

# The Communications Commission's media monitoring report on the pre-election period

Qualitative

(01.09.2020 – 30.09.2020)



Communications  
Commission



## **Results of Qualitative and Quantitative Media Monitoring Conducted by the Communications Commission**

(01.09.2020 - 30.09.2020)

The Communications Commission publishes a media monitoring report on the pre-election period of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia that covers the period from September 1 2020 to September 30 2020.

The qualitative and quantitative monitoring of 6 national broadcasters is carried out during the reporting period. These broadcast channels are: First Channel of the Public Broadcaster, Adjara Public Broadcaster, Rustavi 2, Imedi TV, Pirveli TV and Mtavari TV. The monitoring is carried out on the primetime programs, namely, on the period from 19:00 to 24:00.

The subjects of the Commission's observation in the media monitoring process are:

- A) pre-election advertising;
- B) pre-election debates;
- C) news and political programs;
- D) pre-election agitation;
- E) public opinion surveys/polls;

The media monitoring of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia is carried out by persons specially selected through a competition, together with the staff of the Commission.

The Communications Commission monitors were trained by Rasto Kuzel, a media expert of the Council of Europe and the executive director of Memo 98. The expert introduced the peculiarities and specifics of conducting qualitative media monitoring during the pre-election campaign to the monitors by sharing international practice. The monitors deepened their knowledge in conducting pre-election media monitoring in accordance with internationally recognized standards.

During the monitoring process, a detailed analysis is carried out on the fair and transparent distribution of pre-election paid and free political advertisements among broadcasting companies. During the monitoring period, in the process of monitoring the main news and political programs, as well as pre-election debates, the main focus is on the time allocated by the broadcasting companies to qualified election subjects and the coverage of their pre-election activities. The subject of observation is also

coverage of activities of the political subjects by the broadcasters that are not qualified election subjects but participate in the elections. In case of non-fulfillment of the obligations included in the current legislation, the Commission studies each specific issue and takes the measures provided by law.

The monitoring of the above-mentioned channels included both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The quantitative aspect involves the time allotted to the subject, direct and indirect coverage, and tone of coverage. Within the time allotted directly, the cases when the election subject/candidate speaks/participates directly in the program are analyzed, while within the time allotted indirectly, the time spent by the broadcaster on talking about the election subject/candidate, their supporters is analyzed. Both direct and indirect coverage is assessed by a monitor based on three categories: positive, neutral and negative.

The monitoring results also give information with regard to gender presentation, namely, about the total time allotted to male and female politicians in newscasts of individual broadcasters.

During the qualitative monitoring, the broadcaster is assessed in terms of the following broadcasting standards: balance, accuracy, relevance, diversity, omission of important information, hate speech, misinformation, discrimination, and visual/audio manipulation.

### **Key Findings:**

- The coverage of pre-election activities in the news programs of the Public Broadcaster was in compliance with ethical standards and the balance was not disturbed. At the same time, during the coverage of ongoing events, the representatives of the Government (the Government and Georgian Dream) had the right to both the first and the final word. Presenters of political programs were distinguished by critical questions and analysis, including towards the government officials. Most of the election subjects were covered by the Public Broadcaster.
- The main news programs of Adjara TV were diverse in terms of opinions and guests, however, most of the time on Adjara TV was allotted to the Government of Adjara and 49% of the coverage was positive. Invited politicians were interviewed in news programs. It should be noted that during the monitoring period, in most cases, direct time in such a format was dedicated to the representatives of the Government of Adjara.

- Imedi has a positive attitude towards the government and Georgian Dream, and a sharply negative attitude towards the opposition, especially United Opposition “Power is in Unity”. There is no balance in the stories, and as usual the opposing position is not covered. In most cases, the representatives of the Government and the ruling party are invited to political programs. Opposition members are not invited to any of the primetime political programs aired on Imedi TV. On September 25, Kakha Kukava was invited as a guest to “Daily Chronicle”. He was allotted little time to express his opinions and was strongly opposed by the presenter which has never happened to the representatives of Georgian Dream and the Government. Political programs are one-sided; there is no debates or discussions on topical issues among election subjects.
- On Rustavi 2, the presenters of “Courier” cover the news mostly in accordance with ethical standards, but there are stories the quantitative balance of which is disturbed and time is allotted to more representatives of the government and Georgian Dream than the opposition. There are cases when presenters use ironical expressions towards the opposition. During the monitoring period, Rustavi 2 offered its viewers the political program “Night Courier” in its primetime that was mainly saturated with critical questions and analysis, although, in some cases, the viewers received superficial information.
- Pirveli TV is sharply negative and biased towards the government and the ruling party. In most cases, election activities of the opposition parties are covered. The stories focus on investigations and the facts of possible corruption, but are not supported by evidence and are based on assumptions. At the same time, important news that positively present the activities of the Government are not covered. political programs often cover information that makes serious allegations against government officials and that are not evidence-based. Stories are often built on suspicions and assumptions made by the author of the program and journalists, allegations are not based on evidence, and events are covered unilaterally. In order to enhance the special significance of the news stories and the dramatization of the events, the noisy announcement during the broadcast is often used, accompanied by specially selected dramatic music. There are cases when the presenters of the program show support for the opposition majoritarian candidates during a live broadcast.
- The journalists of Mtavari TV openly declare their political views and have a sharply negative attitude towards the ruling party and several other political parties. Their texts and assessments are often saturated with hate speech and obscene talk. The news programs often cover fake news where the story is entirely built on assumptions and assessments.

The coverage of the pandemic was sharply negative, the representatives of political parties were invited as experts, and the situation was assessed as hopeless that may contribute to sowing panic among the population. Important information was omitted that might have portrayed the government's achievements positively. For example: a report by the US State Department, a statement by the President of Azerbaijan regarding the spread of misinformation, as if Armenia was receiving weapons through Georgia, the visit of the Prime Minister to Brussels. The representatives of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" are most often invited to political programs and no critical questions are asked.

## Results of Monitoring News and Political Programs

### PSB Channel One

**Newscast** - Time allotted to the monitoring subjects: the Government of Georgia - 24.8% (positive - 37%, negative - 5%), Georgian Dream - 17% (positive - 31%, negative - 18%), United Opposition "Power is in unity" - 12.3% (positive - 9%, negative - 26%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** - Ethical standards were observed in the news program "Moambe" of First Channel (21:00) during the monitoring period. There were no instances of using discriminatory terminology in the texts of journalists. The balance was maintained while covering pre-election activities. "Moambe" mainly covered ongoing important political events in the country.

The ruling party was criticized by the government opponents in "Moambe". There was a tendency for the representatives of the Government (the Government and the Georgian Dream) to have the right to both the first and the final word in the coverage of ongoing events.

For example, on September 11, at 21:39, the story "The Elections 2020 - Election Strategies of the Parties" was aired. At first, the comment of a representative of Georgian Dream and then the assessments of the opposition parties were presented, and final time was allotted to Georgian Dream.

On September 18, at 21:10, the story entitled as "The Minister of Economy in the Parliament" was aired. At first, we heard the statement of the Minister of Economy criticizing the opposition, then the critical remarked and questions of the opposition to the Minister were asked, and in the final part of the story

we heard the comment of the Minister of Economy after his speech in the parliament, where he criticized “European Georgia”.

“**Moambe**” offered its viewers a 7/8-minute collage about activities of the election subjects. The activities were covered impartially. It is noteworthy that the focus was on giving equal time to the candidates and the audience mainly listened to the pre-election promises of the politicians.

**Political programs** – First Channel of the Public Broadcaster airs the political program "Free Vision" that was visited by European Georgia (once), Social Democrats for Development of Georgia (once), Democratic Movement (once) and Solidarity Alliance (once).

The format of “**Free Vision**” allowed the election subjects to talk about their election programs and political plans. The presenter focused on discussing the programs. The journalist allowed the guests to express their opinions and visions to the end, often tried to clarify the information, and was not biased or ironical towards any political subject.

“**Weekly Interview**” covered representatives of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (once) and a representative of Georgian Dream (once).

“**Weekly Interview**” is aired on First Channel on Wednesdays. On September 16, the chairman of Republican Party visited the program. The presenter was fully involved asking critical questions, effectively opposing the guest, citing opinion polls, statements made by politicians in the past, specific decisions made by them, and so on.

On September 30, Kakha Kuchava, a representative of Georgian Dream, visited the program. The presenter was focused on asking critical questions again and did not try to create a comfortable, loyal environment for the respondent. The presenter was not biased and was equally demanding towards the representatives of the ruling team as well as the opposition.

“**Current Topic**” was visited by the representatives of the Government of Adjara (once) and the Government of Georgia (once) during the monitoring period.

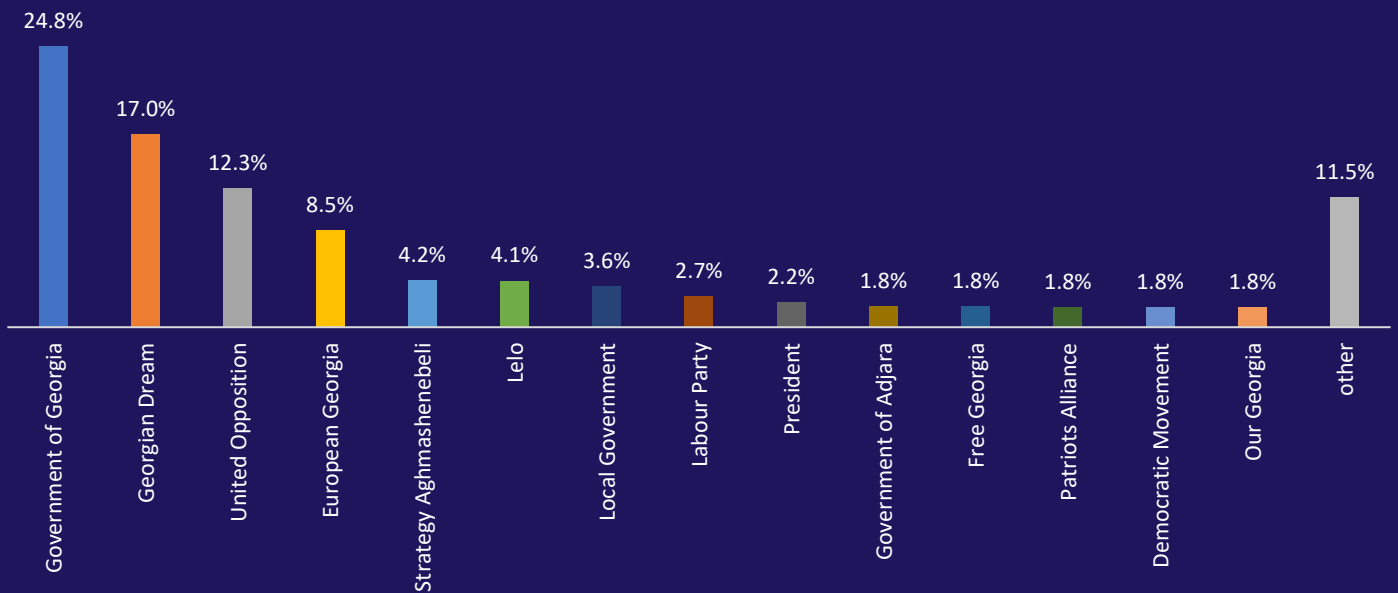
During the monitoring period, “**Current Topic**” was aired three times, and the monitoring subjects were invited only once.

The program “**New Week**” aired stories covering the following monitoring subjects: the local Government (once) and the Government (four times).

According to the weekly information of the broadcaster, no complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of the Public Broadcaster.

