

6. ONLINE MEDIA DATA BY MEDIA OUTLETS

6.1 Interpressnews

About InterPressNews: Interpressnews (IPN.ge)²⁵ was founded in 2002 and is one of the largest private news agencies in Georgia. The news agency, which is part of Media Palitra Holding, has changed hands several times. As of February 2015, shareholders of News Ltd are: Zaza Buadze – 12%; Irakli Tevdorashvili – 46%; Giorgi Tevdorashvili – 12%; Kviris Palitra Ltd – 15% (Zaza Buadze 25%, Irakli Tevdorashvili 75%) and Newsroom Ltd 15% (Kviris Palitra Ltd 100%). One of the shareholder, Giorgi Tevdorashvili also owns 50% of shares in Tri-Media Intelligence (TMI), the company measuring television audience. The news agency has contracts with various ministries and budgetary organizations on dissemination of information and other information services for which it received GEL 249 352 in 2015 - one of the highest amount among agencies.

Quantitative Data

Total coverage. In the monitoring period (1 April -31 July) news agency InterPressNews (IPN) has allocated the largest amount of space to the reporting about the government and the Georgian Dream ruling party. The share of government in the total reporting (7 202 stories) stands at 53,9 % whilst that of Georgian Dream at 14,4%. With the ruling political team - government and Georgian Dream combined – being in the lead comprising 68,3% of total coverage, the ranking of other electoral subjects by the amount of received coverage is the following: United National Movement – 7,7 %, Republican Party – 4,5 %, Free Democrats – 3,1 %, Democratic Movement-for United Georgia – 1,7 %, Industry Will Save Georgia – 1%. The total coverage of other opposition parties that are not represented in the parliament made up 1%.

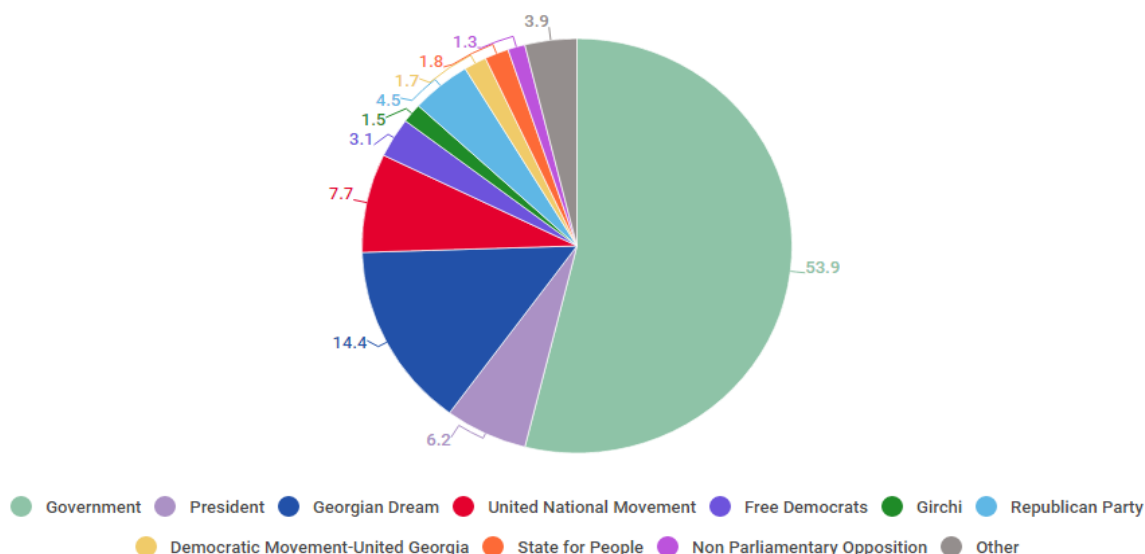
Among the political parties established during the year of the elections, the largest amount of coverage was received by the State for People political party which is led by Paata Burchuladze– 2%; by the most recent NDI poll results, the State for People enjoys 4% of population support. It is followed by Girchi (at 1%) which has the representation in the parliament.

The category “Other” combines following qualified political parties: the Labor Party (0,05%), the National Forum (0,5%), the Conservative Party (0,4%) and the Alliance of Patriots (0,1%) and newly established parties: Tamaz Mechiauri-United Georgia (0,4%) and New Georgia (0,3%).

