



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



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

TV News Monitoring Preliminary Report

5 July - 25 September 2021



საქართველოს ჟურნალისტური
ეთიკის ქარტია

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About the Project

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, as part of a UNDP project entitled “Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2021 Local Self-Government Elections in Georgia” and with the financial assistance of the European Union, is observing TV media coverage of the 2021 local elections.

The monitoring began on 5 July 2020 and will continue until March 2022. The following 14 TV channels (5 national, 9 regional) are being observed: the 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster, the Achara Public Broadcaster, TV Mtavari, Rustavi 2, Imedi, TV Pirveli, TV 25, Trialeti, Channel 9, TV Odishi, Gurjaani TV, TV Guria, Rioni TV and TV 4.

Methodology of the Monitoring

The monitoring consists of quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative monitoring determines indicators that can be counted and measured: time allocated to subjects, tone of reporting (positive, negative, neutral), direct or indirect reporting (whether subjects speak themselves or others speak about them) and gender (male or female).

The qualitative monitoring is focused on the aspects that cannot be measured qualitatively: timeliness of the coverage of facts, distortion of information, unbalanced coverage, bias, facts-based coverage, diversity of sources, manipulation of sound or music, adherence to ethical or professional standards, and any other factor that affects the quality of the information broadcast.

The subjects of the monitoring are the political parties and politicians participating in the 2021 municipal elections as well as the Government (central, local, Achara Autonomous Republic), the President, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili. The monitoring focuses upon reports on the elections as well as upon all other reports during which the monitored subjects are discussed.

Key Findings:

- Pre-electoral monitoring of the 2021 self-government elections revealed that the polarization of broadcasters has increased even more than last year, and that channels are divided into two pro-government and pro-opposition camps;

- The biased editorial policy of broadcasters is reflected in their negative coverage of the political entities that they dislike;
- TV news often contained violations of professional ethics and attempts at manipulation;
- The 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster maintains a loyal editorial policy towards the government;
- Rustavi 2 is becoming increasingly benevolent towards the government and the ruling party. During the last period of monitoring, the channel tried to pursue a more or less balanced editorial policy, but this year this balance has been upset in favor of the government and the ruling party;
- Compared to previous years, the quality of news programs on regional televisions has deteriorated, both technically and in terms of content;
- Some regional channels could not broadcast on a daily basis. Broadcasts on some channels ran according to an unspecified schedule. There were gaps in programming for several days, including one-month breaks;
- Some regional channels often use materials prepared by the press offices of government agencies without clearly referring to them as such;
- The bias of TV channels towards specific subjects was evident in the coverage of such important topics as “the events of July 5”, the “refusal of EU macro-financial assistance”, the “annulment of the Charles Michel Agreement” and “leaked recordings”, presumably recorded by the State Security Service “.

Report

TV media play an extremely important role during the pre-electoral period, and the main purpose of the monitoring of main news programs was to determine how fairly, equitably and professionally (in terms of journalistic standards) the activities of political entities were covered.

The monitoring before the 2021 local elections makes it clear that the media environment is both pluralistic and politicized. The pre-electoral tensions and the peak of political polarization were caused by the events of 5 July 2021, when around 50 journalists were attacked and seriously injured. Lekso Lashkarava, a cameraman for TV Pirveli, subsequently died, and critical media representatives staged protests whose main demand was the resignation of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and Minister

of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri. On July 14, some television stations (including the monitored Channel One and TV Pirveli) stopped broadcasting for 24 hours in protest, demanding the Prime Minister's resignation. The same political demand was made by some regional TV companies the day before, on July 13, when they stopped broadcasting for 10 minutes. At the same time, Imedi TV, which this year is biased in favor of the government and the ruling party, openly stated that its main goal is to prevent the National Movement from taking their revenge in Georgia.

As a result of this political polarization, national broadcasters often violated the principle of fair and equal coverage during the pre-electoral period and TV channels are split between pro-government and pro-opposition. This trend has been maintained, and bias is manifest in the negative coverage of "undesirable" political opponents. The monitoring has also revealed a lack of stories on electoral topics, despite the fact that such stories would greatly help voters to make informed choices.

Critical media were focused on discrediting the ruling party and the government, while Imedi was focused on discrediting the opposition.

Mtavari Arkhi and TV Pirveli did not cover the Georgian Dream's electoral campaign. Their main news programs did not cover the electoral programs of ruling party candidates, and Mtavari Arkhi viewers were not told anything about the ruling Tbilisi mayoral candidate's plans or even in which district the Georgian Dream had nominated a candidate for mayor. In contrast, the channel openly supported the opposition, especially the United National Movement and its leader Nika Melia. No critical materials were prepared about this party. Mtavari Arkhi dedicated a live broadcast to the nomination of Nika Melia, the United National Movement's candidate for the mayoralty of Tbilisi, and Elene Khoshtaria, an opposition candidate for the chairmanship of the City Council.

In contrast, Kronika devoted most of its airtime to covering the ruling party's electoral campaign: indeed the party's activities coincided with the channel's main news program. Imedi continued the trend of previous years and refrained from criticizing the government, focusing instead upon the United National Movement, Mikheil Saakashvili and the activities of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia (of the "For Georgia" party) in a noticeably negative tone. Imedi also often repeats ruling team messages exactly and directly: the refusal of EU macro-financial assistance, for example, was presented as a "loan refusal" and "high economic growth" was cited to support this view, brushing aside the fact that the government did not meet the eligibility criteria for this assistance in the first place.

The editorial policy of Rustavi 2 was similar to that of Imedi. Two years after another change of ownership, it has joined the ranks of broadcasters with particularly negative coverage of the opposition, particularly the United National Movement. The channel is biased towards the government and often tries to present its activities in a positive light. On the one hand, planned projects are covered, and on the other, journalists do not ask critical questions about the government's work. During coverage of pre-electoral activities, the channel's attitude was biased towards the Georgian Dream's mayoral candidate, Kakha Kaladze, whose candidacy was presented before the news program and to which over 12 minutes were dedicated (compared to 4 minutes for the National Movement candidate, Nika Melia). It should

also be noted that although Nika Melia's presentation coincided with the main news program, it was not broadcast live; in contrast, even the nomination of the Georgian Dream's candidate members of the City Council was.

The 1st Channel of the Public Broadcaster maintains a loyal editorial policy towards the government. Although some criticism of the government and the ruling team can be heard on the channel, it is always expressed in statements by their political opponents and non-governmental organizations. Moambe is the most positive in its coverage of the activities of the Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, and the government. Achara TV of the Public Broadcaster had different editorial priorities this year. The local government and the government of the Autonomous Republic of Achara received the most positive coverage on the channel, while a negative tone prevailed in its coverage of the central government.

During the monitoring period, it was revealed that TV channels were biased, loyal or critical even when covering important topics for the public.

Moambe covered the events of July 5 without criticism and without highlighting the government's responsibility. On the one hand, it mentioned that journalists were victims of violence and aggression, but only 25 minutes after the news program aired, viewers were shown a statement by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili which was perceived by the opposition and NGOs as encouraging violent groups. Imedi and Rustavi 2 also covered the violent events of July 5 without criticizing the government.

