

## The Coverage of the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in the Belarusian Media

Bulletin No. 3

(2 – 15 September 2012.)

The monitoring aims to:

- *assess whether the Belarusian media are able to give an exhaustive and comprehensive coverage of the election process and whether they follow the guidelines of ethics in journalism and the internationally accepted standards in their election coverage;*
- *draw the attention of the journalists' community in the country to the fact that it is the duty of the media to provide voters with balanced and comprehensive information about the election process, as well as the candidates' and their supporters' political and social agendas and opinions;*
- *analyse how the media influence the voters' electoral choice.*

The monitoring covers seventeen Belarusian media, both state-owned and independent, electronic and printed, nationwide and regional.<sup>1</sup> The content analysis is based on both qualitative and quantitative data, *ie* we assess the manner in which the election actors are presented and the amount of space/air time given to the election coverage in the printed and electronic media, respectively.

During the monitored time span the candidates addressed the voters by publishing their programmes in the printed media, made their TV and radio appearances and took part in debates. The candidates' media campaigning is now finished.

### Main Findings and Conclusions

Although technically the given time span was supposed to be the most active phase of the campaigning in the run-up to the elections, the state-owned media did not provide the appropriate information support for it. Nor did they do anything to help as many voters as possible to watch or listen to the candidates' media appearances.

The monitored state-owned media still kept to their practice of failing to announce TV and radio addresses by particular candidates or their debates. They still did not give the candidates' names or focus the voters' attention on what parties the candidates represented. These media limited themselves to only giving the number of the constituency and the corresponding date (see, for example: <http://www.tvr.by/rus/raspisanie-debaty.asp>).

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<sup>1</sup> **The electronic media** are *Panorama (Panorama)* news programme on Belarus 1 TV station; *Nashi Novosti (Our News)* news program on ONT TV station; *V Tsentre Vnimanija (In the Focus of Attention)* weekly analytical program on Belarus 1 TV station; *Radyjofakt (Radiofact)* on the 1<sup>st</sup> Channel of the National Radio; *Naviny Rehijona (Regional News)* on the Homiel Regional TV and Radio Company; *Naviny (News)* on Homiel FM; *Naviny Mahiloŭ (Mahiloŭ News)* on the Mahiloŭ Regional TV and Radio Company; *Naviny (News)* on the Mahiloŭ Regional Radio; **the Internet resources** are [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by), [www.belta.by](http://www.belta.by); and **the printed media** are *The Belarus Segodnia (Belarus Today)*, *The Narodnaja Vola (People's Will)*, *The 7 Dniy (7 days)*, *The Naša Niva (Our Field)*, *The Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii (YCL Truth in Belarus)*, *The Homielskaja Praŭda (Homiel Truth)* and *The Mogilevskaya Pravda (Mahiloŭ Truth)*.

The TV listings of the stations that were to broadcast the candidates' messages and debates, announced them simply as 'Elections'2012' rather than 'Parliamentary candidates' addresses' or 'Debates'. Moreover, the candidates' messages and debates still did not find the way onto the websites of the TV and radio stations. Thus, it can be concluded that by covering the campaign in this specific manner, the state-owned media did not only try to marginalise its key actors, *i.e.* candidates, but also intended to prevent the voters from obtaining information about the candidate's agendas and block their discussion.

These media continued censoring candidates' addresses and debates, since the procedure of pre-recording instead of live broadcasts enabled them to do so. According to the chairperson of the United Civil Party Anatol Labiedźka, thirty two addresses of the party's candidates did not go on air and papers did not publish eleven candidates' programmes: ([http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2012/09/14/ic\\_articles\\_410\\_179201/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2012/09/14/ic_articles_410_179201/)). The head of CEC Jarmošina admitted censorship: 'Why have they been banned from air? Because there were calls for a boycott of the elections during these debates.' (<http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24704611.html>)

At the same time the debates on the monitored TV and radio stations were preceded by presentations of the relevant constituencies, in which the local authorities were featured in a highly positive light. Thus, these video and audio broadcasts actually promoted the governmental candidates who appeared in the debates.

In fact, the purpose of the bleak campaign coverage and the censorship of the candidates' media appearances was to undermine the tension of electoral competition and depoliticise the elections. A highly revealing fact: of the thirteen constituencies in the Mahiloŭ region, only four had candidates who debated on TV and only three constituencies' candidates debated on the radio.

As for the other election actors, the state-owned media continued focusing on *the CEC*, all the other actors lagging a long way behind. For example, *Panorama* news on *Belarus 1* TV station gave *the CEC* 40.3% of its election coverage time, while *the OSCE observers* received 18.2%, *the CIS observers* were given about 14% and *a depersonalised candidate* was granted about 6%. The other actors received from 5% to 0.1% of election coverage time. The same trend is typical of the other monitored nationwide state-owned media, both electronic and printed. The regional electronic media feature *a depersonalised candidate*, *the OSCE observers* and *the CIS observers* as major actors in the election process. Here *the CEC* gives way to *local authorities* and *constituency commissions*.

This pattern of election coverage is virtually in sync with the state ideologues' vision of the role played by the media.

'*The role played by the media in the run-up to the elections,*' said Deputy Head of the Ideology Department of the Mahiloŭ Executive Committee Ms Alena Dzivakova, '*is quite significant. Their task is to inform the society about the basic provisions of the Election Code and the voters' and candidates' rights and duties. The media are also supposed to inform voters what efforts the bodies in charge of holding the elections take in order to create the required conditions for candidate nomination, voting and ballot count, i.e. the protection of Belarusian citizens' rights as voters. The media are also a core driving force in shaping the public opinion, and the Election Code gives special prominence to the media at the stage of campaigning in the run-up to elections.*' (Mahiloŭ regional radio, *Naviny*, 8 August, 2012).

The presented ideological vision clearly leaves no room for informing voters about the candidates' agendas on a large scale, including their discussion in the state-owned media.

The upcoming elections still remained a matter of marginal interest to news programmes. As usual, the above-mentioned *Panorama* gave the election coverage less air time than the weather and sport – 1.88%, 2.82% and 14.7%, respectively. It means that the proportion of air time for election coverage went down a bit as compared to the previous monitored time span, even though technically the campaign entered its most active phase. Low-key coverage of the elections is typical of the other monitored state-owned media, too.

Of the independent media, the closest attention to the election-related issues was given by the online resource [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by). Furthermore, it increased the number of election actors it covered as compared to the previous monitoring stage from twenty six to thirty one. The printed independent media offered a much narrower picture of the election process. Thus, *The Narodnaja Vola* featured or mentioned eight election actors and *The Naša Niva* spoke about six of them, while *The Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* wrote about five election actors in its thick edition. The former two papers criticised the performance of the government, while the latter gave all the actors neutral coverage exclusively.

Thus, the monitoring data shows that the independent press may have given the elections more coverage than their state-owned counterparts, but they still lagged behind [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by) in presenting the general picture of the upcoming elections.

Generally speaking, the monitored stage is characterised by a virtual absence of voters' opinions on the candidates' programmes in the media and lack of voters' visions of the social, economic and political problems that the Belarusian society faces.

