Political Candidates' Coverage in the 2010 Iraqi General Elections

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Abstract

This study investigates the tone of political candidates' election coverage in the evening newscasts of four Iraqi satellite television channels: Iraqia (state-run), Furat (Shiite), Hurria (Kurdish), and Baghdad (Sunni) for the 14 days leading up to the 7th of March 2010 Iraqi general election. Iraq is believed to have a new liberal and plural media that emerged after 2003 which is different from the authoritarian media during Saddam Hussein's rule. Except for Iraqia TV, the three other channels are run, supported, and funded by different political parties. The analysis included examining 56 evening newscasts which had 857 news stories related to the elections. Although the channels all claimed to follow the principles of good journalism such as being fair, balanced, and objective, the evidence presented here indicates that all four channels were biased and one-sided in their coverage of the Iraqi politicians. Even the state-run al-Iraqia channel that was expected to stay neutral in its coverage due to its mandate, showed slight preferences to some politicians over the others.

Keywords: *2010 Iraqi elections; Iraqi media, Iraqi TV channels; Arab media; partisan channels; plural media; sectarianism*

Introduction

After the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of newspapers and tens of radio stations and television channels were founded in a very short period of time. In relation to the state-run media, the US Administration or 'Coalition Provisional Authority' (CPA) established the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) which replaced the Ministry of Information that held sway during the Baath's rule. CMC was created to be a non-profit organization that provides licenses for telecommunication companies and monitors media channels operating in Iraq. Part of its task was the creation of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) which runs al-Iraqia TV and a few affiliate channels such as al-Iraqia-Education, al-Iraqia-Sport, and Al-Forqan (religious programs).

One emergent problem that occurred following these initiatives was that new regulations and codes of practice for broadcasters were decreed, following those adopted by developed nations, though very few have been effectively applied. This observation triggered the study reported in this paper which examined the nature of news coverage of the 2010 Iraqi general elections by Iraqi television stations with different political (and religious) allegiances.

From the beginning of the US occupation of Iraq, the CPA stated that the CMC should follow a regulation that provides 'the fullest exercise of freedom of expression as defined by International Convention, must encourage pluralism and diverse political debate and must empower rather than restrain independent and impartial commentary' (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003). Hence, everyone in the beginning expected to have a new Iraqi media that was free and independent from state control, following the BBC's example.

According to CMC, there are strict media regulations stipulated in the 'Guidelines on Accuracy and Balance' (2007) to be followed by journalists and media bodies when covering news. All the Iraqi media outlets must abide by these laws in order to be granted licenses to work. Hence, it is expected that these media outlets will seek to abide by the rules. For example, in the 'General Steering' (n.d.) published on the Commission's website, news bias is clearly defined and clarified. No media channel would be given a license unless it signed a document that stated the necessity to respect the rules of fairness, accuracy, and objectivity in reporting.

As for election times, CMC's 'Code for Media during Elections' which was also published on the website of the Independent High Electoral Commission- Iraq (n.d.), states the regulations to be followed by media channels before the elections. In Article (3) entitled 'Fair Reporting', the code states that: 'In covering any Political Entity or Coalition, or any of their candidates, no Media shall engage in intentional distortion, suppression, falsification, misrepresentation or censorship of information. All Media shall ensure due accuracy and fairness' (Communication and Media Commission, 2005, pp.39-40). CMC made it clear for IMN that news commentary and opinion must be 'distinguished from fact so as not to be confused with news coverage or current affairs programming'. Further, the Code insists that no media channel 'shall endorse any Political Entity or Coalition, or any of their candidates. In all such media, opinion shall be clearly distinguished from fact so as not to be confused with news coverage or current affairs programming'.

However, CMC's assertion of applying the universal principles of good journalism in Iraq is too ideal simply because these principles are impossible to be applied in the current political climate of Iraq which is in a state of an emerging democracy. In fact, Iraq's case is similar to many other countries around the world especially in Latin America, post-communist Russia, and Eastern Europe which witnessed a political transition toward democratic rule. One has to take into account the fact that most media outlets in Iraq are owned by either political or religious parties whose views shape the nature of messages sent to the public, so having balanced news production seems an ideal goal in this polarized scene. Added to this main factor, there is the burden of the past Baathist legacy and lack of proper independent training for journalists and funding for media channels.

For the current study, the Iraqia, Furat, Hurria, and Baghdad channels were selected based on their popularity and partly on the results of the 2009 Governorate Elections. In the above election, the 'State Law Coalition' came first throughout all Iraqi Shiite governorates; this electoral list included the Shiite Dawa Party headed by Prime Minister Nouri Maliki and Muqtada Sadr's movement that does not have an official satellite channel. In the second place came the 'List of Independent Forces and the Martyrs of the Mihrab', headed by Abdul Aziz Hakim and hence, the choice is made to include Hakim's TV channel, Furat, which is managed

now by his son, Ammar Al-Hakim after his father's death in 2009. He is also the head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.

