



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



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

Online Media Monitoring Preliminary Report

5 July - 25 September 2021



საქართველოს ჟურნალისტური
ეთიკის ქარტია

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About the Project

Within the framework of the UNDP project “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, the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics monitored the coverage of the 2021 local elections in online media. The monitoring began on 5 July and will end in December.

Methodology of the Study

The monitoring has both quantitative and qualitative research components. Quantitative monitoring focuses upon indicators that can be counted and measured—e.g. the amount of space devoted to various subjects, the tone of the coverage (positive, neutral, negative) or the gender of the subject (male or female).

Qualitative monitoring focuses on indicators that are difficult to quantify but are important to the quality of information—e.g. the timely reporting of facts, the distortion of information, unbalanced coverage, bias, fact-based reporting, the diversity of information sources, image manipulation, ethical and professional aspects, etc.

The monitoring covers the political parties and politicians running in the 2021 local elections as well as: the Government (central, local, Achara), the President, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili.

The monitoring focuses upon articles on the elections as well as upon all other materials in which the monitored subjects are discussed.

Advertising materials that are properly separated from editorial ones are not monitored.

The preliminary report presents the main results of online media monitoring. A detailed evaluation of each selected online media outlet will be presented in the final monitoring report.

17 online media outlets were selected for media monitoring: Ambebi.ge, Batumelebi.ge, Guriismoambe.com, Interpressnews.ge, Knews.ge, Kutaisipost.ge, Livepress.ge, Mpn.ge, Netgazeti.ge, News.on.ge, Publika.ge, Qartli.ge, Radiotavisupleba.ge, Reginfo.ge, Sknews.ge, Sputnik-georgia.com and Tabula.ge. Of these 17 selected outlets, 8 are regional online publications, which was one of the selection criteria. The selection was based upon ratings and a survey of media specialists.

Key Findings:

- Most online media display a high degree of editorial independence. According to the information they publish on their websites, their owners are affiliated with neither the government nor political parties. (14 of the 17 online publications monitored publish such information.) In addition, they receive financial support from local and international donor organizations operating in Georgia, which largely contributes to their editorial independence;
- There is less sharp political polarization among online media. However, several websites were identified as clearly showing a positive attitude towards the government team (e.g. Mpn.ge, Sputnik-georgia.com, Interpressnews.ge, Knews.ge) or the opposition (e.g. Guriismoambe.com);
- Most online publications do not have an editorial code of conduct published on their website, the only exceptions being Livepress.ge, News.on.ge and Tabula.ge. Nevertheless, a large proportion of online publications try and succeed in adhering to the standards of journalistic ethics;

Special attention is paid to the protection of high journalistic standards by Batumelebi.ge, Livepress.ge, Netgazeti.ge, News.on.ge, Publika.ge, Radiotavisupleba.ge, Reginfo.ge and Sknews.ge. Tabula.ge works in accordance with journalistic standards, but there are often cases of image manipulation in which representatives of the ruling party are presented in a mocking or derogatory manner;

Among the online publications selected for monitoring, the most serious violations of journalistic standards are systematically found on Mpn.ge, which, in an attempt to discredit opposition politicians, often uses hate speech, extremely offensive terminology, obscenity and homophobic and sexist statements. Particularly offensive statements against members of the ruling team are often posted on the regional website Guriismoambe.com. Failures to maintain a reasonable degree of balance during the coverage of political events were often found on the websites Ambebi.ge and Sputnik-georgia.com.

- Pluralistic and diverse coverage of the political spectrum remains a problem in online media. It is true that most of the websites pay due attention to the coverage of representatives of various political forces, but it should be noted that over half of the coverage of all online media outlets selected for monitoring was dedicated to the ruling team, the ruling party and central or local government. In the case of some media outlets, the frequency of coverage of the ruling team is much higher, especially in regional publications (see Appendix: Charts);
- The same can be said of the coverage of mayoral candidates: in most cases, candidates from the capital or other municipalities are covered in the context of partisan controversies, and there is little analysis of their election programs or visions for the development of municipalities. It should be noted that this circumstance to some extent reflects the pre-electoral political environment, as the candidates themselves (and especially those from opposition parties) paid less attention to the development plans or visions of the municipalities during the pre-electoral period, and often

viewed local elections in the context of the possibility of a change of government;

The improper separation between commercially contracted articles and editorial materials remains a challenge for online media. Although advertising materials on websites that adhere to journalistic standards are published with proper references, some online websites (e.g. Ambebi.ge, Interpressnews.ge) continue to publish advertisements without proper reference in online media;

- Especially noteworthy in this regard is Interpressnews.ge, one of the most rated online media outlets, which systematically publishes articles prepared under a commercial contract with inappropriate references (with Latin symbols “NS” placed in a circle). As a result, the reader cannot tell which of the published articles are advertising and which are journalistic work prepared by the editorial board. Official press releases prepared for publicity by various state agencies are often published as editorial materials by Sputnik-georgia.com and Mpn.ge;
- The greatest challenge facing online media is their superficial coverage of events. Only a small number of websites selected for monitoring are able to cover current political processes in depth and from different angles, as well as to seek out important issues for the public. Most of the online publications only follow the agenda of politicians and mostly cover the statements and daily activities of government officials and politicians. This problem is particularly evident in regional online publications;

Most regional publications fail to properly inform the local population about ongoing political processes in the region. With rare exceptions, coverage is limited to interviews with candidates about municipal development plans and visions. In most cases, the nomination of candidates from different political parties in the regions is actively covered, albeit superficially and in a fragmentary way, but direct communication between them and journalists is extremely rare.

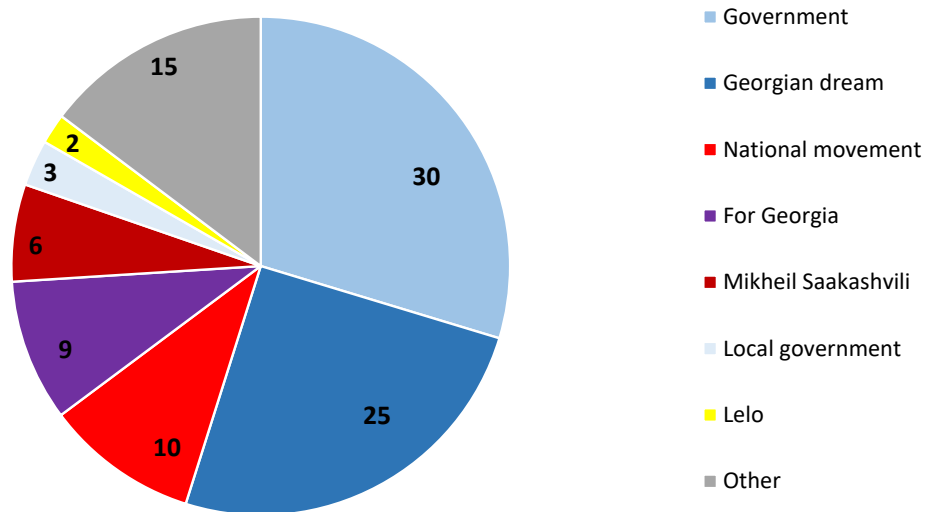
A disproportionately large amount of the relatively few materials published daily by regional online media outlets is devoted to coverage of the ruling party and central or local government (see Appendix: Diagrams), further reducing their readers’ ability to be properly informed about electoral issues;

- During the pre-electoral period, a number of statements containing gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination and deliberately undermining the role of women in politics were published without change and without comment. That said, it should be noted that compared to the results of monitoring during the 2020 parliamentary elections, the number of such cases has decreased.

