

**A Comparative Analysis of the Coverage of
NEBE in Addis Zemen and Reporter
Newspapers**

BY

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Abstract

These days, the role of media is vital in informing, educating, and controlling the malpractices of democratic institutions in any country, regardless of their level of development. But this importance becomes even more crucial in countries that are undergoing transitions to full-fledged democracies. As elections are the gateway to democracy, the role of the media should be prominent when it comes to covering elections.

In this study, the researcher aimed to analyze and compare coverage by the government and the private press of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) while the May 2005 general elections were being conducted. To this effect, the researcher mainly used content analysis to investigate coverage of two purposely selected newspapers, the government-run Amharic daily, *Addis Zemen*, and the private biweekly *Reporter*, in order to examine the media's role during elections, keeping in mind its watchdog and agenda setting roles. A total of 575 stories in 118 publications were reviewed. Supplementary to the quantitative data, qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews. Data was analyzed using an appropriate statistical tool (SPSS). Accordingly, *Addis Zemen* was found to be partisan to the government. In particular, editorials were found to be biased towards the NEBE. In contrast, *Reporter* was highly critical of the NEBE. It published stories that appeared more neutral and positive-toned. In light of the findings, the researcher concluded that *Addis Zemen* was unethical in the way it covered the May elections. The paper failed to meet professional standards. Based on the findings and reviewed literature, the researcher recommended that journalists working for the government-affiliated *Addis Zemen* needed to work towards impartiality, the core of journalistic ethics, in all kinds of reporting and particularly in such delicate matters as elections. One of the ways they could develop sensitivity to neutrality, it was recommended, would be by undergoing professional training in journalism.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

As it is mentioned by numerous researchers, when elections go well they can be considered a turning point in any nation's road to democracy. If they are badly run, the country's road to building democracy can easily be destroyed and result in a dictatorship. This is why the role of a democratic institution like the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is so important. This institution has to be as independent as possible. The press in its turn has to play a professional role. Both the press and the national electoral board have a responsibility to be impartial and independent of bias. This is vital if they wish to gain the necessary recognition and credibility from the public which is needed for building democracy in the country.

To this end, this research focuses on a comparative study of both the private and government press in their coverage of the NEBE. The first chapter introduces the issue, while the second chapter offers an extensive view of related literature. Chapter Three presents the design of the study, while chapter four analyses all data. Chapter five concludes the thesis and offers various recommendations.

1.1 Background and statement of the problem

The media has an enormous responsibility to be impartial, professional, objective and responsible in their reporting about elections and the neutrality of electoral institutions.

For free and fair elections, government bodies at various levels and the electoral board in particular has to act neutrally while respecting human rights, including freedom of expression, association and assembly, as well as the right to be free from intimidation, all of which are central to an effective electoral exercise.

For any democratic society to conduct free and fair elections, the importance and the role of an impartial, non-partisan and transparent electoral commission is unquestionable. Hayward (1987:64) argues that a democracy may work only if relevant political forces can find institutions that will provide reasonable guarantees that their interests will not be affected in a highly adverse manner in the course of democratic competition.

The present National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (hereafter referred to as NEBE) was established during the transitional government period under proclamation number 111/1995, Article 3, and proclaimed to be accountable to the council of representatives of the transitional government or its successor. The board was given a guarantee to be able to conduct elections without the influence of any outsider under the transitional charter Article

102/1. From its conception, the board has conducted three nationwide elections and several other by-elections where the mandates of various elected representatives were terminated due to various reasons. The board has seven members that are delegated by the council of representatives, taking into consideration national representation, technical competence and integrity. The main focal point in election administration staffing is to appoint committed professionals with a high degree of integrity, insulated from bias and any political pressure.

The NEBE has been allocated a great deal of power and many duties under the electoral law of Ethiopia in Article 5. It has the responsibility of carrying out, in accordance with the supreme law of Ethiopia, investigating, cancelling election results and ordering a re-election where it has evidence of fraudulent practice in the course of an election, and organising and training the manpower required for conducting elections. With such and other responsibilities, the electoral board remains the most important institution in ensuring an effective and competent election process.

However, the election process does not only require this, but also necessitates the public receiving information and ideas, and consequently the mass communication media has the right and also the duty to impart such information.

It is crystal clear that in the election process, the media has an important role to play in creating an atmosphere conducive for debating the political parties' merit and campaigning, and reporting about the activities of the NEBE. On the other hand, the electoral board's duties and responsibilities in counting the votes honestly and in reporting the results in a faithful and professional manner is the cornerstone for a competitive electoral process. Moreover, according to Article 19 (1994:15), the electoral process can only be effective if the judiciary, the military and the police force conduct themselves impartially and if the ruling party does not hinder in one way or another the opposing political parties' rights to spread and disseminate their messages through either the private media or government-owned media. Finally, it is also important for the election process to be effective and competent, and this includes the degree to which the media is free to criticize the government and to report on events during the election process, thereby allowing the public in general to be aware of events as they happen and helping them make informed choices.

Elections are vital events in democratic countries. Particularly in emerging democracies, they often occur in a highly charged environment in which everyone is looking for something to go wrong. .