According to an IREX audience survey in 2010, Furat TV came seventh out of ten channels in terms of viewership in the Shiite dominated Southern Iraq (IREX 2010). As for the Kurds, Masud Barazani, head of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and Jalal Talabani, Iraqi President and head of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), are both governing the independent northern region. Barazani, who also heads the Kurdish Region, is known to be more chauvinistic than Talabani and has more popularity in Erbil and Dohuk; however, his Arabic speaking channel Al-Taakhi TV stopped broadcasting few years ago. Hence, Hurria channel which is run by Talabani was selected. Finally, the Sunni Coalition Iraqi Accord Front (IAF) led by the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) won in some Sunni dominated governorates; thus, the Baghdad TV channel was chosen. Ayad Samarai is the head of the IIP and former Parliament chairman. As for Ayad Allawi, Iraq's former prime minister and whose slate won in the 2010 elections, he does not have a particular channel that he sponsors except for *Baghdad* newspaper.

All the above four TV channels transmit flagship evening news broadcasts that usually reflect the editorial stance of the channel. These flagship newscasts were chosen for analysis as they fell within prime-viewing time for Iraqi audiences and therefore potentially serve as primary sources of the latest political news for large swathes of the population. Research elsewhere has confirmed, that although not the only sources, main evening newscasts can be particularly influential in major election contexts (Iyenger, Peters, & Kinder, 1982).

Theoretical Framework

Semetko et al. (1991) argue that the editorial approach followed by news organizations that cover the election campaign is of two types: sacerdotal and pragmatic. Based on the analysis and comparison of the 1983 British general election with the 1984 American presidential election, the researchers found that British journalists were rather cautious in their coverage, trying their best to make TV news somewhat 'politically innocuous' (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 53), whereas American journalists working for NBC were more proactive, 'looking for events to report that

would be laced with drama, conflict, novelty, movement and anomaly' (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 55). The first type suggests that the elections play a significant role in shaping democratic societies; hence, the election campaign is newsworthy and politicians are usually respected in such coverage. Studies of British journalism in the 1980s show an overwhelmingly sacerdotal approach since journalists are usually cautious in their coverage (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2000). In fact, many European journalists used to cover the elections in their countries some decades ago by following the sacerdotal approach (until the late 1960s in the Netherlands; until the late 1970s in Belgium; until 1980s in Britain; throughout the *Lottizzazione* period in Italy) (Semetko et al., 1991; Asp, 1983; Siune & Borre, 1975). Media outlets followed the partisan logic since they were careful not to offend the political parties and their candidate(s) (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1993; Brants & van Praag, 2006; Roncarolo, 2002; Asp, 1983). Some media experts call this kind of coverage agenda-sending since the journalists are only focused on reporting the political agenda of the competing parties without challenging the prevalent political views (Semetko & Canel, 1997). In other words, journalists transmit or send the political ideology of politicians without necessarily questioning the credibility of those politicians and their ideas.

However, media coverage of election campaigns in Europe later developed by adhering to media logic in the sense that the overage became proactive (pragmatic) instead of being reactive (sacerdotal) toward the political parties' agendas (Semetko et al., 1991; Nossiter, Scammell, & Semetko 1995). For example, journalists in the 1997 general British election were more proactive, suggesting a shift to the pragmatic approach and to the American model of journalism (Blumler & Gurevitch 2000). This new approach has been adopted by many other journalists in Europe in the recent past years (Norris et al., 1999; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1998; Semetko & Canel, 1997; De Vreese, 2001). However, there are still traces of the sacerdotal approach. For instance, Donsbach (1997) investigated the coverage of the German Bundestag Election of 1994 and mentioned that the news framed the political process. From the 18 German news organizations - eight daily newspaper, two news magazines, four weekly papers, and four news magazines on television- Donsbach investigated, the majority followed an advocacy model in the sense that they supported/favored a certain political candidate.

Despite the fact that the principles of good journalism prevent journalists from being one-sided and biased in their coverage of events, ideological beliefs tend to overrule all these principles as the news slants in the end 'toward the dominant or hegemonic perspective' (Garyantes & Murphy, 2010, p. 153). Indeed, ideology and the nature of political system both exert tremendous influence on media freedom and objectivity (Oates 2006; Jakubowicz, 2001; Bagdikian, 1983; Gans 2004; Gauthier, 1993).

Since this study focused on measuring the tone of TV coverage of election-related topics, it is relevant to briefly discuss bias, which refers to the tendency for news organizations to side with one group or perspective at the expense of another by deviating from the norm of objectivity and in an effort to serve personal or political purposes (McQuail, 1992). Several scholars define bias as a systematic slant seen in favoring one side/party/figure over another. This kind of differential treatment is usually repeated over time (Kenney & Simpson, 1993, p. 346; Greene & Stevenson 1980, p.115). According to McQuail, bias is described as a 'consistent tendency to depart from the straight path of objective truth by deviating either to left or right …. In news and information it refers to a systematic tendency to favour (in outcome) one side or position over another' (1992, p.191). D'Alessio and Allen (2000) classified bias into three main types: gatekeeping bias which is done by the selection of stories from a particular party; coverage bias which takes into account the amount of coverage received by each party, and statement bias which emphasizes the issue of tone (favorability and unfavorability).

One approach to measuring bias on TV news is to compute the numerical sum of positive, neutral, and negative references, forming a scale of which the point in the middle becomes the neutral point. This is especially useful in comparing the news stories aired by more than two TV channels (McQuail 1992, p. 227). Another way of detecting bias is by measuring the emphasis or amount of coverage given to a particular issue or figure and comparing it to another similar entity. Media channels can easily distort or polish someone's image by manipulating this factor, and research found that people tend to believe that a particular person is more important if there is more coverage focused on that individual (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Based on an investigation of the tone of coverage of political candidates, this study attempts to examine the coverage of the General Election by four channels: Iraqia, Furat, Hurria, and Baghdad. The answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. What was the amount of attention given by the four channels to different political candidates and their slates?

