



# **HOW THE PROPAGANDA MACHINE STOLE THE RUSSIAN ELECTION**

**Monitoring of media**

Russian presidential election 2018

**MAY 2018**

This report was researched and written by a group of Russian media analysts led by Luydmila Savchuk and Rastó Kužel, Director of Memo 98. It was reviewed by Gulnara Akhundova, Head of Department at International Media Support.

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# Executive Summary

- The Russian state media failed to provide sufficient information about political alternatives to incumbent Vladimir Putin ahead of the 18 March presidential election. Coverage on nationwide private channels was similarly limited. For the 2018 presidential election, a strong and independent media providing unbiased coverage of the political situation in the country, thereby enabling the electorate to make an informed choice, were significantly lacking.
- Alexey Navalny, who was barred from running as a candidate, called for a boycott of the election. His political position was largely ignored by most of the monitored broadcast media, with the exception of TV Dozhd and Radio Ekho Moskvyy.
- The nature of the election process, whereby the incumbent refrained in most respects from conventional campaign discourse, including non-participation in public debates, and the only real opponent was barred from running as a candidate, did not provide basic conditions necessary for a normal democratic election.
- First Channel, Russia 1, NTV and Ren TV, offered viewers an extremely limited range of political viewpoints. They presented only the official Kremlin position, and failed to offer any independent or alternative views, or any critical reporting challenging the performance of the authorities.
- Coverage of the nationwide channels was driven by the official and election process-oriented agenda. The bulk of their news coverage

was devoted to Vladimir Putin, primarily in his capacity as president (i.e. outside the campaign context). This gave him clear advantage over his opponents, none of whom received similar levels of airtime on the nationwide TV channels.

- TV Dozhd and Radio Echo Moskvy, along with some online news platforms, presented a greater diversity of views, but their potential impact on voters in Russia is not comparable to that of state-controlled TV channels.
- Of the five monitored newspapers, three supported the current establishment and two provided a slightly more balanced picture of the political and election-related events. In general, however, the newspapers did not compensate for the clear lack of balance on the part of broadcast media. They do not facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, confrontation, investigation and commentary, all of which are integral to meaningful public access to the political platforms of persons and groups seeking elected office.
- Reporting by online media outlets was quite similar to that of the newspapers. These outlets did not provide investigative stories, nor deeper analyses of the current political situation. Three of the four monitored outlets, supported the incumbent president, while one was critical.

# Methodology

*Information Peace*, a group of Russian media analysts led by Luydmila Savchuk, in cooperation with the Slovak-based media monitoring organisation MEMO 98, systematically monitored the media coverage of the 18 March presidential election in Russia.<sup>1</sup>

The monitoring was intended to offer a comprehensive and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on five television channels, one radio station, five newspapers, and six online media outlets.<sup>2</sup> The methodology was developed by MEMO 98, which has carried out similar projects in more than 50 countries over the last 20 years.<sup>3</sup> Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology was specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes.

The primary goal of the initiative was to inform the public about the conduct of media during the pre-election period, and to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting.

The methodology for the media monitoring was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar monitoring projects in more than 50 countries in the last 20 years.<sup>4</sup> It included quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focused on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were

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<sup>1</sup> The monitoring took place over two periods, the first one from 1 until 16 February and the second one from 17 February until 16 March.

<sup>2</sup> Television: First Channel, Russia 1, NTV, Ren TV and TV Dozhd  
Radio: Ekho Moskvyy  
Newspapers: Parliamentskaya Gazeta, Rossiskaya Gazeta, Novaya Gazeta, Kommersant and KP  
Websites: Gazeta.ru, Lenta.ru, Meduza.ru, RBC.ru and Ria novosty.ru

<sup>3</sup> [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see also [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assessed the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified.

Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, it is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and topics. The main goal was to evaluate if the Russian TV channels provide their viewers with objective and balanced information about important international and local issues. As such, the outcome of the monitoring is a detailed analysis of the quality of selected channels' news programming.

Based on criteria such as media ownership, coverage, and impact, the following media were selected for monitoring:

**Table 1 | Monitoring subjects**

Media	Ownership	Programmes monitored <sup>5</sup>	Coverage
<b>First Channel</b>	51% Russian State 25% National Media Group 24% Roman Abramovich [reportedly under sale]	Vechernie novosti Vremya   Voskersnoe Vremya Mon-Sun (18:00; 21:00)	98.8% of Russian population; <sup>6</sup>  Also rebroadcast by <i>ONT</i> (Belarus), <i>TV1</i> (Armenia), <i>TV Prime</i> (Moldova); First Channel - Eurasia (Kazakhstan); First Baltic Channel (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). Broadcasted worldwide via satellite and selected cable networks.
<b>Russia 1</b>	Russian Government	Vesti   Vesti v subbotu   Vesti Nedely  Mon-Sun (20:00)	98.5% of Russian population; <sup>7</sup>  Available internationally as <i>RTR-Planeta</i> via satellite and selected cable networks.
<b>NTV</b>	Gazprom Media Holding <sup>8</sup>	Segodnia Mon-Fri (19:00) Itogy dnya Mon-Thu (23:40)   Itogy nedely Sun	99.2% of Russian Population; <sup>9</sup>  Also available internationally via Satellite and selected cable networks as NTV-Mir.

<sup>5</sup> All broadcast time indicates is UTC+3 (Moscow Time) unless stated otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.1tv.ru/total/pi=5>

<sup>7</sup> [http://russia.tv/article/show/article\\_id/7481/](http://russia.tv/article/show/article_id/7481/)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1873630>; <http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/Schema31042015.pdf>;

[http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/spisok\\_13012015.pdf](http://www.gazprombank.ru/about/shareholders/spisok_13012015.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gazprom-media.com/ru/company/show?id=13>



		(19:00)	Also local editions are broadcast in the US, Canada and Belarus. <sup>10</sup>
<b>Ren TV</b>	82 % National Media Group	News (19:30; 23:00)  Dobrov in the air. Sun (23:00)	22 % of Russian population <sup>11</sup>
<b>TV Dozhd</b>	95% Natalia Sendeeva & 5% Vera Krichevskaya	Zdes I Seichas / Mon- Fri (20:00) The burden of news Sun (21:00)	Available as pay-per-view via Satellite (Russia and Europe), Internet and selected cable networks in Russia <sup>12</sup>
<b>Radio Echo Moskvyy</b>	66% Gazprom Media Holding, 34% shared between Echo's journalists, 18 % owned by Alexey Venediktov (Editor-in-Chief)		24 hours of broadcasting in more than 40 Russian cities, CIS, US, and Baltic countries.  Internet broadcasting 32 - 160 Kb/s, audio and video podcast (RSS). Online on the website.  Daily audience in Moscow is about 900k people and about 1.8 million across all other regions of Russia. Potential audience of listeners in Sept 2011 - 46,835 million.
<b>Rossiyskaya Gazeta (newspaper)</b>	Russian Government 100%		Daily circulation – 185,445 copies (2010). Printed in 44 Russian cities with local applications.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ntv.ru/kompania/veschanie/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://nm-g.ru/actives/sections.php?ID\\_BLOCK=1&ID\\_SECTION=3](http://nm-g.ru/actives/sections.php?ID_BLOCK=1&ID_SECTION=3)

<sup>12</sup> <http://tvrain.ru/connecting/>

			The newspaper publishes a series of books with government documents and commentaries.
<b>Parlamentskaya Gazeta (newspaper)</b>	Periodic socio-political publication of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation		Weekly circulation - at least 60,000 copies <a href="http://www.pnp.ru">www.pnp.ru</a>
<b>Novaya Gazeta (newspaper and website)</b>	76% belongs to the team; 14% - to businessman Alexander Lebedev; 10% to Mikhail Gorbachev (former president of the USSR).		Total circulation of the newspaper is 284,500 (June 2012).  Printed in Vladivostok, Yekaterinburg, Krasnodar, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Rostov-on-Don, Ryazan, Samara, St. Petersburg. Foreign editions: Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan.  <a href="http://www.novayagazeta.ru">www.novayagazeta.ru</a>
<b>Komsomolskaya Pravda (newspaper and website)</b>	Since 2007, the newspaper has been owned by businessman Grigory Beryozkin, Chairman of the board of directors of the ESN group. He bought the paper from Prof Media and the		The circulation in Russia and CIS countries for 2008 amounted to 35 million copies.  Abroad, the newspaper comes out with a circulation of 1 million copies, in 48 countries.  <a href="http://www.kp.ru">www.kp.ru</a>

	Norwegian media group A-pressen. Viktor Shkulyov, the Chairman of the board of directors of the competing media group - Aset Filipaki Shkulyov, argues that ESN, which has existed since 1990, is close to RAO RZhD and its ex-president Vladimir Yakunin.		
<b>Kommersant (newspaper and website)</b>	100% of the media holding of ZAO Kommersant-Holding is controlled by Russian businessman Alisher Usmanov.		Frequency: daily Circulation: 120,000 copies  Full coverage statistics: <a href="http://www.kommersant.ru/about/kommersant">www.kommersant.ru/about/kommersant</a>
<b>RIA Novosti (website)</b>	100% Russian state budget		Over 9 million visitors per month (2013) <a href="http://www.ria.ru">www.ria.ru</a>
<b>Meduza (website)</b>	100% Meduza Project, Latvian company of Galina Tmchenko (former Editor-in-Chief of «Lenta.ru»).		As of December 2017, the audience of Meduza is 33 million visitors per month ( <a href="http://www.meduza.io">www.meduza.io</a> ).

	The names of investors are kept secret.		
<b>Gazeta.ru (website)</b>	100% Rambler&Co		Over 23 million visitors per month
<b>Lenta.ru (website)</b>	100% Rambler&Co		Over 21 million visitors per month
<b>RBC (website)</b>	65 % - businessman Grigory Beryozkin, <a href="https://clck.ru/DA8Dh">https://clck.ru/DA8Dh</a>		In March 2017 the audience was 26.5 million

The monitoring team observed media coverage of the Russian and international political scene in order to:

- assess whether different local and international entities are granted fair access to the media;
- supply the media, political entities, regulatory organs, citizens, and international community with data to measure the objectivity of the monitored media;
- raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe standards of balanced reporting;
- enable citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project intended to:

- enhance the capacity of civil society and academic communities in conducting advanced media research;
- put public pressure on journalists, editors and media owners to provide information that is more accurate, more impartial and fairer.

To achieve these objectives, the implementing partners evaluated the media coverage against internationally recognised professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which include:

- Balance
- Accuracy and Exactness
- Clarity
- Matter-of-fact
- Timely
- Transparency
- Relevance
- Variety
- Omission of facts

The monitoring assessed different types of programmes, which were monitored both quantitatively and qualitatively. The enclosed results reflect only the quantitative results of the monitored news programmes.

# Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis focused on the amount of time allocated to selected political and other local and international subjects and the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral and negative. The monitoring also focused on thematic and geographical structure of the news, evaluating the thematic and geographical diversity by measuring the actual time devoted to different topics and focusing on the geographical area from where the news is broadcast. In addition, the monitoring focused on what were the top stories in the monitoring period.

It is the behaviour of media outlets that was being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not the viewer/reader was offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors gave an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by each media outlet. The evaluation mark was thus attached to all monitored subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in a positive, negative, or neutral light.

The description of the five-level evaluation scale was as follows:

Grade 1 and 2 meant that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage was favourable.

Grade 3 was a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations.

Grades 4 or 5 meant that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage had negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It was important for monitors to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context of the story or item.

# List of Monitored Subjects

- President
- Presidential Administration
- Government
- Central Election Commission
- Vladimit Putin (as candidate)
- Vladimir Mikhailov
- Aleksandr Chukhlebov
- United Russia
- Communist Party of Russian Federation
- Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia
- Fair Russia
- Motherland Party
- Civil Platform
- Civil Initiative
- Russian People Union
- Party of Growth
- Yabloko
- Green Alliance
- People's party of Russia
- Party of Social Security
- Russian United Labour Front
- Party of Social Reforms
- Communists of Russia
- Alexey Navalny

# **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis evaluates the performance of selected media outlets against ethical and professional standards, such as balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language that cannot be easily quantified. These data are reported separately and integrated in the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.



# Monitoring Findings

The principal finding was that there was an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors on the main Russian TV channels. This was visible in both local and international coverage. There was a strong tendency to provide extensive coverage of the activities of state officials, highlighting achievements and successes, while neglecting to offer any independent and alternative views or critical reporting challenging the performance of the authorities. The primetime programs on the three channels failed to provide meaningful agenda-setting debates involving genuine public discussions on pressing economic, social and policy issues. The monitoring revealed that the national Russian channels have been used as instruments of propaganda, diverting attention from important domestic issues and challenges. Rather than serving as a platform for discussion on public policy issues, the main channels openly demonstrated bias, in breach of media ethics and the principles of impartial and objective reporting.

Analysis of the media coverage during the election period demonstrated that the mainstream Russian media manipulated the public opinion to achieve the incumbent government's desired outcome. This manipulation took place mainly on national TV channels, accessible to most Russians and for many the only source of political information. Manipulation of information targeted news and current affairs programmes, and was deployed widely in election-related coverage. For instance, in order to promote negative public opinion of one of the candidates, Ksenia Sobchak, some media highlighted her alleged "US connection" (i.e. her trip to the United States before the election).<sup>13</sup> Mainstream media also sought to create an atmosphere of external threat to Russia (notably from the United States, Ukraine and the European Union). This was frequently used as a means of promoting Vladimir Putin, who was portrayed as the only candidate capable of protecting Russia from these external threats.

Another example of anti-American sentiment was the portrayal of Russia's superior progress in space exploration, highlighting the achievements of Russian astronauts. To support their claims, some TV presenters used obscene language, insults, and/or vulgar humour. This tactic was often aimed at limiting any discussion on the topic in question, and to shock the opponent, preventing a substantive reply. The effect of crude language and

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<sup>13</sup> The main Russian TV channels portray the United States in a very negative way, as documented by various previous monitoring [projects](#) in the past.

obscene humour is aimed at disabling the ability of audiences to critically reflect on the information they receive. . This tactic was frequently used by national TV channels in order to curtail the discussion and/or to silence critics. This enables unsubstantiated criticism of a person or idea.

Moreover, Kremlin critics often become victims of bullying. For example, on 12 February, NTV ran a story in the programme “The day’s results” about Grigory Rodchenkov, the former director of Russia's national anti-doping laboratory, the Anti-Doping Center. The Center was suspended by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in November 2015 for facilitating Russia’s elaborate state-sponsored doping programme. NTV ran a story titled “ Rodchenkov’s public appearance,” featuring the slogan. “A man who has lost his face.” The journalist spoke about plastic surgery as well as Rodchenkov’s “betrayal”, i.e. speaking up about the doping in Russian sport. The programme did not question whether Rodchenkov’s actions had been right or not. In describing him, NTV used language aimed at humiliating his personal and professional dignity; for instance, “he ran like a rat” when escaping Russia.

The monitoring team did not conduct a comprehensive analysis of how social media platforms were used in the context of the election. However, the limited qualitative analysis revealed that certain narratives aimed at promoting the incumbent president were distributed exclusively online. For example, the decision by Vladimir Putin not to participate in the televised debates was generally not reported by the national TV channels. A number of online media outlets did report that the president was too busy working, and that candidates such as Mr. Grudinin were unfit to debate serious political issues with Mr. Putin. Additional narratives circulated online included the notion that Mr. Putin is a great politician capable of protecting Russia with a strong understanding of nuclear weapons, whereas a candidate such as Mr. Grudinin is only capable of discussing the cultivation of strawberries (a reference to his professional background in agriculture).

The national channels used deliberate manipulation and disinformation during their reporting, including reports on selected events, opinions, and use of a distinct political vocabulary. For example, in the context of external threats to Russia, media frequently used words such as “threat”, “pressure” and “militarization” when reporting on foreign policy issues. This vocabulary became a part of the “manipulated reality” created by the media. The fear and scaremongering were used to create a situation whereby voters were encouraged vote for stability (represented by the

incumbent president) over any of the other candidates. In the framework of this “militarization of the information space”, the TV channels (Ren-TV, NTV, Channel 1) presented Mr. Putin’s successes and achievements in foreign policy and the military. For example, Channel 1 broadcast Vladimir Putin’s 40 minute-long address to the Federal Assembly devoted to military achievements and the latest developments of the military-industrial complex (aired 1 March on Russia 1).

The anti-Ukrainian theme remained a priority for pro-government media. This topic is closely connected with the portrayal of Putin, who, according to the media, has prevented a terrible tragedy in Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is often used in propaganda for a range of different purposes. During the election campaign, the media continued to talk about military and social threats from Ukraine. Events in Ukraine are presented as the terrible consequences of the Euromaidan revolution. For example, on 11 February, NTV featured a story showing liberal processes in Ukraine along with scenes from neo-fascist marches and radical parades and demonstrates, attempting to draw strong connections between fascist ideology and current Ukrainian reforms. NTV also posited that the US seeks to stoke radical sentiment.

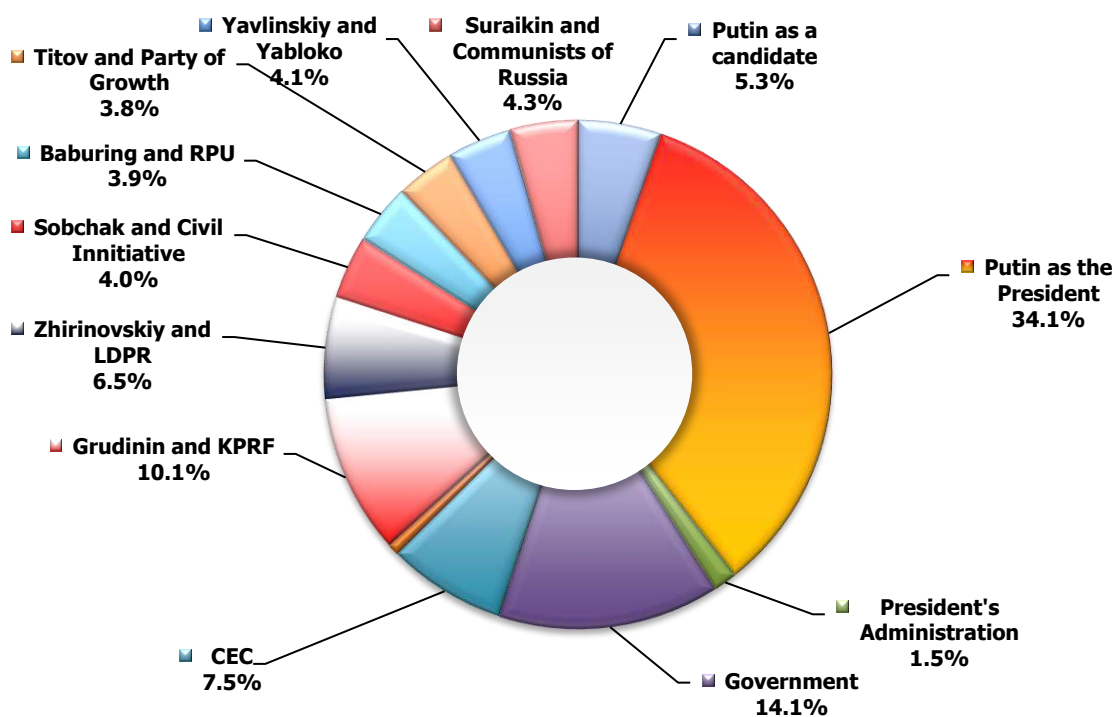
Another manipulation technique was the use of sexism and gender stereotypes to discredit Ksenia Sobchak. For example, Zhirinovskiy called Sobchak a whore, a prostitute and a slut (blyad’). During the last debate, Zhirinovskiy, Suraykin and Baburin harassed Ksenia Sobchak to the point of tears. The media repeatedly published semi-nude photos of her to illustrate various news stories (using pictures taken for Playboy magazine).

The qualitative analysis revealed that a vast number of news reports lacked balance and were highly subjective, quoting multiple sources that supported a single perspective – that of the Russian authorities. The month-long monitoring confirmed that the problems identified in the main Russian channels are not short-term anomalies but indications of significant and longer-term trends. The editorial policies of these channels are clearly determined by the interests of the current Russian authorities, not the interests of the audience.

### **First Channel**

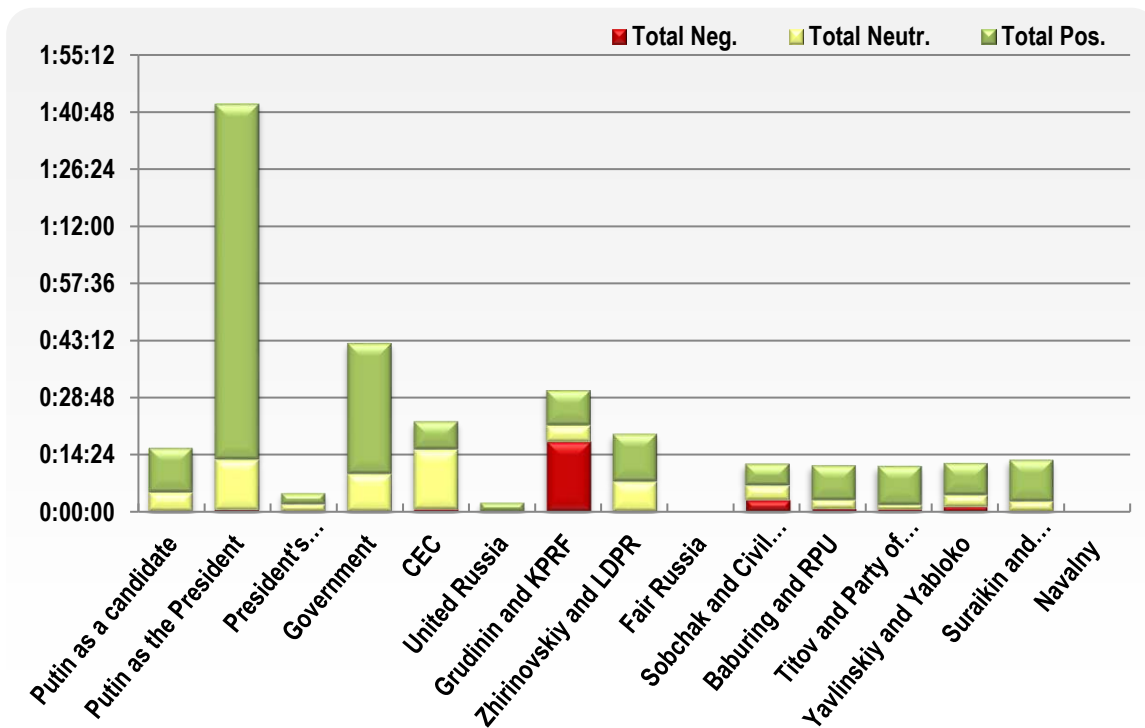
From 1 – 16 February, *First Channel* devoted the bulk of its prime-time news coverage to the activities of President Putin – 39.4 per cent of the coverage

(34.1 per cent of this coverage was devoted to him in his capacity as president). The incumbent president also received a large amount of the so-called *direct time*.<sup>14</sup> The next most covered monitored subject was the government with 14.1 per cent of the coverage, followed by the KPRF and its candidate Grudinin. While the tone of the coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral for the president and his cabinet, the KPRF received mainly negative coverage (57.4 per cent of the KPRF coverage was negative and 29 was positive). The current establishment (represented by Vladimir Putin – both in his capacity as candidate and president, the government, the presidential administration, and the ruling United Russia party) received almost 55 per cent of the coverage all positive and neutral. By comparison, Alexey Navalny did not receive any coverage in the monitoring period.



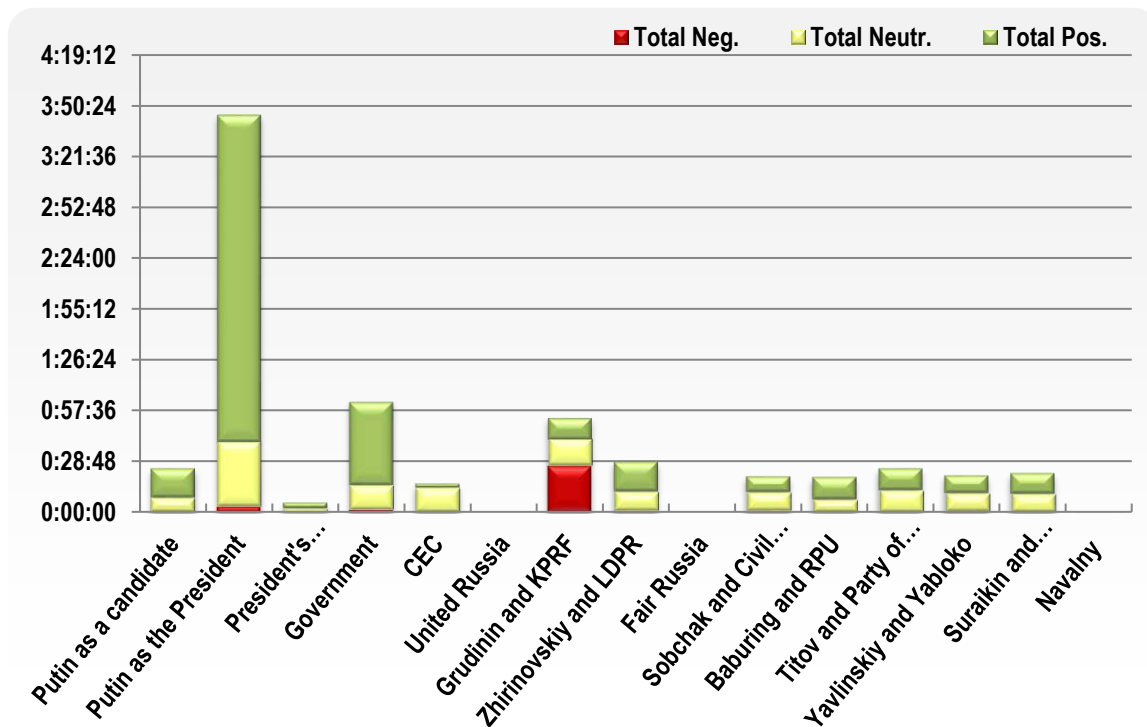
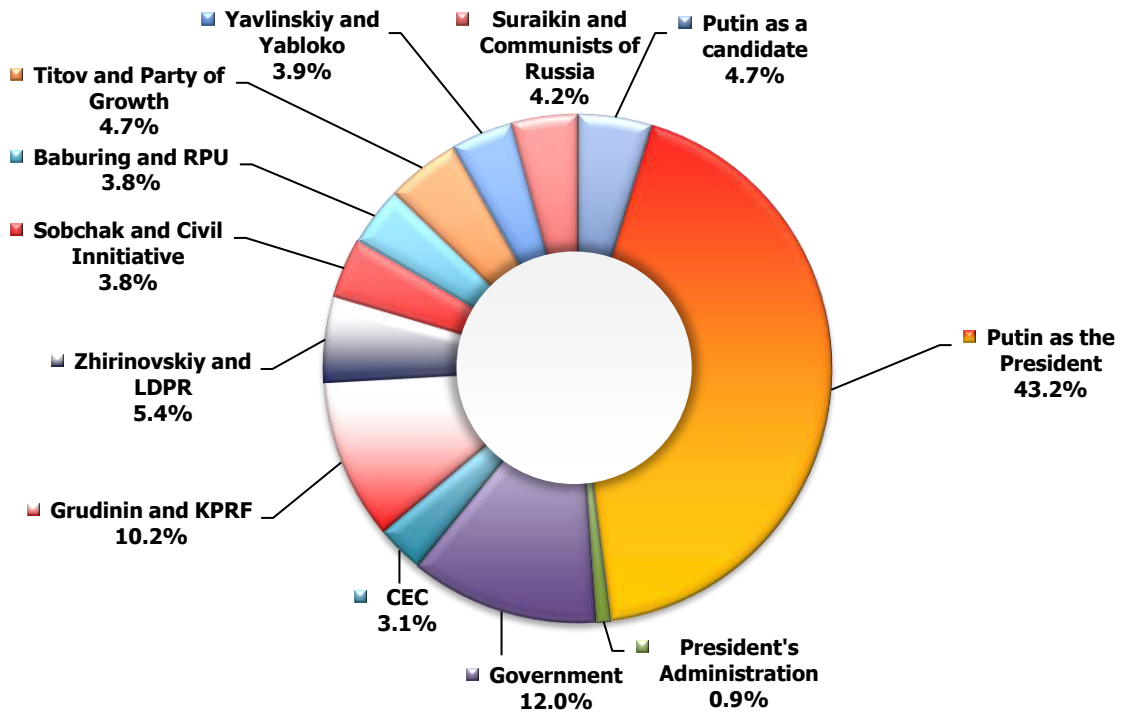
First channel acts as a government’s mouthpiece. Its coverage of political developments is skewed towards authorities and lacks balance. First Channel reports extensively about activities of the president and government, but fails to report issues that might be challenging the positions of the authorities or their policies. Its journalists tend to express opinions in the news reports.

