PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2020 GEORGIA

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

Final report
1 September - 30 October 2020

15 February 2021

Supported by

Transitions

MEMO98

INTRODUCTION

Between 1 September and 30 October 2020, MEMO 98, a Slovak non-profit specialist media-monitoring organization, in cooperation with GIPA (Georgia), Transitions (Czechia), and Linking Media (Poland), monitored social media in the run-up to the 3 November parliamentary elections in Georgia. The monitoring included 41 different actors (political parties, politicians, and media) with accounts on Facebook who produced a total of 44,126 posts and generated as many as 21,547,243 interactions.

The main purpose of the monitoring has been to determine the impact of the monitored social media on the electoral process and the extent to which social media serve as a platform to provide important information that voters need in their decision making. While in general, for most people, television remains the primary source of information about politics, the growing relevance of social media inspired us to monitor the use of Facebook and Instagram during the Georgian elections. According to a survey by National Democratic Institute, the internet and social media are important sources of information people use to access political news and information in Georgia.

The monitoring also focused on topics and issues discussed in the context of elections. When it comes to social media, we have focused on profiles of contesting political parties, individual politicians as well as selected Facebook pages of traditional media. From a wider perspective, we also wanted to assess the overall role of social media in the elections and their potential impact on election integrity, particularly the level of public trust and confidence in the process. This monitoring was conducted by students of GIPA in the framework of a project financed by the Czech foreign ministry along with USAID co-financing coming through People in Need.

1 Pubic Attitudes in Georgia, carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia:
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202019_Public%20Presentation_ENG_VF.pdf

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

● In the period between 1 September and 30 October, we monitored 41 public pages of political parties, politicians, and media, which produced a total of 44,126 posts on Facebook. These posts generated a total of 21,547,243 interactions.

● In the electoral campaign, the most active party was Free Georgia with a total number of 670 posts on Facebook, while the most active politician was Bidzina Ivanishvili with 500 posts. During the electoral campaign, the number of interactions on the politicians' pages was about 1.3 times higher than on the parties' pages.

● The most popular candidate on Facebook by the number of interactions was Mikheil Saakashvili (1,126,490), followed by Giorgi Gakharia (641,727) and Zurab Japaridze (337,462). The most popular party by the number of interactions was Giorgi Vashadze – Strategy Aghmashenebeli (739,631), followed by Georgian Dream (679,461), and United National Movement (615,298). Mikheil Saakashvili generated more than four times more interactions to his 128 posts than Bidzina Ivanishvili, who generated almost four times more posts.

● The most covered issues measured by the number of posts of candidates and parties were Elections-campaigning, Elections-general, and Economy in general. The fifth and sixth most covered topics were COVID-19 in Georgia-adopted measures and COVID-19 in Georgia-failure to adopt measures respectively. In this regard, it is important to note that COVID-19 impacted the way the electoral campaign was conducted.

● The issues that generated most interactions from Facebook users were Elections–campaigning, Elections-general, and Road & infrastructure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Between 4 August to 25 November, there were in total 6301 advertisements on Facebook and Instagram in Georgia on social, electoral, or political issues, with a total value of € 609,460 or about 2,432,125 Lari.

- Among politicians, Giorgi Vashadze spent the most money on advertising on social issues, elections, and politics, starting from 4 August. At the same time, Zviad Dzidziguri was the only candidate who did not use a single euro for his promotion on Facebook and Instagram, according to the Facebook Ad Library.

- Tbilisi, Kakheti, and Kvemo Kartli were the top three administrative regions where most advertisements on social issues, elections, or politics were delivered between 4 August and 25 November.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN GEORGIA

DIGITAL REPORT ON GEORGIA

According to the data from the Digital report on Georgia released by We are social and Hootsuite, with some 3,99 million Georgian, approximately 2,7 million (some 68 percent) are internet users and approximately the same number of them are active social media users (most of them accessing social media via mobile phones). The report indicated that Facebook is the most widely used social media platform with Facebook reporting that as many as 2,5 million people can be reached with adverts on Facebook. By comparison, around 940 thousand people can be reached on Instagram which is the second most used social media platform.

According to a survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute in Georgia, 69 percent of people indicated television as their first main source of information about politics and current affairs. By comparison, 24 percent of people are using the internet and Facebook as their first source of news (and 25 percent as the second source). Of the 57 percent Georgians who encounter political news on Facebook, only 11 percent mostly trust it, 67 percent sometimes trust is and 20 percent never trust it.

It is important to mention that this year, all entities that wanted to run ads about social issues, elections, or politics on Facebook and Instagram in Georgia were required to complete an authorizations process. The Facebook policy required that any advertiser who wanted to create or edit ads targeting Georgia that reference political figures, political parties, or elections (including “get out the vote” campaigns) had to go through the authorization process, place "Paid for by" disclaimers on ads and had these ads enter the Ad Library. This included any person creating, modifying, publishing, or pausing ads about social issues, elections, or politics. These persons had to submit an ID issued by the Government of Georgia and to submit it for review to Facebook.

2 For more information, check also https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-georgia1

BACKGROUND

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2020 AND COVID-19

In June 2019, a wave of anti-government protests demanding the resignation of the government and the conduct of early elections under a fully-proportional system broke out but failed to generate such a change. On 8 March 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding between the main opposition parties and the ruling party was signed leading to the adoption of the constitutional amendments and conduct of these elections under a revised electoral system. These amendments introduced a larger proportional component to the electoral system and lowered the threshold for parties to be represented in parliament.

The president called parliamentary elections on 31 August. On 31 October 2020, voters elected the parliament through a new mixed electoral system with 120 members elected proportionally through party lists, and 30 in single-member constituencies. In the proportional component of the vote, parties had to obtain at least one percent of valid votes cast to qualify for proportional seat allocation. When it comes to majoritarian contests, candidates could be nominated by the parties or run independently and had to receive over 50 percent of the votes cast to be elected. If no candidate received the required number of votes, a second-round was held between the two leading candidates (there were 17 second rounds during these elections held on 21 November 2020).

Political and social tensions continued during the campaign which was also considerably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ODIHR preliminary statement on the elections mentions that "while political activities were not restricted by the COVID-19 regulations, many parties reported reducing public campaign activities due to health-related concerns".

