

Belarusian Association of Journalists

Monitoring: Coverage of the 2010 Presidential Election in the Belarusian Media (November 1 – 20, 2010)

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Minsk, Belarus

1. Introduction

The report sums up the findings of the second stage of monitoring the coverage of the presidential election by the electronic and printed Belarusian media.

According to the schedule of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Belarus, during this period CEC checked the authenticity of signatures collected for the nomination of potential runners for presidency and they were officially registered as presidential candidates.

2. Summary of Conclusions

- The state-owned electronic and printed media kept to the low-key approach to the presidential election, though some media began to give it more coverage.
- The general picture of the election coverage did not change much, either. Its main actors were still the incumbent president, ‘the government’ as a depersonalized subject, CEC and territorial election commissions, whose actions received positive assessment.
- The state-owned media went on ignoring the potential contestants of the incumbent. Some minimal attention that they received was due to the registration procedure during the final period of monitoring. Thus, a positive assessment of the incumbent and his clearly dominant position in the state-owned media make part of their general strategy of the election coverage. The other side of the coin is marginalization of all the other contestants, whose identities remained unrevealed for the audience of the state-owned media.
- Just like at the previous stage of monitoring, the state-owned media continued ‘pre-programming’ the outcome of the voting through repeated references to opinion polls, sometimes without mentioning the institutions that had carried them out. These media’s coverage of the election was characterized by explicit disregard for ethical principles in journalism and internationally recognized standards.
- As for the independent press, all the potential candidates were present on their pages. The independent media presented an election picture that included many more actors as compared to the state-owned media.

- The monitoring did not find any cases of distorted or misrepresented information or biased coverage in the monitored independent media.

3. Main Findings

3.1 State-owned Media

Panarama (Panorama) news program on the 1st National TV Channel gave even more prominence to the country leader's actions. He received about 85% of all the air time given to all the monitored subjects, measured against the 75% in the previous period. The other prominent actor featured in **Panarama** is CEC, which received about 11% of the air time. The remaining monitored subjects received no more than 1% of the overall coverage. President Lukashenka and his actions were represented in predominantly positive light. The news program gave a chiefly positive assessment of the work done by CEC, too.

This time the upcoming election received more coverage than at the previous monitoring stage. It made up 3% of the total air time, compared to the previous 0.86%. It was as much as the weather. However, the subject featured most prominently was preparation for hosting the *Junior Eurovision* show. On November 19, 2010 the news opened with the following words, *'The show all the country is looking forward to. Today the President came up the stage of the Junior Eurovision.'* In fact, during this stage of monitoring, the time given to all kinds of news items on the subject made up 1 hour and 12 minutes, which was nearly three times as much as the election.

Compared to the previous stage of monitoring, **Nashi Novosti (Our News)** program of ANT TV station gave the upcoming election more coverage, namely 6.8% of its total air time, whereas the previous figure made 3.3%. However, **Nashi Novosti** did not show any progress in covering Mr. Lukashenka's potential challengers and their actions. Thus, the incumbent was on air for about 54 minutes, while the other potential presidential nominees taken together received only a bit more than 2 minutes' coverage.

Radyjofakt (Radiofact) program of the 1st National Radio Channel presented CEC and President Lukashenka as the key actors. It was characteristic of both the **Radyjofakt** and a number of other state-owned media that they referred to the other potential presidential runners as a depersonalized subject.

The main actors in the election process as viewed by **Naviny Rehijon (Regional News)** of *Mahiloŭ* TV and Radio Company were Mr. Lukashenka, who received 41% of the total coverage given to all the monitored subjects, the regional election commission (29%) and a depersonalized candidate (10%). The program allotted 2.1% of its air time to the election, which was a bit more than the 1.6% at the previous stage of monitoring.

www.belta.by continued covering the election the way it had done before, i.e. it focused its attention on CEC and the incumbent, marginalizing the other potential runners for presidency. Just like *Radyjofakt*, www.belta.by wrote mainly about depersonalized candidates without giving the names of Mr. Lukashenka's challengers.

Just like at the previous stage, the *SB – Belarus Segodnia* paper featured prominently only one potential candidate, i.e. the incumbent, ignoring the others. He received 61% of the total space given to all the monitored actors. The paper also gave more coverage to CEC, who got 22.1% of all the space given to the monitored subjects, as compared to 11.3% at the previous stage. It showed less interest in the opposition, presenting it mostly in the negative light. Meanwhile, the paper gave a positive assessment of Mr. Lukashenka and his actions.

Compared to the *SB – Belarus Segodnia*, the *Respublika* paper gave even more coverage in absolute figures to CEC. The *Respublika* limited its election coverage to presenting five other actors, namely the incumbent, who received about 35% of the space given to all the actors, as well as the government (about 39%), the regional election commissions (5%), western observers (1.2%) and CIS observers (0.6%).

3.2 Independent Media

There was hardly any difference in the way the *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* covered the election, as compared to the previous stage. It featured prominently CEC and the incumbent president, only mentioning the other potential nominees.

www.naviny.by gave a wide picture of the election process, just as it had done before. It covered 43 election actors and their activities. It should be mentioned that the potential runners for presidency were featured noticeably, even though they lost a bit of the Internet resource's attention. All the actors received balanced coverage, i.e. they were assessed both neutrally and positively or negatively in some cases.

In the *Naša Niva* paper the potential nominees were featured not so much as they had been. However, just like at the previous stage, the evident leader was Mr. Niaklajeŭ, who received 25% of the space given to all the monitored subjects. Next to him came Mr. Lukashenka, who received a bit over 14%. Yet, this time Mr. Niaklajeŭ was presented neutrally and negatively on approximately equal basis. The same refers to Mr. Lukashenka.

The *Narodnaja Vola* paper featured most prominently the government, in the same way as it had done at the previous monitoring stage. This actor received nearly 35% of the total space given to all the monitored subjects, and was viewed in mainly critical terms. As for the potential runners for presidency, Mr. Lukashenka got a bit over 10% of the space given to all the monitored subjects, Mr. Kastusioŭ received 9%, about 7% was given to Mr. Ramančuk, Messrs. Niaklajeŭ and Saŭnikaŭ each received a bit more than 1% and Mr. Vus was given about 0.4%.

The *Belorusy i Rynok* paper focused slightly more on the potential candidates. Just like at the previous stage, it gave quite balanced coverage of the various monitored actors.

4. Media Effects

By media effects we mean instances of distorting and misrepresenting information or giving incomplete, partial or biased coverage in order to influence readers'/voters' opinions.

Here are just a few of such instances.

Processing information in order to favor the current government. On November 4, 2010 www.belta.by published the following contribution (http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/politics/Evrosojuz-otmechaet-bolee-svobodnyj-karakter-nyneshnej-kampanii-po-vyboram-Prezidenta-Belarusi_i_530196.html): *'The European Union points out that the current presidential election can be characterized as more liberal,' said Mr. Ronald Pofalla, the Bundestag deputy, Head of the Department of the German Federal Chancellor and Federal Minister for Special Missions, to journalists in Minsk, says a BELTA reporter.*

'We see the situation in Belarus changing for the better,' he said. 'The limitations that used to exist, particularly in collecting signatures for potential nominees, are non-existent now.'

'Ronald Pofalla pointed out that certain standards, such as absence of various obstacles for the registration of presidential candidates, balanced election commissions and access to international observers, are part of a free and fair election. He also said he would follow the election closely. In his opinion, the today's political climate is absolutely different from that of the past years.'

However, the BELTA Information Agency failed to quote the second part of Mr. Pofalla's statement. It was given the same day by www.naviny.by (http://naviny.by/rubrics/elections/2010/11/04/ic_media_video_623_4894/) in the contribution entitled **Ronald Pofalla: There Are No Normal Principles for Free Election in Belarus**: *'According to the minister, the stage of collecting signatures for the nomination of presidential candidates was more liberal in comparison with the previous elections.'*

However, he pointed out that the situation in Belarus before the election bore no comparison to other European states. 'If voters do not know who is running for presidency a few weeks before the voting day, it is certainly a big drawback. We see positive trends in Belarus,' said Mr. Pofalla. 'But we still hold an opinion that there are no normal principles for a free election in the country.'

