

Media for Democracy in Afghanistan





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INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan went through a historic cycle of elections between 2004 and 2005, first electing a president through universal adult franchise and then creating the legislative institutions that will govern the country at the national and provincial levels until 2010.

The nascent media in Afghanistan followed the emergence of the new democracy with customary interest and commitment.

Another cycle of elections is due to begin in 2009, when the current tenure of Afghanistan's president expires. Elections to the national and provincial assemblies are due in 2010, although there is debate about whether to bring these forward to coincide with the presidential elections. There is also a need to hold district council elections, which have long been postponed because of difficulties in agreeing on the demarcation of boundaries and other related complications.

In all this, a significant role is envisaged for the media, as a watchdog over the integrity of the electoral process and as the main channel of information for the voting public. Significant constitutional issues remain to be resolved. These include the criteria for demarcation of district and provincial boundaries, the extent to which power is to be devolved from the national level to the provincial and then the local level, and the role of political parties.

With district councils yet to be elected, the constitutional scheme in Afghanistan remains incompletely implemented. The Meshrano Jirga, or upper house of the national parliament, is constitutionally required to have a third of its 102 members elected from the district councils. Since this condition has not been met, the upper house has made do temporarily with several "provisional" members put in place by the provincial councils.

The failure to hold district council elections also means that the people of Afghanistan do not quite yet see democratic accountability in practice in its most immediate sense.

Afghanistan is likely in the 12 months from August 2008 to revisit numerous themes in the practice of electoral democracy, that were submerged or dealt with summarily in the earlier round of elections. A well-informed public can participate in this debate and construct a positive outcome, if it is provided with authentic and reliable information by a well-informed and public-spirited media.

The purpose of this handbook is to lay out some principles that could function as guideposts for journalists in Afghanistan as they seek to grapple with the evolving complexities of democracy in action. It seeks to provide concrete suggestions on how global best practices in political reporting and election coverage could be adapted for the Afghanistan context.

Interactions between the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Afghan Independent Journalists'

Association (AIJA) have arrived at several conclusions about current media awareness of the democratic electoral process.

- Journalists find they have little access to the inner workings of the electoral process.
- They think that political leaders do not want to face journalists who ask difficult questions.
- The referee of the electoral process, the Independent Election Commission established under the constitution of Afghanistan, also is in need of media oversight, as are the election observers deployed by international agencies.
- Journalists are keen to join debate about the most appropriate pattern of electoral democracy for Afghanistan, in terms of assessing the presidential and the parliamentary system, and all the variants on these basic models.
- Journalists want an agreed charter of rights regarding their powers of scrutiny over the electoral process, so that they can report irregularities that ordinary people and public authorities can then seek to correct.
- Journalists want to understand better the principles of neutral and non-partisan reporting.
- In the specific situation of past and present conflict in Afghanistan, journalists want to understand how they can expand the limits of "safe reporting", particularly in relation to the influence and coercive power wielded by erstwhile "warlords".

This handbook is designed with specific reference to the political situation in Afghanistan and is intended for use by working journalists and practitioners from across all media (print, radio, television

and online). It was developed through a series of IFJ workshops in Afghanistan which aimed to equip participants with the expertise to do the following.

- Report on and interpret elections in the context of earlier such exercises in Afghanistan.
- Be attuned to the legal issues involved in elections, particularly in regard to the practice of journalism.
- Be aware of the logistics and mechanisms of electoral processes, including delimitation, voter registration, balloting and counting processes, and election supervision.
- Report on these in a transparent and audience-friendly fashion.
- Decode the various styles of electoral appeal used by candidates.
- Interpret in a transparent fashion the application of predictive techniques such as opinion polls, etc.
- Approach their political reporting tasks by applying the principles of public service journalism.
- Use these concepts in reporting on elections, as an essential part of Afghanistan's democratic transition.
- Understand the various electoral systems in use globally and place the Afghanistan system in comparative context.

BASIC CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY

In any discussion on democracy, certain themes emerge, including the following.

- Concepts of democracy, such as democracy defined as rule by the people.
- Processes of democracy, such as regular elections that reflect the will of the people.
- Practices of democracy, such as a division of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary.
- Principles of democracy, such as accountability of all institutions to the people.

These themes are inter-related and feed off one another. There is a circular logic as rule by the people moves through processes, practices and principles to return to accountability to the people. Rule by the people, in other words, becomes an actuality only when all institutions of governance are accountable on an absolute basis.

The State cannot, absent the process of law, do anything that is contrary to the basic rights of citizens: the right to life, the right to livelihood, the right to free speech, the right to information, the right to free movement.

In terms of the actual career of democracy as a political idea, we have the following set of propositions from a well-known journalist and political analyst in the United States, Fareed Zakaria in *The Future of Freedom* (2003):

- Democracy means a “government created by elections in which every adult citizen could vote”.
- “In 1900 not a single country had what we would today consider a democracy”.
- “Today 119 do, comprising 62 percent of all countries in the world”.

“Sovereignty” refers to a zone of freedom where the political authority or an individual can act without restraint. No sovereignty is absolute. There is a consensus shared by all countries and enshrined in the United Nations Charter that the “nation” as represented by the “State” is sovereign. Yet, though sovereign, the State is bound by the law.

Similarly, modern liberal democracy enshrines the sovereignty of the individual as a cardinal principle. However, the sovereignty of any single individual is limited by the compulsion he or she is



under to respect the sovereignty of another.

The State cannot do anything that is contrary to the basic rights of citizens: the right to life; the right to livelihood; the right to free speech; the right to information; the right to free movement. The circumstances under which any of these rights can be abridged need to be stated firmly under the law. In each instance where a State invokes these special powers, justification is required before the appropriate body.

Democracy also enshrines a particular mode of relationship between the individual and the State. This relationship can take several forms, when the individual could be seen in the following ways.

- As a voter.
- As a participant in public discussion.
- As a decision-maker.

Does an individual's participation in the political process begin with his or her entry into the polling booth and end with him or her dropping a paper into a ballot box? Is an individual's political engagement limited to this exercise, which could happen once in four or five years? Or is it an ongoing engagement? Does he or she remain engaged with the political process and governance?

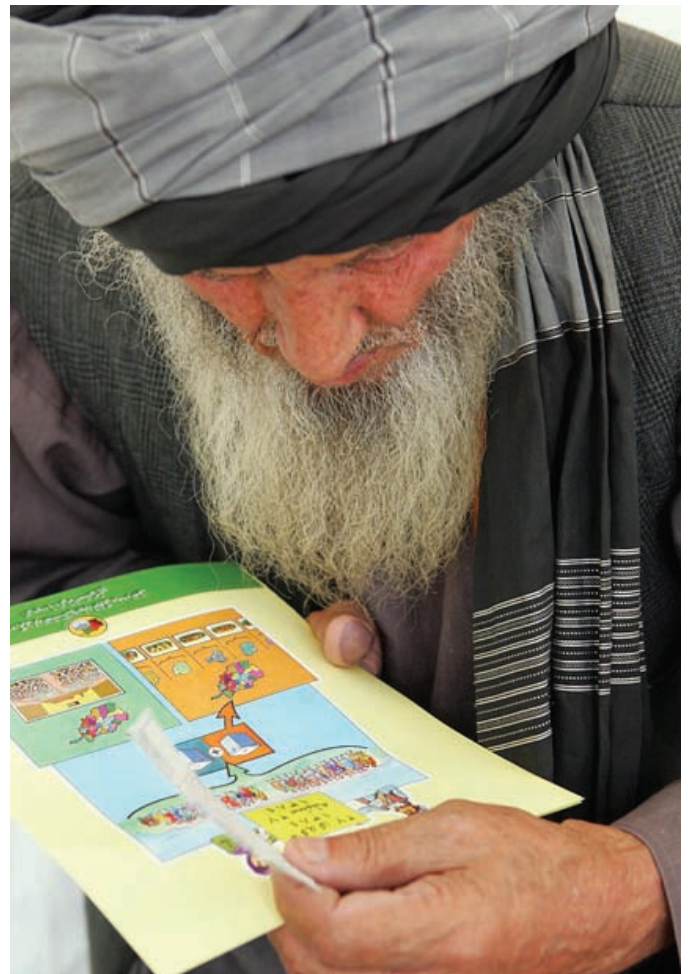
Democracy obviously means more than the freedom to cast a vote every few years. A functioning democracy needs to enable the citizen to exercise his or her freedom to comment on decisions made by the government. The citizen has to be aware that his or her opinion is of consequence in any important policy decision. Democracy in this sense is more than the freedom to vote every now and again. It is more like a continuous referendum on how people wish to be governed.

