

situation is often complicated by the fact that the mass media outlets have been, or remain, government-controlled. Public broadcast media, where they exist, may not be truly independent, and even private media may be biased in favor of particular contestants.

Your monitoring group can play an important role in pressing for the elimination of censorship, more equitable distribution of media access for political contestants, fair news coverage of contestants and election issues, and adequate voter education through the media.⁴³ Equally important, once the legal framework has been set, you should scrutinize the implementation of the sanctioned rules. For this purpose, you should assign a special team to assess media fairness.

Media monitoring has become a significant activity for domestic election monitors. The Mexican Academy for Human Rights, a member of Civic Alliance/Observation '94 (a coalition of more than 400 Mexican citizen organizations), issued a series of influential reports on media coverage of the 1994 Mexican elections. The Media Monitoring Project of South Africa not only reported on media behavior during the 1994 elections, but published a journal on the subject entitled *Media Mask*. NGOs in many other countries have added media monitoring to their election activities, while government oversight bodies and political parties also have begun to monitor media behavior during the election period. The discussion in this section is intended to be useful to media monitoring by any of these actors.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS There are four principal aspects to media monitoring. The first aspect concerns monitoring how the government acts to ensure the news media's right to gather and impart information and ideas. The second concerns how the government and the news media act to provide access to political contestants so that they may effectively communicate with the public during election campaign periods. The third concerns how the government and the media act to ensure fair and objective coverage of

political contestants in news and information reporting. The fourth aspect concerns how the government and news media act to educate the electorate on how and why to vote.⁴⁴

The Media's Right to Gather and Impart Information

Media monitoring should begin with an analysis of government actions to ensure the media's right to gather and impart information. This analysis should focus upon the media's ability to criticize activities or inaction of the government and governing party, to investigate corruption and to operate independently of political pressures.⁴⁵ A number of factors that may inhibit the media from performing these functions can be identified and documented by media monitors. Among such factors are the following.

Direct government censorship and intervention, including:

- 1] enforcing prior restraints, usually pursuant to law, on publication of material concerning certain subjects (often on grounds of national security and sometimes touching topics like redrawing national or internal boundaries);
- 2] banning media access for certain political parties and/or candidates;
- 3] refusing, by government-controlled media, to run stories about or advertisements by certain political contestants;
- 4] confiscating publications for political reasons;
- 5] closing media outlets for political reasons;
- 6] prosecuting journalists and/or publishers for sedition or other charges (such as libel) for carrying out legitimate professional activities;
- 7] imposing martial law or states of siege to curtail media activity in order to gain electoral advantage; and
- 8] using threats of any of these actions to gain electoral advantage.

Indirect forms of censorship, including:

- 1] government action or inaction that places journalists and/or publishers in fear for their

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⁴³ See Section P, *Election System*, for more information on advocating changes in media rules. See Sandra Coliver and Patrick Merloe, *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies* (ARTICLE 19; London: 1994), for a comparative analysis of problems with radio and television access and news coverage in transition elections as well as international standards for avoiding such problems.

⁴⁴ See also Section Q, *Civic and Voter Education*, for suggestions on monitoring voter and civic education activities.

⁴⁵ The analysis should also consider significant developments affecting press freedoms in the country's recent history. This is necessary where such developments are likely to be reflected in the media's approach to election campaign reporting.

safety or for the security of their property; and

- 2 manipulating: (a) licensing of media outlets; (b) import licensing of equipment and/or supplies necessary to effectively run media outlets; and/or (c) government-controlled resources (such as newsprint or electricity), in order to gain electoral advantage.

Intimidation and attacks on the news media aimed at preventing the media from fulfilling their legitimate role in the electoral process, including:

- 1 government attacks on journalists, such as security forces physically beating them or firing on them, their vehicles or premises; and
- 2 arbitrary detention of journalists and publishers in order to interfere with their reporting on events pertinent to the election.

Failure of the government to provide adequate protection for journalists and publishers against intimidation and attacks by supporters of political parties or candidates and/or from political extremists, as well as failure to investigate such acts and to prosecute vigorously those responsible for such acts.

