

**The Caucasus Institute
for Peace, Democracy and Development**

EFFECTS/IMPACTS OF MEDIA
**Leading televisions and election
campaigns in Georgia**



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Effects/Impacts of Media: Leading Televisions and Election Campaigns in Georgia

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David Aprasidze

Introduction

The first half of 2008 proved especially eventful in Georgian politics – early presidential elections were held on 5 January and (on the basis of a plebiscite conducted in tandem with the presidential poll) snap parliamentary elections were held on 21 May.

The increase in political activity started from October 2007 when most major opposition parties managed to unite, mobilize large numbers of protesters and organize large-scale demonstrations against the government of President Mikheil Saakashvili and his ruling National Movement party. The demands of the opposition parties varied considerably, but one major demand was agreed upon: parliamentary elections should be held in spring 2008, at the end of the four-year term of the acting parliament, and not in autumn 2008, as stipulated by a constitutional amendment passed in December 2006.

On 7 November 2007 the government used force to break up an opposition rally outside parliament: police used water, tear-gas, rubber bullets and clubs, leaving hundreds with injuries (though none were killed). This event greatly damaged international image of the country – while previously Georgia was hailed as a “beacon of democracy”, after 7 November it became the subject to growing criticism from the West.¹ Of more concern to Western allies than the dispersal of the protest was the violent closure of pro-opposition Imedi TV that evening. At about 21.00 hours, special forces broke into the station, halted its broadcasts and destroyed its archive and much of its equipment. Shortly after, another station frequently critical of the government, Tbilisi’s local Kavkasia TV, was also taken off the air. Later the govern-

¹ Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?, International Crisis Group. Europe Report N°189. 19 December 2007.

ment declared a state of emergency under which only the Public Broadcaster could air news.

What caused the government to take such radical measures? It was evident that the activity at the rally, having reached its peak on 2 November, was diminishing and by the morning of 7 November clearly posed no immediate threat to the government. On 8 November President Saakashvili talked about a conspiracy against the Georgian government in a televised address.² Government representatives were straightforward in fingering the owner of Imedi TV, tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili (a close friend of Boris Berezovskiy), as the mastermind of the plot. Patarkatsishvili amassed billions in Russia in the 1990s but fell out of favour with the government after Vladimir Putin's ascent to the presidency. He relocated in 2001 to his native Georgia, where he quickly became one of the most influential figures outside the government. Government officials said his Imedi TV sought to incite revolution and the violent overthrow of the government, particularly after he proclaimed that he would spend his last cent to ensure the removal of Saakashvili's "fascist regime".

The Office of the Prosecutor-General of Georgia brought criminal proceedings against Patarkatsishvili, who at the time was in London. Saakashvili, meanwhile, in an effort to repair the damage to his reputation as a democrat, called a snap presidential election for 5 January 2008 in a televised address on 8 November. On the same day the population Georgia would decide by way of plebiscite whether the next parliamentary election would be held in spring or autumn. The state of emergency was cancelled on 16 November and the election campaign began amidst an extreme polarization of political forces and society. Imedi regained its broadcasting licence on 7 December but was able to return to the airwaves only on 12 December because of the extensive damage to the station's equipment. Imedi did not stay on the air for long: on 24 December the government released an audio recording of Patarkatsishvili's conversation with a high-ranking police official that appeared to show he was in fact seeking to overthrow Saakashvili's government. Within two days,

² Address of the President of Georgia to Georgian Population. Georgian Public Broadcaster. 08.11.2007.

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much of Imedi's staff had quit the channel and it halted broadcasts once again, this time voluntarily.

Imedi was off the air during presidential and parliamentary elections, but it remained an acute issue. After Patarkatsishvili's death on 12 February, ownership of the channel became the subject of a legal dispute spanning the court systems of several countries. Imedi became a symbol of political control over freedom of speech and media on the one hand and of political struggles of media and the media's influence over politics on the other. These, seemingly different approaches generated the following sets of questions:

- Is the freedom of speech guaranteed in Georgia?
- How free is the media in Georgia from state or private interests?
or
- How well does the media perform its basic functions?
- How professional is media and how capable is it of resisting pressure?
- How well does the media understand its responsibilities?

The questions are often asked but answers to them are mostly speculative or politically coloured, either journalists are accused of lacking professionalism when trying to explain existing problems or politicians are criticized for being omnipotent, for controlling and subordinating everything and everyone. A number of normative guides telling us about the features of an ideal journalist, media, relations between politics and media, but they do not really venture to investigate why these ideal models are not in place practically and what causes this disparity.

Aims of research and issues under study

No systematic research into the Georgian media has been carried out so far. Case studies analysed in Western manuals are taught and discussed in our universities but original Georgian cases which are doubtlessly worthy of attention are not given proper consideration.

Representatives of academia thus give support to the followers of conspiracy theories and political adventurers and provide fertile ground for the establishment of stereotypes.

This collection of works aims at addressing this problem. Since it is the first such effort it cannot be expected to be flawless. We surely cannot fully escape strongly-rooted stereotypes, though in being aware of this danger, we have applied a pluralistic approach. The interrelationship of media and politics is the subject of study by a wide spectrum of social sciences – communications studies, political science, sociology, etc. The authors of the works in this collection also have varied backgrounds in sociology, communications studies, law and political science and – as we can see – have different approaches. Accordingly, the aspects of the problems, reasons exposed and recommendations are also varied. This may be considered as a fault of the book since the conclusions made by different authors may seem controversial and incompatible and thus lead one to ask what it is that unites these works. The main answer to such criticism is our desire to present a pluralism of ideas – something that is sorely lacking in the Georgian media and elsewhere. We believe that diversity is to be appreciated.

At the same time, it is evident that diversity should not resemble chaos. In order to concentrate our efforts in the extremely broad field of media and politics and make purposeful use of our energy, we established several limitations:

This collection of works is dedicated to the interrelation between media and politics during the pre-election campaign. We believe that the role of media in political processes, as well as the interests of political institutions in media institutions, is particularly evident during the electoral cycle when a country is facing significant changes.³ This observation is particularly true of the countries in the process of transformation, where elections have the potential of inducing fundamental changes. Public activity reaches its highest point at such periods. It is true that such periods cannot be described as normal phases for relations between media and politics. However these

³ For greater details see the chapter Election Coverage from the Perspective of Professional and Ethical Standards.

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periods are particularly good for exposing the channels through which the media influences politics, as well as the influence of politics upon the media. This makes it easier to analyse and draw conclusions. Unfortunately it was impossible to implement the original idea – observations of pre-electoral activities of the media during presidential election of 5 January as well as parliamentary election of 21 May – as the project's implementation started in February. Thus full analysis of presidential elections was not possible and the authors of articles in the book were confined to an analysis of secondary data. However diverse research methodology (see below) was used for the parliamentary election, in both the pre- and post-election period. Analysis of the secondary data about the activities of media during presidential elections demonstrates that our findings can also apply to the period around the presidential election.

The analysis of pre-electoral role and significance of media is limited to the leading Georgian TV stations – the state-funded Georgian Public Broadcaster and private Rustavi-2, Mze, and Kavkasia.

Why TV stations and not radio or printed press? This decision was taken based on the working hypothesis of the research that the majority of Georgian population obtains information and news predominantly from TV.⁴ Since television is the most effective mechanism for informing as well as mobilizing the society, clearly the interrelation between media and politics is most explicit in the case of TV. Thus again, the political activity of media, as well as the influence of politics upon the media is most easily observable in case of TV stations. The political tensions surrounding Imedi confirm this: the government perceived a danger precisely in a TV station, not in a radio station or the print media.

When analysing the pre-electoral role and significance of TV stations, four major topics were singled out – *independence, accessibility, means for making informed choice, professional and ethical standards*. Clearly, all these issues go beyond the scope of TV stations and cover global relations between media and politics, media and society. The aim of the research was exactly this – to obtain easily generalizable findings based on the analysis of

⁴ For greater details see chapter Media as the Tool of Informed Choice.

relatively concrete fields. The task set before the authors was to study all these issues through the cases involving elections and TV stations.

Accordingly the main premise of the book is as follows: *the problems of the relations between media and politics expressed through four major topics (media independence; accessibility of media for various societal groups; media as means for making informed choice, professional and ethical standards) are most clearly demonstrated during the pre-electoral period, especially on the example of nationwide networks.*

Accordingly, the main research topics covered by the articles in this collection are:

- What determines the dependence of media upon the political elite and/or owners of media?
- How big is the scope of such dependence for editing activities?
- How accessible is the media for various political or social groups?
- How effectively do they use and/or misuse their accessibility to the media?
- Does the Georgian media give the public the means to make an informed choice?
- Does the public perceive the media as such?
- Can professionalism of journalists guarantee their independence?
- How well established are ethical standards in the Georgian media?
- How well does the media understand its responsibility before the public?

Individual articles in the book give both straightforward and indirect answers to these questions. At the same time, as mentioned above, the answers given by various authors might vary from each other and in many cases readers may not agree with them. The only, but not full guarantee of the reliability of the research is its well-grounded methodology.

Theoretical construct and research methodology

The research is based on one of the basic normative assumptions from the theory of democratization that *an independent (from government and private interests), professional and diverse media space is an important pre-condition for democratic society*, as only this makes it possible to consider issues of public importance through broad participation. This assumption is particularly valid in the pre-electoral period – media is the space where competing political units articulate their political views and try to mobilize electors around these views with its help. The population, in turn, is actively involved in this process – asking questions and seeking to observe processes.

At the same time media cannot be perceived just as two-way channel for the supply of information. The biggest advantage the media possesses is that it can control the information supply during selection, arranging and sending.⁵ This assumption makes us think that often there is a disparity between the normative model and the empirical reality. In fact, an analysis of Georgian media legislation demonstrates that it is in full compliance with the above-described model. Moreover, it is one of the most liberal in the region.⁶

Despite this, implementation of formal regulations is quite complicated. It is very easy but not appropriate to pay attention to the wish of the government to control media. It would be equally inappropriate to attribute everything to the poor standards observed by the media. The significance of the media for the society in transformation period is even greater if we consider it within a greater systemic context: in reality the media does not only contribute to the crystallization of public attitudes towards changes (in this case the role of the media as a moderator would be quite sufficient), but is itself a catalyst of these attitudes, a constructor of a new reality, be it directly or indirectly.

⁵ For greater details see chapter Election Coverage from the Perspective of Professional and Ethical Standards.

⁶ For greater details see chapter Independence of the Media and Relative Degrees of Control in Georgia

All this is complemented by the fact that media itself, as well as journalists, also undergoes changes, including changes in values. This model is best explained by the phenomenon of political culture: the unity of subjective approaches towards political processes – political culture takes shape as a complicated and long-standing process of public interactions. Media is the best arena for articulating, spreading and instrumentizing these subjective attitudes, i.e. for public interaction. Accordingly, through the media it is possible to foster public participation in political processes, as well as public apathy and nihilism. The media is not only a mirror of social processes; it can reflect the existing reality in a number of ways: media is an expression of political culture and at the same time it creates political culture itself. That is why empirical cases of the development of societies and media form various countries often differ from the normative models of interrelations between media and politics.⁷

As a result, this collection of works rejects any rigid model for the interrelation between media and politics: for example, in one chapter we read that the influence of media on forming political preferences is neither absolute nor non-existent. This influence may depend on other factors as well as the social status of recipients. Also, scholars have not yet determined the mechanisms through which media influences political choice.⁸

The study of complex interrelations between media and politics determines *the systemic use of various methods of social sciences*. It is widely acknowledged that various methods of social sciences have different types of advantages and only their complex use can give the intended result. Accordingly, one of the main strengths of these articles is the mixed use of qualitative and quantitative methods of research. Researchers analysed legislative documents and scientific literature, conducted interviews and focus-groups as well as quantitative and qualitative monitoring of political programmes using contemporary technology.⁹

⁷ For greater details see chapter Election Coverage from the Perspective of Professional and Ethical Standards.

⁸ For greater details see chapter Media as the Tool of Informed Choice.

⁹ For greater details see chapter Accessibility of Media for Political Groups and Candidates.

It should be noted that observations on the media were previously done using only quantitative methods. During the presidential election in 2008 several different quantitative monitoring activities were implemented which in most cases aimed at increasing equal access to the media for various political groups.¹⁰ The only exception was the so-called Michnik group: famous Polish media-expert Adam Michnik arrived in Georgia in response to the closure of Imedi in November 2007. A media-monitoring group was established based on his initiative which included representatives of media and society (Alexander Rondeli, Ghia Nodia, Zviad Koridze, Lasha Tughushi, Davit Paichadze, Nato Murvanidze, Levan Khetaguri). The group monitored the observance of ethical standards by Georgian televisions during the election period and discussed the findings of this monitoring live on the Public Broadcaster.¹¹ Therefore this research is the first attempt to provide general analysis of these findings.

Major findings of the research

It has already been noted that various authors of articles present different views about the problems of politics and the media. However, the main conclusion in each article is the same: *despite multiple international and local efforts, including legislative guarantees, the state of media in Georgia leaves much to be desired.*

In the chapter – Independence of the Media and Relative Degrees of Control in Georgia – the authors analyse one of the most vital topics of Georgian media development – independence of journalistic activities (so-called editorial independence) and the influence of politicians, media-owners and producers on these activities.

The logic of politics being built on the categories of interests and power always tempts politicians to use media for their interests. At the same time, judging from the economic principles of media activi-

¹⁰ Such observation was implemented by Media Council, Central Electoral Commission, European Council and OSCE during elections in 2008.

¹¹ For greater details see chapter Election Coverage from the Perspective of Professional and Ethical Standards.

ties, any media-owner tries to direct the activities of a media subject according to its own business interests, or at least not to confront influential political forces. Thus, exercising control over journalistic activities is not, unfortunately, an exception and is even characteristic of consolidated democracies. In the most radical cases media becomes an ideological instrument of strong political and economic centres. Such leftist approaches towards the relation of politics and media may be a bit overstated since it does not focus on such institutions as competition, civil society and political culture and interprets all societal problems only at the level of class structure.

However, this model retains validity in case of countries in the process of transformation, where institution-building is not over. The cases considered in this chapter demonstrate that politicians in Georgia – from governing as well as from opposition parties still wish to control the media or use it to implement their own interests. The parliamentary election campaign showed that all political forces were trying to instruct media how to work during the pre-electoral period. Political forces thought that leading TV companies were “obliged” to behave as they instructed them to. The most vivid example of this was the tension around the Public Broadcaster and the resulting political “deal”. It should be noted that such attempts of some representatives of opposition parties “deprived” journalists of the opportunity to professionally approach their relations with the governing party.

Another important issue to consider is the ownership of mass media outlets. Most notably, the identity of the real owners of leading TV stations is not publicly known. Although legal requirements are officially observed, in reality the names of the companies registered in off-shore countries don't actually give any information. Second, the most vivid example of a political actor using media for political purposes was Patarkatsishvili and Imedi. Accordingly, the issue of legacy of the dead oligarch became very acute and it still cannot be solved without political participation because of the political activity of Imedi. After the parliamentary elections there were reportedly attempts to purchase Kavkasia. The channel's owners say businessmen are hesitant to advertise on its airwaves.

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The present work contains interesting information concerning political and social advertising in general – 99% of commercials ordered by state agencies are placed on Rustavi2, Mze and the Public Broadcaster, the leader being Rustavi2. This presumably can be explained by the leading positions of this TV channel on the market, the relatively low share of other TV companies, including Kavkasia, could be explained by the limited scope of their broadcasting.

The article also talks about licensing problems. After the parliamentary elections Maestro TV, a small cable station, has been having similar problems related to its plans of launching -political programmes. The authors talk about various mechanisms of control, such as self-censorship on the part of journalists, which is directly related to editorial practices, namely the power of producers. Self-censorship is not a sub-conscious phenomenon to be explained by the subjective attitudes of journalists, nor is it the problem of professionalism alone. Self-censorship in many cases is a deliberate tactic that helps a journalist protect himself/herself from being criticized by the editor and frequently just stay the job.

The interviews conducted within this research demonstrated that the media-owners exercise influence upon journalistic activities through producers. Producers, not media-owners, are in daily contact with journalists. In the majority of cases they control the selection of topics and tone regarding electoral issues. The interviews also demonstrated that journalists “understand” their producers without words and know what types of reports are expected of them. Thus the degree of media freedom during the parliamentary election of 21 May was low.

Political forces were still competing for control over the media with varying success. Media-owners could not serve as the protectors of the interests of their own journalists since their interests are mostly associated with political forces rather than even their success as businessmen. Besides, professional and ethical standards of producers and journalists are still insufficient to contain the regulations of politics and economics.

The following chapter – Accessibility of Media for Political Groups and Candidates – deals specifically with the parliamentary

election of 21 May. This chapter of the book summarizes the findings of the monitoring implemented by various local and international organizations, as well as quantitative and qualitative data generated within the scopes of the project and analyses them. It should be noted that the research is based on the simultaneous study of the data generated by three organizations using contemporary media monitoring technologies.

The article starts with the explanation that a state has positive obligation to make media accessible for all types of political opinions; this requires the presence of special mechanisms for not allowing the monopoly of any one group over public opinion. The analysis shows that the majority of the Georgian TV audience (over 60%) watched Imedi and Rustavi2 TV in October and November of 2007. After the closure of Imedi, especially in March and April of 2008, i.e. during the electoral campaign leading up to 21 May, Rustavi2 was the absolute monopolist of the market (more than 44% of the Georgian TV audience while only 18% watched –the other stations, Public Broadcaster, Mze and Kavkasia). It should probably be noted that none of the stations managed to reverse this monopoly.

Meanwhile, despite diverse (often critical) public attitudes towards the Public Broadcaster, the public is not yet ready to first watch broadcasting and then evaluate its performance. The results of the monitoring demonstrate that the Public Broadcaster maintained balance among various political forces in news coverage, as well as in talk-shows; its news reporting was neutral and reports concerning the activities of the acting government were clearly separated from electoral themes. The Public Broadcaster concluded a memorandum of understanding with political forces and in the majority of cases observed it.

Despite this, only a small portion of society watched the channel and some opposition groups remained extremely critical towards its coverage. This is likely indicative of a lack of civic culture (as one type of political culture) in Georgia. Results of the research of other TV stations show that the leader of market, Rustavi2, and Mze (which is under the same ownership) demonstrated loyalty to the ruling party in quantitative indicators as well as in the tone of reporting.

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This can partly be explained by some opposition groups' boycott of the channels and attacks against journalists.

Unfortunately, these examples confirm the aforementioned: politicians view mass media as the means of achieving their own purposes. This is true of Kavkasia as well. The channel was used as a platform by the United Opposition, while ruling party candidates made only a few appearances. Accordingly, Kavkasia reported mainly on the activities of the opposition parties and criticized the ruling party. The analysis of the data shows that despite the leading position of the ruling party, TV airtime was available for all political groups. Whether they were using this access appropriately is a different issue. The author of the article assumes that the stereotype, according to which society and the political elite ascribe all problems, including their own, to media and journalists, can be explained by the phenomenon of political culture.

The following chapter – Media as the Tool for Informed Choice – talks about the public's trust in the media. On the one hand, it considers the availability of media for various political groups and on the other, how this was perceived by the viewing public. Searching for objective and subjective factors determining the formation of trust – as a social phenomenon – is a complex issue and it was not the objective of the author of this article. The author makes an assumption that the bigger the trust of a society towards the media is, the stronger the role of the media in the political choices made by this society. The author uses the notion of the effect of boomerang, meaning that if the trust of society towards a particular media outlet is low, information conveyed by this channel not only changes a position or opinions of spectators, but rather reinforces them. Besides, the mechanisms of affecting the political choice of the population by the media and the strength of this influence have not yet been determined. The research has demonstrated that viewing news reports on TV channels is not directly related to participation in elections.

This chapter of the collection is based on the data generated from quantitative as well as qualitative research – an Initiative survey conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centres and original research carried out within the project – focus-groups and inter-

views. Although Data Initiative was conducted in 2007, it still gives an interesting picture about the attitude of Georgian population towards TV stations. This information, together with the interviews conducted in 2008 and the data indicating distribution of broadcasting time among various political groups gives us grounds to make assumptions about the political impact of media. First, Imedi was the leading TV channel in terms of trust of the population until its broadcasting was suspended on 7 November 2007 – the audience considered the information broadcasted by Imedi trustworthy. In other words, Imedi had the necessary pre-conditions for exercising political influence upon the population. Our research did not involve investigating the extent to which the owner of the channel was using these conditions for political purposes. However, as mentioned above, the logic behind the relationships among media, politics and business does make such assumptions.

Secondly, Rustavi2, although being doubtlessly the leader in TV broadcasting during parliamentary elections, was widely perceived as a pro-governmental channel. The majority of the population watched this channel. However the information broadcast by Rustavi2 had a boomerang effect upon some. Two phenomena revealed by the research arouse particular interest and require further research: firstly, the population in general is very critical towards professionalism of Georgian journalists and think that western media are much more professional and free.

At the same time, surveys show that absolute majority of the population cannot access foreign information channels due to language or technical problems. Thus they cannot really compare and base their assumptions on the prevailing stereotypes (which, in many cases are spread by politicians). Secondly, the population residing in the regions is positive towards the TV channel Kavkasia despite the fact that they cannot view its programmes. In other words, people are evaluating a product they are not using.

The same phenomenon applies in the case of the Public Broadcaster: although not many people are acquainted with the product of this channel, the level of trust towards it is still low. Clearly, this is the problem to be taken care of primarily by the management of this

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channel. However, this fact also speaks to the civil consciousness of the population. In general, the author assumes that the level of trust towards media as an institution has been reduced. Thus during the parliamentary elections of 21 May a significant part of the population did not think of the media as a means for making an informed choice. The findings of the research are different from the conclusions of the previous chapter only in one aspect: that media was mainly open for all political groups. As previously noted, this chapter provides not a factual but rather attitudinal analysis, indicating the faults of civic rather than media culture.

All chapters of this collection implicitly deal with the problems of journalistic ethics and professionalism. The last article of the collection – Election Coverage from the Perspective of Professional and Ethical Standards – explicitly covers this issue. Professionalism and ethical standards have long been an issue of discussion with regard to the Georgian media and the period leading up to the parliamentary elections of 2008 was no exception. Politicians of all political orientations were eager to point out journalists' lack of professionalism and violations of ethical principles. The research demonstrated that the problems of professionalism and ethical standards did indeed exist and even journalists do not deny this. If this were not the case, journalists would likely not have put up with politicians' criticisms.

The permanent mockery of journalists by politicians and experts only aggravates the situation and fosters the people's mistrust towards the media. The research was based on a theoretical review of media-professionalism and standards as well as content-analysis of leading TV channels during the parliamentary elections of May 21 and findings of focus-groups. The research has found that journalists chose to highlight the campaign process rather than analyse content. In other words, they did not put reflective questions to politicians about their vision, programmes and plans. Thus politicians, who are always keen to determine the topics to be covered by media, in fact succeed in doing this; accordingly, Rustavi2 and Mze focussed on the electoral campaign (not platform) of the ruling party while Kavkasia highlighted the electoral campaign of the opposition.

No TV programmes, including talk-shows, offered the approaches of various political groups towards certain issues, which would give the population an opportunity to compare. It should be noted that the attempt of the Public Broadcaster to do so was unsuccessful – talk shows intended to compare the approaches of various political groups ended up in politicians trading personal insults. This is more an ethical problem of politicians rather than a problem of ethical standards of journalists. In conclusion, it can be said that media activity during the parliamentary elections of 21 May once again confirmed the importance of professionalism and ethical standards for a truly independent media. The strongest self-defence mechanism in the hands of a journalist is professionalism.

Quo vadis?

The authors of the project were expecting that the research would generate more new questions rather than answers to existing questions. The main conclusion of the research is that the development of the media as a process is inseparable from the development of society itself. *The establishment of the media as an institution is impossible when other civil institutions are underdeveloped. Additionally, journalists are not isolated from society.*

Recommendations towards resolving this are frequently heard and are repeated in various forms: more clarity about media-owners; more institutional guarantees for media-institutions; more efforts for educating journalists; more sensitivity for politicians and businesspeople. We seek to approach these issues from a new angle.

