Image of Lithuanian Civil Service in Society and Mass Media

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Public distrust of political institutions as well as civil service itself is still dominant in Lithuanian society. The paper seeks to reveal the image of civil servants and civil service itself which undoubtedly is related with public trust. The paper is based on the analysis of empirical quantitative data and content analysis. Comparative analysis of public opinion surveys conducted in 2003 and 2008 indicate that public approach towards civil service is changing very slightly and sceptical attitudes are the leading ones. The content analysis of selected newspapers and online internet news reveals that critical information about civil service is more frequent than a positive one. It might be assumed that the above mentioned issues have negative influence on civil service image and possibly imply sceptical public attitudes towards civil service.

Introduction

In late eighties and early nineties, Lithuania, as well as other Eastern and Central European countries, have taken far-reaching radical changes moving from central planning administration economy system to western market economy based liberal political system. Evidently, the changes influenced not only politics and economics, but also public administration, especially civil service, its size, functions, budgeting, etc. On the other hand, some authors notice, that development of civil service in Lithuania started not

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immediately after Independence, but almost 10 years in 1999 when Seimas adopted the *Law on Civil Service* and other related legislation [8, p. 425]. Anyway, the fall of communist regime and restoration of Lithuania State Independence was a starting point for a contemporary civil service in Lithuania [13, p. 55].

Unfortunately, the public trust in political and state institutions is still rather low in Lithuania [3, p. 130-139; 8, p. 428-429; 11; 10; 1]. In comparison with other EU members that joined EU in 2004, Lithuanians are the most sceptical about civil service comparing to Estonia, Latvia, Check Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Lithuanians trust civil service even less than Bulgarians and Romanians [2]. Thus, the question that remains is what the possible reasons of the distrust are, or what is the image of civil service in society?

The paper is focused on image of civil service in society and reveals its picture drawn by mass media. The study first of all is based on two quantitative surveys conducted in 2003 and 2008 that reflect the tendencies of public attitudes towards Civil Service. The expert quantitative content analysis of press and internet mass media reveal the value context of civil service connotations and enable to see the picture of civil service not only in society but in mass media as well.

1. The image of civil service in public opinion

The debate on civil service image, its characteristics, and trends of trust and distrust in public service start to be popular topic in academic community and public sector. Institutional image could be defined as an impression made by institution on society [14]. Eventually, image of institution is the function of public expectations based on facts and visions. Obviously, institutional image could appear as positive and negative.

Public polls and public opinion surveys that disclose the communication and its feedback between civil service and society reveal trust and distrust in public institutions, are an integral part and important factor of public image building. Newton and Norris [9, p. 61] argue that the key to understand citizens' confidence and trust in public institutions is the actual performance of government. In this context the level of public trust in civil service depends on civil service action – "institutions that perform well are likely to elicit the confidence of citizens; those that perform badly or ineffectively generate feelings of distrust and low confidence" [9, p. 61].

Thus, one of the questions explored in this paper is: what is public opinion about civil servants, civil service and its' institutions in Lithuania? Unfortunately, according to the results of two public opinion surveys[1] it might be assumed that the prestige of civil service is not high (see Figure 1). The survey results indicate that in 2003 and 2008 average evaluation of public servants is at or above the scale midpoint (5.5), however, below public servants evaluation in the scale are only politicians (average evaluation 4).

The similar assessment of civil servants and politicians could be explained by the fact that "the relation between politics and civil service is close by the nature, as civil

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[1] Surveys were conducted in November 6-9, 2003 and July 10-15, 2008 by Market and Opinion Research Centre "Vilmorus" Ltd. The above mentioned surveys are funded by Civil Service Department under Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

