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MEDIA MONITORING FOR 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS INTERIM REPORT





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The European Union for Georgia



The Media Monitoring for 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia

Interim Report on Monitoring of News Releases on Radio Channels

18 June - 15 October



Prepared with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Contents of the report are the sole responsibility of Internews Georgia and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union (EU) and UNDP.

Tbilisi, 2018

About the Project

Internews – Georgia observes primetime news programmes of the radio broadcasters, within the frameworks of the UNDP project Media Monitoring for the 2018 Presidential Elections, carried out with the support from the European Union. The monitoring was launched on 18 June 2018 and will be completed in November.

Evening news releases of 11 radio broadcasters are monitored: Radio 1 of the Public Broadcaster, Ajara (Public Broadcaster of Ajara, Batumi), Radio Tavisupleba (Radio Liberty), Imedi, Maestro, Radio Palitra, Pirveli Radio, Fortuna, Radio Apkhazetis Khma, Radio Atinati (Zugdidi), Radio Hereti (Tbilisi/Lagodekhi).

Methodology

The monitoring of the main news releases of radio channels aims at determining the extent to which equal conditions are maintained and the journalistic standards are observed regarding the allocation of the air time to political subjects and the coverage of their activities during the election period.

The monitoring consists of quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative monitoring determines the indicators that can be calculated and analysed. As for the qualitative monitoring, it is used for evaluating the performance of media outlets in regard to the indicators such as ethical or professional standards, which is difficult to quantify; here the focus is laid on accuracy, imbalanced coverage, bias and any other factor which is important for understanding the quality of information.

The monitoring is focused on the qualified and non-qualified election subjects, the political parties and politicians, who are involved in the 2018 presidential elections. Besides those subjects, the monitoring subjects are the presidential candidates nominated by initiative groups, the government (central, local, Government of Ajara) and the President. The time allocated to the presidential candidates is counted starting from their nomination.

In the period of 18 June - 15 October, the monitoring revealed the following findings:

- Most of the time was allocated to the government, Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, European Georgia and United National Movement;
- Radio broadcasters pay less attention to the presidential candidates supported by non-parliamentary parties. Consequently, most of the coverage time was given to: Salome Zurbishvili, Davit Bakradze and Grigol Vashadze;

- The air of radio broadcasters was again built up on the statements of politicians rather than the information obtained by the journalists;
- The lack of information sources and critical questions was observed – the journalists did not scrutinize the facts. Public statements of politicians still determined the dynamics of the news programs;
- There is lack of competition between the radio channels, however in some cases different broadcasters covered affairs from different angles; criticism of the government was heard, and its representatives also had the opportunity to speak about their achievements; nevertheless, the listeners would have to listen to different radio broadcasters to have a balanced outlook on the events;
- Public broadcasters did not meet up to the expectations: the journalists did not prepare exclusive stories; the media content was dry and superficial. In some cases, news reports raised doubts that the journalists refrained from criticizing the government;
- Still low attention was paid to social topics, as well as to the problems of regions and minorities;
- The coverage of the Government was dramatically affected by the recent developments, including the protest of the fathers of the killed children (in demand of just investigation to their cases), work of the Parliamentary investigation commission on Khorava street murder case, and surveillance records on possible elite corruption;
- The basic principles of journalistic ethics were upheld: no cases of voice/music manipulation or use of hate speech were identified.

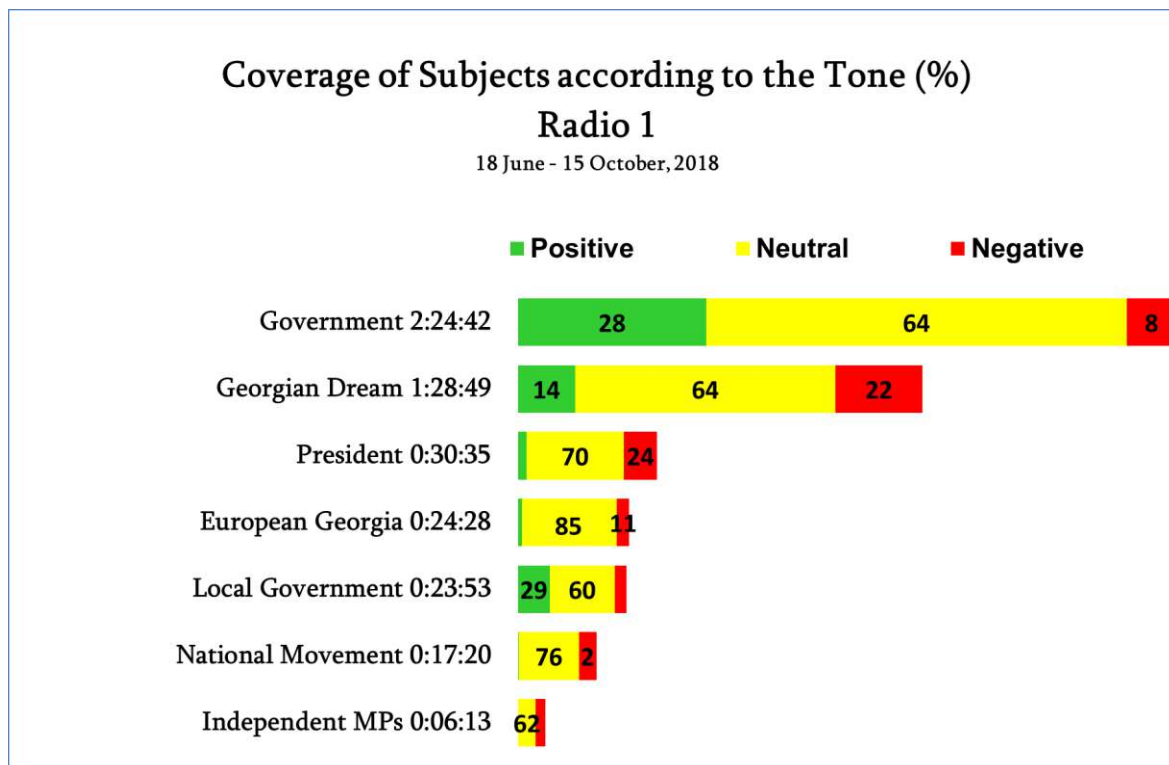
Radio 1

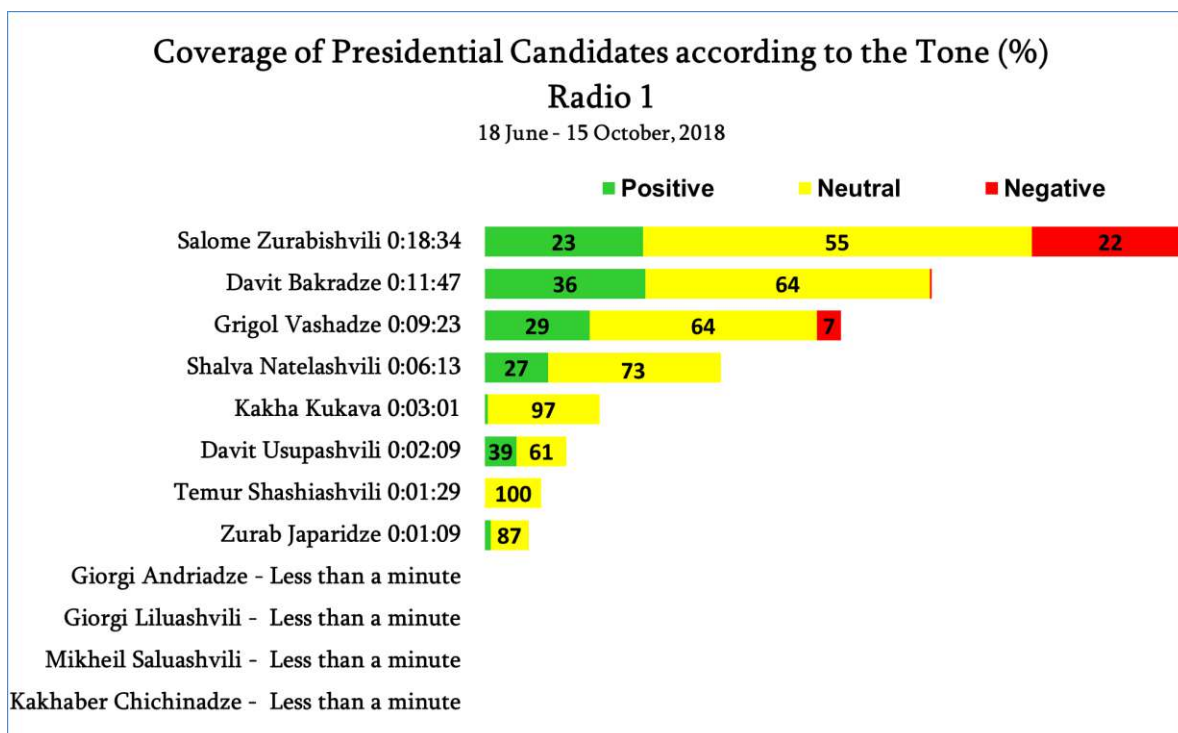
Public Broadcaster has not improved the quality of news releases. Similar to previous years the materials were dry and superficial. The expectation that the Public Broadcaster journalists would pay more attention to social issues or problems of minorities than other broadcasters, were not met. Besides, in some cases the news reports raised concerns that the criticism of the government was avoided.