Self-censorship that is a consequence of attempts to avoid government censorship and intervention, indirect censorship or intimidation and attacks by nongovernmental forces aimed at preventing the media from fulfilling their legitimate role in the electoral process; self-censorship may also entail publishers or editors suppressing accurate information in order to favor a political contestant they support or to harm one they oppose.

In addition, media monitoring should evaluate the availability and function of complaint mechanisms accessible to the media for seeking redress against abuses as well as complaint mechanisms available to political contestants to redress media mistreatment. These mechanisms could include procedures before a government election commission, a government body charged with media oversight, and/or the judicial system.⁴⁶

Direct Access Messages (Political Advertisements)

Monitoring "direct access programs" or messages (sometimes called "political advertisements") for political contestants should include the following considerations.

The types of access time provided, including: whether the broadcast time is live or taped; whether all political contestants must use the same formats (i.e., whether they use the same print layouts and space, one person must deliver a broadcast message or a variety of sources can be employed, music and images may or may not be used, etc.); and whether all contestants are given the same opportunity to present high quality productions.

Whether the amounts of access to printed space or broadcast time are allocated equitably, including: whether equal space or time is given to all political contestants; or, in the case where a division is made between major political contestants and more numerous minor contestants, whether equal amounts of space or time are given to contestants in each category and whether the minimum amount given is sufficient to present meaningful messages to the public.

Whether there are impartial criteria for qualifying political contenders for direct access print space or broadcast time and for the allocation of that space or time, including provisions for new parties and independent candidates.

Whether an impartial system is used to ensure that no political contestant is favored by receiving premium (more desirable) access space or times, while others are consistently aired at less desirable times (e.g., late at night) or given less prominent printed space.

Whether financing of direct access messages is equitable, including: whether adequate print space or broadcast time for meaningful messages is provided free of charge to the political contestants or at a nominal rate; whether additional commercial space or time is available; and whether there are limitations to ensure that one party or candidate cannot monopolize that space or time or otherwise take undue advantage of such time or benefit from political favoritism of media owners.

⁴⁶ See Section 5, *Election Campaign*, for suggestions on monitoring the enforcement and review of complaints.

News and Information Coverage

You should also consider monitoring news and information coverage relevant to the election. Among the factors to evaluate in this area are the following.

Whether there is balance or imbalance in the quantity of coverage given to the contending political parties and/or candidates. To gauge this factor, monitors will need to review news stories and information broadcast coverage with a stopwatch and note the number of seconds devoted to each party and candidate and printed stories with rulers to determine the amount of coverage.

Whether there is balance or imbalance in the quality of coverage. A number of elements must be evaluated, including:

- 1 whether certain political contestants are disproportionately presented in a positive (or negative) light;
- 2 whether certain parties or candidates appear disproportionately as the first political contestant covered;
- 3 whether the actual voice of the speaker is used in reports about certain political contestants, while no quotations are used by the print media or the voice of the announcer is used in broadcast reports about other political contestants; and
- 4 whether photographs or film footage of certain political contestants or their events is used in reports, while no photographs of film footage is used in reports on others.

Whether standards of accurate reporting are violated to a degree reaching manipulation of coverage. Examples of this in broadcast media include: consistent use of camera angles that make the crowds at political rallies of certain contestants appear larger than the crowds were in reality, while using angles at rallies of other contestants that make them seem smaller than they actually were; broadcasting film footage that does not correspond with the events reported in order to favor certain political contestants; broadcasting unsubstantiated reports that favor one contestant or that damage another in the eyes of the electorate.

Whether reporting fails to distinguish between coverage of government officials conducting newsworthy government business and such officials conducting election campaign activities.

Whether reporting on opinion polls is given undue prominence, which could favor one political contestant over others. Factors to consider in this regard include whether: the polls come from reputable sources; the source of the poll was revealed in the report; the margin of error, the time the poll was conducted, the size of the sample, the location of the sample, the actual questions asked and other contextual material was reported; the media reported that gaps between political contestants were within the margin of error; the results of other reputable polls on the same subject at about the same time were included in the report; and polling trends over time were included in the report.

