

BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Media Coverage of the 2008 parliamentary elections in Belarus Report n.6

(September 5 –20, 2008)

Minsk, 23 September – BAJ, an independent, non-partisan Belarusian NGO dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, has been systematically monitoring the media coverage of the 28 September parliamentary elections. BAJ seeks to evaluate the mass media's performance in providing objective and balanced coverage of the contestants and their platforms so the citizens of Belarus can make informed choices at the ballot box. The project's findings are determined through a well-defined and rigorous methodology and are not intended to support any one candidate or political party, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during the campaign season.

In this monitoring period, BAJ has monitored four national and regional TV channels, three radio stations, 9 newspapers and 4 online media outlets¹. The media monitors analyzed the prime time news programs assessing and producing findings on the time allocated to all contestants running in the elections, as well as the time allocation given to the incumbent President, the government and other relevant entities (monitored subjects). The tone of the coverage was also evaluated. Quantitative analysis measures the total amount of time devoted to monitored subjects on news programs. Qualitative analysis evaluates the tone in which the monitored subjects have been portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. The enclosed charts show the results of the monitoring from 5 till 20 September.

During the monitoring period, registered candidates continued conducting their election campaigns, including free-of-charge presentations in the State-funded media². On 13 September Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) Mrs. Yarmochina announced about a decision to rebroadcast the free-of-charge presentations of all candidates which have so far been aired on State-funded electronic media outlets.

HIGHLIGHTS

While the CEC decision to rebroadcast the free-of-charge presentations has formally increased the time devoted for the campaign by the State-funded media, the potential impact on voters' ability to form opinions of candidates remains questionable. Partly these presentations were once again aired outside of the peak time hours - from 17.30 till 18.30 on *Lad TV Channel*. It is unfortunate that the decision failed to offer some more free space for candidates in the State-funded press.

The coverage of the campaign by the State-funded media remains to be low-key. Similarly as in the previous monitoring periods, instead of providing more information on candidates and their

¹ 1 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.

² These are *Zviazda*, *Narodnaja gazeta*, *Respublika*, *Belaruskaja niva* as well as regional and district newspapers, *Lad* and *STB* TV Channels, *Staslica* radio station as well as regional State funded TV Channels and radio stations. It should be stressed that all these media outlets are not among the most rating media in Belarus.

platforms, the State-owned media chose to focus on technical procedures of the elections. This approach could be seen *inter alia* on the National Channel *ONT (Nasi Novosti* news program), the *1st Channel of the National radio (Radiofact* news program) and the newspaper of presidential administration *Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya* (see appropriate charts enclosed).

Moreover, the State-funded media continued to allocate the bulk of their election-related coverage to the President and the CEC. For example, during this monitoring period, the combined coverage for the incumbent President and CEC ranges from 87% in *Radiofact (1st National Radio Channel)*, to 99% in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya* papers. Similarly as during the previous monitoring periods, it is evident that the State-owned media have so far failed to bring information about different political agendas, platforms, social and political scenarios for the Belarusian society. Despite the fact that the campaign coverage of the media is lacklustre, the State-owned newspaper *Respublika (September 18, 2008)* wrote: “*Situation prior to the voting day in Belarus does not leave any doubt that the elections in the country will be conducted in a quiet and business-like atmosphere.*”

In addition, those media outlets, which are not legally obliged to allocate free-of-charge airtime or space generally did not allocate any significant share of time and space to cover the election-related topics. This could be seen on the *Radiofact* news program –, the total share of time devoted to elections, which was some 10 per cent of the coverage during the previous monitoring period (*August 23 – September 5*), actually dropped to less than 9 per cent in the last monitoring period.

On the other hand, some State-funded media outlets did allocate more significant time to election-related topics. For example, *1st channel* devoted as much as 71 per cent of its time to election campaign coverage in its regular analytical program *Panorama Nedeli*. While the program featured also opposition candidates, they were portrayed exclusively in a negative way.

In comparison with the previous period, private newspapers and online outlets provided more information about political parties and candidates. For example, independent online outlet www.naviny.by almost doubled the virtual space dedicated to opposition candidates and considerably increased the space dedicated to different political parties. The coverage of opposition candidates was mainly neutral in tone. As regards the President and pro-governmental candidates this coverage has been both neutral and critical. In addition, the non-State *Narodnaja Vola* even published a special issue dedicated to the *United Democratic Party* and its candidates. However, due to the extremely limited circulation and geographic outreach, the independent press and online media outlets cannot substitute for the overall lack of objective and balanced reporting by the State-funded media.

Conclusion

This period’s findings confirm the trends identified in the previous monitoring reports – the media coverage of the campaign in the state media aims at minimising political competition between different political forces, excluding the voters from the competition and marginalising alternative programmes (and alternative possibilities) for the Belarusian society and its development.

The CEC decision to rebroadcast all candidates’ speeches did not change the general character of the election campaign coverage in the State run media. This coverage still excludes any objective portrayal of the current political situation in the country and does not present any opposing or dissenting views critical of the current establishment

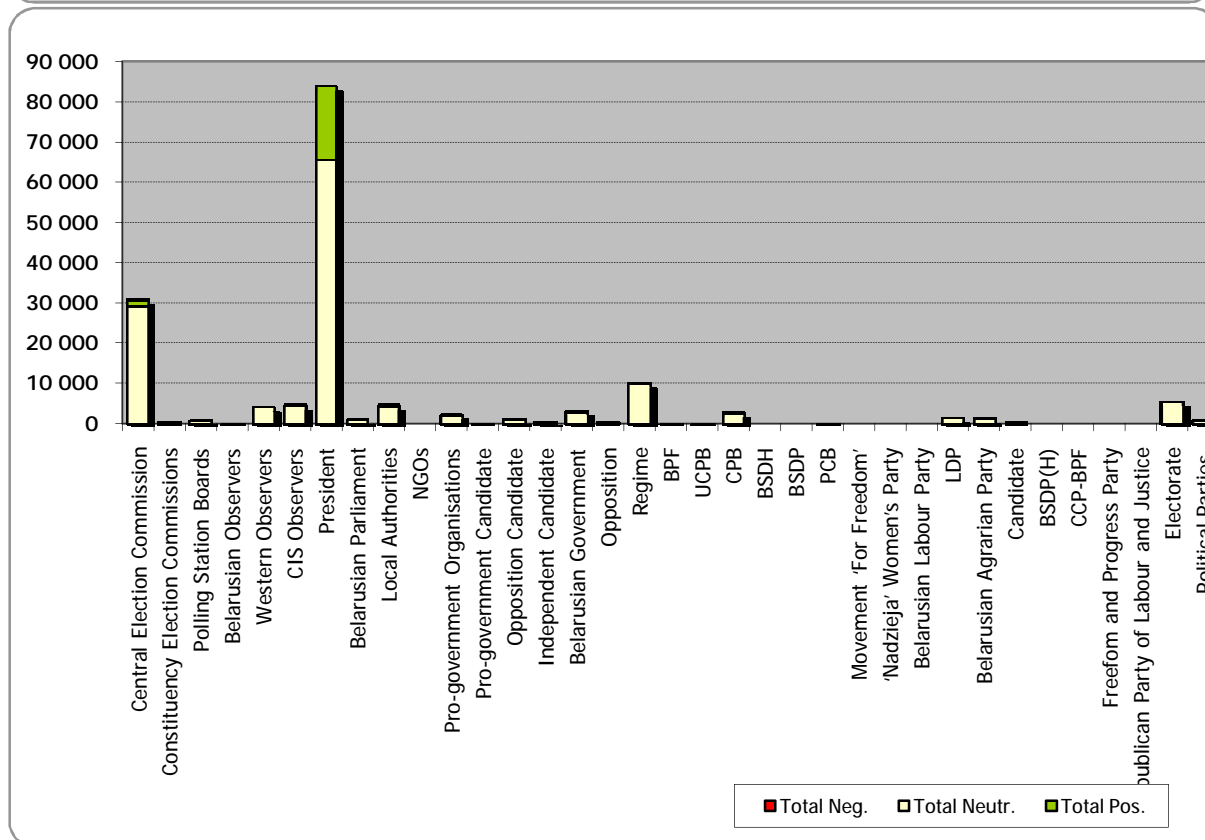
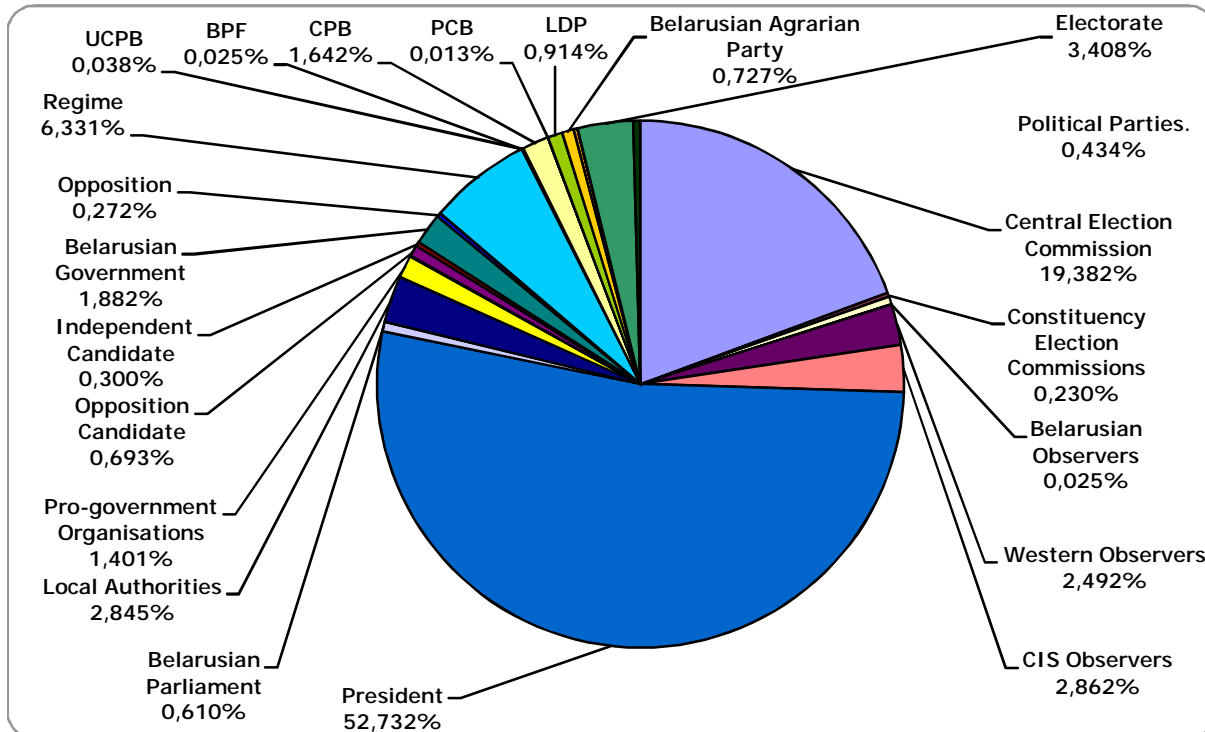
The state-funded media have so far failed to cover the election campaign in the way to give voters sufficient information to make intelligent choice at ballot box. They also marginalized the role of candidates as insignificant figures in this campaign.



BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

belta.by
06.09-20.09.2008

Measured in symbols



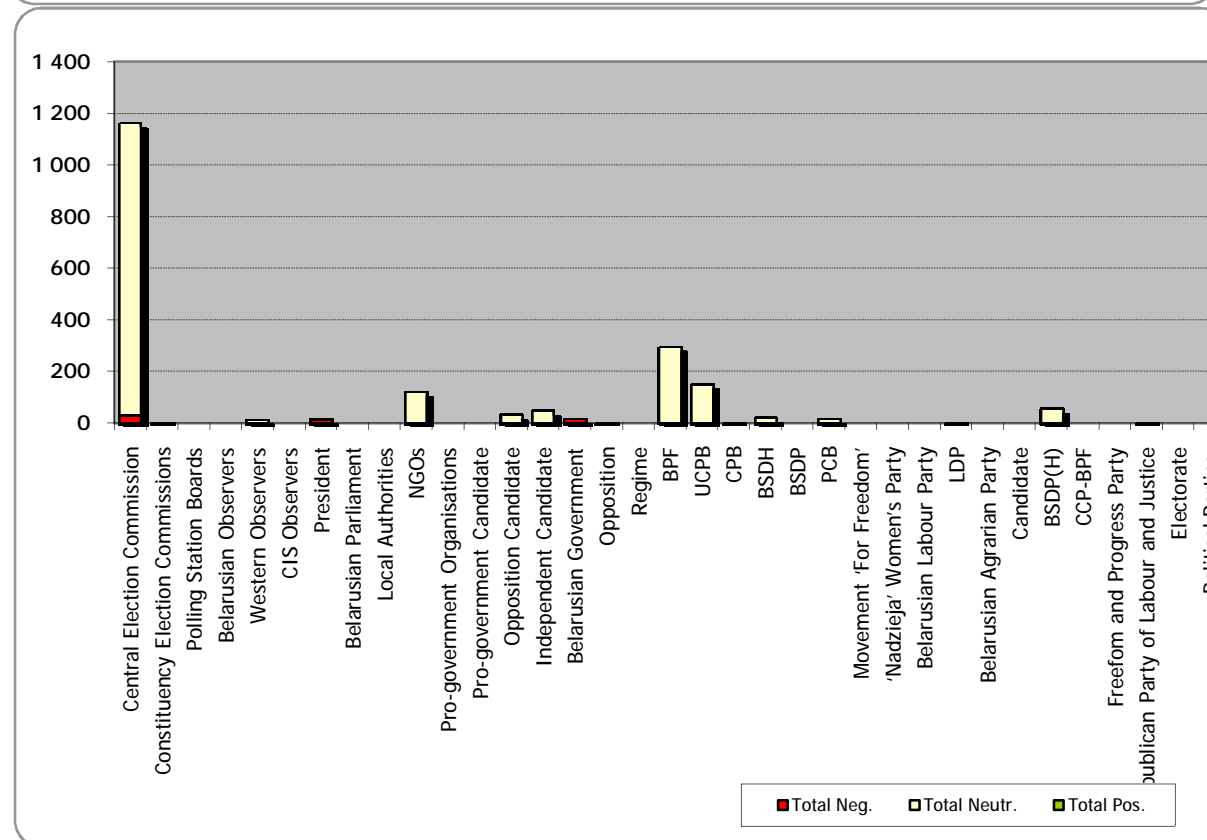
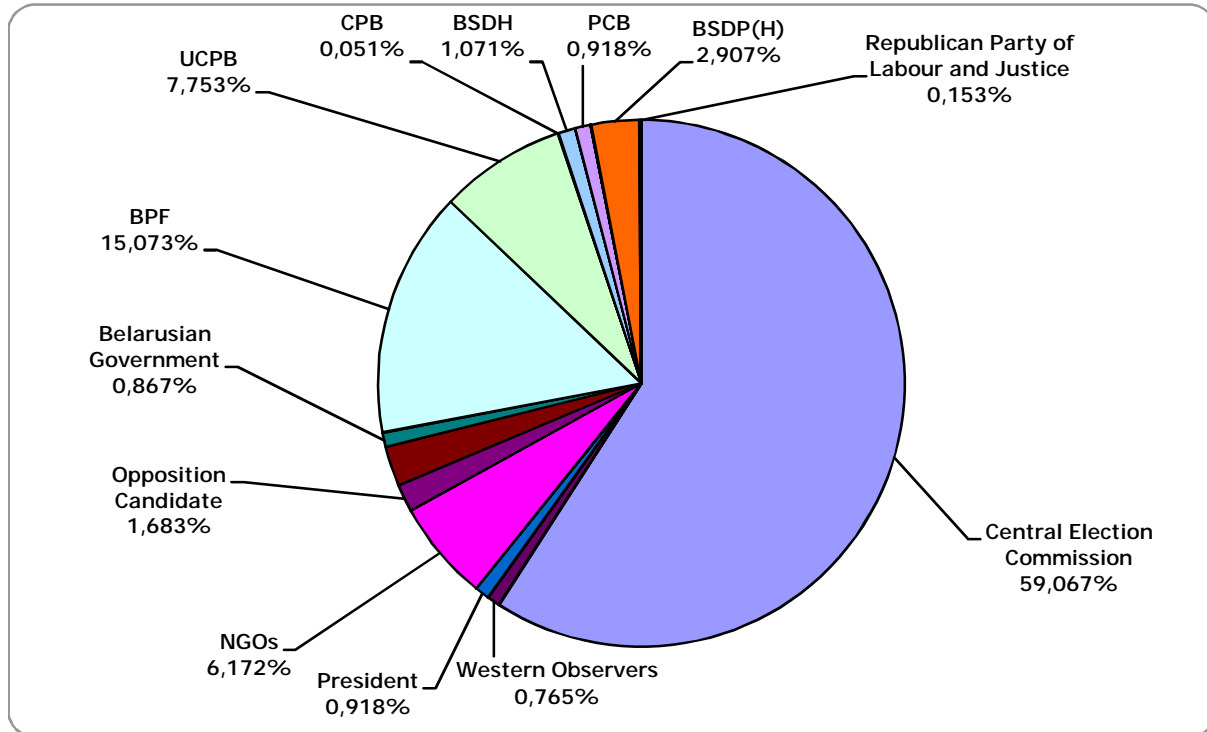


