

Assesment of Political Diversity in Media Reporting on General Elections | MYANMAR

September 2015 – February 2016

Myanmar Institute for Democracy & MEMO 98



Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2. PROJECT OVERVIEW	6
3. METHODOLOGY	9
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	9
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	9
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	11
4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK	12
5. MEDIA MONITORING ANALYSIS	13
5.1. PRE-ELECTION PERIOD	13
5.2. POST-ELECTION PERIOD	15
5.3. TELEVISION	15
<i>STATE-OWNED BROADCASTERS</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>PRIVATE TV CHANNELS</i>	<i>18</i>
5.4. RADIO	20
5.5. NEWSPAPERS	22
<i>STATE-FUNDED PUBLICATIONS</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>PRIVATE PUBLICATIONS</i>	<i>23</i>
5.6. ONLINE MEDIA	25
6. CONCLUSION	26
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	28
7.1. TO THE GOVERNMENT	28
7.2. TO THE MEDIA & CIVIL SOCIETY	30
7.3. TO THE INTERNATIONAL DONORS	31

“The mass communications media provide information to most voters that is essential to the choice they exercise at the ballot box. Therefore, proper media conduct toward all political parties and candidates, as well as proper media conduct in the presentation of information that is relevant to electoral choices, are crucial to achieving democratic elections. Monitoring media conduct – when done impartially, proficiently and based on a credible methodology – establishes whether this key aspect of an election process contributes to or subverts the democratic nature of elections. Media monitoring can measure the amount of coverage of electoral subjects, the presence of news bias, appropriateness of media access for political competitors and the adequacy of information conveyed to voters through news, direct political messages, public information programming and voter education announcements. Shortcomings in media conduct can be identified through monitoring in time for corrective action. Abuse of the mass media power to affect voter choices also can be documented, which allows the population and the international community to appropriately characterize the true nature of the electoral process.”¹

Robert Norris and Patrick Merloe

¹ *Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections - An NDI Handbook for Citizen Organizations*, National Democratic Institute, for International Affairs (NDI), July 2002, [Robert Norris](https://www.ndi.org/files/1420_elect_media_02_1-31_0.pdf) and [Patrick Merloe](https://www.ndi.org/files/1420_elect_media_02_1-31_0.pdf), available at https://www.ndi.org/files/1420_elect_media_02_1-31_0.pdf

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MID has systematically monitored the media coverage of the 2015 general elections as well as the post-election developments. The project was supported by a number of international donors and it was intended to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on nine television channels, three radio stations, six newspapers, and four online media outlets.

The main goal of the project was to inform the public about the conduct of media during the pre-election and post-election phase and to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and to promote their adherence to international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and independence of media.

The methodology for the media monitoring was developed by a Slovak organization MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in some 50 countries in the last 18 years. It included quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focused on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assessed the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified.

The main findings deriving from the pre-election media monitoring activity are:

- **The media as a whole provided basic information about contestants running in the elections. However, to be able to form a more objective view of the campaign and to make an informed choice at the ballot box, voters had to follow several media outlets.**
- **Media were strongly divided along political lines and demonstrated their open support either to the ruling powers or to the opposition. Only a very few monitored media attempted to offer a more balanced coverage of the campaign.**
- **The coverage of state-funded media was driven by official and process-oriented agenda. There was limited coverage of the campaign in the news programs with State-funded media allocating the bulk of their coverage to the activities of the state authorities, particularly the president, outside the campaign context. This gave the ruling Union Solidarity and Peace Party (USDP) clear advantage over their opponents who did not receive such coverage on the state-funded media.**
- **State-funded media and some private broadcasters reflected positively on the work of the president and other state officials, often pointing out achievements and successes, while independent and critical opinions on their performance were generally absent.**

- **Contestants were able to utilize free airtime on both state-funded and some private broadcasters and radio channels as well as the free space in the state-controlled newspapers. Their ability to freely express their views, including criticism of the incumbents, was restricted due to strict regulations on the free airtime allocation.**
- **DVB was the only television to provide voters with more diverse information about different contestants. DVB was also the only channel to offer its viewers debates between the contestants based on which voters could form more informed opinions of the candidates.**
- **Private print, online media and foreign radio services covered the campaign more intensively, focusing primarily on the two main frontrunners – the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the USDP. Most of them openly supported the NLD and criticised the USDP and state officials.**
- **There was a general lack of in-depth and analytical coverage that could help the voters to better assess the electoral contestants.**
- **Voter education programmes, including numerous Get-Out-and-Vote spots, were aired on a number of broadcasters, including MRTV.**

The main findings deriving from the post-election media monitoring activity are:

- **The post-election coverage was characterised by reporting on the election results. The winning party in elections NLD received the bulk of the coverage on most monitored media in November.**
- **Following the elections, the state-controlled media generally provided more coverage to the NLD than during the pre-election period.**
- **At the same time, the state-controlled media’s coverage continues to be focused mainly on activities of the outgoing government and president.**
- **Private print and online media have intensively covered the post-election developments, focusing primarily on the NLD.**
- **A number of important reforms and changes will be necessary in order for the media to provide their audiences with more objective and balanced coverage of the political and social issues.**

The recommendations included in this report are offered with a view to enhance the media coverage of elections in Myanmar and to support efforts to bring it in line with international standards and other obligations and standards for democratic elections.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Myanmar Institute for Democracy (MID), an independent, non-profit organization that promotes the values of freedom and democracy, was monitoring the media coverage of the 8 November general elections. MID sought to evaluate the monitored media's performance in providing objective and balanced coverage of the contestants and their platforms so the citizens of Myanmar can make well-informed choices at the ballot box. The main objective of the project was to inform the public about the conduct of media during election campaign and beyond and to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of media reporting. The project was supported by Democracy Reporting International (DRI) in the framework of the EU-funded project STEP Democracy as well as by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The monitoring was intended to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on five television channels, eight radio stations, ten newspapers, and three online media outlets.² The project's findings were not intended to support any one candidate or political party, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during the campaign season. The findings were compiled in five monitoring reports about the media's behavior during the election campaign and after elections and disseminated to the public, media, civil society, political parties, and international community.

The methodology was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in more than 51 countries in the last 18 years, including in Myanmar.³ Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology was specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes. The outcome of the monitoring is not just a set of data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, and incorporating concrete comparisons and analysis.

The media monitoring included quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focussed on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assessed the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors reported on lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias, and anything else that was important to presenting the quality of reporting. This data was reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

² Television: *MRTV, MRTV4, Myawaddy TV (state-funded), Up to date, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)*
Radio: *Radio Myanmar (state-funded), City FM, Cherry FM, Mandalay FM, Shwe FM (private) and foreign radio services BBC Myanmar, Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA).*
Newspapers: *Kyaymon, Myanmar Ahlin (state-funded), Democracy Today, Eleven, Messenger, Myanmar Times, People's Cause, Tomorrow, Voice and 7 Day.*
Web portals: *Irrawaddy, Mizzima, News Eleven.*

³ www.memo98.sk

The main goal of the project was to inform the public about the conduct of media during the pre-election and post-election phase and to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and to promote their adherence to international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and independence of media.

