

Врх градске власти одговоран за Савамалу

„На питање да ли Савамала и dalje uništava historijsku podrijetu, Aleksandar Vucelić je kazao da je reč o građevinskom projektu koji je „lošiji od ruševnog objekta u Beogradu“ i da to znači da treba prekinuti sa „dalje građevinske delatnosti u Savi i Mali““



Podignuti objekat, 27. oktobra, dva dana posle rušenja



THE CASE OF SAVAMALA



**CIVIL
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS**

Događaj koji je
uzburkao javnost:
Srušeni objekti u
Hercegovačkoj





THE CASE OF SAVAMALA

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KEY FINDINGS

During the entire year, media covered the ‘Case of Savamala’ in a very disproportional manner and with obviously declining interest although the perpetrators of demolition of buildings in Hercegovacka Street have not been identified and no accountability was established. ‘The Case of Savamala’ was the topic of total of 706 news stories in six newspapers, whilst in another 527 stories, the case was just occasionally mentioned.

The coverage is directly related to (1) circulation, (2) type of daily papers and (3) their editorial policy. The higher the circulation the less amount of coverage, more bias in coverage, and less objectivity, and the lowest level of criticism for the government.

In average, two news stories per day were published in six newspapers. The majority of stories were published by two serious papers, Danas and Politika (70% of the total number of stories), mid-market papers Blic and Vecernje Novosti covered less (about 20%), and tabloids Kurir and Informer the least (10%).

Amount and frequency of newspapers coverage have varied very much: Danas published 343 news stories, almost as much as the other newspapers together (N= 363), Politika 140, nearly as Blic and Vecernje Novosti together (N= 147), and Kurir and Informer 76 stories together.

Danas holds the record for the amount of newspaper coverage, and it culminated with the special edition of June 26, when different famous people discussed the topic. Only in this edition, Danas published 26 pages and many different opinions, aspects, and positions on the event which is more than majority of newspapers did in a year. Only in this month (June), Danas has published the same number of news stories as Kurir and Informer did together for the entire year.

Tabloids have the least number of news stories on the case of Savamala (Informer 32, Kurir 44), but they dedicated most of the space to it. Informer had the biggest average story (548 mm²), Kurir somewhat smaller (502 mm²), Politika had much smaller (369 mm²), and the smallest was in Vecernje Novosti (308 mm²).

For the case of Savamala, tabloids often had huge headlines large as front pages. With the fewest stories Informer has more cover page headlines (N=13) than Politika (N=12) which has four and a half times more stories.

All newspapers contributed to the significance of the case of Savamala by publishing a multitude of photos. More than 80% of news stories had at least one illustration, and 10% of stories had more than three, sometimes even nine illustrations. Aleksandar Vucic is in the majority of illustrations, followed by Sasa Jankovic, and activists of “Ne davimo Beograd” could mostly be seen in the coverage from protests they have organised, followed by Rodoljub Sabic.

Demolition of buildings in Hercegovacka Street was to be seen in photos between 10% (Politika, Danas, Blic, Kurir) and 20% (Vecernje Novosti). Only Informer has not once published a photo on the demolition of buildings in Hercegovacka Street, whilst publishing only one photo of the civil protests.

News items dominate the majority of newspapers (48% in Danas, 86% in Vecernje Novosti), while the analytical news items are the rarest (24% in Danas, 11% in Vecernje Novosti). Kurir does not have editorials or columns at all, Vecernje Novosti only have two

columns, Informer has only three editorials, and both columns and editorials could be found in Blic (almost 20%), Politika and Danas (almost up to 30%). However, newspapers without any or with only few columns and editorials are highly biased in all news items (stories).

Newspapers mostly publish content that they produce independently yet more than quarter of the content has been republished from the other media – 13.3% from either agencies or other media, and 13.6% from official documents or press releases.

Institutions, their representatives and event participants are the main source of information, but the newspapers have rarely searched for sources apart from the official sources of information. Danas is the single one with a large number of public figures and civil activists thus providing the strongest contribution of making voices of civil society heard.

The topic of each third story is demanding to know who is accountable, and another third of stories concerns with demolition in Hercegovacka (16.29%) and work of public authorities on this matter (15%). The activities of the Initiative “Ne davimo Beograd” (“Let’s not drown Belgrade”) and independent institutions together were an issue in approximately a quarter of the news stories. The representatives of the authorities themselves also frequently demand identification of persons accountable and announce investigations, so by covering these statements the majority of journalists create an illusion of criticism where the government is critical of itself.

When dealing with accountability, the papers are divided into three groups: those critical of the government (Danas), those demanding to know who is accountable but differently combining lack of criticism and their political bias (Politika, Blic, Vecernje Novosti and Kurir) and those critical of the opposition and the civil activists (Informer).

The dominant approach to the issue came from the position of collapsing of the rule of law (83.4%), and Kurir, Vecernje Novosti, and Politika have in approximately 10% of news stories discussed the issue from the point of view of ‘toppling the government’. Informer covered Savamala mostly as an attack on the Prime Minister and toppling the government (80%), and only occasionally from the point of view of corruption and crime (10%) or as the collapsing of the rule of law (10%). Not only that this is a different approach, but also absolutely opposing interpretation of the events related to Savamala.

Frequently using sensationalistic headlines and making caricatures of such symbols as yellow duck and the phantom, Informer trivialises the case of Savamala, whilst serious dailies have favoured photos of story actors and civil protests.

A half of the news stories concerned the current events, somewhat more than 10% were based on the pseudo-events, and more than a third was a result journalists’ personal initiative. Danas published the majority of these stories, so this daily has maintained the interest of the public even when the authorities through their inactivity tried to make this issue forgotten.

Aleksandar Vucic (14.11%) and “Ne davimo Beograd” activists (13.89%) were the most represented actors, and “Ne davimo Beograd” activists were quoted the most, while Aleksandar Vucic’s words were paraphrased. The majority of “Ne davimo Beograd” activists’ quoted statements came from the public rallies and events that media have covered.

Aleksandar Vucic has addressed directly 10 times, and his words were paraphrased 80 times, while “Ne davimo Beograd” activists have addressed directly in 42 news stories, and in 56 stories their words were paraphrased. Aleksandar Vucic has been mentioned for another 106 times, and “Ne davimo Beograd” activists for 95 times.

Public figures, also very active in the Case of Savamala, have been present almost only in Danas in 35 stories by criticising the public authorities and demanding to know who is accountable for demolition in Hercegovacka.

The presence of the political parties from the opposition in the press was very low, and in total, they were actors in less than 5% of news stories, however, they have actively tweeted about this topic.

