

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

Bulletin No. 1

(31 July – 17 August 2012)

The monitoring aims to:

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

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

The given time span covers such important stages of the elections as the formation of election commissions at the polling stations and candidate nomination.

### **Main Findings and Some Conclusions**

Within the given time span the state-owned media covered the election process in their typical manner, *i.e.* the elections remained much less in the focus of their attention than the weather and sport. (Naturally, the latter was dominated by reports of the London Olympics.)

The Central Election Commission (CEC) was the main newsmaker in these media. As for the opposition political parties whose members are going to stand for the parliament, their presence in the state-owned media was next to nil. If mentioned at all, they were chiefly presented in negative or highly negative light. Never once did the opposition members, independent experts, political analysts or NGO representatives have an opportunity to voice their opinions in the state run media.

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

The OSCE observers, their work and the role they play also received highly negative coverage. In other words, the manner of representation of the parliamentary elections in the state-owned media has not changed markedly as compared to all the previous campaigns. This manner is characterised by a heavy slant, negative portrayal of the regime's opponents and the western observers, obvious denial of the right to rebut and distortions in presenting the political parties and their supporters' views and opinions. The election coverage in the state-owned media is also marked by diametrically opposite approaches to the regime and the CIS observers on the one hand and the opposition and the OSCE observers on the other.

The independent media gave the parliamentary elections a distinctly wider coverage. Unlike their state-owned counterparts, they did not limit themselves to the official information released by the CEC. At the same time, judging by the space allocated to the elections in the independent media, in their view this subject has not yet become a high priority.

If we sum up the overall impression produced at this stage of the monitoring, the parliamentary elections in Belarus appear to be a ritual political performance with a clearly foreseeable outcome rather than a high-profile media event.

### ***The Electronic Media and the Internet Resources***

As we have said, the state-owned electronic media focused on the CEC and its work. CEC representatives were their chief source on such issues as the formation of the election commissions, the creation of initiatives to nominate candidates and the candidate nomination itself. Here is a quote from Mr Lazavik of the CEC: *'I have analysed the nomination to the election commissions at the polling stations in the 49<sup>th</sup> constituency of Hrodna only. In that constituency the United Civil Party proposed eighteen nominees to the election commissions at the polling stations. When we analysed what sort of people they were, it turned out that ten out of the eighteen had been charged with criminal and administrative offences and nine are out of work. What kind of respect can they enjoy with the voters?... Such types should not be allowed to the election commissions.'* (Belarus 1, *V Tsentre Vnimaniya*, 12 August, 2012)

The state-owned electronic media extensively featured what the President had to say about the opposition: *'If today our... well, they do not deserve to be called the opposition, though there are perhaps some opposition-minded people in their ranks... so if our fifth column and the opposition felt they were going to win, they would never claim that the elections lacked legitimacy. This would automatically mean that their MPs lacked legitimacy. If they do say so, it only shows that they know all too well that in today's conditions they will flop... Whatever tactics they are going to opt for is going to be decided in their dirty games. Please, believe me that their dirty games are all about one thing only – money. It may be little money, because the West no longer gives them big money, but it would be enough to support themselves and pay for the petrol to fill their cars, which, once again, the West helped them buy, and maintain the mansions they built when they promised the West they would rise to power in Belarus. At that time the West gave them a lot of money, so they built their mansions, which now need maintenance. In order to receive at least this portion from the West, they are willing to yell and scream, blow up bombs and shoot. All foul means are good for them – that's their politics... We see the same faces, shabby and scruffy. They went abroad and betrayed their country and poisoned the people.'* (Belarus 1, *Panorama* – 9 August, 2012)

The role of the OSCE observers looks just as clear: *'You can see that we have invited all these reeves, whether they have already been here or not. Let them take a close look. We know everything they are going to write and we are already receiving their first reports and information coming from them. It's a long way before the elections, but we have already read*

*what they have to say. We made a conscious decision. We know they are going to screw us, no matter how we hold the elections.*' (Belarus 1, Panarama – 9 August, 2012)

The state-owned TV stations also spoke negatively of the head of the OSCE observer mission: *'Matteo Mecacci is a radical Italian politico. In his home country he actually supports the plans to legalise prostitution, online paedophilia and soft drugs more than he advocates the freedom of expression. The majority of the Italian society stigmatises Mecacci and his ideas. As for his attitude to Belarus, judging by his earlier statements and calls for expanding the sanctions, he is definitely prejudiced. Instead of giving an objective assessment, the Italian MP is apt to bow to the West with its bad case of wishful thinking.'* (ONT, Nashi Novosti, 15 August, 2012)

Among the actors in the election process presented by the state-owned TV stations, the President, the CEC and the opposition hold a dominant position, the latter being featured in a negative light exclusively. This is how *Nashi Novosti* on ONT distributed its air time given to different actors in the election. The President received 59%, the CEC got 10.5%, the depersonalised candidate had 8% and the opposition's share made up 6.5 %. The coverage given to the remaining eleven actors ranged from 3% to 0.15%. A similar picture is typical of the other state-owned electronic media. The only differences are that the actors' rankings by their air time or space on the Internet resources can alter and the regional state-owned media gave more coverage to the local election commissions.

The independent Internet resource *www.naviny.by* presented a far more versatile range of actors in the election process. It spoke of thirty three of them, compared to seventeen actors presented by state run [www.belta.by](http://www.belta.by) . On top of that, this independent website offers its readers politicians', experts' and political analysts' opinions about the elections on a regular basis.

### ***The Printed Media***

The monitored printed media is lagging behind their electronic counterparts in the election coverage. For example, the presidential *Belarus Segodnia* in fact limited itself to the official information released by the CEC, which made up 1,632 cm<sup>2</sup>. Of the three monitored issues of *The 7 Dniy*, only one had a short piece of 438 cm<sup>2</sup> with the official information released by the CEC; the paper said nothing at all about any other actors. The independent *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* did not write anything altogether about the election in its thick edition.

*The Narodnaja Vola* presented eleven actors, while *The Naša Niva* weekly gave coverage to six of them. *The Narodnaja Vola* spoke negatively of the CEC and the commissions at the polling stations. The paper presented the opposition, the electorate and the other actors in a neutral light. *For Freedom* Movement received both negative and neutral coverage. *The Naša Niva* kept to an exclusively neutral coverage of all the actors that were featured on its pages.

The state-owned regional press gave the elections only an insignificant share of their space, which totally made up 395 cm<sup>2</sup> in *The Mogilevskaya Pravda* and 491 cm<sup>2</sup> in *The Homielskaja Praŭda*.