Based on criteria such as media ownership, coverage, and impact, the following national media were included into the monitoring:

Table 1: Media monitored

MEDIA	OWNERSHIP	MONITORED PROGRAMMES/ARTICLES
Television		
MRTV	State-controlled	Newscasts and all related programmes at 18:00 and 20:00
MRTV4	JV with Forever Group & State	News programmes at 18:00 pm and 20:00
Myawaddy TV	State-controlled	News programmes at 18:00 and 20:00
Sky Net (Up to Date)	Private - Shwe Than Lwin media	All related programmes from 18:00 to 23:00
DVB	Private	News programmes, Debates and all related programmes from 18:00 to 23:00
Radio		
Radio Myanmar	State-controlled	News programmes at 07:30, 11:00, 13:00, 15:00, 16:00, 18:30, 19:00 and 20:00
City FM	Private - YCDC	News programmes at 08:00, 13:00 and 20:00
Cherry FM	Private - Toe Naing Man	News programmes at 08:00, 13:00 and 20:00
Mandalay FM	Private - Forever Group	News programmes at 08:00, 13:00 and 20:00
Shwe FM	Private - Shwe Than Lwin media	News programmes at 08:00, 13:00 and 20:00 pm
BBC Radio	Foreign service	News programmes at 18:30 and 20:15 pm
VoA	Foreign service	News programmes at 06:00, 18:30 and 21:00 pm
RFA	Foreign service	News programmes at 07:00, 19:00 and 20:00
Newspapers		
Kyaymon	State-controlled	Politics-related articles
Myanmar Ahlin	State-controlled	Politics-related articles

Democracy Today	Private - Shwe Than Lwin media	Politics-related articles
Eleven	Private - Dr,Than Htut Aung	Politics-related articles
Messenger	Private - Zaw Min Aye	Politics-related articles
Myanmar Times	Private - U Thein Tun	Politics-related articles
People's Cause	Private – Dr.Phay Myint	Politics-related articles
Tomorrow	Private – Zaw Thet Htwe	Politics-related articles
Voice	Private - Living colour Group	Politics-related articles
7 Days	Private – Thaung Suu Nyein	Politics-related articles
<i>Online sources</i>		
Irrawaddy	Private – Aung Zaw	Politics-related articles
Mizzima	Private - U Myint Soe	Politics-related articles
News Eleven	Private – Dr.Than Htut Aung	Politics-related articles

The monitoring team⁴ observed media coverage of the Myanmar political scene in order to:

- assess whether political entities are granted fair access to the media;
- supply the media, political entities, regulatory organs, citizens, and international community with data to measure the objectivity of the Myanmar media;
- raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe standards of balanced reporting;
- motivate citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project was supposed to:

- enhance the capacity of the civil and academic communities in conducting the advanced media researches;
- put public pressure on journalists, editors and media owners to provide information that is more accurate, impartial and fair.

To achieve these objectives, MID was assessing the media coverage against Myanmar legislation and internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which include:

Accuracy and transparency

Balance

Impartiality

Matter of fact

Clarity

Variety

Relevance

Correctness

Protection of minors/of other groups in needs

⁴ AungHtetAung,AungKyawZin,Dennis AungAung,HeingHtetZaw, Hlaing Win Swe, Cho Cho Than, KhinePyaeSone, KhinMyatMyatKyaw, KyawNyunt,Myon Thant,Thaw ZinSoe, TheintThinZarZin,ThihaAung, Yu Htwe Thu andZin Nanda.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the media monitoring incorporates both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and is based on the methodology developed by MEMO 98 that has been used in 50 countries.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative component of the monitoring consisted of a content analysis of a representative sample of media outlets. Media monitors measured the total amount of time devoted to selected subjects.

Monitored subjects:

President

Vice President

Government | Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Speaker of Parliament

Local Government | Mayors

Army | Four top commanders

Political parties (all parties registered for the elections)⁵

In order to monitor the broadcast media, monitors used stopwatches to measure the actual “direct/indirect appearance time” of selected subjects. They also separately recorded each instance where a subject was mentioned indirectly (e.g. by a news presenter or by someone else) as a “reference”.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative measurements were subdivided into two major categories:

Monitors evaluated the tone in which the relevant subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. This data was recorded for all stories and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.

Important additional comments relating to a content-based analysis that illustrate balance, fairness, accuracy, timely, transparency, matter-of-fact or attempts at manipulation. These data offered more insights than simple positive and negative measurements. These trends were systematically documented to provide compelling evidence about media conduct.

It is the behaviour of media outlets that was being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not the viewer/reader was offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors gave an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by each media outlet. The evaluation mark was thus attached to all monitored

⁵ See in the Annex.

subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in a positive, negative, or neutral light.

The description of the five-level evaluation scale was as follows:

Grade 1 and 2 meant that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage was favourable.

Grade 3 was a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations.

Grades 4 or 5 meant that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage had negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It was important for monitors to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context of the story or item.

As for the qualitative (content-based) analysis, the monitors reported on fabrications, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias and anything else that was important to the presentation of quality of media reporting. The data was reported separately, but integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

In order to eliminate any elements of subjectivity in the qualitative analysis, the monitors' analysis was subject to frequent quality checks. Where there was a difference of opinion over the evaluation of a particular item, the whole monitoring team (or a team leader) evaluated the item before making a final decision on its “tone.”

The monitors evaluated:

- the placement of relevant stories and items in comparison with other reported topics and issues;
- the overall quality of political diversity in media reporting;
- journalist's knowledge and his/her ability to work with facts and information;
- the ability of the author to engage the audience;
- the overall impression of how the media outlet covers political stories;
- the journalist's involvement in the story;
- whether interview questions were fair or “loaded;”
- how the language used shaped the audience's understanding and perception of politics;
- whether certain language, graphics and camera angles were used to influence the audience's perception of the monitored subjects and topics.

Data collection and analysis

For each day's news coverage a monitoring form was completed and entered into a database. The collected data consisted of subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic, and time index. Given the relatively small number of data types, an Excel spread-sheet is sufficient for processing the monitoring results.

The MID's monitoring focused on political and election-related prime time news coverage of selected TV and radio broadcasters and political and election-related coverage in selected newspapers and online media. The monitoring team analysed the coverage by the time allotted to each relevant monitored subject, the tone of the coverage, and assessing whether journalistic standards were being observed. Televised debate programmes were analysed only qualitatively.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

There exist a number of media-related laws in Myanmar, many of which have recently been changed or amended but there remain provisions which run counter to international standards and best practices on freedom of expression. While the Constitution provides for freedom of expression (Articles 354 and 365), it does not stipulate any protection for the right of freedom of information. One of the most chillingly effective tools to limit the freedom of expression is the Penal Code. More specifically, there are a number of restrictive provisions, including those on insulting religion, criminal defamation, sedition – all of which have been used to curb the media.

During the election campaign, there were a few cases with Facebook users facing criminal charges in result of their posts, allegedly insulting state officials, particularly the military. It included a case in which Chan Sandi Tun, an NLD activist, was charged under Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Act as well as for a defamation charge under Section 500 of the Penal Code for a satirical post likening new army uniforms to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's *htamein*⁶, suggesting that officers wear it on their heads. Other cases included an arrest of a poet Maung Saungkha, who posted a verse suggesting that he had a tattoo of the president on his genitalia. While it is questionable if these kinds of posts were of a good taste, using criminal charges for expressing satirical comments about the officials is unacceptable as it seriously discourages exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech. At the same time, it is of concern that some candidates used inappropriate nationalist and religious rhetoric, including on the social media.

While there are a number of election laws, none of them governs the conduct of the media during election campaign. As such, the Press Council worked out the Election Guidebook, which, along with the 2014 Code of Conduct, provided a framework for the media behaviour during elections. They inter alia provided for impartial, fair and balanced coverage in news and current affairs programmes. The Press Council was in charge of adjudicating election-related complaints concerning the media.