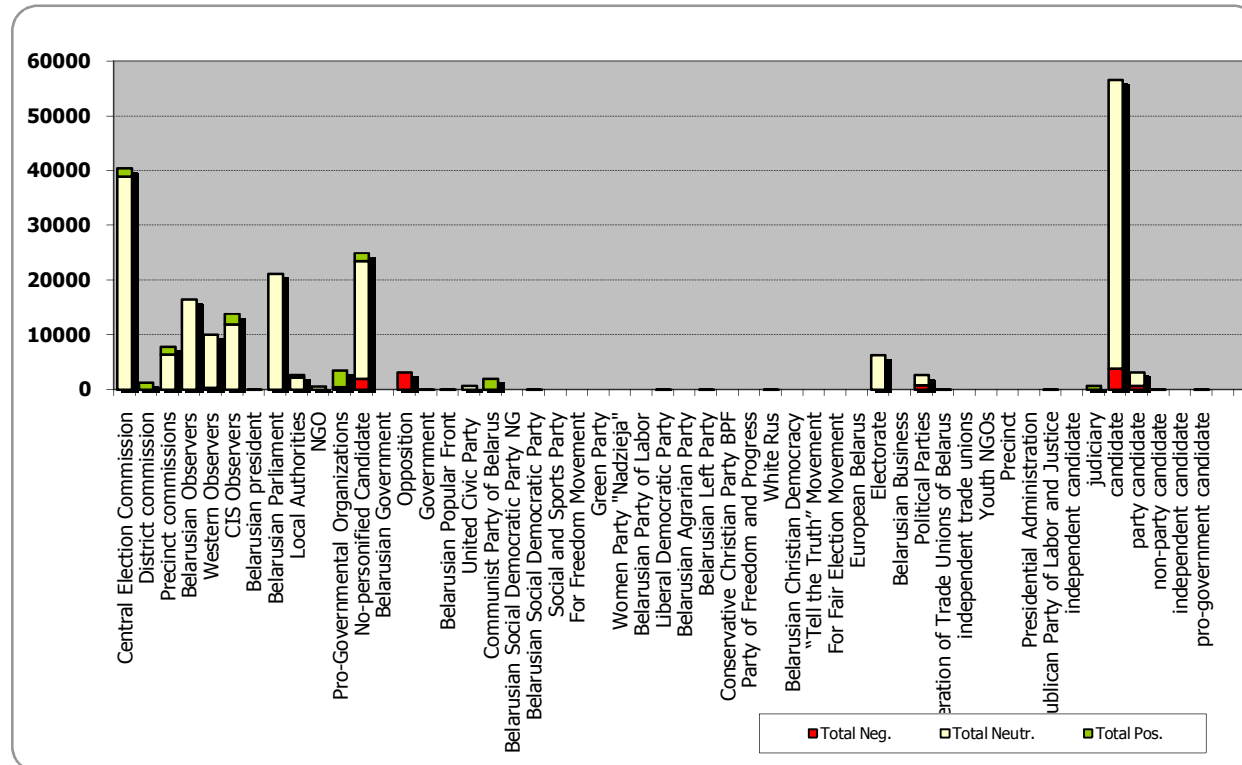
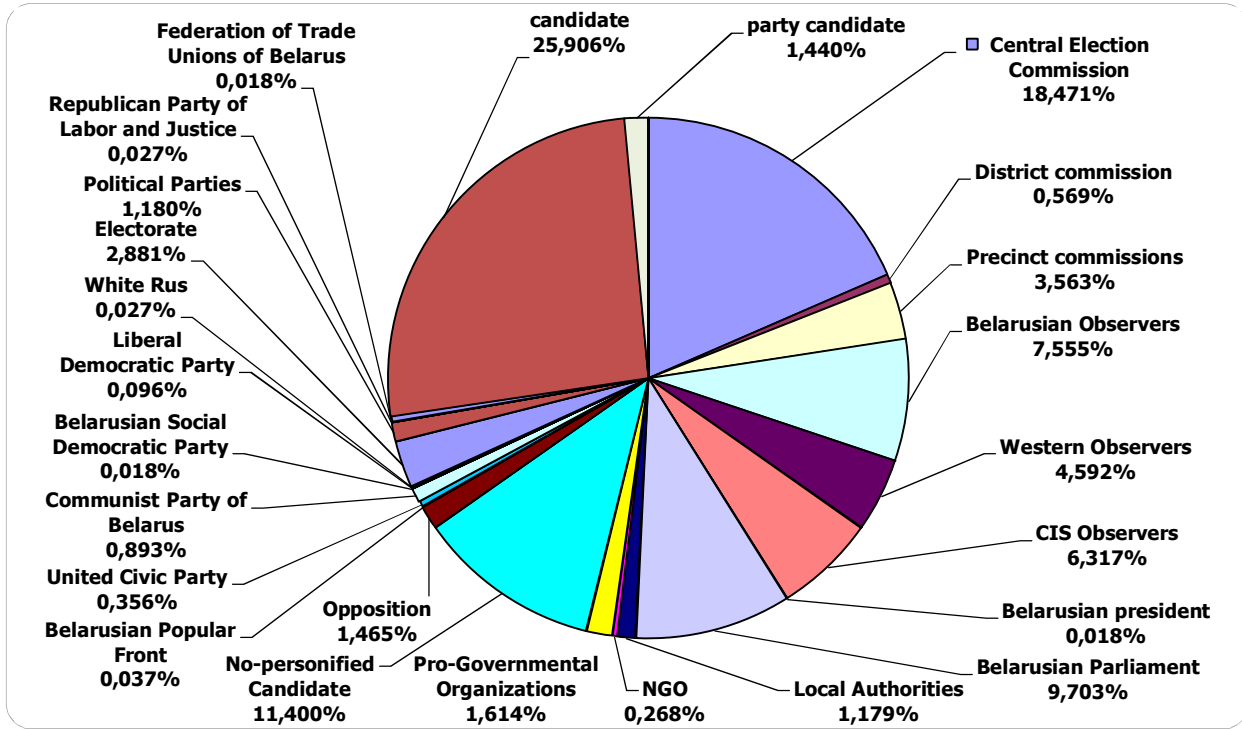


