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საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Study and Research on Media Coverage of 2021 Municipal Elections of Georgia

TV Talk Shows Monitoring Final Report

August 2 – September 25, 2021



THE GEORGIAN CHARTER
OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

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About the project

As part of an EU and UNDP project entitled “Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2021 Local Self-Government Elections in Georgia”, the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics monitored prime time TV talk-shows dealing with current affairs.

The monitoring covered 14 television channels from 2 August (the official launch of election campaigns) to 25 September.

The TV channels that were monitored were: the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster, Rustavi 2, Imedi, TV Pirveli, Mtavari Arkhi, Achara Public Broadcaster, TV25, Rioni, Gurjaani TV, Guria TV, TV4, Trialeti, Odishi and Metskhre Arkhi. Of these channels, six are national broadcasters and the remaining eight have a more regional focus.

The channels were selected according to the following criteria: the two public broadcasters (given their role), the four highest-rated national broadcasters and one broadcaster from each region.

Methodology

The election monitoring of talk-shows solely involved a qualitative component, and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics monitored the appearance on air of selected subjects. Talk-shows were assessed according to the following criteria: the relevance of selected topics; the adequacy of the level of expertise of guests; the impartiality of the selection of guests; the course of the discussion; the handling of discussions by the host or hosts; the host’s questions; the host’s degree of preparedness and ability to prevent guests from spreading false information; and the use of the program to spread hate speech. The overall question was whether viewers were provided with additional information that would help them to make informed choices.

The subjects of the monitoring were the President, the Government and political parties.

Key Findings

- Similarly to the monitoring results of previous years, Georgia's national broadcast media are sharply polarized; one part is biased in favour of the government and the other in favour of the opposition. This polarization was further exacerbated by the events of July 5, when over 50 journalists were beaten and injured, yet all the perpetrators, including the organizers of violent groups, have not yet been brought to justice.
- The run-up to the municipal elections officially began on August 2, a period during which almost all broadcasters had no broadcasting season and consequently did not air any socio-political programmes. Mtavari Arkhi and TV Pirveli were the exceptions.
- It should be noted that the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster and the Public Broadcaster of Adjara did not broadcast talk shows until September 6, and that most of the regional broadcasters did not do so until mid-September.
- As during the previous year, representatives of the ruling party refused to appear on critical national broadcasters. Opposition parties were under-represented on Imedi TV.
- During the reporting period, the narratives of Imedi TV coincided with the messages of the Georgian Dream. Presenters did not shy away from expressing cynical attitudes towards some of the opposition. TV Pirveli and Mtavari Arkhi displayed a subjective attitude towards some opposition electoral subjects and expressed sentiments in favour of the opposition. Also, in many cases some presenters expressed their own opinions of particular issues or subjects.
- During the monitoring period, the transformation of Rustavi 2 was especially evident. If during the previous monitoring period the broadcaster was more or less critical of the government, during the pre-electoral period it ensured maximum positive coverage of the ruling party. The TV company often only served as a rostrum which the ruling team used to repeat their own messages and discuss topics of interest to them.
- It should be noted that this transformation process coincided with the departure of several journalists from the channel. Two of them later announced publicly that their decision to resign from the channel was caused by its change of editorial policy.
- It should also be noted that, during the reporting period, the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster and the Public Broadcaster of Adjara broadcast debates to their viewers.
- Two such debates were aired on the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster, but the format of the debate among Tbilisi mayoral candidates did not enable viewers to obtain complete information with which to make an informed choice. It is also noteworthy that some mayoral candidates made homophobic and xenophobic statements, to which the debate's hosts did not respond adequately.

- The Adjara Public Broadcaster also offered viewers debates between mayoral candidates and political parties in the Adjara region; but in a programme called 'Free Space', in which the mayoral candidates participated, the host did not ask them to clarify any of their declarations and, in many cases, did not ask them any critical questions.
- The second talk-show of the Adjara Public Broadcaster, entitled 'Self-Government Elections', featured the representatives of various political parties. The programme did give its viewers the opportunity to make an informed choice. The debate's hosts asked critical and clarifying questions, and did not allow respondents to use hate speech.
- Among regional TV companies, various problems were identified during the monitoring period. With rare exceptions, the news networks of regional broadcasters were unstable, with talk-shows being aired irregularly and inconsistently. TV 4 and the Ninth Channel did not air any talk-shows at all during the monitoring period.
- Unlike the case among national broadcasters, polarization is less evident among regional broadcasters. On some regional channels, representatives of the opposition and the government even sat down together in order to hold a debate.

