Covering Elections:

The Challenges of Training the Watchdogs

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Rosemary Armao

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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world. The Center provides information, builds networks, conducts research, and highlights the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development. The Center was one of the of the main nongovernmental organizers of World Press Freedom Day 2011 in Washington, DC.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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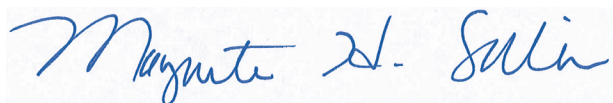
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CIMA Research Report: Covering Elections

Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of training for journalists to cover elections in countries where media developers work to improve journalism.

CIMA is grateful to Rosemary Armao, a journalism educator and veteran journalist with extensive international experience as a trainer, for her research and insights on this topic. Her paper lends itself to analysis and discussion. It represents the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of CIMA or its parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.

Marguerite H. Sullivan
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Executive Summary

An unparalleled opportunity for media developers to boost democracy is at hand in the Middle East and North Africa, where once repressed media and civil society groups are forming in the wake of popular uprisings that toppled or are threatening regimes. New constitutions are being drafted, new forms of government debated, and new representatives selected, all against a backdrop of new citizen empowerment and tension among differing parties if not, as in the case of Egypt, outright violence. In addition, new media and technology have radically changed both the political debate in societies and how that debate is covered compared to the past.

High-quality political news coverage seems essential for reform and for the successful formation of democratic governments. Western reporters already have been recruited to give seminars and instruction to counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia. Now is the time to assess years of training journalists around the world in how to cover political campaigns and elections and to solidify in future trainings what has worked.

There will be challenges to accomplishing that. Scant information exists on exactly how much the numerous government and advocacy groups have spent on election training to date. For example, Michael Henning, chief of the Elections and Political Processes Division of USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance, estimated that his agency alone spends $200 million to $300 million a year globally on elections and political process of which communications is a small piece of each individual program. On election training for journalists specifically, the figure is below $10 million, but Henning cautions that the figure is his guesswork and "not very credible."[1] Second, as an article in the Winter 2011 issue of *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* emphasized, there is to date little study of the effectiveness of trainings, especially long-range effects, disagreement on what to measure, and weak evidence of links between better reporting and better governance.

Now is the time to assess years of training journalists around the world in how to cover political campaigns and elections and to solidify in future trainings what has worked.

Election training for journalists has been something of a sideline in most media development programs. Programs aimed at improving election laws, structures, and processes may include a journalism component, for example. Or efforts to boost investigative reporting might focus on elections in a particularly sensitive year. Media trainers interviewed for this report support the author's impression that where specialized election coverage programs have been mounted, they have tended to be short term and timed directly before elections, with faulty recruiting of participants, little focus on skills to be imparted in the rush, and no follow-up. Donors, trying to show they have no vested interest in influencing how people vote have also had little input on the content of journalist training.

Experience has prompted the best training organizations to forgo much of the "parachute" training that used to be commonplace and to invest in extended journalism training that includes practical skills and treats election coverage as one specialized and important aspect of what good journalists do. This is an effective way to combat the many barriers to good election coverage faced in the developing world. To summarize them: journalists with little formal training and inexperienced at any kind of reporting are asked in these places to report on elections, which requires knowing about laws, political processes, and history as well as using sourcing, storytelling, and multi-media tools. In places where little is known about interviewing and production, is it realistic to expect one-shot training to quickly make local journalists proficient in the polls, personalities, and policies that comprise in-depth political coverage?

Depending on the trainer, content and approach vary widely. There are some half dozen possibilities. Reporters might be taught the need to root out and report on fraud by parties or the need to talk to citizens to discern and play up the issues that most matter to them in an election. Some trainers focus on compiling voting guides and educating the journalists and citizens about how democracy works. Others train in management and collaborative methods (organizational meetings and teaming between print and broadcast partners) as a way to get better election coverage. Still others believe emphasizing ethics and the need for accurate, fair, and balanced coverage is the best way to use the limited time given for election training. Trainers disagree about the need for teaching reporters in the developing world to dig into campaign finance records and write high-quality opinion and commentary–as well as on the possibility for success of such training.

Election training for journalists has been something of a sideline in most media development programs.

Election trainings could be strengthened with some attention to a few opportunities currently being missed. Among these is increased cooperation between American and Western European donors in both funding long-range journalism training and improving the content of training. Intensive, practical training–and maybe equipment–in the use of technology so that reporters can take advantage of social networking, cellphones, and computerized graphics is overdue.

Technology makes political stories personal, urgent, and get the audience involved. Even in places where computers have not reached a majority of the population, significant groups of users, especially young people, already exist. Journalists with both experience or personal backgrounds in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and training in the West have proven especially valuable as trainers in newly developing countries. They have had success teaching even sophisticated reporting techniques and are less easily discouraged by difficulties securing information. Also, better use might be made of increasingly sophisticated understanding of voting processes by academics in the fields of political science and statistics. Finally, election trainers need to reach out to election monitors who have worked for years in countries just now experimenting with elections. They have a wealth of experience and examples to draw from on what to look for in election processes. Election monitors acknowledge that outreach to journalists is an important but neglected area for them.

Introduction

Beginning in December 2010, a series of dramatic political events in several countries brought into sharp focus the topic of this report–election training for journalists. Elections in Haiti and Ivory Coast turned unexpectedly chaotic and violent. Elections results in Uganda, Nigeria, Congo–and more recently in Russia–prompted protests and tensions that journalists had to contend with while assessing claims of voting fraud. And the extraordinary popular uprisings that continue to change the face of North Africa and parts of the Middle East are leading to more open and contested elections in that region. In these places, journalists over the next years may for the first time in decades be covering elections and political campaigns, as citizenry looking for new governance experiment with democracy, multi-party politics, and newly potent civic organizations such as those becoming evident in Tunisia.[2] This is an ideal time for donors to examine the kind of training their money has been supplying in the area of election and campaign coverage.

Such training has become ingrained over the past 15 years or so. Several organizations have sponsored programs meant to improve awareness of and coverage of elections in a variety of countries emerging from the Iron Curtain or other oppressive regimes. That is logical since open elections are the most obvious manifestation of a democracy. The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) opened its 2001 guide to improved election coverage in emerging democracies with the declaration that "Free elections are the key to democracy. The ability of the general public to choose its government in an open fair process is the hallmark of a democratic society."[3] Margot Gould of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, a Stockholm-based intergovernmental organization that provides training on election processes for government officials, says, "An election is the largest and most complex logistical operation that a country ever undertakes in peace time."[4]

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Oddly, however, perhaps because election coverage is so basic a component of political reporting in the Western democracies, there has been little reflection about how it is accomplished, how to teach it, and what the goal of training in election coverage should be. Literature on these points is scarce, though effective coverage of its own elections is constantly debated in the United States.

