

**Fairness and Balance in Election
Campaign News Stories During the
May 2005 Ethiopian Election. A
Study of “*Addis Zemen*” and the
“*Reporter*” Newspapers**

By

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Abstract

In today's world, the media has become one of the most important sources of information on candidates running for office in an election. Along with that, the media has been thoroughly studied in order to assess how fair and balanced their coverage of candidates and political parties were during the run up to election. In this content analysis study of fairness and balance in election stories, the two newspapers (Addis Zemen and the Reporter) coverage of the May 2005 election in Ethiopia were considerably unfair and imbalanced in the space, prominence and visibility given to candidates and political parties running for seat in the government. Of course, readers have only one in six chance of encountering a story that is both fair and balanced in the two newspapers. This study also found out that stories covering the 2005 Ethiopian election in these newspapers to be much more imbalanced than balanced in both partisan and structural dimensions according to measures applied in the study. Hence, while the proportion of stories in the Addis Zemen newspaper favoring EPRDF candidates were noticeably higher than other contestants, the CUD coalition party and its candidates received much more attention than their counterparts in the Reporter newspaper. Moreover, individual stories in the two sample newspapers are constructed to give a great deal of attention (in terms of space, prominence and visibility) to one candidate and/or political party than other opponents. Accordingly, approximately equal proportions (83% in Addis Zemen and 85% in the Reporter newspaper) of the stories in both newspapers are imbalanced by one up to four component measures. Overall, this study suggests that there is a lot that has to be done to achieve the standards of fairness and balance in both the Addis Zemen and the Reporter newspaper.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and problem statement

Media plays a decisive role during elections by providing fair, accurate and balanced picture of all the contesting political parties, candidates and coalition blocs to the general public so that the people can have an informed decision. It is the media that many people usually rely on to get themselves informed about candidates and campaign issues. According to Fico and cote (1999:124) daily news coverage of candidates issue positions and views is arguably the most credible way that candidates can speak to voters. They argue that the intent of news coverage is to inform the public rather than promote a candidate. Therefore the media has to make it their fundamental mission to inform the public in the most complete, balanced and fair manner possible. Lange (1999:5) acknowledging the crucial role the media plays during election sates that:

It is a Cliché, but the media's performance in the course of an election campaign is genuinely of great importance. Editorial independence, integrity and professionalism are the cornerstones of sound election coverage. A lack of journalistic autonomy or responsibility can... prejudice the results of elections.

It has now become a common thing to assert that the media plays a great deal in covering elections particularly by presenting a fair and balanced election campaign stories about political parties and candidates running for seats in a government. The media has an immense responsibility to remain unbiased in their coverage of campaigns during the electoral period. Finn (1982:7) recalling the experience of developed countries media on the issue of covering election wrote that:

In modern, largely developed countries, where the mass media exercise relative freedom, they will always devote considerable, and often partisan, coverage to a general election. The majority of voters depend on the mass media for information on political campaign.

Moreover, it is the media that political parties, candidates and coalition blocs running for seat in an election rely on to get their messages, political positions and manifestos across to the general public. Several professional principles and ethics guide media organizations to present a fair and balanced campaign news stories to their readers and viewers. The two reporting qualities (fairness and balance) are probably the most important components of excellent election campaign coverage in today's journalism than any time else. With regard to fairness and balance in election news stories and their importance Carter et al, (1999:49) state that,

Fairness and balance in reporting electoral contest is central to a democratic society's ability to make full, informed choices among candidates with differing policy priorities. Fairness and balance are central ethically to journalism's self-defined role as an impartial and objective observer. Finally, fairness and balance are also economically important to the mass media, which depend on a mass audience attracted in part by the credibility of their claims to report conflicts fairly and objectively.

In addition, query into fairness and balance to investigate the extent to which opponents in an electoral contest get a manifestly equal chance for their assertions in the media has been the major goal of several media monitoring projects that have been conducted in different countries around the world. Most of the media monitoring projects made it their purpose, among other things, to assess whether political parties, coalitions blocs and candidates running for seat in an election were covered in unbiased, fair and balanced manner possible. Some of the findings that have emanated out of the monitoring projects indicate the presence of imbalance and inequitable coverage of political parties and candidates by the media during the run-up to election. A case in point is the media monitoring report prepared by the Tunisian League for the

Defense of Human Right (2004) monitoring the coverage of the October 2004 Legislative and presidential elections in Tunisia. The monitoring project has found out that all media monitored showed significant bias in their coverage of the election favoring the RCD party and the presidential candidate Ben Ali. Moreover, according to the findings of the monitoring project, all the broadcast media monitored, failed to comply with obligations of balance and equitable coverage of parties and candidates.

In May 2005, Ethiopia has conducted its third multi-party general election, which of course is a relatively heavily contested political election compared to the past two general elections in the country. Mesfin and Fantaye (2005) point out to the third general election as one which stand out from all previous elections in terms of an apparent increase in public debate and more noticeably, wherein several and well-watched debates have been organized on a range of topics among various political parties. Significantly enough, they asserted that, the political parties have combined their resources, to be more prepared and to enlist more popular support, leading in a large voter turnout, which according to them, “undoubtedly indicated the strengthening of democratic standards.”

Nonetheless, as Ethiopia is in the process of democratization and the media is in its infant stage in the process, it is not unusual to hear people complaining about several issues in the politics of the country and the way the media behave particularly during the coverage of candidates and political parties election campaigns that has been carried out in the electoral period. As is the case elsewhere in most transitional democracies in Africa and developing countries around the world, the media in the country seem to be categorized in two different and usually opposite camps, the state owned media and the private media. State media is usually considered to be pro- government. According to Ethiopia

Pre-Election Assessment Report (2004) prepared by McMahon et al, opposition and civic organizations bitterly criticized slanted news coverage by the state media in favor of the government in power. On the other hand, private media is often considered to be anti-government and sensational in their reports. McMahon et al (2004) assert that some independent papers have, at times, taken extreme and inflammatory positions.

In a media atmosphere as such several important aspects of the relation between the media and their role during an electoral contest remain at stake. Amongst of which the right of the general public to get a fair and balanced news coverage of candidates campaign issues, and the right of contesting candidates and political parties to get equitable and fair coverage of their policy position and campaign assertions. Moreover, another important thing that will remain at stake is the violation of professional ethics and principles of covering election contest in a fair and balanced manner, which are supposed to be corner stones in any democratic and professional media organization. Apparently, therefore, it seems imperative to look into the concerns of the public and other stakeholders alike, in a more modest and critical manner to illuminate whether the concern holds water or not. Hence, this study was about investigating the extent to which the media explicitly hold up to the standards of fairness and balance. And whether there exists lack of fairness and balance in the election news stories of the *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers, with regard to covering the assertions of the various political parties and candidates contesting in the third general election of May, 2005 in Ethiopia.

1.2 Research Questions

Since fairness and balance present a fertile ground for contention as to their distinction with one another, it appears to be important to present the assumption that is used for this particular study. Therefore, story fairness is defined as the simple inclusion of both sides in stories and hence story fairness is indicated by whether they were one-sided or two-sided, while story balance is defined how equally (even-handedly) were the two sides in the conflict are treated relative to one another. Two types of balance (partisan and structural balance) were implemented to assess story balance. While story structural balance indicates the political party that is favored in the total coverage, story structural balance indicates the chance that readers/viewers come across individual stories that are balanced and/or imbalanced regardless of the political party or candidate favored in the story. These content based definition of fairness and balance are adapted from Fico and Cote (1997) from their study “*Fairness and balance in election reporting: The 1994 governor's race in Michigan*”. This study; therefore, addressed fairness and balance in the news coverage of political parties campaign in both *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers by trying to answer the following leading research questions.