2. How were the channels different or similar in covering the political candidates?

Method

In this study, quantitative and qualitative content analyses were conducted. The two weeks leading to the Election Day were chosen as some previous election studies concentrated on examining the same time period (Fox et al., 2005; de Vreese et al., 2006). There are good reasons for choosing to do this. Farnsworth, Lichter, and Schatz (2009) studied the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation coverage of Canada's 2006 Liberal Party Leadership candidates and found out that about 90% of the statements in the newscasts on or by the candidates were aired in the last two weeks of the campaign. There is also evidence that many voters usually make their decision during the election campaign itself. In the 1960s in Britain, one in ten voters made up their mind during the campaign, but in the 1990s this proportion increased to one in four voters (Norris et al. 1999). In the 1984 Canadian elections, 58% of Quebec voters and 47% of voters elsewhere made a decision on whom they would vote for during the campaign (Wagenberg et al. 1988). Finally, voters who decide late are known to rely more on the visual presentation of candidates (McHugo et al. 1985; Graber 1987).

A total sample of 56 evening newscasts containing 857 news stories that were related to the election were analyzed. The unit of analysis in this study is the news story itself (Campbell, 2006). News stories that dealt with the economy, sports, or international events were ignored. During late February, it was noted that there were several stories irrelevant to the election in the beginning of the campaign, while in early March the majority of the news stories were focused on the election. This is common because the efforts of supporting the candidates and disseminating the knowledge on the election were intensified in the late campaign phase.

The recordings were made on a daily basis from the 22nd of February to the 6th of March 2010. All the targeted transmissions were flagship programs televised by 8pm and 10.30pm in the evening. The Sunni Baghdad channel aired the highest number of stories (n=234) among the rest of channels. The Shiite channel, Furat, aired (n=221) stories followed by the Kurdish TV Hurria with (n=201) stories and the state-run Iraqia channel with the same number of stories. As can be seen from the above figures, the four channels aired a similar number of news stories. However, Baghdad channel was more concerned with covering news and reports on the elections though the very same channel had refrained from airing news related to the election on one whole day which was Prophet Mohammed's Birthday.

The main coding frame originally measured newscast content features at three levels: (1) the program level (2) the story level (3) candidates level (sub-story). This approach was adopted following previous research that focused on the study of TV news covering three areas: the story, the language, and the visuals (Beharrel et al., 1980). In relation to the candidate level, narrative terms signaling neutral/positive/negative on each candidate are investigated. The authors calculated the tendency tone or evaluative direction (McQuail 1992; Wimmer & Dominick 1991) to determine the way candidates were presented in the newscasts by relying on specific meanings conveyed by the verbal language of each news item. In their study, Garyantes and Murphy (2010) compared Al-Jazeera.net (English version) with CNN.com's coverage of the 2005 Iraqi election. The study concluded that CNN.com framed the election news by mainly presenting positive news, whereas Al-Jazeera.net pictured the election with some kind of negativity by projecting some kind of doubt in the election results.

In relation to this study, a list of the neutral/positive/negative words, expressions, and adjectives were provided to the coders in order to make their task clearer (see Table 2). As for the coding of candidates, they were classified into seven groups which represented the main political blocs except for the final one which was assigned for 'other' minor slates. The political slates that are covered in the study are: (1) Nouri Maliki's State of Law; (2) Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya; (3) Ammar Hakim's Iraqi National Alliance (INA); (4) Muqtada Sadr's movement which is part of INA; (5) Jalal Talabani's Kurdish Alliance; (6) Ayad Samarai's Iraqi Accord Front; and (7) other groups. The grouping of political candidates was done by linking them to

their original slates. However, the coding book did not include all the names of candidates mentioned on TV; the most important figures of each party/bloc were listed instead of citing all the parties' candidates. For example, story (Baghdad TV, 22nd February, sequence 6) introduced new names like Dr. Osama al-Tikriti and Abdul Jabbar Shalash (Code 6) from the Iraqi Islamic Party, and story (Hurria TV, 2nd of March, sequence 9) presented Abdul al-Bari al-Zibari, Hasan al-Doski, Zahida Sarhan, and Sidqi al-Umdi from the Kurdish Alliance Slate (Code 5).