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

BELTA.BY

03.09 - 15.09.2012

Measured in symbols



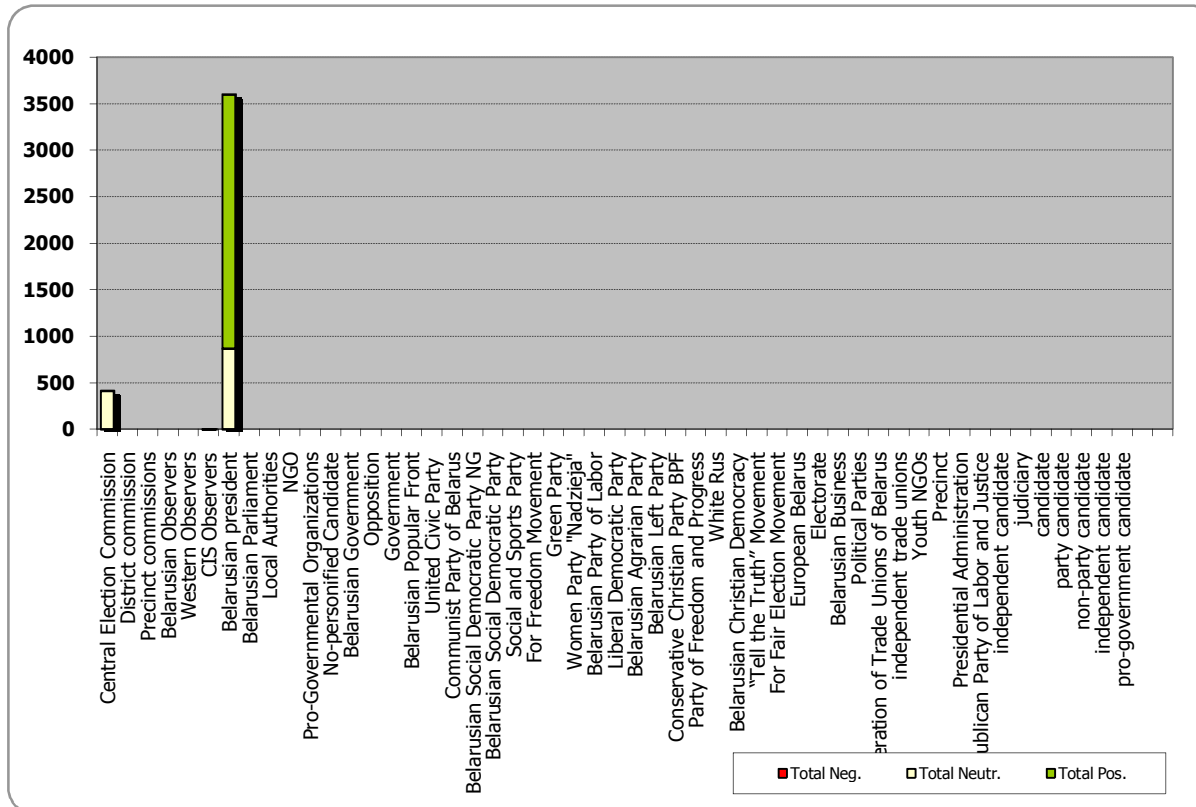
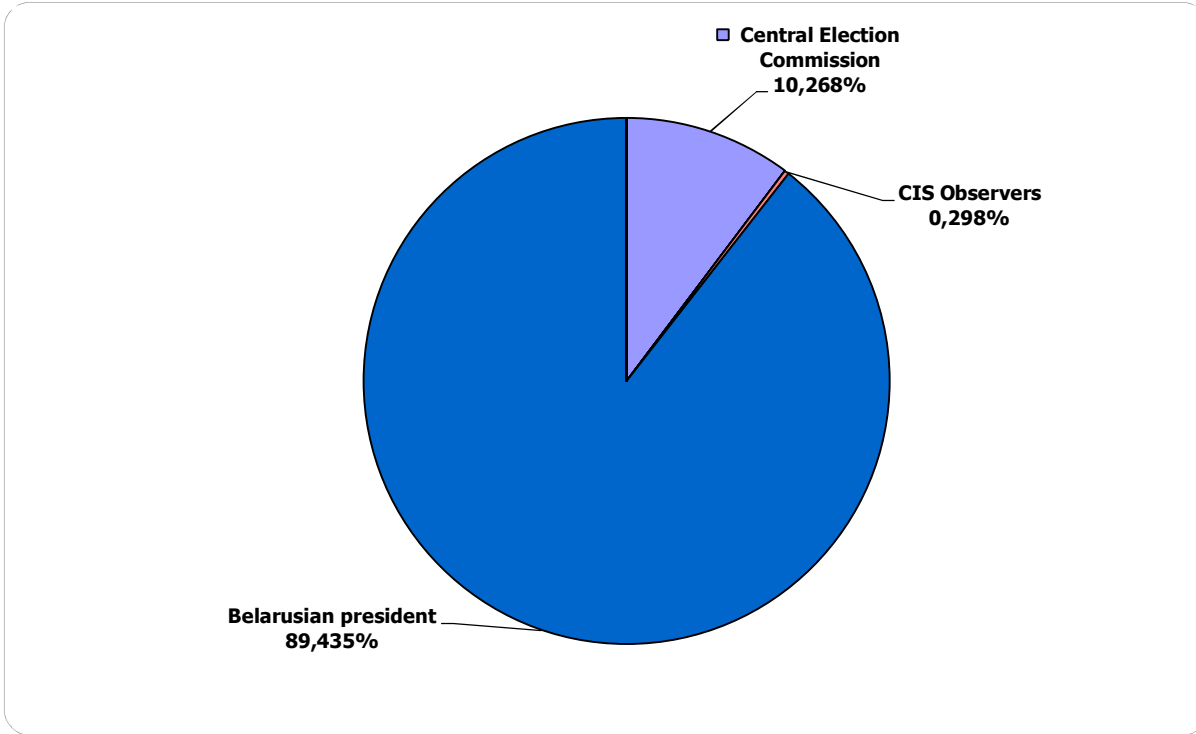


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

## "Sovietskaja Bieloruszija"

03.09 - 15.09.2012

Measured in cm2



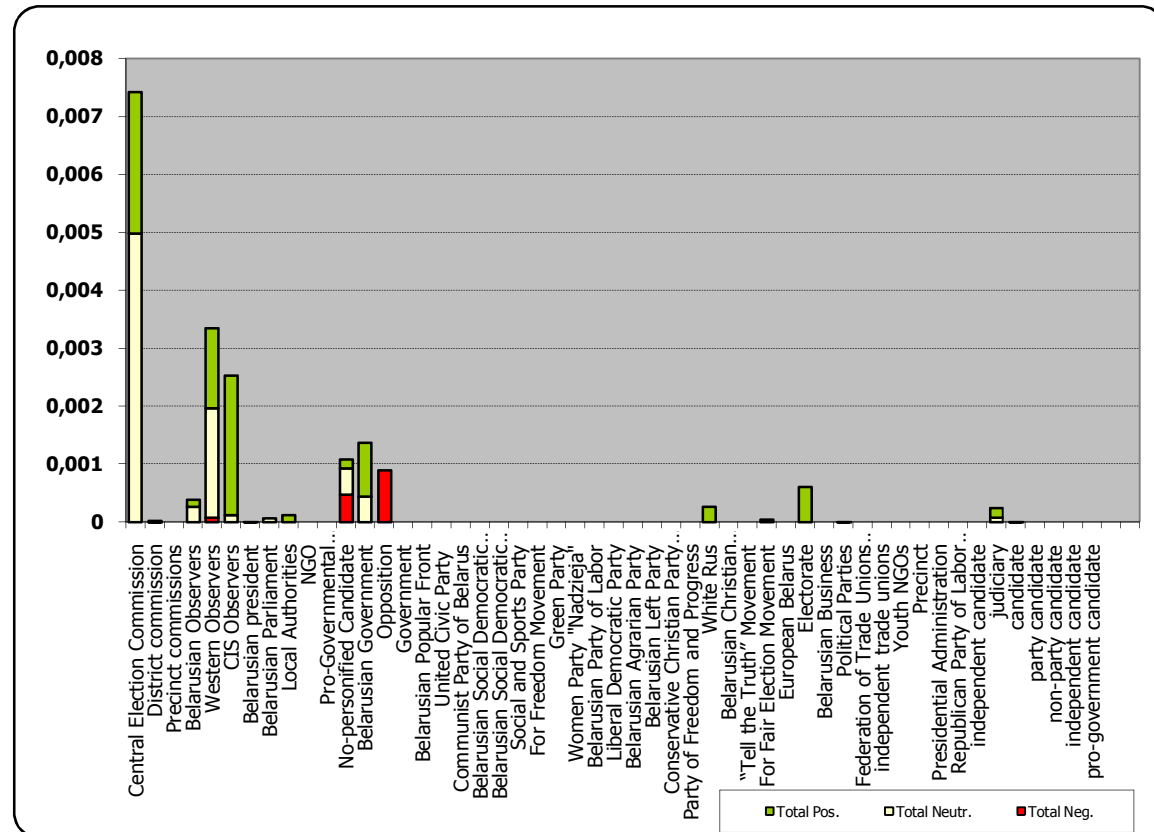
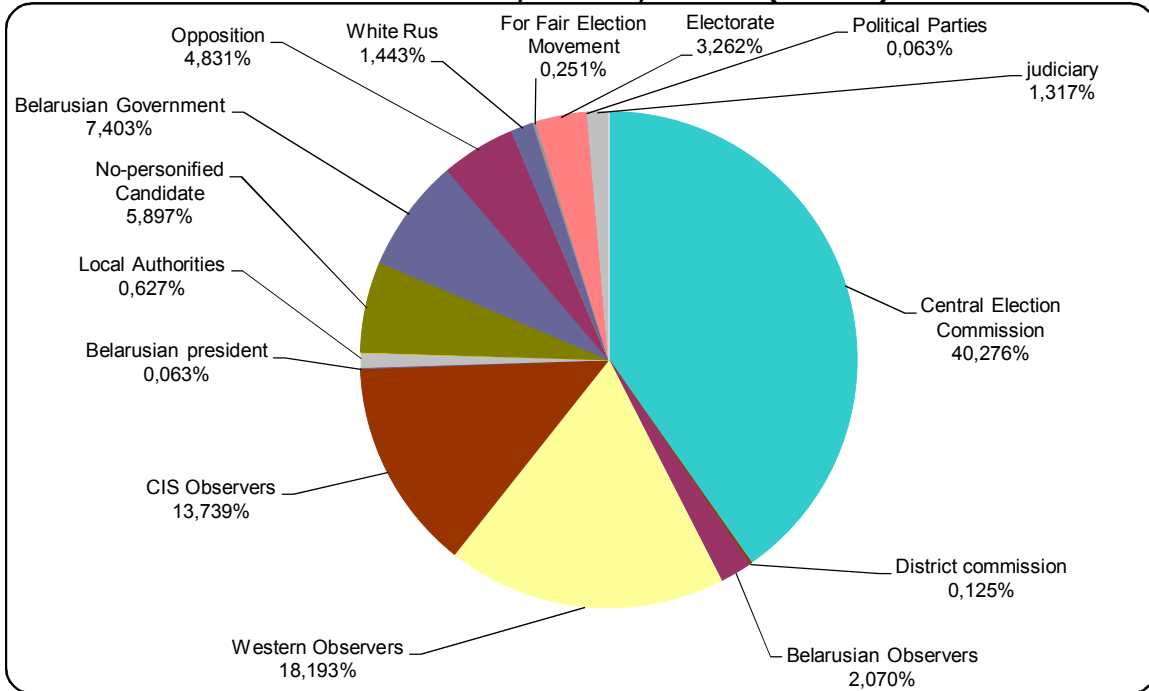