As regards the coverage of institutions, second to the government is the President and presidential administration (6,2%), followed by the Central Election Commission (1%) and the Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (0,01%) which started operation in July.

²⁵ MediaMeter, MDF, IPN, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/interpressnews>

Chart 6.1.1.Total coverage of political subjects, IPN

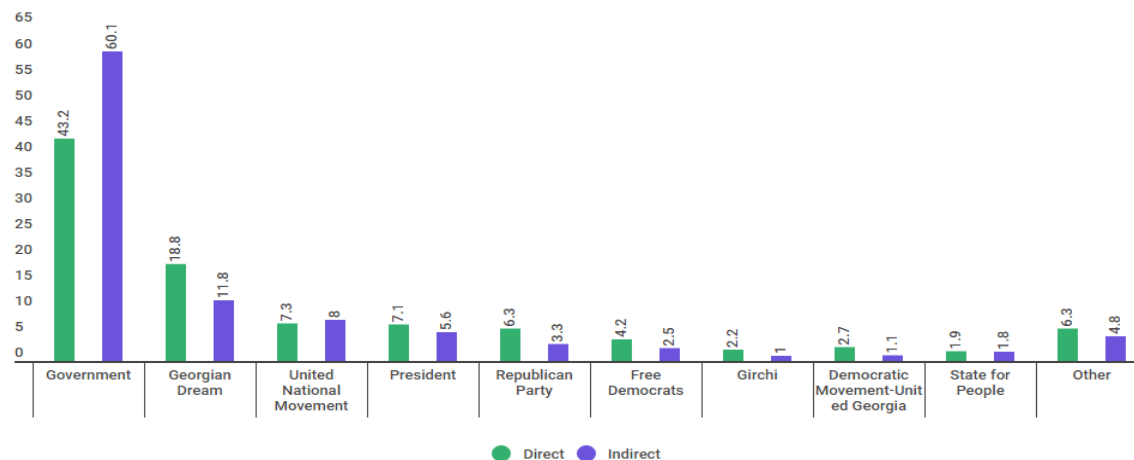


Direct/indirect coverage. The indicator of direct coverage of government is lower as compared to the indirect coverage (43.2% and 60.1%, respectively). In the case of the President, the situation is opposite – the direct coverage exceeds that of indirect (7.1% and 5.6%, respectively).

As chart 6.1.2 shows the direct coverage is higher than the indirect coverage in case of majority of political parties, exception is the United National Movement with the received direct coverage (7.3%) being insignificantly lower than the indirect coverage (8%). Among other qualified electoral subjects the Labor Party is the only political party which has not received any direct coverage and been covered only indirectly (0,1%); the Alliance of Patriots received equal amount of direct and indirect reporting (0.1%).

As regards newly established political parties, the highest indicator of direct coverage is seen in case of the Girchi (direct at 2.2% and indirect at 1.0%) and the State for People party (Paata Burchuladze) (direct at 1.9% and indirect at 1.8%).

Chart 6.1.2. Direct/indirect coverage of political subjects, IPN



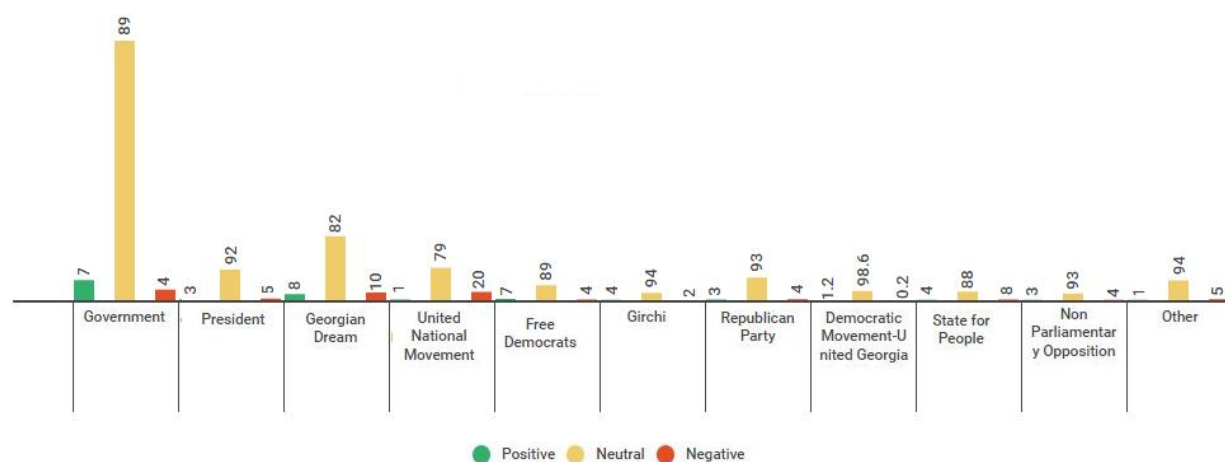
Tone of content in covering subjects. The tone of news agency's reporting about political subjects is mostly neutral. However, the highest indicator of negative tone is observed towards the United National Movement (20%) which is followed by the ruling Georgian Dream (10%), the Alliance of Patriots (9%), and the State for People (8%).