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Belorusy i Rynok

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Measured in cm²



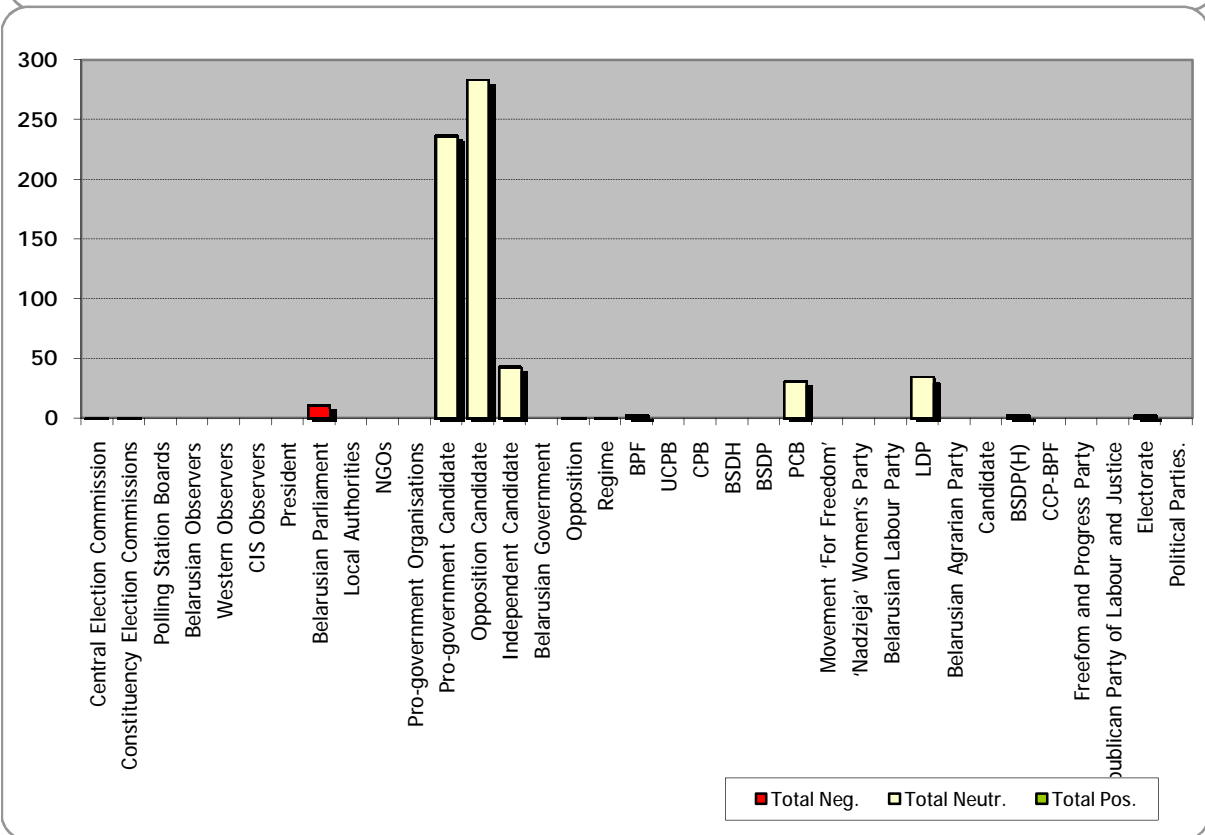
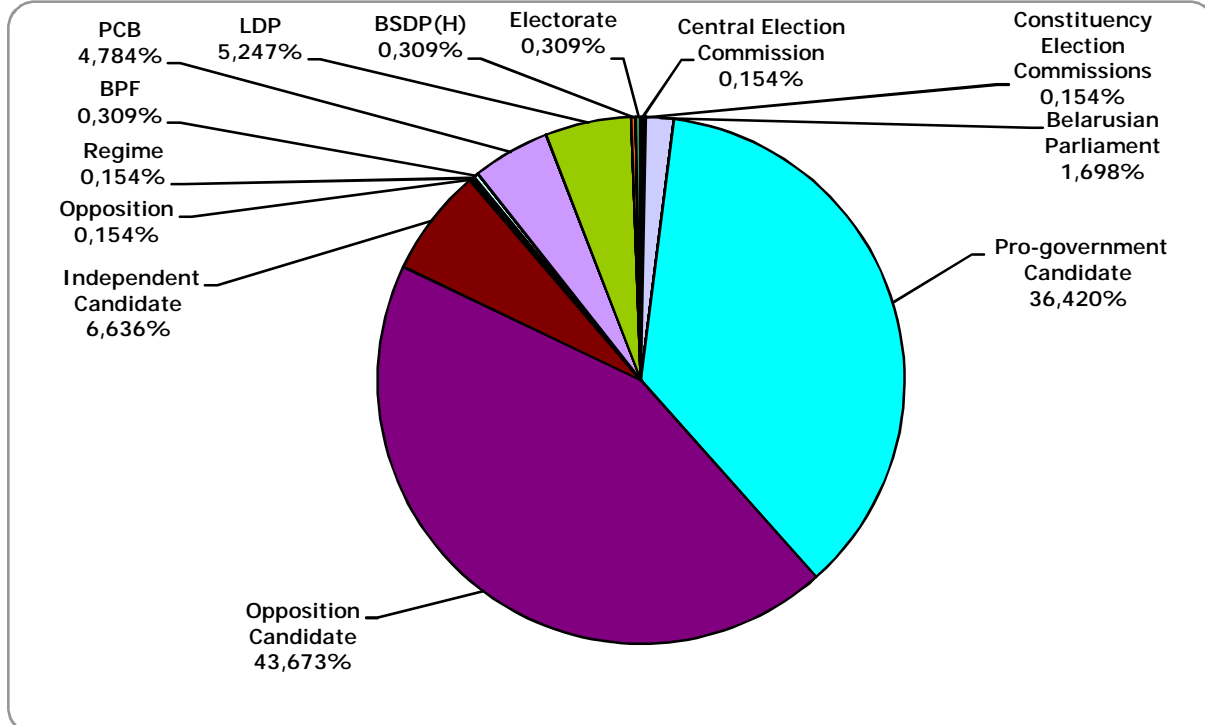


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Brestskiy Kuryer

06.09-19.09.2008

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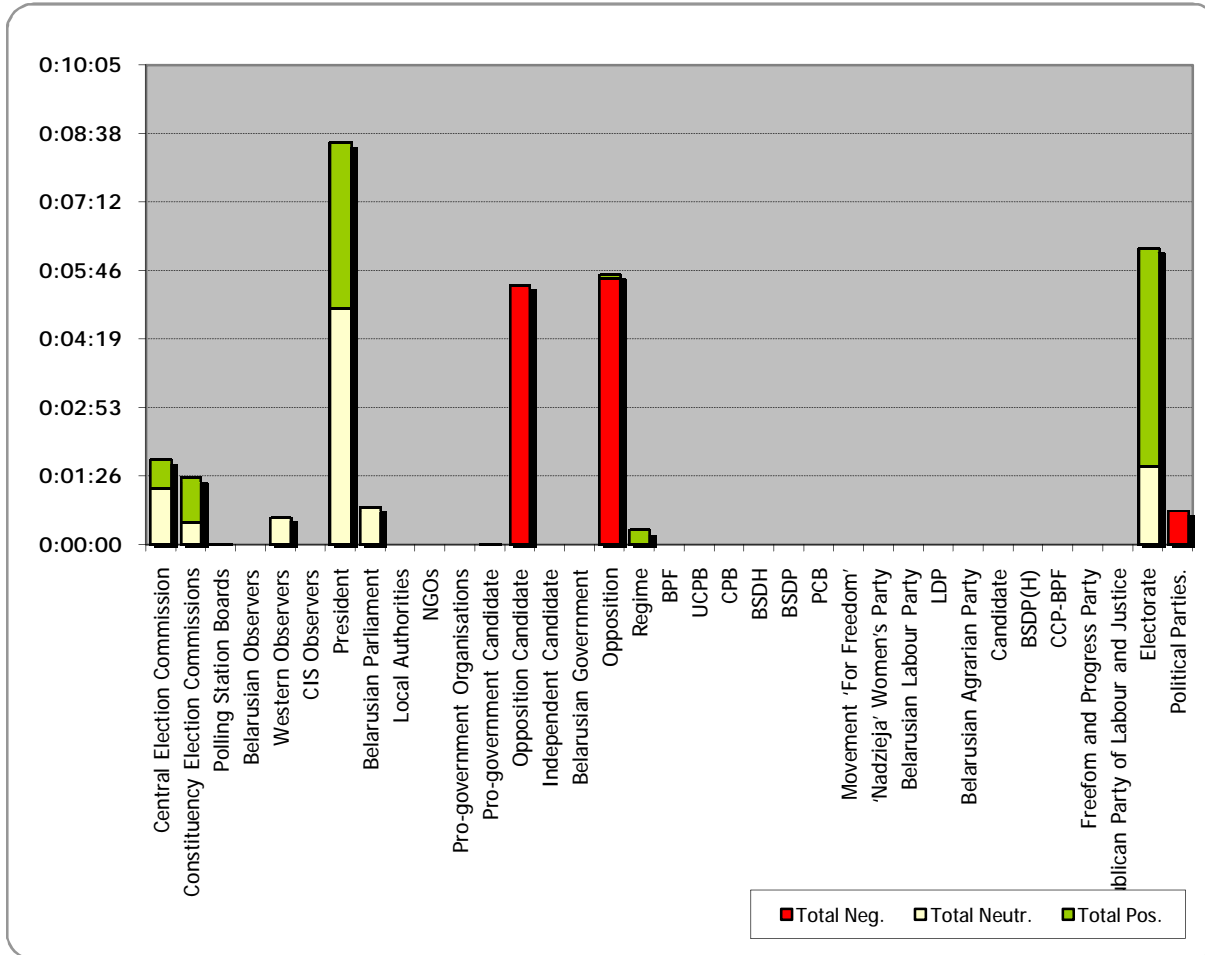
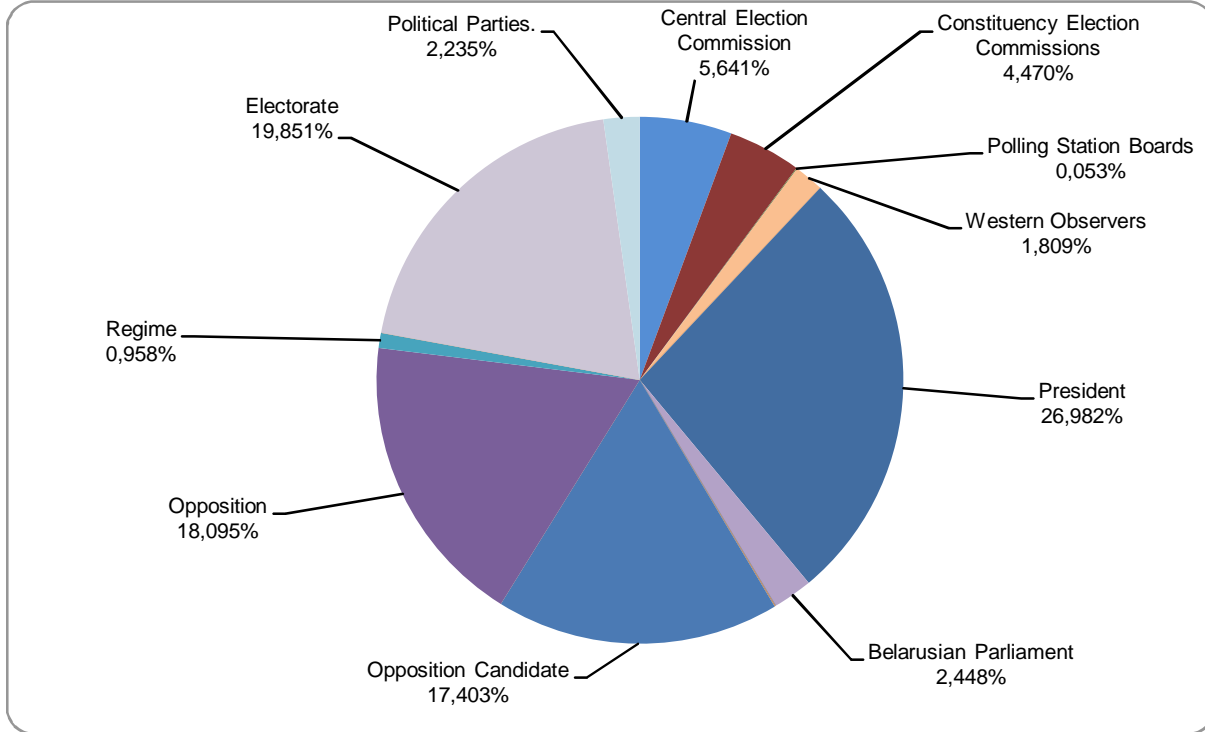


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

06.09-19.09.2008

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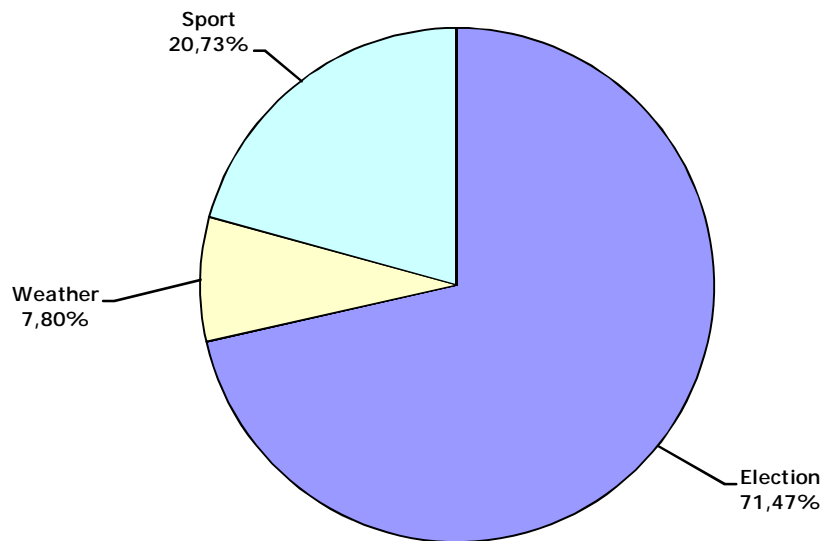


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

06.09-19.09.2008

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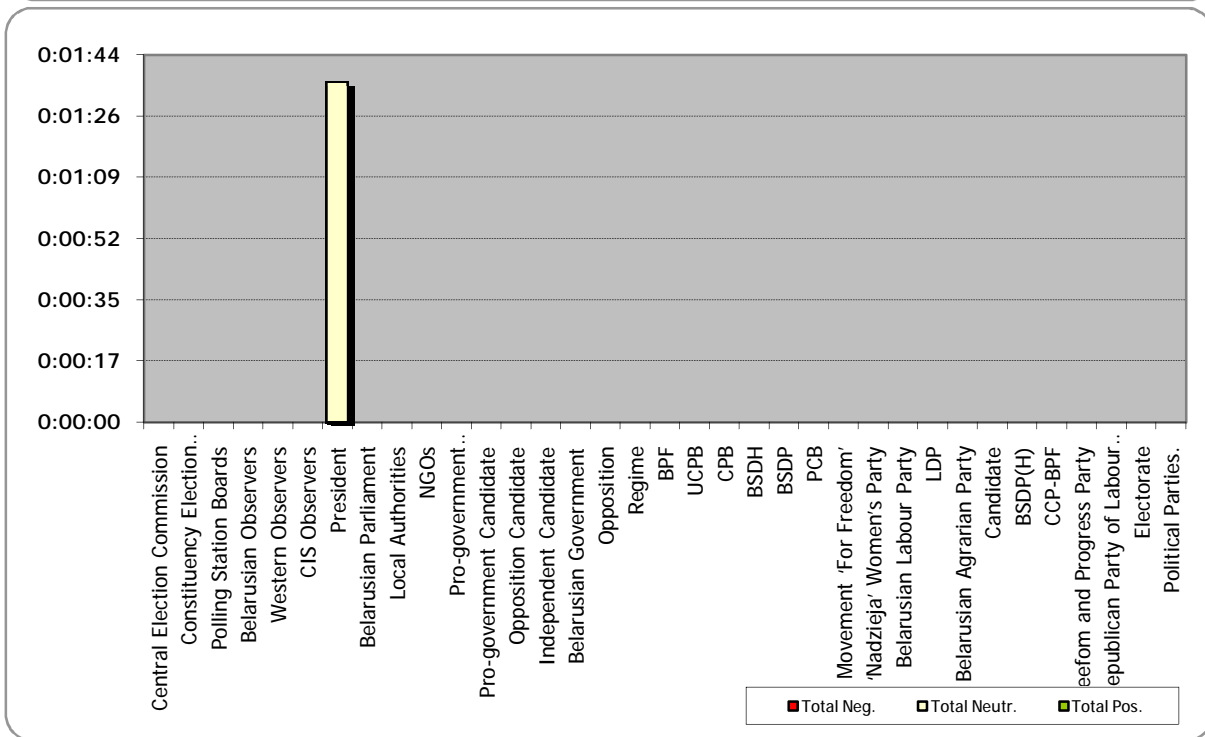
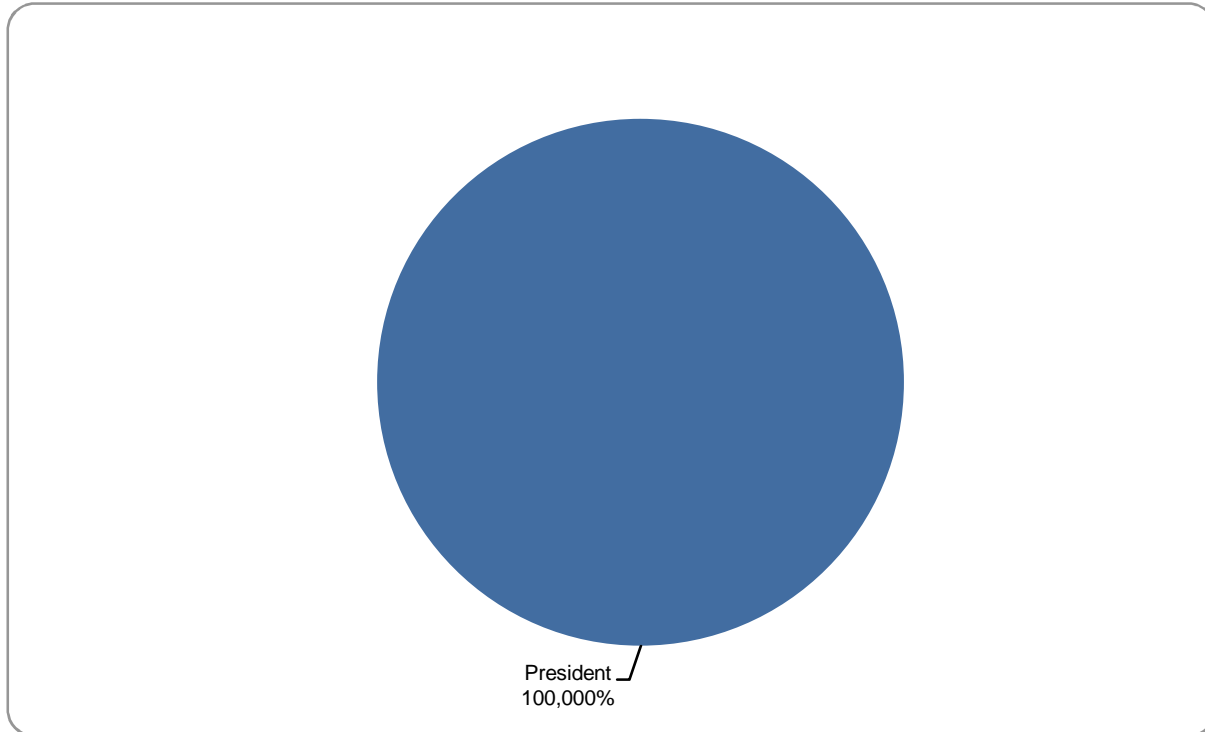