The success of *journalistic education* depends on the funding of the educational system in general, as well as the structure of educational programmes. Currently there are not enough human resources in Georgia to conduct proper media-research and the post-Soviet school of journalism is totally unprepared to meet these new challenges. Therefore academia should ensure the implementation of the principle of liberal education, giving future journalists an opportunity not to remain isolated and receive wide

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knowledge about the social reality and the ways of studying this reality. Such a widening of the scope of journalistic education should by no means be perceived as the decay of journalism as the academic field.

The establishment of a body uniting journalists aimed at promoting professional ethics has long been a subject of discussion. Such unity would contribute to the emergence of a common spirit among journalists, would protect them from unprincipled colleagues and would be a strong factor in securing editorial independence. However we should bear in mind that not all kinds of unions are acceptable. Journalists united around personal sympathies and acquaintances or suspicious values may discredit the principle of free speech. Therefore professional and ethical standards should become the main pillar for this union. These standards cannot be different for the journalists in various fields.

The issue of journalistic education has long been under discussion. However, we think that the *political education of society* is of no less significance. Civic values are important not only for journalists but for the society at large – especially for politicians. Instead of relentlessly criticizing the professional standards of journalists, they should think about their own caste and the rules that prevail within it. This is true of every other sub-system of society as well.

It is absolutely necessary to develop a system of researching Georgian media and integrate existing material therein. This will give us an opportunity to observe not only the statistical situation, but dynamics as well. As noted above, quantitative research may generate very valuable information in this respect. For example, according to the evaluations of various international observers, freedom of press deteriorated in Georgia during 2007.¹² This is an important indicator that must be pondered. It is based on the interpretation of specific facts and is a good argument for analysing these facts. However, these data cannot help us determine fundamental causes – this can only be done through systemic research. Fundamental research will help us determine the directions of development of Georgian media with a high level of reliability.

¹² See Georgia, in: Freedom House. Nations in Transit. 2008.

Nino Danelia
Nini Gogiberidze

Independence of the media and Relative degrees of control in Georgia

Introduction

Freedom of speech is a fundamental value in a democratic society. Without this freedom the promotion of other human rights is almost unthinkable. A free and professional media, as part of the overall requirements of the right to freedom of speech, is one of the most essential prerequisites for democratic, free and fair elections. This is because in a democratic society, the exchange of information and ideas through a free media and through free and open public debate is a crucial element of mass participation and a requirement for democratic responsiveness to public preferences.¹

However, public debate is not always exactly the same as the debate taking place through the free media, even if there is a truly free media.

According to political economists, the economic base determines the ideology and power of media organizations.² Media outlets express the interests of their owners, mostly political and economic oligarchs who constitute the ruling class.³ There is a connection between media elites and the rest of political, eco-

¹ Sartory, G. (1987). *The theory of democracy revisited*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House.

² Murdock and Golding (1977). "Capitalism, communication and class relation." in Curran, J., in Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woolacott, J. (1982). *Culture, Society and the Media*. Methuen: London and New York.

³ Altschull, J. H. (1984). *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs*. New York: Longman.

conomic and cultural elites⁴ and the process by which the ruling class participates in policy-making and regulation.⁵ From this standpoint, the media, together with the government, forms the ruling class's capacity to maintain power.⁶ As Altschull puts it, "The content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press."⁷ Thus, by selecting certain themes and issues, neglecting others and framing coverage in certain ways, media assign a meaning to events that often reflects the political beliefs and interests of the owners.

The public debate, on the other hand, includes protest demonstrations and vigils initiated by citizens, social movements, interest groups and the rhetoric of political parties opposing the ruling party. Through these expressions of public opinion, citizens try to attract the interest of media, other citizens and political decision-makers to the issues at stake and in so doing generate political influence. Social movements develop their own communication strategies and policies to attract media interest and gain the importance necessary for achieving their goals.⁸

When social movements are formed, they highlight the conflicts between ordinary citizens on the one hand and on the other the political and economic elite, who are united by their status of privilege and who own better channels of communications. "Social movements are particularly important for a political economy of communication because they have influenced the means and content of communication."⁹ The links between the economic determinants and

⁴ Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon books.

⁵ Mosco, V. (1996). *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal*. Sage Publication: London, Thousand Oaks and New Deli.

⁶ Altschull, J. H. (1984). "Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media". in *Human Affairs*. New York: Longman.

⁷ Altschul, J. H., & Reese, S. D. (1991). *Mediating the Message*. White Plains: Longman. 254.

⁸ Gitlin, T. (2003). *The whole world is watching: mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press; Mosco, V. (1996). *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal*. Sage Publication: London, Thousand Oaks and New Deli.

⁹ Mosco, V. (1996). *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal*. Sage Publication: London, Thousand Oaks and New Deli.

the dominant rhetoric of the media are most obvious, and often straightforward, when conflict between civil society and the ruling class occurs.

Since the media are closely linked to the dominant structure through their ownership, it is interesting to note what communications strategies media employ to construct their news programmes. Liberals often assert that elite media interact with and relate to other powerful institutions, including the government. While many media professionals often claim they act independently from any outside pressure, this is often not the case. “Nobody has to tell them what to write because they are going to say the right thing,” writes Chomsky.¹⁰ “The right thing” is considered to be what their editors and owners think is right to say. Media sell their audiences to other corporations, and the larger audience they can recruit the more successful they are. In this entire sell-and-buy atmosphere the audience is not a “participant,” but an “observer.”

In Georgia, a country that has declared dedication to the principles of democracy and the freedom of speech, the issue of direct or indirect control of the media needs to be studied because, at first glance the dominant discourses of television companies reveal a tendency of not questioning the political elites of the country, sometimes even excluding certain topics from newscasts that would cast the government in a less than favourable light.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the means and forms of control over Georgian TV news production by the political elite of the country through the owners of Georgian television companies. This mechanism of control through ownership is not unusual in world practice¹¹ though it is particularly important in Georgia given the transitional nature of both society and the media. By identifying the main threats to freedom of expression and addressing them from the perspective of media practitioners, this study will contribute to the development of independent and professional media in Georgia.

¹⁰ Chomsky, N. (2004). *Hegemony or survival: American Quest for Global Dominance*. Bowl Books. 6.

¹¹ Chomsky, N. (2004). *Hegemony or survival: American Quest for Global Dominance*. Bowl Books

The mechanisms of control over the Georgian media and the degree of this control are analysed here in the context of the 21 May parliamentary elections and the period shortly before and after the poll. We begin by analysing the media environment prior to the elections and then examining the existing legal background. Then the study will focus on the types of control, i.e. through ownership institute, editorial policy, advertisement market, and licensing procedures. The study addresses the attitudes of journalists, media managers and experts on these problematic issues. In a separate section, the study will also address the issue of self-censorship as a major challenge to the independence of the media, followed an analysis of the period following the 21 May parliamentary elections.

Media Environment Prior to 21 May Parliamentary Elections

According to Freedom House's report for 2008, Georgia is a partly free country whose Civil Liberties rating declined from 3 to 4 in comparison with 2007 "due to the circumscription of media and free expression in the aftermath of the November protests".¹² According to the Freedom Map of Freedom House Georgia is a partly free country.¹³ At the same time it is ranked higher than its neighbours, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, which are classified as "not free". Other "partly free" countries include Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Albania and much of Eastern Europe.

The need for independent and professional media and exploration of freedom of expression became one of the most important questions for the contemporary Georgian media after the raid and closure of Imedi TV, a highly rated pro-opposition channel, on 7 November 2007. Earlier that day, police violently dispersed opposition demonstrations through the use of water cannon, teargas and

¹² Freedom House (2008). Freedom in the world. country report available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

¹³ Freedom House (2008). Map of Press Freedom 2007. available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

rubber bullets. “That evening, hundreds of special forces troops armed with assault rifles and other weapons entered the Imedi television studios. They forced journalists and other staff members to lie on the floor and held them at gunpoint. The station’s signal went dark just minutes after the news presenters announced the raid was in progress. Imedi’s staff was evicted and the troops damaged or destroyed much of the station’s equipment.”¹⁴

The Georgian government said these actions were necessary to avoid a coup d’etat supported by Russian intelligence and Imedi owner and founder Badri Patarkatsishvili, who had recently begun financing the opposition. The prosecutor-general said the channel had been used as a “tool for overthrowing the government”.

The closure of Imedi sent shockwaves around the world. “The government’s response to any perceived threat posed by Imedi was clearly excessive and a violation of freedom of expression,” said Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch.¹⁵

The issues of freedom of expression was a topical theme in public discussions and television talk-shows. Media experts said that instead of providing the public with accurate, fair, balanced and comprehensive information, Imedi TV was providing news coverage with a clearly anti-government bias.¹⁶ It is also widely accepted, however, that the three other nationwide news broadcasters at the time, private Rustavi2 and Mze and the Public Broadcaster were biased in favour of the government and covered news through a pro-governmental filter.¹⁷ As a result, Public TV’s director-general and board of supervisors resigned and were replaced.

Georgian political elite remained radically polarized after the 5 January 5 extraordinary presidential elections and before the parliamentary elections of 21 May. The election campaign was punctuated by frequent protests and even hunger-strikes by opposition leaders demanding free and fair elections and a free and professional media.

¹⁴ Freedom House (2008). Freedom in the world. country report available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

¹⁵ Freedom House (2008). Freedom in the world. country report available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

¹⁶ Rustavi2. talk-show. 27.12.07

¹⁷ Public broadcaster. 28.12.07, 04.01.08; Rustavi2. 10.01.08.

These events sparked active debate about the state of the Georgian media and the need to analyse its major challenges, resources and prospects.

Legislation vs the reality of media freedom in Georgia

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and media legislation in Georgia is quite liberal. Article 24 of constitution states:

1. Everyone has the right to freely receive and impart information, to express and impart his/her opinion orally, in writing or by in any other means.
2. Mass media shall be free. The censorship shall be impermissible.
3. Neither the state nor particular individuals shall have the right to monopolize mass media or means of dissemination of information.

The exercise of these rights may be restricted by law on such conditions which are necessary for state security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of crime, for the protection of the rights and dignity of others, for the prevention of the disclosure of the information acknowledged as confidential or for ensuring the independence and impartiality of the justice system.

According to local and international reports, the law on Freedom of Opinion and Expression adopted by the parliament of Georgia after the Rose Revolution, on 24 June 2004 is in line with international standards of protection of the freedom of expression in Georgia. "It is unique in the region and, if properly implemented and applied, will provide Georgian journalists and others with guarantees that are fully in line with international standards".¹⁸

The law prohibits censorship and protects journalists against unwarranted pressure from owners and editors. It provides a course of action by which individual journalists can take editors or owners to civil court, thereby ensuring that journalists have recourse not only in

¹⁸ Article 19 (2005). Georgia: Freedom of expression Law. available at <http://www.article19.org>

cases concerning the state, but also in cases when editors and publishers violate the principles of journalistic independence. Under the law, journalists are guaranteed independence and freedom of thought. This particular part of the legislation encourages journalists to make editorial decisions based on their own professional judgment.

The law also states that it should be interpreted in compliance with not only the Constitution of Georgia, but also with the principles of the European Convention of Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Thus, the law clearly aims at considering international democratic standards of protection of freedom of expression.

The presence of progressive legislation without proper implementation does not guarantee the freedom of the media in Georgia. Despite the liberal law protecting freedom of speech in Georgia, the independence of media remained questionable during 21 May parliamentary elections. Complaints about the lack of editorial freedom dominated the rhetoric of prominent journalists, producers and anchors in press interviews. Journalists say their biggest problem is pressure from their owners, who in turn obey the political powers that be. Representatives of the political elite have their counter arguments and say that it is not they, but the owners who decide what news to cover and how, as well as what programmes stay on the air. Owners say that they don't experience any pressure from the government and that they are just trying to stay in business. Thus, the concept of freedom of speech in the Georgian media (particularly the broadcast media) is blurred.

Mechanisms of direct or indirect control over the Georgian media

For the purpose of this study eleven anonymous in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists from the country's three nationwide news broadcasters, Georgian Public TV, Rustavi2 and Mze (the last of which no longer carries news) and Kavkasia, a local station that broadcasts only to Tbilisi. They talked about the degree of the freedom enjoyed by journalists at their respective outlets,

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their concepts of what a journalist's main function is, his/her responsibilities, ethics and mechanisms of regulation. Each of the respondents addressed the issues of control over the media and the professional standards of the journalists. The resulting information is analysed and interpreted in the context of media developments in order to understand the matter from journalists' point of view.

Ownership institute

One of the crucial problems of the Georgian media remains the obscure nature of the ownership of a number of leading media outlets. According to Freedom House report, "information about media owners is not transparent and often journalists and reporters do not know the real owner of the media company for which they work".¹⁹

The International Election Observation Mission (OSCE/ODIHR) had similar remarks. "Despite the pluralistic media environment, most outlets remain under strong influence from their owners and political patrons. As such, all five main TV channels were under some influence from candidates and political parties, which was an obstacle to covering all election subjects in a non-discriminatory manner as provided by law. This resulted in campaign news coverage lacking balance on all monitored TV stations, apart from Public TV, with the ruling National Movement receiving the most coverage on almost all stations".²⁰

Documents submitted to the Georgian National Communications Commission say that Georgian Industrial Group (GIG) and GeoMedia Group own Rustavi2 and Mze. GIG owns a 45% stake in both stations. One of the founding members of GIG group is Davit Bezhushvili, the brother of Intelligence Department chief Gela Bezhushvili. The remaining shares in both Rustavi2 TV and Mze TV are owned by the GeoMedia Group. The only information available about this company is that it is registered in the Marshall Islands.

The vagueness of information about the owners of Rustavi2 and Mze left room for widespread speculation ahead of the 21 May par-

¹⁹ Freedom House (2008). Freedom in the world. country report available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

²⁰ International Election Observation Mission (2008). Georgia — Parliamentary Elections, 21 May 2008. available at www.osce.org/item/31268.html

liamentary elections and led some opposition groups to boycott the channels and further undermined the public's trust in the broadcast media. "Rustavi2 is the operative service for the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs and [Internal Affairs Minister] Vano Merabishvili. Their main function is to discredit..."; whereas Mze "belongs directly to the National Movement and it is only natural that they support and propagate political ideas of the leading political party in Georgia," United Opposition coalition leading member Goga Khaindrava said²¹.

According to Article 15 of Georgia's Law on Broadcasting, the Georgian Public Broadcaster operates as a governmental legal entity that is publicly owned and financed. "The intelligential product is intended for Television-Radio Broadcasting on non-commercial airwaves. This legal entity operates independently from governmental direction and control. It is publicly accountable under collective ownership and operates independently from any state structure or institution".²² The United Opposition repeatedly attacked the Public Broadcaster, accusing it of pro-government bias and demanding the resignation of director-general Tamar Kintsurashvili. The Georgian political elite then reached an agreement to nominate and vote for a new board of supervisors. This deal was an ad hoc decision on behalf of Georgian authorities to overcome crisis following 5 January presidential elections. Five of the nine members were nominated by the authorities and four by the opposition, including Irakli Tripolski, who became chairman of the new board. Later, the new board appointed Levan Kubaneishvili to the post of the station's director-general.

Kavkasia is a privately owned station that broadcasts only to Tbilisi. Proprietor David Akubardia hosts its flagship talk show "Studia Spektri", which tended to serve as a major platform for the opposition candidates.

Although Imedi was not broadcasting during the election period, the scandal concerning its ownership issue is worth mentioning. After the death of founder Badri Patarkatsishvili, his widow, Inna Gudavadze, said in March that the Georgian government was

²¹ Suvariani, N. (2008) *Georgian Government Controls Six TV Stations*. Tbilisi. HRIDC.

²² Article 15 of Georgia's Law on Broadcasting. 2004.

trying to take over Imedi. According to papers submitted to the Georgian National Communications Commission I-Media is the founder and 100% owner of Imedi TV and radio. The company JMG, in turn, has a 65% stake in I-Media. The remaining 35% of I-Media shares are owned by Universal, a firm founded by three relatives of Patarkatsishvili. Gogi Jaoshvili, a close friend of Patarkatsishvili, owned 70% of JMG. Joseph Kay, a distant relative of Patarkatsishvili, said in March that he had bought shares of Imedi TV and radio from Gogi Jaoshvili “simply by paying money.”²³ Kay denied allegations that he was acting on behalf of the Georgian authorities.

Does this mean that there is no independent media in Georgia? Not necessarily. “In fact the freedom of media means the freedom of various types and outlets, and this means that a person is free to receive different viewpoints from different media outlets – to pick and chose. Look at the USA, where some cable news channels are oriented towards conservatives and others towards a more liberal audience. Americans are still free to choose what sources to receive their news from,” explains independent media expert Badri Koplatadze. “The same situation holds true for Georgia too. Kavkasia obviously favours opposition parties. We can see only representatives of the opposition parties on their broadcasts. The bottom line is that people are free to either receive information from Kavkasia or some other channel. Rustavi2 is accused of being a governmental TV station. However, both opposition and pro-government politicians participate in their programmes. They claim that GPB is biased, but I can state that it is the most balanced TV station in Georgia. All in all, both the government and opposition have different opinions about the issue. Finally those three Georgian TV stations create an independent media in the country because of their diversity of views. Regardless, in spite of the facts, I can accept many different opinions about the same media”.²⁴

²³ Imedi TV ‘New Owner’ Plans to Restore ‘Old Imedi’. Civil Georgia. Tbilisi. 23 March, 08 / 15:05 available at www.civil.ge

²⁴ Badri Koplatadze. in Suvariani, N. (2008) *Georgian Government Controls Six TV Stations*. Tbilisi. HRIDC.

However, Kavkasia cannot balance out pro-government outlets simply because it only covers Tbilisi. With Imedi closed, during the election period the Georgian broadcast media was left with four nation-wide broadcasters: Tbilisi-based Rustavi2, Mze, the Georgian Public Broadcaster, and Batumi-based Achara.

Editorial independence

The ideology of a given TV station is conveyed to the news team during meetings with the director-general. Afterwards, producers implement the ideology by selecting some stories and omitting others, as well as counselling journalists on what angle to cover the story from.

Journalists working in the newsrooms of the observed stations see the main function of their profession as looking for truth, disseminating information and creating a free space for public debates. Nonetheless, they say, they do not do their best to ensure their audiences are properly and fully informed. The reason for this, they say, is the pressure on freedom of speech in their newsrooms. Freedom of expression is suppressed mainly by the government and, sometimes, as journalists say, also by representatives of opposition parties.

“Pressures vary...Every government is trying to influence media, because it is the main tool of communication to the audience. The opposition is also trying to exert psychological pressure on the media... It is up to the media to withstand these influences and pressures,” said Mate Kirvalidze in an interview given several days before the closure of news programming on Mze TV, where he served as head of news. “If the authorities do not like something, then they accuse us of acting on the ‘order’ of the opposition, and vice versa. When the opposition is unhappy about a certain report or criticism – they proclaim that it was a governmental ‘order’. In this context, media is always stuck in between the two giants fighting for power”.²⁵

“It is true that the media is not a business in Georgia, rather a media outlet is a political tool in the hands of its owner,” said a journalist from Mze. “But if you are a real professional you’ll not allow your producer or owner to dictate what to do or do

²⁵ Interview with Kirvalidze M. conducted on 18 June 2008.

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something that contradicts your professional standards.”²⁶ Journalists see main problem not as much on the level of owner, who they do not interact with on a daily basis, but on the level of the producers who plan daily newscasts, select stories to cover and edit their reports. Producers assign them specific issues to cover and even tell them what kind of “sound bites” they need to find. Journalists working for three Georgian TV stations – the Public Broadcaster, Rustavi2, and Mze – say they are under pressure of the ruling party, but not necessarily in the form of receiving calls from government officials or the owners of their stations but rather by their producers, who block reports critical of the ruling party. Journalists from Rustavi2 and GPB say that producers demand positive coverage of presidential and government initiatives and insist that such reports be free of criticism.²⁷

Journalists at Kavkasia say they are not under pressure from any political force, though they do acknowledge that they are oriented toward critical coverage of the ruling party and support of opposition parties, particularly the United Opposition.²⁸

Producers and television directors say no pressure is exerted on journalists. For example, Rustavi2 director-general Irakli Chikovani says he manages the channel in the way he thinks will best facilitate the development of new programmes, both political and entertainment. He asserts that no one except the newsroom is able to influence the station’s editorial policy. “You are asking me if somebody is calling me [and giving me orders]: nobody is calling me and nobody is telling me what to do,” Chikovani said in an interview to the daily newspaper 24 Saati. “The only demand the owners have is that the channel should be financially successful,” he said, adding that the Rustavi2 “earns enough to survive and this is already a success”.²⁹

²⁶ Interviews with Journalists from TV-Station MZE conducted in May-June 2008.

²⁷ Interviews with Journalists from TV-Stations Rustavi2, MZE and GPB conducted in May-June 2008.

²⁸ Interviews with Journalists from TV-Station Kavkasia conducted in May-June 2008.

²⁹ Rustavi2 TV Head Tight-Lipped on Ownership. Civil Georgia, Tbilisi. 1 March 08 / 15:22. available at www.civil.ge

Advertising market

Media representatives perceive dependence on advertisement as preferable to political dependence. They think of advertisement as a source of financial and thus, professional strength and the main source of self-sustainability. However, advertising can also indicate the loyalties of the television companies. The top advertisers on Georgian TV channels remain

Advertiser	Channel	Insertions	Cost
Ministry of Education and Science	GPB	28	2 504 \$
Summary for Ministry of Education and Science		28	2 504 \$
Ministry of Health	GPB	162	4 498 \$
	MZE	17	3 590 \$
	Rustavi2	15	8 161 \$
Summary for Ministry of Health		194	16 249 \$
Ministry of Finance	MZE	21	1 371 \$
	Rustavi2	21	7 357 \$
Summary for Ministry of Finance		42	8 728 \$
Ministry of Agriculture	GPB	32	2 035 \$
Summary for Ministry of Agriculture		32	2 035 \$
Ministry of Internal Affairs	MZE	46	9 210 \$
	Rustavi2	126	114 834 \$
Summary for Ministry of Internal Affairs		172	124 044 \$
Tbilisi Municipality	MZE	24	1 194 \$
	Rustavi2	32	8 642 \$
Summary for Tbilisi Municipality		56	9 836 \$
Sighnaghi City Opening Ceremony	MZE	455	31 693 \$
	Rustavi2	49	27 106 \$
	IST	80	1 176 \$
	Music Box	103	1 617 \$
Summary for Sighnaghi City Opening Ceremony		687	61 592 \$
Government of Georgia - Ads on Fuel distribution	GPB	3	767 \$
	MZE	14	2 411 \$
	Rustavi2	10	9 901 \$
Summary for Government of Georgia - Ads on Fuel distribution		27	13 079 \$
Government of Georgia - Ads on Cheap Credits for Agriculture	GPB	22	3 130 \$
	MZE	30	3 474 \$
	Rustavi2	57	40 971 \$
Summary for Government of Georgia - Ads on Cheap Credits for Agriculture		109	47 574 \$
Government of Georgia - Ads on Raising Minimal Pension	GPB	24	3 150 \$
	MZE	58	6 615 \$
	Rustavi2	51	38 602 \$
Summary for Government of Georgia - Ads on Raising Minimal Pension		133	48 367 \$
Government of Georgia - Ads on Giving Out Cheap Credits	GPB	21	3 844 \$
	MZE	44	5 173 \$
	Rustavi2	27	23 226 \$
Summary for Government of Georgia - Ads on Giving Out Cheap Credits		92	32 242 \$
Poti Industrial Zone Opening	MZE	63	3 992 \$
	Rustavi2	56	30 621 \$
Summary for Poti Industrial Zone Opening		119	34 614 \$
Total Summary		1 771	400, 864 \$

Source: TV MR GE, licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research

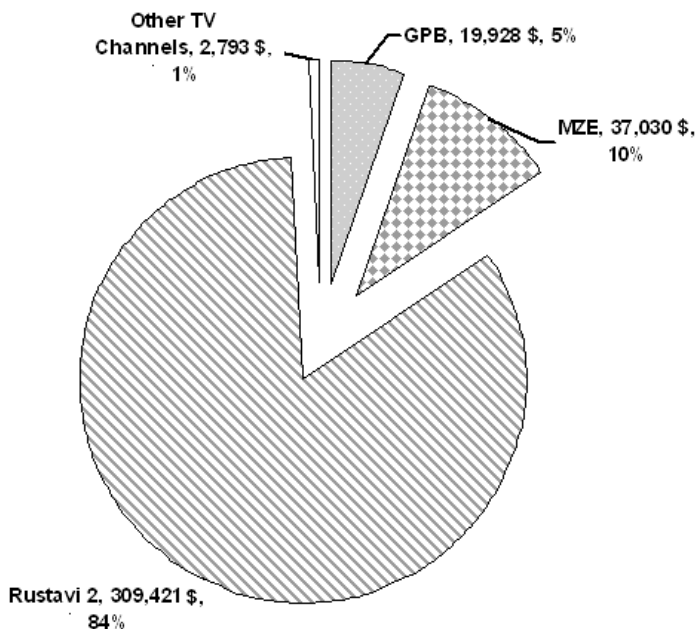
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independent business entities. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe on which channels the government sponsored advertisements are distributed.

