



**MEDIA & ELECTIONS**

**SURVEY ON  
THE NEEDS OF  
POLITICAL PARTIES**



Kingdom of the Netherlands

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Author:

TAMAR KHORBALADZE

Editor:

TAMAR KINTSURASHVILIL

Interviews by:

TAMAR SOPROMADZE, NATIA GOGELIA, MARIAM TSUTSKIRIDZE

Designed by

BESIK DANELIA / *IBDesign*



Kingdom of the Netherlands

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# INTRODUCTION

On 8 October 2016, Georgia will hold parliamentary elections. An important element of free and competitive elections is a free media environment which enables political subjects (political parties and candidates) to fully use the capacity of media as a means of communication with voters.

A crucial importance of media in pre-election period is underscored in the EU Committee of Ministers' Recommendation No. R (99) 15 on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;<sup>1</sup> it defines basic standards for ensuring equal access to media for political parties and professional and ethical coverage by media.

The aim of this survey is to study, ahead of the elections, the needs of political parties and other actors in the efficient use of media as a tool of communication with electorate in the electoral process. Surveying attitudes of election subjects towards media, identifying their attitudes and needs and drawing up recommendations on the basis of the results of the survey will contribute to improved access to media for political subjects and ultimately, informed choice of voters.

The assessments provided in this paper reflect perceptions of political parties and do not represent either qualitative or quantitative analysis of media.

The introduction to this study describes the methodology applied in the survey, key findings of the survey and recommendations drawn up based on those findings; these are followed by results of the questionnaire, which are grouped into the following categories: 1. Media environment; 2. Ways of communicating with voters; 3. Comprehensive/incomprehensive media coverage; 4. Political affiliations; 5. Georgian Public Broadcaster; 6. Refusal to cooperate with media; 7. Cooperation on financial ground/ways of monitoring.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns, 7 November, 2007; [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4a3d](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4a3d)



## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey used a method of in-depth face-to-face interview with open-ended and structured questions to be answered by representatives of political parties.

During the survey 19 interviews were conducted with each representative of 18 political parties and one independent deputy.

The interviews were conducted in February and April 2016. Although at the time of the interviews, no one knew that the political parties making up the Georgian Dream coalition would run for the elections independently, the survey considered them as independent political subjects. The only political party from the coalition, which refused to be interviewed was the Industry Will Save Georgia. It should be noted that it was precisely during the above mentioned period of time that the leader of Industry Will Save Georgia got into conflict with media as well as an inter-coalition conflict with the Defense Minister.

Respondents comprised qualified subjects,<sup>2</sup> Girchi as it is represented in the parliament was grouped with qualified subjects, as well as non-parliamentary opposition, namely, seven political parties<sup>3</sup> falling within an inter-faction group, and an independent deputy of the Tbilisi City Council Aleko Elisashvili who was distinguished for his intensive political activity expressed in exposing corruption of individual members of the ruling team.

The data on qualified political parties and the New Political Centre – Girchi are combined in the statistics on parliamentary political parties; the data on other political subjects, including on the independent member of the Tbilisi City Council Aleko Elisashvili, are combined in the group “non-parliamentary opposition.”

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<sup>2</sup> Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia; Conservative Party of Georgia; Republican Party of Georgia; National Forum; United National Movement; Christian–Democratic Party of Georgia; Free Democrats; Democratic Movement – United Georgia; Alliance of Patriots; Labor Party. Source: <http://www.cesko.ge/uploads/other/29/29500.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> New Rights; European Democrats; National–Democratic Party; Free Georgia; Reformers; Union of Traditionalists; Freedom Party.

During the survey, a segment of political parties said that in the pre-election period they would rather refrain from openly declaring their stance about the relations with media. As agreed with the respondents, part of responses are reflected in the statistical data without identification of sources.

The attitudes of political parties towards the media environment were evaluated by the following variables: ways of communicating with voters; equal access to media; comprehensive and incomprehensive coverage; restriction on the access to media; the right of reply. Political affiliation of media; financial contracts and their impact on the coverage.



# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## FINDINGS

The survey revealed two sets of needs – needs that are common to members of qualified subjects and non-parliamentary opposition, and issues characteristic for any one of them:

- The questionnaire showed that the pluralistic media environment (for example, the existence of a strong, critical media outlet) influences the content of other media outlets, forcing them to pay a certain amount of attention to issues and initiatives of various political forces rather than ignore active political forces;
- An important challenge faced by both qualified and non-parliamentary opposition parties is the lack of coverage of their new proposals and initiatives in prime-time<sup>4</sup> TV news programs; in case of non-parliamentary opposition, this challenge is further worsened by a total neglect of their activities;
- The survey showed that the intensity and quality of coverage of qualified as well as unqualified political parties depends on whether a party's political position and foreign policy orientation as well as message-boxes coincide with the editorial policy of a media outlet.
- One of the challenges faced by qualified political parties is a negative campaign conducted by several media outlets against them. This problem was especially emphasized by the ruling party Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, the former ruling party United National Movement, the Republican Party which was a member of the ruling coalition at the time of survey, the Alliance of Patriots, and the Democratic Movement – United Georgia.

Political parties react to this challenge differently: if the campaign is waged by a TV media outlet, the reaction of parties is stronger. The following ways of reaction were identified: personally contacting a

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<sup>4</sup> Airtime from 18:00 to 24:00.



media outlet to express the party's position; expressing personal opinion via social networks; releasing statements; applying a media self-regulation mechanisms. Political parties, as a rule, do not exercise the right of reply which is specified in the law; nor do they apply to media self-regulation mechanisms. The survey also showed that political parties do not usually react in case of newspapers and news agencies or they respond to them via social networks/other media outlets.

- Several political parties openly declared that they do not cooperate, in principle, with a certain type of media because of latter's foreign policy orientation and hate speech used by them: representatives of the United National Movement and the New Political Center – Girchi said they do not give interviews to pro-Russian media outlets such as Obiektivi TV and Asaval-Dasavali newspaper; the representatives of the Republican Party also said they try not to cooperate with such media outlets, extending the list to include online portal Georgia and World too. At the same time, two political parties refuse to cooperate with Tabula TV company, namely, the Democratic Movement – United Georgia and the Alliance of Patriots.
- One of important problems faced by qualified political parties is the degree of coverage of positive information. Especially unhappy about that is the ruling party the representative of which claimed that virtually none of media outlets in Georgia covers the achievements of the government comprehensively, explaining this with an overly scandalous nature of media.
- On their part, the opposition political parties speak about the efforts to “stifle” initiatives and criticism of the opposition, often by ignoring these issues and/or reporting them only in daytime news programs.
- According to the survey, the Georgian Public Broadcaster falls short of meeting expectations of political parties towards the broadcaster. The absence of political debates on the 1<sup>st</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster and a restricted access to it, including for a segment of qualified political parties, is one of the findings of the survey.
- The main TV forum for non-parliamentary opposition parties is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster, allowing a direct communication with voters; however, the reach and the viewership of the channel is poor, reducing the interest of political subjects towards it.
- The survey showed that the scale of coverage of political forces by news agencies is in direct correlation with commercial contracts signed with these agencies. However, these agencies do not ignore especially important or scandalous facts even if contracts are terminated.
- According to the survey, the majority of political parties rely on their inner resources for the conduct of media monitoring. The survey also showed that independent media monitoring is used by only six

political parties out of interviewed 19 subjects. This means that in their assessments of media coverage, the political parties, especially those in opposition to the government, often rely on their personal experience and perceptions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to provide voters with comprehensive information about political actors engaged in the electoral process, a dialogue must be established between political subjects and media in the pre-election period. A format of pre-election dialogue will help, on the one hand, inform election subjects about those rules, formats and standards that separate media outlets offer to political actors and, on the other hand, improve pluralistic environment.
- In planning and implementing the coverage of election campaign, media outlets should take into account basic principles of international and national regulations:
  1. **Unimpeded and non-discriminatory access to the media:** “[States will] provide that no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process.”<sup>5</sup>
  2. **Broadcast of information at primetime:** The Public Broadcaster, the Ajara TV and Radio of the Public Broadcaster, and a general broadcasters are committed to broadcasting news and social and political programmes at prime time and to ensuring that the audience within their service areas is informed in a timely manner on current events in Georgia and worldwide.”<sup>6</sup> “All significant opinions about any controversial issue should be covered within a period when the issue is urgent.”<sup>7</sup>
  3. **Fair, balanced and impartial coverage:** “The coverage of elections by the broadcast media should be fair, balanced and impartial.”<sup>8</sup> “In the course of the pre-election campaign, while broadcasting of social-political programs and elections, a broadcaster shall observe the principle of impartiality and

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<sup>5</sup> Document of the Copenhagen Meeting (1990), OSCE; <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14304?download=true>

<sup>6</sup> Article 59 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting.

