

BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

The 2008 Parliamentary Election Coverage in the Belarusian Media Bulletin 4

(August 16–22 2008)

The monitoring aims to find out how exhaustively the Belarusian media have covered the election and the work of the subjects involved (both individuals and institutions), as well as the degree to which media contributions meet the key principles of journalistic ethics and professional standards of covering elections.

The present analysis refers to the period within which potential runners have finished submitting the required documents in order to be registered as candidates seeking election to the Chamber of Representatives, the election commissions have begun checking up the submitted papers, the CEC has set the media via which candidates are going to address their voters and the time for such addresses, and the ODIHR/OSCE observers have begun their long-term monitoring of the election.

The BAJ monitoring covers 20 media: *Nashi Novosti* (ONT), *Panorama Nedeli* (the 1st National Channel), *Naviny Rehijona* (Homiel), *Novosti-Reghion* (Mahilou regional TV); *Radiofact* (the 1st National Radio Channel), *Naviny* (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM) and *Naviny* (Mahilou Regional Radio) TV and radio programmes; *Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya*, *Respublika*, *Belorusy i Rynok*, *Narodnaja Vola*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi*, *Brestskiy Kuryer*, *Homielskaja Prauda*, *Mogilyovskaya Pravda* and *Dneprovskaya Nedelya* papers, as well as www.belta.by, www.naviny.by and www.tut.by on-line media and www.euroradio.fm, the on-line version of the European Radio for Belarus.

Main Findings and Some Conclusions

Just as in previous periods, the state-owned media have focused on the technical procedures of the election, representing the CEC and lower-level election commissions as its chief actors. Apart from the CIS and western observers, they have not generally distinguished any other actors. The president was far ahead of all the others in terms of time and space allotted by the state-owned media, getting about 70 per cent of the overall election subjects coverage.

The state-owned e-media have not only avoided increasing the amount of time and space allotted to the election coverage as compared to other issues, but some of them have actually cut down on it. For example, *Nashi Novosti* (ONT) gave the election as much coverage as during the previous period, i.e. about 6 minutes. Meanwhile, on 17 August 2008 *Panorama Nedeli* (the 1st National Channel) did not mention the election at all. Neither did *Naviny Rehijona* (Homiel Regional TV), and *Naviny* (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM) gave the election 25 seconds only.

Naviny (Mahilou Regional Radio) has been covering the election in the same manner as it did before, with much more focus on the weather than the election. However, *Radiofact* (the 1st National Radio Channel) has become an exception to the rule, by giving 32.5 per cent of its time to the election. Yet, it represented only six

actors, a fact that shows that the state-owned media still continue adhering to a very simplistic approach, which ignores a lot of actors.

The state-run nation-wide and regional printed media have featured prominently neither the election, nor the wide range of its participants. Thus, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya* gave most of its election coverage to the CEC, mentioning the *Belarusian Communist Party*, *Liberal Democratic Party* and the *United Civic Party* only in passing. *Respublika* wrote even less on the CEC. Of all the other actors, it only once spoke about the *CIS and western observers*.

The independent press may not have presented a wide range of election actors, but it has given the subject more coverage than the state-owned printed media have. For instance, *Belorusy i Rynok* weekly has allotted the election 2.5 times as much space per issue as *Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya*. For *Brestskiy Kuryer* and *Homielskaja Prauda* the proportion is 3:1, respectively.

The state-run www.belta.by has allotted most of its space to the following eight actors: the CEC, the president, the CIS observers, local authorities, political parties, constituency election commissions, western observers and polling station boards. The remaining 14 actors have only been mentioned in passing.

Just as before, the independent www.naviny.by and www.tut.by have been featuring a wider range of actors (29 and 28 respectively). Apart from giving the CEC and the other election commissions nearly as much coverage as www.belta.by has, www.naviny.by and www.tut.by have also written much more about the other political actors.

As for the manner of presentation, the state-owned media have been giving mainly neutral coverage to the CEC and the other election commissions. In general, they have offered a neutral assessment of the observers' activities, though some of them allotted more time and space to the CIS observers. Thus, www.belta.by gave four times as much of its virtual space to the CIS observers than to their western counterparts. As for the domestic observers, most of the state-owned media have not even mentioned them.

Ignoring quite a lot of election actors, the state owned media for the most part have given the opposition negative coverage, if any at all. It is in the negative light that www.belta.by assessed the role played by the opposition parties. According to CEC Secretary Mikalaj Lazavik, due to their inner conflicts, they '*lack energy to deal with social and economic issues, which should be at the core of policy and which voters are concerned with.*' (http://news.belta.by/ru/news/archive?date=22_08_2008&page=1&id=260683) The www.belta.by website also attributes the opposition parties' low representation at the polling station boards to their inaction. (http://news.belta.by/ru/news/archive?date=20_08_2008&page=1&id=260735)

As we have mentioned, within this period the CEC has set a schedule for candidates' addresses on TV and the radio. (http://news.belta.by/ru/news/archive?date=22_08_2008&page=2&id=261537) It is a telltale sign that the candidates are to be on air from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. in big

cities and Minsk and from 6.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. in all the other localities. (In Minsk the candidates' speeches are to be broadcast by the LAD TV station.) This fact means that in big cities the majority of voters with jobs, who are either commuting or doing their shopping at the time, will not be able to get an idea of the candidates' agendas. The fact that in big cities the candidates are not going to appear on the leading nationwide TV stations with the highest ratings also impedes communication with voters. By the way, campaigning is going to be restricted due to extremely low state funding allocated to the candidates, which has been admitted by CEC Secretary Mikalaj Lazavik. (<http://news.tut.by/politics/115352.html>)

To sum up,

The state-owned media have been giving most of their coverage to the CEC, leaving the other actors out of voters' sight and demonstrating a rather simplistic approach to the election coverage.

Within the analysed period the state-run media have not only failed to give more time and space to the election coverage, but in some cases have even reduced it.

The time scheduled for the candidates' TV and radio addresses does not allow the majority of working voters to get an idea of the candidates' political agendas. The possibility to get a better understanding of the candidates' agendas will be severely limited due to the lack of state funds allocated for campaigning.

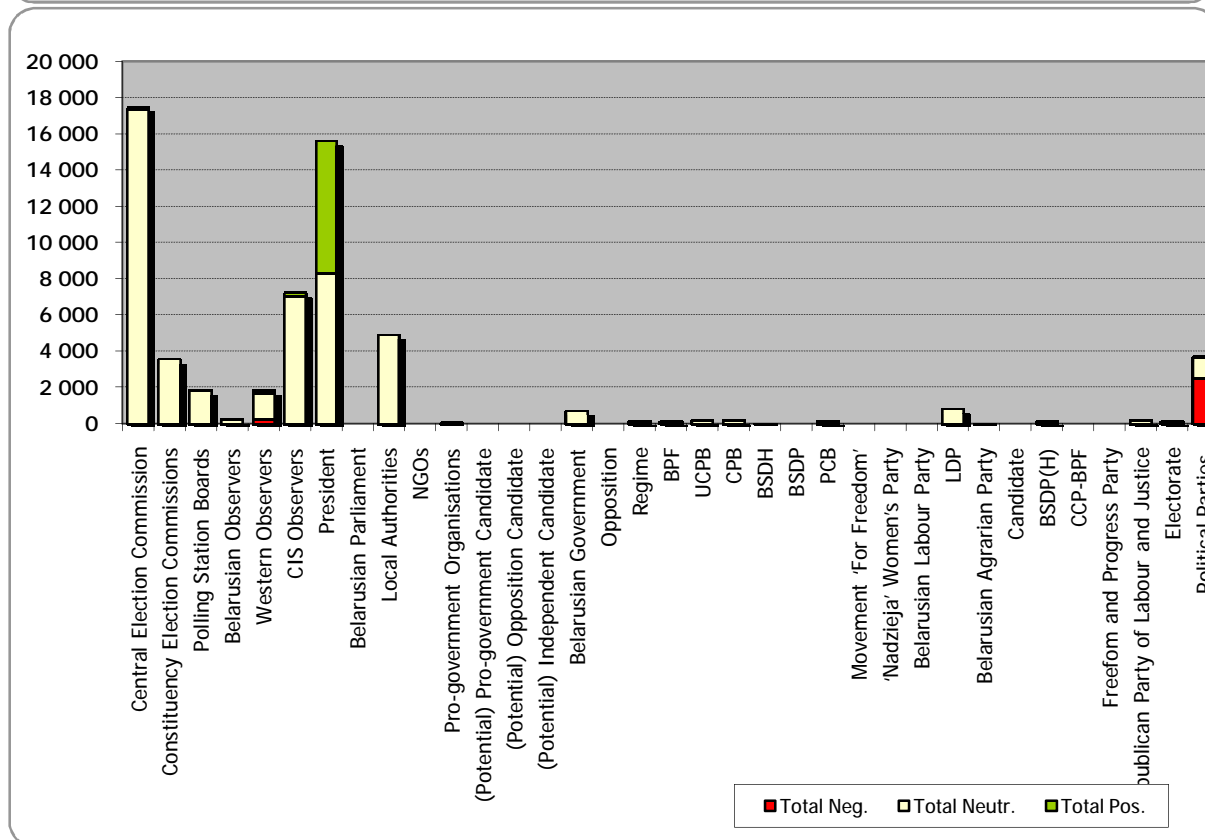
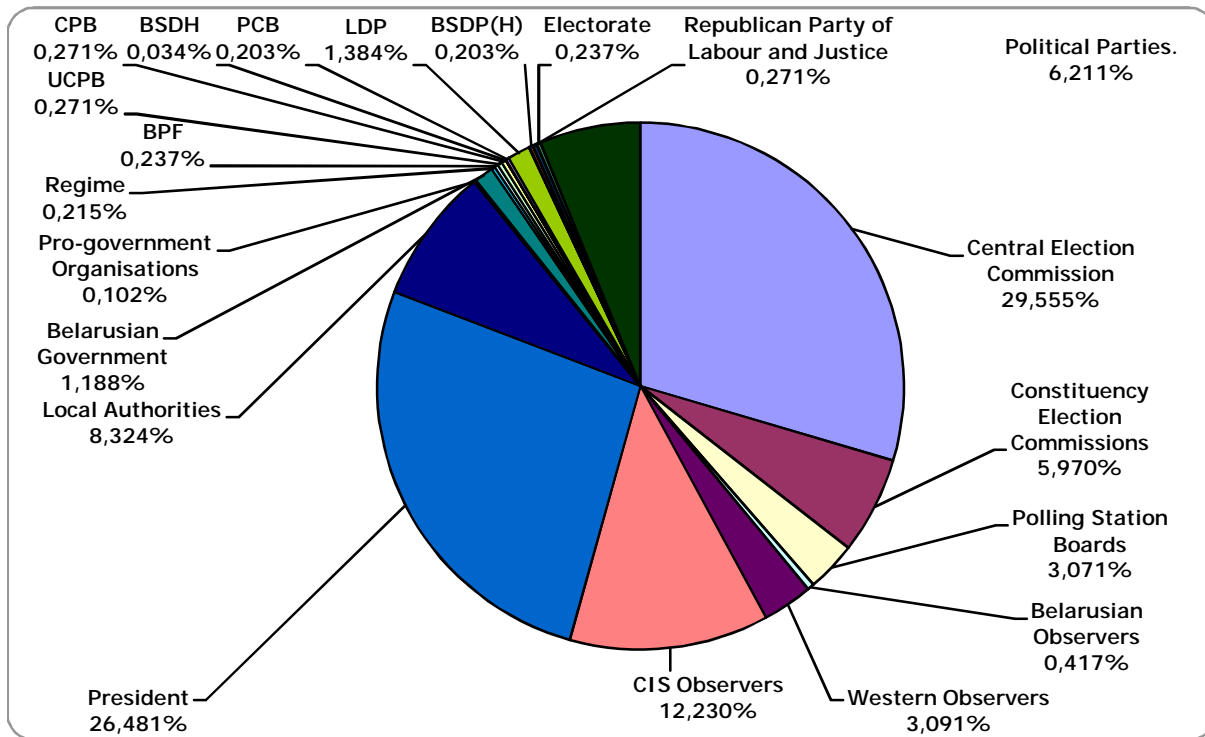
These artificial restraints on communication with voters are bound to curtail competition between different political visions, marginalising alternative programmes and agendas.



BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in symbols



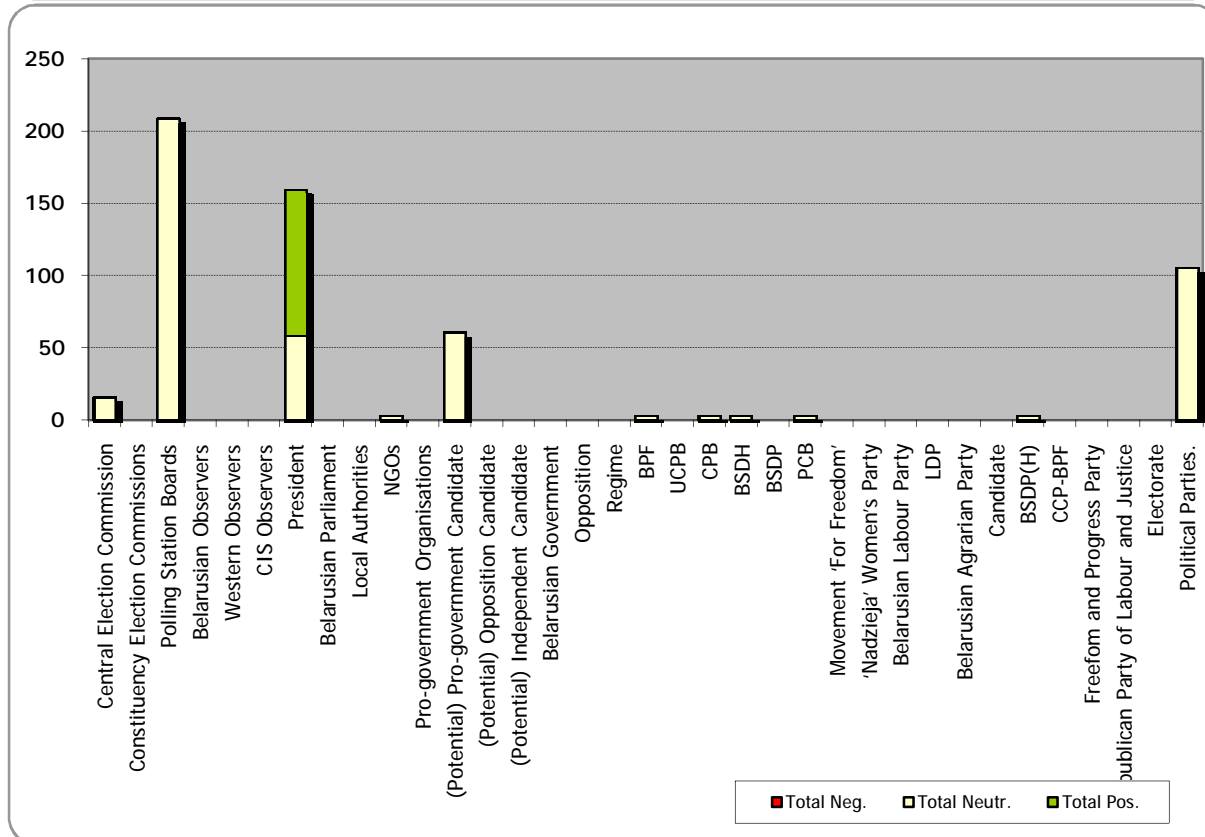
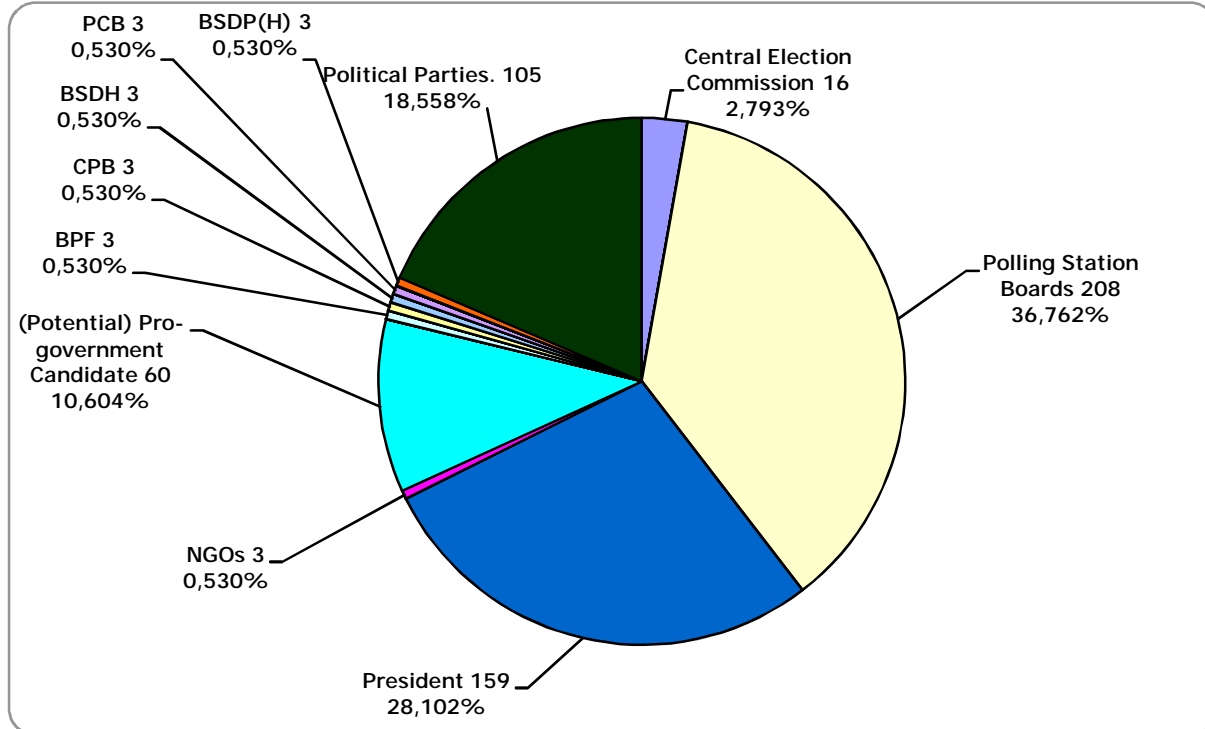


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Belorusy i Rynok

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²



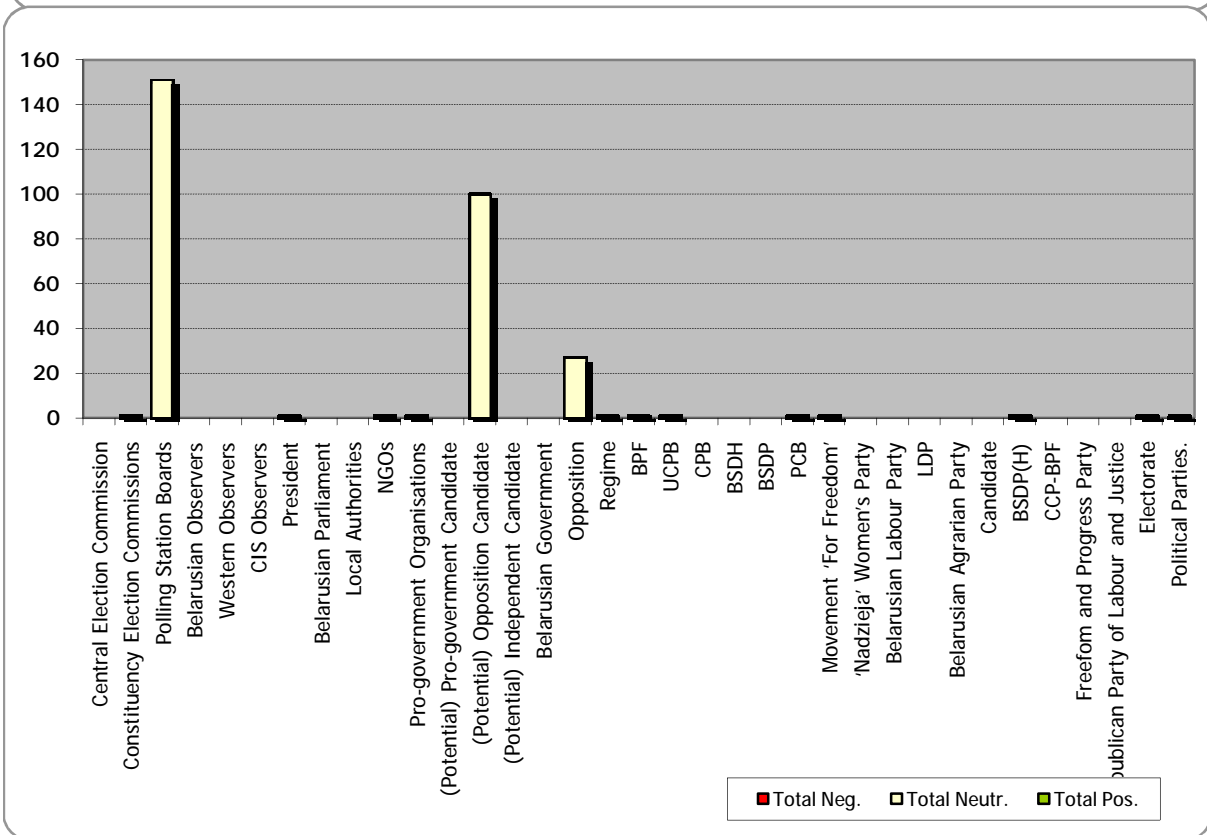
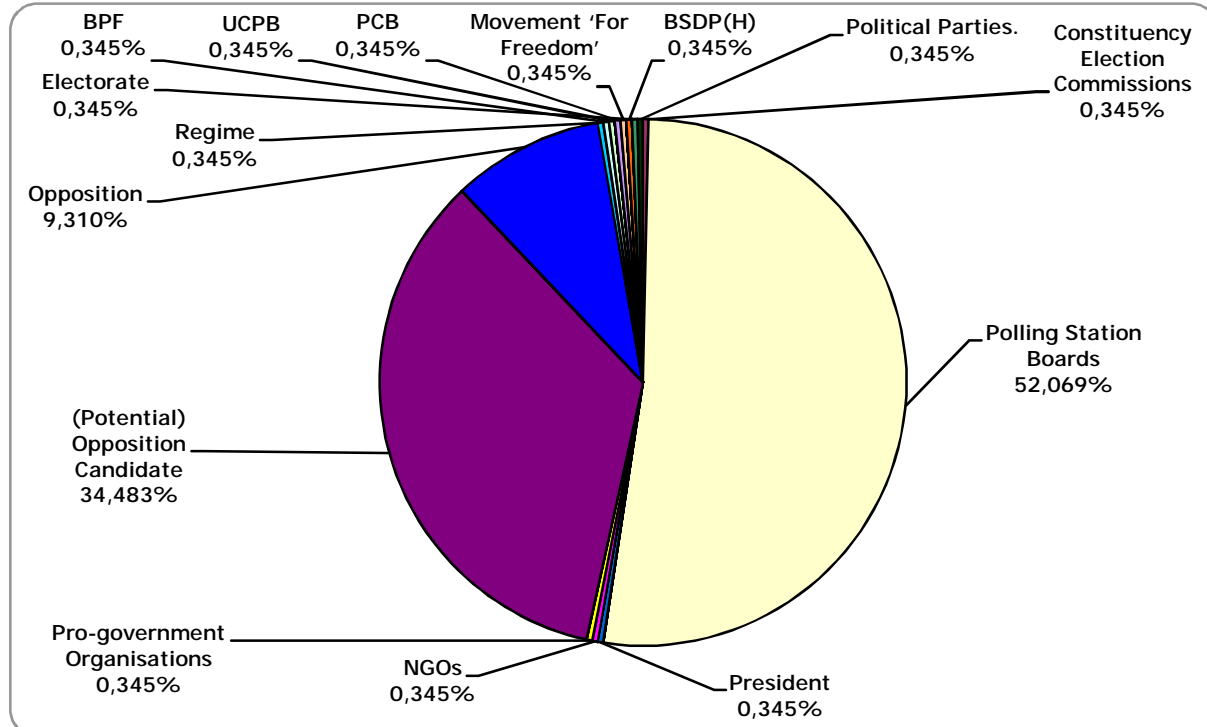


