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საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Study and Research on Media Coverage of 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

Pre-Election Report on Monitoring of TV News Programmes Key Findings

1 September - 15 October 2020



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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 Programme (UNDP). The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is solely responsible for this report, whose contents can in no way be held to reflect the position of the European Union or the United Nations Development Programme.

About the project

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics—with the financial support of the European Union within the framework of the UN Development Project ‘Media Coverage of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia’—monitored coverage of the 2020 parliamentary elections by television channels. The monitoring began on the 15th of June 2020 and ended on the 21st of November, and involved the following 12 channels: the First Channel, Adjara’s Public Broadcaster, ‘Mtavari Arkhi’, ‘Rustavi 2’, ‘Imedi’, ‘Formula’, ‘TV Pirveli’, ‘Maestro’, ‘Obiektivi’, ‘Kavkasia’, ‘Palitra TV’ and ‘POSTV’.

Monitoring methodology

The pre-electoral media monitoring of major TV news programmes included both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative indicators included the airtime devoted to subjects, direct and indirect speech, and tone of coverage. The qualitative indicators were: balance, accuracy, basis in fact, and the manipulation of footage and music. The tone of coverage was noted both when subjects were spoken about indirectly as well as when they spoke about themselves or about other subjects or general issues.

The diagrams show three categories of tone: positive (green), neutral (yellow) and negative (red). When the airtime allotted to subjects was calculated, the tone of this airtime was evaluated. Attention was paid to what journalists or respondents said, as well as the whole context of the story. During qualitative monitoring, attention was paid to balance or to the extent to which several different opinions were presented around the issue that the stories covered, as well as to the accuracy and relevance of the journalists’ reports and of the materials used in the story (footage, respondents’ comments, etc.).

The following were selected as monitoring subjects:

- the President
- Parliament
- the Prime Minister
- Local Government

- the Government of Adjara
- Independent MPs
- Mikheil Saakashvili
- Political parties

Main Findings:

- Of all political parties, television channels devoted the most airtime to the Georgian Dream, followed by the National Movement and European Georgia.
- The Georgian Dream was covered most positively on 'POSTV', with 39% of the airtime allocated to it being positive in tone.
- The most negative coverage of the Georgian Dream was on 'Mtavari Arkhi' (72% of negative airtime). Critical stories about the Georgian Dream were most often aired on this channel.
- The National Movement was covered most positively by 'Mtavari Arkhi', (13% of positive airtime), and most negatively by 'Obiektivi' (91% of negative airtime).
- European Georgia enjoyed the most airtime on 'Formula', although the party was covered most positively by 'Mtavari Arkhi' (7% of positive airtime).
- 'European Georgia' was covered the most negatively (90% of total airtime) by 'Obiektivi'.
- The party 'Lelo for Georgia' enjoyed the most airtime on 'Formula', although positive coverage amounted to only 4% of the allotted airtime. The party enjoyed the most positive coverage on Rustavi 2, with 8% of airtime being positive.
- The Government received the most positive coverage on POSTV (38% of positive airtime).
- 'Mtavari Arkhi' was the most critical towards the Government, with 69% of the airtime devoted to it being negative in tone.
- 'Mtavari Arkhi' was editorially biased towards the National Movement and Mikheil Saakashvili.
- The First Channel was the most positive towards the Prime Minister, Giorgi Gakharia (14% of airtime allotted to him being positive in tone), and the most negative towards Mikheil Saakashvili (47% of negative airtime).

- The First Channel had an uncritically loyal editorial policy towards the Government.
- POSTV devoted the most airtime to Mikheil Saakashvili, although he was covered the most negatively on this channel (86% negative airtime). Mikheil Saakashvili was most positively covered on the Main Channel (24% of positive airtime).
- ‘Imedi’ and ‘POSTV’ showed a biased attitude towards the Government, with an absolutely positive portrayal of the ruling team and the strongest attempts to discredit the opposition.
- ‘Obiektivi’ traditionally devotes the most airtime to the Alliance of Patriots, who also enjoyed the most positive coverage on this channel (43%).
- During the monitoring period, the pre-electoral media environment was pluralistic but sharply polarized, with broadcasters being biased in favour of either the Government or the opposition. Their partiality expressed itself through their negative coverage of certain electoral subjects.
- The number of violations of professional ethics and instances of manipulation increased compared to previous years, and channels frequently lacked balance and disseminated unverified information.
- The superficiality of coverage remains a problem in television news, and channels only rarely broadcast in-depth analyses of issues important to the public.
- As in previous years, the lack of in-depth investigative reporting on electoral issues remains a problem on almost all channels, particularly as such reporting would help voters make informed choices.
- Some of the broadcasters often used materials prepared by the press services of Government agencies without clearly indicating their origin.
- Instances of hate speech or discriminatory terminology could still be detected in TV news—particularly on ‘Obiektivi’, which also frequently repeated xenophobic statements.
- As in previous years, the broadcasting of gender-related stereotypes and gender-based discrimination unamended and without comments remains a problem.
- Several cases of sexist statements were reported during the monitoring period, with both journalists as well as politicians making them.