1. Do election campaign news stories in both *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers include relevant opponents or cover only one side?
2. Are election campaign news stories in both *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers structurally balanced or imbalanced in their treatment of election contestants in the May 2005 Ethiopian election?
3. Are quoted or paraphrased assertions from election opponents presented equally prominently in election campaign news stories or

- gave more space and attention (prominence) to one political party than the other?
4. How balanced are election campaign news stories relative treatment of opponents in terms of lead prominence accorded to each contending political parties?
 5. To what extent do *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers differ in presenting fair and balanced news coverage of campaign events during the May 2005 Ethiopian general election?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To further our understanding of fair and balanced media coverage of elections.
2. To promote the proper and democratic functions of the media especially during the electoral period.
3. To promote electorates and political parties access to the most balanced and fair journalistic coverage possible in the media.
4. To analyze the existence of fair and balanced election news coverage of political parties in *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers.
5. To analyze the difference in fairness and balance of election news coverage of political parties during the electoral campaign period in *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers.

1.4 Hypothesis

Taking the statement of the problem and the objectives set for the research in to consideration the following hypothesis instructs the research problem.

- Overall, front page election campaign news stories are likely to be both unfair and imbalanced than fair and balanced in both the *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers.

This hypothesis will be supported, a) if a particular political party dominates the group of both the unfair and fair stories b) if that particular political party still dominates one-sided or unfair and fair stories in terms of such balance factors as, space and prominence in both the sample newspapers.

1.5. Significance of the study

As far as the knowledge of the researcher is concerned there have been very few studies conducted over the issue of balance and fairness in candidates' election campaign in Ethiopian media. Thus the study may have the following contribution to make:

1. The findings of the research may alert news organizations and media professionals to hold on to the standards of balance and fairness in their reporting during candidates and political parties election campaigns in particular and in reporting of conflicting political issues and of any kind in general. This will help media organizations and professionals in the field not to lose their credibility by the mass audience, on which they depend economically for their survival.
2. The result of the study may play a supportive role for other researchers that are interested to conduct further investigation on the issue of balance and fairness on media's news story coverage of candidates, political parties, and coalition blocs running for seat in the government.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that it doesn't include tone of stories in the analysis. Though such subjective variables might sometimes prove quite difficult to analyze precisely and objectively, the amount of negative and positive information in news content might indicate lack of fairness and balance. Therefore, future studies should include this variable in their analysis.

Another limitation of this study is that it doesn't employ qualitative measures such as focus group interviews and surveys with journalists. Employing such qualitative methods could help illuminate the factors that led to story imbalance and unfairness as well as individual journalists' perception of the concepts of fairness and balance, which in turn may have implication on story fairness and balance. Thus, future studies should find a way to apply such methods in analyzing fairness and balance in election campaign coverage by the media.

Yet another limitation of this study is that it has only tested two newspapers and focused solely on the print media. While similar results found in this study may be present elsewhere, further studies in other newspapers and the broadcast media will be quite useful in the future to support findings in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Review of related Literature

2.1. The Concepts of Fairness and Balance

The concepts of balance and fairness as qualities of reporting conflict involving two or more sides seem to have come into view in the profession of journalism as a result of media's declining partisanship and journalists' apparent failure to stick to the standards of objectivity. According to Ali (2004:8)

At the early stages of journalism, the press was not devoted for fair and balanced reporting. Partisan press was popular. After the press distanced itself from the government and other powerful bodies, the concept of fairness with other ethical principles grew in prominence.

In addition Garrison (1994) states that, in previous times the concept of objectivity in reporting was highly valued, and journalists were obliged to adhere with it. However, in recent years the inadequacies of the concept and the difficulties in implementation have made objectivity more problematic. Journalists have therefore begun to talk more about fairness and balance and less about objectivity. In similar terms Fico and Cote (1997: 10) asserts that, "The modern concern for fairness and balance emerged following the abandonment of objectivity as an attainable journalistic standard." They have however argued that, the practical details that show how journalism should function with the absence of objectivity have been general and rather abstract, focusing more on what they call, "institutional roles and individual motives rather than on defined behaviors capable of assessment." (Ibid: 10). This lends itself to misunderstanding on the part of reporters and editors about these two qualities of reporting, thereby making it difficult for reporters and editors to analyse and measure their own coverage of issue conflict.

Though the concepts of fairness and balance have been in the world of journalism for a long time, the definitions and distinctions of the two terms seems to be slightly different from one to the other. Desbarats, (1996) Cited in Ali (2004: 5) for instance, defined fairness as follows:

Fairness requires a balanced presentation of the facts in a news story, and all the substantial opinions in a matter of controversy. It precludes distortion of meaning by over-or under- emphasis, by replacing facts and quotations out of context, by headlines not warranted by the text.

The definition of fairness by Desbarats seems to make balance as a prerequisite for fairness and mesh the two concepts together. However according to Fico, et al (2005:17)

Fairness in journalism usually refers to whether relevant sides in a conflict are included in news coverage, while balance usually refers to the evenness with which such conflict sides are treated relative to one another in that coverage.

Hence, they assert that, fairness is clearly an essential but not a sufficient condition for balance in any single story. Thereby distinguishing fairness as the incorporation of two sides in a conflict while balance in their definition indicates the evenness with which the two sides in conflict are treated in a given story. Their definition is quite different from that of Desbarats in particularly identifying fairness as a necessary but not a sufficient condition to balance in a story containing two opposite sides, whereas Desbarats has made balance a crucial condition for story fairness.

Robinson and Sheehan (1983) on the other hand presented a completely subjective criterion of defining fairness in news coverage of elections. To determine how fair media treatment of candidates was, Robinson and Sheehan (1983) settled on assessing how much positive information and how much negative information each story contained. Accordingly, if a story had three times as much positive information as negative, they

considered the story to be “good press” for a candidate, whereas if a story contained three times as much negative information as positive meant “bad press” for a candidate. However, such subjective definition of fairness in news content is proved to be quite difficult to measure fairness precisely and objectively, as the criteria for judging certain information as positive or negative to a candidate may be difficult to standardize.

At another circumstance, Norris and Sanders (1998) presented a very detailed measurable definition of balance. They identified three different types of political balance that are frequently in use in newsrooms. These are: *stop watch* balance, *directional* balance, and *agenda* balance.

According to them *stopwatch* balance refers to whether particular candidates, parties or groups have been given equivalent or proportional coverage in the media. *Directional* balance in Norris and Sanders (1998:5) terms “takes the next step and measures the positive, negative or neutral contents of reporting about the different contending candidates.” According to them, news is defined as neutral if even-handed towards the pros and cons of any argument. Coverage is considered as biased or imbalanced if it is excessively critical, negative or antagonistic to one side or the other. *Agenda* balance, according to Norris and Sanders (1998), is prevalent in theories of voting behavior which states that parties often have ‘issue ownership’: Consecutively, Norris and Sanders (1998:3) state that, “focusing coverage disproportionately on one set of issues, plays on conventional party stereotypes and can therefore skew the reporting in a partisan direction.”

Their definition of balance incorporated both the subjective and objective assessment of the term. *Directional* balance, which measures the positive, negative and neutral contents of coverage, is clearly a subjective

assessment than stopwatch balance which deals with the evenness with which opponents in an election has been covered in the media. Their definition of balance is slightly different from the other definitions in a sense that it attempts to measure balance using both subjective and objective criterion.

Fico and Freedman (2003) in their study of comparison of news stories about Michigan gubernatorial races of 1998 and 2002, on the other hand, identified two types of balance, *partisan balance* and *structural balance* that have been developed by Fico and Cote (1997). Accordingly, they state that *partisan balance* of stories indicates whether the total of all stories on an election gave more space and prominence to one or the other candidate. Whereas the *structural balance* of stories considers whether individual stories that are likely to be encountered by individual readers gave more space and attention to one or the other candidate. Hence, they assert that,

Partisan balance addresses actual bias - whether intended or not -in the total coverage of an election, while ***structural balances*** addresses the chance that readers may perceive bias — whether actual or not — depending on how the individual stories they encounter present the candidates.

This definition of balance considers stories in terms of total and individual to analyze balance. The assumption, according to Fico and Freedman (2003) is that readers can perceive a story biased if the story is structurally imbalanced, whereas the total election coverage can be balanced measured in terms of the proportion it gives the contestants. This type of assessment of balance provides a thorough understanding of, for instance, election campaign coverage in terms of both the total campaign coverage out put and individual story item, which can be encountered by the readers and viewers.

