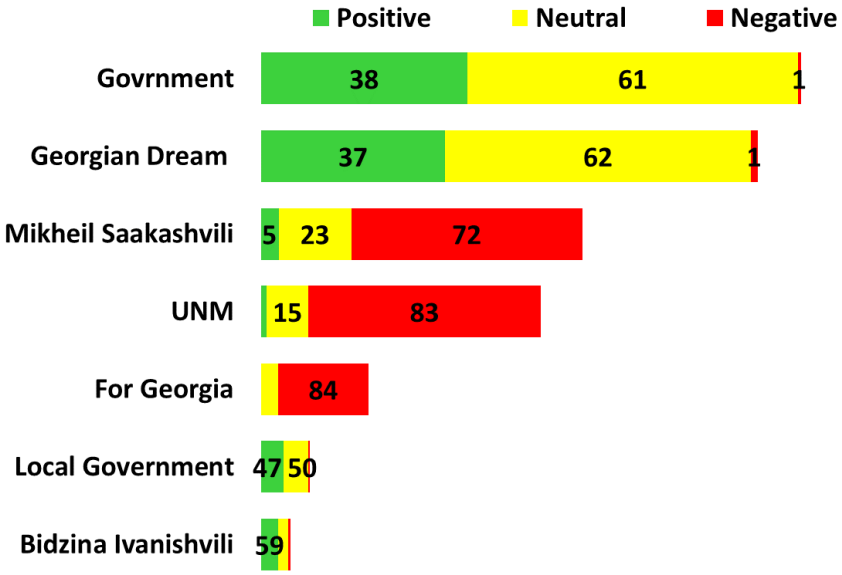
15 July - 30 October, 2021



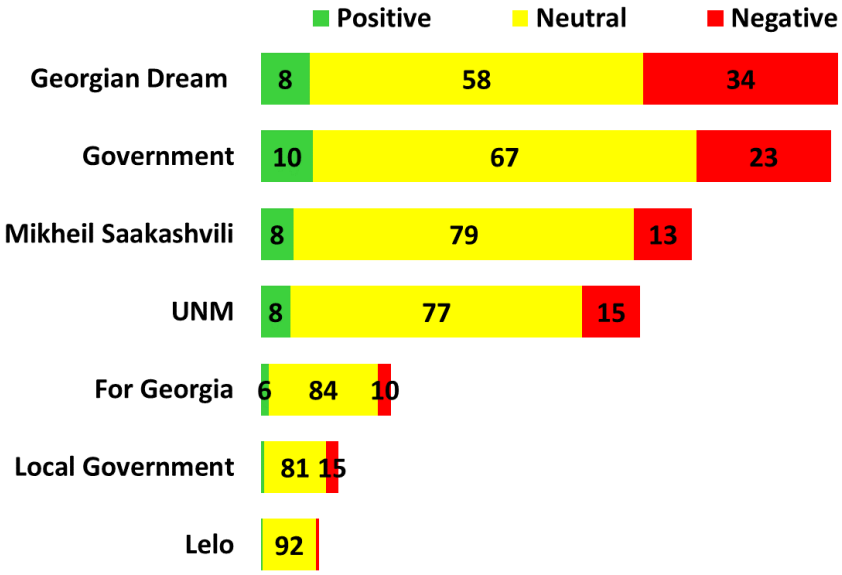
Tone of Coverage (%)
**livepress.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