3 OSCE/ODIHR, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 31 October 2020, available at https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/d/469005.pdf

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK – political parties

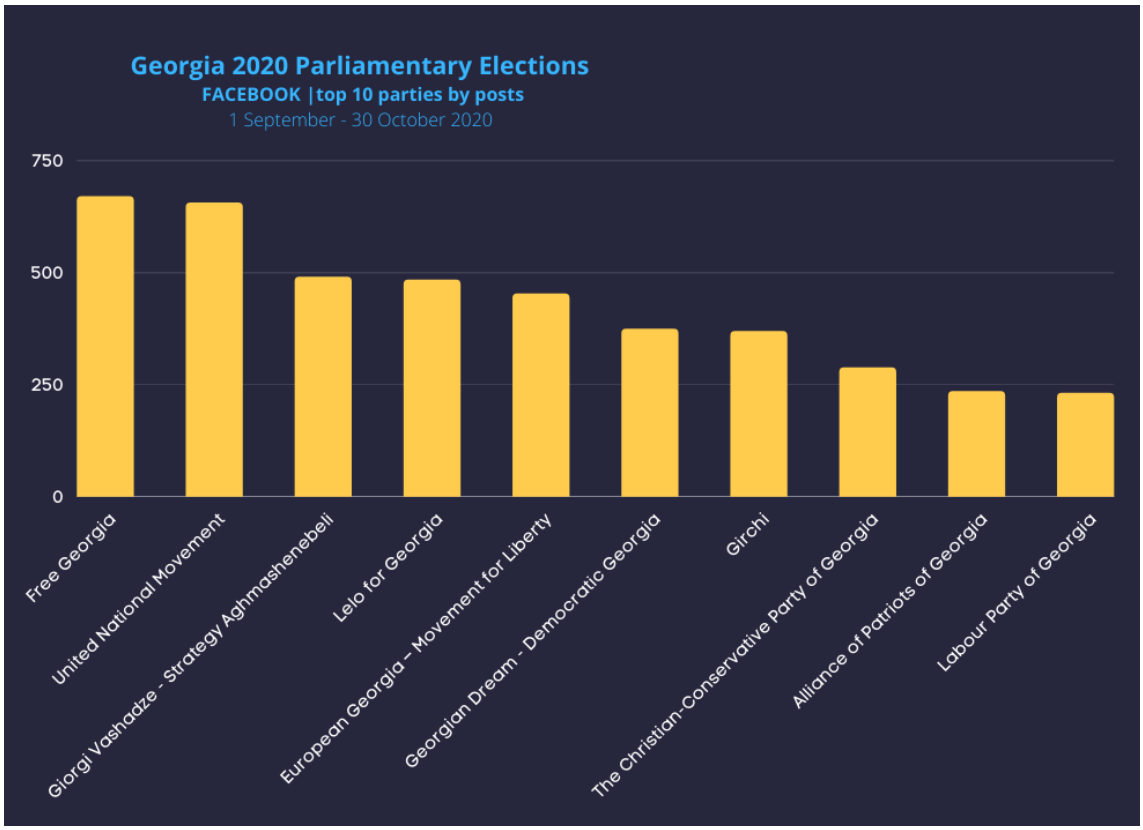

Chart 1

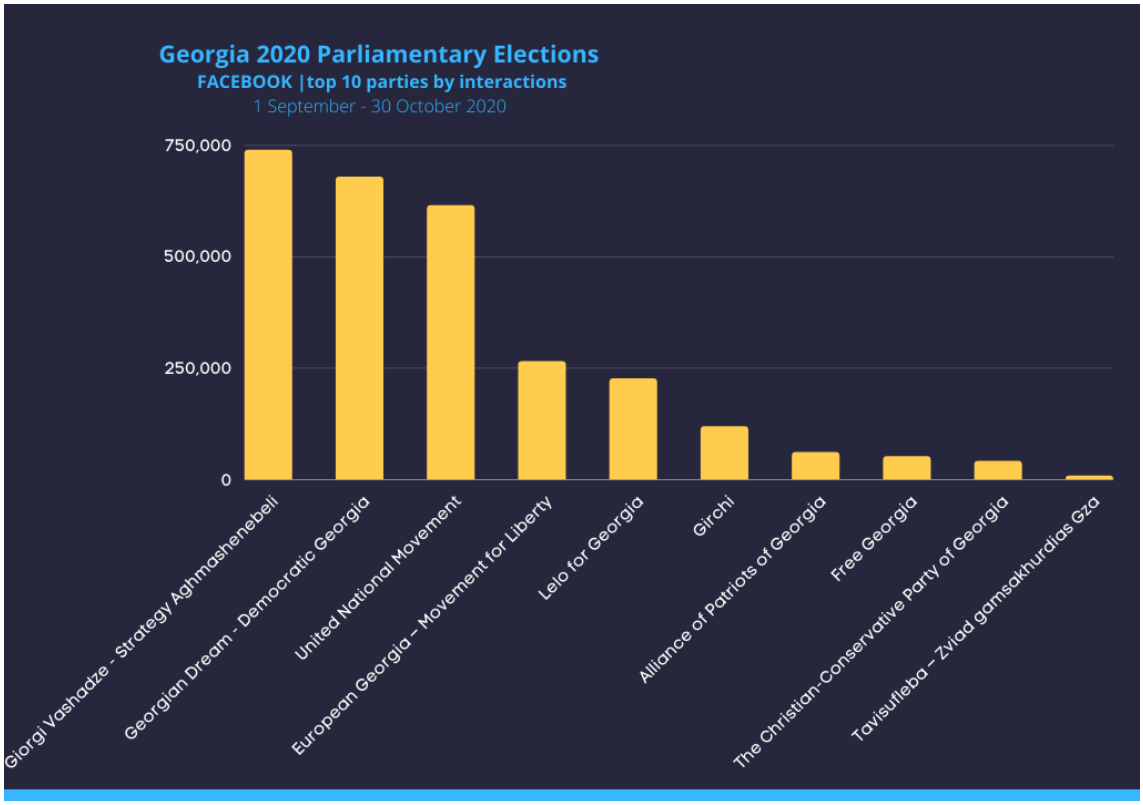

Chart 2

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - politicians

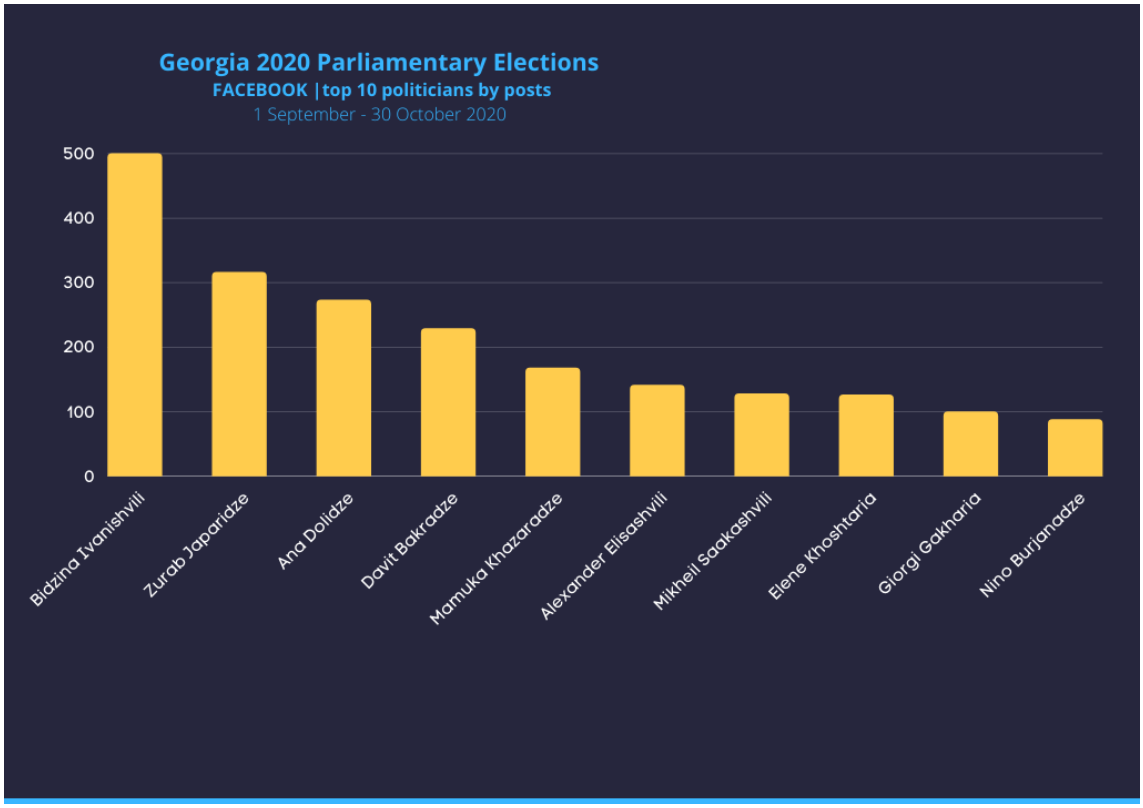

Chart 3

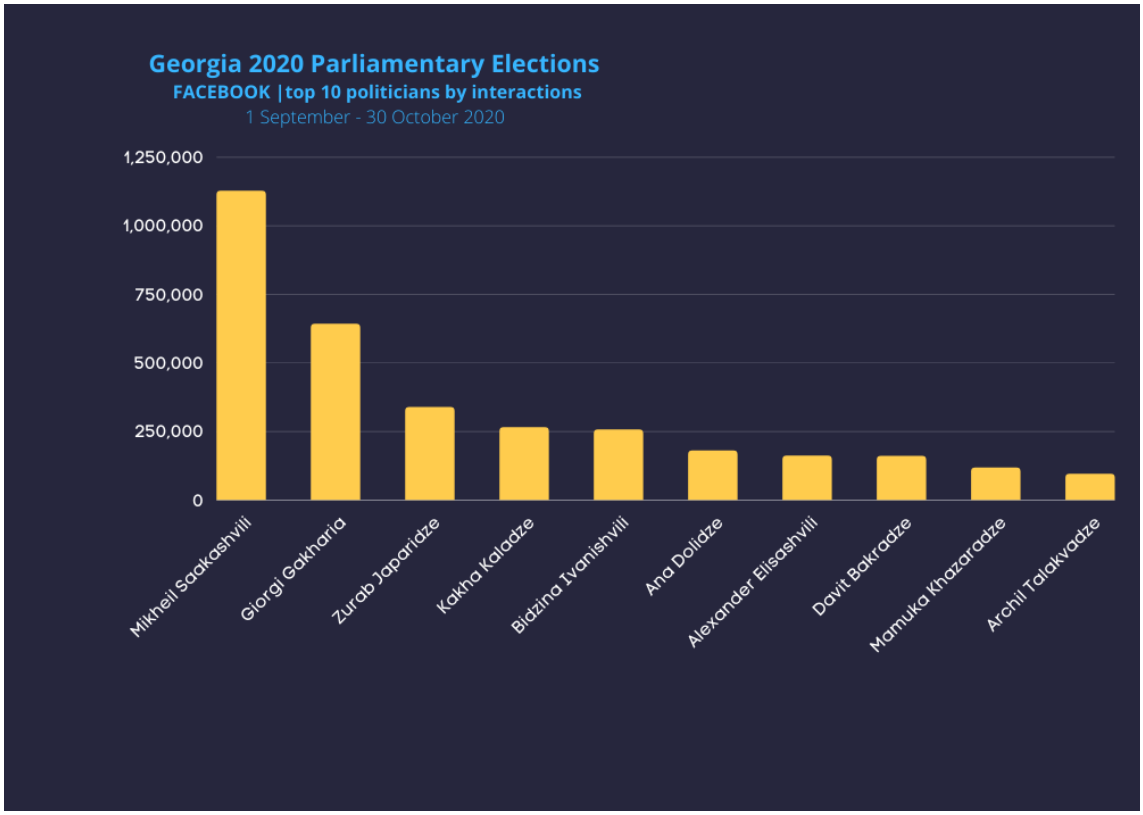

Chart 4

