



Konrad
-Adenauer-
Stiftung



Seminar Report

Media & Election reporting in South Africa

2004

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Introduction

In 2003 and 2004, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Sub-Sahara Media Programme embarked on a comprehensive series of journalistic skills development workshops on election reporting throughout Southern Africa with the Media Institute of Southern Africa, ACCORD and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

During the course of 2004, five countries in the southern African region hosted national elections.

This important act for any democracy demands distinctive preparation and extraordinary skills from the media covering the event. The workshop series focused on the uniqueness of elections reporting and also sensitized journalists to issues such as ethics, gender equality and peculiar technical or obstacles facing reporters of print and radio especially at this time.

The workshop series started in 2003 with editors of various media from the respective countries working together in a three day workshop. They compiled and developed a code of conduct for election reporting.

In a second step journalists and reporters from those media houses attended a four day workshop to get familiar with the code, the general necessities of reporting elections and got a close insight into the electoral rules, institutions, political parties and their programs in the respective countries.

In a third step a series of national follow up workshops took place a few weeks ahead of the elections in the different countries.

In a fourth step, the reporting of workshop participants was monitored by an independent media monitoring organisation. The results of the monitoring was released and discussed with the reporters as well as with the editors at a joint conference to examine the real challenges and obstacles that Southern African journalists experience when reporting elections.

The aim of the workshops and this report is to provide deeper insight into the needs of journalists and help all to improve the quality of their reportage

Ethics In Election Reporting

Greg Dardagan

“Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidarity to pure wind.” (George Orwell in “Politics and the English Language” 1946)

Ethics and the Elections:

Political parties are in full swing with electioneering. Battle lines have been drawn, the gloves are off and a “dog-eat-dog” mentality is rife among opposing politicians. So what’s new?

George Orwell’s statement about political language being “pure wind” now takes on a greater significance with the “wind” turning to “gale force” intensity. Politicians are making promises about what they and their parties will or won’t do, about the issues they will solve i.e. poverty, joblessness, HIV/Aids, crime and so on; and just how they are going to be model representatives for the next five years.

And they are desperate for public platforms and craving exposure in the media. All of a sudden, usually sullen and uncooperative politicians become very friendly and co-operative, especially to journalists. Faces we haven’t seen for ages are now all of a sudden staring out at us from posters, street billboards and so on. For journalists it’s a time when their ethical antennae must be at full stretch, assessing the beams pouring in.

Sometimes the beams are subtle. A lunch, a cocktail party. sometimes, less subtle – a small gift, preferential treatment at a meeting, exclusive interviews. Remember,

there really is no such thing as a “free lunch”. However, there is no point in becoming paranoid about going to lunches and cocktail parties etc – they have become part of the “scene” – but it is wise to be awake to what is behind the scene!

Consider this “real life” example – you are a political reporter and the ANC is holding an important meeting in a far off rural area where access is not easy. The president is among the high-powered speakers and you are tipped off the meeting is going to be worthwhile covering.

The ANC offers you quick and easy access and return to base in a helicopter. All logistical problems solved and deadlines met. What do you do? Are there ethical considerations? Is accepting the ride compromising your objectivity/impartiality? Is the right thing rather to go to the venue in the “beat-up” company transport? By accepting the helicopter ride will there not be pressure on you to write a positive article no matter what transpires?

How do you as a journalist wanting to give the public all sides of the election story, divide your time between all the parties clamouring for publicity?

Does the ANC get the biggest slice of publicity pie just because they are the ruling party or the party, which has the largest following? If a party has a slicker propaganda machine than another, do they necessarily get more coverage? What space do you give the ACDP? What about the fringe parties – do they even deserve a mention? (A grand total of 144 political parties are registered with the Independent Electoral Commission for the elections.

They comprise a collection of new, old, mainstream and odd parties.)

Here are some general guidelines:

1) Journalists must serve only their newspapers, or radio or TV stations. Journalists should owe no loyalty to anyone or anything else – be it a political party or commercial interest. Readers/listeners/viewers must come first. Balanced journalism is difficult enough without battling with a conflict of interests. Contacts are important but journalists must beware of being drawn into the web of being so close/ so on-sides with contacts that one becomes unable to write a critical story about the contact, his/her organisation or political party.

- ❑ Make sure the line between your job as a reporter and being on friendly terms with a contact remains very clear.
- ❑ Never cross that line and ensure your contacts etc are aware that if the time comes when you are faced with a choice of writing a critical/damning story about them or dumping the story, the choice will always be to go with the story.

2) Every story should be a genuine attempt to extract the “truth”, accompanied by a willingness to print the “truth” – however uncomfortable it may be to a journalist’s own beliefs or convictions. Journalists should not accept work that seeks to bolster a point of view in the face of evidence, or undertake reporting which aims to support a preconceived theory.

3) No inducements to publish should be accepted. This does not only mean turning down money and gifts but also the promise of advantage or preferment. Beware of the “freebie” – free meals, free tickets to the theatre, and free accommodation at hotels, free travel etc. The danger is the writer will/may feel obliged to write a favourable or sympathetic story.

4) Do not use your position to threaten or gain advantage. A journalist has power; of that there is no doubt. Many people fear the media and the power a journalist holds.

To abuse that power in your business and private life is unethical.

5) Don’t suppress stories for favours or friendship. It could happen that you are asked, begged, implored not to use a story. Various reasons may be given as to why the story should not be printed and often financial or material rewards will be offered in return. It is clearly wrong to accept such an offer, for the same reason, as it is to print a story for favours. When friends, colleagues or associates are involved the same principle applies – perhaps even more strictly.

6) Don’t trick people into giving information. In most cases be upfront about your identity as a reporter. Obviously if you are working on an undercover assignment it is different. When people do not know you are a reporter they often talk far more freely than when they know you are a journalist.