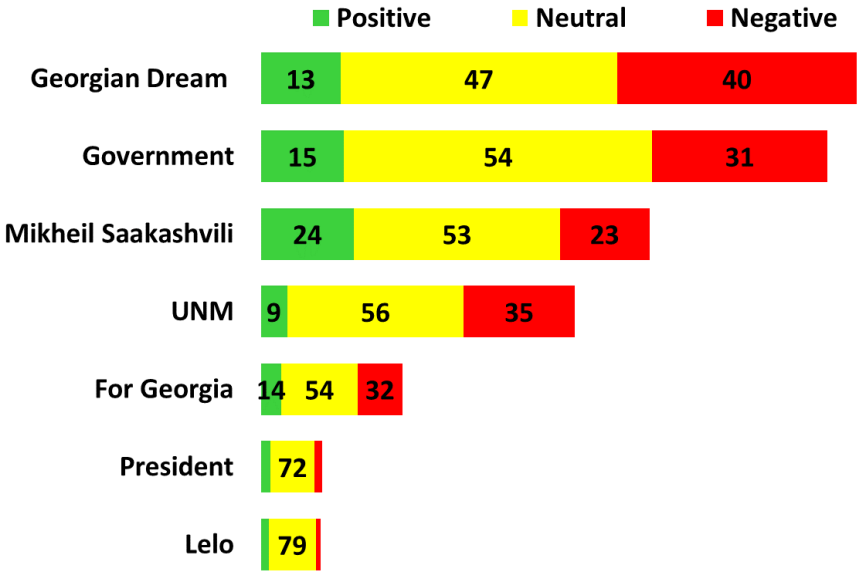

Tone of Coverage (%)
**mpn.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



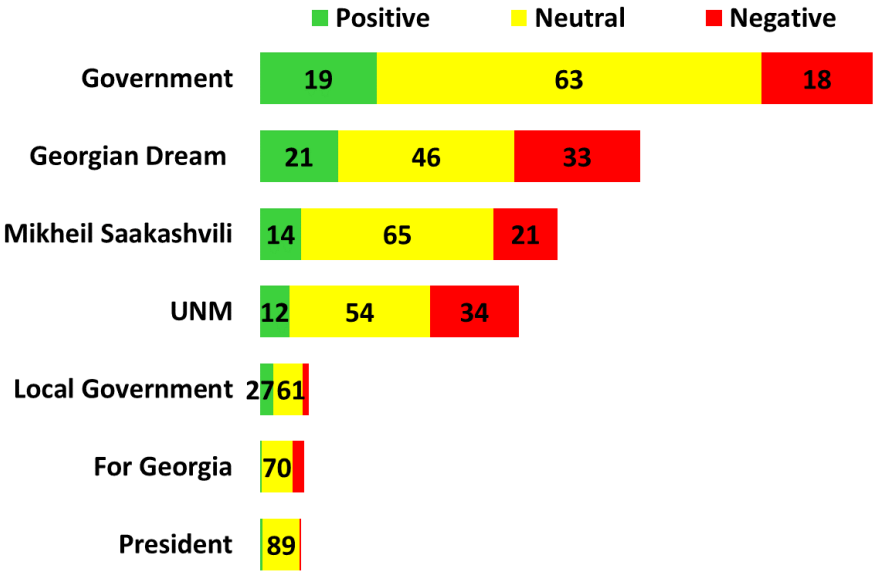
Tone of Coverage (%)
**netgazeti.ge Facebook Page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