The representation of story actors indicates visible polarisation of ‘authorities’ and ‘society’ in the case of Savamala: about 40% of all stories actors are Aleksandar Vucic (14.11%), Sinisa Mali and Nebojsa Stefanovic (11.81%) and investigative bodies (12.98%), and about 40% “Ne davimo Beograd” activists (13.89%), independent institutions (13.10%) and NGOs, citizens and public figures (11.98%).

General tone of coverage about main actors differs greatly. The representatives of the government were given an opportunity to explain their role, respond to criticism, but also criticise others as much as they have been criticised. Danas does not lose the critical edge when it comes to government, yet it has been minimised in Politika, Blic, Vecernje Novosti and Kurir, and completely lost in Informer. On the other hand, civil society activists, especially “Ne davimo Beograd”, have been subject of criticism quite often without any opportunity to respond. As the circulation grows, the only criticism that is evidently allowed has been the one addressing the government opponents.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

On the night between April 24 and 25 in 2016, the day after the parliamentary elections in Serbia, under mysterious circumstances around twenty people masked in balaclavas have, without permission or announcement, demolished a block of buildings in Hercegovacka Street in downtown Belgrade. The harassed and scared citizens have called the police but they have refused to respond, and the public has learned about this case a few days later.

Meanwhile, the city of Belgrade has allowed the construction of a parking lot at the demolished buildings site which has begun in the scope of the controversial project Belgrade Waterfront. This project involves the construction of luxurious residential and business complex at a very attractive location, without previously obtained permission and with a suspicious financial arrangement. Demolition of buildings in Hercegovacka has initiated several other events that together have shaped the ‘Case of Savamala’ during the year to follow. Apart from directly related events, ‘the case’ refers to the response of political actors and authorities, activities of competent public authorities and independent public institutions, protests of citizens gathered around the initiative “Ne davimo Beograd” and other forms of civil engagement that have followed.

After the demolition, several thousand exasperated citizens marched the streets demanding to know who is responsible, why and who ordered the demolition of 1200m² of buildings. They have received support from Rodoljub Sabic, Commissioner for information of public importance, as well as Sasa Jankovic, Ombudsman, demanding from state authorities to identify and prosecute the perpetrators and commanders of this act. In the beginning, the representatives of the authorities have promised that the case will be solved but very soon they have completely marginalised the case and tried to make it forgotten. The prosecutor has been assigned to the case registered as KTN-60/16.

Although no charges have been made until the finalisation of this report, periodical protests have continued, and the case of Savamala became a paradigm of collapsing of the rule of law and the biggest incentive for demonstration of civil discontent since 2000.

IMPORTANCE OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS

‘The case of Savamala’ is significant for understanding media freedom in Serbia and how key media work for the public interest. This Report has been based on the results of the research which has an aim to establish what have the dailies covered concerning the events related to the demolition of buildings in Hercegovacka, how coverage differed and how it contributed to public awareness in ‘the case of Savamala’.

The research concerned the selected dailies. Despite technological and cultural changes and high fall in circulation, the daily press still stands for the important medium defining the topics of public importance. The most of original news content still comes from traditional media, especially from daily papers.¹

As far as the important events are concerned, the media mostly repack and recycle already published information which predominantly comes from the daily press.² Notwithstanding TV is the largest news source for the audience, each newspaper edition contains more news than news bulletins. Even with big media industries, the majority of journalists are working for the printed media. Editorial boards have more journalists than TV or other media outlets in comparison to the total number of employees. Although the habits of the audience have changed significantly since other platforms are used to access the news, even when obtained through other media, it often originates from the daily papers. Therefore, the conditions of the journalistic profession within one environment could be assessed via daily papers content analysis.

This research involved six daily newspapers: Danas, Politika, Blic, Vecernje Novosti, Kurir, and Informer. Out of eight political daily papers published in Serbia at that moment, these papers have been selected to represent the total of news supply. This concerned their ownership structure, format, circulation, ideological orientation, and editorial policy. Among the selected, there were two quality (broadsheet) papers (Politika and Danas), two mid-market papers (Blic and Vecernje Novosti) and two tabloids (Informer and Kurir).³ In the period the research referred to, according to the estimates from several sources, the collective circulation of these papers was about 350,000 copies sold daily, and a total circulation of daily-political papers was about 450,000.⁴

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This research included the total content of the newspapers, meaning all news stories that referred to related issues, actors and events that have shaped ‘the case of Savamala’ during a one-year period. Research corpus consisted of a digital database of stories that were obtained through content search by the keyword Savamala and through additional search by related key words. (N=1233).

¹ How News Happen study of Pew Research Center, for example, has established that in one big urban environment (Baltimore) about 95% of stories that bring new information originate from printed media, most of all daily newspapers. Available at: <http://www.journalism.org/2010/01/11/how-news-happens/>

² One author defines this influence as ‘primordial role of the press’. Patterson, Th., How the Press Failed the American Votes, Shorenstein Centre, Harvard University. Available at: <https://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-General-Election-News-Coverage-1.pdf?x78124>

³ The terminology used here is quality papers or serious dailies, instead of newspaper of record, which is less common, mid-market papers and tabloid press.

⁴ Newspapers circulation numbers are not public and easily accessible data. The attempts to establish a single system of measuring circulation in Serbia has failed several times and the media consider information on the circulation as trade secret. These estimates were made on the basis of the international reports, Reporters without Borders report from April 2017 on readership data, <http://serbia.mom-rsf.org/en/media/print/>, similar periodic reports of IPSOS agency, as well as the compilation of data available on demand that have been received from the media.

After that, the database has been overviewed and narrowed to the selection of news stories which had not included those just occasionally mentioning Savamala (N= 527) so the analysis included 706 news stories in total.

Quantitative-qualitative content analysis has been used as the main research method, and the unit of the analysis was a single news story (item) including all of its content and visual accompanying parts. The analytical instrument has been established so as to use analysis to obtain answers to three fundamental research questions:

- 1) To what extent are media an open forum?
- 2) How different papers coverage varies?
- 3) To what extent media enable the public control of the government?