In total 6 hours and 48 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects, out of which 35% of time was given to the government, 22% - to Georgian Dream and 7% - to the President. The journalists did not pose critical questions regarding the activities of the government. Radio 1 did not scrutinize the topics regarding which the government was criticized by other radio channels. Coverage of such topics was not biased, and the opinions of both sides were presented. Nevertheless, the focus was still on

the government's perspective. Comments from officials were more comprehensive, while the criticism of the opposition was presented more briefly and even mitigated. Declaring trust to the government, depreciation of Georgian Lari, possible cases of elite corruption, delivery of damaged grapes, session of the investigation commission on Khorava street murder case, protest of the fathers of killed sons and surveillance records were all topics covered from the governmental perspective. As a result, Public Broadcaster has high (28%) rate of positive coverage of the government.

Compared with other radio broadcasters, Radio 1 was not distinguished in terms of active and in-depth coverage of pre-election campaign. The broadcaster allocated more than one minute to eight candidates. Out of them the most time was given to Salome Zurbashvili, Davit Bakradze and Grigol Vashadze. Similar to previous years, pre-election coverage was limited to quoting the statements of the candidates made at the meetings with the population.





Radio Maestro

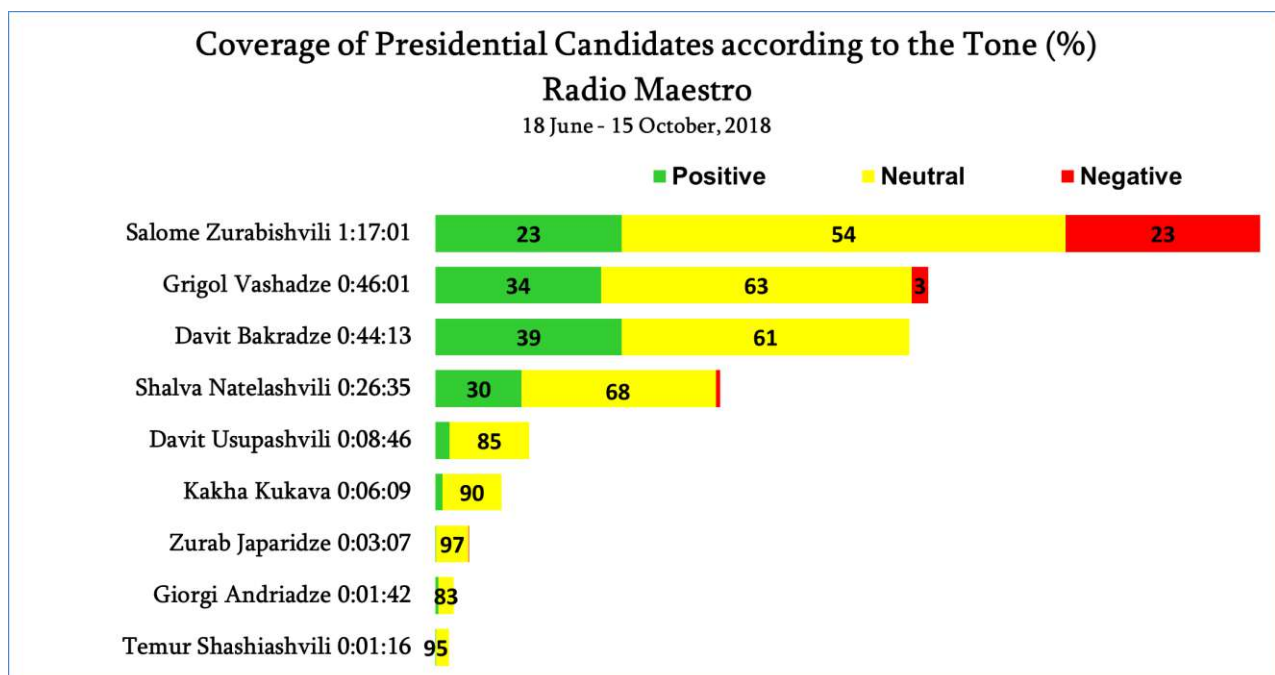
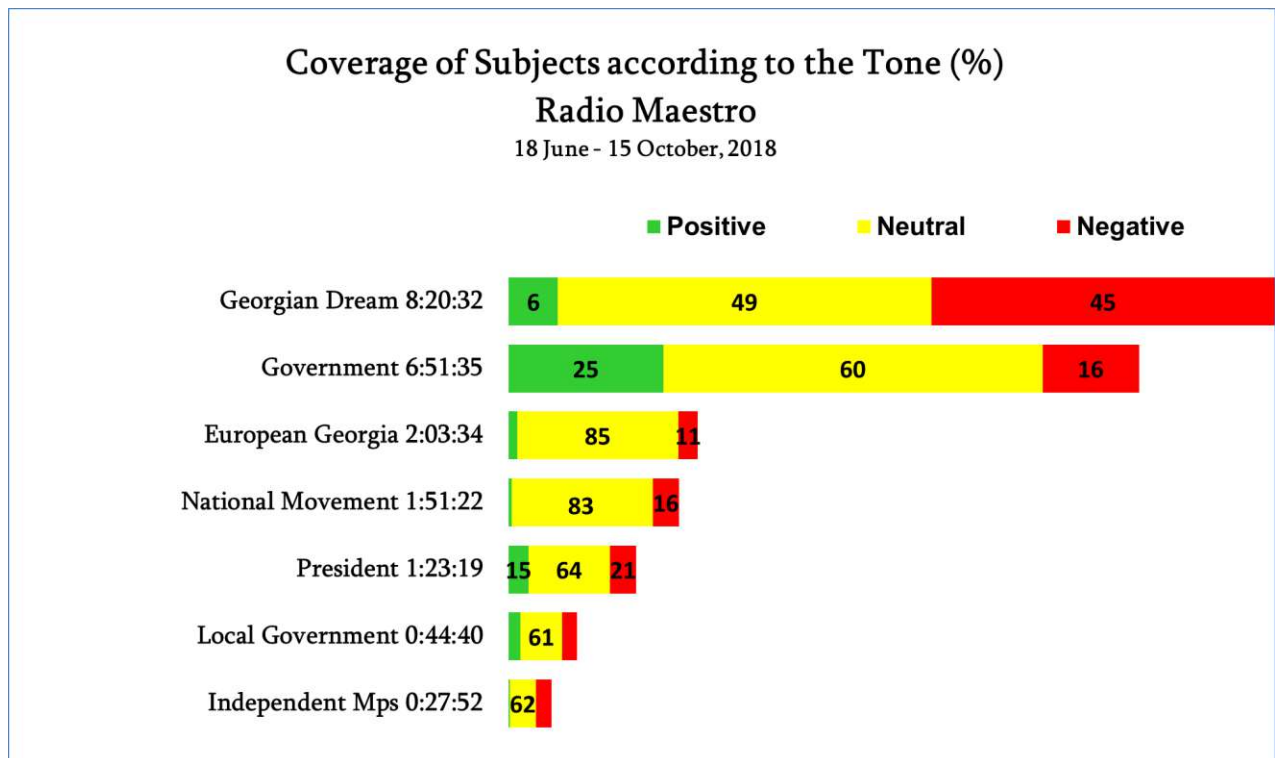
Radio Maestro again prepared the longest news releases; however, the content did not differ much from the news stories of other channels. Criticism of the government was heard often, but this resulted from airing the statements of opposition representatives rather than in-depth analytical coverage of the events. The journalists did not try to develop new topics, verify information and find diverse materials. Problems of regions or minorities also could not make their road to the listeners.

More than 27 hours were allocated to the monitoring subjects. More than half of this time was dedicated to the coverage of Georgian Dream and the government. Opposition parties were also covered actively, and more than 50% of the time was given to their direct speech. Opposition built its electoral campaign on the criticism of the government, therefore Georgian Dream got sharply negative tone (45%). The listener could hear the position of the government; however, the journalists did not try to verify contradicting statements and establish the truth. Despite the length of the news programs, analytical materials were not prepared, and the reports were based on general statements of the politicians.

Pre-election campaign was also covered superficially. No questions were asked regarding the election programmes of the candidates. Simple delivery of general statements of the presidential candidates to the voters, cannot ensure their informed choice.