7) Do not invent or embellish information. Inventing information, such as making up your own quotes, is wrong and dangerous. So too is embellishing the facts or conveniently omitting facts which would lessen the impact of your story.

8) Always correct your mistakes. As in any profession, mistakes are made. When this happens they must be corrected swiftly and as fully as possible. It is the honest and ethical thing to do – your customers will be better informed and they will admire your transparency.

9) Beware of a “correction to a correction” – that undermines the credibility of media arm and the reporter.

10) You should not benefit personally from articles you write. You are compromised if you accept favours from people you write about. You are also compromised if you benefit personally from the articles you write.

11) It is highly dangerous practice to use information you have acquired in order to make commercial gain before the story is

published – almost like insider trading on the stock exchange.

12) Identify sources whenever feasible. Always question a source's motivation before promising anonymity. During elections all stories/reports should have author identification.

13) Make every effort to give subjects of news stories the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing. Remember there are always at least two sides to every story.

14) Support the open exchange of views, even those you find repugnant.

15) Uphold the principle of freedom of expression, and strive to eliminate distortion, news suppression and censorship.

16) Always remember our watchdog role in society, and expose wrongdoing and any abuse of power or positions of power whether in the public or private sector. Be a voice for the voiceless.

17) Do not pander to personal or sectional interests but rather be solely concerned with the public interest.

18) Do not pay for information except where it is in the public interest to get such information and there are no other available means.

19) In areas where violence often accompanies the elections, such as KwaZulu-Natal, the job of a reporter becomes very difficult. Many politicians hold enormous power and influence within their constituencies and further afield. A reporter, who perhaps lives in a constituency where there is a power struggle and where violence is commonplace, could come under enormous pressure from politicians and political parties. Such a reporter must try at all costs to print the truth while at the same time informing the editor and the police, if necessary, of the pressures, dangers and threats faced not only by them but also their families. Gool/Staggie

example. However, no story is worth someone's life and there comes a time where a reporter should be taken off a story, change his/her beat etc.

When checking the content of a story:

- ☐ Be satisfied the story is accurate
- ☐ Be satisfied it is angled correctly
- ☐ Be satisfied it is fair to all parties
- ☐ Be sure every effort has been made to contact all parties involved.
- ☐ Be sure the subject has received fair treatment.
- ☐ Check whether the subject's comments/denial are high up in the report or simply slotted in at the end.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Seek the truth and report it as fully as possible:

- ☐ Inform yourself continuously so you in turn can inform, engage and educate the public in a clear and compelling way on significant issues.
- ☐ Be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting accurate information
- ☐ Give voice to the voiceless
- ☐ Hold the powerful accountable

2. Act Independently

- ☐ Guard vigorously the essential stewardship (protector of society) role a free press plays in an open society.
- ☐ Seek out and publish competing ideas without being unduly influenced by those who would use their power or position counter to the public interest.
- ☐ Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise your integrity or damage your credibility.
- ☐ Recognise that good ethical decisions require individual responsibility supported by joint efforts

3. Minimise Harm

- ☐ Be compassionate for those affected by your actions.
- ☐ Treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect, not merely as a means to your journalistic ends

- ❑ Recognise that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, but balance those negatives by choosing alternatives that maximize your goal of striving for the truth.

What it all boils down to is integrity and reputation – the integrity and reputation of journalists and in turn, the integrity and reputation of the media arm they work for. A loss of integrity and reputation means a loss of faith and trust in the journalist and eventually a loss of faith and trust in their particular newspaper, magazine, radio or TV station.

Once that loss of faith has happened it is difficult to have faith in the work of the journalist or the media arm which employs them.

Journalists must be sure within themselves that their reports are truthful, accurate and fair, as well as balanced and presented in context.

In the end, journalists must be their own most severe critics.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Was the SABC ethically wrong to televise the launch of the ANC election manifesto in KwaZulu-Natal while declining to give other political parties the same exposure?

The following sources were used in compiling this presentation

1. Sunday Times newspaper in Johannesburg.
2. The Universal Journalist by David Randall
3. Independent Newspapers (Pty) Ltd, South Africa
4. Poynter Institute for Media Studies, USA

The Role of Media in Elections

Mary Papayya

The role of the media/Journalist is no different in an election as it is during any other time or event.

There are three critical players in an election:

- ❑ Media
- ❑ Politicians
- ❑ Civil society

What is the key role of the media/journalist in this Troika:

- ❑ Media sets the election agenda
- ❑ Media influences public and political opinion
- ❑ Media helps the public make informed choices

In broad terms the media is the main source of news and information during the election because we inform and educate the voters and influence public opinion. As journalists we also set the election agenda and it is not uncommon certainly in South Africa for political parties to strategise their campaigns and manifestos with the media in mind.

The media is an important building block of democracy because of its key roles in disseminating information and acting as a critical watchdog of public and private institutions.

However, it is important for the journalist to understand that the process, fabric and dynamics of an election are very different if not alien to the daily run of things in the new world. There are far greater challenges and obstacles that face the media during the elections than at any other given moment.

Understanding the challenges and obstacles faced during the elections allows for us to write and tell better stories and to remain professional and ethical despite the difficulties we are faced with.

Professor Tawana Kupe: Head of Media Studies at Wits University says:

“There are at least four key principal roles of the media in elections – information, analysis, debate and discussion and being a watchdog. The following are some tips that he has provided for journalists to play these roles successfully.”

The Watchdog Role!

- ❑ The media must investigate any allegations of electoral malpractice and expose violations to protect the integrity of the process.
- ❑ The media must also keenly observe actual voting as well as the counting and announcement of results to prevent fraud.
- ❑ It is in the context of democratizing countries the watchdog role is most critical because of the higher probability of electoral fraud & the phenomena of “stolen elections”.