Given the difference in actual distinction and definition of the terms of fairness and balance, there have however been a great deal of concern among the media professionals, owners, academicians and the public alike about the importance of these two reporting qualities and the need for practitioners and media organizations to achieve them. IMPACS' (*Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society*) Media and Elections Handbook (2004) for instance advised practitioners to achieve what they call '*fair balance*' in their coverage of election opponents views and positions. In the handbook, it is clearly stated that good quality journalism puts importance on not taking sides and a good journalist seek to produce a report that is not only balanced, which it defined as the inclusion of both side in a conflict, but also fair, which could be achieved by avoiding more attention to one candidate over another in a news story. Moreover, the ASNE in *Newspaper Credibility: Building Reader Trust*. (1985:12) advised reporters and media practitioners to, "be fair, unbiased, accurate, and factual." The standards of fairness and balance are explicitly referred to in the document as an important ingredient of the journalism profession and urged journalists to achieve them.

As a news organization, the BBC's commitment to impartial coverage of the news and current affairs in an election campaign in particular and in coverage of politics in general has been reinforced under section 2 of its document entitled "*Guidance for all BBC Programme Makers during the General Election Campaign*"(2005) stating that:

Daily news magazine programmes and summaries (in the nations, regions and UK wide) must achieve an appropriate and fair balance in coverage of the main parties in the course of each week of the campaign. Daily programmes may balance major interviews, profiles, running series or campaign launches over the course of the campaign.

The guidance on impartial (fair and balanced) reporting of campaign assertions of candidates and political parties in the general election by

the BBC shows the importance it places on the issue of fairness and balance and the need for programme makers to achieve them. Tuchman cited in Fico and Freedman (2003) has described the news media concern for including both sides in stories as a "*strategic ritual*" which they do it to evade criticism from partisans. More apparently though, news organization's concern for fairness and balance in reporting politics is perhaps related with the organization's credibility and reliability among the general public. Studies by Gaziano and McGrath (1983) indicate that media officials, responding to public concern over credibility and reliability, included assessments of fairness and balance in studies of factors affecting media credibility. Strengthening this claim Carter et al (1999:49) assert that:

Virtually every study of media credibility has considered fairness and balance as influencing public perception of the media. As recently as November 1999, the Freedom Forum pledged \$1 million for research and other projects on newspaper fairness because of its link to credibility in the public mind.

Thereby, accentuating the two reporting qualities as factors responsible, at least in part, to news media organization's credibility by the mass public.

Moreover, impartiality (fairness and balance) in reporting has been the major concern among individual reporters too and they are valued as important qualities of professional journalism. According to Fico and Cote (1997:6) "among newswriters as individuals, the standard of impartiality ranked as the second attribute of editorial quality in a survey of 746 editors."

Having raised the concepts of fairness and balance and the concern among stakeholders about these two qualities of reporting, it seems quite important to deal with some factors that may have a direct and indirect

influences over story fairness and balance. The following sub title deals with factors that several studies have identified as factors associated with story fairness and balance.

2.2. Influences on Story fairness and Balance

Several factors have been identified as having influences over election campaign news stories fairness and balance. These factors may range from socio-political level to individual reporters character and traits, and from incumbency status of candidates to type of media owners. Each factor may contribute towards stories even-handedness or partisanship. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) cited in Fico and Freedman (2003) identified five level hierarchical influences on news content. According to Fico and Freedman (2003) four influences from such levels consist of societal level influences, specific media organizational characteristics, work habit within media organizations, and the personality of individual journalists.

A. Societal level influences:

Factors like ideology, legal-political arrangements of a certain society and other non-media institutions are considered to hamper what the media can do (Shoemaker and Reese 1996 in Fico and Freedman). The media are expected to respond to the course of the political process when they cover elections, including the incumbency or challenger status of the contenders and the differential attention they can obtain in a certain news event (Fico and Freedman 2003). This signifies the influence that the political atmosphere has on reporter's ability to cover an election in a fair and balanced manner. Hence, Fico and Freedman (2003) employing societal level influences, particularly the incumbency and challenger status in their study, found that the incumbency or challenger status of the candidates to be an important influence on the balance of stories.

Accordingly, results from their research show that for high visibility elections, challengers are likely to get more attention in stories than incumbents.

B. Organizational level influences:

According to Fico and Freedman (2003) the media organization's resources and goals will limit the actions and routines of its workforce. They state that staff resources available to cover an election, for instance, influence the qualities in the stories reported. All other things equal, Fico and Freedman (2003) argue that, the more staff a news organization has, the more cautiously it will be able to look for and use sources that may result in more even-handed and in-depth treatment of controversy such as elections. Moreover, they assert that organizational resources will decide whether reporters can be deployed to particular bureaus that allow them to cover stories in more intensity and with more focus to different sides. The implication of organizational level influences is that media organization's resources and its objectives influence the way they cover election and stories that involve two or more opposing views. Therefore what is implicit from such claims, according to Fico and Freedman (2003) is that, media stations with a large number of reporters and with abundant resources are more likely to cover elections in relatively even handed and fair manner than those stations with few number of reporters and scarce resources.

C. Within newsrooms level influences:

Within the newsroom, factors such as editorial rewards and sanctions reinforce the work routine, norms and values that reporters follow (Shoemaker and Reese 1996 in Fico and Freedman 2003). For Fico and Freedman, one of the most important indication editors can give

reporters for the qualities they seek out in stories for instance is prominent placement. Prominence story position, according to them, means prestige for the reporter. But, they assert that prominent story placement also means that stories get more public inspection and possible criticism for lapses in perceived fairness. They therefore conclude that editors assigning stories for page one seemingly would seek devotion to such a habit, and communicate that concern to reporters, thereby enlightening the news qualities of fairness and balance in reporters.

Such influencing factors may for instance suggest that stories appearing in the front pages of newspapers exhibit relative fairness and balance than other stories in the newspaper. Accordingly, Fico and Freedman (2003) in their study of the comparison of news stories about Michigan gubernatorial races of 1998 and 2002 found a greater percentage of Page One stories to be balanced between the candidates, compared to the percentage of balanced stories run inside or on section front pages.

D. Individual journalists' level influences:

Personal characteristics of the individual journalists will influence how they distinguish news values, search for sources, and write down their stories (Fico and Freedman 2003). Therefore, the assumption is that individual reporters, according to their distinctive behavior and experience may bring their own biases in a certain news items they write, that may have implication for lack of story fairness and balance.

It is imperative to remind here that the content of a news item has to undergo these different levels of influence before it reaches the audience. Fico and Cote (1997) state that, since most viewers or readers of news content may not be aware of the processes a single news item goes

through before it reaches them, there seem to be a likelihood to judge a news story as biased or unfair and consider media organizations partisan and unreliable. Therefore, media organizations and practitioners need to be aware of such influences and work towards minimizing such influences by applying certain strategies.

Another set of influences on story fairness and balance may arise from such factors as source selection and judgments of newsworthiness by reporters and editors. Fico, et al (2005: 45) emphasizing such factors that could make achieving fairness and balance challenging in reporting affirm that:

Fairness and balance in reporting become problematic, of course, when judgments of source availability, credibility, and truthfulness must be made. Fairness and balance become still more problematic when news values such as impact or unusualness are part of journalistic decision-making.

Source unavailability may for instance make a news story look like unfair and/or imbalanced, in addition the reporter's judgment of source credibility based on certain journalistic criteria's provide a subtle ground for lack of fairness and balance in a story.

Other factors that may influence story fairness and balance can originate from the incumbency and/or challenger status of candidates in an election. Clarke and Evans (1983) in their study of media coverage of congressional elections contend that incumbents are much more likely to get favorable press coverage than that of their challengers, whatsoever their party. Clarke and Evans (1983) pointed out possible clarification for this pattern as to include the incumbents' ability to get regular access to the press, and the ability of incumbents to give newsworthy service to their districts. However, Fico and Freedman (2003) found out that at least for 'high visibility' elections; (presidential rather than local) challengers are likely to get more attention in stories than incumbents.