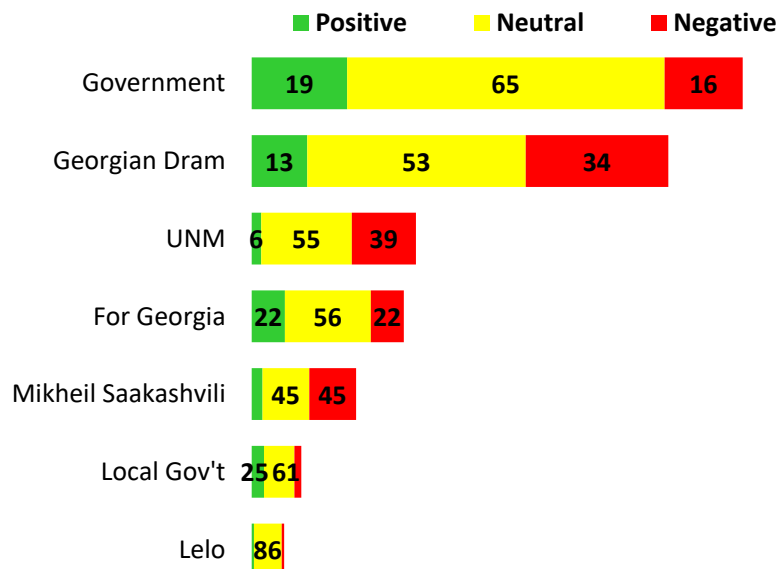
Annex: Diagrams

The diagrams show quantitative data on the subjects most frequently covered by each online media outlet.

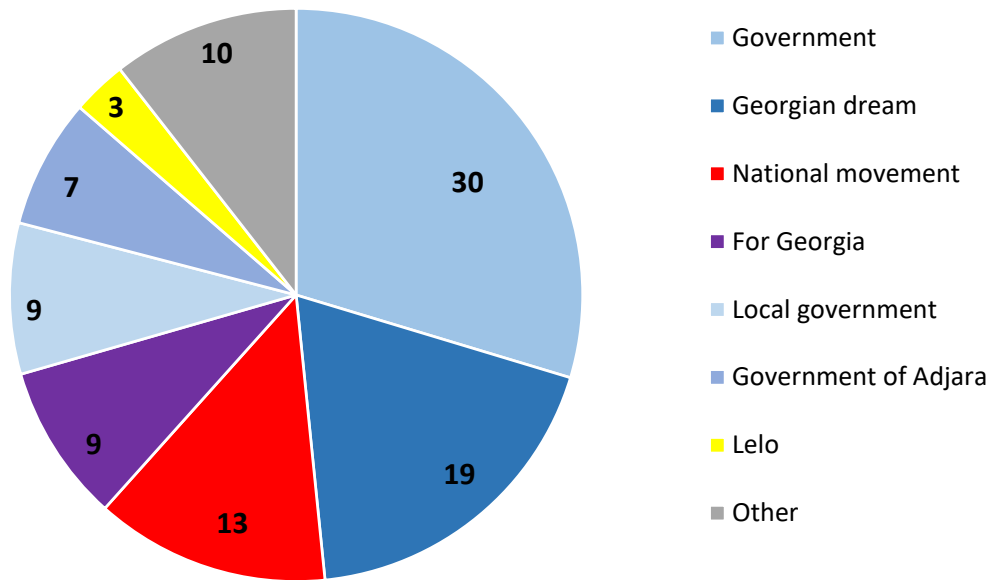
Coverage of subjects(%)
ambebi.ge
5 July - 25 September, 2021



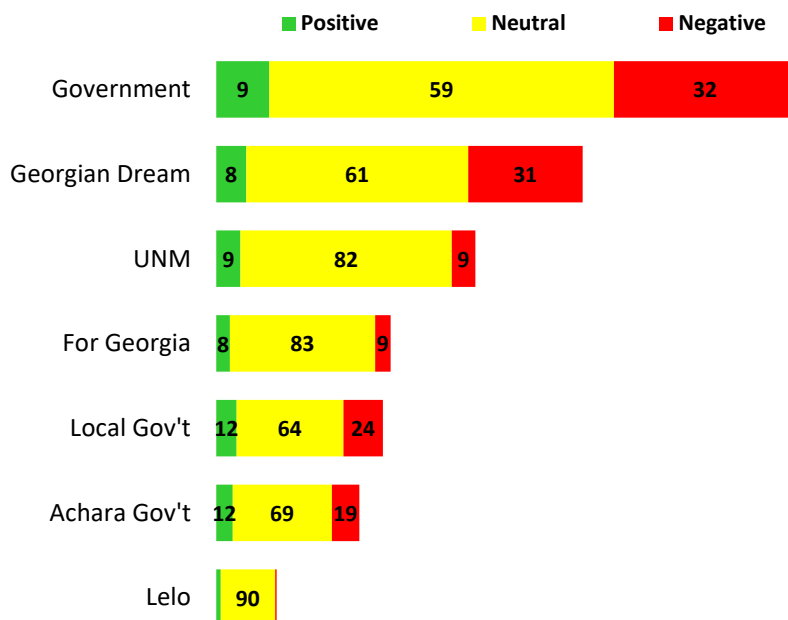
Tone of Coverage(%)
ambebi.ge
5 July - 25 September, 2021



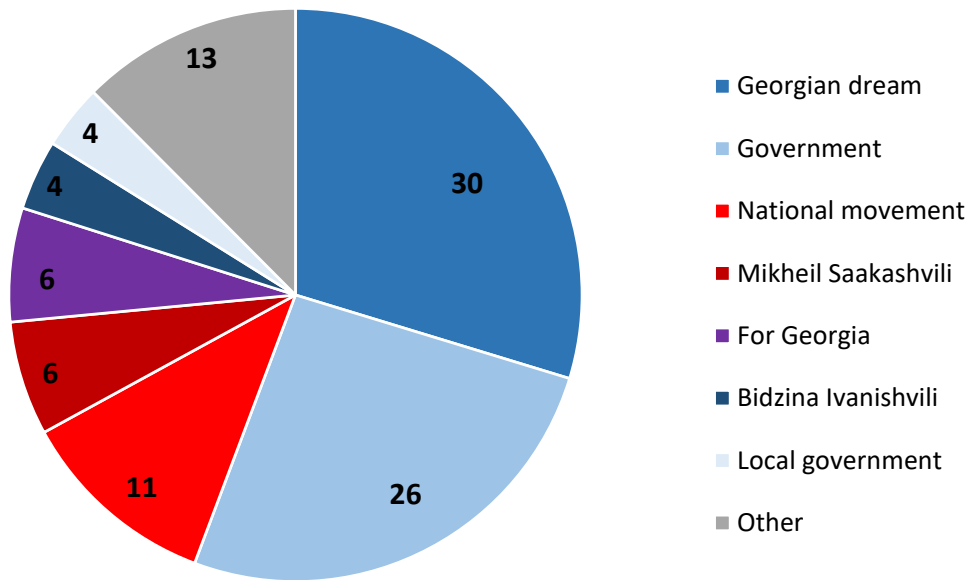
Coverage of subjects(%)
batumelebi.ge
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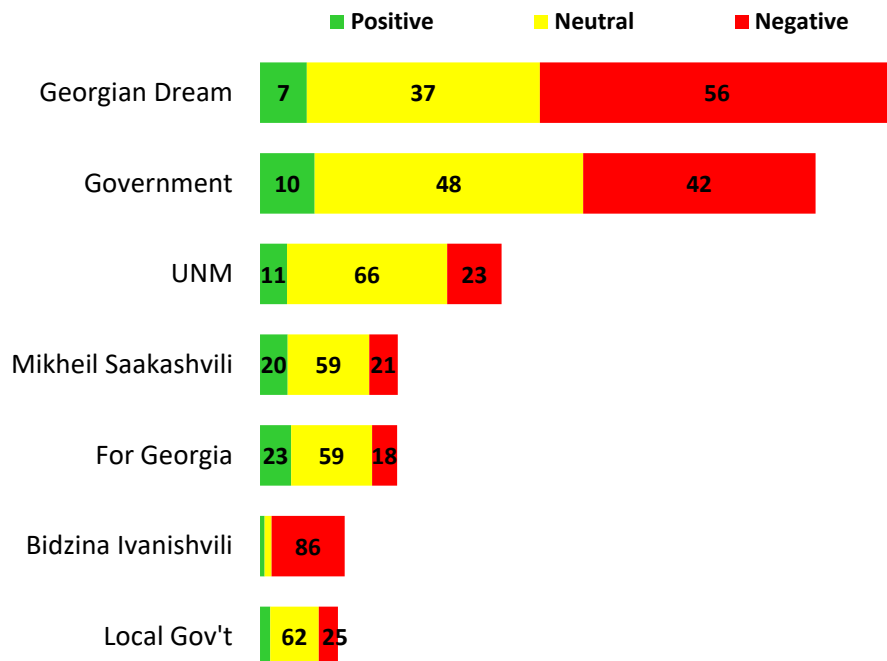
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5 July - 25 September, 2021