The United Election Commission (UEC) regulated the free airtime and space for all registered contestants, granting two free-of-charge 15-minute slots to air a political address on state radio and television, as well as space in state newspapers (from 9 September and 6 November). However, the UEC regulations included a number of limitations including the fact that the authorities and military should be exempted from criticism. In addition, not only there was prior control of the content of the free spots and other materials, but the UEC regulations also banned speeches that could cause the disintegration of the Union, damage national solidarity, or misuse religion for political purposes. While all but six registered parties utilized the opportunity, state media decided to air the second round of broadcasts on its parliamentary Hluttaw channel instead of the main MRTV channel. State funded newspapers also terminated publication of party presentations after the first round, further limiting the information on contestants available to voters.

⁶ *Htamein* is a female version of traditional sarong *longyi*.

5. MEDIA MONITORING ANALYSIS

Media monitoring took place over two main periods - before the 8 November elections (pre-election period) and after the elections (post-election period). The pre-election period included 1 September –1 November 2015 and the post-election period covered 9 November 2015 – 29 February 2016.

5.1. Pre-election period

September 2015

The preliminary media monitoring results for the period of 8 – 28 September 2015 indicated that there were discernable differences in how the media portrayed candidates, parties and other relevant subjects.

Most of broadcast media allocated very little time to activities of political parties but instead devoted the bulk of their coverage to the activities of the state authorities, outside the campaign context. Many of them were also candidates in the elections. Only a few broadcast media provided voters with a diverse range of information about different contestants and other political subjects. By contrast, print media and Internet offered a diverse range of views, some supporting the ruling powers while others showing their clear preferences toward the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The most significant events and topics drawing media attention in September included the national ceasefire process as well as the current stage of the voter list. Since the official start of the campaign on 8 September, contestants were able to utilize free airtime on both state-funded and some private broadcasters and radio channels as well as the free space in the state-controlled newspapers. Their ability to freely express their views, including criticism of the incumbents, was restricted due to strict regulations on the free airtime allocation.⁷ Moreover, one of the monitored TV channels - DVB -broadcast debates between contestants, providing them a good opportunity to convey their messages directly to voters.

October-November 2015

The media monitoring results for the period of 29 September – 1November 2015 indicated that media continued to be divided in the way they covered candidates, parties and other relevant subjects, with state-funded media providing limited time or space to political parties in their news and covering activities of the authorities. By contrast, a number of private media were providing platform for the NLD. Both state-funded and some private media continued to allocate free time and space to registered contestants to communicate their message to voters

⁷ The free airtime and free space allocation is regulated by the Announcement No.52/2015 of 27 August issued by the Union Election Commission (UEC). According to Article 2 of the Announcement, political parties wishing to utilize the free airtime have to submit the script of their “speeches on party policies” to UEC seven days before the speech is to be shown for approval. Article 6 establishes wide-ranging limitations and prohibitions on what parties may say during their speeches.

– this opportunity however was only available until the second week of October.⁸ In a positive development, both state-funded and private media were allocating time for voter education programmes and spots.

Similar to September, the state broadcast media continued to allocate the bulk of their coverage to the activities of the state authorities, outside the campaign context. Many of them were also candidates in the elections that gave them an advantage over their opponents who were not receiving such extensive coverage in the news programmes. Only a few broadcast media provided voters with a wide range of information about different contestants and other political subjects. Print media and Internet continued to offer a diverse range of views, some supporting the ruling powers while others showing their preferences toward the NLD.

The most significant events and topics drawing media attention in October 2015 included the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 15 October, discussions on the voter list, advance voting that started out-of-country, and continuing fights in Shan and Kachin that led to cancelations of elections in 7 townships. Only one of the monitored TV channels - DVB – continues to broadcast debates, including often the contestants, providing them a good opportunity to convey their messages directly to voters.

In November, the state-funded media continued to provide only limited time or space to cover the campaign in their news, giving extensive coverage of activities of state authorities. By contrast, a number of private media provided much more active coverage of the campaign and offered a platform for the NLD.

Both state-funded and some private media continued to provide free time and space – as mentioned above, only the state-funded radio rebroadcast the same free airtime party messages until the end of campaign. As such, a month before the elections, the ability of political parties to directly communicate their message to voters was further limited given the fact that the free airtime and space was no longer available on the state-funded television. Notwithstanding the wide-ranging restrictions, it was an important tool for the contestants to reach their voters. Both state-funded and private media allocated time for voter education programmes that were important for voters to better understand the complexity of the election procedures. The media also allocated substantial amount of time and space to the Union Election Commission (UEC).

Similar to September and October, also in November, the state-funded broadcast and print media allocated the bulk of their coverage to the activities of the state authorities. During the whole pre-election period, the president, in particular, received extensive coverage, highlighting his achievement and successes, in variety of different formats, including news items, policy songs, and documentaries. Taking into consideration the fact that his opponents did not receive such coverage, this gave the ruling party a clear advantage. As such, the state-funded media failed to provide an objective and balanced coverage of the campaign – in

⁸ With about a month before elections, the ability of political parties to directly communicate their message to voters has been limited given the fact that the free airtime and space is no longer available. Notwithstanding the restrictions, it was an important tool for the contestants to reach their voters.

violation of their public mandate. As recipients of public resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of politicians. Moreover, the channels largely ignored any views independent of or critical of the current establishment and there was no discussion on social, economic and political problems of the country, with no information to the citizens about consequences of bad governance.

Only a few broadcast media provided voters with a wide range of information about different contestants and other political subjects. By comparison, print media and Internet offered a diverse range of views, some supporting the ruling powers while others showing their preferences toward the NLD.

5.2. Post-election period

The media monitoring results for the post-election period indicate that media continued to be divided along political lines. In November, however, this trend was temporarily changed and all but one state-controlled media allocated significant coverage to the NLD in connection with its victory in the elections. As for the other monitored media, it can be said that the winning party in elections received the bulk of the coverage on most monitored media in November.

The meetings of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi over the transfer of power with the president U Thein Sein and other state officials as well as her meetings with the top representatives of the Tatmadaw (military) and discussion about nominees for the key positions in the parliament drew media attention in the following weeks.

In January 2016, the key issues widely presented in the media included the session of the new parliament as well as debates on potential constitutional changes which would allow Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to be nominated for the presidency. Following the elections, the state-controlled media generally provided more coverage to the NLD than during the pre-election period. At the same time, the state-controlled media's coverage continued to be focused mainly on activities of the outgoing government and president. Private print and online media intensively covered the post-election developments, focusing primarily on the NLD.

5.3. Television

State-funded broadcasters

Between 8 and 28 September, *MRTV* devoted almost half of its political and election-related news coverage to the activities of the state authorities, with the government receiving 38.1 per cent, the president 36 per cent, the vice-president 13.6 per cent and the military (the Tatmadaw) 9.8 per cent of the coverage. This coverage was overwhelmingly positive. By contrast, the main opposition party NLD received only 0.1 per cent of such coverage which was also mainly positive. There was a notable tendency to cover the activities of state officials positively, often pointing out achievements and successes. Critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities, as well as comprehensive analysis of contestants' platforms have so far been generally absent from the news programmes of MRTV.