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Brestskiy Kuryer

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²



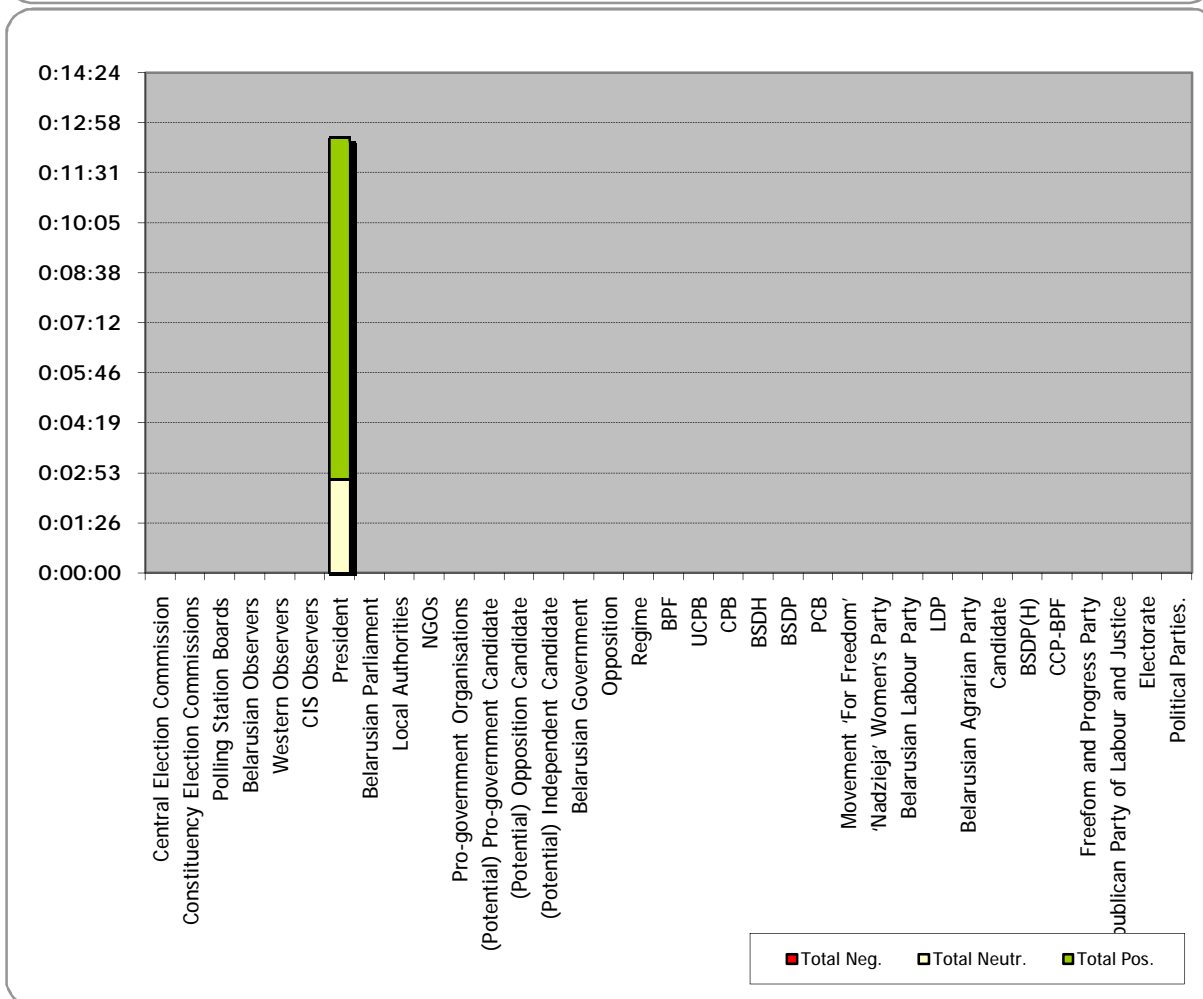
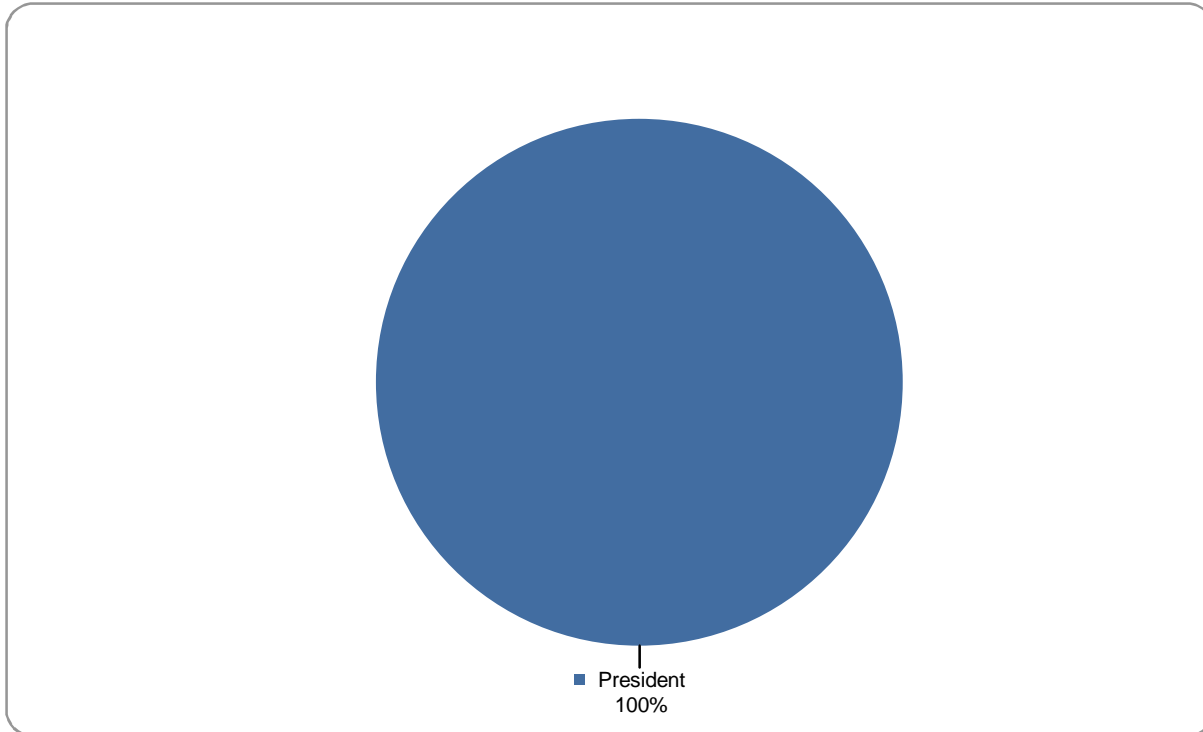


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



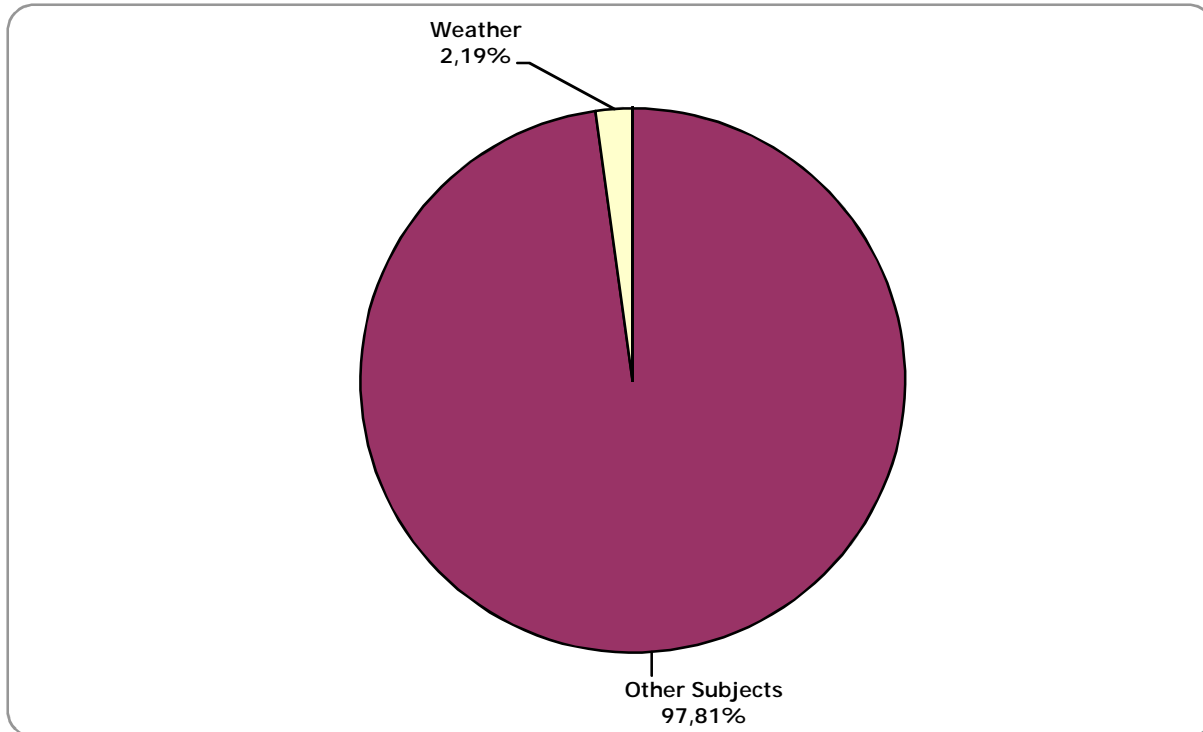


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



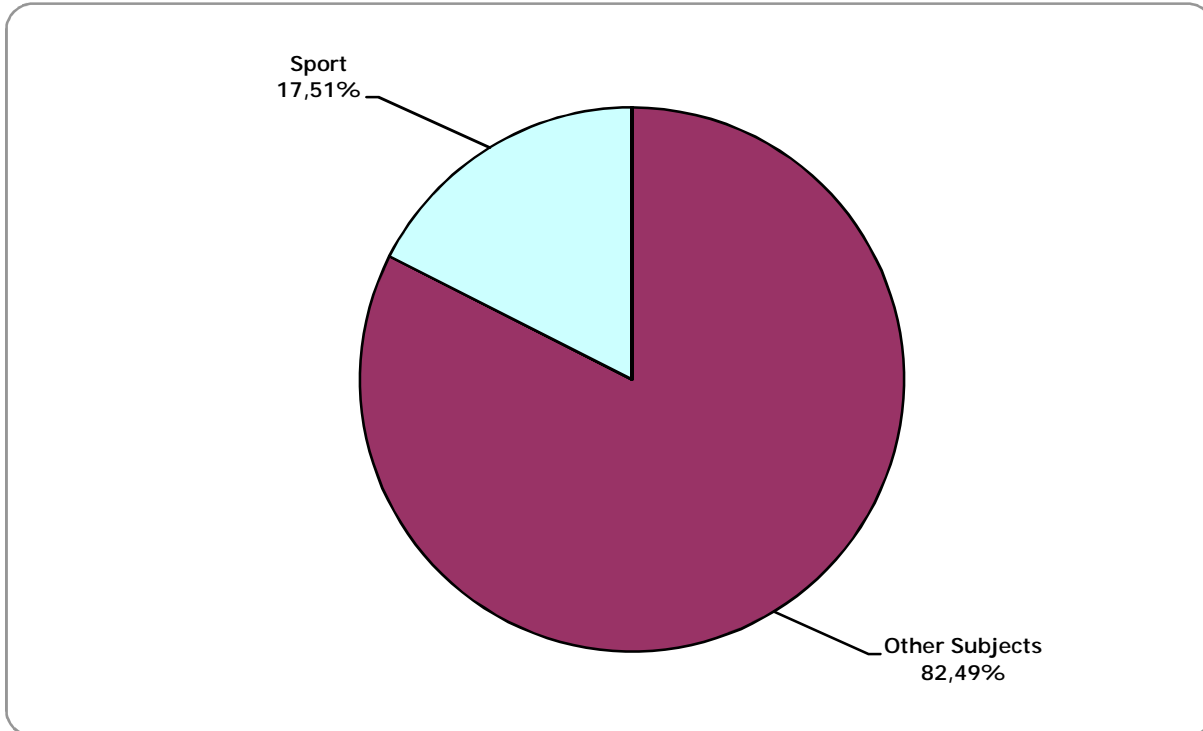


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny Rehijona (Homiel)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