By this token, the mere fact that a country goes through the processes of electoral democracy once in four or five years does not mean that its people enjoy liberty. To quote Zakaria again:

- "Over the last half-century in the West, democracy and liberty have merged."
- "But today the two strands of liberal democracy, interwoven in the Western political fabric, are coming apart across the globe."
- "Democracy is flourishing, liberty is not".

Democratic processes have been in place generally in western countries for more than a century, but liberty has been guaranteed only in the past half-century. Many developing countries, which now employ democratic processes, cannot really claim to have guaranteed individual liberty.

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democracy, different options are available.
People can choose any of these to determine
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Practices and processes of democracy

Within the broad framework of democracy, different options are available. People can choose any of these to determine how political authority is organised and how far political institutions at every level should be empowered.

Irrespective of the nature of political organisation, a political authority at the national level is indispensable.

Federal states, as opposed to unitary states, assign a relatively limited role to the national (or central) authority.

However, a central authority needs to be in place, as there can be no State without a central authority.

Every State needs to make a choice on the powers that will be exercised by the central authority and those that will be exercised by provincial and local bodies.

What is the difference between a federal state and a unitary state?



- The State is a political unit.
- It has no authority if it does not govern a voluntary association of individuals, who share certain characteristics.
- This could be a cultural community of language, ethnicity or religion.
- This could also be a shared willingness to live together and seek a common destiny.

It is a question of what is the basic political unit. In a unitary state, the “nation” is considered the fundamental unit and “provinces” are created for administrative convenience.

In a federal arrangement, the province is the basic unit and exercises the more essential functions. A federal arrangement provides a sense of unity to a larger whole in terms of functions that are best exercised by large units, such as foreign policy, national defence, currency management, and so on.

Where provinces are relatively homogeneous in cultural terms (for example, in the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia and, with serious qualifications, Canada), the federal arrangement is

usually relatively stable.

Where provinces are very different culturally from one another (for example, in India and Pakistan), the central authority needs to make a special effort to accommodate differences.

Where provinces are internally very diverse, as in Afghanistan, there needs to be a greater effort at power-sharing at the central level, and a greater devolution of powers to provinces and, in turn, to districts.

With power comes responsibility

With power-sharing at the central level, there could then be agreements on how much power and responsibility is focused at the centre and how much is devolved to other units of administration.

Democracy is a continuous process of negotiation of these issues. As long as negotiation continues on the basis of sovereign decisions by the people, and does not descend into warfare, it could be said that democracy as a process is surviving.

ELECTIONS AND UNITS OF ADMINISTRATION

At the national level, elected bodies determine broad contours of policy.

At the provincial and district levels, they attend to the welfare needs of citizens, such as health care, education, transportation and infrastructure.

At the district and local levels, they attend to daily needs, such as water supply, the distribution system for life's essential needs, law and order, and so on.

However, distinctions between the policy needs of a people (which would be addressed by the national authority) and their basic and daily needs (which are to be dealt with by authorities at lower levels in the administrative hierarchy) cannot be drawn clearly. The ability of local authorities to meet daily needs often, perhaps always, depend on the policy decisions made by national authorities.

The different tiers of the democratic process should ideally work in harmony. However, in most situations this is an impossible demand, since disagreements and conflicts are part of the basic fabric of democracy. More than a state of perfect harmony then, a functioning democracy depends on accepted methods of conflict resolution.

The media is often a part of the system of conflict resolution. This is not by deliberate design, since any media organisation or operator that sees the settlement of political quarrels as part of its task would end up not being reliable or authentic. Rather, in providing a voice to diverse social groups and allowing potential disputers to engage in a conversation, the media provides a platform for



working out constructive solutions to seeming irresolvable issues. The basic challenge is to provide equal voice to all potential disputers.

Democracy is a system inherently prone to conflict, but it also contains accepted and peaceful means of conflict resolution. This poses a unique set of problems for democracy's consolidation in a post-conflict situation. It is a challenge that requires a careful graduation of the democratic transition in the aftermath of conflict in order to ensure that the inherent potential for dispute within democratic contestation does not lead to a relapse into bitter and open armed conflict.

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Two rival propositions point to contrasting outcomes for democracy in a post-conflict context.

- One says that democracy is the best medicine for dealing with the violence that remains a threat in societies that have suffered extreme conflict.
- The other says that democracy tends to aggravate violence in this context because it involves competition between different individuals, parties and factions.

These two propositions, which point to opposite outcomes, could perhaps be reconciled in another proposition drawn from Jack Snyder (From Voting to Violence, Democratization and Nationalist Conflict, 2000). Since conflicts within States have in recent

times been the consequence of so-called “ancient hatreds”, which arise from ethnic, tribal and communal differences, Snyder proposes that certain prerequisites need to be fulfilled before democratic elections can become a part of the solution to conflict, rather than part of the problem. These preconditions are summed up as follows.

“The gradual development of the rule of law, an impartial bureaucracy, civil rights and a professional media, followed by the holding of free elections, should be able to create a national civic identity that trumps ‘ancient hatreds’.”

The purpose of this discussion is to underline how elections alone are insufficient for guaranteeing peace, security and freedom. Certain other



conditions need to be met to make elections viable and electoral results sustainable. These conditions include the following.

- A neutral and impartial bureaucracy, which is the machinery of governance. Unless the machinery of governance is fair and impartial, people will have no faith that those they elect to lead them will really be able to deliver what they promise.
- A professional media, which is the watchdog of democracy.

THE MEDIA IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

Individuals living in a democratic society can get their information from diverse sources. At first hand, they may encounter the apparatus of government in different ways.

- The post office
- The tax collectors
- The water supply board
- The electricity supply board
- The fair price shop (where governments undertake the distribution of food and other essentials)
- The bank
- The police station
- Various others

People receive diverse inputs of information from these sources, all of which they seek to organise into a coherent whole. In this pursuit, individuals use their own understanding. Another essential source of information is the media.

In this sense, the media constructs a world of politics and governance in which an individual can participate.

However, the media is not an institution that exists in a world of its own, detached from society. Media outlets are owned and controlled by individuals who have their own interests, and

Democracy is itself a competitive game, involving potentially intense rivalries between individuals and groups. There could be situations in which competitive politics aggravates violent situations.

employ journalists who have their own personal opinions on any matter.

A journalist brings several perspectives to the task of interpreting the world of politics and governance for his or her audience, including:

- The individual journalist’s perspective.
- The perspective of the journalist’s boss.
- The perspective that best suits the media organisation’s commercial interests.
- The public service journalism perspective.

The public service journalism approach will be taken up in a fuller discussion later. However, we can conclude this section by summarising some of the points discussed so far about democracy and the media in a post-conflict situation.

Let us consider the widely-held belief that democracy is the best medicine for countries prone



to continual conflict. If serious thought is not given to what constitutes democracy, then this proposition would easily pass. But democracy is itself a competitive game, involving potentially intense rivalries between individuals and groups. There could be situations in which competitive politics aggravates violent situations.

How to avoid violent conflict

What needs to be done when democratic political competition becomes a potential trigger for violence?

- We need agreement on the rules of the game.
- We need a referee who will enforce the rules of the game.
- We need an agency that will inform the people about the rules of the game.
- We need an agency that will highlight every violation of the rules of the game.

In a sense, the media functions as a referee, though this may not be its primary function. However, the primary referee will function most effectively when it is aware that it is under constant watch by a vigilant media.

Afghanistan's electoral law provides for an Independent Election Commission (IEC) to be the

overseer of all election-related processes and activities. However, the media can bring specific cases and public concerns to the IEC's attention. In a

sense, the media also functions as a referee, although that may not be its primary function. An important point is that the primary referee will function most effectively when it is aware that it is under constant watch by a vigilant media.

The essence of the discussion so far can be summed up in the following fashion (cited from Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society and International Media Support, Media + Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook, 2004):

- Freedom is when the people can speak.
- Democracy is when the government listens.
- The media is the messenger.

PUBLIC SERVICE JOURNALISM PERSPECTIVES

Through its work in different environments, the IFJ has evolved a concept of public service journalism. It is a distinctive perspective that seeks to rise above commercial, partisan or political interests, to reflect what people think and what people want in terms of information.

Journalism can be narrowly focused in its interests, catering exclusively to a particular social constituency, reflecting only the interests and concerns of this constituency. This can make the media a poor platform for constructing a social dialogue that could be the basis for creative problem-solving.

Public service journalism, in contrast, seeks to reflect the diversity of the social milieu in which it is practised. It allows a multiplicity of voices to be heard and creates awareness in the media audience about the richness and diversity of the social environment.

The following list, drawn from various IFJ publications, summarises some of the attributes of public service journalism. It is journalism that:

- Promotes democracy, pluralism and tolerance.
- Strives for quality.