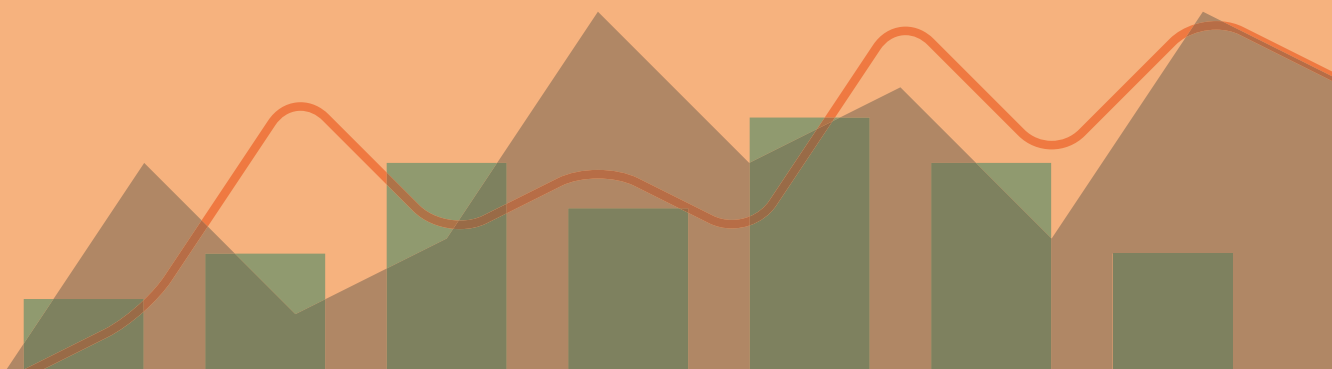
In order to get a more complete picture about the case of Savamala in the media, this research has included Twitter social network and its dynamics, actors and debate. The case of Savamala has been researched in the entire Twitter community (around 300.000 people), meaning everyone using hashtag #Savamala. However, this does not rule out the possibility that other members of the Twitter community have been active and involved in the debate on the issue but have not used the dominant hashtag, so they were not included in the sample.

Social Network Analysis Method (ADM/SNA) has been used for Twitter analysis. Social network analysis is a method that uses visualisation of the network to enable manifestation of occurrences relevant for users and community behaviour in a specific case. All SNA results have been represented through Gephi software.

The purpose of this mapping was to demonstrate how communication initiated by daily newspapers differs from the discussion in social media.

The research team consisted of representatives of non-governmental organisations who had this research as a part of their research training. During one year and a series of workshops and research practice they have gained knowledge and skills that they could be using in similar research and media content analysis in the future.

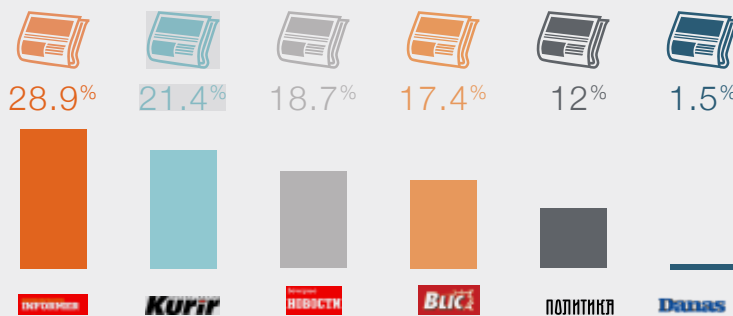
RESEARCH RESULTS



01.

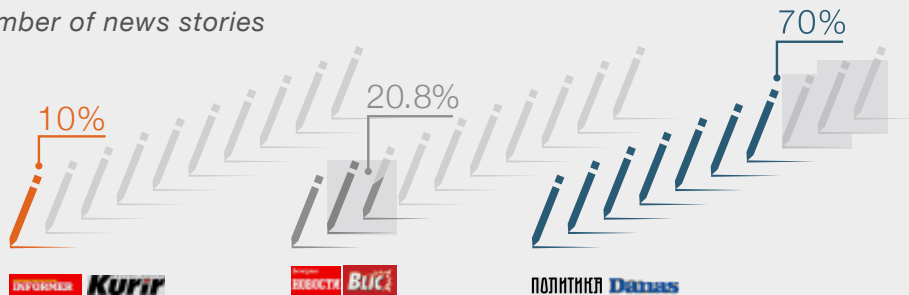
Media landscape Circulation and type of newspaper

Circulation



TYPE OF COVERAGE IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE CIRCULATION, TYPE AND EDITORIAL POLICY OF THE DAILY NEWSPAPERS. THE HIGHER THE CIRCULATION, THE AMOUNT OF NEWS COVERAGE DECLINES.

Number of news stories

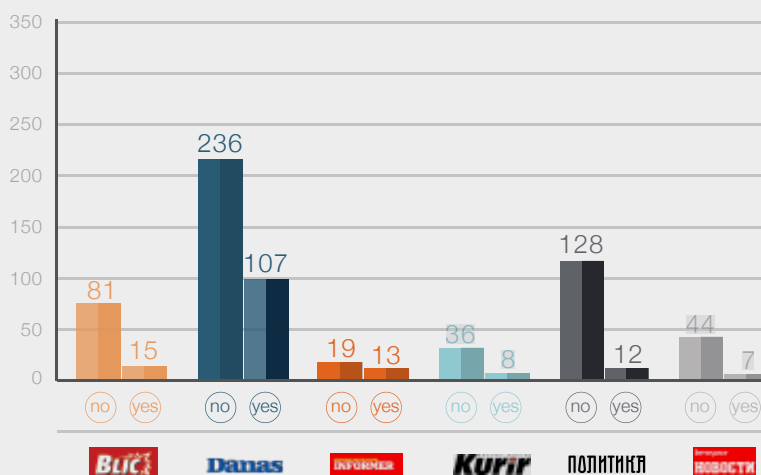


THE HIGHER THE CIRCULATION, THE BIAS (SUBJECTIVITY) IN COVERAGE INCREASES. THE HIGHER THE CIRCULATION, THE LEVEL OF CRITICISM FOR GOVERNMENT DECLINES.

02.

Frequency of coverage
Total number of news stories

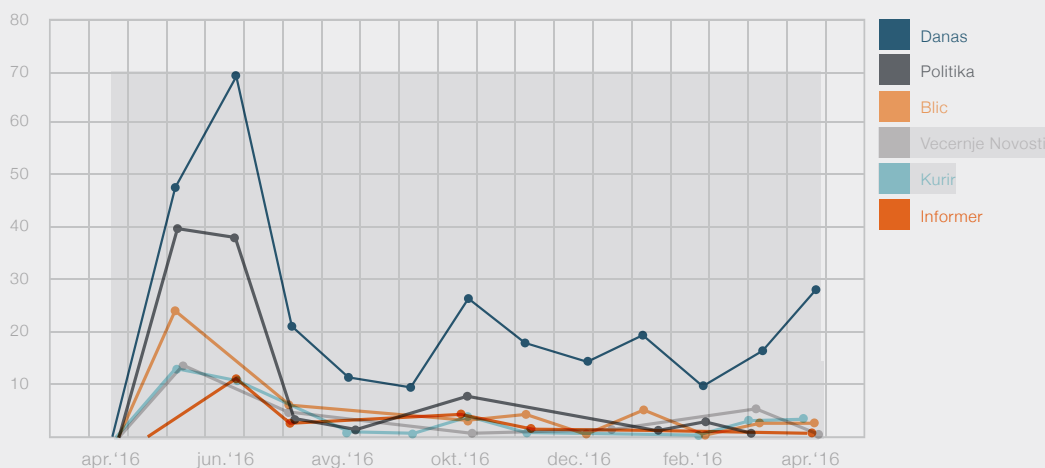
Number of stories and headlines per paper



ON AVERAGE, EACH DAY IN ALL SIX NEWSPAPERS THERE WERE TWO STORIES, BUT THE FREQUENCY OF COVERAGE DIFFERED GREATLY IN EACH.

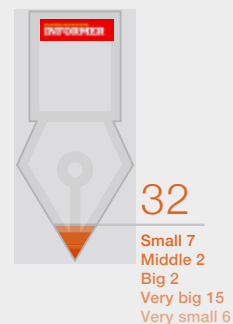
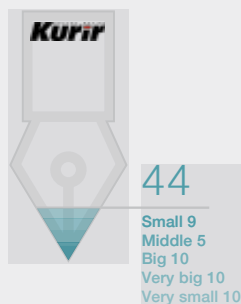
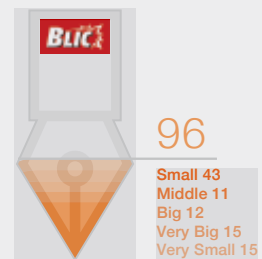
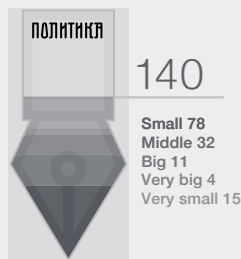
ON AVERAGE, DANAS HAD A STORY EVERY DAY, POLITIKA EVERY SECOND OR THIRD DAY, BLIC EVERY FOURTH, VECERNJE NOVOSTI EVERY SEVENTH DAY, KURIR EVERY EIGHT DAY, AND INFORMER EVERY ELEVENTH DAY.

The number of stories per paper and date

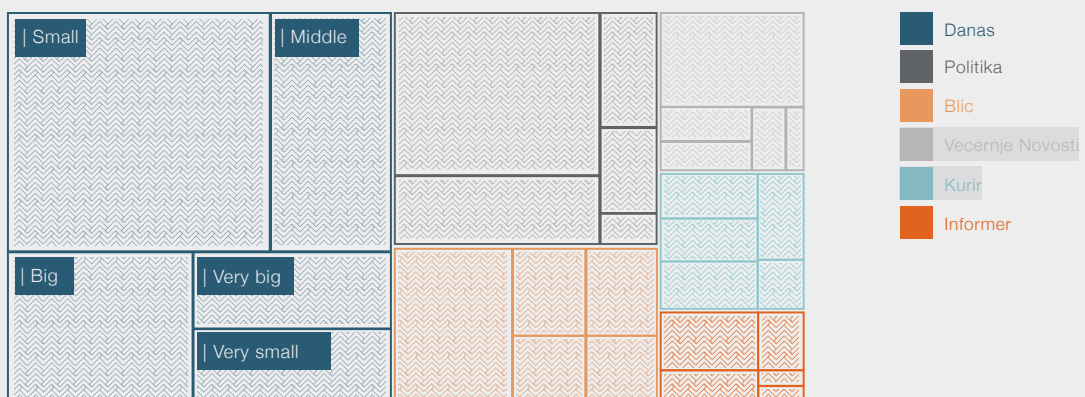


03.

Amount of newspaper coverage Total size of news stories



DANAS PUBLISHED 343 STORIES, ALMOST AS MUCH AS THE OTHER NEWSPAPERS TOGETHER (N= 363), POLITIKA 140, NEARLY AS BLIC AND VECERNJE NOVOSTI TOGETHER (N= 147), AND KURIR AND INFORMER 76 STORIES TOGETHER.



04.

Coverage form
Cover page headlines

Cover page headlines

22.95%

• 162

Other than cover page

77.05%

• 544

100%
TOTAL:
706

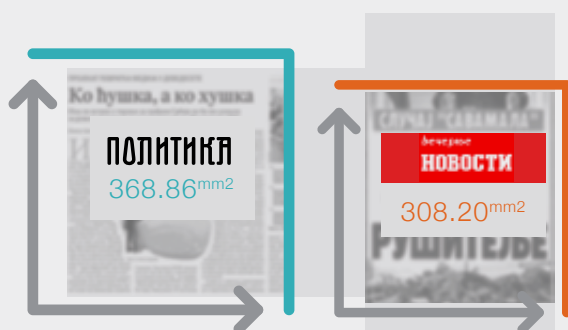
ПОЛИТИКА

FOR STORIES ON THE CASE OF SAVAMALA, TABLOIDS OFTEN HAD HUGE HEADLINES LARGE AS FRONT PAGES. WITH THE FEWEST STORIES INFORMER HAS MORE COVER PAGE HEADLINES (N=13) THAN POLITIKA (N=12) WHICH HAS FOUR AND A HALF TIMES MORE STORIES.



05.

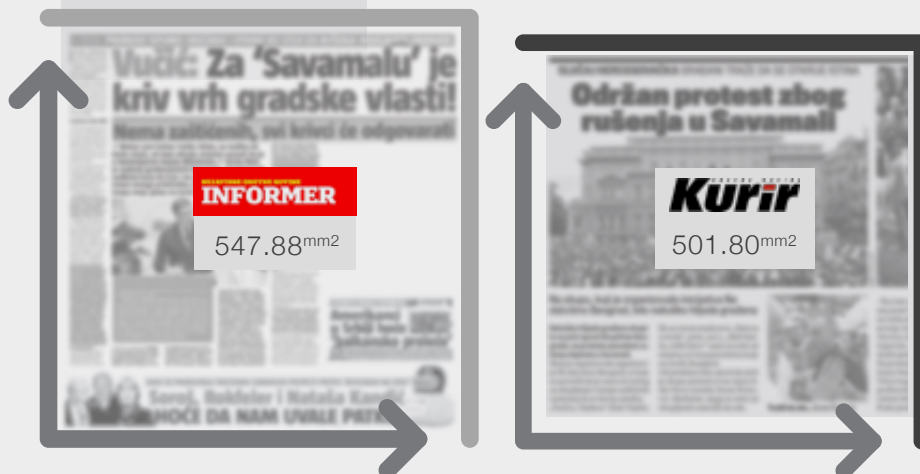
Size of individual news stories



INFORMER HAS THE LONGEST AVERAGE STORY (548 MM²), AND VECERNJE NOVOSTI THE SHORTEST (308 MM²). AVERAGE STORY IN BLIC (386 MM²) IS LONGER THAN THE AVERAGE STORY IN POLITIKA (369 MM²).



Average big and small story for every newspaper $R=1:3$



06.

Types of news stories



NEWS ITEMS DOMINATE THE MAJORITY OF NEWSPAPERS (48% IN DANAS, 86% IN VECERNJE NOVOSTI), WHILE THE ANALYTICAL NEWS ITEMS ARE THE RAREST (24% IN DANAS, 11% IN VECERNJE NOVOSTI). KURIR DOES NOT HAVE EDITORIALS OR COLUMNS AT ALL, VECERNJE NOVOSTI ONLY HAVE TWO COLUMNS, INFORMER HAS ONLY THREE EDITORIALS, AND BOTH COLUMNS AND EDITORIALS COULD BE FOUND IN BLIC (ALMOST 20%), POLITIKA AND DANAS (ALMOST UP TO 30%).



NEWSPAPERS WITHOUT ANY OR WITH ONLY A FEW COLUMNS AND EDITORIALS ARE HIGHLY BIASED IN ALL NEWS ITEMS (STORIES).



News item



Analytical news item



Reportage



Interview



Editorial



Column

Total number of illustrations

[illegible]

08.

Type of illustration

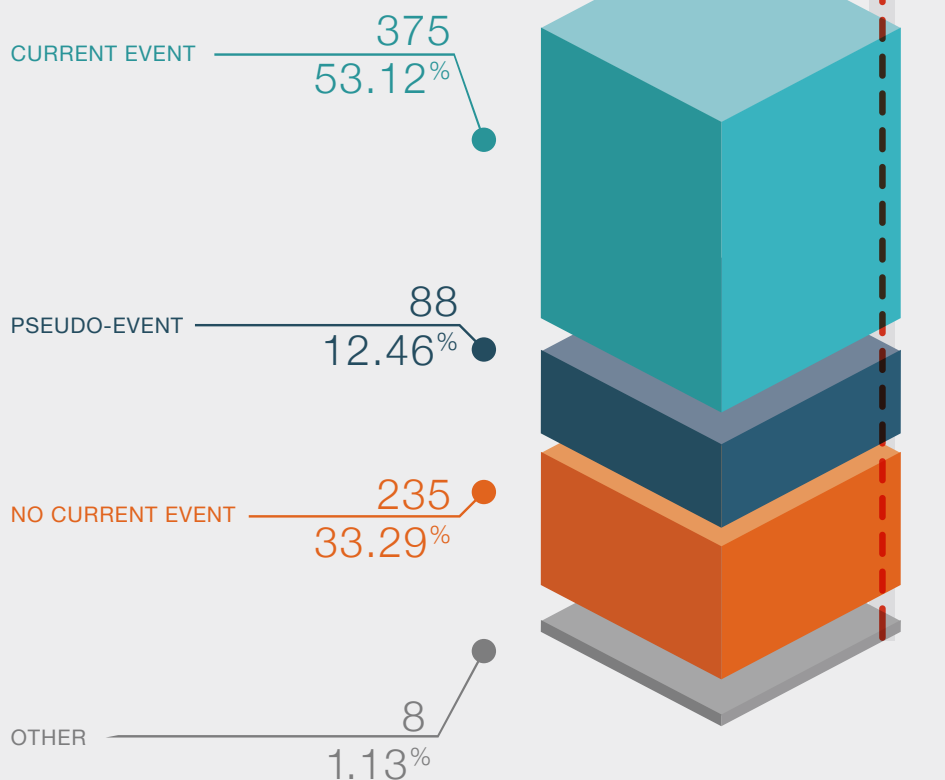


09.

Type of events covered



TWO TIMES MORE NEWS STORIES CONCERNED THE CURRENT EVENTS (53.12%), OR REFERRED TO THE PSEUDO-EVENTS (12.46%), THAN HAD RESULTED FROM JOURNALISTS' PERSONAL INITIATIVE. DANAS PUBLISHED THE MAJORITY OF THESE STORIES, SO THIS DAILY HAS MAINTAINED THE INTEREST OF THE PUBLIC EVEN WHEN THE AUTHORITIES THROUGH THEIR INACTIVITY TRIED TO MAKE THIS ISSUE FORGOTTEN.

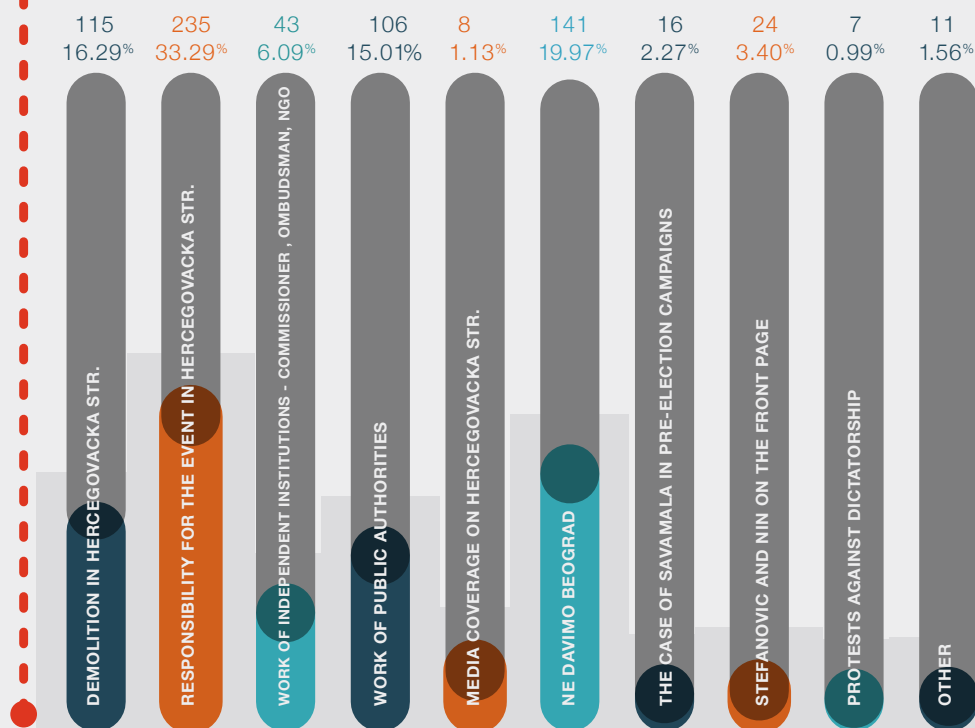


10.

Topic

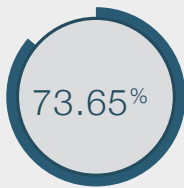
100%
TOTAL:
706

THE TOPIC OF EACH THIRD STORY IS A DEMAND FOR ESTABLISHING ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ANOTHER THIRD OF STORIES CONCERNS THE DEMOLITION IN HERCEGOVACKA (16.29%) AND WORK OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES ON THIS MATTER (15%). THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INITIATIVE "NE DAVIMO BEOGRAD" ("LET'S NOT DROWN BELGRADE") AND INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS TOGETHER WERE AN ISSUE IN APPROXIMATELY A QUARTER OF THE NEWS STORIES. THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AUTHORITIES THEMSELVES ALSO FREQUENTLY DEMAND IDENTIFICATION OF PERSONS ACCOUNTABLE AND ANNOUNCE INVESTIGATIONS, SO BY COVERING THESE STATEMENTS THE MAJORITY OF JOURNALISTS CREATE AN ILLUSION OF CRITICISM WHERE THE GOVERNMENT IS CRITICAL OF ITSELF.



11.

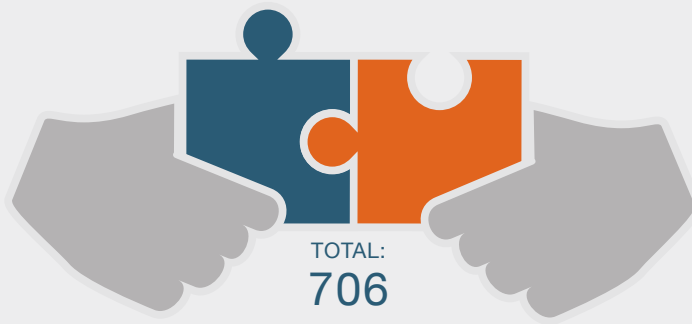
Topic importance



MAIN TOPIC
520

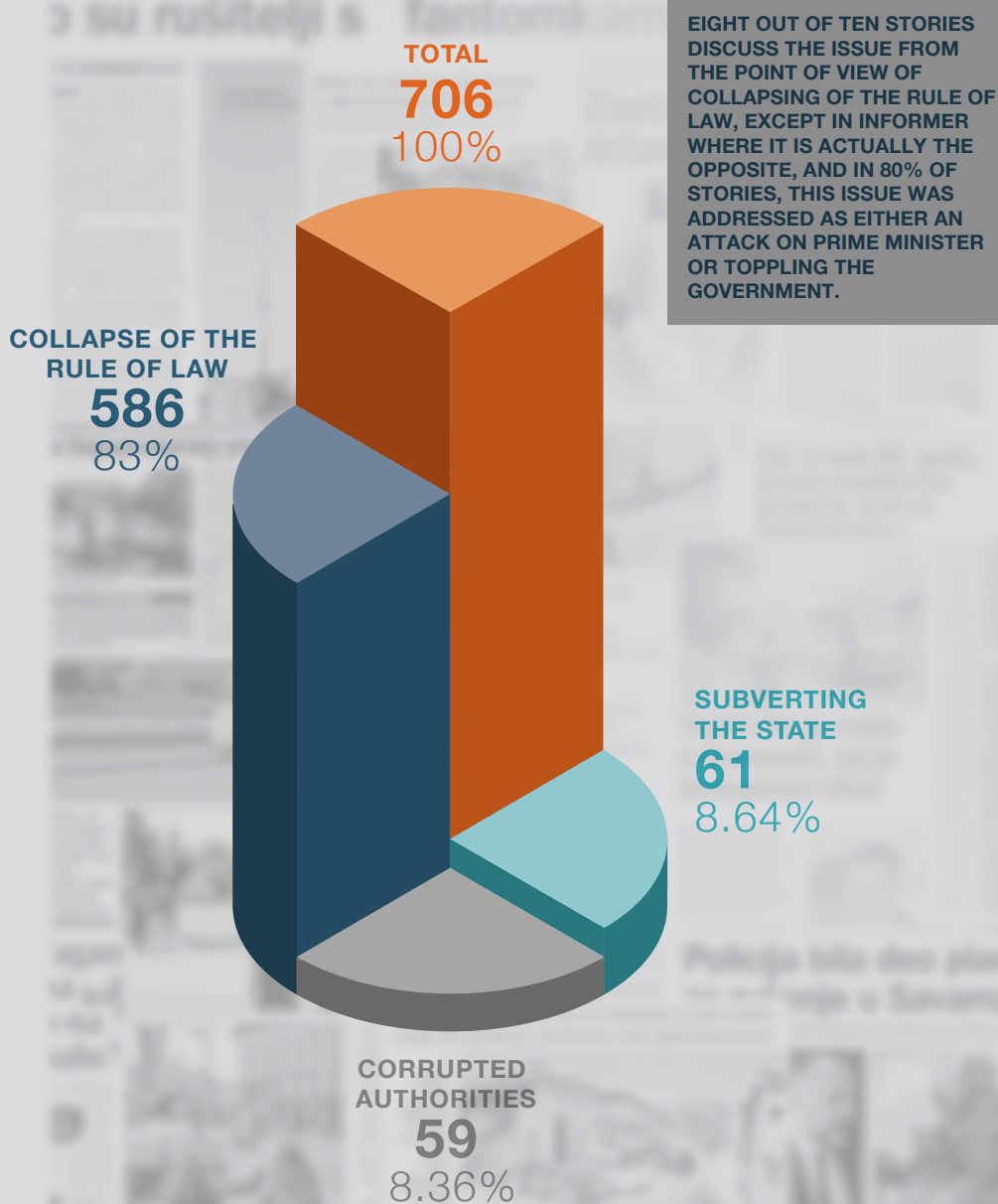


SIDE ISSUE
186



12.

Framework / The approach to the topic

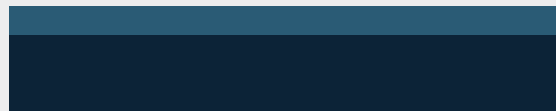


13.

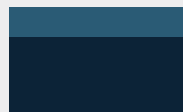
Source



MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION ARE THE INSTITUTIONS, THEIR REPRESENTATIVES OR PARTICIPANTS IN THE EVENT, AND THE PAPERS RARELY SEARCHED FOR SOURCES APART FROM THE OFFICIAL ONES.



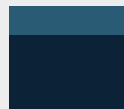
PEOPLE &
INSTITUTIONS
493
57.73%



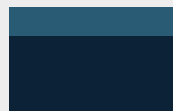
PRESS RELEASE,
DOCUMENT,
CONTRACT
116
13.58%



ANONYMOUS SOURCE
37
4.33%



WITHOUT SOURCE
94
11.01%

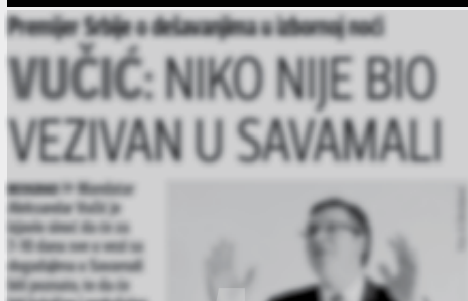


AGENCY NEWS OR
TAKEN FROM OTHER MEDIA
114
13.35%

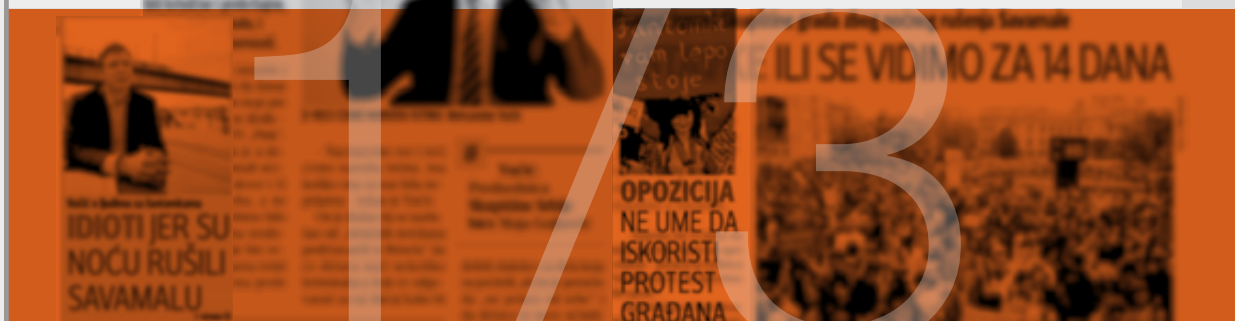
TOTAL:
854
100%

14^a.

Actors



ALEKSANDAR VUCIC
(14.11%)
 & “NE DAVIMO BEOGRAD”
 ACTIVISTS
(13.89%)
 WERE THE MOST
 REPRESENTED ACTORS.



THREE MOST REPRESENTED ACTORS FROM THE GOVERNMENT:

ALEKSANDAR VUCIC, SINISA MALI AND NEBOJSA STEFANOVIC WERE THE MAIN ACTORS IN ABOUT A QUARTER OF NEWS ITEMS.

“NE DAVIMO BEOGRAD”

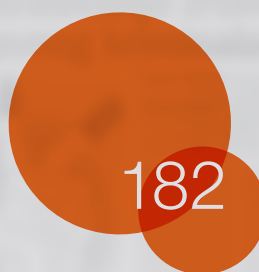
WERE AS EQUALLY REPRESENTED,
 ALONG WITH THE CITIZENS AND NGO ACTIVISTS.

14^b.

The frequency of four actor groups



ALEKSANDAR VUCIC - 196
SINISA MALI - 91
NEBOJSA STEFANOVIC - 73



SASA JANKOVIC - 112
RODOLJUB SABIC - 70



NE DAVIMO BEOGRAD - 193
CITIZENS - 68
NGO - 31



POLICE - 82
PROSECUTOR - 97

15.

Actors' treatment

DIRECT STATEMENTS,
QUOTES

292

21.02%



PARAPHRASED

607

43.70%

MAIN ACTORS ARE MOST OFTEN
PARAPHRASED OR MENTIONED,
RARELY QUOTED, MOSTLY BY
STATEMENTS FROM PUBLIC EVENTS
OR APPEARANCES.TOTAL NUMBER
OF ACTORS

1389

100%

MENTIONED

490

35.28%



16.

Role of actors in news stories



IZVINJENJA TRAZE I VUCIC I JANKOVIC

FANTOMI SU NOSILI CRNE UNIFORME

Policija zatvara oči pred osam počinjenih krivičnih dela

Policija bila deo plana za rušenje u Savamali

VUČIĆ: NIKO NIJE BIO VEZIVAN U SAVAMALI

THE GENERAL TONE OF COVERAGE ABOUT MAIN ACTORS DIFFERS GREATLY.

THE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES HAD AN OPPORTUNITY, IN ALMOST ALL PAPERS, TO EXPLAIN THEIR ROLE, TO STAND UP TO THE CRITICISM, AND TO CRITICISE OTHERS MORE THAN THE OTHERS CRITICISED THEM.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE CRITICAL EDGE DISAPPEARED, IT HAS NOT BEEN LOST IN DANAS, BUT IT HAS BEEN MINIMISED IN POLITIKA, BLIC, VECERNJE NOVOSTI, AND KURIR, AND COMPLETELY LOST IN INFORMER.

Ko huška, a ko huška

Tužilaštvo traži od policije odgovore za Hercegovacku

LAMPAS IZ SAVAMALE

ON THE OTHER HAND, CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS, ESPECIALLY “NE DAVIMO BEOGRAD”, HAVE BEEN SUBJECT OF CRITICISM QUITE OFTEN WITHOUT ANY OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND. AS THE CIRCULATION GROWS, THE ONLY CRITICISM THAT IS EVIDENTLY ALLOWED HAS BEEN THE ONE ADDRESSING THE GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS.

CONCLUSIONS

‘The case of Savamala’ became a paradigm of the rule of law and media freedom situation in Serbia. It has demonstrated that the daily papers scene is highly asymmetrical, that is has been recomposed so the huge group of pro-government media has been created and the role of the media in Serbia has fundamentally changed.

Among the daily papers, which form the backbone of news media, the difference in coverage is directly related to circulation, type of papers and editorial policy. The higher the circulation there is less coverage on Savamala, more bias, less objectivity, and the least criticism of the government.

Circulation and independence are inversely proportional therefore Danas, a daily with the smallest circulation, has published 50% of all stories on Savamala in one year, whilst Informer, a daily with the highest circulation, has published less than 5% of all stories. Since all papers covered the story in inverse proportion to their circulation, it means that this was a general tendency and not an editorial coincidence.