Between 29 September and 24 October, MRTV devoted 97.9 per cent of its political and election-related news coverage to the activities of the state authorities, with the government receiving 44.7 per cent, the president 44.4 per cent, the vice-president 4.3 per cent and the military (the Tatmadaw) 4.5 per cent of the coverage (a small increase in comparison with the first monitoring period). This coverage was overwhelmingly positive. By contrast, the main opposition party NLD received only 0.1 per cent of such coverage which was also mainly positive. In comparison with the first monitoring period, MRTV allocated some very limited coverage to a bigger number of political parties – mainly in connection with the signing of NCA. The channel continued to highlight achievements of state officials, giving them undue advantage over their opponents who were not receiving comparable coverage in the main state-funded TV channel's news programmes. Critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities, as well as comprehensive analysis of contestants' platforms continued to be non-existing on the MRTV's news programmes. As a rule, MRTV continued to highlight president's achievements and successes, using different formats, including documentaries and policy songs.

When looking at the monitored campaign period (between 8 September and 1 November), MRTV devoted as much as 98.1 per cent of its political and election-related news coverage to the activities of the state authorities, with the government receiving 38.3 per cent, the president 46.7 per cent, the vice-president 7.3 per cent and the military (the Tatmadaw) 5.8 per cent of the coverage. This coverage was overwhelmingly positive. By contrast, the main opposition party NLD received only 0.1 per cent of such coverage which was also mainly neutral.

The state-owned *MRTV's* coverage of political actors after the elections to some extent reflected political developments emerging from the outcome of elections. This was particularly visible in November when the election winner - the NLD – became the most presented political party on the *MRTV's* news programmes. It received 17 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral. By comparison, the USDP, which suffered defeat in the elections, obtained some 10 per cent of mainly neutral coverage. It should be mentioned that this is a significant change in *MRTV's* editorial policy as the NLD's share of the state-controlled TV's news programmes during the pre-election period totalled 0.1 per cent. At the same time, however, the state officials remained to be the most presented political entities in November with the government and president receiving 30 and 26 per cent respectively. *MRTV* adopted a similar approach in December and January. Unlike in November, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) became the most portrayed political party in both December and January (it received around 15 per cent of the coverage respectively). In sharp contrast, the NLD was devoted only 3 and 5 per cent respectively in December and January. As such, the positive trend of including some greater diversity of political opinions on state-controlled was short lived.

In February, *MRTV* devoted 50.8 per cent of its political coverage to the activities of the outgoing government. This coverage was mainly neutral and positive. The outgoing president received some 18 per cent of the coverage which was overwhelmingly positive. By comparison, the NLD received some 5.8 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral.

Myawaddy TV is a military-owned television network that was launched on 27 March 1995, in commemoration of the Burmese Armed Forces Day. Between 8 and 28 September it adopted a similar approach to that of *MRTV* and devoted extensive and favourable coverage to the state authorities. The channel gave more than half of its coverage to the activities of the Tatmadaw (59.9 per cent) which was exclusively positive. Similar to the other two state-funded channels, *Myawaddy* featured a number of songs in support of the top representatives of the Tatmadaw as well as other state officials and did not offer any platform for the government opponents.

Between 29 September and 24 October *Myawaddy TV* continued to give extensive and favourable coverage to the state authorities. The channel devoted less than half of its coverage to the activities of the Tatmadaw (49.4 per cent - exclusively positive) which was a decrease in comparison with the first monitoring period (59.9 per cent). At the same time, the president received more coverage (23.9 per cent) than in the previous monitoring period (16.1 per cent). This was due to his role in the NCA. Similar to the other state-funded channels, *Myawaddy* continued to broadcast songs in support of the top representatives of the Tatmadaw as well as other state officials and did not offer any platform for the government opponents.

In contrast to the above-mentioned state-controlled channel *MRTV*, *Myawaddy's* coverage of political actors following the elections remained virtually unchanged, with the bulk of the coverage being devoted to Tatmadaw. This coverage ranged between some 60 per cent in November and December respectively. In January, Tatmadaw's coverage dropped to some 40 per cent. As for the tone of the coverage, it was overwhelmingly positive. The same can be said about the coverage of the president and the government and other state officials. By comparison, similar to its coverage during the pre-election period, the coverage of the NLD remained extremely limited (ranging between 1 to 3 per cent) – thus not providing for a real plurality of political viewpoints.

In February, *Myawaddy TV* gave 45.5 per cent of its political coverage to the Tatmadaw. Almost all of this coverage was positive. By contrast, the NLD received some 7.6 per cent of the coverage which was positive and neutral.

Another state-funded television - ***MRTV 4*** - adopted a similar approach to that of *MRTV* and *Myawaddy TV*, and between 8 and 28 September allocated significant coverage to the authorities (94.4 per cent). However, *MRTV 4's* coverage of the government was more balanced. As much as 56 per cent of the coverage was neutral and 24 per cent was negative (this was mainly in connection of the floods when people complained that they did not receive adequate assistance from the government). As for the coverage of the two frontrunners, the USDP received 2.5 per cent and the NLD 1.6 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral.

Between 29 September and 24 October, *MRTV 4* allocated 96.3 per cent to the coverage of authorities. As much as 57 per cent of the coverage was neutral and some 12 per cent was negative. As for the coverage of the two frontrunners, the USDP and the NLD received respectively 1 and 0.7 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral.

During the post election period, the monitoring team noticed a significant change in terms of the coverage of NLD. *MRTV 4* allocated to the NLD the largest single portion of its political news coverage, ranging from 22 per cent to 25 per cent. The only political entity to receive more airtime was the incumbent government receiving 47 per cent in December and 35 per cent in January. The MID's monitoring team noted another interested trend – while the coverage of the government on *MRTV 4* during the pre-election period was mainly neutral and positive, in December and January, the coverage became neutral and negative. In February, *MRTV4* allocated 32.4 per cent to the activities of the government. In sharp contrast to the other two state-controlled TV channels, the tone of the coverage was predominantly neutral. The coverage also amounted to a small portion of positive coverage as well as negative coverage (the only state-controlled TV to offer some negative coverage of the government).

Private TV channels

The private *Up to Date* channel also demonstrated its open support to the incumbent state authorities and between 8 and 28 September allocated a combined total of 89.1 per cent to them, including the president (41.7 per cent), the government (19.8 per cent), the local government (9.8 per cent), the vice-president (5.4 per cent), and the Tatmadaw (12.4 per cent). Ninety nine per cent of the president's coverage was positive and one per cent was neutral. At the same time, the government received more neutral than positive coverage. The USDP received 0.2 per cent of mostly neutral coverage. The main opposition party NLD obtained some 8.3 per cent of the coverage which was also overwhelmingly positive. Similar to the state-funded channels, *Up to Date* also broadcast a number of songs praising the president as well as the Tatmadaw.

Between 29 September and 24 October *Up to Date* continued to devote most of its coverage to the authorities. During this monitoring period, the coverage amounted to 65.6 per cent which was a decrease in comparison with the first monitoring period (89.1 per cent). The channel covered more political parties than during the first monitoring period. As for the coverage of the main frontrunners, the USDP received 4.8 and 5.2 per cent of mostly neutral coverage respectively. Similar to the state-funded channels, *Up to Date* continued to broadcast a number of songs praising the president.

To summarise the whole pre-election period, the channel devoted most of its coverage to the authorities. During the monitoring period, this coverage amounted to 58.4 per cent which was mainly positive and neutral. As for the coverage of the main frontrunners, the USDP and the NLD received 4.1 and 5.5 per cent of mostly neutral coverage respectively. Similar to the state-funded channels, *Up to Date* broadcast a number of songs praising the president.