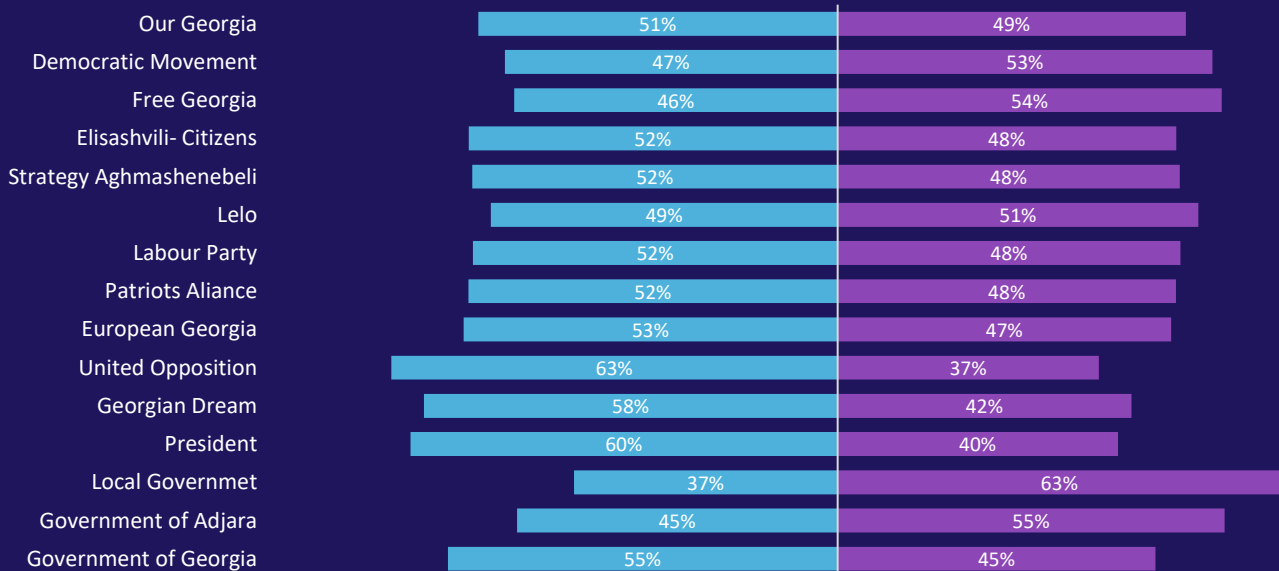


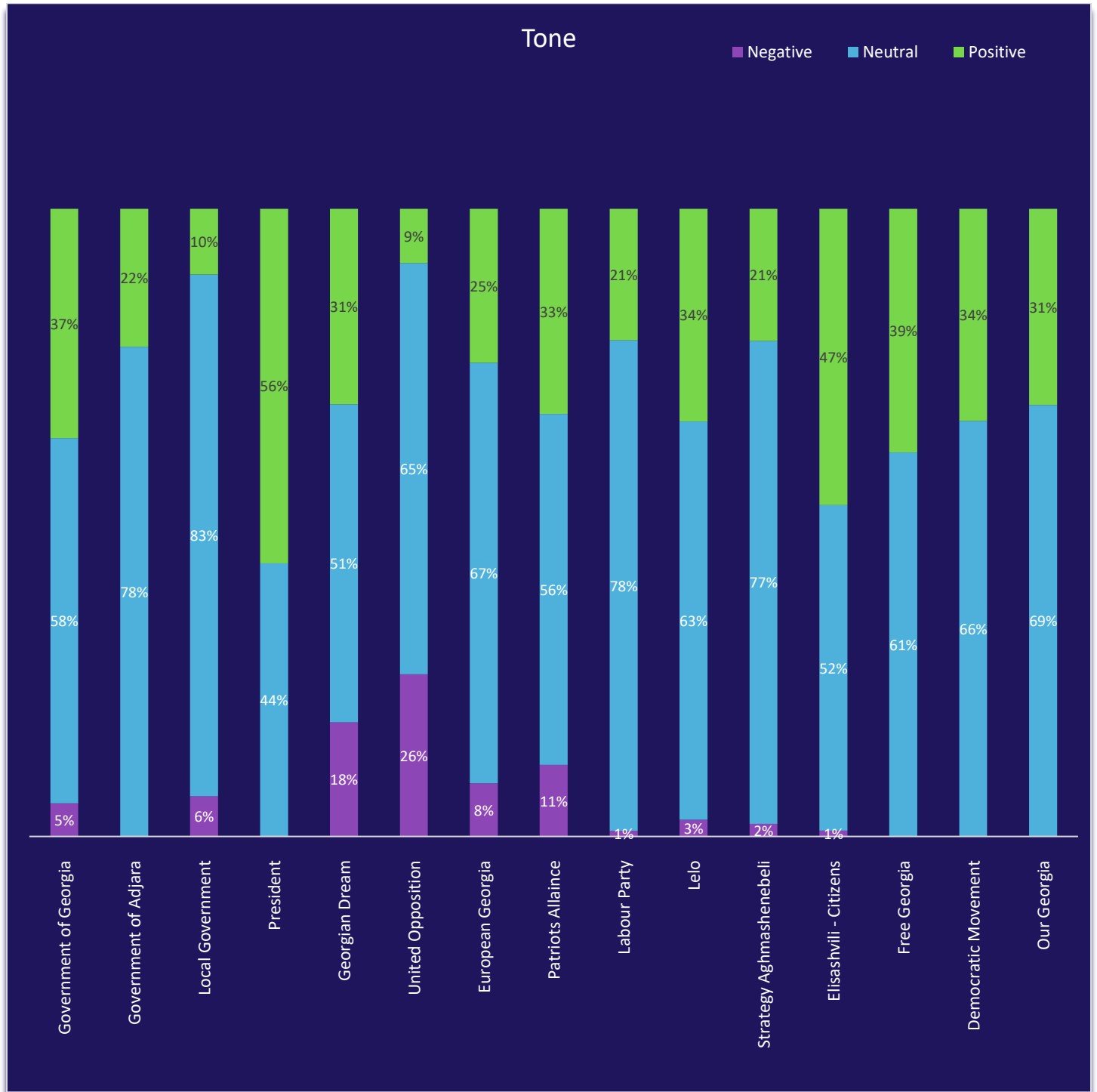
## PSB Channel 1



## Direct and Indirect Coverage

indirect direct



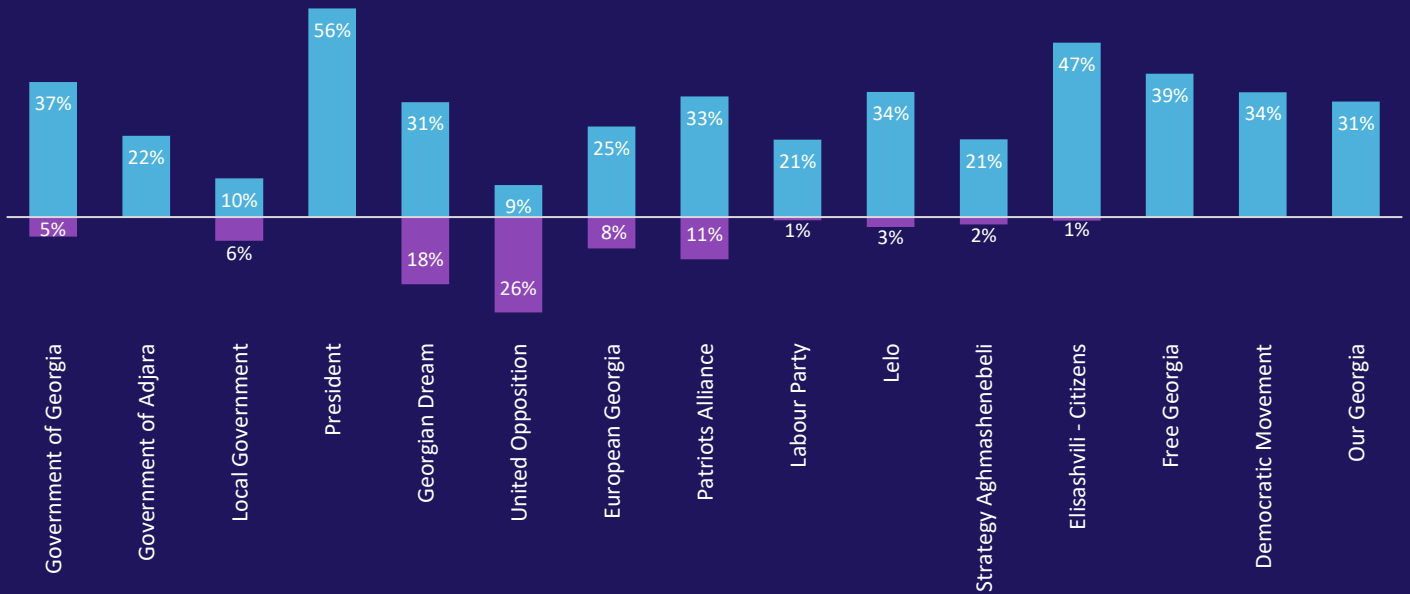




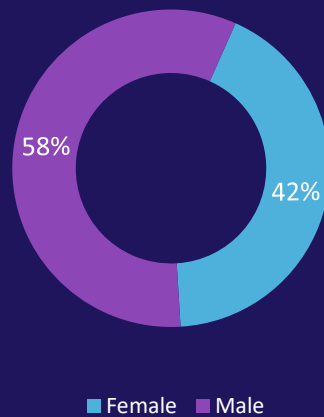


## Positive and Negative Coverage

■ Positive ■ Negative



## Gender



### PSB Adjara TV

**Newscast** - Time allotted to the monitoring subjects: the Government of Adjara - 25.7% (positive - 49%, negative - 5%), Georgian Dream - 19.5% (positive - 40%, negative - 29%), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" - 18.4% (positive - 15%, negative - 28%), the Government of Georgia - 10.7% (positive - 35%, negative - 16%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** - The main news program of Adjara TV was diverse in terms of opinions and guests. Invited politicians were interviewed. However, it should be noted that during the monitoring period, in most cases, direct time in such a format was dedicated to the representatives of the Government of Adjara.

It is noteworthy that the main news program of the channel covered the local problems, as well as ongoing political events.

The problem of thorough investigation of the issue was identified in a news story aired on September 11, at 20:00 regarding rising food prices. According to the story, the journalist clearly explains that the prices of 9 main products were not supposed to increase during the pandemic, although it is apparent that the prices of some of the products have changed. Although the monologue covered the period between March and May, the journalist visited the food market on September 11 to see the change in prices. The Minister of Agriculture of Adjara, invited as a remote guest to the program, expressed his critical attitude regarding the irrelevance of the above-mentioned story.

**Political programs** - During the monitoring period, the political show "**Free Space with Vakho Khuzmiashvili**" covered the following political subjects as remote guests: United Opposition - "Power is in Unity" (three times), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (twice), Democratic Movement (once), European Georgia (three times), Georgian Dream (once), Alliance of Patriots (once), National Democratic Party (once) and Victorious Georgia (once). During the monitoring period, a representative of the political party visited the studio only once - it was the majoritarian candidate of Georgian Dream in Batumi. The presenter of the same program and the Minister of Health of Georgia, Ekaterine Tikaradze, had a face-to-face interview, which was covered in the same program as a recording. In a story of the talk show, direct time was devoted to the event of presenting the candidates of United National Movement.

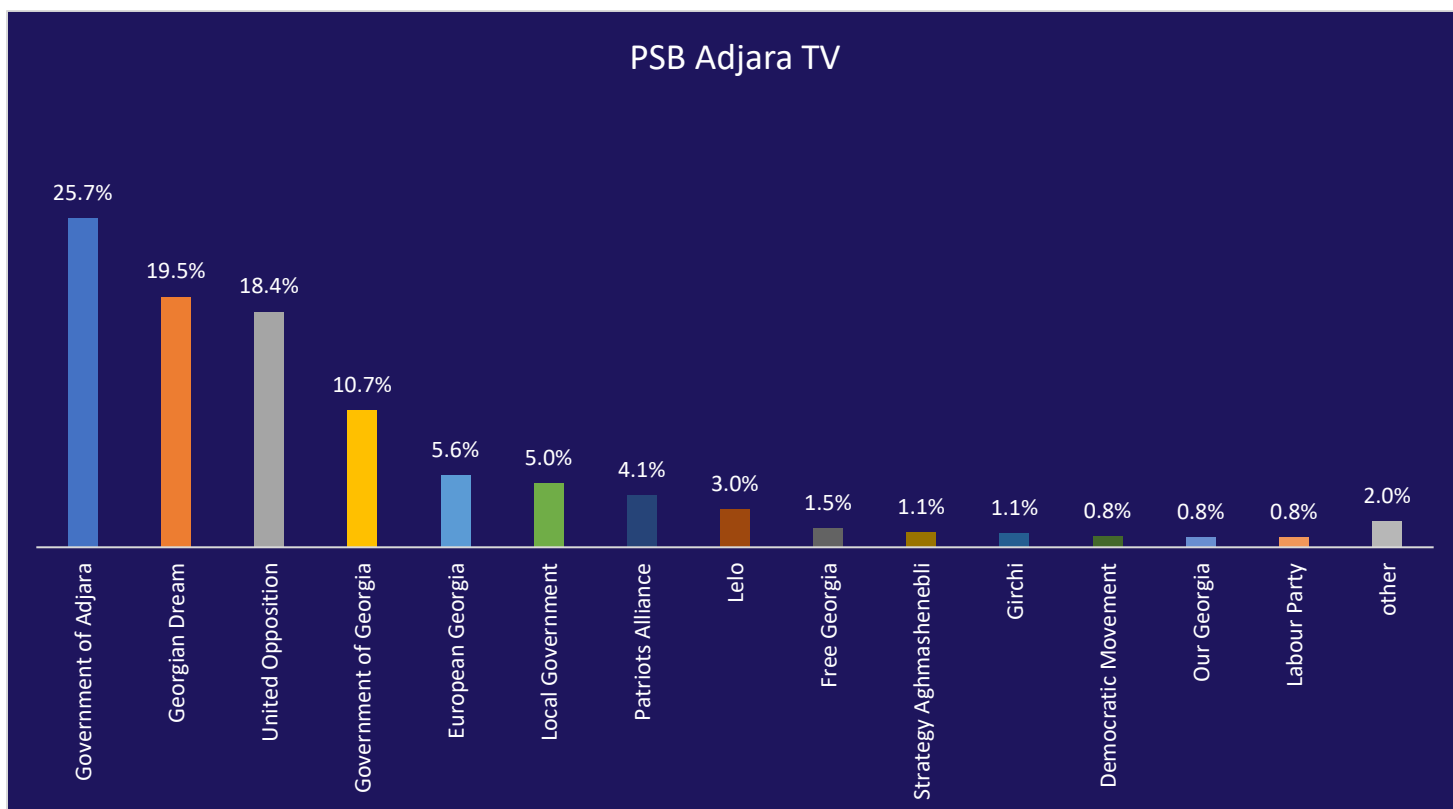
Violation of ethical norms was noticeable in the September 23 episode of the political talk show "**Free Space with Vakho Khuzmiashvili**" against the host of the show when the candidate of Victorious Georgia, Irakli Okruashvili, addressed him using the following unethical phrases: "I do not have time to speak nonsense", "Maybe you have memory problems", "You are interfering as if I am singing the polyphonous song "Mravaljamieri". The reaction was caused by the questions about the actions taken

by the respondent when being a government official that were considered as inappropriate by the interviewee who left the show in protest.

It should be noted that Adjara Public Broadcaster announced launching the program "**Elections 2020**" dedicated to election issues. During the monitoring period, only one episode was aired. The studio was visited only by the candidates of Lelo. It should be noted that the stated purpose of this program is to assist voters in making informed choices, however, in order to achieve this goal, the presenter did not ask critical questions that would help voters be more informed.