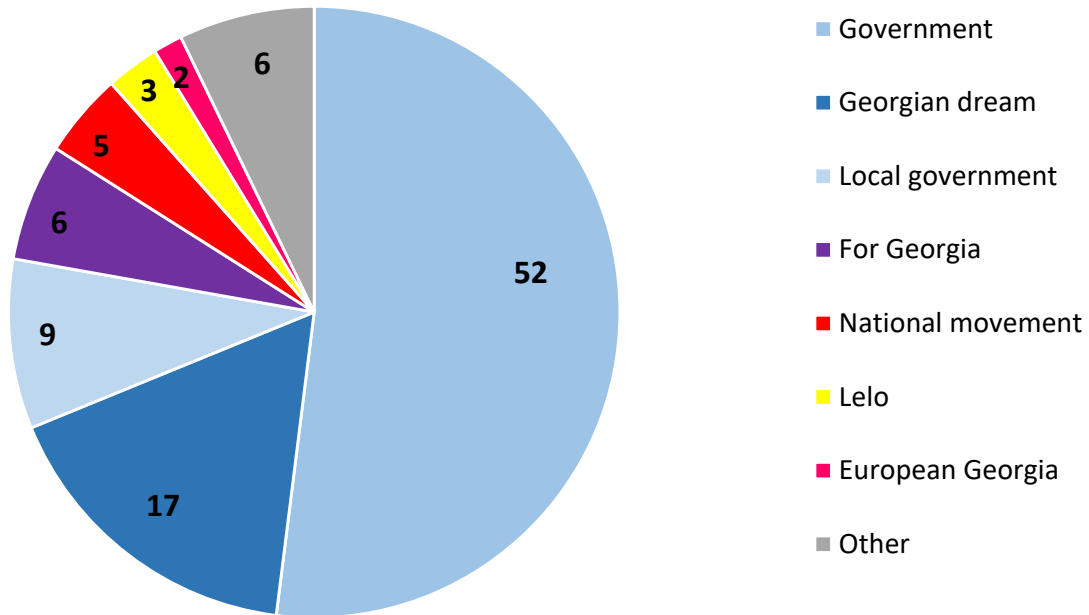
Coverage of subjects(%)
guriismoambe.com
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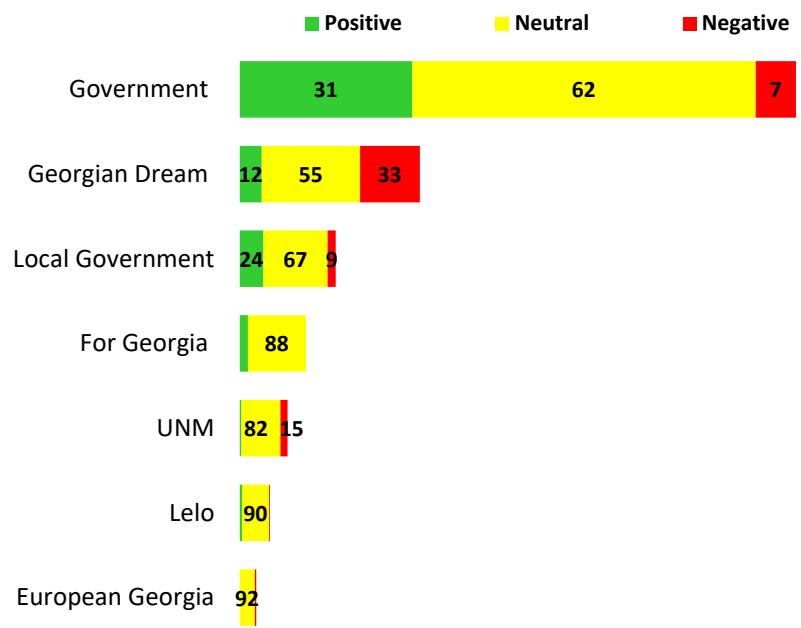
Tone of Coverage (%)
guriismoambe.com
5 July - 25 September, 2021



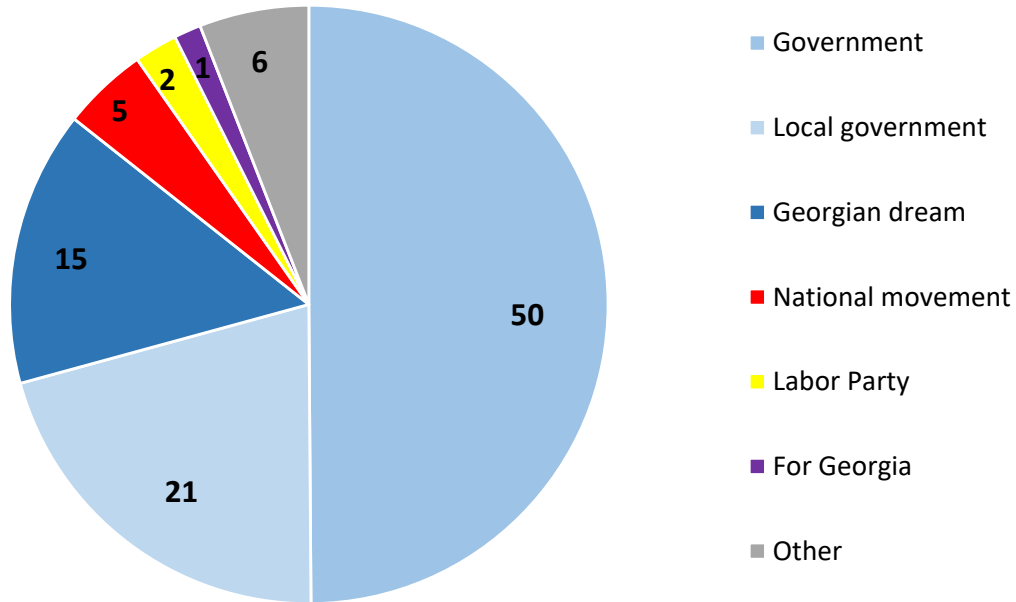
Coverage of subjects(%) **knews.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



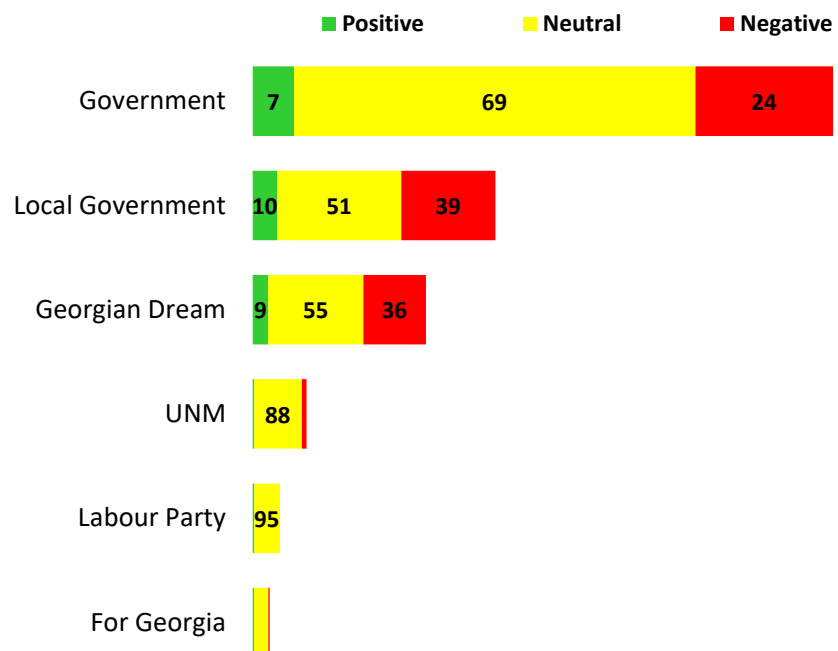
Tone of Coverage (%) **knews.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%) **kutaisipost.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