<sup>14</sup> *Direct time* means that a monitored subject speaks directly on camera.



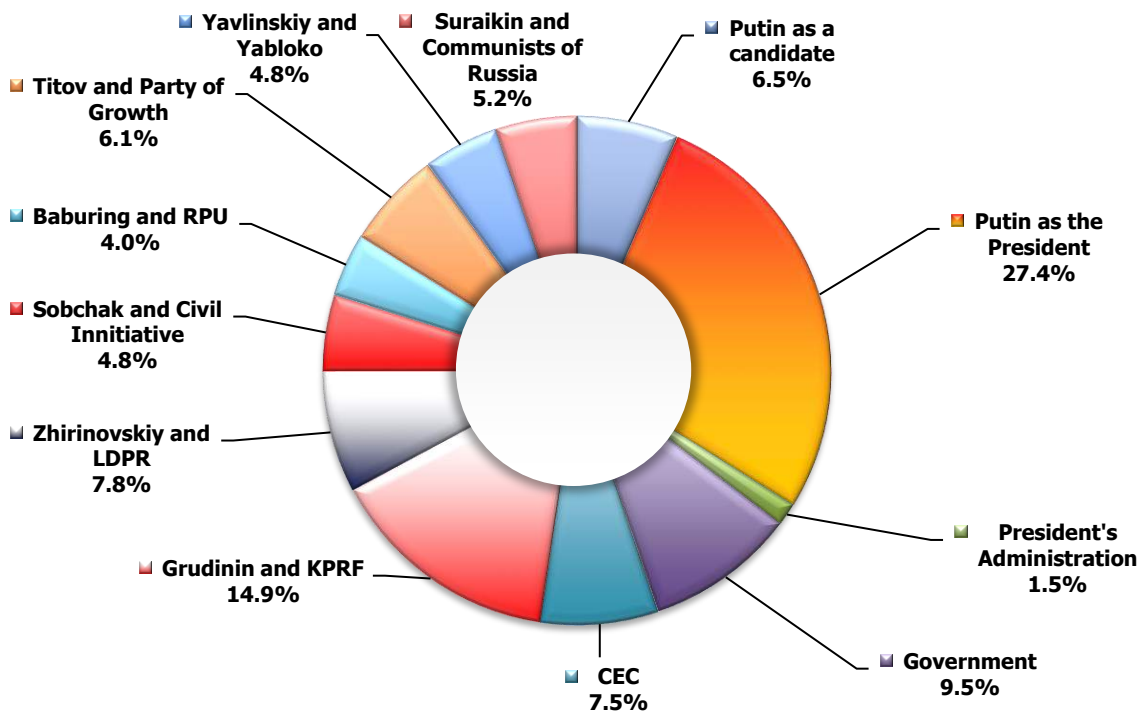
During the second monitoring period conducted from 17 February until 11 March, the *First Channel* devoted even bigger share of airtime (47.9 per cent of the total time devoted for political and election-related news) to President Putin than in the first two weeks of February (38 per cent). The bulk of this coverage was devoted to him in his capacity as president, rather than as a candidate. The president also received significant *direct time*, wherein the subject speaks directly on camera. Putin's direct time far exceeded any other monitored subject. After Putin was the government, with 12 per cent of total coverage (a small decrease in comparison with the first monitoring period, when the coverage amounted to 15.6 per cent). The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) was in third place at 10.2 per cent. While the tone of the coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral for the president and his cabinet, almost half of the KPRF coverage was negative. The current establishment (represented by Vladimir Putin – both in his capacity as candidate and president, the government, the presidential administration, and the ruling United Russia party) received more than 60 per cent of the coverage, all positive and neutral. By comparison, Alexey Navalny received only two seconds of the coverage

during the second monitoring period (he did not receive any coverage during the first monitoring period).

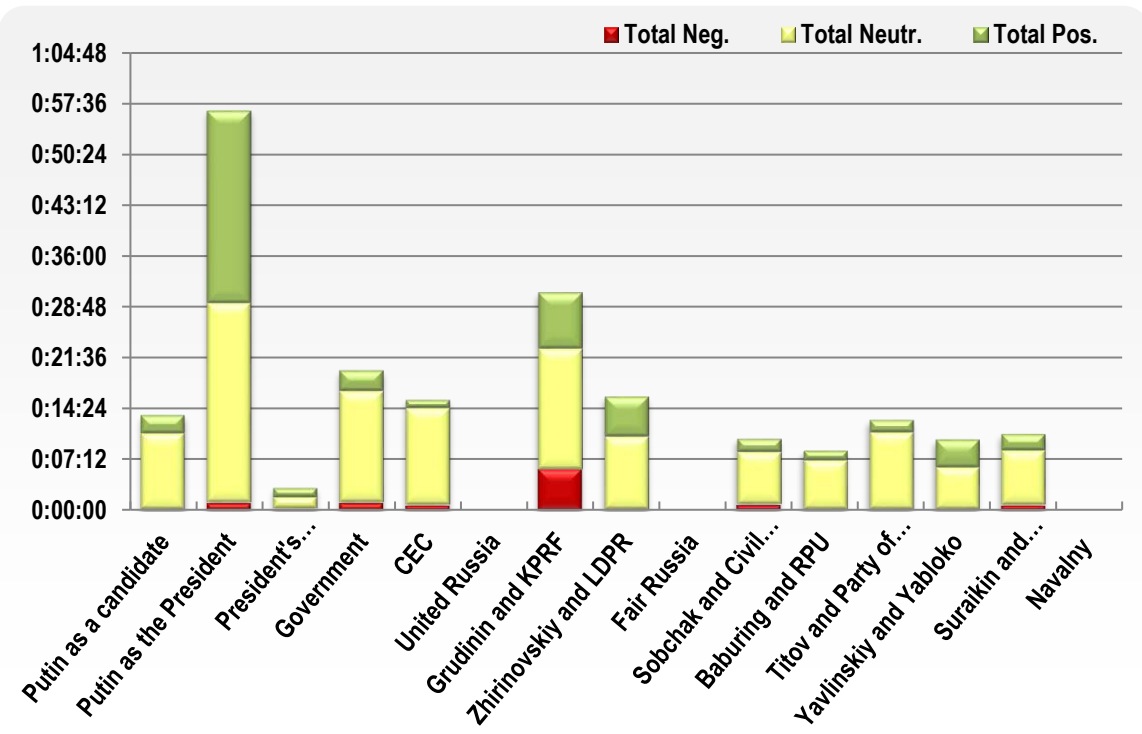


## Russia 1

Similar to the *First Channel*, *Russia 1* also devoted most of its prime-time news coverage to President Putin (27.4 per cent of the coverage). Almost 49 per cent of this coverage was positive and only 1.8 per cent was negative. Further, the most covered subjects which received significant amount of coverage was the KPRF and its candidate Grudinin (14.9 per cent), the government (9.5 per cent) and the LDPR and its candidate Zhirinovskiy (7.8 per cent). While the coverage of most of the subjects was mainly positive and neutral, the KPRF received roughly equal proportions of positive and negative coverage.

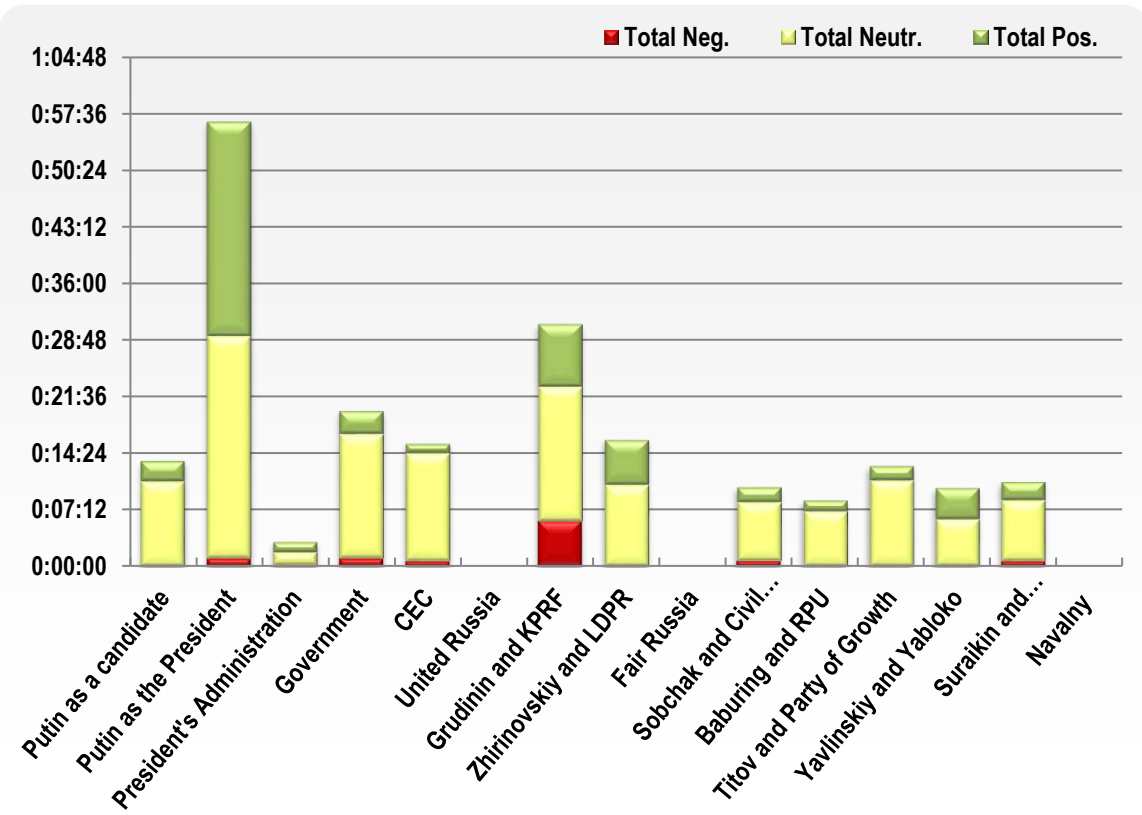
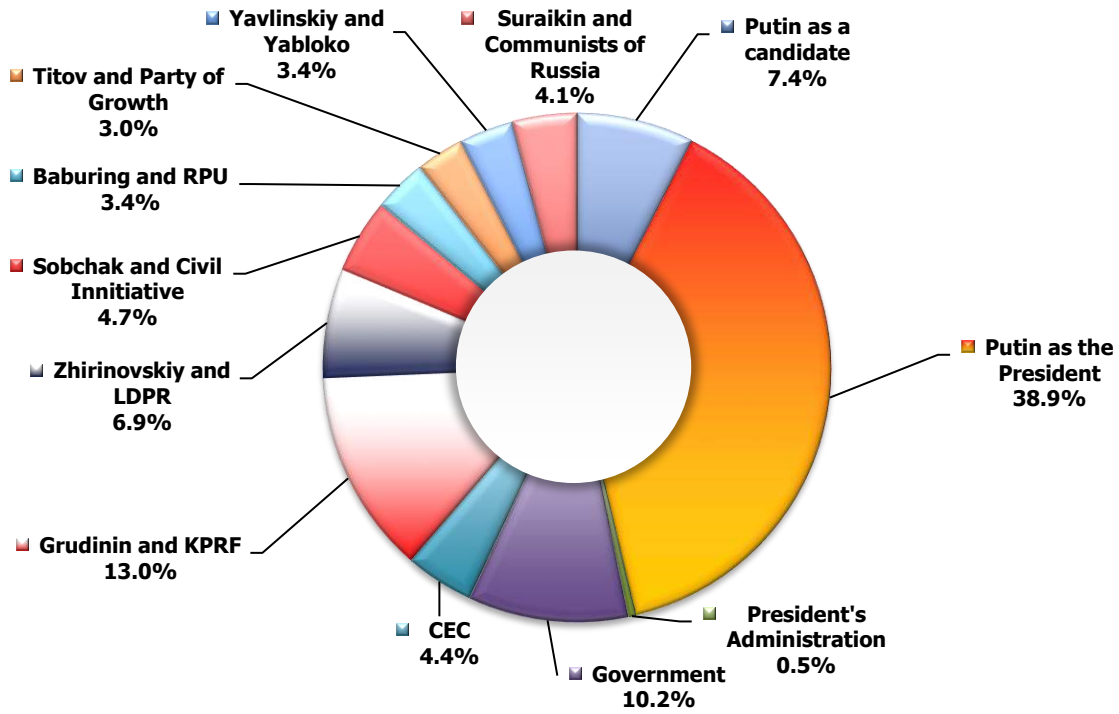


Russia 1, similarly as the First channel, served the president as his PR agency and failed to comply with the basic journalistic standards. Its stories usually presented the reality from a certain angle, while never presenting critical or alternative views. Use of pictures and music to increase emotional effect was common in the reports covering conflicts. Inflammatory language, and mixture of journalists' views and facts was not unusual.



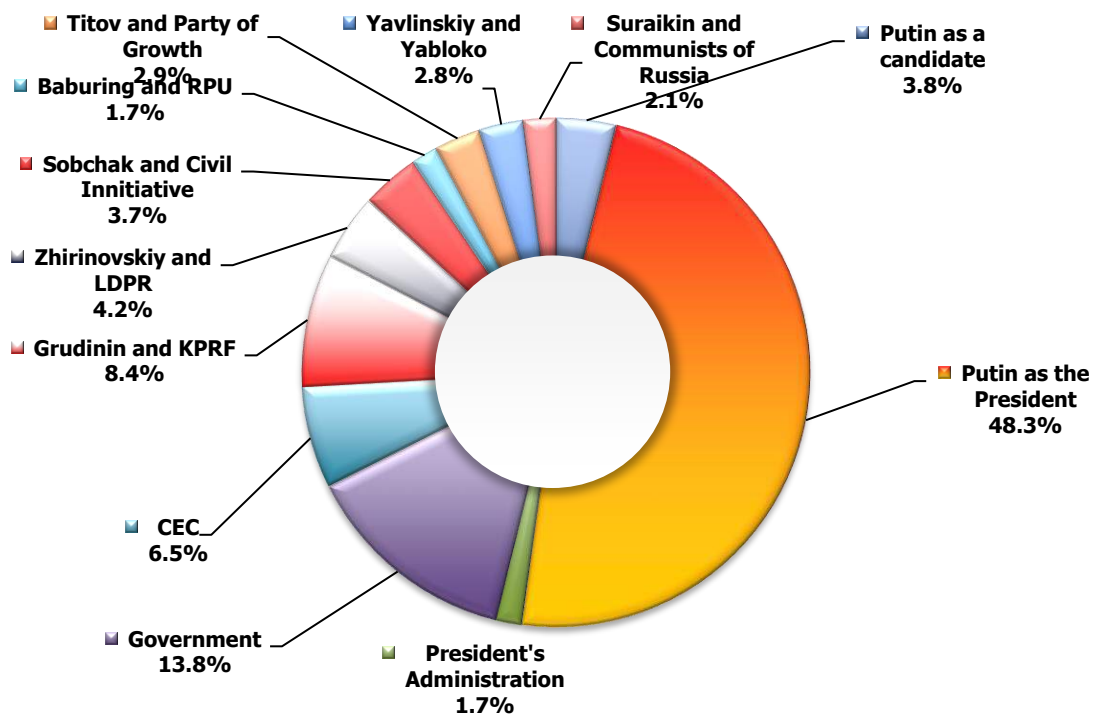
During the second monitoring period, *Russia 1* devoted the majority of its prime-time news coverage to Vladimir Putin (46.3 per cent). This marked a 20 percentage point increase on the first monitoring period (26.3 per cent of the coverage). Virtually all of this coverage was either neutral or positive. The other subjects which received significant amounts of coverage were: Pavel Grudinin and the KPRF (13 per cent), the government (10.2 per cent) and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR (6.9 per cent). Most of this coverage was neutral or positive, with the exception of Pavel Grudinin and the KPRF, who were the only entities to receive some more critical coverage. Alexey Navalny did not receive any coverage on *Russia 1* during the monitoring period.

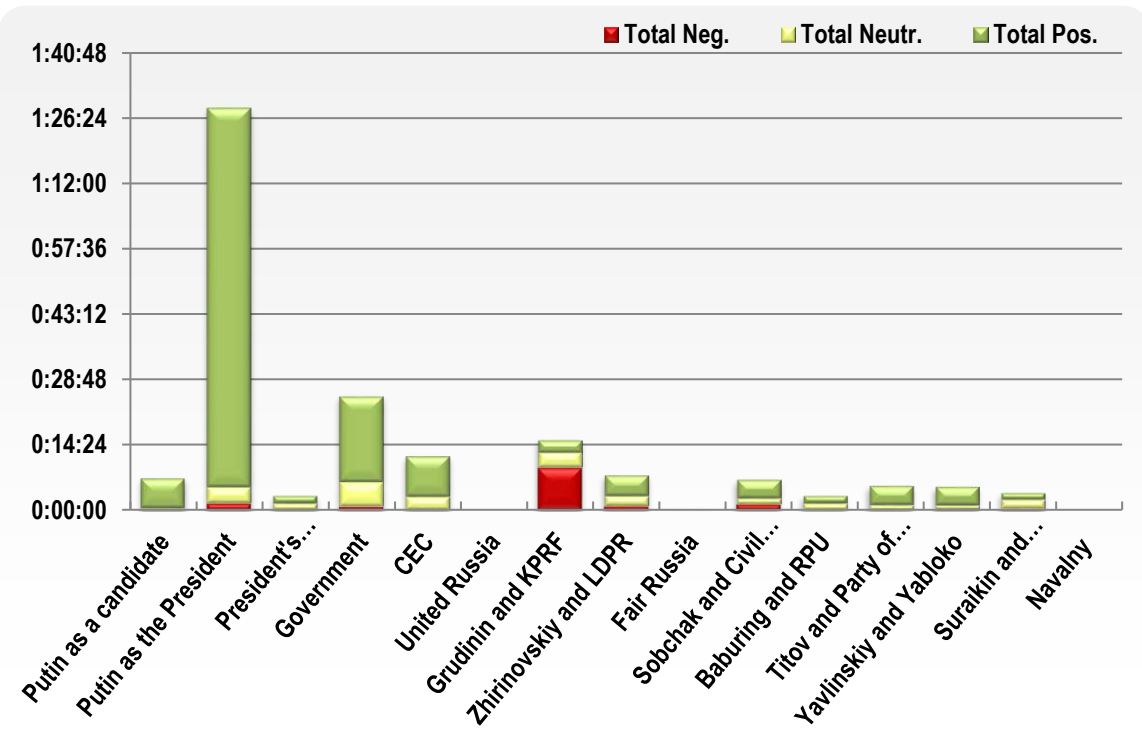




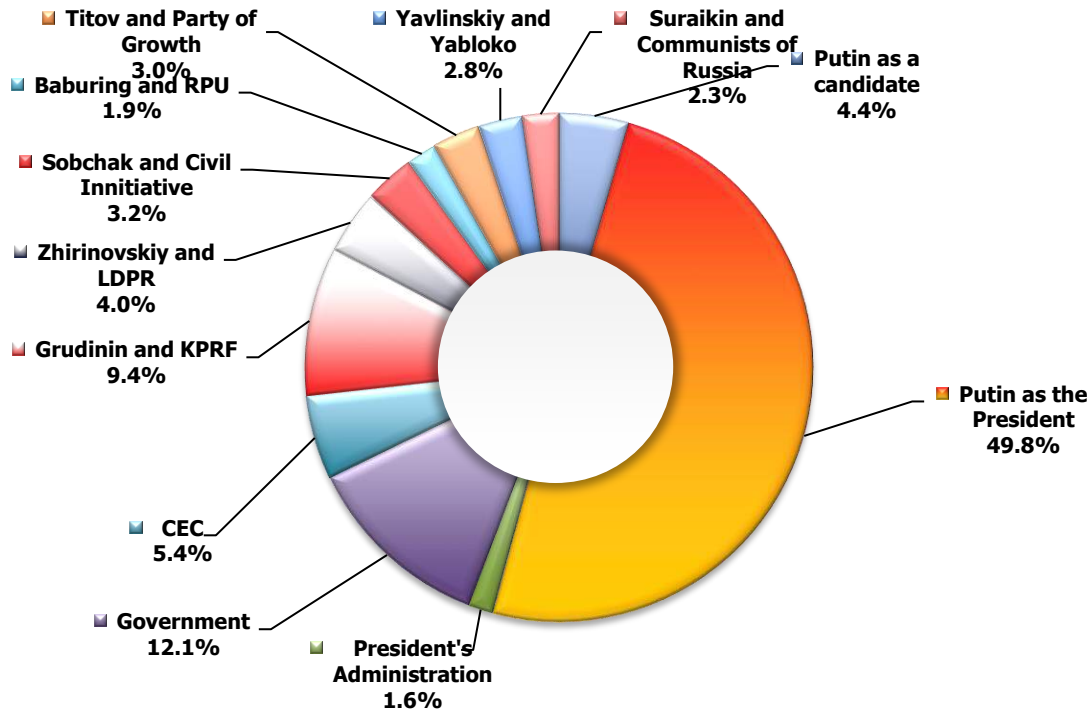
## NTV

Similar to the other two state-controlled channels, *NTV* (controlled by the state-owned company Gazprom Media Holding) allocated the largest single portion of its news coverage to the incumbent president who received 41.3 per cent of the coverage (31.5 of this coverage was devoted to him as a president). 87.2 per cent of this coverage was positive and 12.6 per cent was neutral. The next most covered subject was the KPRF which received 11.2 per cent of the coverage which was mainly negative. The subjects that received some more substantial coverage were the government (9.2 per cent) and the Central Election Commission. They were presented in a positive light. By contrast, Alexey Navalny who was not registered and called for a boycott did not receive any time on *NTV*' news programme.

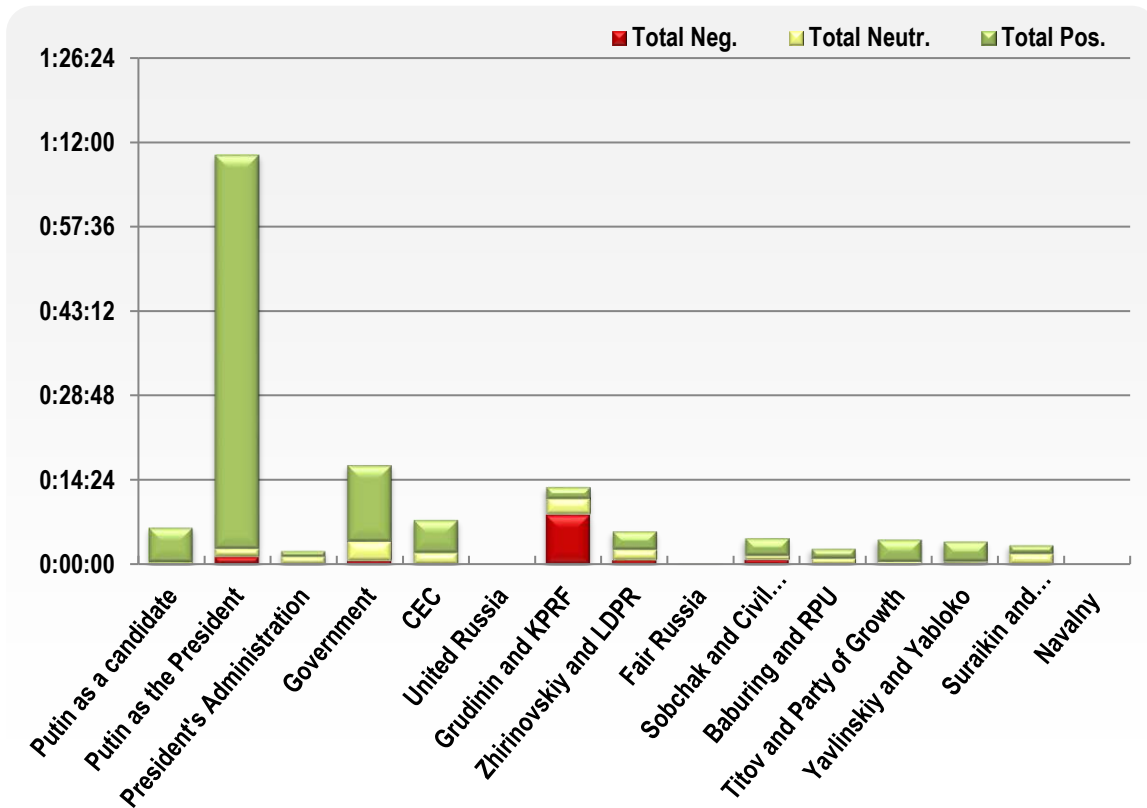




From 17 February until 16 March, NTV allocated even more coverage to Vladimir Putin than the other two state-controlled channels: 54.2 per cent of the political and election-related prime time news coverage (49.8 of this coverage was devoted to him as president). Of the coverage he received as president, 96.2 per cent was positive, and only 1.8 per cent was negative. The second most covered subject was the government, which received 12.1 per cent of the coverage, mainly positive in tone. The only other subjects which received notable levels of coverage were Pavel Grudinin (and the KPRF) with 9.4 per cent of the coverage, which was overwhelmingly negative. Alexey Navalny, who was prohibited from registering his candidacy and who called for a boycott of the election, received no airtime on NTV's news programme.