<sup>7</sup> Article 16 of the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters.

<sup>8</sup> Recommendation No. R (99) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns, 9 September 1999.

fairness pursuant to the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, code of conduct of broadcasters and this Law.”<sup>9</sup>

4. **Forum for pre-election public debates:** “1. A general broadcaster shall broadcast pre-election debates during electoral campaigns taking place within its service area. 2. A general broadcaster, during electoral campaigns taking place within its service area, as well as the Public Broadcaster, shall ensure equal participation of all qualified candidates for election in election debates, without any discrimination.”<sup>10</sup>
5. **Right of reply:** “Given the short duration of an election campaign, any candidate or political party which is entitled to a right of reply or equivalent remedies under national law or systems should be able to exercise this right or equivalent remedies during the campaign period without undue delay.”<sup>11</sup>
6. **Correction and rebuttal in a commensurate form:** A person concerned may demand from the respective broadcaster the correction or rebuttal of untrue facts using the same means and format and with the same duration as the initial statement and nearly at the same time as the initial statement was made.<sup>12</sup>
7. **Non-discriminatory terms and fees:** “Paid airtime fee shall be equal for all election subjects (both for qualified and unqualified subjects).”<sup>13</sup>
8. **Separation of paid content from editorial material:** “In member States where political parties and candidates are permitted to buy advertising space for electoral purposes, regulatory frameworks should ensure that... the public is aware that the message is a paid political advertisement.”<sup>14</sup> The similar standards should apply to print and online media: a clear distinction must be made between editorial content and marketing, advertisements or sponsored material.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Article 51.1 of the Election Code of Georgia.

<sup>10</sup> Article 55 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting.

<sup>11</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns.

<sup>12</sup> Article 52.2 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting.

<sup>13</sup> Article 50 of the Election Code of Georgia.

<sup>14</sup> Recommendation No. R (99) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns, 9 September 1999; [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805e3c6b](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805e3c6b)

<sup>15</sup> Article 9 of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics; <http://qartia.org.ge/charter/>.

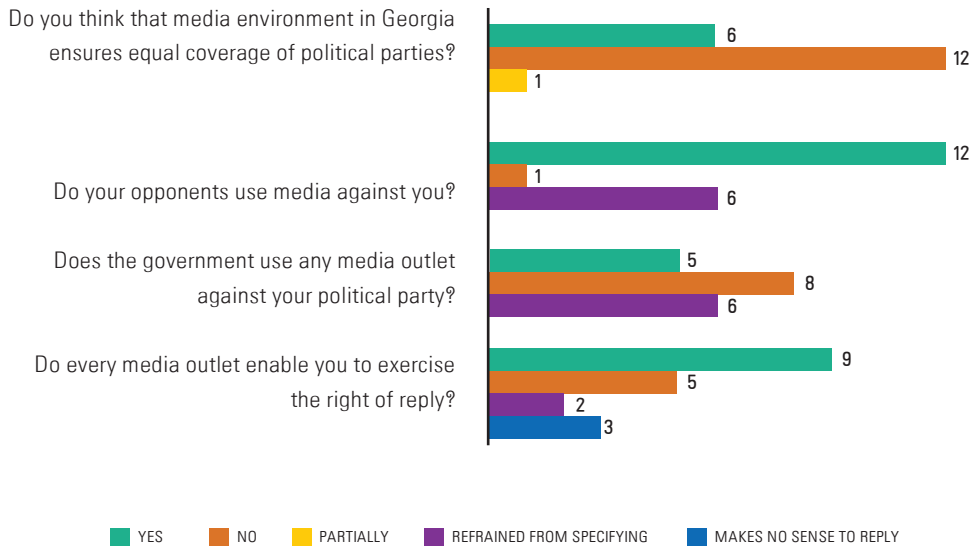
- Georgian Public Broadcaster should fully understand those obligations which it is bound by law in pre-election period and should ensure:
  1. Political debates;
  2. Broadcast of important information at primetime;
  3. Impartial and balanced coverage;
  4. Broadcast of electoral information for ethnic minorities in their respective languages;
  5. Improvement of the reach of 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel in order to ensure a broader access for Georgian population to live format intended for political parties (C-SPAN).
- A permanent media monitoring should be conducted and media content analysis discussed with all stakeholders in order to ensure that, on the one hand, attitudes of political parties towards media rest on facts and, on the other hand, media, based on revealed trends, improve the quality of coverage. For its part, media criticism will contribute to the increase in the media accountability to public, which, in turn, will raise the level of public awareness and informed choice by citizens.



## 3.1. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

In assessing the media environment, two third of the respondents (12) say that the media in Georgia fail to provide equal coverage of political parties; seven respondents believe that the media environment fully or partially ensures equal coverage; 12 respondents think that opponents use several media outlets against them; while five respondents say that the government uses several media outlets against their political parties, representatives of six political parties refrained from answering these questions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Assessment of media environment



It is noteworthy that out of 11 qualified subjects (including the New Political Center – Girchi which is represented in the parliament) only four said in response to the questions about the media environment that media ensure equal or nearly equal coverage.

### ■ Importance of existence of critical media

When assessing the media environment, a segment of political parties emphasized the importance of such media that is critical of the government regardless of its bias towards any of the political forces; such media, in their view, sets the agenda of media market. As an examples, respondents cited the editorial policy of Imedi TV prior to 2007 and that of the Rustavi 2 TV in the run-up to forthcoming elections (New Rights, Free Georgia, National-Democratic Party; independent deputy of Tbilisi city council Aleko Elisashvili).

**KAKHA KUKAVA, Free Georgia:** “The best situation, which I remember, was in 2005–2008 when two rivals , Rustavi 2 and Imedi, operated on the TV media market. Being in competition they forced each other to report main news because should Rustavi 2 fail to cover the news of the day, it would become a scoop of Imedi and vice versa – should Imedi skip any of the main news it would be a scoop of Rustavi 2; therefore, the media environment was balanced.”

The importance of pluralistic media environment was emphasized by the independent deputy of Tbilisi city council Aleko Elisashvili too.

**ALEKO ELISASHVILI, independent deputy of Tbilisi city council:** “Pluralism is very good because when GDS ignores a protest rally as if it did not take place, Rustavi 2 covers it and it is the GDS that suffers. We staged a protest rally against Tamazashvili [the father-in-law of the former prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili], to voice our protest against him leaving eight families homeless. We staged the rally together with these people on the Saakadze square where Imedi and 1<sup>st</sup> Channel arrived; GDS did not show up there however and it came to pass that GDS did not cover it, neither did Rustavi 2. Then we staged a repeat rally and Rustavi 2 reported it and caused uproar...”

