Monitoring of General Elections Coverage by Electronic Media in Pakistan

(Weekly Report - April 25 - 30, 2013)
Society for Alternative Media and Research (SAMAR) is a non-Governmental organization based in Pakistan’s federal capital, Islamabad. It was established in March, 2005. SAMAR has been working in different social, political and environmental development fields for the past seven years with collaboration of international donor agencies including Oxfam GB, ActionAid, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Union against Lungs Disease (France), Campaign for Tobacco free Kids (USA) and others.

Strengthening Democratic Media Development - Since 2008, the organization has been working on a project “Strengthening Democratic Media Development in Pakistan” with the collaboration of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The organization has published an analytical report, ‘Newspapers’ Monitoring Report’ on media contents with citizens’ perspective monitoring and analyzing three English and three Urdu national dailies. Booklets on ‘Media Literacy’ and ‘Media Democracy’ have also been published. Under the project educative meetings, training workshops, orientation sessions and seminars on media literacy, democratic media, and citizens’ role particularly on “Why do we need democratic media” and “Media ethics and citizens’ role have been held in all major cities of the country.

The organization is publishing quarterly ‘Media Review’ in Urdu language for the past three years. In 2011, the project’s target audience was faculty and students of mass communication departments of different universities and colleges focusing on values of media ethics, responsibility, rights of news and views consumers, and to influence changes in curriculum of mass communication to introduce media sociology, issues of economics of journalism and media literacy.
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Background

According to a British media review by Media Standards Trust (2011), the public have little faith in the willingness of the national press to behave responsibly: research conducted for the review found that fewer than one in ten people trust national newspapers to behave responsibly. Nor do people believe we can rely on editors for guidance. 70% of the respondents disagreed with the statement “We can trust newspaper editors to ensure that their journalists act in the public interest.”

Situation in Pakistan is not different. In April 2012, the results of an online survey conducted by The Express Tribune revealed that most Pakistanis feel the local media spreads negativity, is sensationalist and is sponsored by political parties. A total of 1,025 Pakistanis and expatriates participated in the online survey. Respondents included a majority of those aged between 20-30 (61%) and 30-40 (21%). Males comprised 83 per cent of the total sample whereas journalists and media personnel constituted 13 per cent of total respondents, which sums up to approximately 133 people.

The question of ethics and responsible reporting led to questioning the sample whether they had ever been offended by a news story or TV report and if they had ever made an official complaint or signed a petition against a media group. With regards to the former, a large majority of 88 per cent, 902 people out of the total sample, said they had been offended by a news story or TV report.

The Express Tribune, in its editorial on 17 June, 2012, commented that news bulletins blare out everywhere and are available over mobile phones and computers. As a result, there has been an obsession with the news and all that it contains. Endless discussions continue along the lines of the themes laid out, with news organizations setting the agenda for news by determining what we are interested in and what should capture our attention. Not surprisingly then, many issues that we should be concerned about go unnoticed and uncommented on for the most part.

There are laws and rules that regulate the media. But these parameters do not reflect on a comprehensive basis the need to view the role of media from the most important perspective: that of the citizen. At the same time, citizens also have obligations to support and strengthen media independence.

“PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) is clearly not doing its job,” says Zohra Yusuf, Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. “There is a dire need of set up an independent body to regulate the media, she says, adding that there is too much bias in reporting.
Election Coverage

The general elections have been announced in Pakistan in May, 2013. Political parties have already started their activities in this regard. Pakistani media are also preparing for full-fledged coverage of elections. However, keeping in view the concerns about objectivity, impartiality and balance in media, as discussed above, and impulse to manipulate media and control information by different actors in the elections, the need arises to keep an eye on the role of media and election coverage by them.

We have already witnessed a lack of experience and training in reporting election issues in 2008 in an ambivalent media environment. At that time, the Election Commission of Pakistan departed from its tradition of issuing a Code of Conduct for media during the elections and instead issued a directive to Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to monitor the operations of all TV channels including state-owned Pakistan Television, and ensure that coverage as to electoral activities of political parties and candidates till poling day were fair, unbiased and balanced. However, the PEMRA never issued any report during three months of electioneering.

Why this Project?

The media monitoring of elections coverage is done by PEMRA, the state-owned body. The ECP, while proposing Code of Conduct this time, has again directed PEMRA to monitor the election coverage whereas PEMRA failed to produce any report during the whole electioneering period in 2008. There is a need of fair, independent and unbiased monitoring of elections coverage by an independent and impartial body from civil society. SAMAR intends to fulfill this need.