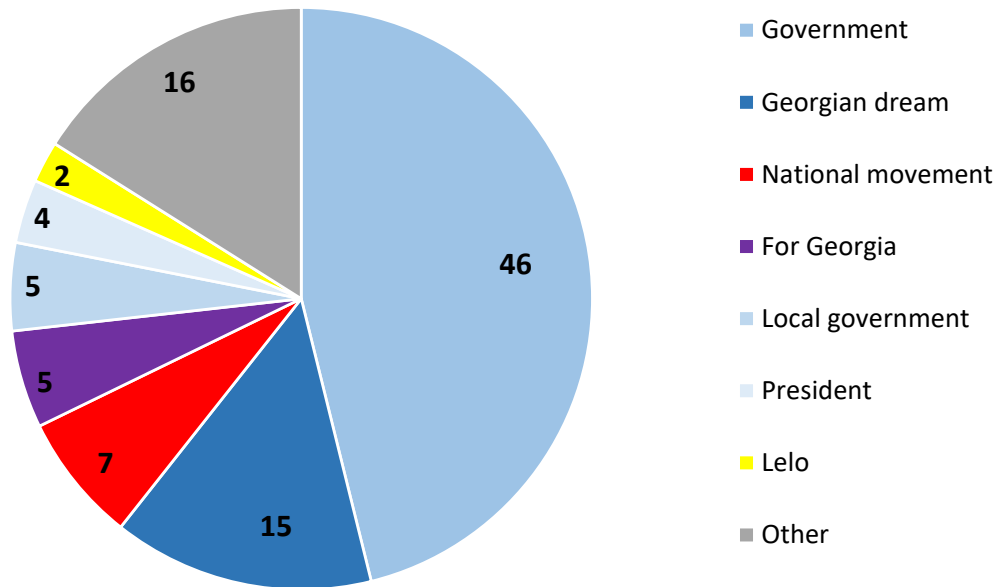
Tone of Coverage (%) **kutaisipost.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%)

livepress.ge

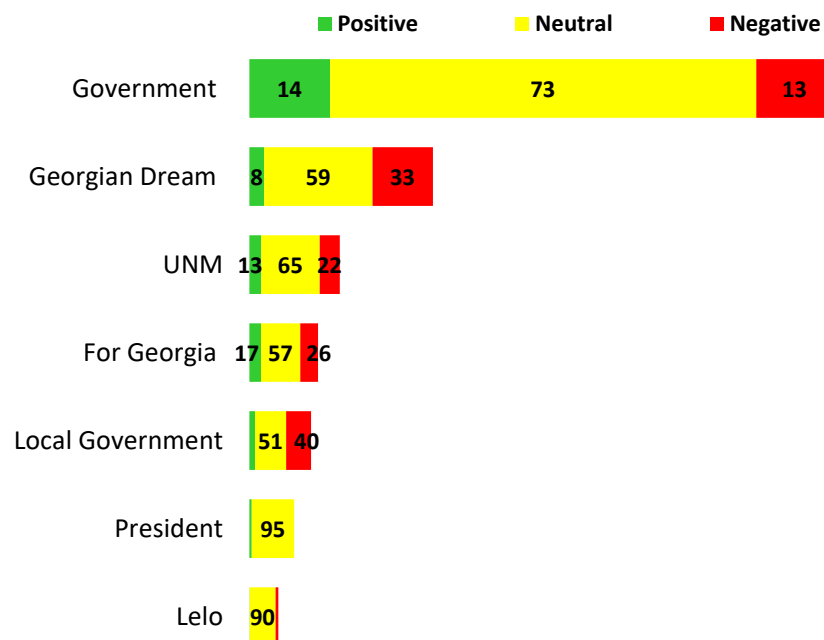
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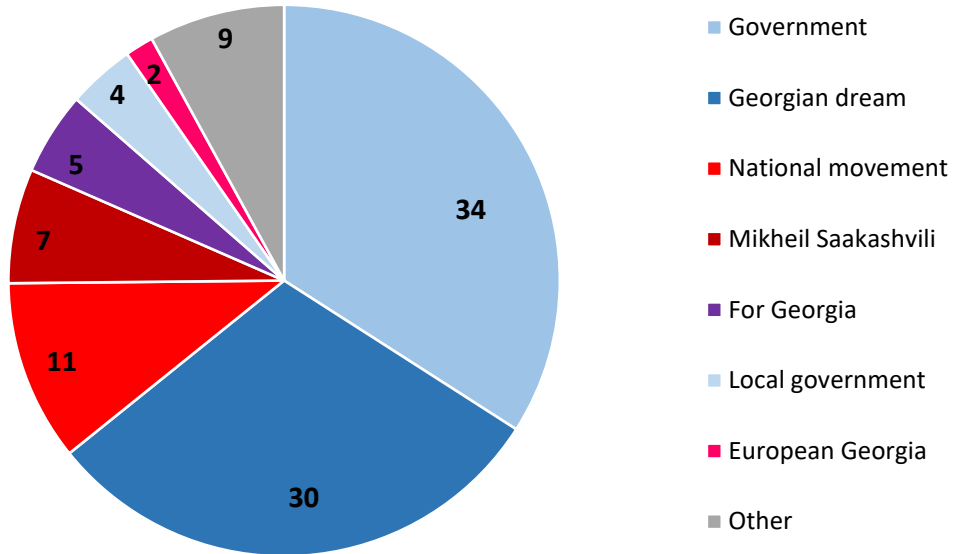
Tone of Coverage (%)

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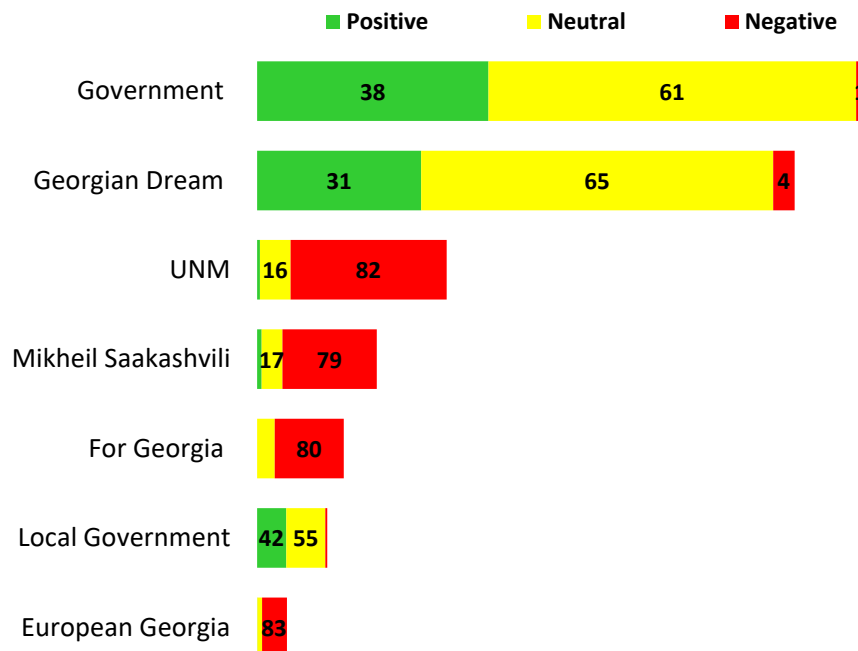
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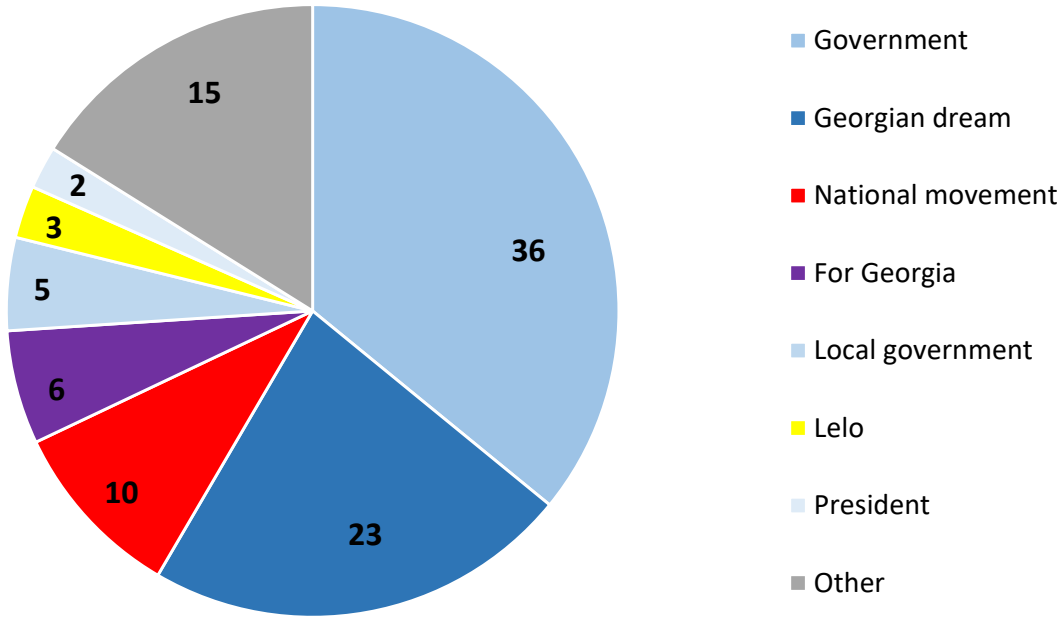
Coverage of subjects(%) mpn.ge 5 July - 25 September, 2021



