

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN COVERING ELECTIONS: RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Jamshid Namozov

Uzbekistan Journalism and public communications University researcher

Abstract: In order to study the role of the media in elections, the article focuses on the opinions expressed by world scholars on this issue. As a main aspect, attention is paid to studying the duties and responsibilities of the media in covering elections. According to well-known media theorists Bill Kovacs and Tom Rosenstiel, such principles as truth, accuracy, objectivity, fairness and responsibility are important in journalistic practice.

Let's also analyze in detail the dynamics of digital media in electoral processes. It is known that digital media are increasingly involved in all our political processes. In addition, we determined the connection of this international practice with the national legislation of Uzbekistan. In particular, the "Electoral Code" and other legal norms implementing the requirements for the media during electoral processes were considered.

Keywords: Media, PR, Elections, Parliament, digital media

The role of the media in election coverage is a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon that has a significant impact on democratic processes. Historically, the media has played a critical role in informing the public about political issues, candidates, and voting mechanics. With the advent of digital technology, this role has expanded and changed, creating new challenges and opportunities.

Traditionally, the media have served as the key intermediary between politicians and the public. Television, radio, and newspapers have long been the primary source of information for voters, providing news, analysis, and political campaigns. According to Thomas Patterson, traditional media have "taken over" the responsibility for providing accurate, objective information, which is so important for a functioning democracy¹. The role of the media in setting the agenda, shaping political discourse, and managing public opinion is well documented in the field of political communication and has the greatest impact on election outcomes in terms of importance.

The rise of digital media has dramatically changed the landscape of election coverage. Online platforms, social media and 24-hour news cycles have transformed the distribution and consumption of information. Digital media offer the public a direct, immediate and interactive way to engage with political content. Andrew

¹ Patterson, T. E. *Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism*. Vintage. 2013. 45-b.

Chadwick explores how the digital transformation has had multiple impacts and become an important source of input into election coverage.²

The media has a major influence on public opinion and voting behavior. Through its coverage, the media can frame issues, shape news, and influence the criteria by which political actors and policies are evaluated. John Zaller has demonstrated the concept of “agenda setting power” and how exposure to media content can shape people’s perceptions and political views³. The role of the media in informing voters is not only to present facts, but also to interpret and contextualize political information. The role of the media in covering elections is an integral part of democratic processes. The shift from traditional media to digital media has expanded the influence of the media and changed the way they perform their role.

Media involvement in elections has a long history, characterized by a gradual evolution from traditional to digital forms. The history of media involvement in elections dates back to the early days of print journalism. Newspapers have been part of political campaigns since the 18th century, initially serving as “talking newspapers” for political parties. Jay Blumler and Dennis Cavanagh describe the early relationship between media and politics as a mutualistic one, noting that “media provided coverage in exchange for information and patronage.”⁴

The advent of television in the 20th century changed election coverage. Television became the dominant medium for political campaigns and shaping public opinion. The 1960 US presidential debates between John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon are often cited as a watershed in the history of television's influence on politics, demonstrating the medium's ability to influence public opinion.

The rise of digital media in the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked the latest evolution in election coverage. Internet and social media platforms have decentralized the dissemination of political information, allowing a wider range of voices to participate in political discourse.

The media has a major responsibility in reporting on elections. In this regard, the responsibility of the media is an important aspect that affects the integrity and health of a democratic society. This responsibility includes several aspects, including adherence to ethical journalistic standards, maintaining objectivity and fairness, and actively engaging in fact-checking to combat disinformation.

Ethical journalism is fundamental to accurate election coverage. According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel,

- Honesty;
- Accuracy;

²Chadwick, A. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford University Press. 2017. Pp.

³Zaller, J. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press. 1992. 26-30-bb.

⁴Blumler, J. G., and Cavanagh, D. *The Third Century of Political Communication: Influences and Characteristics*. *Political Communication*, 16 (3), 1999. pp. 209–230.

- Impartiality;
- Fairness;
- Responsibility

such principles are important in journalistic practice⁵. These principles become even more acute during elections, when the public relies on the media to learn about candidates and policies. The role of the media in providing accurate and balanced information helps voters make informed decisions.

Objectivity in media reporting, especially in the context of elections, is a constant topic of debate. The challenge is to ensure balanced coverage without false equivalence or obvious bias. Robert Entman notes that “the concept of framing and media bias are evident not only in what they report, but also in what they choose to omit.”⁶

The rapid spread of disinformation in the digital age poses a serious threat to the electoral process. Fact-checking has become an important tool in the media’s arsenal to ensure the accuracy of political reporting. “The standards are rising,” Mr. Lucas noted seven years after Graves’s statement, and the issue has become more urgent, but no less important (52)⁷.

The media's responsibility in covering elections is multifaceted and important. Today, adhering to journalistic standards, striving for impartiality and fairness, and actively engaging in fact-checking are important to ensure voters are well-informed and participate meaningfully in democratic processes.

Of course, there are legal obligations for the media to cover elections. The legal obligations of the media to cover elections are governed by complex laws and regulations that vary significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. These legal frameworks are designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and truthfulness of media reporting during elections, thereby ensuring democratic processes.

The legal obligations of the media in the context of elections usually include rules regarding equal time rules, election advertising and bans on certain types of content. For example, in this country, the decision of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan is regulated by Decision No. 952 of 05.10.2019 and the "Electoral Code". This is manifested, first of all, in the accreditation process. Media companies are required to register directly to participate in the electoral process. In particular, if foreign publications are registered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then local publications are registered by the Central

⁵ Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. Three Rivers Press. 2007. 102-103-bb.

⁶ Entman, R.M. Bias in framing: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 2007. pp. 163–173.

⁷ Graves, L. *Deciding What’s True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. Columbia University Press. 2018.

Election Commission. In addition, according to the decision of the Central Electoral Commission No. 952:

- prepare for the elections and cover all events related to their conduct;
- attend meetings of election commissions;
- receive copies of decisions of election commissions for coverage in the media;
- participate in meetings dedicated to the nomination of candidates, meetings of candidates with voters;
- be informed of the time and place of early voting and monitor this process;
- be present at polling stations on Election Day, including during the vote count;
- make photo, video, audio recordings without interfering with the activities of election commissions and the voting process and without violating the secrecy of the vote (with the exception of places of detention and imprisonment, military units, medical institutions);
- be present at the location of the voter during the voting process with his permission;
- receive reports on the results of vote counting from precinct election commissions by election commissions of the relevant district, city (except for the Tashkent City Election Commission) and be present when the results of the district elections are determined;
- have the right to prepare for the elections and express their opinion on their conduct⁸.

In addition to granting rights to the media, the following obligations are also imposed:

- comply with the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Electoral Code, legislative documents on the media and decisions of the Central Election Commission;
- always wear an identity card in a visible place for others in buildings (premises), meetings and press conferences of election commissions;
- prepare for the elections in a designated place in the building where meetings, press conferences, voting and other events are organized, and cover how they are held;
- not interfere with the activities of the election commission and the course of voting when covering the election process;
- when visiting election commissions at all levels, state authorities and administration bodies and other organizations, they must have with them the

⁸ OAV vakilining huquq va majburiyatlari: <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/-4549525>

certificate issued to them and the document proving their identity, and present them in accordance with the requirements of officials.

In Europe, the legal landscape is often different. For example, the European Convention on Human Rights provides a broader framework emphasizing freedom of expression and information, which guides member states in formulating their electoral media policies⁹. These policies vary from country to country, but generally aim to ensure balanced coverage and prevent the media from undue influence on election results.

The development of digital media poses new challenges to the legal regulation of election coverage. Traditional rules applicable to broadcast and print media are often difficult to apply in the digital sphere. This gap raises questions about how to effectively regulate online platforms, social media, and other forms of digital communication that play an increasingly important role in elections.

The legal obligations of the media to cover elections are important to ensure a fair and democratic election process. While these obligations vary significantly across legal systems, their primary purpose is to ensure a level playing field for candidates and accurate information for voters. As the media landscape continues to evolve, the legal framework must adapt to address the challenges posed by new technologies and changing communication methods.

The emergence of digital media and social media has fundamentally changed the landscape of election coverage, creating unique challenges and opportunities. This transformation is characterized by the increased speed of information dissemination, the broader reach of political messages, and the increasing role of interactivity in political discourse. Digital media, particularly social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have greatly expanded the reach of election coverage. These platforms not only allow for the widespread dissemination of information, but also for greater interaction between political actors and voters.

Digital media offer greater opportunities for political participation and mobilization. The interactive nature of social media allows for direct communication with voters, creating a sense of personal connection and engagement. Research by scholars such as Philip Howard and Bensi Collani has shown how digital media can be used effectively for political mobilization, particularly to engage younger people who are more active on these platforms¹⁰.

The role of the media in electoral processes varies significantly across electoral systems. These systems shape the political landscape in which the media operate, influencing how they cover elections and political issues.

⁹ 54. European Court of Human Rights. Freedom of Expression. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-freedom-of-expression-eng/1680732814>

¹⁰ Howard, P. N., and Collani, B. Botts, #StrongerIn and #Brexit: Computational Propaganda during the UK-EU Referendum. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1606.06356>

Proportional representation systems. In proportional representation systems, where seats are allocated based on the share of the vote each party receives, media coverage is more diverse and covers a range of political viewpoints. British academic Pippa Norris argues that such systems often create a multi-party environment that requires broad election coverage, including smaller parties and alternative viewpoints¹¹. This diversity in media coverage reflects the pluralistic nature of the political system and can lead to a more informed and engaged electorate.

This diversity requires that the media provide a voice for these different parties and their policies, ensuring that voters are aware of all the options available to them. In countries with proportional representation, the media often provide lesser-known or new parties with an important platform to communicate with voters. This is especially important given that these parties may not have the same resources as more established parties to conduct an extensive campaign. According to Professor Pablo Mancini, the role of the media in leveling the playing field is incomparable, allowing smaller parties to effectively convey their message to the masses¹². This practice exists in Uzbekistan as well. This provides equal opportunities for all parties in material terms in the elections that are taking place in our country. For example, in the 2023 presidential elections, each candidate has been allocated about 5 billion soums¹³.

Covering a diverse political spectrum is not without its challenges. The media, especially broadcast and print, must balance the need for inclusive coverage with time and space constraints. In practice, this does not prevent the publication of additional information about the governing party. Inclusive coverage in a PR system can lead to voters being more informed and engaged. Representing a wide range of political views in the media can stimulate public interest and participation in the political process and strengthen the overall health of democracy. Scholars such as Torill Olberg and James Curran argue that such broad media coverage can help increase political knowledge and voter participation¹⁴.

Majoritarian Electoral Systems. In first-past-the-post voting systems, where the candidate with the most votes in a district wins, the media's role in covering the election often focuses on the major political parties. This tendency can significantly affect the political landscape and voter perceptions. Such systems typically result in two-party rule. In the media, this binary reflects political dynamics. The dominance of the major parties in the media not only reflects their political power, but also

¹¹ Norris, P. *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. Cambridge University Press. 2004. 11-14-bb.

¹² Mancini, P. *Media and Politics: An Introduction*. In D. Albertazzi and D. Cobley (Eds.), *The Media: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Pearson. 2008.

¹³ Prezidentlik saylovida har bir nomzodga tashviqot uchun qariyb 5 mlrd soʻmdan ajratiladi:
<https://kun.uz/uz/63069733>

¹⁴ Olberg, T. and Curran, J. (2012). *How the Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. Routledge. 2012. pp. 88-91.

depends on the results of the media's editorial choices. As John Curtis, an expert on majoritarian elections, notes, "in such systems, the media may focus disproportionately on the major parties" based on their news value and public interest¹⁵.

One important consequence of media attention is the marginalization of smaller parties and independent candidates. In such electoral systems, these actors often compete for media attention, which is important for raising public awareness and support.

The role of the media in covering elections is an integral part of a healthy democracy. However, this role involves a difficult balance between media freedom, ethical reporting standards, and legal obligations. The conclusion of this discussion provides key insights into how to achieve this balance and its implications for democratic processes.

Media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy, ensuring the free flow of information and ideas essential to public debate. However, this freedom brings with it a responsibility to provide accurate and impartial information, particularly during elections. The independence of the media from political influence is essential for them to act as watchdogs and informers, rather than propagandists. The ability of the media to operate without undue restrictions is fundamental to their role in moderating political power and representing a diversity of viewpoints.

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Ethical reporting standards are critical to maintaining public trust in media coverage. This trust is especially important during elections, when voters rely on the media to provide the information they need to make decisions. For the media to effectively fulfil their democratic role, principles such as accuracy, fairness and impartiality must be upheld.

Balancing media freedom, ethical reporting and legal obligations is an ongoing challenge, and the rapidly evolving media landscape, particularly the emergence of digital platforms, makes the task more complex. Media outlets, journalists, politicians and civil society must work together to uphold these principles so that election coverage can contribute positively to the democratic process.

¹⁵Curtis, J. Election media coverage: the case for reform. *British Journalism Review*, 21(2), 2010. pp. 37–44.