



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის



Empowered lives
Resilient nations.

MEDIA MONITORING FOR 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS INTERIM REPORT





ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Media Monitoring for 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia

Online Media Monitoring

Interim Report

June 18 - October 15

საზოგადოებრივი
განვითარების
ინსტიტუტი



CIVIC
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Prepared and published by the Civic Development Institute (CDI), with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Contents of the report are the sole responsibility of the Civic Development Institute and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union (EU) and UNDP.

Tbilisi, 2018

Project background: Civic Development Institute, within the frameworks of the UNDP project Media Monitoring of 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia, with the financial support of the European Union, is monitoring the coverage of 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia by the Georgian online media. The monitoring started on June 18, 2018 and will be over in November 2018.

The following online media outlets are monitored: ambebi.ge, interpressnews.ge, ipress.ge, liberali.ge, marshalpress.ge, netgazeti.ge, news.ge, on.ge, palitravideo.ge, reportiori.ge, tabula.ge.

Research methodology: There is a quantitative and qualitative monitoring conducted for media outlets, which were selected within the frameworks of media monitoring. The quantitative study is focused on the frequency of coverage of a particular subject in the selected media outlets, and on the coverage tone as well, while the qualitative study looks at how the selected media outlet observes the norms of journalistic ethics, such as: reporting about the verified and doublechecked facts, journalist's terminology, diversity of sources of information, coverage of issues by keeping a reasonable balance, visual, audio or other kinds of manipulation, facts-based arguments by reporters and conclusions, etc. All the articles of the selected media outlets were monitored from the very first day of the monitoring until its completion.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the material resulted in the following **key findings**:

- A big part of the online media outlets manages to provide more or less objective and impartial coverage of current political processes;
- There are less cases of gross violation of journalistic standards in the online media. Most part of the online outlets tries and manages to observe the norms of journalistic ethics;
- The Georgian online media actively covers the activities of virtually all the political forces and presidential candidates;
- Superficial coverage of issues represents one of the biggest challenges of the online media. Vast majority of online media outlets is often busy reporting about statements of politicians and their daily activities, and they pay less attention to the in-depth analysis of issues;
- Online media hardly ever provides an in-depth and multifaceted analysis of social and economic issues. Problems in the regions of Georgia are seldom covered. Stories about the regions are mostly about the initiation or completion of successful infrastructure

projects, and it is noteworthy that these articles are often financed by various state agencies;

- We almost never see the attempt by a journalist to doublecheck information posted on the websites. In most cases, the statements of politicians or other famous public figures are disseminated without any comments or proper verification. This problem becomes especially exacerbated when severe allegations are circulated against a certain individual;
- A big majority of online media outlets publishes articles based on one source only. As a result, the readers are deprived of an opportunity to read different opinions and arguments in the articles;
- Majority of online media reports about the activities of presidential candidates in a superficial manner and they lay main focus on the candidates' statements and daily election activities. Consequently, a big part of the online media cannot provide comprehensive information about the visions and specific action plans of presidential candidates;
- One of the biggest challenges of the Georgian online media is to properly differentiate articles written under commercial agreements from editorial materials. Some websites do not attach any reference notes to these articles. Some websites do that, but not properly.

Ambebi.ge

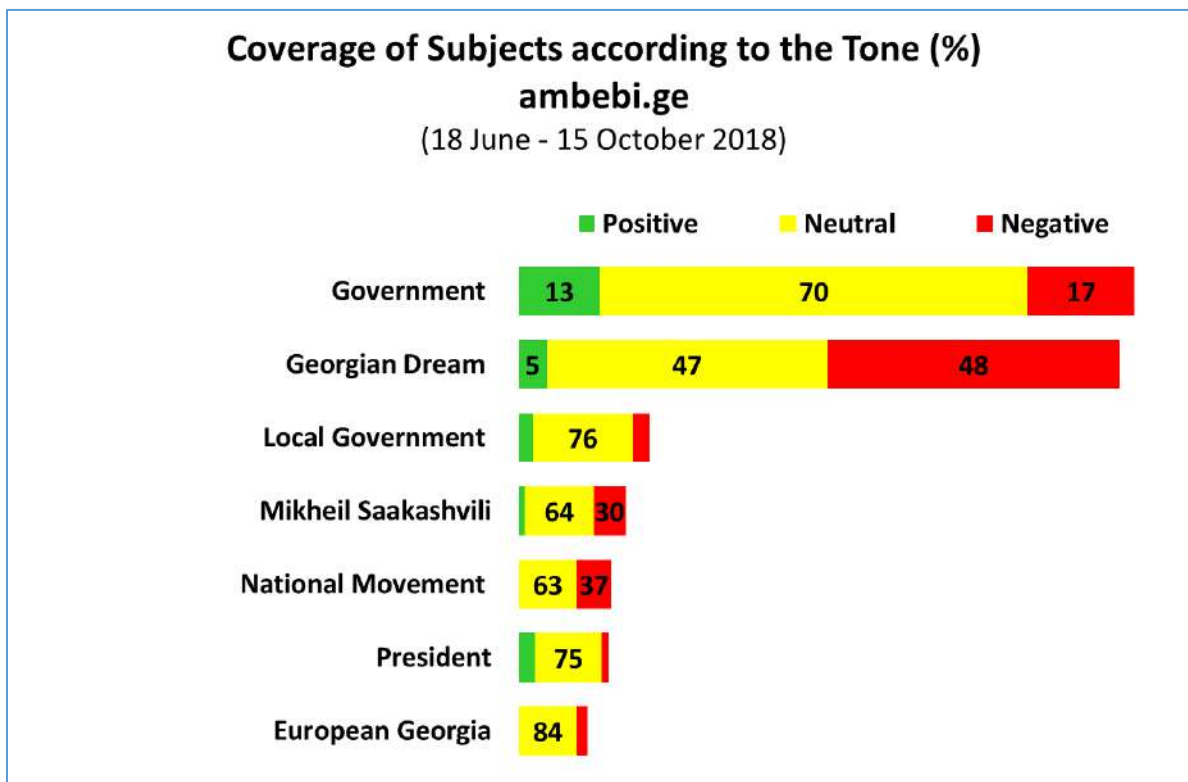
During the monitoring period, there was no clearly identified positive or negative attitudes towards any political force or presidential candidate on ambebi.ge. There were no cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms revealed on the website. Among the political forces, ambebi.ge mostly reported about the activities of the ruling team.