The table below shows the distribution of government sponsored ads on TV channels in March and April 2008.

The table shows that of the USD 400,864 spent on TV ads by various government agencies, the vast majority, 84%, went to Rustavi2 while Mze and Public TV received only 10% and 5% of total investments, respectively. All other TV channels, which, interestingly enough, exclude Kavkasia TV, received only 1% from the investment basket. Chart below shows the exact figures.

This preference can be dictated by the popularity of Rustavi2 and not necessarily by attempt to “buy its independence.” However, taking into consideration the example of Kavkasia, from which, according to its director Nino Jangirashvili, businessmen are pressured to pull their ads, we can state that the authorities are trying to bargain with television companies and that buying ad time is one method of bargaining.



Source: TV MR GE, licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research

Licensing procedures

Another mechanism of control is licensing procedures. The Maestro cable TV station is particularly noteworthy in this regard. The Georgian National Communications Commission has refused to issue a licence to the traditionally entertainment channel to broadcast political programming. On 20 March the TV station received an official letter from the Regulations Committee warning that the station had no right to air political programming. Later, TV station applied for a licence to air political programming, but was refused.

Self-censorship

The practice of self-censorship in the Georgian broadcast media could be the result of direct or indirect pressures and influences; it could be due to the authoritarian rule of producers; and there may be financial factors involved. We may question all these factors, but there is another obstacle, one which derived from the behavioural patterns of journalists themselves. International and local organizations consider *self-censorship* to be among the major problems of the Georgian media. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its biannual report (2004-2005) and the US Department of State in its annual report (2005) notes that Georgian media is self-censored.³⁰ "Self-censorship is when journalists, fearing reproach from their editors or the government, observe certain limits to their criticism and write within the ideological framework favoured by the government".³¹

Journalists know what kind of stories their station wants them to cover and how to cover them. Self-censorship may derive from moral considerations as well, but usually, in Georgia's case, preference is given to conformism. "There were cases when nobody called a journalist to say what to do, but the journalist knew what they had to do," said a journalist at Public TV, "because he or she knows what

³⁰ The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its bi-annual report (2004-2005) and the US department of states in its annual report (2005).

³¹ Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. "Freedom of expression in Georgia". 2004.

happens to those who go against the ideology of the TV station. A producer asked her to go out again and find a positive quote for one story instead of critical voices.”³² Besides that, one journalist from Rustavi2 said, “we all are humans, we have wives and children. If you want to work you need to play according the rules; if not, you can find another job.”³³

“Self-censorship is the worst thing a journalist can do,” explains Levan Kubaneishvili, the new director-general of the Georgian Public Broadcaster. “All my activities so far have been directed towards ‘liberating’ them [journalists] from self-censorship tendencies. Since my appointment, I have also been temporarily acting as head of news.. Today, I am trying to give them maximum freedom. I don’t read their storylines and I don’t tell them how to frame stories. I make a different type of analysis – I observe daily ratings, watch what other TV channels have to offer, make not of what we’re not covering, etc... I do not want to have journalist suffering from self-censorship, nor do I want to see agitated ones. I want smart, interesting, alert journalists who think differently, assess things critically.”³⁴

Aftermath of elections

The results of the 21 May parliamentary elections gave the ruling National Movement an overwhelming victory and a constitutional majority in the legislature. As the various media monitoring groups noted in their reports, nearly all TV companies, both quantitatively and qualitatively favoured the ruling party.

Media managers have their own take on the issue of balance in pre-election period. They argue that since the closure of Imedi TV, opposition parties accused the media and authorities of conspiring against them, which lead to some opposition groups boycotting Rustavi2 and Mze. United Opposition leader Levan Gachechiladze

³² Interviews with Journalists from TV-Station GPB conducted in May-June 2008.

³³ Interviews with Journalists from TV-Station Rustavi2 conducted in May-June 2008.

³⁴ Interview with L. Kubaneishvili conducted on June 17, 2008.

famously dubbed journalists of these channels “riff-raff” working for “the machinery of lies”.

“The boycott by more radical part of the opposition lead to imbalance in news programming,” explains Mate Kirvalidze, “we tried to cover their activities, but were refused interviews or comments, which obviously lead to imbalance. ...so this was not our fault or the fault of the journalists or the station *per se*.”³⁵

The Georgian Public Broadcaster, by contrast, was observed not be biased in favour of the government. “During the media monitoring of the last six weeks of the election campaign, Public TV devoted similar proportions of its political and election prime-time news coverage to the United Opposition (18%) and the National Movement (17%),” the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission said.³⁶

Despite this, on 27 May, the opposition coalition protested in front of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) accusing it of bias and failing to provide proper coverage of a post-election protest rally on 26 May. Members of the opposition coalition went into the general director’s office and accused him of fulfilling the authorities’ instructions. “I want to tell you that Kintsurashvili had to resign after the people demanded it because this was Saakashvili TV. Nothing has changed here after your appointment,” United Opposition leading member Zviad Dzidziguri told Kubaneishvili in front of TV cameras.³⁷

Kubaneishvili called this action of opposition “a typical instance of pressure on Public TV, pressure on media”. Chair of the GPB board of trustees Irakli Tripolski resigned on 30 May, citing as the reason the channel’s non-objective coverage and the board’s lack of control over its activities. “Providing comprehensive information about developments in the country – especially today – should be the goal of this TV station, but unfortunately the general director either cannot or is not doing this,”³⁸ Tripolski said. Levan Gakheladze, who

³⁵ Interview with M. Kirvalidze conducted on June 18, 2008.

³⁶ International Election Observation Mission (2008). Georgia — Parliamentary Elections: May 21, 2008, www.osce.org/item/31268.html

³⁷ Public TV Board Chair Resigns. Civil Georgia. Tbilisi. May 27, 2008. available at www.civil.ge

³⁸ Chairman of Public TV Board Resigns, Civil Georgia, Tbilisi, May 30, 2008. available at www.civil.ge

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was among other five candidates, was nominated by the authorities as a board member was elected chairman after Tripolski's departure.

Other developments followed as well, including the suspension of the most popular talk-show "Prime-Time" on 17 June. It was originally reported that the show would return to the airwaves after the European Football Championship, but it has not been seen since.

Here we will simply mention several other major developments following the 21 May parliamentary elections and will not speculate as to the causes of these events:

20 June: the weekly current affairs programme "Shvidi Dghe" ("7 Days"), produced by the Akhali Droeba studio and compiled largely by journalists who previously worked at Imedi TV, was suspended. The company that gave them equipment for the programme demanded its return because the studio allegedly violated the terms of its contract. Rusudan Tskhomelidze, founder of "Shvidi Dghe", said that the equipment, according to the contract, had been given to the studio for a one-year term.

26 June: the bi-weekly program "Dghis Komentari" ("Comment of the Day") on the Georgian Public Broadcaster was suspended till September because of the summer holidays.

26 June: Mze halted broadcasts of its "Mzera" news bulletins and announced it would become an entertainment-only channel. Mze journalists and producers of the program were transferred to Rustavi2 and Imedi TV Companies.

26 June: Kavkasia TV director Nino Jangirashvili said that three businessmen had pulled their ads from the station because of the pressure from the Financial Police. "Others are asked to visit the Financial Police to have a conversation," Jangirashvili said, going on to allege that the government was trying to financially weaken the nation's only TV station that regularly airs government criticism. Kavkasia's ratings soared after Imedi's closure, resulting initially in an advertising revenue windfall.

Currently, the only political talk show on nationwide TV stations is the "Hard Talk"-esque "Triangle" on Rustavi2, hosted by journalists Eka Kvesitadze and Nino Japiashvili. Kavkasia's "Studia Spektri", which reaches only Tbilisi, serves as a platform for opposition politicians.

Conclusions

As we mentioned in the beginning of this study media cannot be 100% independent. By definition, the media – Georgian or otherwise – is a business and should have transparent and accountable structures. The problem with the Georgian broadcast media derives from the fact that neither the ownership, nor the accountability procedures are set out clearly. The owner of media given media outlet has the most important role in this process. They select staff, appoint top managers and producers, determine the programming and, most importantly, determine the mission of the television station. All journalists interviewed say that the owners should be a defender and a guarantor of high professional standards of journalists working in their respective outlets. But how can this happen when information about the media owners is not transparent? Ideally, the owner should be on the side of professionalism and his audience and not the ally of those who are in power or trying to be in power. But journalists say that currently the owner is responsible for the media content and not for the quality of media content.

According to Levan Ramishvili, the head of the Liberty Institute, an influential pro-government NGO, one of the main reasons for the media's loss of independence is that media magnates, oligarchs and the government have friendly relations. "It is the involvement of media magnates in politics on one hand, and the control of media magnates by the government on the other hand – plus unprofessional journalists – that cause the problem with media in Georgia today".³⁹

If we look at the broad picture of Georgian media and take into consideration that the most popular means of receiving information is television – and Rustavi2 in particular – we can state that the pre-election coverage was not impartial and was oriented more towards positive coverage of the ruling party. This hinders the audience from receiving fair, accurate and impartial information, which is especially important during the elections for the reason of getting possibility to make an informed choice.

So, how do we overcome the threats to freedom of expression in Georgia given that the authorities do not allow media to be totally free, the opposition blames the media for their own failures, producers – not

³⁹ Newspaper 24 Saati. March 11 2005.

Independence of the media and Relative degrees of control in Georgia

journalists – frame the news, journalists exercise extreme self-censorship and the public is simply not ready to accept western-style neutral reporting? Journalists say the best way to improve the media is to elevate the level of professionalism among journalists. However, they emphasize that without the free environment that government is obliged to create and editorial independence that owners should provide, the development of professionalism is if not impossible, then very difficult.

The long-term solution may be the creation of the new brand of journalists, who will take their roles as public watchdogs seriously and create room for alternative public debate and critical journalism. Until this happens, it may be the time for the Georgian public to demand that every single interested party – ruling or opposition – to keep its “hands off” journalists and agree on certain rules of game, which will dictate a new political culture in society: a political culture free from all types of boycotting and labelling journalists and media outlets as pro-government or pro-opposition. After all, what matters in democracy is that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference regardless of frontiers.

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Nini Gogiberidze

Accessibility of media for political groups and candidates

Introduction

Democratic elections are based on the informed choice of the voters. Accessibility of media, as an inseparable part of democratic elections, implies equal opportunities to attract audience attention by the parties participating in political debates. This requirement *per se* does not imply that all political parties or candidates should enjoy equal access to media during the pre-election period.¹ Such a goal is unachievable in practice. Here we are talking about the existence of such mechanisms that would restrict various political parties from wielding undue influence on public opinion and, by extension, on political processes. The appearance of the institution of media ownership in modern society has increased the role the owners of mass media outlets in political processes. In reality, the owner of a media outlet is a new political player who possesses a unique mechanism of influence on formation of public opinion. It is proceeding precisely from this fact that the role of the state in the sphere of mass media regulation does not limit itself only to the principle of non-interference. The state has a positive obligation to make mass media accessible for all kinds of opinion – including opposing opinions – and through this ensure diversity of information.²

¹ Thorgeisdottir H. “Access to Media as a Precondition for Democratic elections”. Council of Europe. *Science and Technique of Democracy*. No. 43. Bucharest. February 2006. available at www.coe.int

² Thorgeisdottir H. “Access to Media as a Precondition for Democratic elections”. Council of Europe. *Science and Technique of Democracy*. No. 43. Bucharest. February 2006. available at www.coe.int

In a democratic society citizens have right to accessibility to media that is free not only from state influence but also performs a public oversight function and often opposes interests of owners of mass media. This type of media requires professional journalists who understand the public's demand to be informed about significant state matters in appropriate manner and is able to inform the population without any self-censorship. In such circumstances, the accessibility of mass media is of questionable value, as on the one hand the mass media owner, deriving from ownership, has the right to control the accessibility of different opinions through his respective outlet. On the other hand society has the right to a pluralistic media environment.

Accessibility to a pluralistic media environment becomes especially important during elections. During this period, the mass media can determine the public's image of a candidate, shape opinions on political alternatives and support holding public debates.³

On 21 May 2008 preliminary parliamentary elections were held. The ruling party, the United National Movement, scored a landslide victory and won a constitutional majority of seats. The campaign proceeded against the backdrop of a variety of protest rallies, hunger strikes, opposition boycotts of TV stations, new developments in Georgia's quest to integrate with Euro-Atlantic institutions and tension in relations between Russia and Georgia. The preliminary conclusions of the International Monitoring Mission state: "The media, in general, offered a diversity of opinions that allowed voters to make better informed choice on election day," though it went on to question to what extent the mass media provided political groups and candidates with equal conditions and objective coverage. "Most [news] programmes were under the strong influence of the owners and management... Every nationwide TV station was somehow under the influence of candidates and political parties, a fact which hindered objective cov-

³ Maiola, G. "Methods for media analysis in election observation". Council of Europe. *Science and Technique of Democracy*. No. 43. Bucharest. February 2006. available at www.coe.int

erage of every election participant as stipulated [by the Georgian law on Public Broadcasting],”⁴ it said.

The purpose of this survey is to sum up results of media monitoring conducted by various local and international organizations for the 21 May 2008 parliamentary elections and draw conclusions as to whether TV was accessible to various and diverse political groups and candidates to such an extent that the voters could to make an informed choice. We will start analysing the above mentioned topic with a review of the TV stations under study: Rustavi2, Mze, Public Broadcaster, Kavkasia and Imedi. This will allow us to examine which TV media were given preference by the voters during the 2008 pre-election campaign period. Afterwards we will examine statistics revealed by media-monitoring groups regarding news coverage as well as the placement of political advertisements. Finally we will analyse the results of the survey and summarize access to mass media during the 2008 campaign.

Which channels were the voters watching?

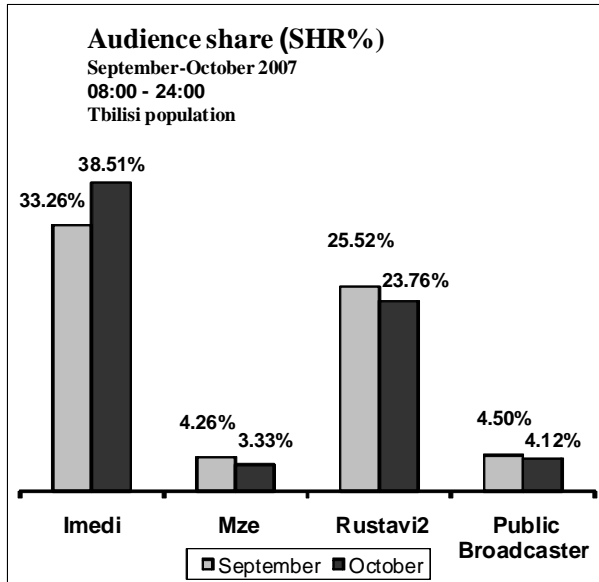
Imedi TV was not broadcasting ahead of the parliamentary election following the channel’s forced shutdown in November 2007. It should be pointed out that before Imedi was closed, it held the leading position in terms of audience share (33-38%), as well as average minute rating (9-12%) and was followed by Rustavi2.⁵ The audience share of other TV channels was so small that in reality only these two channels determined what Georgian TV viewers saw.

Diagram 1 reflects distribution of audience share in September-October 2007 in Tbilisi by channel. From the diagram it can be seen that against the backdrop of the political events that took place in Georgia during this period, loyalty towards Imedi was quite high – 33-38%.

⁴ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – parliamentary elections. May 21, 2008. 12-13. available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

⁵ Results of the survey were exclusively provided by TV MR GE, holder of AGB Nielsen Media Research license in Georgia. For short description of the methodology of survey of auditorium carried out by the company see appendix #1.

Diagram 1⁶



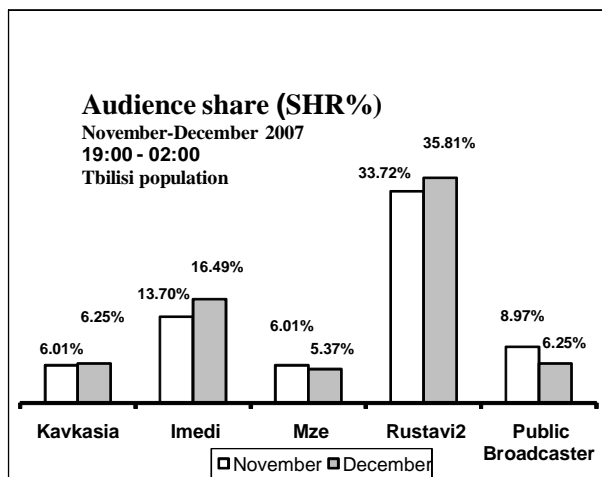
Changes in the main tendencies of audience viewing started in November 2007, the state of emergency under which private TV stations were not allowed to broadcast news was lifted on 16 November. Imedi remained off the air, so the audience loyal to this station shifted to other channels. From 17 November Tbilisi’s Kavkasia TV (which had been off the air altogether under the state of emergency) resumed broadcasting and aired generous amounts of government criticism. On 19 November TV MR GE, the holder of AGB Nielsen Media Research’s licence in Georgia, started monitoring Kavkasia’s ratings. “Despite the fact that Kavkasia does not have a wide coverage area and broadcasts only during ‘primetime’ and only in Tbilisi, in this period it still had some impact on public opinion. While the ‘primetime’, audience share of Kavkasia did not exceed ten percent, this is still a very large share for such a small channel. In short, after Imedi was

⁶ Source: TV MR GE. Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research.

shut down, many viewers switched to Kavkasia,” says Nana Aburjanidze, director of TV MR GE.⁷

Diagram 2 reflects the distribution of Tbilisi audience by TV channel in November-December 2007, during “primetime”. We can see from the diagram that after Imedi went off the air, audience share increased on every other channel. In other words Imedi viewers were distributed not only to Kavkasia or Rustavi2. The audience of other channels also increased significantly. For example, the audience of the Public Broadcaster increased by 4%, as well as audience of Mze.

Diagram 2⁸

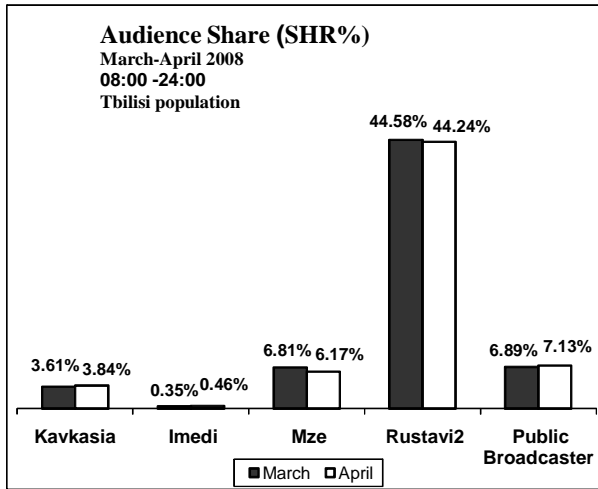


Tendencies of audience viewing ahead of the parliamentary elections of May 2008 were radically different. During the run-up to the election (March, April), the leader in average minute rating (approximately 9-10%) as well as in audience share (44%) was Rustavi2. Accordingly, other Georgian channels received a very low audience as Rustavi2 dominating the ratings game (see diagram #3).

⁷ In-depth interview with Nana Aburjanidze held in Tbilisi on 23 June 2008.

⁸ Source: TV MR GE. Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research.

Diagram 3⁹



How did the Georgian mass media cover the activities of political parties and candidates?

We will discuss indicators of coverage of the activities of political parties and candidates by the Georgian mass media shortly after the results of local and international media-monitoring groups are published and/or provided. For complete analysis we will single out events that developed around each television station and evaluate news coverage statistics.

Georgian Public Broadcaster

Two months before elections the parliament of Georgia appointed a new Board of Trustees of the Public Broadcaster, which in turn elected a new director-general. “These processes were mostly the result of agreement between political parties than of unsatisfactory work of Public Broadcaster,” the new director-general, Levan

⁹ Source: TV MR GE. Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research.

Kubaneishvili, said.¹⁰ From December 2007 the opposition stepped up its criticism of the management of the Public Broadcaster. The opposition declared that the Public Broadcaster was biased and performed the function of government “satellite”. Political passions that developed in parallel with the 5 January 2008 presidential elections, as well as events held before obliged the government to hold negotiations with the political opposition in order to defuse the situation.

One of the topics of the negotiations was a change of management at the Public Broadcaster. Part of the civil society sector did not agree with this process. In an announcement published by Liberty Institute, an influential pro-government NGO, we read: “We are obliged to remind government and opposition of the law on the Public Broadcaster... to remind them that the Public Broadcaster is not under the command of the state and government... In a democratic country the resignation of the director-general of the Public Broadcaster cannot be the subject of bargaining”.¹¹ Nonetheless, an agreement was achieved and the 2008 parliamentary elections were covered by a Public Broadcaster under new management. “In the Board of Trustees some members were thought of as ‘favourites’ of the political opposition and others as ‘favourites’ of the government. However, I can state with full responsibility that none of the members of the board belong to any political party,” said Levan Gakheladze, the acting chair of the board.¹²

Did the new management of Public Broadcaster have enough time to prepare sufficiently for parliamentary elections? The time was limited. However, unlike other TV stations, the Public Broadcaster was prepared for the poll. On the initiative of the Board of Trustees and the new director-general, a “memorandum of understanding” was concluded between the Public Broadcaster and political subjects, which stipulated unbiased and balanced coverage of the activities of different parties ahead of the poll. The Public Broadcaster offered new rules of the game to election participants, as well as to society in general. As a result, during the coverage of campaign, the Public Broadcaster appeared to be the most objective in its coverage. This was noted in the conclusion of the OSCE Monitoring Mission: “...in TV news

¹⁰ In-depth interview with Levan Kubaneishvili held in Tbilisi on 17 June 2008.

