

3.5. GDS

About GDS TV: GDS TV was founded in June 2012. Initially, it was named VTV and the channel was wholly owned by Vladimir Shengelia, technical director of Channel 9 TV. A month later the channel simultaneously changed its name and owner. Bera Ivanishvili, ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's son, became 100% owner of the TV channel. Initially, GDS owned a specialized (cognitive) broadcasting license. After license modification in 2015 it obtained the right to produce news and public-political programs. Following the license modification, the channel launched a talk show 2030, which was initially hosted by Bidzina Ivanishvili and which aimed, as Ivanishvili put it, to neutralize the propaganda unleashed by the opposition UNM party and Rustavi 2 TV. Ivanishvili's family, particularly Bidzina Ivanishvili's wife, Ekaterine Khvedelidze had owned 80% of shares in Channel 9 since 2012. Eight months after the parliamentary elections the channel was closed down. According to TVMR Georgia, an annual average rating (AMR) of GDS TV for the year of 2015 is 0,55%, while the share (SHR) amounts 2,92%.

Quantitative Data

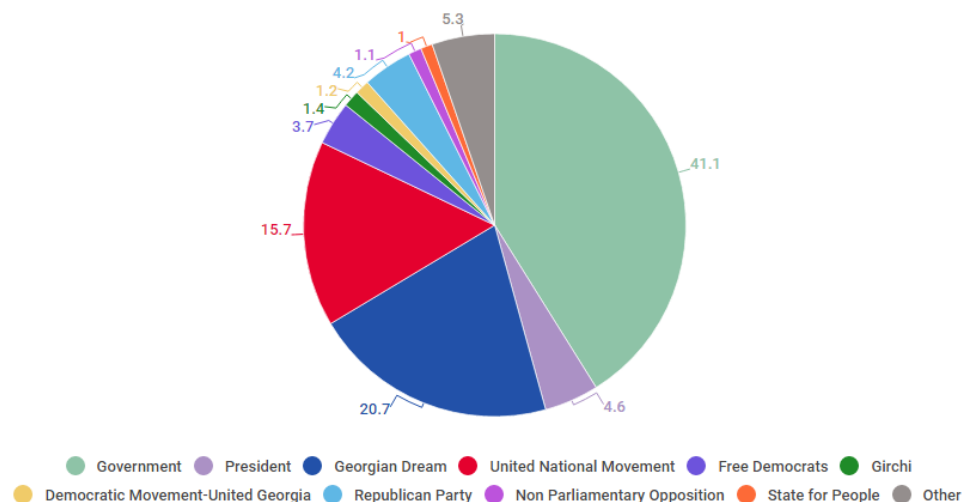
Total coverage. The four-month monitoring of GDS TV (April 1 – July 31) has revealed that the TV channel dedicated the greatest part of its primetime news programs (752 stories) to the Government (41.1%) and Georgian Dream (20.7%). A total share of their coverage is 61.8%.

As for other qualified subjects, United National Movement has the largest share (15.7%), followed by Republicans (4.2%), Free Democrats (3.7%) and Democratic Movement – United Georgia (1.2%). Total coverage of other parties is 5.3%, where coverage of qualified political parties looks as follows: Conservatives – 0.9%; National Forum – 0.7%; Alliance of Patriots – 0.5%; Industry will Save Georgia – 0.4% and Labor Party – 0.3%.

Among newly set up parties, Girchi has 1.4% and State for People – 1%.

The President's share in total coverage amounted to 4.6%, Central Election Commission (CEC) - 0.7%.