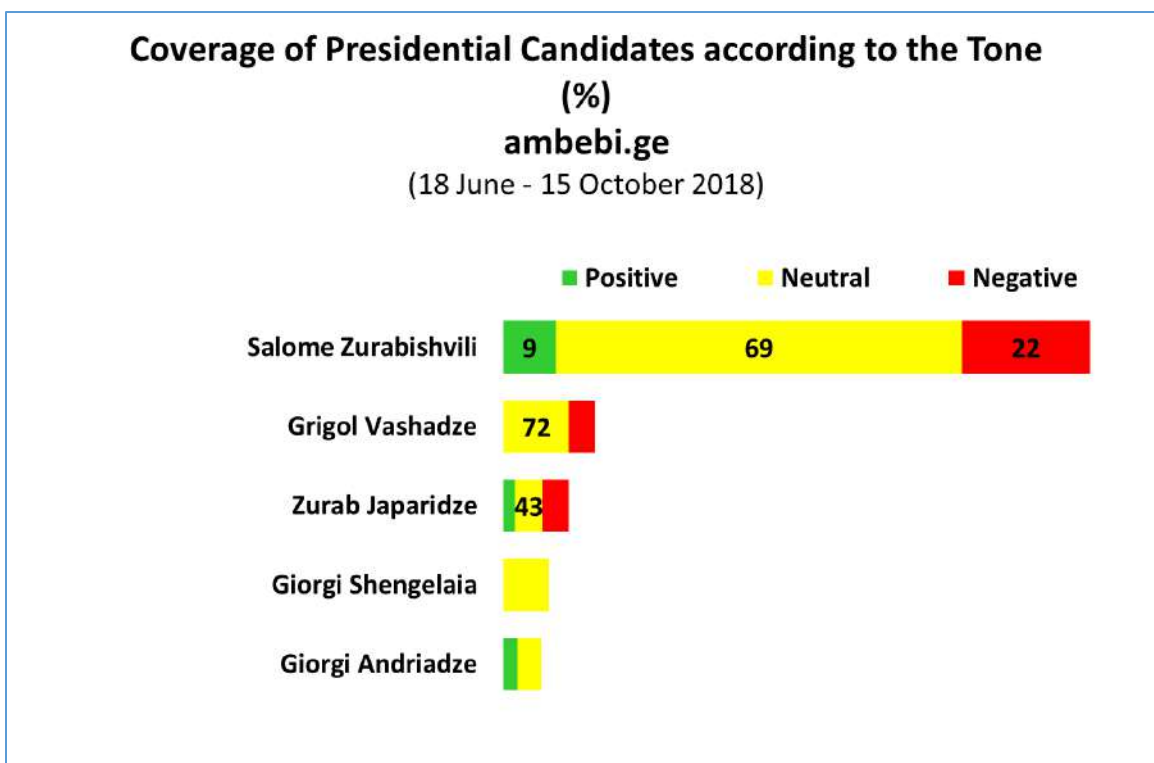
Most of all, ambebi.ge covered the activities of the government (30%) and the Georgian Dream (29%). High rates of negative tone were observed while reporting about the Georgian Dream (48%) and the United National Movement (37%). None of the subjects had especially high rates of positive tone.

The most active coverage was observed about Salome Zurbashvili among presidential candidates. She was covered twice as much as all the other candidates taken together. There

were no especially high rates of positive or negative tone observed while reporting about the presidential candidates.

As the result of monitoring, we can conclude that there were no cases of gross violation of journalistic ethical norms on ambebi.ge. However, it is noteworthy that the website provided more intensive coverage of the ruling team and the presidential candidate supported by them, than the representatives of other political forces. It would be desirable if this online media provided equally frequent coverage of different political powers and presidential candidates.





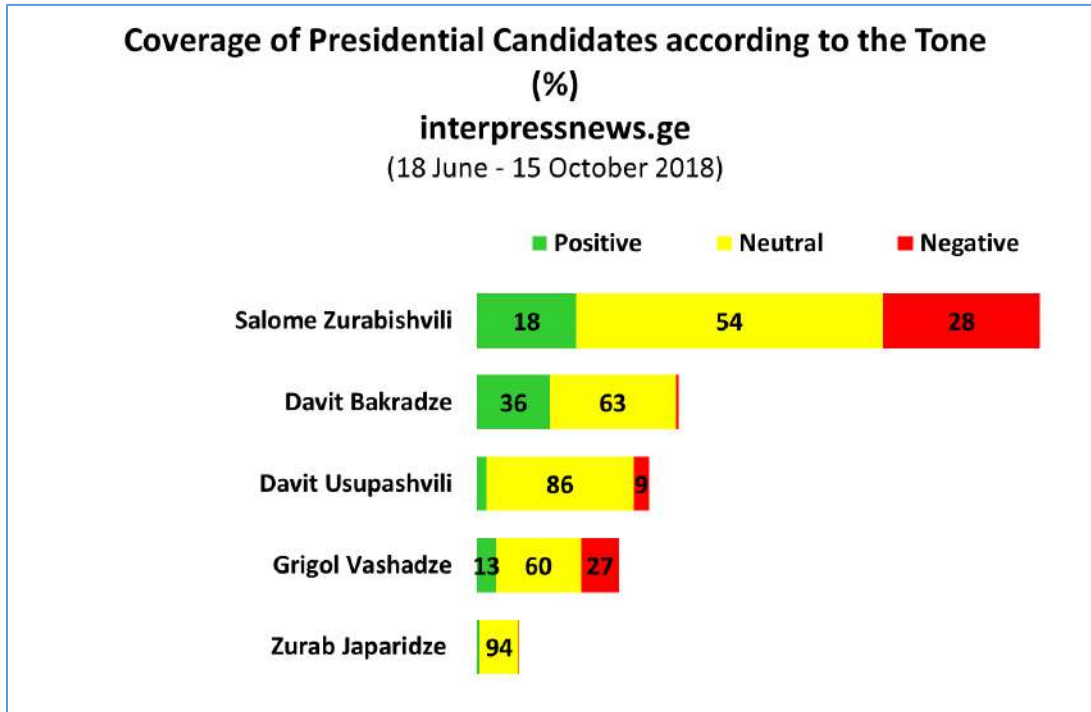
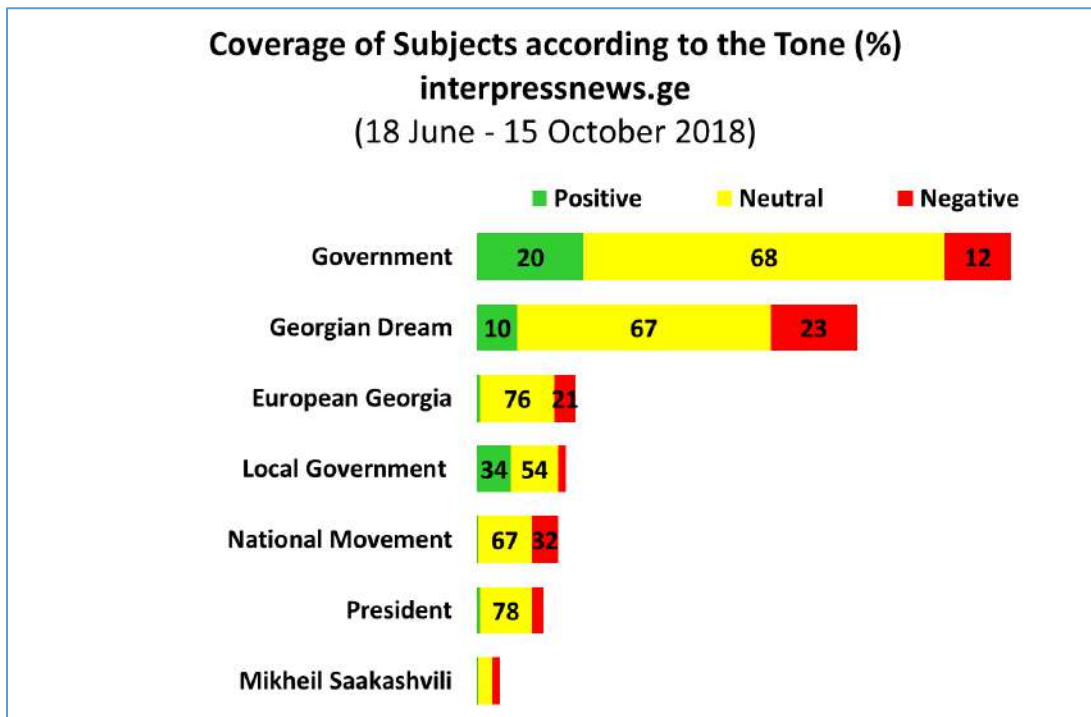
interpressnews.ge

During the monitoring period, there was no positive or negative dispositions observed on interpressnews.ge to any political force or presidential candidate. The media outlet quite actively reported about the activities of various political forces acting in the country. There were no cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms. However, it is noteworthy that the articles prepared under the commercial contracts are not properly differentiated from editorial materials on interpressnews.ge.

