

questions, margin of error, the number of respondents, methodology, et cetera. It is worth noting that titles of information of Pirveli Radio and GHN were identical, focusing on an insignificant difference between two political subjects – the Georgian Dream (33.2%) and the United National Movement (30.7%).

## 6.5 Marshalpress

**About Marshalpress.** The news agency Marshalpress<sup>48</sup> appeared in the Georgian media landscape on February 18, 2015. Marshalpress.ge is managed by private company Marshalpress Ltd, which, as of 6 May 2015, was wholly owned by Otar Stepanishvili, former journalist from Info 9. As a result of changes carried out on November 24, 2015, the shares were redistributed between Otar Stepanishvili (49%) and Luka Antidze (51%).

### Quantitative Data

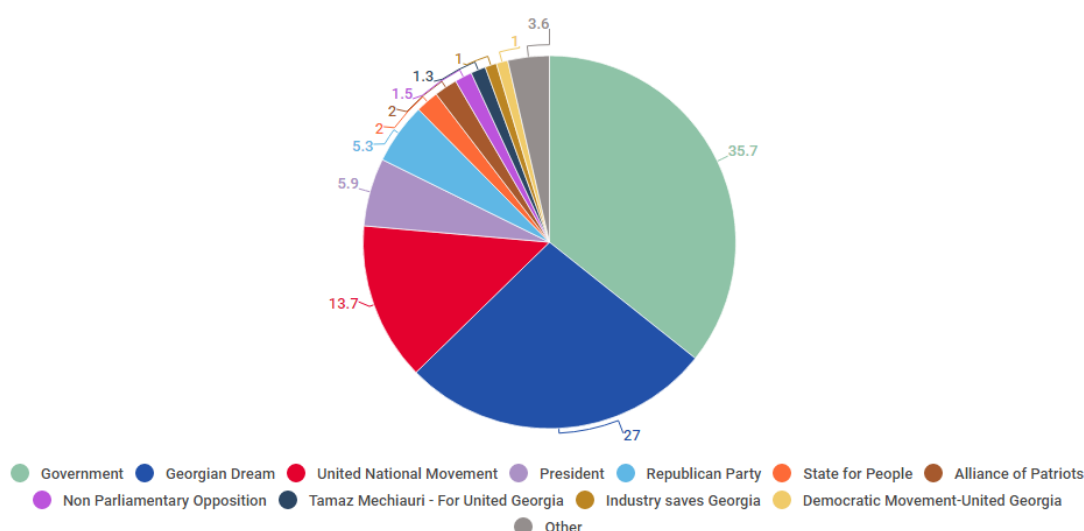
**Total coverage.** In the reporting period (1 April – 31 July), out of the total coverage (2738 articles) the news agency Marshalpress most extensively reported about the government (35.7%) and the Georgian Dream coalition (27%), making up 62.7% in total.

Among opposition political parties the highest share of coverage was received by the United National Movement (UNM) – at 13.7%. Following by the share of coverage were electoral subjects Republican Party (5.3%), Alliance of Patriots (2%) and a newly-established party, the State for People (2%).

The total coverage of all other qualified subjects comprised either 1% or less: the Industry Will Save Georgia and the Democratic Movement -United Georgia (1% each), Free Democrats (0.4%), the Conservative Party (0.4%), the National Forum (0.3%) and the Labor Party (0.3%).

As regards the coverage of institutions, the share of President comprised 5.9% whilst that of the Central Electoral Commission was at 0.2%.