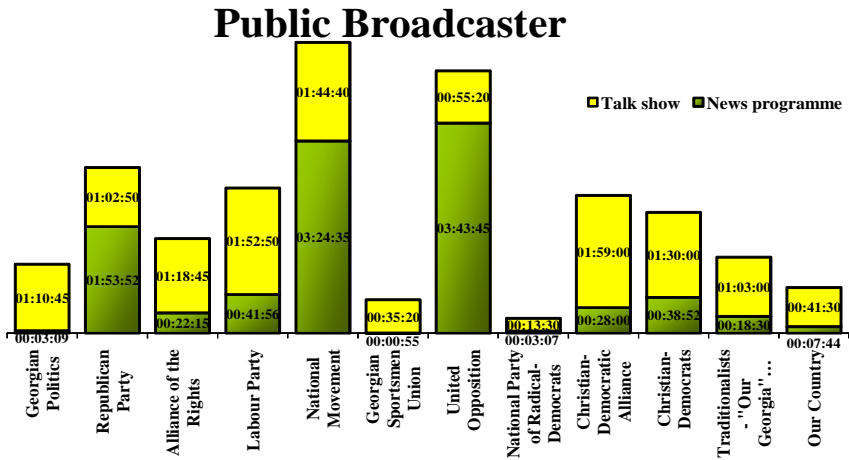
¹¹ Information is available at www.civil.ge

¹² In-depth interview with Levan Gakheladze held in Tbilisi on 17 June 2008.

programmes of stations that were monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR election Monitoring Mission, balance was not maintained during coverage of election campaigns. Most of the airtime almost on every channel was offered to the United National Movement. The only exception was the Georgian Public Broadcaster...¹³

During the campaign, media monitoring was carried out by several local research institutes.¹⁴ Central Election Committee of Georgia ordered monitoring of Georgian TV channels from 10 April to 12 May to from the company Primetime. According to Primetime's data (see diagram 4), "in terms of the time assigned during the pre-election period and especially on 21 April (memorandum), the Public Broadcaster stood out as the most balanced and most broadly covered the activities of each election participant... In terms of time granted in talk shows and political debates, Public Broadcaster stood out as mostly balanced, where every election participant was offered live broadcasting."¹⁵

Diagram 4¹⁶



¹³ The report about preliminary results and conclusions. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary Elections. 21 May 2008, available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

¹⁴ For short review of methodology see appendix #2.

¹⁵ Information available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge

¹⁶ Diagram available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge Parliamentary elections 2008. pre-election TV-monitoring. summary report. report week I-IV (10 April 10- 12 May 2008).

Accessibility of media for political groups and candidates

We can observe slightly different dynamics in reports provided by the Research Company IPM. From 9 April 2008, the day elections were called, IPM started monitoring Georgian TV media. “The Public Broadcaster was the only station that tried to keep balance in terms of coverage of election participants. During this period Public TV offered airtime to every election participant in the news, as well as in talk shows. Despite this fact, according to our observation, the National Movement led slightly in coverage in terms of quantitative as well as qualitative indicators,” said Khatuna Bakradze, the head of IPM’s Media Monitoring Division.¹⁷ According to statistics provided by IPM, during this period (from 9 April to 20 May) the sum of the topics (news, live broadcasts, debates) about different political parties was 1,438. Topics about United National Movement (518) came in ahead of topics about other parties (see table 1).

Table 1

Indicator of information about election participants on Public Broadcaster 09.04.2008 – 20.05 2008	
Election participants	amount
United Opposition	306
United National Movement	518
Georgian Republican Party	207
Giorgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	94
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	79
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrialists"	53
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	58
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	57
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	16
Political Party "Our Country"	25
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Politics"	13
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	12
total	1438

The National Movement (26 hrs. 11 min.) was leading in length parameters on Public Broadcaster, though the United Opposition was not far behind (20 hrs. 28 min.) (See table #2).

Existing differences between monitoring results conducted by different groups may be due to the different methodologies or different period of observation.

¹⁷ In-depth interview with Khatuna Bakradze held in Tbilisi on 23 June 2008.

Table 2

Length parameters (in hours) of election participants on Public Broadcaster 09.04.2008 – 20.05 2008		
Election participants	hour	minute
United Opposition	20	28
United National Movement	26	11
Georgian Republican Party	14	39
Giorgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	9	38
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	11	34
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrials"	8	25
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	9	53
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	7	6
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	8	32
Political Party "Our Country"	8	23
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Policy"	6	7
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	8	38

In its preliminary report, the OSCE Monitoring Mission says that according to media monitoring conducted by the mission, the Georgian Public Broadcaster conceded equal time to the United Opposition (18%) and the United National Movement (17%) during the highest rating time. However, in the same report there were some remarks about the way that parties were covered in the media: “while coverage of the ruling party was mostly positive, coverage of the main opposition group was neutral.”¹⁸

The Gorby polling company analysed the way parties were covered in the media for Transparency International – Georgia. From 9 April to 20 May Gorby evaluated 3,942 election topics shown on every TV channel. This evaluation revealed 5,171 different “tones” of coverage and on this basis concluded that during this period “most of the topics (96.6) shown stood out as neutral. Partial tone was detected 175 times: 32 negative and 143 positive”.¹⁹ According to the results of this research company, in 1,695 times a journalistic tone was detected while covering topics on political parties. In most cases (1,664 times) the tone was neutral. Only twice a negative tone was detected on the Public Broadcaster – towards Labour Party (1) and the United Opposition (1). Obvious positive bias was detected

¹⁸ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary elections. 21 May 2008. 13. available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

¹⁹ Gorby. *results of pre-election monitoring*. 9 April – 21 May 2008.

29 times: 27 towards United National Movement and twice towards the United Opposition.²⁰

Rustavi2 TV

Rustavi2 TV enjoyed the highest audience share in the pre-election period (44%); it was also boycotted for a time by the United Opposition because of its allegedly biased coverage. On 16 February 2008, after remarks made by one of the leaders of opposition, Levan Gachechiladze, on the talk show Primetime, where he called journalists of the channel “pocket journalists” (i.e. in the authorities’ pocket), Rustavi2 demanded an apology and temporarily refused to cooperate with the United Opposition. Still, news programmes reported extensively on the opposition spectrum, though journalists had problems getting interviews with United Opposition leaders and on several occasions found themselves the targets of physical abuse at the hands of opposition protestors. Finally, on 22 March 2008 the United Opposition coalition, which included eight parties, boycotted Rustavi2 and Mze and refused to give any interviews except during live broadcasts. The boycott of Rustavi2 lasted until April 28.

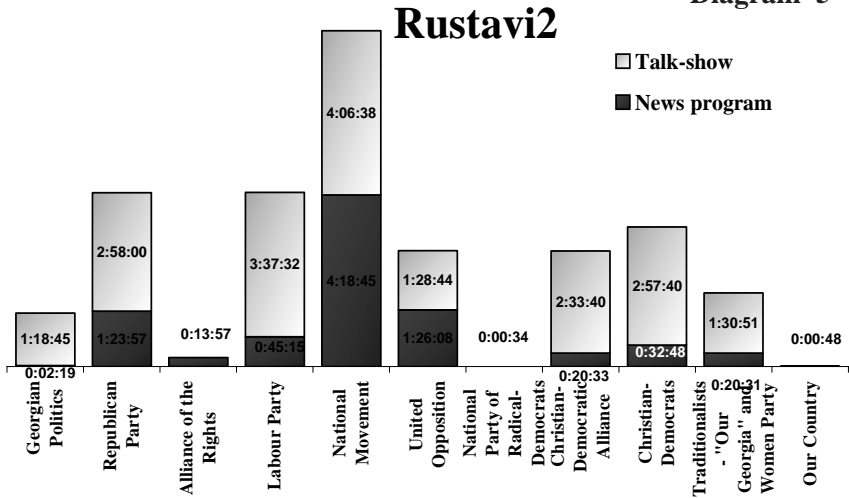
The OSCE Monitoring Mission preliminary conclusion states the following: “Rustavi2 and Mze offered generous positive airtime to state officials. In light of verbal and physical assaults on journalists of these TV channels by the main opposition bloc and its supporters, Rustavi2 and Mze boycotted the United Opposition in their news programmes... In return the United Opposition boycotted Rustavi2 and Mze and accused them of favouring the government, agreeing to speak to the channel only live. Despite the fact that Rustavi2 and Mze started covering the opposition bloc in their news programmes, election events of the government and United National Movement prevailed over topics dedicated to the opposition.”²¹

According to the media-monitoring conducted by the Primetime analytical centre, the National Movement led in terms of news coverage,

²⁰ Gorby. *results of pre-election monitoring*. 9 April – 21 May 2008.

²¹ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary elections. 21 May 2008. 13. available at <http://www.osce.org/odhr>

Diagram 5²²



followed by the Republican Party and the United Opposition. Talk shows were more or less representative as far as almost every large election participant had the opportunity to participate in them (see diagram 5).

The monitoring results produced by IPM show that from 9 April to 20 May, the obvious leader in terms of airtime on Rustavi2 as the United National Movement, with 45:05 hours, followed by the Republican Party, with 22:03 hours (see table 3).

Table 3

Amount of information (in hours) about election participants on Rustavi2 09.04.2008 – 20.05.2008		
Election participants	hour	minute
United Opposition	21	28
United National Movement	45	5
Georgian Republican Party	22	3
Giorgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	15	40
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	17	5
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrialists"	6	3
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	9	35
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	11	45
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	0	32
Political Party "Our Country"	1	1
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Policy"	8	2
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	0	0

²² Diagram available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge Parliamentary elections 2008. pre-election TV-monitoring, summary report, report week I-IV (10 April – 12 May 2008)

According to the data provided by research company *Gorby* on the tone of coverage of political parties on Rustavi2 from 9 April to 20 May, a tone in the reporting could be detected 1,584. In most cases (1,518) the tone was neutral. On Rustavi2 positively biased tone was detected 59 times – among them 58 in favour of the United National Movement and once towards the Republican Party was detected. According to survey by *Gorb7*, on Rustavi2 only seven negative tones were detected – twice towards the Republican Party, three times towards the United Opposition and once each towards the Labour Party and National Movement.²³

Mze TV

Mze TV, like Rustavi2, was boycotted by the United Opposition. “Working in regime of boycott from one part of opposition distorted the general picture of media-balance. However, this was not our channel’s fault, the fault of the newsroom or the journalists. This situation took shape independently of us when part of the opposition decided not to have any contact with the media and openly demanded that we not cover their activities. This was insulting for us, and a problem as well, because it is good for us when our programmes include all viewpoints and maintain balance. This is our own ambition and it is demanded by our sense of professionalism,” Mate Kirvalidze,²⁴ Mze’s former head of news, said. The United Opposition called off its boycott of Mze on 27 April.

During the campaign, Mze did not air debate programmes and its news coverage was dominated by the ruling National Movement. Primetime’s monitoring of Mze from 9 August to 21 May showed that the National Movement enjoyed a solid lead in terms of news coverage (5:03 hours total). (see diagram 6).

According to the results provided by IPM’s media monitoring division, it is clear that Mze granted the United National Movement the most time in their news programmes (see table #4).

²³ *Gorby. Final results of pre-election monitoring. 9 April 2008 –21 May 2008.*

²⁴ In-depth interview with Mate Kirvalidze held in Tbilisi on 18 June 2008.

Diagram 6²⁵

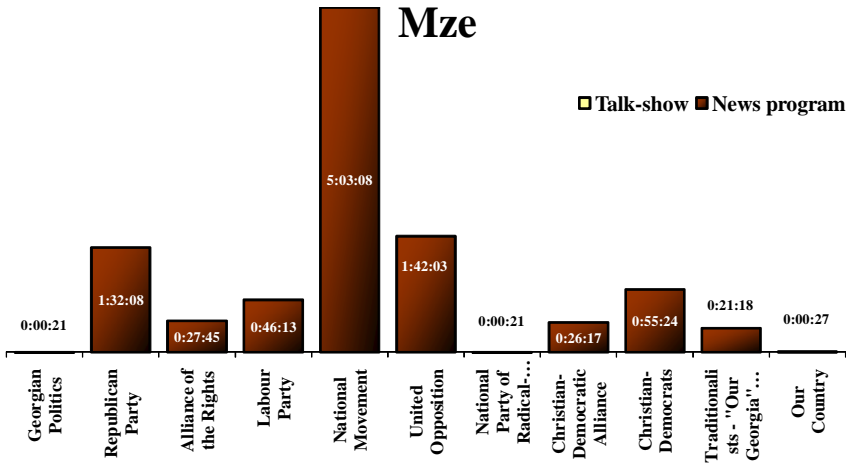


Table 4

Amount of information (in hours) about election participants on Mze 09.04.2008 – 20.05.2008		
Election participants	hours	minutes
United Opposition	6	9
United National Movement	20	19
Georgian Republican Party	5	40
Giorgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	4	17
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	3	52
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrialists"	2	1
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	1	51
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	1	31
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	0	12
Political Party "Our Country"	0	21
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Policy"	0	14
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	0	14

As for the tone of coverage, it was largely neutral- 1192 cases out of 1238. In 43 cases a positively biased tone was detected: in 41 cases towards the National Movement, once towards the Labour Party and once towards United Opposition. A total of three negative tones were detected: once towards the Labour Party and twice towards the United Opposition.²⁶

²⁵ Diagram available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge Parliamentary elections 2008. pre-election TV-monitoring, summary report. report week I-IV. 10 April – 12 May 2008.

²⁶ Gorby. *Final results of pre-election monitoring*. 9 April – 21 May, 2008.

Kavkasia

After Imedi's closure, Kavkasia TV came to serve as an important outlet and platform for opposition parties, particularly ahead of the January presidential and May parliamentary elections. According to the OSCE Monitoring Mission's preliminary findings, unlike other broadcasters "Kavkasia was a platform for the opposition. Most of the time offered for coverage of election campaign, was assigned to the United Opposition coalition and sharp criticism of the United National Movement abounded".²⁷ This led to the irritation of other opposition parties. For example, at the end of March the leader of the Labour Party, Shalva Natelashvili, accused the channel of favouring the untied opposition and dubbed it "Grechikha TV".²⁸ Despite such criticism Kavkasia in fact covered the activities of almost every opposition party.

According to the results of the media monitoring carried out by the company Primetime, "Kavkasia gave the most airtime to the United Opposition. Kavkasia offered a record 12 hours and 27 minutes to the United Opposition in its talk shows"²⁹ (see diagram 7).

The results of company IPM coincide with the results provided by Primetime. In this case the total leader in terms of the amount of information in news programmes and talk-shows was the United Opposition (23 hrs. 35 mins.). (see table #5).

Regarding tones of journalists, according to the results of the research company *Gorby*, the highest number of negative tones was detected on Kavkasia (20 in total), all of them towards National Movement. In total, 584 cases of the tone of journalist detected on Kavkasia were analysed: most of them (558) were neutral; in six cases a positively biased tone was detected, among

²⁷ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary elections. 21 May 2008. 14. available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

²⁸ "Grechikha" (Russian for "buckwheat") is the nickname of United Opposition leader Levan Gachechiladze. Information available at www.media.ge

²⁹ Information available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge

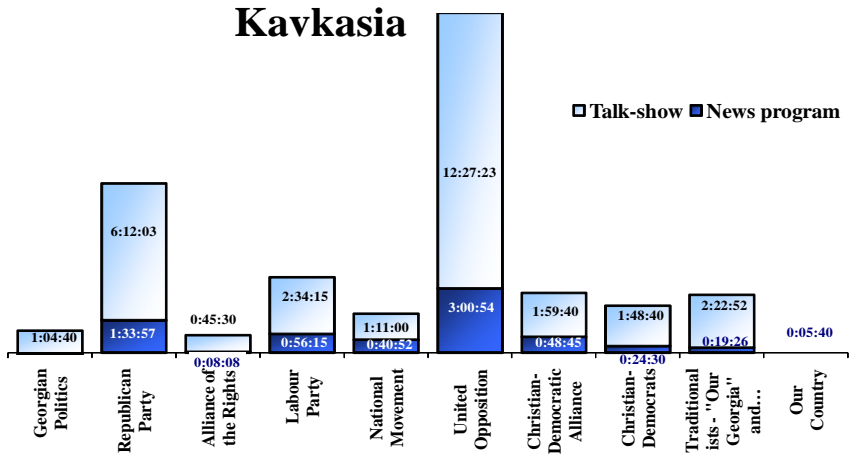


Table 5

Amount of information (in hours) about election participants on Kavkasia 09.04.2008 – 20.05 2008		
Election participants	hours	minutes
United Opposition	23	35
United National Movement	8	50
Georgian Republican Party	20	9
Georgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	13	58
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	16	18
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrialists"	8	27
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	14	29
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	10	6
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	0	2
Political Party "Our Country"	0	9
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Policy"	1	8
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	0	0

them three towards the United Opposition, once towards the Labour Party, one towards Georgian Politics and one towards the National Movement.³¹

³⁰ Diagram available at Central Election Committee web-page www.cec.gov.ge
6. Parliamentary elections 2008, pre-election TV-monitoring, summary report, report week I-IV (10 April – 12 May 2008).

³¹ Gorby. *Final results of pre-election monitoring*. 9 April 2008 –21 May 2008.

How was the pre-election campaign carried out?

Article 73¹ of the Electoral Code of Georgia regulates the provision of information during pre-election campaigns. It stipulates that every commercial broadcaster is obliged to provide every election participant “90 seconds every 3 hours free of charge and without discrimination”; the Public Broadcaster “is obliged to air campaign advertisements in the amount of 60 seconds every hour”.³²

Commercial broadcasters, as well as the Public Broadcaster took into account the above-mentioned requirements during the April-May 2008 pre-election period and offered political parties and candidates both free and paid advertising time. However “the high price of paid ads limited the election participants in their campaign options. The price charged by the leading TV channels for political advertisements was ten times greater than the cost of commercial advertising.”³³

Full monitoring of campaign ads was carried out by TV MR GE, holder of an AGB Nielsen Media Research licence in Georgia.³⁴ The Georgian Public Broadcaster aired advertisements of all election participants without exception. Other channels showed advertisements only of major political parties. Given the complexity of advertisement monitoring, TV MR GE could not distinguish between paid and free of charge advertisements. Nonetheless, the company gave us an idea of what it would cost if every advertisement were paid. In this case investments made by election participants in the same period (9 April– 20 May) are received from official “price-lists” of advertisement of the same period (see table #6).

From 9 April to 20 May, a total of 19,981 paid and free of charge political advertisements aired on Georgian TV stations. The most advertisements were placed by Alliance of the Rights –

³² Election Code of Georgia, article 73¹, paragraph 2 and 3. Available at www.parliament.ge

³³ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*, International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary elections, 21 May 2008. 128 available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

³⁴ For methodology see appendix #1.

Table 6³⁵

TV station	Election Participant	Number of demonstrations	Duration (in seconds)	Investment
Public Broadcaster	National Movement	1,273	32,837	51,331 \$
	Alliance of the Rights	1,621	25,411	38,446 \$
	United Opposition	967	24,194	36,584 \$
	Labour Party	718	23,457	36,942 \$
	Party of Republicans	1,026	22,020	35,242 \$
	Georgian Policy	186	6,505	9,567 \$
	Our Country	1,013	9,015	13,456 \$
	Christian-Democratic Alliance	475	7,798	12,697 \$
	National Party of Radical-Democrats	269	8,318	12,756 \$
	Christian-Democrats	292	7,619	12,150 \$
	Traditionalists	521	7,390	11,791 \$
	Sportsmen Union	668	6,677	10,132 \$
Public Broadcaster total		9,029	181,241	281,093 \$
Mze	National Movement	728	22,430	15,091 \$
	Alliance of the Rights	862	15,644	4,583 \$
	United Opposition	820	15,209	4,502 \$
	Labour Party	372	14,662	4,437 \$
	Party of Republicans	540	12,459	3,444 \$
	Christian-Democrats	129	3,872	481 \$
Mze total		3,451	84,276	32,538 \$
Rustavi2	National Movement	1,257	39,246	529,743 \$
	Alliance of the Rights	915	15,840	6,256 \$
	United Opposition	842	15,402	6,744 \$
	Labour Party	365	14,798	5,607 \$
	Party of Republicans	548	12,852	6,677 \$
	Christian-Democrats	173	4,715	26,584 \$
Rustavi 2 total		4,100	102,853	581,610 \$
Kavkasia	National Movement	188	9,351	17,713 \$
	Alliance of the Rights	414	7,266	9,693 \$
	United Opposition	362	9,776	14,892 \$
	Labour Party	204	7,201	9,380 \$
	Party of Republicans	355	8,252	11,038 \$
	Christian-Democratic Alliance	7	93	248 \$
	Christian-Democrats	12	201	573 \$
Traditionalists	105	1,043	2,627 \$	
Kavkasia total		1,647	43,183	66,164 \$

Table 7³⁶

Election Participant	Number of demonstrations	Duration (in seconds)	Investment
United Opposition	3,760	113,236	618,954
United National Movement	4,261	73,211	63,924
Georgian Republican Party	3,327	73,009	67,946
Giorgi Targamadze - Christian-Democrats	1,922	69,400	61,282
Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party	2,738	64,010	62,000
Alliance of the Rights "Topadze-Industrials"	186	6,505	9,567
Traditionalists - "Our Georgia" and Women Party	1,013	9,015	13,456
Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	495	7,998	13,471
National Party of Radical-Democrats of the whole Georgia	269	8,318	12,756
Political Party "Our Country"	716	19,687	42,621
Political Union of Citizens "Georgian Policy"	626	8,433	14,418
Political Union "Georgian Sportsmen Union"	668	6,677	10,132
Sum	19,981	459,499	990,528 \$

³⁵ Source: TV MR GE. Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research.

³⁶ Selected TV channels are – Imedi, Mze, Rustavi2, Public Broadcaster, Kavkasia, Adjara, Alania, and Pirveli Stereo. Source: TV MR GE. Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research.

“Topadze-Industrialists” (4,261) and by the timing (113,236 seconds) and sum paid for the advertisement (\$618,954) the leader was The United National Movement (see table 7).

Conclusions

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, any democratic elections are based on the informed choice of the voter. One of the sources of information is television and it is on the basis of this information that the voter forms his/her opinion about parties and candidates and, ultimately, makes his/her final choice.

The aim of this survey was to find out whether Georgian TV media was accessible to diverse and different political parties and candidates during the 2008 parliamentary election campaign and whether voters could make an informed choice on this basis. According to the OSCE-led monitoring mission, “In general media provided a diversity of options that allowed voters to make a more informed choice on election day”.³⁷

Despite this assessment, the survey evidenced that on most Georgian TV channels the ruling National Movement was given the most airtime. On the one hand, it is not strange for the ruling party to receive “coverage superiority” in comparison with other election participants. In spite of pre-election battles, it stays in power and continues ruling the country. “This problem is especially common to some central and western European and former Soviet Union countries, where civil servants are quite well covered while executing their ‘official duties’.”³⁸ What is the way out then?

³⁷ *Report on preliminary results and conclusions*. International Election Monitoring Mission to Georgia – Parliamentary elections. 21 May 2008. 14. available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

³⁸ Lang Y. *Media and Elections*. Handbook. Council of Europe Publishing. June 1999. 25 („This problem is particularly pronounced in some countries in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where candidates in office receive very substantial amounts of extra coverage for ostensibly fulfilling their ‘official duties’”).

An original solution for Georgian media on 2008 parliamentary elections was proposed by the Georgian Public Broadcaster. It put forward a “memorandum of understanding” with every political party, according to which reports on campaign activities and opportunities for politicians to present ideas were distinguished from each other; each election participant was assigned one and half minutes of coverage of its pre-election activities; election participants were assigned time to present their platforms and time for debates; they also had the opportunity to evaluate the work of the Public Broadcaster during a live weekly programme.³⁹ “In principle with this memorandum we could distinguish between the activities of officials and the campaign activities of election participants. At the same time we allotted some time to every election participant in almost every news programme. In the 8pm bulletin of ‘Moambe’ news, eight 29-30 minutes were allotted for coverage of election participants. I cannot say that the Public Broadcaster was interesting to watch, but the balance was kept,” Kubaneishvili said.⁴⁰

Regardless of such an innovative approach, the radical part of the opposition accused the Georgian Public Broadcaster of pro-government bias. After the elections the opposition was displeased with what they called insufficient coverage of a protest rally on 26 May and demanded the resignation of newly appointed director-general of the Public Broadcaster. Finally, the chairman of the Board of Trustees, Irakli Tripolski, who had been nominated to the board by the opposition, resigned his post.

“Unfortunately the events that took place on 26 May in Tbilisi made some opposition groups think that it is possible to revise their political defeat – which in itself is regrettable – through demonstrations. After the ‘success’ of 26 May, when unexpectedly tens of thousands of people took to the streets, the opposition tried to build on this ‘success’. As it seems, leaders of the political opposition had the idea that development of this success was possible at the ex-

³⁹ “Memorandum of collaboration and understanding between Public Broadcaster and parties and unions participating in the parliamentary elections of 21 May 2008”. Available at www.gpb.ge

⁴⁰ In-depth interview with Levan Kubaneishvili held in Tbilisi on 17 June 2008.

pense of the Public Broadcaster. Why was the Public Broadcaster chosen as a target? Because in the beginning of the year they could gain some political dividends by attacking Public Broadcaster –there was a political deal that led to the reorganization of the channel’s management,” Gakheladze said.⁴¹

Finally, we can evaluate the pre-election programming of the Public Broadcaster as follows: Despite some omissions during news coverage, as well as advertisement placement, the Public Broadcaster was the most accessible space for every election participant.