Election management bodies should be open with the media about their activities. They should also outline transparent and defensible guidelines for media access to their events and briefings.

The cornerstones for electoral board and media relationships are therefore understanding, transparency and confidence. The relationships should be symbiotic. Schnellinger (2001:4) states that the public and the media must understand the operation and principles of election management bodies. Transparency allows the media to fulfil its role of “watchdog” by having access to all procedures of the election management bodies, and trust matters most. Therefore, she argues that in playing its “watchdog” role, the media has a responsibility during elections in helping control fraud, corruption and unfair practices. Without the trust of the media, an election commission’s work and the creditability of the vote will be imperilled. Voters and the media must be confident that the vote is secret and secure.

In light of the above general problems, and the significance and importance of the relationship between media and election management bodies in the Ethiopian case, there seem to be doubts about the independence of the NEBE. This was primarily seen to be the private press’s major concern, as during analysis several reports that are quite blunt and critical about the impartiality of the NEBE were found.

Moreover, it is quite a common thing to hear many people complaining about the independence of the NEBE. In addition, various opposition parties and independent candidates have repeatedly expressed their concern about the independence of the electoral board, to the extent of proposing to the incumbent government that they re-organize the electoral board so that it

includes representatives from all contending political parties and other people from professional and civic organizations.

With regard to the media in Ethiopia, there seem to be a general tendency to label the print media as either the private press, often considered anti-government in reporting, or the state-owned press, which is usually labelled pro-government in the way they present their stories. The present study focuses on comparative analysis in the coverage and reporting of both the private and state-owned press, on the issue of independence of the NEBE and the role of media in covering the functioning of the NEBE, and the implication of this for the ongoing democratization process in Ethiopia.

1.2 The Research Question

This study addresses the stated problems by trying to answer the following interrelated questions that are central to the topic:

1. To what extent do the private and state press differ in their total coverage concerning the neutrality of the NEBE?
2. To what extent do the private and state press differ in their tone of coverage concerning the neutrality of the NEBE?
3. What is the attitude of key stakeholders, especially of voters, about the role of media outlets with regard to exposing the malpractice and independence of the NEBE?

1.3 Hypothesis

Based on the background, problem statement and the research questions, the following hypothesis will guide the research.

- There is more likelihood that the government media will be positive in covering the independence of the NEBE, than the private media in Ethiopia.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To promote the proper social and democratic functioning of the press media in reporting on matters that relate to the performance of democratic institutions, especially that of election management bodies.
- To assess how the press, both private and state, cover and report about the functions of the NEBE.
- To assess the attitude of key stakeholders about the role of the press in covering the independence and performance of the election management body.

1.5 significance of the study

In a democracy, elections are not a once-off phenomenon, but rather regular and periodic processes. Moreover, the media has a vital role to play by remaining impartial in their reporting about the functioning of electoral management bodies so that the general public receives correct information. In addition, the election management body's responsibility to remain

independent of any outside influence whatsoever in its execution of the election process in order for elections to produce genuine results and express the will of the people, is of paramount importance. Taking these facts into consideration, the present study may have the following contributions to make:

- It could alert media organizations to hold onto the real journalistic role by avoiding bias and impartiality in covering the independence of the NEBE in particular and elections in general.
- It could also be beneficial to the NEBE in reminding it of the importance of remaining independent and holding to the internationally accepted standards and principles of an efficient and legitimate electoral body.
- It could serve as reference for other researchers who may like to carry out further studies on the subject.

1.6. Limitation of the study

The present study set out to achieve a comprehensive analysis of state and private media coverage of the independence of the NEBE in its conduct of the May 2005 national election in Ethiopia. Since the number of newspapers published in the country is quite large and because of the time constraints and lack of resources, any attempt to cover all publications in the country was impossible. Therefore, the researcher was obliged to choose only two major Amharic language newspapers, *Addis Zemen* daily newspaper from the state-owned sector, and *Reporter*, a bi-weekly newspaper from the private sector. It

should also be noted that the comparison of a daily newspaper with a bi-weekly newspaper could have some effect on the results obtained in the study. However, it is the researcher's firm belief that the results obtained from the analysis of these two sample newspapers illustrate vital concerns regarding Ethiopian media coverage of the independence of the NEBE.

The study also investigates the attitude of key stakeholders, primarily voters, in the major cities and towns of the country, concerning the role they think the media should play in informing them about the functions and independence of the NEBE. However, because of time and distance constraints, the study excluded some towns such as Bahir Dar and Mekelle from its analysis. In addition, as the country was experiencing a relatively unstable political situation right after the announcement of the May 2005 election results, unfortunately the administration of the oral interviews coincided with this crisis. Consequently, some respondents were somewhat reluctant to express their feelings overtly, probably because of fear, and others reacted in an unusually emotional manner when expressing their attitudes. This resulted in significant difficulties when analysing the responses gathered through oral interviews that were conducted in selected cities and towns, as many biased and some even incomprehensible for the purpose of genuine and effective interpretation. As a result, a decision was taken to avoid using the data gathered as a whole, and instead some responses were purposely selected in order to illustrate how voters reacted towards the role of the media in informing them about the neutrality of the NEBE.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Concepts of Democratic election

The hallmark of a democratic society is the ability of the general public to choose its government through an open, free and fair process. Free elections are the key for democracy. Alger (1989:5) states that:

The centrepiece of a representative democratic system is the process of selection of representatives by the public through elections. Elections are intended to be the principal form of political participation on the part of the public. Since in order to have democracy we must have to some degree, a government of the people, let us immediately ask when do we find a "governing people", the demos in the act or the role of governing? The answer is: a democratic process encapsulated in elections and electing.