Even so simple a fact as how much have government and nongovernmental agencies spent on election training is difficult to discern because of the large number of players and target countries; the lack of coordination among donors; and because training has been tacked on to larger democracy-building projects.[5]

A look at trainings carried out over the past three years illustrates their geographic range.

- **Afghanistan:** Internews and a local NGO, Nai for Open Media in Afghanistan, trained about 170 Afghan journalists and editors from eight regions over three months in 2009. In September 2010, the U.S. State Department and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) co-hosted a conference to encourage reporters around the country to share election information and resources.

- **Azerbaijan:** The Council of Europe and the Azerbaijani Press Council published handbooks for journalists who would cover parliamentary elections in 2010. It described the rights and obligations of journalists covering the elections and emphasized fairness, impartiality, and neutrality.[6] Similar guides have been put together with international assistance in South Africa, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

- **Burma:** The U.S. embassy in Rangoon helped bring in an American trainer to work with journalists on election and other reporting issues in early 2010. Internews, supported by funding from a number of U.S. government agencies, put together an extensive year-long election training and reporting project that included bringing Burmese reporters into Thailand to work and setting up 30 reporters in an undercover news agency.

- **Chad:** With money from USAID, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) began in early 2011 a two-year program of election preparations in this central African nation that will include improving reportage on elections, including preparations for balloting and results. Chad has no formal journalism school, and the government controls the press.[7]

- **Egypt:** The Thomson Reuters Foundation and the British Council trained 12 Egyptian journalists in covering elections, including reading polls, ethics, legal problems, interviewing, and gender issues. This occurred in February 2010, nearly a year before the overthrow of the regime.

- **Guatemala:** The U.S. embassy, the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, and GraciasVida, a non-profit organization involved in media advocacy and production and training, convened a meeting of nearly 80 journalists in May 2011 to plan cooperative ventures to increase security and to learn digital techniques, such as editing video and audio in advance of elections.

- **Haiti:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; International Media Support (IMS) of Denmark; and the Association of Haitian Journalists organized workshops on elections laws and interviewing for 300 journalists from 10 regions in advance of November 2010 elections. The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), as part of a major effort to build investigative reporting on the island, ended up reporting on the chaotic election and its aftermath.

- **Liberia:** Mitchell Land, interim dean of Mayborn School of Journalism at the University of North Texas, did a two-week, U.S. State Department-sponsored training in Monrovia and rural areas of the country in September 2010, ahead of general elections the next month.

- **Mozambique:** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and election officials ran a series of workshops around the country on election laws and process and the role of the press as a lead-in to elections in October 2009.

- **Qatar:** The U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the local media institute, Darinfo/Dar Al Sharq took 65 journalists through a workshop in January 2008 led by U.S. journalism professors on the role of the press in elections.[8]

- **Pakistan:** With a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, Internews worked to boost technical and research skills at independent FM radio stations in Pakistan before the 2008 elections there.

- **Peru:** Through ICFJ, Hena Cuevas, a bilingual former network TV reporter and producer, spent a year from 2010 to 2011 working with nine TV stations on improving election coverage, putting out a national newscast, and leaving behind trainers who can bring changes to additional stations.

- **Sudan:** In February 2010, the UNDP and a consortium of other international and local media support agencies trained 300 journalists and media outlets in the north and south on how to cover elections in advance of Sudan's April 2010 nationwide polling. In March of that year, two African NGOs, the Inter Press Service and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, hosted a workshop for South Sudan media. The first multi-party elections in 24 years meant reporters needed help with conflict-sensitive reporting, fact-checking, writing about common people, and avoiding sensationalism.

- **Tanzania:** The UNDP and the Media Council of Tanzania trained local journalists and hired two African facilitators to run a series of three-day trainings for print journalists in preparation for October 2010 elections.

- **Uganda:** From September to December 2010, IREX sent two trainers to work with 160 journalists in the capital and three regional towns on improving election reporting.

- **Zambia:** The UNDP and the Electoral Commission of Zambia held a five-day workshop on ethical reporting in July 2010 for print and broadcast journalists that emphasized the role of the media as "amplifiers of peace" in advance of the 2011 elections. They were taught that balanced coverage, verification of facts, and serving as mediators between the public and politicians could prevent tensions from exploding into social unrest.[9]

- **Globally:** The National Endowment for Democracy supports more than a dozen NGOs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa that conduct training in election observation or news coverage.

One potential difficulty these groups could have if they were to become involved more directly with media training was illustrated in December 2011 when Egyptian security forces raided the offices of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and those of other international NGOs seeking proof that they were trying to influence elections there. While in Liberia during the fall of 2010, trainer Mitchell Land was puzzled to find himself called into question on the Internet[10] as something of a U.S. government agent. Writers on the site compared his role in training African journalists to U.S. training of foreign militaries. Land pointed out that the U.S. government has for years tried to build the capacity of foreign journalists to cover elections as part of its public diplomacy mission–and that this is a good thing, involving nothing unethical or shady.[11]

The controversy illustrated well the strange-bedfellows relationship between government donors and journalistic trainers when it comes to media development in general–but particularly to elections, which are potent symbols of a working democracy. Democratic governments ideally hold no sway over an independent media, hence suspicion about the State Department's support of training for Liberia's journalists. But the U.S. government pays for what Judith McHale, former under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, called in a speech "international media engagement" just as it does for innovative technology, cultural programs, and English lessons as ways to creatively "extend our reach to foreign publics."[12]

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In exchange for vague but expected benefits from free and fair elections, the government mostly leaves the actual content, planning, and goals of training to the journalists or NGOs it assigns to projects. Indeed, no-strings-attached funding is the only funding from government that established media development implementers such as IREX and ICFJ, will accept, according to their executives.

"Donors never ask us" to help insure favorable or pro-U.S. results in any election," said Mark Whitehouse, vice president for media for IREX, which has conducted training on elections in as many as 30 countries over the past 15 years.[13] "We make sure it's about reporting professionally on candidates and issues and not taking a stand. The agreements [with donors] just say something to that effect."

Patrick Butler, vice president of programs at the ICFJ, confirmed much the same approach for the Knight International Journalism Fellowships Program, which only signs on with partners who do not press their own agenda.[14]

Even if a precise formula for instruction can be calculated, numerous barriers to effective election and campaign training abroad would remain.