The pre-electoral period coincided with the release of "files allegedly leaked from the State Security Service" on September 13, which became the main topic of the day. While critical media identified the government's responsibility as the main issue, the "Kurier" opening story on Rustavi 2 was not a case of "SSS files" but a criminal story; the scandal of the SSS files was covered as the fourth story. Moambe also covered the scandal of the SSS files superficially. The broadcaster presented this story to viewers as the third topic in its daily news program (after the stories about Megil Kardava's extradition to Georgia and Mikheil Saakashvili's appeal). The story highlighted neither the size of the leaked files nor the people in charge, and did not try to verify the facts, which were confirmed by other media. However, it should be noted that the material prepared on this topic in "Akhali Kvira" was quite critical. As for Imedi, in the main news program of September 13, only the briefing held in the office of the Georgian Dream was aired. Over the following days, the stories prepared on the SSS files mainly talked only about the possible connection of the United National Movement and Giorgi Gakharia with this case.

As for the regional channels, the quality of regional TV news programs has deteriorated compared to previous years, both in terms of technical standards and content. Some regional TV companies could not broadcast on a daily basis. Broadcasts on some channels followed an unspecified schedule, and there were gaps in the broadcast for several days, including one-month breaks. Due to a two-week technical problem at the beginning of the monitoring, Channel 9 could not broadcast, and as for Gurjaani TV, the news program did not air in August. Also, serious problems were revealed during the observation of Odishi TV, whose editorial office was unable to create its own content on a regular basis and mostly aired information from Voice of America.

This year, the superficiality of stories broadcast by regional channels and their lack of in-depth materials remain a problem.

Most of the main news programs of the regional broadcasters are dedicated to local news, although TV 25 and Gurjaani TV also cover important political news.

TV 25's coverage is critical of the government's work.

It should be noted that viewers had the opportunity to receive information about ongoing infrastructure projects in the region. The channel's main problem is the lack of in-depth. Channel 9 and Guria TV have a similar critical editorial policy towards the local government, and once again their main problem is the lack of in-depth materials.

Monitoring revealed a pro-government and pro-ruling party attitude on Trialeti TV, TV 4 and Rioni TV. At the same time, Trialeti and Rioni also sometimes use materials prepared by the press offices of government agencies, without clearly referring to them as such.

In conclusion, it can be said that the viewers of most regional broadcasters have not been given comprehensive information about the elections nor about wider developments in the country.

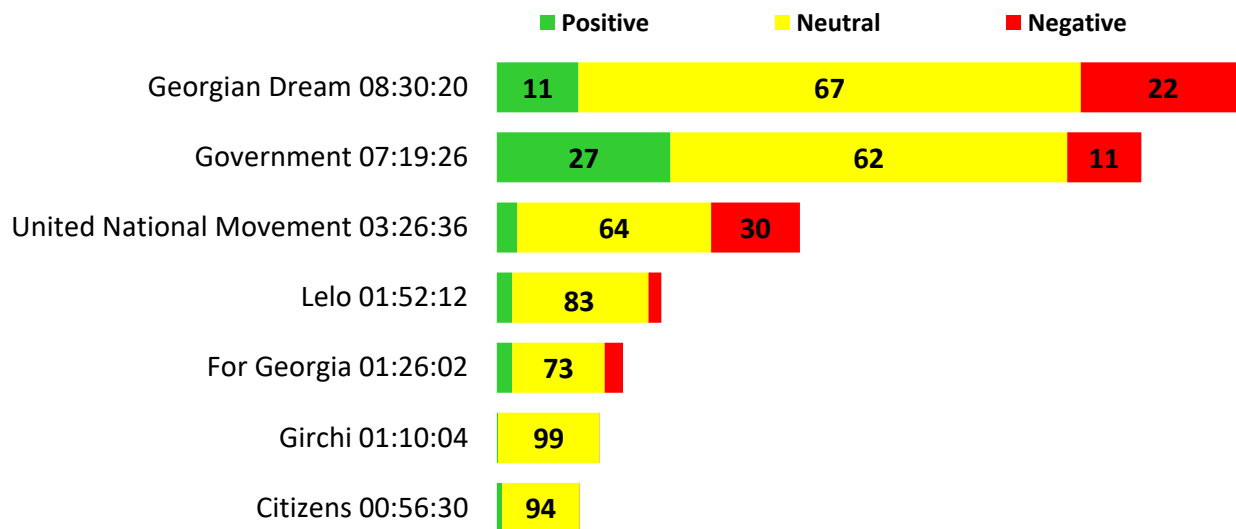
Annex: Charts

The charts show the quantitative data for those subjects most frequently covered by each TV channel.

Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

First Channel

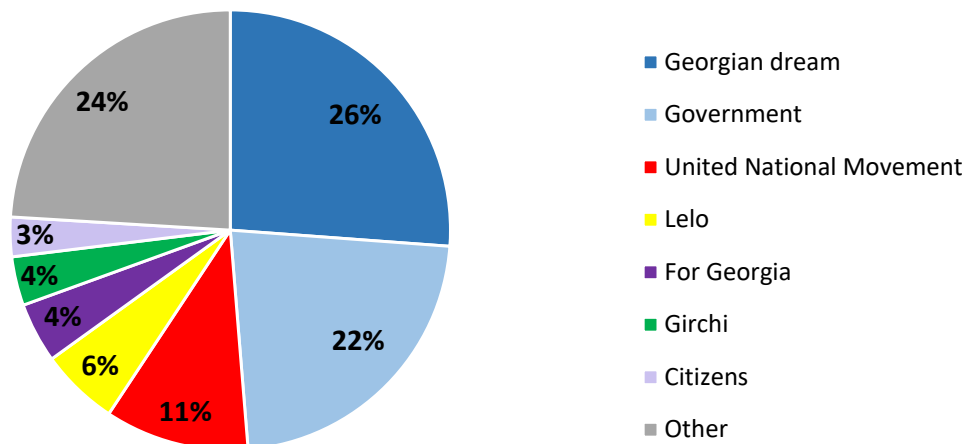
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

First Channel

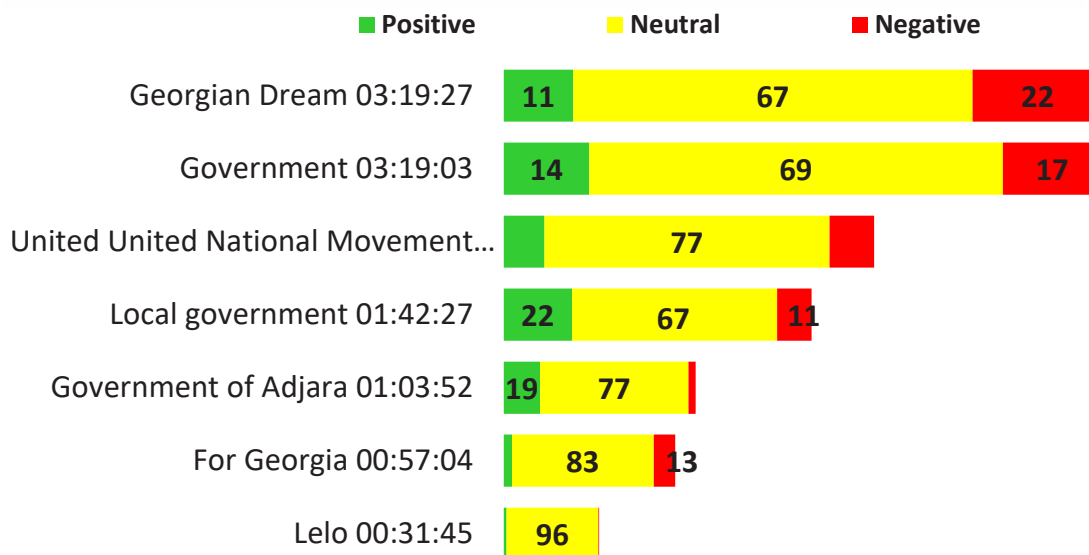
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Adjara TV