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

## Panorama

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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



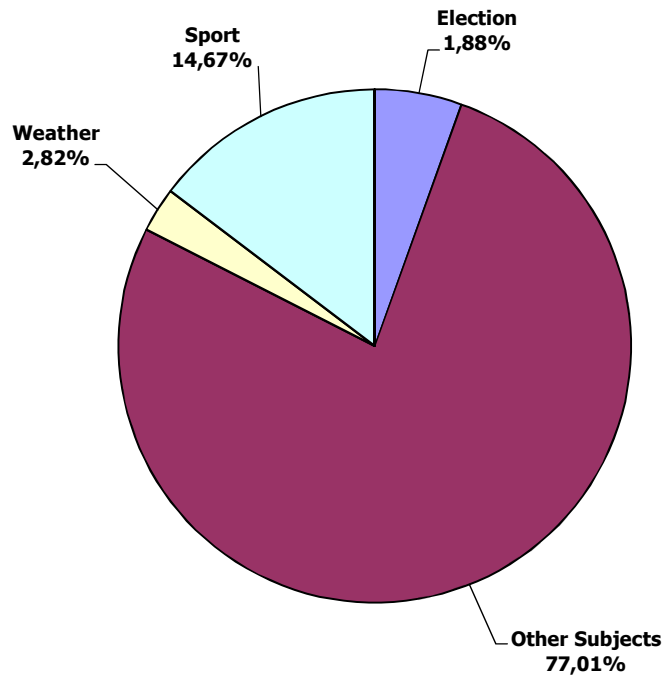


## BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

### Panorama

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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



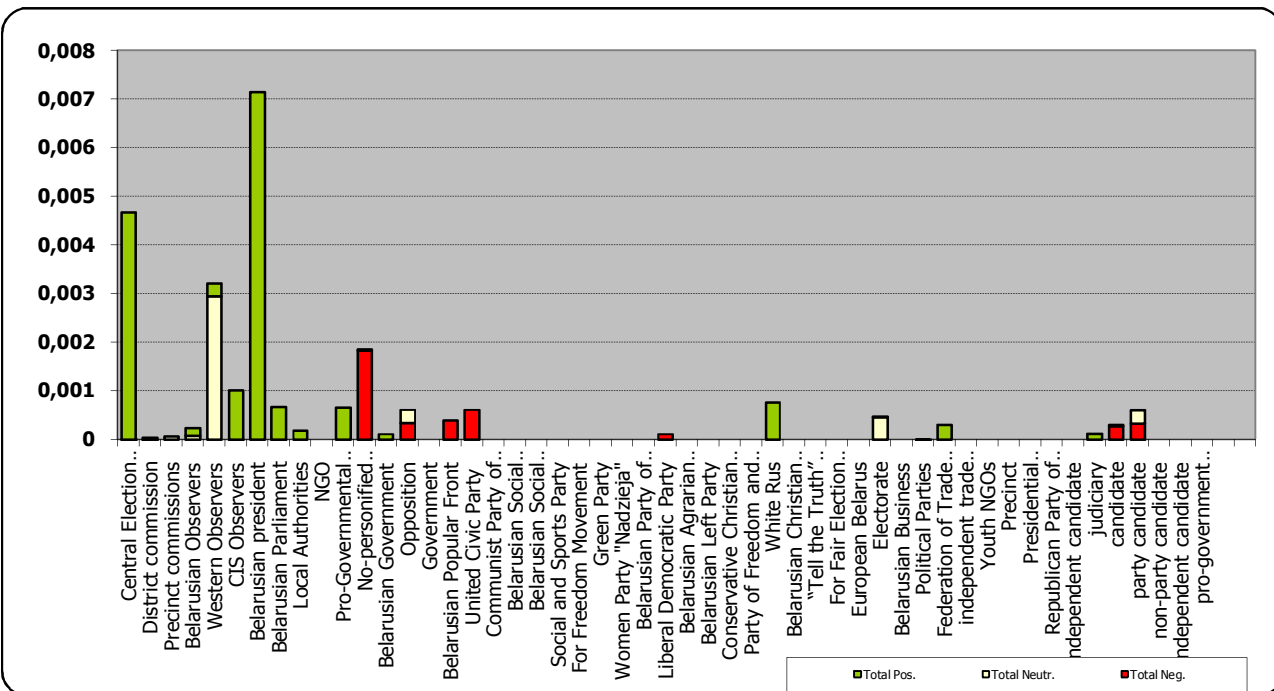
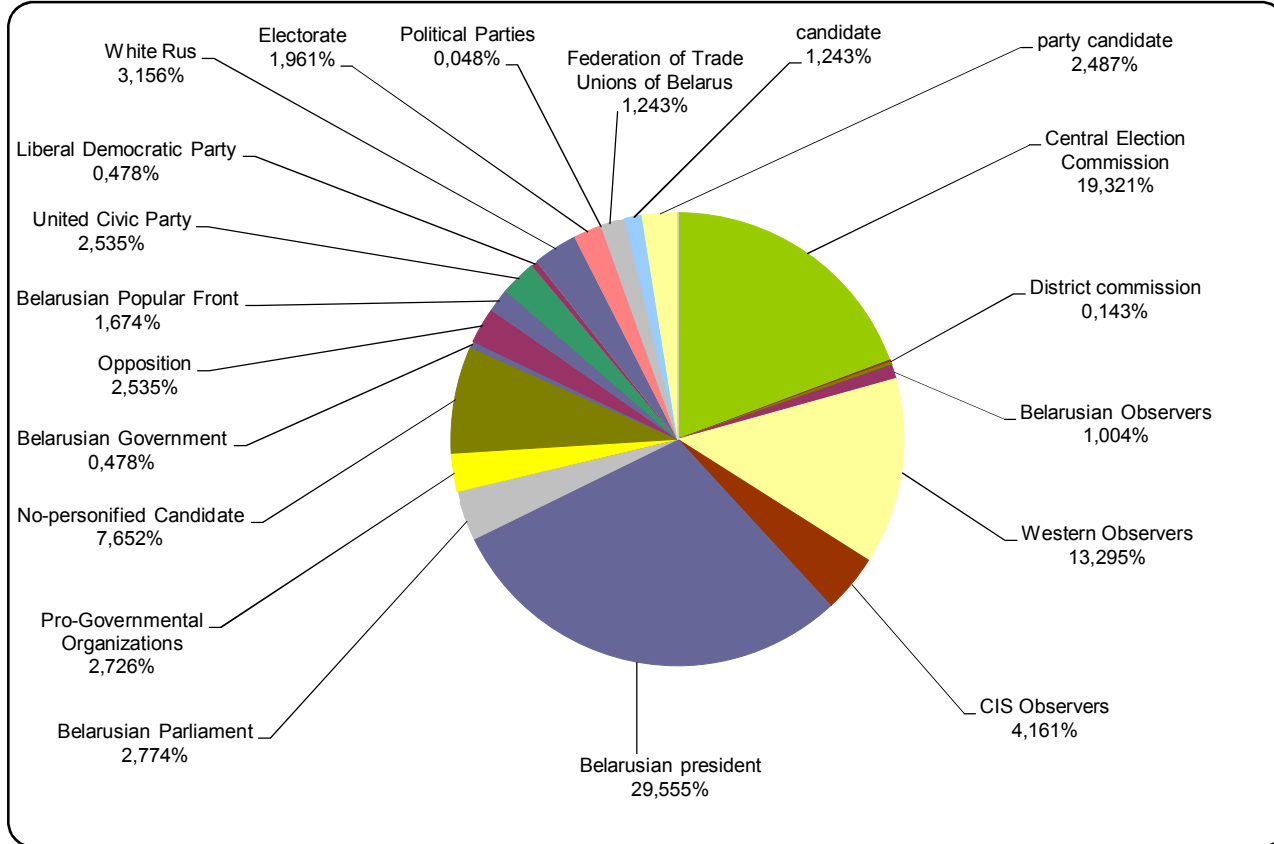