**Chart. 6.5.1: Total coverage of political subjects, Marshalpress**

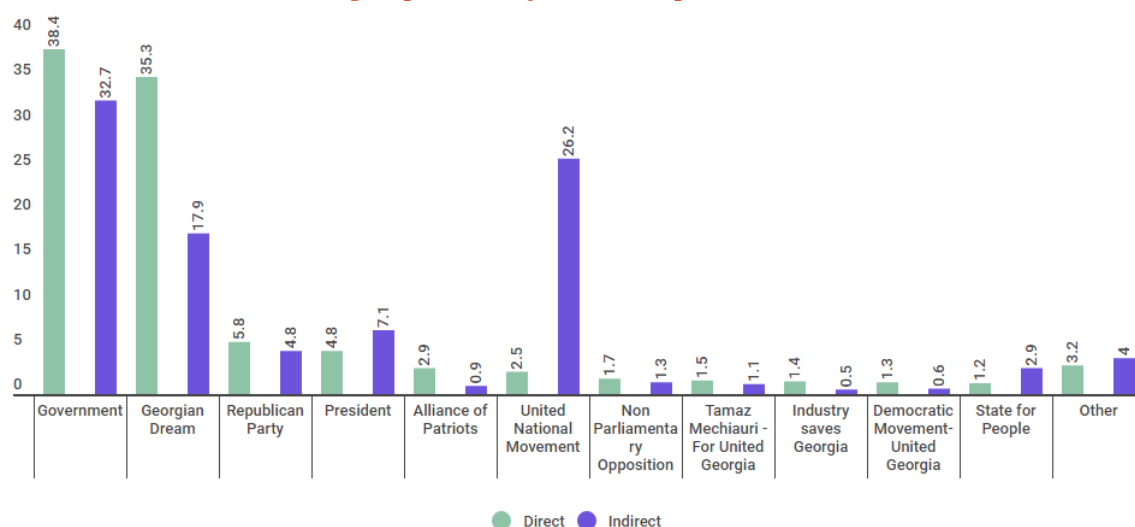


<sup>48</sup> Mediameter.ge, MDF, Marshalpres, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/marshalpress>

**Direct/indirect coverage.** Most extensive coverage in the form of direct (38.4%) and indirect (32.7%) reporting was received by the government. Shares of direct (35.3%) and indirect (17.9%) coverage of the Georgian Dream were also high respectively.

The largest difference between the direct and indirect coverage was seen in the reporting about the UNM, with direct reporting (26.2%) significantly exceeding indirect reporting (2.5%). The indicator of indirect reporting (7.1%) was also higher than that of direct reporting (4.8%) in the coverage of President. The same holds true for newly-established party State for People (indirect at 2.9% and direct at 1.2%) as well as the Free Democrats and the Labor Party (direct – 0.1%, indirect – 0.6%) which received a relatively less amount of coverage from the news agency. As the Chart 6.5.2 shows, such significant differences between these two indicators were not observed in relation to other political subjects.