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Navy (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM)

06.09-19.09.2008

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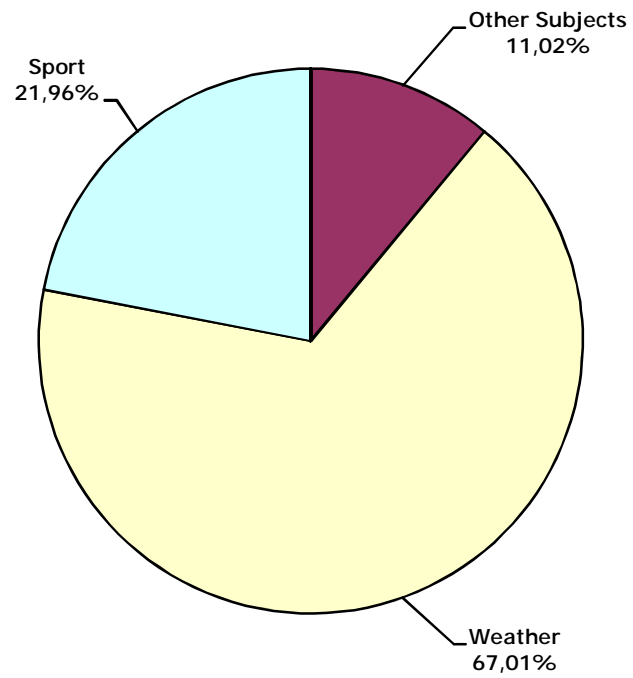


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM)

06.09-19.09.2008

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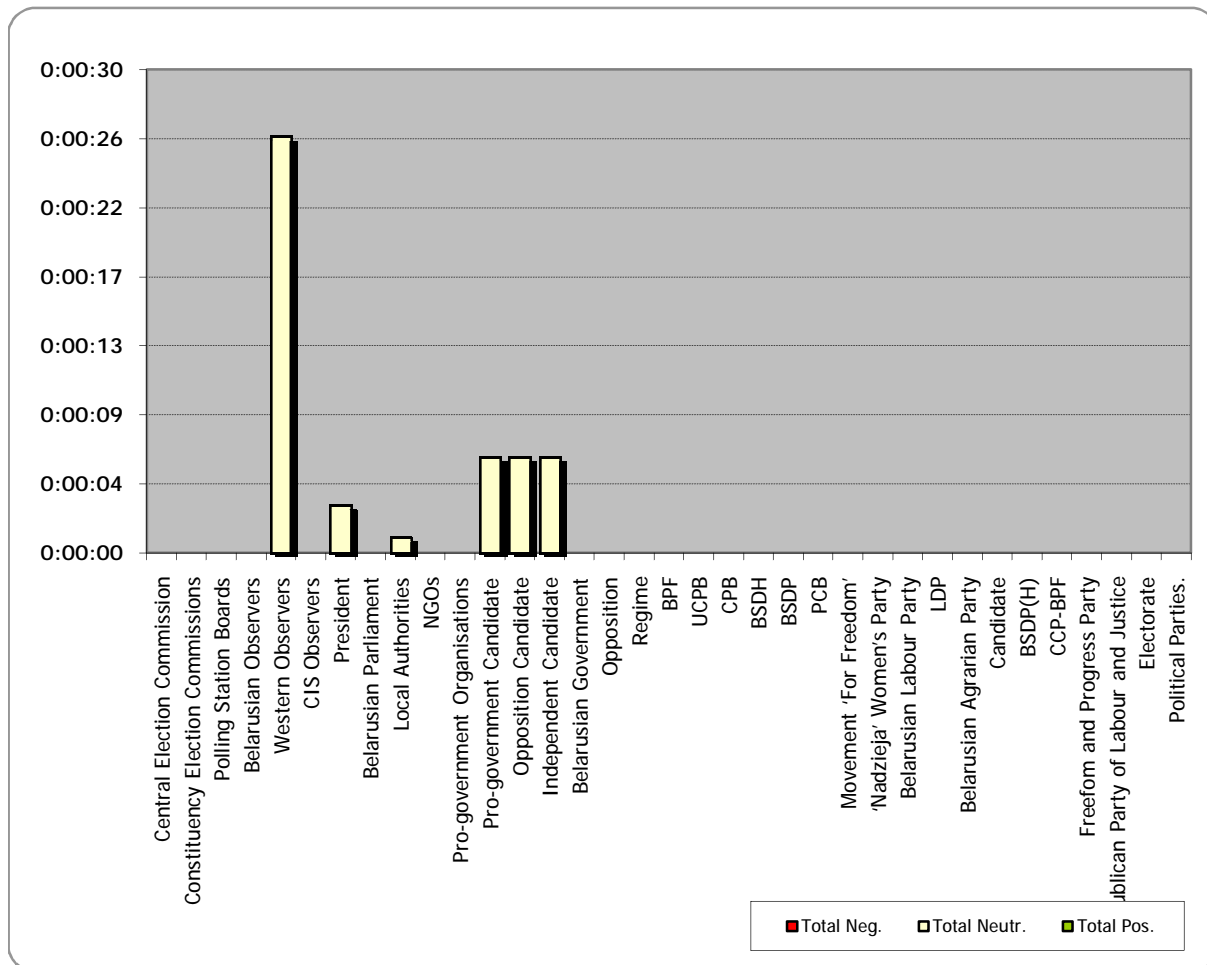
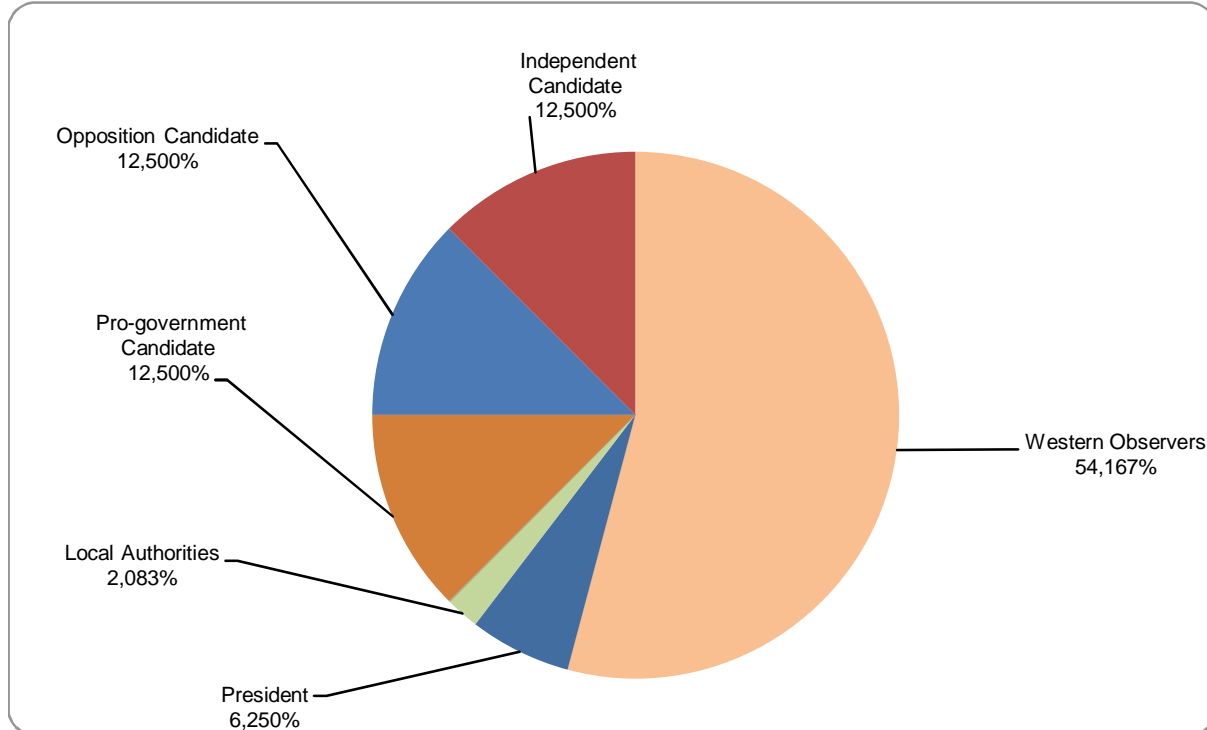


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Navyi Rehijona (Homiel)

06.09-20.09.2008

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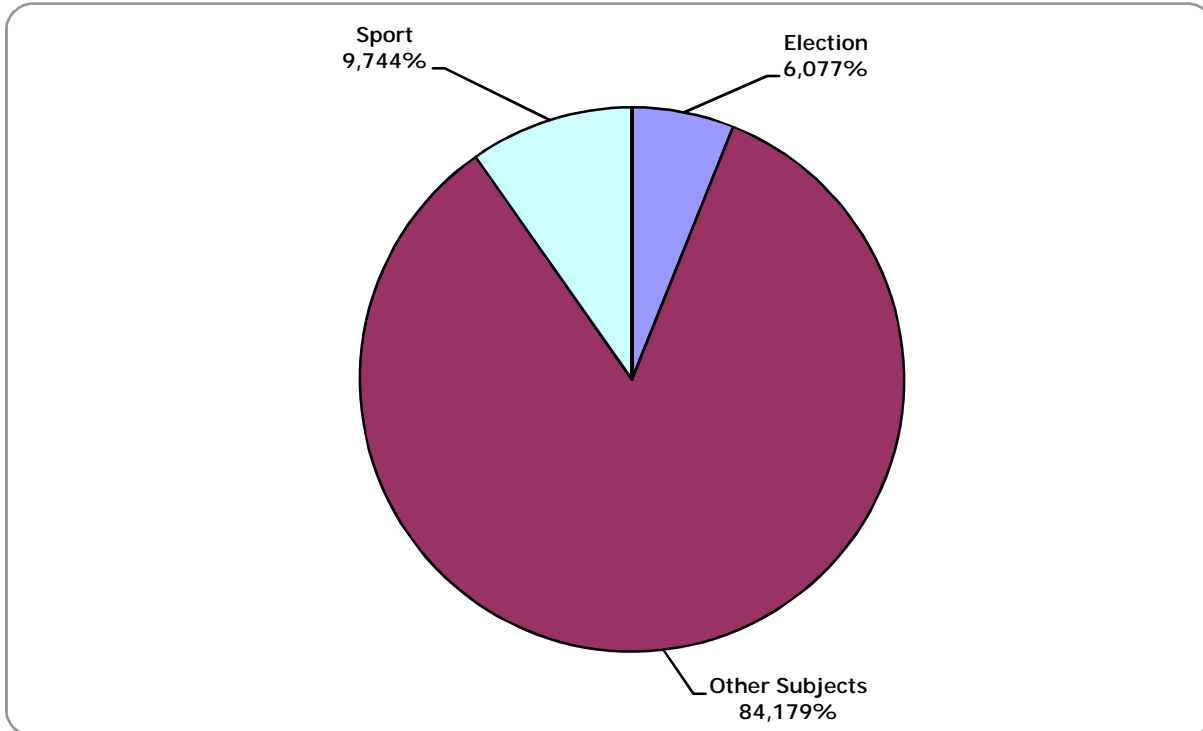


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny Rehijona (Homiel)

06.09-20.09.2008

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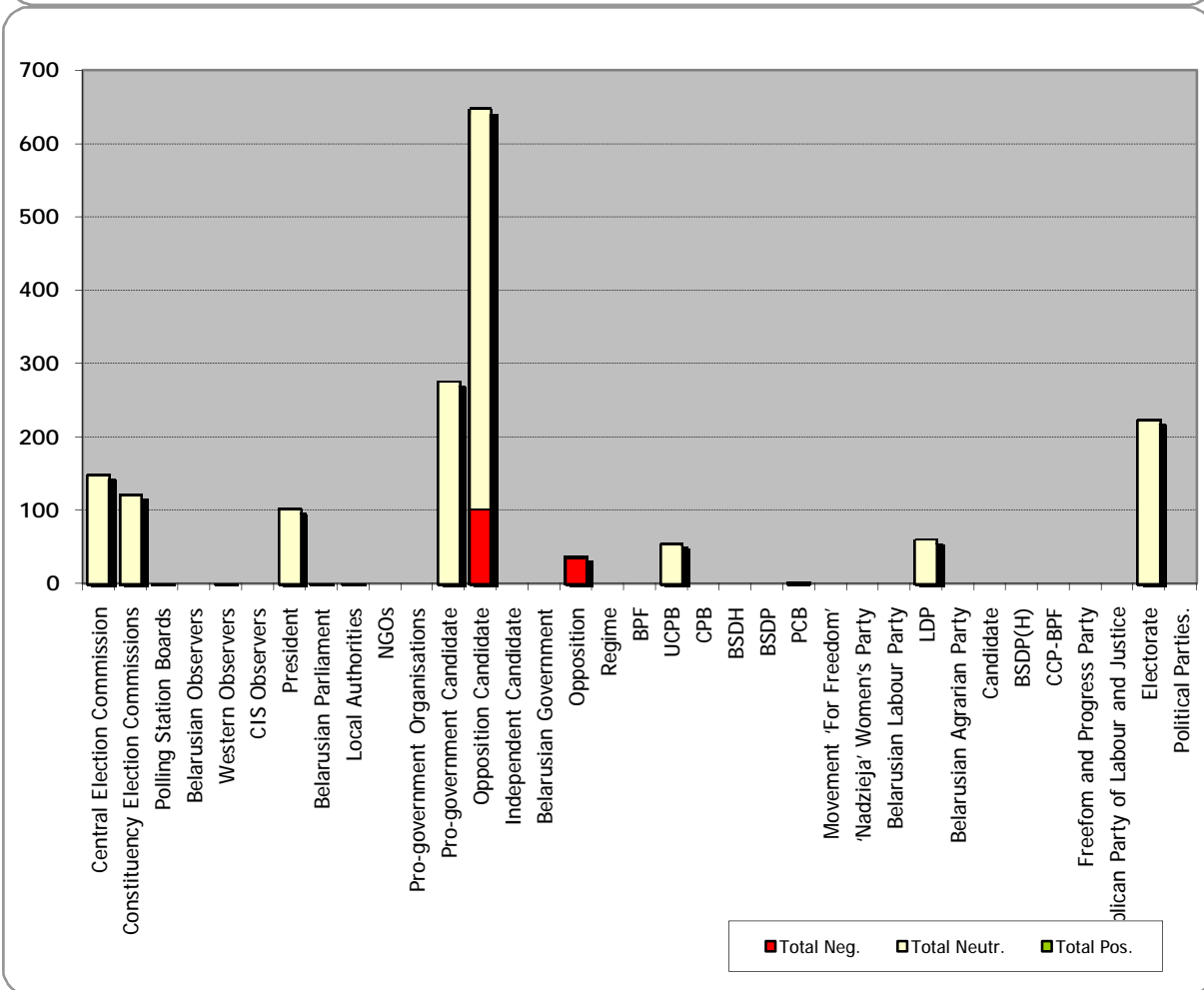
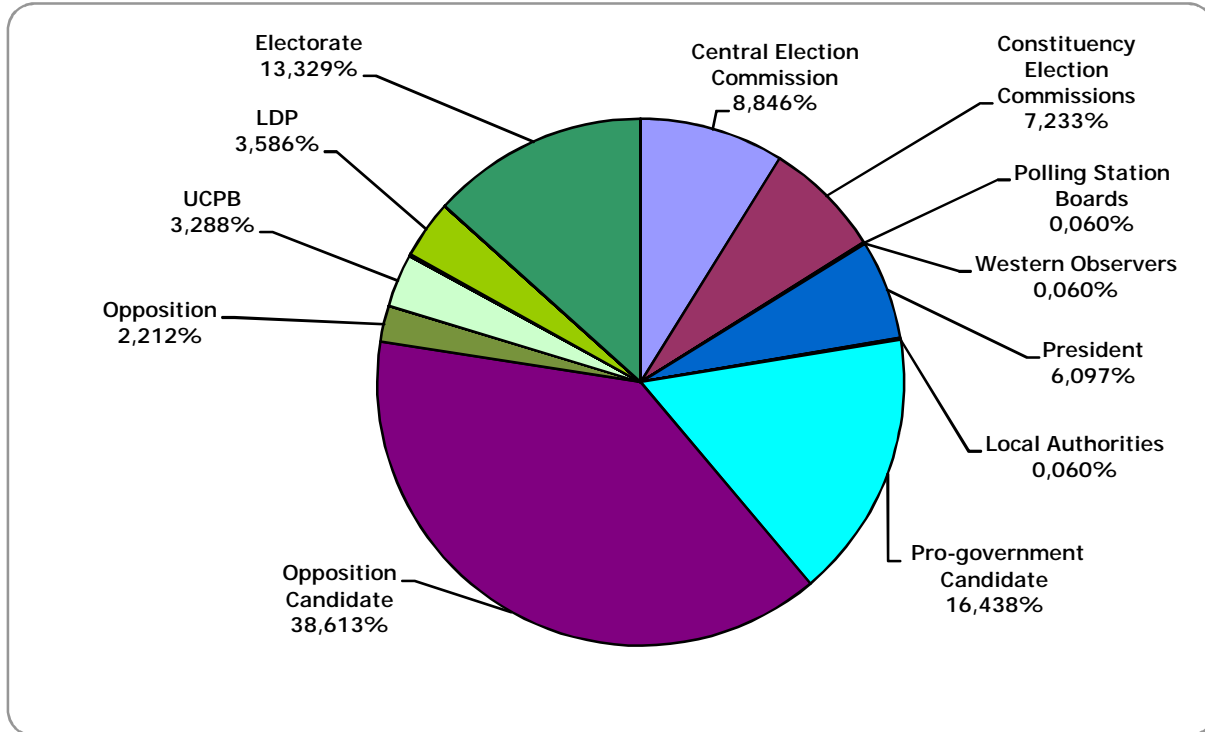