How is the media an aid and guide for people to make choices?

- ❑ By playing the roles of information, analysis & open forum for debate & discussion the media acts as an institutional aid and guide to the citizens/community who have to make their choices.

- ❑ We produce information that allows citizens to make informed choices.
- ❑ If these roles are played well citizens stand a greater chance of making choice on knowledge and not loyalty.

What is the Media's Information Role?

- ❑ The media informs citizens about the candidates and parties contesting the election.
- ❑ Media reports on the manifestos or programmes of the parties contesting the election.
- ❑ The extent of the participations at provincial and national level is also portrayed.

What does analysis entail?

- ❑ The media critically analyses the candidates and parties at all times maintaining fairness and balance
- ❑ In this regard comparisons and contrasts of candidates and parties and their "promises" are made.
- ❑ This also entails a close scrutiny of delivery records and the management of the nation's affairs.
- ❑ In relation to opposition parties the degree of ability to hold the ruling party to account & to be able to form an alternative government are crucial elements to be considered.

How does Media embark on analysis reporting?

- ❑ In playing the analytical role the media must understand the pressing issues of its audiences and the public at large.
- ❑ It is therefore important to note the pressing challenges from the public and focus on these needs when putting the politicians under the spotlight.
- ❑ It is therefore important for the media to implement methods of research, in-depth investigation and analytical reporting, as part of its election coverage.
- ❑ To remain reliable and credible journalists must also use a range of experts, analysts, research reports and results.
- ❑ It is therefore crucial for journalists to be equipped with the tools, resources

and training to embark on such tasks successfully.

Are discussions and debates important?

- ❑ Media serves a democracy best by delivering open debate & discussion that exposes individuals & groups to different or alternative and opposing ideas, viewpoints, opinions and beliefs.
- ❑ Decisions and choices made with the benefit of open debate and discussion have a higher probability of being rational and informed.
- ❑ Media as a public communication channel have a potential if editorially free to be an open forum for debate and discussion.
- ❑ Elections are about choices for the public and therefore the media as an open forum for discussion and debate should allow citizens, candidates & parties to openly discuss and debate issues.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES FACING THE MEDIA DURING ELECTIONS!

Successful coverage of the Elections depends on:

- ❑ Journalists knowledge of the Election Process and its outcomes
- ❑ Meeting and understanding the audience/public needs
- ❑ Positive handling of internal and external factors
- ❑ Fair and balanced coverage
- ❑ Readiness of the media/journalist

Internal factors:

- ❑ Project Planning
- ❑ Content vs advertising
- ❑ Equitable coverage
- ❑ Depth of coverage vs Audience needs
- ❑ Resources and the lack thereof
- ❑ Financial challenges
- ❑ Training and Development
- ❑ The medium – Broadcast vs Print

External Factors:

- ❑ Prevailing political climate

- ❑ Regional/National Landscape – rural vs urban
- ❑ Social and Economic dynamics
- ❑ The players in the Election – Politicians, IEC, etc.
- ❑ Party agenda vs the media agenda
- ❑ Legislation/Regulation
- ❑ The competition

Obstacles:

Internal obstacles:

Poor knowledge and planning of the elections coverage
 Lack of proper resources
 Juniorization/lack of experienced journalists in media
 Conflict of interests: journalists vs media owners, media vs public and media vs politicians

External obstacles:

Difficult politicians
 Covering Elections in hot spots/highly contested terrains
 Inaccessible terrains
 Lack of resources within the organization
 Conflict of Troika interests

REPORTING THE ELECTIONS IN CONFLICT/HOTLY CONTESTED REGIONS

We often hear or read of journalists being caught in the middle of political tensions between rival parties during the elections. Some escape death and severe injuries while others are known to have been so traumatised by the experience that they have given up their careers altogether.

In the run up to the 1994 Elections journalists in South Africa's province of KwaZulu Natal came under enormous pressure from politicians in that region. Death threats, injury and harassment were just some of problems journalists had to endure. There were also instances where politicians stormed the newsrooms unannounced and verbally attacked a journalist for writing a story that portrayed their party or themselves in a "negative" light.

Furthermore in the run up to the 1994 election thousands of people died in the province in what was then referred to a "bloody war" between the ANC and IFP. Political commentators said it was especially during electoral campaigns that tensions between the two parties reached boiling point. It was also at this time when the politicians viewed the media as an important vehicle to leverage votes.

Former Editor Judy Sandison comments:

"During our first democratic elections and the local government elections held in 1996, the ability of news staff to carry out their duties in this province was limited by several key factors. These included at least 90 no-go areas; reporters' names being mentioned in negative ways at rallies making them vulnerable to attack; threatening phone calls from a variety of sources; attempted bribery of journalists; etc."

In this region and other regions of SA where journalists came under fire news leaders and journalists were under pressure to report the elections in a free and balanced manner. Special Election Codes of Conduct or Political Reporting Guidelines were enforced in the affected newsrooms to make sure that the media was in no way responsible for the many accusations levelled against its reporters.

Such guidelines highlighted the need for journalists to:

- ❑ Write and tell the truth
- ❑ Report in a balanced and fair manner
- ❑ To remain impartial players during the elections
- ❑ Question without fear what was being said
- ❑ Practice ethical reporting
- ❑ Correct mistakes as soon as possible

Here is an Example of a Code adopted by the International Federation of Journalists:

IFJ Principles on the Conduct of Journalists:

"This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events.

- 1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.*
- 2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism.*
- 3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.*
- 4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.*
- 5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.*
- 6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.*
- 7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.*
- 8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following:*
 - plagiarism;*
 - malicious misrepresentation;*
 - calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations;*
 - the acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.*
- 9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall*

recognise in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.

