

6.2. PIA

About Pia. The news agency Pirweli (PIA)³⁹ was established in November 2006. It is associated with the name of Ani Mirotadze, representative of the party “National Forum” which was included in Georgian Dream coalition by May, 2016. In 2010, 100 percent of the shares in the news agency was owned by Levan Mirotadze; in 2013, the agency was registered in the name of Khvicha Senakia whilst in 2014, the owner of 100 percent of the shares became Dimirti Tikaradze. Editions linked to PIA are: Daijesti.ge, rubrica.ge, funtime.ge. In 2015, the news agency PIA received budget revenues from the contracts signed with state entities in the amount of 80 236 GEL.

Quantitative Data

Total coverage. In the reporting period (1 April- 31 July), the news agency PIA (total 4 157 stories reviewed) most expensively reported about activities of the government (54.6%) and the ruling party Georgian Dream (16.6%), both making up 71.2%. Compared to this, all other political subjects received much smaller amount of coverage. Three political parties which followed by the amount of coverage were: United National Movement (5%), Democratic Movement-for United Georgia (Nino Burjanadze) (4.5%) and the Republican Party (3.7%).

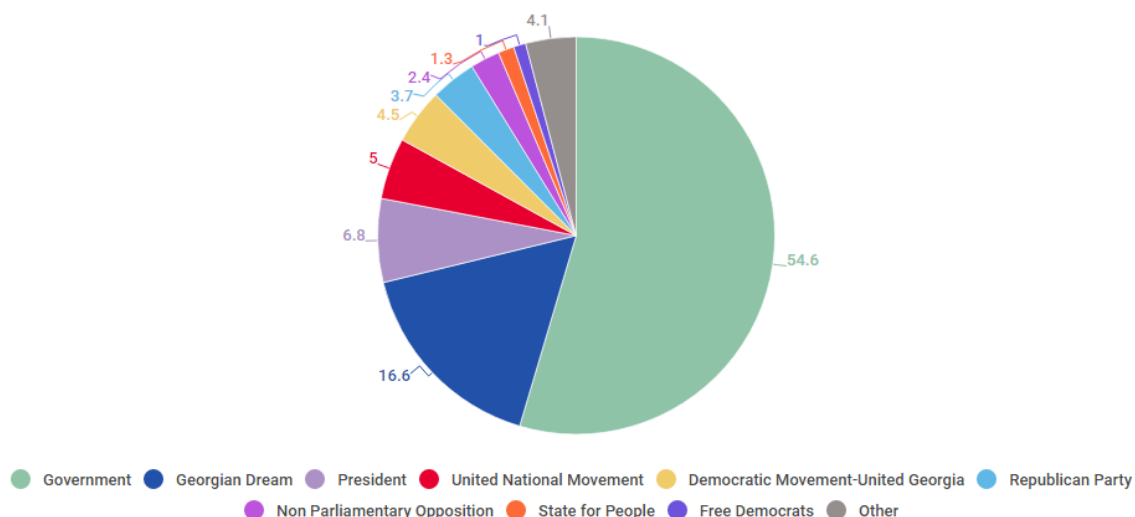
Qualified electoral subjects which received a mere 1% or lower coverage include: Free Democrats (1%), National Forum (0.8%), Alliance of Patriots (0.3%), Industry Will Save Georgia (0.2%), Conservative Party (0.2%), and Labor Party (0.1%).

The political parties that were established in 2016 received the following shares of the total PIA coverage: State for People (Paata Burchuladze) - 1.3%, Tamaz Mechiauri- United Georgia - 0.4%, political center Girchi- 0.2%, and New Georgia - 0.2%.

A corresponding total indicator of non-parliamentary opposition parties comprised 2.4%.

As regards the coverage of institutions, the indicator for President of Georgia and his administration stood at 6.8%, of Central Election Commission at 0.3% and the Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections at 0.1%.