It is important to note that most of the previous studies on media coverage of political elections in the Arab world utilized basic coding frames that measured the prominence and time or space devoted to different candidates and parties. They have not, for example, touched upon the minute details of language or news focus. Indeed, there are no relevant studies on the Iraqi election except for CMC's general and brief reports which have several shortcomings in their methodology, coding measures, and analysis procedures (see for example El Fegiery 2006; UNESCO et al. 2008; Arab Working Group for Media Monitoring (AWGMM, 2007, 2009a, and 2009b; CMC 2005). For example, there was a large-scale study that used a qualitative and quantitative measure and lasted two years to investigate the way newspapers`, television channels, and radio stations covered the elections in Tunisia, Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt (El Fegiery, 2006). The 'observers' of 'Arab civil society organisations' whose identities were not revealed investigated the basic components of the media message: the time and space allotted to the candidates and their parties, the general tone or evaluative codes (positive, negative, neutral), and whether the political candidates have been given direct access to voice their views or are only referred to by the anchors (El Fegiery, 2006). However, it is not clear how accurate the coding frame is especially with regard to the measurement of the tone as there is no reference to the way the coding frame was designed. Further, Maiola and Ward (2007) investigated the Palestinian Presidential elections of 2005 by comparing Pan-Arab media channels' coverage of the elections with local Palestinian channels. They used content analysis methodology by choosing a sample of media channels and conducting interviews with Palestinian media practitioners. In terms of qualitative analysis, the researchers assessed the tone of coverage given to specific candidates by the 'journalists' explicit judgment' in the different media channels (negative, neutral, and positive) as well as 'the framing (value) of coverage' (p. 109). They

observed that the amount of information on the candidates broadcast by PBC TV (Palestinian Broadcasting Cooperation) did not amount to an hour which was mostly devoted to covering the candidate, Mahmoud Abbas, in the 'context of his institutional duties' (p. 107).

In this study, a pilot study was conducted by two coders who independently examined three newscasts. The main evening newscasts were chosen from different phases of the election campaign and from different channels. Inter-coder reliability coefficients were calculated, and the overall alpha score for candidate/topic level (sub-story) was .86, ranging across code measures between .84 and .87.

The researchers used a 13-items coding sheet to analyze the news coverage of elections in relation to political candidates/parties (see the appendix). First, the researchers identified references to political candidates and their parties/blocs in the news and then counted the number of times they were mentioned including the tone of reference e.g. positive/neutral/negative. In this way, we had a clearer understanding of the way political candidates are presented in the news and the attention given to each slate, party, and candidate. Second, the results of the attention given to each candidate/party as well as the tone of coverage were qualitatively assessed by linking them to the political context and relevant information on the candidates' ethno-sectarian tendencies as well as the different channels' affiliations in order to clarify the motives behind having for example over-emphasis or lack of coverage of certain political candidates as well as explaining the channels' tone of coverage.

Results

In relation to the narrative references to candidates (see Table 1 below), the Sunni Baghdad TV had the largest number of stories (n = 164) and greatest amount of time allotted (n = 31,470 seconds) that presented narrative references to candidates representing the Iraqi Accord Front IAF, the slate that sponsors the channel (see Chart 1 below). The stories constituted 69.7% of the total number of news items aired by the channel. Baghdad TV rarely referred to or assigned enough time to other competing political blocs. Just five stories (running time of 855 seconds)

were devoted to other parties/groups that were either unknown by the public or ineffective in the political scene.

The Shiite Furat TV channel came second in rank in terms of the number of stories and time allotted to its party's candidates. The channel aired 120 stories (22,665 seconds) on the party's candidates. The stories made up 54.2% of their total number that were analyzed throughout the period of study. Further, the channel also aired five stories that spanned over 464 seconds carrying narrative references to Sadr's movement/candidate. This is understandable because Hakim and Sadr formed from the beginning the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), so the two Shiite groups stood together against other competing political blocs.

The Kurdish Hurria TV aired 43 stories (3,288 seconds) on the Kurdish Alliance (KA) that constituted 21.3% of the total number of stories aired by the channel. The channel devoted six stories (406 seconds) for Allawi's bloc, and two stories for Maliki's slate (112 seconds) and two others for Hakim's alliance (118 seconds). There were four references to Allawi's al-Iraqia slate (406 seconds) because some of its candidates were subjected to the de-Baathification process which was implemented by the US administration following the example of De-Nazification in Germany after the Second World War. This was done in order to exclude some Iraqi candidates from running in the election. In fact, this move created a great deal of controversy about the credibility of the government and its Accountability and Justice Commission which was led by the late Ali al-Lami, being himself a candidate running in the election.

Finally, the state-run Iraqia TV did not allot more emphasis to one political group over the other. Four stories (160 seconds) were devoted to Allawi's bloc. However, the dominant issue related to this political group was the law suits filed against some of its candidates, as mentioned above. In presenting the different political blocs, the channel established itself as the most balanced and objective among the four channels. In brief, Baghdad TV stressed the importance of its IAF candidates more than the other channels by airing more number of stories and time referring to them. Furat TV came next followed by Hurria TV (see Chart 1 below).

It is important to mention first that there were some limitations observed in conducting the candidate level of analysis. Most of the channels tried to avoid negative references to other political candidates from other blocs in order to avoid problems. For example, Iraqia TV started its 24th of February newscast with an editorial speech that made an indirect reference to Ayad Allawi's previous public statement that mentioned the re-appearance of unidentified corpses in Baghdad's morgue. Allawi's statement coincided with the election campaign, but it was meant to suggest that the security situation worsened and reached a level similar to what Iraqis witnessed during the civil war era especially in 2006. The story lasted 63 seconds with a newsreader only and was followed later with another story that lasted 190 seconds tackling the same issue. Iraqia TV accused the people behind making up and disseminating such a claim to be from the Baath party, a term that has very negative connotation amongst many Iraqis especially Kurds and devout Shiites. However, the authors could not assign any negative attributes to Allawi and his followers because there was no direct reference to the candidate. In brief, the four channels did not attempt to reveal the true identities of the political figures criticized in order to avoid any kind of confrontation or trouble. Also, this was partly due to the channels' way of abiding to CMC's regulations. Finally, there was no examination of the effect of images on the message conveyed. To give an example, Furat TV aired several stories on issues related to its INA candidates and used to show their images along with the Grand Shiite Ayatollah Ali Sistani though the latter refrained from supporting any slate in order to maintain his independence. The implied message was that INA candidates were supported or approved by Sistani which was not publically the case (story aired on the 1st of March (sequence 5)).

In relation to the tone of political candidates' election coverage, Iraqia TV generally refrained from supporting any slate, although there was an indication that it supported Maliki who was shown almost daily either to inaugurate a new construction project and other public service facilities (story aired on the 2nd of March, 204 seconds (sequence 14)); story aired on the 3rd of March, (189) seconds, (sequence 18)) or to follow up on security matters. Almost always, he was praised for his achievements especially on security matters such as inking the Iraqi-US agreement to withdraw US forces by the end of 2011. On the other hand, the other Iraqi politicians like Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi President, and his two deputies were neither given the

same time nor frequency to appear in this manner though they also performed similar activities. To give few other examples, Maliki was shown on the 22nd of February urging Iraqis to vote (26 seconds); however, no other Iraqi politician was given this opportunity. Then, on the 6th of March, 2010 which was the media silence day, Iraqia TV aired two stories to urge Iraqis to vote. The first story (sequence 5) showed Maliki who was given (69) seconds, whereas the second story (sequence 6) presented Ayad Samarai, who talked for 37 seconds only. Finally, there were some negative references aired on Maliki's strong competitor, Ayad Allawi, and his candidate slates, Al-Iraqiya. In fact, Iraqia TV never criticized any other slate. Five negative references were made in comparison to three neutral ones about Allawi. The Iraqi President Talabani and the Parliament speaker Samarai both received one neutral reference. Though Maliki was mentioned on a daily basis and mostly in a positive way, he was always presented as the Prime Minister rather than a political candidate. Still, this could be an indirect way to promote the PM.

On the other hand, the Shiite Furat TV focused on Maliki's abuse of power in promoting his slate during the election campaign; however, there was a tendency to avoid mentioning his name. For example, the story aired on the 26th of February (sequence 8) referred to the decision of employing 20,000 former Iraqi officers as political propaganda, but no reference was made to Maliki who took that decision. Also, there were several reports on a slate whose candidates 'conspired' to buy peoples' votes by either giving them cash money, offering presents, or promising them lands and jobs. In all the reports aired, Maliki's slate was not mentioned but only implied (stories aired on the 28th of February (sequence 10), 1st of March (sequence 12), 2nd of March (sequence 19), 3rd of March (sequence 9), 4th of March (sequence 16), and 7th of March (sequence 11)). It is important to note here that all the stories aired by Furat TV in which Maliki was indirectly mentioned were produced as 'packages', denoting the importance given by the channel to such reports.

Tone of Political Candidates' Coverage

In the case of Furat TV, the concentration of references was naturally on Hakim's slate with (n=124) positive attributes (see Table 1 below). This was expected as Al-Hakim runs the

channel; however, ten negative references to Maliki's slate were not expected from the channel which was probably due to the fact that Maliki decided to withdraw from the Shiite alliance that was formed in 2005 in order to present himself as a unifier of Iraqis whether be Sunnis or Shiites. Hence, Maliki tried his best to include Sunni figures in his slate like the senior members of the Awakening Council of Anbar. Indeed, this move angered Hakim and his bloc that seemed to take a somehow antagonistic attitude toward Maliki and his slate. Other references made by Furat TV included nine positive ones on Sadr and his bloc because the two groups formed a political alliance. Finally, there were few other neutral references made (eight for Hakim and six for Sadr).

The third channel investigated was Baghdad TV (see Table 1 below). There were few negative references to political blocs especially twenty ones concentrated on others who were either unknown or unnamed. As for the positive attributes, we find the largest number of positive references among the four channels to be (n=639) ones for Samarai's bloc and (n=8) ones for other slates. In fact, Baghdad TV scored the highest number of stories, largest time allotment, and highest number of references to its IAF's candidates. Finally, there were seven neutral references to Samarai's bloc, too.

The last channel investigated was Hurria TV (see Table 1 below). In terms of the positive references, there were (n=38) ones on Talabani's slate, seven for Allawi's bloc, and four for Hakim's slate. It seems that the Kurds did not focus on Talabani and his slate because there were investing in other Kurdish-language channels. As for the positive references to other blocs, it is likely that the channel had in mind the idea of future alliances with other slates without which the Kurds could not form a majority in the Parliament. There were few negative references, too. The highest number of such references was centred on Talanabi's slate (n=10) ones, Maliki's slate (n=6) ones, and Allawi's bloc (n=3) ones. Finally, neutral attributes were given to Talabani (n=12) ones, while Sadr and Samarai got one reference each. In brief, the four channels paid different amounts of attention to political candidates (see Charts 2, 3, 4, & 5).