From the above explanation we understand that elections are central for a democratic system. Furthermore, according to Alger, there are two essential elements conceived by prominent thinkers and scholars as essential in a true democracy. These are:

- *First, alternative choice must be available to the public. Central to the idea of an operative democracy is alternative choices competing for public acceptance, the principal form of which is of course, alternative candidates for election. Choice is at the core of democracy, the absence of choice means that democracy is lessened to one degree or another, depending on the nature of the lost voice (Ibid:6)*
- *The second basic element of democracy is that the public must have in its hands what it takes to make a political decision on those choices in a meaningful fashion, that is, to make such choices, as they relate them to their own values, beliefs, and concerns, as effectively as they are able to and act on them. People give direction to the government through their electoral choices (Ibid: 7)*

This shows that in a democratic system there has to be meaningful and extensive competition for positions of government power through regular free and fair elections, and all-inclusive political participation in the election of leaders and policies, such that no major social group is prevented from exercising the right of citizenship, civil and political liberties, secured through political equality under a rule of law sufficient to ensure that citizens can develop and advocate their views and interests and contest policies and offices.. (McConnell and Becker, 2002).

2.1.1 What is an election?

An election is simply one form of political participation, and has been defined in various ways by different scholars. Robston's definition is as follows: "An election is a method of choosing among candidates for some post or office, and elections have become the only fully respectable method for selecting political leaders and governors throughout the world". (Roberston, 1993:157). In a similar manner, the Encyclopaedia Britannica defines an election as "the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting or rejecting a political proposition, by voting". (1993, vol.4: 423).

The definition of an election is presented in different ways by different authors. But whatever way it is presented, its central idea represents the collective decision of people on a particular issue or the way to come up with some sort of consensus on a particular circumstance. (Lijphart, 1991:1).

A comprehensive analysis of definitions of different authors is presented as follows. Palmer (1975:1) defines elections as major agencies of political socialization and participation. Consequently, according to Palmer, they involve individual and collective decisions which directly affect, and are affected, by the total political system. He argues that elections are the most conspicuous and revealing aspects of most contemporary political systems. During elections, the different components of the political system such as governmental institutions, civic societies, parties, and other components are on display, and their role is an easily observable phenomenon. Hence these components highlight and dramatize the basic nature and actual functioning of the political system as a whole.

For Mandefro (1994:1), the general notion of an election corresponds to the democratic method of creating a representative organ of the people so as to influence leaders in policy making. However, this doesn't mean that elections are limited only to democratic societies. They could apply in non-democratic societies as well, without having democratic content, representing the same meaning as appointing, nominating or designating, and this fact underlines the idea that the application of elections prevails in various forms in different systems. Nevertheless, in all systems it has a common character which signifies the usage of elections for the purpose of creating a representative body.

Rokkan (1970:147) defines an election in a somewhat narrower and simpler way, while elaborating to include the purpose of elections.

Elections are institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders by some or all of the recognized members of an organization, whether the organization is a club, a company, a party or territorial polity.

The scope and structure of the organization, the position of the office that is going to field the kind and qualification of membership for participation in the choice of officer, and the procedures or rules of the organization in translating the aggregated choices of members into an authoritative collective decision, are some of the important dimensions that he mentions in describing the electoral institutions (Ibid).

From the above definitions, one can understand that elections are wide and complex activities of people. Their wider role is highlighted because of their direct impact on citizens, leaders and the political system, while their complexity emanates from the fact that the electoral process and institutions are described or affected by a number of dimensions as mentioned above.

2.1.1.1 The role and significance of elections

Elections are one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specified, formal decisions. Where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a

society and as a method for seeking obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual's freedom (Ibele, 1971:292).

The various significances of elections have tempted almost all countries to conduct elections. Thus as the subject was paid more attention by social scientists, attempts of various kinds were made to study and identify its role and functions. However, these attempts faced challenges due to the fact that elections' meaning and role is determined accordingly to the purpose for which they are conducted. Palmer (1975:7) describes this idea as follows:

Elections obviously have different meanings and play different roles in different political systems. In some they have a definitely stabilizing effect, while in others they have a definitely destabilizing effect, in some others they seem to clearly contribute to the political development while in others they lead to a political decay

In a non-democratic society, rather than being used to express the human rights of citizens, they are used as thinly disguised instruments of the government. (Mandefro, 1994:17). Here elections have attracted little significance and tend to be considered by society as a customary act which brings no change to their daily life or political system. (Ibid).