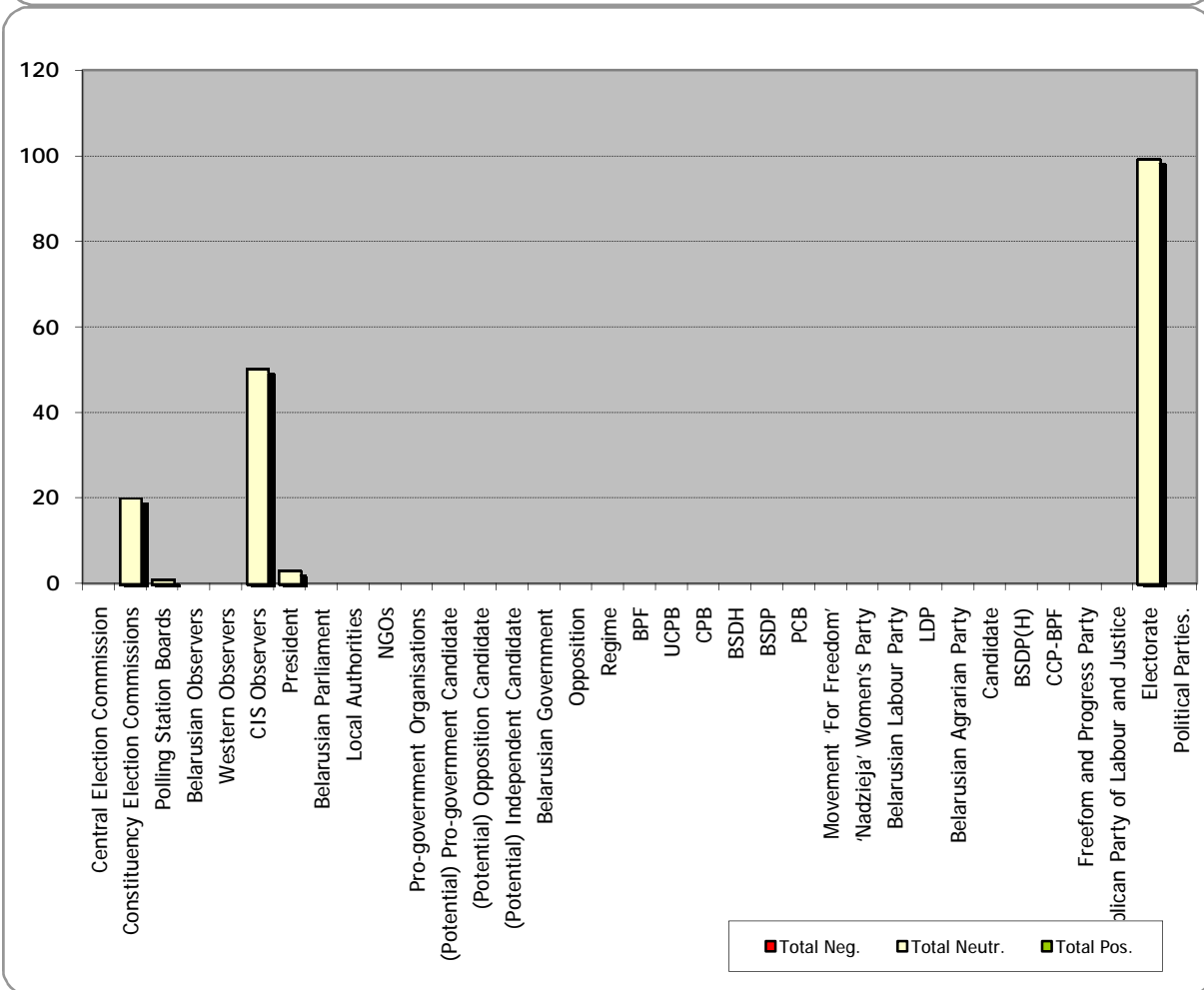
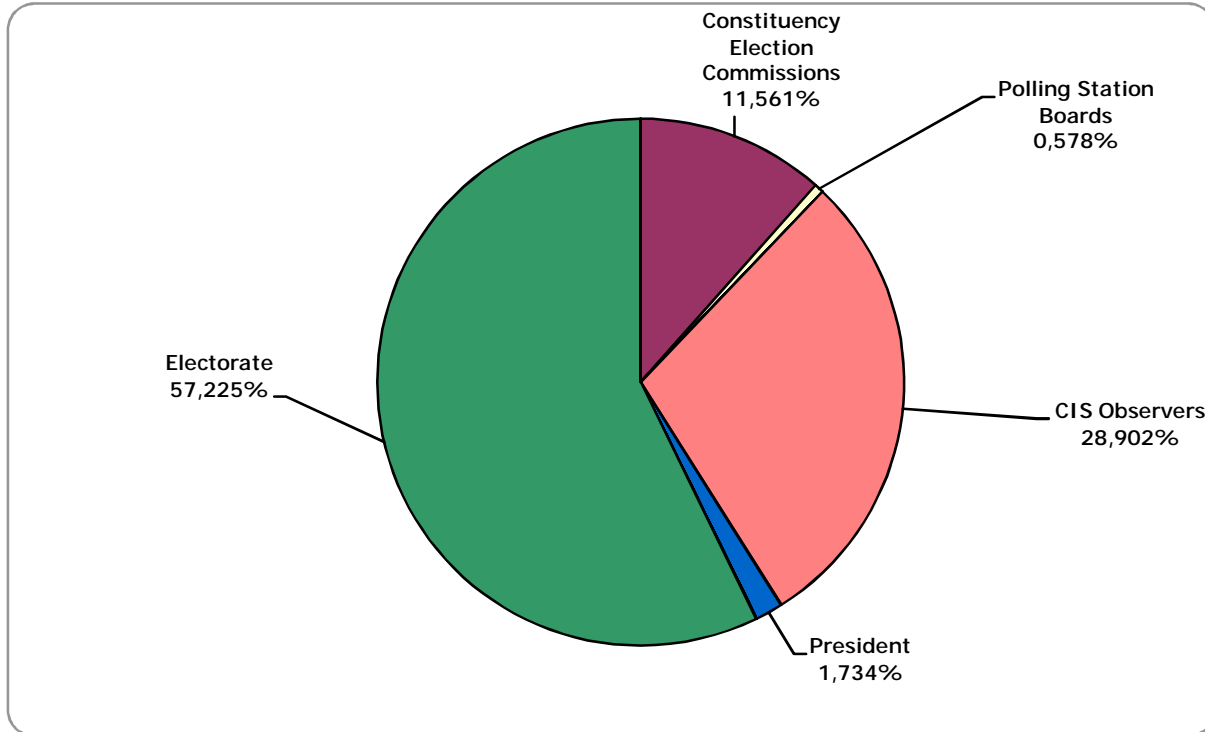


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Homielskaja Prauda

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²



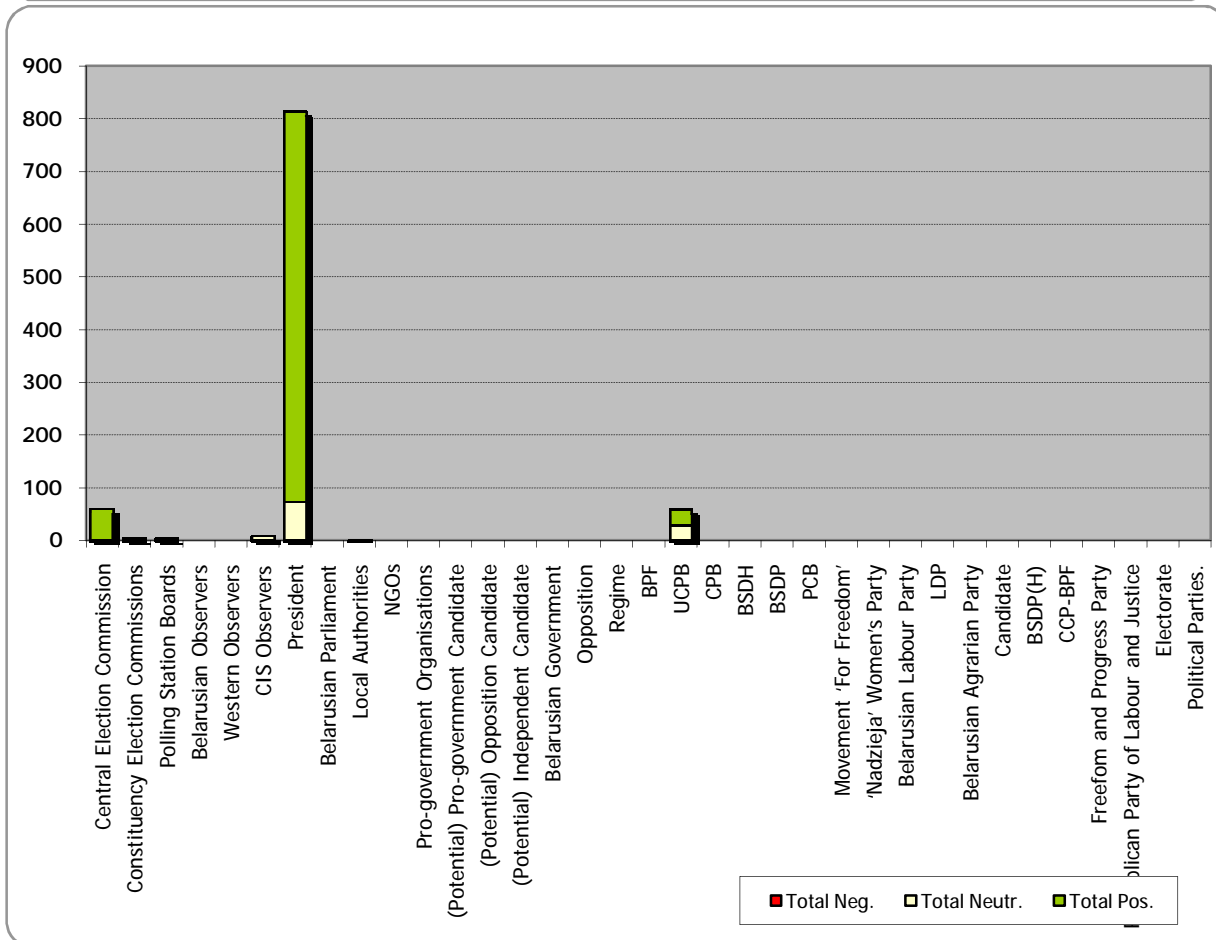
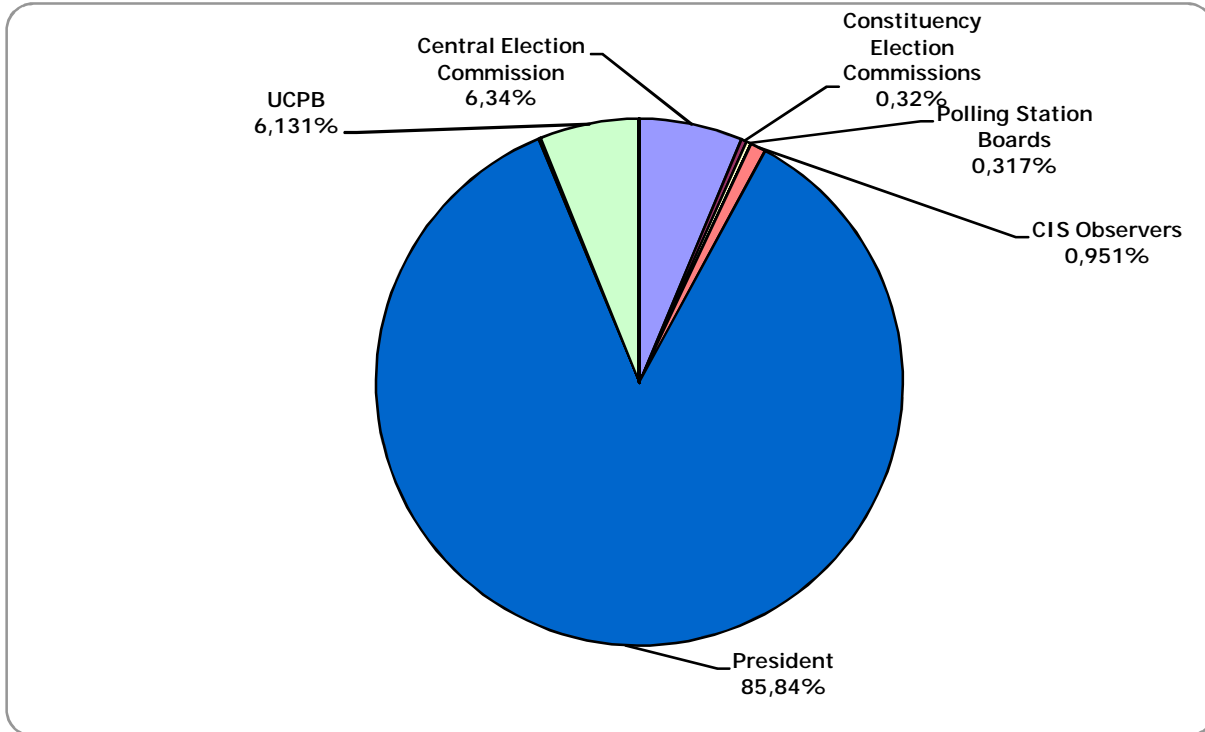