Interpressnews.ge most actively covered the activities of the government (37%) and the Georgian Dream (27%). There were no especially high rates of positive or negative tone observed while covering any of the monitoring subjects. Election activities of presidential candidates were covered quite equally and impartially. We did not reveal especially high rates of positive or negative tone during the coverage of any presidential candidate.

For the interpressnews.ge, the serious challenge is that the articles prepared under commercial contracts are not properly differentiated from editorial materials. Unlike many other monitored online media outlets, interpressnews.ge adds some reference notes to the advertisement materials, but this is not easily understandable for readers, because these inscriptions are done in Latin characters (there is a circled 'NS', and when the cursor is pointed

to it, then “News from Subscriber” will pop up). It is very important that the website add some indications to similar articles, which will be more easily understandable for the readers.



ipress.ge

During the monitoring period, there were more articles with a positive tone prevailing on ipress.ge about the government, and especially, the local government. We did not observe any cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms. However, it is noteworthy that the articles written under commercial contracts are not differentiated from editorial materials on ipress.ge.

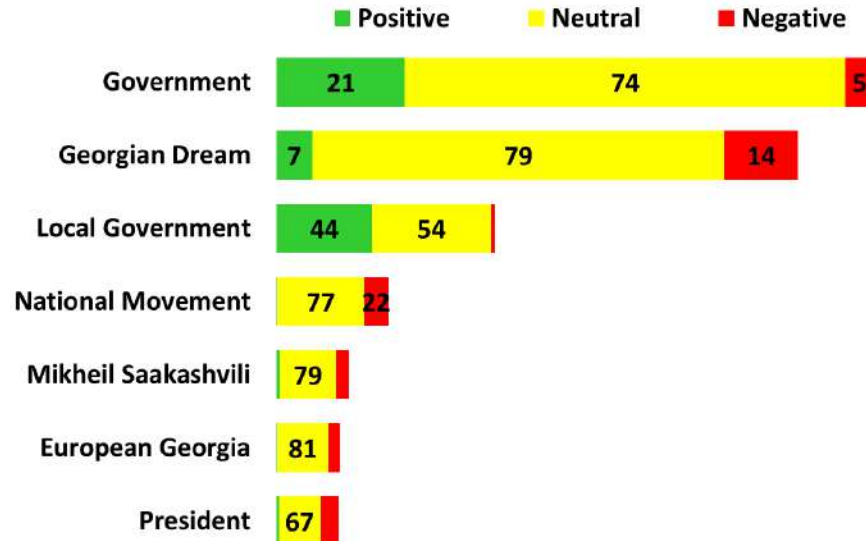
The most active coverage was provided about the activities of the government (29%) and the Georgian Dream (26%) on ipress.ge. The positive tone prevailed in the reports about the local government (44%) and the government (21%). It is noteworthy that ipress.ge quite often published information disseminated by various state agencies about successful infrastructure projects implemented in the regions of Georgia, which presents the activities of regional administrations in a positive way. There were no specifically high rates of negative tone regarding any of the monitoring subjects. Election activities of presidential candidates were covered quite equally and impartially. Rates of positive tone prevailed while reporting about the presidential candidates.

Ipress.ge has a serious problem of not making respective reference to the articles prepared under commercial contracts. We came across with numerous articles on ipress.ge during this monitoring period, which were also published on other monitored websites with exactly the same text, with a reference about an advertising material. For example, the articles “Reception to Celebrate Batumi Days” (September 1), “Access Road to Gymnastics School Paved in Kutaisi” (September 3), with the same date and identical text, was published on interpressnews.ge, marked with the advertisement sign. It is necessary that the online media makes it clear for the audience and properly marks those articles, which are prepared under a commercial contract and do not represent independent editorial contents.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

ipress.ge

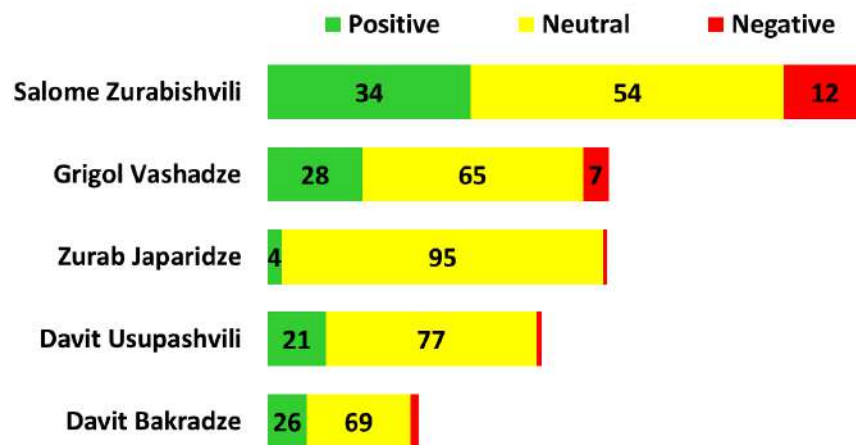
(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone

ipress.ge (%)

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Liberali.ge

There was no positive or negative disposition to any political force or presidential candidate observed on liberali.ge during the monitoring period. Journalistic standards and ethical norms were observed at a high level. Liberali.ge was distinguished with its in-depth and multifaceted analysis of election issues.

Liberali.ge most actively covered the activities of the government (47%) and the Georgian Dream (19%). There were no specifically high rates of positive or negative tone observed in the coverage of any monitored subject. Election activities of presidential candidates were covered quite equally and impartially. Rates of positive tone slightly prevailed while reporting about the presidential candidates.

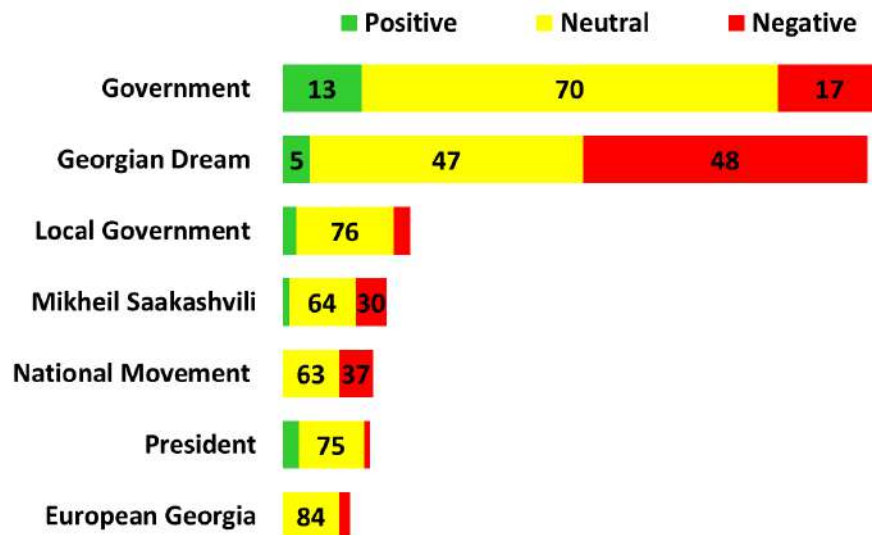
During the election period, liberali.ge provided an active coverage of issues related to the election environment. The media outlet informed the readers about campaign financing of presidential candidates (for example, the article “donors and donations – who finances presidential campaigns”, October 4) and their visions on various issues (for example, the article “what presidential candidates think about drug policy”, October 12).