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - media

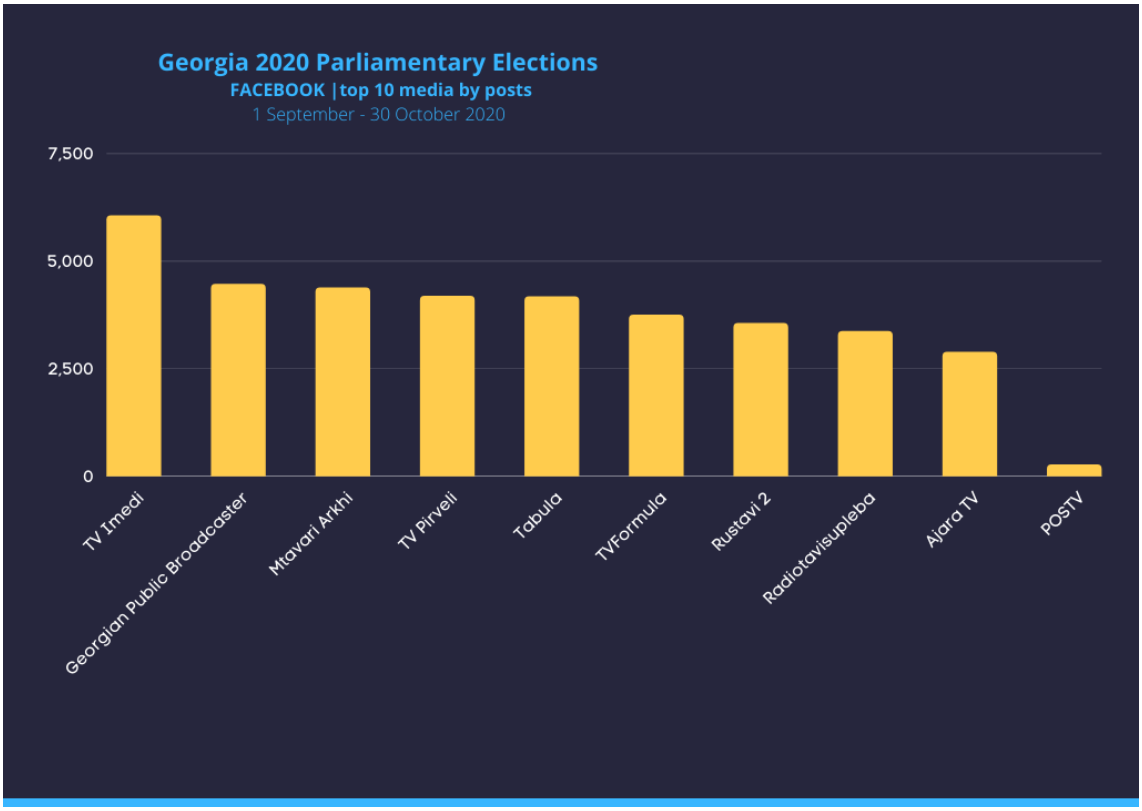

Chart 5

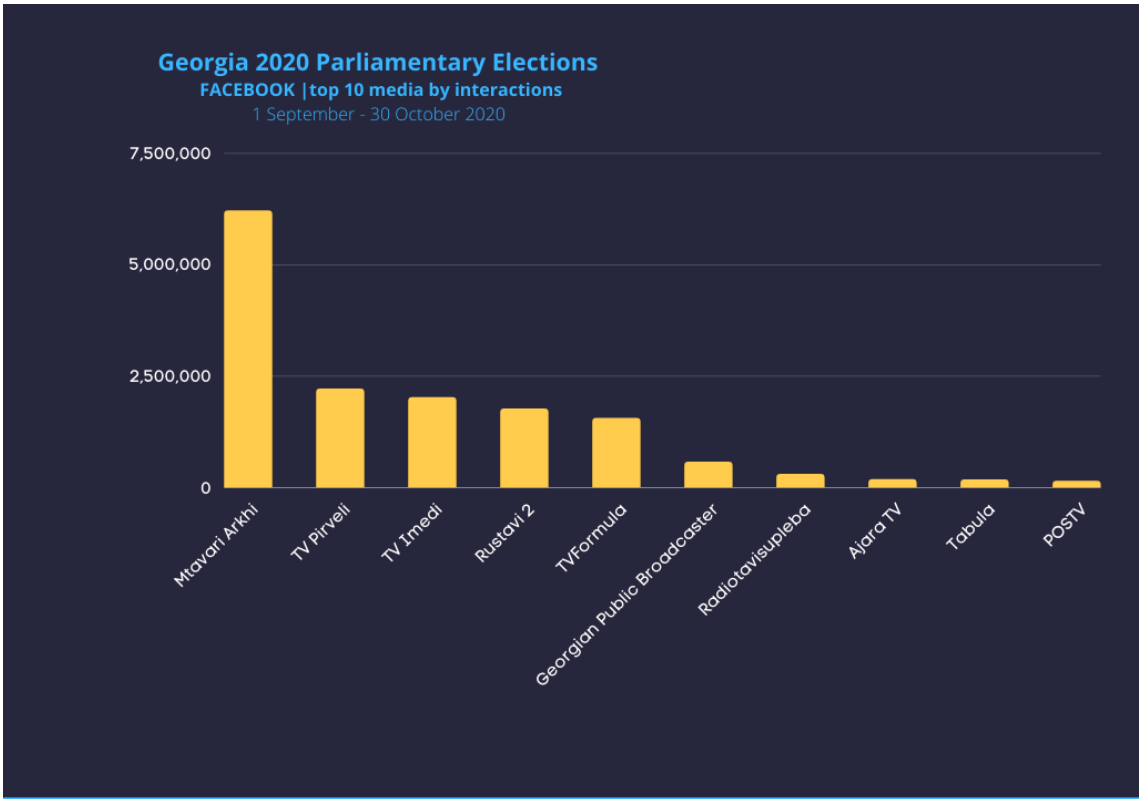

Chart 6

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - political parties - reactions (likes)