- Is accurate, balanced and honest.
- Looks for solutions.
- Recognises many voices.
- Helps society understand itself.
- Investigates issues of public interest.
- Promotes issues important to all citizens.
- Is responsive to citizens' needs.
- Builds trust with readers, listeners and viewers.

Keeping these values and attributes in mind, the reader of this handbook could take any newspaper or news broadcast of the day and look through its reports. Take any sample of reports from the day's newspapers or from the day's broadcasts and try to figure out the sources named in each report. The reader should ask himself or herself certain questions:

- How many of the reports use single sources?
- How many use dual sources?
- How many use multiple sources?
- What is the nature of the source used in each of these (government officials, security agencies, the man in the street)?

Public service journalism seeks to reflect the diversity of the social milieu in which it is practised. It allows a multiplicity of voices to be heard and creates awareness in the media audience about the richness and diversity of the social environment.

- Does each report reflect or represent the voice of every individual or group that would have a stake in the matter it describes?

The reader could then reflect how far these reports meet the public service values discussed above.

As a next step, the reader could consider how these reports could be better written to reflect these values. The following questions could be asked:

- What is the level of public interest in the report?
- How many of the social groups and citizens that the reader encounters on a daily basis would be interested in the report's content?
- What other sources would need to be included in the report?
- Which other voices would need to be heard?
- Is the report accurate and balanced?
- If the report points toward any identifiable social problem, does it also indicate directions in which solutions could be found?

PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES SERVE THE PEOPLE

By M. Akbar

Public service journalism (PSJ), I would say, is the journalism of the public, or journalism at the service of the public. Since I work largely in the area of PSJ, I call it a rough field, not in terms of the rights and wages enjoyed, but because the journalists cannot impose their interests on the community. PSJ is not unattractive but it's pale and colourless, like water it's clean, clear and glowing.

In regard to approaches and action, this field of journalism differs from commercial or corporate journalism. PSJ is an impartial and neutral journalism, free of personal interests and interference. As a former chairman of the BBC put it, PSJ could be supported by commercials but not so much as to lose its value to the public. PSJ never goes beyond defined goals and objectives, and these are always for the welfare of community, in connection to the public interest, rather than to impose a corporate interest or a personal interest of the journalist on the public.

Considering these facts, we can say that where the journalist is neutral, his personal interest or his willingness is not included in these fields. But we will also add that the journalist's neutrality is only up to a point. Partisanship or neutrality is all about an individual's attitude. And when a journalist starts writing a story, he looks at the problem from his particular angle of vision. So is there really a journalism that is impartial and neutral? And if so, to what extent is this a practical vision?

We are living in a world which is like a village. The needs of the global village are wider, deeper and stronger in its dimensions than individual aspects. Climate change and the ozone layer are global issues, terrorism exists in Afghanistan in which physically we suffer, but it also has aspects and dimensions that make it a global issue. The earthquake in China, the cyclone and floods in Burma, the political crisis in Pakistan, the stock exchange rates in New York, Tokyo and London – all these are global issues.

And then we have the daily needs that all of us face, like food, water, clothing, health care – all these are issues interlinked in today's global village. Thinking for the general interest, discussing the issues related to everyone's life, considering every one's ideas and reflections – these are the jobs of PSJ. They are jobs left undone, or very poorly done, by corporate journalism.

I have often stated that we have two types of radio services. One is the corporate or commercial radio and the other is the community radio.

Corporate radio always looks after its revenue and looks at their audience as passive consumers. It belongs to a specific person or company and the most important criteria for this kind of radio is profit, because corporate media does not look for solutions of country-wide issues and problems.

Not just radio, corporate television also functions along the same lines. But public service media works on different principles. Those involved in public media consider the public interest in their own language and present whatever they broadcast in the voice of the people. They respect all classes of society, from the farmer, the worker, the social worker, the professional, the administrator; they consider the young and the old, the male and the female. The purpose of this journalism is to access the issues and problems – and their solutions – in the language of the people themselves.

PSJ is the voice of the people. It thinks about the peoples' beliefs and traditions and always respects cultural differences. PSJ does not cater to the lowest common denominator of audience tastes, but instead tells the people their own stories in their own language through actors who truly represent them. In this sense, PSJ promotes a sense of public ownership over the media.

With all this said, we must concede that PSJ is still an infant in Afghanistan. And to develop this infant further, we need to face several challenges, such as: commercialism, which could divide audience loyalties between different commercial and business groups, and deprive the public of its ownership interest. Given the technological choices possible today, such as multiple modes of transmission through the worldwide web, there are opportunities and threats for PSJ.

PSJ can, however, expand its reach through the support of the people, given their understanding of its benefits, and through political and financial support. With efficient networking and appropriate respect paid to diversity, PSJ could be an instrument of building solidarity.

Dr Akbar is a physician and a public service broadcaster based in Kabul.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

“One person, one vote” is usually taken to be the fundamental rule of a democracy. However, this remains, on a deeper view, an inadequate assurance. More than being given the vote, every person has to be convinced that his or her vote counts and that it is of equal value as any other person’s. Thus we could, on a more fundamental reading, take “one person, one value” as the basic rule of democracy.

What are the systems in place for securing this outcome? Various kinds of electoral systems are in use worldwide, such as the following.

- The simple plurality, single-member district (also known as winner takes all, or “first past the post”).
- The majority vote, single-member district.
- Proportional representation systems, of which notable instances are the additional member system and the single transferable vote system.

How do these systems work? What are their plus and minus points?

Simple plurality, single-member district

British parliamentary elections follow this system. To illustrate how this system rewards disproportionately the first-place party:

- In the 2001 general elections, the Labour Party won 62.5% of seats with a 40.7% share of the votes.
- The Conservative Party won 25.2% of the seats with 31.7% of the votes.
- The Liberal Democratic Party won 7.9% of the seats with 18.3% of the votes.

Similarly, in the May 2005 general elections in Britain:

- The Labour Party won 55% of the seats with 35.2% of the votes.
- The Conservative Party won 30.7% of the seats with 32.4% of the votes.
- The Liberal Democratic Party won 9.6% of the seats with 22% of the votes.

India uses an identical system, although it is much more complex because of the size of the country and the large number of parties that contest elections.

In the 2004 general elections, the Congress party won more seats than its main rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), despite winning a lower share of the nationwide vote. This is because the Congress votes were concentrated within a relatively small number of constituencies, while votes for the BJP were spread over a large number of constituencies.



Neither party had a sufficient number of seats to form a government. Since both were aware that this would be the case, they had worked out several pre-election alliances. These alliances are one way of ensuring that votes of different parties are pooled in each district, improving the chances of each coalition. Even with this, the Congress-led coalition and its rival led by the BJP, won almost identical vote shares – 35 percent each – with the latter winning fractionally more. The number of seats won by the Congress coalition in Parliament however, was significantly more.

Further details on the working of this electoral system, and its plus and minus points, can be found via the Electoral Reforms Society at: www.electoral-reform.org.uk

In the simple plurality, single-member district, several candidates contest each district. The candidate with the most votes wins. Among the system’s advantages is its simplicity. Each seat is contested by several candidates from identified political parties. And the winner of the seat is easily identified. By this attribute, the winning candidate is accountable to a particular well-defined constituency or electoral district. The relationship between the district and its representative is clear and direct.

The single most significant disadvantage of this system is that a candidate may win with a very small share of the popular vote (i.e., the total number of votes cast). For instance, in an electoral district where there are four or more contestants, a candidate with just over a quarter of the popular vote could potentially win.

Two-round, simple majority system with single member districts

This system typically involves two rounds of voting in every district. The first round would eliminate all candidates who fail to reach a certain pre-defined threshold in terms of vote shares. In France's system, a candidate would win if he or she secures 50% of the total number of votes cast, numbering at least 25% of the total number of eligible voters. If no candidate qualifies in the first round, all candidates whose votes exceed 12.5% of the total number of eligible voters would go into a second round.

In the second round, the candidate who wins a simple majority would qualify.

In another variant, the first round would eliminate all except the top two candidates. Thus a multi-cornered contest would become a two-cornered one, enabling one of the candidates to obtain a clear 50% share of the vote in the second round.

This system has the advantage of requiring each candidate to work toward representing the interests of a majority in his or her district. However, it is a long and cumbersome process.

It seeks to force-fit every complicated electoral situation into a two-party contest. However, even the world's most simple two-party electoral system is prone to serious abuses and threats of gerrymandering, or drawing electoral boundaries in a manner that would suit particular groups and deprive others of a fair say in the election.

A further deficiency with this system is that smaller parties with legitimate political interests often get squeezed out.

Proportional representation systems

Different versions of proportional representation systems are used around the world. The purpose of this system is to ensure that every party is represented in proportion to its support among the electorate.