The objectives of the project:

“Monitoring, analyzing and preparing findings reports of Elections 2013 coverage by electronic media in light of Code of Conduct laid down by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism (PCEJ).”
Methodology

Six most viewed current affairs Urdu language TV channels shall be monitored for pre, post and during election coverage. Monitoring tools and indicators shall be developed in this regard in the light of Code of Conduct. Time and space allocated to different political parties and candidates and content of electronic media shall be scrutinized. The categories of media products to be monitored shall be:

1. News Headlines
2. Talk shows
3. Paid Political Content

The approaches used for this project include “Content Monitoring” and “Economy of Production”. These approaches entail the following facets of a broadcast content:

a. Content Monitoring

1. The Text
2. The Context
3. Gesticulation
4. Time slot
5. The Outcome

b. Economy of Media

1. Time slot of Political paid content
2. Duration of each Political paid content
3. Frequency of each Political paid content
Monitoring period and Time Duration

This report is based on the data collected in six day’s consecutive monitoring of the content aired in Prime time (7pm-11pm), from 25th April 2013 to 30th April 2013. The total monitoring duration therefore comprise of 24 hours.

List of TV Channels monitored

The list includes following mainstream State owned and Private News channels:

1. PTV News
2. Geo News
3. Express News
4. Duniya News
5. Dawn News
6. Sama Tv
7. ARY News
8. Waqt News

Time slot

The objective towards selection of merely “The Prime Time” for monitoring is mainly because of its significance in terms of “Viewership” and “Commercial outcome” which are both essentially relevant to each other. According to the popular media viewership indicator’s Prime time grasp maximum number of viewers in front of their tv screens worldwide, and obviously is the most high priced slot.

News Headlines

All Private TV channels projected accusations from the party leaders against each other as News headlines. Most public rallies by mainstream politicians on private TV channel often comprised personal attacks and accusations against one another.

Emergency coverage of Election violence, specifically “Bomb blasts”, on private TV channels was mostly based on speculations, disinformation and exaggeration. Care taker government and state affairs were not given adequate coverage on private TV channels.

The smaller political parties and independent candidates were not given appropriate coverage.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AJI</td>
<td>Awami Jamhori Ittehad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AML</td>
<td>Awami Muslim League</td>
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<tr>
<td>APML</td>
<td>All Pakistan Muslim League</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWN</td>
<td>Awami National Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>JI</td>
<td>Jamat Islami</td>
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<tr>
<td>MQM</td>
<td>Muttihida Quomi Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMLN</td>
<td>Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMLQ</td>
<td>Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid e Azam)</td>
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<td>PPP</td>
<td>Peoples Party Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTI</td>
<td>Pakistan Tehreek Insaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECP</td>
<td>ECP - Election commission of Pakistan</td>
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### Programs / Talk Shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV Channels</th>
<th>Dominant Issues</th>
<th>Party Representation (in order of representation)</th>
<th>Public opinion</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dunya TV</td>
<td>Election Violence, Taliban</td>
<td>1. MQM 2. PPP, ANP &amp; PMLN 3. PTI &amp; PMLQ</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTV News</td>
<td>Election violence, threats, governance</td>
<td>1. MQM,PPP &amp; ANP</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn News</td>
<td>Elections, Manifesto, Security</td>
<td>1. PML N 2. PPP, ANP, PTI PML Q &amp; MQM</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARY News</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>1. PTI 2. PPP, PMLN, JI, PMLQ &amp; APML</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMA TV</td>
<td>Election campaign</td>
<td>1. PTI 2. PMLQ 3.PMLN 4.PPP,ANP ,AML</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>60 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geo News</td>
<td>Election debate, Violence, women candidates</td>
<td>1. PTI 2. PMLN 3. PPP,ANP &amp; MQM 4.JI</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express News</td>
<td>Election campaign , Manifesto, Feudalism, threats</td>
<td>1. PML N 2. PTI 3. PPP ,ANP</td>
<td>90 %</td>
<td>90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waqt News</td>
<td>Election campaign, Governance, Media role &amp; Responsibility</td>
<td>1. PML N 2. AML</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PTI stands the top political advertiser with highest frequency and airtime in the mainstream private electronic media.