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

## ONT/NASHI NOVOSTI

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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





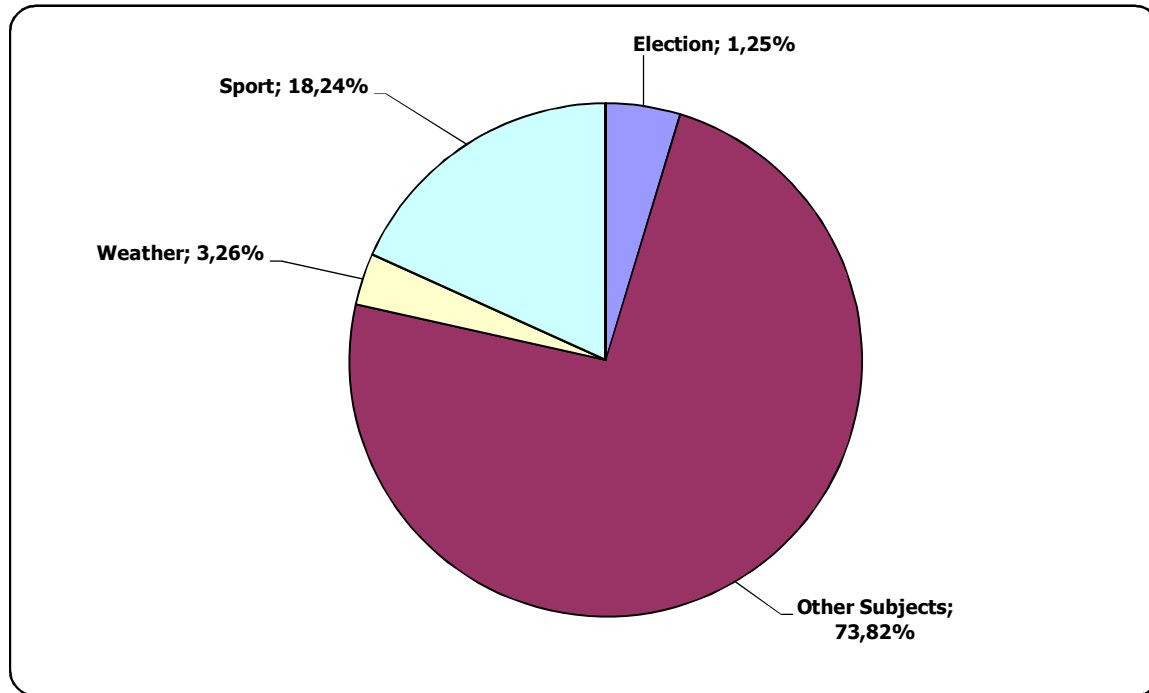


## BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

ONT/NASHI NOVOSTI

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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



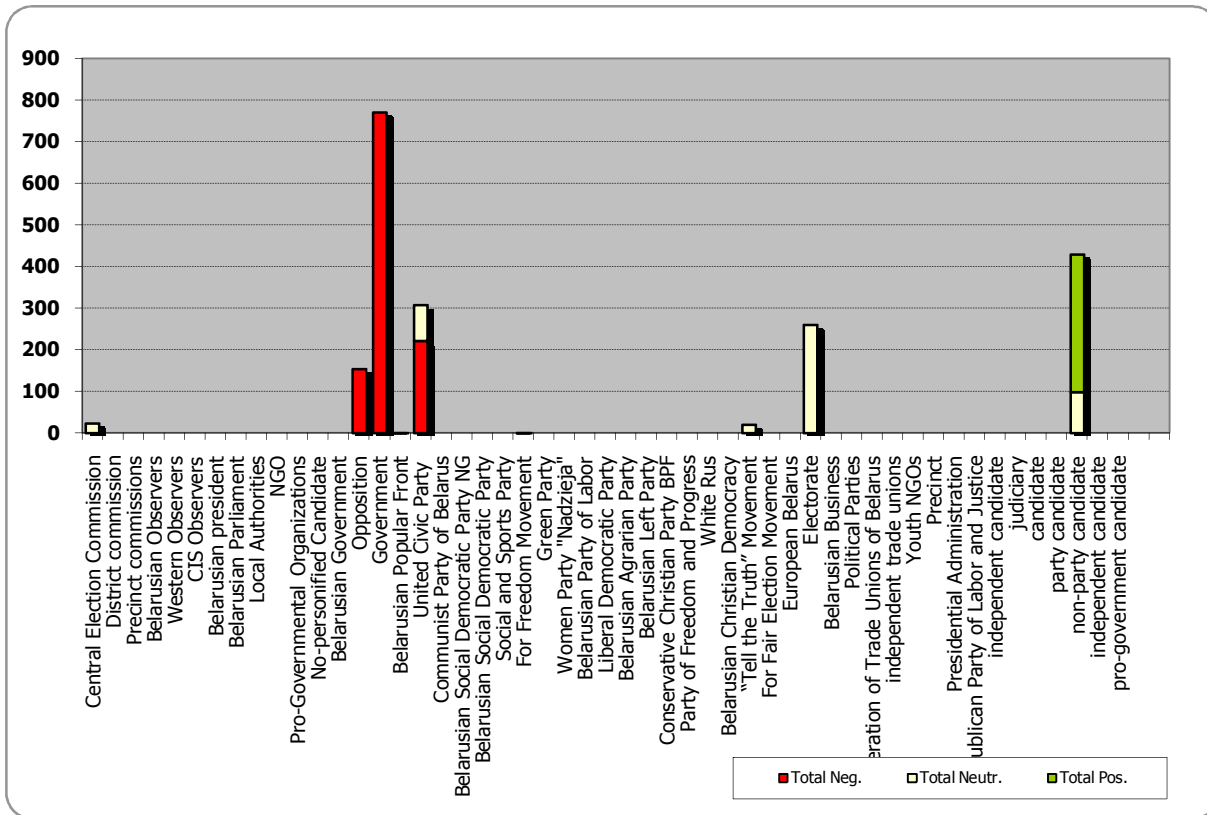
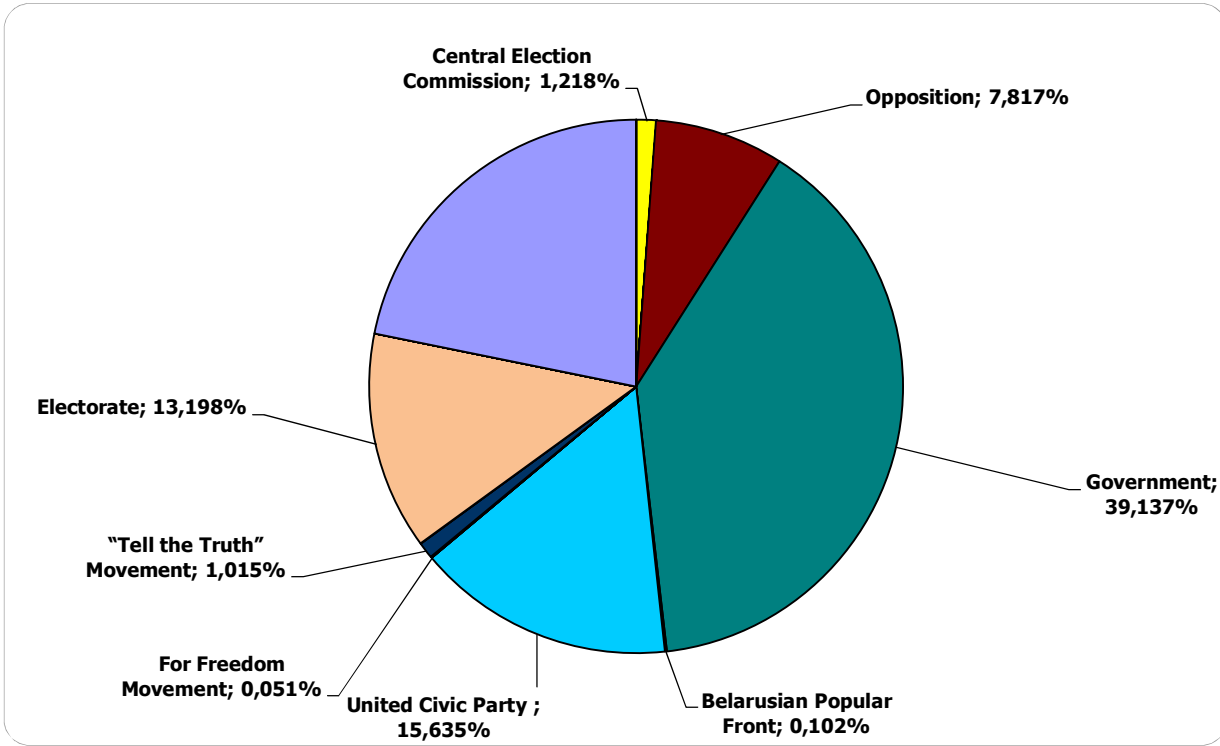