We must not be naive to think that the efforts to ensure that our reporting is fair and balanced will be enough to control the tempers of certain politicians. It is not uncommon for politicians in highly contested areas to ignore the rights of the media and continue the attack on journalists.

In KZN as a senior journalist and later Editor I noted that whether or not journalists did their jobs well, there would always be objection by the political players. It goes with the territory of Elections. Very few complainants were prepared to listen. Most were furious and did not want the publication/station anywhere near their campaigns or rallies.

I also noted that the concerns expressed by politicians during Elections, especially 1994, 1996 and 1999 always dwelt on the following:

- ❑ Politicians in hotly contest areas always objected to stories that “portray” them in a negative light.
- ❑ They also objected when their rivals were given publicity.
- ❑ They also felt personally “attacked” when journalists probe their actions.
- ❑ They felt “betrayed” when journalists who were once their “comrades” prior to 1994 begin reporting about their organization in a critical manner.
- ❑ Certain high profile leaders would also pick up the phone and verbally insult Editors and journalists.
- ❑ Smaller political parties constantly complained that they were being overlooked by the bigger players during the Elections
- ❑ Politicians often objected to the way a story was handled, the type of language used and/the treatment of the piece.

In 1994 and 1996 relations between the media and politicians were at a “knife edge”, Editors like Sandison and I sought

outside help to end the conflict. In KZN the media worked with the then Church Leaders group to enforce a Peace Pledge to stop the intimidation of journalists. This meant all politicians signed a special Pledge to respect the role of the media.

Meetings were also held with the leaders of political parties to raise the concern about how some of their leaders behaved. All sectors interested in the safety of journalists including the editors forums (SANEF), journalist unions and the IEC were contacted to raise awareness of the problem and make certain that it was taken seriously at national level.

In addition, editors and journalists also lobbied for special protection in the Electoral Code and accordingly Chapter 8 of the Code deals with the Rights of the Media during Elections.

In the run up to the April 2004 Elections political parties in several SA provinces have signed the Code at a public ceremonies.

While it is seen as a symbolic gesture, the Independent Electoral Commission is determined to make sure that those who break the Code are held responsible. The media in recent weeks have also widely reported on the Code and what happens to those who break it. This kind of reporting puts pressure of politicians to respect the role of the media during Elections.

It also means that politicians who prevent journalists from doing their work can now be prosecuted. A breach in the Code constitutes a criminal offence.

EXTRACTS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORAL CODE

Taken from the Handbook on Legislation and Regulations for South Africa's Local Government Elections. Published by the EISA and IEC in 2000. Copies can be obtained from the two organizations.

Electoral Code of conduct

Purpose of the code

The purpose of this Code is to promote the conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections, including –

- a. Tolerance of democratic, political activity; and*
- b. Free political campaigning and open public debate.*

Promotion of the Code

Every party and party candidate –

- a. Promote the purpose of the Code when conducting Elections;*
- b. Publicize the Code widely in any election campaigns; and*
- c. Promote and support the efforts in terms of this act to educate voters.*

Aspects of Importance to the Media:

Role of women

Every party and every candidate must –

- a) Respect the right of women to communicate freely with parties and candidates;*
- b) Facilitate the full and equal participation of women in all political activities;*
- c) Ensure the free access of women to all public political meetings, marches, demonstrations, rallies and other political events;*
- d) Take reasonable steps to ensure women are free to engage in any political activities.*

Role of media

Every party and every candidate –

- a) Must respect the role of the media before, during and after an election conducted in terms of this Act;*
- b) May not prevent access by members of the media to public political meetings, marches, demonstrations, rallies and must take all reasonable steps to ensure that journalists are not subject to harassment, intimidation, hazard, threat or physical assault by any of their representatives or supporters.*

Actions of infringement:

Those who violate the Electoral Code could face various criminal charges. Depending on the severity of the crime, various punitive measures can be enforced. The law calls for the

nullification of votes in the voting district where the incidents occur. Political parties guilty of breaking the law can be fined up R200 000 (two-hundred-thousand-rand). Results at affected voting stations can be nullified and the party responsible may be disqualified from a voting station. There is also the possibility of a prison sentence for certain infringements.

For further information see the Handbook on Legislation and Regulations. Published by the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa and the Independent Electoral Commission.

[URL:http://www.eisa.org.za](http://www.eisa.org.za)

[URL:http://www.elections.org.za](http://www.elections.org.za)

Media can play an important role in lessening the conflict during Elections through positive interventions. We do not solve the problems but act as conduit to communicate solutions through other people. These are some examples of how the media can assist:

- ❑ Debates and analysis on critical issues help give a better perspective of problems and concerns.
- ❑ Running in-depth features on the conflict and its negative impact can also help communities look for alternative solutions to problems.
- ❑ By reporting issues in a responsible manner and putting the issues in its right context gives clarity to the issues.
- ❑ Tapping into alternative decision makers such as independent analysts and experts often offer the public an independent view on things.
- ❑ Reflecting on the source of conflicts and getting rival groups to talk to each at a public platform with and solutions for problem areas help develop a better understanding of the situation.
- ❑ This can be difficult and requires a great amount and persuasion.

In 1999 when I was Editor at a Radio Station in KZN we together with the local newspaper hosted a debate with political parties contesting the second

democratic Elections. We felt it important to get rival groups to debate each other in a public arena. The biggest challenge was getting rival parties to participate on the same stage as their opponents. After some tough negotiation and persuasion it happened. It was a historic debate for many reasons.

For more information see “Peace Journalism: How to Do it” by Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch
www.transcend.org/pjmanuel.htm

DEALING WITH OBSTACLES DURING ELECTIONS!

How do I achieve balance in my stories?

By making sure that parties or a party with a vested interest in a story is given a say. The issue is not about equal coverage but rather “equitable” coverage – a fair distribution.

When covering rallies and campaigns, the figure of the crowd can differ from one journalist to the next?