In relation to Africa, elections are recent phenomena, materialising for the first time in many countries during the 1990s' wave of democratization. Many African states during the years 1989-94 entered into a multi-party election system. This has led numerous people to believe that there is something basically new about such a competitive process in Africa. Of course, some of

these elections in Africa have resulted in the incumbent government and leaders to relinquish power in a peaceful political transition. But it should also be noted that this is not only the case, as other elections have resulted in election fraud and have thus allowed the incumbent governments to remain in power for as long as they wish to do so. (Chubal, 1998:250). Furthermore, Berouk and Demiessie (2005:5) believe:

The conventional wisdom holds that, despite the political overture of the 1990's there is "no place for democracy in Africa", simply because there is no foundation to build on. Adhering to this line of argument, political scientists closely studying African politics maintain that, in Africa, "the prime purpose of elections will remain the legitimation of whatever regime currently holds governmental power...[and] are far from being autonomous operations: they reflect the character of the political order and especially the degree of risk incumbents are willing to tolerate" According to these commentators, African elections are in simple terms "window-dressing rituals" with no real political meaning after which the stuffing of the ballot boxes begins behind closed doors. They represent merely an artificial exercise, the results of which are instinctively manipulated by the party in power in order to prevent the election of opposition parties despite the fact that the people might courageously vote for change.

This is in marked contrast to democratic societies, where elections are used as institutionalized procedures for the maintenance and democratization of political systems (Ginsberg and Stone, 1986:5). This is done by assuring legitimacy and allegiance. That is, rulers in such societies claim their position through the formal procedures of an election to confirm the will of the society. Hence, they will be able to gain much popular support to maintain the existence of the system (Ibid). The assumption is that citizens only elect those persons who best serve their interests, and this entails due effort on the part of the elected in order to stay in power and be elected again. Such practices

guarantee the citizen certain rights, and ensure them the leverage to avoid those officials who are not capable of performing their office duties (Ibid).

The role and function of elections could also be seen in terms of the individual citizen in particular and the political system in general. For the individual they are used as a device of political participation and policy influence through their representatives, whereas on the part of the political system, they are used as a means of system maintenance. Turbulence in the system is averted best if positions are fielded through elections. This process will legitimize the system and thus acquire viability and durability. (Palmer, 1975:7).

Summarizing the above points, Palmer (1975) further states that elections have varying significances, but are generally, however, considered as devices for legitimacy, identification, integration, communication, participation, socialization and mobilization, as well as for political choice and political control.

2.1.3 International Standards of Democratic Elections

The pressure for the standardization of electoral principles continued after the establishment of franchise rules, in order to derive legitimate representation through a formal procedure acceptable to all. Following this, electoral principles have determined registration, voting rights, order at polling

stations, the casting of votes, countering of choice and calculation of outcomes (Rokkan, 1978:152). These principles in some countries are stated and effected by constitutional laws, whereas in others, a statutory body is established which is responsible for this purpose and for all electoral activity independently without any intervention (Mandefro, 1994:31).

Another important aspect of a large scale democracy, according to Dahl (1988:86), is the presence of free, fair and frequent elections where elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.

Electoral principles should also entail the concepts of universal suffrage, equal suffrage, and free suffrage. Universal suffrage consists in electoral principles which guarantee all citizens the right to elect and be elected without any discrimination. It is the formal constitutional or statutory recognition of citizens' right to vote, and to run for public office, and is common to democratic states, offering people a substantive and confidence building role (IPU, 1993:31).

In the same way, the principle of equal suffrage requires the weight of votes of citizens to be equal independent of difference in social, economic and political status. (Fitsum, 1988: 27).

But in reality there is no single country which has absolutely adopted universal suffrage. All countries in the world impose restrictions with respect to age, citizenship, mental ability and other criteria. In some parts of the world, social and economic criteria are there informally for the variety and weight of citizens. (Ibid: 28).

It is obvious that in any system, in order to exercise electoral rights, citizens have to be of an age where they are aware of their civic duties. Citizenship and residency are another important qualification of exercising franchise or electoral rights. A person to vote or be elected to office must be a citizen either by birth or naturalization, and is often required to have been a resident for more than a fixed time limit stated by law. The right to exercise electoral rights is also restricted in most systems, for example if one is mentally deficient or one doesn't finish the penalty for crime that he or she was convicted of. (IPU, 1993:4).

However, the legal framework should clearly state the circumstances under which a person's suffrage right may be curtailed or suspended, in what manner and to what degree. Any limitation or restriction has to be justifiable according to accepted principles. The principle of natural justice requires that any class of citizen disqualified from voting be known in advance. Since the right of suffrage is a fundamental human right, such disqualification should

be clearly laid down in the legal framework and not to be subject to the arbitrary direction of an institution or a person. (IDEA, 2002:34).

Free elections which can ensure the will of the majority are regarded as one of the criteria of any democracy. The principle of free suffrage is best stated as follows:

To be free means that the votes shall be left in the untrammelled exercise, whether by civil or military authority, of his right or privilege, there is no impediment or restraint of any charter shall be imposed on him, either directly or indirectly, where by he shall be or prevented from participation at the polls (Mandefro, 1994:20).