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

**"Narodnaja Vola"**

03.09 - 15.09.2012

Measured in cm2

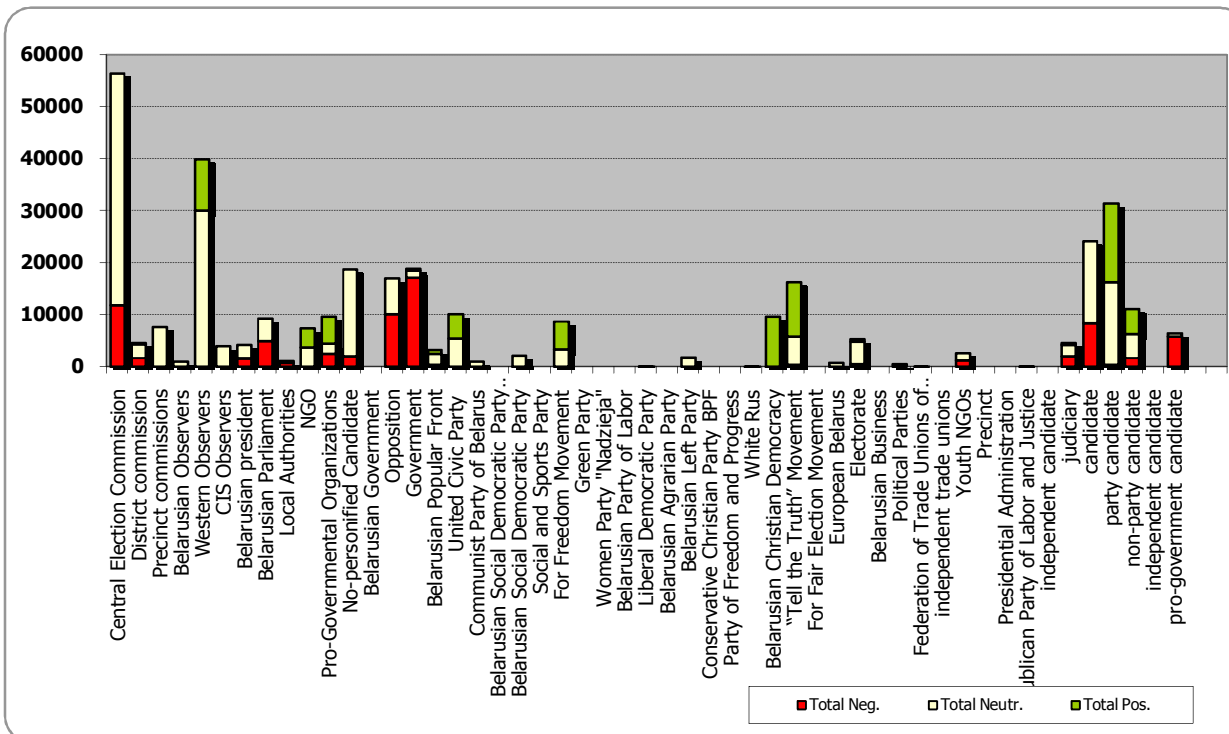
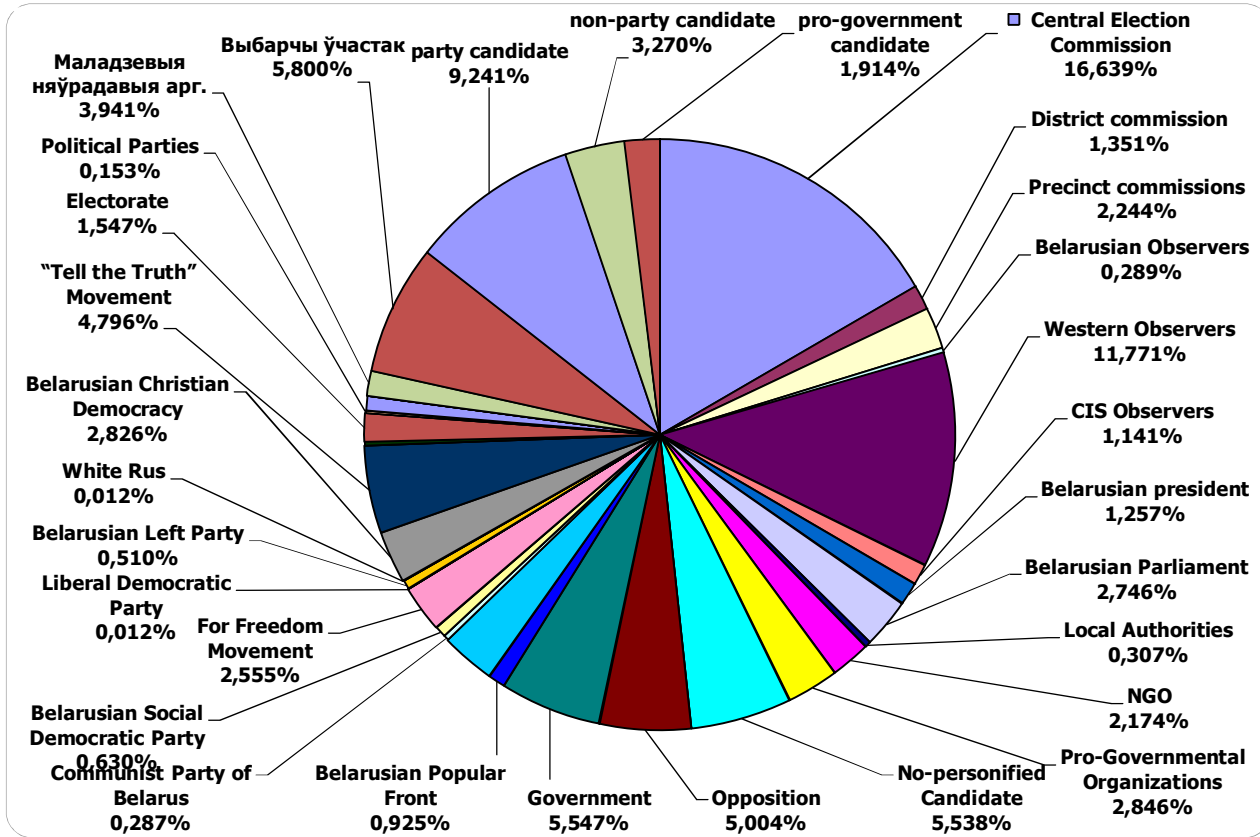




# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

NAVINY.BY  
03.09 - 15.09.2012

Measured in symbols



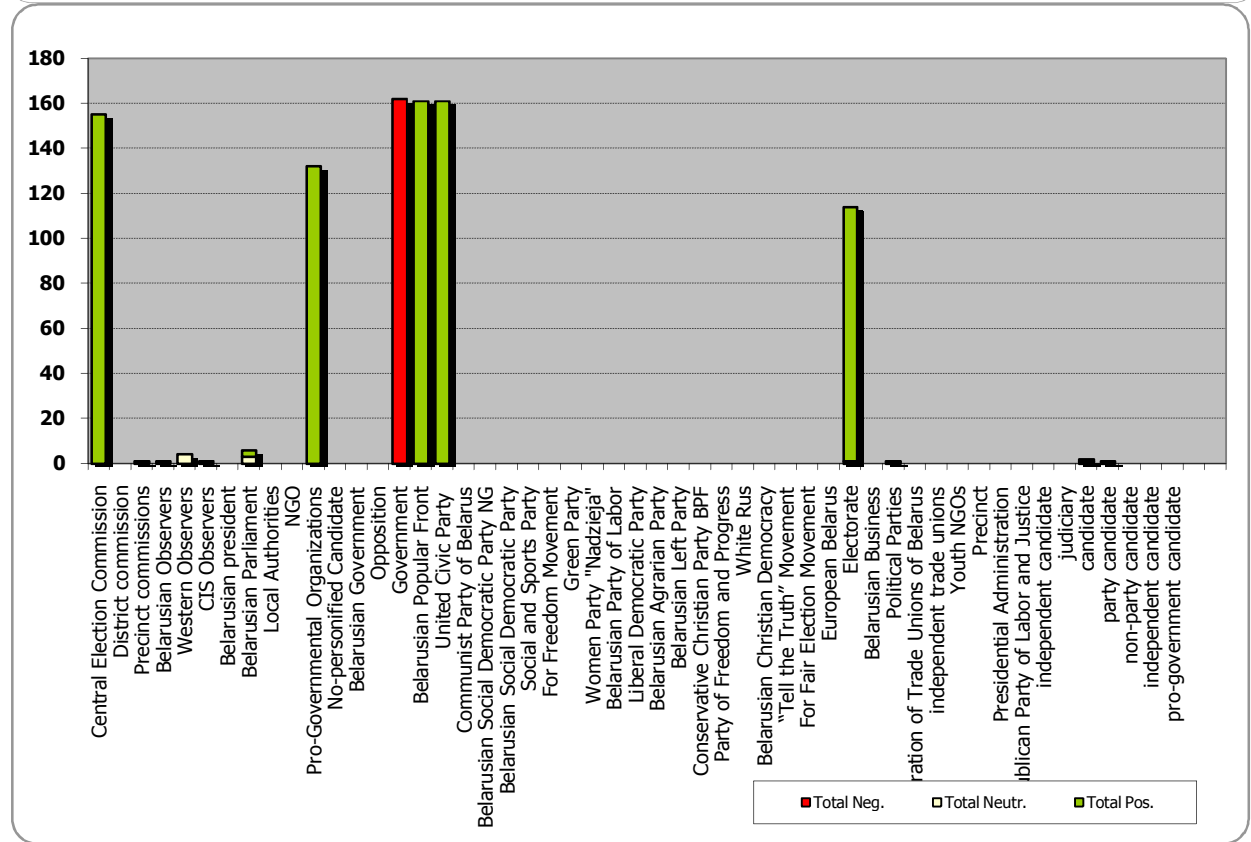
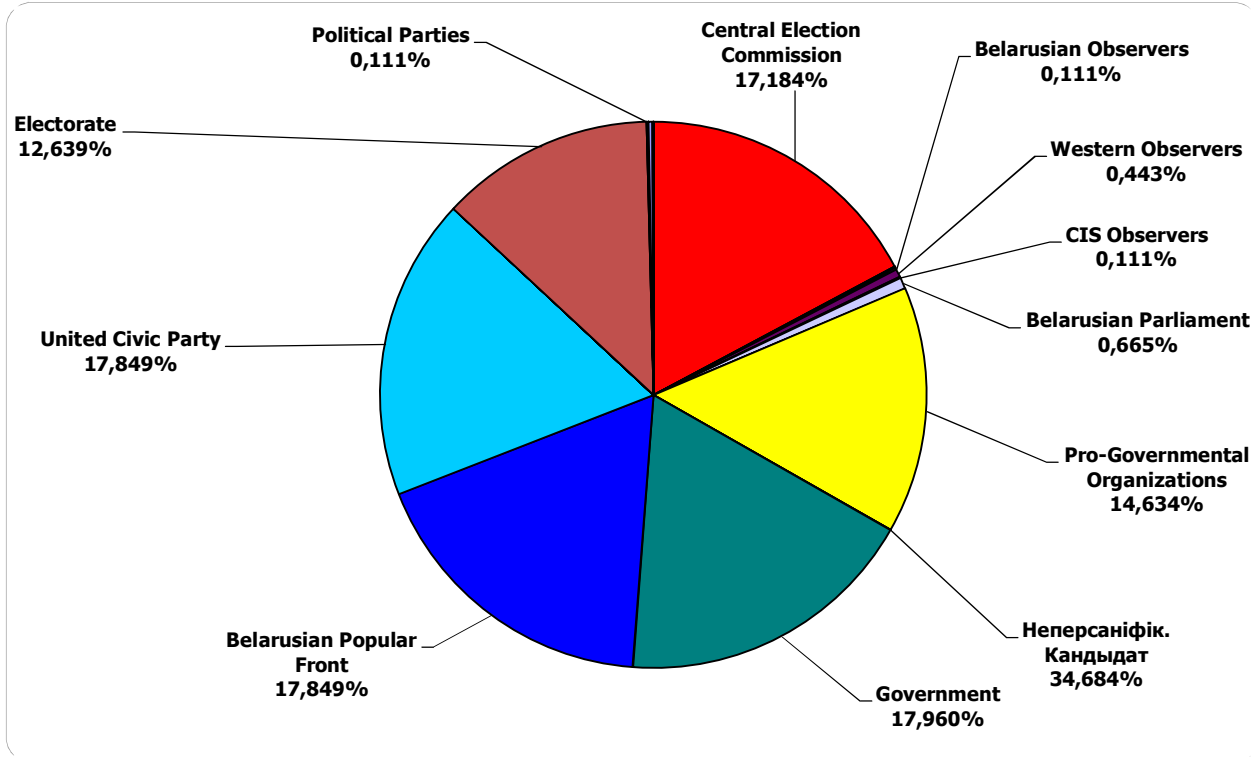


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

"Mogilevskaja pravda"

