

GRAND POLITICAL MEDIA BAROMETER

REPORT ON COMMUNICATION OF BELARUS' INDEPENDENT POLITICAL FORCES

(2012-2016)

Preamble

Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) is happy to present the Grand Political Media Barometer report for 49 months of continuous observations. Following our mission as a non-partisan, independent Belarusian think-tank, we designed this product with one major goal in mind: to scientifically analyze the quality of the political communication between the democratic Belarusian political forces and the society and contribute to its improvement. The research summarizes our findings and offers the main conclusions concerning the major factors that determined this communication throughout the whole period of observation.

Introduction

In a consolidated autocracy, in which the electoral, judicial and legislative arenas are foreclosed to the political opposition, media becomes the last arena in which the autocratic incumbent could be challenged¹. How does the political opposition in Belarus use the available online and printed resources, both partisan and independent? What are the main messages that are being sent? How are the political forces being represented? These are just some of the questions that make the focus of the current report.

The report analyses communication of Belarus' major opposition political forces: both organizations and individual politicians. It is based on the consolidated database of 'BISS Political Media Barometer' (BPMB) — a project that the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) has been executing since 2012². To be precise, it covers the interval between April 2012 and December 2015. During these 45 months of observation three electoral campaigns took place in Belarus: parliamentary

¹ Based on Lucan Wan and Steven Levitsky (2005)

² The authors of the BISS Political Media Barometer benefitted from the insightful comments and advice from its international Board, comprising of: Wojciech Borodzicz-Smolinski (Center for International Relations, Poland), Kristina Vaicunaite (Eastern Europe Studies Center, Lithuania), Donna Victoria (Victoria Research and Consulting, USA), Denis Volkov (Levada Center, Russia) and other anonymous reviewers to whom we remain truly indebted and grateful. Needless to say: the responsibility for any shortcomings or errors solely rests within BISS.

elections (September, 2012); local elections (March, 2014) and presidential elections (October, 2015). Also, in that time interval, Belarus experienced a swing of the geopolitical pendulum: from what could be called ‘isolation’ to ‘engagement’. Thus, roughly between April 2012 and November 2014 there was a period of isolation when the external sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA were mirrored by the increased level of domestic repressions against the civil-society and the political opposition. From late 2014, Belarus’ authorities started to gradually relax the internal pressure, ease the repressions, and seek the normalization of the relations with the West. Minsk became the platform for dialogue on Ukraine, seeking to occupy the peacekeeper niche in the region. Political prisoners were released and the presidential electoral campaign of October 2015 took place without a single administrative arrest. Finally, the Parliamentary elections in September 2016, albeit not being recognized as free and fair by OSCE's observers brought about new outcomes: two members of the opposition received their mandates as MPs. This is particularly important as the changing contexts serve as the natural variable which allows us to test how the context affects and shapes the communication of the political opposition.

The database on which we are basing our conclusions consists of **75541** units of analysis, or **40172** unique instances of media appearance of political forces/individual politicians. Each of the units of media appearance (i.e. article, interview, etc) was analyzed and coded along the 20 various parameters, making the overall sample consist of no less than **1.5 mln.** database entrances (units of analysis). To create this database, we objectively and quantitatively evaluated the media-appearances of the Belarusian opposition political forces (and 27 individual politicians³), based on the systematic monitoring of the available open media sources.

The report structure is as follows: descending the ladder of abstraction we begin with (a) explanation of the methodology followed by (b) the most important detailed results regarding the communication of the political forces. Then we zoom in and (c) analyze the particular parameters of the political forces communication, underlining the most important and puzzling findings which include the impact of the electoral campaigns and changing geopolitical realms. Finally, the results of the BPMB and the policy-recommendations were not only made available to the opposition, but also communicated directly to the leaders of five political forces: Fair World, Tell the Truth, UCP, BCD

³We used the results of our analysis, including the developed ratings to A) encourage the opposition forces to use the independent (and also the affiliated) media more efficiently, B) introduce a new objective performance-based evaluation tool, C) make the oppositional media outreach more efficient, D) encourage a closer cooperation between political forces, the independent expert community, and think-tanks. The report was not intended to reward rating ‘champions’, nor identify losers. It rather served as a ‘reality-check’ tool that provides a level of evaluation of transparency for political media communications, illuminates good practices, and provides certain useful suggestions. The report may contain certain shortcomings, omissions caused by the human factor: although we double proofed the data selectively, the coders could have made minor mistakes, which do not affect the general picture that this report presents.

and BPF. This allows us to conclude with (d) testing how the BPMB affected the communication of the political forces.

Methodology

A full description of methodology of the rating could be found following the link: <http://belinstitute.eu/en/analytics-comments>. The BISS Political Media Barometer's ratings include the following units of analysis:

- a) individual politicians*
- b) political parties/movements*
- c) coalitions*

Each of them is described in terms of political affiliation, gender, and his/her position in the political structure. The qualitative and quantitative indexes that we produce in the report (to be explained in the body of the text), allow us to identify the trends and compare the actors, and to make a media profile of each political force/individual politician. We initially included 27 actors in the analysis, yet that list was revised several times because of various natural reasons: politicians leaving politics, leaders losing the forces that they represent, etc. The initial list consisted of the following:

1. Anatol Liabedzka	United Civic Party (UCP)
2. Siarhei Kaliakin	"Fair World" party
3. Viktar Ivashkevich	"Belarusian Rukh" (former member of BPF)
4. Vital Rymasheuski	Organizational committee on creating of the party "Belarusian Christian Democracy" (BCD)
5. Uladzimir Niakliayeu	"Tell the Truth" civic campaign (TT)
6. Aliaksey Yanukevich	BPF
7. Aliaksandr Milinkevich	"For Freedom!" movement
8. Aliaksandr Fiaduta	"TT" civic campaign (GP)
9. Yuras Hubarevich	"For freedom!" movement
10. Andrey Dzmitriyeyu	"Tell the Truth" civic campaign (TT)
11. Ryhor Kastusiou	BPF

12. Andrey Sannikau	“European Belarus”
13. Zmicer Bandarenka	”European Belarus”
14. Iryna Khalip	Charter 97
15. Stanislau Shushkevich	Belarusian Social
16. Pavel Seviarynets	Organizational committee on creating of the party Belarusian Christian democracy (BCD),
17. Maryna Adamovich	Nikolai Statkevich’s wife,
18. Ales Mikhalevich	No affiliation
19. Dzmitry Vus	The legislative initiative to change the Electoral Code
20. Nasta Palazhanka	“Young front” (MF)
21. Mikalai Khaliezin	Charter 97
22. Volha Bandarenka	Dzmitry Bandarenka’s wife
23. Natallia Radzina	Charter 97
24. Aliaksandr Kazulin	No affiliation
25. Zianon Pazniak	Conservative Christian Party BPF (CChP
26. Iryna Veshtard	Belarusian Social
27. Uladzimir Baradach	Initiative on creating of Belarusian Government in Exile

Throughout the year, the BISS Political Media Barometer’s slightly changed the sample from one issue to another, including the individual politicians, the political forces and coalitions that demonstrated the most active media presence. However, the unstable media presence of political figures on one hand, and the criteria of data comparability on the other, have prompted to a different approach to sampling. Guided by expert opinions and by the analysis of the developments in the political media landscape, we have opted for the following sampling principle.

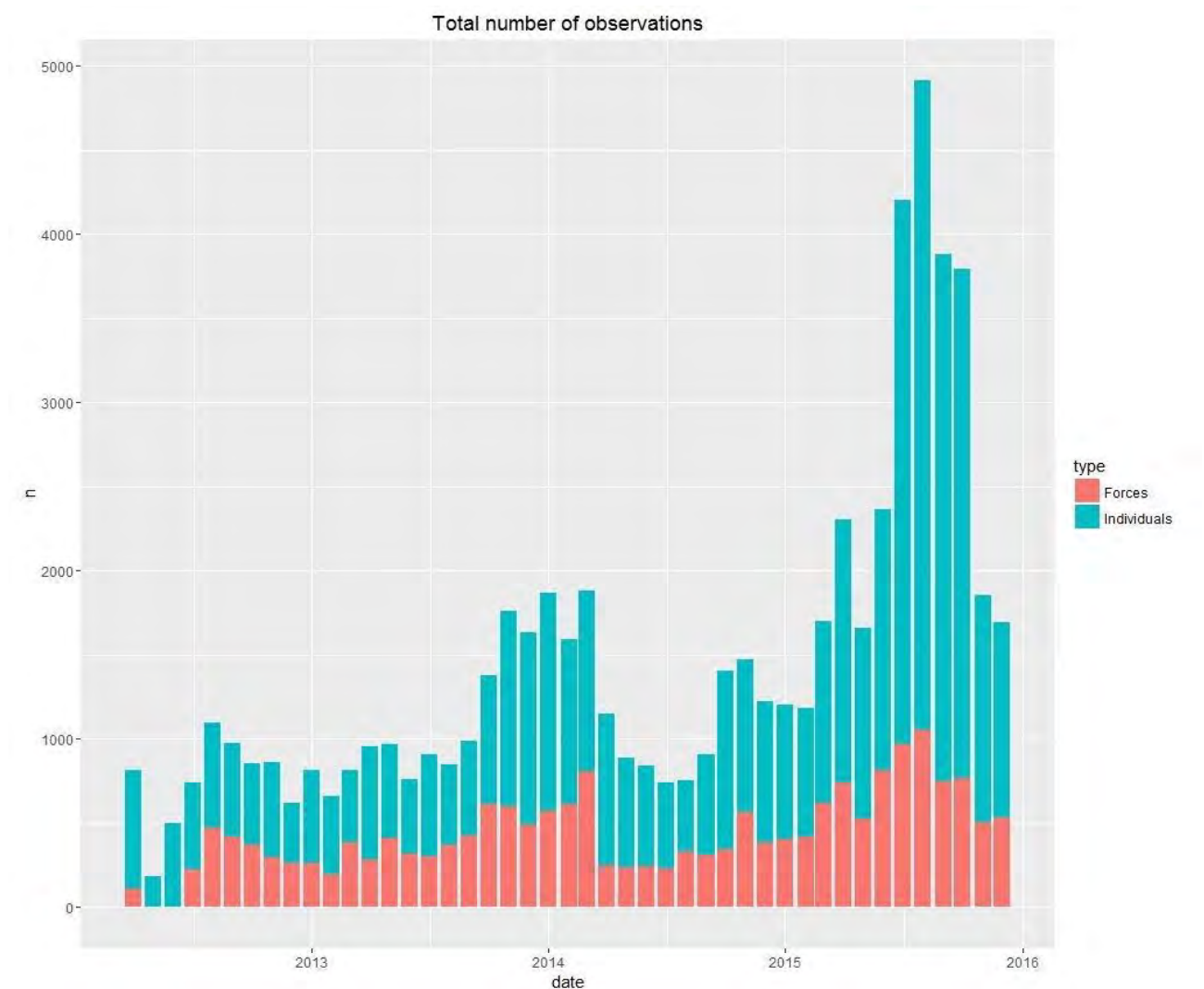
The first-level units of analysis include thirteen political forces. The second-level units of analysis are two representatives from each political force, ‘leader+1’. The sample of individuals may change, depending on how active the representatives of political forces are in the information field.

Key findings

1. Uneven volumes of communication, or how much presidential elections matter. (quantitative indices).

Seasonal character of Belarus' independent politics is clearly reflected in the volume of communications (number of observations). There is a clear explosion of *politics* during the electoral campaigns and the presidential elections could be characterized by the unprecedented growth of communication. Thus, during July-October 2015 the total volume of communication increased by 360% in comparison to the same period of 2014. This 4.6 increase in communication could be clearly seen from the **Graph 1**.

Graph 1. Total number of observation: volumes of communication.



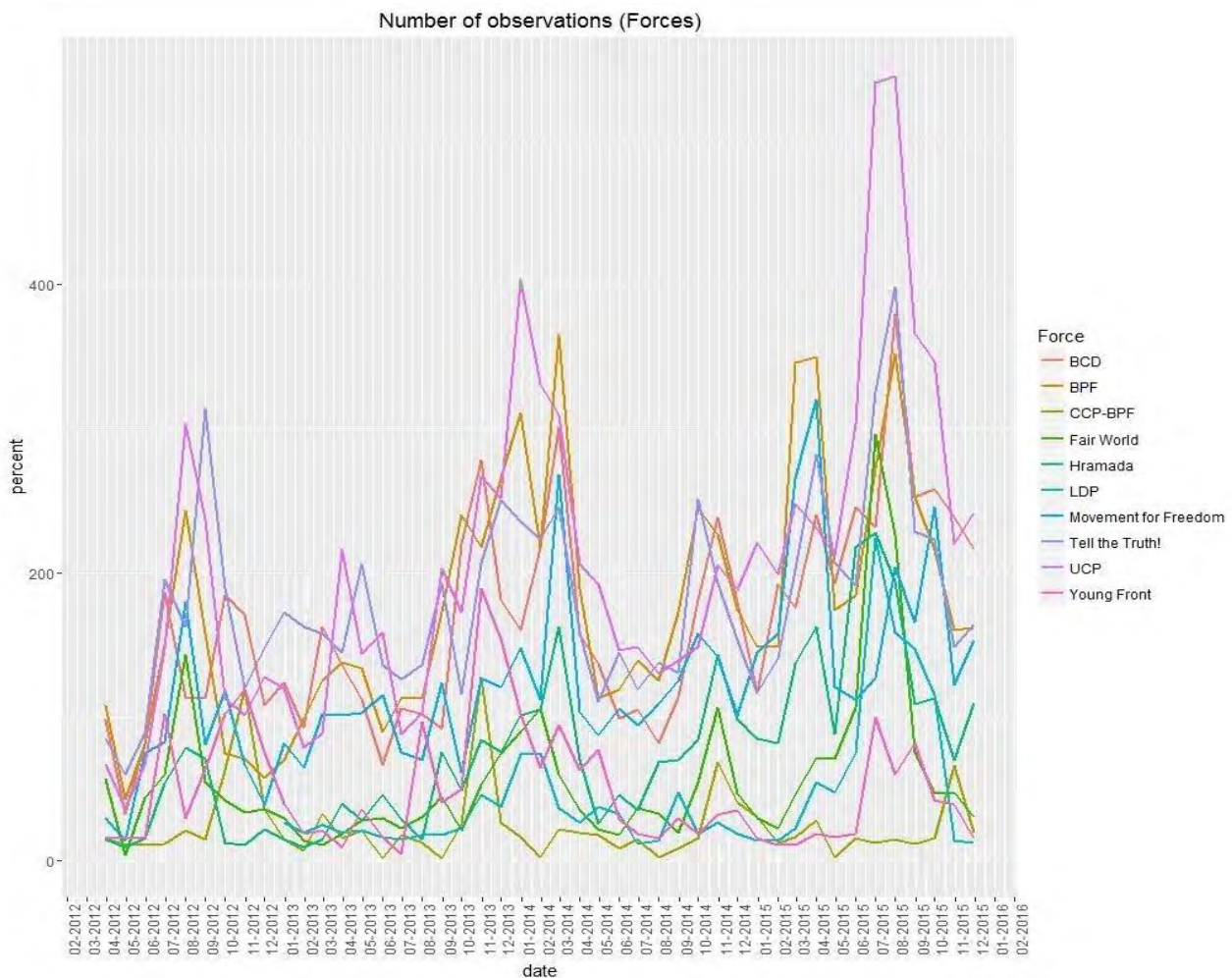
As it is seen from the **Graph 1**, the main growth happened because of the increase of the individual communication of politicians, whereas the increase of communication where forces were the main subjects of messages was rather less significant.

The increase of communication also happened around the end of 2013 - beginning of 2014: this could be explained by both the local elections campaign and the oppositional attempt to (re)negotiate the single candidate.

Yet, arguing that the intensification of communication during the campaigns is just a merit of the opposition would be only partially correct. There is also much more coverage and interest incoming from the side of the independent media.

Having established that the growth in communication happened rather on the level of the individual politicians and not the parties, it is time to draw our attention to **Graph 2**.

Graph 2. Number of observations: volume of communication of political forces.

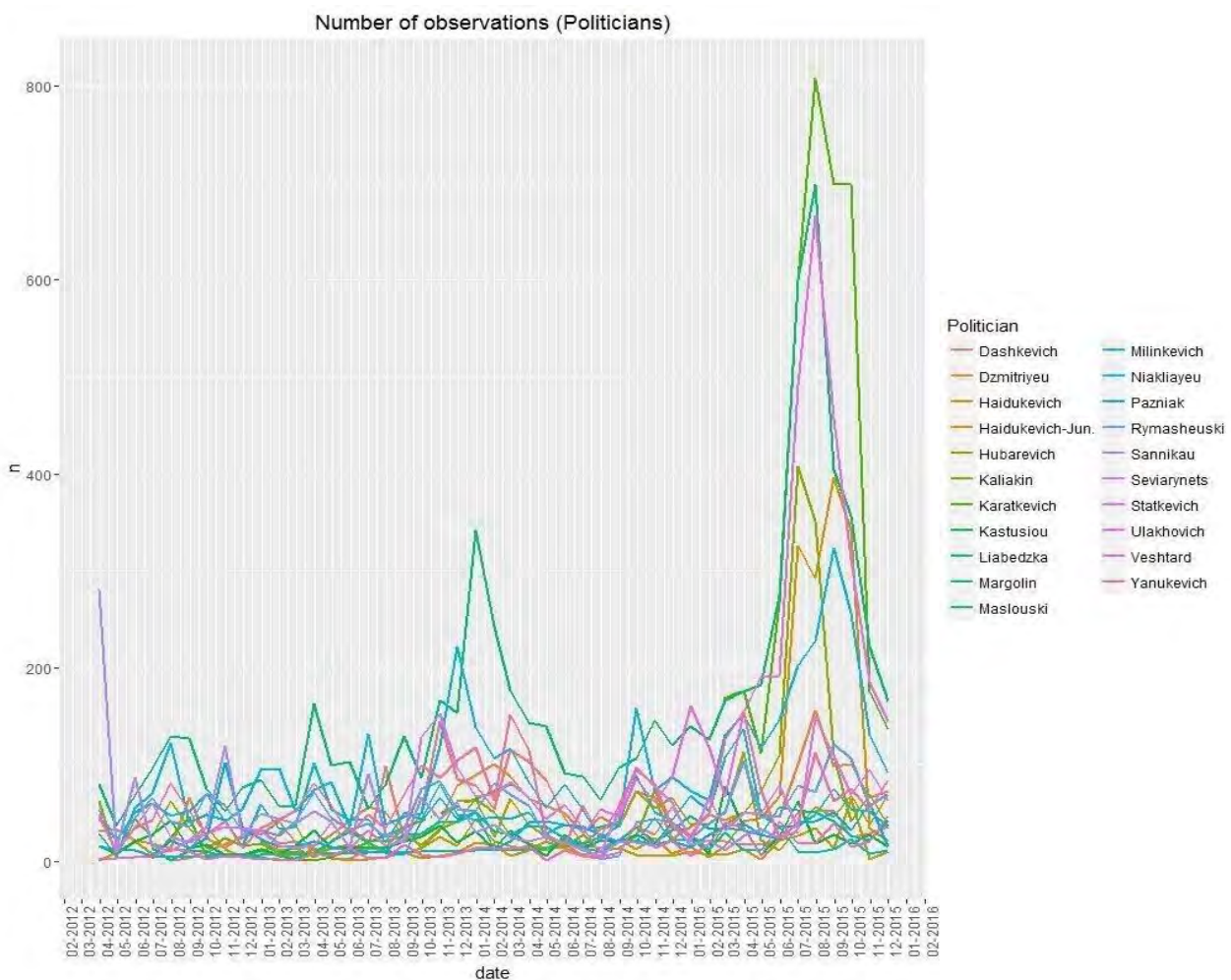


Three peaks of the graph represent the electoral campaigns. Parliamentary campaign of 2012 had less effect on the volume of communication partially because of the long-lasting dialogue in the opposition whether to participate or boycott the elections.