Chart 6.2.1. Total coverage of political subjects – PIA



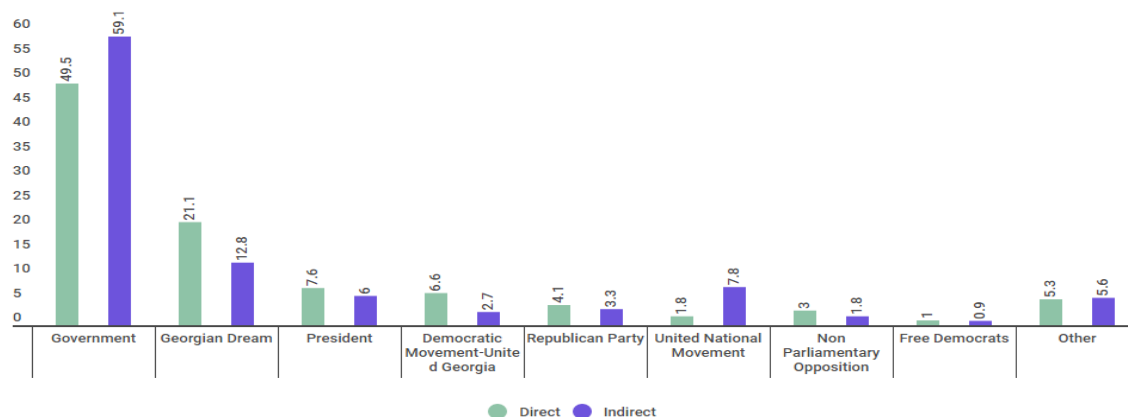
³⁹ MediaMeter, MDF, PIA, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/pia>

Direct/indirect coverage. The direct coverage of Georgian Dream (21.2%) notably exceeded that of its indirect coverage (12.8%) in the materials of news agency; in case of the government, the situation was opposite with indirect coverage (59.1%) exceeding the direct one (49.5%). This may be explained by contracts signed between news agencies (including PIA) and various government entities with the former providing the paid service through releasing information from government entities in an unaltered form.⁴⁰

The highest indicator of indirect coverage was seen in relation to the United National Movement (7.8%), which well exceeded the indicator of direct coverage received by the party (1.8%); the situation with Democratic Movement-for United Georgia was opposite – direct coverage (6.6%) being higher than the indirect coverage (2.7%).

Among newly-established political parties Girchi was the only one which did not receive any direct coverage (the indirect coverage at 0.2%); New Georgia received both direct and indirect coverage (0.1% and 0.09%, respectively); State for People (Paata Burchuladze) also received direct coverage (0.9%). Indirect coverage of this party was (1.8%).