The monitoring results let us conclude that during the election period liberali.ge managed to provide in-depth information to its readers about the election environment, also about the plans and visions of presidential candidates.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

liberali.ge

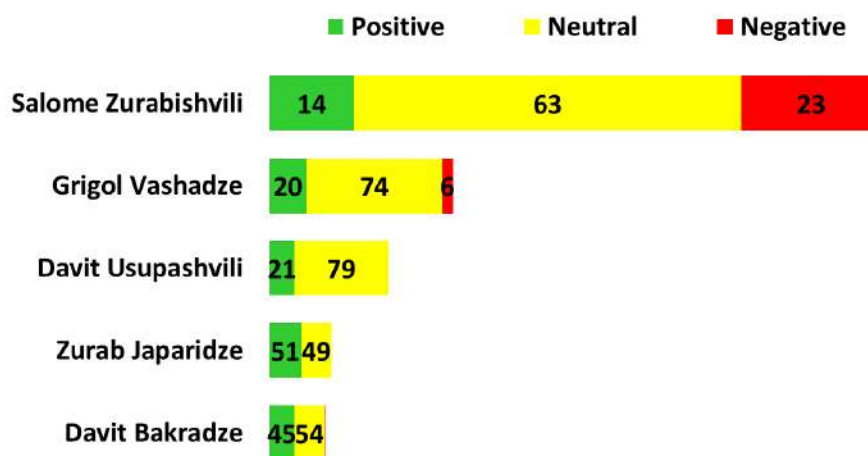
(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone

liberali.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



During the monitoring period, on one hand there was an extremely positive attitude observed toward the ruling team and their preferred presidential candidate Salome Zurbishvili on marshalpress.ge, and on the other hand, there was an extremely negative attitude to the United National Movement, the European Georgia and presidential candidates nominated by these parties. The online media outlet paid especially much attention to the negative and, in most cases, extremely abusive statements of various politicians or celebrities towards the opposition parties.

During the monitoring period, marshalpress.ge most actively covered the activities of the government (38%) and the Georgian Dream (25%). Indicators of positive tone prevailed when reporting about these subjects. There were extremely high rates of negative tone revealed in the coverage about the United National Movement (82%), the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili (66%) and the European Georgia (65%). Among the presidential candidates, the high rates of negative tone were observed in case of Grigol Vashadze (66%) and Davit Bakradze (64%). As for Salome Zurbishvili, she had a quite high rate of positive tone (45%).

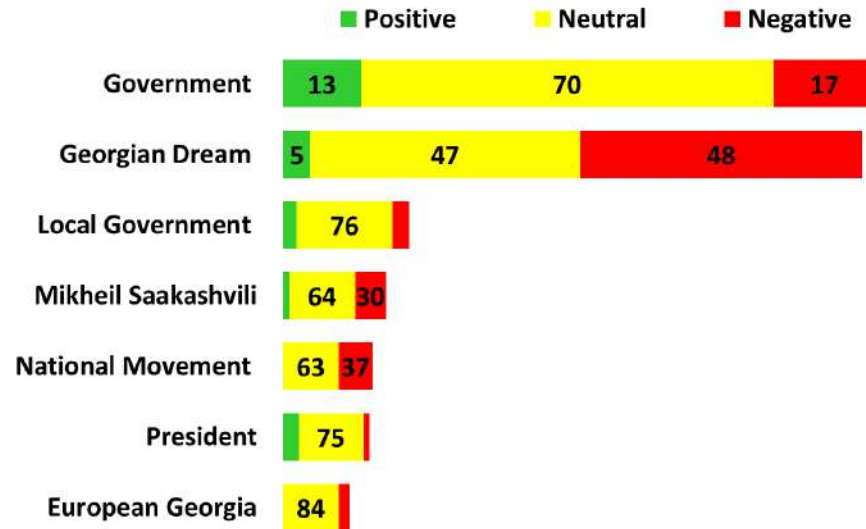
There was a clearly observed one-sided, targeted and regular criticism of the United National Movement and the European Georgia on marshalpress.ge. The online media often publishes stories disseminated by various media outlets, where these parties are criticized. Besides, we quite often see the statements spread by more or less famous people via social networks, which contain criticism, and sometimes in a quite abusive form. These statements criticize these political parties and their presidential candidates (for example, “Bringing Vashadze, Misha’s laquey became the only last straw to catch on – Buba Khotivari”, September 24; “We will punish everyone with these results – no way that this Russian-fed moustachioed seal can win the elections!”, October 2; “They overdid with their narrow party interests... we have seen what you are capable of! – Sopio Khorguani”, October 9). We should also point out the headlines of articles published on marshalpress.ge: e.g. “Another absurd campaign of the National Movement has started” (June 23); “Aggressive action plan of the National Movement” (June 25); “Nationals staging cheap shows focused on scandal and crisis” (June 25).

The monitoring results create an impression that marshalpress.ge did not intend to inform the public, but rather to discredit the United National Movement and this party’s presidential candidate on one hand, and to support the ruling party and the candidate supported by them, on the other hand.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

marshalpress.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)

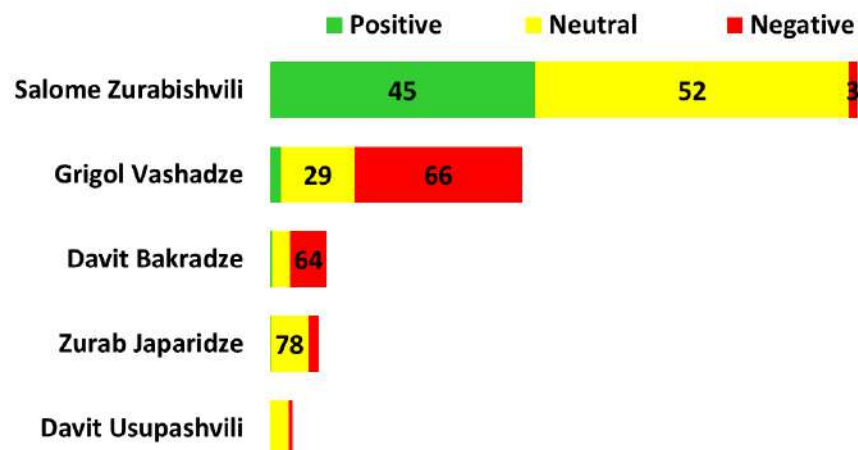


Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone

(%)

marshalpress.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



netgazeti.ge

We did not observe any positive or negative disposition toward any political force or a presidential candidate during the monitoring period on netgazeti.ge. The website was distinguished with the in-depth and multifaceted analysis of issues, especially those related to the elections. Journalistic standards and ethical norms are observed at a high level.

Netgazeti.ge provided the most active coverage of the government (40%) and the Georgian Dream (19%). There were no high rates of positive or negative coverage observed for any subject of the monitoring. Election activities of presidential candidates were covered quite equally and impartially. We did not observe high rates of positive or negative tone while reporting about any presidential candidate.

