

reporting for change:
a handbook for journalists
covering elections



INTERMEDIA

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a handbook for journalists
covering elections

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Foreword

I was delighted that the British High Commission was able to fund the series of workshops on electoral journalism and the production of this guide.

Democracy - a system in which the people freely choose their leaders, and hold them to account - is crucial for guaranteeing stability and prosperity. Democracy is all about strong institutions, protecting the rights of citizens, including women and minority groups, and upholding the rule of law. But it is also about free and fair elections, which are the mechanism through which the people choose who governs them, and express their judgement on the performance of their government. As such, free and fair elections are absolutely crucial to the functioning of a proper democracy.

The media play an important role in any democratic society; a free press is often the way in which governments are held accountable for their actions. At election time, they have a duty to report impartially, sensitively and responsibly, ensuring that the people and the political parties can communicate their vision for the future with each other. They can also act as the guardians of a free and fair electoral process, ensuring the transparency that is crucial for people's confidence in the elections.

This guide, and the workshops that accompanied its production, are an example of the material support of the UK for democracy in Pakistan. I hope that it will be useful, and contribute significantly both to the continued development of the free media in Pakistan, and to open, transparent, free and fair elections in 2008.

**Robert Brinkley CMG,
British High Commissioner to Pakistan**



Introduction

Since the early Seventies, the focus of media coverage during general elections has been mainly on personalities rather than parties and their manifestoes. Before elections new laws are introduced, and constituencies re-demarcated for political gains, but often these go unnoticed.

Radical changes occurred before the 2002 general elections. Once again seats were reserved for women in parliament and the number of seats in the Senate and national and provincial assemblies enhanced.

As the media generally is not trained in election coverage skills, the people's knowledge of election laws, party manifestoes, and election gimmicks is severely limited.

Media coverage of elections in Pakistan is usually limited to reporting on post-election pledges by politicians, and election results. Talking about the possible fallout of the existing or changed law is even rare. Elections are the cornerstone of any democracy. The media has a vital role to inform the masses of the politicians' promises, and communicating to the politicians the peoples' needs and desires. This is particularly important in countries lacking progress on democracy.

Journalists should report elections in a non-partisan way so as to help people make their minds on the basis of what various candidates have to offer.

This guide, funded by the British High Commission, looks at various stages of the electoral process, and areas where distortions can occur, either through deliberate actions or poor management. Many of these areas are highlighted in the guidelines given to journalists during training.

Earlier, under this project, Intermedia trained journalists working with newspapers, magazines and news agencies in election reporting to improve coverage and public knowledge on election issues, focusing on improving journalists' understanding of election laws and their ability to focus on party manifestoes rather than personalities.

The main context is general elections for the provincial and national assemblies, but the guidance will also be applicable to local elections. The guide

also looks at the criteria for judging election transparency, and what can be done to improve the democratic process.

Intermedia gives high priority to strengthening the capacities of communication institutions, improving awareness of the need for freedom of expression, and the utilization of available communication resources.

Particular attention is given to training for media specialists, particularly women journalists, strengthening news agencies, public service broadcasting and assisting media in improving the quality of their local content by providing training, production and distribution opportunities; and training in media literacy for users, particularly women and youth.

Most media development projects work towards improving the quality of media output through training, increasing access to the media through reinforcement of media facilities, especially new technologies, and supporting ethical practices of journalism agreed upon by the media professionals themselves.

Intermedia in collaboration with other agencies provides technical and material assistance designed to promote the development of independent and pluralistic media in the post-conflict areas. Technical assistance includes training of journalists in skills that help provide the public with increased access to non-partisan information.

The media has enormous responsibilities in pre- and post-election phases. Strengthening democracy and basic human freedoms, including freedom of expression, depends largely on the reporter's capacity to provide reliable information through responsible and professional reporting. Journalists and other media professionals are the main parties providing information and material to the public. Therefore, journalism training is an immediate necessity towards the ultimate goal of maintaining a professional media network and working democracy.

Strengthening democracy and basic human freedoms, including freedom of expression, depends largely on the reporter's capacity to provide reliable information through responsible and professional reporting.

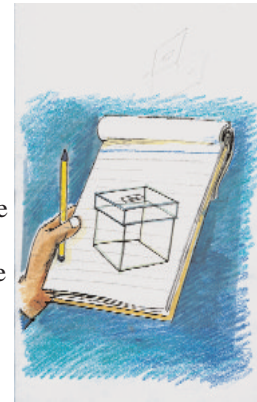
Chapter 1

Elections in Pakistan

Officially a federal republic, Pakistan has had a long history of alternating periods of electoral democracy and authoritarian military governments. Military presidents include General Ayub Khan in the 1960s, General Zia ul Haq in the 1980s, and General Pervez Musharraf from 1999. However, most heads of state and heads of government in Pakistan have been elected civilians. General elections were held in October 2002. After monitoring the elections, the Commonwealth Observer Group stated in conclusion:

"We believe that on election day this was a credible election: the will of the people was expressed and the results reflected their wishes. However, in the context of various measures taken by the government we are not persuaded of the overall fairness of the process as a whole."

On May 22, 2004, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group re-admitted Pakistan into the Commonwealth, formally acknowledging its progress in returning to democracy.



Election Commission of Pakistan

For the purpose of elections to both houses of parliament, provincial assemblies and other public offices, as may be specified by law or until such law is made by parliament by order of the president, a permanent Election Commission is constituted by the president comprising the Chief Election Commissioner as its chairman and four members, each of whom is a high court judge, appointed by the president after consultation with the Chief Justice of Supreme Court and the Chief Election Commissioner.

Duties of Election Commission

The Election Commission constituted in relation to an election has been charged with the duty to organize and conduct the election and to make such arrangements as are necessary to ensure that the election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law and that corrupt practices are guarded against.

The Chief Election Commissioner is appointed by the president, at his discretion, for a term of three years. A person who is or has been, a Supreme

Court judge or is, or has been a High Court judge, and is qualified to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan is appointed as Chief Election Commissioner. The Chief Election Commissioner enjoys security of tenure and financial autonomy.

Under the Constitution, the Chief Election Commissioner has been charged with the duty of:

- a) preparing electoral rolls for election to the National Assembly, Provincial Assemblies and Local Government Institutions. ***A person who is or has been, a Supreme Court judge or is, or has been a High Court judge, and is qualified to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan is appointed as Chief Election Commissioner.***
- b) organizing and conducting election to the Senate or to fill casual vacancies in a House or a provincial assembly. ***The Chief Election Commissioner enjoys security of tenure and financial autonomy.***
- c) appointing Election Tribunals and
- d) conduct of Local Government elections.

Legislative Branch

The bicameral federal legislature consists of the Senate (upper house) and National Assembly (lower house). According to Article 50 of the Constitution, the National Assembly, the Senate and the president together make up a body known as the Majlis-i-Shoora (Council of Advisers or Parliament).

Pakistan's democracy has no recall method. However, past governments have been dismissed for corruption by the president's invocation of Article 58 of the Constitution. The president's power to dismiss a prime minister and dissolve the National Assembly was removed by the Thirteenth Amendment and partially restored by the Seventeenth Amendment.

Senate

The Senate is a permanent legislative body with equal representation from each of the four provinces, elected by the members of their respective provincial assemblies. There are representatives from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs) and from Islamabad Capital Territory. The Chairman of the Senate, under the constitution, is next in line to act as president should the office become vacant and until such time as a new president can be formally elected. Both the Senate and the National

Assembly can initiate and pass legislation except for finance bills. Only the National Assembly can approve the federal budget and all finance bills. In the case of other bills, the president may prevent their passage unless the legislature in a joint sitting overrules the president by a majority of members of both houses present and voting. Unlike the National Assembly, the Senate cannot be dissolved by the president.

Election to the Senate

The Senate consists of 100 members, of whom 14 are elected by each provincial assembly; eight members are elected from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs) by the members of National Assembly from these areas; 2 members - a woman, and a technocrat - are elected from the Federal Capital by the National Assembly members; four women and four technocrats are elected by the members of each Provincial Assembly. The breakup of seats allocated to each province, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Federal Capital, women and ulema/technocrats, is as under:

NUMBER OF SEATS

Province / Area	General Seats	Seats reserved for		Total
		Women	Technocrats and Ulema	
Federal Capital	2	1	1	4
Punjab	14	4	4	22
Sindh	14	4	4	22
NWFP	14	4	4	22
FATAs	8	-	-	8
Balochistan	14	4	4	22
Total:	66	17	17	100

It is the responsibility of the Chief Election Commissioner to hold and make arrangements for the Senate elections in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote through the electoral colleges.

The term of the members of the Senate is six years. However, the term of the first group of the Senators, who shall retire after completion of first

three years of the Senate, is determined by drawing of lots by the Chief Election Commissioner.

National Assembly

Members of the National Assembly are elected by universal adult suffrage (over twenty-one years of age in Pakistan but the Seventeenth Amendment has changed it now to eighteen years). Seats are allocated to each of the four provinces, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and Islamabad Capital Territory on the basis of population. National Assembly members serve for the parliamentary term, which is five years, unless they die or resign sooner, or unless the National Assembly is dissolved.

NUMBER OF SEATS					
EXISTING			PREVIOUS		
Province/Area	General Seats	Seats reserved for	Total		
	Non- Muslims	Women	General	Seats reserved	
			Seats	for Non- Muslims	
Federal Capital	2	10	-	2	1 10
Punjab	148		35	183	115
Sindh	61		14	75	46
NWFP	35		8	43	26
FATAs	12		-	12	8
Balochistan	14		3	17	11
Total	272	10	60	332+10=342	207
					207+10=217

Although the vast majority of the members are Muslim, about five per cent of the seats are reserved for minorities. Elections for the minority seats are held on the basis of separate electorates at the same time as the polls for Muslim seats during the general elections.

There are also 50-plus special seats for women now, and women are selected (i.e. not directly elected in the general election but given representation accordingly as their parties performed in the general election) on these seat by their party head - another Seventeenth Amendment innovation.

Provincial Assemblies

Pakistan is subdivided into four provinces, one territory, and one Capital

Territory. Each province has a provincial assembly, a directly-elected legislature. Members are elected for five-year terms. Each assembly elects a chief minister, who then selects ministers of his or her cabinet.

NUMBER OF SEATS				
Province / Area	General	Seats	Seats reserved	Total
		Non-Muslims	for Women	
Punjab	297	8	66	371
Sindh	130	9	29	168
NWFP	99	3	22	124
Balochistan	51	3	11	65
Total:	577	23	128	728

Election to the office of the President

The president is chosen by a secret ballot through an electoral college comprising members of the Senate, National Assembly and the Provincial Assemblies. A person, who is a Muslim and not less than 45 years of age and is qualified to be elected as a member of the National Assembly, can contest the presidential election. The president is elected for a term of five years. It is the duty of the Chief Election Commissioner to conduct elections to the office of the president in a special session of parliament and all the provincial assemblies in accordance with the provisions of the Second Schedule to the Constitution.