Barriers

Inexperience and Low Skill Levels

Almost regardless of where they are assigned to work, Western trainers face a similar set of formidable barriers. Many are the same encountered by trainers concerned with all kinds of specialized or high-level journalism.

For example, Rachel Jones, who obtained a grant from the Knight Health Journalism Fellowship Program in 2010 to develop a Kenyan Alliance of Health and Science Reporters, outlined challenges she expected the group would have to contend with.[15]

"The goal of improving basic skills for African reporters is tremendous. Often, sincere, energetic and enthusiastic journalists, even at major media companies, have little formal journalism training–especially at a level that could yield analytical, thought-provoking stories about health and science issues," she wrote. "Having spent the past seven years participating in the process of training and skills-building for African journalists, across a range of journalism platforms–in seven different countries to date–I can authoritatively state that most African journalists simply don't have access to the kind of training, mentoring and coaching required to significantly improve content in their chosen media."

Low skill levels are exacerbated by high staff turnover in newsrooms of the developing world and especially in post-conflict areas.

Low skill levels are exacerbated by high staff turnover in newsrooms of the developing world and especially in post-conflict areas. Peter Mwesige, a veteran journalist, educator, and a founder of the African Centre for Media Excellence in Kampala, has noted: "We have seen it in Uganda, in Rwanda, and in Burundi … I observed, based on compelling anecdotal evidence, that anywhere in the neighbourhood of 75 percent of the journalists who covered the 2006 election in Uganda were not only covering their first multiparty election but presidential election too … inexperience in the newsroom is a major problem that in some ways dwarfs the political and legal constraints that African journalists operate under … high staff turnover creates the problem of low 'institutional memory' in newsrooms."[16] He has characterized political reporting in his country as lacking "analytical rigour, investigative depth, insight, context, synthesis and perspective," and called on news organizations to do more mentoring of younger journalists by senior writers.[17]

Poor pay and lack of upward professional mobility force journalists throughout the developing world and even increasingly in the West out of the field and into public relations or other jobs. What this means for training is a steady loss of accomplished and experienced students who might otherwise spread lessons they acquired. Trainers constantly must start over again.

As a Knight fellow wrote of Haiti: "Unfortunately, journalism in Haiti is not considered a noble profession–it's a stepping-stone to other opportunities. Because of past political violence, security concerns and financial restrictions, many of Haiti's most seasoned journalists have moved away from reporting and opened their own stations, left the country, or taken jobs with one of the hundreds of non-governmental agencies that have flooded Haiti since the quake."[18]

Lisa Schnellinger may be the dean of Western campaign/election coverage trainers, having worked over the past dozen years in Asia, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East. Her assignments have taken her to nine countries including Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Her students are generally unfamiliar with the norms of journalism and of democratic elections. She typically faces a conceptual barrier to good coverage. "There is a belief that elections are driven by the candidates. They defer to sources with authority. An election should not be just a horse race. It's about the issues."[19] That kind of journalism demands more work, competence, and confidence of reporters.

Different Takes on Ethics

Low pay and status coupled with undeveloped professionalism are prime causes of another likely barrier for election trainers from the West: problematic ethics. Scandal broke out in India in 2010, for example, when journalists were found to be trading favors with political lobbyists and industrialists, swapping positive stories and publicity for access, influence, and money.[20]

Party-connected media owners and editors' prejudices conspire to make slanted or biased coverage commonplace.

Journalism is highly politicized in many countries, and ethical conflicts of interests are the norm. Party-connected media owners and editors' prejudices conspire to make slanted or biased coverage commonplace. "I am teaching ethics, and they are not interested," said Ann Olson, a veteran of election-coverage and other training in Cambodia, Russia, Ukraine, and Central Asia.[21] In Bosnia, journalism trainer Drew Sullivan said, if reporters ask leading questions of officials of one party they will demand to know what enemy from which rival party is behind them. Similarly, in Iraq and Egypt, Schnellinger said, "If I'm a reporter from a news outlet very well known as aligned with a party, candidates from opposing parties will not deal with [me]." Training in objectivity and neutrality for reporters in aspiring democracies is vital, she maintained.[22]

Similarly, after a short-term training in Nigeria in 2006 for Casals and Associates, an international development firm that works on governance, investigative reporter Don Ray drafted a piece on his experience in which he describes "gratification" payments as so much the norm that they carry no stigma: "Some told me that not taking the money could render them persona non grata with the official or organization offering the payment." At times, it can cost them even more. "If you refuse to accept it," Olawale Rasheed, political editor of the *Nigerian Tribune,* said, "the giver is likely to brand you as an enemy working for his opponents. He may even petition your management … and possibly get you out of the way."[23]

Secrecy and Inaccessible Information

Many trainers say the lack of transparency in the countries where they work is a high hurdle. The best election coverage, after all, makes clear to voters who is getting how much money from whom and using it for what so that they can decide what deals may be in the works and where real loyalties lie.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where reporters at the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN) took a stab for the first time in 2010 at keeping track of money flowing into and out of parties, reporters found ways to get information even though access is highly restricted and freedom of information laws, particularly in the Serb-dominated portion of the country, go widely unheeded. The reporters went through Central Election Commission and auditors' reports on party financing, and on occasion quickly copied or snapped photos of documents officials left them alone with.[24]

Even if they had gotten all the records, Sullivan noted, they would not have gotten all the information. Though taxpayer money is involved, little documentation is kept on party spending. No formal records exist on what businesses seeking political favor pay to parties through in-kind transactions, such as free printing, free ads, and cheap office rentals.[25]

Olson said she found no information available in former Soviet countries. Reporters were not even allowed to ask for it. "No access is the killer thing about media development and especially election training in developing countries," she said. "They use the law; they use controlling the journalists to try and control the politics. Coverage training needs to be as concerned with the law as with the election itself."[26]

The best election coverage makes clear to voters who is getting how much money from whom and using it for what.

In Peru, Cuevas is frustrated by lack of access, not to documents but to candidates. "It's incredibly closed," she said, "and the usual suspects who will agree to give interviews are the ones who will talk to anyone." Small TV stations like the ones she works with cannot compete.[27]

This barrier is all the more frustrating because training cannot remove it. Whitehouse said IREX has de-emphasized straight training, in fact, and moved to "work on issues of the laws and regulations governing coverage of elections." He said IREX also is doing more now than it once did on developing programming, such as debates and talk shows, that can result in more transparency and discussion.[28]

For her part, Schnellinger dismisses the idea of investigative follow-the-money training in non-democracies as "a fruitless endeavor. Those records are not available … follow-the-money reporting is very difficult to do." Schnellinger said there are some basic things she encourages: "You observe the posters a candidate is putting up and confront him about where did you get the

money for them, but accurate records are hard to come by … There's a lot more need for shoe-leather reporting than for records, and that is what we are better able to do." She said she found reporters she is trying to train become frustrated when assigned to records quests. Nothing is reliable, if you can get anything at all, she said; even police reports on attacks against campaign workers will tend to be less truthful than Western reporters have come to expect of such documentation.[29]

Ill-Conceived and Short-Term Training

Considering the number and severity of the barriers, effective training in specialized areas of journalism should naturally be well-planned and carried out by the most qualified of trainers. Too often that doesn't happen, say the trainers with the most experience.