## ■ Role of social media

In the opinion of political parties, social media also ensures the existence of more or less free media environment as it is a free forum to inform society and express own opinions. Ani Mirotadze, a representative of the National Forum, which fell within the parliamentary majority, recalled a case when the appointment of a judge to the High Council of Justice caused indignation of a segment of civil society and political spectrum. The MP expressed her dissenting-with-the-majority opinion via social networks:

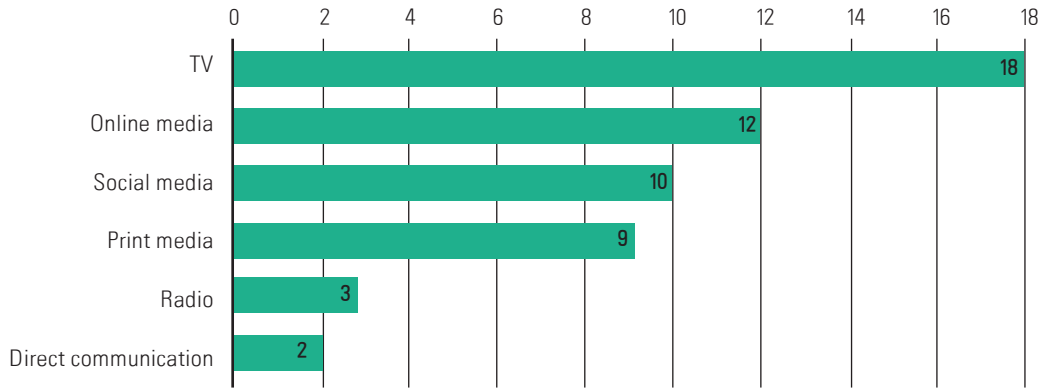
**ANI MIROTADZE, the National Forum: “When judge Murusidze was elected to the Council of Justice I got so indignant that the first thing I did was to post ‘it is a very shameful decision.’ I posted three sentences and I remember it perfectly well that exactly a minute later a journalist called me...”**

In assessing the media environment, respondents, in general, placed main emphasis on TV media as the most influential means of media. They considered large information agencies as an important source of releasing information and announcements, mainly, on commercial basis.

## 3.2. WAYS OF COMMUNICATING WITH VOTERS

The survey showed that the majority of political parties (18) view the television, as well as simultaneous use of various media, as the best way of communication. Even when naming a simultaneous use of various media, respondents gave preference to TV over any other, explaining this, as expected, by a large viewership (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ways of communicating with voters



According to the survey, the TV topped the list and was followed by online (12) and social (10) media. Print media was named alongside other means of media by nine respondents, whilst in addition to TV, social media was one of important communication means for a segment of respondents, for example, the independent deputy of Tbilisi city council Aleko Elisashvili and the New Political Center – Girchi. The United National Movement, the Republican Party, the National Forum and others also spoke about the importance of multiple media resources and their use. Today, there are more than 70 broadcasters (TV and radio), up to 300 newspapers and an increasing number of web portals in Georgia. According to the public opinion poll commissioned by the US National Democratic Institute, which was conducted between 23 February and 14 March 2016, as many as 86 percent of population receives information from TV whereas 11 percent from Facebook.<sup>16</sup> According to Freedom House’s 2015 report on the freedom on the net, the indicator of the access to Internet in Georgia comprised 49 percent in 2014.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Public attitudes in Georgia, National Democratic Institute (NDI); April, 2016; [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202016%20poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House (2015) FREEDOM ON THE NET. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2015/georgia>



### 3.3. COMPREHENSIVE/INCOMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE

Respondents answered an open question as to which media cover their activities comprehensively/incomprehensively.

The top five media outlets named by the political parties as the outlets ensuring comprehensive coverage are:

Rustavi 2 TV (9); TV Pirveli (8); Maestro TV and Rezonansi newspaper (7 – 7); Georgian Public Broadcaster’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel and TV Kavkasia (6-6); Georgian Public Broadcaster’s 1<sup>st</sup> Channel and Imedi TV were named as such by only 2 respondents; another 2 respondents said that all media outlets cover their activities in a more or less balanced way (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Views of political parties about a comprehensive coverage of their activities by media outlets (TV channels).

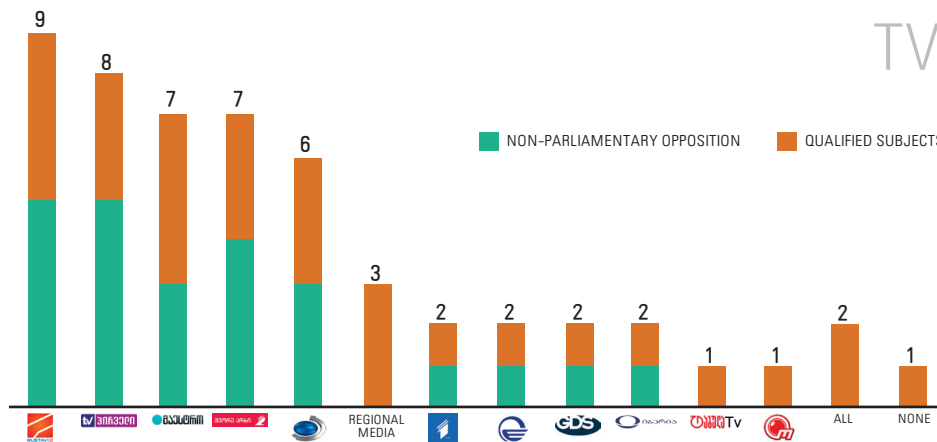
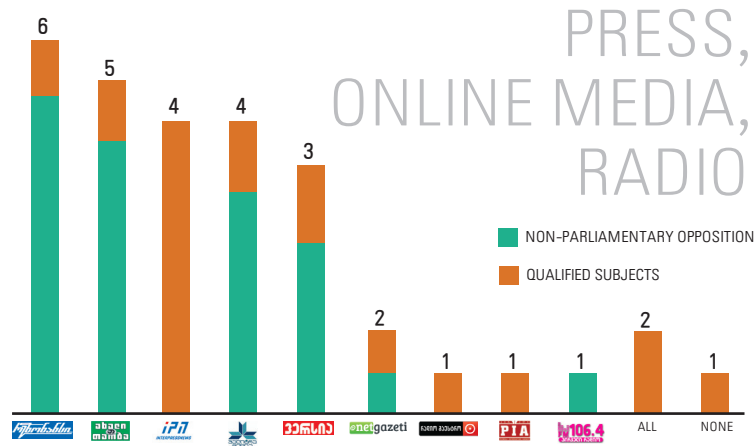


Figure 4. Views of political parties about a comprehensive coverage of their activities by media outlets (online media, radio, print)



At the time of survey, a dispute among Maestro owners was under way. The majority of respondents said that their assessments were related to the manner of coverage under the former management.

A separate topic for assessment was the Georgian Public Broadcaster, which is provided as a separate chapter in this report (see, page 33).

Respondents ranked the TV channels which provide incomprehensive coverage in the following order: Imedi (12), followed by the Georgian Public Broadcaster (10) and GDS (10); Rustavi 2 (6) and Maestro (5) (see Figures 5 and 6). The list of channels providing incomprehensive coverage did not include Kavkasia TV company, TV Pirveli and regional TV media (as representatives of political parties say they do not face any problems in presenting their views in talk-shows on regional broadcasters).

Figure 5. Views of political parties about an incomprehensive coverage of their activities by media outlets (TV channels)

Which media outlet covers activities of your political party incomprehensively?