Their research demonstrate that, “When an incumbent is not on the ballot in a high-visibility election, stories are more likely to ‘balance out’ in the total attention given candidates, and individual stories are also more likely to present both candidates in a more even way.” (pp: 12) Thus, their finding suggests that incumbency advantage may differ according to the type of election. No matter what the case however the incumbency and challenger status of candidates, which actually is out of the control of the media organization, is deemed to have influences over story fairness and balance. It is therefore important for media organizations and their staff to be responsive to such influences in a manner that conforms to the requirements of fair and balanced treatment of contestants in an election.

Yet another factor that may also be a potential source of influence on fairness and balance of news content might arise from the type of media owners and their predisposition to a particular candidate or political viewpoint. Media ownership theory developed by Altschull (1984) cited in Wang and Coleman (2004) pinpoint that, "the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press". The independence of media outlets, Wang and Coleman argue, is given within the boundaries of owners' profits, when the media outlet is commercially owned, the content will reflect the point of view of the news organization's proprietors and advertisers. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) quoted in Wang and Coleman (2004) further signify the impact that ownership has, arguing that, "although news departments may be organizationally buffered from the larger firm, content is still controlled indirectly through hiring and promotion practices". For instance, they claim that, newspapers by and large support political contestant who reflect the proprietor's or publishers' political stance. Thus, it is important to note the extent to which media owners and their tendency to a certain

political outlook can exert a significant influence on fairness and balance of news content.

Generally speaking, therefore, lack of fairness and balance in election coverage by the media can be attributable to influences and factors mentioned above. Given the circumstances, however, media outlets are expected to stick to the standards of fairness and balance in their coverage of issue conflict in general and candidate election campaign in particular. As we have tried to see in the previous section media's perceived lack of fairness and balance in reporting have implications to media's credibility and reliability among the public, which in turn have consequence to media's economical viability. More importantly, it is professionally unethical and against the public's right to know and freedom of expression to report the news in a slanted and unfair manner.

2.3. Previous Studies on fairness and balance in Election Reporting.

Several studies have examined media's fairness and balance in election reporting in different countries, some of them finding differential and others even handed treatment of contending candidates and political parties. Much of the available studies about fairness and balance in election reporting however have been concentrated in the United States and United Kingdom focusing on presidential and premier elections respectively. In the following section, an attempt has been made to summarize some of the results that have been found out in these studies.

Carter et al (1999) examining the partisan and structural balance of broadcast stories covering the 1998 governor's race in Michigan found out fairness and balance in the over all election coverage. However, according to them, fairness and balance has hardly been visible when it

comes to individual stories and packages as measured in terms of both partisan balance and structural balance. They assert that, “individual stories were substantially lacking in balance and fairness. In any given setting, the viewer had a one in four chance of seeing a perfectly balanced story.”(pp: 50). Thus they conclude that there is a possibility that the structural imbalances that exists in these stories, in influencing the judgment of bias among viewers. However, they have suggested further experimental treatments, and surveys to be conducted to establish if this happens to be the case. Their study further found out station staff size, which according to them is a factor that could have created more attention to story qualities such as fairness and balance, to be virtually unrelated with story fairness and balance in stations studied. According to Carter et al (1999), the factors that are most notably linked to fairness and balance in the study rather were relatively more grounded in the journalistic values of news directors and reporters. In an earlier analysis of the 1994 governor's race in Michigan's nine largest dailies Fico and Cote (1997) however revealed the press as covering electoral components unequally in terms of fairness and balance. Their study suggests that election campaign coverage may give some candidates more chance than their counterparts to assert their views. Thereby, finding a contrary result to Carter et al's relative even election campaign coverage.

On the other hand, Wang and Coleman (2004) in a study they have attempted to test the theory of media ownership by comparing the publicly owned Boston Globe with the privately owned Boston Herald on bias in coverage of the 2000 presidential election, generally found the two newspapers to be more objective in their coverage of the 2000 presidential election. They attributed such tendency of objective coverage of presidential candidates to the “rise of civic journalism, better media

rules and regulations, stricter self-censorship, and concerns about newspaper circulation.” However, when all non- neutral paragraphs and leads were tested, their study has found differences in the objectivity of stories about the 2000 presidential election by the Boston Globe and Herald. According to their finding, the Herald demonstrated considerable bias toward Bush “by having significantly more pro-Bush paragraphs than pro-Gore paragraphs on average, and by giving more prominence in the leads to Bush than Gore, and by having more stories whose tone was overall pro-Bush than pro-Gore.”(pp: 21) The Globe, according to their findings, on the other hand, was more objective, giving balanced coverage to both candidates and parties. Consistent with media ownership theory, which states that publicly owned media to be relatively more objective than privately owned media, their study showed that, the publicly owned Boston Globe was more objective than the Boston Herald when neutral variables were excluded.

Fico et al (2005) in their study of, “*Partisan and Structural Balance in Newspaper Coverage of U.S. Senate Races in 2004 With Female Nominees*” discovered that the nine newspapers under investigation coverage of the United States Senate races in 2004 to be mostly even-handed in the space and prominence given candidates. According to their findings; reporter gender, newsroom diversity and newspaper size were factors linked to partisan imbalance, giving more treatment that is favorable to candidates of the Democrat Party than the Republican. Their study however indicated that story partisan and structural imbalances were negligibly related with each other, which in their view suggest that news processing principles rather than journalistic partisanship produced the imbalance.

Norris and Sanders (1998) in their study examining the effects of stop-watch, directional and agenda balance on voters' perceptions during the

1997 British election campaign, found out that the assumptions of *stop-watch balance*, which states that greater coverage of one of the major parties would automatically give them an electoral advantage, not supported in their study. Their results rather suggest that the short-term effects of the amount of coverage of each party in the news, does not actually provide an automatic enhance in that party's support, or a steady decrease in support for other parties. Their study however suggest the assumptions of *directional balance* that measures the positive or negative contents of television news, to be central, particularly positive news according to them has the capacity to provide a short –term and modest increase to that party's affluence. Finally, their study found no support for the need to maintain agenda balance in newsrooms: In general, they concluded that what matters is how parties are covered in television news, in particularly positive stories, rather than how much coverage they receive or what topics are given more emphasis. Consistent with such results Sanders and Norris (1997) in a previous study of the effect of television news on party images during the 1997 British general election have confirmed that voters' views about the political parties can be influenced quite noticeably by the content of television news. In particular, their analysis point out positive news images of a certain political party to wield far more powerful effects on voters' perceptions of the party than negative news. Thus they conclude that exposure to positive news coverage of a particular political party generate a significant change in viewers' perceptions of that party's image.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Design of the Study

This study set out primarily to investigate the extent and nature of balance and fairness in the news coverage of candidates and political parties' campaign issues and positions during the May, 2005 general election in Ethiopia in the *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers. Moreover, the study has made its purpose to compare the difference that exists in the *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers with regard to balance and fairness in their reporting of campaign news stories. To this end, the study adopts content analysis as its sole method of addressing the study problem. The fundamental reason for making use of content analysis to investigate the research problem was that, content analysis provides an opportunity to analyze fairness and balance in election campaign news stories in a more systematic, relatively objective and quantitative manner. In addition, content analysis is crucial in indicating the proportion of one-sided and two-sided election campaign stories that may be encountered by the individual reader. Moreover, content analysis helps to measure the amount of space accorded to coverage of election campaign by different candidates, and political parties, which in turn have implications on the stories characteristics of balance and fairness.