Radio Maestro made critical assessments and the government had to answer grilling questions from the opponents. However, the quality of the operation of radio broadcasters would be improved even

more if the journalists were more proactive and brought issues relevant for the voters to the agenda of the politicians.

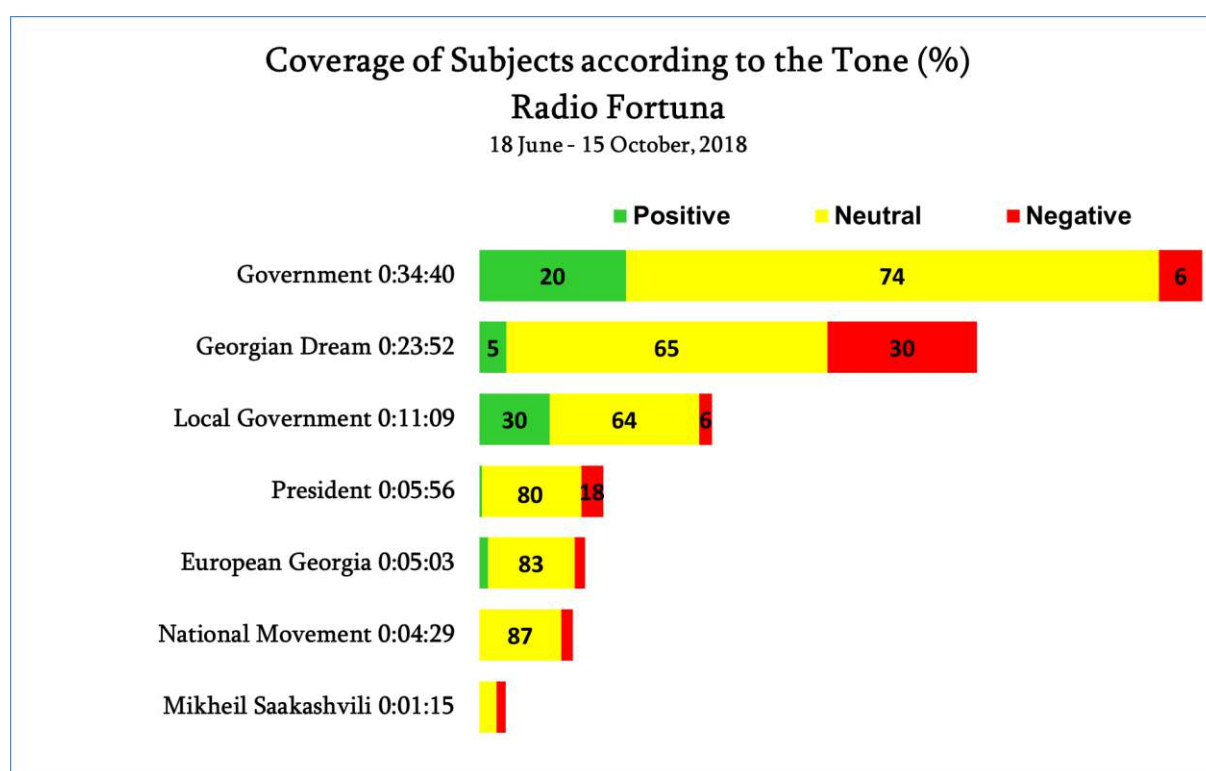


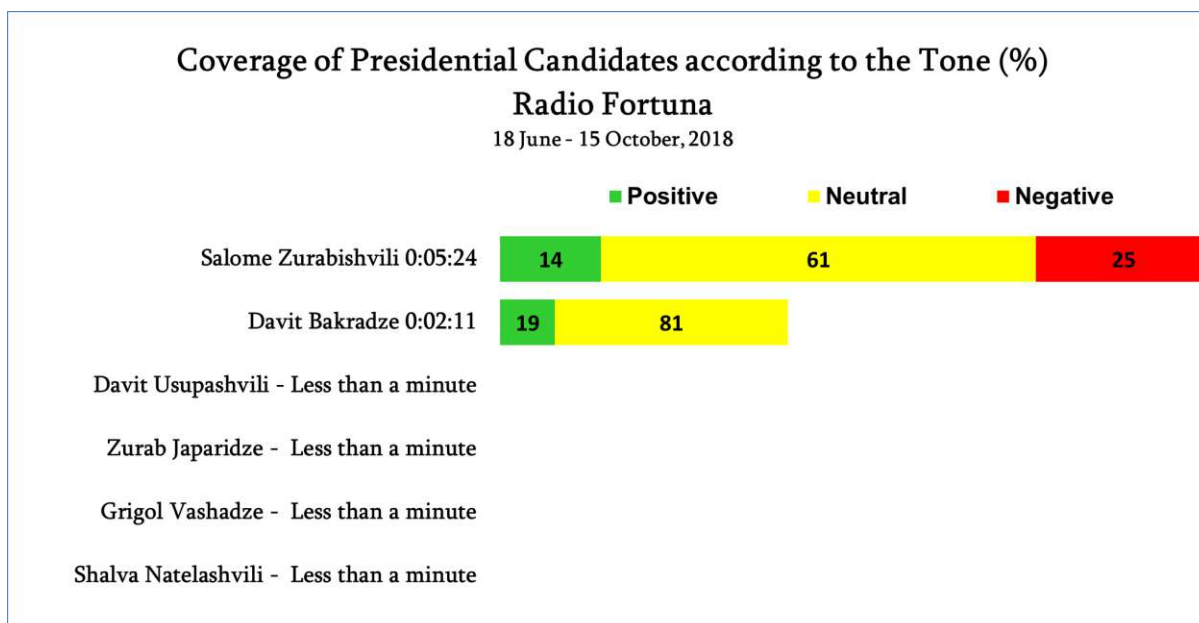
Radio Fortuna

Format of the news release of Fortuna has not changed for years. The program continues for 3-4 minutes and the anchor reads out the news of the day. It was impossible to cover the issues from various perspectives in such brief time, thus the broadcaster most likely could not support the voters' informed choice.

Just one hour and 40 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The government (34%), Georgian Dream (24%) and local government (11%) were mentioned most frequently. The journalists did not attempt to verify comments of the respondents. Some news reports were imbalanced, however in general Radio Fortuna was not biased in favour of any political party.

Pre-election campaign was almost not covered. More than one minute was given only to Salome Zurbishvili and Davit Bakradze. The news reports were prepared in the style characteristic for an information agency. They were monotonous and offered nothing new compared with the information provided by other broadcasters.





Pirveli Radio

Pirveli Radio actively covered political developments, but its topics were similar to other radio broadcasters. The journalists did not try hard to obtain exclusive materials. Like previous years, the channel covered the assessments of opposition representatives extensively and strong criticism of government was heard on its air.

19 hours and 22 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. More than half of this time was given to Georgian Dream and the government. More than one minute was allocated to 21 monitoring subjects. Air was also given to non-governmental sector representatives. Overall, the voice of the respondents criticising the government was heard. Consequently, considerable time given to the ruling team was in negative tone.

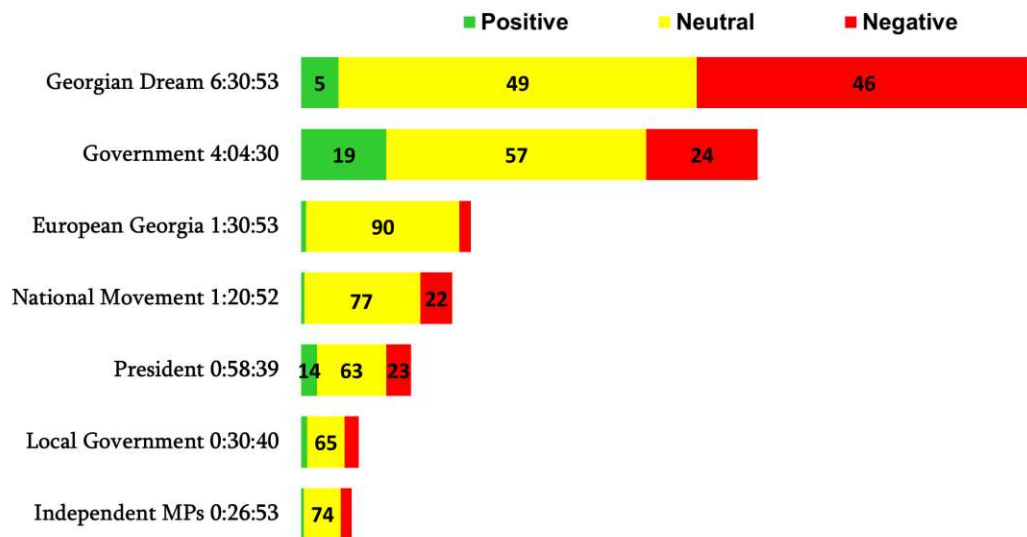
Pre-election campaign was limited to quoting the statements from the meetings with population: the candidates had opportunity to speak about their plans and present themselves positively but did not have to answer critical questions of the journalists. The only exception was Salome Zurabishvili, who was the object of frequent criticism of opponents and got twice more negative tone than positive.