service serve for politics raising and implementing political decisions" [7, p. 333]. Thus, corruption, inefficiency and other professional misconduct made either by politicians or civil servants form a negative opinion of both.
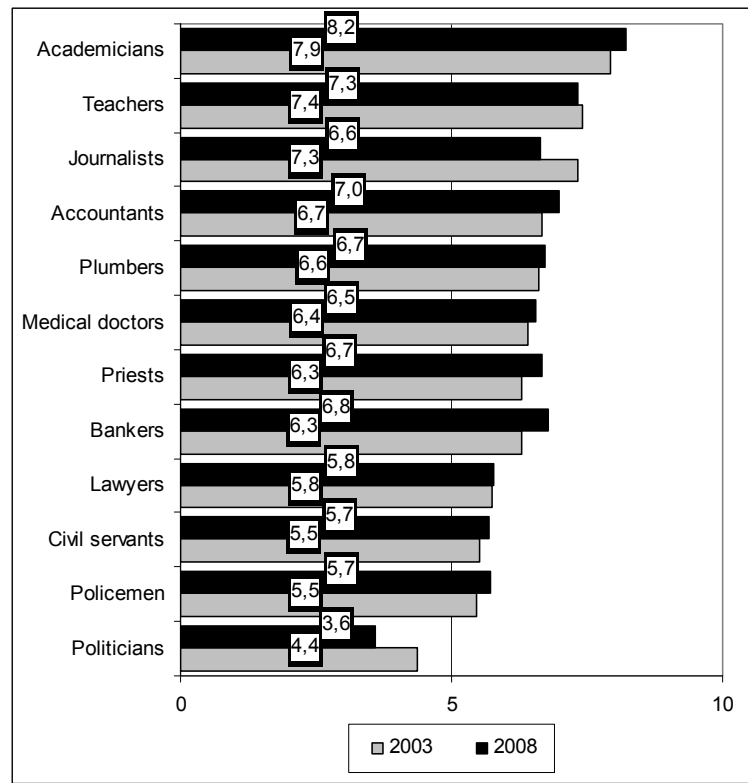

Figure 1: Favourable approach towards civil servant compared with other professions (means, code of one number from 1 (very unfavourable) to 10 (very favourable)

Source: [4; 5].

The analysis of characteristics typical to civil servants, indicate that in public opinion public servants are characterized rather negative than positive. Most often respondents in 2008 identified civil servants as protecting their friends and relatives interests in a professional field (78.6 per cent), being under political influence (70.1 per cent) and under economic interests (64.7 per cent), misappropriation of public funds (66.8 per cent). More than a half of respondents (53.9 per cent) think that public servants work too little. Positive evaluations are less popular in comparison with the negative ones. Only 35.8 per cent of respondents characterize civil servants as competent in their field and responsible in front of society (30.3 per cent). Positive features that are mentioned by less than 30 per cent of respondents were: helpful (29.2 per cent), respectful (26 per cent), fair (19 per cent), unselfish (17.2 per cent).

Comparing the results of the public opinion survey in 2008 with the results of the survey in 2003, some positive changes could be noticed. For e. g., 74.8 per cent of respondents in 2003 characterize civil servants as misappropriating public funds and in 2008 the percentage of so thinking respondents decreased by 8 per cent. Also in 2008 respondents more often noticed positive characters than in 2003. For e. g., in 2008 positive opinion about civil servants increased in following characteristics: accountability (+ 6.5 per cent), competence (+ 6.1 per cent) and fairness (+ 4.3 per cent).

In value scale of 2008 survey respondents think that civil servants are fairer than politicians but less fair than other professionals. Data indicate that people are still rather unconfident in politicians and civil servants. The challenging fact is that civil servants are characterized as less fair and honest even than journalists. In 2003 and 2008 very small percentage of respondents declared that civil servants are fairer than journalists. Although annual *Journalists' Ethics Inspector Activity Reports* [17] and surveys of Transparency International reveal rather serious problems of the media in Lithuania [12], respondents trust journalist more than civil servants.