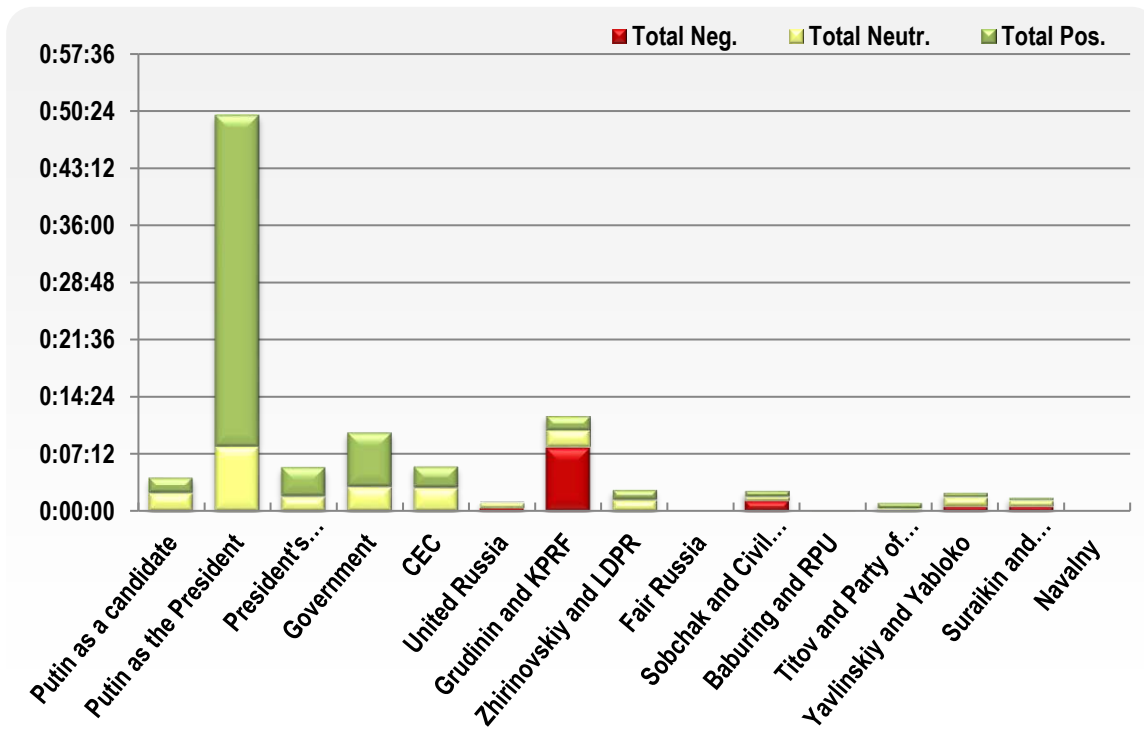
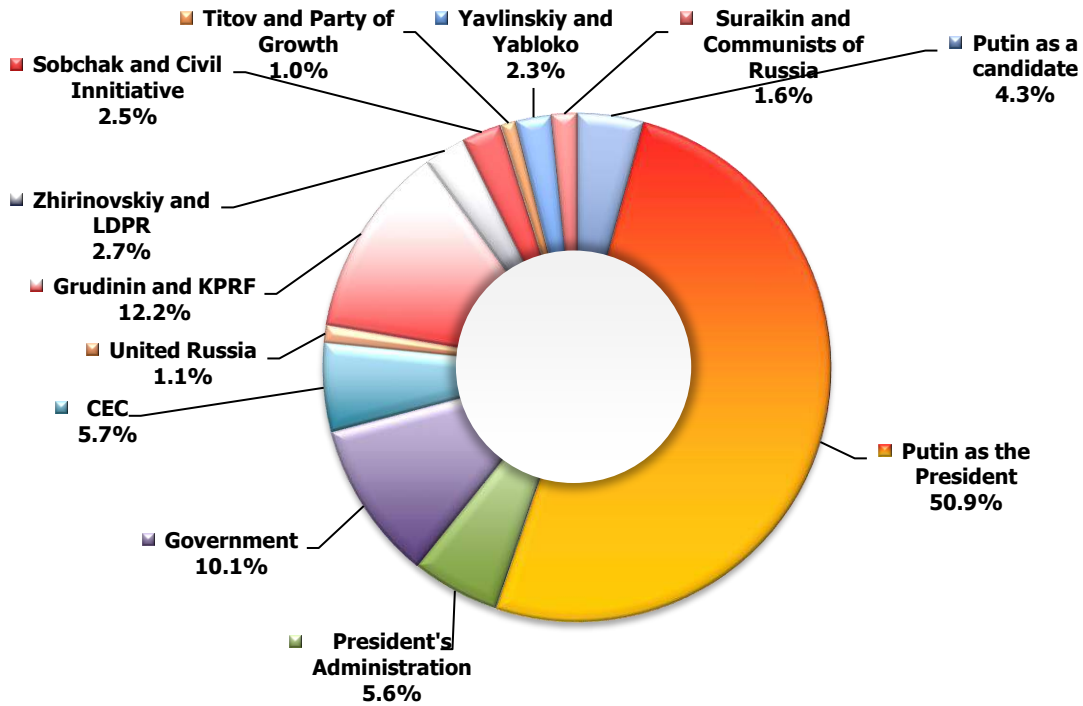


In general, NTV failed to provide information that would offer an alternative to the official position of the current establishment. Its coverage did not differ from that of the state-funded channels described above. Its reports not only lacked balance, but also mixed facts with opinion without clearly differentiating between the two. It also failed to allocate substantial airtime to important developments or sensitive political issues.



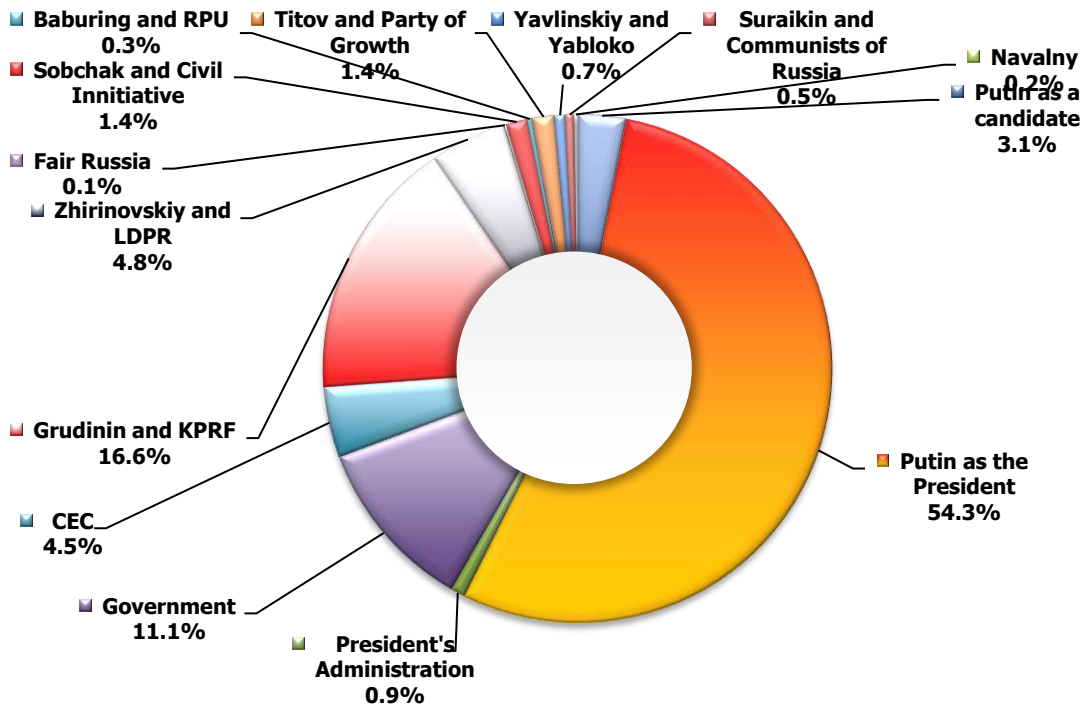
## Ren TV

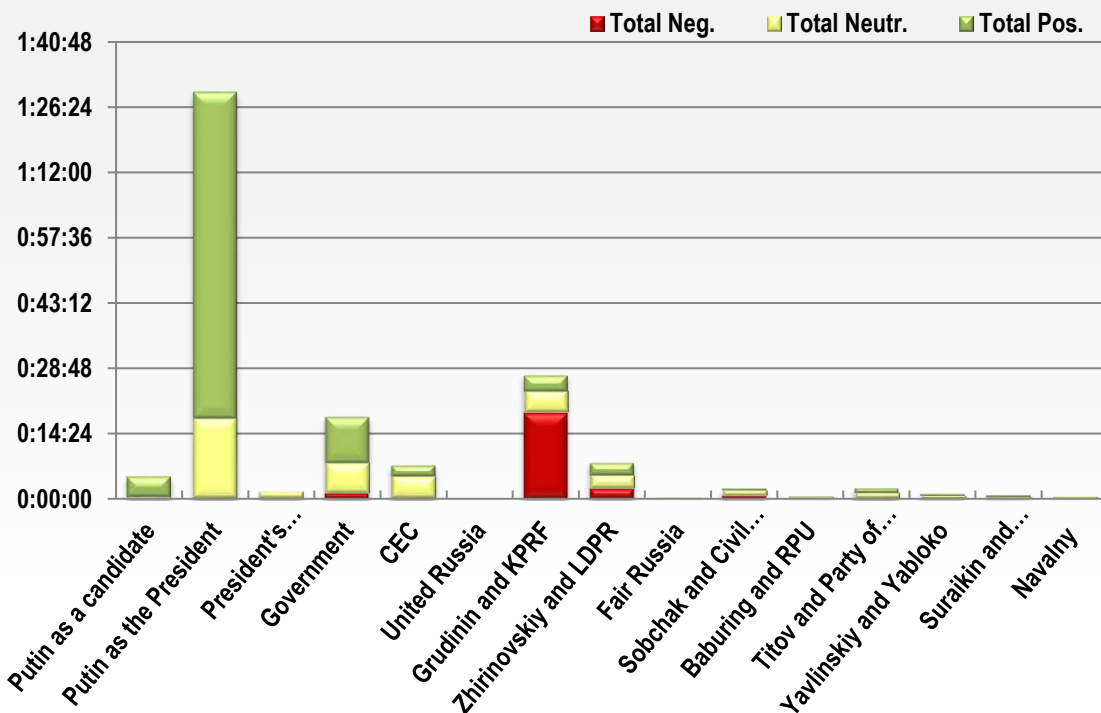
The coverage offered by the private TV channel *Ren TV* did not differ from the three preceding channels. During the first monitoring period, *Ren TV* allocated even more coverage to the president – as much as 55.2 per cent (the bulk of which he received in his capacity as president). Virtually all this coverage was either positive or neutral. By comparison, the KPRF received 12.2 per cent of the coverage which was mainly negative. Similar to the above-mentioned channels, Alexey Navalny did not receive any time on *Ren TV*.



During the second monitoring period, Ren TV continued to show its clear support for President Putin. The channel allocated him even more coverage than the three above mentioned channels – it was as much as 57.4 per cent

- marking a small increase on the first monitoring period, when Putin received 55.2 per cent of coverage. The bulk of this coverage was devoted to him in his capacity as president, and virtually all of it was positive or neutral. By comparison, the KPRF candidate Pavel Grudinin received 16.6 per cent of the coverage, which was mainly negative. Alexey Navalny received 0.2 per cent of the coverage (24 seconds) on Ren TV's prime time news programme.

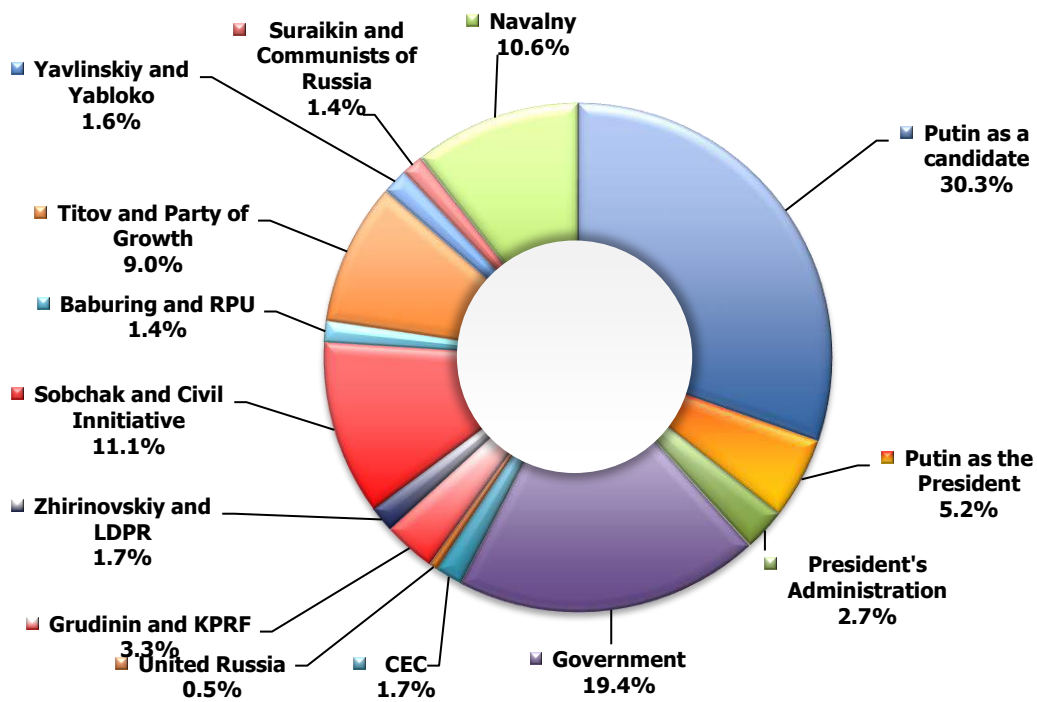




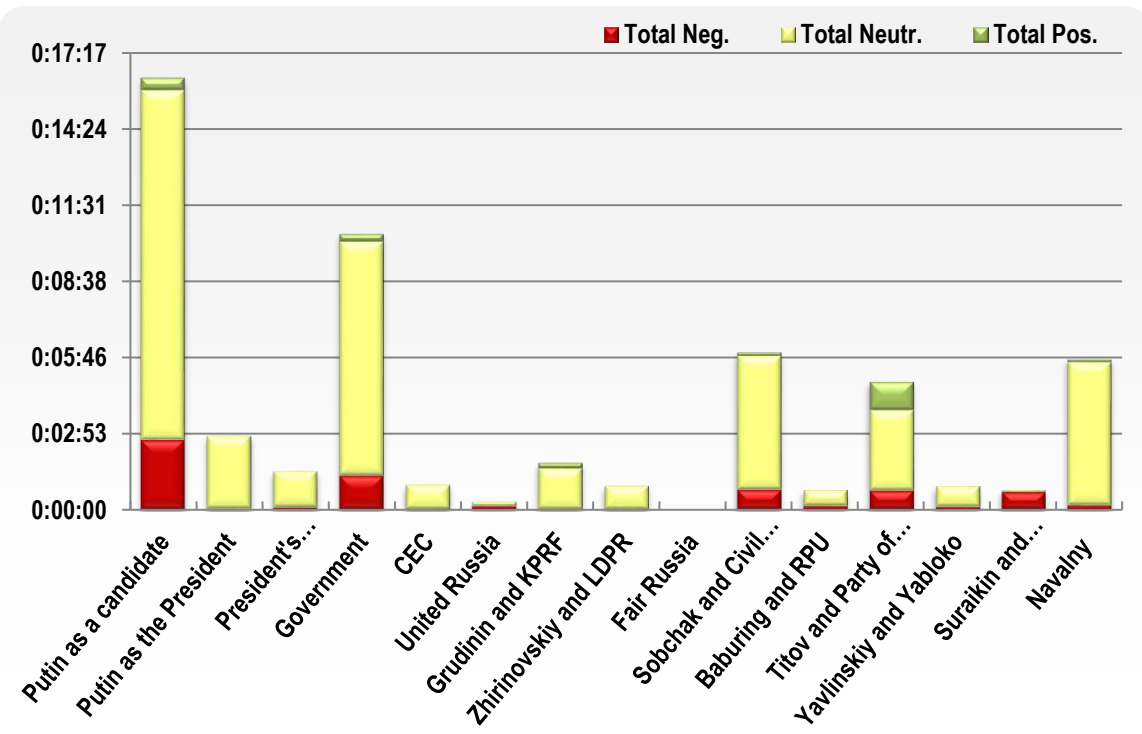
### TV Dozhd

Unlike the above-mentioned channels, TV Dozhd offered its viewers a very different picture. While it allocated the bulk of its political and election-focused coverage to Vladimir Putin (35.5 per cent of the coverage), much of this coverage was in his capacity as candidate (unlike on the other monitored channels which presented him overwhelmingly in his capacity as president). The tone of the coverage was also different – mainly neutral and negative. The main opponent of President Putin, Aleksey Navalny, received 10.6 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral. The government received some 19.4 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral and negative. The Civil Initiative and Ksenia Sobchak received some 11.1 per cent of the coverage; this was mainly neutral and negative.

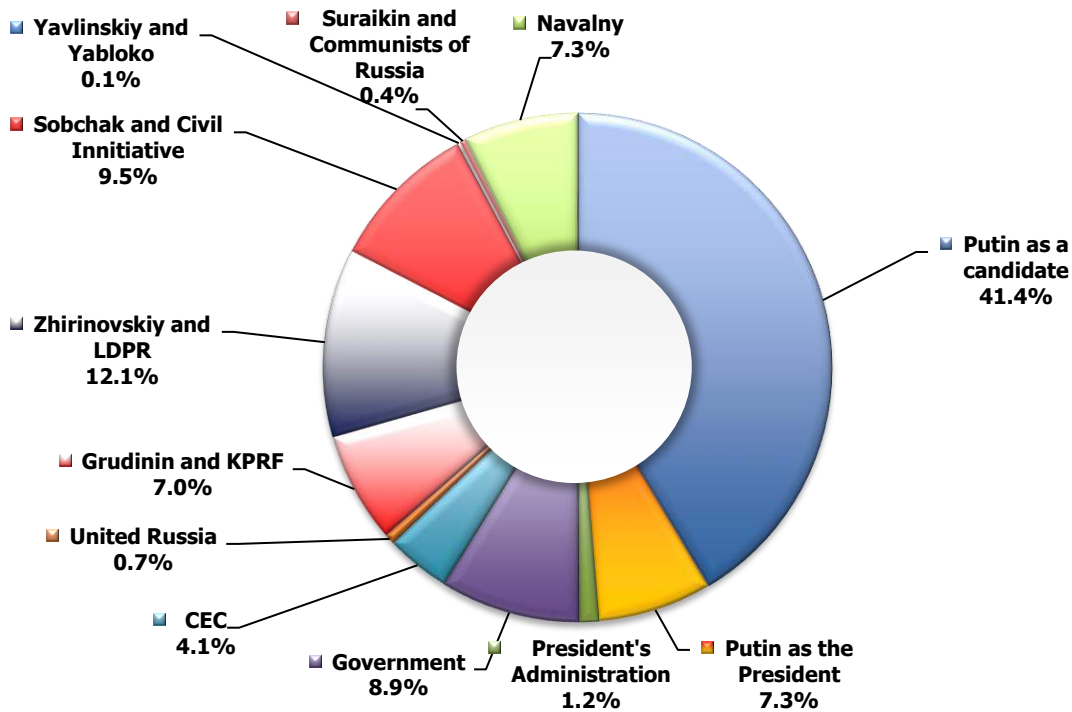




In compared with all other monitored TV channels, Dozhd does not shy away from presenting critical views.

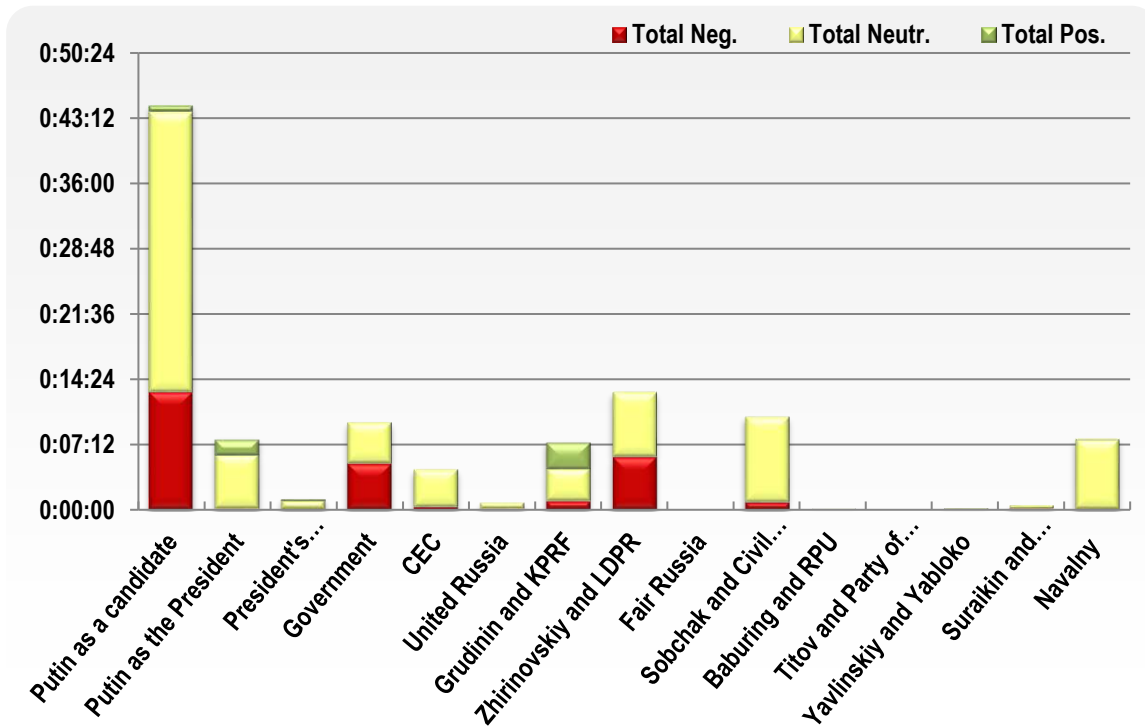


From 17 February until the end of the campaign, TV Dozhd continued to offer its viewers a very different picture. While it allocated the bulk of its political and election-focused coverage to Vladimir Putin (48.7 per cent of the coverage), much of this focused on his candidacy. The tone of the coverage continued to be different – mainly neutral and negative. Putin’s main political opponent, Aleksey Navalny, received 7.3 per cent of the coverage, which was mainly neutral in tone. The government received 8.9 per cent of the coverage (a significant decrease on the 19.4 per cent it received during the first monitoring period, which was also which was mainly neutral and negative).



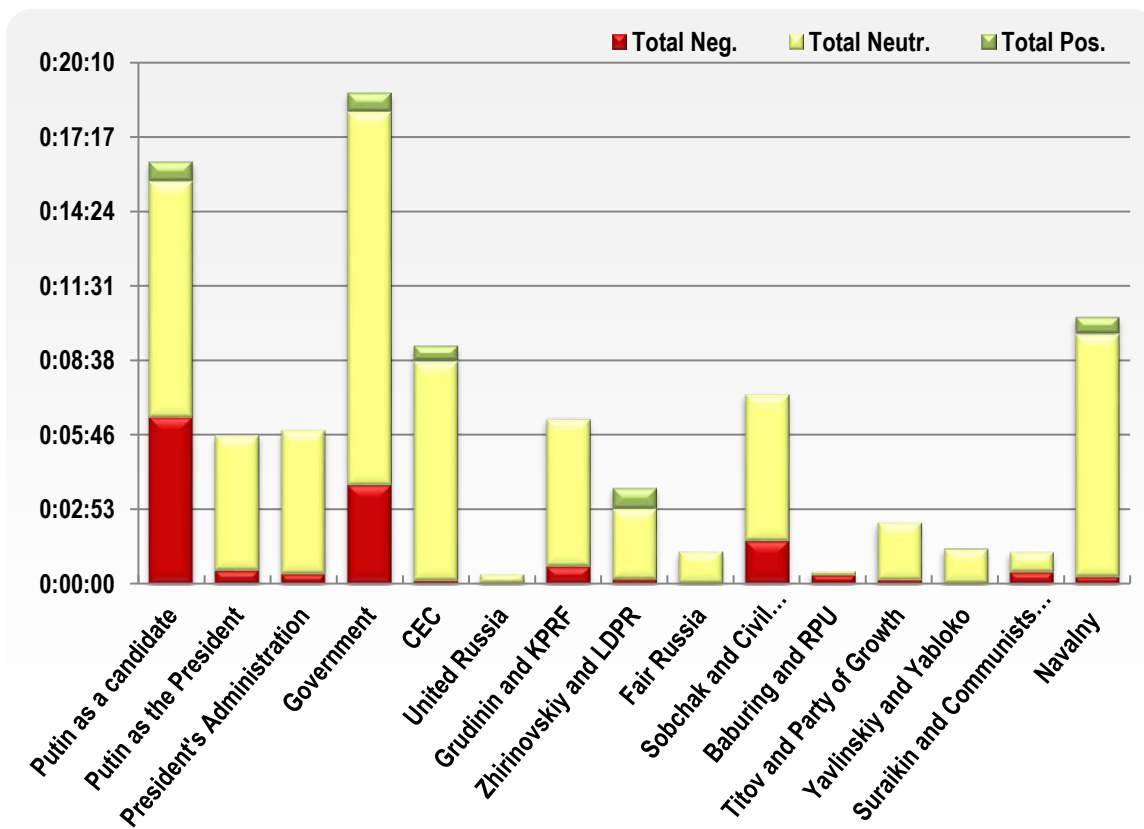
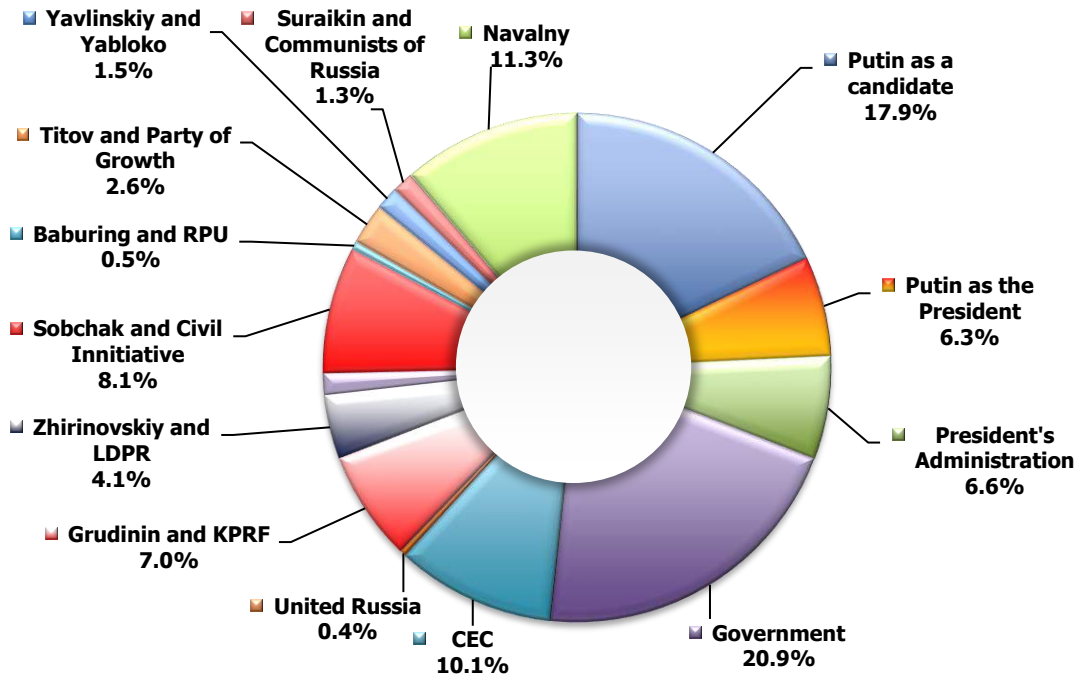
In comparison with the other monitored TV channels, Dozhd was more professional in terms of compliance with journalistic standards. However, TV Dozhd is not available on the regular television networks, and thus its audience is limited. According to *TV Index Plus*, approximately 120,000 daily visitors watch TV Rain (December 2017).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://tvrain.ru/up/docs/tvrain\\_rus\\_01.02.18.pdf](https://tvrain.ru/up/docs/tvrain_rus_01.02.18.pdf)