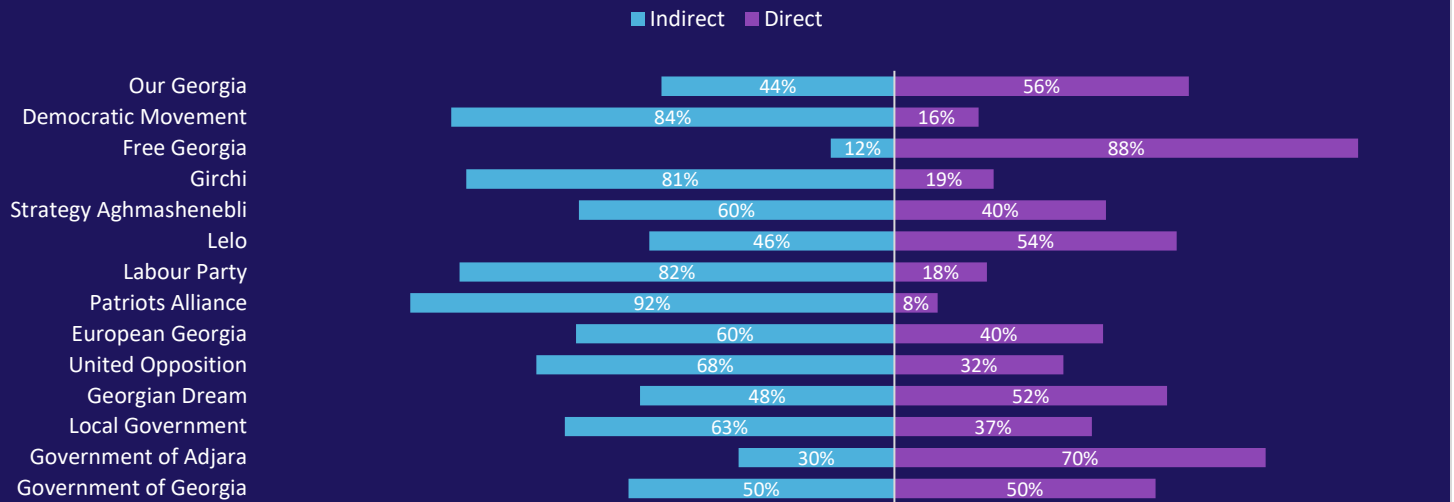
There were no debates among election subjects during the monitoring period.

According to the weekly information of the broadcaster, no complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of Adjara TV.

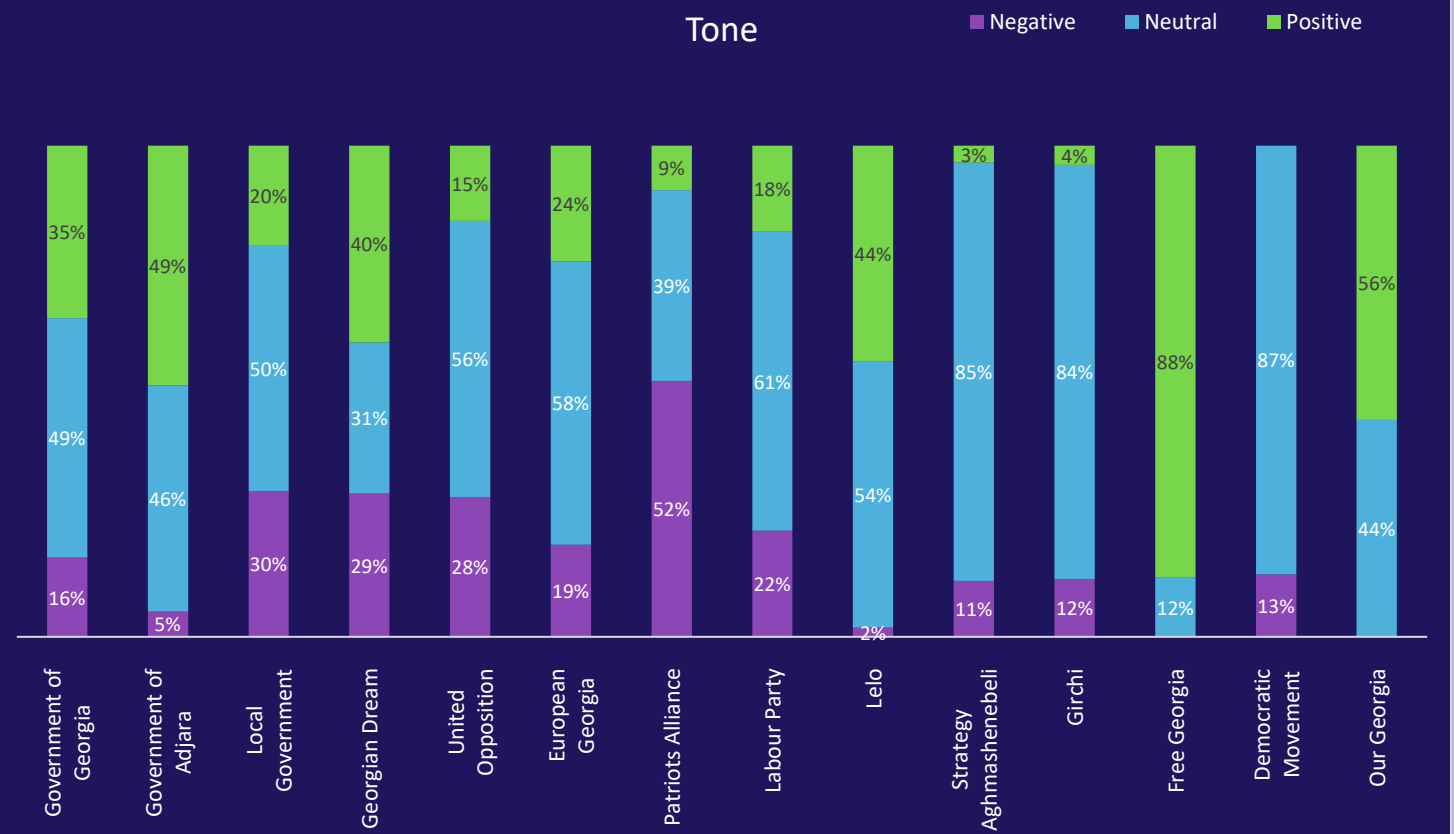




## Direct and Indirect Coverage



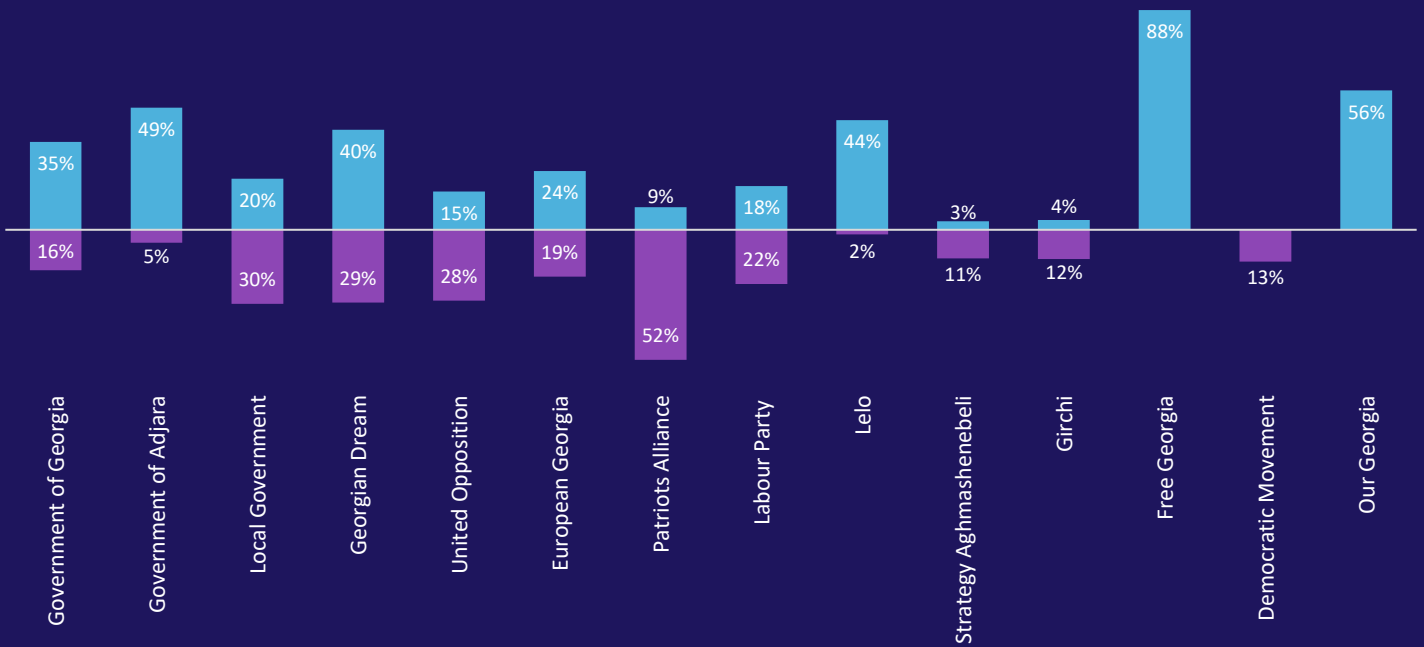
## Tone



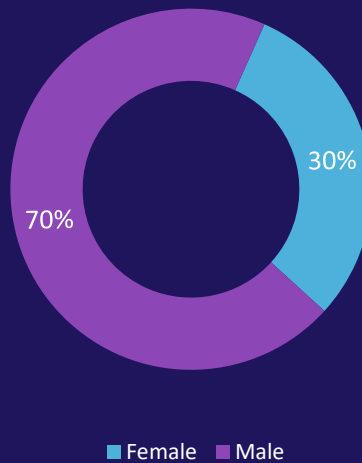


## Positive and Negative Coverage

■ Positive ■ Negative



## Gender



### Teleimedi

**Newscast** - Time Allotted to monitoring subjects: Georgian Dream - 43.3% (positive - 34%, negative - 2%), the Government of Georgia - 26.9% (positive - 43%, negative - 1%), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" - 18.9% (positive - 0%, negative - 77%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** - During the monitoring period, the news program "**Chronicle**" at 20:00 showed a positive attitude towards the Government and Georgian Dream and an sharply negative attitude towards the opposition, in particular, towards United National Movement. Most of the stories did not cover the opposition members who were not given the opportunity to state their position.

Most of the news stories cover Georgian Dream and the Government more than the opposition. However, the channel tries to maintain a formal balance and the representatives of the opposition, mostly, United Opposition "Power is in Unity" and European Georgia are given an opportunity to express their opinions, although the stories are largely saturated with critical comparisons to the opposition. In some cases, balance is not maintained at all.

For example, on September 3, the channel aired the following stories of the main news program: "Khaindrava Assesses the Pre-election Environment" and "Gvaramia's Harmful Fake News on Bidzina Ivanishvili's family", but no opposing opinion was mentioned in any of the stories.

During the monitoring period, Georgian Dream and its leaders were widely covered in the news program "Chronicle" at 20:00, mostly in a positive or neutral context. The channel dedicated a lot of direct time to them. For example, on September 29, Tea Tsulukiani's 8-year work report was aired, to which the channel devoted 21 minutes and 3 seconds of prime time; On September 18, 27 minutes and 56 seconds of the airtime were dedicated to nominating Zaza Lominadze and Ioseb Khakhalishvili as a mayoral and a majoritarian candidate; On September 10, 55 minutes and 47 seconds were dedicated to presenting to the list of the first 20 members of Georgian Dream and covering the leaders. During the monitoring period, representatives of other parties did not have such an opportunity in the main news programs. In particular, they did not have the opportunity to nominate candidates and present their election program to the viewers, their pre-election meetings with the population were not covered.

During the monitoring period, Imedi TV made a series of stories about the life and future plans of 13 Georgian Dream candidates, covering each of them in a positive context.

**Political programs** - Opposition members are not invited to any of the primetime political programs on Imedi TV. The political shows are one-sided with no debates or discussions among election subjects on topical issues.

As for other topics, news related to the coronavirus pandemic is frequently covered, the stories are balanced and aim at informing people.

During the monitoring period, the program "**Arena**" was visited by the representatives of Georgian Dream (four times) and the Government of Georgia (twice).

The government officials (seven times), the representatives of Georgian Dream (twelve times), a representative of the Government of Adjara (once) and a representative of Free Georgia (once) appeared on the daily program "**Daily Chronicle**".

During the monitoring period, representatives of the opposition were not invited to the political and entertainment programs of Imedi TV, except one case, on September 25, Kakha Kukava was the second guest on "**Daily Chronicle**". He was allotted little time to express his opinion and was strongly opposed by the presenter that has never happened to any representative of Georgian Dream and the Government.

During the monitoring period, the program "**Open Airtime**" was visited by the representatives of the Georgian Dream (six times).

During the monitoring period, the program "**Real Numbers**" was visited by Georgian Dream (seven times) and the Government of Georgia (twice).

On September 17, the Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia was a guest of the program "**Real Numbers**". The presenter openly praised the work of the Minister. The program aired three extensive pre-prepared image stories.