The outcome of the 8 November elections had a certain impact on *Up to Date's* editorial policy. In November, the channel allocated the biggest portion of its political news coverage to the NLD (as much as 44 per cent). This was in sharp contrast to the pre-election coverage when the ruling powers gained the bulk of the coverage. Given the fact that the NLD coverage dropped in December and January, it could be said that the November's coverage is linked

with the *Up to date's* reporting on the outcome of elections. At the same time, however, while the channel devoted most of its attention to the activities of the outgoing government, the NLD was still the most presented political party, obtaining 19 per cent of the coverage in December and 10 per cent in January. No other political party received more airtime.

In February, *Up to Date* offered 37.9 per cent of its political coverage to the outgoing government – the coverage of which was mainly neutral. By comparison, the NLD received some 15.3 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral and positive in tone. The USDP received only 3.6 per cent of overwhelmingly positive coverage.

Unlike other monitored TV channels, the private *DVB* offered its viewers a balanced coverage of the political and election-related information. Between 8 and 28 September 2015, *DVB* allocated 28.8 per cent of the coverage to the authorities, including 5.6 per cent to the president, 0.1 per cent to the vice-president, 12.4 per cent to the government, 1 per cent to the local government, and 9.7 per cent to the Tatmadaw. The USDP received 16.1 per cent of the coverage. It should be mentioned that *DVB* was among a few monitored broadcasters to offer some critical coverage of the state officials. By comparison, the NLD received 31.5 per cent of the coverage. The tone of the coverage for the two main competing parties was also comparable. While twenty eight per cent of the USDP's coverage was positive and eighteen per cent was negative, as much as thirty two per cent of NLD's coverage was positive and fourteen per cent was negative. *DVB* also provided some time to cover activities of other political parties contesting the elections. *DVB* was the only channel to offer its viewers debates between the contestants. These debates enabled candidates to convey their messages to the electorate and allowed voters to form opinions of the candidates.

DVB continued to present a much bigger number of political parties than any other monitored TV channel also in the period 29 September – 24 October 2015. It covered as many as 56 contestants in its news programmes. During this period, it allocated 14.1 per cent of the coverage to the authorities, including 3.5 per cent to the president, 0.3 per cent to the vice-president, 4.1 per cent to the government, 1.8 per cent to the local government, and 4.4 per cent to the Tatmadaw (this was a decrease in comparison with the first monitoring period when this coverage was 28.8 per cent). The USDP received 14.7 per cent of the coverage. *DVB* continued to offer some critical coverage of the state officials. By comparison, the NLD received 36 per cent of the coverage (an increase in comparison with the first monitoring period when it was 31.5 per cent). While the tone of the coverage for the two main competing parties in the first monitoring period was comparable, *DVB* gave more positive coverage to the NLD during the second monitoring period.

Overall, *DVB* presented a much bigger number of political parties than any other monitored TV channel. Between 8 September and 1 November 2015, *DVB* covered as many as 69 contestants in its news programmes. During the pre-election period, it allocated only 14 per cent of the coverage to the authorities, including 3 per cent to the president, 0.2 per cent to the vice-president, 4.6 per cent to the government, 1.5 per cent to the local government, and 4.7 per cent to the Tatmadaw. The USDP received 14.4 per cent of the mainly positive and neutral coverage. Unlike other channels, *DVB* offered some critical coverage of state officials.

By comparison, the NLD received more than two times more coverage than its main opponent - 37.9 per cent - which was mainly positive and neutral.

DVB's coverage of political actors did not change in the post-election period – it continued to offer wider range of political viewpoints than other monitored TV channels, devoting the biggest attention to the NLD – the same as during the pre-election period. For example, in November, it allocated half of its news coverage to cover the activities of NLD. This coverage was overwhelmingly neutral. *DVB* continued to cover the activities of the outgoing government (23 per cent in December and 12 per cent in January) with the tone of the coverage being mainly neutral and negative.

In February, *DVB* allocated 37.8 per cent of its political coverage to the NLD. This coverage was mainly neutral and positive. A small portion of the coverage was also negative. The coverage of other monitored subjects was also mainly neutral, with the Tatmadaw receiving the biggest share of negative coverage in comparison with other monitored subjects.

5.4. Radio

Similar to other state funded and some private broadcaster, the *Myanmar state-funded radio* allocated the free-of-charge airtime (15 minutes to three parties per day) between 8 and 28 September 2015. As for the political and election-related news coverage, it adopted a similar approach to that of the state-funded TV channels and devoted the bulk of its news coverage to the activities of state officials.

Between 29 September and 24 October, *Myanmar state-funded radio* allocated the bulk of its political and election-related news coverage (86.9 per cent) to the activities of state authorities that was mainly positive or neutral. In addition, the USPD received 0.8 per cent of mainly positive and neutral coverage. By comparison, the NLD received only 0.1 per cent of the coverage which was also neutral. Unlike state-funded TV, the state-funded radio continued to broadcast free airtime of political parties beyond the end of the first week in October.

To summarise the whole pre-election period, similar to other state funded broadcasters, the Myanmar state-funded radio allocated the bulk of its political and election-related news coverage (98.2 per cent) to the activities of state authorities which was mainly positive or neutral. In addition, the USPD received 0.3 per cent of exclusively neutral coverage. By comparison, the NLD received only 0.2 per cent of the coverage which was also neutral.

Looking at the post-election period, the overall picture of the political actors in Myanmar state-funded *Radio* was similar to the one presented by the *MRTV*. NLD was allocated as much as 40 per cent of the coverage in November. This is in sharp contrast to the pre-election period when NLD's coverage on state radio totalled 0.1 per cent. Similar to *MRTV*, however, the NLD's coverage dropped in December and January to 5 and 3 per cent respectively. The outgoing government was allocated the biggest portion of airtime during the entire post-election period with its share ranging from 26 per cent in November to over 40 per cent in the next two months. Similar to the pre-election period, the outgoing president as well as the USDP continued to receive significant coverage on the state-controlled radio news

programmes. All actors were portrayed in a neutral or positive manner, but when comparing to the pre-election period (when all actors received primarily positive coverage), there was a larger share of neutral information noted in the radio's news during the post-election period. In February, *the Myanmar State Radio* allocated 36.5 per cent of its political coverage to the government. This coverage was mainly neutral. By comparison, the NLD received 12.3 per cent of the coverage which was also mainly neutral. The only subject to receive more positive than neutral coverage was the outgoing president.

The pre-election coverage of other monitored radio channels can be divided into two main groups. The first group consisted of those stations which, similar to the state-funded radio, devoted the bulk of their coverage to the activities of state officials – *Cherry FM, City FM, Mandalay FM* and *Shwe FM*. *BBC Myanmar* belonged to the second group – it provided its listeners with a balanced coverage of the campaign. The same can be said about other foreign radio services – which also offered a more balanced as well as extensive, in-depth and informative coverage, focusing on the two frontrunners as well as on ethnic-based state/regions. In the second monitoring period (from 29 September to 24 October) *Voice of America (VOA)* offered a platform to the NLD and provided critical coverage of the authorities, in particular the government and the Tatmadaw. *Radio Free Asia (RFA)* gave 42.3 per cent of its coverage to the NLD which was mainly positive and neutral. By comparison, the USDP and the state authorities received 17.1 and 18.9 per cent of mainly positive coverage respectively.