Chart 6.2.2. Direct/indirect coverage of political subjects – PIA

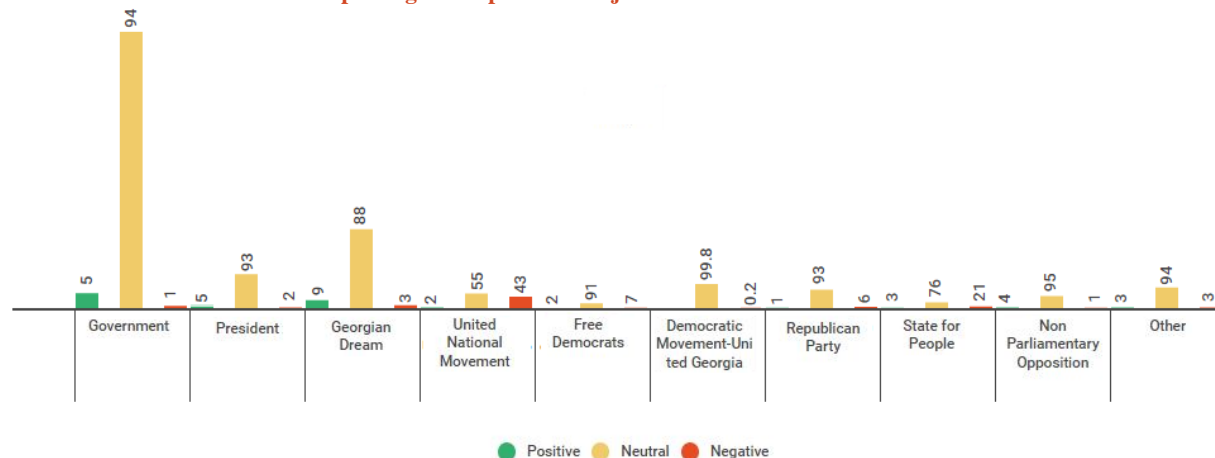


Tone of content in covering subjects. The content of the news agency was explicitly negative in tone towards the United National Movement (43%) and the newly-established political party State for People (21%). The negative tone of content was observed in relation to Free Democrats (7%) and Republican Party (6%) whereas the positive tone was the highest towards the Georgian Dream (9%). Compared to other media outlets, PIA showed the lowest indicator of negative tone (1%) in the reporting about the government. By positive tone of content, the leader was Georgian Dream (9%), followed by the government (5%) and the President (5%).

Among the qualified political subjects having received less than 1% of the coverage, the highest indicator of negative tone was seen in relation of the Labor Party (30%) and the Industry Will Save Georgia (22%).

⁴⁰ 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/ge/research/reklamis-da-informaciis-gavrcelebis-miznit-mediashi-sabujeto-resursebis-ganacilebis>

Chart 6.2.3. Tone of content in reporting about political subjects –PIA



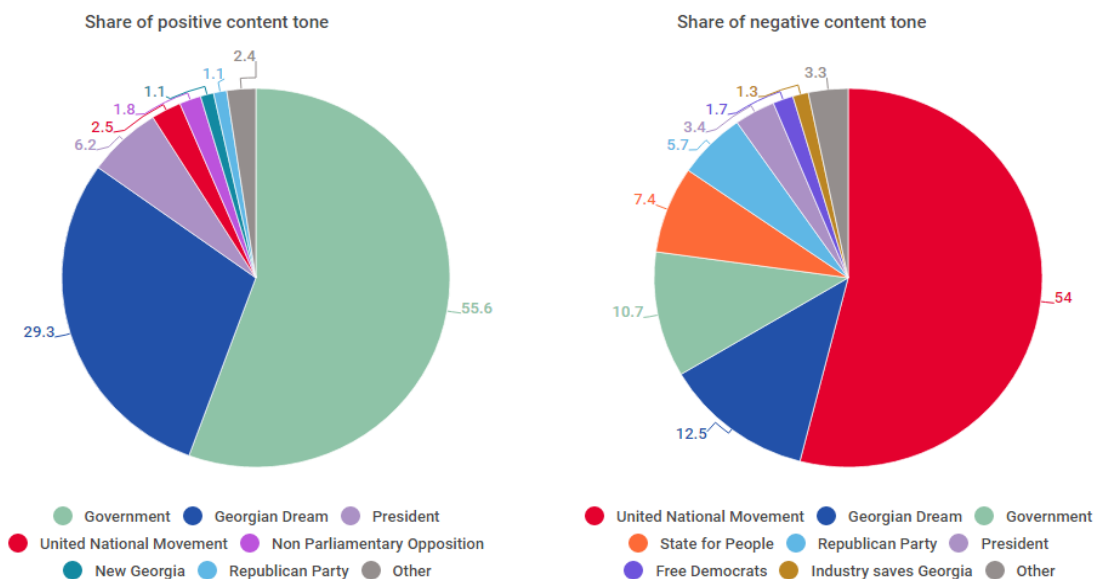
Share of subjects in the news agency's content of positive and negative tone. The largest amount of PIA's total positive content was received by the government (55.6%) which was followed by the Georgian Dream (29.3%). Apart from these two, the positive coverage was also received by the President (6.2%).