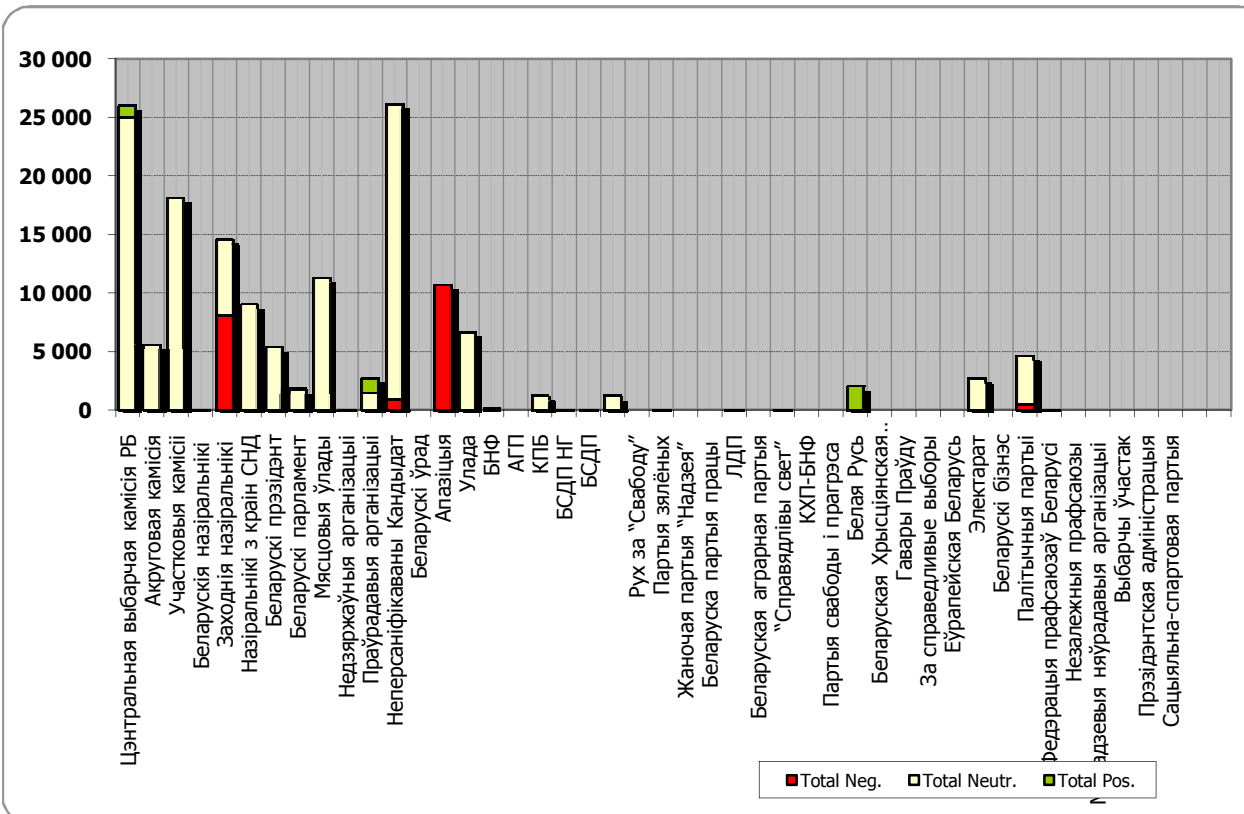
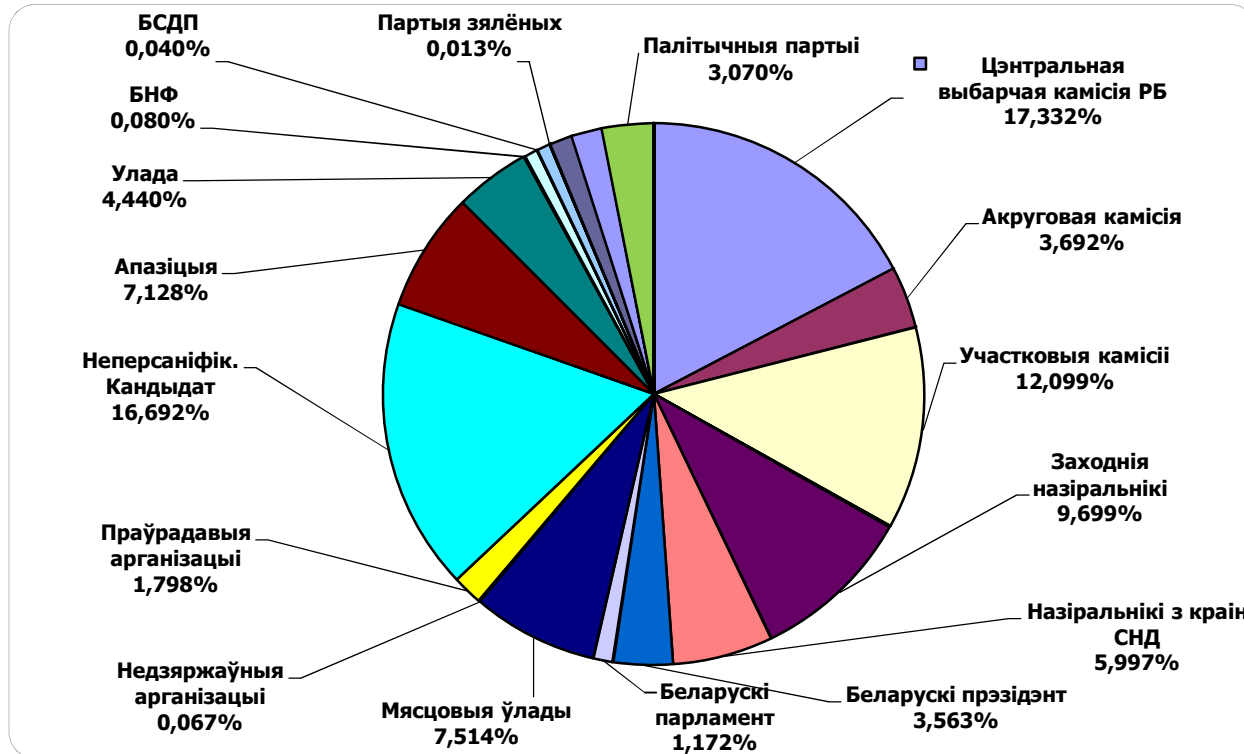
Thus, so far there have been no essential differences in the parliamentary election coverage as compared to that of 2008. Moreover, it looks like a routine which cannot attract any sincere interest.



# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

BELTA.BY  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

## Адзінка вымярэння - колькасць знакаў



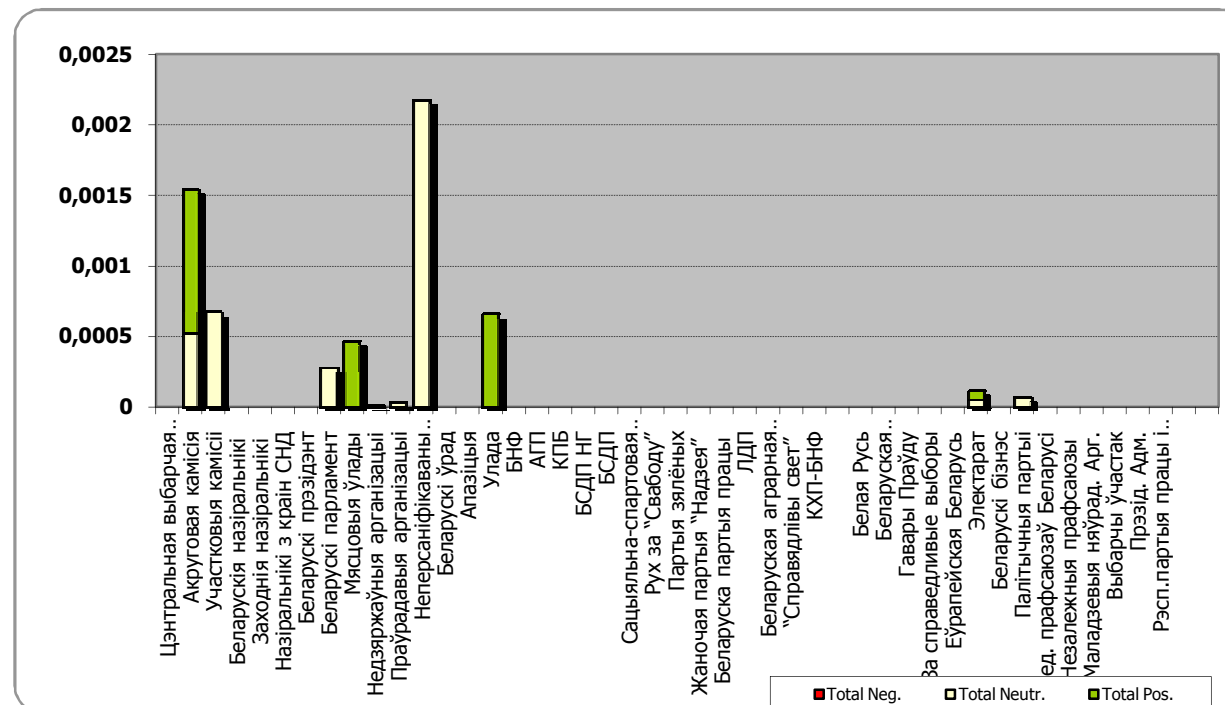
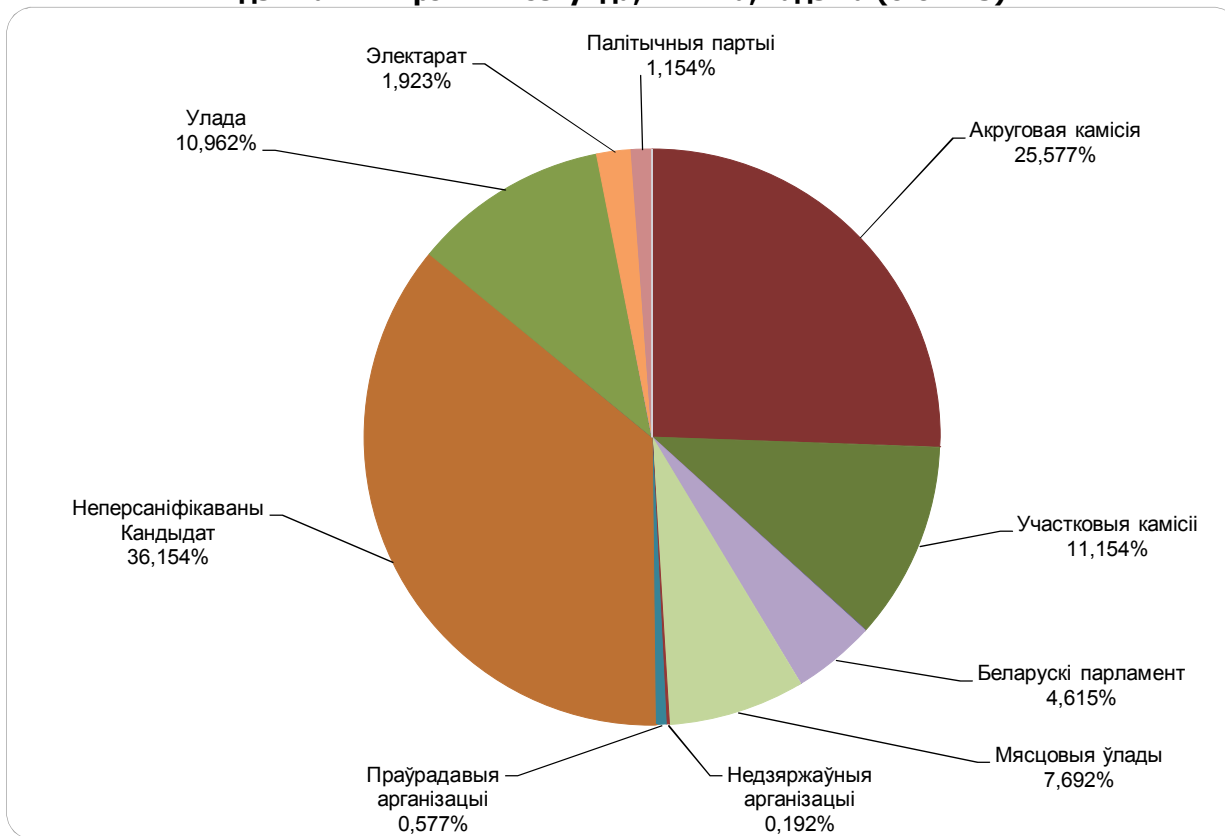


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

ТРК "Магілёў" / Абласное радыё "Навіны"

31.07 - 17.08.2012

## Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)



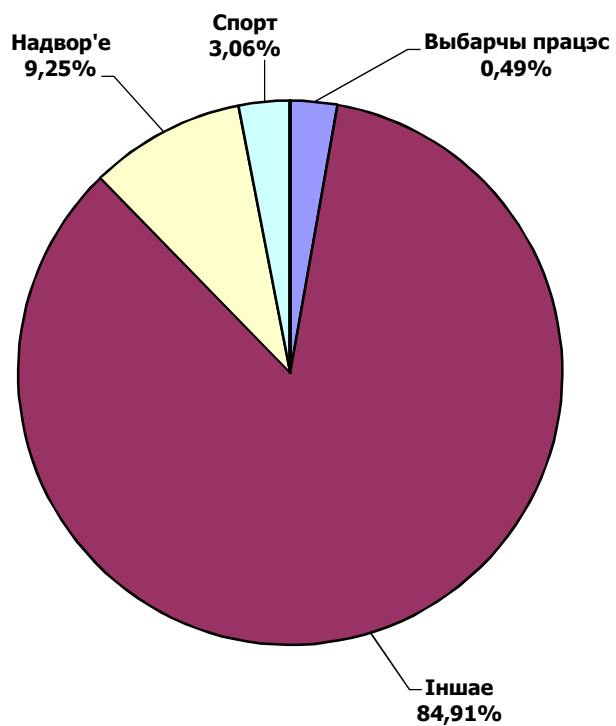


## BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

ТРК "Магілёў" / Абласное радыё "Навіны"

31.07 - 17.08.2012

Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)