In the most general form of the proportional representation system:

- All parties put up a list of candidates before the election.
- All voters then cast their votes, indicating their choice among the parties.
- Parties are awarded seats in proportion to the share of the vote they obtain.

Thus, in a 100-seat legislature, if Party A gets 43% of the total vote, it would be awarded 43 seats. The first 43 candidates in the list submitted by Party A would be declared elected. The process would be the same for all other parties.

Power brings responsibility. Devolution of powers normally also means devolution of taxation authority. In under-developed countries, the central legislature commonly enjoys disproportionate authority in determining how scarce resources are deployed.

The most significant problem with this system is that it removes the direct link between a candidate and the district. It could be argued that this link is not of great consequence for a legislative body at the national level, which should be concerned with broad issues of policy and the principles of governance. This argument is likely to have some weight only in situations where a credible system of devolution of power to provincial and local level bodies exists.

Power brings responsibility. Devolution of powers normally also means devolution of taxation authority. In under-developed countries, the central legislature commonly enjoys disproportionate authority in determining how scarce resources are deployed. In the

circumstances, it is often necessary to establish some link between elected members of the central legislature and particular regions and districts.

The additional member system and the single transferable vote system represent different ways of seeking to remedy these deficiencies of the proportional representation system.

Additional member system

The additional member system is a hybrid of the single-member, simple plurality system and the proportional representation system. It seeks to address the deficiencies of both by establishing a direct link between elected representatives and their constituencies. Under this system, each party puts up a candidate in every electoral constituency and also puts forward a "national" list of candidates. If a candidate wins a constituency, his or her name is taken off the list. All constituencies then declare their winners. A fixed number of seats in the national parliament are then distributed in accordance with the proportion of the total vote won by each party. The German Bundestag (Federal Parliament), for instance, has 299 members who are elected through direct constituency-based elections and another 299 who are elected through a "list" system.

In certain variants of the additional member system, there is a threshold that every party has to clear. For instance, a party should have a minimum of 4% of the national vote to qualify for representation in the parliament. The threshold helps to ensure that the party profile of the parliament is not excessively fragmented, which would make the management of parliamentary business excessively difficult.

Single transferable vote system

The single transferable vote system is another variant of a proportional representation system. In this system, an individual votes not just for a single

candidate, but for a number of candidates, in preference order. Thus, instead of ticking off a single candidate's name on the ballot paper, he or she would mark 1, 2, 3, and so on, against a number of candidates' names. A certain threshold or quota is fixed for a candidate to be elected. Once a candidate crosses that threshold, any first preference vote cast for him or her would be disregarded. Instead, the vote would be assigned to the second preference candidate marked. Once all the votes are counted and the required number of candidates has been elected from each constituency, the electoral process is declared over. However, if the number of representatives falls short in any constituency, the lowest-ranked candidate in terms of first-preference votes is eliminated, and all his or her votes are assigned in accordance with the second preferences marked. This process continues until the required number of candidates is declared victorious for each constituency.

The single transferable vote system is used in the Republic of Ireland for elections to the national parliament. Various other countries have used it for elections to provincial and city councils. Its principal advantage is deemed to be the multiplicity of choices it offers to voters. It preserves a close link between voters and elected representatives. Candidates are assessed on their individual merit, not so much on their party affiliation, although party affiliation could be a factor influencing voter preference.

Single non-transferable vote system

The single non-transferable vote system was used in Afghanistan in the last round of elections to the national and provincial councils. Under this system, the voter casts his or her vote for an individual rather than a candidate. Every region has a certain number of seats, of which some



could be reserved, as in Afghanistan, for women candidates. In a particular region with, say, 10 seats, the candidates with the top 10 vote tallies would qualify.

This system was used in Japan between 1948 and 1993. It was then abandoned because of several problems.

Consider a region with 10 seats. A party that puts up 10 candidates and wins, say, 40% of the vote, with each candidate getting 4%, may gain no seats. In comparison, another party may put up three candidates who win 8% each, for a party total of 24% of the vote. That party would then conceivably get all three candidates elected. This would be more likely if there were a large number of candidates in the field, with the result that the votes would be thinly spread and the threshold for victory would be relatively low.

In addition, if two of the 10 seats in the region are reserved for women, then the top two women candidates would gain entry into the national parliament, even if their individual vote tallies were well below that garnered by other candidates.

First-time elections in post-conflict democracies need to do a particularly good job of translating votes cast into seats won for majorities, minorities and independents.

The single non-transferable vote system assigns a relatively minor role for political parties. Non-party based elections are deemed to have an advantage in Afghanistan since the party system is incipient. However, non-party based systems make the task of managing the business of parliament additionally complicated.

What system best suits Afghanistan?

A 2004 report on Afghanistan's electoral scene (Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder, *Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges for Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit) observed:

"First-time elections in post-conflict democracies need to do a particularly good job of translating votes cast into seats won for majorities, minorities and independents. Election results are particularly susceptible to challenge if the 'losers' feel that the outcome is unfair or rigged, or the voting system has discriminated against their core constituency."

The media community in Afghanistan could reflect over this proposition. Democratic elections are all about the will of the people. And in the complexity of nationwide elections in a country with such great diversity as Afghanistan, the popular will is often difficult to interpret. Every political party would interpret the popular according to its interests.

In an objective sense, the closest indicator would probably be the share of each candidate or party in



the popular vote. However, when there are no contesting parties with defined political programs, the popular will is even more difficult to interpret. Without identifiable political programs that are advocated by particular parties, and without the identification of candidates aligned to these programs, people tend to vote according to their ethnic or community identity. This is often difficult to translate into a coherent legislative program for newly elected parliaments.

What then is the electoral system that best converts votes won into a fair distribution of seats in the legislature? This question could become the subject for a debate within the media in Afghanistan.

In the context of the committed goals (under the Bonn agreement of 2001), that Afghanistan would have a “broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government”, the principal challenge before the Afghan media is to arrive at an electoral system that best achieves these goals.

Afghanistan still has a choice to make about the electoral system that best suits its circumstances: the first-past-the-post system and variants of proportional representation, including the “list” (whether based provincially or nationally), the additional member system or the single transferable vote system.

The Reynolds and Wilder study looked at this question and found that the “provincially based form of list proportional representation (List PR) is the system most often adopted for post-conflict elections in emerging democracies”. Countries that have opted for this system while emerging from bitter internal conflicts include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Namibia, Cambodia and East Timor. The study’s authors conclude, “On a political level, List PR is much better at providing basic ground rules that help bring about lasting stability in a fragile, multi-ethnic, inchoate political climate.”

In concluding this section, we could revisit the deficiencies of the list proportional representation system that were earlier discussed. A credible way of overcoming these deficiencies, including the failure to establish a strong link between the people of the electoral district and their elected representatives, is to provide for a real devolution of authority to provincial, district and local bodies. In this sense, the completion of the electoral cycle in Afghanistan is no mere luxury, but a necessary condition for securing a strong popular investment in democracy.

MEDIA AS ADVOCACY

By Mohammad Halim Fidai

Advocacy is the attempt and plan for public reform, to bring about positive changes in terms of policy and programs. Advocacy efforts require the collection of information regarding specific problems and challenges. They define problem-solving possibilities and recommend optimal solutions. In brief, advocacy is the attempt to achieve targeted goals, and gain the support of others for it. Advocacy is a response to all challenges existing in a democratic society, where people suffer from a lack of involvement.

Advocacy has its own way and style of doing things and adopts different styles in response to particular situations. The experienced practitioners gather all relevant information, put together their analyses and in the light of the problem at hand, choose the best method.

Advocacy can take place as a personal effort, through public protests and demonstrations. It can be undertaken with regard to legislative authorities, judicial forums and implementing agencies.

The media is another forum and instrument of advocacy. Media can change the ways and approaches of both policy makers and public. The media can be used to inform the public about the root causes of problems that affect them. And the public can use the media to explore problem solving opportunities.

Media can highlight the resources, services and the possibilities available for problem solving in society. One of the problems of democracy in Afghanistan could be that we are using imported policies and strategies from the west, which work less effectively here. For instance, we in Afghanistan use the Jirga as a conflict-resolution method. For voluntary community work, we have the term Ashar. There is the term Zakat for charity and financial support for the needy, and for public information and interactions we use the Masjid and the Khanqa.

Why media advocacy? The Holy prophet Mohammad (PBUH) says "every one of you is a shepherd responsible for his herd". Everyone is enjoined to have a sense of responsibility to the community he lives in and inform others about their rights. The media can not only report problems but also point the way towards sound and rational options in resolving them. In our advocacy through the media, we should ask and invite answers for such key questions as: do people want a democratic process in the country? Is there any antagonism to the process? What are the main causes for a lack of understanding of the democratic process? Is there adequate knowledge and skill relevant to the issue? What are the advantages of media advocacy? The major

benefit is that issues of public concern are debated and discussed among the people with a stake in resolving these issues. Without the active involvement of the media in questions of public importance, civil society, government and private sector organisations would find it difficult to gain an audience for problem solving options.