Finally, in order to examine the details of the differences in covering the candidates among the four channels, statistical tests were computed. In terms of the neutral attributes, there was only one significant difference in the coverage of Talabani and his slate which was due to

Hurria TV's high number of neutral references to its sponsor. As expected, the highest degree of significant differences was centered on the positive terms and in particular the slates of Allawi, Hakim, Samarai, and Talabani. As for the rest of candidates, there were no differences in the way they were covered by the four channels. However, the highest degree of significant difference was found in Samarai's slate with a Chi-square of (326.668) due to the high number of positive references made by Baghdad TV to its sponsor. Hakim's slate came second with a Chi-square of (63.363) and Talabani's slate came third with a Chi-square of (19.697), while Allawi came in the end with a Chi-square of (6.54). Surprisingly, there were no significant differences among the four channels in terms of the negative references to the different candidates. This was probably due to the channels' tendency to avoid criticism of other candidates (see Table 1 below).

Discussion & Conclusion

Due to the overtly partisan nature of the election coverage in Iraq, the findings of this research confirm the results reached by previous studies on European elections that examined the nature of partisan coverage few decades ago. Based on the data reported above, we can conclude that all the TV channels examined in this study showed some kind of imbalance and favoritism in covering the political candidates. What we observed was that all the channels, except in few cases, tended to either align with the positive or negative sides. We need first to discuss whether the channels discussed above presented the election news in a certain direction. As a reminder, issues are presented by the selection of excerpts shown to the audience. In relation to the first research question, we can say that Baghdad TV came first in the emphasis it showed on covering its candidates. Furat TV was second and was followed by Hurria channel. On other hand, Iraqia TV tried to be as discreet as possible in covering the candidates. Indeed, Furat and Baghdad channels were highly biased in their coverage of political candidates since they overtly favored their own candidates over the others. The Kurdish channel, Hurria TV, was less biased as there were even some negative references to Talabani and his slate. On the other hand, Iraqia TV showed no obvious bias in its coverage of political candidates, though there was a slight bias against Allawi and his slate and a subtle type of bias in favor of Nouri Maliki, the PM.

To answer the second research question, we conclude that the four channels covered the candidates in different ways especially in connection to the positive attributes, but no major differences were observed in relation to the neutral tone. As for the negative attributes, there was no significant difference at all among the four channels.

Similar to the case of post-communist Eastern European countries and Russia where a kind of advocacy journalism is practiced, it seems that Iraqi journalists' ideological beliefs overwhelmed the way they covered the election; hence, this research reached results that are voiced by other media scholars on the influence of ideology and nature of political system on media freedom and objectivity. Like Russia and Eastern Europe, Iraq is still confined to the authoritarian past but to a more intense degree. In Latin America where journalism of opinion is viewed as the norm, the media plays a vital role in the society. Waisbord (2000) stressed that the press in Latin America enjoys a great deal of respect especially that watchdog journalism has 'contributed to the quality of South American democracies' (p. 246). Unfortunately, the Iraqi media has not reached this level yet since the political elite control the state and the media; as a result, many media outlets and practitioners must succumb to political pressure and become agenda senders instead of agenda setters in order to survive.

Due to the scarcity of research studies on Arab elections in general and Iraqi elections in particular, this work fills a big gap in the systematic analysis of television newscasts by relying on solid and more comprehensive measures followed in the social science instead of presenting general assessments and speculations on the Iraqi media. Three levels of analysis are employed in this research - program, story, and sub-story levels - in order to give a richer and more accurate assessment of the 2010 election coverage. In more specific terms, the study tackled the amount of coverage in relation to candidates and the tone of coverage and its emphasis. These aspects are fully investigated to reach a better understanding of the way four different Iraqi TV channels covered the 2010 General Election.

It seems that the Sunni Baghdad TV was the only channel that showed the news in a way that significantly differed from the rest of the channels. This was mainly due to the nature of the channel's Sunni sponsors who seemed to feel that they needed to overstate the shortcomings of Maliki's government and stressed that its candidates would be better alternatives. The channel's

apparent goal was to stress that its candidates would be the right choice for Iraqi voters in order to establish a democratic state in which corruption and calls for federalism are strongly dealt with. Indeed, all the four channels presented the political parties in directions that generally reflected the policies of the channels' sponsors. Contrary to the pledge of objectivity dictated by CMC, all the channels except for Iraqia TV gave enormous attention to their political candidates. Probably more time has to elapse before one sees different Iraqi TV channels that truly seek to apply the principles of good journalism and present all the different aspects of the election without any kind of favoritism or partisanship. The analysis cited above reflects the partisan nature of these channels and their mostly one-sided outlook by which they represented the political candidates investigated in this study.

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Charts & Tables

Table 1 Number of Stories Per TV Channel Featuring Narrative References to Political Candidates

	Iraqia TV	Furat TV	Baghdad TV	Hurria TV	Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.
Maliki	1^a	1^a	1^a	2^a	0.78	$p < 0.855$
Allawi	4^a	0^b	0^b	6^a	12.30	$*p < 0.006$
Hakim	0^a	120^b	1^a	2^a	386.20	$**p < 0.000$
Sadr	0^a	5^b	0^a	0^a	14.46	$***p < 0.002$
Talabani	1^a	0^a	0^a	43^b	110.33	$****p < 0.000$
Samarai	1^a	0^a	164^b	1^a	529.52	$*****p < 0.000$
Others	0^a	0^a	5^b	2^a (Baghdad)	8.58	$******p < 0.035$

Note: Scores that share the same superscript are not significantly different at the $p < 0.05$ level. In few cases, the channel that does not share a significant difference with another is written between brackets though the superscript is different.

