ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia

Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2021 Local Self-Government Elections in Georgia

Social Media Monitoring

Preliminary Report

15 July - 25 September 2021

საქართველოს ჟურნალისტური ეთიკის ქარტია

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

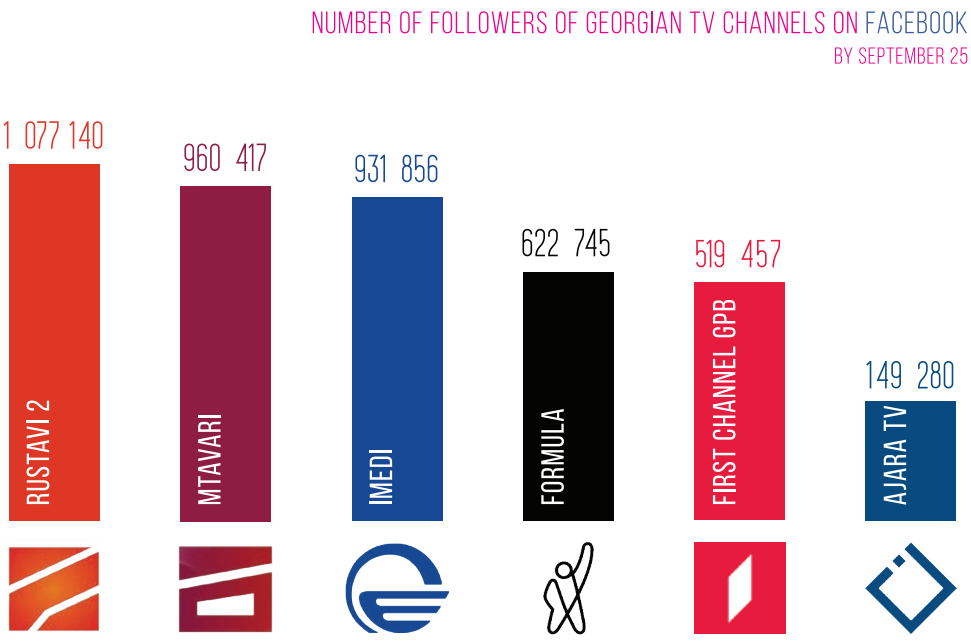
The social media monitoring carried out for the 2021 Local Self-Government Elections in Georgia aims to explore what type of information about ongoing political events in the country reaches social media users on a daily basis. Considering the fact that Facebook is the most popular social network platform in Georgia, the monitoring focused on finding out how it is used by traditional media and electoral subjects and 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 election period.

Sampling and the observation method

During the monitoring period, only *quantitative* observation was carried out on the following sources:

1) The Facebook pages of 6 TV channels

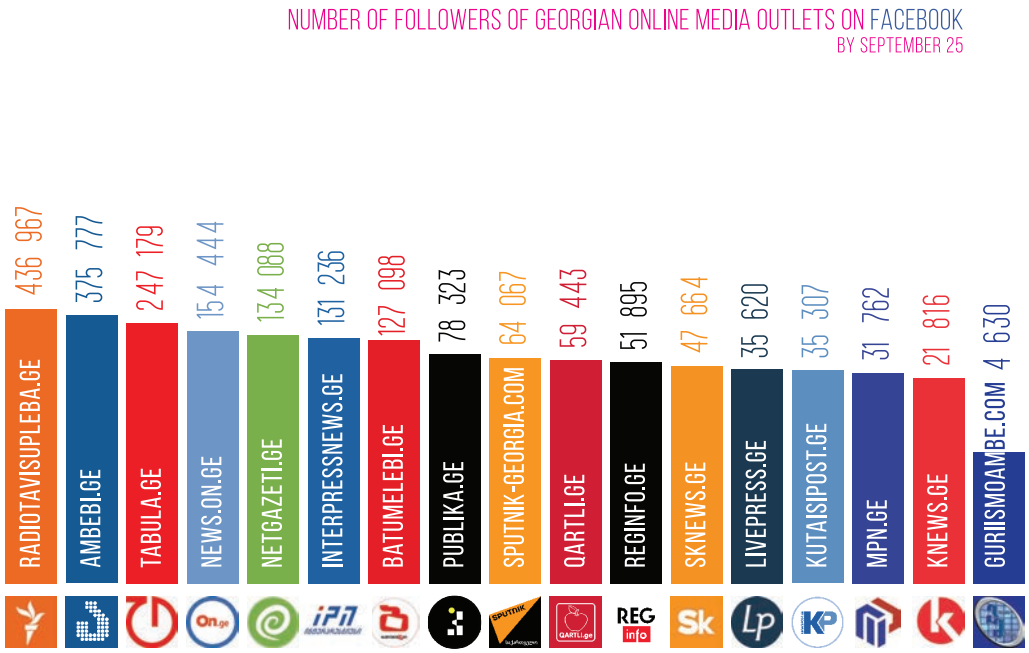
Sampling method: National broadcasters that, in addition to on-air broadcasting and a Facebook page, have their own website from which they actively share content on their Facebook pages and furthermore, whose Facebook page has over 100,000 followers.[1] Also the Public Broadcaster's Achara Television Facebook page.



1 For example, the monitoring of the Facebook pages of TV channels did not include that of TV Pirveli, since during the period when monitoring began this channel did not have its own website from which it could often share articles on its Facebook page.

2) The Facebook pages of 17 online media outlets

Sampling method: 17 online media outlets (of which 8 are regional) selected for monitoring by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics.



Observation method: All content published daily on the Facebook pages of the selected TV channels and online media outlets where a monitoring subject is present.

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.

In the course of the research, the emphasis was on the frequency and the tone of the coverage of various subjects in a given media product. An either positive or negative tone is assigned to the coverage if 1) if a journalist or a respondent makes positive or negative assessments of a subject and 2) if the issue itself provokes a positive or negative attitude towards a subject.

The coverage of monitoring subjects in video content shared via the Facebook pages of TV channels has been calculated based on the time allocated to them. For other products (photographs, editorial texts or articles shared from a website) and in all types of content (video, article, image, editorial text) shared on the Facebook pages of online media outlets, a subject and the tone of coverage are taken as a single unit according to the information in the shared content. Content shared as articles is assessed based upon the headline, image and accompanying caption.

During the monitoring period only *qualitative* observation was carried out of the following sources:

1) **The Facebook pages of 22 government agencies**

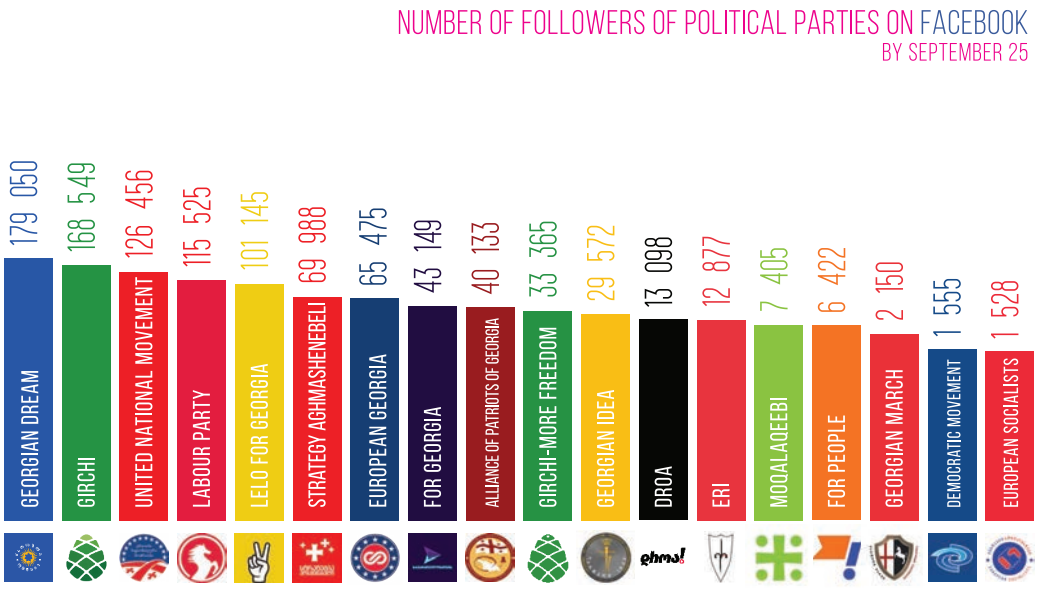
Sampling method: 11 ministries, the Government Administration, the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Achara, the Head of the Government of Achara, Tbilisi City Hall, the Mayor of Tbilisi, the President, the Prime Minister, the Chairman of Parliament and 3 ministers with official Facebook pages.

2) **The Facebook pages of the administrations of 63 municipalities**

Sampling method: All municipal administrations with official Facebook pages.

3) **The Facebook pages of 18 parties and 17 party leaders**

Sampling method: The political parties with the most frequent coverage in Georgian mass media during the media monitoring of 2020-2021, and the official Facebook pages of their leaders.

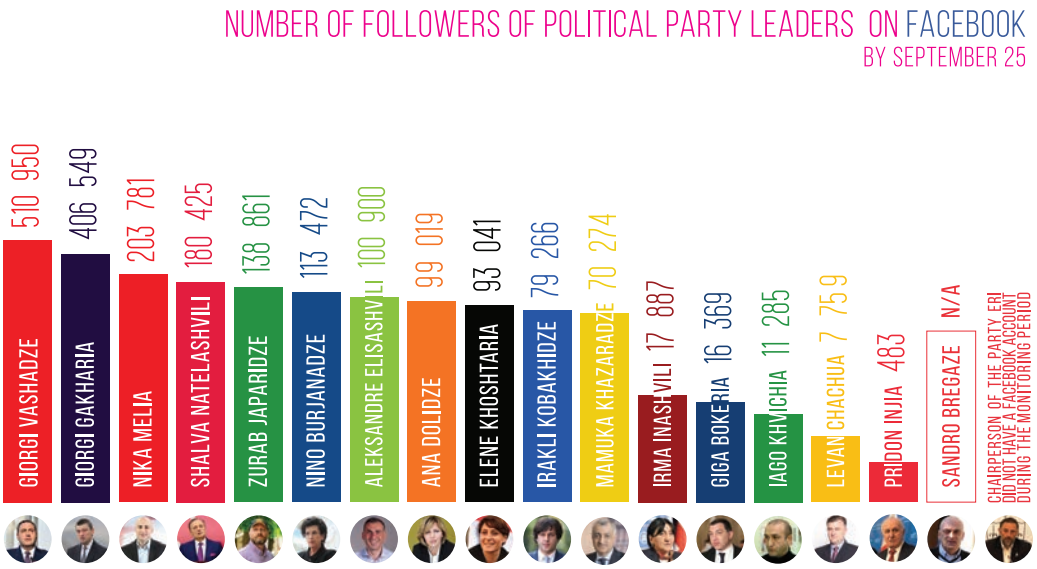


Observation method: Only a qualitative observation was maintained over all daily content published on the selected pages in order to answer the following research questions:

a) Do the government entities, municipal governments, parties and party chairpersons use Facebook pages to promote their own activities and party candidates or to discredit their political opponents?

b) Do government entities, municipal governments, parties and party chairpersons use their own Facebook pages to disseminate problematic content, including deliberate misinformation, hate speech or various forms of discrimination?

c) Are there cases of political parties or politicians sharing especially problematic content (e.g. hate speech, content inciting gender-based or other forms of discrimination or deliberate misinformation) during their criticism of political opponents?