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Homielskaja Prauda

06.09-20.09.2008

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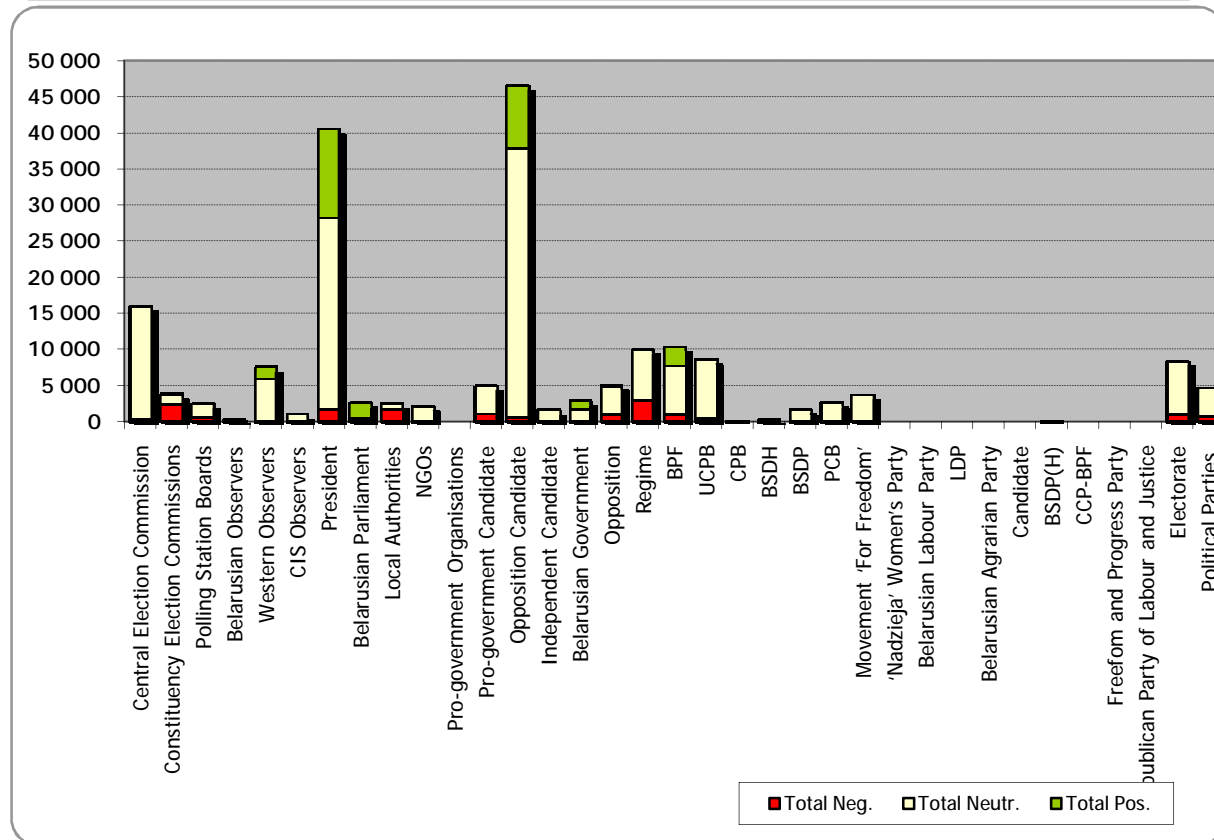
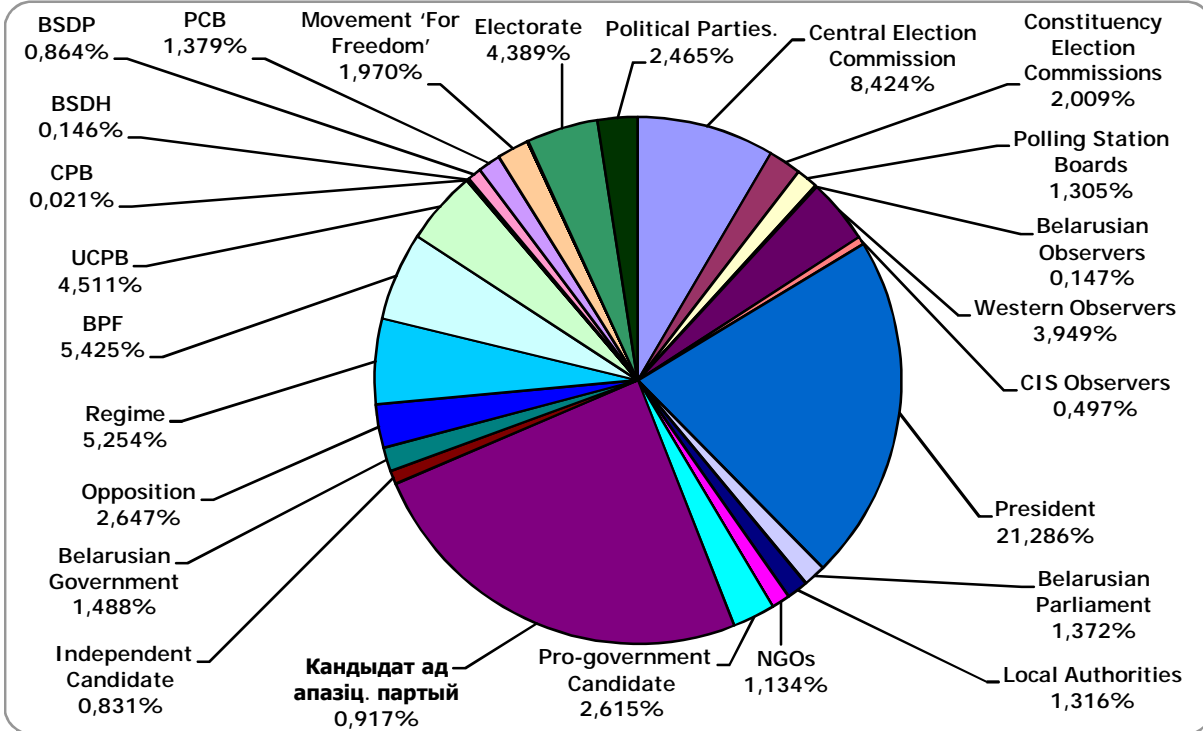




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

NAVINY.BY
06.09-19.09.2008

Measured in symbols



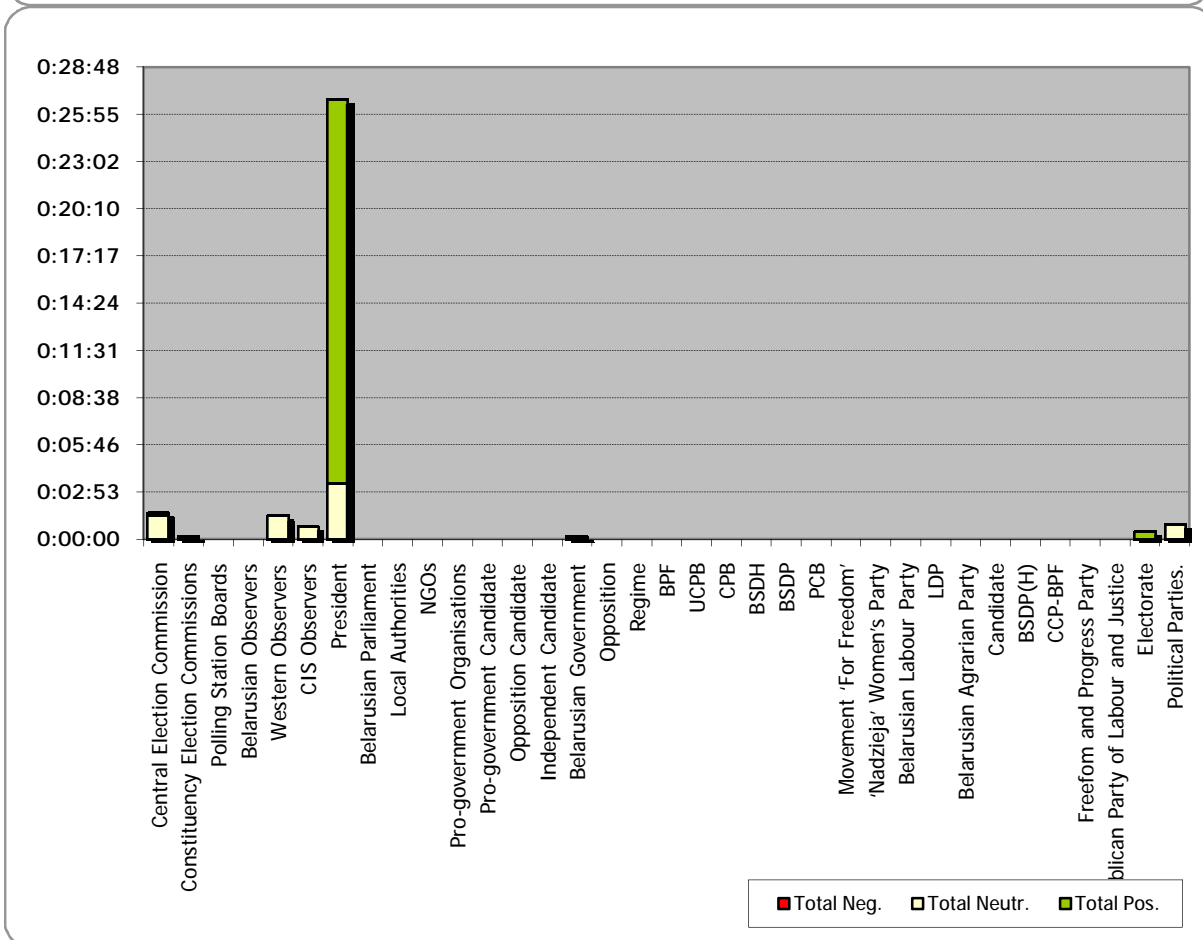
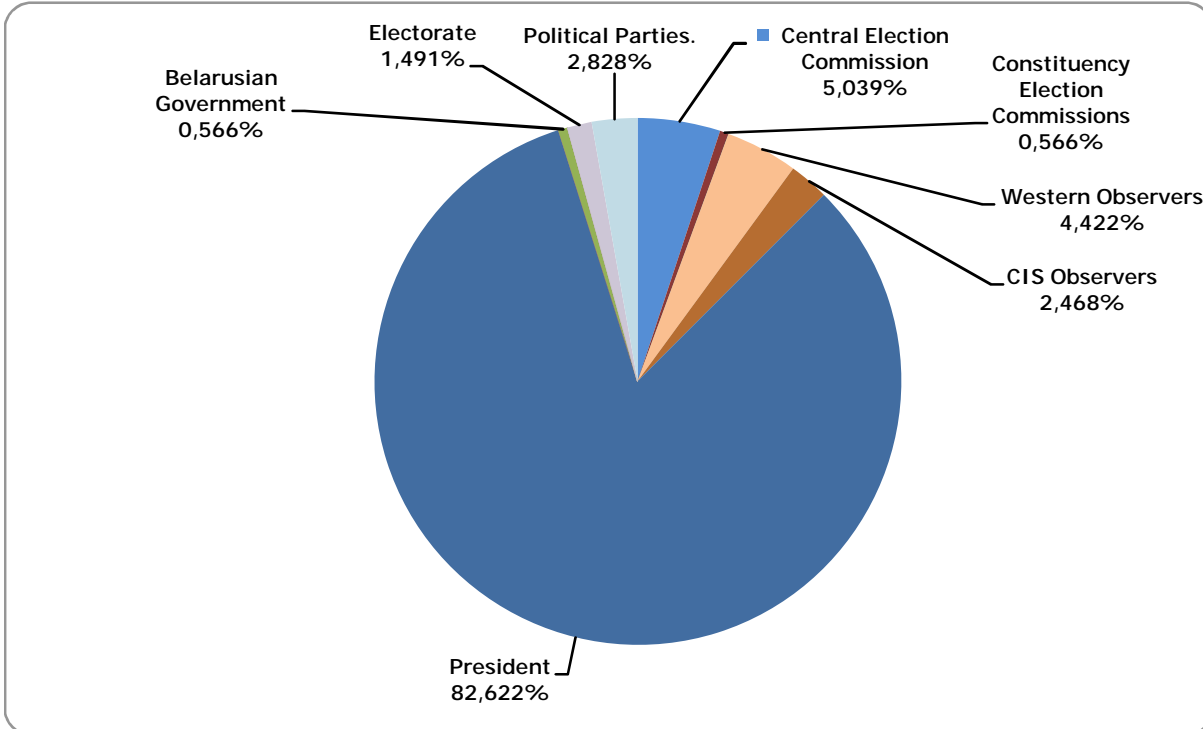


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Nashi Novosti (ONT)

06.09-19.09.2008

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



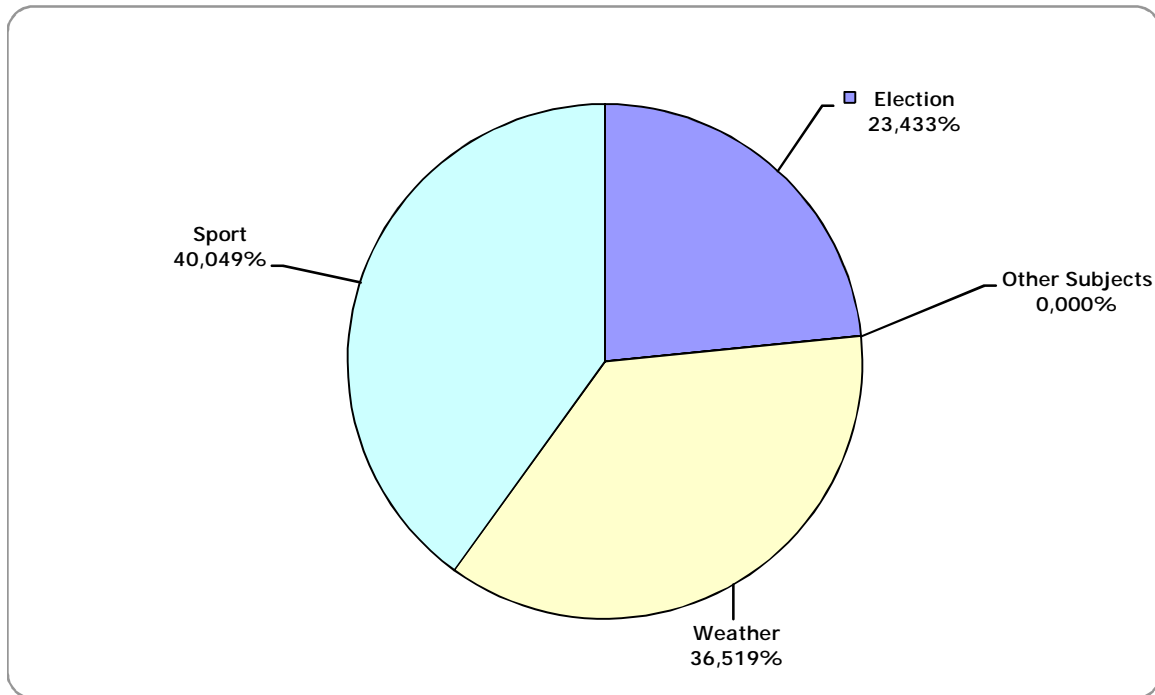


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Nashi Novosti (ONT)