**Chart 6.5.2: Direct/indirect coverage of political subjects, Marshalpress**

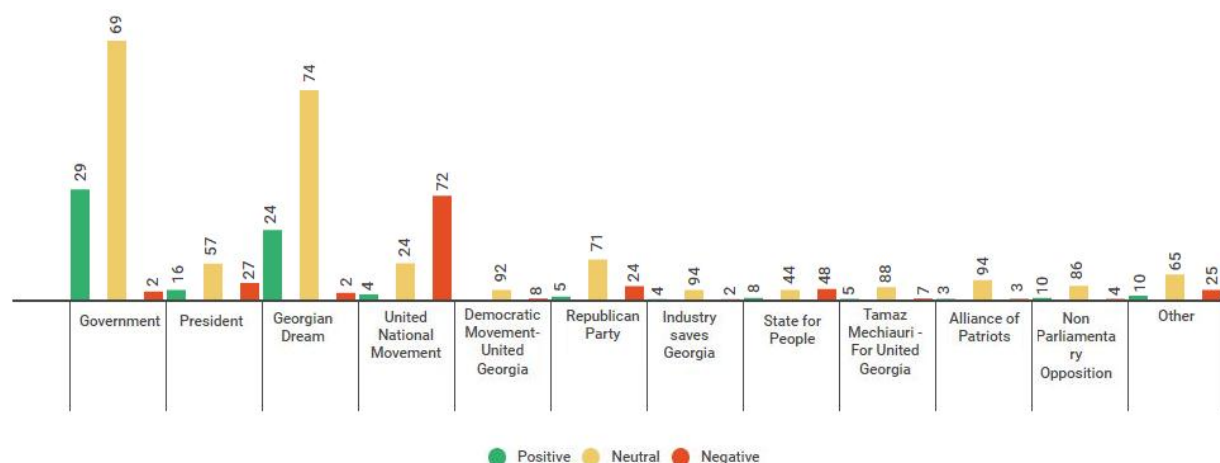


**Tone of content in covering subjects.** Compared to other news agencies, the coverage of particular political subjects were either explicitly positive or explicitly negative in tone. For example, the most extensive positive coverage was received by the government (29%), Georgian Dream (24%), President (16%), followed by non-parliamentary opposition (10%), various political parties which, taken separately, did not receive more than 1% of the total coverage (10%).

The highest negative tone of content was seen in the reporting about the UNM (72%), with the positive indicator comprising a mere 4%. The coverage of Republican Party was also high in negative tone (24%), while positive tone amounted 5%.

Although, after the government and the Georgian Dream coalition, the President received the highest amount of positive tone (16%), at the same time the negative coverage of President was quite high (27%). The same holds true for Paata Burchuladze's new political party State for People – 8% of positive coverage against 48% of negative coverage. The neutral content tone was overwhelming in the reporting about Alliance of Patriots (94%), Industry Will Save Georgia (94%), Democratic Movement- United Georgia (92%) and Tamaz Mechiauri-United Georgia (88%).

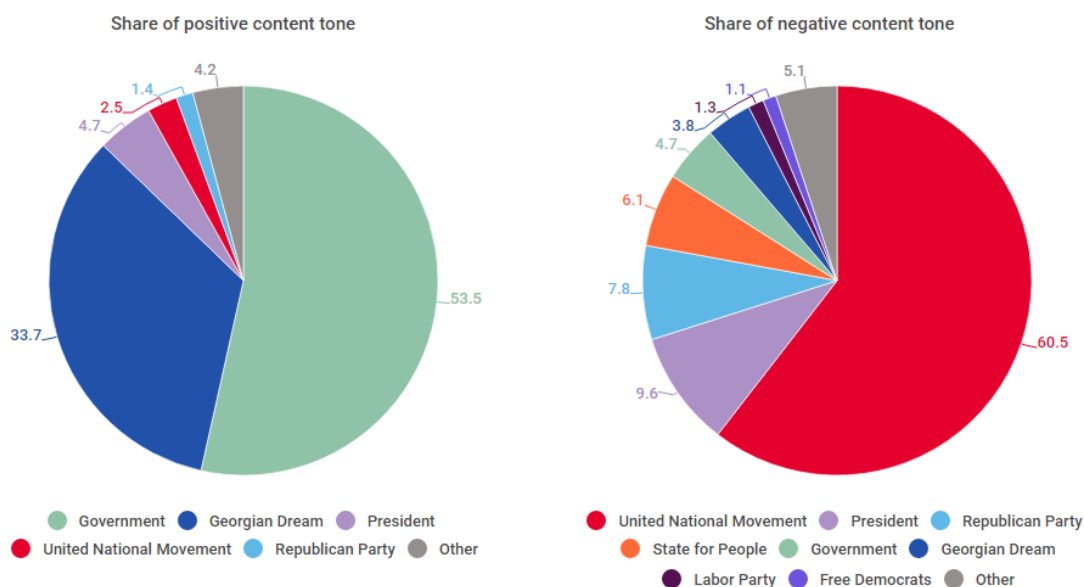
**Chart 6.5.3. Tone of content in reporting about political subjects, Marshalpress**



*Share of subjects in the news agency's content of positive and negative tone.* Marshalpress allocated the highest share of positive content tone to the government (53.5%) and Georgian Dream (33.7%), which, combined, made up 87.2%. Much smaller were the corresponding indicators for President (4.7%), UNM (2.5%), Republican Party (1.4%) and other subjects (4.2%), with all, taken together, totaling 12.8% of positive content.