In the public discourse on new public management and its neoliberal principles in Lithuanian context, civil service and civil servants rather often are compared with private sector and its employees. In the surveys of 2003 and 2008 respondents had the opportunity to compare civil servants and private sector employees. The data indicate that at all point civil servants have worse characteristics than private public sector employees and in five years such attitudes only increased (see Figure 2).
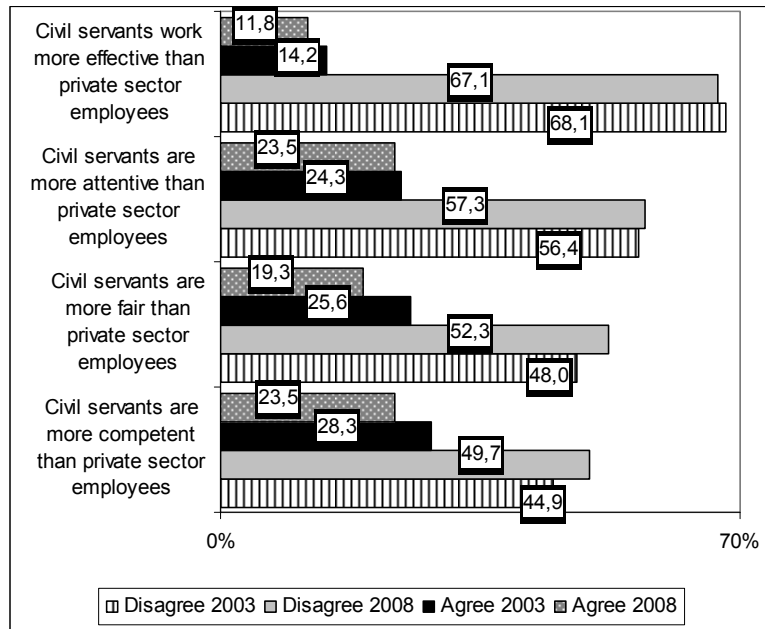

Figure 2: Civil servants compared with private sector employees (*per cent*)
Source: [4; 5].

However, the most excellent question revealing the image of civil servants in society is *What profession would you like your child to choose?* According to survey results, in 2003 and 2008 most of respondents declare that the most required professions are the ones of medical doctor or lawyer. In 2003 22.5 per cent of respondents want their child to be a medical doctor and 21 per cent required him/her to be a lawyer, in 2008 respectively 22.6 per cent and 19.3 per cent of respondents express the above mentioned expectations. Less wanted but still rather popular professions are banker, academician, journalist and teacher. Just 5.9 per cent of respondents in 2003 and 6.6 per cent of respondents in 2008 want their child to become a civil servant. The professions that appeared to be less wanted by parents are accountant, priest, social worker and plumber. However, the least popular career is politician. Only 1.2 per cent of parents express the wish that their child become a politician. The last but the one profession appeared to be a profession of policeman. Thus, it can be assumed that the image of civil servants in Lithuania is not high. The tendency is confirmed by the fact that more than a half of respondents think that there are too many civil servants in Lithuania. 75.5 per cent of respondents in 2003 and 67.5 per cent of respondents in 2008 approve the above mentioned statement. Most of them commenting their choice emphasize that they do not see any clear social benefits of civil service performance.

According to the public discourse, one of the most burning issues in civil service is corruption. Political scandals, conflicts of interests and bribe are rather often mentioned in discussions about politics and civil service. Important indicator of the above mentioned issues is high level of Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index that is widely discussed in society [15]. To understand the corruption in civil service in 2003 and 2008 respondents were asked whether they had to bribe a public servant and did it help to solve a problem (see Figure 3).

However, more than half of respondents in 2003 as well as in 2008 declared that they had not tried to solve a problem by paying a bribe. Nevertheless, majority of those who paid a bribe confirmed that it helped. It should be noticed that in 2008 there are less respondents who confessed to bribe. According to social demographic characteristics of a bribe payers, bribery is most popular in Lithuania's larger cities (Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai) among people working at private or public sector and being at the age of 30-39 (30.8 per cent) and 40-49 (31.6 per cent). Thus, the fact that should worry is that more active and significant groups in society are more intended to bribe solving their problems.

2. The picture of civil service in mass media

Nowadays the flows of information are tremendously increasing, and not every citizen is able and competent to find and analyze enough information on his or her own. Thus, mass media plays a relevant role in nowadays public life, as "private citizens rather often get connected to the global information by mass