More than half of the total negative reporting by the news agency concerned the United National Movement (54%) which was followed by the Georgian Dream (12.5%) and the government (10.7%). Negative coverage was also received by the State for People (7.4%), the Republican Party (5.7%). In this regard, other subjects fall behind the President (3.4%) and received 3.3%.

The political subjects having received lower than 2% of share of negative content are Free Democrats (1.7%) and Industry Will Save Georgia (1.3%), as well as Labor Party (0.6%) and National Forum (0.1%).

Indicators of positive content tone for the United National Movement stood at 2.5%. The Republican Party and the New Georgia had equal indicators – 1,1% each. These were outstripped by the non-parliamentary opposition with 1.8% indicator. All other political subjects received the total of 2.4% of content positive in tone.

Chart 6.2.4. Share of coverage of political subjects in positive and negative content tone – PIA



Qualitative Data

The news agency PIA reports about activities of various political subjects but prioritize clearly several political subjects. Problems in meeting standards of accuracy, balance, reporting public opinion polls and impartiality were observed. Several illustrations of are provided below:

Breach of balance/impartiality. The news agency PIA published an article titled “Political trick of UNM – who is Paata Burchuladze’s candidate for Zugdidi constituency” (11 July).

The article discusses the ties of potential single-seat candidates from State for People political party, Vakhtang Tskhadaia (in Zugdidi) and Goderdzi Bukia (in Khobi), with the United National Movement as well as the assistance they received from law enforcement authorities. The coverage is in negative tone, unbalanced lacking opinions of State for People party, and of single-seat candidates or the United National Movement. However, another information about Goderdzi Bukia, which the news agency published a little later (on 25 July) when Goderdzi Bukia was nominated as a single-seat candidate by the Georgian Dream and not the State for People, was reported in a starkly different, positive tone. In this latter case, Goderdzi Bukia received a positive coverage from the news agency: “He is a seasoned parliamentarian, a true patriot of his district and will allocate a great deal of his attention to Khobi.” This information did not contain background information about the candidate’s links to the United National Movement.

Biased reporting. As noted with regard to IPN, PIA’s report about the attack on leaders of United National Movement by the sportsmen brought from Tbilisi in the village of Kortskheli, Zugdidi district, during the midterm local elections on 22 May, was biased. In contrast to IPN which identified the parties to the confrontation - the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement, PIA covered that incident as a confrontation between population and United National Movement. Within an hour after the incident happened, the news agency released three pieces of news and titles of all the three items informed that the conflict occurred between local population and the former ruling party, saying nothing about the physical assault on leaders of political party as it was stressed in the title of news item published by Netgazeti:

PIA	Netgazeti
12: 58 Quarrel took place between Giga Bokeria and people gathered at the precinct in Kortskheli	UNM members physically assaulted at Kortskheli precinct
13:39 Quarrel took place between local residents and one of UNM leaders at the Kortskheli precinct	
13:51 Nikanor Melia and Tengiz Gunava went into confrontation with local residents	

Without referring to a source, one of the news items noted that the cause of quarrel between local population and UNM leaders was the offence of population by the UNM members. The news item, in particular, said: “According to existing information, UNM members, standing at the entrance to the precinct, were offending population” (22 May).”

Accuracy, conformity of title and text/photo, balance. The news agency PIA reprinted, with smaller changes and identical title, an article from the *Prime-Time* newspaper about the Charity Fund Iavnana. The article was titled “Iavnana spent only 27% of revenues received as charity contributions from people” (28 July). The article was about past charity activity of Paata Burchuladze, the chairman of State for People party.

The information provided in the article is incompliant with the title as the article does not provide information about the remaining 73% of the revenues and, consequently, it is not clear whether or not this amount was spent on charity; moreover, the article does not provide opinions of either the charity fund or the State for People political party, although the article had a photo of the leader of the party, Paata Burchuladze.