3.1. Sampling strategy

A comprehensive analysis of the total range of media fairness and balance in the coverage of candidates and political parties' election campaign in all the existing media in the country is probably impossible and certainly beyond the capabilities of any single research effort, and the present research is no exception. Given the time, space and resource

available it is not possible to investigate all the newspapers that are published in the country. Taking this in to consideration, this study selects two newspapers (based on their circulation size, and ownership), one from the government owned and one from the private owned to investigate fairness and balance in their coverage of candidate's election campaign during the May 2005 general election in Ethiopia. Accordingly, two prominent titles, the *Addis Zemen* newspaper from state owned and the *Reporter* newspaper from the private owned has been selected for investigation. The two newspapers are published in *Amharic*, the official language of the country, and according to the ministry of information's audit figures quoted in Media Monitoring Report (2005:7) have an average circulation of 17,700 and 9,833 respectively. While *Addis Zemen* is a daily newspaper except for Monday the *Reporter* is published twice a week since January 2005. For the purpose of comparison, only the Wednesdays and Sundays publications of both newspapers are taken for investigation. This is based on the publication dates of the bi-weekly newspaper, the *Reporter*. Since election campaign and other election related issues were receiving a great deal of attention in the mass media and the public at large during the months prior to election date, purposive sampling has been adopted to select the publications of both newspapers starting from Wednesday, March 2nd to Wednesday, 11th of May 2005, which accounts for about two months, to serve as the total population of the research problem.

3.2. Sampling Unit

The sampling unit of the research problem was the entire news stories and articles relating to the election campaign appearing on the front pages of the selected two sample newspapers starting from March the 2nd to the 11th of May 2005. Front page news stories are considered because they give candidates and political parties a way to present their

views, and reporters are obliged to report those views in a fair and balanced manner (Fico and Cote 1997). Similarly, the International Federation of Journalists “*Election Reporting Handbook*” though acknowledging the fact that the media can not entirely be unbiased, it has however, objected to a lack of balance in news columns, which are supposed to contain objective reportage in comparison to, for example, the editorial column. Therefore, this study focuses particularly on front page news stories. Key word strategy is deployed as qualifying criterion to recognize all election campaign related stories from the two sample newspapers by coders. Therefore, the entire election campaign related news stories that made specific reference to names of candidates and political parties running for seat in the government during the May 2005 Ethiopian general election are coded and measured to investigate story fairness and balance.

3.3. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was individual election campaign related news story items that made specific reference to names of candidates, political parties and coalition blocs and that are featured in the front pages of the sample newspapers.

3.4 . Fairness and Balance Measures

The following fairness and balance measures are for all practical reasons identical with those developed by Fico and Cote (1999). They are therefore adapted to help measure balance and fairness in the election campaign news stories in this particular study. These standardized measures of fairness and balance have been employed by Fico and colleagues in several other studies aimed at assessing fairness and balance in election campaign coverage in the United States.

Consequently, the presence or inclusion of more than one political party in a story establishes the fairness of that story; therefore, story fairness is determined in terms of whether the story was one-sided or included opponents in the electoral contest. On the other hand, story balance is assessed by determining how equally (even handedly) the candidates or political parties are treated in a story relative to one another. Both partisan and structural balances have been assessed for each story. While partisan balance indicates the party and/or candidate that is favoured in the total coverage, structural balance indicates the chances that readers may encounter a story balanced or imbalanced regardless of the party favored. According to Carter et al, (1999: 14)

These two assessments, partisan balance and structural balance, are clearly related but also differ in fundamental ways. Across the life of an election, the partisan balance of coverage may be quite even, although any particular story might be very one-sided. Journalists might credibly claim that coverage of the particular election was fair, while viewers of any particular one-sided story would assert the opposite. Assessing both partisan and structural balance of campaign stories permits a probabilistic approach to determining the likelihood that news consumers will perceive bias in the news, whatever its partisan direction.

Four components are constructed as indicators of partisan and structural balance for each story. These components are also applied to construct story structural and partisan index. The first component deals with total paragraph space quoting or paraphrasing the candidates and/or political parties in the news story measured in centimeter square. The second component deals with story prominence, whether the first paragraph lead of the story contained election campaign statements of a particular political party or, two or more political parties or candidates and/or neither of them. According to Fico and Cote (1997:19) the reason to measure prominence is that, “readers start stories at the lead, with fewer and fewer continuing to the end. Readers may never encounter a balance in a story that confines an opponent to the story's last half.”

Moreover, Stempel & Culbertson (1984) cited in Fico et al (2005) states that, "The lead of a news story is usually where the most important items of a story lie. Whoever is dominant in the lead of the story is usually preferred in the coverage of the news story." The third component relates to the election assertions for each candidate or political party appearing in the first half and last half of the story. The fourth component deals with whether or not a certain candidate is accompanied by a photographic material and the space of the photograph is measured in centimeter square and is coded. For example, a story would be judged the most imbalanced if it gives a certain candidate or political party: (a) more total paragraphs of space than the other contending candidate or political party; (b) a statement in the lead, but not the other candidate or political party; (c) an assertion in the first half of the story, but not the opponent; and (d) more photograph space, but not the opponent political party candidate. The story would be judged the most balanced possible if it gives identical paragraph space and story placement to each candidate and political party in each of the four components. The story could also be judged as balanced if candidates or political parties "divide" the components equally.

To create the partisan balance index, each of these components are first judged to favor EPRDF, to favor CUD, to favor UEDF, to favor Others, to be balanced (because election campaign statements of each candidates are equally present in the component) or to be irrelevant (because no one party's or candidate's election campaign statements and/or pictures are present). The candidate and/or political party favored by the most components is therefore judged to have been favored by the story. To create the structural balance index, the four components are used to determine the degree to which the same candidate and/or political party dominated the story, regardless of who that candidate or political party

is. To assess this, the number of components favoring that particular candidate or political party is subtracted from the number of components favoring the opponent, and then the absolute value of that number is used. The resulting index could range from 0, indicating a story structurally balanced between the candidates and/or political parties (and also balanced on the partisan index), to 4, indicating that the same candidate and/or political was favored on each of the four components.

Therefore, a political party favored by most of the components, say three of the components, is judged to have been favored and hence the story is judged to be imbalanced. And the story is judged to be balanced if an approximately equal number of components (identical space and story placement) favored the candidates and or political parties featured in the news story.

3.5 Coding Categories (Variable Lists)

The following three coalition parties were the main political parties involved in the May 2005 Ethiopian general election.

1. EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Front)

TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front)

OPDO (Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization)

ANDM (Amhara National Democratic Movement)

SEPM (Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Movement)

The EPRDF coalition is the ruling party and is running for the third time for office since the downfall of the military regime in the country. The coalition represents those groups that have fought the Derg military regime in the country for over thirty years, and took power overthrowing the regime in 1991. The four parties (TPLF, OPDO, ANDM, and SEPM) formed the EPRDF Coalition Party (Mesfin and Fantaye, 2005).

2. UEDF (The Opposition Alliance: United Ethiopian Democratic Forces)

UEDF/EDFU (United Ethiopian Democratic Forces)

ONC (Oromo National Congress)

SEPDC (Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition)

AAPO (All Amhara Peoples Organization)

UEDP (Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party)

Formed in 2003, a coalition known as United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) appears to be one of the most notable opposition parties that have been involved in the third general election of May 2005 in Ethiopia (Mesfin and Fantaye, 2005)

3. CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy)

EDL (Ethiopian Democratic League)

AEUP (All Ethiopian Unity Party)

UEDP/ MEDHIN (Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party/Medhin)

ERMDJ (Rainbow Ethiopia: Movement For Democracy and Social Justice.)

Created in 2004, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) was formed by the above four political parties. The CUD coalition party was also one of the most notable opposition political parties winning a second large majority of seats in the parliament in the 2005 general election in the country (Mesfin and Fantaye, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, other non-coalition parties and independent candidates are described as ‘Others’.

The following details from each election campaign news story item have been coded and measured to investigate story balance and fairness in the two sample newspapers.