When we want to use the media for advocacy purposes, we should know the limitations of the media. Every individual should know the demands, requirements, interest and policy of the media. What is the nature of the media organisation's audience? In which geographical area are they? What language do they speak? What media would be interested in the issues? And what are likely to be the audience reactions?

Issues should be addressed in such manner as to increase the audience and hold their attention. New angles of looking at a question should be explored, and accurate and relevant background provided on every matter.

Also the people who are dealing with media advocacy should know what is of interest to the media. Repetitions of old and incomplete stories should be avoided. And information provided to the media should be sufficient for them to be interested and retain interest. Selection of the media is as important as the message you want to deliver. The person delivering the message should also have the authority to gain the attention of the media. A checklist could be prepared including such matters as: what is the audience we want to target? Why do we want to deliver the message to them? What are their attitudes typically, on the matter we want to talk to them about? What is the media that has the best chance of reaching them?

What is your message about? What are the best tools for transmitting the message?

The problems should be reflected as matters of universal rather than individual concern and practical options to address the problem should be recommended. Every organisation should have its own policy.

Media advocacy differs from public relations and marketing because it is aimed at strengthening public capacities to address issues at the policy level. Because it deals with complex issues of social importance, media advocacy has to be ready to address many challenges. Journalists may ask hard and tricky questions and the advocacy effort should be ready with logical explanations.

The author is a senior journalist based in Kabul and secretary of the South Asia Free Media Association, Afghanistan chapter.

THE LOGISTICS AND MECHANICS OF FREE ELECTIONS

Democracy works on the fundamental principle of one person, one vote. However, this principle is of little value if it is not translated into the more profound principle of “one person, one value”. Every person should be registered to vote and every vote should count.

Under Afghanistan’s election law, every citizen is entitled to vote provided he or she is:

- 18 years of age or more.
- Has not been deprived of any political and civil rights by an authoritative court.
- Is registered in the voters’ registration list.

Under the election law, the Independent Election Commission “must certify the voters’ roll or the segments of the voters’ roll to be used in the election and make it available for inspection in public places, determined by it, 15 days before an election.

Readers of this handbook are likely to have first-hand knowledge of the voter registration process that took place on a nation-wide scale before the last round of elections in Afghanistan. They could ask themselves a few key questions:

- Were there omissions in the voters’ rolls in their area or province?
- If so, did the omissions follow any pattern, or indicate any purpose of keeping some group of voters out of the election process?
- Was an opportunity given to the omitted persons to seek corrections?
- Were complaints dealt with fairly and well?

Another crucial aspect of electoral processes is the demarcation of electoral boundaries, or the delimitation of districts. Through the 2004-2005 election cycle, Afghanistan retained the demarcation of districts that existed since well before the recent turmoil. There is wide agreement that this definition of electoral districts does not do justice to the significant shifts and growth in population that have occurred in Afghanistan. Therefore, achieving a consensus on provincial and district boundaries is of crucial importance before the next round of elections. This requires, at a minimum, a reliable population census.

This issue is of importance in two respects. Firstly, the number of seats that each province gets in the Wolesi Jirga depends upon population numbers. Secondly, the demarcation of electoral districts, as and when that is done, depends upon the population distribution within the district.





There is a particular need to provide adequate representation for communities that may be minorities within certain provinces. Gerrymandering, or drawing district boundaries in a manner that tilts the advantage in favour of particular political and ethnic groups, is a constant threat in these processes.

For instance, if there is a compact pocket of a particular ethnic community in a province in which they are a minority, the delimitation process could address the matter in two ways. It could either create an electoral district around this pocket, so that the community in question is assured of some representation from the province. Or it could cut the pocket two or three ways and assign each fragment to a neighbouring electoral district, so that the community's identity is submerged within that of the majority. That way,

they would not be assured of any representation from the province.

Resolving these matters satisfactorily requires accurate data, careful negotiations and an attitude of fair-mindedness on all sides. The media in Afghanistan could promote a fair outcome to this debate by creating the conditions for a constructive debate on these issues.

As of now, there remain some anomalies in the voter registration process in Afghanistan, as the following table shows.

Assuming that the population figures are accurate, and taking into account the central statistical organisation estimate that 55% of the total Afghanistan population is over the age of 18, there should be 11,380,325 voters in Afghanistan.

Assuming further, that the female/male population in every age group is roughly 50:50, the total number of voters should comprise 5,690,163 women and the same number of men. There could be minor discrepancies, but the figures should roughly be in balance.

There is a particular need to provide adequate representation for communities that may be minorities within certain provinces... The media could promote a fair outcome by creating conditions for a constructive debate on these issues.

However, rather than a 50:50 distribution between men and women, there is a 59:41 distribution at the national level in Afghanistan. This could, in a sense, be seen as the inevitable

consequence of prevalent social conservatism which discourages women from becoming active participants in the electoral process. However, this explanation does not seem to apply in at least one region of the country – the Central Highlands – where women outnumber men 53:47.

There are also problems with the voter registration figures in the Central Highlands, the East and the South-east, where the number is far in excess of the population in the 18-plus age group.

Table 1: Population Versus Voter Registration in the Various Regions of Afghanistan

Region	Population statistics from central statistical organisation	Registration numbers from joint election management board	Percentage of eligible voters registered
Central	5,311,200	1,878,655 (62% men, 38% women)	64.3%
Central Highlands	691,000	493,999 (47% men, 53% women)	129.5%
East	1,922,900	1,249,334 (58% men, 48% women)	118.1%
North	2,984,500	1,480,626 (52% men, 48% women)	90.2%
North-east	3,046,900	1,471,968 (55% men, 45% women)	87.8%
South	2,551,300	1,383,698 (79% men, 21% women)	96.6%
South-east	1,883,700	1,347,469 (53% men, 47% women)	133.6%
West	2,349,400	1,257,104 (59% men, 41% women)	97.3%
TOTAL	20,691,500	10,562,853 (59% men, 41% women)	92.8%

Source: Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder. *Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges for Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan*. 2004

These anomalies need to be sorted out if democratic governance through periodic elections is to gain credibility within Afghanistan.

With another cycle of elections beginning in 2009, the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan needs to show tangible progress in demarcating district boundaries, drawing up electoral rolls and registering all those who have been left out. The media can contribute to the



process by creating public awareness and a transparent environment in which these issues can be resolved.

There is also likely to be significant public interest in the sustainability of the elections machinery.

The Afghanistan Compact, agreed at the London Conference on Afghanistan from January 31 to February 1, 2006, laid down a complex schedule of commitments. But the following in particular, seem relevant:

- The Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission will have the high integrity, capacity and resources to undertake elections in an increasingly fiscally sustainable manner by end-2008, with the Government of Afghanistan contributing to the extent possible to the cost of future elections from its own resources.
- A permanent civil and voter registry with a single national identity document will be established by end-2009.

Once these fundamentals are sorted out, the media needs to focus on the actual logistics of elections, including the large-scale printing of ballots, securing them against tampering, and transporting them in adequate numbers to each polling station. On election day, security will have to be deployed around every polling station. Once the polling is finished, credible measures need to be taken to secure ballot boxes and to dispose of unused ballot papers.

As the IFJ workshops in Afghanistan revealed, all these factors were major issues with the last round of elections. The media needs to be vigilant in identifying any possible failures of election authorities in these respects.

The location of polling booths and the hours allowed for people to cast their votes are important elements in the planning of an election. Even in mature democracies, certain groups of people have been denied the full franchise right because of the long distances they had to travel

to find a polling booth.

Again, if the number of polling booths in an area is not consistent with the density of voters, there is a possibility that voters could queue up for hours and not be able to cast their vote within the time allowed for balloting. Complaints about this kind of problem have been voiced even in mature democracies such as the United States, particularly in neighbourhoods where the relatively poor and underprivileged live.

Journalists reporting on elections should be attentive to the following

- Location of polling booths
- Population density relative to density of polling booths
- Hours allowed for polling
- Typical livelihood activities in the area – do these allow enough time for people to cast their votes without undue bother or risk of a loss of income?

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

Political parties are integral elements of the competitive electoral system. How did they originate? And why did they originate? There is no agreed answer to these questions.

The origins of political parties such as India's Congress Party, the Pakistan Muslim League, the Labour Party in Britain and the Republican Party in the United States can indeed be traced. Yet the origin of a party, as a necessary part of democratic practice, is not quite so easily traced. As the Oxford Companion to Politics of the World (Oxford University Press, 1993) puts it, "... as power gradually concentrated in the modern State, groups (usually called factions, sometimes parties) formed around key leaders or families to struggle for its control."