One reality of international media training is that it is conducted by organizations that want to continue to receive government grants and know that to do so they have to show results. That generally means reference to metrics that have little to do with real capacity building. It's about offices, programs, conferences, and "ticking off boxes," in the description of one trainer who prefers working long-term with indigenous media.[30] This trainer asked for anonymity because of fear of losing future assignments, but the criticisms were echoed by every trainer contacted for this report. Organizations that provide training under contract rarely take a hard critical look at their programs after the fact. They accentuate the positive to donors and downplay failures.

Above all, training programs should emphasize language skills. Increasingly, trainers who can speak directly to international colleagues are being sent into the field.

Teaching requires a whole different skills set than reporting and writing, Schnellinger said. "I cannot walk in and say, 'I've been an accountant for 10 years and now I'm going to be your trainer.' But I can report for 10 years and then go to Armenia and train journalists?"[31]

Expert trainers consulted for this report suggest some skills and traits aside from excellent reporting and writing that ought to be expected in international media coaches: the ability to teach adult learners and cater to different learning styles, including visual and on the job; knowledge of project management; adaptability; and appreciation of foreign cultures. Above all, training programs should emphasize language skills. Increasingly, trainers who can speak directly to international colleagues are being sent into the field. Alternatively, expert translators must be hired and spend time with trainers if workshops and group projects are to run smoothly.

Finally, many election trainings are too short. Trainers run out of time or money to do follow-up or add-on training that could cement newly implanted journalistic skills. This might be said about a lot of media development, but it is especially a problem for political reporting because each election is a one-time event with an end date. On the surface it makes sense to do training

a short time before that event and to get out of town when it is over. Cuevas in Peru appreciates the luxury she enjoyed as a trainer in a rare year-long election improvement project. In two-week trainings she's done, she said, "people get all excited, and then I leave, and it goes back to how it was."[32]

Olson said an ideal election training program would run for three years and would include training in in-depth reporting on issues other than politics. Training could be centered on elections, she said, but it would really be about covering the political life of a community or a society. Journalists would then realize they were not covering a horse race. It's about measuring, looking at, and understanding the electorate. "Election coverage is like the icing on the cake–you have to bake the cake and you have to have all the ingredients that go into the cake."[33]

Jerome Aumente, founding director and senior research associate at the Journalism Resources Institute of Rutgers University, agrees that real training goes on for years. "The election is not the end but the beginning," he said. "You have to follow through with investigation, enterprise, and specialization … What happened after the new officials were voted in? Did public policy change? Did they do what they promised they would?" A goal of election training, he said, should be helping to build watchdogs over the government.[34]

Simple lack of resources is an underlying cause for much bad election coverage, trainers said.

Trainers commonly must settle for less ambitious trainings and then try to leave some reminders or reinforcement. Trainer Ray formed a listserv. Others have trained local assistants to take over their roles once they go home. And many leave behind customized election coverage guidebooks or computerized handbooks. Alison Bethel did one for Ghana, for example, after her Knight fellowship ended in 2009, that is especially good on reporting to combat violence. In February 2010, IMS and Article 19 compiled an *Election Notebook for Journalists in Ukraine* heavy on appropriate ethics for political reporting. It also "provides security considerations and gives tips on assessing … election-related sociological surveys."[35]

Poverty and Lack of Organization

Simple lack of resources is an underlying cause for much bad election coverage, trainers said. Only a few media outlets in the countries where training is needed can afford full-time political staff or allow extensive travel to follow national campaigning or connect with voters. Even fact-checking and taking time away from work for "free" training offered by Western donors can be a hardship in many places. Newsrooms in developing countries generally are challenged to replicate the coordinated planning and deployment of staff that Western newsrooms employ to get the most out of limited resources. In some places, even the idea of a morning meeting to go over story possibilities for the day and another meeting in the afternoon to decide on placement of leading stories is alien. Under such circumstances, candidates can easily set the tone and agenda of campaign coverage: They issue statements, hold rallies or other easily digestible events, and spoon feed a passive press.

Failure to Learn From Election Monitors

Trainers seeking to improve coverage of elections are missing one obvious opportunity and that is incorporating the knowledge and experience of election monitors.

Election monitors are not journalists. Monitors answer to governments or to the international community. They are concerned with process and legal strictures not with outcomes. They work intently and solely on elections, not on a variety of topics as do most reporters. But the two jobs intertwine.

David J. Carroll, director of the Democracy Program at the Carter Center, said "I and Carter Center colleagues have long viewed as very important but very neglected" questions about what journalists should do in an ideal situation and what they most need training in to promote better elections and healthier democracies.[36] Carroll, who has been observing elections globally for 20 years, said co-workers have talked about sponsoring a joint conference or working on a learning package for journalists. Reaching out to form a partnership with journalists is on the back burner.[37]

What to Teach?

The upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa have sharpened the major questions that donors and trainers need to work out: What skills are needed to do campaign coverage right, and how should they be taught to best impart those skills?

Some would-be recipients of election training know what they want to learn.

Nigerian editor Lanre Idowu said in an interview in early 2011 that NGOs planning training programs in advance of elections in that country needed to sensitize reporters to "some of the things they need to watch out for. For example … how do we cover party primaries, how do we cover voting, how do we deploy our people, how do we train those who may not be conversant or versed in political reporting?"[38]

> *The upheavals in the MENA region have sharpened the major questions that donors and trainers need to work out: What skills are needed to do campaign coverage right, and how should they be taught to best impart those skills?*

Barbara Kaija, editor in chief of the government-dominated Vision Group in Uganda, hired American trainers to teach her staff how to convert into stories the results of a poll on what voters were most worried about–access to drugs in health centers, the widow and orphan problem in northern Uganda, unemployment, and lack of markets for food crops. Data they understood, but not sourcing and story-telling.[39]

Their preference, in short, is for basic journalism training as well as factual lessons on the mechanics of elections and political processes specific to their countries.