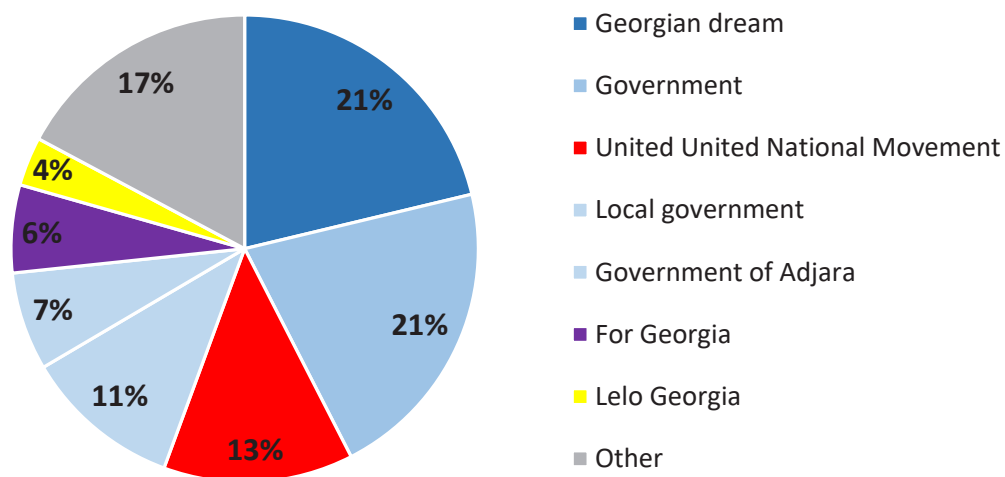
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

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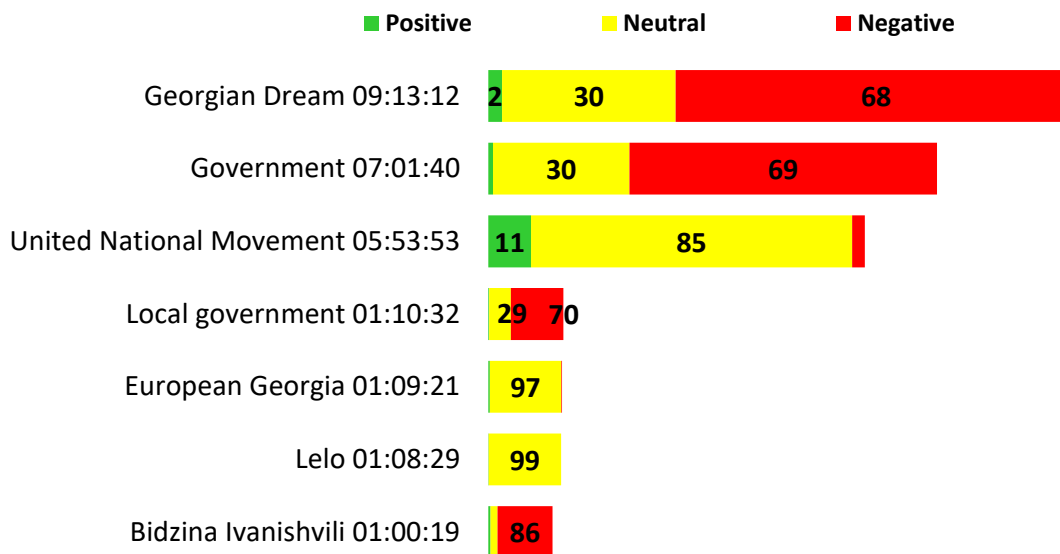
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Mtavari Arkhi

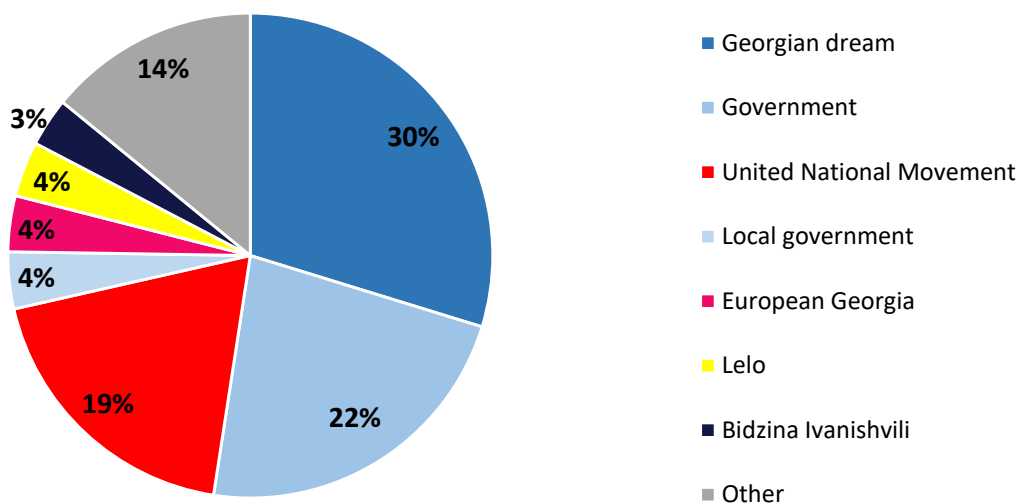
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Mtavari Arkhi