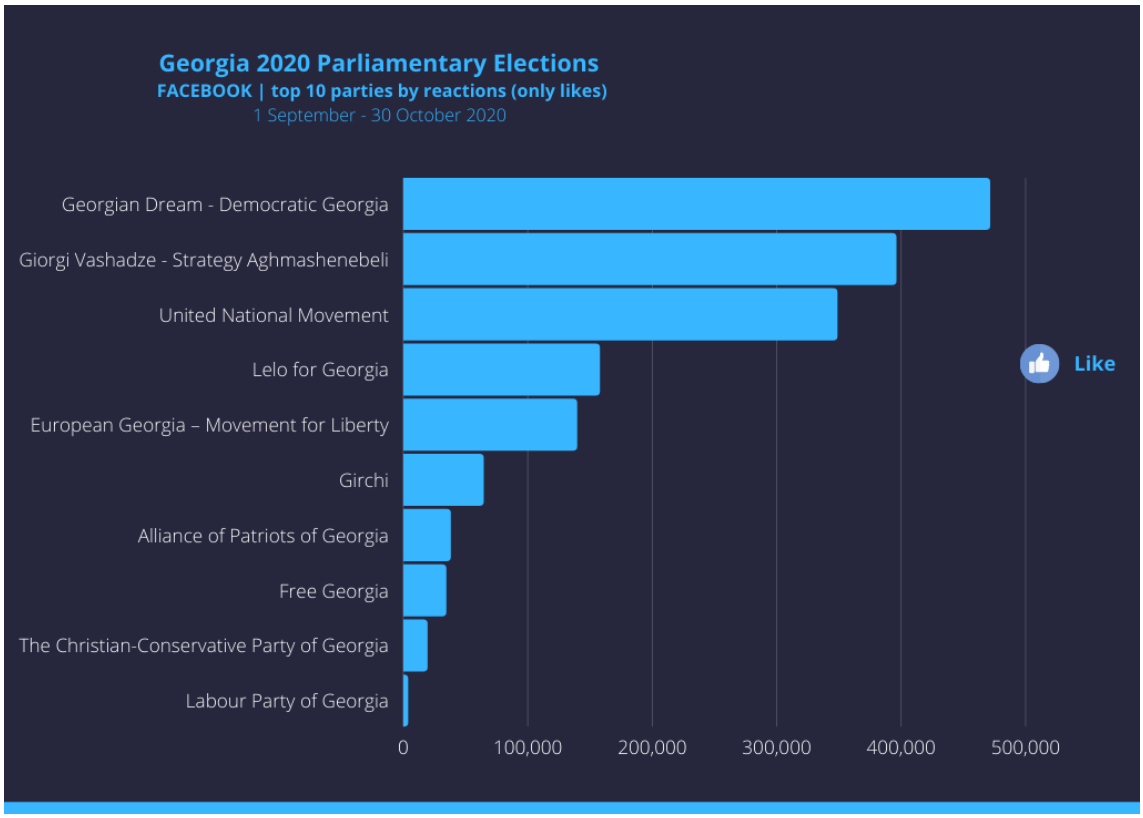

Chart 7

FACEBOOK - politicians - reactions (likes)

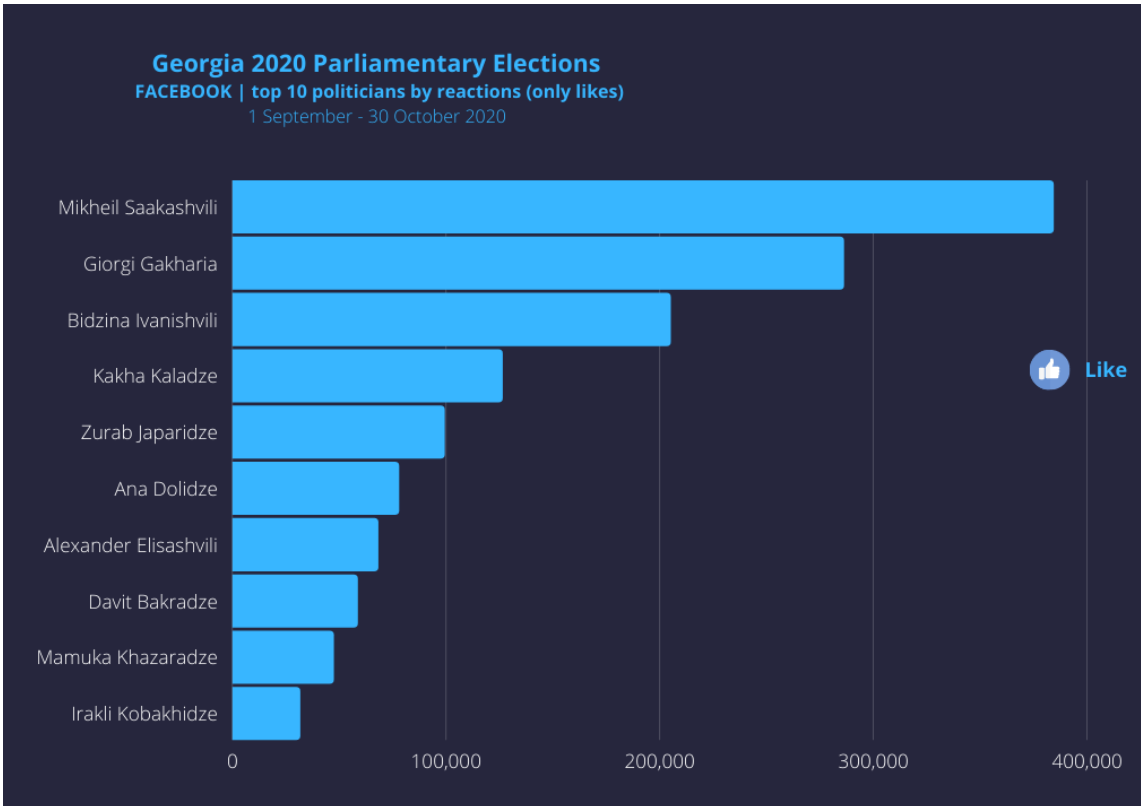

Chart 8

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - political parties -reactions (no likes)