Gesticulation of the content

- **PTI** stands the top political advertiser with highest frequency and airtime in the mainstream private electronic media.
Conclusion:

Pakistan’s first transition to democracy after completing of five year tenure by the PPP and coalition has opened media space and greater levels of information availability and consumption. Growing media pluralism, information availability in real time, and news accessibility in local languages has changed people’s access to information on issues such as politics, elections, legislation and democracy.

The majority of stories were based on press releases with very few news items appearing to be generated by the reporters themselves. There were very few investigative reports. There was no attempt to educate the media consumers, merely to provide routine information on the subject. The vast majority addressed the performance of the present/outgoing government. There was clear lack of news stories/shows about Baluchistan, FATA, law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Election commission violations of code of conduct, women’s participation in the elections and minorities etc.

All broadcast media monitored failed to comply with the basic obligations of balance and equitable coverage of parties and candidates. Due to the vague and inadequate provisions of the Election Commission of Pakistan about media ‘s code of ethics, the allocation of airtime on broadcast media was extremely selective. As the content analysis demonstrates the coverage of the elections, although enjoying a very prominent position in the national news agenda, it overwhelmingly showed PTI and PMLN. TV channels denied its consumer/viewer of their two basic rights protected in the electoral process: the right of voters to be informed about political alternatives and matters of public interest and the right of candidates to put their message across.

With regards to the allocation of airtime to the different political parties in news programmes, quantitative data shows that there is an extremely high percentage of coverage dedicated to PTI and PMLN and low coverage of ANP, PPP and MQM who are under attack from Taliban. These parties (PPP, ANP & MQM) received some time, although their coverage concentrated on specific events of bombing and attacks on their rallies and offices during elections.
Annex: Program Monitoring Format
Electronic Media Monitoring
Society for Alternative Media & Research (SAMAR)

Date: -------------- Monitor no: -------------- List no: --------------

1. **Tv Channel**
   - Geo News
   - Duniya Tv
   - Dawn News
   - ARY News
   - Express News
   - Sama Tv
   - Waqt News
   - PTV News

2. **Starting time** ............... **Ending time** ............... 

3. **Duration:**
   - 30:00 minutes
   - 40:00 minutes
   - 45:00 minutes
   - 50:00 minutes

4. **Program Title** ......................

5. **Anchor person** ......................

6. **Participants (Studio/Video conference) names:**
   - 1.
   - 2.
   - 3.
   - 4.

On Telephone

   - 1.
   - 2.
   - 3.
   - 4.

7. **Topic/ Issue/Issues**
   - Electoral Process
   - Party Manifesto
   - Governance
   - Transparency
   - Restraints
   - Threats
   - (Any other)

8. **Scope**
   - National
   - Provincial
   - Local

9. **Constituency**
   - NA No........
   - PP No........

10. **Participants backgrounds**
    - Party Rep (No: )
    - Analysts (No: )
    - Journalists (No: )
    - Retired Armed Personnel (No: )
    - Retired/Serving Bureaucrats (No: )
    - Legal Expert (No: )
    - Independent Contestant (No: )
    - Public (students urban rural)
    - Others

   (i) If students then institution

       a. Public  b. Private

   (ii) Public Opinion

       a. Yes  b. No

   (i) live  (2) recorded

   (i) No of respondents .............

   (ii) The number of neutral respondents
(iii) The number of respondents having party affiliations

(iv) The proportion

a. Biased  b. Balanced

11. Represented Parties

PPPP  PML(N)  ANP  PTI  MQM  PML(Q)  JI  JUI(F)  APML  PML(F)  NP  BNP  PMAP  PPP(SB)  JSQM  Others

12. Participation of Marginalized/ Vulnerable Groups


13. No. of questions to each Participant  1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  6.

14. Time Dedicated to each Participant (percentage)

1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  6.

15. Method of Questions raised  (a) Fair (b) Discriminative (c) Factual (d) speculated (e) Direct  (f) Ambiguous  (g) Biased Other

16. Basis of Bias or discrimination  (a) Against a particular Candidate/Party name______________ (b) Religion______________ (c) Creed______________ (d) Gender______________ (e) Ethnicity__________ (f) Political affiliation/Ideology…………… Other

17. Questioning Manner  (a) Polite (b) Harsh (c) Emotional (d) Offensive (e) Neutral

18. Repeated Words/Terminologies/Variables   (a)Democracy (b) Transparency (c) Economic crises (d) Energy crises/ Power outage (e) Rigging  (f) Unemployment (g) Price hike (h) Army (i) America (j) Drone strikes (k) Taliban/ Banned religious outfits (l) FATA (m) Balochistan (n) KPK (o) Sindh (p) Punjab (q) Saraiki province (s) Judiciary (t) Agencies (u) Polling station (v) Security (x) Election commission (y) corruption (z) Peace, change Others