media" [6, p.165]. Mass media provides citizens with information about public and social institutions and their service, introduces current news and help to perceive them. However, mass media has a big power to manipulate public opinion by implying on one or another focus [6, p. 144]. Bias is very effective instrument of forming public opinion, however, thus, rather often the image of institutions also depends on its' picture drawn by mass media. Street [14, p.34] notices that "the qualified notion of bias has important implications for the way we analyse media content".
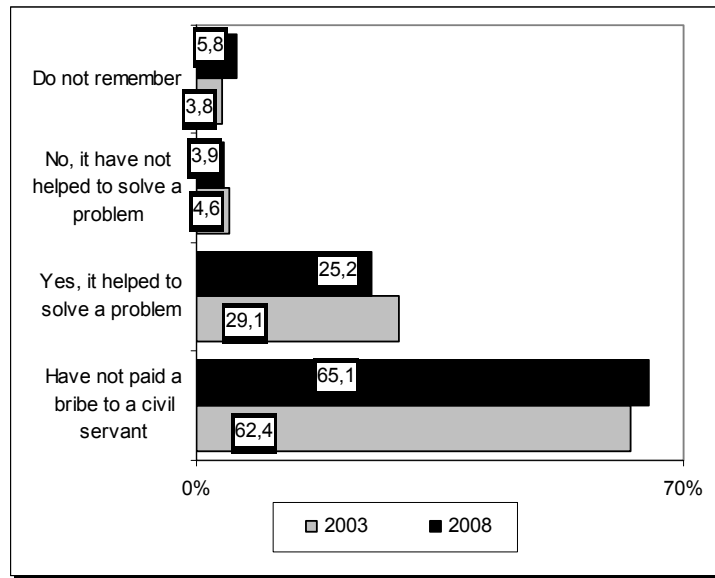

Figure 3: Distribution of public approach towards bribery in solving the problem (*per cent*)
Source: [4; 5]

The results of above mentioned survey of public opinion in 2008 indicate that the main mass media sources providing information on civil service are TV (85 per cent) followed by press (59 per cent), radio (38 per cent) and online internet news (21 per cent) [5]. As it was mentioned above in the paper, Lithuanian people trust journalists, thus, the question that arise is how does mass media and especially press characterize civil service? The study is dwelling on the content analysis of two main daily newspapers in Lithuania *Lietuvos rytas* and *Lietuvos žinios* and very popular internet online news website *Delfi*[2]. The above mentioned selection enables to compare the content of information in traditional press and

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[2] The period of analysis is January 1, 2006 – June 30, 2008. The content analysis of press and internet mass media is funded by Civil Service Department under Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

internet news. Based on the selection criteria 191 articles were analysed in total – 61 in *Lietuvos žinios,* 46 in *Lietuvos rytas* and 84 in *Delfi*[3].

According to various theories on communication processes [16] mass media in to strengthen the sent message often use focused measures called stimulus and process called stimulation. The most popular stimulus in press could be: the location of the article (front page, etc.), the size of the article, font, annotation, headline, etc. Pictures, photos, tables and graphs are also strong instruments of stimulation striving to attract reader's attention. Nevertheless, the results of the research show that stimulation of articles with the focus on civil service is rather low. Only 7 per cent of all analyzed articles are stimulated by annotation and only 6 per cent are on the front page. Thus, it might be assumed that articles about civil service are not always seen as relevant topics. One of the most common stimulation instruments appeared to be a photo – used in 73 per cent of articles. However, stimulation by photo is more popular in internet sources that have bigger commercial space than newspapers that have finite number of pages. According to the analysis results, *Delfi* illustrate 87 per cent of analyzed articles, and *Lietuvos žinios* 74 per cent, meanwhile more expensive *Lietuvos rytas* only 48 per cent. Other above mentioned stimulus is rather rare: stimulation with picture – 8 per cent and stimulation with tables, which potentially are most objective stimulus, used only at 2 per cent of articles. Semantic stimulation with headlines is more popular than stimulation with annotations and more than half of all analyzed articles are stimulated by biased headlines. Obviously, this instrument of stimulation is the "cheapest" one as on contrary to pictures, tables, photos or annotations, does not requires additional commercial place. The leader in this field is *Lietuvos žinios*, as 72 per cent of analyzed articles in the newspaper are stimulated by biased headline. *Lietuvos rytas* use the stimulus in 52 per cent of analyzed articles and *Delfi* respectively 32 per cent.

Thus, the question that arises is what is the type of information about civil service in above mentioned mass media? According to the research results, majority of articles are neutral (75 per cent) and 22 per cent are possibly biased (see Figure 4). Therefore it might be assumed that the information about civil service in the analyzed mass media is not often biased. Instead of presenting biased information, analyzed mass media present neutral facts and let their readers to make their own interpretations on civil service or civil servants.