Moreover, free elections do not only refer to the situation on polling day, the time for opening and closing, keeping order in polling place, guaranteed safety of voters at the polling place and so on. It also includes the candidates' rights to express their political views without restriction, freedom to complain and the availability of independent media which are free from any restraint and, most importantly, the existence of an independent, impartial and neutral Election Management Body (EMB). Therefore, the application of free suffrage has a vital impact on the result of any election. (Ibid, 2-22).

A free and fair election requires the state to pass laws. For this reason, an election must follow clear rules and procedures to avoid mistakes and corruption, and the laws of the country must support and enforce these rules fairly. Needless to say, these rules have to meet international electoral standards. According to the IDEA (International Institution for Democracy and

Electoral Assistance), international standards for democratic elections are necessary to ensure democratic elections and the legal frameworks are intended to identify electoral standards which contribute to uniformity, reliability, consistency, accuracy, and overall professionalism in elections. (IDEA, 2002:5).

Furthermore, the IDEA (2002:7) states that the legal frameworks for democratic elections in a country should observe the various international and regional organizations' declarations and conventions on human rights and other relevant legal documents. The most important of these instruments include the following:

- *The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights;*
- *The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;*
- *The 1950 European convention (together with its protocols) for the protection of Human and Fundamental Freedoms;*
- *The 1990 Document of the Copenhagen meeting of the conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE);*
- *The 1948 American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of man;*
- *The 1969 American Conventions on Human Rights; and*
- *The 1989 African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.*

The formal applicability of international standards to each particular country will depend upon its international undertakings in relation to such documents. This has been explained by the IDEA (2002:8) as follows:

When a country's legal framework is being reviewed, it is a signatory to an international treaty or convention, the provision of such a treaty of convention incorporating electoral standards are directly applicable and might even have a constitutional or a legal status therein. Other UN instruments to which the country is not a party, or which lack a strictly binding force, may be seen as incorporating electoral standards of a strong persuasive value for that country.

There are also supplementary sources for the international legal standards for elections. These are the final reports on elections from observers' missions (international or domestic), the requirement of international instruments to which the country is a party, which impact on election laws, and model codes of conduct addressing election issues developed by international, governmental or non-governmental organizations (Ibid).

The importance of assessing a country's legal framework based on international standards is that they will provide a set of constructive suggestions for corrections, improvements and possible best practices to strengthen the legislation. At the same time, another country's particular system or practice of legislation should not be considered to be ideal or directly transferable (Ibid).

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned primary and supplementary sources for internationally accepted standards of electoral legal frameworks, the electoral law and the constitution of a particular country that promotes free, fair and democratic election is required to pass laws which according to IMPACS (2004:11) guarantee the following major human and democratic rights:

- *Each and every citizen has the right to participate as a voter and as a candidate no matter what his or her class, caste, gender or religion.*
- *Elections take place at regular intervals, so that the people can review or change their choice of governing party.*
- *The voting procedure gives everyone the right to a vote that is secret and will be accurately counted.*
- *The operation of the election is controlled by an election management commission that is independent of politicians and the government. Members of*

the commission should not belong to any political party and should be trustworthy members of the community. Anyone should be able to complain to the commission about election irregularities. The commission should act quickly and fairly and everyone should respect its decisions.

These internationally accepted standards of legal frameworks for elections will enhance the creditability of and public confidence in elections and will also provide increased legitimacy. It means that the people accept that the winning party has the right to be the government and to make decisions affecting everyone. It also means other countries of the world will recognize the government's power (IDEA, 2002:10).

2.2 Election Management Bodies (EMBs)

In any democratic society where there is an established system and institutions, election administration is handled by national and local governments whose neutrality and fairness are generally accepted by the electorate. But, in emerging democracies, there has been an increasing trend to establish an independent Election Management Body (EMB). It is an important step in building a democratic system in general, and building a tradition of independence and impartiality in particular, as well as building the confidence of the electorate and political parties in the electoral process (IMPACS, 2004:5).

Berouk and Demessie (2005:5) write about the independence of democratic institutions, mainly that of the electoral commissions, as follows:

This institution ought to be independent, competent and perceived as completely fair by all the candidates and parties participating in the electoral process. Further, the institutions 'esteem' will depend, in large measure, on its ability to handle election-related complaints. Only in this way, can this institution build the confidence of the electorate and parties alike which is essential to generate a credible electoral process. However, in Africa's nascent but fragile democracies, the responsibility for elections is usually conferred to an institution which is not properly insulated from the political pressure and control of political forces, especially the incumbent party, that have an interest in the outcome of the elections.

Therefore, administering democratic elections requires that EMB's be, and be seen to be, impartial and independent of government or other influence. This is a critical area, as the election administration machinery makes and implements important decisions that can influence the outcome of the elections. (IDEA, 2002:38).

2.2.1 International standards and legal framework of EMBs

International standards and legal frameworks require that EMBs be established and operated in a manner that ensures the independent and impartial administration of elections. In this case, an independent EMB means autonomous and impartial. As Hayward (1987:64) puts it, democracy may work only if relevant political forces can find institutions that would provide reasonable guarantees that their interests would not be affected in a highly adverse manner in the course of democratic competition.