Indirect campaigning for a candidate before the registration. On November 9, 2010 *Radyjofakt* program of the 1st National Radio Channel presented the following news item called *'Belarusians in Moldova Endorse Lukashenka at Upcoming Election'*. It was nine days before he was officially registered as a presidential candidate. The statement was allegedly made by all Belarusians in Moldova. The same day *Homielskaja Praŭda* (No. 171 (22442)) in its contribution entitled *I Do Care* quoted the following opinion, *'I do care what kind of future my relatives and friends, as well as all the nation are going to have. That is why I back up our*

President Alexander Lukashenka with all my heart. Мне не безразлично, какое будущее ожидает родных, близких и весь наш народ. Let the angel and God guard him for saving our nation from perestroika. Let his star shine until he is a hundred, let good people follow him and guard our dear Belarus.'

Focusing attention on one candidate. On November 18, 2010 the quoted above BELTA State Information Agency published a news item called '*Lukashenka Registered as Presidential Candidate*', though nine other candidates had been registered alongside him (however, their names are mentioned in the article).

Marginalizing and discrediting potential opposition candidates. On November 14, 2010 Jury Prakopaŭ, presenter of *V Tsentre Vnimaninya* weekly analytical program said on air, '*It is the first time that 10 individuals have had real chances of becoming presidential candidates. However, both according to the findings of opinion polls and experts' opinions and even the potential presidential candidates' own estimates, nine of the ten candidates stand virtually zero chance of winning voters' trust. The ratings of all Lukashenka's opponents do not exceed one per cent.*

'Now the opposition members are racking their brains how to avoid disgrace. They traditionally pin their hopes on rallies following the voting day. However, their calls to protest in the square nobody knows why or for whose sake are of no interest even to those committed to a cause, so the opposition is unscrupulous enough to resort to conning. Letters are being sent on the Internet, in which a political rally is presented as a cultural event. Yet, there is no hope that the trick will work, so in order to create an impression of large-scale protests, the opposition has invited Russian radicals to the square, since decent people steer clear of the Belarusian opposition.'

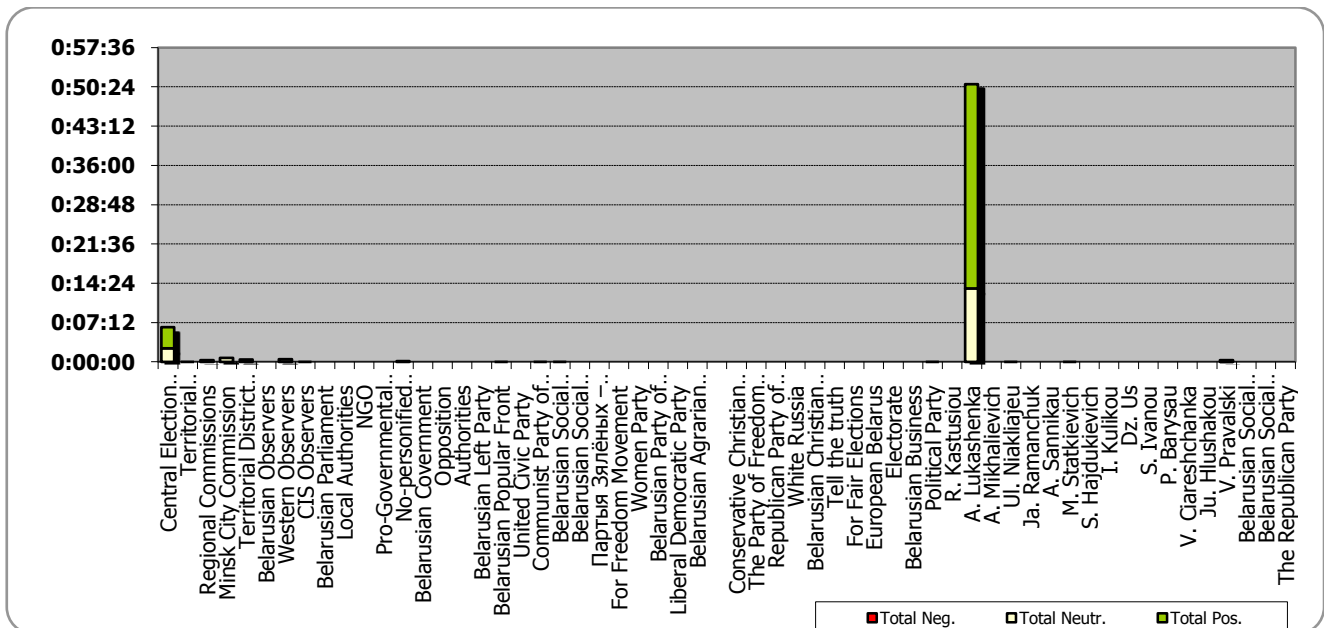
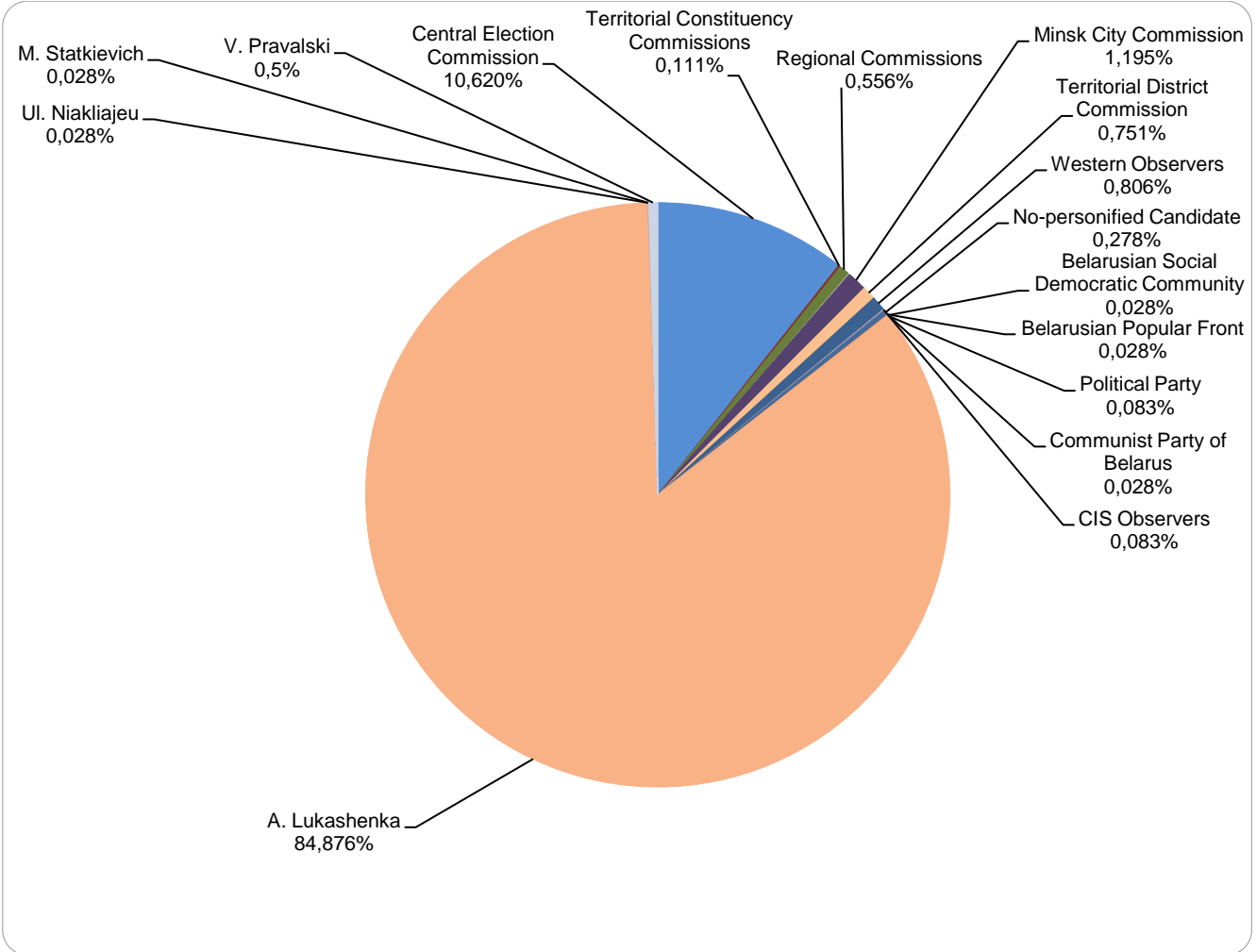


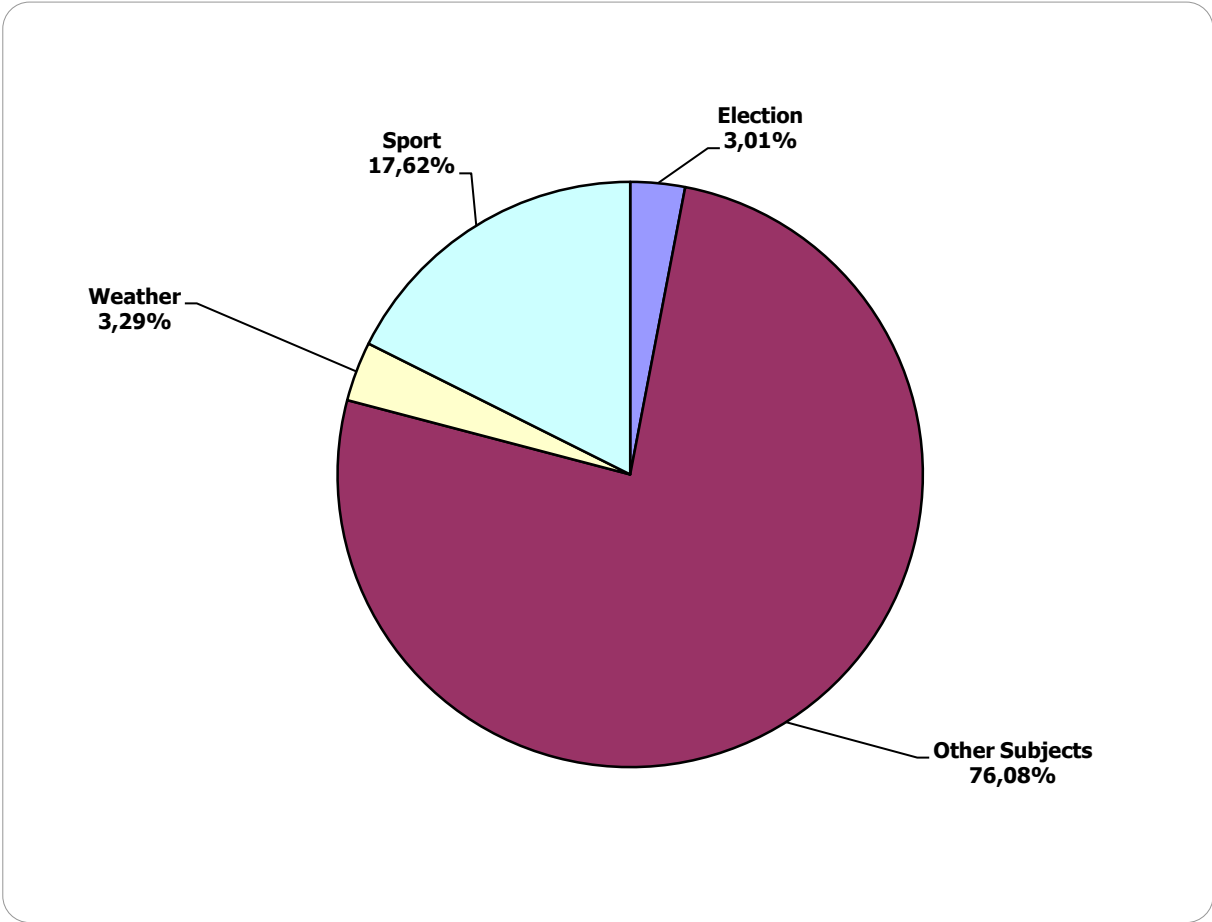
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

BT/PANARAMA

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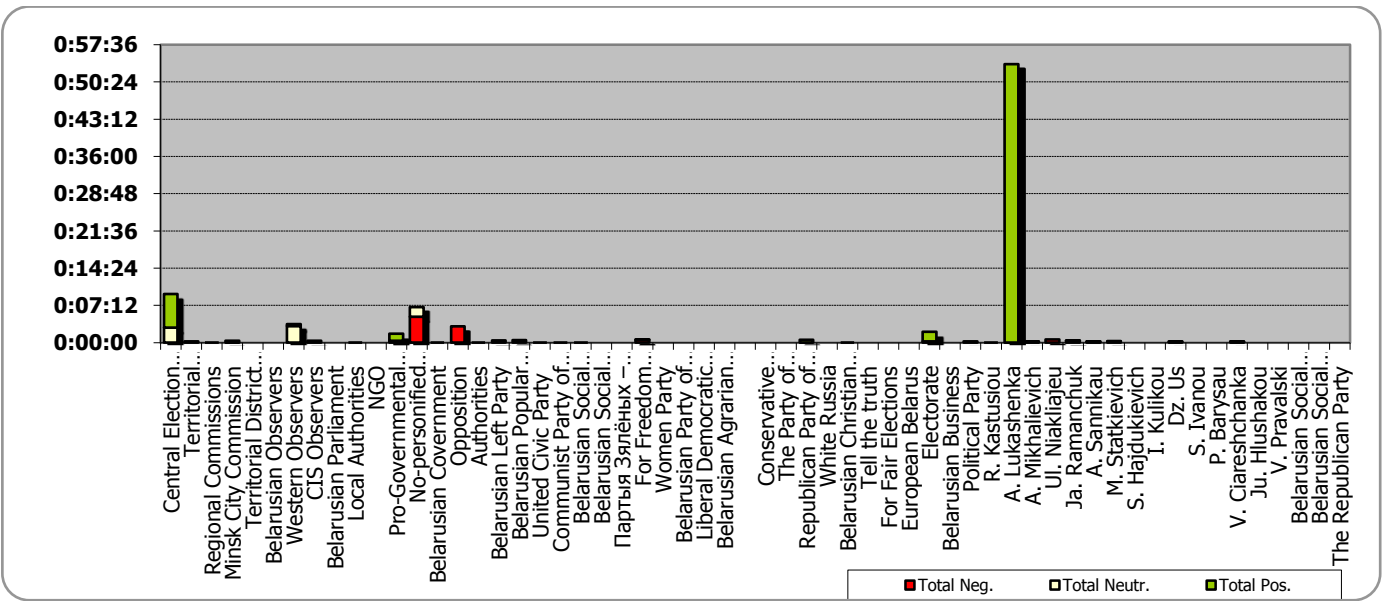
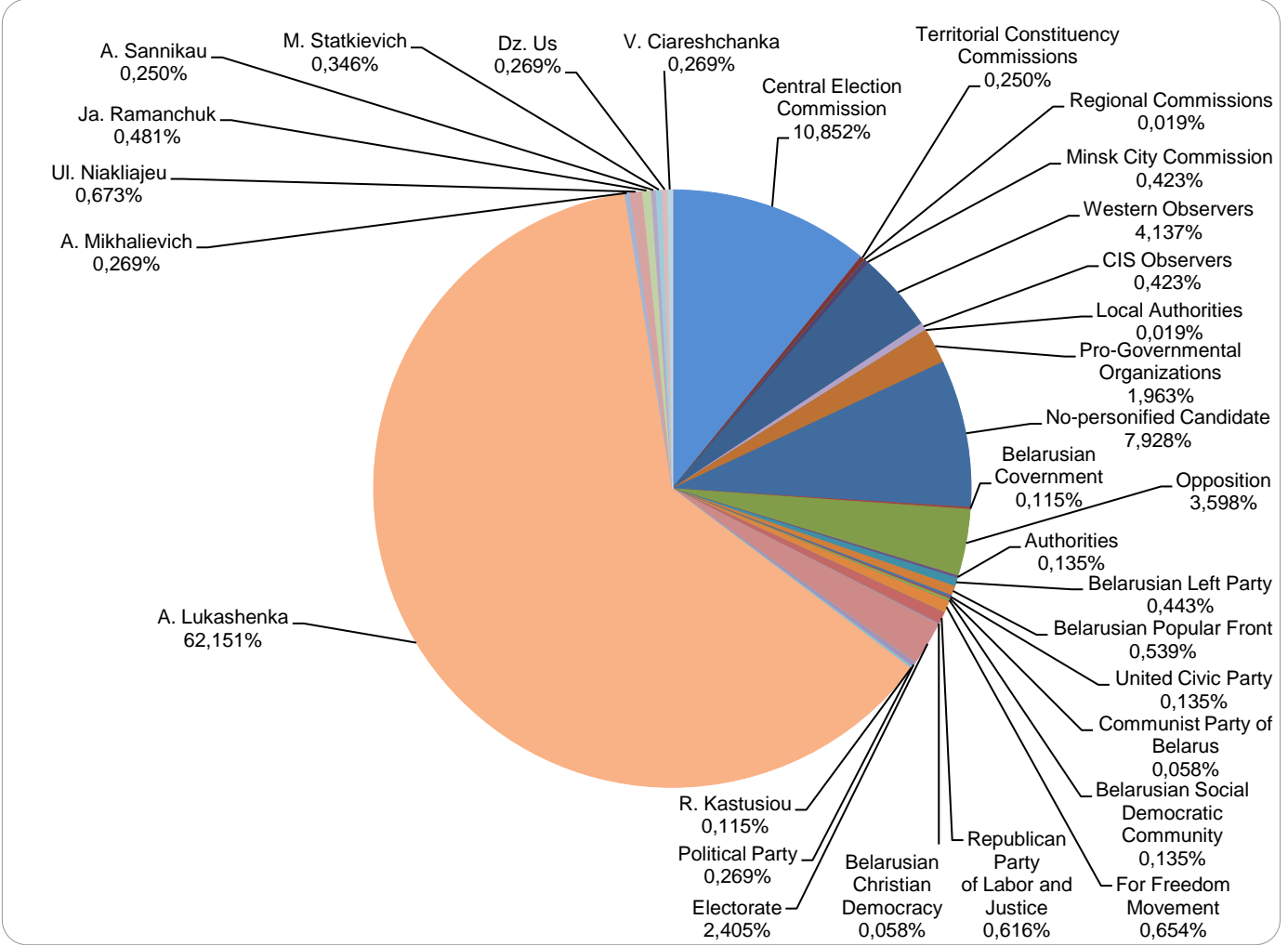


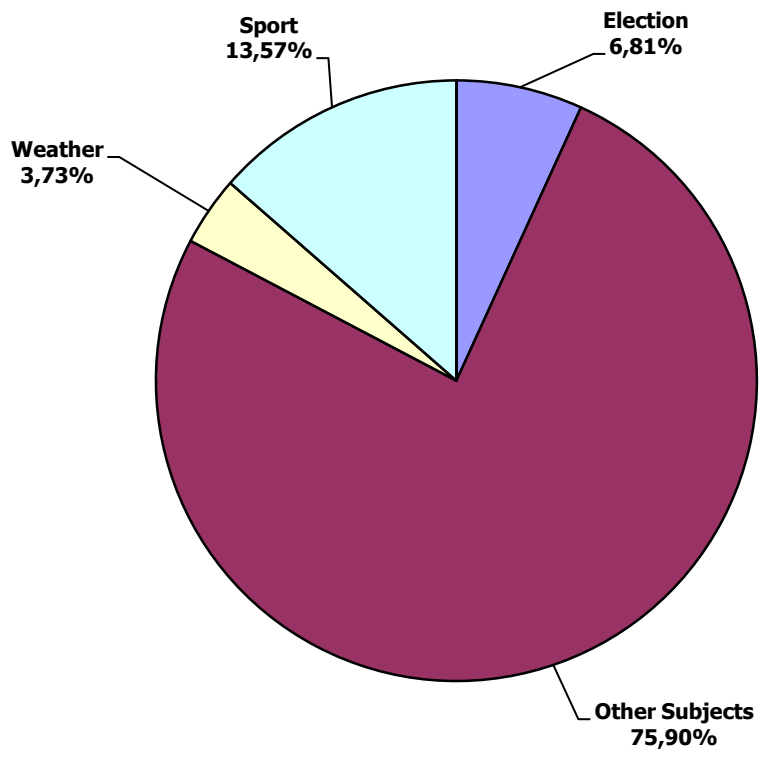
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

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01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

Measured in hours, minutes, seconds (0:02:45)





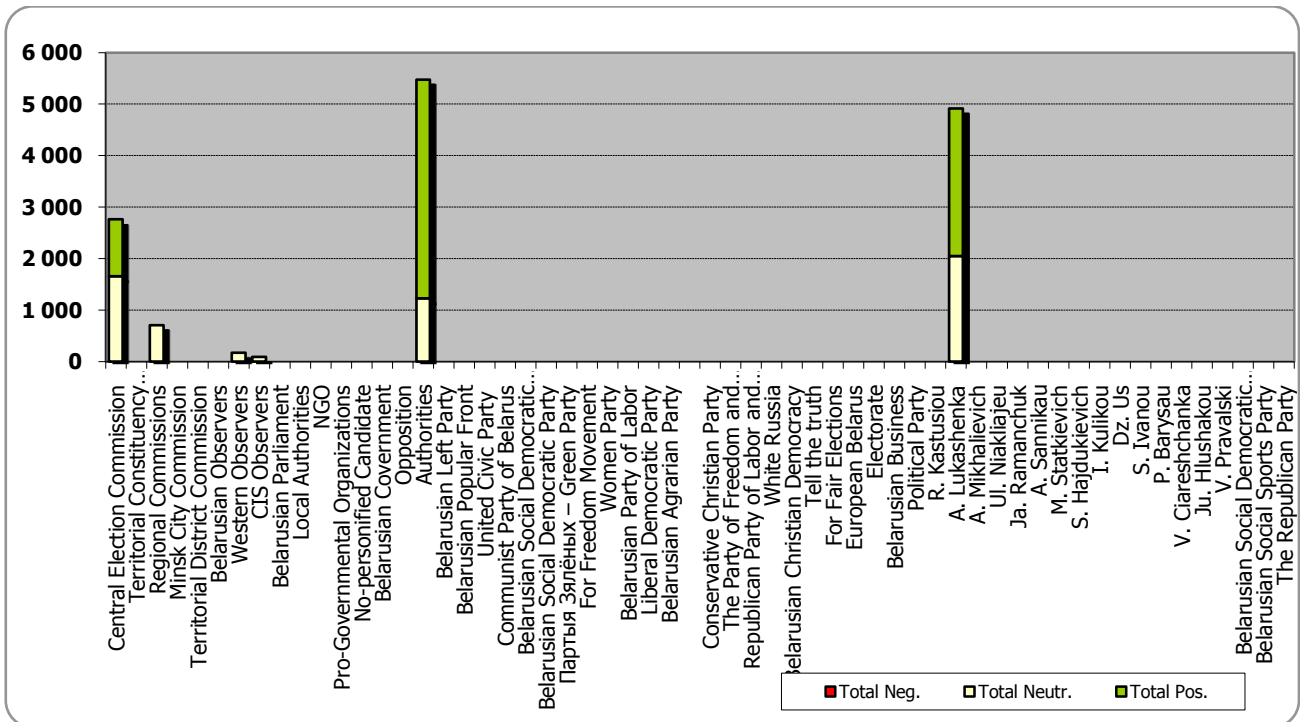
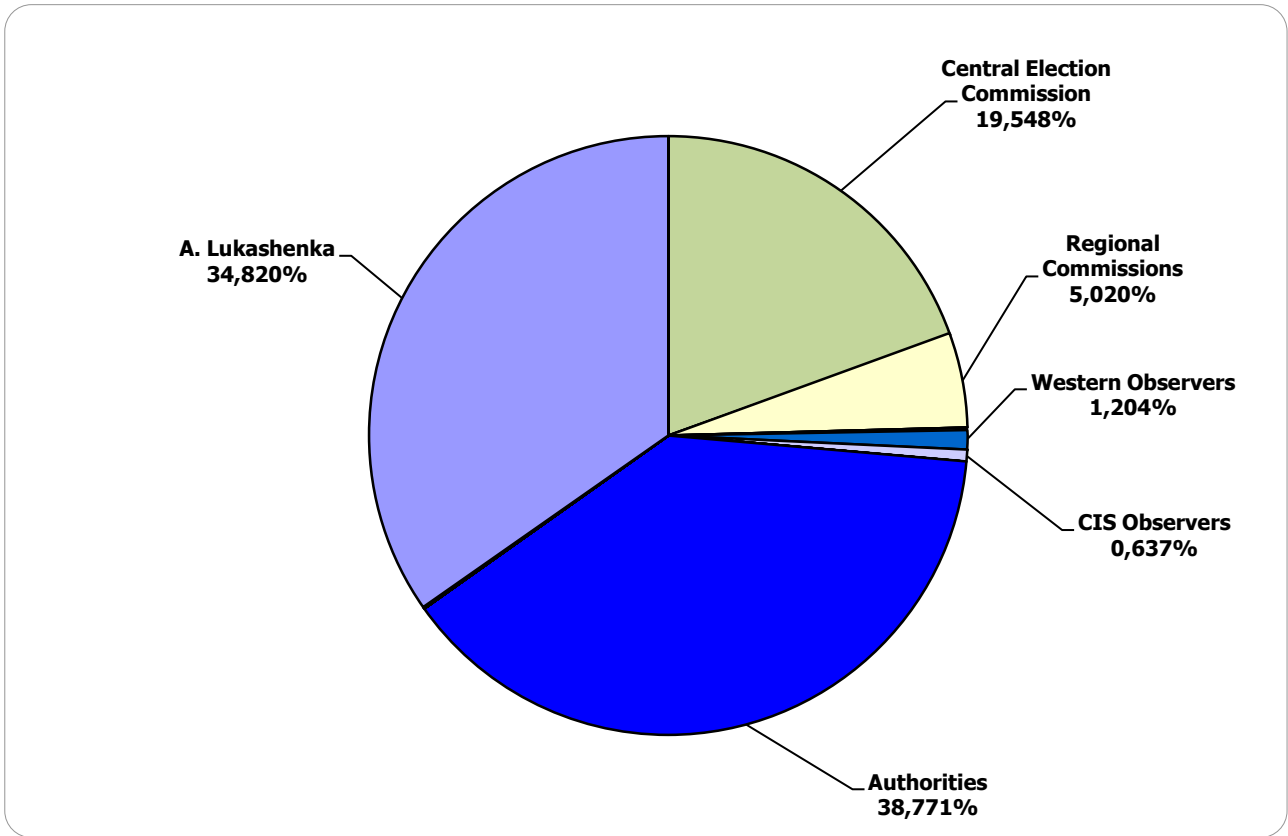


BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

RESPUBLIKA

01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

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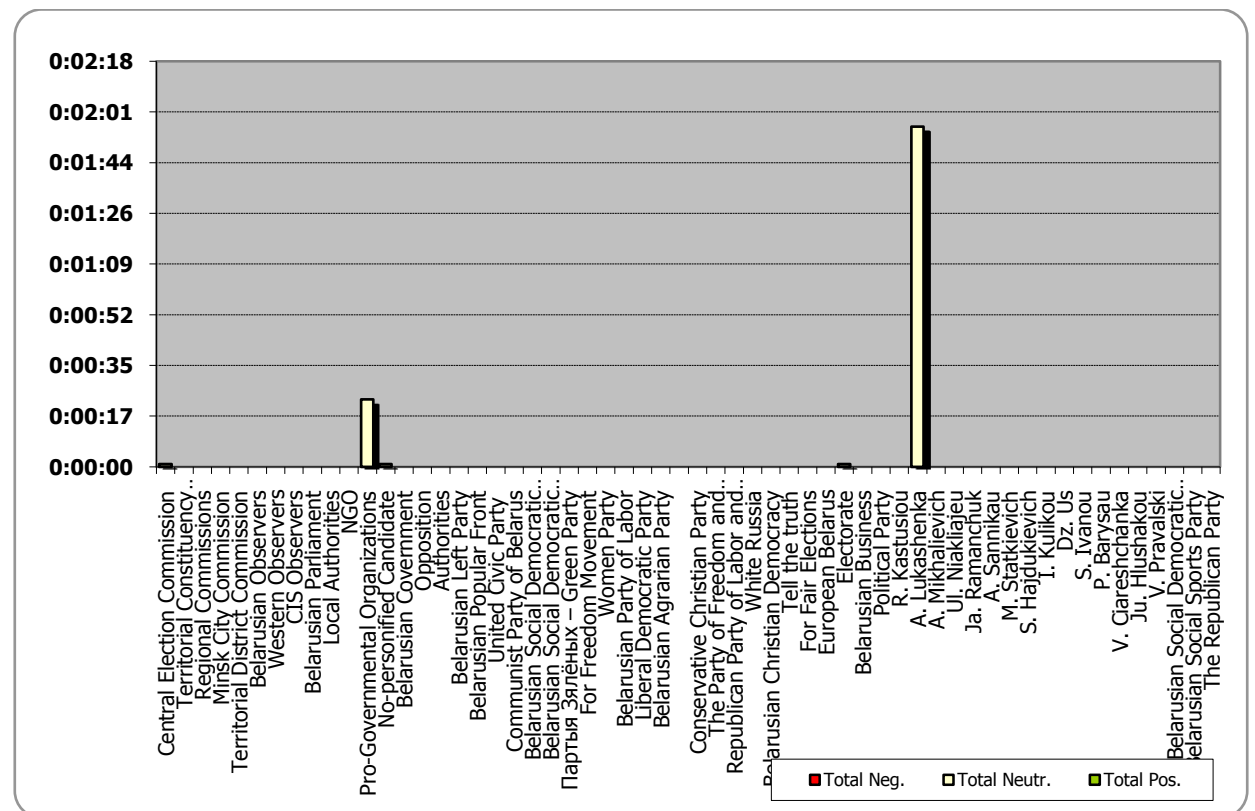
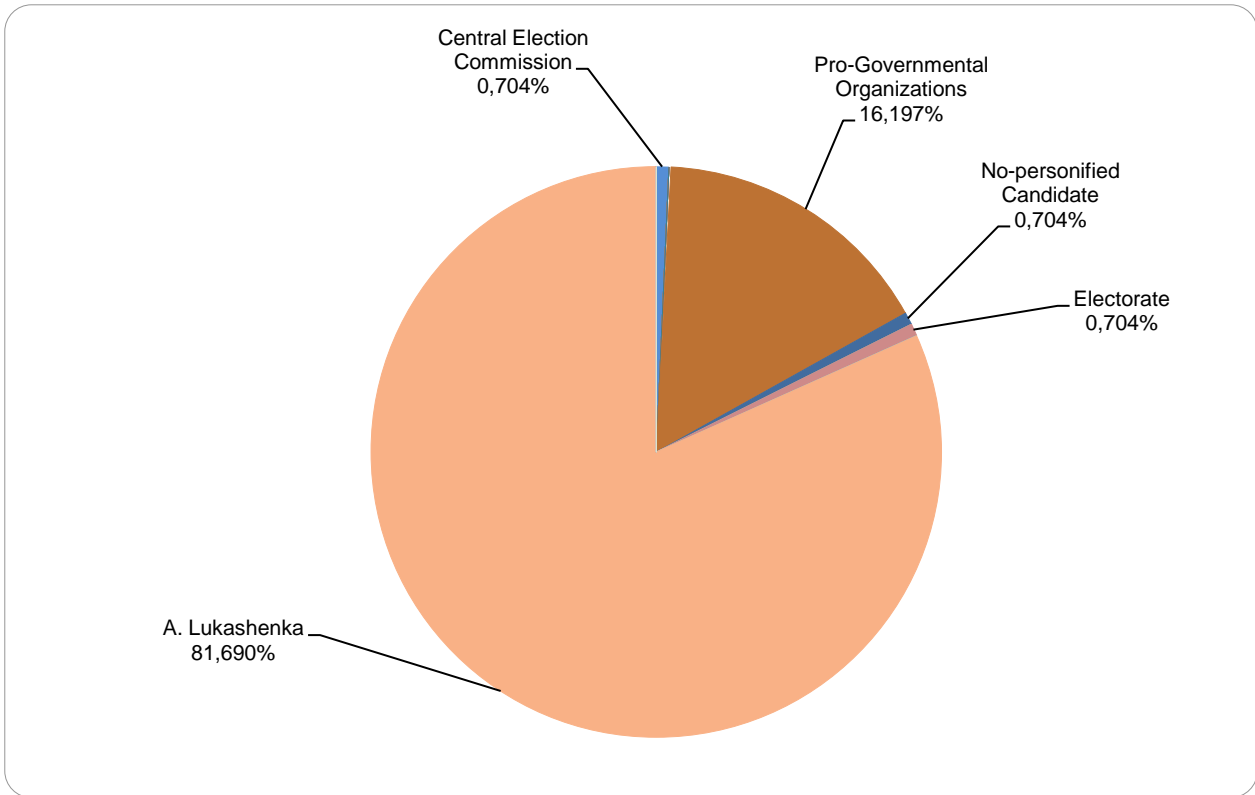


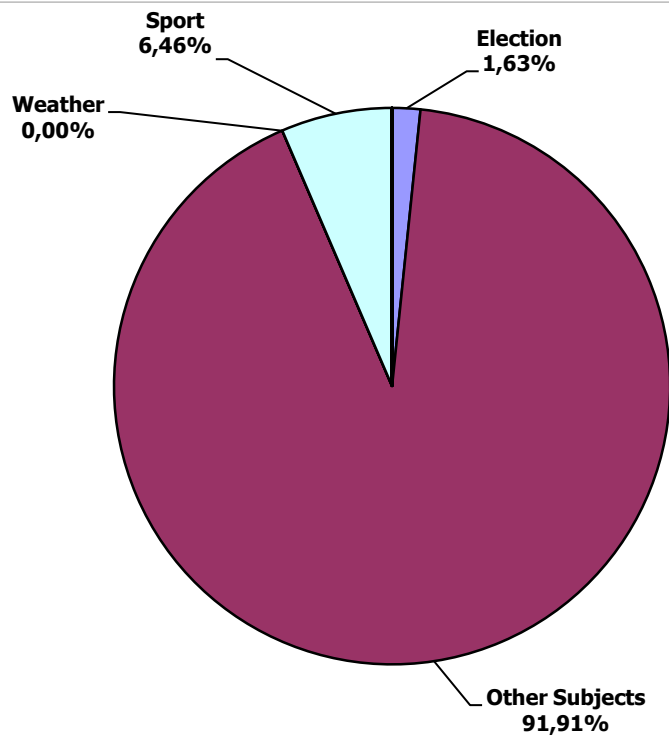
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

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01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

Measured in hours, minutes, seconds (0:02:45)





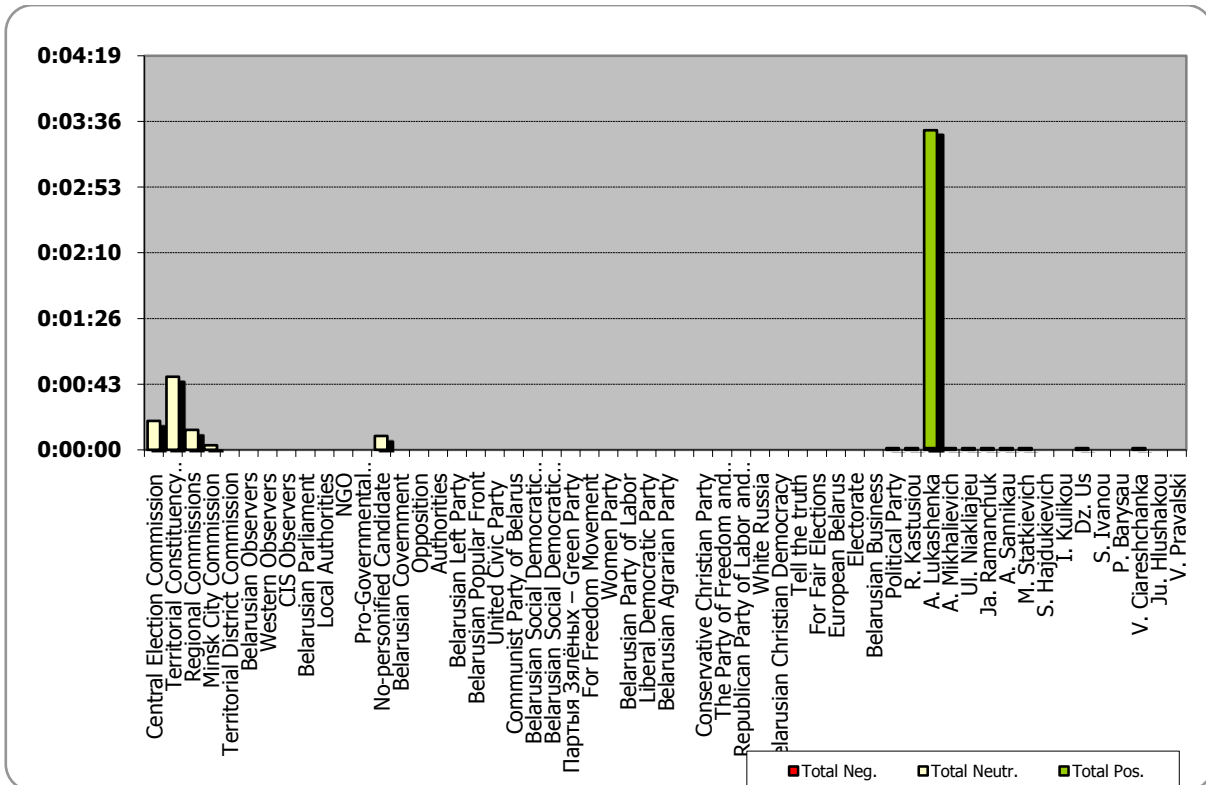
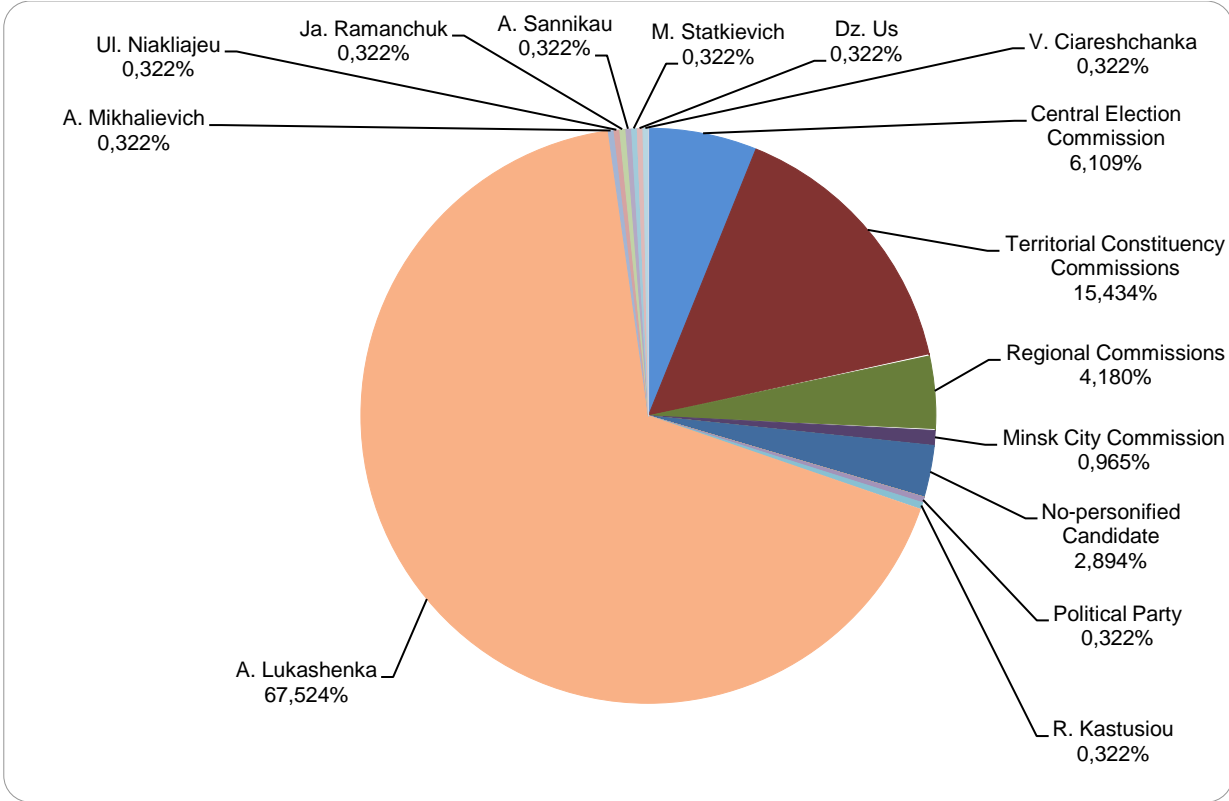


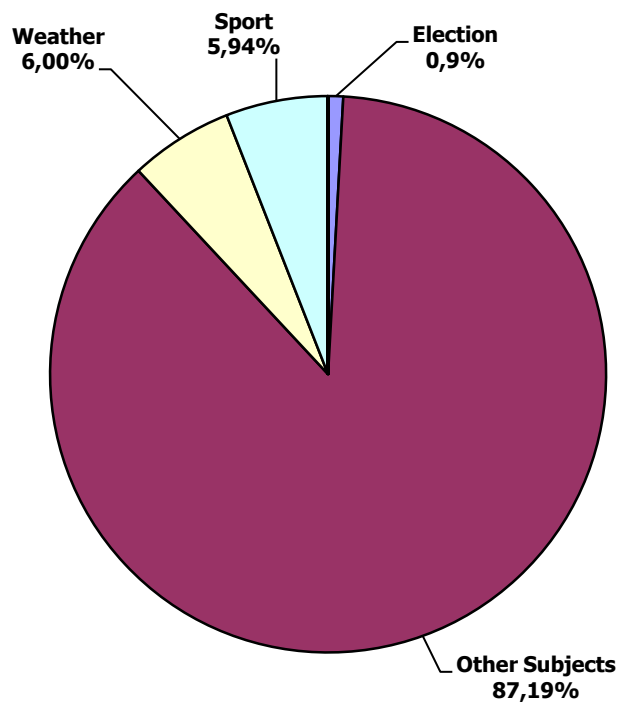
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

TRK MAHILIOU/NAVINY

01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

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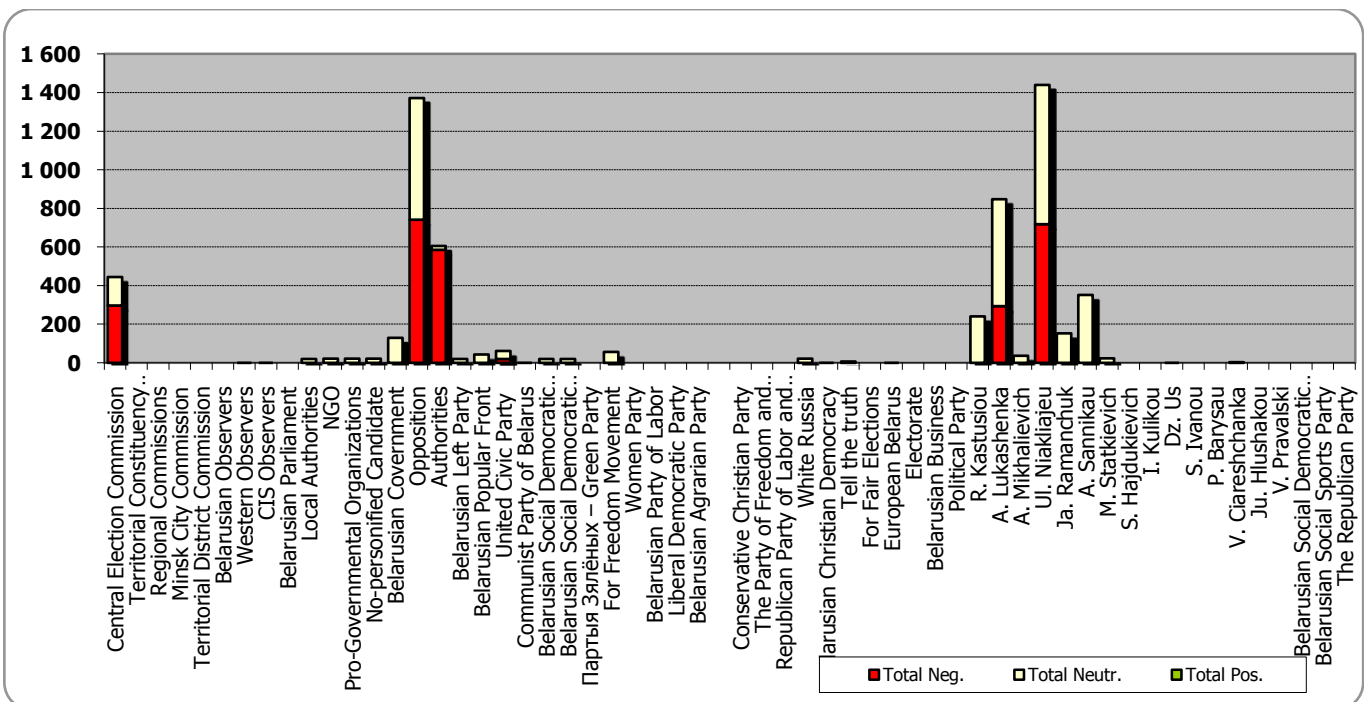
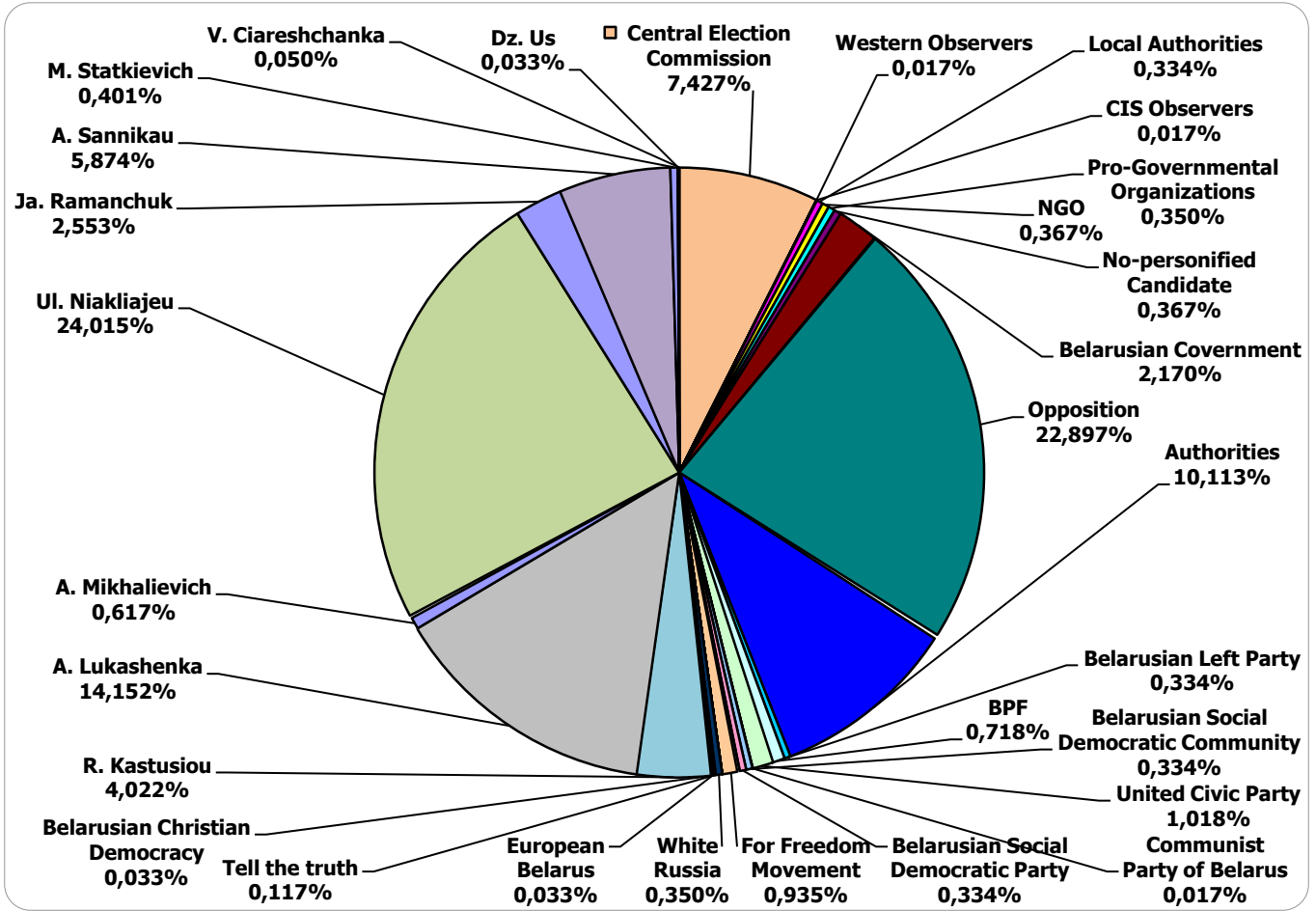


BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

NASHA NIVA

01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

Measured in cm2



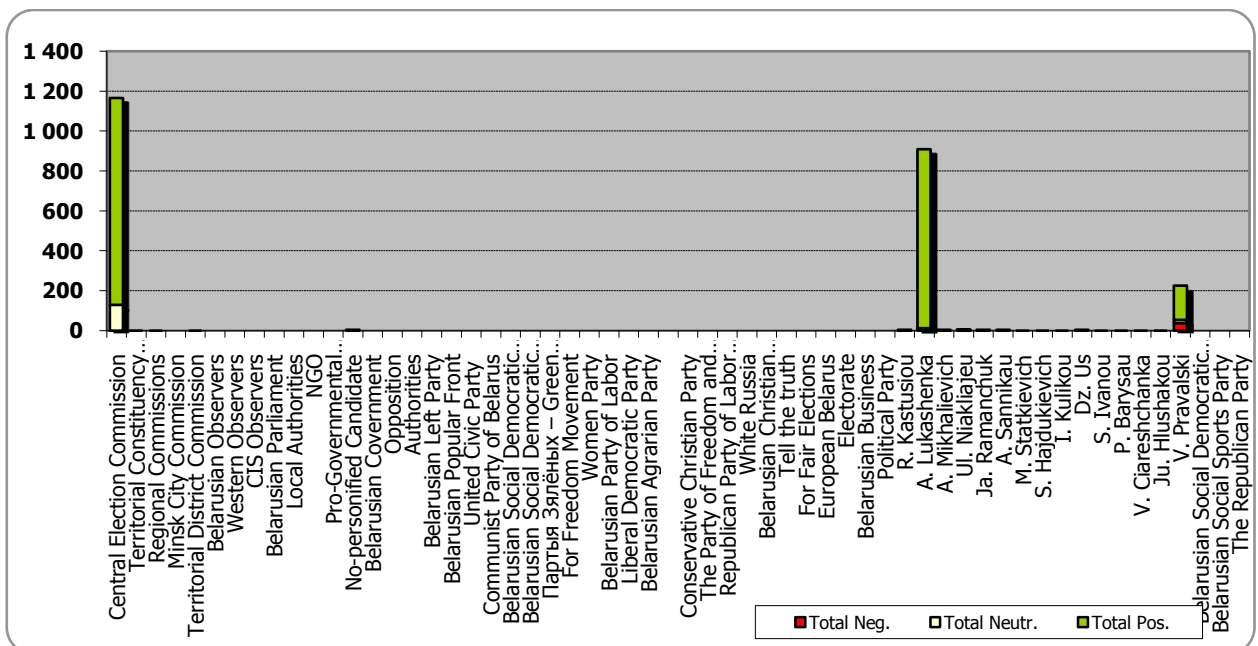
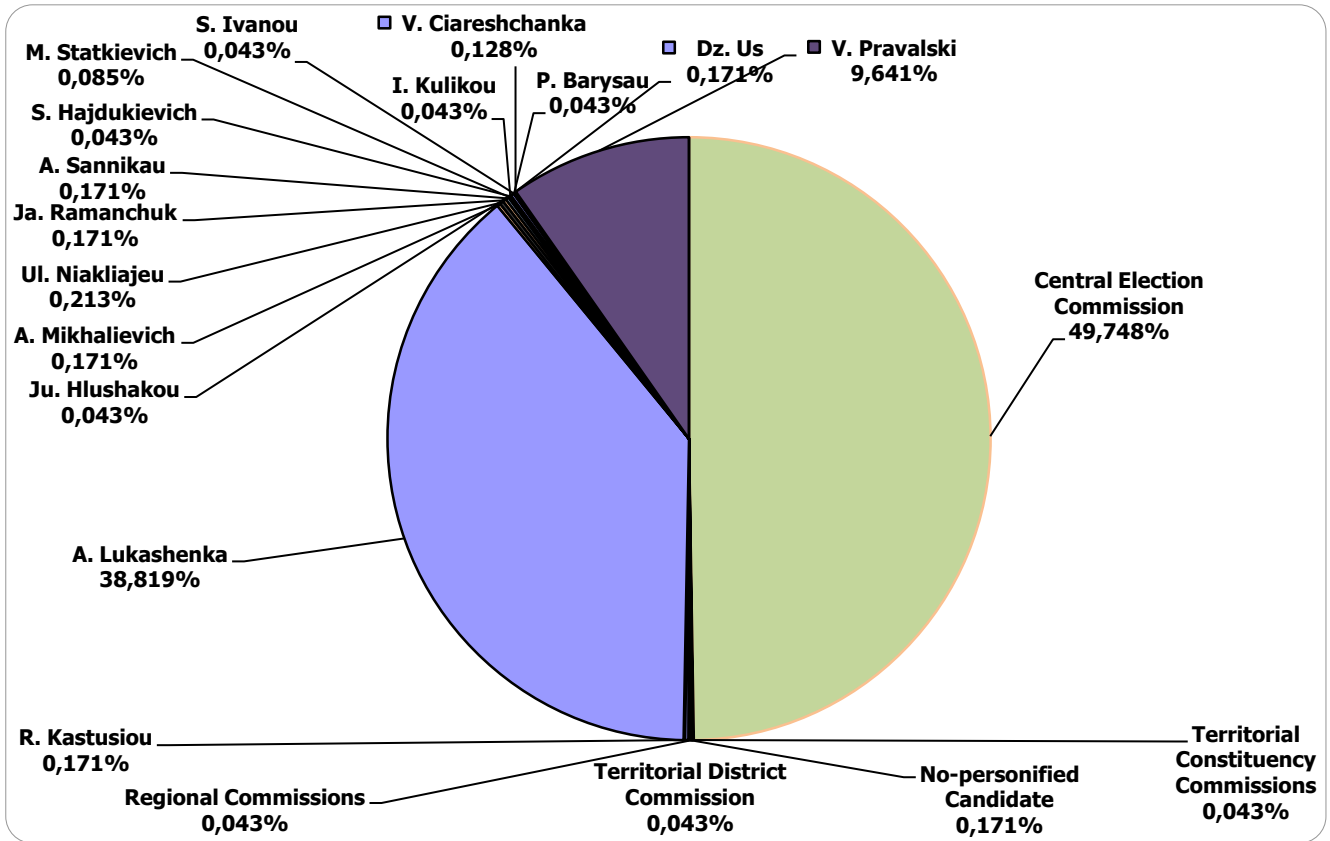


BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

KOMSOMOLSKAJA PRAVDA

01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

Measured in cm²





BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ELECTIONS 2010

NAVINY.BY

01.11.2010 – 20. 11.2010

Measured in symbols