However, it must be mentioned that almost half of the Georgian TV audience share was watching Rustavi2. This means that most of the voters were watching exactly this channel and had to formulate their point of view about election participants using the information selected by this channel’s editorial staff. As we know, Rustavi2 was dominated by coverage of the National Movement. The fact that the activities of political opposition received less coverage on this channel can be explained in part by some opposition groups boycotted the station, as well as Mze.

The fact that our society and political elite assign every “sin” to the media is indicative of the political culture of a transitional democracy. In reality no-one is above criticism. According to the opposition, they did not try to appeal to the public through Rustavi2 and Mze because they were controlled by the government. Pro-government candidates, meanwhile, refused to appear on debate shows on Kavkasia.

A unipolar broadcasting environment negatively reflects on political and social development. In a genuinely competitive market Kavkasia⁴² probably would have made the 2008 parliamentary campaign battles more competitive. However, this does not mean that society did not have the opportunity to make an informed choice. On 8 May 2008, the company IPResearch published the results of a survey according to which 63% said that they watched pre-election debates and considered them “interesting” and “informative”.⁴³

⁴¹ In-depth interview with Levan Gakheladze held in Tbilisi on 17 June 2008.

⁴² More recently Kavkasia has held only 5% of the audience and only in “primetime”.

⁴³ Information about survey published at www.media.ge. 500 Tbilisi residents took part in the survey.

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Media as a tool of informed choice

Introduction

It is impossible to deny the importance of mass media in modern society. Media has an influence almost on every aspect of social life and plays an important role in the socialization of children and the political choices made by voters. To this day, we do not have a precise answer to the following questions: what is the mechanism of media influence on society? and why does it happen that in some cases mass media is responsible for changes and in some cases its messages fail to make an impact?

The aim of this chapter is to discuss role of media in the context of modern Georgian politics – more concretely we will discuss mass media as a tool for making informed political choices. It would be wrong to share the idea that political information spread by mass media has an immediate influence on the political choices of the electorate. It is obvious that influence of media varies according to each socio-demographic group in society. We will try to explain the forms and mechanisms of influence of mass media in modern Georgian society.

“Media” is a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of outlets – informative and non-informative materials spread by television, radio and press. Since our goal is to evaluate the impact of political information spread by the media, we are not interested in outlets that disseminate non-political information.

The task undertaken by this chapter inevitably requires analysis of public opinion on the role of the media in politics. First of all, the sphere of our interest consists of determining how people view the mass media and the level of trust people have towards political information spread by the mass media during the pre-election period,

as well as those factors that conditioned trust or distrust. Unfortunately, there is a little research in Georgia at present dedicated to functioning of mass media. Therefore, two focus groups and three in-depth interviews were carried out in the framework of the project. Of course, the information obtained is not complete and, as in the case of any qualitative research, we are not able to generalize our data. Nevertheless, these interviews and focus groups enrich our knowledge on how the people see and evaluate the media.

It is important to note that both focus groups and all three interviews were carried out after the announcement of the results of 21 May 2008 parliamentary elections. This circumstance undoubtedly had an impact on the respondents' answers.

In addition, we use the results of "Data Initiatives" of the Caucasus Research Resource Centres. These results are representative for the whole country though they reflect public opinion before the November events, as the fieldwork was carried out in October 2007.

Theoretical context

While countless studies have been carried out in other countries, we still do not have a comprehensive answer to the question: what is the degree of the impact of mass media on its audience?

The connection between the sources of mass information and the audience (including the impact of the media) first came under study in the 1930s. After World War II these studies developed rapidly. After the 1960s it became clear that the first model of the impact of mass media on the audience was quite naive. According to this early model, consumers of media were seen as passive and monolithic recipients under the total influence of the information received.

After World War II researchers found out that the audience does not change its attitudes (among them – political standings) easily under the influence of mass media. This discovery led to the creation of models of differentiated effects. According to them, the influence of mass media differs according to social group – first of all for consumers of different social experience and level of educa-

tion.¹ At the same time the theory of “selective perception” was developed, according to which each consumer of mass information “filters” the information obtained and accepts only those aspects of this information that do not oppose his/her existing point of view.

In the seventies, when mass media became truly popular, special attention was paid to the two-sided process of “encoding” mass information: firstly information of occurring events is encoded by mass media, and then it is transmitted by mass information channels, finally this information is “decoded” by members of the audience. It is to be expected that during this process the essence of the information will be distorted.

“Production and reception of the television messages are not identical, though they are related.”² Furthermore, individual characteristics and life experience of members of the audience influence the decoding process, which under no circumstances can be uniform for the whole audience. Moreover, results of various studies confirmed that news spread by mass media could be radically different from the meaning given to it by the producers of the information.³ In this process, distortion of the information is highly probable. Consequently, according to the new theories of media influence, media information is capable of strengthening existing positions of audience members but cannot change them⁴.

In a democratic state with pluralistic, democratic elections, great attention is paid to the role of media. Obviously, theories about the influence of the mass media, as almost every aspect of the mass media’s functions, significantly differed for totalitarian and demo-

¹ See: Halloran, James D. “On the Social Effects of Television.” 433-437 in: Marris, P., & Thornham, S. (Eds). (2000). *Media Studies. A Reader*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. 434.

² Hall, S. (1980). “Encoding/Decoding.” 51-61 in: Marris, P., & Thornham, S. (Eds). 2000. *Media Studies. A Reader*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. 53.

³ Stevenson, N. (1995). “Critical Perspectives within Audience Research.” 231-248 in: O’Sullivan, T., & Jewkes, Y. (1997). *The Media Studies Reader*. London: Arnold. 233. See also: Halloran, James D. “On the Social Effects of Television.” 433-437 in: Marris, P., & Thornham, S. (Eds). 2000. *Media Studies. A Reader*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. 436.

⁴ Negrine, R. (1994). *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain*. Second edition. London and New York: Routledge. 158.

cratic societies. Besides, it was impossible to study political impact of media in totalitarian states.

Traditionally, the media had always been a defender and supporter of the interests of the government in all countries.⁵ However, this role became unacceptable in democratic societies. Many democratic states now have a media model under which outlets of printed mass media tend to support a certain political power while television (which studies have repeatedly shown to be the most influential part of the mass media⁶) mostly maintains political neutrality. This is certainly the case in Great Britain, where all newspapers have a well known political platform, but BBC television has been covering election campaigns in a politically neutral, balanced and unbiased way for several decades.⁷

Even when mass media is truly independent from any political power, it still has great influence over society. Forms of indirect influence of the media should also be considered, especially in terms of setting the agenda of issues under discussion in society. A crucial part of the media's function is selecting which news to cover. "The typical daily newspaper, for example, has room for less than one fifth of the news that is available to it each day."⁸ By choosing some issues and leaving out others, each publication automatically focuses the attention of society on the issues that were deemed worthy of coverage. It is easy to imagine that when sources of information are limited, this influence becomes much stronger. Even if media does not intend to determine what the audience thinks, it does determine what people think about. And this is already the first step in the formation of public opinion.⁹ "Studies of media agenda-setting suggest that the news media structure the main political issues of the day and prioritize them by virtue of the process of selection and presentation."¹⁰

⁵ Ibid. 22.

⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁷ It should be noted that this assertion does not apply to the US media.

⁸ McCombs, M., Danielian, L., & Wanta, W. (1995). "Issues in the News and the Public Agenda: The Agenda-Setting Tradition." 281-300 in: Theodore L., Glasser, J. L., & Salmon, C. (Eds). (1995). *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent*. New York and London: The Guilford Press. 281.

⁹ Ibid. 283.

¹⁰ Negrine, R. (1994). Op. cit. 160.

Besides indirect forms of influence, media has the power to influence the audience in a direct and immediate way. However, as mentioned above, the exact mechanisms of media influence are not quite clear and, when a media outlet is so inclined, it is difficult to target this influence in such a way as to guarantee success. Still, the essential pre-conditions for media influence on society have been established: accessibility to means of information, interest of audience and trust towards the source of information.

Studies have confirmed that people who trust a given source of information become dependant on it for receiving information. They consume media to a greater degree and are more subject to influence in terms of the process of definition of actual topics for the society¹¹. At the same time, the so-called “boomerang effect” was studied, according to which “if the general climate is hostile to the message, there is even the possibility of a boomerang effect, i.e. the hostility being increased”¹² against the message being communicated and against its source.

Naturally, while studying mass media influence, researchers examine various topics and messages of different genres, however, it would not be an overstatement to say that one of the most important focuses of these types of surveys is election campaign coverage.

For the present time, researchers only agree that media “can affect voter behaviour and choices”¹³. Attempts to study concrete forms and mechanisms of this influence have thus far not given convincing answers to the questions of researchers, mostly because political choices are made in a wide social context in whose framework all voters are influenced by various diverse factors¹⁴. Often the person him/herself cannot separate media influence from the impact made by other social institutions. Consequently, it cannot be said

¹¹ Ibid. 29

¹² Halloran, James D. “On the Social Effects of Television.” 433-437 in: Marris, P., & Thornham, S. (Eds). (2000). *Media Studies. A Reader*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. 436.

¹³ Negrine, R. Op. cit. 152.

¹⁴ Ibid. 156. also: Stevenson, N. (1995). “Critical Perspectives within Audience Research.” 231-248 in: O’Sullivan, T., & Jewkes, Y. (1997). *The Media Studies Reader*. London: Arnold. 232.

that the important political decisions of voters are made only by the influence of media.

Given the findings of media research, some researchers are sceptical about the role of media in society and, more specifically, in political processes. For instance, Jean Baudrillard believes that the modern mass media is nothing more than a “speech without response”, which makes interaction of ideas between members of the audience and producers of the information impossible¹⁵, and the reaction of audience to this is either silence, or an aggressive attitude – especially in the case of, as Baudrillard puts it, “useless hyperinformation”¹⁶.

Even though we still do not have fully comprehensive answers to the questions of the researchers and members of society, surveys carried out in various countries enable us to understand the role of the mass media in society to some degree and, more concretely, in the political processes. In Georgia, surveys on the influence of media have never been conducted; accordingly, very little is known about the role of the media in political (and especially in pre-election) process in this country. The exception is quantitative monitoring of the pre-election campaign conducted by several non-governmental and mass media organizations. This process mainly implied measuring the time provided to candidates on each television channel.¹⁷ Monitoring results inform us about the degree of availability of media for various political powers, though it does not explain from the perspective of the voters whether the Georgian media was used as a tool for informed political choice before the parliamentary elections on 21 May.

As we will see below, the models of media influence elaborated in the West can apply to the study of the tense political context that has existed in Georgia of late. We will apply the knowledge derived from aforementioned international research experience, qualitative survey conducted in the framework of this project and the data obtained by Caucasus Research Resources Centers (CRRC) and will

¹⁵ Baudrillard, J. (1985). “The Masses: The Imposition of the Social in the Media.” 98-108 in: Marris, P., & Thornham, S. (Eds). 2000. *Media Studies. A Reader*. Second Edition. New York: New York University Press. 99.

¹⁶ Ibid. 101.

¹⁷ See chapter “Accessibility of media for political groups and candidates”.

try to analyze the role of modern Georgian media as a means for the local population to make an informed choice.

Sources of political information in Georgia

According to Data Initiative 2007, conducted by CRRC, respondents are more interested in national news, i.e. policies implemented by central Georgian government than in international politics; moreover, respondents are equally interested in national and local policies (Table 4-1). Similar results are common for the whole world: people are always more concerned with issues of their environment that directly influence their every-day life than with territorially and culturally distant affairs.

The vast majority (80%) of CRRC respondents name television as their main source of information about national politics. As the second main source they named newspapers (29%) and as the third word of mouth – neighbours and friends (27%). It should be noted that the importance of newspapers and word of mouth significantly lag behind television as sources of information. Moreover, most information discussed among neighbours and friends usually originally comes from the media.

It is noteworthy that, according to this research, the use of sources of political information is not connected to the political behaviour of respondents. Irrespective of whether they participated in the elections

Table 1

How interested are you in ... (%)

	International Politics	National Politics	Local Politics
Interested ¹⁸	44	60	56
Not interested ¹⁹	56	40	44

Source: CRRC, Data Initiative 2007

¹⁸ Sum of positions “very interested” and “mostly interested”.

¹⁹ Sum of positions “mostly not interested” and “not interested at all”.

Table 2

What is the mains source of information about national politics? (% in relevant sub-group)

	First source: Television	Second source: Newspapers	Third source: friends, neighbours
Took part in elections	80	30	26
Did not take part in elections	81	25	27
Average	80	27	27

Source: CRRC, Data Initiative 2007

or not, the same number of the respondents name television as their main source of political information. As for the results about newspapers as the second most important source of information, the difference between these two groups is small (Table 4-2). We do not see a statistically significant correlation between the political behaviour of the respondents and their main source of information about national politics in the table below:

It should be noted that similar priorities were revealed as the result of qualitative research. Respondents of in-depth interviews stressed that in the Georgian reality print media plays a small role and that this is due mainly to economic factors:

“[In Georgia] Television is most widespread... Television is free. Not everyone has a radio... 97 per cent of people have a television, so we learn about the news from television. Press is expensive. I read [newspapers], because I go to the library. ... People cannot afford to buy a newspaper everyday, ... That is why television has become the main source”²⁰

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, civil servant, male, 52 years

“I will put it simply: a lot of people cannot afford to buy newspapers. People can't buy them. And when nothing is said on

²⁰ Style of respondents is maintained in the quotations.

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television, or on the radio, when you cannot buy newspapers – what should you do? What should you learn from where?”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 28 June 2008, pensioner, female, 72 years

Television, as a source of information, is clearly the leader in terms of spreading national political information. This case coincides with above discussed international experience, according to which precisely television is the main source of political information and political campaigns are planned according to its specificities.²¹ Here we should mention that, according to the CRRC, only 14% of households watch cable television and 8% own a satellite antenna. Moreover, if we take into consideration the fact that only a very small part of the Georgian population throughout the country speaks a foreign language²², we should conclude that the major source of information about political processes is Georgian TV channels.

Georgia's television channels are not particularly diverse – a few channels broadcast throughout the country; some of them do not transmit programmes in all regions of the country for technical reasons (Mze and Kavkasia, for example). However, when people have a choice to watch programmes of several TV channels, respondents point out that as a rule political news is covered from similar political angles:

“These channels are almost identical²³, and I trust them about 40-50% of the time. I do not receive [other information], and I cannot compensate for it and so I am in a vacuum.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, civil servant, male, 52 years

“Mze has closed its news programmes. But that [channel] was not necessary, because it was one holding in the same holding with Rustavi2; and the Public Broadcaster is just the same, you cannot find dissenting opinions. They all say the same thing.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, private entrepreneur male, 51 years

²¹ Negrine, R. Op. cit. 163.

²² Russian is an exception, 68% of respondents believe they speak Russian on fluently or at least good level.

²³ Respondent is talking about Rustavi2, Public Broadcaster and Achara.

In short, the Georgian people do not have a wide choice in terms of selecting information sources and in some regions (especially villages) there is no such choice at all. Since the channel Imedi was closed down after the events of November 2007 news coverage on Georgian TV has become particularly monolithic, leaving little options for viewers. This is especially important to the respondents who saw this station as an independent and trustworthy source of information.²⁴ One of the respondents of an in-depth interview conducted in Telavi points out that

“Since Imedi shut down, I do not watch television at all, none of the channels. I trusted them, I knew that their information was real, and ... I am sure, that [now] unbiased information is not shown by any of the channels. I don't care about their lies anymore”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 21 June 2008, pensioner, female, 72 Years

Information available to us demonstrates that consumption of information spread by the mass media has a passive character. Respondents receive information from the media, but they do not give feedback to sources of information: over the last six months, only 11 persons of the 3,000 respondents said they had called or wrote to a television broadcaster or print media while 863 respondents (26%) have discussed politics with friends and colleagues.

Here we should mention that in Georgia's reality it is too early to discuss modern information sources (especially Internet) as sources of public information. Throughout Georgia, 85% of the respondents of the Data Initiative declare that they do not have any internet navigating skills (in Tbilisi this number stands at 68%, in villages – 96%); and only 5% feel that their internet skills are high. It is not a surprise that such respondents are 17 times more in Tbilisi than in rural areas.²⁵

Consequently, respondents have a rather limited choice of sources of information about the goings-on of political processes in the country, which makes us think that a great part of the population

²⁴ The fourth sub-chapter is dedicated to issues of trust towards the media.

²⁵ Only 5% of the households under study have internet access at home.

makes political decisions without being adequately informed. The condition of limited radio and press accessibility leaves television as a main source of information, even though the population does not believe that the information spread by Georgian channels is trustworthy. In the following two sub-chapters, we will see the flaws of Georgian TV stations in the eyes of the respondents.

Professionalism of journalists and freedom of media in Georgia

In Georgia, until now, a model of social responsibility²⁶ for the press has yet to be developed and there is no tradition of journalists being unbiased and holding politicians to account for their activities.²⁷

Respondents of the focus groups evaluate the quality of Georgian television and press very critically. A statement of one of the participants of the focus group is noteworthy:

Even the formats of existing talk shows are very cheap. Real political debates do not exist.

Focus group, Tbilisi, 7 June, age of respondents: 60-70

Criticism of mass media by the respondents is focused on two main areas: one is the low level of professionalism of journalists and the second is political pressure from the government on the Georgian media.

According to respondents, Georgian journalists (except the ones who work for international outlets) do not display a sufficient professional qualification.

Respondents often point out that the tendentiousness of the media in Georgia has a long history and is connected to the Soviet legacy. However, it is also clear that even with current problems, the situ-

²⁶ Negrine, R. Op. cit. 25.

²⁷ See chapter Coverage of 21May 2008 Georgian parliamentary elections from the perspective of professional and ethical standards.

ation is far better now than it was in the Soviet times because much more sources of information are accessible.

However, like earlier, Georgian media and, especially television, is openly involved in political processes and, as a rule, defends the interests of the authorities, instead of trying to play the role of “the fourth estate”. According to the respondents, the same happened during the pre-election period.

“The media is not independent. Just like in Russia. There are no channels that are critical of the government’s policies”.

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, private entrepreneur male, 51 years

In the whole world, political powers try to control the media, especially TV. We can bring a number of examples where the Georgian government limited freedom of speech in order to reduce political criticism in the media.²⁸ Moreover, it is obvious that while, in countries with long democratic traditions, control on media is legitimized and is only executed under state of emergency (which, as a rule, implies armed conflict), in non-democratic countries governmental control on media is a part of every-day life.

According to Georgian legislation, mass media is free from state control. Officially, Georgia acknowledges the liberal value of independence of the press, according to which, “the liberty of the press has its inconveniences, but the evil which may result from it is not to be compared to the evil of censorship.”²⁹ Nonetheless, our respondents do not share the opinion that press is independent in Georgia:

“That [the Georgian media] is biased is a fact. But this opposition – we have a very catastrophic opposition. Still, at least there do exist [opposition media] – in Russia no one would allow a channel like Kavkasia to exist. It does not broadcast throughout the whole country, but Tbilisi is Tbilisi, maybe 80% of politically active people live in Tbilisi.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 08, private entrepreneur male, 51 years

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. 22.

Media as a tool of informed choice

“Absolutely no information exists; one can only learn something from opposition newspapers – though I already doubt this information is true either. There is no information, on the contrary – information is limited every day, for instance, for a few days now, news programmes on Mze have been closed down – first of all, what kind of reliable source was their news programme? But even when that does not exist, what shall be? How should one be informed?”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 21 June 2008, pensioner, female, 72 Years

Given the fact that it selects the information we hear about, the mass media, unsurprisingly, modifies our surrounding reality as opposed to presenting a pure reflection of the exact “reality”. Understanding this circumstance is a necessary pre-condition for studying the mass media. However, by no means should this be seen as a conscious effort to distort reality – the topics to be covered, as well as the means of their coverage should be dictated by unbiased decisions drawn from the interests of the society, and not from political or any other type of bias.

As a rule, focus group respondents give a much higher assessment to foreign (mainly to Western European, but not Russian) media objectivity. Deriving from the fact that, as mentioned above, only a minority of the Georgian population has the possibility of watching Western European channels, we should presume that, in most cases, this assessment is idealized. At the same time, Georgian information sources are seen as biased.

The example of Imedi TV, according to the respondents, shows that disobedient media representatives in Georgia are under not only political pressure, but also sometimes can even become victims of the authorities. Even those respondents who say that they support the present government stress the necessity of a source of information expressing alternative opinions:

“All people are oppositionists in spirit, and when they hear opposing [ideas], they receive spiritual satisfaction, because they can hear the truth”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, civil servant, male, 52 years

Respondents believe that media is not only under political pressure, but is also subject to the influence of financial interests. Modern media theories agree that, in democratic societies, mass media should not only be free of state control, but also “should not be concentrated in too few hands”³⁰. Even if we do not take into account the similarity of Georgian TV channels, their limited number undoubtedly indicates that they have very few owners. However, according to our respondents, the interests of Georgian “media magnates” are often interlinked with political pressure:

“If their financial interests will be guaranteed, their political independence will hardly be possible. ... They are not entirely independent.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June, private entrepreneur male, 51 years.

The existing business environment in Georgia is seen as non-liberal and politicized; this inevitably leads TV stations to be loyal to the political course of the government in order to guard the business interests of their owners. In this context, respondents are especially interested in the case of Public TV, which, they believe, should be oriented towards the interests of society.

“We cannot oblige the private TV stations to do so, but the public channel should be balanced.”

Focus group, Tbilisi, 7 June 2008, age of respondents: 60-70.

Aside from a number of print media outlets and Tbilisi’s Kavkasia TV, respondents think that in the period preceding parliamentary elections on 21 May 2008, Georgia still followed a non-pluralistic model of mass media, in the frame of which the majority of information sources shared pro-government positions. Respondents believe that this was caused by two main factors: political and financial pressure on media. The low level of professionalism of most of the journalists, made the situation even worse.

³⁰ Negrine, R. Op. cit. 32.

The presence of opposition newspapers and Kavkasia TV gives the government the right to speak about freedom of media in Georgia. Here, political risks are very low, because the majority of the population cannot afford opposition newspapers and Kavkasia broadcasts only to Tbilisi, where pro-opposition sentiment is strongest. The main means of information – i.e. the few TV channels that broadcast throughout the whole country – support the main political power of the country and it is not by chance that respondents mention similarities between them.

Trust towards media

Transformational processes in former Soviet Union countries have had a huge influence on relations between the population and basic public institutions. As a rule, at the first stage of transformation, trust towards social institutions dropped radically, but with the passage of time, some of them did win the public's trust.

According to a series of studies conducted by International Republican Institute (IRI) in May 2003, the trust the population had in the Georgian mass media was invariably very high (73%-86%)³¹. Unfortunately, in Georgia, we do not have indicators for long-term dynamics of public trust towards public institutions, however, we do have detailed and reliable information on public trust levels towards basic public institutions from October 2007, immediately before the November events. 21% of respondents of the CRRC's research express total trust towards mass media information, 31% mostly trusted it. 33% stated that they had neutral attitudes towards the media (neither trusted nor distrusted), 11% distrusted the media. It is noteworthy that among many rather important public institutions that were evaluated, the media won greatest trust of the population after religious institutions and the army, preceding such important civil society elements as nongovernmental organizations (See table 4-3), not to mention governmental institutions, which are trusted by only a minority of the public.

³¹ see <http://www.iri.org.ge/geo/geomain.htm> (viewed on 21.07.2008).