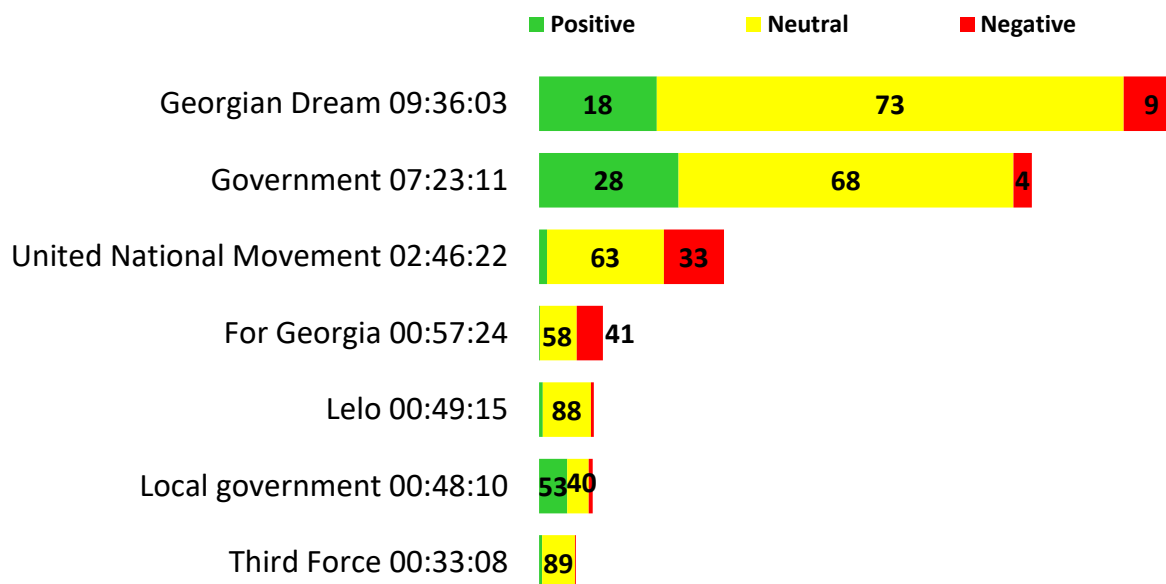
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Rustavi 2

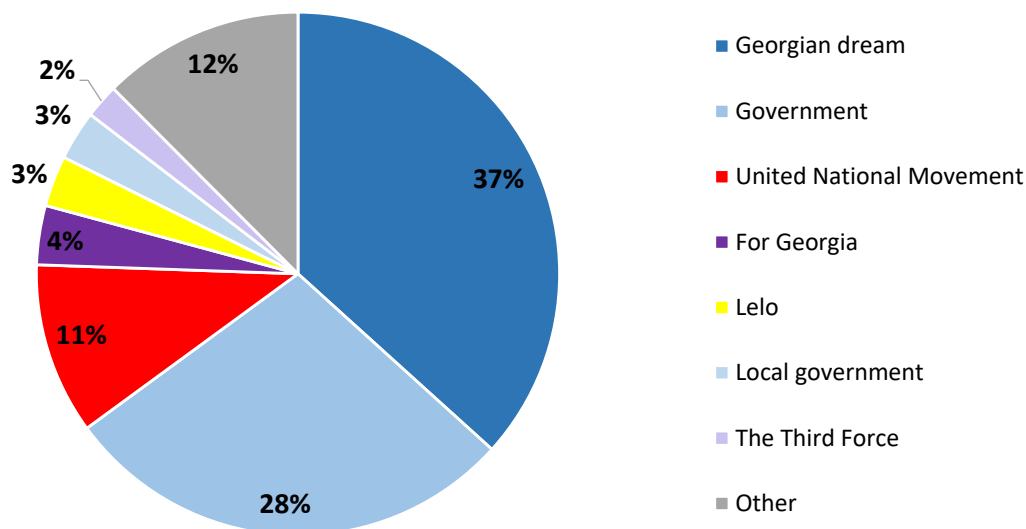
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Rustavi 2

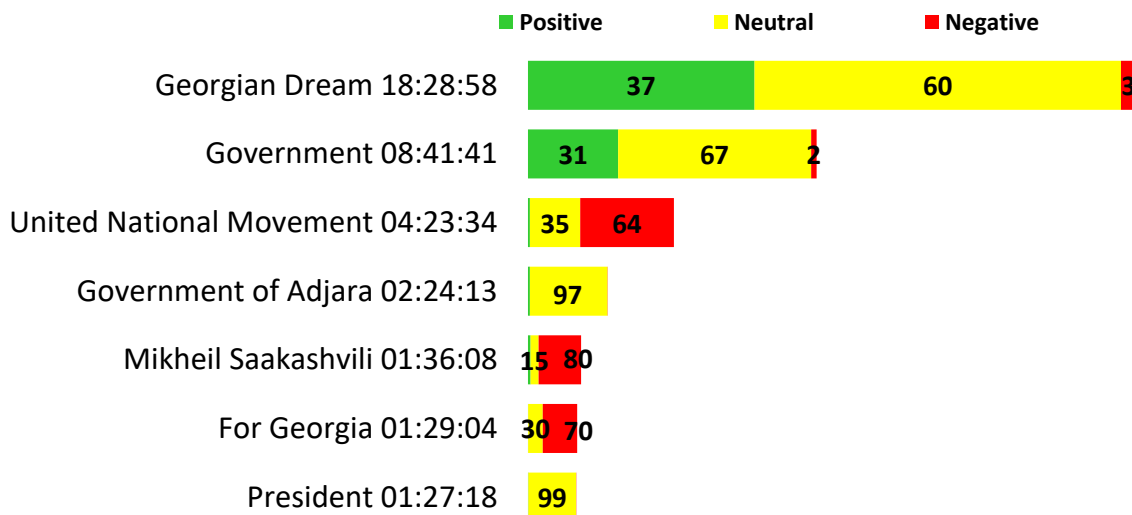
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Imedi

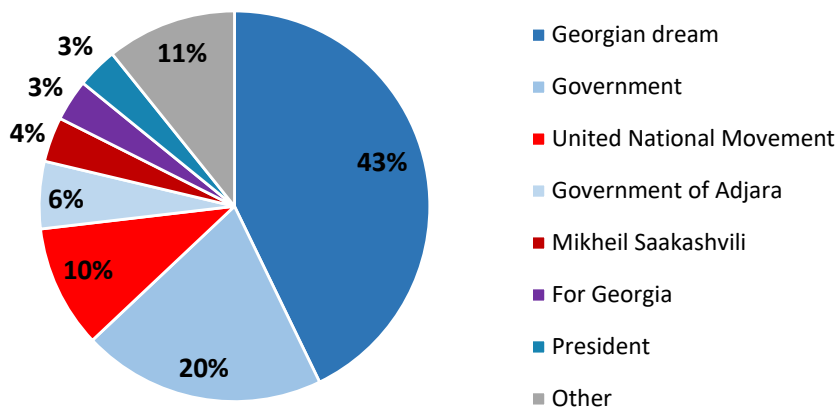
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of Subjects (%)