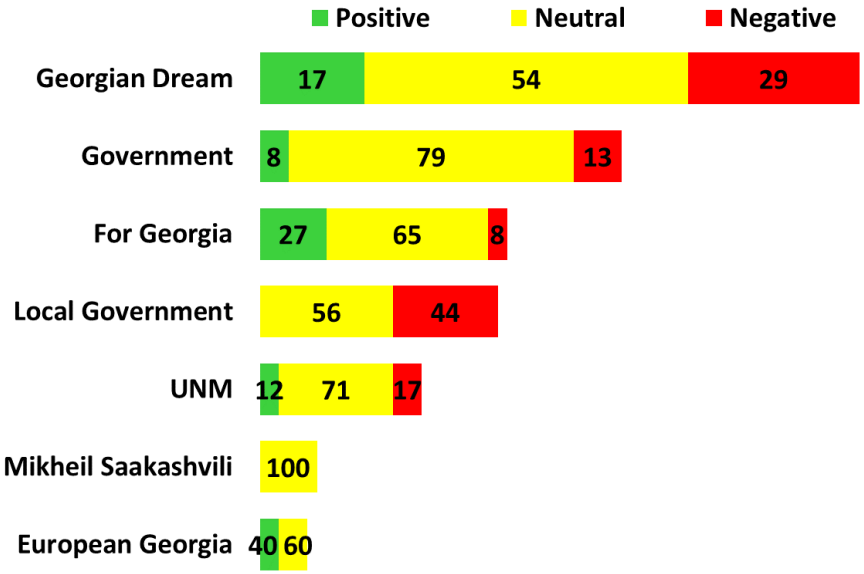

Tone of Coverage (%)
**news.on.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



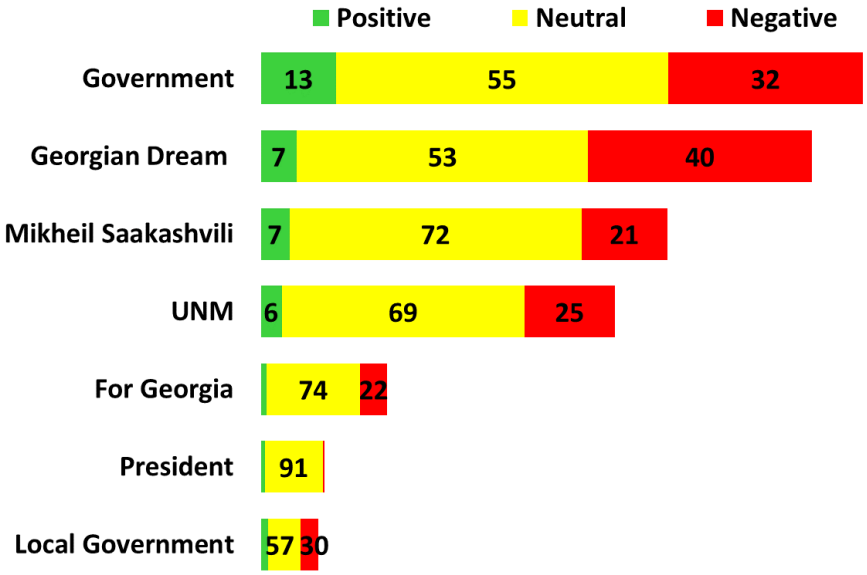
Tone of Coverage (%)
**publika.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



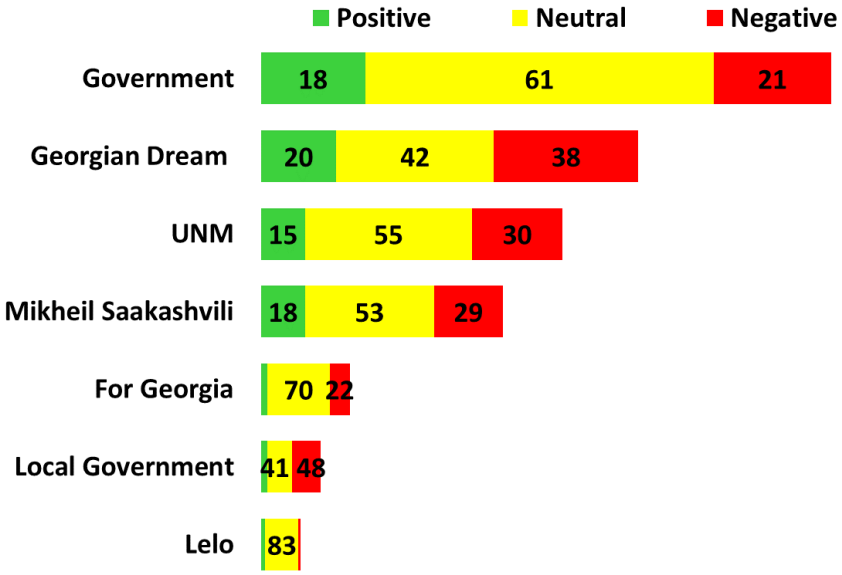

Tone of Coverage (%)
**qartli.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