Perhaps the most curious conclusion that could be drawn from the presidential campaign's peak of the graph is the UCP's success in capitalizing on the topic and seizing the moment, given that the party that did not have its own candidate. Yet, there is an obvious explanation to that: the near competitor of UCP, Tell the Truth (TT) was preoccupied with promoting its own candidate, and the side-brands of 'peaceful changes', that the TT brand was left in the shadow.

Let us now shift our attention to the level of individual politicians (**Graph 3**): during the presidential campaign of 2015, Tatsiana Karatkevich was clearly a net-winner, followed by Nikolai Statkevich who proved capable of maintaining his high rating after the release from prison, and followed by Anatol Liabedzka.

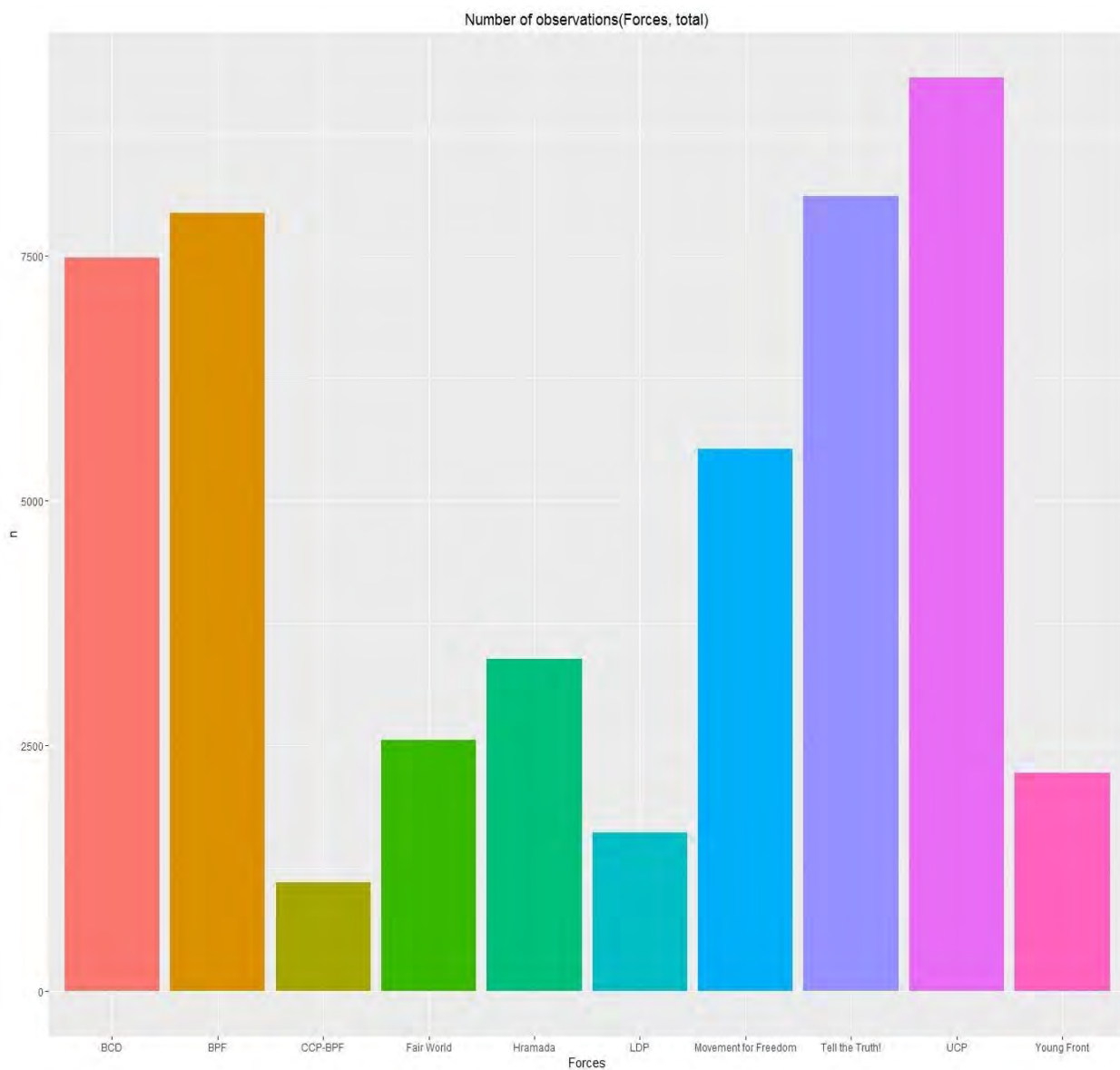
Graph 3. Number of observations: volume of communication of politicians.

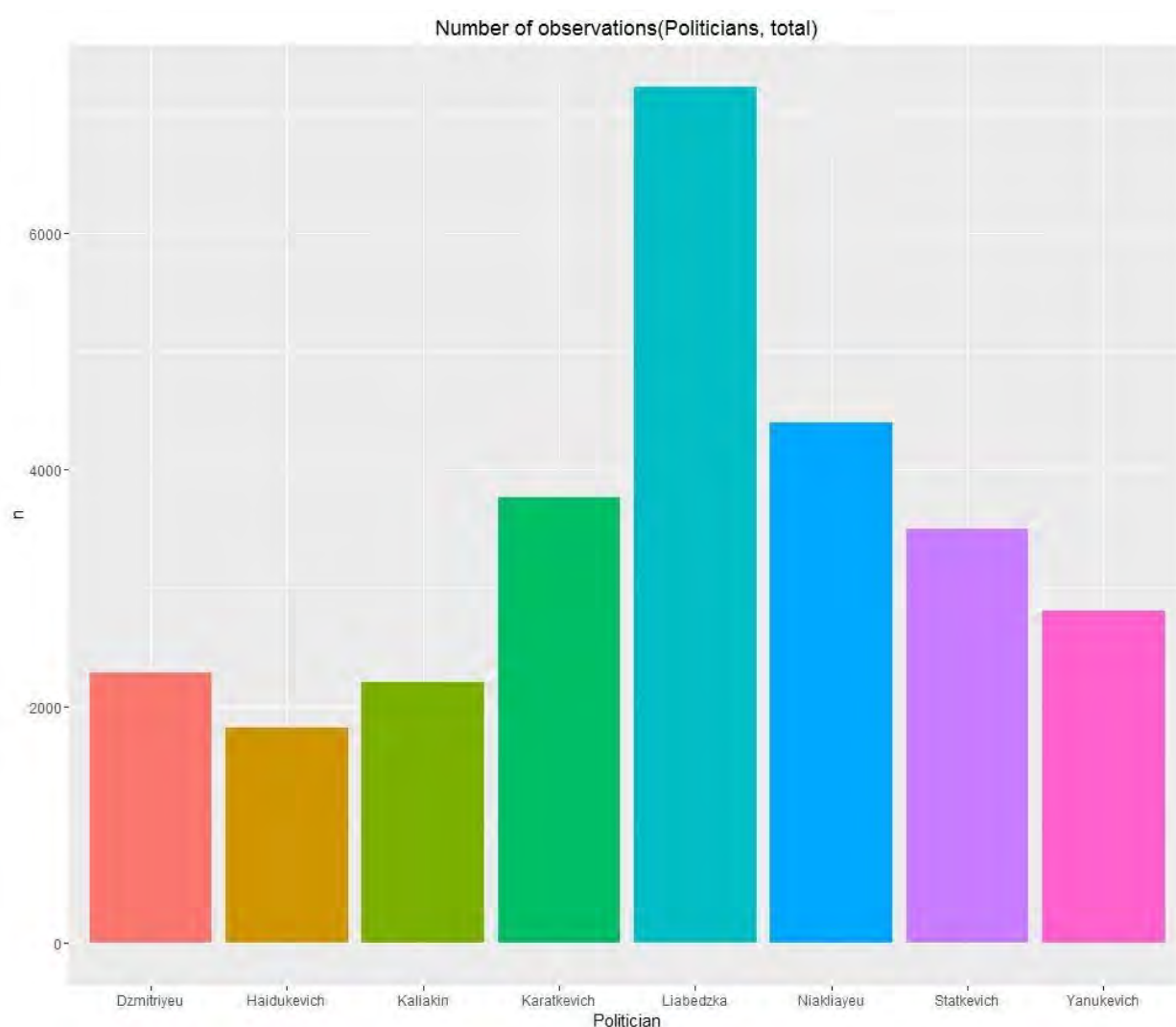


Anatol Liabedzka seems to be a traditional leader of the ranking. But from time to time he is replaced by some leaders who called out the interest of the media due to important events, like the release of political prisoners: e.g. Andrey Sannikau and Mikalai Statkevich. Meanwhile, when Uladzimir Niakliajeu was leading Tell the Tuth he left Anatol Liabedzka behind but he has lost his positions immediately after leaving the civic campaign.

Graph 4 demonstrates the overall quantitative rating of communication between April 2012 and December 2015. UCP occupies the first place by the number of mentions, followed by Tell the Truth, BPF and BCD.

Graph 4. Number of observations (forces, total)



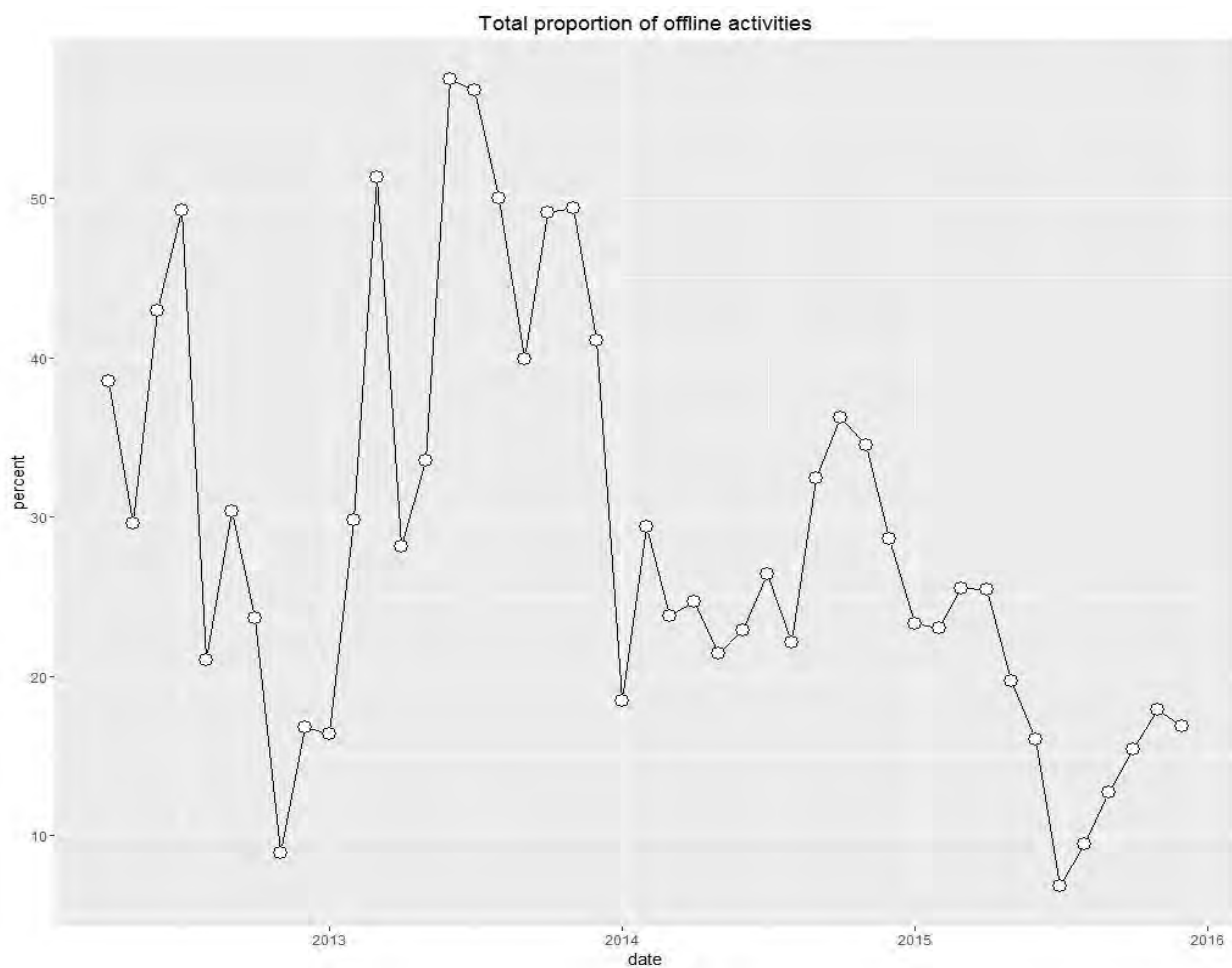
Graph 5. Number of observations (politicians, total).

When shifting our attention to the layer of individual politicians (**Graph 5**), we see that Anatol Liabedzka wins in terms of the quantity of mentions by significant margin. Uladzimir Niaklayeu scores second. This corresponds to the ranking of political forces. However, Niaklayeu's second place happens primarily because of his affiliation with Tell the Truth, which has been no longer the case since April, 2015. After departing from Tell the Truth, Niaklayeu's rating began to drop rapidly. But other places are distributed in the different way, and it shows the significance of influence of the period of president elections. Tatsiana Karatkevich scores third despite the fact that she appeared in public politics relatively lately, and was not present in the Barometer before early 2015. The fourth place goes to Statkevich, and he gained this result also only due to the period of electoral campaign when he was released from the prison.

2. Online ghetto of Belarusian oppositional politics.

Having limited channels to reach society and greater capacity of online media to carry political messages compared to offline media inevitably pushes the Belarusian political forces to ‘migrate’ into the virtual space, which, for the most part, have not been monopolized by the authorities. The migration to the online space is neither surprising, nor problematic in itself. Taken together with other trends in political communications it may, however, reinforce the feeling that political forces exist exclusively in a virtual environment and encourage the ongoing disconnect between citizens and political actors. There is a vicious circle: the oppositional forces are pushed from the offline world into the online realm of the Internet and a few available independent media and getting out the ‘matrix’ is both vital in terms of political strategy but yet extremely hard given the constraints put by the political regime.

Graph 6. Total proportion of offline activities (from all observations)

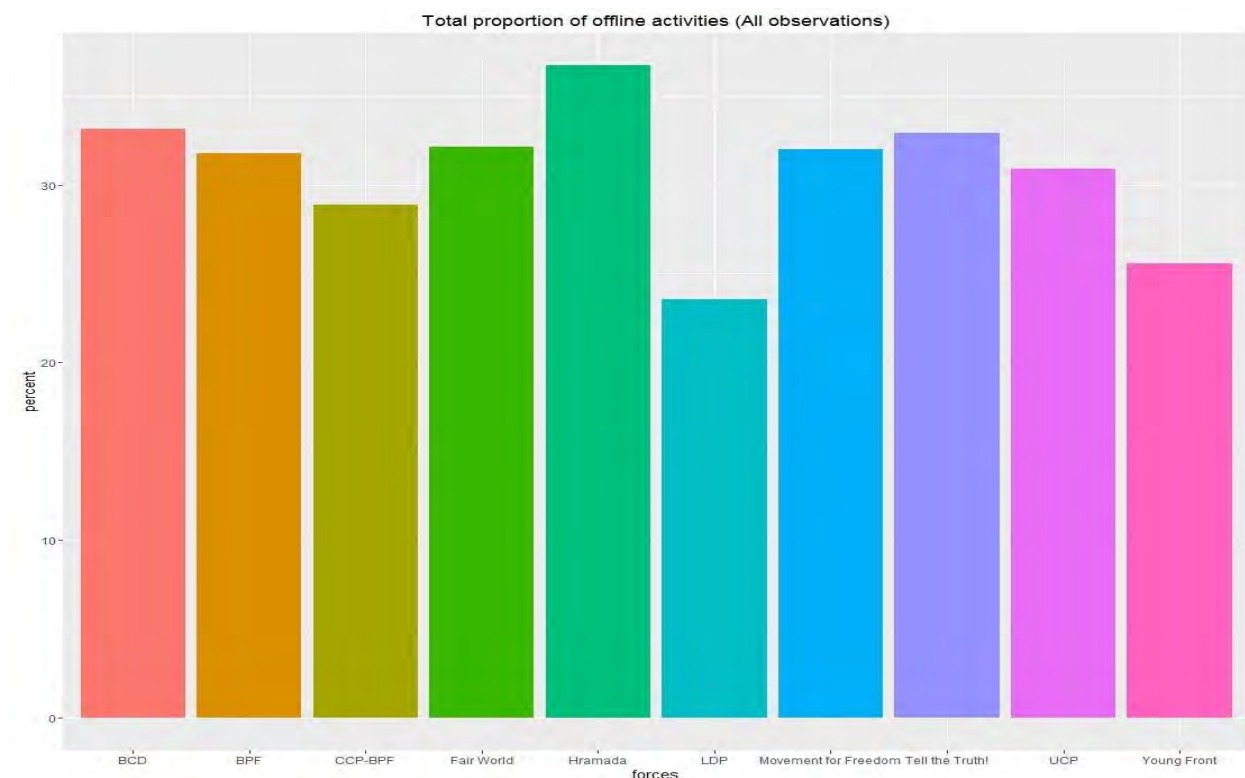


Graph 6 demonstrates the total share of the offline activities represented in the overall volume of communication. Mostly, the share of offline activities reflected in communications depends on the interest of the media focused on the field of politics, this lead to the growth of mentioning of politicians not based only on their own offline activity.