As closer it gets to tabloid format, the media get more biased in coverage and less objective. Quality papers, Danas and Politika, kept the issue in public focus, mid-market papers, Blic and Vecernje Novosti, contributed to the total coverage twice as less (about 20%) in comparison to their share in total circulation of analysed papers (about 40%), and tabloids, Informer and Kurir, which use scandals to make a living, when it comes to one of the greatest political scandals, together have published fewer stories in a year than Danas did in a month. This amount of newspaper coverage is simultaneously followed by a certain level of bias so in quality papers the coverage is more versatile and balanced (or objective?), with a variety of topics, actors and voices about the event which even almost two years after does not have either political or police epilogue.

Finally, despite similarities of each type of paper, differences in their editorial policies are demonstrated through the level of independence, meaning critical attitude towards the government. This is most obvious in the quality press. Two papers that contributed to Savamala becoming a public topic, addressed the issue of accountability for demolition in Hercegovacka differently, who is the object of criticism and by whom. While Danas used the sharp edge of criticism towards the government and kept insisting on its accountability, Politika has tried to create the non-existing balance.

More often than various critics having an opportunity to require accountability, representatives of authorities had an opportunity to explain their role, reject demands and discussion on accountability, promise investigation and even impose different topic by criticising ‘unknown’ perpetrators or civil activists or opposition.

One year of coverage on Savamala events has demonstrated how the daily newspapers have also become ‘a case’ of their own. Media pluralism has been very reduced in them, their role of public forum is being threatened, and since the scene as a whole has not been open, fair and free, their role of a ‘watchdog’ of democracy has been compromised as well. The majority of daily newspapers have gathered around in providing support for the government, and that solid ‘pro-government’ group has become dominant in the media. Pro-government media range from far right, conservative and nationalist side, to more moderate media centre. Due to their domination and the emphasised asymmetry there is no media basis (mainstream media)

anymore, and polarisation and bias have been distributed along the ideological and professional path in a different manner.⁵

The media critical of the government have been pushed towards the opposite margin. Few independent media have been placed on the top of this asymmetry. Each attempt of media independence is labelled by the media majority as biased or an opposition and even as an enemy activity. On the other hand, defending and supporting the government is the main task of highly biased media from the conservative pro-government side. Moderate, pro-government newspapers carry out 'the normalisation' in this polarisation.

A visible indicator of this asymmetry is the considerable domination of tabloid media. In comparison to average estimated circulation of these six papers during the period of the research (about 350,000) that ratio was approximately 50-40-10% in circulation of tabloids, mid-market papers and quality papers. Actually, the collective circulation of tabloids could have been even higher but the remaining two daily papers Alo and Srpski Telegraf, also tabloids with high circulation, have been excluded from the research. This means that tabloid share of daily papers probably makes more than two thirds of collective circulation of daily press.

With this ratio, we can in fact talk about high concentration of pro-government media and not pluralism or polarisation in the media world. Danas is the only one to be qualified as independent daily paper, and its share in total press circulation is about 1 and 1.5%. If we include the papers which have a less critical attitude towards the government and higher degree of professionalism since they mostly work for the public interest, Politika and Blic, this group of daily papers still makes less than 25% of total market.

Diversity, impartiality and critical approach are not the principal values of the media but characteristics of the rare 'liberal' papers.

The higher the media circulation and closer they are to the government, their thematic variety, the range of opinions and interviewees are significantly declining. Pro-government media demonstrate lack of criticism differently along with their political bias: if they are closer to the centre and they respect professional standards, they are mostly combining the non-critical attitude towards the government with 'neutral' relationship towards everybody else. On the other hand, radical pro-government papers combine high praises of the government whilst being disapproving towards all government critics. Extremely pro-government media have characteristics of radical right media ('alt-right'), who combine their support for the government, not only by frequently attacking government critics but also by often attacking the mainstream media.

Even when they are less critical of the government, the papers that respect higher professional standards have a better variety of topics, sources and interviewees and more objective approach.

⁵ Asymmetrical polarisation is present in various media environments.

According to the research Partisanship, Propaganda & Disinformation of Berkman Klein Centre in USA the asymmetrical polarisation is a characteristic of another media culture where apart from more sharp polarisation between liberal and conservative media, the previously dominant 'mainstream' media of ideological centre are disappearing. Available at: https://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/2017-08_electionES_2.pdf

On the other hand, recent research of Centre for Media, Data and Society in CEU indicate that in Hungary the number of pro-government media is rapidly growing as they now constitute a huge majority.

Available at: <https://cmds.ceu.edu/article/2018-01-16/explore-government-friendly-media-empire-hungary>

At the same time, independent media have a wider selection of interviewees and topics they choose themselves, and they usually respond to the issues imposed by the media close to the government, so in the framework of smaller public they were the only ones with a room for debate.

The situation in the social media tells about different dynamics. On Twitter, which has the most important role in political communication (exchange of messages, mutual likes and re-tweeting) two communities are more strictly divided and there is more symmetry here: one is grouped around public officials, high circulation pro-government media and the Internet followers. The other consists of representatives of independent institutions, critical media, civil initiatives, NGOs and active citizens. This division indicates the role of media in political polarisation which is related to the ideological and political divisions in the society, but also technological details of the media landscape. Instead of obvious asymmetry from the daily papers, in online sphere we have more visible polarisation which is indicating a smaller degree of control and greater freedom of expression.

There are however other consequences of this polarisation. It contributes to narrowing of the room for public discussion, harsher division of the public, radicalisation of the followers and increased apathy of the less interested public. Polarisation contributes to the general decline of trust in the traditional media and directly facilitates the dissemination of disinformation, bias and further radicalisation that are more easily conveyed in online media space.

The domination of the media close to the government, who demonstrate this affection by attacking few professional media, is creating a belief that independent media are redundant. The lack of criticism towards the government threatens the public awareness by normalising the belief that the role of media is not to enable responsible government but to control the public.

Unlike the prominent asymmetry from the daily newspapers, the polarisation visible in the online sphere is indicating the smaller degree of control and more freedom of expression.

However, this type of polarisation has other consequences. It contributes to narrowing the room for public discussion, the sharper splitting of the public, the radicalisation of the followers and growing apathy among the less interested public.

Polarisation contributes to the general decline of trust in the traditional media and indirectly facilitates the dissemination of disinformation, bias and further radicalisation, which are more easily distributed in online media space.

In addition to, with the domination of the media close to the government who demonstrate this affection by attacking key professional media, the belief is created that the critical media are unnecessary. Complete lack of criticism towards the government is threatening to normalise the public belief that the main role of media is not to criticise and control the government but to control the public.

 CIVIL
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS

THE CASE OF SAVAMALA