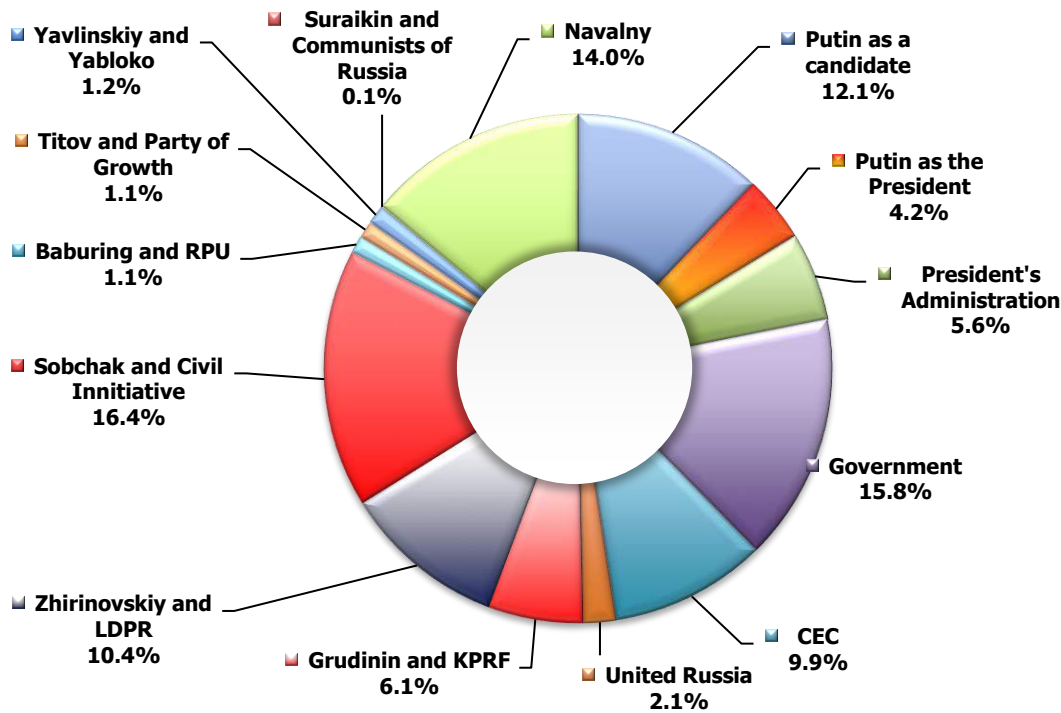


### Radio Ekho Moskvy

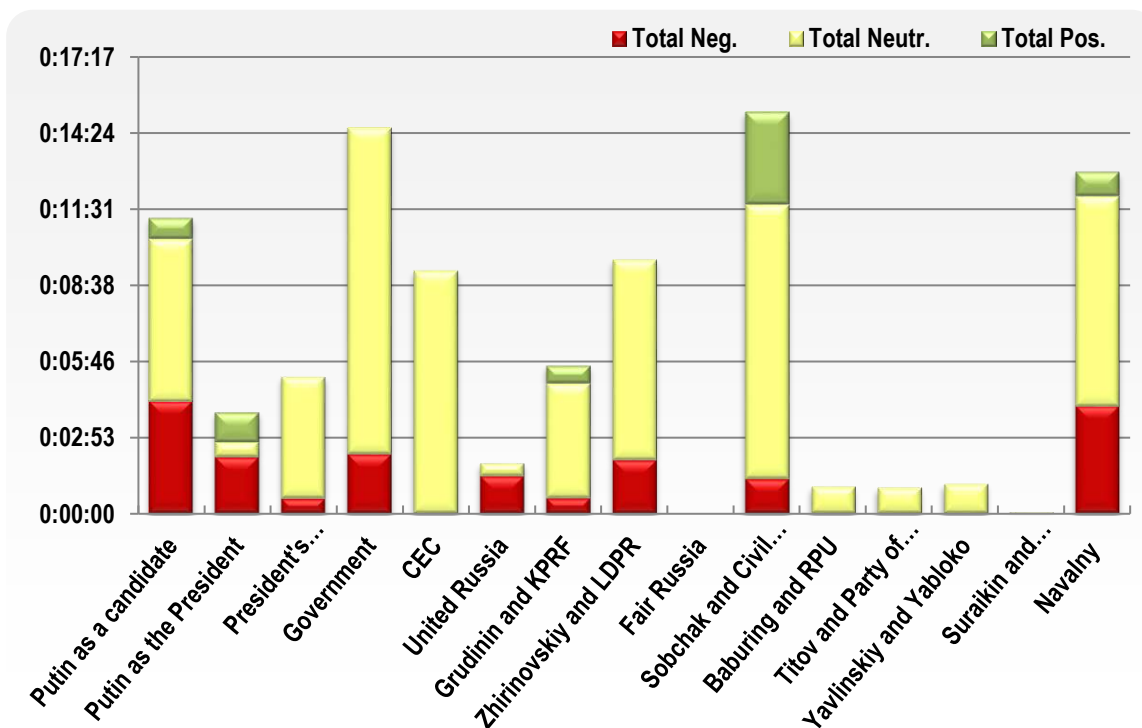
Similar to *TV Dozhd*, Radio *Ekho Moskvy* presented a different position to its listeners, exposing them to a wider diversity of views in the framework of the ongoing campaign. During the first monitoring period, the government received the biggest portion of the political and election-related news coverage amounting to 20.9 per cent – which was mainly neutral and negative in tone. Vladimir Putin received 24.2 per cent of the coverage the bulk of which was devoted to him in his capacity as candidate. This coverage was mainly neutral or negative. By comparison, Alexsey Navalny received 11.3 per cent of the coverage, which was mainly neutral.



During the second monitoring period, Radio *Ekho Moskovy* continued to present alternative perspectives to its listeners, exposing them to a wider diversity of views within the framework of the on-going campaign. Unlike during the first monitoring period, the Civil Initiative candidate Ksenia Sobchak received the largest portion of the coverage (16.4 per cent), closely followed by Vladimir Putin (16.3 per cent). While Sobchak received mainly neutral coverage, Putin's coverage was neutral and negative in roughly equal shares. Alexsey Navalny received 14 per cent of the coverage, which was mainly neutral and negative in tone.



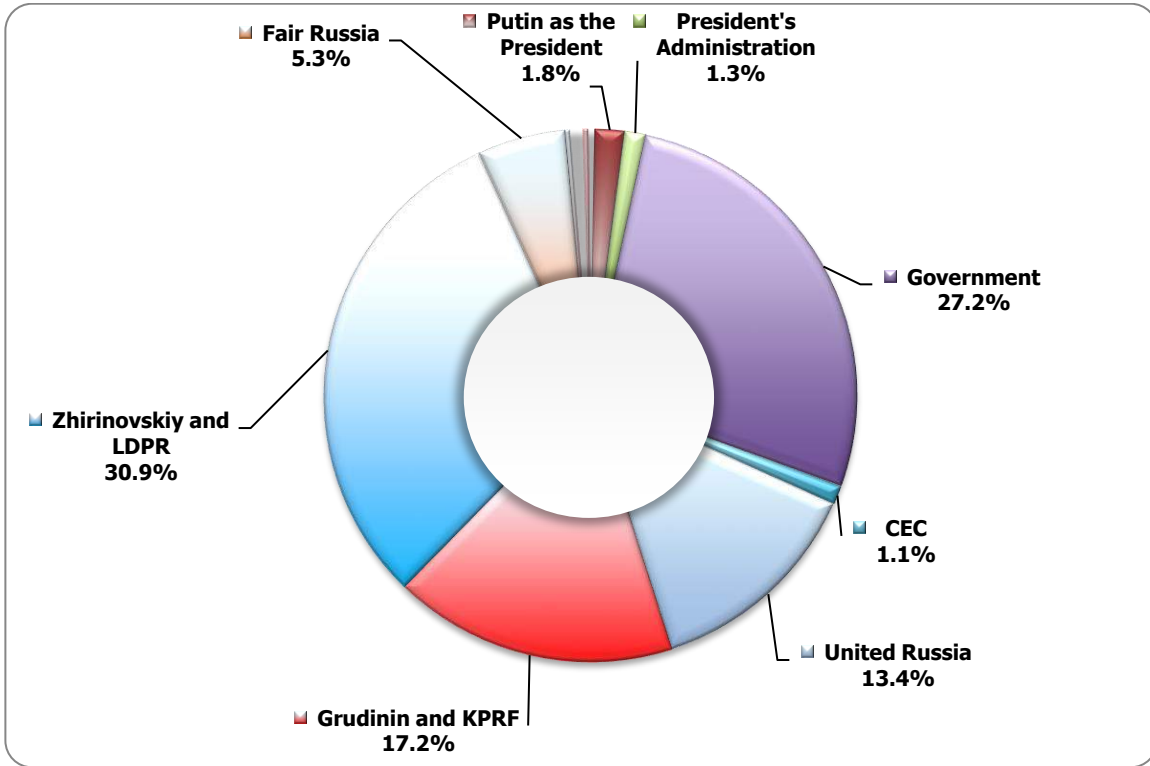
While *Ekho Moskovy* broadcasts views that are independent and critical of the views represented by the current establishment, its potential geographical outreach and impact are, like TV Dozhd, much lower than the aforementioned TV channels.



## Newspapers

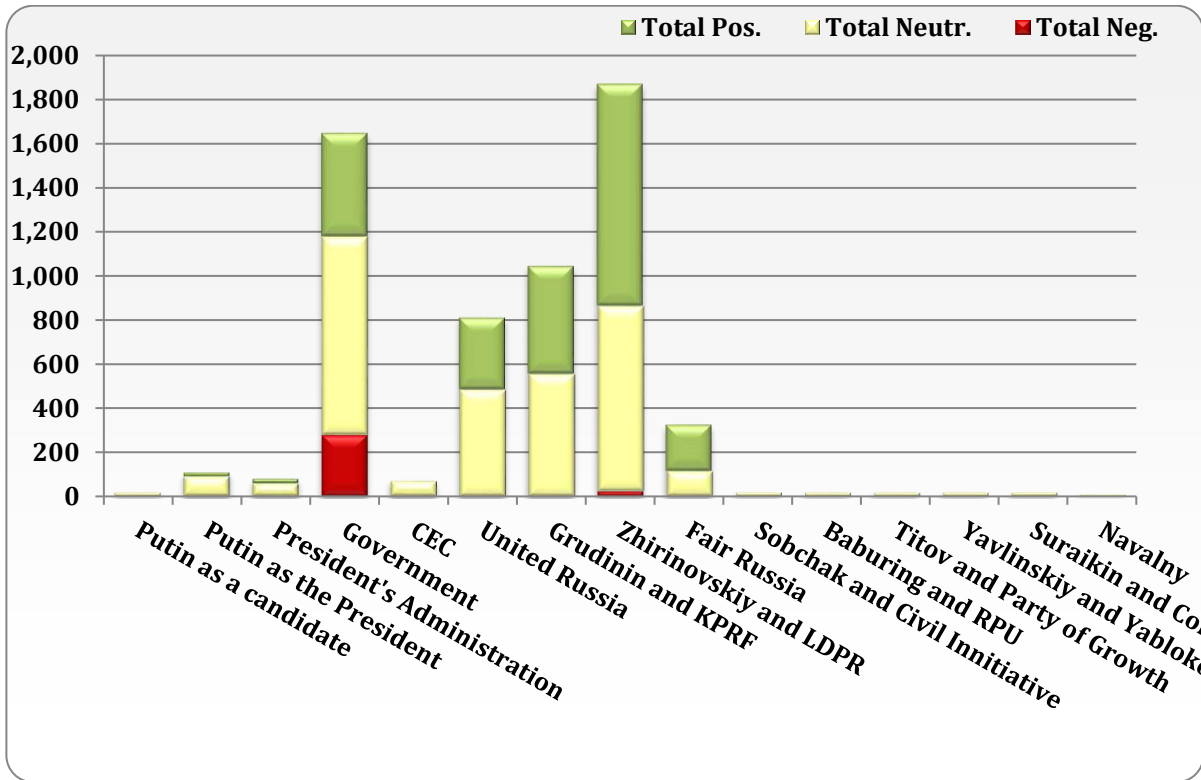
Of the five monitored newspapers, three supported the current establishment (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, Rossijskaya Gazeta and Komsomolskaya Pravda) and two provided a slightly more measured approach when it comes to the coverage of President Putin and the campaign as a whole. The newspapers in general however did not substitute for the obvious lack of balance by the broadcast media. They do not facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, confrontation, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analyzed and assessed views of persons and groups seeking elected office.

During the first monitoring period, *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to the LDPR and its candidate Zhirinovskiy (30.9 per cent), followed by the government (27.2 per cent), the KPRF and its candidate Grudinin (17.2 per cent) and the United Russia (13.4 per cent). Interestingly, Vladimir Putin received only 1.8 per cent in the newspaper – in his capacity as the incumbent president.

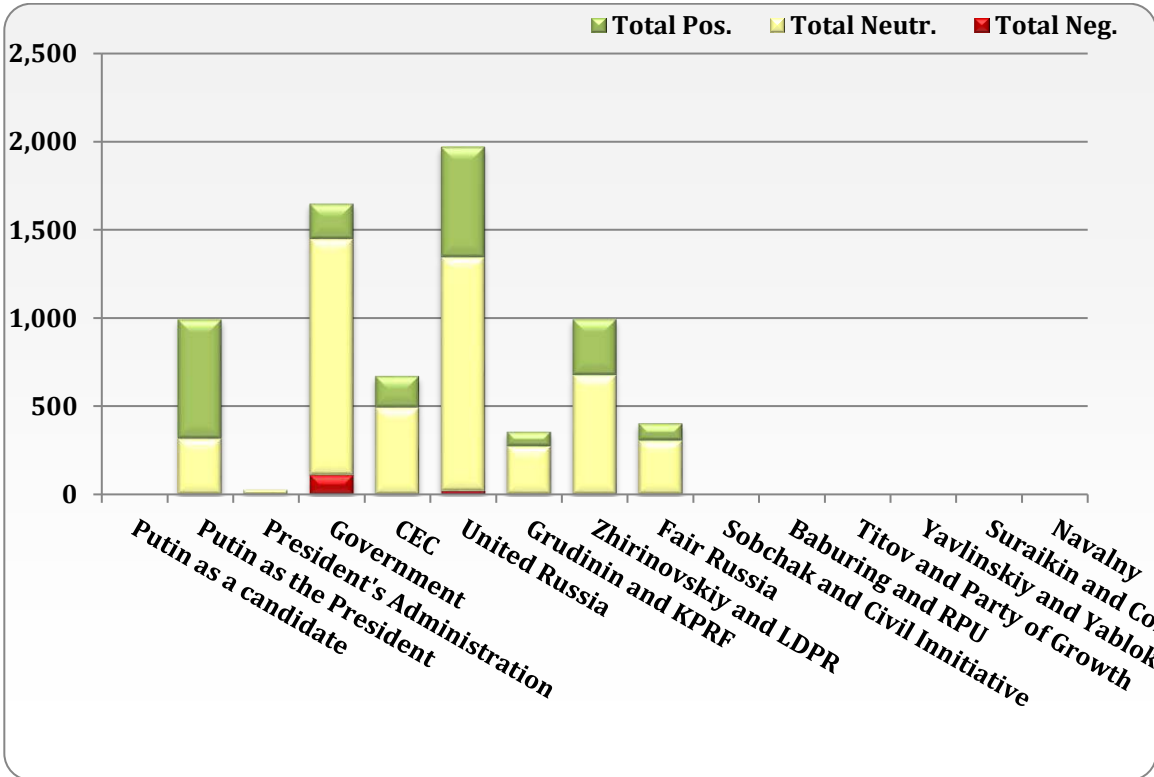
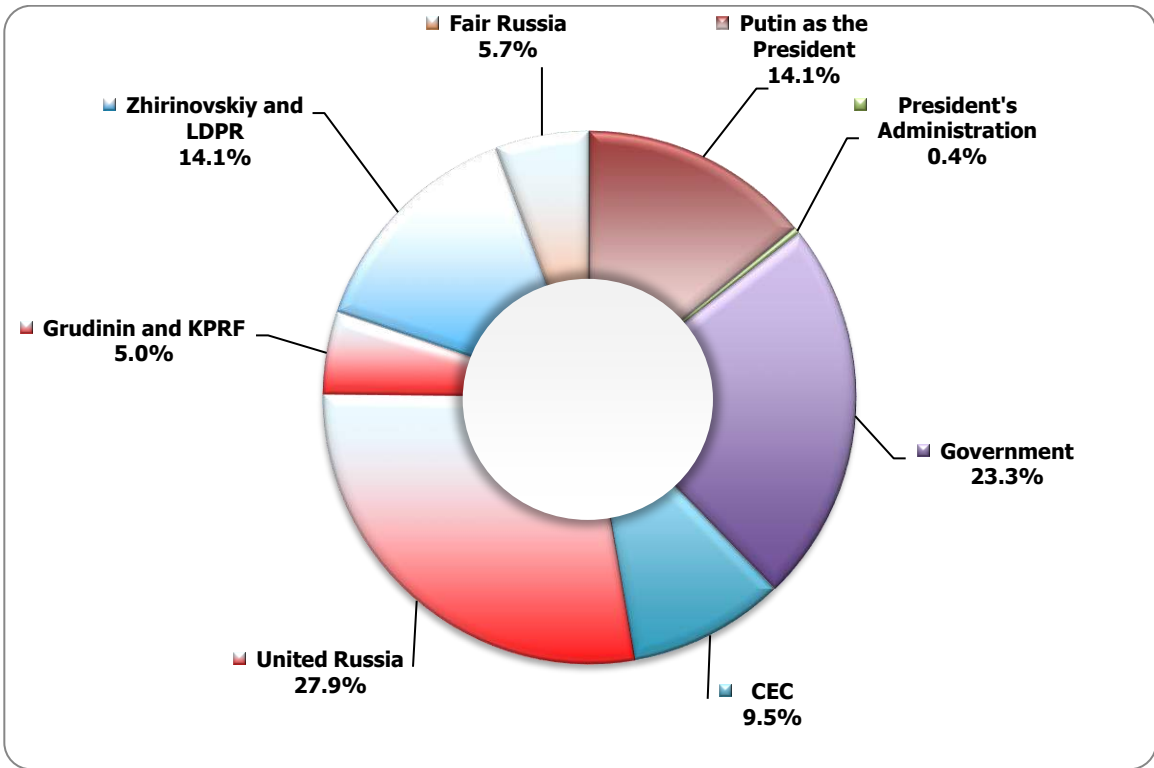


The tone of the coverage was primarily positive and neutral about all monitored subjects. The only exception was the government, which received also some negative coverage (17 per cent).



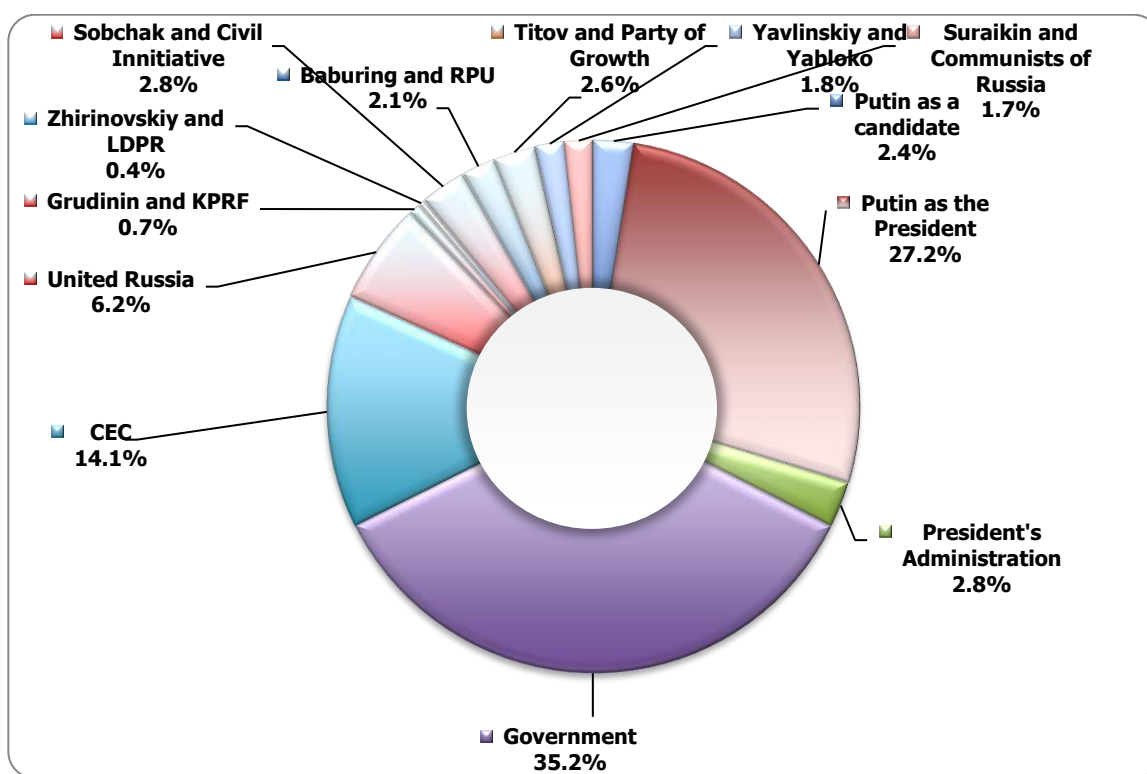


During the second monitoring period, *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to United Russia (27.9 per cent), followed by the government (23.3 per cent), and the LDPR and its candidate Zhirinovskiy (14.1 per cent). During the second period, President Putin received 14.1 per cent of the coverage, marking a significant increase on the first period.

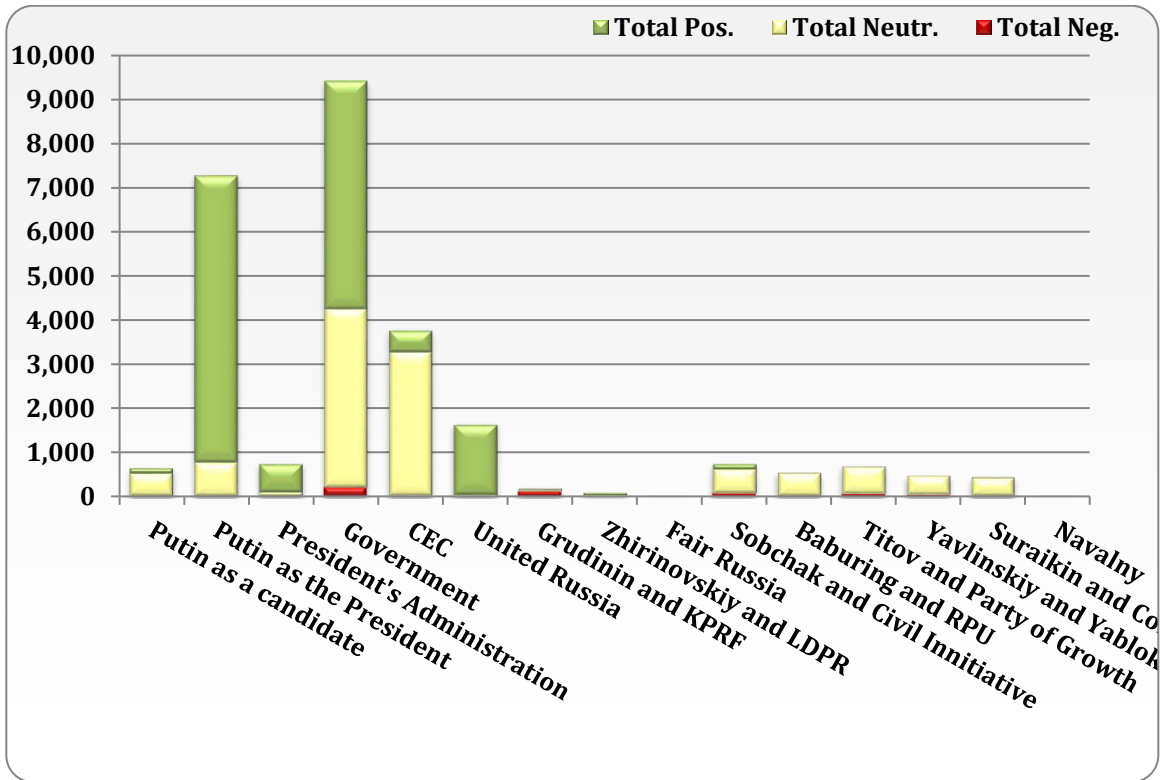


The tone of the coverage was once again mainly neutral and positive about all the monitored subjects. Similar to the first period, only the government received negative coverage, although the share was smaller than during the first period.