Thus all the peaks of offline activities reflected in communications are called out by the increasing of political communications as such. For example, the graph above should be read bearing in mind that the huge decline in the share of the offline communication in 2015 happened not because of the fact that the politicians started to say less about what they do in reality, but because of the overall 360% explosion of the volumes of communication. The peaks in the graph call for more analysis, since not all of them could be explained by the elections, release of the political prisoners and other offline significant events (negotiations on the single candidate). Yet, in order to do so we need to zoom in deeper into the levels of offline activities of various political forces.

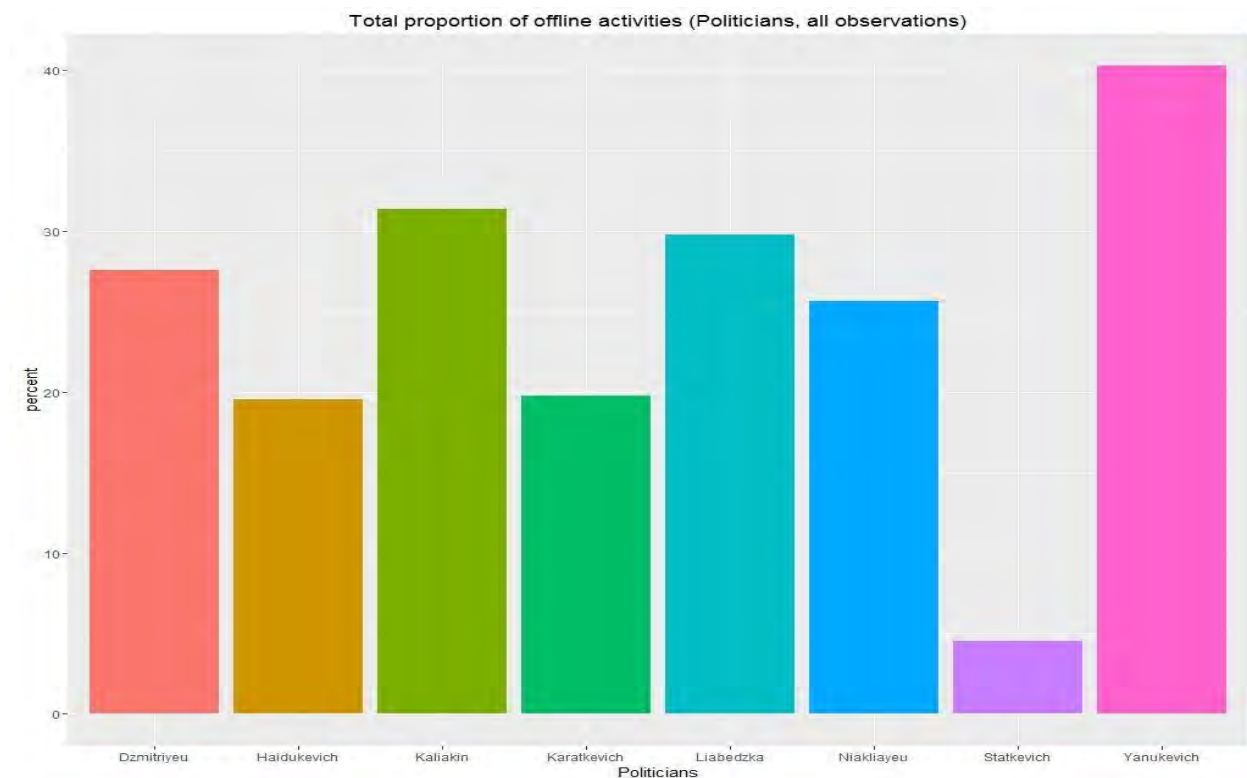
As **Graph 7** demonstrates, Hramada is the leader in terms of reference to the offline, real-life activities but that is because of the high regional specificity of the force and the overall average volume of communication (it scores 5 out of 10 forces by the volume of communication). Another reason of high performance is its affiliation to People's Referendum and absorbance of its agenda. BCD, Tell the Truth, UCP score similarly when it comes to the share of the offline activities in media.

Graph 7. Total proportion of offline activities (forces)



Graph 8 shows the proportion of offline activities in the communication of the individual politicians. Yanukevich is the overall leader, in whose media presence more than 40% of the cases contain a reference to the real activity, followed by Kaliakin and Liabedzka. Nikolai Statkevich is in the last place mainly because his name was predominantly used in relation to his political imprisonment.

Graph 8. Total proportion of offline activities.

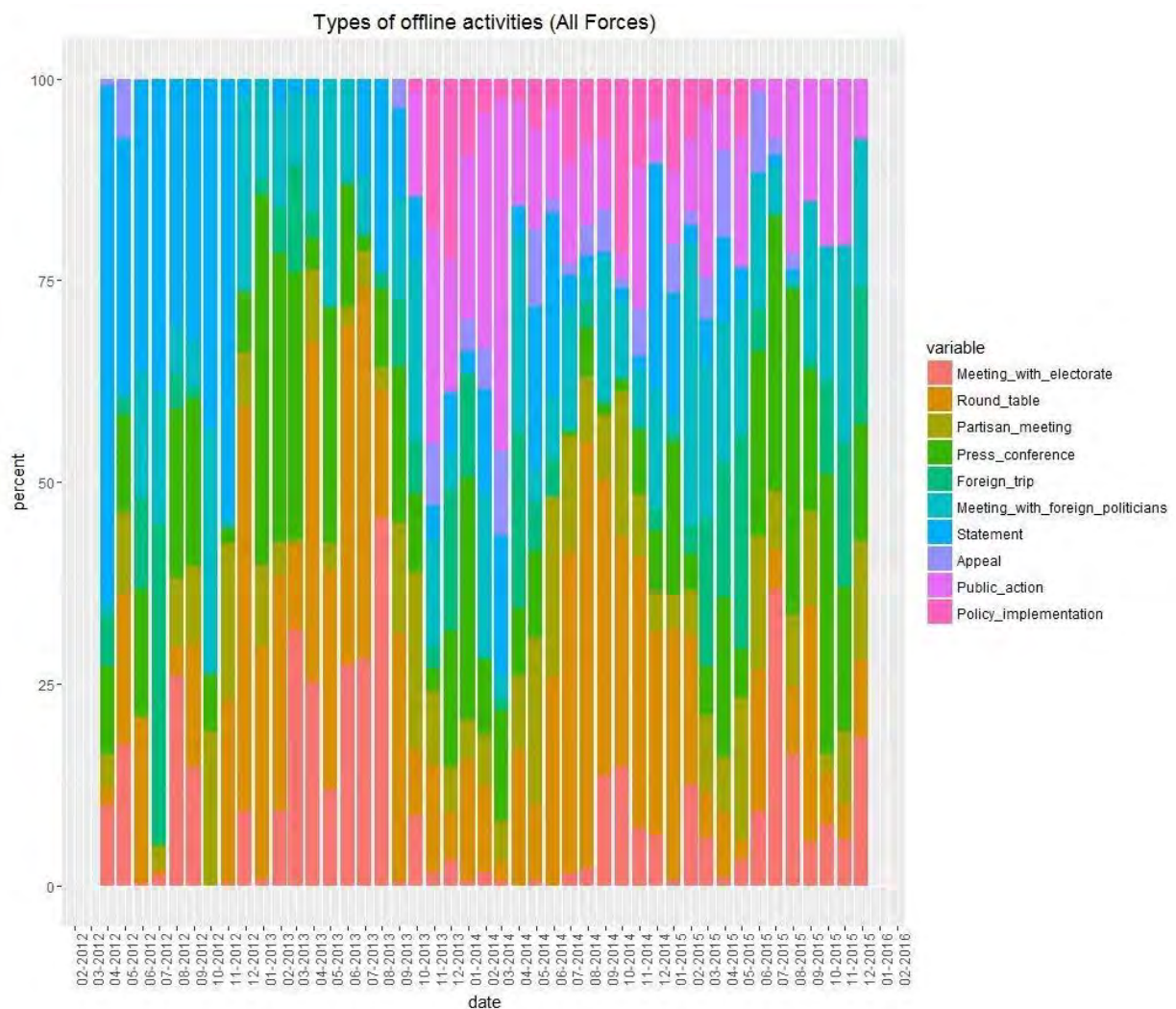


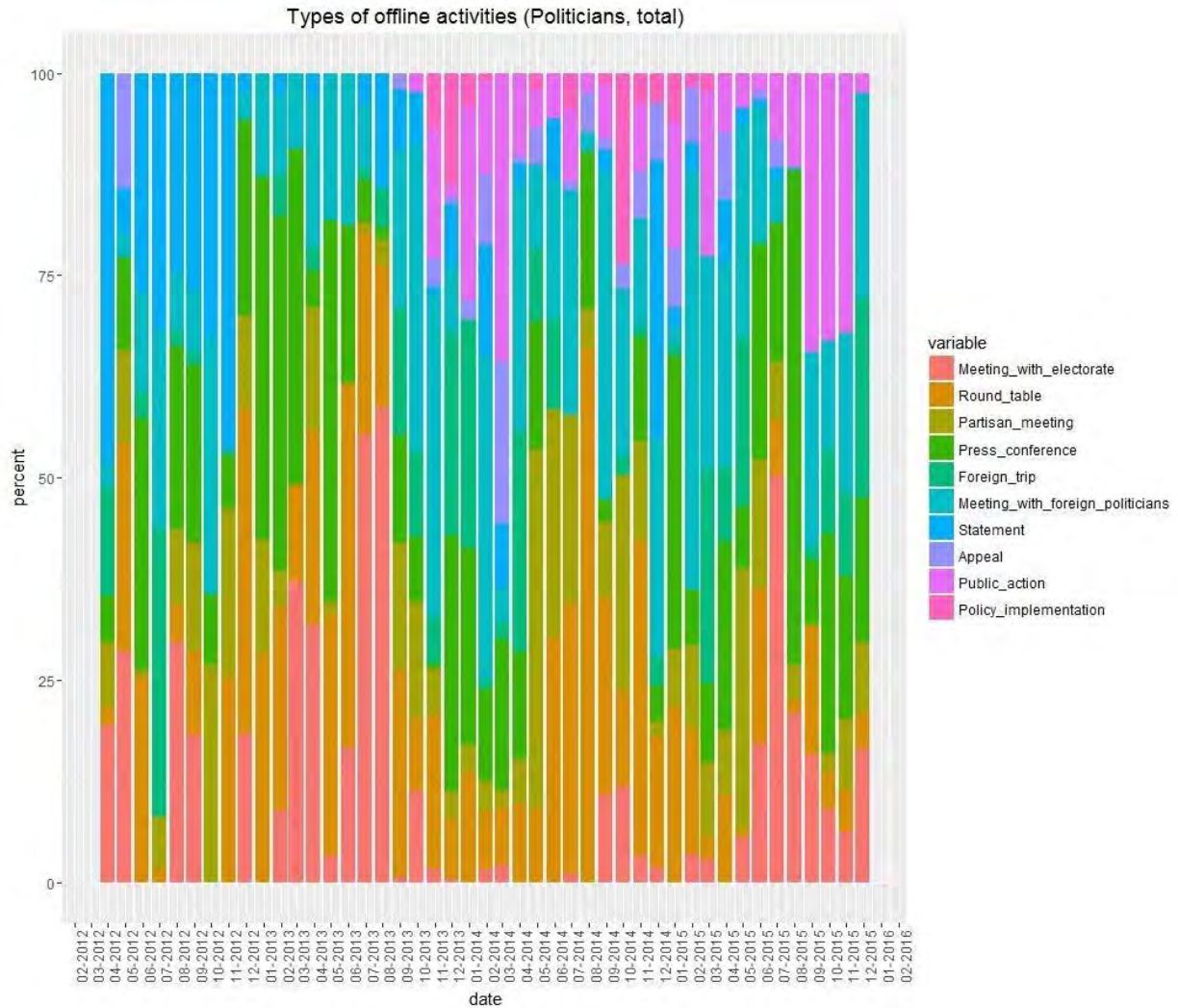
Overall, we identified a low level of correlation between the media- and real life activities of the political forces. On average, approximately 29% of the political media was accompanied by offline activities. Of those activities, the majority were activities focused at the media (press conferences, releases, etc.). We can hypothesize that the dominance of the web, along with the inward focus of party communications and the lack of reflection of real life, particularly citizen based regional activities in the political media, may heighten the sense that the opposition forces exist in Minsk or online only and that such activities and activism do not relate to regular people or regional action. The challenge for democratic forces interested in mobilizing the public is to link activities in virtual space with offline activities so as to use the two spaces to build on each other rather than allowing the virtual space to dominate and create a sense of activism that only exists virtually.

3. Types of offline activities mentioned.

Having established the proportion of references to the offline real-world activities, let us shift our attention to the analysis of what is the exact substance in the messages that reference the offline activities? **Graphs 9 and 10** represent the dynamics in the overall type of offline activities of the political forces.

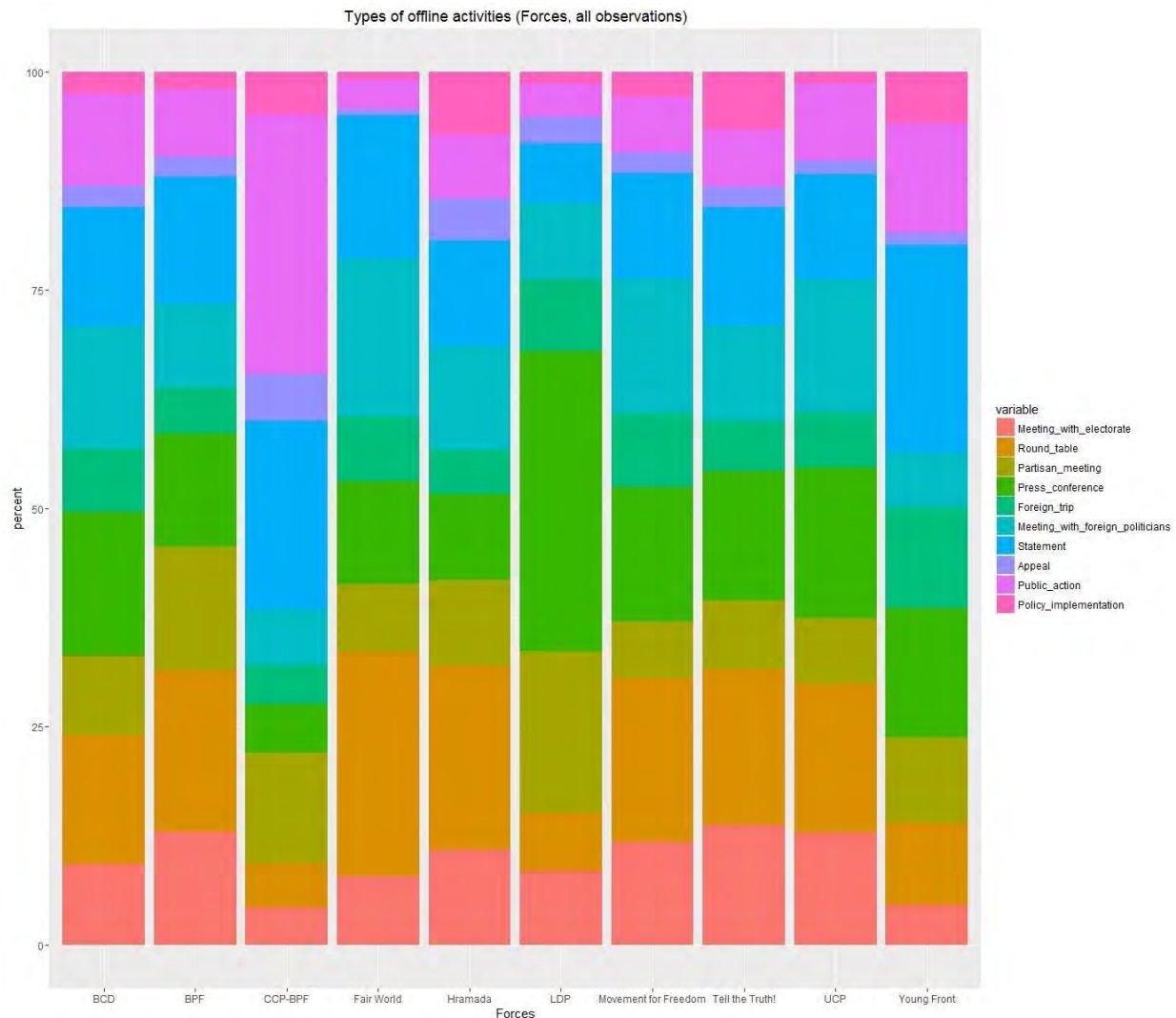
Graph 9. Types of offline activities (all forces)



Graph 10. Types of offline activities (politicians)

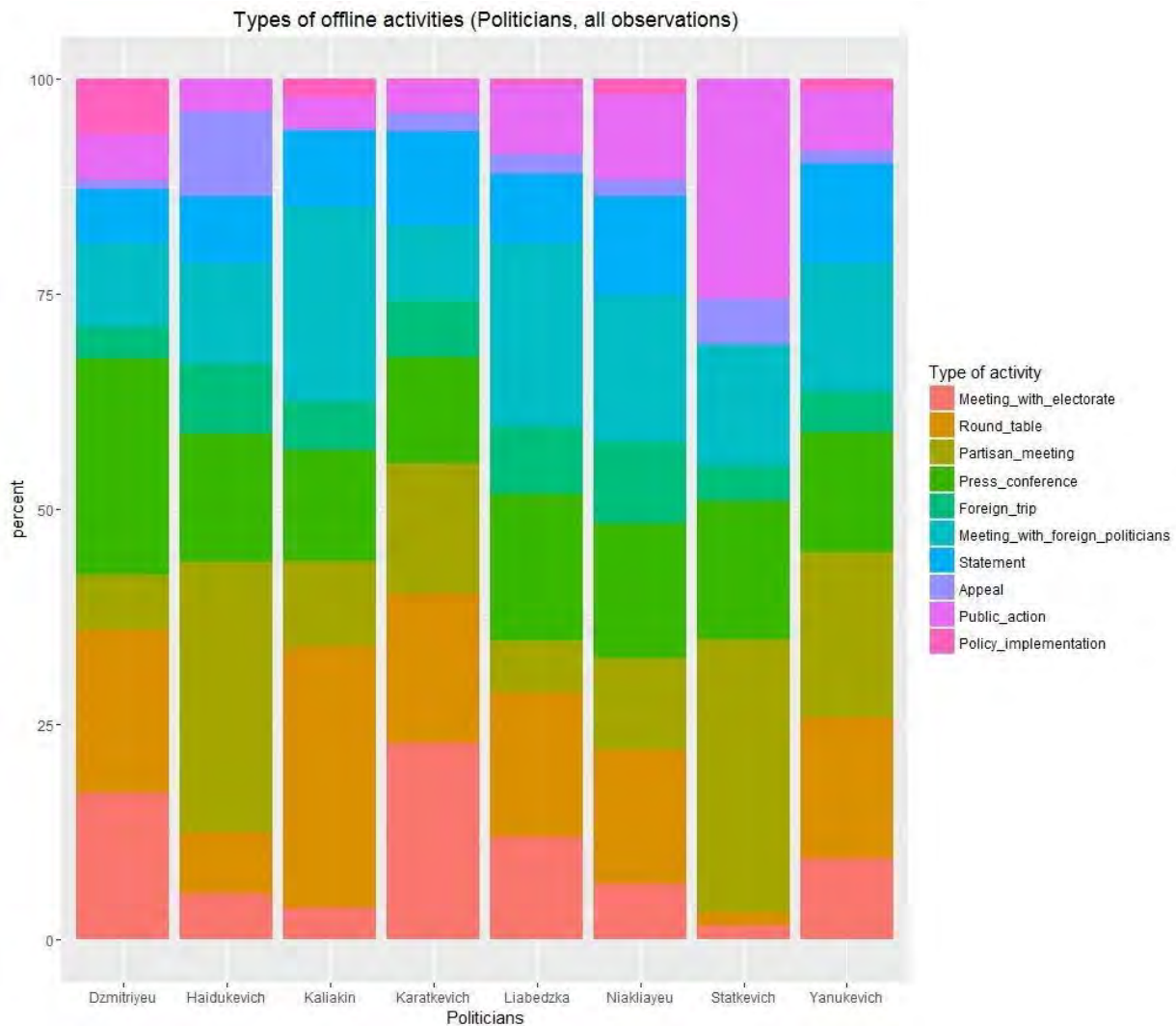
Both graphs demonstrate electoral dynamics: during the high electoral season, both politicians and parties reference meetings with the constituencies much more than in the previous periods, where they tend to make statements and comment on the events. Moreover, the share of public actions grows during electoral campaigns and the share of policy implementation increases between the electoral periods.