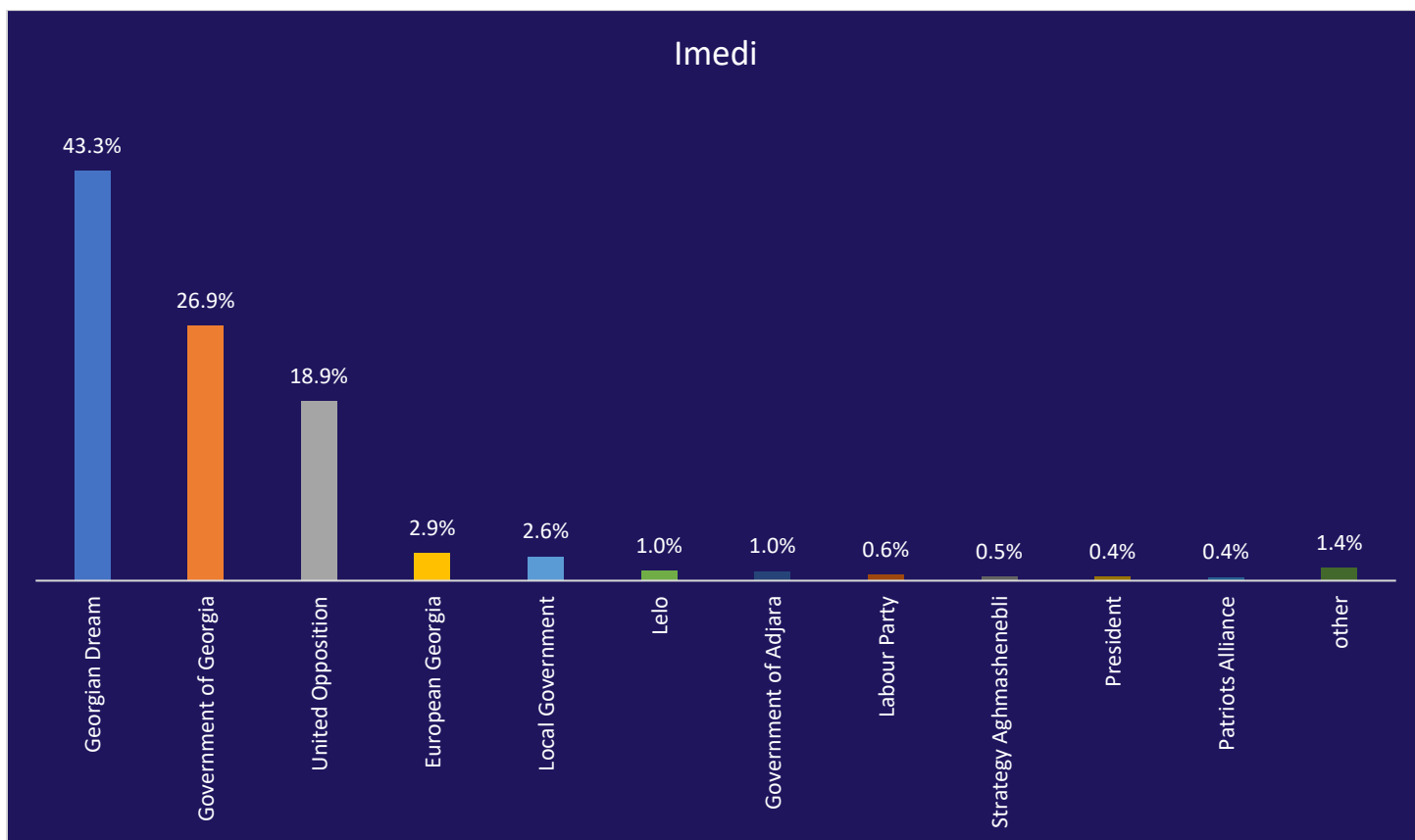
The presenter said: "Unfortunately or fortunately, I have to confess to you Ms. Maya that we have a lot of data and this data is, of course, all positive. Just the format of the show does not allow us to cover it and tell the viewers about this positive information". Throughout the program, the presenter used diagrams about the work done by the Ministry and said: "Ms. Maya, this is very impressive, how did you manage to make such an impressive intensification?" It is noteworthy that an expert was invited to the show who opposed the Minister. However, in many cases, the presenter himself was arguing with an expert. It should be noted that the expert was given an opportunity to oppose them.

The program "**Week of Imedi**" dedicated its airtime to Georgian Dream (four times), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (four times), the Government of Georgia (four times), European Georgia (twice), Free Georgia (twice), Alliance of Patriots (Twice), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (twice), Labor Party (twice), Democratic Movement (once), Lelo (once) and Girchi (once).

During the monitoring period, the representatives of Georgian Dream were invited to the news program **"Chronicle with Tea Sichinava"** (twice).

During the monitoring period, election subjects were invited to the entertainment programs. The program **"Morning of Imedi"** covered Georgian Dream (once). Georgian Dream made an appearance on **"the Night Show"** (three times). The program **"Sport on Imedi"** invited a representative of Georgian Dream as a guest (once).

According to the weekly information of the broadcaster, no complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of Imedi TV.

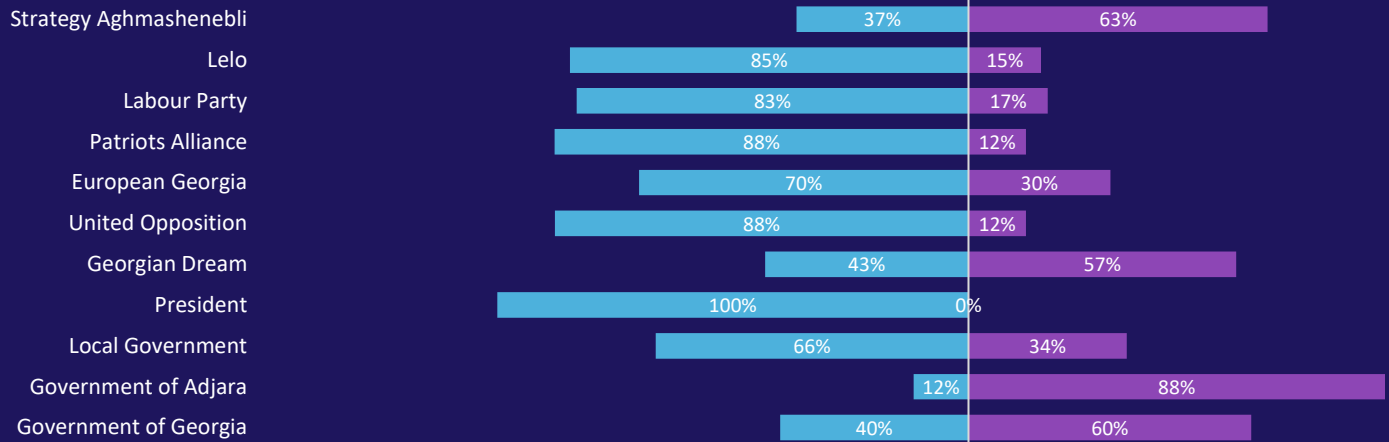






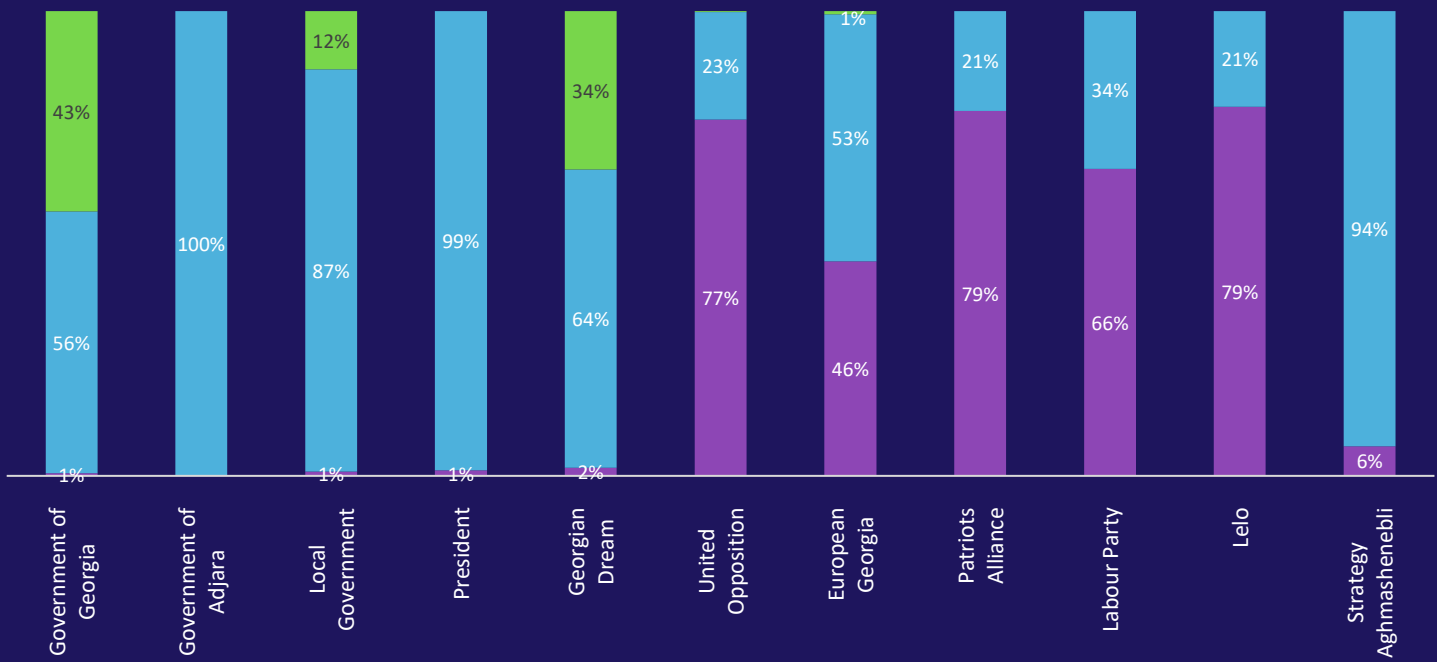
## Direct and Indirect Coverage

■ Indirect ■ Direct



## Tone

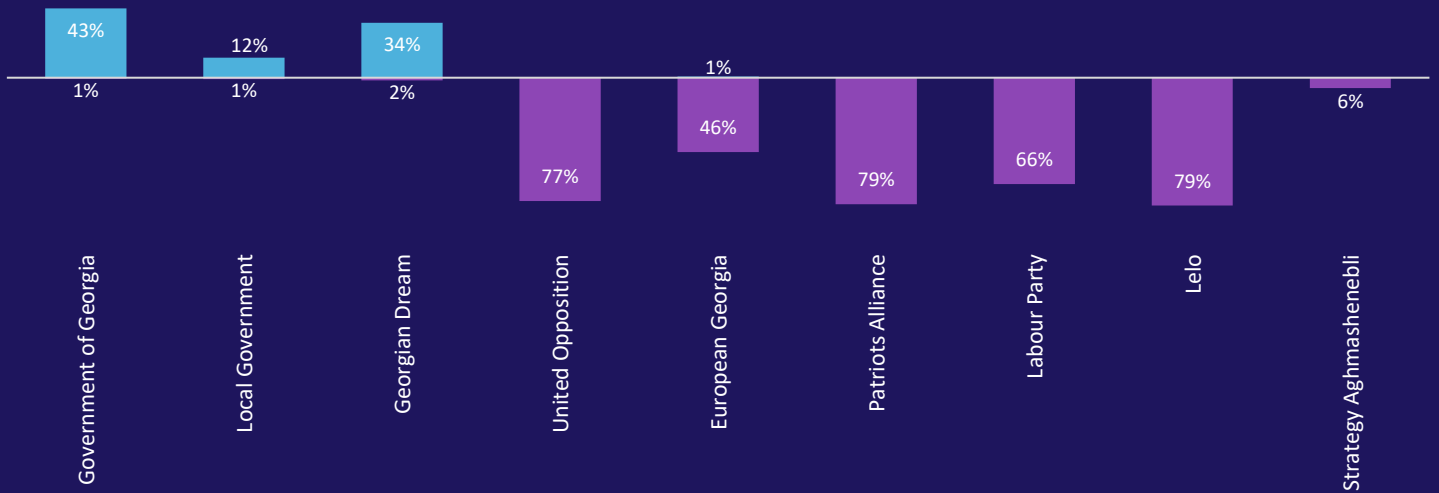
■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive



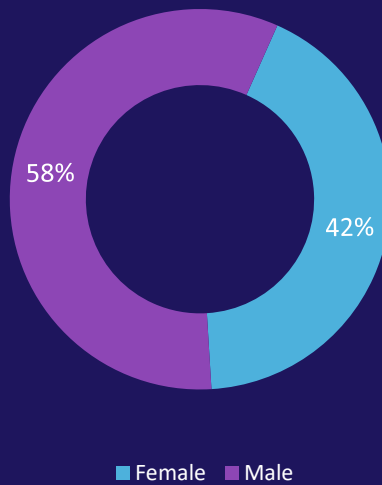


### Positive and Negative Coverage

■ Positive ■ Negative



### Gender



## Rustavi 2

**Newscast** - Time allotted to the monitoring subjects: Georgian Dream - 25.6% (positive - 32%, negative - 12%), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" - 21.6% (positive - 14%, negative - 32%), the Government of Georgia - 15.4% (positive - 32%, negative - 5%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** – On Rustavi 2, the main news program of the day "**Courier**" was monitored during the period. Journalists reported on ongoing events in accordance with ethical standards in most cases.

The presenter was sometimes ironical to the opposition members and called some of the election subjects "wandering politicians". Presenter also referred to Alliance of Patriots as "the party of the vice-speaker pilgrimage to the occupiers" and sniffed at the Republicans' frequent changes of principles.

For example, on September 1, the topic of one of the stories was the Russian connections of Alliance of Patriots: "The Audit Office has officially launched an investigation on the transparency of the funding sources of Alliance of Patriots. It is likely that after publishing the report of the agency, it will become known how the party of the vice-speaker pilgrimage to the occupiers can be assessed".

September 2: "Politicians wandering from one camp to another, majoritarian candidates, who until recently were a part of the ruling team, are now becoming the faces of the former ruling party. In general, in the country a specific type of politicians has already formed for whom the main thing is not the party value, but the mandate of the MP. "

In some cases, "Courier" disturbed the quantitative balance in favor of the ruling force. On September 1, in one of the stories, the main topic of which was "Saakashvili's Apology", we could see 3 respondents from the ruling party, 2 from the Government, and only 1 respondent from United Opposition "Power is in Unity". On September 14, while covering the NDI survey, 4 out of 8 respondents were members of Georgian Dream.

While covering the incidents in Bolnisi and Marneuli on September 28-29, despite the fact that the incidents had not been investigated, only mutual accusations were heard from both sides, the journalist's texts left the impression that Georgian Dream was the only victim: "the traces of bats and stones are still visible on the activists of the ruling party but United National Movement claims that they were attacked by Georgian Dream"; "United National Movement and Georgian Dream accuse each other of provocation, although a representative of the ruling party has suffered physical injuries."

**Political programs** - During the monitoring period, **“Daily Courier”** was visited by representatives of Georgian Dream (twenty times), the Government (eleven times), United Opposition “Power is in Unity” (fifteen times), European Georgia (ten times), the local Government (twice), the Government of Adjara (once), Victorious Georgia (once), Girchi (once), Democratic Movement (once), Free Georgia (once), Conservative Party (once), Labor Party (twice), Lelo (twice), Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (twice), Alliance of Patriots (twice), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (four times) and Solidarity Alliance (three times).

The following monitoring subjects were invited to **“Night Courier”**: Georgian Dream (four times), the Government (once), European Georgia (four times), United Opposition “Power is in Unity” (four times), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (twice), Democratic Movement (once), Free Georgia (once), Conservative Party (once), Lelo (once), Alliance of Patriots (once) and Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (once).

During the monitoring period, Rustavi 2 offered its viewers only one political program **“Night Courier”** in its primetime that was mainly saturated with critical questions and analysis, although, in some cases, the viewers received superficial information.