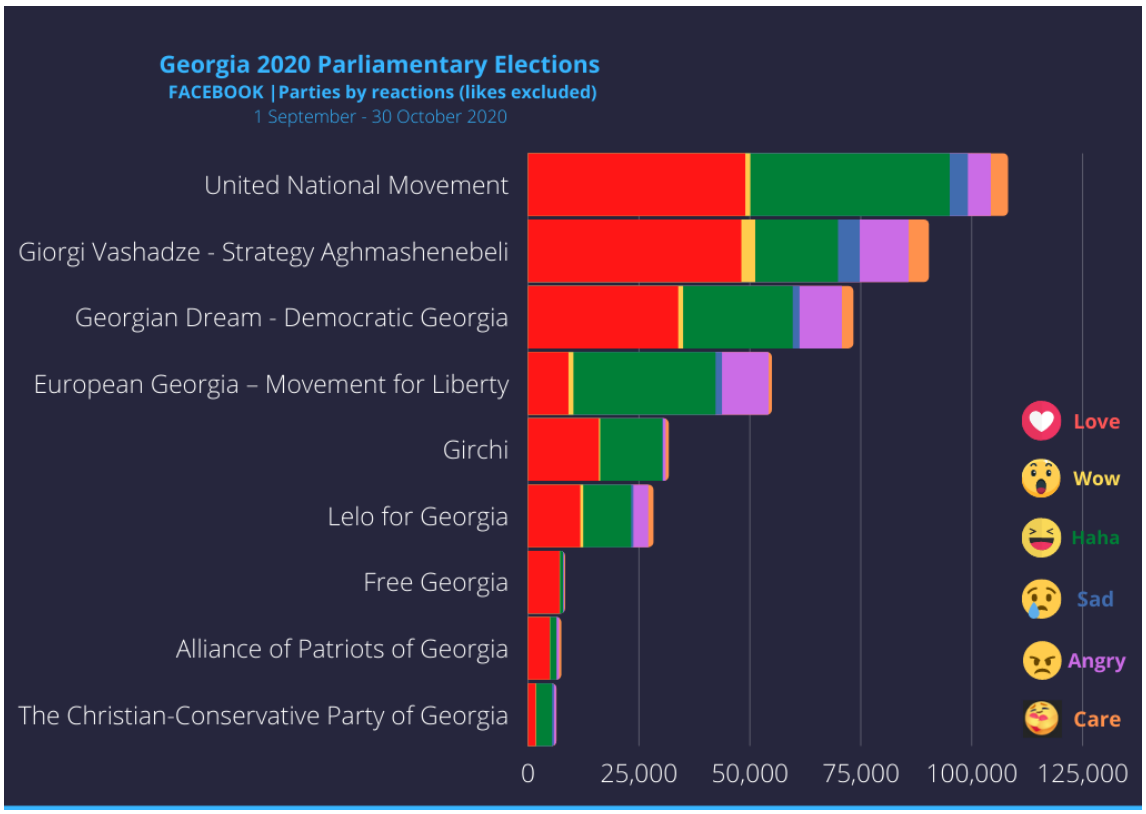

Chart 9

FACEBOOK - politicians -reactions (no likes)

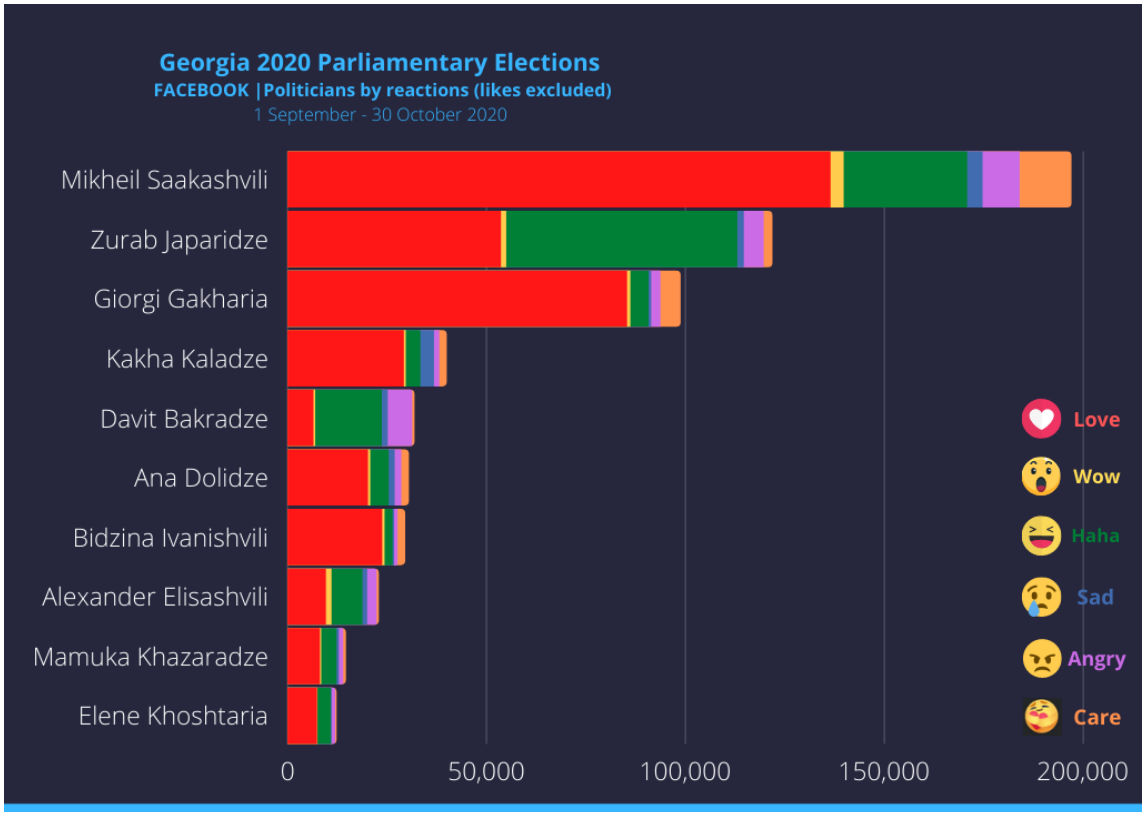

Chart 10

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - top 10 issues by parties - posts