Qualification for membership of Parliament

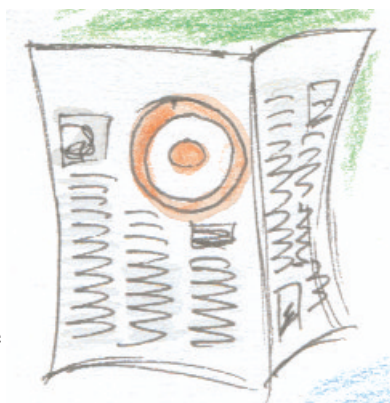
A person who is a citizen of Pakistan, is enrolled as a voter in any electoral roll and in case of National/Provincial Assemblies is not less than 25 years of age and in case of Senate not less than 30 years of age, is of good character and is not commonly known as one who violates Islamic injunctions, has adequate knowledge of Islamic teachings and practices, performs obligatory duties prescribed by Islam as well as abstains from major sin, is sagacious, righteous and non-profligate, honest and ameen (custodian), has not been convicted for a crime involving moral turpitude or for giving false evidence, and has not, after establishment of Pakistan, worked against the integrity of the country or opposed the ideology of Pakistan and is a graduate (has a graduate/bachelor's degree) can contest the elections and become a member of Parliament or a Provincial Assembly.

Qualification of a voter

A person, who is a citizen of Pakistan, is not less than 18 years of age on the first day of January of the year in which the rolls are prepared or revised, is not declared by a competent court to be of unsound mind and is, or is, deemed to be a resident of an electoral area, can get himself enrolled as a voter in that electoral area. The citizens registered on the electoral rolls are only eligible to cast their votes.

Electoral procedure

For the conduct of elections to the national and provincial assemblies, the Election Commission appoints a District Returning Officer for each district and a Returning Officer for each constituency, who are drawn from amongst the officers of the judiciary, the federal/provincial government and local authorities. Returning Officers are mostly Additional District & Sessions Judges.



1. The list of polling stations is prepared by the Returning Officers and approved by the District Returning Officer. No polling station can be located in the premises of a candidate.
2. The list of Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and polling staff is prepared by the Returning Officer and sent to the District Returning Officer for approval at least 15 days before the polls. The Presiding Officer is responsible for conducting polls at the polling station and maintaining law and order. He is assisted by the Assistant Presiding Officers and Polling Officer.
3. After the publication of election schedule by the Election Commission, nomination papers are invited from interested contesting candidates.
4. Scrutiny of nomination papers is carried out by the Returning Officers and nomination papers are accepted or rejected.
5. Appeals against rejection/acceptance of nomination papers are filed with the appellate tribunal, which decides such appeals summarily within such time as may be notified by the Commission and any order passed thereon shall be final.
6. Final list of contesting candidates is prepared and published in the prescribed manner by the Returning Officer after incorporation of

the decisions on appeals and after withdrawal of candidature by the candidates if any.

7. Election symbols are also allocated by the Returning Officer (RO) from the list of symbols approved by the Election Commission. The RO also publishes the names of the contesting candidates arranged in the Urdu alphabetical order.
8. The Election Commission of Pakistan provides each Returning Officer with copies of voter's list for his constituency, who distributes it amongst the Presiding Officers in accordance with the polling scheme and assignment of voters to each polling station/booth.

Voters cast their votes at specified polling stations according to their names in an electoral roll. Since the election for both national and provincial assemblies constituencies are held on the same day, the voter is issued two separate ballot papers for each national assembly and provincial assembly constituency.

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10. When an voter presents himself at the polling station to vote, the Presiding Officer shall issue a ballot paper to the voter after satisfying himself about the identity of the voter through his identity card.
11. Polling is held for nine hours on the polling day without any break.
12. Immediately, after the close of the poll, votes are counted at the polling stations by the Presiding Officers in presence of the candidates, their Election Agents, and Polling Agents.
13. After counting the ballot papers the Presiding Officer prepares a statement of the count indicating the number of votes secured by a candidate, and sends it to the Returning Officer along with the election material, unused ballot papers, spoilt ballot papers, tendered ballot papers, challenged ballot papers, marked copies of the electoral rolls, the counterfoils of used ballot papers, the tendered votes lists, and the challenged votes lists.

14. The Presiding Officers also announce the result of count at the polling stations and paste a copy of the result outside the polling stations.
15. After the receipt of statement of counts from the Presiding Officers of the polling stations, the Returning Officer compiles the preliminary unofficial result and intimates the results to the Election Commission through fax for announcement on print/electronic media.
16. After the announcement of unofficial result, the Returning Officer serves a notice to all the contesting candidates and their Election Agents regarding the day, time and place fixed for consolidation of the result. In the presence of the contesting candidates and election agents, the Returning Officer consolidates the results of the count furnished by the Presiding Officers in the prescribed manner including postal ballot received by him before the polling day.
17. Immediately after preparing the consolidated statement the Returning Officer submits a copy to the Election Commission in the prescribed form which publishes the names of the returned candidates in the official Gazette.

After the announcement of unofficial result, the Returning Officer serves a notice to all the contesting candidates and their Election Agents regarding the day, time and place fixed for consolidation of the result. In the presence of the contesting candidates and election agents, the Returning Officer consolidates the results of the count furnished by the Presiding Officers in the prescribed manner including postal ballot received by him before the polling day.

Electoral processes

An electoral campaign could suffer from multifarious flaws, and these are the most prominent ones that the Pakistani electoral campaign faces:

Understanding nomination papers: In other parts of the world, nomination papers require basic information - name, ID or passport number. In Pakistan, the extent of information that the nomination papers asked of the nominees, made filing it a daunting process. People have had to pay as much as Rs50,000 to get the nomination papers filed. The forms should be made simple: name, serial number of the nominee in the electoral list, ID card number. The same information should be asked of those who propose or second a nominee.



Women are traditionally kept from voting and participation.

Election tribunals: The whole premise of settling the election disputes through the election tribunal is based on a lie. Love's labour lost is how many people in Pakistan describe it. In the case of disputed or forged degrees, from religious seminaries or universities, if the election tribunal does not settle the issue promptly, they send it to the high courts that forward it to the Supreme Court. The decisions remain pending for years. It is a process that serves those in power and is usually referred to as a self-defeating process that is aimed at consoling the defeated.

Women's participation: Women are traditionally kept from voting and participation. Religious elite has always played up the social, cultural and religious taboos. But now that they have realized that it is a setback, because of the backlash, and also because women have been used to cast bogus votes, the religious parties are encouraging women to come out.

Campaign finances: Pakistani society is capitalist and wealth has to express itself some way. Increasingly, power is where it asserts itself more and more. The election campaign fee for the national and provincial assemblies is clearly defined but contestants spend a phenomenal amount of

money on canvassing and once in power they work to recover all that they have invested in the election process. The voters are dazed with the glamour of works, because it works. The election process itself is expensive - the posters, private transport - that is far beyond the means of ordinary people.

Independent monitors: There are two points when it comes to the role of independent monitors: Pre-monitoring of the election process and preparations that finally influence the way they are conducted. There is a need for local trained monitors because foreign monitors don't understand the process fully.

Social restrictions

There are different conditions that put a social bar on people to contest and cast their vote. Some are as follows:

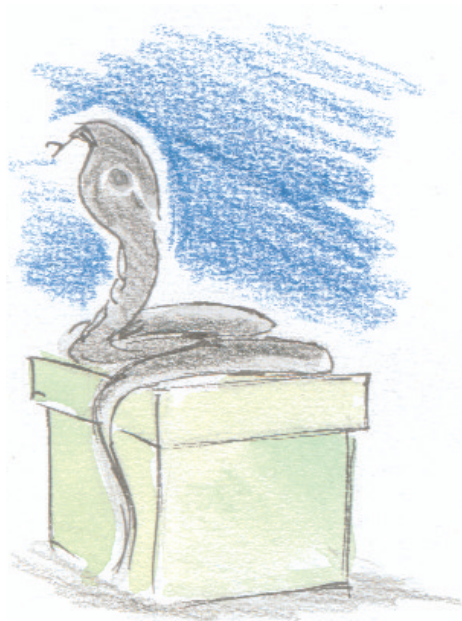
Education criteria: Graduate. In Pakistan, an estimated 3.5 per cent of the people are graduates. With this yardstick, 96.5 per cent of the people straightaway have been stripped of their right to contest elections.

Minorities: Political parties do not give tickets to non-Muslims because during dictatorship, the non-Muslim seats were separated and the political parties fear that they will not be able to win the election. Due to this condition, non-Muslims struggle to enter mainstream politics.

Women: Women have 20 per cent seats in the assemblies. In the 2002 elections, most of the parties fielded female candidates who were either friends or relatives of politicians. Again, ordinary women face an uphill task to enter mainstream politics.

Finances: Since a lot of money is required for electioneering, only the rich can contest election.

Classism: In the local bodies election, people from humble backgrounds were not given tickets.



Sources of funding

- membership fee
 - allocation of party tickets
 - fund raising
 - lobbying
- The party workers lobby for funds from:
- business groups, international companies, and multinational etc.
 - foreign funding (Overseas Pakistanis, interest groups).
 - role of government.
 - role of military.

Journalists should monitor political campaigns and sources of the politicians' income.

For example, a story can also be done on the sitting government's manipulation of funds and launching of development programmes close to the elections.

Abuse of voting rights: There are many issues related to the abuse of voting rights.

Social Pressures: Biradari or community. Sometimes, the entire village has to vote for a particular candidate even if some of

them don't want to.

Accepting influence: Sometimes, an influential person decides for the entire family.

Demanding returns (street, road, loans, or employment): The people ask the candidates favours in return for their vote. The candidate gives his word but rarely honours.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press is a basic human right, through sensitization and monitoring activities. It also fosters media independence and pluralism as prerequisites and major factors of democratization by providing advisory services on media legislation and sensitizing governments, parliamentarians and other decision makers.

Media and elections: Media can repress or liberate, unite or fragment a society, as well as promote or hold back social progress. This makes media an extremely powerful tool, a catalyst of social, structural and cultural changes. Given the power and transformative potential of the mass media, the question of whose reality is presented, who owns it and whose interests it serves, become central to a critical discussion of the impact of the media in conflict dynamics and resolution.

The media played an active role in all three Pakistani elections from the late 1980s to mid-1990s. Although the government-owned radio and PTV presented a pro-government line, the establishment of People's Television Network ended government monopoly of television news. In the case of the print media, government-controlled newspapers tended to express the government's viewpoint, but the large private sector of print journalism furnished a much greater variety of opinion.

Information is power. Its production, processing, and dissemination carry implications for power relations. The control of information and information technology is vital in the reconfiguration of power and politics, locally and globally. Dominant social groups can, and invariably do, use the media as ideological weapons during elections to secure advantages for themselves.

Acquisition of information has created another social dimension



The media's firm conviction that democratic values can restore political stability in the region forces it to initiate in such a manner that it should educate the masses. Political education can be multi-oriented. It can be started from the advocacy of the importance of casting votes.

of information haves and have-nots. The thinking of the have-nots is that the international media aids in transposing Western values on the rest of the world. This concern with the dependency of the developing world on the Western media sources has led to a call for the New International Information and Communication Order. It aims at giving developing countries a better chance to put across their case in the international arena. This has fundamental implications for the success or failure of conflict resolution. Since the news media are important arbiters of reality, not only at the mass level but also amongst decision-makers, distorted images of the international scene could become a major obstacle for those trying to solve problems and issues. This bottomline concern over the way in which the North and South portray each other through their own media, as well as the way in which development issues are covered by the media, prompts a research on the subject.

Generating mass interest

Successful democracies all over the world have set instances for growing democracies like Pakistan. The most emphatic instance in this regard is voter enthusiasm and their mistrust in the political system. That is why citizens in ideal democratic societies do utilize their vote by casting it in numbers. Yes, there are some cases, like youngsters losing their interest in the process of vote casting in America. But the media intervened at the right time by convincing the youngsters that they should play their role in a positive manner.

The situation in Pakistan is slightly different. Since Pakistan has been facing enormous problems to settle down as a democracy it becomes really important that people should not discard democracy as an ultimate governing system for Pakistan.

The media's firm conviction that democratic values can restore political stability in the region forces it to initiate in such a manner that it should educate the masses. Political education can be multi-oriented. It can be started from the advocacy of the importance of casting votes.

Pakistan's political history confirms the fact that early on ideologies of the political parties were the main source of satisfactory turnout in elections. Those days are long gone. The situation now is a bit different, as the stigma of saving their own ends is being associated with the leaders of all political

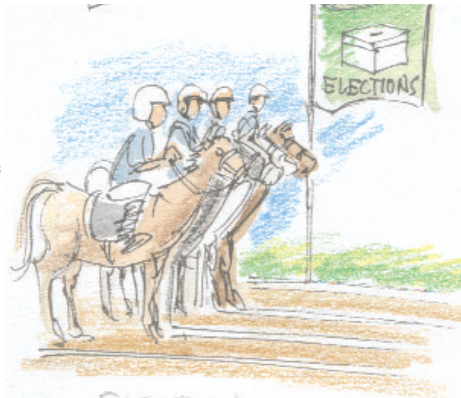
parties in Pakistan. Corruption, too, has shaken the confidence of the masses.

So the media has another task, and that is to politicize the entire society, make the people believe that ideal democracy might be the ultimate goal to achieve. People's enthusiasm will make all other stakeholders accountable. This does not mean that the media should start poking its nose in every issue without realizing its own duties. In ideal democracies, institutions don't interfere in each other's affairs. Even though the media can positively inspire the people, it must not try to take over the functions of other institutions. A true journalist is not one, who is obsessed with imposing his mindset on others, though, ethically and principally, he is allowed to demonstrate his vision.

Media as an effective institution can try to supplement and somehow intervene in certain situations. Without being suspicious of the intentions of some media houses, one must understand that journalists are supposed to report and not to rectify the injustice done by concerned institutions, if any. So the media as watchdog of the entire process must keep a check on the performance of various bodies.

Political campaigning

The general election campaigns and media coverage in the past mostly hovered around the election focused on electoral process - the actions, strategies and prospects of the participants - and not on party manifestoes and issues such as taxation, crime, education. Whilst voter turnout and awareness of the party campaigns were up during the last general elections, the public generally viewed the campaigns as lacklustre and uninspiring.



Party campaigns to a large extent depend on traditional campaign tools such as leafleting and house-to-house canvassing with local party volunteers. Use of new technologies increased particularly, modern methods of targeting voters in marginal seats such as telephone calls.

Almost a huge percentage of front pages didn't mention election issues and there was less broadcast coverage in main bulletins.

Media coverage of the election was distinctly presidential during 2007 presidential election. A substantial proportion of coverage was dedicated to the ruling party leaders, and exclusion of other presidential candidates.

Around nine in ten people used television as their main source of political information during the presidential elections

Around nine in ten people used television as their main source of political information in the run up to the election. In addition, 50 per cent used local newspapers, 43 per cent national and regional newspapers, and 54 per cent used radio to access information on the elections.

Public awareness of party campaigns and turnout was not modest in the 2002 general elections. However, there is evidence that people felt uninspired by the campaigns and that there was a lack of connection especially for those living outside the key battleground seats identified by the parties. Whilst parties have limited funds for campaigning, and therefore, have to target their resources, it's vital that they find ways to engage with the whole electorate.

Key guidelines

When covering past elections, the media focused almost exclusively on what the voting system produced, rather than what the voters said with their ballots. Unfortunately, the core assumption - that the results reflect what voters said - is simply wrong.

Media professionals are expected to look behind the curtain for the real story. By taking the following steps they can eliminate erroneous and misleading coverage of this critically important national event.

- 1) Couple analysis with what voters have actually said with their ballots, rather than blindly reporting the number of seats won by each party. For example, in the last election, the 'A' party won far more votes than the 'B' party. If the voting system treated all voters equally, the 'B' party would have had more votes than the 'A' party, but the voting system gave the 'A' party nearly three times as many seats. When reporting on the seats won by each party, the media should provide a parallel report on how many seats each party would have won if every voter had an equal vote.

- 2) Do the same for provincial results. In the 2002 election, the media reported that the PML-Q swept the polls. Journalists should not make sweeping statements about a certain party as though seat results reflected the way they actually voted.
- 3) Provide fair, balanced, and accurate commentary on the treatment of voters supporting each party. Election analysts should provide comparative commentary on how other groups of partisan voters are treated by the voting system. Election analysis should include a comparative scorecard on how the voting system treats the voters of each party and to what extent it diverges from voter equality.
- 4) Provide an efficiency rating for the voting system. Citizens cast votes to elect their parliamentary representatives. But how efficient is the system? Give viewers and readers the answer by providing an election night and post-election analysis of the number of effective votes (votes that elected MPs) and wasted votes (those that elected no-one) for voters in each province. Provide comparative electoral efficiency figures for other democracies. Offer commentary on the implications for democracies whose voting systems waste an average of 50 per cent of all votes, compared to those with five per cent or fewer wasted votes.
- 5) Do not make inappropriate and erroneous statements about winners and losers. Based on the issues noted above, it follows that traditional descriptors of the winners and losers must be scrapped. Do not state that a party receiving far less than a majority of votes has received a mandate from the people. Do not say that the voters have spoken when referring to seat results. Do not make exaggerated statements about regional political preferences based on seat allocations.

Provide fair, balanced, and accurate commentary on the treatment of voters supporting each party. Election analysts should provide comparative commentary on how other groups of partisan voters are treated by the voting system. Election analysis should include a comparative scorecard on how the voting system treats the voters of each party and to what extent it diverges from voter equality

Perhaps, the most important function our media serves is to provide voters with the information they need to make sound decisions in the voting booth. If people don't know what they're voting for, democracy is in serious trouble. Unfortunately, it appears that we're in serious trouble.

How do we know who our candidates are, and what they stand for, when the media fixates on polls, controversy and spin instead of issues? How can we have meaningful elections when people don't know what they're voting for? Our media is responsible for giving us a balanced inspection of all claims,

careful fact checking, and reasoned analysis. But that was all but abandoned in 2007 presidential campaign. And it is exactly what we would expect. As a result of media consolidation and pressures to cut costs, media corporations have gutted investigative journalism and hard-hitting analysis. Hence, we get hours and hours of coverage of baseless stories, and barely a look at what the actual policies of the administration are, and how they affect the nation.

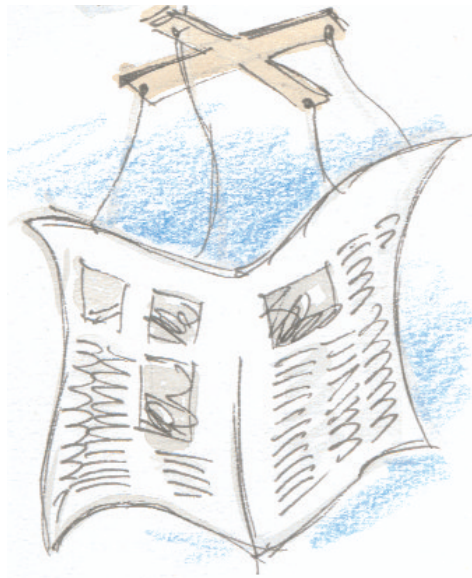
The complicity of our major media in subverting public discourse runs even deeper. The handful of enormous media corporations make huge sums from TV ads alone, shattering previous records and subjecting voters to half-truths and distortions.

An iron law in commercial broadcasting is that you do not do programming that undermines the credibility of your sponsors. The result: more political ads and little-to-no

critical journalism that exposes the spin and lies in these TV commercials. A more brash insult to our intelligence can hardly be imagined. This also explains why corporate media giants are enthusiastic about campaign finance.

Lastly, media companies have a conflict of interest; they benefit from siding with this and that party.

We are faced with a situation that could scarcely have been imagined by the right thinking people. Our Fourth Estate is hardly an independent sector in service to the citizenry. It is a massive industry dedicated to serving the needs of its owners. It is the central tension in our democracy, and one that we must address if we are to get off this downward spiral of misleading political campaigns driven by massive contributions from wealthy quarters. Reforming the media is not the only issue that faces our nation, but it is an unavoidable one.



So what are we going to do about it? Reform means giving citizens more outlets of independent news and analyses that isn't beholden to the bottom-line. It involves giving citizens more access to their own airwaves to let them know what's really going on in their cities and neighbourhoods. It involves making sure that access to information is equitable and affordable.

For most part, the governments have never been friends to media reform, but there is cause for hope. People favour journalism over spin and dislike commercial marinating of our culture.

While the short-term prospects for structural reform are limited, there is important defensive work to be done. We can continue to make headway on a number of issues and plant seeds for eventual victories. It's time for the media reform movement to do the groundwork to prepare for the big fights coming years down the road. We have to think in terms of the long haul in order to be effective.

Never again should we allow our media system to send voters to the polls without the information needed to make well-reasoned decisions. There is a national emergency when voters go to the polls ignorant of the most elementary facts about economy, foreign policy, health care, and environment. It is unacceptable.

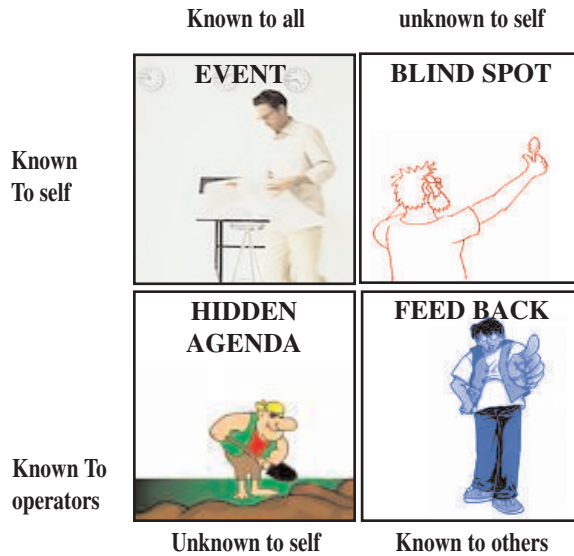
Now is the time to plug in and take action to create a better media system so that when the next big election comes along, Pakistanis actually have a clue about what their candidates stand for. Remember this, act on it, and we will prevail.

Chapter 3

Information gathering

Where does all the information that appears in newspapers, magazines, periodicals, or broadcast over television and radio channels come from. Becoming an excellent reporter is an endless process and there are some basic rules that can help one become a good journalist. News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media, (eighth edition - 2000), a leading journalism textbook by Melvin Mencher, describes reporting as being done in three layers. Each has its own dangers for journalists trying to

Information gathering model



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convey honest and truthful information to the citizenry. We'll see how it can be described in Pakistan's context.

First-layer information is the information that is deliberately generated by various news sources for the express purpose of drawing news coverage. This is the easiest way to get information. It comes in the form of press releases, news conferences, speeches and statements issued by various newsmakers.

The danger here is that the information is so easy to get that reporters can be lulled into accepting a contrived version of events, a contrivance that leads to important information being left out of

the article. There is a fear that such pseudo-events distort reality, but it isn't always true that information that arrives unsolicited - the announcement, the press release, the speech - is tainted, unfair or untrue. But reporters need to know that such information is not always complete and fair rendering of the situation.

That leads to an important rule in place at many news organizations: Have at least two sources for all information. These sources should not be closely connected to each other. This independent verification will keep many mis-

takes from getting in the paper, errors that could lead to a great loss of credibility.

In practice, it is not always possible to get two sources - there may only be one place that gives the lunch menu for the coming month. But before putting anything in the paper, consider: What happens if this information turns out to be wrong? How can it be verified?

The second-layer reporting, according to the Mencher model, involves more work on the part of the reporter. It includes the coverage of spontaneous, unplanned events - storms, accidents, and the things that happen not because a news source wants to make news but because, they happen. Consider a storm. The reporter has at least a dozen places to check to gather information and then weave it into a complete, coherent article. A partial list of sources would include the weather service, police, fire department, Red Cross, power company, area hospitals, people living or working in or near the affected areas, and so on.

Note that a journalist may use both Layer-1 and Layer-2 reporting in the same article. The reporter may go to a news conference by a minister or some political leader and take notes on the prepared statement the politician reads at the beginning. Then, the reporter may ask some questions, either seeking further explanation on a point raised in the statement or a new topic. That is moving from Layer-1 to Layer-2 reporting.

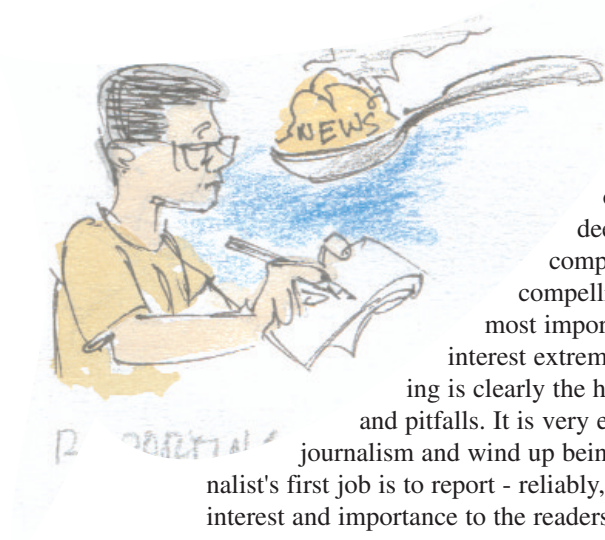
In the storm article, one agency or another may issue a press release to all journalists. That is Layer-1 information, but it may well be very useful as part of the emerging whole article. The advantage to Layer-2 reporting is that the resulting article is more apt to be fuller, rounder, more complete and more truthful.

The problem with Layer-2 reporting, compared with Layer-1, is that it is harder and more time consuming. For reporters working on deadlines - or reporters who have to attend classes and do homework and all the other

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things associated with going to school - the extra time is a serious problem. Still, despite the premium that journalists put on speed, it is probably better to wait a day or so and make sure that an article is complete than to rush a half-done article.

Layer-3 reporting involves interpretation and analysis, trying to explain the "why" of an event or getting to the absolute bottom of an issue. Thorough



reporting, the kind required for Layer-2 reporting, demands that the reporter dig out enough information to present all legitimate sides of an article fairly.

Layer-3 reporting requires more reporting still. To do this third layer of reporting, the journalist has to dig deeply enough to know which of the competing sides of an issue has the more compelling argument. Done well, this is the most important of all and can serve the public interest extremely well. However, this type of reporting is clearly the hardest to do and contains most dangers and pitfalls. It is very easy to lose one's balance in this sort of journalism and wind up being an advocate, not a reporter. The journalist's first job is to report - reliably, accurately and fairly - on the world of interest and importance to the readers.

Truth be told, most reporters have a strong desire to help correct social ills; the profession attracts people with that sort of disposition. However, almost always the greatest social service a reporter can provide is to be a reliable, accurate and fair vehicle for telling readers what is going on. The good journalist has faith that people will fix problems if they know that they exist. That faith lies at the very heart of good journalism.

A good example of a journalist with that kind of faith is Jacob Riis, the most famous of all the muckraking photographers at the turn of the 20th century. He took searing photographs of life among the poor of the Lower East Side in Manhattan. Riis was Danish by birth. Upon immigrating to New York, he got a job as a reporter for The New York Tribune, where he wrote frequently about the squalor and misery of the poor as part of his work as a police

reporter. He took up photography only when he came to believe that it was his own inadequacies with English that prevented him from conveying the horror and injustice of what he saw.

Investigative journalism

Investigative journalism, which may involve reporting on crime, corruption, vertical scandals, unethical businesses etc, is rarely seen in Pakistan.

However, following are some prerequisites for a person to be an investigative journalist:

- 1) get your facts right, because, if factual data is not collected, then, in the end, the story may contradict itself.
- 2) be objective and not biased about any topic. The analysis should be based on objectivity and not on personal bias
- 3) follow a set of ethics that should be strictly followed
- 4) open mindedness:

Sometimes, at the end, one finds that the data collected so far is not based on facts. If a journalist is not open minded then he may end up writing a story based on fictitious data. The information should be collected from dif-

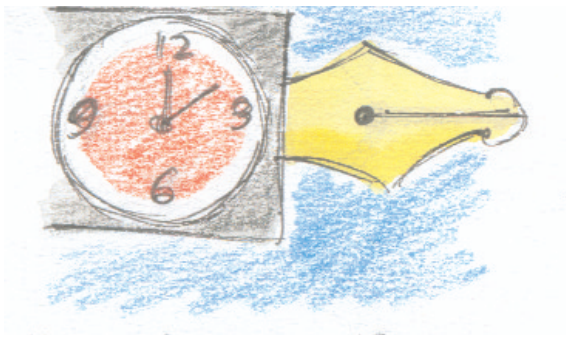
sometimes journalists ignore ethics while digging a story, which is a wrong method. In actuality, they should strictly follow the set of ethics given to them no matter what impact it leaves on their story. He said that journalists should also keep social and legal issues in mind, which may arise due to a story

ferent sources. It is mandatory for an investigative journalist to put in long hours to do a good story instead of just twisting the press releases to write the stories. Journalists should do research by using archival records or Internet and address books besides going in person to the sources to get first hand information.

An investigative journalist is expected to travel extensively. Reporters world over are required to travel a lot to do investigative stories, sometimes even spending weeks/months or a year on one story. Since very few investigative stories are written in Pakistan, It is not the norm in our part of the world.

Moreover, using surveillance techniques is also part of investigative journalism in the West. The investigative journalist, while working on a tip-off, can work by doing surveillance of any character that is involved in any story. An investigative journalist should have the capability to analyze the documents in order to understand it in the right context. He/she should have an analytical mind.

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Timing is important

Nevertheless, the deadline issue is the main impediment for following any such rules in their stories by journalists because in Pakistan, a reporter sometimes is required to file two to three or even more stories in a day for which he has to compromise on quality.

During the past two or three decades, the tolerance level of society has reduced sharply, serving as a major deterrent for doing an investigative story. The people are not ready to hear comments contradicting their ideology or views and sometimes they resort to violence.

Militancy is on the rise - courtesy various armed groups. Suicide attacks, bomb blasts and other terrorist activities hardly give room for investigative reporting. It is risky doing a story on a militant group. If it is done, it is done with extra care. For example, a story on a Karachi-based militant group cannot be published in a Karachi-based newspaper because it may have great fallout on the person or the organization he or she works for.

The second important issue is corruption, which has touched new heights during this period. As journalists, we are "kings" and ask questions from any high level personality, and they are bound to answer. But, in the corporate culture the situation is very different. If a reporter goes to investigate a story about the corruption in a business house, he or she could be offered a huge

bribe and asked to ignore the issue. It is not easy for a middle class journalist to resist the temptation. Here again, investigative journalism is considered a saleable commodity.

The positive thing is that the pay scales in Pakistan have improved considerably after the rise of electronic media. Things are likely to get better if true democratic rule and independent judiciary come into place. The gradually changing scenario is paving the way for good stories on big groups and mafias, which have become a challenge for society, particularly the journalists.

A reporter must be tactful. A reporter of a leading newspaper in 2006 did a story about the then Chief Justice, but was not published in his paper. He twisted the story slightly, rephrased the critical points, and gave it to another reporter to file the story in his newspaper. It was carried.

However, newspapers owners in general are not keen to publish stories against business groups, corporations, and political parties because once published it becomes public knowledge. Sometimes reporters have leanings towards some political or religious groups and are reluctant to do critical stories about them.

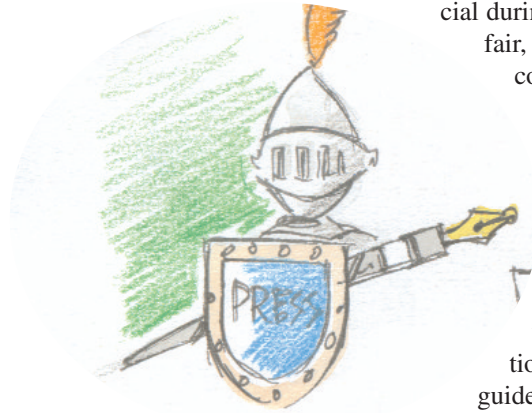
The future of investigative reporting has become bright, because of the cut-throat competitive environment. This competition is bound to increase in the days ahead.

Unfortunately, no newspaper in Pakistan is truly devoted to investigative journalism. Researching old files and records can unveil vital information. For example, a story on political killings in Pakistan in the last 20 years can be a good subject to dig into.

Doing investigative stories on sensitive subjects like defence is extremely risky. It is a specialized field. Information can be easily misinterpreted and misunderstood. It is not everybody's cup of tea.

Election coverage

Elections can be a key element in conflict resolution and escalation. Therefore, free and fair elections are essential for democracy's consolidation and conflict prevention. Professionalism is crucial during election periods. To promote fair, safe and professional election coverage, Intermedia supports



advocacy to encourage full, fair and efficient disclosure of information to journalists covering the elections; training to enhance professional election reporting; training on the safety of journalists and their right to work without threat; and production and distribution of election guidelines reflecting principles of professional reporting during elections, journalists' rights, election processes and safety information, as well as briefing notes on international human rights law with emphasis on freedom of expression.

information, as well as briefing notes on international human rights law with emphasis on freedom of expression.

Security and safety of media people

With each conflict, the price paid by local journalists is becoming heavier. After respect has been paid to the victims for their courage, people are asking increasingly urgent questions. Have the countries, international organizations, and media institutions put in place all possible means to limit the risks incurred by the journalists? Can reporters be efficiently prepared, and by whom, to face the dangers? In the past 10 years, nearly 350 journalists have been killed in the conflict zones. The majority died, not in crossfire, but being hunted down, often in direct reprisal for their reporting.

Particular attention should be given to the safety and security of local journalists. International journalists are often heavily equipped and protected. It is the local journalist, who is most vulnerable. Promotion of training and safety standards are also ways to address this issue.

Many countries have codes of conduct to regulate journalists in their work. These may be promulgated by professional, trade union bodies, media houses or regulatory authorities. There are also international codes of conduct, adopted by the International Federation of Journalists.

The general principles contained in these codes are applicable during election period. They form the basis for the professional standards journalists and editors follow at all times. Nevertheless, it is often considered useful to develop a specific code of conduct to address particular professional dilemmas that may arise during elections.

Codes of conduct for journalists and editors become highly effective when the media practitioners themselves are involved in drawing them up. The standards in the code are then seen as means to open doors to effective journalism that is free of restrictions. Sometimes the media alone does this, but on other occasions it is done in consultation with other stakeholders, including the electoral management body and political parties.



Components of a code of conduct

A code of conduct for election reporting has to include a mixture of general ethical standards, applicable in all circumstances, and those specific to election periods. The following points are derived from international codes of conduct in the light of which any media code of conduct can be based:

- * a journalist has the responsibility of reporting information accurately and avoids biases; also, he should report only the facts of which he/she knows the origin while avoiding the suppression of important information.
- * a journalist should respect the professional secrecy of the source of information obtained and treat it as confidential.
- * a journalist shall report in a balanced manner; the neutrality and accuracy of the information treated is of very high importance. In this sense, the journalist has to quote the candidates and political par-

- ties directly and in their own words.
- * a journalist shall avoid using language or expressing sentiments that may cause discrimination or violence on any grounds, including race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.
 - * when reporting the opinions of those, who do advocate discrimination or violence, a journalist should be able to put such views in a clear context and to report the opinions of those against whom such sentiments are directed.
 - * a journalist shall not make any promise to a politician about the content of a news report and should be able to consider opinion polls which will not contain:
 - *who commissioned and carried out the poll and when.*
 - *how many people were interviewed, where and how were they interviewed and what is the margin of error.*
 - *what was the exact wording of the questions.*
 - * a journalist shall regard plagiarism, malicious misperception, calumny, slander, libel accusations and acceptance of bribe in any form as his or her professional enemies.

Reporting truth

Reporting the truth during an electoral campaign or as a practice related to media conduct should respect the following points:

- * ensure an accurate, balanced and impartial coverage of news, while making sure that the news content is substantiated, accurate and in context.
- * avoid making assumptions via making a good faith effort before publication in order to get comments from the persons or organizations involved.
- * be careful with technical terms, statistics, estimates and election results, also taking headlines into consideration and make sure they reflect the facts of the story.
- * avoid inflaming emotions over controversial issues and seek neutrality as much as possible.
- * label advertising clearly so that it is not confused with the news, and be honest and fair in gathering, reporting and presenting the news.
- * avoid plagiarism, fabrication and misleading the public by any means.

Harm minimization

- * to be transparent and honest and clear to the readers.
- * to act honourably and ethically in dealing with news sources, the public, and colleagues.
- * not to expose the private life of a private citizen without reason.
- * to be sensible while interviewing, and recognize the fact that gathering news can cause harm or discomfort.
- * to respect the rights of persons involved in the news and observe common standards of decency while treating people with dignity, respect, and compassion,
- * to balance the right of an accused person to a fair trial with the public's right to know in order to ensure fairness.

Independent action

It is important for a journalist to act independently by following these steps:

- * avoid conflict of interest by refusing to accept gifts, favours or other benefits from anyone being covered in an article or from newsmakers, politicians, or other journalists.
- * avoid being influenced by advertisers on the content of one's own reporting.
- * not to give favourable rates to one political advertiser and not other, and not to give money for sources of stories provided with.

Being accountable

- * journalists should be accountable to the public for the fairness and accuracy of what they write.
- * journalists should honour pledges of confidentiality to a news source; otherwise, identify sources.
- * journalists should be accountable for how they behave and collect news. They should also obey the laws and the standards of ethical journalism.

Chapter 5

Tips on preparing News Room

Setting the policy: A newsroom, ready to cover elections, is a place where one can feel the elements of contingency. Different reporters assigned to cover different aspects of elections and pitch their stories on different bases require harmony and an entire sense of understanding within each other. Keeping this view in mind it becomes rather imperative to design a policy, an agenda for the news room. This agenda setting for any newsroom will be mighty helpful to really focus and deliver a harmonious election reporting.



Aptitude of journalists: The indemnity to cover elections or report them in keenest manner means the misunderstanding of the phenomenon as a whole. During election reporting one has to cover lots of areas. For this purpose a newsroom requires a journalist who can comprehend laws and other constitutional puzzles and above all he/she might know the planks of different political parties on their fingertips. So this will provide comfort to the editor of any news room to identify the aptitude of his mates and assign the (sub) beats accordingly.

Collecting related data: Collecting related data falls in the category of the most important steps taken for the making of a newsroom. To cover elections doesn't mean to report the process without any context. The history of elections in any state is very important, the performances and the agendas of all political parties involved in elections shall get properly invoked in order to predict and justify the results. The role of the election commission and history of relevant institution shall also be highlighted to get proper deductions indeed.

(If journalists are to report elections professionally it is clear that they must be trained to do so. The need is

self-evident, but rarely met.)

Fundamentally, the professional requirements of reporting elections do not differ enormously from reporting anything else. In particular the ethical imperatives of accuracy, impartiality, responsibility and probity assume great importance in covering elections - but these should be the bedrock of a journalist's working method in any case.

However, there are many additional areas of knowledge that journalists will need if they are to report elections effectively. These include:

- * an understanding of the political and electoral system.
- * an understanding of the overall electoral process.
- * familiarity with electoral law, especially as it affects media reporting.
- * understanding of the role of the media in covering elections.
- * knowledge of the country's election history.
- * detailed knowledge of the mechanics of voter registration, boundary delimitation, the vote, the count and any other issues of relevance (such as the use of technology in voting or the use of postal votes, if these are potential matters of controversy).
- * types of reporting that are fairly specific to elections (such as reporting opinion polls).

Many of these are matters that could easily be covered in the basic curriculum of a journalistic training institution. In practice, however, they seldom are. Certain types of specialized coverage, such as court reporting, are routinely included as part of the basic training for a journalist (even though many journalists will never employ these skills). In practice most journalists will end up reporting on elections, but many are unprepared to do so. The consequences of this lack of knowledge may be serious. Not only is there a likelihood that the media will report inaccurately or, at best inadequately. They will also be unable to play their role of monitoring the electoral process and holding administrators to account for any shortcomings.

This frequent lack of training is often part of a more general problem of access to training by journalists. Many poorer countries do not have any journalism-training establishment at all.

The lack of training of journalists in covering elections is often made up by ad hoc training courses run by variety of institutions. These may take place either in the country concerned (with the advantage that more journalists can attend) or at the training institution. There are a number of potential problems to be overcome when outside training institutions organize training:

- * **how can it be made relevant and specific to the conditions of the country concerned?**
- * **how will it be possible to reach enough journalists to have an impact?**
- * **when can journalists be trained to have the maximum benefit but not interfere with their actual reporting duties?**

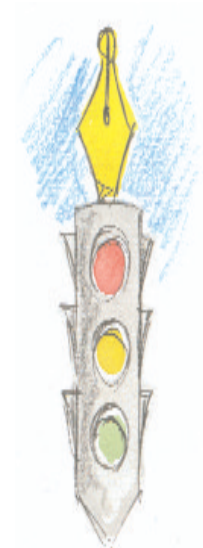
There are no simple answers to these questions. However, they can best be addressed if training is organized with close consultation of the most important stakeholders: the electoral management body, media regulators, media proprietors and journalists' professional bodies and trade unions.

Knowing the constitution of the state is the first step towards election reporting

Training for election reporting

Realizing the importance of all the above mentioned preparations for a news room to cover elections will lead to realize another very important issue as far as election reporting is concerned, and that is to train journalist in an apt manner. To build the capacity of election reporters does not necessarily mean that they have to get trained once. And these training programmes can be used to refresh and sharpen the skills of the journalist who has already covered election many times. At times election reporting can be creative, and journalists reacting to the situation can deduct the right picture to show to the audiences.

Opening up the issues with an altogether different vision can make election reporting even much more effective. So, training programmes for reporters to cover elections can be productive in many respects. For senior reporters, this process can be a golden opportunity through which they can recall and reanalyze their experiences and on the other hand it could be brainstorming as well. To relate the experience with an ongoing election process is another thing that can be obtained through these training programmes. One can even explore new ways to tackle the odds faced previously.



Aptitude for election reporting

Knowing the constitution of the state is the first step towards election reporting. All the amendments made through the history of legislation of the state, its advantages and disadvantages have to be in the mind of a reporter covering elections. Knowing the constitution of the state will allow any reporter to identify even the minutest chance of mishandling in the elections by the governing bodies. It will also help a reporter to interpret the constitution in such a manner that even a commoner can also comprehend things. Of late, the booming electronic media is delivering rather ball-to-ball commentary of the issues. In this regard, so many points which were omitted in the past by reporters, just considering it not relevant, have now become a public discourse. So, a reporter knowing the constitution will be considered a learned and competent one.

All in all, knowing laws of any state must be the first and foremost priority

of a journalist who wants to cover elections. And then comes the other important thing, that is to understand the role of the institutions. The intermingling and yet different role of the judiciary, executive and legislature, or election commission, for that matter, has to be clear in the minds of a reporter. By clearing these concepts he will be very well-equipped to see and provide an opportunity to slash down the chances of technical rigging. It must be made sure that everything is smooth and transparent and no governing body is trying to enforce its power by giving favours to any stakeholder.

A journalist involved in election reporting cannot ignore the manifestoes of political parties taking part in the elections. The ideology behind the manifestoes of a political party could be grounds for any reporter to judge and narrate the contradictions, whether he or she can identify their implications. In modern times interviewing the big guns of the political scene has become an art. A reporter can provide related data to the anchor persons talking about the performances of political parties by interviewing their leaders. Even reporters themselves can figure out the paradoxes available in the history of political parties by doing proper research.

The code of conduct issued by the election commission is also a very important document to read. By observing the activities of the ruling and opposition parties, a reporter can conclude whether they are following the code of conduct or not.

Rights as journalist covering elections

Rights often give extra confidence if you are a journalist. Nobody can stop you from doing anything by simply saying that you are not supposed to cover it. As a well-equipped, sharp and vibrant reporter who wants to be in the middle of action all the time he must know what he is capable of doing rather than what he is allowed to do. A reporter should have command on the subject of rights and responsibilities both as a journalist and as a citizen. For instance, very few know that as a citizen you have the right to access official data. By giving a simple application one can ask the authorities to allow him access to the required stuff. On the other hand a journalist who wants access to dif-



The purpose of media laws or regulations in elections and the function of the regulatory body is to create an environment in which the media can go about its business unhindered

ferent places must have a very good idea of the decorum and their positions. Recently in Pakistan, the rift between the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the media makes this point even much more crucial for mediapersons to know their rights.

The purpose of media laws or regulations in elections and the function of the regulatory body is to create an environment in which the media can go about its business unhindered. Election campaigns are not state secrets to be winkled out by journalists, they should be conducted in the public eye.

Freedom of information means, among other things, that the media is entitled to investigate and report critically on the efficiency and probity of the election administration. Election administrators may not always welcome this, but essentially they have no choice in the matter. This scrutiny is not an interference with the organization of the election, but it facilitates and promotes efficiency. This is true as a matter of broad accountability, but it is also of practical use to election administrators in communicating their messages. If the media has good access to the election organizers, they will convey their concerns rapidly to the public. This functions as an effective, no-cost method of voter education.

Reporter on scrupulous grounds

It is impossible for a journalist not to have an ideology or opinion about the socio-political perspective of his surrounding. But, a true journalist might decline any offer made to him by his own set of believe-relating politics. Impracticality might be an apt expression for this act. Reporting on elections means just reporting, and not biased commentary. This balance of opinion can be maintained through different techniques. For instance, a reporter can provide maximum chance to all the stakeholders by highlighting their point of view.

It will often be difficult for the media to establish a balance in a particular story. A journalist may be assigned to do a party campaign and may not have the opportunity to seek comments from other parties. In that case, the responsibility lies at the editorial level to make sure that different party positions on the same issue are reported, either by compiling composite stories or by running parallel stories portraying different positions.

Finally, an important measure of a journalist's impartiality is that he does not hold prominent office in any political party or movement. A journalist is

as entitled as anyone to his political beliefs and views, but a position of individual political prominence will compromise his credibility as an impartial chronicler of events.

Keeping the content alive, reporting diction - ethical or unethical?

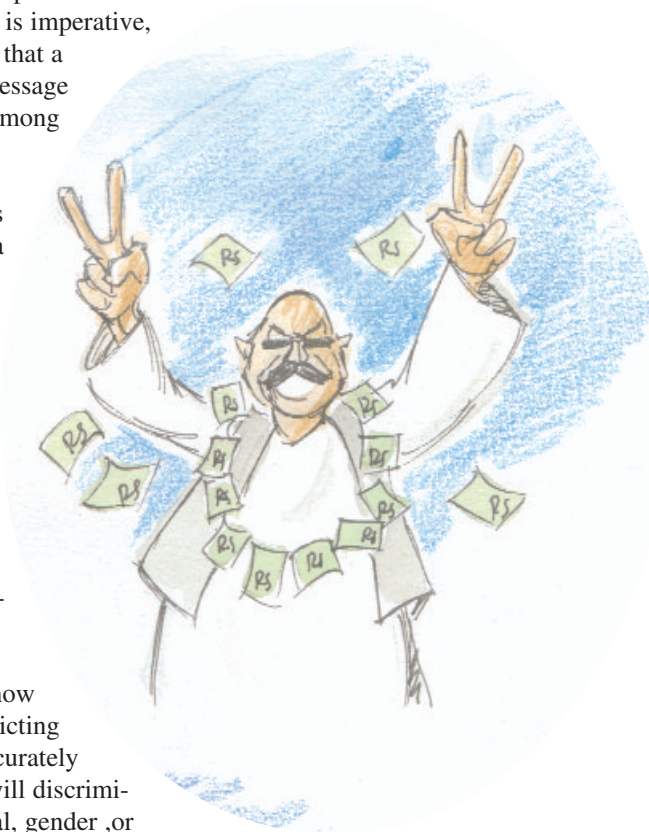
Hot news means more audiences to the media personnel.

Despite this reality an election reporter must realize the importance of diction. It is imperative, both ethically and aesthetically, that a reporter should decimate any message which will disseminate hatred among communities.

So diction of reporting becomes the most important element. If a reporter thinks that some news or comment by an important figure can cause unrest in society he must avoid it or at least try to soften it.

One of the greatest professional challenges for a journalist covering an election campaign is how to report inflammatory language and sentiments spoken during political campaigns. From a journalist's point of view, the challenge is how to balance two potentially conflicting ethical obligations: to report accurately and not to write anything that will discriminate on racial, religious, national, gender, or other grounds.

In practice, however, in using good professional reporting practices, the dilemma may be more imagined than real. In addition to accurate reporting, the journalist has to maintain a balance. Balance involves citing differing or opposing viewpoints. It also entails placing the words of politicians in an



accurate context.

Sometimes accurate reporting of inflammatory or hateful language may serve to undermine the intentions of the politician using such words. Often extremist politicians present themselves to the electorate as "moderates" who are simply articulating widely-held sentiments (about immigrants, minorities, or whatever). Exposing the words used at political rallies may actually undermine their broader credibility of a politician. It will also be the responsibility of the media to document the consequences of such a speech. If militants leaving a political rally inflict violence on their opponents or members of demonized communities, it must be reported.

Even when this is not the case, the balancing of hate speech by the voices of those who are being maligned plays a positive and useful purpose. Not only does it provide the opportunity for the factual content of hate speech to be challenged, it also humanizes them - dehumanization being the immediate purpose of most hate speech - and creates the possibility of sympathy.

More broadly, accurate reporting of hate speech is a valuable early warning tool, indicating potentially more serious social conflict or human rights violations to come. One of the most important arguments against banning hate speech is that it provides an opportunity to address the causes of prejudice and hatred rather than driving them underground. Responsible media reporting plays a crucial part in this.

Is election reporting fulfilling the responsibilities of the media? Where does society stand today? What about the voter and civic education, is it media's responsibility or not?

Time has proved that the media has a responsibility towards society, especially in countries like Pakistan, people are desperate for democracy. During elections it must take on a teacher's role and educate the people about their basic rights and the benefits of casting their vote.

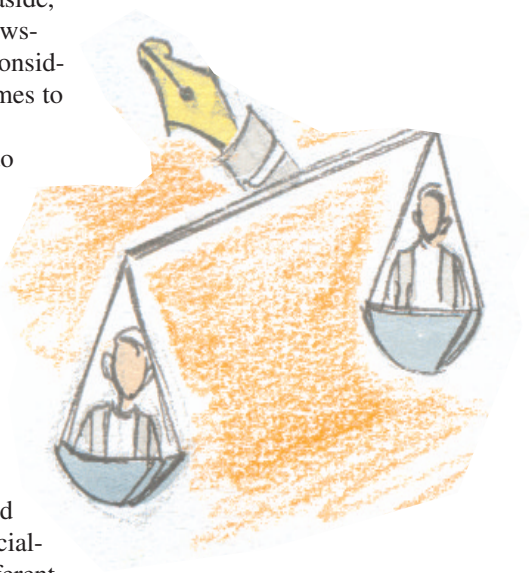
The experience of Intermedia has been that political parties in election campaigns generally complain about media bias in one direction or another, often pointing finger at some newspapers! The emotion that elections generate in candidates is such that their normal objectivity is suspended and they find unfair anything that might contain a hint of criticism of them or the policies that they support. They also assume a degree of avidity of readership that does not reflect the reality of the reading habits of newspaper readers. But these issues aside, Intermedia in a baseline survey of newspapers found that there is a need to consider the role of newspapers when it comes to reporting political issues.

We uphold the right of a newspaper to have its own political position; to accept certain beliefs and policies and to reject others; and to favour the election of one party and to oppose the election of another. We think that this is an essential element of the freedom of the press and it would not be possible to speak of that principle unless this right was recognized.

Newspapers will often be partisan and biased and will appear to be so, especially to those who are committed to different opinions, policies and parties. However, newspapers which profess to inform the community about its political and social affairs are under obligation to present to the public a reasonably comprehensive and accurate account of public issues. This implies an adequate and accurate reporting of variety of views and policies at least more prominently espoused within the community; the central conflicts and criticisms that occur between opposing views; and so on.

Only a press that functions to facilitate full and wide communication within the community can be regarded as a free press or at any rate one that promotes and enhances freedom.

The application of these principles has led to a number of conclusions being



reached in regards to particular issues.

First and foremost it is essential that a clear distinction be drawn between reporting facts and stating an opinion. A newspaper's editorial viewpoints and its advocacy of them must be kept separate from its news columns where they purport to present facts and community opinions. Likewise, editorial comment should not misrepresent the position of a party.

Headlines

Headlines are a fertile ground for concern. Headlines try to encapsulate the subject or flavour of an article in two or three words. Their capacity to misrepresent a position is manifest. In this respect it is doubtful that the reporting of election issues raises any different problem than reporting of other news items. It is just that, as noted earlier, candidates are very sensitive to the way in which matters are presented during campaigns. Editors need to be aware of this sensitivity and take care that a headline does not misrepresent the factual position that is set out in the article. Headlines are much more likely to be called into question at these times as more is seen to be riding on the impact of a headline than at other times.

Equal opportunity for candidates

Equal opportunity to present views is also a source of tension between candidates, particularly in the Urdu and vernacular press. It is common for a newspaper to run a feature on candidates and invite them to present their views on topics or outline their policies. It is important that this type of an article treat the parties fairly.

Generally, equal space should be provided to them. If photographs are to be published all should be given the chance to provide a copy and the photographs should be of equivalent quality. A candidate should be sought out to provide comment if that opportunity is being provided to his or her rivals.

However, when there are a large number of candidates in the same constituency, a newspaper can be selective in who to approach and limiting itself to candidates who it considers have a chance to succeed.

Opportunity to respond

Whether readers should have the opportunity to respond to matters published in a newspaper is a difficult issue. No matter how strongly a person feels that opinions misrepresent facts or are just plain wrong, the newspaper is not obliged to provide a forum for their alternative view to be published. It might well choose to do so in the interest of a public debate.

But if the other side of the story has not already been obtained and published, they should be given the chance to present it to the public either through a published article or a letter.

The situation during electoral campaigns is a little more complicated. An opinion piece relating to the policies of a party generally would fall within the approach set out above, there being no right of reply. But where the comments relate to the views of a particular candidate, the candidate must be given a chance to respond.

Problems are also likely to arise in relation to claims that factual material, such as party policy or manifesto, has been misreported. The difficulty is likely to stem from the newspaper having had to translate or summarise the material or the statements of a candidate. Again the best way to deal with this is to publish a reply from the party or candidate.



Timing of response

The timing of a response is a matter that has prompted a number of complaints to newspapers as Intermedia followed some of the "contradictions" and "clarifications" published in the mainstream newspapers. However, most senior journalists believe that a paper is under no obligation to keep on publishing charges and counter-charges between candidates. But a paper has the right to terminate a debate whenever it wants provided it is not unfair to any of the parties.

Placement of response

Candidates who seek an opportunity for response to an article will almost always want their response to be of the same size and prominence as the original article.

Usually a reply to a page one report is buried somewhere inside the newspaper. The question is does it always have to be included at the same point and with the same prominence as the original. It is a matter of judgment what seems fair to the parties and what will bring the reply to the attention of the readers who saw the original.