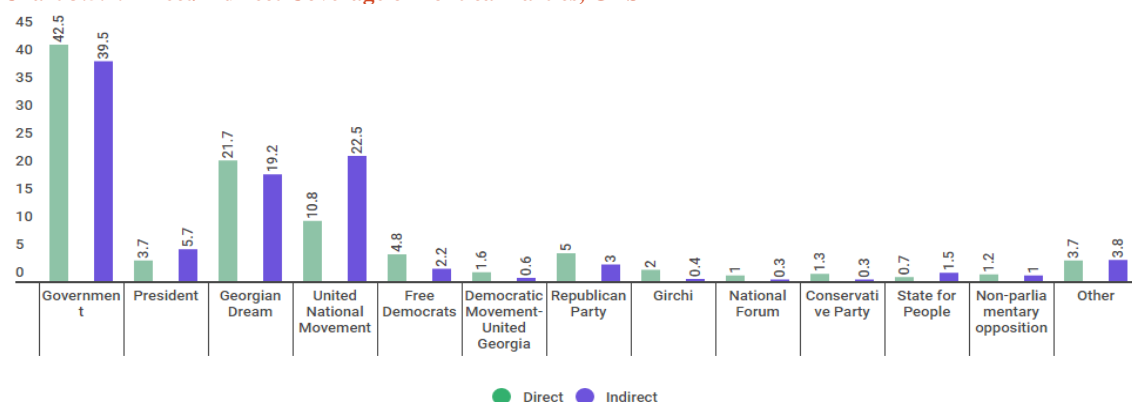
Chart 3.5.1 Total Coverage of Political Subjects, GDS



Direct/Indirect Coverage. Direct coverage prevails over indirect coverage in case of the Government (direct 42.5%; indirect 39.5%) and the ruling party (direct 21.7%, indirect 19.2%), though with a slight difference. On the contrary, in case of the United National Movement indirect coverage (22.5%) is twice more than direct coverage (10.8%). The situation is identical in case of the President (indirect 5.7%, direct 3.7%) and State for People (indirect 1.5%, direct 0.7%); however, the difference is insignificant.

In case of other political subjects, as chart 3.5.2. shows, mostly direct coverage prevails over indirect coverage.

Chart 3.5.2. Direct/Indirect Coverage of Political Parties, GDS



Tone of content in covering political subjects. New Political Center Girchi and Democratic Movement – United Georgia were covered most neutrally (100%) by GDS TV. The tone of coverage of other subjects was also mostly neutral with the exception of the United National Movement, where the highest negative tone (27%) and lowest positive tone (2%) were observed. In terms of negative coverage, the National Movement was followed by a group of various parties, whose coverage was below 1%; these parties are followed by non-parliamentary opposition (9%), Georgian Dream (8%) and the Government (6%).

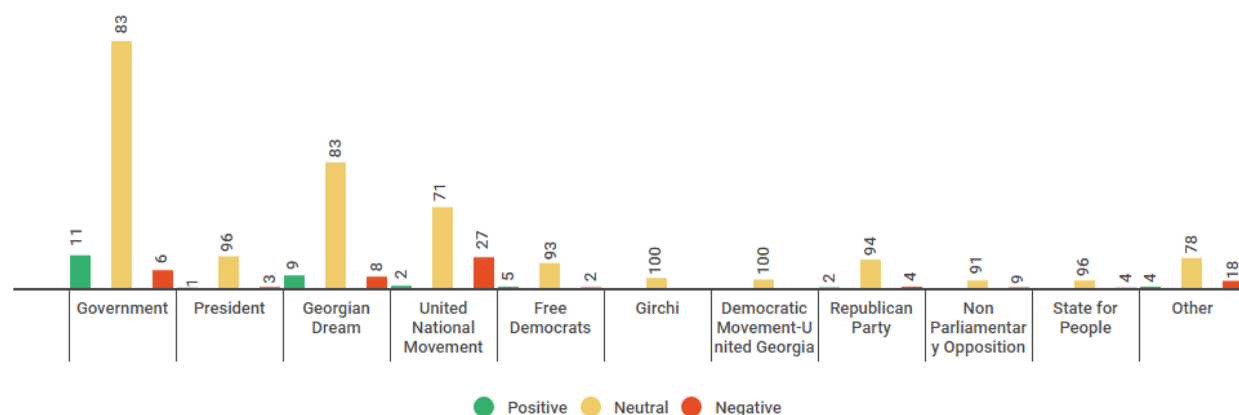
The highest level of positive tone was observed with respect to the Government (11%) and Georgian Dream (9%).