06.09-19.09.2008

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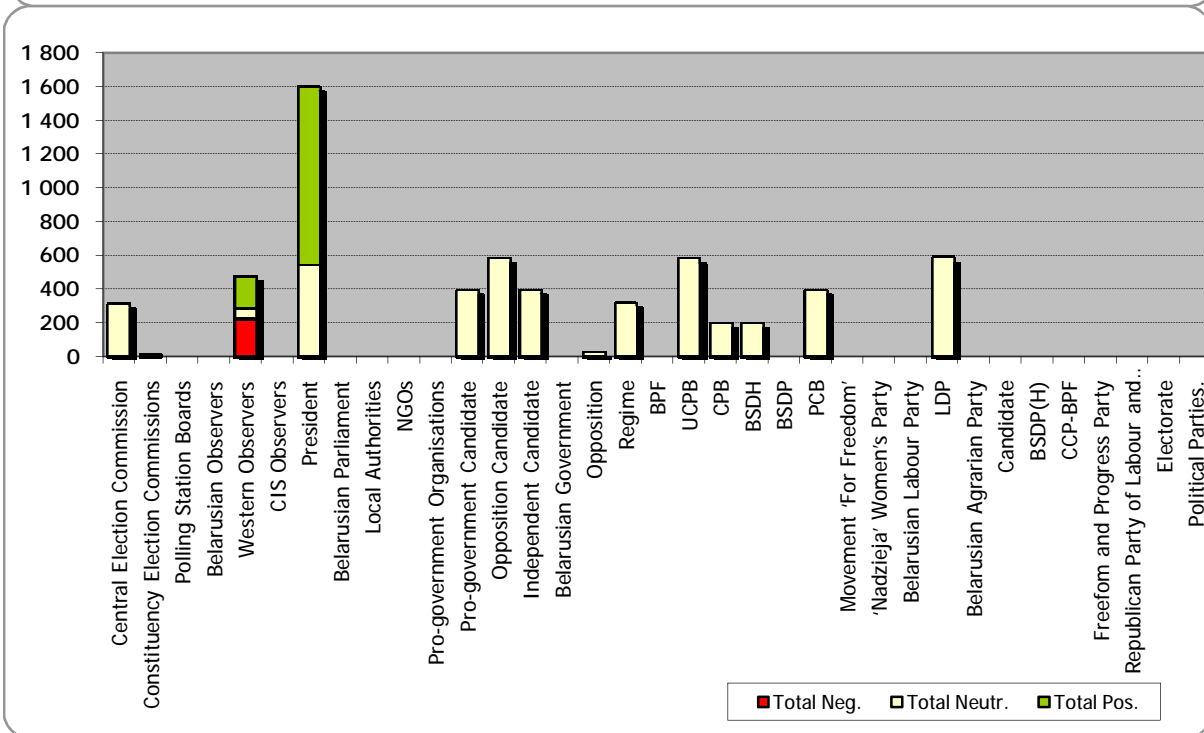
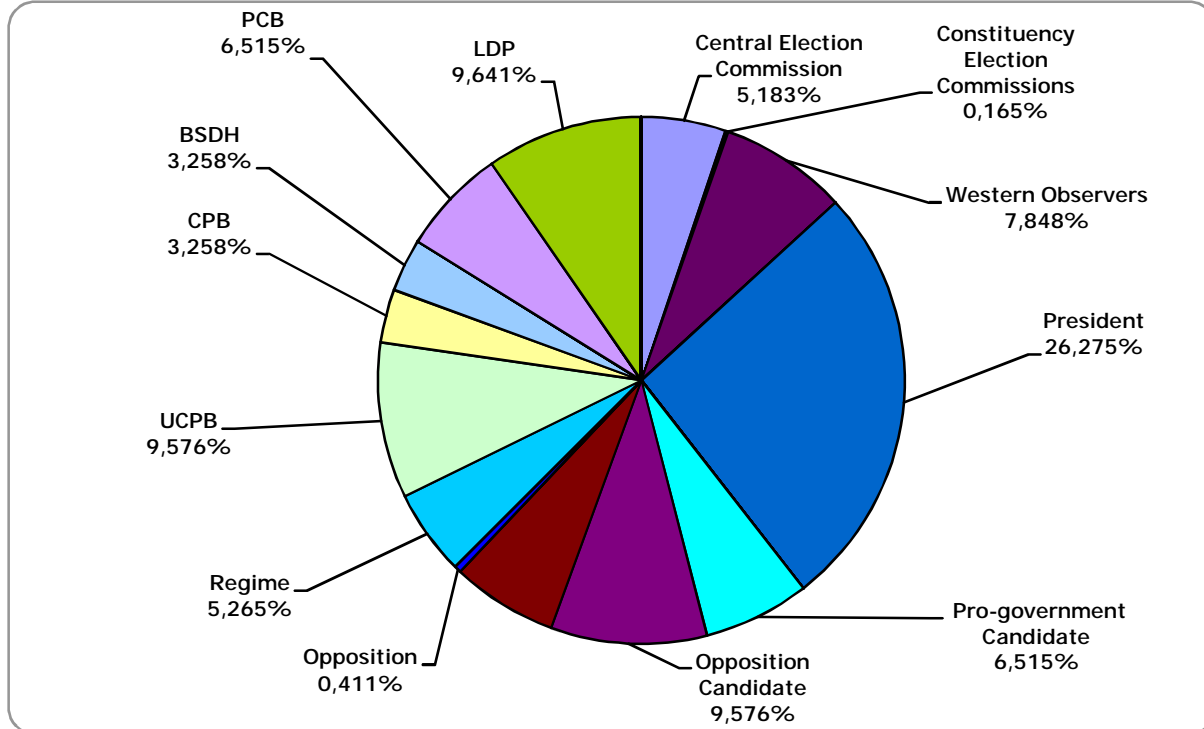




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Respublika
06.09-19.09.2008

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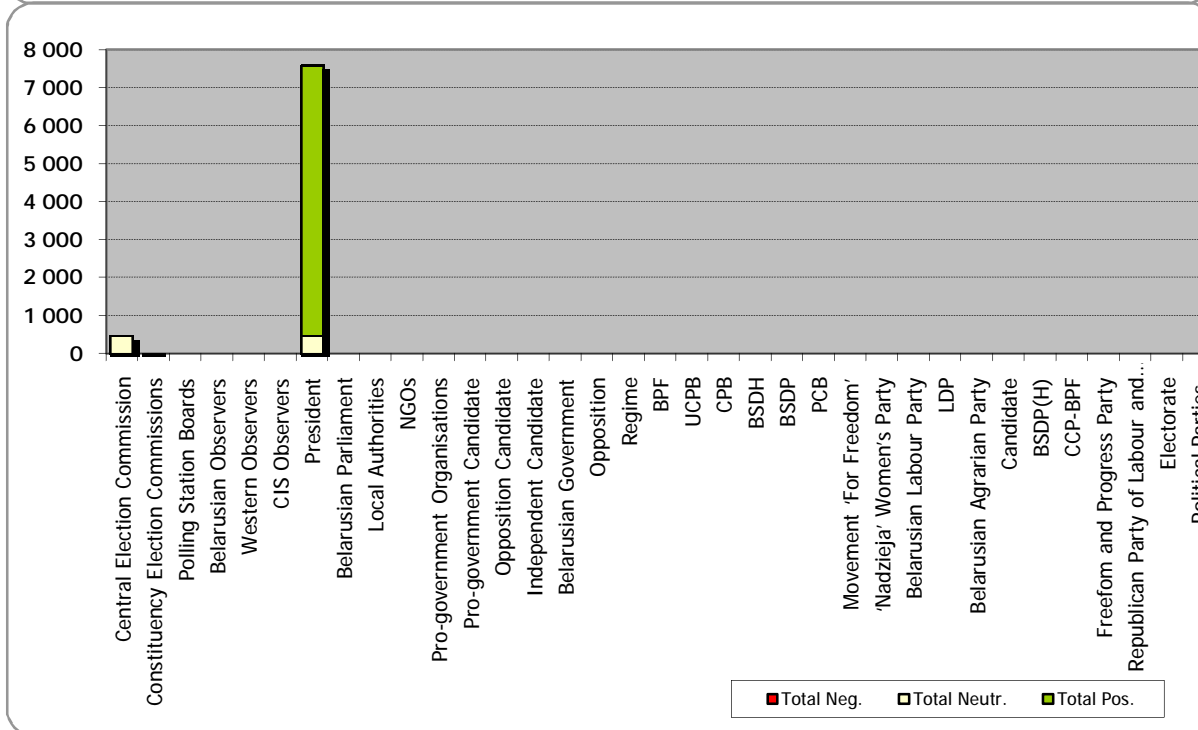
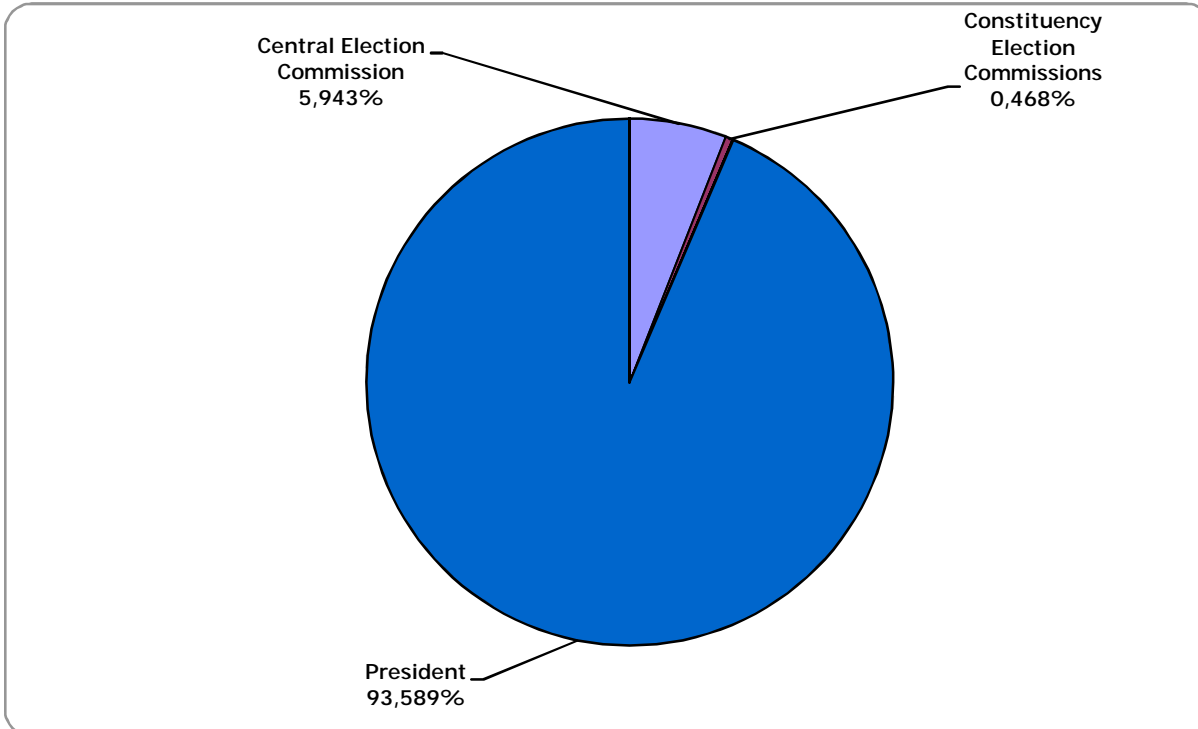


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya

06.09-19.09.2008

Measured in cm²

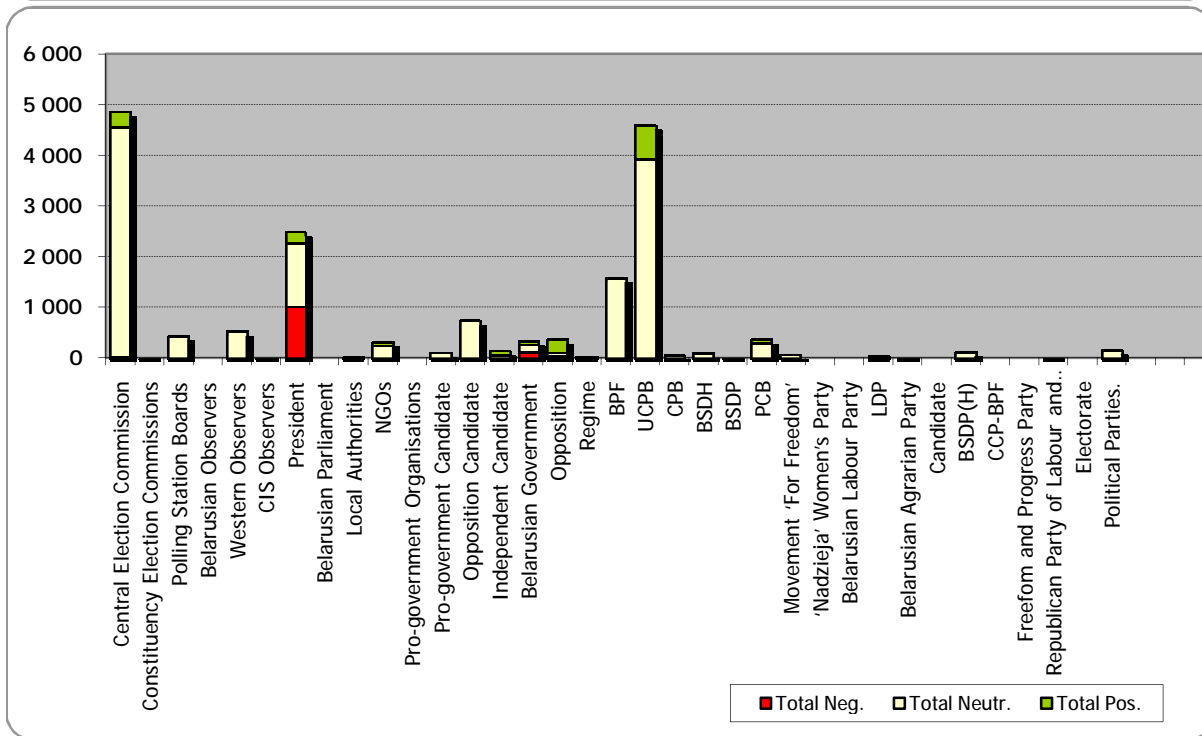
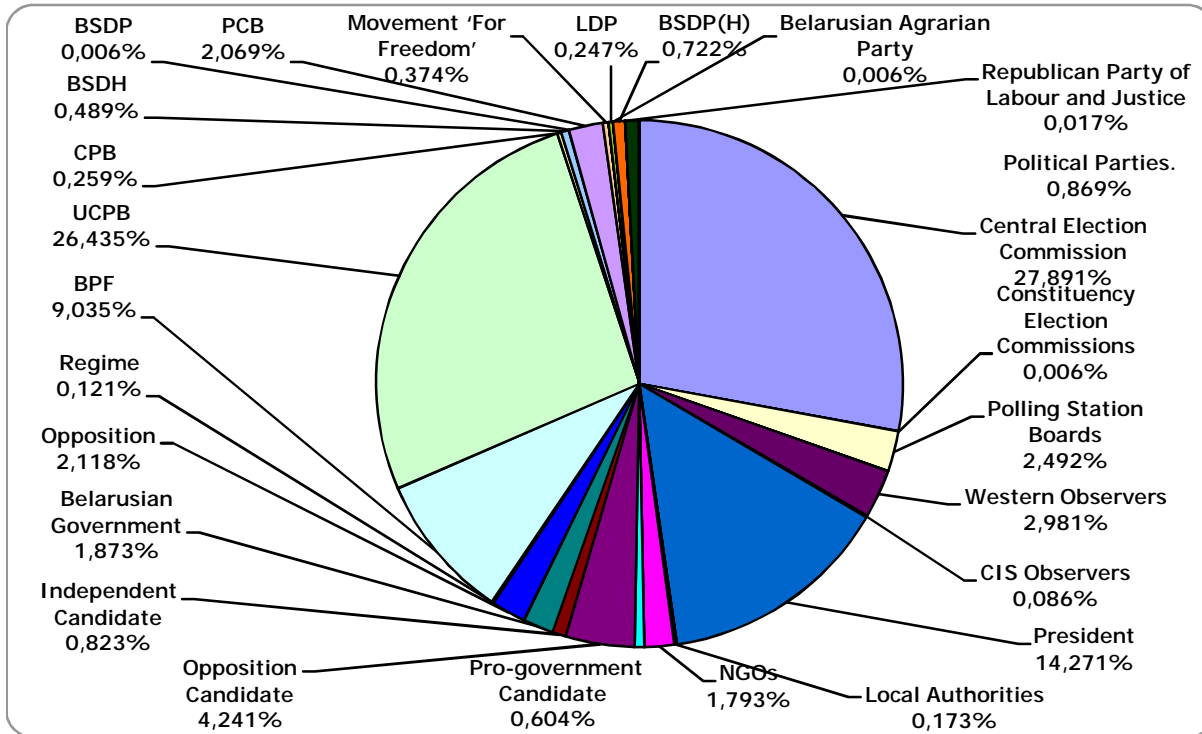




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Belorusy i Rynok
21.07-27.09.2008