Donors generally make few demands about the results they expect from the contractors they sign up to do election training. So this leaves the contractors free to determine the learning outcomes, curriculum, and assessment methodologies. This approach has the value of flexibility, of trainers being able to tailor learning to the local conditions of the reporters they are working with, but it also has made for wide variation in trainings. Proponents of civic journalism do not believe investigative techniques are relevant or teachable abroad, for example. Proponents of advocacy journalism believe responsible opinion writing should be taught, while hard-news reporters believe sticking with the tenets of objective reporting is the best way to go.

Examples of Training Around the World

Uganda

Bill Ristow, a former editor at the *Seattle Times* and now an international trainer, and his wife Theresa Morrow, also an experienced journalist and trainer, are the people Kaija brought in to prepare reporters for Uganda's February 2011 presidential election.

"In general," Ristow said, "our training follows the developments in American campaign coverage in the past 20 years or so–the period when U.S. journalists, feeling trapped into reactive coverage driven by the candidates' agendas, started pushing back and pursuing what was sometimes called 'people's agenda' or 'voters' voice' coverage. Instead of simply reporting on each new speech, each new charge by one candidate against the other, etc., journalists started developing ways to independently determine what issues truly mattered to voters, and what the voters were thinking about what they saw in the campaigns."[40]

Ristow said his training is built on the techniques of traditional U.S. campaign coverage, including getting crowd reaction to speeches, and checking with the opposition about what candidates said and did, checking to verify things candidates said that struck them as false. Ristow asked journalists to identify issues residents of their regions found important and write compelling stories about them. He taught interviewing skills, and he did some training on reporting about violence in an objective, non-inflammatory way.[41] He showed some examples of technology-enhanced campaign coverage in the United States but did not teach it directly.

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>
> — Bill Ristow

Nigeria

Ray emphasized his best skills–observation, an eye for corruption, and bottom-up reporting–for his Casals-funded training in Nigeria. Ray tried to get reporters to see the influence of "godfathers," wealthy big-shots who selected candidates later beholden to them, on the electoral process. He talked to them about how they and their editors were caught up in corruption as well, that their collection of envelopes of money before covering events and envelopes of "gratitude" after the coverage granted was not innocent. He taught them about paying attention, for example taking a photo of a truck laden with mattresses and later figuring out that poor people were trading votes for mattresses**.** But Ray did not consider effective the two-week training that took him and two other trainers–one Polish and the other local–to eight "whistle stops" around the country. It was too little, too late before the actual election. To compensate, he set up a group listserv so that reporters could enlist his help and continue sharing ideas with each other after he left.[42]

Cambodia

Olson's direction of a much-emulated 2001-02 election project in Cambodia, when that country was holding democratically contested local elections for the first time since 1925, emphasized explanatory writing. "Teaching people what democracy is about … is a real crucial issue," Olson said. "I think that you can have all the journalists in the world, but if the public doesn't understand how important Election Day is you've missed out on a key push of what democracy is about. We sent journalists around the country with the idea that they got to ask questions … We found that people had no idea what they were voting on. The journalists actually were educators.[43]

Olson believes in combining classroom instruction with hands-on practice, after experience in Russia, Ukraine, and Tajikistan. "You have to teach them ideas," she said, "and then give them a chance to do it." In Cambodia she commandeered 16 international trainers from NGOs operating there to work with 41 journalists divided into teams that scoured the country. They set up a newsroom in an Internet café, worked with each other through translators, and employed techniques the Cambodians had never seen before. As she remembers, they brought a leading democracy advocate into the classroom for an hour-long presentation after which the journalists had to produce three story ideas based on his remarks. "I got a whole bunch of blank faces," she said. "They asked, 'Teacher, what is a story idea?'"[44]

Peru

Cuevas also has been concerned with clarity and story effectiveness in her year-long ICFJ-funded election training with small TV stations in the Peruvian countryside. Her emphasis, she said, is first on production quality and incorporating use of social media and the Internet and second on basics such as proper writing. All of this is to help achieve the goal of reader-focused story telling. The journalists she works with, she said, "have not noticed that the coverage they are doing is limited to following candidates around. We try to think of a different way so the candidates are not in control … For example in Peru gay marriage is an issue, but no one has covered it because they are following candidates" who are not bringing it up.[45]

Burma

An unusual and undercover election training project ran throughout 2010 to prepare Burmese reporters for November elections that initially had raised hopes for wider political freedom. American and European donors combined efforts, which is unusual, to put international journalists in Rangoon and to equip a stealth newsroom in neighboring northern Thailand that sent news back into Burma. Dozens of reporters were involved, including minority ethnic journalists recruited in remote areas away from the capital. The project was heavily Web-based, and it provided material on the elections to two dozen Asian and Western media outlets, including the Voice of America. Inside Burma, media outlets produced voters' guides, as has been done in Cambodia.

Because of fear of government reprisal, a lead trainer in Burma, a veteran of the Cambodian project, will not be identified here, but his experiences are valuable to consider, especially in light of upcoming trainings likely to be attempted in North Africa.

The curriculum for the training came out of a blend, he said, of "what is most useful in this part of the world and the Western idea of what a political reporter should do … be a watchdog on politicians and government."[46] Campaigns in Southeast Asia, he said, are different from the rest of the world. There is more political violence. Ruling parties engage in more dirty tricks to insure they maintain power. In Burma, he said, one goal was to report on parties twisting the law or fooling or bribing voters.

Another was to explain who the candidates were, what they stood for, and what they were promising.

And the Burmese, seeing their first general election in two decades, he said, require education about democracy from the press. There is no sense of that currently, he said. "What does it mean in the Burma or Asian context? We looked at different models." Political scientists from Indonesia, where the military holds tremendous political power, Thailand, and Cambodia were brought in. Examples of good journalism were also drawn from these countries, whose journalists share far more similar experiences with each other than with their counterparts in the United States. One result, he said, was that Burmese reporters learned the art of indirect criticism of their oppressive government by getting people to talk about bad roads and electrical outages in stories.

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— Leading journalism trainer in Burma

For all this effort, the trainer said, journalism did not make a difference in the bad outcome of the election–continued control by the military's Union Solidarity and Development Party. "It was a rigged election from the start," he said, an opinion Reporters Without Border and the Burma Media Association expressed well before the actual event. "Prior censorship, intimidation, imprisonment and expulsion of foreign reporters," by the military government, the groups said, "are all completely incompatible with a free election." Electoral laws that restricted access to information and polling stations as well as government control of the Internet and censorship did not help.[47] A constitution that insured a bloc of legislative seats for the military and a boycott of the elections by the National League for Democracy party of Aung San Suu Kyi undermined the elections.