1. **The name of the newspaper:** this refers to either of the two sample newspapers (*Addis Zemen* or *The Reporter*)
2. **Coder:** this refers to the name of the person who coded the story item.
3. **Article Date:** Refers to the date the news story appeared in the newspaper.(dd/mm/yy)
4. **Unique story ID number:** refers to a unique identifier for each campaign news story.
5. **Type of page:** refers to the page where the relevant election related news item is collocated in, including continued pages. (In this case front page and...)
6. **Actor involved:** actor refers to the candidates and their political parties.(EPRDF,CUDP...and names of candidates)
7. **Political party association:** this refers to the party the candidate belongs to.
8. **Coalition bloc:** this refers to the coalition bloc the party has joined. Variables (5,6,and7) seem to be almost similar, however they are quite important to clearly identify the actor as to belong in one of the major coalition blocs and also help to assess the importance of the actors as indicated by a combination of the story space and story prominence given to the candidates and political parties.
9. **Story Fairness:** This variable assess the story fairness in terms of whether the story was one-sided or included opponents in the electoral contest (if only one actor's election campaign assertions and statements are reported in a story, then the story is judged Unfair, if on the other hand, the story included election opponents assertion then the news story is judged fair.)
10. **Story prominence:** This variable assess the number of times a certain political party or candidate appears in the first paragraph

lead position and/ or the number of times the party has appeared in the first half and last half of the particular election news story.

11. **Photograph:** refers to the photograph of the actor and is measured in centimeter square.
12. **Space:** this refers to the measure of paraphrased or direct quote centimeter coverage the actor received in each story item.

Variables (10, 11, and 12) use to assess story balance and are developed to create story balance index. These variables show how candidates, parties, and or political parties have been treated in a given story. The assumption is that readers will read stories from top to down and that there is likelihood that readers perceive bias in stories which, for instance, gave prominent placement in the lead paragraph to one candidate or the other. The aggregate of the indices used here therefore are supposed to indicate story balance or imbalance.

3.6. Inter-coder Reliability Measures

Two coders were trained for two days on the coding scheme of the study and then coded approximately 20 percent of stories sampled randomly from the relevant ones to calculate the inter-coder reliability for the study. The two coders are graduate students of the School of Journalism and Communication of Addis Ababa University and have got experience in coding similar contents. Percent agreement was used to calculate the reliability of coding for both story fairness and balance. The two-person coder reliability assessment for the presence of two or more political parties and/or candidates in the story was 100 percent. Moreover, all of the four component variables for story balance had percentage of agreement scores between 90 and 100 percent.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of the Study

4.1. Presentation and Analysis of Data.

In this part of the study, the key findings are presented and analyzed. The first section deals with the nature of story fairness, which is assessed using the proportions of all stories among the different contesting political parties, in the two sample newspapers. The second section deals with the nature of story balance, hence, both structural and partisan balances of stories were assessed using the proportion all stories. While story structural balance measures the chances that readers have in encountering a story that is structurally balanced or imbalanced regardless of the party favored in the story, partisan balance measures the party that is favored in the total front page election campaign news coverage. The third section presents the political party that has dominated placement in the most prominent part of a story, the lead of the paragraph, and is assessed using the proportion of all stories that featured a certain political party in the lead of the story paragraph.

A total of 42 newspapers (21 editions of *Addis Zemen* and 21 editions of the *Reporter*) spanning from 2, March 2005 - 11 May 2005 are collected and examined. These editions has resulted in a total of 86 front page election campaign related news stories (47 from *Addis Zemen* and 39 from the *Reporter* newspaper) on the May 2005 Ethiopian general election. The 86 stories on the 2005 election from both the sample newspapers are assessed to determine the extent to which relevant opponents in the election are included and to determine the extent to which stories are balanced (evenhanded) in their treatment of the

contending political parties in terms of such balance measures as prominence and space. Story partisan and structural balance index were created for each front page campaign news stories to identify the political party that is most favored in the coverage and to identify the chances that readers would encounter a story that is structurally balanced or imbalanced regardless of the party favored in the coverage. Moreover, the 47 front page election campaign news stories from the *Addis Zemen* newspaper were compared to the 39 of same stories from the *Reporter* newspaper to illuminate differences in fairness and balance between the two newspapers.

4.1.1. Fairness of Front Page Election Campaign News Stories.

A content based definition of fairness is adopted from Fico and Cote (1997) and is employed to assess story fairness in this particular content analysis study of front page election campaign news stories on the May 2005 general election in Ethiopia. Accordingly, fairness is defined as the simple inclusion of relevant election opponent in an election campaign news story. Therefore, story fairness is determined in terms of whether the story was one-sided or included opponents in the electoral contest. Table 1 and 2 below summarizes the proportion of fair and unfair stories as well as the proportion of fair and unfair stories that are dominated by each contesting political parties in the two newspapers

Table-1:

Front page Election Campaign News Story Fairness in *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* Newspapers.

Newspaper	Fair		Unfair		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Addis Zemen	17	36	30	64	47	100
Reporter	25	64	14	36	39	100

Research question number one asked whether the two newspapers under investigation include relevant election opponents or cover only one side. Findings from table-1 shows that out of the total of 47 stories the *Addis Zemen* newspaper has only 36% fair stories that include relevant election opponents whereas the majority (64%) of the stories are completely one sided or unfair. the *Reporter* newspaper, on the other hand, has exhibited a significant number (64%) of fair stories that included relevant opponents while the remainder 36% of the stories is one sided or unfair. When we compare the two newspapers, the *Reporter* newspaper has a large proportion (64%) of fair stories than the *Addis Zemen* newspaper, which only had 36%. The research hypothesis stating that election campaign news stories in both the sample newspapers are likely to be unfair than fair is only supported in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper, wherein, approximately two third of the stories are completely one sided or unfair. The fact that the majority (64%) of *Addis Zemen's* front page election campaign news stories are completely one-sided may however mean, that on aggregate one of the political parties in the electoral contest is likely to get a much more chance to be visible to voters through the

stories during the campaign period than other contending political parties. Moreover, it may also mean that the chances of readers encountering a story dominated by a single party are likely to be higher than that of the opposition. Given the fact that the *Addis Zemen* newspaper has published more stories that are one sided on average than the *Reporter* newspaper, one conditions which however should be met for the hypothesis to be totally supported or refuted is if a certain political party dominates both the fair and unfair stories in the coverage. Table two below summerises the proportion of fair and unfair stories dominated by the different contesting political parties which inturn shows the political party or parties that have enjoyed the domination in the coverage in the two sample newspapers.

Table-2:

Political Parties Dominance of Fair and Unfair Election Campaign News Stories in *Addis Zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers.

	Newspapers							
	Addis Zemen				Reporter			
	Fair		Unfair		Fair		Unfair	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
EPRDF Dominated	3	17.5	24	80	4	16	3	21
CUD Dominated	3	17.5	3	10	9	36	8	58
UEDF Dominated	2	12	2	7	4	16	1	7
Others Dominated	1	6	1	3	2	8	2	14
Neutral	8	47	-	-	6	24	-	-
Total	17	100	30	100	25	100	14	100

Table 2 indicates the party that has dominated coverage in both the fair and unfair stories in the two sample newspapers. Accordingly, in the *Addis Zemen* Newspaper EPRDF has dominated more than three fourth (80%) of the unfair stories, followed by CUD, dominating only 10 percent and, UEDF accounting for only 7 percent of the unfair stories and the rest 3% is dominated by non coalition parties. Considering the two sided or fair stories, while some 47 percent of the stories are neutral (meaning that no party has dominated coverage) equal proportion (17%) of the fair stories are dominated by EPRDF, and CUD, and the remaining 12%, and 6% of the fair stories are dominated by UEDF and other non coalition political parties respectively. Overall, EPRDF has dominated more than half (27) of the the total of 47 stories in Addis Zemene newspaper, followed by CUD, UEDF and Others which accounts for 6,4 and 2 number of both the one sided and fair stories respectively. On the other hand, in the *Reporter* newspaper, the CUD party has dominated morethan half (58%) of the unfair stories out of the total of 14 stories, followed by EPRDF, Other non-coalition parties and UEDF which have dominated 21, 14 and 7 percent of the unfair stories respectively. Considering just the fair or one sided stories, CUD party and candidates have still done better than the other contesting political parties by dominating 36% percent of the fair stories. While EPRDF and UEDF, have registered equal proportion (16%) of domination in the coverage of the fair stories, 24% of the fair stories have turn out to be neutral and the rest 8 percent of the stories is just dominated by Others. Overall, CUD party has enjoyed dominating half of the total of fair and unfair stories in the *Reporter newspaper*, followed by EPRDF, UEDF, and other non-coalition parties sharing 7, 5, and 4 of both the fair and unfair stories respectively.