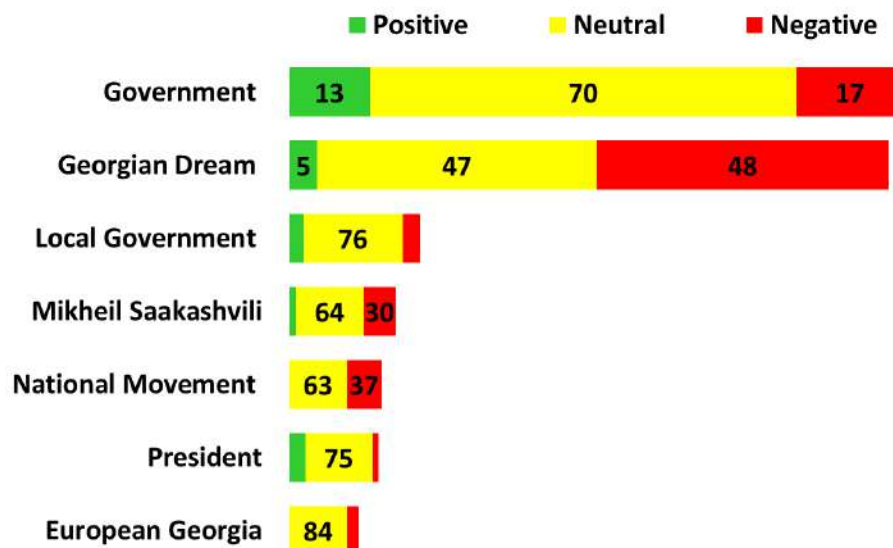
Netgazeti.ge was distinguished with an in-depth coverage of election topics during the monitoring period. We often came across with the articles which collected the opinions of various presidential candidates regarding a certain issue (for example, “Visions of presidential candidates regarding the educational system”, October 12; “Position of presidential candidates on the women’s engagement in politics”, October 12, “Positions of presidential candidates on the rights of LGBTQI people”, October 12; “Positions of presidential candidates on drug policy”, October 12). Netgazeti.ge also provided an in-depth analysis of the election environment in the country (for example, the article “Why is one third of the population of Georgia still undecided 3 months before the elections?” August 1).

The monitoring results let us conclude that during the election period netgazeti.ge managed to provide in-depth information to its readers about the election environment, also about the plans and visions of presidential candidates.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

netgazeti.ge

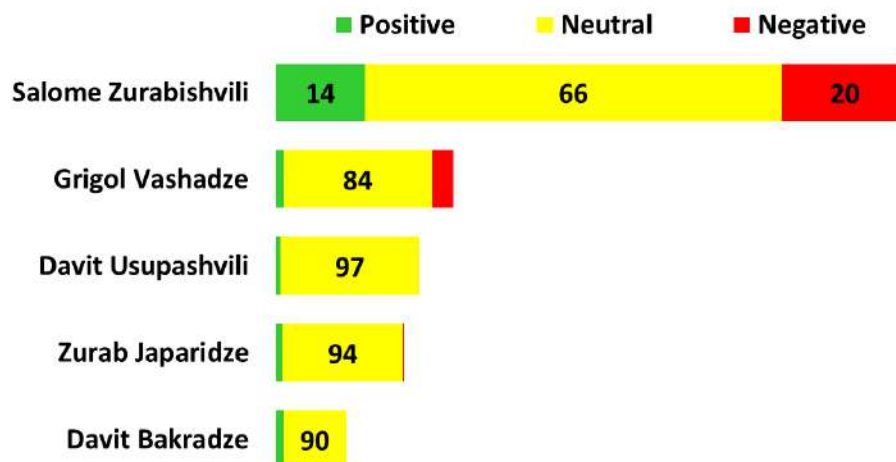
(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

netgazeti.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



news.ge

During the monitoring period we did not observe any particularly positive or negative attitude toward any political force or presidential candidate. We did not identify any cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms. However, we should point out that articles prepared under commercial contracts were not differentiated from editorial materials on news.ge.

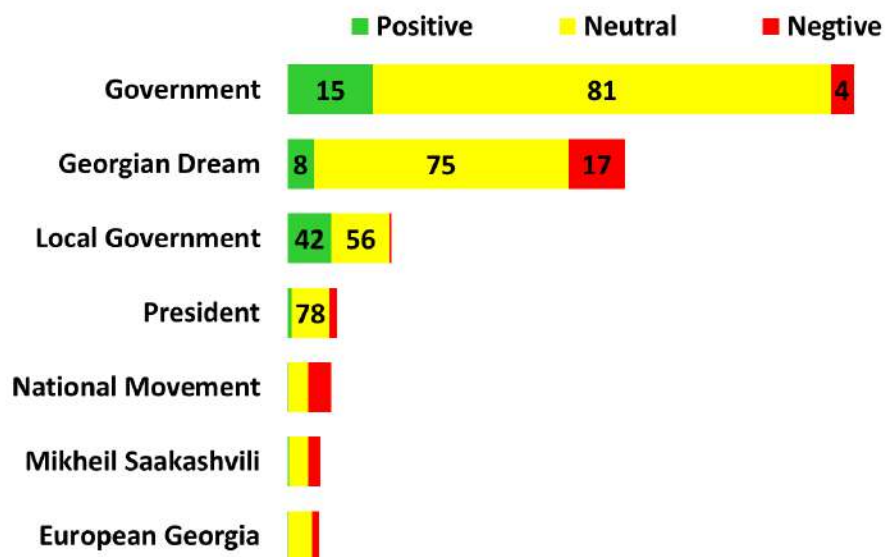
News.ge provided the most active coverage about the activities of the government (43%) and the Georgian Dream (25%). It is noteworthy that this website had almost three times more coverage about the activities of the ruling team than all the other monitoring subjects taken together. High rates of positive tone were revealed while reporting about the local government (42%). News.ge often published information disseminated by various state agencies about the successful infrastructure projects implemented in the regions of Georgia, which clearly presents the activities of regional administrations in a positive way. We did not observe any especially high rates of positive or negative tone in the coverage of any other monitoring subjects. Election activities of presidential candidates were covered quite equally and impartially.

News.ge has a serious problem of not making respective reference to the articles prepared under commercial contracts. We came across with numerous articles on news.ge during this monitoring period, which were also published on other monitored websites with exactly the same text, with a reference to an advertisement content. For example, the article published on March 26 “Flats in a Newly Constructed Building Allocated to 164 IDP Families” was published on the websites news.ge and on.ge with the same text, same title and same photo was attached to it. News.ge published this article without any reference to an advertisement, but on.ge made this reference. On September 24, news.ge published an article without an advertisement note “Azeula Castle Illuminated”, but interpressnews.ge published this article the same day, with an identical text, but with the advertisement reference. It is necessary for the online media to make it clear to the audience that the articles are prepared within the frameworks of a commercial contract and that they do not represent an editorial content.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

news.ge

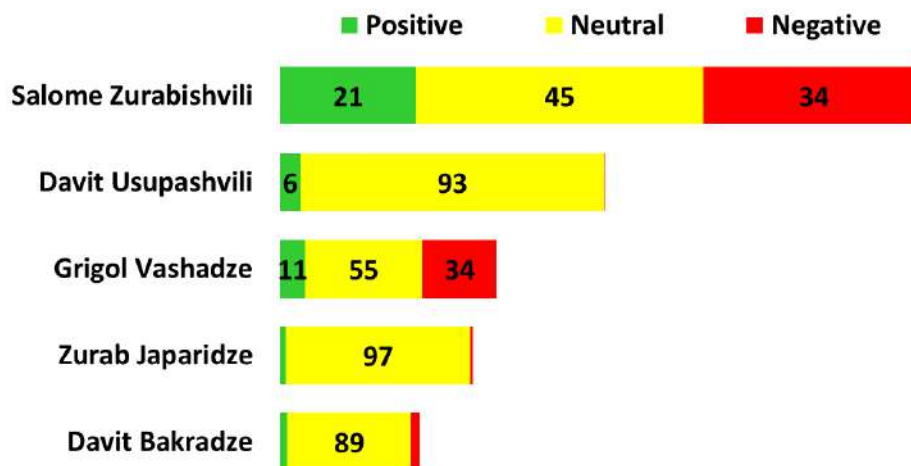
(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

news.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



on.ge

During the monitoring period we did not observe particularly positive or negative attitude to any political force or presidential candidate on on.ge. Among presidential candidates Salome Zurabishvili was covered most actively. We did not reveal any cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms.