The media could control none of this. Still, the trainer does not believe the effort was wasted. "We elevated the journalism they can do, "he said. "They can turn over stories quickly … they know how to find a sharp angle and support it with quotes … This was the best chance in 10 years to put skills into practice." He added that the Burmese media is different, too: "Censors

allowed space for politics, for the first time in a half century. The first-ever voter guides were done … people felt more free in tea shops and in the streets to talk about politics. We pushed boundaries and created expectations."[48]

Another international trainer who worked with about 50 journalists in Burma in 2010 on U.S. State Department money agrees that flawed as it was, the election presented "a rare crack in the wall" that allowed him to go in and talk to Burmese officials about democracy–in front of the secret police who attended his workshops.

Afghanistan

Schnellinger, like the trainers working in Burma, sees a difference in training for elections in places that have even rudimentary democratic institutions–and those with none at all. She has spent some eight years in all working in Afghanistan, with funding that has varied from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, USAID, the U.S. embassy in Kabul, and the Open Society Foundations. In these places with few computers, especially outside the main city, and with no memory or tradition of democracy, you start from scratch, keeping training to its most basic level: What is the role of elections in a democracy? What does democracy mean? How do journalists fit in? How do you write a balanced story, and how do you stay out of trouble?

Schnellinger, who worked on the Cambodia project and wrote a journalism guide on election reporting in new democracies, covered elections herself in the Seattle area where some of the earlier experiments with voter-centered civic journalism reshaped U.S. election coverage. She has carried the model around the world. She puts together simple surveys with small but scientific samples to discover what voters most care about. Frequently this serves to shake up journalists who come into her sessions convinced that they know what their readers and viewers want. In the places she works, she said, the man on the street has never had a chance to speak out, so the idea–by now seen as a cliché in U.S. media–is revolutionary.[49]

During training she has reporters do a test survey that they then examine for biases. These, she says, are inevitable. Men will outnumber women among those surveyed, or one ethnic group will dominate, or no old people are questioned. She works with the reporters on ways to talk to women in places where that is not easy (for example, go to the husband first and set up screens so no face-to-face contact is required). "It's extremely important in election coverage that they talk to voters that are not like themselves," she said.

And finally, reporters she works with talk to voters. "I initially got this resistance," she said, "like 'Why do we care what street vendors think of national issues?' or 'These people have nothing useful to say.'" Reporters found out otherwise. Schnellinger has had reporters go into the market and take photos of the men on the street they've been forced to talk with. She has them printed and hands them out to be taped to computers. "This is who you work for … this is your boss," she tells them.

She advocates the symbolic importance of these interviews. When a Pashtun reporter interviews someone who is Hazara, that "de-escalates conflict," she explained. "The act of talking to each other is de-conflicting. Those of us who look long term believe education and voice is what this training is all about. Journalism is a form of education." Schnellinger likes to use another graphic in training, one that shows the flow of power the old way and under democracy. "Democracy is a fairly radical notion in the scheme of political ideas mankind has come up with," she said. "In the old way, power flows from the top down and it's the job of the scribe who takes the dictates of the ruler and disperses it among the people. Democracy reverses that flow. It is the role of the journalist to listen … to take the reality of the masses and communicate it upward."

Schnellinger counts as an intangible of election trainings a quality that is hard to measure–inspiration.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Sullivan has come to see that Bosnian elections are not the equivalent of those in America or Western Europe. "I think that we Americans generally deal with an election as a giant event and a show. The local reporters … don't see elections as a particularly big story … they see it as part of an ongoing process, jockeying for control by parties. Campaign issues don't exist for debate because the election is more a referendum on the political party itself. What we really should do [as trainers] is help them do what they want to do better."[50]

"The act of talking to each other is de-conflicting. Those of us who look long term believe education and voice is what this training is all about. Journalism is a form of education."

— Lisa Schnellinger

He has translated that for CIN to mean deeper back-grounding of political stories and investigation of party finance and corruption. Ultimately, he said, journalists "have to train the public to uphold their democratic responsibilities, to consider far-reaching public policies when they vote."

CIN got $48,500 from the NED in advance of the October 2010 elections, to look into political party funding sources and spending patterns. Reporters connected parties to donations from businesses awarded government contracts, for example, and to special interests.

Appraising and Improving Election Training

Trainers consulted for this report expressed firm belief in the work they do, yet none of them offered a program they had been involved in as a golden example of how to do it right. Trainers measure their successes in educational efforts like these in small gratifications, according to the reports they turn in after the fact. They are happy that journalists they have worked with are excited about new story ideas or new techniques, about seemingly increased understanding of citizen-based coverage, even about their own renewed sense of mission. But they were unable to link work they had done to lasting change in publications they had worked with, much less to governance as a whole in those countries.

Troy Etulain, a former senior media advisor for USAID who has done extensive training of journalists working on elections in sensitive places, including Sudan, said the problem is "an impatient expectation for major changes. We fund projects for two years and expect the whole situation to change" in that time.[51] He noted that grant applications, including those for his organization, require bidders for media development projects to say how they'll evaluate their work. Because such evaluations are not standard, meaningful comparisons across programs are impossible, he said. Worse still, the goal of evaluations as they exist now is not focused on improving journalism, simply on making a favorable report to funders.[52]

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A compelling article in *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* recently took up the issue of how hard it is for the aid community to "measure impact and effectiveness" of programs intended to "build democratic institutions and boost government accountability by strengthening the Fourth Estate." Donors, the article noted, rightfully ask for more rigorous proof that their programs "produce a change in outcomes, but this is extremely hard to measure. In part, this is because media development is an intangible goal that does not lend itself to quantitative measurement." In addition, donors such as the Thompson Reuters Foundation and World Bank Institute do not publicize the result of evaluations they do on their own programs, making development of better evaluative instruments harder.[53]

The authors of this piece examined in depth the results of two specialized reporting trainings in Africa completed in 2009 and 2010 by Columbia University teams funded by Revenue Watch Institute and Investment Climate Facility for Africa, an NGO. The training topics were not politics, but evaluations of the program done through content analysis before and after the sessions and through interviews and questionnaires of journalists revealed findings–18 recommendations about trainings–relevant here.

For example, the authors found that "source balance" did not improve in articles before and after trainings, perhaps because journalists lack the resources of skill to cultivate multiple voices in their work. They suggested trainings that introduce journalists to possible sources. These might be similar to the kinds of advanced seminars the Knight Center for Specialized Journalism has done for years in the United States.

They recommended that training be carried out by media development organizations, not by NGOS trying to raise awareness about their own agency; that presentations by academics and other neutral researchers be featured; and that while some speakers from overseas are good, local people with a firm grasp on the issues must be involved.