It is a positive sign for the freedom of media, when the broadcaster is critical to the government and gives floor to the opposition. However, it is also important to distinguish the role of a journalist in this regard. The channel needs to demonstrate that the criticism is not based solemnly on the statements of opposition, the facts are verified, and new materials are presented.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

Pirveli Radio

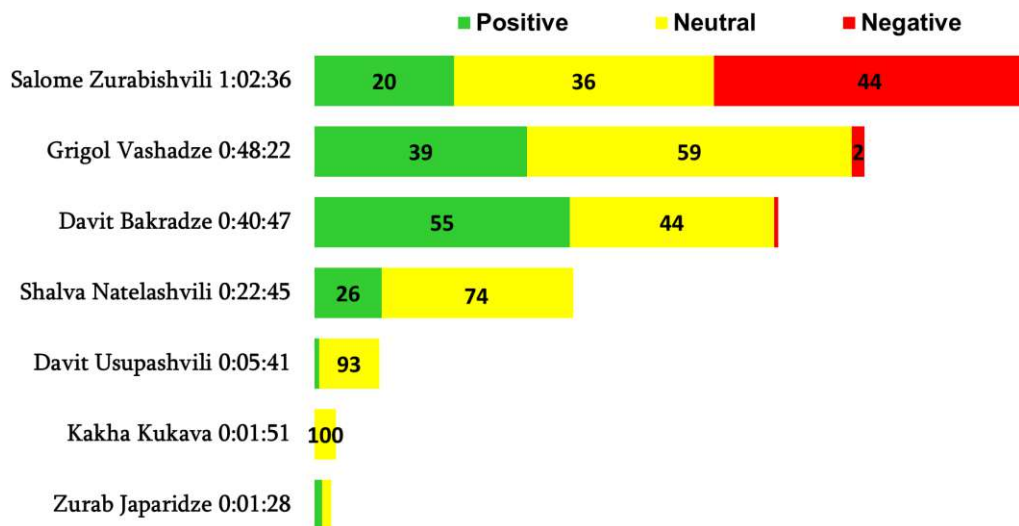
18 June- 15 October, 2018



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

Pirveli Radio

18 June - 15 October, 2018



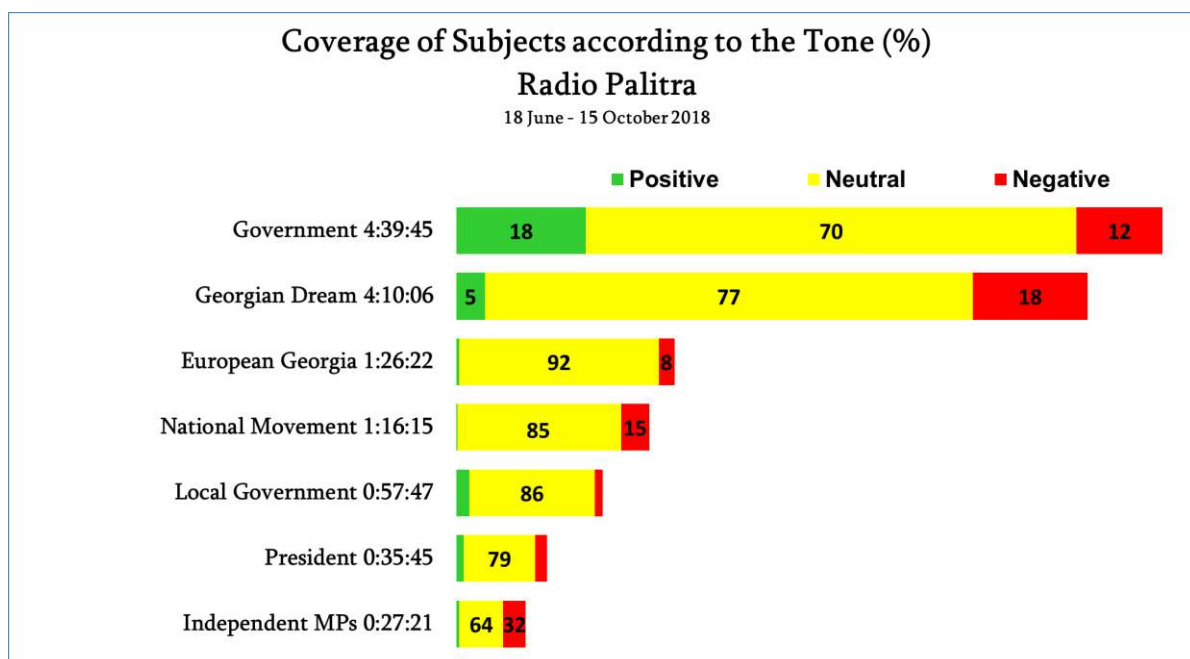
Palitra

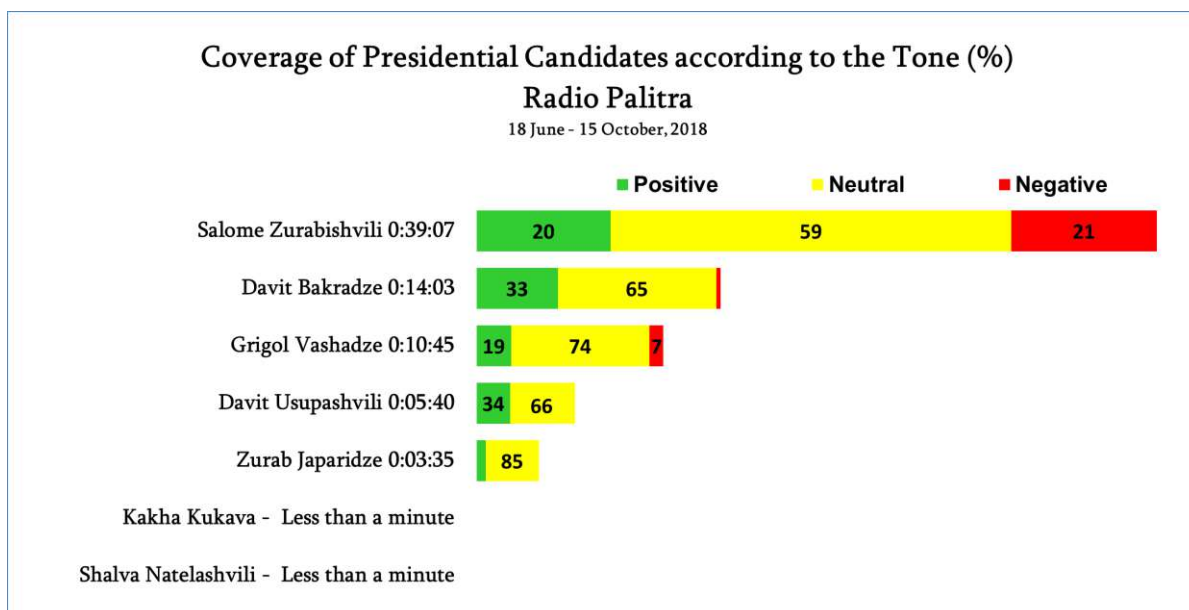
The length of the Palitra news programs provided opportunity for covering regional news and problems as well, but the channel did not use this chance. Main news of the day was actively

covered; however, journalists were not proactive and exclusive reports were not prepared. Like in previous years, news releases were mostly balanced, and the events were covered in impartial manner.

15 hours and 34 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most of this time was dedicated to the government (30%) and Georgian Dream (27%). The subjects, including the candidates for president had equal opportunities for direct speech (on average 30% of time). More than five minutes was given to just four candidates – Salome Zurbashvili (39 min), Davit Bakradze (14 min), Grigol Vashadze (10 min) and Davit Usupashvili (5 min). The radio broadcaster superficially covered pre-election campaign. The listener basically heard the statements of candidates, and the journalists tried less to obtain additional information, verify facts and ask critical questions to the politicians.

The journalists were not biased in favour of any of political party. However, exclusive materials and focus on the issues of regions and minorities would make the programmes more diverse and interesting.





Imedi

Imedi actively covered political events, however social topics, as well as news and problems of regions were less included in news releases. Overall, the events were covered impartially, however in some cases the balance was in favour of the ruling team. The journalists did not ask critical questions and tried less to obtain additional information.