During the monitoring period, on.ge provided most frequent coverage for the government (43%) and the Georgian Dream (20%). There were no especially high rates of positive or negative tone observed in regard to any political force or presidential candidate.

It is noteworthy that Salome Zurabishvili was allocated twice more coverage than all other candidates together. Important issues related to the pre-election campaign of this candidate were discussed on the website. For example, the financing of Zurabishvili's pre-election campaign was widely covered by on.ge ("Archi Group Founders and Partners Donate GEL 180000 to Salome Zurabishvili," 2 October; "The Doctor who Donated GEL 20000 to Salome Zurabishvili Says He does not Support Her," 8 October; "Salome Zurabishvili Received more than GEL 1.5 Million in Donations in October," 10 October)

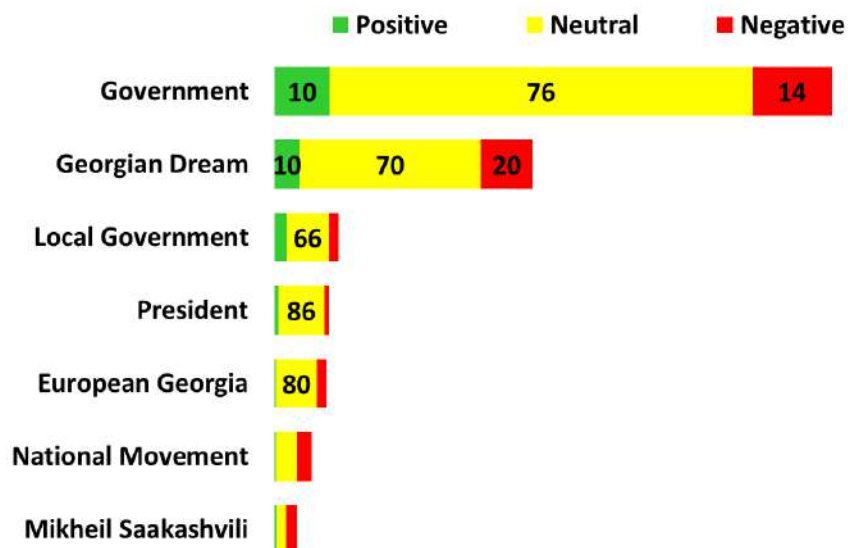
The monitoring results let us conclude that on.ge provided an objective and impartial coverage of current events. However, it is noteworthy that the presidential candidate endorsed by the ruling team was covered much more actively than representatives of other political forces. It is desirable for the online media to try more for providing equally frequent coverage of various presidential candidates to give the audience more comprehensive information about them.

It is noteworthy that on.ge is one of the exceptional online media outlets, which differentiates the articles prepared under commercial contracts from the articles with editorial contents.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

on.ge

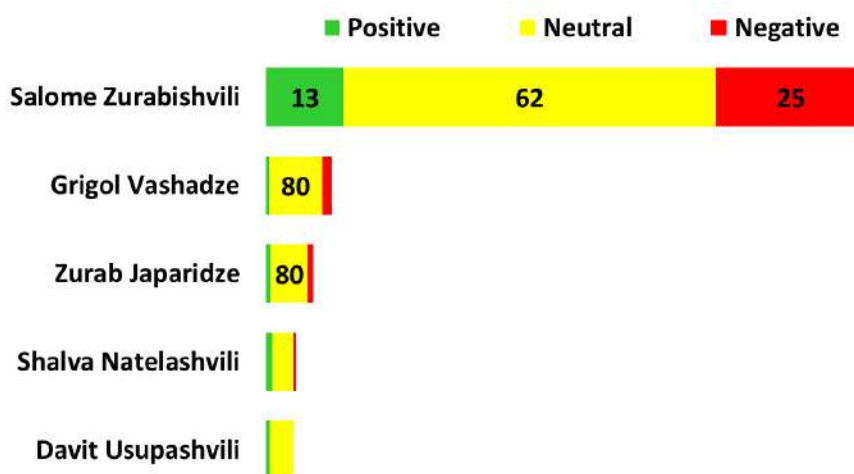
(18 June- 15 October, 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

on.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



palitravideo.ge

Palitravideo.ge did not provide active coverage of election issues during the monitoring. In general, due to the format of the website, the political issues were covered in a fragmented manner. We did not identify any cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms.

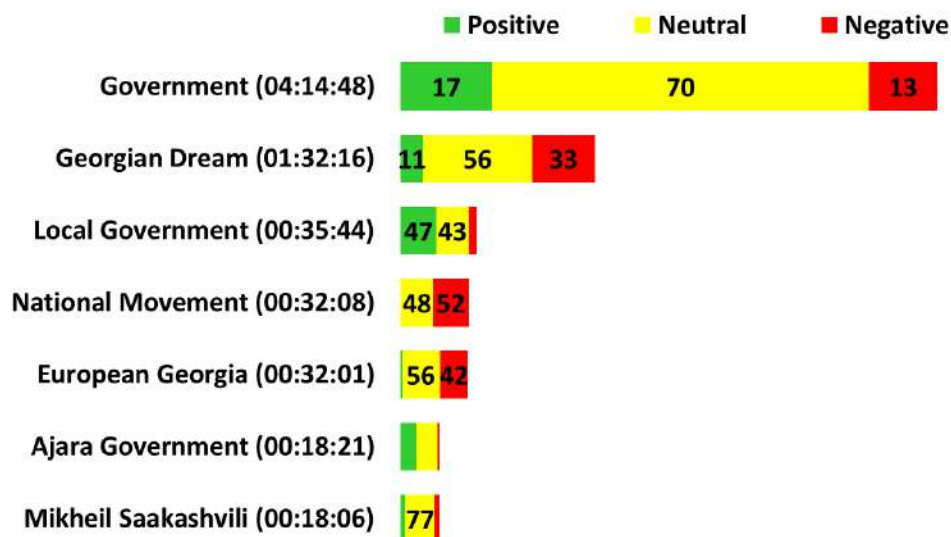
The most active coverage on palitravideo.ge was provided for the activities of the government (47%) and the Georgian Dream (17%). Rates of negative tone prevailed in the stories about the United National Movement (52%) and the European Georgia (42%). We did not observe any particularly high rates of positive tone in regard to any political party. Among presidential candidates, the most coverage was dedicated to Salome Zurbishvili. Rates of positive tone prevailed while reporting about this candidate.