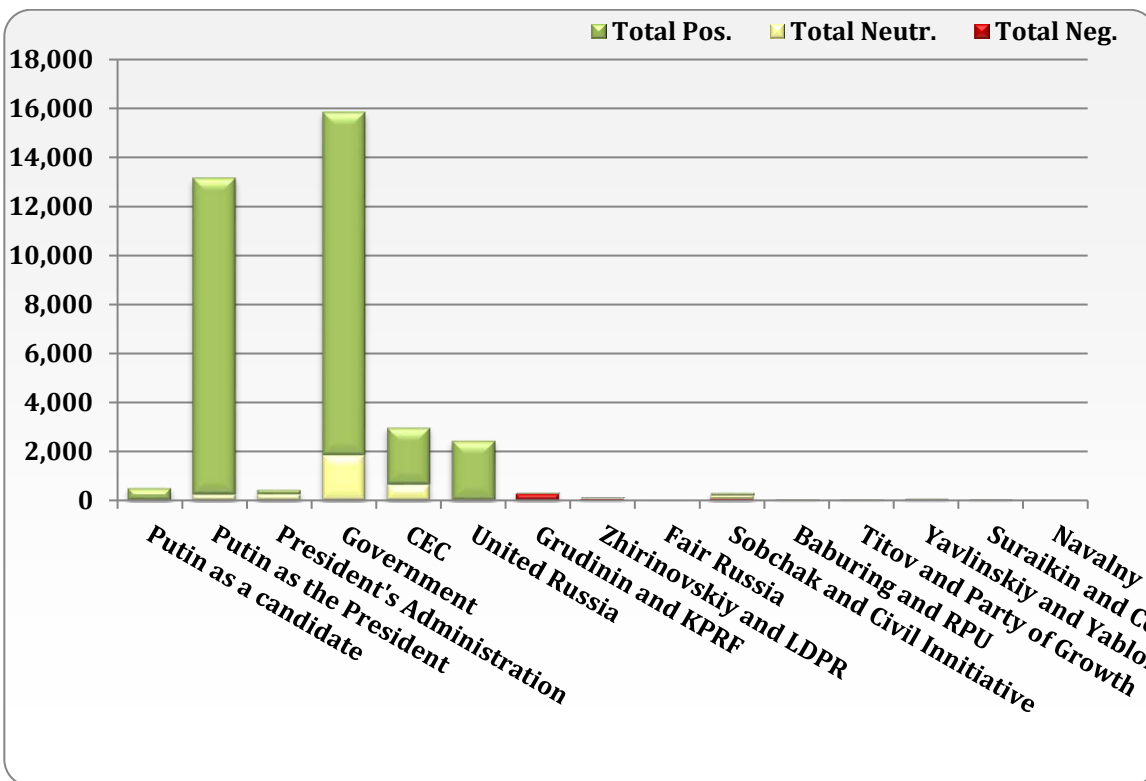
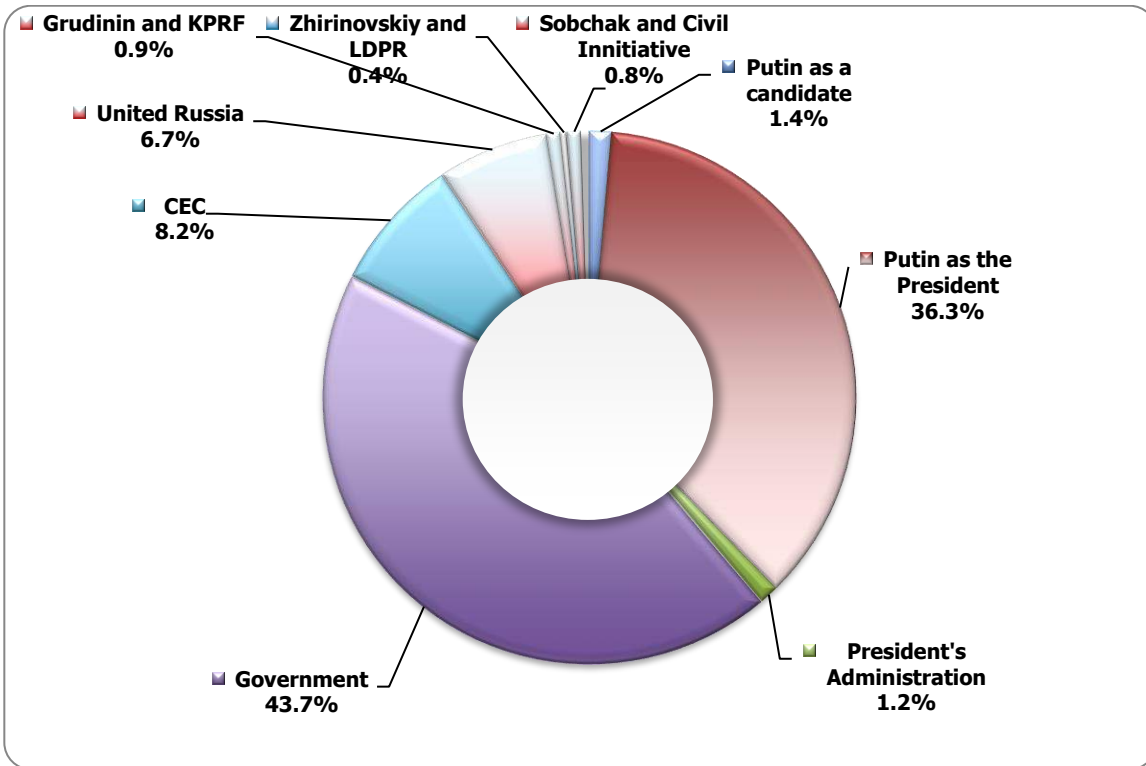
Between 1 – 16 February, *Rossiskaya Gazeta* devoted 35.2 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the incumbent cabinet. *Rossiskaya Gazeta* followed by President Putin, who was allotted 27.2 per cent of the coverage in his capacity as president. It is worth mentioning that CEC also received a significant amount of coverage – 14.1 per cent.



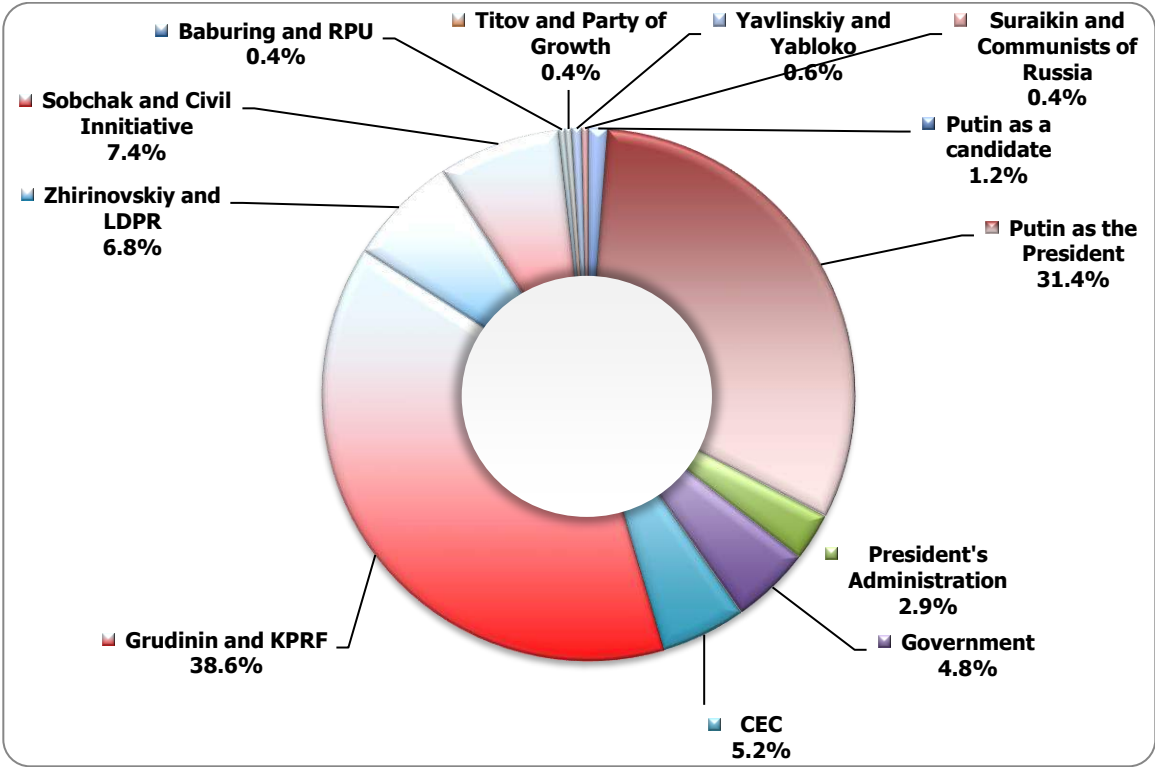
Similar to the coverage on the monitored TV channels, the coverage of the incumbent president was overwhelmingly positive. The government received almost equal shares of positive and neutral coverage. The coverage of the CEC was mainly neutral, as was the coverage of all other monitored subjects (aside from United Russia, which received mainly positive coverage).



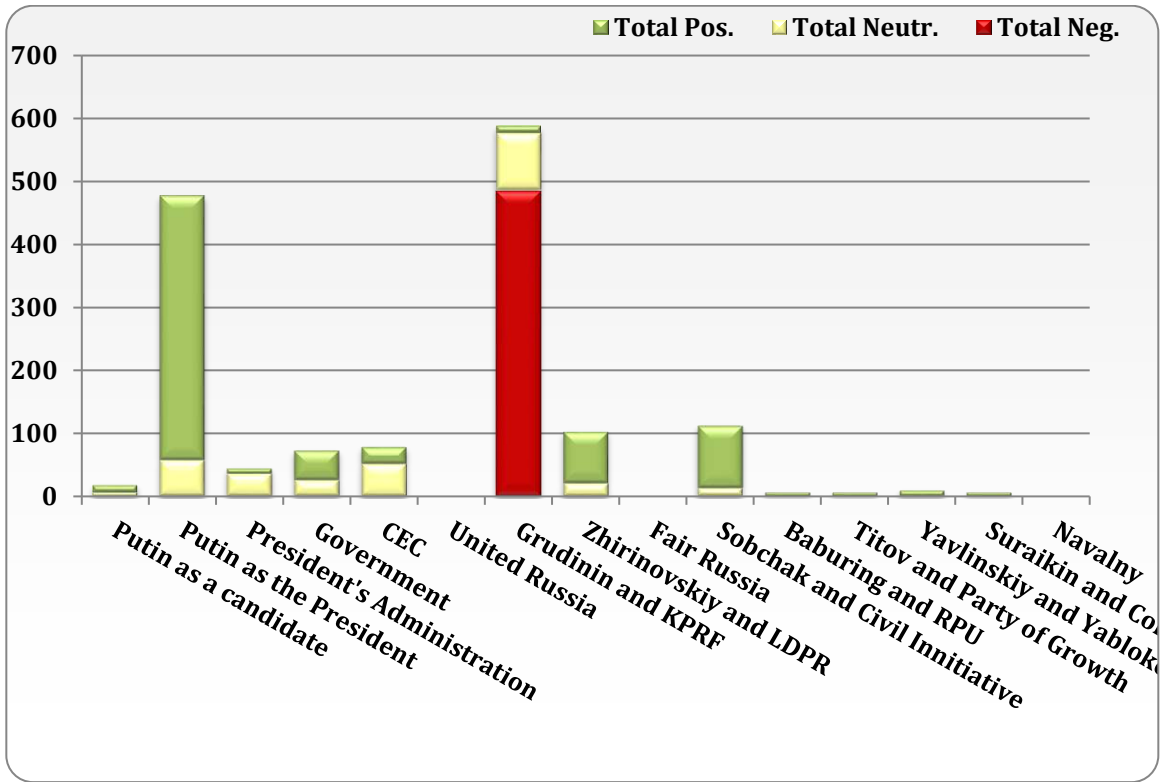
From 17 February until 16 March, *Rossiskaya Gazeta* devoted even larger share of its coverage to the government (43.7 per cent), followed by President Putin, who received 36.3 per cent of the coverage in his capacity as president. The tone of the coverage was very positive for the president, the government, and the ruling party United Russia.



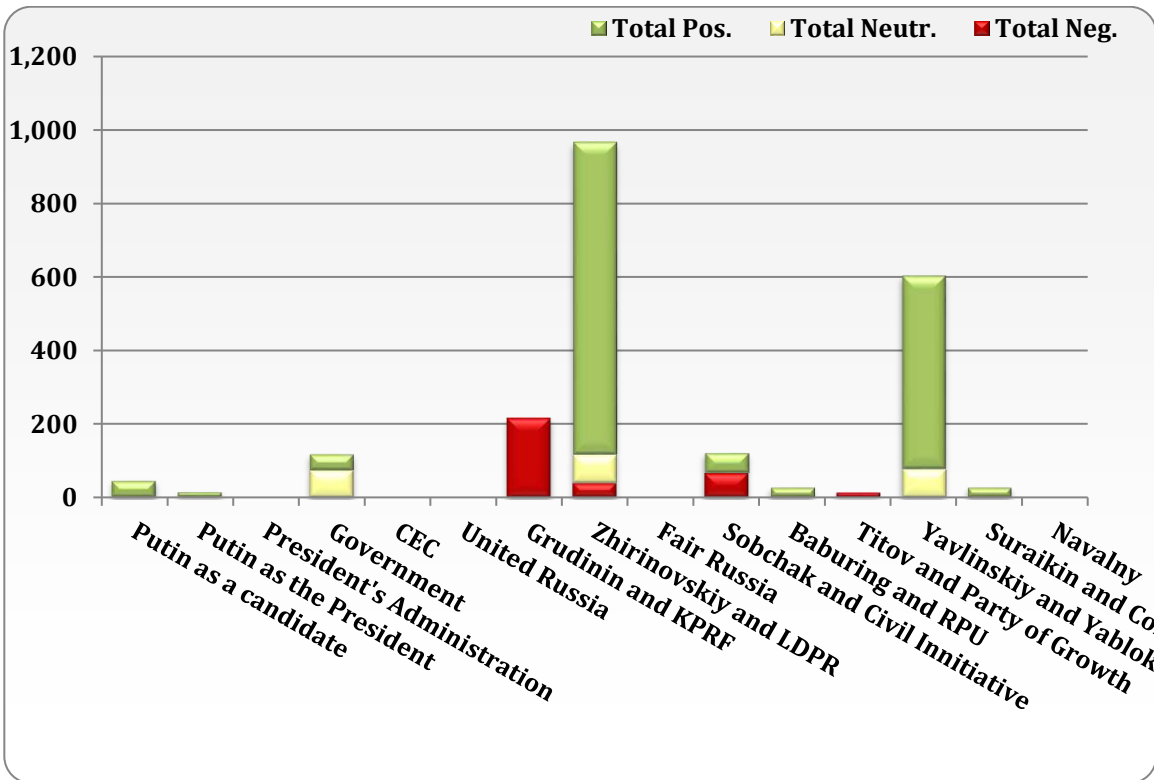
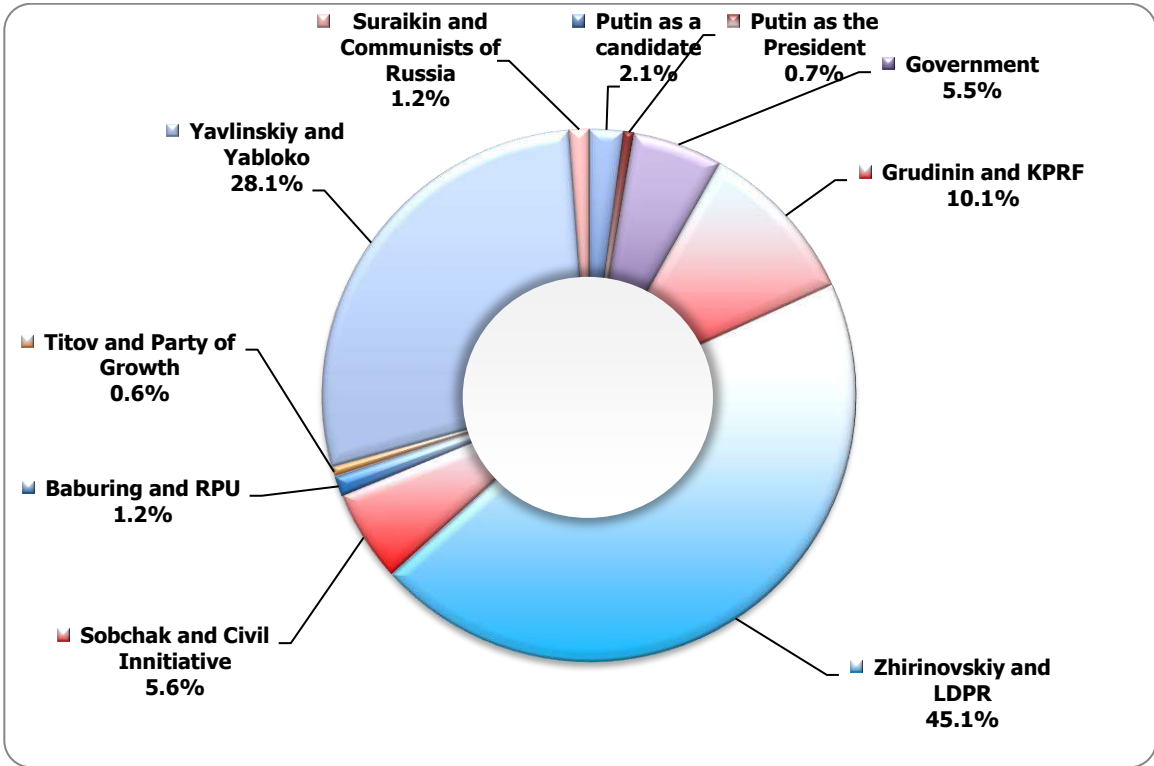
During the first monitoring period, *KP* devoted as much as 38.6 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the KPRF and its candidate Grudinin, followed by President Putin (31.4), and then Sobchak and her Civil Initiative (7.4 per cent).



The analysis of the tone of the coverage shows that *KP* was clearly biased against Grudinin and supported incumbent President Putin as its chosen candidate.

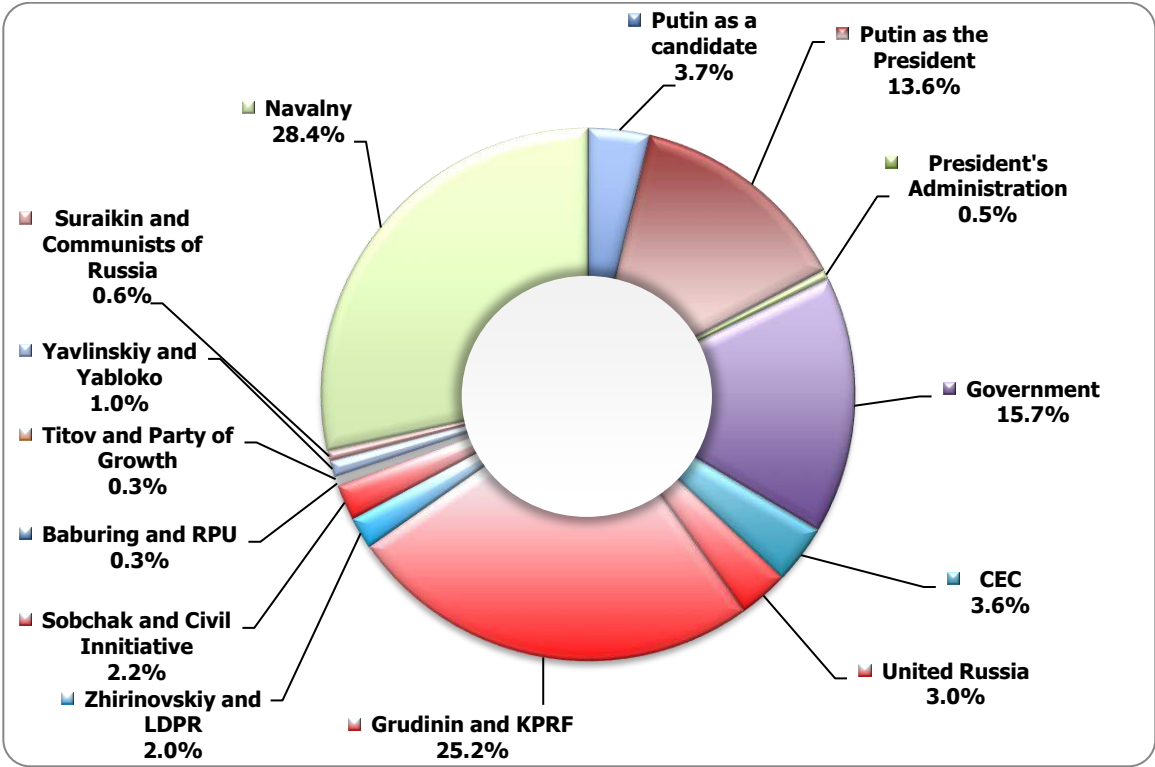


During the second monitoring period, the bulk of the coverage went to Zhirinivskiy and the LDPR (45.1 per cent), followed by Yavlinskiy and his Yabloko (28.1 per cent). By comparison, the KPRF and Grudin in received 10.1 per cent and Sobchak, just 5.6 per cent. The tone of the coverage continued to be negative for the KPRF candidate, and mainly positive for the LDPR and Yabloko candidates.

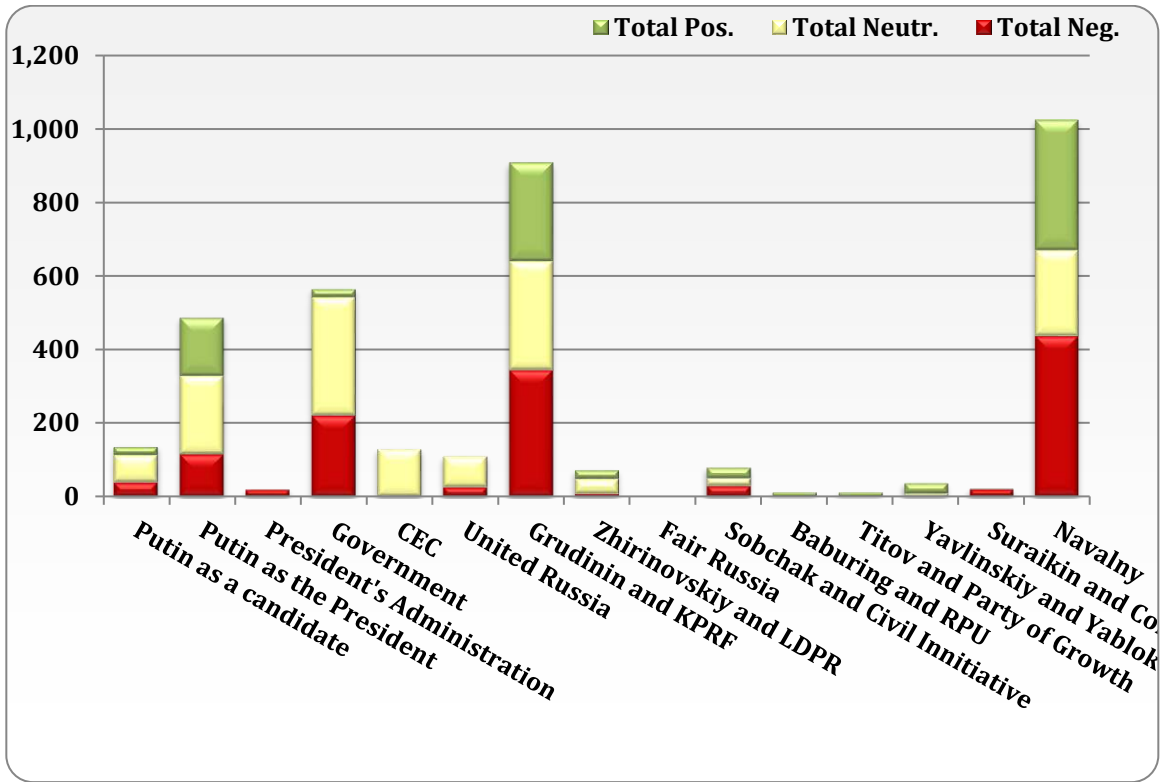




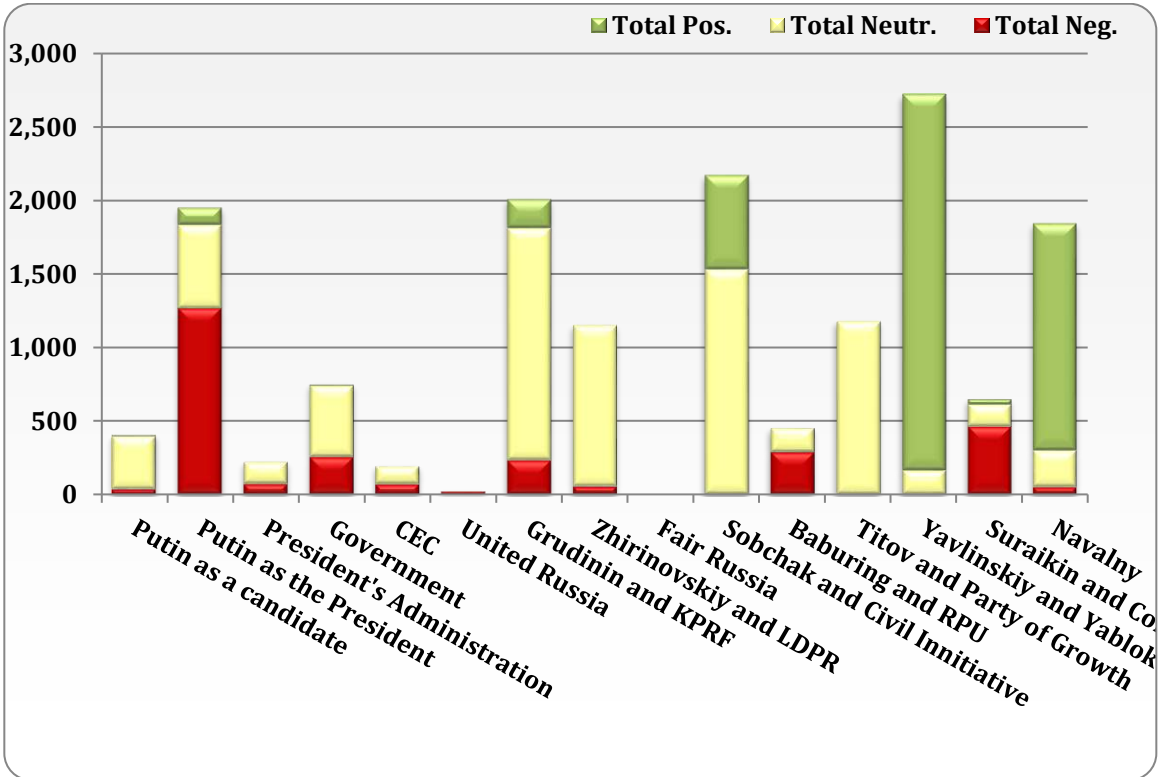
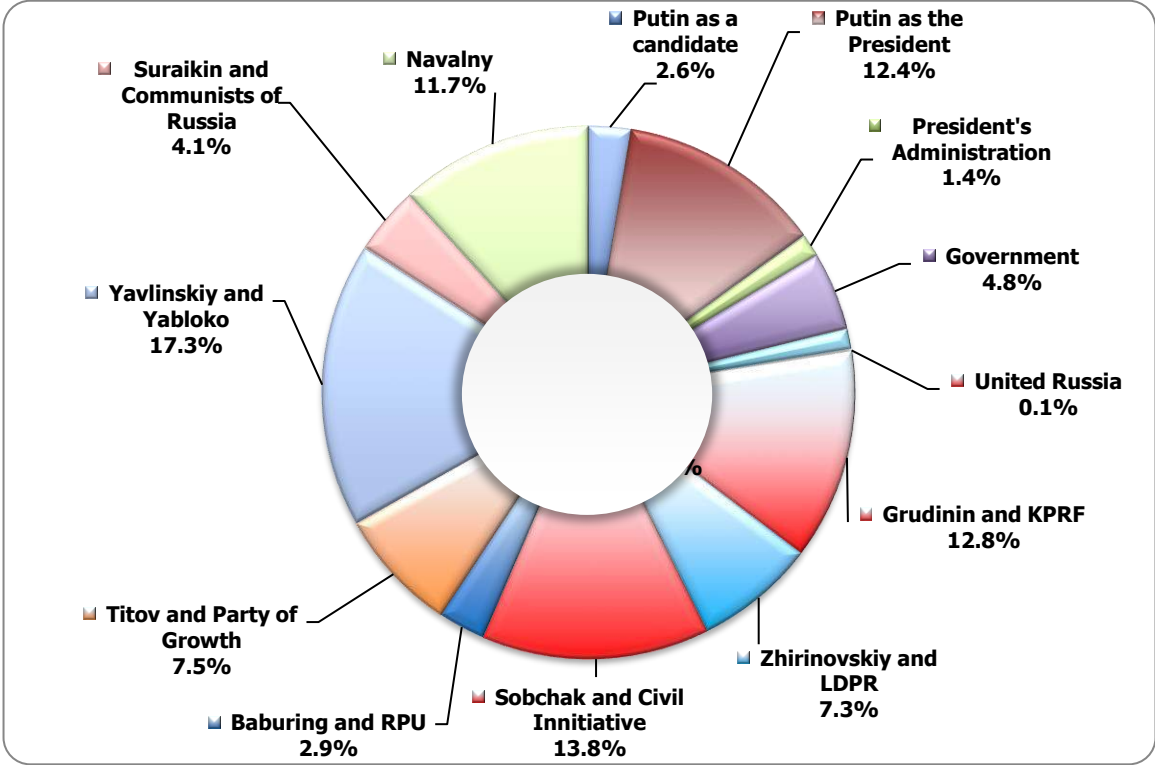
During the first monitoring period, Novaya Gazeta showed a very different picture of the campaign in comparison to the above-mentioned newspapers. The greatest recipient of coverage was Aleksey Navalny, who received 28.4 per cent, followed by the KPRF and its candidate Grudinin (25.2 per cent) and the government (15.7 per cent).