In other words, as politics became more complex and power began shifting from clans and tribal units to the

nation-state, political parties began forming, often around the nucleus of key clans or tribes.

Although the last cycle of elections in Afghanistan was non-party based, some political parties did make their presence felt. In the interests of long-term stability and viability, it may be essential for Afghanistan to develop a competitive party system. Legislatures organised along party lines are normally more efficient at transacting their business, since parties provide a basis for unified action by large blocs of elected representatives. Without the discipline of the party system, every legislative body becomes a disparate group in which every elected member would essentially function according to his or her own agenda.

In the lead-up to the next cycle of elections, the media could focus on the

political parties that played a significant role in the last round of elections.

- Who were their leaders?
- Where did they come from?
- What future did they promise for Afghanistan?
- Who else shared in this vision of the future of Afghanistan?

In the interests of long-term stability and viability, it may be essential for Afghanistan to develop a competitive party system. Legislatures organised on party lines are normally more efficient.



- What is their status now?
- What role can they be expected to play in future elections?

The following definition is found under Article 2 of Afghanistan's Political Parties Law:

In this law, 'political party' means an organised society consisting of individuals which undertakes activities for attaining its political objectives, locally and/or nationwide, based on the provisions of this law and its own constitution.

Under Article 6 of the law, political parties shall not:

1. Pursue objectives that are opposed to the principles of the holy religion Islam.
2. Use force, or threaten with, or propagate, the use of force.
3. Incite to ethnic, racial, religious or regional discrimination.
4. Create a real danger to the rights and freedom of individuals or intentionally disrupt public order and security.
5. Have military organisations or affiliations with armed forces.
6. Receive funds from foreign sources.

This list of prohibited activities for a political party may seem unexceptionable. However, the point about laws is to observe them in practice, rather than principle. In the lead-up to the next cycle of elections, the media in Afghanistan could initiate a public debate on whether these restraints on political parties are warranted, fair or prone to abuse. This could be a part of the effort at re-energising the party system for the benefit of democracy in Afghanistan.

ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

By Aunohita Mojumdar

The strength and courage of Afghanistan's journalists has enabled the growth of a strong and vibrant media, which is now an important component of Afghanistan's fragile new democracy, sometimes more effective than other institutions of state.

As the media grows in strength and reach, so do the challenges facing Afghanistan's journalists. There are increasing attempts at censorship, threats, violence, kidnappings and arrests and murders. My task is to address what I would call the other side of the coin. Not the acts of commission which are easy to see and document, but the acts of omission, the withholding of information, which is difficult to see and therefore much more difficult to combat.

In the long run it is the absence of information which can pose an equal or even greater threat to media freedom by limiting the ambit of the media, ensuring an automatic compliance.

As nation states grow, so do their means of controlling information and the access to it. By withholding information from the media they are able to shape public debate and discourse and therefore policy and implementation.

The first refuge of governments and other interested parties seeking to withhold information is to invoke the principle of national interest and security and this is something that is amply evident in a situation of conflict as in Afghanistan. Information on the ongoing operations is very difficult to obtain.

In most of the battle zones it is impossible to reach and journalists have to rely on what is reported to them by the different parties to the conflict.

On a good day any Afghan journalist can hope to get four different versions of the truth from four different sources. While this may seem primitive to journalists from developing countries, I would argue that it actually represents an opportunity for Afghan journalists. The lack of coordination between different arms of the state entity allows for multiple versions of events to find their way into the media, allowing the public to see the contradictions. Most people conclude perhaps that the truth lies somewhere in between as it usually does. This would be much more difficult when a nation state develops a well oiled response that coordinates and controls the flow of information, putting forward only one absolute and sanitised version of events.

The lack of real information from the conflict areas is something that has been acknowledged by the United Nations as hampering humanitarian assistance to the conflict zones, a telling commentary on the reliability of information from government and pro-government sources.

Depending on where the journalists are working, they face immense pressures from government, the security forces, both international and national and the anti-government forces, to put out only one version of events. Those who choose to do otherwise are seen as being either difficult or disloyal or in the most extreme examples as traitors deserving punishment.

This is not unique to Afghanistan by a long shot. Most countries, including mine, India, have a very well developed state apparatus that ensures a national consensus on issues of national security. For the reporting I did on Punjab and Kashmir, which reported on the disenchantment of the people with the Indian government, I was labelled a traitor, anti-Indian and worse. I can state from experience that it is not a label that is easy to wear and many journalists succumb to the consensus of the state, preferring to exhibit loyalty to the government rather than their profession.

While travelling extensively in Punjab and Kashmir helped me gather information, it was far more difficult to do so when I began reporting on foreign affairs. Diplomacy is largely an event that is based on policy, not events, and on decisions behind closed doors. Unsympathetic journalists can be shut out quite effectively. The choice that sometimes faces critical journalists is to either stop criticising or face an information vacuum. The vacuum in turn, like all vacuums, gets filled, naturally, by the information that is fed by the authorities, providing an unbalanced version of events.

While conflict situations are hopefully reversible, the lack of information is more insidious when it comes to documenting governance. While it is easy enough to record the events involving political figures in capitals and urban centres, collecting news about the beneficiaries of governance is very difficult. How are people benefiting from the programs and policies? Are the policies wrong or the implementation? While human interest stories documenting the plight of the poor are not unusual, it is more difficult to get specific information on the individual policies, programs and expenditures.

While few governments will openly deny information to the journalist, they make it so difficult that media organisations, who have limited resources in

terms of money time and people, eventually give up.

In Afghanistan, for example, while the larger numbers relating to aid and expenditure are easily thrown about, specific detailed breakdowns which would actually give the real information about the effectiveness about a program are very hard to find. Anyone here, who has tried to get information, for example, about donor funding, will know what I am talking about. For that matter even the Government of Afghanistan cannot often find out the information from international donors! Whether government or international organisations, information is given as a privilege, a concession rather than a right and this is the central aspect that needs to change.

Specific laws that provide for Freedom of Information have to be enacted in order to reverse this equation. In India the Government has adopted the Freedom of Information Act 2005 that enables every citizen to ask for information on any government program or policy. The onus of explaining why information is not being given is now on government officials who can be held accountable and punished for not giving information.

There is sufficient anecdotal evidence from India, to suggest that those sufficiently interested – such as groups working with communities - have used this law to obtain information that would otherwise be denied in the normal course.

Once decision-makers know that their every decision, expenditure and policy can be subject to public scrutiny, the entire process of decision making will change, making governments more accountable to people. Afghanistan has a great window of opportunity to seek this right at the initial stages of nation building. The right to information is not the answer to all problems, but it is a very important tool towards changing the balance of power towards more equitable governance.

The author is an independent journalist based in Kabul.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

Afghanistan's electoral law provides for the establishment of a Media Commission that will monitor the performance of the media through an election campaign and ensure that a code of conduct is followed.

This is an unusual legal provision, since the media in most countries is governed by voluntary codes of conduct. The full text of the provision is in the box below.

Provision for a Media Commission in Afghanistan's electoral law

The Independent Electoral Commission shall set up, at least 60 days prior to the election date, a Media Commission to monitor the reporting and coverage of the electoral campaign and advise it on any breaches of fair reporting and coverage of the election campaign and of any breaches of the provisions of the code of conduct (procedures) for the elections relating to the media that may occur during the election campaign. Following the recommendation of the MC, the IEC may issue a public reprimand of the media involved or refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Journalists' organisations have always been very protective of their autonomy in the face of external efforts at regulation. Codes of conduct for the media normally evolve voluntarily. The media should keep afloat the debate on this issue. Ethical journalism in contemporary understanding is not about an external imposition of standards. It is about instituting sufficient checks and balances within the internal editorial processes of the media.

Three questions are especially pertinent:

- What are the merits of this legal provision and how has it worked in the past?



- Are there cases in which the Media Commission's statutory powers have been applied?
- Is self-regulation by the media a better option?

Several things can go wrong with elections and the media needs to be continually on the alert to blow the whistle when it can see things going wrong. A checklist may be used by media practitioners to assess the fairness of an election as it is under way (see box below).

Media Checklist

- Are voters' lists complete?
- Are voters who are not listed able to get on the list by showing proper identification?
- Are the ballots easily understood by voters who cannot read?
- Do voters easily understand the voting instructions?
- Are there enough ballots, ballot boxes and officials to observe the voting and count the ballots?
- Are there security arrangements to protect the ballot boxes so no one can stuff them with false ballots?
- Is the election commission seen as impartial, independent and honest?
- Does the election commission respond quickly to complaints from the media, the voters and the political parties about all alleged violations of the election laws?
- Does the election commission investigate and stop violations of the election law?
- Are violators penalised in any way?
- Is the state media providing reliable coverage of all the candidates and parties?
- Is the coverage by the state media accurate, impartial, responsible and fair?
- Does private media – newspapers, radio and television – provide reliable and fair reporting?
- Does private media treat all parties' advertising equally?