On September 4, the presenter did not allow the leader of Alliance of Patriots, Irma Inashvili to blatantly spread the fake news published on one of the websites, checked the date of creation of the media source and urged the respondent not to mislead the viewers with the newly created, non-authoritative publication and a website of the country (Venezuela) that is “known for its serious problems of freedom of speech”.

It should be noted that the presenter was also critical towards the representatives of the ruling party. On September 25, Irakli Kobakhidze, the executive secretary of Georgian Dream had to recollect unfulfilled promises and past statements, as well as talk about the devaluation of the national currency.

During the discussion, the presenter asked a number of relevant questions: "Georgian Dream promised us 200,000 new jobs in 2016, if we summarize the data of 2016 and 2019, based on the Geostat, instead of 200,000 new jobs, we got minus 27,100 ones".

"When the currency starts depreciating pensioners are the most vulnerable. Almost every second pensioner in Georgia has a pension loan with the interest rate of 31%. For example, if they buy an item for 500 GEL, it means that they have to pay 30% more than the actual price, which means that they have to pay almost 70% of their monthly pension. Is Natia Turnava an effective Minister of Economy for these people? "

There were different cases as well, for example, on September 22, during a conversation with Mamuka Mdinaradze, the deputy speaker of the Georgian Parliament and a member of Georgian Dream, the journalist raised the issue of "increasing funding for the Patriarchate", however, when Mamuka

Mdinaradze replied that “the funding has not been increased”, the journalist had no information on how much the patriarchate is funded.

It should be noted that the representatives of some of the parties invited to the program, for example, Aleko Elisashvili and Kakha Kukava, had to speak about and evaluate other parties instead of their election promises and programs.

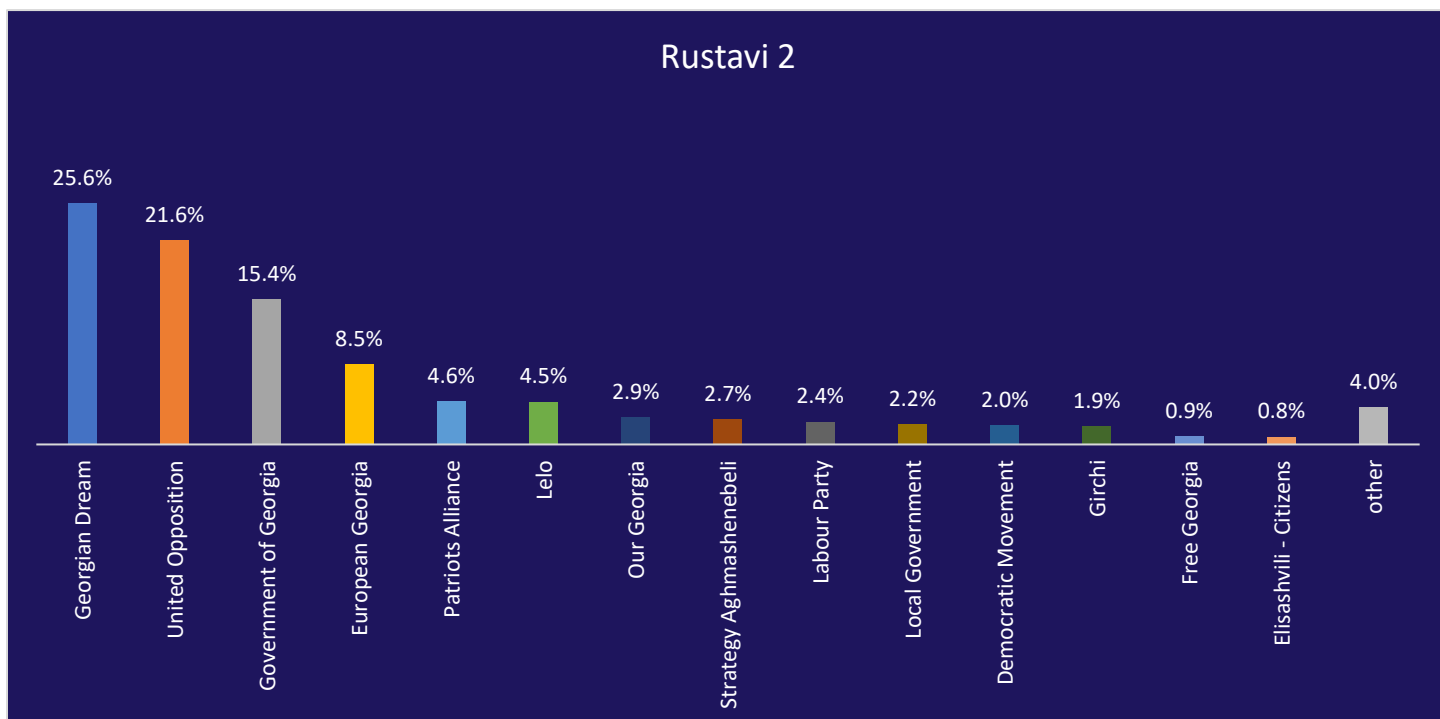
"I will be thankful if you ask me what I am going to do, why I created a political party, what I can do for Saburtalo" - Aleko Elisashvili told the presenter.

**Entertainment programs** - During the reporting period, election subjects also appeared on entertainment programs. **"Good Morning, Georgia"** was visited by the representatives of Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once), Georgian Dream (once) and Movement for People (once).

The representatives of Georgian Dream (once), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (once) and European Georgia (once) appeared on **"Nika Aravidze's Show"**.

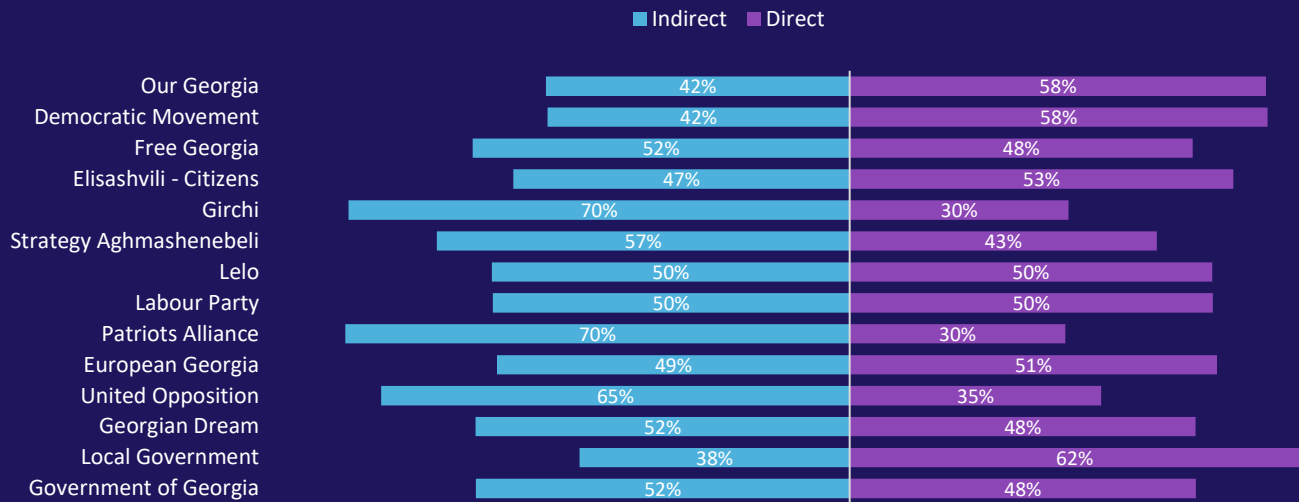
**"Secret Envelope"** was visited by one election subject, a representative of Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once).

According to the weekly information of the broadcaster, no complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of Rustavi 2.



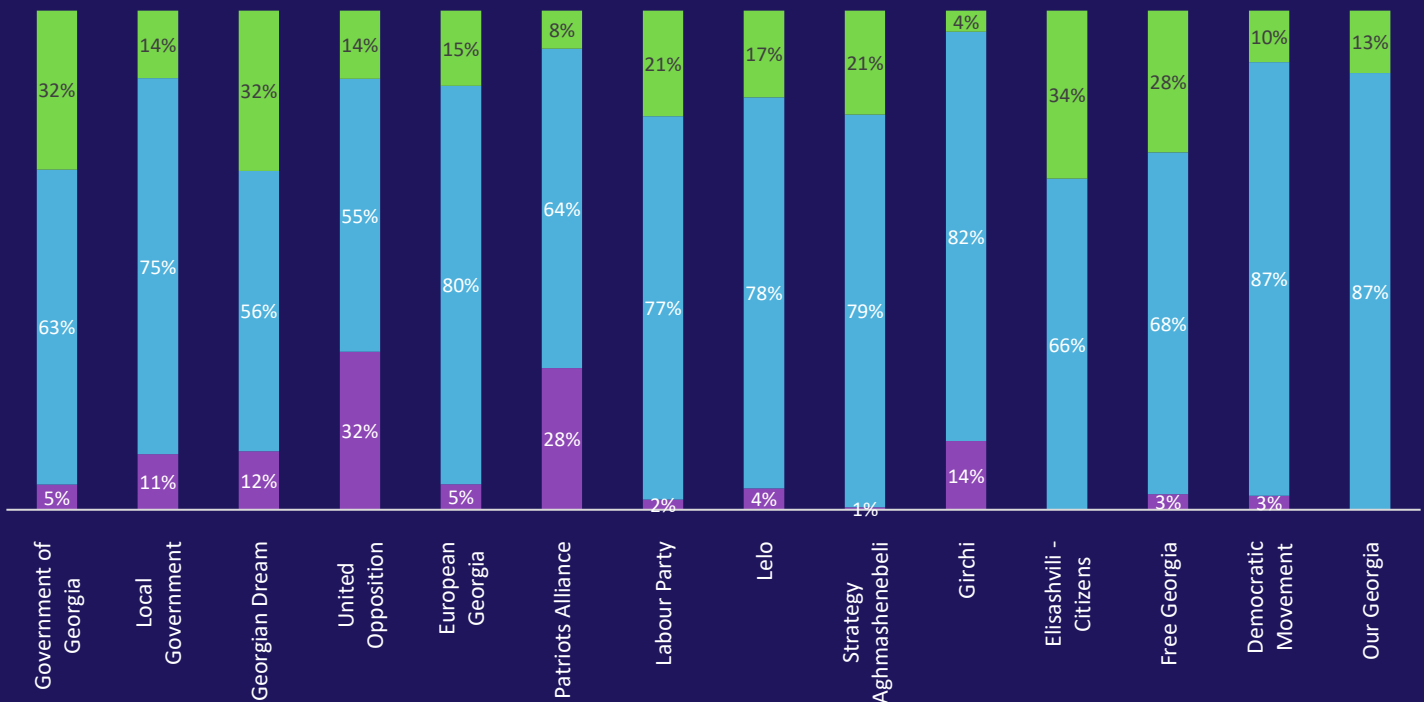


## Direct and Indirect Coverage



## Tone

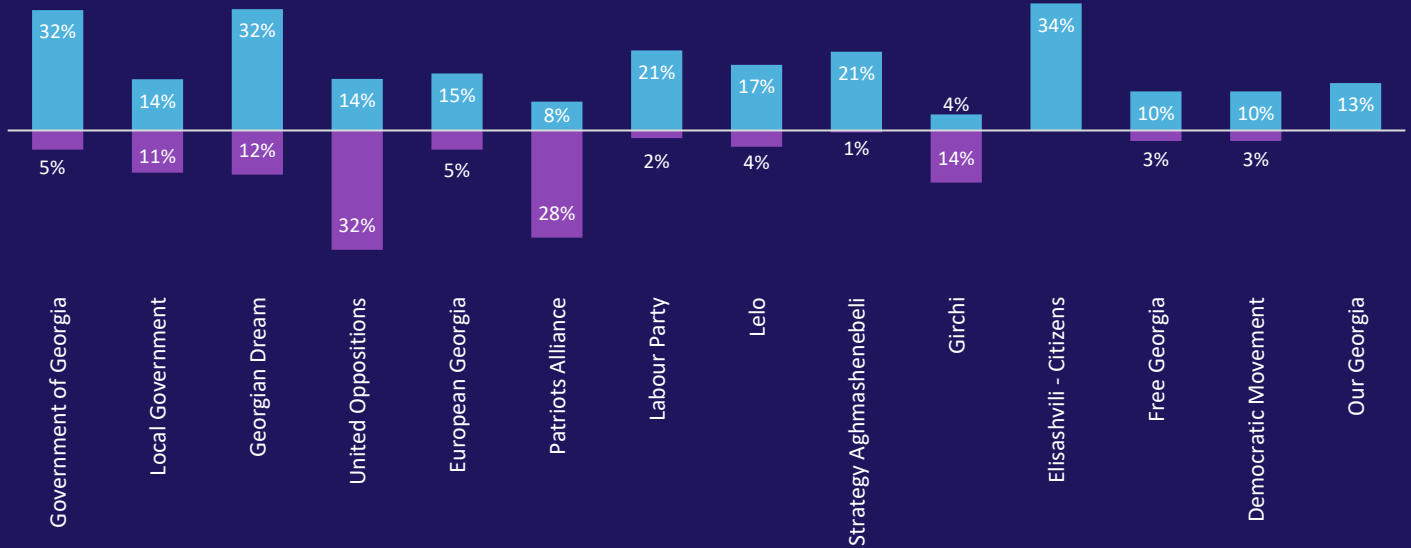
■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive



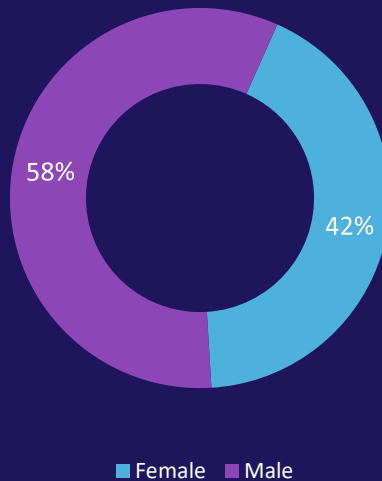


## Positive and Negative Coverage

■ Positive ■ Negative



## Gender



### TV Pirveli

**Newscast** - Time allotted to the monitoring subjects: Georgian Dream - 37.7% (positive - 16%, negative - 48%), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" - 22.9% (positive - 2%, negative - 20%), the Government of Georgia - 12.1% (positive - 2%, negative - 40%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** - Observations of the news programs have shown that Pirveli TV is sharply negative towards the Government and the ruling party.