However, the above mentioned general tendencies differ from newspaper to newspaper. In daily newspaper *Lietuvos žinios* 53 per cent of articles on civil

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[3] The analysis of mass media included only those articles in which civil service was the main topic focused on central level government institutions: Office of the Prime Minister, Ministries and Subdivisions under the Ministries. The analysis of newspapers articles was focused on all topics with the exception of criminal news, global politics and sport articles. In total, the selection criteria have been addressed to all articles on civil service in 10 month releases of Lietuvos rytas and 10 month releases of *Lietuvos žinios*. The analysis of internet news in *Delfi* was focused on topic "Dienos naujienos Lietuvoje" and included only original articles of *Delfi* eliminating articles reprinted from the newspapers. In total, there have been analysed 31 online internet news Delfi releases.

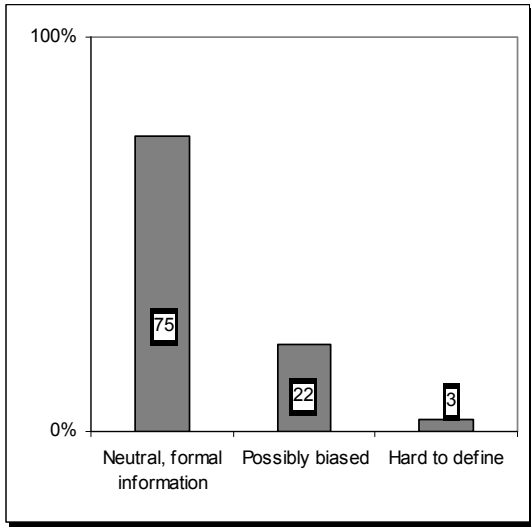service are neutral, however, 43 per cent are possibly biased. And on contrary, in *Lietuvos rytas* only 11 per cent are possibly biased and majority of analyzed articles are neutral. Similar tendencies could be noticed analyzing *Delfi* in which 85 per cent of articles appeared to be neutral. Nevertheless, analyzing in more details it could be noticed that facts with comments and remarks about civil service are four times more frequent than just fact-based information. Thus, despite dominant neutral style, Lithuanian press does not avoid comments and remarks (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: Press approach towards civil service (*per cent*)

It could be noticed that pure matter-of-fact information is mostly on newsletters and announcements that rarely are published on daily newspapers. Most often in the analyzed articles could be found single or multifold opinion on the discussed issue. The research results indicate that 54 per cent of analyzed articles incorporate single opinion, however, difference in the ratio of articles with single opinion and multifold opinion is relatively small (see Table 1).

Analyzing newspapers the difference between *Lietuvos žinios* and *Lietuvos rytas* is obvious again. *Lietuvos žinios* has approximately equal number of single opinion and multifold opinion articles, meanwhile in *Lietuvos rytas* single opinion articles are dominating.

Figure 5: Characteristics of Press articles (*per cent*)

Table 1: **The ratio of single opinion and multifold opinion articles in press**

	Lietuvos žinios	*Lietuvos rytas*	*Delfi*	*Total*
Single opinion	28 (46%)	35 (76%)	41 (49%)	104 (54,5%)
Multifold opinion	33 (54%)	11 (24%)	43 (51%)	87 (45,5%)
Total	61 (100%)	46 (100%)	84 (100%)	191 (100%)

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One of the key objective of the study is the context analysis of reference towards civil survey in mass media. Analyzing the articles on public service positive references are relatively rare and are mostly focused on well performed duties (functions)[4]. Well performed duties in the analyzed information sources are mentioned 23 times, meanwhile reforms in civil service and defence of public interests are mentioned just 8 times (see Table 2). The least popular positive reference is competence building. Despite considerable institutional attention to competence building, the above mentioned fact indicates low mass media interest in the issue.

Table 2: **Positive references to civil service and civil servants performance (units)**

Keywords	Lietuvos žinios	Lietuvos rytas	Delfi	Total
Well performed duties (functions)	9	9	5	23
Reforms	4	1	3	8
Defending of public interests	0	1	7	8
Applying new ICTs	3	1	1	5
Motivation of the best civil servants	0	1	1	2
Competence building	0	1	1	2
Total	16	14	18	48

Speaking about neutral references to civil service, the most frequent reference is to issues on wages in civil service, which is mentioned 26 times (see Table 3). Another rather frequent reference is to general information about institution performance that is mentioned 21 times. General information about civil service performance is most frequent in *Lietuvos rytas*. Meanwhile *Delfi* also has a strong focus on issues on shirk reduction (14 references).