Source: IMPACS. Elections + Media: An Elections Reporting Handbook. 2004.

Understanding campaign strategies

An essential strategy of a political party is to win the votes of people who supported the party in the past. This traditional support is called the party's political base, or core vote. However, few parties win on the strength merely of their core vote. This requires that they make an aggressive effort to win over undecided voters.

Political parties often work out elaborate media strategies to represent themselves through the media to a wider audience, to make themselves look good and to help them win over undecided voters. Journalists need to be aware of the strategies of news manipulation and "spin", which are increasingly used by parties to ensure that the media projects them in a good light.

Combat spin and news manipulation

- Ask tough questions at press conferences (but be polite and respectful).
- Do not let politicians and candidates deal only with issues that make them look good.
- Refer all claims made by politicians to rivals or to the broader public.
- Bring these broader opinions into any report on a political leader or a party.

Source: IMPACS. Elections + Media: An Elections Reporting Handbook. 2004.

Reporting press conferences and campaign speeches

Political speeches should, to the extent possible, be reported in the candidate's own words. If offensive or intemperate language is used, a journalist and media institution should refrain from censorship, but seek to produce as accurate a report as possible without offending good taste. If there is a serious risk of causing public offence, the media should report the speech but seek to distance itself from the sentiments expressed, by using appropriate disclaimers. If the words are such that they cause damage to another's reputation, the affected party must be given a reply to reply.

Aside from campaign speeches and the words spoken at political rallies and meetings, a journalist will also seek to capture the atmosphere and the public mood. Following is an illustrative, though not exhaustive, list of things a journalist might consider in preparing his or her report.

- How many people were at the meeting or rally?
- How far had they travelled to be there?
- How did they get there?
- Were they brought in by the candidate or party, or did they arrive on their own?
- What was the composition of the audience in terms of likely ethnic affiliation or political preference?
- Were all groups mixed within the audience or did they occupy separate places?



- How did sections of the audience respond to different parts of the speech?
- What were the interests and concerns of the audience according to your interactions with them?
- Did the speech touch on any of these concerns?

Finally, while the report is being prepared for publication or broadcast, there are several questions that a journalist could ask himself or herself before reporting election news (see box below).

Is the report complete?

- Is this report accurate? Are the facts and names correct and do I believe the information is true? Have I made every effort to confirm the information is true?
- Is this report impartial and balanced fairly? Does it include both sides or alternative views and does it present the news without giving any special favour to one party or candidate?
- Is this responsible journalism? Was this news obtained without bribes or illegal actions and does it protect sources and not violate the election and press laws?
- Is this report voter-focused? Does it have significant news for the voters? Does it present the concerns of voters to the politicians?
- Is this the whole picture? Do the words, images and/or audio give a true picture of the most important thing that happened at the event?
- Will this news report help to make the voters well-informed, so they can vote wisely, in their own best interest?
- Is this election free and fair? Is there other news about this election that should be reported?

Source: IMPACS. Media + Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook. 2004.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO FURTHER PRESS FREEDOMS

By Anand K. Sahay

In the ideal world, a good fairy would give us a pile of money and say, go start a newspaper. She might also say go choose your own editor, or as a measure of caution, might pick from among perfect strangers a senior journalist of integrity and experience to edit the journal. And then, she might say, here on you are on your own; don't bother me any more with phone calls and messages until you've run out of money!

This is too perfect, of course, and it never works that way. But I start with this imagination since I believe that promiscuity in news organizations - in other words, the manipulation or curbing of normal news/current affairs work in a paper or radio or TV station - does very often start at the top. If media proprietors were more like our good fairy and they were not whimsical, did not have their own political and business agendas, and did not chop and change editors as much as they do in order to "lay down the line", a typical newspaper would enjoy a much greater degree of freedom in its day-to-day running.

I am keenly aware that there are larger systemic forces at work - such as governments, military oligarchies, powerful organised groups in the shape of business forums, the religious establishment, crime syndicates and terror organisations in pursuit of their goals - which exert great pressure on the media, and reduce its autonomy. In extreme cases, journalists end up dead, as we saw not long ago in Afghanistan. Indeed, since democracy, as the term is broadly understood, is not up and running in great parts of the globe, curbs on the media do typically emanate from sources such as the ones cited above.

Nevertheless, it is also my understanding that in a non-democratic socio-political environment, key actors seek to own media outlets in the expectation that these would further their influence and leverage in the wider game of power that is being played out, or further their object of getting hold of as much of the floating funds in the system that they can lay their hands on through policy manipulation or crony networks. Thus media proprietors are like other power players and they make sure that their papers or radio or television stations are mandated to serve a specific interest which may only tangentially correspond to the broad public interest.

It is futile to expect that such media would aspire to be disseminators of objective news reports and analyses, and balanced comment, in the service of society with the object of providing untainted information that may become a key factor in helping citizens make democratic choices. But what is surprising is that media barons in democratic systems are not infrequently an autocratic presence. Their actions have direct effects for independence of the media. And this is what interests me here.

In recent days, a certain Conrad Black has been in the news. He could possibly go to jail for 35 years for defrauding

shareholders. This Mr Black presided over a newspaper chain in North America, but certainly the most prestigious publications in his stable were the Daily Telegraph of London and the Jerusalem Post. I do not know how he ran the Post, but his steam-rolling of editors and other journalists at the Telegraph are graphically recorded in a well-regarded book by one of the more distinguished editors who served under him.

Another media magnate, Rupert Murdoch, has interests that straddle the world. He owns the hoary London Times and also the Sun, the sassy tabloid - two very different kinds of products. Such was his handling of editors and editorial matters that a significant body of journalists departed the Times to start the Independent.

In my own country, India, the equation between journalists and their employers corresponds more closely to the Murdoch model. Journalists at all levels are asked to pack their bags at short notice. Senior writers and editors are more vulnerable because they are usually on short-term contracts that may or may not be renewed.

Naturally, in most cases, they do as they are told. If journalistic independence to inform society in as unbiased a manner as possible is a casualty, so be it.

Since it is the unspoken threat of losing employment that makes journalists do as they are told, and this is nearly always to the detriment of media independence, the only way to ensure that media freedoms are not trampled on with ease is to ensure that journalists cannot be thrown out of jobs with ease.

If journalists and editors knew that they cannot be removed on a whim, they are more likely to work in a professional manner and resist pressures to mould facts, analyses, and opinions to suit particular interests. This is true as much of the democratic world as of other countries.

But it is doubtful that journalists alone, no matter how well organised they are, can ensure the passage of legislation that makes it difficult to sack them from their jobs. Professional media workers need to establish firm institutional links with other civil society bodies in order to succeed in this effort.

There is only one other issue I would like to refer to here. This is the matter of journalist education and training. If journalists are intellectually better equipped than they are, they will understand better the role that they play in the furtherance of democracy. They will understand better that the end-product of their collective labours is crucial to keeping the wheels of democracy running only if they have a better appreciation of history, political affairs, and the evolution of human society and state systems in the modern era. In the absence of this, journalists are merely instruments who put pen to paper.

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APPENDIX I

Charter for a Democratic and Pluralist Media Culture and Social and Professional Rights for Media and Journalism in Afghanistan

As declared unanimously at the National Media Summit, Kabul, July 31, 2007:

REPRESENTATIVES OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS FROM ALL OF AFGHANISTAN, INCLUDING THE AFGHAN INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION, THE COMMITTEE TO PROTECT AFGHAN JOURNALISTS, THE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM, THE AFGHANISTAN CHAPTER OF THE SOUTH ASIAN FREE MEDIA ASSOCIATION AND OTHER FRATERNAL PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS, MEETING AT A NATIONAL MEDIA SUMMIT AT KABUL ON JULY 31, 2007, WITH THE PARTICIPATION AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS (IFJ) AND THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DECLARES ITS ENDORSEMENT OF THIS CHARTER FOR A DEMOCRATIC AND PLURALIST MEDIA CULTURE AND SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISM IN AFGHANISTAN AND COMMITS ITS PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE MEMBERSHIPS TO A PRACTICAL PROGRAM OF ACTION TO OPERATIONALISE THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS CHARTER, OF WHICH SOME HAVE BEEN OUTLINED BELOW.

Fair, balanced and independent media is essential to good governance, effective public administration and the capacity of the Afghan nation to find a pathway out of the situation of internal turmoil, political instability and external tutelage that it finds itself in. A professional media with a responsibility to the public interest, independent of government or partisan influence and interference, is a vital part of the series of checks and balances central to democracy.