Information programming by radio and television includes activities such as individual and panel interviews, debates, forums, so-called "talk-back" programs with party representatives and/or candidates, and roundtable discussions concerning topics of import to the election. Among the factors to consider in this area are the following:

- 1 whether there is interviewer or moderator bias toward certain parties or candidates;
- 2 whether parties and candidates receive equitable and sufficient time to present their ideas; and
- 3 whether all participating parties or candidates were provided the same amount of time to prepare for the program.

When the print media covers such events, general considerations discussed above apply.

Voter Education Programming

The last type of coverage to monitor is voter education programming. Factors to consider in this area include:

- 1 what time of day such programs or announcements were aired or what prominence they were given in the print media;

- [2] how frequently they were published or aired;
- [3] did the messages adequately inform voters about how to vote and why to vote;
- [4] did the messages use minority languages and/or were they especially aimed to reach any group that traditionally has low voter participation; and
- [5] did the messages favor any party or candidate.

MONITORING THE RADIO AND

TELEVISION Radio and television are often the media through which most of the population acquires information regarding political developments. In developing your plan to monitor access for political contestants, as well as fairness and objectivity in news and information programming, you should consider a number of practical issues, including the following.

First, the number of radio and television stations to be monitored must be decided. National radio and TV channels are obvious monitoring choices. Local stations may also be important. This is particularly true where the topography of a country makes it difficult to receive stations and channels transmitted from distant locations and/or in countries where there are important language differences among various regions. Also, the relative importance of monitoring electronic media is affected by the literacy rate and the distribution systems for the print media, as well as the number of and access to radios and television sets.

Second, the number of monitors that will be needed depends on: (1) the number of factors to be monitored; (2) the number of stations and channels included in the project; (3) the number of hours of relevant programming to be monitored; (4) whether a comprehensive review of all programming is to be undertaken; (5) whether relevant programming is aired at the same time on different outlets; and (6) whether tapes are available for each relevant program. More than one person (perhaps two or three) should evaluate each program to eliminate potential monitor bias.

Third, the types of programming to be monitored may include: direct access programs that allow the political contestants to communicate campaign messages directly to the population through free time slots and/or paid advertisements; news coverage; special information programs that cover topics of import to the elections, such as debates, candidate interviews and panel discussions; voter education messages developed by the government or nonpartisan citizens' organizations. General programming can be reviewed for subtle forms of manipulation, such as using candidates or party representatives, symbols, slogans and/or songs in entertainment programs.

Fourth, the number of factors evaluated will depend in part on the type of programs monitored, as described above in the sections on direct access, news coverage and other topics.

Fifth, once data is collected, it can be evaluated according to how a particular media outlet treats each political contestant. It can also be evaluated to determine how each contestant is treated over a range of outlets.

Sixth, the number of parties and candidates to track in the monitoring project will depend on the number contesting the election. Resources may necessitate limiting the number of political contestants tracked to those that have a realistic chance of winning seats.

Seventh, the duration of the project must be determined. It must start sufficiently in advance of election day to evaluate radio's and television's likely effect on voter behavior. In some countries this question arises a considerable time before the election, while in others it only becomes an important issue several weeks before election day.

Eighth, a budget must be developed to cover the costs for: (1) obtaining radios and televisions (although they usually can be made available by volunteers); (2) audio and video tapes and taping equipment (in some instances, radio and television stations may make tapes available for monitoring free of charge); (3) stopwatches; (4) developing and producing evaluation forms; (5) paying monitors for their time, if necessary; and (6) developing and distributing reports concerning results of the monitoring project. Because

extensive commitments of time may not be needed to monitor news, information, political advertisements and voter education programs, it may be possible to recruit volunteer monitors. On the other hand, continuity of monitors is important for removing bias and producing comprehensive results; therefore, it may be necessary to pay monitors.

MONITORING THE PRINT MEDIA There often are a large number of newspapers and magazines published in a country, and it is usually not possible to monitor all of them. Typically, only newspapers with national circulations and papers with large circulations in major cities or regions can be monitored.

Monitoring the print media is a resource-intensive endeavor. The benefit of monitoring the potential impact on the electoral process of problems in the print media must be carefully compared to the human resources available in your monitoring effort in order to determine whether and how to monitor this media. When there is a diversity of political opinions reflected in the national press, you also should consider the degree to which such pluralism may mitigate the effects of bias as part of your decision about monitoring.