Looking at the pre-election campaign period (between 8 September and 1 November), it can be concluded that *Cherry FM, City FM, Mandalay FM* and *Shwe FM* showed their open support to the authorities. By contrast, foreign radio services offered a more critical coverage of the authorities and platform for the main opposition party. In addition, they also offered more extensive, in-depth and informative coverage of the campaign in comparison with the state-funded media. More specifically, *VOA* offered a platform to the NLD and provided critical coverage of the authorities, in particular the government and the Tatmadaw. *RFA* gave 45.1 per cent of its coverage to the NLD which was mainly positive and neutral. By comparison, the USDP and the state authorities received 14.9 and 11.9 per cent of mainly positive coverage respectively. *BBC Myanmar* allocated 39.4 per cent of its coverage to the NLD (neutral and positive) and 17.8 per cent of the coverage to the USDP (neutral).

As for the post-election coverage, the monitoring revealed that the private radio stations - *Cherry FM, Mandalay FM* and *Shwe FM* - apparently used the same news agency as a source of their news programmes as the shares devoted to various monitored entities were almost identical. Similar to their pre-election coverage, the main focus of their news programmes was on the activities of the outgoing government that received between 44 and 50 per cent of the coverage, followed by the outgoing president and the Tatmadaw. These three subjects, along with other state officials, clearly dominated the broadcasts of these radio stations during the post-election period. In comparison, the NLD's share of the coverage did not exceed 2 per cent in any of the three months. All the subjects presented in the news programmes aired on the three stations were portrayed mostly positively.

Another private radio *City FM* offered similar coverage, with clear focus on the activities of the outgoing government. The latter received 29 per cent of the coverage in November and more than 60 per cent of the coverage in December and January respectively. By contrast to the three above mentioned channels, *City FM* allocated more significant coverage to the NLD – as much as 18 per cent in November. At the same time, however, NLD’s coverage dropped to some 3 per cent in December and January.

In November, *BBC*, *RFA* and *VOA* provided the bulk of their coverage to the NLD (52 per cent in *BBC*, 42 per cent in *VOA* and 49 per cent in *RFA*), mainly in connection with the NLD’s landslide victory in the elections. In the following two months, the amount of NLD’s coverage did not exceed 40 per – which was comparable to what the party received on these three foreign channels during the pre-election period. At the same time, while the NLD received the bulk of the coverage, *BBC*, *RFA* and *VOA* allocated considerable amount of airtime to the coverage of activities of the state officials and institutions. The foreign services somewhat differed in the way they presented different actors, with *BBC* maintaining mainly a neutral tone of coverage towards presented actors, while *VOA* presenting a more critical approach (especially towards representatives of the government and Tatmadaw). Overall, while the portrayal of NLD was mainly positive or neutral, the portrayal of the outgoing government and the Tatmadaw tended to be somewhat negative.

5.5. Newspapers

There are currently numerous print publications available in the country, ranging from daily newspapers to weekly journals and magazines. While there were speculations in terms of real ownership of some of the private publications, during pre-election period newspapers provided a diverse range of views.

State-funded publications

The manner in which the two state-funded publications, *Myanmar Ahlin (New Light of Myanmar)* and *Kyaymon (The Mirror)*, informed about political and election-related events during the first monitoring period - between 8 and 28 September 2015 - was similar, from both qualitative and quantitative perspective. Both newspapers clearly prioritized coverage of state authorities, including the president (and the vice-president), the government, the local government and the Tatmadaw. Outside of the free space allocation, the space allocated to political parties was very limited (no party received more than 2.6 per cent of the coverage).

Similar to the state-funded broadcasters, *Myanmar Ahlin* allocated free space to all registered parties. Outside of the free space, however, the paper devoted most of its political and election-related coverage to the president (29.3 per cent), the Tatmadaw (20.2 per cent), the government (19.4 per cent), the vice-president (13 per cent) and the local government (1.1 per cent) – which was altogether more than three quarters of the coverage. This coverage was exclusively positive or neutral.

Another state-controlled daily, *Kyaymon* demonstrated similar approach – it devoted 81.9 per cent to the coverage of the authorities. The tone of the coverage was again overwhelmingly

positive or neutral.⁹ By comparison, the coverage of the NLD was very marginal. As for the coverage of other political parties, the most covered parties were the Kayin Peoples Party (KPP) and the National Unity Party (NUP) which received respectively 3.7 per cent of mainly positive coverage.

Looking at the post-election period, the state-controlled newspapers *Kyaymon* and *Myanmar Ahlin* offered overwhelmingly large coverage of the ruling powers, while the opposition parties were given extremely limited coverage, with NLD presented in only some 0.1 per cent of the coverage during the two months preceding the elections. In sharp contrast, the NLD was given the largest single share of the coverage in both *Kyaymon* (39 per cent) and *Myanmar Ahlin* (31 per cent) in November. Similar to the trend noted on *MRTV* and *Myanmar radio*, the coverage in both papers in December and January was more concentrated on the activities of the outgoing government and the president which received the bulk of the coverage. At the same time, however, the NLD was provided with comparable coverage to the one given to the USDP – which respectively totalled some 8 per cent in December and 2 – 3 per cent in January (in both state-controlled newspapers). As for the tone of the coverage, the portrait of all actors and political parties presented in these dailies was positive.

In February, the state-controlled newspapers continued to allocate the bulk of their coverage to the state authorities – but the coverage was not so extensive as during the pre-election period. In addition, *Kyaymon*, for example, devoted a more significant coverage to the NLD – 16.4 per cent of neutral coverage.

Private publications

The pre-election monitoring results indicated that monitored private publications covered the political and election-related events from a different perspective than the state-controlled newspapers. Unlike the state papers, the private ones focused less on the activities of state authorities and were not afraid to criticise them. While private papers covered a range of political parties (between 14 to 29 parties), the bulk of their coverage went to the biggest opposition party, the National League for Democracy, which was portrayed mostly in a positive and neutral way. While NLD also received some criticism, it was much less than other covered parties.

Dailies

During the first monitoring period, of the five monitored dailies, *Eleven News*, *7 Days* and *Voice* devoted the biggest portion of their coverage to election campaign, with *Eleven* devoting as much as 56 per cent to the NLD. By comparison, the ruling USDP received 11.2 per cent of the coverage. While the coverage of the NLD was overwhelmingly positive and neutral, the USDP coverage was mainly neutral or negative. The next most covered entities were the government and the Tatmadaw receiving respectively 10.5 and 9.1 per cent. The tone of the

⁹ As much as 96 per cent of the government's coverage was positive, 3 per cent was neutral and only 1 per cent was negative.

government's coverage was mainly negative. *Messenger* and 7 days adopted a similar approach.

Voice allocated two times more coverage to the NLD than to the USDP (33.9 against 16 per cent). The paper was critical towards authorities, mainly to the Tatmadaw and the government. *Democracy Today* also gave more space to the NLD than the USDP and generally portrayed the subjects in a neutral manner.

Weeklies

Of the three monitored weeklies, *People Cause* devoted 72.8 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the NLD in the first monitoring period. This coverage was almost exclusive positive. By comparison, the USDP received only 1.2 per cent of such coverage. In general, the two other weeklies also devoted more coverage to the NLD but portrayed them in a more balanced way.

Unlike local radio channels that provided only limited campaign related coverage, print media covered the campaign intensively. Similar to monitored radio channels, also monitored print media were clearly divided in the way they covered the political and election-related news, with the state-funded papers *Myanmar Ahlin* and *Kyaymon* supporting the ruling powers and the private ones - *Eleven News*, *7 Days*, *Voice*, *Messenger* and *People Cause* to the NLD.