19. Deemed outcome of discourse

Information about (a) Parties (b) Candidates (c) Campaign issues (d) Voting process (e) Electoral reforms (d) Incitement to violence/ hatred /intolerance/ Public disorder  Other

Monitor’s Name & Signature  Supervisor’s Name & Signature

News Monitoring Form
Annex: Electronic Media Monitoring
Society for Alternative Media & Research (SAMAR)

Date: Monitor no: Form no:

Broadcast outlet/Channel:

News Bulletin/Program Title:

Time Start: Time End: Total Duration:

Head lines in order of presentation:

1. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Press conference</th>
<th>News Report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Org/Ind/Party/Inst/Govt. Official Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive/negative:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive/negative:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</table>
Est Time:

6._____________________________________________________________________________

Statement   Press conference   News Report
Org/Ind/Party/Inst/Official Other
Positive/negative:  1 2 3 4 5
Est Time:

7._____________________________________________________________________________

Statement   Press conference   News Report
Org/Ind/Party/Inst/Official Other
Positive/negative:  1 2 3 4 5
Est Time:

8._____________________________________________________________________________

Statement   Press conference   News Report
Org/Ind/Party/Inst/Official Other
Positive/negative:  1 2 3 4 5
Est Time:

Parties/Institutions Represented:

PPPP PML(N) PTI ANP JUI(F) MQM PML(Q) NP BNP(M) PML(F) PPP(SB) APML  AML  JI
JUI(N) others

ARMY  JUDICIARY  ELECTION COMMISSION  CARE TAKER GOVT.  Others

Social Issues Represented:

Gender  Health  Education  Environment  Unemployment  Price hike  Load shedding  Others

Marginalized Groups Represented:

Women  Religious minorities  Ethnic minorities  Transgender  Others

Govt. Official's Represented:

PM  Governor  CM  Federal Minister  Provincial Minister

Other

Monitor's Name & Signature   Supervisor's Name & Signature
Annex: Paid Content Monitoring Form
Electronic Media Monitoring
Society for Alternative Media & Research(SAMAR)

Date: Monitor no: Form no:

1. Time Slot:

2. TV Channel:

3. Total No of Paid Commercials/Content:

4. Total Duration of Paid Content:

5. Advertising parties:

   PPPP PML(N) PTI MQM PML(Q) APML ANP JI Other

6. Duration of each Advert (Party wise):

   a. PPPP    b. PML(N)    c. PTI    d. MQM
   e. APML    f. PML(Q)    e. JI    Other

7. Frequency of each Advert (Party wise)

   a. PPPP    b. PML(N)    c. PTI    d. MQM
   e. APML    f. PML(Q)    e. JI    Other

8. Nature of the Paid Advert/Content (Party wise):

   Nature               Party Name/Names

   a. Documentary style
   b. Video song
   c. Emotional
   d. Biased
   e. Neutral
   f. Comparative

Monitors Name & Signature       Supervisors Name & Signature
Annex: Paid Content Monitoring Form  
Electronic Media Monitoring  
Society for Alternative Media & Research

Date:      Monitor no:     Form no:

1. Time Slot:

2. Tv Channel:

3. Total No of Paid Commercials/Content:

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5. Advertising parties:

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<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tr>
<td>PPPP</td>
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<tr>
<td>PML(N)</td>
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<td>PTI</td>
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<td>PML(Q)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MQM</td>
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<tr>
<td>APML</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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6. Duration and frequency each Advert (Party wise):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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7. Nature of the Paid Advert/Content (Party wise):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Party Name/Names</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentary style</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Video song</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
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Monitors Name & Signature       Supervisors Name & Signature
Disclaimer

SAMAR in collaboration with FES has undertaken this Electronic Media Monitoring as a pilot project with very limited human resource and finance involved. Four monitors watched assigned television channels and filled questionnaires separately designed for each assignment by SAMAR. There is, however, a possibility of human error affecting the overall accuracy of the data. The report aims to give a representative sample of the Pakistani electronic media but cannot be used as evidence in any court of law. This is an attempt to gauge the trends and dynamics of election campaign on state owned and private TV channels. All the content has been monitored with reference to the code of conduct for media (election 2013) issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan.