ELECTIONS REPORTING IN THE ARAB REGION

Booklet resulted from the 'Exchange of Experiences Seminar'
Amman, November 2013

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UNESCO

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Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

INTRODUCTION
by Rut Gómez Sobrino

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Electoral processes are not like any other current issue in national or world politics. The relevance of elections is understood by the impact of the results in the future of the country where they are held. This fact positions media professionals as key actors in any electoral process. The journalists are essential (i) to inform the citizens about the process, including the political programs of the candidates and the electoral law, (ii) to report on the proper functioning of the elections and (iii) to voice the different communities and voting tendencies in any given context. Journalists have also an additional and crucial role that requires to be mentioned apart: to avoid civil conflict and confrontation susceptible to occur in any electoral process. This, in countries in transition, is of particular importance.

These four roles are only feasible if there are guarantees for the professionalism of the media. For this, both capacities and skills of the professionals and a proper environment involving media freedom and laws to protect the journalists, constitute the only keys to settle these guarantees.

This diagram -4-role and 2-key formula- shows that elections on their own or professional journalism alone are not the guarantee for an adequate democratization process. Without the commitment and willingness of the decision-makers to protect the work of the journalists and the involvement and participation of the citizens through awareness campaigns, all efforts will be in vain.

This is the approach and philosophy used throughout the Project **'Enhancing Professional and Accurate Media during the Electoral Process in Jordan'** which was implemented in 2013 by the UNESCO Office in Amman thanks to the funds of the European Union. To train journalists on professional reporting of elections as well as to increase awareness of key communities in the society –such as youth or media students- constituted major focus in the activities conducted. At the same time, to engage key authorities in supporting the work, of the journalists received major attention in this Project. The participation of the Independent Electoral Commission in Project activities and internal meetings

As in other media development strategies and interventions, this approach proves that only through cooperation and engagement of the different actors, including political authorities and institutions, professionalism of the media will take place.

The booklet presented in these pages is a clear example of this cooperative approach. Resulted from the last activity of the Project, and elaborated by personalities whose work is intimately related to electoral processes, this unique and unprecedented publication briefly describes the challenges that media professionals in neighboring contexts to Jordan, namely Tunis, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq, are facing when covering elections. In a region under a profound moment of transformation in which new political systems are being developed and where social participation is acquiring a new dimension, elections are becoming one of the meeting points of the interaction between political leaders, societies and media professionals.

The analysis of the coverage of elections in those environments definitely provides not only a clear picture of how elections are reported but also the level of common challenges that could be addressed at the regional level. Independence and accuracy of the media, trust of the society on the role of the journalists and legal guarantees to the work of the media are referred by most of the authors of this publication as matters to be considered.

With the aim to facilitate future initiatives to improve the reporting of elections, we hope that the next pages constitute a good reference material to reporters covering elections, media students and researchers interested in electoral processes in the Arab region and institutions in those countries that believe in the power of media to strengthen democratic processes.

Special mention should be made to the work of the authors of this publication, who generously shared their experiences with Jordanian journalists in the Seminar conducted in mid-November in Jordan where they analyzed the challenges of elections reporting in the Arab region. The interest brought through the 2-day presentations and discussions led the UNESCO staff assigned to the Project to produce a publication to share all the contributions with additional audiences who were not able to attend this Seminar. We hope that the extensive knowledge generated through this event is well reflected in this publication that will constitute a unique reference.

Thanks to all who contributed to this.

Foreword
by Patricia Pennetier

Programme Manager Human Rights, Good Governance, Gender, Civil Society European Union Delegation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Against the changing political backdrop in the Southern Mediterranean, the European Union (EU) adopted a new approach to allow neighbourhood partner countries to develop their links with the EU in line with their own aspirations, needs and capacities. The SPRING Programme ("Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth") was set-up in September 2011 to provide partner countries committed to establishing deep and sustainable democracies with financial and technical support to help implementing the associated reforms, following a "more for more" approach.

Thus, in Jordan, the EU is determined to accompany the country on its path to democratic reforms towards a just and inclusive society with democratic rights, social justice and economic opportunity as key features. A substantial support was made available to Jordan to achieve a number of priorities with particular emphasis on good governance and democratisation. To this end, a support to the electoral reform process, in which Jordan was engaged for several months, was adopted.

The main support consists in increasing the capacity of the Independent Electoral Commission to supervise and manage elections. But besides this major component, several other programmes were deemed essential to complement the whole electoral process: support to civic awareness campaigns, support to political parties, and support to media during elections. The EU support to UNESCO throughout the project "Enhancing professional and accurate media during the electoral process in Jordan" is indeed fully part of this important Programme because developing free and objective information and reporting on electoral processes must go hand in hand with the capacity building of democratic institutions. Ultimately, the objective is to enhance the public confidence and participation in the electoral and democratic process.

The added value of the project is that it does not only target professional media, but also civil society organisations involved in the defence of free expression and independent media. The valuable participation of key media organisations in the implementation of the project allowed addressing challenges in more practical and constructive manners. The publication of this booklet is a perfect example of this approach since the contribution of various actors from the media sector (academics, NGOs, journalists, international organisations, civil servants...) sharing experiences from

the region, will enable professionals to fine-tune their skills with a broad range of different perspectives.

The role of media is crucial during any electoral process that has the genuine ambition of being free and fair. However, in working with media, it is pointless to deliver specialised training to journalists if editors and/or media owners prevent the publication of stories. This is the reason why the European Union has recently signed a financing agreement with the Jordanian Government to implement activities aiming first and foremost at strengthening an enabling regulatory and institutional environment and thereafter building the capacity for an independent, quality based media sector serving the entire population. UNESCO will continue to be a privileged partner in this long-term endeavour which will hopefully enable Jordan to enjoy an improved professional and accurate media, and not only in the field of elections.

Elections in the Arab World in Times of Transformation
by Ayman Ayoub

Regional Director of the West Asia & North Africa Region at International IDEA, member of the Steering Committee of the Project "Enhancing Professional and Accurate Media during the Electoral Process in Jordan", implemented by UNESCO and funded by the EU

Almost three years after the start of the so called "Arab Spring", we are still waiting for real blossoms to flourish. However, the spirit of change that is ever since sweeping the Arab region should be regarded as the main gain here. This should therefore help mitigate the negative effects of frustrations that can easily be seen everywhere. A good understanding of the fact that transitions to democracy constitute all-encompassing long term processes of multifaceted change, should certainly act as an important source of hope, despite setbacks, challenges and delays..

Elections are certainly in the heart of all ongoing transition processes in our region. This is no exception to what is seen elsewhere, as transitional processes mainly involve the need to establish new representative institutions that replace old regimes, as a starting point to launch the many other steps of democracy building.

Watching electoral reform, processes and events that have been and are taking place in a good number of Arab countries, it is easy to conclude that on top of many important and related challenges, the region faces the need to deal with an important **credibility and integrity** gap that impacts electoral reform, processes and events the like.

Indeed, despite promising initial steps undertaken so far in democratic elections, whether as a result of a popular uprising or the launching of a national reform process, countries in the region are faced with question marks about the legitimacy of those who are supposed to drive electoral reform and draft new election laws.. The usual challenges of designing and introducing new electoral systems that avoid the usual results of "one winner takes all", the need to produce accurate voters´ lists, the many problems around electoral districting, or the professional and independent administration of elections, etc, are only some of the matters where such a credibility and integrity gap manifests itself more clearly.

We have seen the paramount efforts made by the National Dialogue Committee in Jordan, by the National Instance to preserve the objectives of the revolution in Tunisia (known as the Ben Achoure Committee), by the transitional authorities in Egypt, by the NTC in Libya, etc, In addition, "independent" election management bodies (EMBS) were established in countries of the region, following an international trend and a clearly pressing demand. These EMBs continue to struggle to manage

elections fairly and independently. Not an easy task certainly following decades of stolen elections managed by those who systematically won them.

Reform efforts are however far from complete. A lot still needs to be done to reach a stage where genuinely democratic elections can be delivered with integrity in a sustained manner.

According to the report of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security on "Deepening Democracy: A Strategy for Improving the Integrity of Elections Worldwide" there are 5 main challenges to elections with integrity. These are:

- Building the rule of law to substantiate claims to human rights and electoral justice;

- Building professional, competent EMBs with full independence of action to administer elections that are transparent and merit public confidence;

- Creating institutions and norms of multiparty competition and division of power that bolster democracy as a mutual security system among political contenders;

- Removing barriers — legal, administrative, political, economic and social — to universal and equal political participation; and

- Regulating uncontrolled, undisclosed and opaque political finance.

These are only the main ones. Many other challenges also impact the integrity of elections, such as electoral violence, post conflict specific difficulties, women and minorities participation, barriers that affect the participation of refugees, IDPs and persons with disabilities, independent and efficient observation of elections, and more.

Most if not all these challenges can be seen, to a greater or lesser extent across the Arab region. Special attention is always needed to the challenges related to political finance, public versus private funding, use of state resources, control of campaigns expenditures, etc.

While elections themselves, no matter how professionally and technically sound they may be administered, do not necessarily bring democracy as experience has shown, they nevertheless constitute a key element of a democratic construct. Indeed, unless political contenders stand real and equal chances of alternating power in a peaceful manner, it is difficult to imagine a system of rule of law, checks and balances, responsibility and accountability, inclusiveness and real public participation by all. This is, a genuine democratic system of governance that ensures social peace.

Therefore, elections can be, and indeed are, a stabilizing factor, very much needed in all cases, and more especially under transitional processes. However, due to their very nature, elections can also be, and in many cases they are, a destabilizing factor. Well designed and managed elections with integrity help mitigate conflict, while elections marred with fraud, corrupt practices and violence can easily aggravate and even trigger conflicts.

In fact, in our region we had the opportunity to see both cases. While the first elections held after an uprising like those in Egypt or Tunisia, or after a conflict like those in Libya, brought hopes for stability, not least as they were conducted under a context of enthusiasm and euphoria, further elections have been much more conflictive and challenging.

Among the main pillars for elections with integrity is the big challenge of introducing systems and practices that are able to guarantee a level-playing field for all contenders. An electoral system, administration and procedures that ensure wider enfranchisement for all and that gain the confidence of the people. Ultimately, elections that produce credible and uncontested results that lead to the establishment of faithfully representative institutions.

In this very regard, the media plays a decisive role that needs to be carefully considered and well planned for. In fact, media plays a dual role in electoral processes: On the one hand, it is the media role to inform the electorate, thus enabling them to meaningfully participate and make informed decisions and choices. On the other hand, it is the media role to scrutinize actions of government, political parties, candidates, EMBs and others, by holding them to account.

The 2005 annual World Press Freedom Day international conference produced a declaration that stressed: "independent and pluralistic media are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and participation as fundamental elements of good governance and human-rights based development". Furthermore, the declaration urges to "respect the function of the news media as an essential factor in good governance, vital to increasing both transparency and accountability in decision-making processes and to communicating the principles of good governance to society".

To fully consider the role of media, it should be related to that of EMBs, who are ultimately the ones responsible to deliver credible elections with integrity. In this regard, an important question is about how do EMBs interact with the media – and is this interaction effective in countries that do not have permanent independent EMBS?

The relationship between the two is multifaceted:

- As communicator: the EMB will invariably want to use the media as a vehicle for communicating its messages to the electorate.

- As news story: the EMB will be a focus of media interest throughout the electoral process. The media will be interested in the information that the EMB can provide, as well as trying to scrutinize the EMB's performance and the efficiency and integrity of the elections.

- As regulator: the EMB may in some instances be responsible for developing or implementing regulations governing media behavior during elections (especially relating to direct access to the media by parties and candidates). It may also be responsible for dealing with complaints against the media.

Another important aspect of the role of media in elections refers to the relationship between public and private media:

Public media, by virtue of their source of funding, are and should remain a resource for the entire electorate. It is generally accepted that they should not be politically partisan in their editorial coverage. This was the view set out by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, in his 1999 report, when he spoke of the obligation of the state-owned media to give voice to a variety of opinions and not to be a propaganda organ for one particular political party. Also, they have particular obligations to provide civic education, as well as to provide a platform for the different political parties.

The obligations of the private media are far fewer. The essence of a free media environment is that broadcasters and journalists are not told what they may or may not say or write. The best guarantee that the variety of political ideas are communicated freely and accurately is often understood to be for the media to be allowed to get on with their job unhampered. But this does not mean that private media have no obligations at all. Professional journalistic standards will demand accurate and balanced reporting, as well as a clear separation of fact and comment.

Many laws hold principles of 'equal airtime' for candidates in elections.

How are these principles reflected/respected/implemented in our region, if at all, remains a big question.

The rise of social media, where the same standards that bind journalists do not bind 'citizen journalists' is yet another challenge that needs due consideration. Missinformation can spread as easily as correct information, so the question is: who is there to keep it in check? Do the media have a responsibility in correcting miss-information? In attempting to respond to these questions, regard should be given to the symbiotic nature of social media and traditional media. Indeed, news on social media is increasingly being picked up by traditional outlets, allowing for citizen voices to be heard in a new way, but at times at the expenses of much needed accuracy and verified information.

All of the above leads to a bold question about the big potentials of media, regardless of its nature, of contributing to integrity in elections or, otherwise, of turning them into a dangerous destabilizing factor. Unfortunately, we are seeing much of the latter lately, mainly due to biased and astute use of media that focuses on shorter term gains instead of longer term consolidation of democratic governance that should ultimately benefit all.

When the aim is to build a sustainable democracy, journalists should ideally work under a neutral, non-biased, non-partisan approach, just like an EMB should be expected to behave. In my view, gatherings like this one need to answer the question of: to what degree is this happening in the news being generated from our region?

At the same time, journalists have the

responsibility of voicing opinions against censorship – is this being the case here and now? And how are allegiances with state media, traditionally under full control by ruling regimes, changing with new governments coming into power? Some examples recently seen in countries of the region suggest that we may be witnessing alarming attempts to simply silence critics...

While there may be good reasons to argue that freedom of speech and expression may not be absolute freedoms, curtailing them should be done within well-defined standards and for clear and widely accepted reasons, if any...

What is ultimately at stake is to enquire whether what is being prioritized in relation to the media role is stability or the fight for freedoms? If freedoms are let go or postponed, we ought to ask ourselves when and how will they make it back?

It is clear that, in looking into elections under the ongoing transformations in this region, one has much more questions than answers. However, allow me to stress that an organization like the one I represent here, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

(IDEA), can only attempt to help real owners of democracy building processes to search for good answers.

Through IDEA´s West Asia and North Africa programme, we humbly offer our support to state and non-state actors to enable them make better choices that are in line with their own needs, values and context. Despite the many question marks that are usually raised about it, we continue to believe in and work guided by the concept of "democracy from within". We are convinced that, while preserving universal principles and values, only home grown democracy will be able to become sustainable and further consolidate democratic governance. For this reason, IDEA sticks to providing non-prescriptive policy advice to all actors, by facilitating dialogue and providing comparative knowledge, thus attempting to contribute to the launching of democracy building processes. However, achieving acceptable levels of democratic governance that meets the aspirations of the people is a different matter that can only be reached through much longer term processes.

Democracy Is Not Just About Elections
By Simon Haselock

Co-founder and Director of Albany Associates, partner at the Project "Enhancing Professional and Accurate Media during the Electoral Process in Jordan", implemented by UNESCO and funded by the European Union.

In discussing elections in the context of the Middle East and in post conflict situations it is important to acknowledge that we are talking about circumstances where there has been little tradition of democracy. In most cases there is a lack of political plurality with no properly established political parties. Instead politics is largely identified with revolutionary or activist movements organised to fight or challenge an authoritarian regime or constitutional status quo. They are revolutionary movements built to overthrow the established order rather than contest the democratic space based on specific political programs. They are often based simply on ethnic or religious constructs like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian National Council or the SPLM in South Sudan.

In post conflict or revolutionary situations there are always tensions over the timing of elections – should they happen as soon as possible or should there be a transitional period where institutions can be developed and conventional plural political parties established? The post conflict elections in Bosnia were prime examples of this, where early elections merely embedded the sectarian factions that had prosecuted the war. People voted for those with whom they'd fought the war, not for who had the best political

program to rebuild the country. Some argue that they were more important for the international community as a demonstration to their own publics that they had succeeded in bringing democracy and therefore a job well done rather than in establishing effective new representative government. Kosovo provides a similar example as does Iraq.

As in these circumstances and contrary to hopes and expectations elections are not necessarily always the ultimate expression of democracy. Without institutional change or reform and without the necessary conditions in place they can often merely embed the reactionary status quo.

Some key questions to ask in these transitional and post conflict situations include, how can we encourage genuine broad political debate around genuine issues of government, governance, service provision and administration across the population?

How can we prevent the democratic process being captured by the elites, the activists and those who have cash in such a way that includes and gives voice to ordinary people?

How can we enable and empower the ordinary citizen who are the people who will be most affected by the outcome?

How can we create mechanisms to enable people to hear their own voices in the political discourse?

Conditions for elections

There is often much more discussion about the fact and mechanics of the elections rather than the conditions that need to be in place in order for them to be genuinely 'free and fair.' This conference has been about journalists reporting elections but I would argue that it's more than being just about the media and journalists but the conditions and circumstances in which they operate.