$*p < 0.006$ (Allawi: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)
$**p < 0.000$ (Hakim: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)
$***p < 0.002$ (Sadr: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)
$****p < 0.000$ (Talabani: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)
$*****p < 0.000$ (Samarai: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)
$******p < 0.000$ (Other: There is significant difference among the four channels in the way this slate was covered)

Chart 1 Time Allotted (in seconds) by the Four Channels to Narrative References to Political Candidates
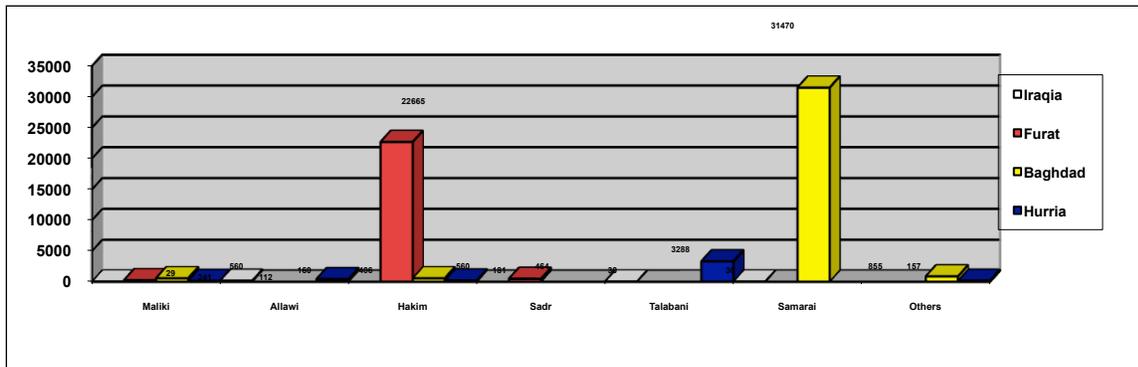
Table 2 List of candidate/party terms or attributes

Negative	Positive	Neutral
Corrupt (1)	Transparent (2)	Politician (3)
Mean (4)	Honest (5)	Government worker (6)
Agent (7)	Nationalist (8)	Iraqi (9)
Fraudster (10)	Sincere (11)	Citizen (12)
Liar (13)	Straightforward (14)	Political Party (15)
Embezzlement (16)	Open (17)	Candidate (18)
Blackmail (19)	Forthright (20)	----
Theft (21)	Noble (22)	-----
Treachery (23)	Trustworthy (24)	-----
Treason (25)	Reliable (26)	-----
Destructive (27)	Constructive (28)	----
Irresponsible (29)	Responsible/countable (30)	----
Baathist (31)	Pro-Iraqi (32)	----
Terrorist (33)	Peacemaker/ Peacekeeper (34)	----
Other…Please specify	Other…Please specify	Other…Please specify

Chart 2 State-Run Iraqia TV, candidates' score of terms

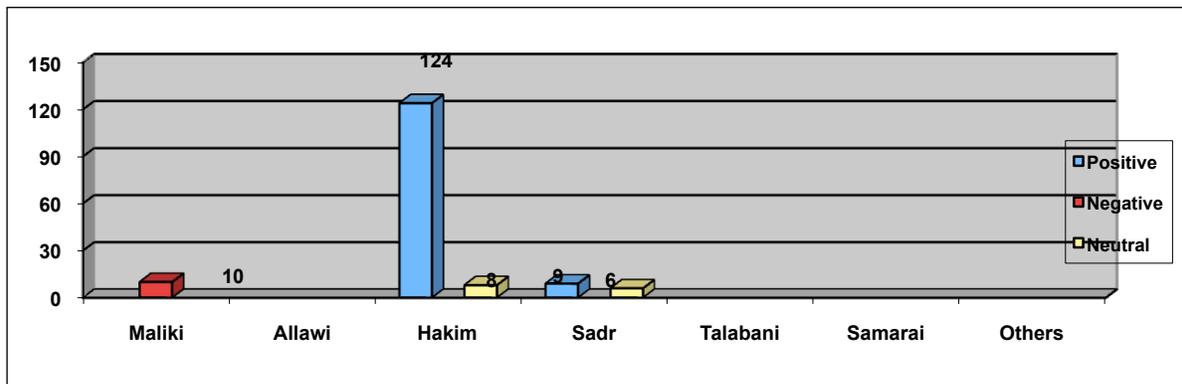**Chart 3 Furat TV (Shiite), candidates' score of terms**
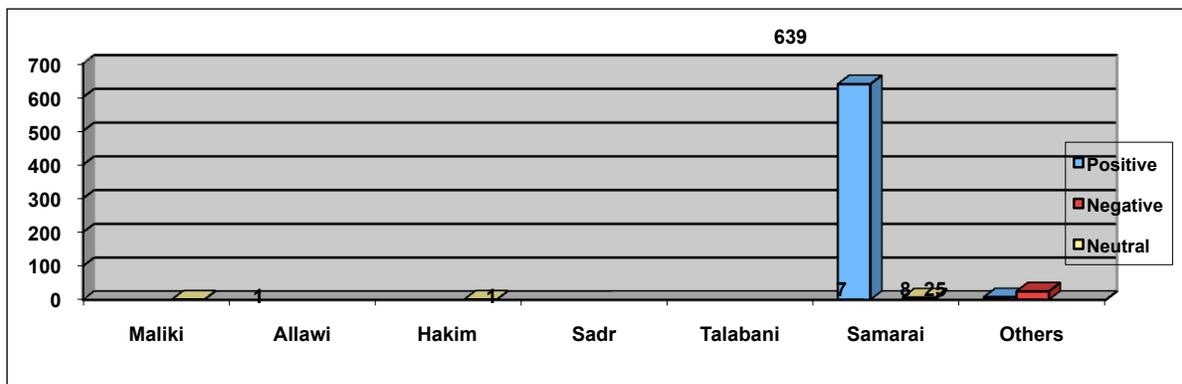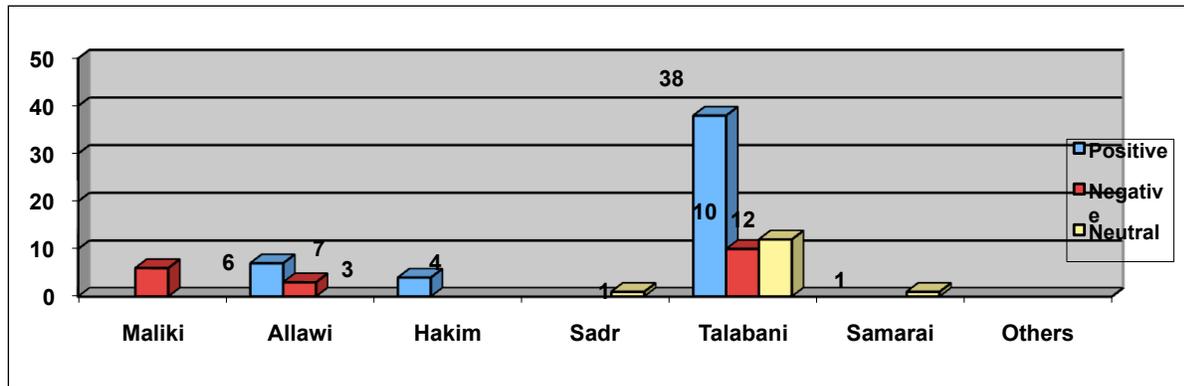