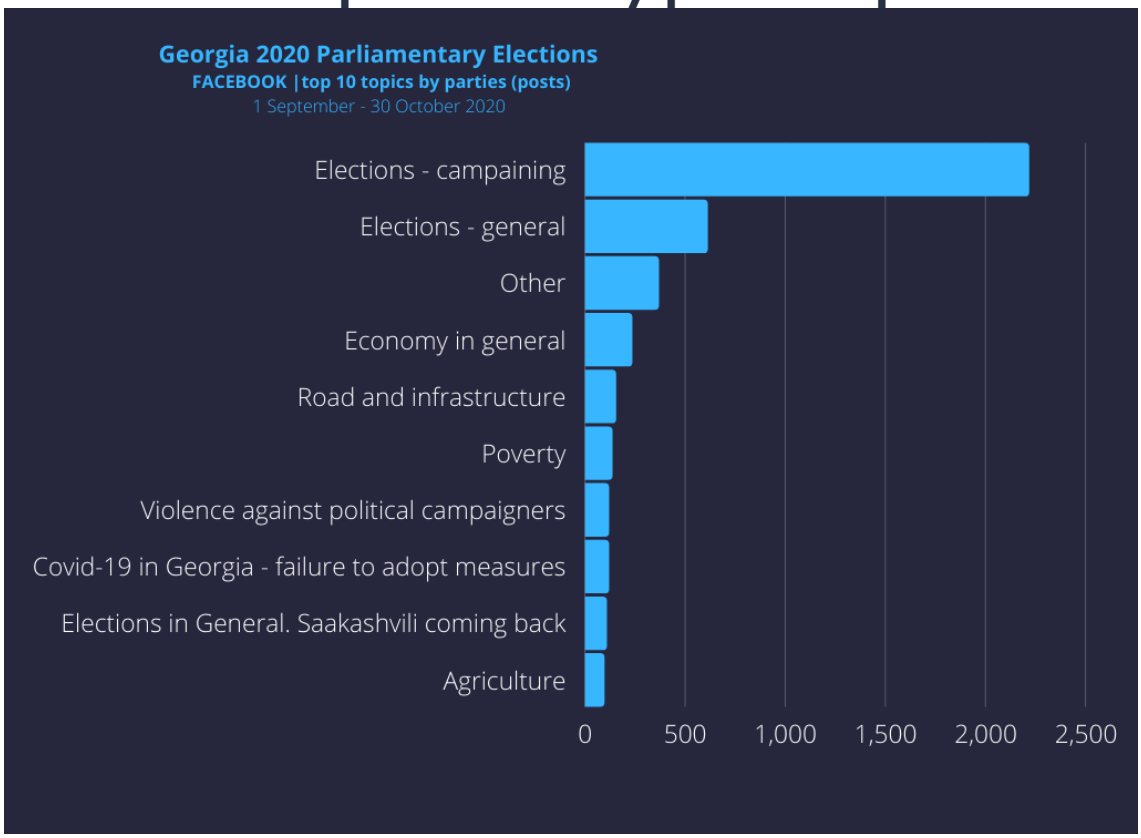

Chart 11

FACEBOOK - top 10 issues by parties - interact.

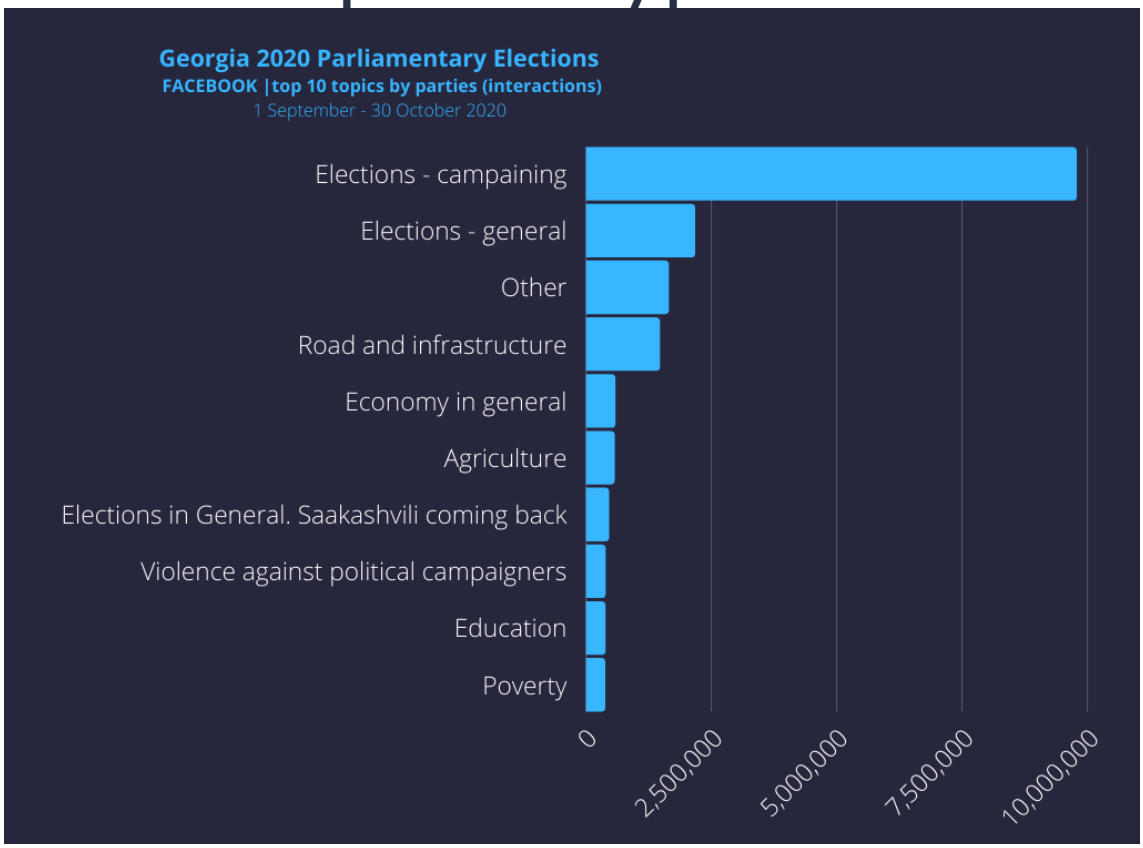

Chart 12

MONITORING RESULTS

FACEBOOK - Ads Library (4/8/2020 - 25/11/2020)