The channel tries to maintain a balance in favour of the opposition political parties, although the situation is different in the case of covering the ruling party and the Government.

The election issues were mainly reported by live coverage of the meeting or the nomination of candidates. Meetings of the candidates with the society and other election activities were broadcasted only in fragments in the main news program.

The channel frequently covered the political activities of specific election subjects - United Opposition "Power is in Unity", European Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli and Lelo. The broadcaster did not try to maintain balance when covering the election campaigns despite the large number of parties and candidates running in the elections, which indicates a selective approach of the broadcaster and disregard for the interests of other political parties. All the above-mentioned prevents voters from receiving comprehensive information and making an informed choice on the election day.

On September 9, at 20:37, the main news program of Pirveli TV aired the story "Cleaning at Schools - Principals Fired".

"Georgian Dream has started implementing a well-trying plan again before the elections. All school principals who are not supporters of the ruling party have been fired. Only those whose loyalty was not doubtful retained their positions. We are talking about more than 1400 educational institutions" (the presenter's monologue).

The presenter of the program openly accused Georgian Dream of firing the principals, but the accusation was not substantiated by the relevant evidence and the story did not contain evidence of the illegal dismissal of the school principals. The journalist used the comment of an education expert to substantiate the accusation and assess the illegal activities of the ruling party, although Mariam Raminashvili, presented by the channel as an education expert, is a member of European Georgia and, therefore, her comment could not be impartial.



The story did not cover the position of Georgian Dream during the accusations and, at the same time, there was no attempt to obtain a response. It should be noted that the news about the activities of the Government is mainly covered in a negative tone.

Pirveli TV offered its viewers "exclusive" details of high-profile criminal cases, where ethical standards were often violated and the opposing positions was not presented. The main tendency was to cover the hidden business interests of the government officials and materials exposing corruption, which was accompanied by a violation of ethical principles. Coverage of events was often one-sided, but the channel names the boycott of Georgian Dream as the reason.

It was apparent that Pirveli TV put emphasis on the unsuccessful activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the connections of the participants of the unsolved cases with Georgian Dream when airing the main news program. The journalistic materials are presented in such a way as to give the impression that Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili and his associates are hidden behind any illegal action. The stories focus on violence by the authorities, which is often based on assumptions and is not supported by facts.

For example: “Elections and vicious practices again. Even after years, the Government does not refuse to blackmail its citizens with personal life footage and thus to try to score political points” - the journalist said in a monologue of the news program aired on September 7, despite the fact that the disseminator of the information about the blackmail only expressed suspicion that Georgian Dream was behind the crime.

Sometimes important information was not covered. For example, On September 15, at 20:30, the main news program of Pirveli TV aired the story "The European Parliament: Ivanishvili is a Threat to Democracy" that covered only the part of the report of the European Parliament report that contained recommendations to the Government. The journalist used the statements of the MEPs who are always critical towards the Georgian Government and Bidzina Ivanishvili in the story. The story did not provide the viewers with complete and extensive information about the content of the report of the European Parliament and gave the impression that it only contained negative assessment of the activities of the Government. It should be noted that various media outlets and agencies have reported that, in addition to the recommendation part, the European Parliament acknowledges the progress made by Georgia in implementing comprehensive reforms and welcomes the results achieved by the country in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis.

**Political programs** – Pirveli TV airs discussion and political programs everyday. In most cases, the topic of discussion was ongoing events in the country and mutual accusations of the politicians. As for the

election topics, the voters mainly listened to the general promises and not the analysis of the fulfillment of the promises made by the candidates. Independent experts did not participate in the programs.

It is noticeable that the presenters and authors' attitude towards specific opposition candidates is very positive. In many cases, they give respondents, who are critical of the Government, the opportunity to accuse the Government and the ruling party without evidence and opposing opinions.

During the monitoring period, the program **"Nodar Meladze's Saturday"** aired stories about the following political parties: Georgian Dream (eleven times), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (three times), Alliance of Patriots (once), Lelo (once), Social - Democratic Movement (once). In addition, 5 stories dedicated to the Government were aired.

The program **"Nodar Meladze's Saturday"** often airs manipulative stories prepared in violation of ethical standards. The stories are mainly dedicated to exposing corruption of the members of Georgian Dream and Bidzina Ivanishvili's entourage and their Russian connections. Stories are often built on suspicions and assumptions made by the author of the program and journalists, allegations are not based on evidence, and events are covered unilaterally. In order to enhance the special significance of the news stories and the dramatization of the events, the noisy announcement during the broadcast is often used, accompanied by specially selected dramatic music. There are cases when the presenters of the program show support for the opposition majoritarian candidates during a live broadcast.

Pirveli TV aired the news story "Marijuana Business in South America" on September 19. In the program announcement, Nodar Meladze speaks about the fact that "after Bidzina Ivanishvili's plan to cultivate marijuana in Georgia failed, his team moved to Uruguay, spent a lot of millions and now expects to harvest 40 tons of cannabis".

The journalist notes that the information about the investors and owners of the company is unknown and tries to confirm his doubts "whether Bidzina Ivanishvili is behind this multi-million dollar business".

Before the story was aired, the company "Pharmin" spread information about the only investor of the company Temur Ugulava, which was not mentioned in the program by the journalist. It is obvious that the journalist manipulated Bidzina Ivanishvili's interests with the cannabis industry and tried to convince the audience of Ivanishvili's connection to the multi-million dollar marijuana business, while a statement was made by the real owner before the show aired.

The principle of accuracy of information was violated when airing the program and the deliberate distortion of facts was obvious.

**"Inga Grigolia's Reaction"** was visited by the following political parties: "European Georgia" (seven times), the United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (seven times), "Lelo" (five times), "Girchi" (once), Victorious Georgia (three times), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (Three times), Labor Party (four times), Alliance of Patriots (twice), Democratic Movement (once), Free Georgia (once), Movement for People (twice), Party for Justice (once), Solidarity Alliance (twice) and Tribune (once).

In the same program, debates took place among the representatives of the following political parties: Solidarity Alliance, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, European Georgia, Lelo, United Opposition "Power is in Unity", Free Georgia, Labor Party, Movement for the People and Victorious Georgia.

During the monitoring period, the program **"Public Policy"** was visited by European Georgia (five times), the United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (four times), Lelo (four times), Girchi (three times), Victorious Georgia (once), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (twice), Labor Party (once), Alliance of Patriots (twice), Democratic Movement (once), Free Georgia (twice), Solidarity Alliance (once), Free Democrats (once), Conservative Party (once), Party for Justice (once), Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (once), Movement for Social Justice (once) and an independent candidate - Bidzina Gegidze (once).

During the monitoring period, in the programs **"Public Policy"** and **"Inga Grigolia's Reaction"**, when the opposing parties were also invited, the heated discussion turned into insults several times.

In several programs, open support was expressed to the opposition candidates. During coverage of Elene Khoshtaria as a remote guest in the program **"Reaction"** on September 17, Inga Grigolia stated:

"If I were a voter in Vake, I would vote for you. I am the author of the program and I will definitely give myself the right to say it for various reasons. I will not start listing these reasons now, I would just be happy to see you in the Parliament of Georgia. I'm so sorry that I'm not a voter in Vake. I'm telling you this honestly, I'm telling you this directly". Inga Grigolia violated the requirement of Code of Conduct for Broadcasters that a presenter of a copyrighted program shall not use their position to spread their own opinion in a way that could violate the impartiality of a program.

Violation of the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters was observed when airing the program **"Political Friday"** on September 25. Eka Mishveladze addressed Nanuka Zhorzholiani: "Nanuka, I am sure you will win, because if I were a voter in that region now, I would definitely vote for her as she is such a reliable, trustworthy person, and a celebrity, and I think it will be very difficult to compete with her".

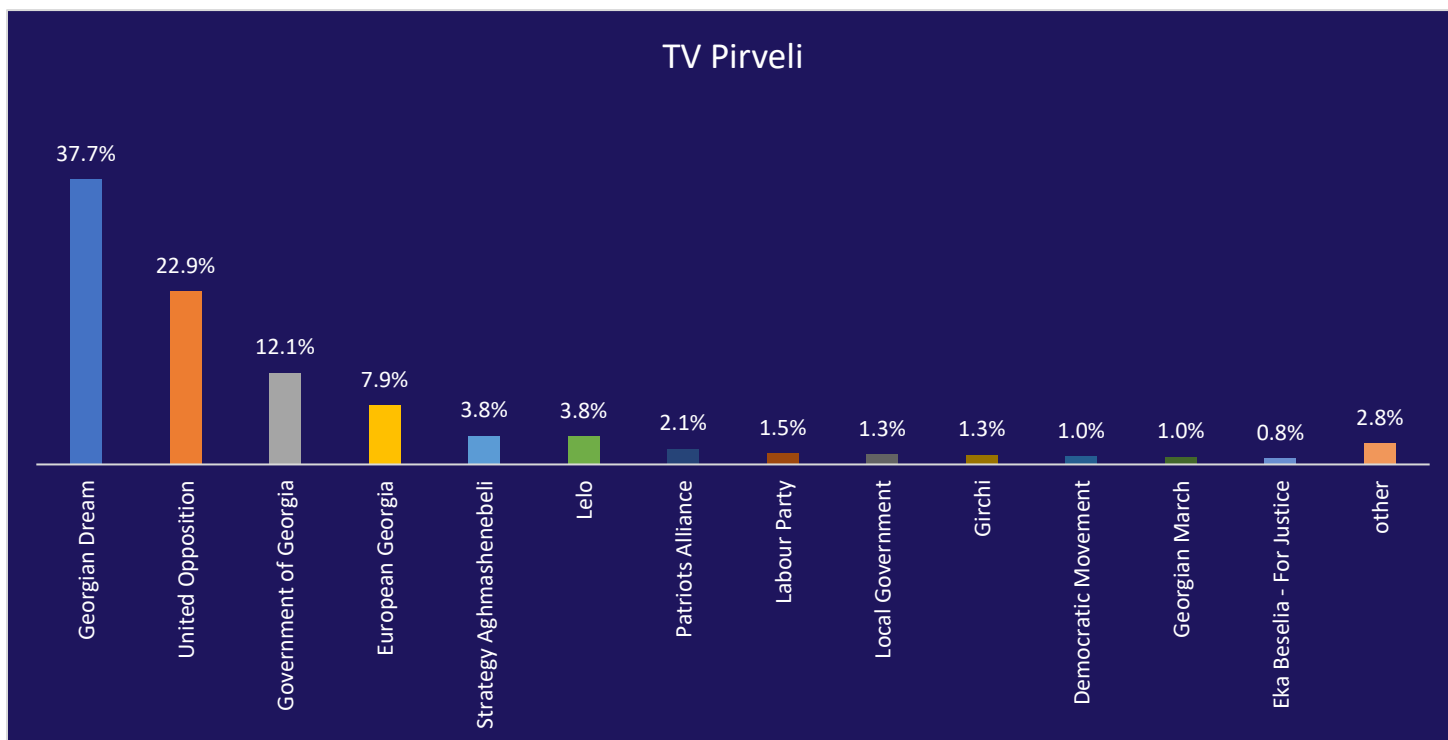
The political program **"Political Friday"** was visited by European Georgia (once), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (six times), Lelo (twice), The Green Party of Georgia (once), Strategy

Aghmashenebeli (once), Tribune (once), Conservative Party (once), Party for Justice (once) and an independent candidate - Bidzina Gegidze (once).

The program **"Daily News"** that is aired three times a day, invited the following political parties to be the guests: European Georgia (forty-six times), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (sixty-eight times), Lelo (thirty times), Girchi (nine times), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (Fifteen times), Labor Party (nine times), Alliance of Patriots (twice), Democratic Movement (nine times), Free Georgia (once), Solidarity Alliance (eight times), Conservative Party (once), Party for Justice (six times), Victorious Georgia (four times), Serve Georgia (three times), Democratic Movement (once), Tamaz Mechiauri for "United Georgia" (three times), Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (Four times), Movement for People (twice), The Green Party of Georgian (once), independent candidates Bidzina Gegidze (once) and Tamar Makashvili (once).

The program **"First Line"** was visited by Victorious Georgia (once), European Georgia (twice), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (eight times), Lelo (twice), Party for Justice (once) and an independent candidate - Bidzina Gegidze (once).

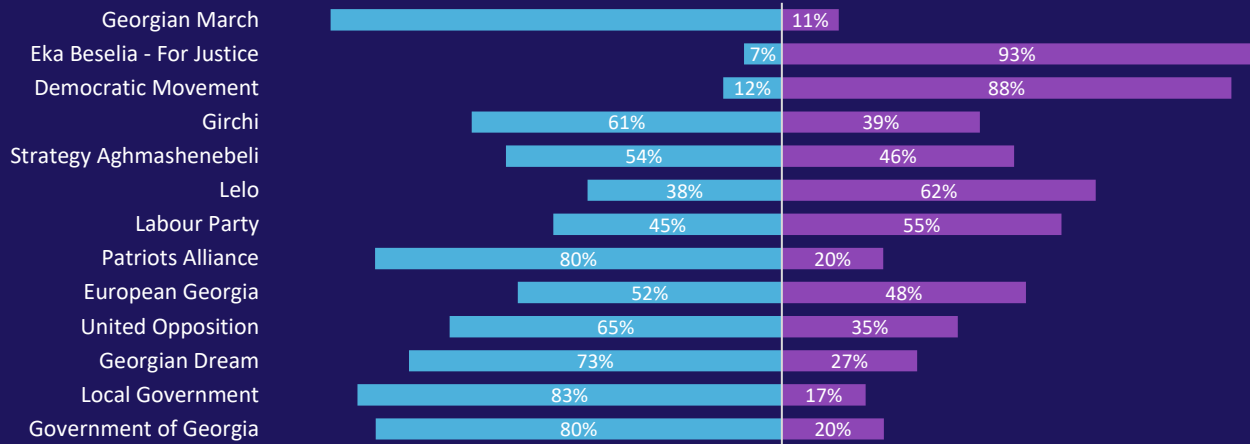
According to the weekly information of the broadcaster, no complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of Pirveli TV.