The practice of journalism in Afghanistan faces many challenges. These challenges are of concern to all citizens of Afghanistan but journalists, working together in professional solidarity, by building a culture of independent journalism, have a pivotal role in leading the campaign for media reform. There needs to develop a strong, democratic public service culture within the news media so that it reflects the richness of society, serves the whole community independent of ethnic, commercial, partisan or government interests and provides a plurality of voices from across the spectrum of society in Afghanistan. This charter sets out the minimum standards and principles that underpin the public's right to know and a free media in a democratic society and outlines a practical program of action to support media reform.

1. Fundamental Principles

Respect for truth and the right of every individual to know, are the primary obligations of journalists. Access to information is the right of every individual and the media should fulfill this right in a manner that is attentive to national, cultural and religious sensibilities. That the creation of a tolerant, peaceful and just society depends upon the freedom of citizens to have access to authentic information about the social, political and natural environment they live in. That this need is in vital fashion served if citizens have access to quality media that respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights. All journalists and media staff have the right to work in conditions of safety and security. They have the right to freedom of association and to collectively bargain for wages and appropriate working conditions. Individual citizens have the right to information and journalists aside from their rights as a professional community are obligated to hold as a public trust, the broader rights of the citizens of Afghanistan. It is recognised by all the journalists' organisations that the creation of a single national voice for journalists on professional issues is central to advancing their rights as a professional community in Afghanistan. This claim to a distinct set of rights as a professional community is underlined by an ethical code that commits journalists to the public right to know. Journalism and media policy in Afghanistan must be guided by the following principles:

- That media, whatever the mode of dissemination, are independent, tolerant and reflect diversity of opinion enabling full democratic exchange within and among all communities, whether based on geography, ethnic origins, religious belief or language;
- That laws defend and protect the citizens' rights to freedom of information and the right to know;
- That there is respect for decent working and professional conditions, through legally enforceable employment rights and appropriate regulations that guarantee editorial independence and recognition of the profession of journalism.

2. Editorial Independence

All media, whether public or private, must uphold ethical conduct in journalism, support professional independence, exercise tolerance, and respect the democratic rights of all citizens.

The treatment of news and information as a commodity for economic gain, for political ends, or in support of narrowly defined cultural or religious objectives must not override or interfere with the

duty of journalists and media to inform and educate the public.

Media must never be used as instruments of propaganda to support violence and extremism. Media content must not, whether directly or indirectly, legitimise violence or extremism. Responsibility for ethical conduct in journalism rests with media professionals who should be responsible for drawing up codes of ethical conduct and who should establish credible and accountable systems of self-regulation.

There should be no legislation beyond the general law that interferes in matters that are the responsibility of working journalists: namely, the gathering, preparation, selection and transmission of information. Freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of association should be guaranteed in law in accordance with international standards.

In addition, media policy should encourage the adoption of internal editorial statutes and other provisions safeguarding the independence of journalists in all Afghan media.

The IFJ Code of Principles for the Conduct of Journalism provides ethical codes supported by all IFJ affiliated national representative organisations of journalists. These could be studied by professional bodies of journalists in Afghanistan, who will seek through dialogue with other concerned bodies like publishers, newspaper workers and news consumers, to evolve an appropriate code of conduct for the Afghan context.

3. Media Pluralism, Public Service and Open Government

Afghanistan must promote transparency, open government and freedom of information and ensure the participation of all citizens in developing a democratic culture to strengthen the cohesion of all communities. Political parties and authorities should respect the role of media to report, in an independent and critical manner, on all aspects of government at all levels.

There should be no legal, regulatory or policy developments in media without full consultation with Afghan media and journalists and their representative organisations.

The law must guarantee citizen's access to information and freedom of information at all levels of government.

There must be no undue pressure on media, exercised directly or indirectly, or any interference in the work of journalists. Where such pressure is identified it should be properly investigated and appropriate remedies taken.

Public service values in media should be respected in all state-owned media. Where they are not already applicable, the state media sector should commit itself to honouring the following objectives:

- To remove all forms of direct political control over the public service media
- To create a framework for the administration of public service media, in line with international standards, through ethical, accountable and financially transparent structures
- To support editorial self-regulation by journalists and media professionals that will promote editorial independence and high standards of accuracy, reliability and quality in information services.

4. Social Dialogue, Rights of Journalists and Media

Structures for dialogue should be set up bringing together representatives of media managements and the workforce through their representative media associations and trade unions to establish a basis for professional dialogue and industrial relations within the Afghan media.

There should be openness and transparency in the business and social affairs of all media enterprises including full public disclosure of political affiliations and ownership information.

Representatives of media and the workforce should agree an action plan to promote the economic and social development of Afghan media, including provincial media and to the extent possible, media catering to all known languages and dialects.

Minimally acceptable working conditions should be agreed and implemented for all media staff through collective bargaining processes that honour the following priorities:

- To ensure that all employees have an employment contract setting out their wages, working conditions and labour rights;
- To improve the safety and security of journalists and media staff;
- To limit the use of freelance and casual labour, and where they are used, to ensure proper remuneration and equal rights;
- To guarantee non-discrimination and gender equality at all levels in media;
- To recognise the rights of trades unions to organise in media and to represent media workers including journalists;
- To ensure diversity in access to journalism and to provide access to proper professional training.

APPENDIX II

The IFJ's Manifesto for a Democratic Media Culture

As adopted by journalists' unions from 60 countries at the 21st World Congress of the IFJ, Montreal, June 8-13, 1992.

The International Federation of Journalists looks to the future with confidence. We believe that professional journalists, organised in free and independent trade unions, play a key role in the creation and maintenance of a democratic media culture.

The IFJ believes that democracy depends upon the extension of freedom of expression and social justice worldwide.

The IFJ insists that democracy is fully respected when there is an understanding of the special and particular role of the media in democratic society.

The IFJ believes that the role of media in democratic society is to apply the principles of press freedom upon which the freedom of expression and opinion relies.

The IFJ considers that the treatment of news and information as a commodity must not override or interfere with the duty of journalists to inform their audience.

The IFJ believes media freedom can only be achieved when there is recognition that:

1. A free, independent media reflecting diversity of opinion is a precondition of democratic societies;
2. The free flow of information is the lifeblood of communities whether they be based on geography, ethnic origins, shared values or common language;
3. Freedom of expression and opinion can only exist where citizen's rights to freedom of information and the right to know are guaranteed;
4. The professional integrity and independent role of journalism have to be respected to ensure a democratic and pluralistic press around the world;
5. Information and cultural material of communities must not be threatened for political or economic reasons by technological developments.

The IFJ calls upon all governments to provide a legal framework which will ensure the freedom of information, freedom of access to sources of information, and the freedom to practise professional journalism without pressure from either political or economic interests.

The IFJ demands full and universal recognition of the right of freedom of association and of the right of journalists' unions to bargain collectively on behalf of their members.

The IFJ opposes the use of information media by governments, state authorities or proprietors for their own political or commercial or personal advantage.

The IFJ promotes and campaigns for the creation of material conditions for the development of freedom of expression and opinion.

The IFJ, therefore, reaffirms its support for the Declaration of Windhoek of May 3rd 1993 which identifies fundamental principles for the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press which is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.

The IFJ supports the Charter of the United Nations and strengthened international co-operation based upon universal respect for trade union and human rights.

The IFJ seeks endorsement at local, regional, national and international level of the IFJ Code of Principles on the Conduct of Journalism which forms the basis for universal standards of ethical conduct for the practice of professional journalism.

The IFJ believes media professionals, journalists and editors and publishers, both in the written and audiovisual media, should engage in dialogue internally and with governmental and intergovernmental authorities on the question of media policy. Such structures for dialogue should bring together legitimate representatives of workforce, management and consumers to discuss:

1. the economic and social development of the media, and in particular, the need to limit monopolisation which can threaten diversity of information sources necessary for the practice of democracy at all levels in society;
2. the problems of unemployment and job insecurity whether caused by concentration of mass media ownership or otherwise;
3. the practical implementation of laws, policies and standards designed to assist in the development of free and pluralistic media.
4. professional, economic and social conditions within the media including:
 - a) The development of openness and transparency in the business and social affairs of all media enterprises.
 - b) The maintenance of independent and recognised systems of professional training which reflect the need for high quality journalism, independent and distinct from political and commercial imperatives.
 - c) Legal recognition of mechanisms for the defence of freedom of information and independent journalism such as editorial statutes.
 - d) The creation of secure working conditions within media enterprises, based upon equality of opportunity and including limitations on exploitation of freelance and casual labour.

The IFJ calls upon the journalists the world over to unite under the principles and policies of the IFJ in the fight against censorship and political and economic oppression.



The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, WIPO and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.

Visit asiapacific.ifj.org or www.ifj.org for more information.