The report ends with this encouragement, apropos of this topic: "… we recommend that media development organizations continue to offer training programs. Even as currently designed, they have strong, positive benefits; but with the improvements suggested in this article, these impacts could be substantially enhanced."

Etulain said he has proposed convening a grand conference to agree on and endorse some common content analysis of media development projects. Evaluation would become a fully funded part of projects meted out to implementers in his plan and would in the future yield meaningful analysis of what techniques, trainers, and programming features give the best results for the money invested in them. Etulain said that over time election training has moved away from short-term centralized workshops to more effective on-site mentoring in smaller groups and more attention to editors and owners and to the equipment needed to do good journalism. Evaluation of what works and what does not is the next step to increased training quality.

Dealing With Violence

Training in conflict-sensitive reporting takes two related angles–journalists' role in preventing violence and steps they need to take to protect themselves. Unfortunately there is much recent history from which trainers can draw lessons–from the 2007 election violence in Kenya that left 1,200 people dead to the 2010 Haitian elections that devolved into chaos to the 2011 Ivory Coast presidential election that brought on civil war.

Journalists mostly need to learn to remain "independently focused, fair, impartial, factual and objective," as Kenyan radio reporter Matthews Ndanyi has taught.[54] In Kenya, he said, the media took partisan sides, aligning with tribes or parties and that increased polarization. Journalists were subjected to threats and intimidation leading to self-censorship. At one point editors agreed to a blackout on some information in the name of keeping the calm.

Ndanyi said he realized later that even so basic a component as the words he used in stories could have "helped to incite anger or harden feelings, thus aggravating the conflict."[55] Full and rigorous coverage serves the public best, he concluded, so long as it is precise, accurate, verified, and delivered in a measured tone. This kind of reporting also protects reporters, other trainers agree.

A report by the BBC World Service Trust (now BBC Media Action), *The Kenyan 2007 Elections and Their Aftermath: The Role of Media and Communication*, done in 2008 recommended two changes in election and campaign coverage training. One was to work more with talk show hosts on facilitating public debate, and the other was training on conflict reporting. It "has been considered unnecessary in Kenya," the report noted, "many journalists now consider it an urgent need."[56]

In May 2011 Guatemalan journalists meeting about improving coverage of upcoming elections discussed the need for better security if they were to tackle issues seriously in print and on air. One strategy they hit on was "for journalists to put aside competition and go out in groups of three or more, especially in remote areas where acquiring information can be difficult." They also concluded that issues raised by these collectives rather than by a single journalist would be harder for authorities to ignore.[57] Mexican reporters covering drug trafficking have learned much that can apply to election reporting as well. For example, they keep their bylines off dangerous stories.

Election training in places where violence is possible or even predictable must include practical advice on reporting in dangerous places that war and foreign correspondents learn. The Committee to Protect Journalists in 2011 revised its journalists' security guide to include sexual attacks. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) *Reporters' Handbook for Safe Journalism* counsels reporters to dress for running, travel with a companion, publicize travel plans, watch for unexpected or odd crowd behavior, write about all attacks and violence, and never carry a weapon.

Harnessing Technology

The prominent roles Facebook, Twitter, and the Internet have played in the political protests in recent years have called new attention to what technology means to democracy efforts around the world.

Sullivan downplays whiz-bang technology as an ingredient for better election coverage. He sees it as a distraction in places where the Internet does not have great penetration and reporters need to do more legwork. That said, he acknowledges that better use of polling, use of voter databases, and Internet research to track money flows to and from political parties should become part of Bosnian election coverage.

But other trainers are more excited about the newsgathering potential of cellphones, the Internet, and social networking media. The BBC World Service Trust report on Kenya talks about "the transformative and largely positive opportunities new technologies offer for enhancing democracy and empowering people."

"There are exciting new tools that are so wonderful," gushed Schnellinger who has found ways to use them to advantage in remote areas of Afghanistan. "There are so many examples."[58] In 2009, during the presidential election, she got reporters for Pajhwok Afghan News in Kabul–an independent Afghan news agency that she is helping to establish–to tweet. True, she said, the audience for the 140-character election tidbits they compiled was mostly outside the country, but she expects that the training won't be wasted and the internal audience reading cellphone texts will grow. Her reporters, who had never heard of Twitter when she started, soon were turning out 200 tweets a day in English, Dari, and Pashto. Most of the journalists already had personal Facebook accounts so it was a small extra step to post updates on a Pajhwok page too. No training at all is required to add these news bulletins, she emphasized.

> *Cellphones and social media are being increasingly used to keep elections honest.*

The next step, with help from a Knight News Challenge grant, was Alive in Afghanistan, a website that incorporates SMS into news reports. This began with text messaging about the 2009 elections, and it was the only real-time news available on the event. The project might have been abandoned after the return of Hamid Karzai to office and cancellation of an expected run-off election. Instead, it was expanded to reports on everything from sports to governance. Pajhwok together with Small World News, a documentary and new media company, operate the site. It has been praised as a "journalism-strengthening project for supporting a free and fair media in Afghanistan."[59]

Cellphones and social media are being increasingly used to keep elections honest.

Voters in Kenya deciding on a new constitution in 2010 used Twitter and Facebook to turn in complaints about treatment at polling stations or worries about fraud. They created an effective nationwide monitoring of the polls by posting Twitter messages labeled "#uchaguzi ("election" in Kiswahili) or sending text messages to a special number. Both could be done anonymously. With none of the voter intimidation and violence of 2007, the election resulted in a new constitution.[60]

A similar effort in Egypt in 2010 was the U-Shahid.org website to which a group of bloggers and activists reported via texts, e-mail, and Twitter about election irregularities.[61]

USAID's Michael Henning said[62] journalists doing elections training should consider incorporating the work of Patrick Merloe, senior associate and director of electoral programs at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Since 1986, NDI has enlisted activists and party officials in countries from Mexico (during the 2000 elections that overthrew a ruling party 70 years in power) to Nigeria (in April 2011) into its "quick count" system.

Digital technologies not necessarily geared toward journalism and communication can also be applied to training for election coverage– and vice versa.