It is important for us to quote reliable sources when it comes to the numbers. For instance if information came from the police, the organizers or observers we must say so.

What do we do if we are attacked or harassed by a politician?

We must report the incident to the police and make sure there are witnesses. Such incidents are often denied by those responsible.

The case is investigated like any other criminal case.

Our organization must cover the story and so must every other news organization. The editor must report it to the party and send a written notification to them. The IEC and other observer bodies must also be notified so that the correct action can be taken against the person responsible.

What if a politician phones me at the office to complain about a story?

All complaints should ideally be channeled to the Editor or News Editor. If there is a mistake in the story it should be rectified immediately.

If there is no mistake and the person refuses to behave in a rational manner and threatens you and the Editor, then a complaint should be placed with the party leadership and the IEC.

In some instances once the storm has settled, individuals do come back to apologise to the journalist.

What do I do if my organization does not support my safety?

It is an accepted practice that journalists are free to reject assignments when there are in personal danger.

In some instances there maybe the need to educate news bosses about the danger out in the field so that they are aware of the situation before they make the deployment.

In instances where you are sent out on an assignment that involves conflict make sure you go with other journalists and never alone.

Reporting on the Elections can sometimes be the much of the same thing, how do I make it interesting?

The trend in newsrooms is to make the Elections an interesting and human-interest event.

Elections in a broad sense are about people so touching on people's lives, their expectations, their pain in the case of conflict and the unusual and real life experiences can make a difference.

It is important for journalists to work with a broad range of community based organizations as well as the IEC and other groups to ensure that we keep in touch with what ordinary people are saying and thinking.

In areas where terrains are inaccessible working with community-based

organizations helps us tap into important information about ordinary people.

Teaming up with fellow journalists also allow for better debate and discussion on issues at community level and makes for a stronger coverage on critical stories.

Do I need to know about the Elections to cover it?

It is important for journalists involved in covering the Elections to know something about the Elections.

In some instances a lack of knowledge has resulted in journalists writing inaccurate stories about aspects related to the elections.

A broad understanding of how the Elections works, the logistics of voting and counting, the role of the politicians and the dynamics of the region we are covering often make election reporting a lot easier than if we went into it without such knowledge.

Talking to experienced journalists in the newsroom and attending workshops or even reading up on the process itself often helps a great deal.

Do women play a role in the Elections?

Is Important for us to report on women in the Elections?

The issue of gender is often lost due to deadlines pressures or plain ignorance.

Women are candidates in the elections, they could also be experts or monitors or professional and parents.

We need to be mindful of these roles when we report as women can bring a different perspective to our stories.

Gender and women are high on the agendas of most political parties especially in the run up to the Elections.

As the media we must scrutinize the candidate lists of the various parties before and after the election to see how many women do make it to the top structures of the parties.

Covering The Election: Role Of The Media

Cyril Madlala

What is the role of the media in a constitutional democracy that has the media as an integral part?

The South African Constitution enshrines certain rights to the media, but what are the responsibilities of the community media towards strengthening and protecting those rights?

Is it enough for the media to reflect merely the “reality” of the five W’s of the election story?

What is the role of community media in advocacy journalism, if any, and how would this affect coverage of the election?

Is there a responsibility to tackle apathy for instance, possibly to raise political awareness and public interest in the election to the same level as there is on Jabu Pule’s antics, or Simphiwe Mtshali’s alleged escapades?

What is the community media’s role in making this election “sexy”, so that it generates as much passion and discussion as a Chiefs/Pirates game?

Why is it important to understand these debates?

Discuss the central role of the media in a psychological process “selective perception”, whereby we tend to disregard

ideas that are at variance with established beliefs and values. Beliefs and values developed from “opinion-makers”, and other dominant mainstream media. How does this affect the community media’s own interpretation of the unfolding political process during an election?

How do we work around “conventional wisdoms” imposed by the mainstream media?

Should the community media not be shaping its own “agenda” that is much more reflective of the “true” situation on the ground and as it affects communities?

What is the community media’s role in covering an election that is dominated by spin-doctors, and is it possible to survive the information onslaught while remaining credible?

Who are we loyal to?

What about pressures from sponsors and advertisers, and being politically-correct?

Content & Contexts In Election Reporting From A Public Opinion Surveys' Perspective

Nakatiwa G. Mulitkita

INTRODUCTION

Public Opinion Surveys are an aspect of elections reporting that are conducted by opinion pollsters and research institutions prior to and in between elections. It is important for journalists, media practitioners and those interested in polls to reach a more informed judgment about the value of polls and the most appropriate ways of conducting them and reporting them. For Journalists and those in the business of making news the latter point is very important

In this paper the author proposes to walk the workshop through the subject of how the News Media can get the most out of opinion surveys so as to better inform the public and finding story hooks.

OPINION SURVEYS

Public Opinion surveys are regularly conducted and published in many countries. They measure not only political party support but also public opinion on a wide range of social and political issues, health, economy, education, gender issues and concerns, voting preference etc. The newspapers and broadcast media publish results of such surveys regularly. This results in much discussion amongst journalist themselves, the public and various interest groups, one such group being politicians, some of whom wish to limit or ban them completely.

OPINION SURVEYS IN A DEMOCRACY

Opinion surveys are said to be feature of modern democracies. Opinion Surveys can help journalists trace election campaigns, popularity of rulers. Academics such as Political scientists learn a lot about electoral choices of different groups in society and sociologist are able to follow shifts in opinions on major social problems and keep track of changes in social values. On the other hand those in power and their opponents can gauge their support over different elections and impact of important national events. In addition citizens can also have their voice heard and compare their own views with views of others on the same national issues. (ESOMAR: 2).

WHO DOES PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS IN SOUTH AFRICA (WHO TO GET POS FROM)

- ☐ Market Research (Markinkor, research Surveys, Citizen Surveys (Pty.) Ltd (did AFB surveys), Development Research Africa.
- ☐ State Institutions (Human Science Research Center (HSRC), Statistics SA

Markinkor (Doing it for Free Advertising)
SABC (Doing it News) (2 done Month Ago) on Elections

How Are Surveys Done

- ☐ Design Survey
- ☐ Framing the Questions

- ☐ Survey Preparation
- ☐ Sampling Selecting Participants
- ☐ Getting into the field

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY Vs POPULATION CENSUS

☐ **POS is not a Census**

Unlike a Population census POS uses samples to infer things about total (adult) population.

Surveys are useful when we want to know about large number of people. The goal is to speak to some smaller numbers of people (sample) and to generalize to some larger population of people (population). Sampling is generally complex and usually requires a lot of statistics and computers.

☐ **Is not a household Survey**

Such as those conducted by Government for example HH surveys and Labour Force Surveys. Unlike household surveys, Public Opinion Surveys use people as unit of analysis and not the household and measures beliefs, preferences, attitudes.

Drawing a Sample and How Can they represent Whole Publics

“A sample is a portion or subset of a larger group called a population. Surveys often use samples rather than the populations. A good sample is a miniature version of the population from which it comes, just like it, only smaller. The best sample is representative, or a model of the population. A sample is representative of the population if important characteristics (e.g., age, gender, health status) are distributed similarly in both groups. Suppose the population consists of 150 people, 50% are male, with 45% over 65 years of age. A representative sample of that population will have fewer people (say 75), but it must also consist of 50% males, with 45% over 65 years.

The criterion for inclusion in a survey consists of the characteristics of individuals that make them eligible for participation; the exclusion criteria are the characteristics that rule out certain people.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to the population. Once you remove from the target population all those who fail to meet the criteria and all those who succeed in meeting the exclusion criteria, you are left with a study population consisting of people who are eligible to participate”. (Arlene Fink: How to Report Surveys, P49).

1. A Survey of a sample of 2,400 can tell us about the opinions of the whole public, with a margin of error of confidence interval of +/- 2 percentage points.

-1,200 (+/-2 percentage point
-600 (+/-4 percentage points)
-300(+/-5 percentage points)

The larger the sample the smaller the error up to a point. 300 huge error 600 bring it down by half. Only increase by one percentage

2. Using the “Bowl of Soup Analogy”

Drawing a sample is like making a bowl of soup. You only need two spoonfuls to get a reasonable reliable idea of what the entire soup tastes like. Assuming of course that the soup has been mixed well, i.e. all the salt is not lumped in one corner, or all potatoes are not lying at the bottom of the bowl, or that all the garlic has moved to the side of the bowl. Any of these possibilities would mean that the spoonfuls were likely to be unrepresentative of the bowl.

On the other hand assuming the soup I well mixed about the same number of randomly spoonfuls will give a good idea of the taste regardless of whether the soup comes from an ordinary black pot on a home stove or one of those industrial-seized pots in a restaurant. He same number of spoonfuls should do if the bowl is well mixed

The reality is that few populations are well mixed there are often groups (or strata of people) whose attitudes differ significantly from other people, who are not randomly scattered throughout the population but tend to cluster together in certain regions, cities, neighborhoods.

Any possibility that a sample would miss or under represent any of these groups or strata in a purely randomly drawn sample should be reduced to the greatest extent possible. In effect, while attempting to draw a sample that is representative of the whole the sample so as to draw mini, sub-samples of each desired sub-group (thus ensuring adequate sub-samples of potatoes, rice, and potatoes.)

This means paying attention to representing people of all races and language groups, all regions, or rich and poor, or urban and rural. Usually these strata should be constructed so that their size is proportionate to the size of the actual population. Thus if the rural component of some desired population is 52 percent, the rural component of the same sample should be the same.

Where populations of a grouping are small, over sampling them in a survey is way of getting round issues of representatives.

SAMPLING THE INDIVIDUAL

If lists of all in a given area are available randomly sample from that list. Bottom line is that all get an equal chance to be selected. Called pure random sampling. Costly means of getting a sample

- ☐ No list use cluster sampling. A primary sampling unit is selected, example of this are enumeration areas used by the Census as represents smallest unit for which there's reliable population data. Having taken population sizes into account select the sampling point from a list of these enumeration areas.
- ☐ Maps are also used to aid in where to go in the selected sampling point in the selected enumeration area. If maps at available than a rule of thumb agreement to start at one point and e.g. stop at every fifth house to do the interview.
- ☐ Once in the household make a list of all individuals and sample from the list made. e.g. every eligible fifth person on the list.

DEMOCRATIC VALUE OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

ELECTIONS VS POS

ELECTIONS

- ☐ Are held every five years
- ☐ Not everyone votes
- ☐ Hard to reveal preferences

SURVEYS

- ☐ Can be done anytime over period covering the elections
- ☐ Can count voters and non-voters equally or compare them. e.g. can ask if voted would result have gone differently can't ask this with an election.
- ☐ Can help separate values and policy preferences, from the vote. e.g. Some people may vote for a particular Political Party due to a particular campaign issue they agree with but may not necessarily prefer that Political Party.
- ☐ Can distinguish between several preferences of evaluations made.
- ☐ Can also reveal that some voters vote for individuals rather than the Party.

Surveys can thus both be a threat and Benefit to Governments, Political Parties and Organizations

VALUE OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS FOR THE PUBLIC MEDIA

- ☐ Polling Industry and News Media are natural allies North America and Western Europe
- ☐ If news media see themselves as guardians of the public interest, then opinion survey polls are far better guides to what public wants and thinks than typical "person on the street". Provides story hooks
- ☐ Opinion surveys are 'news' in themselves and of themselves
- ☐ Identify interesting or surprising result
- ☐ Ask politicians for a response
- ☐ Interview some ordinary people for quotes to try and put some face to the numbers.