The private newspapers *Democracy Today*, *Eleven News*, *Messenger*, *Myanmar Times*, *People's Cause*, *Tomorrow*, *Voice* and *7 Days* all continued to focus their coverage primarily on the NLD also in the period after the elections. Assessing the three-month period, the total share of the coverage that NLD received remained significant - almost all monitored newspapers allocated their largest shares of coverage to NLD in November.

Table 2: *Share of the NLD coverage in monitored private newspapers (in percentage)*

	Nov-15	Dec-15	Jan-16
Democracy Today	45	38	29
Eleven News	57	36	32
Messenger	60	45	75
Myanmar Times	66	43	58
People's Cause	77	74	61
Tomorrow	59	41	55
Voice	50	45	36
7 Days	61	52	42

The portrayal of the NLD remained generally positive in the post-election period, as it was also in the pre-election period, yet, there was a slight increase of critical coverage in regards to the activities of the party while the portrait of the outgoing government and officials was somewhat less negative in comparison with the period prior to the elections. Two

newspapers, *Messenger* and *Tomorrow*, offered significantly smaller amount of political content in December and January compared to the previous periods monitored.

5.6. Online media

Given the growing important of Internet, three online web portals – *Irrawaddy*, *Mizzima* and *Eleven News Group* - were included into the monitoring. In general, all three monitored online portals devoted the bulk of their coverage to the NLD that was portrayed in a positive or neutral way.

In the first monitoring period, *Eleven News Group* gave as much as 56 per cent of the coverage to the NLD which was overwhelmingly exclusively neutral and positive. By contrast, USDP received only 11.2 per cent of such coverage which was mainly negative and neutral. Both *Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima* devoted more space to different parties, including the Arakan National Party (ANP), the Democratic Party For a New Society (DPNS), the Mro Nationality Party (MNP), the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and the Democracy and Human Rights Party (DHRP). As for the coverage of the two main frontrunners, they both gave more space to the NLD than the USDP.¹⁰

During the second monitoring period (29 September and 24 October), online media continued to offer more space to different political parties than other monitored media. As for the coverage of the two frontrunners, *Irrawaddy*, *Mizzima* and *Eleven News Group* devoted more coverage to the NLD than the USPD.

While the MID monitoring did not include the social media, it is important to mention that the social media, in particular Facebook, played an important and active role in the campaign. Traditional media on their Facebook pages often provided links to their articles to attract more readers.

As for the post-election period, online media *Eleven News Group*, *Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima* offered similar picture of the political actors as the private newspapers. They also allocated major portion of their content to the NLD activities in the post-election period.

Table 3: *Share of the NLD coverage in monitored online sources (in percentage)*

	Nov-15	Dec-15	Jan-16
Eleven News	59	48	47
Irrawaddy	64	50	42
Mizzima	62	64	40

Monitored online media continued to provide rather neutral or positive portrayal of the NLD as well as to the most political actors covered. The portrayal of the USDP was somewhat more neutral in the post election period compared to the period prior to the elections.

¹⁰ *Irrawaddy.org* also offered some video materials devoted to the election campaign. While only 4 parties were covered - ANP, DPNS, NLD, USDP - only first three received significant, exclusively neutral and positive coverage.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Data from the overall monitoring period revealed wide differences in the way political subjects were portrayed and in the amount of coverage provided to different political subjects. Pre-election and post-election monitoring periods indicated that media did not follow the same standards of balance, fairness and impartiality, and some of them openly showed their sympathies towards particular political parties. The qualitative analysis also indicated that some media neglected to offer voters opposing views on particular stories. News reports were mainly driven by activities of politicians - journalists themselves usually did not try to dwell on problems, single them out. There was an apparent lack of more analytical approach, and conversely reports were sometimes limited to superficial coverage.

Voters would have benefited from a more analytical and in-depth coverage that could help them to better analyse and assess the qualities and platforms of electoral contestants. The media need to be more proactive in setting the formats of their election-related reporting and their general coverage of elections to better facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analysed and assessed views of persons seeking elected office.

There was a clear problem in the way the state-funded media portrayed the campaign. As recipients of public resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of politicians as well as comprehensive reporting on politically relevant events. They showed only the activities of state authorities and overwhelmingly from a positive perspective; whereas largely ignored any views independent of or critical of the government during the pre-election period. There was generally no discussion on social, economic and political problems of the country, with no information to the citizens about the consequences of bad governance. The coverage of the private media was deeply divided along political lines, with some showing their open support to the ruling powers and others supporting the NLD. DVB, foreign radio services and print media covered the campaign most intensively.

Monitored broadcast media covered daily campaign developments in special election programmes (Election Chronicles) while news programmes, available to a larger audience, offered only limited coverage of campaigns. Instead, news programmes focused on coverage of governments and state officials, many of whom were candidates in the elections. There was a general lack of investigative approach as well as a lack of critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities.

It can be concluded that overall some monitored media tried to provide such coverage based on which an informed choice at the ballot box would be possible. This was mainly thanks to televised debates and special election programmes, as well as the coverage in the print and online media. However, a number of serious problems persist. These include the fact that the editorial policy of media was still determined by the interest of owners and not the interests of the readers or viewers. In addition, contestants' appearance in the news reports and articles was sometimes determined not based on newsworthiness.

The post-election monitoring revealed that the problems identified during the pre-election period in the media were not results of short-term anomalies but appear to have reflected general atmosphere of significant changes in the political makeup of the country. As such, the findings confirmed 'activist-like'trends in a number of the monitored Myanmar media. While after the elections the media started to cover more intensively political parties in the news programmes, they continued to show their more or less open preferences towards certain politicians and/or parties. In addition, there continued to be a general lack of investigative approach as well as a lack of critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities. As such, a number of important reforms and changes will be necessary in order for the media to provide their audience with a more diverse coverage of political views and opinions.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are offered with a view to improve media environment and its legal framework, to enhance the media coverage of political affairs in Myanmar and to support efforts to bring it fully in line with international standards and other obligations and standards for human rights, including freedom of expression, and for democratic elections.

7.1. To the Government:

General

Consideration could be given to ratifying of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other core human rights treaties.

Media independence & diversity

Undue restrictions on freedom of expression should be eliminated from the legal framework in order to foster a free campaign environment and to ensure full respect for fundamental freedoms crucial to the conduct of democratic elections. The authorities should implement reforms to bring the nation's laws and practices in line with international standards for press freedom and freedom of expression.

The freedom and independence of the media should be respected, as objective reporting is essential during an election campaign. State authorities should always refrain from interfering in activities of the media and journalists as it undermines their independence.

The legal framework should be reviewed with a view to encouraging broadcasters to provide independent editorial policy that would result in a fair, impartial and comprehensive coverage of the campaign activities of candidates. Having such information in the news and current affairs programmes would help voters in making informed choices.

The media regulatory body that is to be formed under *the 2015 Broadcasting Law* should create conditions, including granting licences, that would lead to more local-based media as well as a more diverse broadcast media environment, particularly in the television sector. The body should consider conducting its own media monitoring to oversee the media compliance with the legislation, notably during elections. Such activity could contribute to identification of partial and biased coverage and help to provide for a prompt and effective remedy.

State media reform - Public service broadcasting

State-owned and state-controlled media are easy targets for any state authorities willing to use them as propaganda tools. The authorities should move ahead with the plans to transform State broadcasters into an independent public service media that will provide citizens with impartial and politically balanced information on election contestants. The mandate of such public service media should reflect public interests and should be based on independence,

editorial freedom, ethics and non-interference by political parties. This includes development of impartial editorial practices, in order to provide the public with balanced coverage of political opinions during and beyond an election period.