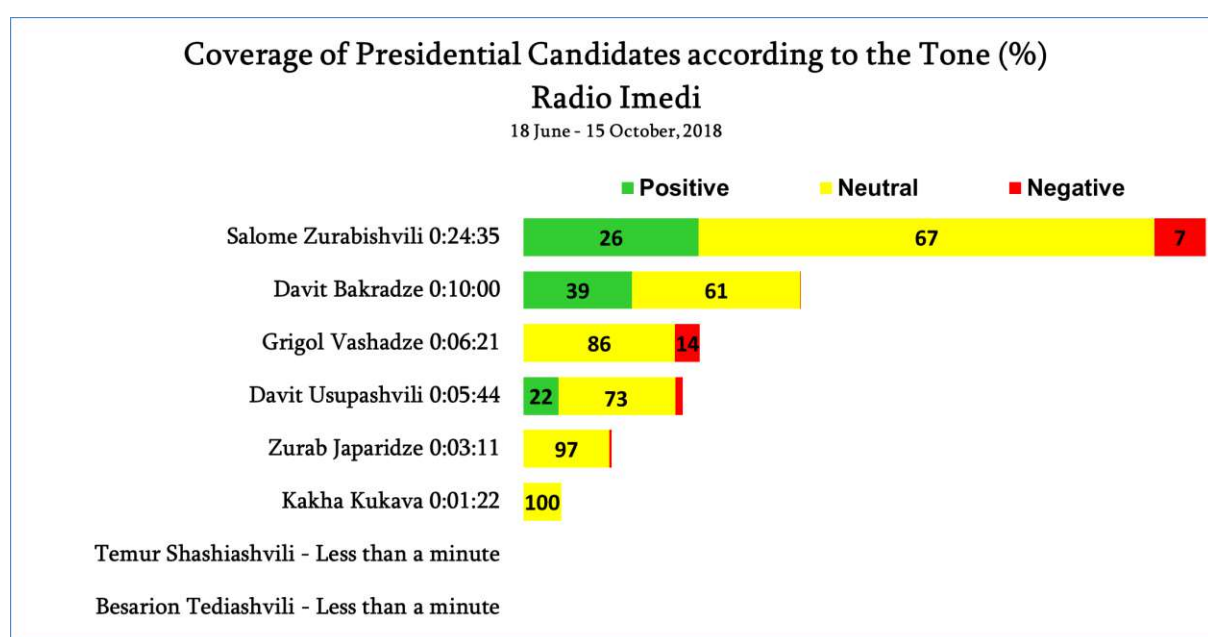
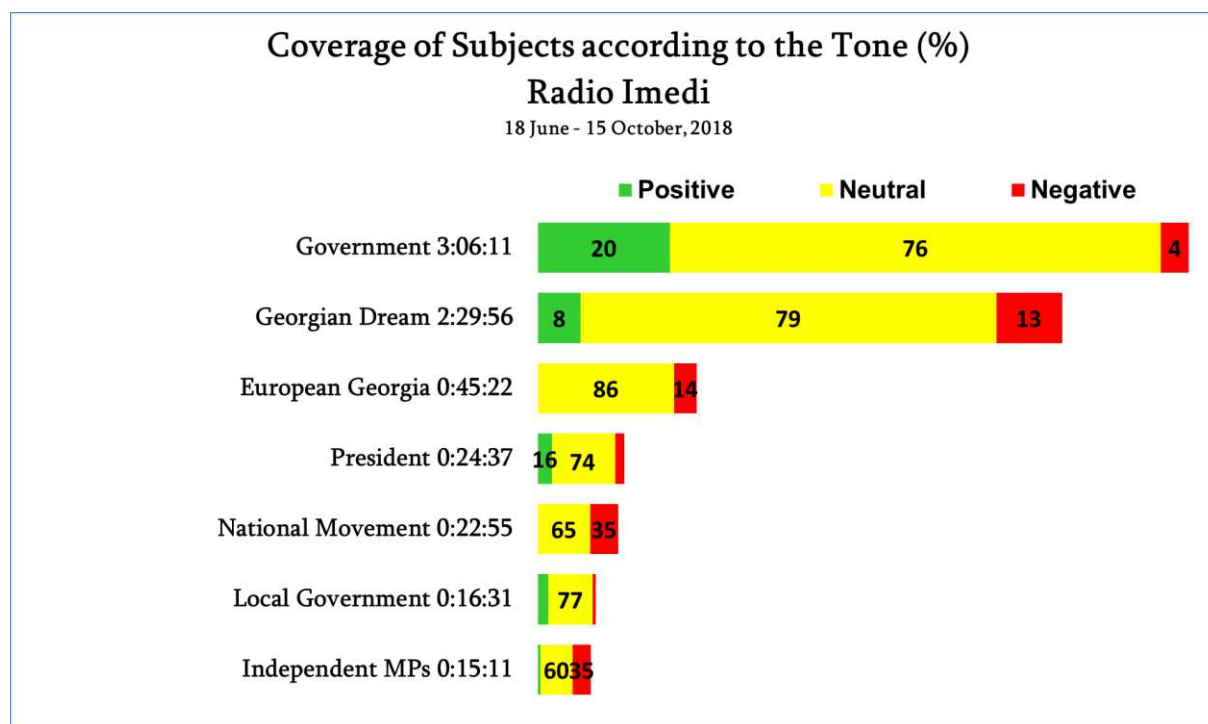
The radio broadcaster allocated 8 hours and 52 minutes to the monitoring subjects. More than half of this time accounted for coverage of the government (35%) and Georgian Dream (28%). Out of opposition parties, just European Georgia (9%) and United National Movement (4%) were covered. The share (on average 50%) of direct speech of government as well as of opposition parties was increased compared to previous years. However, in some cases identification of the respondents was difficult, since journalists did not say their names. Consequently, it was not possible to calculate the time allocated to them.

While covering pre-election campaign, the channel was limited to general statements of politicians. In total 51 minutes were allocated to the presidential candidates. Imedi provided lengthy coverage of possible falsification of the list of supporters submitted to the CEC by the union of opposition parties Power in Unity. Therefore, their presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze got 14% of coverage in negative tone.

In selected reports, the balance was in favour of the government: in the programme of 27 July, while covering conflict between United National Movement and Georgian Dream at the session of City Council, the journalist presented to the listeners only the position of the latter. Besides, the

broadcaster did not cover some topics (for example Machalikashvili's protest in Pankisi) that would present the government negatively.

Main challenge of Imedi is still the journalists' proactivity and insufficient scepticism towards the politicians' statements. Also, they need to work more to cover the topics outside what is discussed by the politicians at the press conferences. This would make the programmes more informative and diverse.



Tavisupleba (Radio Liberty)

Tavisupleba covered main daily news in brief, focusing on the processes ongoing in regions and regional problems. The journalists asked critical questions and criticised local government. Tavisupleba covered topics (agriculture, infrastructure, social issues), which were not included in the programmes of other broadcasters.

Tavisupleba dedicated 14 hours and 51 minutes to monitoring subjects, out of which 27-27% were allocated to central and local governments, and 19% of the time was given to Georgian Dream. On average 80% of the time dedicated to the subjects accounted for indirect speech.

Like in previous years Tavisupleba allocated relatively less time for covering pre-election campaign. Mostly the meetings with voters were covered. Out of one hour dedicated to the presidential candidates 23 minutes were dedicated to Salome Zurbashvili: the comments of opponents and the representatives of Georgian Dream to her statements were heard on the air.

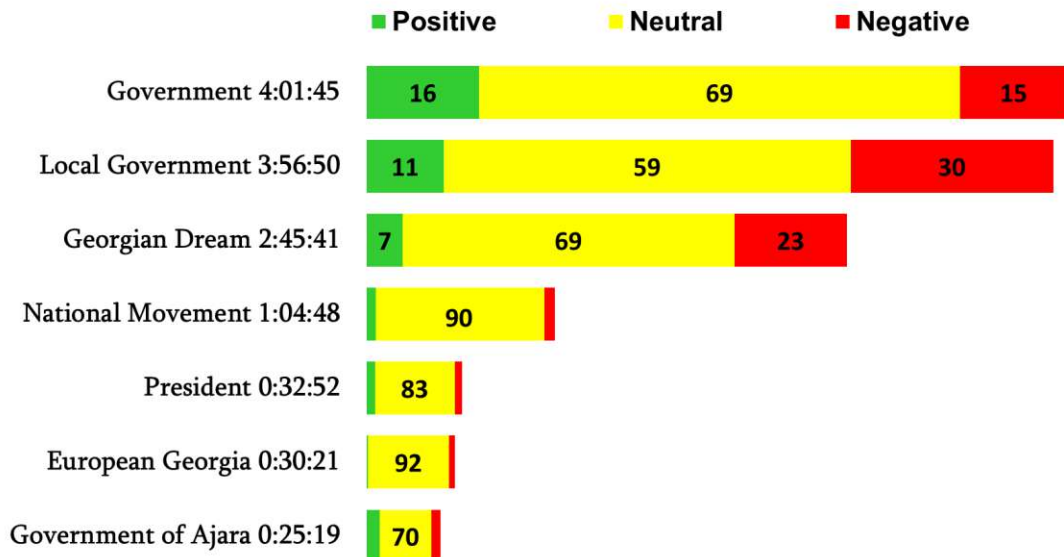
On 28 September and the next days the broadcaster prepared several stories on whether the promises of the presidential candidates went beyond the limited authorities of future president. However, journalists did not identify who made such promises.