As regards the negative content tone, the highest share was seen in the case of UNM (60.5%), followed by President (9.6%), Republican Party (7.8%), State for People (6.1%). Relatively lower indicators of negative coverage were seen in reporting about the government (4.7%), Georgian Dream (3.8%), and all those subjects (4.2%) which received less than 1% of the total coverage and are shown in the Chart 6.5.4 in the form of a total share.

**Chart 6.5.4: Tone of coverage of political subjects, Marshalpress**



## Qualitative Data

The data and analysis gathered showed that the news agency Marshalpress was distinguished for violating ethical standards, principles of balance, accuracy and using visual manipulations.

**Visual manipulation.** The news agency manipulated with photo and video materials in regard to separate politicians and various topics in order to exacerbate critical attitudes among society.



For example, an excerpt from an interview of former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili which he gave to France 24 in 2015, was published by the news agency in an edited form under the title “Inebriated Mikheil Saakashvili” (April 18).<sup>49</sup> A 16-second-long video,<sup>50</sup> which contained only small fragments of journalist Robert Parsons asking two separate questions, was focused on the expression of Saakashvili’s face when he was listening to the questions; the respondent’s answers to those questions were cut out and the last shot of the video stopped on the smiling face of Saakashvili. The video was accompanied with the editorial comment saying that the news agency decided to publish this material, in which Saakashvili seemed inebriated, because of its popularity on social networks. The material was misleading whilst its title based on manipulation of video and unfounded editorial text.

On 21 July, Marshalpress used photomontage again,<sup>51</sup> suggesting that the former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili had ties with ISIS. The illustration was accompanied with the information titled “**List of educational institutions established by Fethullah Gülen in Georgia.**” Relying on the founder of political party Kartuli Dasi, Jondi Baghaturia, as a source, the news agency alleged that Fethullah Gülen, whom the Turkish government accused of coup d’état attempt, together with Saakashvili’s mother, Giuli Alasania, established educational institutions in Georgia. The information contained only the list of educational institutions, but no information about the persons portrayed against the background of ISIS in the manipulated photo.



Yet another photo manipulation concerned Paata Burchuladze, the leader of newly established political party State for People. On 16 May, the news agency reprinted a comment of poet Rezo Amashukeli, which was published in a tabloid *Asaval-Dasavali* newspaper, under the title “**Paata Burchuladze defended Rustavi 2 brothel like a brothel keeper.**”<sup>52</sup> The photomontage accompanying the text manipulated with biographical details of Paata Burchuladze, who was an opera singer, portraying him performing the solo; the comment to the photo said that Paata Burchuladze was the UNM’s satellite and was fulfilling its order.

<sup>49</sup> Marshalpress, 18 April, 2016. <http://marshalpress.ge/archives/32867>

<sup>50</sup> France 24, The Interview, 23 February, 2015. <http://www.france24.com/en/20150221-interview-mikheil-saakashvili-former-georgian-president-ukraine-putin-poroshenko>

<sup>51</sup> <http://marshalpress.ge/archives/49610>

<sup>52</sup> <http://marshalpress.ge/archives/37792>



wedding dress.

The chapter on Hate Speech discusses an instance of photomontage which is of homophobic nature (pg. 80). On April 20, news agency again published article titled **“Signatures cannot be collected for putting an issue of same-sex marriage on referendum”**<sup>53</sup> in homophobic contest. The material concerns the registration of a referendum question about the definition of a family as an union between a man and a woman in the Constitution. The article is illustrated with a photo from an LGBT pride in a foreign country, portraying a man in a

**Accuracy/impartiality.** Like the news agency PIA, Marshalpress reported about the attack on leaders of United National Movement by sportsmen transported from Tbilisi in the village of Kortskheli, Zugdidi district, during the midterm local elections on 22 May, in a biased way, describing it as a physical confrontation between local population and UNM members (**“Physical confrontation at Kortskheli precinct”**). The accompanying video, however, featured physical assault on UNM members by strangers.