An unbalanced material on the same topic, titled “Where Paata Burchuladze spends contributions of our citizens,” was reprinted by the news agency from *Akhali Taoba* newspaper on 20 July.

Accuracy, balance. The news agency PIA published an accusation made by a military expert Tristan Tselashvili against the leader of UNM in Adjara, Levan Varshalomidze, under the title “Military expert: Levan Varshalomidze was tasked by Saakashvili to set up a paramilitary group” (8 July).

The material relies on the accusation of a single source, which is not verified with another party, investigative authorities or any other independent source. Moreover, the background information does not mention that the source of accusation, Tristan Tselashvili, was convicted for espionage during the rule of previous government and was released by the current government as a political prisoner.

Reporting public opinion polls. In the reporting period, the news agency PIA repeatedly reported about the results of public opinion polls either incompletely or without the data which the law requires to publish in the pre-election period. The titles of news items about NDI polls as well as in-house polls which Georgian Dream conducted and disclosed partially, emphasize the advantage of the ruling party. For example:

“Georgian Dream: 65% think Georgian Dream will get most of the seats in parliament – poll results” (1 July);

“NDI: Compared to previous polls share of Georgian Dream supporters has increased” (30 July).

Out of 11 compulsory indicators, specified by Article 51(11) of the Electoral Code of Georgia, to be communicated to public when reporting poll results in the pre-election period,⁴¹ only four indicators (organization that commissioned the poll, the number of respondents; the formulation of question and the time of conducting the poll) were named in the first case and three (organization that commissioned the poll, the formulation of question and the time of conduct) in the second case. The report about the poll conducted by the Georgian Dream, which was not officially published, did not provide results of any other party either. In reporting NDI polls, the coverage lacks important information such as the number of undecided voters, which is quite high (57%) and may affect the outcome of the elections.

Accuracy was a problem too. For example, the title of a news item “Majority of respondents would vote for the same political party they supported in 2012” is misleading. Although the text of the item notes that only 57% of decided voters say that they would vote for the same party or bloc which they supported in 2012, but it does not specify that this response reflects the attitudes of the majority of that 38% of respondents who has already decided whom they will vote for and that amount of undecided voters was sufficiently high.

NDI question	PIA title
Do you intend to vote for the same party you voted for in 2012 elections? - 38% who have decided who they vote for	Majority of respondents would vote for the same political party they supported in 2012

Thus, the standard of reporting opinion polls as well as the principle of due accuracy is violated.

Materials financed by budget organizations and political parties in an unaltered form. Similarly to IPN, the news agency PIA has entered into contracts with budget organizations to release their information. However, in contrast to IPN, this news agency does not signpost such information as financed (see table 6.1. pg.55), thus misleading readers.

According to MDF study⁴², PIA also provides the paid service to 2 political parties –Georgian Dream and Democratic Movement for United Georgia (Burjanadze). Table 6.2 (pg. 55) contains an example of the news agency publishing information of the Democratic Movement for United Georgia without signposting it as financed and changes of content and title.

⁴¹1. An organization having conducted a public opinion poll, 2. a person having ordered or funded a public opinion poll, 3. the exact formulation and sequence of questions put in a public opinion poll, 4. the time of conducting field opinion poll, 5. the number of individuals interviewed and the method of selection, 5. in what area or among what category of people the selection was conducted, 7. whether the survey is based on the opinions of all respondents, 8. the number of respondents who refused to participate in the poll, who did not answer a question, or who could not be interviewed, 9. the sample size, 10. the margin of error, 11. information about any other factors that might have caused a significant impact on the results.

⁴²Media Development Foundation (2016); Practice of Allocating Budgetary Resources among Media for the Release of Information and Advertisement; Chapter V, Online Media; <http://mediameter.ge/ge/research/reklamis-da-informaciis-gavrcelbis-miznit-mediashi-sabujeto-resursebis-ganacilebis>