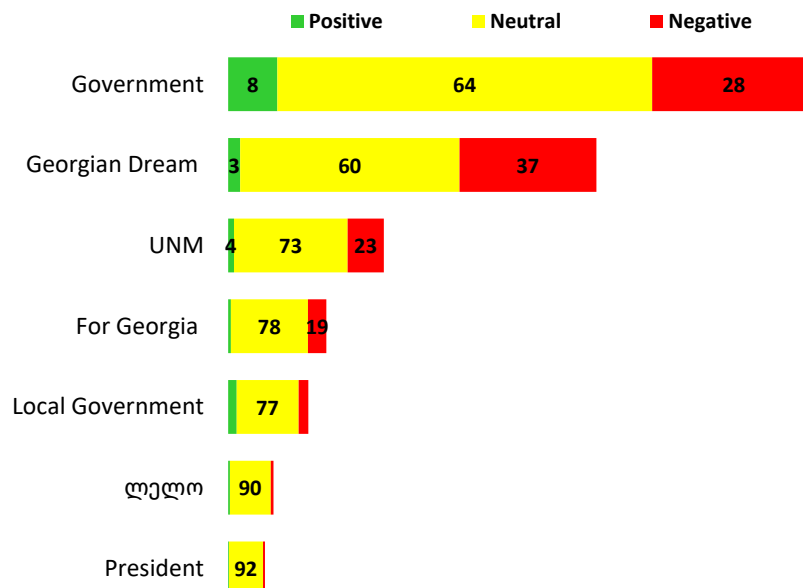
Tone of Coverage (%) mpn.ge 5 July – 25 September 2021



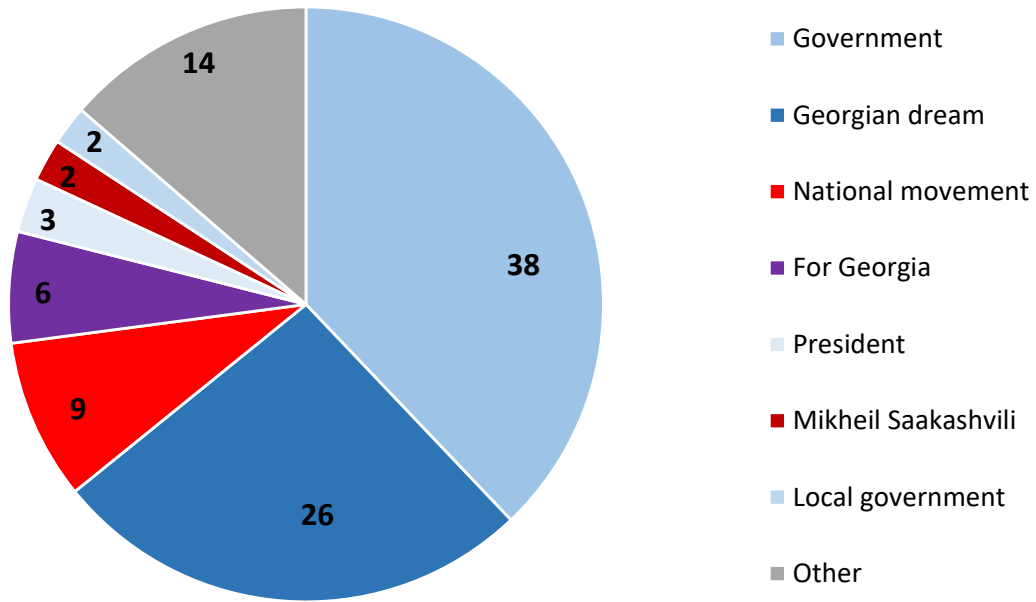
Coverage of subjects(%) **netgazeti.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



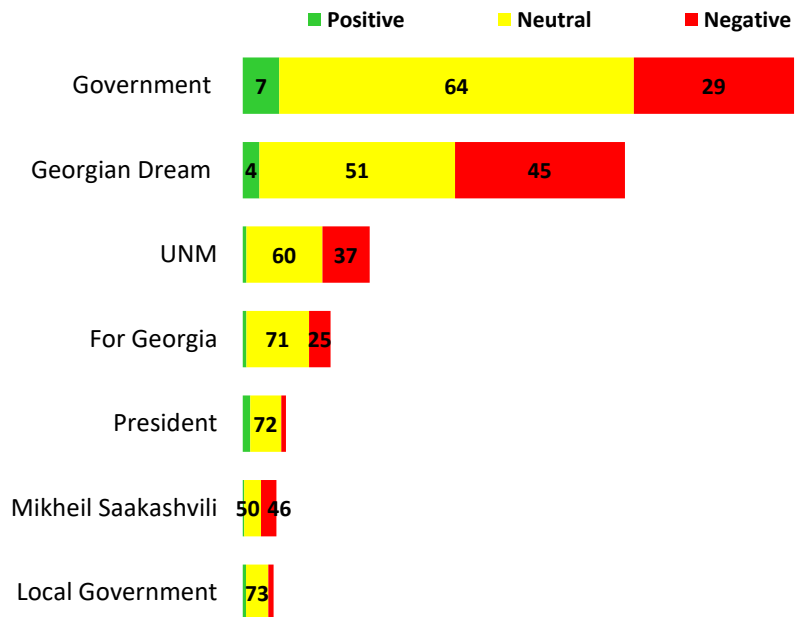
Tone of Coverage (%) **netgazeti.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%) **news.on.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