Table 3

Trust of respondents towards Georgian public institutions

<i>Public institutions</i>	<i>“Trust coefficient”³²</i>
Religious institutions of the respondents’ confession	14.7
Army, as defender of the country	11.1
Mass media	5.1
Banks	3.5
Ombudsman	2.9
Healthcare system	2.5
Education system	2.1
Police	2.0
Non-governmental organizations	1.1
President	0.9
Parliament	0.4
Executive government	0.4
Judicial system	0.4

Source: CRRC, Data Initiative 2007.

While in October 2007, 56% of the Georgian population totally or mostly trusted the mass media, in Azerbaijan and Armenia this figure stood at 42% and 28%, respectively. However, it should be noted that after November events of 2007 and the shutdown of Imedi, Georgians’ trust in the media is likely to have gone down significantly.

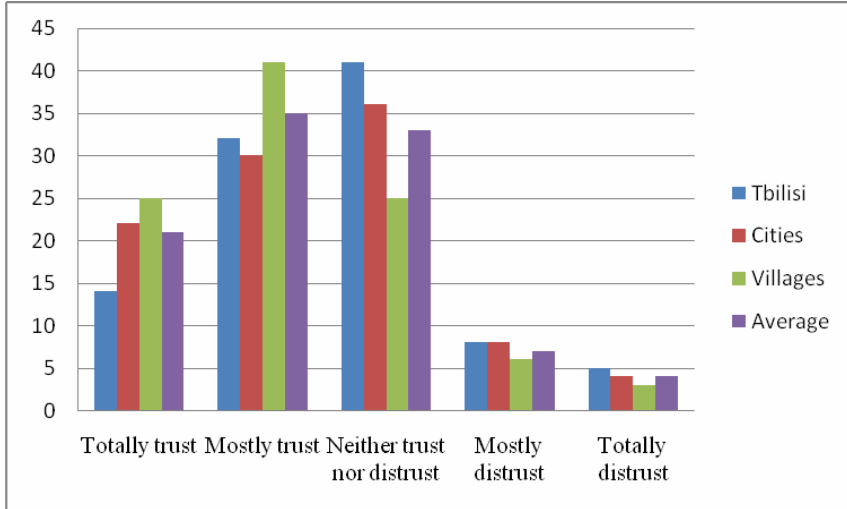
Further analyses of the results show that population of the cities, especially the capital, are more critical towards the media and, correspondingly, trust it less than others. As for the population of rural parts of Georgia, they demonstrate highest level of trust towards the media (Diagram 4-1). The level of trust does not vary according to the gender of the respondents.

These results show the trust of the population towards all types of mass media. We know that the main source of information for Georgian population is television. We do not have, how-

³² In order to calculate the coefficient in the case of each social institution, the share (%) of the respondents who declare, that “totally” or “mostly” trusts given public institution, is divided by the share (%) of those respondents who say they “mostly distrust” or “totally distrust” it.

Diagram 1

Trust of respondents towards mass media according to populated areas (October 2007, % according to the type of populations areas)³³



Source: CRRC, Data Initiative 2007.

ever, results of qualitative research on trust towards television or concrete TV channels.

As mentioned above, trust towards a source of information is a main pre-condition of effectiveness of this source. Results of Data Initiative 2007 illustrate trust of the population towards various public institutions and, among them, mass media before the pre-election crisis in Georgia. Our in-depth interviews and focus groups demonstrate that the November events of last year had a negative impact not only on the level of trust of respondents towards mass media, but also generally, towards interest in national politics. They indicate that interest towards political processes in Georgia have considerably weakened after the elections. We noted above that a respondent interviewed in June 2008 illustrated weakened interest towards po-

³³ $r = -0.146, 0.000.$

litical processes of the country and stronger distrust towards mass information outlets –especially towards television.

“It is a paradox, but at one moment you trust, then... before elections, you trust, after elections, you distrust; it is sold, politics itself is for sale and it is obvious that this was a crock.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, civil servant, male, 52 years

It is much more difficult to evaluate which information sources are trusted and which ones are not trusted by the respondents. We do not have representative research results on this subject. As for the focus group results, older citizens agree that none of the sources of information is solely trustworthy and that one should receive information from various sources and after analysing all of them and then draw conclusions:

“Some of the channels are owned by the state, some are private, thus, we should receive information from all channels and then make our own conclusions.”

Focus group, Tbilisi, 7 June 2008, age of respondents: 60-70

“When you listen to information from various sources, then you have the right to make conclusions. I never trust only one source.”

Focus group, Tbilisi, 7 June 2008, age of respondents: 60-70

Such a model can work only where the population has the opportunity to choose between sources of information; however, as we have seen from above, much of the country is not able to make such a choice.

It seems that trust towards Rustavi2 TV, a formerly pro-opposition station that played a key role in bringing the current government to power in the “rose revolution” of 2003, has gone down. As one of the respondents points out:

“After this, they [Rustavi2] became their servants, servants of the authorities; you cannot trust them.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, June 21, 2008, pensioner, female, 72 Years

Media as a tool of informed choice

Respondents mention that before the November 2007 events most the trustworthy source of information was Imedi; they believed that it would no longer be the same Imedi following its return to the airwaves in September.

“Imedi is a big loss for society. It will not be possible to restore it in the old format. ...Now, even if Imedi existed, they would only chatter, because neither one speaks complete truth.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, private entrepreneur male, 51 years

Respondents often point out that the only channel that still provides objective information to its viewers is Kavkasia. But given that this station broadcasts only to Tbilisi, most of our respondents (in Telavi) had in fact never seen it and have only heard about it. Still they demonstrate greater trust towards this channel than others. It is obvious that trust towards Kavkasia among the respondents living outside Tbilisi derives from a number of intermediary factors, mostly, from widespread information that this channel is different and airs criticism of the government.

“There is only Kavkasia, part of Tbilisi’s population watches it, a pro-opposition channel with different opinions – but most of the country cannot watch it.”

In-depth interview, Telavi, 29 June 2008, private entrepreneur, male, 51 years

During interviews, the tendency of equalizing “objective” and pro-opposition was noticed. One respondent who described himself as a regular reader of newspapers said the print media (first and foremost Asaval-Dasavali) are more objective and accordingly are more worthy of his trust than TV channels.

Distrust towards information spread by the mass media creates a feeling among the respondents that they are not well aware of processes taking place in the country or outside it and name those events that they want to have more information about. They include: details of the death of Sandro Girgviliani (killed by police in early

2006, allegedly on the order of high-ranking Interior Ministry officials), exact topics of negotiations between Russia and Georgia and the decisions made as the result of these negotiations, elections and the reasons behind growing inflation.

Similarly, according to the respondents, the Georgian media failed to provide voters with necessary information before 21 May 2008 parliamentary elections; they named as the reasons for this the fact that on the one hand opposition candidates were granted less airtime and on the other hand the media did not provide voters with sufficient information on defending votes and ensuring the fairness of elections.

During the post election period, various rather important public issues should be covered. The question as to whether people will receive reliable and objective information on these issues remains to be answered.

Conclusion

The media does not provide voters with the means to make informative political decisions. This circumstance can be explained by objective and subjective reasons. Among objective reasons, we should include the economic hardships that continue to be endured by the population,³⁴ which substantially limits the use of printed media throughout the country. The results of quantitative and qualitative surveys dealt with above confirm that the main source of information for the population is television. However, the range of Georgian TV channels is very small; according to the respondents, the small number of channels spreads very similar information and thus, very closely resemble each other. Moreover, respondents demonstrate incomplete trust towards political information disseminated by TV channels; as we know from media effectiveness theory, lack of trust substantially reduces the effectiveness of relevant means of conveying information. In some

³⁴ Welton, G., Zurabishvili, T., & Nozadze, N. 2008. *Georgia Human Development Report 2008: The Reforms and Beyond*. Tbilisi: UNDP. 33.

cases, political propaganda that spreads through media and is not trusted by the respondents may cause a “boomerang effect” and lead to a result opposite the one planned.

Given the aforementioned, we can conclude that at present Georgian society does not have sufficient information about ongoing political processes in the country.

In this context, two circumstances cause concern. First: Rustavi2 TV, the nation’s most highly rated station, has to a great extent lost the trust of society which it enjoyed in 2003; this is especially unfortunate if we take into consideration human, technical and financial resources owned by this TV company. Given the scarcity of information sources, Rustavi2 is still perceived as a leader, though restoring the old level of trust will be very difficult for the channel. Rustavi2, as any other source of information, will gain trust of the society only if the latter believes that the channel expresses its interests and not those of political parties and business organizations.

Second: Despite a new leadership and reforms of various kinds, it seems that the society has not noticed a great difference between the “old” and “new” Public Broadcaster. Respondents explicitly see this channel as the “property” of the government and not of the public and are less interested in its programming.

A separate problem is the poor circulation of print media outlets, which derives not only from the problems existing in the sphere of journalism.

Georgian society is experiencing a lack of reliable information about local political processes and is fully aware of this fact. Even though, as one respondent pointed out, the situation in Georgia is still better than it is in Russia, this is of little comfort given the fact that the independence of the Georgian media has decreased over the past few years.

It is difficult to say whether a truly democratic and objective media will exist in Georgia in the near future, though it is clear, that this should be the goal of development for the Georgian mass media. Without accessible and reliable sources of information, society will not be properly informed about either political or public processes. The deficiency of public information could be in the interests

of those who seek to manipulate the population. From the standpoint of independent media development, the main problem is the weakness of civil society and deficiencies in the process of the country's democratization.

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Coverage of the May 21, 2008 Georgian parliamentary elections from the perspective of professional and ethical standards

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the adherence to professional and ethical standards by Georgian broadcast journalists in their coverage of the Georgian parliamentary elections on May 21, 2008. More specifically, the study will analyze election coverage in prime time news programs and talk-shows aired on the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and the private stations Rustavi2, Mze and Kavkasia.

In order to make a properly informed decision, society needs a free space for discussion of issues of public interest. The main role and function of the media is to provide the audience with the fairest and most accurate and impartial information and create a free space for public debate that will allow citizens to make an informed choice. American independent journalists list “exposing the truth” and “loyalty to the audience” as among their prior professional obligations.¹

These principles of professional journalism become even more important during elections because people are more prone to develop and maintain dependency relations with the media during periods of transition.² In other words, when possible political, social or cultural changes loom, citizens need more information. They get this infor-

¹ Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism*. New York: three rivers press.

² Ball-Rockeach, S. J., & DeFleur, M. L. (1976). A dependency model of mass media effects. *Communication Research*, 3. 3-21

mation from the media – first and foremost from television. Television news is more likely than newspapers to assist citizens in forming opinions on the candidates and the issues.³ Elections in general imply defining a country’s political scene – whether it will remain the same or change according to the citizens’ choice.

“Media has an important task in helping the voters understand the key issues of the election in order to make the best possible decisions on whom to vote for. The media must help the voters make informed choices. The need of the voters is obviously to be informed about the political players: About their visions, their policy and the effect of their policy. And on a more personal level: Who is the politician? Is he or she trustworthy?”⁴ This should be the goal of both public and private broadcasters. Political elite or other powerful players have no right to interfere in the work of media or to influence journalists in order to get favorable coverage of their campaign.

Discussion of professional and ethical standards in the Georgian media is not new for professionals and the interested public. However, despite many attempts, Georgian journalists have yet to agree on common professional standards and thus have not been able to set up a self-regulatory mechanism to maintain and check adherence to these standards. Journalists try to avoid the institutionalization of ethical standards because they fear it would threaten their independence. Proponents of setting common ethical standards, meanwhile, believe that the existence of such a professional self-regulatory mechanism would enable journalists to avoid being influenced and pressured by the government and the owners of the media outlets they work for.

Professionalism is the most effective tool for journalists to defend themselves against attacks by political actors who object to the way the media cover them. The importance of ethical and professional standards in the Georgian media became even more evident during the extraordinary presidential election on January 5, 2008 and afterwards, during the parliamentary elections of May 21, 2008.

³ Hennessy, B. (1985) *Public opinion*. Monterey: Brooks/Cole

⁴ Hansen, H. (2008) 8. *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. 8

The May parliamentary elections were of special interest both locally and internationally, particularly because they came on the heels of a political crisis that culminated in the dispersal of opposition rallies and forceful closure of pro-opposition Imedi TV on November 7, 2007. The following day, President Mikheil Saakashvili called a snap presidential election for January 5 (which he won) to be held in tandem with a plebiscite asking if they approved of holding parliamentary elections in the spring (which passed overwhelmingly).

The snap presidential election was held in order to defuse the crisis, but in fact the political situation became further strained after opposition forces claimed that authorities falsified the poll and dubbed the parliamentary vote its “second round”. The political scene in Georgia remained extremely polarized through both elections. Political parties were not willing to compromise and the opposition continued to organized protest rallies, including a 16-day hunger strike. The opposition submitted a memorandum consisting of 17 demands to parliament. The leader of the United Opposition coalition, Levan Gachechiladze, named free media among the priorities of the memorandum. “We should have freedom in elections, the judiciary and in broadcasting,” he said.⁵

The opposition organized several protests in front of the building of Public Broadcaster (GPB), accusing the station of pro-government bias and demanded the resignation of director-general Tamar Kintsurashvili. As the result, parliament selected a new board of trustees, which chose Levan Kubaneishvili as the new director-general on April 4. The campaign period was tense not only for GPB, but also for the private stations Rustavi2 and Mze, whom some opposition groups boycotted in March because of their alleged pro-government bias. On April 17 they suspended their boycott. A few days after the elections, on May 27, members of the the United Opposition coalition entered GPB’s premises and protested at the station’s alleged underreporting on a protest rally on 26 May and overall bias in favor of the ruling party.⁶

⁵ www.civil.ge 15 Feb. 2008. Opposition Plans Mass Hunger Strike, ‘Town of Tents’.

⁶ www.civil.ge 15 Feb. 2008. Opposition Plans Mass Hunger Strike, ‘Town of Tents’.

The role of media, freedom of media, media ownership issues and the professional standards of Georgian journalists were at the fore of several public and professional discussions during the period leading up to the presidential election. Different attempts to monitor media during elections were conducted in order to evaluate how fairly the election campaign was covered and measure how much time was given to each presidential candidate. The only attempt to provide qualitative as well as quantitative monitoring of election coverage was the weekly accounts of the so-called “Michnik group.” The well-known Polish newspaper editor Adam Michnik visited Georgia as part of a broad international effort to get Imedi TV back on the air in December 2007. He set up a group consisting of representatives of the media and the general public. The group monitored the Georgian broadcast media’s adherence to ethical standards during the presidential election and discussed the results of their monitoring each week live on GPB.

No analysis of these findings was conducted, however. In general, there has been no study in Georgia into the professional principles and values of the media, an institution that plays such a crucial role in democracy. Analysis of the professional standards of the Georgian broadcast media would provide deeper understanding of journalists’ possible biases. Such a study would be particularly important in Georgia given the transitional nature of both society and the media. It would also contribute to the ongoing general discussion on the professional and ethical standards of the Georgian media.

With this in mind, the present chapter starts with an overview of the existing regulations that serve as ethical norms of sorts for the Georgian broadcast media during the elections, as well as these regulations’ compliance with international standards. The chapter then discusses the theoretical framework of the media’s role during elections, focusing on the importance of professional and ethical standards. Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of the coverage of the May 21parliamentary elections by four Tbilisi-based TV channels: GPB, Rustavi2, Mze and Kavkasia.

Legal and Professional guidelines: Georgian and International experience

The election code of Georgia stipulates that broadcasters are obliged to provide a similar amount of time, equal treatment and equal conditions in terms of free advertising to qualified political subjects.⁷ The code stipulates a special role for GPB, which is obliged to provide airtime not only to qualified subjects, but also to other minor parties and blocs.⁸

Georgian law is fully in line with international standards. However, in countries with established democracies, general principles of law are laid out in more detail in particular codes of ethics or professional standards of media.

The BBC's editorial guidelines have this to say about election coverage: "Our commitment to impartiality and fairness is under intense scrutiny when we report election campaigns. All political parties will seek to influence editorial decisions. Content producers should take all complaints seriously and be aware that anything they say may be construed as 'BBC policy'. We should explain that general complaints or allegations of bias must always be dealt with at a higher level, and refer them accordingly. We should make, and be able to defend, our editorial decisions on the basis that they are reasonable and carefully and impartially reached."⁹

The BBC guidelines state that in order to ensure professional and impartial coverage of elections, parties should receive coverage in doses that correspond to the support they received in past elections and also with due consideration to recent changes in the level of electoral support. "Daily News magazine programs must achieve an appropriate and fair balance

⁷ The Georgian Electoral Code, Article 73¹ "On media coverage of election campaigning", reads: "a qualified electoral subject is a political party or bloc that gets funding from state budget, because of a) it has a faction in parliament, b) is garnered at least 4% of votes during the last election based on the proportional system". (Georgian Electoral Code, 21.03. 2008 N6013).

⁸ Election code of Georgia, Article 73¹. Information on pre-election campaigning.

⁹ BBC editorial guidelines <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/politics/broadcastingdur.shtml>

in coverage of the main parties in the course of each week of the campaign,”¹⁰ the guidelines say.

The only television company that has an official code of ethics is the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB). In 2006 GPB approved a code obliging it to cover candidates and parties participating in elections in “a fair, impartial and balanced manner.”¹¹ This means that in news- and other programs, preferential treatment of any election subject is prohibited. “The programs of the Public Broadcaster should not serve as an instrument for propaganda for any party or candidate.”¹²

The code emphasizes that journalists must cover the election campaign impartially and provide only fact-based reporting.¹³ The code also obliges journalists to maintain balance in coverage of all qualified political subjects during a given week.¹⁴ A separate chapter of the code dedicated to debates states that discussion should be held objectively and in an impartial manner.¹⁵ Unfortunately, no other television company even purports to adhere to such standards. Moreover, despite the fact that Rustavi2 and Imedi, together with GPB, were co-founders of a media council tracking adherence to media standards in Georgia, they never expressed any interest toward this institution.

Theoretical background: framing and indexing theories

The present study employs theoretical perspectives derived from framing and indexing theories. These theories are important for the present study because a large amount of scholarly work has shown that even when citizens do engage in democratic practices, want to be informed and therefore pay attention to political news, they are

¹⁰ Election Guidelines For the elections being held on May 1, 2008 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/election/balance.shtml>

¹¹ GPB Code of Conduct, 2006.

¹² GPB Code of Conduct, 2006.

¹³ 3.1 Rules of election coverage. GPB code of conduct.

¹⁴ 3.3 Balance of information during election coverage; GPB code of conduct

¹⁵ 3.7. Debates; GPB code of conduct

often, whether politically educated or not, under the influence of the media and other political actors who dominate the news discourse.¹⁶

This is the primary assumption of the *indexing theory*. It says journalists need to quote authoritative sources and argues that as a result, news outputs are a function of “official” views on a given issue.¹⁷ On the other hand, according to the *framing theory* the political players and media professionals both define and give desirable meaning and context to the issues and connect them to a larger political environment.¹⁸ Thus, by having easy access to media, political actors can easily convey their messages to the public. Only coverage of events in compliance with professional standards can create certain professional filters for proposed frames and make a fair news story instead of political propaganda.

Framing Theory: The general idea of framing theory is that a frame is a discursive device that allows professional communicators construct the meaning of an event or an issue and channel the audience toward a desirable understanding of it. Framing is “the process by which a source defines the essential problem underlying a particular social or political issue and outlines a set of considerations purportedly relevant to that issue”.¹⁹ In other words, “framing is the process by which a communication source ... defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy”.²⁰ Thus, the frame

¹⁶ Callaghan, K., & Schnell, F. (2001). “Assessing the democratic debate: how the news media frame elite policy discourse”. *Political Communication*, 18. Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). “Politicians and the press. Political communication settings”. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woolcott, J. (1981) *Culture, society and the media*. Methuen: London and New York

¹⁷ Bennett, W. L. (1990). “Toward a Theory of press state relations in the United States”. *Journal of Communication*, 40 (2) Zaller, J.R., & Chiu, D. (1996). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Entmann, R. (1993). “Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm”. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51- 58.

¹⁹ Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z.M., & Clawson, R.A. (1997a). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behavior*, 19(3). 222

²⁰ Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R.A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997b). “Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance”. *American Political Science Review*. 91,567

constructs political, social, economic and other important issues. This idea of associations is critical to understanding framing. A model of framing can be built on the premise that to frame a message in a given way entails certain associations rather than others.

Evidence suggests that frames are a powerful influence over citizens' opinions on policies and related perceptions.²¹ Political elites can effectively use frames to promote their own political ends. This study will look in particular at two frames identified by Graber.²² *Strategy (Sometimes called process) frame* is where journalists focus on political tactics, political alliances, spin and the struggle for power behind the scenes while the *issue (sometimes called content) frame* is where journalists ask questions and discuss a concrete issue and focus on the consequences and effects of political decisions. Sometimes the usage of *strategy frame* is referred to as *process journalism* and *issue frame* as *content-journalism*.²³

Given that journalists' primary obligation is to report the truth, it is very important to provide citizens with content journalism instead of process journalism and to separate facts from opinions and commentary. Only fact-based reporting can fulfill the main goal of journalism – the impartial and unbiased pursuit of truth. “We strive to provide coverage that aims as much as possible to present the reader with enough information to make up his or her own mind. This is our highest ideal.”²⁴ Hansen lists some recommendations in order to achieve such coverage that will help the audience to make an informed choice:

- We must ensure that our coverage reflects the agenda of all the voters, that we are present all over the country and that we hear the voice of the voters;

²¹ Callaghan, K., & Schnell, F. (2001). “Assessing the democratic debate: how the news media frame elite policy discourse”. *Political Communication*, 18; Nelson, T., & Kinder, D. “Issue frames and group-centrism in American public opinion”. *Journal Of Politics* 1996. Nelson, J. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M., “Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance”. *American Political Science Review*, 91 (1997b).

²² Graber, D.A. (2000). *Media Power in Politics*. Washington DC: CQ PRESS

²³ Hansen, H. (2008), *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasburg: Councils of Europe.

²⁴ Kovach, B., Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: three rivers press, 42.

- We must ensure that the voters get a solid general view of the parties and candidates, enabling them to make an informed choice when they decide whom to vote for;
- We must ensure that our coverage is about political ideas and visions but also that politics are about the individual politicians and the confidence the voters have in them;
- We must pass the most important proposals from the candidates to independent experts and ask them to critically test the proposals.²⁵

Thus, in the absence of professional standards the media becomes predisposed to conveying the frames and messages offered by political elites and less able to act in the interests of citizens. Furthermore, according to *indexing theory* the media needs to refer to the political elite for information.

Indexing Theory: Zaller and Entman maintain that the positions of elite political actors inside and outside government define the key parameters and points of reference in discussion and thought for the media and citizens alike. If the points of view of these sources are dominant in media, public discussion can be highly dependent on the discursive behavior of political elites. Thus, these scholars present a “top down” view of the relationship between elite discourse and public opinion.²⁶

Bennett and Lawrence found that dramatic, unsettling news events provide journalists with story material while encouraging them to seek out sources that can contextualize these events.²⁷ However, according to the theory of indexing, reporters use non-political sources for strengthening the agenda of the political elite.²⁸ The second rule

²⁵ Hansen, H. (2008). *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasburg: Councils of Europe. 15.

²⁶ Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The Nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Entman, R. (1993). “Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm”. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4).

²⁷ Bennett, W. L. (1990). *The governing crisis: media, money and marketing in American elections*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Lawrence R. J. (2000). *The politics of force*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁸ Bennett, W. L. (1990). “Toward a Theory of press state relations in the United States”. *Journal of Communication*. 40 (2).

formulated by Bennett involves keying a story to disagreements among officials – particularly officials with the power to affect the outcome of the developing news event.²⁹ Such conflict serves as a signal for journalists to expand a story to include the views of experts, social groups, opinion polls and other sources that reflect the observed differences between powerful politicians. The aftermath of November 7, including the January 5 extraordinary presidential election and period ahead of the May 21 parliamentary elections provided journalists with exactly such unsettling and dramatic news events. At that time the Georgian media was able to seek out information not only from the political elites of the country, but also from independent experts and ordinary citizens.