Newly established State for People and Republicans have identical coverage in negative tone (4%).

The President's coverage was relatively neutral in tone (positive 1%; negative 3%). Among qualified parties, Free Democrats party was covered positively (positive -5%, negative - 2%).

The tone of coverage is 100% neutral with respect to Girchi and Democratic Movement – United Georgia. The tone of coverage is mostly negative in case of the Republican Party (4%; positive 2%); among newly established parties, coverage of State for People is negative in tone (4%). At the same time, coverage of State for People, like the President, was highly neutral in tone (96%).

Chart 3.5.3. Coverage of Political Subjects – Tone of Content, GDS



A share of subjects in positive and negative content. A share of the Government in positive content is 63.4%; Georgian Dream – 24.7%; their total share is 88.1%. All other subjects have a share of 11.9% in positive content. As for negative coverage, the Government’s share is 25.2% and Georgian Dream – 15.9%.

The highest share of negative content comes to the United National Movement (43.5%) that is almost twice more than the government’s share (25.2%) and three times more compared to Georgian Dream (15.9%); its share in positive content is 4.5%. Compared to other parties, a share of National Forum in negative content is also high (6.6%). The latter was not covered positively.

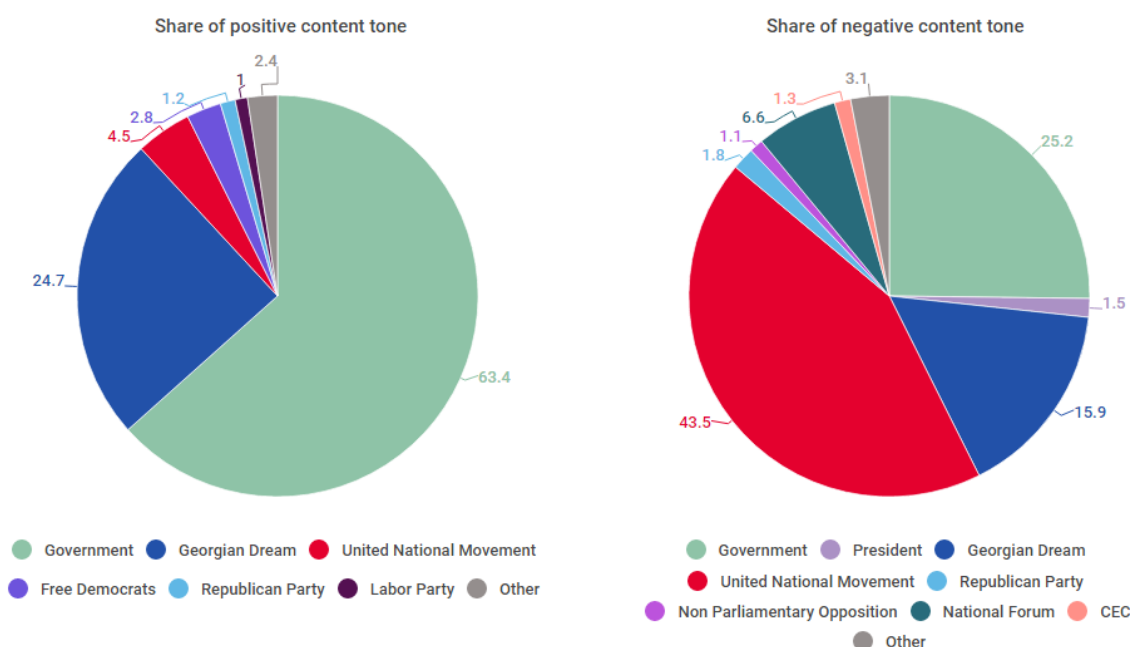
A total share of those qualified and newly established parties, whose share in negative content is less than 1%, amounts to 3.1% in negative content.