Chart 4 Baghdad TV (Sunni), candidates' score of terms

Chart 5 Hurria TV (Kurdish), candidates' score of terms

Appendix

Coding Sheet

1. **What is the unique candidate code number?**

The coder can use the candidate's surname or first name if his surname is not known.

2. **What is the newscast code number?   …………….**

3. **What is the channel code number?   …………………..**

4. **What is the story code number?   ……………..**

5. **What is the newscast duration that is related to the election? Seconds……..**

6. **What is the story duration?   Seconds……..**

7. **Has the candidate been mentioned in the narrative?**

   0. No   1. Yes

8. **Is the candidate shown in film report?**

   0. No   1. Yes

9. **Is the candidate shown in studio interview?**

   0. No   1. Yes

10. **Has the news story described/discussed a candidate?**

0. No   1. Yes

11. What is the candidate's score of terms from narrative signaling 'neutral'?

Check the list of candidate/party terms or attributes (list the number only)

List of candidates and their parties and codes
1. Nouri al-Maliki (Ali Adeeb, deputy), Dawa Party, State of Law slate, Code (1) 0 -
        Neutrality Score No…………….

2. Ayad Alawi (Tariq al-Hashimi, Atheel al-Nujaifi, Rafia' al-Eissawi, representatives), al-Iraqiya
    slate, Code (2) 0   -   Neutrality Score No…………….

3. Ammar al-Hakim (Adel Abdul Mahdi, Baqr Jabbir Solagh, Jalal al-Deen al-Sagheer,
    representatives), Islamic Supreme Council, Iraqi National Alliance slate, Code (3)
        0   -   Neutrality Score No…………….

4. Muqtada Sadr (Hazim Al-'Araji, Bahaa' Al-'Araji, 'Aqeel Abid Hussein, Salih Al-'Aqeeli…etc.
    representatives) Sadr movement, Iraqi National Alliance slate, Code (4)   0   -
        Neutrality Score No…………….

5. Jalal Talabani & Masud Barazani (Barham Salih, Fu'ad Ma'sum, representatives), Kurdish
    Alliance slate, Code (5) 0   -   Neutrality Score No…………….

6. Ayad al-Samaraei (Mahmood al-Mashhadani, Salman al-Jumaili, Rashid al-Azzawi,
    representatives), Iraqi Islamic Party, Iraqi Accord Front, Code (6)   0   -   Neutrality
    Score No…………….

7. Others…., please specify………., Code (7)   0   -   Neutrality   Score
    No…………….

12. What is the candidate's score of terms from narrative signaling 'positive'? (please refer to the
    list of candidates/parties above)
    1. Code (1)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    2. Code (2)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    3. Code (3)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    4. Code (4)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    5. Code (5)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    6. Code (6)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

    7. Code (7)   0   -   Positive Score No…………….

13. What is the candidate's score of terms from narrative signaling 'negative'? (please refer to the
    list of candidates/parties above)

2.

    1. Code (1)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    2. Code (2)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    3. Code (3)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    4. Code (4)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    5. Code (5)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    6. Code (6)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….

    7. Code (7)   0   -   Negative Score No…………….