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²



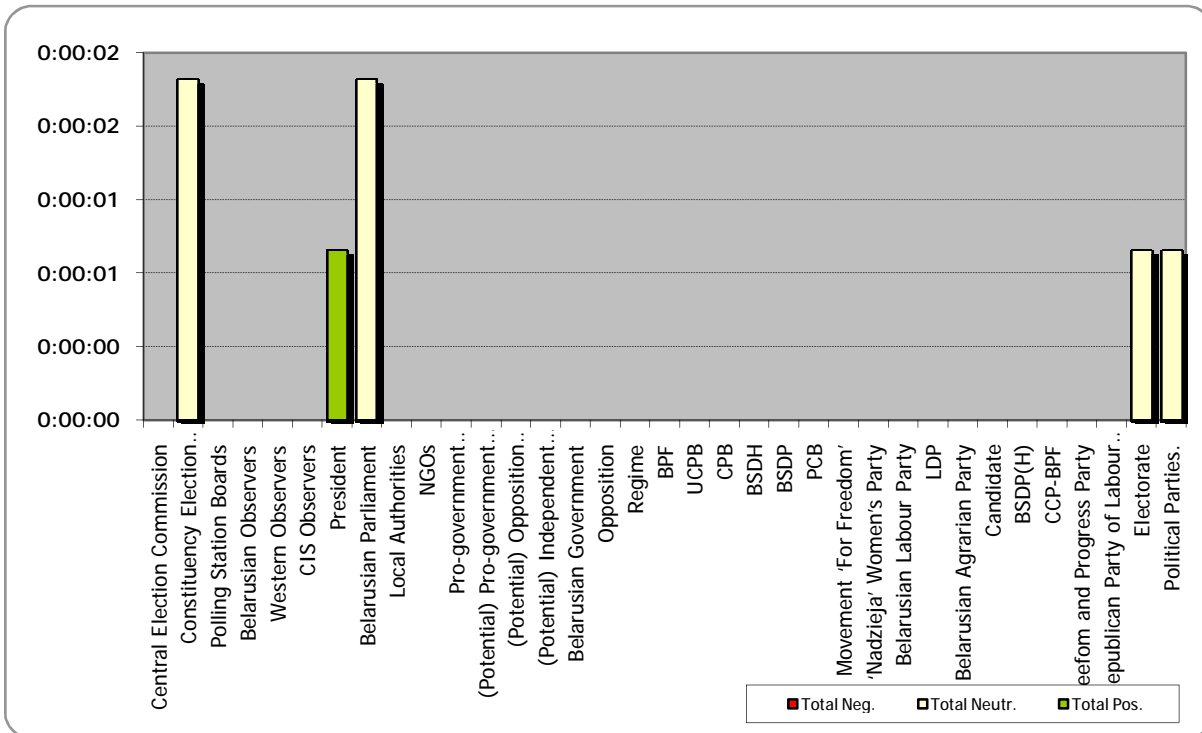
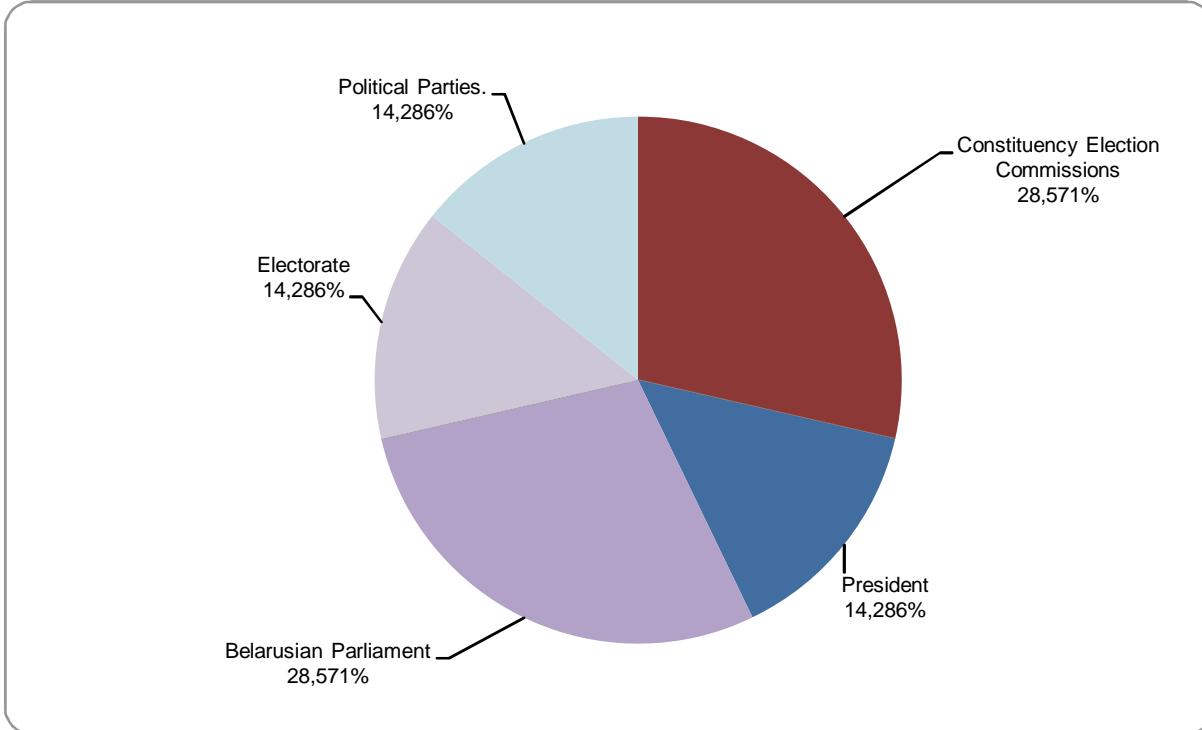


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Novosti-Region (Mahilou regional TV)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



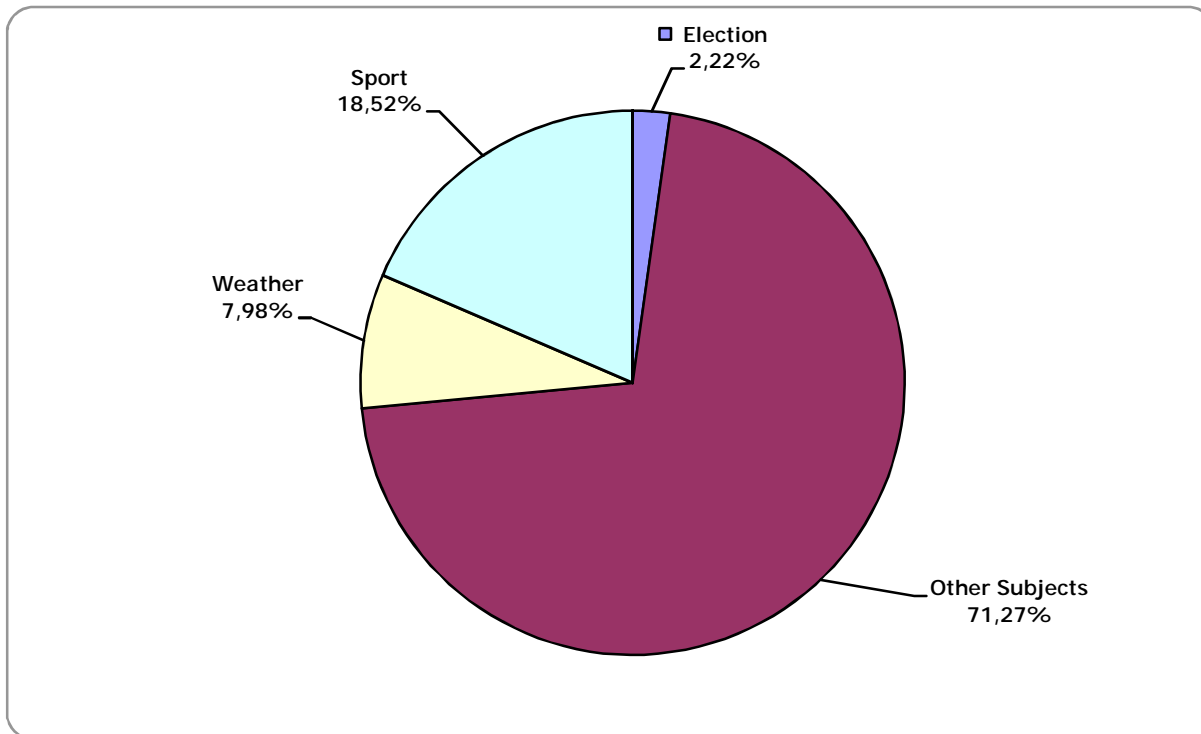


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Novosti-Region (Mahilou regional TV)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



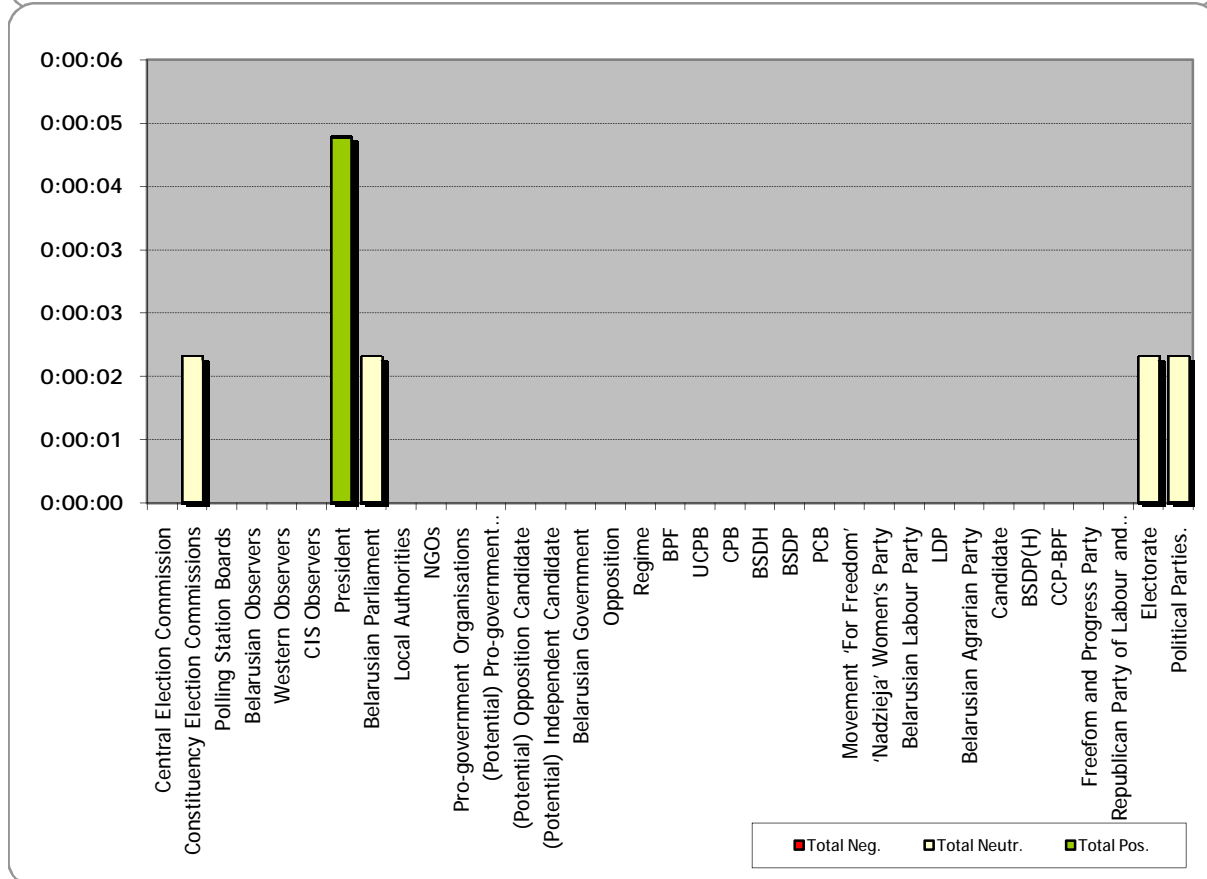
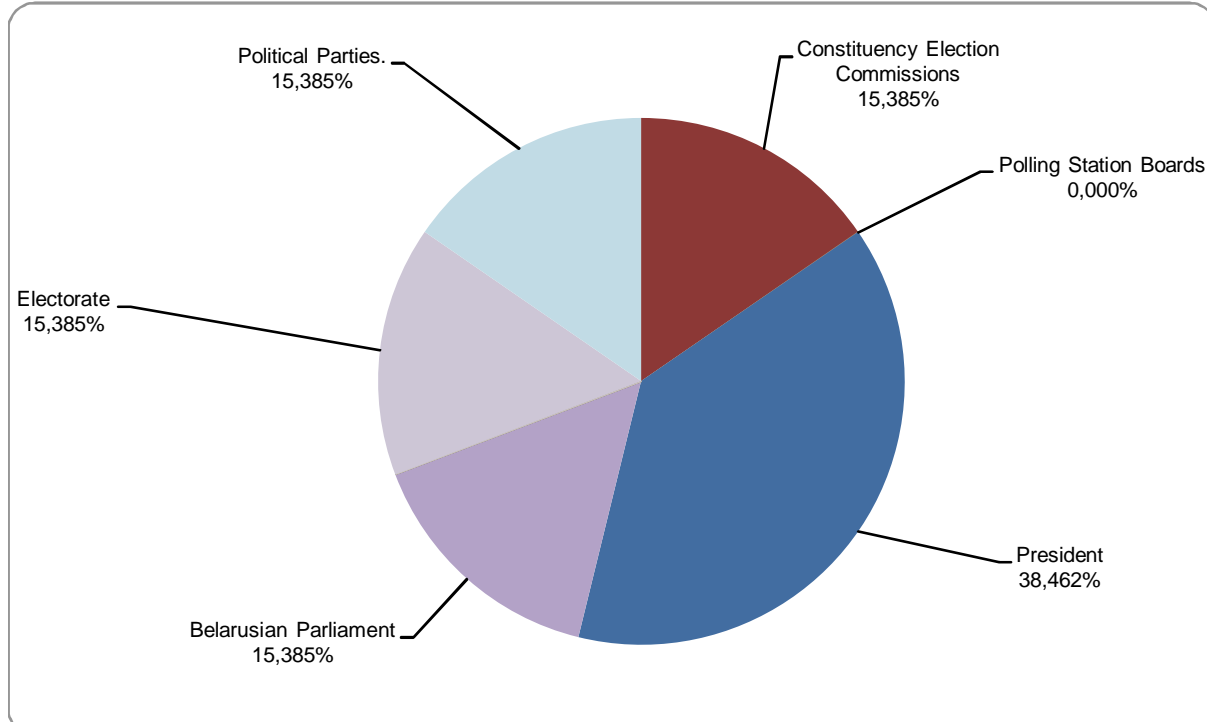