Measured in cm²



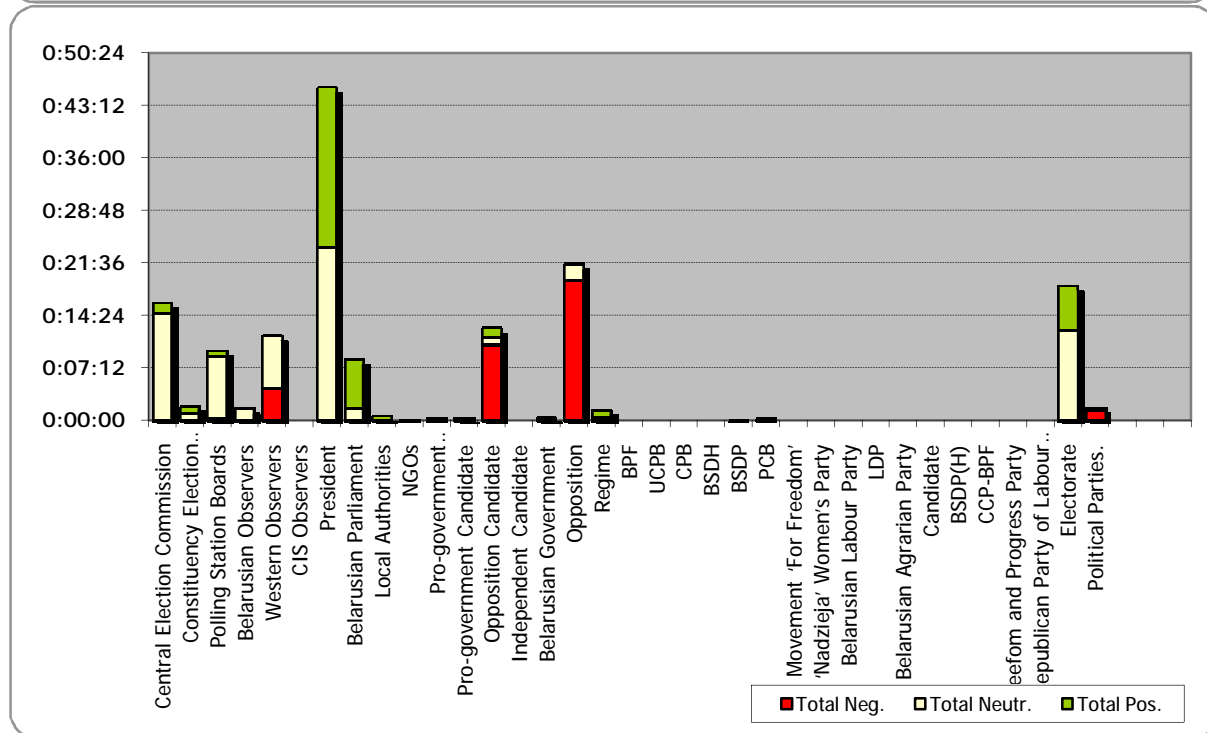
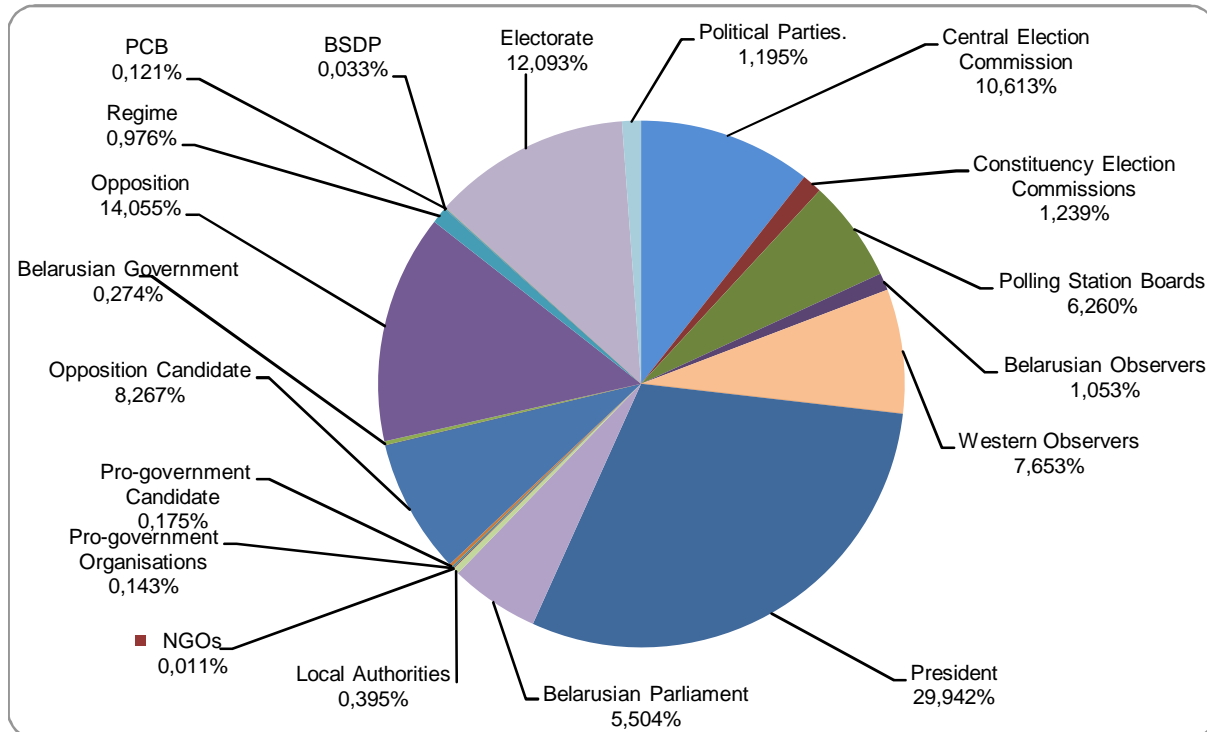


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

21.07-27.09.2008

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



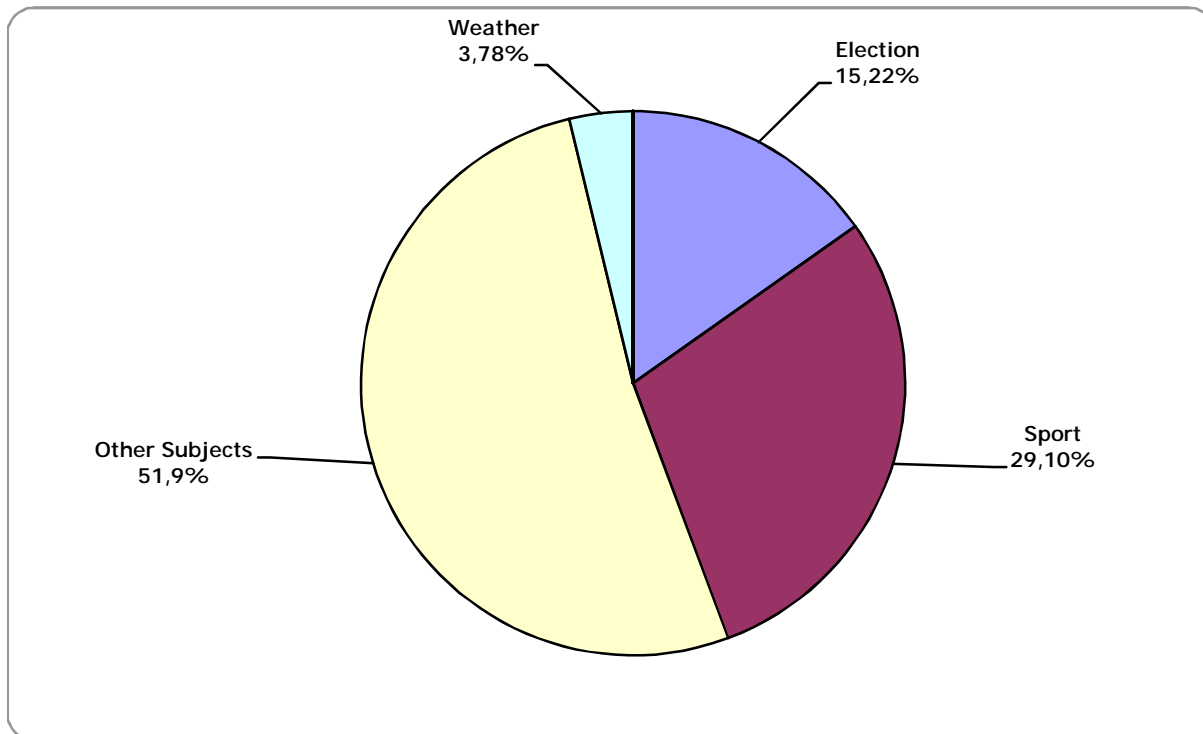


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Panorama Nedeli (the 1st National Channel)

21.07-27.09.2008

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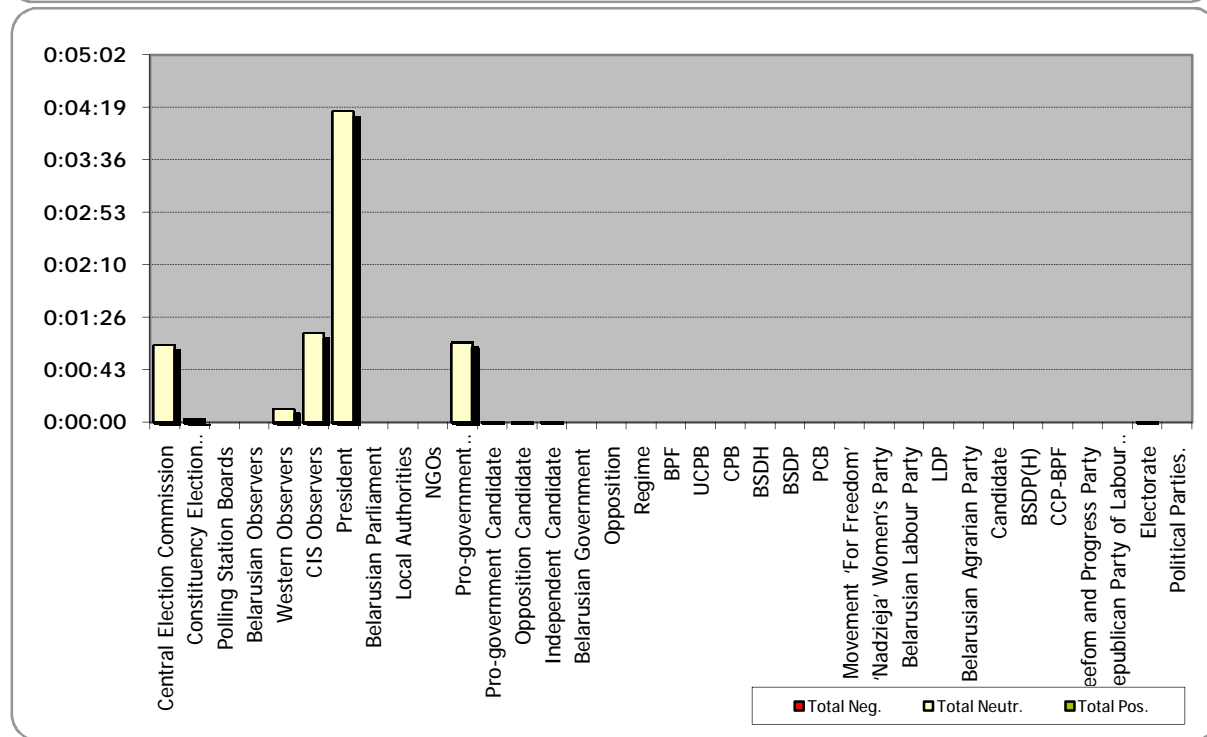
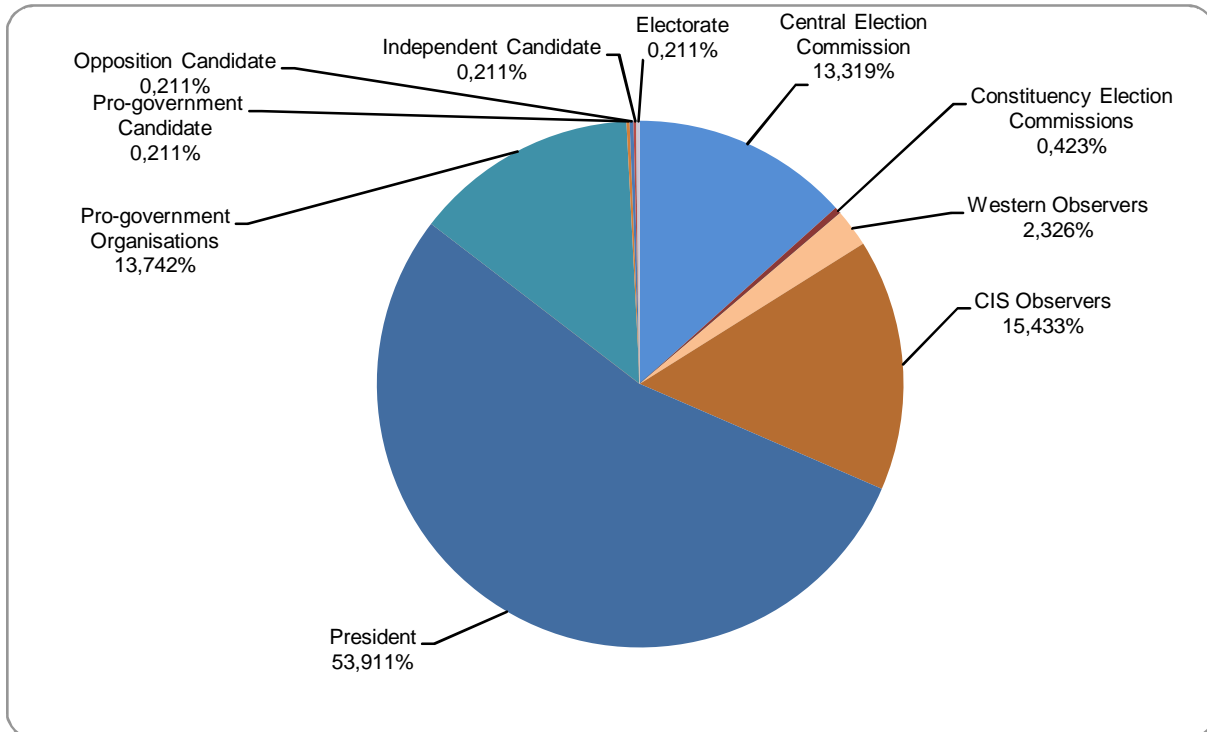


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM)

21.07-27.09.2008

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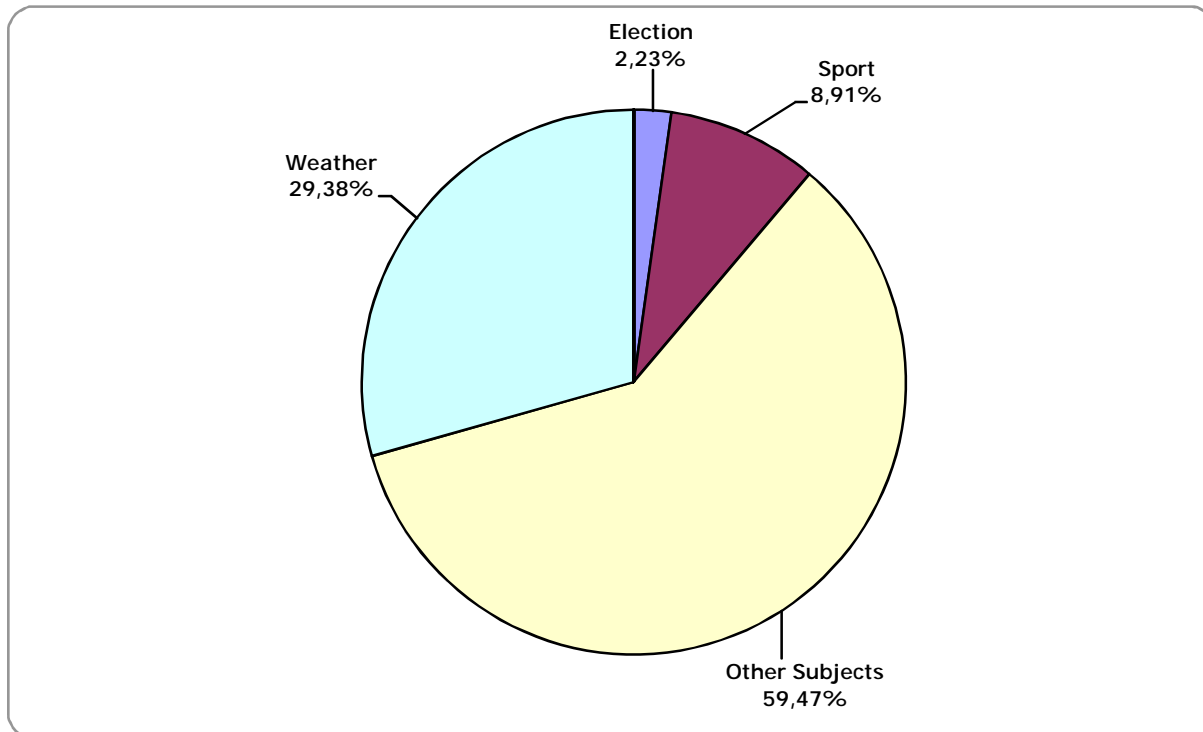


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny (Homiel Regional Radio 101.3 FM)