During the monitoring, both *qualitative* and *quantitative* observation was maintained over the following sources:

1) 307 public Facebook pages

Sampling method: Facebook pages that are not the pages of specific individuals, associations, organizations or companies and which are liked and followed by a high number of users, e.g. entertainment, comic, religious or sports pages.

For the purposes of monitoring, pages were selected with over 40,000 followers when monitoring began. 307 such pages were found through the analytical program Crowd Tangle.

Shared content was observed three days after sharing to enable the collection of user interactions in an optimal period of time.

2) 167 open Facebook groups

Sampling method: Open groups on Facebook with over 40,000 users when monitoring began. 167 such open groups were found through the analytical program Crowd Tangle.

Shared content was observed three days after sharing to enable the collection of user interactions in an optimal period of time.

Observation method: Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content (30 pieces daily) with the highest levels of interaction shared on selected pages and groups. The main objective of the observation of popular pages and open groups is to determine the type of content that triggers the highest levels of interaction among users and how frequently politics or electoral matters are found among such content; how frequently monitoring subjects feature in these materials and the tone of their coverage; and the credibility of high-interaction content shared about politicians on these pages.

The key findings have been derived as a result of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content:

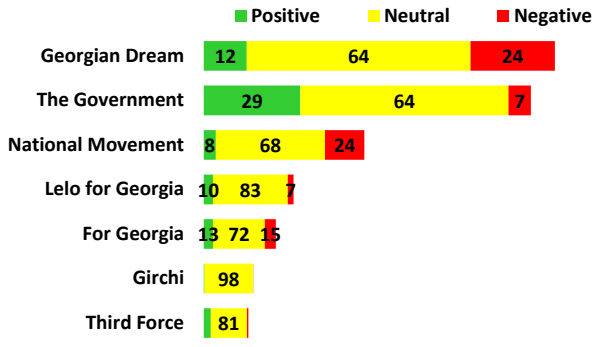
- The monitoring of the Facebook pages of TV channels identified that, as with on-air broadcasting, the information on political matters they disseminate over social networks is extremely polarized.

  An extremely negative attitude towards the ruling team was evident on the Facebook pages of the Mtavari Channel and Formula. Conversely, a positive attitude towards the government and a negative one towards opposition parties and politicians was observed in the content disseminated via the Facebook pages of Imedi, Rustavi 2, Achara Television and Channel One of the Public Broadcaster (See Annex: Diagrams).

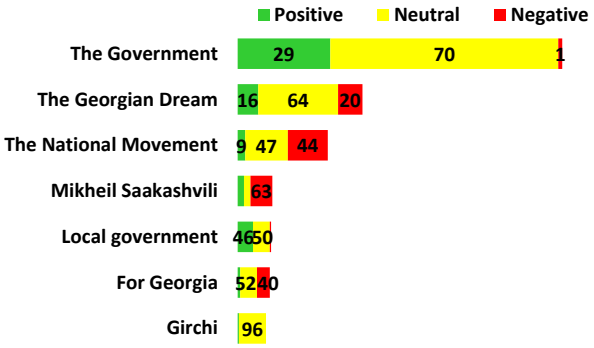
  For Channel One of the Public Broadcaster and Achara Television, quantitative monitoring revealed that, compared to broadcasting, a mostly positive attitude towards the ruling team and a more negative one towards the representatives of opposition parties can be observed in the content disseminated over their Facebook pages.

  The Facebook page of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster deserves special mention, as its monitoring revealed an extremely high predominance of positive tone towards the representatives of central and local government.

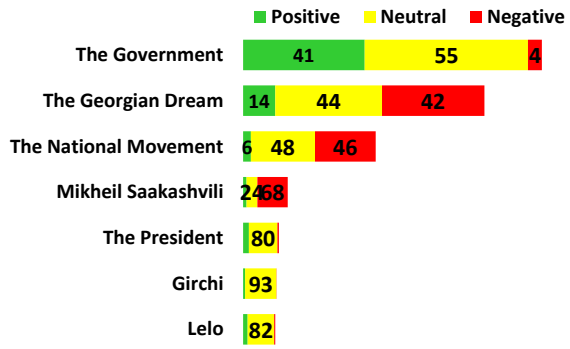
**The coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on the air of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster
(in main news programs)
July 15 - September 25, 2021**



The coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster
July 15 - September 25, 2021



The coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster
July 15 - September 25, 2021



- No tangible difference was found in most cases when comparing the results of the monitoring of information shared via Facebook pages of online media outlets and the results of monitoring articles published on their websites during the same period. Despite minor differences, it can be said that the form and content of the coverage of politicians and political issues by online media outlets via their Facebook pages is mostly the same as that published on their own websites, since most of the content they share over Facebook consists of their own articles. (For the results of the monitoring of Georgian online media, see the Report of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics on Mediamonitor.ge.)

- No instances were identified of problematic content being published on the Facebook pages of government entities or top leaders during the period of monitoring; nor were attempts to promote party candidates or discredit opposition politicians observed on the Facebook pages of government entities or municipal administrations; not were any instances identified of deliberate misinformation being spread via the Facebook pages of government entities or top leaders.

- Insulting or humiliating content was frequently published on the Facebook pages of political parties and certain politicians, and the monitoring identified numerous cases of opponents being grossly insulted. That said, particularly problematic materials containing hate speech, incitements to violence or deliberate misinformation were only very rarely encountered. Essentially, materials containing hate speech, homophobic statements, targeted misinformation and anti-vaccination messages were only observed on the Facebook pages of the Georgian Idea party and its chairperson, Levan Chachua. Similar problematic content was not identified on the Facebook pages of any important party or politician.

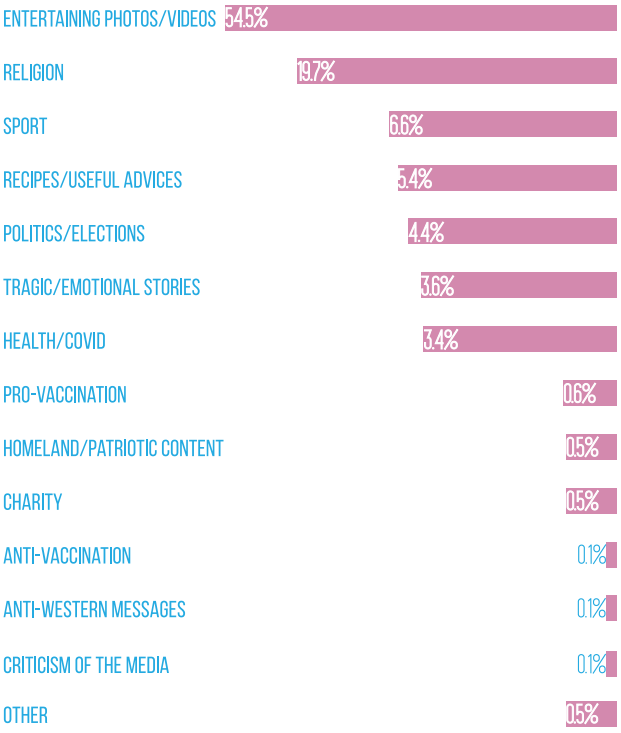
NUMBER OF POSTS SHARED BY POLITICIANS ON THEIR FACEBOOK PAGES.
JULY 15 – SEPTEMBER 25, 2021

Matters related to politics or the elections were rarely observed among the content that enjoyed high levels interaction on popular pages and open groups. On popular pages, only 4.4% of the content with the highest daily levels of interaction concerned politics or politicians, and in open groups this dropped to 2.1%. Instead, entertainment, religion, sports and other content enjoyed the highest levels of interaction on popular pages and in open groups.

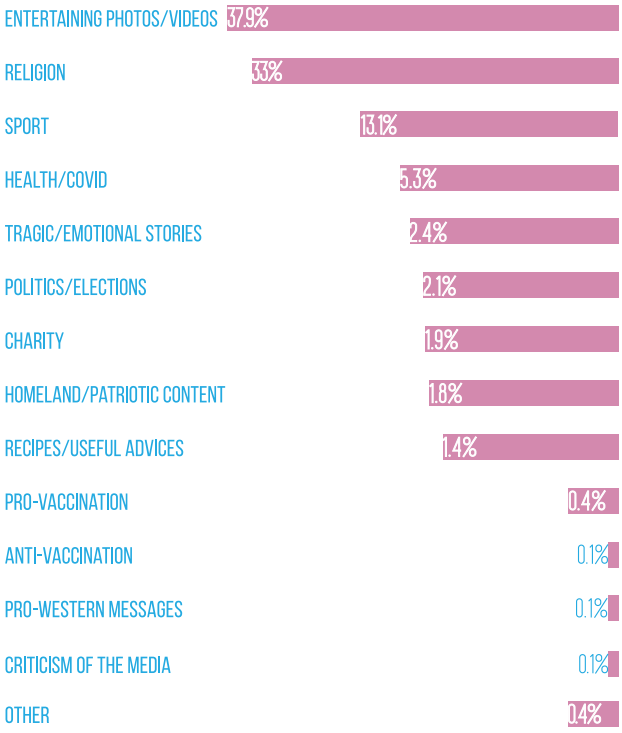
Materials about individual politicians were shared irregularly and the tone was mostly neutral. As for political parties, only several pages were identified as openly supporting the ruling party (e.g., Mikheil Ukrainologi, Bidzina Ivanishvili for Georgia). These pages also shared content that was critical and often insulting towards opposition politicians, but it must be said that such content was only rarely found among materials that enjoyed the highest levels of interaction.

Especially problematic materials (e.g. containing hate speech, incitements to violence or targeted misinformation) with high levels of interaction were not found on popular pages and in open groups.

TOPICS OF POSTS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF INTERACTIONS ON PUBLIC PAGES. ANALYSIS OF 2130 POSTS

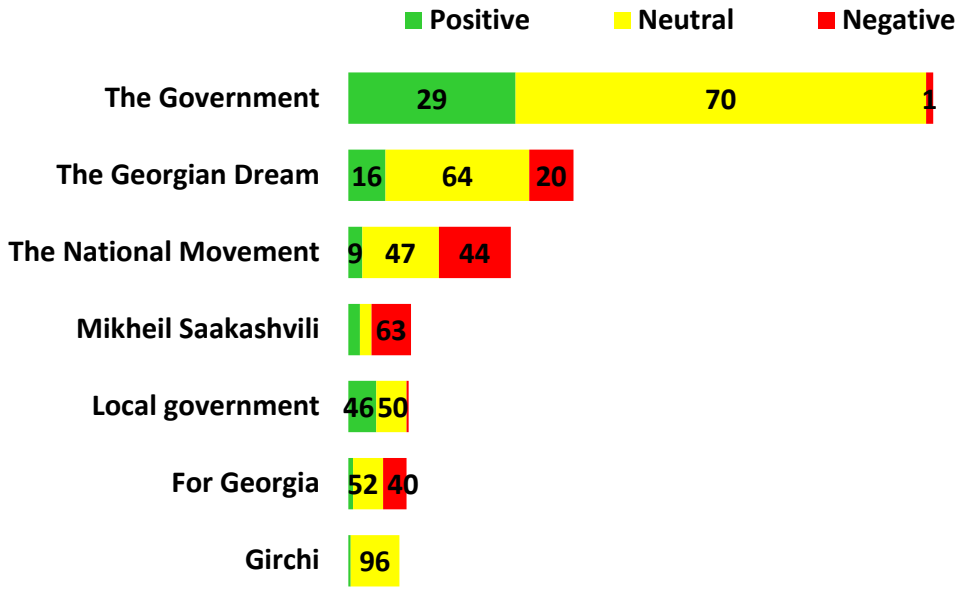


TOPICS OF POSTS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF INTERACTIONS IN OPEN GROUPS. ANALYSIS OF 2130 POSTS

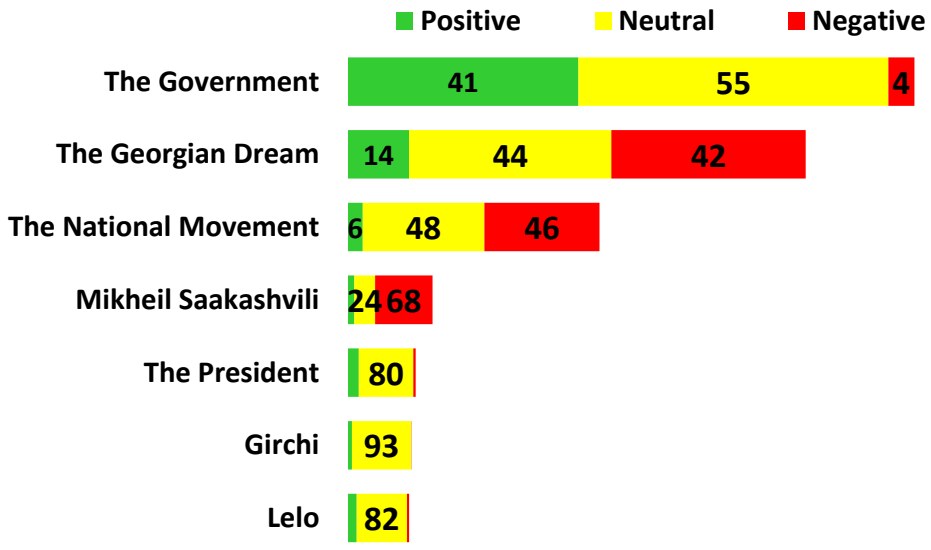


Annex 1: The results of monitoring the Facebook pages of TV channels:

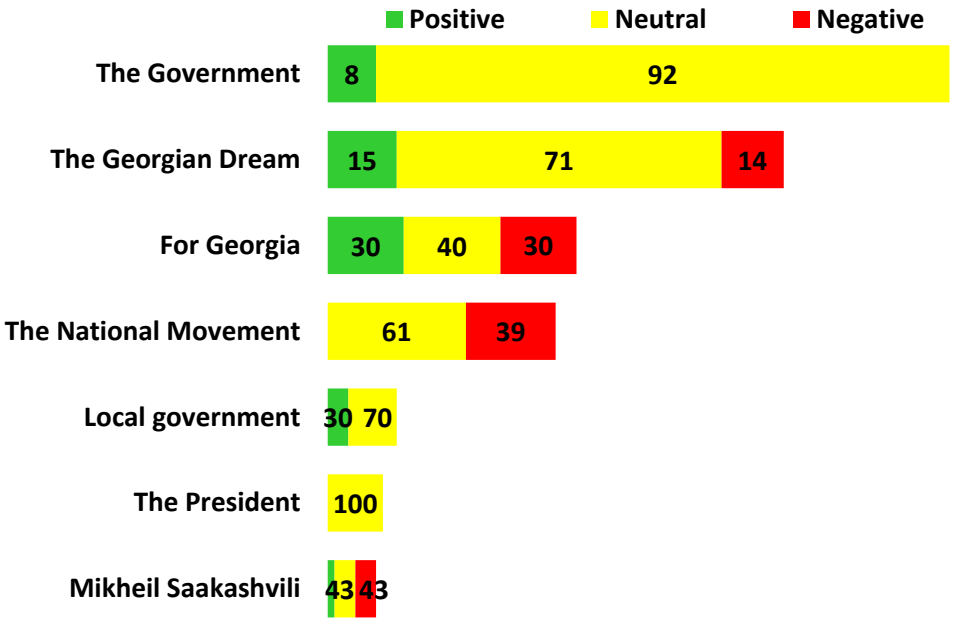
The coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster
July 15 - September 25, 2021



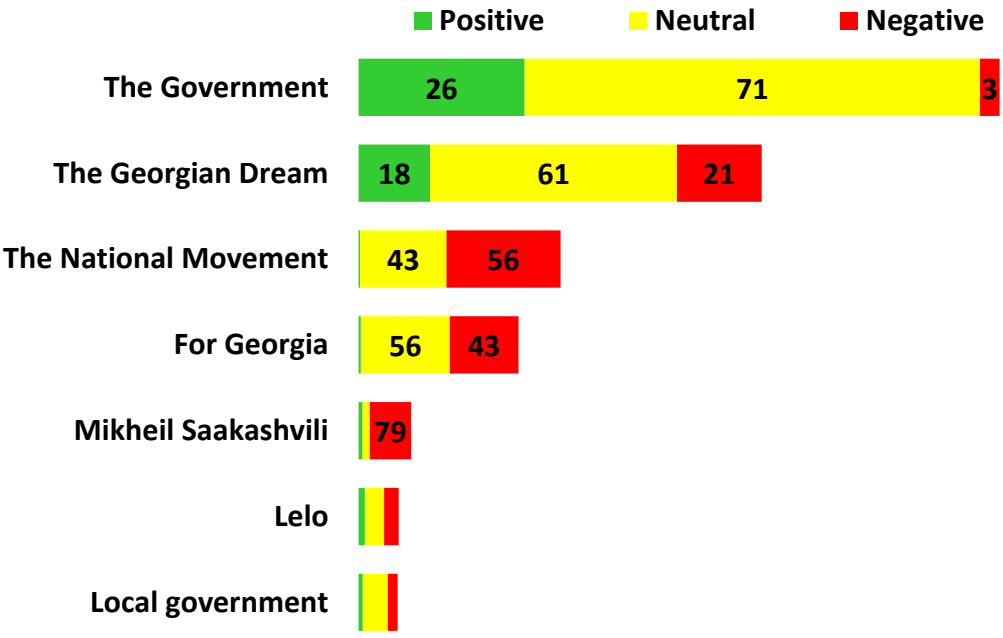
The coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Channel One of the Public Broadcaster
July 15 - September 25, 2021



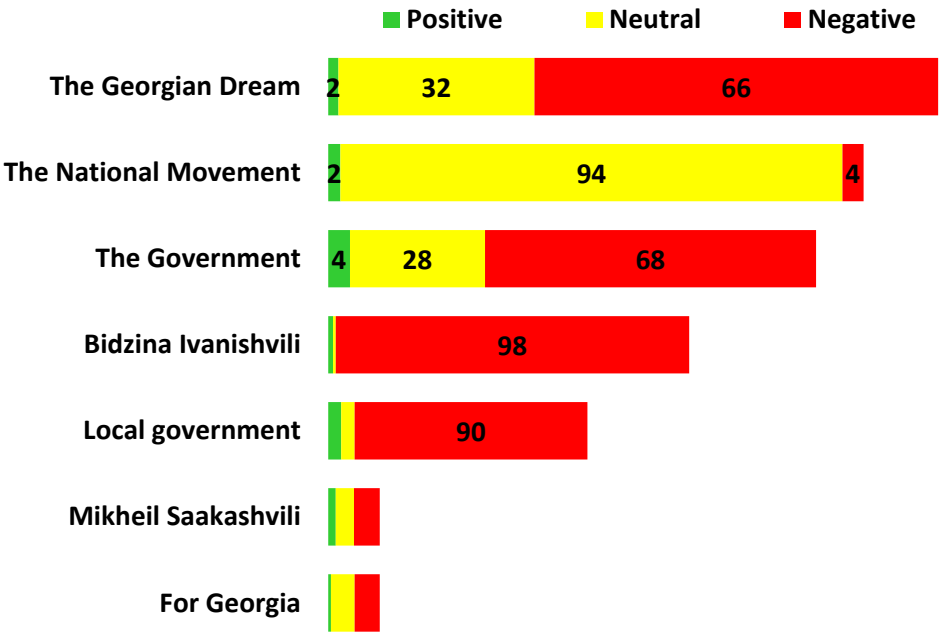
The coverage of the subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Rustavi 2
July 15 - September 25, 2021



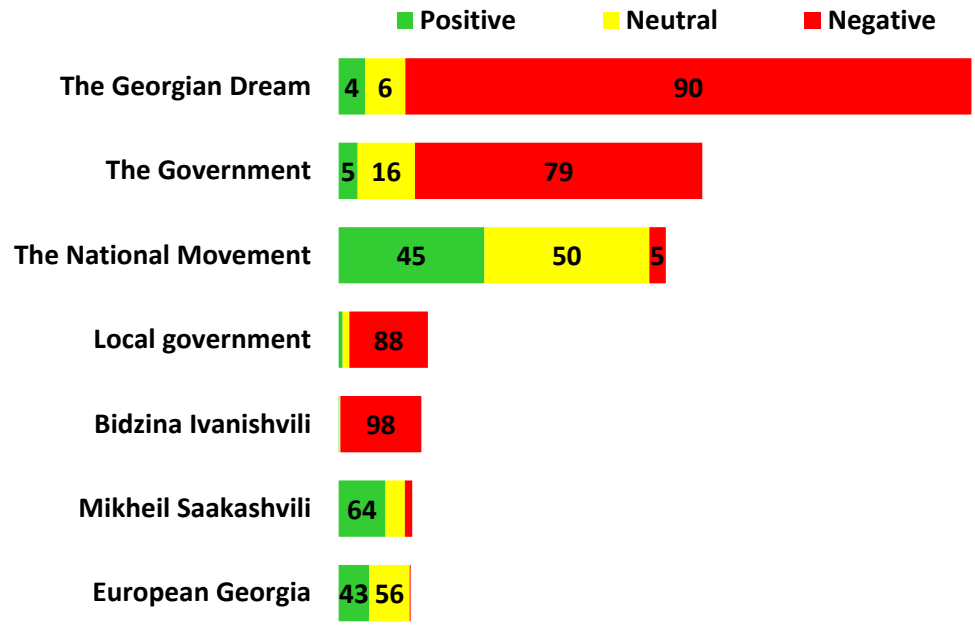
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Rustavi 2
July 15 - September 25, 2021



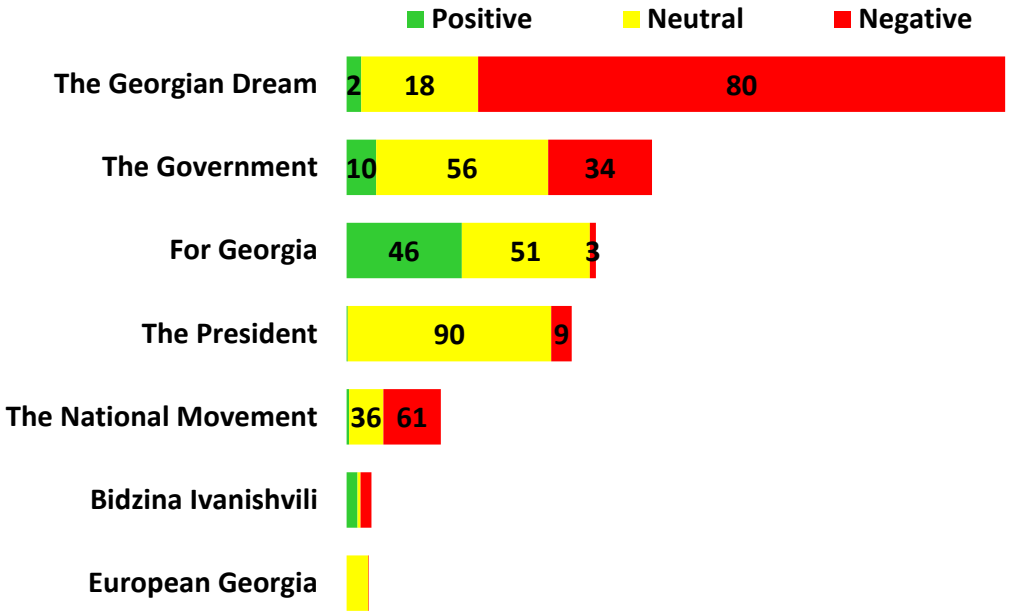
The coverage of subjects by tone(%)
in Facebook posts of Mtavari Channel
July 15 - September 25, 2021



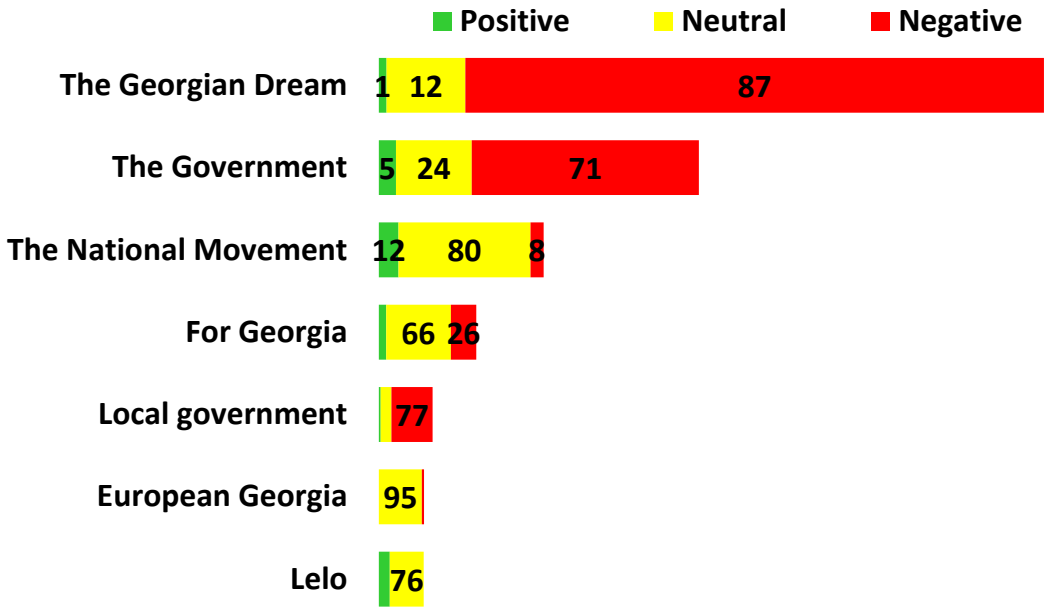
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Mtavari Channel
July 15 - September 25, 2021



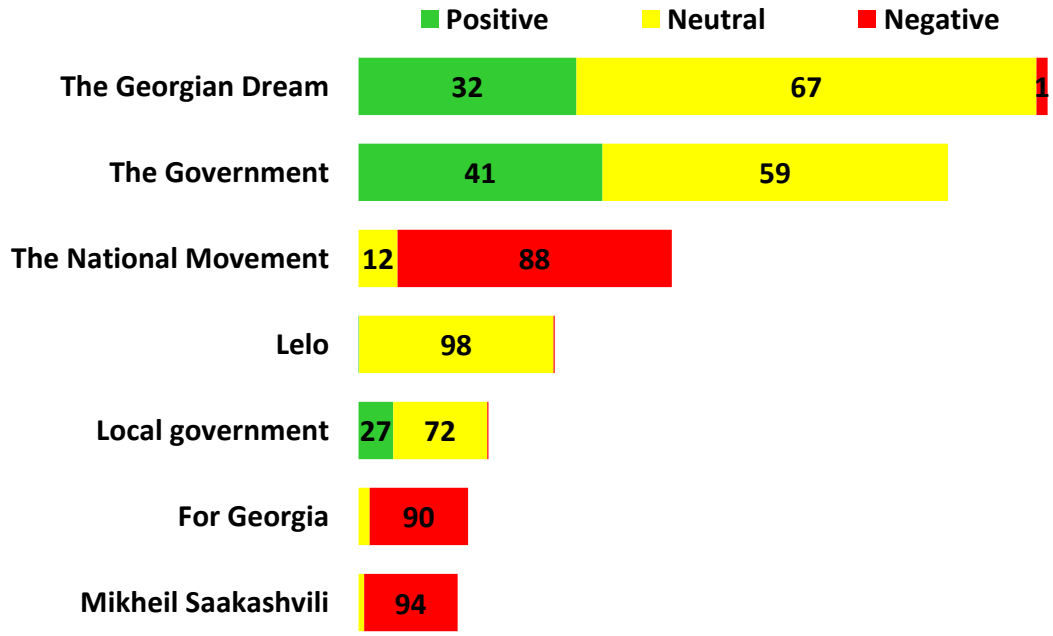
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Formula
July 15 - September 25, 2021



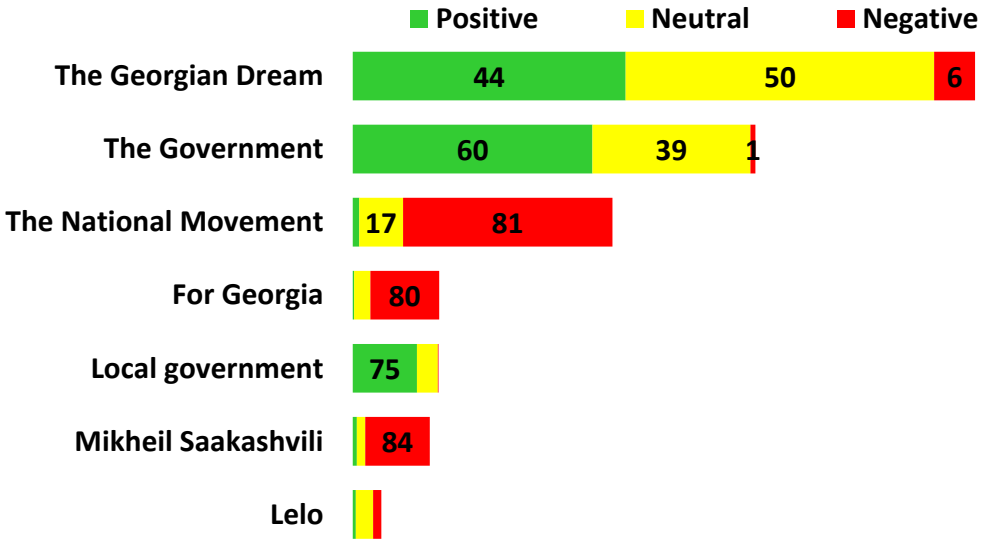
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Formula
July 15 - September 25, 2021



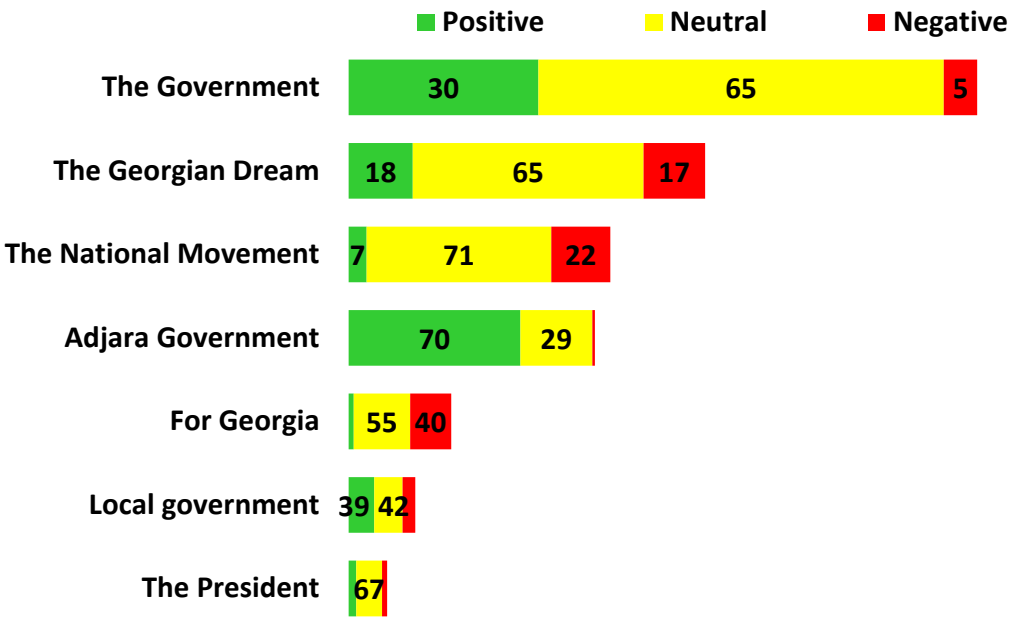
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Imedi
July 15 - September 25, 2021



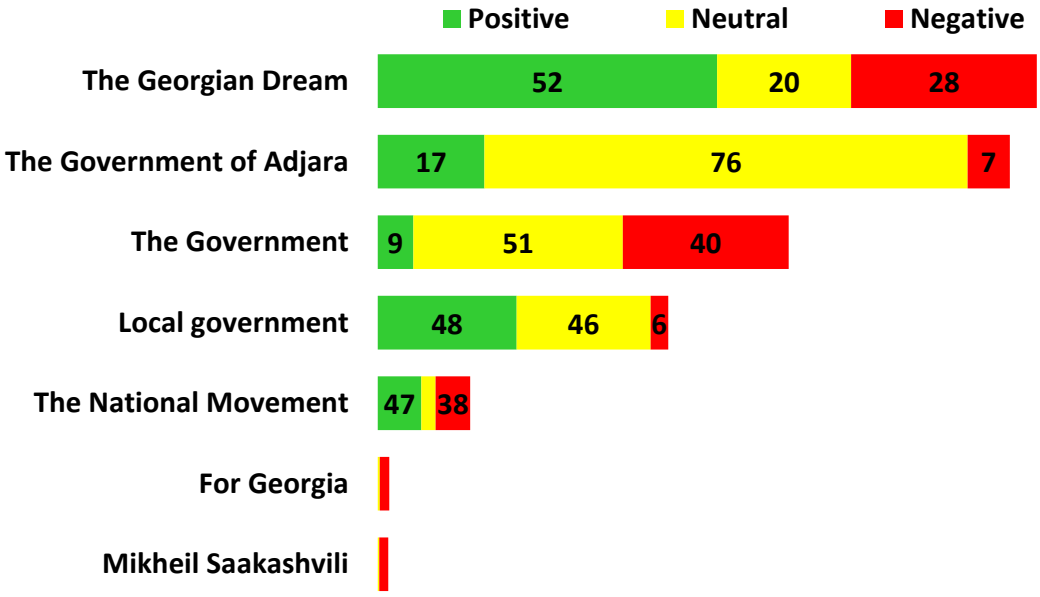
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Imedi
July 15 - September 25, 2021



The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook posts of Adjara Television
July 15 - September 25, 2021

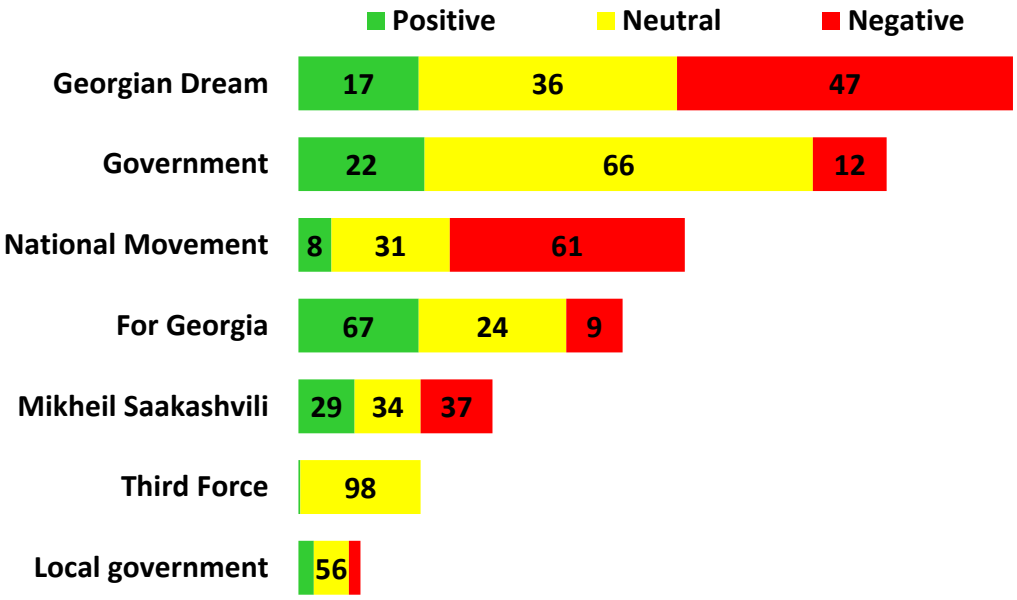


The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
in Facebook videos of Adjara Television
July 15 - September 25, 2021

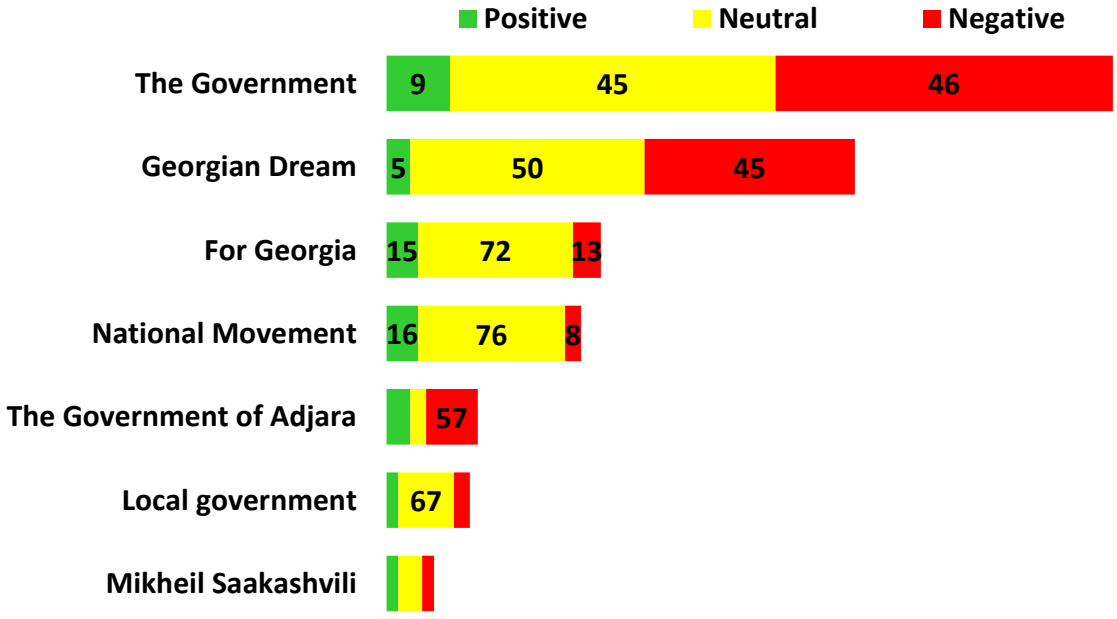


ANNEX 2. The results of the monitoring of Facebook pages of online media outlets:

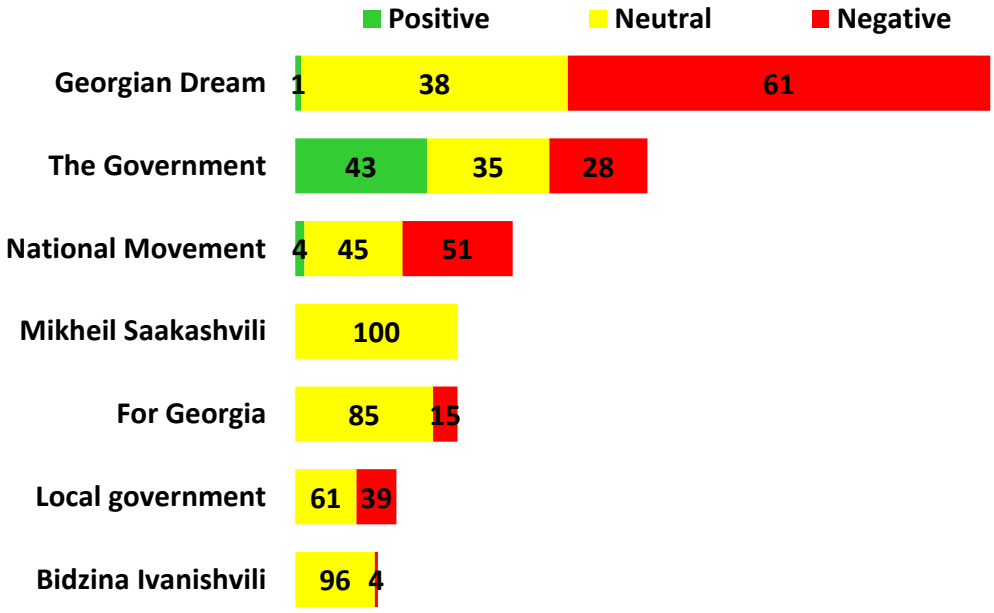
The coverage of subjects by tone (%)
on ambebi.ge Facebook page
July 15 - September 25, 2021



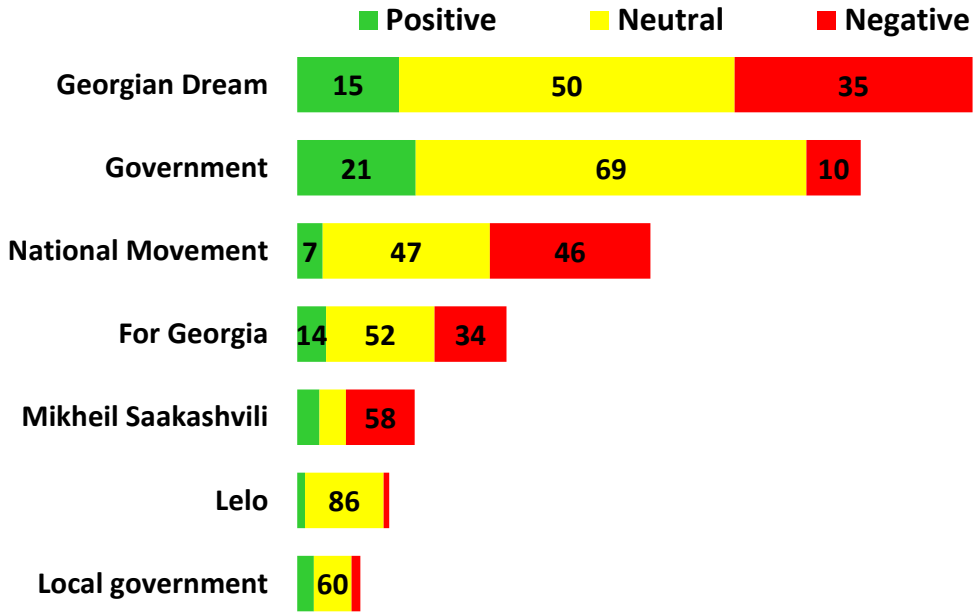
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **batumelebi.ge Facebook page**
July15 - September 25, 2021



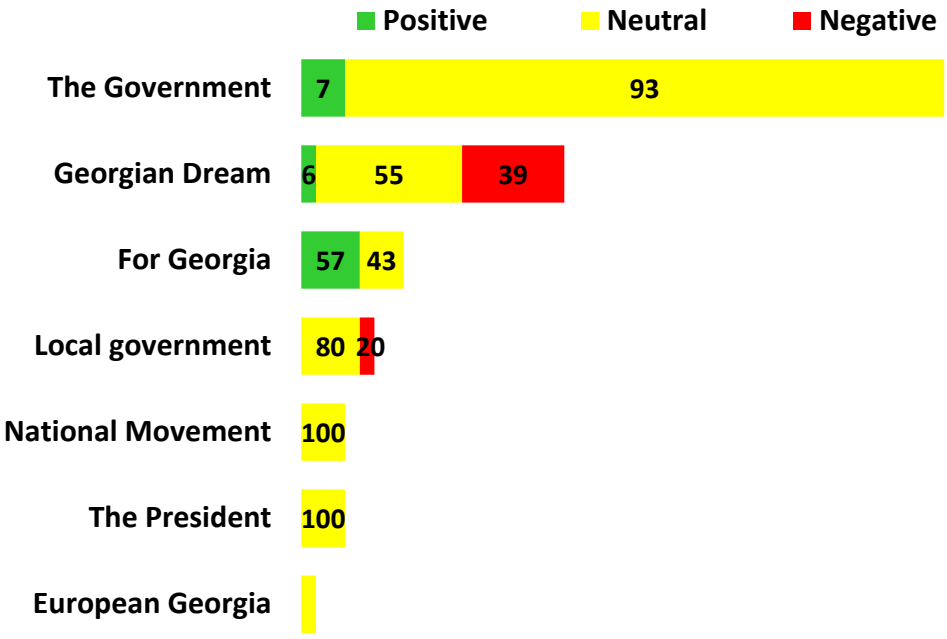
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
on **guriismoambe.com Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



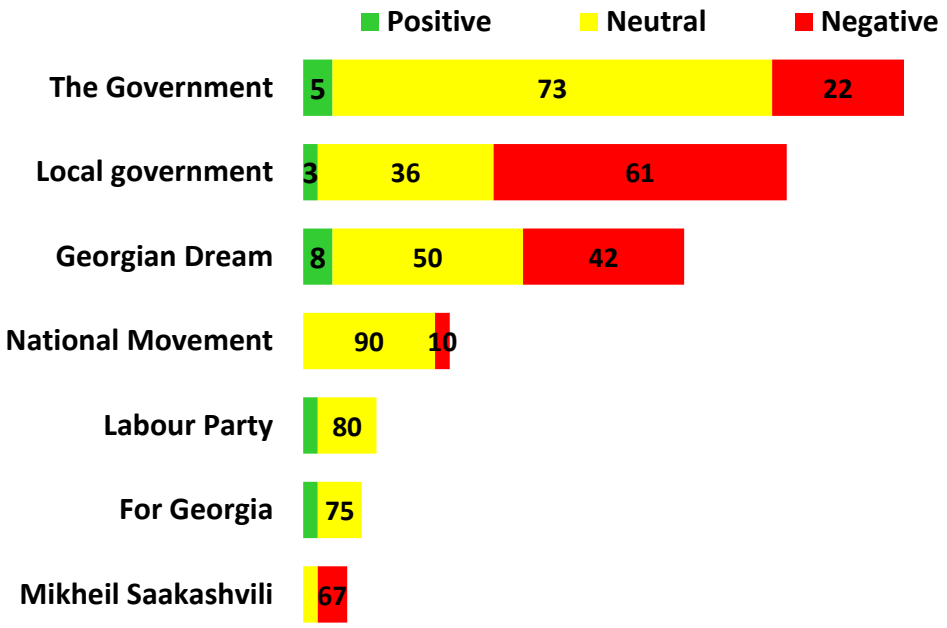
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
on **interpressnews.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25 , 2021



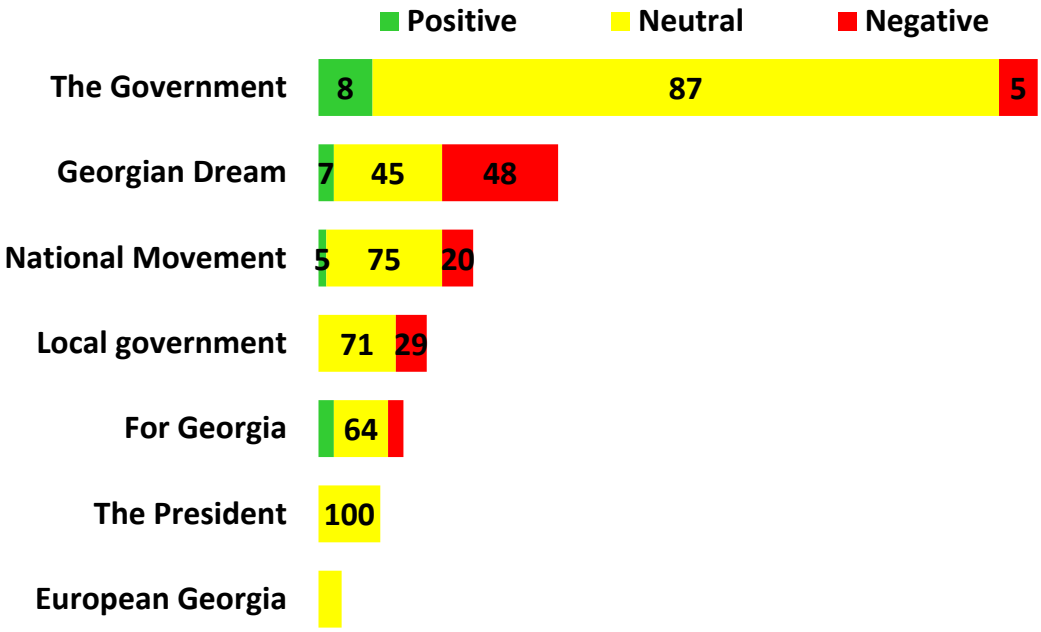
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **knews.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



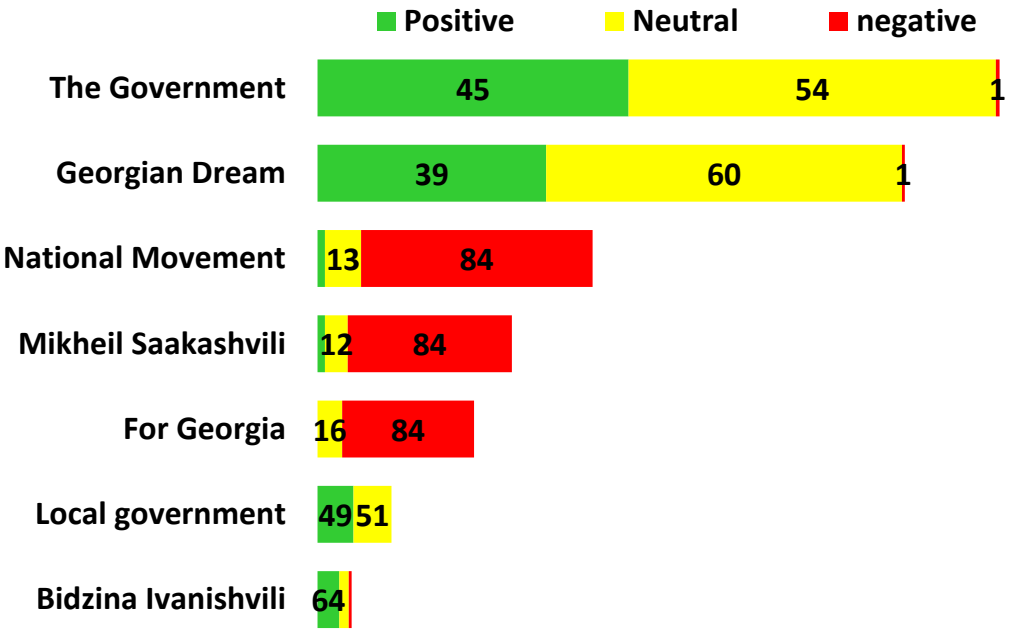
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
on **kutaisipost.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



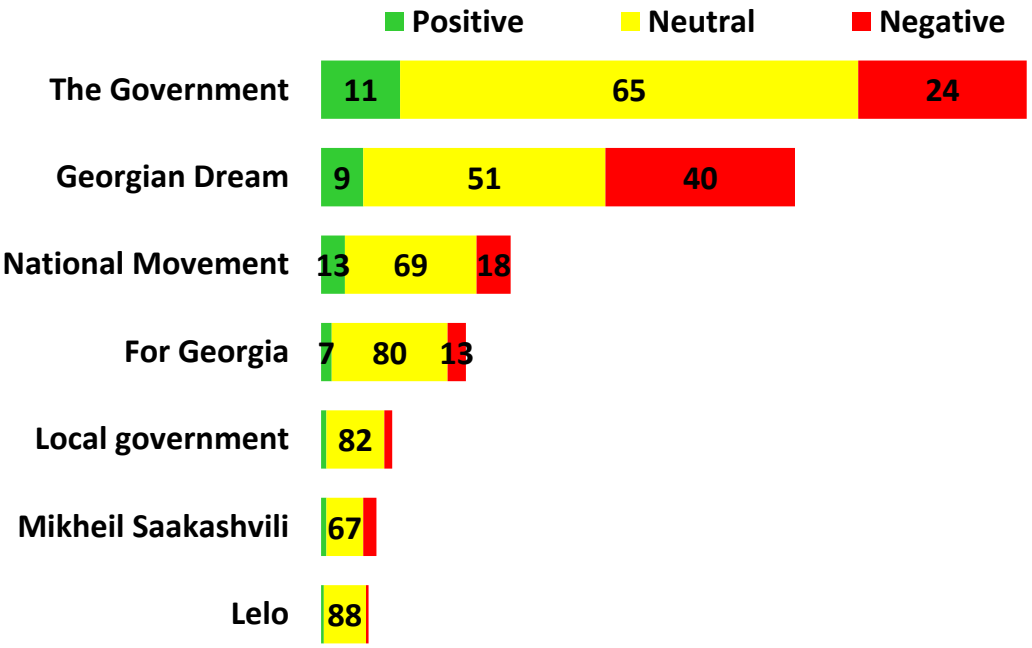
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **livepress.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



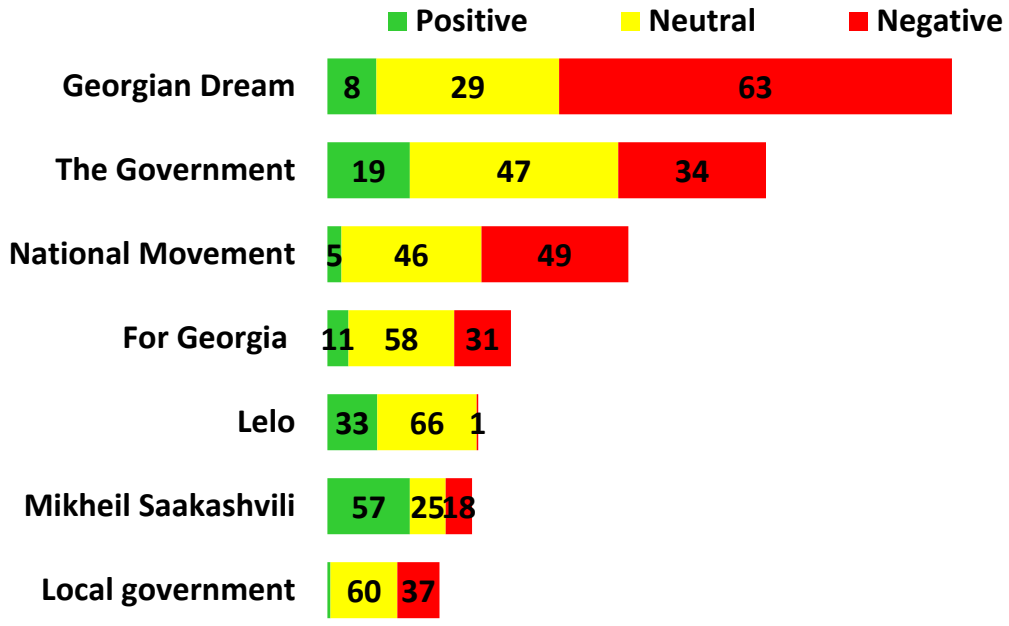
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **mpn.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



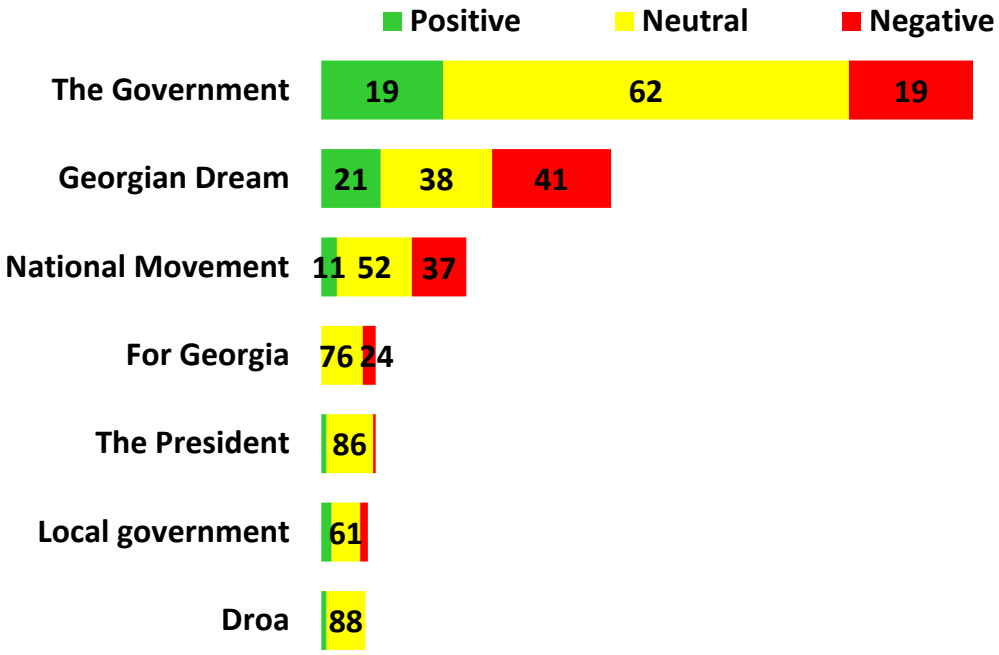
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
on **netgazeti.ge** **Facebook** **page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



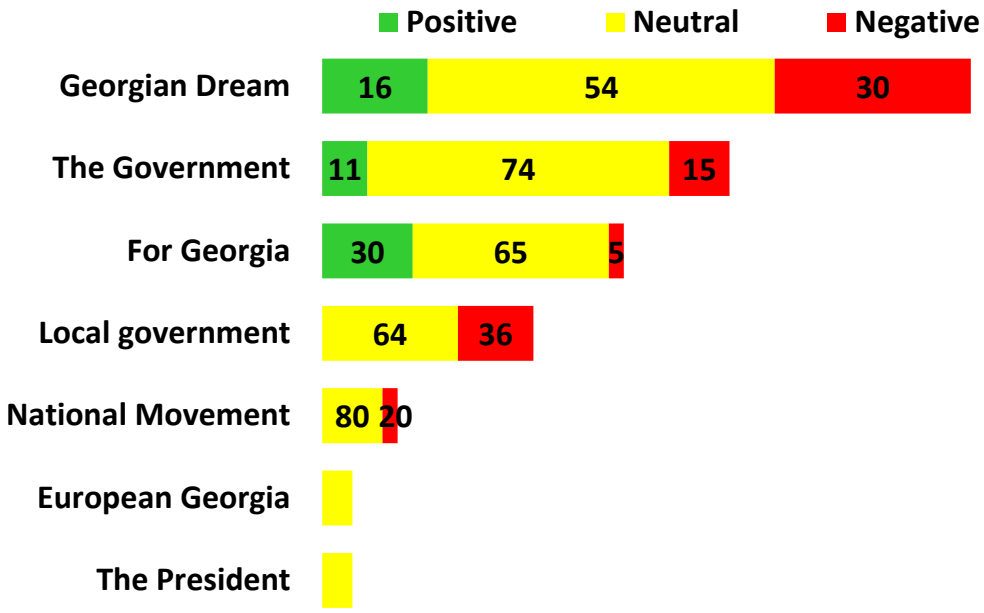
The coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **news.on.ge** **Facebook** **page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