Publication of letters

The selection of letters for publication is an editor's prerogative. No-one can insist that a letter be published except in the circumstances referred to above where they have been the subject of an article or letter in the paper.

Likewise no one can object to the publication of a letter on the basis that the views stated are wrong or offensive. If the letter is defamatory the affected person can approach the court. So candidates cannot object to letters critical of them and their manifestoes.

It was noticed during the Intermedia survey that some letters are written under false names. If an editor has reason to suspect that a writer is not the person who they purport to be, the editor should not publish without first checking out whether the letter is genuine. Sometimes political parties themselves flood newspapers with letters praising their own manifestoes.

Also, care should be taken while editing letters from a candidate or his party to avoid allegations of distortion of views. It is wise to agree with the candidate on the form the letter should take. If an agreement is not forthcoming, the paper can choose to publish the letter.

What is voter education? On whose shoulders rests the responsibility for educating voters? Undoubtedly, the media is leading the struggle.

Using the media to rig elections

The media's role in undermining the function of true democracy, and especially during elections, cannot be overstated. The elite is unhappy with the media infiltrating the nation's highest political offices, and lobbying with special interest groups.

Before the bottom 90 per cent of society are even allowed to approach the polling booth, the elite takes the opportunity to subject the entire population to no less than six full months of intense political conditioning in which individuals and policies that pose a threat to their wealth and power, are systematically discredited. By praising their sympathizers and discrediting and smearing their opponents, the elite has consistently and successfully used the media, to elect enough political candidates to ensure success with their future lobbying.

Needless to say, most of the politicians running for election or reelection are doing so with funds contributed by the elite in one way or another, and of course election support translates into either payoff for past favours, or for favours due.

Do these candidates have independent thoughts? Maybe. But they never voice them in public because it might not be in line with their party doctrines.

Do they ever vote for a bill, law or policy because it is the right thing to do for the country? Only if the party tells them it is okay to do so.

There is nothing wrong in working together to do what is right for the country regardless of what the party you are affiliated with says?

If you are disillusioned with the political process get together and make them see how upset you are. No one can do it alone.

Democracy is a good thing. But it becomes pointless when the state apparatus is corrupt and most laws are subverted. Then who cares who gets elected.

Elections in Pakistan have never been about policies. Party supporters behave like football hooligans, parading the streets on the backs of trucks and buses, running red lights and generally creating a huge public nuisance. Contrary to expectations, the lives of party workers are lost in rioting. Many

supporters hire themselves out for the occasion. Reportedly, the going rate is a few thousand rupees per person to attend a political rally. It is a good day out for a typical low-wage family. They can earn some pocket money and free transport.

What do most people do when they are too poorly educated to understand policy platforms and when the policies are largely irrelevant anyway because they will be subverted by corruption? They vote for candidates who are already known to them. And so a vote then becomes an expression of approval for a candidate's past career decisions.

The journalists can prevent election problems like disenfranchising of voters, changing election outcomes inappropriately, and cementing the democratic processes in the country.

Suspicious, some unfounded

Just as journalism is often more art than science, the process of determining when, why, and whether good stories are being ignored is an imperfect one - as journalists themselves freely admit. A strong majority - 58 per cent - says that journalists, occasionally, wrongfully suspect a story is being killed or

buried because of conflict of interests, when it simply lacks merit.

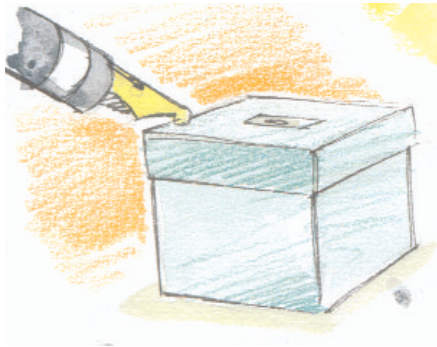
On the other hand, the survey provides considerable evidence that at least for some journalists, there has been an unmistakable intrusion of commercial interests into news room decisions. For instance, about one-in-five local (20 per cent) and national (17 per cent) reporters say they have faced criticism or pressure from their bosses after producing or writing a piece that was seen as damaging to their company's financial interests.

More local journalists report influence by corporate owners and advertisers while deciding on which stories to cover. And on the question of whether the media does a good job of

informing the public, both local and national journalists give themselves poorer marks. At that time, about half of the national (49 per cent) and local (55 per cent) journalists said the news business did a good or excellent job of balancing journalism's twin goals of telling the public what it wanted to and what it needed to know. Now, only 37 per cent of the national journalists and 35 per cent of local journalists give the profession high marks, with majorities in both groups saying the media does only a fair job at this crucial task.



Why truth?



The principles of fairness and impartiality should be the hallmark of the election coverage in any democratic country. When journalists report elections, they may need to take into account the circumstances under which the particular election is being held, especially where serious questions are raised about the openness or fairness of the electoral process.

Journalists owe a special responsibility to the audiences who are about to vote. The closer to the election date the greater the need for care. If it is considered that any report could have an undue and unfair influence on the election, then it should be delayed, may be until after the polls.

Being watchdogs of the public interest, regular media interaction with political parties, the Election Commission and other stakeholders is imperative. To report on how the elections are being shaped, journalists should have access to the Election Commission and political parties at all levels. Journalists covering elections are suggested to draw their own guidelines and checklists for fair and balanced coverage. A few tips to make your own guidelines and checklists are given below.

Establish guidelines

Establish your own guidelines keeping in view transparency, fairness and balance in election coverage. These guidelines may be based on:

- * how are we going to report?
- * how are we going to ensure balance?
- * how are we going to monitor that balance?
- * how are we going to resist pressure to act undemocratically?
- * how are we going to respond to complaints?

Get the guidelines acknowledged and accepted by all concerned within the organization. If there are disagreements, it is better to have them when things are quiet than in the heat of the elections.

Ensure to pass-on these guidelines, in printed form, to all the concerned -

including the district correspondents. This can be a pamphlet, in newspapers or magazines, on a web site, and of course on air. The wider the publicity given to your intentions, the easier it will be to convince your audience of the transparent and balanced role you are playing in the democratic process.

Elections unit

Establish an elections unit within the organization comprising senior people, journalists working on desk and beat reporters. In smaller organizations this unit may be one person. But, whatever the size, it will ensure that appropriate planning takes place. This group may meet weekly, to begin with, but the frequency will increase as the campaign period approaches.

Training

Ensure that an experienced senior journalist leads the team. All members of the team should go under "self-training" by studying all relevant materials - election laws, election procedures, mandate of the Election Commission, role of election officials, election tribunals, how to file the nomination papers etc. As the elections approach, the team will inevitably expand. See that all new recruits to the team are of the highest calibre and cascade the training down to every level.

Election plan

Establish an overall election plan like:

- * what stories, features, analysis are to be done?
- * will there be supplements during the election?
- * how much coverage will be given to the mainstream parties?
- * what is important in the party manifestoes?
- * what formats will be used?

Highlight the past performance of the political parties.

- * what programmes will be produced?
- * what rules will apply to programmes involving rival candidates?
- * how will the programme help promote democracy?
- * how will the issues be explained?

Educating voters

Remember media exists to serve its audience - readers, viewers and listeners. What are their needs during elections? Obviously, to know the reasons behind elections, why should they vote, and how much their vote matters etc. The responsibility for voter education rests substantially with the media. Many among the audience will be voting for the first time.

The media shares the responsibility and have an obvious duty throughout the election campaign and up to the close of the polls, to provide education and information on the electoral process designed to ensure a maximum turnout on the polling day.

It goes without saying that voter education programmes must not in any way be instrumental in furthering the interests of any party or candidate.

The media must get across to the public an understanding that their votes matter, that politics matter, that politics are about their lives, their health, their education, their culture, their security, their future. Your audience may well be made up of young people who will have to carry the torch of democracy into the next generation and creating a democratic environment is not necessarily a heavy intellectual exercise.



Monitoring

Establish a comprehensive system for monitoring your election output.

You must be able to judge, at every point in the campaign, the balance of reporting and relate that balance to the output that will follow. It will often be necessary to adjust the output to maintain fairness.

Reporters and sub-editors need to assess each report, and where normal journalistic judgment creates an unavoidable temporary imbalance, they must rectify it as soon as possible over succeeding output. A meticulous system must be set up so that such judgments can be made rapidly and backed by evidence. A large wall-chart with basic details of every election story entered daily would be a good start.

Party campaigns



Such issues need specific guidelines at the organizational level. Even though there are no easy answers to such issues, each needs addressing in the interest of democracy.

Allocation of space/air time

In the present situation when electronic media is increasing in Pakistan, the political parties will want direct access to the airwaves to put across their manifestoes, unhindered by awkward questions from journalists. What do you offer them in the way of number, duration and timing of broadcasts? How do you divide up the available time between the parties? There needs to be something close to parity for the main parties and an agreed smaller number of broadcasts for minor parties. Do parties pay for them? Can the richest party (usually the ruling party) have as many as it wants? Media organizations can devise a plan where smaller parties can also pay for the airtime.

The Election Commission of India introduced a new scheme in 1998 whereby "a base time of 45 minutes is given (free of cost) to each recognized national or state party uniformly and additional time is allocated to parties decided on the basis of the poll performance of the parties in the last Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections."

Does the station retain any editorial control over these programmes?

Whether or not, the station must have a system for monitoring them. It would be better to pre-record. Are you obliged to provide production facilities? If not, you will have to insist on minimum technical standards. What if a programme is too long or contains unacceptable abuse of political opponents? Who edits it?

The BBC guidance on election coverage leads with a section on "Achieving Balance":

"Daily News magazine programmes... must achieve an appropriate and fair balance in coverage of the main parties in the course of each week of the campaign.

Each strand (e.g. a drive time show on radio) is responsible for reaching its own targets within the week and cannot rely on other outlets at different times of the day (e.g. the breakfast show) to do so for it.

Single programmes should avoid individual editions getting badly out of kilter.

There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda e.g. when the main party manifestoes are launched, but in that case care must be taken to ensure that coverage of similar prominence and duration is given to the other manifesto launches on the relevant days. Every edition of the multi-item programmes which cover the campaign should refer at least one item to each of the main parties.

Weekly programmes, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or another, should trail both forwards and backwards so that it is clear to the audience that balance is built in over time.

(Extracts from the Guidance to all BBC Programme Makers during the General Election Campaign)

Bribery and corruption

How can we prevent candidates from expecting, demanding even, and favourable coverage by reporters in return for transport, food and accommodation? How can we stop the blatant bribing of journalists with cash or other favours?

The station must make it clear to the journalists that to accept any sort of bribe is a serious breach of duty likely to result in their dismissal. The politicians must be told that any instance, which is an attempt to distort the election process, will be reported immediately to the electoral body.



The designated officials of the media outlets should guarantee to investigate any complaint immediately and respond within a given (very short) time

Comments

How do we ensure that reporters and editors avoid expressing their own opinions? How do we separate and identify the legitimate contributions of political commentators from what is news. Some of the journalists in our society are identified with one or other political party. This completely destroys their credibility and that of their station. A station's house rule that the news room bulletin writers and reporters are forbidden to express their own political views, must be made public and restated at regular intervals.

