

MEDIA MONITORING OF POLITICAL PLURALISM

Media monitoring of political pluralism aims at observing the media coverage in a scientific manner in order to assess:

- The access granted to political parties and independent candidates in the mass media and whether the coverage of candidates is fair and balanced;
- whether candidates standing for election were covered in a unbiased and equitable manner;
- the tone of media coverage towards the political actors.

Television and radio channels will be monitored during peak time viewing and listening hours and will include monitoring of all programming within this time framework. The programmes will be recorded and all aired material involving political actors will be timed and measured by the monitors in order to assess the access that each candidate and political party receive on each of the channels. Furthermore, quantifying the amount of coverage each candidate receives will be complemented with an assessment of the tone of the coverage received based on a scale of negative, neutral and positive. Newspapers will also be monitored according to the same principles.

The monitoring involves not only the time devoted to subjects, but also all the factors shaping a campaign on the media. Elections do not only consist of candidates, but also a whole set of dynamics and groups that play a role in the elections and are active in the processes and production of mass communication. For this reason there is a broad definition of actors used in the media monitoring that allows a range of political actors to be included in the monitoring. This includes candidates, political parties, members of the Government, MPs, political parties' supporters and members. The monitoring will also consider the coverage of ministers, government and president performing their institutional duties outside of the campaign, and this will be marked as official duty. The monitoring methodology ensures that these activities are distinguished between campaigning.

Media monitoring of political pluralism - Focus of the analysis

The main focuses of this area of monitoring are:

- The formats used for political coverage and elections;
- Time-Space and Access for political actors;
- Tone of the coverage for each political actor;
- Topics related to the coverage of political actors;
- Gender balance of media coverage of actors and groups.

Monitors will code any item of communication involving political actors, independently whether the coverage is election-related or not.

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Media monitoring of political pluralism – Coding system

Monitors will work with '**Units of coding**'. This is the segment of the message that is devoted to one relevant actor. Therefore every unit of coding will be related to only one actor. In the same unit of context (for instance a talk show or article), we have as many units of coding as the number of segments of communication devoted to different actors. One unit of coding can contain just one actor (no more!).

If one of the variables of the record changes (e.g. programme, page number, tone, etc.) monitors will have to code a new recording unit. If it is only the time-space or access changing then it is possible to sum them up in the same record.

Important variables for the purposes of media monitoring are **(a)** the definition of political actor and **(b)** the definition of the measurement system:

(a) The definition of political actors

The presence of a relevant actor in a segment of communication is basic rule to fill a recording unit. The actors to be considered are all politicians and candidates, in particular they should include:

- All members of parliament
- All members of the national government (president, ministers, deputy ministers, regional ministers)
- All members of the local governments (governors, mayors, members of district assemblies)
- All candidates running for election (based on official lists presented by competent authorities)

- Members of political parties, clearly defined as active politicians (party leaders, activists, etc.)
- All registered political parties.

Note: foreign politicians are not considered political actors for the purpose of the monitoring.

There is a number of useful information about the political actor that should be recorded and linked to the actors. In particular, essential variables are: name, party affiliation, candidacy, gender, role.

Example:

Name: Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa

Party affiliation: ZANU–PF

Candidacy: YES (not running for the forthcoming local elections)

Gender: Male

Institutional Role: President

The monitors will refer to a list of relevant actors. If the actor is not in the list, he/she will be coded as Male or Female Representative of his/her political party. The party affiliation of the actors is crucial information and should, therefore, be carefully checked against official sources (parliament, election bodies, party websites, etc.).

The party affiliation of independent candidates will be "independent".

Members of the government will be recorded with their respective party affiliation. However, the type of event will distinguish whether they receive media coverage as officials in their duties or as members of a political party.

(b) Definition of the measurement system

The units of measurement are seconds for electronic media and square centimetres for print media. Monitors will record the Time/Space of media coverage given to an actor, as well as the Access - live speech - of an actor on screen/page.

Time is calculated with the aid of a stopwatch and reported **in seconds** (therefore 2 minutes and 30 seconds will be recorded as: 150) in the time column of the analysis form for TV/radio. Space is calculated **in square centimetres** and reported in the space column of the analysis form for the press.

Only the explicit Time/Space dedicated by the media to an actor will be taken into consideration: the coding then is to be undertaken only if an actor is explicitly covered. Not only journalists, but also other speakers can cover a political actor. Other speakers include: experts, international politicians, civic society representatives, common citizens, etc. Monitors will then measure time and space also in those cases.

Media monitors will consider actors explicitly named – either with their name or their position (i.e. Minister of Finances, the President of the Republic). Nicknames for actors will be taken into account only when they are clearly recognisable and they unmistakably refer to a specific individual.

Access is the direct-speech time or interview space provided to political actors by the media. For audio-visual media, access is the time during which the actor speaks live and listeners can hear and understand his-her words. For the press, access represents the space assigned to the actor's direct quotes. The length of time will be calculated in seconds and the amount of space in square centimetres.

Access is a portion of the total Time/Space, therefore it cannot be larger than Time/Space. If there is no Access media monitors will put 0 (zero) in the corresponding column of the coding sheet. Access is allotted to the actor that is directly speaking, even if he or she is speaking about another actor.

Example:

An interview with a political actor that lasts for 20 minutes (time devoted to questions and answers), while the actor speaks for 12 minutes (time devoted to the answers), will be recorded as:

Time 1200 seconds

Access: 720 seconds

Quality of political coverage

TONE: the **Tone** identifies the explicit judgement made by the speaker about the actor. Monitor must hear or read clear and open expressions from the speaker (journalist or other non political actor) expressing positive or negative opinions about the actor, so to reach a high degree of reliability among different coders. The tone is measured using a scale of three values (positive, neutral, negative).

Topics

Political actors will be attributed a topic for each recording unit. A list of macro topics is provided to the monitors. Choose the topic that best describes how the story is reported. Remember that a single story can fall into different topics, depending on how it is reported. Sometimes several topics will be covered within the same story. **Choose the one that is given most prominence** - e.g. in terms of the amount of time or commentary devoted to it.