Palitravideo.ge usually disseminates information via the videos. In most cases the visually attractive material is circulated. This trend applies to the coverage of political processes. Correspondingly, the ongoing political events, among them the election activities of presidential candidates are disseminated in a fragmented manner. Relatively high rates of negative tone, which was identified in quantitative data, is the result of this format. There was no particularly positive or negative attitude observed on palitravideo.ge toward any political power or presidential candidate.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

palitravideo.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)

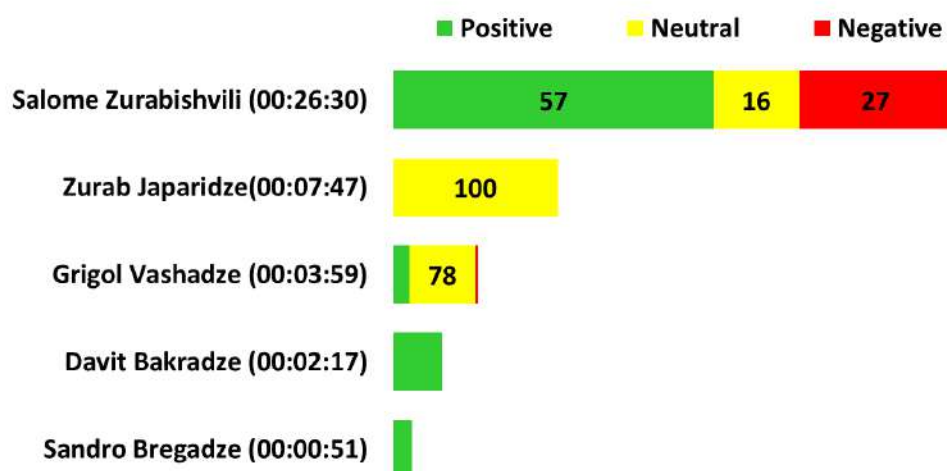


Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone

(%)

palitravideo.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



reportiori.ge

During the mentoring period, there was a clearly positive disposition on one hand toward the ruling team, and an extremely negative attitude on the other hand toward the United National Movement, the European Georgia and their presidential candidates. Norms of journalistic ethics were regularly violated on the website. The events were covered from one side only and we often observed that ungrounded and grave accusations were disseminated against the opposition parties and their presidential candidates. Besides, during this monitoring period there was a fake news published on reportiori.ge about the President of Georgia.

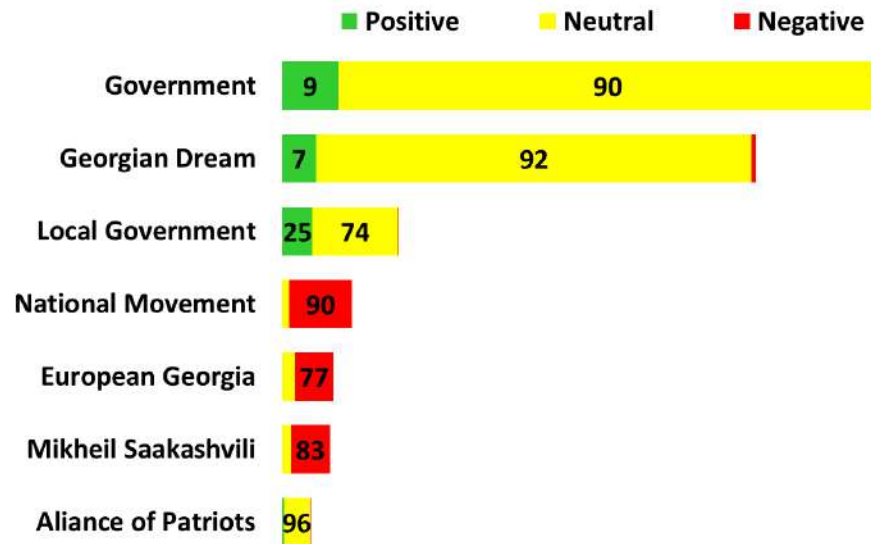
Reportiori.ge provided the most active coverage for the activities of the government (39%) and the Georgian Dream (31%). The ruling team was covered approximately three times more frequently than all the other monitoring subjects taken together. There were extremely high rates of negative tone revealed in the reports about the United National Movement (90%), ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili (83%) and the European Georgia (77%). Among the presidential candidates the most actively covered activities were those of Salome Zurbashvili. Rates of positive tone prevailed in the stories about her. However, the rates of negative tone prevailed in the stories about the presidential candidates of opposition parties.

There is a one-sided and targeted regular criticism of the United National Movement, the European Georgia and their presidential candidates clearly observed on reportiori.ge. The website frequently disseminates the statements against these political parties, which were posted by more or less famous public figures in the social networks. These statements are often quite abusive and critical (e.g. “Gia Gabrichidze: Gogorishvili is blinking her frog-eyes, Kakhidze is texting someone, Khoshtaria is silent...”), September 7; “Davit Liluashvili to the “Nationals”: neither you nor your propagandistic TV will not have any success!”, October 13).

During this monitoring period, reportiori.ge circulated fake news about the President of Georgia. According to the article posted by the reportiori.ge on August 10 (“President of Georgia was fined after smoking marijuana in his hotel room during his visit to the US”), an American media outlet Washing Daily reported that the President of Georgia was fined because of smoking marijuana in a hotel room during his visit in the US. The media outlet Washington Daily cannot be found in the Internet and, therefore, it is less likely that this media exists at all. Other than spreading the fake news about the President, the same day reportiori.ge published a statement of an expert Mamuka Areshidze (“Mamuka Areshidze: the President’s main function is to represent his country abroad”), where the respondent is talking about this fact and criticizes the President because of his inappropriate conduct. Reportiori.ge did not seem to have tried to check the accuracy of this fact at all.

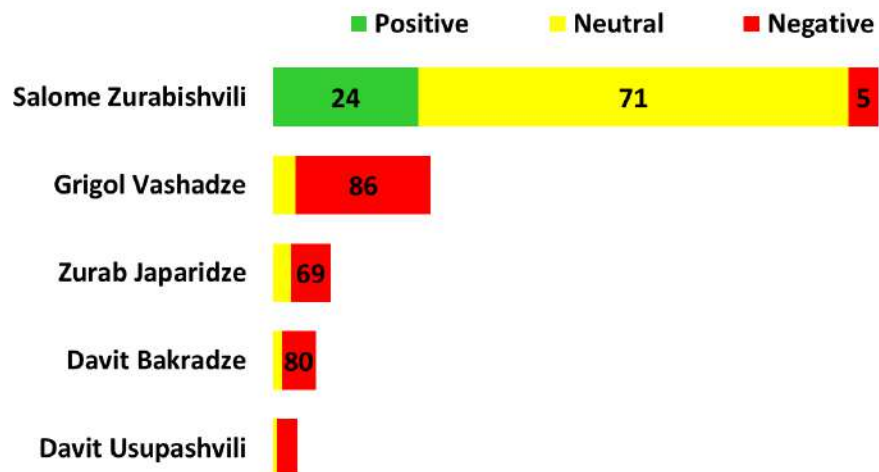
Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%) reportiori.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%) reportiori.ge

(18 June - 15 October 2018)