A share of Free Democrats in positive content is 2.8% and in negative content – 0.7%. A share of Republicans in positive content is 1.2% and in negative - 1.8%.

Among newly established parties, Tamaz Mechiauri – For United Georgia was mostly covered positively in tone (0.9%).

A share of the President’s coverage in positive content was one of the lowest (0.7%); negative content – 1.5%.

3.5.4 A Share of Political Subjects in Positive and Negative Content – GDS



Qualitative Data

The balance on GDS TV is inclined in favor of the ruling party and the government which is revealed by following statistical data - the total sum of a share of the government and the ruling party in positive content amounts 88,1%, while all other political subjects have 11, 9% share in positive content, respectively. Coverage of the government and/or activities linked to the companies owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili in the news programs of TV Company appears without background information and alternative opinion. Breaching standards regarding factual accuracy and covering public opinion polls is also revealed.

Accuracy of Facts/ Biased Coverage. The incident that took place on May 22, 2016 in the Village Kortskheli (Zugdidi Municipality) during the Midterm Local Elections, when the leaders of the United National Movement were physically abused, GDS TV covered on May 23, in the News Show “20:30” (on the 20:38 minute mark)²⁰. The coverage notes, that “out of 45 polling stations, this was the sole incident, reported during the Midterm Parliamentary Elections”

The coverage presents the incidents in the contexts of mutual responsibility: the two representatives of the opposition (United National Movement and Free Democrats) focus on the responsibilities of the Government, while the representatives of the ruling party – speak of the responsibilities of the UNM, which is being accused of provoking the violence. The Minister for Sports and Youth, Mr. Taniel Khechikashvili, as well as the member of the Georgian Dream, Mr. Leri Khabelovi, in their comments rejected the idea that sportsmen participated in the incident. Despite the fact that the videos air clearly shows the sportsmen²¹, the journalist fails to point out the factual discrepancy between the actual video documentation, and the comments made by the ruling team.

Towards the end of the coverage, it is pointed out, that out of 9 electoral districts, 7 was won by the Georgian Dream and 2 by the UNM representatives. The coverage in question fails to point out, that one of the districts were the National Movement had won is Kortskheli, where the incident took place.

Biased Coverage/Balance. On June 08, GDS covered floods that took place 1 year prior, on June 13 in the Vere Gorge in Tbilisi (on the 20:59 mark). The coverage mostly was dedicated to the rehabilitation infrastructural works of the Tbilisi Municipality and the assistance to the affected population. The journalist, based on the majority of the flooding victims, declares that “according to the majority of the June 13 flooding victims, they have already received compensation and housing space”. The statement is followed by Vake Gamgebeli (governor) comment, who notes that the majority of the victims have been satisfied and only several individuals remain out there that still dispute property and the categories assigned to them. Not only has the journalist failed to provide statistics on how many victims had been satisfied, but the coverage also fails to represent those individuals, who dispute the actions of the government with regard to their financial and material compensations. Only 2 victims were recorded, who recount development of events that took place 1 year ago. The coverage also fails to present comments of those NGOs, that monitored the process (Article 42) and advocated the rights of the flooding victims (Georgian Young Lawyers Association).

The second part of the coverage focuses on already carried out and the future recreational projects.

Biased Coverage/Balance. GDS covers the projects funded by the Georgian Co-Investing Fund. The Fund is established by Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili, former Prime-Minister of Georgia.

For example, on **May 25 (20:32 mark)** the news service of the GDS TV prepared as a first story to run a list of projects funded by the Fund. “A new investment for the merger of the high class Marriot hotels, the three of which are under construction and will be merged under the brand “Autograph Collection”. These includes the hotel financed by the Co-Investment Fund on Freedom Square, in Sololaki and in Shekvetili. The total sum of the project equals to \$ 265 Million.” This is how the news anchor presented the story.

The coverage features comments of the Prime Minister of Georgia, the representative of the Marriot, the representative of the Advisory Board of the Co-Investment Fund and the Mayor of Tbilisi. Their evaluation of the project is overly positive. The Mayor of Tbilisi not only highlights the positives, but also adds that “these are the projects, that only have positive sides to them”.