Similarly to PIA, Marshalpress reprinted a one-sided material titled **“Where Paata Burchuladze spends contributions of our citizens”** (20 July) from *Akhali Taoba* newspaper. In the article with the title accusing the leader of State for People political party of misappropriating revenues of the charity fund Iavnana, doubts were expressed, in the form of questions, about the embezzlement of monies collected as charity contributions. The report is unbalanced as it did not contain comments of either Paata Burchuladze or a representative of the charity fund.

Accusations against the leader of Labor Party, Shalva Natelashvili, titled **“Soso Shatberashvili: Labor Party received substantial funding from the UNM,”**(14 May) were expressed based on one source alone and without providing any proof. The material was built on a comment of Soso Shatberashvili, the leader of Left Alliance and former Labor Party member, in which he alleged that the UNM transfers hundreds of thousand euros to Shalva Natelashvili’s account in a bank in Austria. The material was unbalanced, failing to provide either a position of Labor Party representative or any factual evidence.

**Accuracy/manipulative title.** With the material titled **“You have no right to come here – population confronts Varshalomidze”** (20 July), Marshalpress reported about a pre-election meeting of UNM leader in Ajara, Levan Varshalomidze, with population. A video attached to the material, however, showed that the dissatisfaction with the period of UNM rule was voiced only by one citizen attending the meeting. The news agency generalized the disapproval of the UNM leader by one person on the entire population noting in the editorial text that Levan Varshalomidze who arrived at the so-called City of Dream was confronted by a segment of residents there. Both the title and the text were misleading.

**Bias/tendency.** The coverage of Free Democrats was also negative; while the total reporting about the party was very small (0.4%), the share of negative coverage in it was quite high which can be proved by titles given below for illustration purposes:

“Demur Giorkhelidze: God forbid Georgia from a leader like Irakli Alasania!” (6 April); “Why was Alasania not interrogated? Why is he not held responsible?” (19 May); “Irakli Alasania may be interrogated” (23 May); “Zaza Piralishvili left Free Democrats” (16 June); “Members of Alasania’s team left the party and joined Georgian Dream” (21 June); “Kvitsiani: Irakli Alasania and his special services had laid a trap for me” (14 July); “Gamzardia: Compared to Alasania, even Bokeria seems the embodiment of morality and honesty” (16 May).

<sup>53</sup> <http://marshalpress.ge/archives/33148>



*Accuracy/standard of reporting opinion polls.* In the material titled “**NDI: Georgian Dream – 31%, UNM – 11%**” (13 April), Marshalpress provided the data which did not reflect official results of the public opinion poll conducted by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI). In particular, the information released by the news agency noted that the Georgian Dream was in the lead among the political parties by responses to the question “if parliamentary elections were held tomorrow which party would you vote for?” with 31% of respondents naming the Georgian Dream and 11% of respondents naming the UNM. The official data published by the NDI,<sup>54</sup> showed different results to the above question; namely, 16% named Georgian Dream and 15% named the UNM.

That 31% was the result of responses to a totally different question, namely “if parliamentary elections were held tomorrow which party do you think would win?” to which 31% of respondents named Georgian Dream and 11 named the UNM.

The above news items contained only 4 compulsory indicators out of 11 specified in Article 51(11) of the Electoral Code of Georgia; namely, organization that commissioned the poll, geographic area, the number of respondents and the time of conducting the poll.

Similarly to PIA, Marshalpress distorted the results of NDI June polls in the material titled “NDI: 57% of respondents would vote for the same political party they supported in 2012” (29 July). The text of the material did not specify that 57% reflected the attitudes of the majority of that 38% of respondents who already decided whom they would vote for. Of compulsory data, the information contained only five –the organization that commissioned the poll, the methodology, the number of respondents, the geographic area and the time of conducting the poll.

---

<sup>54</sup>NDI (March, 2016), Public attitudes in Georgia.

[https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202016%20poll\\_Public%20political\\_GEO\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20political_GEO_vf.pdf)