“Control over political rhetoric is an essential tool to influence public opinion.”³⁰ In other words, a party or politician is the winner in the discussion about a certain policy, if he can guide the discussion in a certain direction by means of inserting certain terms regarding the issue.³¹ This is the reason why interest groups are eager to insert their language and symbols into media coverage of an issue and in so doing increase the issue’s visibility, salience and potentially tip the political balance in that group’s favor.³² This is the reason that political parties or individual politicians prefer certain newspapers or television companies over others when it comes to four crucial criteria: easy access, large audience, high credibility and control over the final product.³³ This means that the politicians look for coverage in newspapers, television and radio companies which

²⁹ Bennett, W. L. (1996). *The governing crisis: media, money and marketing in American elections*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

³⁰ Callaghan, K. (2001). “Assessing the democratic debate: how the news media frame elite policy discourse”. *Political Communication*. 18; 184.

³¹ Kinder, D., & Sanders, L. (1990). “Mimicking political debate with survey questions: the case of White opinion on affirmative action for Blacks”. *Social Cognition*. 8 (1).

³² Kollman, K. (1998). *Outside lobbying: public opinion and interest group strategies*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press; Baumgartner F.R., & Jones, B.D. 1993, *Agendas and instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³³ Cook, T. E., & Sehnal, F. (1989). *Making laws and making news*. Washington: The Brookings Institution.

have high ratings, are considered credible and are loyal to those politicians. Loyalty ensures that the newspaper or TV or radio station is eager to have quotes from these politicians more often than the quotes of less sympathetic politicians and thus allow them to shape the news product. This, in turn, means that the politician will more likely be able to insert his language – terms and symbols – into a news story and have the opportunity to convey his message in a favorable way. This is the reason why the opposition favored Kavkasia, which was inclined to cover the news from the perspective of opposition while the ruling party favored Rustavi2, where the news was covered in a manner more loyal to the ruling party.

At the same time, scholars argue that media outlets themselves have their own professional standards and commercial and ideological interests and may ultimately convey a “media-constructed” version of reality.³⁴ Blumler and Gurevitch discriminate two media models: *adversary* and *symbiotic*.³⁵ They described the adversary model as a model based on a conflict of interests between politicians and media.

“Politicians should be carefully watched when they abuse their power, exceed their mandates, commit blunders they would prefer to conceal, and elevate themselves to positions of non-accountable authority.”³⁶

The authors say that the media has a symbiotic relationship with political actors when certain conditions are in place for bargaining between the two.³⁷ Journalists provide politicians with access to the public via media in exchange for information. Journalists, in turn,

³⁴ Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). “Politicians and the press. Political communication settings”. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woolacott, J. (1981). *Culture, society and the media*. Methuen: London and New York.

³⁵ Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). “Politicians and the press. Political communication settings”. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woolacott, J. (1981). *Culture, society and the media*. Methuen: London and New York.

³⁶ Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). “Politicians and the press. Political communication settings”. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woolacott, J. (1981). *Culture, society and the media*. Methuen: London and New York. 470.

³⁷ Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). “Politicians and the press”. Political communication settings. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J. & Woolacott, J. (1981). *Culture, society and the media*. Methuen: London and New York.

are often influenced by their own cultural and social biases while covering certain events and issues.³⁸

The same situation has taken shape in Georgia. Kavkasia maintained a symbiotic relationship with the United Opposition and an adversary relationship with the ruling party. On the contrary, Rustavi2 and Mze were engaged in open confrontation with the United Opposition and were biased in favor of the ruling party. GPB, meanwhile, tried to bargain with both sides.

The Georgian media has a number of characteristics in common with media in other post-Communist countries. Some works can be found that scrutinize the frames and sources or general characteristics of different types of media in this region. For example, Romania and Poland, like Georgia, are countries that have undergone (with varying levels of success) a similar development from communist autocracy toward democracy. So it would stand to reason that media in these countries have some similar characteristics.

For example, Gross gives six characteristics of the Romanian media in 1996-2000 that resemble some characteristics of Georgian media.³⁹ As Gross argues, the media and journalists in Romania generally failed to serve as models of democratic beliefs and values. He claimed that “journalism (a) contributes to suspicions about democracy; (b) often increases rather than decreases the intolerance for opposing parties, beliefs and preferences; (c) does not contribute to an atmosphere that increases willingness to compromise with political opponents or that enhances pragmatism and flexibility; (d) increases mistrust of the political environment and cooperation; (e) does nothing to encourage moderation in political position and partisan identification or civility in political discourse; and (f) contributes little to political efficiency and participation.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Hall, S. (1997). “Culture, the media and the “Ideological effect” in Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., & Woolcott, J. (1977). *Mass Communication and Society*. Beverly Hills/London: Sage.

³⁹ Gross, P. (1999). “Limping to nowhere: Romania’s media under Constantinescu”. *East European Studies* 51. 35-36

⁴⁰ Gross, P. (1999). “Limping to nowhere: Romania’s media under Constantinescu”. *East European Studies* 51. 23

Goban-Klas emphasized a similar tendency in the Polish media. He argues that the media in Poland is partisan and that this partisanship reflects inherent social tensions and competing political groups' perceptions that in the struggle for power media have become "the main instrument for politics. Their vision of the media is one-dimensional, over-politicized and simplified, believing in a missionary role for journalists and an ideologized press."⁴¹

The importance of news sources for the political elite is stressed in Ellis's study of the Russian media in the late 1990s. The author argues that "the primary function of mass media in Russia is not to attract and hold large audiences for advertisers, but to attract and hold large audiences for individual politicians, who either control or strive to control the mass media."⁴²

This contrasts with the professional standards generally adhered to by reputable media outlets in Western Europe and the USA, which say that journalism's first loyalty is the public and not to those who have political, economic or any other power. As Hansen puts it, "the role of the media is to persistently control whether the government ensures this free, open and fair election process."⁴³ Citizens can be fully engaged and understand the ongoing developments of the country only through free public debates. That is why free and balanced discussions on the platforms and visions of political parties or individual politicians are very important, especially during elections. "This should be the starting point of any media with intentions of providing decent coverage of a national election campaign: Democracy is discussion. And a democratic election campaign is a free, open and fair process."⁴⁴ The credibility of a media outlet and trust of the

⁴¹ Goban-Klas, T. (1997). "Politics vs. media in Poland: A game without rules". In: P.O'Neil (Ed.) *Post-Communism and media in Eastern Europe*, London: Franc Class, 37

⁴² Ellis, F. (1999). *From Glasnost to the Internet: Russia's new infosphere*. London: Macmillan. 104.

⁴³ Hansen, H. (2008), *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*, Strasburg: Councils of Europe. 8.

⁴⁴ Hansen, H. (2008). *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasburg: Councils of Europe. 7.

citizens means that the media is loyal to the audience – this is its direct obligation.⁴⁵

Research Method

In order to analyze whether the coverage of the elections by GPB, Rustavi2, Mze and Kavkasia complied with international ethical and professional standards, the researcher used a content analysis method and conducted a focus group with journalists working for the outlets under study. According to Kellinger, content analysis enables the researcher to study “communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables.”⁴⁶ Coders selected each fourth day starting March 1 and coded election news stories aired that day in prime time news stories. They also selected and coded every fourth talk-show.

The main variables of the research were: TV station, program type (news program or a talk-show), sources (representatives of political parties, their supporters, central election committee and its branches, independent local and international observer missions representatives). The study looked at: 1. the importance of the information for the public, 2. whether fact was separated from opinion/commentary and 3. impartiality and balance.

The study looked at two dominant election frames: issue frame and strategy frame. The issue frame was defined as a frame covering a particular issue, policy or its effect on ordinary citizens. The issue frame is oriented toward discussion on solving concrete problems, how political parties address the concrete issues at hand and how they plan to improve the situation regarding said issue. The strategy frame was defined as a frame that looks at the political race as a process, is less issue-oriented and is more oriented toward personal

⁴⁵ The credibility of Georgian TV stations is discussed in a separate chapter of this book.

⁴⁶ Kellinger, F. (1986). *Foundations of behavioral research*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. In Wimmer, R., & Dominick, J. (2000). *Mass Communication Research*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. 135

critiques or attack against competitors. Thus, in order to identify which frame was used in the news story, the following questions were asked:

Strategy frame:

1. News-story addresses who is leading or trailing in the campaign.
2. News story covers and describes a particular campaign event.
3. News story announces results of opinion polls.
4. News story focuses on conflict between participating parties.

Issue frame:

1. News story covers particular aspects of participating parties' electoral platforms.
2. News story covers existing problems facing society and examines ways to solve them under the electoral platforms of the participating candidates or parties.
3. News story reports in depth on the content election platforms of participating parties and candidates.

The study also looked at election coverage in talk-shows, and in particular, whether the moderator of the talk-show gave the parties the same amount of time and was mediating the discussion in such a way as to provide the audience with issue-based information or was a provocateur seeking to inspire strife between the debating parties and have more personal attacks on the show.

Content was coded according to the procedures described by Riffe⁴⁷ by two coders from Ilia Chavchavadze State University, in Tbilisi. To ensure the accuracy of coding procedures and results, the coders received special training. They coded 20 percent of the stories together until consensus was reached and categories were refined. After reaching consensus they coded the remainder of the stories separately.

Ninety-five stories were coded from GPB, 88 from Mze, 75 from Rustavi2 and 111 from Kavkasia. A total of 369 stories were coded according to content.

⁴⁷ Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F.G. (1998). *Analyzing media messages*. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum.

In order to get an in-depth understanding of ethical dilemmas and issues during the elections, the researcher carried out a small discussion in a focus-group of journalists in addition to the content analysis. In the focus groups, the moderator posed questions concerning ethical and professional standards in Georgian journalism.

Research Findings

The main findings are that all four TV stations covered the May 21 parliamentary election from the perspective of the process of elections. News coverage focused on individual events of the parties' pre-election campaigning rather than discussion of their election programs or specific effects thereof. Thus, Georgian broadcast media created a space for political parties to present their platforms rather than create a forum for public discussion on specific policies and the merits of each party's political vision and ability to accomplish their campaign promises.

Table 1 shows the amount of time allocated to the representatives of each party. Overall, the ruling United National Movement enjoyed the most coverage ahead of the May 21 parliamentary election.

Table 1

Sources

News sources	GPB (Sec.)	Rustavi 2 (Sec.)	Mze (Sec.)	Kavkasia (Sec.)
Ruling party – National Movement Party representatives	1,670	638	1,459	1,338
Opposition Coalition (8-party bloc)	1,609	360	723	3,622
Republican Party	765	503	369	1,219
Labor Party	417	153	386	839
Christian Democrats	334	190	347	331
Other parties	619	240	272	705
Local and international observers	263	209	289	551
Representatives of central electoral committee and its local branches	619	357	363	666
Other	115	80	98	75

The ruling party got most coverage on three nation-wide television companies: Georgian Public Broadcaster, Rustavi2 and Mze. Mze's coverage of the UNM was twice as much as its coverage of the United Opposition, which came in second in terms of time. On Kavkasia the United Opposition enjoyed the leading position. The United Opposition coalition received the second largest amount of coverage on GPB and Mze while the Republicans came in second on Rustavi2 and on Kavkasia – UNM. The Republicans came in third on GPB, Mze (where it shared the spot with the Labour Party) and Kavkasia while on Rustavi2 the United Opposition was third.. Other, smaller parties got the most coverage on Kavkasia, not on GPB, the only station whose charter explicitly obliges it do give airtime to minor, less influential groups. The observer's mission received the most coverage on Kavkasia and the least on Rustavi2. The Central Electoral Commission was quoted most often on Kavkasia and GPB.

Table 2 shows that all four TV stations aired very few stories on specific issues from the party platforms.

Table 2

Frames of election coverage in Georgian broadcast media

Frames	GPB (%)	Rustavi 2 (%)	Mze (%)	Kavkasia (%)
Issue frame	2	1	4	3
Process frame	72	90	93	76
Other frame	26	9	3	21

In most cases the Georgian broadcast media covered the process of the campaign without focusing on issues addressed in the parties' platforms. The United Opposition was covered almost exclusively from this perspective: 97 % of stories concerning the coalition used the process frame. The platforms of the UNM and Labor Party received the most coverage. No stories concerning United Opposition covered their platform or overall policy vision.

Reports about UNM candidates in single mandate (majoritarian) constituencies attending grand opening ceremonies conducted by local officials were a regular fixture of TV campaign coverage. Such stories as "The National Movement bought a house for the Otarashvili family

Table 3

**Frames of each party coverage by TV stations under study
(in per cent)**

Frames	United National Movement (%)	United Opposition (%)	Republican Party (%)	Labor Party (%)	Targamadze-Christian Democrats (%)
Issue Frame	17	2	5	18	14
Process Frame	80	98	88	78	65
Other	3	0	7	4	21

in Bodbe,” “a minibus line was opened in Avlabari,” “a new sports stadium was opened in Mtatsminda’s Sevastopol Street,” “[UNM parliamentary candidates] Koba Subeliani and Lasha Zhvania attended a women’s volleyball match together with refugee children” abounded on Georgian channels ahead of the poll. Table 3 shows what frames were used to cover each political party by all four TV stations combined.

Table 4 gives a more specific description of the stations’ adherence to journalistic standards and ethics. The small portion of balanced stories again reflects the fact that most coverage simply showed campaign events and did not require any balance. In such case the journalist was impartially describing the pre-election campaign story without tackling substantive issues.

Balance was not required in the majority of reports aired by Rustavi2 and Mze because they were covering not a given issue or how the parties or candidates address that issue, but rather the campaign events of individual parties. This consisted mostly of meetings with voters, protest rallies (in the case of opposition groups) and government activities carried out with the participation of ruling party candidates. In reports where balance was applicable, however, the data show that bias was evident.

Table 4

Broadcasted information was	GPB (%)	Rustavi 2 (%)	Mze (%)	Kavkasia (%)
Impartial	82	60	60	27
Balanced	27	15	16	10
Balance was not applicable	52	65	62	20

As for the talk-shows, half of such programs featured a discussion moderated by the host. In half of these cases, the host was provocative and sought to encourage conflict between the debating parties. In most cases the debating parties were able to finish their respective parts of the discussion without the host interfering and the host was impartial in 67 percent of talk shows aired on the four TV stations. However, as Table 5 shows, in most cases politicians were attacking opponents personally or attacking opponent's party and did not, in fact, debate issues of concern to the public.

Table 5

Talk shows' main rhetoric (%)

Radical opinions of politicians	85
Programs of political parties	80
Discussion on concrete ways of fulfilling campaign promises	3
Offer of compromise	0
Personal attacks	93

Conclusion

“The standards of free, fair and balanced election coverage recommended by the Council of Europe and exercised by most of the serious quality media in Western Europe is either a dream for many editors and reporters in these countries or a naive perception with no or poor chance of being adopted by the highly commercialized and politicized local and national media, which are not supposed to promote pluralism.”⁴⁸

A study of the May 21 parliamentary election coverage shows that the ruling party, UNM, received the most coverage from the three nation-wide TV channels in Georgia. Rustavi2 and Mze gave it almost twice as much coverage as the United Opposition. Tbilisi's local Kavkasia TV, meanwhile, covered the United Opposition most

⁴⁸ Hansen, H. (2008). *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasburg: Councils of Europe. 4.

extensively. Taking into consideration that Rustavi2 holds leading positions in terms of market share (see next chapter), we can conclude that by watching Rustavi2 residents of the regions were mostly getting information about the UNM. Most importantly, the majority of stories concerned UNM campaign events, such as meetings with constituents and openings and presentations using administrative resources. The media addressed these issues from the process frame filter, offering simple descriptions of the events and not delving into actual issues.

In general, no issue frame was used to provide more in-depth content to the reports. For example, in the case of election coverage, content-based journalism requires knowing the election code and questioning the use of administrative resources. Reports on the process and not on issues create the understanding of a given UNM campaign event as “good news”, as “an action taken to resolve an existing problem.” The United Opposition and other opposition parties, meanwhile, received more coverage during protest rallies, which the audience might associate more with unrest. The media alone is not to blame, however: the opposition coalition did not offer a concrete vision on how to address the problems facing the country and can be said not to have had a coherent campaign platform.

Balance was not applicable because election coverage focused on individual parties’ campaign events and did not feature news packages where several political parties addressed a single issue that was of public concern. Still, given the fact that impartiality was also not maintained, the coverage could be described as biased. If we look at the duration of the footage of candidates shown we will clearly see preferential coverage for UNM on GPB, Mze and Rustavi2 and preferential coverage of the United Opposition on Kavkasia.

Preferential coverage of UNM on Mze and Rustavi2 might be explained by the United Opposition’s boycott of these stations and calling the journalists working for these companies “riffraff”. On the one hand, they were not talking to journalists and thus, had no chance to have direct or indirect quotes in the stories or even relatively balanced coverage and on the other hand, journalists became personally hostile to United Opposition representa-

tives and made this evident in their coverage. This was another factor that conditioned the TV landscape's overall bias in favor of the ruling party.

The high percentage of process-based coverage shows that journalists focused on campaign events, opinion polls, and conflict between participating parties instead of tackling substantive issues and discussing parties' platforms.. This type of election coverage on one hand failed to provide the audience with truthful, fair, accurate and balanced information in order to make an informed decision and on the other hand allowed politicians to get positive exposure through the media. Thus, the political party that was better organized, more articulate and better prepared to campaign garnered the most coverage and set the agenda for Georgian broadcasters.

In addition to the low professional standards of broadcast journalists, coverage of the May 21 parliamentary election also highlighted the low level of political culture of the political parties taking part in the poll. Key political players' often combative debates on talk shows made this abundantly clear. Instead of talking about concrete issues, their political platforms or policies to be implemented, political leaders engaged in fierce personal attacks against one another. Some politicians boycotted certain channels and on several occasions, TV journalists were physically assaulted by opposition activists.

Thus, according to social responsibility theory, the four Georgian TV stations failed to provide a truthful and comprehensive account of events. They also failed to provide the public with a forum for discussion on the concrete issues at stake. On the contrary, they allowed political parties and their PR services to use the media as a means of propaganda.

The character of election coverage was not determined by the low professional standards of journalists working on elections alone, but also, as the focus group showed, journalists' lack of independence in preparing their reports. Journalists said they were often forced to prepare certain stories or use certain sound-bites and comments by certain politicians. Thus, they were not acting independently and in accordance with ethical standards, but rather in accor-

dance with the ideology of the newsroom and, by extension, the owner of the given station.

In sum, the coverage of the May 21 parliamentary elections was not impartial, fair and balanced for three principal reasons: 1) the low professional standards of journalists, who did not chase the story, but used easy-to-cover propaganda events staged by the political parties; 2) the ideological pressure exerted by the leadership of the TV stations – in order to avoid losing their jobs, journalists largely complied with the ideology imposed on them by their respective channels' leadership; 3) the low political culture of the political players, who radicalized the political situation in Georgia and focused on personal attacks against competitors as opposed to discussing substantive issues.

In conclusion, the last two elections in Georgia show that agreement on and adherence to professional and ethical standards in line with international experience would be of much benefit to the Georgian media. The very existence ethical guidelines and professional standards would make it possible to distinguish serious and quality media from yellow media of low quality.⁴⁹

Agreement on professional standards among Georgian journalists would also facilitate the fair, accurate and impartial coverage of events and increase the public's trust in the media, regardless of what the political elite – be it the ruling party or opposition – demand from the media. The existence of high professional and ethical standards is necessary for the media to be able to fulfill its main role in a democracy, especially during elections.

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⁴⁹ Hansen, H. (2008). *Fair and Balanced Elections Reporting*. Strasburg: Councils of Europe. 51.

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APPENDIXES

Media-monitoring methodology of company TV MR GE

Company TV MR GE, Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research, carries out survey of TV audience since 2004 using ‘peoplemeter’. Peoplemeter is a tool installed on a TV set that provides a possibility to define which channels family members and/or their guests watch and when they watch it.

For the national panel 300 families were selected throughout Georgia, including 180 families in Tbilisi and 120 families in other cities. General population of the survey includes every person over four years, despite their ethnical belonging or language. Panel survey of media through peoplemeter provides a TV audience data based on one minute intervals for national and local channels participating in the survey that broadcast in the research target city. During selection of panel families, panel control parameters were used. These are individual characteristics of whole as well as single family members that influences TV viewing. Through control of these characteristics in the panel, its representativeness is maintained.

Information collected by peoplemeter is transferred to TV MR GE office, where data is processed and analyzed. On the basis of the survey, analysis of the following parameters is possible: rating, total parameter of rating, coverage, market share, correspondence of advertising prices with the rating and etc.

Together with audience survey, TV MR GE also conducts TV broadcasting monitoring. Currently eight TV stations are monitored: *Imedi, Rustavi2, Public Broadcaster, Kavkasia, Adjara, Alania and I Stereo*. Broadcasting of each television is recorded digitally during 24 hours. TelePad® software is used for monitoring, where operators set titles of programs, blocks of commercials, commercials and other detailed parameters. Monitoring of block of commercials is conducted on the basis of exactly this data; the same data is used for comparing audience viewing.

Finally the information collected by the company (peoplemeters and database) is combined in software “Ariana”, which provides a possibility to analyze TV survey results.

Media-monitoring methodologies of companies – Primetime, IPM, Gorbi-Gelap International Centre

TV-monitoring project of company “Primetime” carried out for the Central Election Commission, was targeted at monitoring of information and election advertisements about election participant parties and their candidates shown on Georgian TV channels during parliamentary pre-election period, 2008, from April 10 to May 12.

The project was prepared on the basis of the media-information bank of analytical group “Primetime» and the records of full broadcasting web of TV-channels. Objects of monitoring were political parties participating in the parliamentary elections of May 21, 2008, their representatives and candidates.

The project was divided in two parts: monitoring of information programs and monitoring of TV-advertising. Six Georgian central TV channels were selected: Public Broadcaster, *Rustavi2*, *Mze*, *Imedi*, *Kavkasia* and *I Stereo*. Every news program, talk show and political debate broadcasted during the day was subject to information monitoring.

Monitoring of information programs consisted of two parts:

1. Monitoring of news programs included analysis of subjective and objective positioning of election participants – political parties, party representatives, leaders and supporters shown in news programs on selected TV channels.
2. Monitoring of talk shows and political debates included analysis of subjective and objective positioning of election participants – political parties, party representatives, leaders and supporters shown in these types of programs on selected TV channels.

Monitoring of news programs and talk shows consisted of two parts:

1. Subjective positioning implies analysis of airtime assigned for election participant parties, their representatives according to number of stories, timing, channels, parties and persons.
2. Objective positioning implies analysis of information about election participant parties, their representatives and their mentioning by the stories – number of citing, timing, accents (by channels, parties, persons).

Methodology of the media-monitoring division of IPM company

Media-monitoring division of IPM conducted monitoring of TV programs during 2008 parliamentary elections for of various organizations and private companies (including Georgian Public Broadcaster, Tbilisi City Hall, research company “Gorby” etc.). IPM started monitoring of TV channels from April 9, 2008, when the official date of elections was appointed, to May 20. During this period all Georgian TV channels that broadcasted news programs, were targets of monitoring. These channels are Georgian Public Broadcaster, *Rustavi2*, *Mze*, *Kavkasia*, *Alania*. Every news program and so-called talk show, including political debates was subject to monitoring.

Media-monitoring specialists processed the data simultaneously with the broadcasting of TV programs. Broadcasting of each channel was recorded digitally during 24 hours. For airtime monitoring TelePad® software was used. Processed data was transferred to MMS© software, that provided a possibility for further analysis. The following data was entered in the program during processing stories:

- Name of the TV channel,
- Name of the program,
- Type of the story (information, interview, announcement, advertisement),
- Recording of the TV story,

Appendix 2

- Topic of the story,
- Author of the story,
- Commentators of the story – every person, who made comments directly,
- Objects of the story – every object mentioned at least once,
- Length of the story (in seconds) and
- Succession (sequence of the story).

IPM software MMS© automatically generated different types of diagrams and data based on this information.

Survey methodology of the research company “Gorbi-Gelap International Centre”

“Gorbi-Gelap International Centre” carried out media monitoring during pre-election period of the parliamentary elections of May 21, 2008 with financial assistance of “International Transparency – Georgia”. Georgian newspapers and five TV channels – Public Broadcaster, *Mze*, *Rustavi2*, *Kavkasia* and *Alania* were studied within the frame of this monitoring. Media monitoring started on April 9, 2008 and finished on May 20, 2008. During this period, 3942 TV stories and 1978 newspaper articles were analyzed.