Seen in stasis, **Graphs 11** and **12** accordingly, break down the topics of the offline communication of political forces and individual politicians. As we can see, ‘foreign trips’ and ‘meetings with foreign politicians’ occupy a much greater role in the mentions of the forces than, for example, work with the electorate, policy implementation or public action. In a way, an outsider to the Belarusian politics could get a sense that domestic oppositional politics in Belarus are rather about building solid linkages to the West, rather than the inward oriented work with the domestic constituencies.

Graph 11. Types of offline activities (political forces).

The most balanced proportion of different type of offline activities with relatively big share of meetings with electorate and some share of policy implementation belongs to BCD and the forces included in People's Referendum campaign: BPF, Hramada, Tell the Truth and Movement for Freedom.

When it comes to the individual politicians (**Graph 12**), Karatkevich's and Dzmitriyev's communication includes a significant proportion of meetings with the electorate. Contrary to them are Statkevich (due to his long imprisonment), Haidukevich, and Kaliakin with high proportion of 'statements' and low level of meetings referenced in media. The offline activity of Dzmitryeu, Niakliayeu and Yanukevich reflected in the media seems to be well balanced with some share of policy implementation.

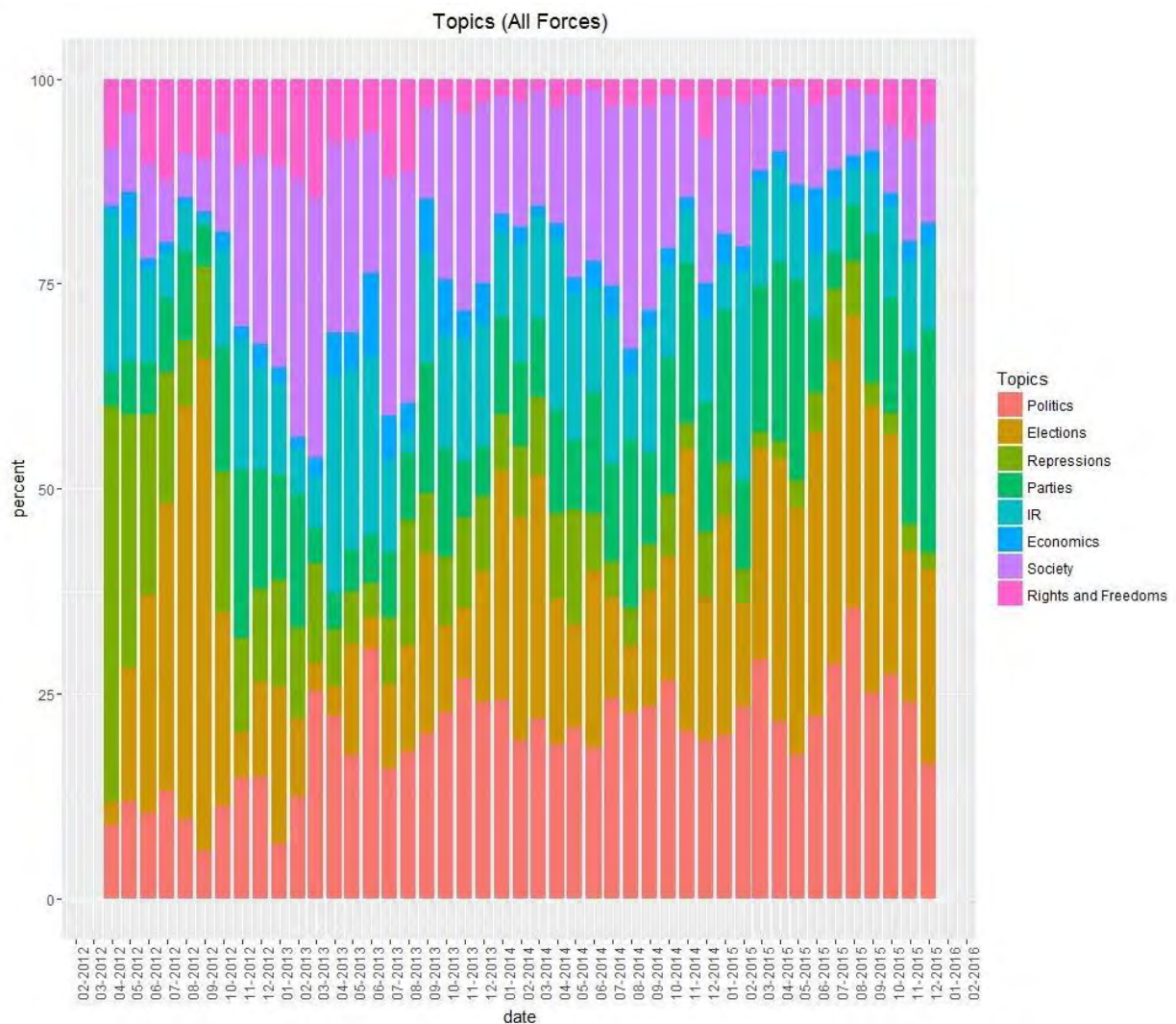
Graph 12. Types of offline activities (politicians).

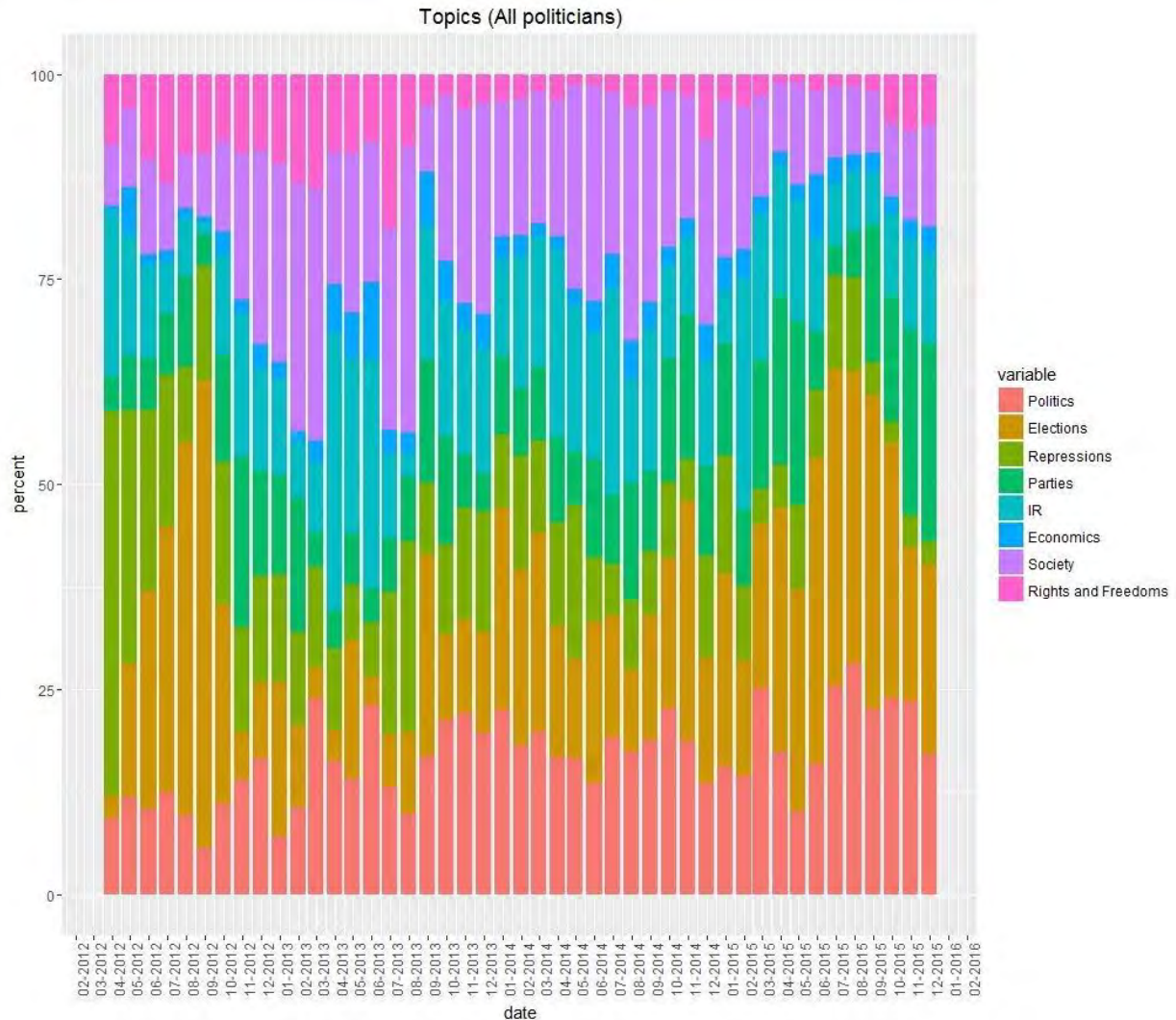
4. Major topics of communication.

One of the key conclusions that could be drawn, is that there is a gap between the interests of the median voter (the demand side) and the topics that dominate the political discourses of the independent political forces in the media (the supply side). We hypothesized that this gap contributes to the maintenance of the current situation in which the opposition has little traction with the citizens: the independent political forces tend to overemphasize topics related to their internal functioning or the internal politicking of the opposition, which have a doubtful level of importance to most Belarusians.

The political forces are communicating to their own insular audiences on issues of importance to technical experts rather than directly addressing the electorate on issues that matter to them. The recommendation that we provided in the BPBM was self-explanatory: the political forces may be interested in doing and hence reporting more work inside Belarus with the real people than the internal oppositional processes and infighting and their international activities. Overall, the current trends signify the feeling of the detachment of the independent political actors from the society.

Graph 13. Topics of communication (all forces)



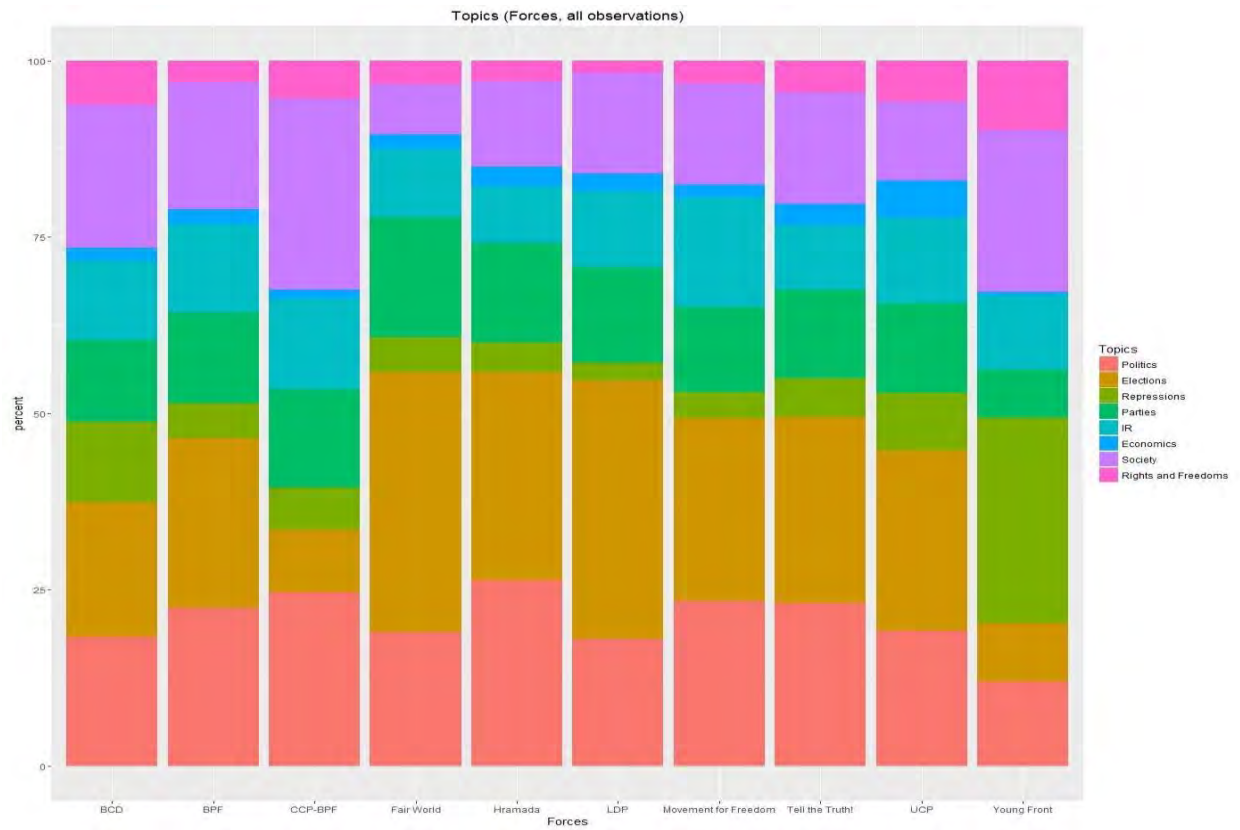
Graph 14. Topics (all individual politicians).

Graphs 13 and 14 demonstrate the trends in the topics of communication. Herein we fused both internal (partisan web-sites, etc.) and external channels of communication (independent media) of the political forces. The most striking conclusion that could be observed: economy (e.g. economic and financial crisis) is the least used topic by the political forces in Belarus, whereas this has arguably been the most important topic for a median voter.

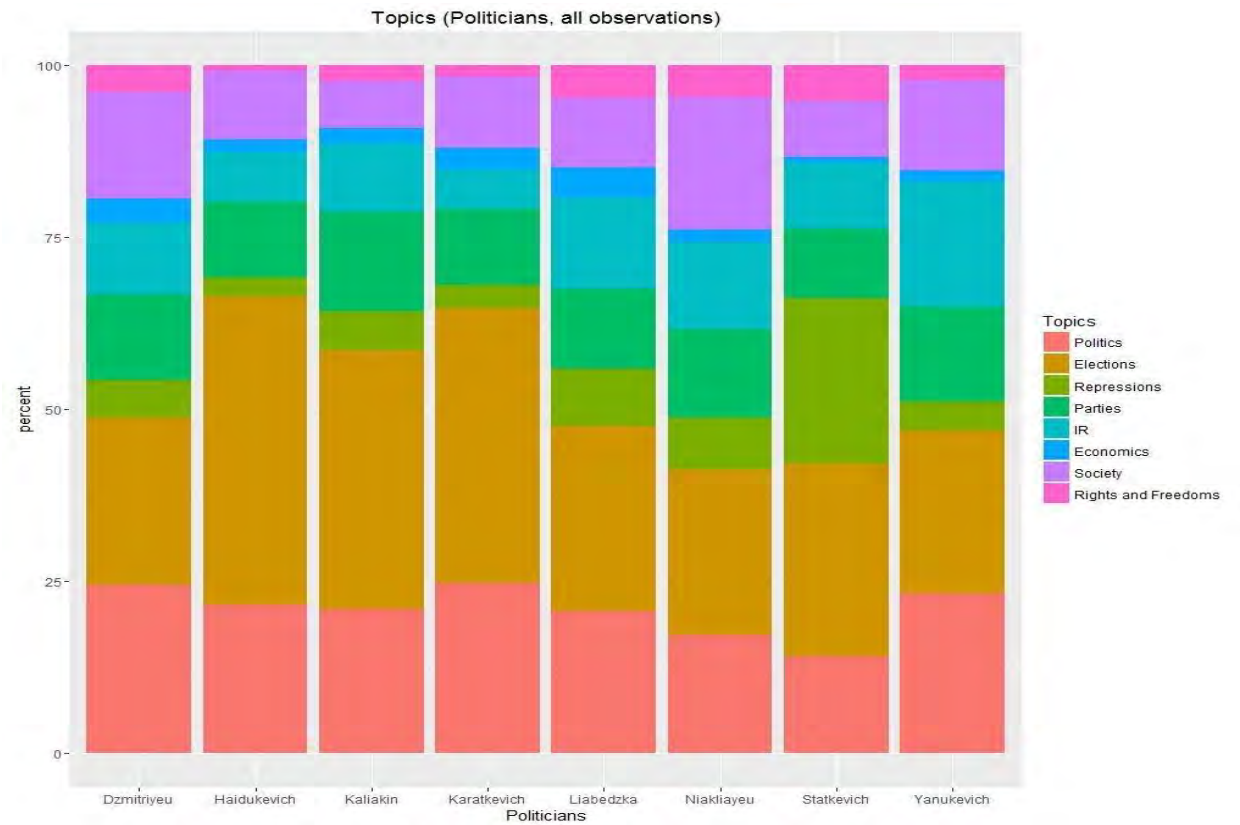
‘Rights and freedoms’ started faded away from the political agenda of the Belarusian political forces communication when some political liberalization has started. Likewise, the share of messages referencing ‘international relations’ started to decline when some dialogue between the EU and the official Minsk started to become relaunched.