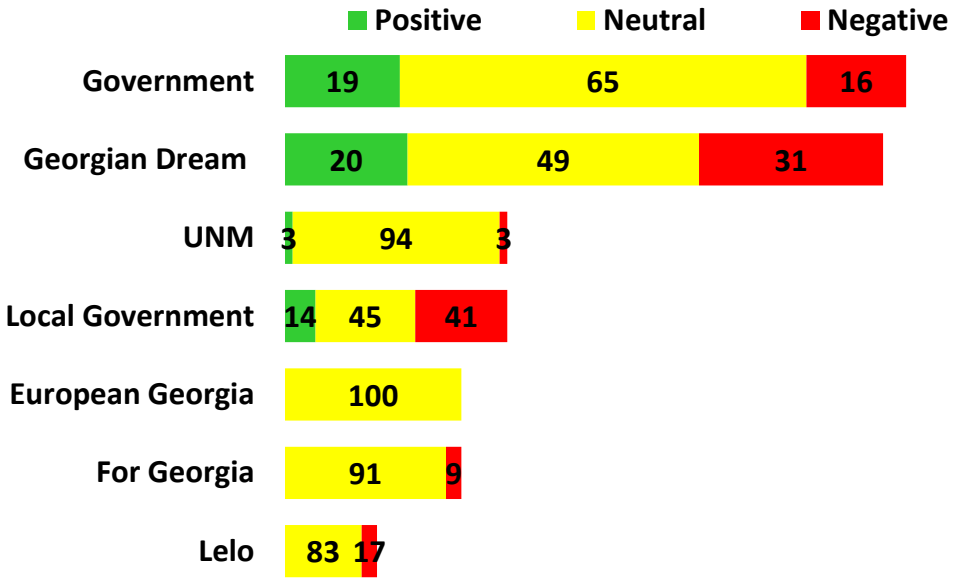
Tone of Coverage (%)
**radiotavisupleba.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021



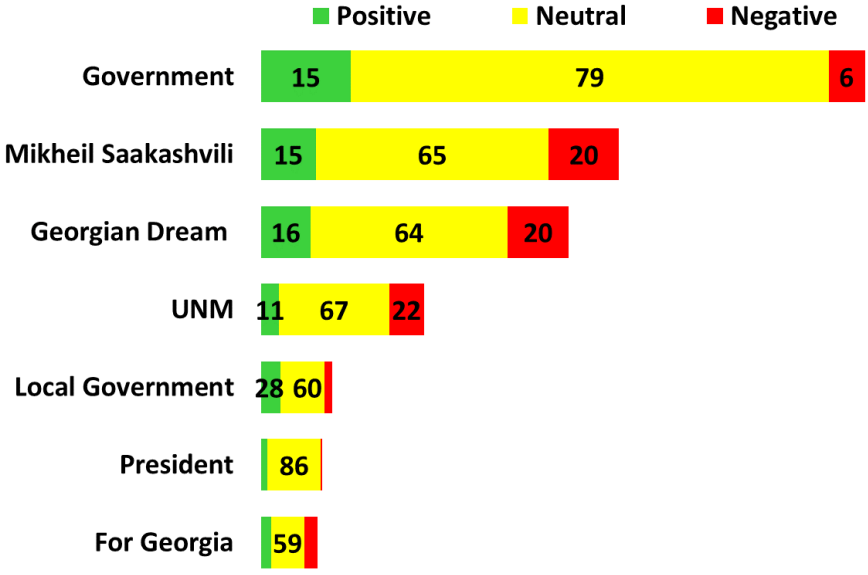

Tone of Coverage (%)
**reginfo.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021