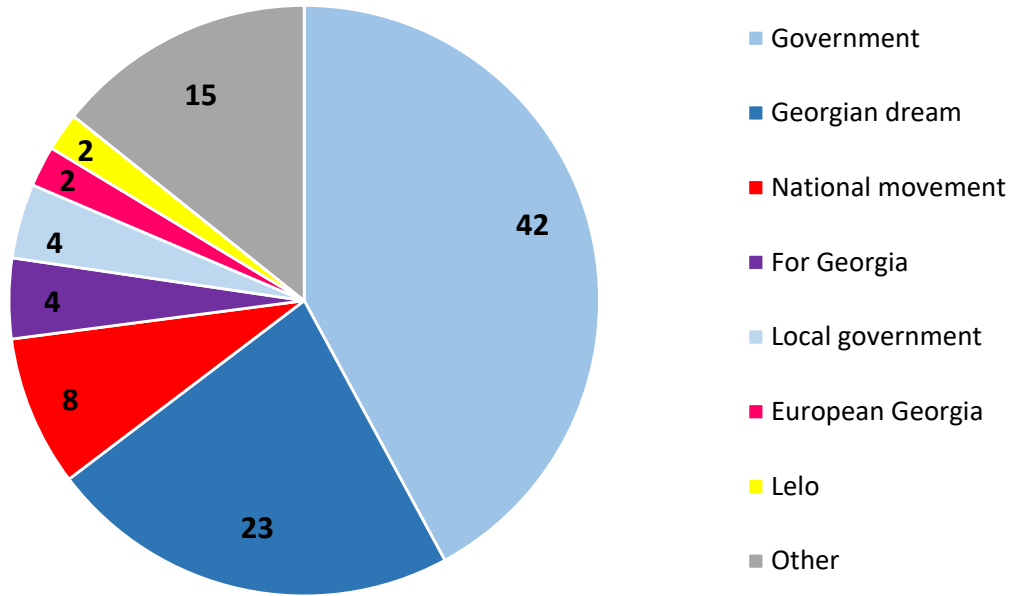
Tone of Coverage (%) **news.on.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%)

publika.ge

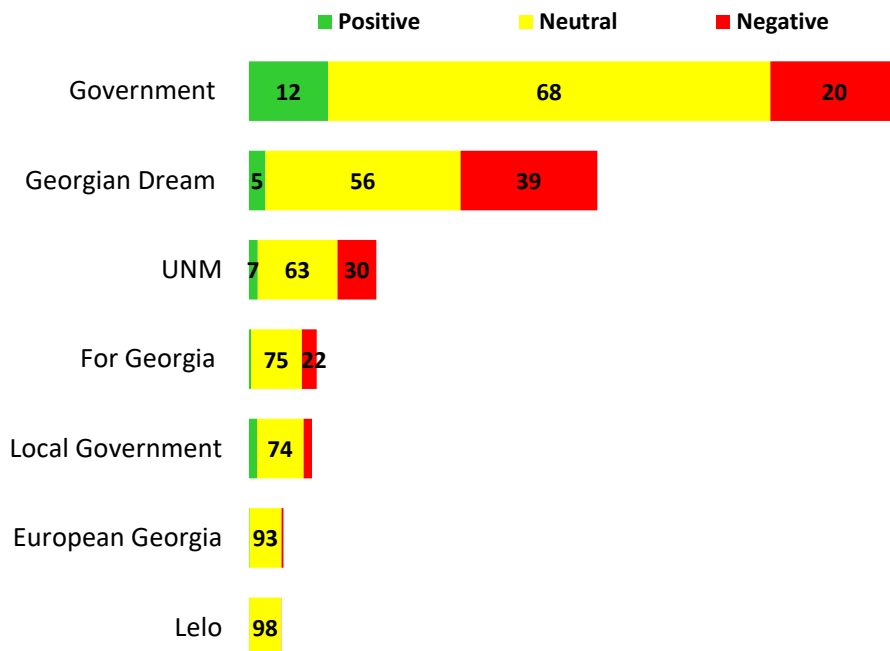
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)

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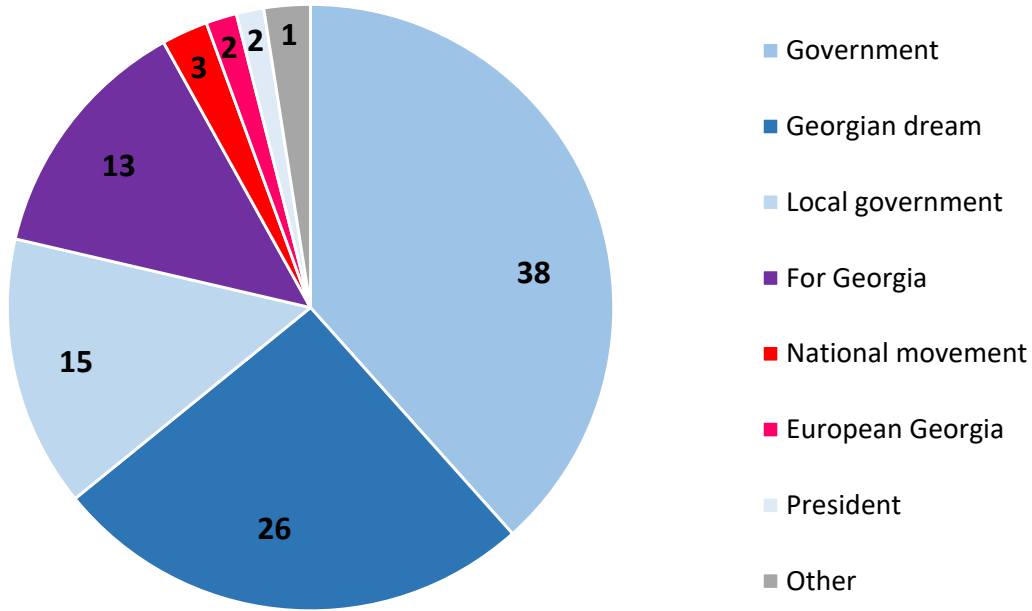
5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%)

qartli.ge

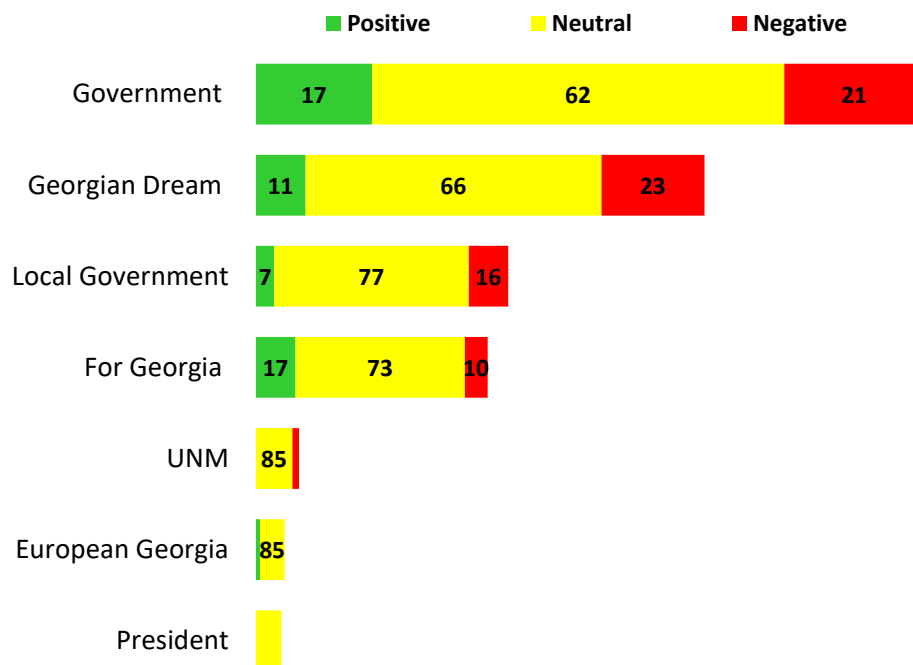
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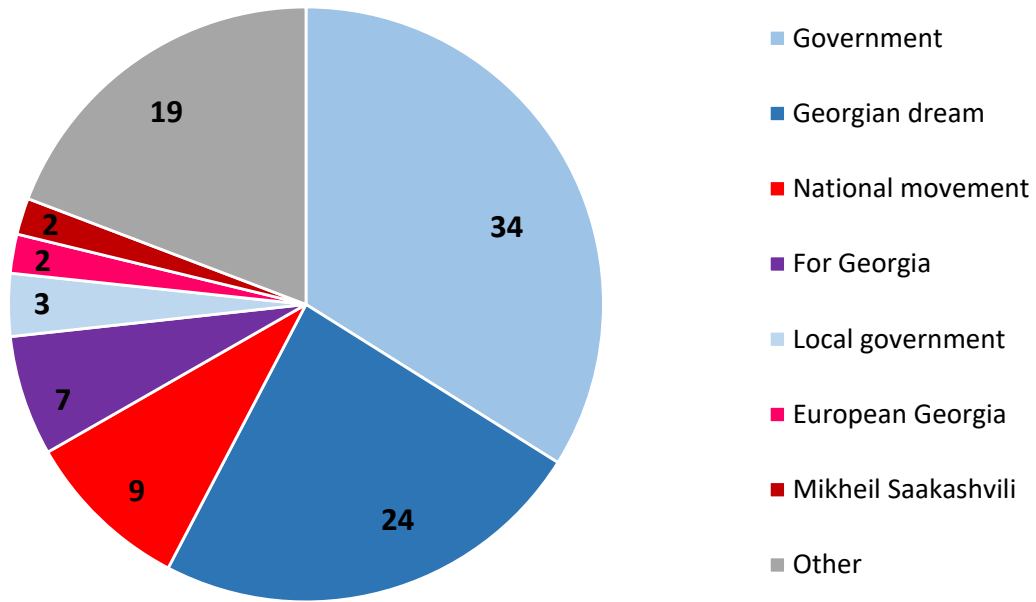
Tone of Coverage (%)