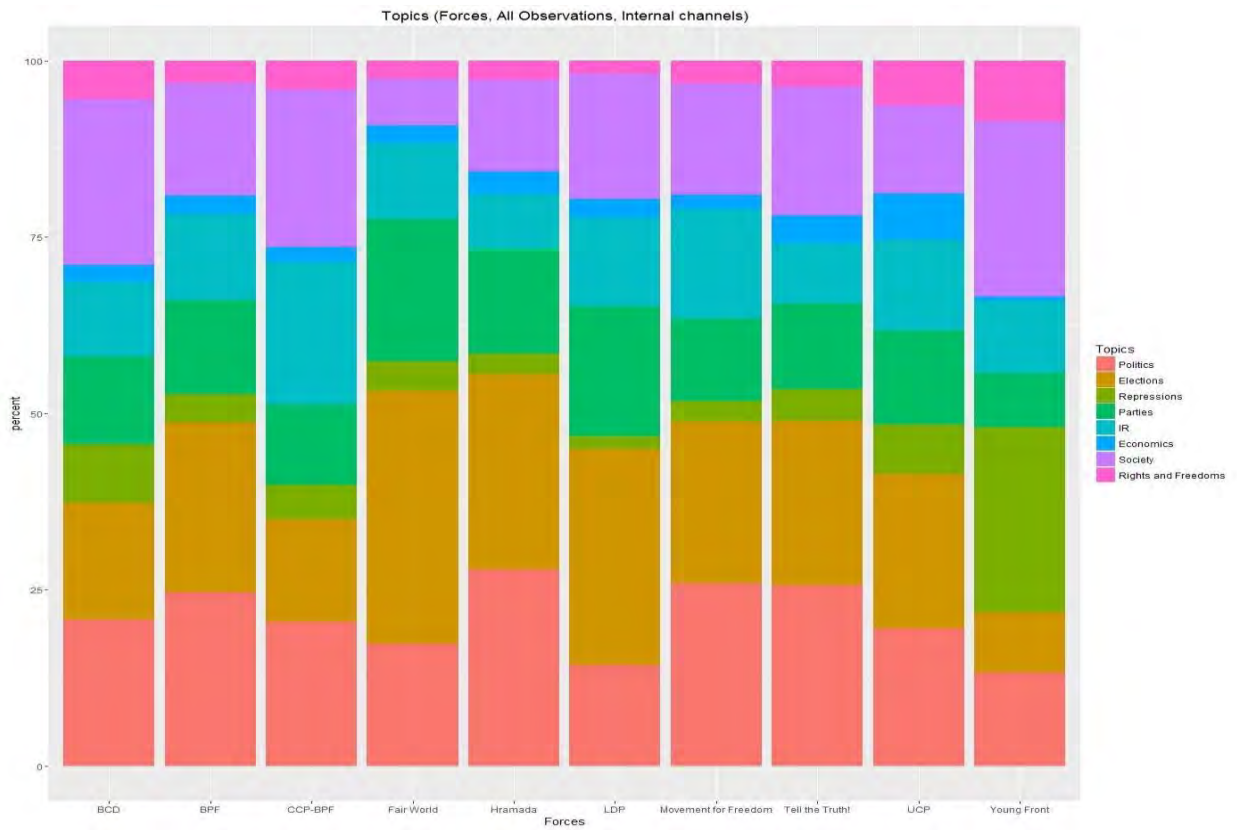
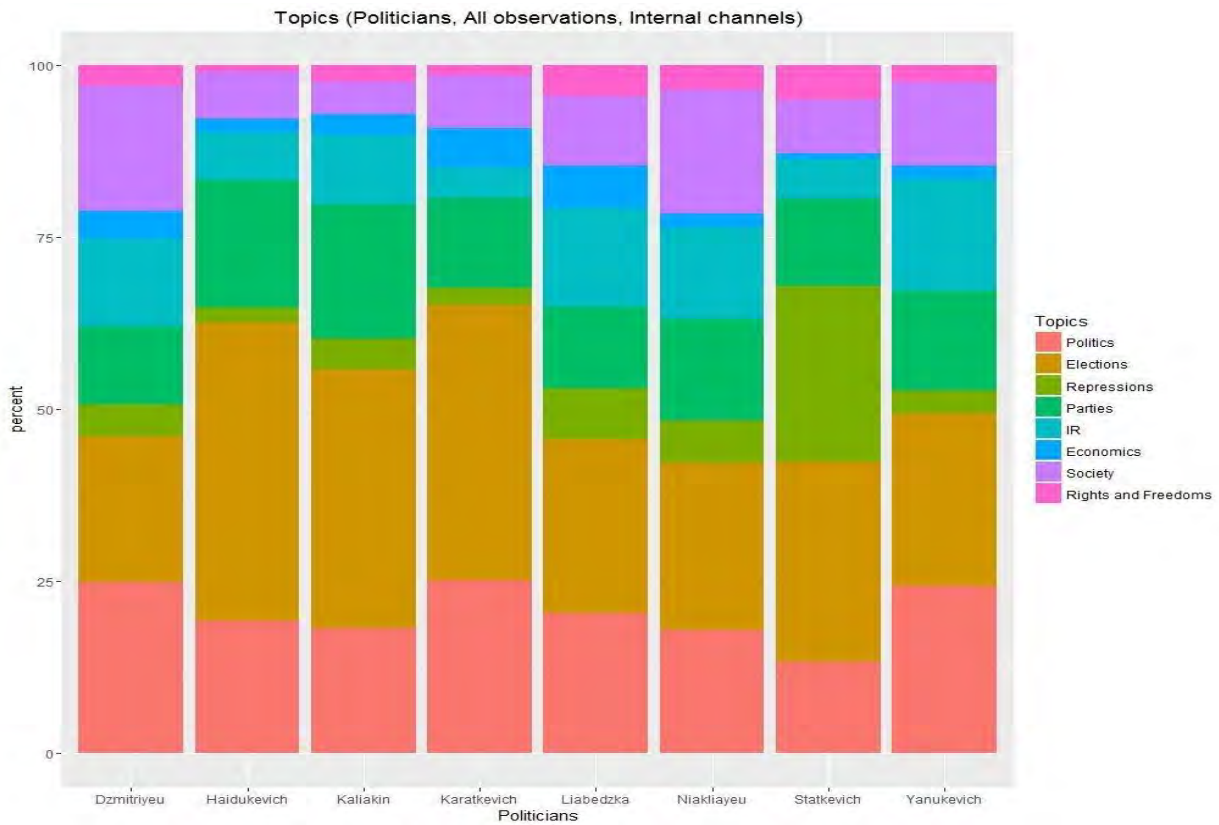
The next important dimension, represented by graphs below, is the structure of topics communicated by Belarusian political forces.

Graph 15. Topics (political forces, all observations).



Graph 16. Topics (individual politicians, all observations).



Graph 17. Topics (forces, internal channels)**Graph 18. Topics (individual politicians, internal channels).**

Graphs 15 and 16 demonstrate the topical break-down of forces' communications and allows to see how various topics are balanced. Does the balance of topics in forces' political communication depend too much on the external media (i.e. no web-sites question a political leader about economy)?

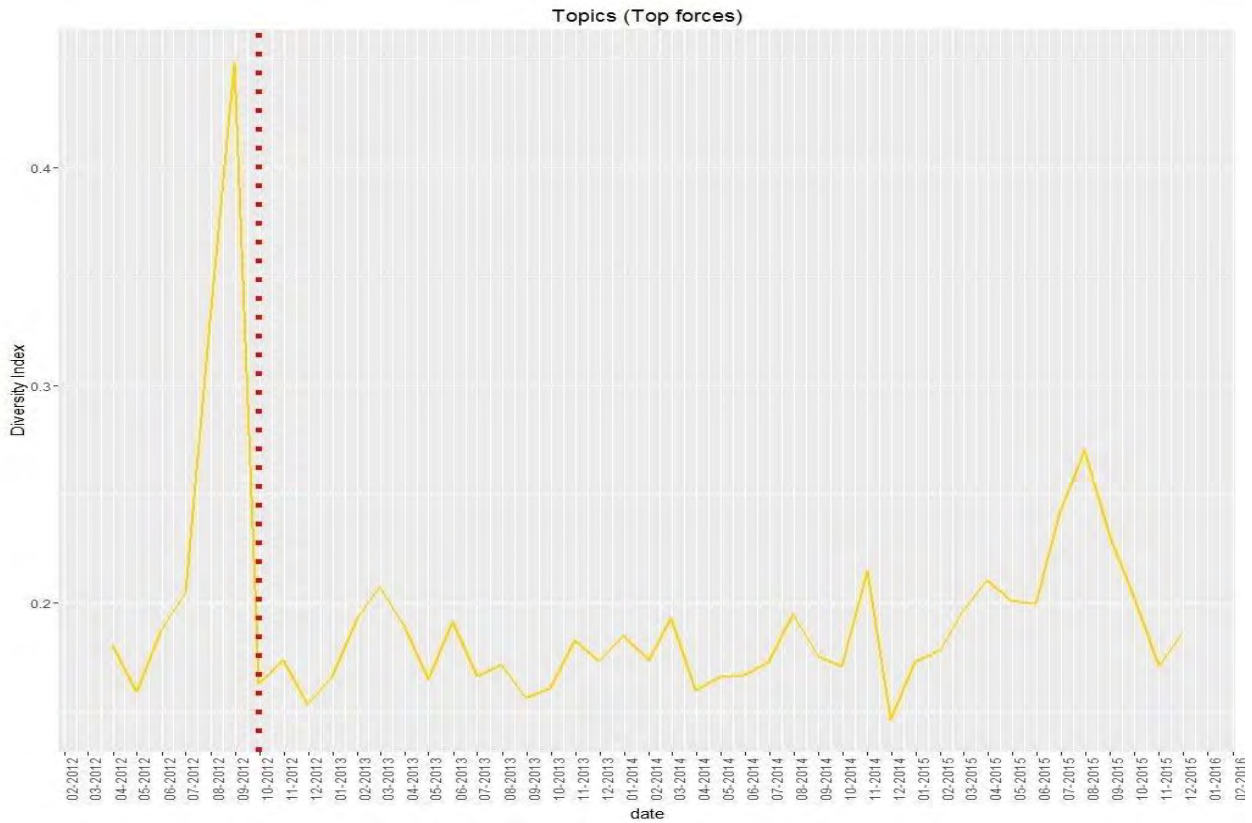
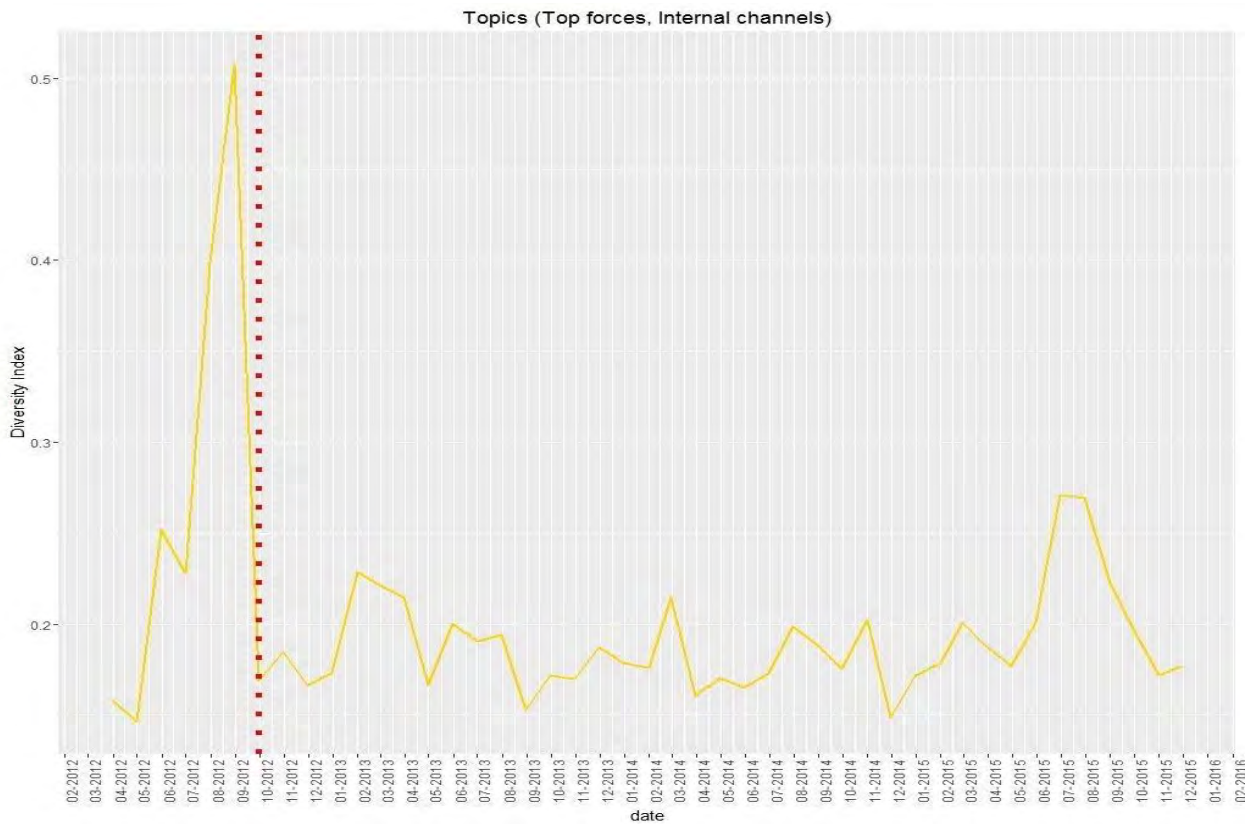
Graphs 17 and 18 refer only to the internal communication of the forces and individual politicians and clearly demonstrate that a similar distortion is present when external communication is isolated.

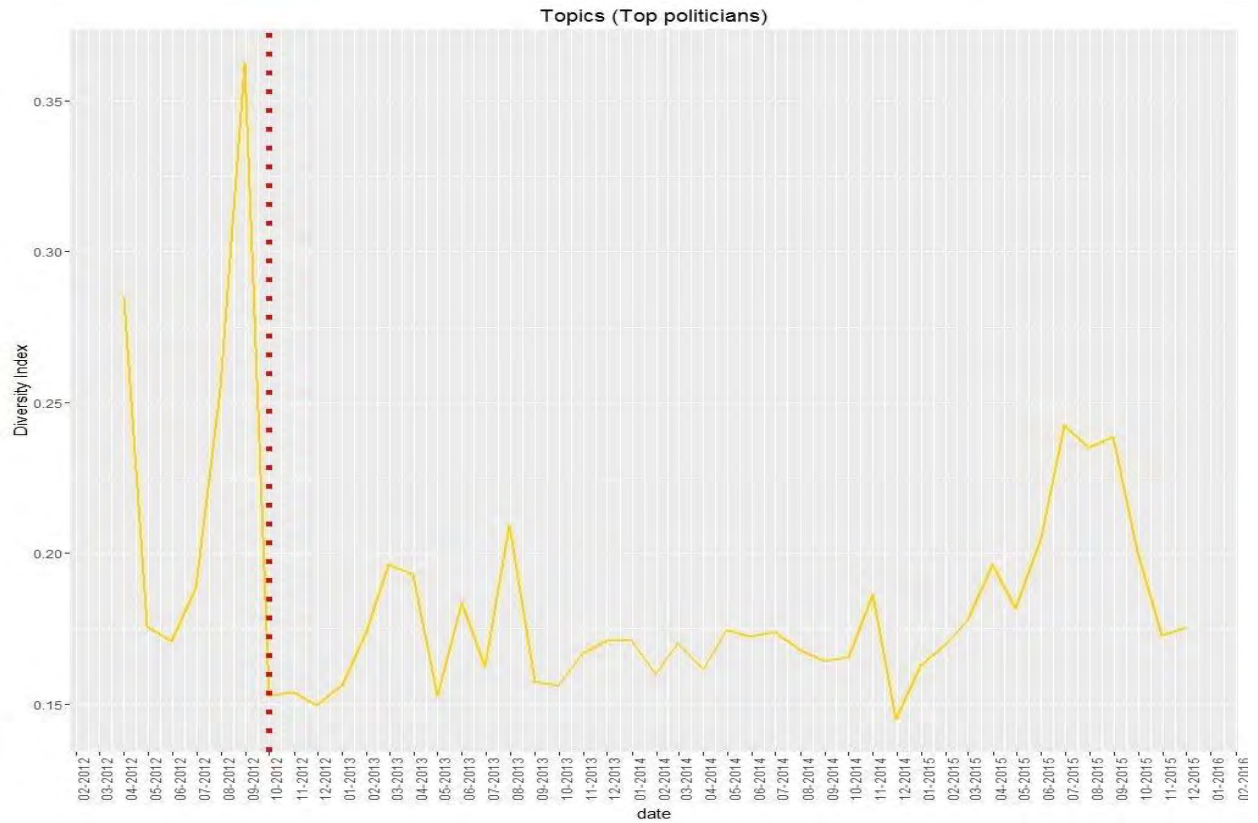
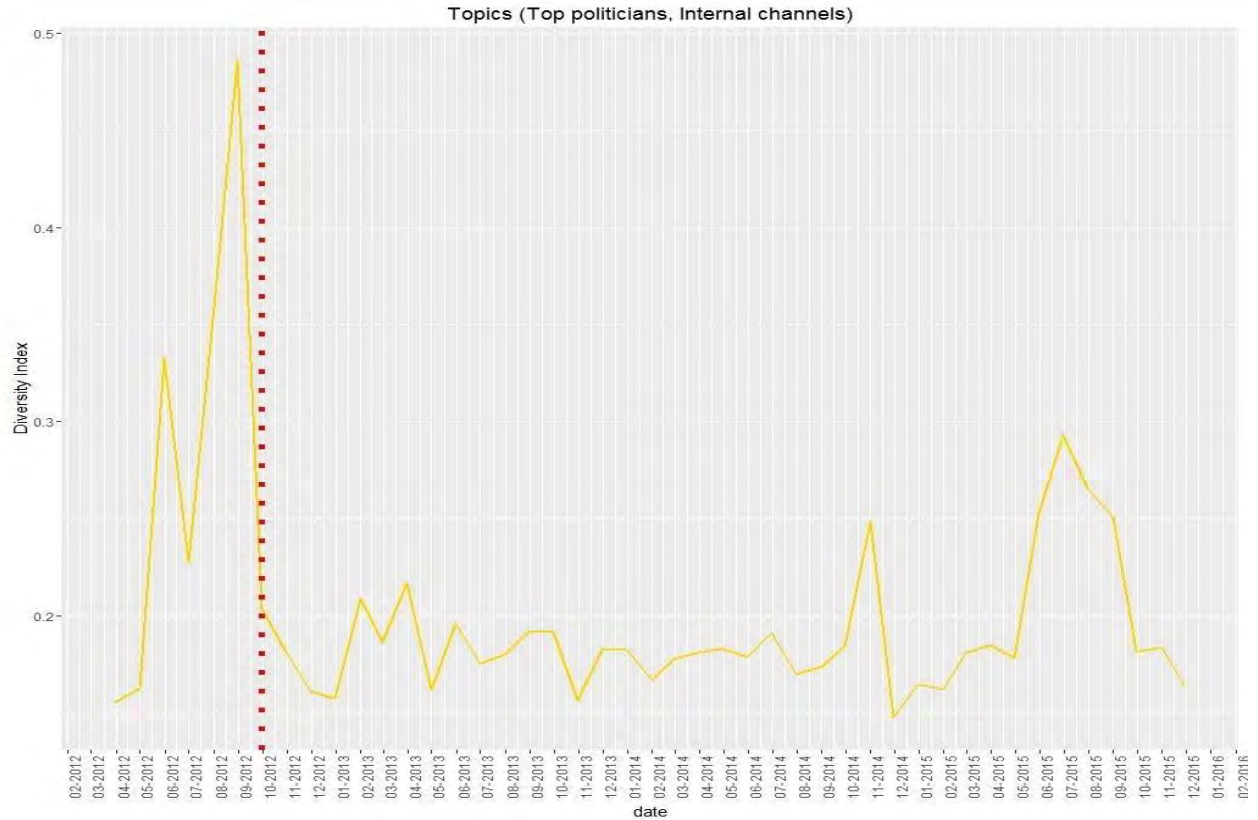
5. How did BPMB impact the diversification of the topics?