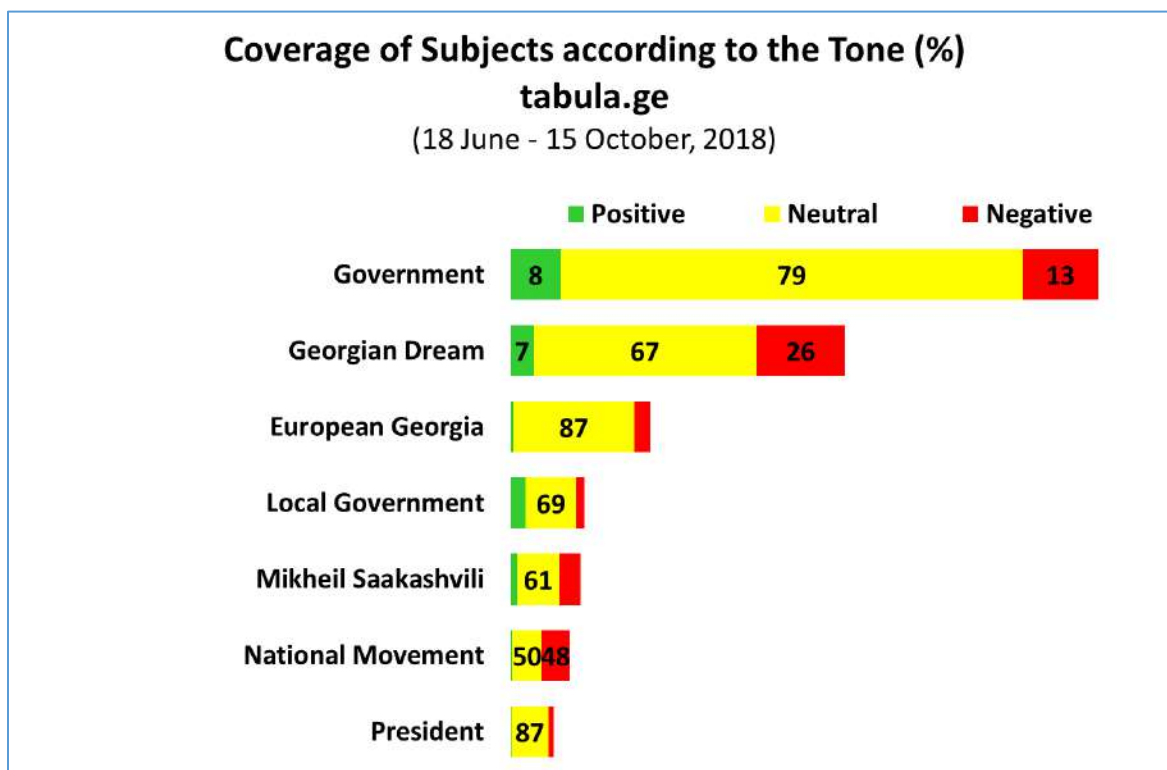


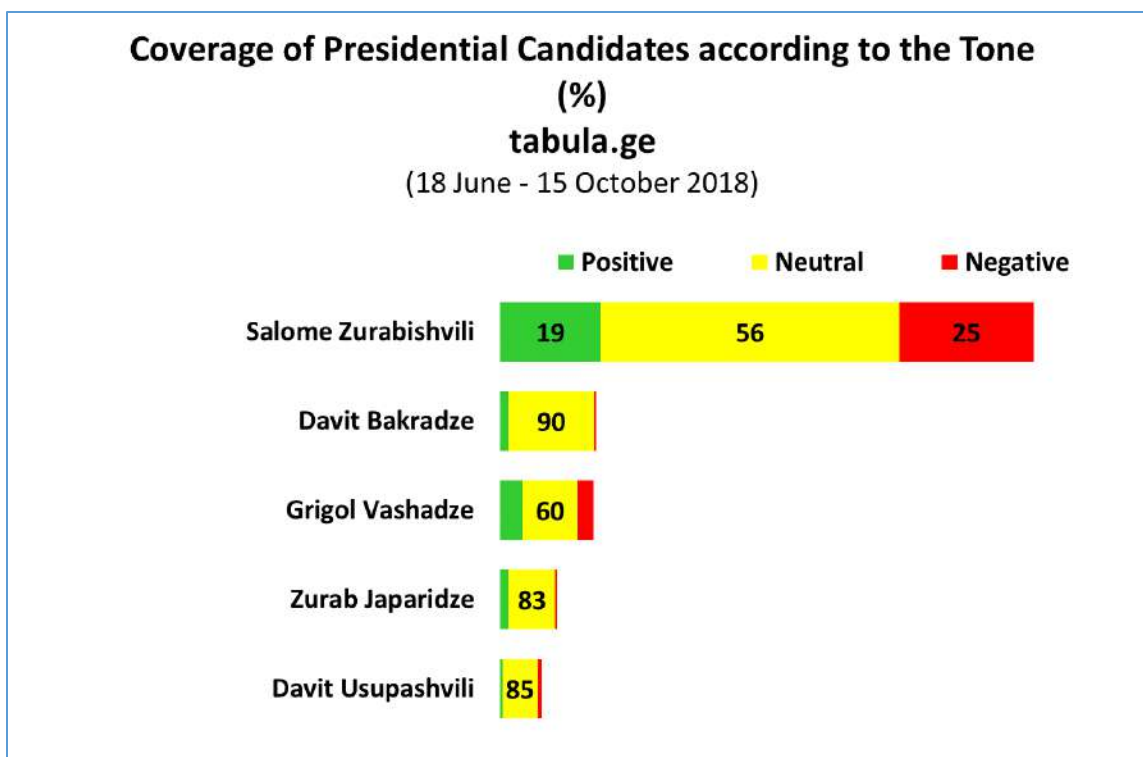
tabula.ge

There was no positive or negative attitude observed on tabula.ge toward any political power or presidential candidate during the monitoring period. No cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms were identified. Activities of the presidential candidate Salome Zurbashvili were most actively covered.

During the monitoring period, tabula.ge provided the most active coverage of the government (37%), the Georgian Dream (21%) and the European Georgia (9%). There was a relatively high rate of negative tone revealed while covering the United National Movement (48%), the ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili (31%) and the Georgian Dream (26%). We did not observe any particularly high rates of positive tone in regard to any of the monitoring subject.

Election activities of presidential candidates were actively and impartially covered. The most intensive reports were about the activities of the presidential candidate Salome Zurbashvili. This candidate had at least five times more coverage than any other candidate. We did not observe any high rates of positive or negative tone in regard to any presidential candidate.





Conclusion

The monitoring has revealed that the cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and ethical norms are rare in the Georgian online media. Most part of the online media outlets tries and manages to adhere to the basic journalistic standards. In most cases, activities of various political powers and presidential activities are covered equally and impartially. Most part of the websites did not demonstrate any particularly positive or negative dispositions toward any political power or presidential candidate.

The biggest challenge for the Georgian online media is the superficial coverage and lack of critical analysis. Vast majority of online media outlets lays emphasis only to the statements and daily activities of politicians and various state agencies. Journalists very rarely look for stories, doublecheck facts, or link additional information to the sources, etc.

Presidential candidates are covered the same way. Other than a few exceptions, most part of the online media only covers the statements of candidates and their daily election activities, and they do not try to provide more comprehensive information to the readers about the visions and particular plans of presidential candidates.

One of the most severe challenges of the online media is that the articles prepared under commercial contracts are not properly differentiated from editorial articles. We often see advertisement articles, which do not have clear reference that would be easy to understand for the readers.

The monitoring results let us conclude that the Georgian online media manages to inform the readers about political and election processes taking place in the country. However, we seldom see any in-depth and multifaceted analysis of issues.