- ❑ Get an expert to comment on the political implications of the result
- ❑ Any given result has multiple angles (e.g. how the results differs by gender, race, age or region)
- ❑ Any given survey usually contains many results and therefore many possible news stories.

WHAT SHOULD YOU REPORT (Things To Look For In Reporting Public Opinion Results)

From the Researcher understand:

- ❑ Actual question wording used (were buzz words used. Such words may have been understood differently by respondents).
- e.g. Asking respondent to compare life today and under Apartheid or ask compare life now and before 1994 could get different responses. People might be more neutral. If said before 1994 rather than use the word during Apartheid era.
- e.g. How you describe different groups is also important. If you say should White minority have influence with Majority might get one response. But if say Should Minority groups get same influence as Majority could get a different response. Certain word may trigger certain emotional responses so need to be careful.
- e.g. Meaning of violence 10 years ago different from present meaning. Violence described as political, now have all sorts of violence, black on black violence, Gender Violence (Workshop provide some buzzwords)

Sample size and how selected (ask about the margin of error i.e. how representative is this sample).

The scope of the survey

- Was it National or Regional?
- What age groups were covered 16 + or 18+
- Was it carried out among citizens only? (In 1999 AFB looked at registration levels and found some people not registered as voters. So those not registered were higher. Home affairs reacted by saying all are registered we must have registered non South Africans.

Who conducted the interviews, how did they present themselves did they wear Party colors without realizing it and respondents pick on that. (If respondents feel that interviewer is pro a particular party they may not respond truthfully if they support another party).

CASE STUDY: MEASURING DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA Afrobarometer Survey Round 2 results

1. What "story hooks" can be identified from the summary of Key results.
2. Select one story that you can follow up and write a feature article on
 - suggest a title for the article
 - How would you go about collecting the information for the article (who is the audience, who would you speak too, what possible questions would you need to ask, what other sources of information would you need).
3. Suggest other steps required in completing this assignment.

Planning Your Election Coverage

Raymond Joseph

Sections of this document have either been used in full or amended from the International Federation of Journalists ELECTION REPORTING HANDBOOK

With elections about to take place in South Africa, journalists are facing a challenge to produce copy that goes beyond merely reporting what political parties and their candidates - who spend much time attacking their opposition and ignoring the real issues - are saying.

“The challenge of objectivity, impartiality and balance in journalism is faced daily by journalists, but there is no test of professionalism greater than that posed in the heat and pressure of a bitterly-fought political election,” says Aidan White, the General secretary of the International Federation of Journalists:

Inevitably during an election, reporters from other sections of newspapers, radio and TV stations, who would not normally cover politics on an ongoing basis, are called on to help the political staff with the coverage.

While the challenge for those who do not usually cover a political beat seems daunting, the same rules of reporting still apply: objectivity, fairness, impartiality, ensuring copy is multi-sourced and gives all sides and perspectives – and making sure that anyone who is affected is allowed the right of reply. If we follow these simple journalistic rules, then the challenge becomes much less difficult and far less daunting.

It is equally important to be aware that at election time there is a stronger than ever impulse by politicians and political parties

to manipulate the media and to attempt to control information .

Allegations of bias in the news media happen all the time, but they are most evident at election time.

As journalists we know that to politicians and public interest groups, the omission of certain news items or issues from newspapers and radio and television news bulletins, the angle given to a story or the choice made about its placement on a page or in a bulletin, will sometimes be construed as a deliberate act of bias.

But, more often than not, journalists make these choices on the basis of sound professional judgment. Nevertheless mistakes are made, especially when the pressure is on and deadlines loom - so it is important to strive for fairness at all times and to make our decisions solely on the basis of news value.

Nevertheless, we should be aware – and prepared - for media bashing with some candidates, especially weaker who believe they are getting unfavourable coverage, to blame the media.

Do not be intimidated. Just do your job. And if you find yourself under attack or under pressure from parties or politicians speak out and tell your editor or news editor what is happening and let them help deal with the problem.

A final word: bias is also about news priorities. We can choose to focus on a

particular issue, or we can join the herd in following a particular controversy, or we can decide to go another, less travelled route and seek out and report on the real issues that are important to the voters.

The key to effective election coverage – before, during and afterwards – is planning to ensure that you are properly prepared.

So what can an under-resourced newspaper or radio station - or you as a single reporter - do to ensure you are properly prepared for elections?

It is important that everyone at a paper or radio station who will be involved in the election coverage sit down as soon as possible and begin formulating a plan. And, remember, it is not enough to work out what has to be done – you also have to be sure who will be responsible to do what. So ensure that someone is assigned – made responsible – for each task.

Below is a quick check list to help with your planning.

- ❑ **Check with the electoral commission** to familiarise yourself with the basic details, including the final registration date, the parties involved, the start and closing date of the campaign period and the specifics of election day (like where the polling stations will be sited, what time they open and close, how polling will be organised, the timetable for election returns, details of the counting of votes, security around the polls, if there are independent monitors and, if so, who they are.)
- ❑ **Study the election rules:** make a point of understanding the voting system, electoral laws, laws governing international observation delegations etc).
- ❑ **Research:** If you are assigned to cover a particular area or region, research it thoroughly and find out basics (like the number of registered voters, previous voting trends - in by-

elections and previous national or regional elections - to ensure you are armed with information that will help add context, depth and background to your reporting.