Diversifying the topics of communication was one of the major policy-advice that BPMB has given: as reaching out to the broader audiences should take into consideration the interests of the audience that the politician is trying to get. The policy-advice was not only written in each of the reports of the barometer, but also communicated directly to the leaders of Belarus' political opposition. In order to test our success with getting the message across and to study our own impact factor on the opposition, we created a score of 'topic diversification'. It is represented in the following 4 charts (top 10 political forces and top 6 individual politicians), measuring both the whole sample and the internal communication only in order to isolate what the politicians could manage from what was left for the independent media to decide. The red line in all the graphs represents the publication of the first BPMB report. Index of diversification is the scale from 0 to 1, where 1 represents the full hegemony of topics (1 topic) and 0 represents the empirically meaningless but theoretically plausible infinite number of topics⁴. Therefore, we assume that the less the score the better it is. **Graphs 19, 20, 21 and 22** show the impact of BPMB on the communication of the forces.

Although the 'pre-BPMB' period is rather short and somewhat volatile, all 4 graphs suggest that the publication of the first BPMB report is correlated with an overall increase in the diversification of topics communicated by Belarus' political opposition. Bearing in mind a significant increase in number of observations during the presidential election of 2016, it is possible to argue that even in that period the diversity of topics remained relatively high in comparison with the pre-BPMB period.

⁴ The index is calculated as follows: $\frac{1}{n}$, where n – is number of observations on a certain topic and N – is total number of observations

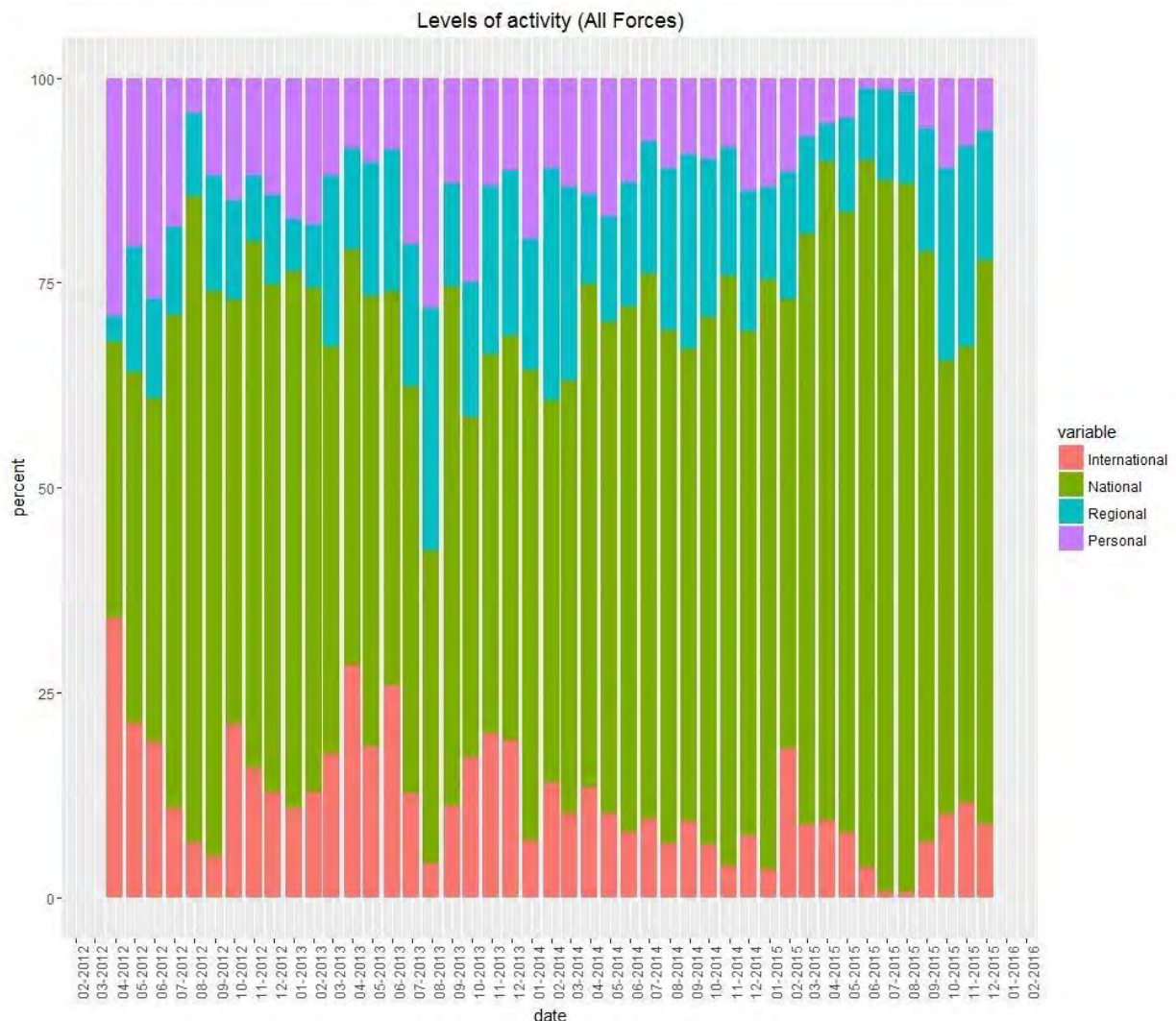
Graph 19. Index of diversification (top ten forces, overall)**Graph 20. Index of diversification (top ten forces, internal channels)**

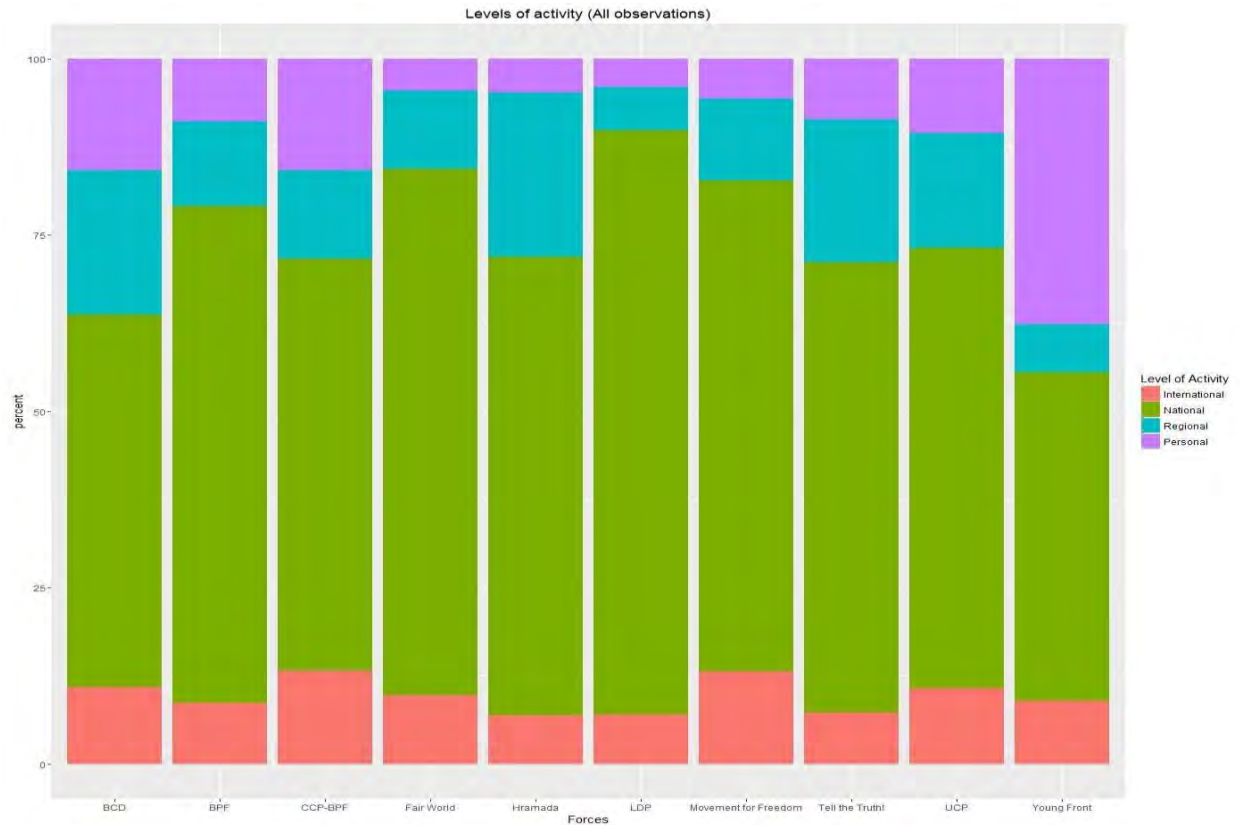
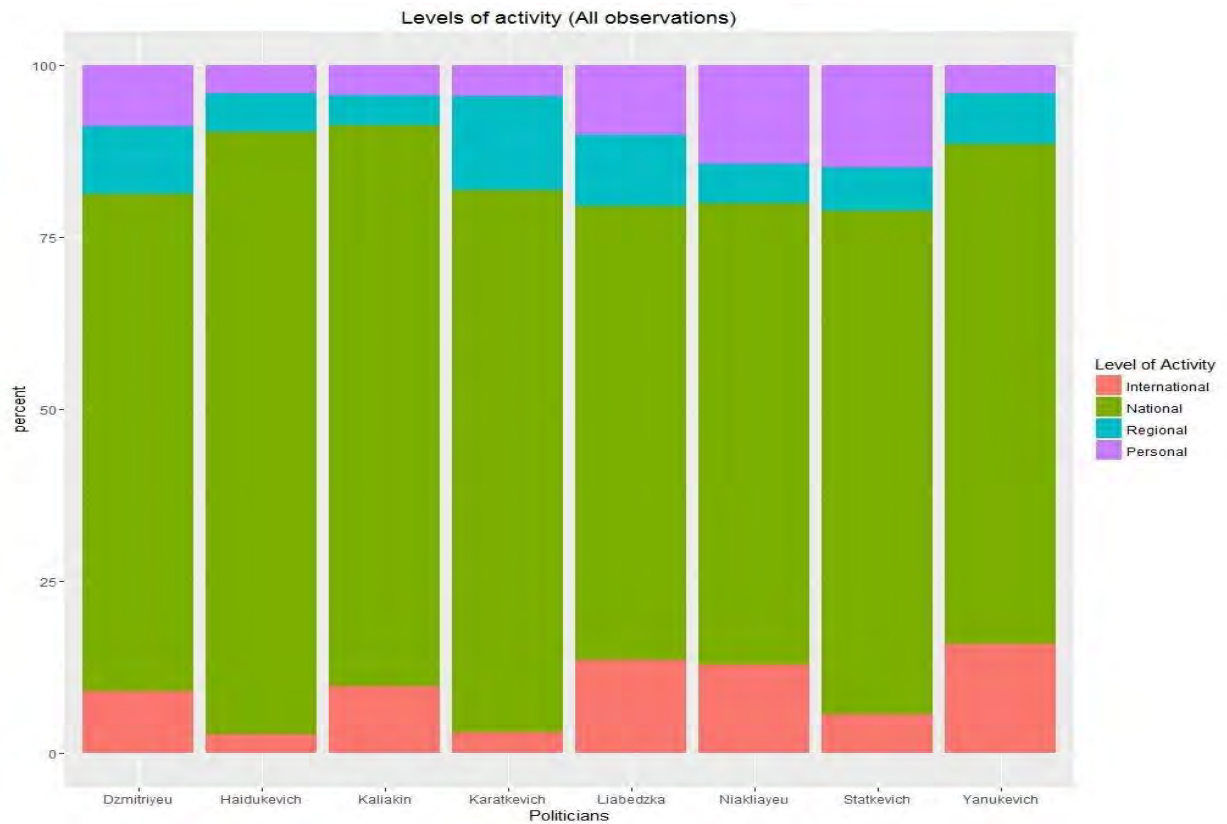
Graph 21. Index of diversification: top politicians**Graph 22. Index of diversification (top politicians, internal channels).**

6. Levels of activities.

Each opposition media appearance was analyzed by the level of activities: international, national, regional and personal. The latter refers to events from the private life of a politician (i.g. marriage) that got into media. As it is seen from the **Graph 23**, initially there was a high level of concentration on the events at the international level (visits of the opposition abroad, etc.). Regional level has also suffered from low representation. Starting from 2014, this trend has been changed by a growing dominance of communication on national level, which replaced a significant amount of news covering international events. However, that has not helped to make the representation of regional level any better.

Graph 23. Level of activity (all forces).

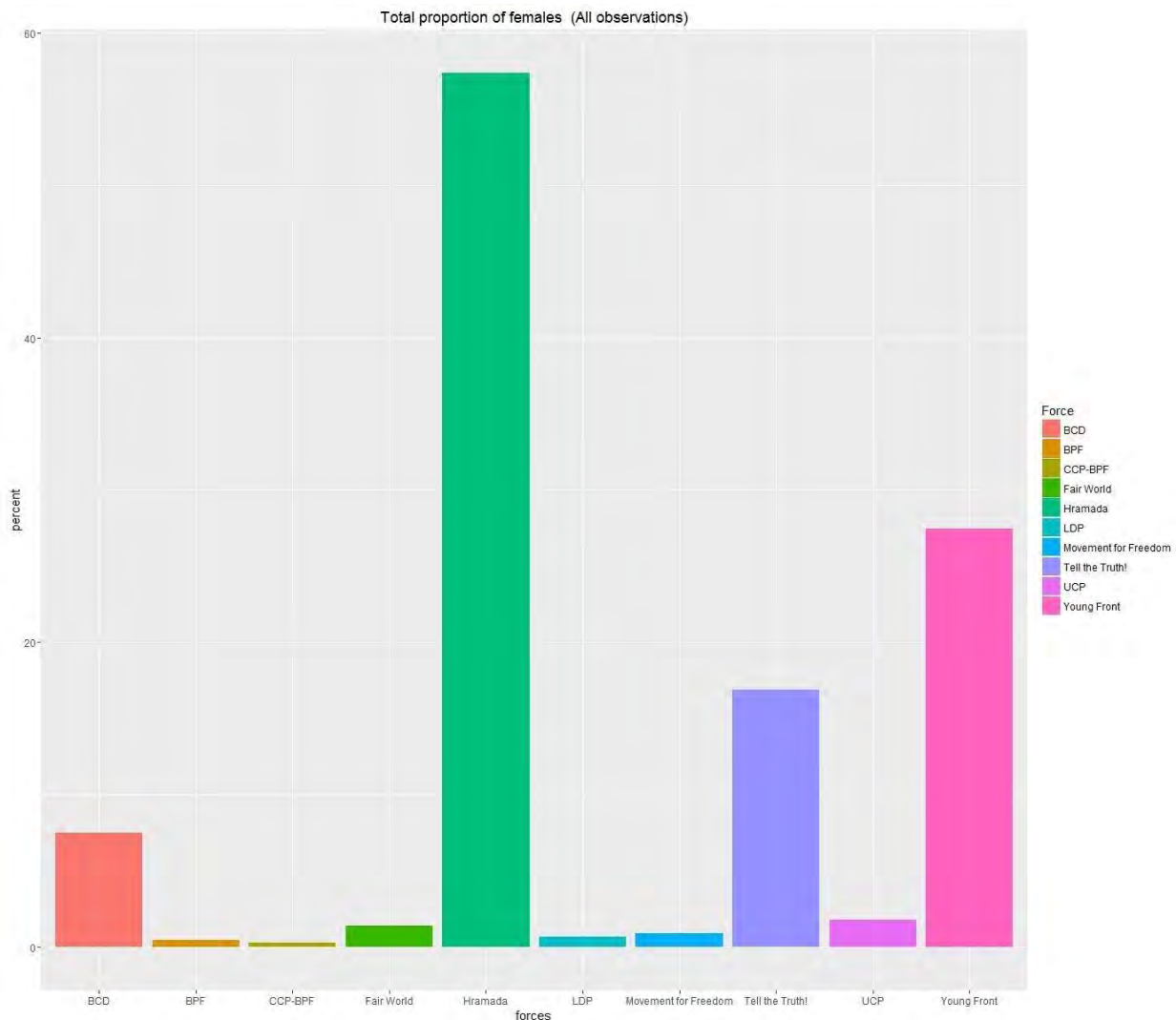


Graph 24. Levels of activity (forces)**Graph 25. Level of activity (individual politicians)**

7. Gender (mis)balance in Belarusian politics.

An extension of non-diversified political communications in the media is the extremely small role allocated to women in media communications. In Belarus women are rarely chosen to be political communicators and much less prominently featured in the media stories about political issues than men. Most often women are shown in political communications as the advocates and support network (husband/brother/friends) for male political figures under arrest or facing repressions. Irina Veshtart, Chair of Hramada, and Tatsiana Karatkevich (co-chairperson of Tell the Truth) are the main exceptions. The opportunity to increase the presence of women in political communications is a matter of political will within the democratic forces to diversity their communications.