According to the analysis of negative references to civil service the leading reference in analyzed mass media is shirk and engagement in conflict of interests. Newspapers have given this kind of information for the reader 42 times **(**see Table 4). Another rather frequent reference speaking about civil service is public servants misconduct that was mentioned 39 times.

Consequently, it can be assumed that strong articulation of above mentioned negative reference in traditional mass media could have negative impact on the public service and eventually public servants image.

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[4] References counted according by the listed key words. In one article are maximum 3 keywords referring to positive, neutral or negative attitudes towards civil service.

Table 3: **Neutral references to civil service and civil servants activities (units)**

Keywords	Lietuvos žinios	Lietuvos rytas	Delfi	Total
Issues on wages in civil service	5	0	21	26
General information about institution activity	5	11	5	21
Issues on shirk reduction	2	0	14	16
Appointments in civil service	4	0	5	9
Issues on civil service reforms	2	2	2	6
Issues on civil service finance	2	0	4	6
Legal processes related to civil servants	3	0	2	5
Issues on civil servant image	1	0	2	3
Issues on growing civil servants' competence	1	0	1	2
Total	25	13	56	94

Table 4: **Critical references to civil service and civil servants activities (units)**

Keywords	Lietuvos žinios	Lietuvos rytas	Delfi	Total
Shirk and engagement in conflict of interests	11	12	19	42
Misconduct of civil servants	14	10	15	39
Irrational and not transparent use of funds/ property	11	1	6	18
Possibly corrupted appointments in to civil service	5	1	4	10
Lack of reforms	0	0	3	3
Lack of competence among civil servants	0	0	2	2
Total	41	24	49	114

Concluding remarks

The public opinion surveys in 2003 and 2008 have revealed that negative approach towards public servants and their professional performance has been dominating in society. Lithuanians even after 5 years continue to view civil service and its officials with a large dose of scepticism.

The content analysis of selected daily newspapers and online internet news indicate that information and articles about civil service and civil servants are not frequent in Lithuanian mass media. The daily newspapers *Lietuvos žinios* and *Lietuvos*

rytas as well as online internet news *Delfi* mention civil service rather often, but most frequently it is contextual information, not the main topic of the article. The information has strong focus on politicians and rather low interest in public servants meanwhile civil service as institution itself is rarely a main topic in press.

The information about civil service and civil servants that is analyzed in mass media has more negative bias than positive. The content analysis of selected newspapers and internet news indicate that articles with negative references to public service are more frequent than the ones with positive references. However, the most frequent information in public discourse is neutral, thus, there is no single opinion whether mass media is negative towards civil service or not.

Nevertheless, following the idea that public discourse is a strong factor of image building, and mass media is a guide for citizens in jungles of public administration, the answer to the question about image of civil servants and civil service itself sounds not promising. However, the question what are the genuine reasons for high confidence in and brilliant image of civil service – bias or the way institution performs, still remains rather open.

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Eglė Vaidelytė, Giedrius Žvaliauskas

Lietuvos valstybės tarnybos įvaizdis visuomenėje ir žiniasklaidoje

Santrauka

Lietuvai, palyginti su kitomis ES narėmis, būdingas itin didelis nepasitikėjimas politinėmis institucijos apskritai ir valstybės tarnyba konkrečiai. Šio straipsnio tikslas – atskleisti valstybės tarnybos ir valstybės tarnautojų įvaizdį, kuris daro poveikį pasitikėjimo lygiui. Straipsnyje lyginami 2003 m. ir 2008 m. atliktų apklausų rezultatai, kurie rodo, kad visuomenė išreiškia neigiamą požiūrį į valstybės tarnautojus, jų vykdomas veiklas ir teikiamą socialinę naudą. Ekspertinė spausdintos ir internetinės žiniasklaidos kiekybinė turinio analizė rodo, kad pozityvi informacija apie Lietuvos valstybės tarnybą yra publikuojama gerokai rečiau nei kritiška informacija. Akcentuojama, kad tokia žiniasklaidos priemonių pozicija nelemtų tai, kad formuotųsi teigiamas valstybės tarnautojų ir apskritai visos valstybės tarnybos įvaizdis.