Imedi

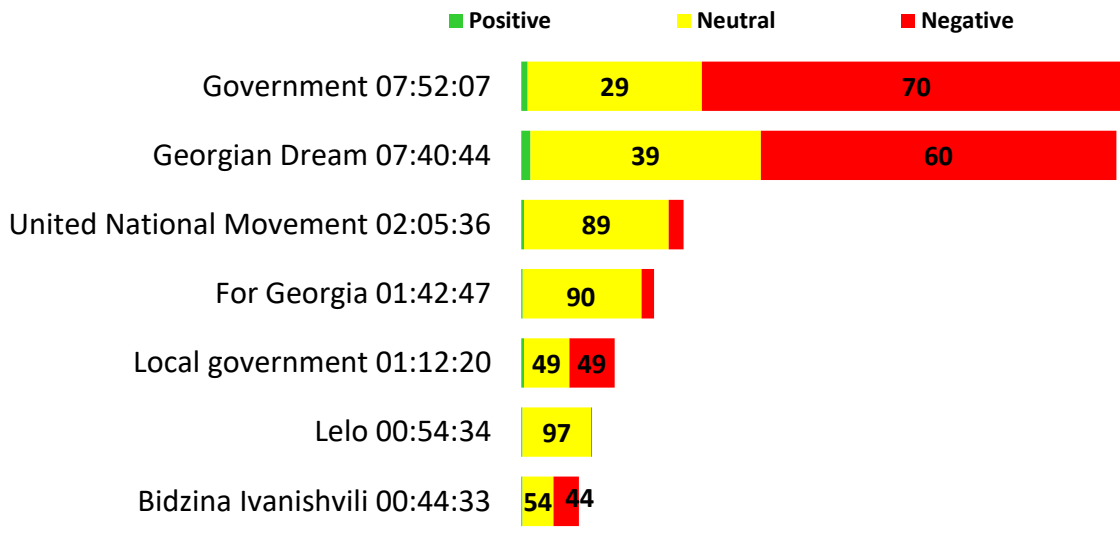
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

TV Pirveli

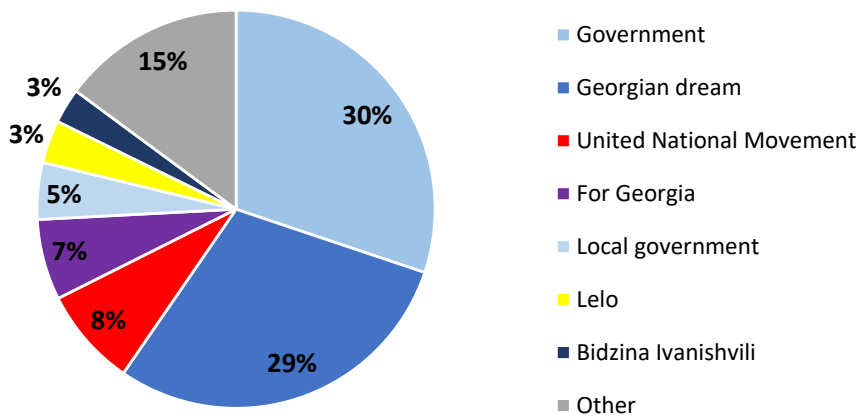
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

TV Pirveli

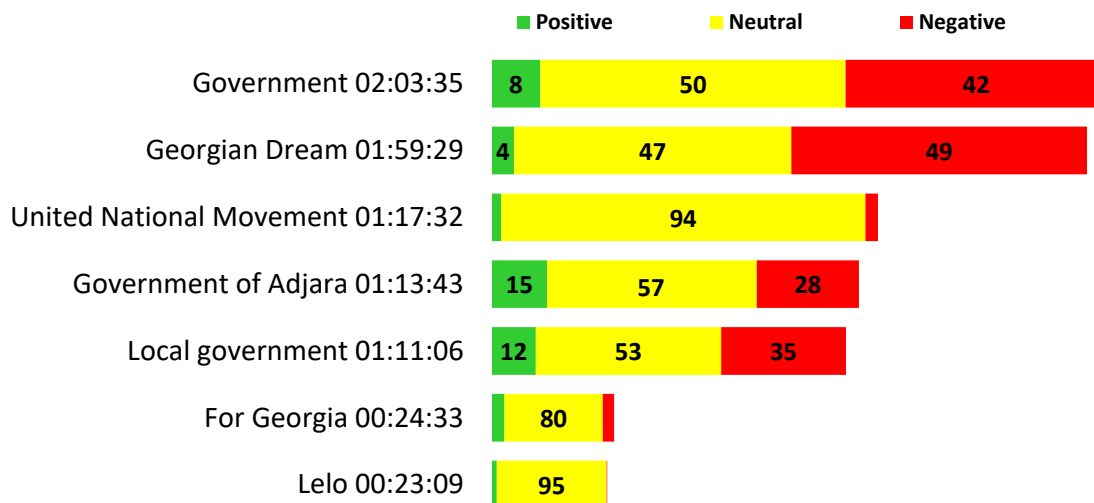
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

TV 25

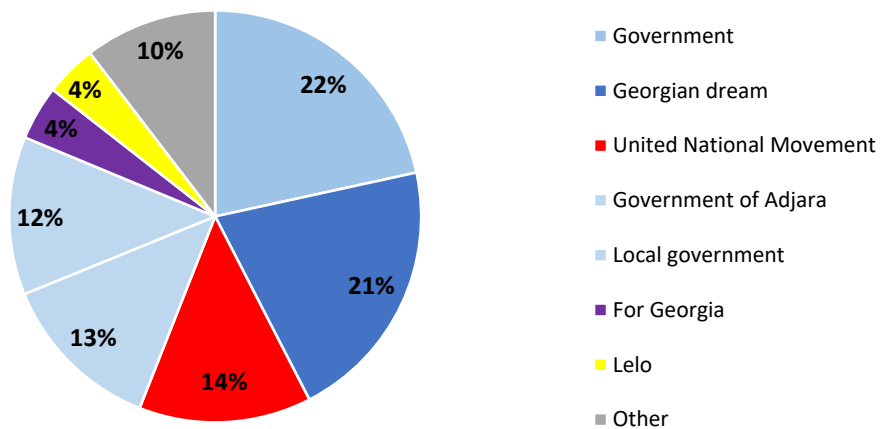
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

TV 25

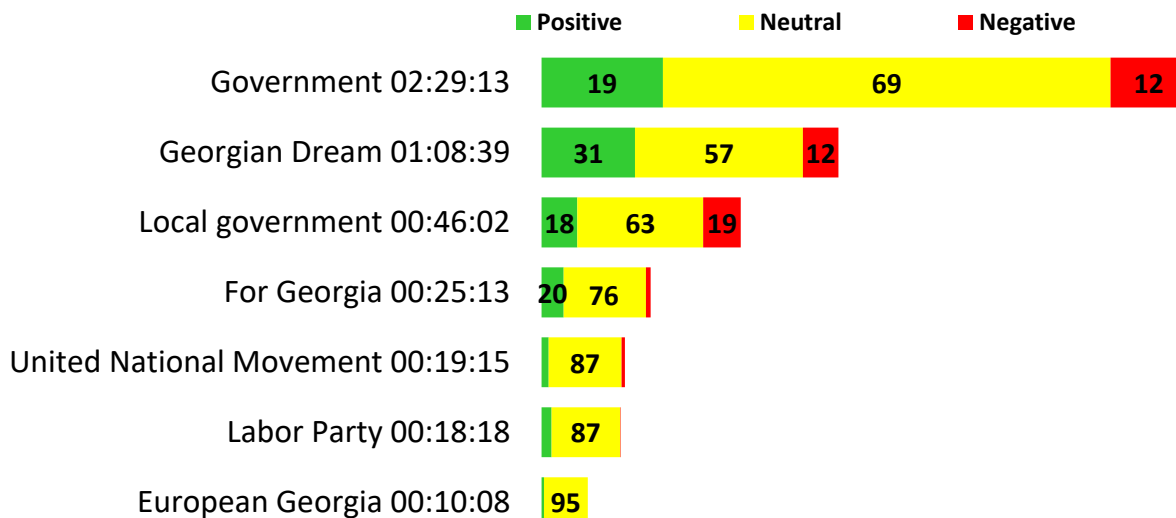
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Rioni