Entertaining complaints

Should complaints about unfair treatment be addressed to the editor or chief of the media organization? Your organization may have a complaint-redressed mechanism. The designated officials of the media outlets should guarantee to investigate any complaint immediately and respond within a given (very short) time.

Fairness

Giving fair coverage to political parties does not mean giving them equal treatment, or distorting news values and processes by giving the same weight to a small one-man party and a mainstream political force.

Consistency

Be consistent in media treatment of contesting parties and conflicting views.

Seeking out information:

Do not only rely on press releases by political parties, but actively seek out information. Failure to do so would skew the coverage in favour of parties with more resources.

Manipulation

We need to ensure that the candidates do not use other, non-political means for their campaigns. Avoid coverage of non-political functions of ministers and other parliamentarians during the election campaign. The ministers usually go to such functions to get media coverage, which eventually becomes part of their election campaigns.

Often during the period of an election campaign, presidential, prime ministerial or other ministerial engagements are turned into huge supplementary electioneering broadcast opportunities.

This is a major problem in many countries which grossly distorts the balance in election coverage.

Opinion polls

Great care must be used when quoting opinion polls about the outcome of the election. A party may try to swing floating voters by publishing so-called opinion polls that appear to put it in a strong position. Important questions: Who paid for the survey? When was it done? Where was it done? How was it done? If a poll appears to have been conducted using dubious methodology, its outcome should get no mention in your reports.

Self-censorship

Is it censorship or self-censorship that compels editors to put the most un-newsworthy item on the front page if the word president appears in the story even if it's about a birthday party of president's mother. Surely, presidents must wince with embarrassment at this fawning lack of professional judgment.

It is generally found in election time that one candidate dominates news coverage. Perhaps, information-gathering procedures are the reason.

Fairness and balance are central ethical tenants in modern journalism, but defining and

assessing them are formidable problems. Subjective judgments of these reporting qualities are implicitly biased and unreliable. Partisan critics, for example, may not examine their news coverage in the context of how their opposition is treated. For their part, journalists may be unaware of how their own biases can distort their coverage.

Consequently, a content-based definition of fairness and balance are constructed and applied in this study to newspaper coverage of the 1994 Michigan governor's race in the United States.

Content analysis of campaign reporting can measure how opposing candidates are treated. Candidate partisans cited in stories, for example, can be counted and compared. The length and position of their assertions can be determined. The assertions of election experts can be analyzed for assessments of candidate strengths and weaknesses.

But content analysis cannot illuminate the objectives of the reporters who



wrote the stories. Hence, campaign reporters are interviewed in this study to explore their perspectives.

Concern for fairness and balance

The notion of fairness in reporting is related to the notion of balance. Fairness usually means the simple inclusion of the other side in stories about conflict. Balance concerns how equally sides to a conflict are treated relative to one another.

The two terms interrelate conceptually and ethically, depending on whether focus is on a single story or a related group of stories. Fairness is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for balance in a single story. For example, a fair story can still be imbalanced if more sources on one side are given more space compared to their opponent. But a group of individually unfair stories on an ongoing conflict can still be fair if the domination of one story by one side is balanced by a story dominated by the opponent. In this case, fairness and balance are arguably one, conceptually and ethically.

The modern concern for fairness and balance emerged following the abandonment of objectivity as an attainable journalistic standard. But notions about how journalism should function without objectivity have been general and abstract, focusing more on institutional roles and individual motives rather than on defined behaviour capable of assessment.

Philosophers on the Commission on Freedom of the Press during World War II advocated a social responsibility that emphasized a public service role for journalism. Fairness is implied in their urging the press to be less partisan in

Fairness is implied in their urging the press to be less partisan in reporting controversy and to provide the public with all relevant sides of issues. But the commission did not provide specific guidance on how to assess whether all relevant sides were included in covering controversy. News organizations have explicitly called for stories to be fair and balanced. Codes accepted by organizations such as the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Society of Professional Journalists and many prestige newspapers have used these terms, or related ones such as impartial or unbiased.

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Such codes are specific on behaviours such as those entailing potential conflict of interest in reporter-source relationships. Little or no guidance is given, however, on how to impartially portray controversy in stories.

Among news workers as individuals, the standard of impartiality in reporting also has been valued. Impartiality ranked as the second attribute of editorial quality in a survey of 746 editors. Presumably such editors know this quality when they see it in copy. But it is unclear what rules individual editors may apply to assess particular stories or issues.

News organization concern for credibility also engages fairness and balance. Studies by two leading media researchers Cecilie Gaziano and Kristin McGrath (Fairness and balance in Election Reporting, *Newspaper Research Journal*, Fall 1997) note that news organization officials, responding to public concern over credibility, included measures of fairness and bias in studies of factors affecting credibility. Again, however, no specific guidance on recognizing and eliminating such bias has emerged from this concern over its presumed negative effects on credibility.

Some story ideas on political parties

1. Democracy within political parties: Political parties want democratic rule in the country. But how democratic, really, are they? This story could be an investigation of election processes within parties. Are elections held at periodic intervals? Is pluralism promoted? For instance are there multiple candidates for the top post in party such as president, chairperson, etc.
2. Accountability within political parties: The top leadership of most political parties in Pakistan has been charged with corruption and abuse of authority dating to their days in power. However no party seems to have conducted an in-house investigation of the charges (for example against Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Shujaat Hussain, etc). Parties automatically defend their leaders. This story could investigate the processes and instances of corruption charges against 1st and 2nd tier leadership within parties.
3. Party promises -- kept or not: Parties seek votes on the basis of a collective vision as outlined in party manifestos that are revised and announced ahead of elections. Bhutto, Sharif and Shujaat's parties have served at the federal and provincial levels, Altaf's MQM, Asfandiyar's ANP, Qazi/Fazal's MMA have served at the provincial levels. These parties will be seeking votes again. How can voters measure their performance before giving them their precious votes? This story could investigate - theme-wise - the promises made in their manifestos in the last elections and if they kept their word.
4. Party business: Political parties aim for political power to govern and manage national / provincial / local finances. A barometer of how good (or bad) they can be on this count can be gauged from how they manage party finances. This story could investigate how parties raise and spend funds to contest elections within the spending limits prescribed by campaign financing laws; if parties award tickets to rich candidates; and how many candidates, who declared they did not have money to spend, were awarded tickets by parties in last elections?
5. Developing party leadership: Political parties vie for national / provincial leadership. But how do they develop in-house leadership? This story could investigate the decision making mechanisms of parties. What is the structure of central decision making units / councils of

parties that frame party policies and what is the criteria that govern its membership?

6. How serious are the political parties about various issues - unemployment, health, education, housing etc. -- when they prepare manifestoes? Do the manifestoes portray the real situation and realistic solutions, or are marked by tall promises everybody knows will never be met?

Some story ideas on election monitoring

1. The election processes - to let the audience know how the Election Commission works; mandate of the EC, appointment of top EC officials; how autonomous it is - both in management and finances/budget, etc.
2. Demarcation of constituencies - usually the national assembly and provincial assembly constituencies are changed/demarcated before the general elections; journalists can look into if these demarcations will benefit any particular political party or individual candidates; is this demarcation being done on the behest of the government officials/ministers/ruling party or it is purely on the basis of vote count;
3. Is government machinery being used for campaign of any political party or candidate(s); how the ministers, prime minister and president are behaving during the campaign; will their actions influence the voter decision; are any development schemes being initiated to influence the voters of any particular areas; are the nazims or other office holders in local government influencing the voters
4. Appointment of the election staff - are the election officials from the same district or constituency; are they in any way related to the candidates; do they have previous election experience; where they were posted in the previous elections; do they have any direct interest in the elections of the contestants
5. Shipment of ballot boxes to polling stations and booths - how the boxes are to be shipped to the relevant areas; what steps would be taken by the election commission to ensure security of the boxes; are transparent boxes to be used; how they would be sealed and who would be opening them for counting

6. Printing of ballot papers - journalists should see where the ballot papers are being printed; is there a transparent mechanism for printing the ballot papers; how these papers would be shipped to the respective polling stations/constituencies; can any of the candidates have access to the ballot papers before the polling day;
7. Presence of polling agents - according to the Election Commission laws and rules every political party or the candidate has a right to appoint polling agent to oversee the voting process from the start of the day till counting of votes at that particular polling station; journalist should see that there is no bar on the presence of polling agents at the polling stations and polling booths
8. Counting of votes - counting of votes is the most important step; journalists need to keep vigil on the counting process; is it being done according to the prescribed rules of the Election Commission; is the counting being done in presence of the polling agents of the political parties/individual candidates; how are the results being compiled
9. Announcement of results - journalists working on the micro-level need to check if the total tally of votes of any constituency matches that of total of all the polling stations of that constituency; usually the EC staff and the polling agents at each polling station know the vote count-journalists can ensure that at every polling station the results are announced;
10. Transparency at the macro level - after every elections there is outcry by the runners-up about rigging at the national and provincial levels; journalists need to keep close contact with the political parties to know their views about the rigging and these should be made public; for this journalists working at main media stations like Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Multan, Hyderabad and Abbottabad should take into account the process of ballot boxes and papers shipment; printing of ballot boxes; the counting process; etc.
11. Transparency at the micro-level - there are incidents of micro-level rigging where political parties/candidates or their agents purchase ID cards and votes are cast by phony persons; at some places people even sell their votes; some of the political parties/candidates also try to get fake ID cards; journalists should look into the voting procedures at polling stations

Other story ideas that can be developed further

1. Likely turn out of young people, age (19- 30), political consciousness and the lack of it, cause and effect, mobilization etc
2. Foreign policy/international relations: What are the beliefs, challenges, and opportunities of political parties? Will it shape politics and policies in the future?
3. Education: What will a political party's stand on education mean for efforts focused on education budget, primary education, higher education, access/affordability of education, race, class, and gender education?
4. Health care: health policy, access
5. Provincial autonomy and sharing resources
6. President's accountability: Democratic reforms, has devolution been effective, can it be sustained, accountability (NAB), free and fair elections under his regime
7. Checking candidate background/criminal record/eligibility/connections / campaign funds and profile them
8. Women participation in the electoral process: opportunities and obstacles
9. Women voters in NWFP and Balochistan provinces
10. Probable women candidates and their quota seats in these provinces
11. Interview of Chief Election Commissioner or Secretary EC
12. Interview of former Chief Election Commissioner or Secretary EC
13. Parties registration: PPP (Parliamentarian) Vs PPP (patriot): The legal battle for identity in 2007 elections

14. Use of transparent ballot boxes, the new EC policy
15. Voters Lists & EC policy on NADRA ID cards
16. Follow up on ARD proposals to EC for free and fair elections
17. EC's policy on District governments' role during elections
18. Security at polling booths: Lessons from past
19. EC's Arrangements for women polling booths in NWFP and Blochistan
20. EC's planned visits to and policy about "sensitive areas" in Pakistan

Intermedia is a not-for-profit organization working on media development issues. We believe in freedom of expression; access to information; citizenry making informed opinions and decisions and participatory democracy. Our core value is to promote an informed, democratic and tolerant society and core purpose is to support, promote and strengthen free media as an effective tool for social progress.

INTERMEDIA PUBLICATIONS