As in Kenya, volunteers are sent to selected polling stations to watch voting and ballot counting. They enter information on standardized forms and report findings by cellphone to a collection center. The reports can quickly indicate the validity of election results or identify where trouble such as ballot stuffing or disenfranchisement may have occurred. Merloe describes the quick count method as a variation of the exit polls Western reporters do routinely that is more acceptable in places where talking to reporters about how you voted seems dangerous.[63]

Digital technologies not necessarily geared toward journalism and communications can also be applied to training for election coverage–and vice versa. For example, ICasualties.org, a site on which computer programmer Michael White tracks troop deaths and injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan, inspires Schnellinger. White has created a database by trolling through official releases and worldwide news about war wounds. She sees the potential for using that approach to expand coverage in nationwide elections.[64] She has worked with reporters in different locales, urging them keep track of candidates' promises and to compare notes. The same could be done with campaign expenditures. And reporters who work together on one project will be willing to pool information covering other stories, which can strengthen journalism overall.

Experiences in Africa and the Arab world suggest another component that election trainers may want to begin to incorporate–combating the negative and undemocratic use of new media, including blogs and phone texting, and redefining the role of the press at a time when voters can speak directly with candidates and with other voters. In Kenya in 2007, for example, the BBC World Service Trust's report said, "unregulated mass SMS messaging has been a feature of the

election campaign, and has been used for promoting ethnic hatred and intolerance," citing the Kenyan Human Rights Commission, which found that they contributed to "a climate of hatred not conducive to free and fair elections."

In short, election coverage training that does not incorporate technological advances in online campaigning, dissent, and citizen participation is out of date. The reach of computers continues to spread, and significant populations of young and educated citizens are using them. In June 2011 the *New York Times* reported on a global effort by the Obama administration to set up "shadow" Internet and mobile phone systems to thwart governments that try to shut down critics and citizens. The work is part of a "longstanding diplomatic push to defend free speech and nurture democracy." Failure to combine Internet freedom with political reporting is to miss an opportunity.[65]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Covering elections is not just coverage of one "grand event," and training must reflect that. Short-term training just in advance of election day has been mostly discounted as ineffective. More must be done to cast elections as part of a critical on-going political process and to equip journalists to understand, monitor, and report about that. Training journalists to cover elections must be paired with other legal and election infrastructure reform if meaningful change is the goal. International donors could have great influence by pushing harder for formation of election commissions with actual clout in countries where they work and for clear election laws, especially campaign finance transparency laws. Framing and passage of laws to protect journalists who cover politics also should be on donors' agendas. To achieve this, media development organizations and donors should:

1. **Coordinate.** Many organizations offer journalists training in election coverage, but these groups do not work together to capitalize on strengths or to reinforce training they each give. Trainers on the ground, many of whom have worked for two or more different organizations involved in election coverage over time, do cooperate, but little is being done by way of efficient joint operations. This is especially true between U.S. and Western European groups. U.S.-European cooperation might be especially fruitful given that most developing countries have copied European not U.S. political systems. The barriers to cooperation are low. The most-cited reasons: It has rarely been done before, and funding cycles in the United States and Europe differ.

2. **Follow up and help establish institutional memory on election coverage**. Too often even training that begins well in advance of the campaign period and continues for a significant time stops before or on election day. Trainings must make some accommodation for check-backs with reporters and editors to see that issues raised during the training are still being tracked. In those cases where elections lead to disputes, protests, or violence, journalists are likely to especially need back-up and organizational assistance. Trainers could be instrumental in setting up centralized, digitized collections of election and political reporting. Such libraries of print and broadcast clippings plus "tip-sheets" are widely used in the West by reporters in search of context and background, ideas, and models. Individual media houses all maintain such files, as do some professional organizations, such as the Poynter Institute[66] and Investigative Reporters and Editors.[67] Similar collections could be even more useful in post-conflict societies such as Uganda and Rwanda, where turnover among journalists is high and no cadre of veteran political reporters to follow exists. There should be no instruction of foreign colleagues without the collaboration or involvement of local trainers. This will result not only in more relevant training but in continuation of new practices introduced during training.

3. **Look for the best reporters to teach**. Donors' desire for impressive metrics justifying investment that show how many journalists at so many outlets were reached tends to make election training shallow and generalized. The goal should be to screen for and recruit the reporters who will benefit the most. Trainers disagree about whether the better method would be to recruit on the basis of applications that include work samples and interviews or to screen on the basis of enthusiasm plus support from bosses. Either method is superior to rounding up gangs of trainees or soliciting attendance in training sessions with inducements like food, pay, certificates, or time away from regular duties.

4. **Train investigative reporters, at least in some places.** The showpieces of top-notch campaign and political reporting in the United States and Western Europe are in-depth pieces involving scrutiny of campaign finance documents, party operations, and corruption. Trainings, necessarily focused on the basics of fact-based reporting, checking, and ethics seldom cover anything like this. Many trainers resist the idea that they can get their charges to tackle such work and blame this on the low skill level of their students or their lack of access to campaign finance data. But these are not universal problems. In places where access to election finance information is controlled and restricted, advanced reporting on more basic elements of campaigning should be encouraged. For example: Are candidates qualified and do they meet the legal requirements of candidacy? Who is supporting what candidates publicly and why? Are campaign laws being obeyed?

5. **Train political commentators.** Much election coverage correctly emphasizes fair and balanced reporting, objectivity, tone, and word choice that is stripped of bias. But commentary on politics is a mainstay of news media in many developing countries as it is in the United States, and that should be acknowledged and incorporated into training, at least for some editors or senior reporters. (Some excellent trainers will strenuously disagree with this recommendation. They work in emerging democracies, such as Afghanistan, where commentary unsupported by reporting or fact checking substitutes for real journalism. Advocate commentary in such places, trainer Schnellinger warns, and you risk undermining all journalism training.)[68]

6. **Give training on covering elections a higher priority and standardize the content of that training to some extent**. Many trainers indicate that they could use a basic curriculum or more direction about the goals they should be attempting to reach. Even so simple a guide as expectations for results could better focus trainings.

7. **Coordinate with election monitors.** Opportunities to link journalists who cover elections with professional election observers have been missed. This community of observers has done extensive research and published papers on how to assess elections. In 2005 monitors worldwide, led by the Carter Center, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, and NDI, issued a "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation."[69] These materials ought to be incorporated into journalism training programs. While the task

of journalists is different from that of monitors, they both need to be concerned with such issues as suffrage, security of ballots, prevention of corruption, and freedom of opinion. Oddly, the failure to connect the two sides stems, at least partly, from the fact that both election monitors and major donors in the field of free elections consider journalism on the periphery of their missions.

8. **Incorporate new technology into election coverage training.** This is a rich and neglected area, in part because the use of SMS, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, cellphones, and other technologies in campaign coverage is evolving and in part because there is so little coordination about what to teach. This is one area where colleagues in the developed and the developing world ought to be collaborating. As recent upheavals over political corruption in North Africa and the Middle East showed conclusively, young people are using these tools already.

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