There are some important points that can serve as internationally accepted standard and legal framework benchmarks in administering democratic elections. Among other things, the size and composition of membership of the

EMBs, as well as the appointment and removal of members, and other many factors which could directly or indirectly affect the independence and impartiality of the EMB. Consideration has to be taken in the formation of EMBs. The administrative structure from central to the polling station has to be clearly defined by the legal frameworks, such as outlined in the constitution, and electoral laws. It is critical that these legal frameworks define the relationship between the central EMB and the lower-level election bodies, as well as the relationship between all election bodies and the executive government authorities. (IDEA, 2002:38).

2.2.1:1 Duties and functions of EMBs

According to the international standards for legal framework of EMBs, the election commission faces an enormous task. IDEA (2002:41) recommends the following particular duties and functions for EMBs:

- *Ensuring that election officials and staff responsible for the administration of the election are well trained and act impartially and independently of any political interest;*
- *Ensuring that clear voting procedures are established and made known to the voting public;*
- *Ensuring that voters are informed and educated concerning the election processes, contesting political parties and candidates;*
- *Ensuring the registration of voters and updating voter registers;*
- *Ensuring the secrecy of the vote;*
- *Ensuring the integrity of the ballot through appropriate measures to prevent unlawful and fraudulent voting; and*
- *Ensuring the integrity of the process for the transparent counting, tabulating and aggregating votes.*

The functions and duties of EMBs also include, in some cases, certification of final electoral results, delimitation of electoral campaign finance and

expenditure, and research, advice to government and/or parliament, and international liaison (Ibid).

2.2.1:2 Operation of EMB's

The primary objective of the international standard and legal framework is to guide the EMB and enable it to achieve delivery of free and fair election. Thus the EMBs should operate independently, transparently and impartially and must serve the interests of all citizens and election participants. To this end, the critical attributes of a free and fair election and that of the EMB, according to the IDEA, (2002, 42-3) include the following points:

- *Independence and impartiality:*

The functioning of the EMB should not be subject to the influence of any other person, authority or political party. Levels of independence are difficult to measure, as necessary evidence is only really available for public scrutiny, but perceptions about EMB independence are in any case almost as important as the actual, but indiscernible. A perceived lack of independence often raised by losing electoral contestants in need of a scapegoat is sometimes so serious it taints the legitimacy of the entire electoral process.

- *Efficiency and effectiveness*

These are the integral components of the creditability of election. The lack of it leads to clashes and breakdown of law and order.

- *Professionalism*

The administration of elections should be handled by specialized groups of highly trained and committed expertise.

- *Impartial and speedy adjudication*

The legal framework should have to consider mechanisms of adjudication of electoral complaints in a timely manner.

- *Transparency*

In this regard the international standard and legal framework underline that the election commission should be a model of transparency. The overall credibility of an electoral process is substantially dependent on all relevant groups (including political parties, government, civil society and the media), being aware of and participating in the debate surrounding the formation of the electoral structure and process, and as well as the function of EMB. Though the level of transparency in the work of EMB is important, it is often overlooked as an important factor that when parties and voters are given insight into the basis for decision making, they tend to accept EMB decision more willingly.

2.3 National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)

In any democratic society, especially in emerging democracies, in order to conduct free and fair elections, the importance and the role of an impartial, non-partisan and transparent electoral board or EMB is unquestionable. As is

the case in many other emerging democracies, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) was established during the transitional period under proclamation number 111/1995, Article 3, to administer free and fair elections in the country.

The electoral board of Ethiopia has been given lots of power and duties under article 5 of the electoral law of Ethiopia which is proclaimed according to the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (proclamation no: 111 of 1998), as amended by proclamation no 438 of 2005. Among some of its duties, the board has the responsibilities of carrying out the election in accordance with the supreme law of Ethiopia, which includes managing all elections in the country, developing regulations governing the conduct of elections, promoting a non-partisan education campaign, organizing and training and distributing the manpower necessary for conducting elections, and the necessary logistics to investigate, cancel results and order re-elections where it has evidence of fraudulent practice in the course of elections.

Indeed, the constitution established the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) to conduct in an impartial manner free and fair elections in federal and state constituencies (Article 102 section 1). With all these responsibilities, the electoral board remains the most important institution in insuring an effective, competent, fair and free election process.

2.3.1 The structure and function of NEBE

As it is mentioned above, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia was established by Article 102 of the 1995 constitution to undertake its duties as an impartial and autonomous agency. The members of NEBE are "appointed by the house of people representatives upon the recommendation of the prime minister" (Article 102, section 2), on the basis of national representation, professional competence, integrity and experience. To this end the board is supposed to be "independent of any influence". But this mode of appointment is criticized in Berouk and Demessie (2005:13) as follows:

This mode of appointment is bound to be controversial as the present members are all appointed by the EPRDF-dominated and one-sided parliament, thus running the risk of not being perceived as politically neutral and dependably credible when discharging its duties.