Although the total coverage (7202 stories) of the Labor Party is insignificant (0.05%), the share of negative tone in the total coverage comprises 39%.

The highest indicator of positive tone is seen in the coverage of the Governmental Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (25%), the Alliance of Patriots(9%), the Georgian Dream (8%) and the newly-established political party New Georgia (8%).

The lowest indicator of positive tone is seen in the coverage the United National Movement (1%) and the Democratic Movement–United Georgia (Nino Burjanadze) (1,2%) as well as other parties with the total received coverage standing below 1%.

Chart. 6.1.3. Coverage of political subjects – tone of content, IPN



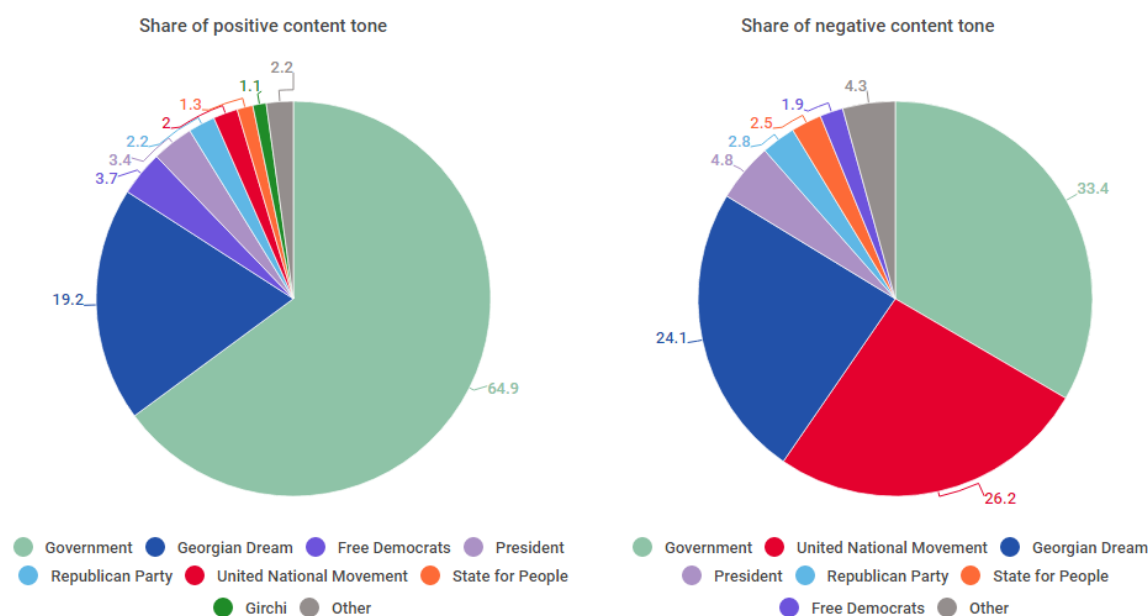
Share of subjects in the news agency's content of positive and negative tone. The largest share of IPN's total content of positive tone was received by the government – 65%, which is followed by “Georgian Dream- democratic Georgia” with 19%. Besides these two political subjects, political parties are minimally covered in positive tone of content. The third place takes Free Democrats with 4%, which is followed by the President (3%), United National Movement (2%) and Republic Party (2%).

Newly established political parties – Girchi and the State for People (Paata Burchuladze) - have similar indicators of positive content (1%).