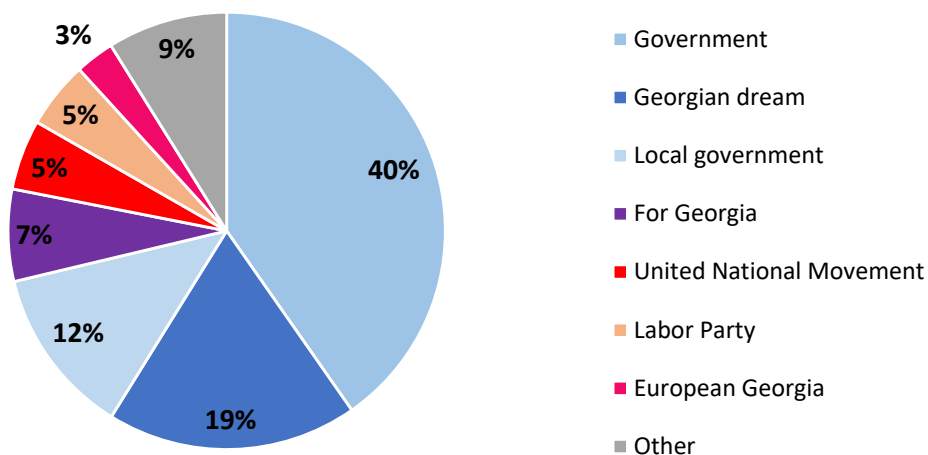
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Rioni

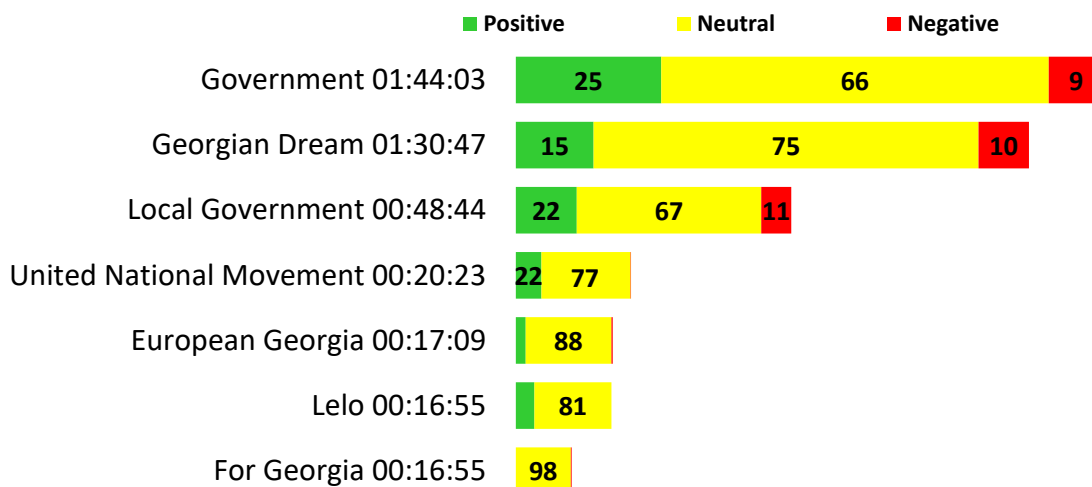
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Trialeti

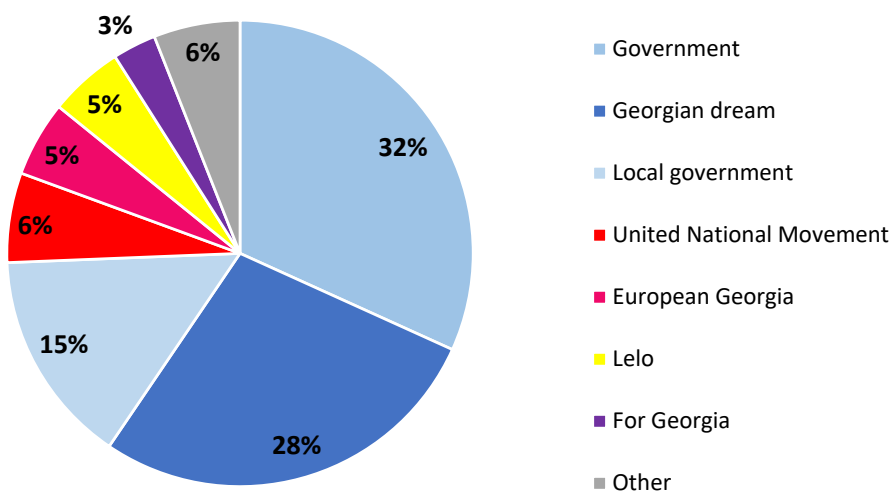
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Trialeti

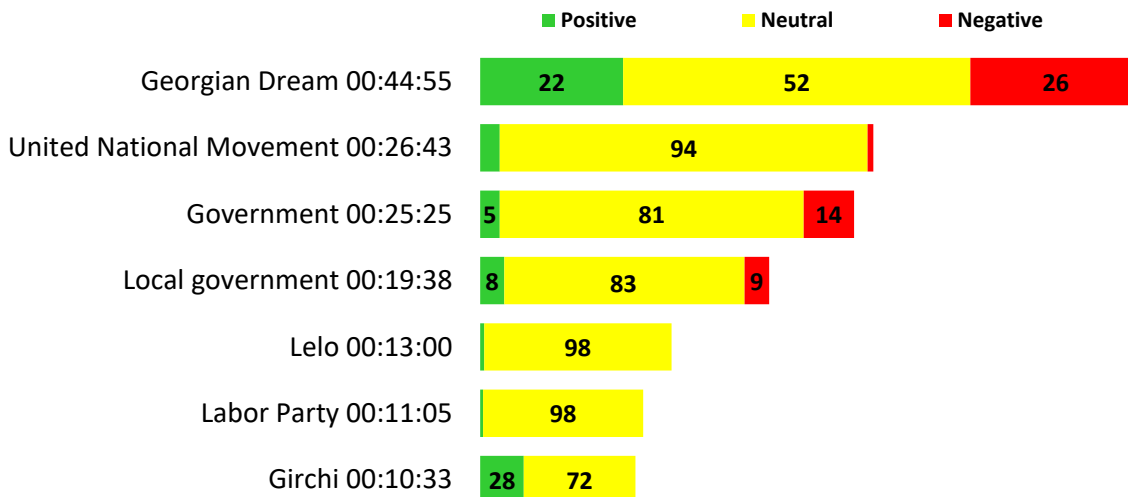
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Guria