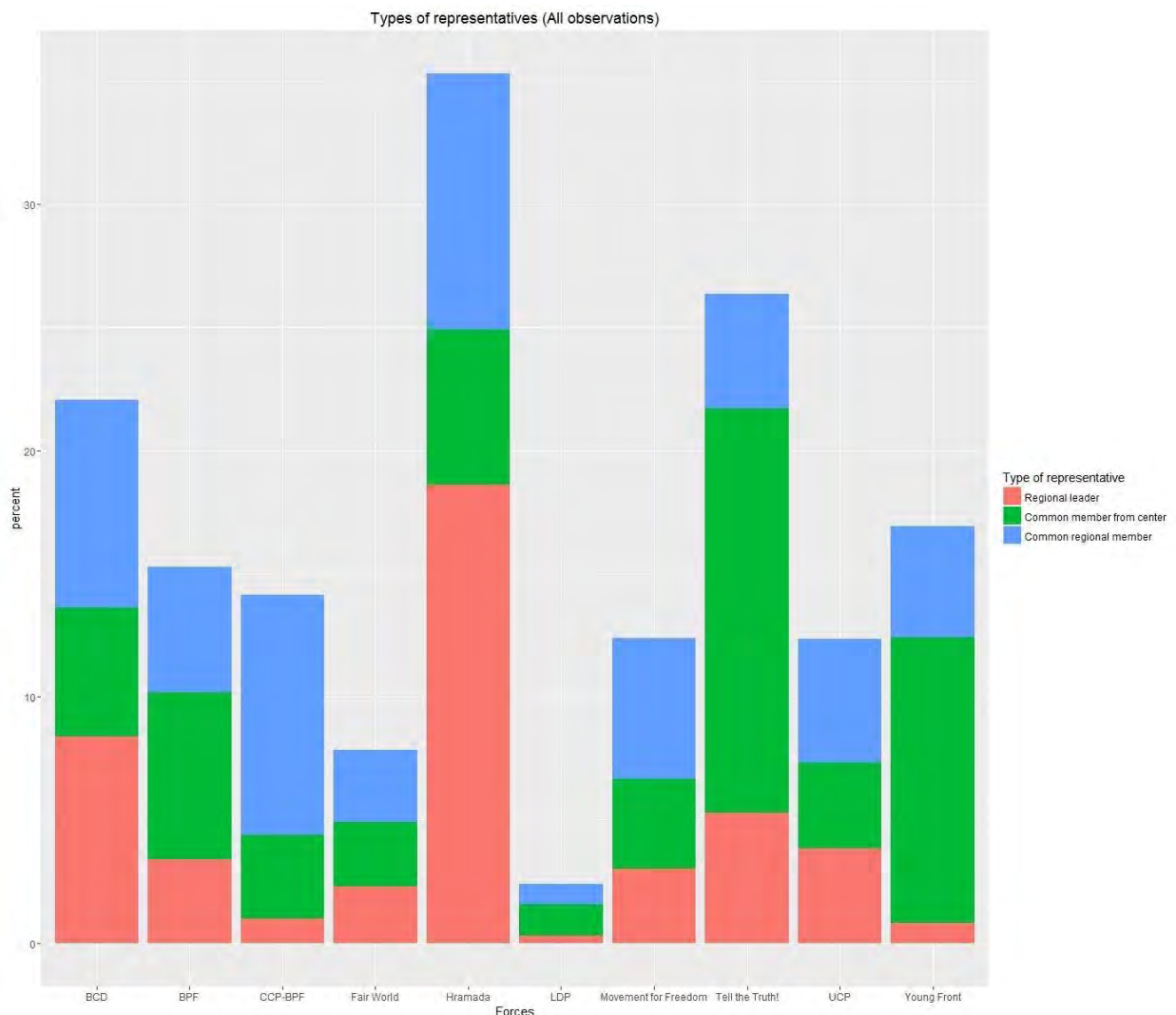
Graph 26. Proportion of females in the communication of the political forces.



8. Type of representatives, level of activeness, media evaluation and the character of mentioning.

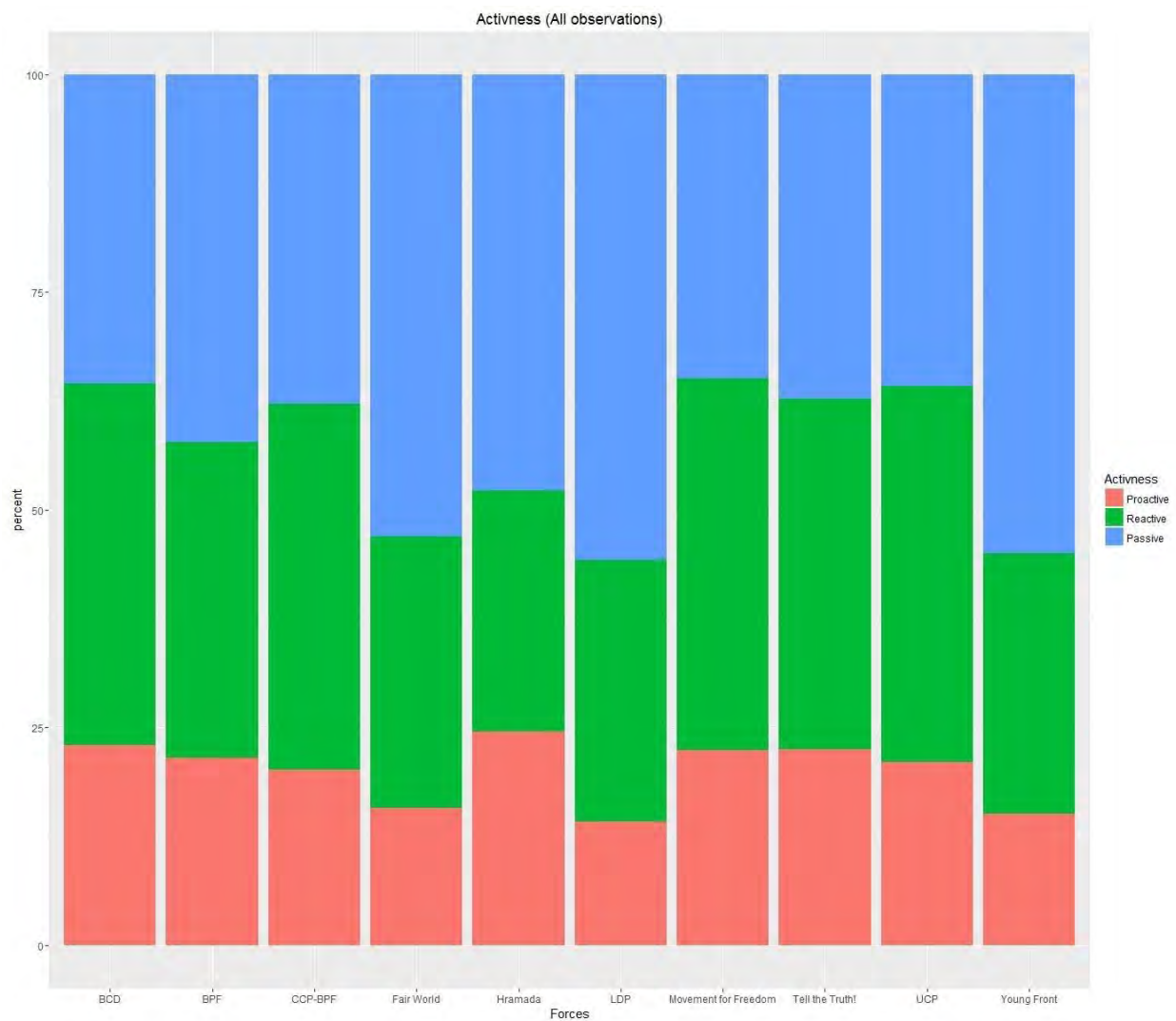
As the **Graph 27** suggests, Belarus' opposition forces heavily rely on leaders in their communication. The amount of communication produced by regional leaders or local activists barely reaches 20% on average. The only one outlier from this trend is Hramada, which has managed to increase this proportion to roughly 35%. However, it should be taken into account that, as in the case of offline activities, this is probably because of the overall low average volume of its communication and the regional specificity of this party. This trend is a repetition of a pattern seen on the structure of levels of activities. Indeed, since the regional level is systematically underrepresented in the communication of Belarus' opposition, one can hardly expect this trend being any different for the proportion of regional leaders and local activists.

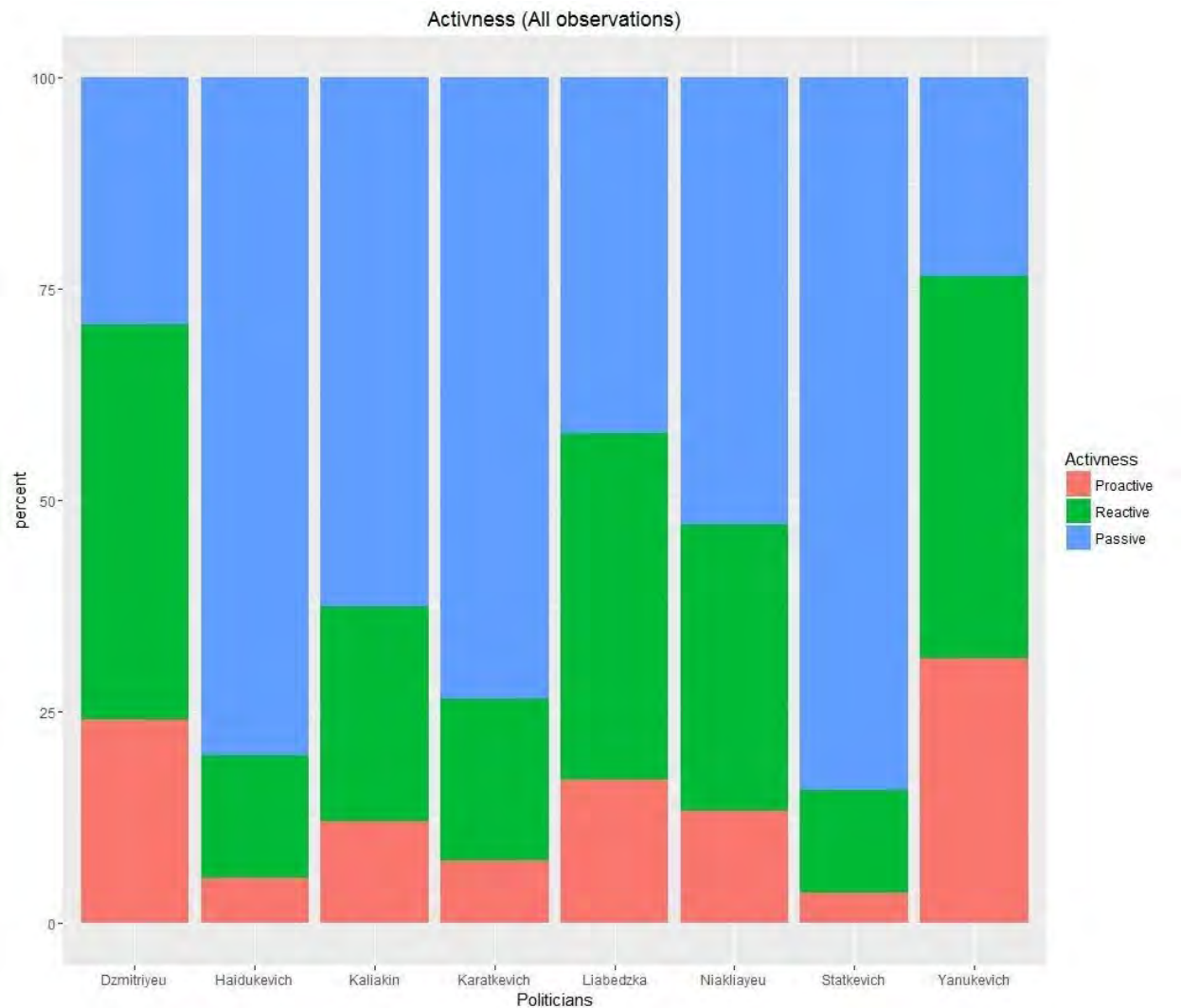
Graph 27. Types of representatives (all observations)



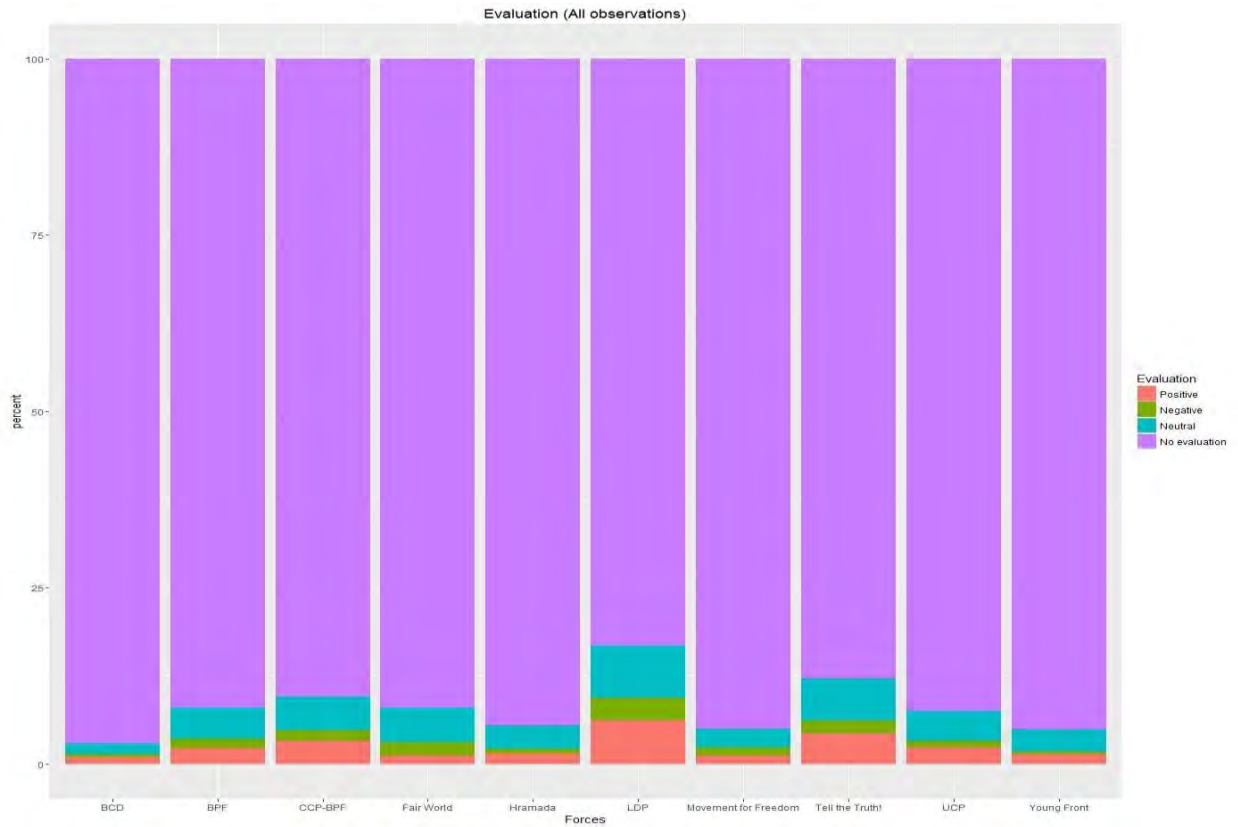
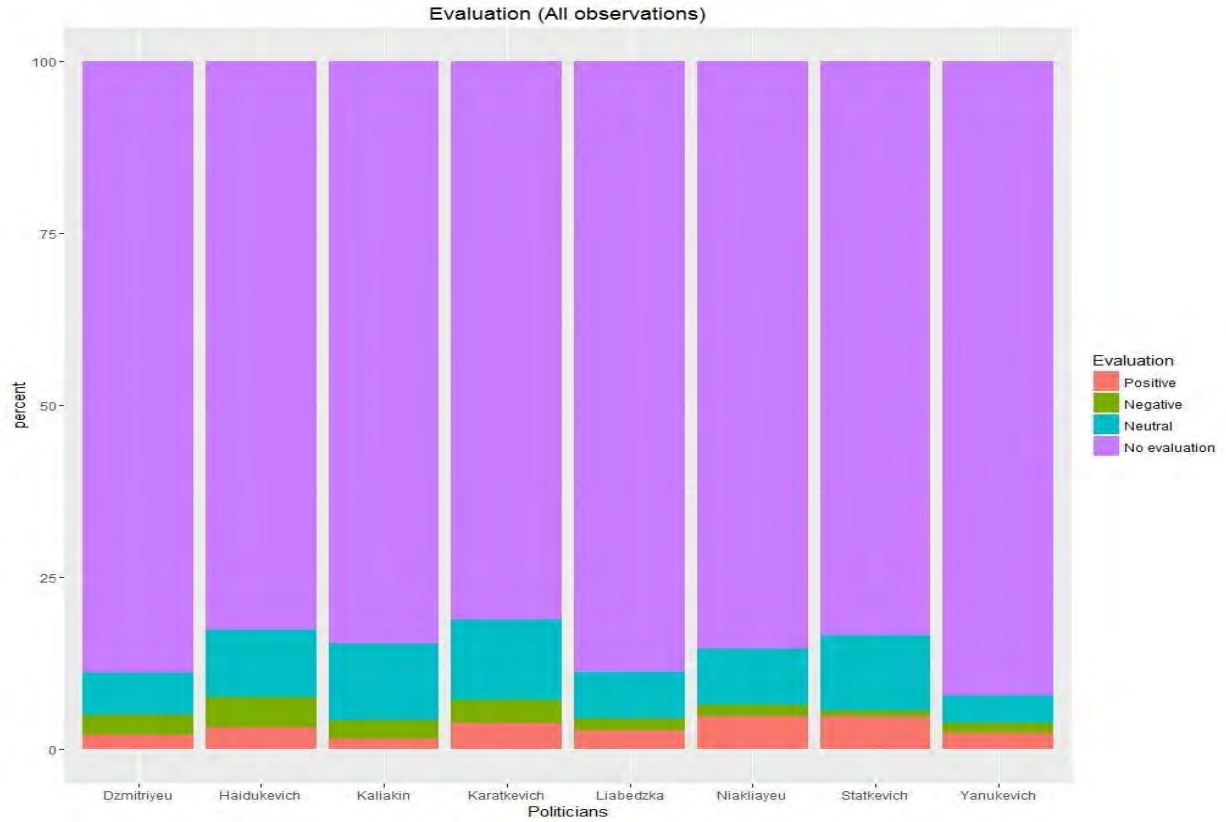
Speaking about the level of activeness, Belarus' political forces demonstrate a surprising homogeneity (**Graph 28**) - proactive communications account for the smallest fractions, while the rest is distributed between reactive and passive types of communications almost equally. On the level of individual politicians, however, there are clear leaders - Yanukevich, Dzmitriyeu and Liabedzka, whose fractions of passive communications are the smallest, while all three politicians also demonstrate the highest proportions of proactive communications.