Whatever the case, the Board, according to the constitution and the electoral law of the country, was established among other things on the basis of competence and integrity. The main focal point here in election administration staffing is to bring up committed professionals with a high degree of integrity, insulated from bias and political pressure.

The National Electoral Board is led by the chairman of the Board with the support of the managing body - the secretariat - which is headed by the chief executive and a deputy chief. The NEBE has seven board members, whereas the secretariat is staffed by 170 permanent officials and 150 election officers working during election time. The secretariat recruits and trains around

150,000 polling station and constituency election officers (Berouk and Demessie, 2005:13).

In the course of conducting the May 2005 third regional and parliamentary election, the NEBE exerted all its efforts to maximize its operation to a level better than when compared to the past two elections it had conducted. This of course was witnessed in its attempt to obtain technical and financial support from international non-governmental organizations. All structures from the centre up to the polling stations were well coordinated and organized. According to Berouk and Demssie (2005:14), the NEBE was significantly supported by ERIS, a London-based firm providing a consultancy service on elections, democracy and governance. Furthermore, ERIS produced a political party code of conduct for the election campaigns, and assisted the National Electoral Board to hold weekly Joint Political Party Forums which allowed "open dialogue between the election administration and political parties". According to them, ERIS also provided training for political party agents and candidate representatives on their role and responsibilities on election day, and drafted a guidebook for candidate representatives and observers in polling stations. Most importantly, ERIS produced a code of conduct for the media and initiated a training programme on the importance of balanced and impartial reporting of election-related stories for journalists from both the private and public media.

To sum up, this election, "the eleventh election in Ethiopian political history, the fifth election after 1991's political change and the third federal and regional election ten years after the promulgation of the 1995 constitution" (Ibid:2), seemed to stand out against all previous elections in the nature of campaigning, where the opposition parties got a chance to explain their political programme through various forms of media to the public, in well-watched forums and public debate with the ruling party, which is unique from the past, and this incidence increased the participation of the public significantly. However, although such participation indicated the strength of democratic standards, the election nonetheless was dogged by a number of problems, probably the most important one being the release of the electoral results:

Apparently not to save face as likely losers, the opposition political parties made a host of allegations that the polls were overshadowed by too many irregularities. These included intimidation and interference by the security personnel and ruling party organs; multiple registration and voting, impersonation of voters, and ineligible voters; pre-stuffed ballot boxes; ballot dumping; bribery and other corrupt practices; and, collusion and collaboration of the National Electoral Board which turned a blind eye to every conceivable irregularity and fraud in the book (Berouk and Demssie, 2005:3).

The opposition parties' rejection of the election results declared by the NEBE resulted in street clashes among protesters who supported the claims of opposition parties, and government police forces. This, according to Berouk and Demassie (2005:3), led to local, public and private and international medias producing different types of coverage or portrayal about the political turmoil in the country. Moreover, the main opposition political party - the

Coalition for Democracy and Unity - decided not to accept seats in parliament and all regional councils that had been approved by the NEBE. Police alleged that the leaders of the Coalition incited and led the successive “street violence” that took place in the capital city of Addis Ababa and other towns in the country, and many have been taken into custody for investigation and are awaiting trial.

2.4 Media and Election

As is noted in the above sections dealing with elections, they are intended to be the foundation of the democratic process. Therefore, the electoral process remains an essential and significant part of the democratic process, linking the public with the government and enabling the public to assess the past operation of the government and choose its future directions, principally through the choice of candidates for public office. (Alger, 1989:185-6).

The US Agency for International Development (USAID), in its publication, "The role of Media in Democracy: A strategic Approach" (1999:3), defines the role of media in democracy as follows:

Information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a "checking function" by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them.

Thus elections are one of the important instruments that ensure the democratic rights of citizens and the will of the public in the practical decision making process. Therefore, the media are instrumental in this process by providing the necessary platform for the presentation of party ideologies as well as granting the public the opportunity to scrutinize and gather information on a broad array of manifestos presented by candidates for election (Lange and Ward, 2004:1).

Alger (1989:185) describes the relationship between media and elections as follows:

Elections are also the realm of the political system where the role of the media is perhaps most strikingly evident. As Election Day nears it is hard to avoid being exposed to (if not inundated by) pictures and stories of campaign parades and rallies and the sounds and images of campaign ads. Beyond the obvious pictures and hoopla, the facts are that the mass media are an increasingly central mechanism of elections.

Therefore, the media are a crucial component in the process of democratic elections. The media has to disseminate information on how to vote, on different choices, and the media asks and get answers about the transparency of the election processors and informs voters if there is something wrong so that it can be fixed through accountable and sustainable structures of democratic institutions (IMPACS 2004:6). In this case, it can be said that democracy and a free media have a special relationship, in that a free media will help keep the election honest and democratic (Ibid).

Lange and Ward (2004:1), in the book "Media and Elections", describe this issue as follows:

The media's role in the democratic process is unquestionably central, and a democratic system of government that is not supported by a free, vibrant, and healthy media system represents a nominal rather than real system of democratic decision making.