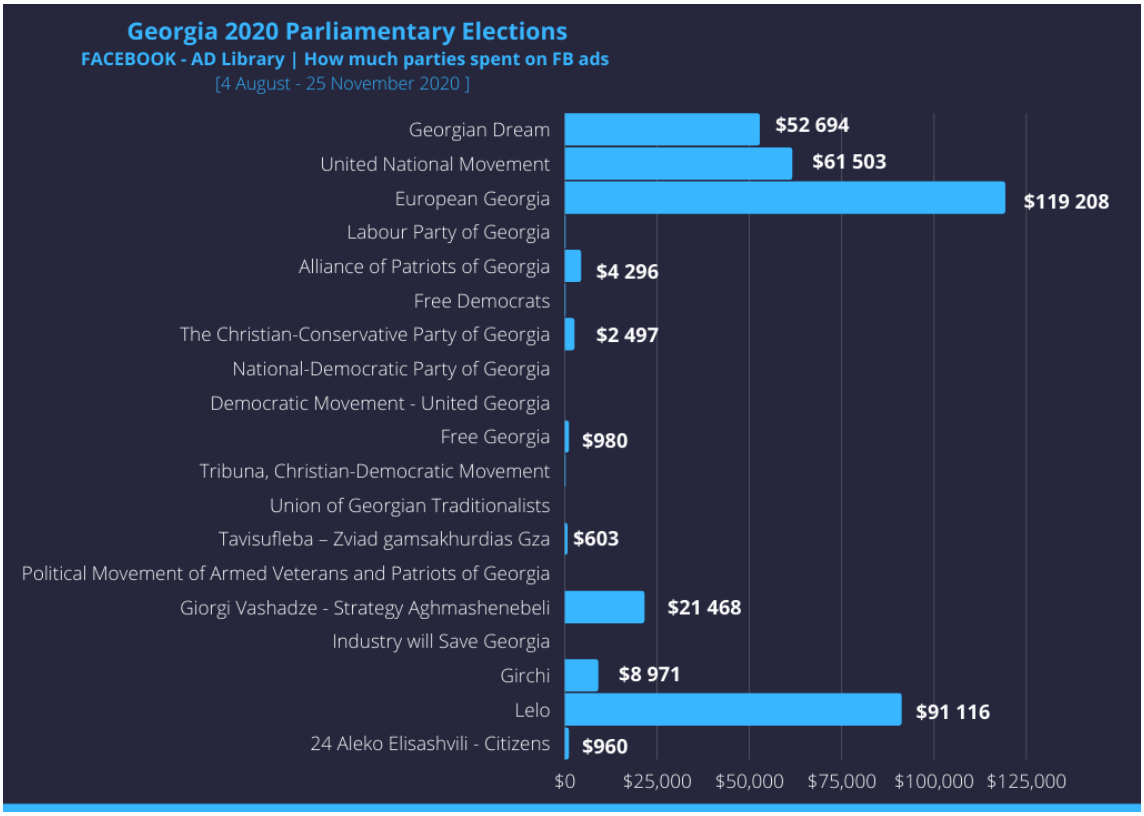

Chart 13

METHODOLOGY

The applied methodology consists of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the selected media content (we analyzed only Facebook). For the election campaign (1 September - 30 October 2020), we analyzed a list of registered political parties (16), as well as their leaders active on social media(15). Also, we monitored posts by 10 media outlets.

The quantitative analysis focuses on the number of posts generated by political actors (parties, politicians as well as media, with the assistance of CrowdTangle (CT). We looked at the engagement statistics such as the number of reactions (likes and other emoticons), shares, and comments. This was done in order to determine how active are the politicians and their parties on social media and how are people engaging with their posts. The quantitative data concerning the posts were extracted every three days from 1 September to 30 October, so it might slightly differ from the current engagement data on posts.

The qualitative analysis means that we analyzed the manner in which the actual messages were presented (positive, neutral, negative). We looked at their posts through a predefined list of issues that were addressed by politicians and parties in their posts. We also looked at the tone of the coverage in which selected issues were presented. In case they were promoted they were assessed as positive; in case they were criticized, they were assessed as negative. In case these topics or issues were only introduced without stating any specific position, they were assessed as neutral.

4 CrowdTangle (a social media analytics tool owned by Facebook) "tracks public posts on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, made by public accounts or groups. The tool does not track every public account and does not track private profiles or groups, so this data is not representative of performance across the entire platform. The numbers shown here reflect public interactions (likes, reactions, comments, shares, upvotes and three second views), but do not include reach or referral traffic. It does not include paid ads unless those ads began as organic, non-paid posts that were subsequently "boosted" using Facebook's advertising tools. Because the system doesn't distinguish this type of paid content, note that some high-performing content may have had paid distribution. CrowdTangle also does not track posts made visible only to specific groups of followers."

METHODOLOGY

One social media post served as a reference and unit of analysis. As such, in order to preserve the total number of posts, in instances with various issues contained in one post, these posts were divided by a number of issues. These results can be found in Chart 11. We used CT to export the metadata which was further analyzed by a human coder.

List of monitored parameters
Political parties (16)

Alliance of Patriots of Georgia
Giorgi Vashadze - Strategy Aghmashenebeli
Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia
United National Movement
Lelo for Georgia
European Georgia – Movement for Liberty
Girchi
The Christian-Conservative Party of Georgia
Free Georgia
Free Democrats
Tavisufleba – Zviad gamsakhurdias Gza
National-Democratic Party of Georgia
Political Movement of Armed Veterans and Patriots of Georgia
Labour Party of Georgia
“Democratic Movement - United Georgia
Tribuna, Christian-Democratic Movement

METHODOLOGY

Politicians (15)

Kakha Kaladze
Giorgi Gakharia
Mikheil Saakashvili
Irakli Kobakhidze
Nino Burjanadze
Zurab Japaridze
Alexander Elisashvili
Ana Dolidze
Archil Talakvadze
Davit Bakradze
Mamuka Mdinaradze
Mamuka Khazaradze
Giga Bokeria
Elene Khoshtaria
Bidzina Ivanishvili

Media (10)

Mtavari Arkhi
TV Pirveli
TV Imedi
TVFormula
Rustavi 2
Georgian Public Broadcaster
POSTV
Radiotavisupleba
Tabula
Ajara TV

METHODOLOGY

Top issues (59)

World pandemic Covid-19
Covid-19 in Georgia (general)
Covid-19 in Georgia - adopted measures
Covid-19 in Georgia - failure to adopt measures
Covid-19 in Georgia - health, social implications
GEO - Russian relations
Court Transparency
GEO - EU relations
GEO - US relations
International affairs
Belarus crisis
Elections in General. Saakashvili coming back
Online education during Covid-19
South Ossetia issues
Elections - campaigning
Elections - electoral violations
Elections - general
Abkhazia issues
Judicial system
Fighting corruption
Corruption and bribery schemes

METHODOLOGY

Privileged groups not following law
Poverty
cybercrime and cybersecurity
Salaries & Pensions
Ethnic polarization
Minorities (Ethnic minorities, LGBTQ community)
Disinformation
Road and infrastructure
Business Environment
Unemployment
Tourism
LGBT
Religion and church
Country sovereignty
Adjara in danger", Bonding with Abkhazia and Ossetia
Education
Other
Diaspora
Environment
Violence against political campaigners
GEL Depreciation
National Debt
Crime
IDPs

METHODOLOGY

Gambling
Military
Agriculture
Women's rights
Economy in general
Promoting healthy lifestyle in youth
Human Rights
Socio-economic situation
Local Government Development
Technological Development
Health Care System
Importance of Proportional Electoral System
Privatization of the property
Police

ABOUT

MEMO 98

An internationally recognized, independent, and non-profit specialist media institution with 22 year-long experience of in conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. Using tested and approved methodologies and tools, we provide media analysis and media monitoring with tangible results, in particular during election periods. Having participated in more than 120 election observation missions and about 150 media & election-related projects and training in more than 55 countries (in the Commonwealth of the Independent States and the Balkan countries, but also in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East), our experts provide assistance on media & electoral and other democratic arrangements.

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