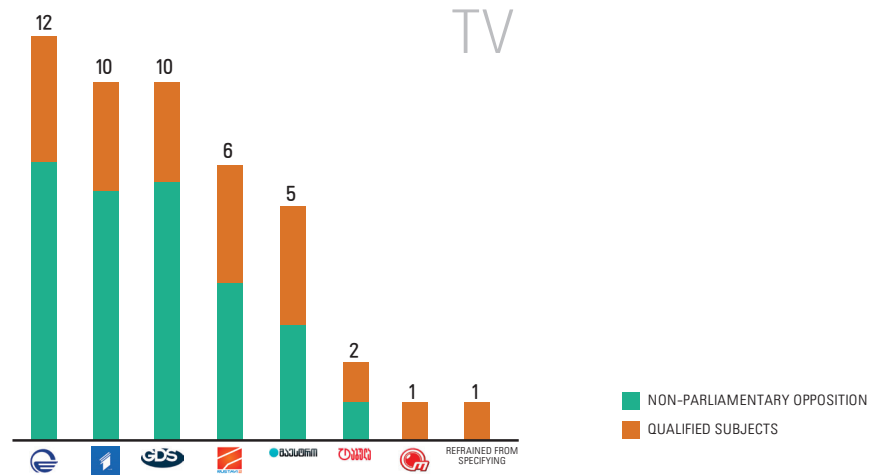
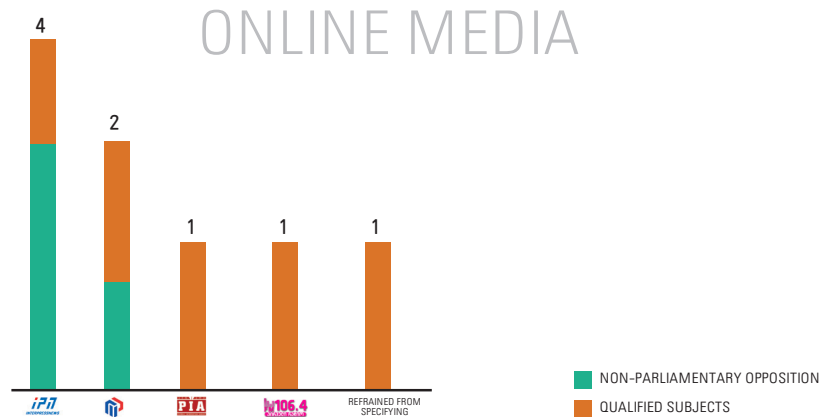


Figure 6. Views of political parties about an incomprehensive coverage of their activities by media outlets (online media)

Which media outlet covers activities of your political party incomprehensively?



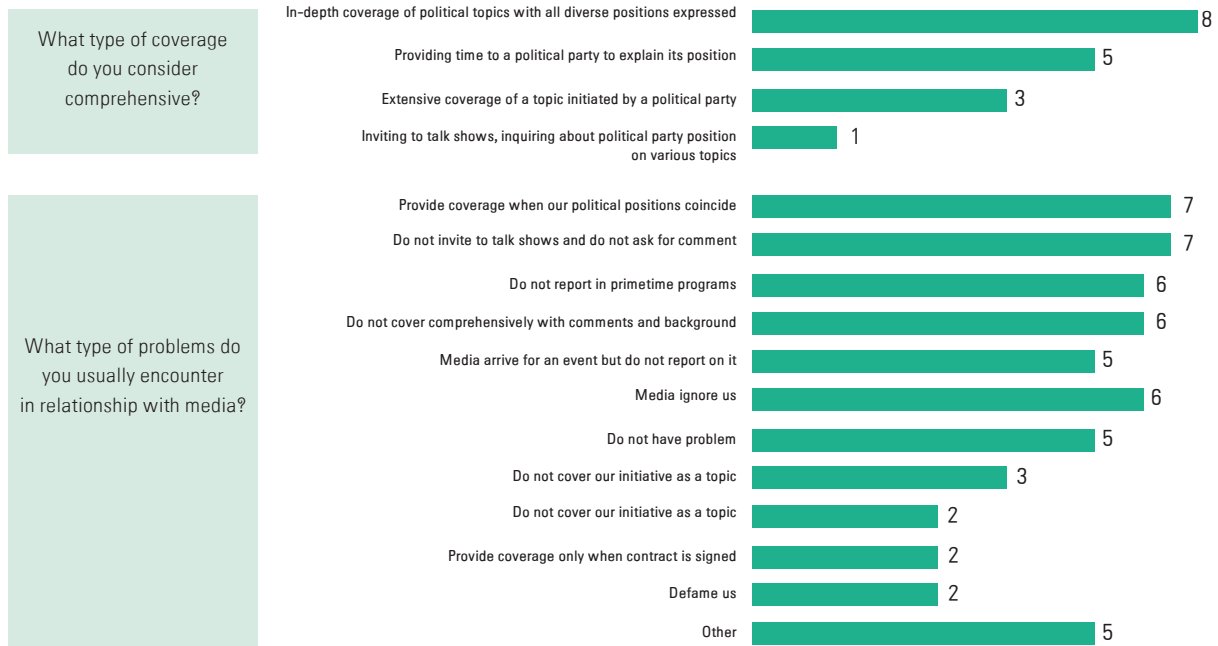
Respondents were also asked to explain what type of coverage they regard as comprehensive/incomprehensive.

A segment of political parties believe that a comprehensive coverage is when media provide in-depth reporting of issues, show interest towards positions of all parties, provide background information (8). However, several political parties expect more from comprehensive coverage: for example, a segment of political parties (5) (including the ruling party Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia) consider it important that they are given an ample time to present their positions (the format of 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel of Public Broadcaster was cited as an example, which is analogous to C-SPAN;<sup>18</sup> another example cited was the program Spektri aired on Kavkasia TV). Yet another characteristic of positive coverage, as named by political parties, is an extensive coverage of topics initiated by them (or their achievements) rather than a short report or a video with one or two syncs (3). Such expectations were expressed by representatives of Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, United National Movement and New Political Center – Girchi (Figure 7).

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<sup>18</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel is analogous to American C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network), which provides live coverage of plenary sittings of parliament of Georgian, important committee hearings and also provides live on-air time to political parties daily. This format of cooperation among the Georgian Public Broadcaster, parliament of Georgia and political parties was established under the memorandum of understanding signed in February 2010, which was renewed in 2013. Source: <http://mediameter.ge/ge/media-profiles/meore-arxi-sazogadoebrivi-maucqebeli>

Figure 7. Interpretations of comprehensive/incomprehensive coverage



The views of parties about incomplete coverage is quite diverse.

The gravest accusation was made concerning a deliberately negative coverage of political parties. In particular:

- Three qualified political parties complained that when being covered their activities are devalued by negative information or efforts to create a negative image of concrete persons (Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, Republican Party, United National Movement).
- Negative coverage was also mentioned by those qualified political parties which believe, in general, that the majority of media ignore them (Democratic Movement – United Georgia, the Alliance of Patriots).
- Most frequently (7) respondents said that the activities of their political parties were covered only when the editorial policy of media outlets coincided with message-boxes of political parties (including 2 qualified and 5 non-parliamentary opposition parties).