qartli.ge

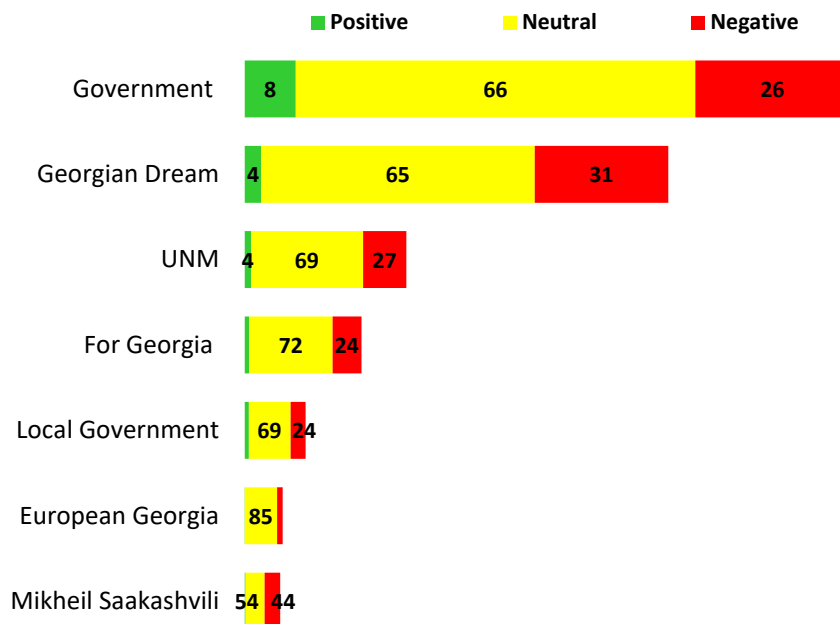
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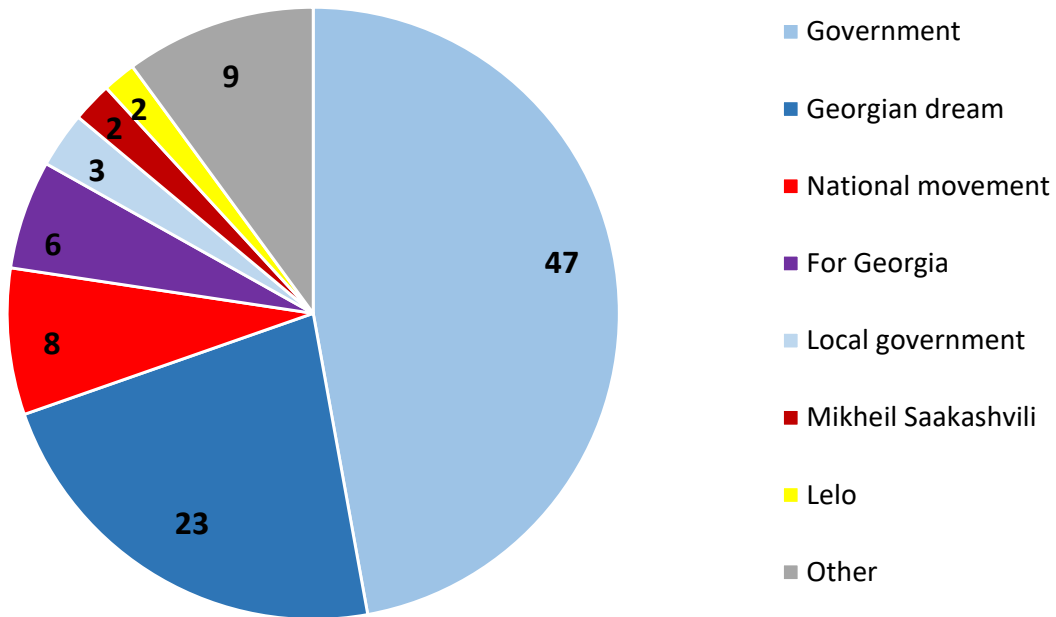
Coverage of subjects(%) **radiotavisupleba.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



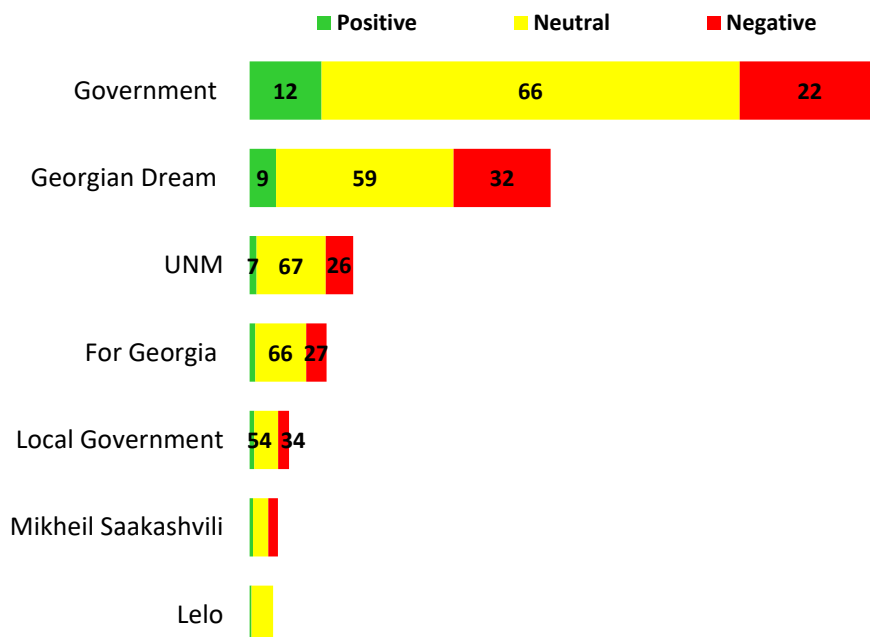
Tone of Coverage (%) **radiotavisupleba.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



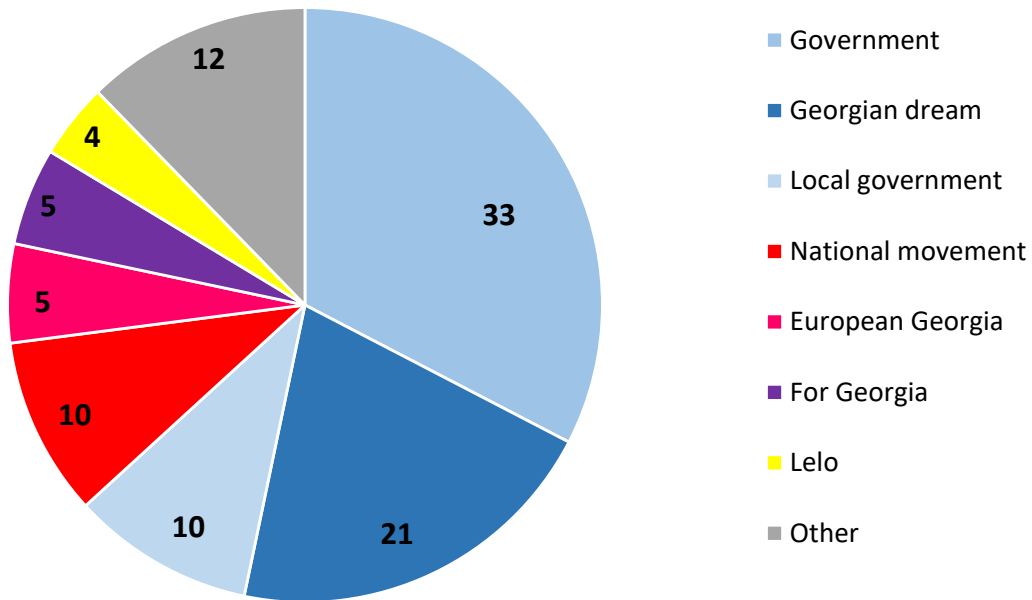
Coverage of subjects(%) **reginfo.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