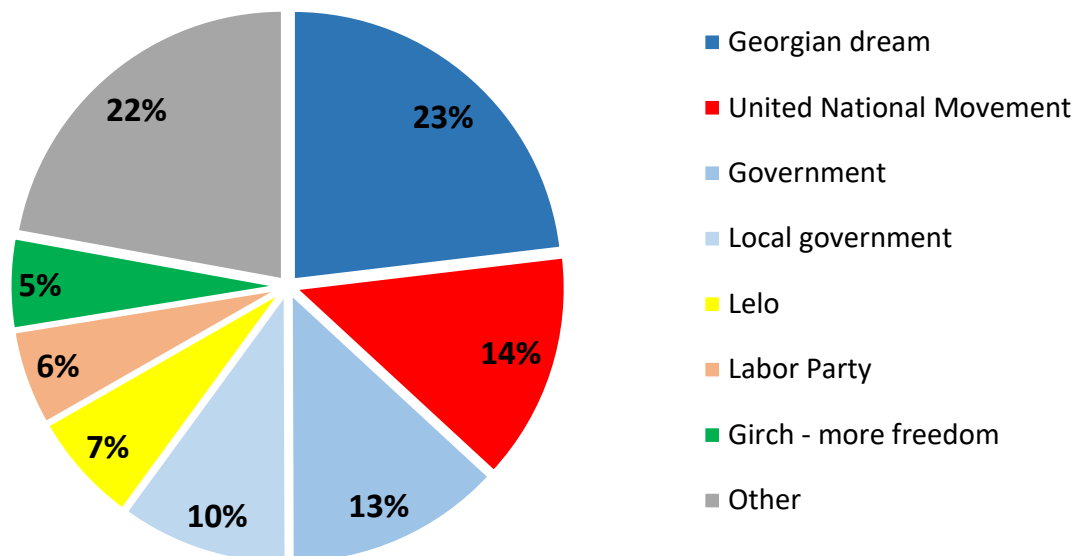
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Guria

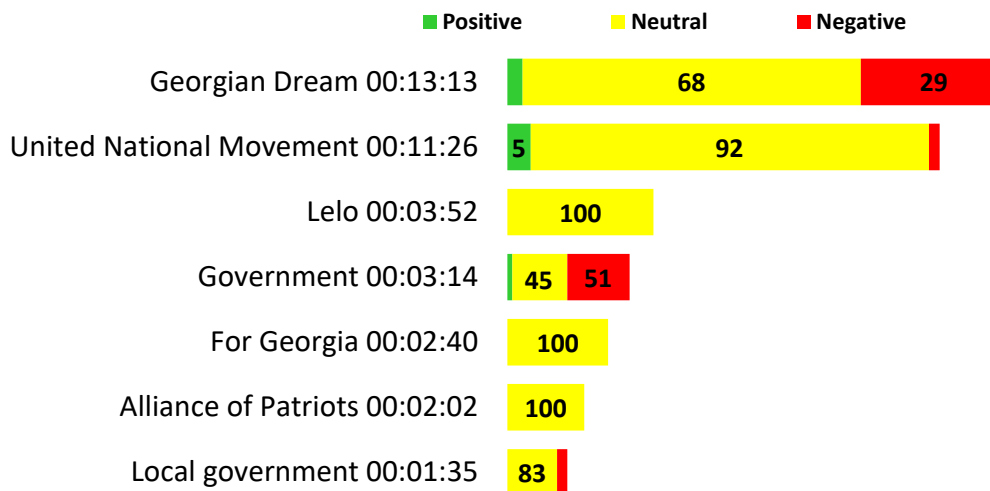
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Odishi

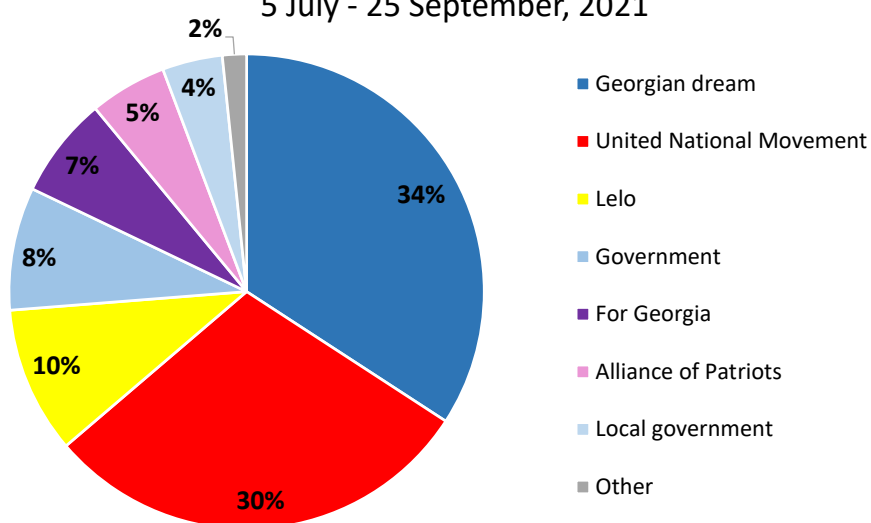
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Odishi

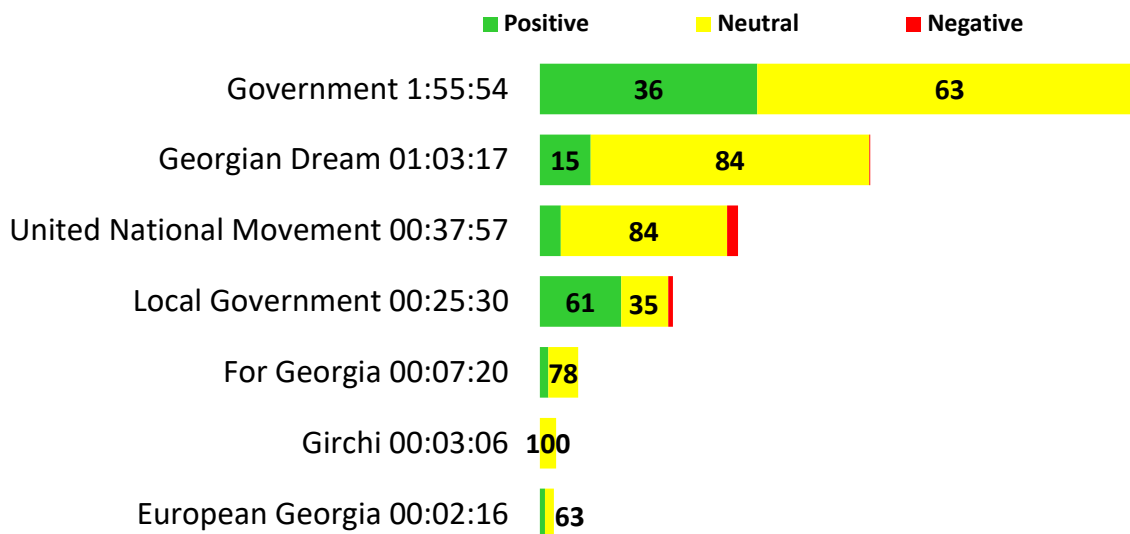
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Gurjaani