- According to seven respondents, their representatives were not given a possibility to participate in talk-shows (of qualified political parties such complaints were made mainly by the Alliance of Patriots, Democratic Movement – United Georgia and the Labor Party, whereas the United National Movement made such a complaint towards the Georgian Public Broadcaster. A large segment of unqualified political parties also claimed that they were not represented in talk-shows of 1<sup>st</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster though did not make complaints about that).
- Many of the complaints of respondents (6-6) were related to the time of coverage, namely that reports on the activities of political parties were not aired on main news programs during primetime.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, they said the coverage was incomprehensive and lacked comments and background information and reports were not always produced on the topics they put forward (including three qualified political parties).
- According to respondents (5) there were instances when media attended events but did not thereafter report on them (4 representatives of non-parliamentary opposition and the Labor Party). Such instances may be explained, on the one hand, by newsworthiness of topics – something which is decided by the editorial staff themselves, and on the other hand, by elements of self-censorship which can be evaluated according to topicality of separate themes and degree of criticism.
- An important feature is that representatives of political parties agree to a certain extent that the intensity of coverage of political parties should be linked to their ranking (a status of a qualified party, the ratings in most recent opinion polls) (United National Movement, Alliance of Patriots, Democratic Movement – United Georgia, New Rights, National-Democratic Party, others). The political parties also believe that the authorship of significant initiatives and the degree of involvement in political process should also be taken into account (for example, working on election legislation within the inter-faction group (New Rights, National-Democratic Party); spearheading important legislative amendments (Girchi), et cetera).

To better understand features characteristic of comprehensive/incomprehensive coverage, we will consider examples cited by respondents. We would like to note that the assessments of qualified and unqual-

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<sup>19</sup> Air time from 18:00 to 24:00.

ified political parties of the degree of coverage differ. The former mainly complained about the timing of coverage, the size and content of report whereas the latter mainly complained about being neglected.

### ■ Not receiving coverage in primetime news programs

Qualified political parties believe that covering a topic in the daytime program and refusing to produce report on an initiative or a fact in a primetime news program is one of most tested methods to stifle main accents of activities of their parties. Representatives of non-parliamentary opposition parties do not get coverage in primetime news programs either, but they do not complain much about that.

The United National Movement believes that Imedi TV conducts an intensive campaign against the party and applies the above mentioned method to stifle events of the party:

**IRMA NADIRASHVILI, United National Movement: “Imedi TV company is busy waging a campaign against the United National Movement; this is apparent in every detail. Imedi tries either to not cover our initiatives and positions or when covering to stifle them in its primetime news programs. For example, on 23 February we announced about our alternative draft law on land registration which we are going to submit to the parliament. This issue was covered only in daytime news slots. On the next day, however, Imedi aired a report on the initiative of Girchi in the primetime news program. Girchi proposed this initiative long before that but Imedi did not report on it until we put forward our initiative.”**

For his part, representative of the New Political Center – Girchi, Zurab Japaridze, complained about the coverage of the same initiative by other TV channels:

**ZURAB JAPARIDZE, New Political Center – Girchi: “We proposed an interesting initiative regarding the land registration though the majority of TV channels reported about it only in daytime news programs...”**

A representative of non-parliamentary opposition believes that apart from the coverage in primetime news, the order of the stories appearing on the program should correspond to the ratings of political parties:

**BAKUR BAKURADZE**, Democratic Movement – United Georgia: “Our activities may receive a very brief coverage even in daytime news slots whereas in primetime news program they are covered very rarely... In general, the order of stories about political parties in all TV news programs is always a problem. By all standards, the order should correspond to the ratings of political parties.”

#### ■ Coincidence of political party positions with TV message-boxes

Several respondents said that the intensity of coverage depends on the coincidence of a political stance with the editorial policy of a channel (for example, the New Rights political party; independent deputy of Tbilisi city council Aleko Elisashvili, political party Reformers, others).

**MANANA NACHKEBIA**, New Rights: “This type of conjuncture has always been observed in Georgia: where a media outlet expresses interests of a political group and your statements match its interests, you get coverage otherwise the media outlet abstains from covering unless something extraordinary happens. Therefore, at this stage, I think that we, as a political force in opposition to the government, more frequently appear on Rustavi 2 and this is natural. We receive the least coverage from GDS and this is natural too. I am neither surprised nor feeling offended and consider this absolutely natural.”

A representative of the political party Reformers explained the coverage of his party by Rustavi 2 with the pro-Western orientation of the political party:

**IRAKLI GLONTI**, Reformers: “We have seen of late the highest degree of support from Rustavi 2 and I think, the only explanation to this is that we have common visions about the West. Frankly speaking, there are, in reality, a very few pro-Western political groups in Georgia and I am not exaggerating when saying that.”

The instances of coverage by Rustavi 2 on the same ground (coincidence of political message-boxes) were also mentioned by a segment of those political parties which considered the coverage by this TV channel incomprehensive and did not underline that their orientations coincide: the Democratic Movement – United Georgia and the Alliance of Patriots.



**BAKUR BAKURADZE, Democratic Movement – United Georgia:** “A declared position of Rustavi 2, which our party believes and I believe that the wider public knows too, is that it is a partisan television and when our position coincides with its message-boxes, then we receive coverage from it, but when it is not interesting for their policy, we do not actually receive coverage...”

#### ■ **Creating negative attitude towards a political party**

A representative of the ruling party, Gia Volski, believed that none of media outlets ensures a comprehensive coverage of the government and the ruling party Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia. Moreover, he claimed that TV companies Rustavi 2 and Tabula cover the activities of the ruling party, but try to belittle them with negative information; he also spoke of the use of entertainment programs for the creation of negative attitudes:

**GIA VOLSKI, Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia:** “Although Rustavi 2 TV company covers our activities it belittles them with negative information. Moreover, negative attitudes towards the party are spread not only through news programs but also entertainment programs. Social difficulties are used against the political party. With regard to Rustavi 2 and in general, TV channels I should note that they refuse to give extensive coverage to positive developments, for example, to report about newly established enterprises, employed people, new projects.”

Yet another political party falling within the coalition thinks that Rustavi 2 and Tabula deliberately discredit their leaders (Paata Zakareishvili, Davit Usupashvili, Tinatin Khidasheli):

**DAVIT ZURABISHVILI, Republican Party:** “Rustavi 2 and Tabula TV companies try to discredit the political party. For example, Tabula TV company spares no efforts to portray Paata Zakareishvili as defender of Russian interests, to mold such an image of him. Negative coverage is also given to Tina Khidasheli and Usupashvili; the negative attitudes are basically directed towards these three people. The same holds almost true for Rustavi 2.”

A representative of the Alliance of Patriots deems the allegations about pro-Russian orientation of her party as an anti-campaign:

**IRMA INASHVILI, Alliance of Patriots: “The Republican Party declares that we are pro-Russian; the United National Movement declares the same; Imedi and Rustavi 2 place analogous emphases.”**

The Republican Party and the United National Movement spoke about deliberate spread of negative information about their parties by media outlets such as Obiektivi TV, Marshalpress, Asaval-Dasavali, Alia, Georgia and World, Postalioni. As an example, the United National Movement cited the release of unauthentic phone conversations between leaders of the United National Movement, based on a suspicious source (Ukrainian WikiLeaks).

#### ■ Release of incorrect information

A segment of political parties complained about the release of incorrect information about them. For example:

**IRMA INASHVILI, Alliance of Patriots: “Media (TV media outlets) covered the process of hunger strike, but deliberately distorted the context. For instance, when I said that we were moving onto a permanent hunger strike, the TV channels reported as if I stopped the hunger. I did not stop hunger strike but carried it on to the end; I just required transfusion. I did not receive any other meal...”**

#### ■ Format of a direct dialogue with voters

A segment of non-parliamentary opposition political parties consider only live broadcast as a comprehensive coverage:

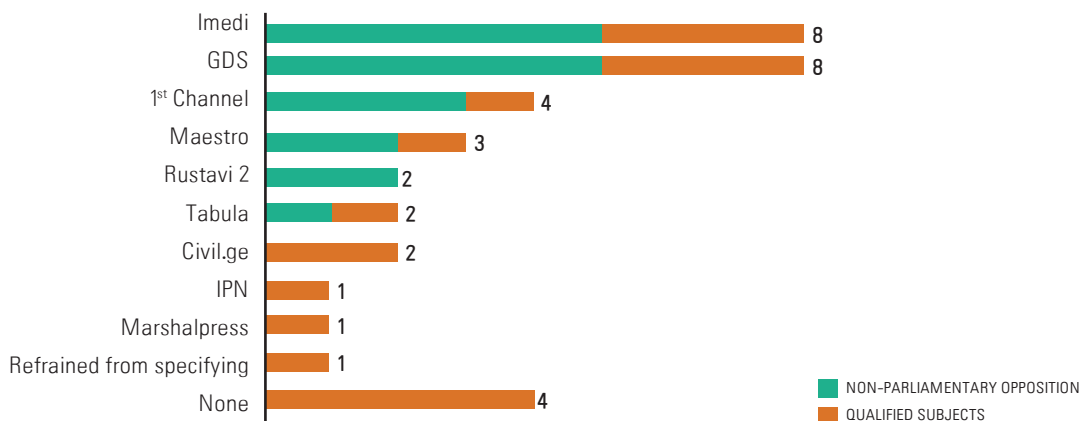
**AKAKI ASATIANI, Union of Traditionalists: “The most comfortable is the conversation with Akubardia on Kavkasia TV, which has its loyal audience and you are given an opportunity to speak extensively and in details about this or that topic.”**

## ■ Restricted access

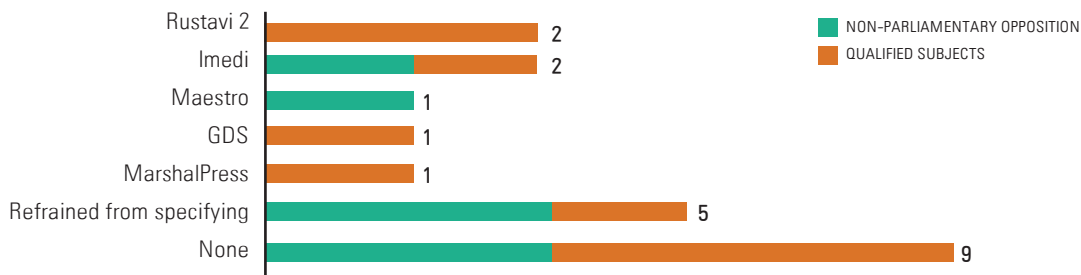
According to the survey, the highest number of complaints (8-8) were made towards TV companies Imedi and GDS; this was followed by the Georgian Public Broadcaster (4 respondents), Maestro (3) and Rustavi 2 (2); (See Figure 8).

It is noteworthy that these data include only those media outlets which political parties wanted to publicly express their opinions about.

Figure 8. Access to media outlets



Which media outlet denies you the right of reply?



Of qualified subjects, positions about a restricted access were openly expressed by the Alliance of Patriots, the Labor Party and the United National Movement.

The Alliance of Patriots named several media outlets, saying that TV companies Imedi and GDS did not consider it necessary to enable her express her opinions during the midterm elections without a special application.

**IRMA INASHVILI, Alliance of Patriots: “Imedi does not report about us; none of my meetings or briefings was covered by it. Rustavi reports only about 10 percent, even less – 5 percent of 100 percent and I have never participated in any talk show hosted by Gabunia although I am the leader of a qualified political party.”**

Yet another qualified political party, the Labor Party, also had complaints towards Imedi TV company. A representative of the party said that talk shows on Imedi were closed to them and the TV channel showed no interest to cover initiatives and events of the political party even when a TV crew arrived to shoot. This position was shared by a large segment of non-parliamentary opposition; for example:

**PAATA DAVITAIA, European Democrats: “While seeing microphones of, say, Imedi at a briefing, you cannot see a report about my briefing in any news program of Imedi; this never happens. I do not even speak about the percentage share of the coverage – it does not cover by 100 percent.”**

The independent candidate of Tbilisi city council, Aleko Elisashvili, who was distinguished, during the conduct of the survey, for his criticism and accusations of ex-prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and the leaders of the Georgian Dream, spoke about a sheer neglect on the part of TV company GDS:

**ALEKO ELISASHVILI, independent candidate of Tbilisi city council: “I have never been invited to GDS, though they speak about me all the time, dedicating at least several programs a week to me and I have never been in its studio, not even when Bidzina Ivanishvili was sitting there with invited guests busy condemning and cursing me. I wondered, why this man did not invite me to the studio instead of ‘talking’ with me from distance. A lot of programs were on GDS and I had a live link up from Borjomi**

only once, but was never invited to the studio. They once approached me and I gave them a 30-minute-long interview, but they edited it so that distorted everything what I had said; such things did not happen even during the Soviet Union.”

One should also note the existing dissatisfaction with a trilingual web portal Civil.ge. This online edition, which targets international community rather than local population, was named by representatives of the former ruling political party (the United National Movement) and the Alliance of Patriots as a media outlet which they did not have access to:

**IRMA NADIRASHVILI, United National Movement: “The Internet portal does not report on our parliament initiatives and our position. It does not cover novelties we provide. However, this news agency is an important source as it is trilingual and its target audience comprises international organizations and international community. We repeatedly tried to communicate with it but without any result.”**

Similar complaints were expressed towards the web portal by the Alliance of Patriots which believes that this news agency deliberately blocks the communication of the political party’s position to international community:

**IRMA INASHVILI, Alliance of Patriots: “It pursues a targeted policy... They have to merely ask me for a comment and express my position in their materials. This is a real thing to do, is it not? Consequently, I think that Civil.ge pursues the aim to discredit me; it does this not for Georgian audience and Georgian farmer. It does this for the aim of isolating me from the West, European structures, the USA, the Congress, our embassies.”**

## THE RIGHT OF REPLY

The situation with the right of reply is mixed. More than two third of political parties said that they had no problem with that or they refrained from specifying any media outlet (14). Their majority think that it makes no sense to reply or they reply via other media outlets or the Facebook.

Two instances were named of the use of Charter of Journalistic Ethics as the right of reply mechanism. One of them was recalled by a representative of the ruling party Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia.<sup>20</sup> It concerned the program hosted by journalist Inga Grigolia on Imedi TV company. The main topic of Grigolia’s program Reaction, aired on 20 March 2015, was a protest rally scheduled for 21 March. In the announcement of the program Grigolia said: “Our guests from the United National Movement will be Irma Nadirashvili and Mikheil Machavarani; as regards the parliamentary majority, we received a categorical demand from the parliamentary majority of the Georgian Dream that this topic not be covered in the talk show format or they would not come to the program. Let us see whether they come or not. We, naturally, do not bow to demands of the government as to which topic to cover or not.” During the program, Grigolia repeated this twice; Gia Volski declared that this information was not true and a representative of the political party filed a complaint with the Charter of Journalistic Ethics regarding Grigolia’s statement. The Charter failed to take a decision on this case because of a tie vote.

The Charter of Journalistic Ethics was also used by the United National Movement as a mechanism to deny information. It concerned an incident which took place in Baku international airport, at the Azerbaijani border, on 19 June, when MPs Irma Nadirashvili and Zurab Japaridze were stopped by border officers. The news item released by the news agency InterPressNews noted that the members of the United National Movement were bringing electroshock weapons and a large amount of money to Georgia. Irma Nadirashvili demanded that the news agency correct the information. The council of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics resolved that the journalist violated Article 1 of the Charter which require from journalists to respect the truth and the right of the public to accurate information.<sup>21</sup>

As the interviews revealed, other political parties did not officially apply to media outlets to exercise the right of reply. The majority of them opt for responding via other media outlets, holding a briefing or releasing a statement. The majority of respondents said that they refrain from responding to information released by online agencies and newspapers. They often use Facebook to express their position which becomes a topic of interest for various media outlets.