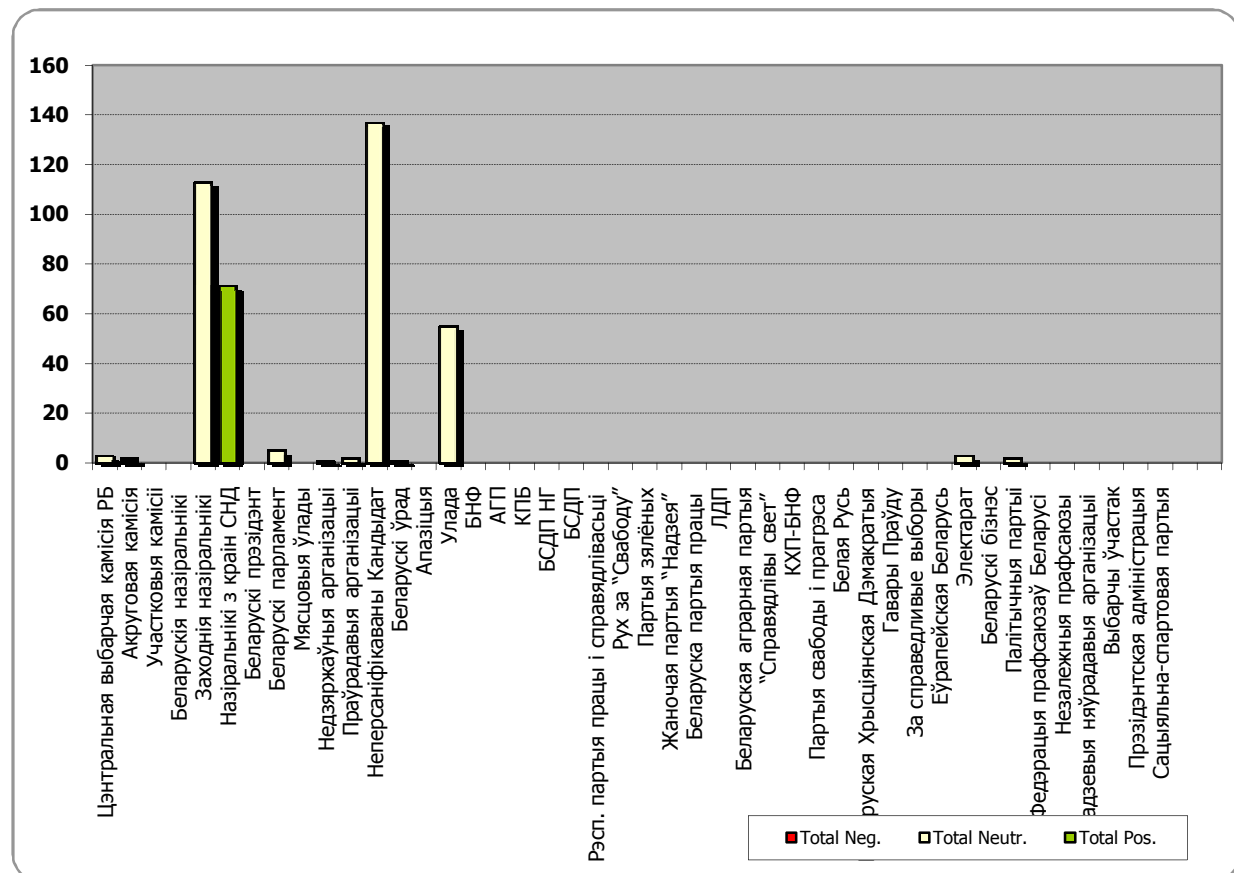
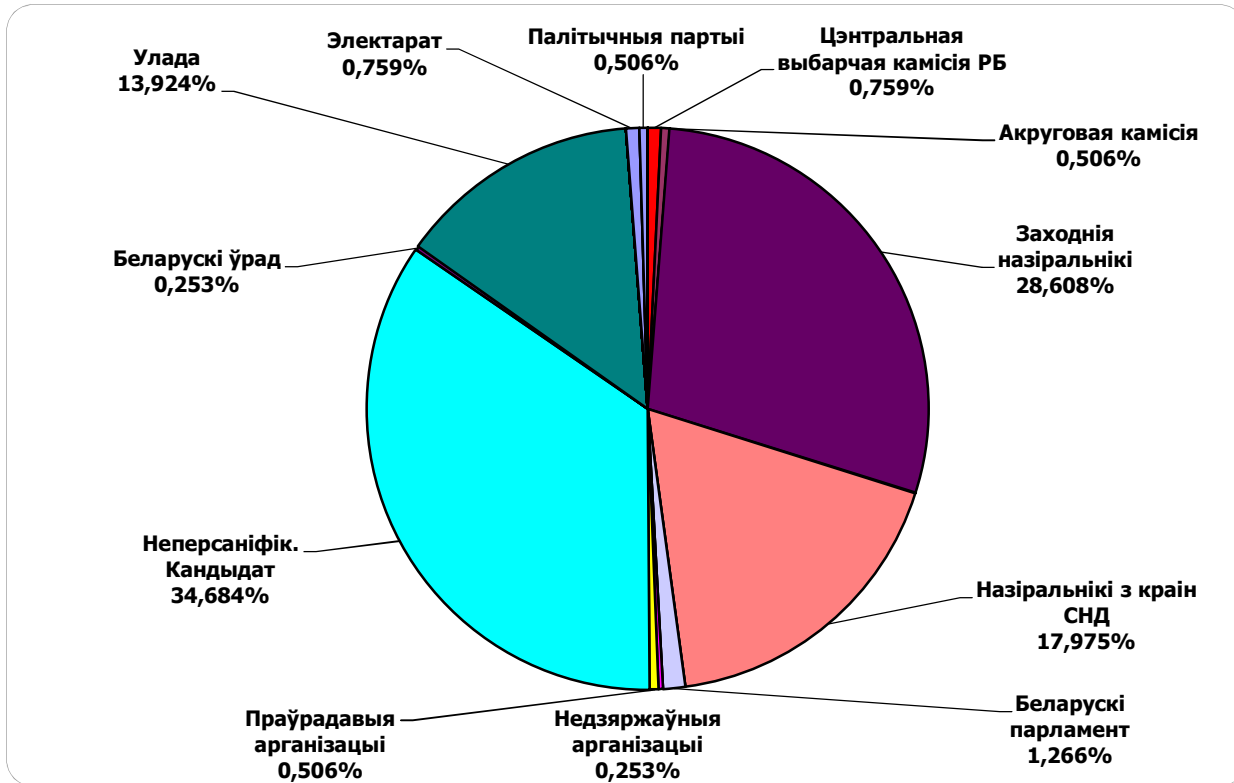


# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

## “Могилёвская Правда”

31.07 - 17.08.2012

### Адзінка вымярэння - см. кв.

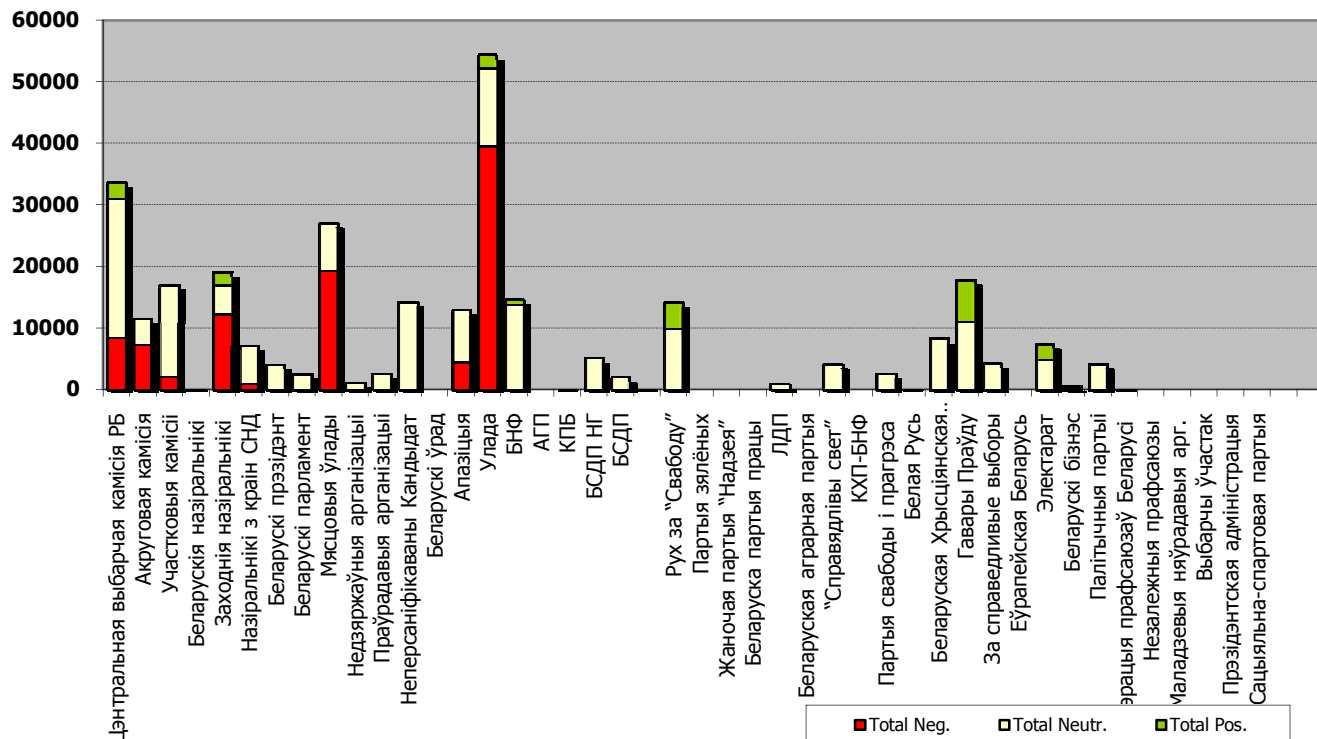
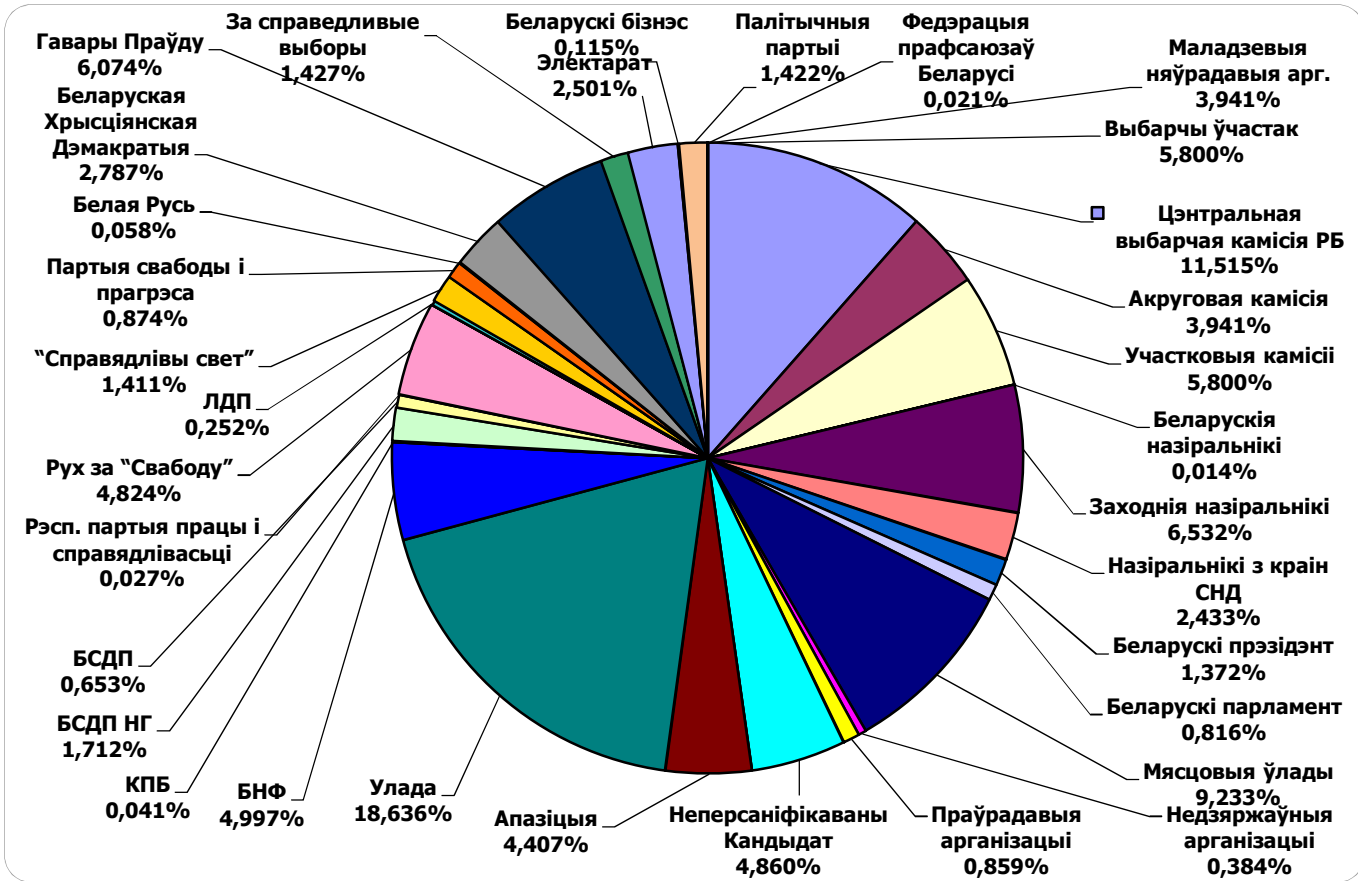




# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

NAVINY.BY  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

## Адзінка вымярэння - колькасць знакаў



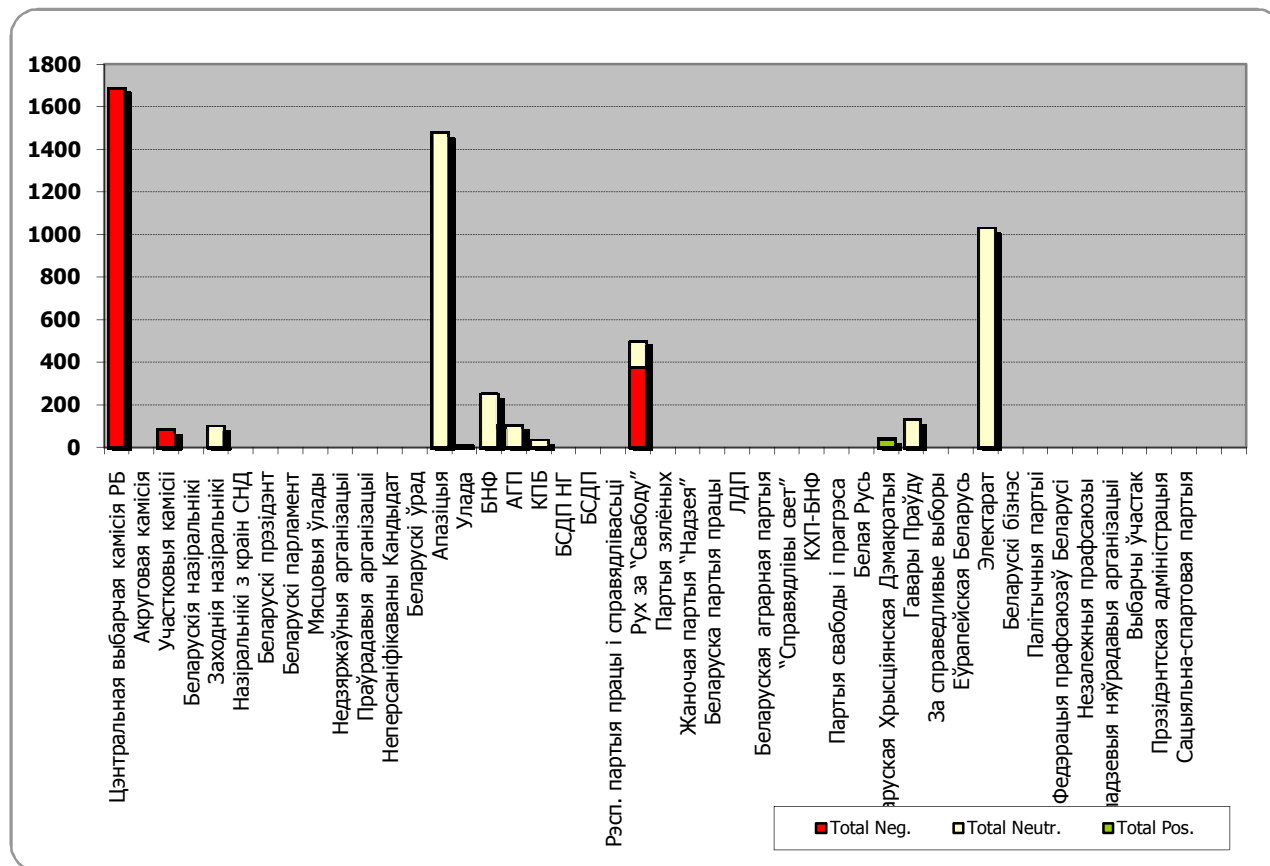
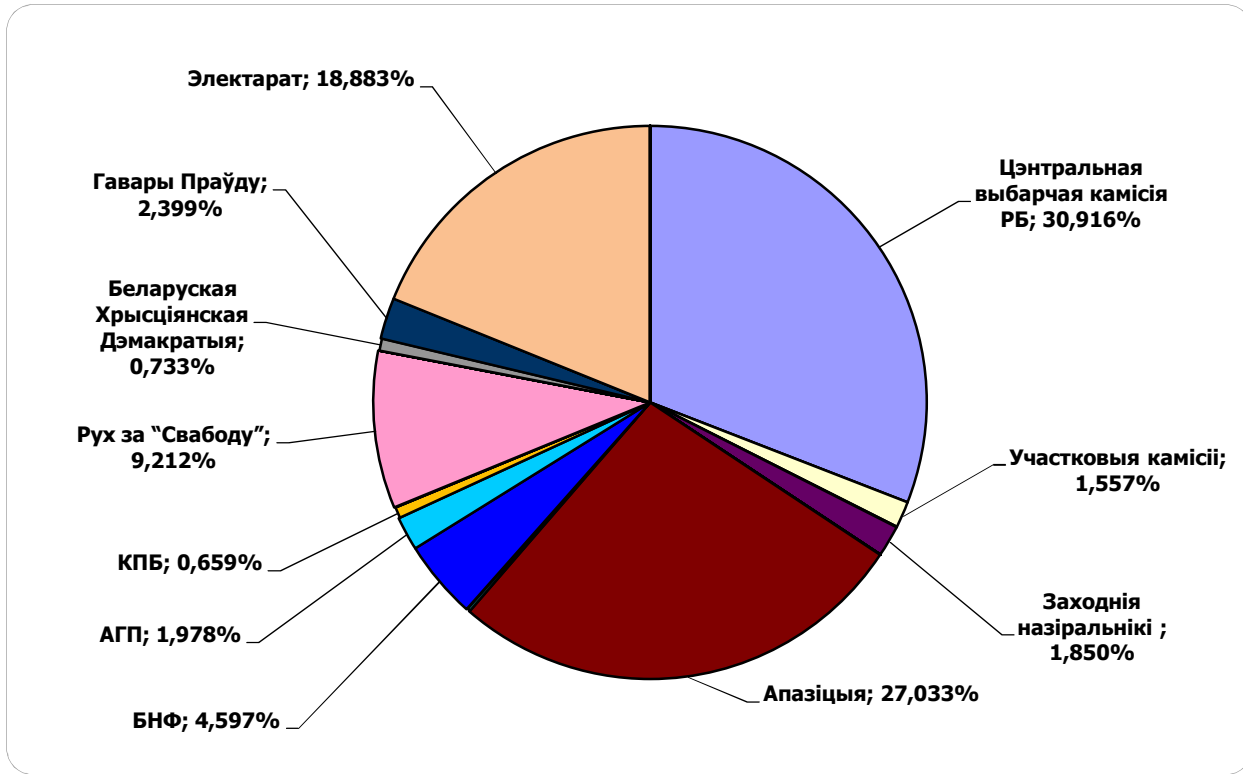




# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

**"Народная Воля"**  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

**Адзінка вымярэння - см. кв.**

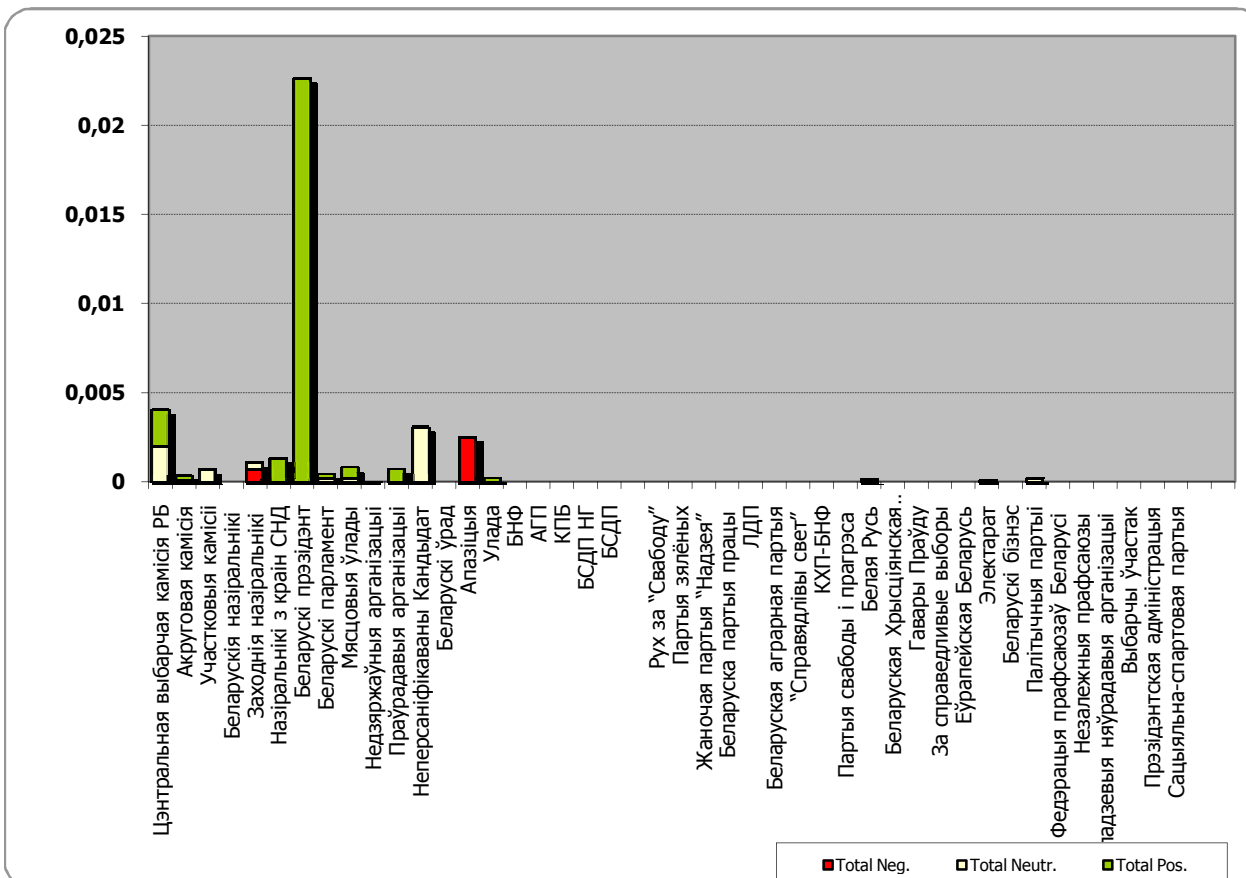
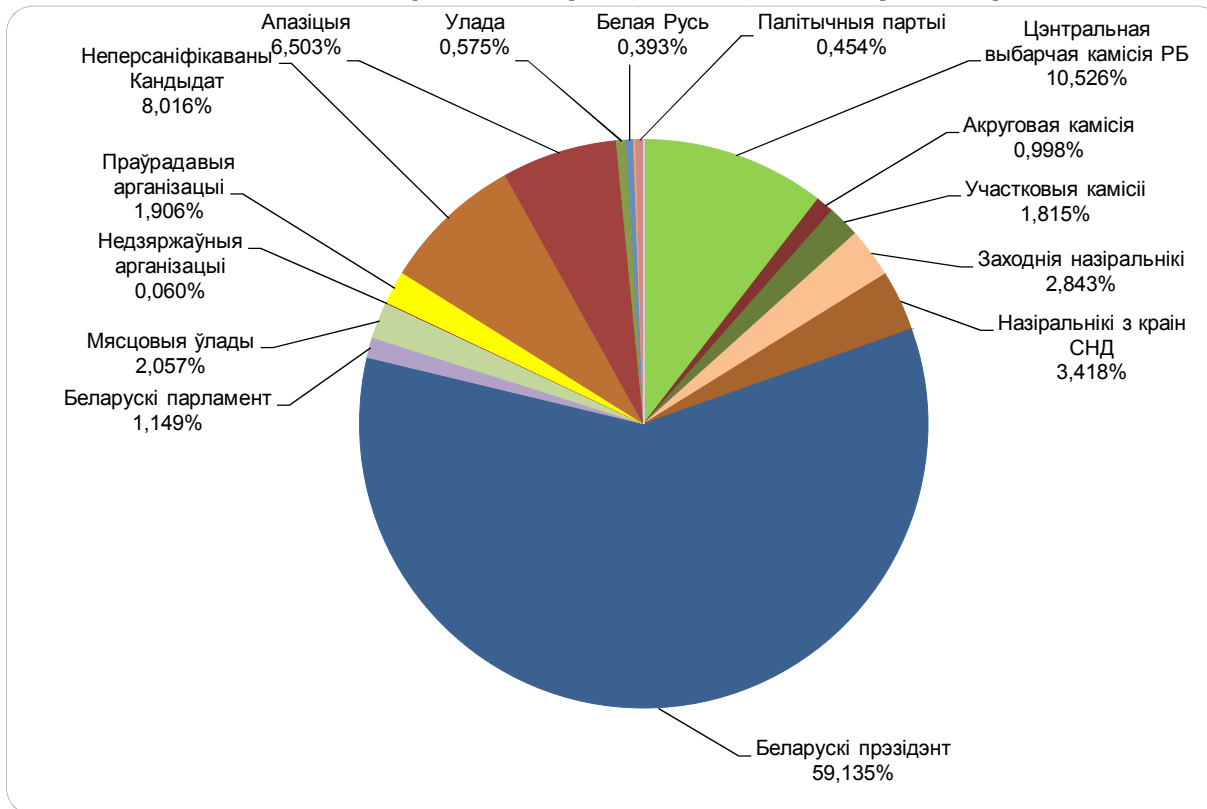




# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

**ОНТ НАВІНЫ**  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

## Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)