Cases of irrational use of air time were identified: the same 4-6-minute stories on non-political topics were repeatedly included in news releases. It would be better if the broadcaster considered using this time for electoral topics, especially with coming closer to the E-Day, providing the voters with comprehensive information on realistic or unrealistic promises of the presidential candidates. This would help the voters in making informed choice.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

Radio Tavisupleba

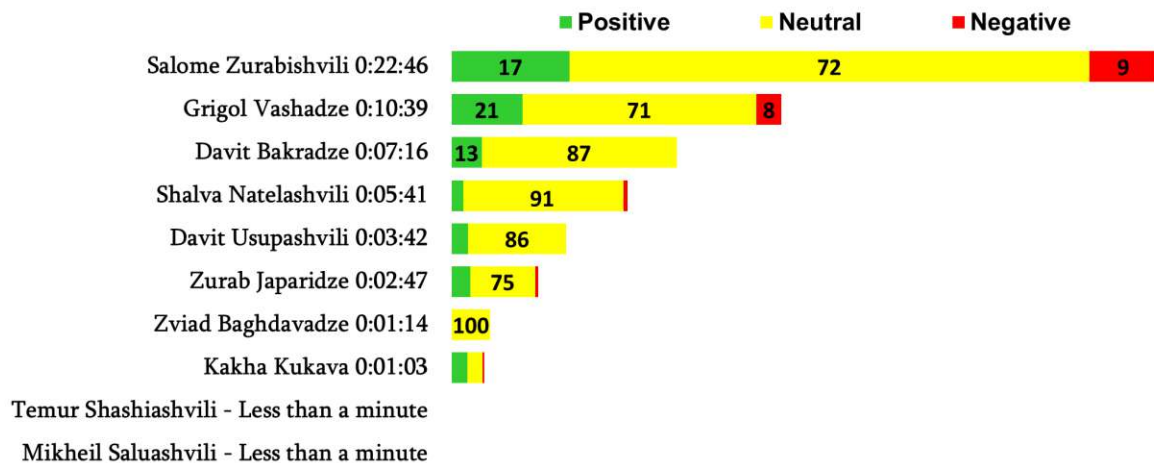
18 June - 15 October, 2018



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

Radio Tavisupleba

18 June - 15 October, 2018



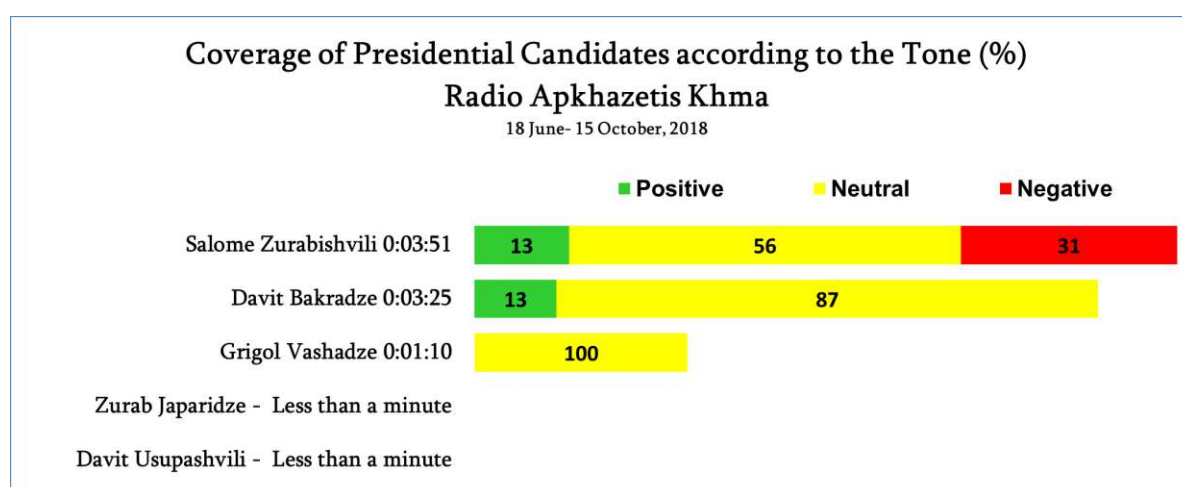
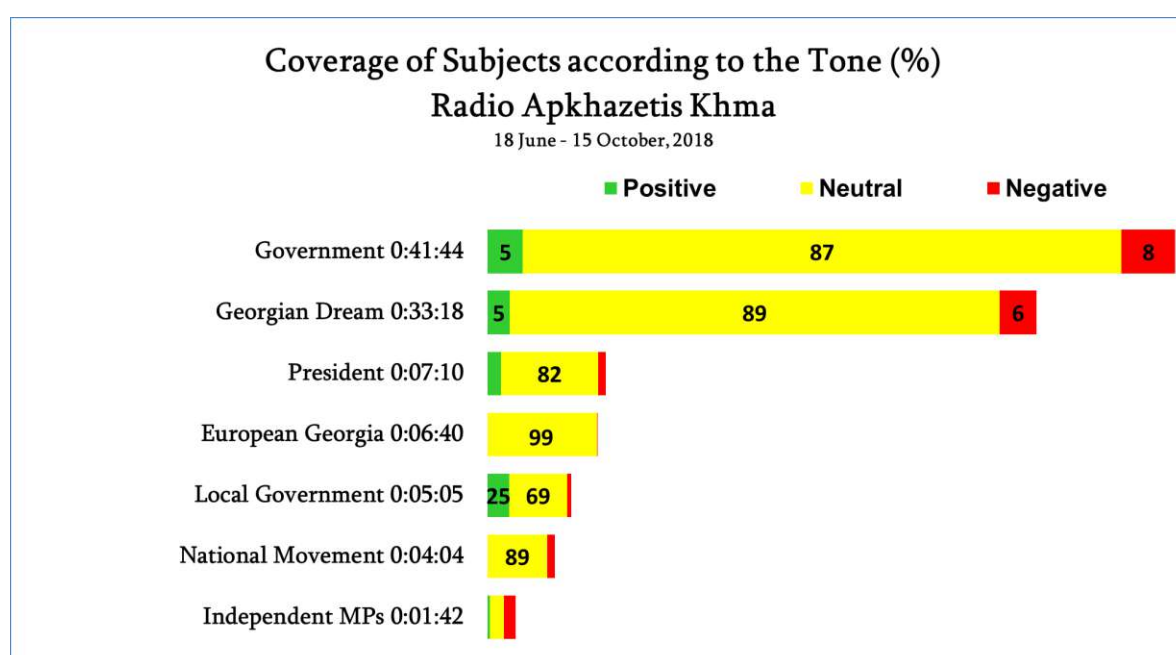
Apkhazetis Khma

Apkhazetis Khma briefly and drily broadcasted some main news in short news programmes. The broadcaster did not express bias towards any political subject, however superficial coverage did not provide the listener with comprehensive information.

The radio channel dedicated one hour and 52 minutes to the monitoring subjects. 100% of this time accounted for indirect coverage – journalist quoted the statements of politicians. The anchor's quotes were neutral, most of the time was dedicated to the government (37%) and Georgian Dream (30%).

Balance was maintained in the news, and the comments of both the government and the opposition were heard. Pre-election campaign was almost not covered on the air of the broadcaster. Out of the presidential candidates 3 minutes were allocated to Salome Zurabishvili and Davit Bakradze only.

Like in the monitoring of previous years, main problem of the channel still is lack of diverse materials, less proactivity of journalists and superficial coverage of the events.



Hereti (Lagodekhi/Tbilisi)

Hereti actively covered the events ongoing in the country. In news releases main focus was on the events developed in the region. The journalists never avoided exploring a problem and covered the issue from different perspectives, asked critical questions and tried to verify the respondents' statements. However, like in previous years, dry coverage of pre-election campaign still remained a problem.

The radio broadcaster dedicated 8 hours and 17 minutes to the monitoring subjects. Out of this 28% was used for coverage of the government's activities, 24% was given to Georgian Dream and 7-7% to United National Movement and European Georgia. In September and October time dedicated to the presidential candidates and coverage of their activities was increased and compiled one hour and 13 minutes. On average, 50% of time was given to the subjects for direct speech, while significant part of the time accounted for neutral tone.