21.07-27.09.2008

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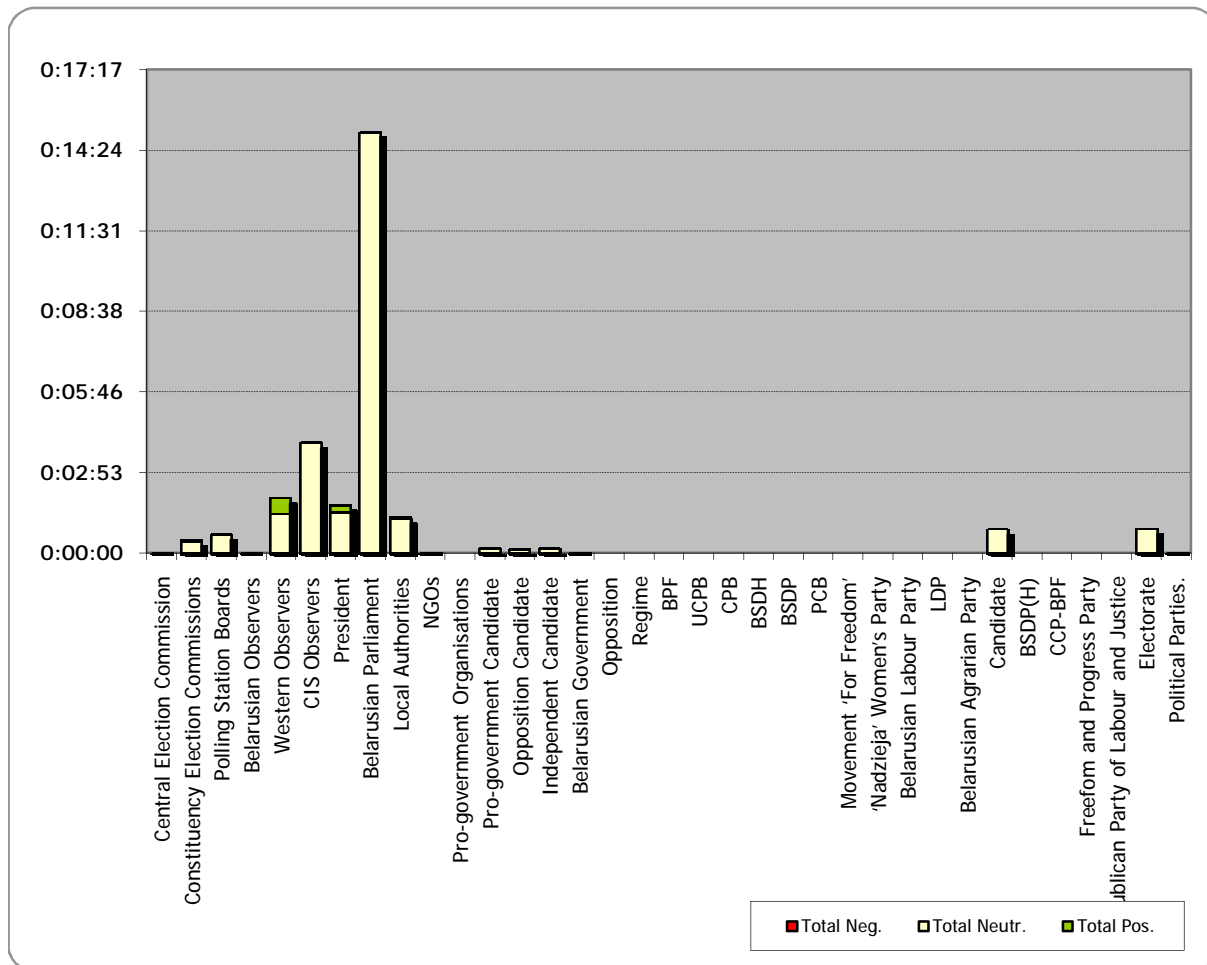
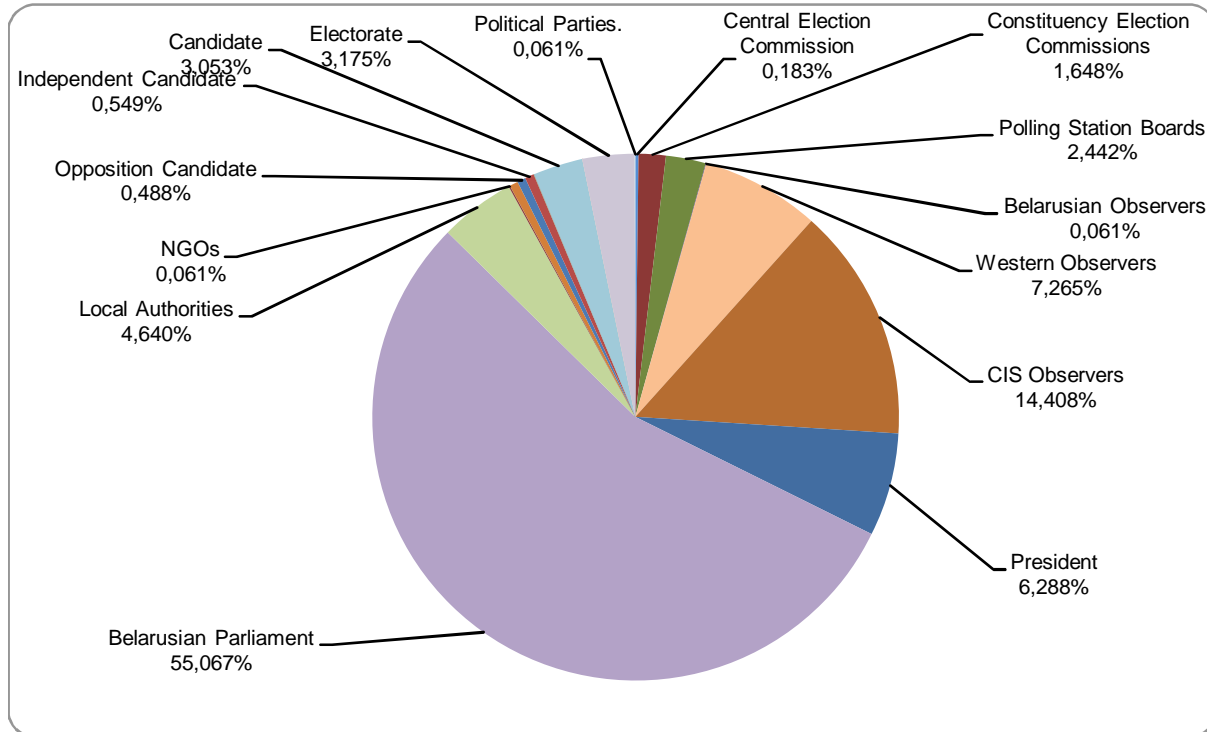


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Navyi Rehijona (Homiel)

21.07-27.09.2008

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



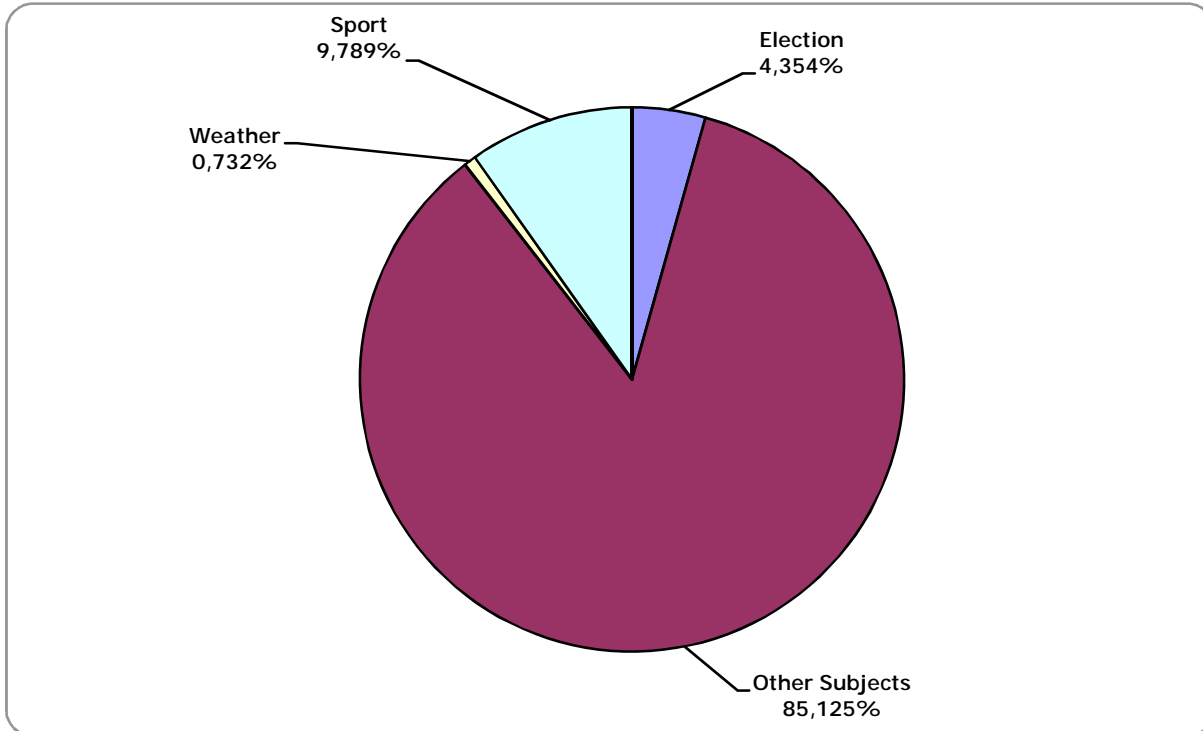


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Naviny Rehijona (Homiel)

21.07-27.09.2008

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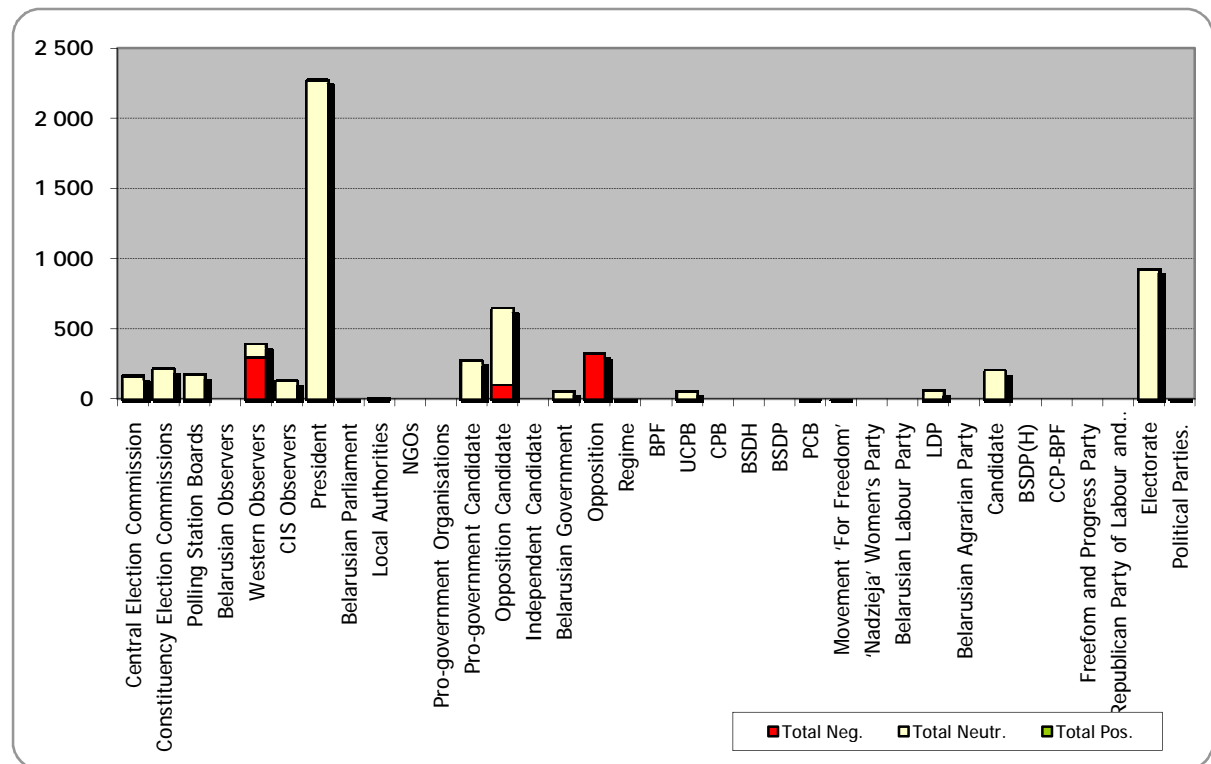
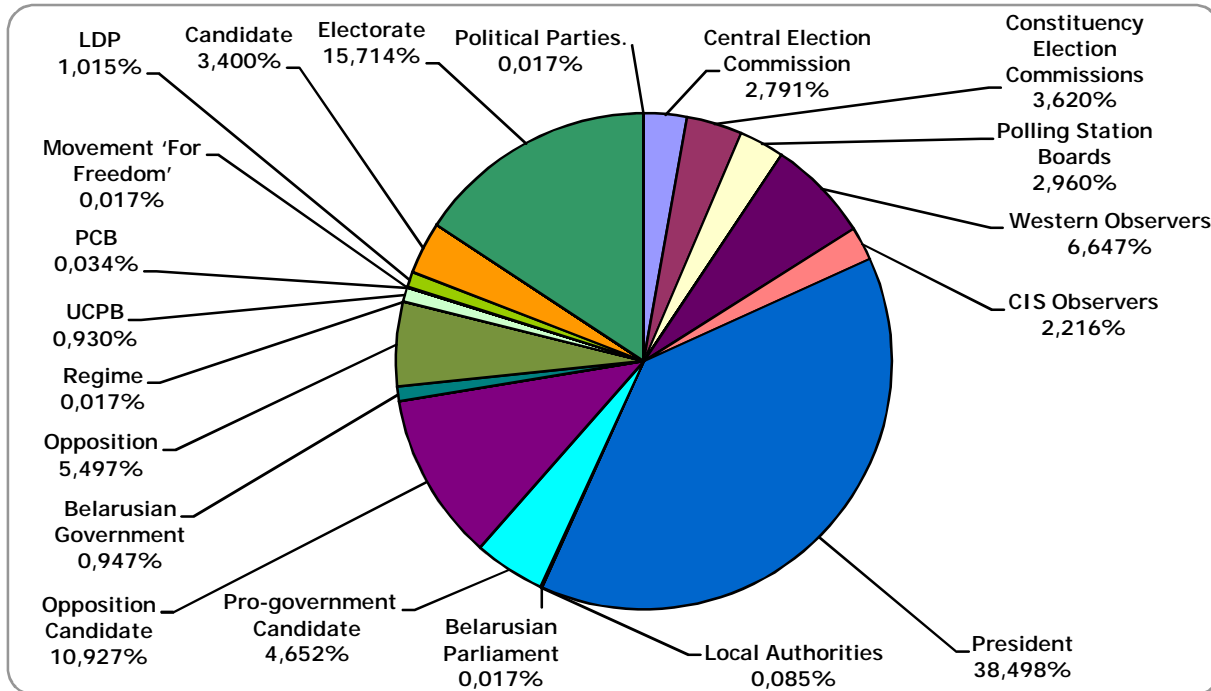


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Homielskaja Prauda

21.07-27.09.2008

Measured in cm²

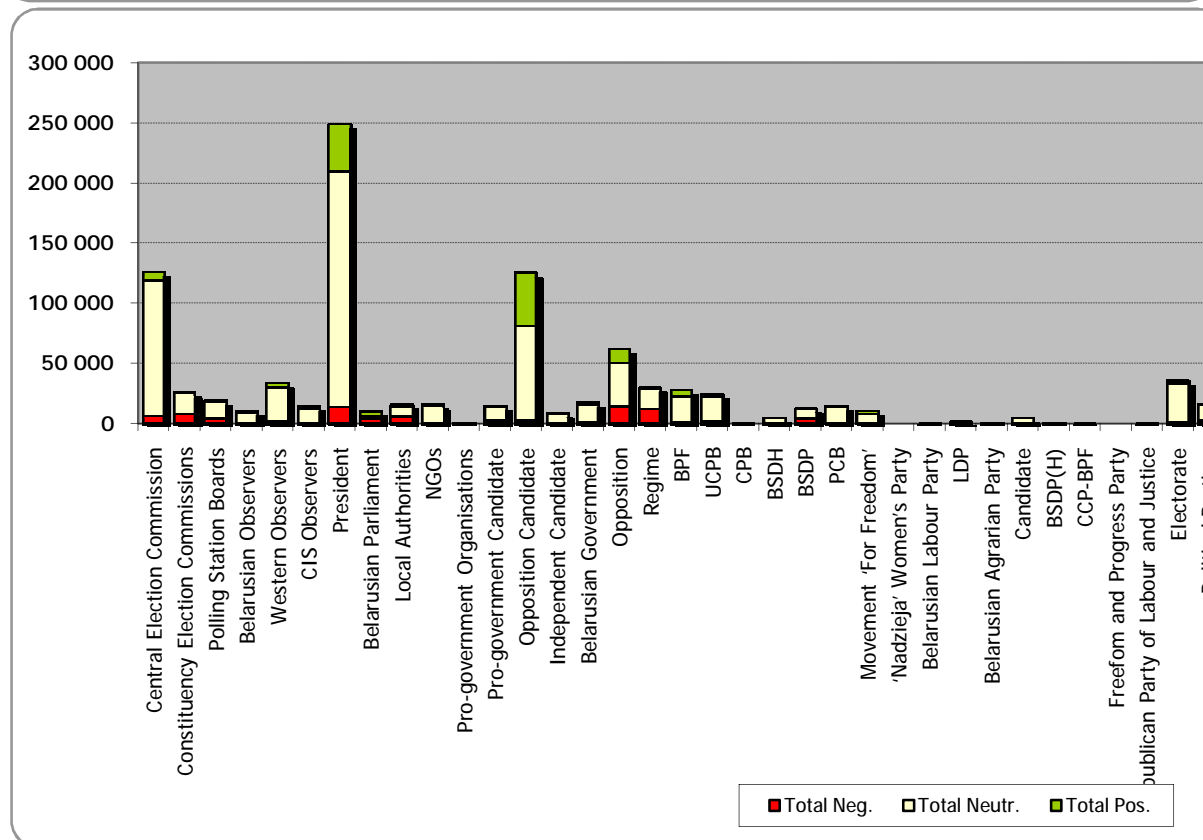
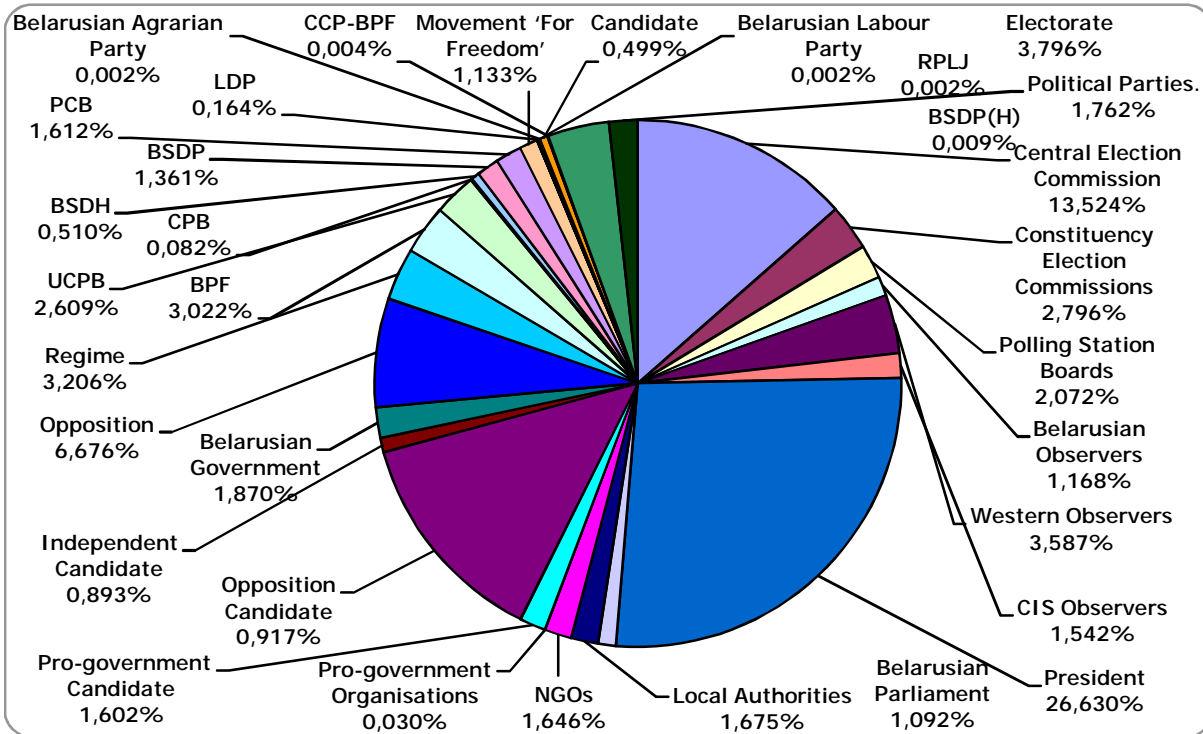