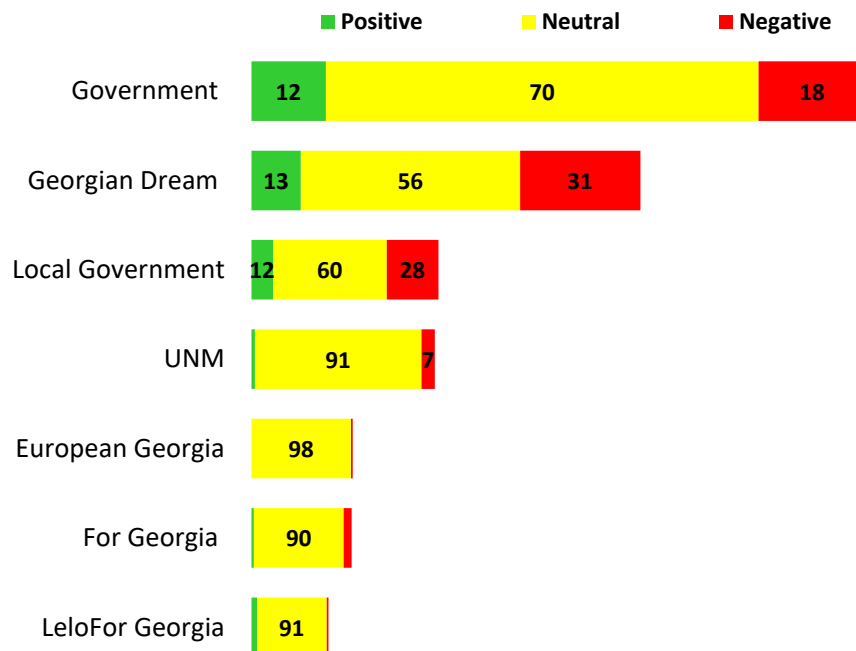
Tone of Coverage (%) **reginfo.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



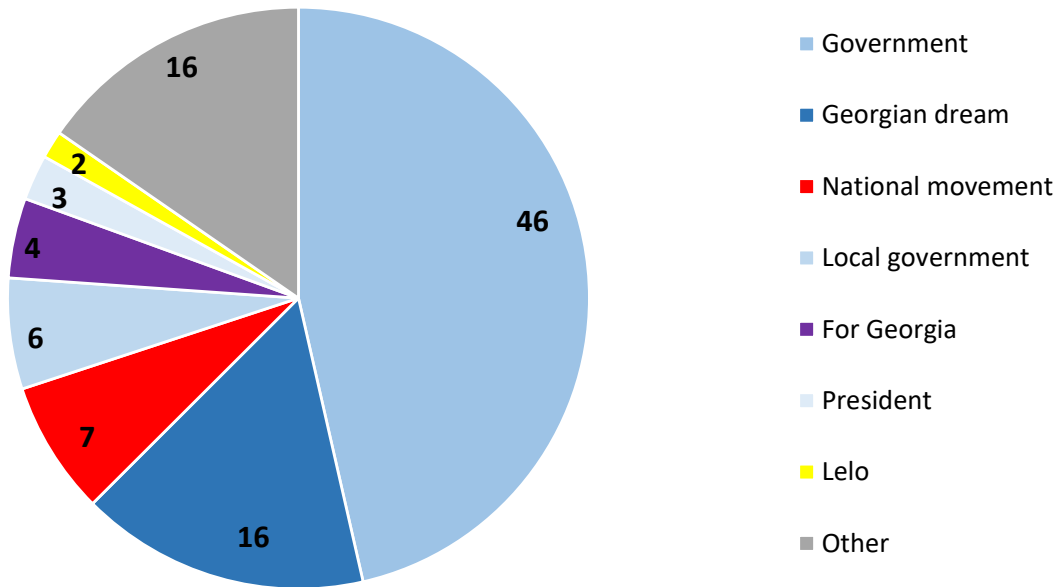
Coverage of subjects (%) **sknews.ge** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



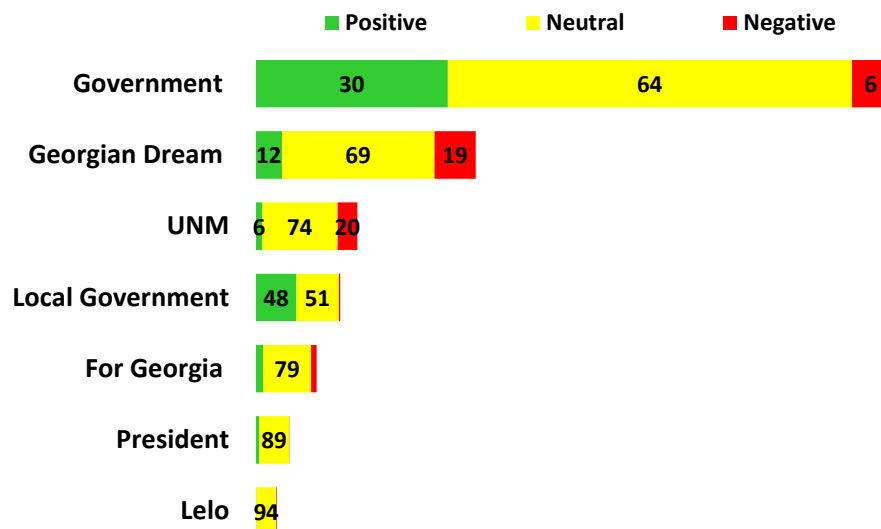
Tone of Coverage (%) **sknews.ge** 5 July – 25 September 2021



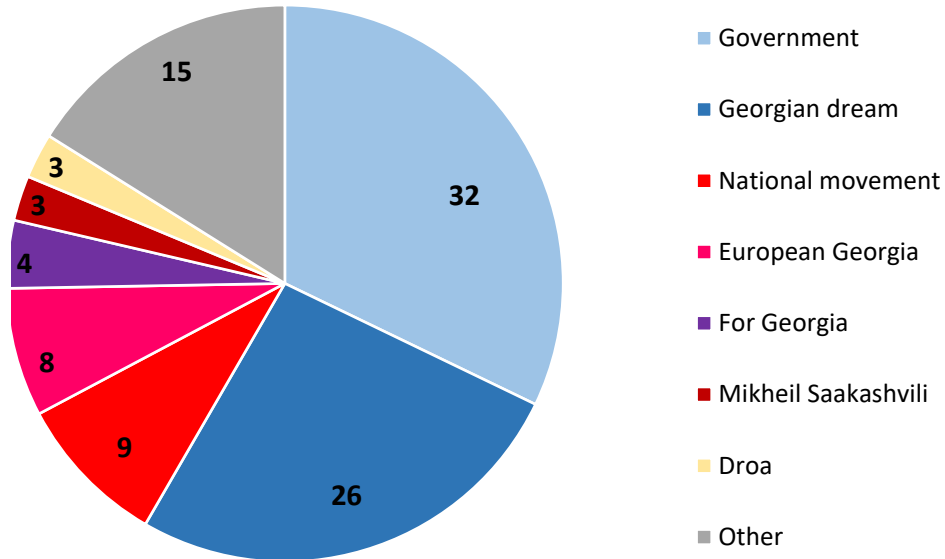
Coverage of subjects(%) **sputnik-georgia.com** 5 July - 25 September, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%) **sputnik-georgia.com** 5 July – 25 September 2021



Coverage of subjects(%)
tabula.ge
5 July - 25 September, 2021



Tone of Coverage (%)
tabula.ge
5 July – 25 September 2021