The study hypothesis predicting that, front page election campaign news stories on the 2005 Ethiopian election in both the *Addis zemen* and the *Reporter* newspapers are likely to be unfair than fair, on condition that a certain political party dominates most of the stories is supported. While EPRDF dominates more than half of the 47 stories in *Addis Zemen* newspaper, CUD party enjoys dominating 17 of the 39 fair and unfair stories in the *Reporter* newspaper. The mere fact that two newspapers have significantly favored one contesting political party than the others during their coverage of the 2005 Ethiopian election just simply contradicts with the assumption of democracy and the principles of ethical reporting. According to Fico and Freedman (1999: 3)

The normative assumption of democracy is that voters consider the competing claims of candidates and support those with whom they most agree. But this assumption requires that voters be first exposed to the views of candidates, particularly through news media coverage of their campaigns. Correspondingly, the normative assumption for news organizations covering an election is that they report competing partisan claims in a fair and impartial manner.

Hence, what the above result from the two newspapers may mean that voters who depend on the news media for their information on the contending political parties during the electoral period were not exposed to a fair and rather impartial presentation of the views and assertions of each of the contesting candidates and political parties running for seat in the election.

4.1.2. Front Page Election Campaign News Story Balance.

Story balance in this study measures the extent to which election opponents are treated equally or evenhandedly relative to each other in the relevant election campaign news stories. To assess this, four components have been measured from each election campaign news stories, these components include; total paragraph space, prominence in

the lead paragraph, campaign statements of the contesting political parties appearing in the first half of the story, and candidates photograph space measured in centimeter square. On the basis of this four components, structural balance and partisan balance of stories were assessed in both newspapers. Story structural balance index is created by subtracting the number of components favoring a particular candidate or political party from the number of components favoring the opponent, and then the absolute value of that number is used. The resulting index could range from 0, indicating a story structurally balanced between the candidates (and also balanced on the partisan index), to 4, indicating that the same candidate and/or political was favored on each of the four components. On the other hand adding the number of components favoring a certain political party creates story partisan index and if the party or candidate is favored by most of the components then that story is judged to favor the party and hence the story is judged to be imbalanced.

Table- 3

Story Structural Balance Scores on the May 2005 Ethiopian Election in the Addis Zemen and the Reporter Newspapers.

Story Structural Balance	Score	Newspapers	
		<i>Addis Zemen</i>	Reporter
Most Balanced	0	17%	15%
	1	2%	13%
	2	17%	26%
	3	27%	31%
Most Imbalanced	4	37%	15%
Total Number of Stories		47	39

The higher the story scores in the structural balance measure in the above table, the more imbalanced the story is in its handling of the different contesting political parties on the 2005 Ethiopian election. Thus, a story that scores, for instance, 4 is judged the most balanced story as it gives equal paragraph space to statements and campaign assertions of the contesting candidates and political parties, as well as equal prominence for all candidates in the story lead, in the first half of the story and equal space of candidate pictures. The most imbalanced story on the other hand, gives such attention in the four components to only a particular candidate and/or political party. Consequently, findings from table 3 show that some 28 percent of the 2005 election campaign news stories in *The Reporter* newspaper are either the most balanced or are imbalanced by only one component, compared to 19 percent of same stories in the *Addis Zemen* that are the most balanced or are imbalanced by only a single component. Interestingly, however, nearly equal (17% in *Addis Zemen* and 15% in *The Reporter*) percentages of stories in both newspapers are the most balanced among the different candidates and/or political parties. Moreover, as it can be clearly seen from table 3, some 64 percent of the 2005 stories in *Addis Zemen* are imbalanced by three or four components, compared to 36 percent of the stories that are imbalanced by three or four components in *The Reporter* newspaper. On the other hand, while stories that are most balanced and that are the most imbalanced made up the same proportion (15%) of stories in *The Reporter* newspaper, some 37% of the stories are the most imbalanced and only 17% of the stories are the most balanced in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper. Research question number two asked whether front page campaign news stories in both the sample newspapers are structurally balanced or imbalanced. Overall, the election campaign news coverage on the 2005 Ethiopian election is significantly imbalanced in the structural dimensions of stories, as examined by measures applied in this study, in

both the *Addis Zemen* newspaper (wherein some 83 percent of the stories are imbalanced by one up to four components) and *The Reporter* newspaper (wherein some 85 percent of the stories are imbalanced by one up to four components). Hence research hypothesis predicting that front page election campaign stories to more likely be imbalanced than balanced is supported.

Table-4:

Partisan Balance of Stories on the May 2005 Ethiopian Election in the *Addis Zemen* and *The Reporter* Newspapers.

Story Partisan Balance	Newspapers	
	Addis Zemen	Reporter
Favors EPRDF	51%	23%
Favors CUD	13%	42%
Favors UEDF	10%	10%
Favors Others	9%	10%
Balanced	17%	15%
Total Number of Stories	47	39

The partisan balance of stories are assessed using the proportions of all stories that favored EPRDF, CUD, UEDF, Others or were evenly balanced (in the four components measured in each story) among the different political parties in the electoral contest. Accordingly, results from table 4 show that, in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper the ruling party, EPRDF, has dominated the partisan balance of just 51 percent of front page election campaign news stories, with CUD party dominating 13 percent, UEDF 10 percent, Others 9 percent and the rest 17 percent of the stories evenly balanced among the contesting political parties and candidates. In *The*

Reporter newspaper, on the other hand, the CUD party has dominated the partisan balance of just 42 percent of the election campaign news stories, with the ruling party EPRDF dominating the partisan balance of 23 percent, UEDF and Other non coalition political parties and candidates accounting for the same proportion (10 percent) of the partisan balance of the stories and the rest 15 percent evenly balanced among the different candidates and political parties. Research question number three asked whether assertions from election opponents presented equally prominently in election campaign news stories or gave more space and attention (prominence) to one political party than the other. Overall, the election campaign news coverage on the 2005 Ethiopian election is significantly imbalanced in terms partisan balance of stories, as examined by measures applied in this particular study, in both the *Addis Zemen* newspaper (in which EPRDF has been favored by well over half of the stories than other electoral opponents) and *The Reporter* newspaper (in which the CUD party has enjoyed dominating 42 percent of the stories).

Table-5:

Fairness and balance of campaign news stories in *Addis Zemen* and *The Reporter* Newspapers.

Story Characteristics	Newspaper			
	Addis Zemen		Reporter	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Fair and Balanced	8	17%	6	15%
Fair and Imbalanced	9	19%	19	49%
Unfair and imbalanced	30	64%	14	36%
Total	47	100%	39	100%

Table 5 above demonstrates the chances that readers have in encountering a story that is both fair and balanced in both *Addis Zemen* and *The Reporter* Newspapers. Accordingly, out of the total of 47 stories in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper, only 17 percent of the stories were both fair and balanced. However, more than two third (64 percent) of the stories were completely onesided (unfair) as well as imbalanced. On the other hand, out of the total of 39 stories in *The Reporter* newspaper only 15 percent of the stories are both fair and balanced, while some 36 percent of the stories are both unfair and imbalanced. As can be clearly seen from table 5 above a significant percentage (64%) of stories in Addis Zemen are both unfair and imbalanced compared to 36% of stories that are both unfair and imbalanced in The Reporter newspaper. Interestingly however, readers only have a one in six chance of encountering a story that is both fair and balanced in both newspapers. Overall, front page election campaign news stories in both news papers are significantly imbalanced and unfair favoring a particular political party than the opponents. Readers are most likely to encounter a story that is both unfair and imbalanced than stories that are both fair and balanced.

4.1.3. Political party story lead domination.

This section of the study deals with story lead dominance by political parties in particular, since the story lead is one area where the most important information is placed and if a certain political party's or candidates' assertions or campaign statements dominated the story lead, it is presumably supposed that the political party has been favored in the coverage. According to Stempel & Culbertson (1984) cited in Fico et al (2005), "The lead of a news story is usually where the most important items of a story lie. Whoever is dominant in the lead of the story is usually preferred in the coverage of the news story." Moreover, the political party that dominates the lead of a story is most likely to be

exposed to readers than other oppositions. With regard to this, Fico and Cote (1997:19) state that, “readers start stories at the lead, with fewer and fewer continuing to the end. Readers may never encounter a balance in a story that confines an opponent to the story's last half.”