Political theory has it that there are 'four estates of democracy"; 1) a freely elected legislature or parliament that is representative of the people who elected it and accountable to them; 2) an executive that is answerable and accountable to the legislature and the people who elected it; 3) an independent judiciary that is accountable to the law; and 4) a free and independent press and media that holds all three to account and enables free and open public debate. The elections that establish the first two are impossible without the last ones.

Rule of law

The rule of law, (estate 3 above) rather than the rule of the strong is a crucial precondition for genuine elections. It is often the case that elections are held in post conflict or transitional situations without this essential precondition sufficiently embedded. This can be seen across the Middle Eastern, Maghreb and Sahel regions where the courts and police represent the established government rather than the people and populations. Somalia at the moment is a case in point where the courts are often used against the individual rather than in their support. The controversy over the recent arrest of a woman who claimed she'd been raped by the police, alongside the journalist who reported it is a prime example. Similarly, independent regulatory structures for the press or for the elections rules themselves depend on an independent and impartial judiciary and the rule of law.

In post conflict, revolutionary and situations of violence, crime and civil disorder people want security first, then peace and justice and then democracy. In an ideal world this would be the trajectory towards elections in post war and transitional societies with security as the first enabler for political debate. But there are inevitably tensions between security, peace, justice and democracy and the order in which they are achieved. However, security and the rule of law are generally recognized as prerequisites for free and fair elections. Journalists are the ones who should hold administrations to account on insuring and interrogating whether they are genuinely in place. But these are reciprocal conditions because, as mentioned already, it is also the rule of law that underpins the regulatory and legal frameworks that enable a free and independent press and media that can do this.

Free, fair and independent media

There is much discussion about what

constitutes independence, particularly when referring to the media. What does it really mean?

Most people are intrinsically biased in one way or another, either by their family background, their education or by their life experience. Opinions and attitudes are also driven by the prevailing narratives that surround particular issues. These may or may not reflect reality or the truth but just the colour of the lens through which they are viewed. Language itself also has a tremendous effect on the way issues and attitudes are viewed and formed. Words and phrases can be heavily loaded with bias or political inference.

We saw from the reporting of the international press during the Sarajevo siege that this conflict created the acknowledged phenomenon of agenda journalism where journalists no longer saw themselves as impartial observers. Many began to consider their reporting as part of the struggle on behalf of one side against the other as a consequence of their own experience. We are seeing a similar situation emerging in Syria where the media has now, as a consequence of its own experience, identified largely with the opposition. In conflict situations where the rule of law has broken down or where the power is held by authoritarian regimes this can bring its own problems as journalists become targets in their own right if they are producing critical copy. Again security and the rule of law are fundamental to the ability of journalists to ply their trade in safety.

It is extremely important to understand bias in these contexts and try to compensate for it, but this can be very difficult. Examples like those in Rwanda or in Kosovo demonstrate how ethnic and/or political bias in the media can produce catastrophic reactions and results. Independent regulatory frameworks underpinned by the rule of law are essential in these situations not as instruments of restriction but as mechanisms of protection and professionalization.

These independent regulatory mechanisms must be constructed in consultation with media professionals, civil society and the consumer and recognized in law. In place they provide the framework for independent media houses and platforms to develop and in which journalists can work professionally. Too much emphasis in the past has been placed on training journalists in the absence of outlets and media enterprises where they can practice what they have learned.

Embedding security and institutional reform across transitional societies is thus a vital part of democratization and should ideally be in place prior to elections being held.

So how to achieve this?

Of course achieving this takes time and international attention is short lived. Politicians, journalist and analysts alike should all realize that perfect first elections are extremely unlikely. They should be seen as work in progress. Priority efforts initially need to be focused on achieving the rule of law, then establishing appropriate independent

regulatory structures and law that requires institutional transparency and freedom of information and decriminalizes defamation and insult. These will in turn enable a free and independent media to flourish and enable the broad discourse that is the essence of democracy and free and fair elections.

Advocacy campaigns are needed in parallel, which ensure people understand what independence means, the rights they have to information and broader issues of media literacy.

Public information and education about what they are voting about and why are in many ways more important than the where, when and how of the elections. Voter education is critical, but not just about the mechanisms but about the

reasons and the issues. Journalists need to listen and not just report, they need understand that whilst opinion is important the most important opinions are not those of the politicians but those of the ordinary people. It is their job to confront journalists with the issues that affect people, not the political polemic on which early elections often thrive.

But finally and primarily it can be argued that the biggest responsibility of journalists is to build realistic expectations rather than false ones. Elections, especially those in post conflict or transitional circumstances, always create huge enthusiasm that things will immediately get better and that all their problems will be solved in a single term – they are invariably disappointed.

Covering elections in Jordan
By Daoud Kuttab

Director General of Community Media Network and former Ferris professor of Journalism at Princeton University. CMN is one of the organizations that took part in the UNESCO/EU funded election's coverage project

Free and fair elections have always constituted pillars in any democratic society. Open, transparent and inquisitive media in times of elections represent a linchpin for the success of this election. The experience of election coverage in Jordan has reflected on this kingdom's gradual effort towards political reform.

Election reporting is seen by many observers as a special skill that is different from any other media coverage because of its time limitation and its potential of causing exaggerated influence on the public. In dealing with the issue of its coverage the national and municipal elections in Jordan in 2013 represented a huge challenge. It was perhaps the first time in years that the public was confident that elections will be conducted without the usual external intervention. The constitutional changes including the creation of an Independent Election Commission (and a constitutional court) provided Jordanians with the feeling that this time the elections would be different. Appointing a respected civil servant such as Mr Abdulilah al Khatib, and his Commission of well respected personalities provided this reassurance.

While the public confidence in the relative independence of the elections was ensured, the challenges to the Commission and to the media would prove much greater thus increasing the pressure on media to bridge the information gap that existed. Not only was the public dealing with a new electoral commission, but commission and the public, as well as candidates, were confronted with a totally new election law. The new Election Law added a second vote for national lists which produced 27 new candidates in the expanded 150-seat lower house of the parliament.

Election coverage therefore had to begin with a wide ranging awareness campaign. The Independent Elections' Commission was able in record time to produce video and audio Public Service Announcements but these did little to satisfy the thirst of the public for information especially when it came to that crucial second vote that everyone was able to cast in the national elections.

The United Nations Education and Science Organization (UNESCO) provided some relief, with funding from the European Union, in the area of providing a robust media component in the election process. While the state run media made its routine passive coverage to the election process, it was the support of UNESCO that added a special independent media component

to the various needs for media coverage of elections.

On the theoretical level –and in the framework of the aforementioned Project- the Jordan Media Institute (JMI) provided for a series of workshops and lectures that dealt with the various issues connected to elections. JMI's premises were open to various public events that dealt seriously and comprehensively with the election process and the media component of elections.

Elections take place on the field and in the field, the Community Media Network (CMN) was active in providing training and radio/online coverage of the elections period. This coverage included training 50 citizen journalists in five districts of the Kingdom which rarely receive such training. Out of those trained 35 were chosen -seven from each of the five districts-. These trainees were equipped with video and audio equipment that allowed them to record still photos and video reports that were broadcast on Radio al Balad and published on AmmanNet's Youtube station. After the basic training the citizen/journalists produced tens of news reports that were published on the day before, the day of elections and the day after elections.

Debates are another perfect media activity for elections. Six debates took place dealing with social, economic and political issues and providing the electoral public with information about the candidates in their own district and how they stand up to reporters and the public's scrutiny.

Elections Day is always the longest day for media. It begins at 7am with a round of visits to polling stations to ensure that they are open and fully manned, and continues till the early morning hours of the next day.

While the political and economic issues and the candidate's position regarding them received widespread coverage a group of investigative journalists trained by Arab reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) were busy checking out allegations of political voter irregularities. Buying votes has always been a problem in Jordan and this election cycle was not much different even though the electoral commission provided a much more independent control over the election process. Vote buying was documented by a group of journalists and broadcast on the local Roya'a TV station in Jordan. A number of individuals including candidates were arrested on the eve of the elections. Some of those arrested still won in the elections and have become members of parliament. Existing by-laws of the parliament doesn't ban any citizen from becoming a member even if they are elected while awaiting trial.

The national Parliamentary elections in January 2013 were evaluated in positive terms by local and international observers. The existence of the Independent Commission and the unprecedented media access has ensured that the electoral process –even with an incomplete election law- has helped produce good results that the country can be proud of. In August of the same year municipal elections took place and while these local elections were not as high profile, the journalistic experience

of covering national elections was also put to work in making sure that the public stayed fully informed and the electoral process monitored.

Free and independent media can go a long way in ensuring that the public is aware of their electoral process and what their candidates stand for. Media coverage doesn't in itself guarantee that elections are free and fair. The global experience shows that for free and fair elections to take place a wide range of issues must be guaranteed including free and independent media. As the reform process in Jordan continues Jordanians and their friends around the world are hopeful that this process will continue in its gradual improvement and will not retract back. Independent media is like toothpaste, once it is out it is difficult to put it back. The media's efforts however require an enabling environment which can support it and provide an opportunity for it to accomplish its goals of an informed, democratic and knowledgeable public.

Lebanese Media and Elections Coverage
By Magda Abu-Fadil

Former foreign correspondent and editor with international news organizations such as Agence France-Presse and United Press International, and current Director of Media Unlimited.

Lebanese media's coverage of presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections is traditionally a mixed bag.

It ranges from fairly professional accounts of events, accompanied by increasingly advanced technological renditions such as multimedia presentations of voting procedures and poll results, to mediocre reporting verging on outright editorializing, sectarian mud-slinging, sub-standard articles, skewed videos and questionable online content.

Given the loaded legacy of a 15-year civil war and interminable domestic upheaval in Lebanon, affected by regional and international disturbances, it is no surprise that news coverage of Lebanese elections has been, and continues to be, adversely affected.

Media have been fined or shut down and journalists harassed for violating regulations on how or when to cover elections.

A case in point is Murr TV (MTV-Lebanon), which fell afoul of the law in 2002, when major shareholder Gabriel El Murr ran for parliament and won against his niece Mirna, daughter of Michel El Murr, a former cabinet minister and legislator then allied with Syria and the pro-Damascus former president Emile Lahoud.

The brothers Gabriel and Michel have had their political differences over the years.

According to Lebanon's electoral law at that time, media were barred from publishing or broadcasting campaign fare for a specified period prior to the vote, and faced indefinite closure if they veered off course.

MTV, which reopened in 2009 under a different president, was charged with broadcasting promotional programs to boost Gabriel El Murr's chances at the ballot box during that blackout so it was shut down and countless employees found themselves jobless overnight. His election victory was nullified.

Lebanon's newly formed cabinet following the assassination of then prime minister Rafic Hariri on February 14, 2005 and a popular uprising dubbed the "Beirut Spring," took an unprecedented step to form the National Commission on Parliamentary Electoral Law on August 8, after securing a vote of confidence.

The Commission drew up a draft law aimed at securing fair representation of the Lebanese people within the country's democratic parliamentary framework, under the umbrella of the Taef Agreement that ended the 1975-90 civil war.

According to the Commission's mandate, the key reforms proposed in the draft legislation included:

- Establishing a mixed system combining both the small constituency majoritarian model and the large constituency proportional model

- Establishing the National Commission on Parliamentary Electoral Law

- Permitting non-resident Lebanese citizens to vote

- Lowering the voting age (from 21) to 18

- Establishing a quota for women candidates

- Regulating audio-visual media advertising and news coverage

- Permitting voters to vote in their place of residence, rather than where their official registry is

- Mechanizing the vote counting process using scanning machines

- Providing special facilities for voters with disabilities

- Conducting the vote in one day

- Ensuring the prime minister and cabinet members are not candidates for parliamentary seats.

But the draft did not fully annul the country's entrenched political sectarianism.

According to the Commission, a clause regarding media and advertising stipulates:

"The draft law also includes many provisions for advertising regulation of private audio-visual media, securing the freedom of expression for all trends of thought and opinion in the programs of the said media. The Independent Commission shall have the power to give binding directives and instructions that it deems necessary in this regard, in order to secure justice and balance between the candidate and his/her competitors, and impartiality towards candidates/lists."

The clause was aimed specifically at private media outlets since state-run radio and television are automatically constrained by government regulations.

In its first report on the electoral campaign, the Commission detected various infractions in print and broadcast media. It found violations in content that did not comply with Article 68 of the existing electoral law that bars hate speech, libel and slander.

Ideally, conditions for covering elections mean the media should focus on the country/government:

- Providing voters with equal opportunities to select among parties and candidates

- Providing competing political parties with the freedom to campaign, organize meetings and present their programs to voters

- Providing electoral laws that will be respected by candidates and implemented by individuals and organizations

- Ensuring voters fully understand their political options.

Democracy cannot exist without a free press:

It is difficult to guarantee implementation of the four prior conditions without a free and serious press.

The media should allow voters to learn about the electoral process and political choices available to them.

For the media to be free, they should have a free hand to probe into the transparency of the elections, and to inform voters about inconsistencies and errors so that such mistakes are corrected.

The media should also evaluate the work of the government and opposition parties during the pre-election period.

Citizens should be informed about the government's record in running the country in previous elections as well as the opposition parties' alternative programs.

"You've turned the elections into a joke, we're the gods of jokes," was the slogan of a satirical electoral campaign launched by Lebanese activists and bloggers that aimed to uncover traditional politicians' hypocrisy and misleading statements. Their website was called www.intekhabet.com (elections.com) and its candidates' list was called "Abiye Nafsi" (I sell myself).

Another basic requirement for the media is to know what a legislator's role is and explain it to voters. Unfortunately, many members of parliament in Lebanon are not fully familiar with their duties and have not studied the MP's manual. Many journalists are also totally ignorant of what an MP does, which is a disservice to the public.

An important issue in covering campaigns is familiarity with financial matters before, during, and after the elections and how public funds are spent.

It is also imperative to understand how the government's budget is drawn based on public expenditures and revenues. The media can highlight weak practices by focusing on warped priorities, reduced productivity, extra-legal procedures and corruption within official ranks.

Good coverage of elections should include:

A historical overview of issues, how the issues were handled in the past and candidates' positions on them, as well as a review of political parties' and blocs' positions on the issues.

The media's role is to observe the electoral process, explain it, report on whether laws were respected, and whether there was any cheating, bias towards one person or group, or offenses directed at voters.

Above all, the media should be accurate, fair, balanced and responsible.

Iraqi Media and Elections
by Zuhair El Jezairy

Former Chief Editor at Aswat Al Iraq
(Voices of Iraq) News Agency.

Like any other country out of a one-party dictatorship, the process of democracy building in Iraq has faced the same difficult question: do we start with an election that lays the foundation to a democratic parliament that paves the way to create liberal media, or do we start with independent and impartial media that prepares the citizens for fair and clean elections? Both need a good deal of time.

Newly founded Iraqi media has had an exceptional importance for the first Iraqi elections in 2005 because after 30 years of the one-party rule and the absence of other parties formed three generations of Iraqi youth clueless as to the existence of parties other than the ruling party or a leader other than the single leader. Also, these citizens remained ignorant about the agendas of the parties that emerged on the scene all at one after the collapse of the one-party system. Because of all that, the candidates needed to introduce themselves to the public.

The unstable state of security following 2003 impeded the ability of candidates to communicate directly with voters through field tours or campaign rallies. The consequence is that the Press, Radio and TV were the only means of communicating with the public.

After years of the absence of political life and the absence of parties in the secular sense, the sectarian and national challenge was the leading force toward the parties and the figures that embodied its primary identity. Those parties relied on this representation for their popularity through the fear of the other.

Iraqi media with its poor and new expertise faced the challenge of elections in a society polarized by sectarianism and nationalism. It had to adhere to professional standards in preparing for the elections and introducing electoral blocs fairly and objectively, avoiding sectarian or national prejudices, defamation and scandals.

Having independent media that provides equal opportunities for all parties and contenders takes a lot of time, that's why there was a need to set regulations for all media outlets to abide by. The Committee for Media and Communication (CMC) had issued prior to the elections of December 2005 the first list of regulations for media coverage of the elections which was circulated to media institutions. After the elections they issued a report which showed that "as a first attempt" at a free election it could be said that the broadcast media outlets in general demonstrated a "level of professionalism

higher than what was expected" and that by respecting most of the rules and regulations of media coverage and educating the citizens about the electoral process and introducing the candidates to the public and its general commitment to cover the campaign despite the scarce resources, little expertise, lack of training as well as instability and rampant insecurity to a great extent

It is important to mention that the Commission did not recorded any violations calling for discrimination, sectarianism or inciting violence or promoting hatred, even the cases of defamation against the candidates were rare and were spread through word of mouth, not through mass media.

However, it is hard to talk about professional objective standards in election coverage without taking into consideration the nature of the formation of Iraqi media institutions in the period after 2003. This was the formula maintained until 2009 and which was reflected to a large extent on the nature of the media coverage of the elections. The coverage tendencies can be divided according to the forms of media that emerged to the scene:

1- Partisan media

2- State media

3- Independent media

In the election campaigns, the partisan media focused on their candidates in particular through prolonged interviews or promoting recurring advertisements about the electoral list, the candidates or the full coverage of their candidates'

campaigns. That bias was so obvious that "it was easy to switch between channels to know who they represented and what exactly they wanted, as the movements of the leaders who represent these blocs make headlines in the news and the mottos of their blocs keep appearing between shows".

The Mirror Network which consisted of 5 members from civil society organizations monitored the media coverage of the 2005 elections in the period between 14/11/2005 and 25/12/2005.

Let me present now some of the outcomes of the monitoring process by the Mirror Network: the TV coverage for Dr. Eyad Allawi was 64%, 31% of it was impartial, 64% was positive coverage, 5% was negative. As for Dr. Ibrahim Al-Ja'afari, his share of the coverage was 27%, 58% of it was positive, 38% was impartial and 7% was negative. As for Jalal Talibani it was 27%, 38% of coverage was positive, 45% impartial and 17% negative. As for Al-Jalabi, he got 9% of coverage, 32% positive, 38% impartial and 18% negative.

As for **Al-Iraqiyya channel**, their share of the coverage was 56%, 54% of it was positive, 3% impartial and 43% negative. The percentage of the appearance of some candidates from the electoral lists, Al-Iraqiyya list's share of appearances on Al-Iraqiyya was 13%, 10% of it positive and 90% negative, the percentage of appearance of candidates from that list was 27%, as for the Kurdistan Alliance their share was 22%, 47% of it was positive, 32% impartial and 30% negative, the percentage of appearance of candidates from this list was 36%.

On **Kurdistan Satellite channel**, Jalal Talibani's got 70% of the coverage, 70% of it was positive and the remaining 30% impartial, while Masoud Al-Barazany got 30% of the coverage, 60% positive coverage and 40% impartial.

As for the radio, the results were as follows: the Unified Iraqi Coalition got 47%, 51% of that was positive coverage, 34% impartial and 15% negative. Al-Iraqiyya list got 26%, 35% of it positive, 30% impartial and 35% negative, while the Kurdistan Alliance got 17%, 40% of it was positive, 30% impartial and 30% negative, as for the Iraqi Accord Front, it got 10%, 50% of it was positive, 15% impartial and 35% negative. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Ja'afari got 37% of coverage, 25% positive, 58% impartial and 17% negative while Dr. Eyad Allawi got 30% coverage, 50% of it positive, 30% impartial and 20% negative. Talibani's share was 20%, 27% of it positive, 46% impartial and 27% negative. As for Al-Jalabi it was 35%, 50% of it positive, 38% impartial and 12% negative.

When it came to local newspapers, on the front pages, the Unified Iraqi Coalition's share was 55%, 64% of it was positive, 30% impartial and 6% negative. As for pictures of candidates it was 40% -- the Kurdisrtan Alliance got 30%, 50% of that was positive, 39% impartial and 11% negative. As for the percentage of appearance of candidates from the list it was 30%. As for Al-Iraqiyya list, it got 15%, 42% of it positive, 16% impartial and 42% negative, the percentage of appearance of candidates was 50%.

If we go back to the 2005 media coverage we will find that the ruling political bloc or those nominated to assume power were enjoying a wide coverage (The Coalition 55%, the Kurdistan Alliance 30%, Al-Iraqiyya list 15%), which correspond to their later positions in the government and the parliament. The coverage took place through their private channels and other channels.

The Sunni Iraqi Accord Front which held the number 618, led by the former head of the Iraqi Sunni Endowment Diwan Adnan Ad-Dulaimy, broadcasted their promotional video on several satellite channels, while the Unified Coalition list which held the number 555 mixed between using their private channels (Al-Faiha'a and Al-Furat) and between spreading the word through other channels. The Coalition list used religion and religious symbols in their campaign activities to influence the voters in the rural villages in the South and the middle and the poor neighborhoods in the cities; they used the name and picture of the Shia Marja Ayatollah As-Sistani in election posters throughout the campaign.

The night before the 2005 elections, Al-Ja'afari's list used a conference broadcasted on Al-Jazeera where the religious Marja Ayatollah As-Sistany was insulted to mobilize the public to the benefit of the Coalition list.

In Kurdistan, two major parties control 80% of the media, and there was a clear case of using the issue of nationalism to mobilize the public around the ruling alliance. The bias of Kurdsat channel, the Freedom channel, and Kurdistan TV whose broadcast reaches Baghdad was

very obvious in the favor of the electoral list of the Kurdistan Alliance. The partisan media was in accordance with the official media of the territory.

As for the state media which consists of Al-Iraqiyya Sattelite channel, As-Sabah newspaper and the Iraqi Republic Radio, it was formed and grew as it staggered back and forth between being a state media or a government media. That media was not really independent from the Government as it was assumed when IMN was founded. This staggering was reflected in the media coverage of the elections.

Al-Iraqiyya channel gave way for other blocs and parties to present their agendas and orientations in the conferences or through free media programs. But the share of candidates in the 2005 or 2009 elections remained small and limited compared to the share of the Prime Minister; for when the PM's list holds a conference to present its agenda, the official TV does a live coverage of it while all the other lists get is a quick news segment, moreover, the information related to the activities of the government authorities were used for political advertising purposes, some organized celebratory events are even turned into platforms for election campaigns, and they are highlighted in news broadcasts and they are given more value than they really deserve or can be reasonably deemed relevant to the public. For example, 13 minutes of a 30-minute news broadcast on Al-Iraqiyyah channel were dedicated to cover the activities of the

PM. Although that coverage was not a regular daily pattern, it was obvious that the news related to the PM was presented at the primary part of the news broadcast and enjoyed sufficient coverage even if it was not worth it from a professional and political point of view. There was clearly a clear mix-up between covering his activities as a Prime Minister and his activities as the head of an electoral list.

As for the independent media, it worked in two opposing directions, as it tried to take a neutral stand between opponents and at the same time invest the huge amounts of money spent on preparing for the elections and campaign advertising as a source of funding for the new media. Many newspapers that had previosuly disappeared for financial reasons resurfaced again, some weekly newspapers became daily newspapers in order to gain more profits through advertising. Even new TV channels appeared on the scene prior to the elections like (Al-Masar, Asure, , brotherly Nineveh). The Independent media faced pressures and temptations by politicians throughout the elections; in 2005 chiefs of independent newspapers became consultants for presidents of lists during the elections and their newspapers turned into one-sided media platforms.

If we did a quick review of the period after 2003, we would find that Iraq witnessed two national elections and a voting on the constitution in 2005, while 2009 that started with the governorate elections would be eventful with over 10 elections and voting processes[1]. Through

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[1] the governorate elections, voting on the Iraqi-American Treaty, voting on the constitutional amendments, the poll in Kirkuk, the election in Kirkuk governorate, the elections of districts and provinces, the Kurdistani governorate election, the elections of conflicted districts and provinces, the parliamentary elections by the end of the year.

these processes the media is used by the state and the political parties as a political tool for political mobilization and marketing. We noticed how opinion columns and political news disappeared from the front pages to make room for the advertisements of the Commission or the full-scale photos of candidates. We've also seen how the line that separates between the ads and opinion articles had disappeared when some newspapers and satellite channels adopted one side over the others.

Independence of the media

Now we are back to the first question at the beginning of this chapter. In a new media and a new democracy in a society divided ethnically and religiously, the stronger sides with money and power could influence the independence of the media and hence the opinion of voters who have been recently introduced to their politicians and were used to take the side of the more powerful. Depending on the psychology of loyalty, some candidates described themselves to the voters as "powerful" or "honest and strong". The source of this person's power may not be their actual practices, but rather the way the media depicts them.

The 2009 elections took place in a different atmosphere than that of the 2005 elections, to a great extent:

1- The challenge was not sectarian like the previous time, nor was it the main drive for participants in the current elections for choosing the candidates. In a poll conducted by the National Media

Center related to the Cabinet, which included 3000 people who fulfilled the conditions required for participating in the governorate elections and was published in October 2008, it was shown that 20,3% of the people who participated in the poll support using religious symbols in the elections while 67,8% where against it, as shown in the following chart:
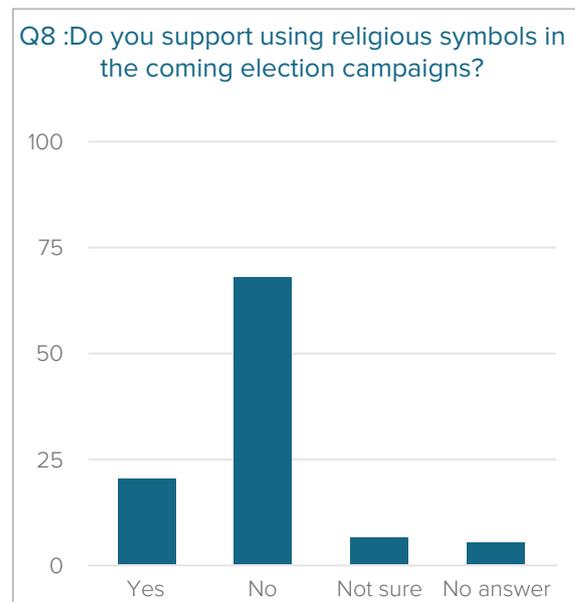
2- Despite three fatwas by Ayatollah As-Sistany, the Shia's participation was much less than that of the Sunni. (An-Najaf 50% while Tikrit 65%), and neither were the names of the lists nor the candidates' mottos - save for a few- religious or sectarian, they were rather dominated by a secular political character, while the chances of political entities like (the higher council) fell behind, making way for less sectarian religious powers.

3- In an environment of dissolving sectarian blocs, the withdrawal of the Sadrist Movement and the Virtue Party from the Shia Coalition, the dissention of

Al-Ja'afari with the Reform Bloc, and Al-Maliki's introduction of a list independent from the Higher Council, while on the Sunni front the Al-Sahwa group emerged as an opponent to the Accord List in the Sunni governorates.

4- The public in the first parliamentary elections was ignorant about the actual reality of the new leaders who hadn't been involved in the practice of politics yet, hence they would get to know the leaders through the way the media would depict them, not what they were actually like.

After two elections and four years of quotas, the perception of leaders became clearer when in power. The first Prime Minister Eyad Allawi who looked like the "powerful man" through the image he formed of himself, turned out as not so powerful in dealing with the corruption in his government. Before he assumed office as PM, Al-Ja'afari enjoyed a good reputation among Shias and Sunnis due to the fact that he had the gift of the gap; he sounded cultured as he used unfamiliar political vocabulary compared to the other leaders of the religious parties.

The word "transparency" which Al-Ja'afari had used a lot in his speeches was new to a society used to mystery and secrecy. As a Prime Minister, Al-Ja'afari started his actual political practice in May 2006 and for a period that didn't last for more than 1 year, his term witnessed the rise of militia groups and sectarian war which started after the explosions of the two shrines, which caused his popularity to plummet until his same former discourse was

contradictory to his political practices. In a nutshell, voters came to learn through practice some of the advantages and flaws of the leaders they got to know as they were in power.

5- The 2009 elections took place in a clearly improved security situation which reflected on direct relations between the leaders of blocs and the voters through festivals and campaign tours, while the media was the only means of communication in the previous elections. This improvement in the security situation had an effect on the elections and their results as it led to the rise of the man whose name was linked to the security improvement.

6- The failure of religious political movements in improving the lives of the impoverished and middle classes as well as providing reasonable services to the people, in an atmosphere of financial and administrative corruption put Iraq in a worse position than Somalia on the list of the most corrupted countries in the world.

7- Open lists gave voters more freedom in choosing candidates based on competency while closed lists were suitable for choosing candidates based on their national or sectarian identity. Open lists also helped voters choose candidates based on competency and electing the candidate who doesn't belong to a religious party and hadn't held a media campaign like others did, was a proof that competency was the basis of voting in the governorate of Al-Maliki and Al-Ja'afari.

8- On the other hand, the current elections

witnessed unprecedented attempts at bribing voters with money (100 dollars for an oath to vote for the list) or material gifts like blankets and food stuffs or even mere promises to give them lands or job opportunities.

With regard to the role of media in covering elections in Iraq, I would like to mention few points:

1- The elections came at a time of increasing control by the ruling parties over the press, radio and TV, while the role of the independent media was decreased. According to initial estimates, the ruling parties in the Arab regions and Kurdistan control 70% of media outlets and have used their power to influence the independent media.

2- The elections have also witnessed an obvious increase in the money spent on advertising through posters or promotional teams, not to mention the wide use of satellite channels and private TV and radio stations. This lavish spending raised questions about the sources of all these funds. The absence of a partisan law, the lack of a law that regulates election campaigns and sets a limit for advertising expenditure, the weakness in the culture of accountability, transparency and revealing funding sources, all of this affected the electoral process and its integrity; therefore media outlets exchanged accusations among themselves which weakens democratic competitiveness.

3- The Iraqi media still lacks the expertise which could qualify it to cover the elections as an integrated process and lacks the knowledge of election laws, voting systems, election monitoring, the laws related to international observers and how to use polls to identify the orientations of the public opinion. It also lacks knowledge of the laws of political discourse and the laws governing the use of the official media for the elections and the laws regarding accepting financial aid for election campaigns, and it lacks specialized staff in that field, therefore many of the practical aspects, like the decreased number of registered voters and campaign funding, weren't addressed by the media.

4- The polarization witnessed by the Parliament, the Government and the two Presidents around the laws of the governorates and the elections was reflected on the media too, as it took a national dimension between an Arab media and a Kurdish media. That polarization was not without racial incitement, that's why the Kurdish Minister of Culture warned the Kurdish press against turning the political dispute into a national grudge. Nonetheless, instant and impulsive coverage was dominant over analysis in dealing with aspects of crucial nature according to some powers, for example, the protest in Kirkuk against dividing the governorate into 4 precincts was countered by another protest against postponing the elections.

5- Media outlets mass-circulated a statement by the religious Marja's stating that they refused being used in campaign advertising, like the statements made by the representatives of the religious Marja As-Sistani and the religious Marja

Al-Madrasi as well as the religious Marja Sheikh Yaqoubi. Religious Marja Al-Fayyad demanded that religious symbols not be used on the elections and that politicians don't interfere in the affairs of the Hawza. This helped reduce the use of religion for campaign advertising purposes.

7- The State-funded media focused on what was done by the Iraqi government and its security forces to protect the registration centers. On the other hand, the media's interest diminished in the difficulties that face the voters on their way to the registration centers, like the long distance they have to go to reach the centers, the poor awareness and education about the registration process, in addition to other obstacles like not allowing those who immigrated from the same governorate to register until after they have moved their provision cards to their current area of residence, a process which takes the voter a month at least to go through the routine paper work, as well as asking those who immigrated from other governorates to bring a letter from the immigration department, which is a difficult process for voters in general and for immigrants in particular.

The majority of election agendas and advertising campaigns lacked the element of suspense and renovation as they mostly depended on speech (interviews, conferences, paid advertisements), and they lacked the visual element.

Compared to the 2005 and 2009 elections, the campaign witnessed a huge rise in negative propaganda which relies on incitement against others. The

campaign of Mr. Eyad Jamaluddin for example was based on emphasizing the critical choice between "Either this or that", "either corruption or sectarian quotas", or "a new life with the free people of Iraq". In these extreme choices all the disadvantages are attributed to the other party and all the advantages are attributed to the party making that announcement. The promotional advertisement for the Unified Iraq Alliance List 330 was shown at 5:04 pm on the 26th of February 2010 as a selective historical account of the history of the political process itself:

"In 2003, the law was absent. In 2004, the sectarian quota was implemented. In 2005, we saw rampant insecurity. In 2006, human life became a commodity. In 2007, neighboring countries stepped in. in 2008, corruption reigned supreme. In 2009, poor services. In 2010, the alienation of the national line." As-Sharqiyya also used fixed advertisements in the imperative form such as: Don't vote, Block the way in the face of sectarianism and sectarian quota".

The campaign wasn't limited to the direct election announcement of the candidate or the list, as the satellite channels involved the citizens in hating the other side. With the cameras going down to the streets in a state of heightened tension, and using the citizen's opinions against the other side, the Shia satellite channels such as Al-Iraqiyya state TV would normally go to the markets of Karrada And Al-Jadriya, while As-Shariqiyya would roam Adhamiyah to ask the citizens about their opinions against the other side.

Most of the time the channels would keep

the most offensive statements made by the citizens without editing them. But the polarization between the biggest blocs (The State of the Law List and the Al-Iraqiyya List) had the lion's share of the advertising either during programs or in individual statements and interviews. If we took Al-Iraqiyya channel as an example, which is supposed to be a state TV that gives the lists equal opportunities, we would find that the share dedicated for the lists in "Vote for Iraq"* and "Vote"* programs are much bigger than the share dedicated to the small lists, as shown by the three dimensional diagram that was included in CMC'S report

Sectarian polarization, security challenges and the people's need for someone to improve the security situation had a clear impact on the results of the elections, as all the small trans-sectarian lists who are unlikely to reach the highest ranks of power lost the elections, while those who won were the ones who had been

in power before and achieved tangible security results, as Eyad Allawi won the largest percentage of the Sunni votes, given that he eliminated the Shia militia groups in Najaf and the Sunni groups in Falluja. Al-Maliki won too for the same reason.

The percentage of election programs and political programs

2%

98%

● Election programs ● Political programs
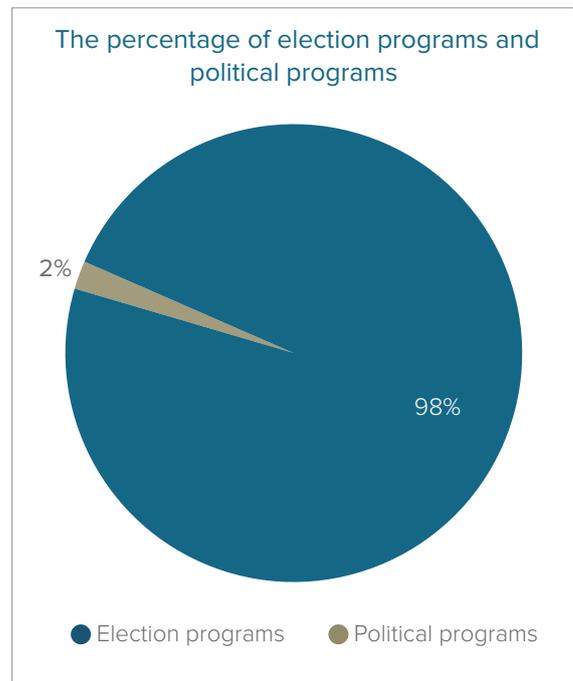
The coverage of elections in Tunisia after the Revolution
by Achref Maktouf

Président of the International Center of Democracy and Election Monitoring in Tunis and former observer of the first elections held in the country after the Jasmine Revolution.

Tunisia is a republic with a presidential system. Munsif Al-Marzouqi has assumed office as President of the Tunisian Republic after the Revolution in 2011, which led to the ousting of Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali, in power since 1987. Before, Al Habib Bourguiba held the Presidency of the country after the declaration of the Republic in 1957. During his rule, Bourguiba was assisted by ministers, who were in chronological order: Al-Bahi Al-Adham, Al-Hadi Nuwaira, Muhammad Mazali, Rashid Safar and Zien Al-Abidien Ben Ali. The Constitutional Democratic Rally was the successor of the Constitutional Liberal Party which was the ruling party in Tunisia since the independence and the only authorized party between 1962 and 1983. Currently, there are more than 120 parties in the country.

The President of the Republic is elected to serve a five-year term and he appoints the Prime Minister, who contributes to the implementation of state policies. Local governors of the governorates and their local representatives are also appointed by the central government, while municipal councils are chosen by popular vote.

Tunisia is a country with a presidential system and two legislative bodies: the Chamber of Deputies and the House of Advisors. The Chamber of Deputies has 214 seats and it is gaining importance as a platform for discussions and arguments about national policies, but it seldom happens that a budget or a legislation proposed by the executive authority is passed.

Opposition parties entered the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies for the first time in 1994 and they occupy 9% of the total seats. The first multi-party presidential election took place in October 1999, when Ben Ali won with an overwhelming majority of 98%. In the 2004 elections, Zine Al-Abedine Ben Ali won with 94% of the votes in an obviously rigged election amidst increasing public outrage due to the expensive living conditions and high unemployment rate among university graduates.

After the Jasmine Revolution

With the momentum gained by the public and the approval of the Constituent Assembly election, the High Commission for achieving the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transformation headed by Yadh Ben Achour, prepared an election law to determine the requirements of voting[2]. The proposed text specified the method of holding an election on

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[2] These consisted of representatives from political movements, civil society and actors that took part in the Revolution

basis of the proportional representation in 33 constituencies: each governorate is considered one constituency except Tunis, Sfax and Nabeul, which are divided into two constituencies each, and each constituency is then divided into 6 districts. It also states that Tunisians have the right to run for elections and to vote outside the country. Each constituency receives a share of 4 to 10 seats depending on its population, 1 for every 60,000 citizens, with a bonus seat for inland governorates.

The Tunisian Constituent Assembly consists of 217 members elected by Tunisians who registered for the election after the famous public service announcement "It's time to register", or those who were automatically registered because they didn't register themselves, this election took place on the 23rd of October 2011, and this council will have the biggest share of seats by laying a new constitution for the Tunisian Republic. The Renaissance Party won 89 seats, followed by The Congress for the Republic Party with 29 seats, while the lists of the Popular Petition came third with 26 seats, which came as a surprise to observers.

The Independent High Electoral Commission was the responsible body for organizing the election, held on the 23rd of October 2011.

Press coverage for the October 2011 election

Audiovisual media: 80% of TV coverage was followed the activities of the parties and lists nominated for the Constituent Assembly, the Independent High Electoral Commission and the High Commission for achieving the goals of the revolution got 10% of the aforementioned coverage.

In fact, most of the coverage for both commissions was originally following the activities of the Independent High Electoral Commission in political education and reporting the details of the electoral process.

The two public channels Al-Wataniyya 1 and Al-Wataniyya 2 dedicated the biggest part of their coverage to the program about the election campaign. This consisted of TV airtime for all the lists competing in the election, recorded and broadcasted for free in cooperation with the Independent High Electoral Commission. This content was broadcasted during prime time and was produced according to rules different than those followed in ordinary TV shows productions, as it followed special regulations set by the Independent High Electoral Commission.

The context of the coverage of this program by public channels was neutral as it was imposed on them according to the obligations entailed by the fact they were state-funded channels. This was rejected by private TV channels as they avoided broadcasting these segments, ignoring the terms set forth by the Independent High Electoral Commission.

On the other hand, due to the size of that program the public channels couldn't play their role in explaining, analysing and raising issues that matter to the voters through a content that goes beyond

reporting information, such as through their talk shows.

As for private channels, they managed to follow the activities of political activists through special talk shows. However, **Nasma** and **Hannibal** channels were not generally balanced in allocating broadcast time and speech time to political activists. The former dedicated the biggest part of its coverage to Democratic Modernist Pole while the latter dedicated the biggest part of their coverage to the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties.

Despite their limited coverage for political activists throughout the election campaign, the two foreign news channels **Al-Jazeera** and **France 24** dedicated the biggest part of that coverage to The Renaissance Party.

Mustafa Ben Ja'afar, the General Secretary of the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties had the biggest share of appearances in TV coverage. As for **Nasma channel**, it had the biggest share of TV coverage for female political activists.

Al-Mustaqillah channel, which was included by the qualitative analysis, dedicated two programs as daily advertising for the Popular Petition for Freedom and Justice. This can be justified by the fact that the leader of this party, Mr Hechmi Hemdi, is also the owner of the channel.

Written press: the interest of print media throughout the election campaign was particularly focused on the activities of the parties, lists and coalitions running

for the Tunisian Constituent Assembly election with a percentage up to 70% of its coverage for political activists.

In the second place, they focused on covering the activities of government members, and finally on the Independent High Electoral Commission and the High Commission for achieving the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transformation.

It should be noted that throughout the election campaign, the print media followed the activities of the Independent High Electoral Commission through public announcements as well as field coverage for the commission's activities.

The daily press remained mainly informative, as newspapers focused largely on reports and news articles more than video reports, investigations and opinion articles. In terms of size, **Ash-Shurouq** newspaper dedicated the biggest part of its space to follow the activities of the political activists through a special addendum of 24 pages.

The Renaissance Party got the biggest part of the total coverage space dedicated for the activities of the parties and lists running for the elections, with 421033 square centimetres, which amounts to 11% of the total space. This was followed by the Progressive Democratic Party with 7% and then the Democratic Forum with 4.5%.

In the Radio: like public TV stations, Public radio stations dedicated the biggest part of its political radio coverage to the election campaign program. In addition to the daily program for the election

campaign, the public radio stations broadcasted a unified news broadcast, and hence their coverage, be it central or regional, was generally balanced.

As for private radio stations, they followed the activities of political activists mainly through talk shows. **Shams FM** took the lead in terms of coverage time with more than 29 broadcast hours, followed by **Express FM** with over 27 broadcast hours.

Although the context of their coverage was generally neutral, **Express FM** and **Mosaic FM**, which are private stations, were not fair to a certain extent in allocating broadcast time and speech time to political activists.

As for **Shams FM**, it was the most balanced among the private radio stations with regards to broadcast time and speech time allocation to political activists.

Out of all radio stations, both public and private ones, **Express FM** had the biggest amount of coverage for female political activists.

Reporting elections in the post-revolution Egypt
by Mai Shams El Din

Journalist at Mada Masr and former producer at Al-Jazeera English, Cairo Bureau and at BBC World.

Introduction

The January 25 revolution came as a major shock wave for Egyptian journalists, with all the challenges it posed in terms of formulating news professionally, and having realized - finally- after years of political, social and cultural stagnation, that the media has a great power to influence large sections of the public opinion. In spite of the big responsibility this was supposed to entail on journalists in terms of seeking to be extra accurate and professional in their coverage of different issues.

However, the experience of Egyptian journalists - especially during election coverage- proved their inability to succeed in a real professional challenge in which journalism plays its effective role as a real tool of knowledge, on which the public can rely to build their voting decisions correctly.

Hence, before going through the details of the challenges faced by Egyptian journalists to provide a professional media coverage of the elections, let us look for the real reasons that created such challenges. Those reasons are largely presented in the period of time prior to the January 25 revolution.

Election coverage, post-revolution period

The experience of Egyptian journalists with regard to the coverage of the elections was very limited. This is explained by the fact that journalists had to focus most of the time on covering the violent events that accompanied the elections and the violations associated with the cases of fraud in favor of the National Democratic Party, which was the ruling party back then.