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny (Mahilou Regional Radio)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



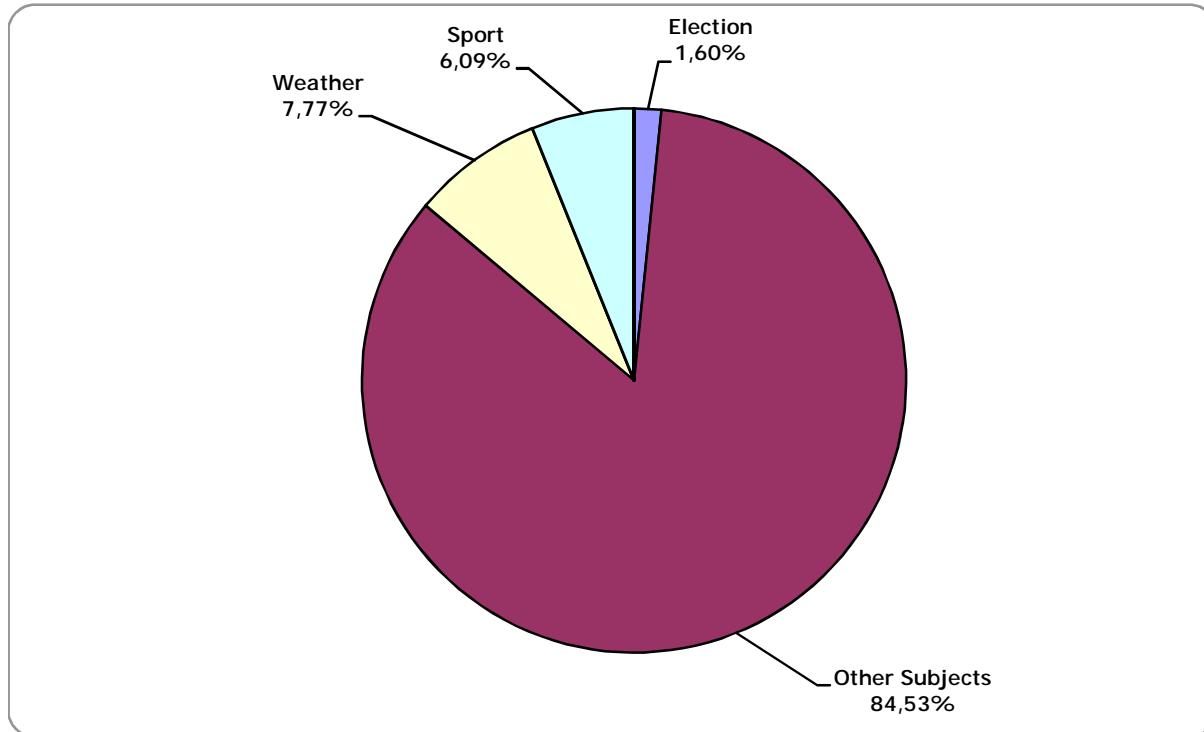


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny (Mahilou Regional Radio)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



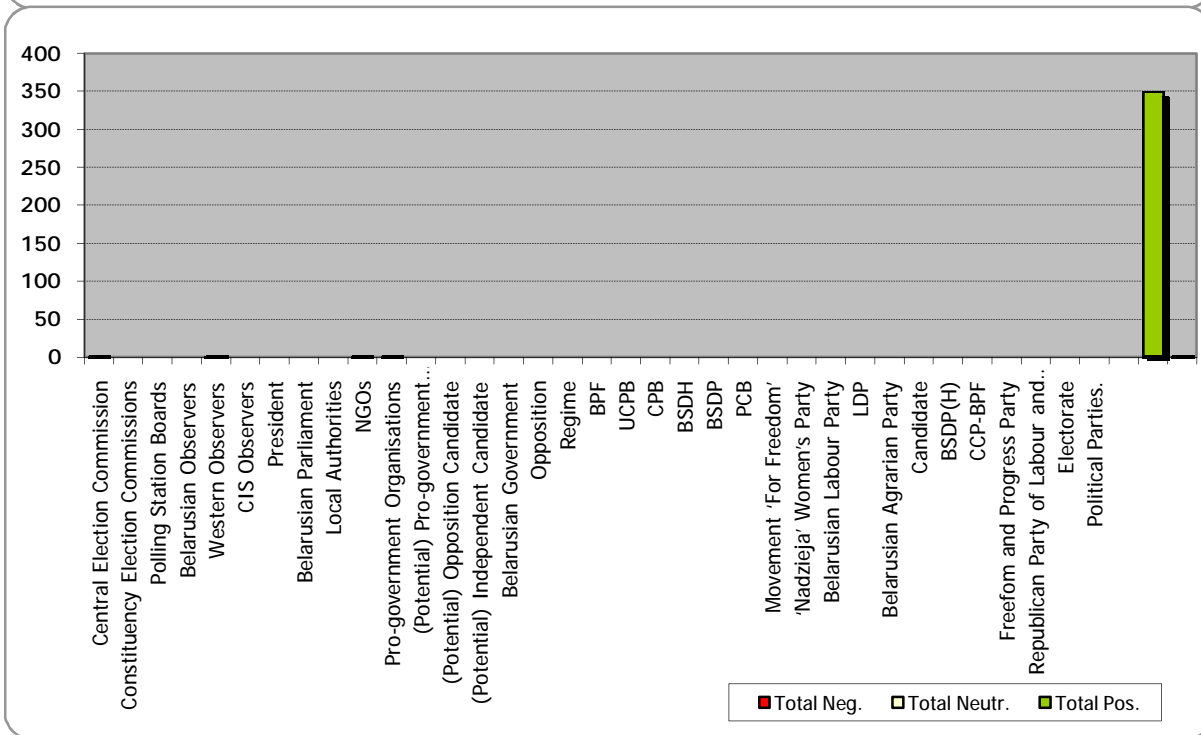
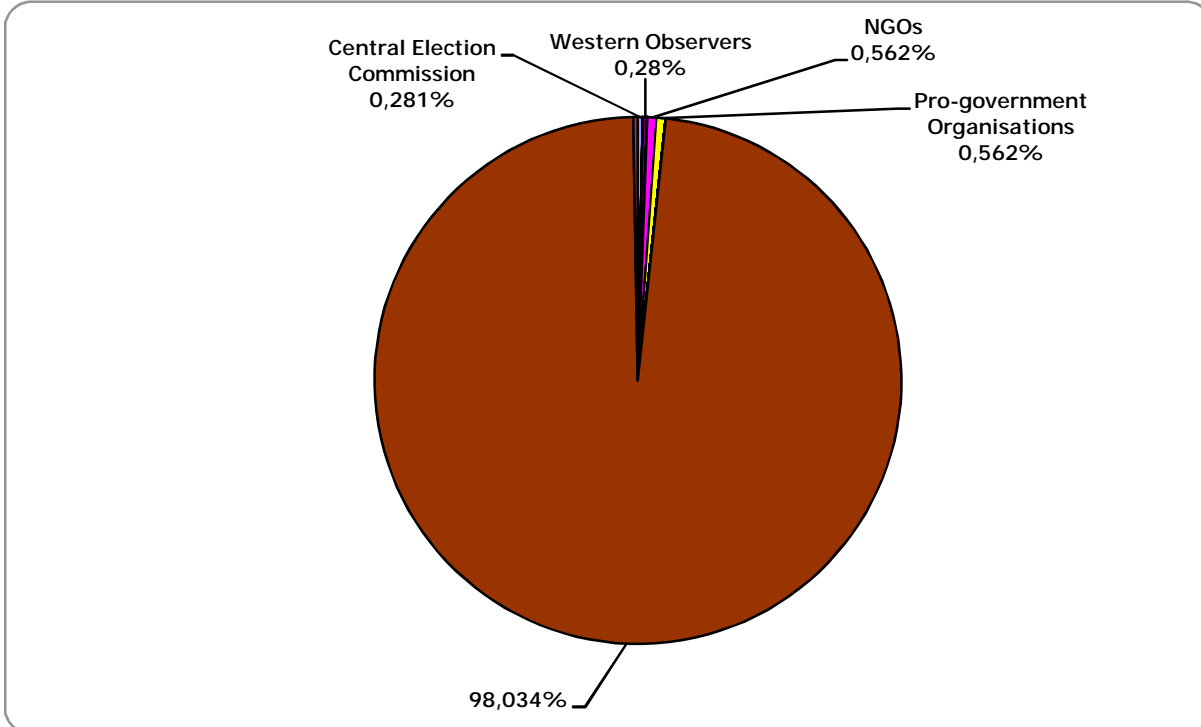