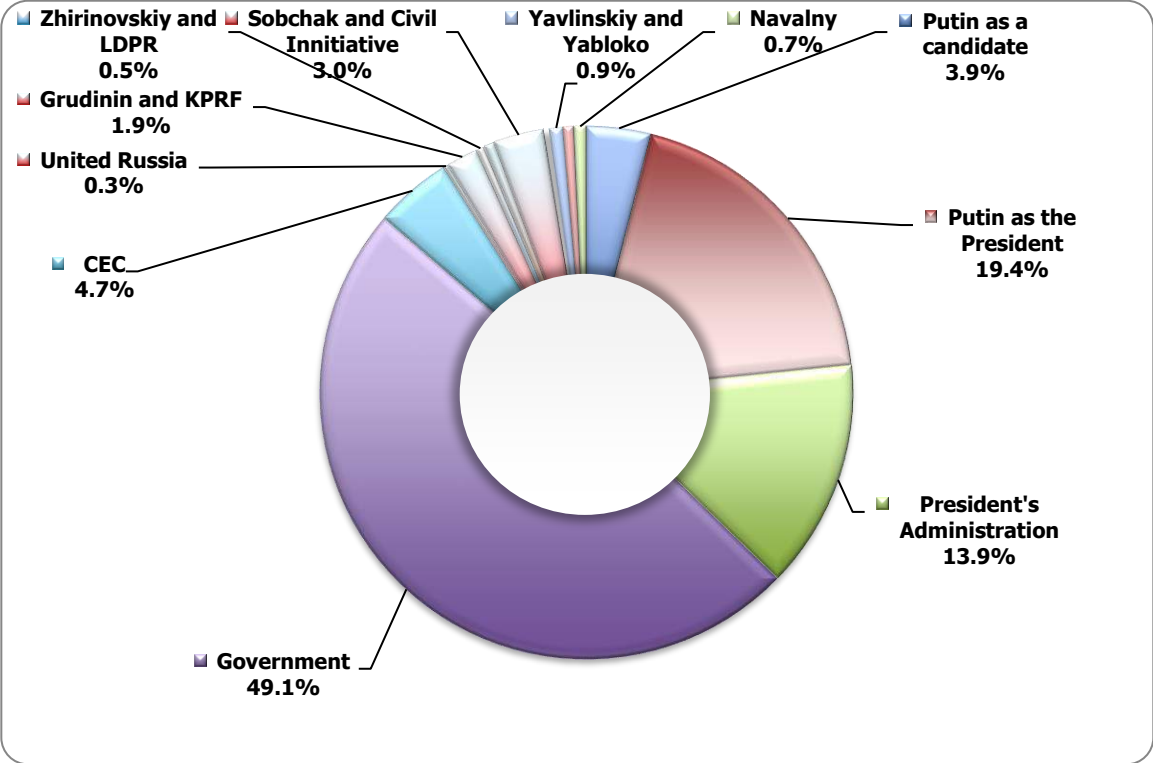
Analysis of the tone revealed that this paper was more critical in its coverage of political subjects. It allocated roughly equal portions of negative and positive coverage to Navalny, Grudinin and President Putin. The coverage of the government was mainly neutral and negative.



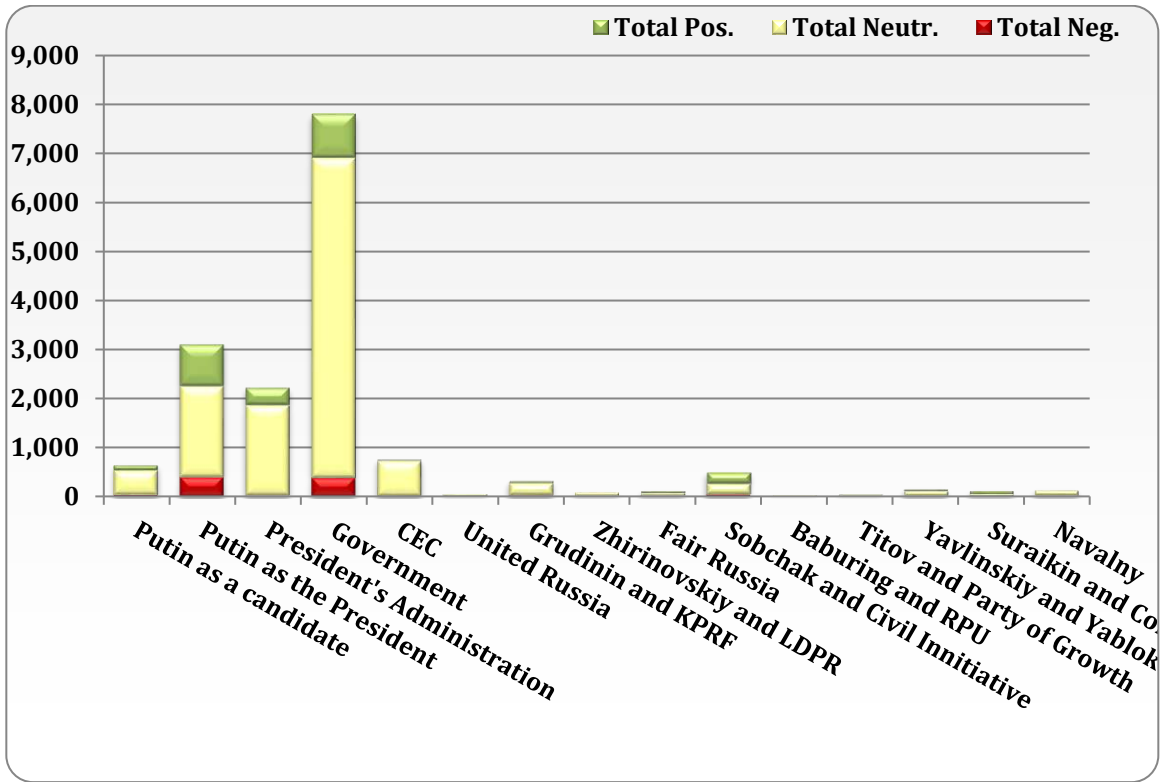
From 17 February until 16 March, Novaya Gazeta generally demonstrated greater diversity in its coverage. The biggest share of the coverage went to Grigorij Yavlinskiy and Yabloko (17.3 per cent), followed by Ksenia Sobchak (13.8 per cent), Grudinin (12.8 per cent), President Putin (12.4 per cent) and Aleksey Navalny (11.7 per cent). The analysis of the tone of the coverage revealed that while President Putin was subject to heavy criticism, Yavlinsky and Navalny both received overwhelmingly positive portrayals.



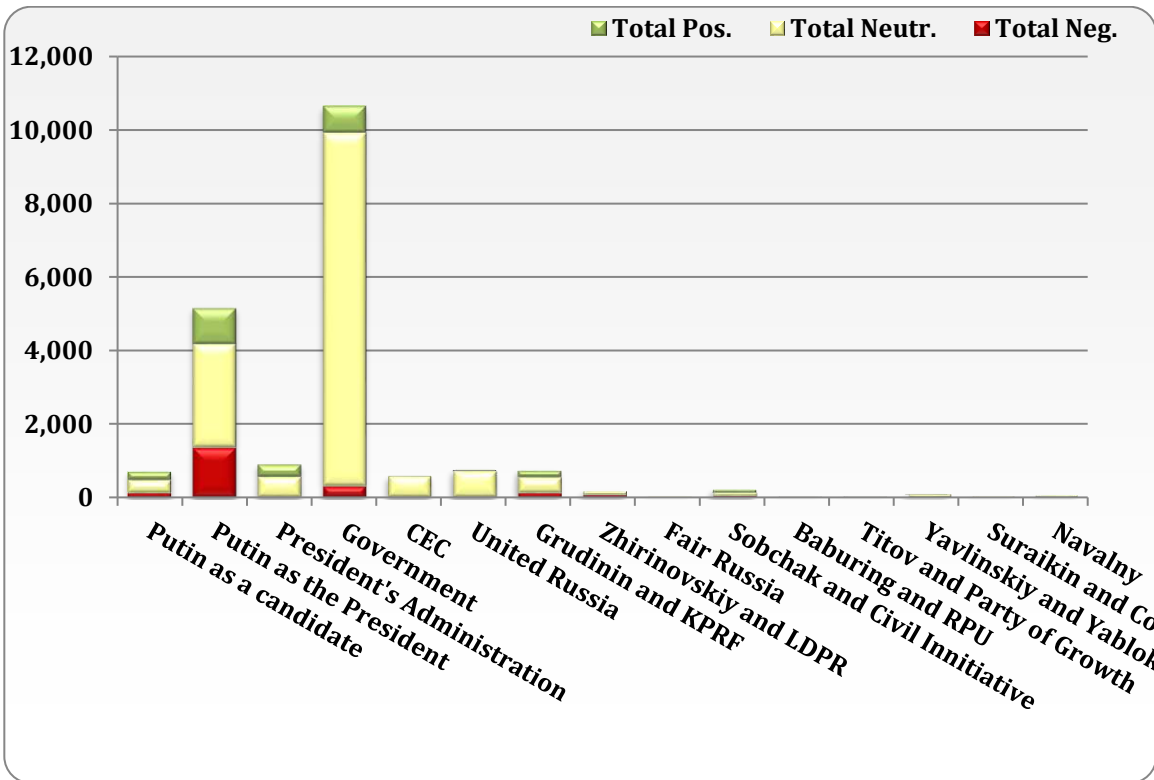
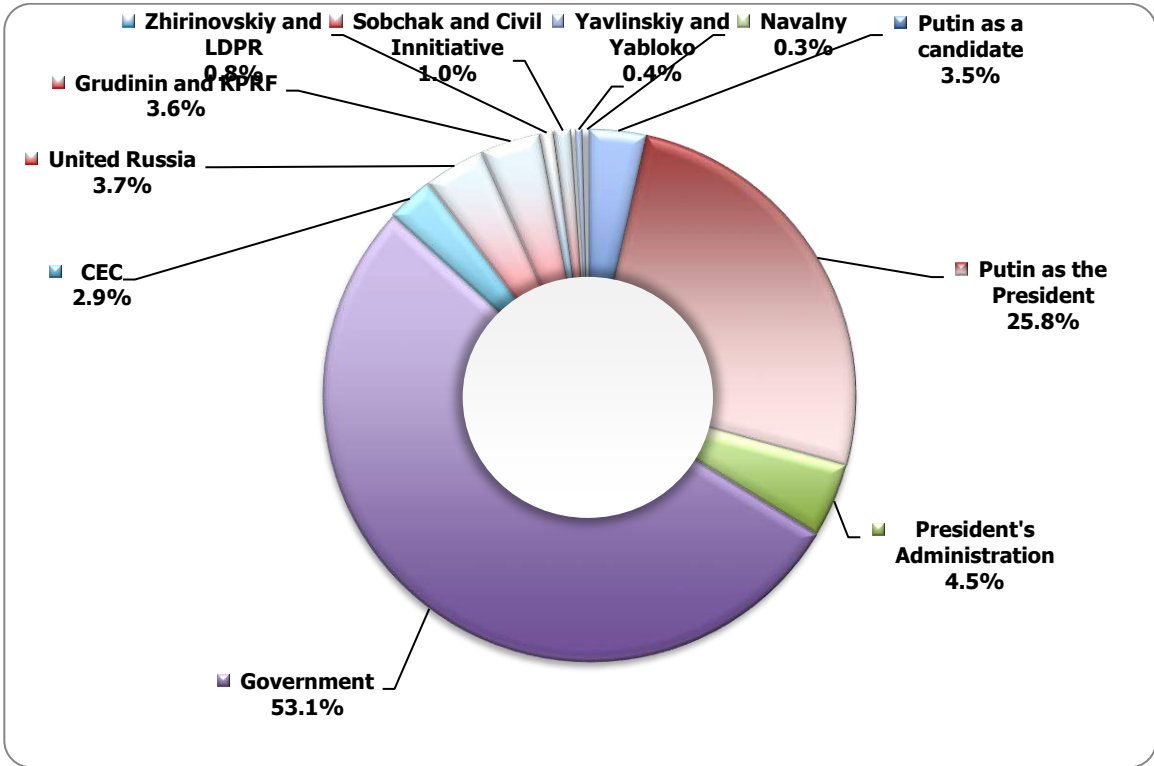
During the first monitoring period, *Komersant* allocated almost half of its political and election-related coverage to the government, followed by the incumbent president (19.4 per cent) and the presidential administration (13.9 per cent).



The tone of the coverage of the government, the president and the presidential administration was overwhelmingly neutral.



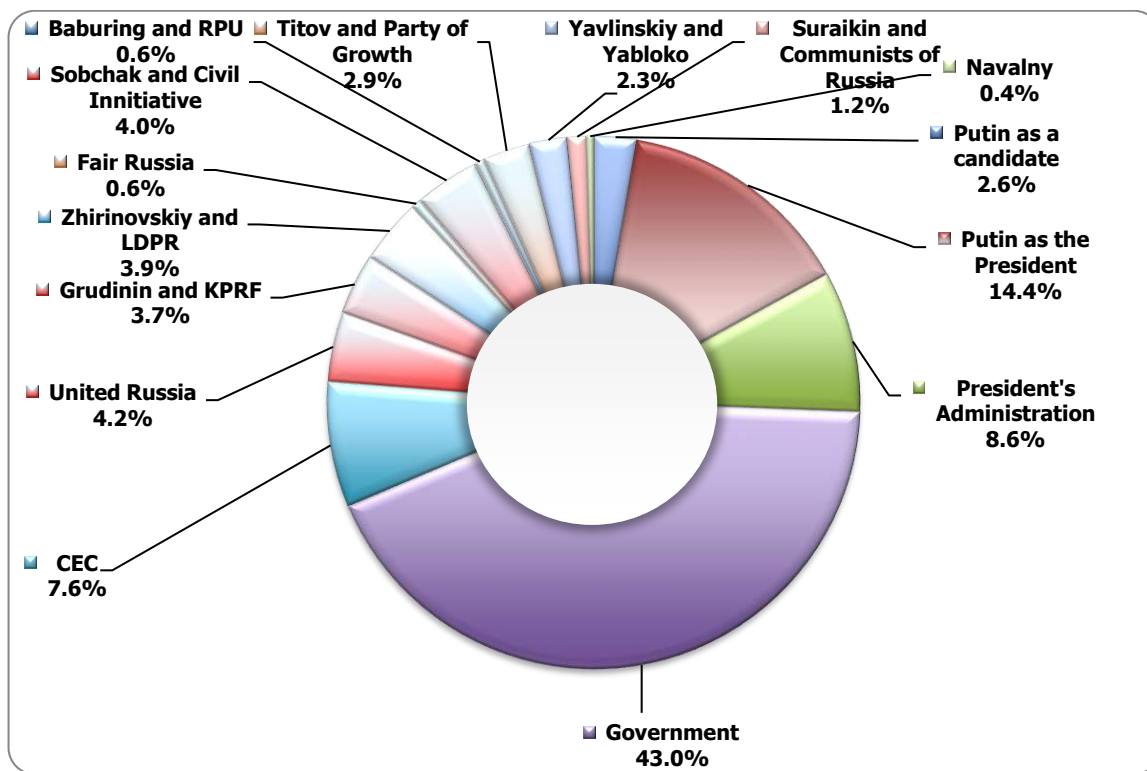
During the second monitoring period, the government received an even larger share of Kommersant’s coverage, amounting to 53.1 per cent. The only other entity to receive significant coverage was President Putin, who was allocated 25.8 per cent of the coverage. The tone of the coverage of Putin was mainly neutral and negative.



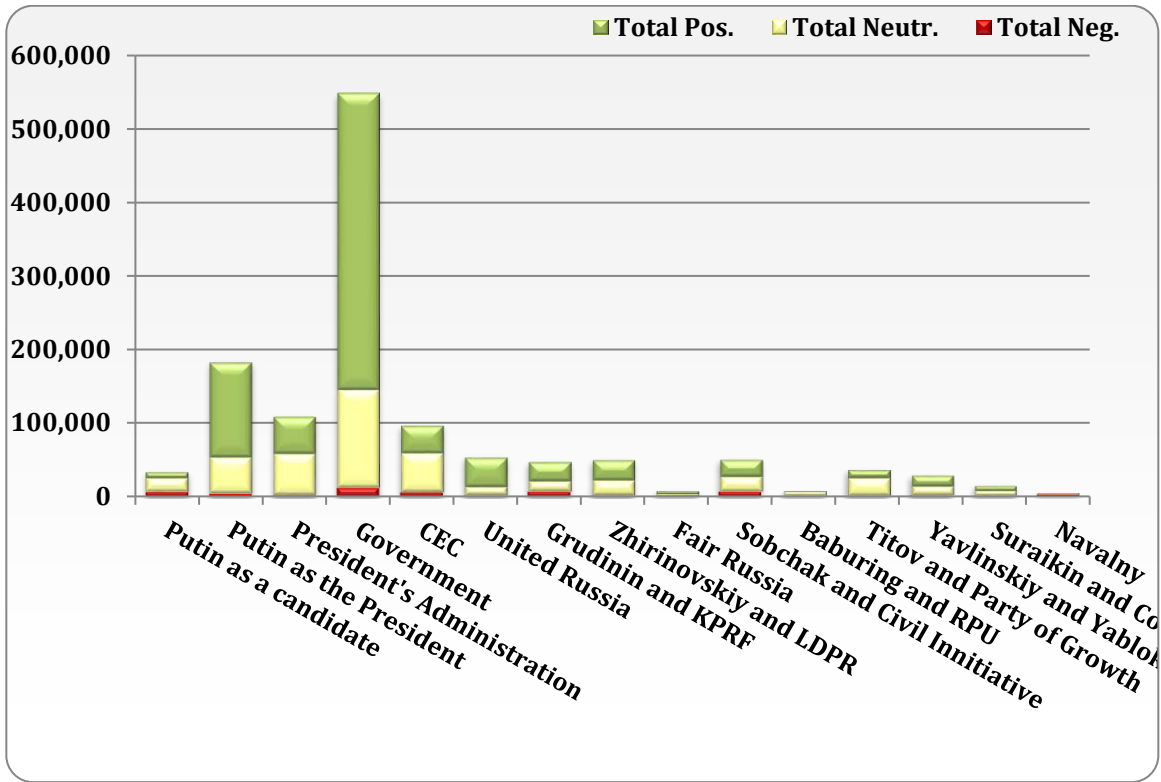
## Online media

The election reporting by online media was quite similar to that of the newspapers. They published neither investigative stories nor deeper analyses of the current political situation. Of the four monitored online media outlets, three supported the incumbent president (Ria Novosty, Gazeta.ru and Lenta.ru), and one was critical (Medusa.ru).

The state-run news agency Ria Novosty devoted 43 per cent of its political and election-related news coverage to the cabinet and its ministers, followed by President Putin (14.4 per cent) and the presidential administration (8.6 per cent).

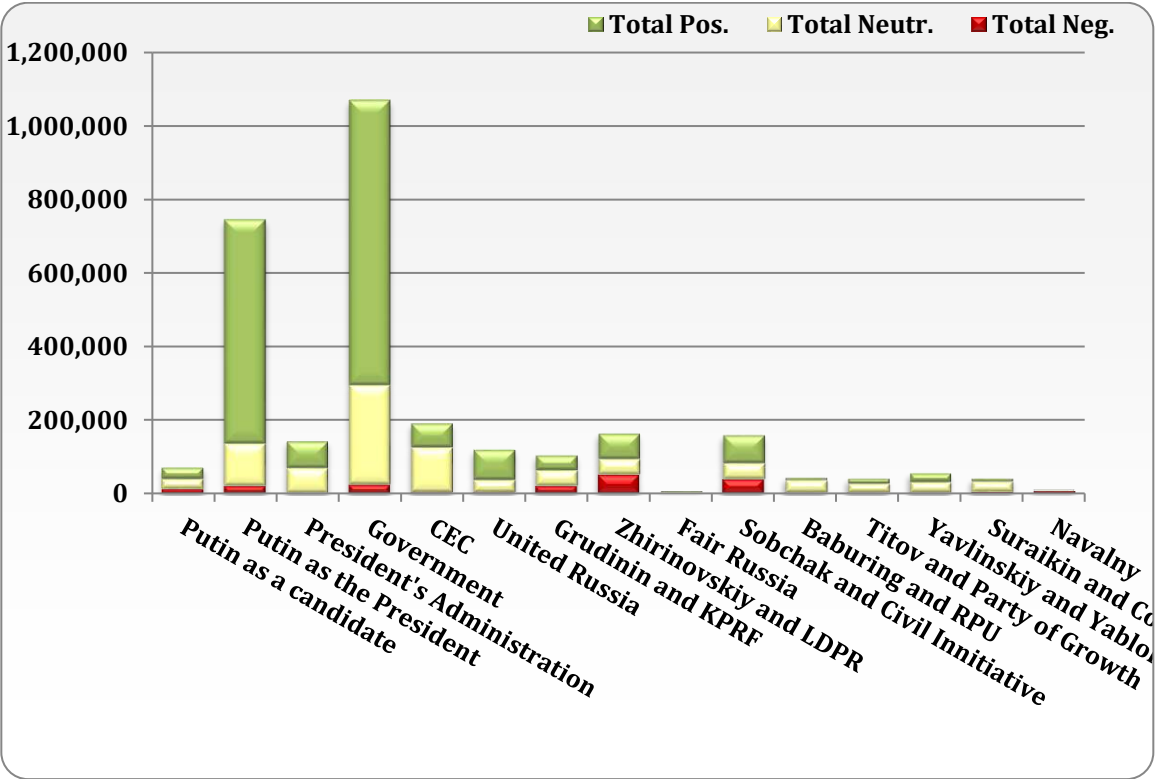
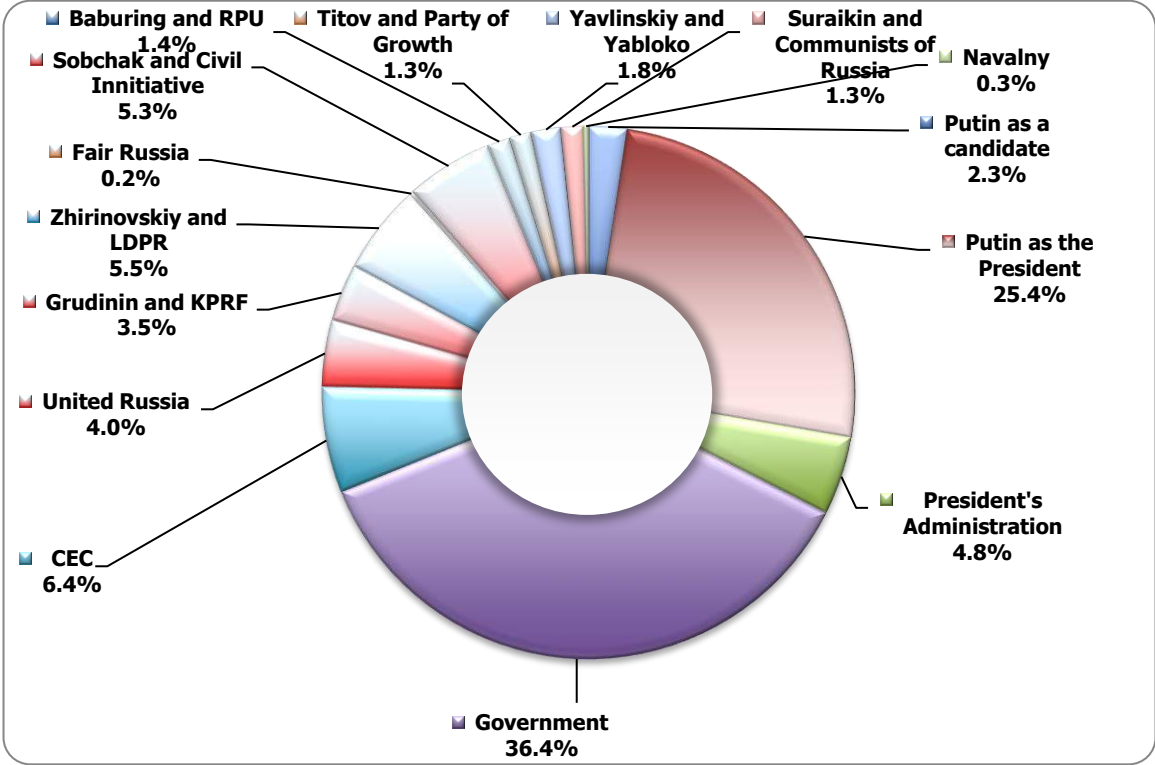


Similar to other state media outlets, Ria Novosty covered all official bodies and institutions in a positive or neutral light, largely refraining from any criticism.