The share of all other political subjects in terms of positive content tone is below 1%.

As regards the negative content tone, the government is in the lead here too (33,4%), though this indicator is half the positive tone indicator (65%). The second in ranking by negative tone of content is the United National Movement – 26% whilst the third is the ruling Georgian Dream with 24%. It is worth noting that the negative content tone is higher in the coverage of the Republican Party (3%) than the positive content tone (2%). The indicators of Girchi, the CEC and non-parliamentary opposition are almost identical 1%. All other subjects,taken separately, receive less than 0.5% of negative content tone.

Chart 6.1.4. Tone of coverage of political subjects, IPN



Qualitative Data

The news agency InterPressNews (IPN) does not provide information in the format of articles but publishes it in the form of separate comments and pieces of news. Consequently, one may only judge about the balanced coverage by analyzing all pieces of news about one topic. Overall, this media platform is pluralistic and reports about activities of all political subjects, though with differed prioritization.

As the quantitative analysis shows, news about government activities comprises 54% of the news agency's total content. This may be explained by contracts signed between news agencies (including IPN) and various government entities²⁶ on the release of information of the latter, which is manifested in the publication of identical materials on official government websites and various news agencies.

Identical materials of budget organizations in an unaltered form. The news agency publishes information provided by government entities in an unaltered or slightly altered form and without providing any alternative opinion. In contrast to other news agencies, being awarded budget contracts to release official information,²⁷ the IPN is the only agency which uses symbol NS (News from Subscriber) in the byline to signal such materials as financed, though this practice is not regular.

For example, the information published on the website of Tbilisi Mayor's Office was simultaneously released by nine news agencies, including three (see table 6.1.) that are under monitoring, with the identical title "Three new squares to open in Tbilisi in autumn." Among those news agencies having published this piece of news, IPN was the only one which signposted this material by NS, thus separating the editorial material from the financed content. However, as Table 6.1 shows, on another similar occasion the IPN did not signpost the material as financed. It is worth noting that in 2016, the news agency entered into the contract with the Mayor's Office on the release of information via the intermediary company IPM Research.

²⁶ Media Development Foundation (2016); Practice of Allocating Budgetary Resources among Media for the Release of Information and Advertisement; Chapter V, Online Media; <http://mediameter.ge/en/research/practice-allocating-budgetary-resources-among-media-release-information-and-advertisement>

²⁷ Ibid.

Table 6.1 Identical materials of budget organizations in various online agencies

	IPN	PIA	Marshallpress	Netgazeti
Title	Three new squares to open in Tbilisi in autumn ²⁸	Three new squares to open in Tbilisi in autumn ²⁹	“New Kindergarten is being built in Nadzaladevi district” ³⁰	—
Form of publication	NS	—	—	—
Title	Green wall to be arranged on building on Aghmashenebeli Avenue ³¹	—	—	Green wall to be arranged on building at 59 Aghmashenebeli Avenue ³²
Form of publication	—	—	—	—

Materials financed by political and other subjects in an unaltered form. The news agency provides a paid service to several electoral subjects³³ too, though it largely ignores signposting the material as financed, thereby misleading readers. On several occasions, the news agency indicates inside the text that the information has been provided by a press service or a political party. The Table 6.2 below shows separate examples of news items released by IPN and PIA news agencies, which are either word-for-word repeats or slight modifications of information published on official websites of political parties, without bearing NS symbol to signpost the material as financed. The Table reflects materials of those political parties which receive paid service from the IPN.

Table 6.2. Materials financed by political parties

	IPN	PIA	Websites of political parties
Title	Neither NATO nor Russian army on Georgian territory – this will be the only guarantee of security ³⁴ <i>Indicated source: press service of the party</i>	Neither NATO nor Russian army on Georgian territory – this will be the only guarantee of security	Neither NATO nor Russian army on Georgian territory – this will be the only guarantee of security <i>Democratic Movement for United Georgia</i>
Title	Nino Burjanadze on NDI poll – for the first time ever I wished I were a man and even more so, from Kakheti ³⁵	For the first time ever I wished I were a man and even more so, from Kakheti ³⁶	For the first time ever I wished I were a man and even more so, from Kakheti <i>Democratic Movement for United Georgia:</i>
Title	Helen Khoshtaria met with residents of Tskneti ³⁷ <i>Indicated source: press service of the party</i>	—	Helen Khoshtaria met with residents of Tskneti <i>United National Movement</i>
Title	A Girchi district office opened in Avchala ³⁸ <i>Indicated source: press service of the party</i>	—	A Girchi district office opened in Avchala <i>Political center Girchi</i>