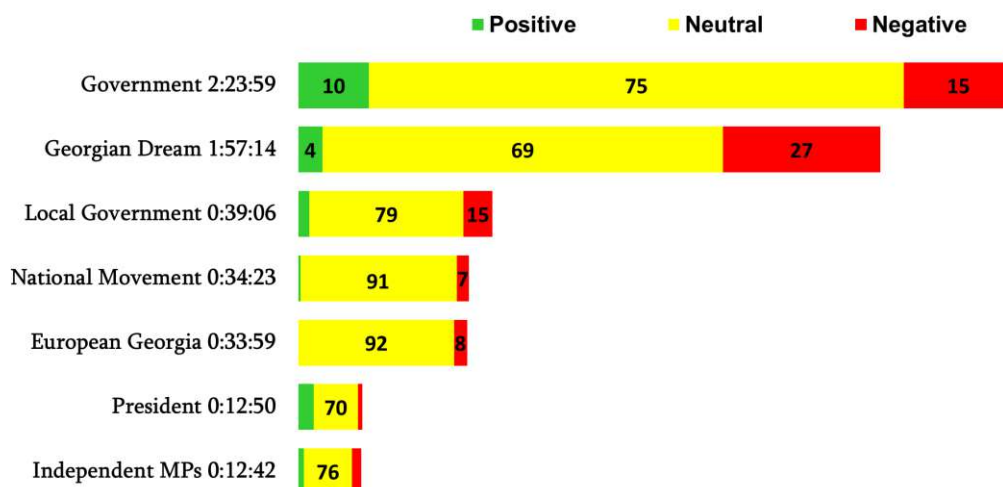
The journalists actively covered local problems. They prepared exclusive stories. Infrastructural and other social problems were covered frequently. The radio broadcaster was focused on concrete problematic issues and tried to present the positions of responsible persons in that regard. For example, in the programme of 25 June, a story was prepared exploring assessments of non-governmental sector on operation of local self-government and position of the latter was also presented.

The radio broadcaster operated impartially, following the standards of journalistic ethics. However, superficial coverage of pre-election campaign and promises of politicians still remained a problem.

Coverage of Subjects according to the Tone (%)

Radio Hereti

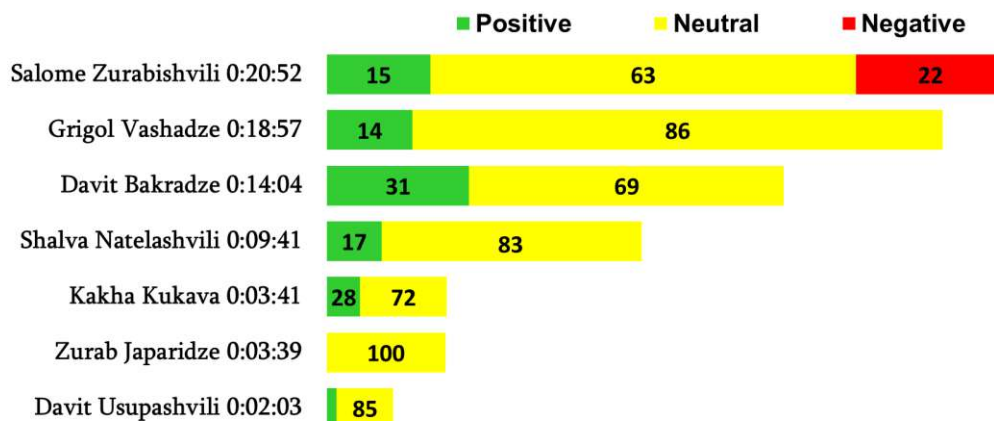
18 June - 15 October, 2018



Coverage of Presidential Candidates according to the Tone (%)

Radio Hereti

18 June - 15 October, 2018



Temur Shashiashvili - Less than a minute

Giorgi Andriadze - Less than a minute

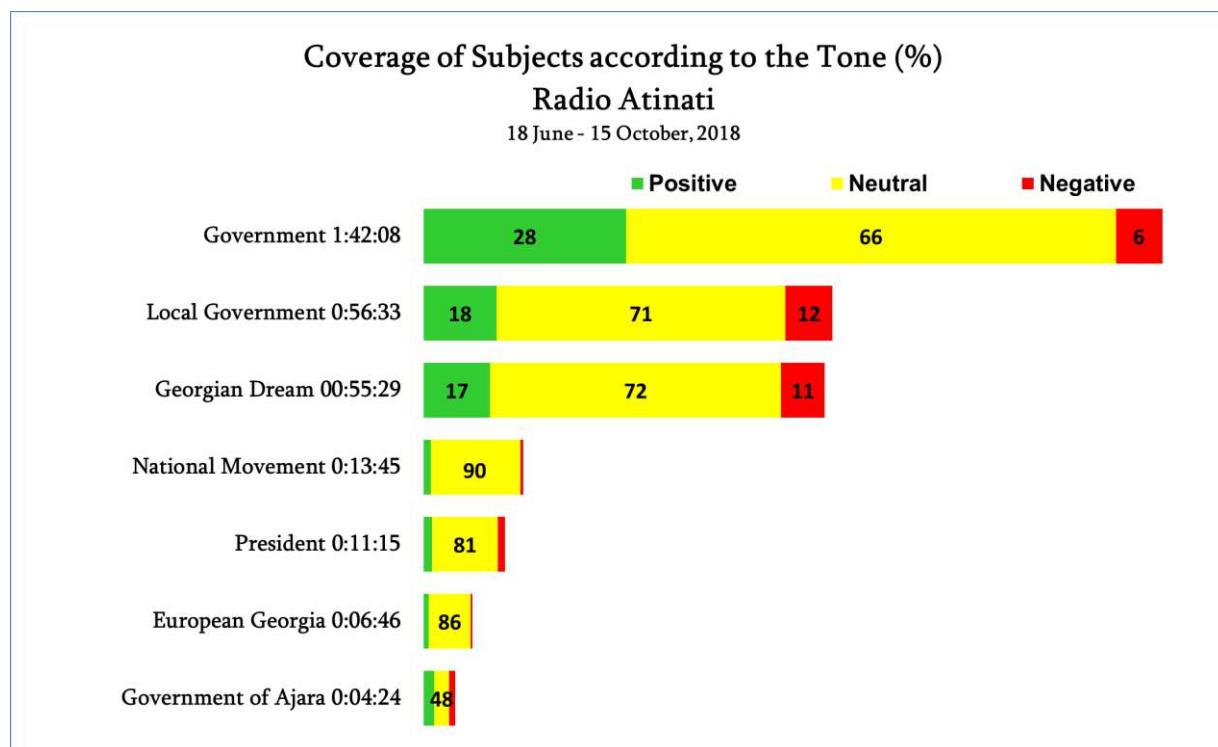
Radio Atinati (Zugdidi)

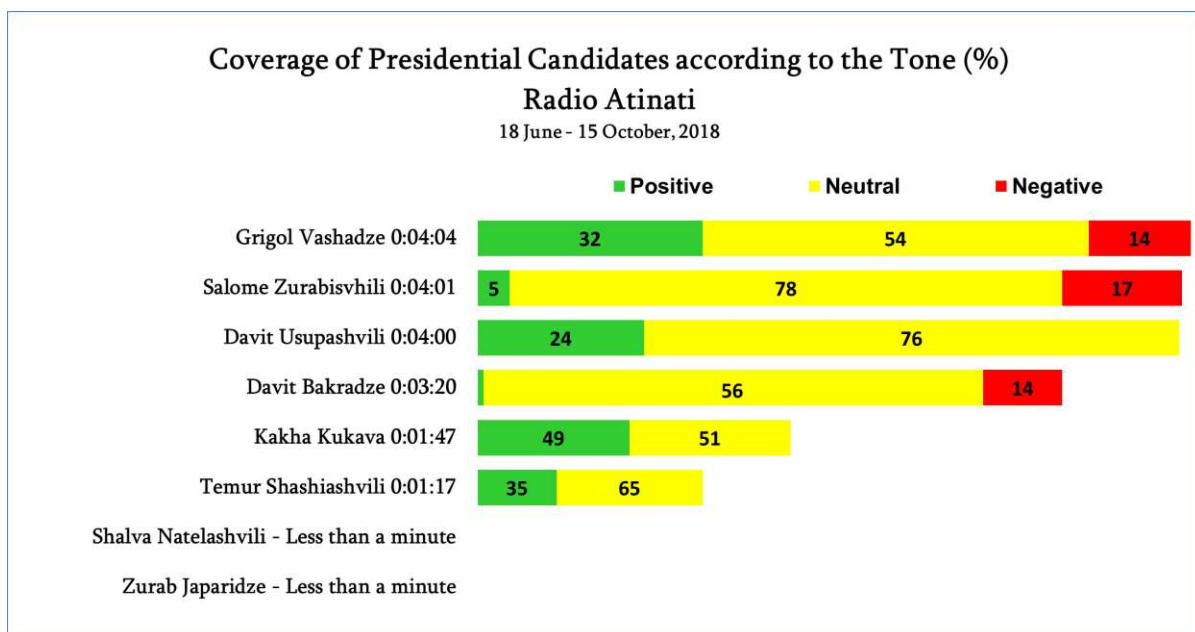
Radio Atinati mostly covered the events developed in Samegrelo. The news was brief and superficial. The journalists did not express bias towards any political party, but the events were covered without in-depth analyses. Critical questions were not heard on air.