03.09 - 15.09.2012

Measured in cm2



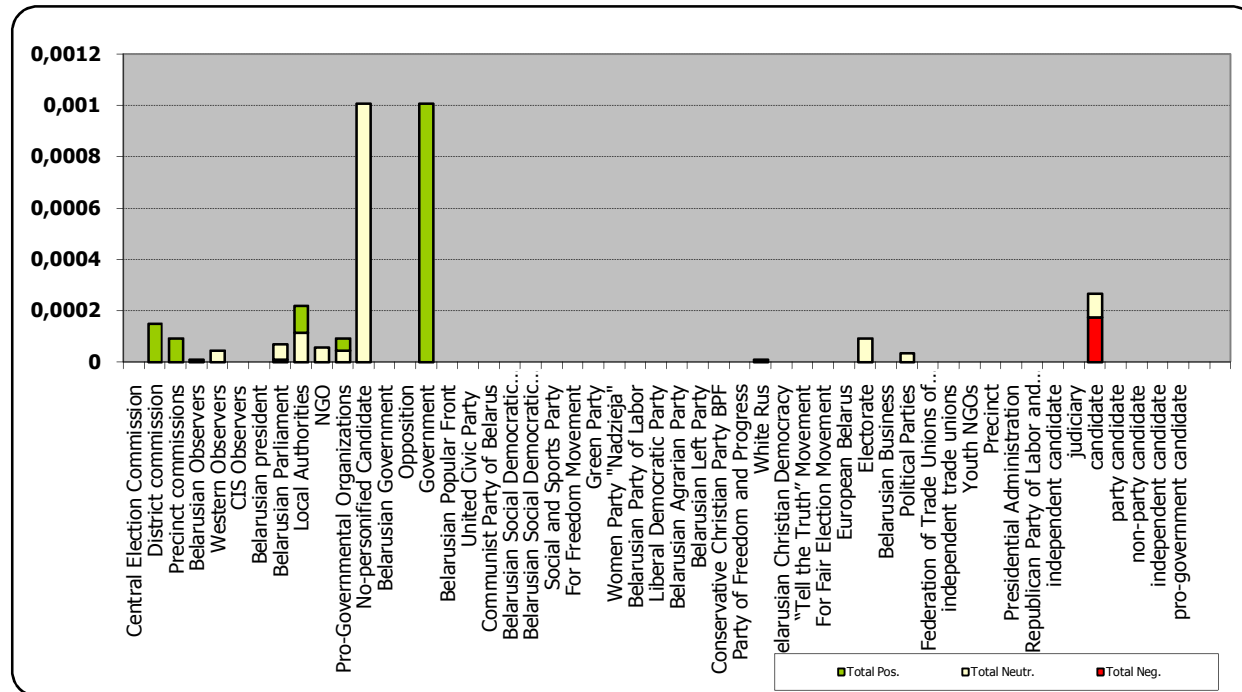
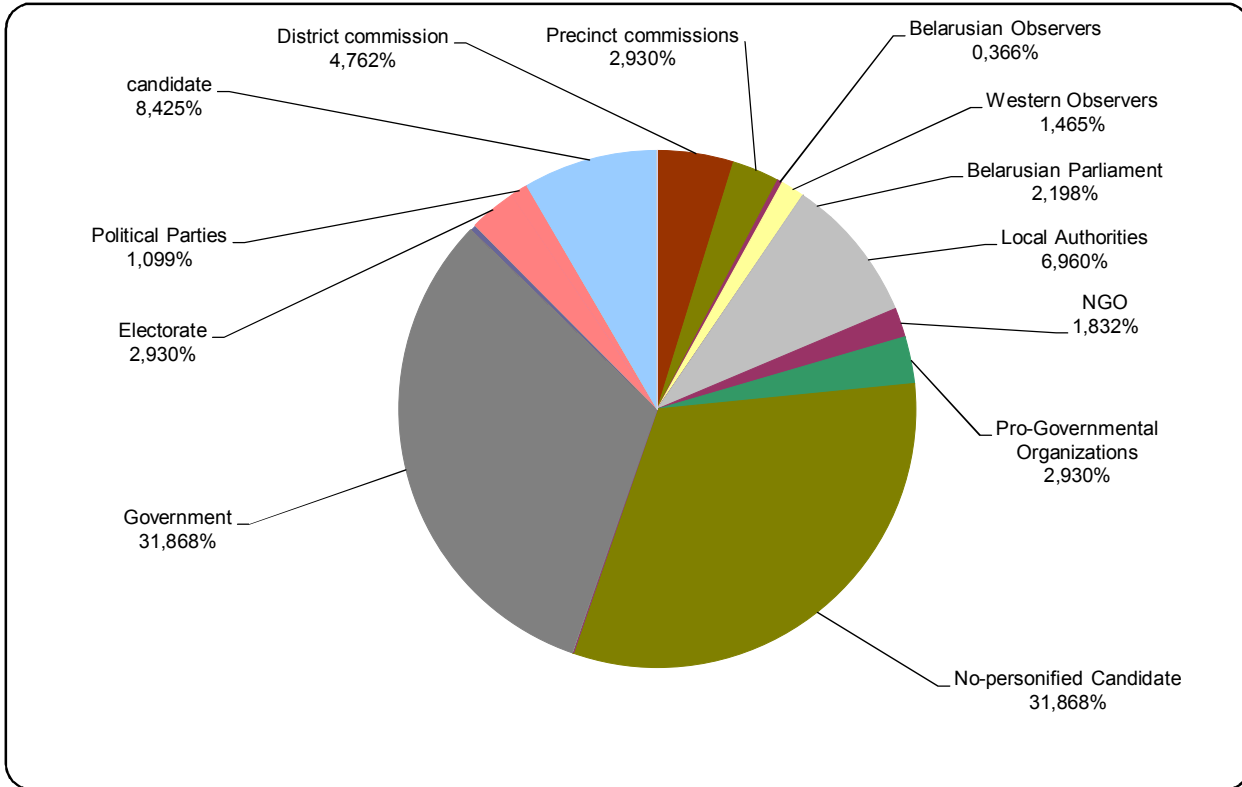


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

TRC "Mahilou"/Radio "News"

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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



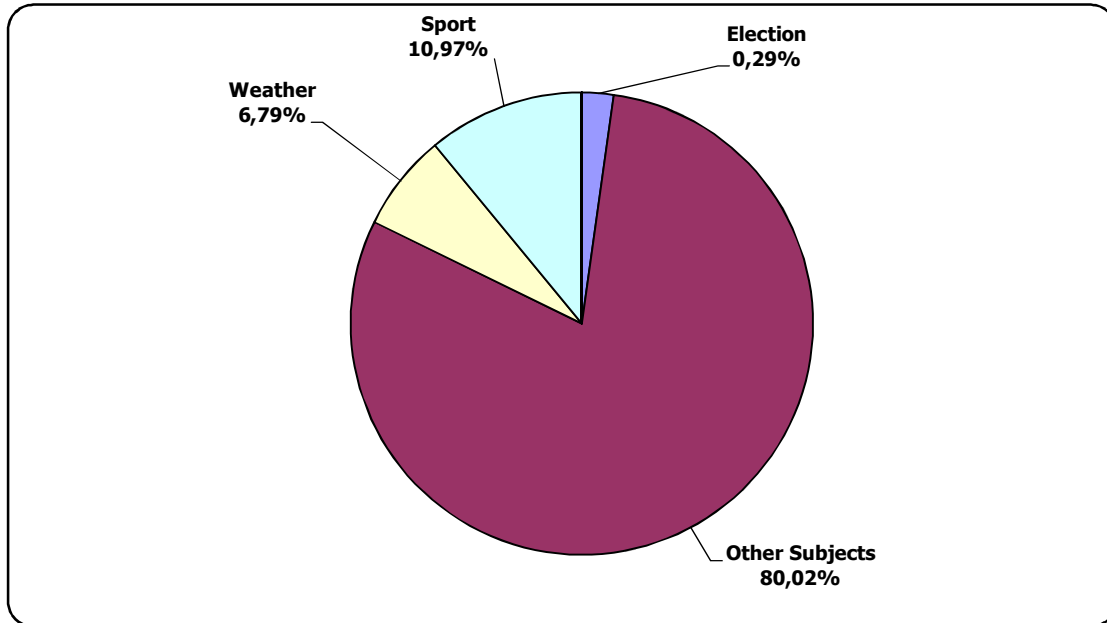


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TRC "Mahilou"/Radio "News"

03.09 - 15.09.2012

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



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