Several interrelated considerations must be evaluated before deciding whether and how to monitor the print media.

First, you must decide upon the number of newspapers to be monitored. Papers that influence large or particularly important segments of the population should be given first priority for monitoring. The actual number of papers to be monitored will ultimately depend on an evaluation of other considerations, discussed below.

Second, the number of monitors that will be needed should be calculated. This will in part depend upon the number of factors to be evaluated for each monitored publication, discussed below. If seven factors are evaluated for each publication, for example, then the amount of time will include that needed: (1) to review a publication to identify pertinent articles; (2) to separate those

articles for record keeping, if that is to be done; (3) to evaluate each article according to the seven factors and to record the evaluation on monitoring forms; and (4) to tabulate and report on the results. This easily could amount to two or more hours per monitored publication. One person, therefore, could probably monitor three to five publications in an eight-hour period.

In addition, it is important to identify and eliminate potential monitor bias. This means that more than one person should evaluate each monitored publication. While several persons might monitor each publication in an ideal circumstance, two or three persons per publication is likely to be the most possible. This means that if three persons evaluate each monitored publication, only three to five publications could be effectively monitored each day, while six to 10 could be monitored by six persons.

Third, the number of factors to be monitored must be determined. The number of factors monitored will depend upon the number of monitors and the financial resources available to the project. Typically, most of the following factors are evaluated:

- 1 the number of column inches given to each political party and/or candidate;
- 2 the number of times a party's or candidate's name is mentioned;
- 3 the page number of the article and the article's location on the page;
- 4 whether a photo appeared with the article;
- 5 who was depicted in the photo;
- 6 whether the article was about election campaign activity or something else (such as a governmental function or personal action); and
- 7 whether the tone of the article and/or photo was positive or negative.

If a political advertisement appears for a political contestant, an evaluation should be made to determine whether it was given adequate space, whether its layout was treated equitably and its location was equitable compared to advertisements by other contestants. Positive and negative weights can be assigned to such factors

to arrive at an overall score for each article or advertisement.

Fourth, the data collected can be evaluated according to how a particular publication treats each political contestant over specified time intervals. The data can also be evaluated to determine how each contestant is treated over a range of publications.

Fifth, the number of political contestants to track in the monitored publications will depend on the number in the election and the resources available to the monitoring project. When there is a large number of contestants, it might be necessary to monitor only those contestants that have a realistic chance of winning the election. In proportional elections with party lists, it may be necessary to limit monitoring to candidates who are actually likely to take seats.

Sixth, the duration of the monitoring project must be determined. The project should start sufficiently in advance of election day to measure the effect of the print coverage on voter behavior. While voters may not pay considerable attention to the treatment of political contestants far before election day, it is not sufficient to monitor the media simply for the few days before the election. In some countries, media manipulation may be a particularly important issue well in advance of the election.

Also, at least a week should be planned at the beginning of the project to test monitoring methodology in order to make necessary adjustments. Limiting the number of political contestants covered, the number of factors evaluated and/or the number of publications monitored may be necessary, given the amount of financial and human resources available for the project.

Seventh, a budget must be developed to cover the costs of: (1) subscribing to the monitored publications; (2) developing and producing evaluation forms; (3) paying monitors for their time, if necessary; and (4) developing and distributing reports concerning results of the monitoring project. It may be possible to obtain free subscriptions and to use volunteer monitors. Maintaining continuity of the monitors, however, is very important in limiting monitor bias, which may mean that they should be paid for the substantial amounts of time required.

REPORTING RESULTS The results of your media monitoring should be seen as part of your overall election monitoring effort. (*See Appendix IV.*) Results may be used to seek changes in government behavior towards the media and to seek changes in media behavior toward parties and/or candidates. A plan, therefore, should be developed for disseminating reports on media monitoring.⁴⁷

Monitoring results may be used, where necessary, as part of efforts to secure the rights of parties, candidates and voters to impart and receive information needed to make informed choices in a fair electoral process. This use may include presenting your findings in complaint procedures before the national election commission, the governmental body responsible for media oversight and/or before the courts. The results of media monitoring also can be provided to the international news media and to international election observers that are monitoring the electoral processes of the country.

⁴⁷ See also Section Y, *Post-Election Reporting*.