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<sup>20</sup> Parliamentary majority vs Inga Grigolia, 23 June, 2015; <http://bit.ly/10LWMHw>

<sup>21</sup> Irma Nadirashvili and Zurab Japaridze vs Nata Mumladze, 7 December 2014; <http://bit.ly/22odqoq>

### 3.4. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

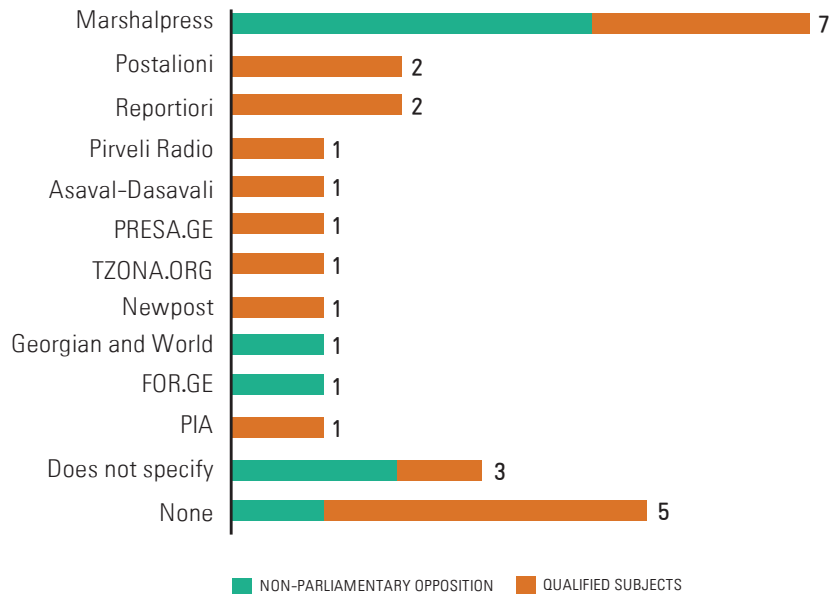
During the survey, respondents named politically biased TV channels and online editions. Respondents refrained from answering an open question about political affiliation, though named the following TV channels: TV Obiektivi (Alliance of Patriots) (19); GDS (Georgian Dream) (17); Rustavi 2 (United National Movement) (17); Tabula (United National Movement) (17); Imedi (the government) (8); Georgian Public Broadcaster (5) (the government).

In case of the first four TV companies, respondents named owners and managers, content, and declared positions of TV companies as proofs of affiliation. In case of Imedi, respondents named the content as well as the involvement of persons close to Imedi and its owners in the disputes over the ownership of Rustavi 2 and Maestro TV companies. In case of Public Broadcaster, respondents named the content.

The interviews showed that despite noting political affiliations of media outlets, a segment of political parties, when it comes to coverage by those media outlets, do not speak about incomprehensive coverage by those media outlets (see Figures 2, 3 and 5).

The situation is different in terms of online editions. In contrast to TV channels, when assessing political bias of online editions the political parties believe that the activities of these editions are deliberately directed against them. On top of the list of such media outlets is Marshalpress (7) which is regarded by a segment of respondents as affiliated with the government (special services). The list of media outlets, waging a targeted campaign against pro-Western political parties, include: Postalioni (2), Reportiori (2), Asaval-Dasavali (1), Georgian and World (1). For.ge (1). On the other hand, the online editions named as working against government included: Pirveli Radio (1), Presa.ge (1), tzona.ge (1), Newspost (1) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Politically affiliated web portals acting against political parties



An interesting opinion was expressed by a member of the Georgian Dream coalition, the Republican Party, saying that the eclecticism of the government makes it difficult to identify government-affiliated media:

**DAVIT ZURABISHVILI, Republican Party:** “The government itself is eclectic today; we have several centers of power – president, parliament, prime-minister, Church, former prime minister – all separately and since we do not have a concentrated government, it is difficult to single out pro-government media. However, if one may say so, one may feel in media the interest supporting the conservative segment of government; also an interest against us.”



### 3.5. GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER

The Georgian Law on Broadcasting<sup>22</sup> assigns a special role to Georgian Public Broadcaster in the coverage of political and pre-election developments. The Code of Conduct<sup>23</sup> of the Georgian Public Broadcaster stipulates the obligation the Broadcaster has regarding the coverage of political parties. Considering these very obligations and given the mission of the Broadcaster, all election subjects have higher demands and consequently, claims towards the Public Broadcaster than towards private broadcasters.

Assessments of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> channels of the Public Broadcaster differ.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster was named by seven respondents, including four non-parliamentary opposition political parties, as a medium giving them comprehensive coverage (among qualified political parties, the channel was named by the Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia, the Alliance of Patriots, the Labor Party). However, it should be noted as well that respondents emphasize poor effect of the channel because of its restricted reach and poor viewership.

The situation is different with regard to the 1<sup>st</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster. This channel was named by the total of four political parties as the channel offering comprehensive or more or less comprehensive coverage. The Republican Party is the sole party which said that this channel is the most balanced one.

**DAVIT ZURABISHVILI, Republican Party: “The most objective TV company today is the Public Broadcaster. It is more balanced; it is neither clearly pro-government – does not report with great fanfare about the inauguration of a bridge somewhere – nor excessively critical; it communicates a balanced position, has good talk shows of late, is more objective. Realuri Sivrtse is a good program; all parties are presented. Mtavari hosted by Tamar Chikovani, Interview hosted by Salome Asatiani are more or less interesting programs.”**

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<sup>22</sup> <http://bit.ly/1NKTOYU>

<sup>23</sup> Activities of political parties should be reported impartially. Allocation of airtime to political parties depends on their political activity, which is not simply estimated by frequency of press conferences arranged by them. Accordingly, it is not necessary (save election campaigns) that parties be allocated the same airtime. However, in reporting major political parties and their judgements, the balance needs to be attained over a definite time interval (for instance, during a month). <http://gpb.ge/files/documents/2006/04/b80766114bede8515fda6dab805e19e5.pdf>

Out of interviewed respondents 10 named the Public Broadcaster as an example of incomprehensive coverage (including five qualified political parties).

Problems which political parties see in relation to the Public Broadcaster differ in their degree. One of main complaints is that the Broadcaster does not cover their events even when the microphone of the 1<sup>st</sup> Channel is seen, for example, at a news conference (Democratic Movement – United Georgia, Alliance of Patriots, New Rights, Reformers, National-Democratic Party, Freedom, Union of Traditionalists, Aleko Elisashvili, European Democrats).

The ruling party also had complaints about the Public Broadcaster. The representative of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia said that the channel does not report positive development and is oriented on scandal.

According to the United National Movement, the Public Broadcaster ignores their representatives in talk shows and the political party gets an extensive coverage in primetime news programs only when the information about them is negative.

**IRMA NADIRASHVILI, United National Movement: “The Public Broadcaster covered an incident with Chiora Taktakishvili’s father<sup>24</sup> in the news program. Moreover, although the attention towards this minor incident was drawn because of party affiliation of Chiora Taktakishvili, the report was produced so that the channel did not contact the political party and the position of the party to the incident was taken from Chiora Taktakishvili’s Facebook wall.”**

A representative of the Alliance of Patriots also thought that the Public Broadcaster ignored their political party and cited the midterm elections in Sagarejo as an example.


**IRMA INASHVILI, Alliance of Patriots: “None of my meetings were reported by any of TV channels. I requested airtime on the Public Broadcaster, but it said it did not have the right to allocate airtime to a candidate of the midterm election.”**

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<sup>24</sup> On 13 February an incident occurred in a Tbilisi supermarket was covered, in which a 75-year old man, MP Chiora Taktakishvili’s father, was detained on charges of stealing a bar of chocolate. Police has already instituted a proceeding; investigation is underway under article 177 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

Complaints towards the Public Broadcaster are also related to the absence of debates on the channel.