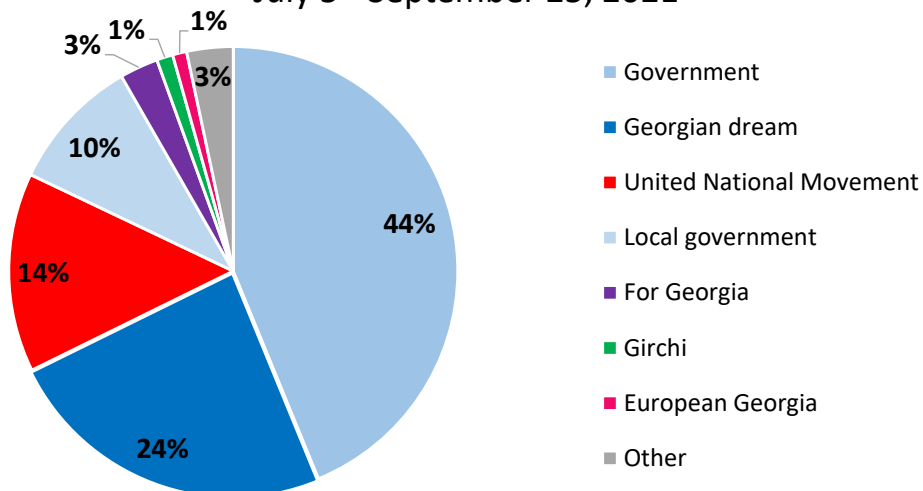
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Gurjaani

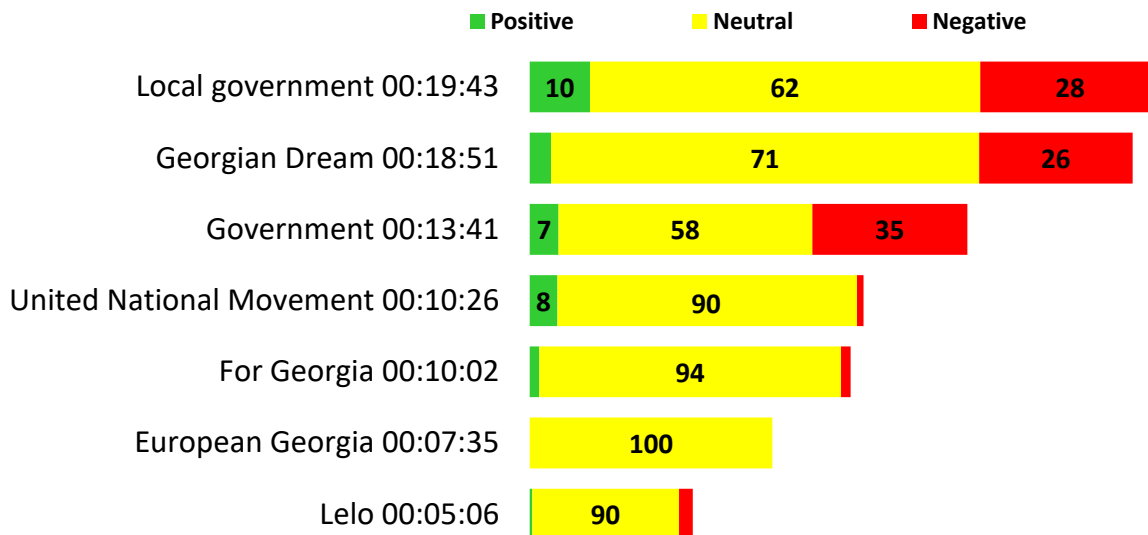
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

Ninth Channel

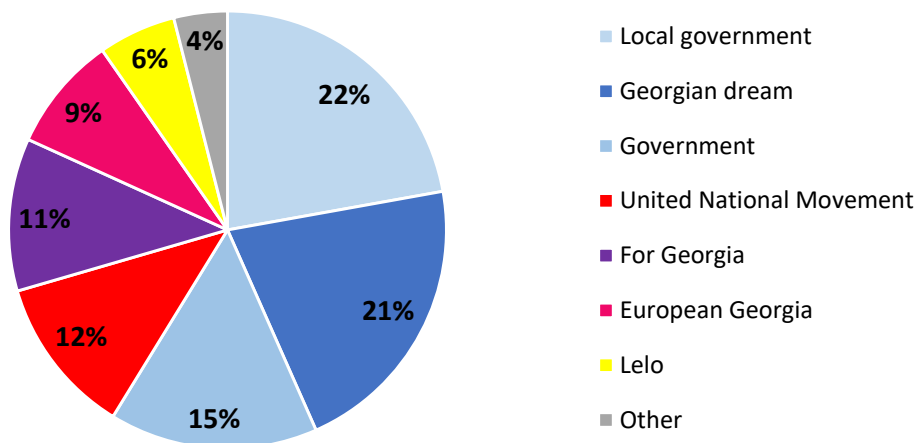
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

Ninth Channel

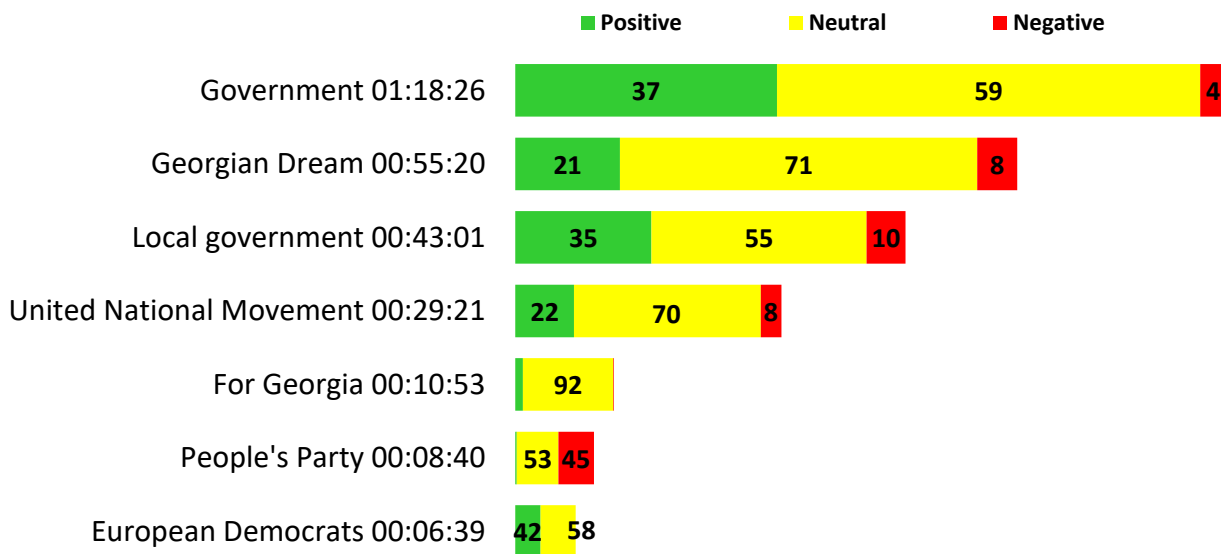
July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects by tone (%)

TV 4

July 5 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects (%)

TV 4

July 5 - September 25, 2021