²⁸ IPN, 31 July, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2cZt89L>

²⁹ PIA, 31 July, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2cEohdc>

³⁰ Marshallpres, 31 July, 2016. <http://marshallpress.ge/archives/51058>

³¹ IPN, 27 July, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2caop4Y>

³² Netgazeti.ge, 27 July, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2ct4zzj>

³³ Ibid., Georgian Dream, United National Movement, Democratic Movement, Free Democrats.

³⁴ IPN, 14 July, 2016. <http://bit.ly/2cn8Ov0>

³⁵ IPN, 29 July, <http://bit.ly/2cIYNKg>

³⁶ PIA, 30 July, <http://bit.ly/2cwn9YW>

³⁷ IPN, 30 July, 2016. <http://bit.ly/2cXEyrD>

³⁸ IPN, 22 July, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2cwPBq2>

There are instances when published information, containing political accusations, have been signposted as advertised material.

Under the section “Important Information”, the IPN news agency published an article about the former defense minister of the United National Movement government, titled **“Senta Group vs Kezerashvili - a court sitting on high-profile case to be held on 10 June”** (10 June).

The article begins with the sentence: “A business seized under the previous government and yet another case against Kezerashvili and his former companies” and it provides the position of a party to the dispute - the Senta Group.

The news agency published again the material of similar content and signposted as advertisement: **“Address of founders of Senta Group to the government”** (13 June).

The information published as advertisement covers an issue of high public interest as it contains accusations against the defense minister of the previous government. However, the news agency did not undertake any measures either to provide the position of another party regarding the accusations voiced in the article or to carry out an independent journalistic investigation into the case in its own editorial materials.

Biased coverage. On May 22, during the midterm local elections the leaders of the United National Movement were physically offended by sportsmen transported from Tbilisi in the village of Kortskheli, Zugdidi district. While Netgazeti outlined the fact of physical offence of opposition party members in the title (“UNM members physically offended at Kortskheli electoral precinct”), the IPN, just like Marshalpress, stressed the confrontation between the parties in the title (“Physical confrontation occurred at #53 precinct in Kortskheli”) and in the text of the news item. However, while Marshalpress and PIA described the incident as happening between the population and the opposition political party, the IPN named as the parties of the confrontation the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement.

Breach of standards of reporting public opinion poll/balance. The IPN published the results of an in-house public opinion poll, commissioned by the Georgian Dream to the research-consultation center Psychoproject, by violating the rule established under Article 51(11) of the Electoral Code of Georgia which requires the communication of 11 necessary data the information was provided in a fragmented form, mainly focusing on two electoral subjects.

For example: “According to the in-house poll of the Georgian Dream, the majority of respondents believe that Giorgi Kvirikashvili will be able to really solve problems” (30 June, 1 July).

“The poll conducted by Psychoproject shows that 65% of respondents think that Georgian Dream will get the majority of seats in the parliament” (30 June, 1 July).

“Zurab Bigvava – according to in-house polls, the rating of United National Movement is under 13% whereas that of Georgian Dream comprises 35%” (29 July).

Moreover, although the news item contained poll results for the United National Movement, the news agency did not provide the opinion of a UNM representative about the issue.

The news about a public opinion poll commissioned by Rustavi 2 TV company to the GFK was also incomplete (indicating who commissioned and who conducted the poll, the number of respondents covered, the date of survey; but omitting the method of survey, margin of error, et cetera). Moreover, the news agency published the news about the poll results in combination with a statement by the political party Girchi, under the following title:

“Girchi – in 2014, the GFK was stripped of the right to measure TV viewership ratings because of tampering with ratings by bribed panelists” (28 June)

The above information contained accusations (that was included in the title) against the company that conducted the poll as well as question marks regarding Rustavi 2 TV company (For example, stating that the results of the public opinion-poll was preliminary known by Mikheil Saakashvili). However, neither the mentioned news item nor any other material published on 28 June or thereafter, provided the position of the research company or Rustavi 2 TV company regarding those accusations.