Article 55<sup>1</sup> of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting requires that: “In the period between elections, the Public Broadcaster and the Ajara TV and Radio of the Public Broadcaster shall weekly broadcast programmes intended to hold political discussions on the most important developments in the country; the Public Broadcaster and the Ajara TV and Radio of the Public Broadcaster shall also ensure representation of political forces functioning within the Parliament of Georgia (factions) in a non-discriminatory manner, as well as representation of the political unions that are financed from the State Budget of Georgia.” Despite this obligation, the termination of political debates<sup>25</sup> was pointed out by, for example, a representative of the political party Free Georgia:

 **KAKHA KUKAVA, Free Georgia: “This is a scandal. The 1<sup>st</sup> Channel closed down political debates, this is an unspeakable anachronism, it is a conflicting oxymoron; it does not do something which it is given 40 million lari for and instead, makes millions of other stupid programs about folklore, religion, foreign policy; its main function is to show diversity of opinions existing in society and it does not fulfil this function; there is no public broadcaster in the world, other than the Georgian Public Broadcaster, that does not have political debates.”**

### 3.6. REFUSAL TO COOPERATE WITH MEDIA

During the survey several political parties openly said that they do not cooperate, in principle, with certain type of media because of their editorial policy.

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<sup>25</sup> The talk show Pirveli Studia was taken off the air in autumn 2015. On 4 September 2015, a consultant to the Georgian Public Broadcaster explained the dismissal of the talk show host (Eka Mishveladze) with the conflict of interest as she married a politician Buka Petriashvili. On 8 September the talk show host filed an application with the Prosecutor’s Office with the request to start investigation into an illegal spying on her. The talk show host Eka Mishveladze received the first official explanation about the closure of her program on 10 February 2016, which says that Pirveli Studia was taken off the air whereas a project of a new program which she submitted did not get approval of the broadcaster. [http://www.mediameter.ge/ge/media-cases?field\\_media\\_tid=All&field\\_violation\\_typology\\_tid=All&page=2#case-114](http://www.mediameter.ge/ge/media-cases?field_media_tid=All&field_violation_typology_tid=All&page=2#case-114)

**Table 1. Media outlets which political parties refuse to cooperate with**

TV Obiektivi, Asaval-Dasavali, Georgia and World, et cetera	Tabula TV
United National Movement	Democratic Movement – United Georgia
New Political Center – Girchi	Alliance of Patriots
Republican Party	

Representatives of the United National Movement and the New Political Center – Girchi said that they do not give interview to pro-Russian media such as TV Obiektivi and Asaval-Dasavali. The representative of the Republican Party also said they try not to cooperate with antagonistic media outlets, naming Georgian and World amongst.

In parallel, there are two political parties that refuse to cooperate with Tabula TV.

According to the representative of the Democratic Movement – United Georgia, the Tabula magazine, after the events of 26 May (2012), published Nino Burjanadze’s photo with a caption “Justice Awaits.” As the political party states, the TV company and online edition belong to one media group and the political party demands that TV company apologize to Nino Burjanadze, otherwise the political party refuses to cooperate with the TV company.

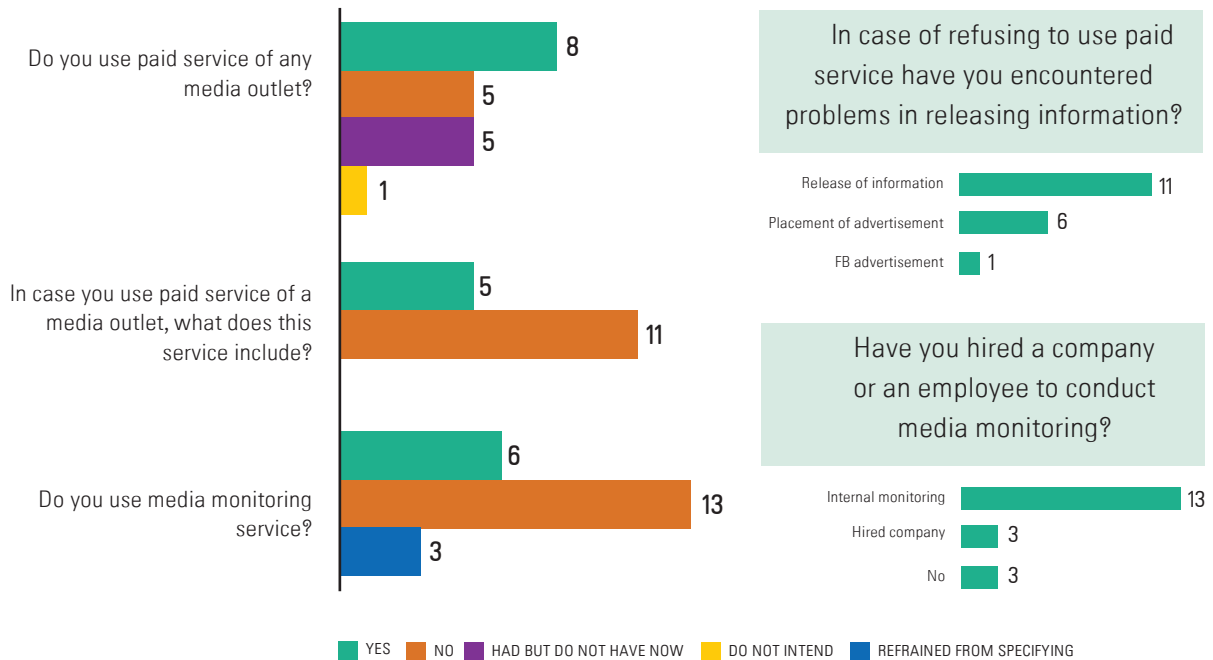
The leader of the Alliance of Patriots, Irma Inashvili, cited personal reasons as the ground of refusal to cooperate with Tabula. According to her, the director of this TV company brands her as an enemy, a spy of Russia and with other similar labels. “I offered the director of Tabula to come to Obiektivi TV company and only after that I would go to Tabula. However, she turned down this offer,” Inashvili said.

### 3.7. CONTRACTS WITH MEDIA/WAYS OF MEDIA MONITORING

According to the survey, the majority of political parties use paid service of media mainly in pre-election period or significant political events. This service, except for election advertisement service (mainly in TV

media), basically means signing contracts with news agencies to publish information and press-releases as well as to place banners (See Figure 8).

Figure 10. Contracts with news agencies



Moreover, it should be noted that member parties of the coalition (for example, four member parties of the Georgian Dream or a member of the United National Movement coalition, Christian-Conservative Party) use paid pre-election services within the framework of common policy.

Rare exceptions are political parties acting independently (for example, the Republican Party had a short-term contract with the news agency InetrPresssNews) in the period of their party forum.

It is worth noting that almost all political parties who noted that they have or had contracts with media for paid services (except for TV advertising) named the news agency InetrPresssNews as one of (or the

only) media outlet they had such a relationship. As political parties explain the reason of it is the authority of the news agency, diverse package of services and popularity.

Political parties avoided answering open answers to a question whether they faced any problems with the release of information after terminating paid service contracts. The total of five political parties gave a positive answer to this question.

Moreover, apart from those five political parties, a segment of respondents said that after they terminated contracts on the release of information with the news agency, the news agency refused to report about them unless it was a scandalous or high-profile event. However, these political parties did not view such an attitude problematic and consequently, did not express their stance in the column concerning problems in the release of information.

The same holds true for the purchase of media monitoring service – the majority of political parties rely on their internal resources to conduct media monitoring during which they also use paid monitoring resources available for parliamentary factions or coalitions.

The survey also revealed that out of interviewed 19 political parties only six political subjects used media monitoring service independently.