Graph 28. Level of activeness (political forces)



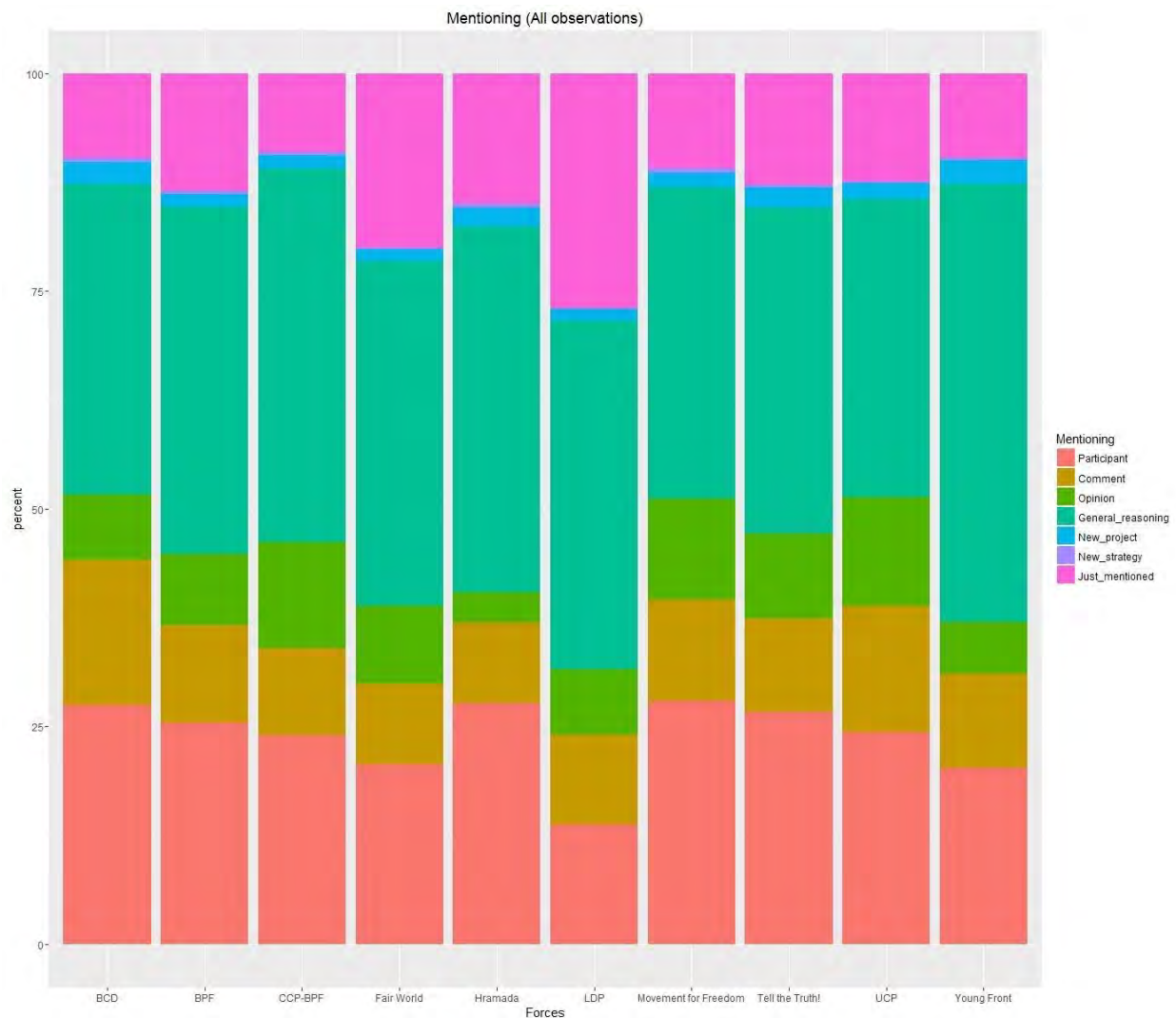
Graph 29. Level of activeness (individual politicians, all observations)

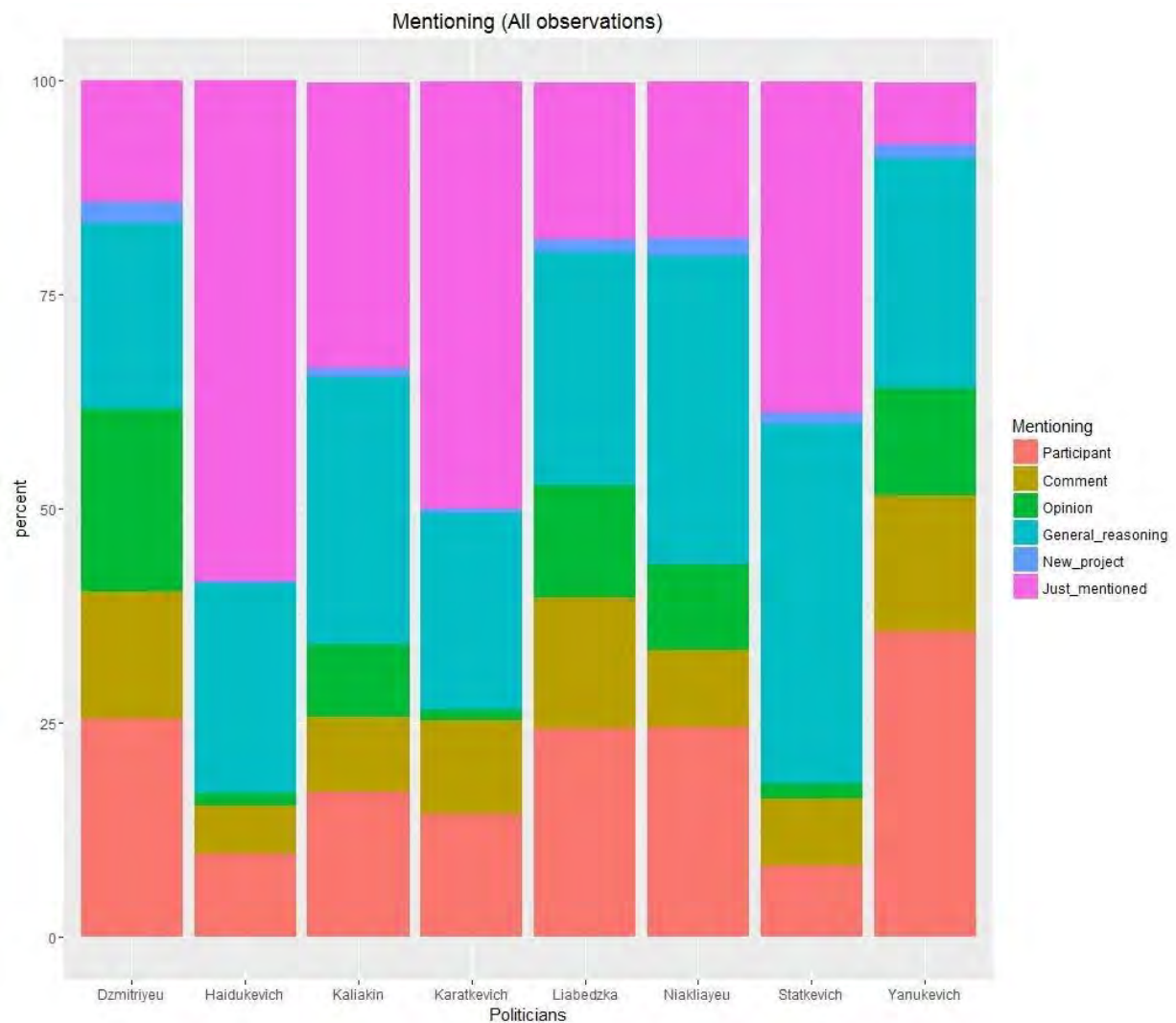
By analysing **Graphs 30** and **31**, which describe quantitative characteristics of evaluations given to Belarus' opposition in media, it is possible to conclude that they are rarely a subject of either criticism or praise, since the overwhelming majority of news in the sample do not contain any evaluation or use rather neutral connotations. The situation is slightly different on the individual level, where Haidukevich and Karatkevich received a significant, at least in comparison to the whole trend, amount of negative evaluations. This could be interpreted as a sign that the traditional Belarus' opposition is to an extent sceptical towards 'outsiders' or new players.

Graph 30. Evaluation in media (forces, all observations)**Graph 31. Evaluation in media (politicians, all observations)**

Graph 32 represents the character of mentionings of political forces or, put it simply, why some force is mentioned in a particular article. Repeating the trend shown by the proportion of offline activities, political forces are mentioned as participants of offline events in about 25% from all observations. At the same time, such categories as “General reasoning” and “Just mentioned” account for the biggest amount of all mentionings of Belarus’ opposition forces, suggesting that they indeed exist more as ‘online’ representations of themselves rather being presented as actives forces offline. Once again, this trend is correlated with mostly passive and reactive character of communication of Belarus’ opposition. The situation is not much different for individual politicians as well (**Graph 33**). Interestingly, the two smallest fractions are presented by the ‘New strategy’ and ‘New project’ categories, which could be interpreted as an indicator of a low flexibility of Belarus’ opposition.

Graph 32. Character of mentioning (political forces)



Graph 33. Character of mentioning (individual politicians)

9. Qualitative index.

Qualitative index of media presence assesses the contents and balance of topics of political actors' communication. The qualitative index was introduced in order to compare in what capacity the politicians were referred to in the media. The qualitative index is composed of 3 subindices:

- **Expertise** (includes a political actor's appearances in the media as an expert, commentator or author of analytical materials);

- **Initiative** (includes the media coverage of politicians presenting new programs, projects or tactic/strategy of the activity); and
- **Action** (coverage of specific actions taken by a political actor or force during the analyzed period, for example, when a leader participates in a round table or a rally).

The total sum total of all the politicians' indices in each of the three areas is 100 points. The individual indices for 'Expertise', 'Initiative' and 'Action' show the share of each political actor's contribution to the media coverage in that capacity and in the given dimension.

Table 1. Qualitative index (individual politicians).

	Expertise	Initiative	Action	Total
Liabedzka	13.5	15.1	16.6	45.2
Niakliayeu	7.5	7.9	8.3	23.7
Seviarynets	4.6	9.8	5.8	20.3
Yanukevich	4.3	5.2	7.4	16.9
Statkevich	7.6	5.3	3.2	16
Dzmitriyey	4.1	7.6	4.1	15.8
Rymasheuski	4.8	4.8	5.5	15.1
Milinkevich	3.9	1.8	5.1	10.8
Hubarevich	2.1	4	3.4	9.5
Karatkevich	3.7	1.2	4.5	9.5
Dashkevich	3	4.3	2	9.3
Kaliakin	2.8	2.4	3.2	8.4
Sannikau	3.7	0.8	3.9	8.4

Pazniak	3	2.3	1.5	6.8
Shushkevich	2	1.4	1.4	4.9
Haidukevich JR.	1.1	1.5	0.8	3.3
Haidukevich	1.2	1.1	0.9	3.2
Veshtard	0.6	0.8	1.7	3.1
Karach	1.2	1.6	0.4	3.1

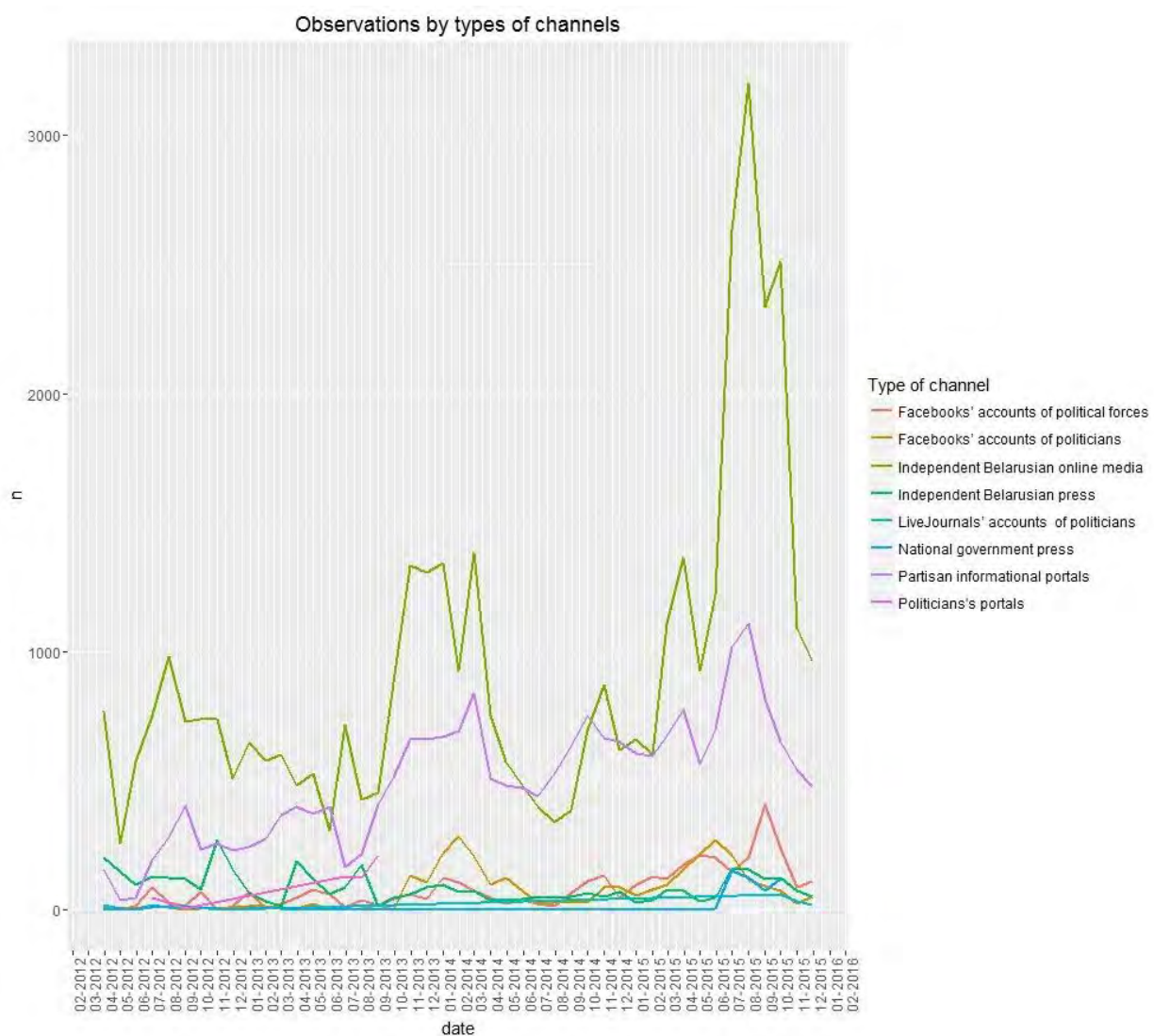
Table 2. Qualitative index (parties).

	Expertise	Initiative	Action	Total
United Civic Party (OGP)	18.7	18.5	18	55.2
Civil campaign “Tell the Truth!” (TT)	13.3	17	15.6	45.9
The Belarusian Christian Democracy Party (BCD)	13.3	17.5	14.2	44.9
BPF party	12.5	10	12.8	35.3
Movement for Freedom	8.3	9.4	9.7	27.4
«Young front” (MF)	5.4	7.6	3.9	16.9
Belarusian Social Democratic party “Hramada”	4.3	6.2	6.4	16.9
Belarusian united left party “Just World”	3.3	2.8	3.5	9.6
Civil campaign “European Belarus”	4.3	0.3	4.8	9.4

10. Types of channels

Finally, as it is seen from the **Graph 34**, an overwhelming majority of news regarding Belarus' opposition are covered by independent Belarusian online media and partisan informational portals. Interestingly, the growing number of communications during the presidential election was caused mostly by independent Belarusian online media, while partisan information portals showed only a slight increase in their attempt to reach voters through internal channels.

Graph 34. Observations by types of channels



Conclusion

The chief conclusion that could be drawn from the presented analysis is that there is indeed a trend of ‘migration’ of Belarusian opposition forces to some sort of ‘online ghetto’. This trend repeats itself in several dimensions – not only the low proportion of offline activities mentioned was indicative, but also the analysis of reasons of mentioning and levels of activeness support this hypothesis. The structure of data on the character of mentioning revealed that the proportions of news where forces or individuals politicians are participants in any event is relatively small, while in the majority of news they are presented as commentators or mentioned due to some general reasoning. The pattern shown by the data on levels of activeness could be interpreted in the similar manner – the low level of proactive communication with rather high portion of reactive and passive communications suggests that Belarus’ opposition prefers to react to hot events in media than to create them.

The second important conclusion is that the ‘online ghetto’ is by no means a Fantasyland and does not allow to overcome structural problems of Belarus’ opposition presented in real life. Thus, the weak role of regional and local activists, the extremely low number of women in Belarus’ opposition, the lack of initiatives and new strategies, and the detachment of the palette of topics covered from the issues which one might think should be the most relevant for a median voter remain not only pitfalls of Belarus’ opposition *per se*, but also are the main shortcomings of their media activity. Interestingly, almost the same patterns were revealed even where data was decomposed into internal and external channels of communication, although one might expect that political forces and politicians would attempt to overcome these issues in their own communication.

This leads us to the logical follow-up question about an extent to which any external set of recommendation could influence the media strategies used by Belarus’ opposition. Thus, the third conclusion is that there is a possibility that the BPMB might have an effect only on the instances where any effect is possible at all. As it was shown by the analysis of topics’ diversity, after the first realize of BPMB there is a persistent increase in the diversification of topics covered. Although the observational nature of the data, the short pre-BPMB period, and the non-random sampling do not allow to make a robust conclusion about causal link between BPMB issues and Belarus’ opposition media strategies, it is possible to at least hypothesize that such a link does exists, as the correlation between them is clearly presented. However, BPMB reports do not have a capacity to change the state of Belarus’ opposition, therefore, although recommendations regarding women’s representation, regional and local activists, levels of activeness, offline activities, etc., had been repeatedly made, that did not have a significant impact on how opposition forces and politicians use available media.

Last but not least, the main tendencies could be identified:

- Political communications show significant grows during the election campaigns. It is called out mostly by the media high interest to the political field. It is driven by mentioning not of political forces but of individual politicians. Structure-agency dilemma seems to be solved in Belarus political science, and actors matter more than institutions.
- Growing quantity of political communication brings about to declining quality. Communications provided mostly by the attention of the media contain lower share of offline-activity and lowest topic and activity differentiation.
- The leaders by qualitative parameters such as share and differentiation of offline activities and balance of the level of reflected events are BCD and the parties belonged to People's Referendum. Thus we can make a conclusion that such a campaigns could be useful for the media image of the forces.