The coverage fails to mention civil protests, which is addressed towards the construction of one of the components of the projects – “Panorama Tbilisi” to be built on the Sololaki Heights. The construction has been the reason for numerous public demonstrations of environmental activists.

²⁰ On Weekend, the 20:30 does not air.

²¹ E.g. Mr. Vladimer Gegeshidze- Greco-Roman Style wrestler. Mr. Koba Tkeshelashvili - a member of the Georgian National Team, also a founder of the Georgian Federation for Mixed Martial Arts and others.

Balance/Accuracy of the Facts/Coverage of Cases Related to the Previous Government . GDS TV broadcasted 752 stories, out of which 54 were dedicated to high level officials of the previous government and the criminal charges brought against them. Only in July, 21 news shows covered 17 stories on previous government. The existing practice shows that, frequently the position of the defendant party is not represented or in some cases the absence of the respondent party is explained away by their refusal to comment on the story.

For example:

April 26 announcement of the show and the subsequent coverage “the demand of Tsindeliani” (**20:38 minute mark**) was dedicated to the so called 2008 March 27 prison upheaval in the #5 Ortachala Penitentiary Establishment: prisoner disobedience of the authorities results in the death of 7 inmates. After 10 years, the former prisoner, Mr. Levan Tsindeliani demands the events to be reinvestigated. Mr. Tsindeliani declares, that Mr. Bacho Akhalaia, Megis Kardava and other high level officials pressured him and demanded he confess in masterminding the prison upheaval. He believes that the allegations brought forward to the accused in the case are too soft and is inadequate with the gravity of the crime committed.

The coverage brings minor quote from the words of Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, where he can be heard saying, that he will not tolerate “the prison management by the thieves-in-law”. The coverage does not demonstrate exactly what role of the thieves-in-law in meant by the then President Saakashvili with regard to the prison upheaval in question, and it also does not say what were the initial findings of the investigation on the case. The coverage only offers the version of one contesting party and it is noted, that both the lawyers of Bacho Akhalaia and the Prosecutor’s office declined to comment on the case.

On June 25, 20:51 GDS TV covered testimony of the former Defense Minister, Irakli Okruashvili against the former President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili; the coverage shows a question, asked by the attorney representing a party to the witness. Mr. Okruashvili did not respond to the question, however the journalist has recorded a comment of the Prosecutor of the case. The comment of Saakashvili lawyer, despite the fact that the lawyer was present at the hearing, was not aired at all.

Standard for Airing Public Opinion Survey. On July 29, GDS TV covered the results of the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) public opinion survey. In presenting the survey results, the news anchor focused on the distrust towards the instrument. Also, the announcement was selective in the survey results. Namely, the anchor noted that, “the majority of the surveyed plans to vote for the Georgian Dream again, while the majority of the surveyed will never vote for the United National Movement”. By announcing results of two, separate questions in one single sentence, the anchor highlighted the supremacy of the Georgian Dream and discontent with the UNM. Additionally, on the question of “Which party would you never vote for?” – 21% indicated the UNM, while 19% - the GD. It must also be noted, that standard deviation of the research was +/- 2,1%.

On June 28, (20:44) GDS aired a coverage titled “Who did Rustavi 2 contract to conduct research?!” The research in question was conducted by German-American organization GFK. The coverage illustrated responses to only one question out of the research: “If you are participating in the October 8 elections, which political party would you vote for?” and the video shows answers, according to which “the Georgian Dream” is favored by 22,4% of the surveyed, while the National Movement by 21,7%. The answer to the question is followed by “party ratings”, according to which the “Georgian Dream” has 30,5%, while the National Movement – 28,2%. However, the coverage does not specify to which question did these answers belong to.

Furthermore, the coverage only speaks about the problematic issues related to brand name of GFK. As the journalist has put it, the current “research has made analytics question it”.

The research methodology, dates, and deviation margins are not listed at all.