Table 6:

Lead Dominance in *Addis Zemen* and *The Reporter* newspapers.

	Newspapers	
	Addis Zemen	Reporter
EPRDF Dominated Number of story Leads	23	6
Percent	50%	15%
CUD Dominated Number of story Leads	6	13
Percent	13%	33%
EUDF Dominated Number of story Leads	5	4
Percent	11%	10%
Others Dominated Number of story Leads	3	3
Percent	6%	8%
Balanced Number of story Leads	4	10
Percent	9%	26%
Neutral Number of story Leads	5	3
Percent	11%	8%

Table 6 above reflects the proportion of story paragraph leads that favored and/or dominated by each contending political party in the two newspapers. Accordingly, while the majority (23 out of 47) of the *Addis Zemen* story paragraph leads are dominated by EPRDF, only 9% (4 out of

47) of the leads were balanced and the rest 6(13%), 5(11%), and 3(6%) of the leads are dominated by CUD, UEDF and Other non coalition political parties respectively. On the other hand, the CUD party has dominated one third (33%) of the story lead in *The Reporter* newspaper, with EPRDF, UEDF and Other non coalition parties dominating 15%, 10%, and 8% of the story leads respectively. Overall, the same political parties (EPRDF in the *Addis Zemen* and the CUD party in *The Reporter* newspaper) that have dominated coverage in the partisan balance and the group of fair and unfair stories, have still got a better chance of being visible in the story lead in both newspapers. Research question four asked whether the story leads in the two newspapers under investigation are balanced in terms of lead prominence accorded to each contending political parties or imbalanced giving more prominence to certain political party than its opponents. Overall, story leads are significantly imbalanced in both newspapers by giving one political party more dominance and coverage than its opponent.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

Differences were found in the overall fairness of stories on the 2005 election by the *Reporter* and *Addis Zemen* newspapers considered in terms of stories that include relevant election contesting candidates and political parties. Accordingly, when we compare the two newspapers, the *Reporter* newspaper has a large proportion (64%) of fair stories that have included relevant opponents in the election than the *Addis Zemen* newspaper, which only had 36%. Nonetheless, when both fair and unfair stories dominated by political parties are tested, stories are considerably unfair in both the sample newspapers; while the CUD party notably dominates stories in the *Reporter* newspaper, stories in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper have showed significant favoritism to the ruling party EPRDF. In a similar manner, stories in the *Reporter* newspaper gave more

dominance in the leads to the CUD party, while stories in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper gave more dominance in the lead to EPRDF.

This study also shows that stories in both the sample newspapers to be significantly imbalanced than balanced in the structural dimensions of stories according to measures applied in the study. Hence, approximately equal proportion (83% in *Addis Zemen* and 85% in the *Reporter* newspaper) of the stories is imbalanced by one up to four component measures. Moreover, findings from this study indicate that front page election campaign stories in both newspapers to be imbalanced in the partisan balance of stories exhibiting more favorable treatment to the ruling party EPRDF in the *Addis zemen* newspaper and to the CUD party in the *Reporter* newspaper. Overall, front page election campaign news stories in both newspapers are significantly imbalanced and unfair favoring a particular political party than the opponents. Readers are most likely to encounter a story that is both unfair and imbalanced than stories that are both fair and balanced. Ofcourse readers have a one in six chance of encountering a story that is perfectly balanced and fair in both newspapers.

Hence, election campaign news stories in these newspapers gave more visibility to a particular political party than other oppositions, which may mean that the opposition's candidates and political parties have been denied of their right to get their views presented in a fair and balanced manner. According to Fico and Cote (1997) however:

From both a journalistic and public standpoint, candidates have an accepted legitimacy in seeking to have their views placed before the public. Many of these views focus on contentions over specific policy prescriptions that are arguably matters of opinion rather than verifiable right or wrong. In essence then, an election should maximize the value of fairness and balance as approximately equal treatment of the candidates in the visibility given such views in stories.

Nonetheless, findings from this study suggest that certain political parties are much more likely to get dominant coverage than other oppositions, and yet, readers are much more likely to encounter stories that are dominated by these political parties than other oppositions. What in effect this may mean is that, professional journalism ethics mandating opposition views to be placed equally and fairly are violated. Moreover, results from this study suggest that, the right of the public to get a fair representation of the views and positions of opponents during the election period in the media is far from existent, as the readers of these two newspapers during the study period have apparently received more information about the positions and views of a certain political party than its opponent.

The results of this study further indicate that the two newspapers have systematically favored one political party than the other. Consequently, while the privately owned the *Reporter* newspaper has favored the CUD party, which appears to be the major opposition party in the election, the state owned *Addis Zemen* newspaper has made much of its coverage in favor of the ruling party EPRDF. This may suggest the existence of systematic favoritism to political parties that the newspaper owners and/or journalists have ideas in common with. Moreover, it may also suggest that readers reading the *Addis Zemen* newspaper will judge the newspaper as being in favour of the ruling party EPRDF and label the paper as pro government, whereas readers reading the *Reporter* newspaper might be convinced that the paper is pro opposition. Nonetheless, further studies adopting survey and focused interview techniques should be conducted to illuminate whether this suggestions hold water or not.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Conclusion and Implication

5.1. Conclusion and Implication

An important question in this study has largely concentrates on whether any news coverage unfairness and imbalance has occurred on the May 2005 Ethiopian election during the two months prior to election date in the *Reporter* and *Addis Zemen* newspapers. The findings of this study shed light on the fact that the professional journalistic standard of reporting an opposing point of view in a fair and balanced manner not to be displayed in quite a large proportion of stories that are published in the two sample newspapers during the study period. Though, the *Reporter* newspaper has included relevant opponents in a reasonably large percentage of the campaign news stories than the *Addis Zemen*, there was an overall lack of fairness and balance in stories covering the 2005 election campaign in both newspapers. Taken separately, stories in the two newspapers are quite largely imbalanced in both structural and partisan dimensions measured in the study, wherein a single party enjoys dominating coverage in both partisan and structural ways than its opponents. Moreover, readers have only one out of six chances of encountering a story that is both fair and balanced in both newspapers. This study also suggests the existence of systemic favoritism in the two newspapers. While the *Addis Zemen* newspaper has given a considerable amount of its coverage to the ruling party EPRDF, the *Reporter* newspaper has made much of its coverage in favor of the main opposition political party, CUD. Overall, the results of this study suggest that there is a lot to be done with regard to upholding to the standards of balance and fairness according to measures applied in the study in both the

sample newspapers. And this really matters, as the lack of fairness and balance in reporting may needlessly arouse readers' perception of media organizations as partisan and unreliable. Readers are most likely to perceive bias in stories that featured a single candidate and/or political party in the lead paragraph and/or a story as a whole. In addition, the lack of fairness and balance exhibited in the two newspapers has implication for the strengthening and development of a pluralistic and democratic society, wherein the media are supposed to provide a platform for political discussions and serve as an outlet for the expression of dissent. Nowadays, the public's dependence on political information and candidates' campaign issues and position has increased and the mass media role of providing adequate, fair and balanced information to help people decide among differing candidates becomes even crucial. It is therefore imperative for media organizations to stick to the standards of fairness and balance in election reporting in particular and issue conflict report in general. Moreover, lack of fairness and balance is critical for the proper functioning of the media organizations themselves, which depend on the mass audience for their survival and economic viability. Hence, it is quite important that the media organization's, and media personnel's adapt the measures applied in this study or develop a certain strategy of measuring their own coverage and adjust the problems and strive to achieve the qualities of fairness and balance in their coverage of elections in the future.

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Appendix

Coding manual

Coder Name _____ Newspaper Title _____

Date of publication _____

Unique story ID No	Page Type	Actor	party	Coalition	Fairness	Prominence	Position	Space in cm	Candidate Photo/cm