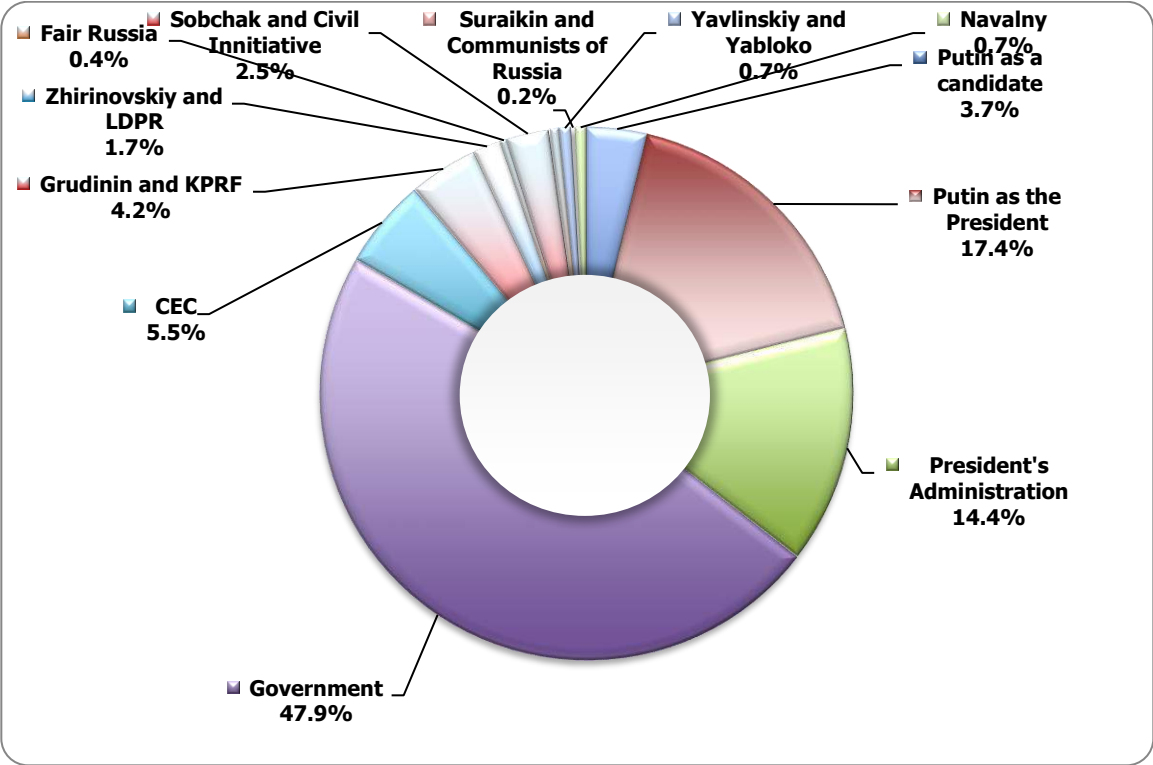


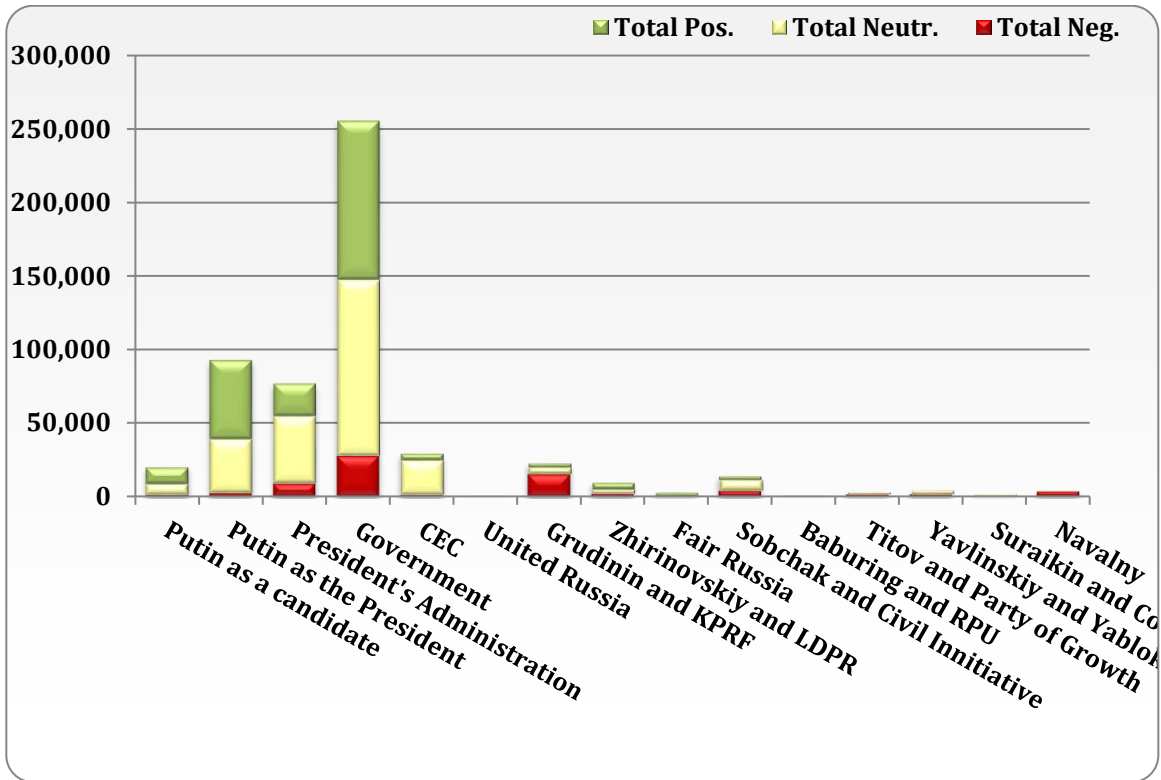
During the second monitoring period, the state news agency continued to allocate the largest portion of its coverage to the government (36.4 per cent), followed by President Putin (25.4 per cent) and the CEC (6.4 per cent). The tone of the coverage was again very positive when it came to the government and President Putin.



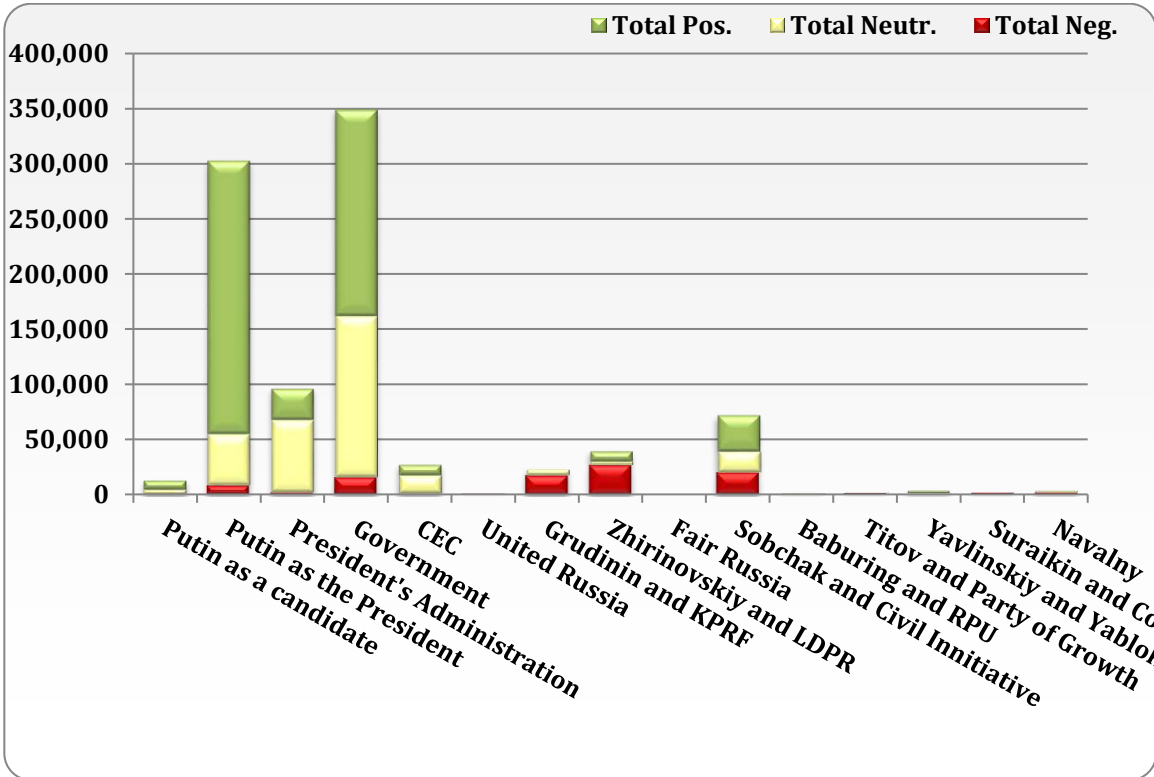
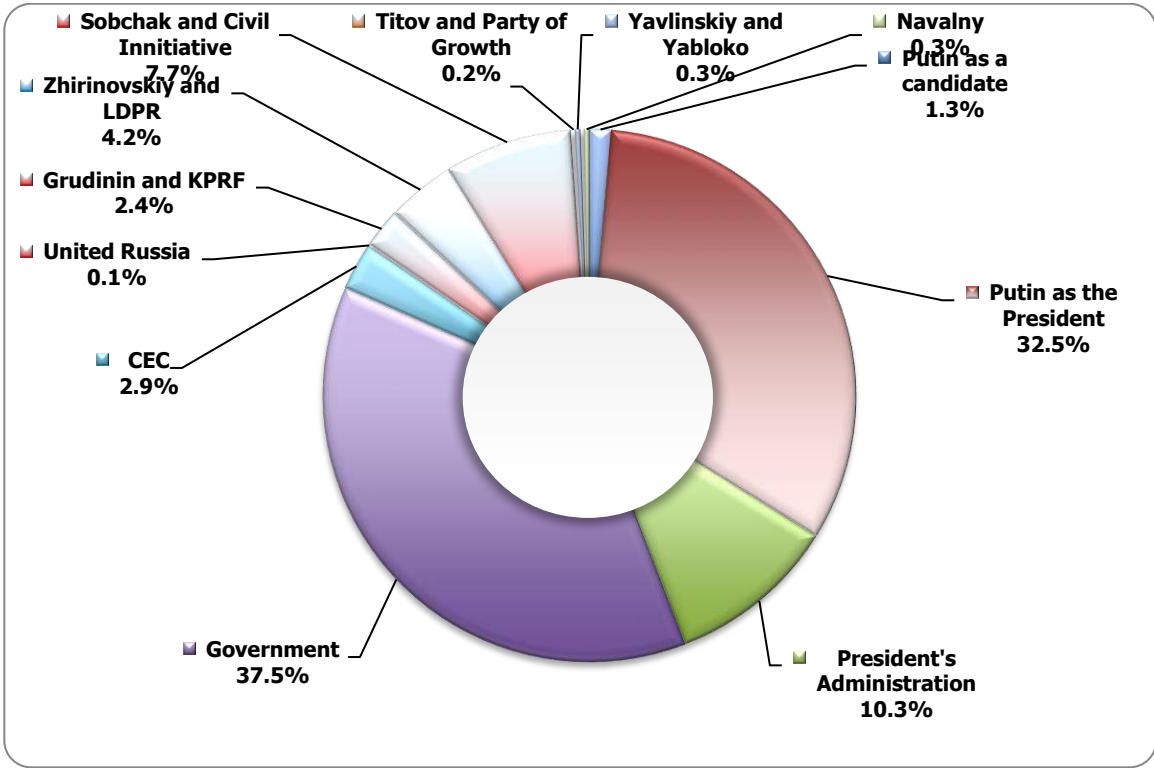


Gazeta.ru also allocated the bulk of the coverage to the government (47.9 per cent), followed by President Putin (17.4 per cent) and the presidential administration (14.4 per cent). As for the tone of the coverage, it was mainly neutral and positive for the government. The incumbent president received slightly more positive than neutral coverage.

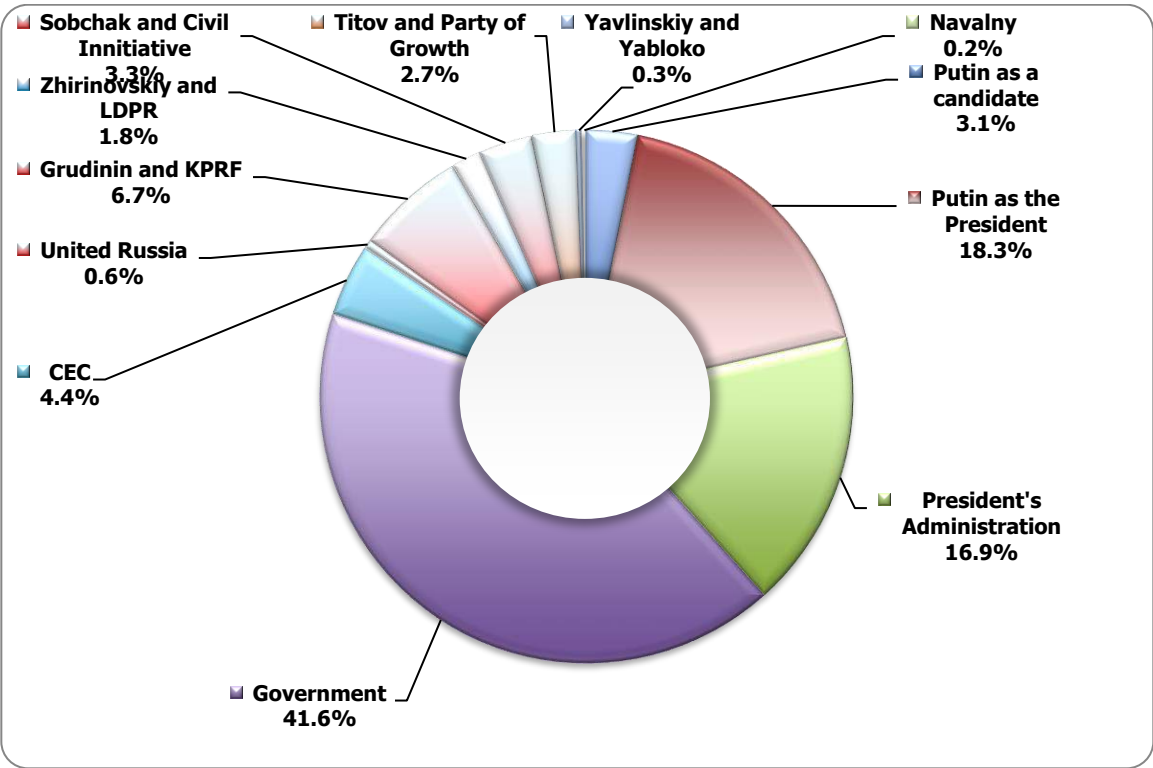


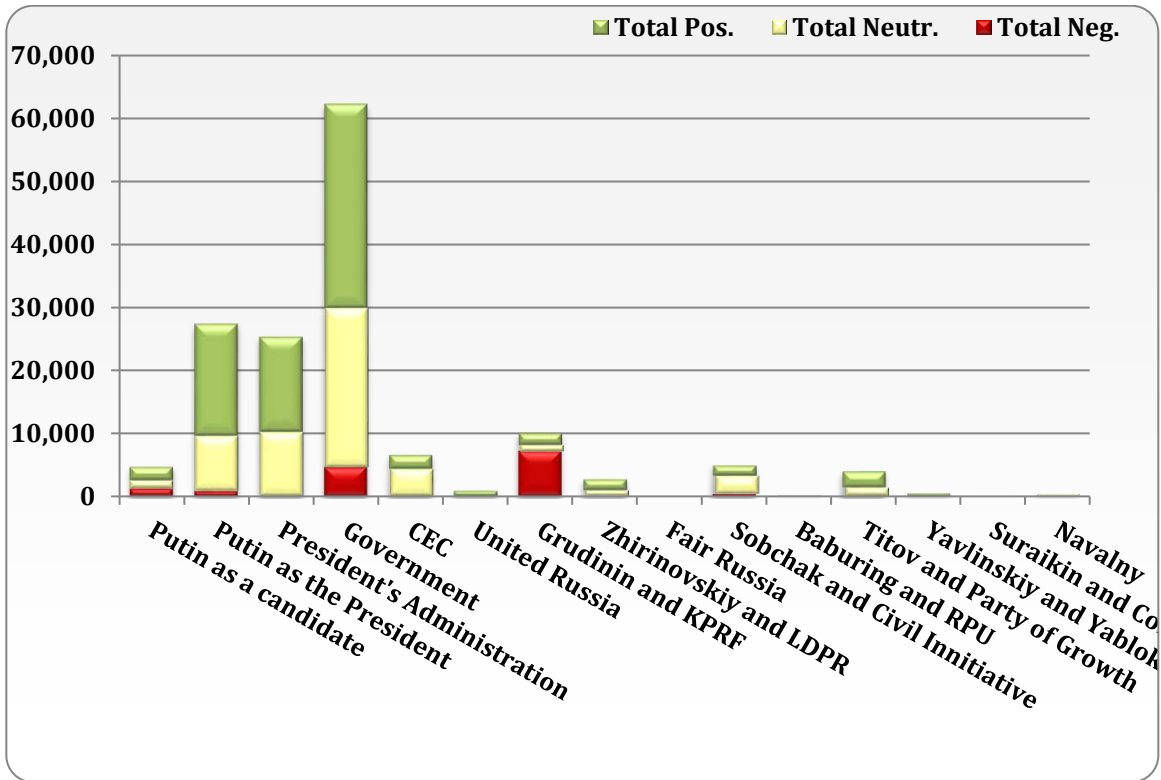


From 17 February until 16 March, gazeta.ru allocated the largest share of its coverage to the government (37.5 per cent). Mr. Putin received a slightly bigger share of the coverage in comparison with the first monitoring period, during which he received 32.5 per cent of coverage. The tone of the coverage was mainly positive for both the government and the President. By contrast, the coverage of Mr. Grudinin and Mr. Zhirinovskiy was mainly negative.

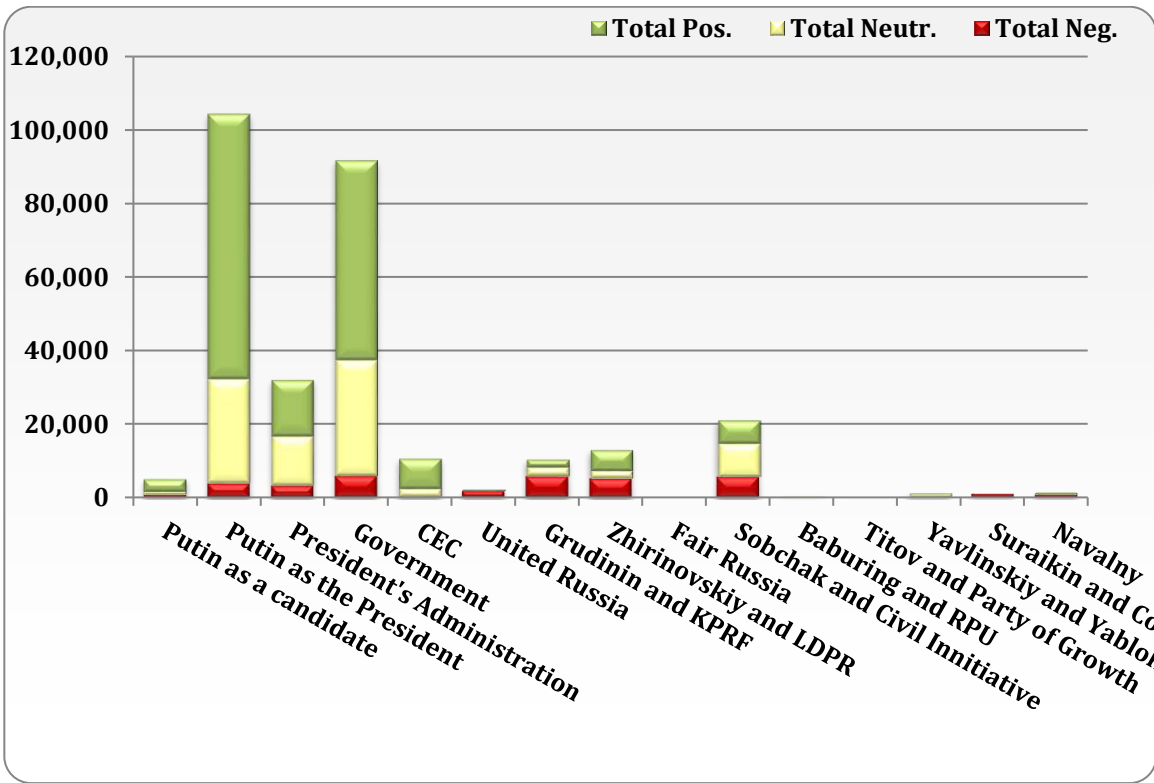
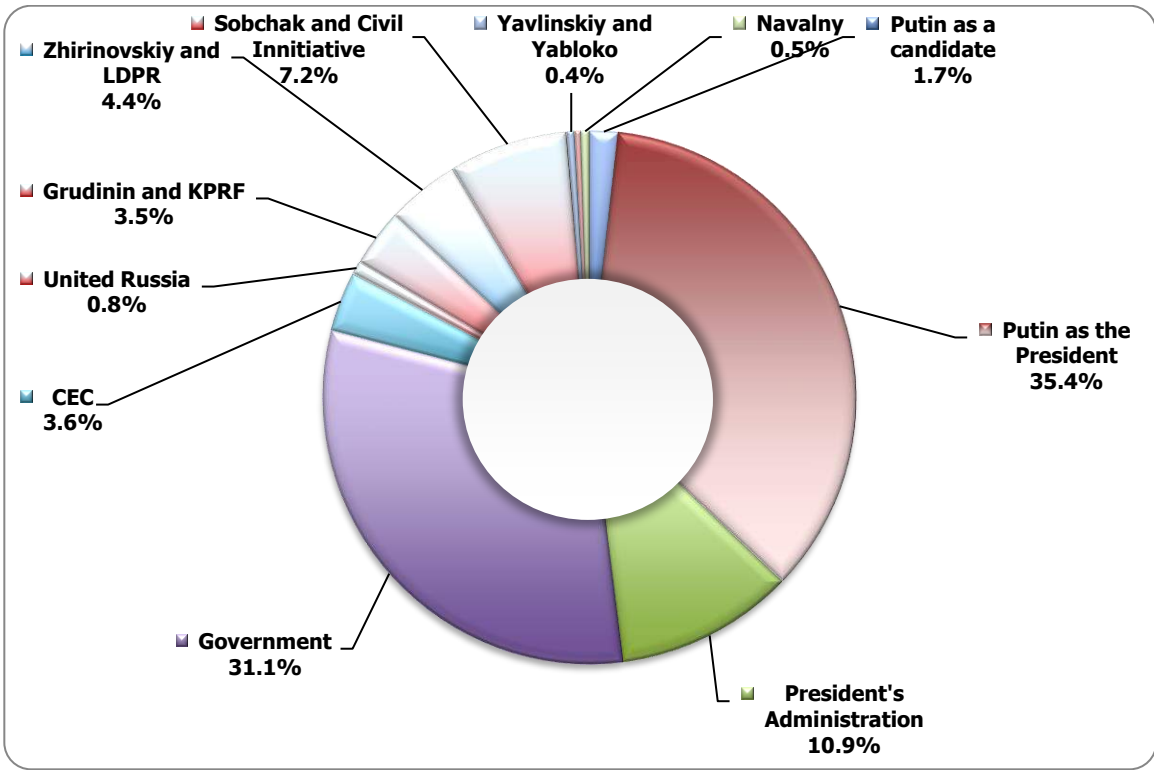


Another online media outlet, Lenta.ru, also allocated the bulk of its coverage to the government (41.6 per cent), followed by the incumbent president (18.3 per cent) and the presidential administration (16.9 per cent). While the tone of President Putin's coverage was mainly positive, the coverage of Mr. Grudinin was mainly negative.