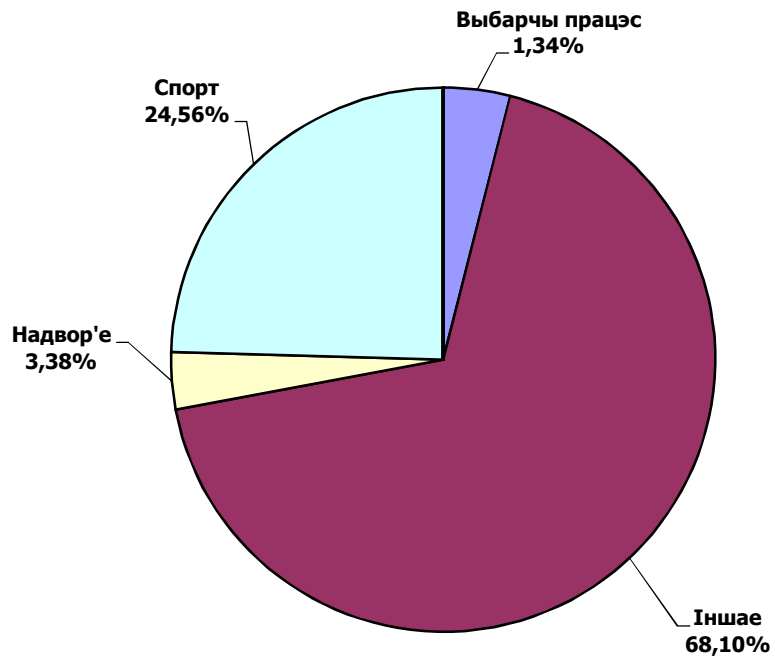




## BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

**ОНТ НАВІНЫ**  
30.07 - 20.08.2012

**Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)**

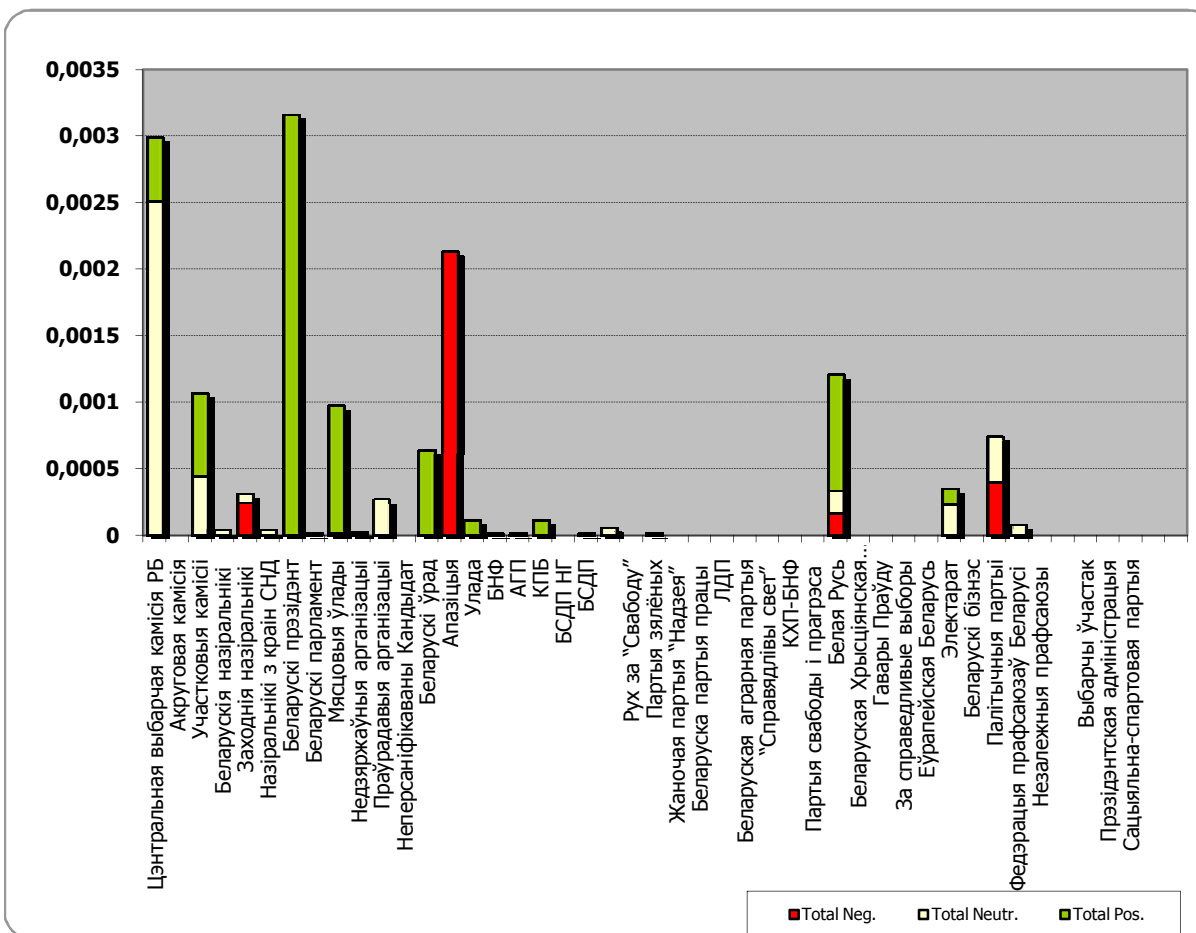
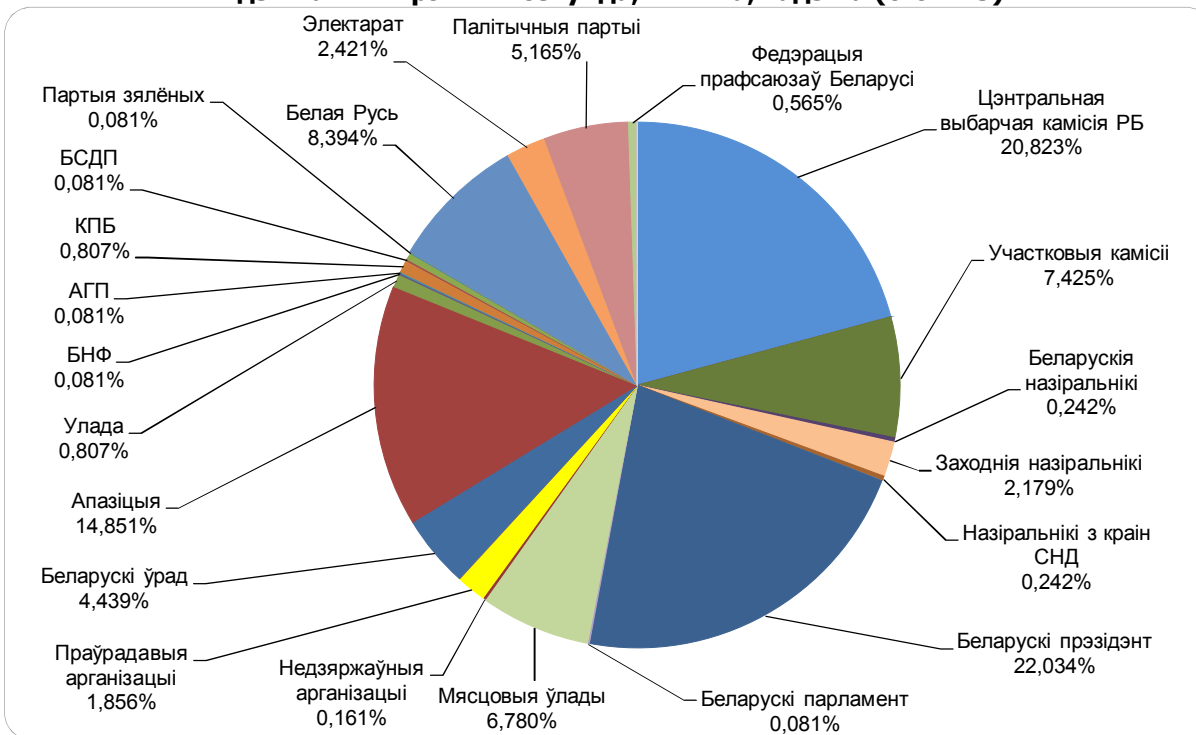




# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

Панарама  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

## Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)

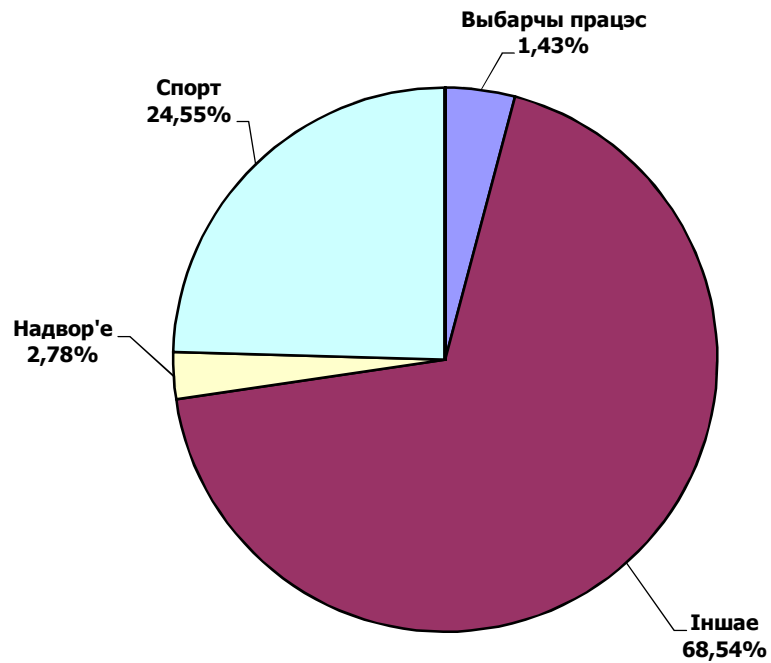




## BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

**Панарама**  
31.07 - 17.08.2012

**Адзінка вымярэння - секунда, хвіліна, гадзіна (0:02:45)**





# BELARUSIAN PARLAMENT ELECTIONS 2012

## "Советская Белоруссия: Беларусь сегодня"

31.07 - 17.08.2012

### Адзінка вымярэння - см. кв.