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

NAVINY.BY
21.07-27.09.2008

Measured in symbols



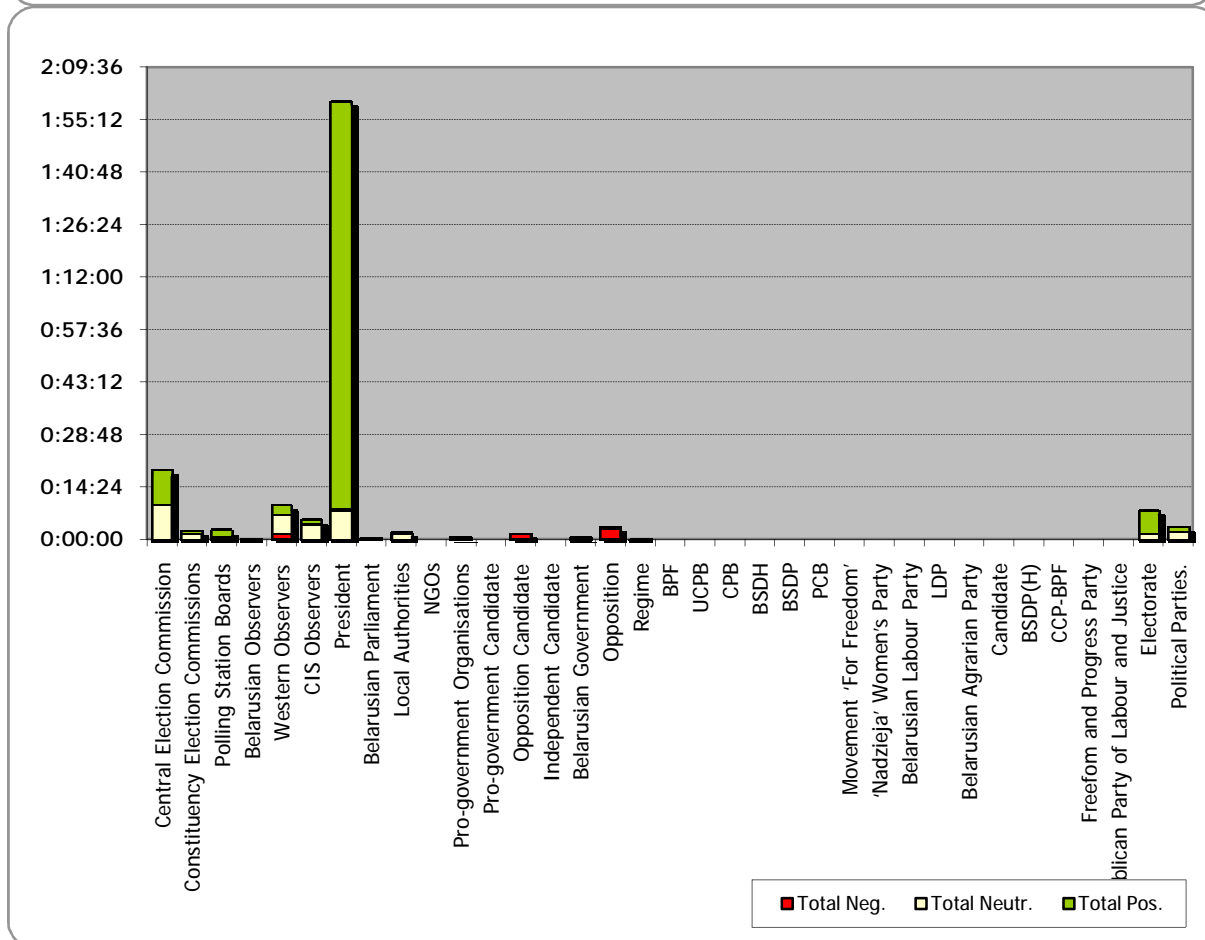
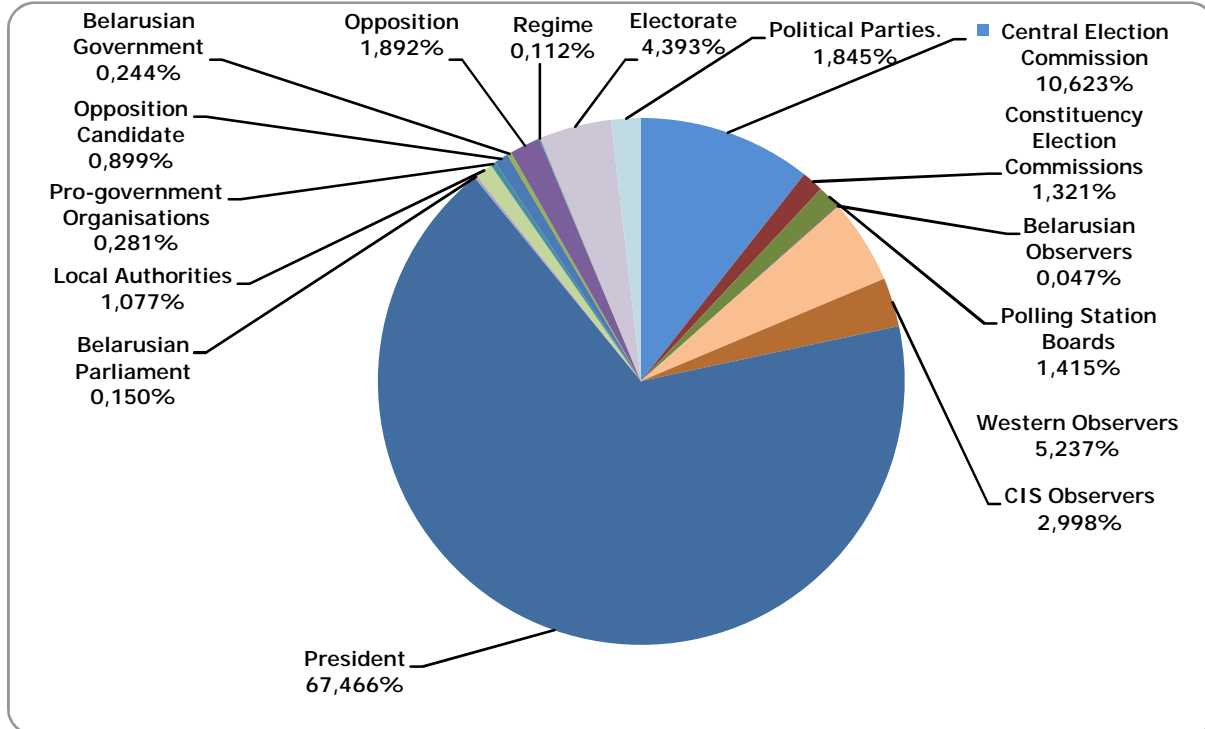


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Nashi Novosti (ONT)

21.07-27.09.2008

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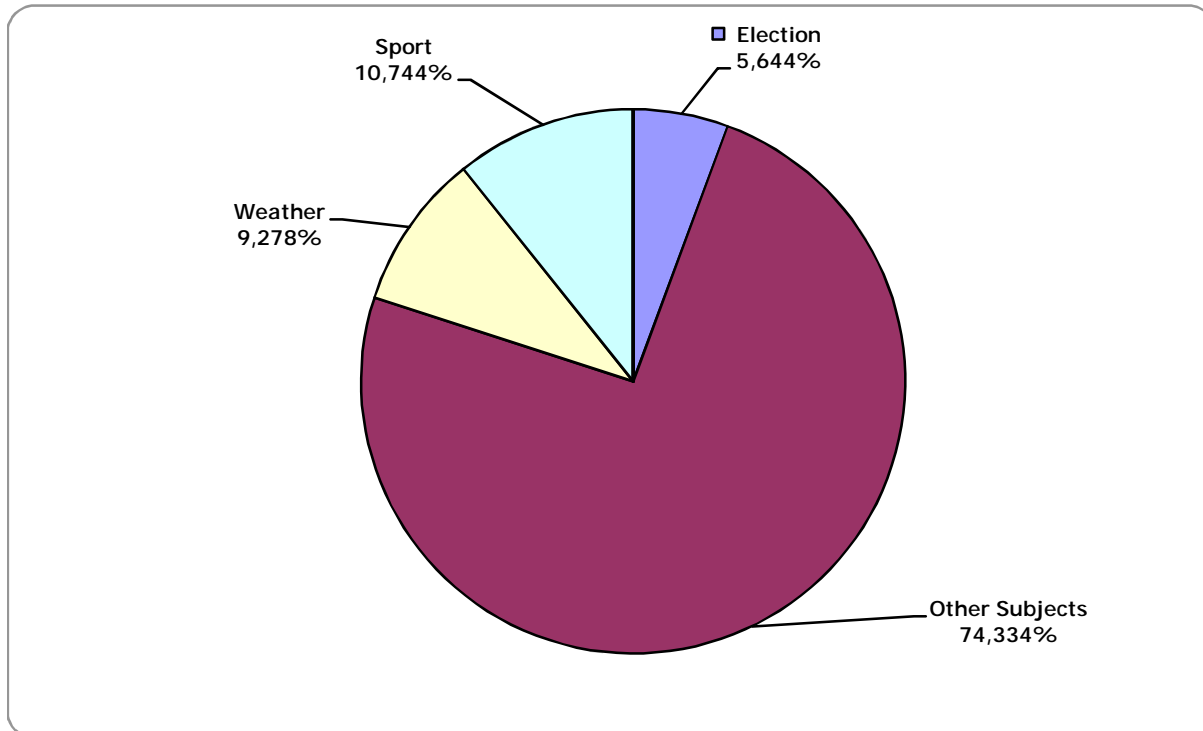


BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Nashi Novosti (ONT)

21.07-27.09.2008

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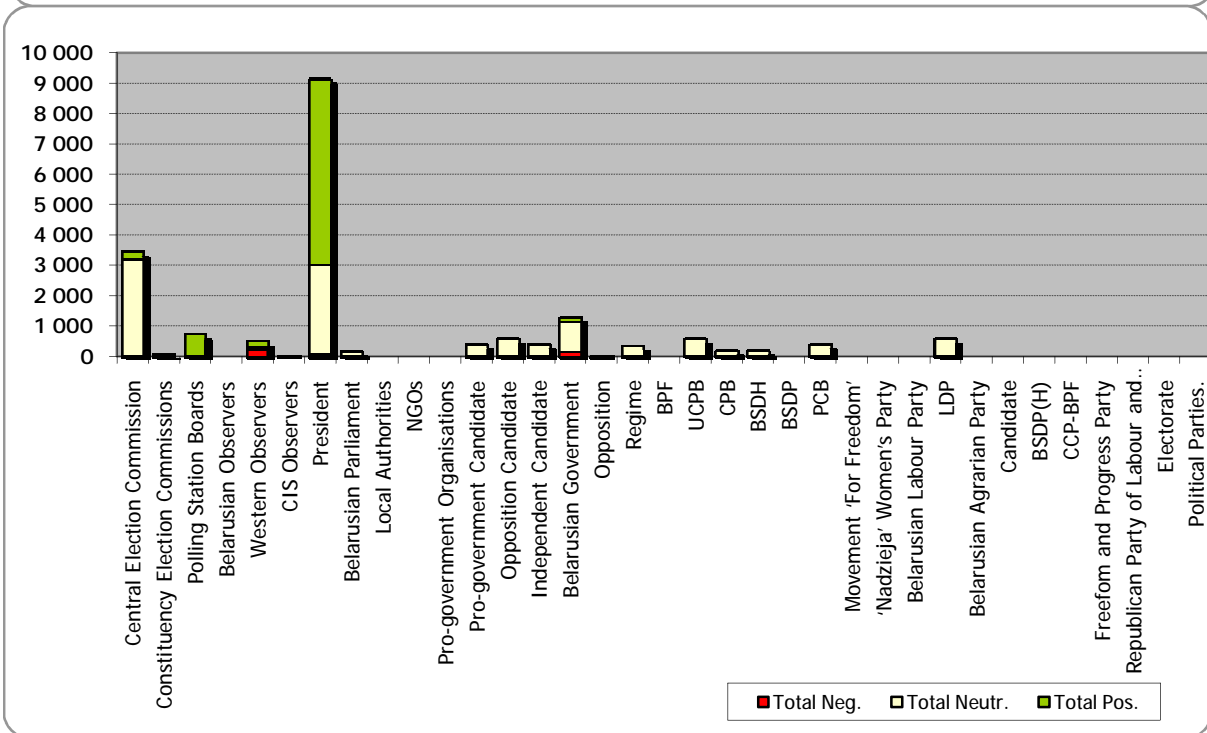
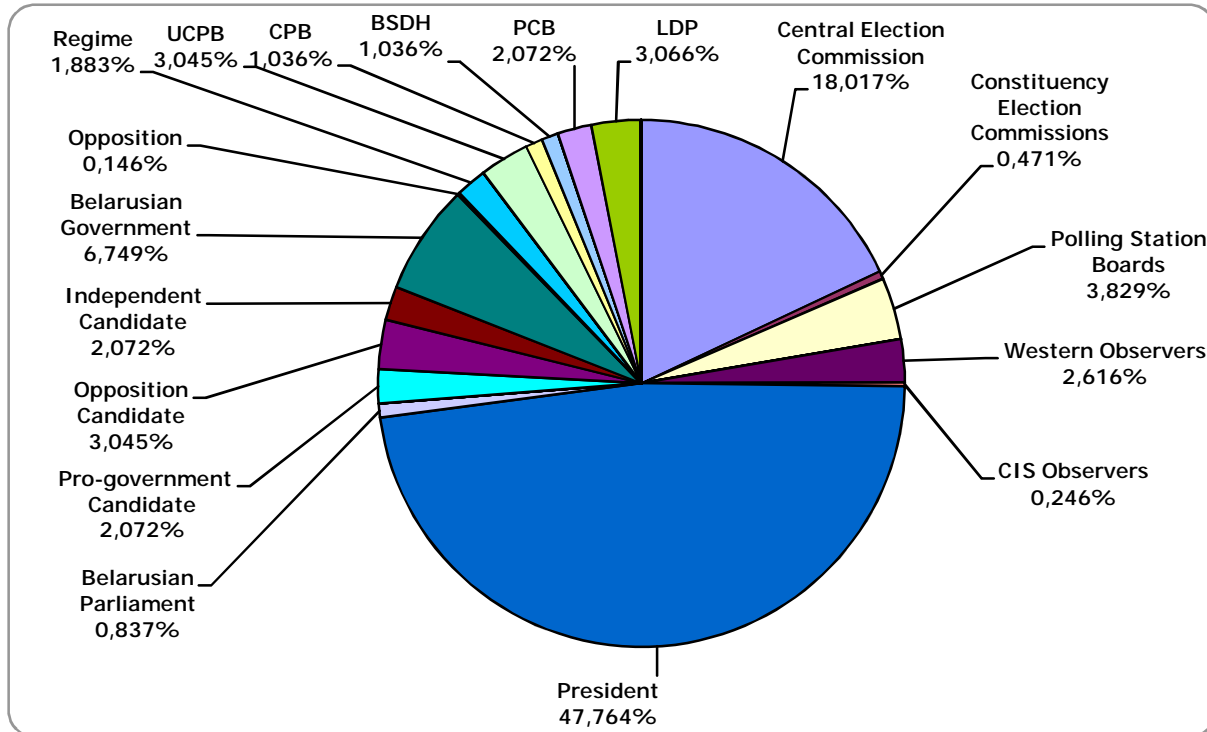




BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Respublika
21.07-27.09.2008

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





BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2008

Sovetskaya Belorussiya: Belarus Segodnya
21.07-27.09.2008

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