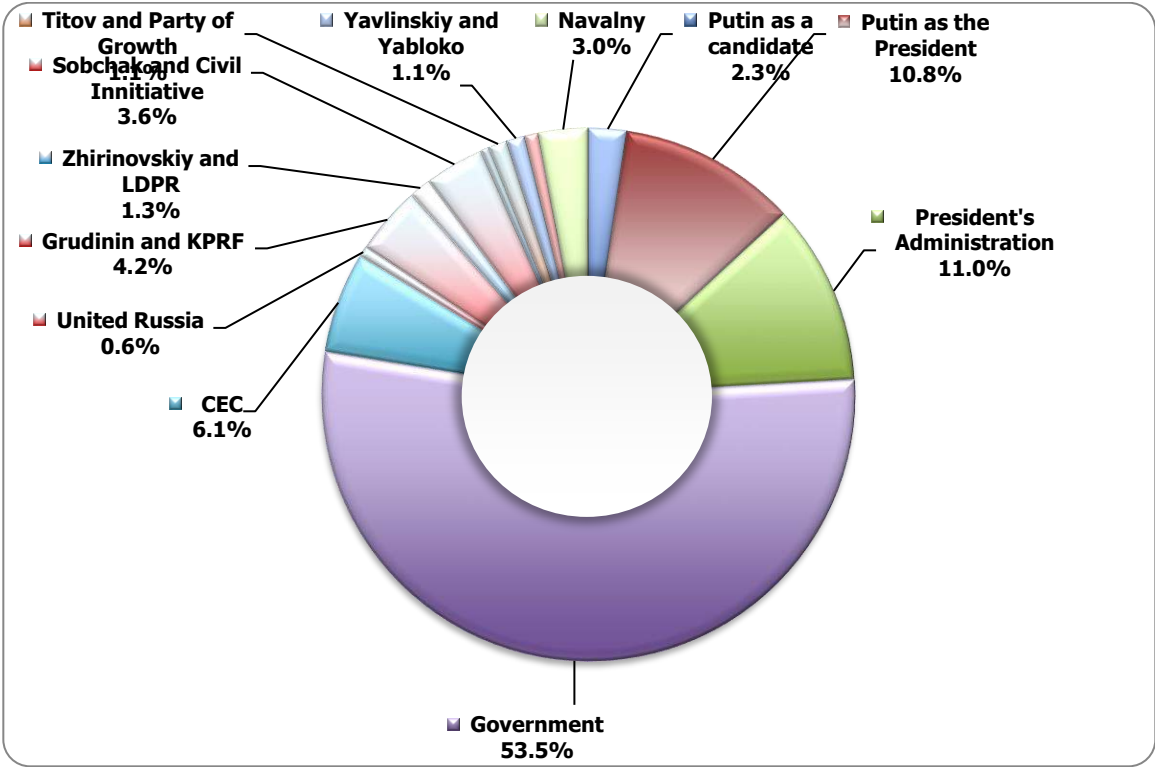




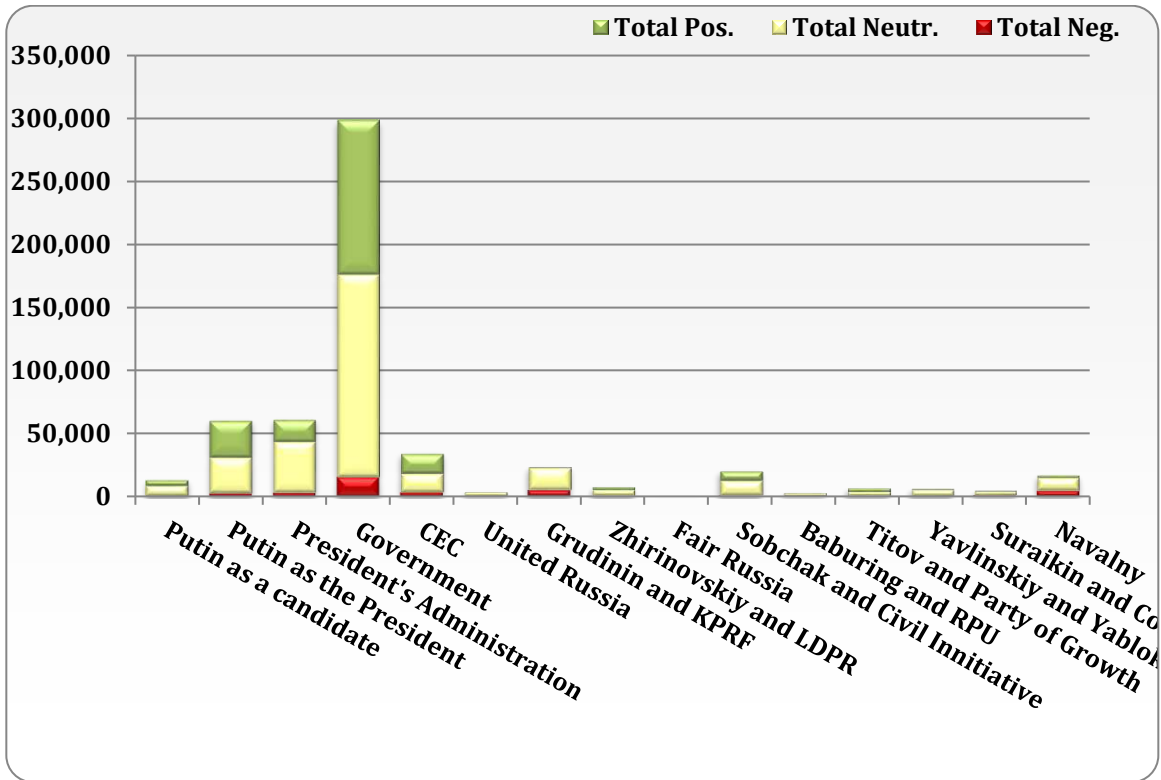
During the second monitoring period, Lentu.ru allocated an even greater proportion of coverage to President Putin (35.4 per cent), followed by the government with 31.1 per cent of coverage. Similar to the first period, the tone of Mr. Putin's coverage was mainly positive. By contrast, coverage of Mr. Grudinin was largely critical.



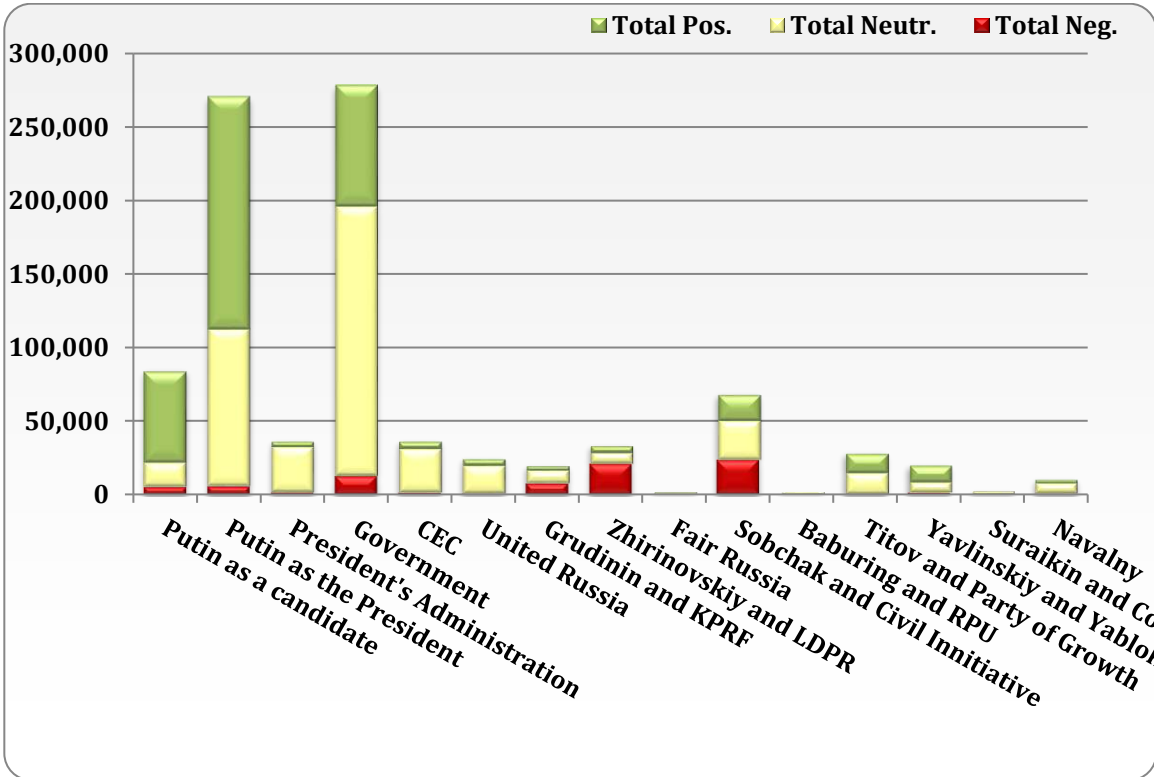
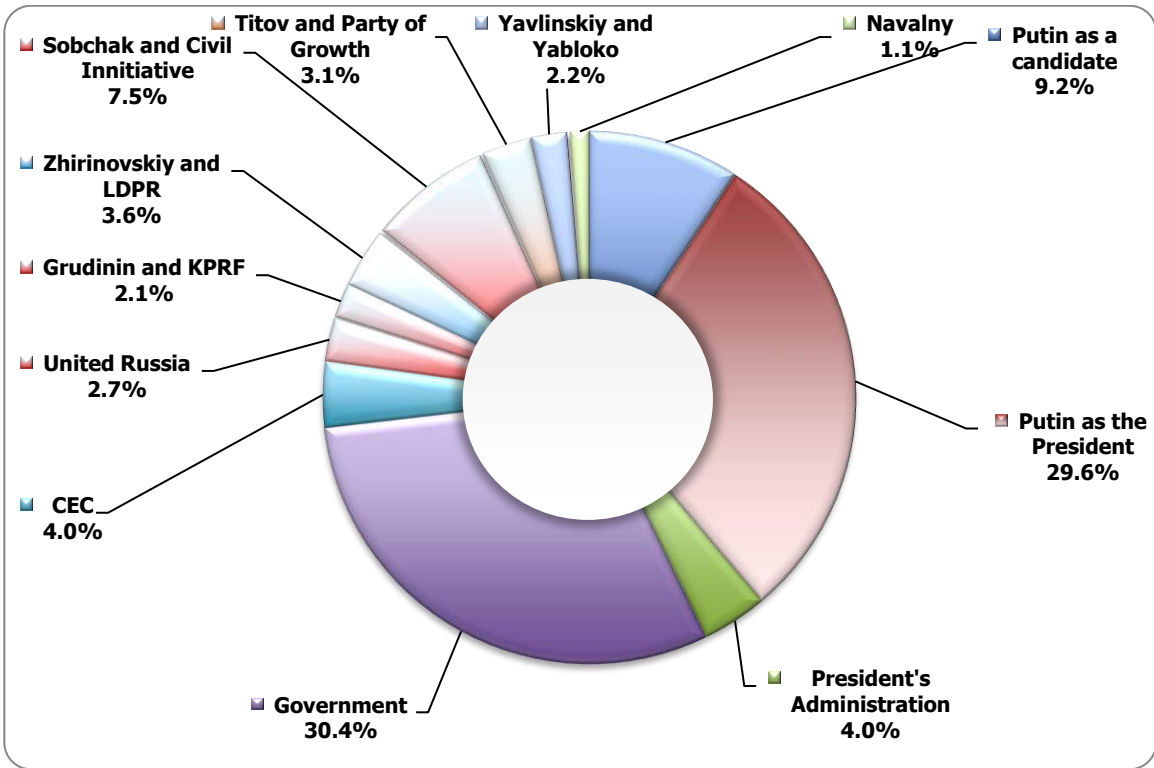
Similar to most of the other monitored online media outlets, RBC also devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to the government (53.5 per cent), followed by President Putin (10.8 per cent) and the presidential administration (11 per cent). The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral and positive.



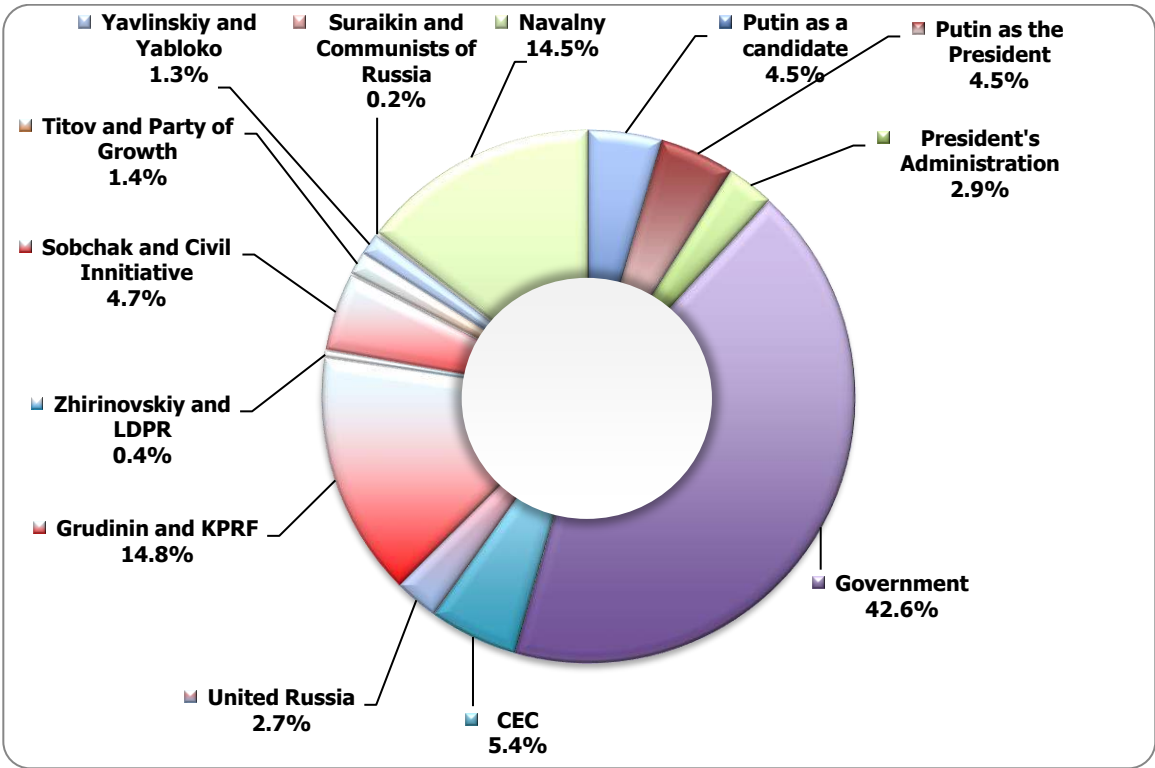


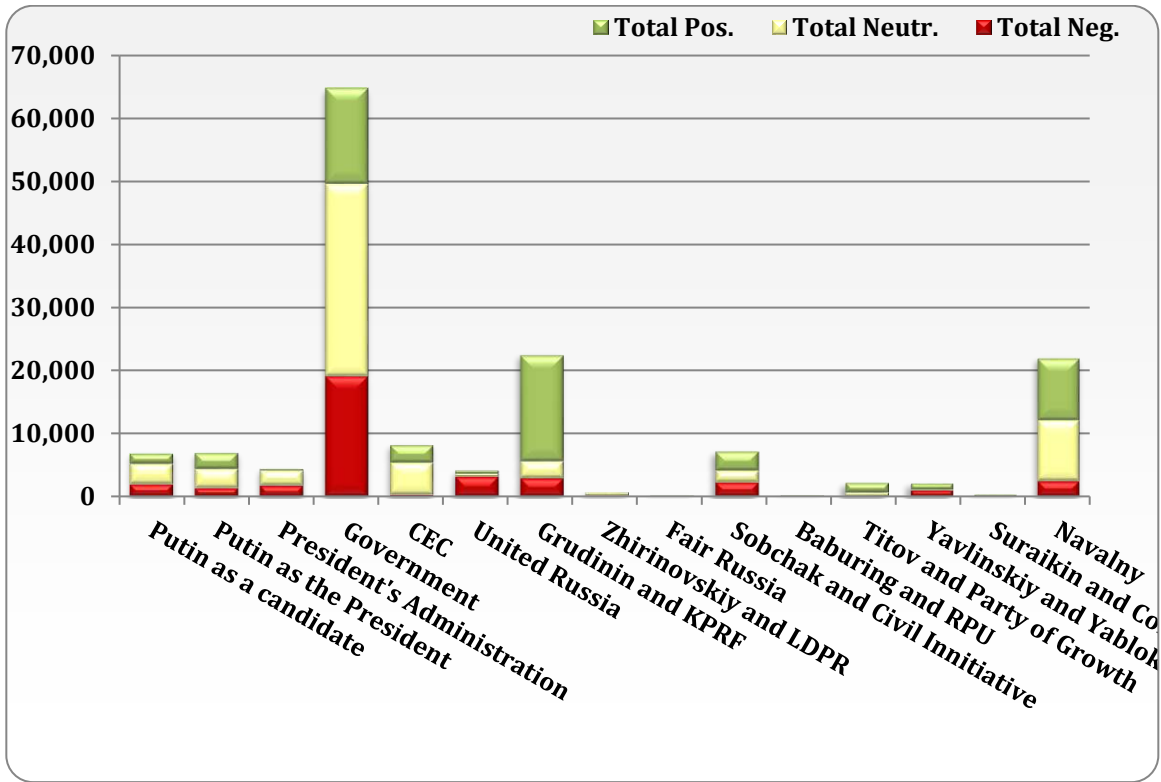


From 17 February until 16 March, RBC once again allocated the largest portion of its coverage to the government and the president (30.4 and 29.6 per cent respectively). While the tone of Mr. Putin’s coverage was more positive, coverage of the government was mainly neutral.

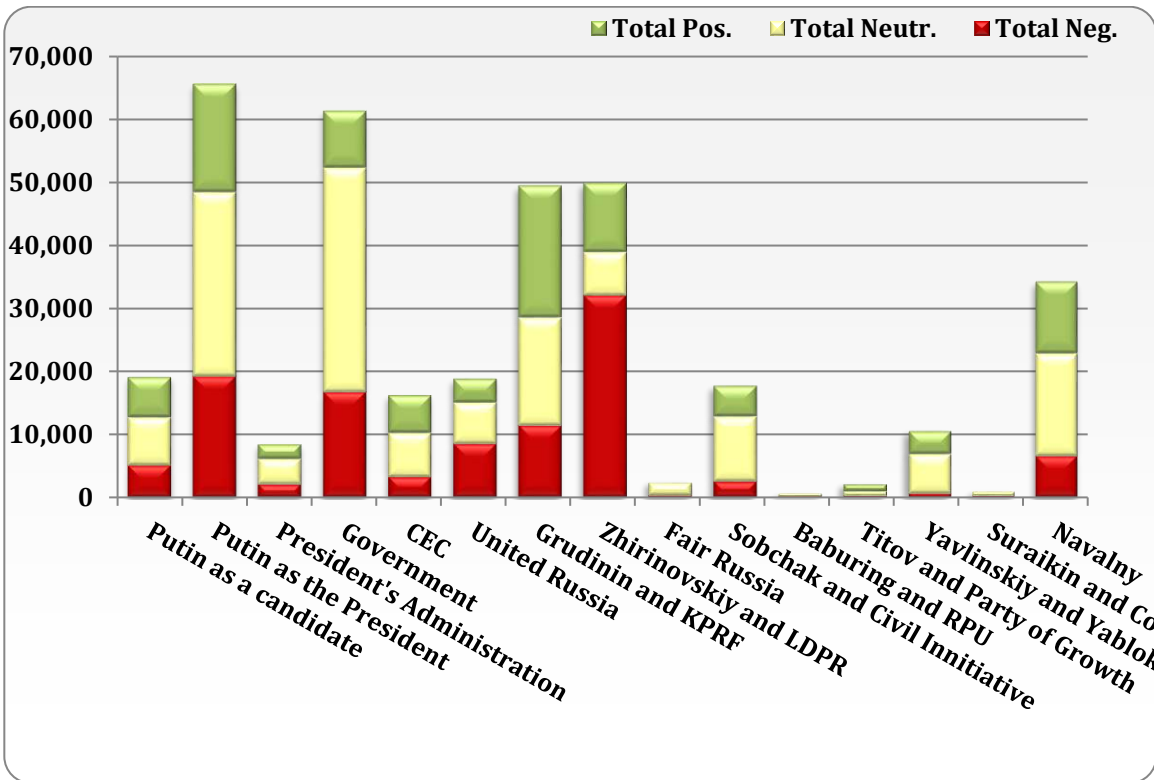
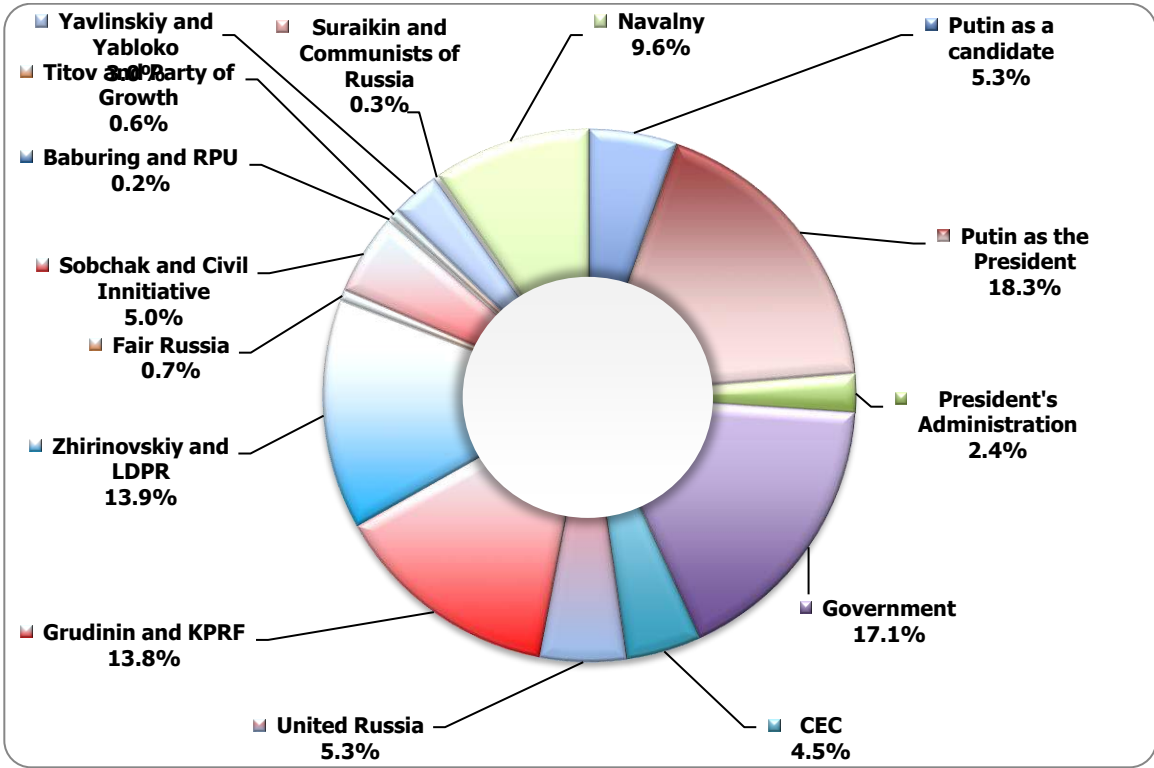


During the first monitoring period, Meduza.ru allocated 42.6 per cent of its coverage to government, followed by the KPRF and Mr. Grudinin (14.8 per cent), and Mr. Navalny (14.5 per cent). While the tone of the government coverage was primarily neutral and negative, coverage of Mr. Navalny and Mr. Grudinin was mainly positive and neutral.





During the second monitoring period, Meduza.ru covered a broader range of political actors, allocating the biggest share of its coverage to President Putin (18.3 per cent), followed by the government (17.1 per cent), and then Mr. Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR (13.9 per cent). The coverage of Mr. Zhirinovskiy was very negative in tone. President Putin received more negative than positive coverage, while Mr. Navalny obtained slightly more positive than negative coverage.



# Conclusion

In general, the Russian media did not provide sufficient information on the political situation in the country ahead of the 18 March presidential election. The nationwide TV channels in particular offered their viewers a very limited range of perspectives, thereby depriving them of objective and balanced coverage. The similarity of the content across these three channels, and the general absence of critical views targeting the government or challenging the performance of the authorities, indicate a shared objective - to support the incumbent government. Ren TV adopted a similar approach. News programs focused on coverage of the incumbent president and other state officials. There was a general lack of investigative approach as well as a lack of critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities.

While TV Dozhd and Radio Ekho Moskvyy presented a greater diversity of views, their potential impact on voters in Russia is simply not comparable to that of state-controlled TV channels.

Of the five monitored newspapers, three supported the current establishment and two provided a slightly more balanced picture of the political and election-related events. In general, however, the newspapers did not compensate for the clear lack of balance on the part of broadcast media. They do not facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, confrontation, investigation and commentary, all of which are integral to meaningful public access to the political platforms of persons and groups seeking elected office. Reporting by online media outlets was quite similar to that of the newspapers. These outlets did not provide investigative stories, nor deeper analyses of the current political situation. Three of the four monitored outlets, supported the incumbent president, while one was critical.

# Recommendations

It is vitally important that Russian civil society fosters democratic values and principles, including respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights. *Information Peace* stands committed to support the necessary efforts and changes within the existing media environment and its legal framework, in order to bring it in line with international standards and other obligations, including freedom of expression. Various stakeholders, including the previous OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions, and relevant domestic and international organisations, have already adopted several valuable documents, including general and more specific recommendations. The recommendations below are offered by MEMO 98 and Information Peace in regard to the systematic changes that are necessary to improve the media coverage of the next elections:

## **General – freedom of expression**

- The freedom and independence of the media should be respected, as objective reporting is essential during an election campaign. State authorities should always refrain from interfering in activities of the media and journalists, as it undermines their independence.
- Media reporting should be balanced and factual, including coverage of the work of the authorities. The media should be consistent in separating the activities of incumbent powers from the activities they pursue as the representatives of political parties running in the election. No privileged treatment should be given to state authorities by the media during election campaigns.
- Libel and insult of state officials should be decriminalised, and the legislation placing disproportionate limitations on free

speech and expression, including on the Internet, should be repealed.

- The media should refuse all open or furtive expressions of intolerance and will carefully consider whether publication of such expressions entails defamation and ridicule based on sex, race, colour, language, faith, and religion, affiliation with national or ethnic minority or ethnic group, social difference, and political opinion
- The media should avoid broadcasting a message based on unverified information, rumours, and/or with the intention of deliberately misinforming the public and/or for propaganda purposes.
- The media should not manipulate images or sound in a way that distorts the intended meaning or value of the message.
- The media should avoid adjusting data and facts in a manner that distorts reality. In determining the order of importance of the individual pieces of information it should impartially and objectively provide, it should distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information.
- The media should follow professional standards as well reporting techniques and methods. They should ensure that every piece of news contains only facts corresponding to reality and whose veracity will be verified by independent sources quoted therein. Journalists, editors, producers and proprietors should spare no effort to ensure that the distributed information corresponds with truth and conscience. The facts should be presented without any distortions and in their respective contexts. If a flawed message is published, it should be followed by an immediate apology.

## **Television**

- State-owned and state-controlled media are easy targets for any state authorities willing to use them as propaganda tools. The authorities should move forward with plans to transform state broadcasters into an independent public service media that will provide citizens with impartial and balanced information on



election candidates. The mandate of the public service media should reflect public interests and should be based on independence, editorial freedom and non-interference by authorities. This includes the development of impartial editorial practices.

- Media should be able to criticise activities or inaction by the authorities and other official bodies whose activities are publically financed, and to investigate corruption and other wrongdoings without fearing pressure or retaliation.<sup>16</sup>
- Media should to consider what is newsworthy from the viewer's perspective, rather than merely seeking to satisfy the politicians. The media should enhance their reporting by offering relevant context and background information, and present alternative views. This can help viewers to understand what the information means for them; the consequences of poor governance; and its alternatives. The news items should be presented from various angles, including a range of experts and civil society representatives (not always the same ones).<sup>17</sup>
- When reporting on any controversial issue, it is crucial to present all parties involved, clearly stating when a party refuses to comment. In such case, scenario, such a refusal shall be presented so that the public is properly informed on the reasons for the refusal. Impartial background information should be provided if the issue has a long backstory and/or is complicated.

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<sup>16</sup> Consideration could be given to better selection of information with the goal of featuring in the primetime news program only events of importance for the socio-political context, i.e. events that are newsworthy for the station's target group. In reporting on economic and development projects for which the government is responsible and in which the government participates only in a formal sense (opening of sections of highway, factories, bridges...), focus should be placed on the significance of these projects for the community, putting citizens, engineers, farmers and so on into the foreground. A stronger analytical approach should be ensured. The views of independent relevant people should also be offered.

<sup>17</sup> Kuzel, Rasto, *Final Narrative Report*, Council of Europe, Georgia 2016, <https://rm.coe.int/168048ba65>

- Journalists can do more to reflect what is happening in the country, from both social and political perspectives. Important developments should always be shown. Background and context must always be provided, and journalists should seek to confront actors (especially holders of public office) with such questions related to the background of the story.

### **Print and Online media**

- Print and online media can do more when it comes to in-depth and analytical reporting of candidates' views and positions on different issues. A greater variety of sources should be used, in order to present the information from various angles.
- Journalists should not merely reflect the positions of authorities, without questioning official statements or properly verifying the facts. Proper fact-checking and criticism of official (in)action by the authorities and other official bodies should be ensured.

### **Media regulation**

- An independent oversight body should be established and mandated to oversee free, equitable and fair access to state-controlled broadcasters.