But let's go back to 2005. That year, the currently deposed President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak decided to make amendments to the Constitution that would give Egyptians the right to elect their President freely and directly through direct secret voting. Other amendments came in 2007 specifying the required conditions to run for presidential elections, but these amendments were superficial, aiming to keep the ability to run for the elections confined to the candidates of the ruling party at that time.

Those elections were not clean enough, and the Election Day for Egyptian journalists turned to something like a scene from a Hollywood action movie. Media professionals were obliged by the

circumstances to focus on covering the violations perpetrated by supporters of the ruling party as well as the attacks on voters and preventing them from casting their votes through thugs hired by the ruling regime.

Egyptian journalists worked in that plagued environment, and their sole experience in covering the elections was formed there. Hence, covering free, clean elections after the January 25 revolution was a big challenge to them.

The election timetable in Egypt after the revolution

- The referendum on constitutional amendments (March 2011)

- Parliamentary election

    - The House of Representatives

        - 3 phases (from November 2011 to January 2012)

    - Shura council

        - 2 phases (from January 2012 to March 2012)

        - Presidential election: 2 phases (May - June 2012)

- The constitutional referendum (November 2012)

The professional challenges during election coverage

One of the most significant challenges that Egyptian Journalists faced during the recent elections was the absence of opinion poll centers and research centers that work on conducting periodic surveys for public opinion trends. Most of these polls and surveys were inaccurate

and did not really reflect the real trends of public opinion. Furthermore, these centers used none-scientific methods in conducting investigative surveys, and it was often that the political inclinations for many of these centers affected the results of their surveys, which rendered them inaccurate.

For instance, most opinion polls prior to the Parliamentary Elections showed the candidates Amr Moussa and Abdul Mun'em Abul Futouh leading the race, only to the surprise the public opinion after announcing the results of the first phase of the election. In fact, these two candidates came at the bottom of the list, while the candidates who scored low results in the polls, Muhammad Mursi and Ahmad Shafiq, were on top.

Media professionals also faced a major crisis, which was the dominant Islamic-secular polarization over the political and media scenes, hence the election coverage focused most of the time on issues related to that polarization. Issues of identity and some minor freedom issues like wearing bikinis or the prohibition on alcoholic drinks, despite being important issues were not relevant to large sections within the Egyptian society. Other topics such as high rates of poverty, unemployment and the lack of basic services such as health care and education that affect large segments of the population, were absent during the election coverage.

Journalists also largely neglected important phases of the electoral process, especially the phases before and after the elections, as the culture of

investigating public opinion was absent in different districts.

Due to the dominance of the central nature on Egyptian media, no effort was made to know the opinions of the voters in remote areas such as Upper Egypt, Sinai and Lower Egypt. Most coverage focused on Cairo and Alexandria, major cities in the country. Journalists disregarded election coverage in areas controlled by tribalism and different political trends in the districts and also the influence of certain political powers on particular areas, as these factors had a direct impact on the results of the election.

Journalists also neglected the post-election phase, in which it is necessary to study the results and try to understand them, perhaps to help both public opinion and politicians in their making up their minds for the next election.

My personal experience

My personal experience in election coverage focused on attempting to find answers to several questions about the dominance of certain political movements over the elections, public opinion trends in different areas and attempting to present objective readings for the election's results which were summed up in the following:

- During covering the constitutional referendum I went to Ain Shams, which is a popular area with dense populations of large groups like Salafists who urged people to vote "Yes" for the constitutional amendments to protect Article 2 of the Constitution,

to protect Islamic Sharia. It also has a large population of Coptic members who urged people to vote "No". The election coverage was important in order to shed light on the different opposite voting trends in one area.

- I also worked on election coverage before the Parliamentary Elections, to investigate the possibility of violent acts in Upper Egypt, which was dominated by supporters of the former ruling party which is also dominated by supporters of the former ruling party.

- During the second phase of the presidential election I went to Sharqiyya District, which is the birth place of both candidates, Shafiq and Mursi. That district posed a special challenge as it witnessed intensive voting for the candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Parliamentary elections. Contrary to that, the first phase of the presidential election witnessed intensive voting for Shafiq. This district raised a major question regarding the dramatic transformation in its voting trends.

- During the coverage of the constitutional referendum in 2012, I went to the city of Banha in Qailoubiya District, where I saw a huge contrast between the elderly who voted "Yes" for the Constitution in order to restore political stability, and the youth who voted "No" against what they considered to be a constitution that would worsen the societal conflict. The contrast between generations reflected a different vision by older generations that want a temporary stability, and younger generations of young people who look forward to the

future, sacrificing the dream of short-lived stability.

- Finally I was also involved in a report to study the results of the elections after the Revolution. This was a comparison study of the results of the elections before the Revolution, as the results reflected a clear change in Egyptian public opinion trends, especially in the stark contrast between Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Before the Revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood had clear control over Lower Egypt, while the supporters of Mubarak's regime dominated Upper Egypt. After the Revolution, the tables were turned, as the Muslim Brotherhood found in Upper Egypt a perfect environment for sectarian-based voting, and a good use of tribal networks. At the same time, the supporters of the former ruling National Party managed to control the networks of farmers and factory workers in Lower Egypt.

Unveiling the formula for election coverage
By Sanam Shantyaei

Broadcast Journalist at France 24.

Broadcast Journalist at France 24,

Covering an election, the centrepiece of any democracy, is a challenge facing journalists today, specifically in the turbulent Middle East.

Given that media is subject to restrictions and censorship in certain countries within the region, journalists can be encouraged to adopt a mainstream formula to ensure unbiased coverage of the electoral process.

The Formula:

1. Profiles of top contenders in the electoral race

Presenting Background information on main condidates	- Who are they? Where are they from? - What was their role in politics ahead of the election process?
Highlighting Candidates Allegiances	- Who backs them in the politicial sphere? - Who is their support base?
What their policies were in the past/what they will bring to the country (Examples in Iran's case:)	- International Policies: Ties with the West, Nuclear program and Sanctions - Domestic Policies: Economy Education and Reform

2. Preparations/Campaigning

This process provides colour for an election story. It is vital to cover the developments in cities/areas that:

i.   depict the different sectors of society: age group, social class, religious beliefs and political standing

ii.   highlight the main themes surrounding the election, economy for example

Visuals of preparations/campaigning getting underway (for Broadcast and Photojournalism) include the following:

-   Pamphlet distribution

-   Street walls being plastered with posters featuring candidates

-   Set-up of polling stations: ballot boxes delivered and installed

-   Increased security presence on the streets

-   Campaign trail:

    i. Speeches given by candidates

    ii. Opportunity to paint a picture of their support base

To ensure unbiased coverage, journalists are encouraged to follow the campaigns of the main candidates, not just focus on one.

3. Mood Piece

Each election signals a mood within the respective country. This can be portrayed through public opinion and expert analysis:

Vox Pops (Vox Populi): Talking to people on the streets	Analyst comments/experts opinion to offer objective perspective:
- What do people want out of the elections? - What are their expectations? - Who will they vote for? Why?	- What issues will impact the vote? - Expectations/ Turn-out and results - Will the elections be fair?

4. Features Ahead of election day

The features can focus on:

i.   the main issues that will directly impact the vote: (Examples in Iran)

- Economy

- Ties with the West

ii. A look at different communities that will head to the ballot boxes

- Students/Youth

- Religious minorities

- Women

- Workers

5. Election day

Some of the below examples are more suited for broadcast and photo journalism:

- Polls Open
- Casting vote:
  i.   General Public
  ii. Candidates, including opposition
  iii. Minorities – religious for examples
- Election Commissions: observers comment on turn-out figures throughout the day
- Comments from all parties
- Votes close
- Vote count

6. Election Results

- Preliminary results
- Final Results

7. Reactions/Aftermath

- Reactions to results:

    General public

    Analysts

    Country's officials

    International community

- Aftermath:

  I. Smooth transition:

     Handover

     Swearing-in ceremony

     Cabinet nominations/selections

  II. Opposition and Unrest:

Bringing news of voting irregularities, civil anger, demonstrations, and ensuing crackdown on the opposition can be the main challenge that a journalist faces in countries that are subject to stringent media control.

To silence the independent media outlets, authorities have been known to restrict the access of journalists to the events on the ground.

Moreover at times, internet access -- normally subject to close surveillance in the region -- has been blocked, including sites belonging to government officials.

As a result of these restrictions, journalism is experiencing a fundamental shift.

Aided by social networking sites, journalists are able to access information, news, and even amateur photographs and video to get results.

Another challenge arises here, as journalists are required to fact-check and validate whatever information comes their way, and treat social media as a mere tool, among others.

Photogallery of the Exchange of Experience session
Amman, 12-13 November 2013