Tones of journalists (authors and hosts of TV stories and newspaper articles) and not of individual candidates and other political and social personalities (respondents of stories, programs and newspaper stories) were emphasized during the analysis of coverage tones of pre-election campaign of parties, Within the framework of media monitoring it was defined how neutral, positive or negative journalists’ tone towards election participant parties was. Tones were defined by following criteria:

Positive tone:

- An author or a host clearly expresses his/her preference towards the candidate, with whom he/she leads discussions,

takes interview or prepares story/article;

- An author or a host praises politics of a presidential candidate or his/her personality;
- An author or a host asks only simple, positive and not complicated, critical questions to one presidential candidate (while he/she gives more sharp questions to other candidates).

Neutral tone:

- An author or a host states facts, information is provided to the viewer/reader without analysis or analysis is obviously neutral and balanced;
- Airtime is assigned directly to political candidates (direct speech of political candidates is always evaluated as “neutral”);
- Airtime is assigned to political advertisements (political advertisement is always evaluated as “neutral”).

Negative tone:

- An author or a host obviously expresses negative attitude towards the candidate, with whom he/she leads discussions, takes interview or prepares story/article;
- An author or a host groundlessly criticizes politics of a presidential candidate or his/her personality;
- Author or host gives particularly critical, sharp questions to a presidential candidate (when he/she asks simple, desirable questions to other candidates).

Appendix 3

“Data initiative 2007”

“Data initiative” research of Caucasus Research Resource Centers was conducted in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2007. 3341 respondents were interviewed in Georgia in October 2007, through face to face interviews. They were selected on the basis of multistage cluster sample; interviews were held in 81 selected places.

Results are representative for the whole country as well as at the community type (capital, cities, villages) level.

“Data initiative” is conducted since 2004 in all three South Caucasus countries and provides a possibility for the researches to study evaluation of ongoing social, economical, political and other processes in these countries by the population. It is important that not only results of the survey, but whole methodological information connected with the survey and data bases are available on the websites of the centres. For full information please visit <http://www.crrcenters.org/index.php/en/5/999/> (found on 17.07.2008).

Coding system

Name of the coder:_____

TV channel: (please check)

1. Public Broadcaster 2. Mze 3. Rustavi2 4. Kavkasia

Type of the program: (please check)

1. News program 2. Talk show

Date of the program shown:_____

Conditional title of the topic_____

Sources and airtime

Political parties and subjects

_____ Georgian Politics_____sec

_____ Republican Party_____sec

_____ United National Movement_____sec

_____ National Council_____sec

_____ Labor Party_____sec

_____ Targamadze – Christian-Democrats_____sec

_____ Majoritarians_____sec

_____ Other_____sec

Supporters of political parties and subjects

_____ Georgian Politics_____sec

_____ Republican Party_____sec

_____ United National Movement_____sec

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_____ National Council _____ sec

_____ Labor Party _____ sec

_____ Targamadze – Christian-Democrats _____ sec

_____ Majoritarians _____ sec

_____ Other _____ sec

_____ **Central Election Commission** _____ sec

_____ **International election monitoring missions and local experts** _____ sec

Information provided in TV report is important for the society

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

Facts and comments are distinctly distinguished from each other

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

The fact was discussed in an unbiased way by the journalis

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

The balance between interested parties is kept in TV report.

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

Number of sources cited in TV report, including documents

0 1 2 3 4 5 more than 5

The fact In the report is confirmed with additional sources or documents

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

The report is about:

Essential discussion of election issues

Personal accusations made towards political rivals

Other (please specify)

The following was used in the report:

Process (strategy) frame

Issue (content) frame

Only talk show

The following are discussed in the talk show:

_____accurate facts

_____election programs of politicians

_____ways of fulfillment of particular pre-election promises

_____radical consideration of politicians

_____compromising proposals

_____mutual abuse

_____other (please specify)

Participants have equal status in their parties

1. yes 2. no 3. I do not know

Equal treatment towards candidates is guaranteed

1. yes 2. no 3. hard to estimate

Cutting the speech of the participant by the journalist without letting him/her formulate the opinion during the program

1. often 2. seldom 3. never happened

Talk show host in debates is

1. mediator 2. provoker

Conditional name of the report

Indicate the sentence, by which the host or the journalist him/herself presents the story. It might be necessary to identify the report.

Sources and airtime

Political party and/or entity is the one, who officially represents political party or entity and his/her party belonging is indicated in titles or text of the journalist.

Appendix 4

Supporter of a political party or entity is the one, who supports, approves and positively appraises statements and activities of a given party or of its concrete representative, expresses support towards it.

Central Election Commission

Representative of Central Election Commission is the one, who represents Central Election Commission, election districts and precincts, including precinct commission members, in the media.

International election monitoring and local experts

International election monitoring and local expert is the one, who observes elections during pre-election period, on the election day and afterwards, until the final results are announced.

Information provided in a story is important for the society

1. Information is important in case if it is new, delivers new knowledge about election situation, election participant party or entity, their program, ways of solution of particular issue in any form, assists voter in making decision.
2. Information is not important in case if it, in essence, does not deliver new knowledge, does not make clear any particular issue and is based only on personal assault towards opponent.
3. Information is partially important in case if it in any way includes important information for the voter, despite personal assaults towards opponent.
4. If information cannot be assigned to any of mentioned above categories, check “hard to estimate”.

Facts and comments are distinctly distinguished from each other

Fact is what really happened and this is authentically confirmed in the report.

Comment is the evaluation of the fact and its analysis.

Distinguishing those two means that while watching the report a viewer knows when the facts are conveyed and opinions expressed by someone are not provided as an factual material.

A fact is discussed in an unbiased way by the journalist

A fact is discussed in an unbiased way by the journalist in case if he/she tells about the fact in a neutral language, gives equally critical questions to the respondents and provides them equal time in the report.

The balance between interested parties is kept in the story

In the story the balance is kept between interested parties in case the parties, mainly election participant parties and entities, are granted equal opportunities to express opinions about the issue discussed in the report; journalist treats each one equally. In case of a particular accusation defendant is also presented.

Number of sources cited in the report, including documents

The source is a person, who gives an interview to the journalist. Also, the source is a written or visual document, that is provided by the journalist in the report to confirm the fact.

In the report the fact is confirmed with additional sources or documents

The fact is confirmed with additional sources or documents in case the journalist bases the report not only on accusations of a representative of a party or its supporter, but cites independent sources – people, written or other kinds of documents, that strengthen, confirm the fact.

A report is about:

Essential discussion of election issues means that the issues referring to the arguments about: legislation, election program of political parties and entities, different types of contraventions, voting lists, election procedures, counting of votes etc. are discussed in the report.

An action is considered as accusation of a political rival when personal attack or insults towards political rivals takes place, which does not provide voters any concrete information about election

Appendix 4

issues or election programs of political parties or ways for solving a particular issue and its goal is to discredit personally political opponents.

Process (strategy) frame

A process (strategy) frame is used in a TV report if it provides positive answer to one of the three questions:

1. A report talks about who passes ahead of political rivals in ratings;
2. A report talks about one concrete event, that is devoted to pre-election campaign;
3. A report about the results of public opinion polls;
4. A report talks about conflict among election participant political parties.

An issue (content) frame is used in a report if it provides answers to the following questions:

1. A report touches concrete issues of election programs of election participant parties;
2. A report touches matters of public importance and the ways of their solution according to programs of election participant parties;
3. A report concerns in-depth analyses of the election program of election participant parties.

Only talk show

The following is discussed in a talk show:

_____An event that really happened, that is confirmed by additional sources and documents. about a report talks not only about accusations of one party representative of supporter, but about data confirmed by independent sources

_____Election programs of politicians – concrete plan about issues of state importance and ways of their solution provided by political parties

Coding system

_____Ways of fulfillment of particular pre-election promises – political parties and entities tell voters how and through which resources they are going to fulfill concrete promises

_____Radical opinions of politicians – ungrounded promises and mutual accusations

_____Compromising proposals – endeavors of parties and entities to achieve agreement about particular issues

_____Mutual abuse implies personal accusations and insults that do not have anything in common with election programs and ways of settlement of particular issues

_____Other (please specify)

Participants have equal status in relevant parties

Participants have equal status in relevant parties in case when opponents are persons with equal position and influence, they are rivals in the same election district or have same positions in the elections lists.

Equal treatment towards candidates is guaranteed

Equal treatment towards candidates means that candidates are granted equal time to answer and questions of a journalist are equally critical towards them.

Talk show host in debates is a

1. Mediator – tries to help opponents to explain the essence of the issue, lead them to the compromise and find points of coincidence;
2. Provoker – tries do intensify the rivalry between the opponents and make their positions radical to cause senseless anxiety and cause tension.

Guides for focus group discussions

1

[Greeting]

How interested are you in ongoing political processes in Georgia?

How informed do you consider yourself about ongoing political processes in our country? Why do you think so?

Please complete the following sentence: “I think politics in Georgia is ...” How would you complete this sentence?

Usually from which sources do you receive information about ongoing political processes in our country? Why do you give preference to this sources of information?

Frequency of use of the named sources (how often do you watch / listen / read?)

Which political news story of recent days do you think is the most important? Why?

Which news story would make you happy this evening? Why?

How do you think, which sources of information in Georgia – newspaper, magazine, radio, television or other – spreads the most reliable information? Why do you think so? Which source provides less reliable information? Why?

Which features should a good political journalist possess? Which journalist (or journalists) has these features?

Guides for focus group discussions

What is the best tool to receive the most reliable information about ongoing political processes in Georgia? In which case will we know the complete truth about what is going on in our country? About which political event do you want to know the whole truth?

If we talk about TV channels in Tbilisi [cite], which are the TV channels that spread the political information that you trust the most? Can you say that you trust fully? Why? Which channels do most of the people (relatives, friends, coworkers) around you trust?

And which are the TV channels that spread political information that you distrust? Why?

How do you think, what are the interests driving ordinary TV journalist above all? And what are the interests driving TV channel management above all?

What kind of information do you need most of all to get concerning parliamentary elections? How do you think, which TV channels will provide you with this information?

If TV channels would make public appeals before parliamentary elections, the appeals of which TV channels would you follow?

Imagine, that only one TV station must exist in Georgia – which/ what kind of channel should it be? Why?

2

1. Do you agree or not with the statement, that a journalist has a right to look for, demand and freely distribute information through media? (please check only one number on the scale below)

Appendix 5

2. Do you agree or not with the statement, that a journalist has a right to express and distribute ideas freely through media?
3. What do freedom of speech and expression mean to you?
4. What is the main function of a journalist: spreading information, looking for truth, controlling ruling elite/authorities, ensuring discussion of issues of public importance and public debates, contributing to establishment of democratic values, preserving national values and traditions?
5. What does editorial independence mean?
6. What would you say about professional level of Georgian journalists?
7. Do you think that Georgian media is under pressure of state officials?
8. Do you agree with the idea that Georgian media is under the pressure of owners following the instructions from state officials?
9. From your point of view, what is the best form for media regulation?
10. Do you think that agreement on professional ethics standards is necessary or not?
11. What hinders this process?
12. What can be done for Georgian media to agree on the rules of ethical code?
13. From your point of view, what does self-censorship mean?
14. Is there self-censorship in Georgian media or not?
15. Which media is more independent today: press, television, radio, internet-media? Why?
16. From your point of view, what is the function of a media owner?

Guides for focus group discussions

17. From your point of view, what could limit or is most of all limiting freedom of Georgian media? Public order, state pressure, owner pressure, Georgian legislation, non-professional journalists/ low professional level of journalists, non-existence of financial freedom.
18. From your point of view, Georgian media is independent, partly independent or is not independent?

Questionnaire

Please read the questions carefully and answer them honestly, based on your practical experience. Your answers will be used only for the survey of Georgian media.

- 1. Do you agree or not with the statement, that a journalist has a right to look for, demand and distribute freely information through media? (please check only one number on the scale below)**

/-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

- 2. Do you agree or not with the statement, that a journalist has a right to express and distribute ideas freely through media? (please check only one number on the scale below)**

/-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

- 3. What do freedom of speech and expression mean to you?**

- 4. What is the main function of a journalist: (please number statements listed below in accordance with their importance: 1, 2, 3 etc.)**

Questionnaire

- Distribution of information
 - Searching for truth
 - Control of ruling elite/authorities
 - Ensuring discussion of issues of public importance and public debates
 - Contribution to establishment of democratic values
 - Preservation of national values and traditions
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

5. What does editorial independence mean? (please check as many categories as necessary/ number categories listed below in accordance with their importance)

- Independence of journalist from any kind of external interference
 - Independence from state interference
 - Independence from owner
 - Freedom of obtaining correct and accurate information
 - Independence means the right to express own opinion only on the editorial page
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

6. Do you agree with the opinion that professional standards of Georgian media and journalists are low (please check only one answer)

- /-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

7. Do you agree with the opinion that Georgian media is under the pressure of state officials? (please check only one answer)

- /-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

8. Do you agree with the idea that Georgian media is under the pressure of owners following the instructions from state officials?

/-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

9. From your point of view, what is the best form for media regulation? (please check only one answer)

1. Legislation
2. Professionalism of journalists
3. Self-censorship
4. Editor and/or editorial board
5. Media owner
6. Devotion to public interests
7. Control of information receiving process by the providers of the information
8. Other (please specify)

10. From your point of view, what does self-censorship mean?

1. The journalist selects, filters and covers the information him/herself in accordance with the media ideology, where he/she works.
2. The journalist selects, filters and covers the information him/herself in accordance with the point of view of the media owner, where he/she works.
3. The journalist selects, filters and covers the information him/herself in accordance with the point of view of the editor.
4. The journalist selects, filters and covers the information him/herself in accordance with the professional and ethical standards.

11. Please explain your answer to question 10

Questionnaire

12. Which media is more independent today?

1. Press
2. Television
3. Radio
4. Internet-media
5. I don't know

13. From your point of view, was Georgian media more independent under Ex-president Shevardnadze than under President Saakashvili?

/-----/-----/-----/-----/
-2 -1 0 1 2
totally disagree do not agree do not know agree totally agree

14. From your point of view, the function of media owner is: (please check as many categories as necessary)

1. Mediator between state officials and editors/journalists
 2. Manager or supervisor of editorial board
 3. Protector and guarantor of professional standards of privately owned media and journalists working for this media outlet.
 4. Responsible for the content of information covered by the media
 5. Other (please specify)
-
-

15. From your point of view what could or is mostly limiting freedom of Georgian media? (please check as many categories as necessary)

1. Public order
 2. State pressure
 3. Owner pressure
 4. Georgian legislation
 5. Non-professional journalists/low professional level of journalists
 6. Non-existence of financial freedom
 7. Other (please specify)
-
-

Appendix 6

16. From your point of view what dangers threaten Georgian journalists during performance of professional duties?

1. Physical pressure
 2. Losing job
 3. Blocking prepared report
 4. Pressure from state
 5. Pressure from owner
 6. Other (please specify)
-
-

17. From your point of view does media regulating legislation contribute to the development of free and professional media in Georgia or not?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not know

18. From your point of view Georgian media is: (please check only one answer)

1. Independent
2. Partly independent
3. Is not independent
4. I do not know

19. From your point of view Georgian journalist are: (please check only one answer)

1. Good professionals
 2. Average professionals
 3. Not professionals
 4. Other (please specify)
-
-

Questionnaire

20. How would you evaluate Georgia by the level of freedom of speech and expression? (please check only one answer)

1. Is not free
2. Is partly free
3. Is free
4. Other (please specify)

Guides for in-depth interviews

Version 1

TV space 2-3 months before parliamentary elections 2008

1. How would you characterize Georgian TV space 2-3 months (March, April) before parliamentary elections 2008?
2. During this period, what were the topics that Georgian TV media paid most attention?
3. What were the main trends of coverage of political parties 2-3 months before elections? Which parties were covered, how much time was assigned to them and which channels covered them?
4. Did an indirect election campaign take place during this period (March, April) while covering the activities of state agencies? If yes, could you state some examples (for example, events organized by Koba Subeliani, Gigi Ugulava, Bakradze etc.)?
5. From your point of view, did emphasizing these issues contribute to popularization of pre-election platform of United National Movement?

Pre-election period from April 21 to May 21 – media-monitoring

1. What methods did you use to carry out media-monitoring of news programs during pre-election period?
2. According to the results of media-monitoring was the balance (qualitative, as well as per minute) maintained on Georgian TV channels during coverage of ruling party and opposition parties?
3. Except election themes, which other themes were paid most attention to during this period?

Version 2

Reorganization of the Public Broadcaster and elections

1. From your point of view, what caused change of the Board of Trustees and the Director of the Public Broadcaster two months before elections?
2. Did new management of the Public Broadcaster have enough time to prepare appropriately for 2008 parliamentary elections?
3. How the was memorandum of understanding between Public Broadcaster and election participants prepared? What were the main objectives for preparing the memorandum? What were the results brought by the memorandum?
4. In your opinion what caused resignation of the Head of the Board of Trustees of the Public Broadcaster after elections?

Media Independence and regulation

1. What does freedom of speech and expression mean to you?
2. What is the main function of a journalist: distribution of information, search for truth, control of ruling elite/authority, ensuring discussion of issues of public importance and public debates, contribution to the establishment of democratic values, preservation of national values and traditions?
3. What does editorial independence mean to you?
4. In Georgia, how should editorial independence be enforced?
5. Do you think that Georgian media is under any kind of pressure? If yes, what kind of pressure?
6. How much do you agree with the opinion that Georgian media is under the pressure of owners following the instructions from civil servants?
7. From your point of view, what is the best form of media regulation?

Journalistic ethics and professionalism

1. What would you say about the level of professionalism of Georgian journalist?
2. Do you think there is a need for common agreement on the norms of professional ethics?

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3. What is hindering this process?
4. What needs to be done for Georgian media to agree on a code of ethics?
5. From your point of view, what is self-censorship?
6. Does self-censorship exist in Georgian media?

Version 3

Parliamentary elections 2008 and TV company *Mze*

1. Under what circumstances did newsroom of *Mze* work during the pre-election period of 2008 parliamentary elections?
2. What was the main characteristic of news programs during this period?
3. What caused boycott of TV company *Mze* by the *United Opposition*?
4. Was “positive attitude” towards United National Movement felt in the news programs of TV company *Mze*?
5. How would you characterize the program “Mzera to Tbilisi”?

Media independence Component

8. What does freedom of speech and expression mean to you?
9. What is the main function of a journalist: distribution of information, search for truth, control of ruling elite/authority, ensuring discussion of issues of public importance and public debates, contribution to the establishment of democratic values, preservation of national values and traditions?
10. What does editorial independence mean to you?
11. Do you think that Georgian media is under any kind of pressure? If yes, what kind of pressure?
12. How much do you agree with the opinion that Georgian media is under the pressure of owners following instructions from civil servants?
13. From your point of view, what does self-censorship mean?
14. What would you say about the professional level of Georgian journalists?

Version 4

Reorganization of the Public Broadcaster and elections

5. From your point of view, what caused change of the Board of Trustees and the Director of the Public Broadcaster two months before elections?
6. Did new management of the Public Broadcaster have enough time to prepare appropriately for 2008 parliamentary elections?
7. How was the memorandum of understanding between Public Broadcaster and election participants prepared? What were the main objectives for preparing the memorandum? What were the results brought by the memorandum?
8. In your opinion what caused resignation of the Head of the Board of Trustees of the Public Broadcaster after elections?

Media monitoring

9. How did you conduct media monitoring of news programs during pre-election period?
10. According to the results of media monitoring how was the balance between the ruling party and opposition parties maintained on Public Broadcaster during coverage?
11. Were the results of media monitoring adequate to the provisions of the memorandum of understanding?
12. How much do you agree with the preliminary conclusion of OSCE that “tone of coverage of the ruling party mostly was positive, coverage of main opposition block was neutral”?

Journalistic ethics and professionalism

13. What would you say about the level of professionalism of Georgian journalists?
14. Do you think that agreement on the standards of professional ethics is necessary or not?
15. What is hindering this process?
16. What can be done for Georgian media to agree on the rules of ethical code?
17. From your point of view, what is self-censorship?
18. Is there any self-censorship in Georgian media?

Version 5

TV-space 2-3 months before parliamentary elections 2008

1. How would you characterize Georgian TV-space two-three months before parliamentary elections 2008 (March, April)? What were the main trends of television viewing?
2. Considering the main trends of viewing, what differences would you emphasize in respect to presidential elections 2007?
3. During this period (March, April) did state-financed ads run on Georgian channels contributing to popularization of state programs (poverty reduction program, land registration program, cheap credits program, etc.)? Could you state some examples? On which channels did most of such advertisements run?
4. In your opinion, did such social advertisements contribute to popularization of United National Movement pre-election platform?

2008 pre-election advertisement campaign

1. In general, what are the criteria for a successful advertising campaign?
2. How would you characterize pre-election campaign led by main election participants?
3. What issues did political parties emphasize during their advertising campaign?
4. In your opinion, which political parties had better planned advertising campaign? (high GPR, clear messages, etc.)

General indicators

1. In your opinion what determines the rating of a particular TV-channel/program?
2. Which TV-channels and programs had high television viewing from April 21 to May 21 and why?

About TV Companies

LTD “TV Company Mze”

Broadcasting since: June 1, 2003

Potential Auditorium: 1 300 000

Address: Kostava str, 75b

Tel: 8 (22) 21 21 11

Email: mze@mze.ge

Internet: www.mze.ge

General Director: Zaza Tananashvili

LTD “Broadcasting Company Rustavi2”

Broadcasting since: June 1, 1994

Potential Auditorium: 2 794 000

Address: Vazha-Pshavela Avenue, 24

Tel: 8 (22) 20 11 11

Email: tv@rustavi2.com

Internet: www.rustavi2.com

General Director – Irakli Chiqovani

LTD “Kavkasia”

Broadcasting since: June 21, 1994

Potential Auditorium: 1 000 000

Address: Giorgi Leonidze str, 11a

Tel: 8 (22) 98 67 43

Email: kavkasia_tv@hotmail.com

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About Authors

Nini Gogiberidze – graduated from Tbilisi State University, Faculty of International law and International Relations in 2003. In 2005, she received MSc degree in Human Rights from London School of Economics. For years she has worked in American Bar Association, Tbilisi, where she was actively engaged in law enforcement and criminal law reforms program. In 2006-2008 she directed Media Monitoring Department of Institute for Polling and Marketing. Presently she is involved in various scientific research projects at Ilia Chavchavadze State University.

Nino Danelia is an assistant professor at Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management. She has graduated from Louisiana State University with a master's degree in Mass Communication. She has worked for Georgian print media, including *Resonansi* and *Ecodigesti* as the head of Art Review Department. She has worked for two years for the radio *Green Wave* as a producer and anchor of the weekly program “Veil” discussing gender issues and a year for Inter-news – Georgia as a producer and anchor of weekly news program “Kviris Ambebi”. She is primarily interested in the field of media research. Among others, she has carried out research on Coverage of Rose Revolution in Georgian Media and Values of Georgian Media.

Tinatın Zurabishvili received her Ph.D in the Sociology of Journalism from Moscow M. Lomonosov State University in 1999. She has taught B.A. and M.A. courses in sociology, focusing on research methods, at Telavi State University and Tbilisi State University Center for Social Sciences, where she was a Civic Education Project (CEP) Local Faculty Fellow (2001-2003) and Academic Fellowship Program Returning Scholar (2005-2006). In the spring semesters be-

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Prior to teaching in Georgia, between 1999 and 2001 Zurabishvili served as junior researcher for Yale University's project "Poverty, Ethnicity and Gender in Eastern Europe during the Market Transition". Zurabishvili also worked for five years as a sociologist at the Russian Center for Public Opinion and Market Research (now the Levada Center), where she worked on the Russian Public Opinion Monitor. Her academic publications focus on social research methods, sociology of transition and sociology of the media.