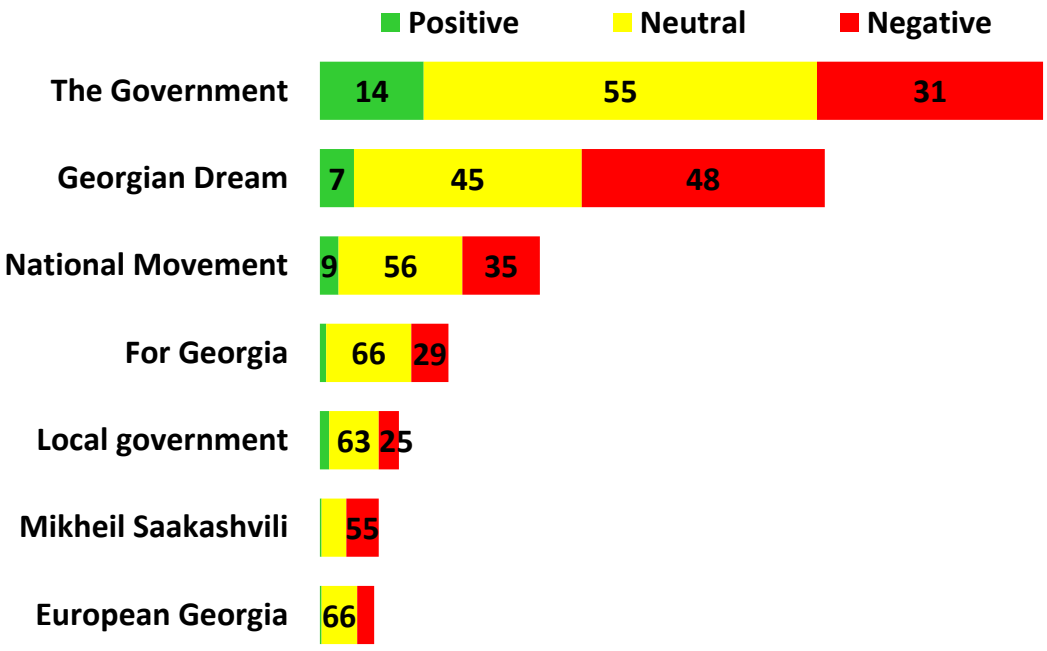
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **publika.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



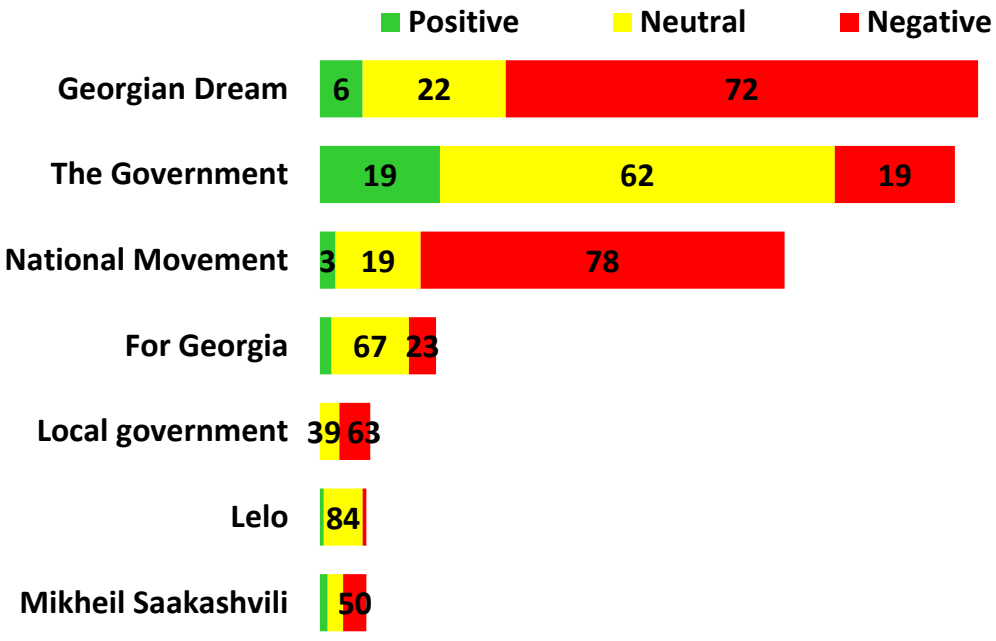
Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **qartli.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



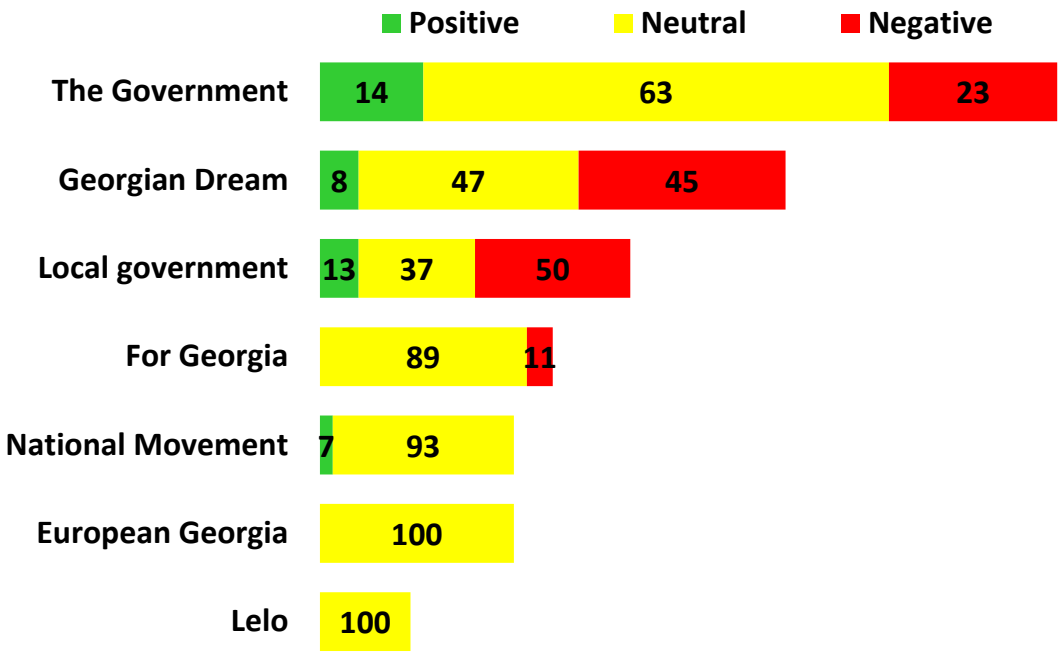
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
On **radiotavisupleba.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



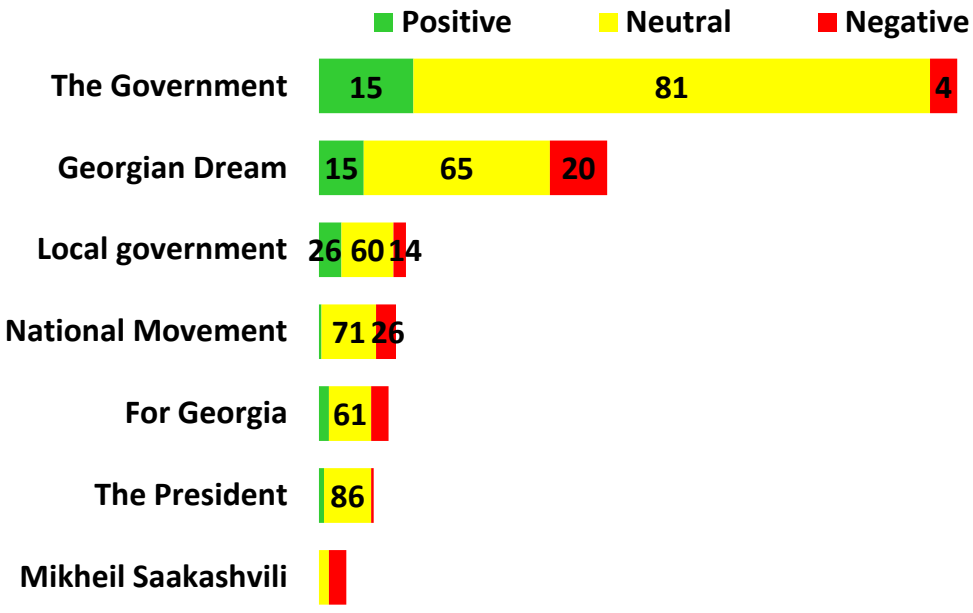
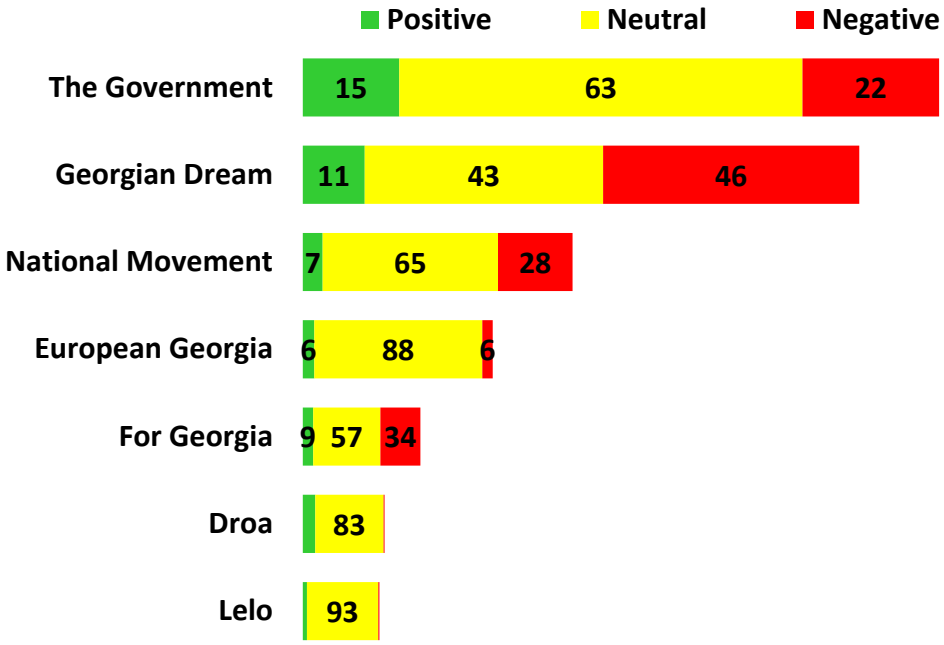
Coverage of subjects by tone (%)
On **reginfo.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
On **sknews.ge Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **sputnik-georgia.com Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021



Coverage of subjects, by tone (%)
on **tabula.ge-ს Facebook page**
July 15 - September 25, 2021