An independent controlling board should be formed as a controlling body to the Director General, with powers to ensure and enforce that the programming of the public broadcaster is in compliance with its public service remit. The appointment procedures for the Director General and for members of the board should be independent, transparent and not politically motivated and should provide for a more diverse membership of the board, including representatives of the civil society active and experienced in the media field. This is particularly important in view of the fact that MRTV and other state-funded media have tended to yield to political pressure, adjusting their editorial line with a view to satisfy political interests and not interests of the public.

Access to information

The Freedom of Information Act should enact mechanisms to ensure proactive publication of information, including on the websites of all the public agencies.

An accountability mechanism for the failure to provide public information or for not imparting public information in a timely manner should be established.

Education & Legal awareness & Media professionalism

Consideration could be given to amending or abolishing laws allowing the criminal prosecution of journalists, particularly for charges of defamation and sedition, so that free expression and journalism are not criminalized. Furthermore, measures should be taken to ensure that civil sanctions are not so large as to negatively affect freedom of expression and are designed to restore the reputation harmed, not to compensate the plaintiff or to punish the defendant.

Transparency of media ownership

Consideration could be given to introducing legislation regulating transparency of media ownership, with a view to ensuring public access to detailed information regarding the involvement of individuals and of legal entities in the ownership structures of the media and on the nature and extent of their respective involvement. Transparency of media ownership is not only important for the authorities in charge of implementing regulations concerning media pluralism so they can take informed decisions, but also for the public to make its own analysis of the information, ideas and opinions expressed by the media.

Consideration could be given to reviewing the legislation so as to prevent any direct or indirect cross-ownership in the broadcast media. No single owner may own shares in other companies, including through a third party.

Consideration could be given to strengthening protection of media against inflammatory speech that breaches the law. At the same time, if applied, restrictions to the freedom of expression should not be disproportional in scope and should not be arbitrary and politically motivated to limit the expression of alternative positions.

7.2. To the Media and Civil society

Media reporting should be balanced and factual, including coverage of the activities of the authorities. The media should be consistent in separating the activities of incumbent powers from the activities they pursue as the representatives of political parties running in the election. No privileged treatment should be given to state authorities by the media during election campaigns. Media should be able to criticize activities or inaction by the authorities and other official bodies whose activities are financed from the public money, to investigate corruption and other wrongdoings and they should not face any pressure in the form of retaliation.¹¹

The media should refuse all open or furtive expressions of intolerance and will consider thoughtfully if publication of such expressions is not conducive to defamation and ridicule based on sex, race, colour, language, faith and religion, affiliation with national or ethnic minority or ethnic group, social difference, political or other opinion.

Media should continue and strengthen their mechanisms of self-regulation, including adopting internal Code of Ethics. In addition, self-regulatory bodies such as the Press Council could consider reinforcing professional standards and media literacy through more training programmes for journalists.

Media monitoring activities should become strong and on-going process, both in quantitative and qualitative mode, to provide a feedback to the sector, and to foster media professional and ethical standards.

The media should avoid broadcasting a message based on unverified information, rumours and with an intention to arouse a scandal or for propaganda purposes. If it decides that such a message is somehow important, despite the fact that it can't be verified, it should broadcast it with a warning saying that the message is not verified. An important criterion is to separate facts from comments that shouldn't be part of the news-providing section of a newscast.

¹¹ Consideration could be given to better selection of information with the goal of featuring in the primetime news programme only events of importance for the socio-political context, i.e. events that are newsworthy for the station's target group. In reporting on economic and development projects for which the government is responsible and in which the government participates only in a formal sense (opening of sections of highway, factories, bridges...), focus should be placed on the significance of these projects for the community, putting citizens, engineers, farmers and so on into the foreground. A stronger analytical approach should be ensured. The views of independent relevant people should also be offered.

The media should follow professional standards as well reporting techniques and methods. They should ensure that every piece of news contains only facts corresponding to reality and whose veracity will be verified by independent sources quoted therein. Journalists, editors, producers and proprietors should spare no effort to make the distributed information correspond with truth and conscience. The facts should be mediated without any distortions and in their respective contexts. If a flawed message is published it should be followed by an immediate apology.

On contrary, media should avoid adjusting data and facts in a manner that would distort reality and in determining the order of importance of the individual pieces of information it should impartially and objectively provide, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information. Likewise, they should not manipulate picture or sound so that the choice of words or other means of expression, change in tone, shift of stress or editing will not deliberately displace the meaning or value of the message.

Consideration could be given to creating new platforms for discussion, trainings, studies and self-reflection on the media, including in the regions, to enhance the current level of journalistic profession. This would help managers, journalists and students to increase their professional capacity and would also improve the current level of media literacy. Access to various educational resources, such as books, databases, methodology, research magazines, as well as a chance to exchange experience through international media networks and journalistic associations would also help in achieving these efforts. It is also important to strengthen legal awareness of journalists, including use of legal protection mechanisms.

7.3. To the International donors:

Continue supporting regular training programmes and schemes in complex media-related areas, including programming, news coverage, business planning, new technologies for Myanmar journalists & media outlets.

Given the overall lack of high-quality reporting, consideration should be given to supporting activities aimed at raising professional standards, including adherence to internationally recognized ethical codes and standards for balanced and objective reporting and news presentation.

ANNEX LIST OF PARTIES REGISTERED FOR THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Akha National Development Party
All Nationals' Democracy
Arakan National Party
Arakan Patriot Party
Asho Chin National Party

Bamar People`s Party

Confederate Farmers Party

Daingnet National Development Party
Danu National Democracy Party
Danu National Organization Party
Dawei Nationalities Party
Democracy and Human Rights Party
Democratic Party For a New Society
Democracy Party For Myanmar New Society

Eastern Shan State Development Democratic Party
Ethnic National Development Party

Federal Union Party

Guiding Star Party

Chin Democracy League
Chin Progressive Party

Inn National Development Party
Inn National League Party

Kachin Democratic Party
Kachin National Congress for Democracy
Kachin State Democracy Party
Ka Man National Development Party
Karen National Party
Kayah Unity Democracy Party
Kayin Democratic Party
Kayin State Democracy and Development Party
Kaying Unity Democracy Party
Kha Me National Development Party
KhumiNational Party

League Chin National Democratic Party
Lhaovo National Unity and Development Party
Lisu National Development Party

Modern People Party
Mon National Party
Mro National Democracy Party
Mro Nationality Party
Myanmar Farmer's Development Party
Myanmar National Congress

National Democratic Force
National Democratic Party for Development
National Development Party
National Development and Peace Party
National League for Democracy
National Political Alliance
National Prosperity Party
National Unity Congress Party
Negotiation, Stability and Peace Party
New Era Union Party
New National Democracy Party
New Society Party

Party Kayah State
Peace for Diversity Party
People Democracy Party
People's Party of Myanmar Farmers And Workers
Phlone-Sqaw Democratic Party
Public Contribute Students Democracy Party

Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
Shan-ni& Northern Shan ethnics solidarity party
Shan State Kokang Democratic Party

Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party

Union Democratic Party
Union Farmer Force Party
Union Pa.O National Organization
Union Solidarity and Development Party
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State

Wa Democratic Party
Women Party (Mon)
WunThar Nu Democratic Party

Zomi Congress for Democracy
Zo National Region Development

88 Generation Democracy Party