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2007

Mogilyovskaya Pravda

16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²

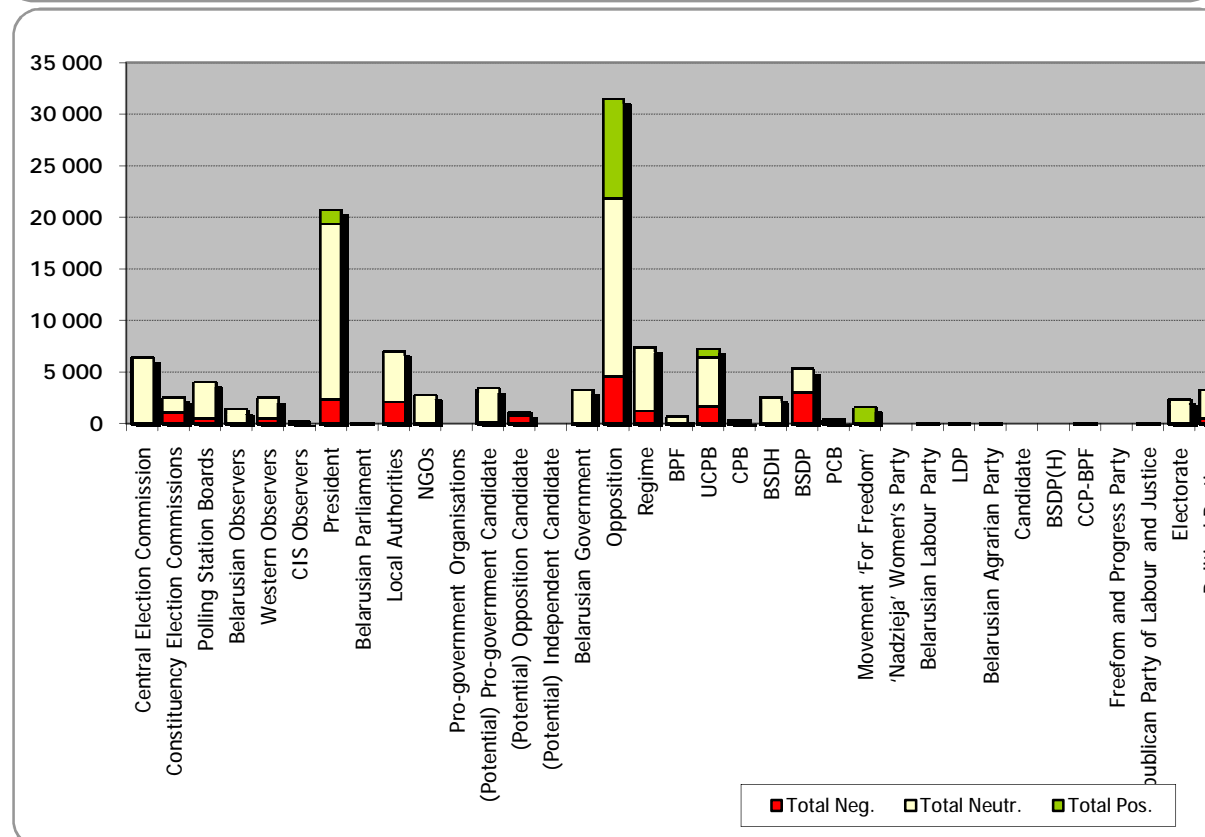
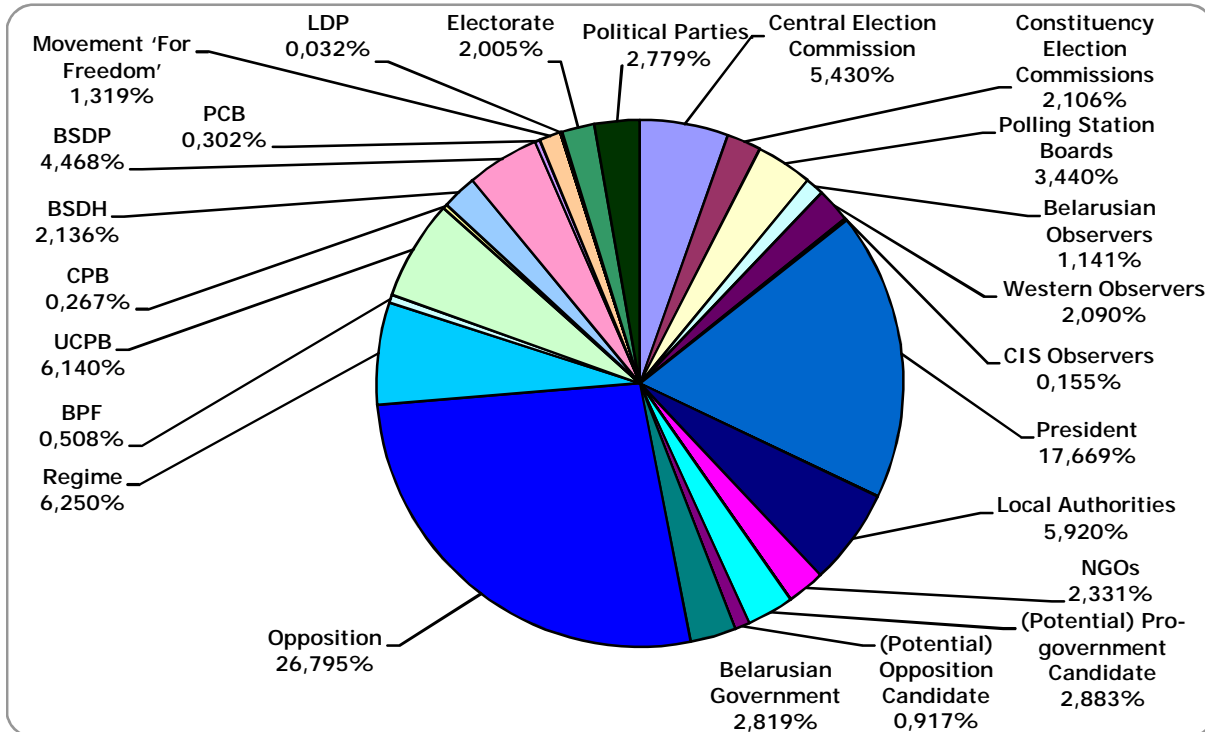




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

NAVINY.BY
16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in symbols



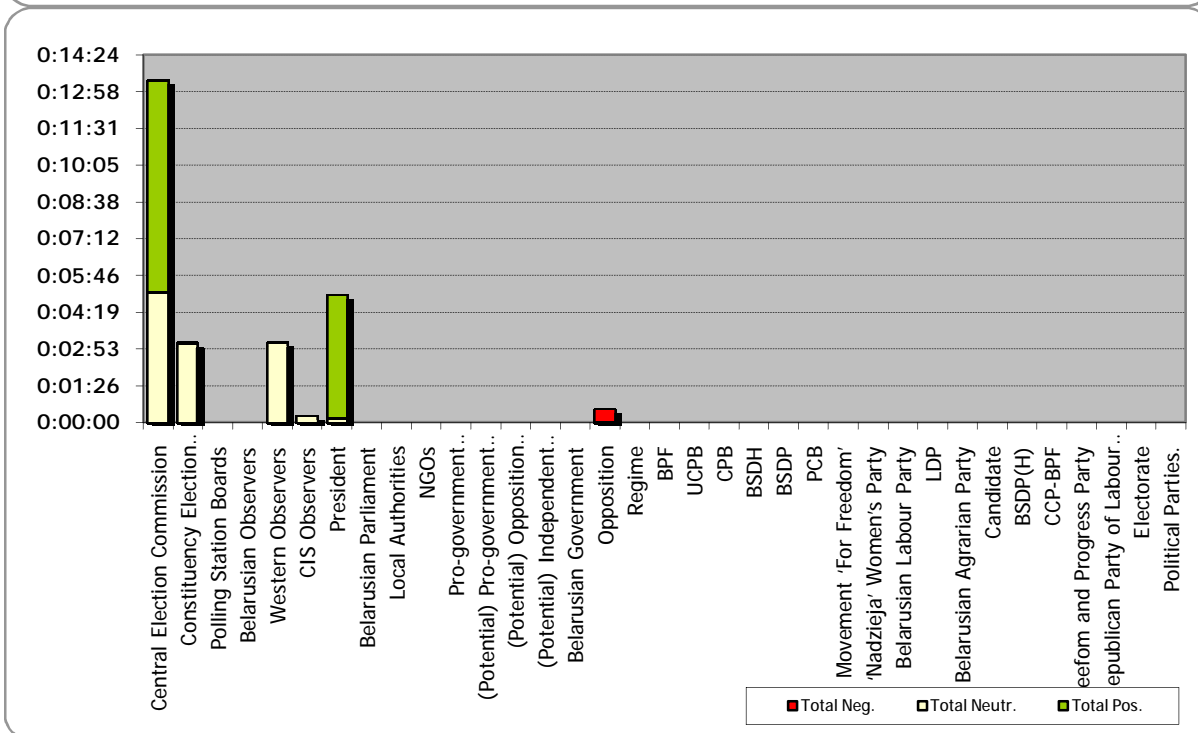
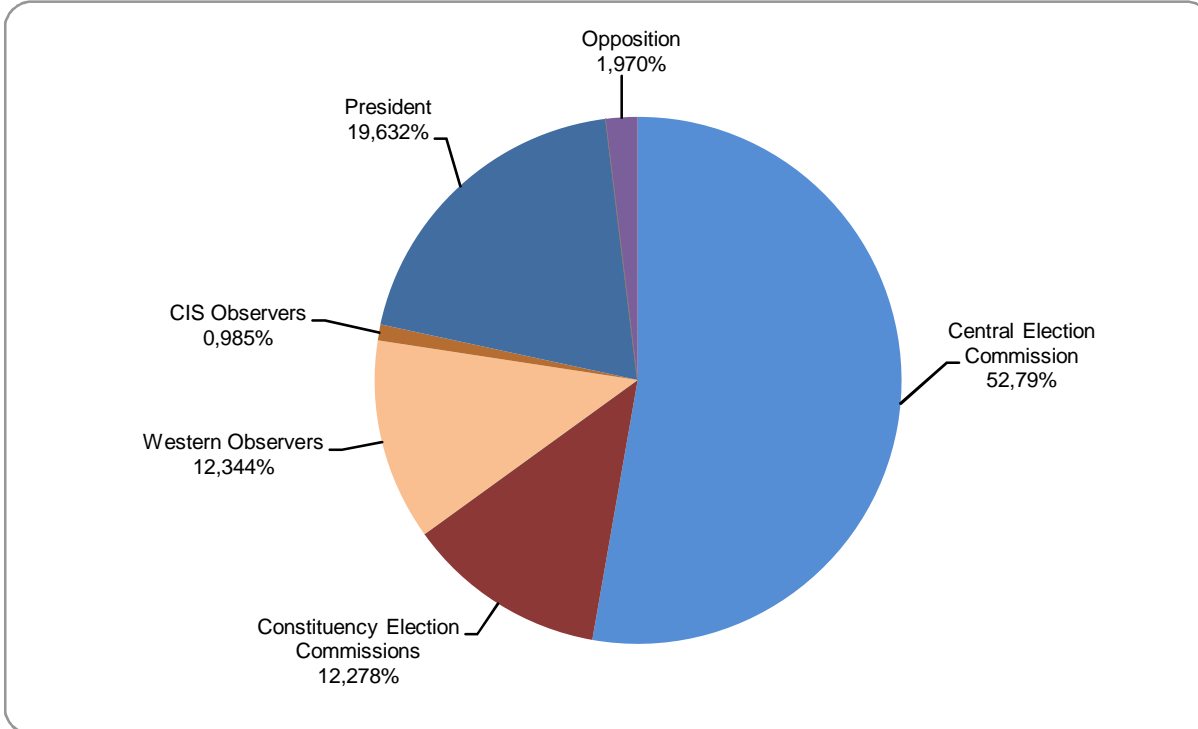


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Radiofact (the 1st National Radio Channel)

16.08-22.08.2008

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



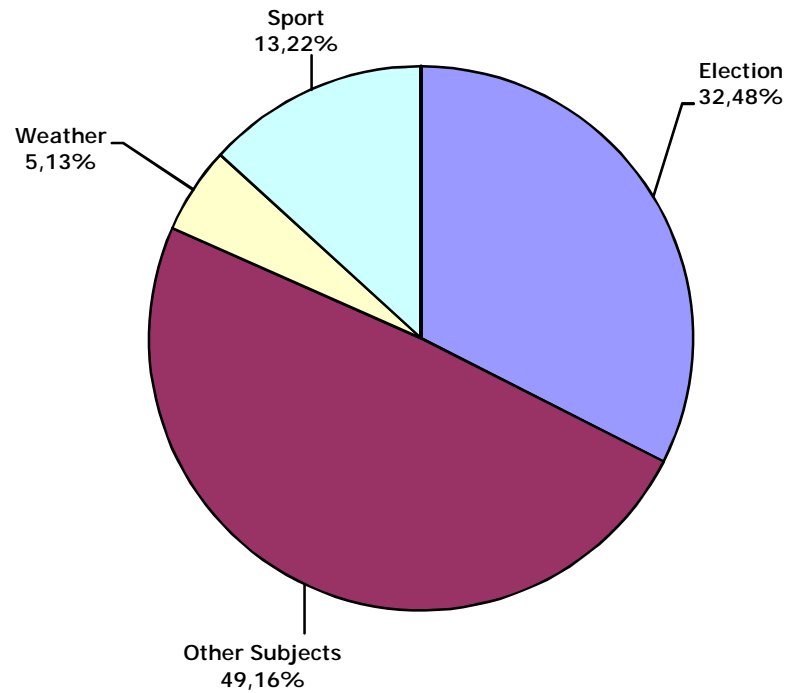


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Radiofact (the 1st National Radio Channel)

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

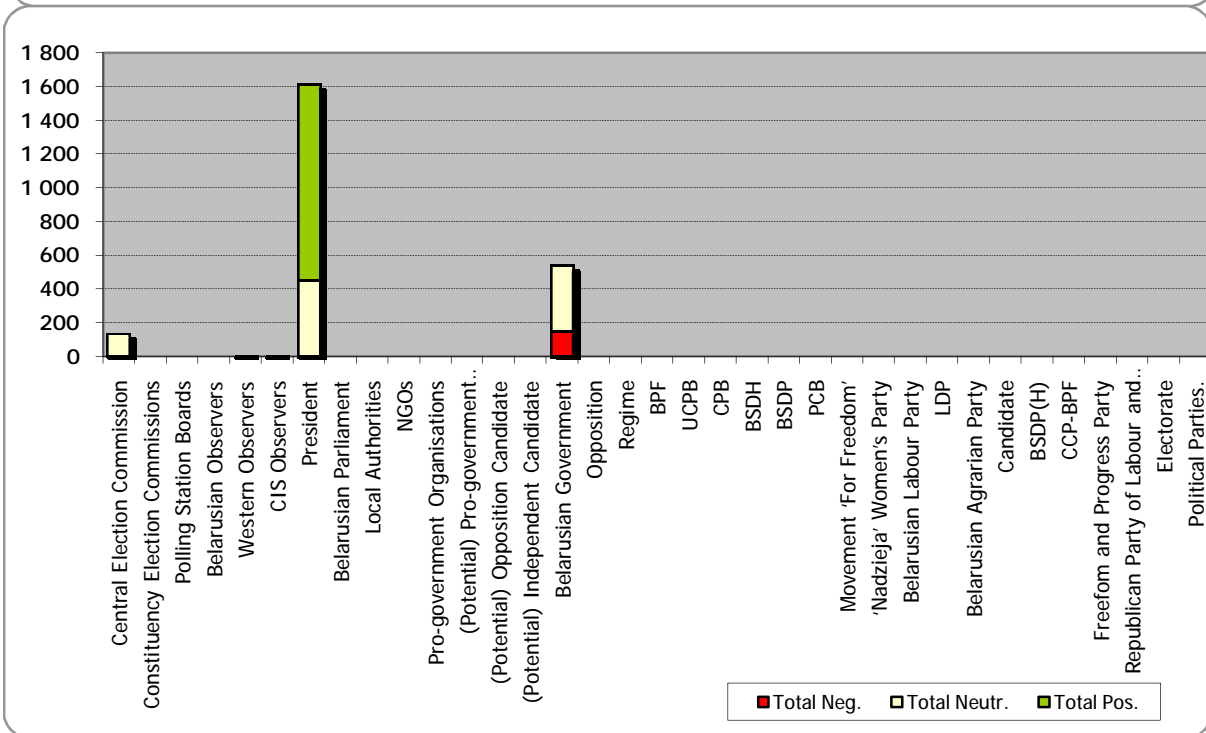
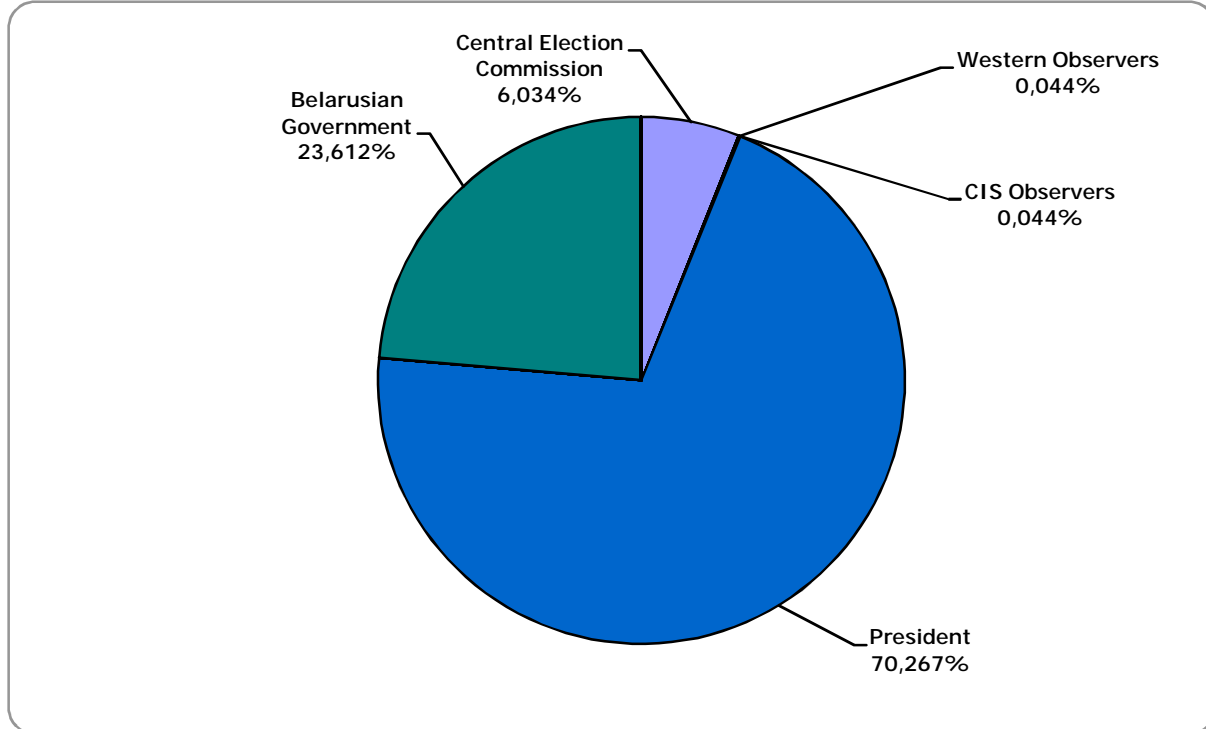




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Respublika
16.08-22.08.2008

Measured in cm²



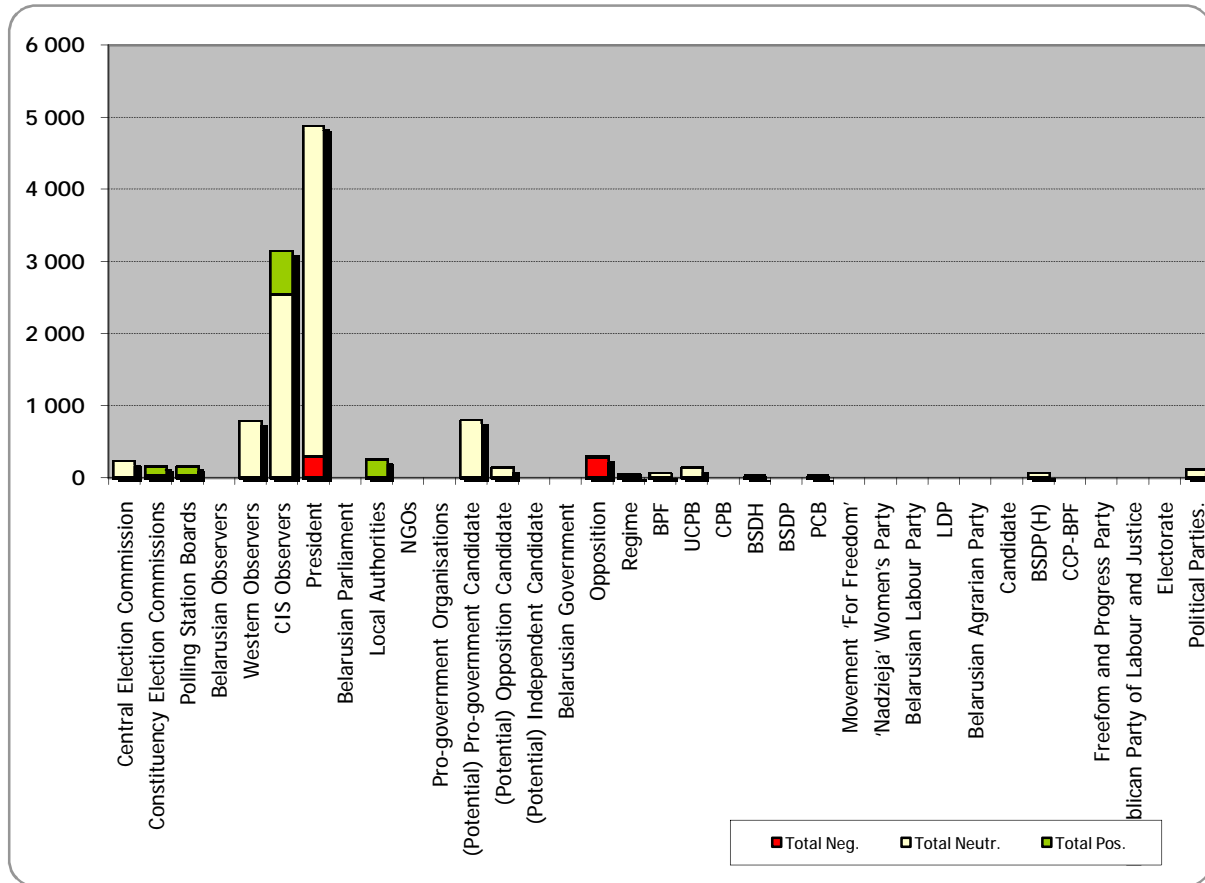
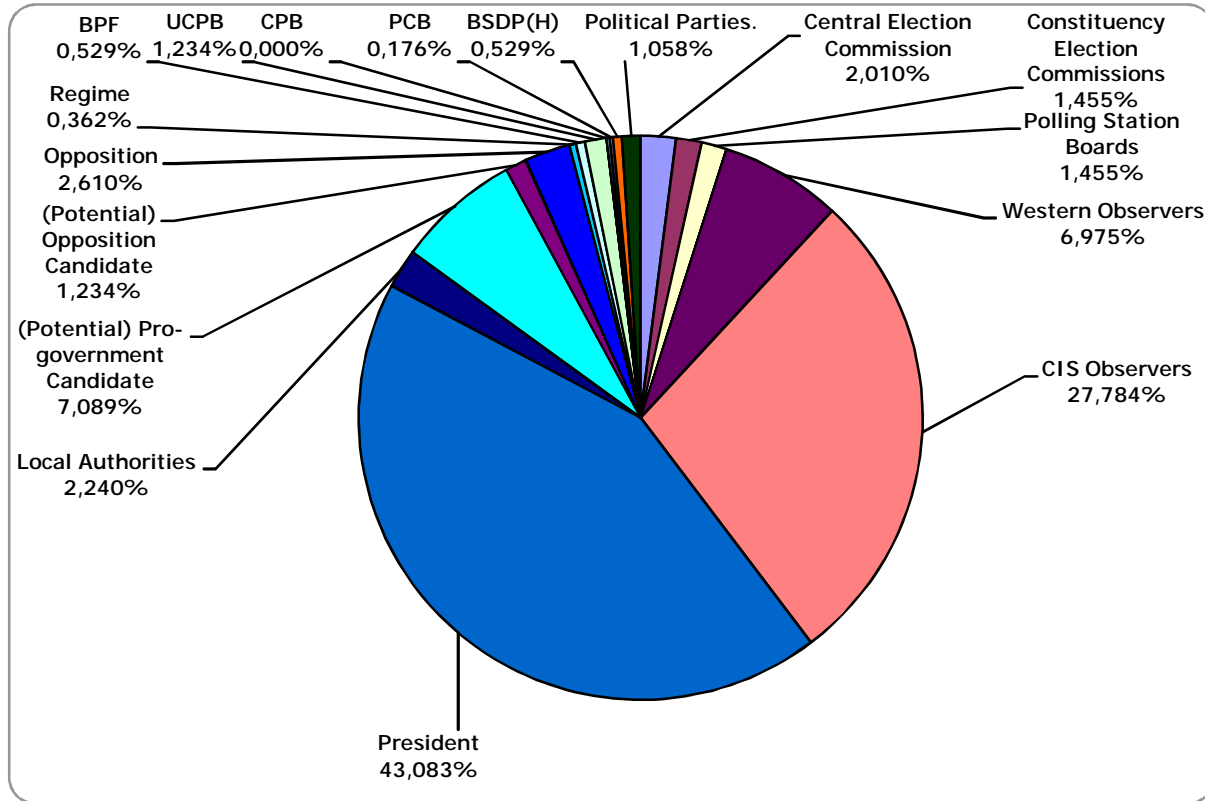


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

TUT.BY

23.08-05.09.2008

Measured in symbols





BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Navya (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM)

16.08-22.08.2008

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