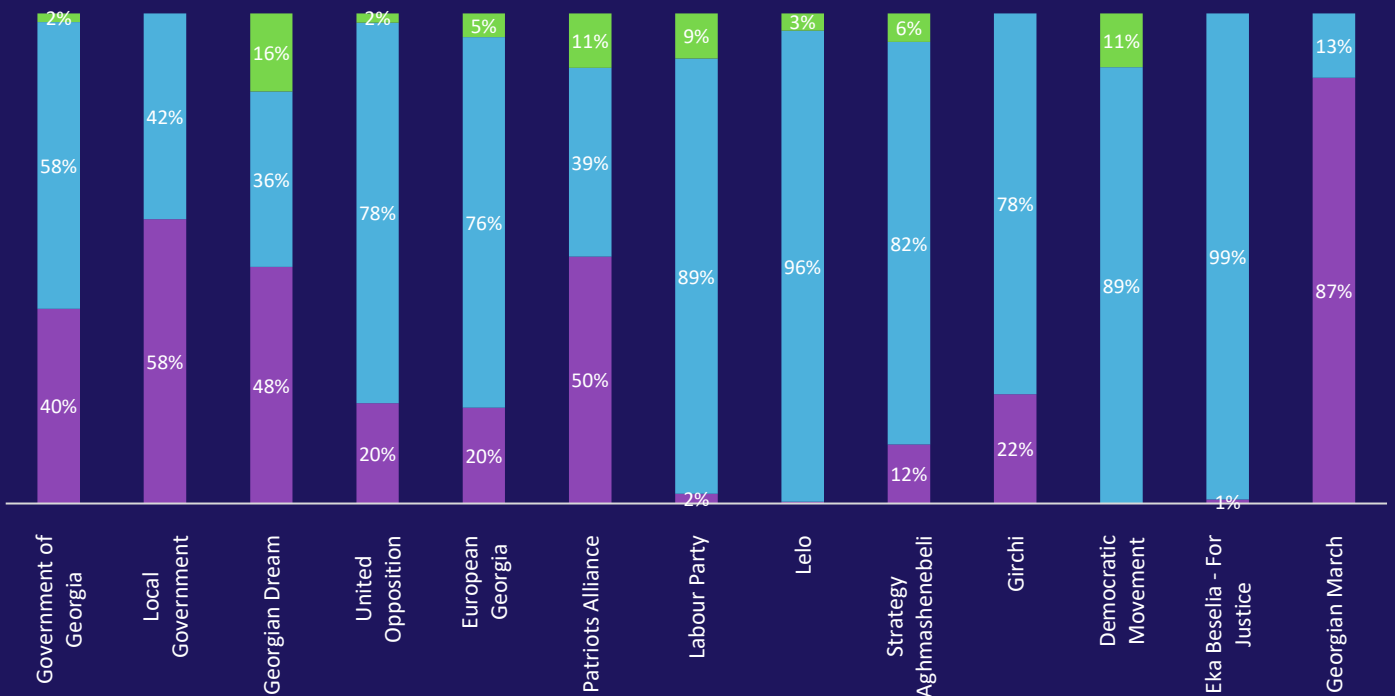
## Direct and Indirect Coverage

■ Indirect ■ Direct



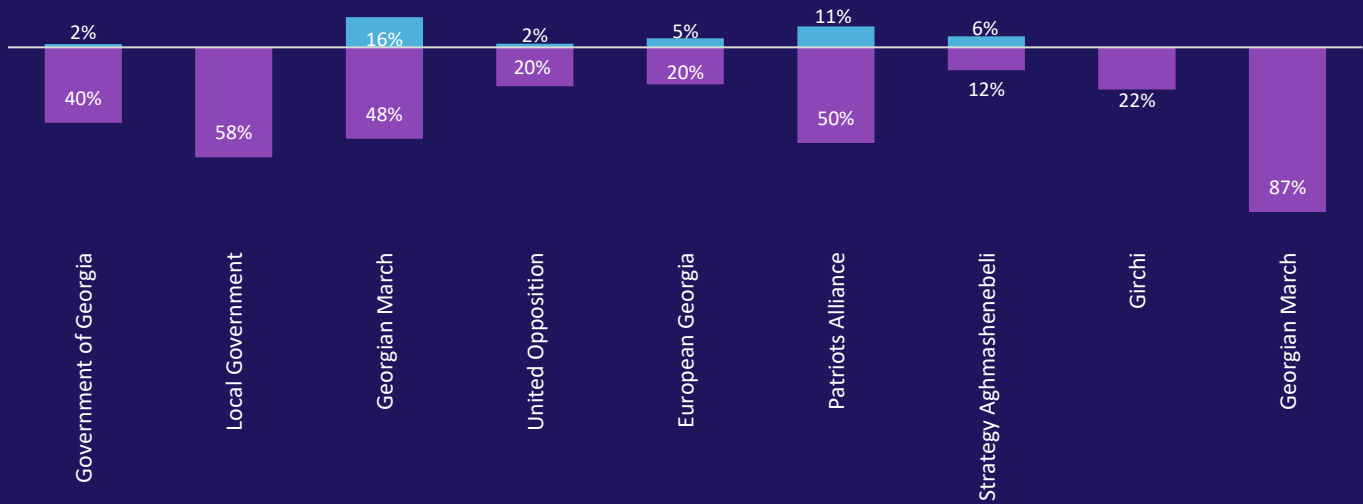
## Tone

■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive

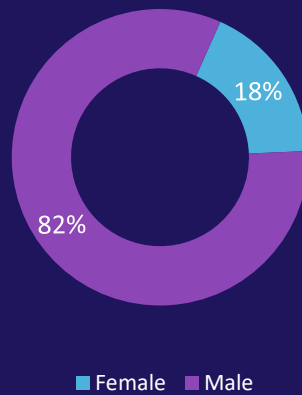




### Positive and Negative Coverage



### Gender



### **Mtavari TV**

**Newscast** - Time allotted to monitoring subjects: United Opposition "Power is in Unity" - 37.6% (positive - 21%, negative - 3%), Georgian Dream - 32.1% (positive - 1%, negative - 62%), the Georgian Government - 10.5% (positive - 0%, negative - 37%), and all other subjects - less than 10% (see the diagram).

**Qualitative assessment** – The television presenters and journalists of all types of programs openly declare their political views and have a sharply negative attitude towards the ruling party and several other political parties.

The representatives of the ruling party refuse to appear on Mtavari TV, thus the positions of the representatives of the ruling party and the Government officials are not covered in the programs. The journalists of the channel do not try to balance the information or the statements made by other politicians, and give one-sided and biased information to the viewers.

The ruling party is systematically referred to as a party pursuing Russia's interests. The ruling party was mentioned in a negative context even when the issue concerned another election subject (22.09 - Georgian March that is an ally of Georgian Dream receives instructions from Russia). Apart from the Georgian Dream, another unacceptable political subject to the channel is Alliance of Patriots. The frequency of covering Bidzina Ivanishvili, the chairman of Georgian Dream in a negative context is very high. The presenters and journalists assess him very negatively and try to discredit him and the ruling party. For example, in "**Mtavari on Saturday**", on September 5, 4 out of 9 stories being unequivocally negative were directly dedicated to Bidzina Ivanishvili. The stories were built on the opinions of journalists and no proper evidence was presented.

The news presenters use the following expressions when announcing stories: "Dream is in hysteria", "crash", etc. Other leaders of the ruling party and the Government are also the subjects of negative evaluations and epithets of the presenters and journalists. Mentioning their names is often irrelevant and not related to specific information at all.

The news programs cover the facts that are hardly investigated and the whole story is based on the sharp assessments of political opponents and the opinions of experts who are directly or indirectly related to any opposition party. For example, "Construction of Namakhvani HPP" (23.09.2020); "Dream MPs Being Gombeen Men"(25.09.2020) were based only on the statements of the representative of Lelo while the facts had not been investigated;

Coverage of the pandemic was irrelevant to the situation and sharply biased. Representatives of specific parties were mainly invited to discuss the issue. The situation was assessed as catastrophic, hopeless, collapsed, which may contribute to sowing panic among the population.

Important information was deliberately omitted in the main news programs. For example: an important report by the US State Department assessing the progress and the activities of the Government positively, a statement by the President of Azerbaijan regarding the spread of misinformation, as if Armenia was receiving weapons through Georgia, the Prime Minister's visit to Brussels, during which meetings were held with the leadership of NATO and the European Union.

The representatives of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" were most often invited to the public-political programs in September. The attitude of all journalists of the channel was positive or neutral, no critical questions were asked and no attempt was made by the presenters to clarify the guests' views, or the unconfirmed facts provided by them.

**Political programs** - During the monitoring period, the representatives of the following election subjects visited **"Guest of the Day"**: United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (thirty-three times); European Georgia (fifteen times); Lelo (eleven times); Tribune (once); Party for Justice (once), Solidarity Alliance (once), Serve Georgia (once) and Aleko Elisashvili – Citizens (once).

**"Mtavari at Night"** was visited by the representatives of the following election subjects: United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (seven times), European Georgia (five times), Lelo (once), Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (once), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (twice) and Girchi (once).

**"Main Accents"** was visited by United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (four times), European Georgia (once), Lelo (once), Labor Party (once), Girchi (once) and Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once).

The presenter of the program, who is also the founder and CEO of the channel, often uses obscene talk and shows a highly negative attitude towards the ruling party when being on the air. His monologues are saturated with hate speech. For example, he uses such terms as "homeless", "illiterate", "dick" (20.09.20, 27.09.20). In the episode aired on September 27, the presenter even mentioned term "Motherf\*\*\*\*r" several times.

During the monitoring period, the representatives of the following election subjects appeared on the program **"Main Debates"**: United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (six times); European Georgia (four times); Lelo (twice); Girchi (once); Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once); Democratic Movement (once); Victorious Georgia (twice); Labor Party (once) and Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (once).



"**Main Debates**" have been aired on the channel since September 12 (once a week); Representatives of different parties are presented in the studio and discuss ongoing political events. The host mentioned in the very first program that the ruling party Georgian Dream refuses to cooperate with critical media.

**In the same program, debates took place among the following political parties:**

- 1) United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (the representatives of United National Movement and Republicans) and European Georgia;
- 2) Labor Party, United Opposition "Power is in Unity", European Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Democratic Movement, Victorious Georgia, Lelo and Girchi;
- 3) United Opposition "Power is in Unity" and European Georgia;
- 4) Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens, Lelo and Victorious Georgia.

The Sunday social-analytical program "**Post Factum**" was added two parts for the pre-election period: "Majoritarian Candidates for Constituencies" and "Questions and Answers".

In September the program dedicated the airtime to the following subjects: United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (four times); Lelo (four times); Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once); Tribune (once); European Georgia (once); Party for Justice (twice); Our Georgia (twice); Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens (once); Girchi (once) and Labor Party (once).

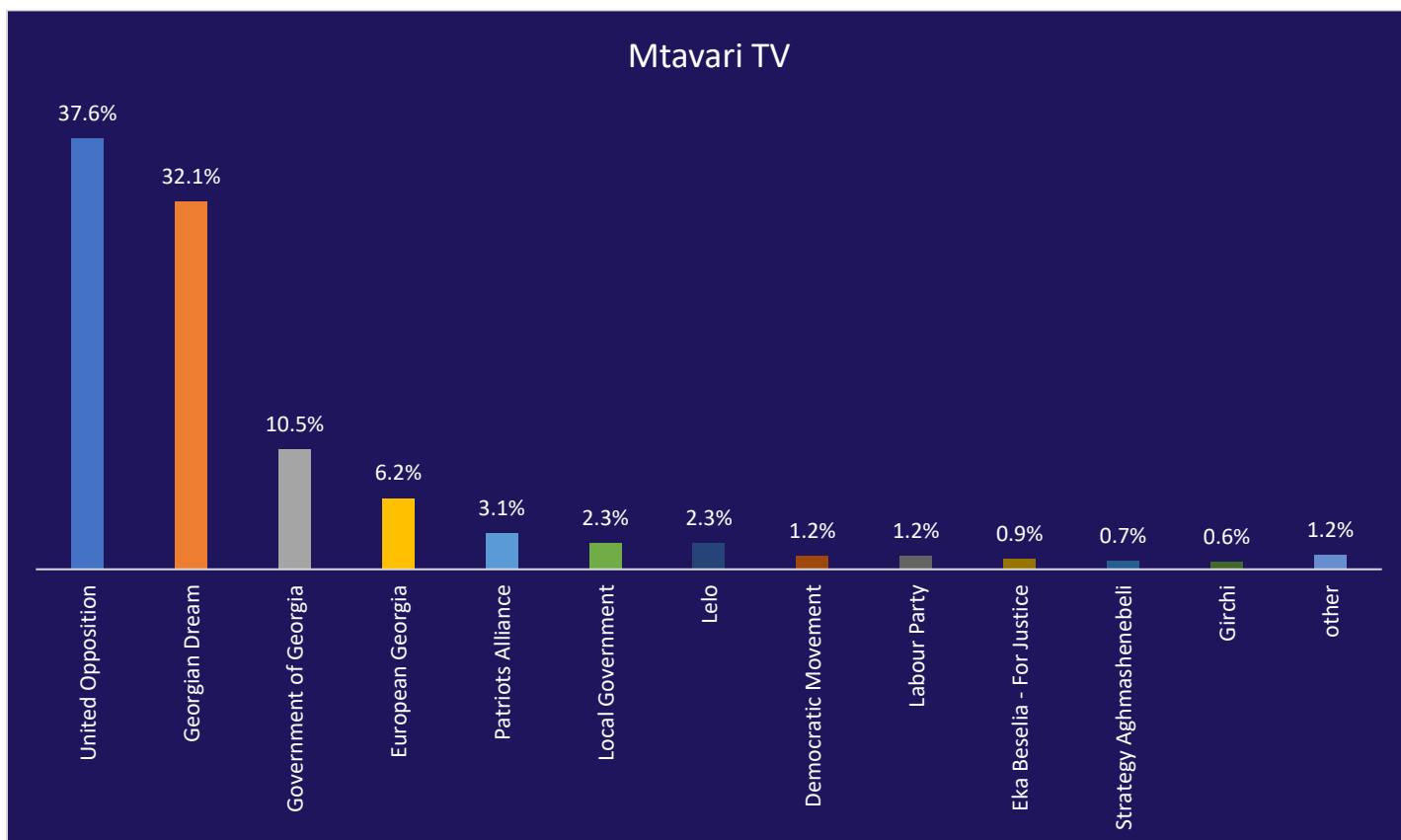
When covering Georgian Dream candidates (majoritarians for Isani), the broadcaster used a black background because Georgian Dream candidates refused to be interviewed. Then this practice changed and the broadcaster showed billboards with the images of Georgian Dream candidates. The fact that the candidate of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" is allotted a large amount of time when covering the candidates is noticeable (for example, in case of the majoritarians for Isani, and the majoritarian for Tskaltubo).

On September 5, the program "**Mtavari on Saturday**" aired a story about the criminal authority Mindia Lavasoghli. The broadcaster claimed that according to its "source", Mindia Lavasoghli was brought to Georgia from Minsk by a special flight, however, no evidence was presented to the viewers. None of the respondents confirmed the fact, on the contrary, close friends and relatives said that the information was incorrect and that Mindia Lavasoghli was still in Minsk. At the end of the story, a representative of the opposition party suggested that the Government needed criminal authorities for the elections, and the journalist concluded the story with the following words: "Apparently Bidzina Ivanishvili has already decided which cities he wants to hand over to criminal authorities."

During the monitoring period, election subjects appeared on the entertainment programs. The program **"Only with Lela"** was visited by a representative of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (once). The program **"The Vano's Show"** invited representatives of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (twice) and Lelo (once). A representative of "Power is in Unity" appeared on "Peppers" (once). The show **"Main Boys"** invited the leader of Girchi as a guest (once).

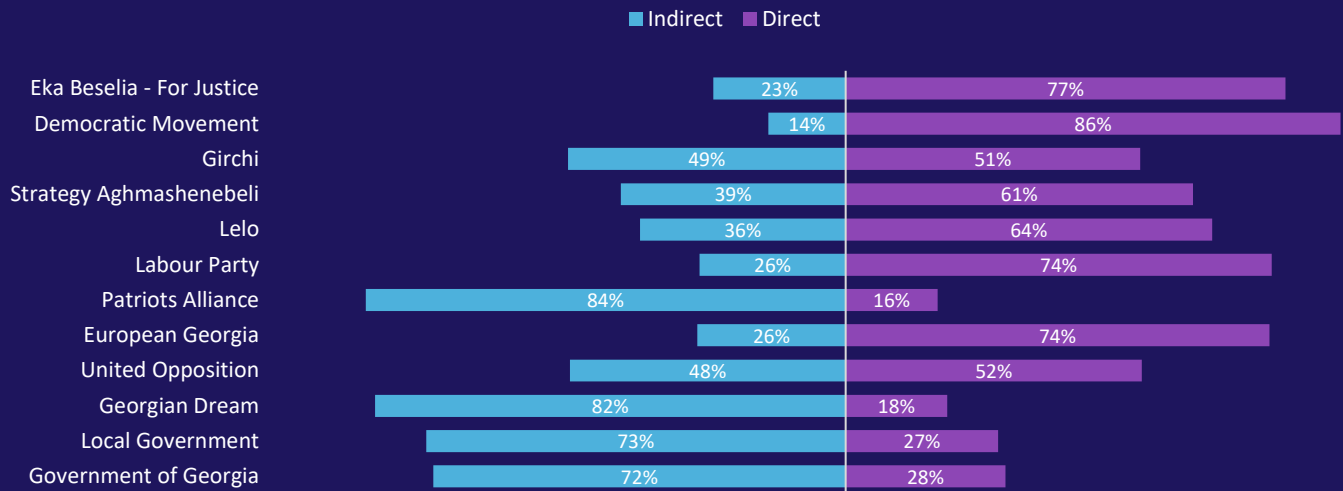
During the monitoring period, the channel aired the publicistic film "Anatomy of Misha's Persecution" in which the authors claim that the allegations leveled against the Prime Ministerial candidate of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" are absurd. One of the authors of the film was later included in the electoral list of United Opposition "Power is in Unity".

No complaints about the company's impartiality, fairness and balance were submitted to the self-regulatory mechanism of Main Channel.



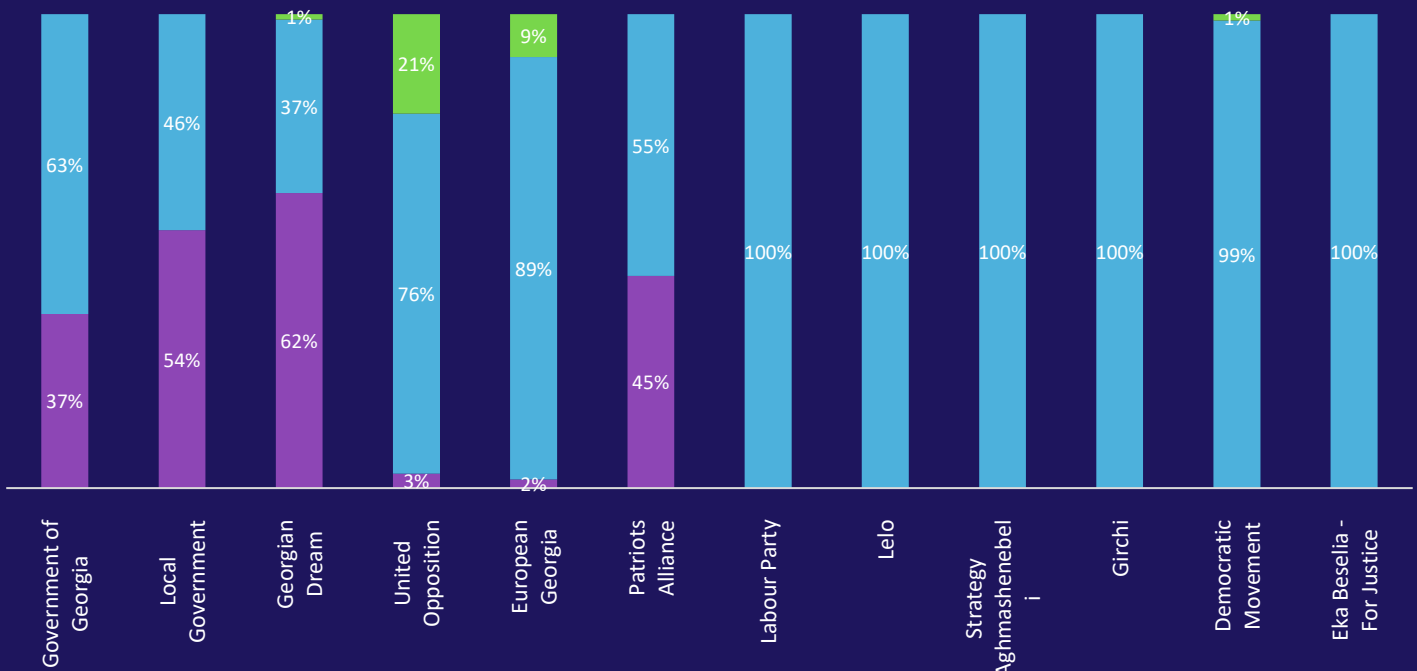


## Direct and Indirect Coverage

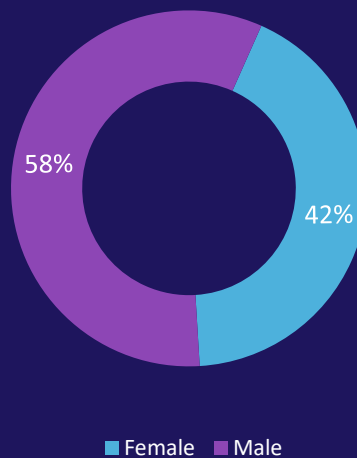


## Tone

■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive



Gender



#### **Pre-election Environment, Violations and Recommendations:**

Observations on the above-mentioned 6 broadcasters during the monitoring period have shown that:

The news programs of the Public Broadcaster are mainly balanced and in compliance with and ethical standards. As for Adjara Public Broadcaster and Rustavi 2, the news programs are balanced and ethical in most cases.

The presenters of the political programs of the Public Broadcaster and Rustavi 2 are distinguished with their critical questions and assessments, including towards the government officials that help the voters be more informed. It should be noted that the biggest number of election subjects were covered by the Public Broadcaster.

Based on the examples of Imedi TV, Pirveli TV and Mtavari TV, the analysis of the media monitoring has clearly shown how polarized the pre-election media environment is. A bias in favor of different political parties is unequivocal. News programs as well as political programs are characterized by a violation of journalistic standards and disturbing balance.

The programs of Pirveli TV and Mtavari TV often spread misleading, false information. Serious accusations can be heard that are not supported by evidence. Violations of ethical norms are frequent. Mtavari TV often use hate speech and obscene talk.

All the above-mentioned is a gross violation of the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters. According to the current legislation, they can be responded to and discussed only within the framework of the broadcasters' self-regulatory mechanism, and the decision made by the broadcaster's self-regulatory body cannot be appealed to either the Communications Commission or the court.

The part of the legislative requirements that imposes formal obligations (e.g. the standards of political advertising: the size of a name and a number of a political party, sign language translation, information that must be given to viewers when publishing opinion polls) is generally complied with and enforced without significant violations.

The Communications Commission drew up an administrative violation report against 2 broadcasters for violating the rules of conducting pre-election/political advertising campaign and sent it to the relevant (city/district) court for further response.

According to Paragraph 20 of Article 185 of Election Code of Georgia of the Organic Law of Georgia, "in the course of political/pre-election advertising, the total of the single contours of the letters indicating the name of the electoral subject and the single contours of the numbers indicating the serial number of his/her participation in the elections shall occupy not less than 5% of the frame area. In addition, the advertisement must be made in such a way that at the end of the advertisement, the name and serial number of the electoral subject are displayed for at least the last one second, so that the total of the single contours of the letters denoting the name and the number of contours of the serial numbers occupies not less than 25% of the frame area. "

The monitoring has revealed that some broadcasters aired the advertisement of National Democratic Party that did not meet the above criteria of the Election Code, in particular, the contours of the name and serial number of the election subject shown at the end of the advertisement occupied 13.1% of the frame area.

Due to the mentioned violation, administrative violation reports were drawn up against the following organizations: TV Company Pirveli Ltd, Formula Ltd.

### **The Commission considered 2 complaints regarding possible violation of the Election Code:**

1. The complaint of Free Georgia, according to which the political union submitted two videos having the political content to the broadcasters that were not aired by TV Company Pirveli Ltd, Rustavi 2 Broadcasting Company Ltd, Public Broadcaster LEPL and Adjara TV and Radio Public Broadcaster LEPL.

The Commission found that the video advertisements submitted by the political union did not meet the legal requirements and the broadcasters were not obliged to air them. Accordingly, on 24 September 2020, the Commission decided to reject the complaint N8-20-16/765. The decision can be found on the Commission's website - <https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/6/6540.pdf>

2. The complaint of the political union Lelo for Georgia, according to which since September 15 2020, TV Company Pirveli Ltd, Telemedi Ltd, Main Channel Ltd and Maestro TV Ltd aired a free political advertisement of the political union Free Georgia that was inappropriate and aimed at misleading the population and discrediting political opponents.

As a result of the discussion, the Commission noted that the advertisement was not unethical and the broadcaster did not have the opportunity to verify whether the specific facts mentioned in the political advertisement were true. Finding such information is beyond the reach of the broadcaster, especially considering the fact that the number of pre-election/political advertisements submitted simultaneously to the broadcaster during the pre-election period is quite large. Therefore, finding such information is beyond the competence of the broadcaster. Accordingly, on 8 October 2020, a decision was made to reject the complaint. The decision can be found on the Commission's website - <https://www.comcom.ge/ge/legal-acts/solutions/2020--20-16-793.page>

#### **The Communications Commission issued a written warning on 3 broadcasters:**

According to the rules for providing information on conducting the pre-election campaign established by the Election Code, the broadcaster that plans to air a paid pre-election advertisement shall inform the Commission about the allocated schedule and airtime tariffs. In particular, according to Part 1 of Article 50 of Election Code of Georgia of the Organic Law of Georgia, a broadcast license holder or authorized broadcasters shall submit information on airtime tariffs for the paid pre-election advertising campaign to the Communications Commission not later than 5 calendar days from the 60th day before polling for the purpose of publishing on the Commission's website. The Communications Commission issued a written warning on 3 radio broadcasters for violating the rule:

1. Radio Georgian Times Ltd - <https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/6/6537.pdf>
2. Our Radio Ltd - <https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/6/6538.pdf>
3. Radio Company First Radio Ltd - <https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/6/6539.pdf>

**Election Subjects in Non-Political Programs:** The Commission considers that in order to cover the pre-election campaign fairly, impartially and in a balanced way, it is important for broadcasters to pay special attention to the recommendations regarding coverage of pre-election campaign of election subjects, set forth in the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters approved by the Resolution N2 of 12 March 2009 of the Communications Commission. They shall consider that the participation of a candidate or a representative of a party in a program that is not directly related to politics is permissible only if

negotiations for the participation in the program took place before the election period. Candidates should not be allowed to express political views or advertise their candidature in any way.

The candidates were given the opportunity to make political statements on the following non-political programs:

The program **"Morning of Imedi"** of Imedi TV covered Georgian Dream (once). Georgian Dream appeared on **"the Night Show"** (three times). The program **"Sport on Imedi"** was visited by Georgian Dream (once).

The program **"Good Morning, Georgia"** aired on Rustavi 2 was visited by the representatives of Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once), Georgian Dream (once) and Movement for People (once). The representatives of Georgian Dream (once), Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once), United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (once) and European Georgia (once) appeared on **"Nika Arabidze's Show"**. **"Secret Envelope"** was visited by one election subject, a representative of Strategy Aghmashenebeli (once).

The program **"Only with Lela"** was visited by a representative of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (once). The program **"The Vano's Show"** invited representatives of United Opposition "Power is in Unity" (twice) and Lelo (once). A representative of "Power is in Unity" appeared on "Peppers" (once). The show **"Main Boys"** invited a representative of Girchi as a guest (once).