- ❑ **Cover the issues that are important to voters, not political parties:** Speak to ordinary people on the ground to find out their concerns and what is important to them - and then ensure you cover these issues independently from party positions. Endeavour to report on issues that are neglected by political parties. Also ensure you obtain and study the manifestos of the various parties so you are able to compare what is actually happening on the ground to what the politicians are saying – and report the contradictions.
- ❑ **Make contact with politicians and their parties in advance:** In the run-up to the elections ensure you get hold of all the political parties to obtain contact details for their candidates and official spokespeople. You could find yourself filing incomplete copy if you fail to take this simple step and then having to rush around on deadline trying to find someone to comment. Also ensure that they have your details so they are able to contact you when necessary.
- ❑ **Identify resource people:** they will be helpful in giving expert advice during the election campaign and as soon as the results are made public. They should include independent political scientists and community leaders, but don't forget to give ordinary people a say. And, finally, ensure that you arrange in advance with political party leaders and candidates for election-night comments on results.
- ❑ **Check your photo files:** you should have as many pictures of candidates as possible stored in your photo library. Either get them from the political parties or take them yourself;

- ❑ **Start well ahead of election day:** prepare profiles of major candidates and electoral districts;
- ❑ **Avoid "pack" journalism:** Journalists should shy away from the tendency to follow candidates like a pack of wolves, which inevitably leads to a concentration on the same events and interpreting them in the same way.
- ❑ **Beware of campaign tricks:** Watch out for stunts and cooked-up events designed just to grab headlines.
- ❑ **Press releases:** Do not just publish political parties' press releases as they are sent. Check them, use them as a source for a more balanced story. Do not run for "photo-opportunities". Do not overhype controversy: a contrived rumour campaign – a “red herring” – can lead you far away from voters' real interests.

An election briefing paper by John Lawrence, Training Editor of "The Nation", Kenya

Report events exactly as they happen - and not as you would like them to happen. This means that you must be impartial in every way:

- ❑ Give equal prominence to all the major candidates. This means attending an equal number of candidate's meetings.
- ❑ Be careful not to colour your reports with inflammatory language.
- ❑ Report what candidates say and not what interested parties say candidates said.
- ❑ Be careful not to be seen to be taking sides in political arguments.
- ❑ Do not (in any circumstances whatsoever) accept any inducement from a candidate or his/her supporters. Do not even take a ride in a politician's car.
- ❑ Do not promise any politician (or anyone else for that matter) that a report or story will appear in the paper.

- ❑ Report what you see without exaggeration.
- ❑ Exercise fair play. If a candidate makes an accusation against his opponent, ask that opponent for a comment.

You should listen for:

PROMISES: These are usually part of the party manifesto or platform: lofty pledges to initiate irrigation schemes, build highways, lower taxes waive education fees. Or they could be titbits for village consumption: "Vote for me and I will give you 10 new cattle dips". "Vote for me and no child in the district will go barefoot". "Vote for me and your stomachs will be full of ugali forever". So you've got to be alert. You could get a national story or one for the provincial round up briefs.

HECKLERS: Hecklers, people who like to disrupt meetings with their interjections, can provoke violence or laughter in equal measure. Be alert for humorous, rapid-fire exchanges. You may get a good verbatim quote.

THE UNEXPECTED: Unexpected, quirky things often happen at public meetings.

CONTRADICTIONS: Be prepared for a sudden departure from the prepared speech, particularly contradictory statements or fundamental shifts in platform policy. Do not rely on the printed text alone. You will need acute powers of observation. You will need to gauge the mood of the meeting. Is it tense, light-hearted, gay? Look around and observe the placards, the expressions on people's faces. Are there trouble-makers?

THE CROWD: How big is the audience? To estimate accurately the size of a crowd is an important skill. But it is wise to quote a variety of sources: yours, the police, the organisers.

Tip: To roughly gauge the size of a crowd, take a section and roughly count the number of people in it. Then work how many similar sized sections there are,

multiply by the number of people in the section you counted, and you should have a very rough size of the crowd.

CONFRONTATIONS: In a volatile political situation, anything can happen. Certain signs will prepare you. These include the number of infiltrators from the opposition camp. Are they armed? (even with stones). Listen to what people in the crowd are saying. And observe the security presence. Are they armed with shields, batons, machine guns and teargas? Are they expecting trouble? Do they appear nervous? Do not jump to conclusions about how trouble has started if a sudden commotion takes place. Talk to people, you may have missed something or an act of provocation.

If you carry out all the points raised in this rather long list, you will have performed a valuable service for your newspaper/media group. Remember, you will be in on the ground floor as history is made.

HOW TO DETECT POTENTIAL ELECTION IRREGULARITIES

One of the major stakes in any election is its level of fairness and transparency. Even when the poll is being monitored by representatives of political parties, electoral or international observation teams, journalists should attempt to determine by themselves the degree to which any problems affect the quality of the electoral process.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in the United States gives these guidelines to its observer teams. They might be used as an inspiration for journalists: *"Try to observe, research and record the severity, frequency and pattern of any of the following issues and the number of voters influenced."*

- ❑ **Unfair attempts to influence voters** or election officials through bribes, employment promises, threats, intimidation, systematic disruption of the election process, unbalanced media access;

- ❑ **Disenfranchisement of voters** through: unreasonably restricting the registration process, unreasonably restricting candidate eligibility, failing to properly list registered voters, failing to distribute voter identification cards, requiring unreasonable supplemental voter identification, systematic complication of the election process, incomplete distribution of election materials;
- ❑ **Fraud**, such as stealing ballots, stuffing ballots, destroying ballots, misreading, miscounting, providing misleading reports to the media, voting twice, trying to remove indelible ink;
- ❑ **Logistical problems**, including insufficient number of ballots, ballots missing for certain parties, insufficient number of envelopes, ink that washes off, inadequate secrecy of the vote, missing officials, missing voter registry, no artificial lights; and
- ❑ **Civic education**: voters do not seem to have a reasonable understanding of their right to freely choose a candidate or how to express their choice, and administrators do not have a reasonable understanding of their duties and how to execute them."