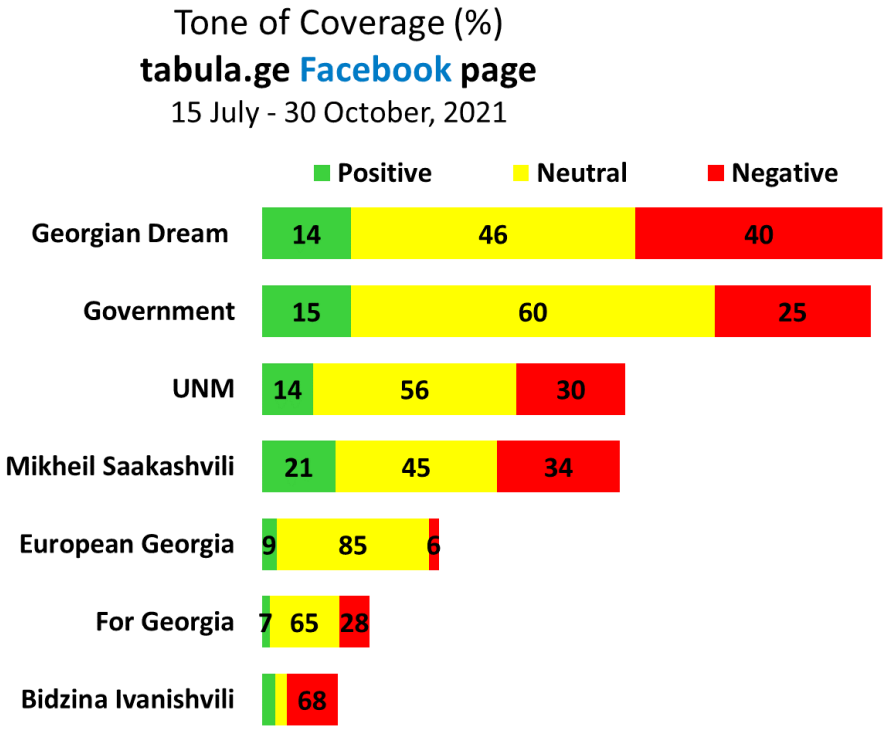


Tone of Coverage (%)
**sknews.ge Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021




Tone of Coverage (%)
**sputnik-georgia.com Facebook page**
15 July - 30 October, 2021






# Observation Method

- ***TV channels and online media outlets:*** Content that referred to electoral subjects and that was published daily on the Facebook pages of selected TV channels and online publications was monitored. The research focused on how often and in what tone this or that subject was covered in the shared posts. Coverage was given a positive or negative tone if: 1) there were positive or negative assessments of the subject by the journalist or respondent; 2) if the issue itself created a positive or negative attitude towards the covered subject. The coverage of the monitored subjects in the videos shared on the Facebook pages of the TV companies was calculated according to the time allotted to them. In other materials (photos, copyrighted texts or articles shared from websites) and content shared on the Facebook pages of online media outlets (videos, articles, images, copyrighted text), the subject and coverage tone were determined in accordance with the information presented in the content shared as one unit. Materials shared in the form of articles were evaluated solely on the basis of title, image and attached caption.

- ***Government agencies and parties:*** Only qualitative observations were made of the content published daily on the selected pages in order to answer the following questions: a) Did government agencies and municipal administrations use Facebook pages to present their activities or to publicize party candidates or to discredit opposition politicians? b) Did government agencies, municipal administrations, parties and their leaders disseminate problematic content through their Facebook pages, including deliberate misinformation, hate speech or various forms of discrimination? c) Did political parties and politicians, while criticizing opponents, share particularly problematic content such as that encouraging hate speech, gender-based or other forms of discrimination or deliberate misinformation?

- ***Popular pages and open groups:*** Three days after having been shared, content was observed in order to calculate user reach during the optimal period. Quantitative and qualitative research was conducted on the (30 daily) most popular materials shared through selected pages and groups. The main purpose of monitoring popular sites and open groups during the monitoring period was to determine: What types of materials had the highest user reach and how often did they mention political or electoral issues? How often and in what tone were the monitoring subjects presented in such materials? How credible was the content (about politicians and having high reach) shared on these pages?