In total 4 hours and 35 minutes were dedicated to the monitoring subjects. 37% of this time was given to the government, and 20-20% to local government and Georgian Dream. In most cases, other people were talking about the subjects. On average, 65% of the time was dedicated to indirect coverage.

Atinati covered the presidential candidates in accordance with their activities in the region. The journalists presented to the listeners the election promises of the candidates, however they were not interested in the extent to which the candidates could keep the promises and whether this or that promise was beyond the authorities of the president. In total 20 minutes were dedicated to the coverage of candidates. Out of this time 4 minutes were given to each of the following candidates - Grigol Vashadze, Salome Zurabishvili and Davit Usupashvili.

The news releases were balanced. The journalists did not make personal assessments and no case of bias was identified. However, superficial coverage of the events remained a problem. Burning social problems and problems of regions were less covered on the air of the radio broadcaster.





Radio Ajara (Broadcaster of Ajara, Batumi)

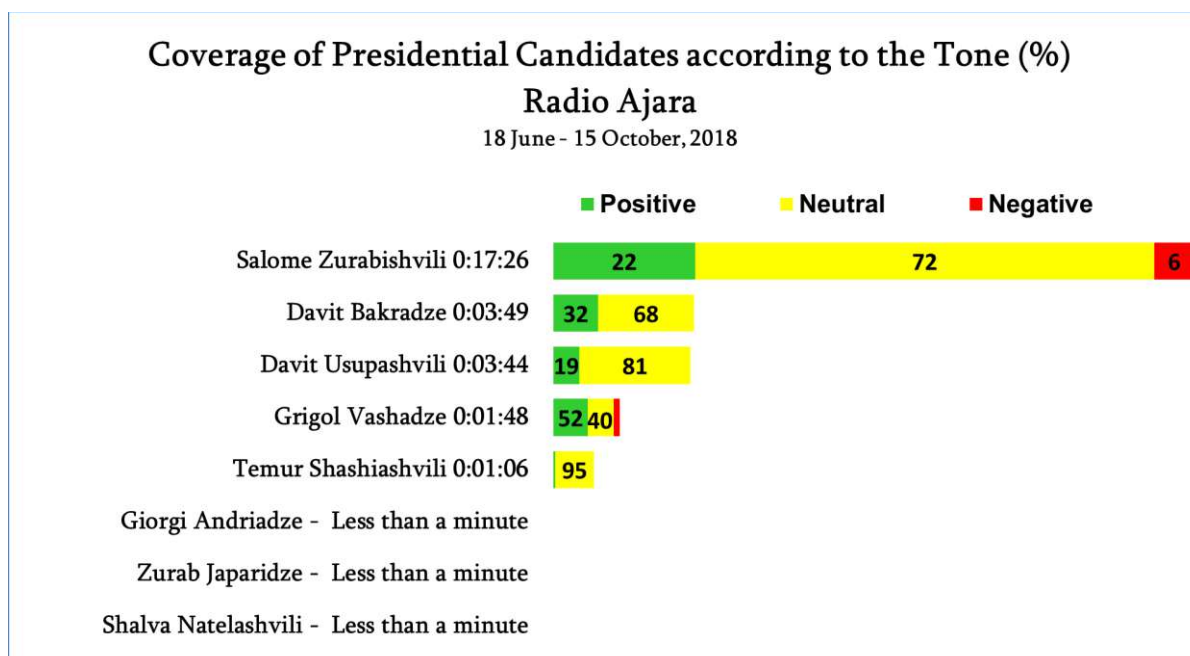
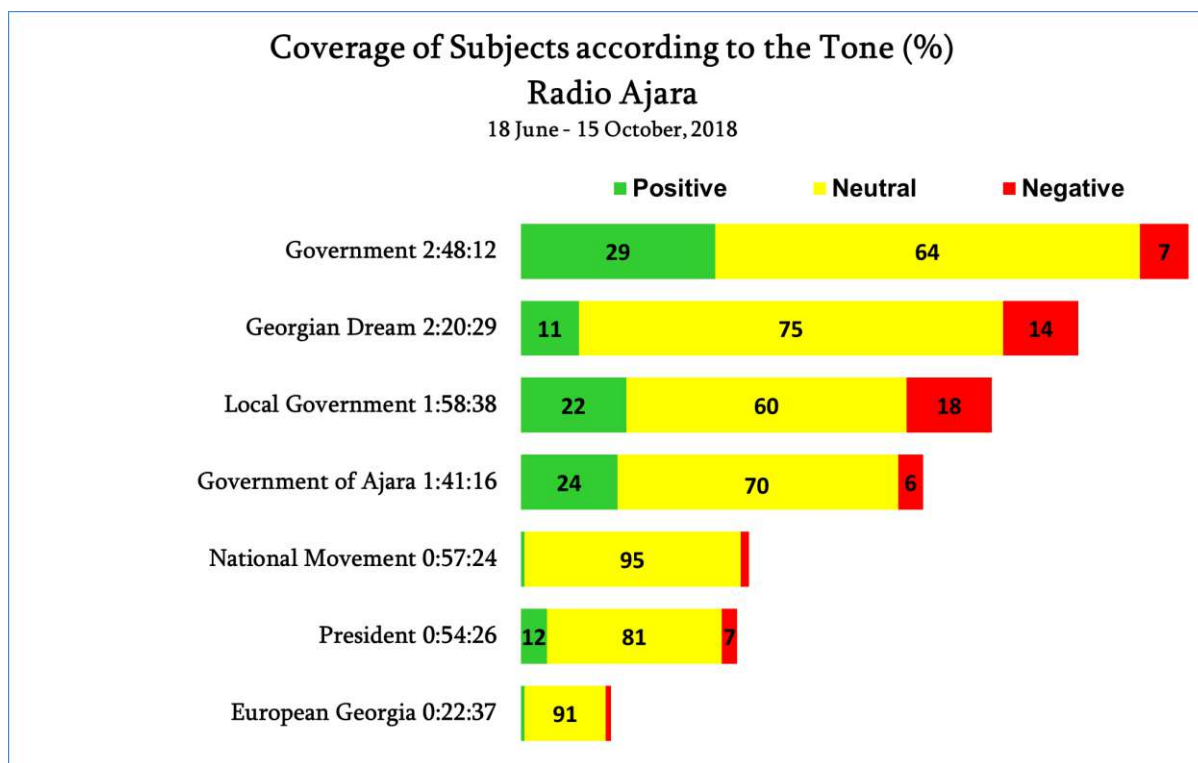
Radio Ajara covered briefly and superficially the events ongoing in the region. Consequently, main problem of the news releases was lack of in-depth stories. In contrast to previous years, the tendency of positive coverage of ruling team was decreased, however positive rate is still high, the journalists ask less critical questions to the government.

Radio Ajara allocated 12 hours to the monitoring subjects. 23% of total time was dedicated to the coverage of the government, 19% - Georgian Dream, and in total, 31% to local government and the government of Ajara. On average 30% of time dedicated to the subjects accounted for direct speech. Often, it was difficult to identify the respondents, since anchor did not introduce them. Due to that, it was impossible to count the time of direct speech of many subjects.

The radio broadcaster covered the presidential candidates in accordance with their activities in the region. Most coverage time was dedicated to the premises made at the meetings with population, however the journalists did not ask additional questions. Out of the time dedicated to the candidates (30 min), 17 minutes were allocated to the coverage of Salome Zurabishvili. Her statement regarding who started the August War was not covered and consequently the listener did not have the opportunity to hear critical assessments of her opponents. Thus, considerable time dedicated to Salome Zurabishvili was in positive tone.

Brief news releases on the air of the broadcaster were balanced. Problems of local population were covered frequently, however this is not enough, since the listener expects public broadcaster to ask

critical questions, cover the topics and problems which might not be mentioned by private broadcasters.



Summary

During the reporting period, the radio channels tried to actively cover political events, however less attention was paid to pre-election campaign.

Compared with previous years, there was improvement regarding balanced coverage. Most of radio broadcasters did not demonstrate bias towards any political force. The journalists did not make personal assessments. However, some issues need to be resolved for radio broadcasters to become meaningful contributors to the informed choice of the voters.

Part of radio broadcasters did not avoid strong criticism of the government and positions of different parties were also covered in the stories, but their majority did not try to verify the respondents' statements.

Contradicting statements of politicians dominated the air. The role of journalists was less clearly demonstrated in such scenario. More journalistic effort demonstrated in collecting additional information would create the basis for the criticism of the government beyond statements of the opposition representatives.

Even though the radio broadcasters cannot develop exclusive content and the same topics are repeated on the air, sometimes the events are covered from different perspectives. Government was criticized, and its representatives also have opportunity to speak about their achievements. However, the listener has to listen to different radio channels to receive balanced and diverse information.