The very nature of democracy as it is mentioned in the above discussion, suggests that free and open communication, through a variety of channels, is necessary to foster critical practices found in democratic societies. The media are not the sole source of information for voters, but in a world dominated by mass communications, it is increasingly the media that determine the political agenda, even in the less developed countries of the world. Thus election observation teams, for example, now routinely comment on media access and coverage of elections as a criterion for judging whether elections are fair, as well as whether media coverage has been fair. (Samson and Mancini, 1996:2-8).

The most important point and the underlying principle of the role of media in an election is that without media freedom and pluralism, democracy is not possible. That means the rights of voters to make fully informed choices, the right of the candidates to put their policies across, and the right of the media to report and express their views on matter of public interest are essential rights of citizens. These rights, which are essentially all aspects of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, apply at all times, and not only when there is an election pending. But it is the very formality of the election process, the fact that it is conducted according to procedures that are clearly set out in law, and that has stimulated the interests of those who are concerned with issues of media freedom and how far media freedom and pluralism are respected during an election period can be a fairly sensitive index of respect for freedom of expression in general. And in itself this is an essential precondition for a functioning democracy. Conversely, an election could be an ideal opportunity to educate both the authorities in their obligation to respect and nurture media freedom, and the media, in their responsibility to support the democratic process. (IMPACS, 2002:14-17).

The body that is primarily concerned with the responsibility for elections and media relationship is the election administrator. It has to develop a regulatory framework for media activities and behaviour during the election period and help facilitate media freedom. However, much of it may also be of value to others, such as media practitioners themselves and political parties. These require a regulatory framework for the media in elections ranging from an independent electoral commission to a specialized media regulator, such as a broadcasting commission, media council or press complaints body. It looks at the different obligations of the print media that are privately owned and those funded out of public money. (Ibid, 10-12).

Though freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and accepted by the majority of countries as being part of their constitution, the practice is different from country to country. According to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many accepted international laws and declarations, freedom of expression, and with that, freedom of the press, is not a virtue given by the government to the journalists but it is a freedom guaranteed to every citizen of the country and of course it is one of the basic human rights. But, one can understand in a real sense that there can be no rights without the corresponding responsibilities. As a result, media workers should strive to publish fair, balanced, and accurate information that serves their communities.

2.4.1 The role of media in elections

Bearing in mind the above conceptualization of media and elections, one realizes that the role of media in elections looks at various issues arising from media coverage of the successive stages of the electoral process, from the pre-campaign period of voter education, through the campaign itself, to voting day, and the count and announcement days. In doing so, it focuses on the "watchdog" role of media by unfettered scrutiny and discussion of those success and failures of governments. The media can inform the public of how effectively its representatives have performed, and help to hold them accountable, especially during elections in controlling and exposing fraud,

corruption, and unfair practices. Yet the media can also play a part in enabling full public participation in elections, not only by reporting election events but also by educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights. Moreover, through its agenda-setting role, the media helps shape public opinion through reporting and covering election related issues.

In order to ensure the role of the media in election, journalists should be given the fullest access possible to election events as well as to a maximum flow of information. The media cannot cover elections properly if they are unable to gain access to relevant events and places. While this is obvious enough, unfortunately many countries that are embarking on democratic elections for the first time may have little experience in the role of media in elections. It is important that access should be non-discriminatory. It would be unacceptable, for example, if journalists from certain media organs were excluded from rallies of certain political parties. It should be an explicit element of the parties' code of conduct that they allow free access to all media at all their public events. It would be worse, however, if the electoral authorities themselves were to exercise any discrimination in which media were given briefing materials or invited to a press conference (IMPACS, 2001:10-12).

These rights of access to journalists flow directly from the freedom of information principles that underline the role of media in a democracy. The

Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948 is the definitive statement of principle on human rights, and contains two principal Articles (Article 19 and 21) that are fundamental to the obligations of governments regarding the role of media in elections. But, as a declaration, it is only what is termed customary international law. With the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966, these same provisions were amplified and given the force of binding and enforceable law over all those states which ratified the declaration. Article 19 of the ICCPR states in part:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; the right shall include freedom to seek receive and import information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

In the same way Article 21 of the ICCPR states in part:

Every citizen has the right and the opportunity, without any of distinction... and without unreasonable restrictions... (b) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret --- of guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.

Taken together, these two provisions have been understood to impose obligations on governments to ensure the diversity and pluralism of the media during elections.

Therefore, freedom of information means, among other things, that the media are entitled to investigate and report critically on the efficiency and probity of

election organizations. This scrutiny is not an interference with the organization of the election, but facilitates and ensures efficiency. This is true as a matter of broad principle, but also as a matter of practicality. If the media have good access and are present at all relevant events of election, then it will be much easier for the electoral administration to convey its messages and concerns to the public. This functions as an effective, no-cost method of voter education. (IMPACS, 2001:4-7).

To this end, the fundamental principles of media management in election situations, according to Carver (2000: internet), are the following:

- *The election administration will make available the maximum amount of information, barring only that information whose disclosure would compromise the integrity of the election process.*
- *All information that the election administration releases will be accurate, to the best of its knowledge.*
- *Information will be released on a non-discriminatory basis to all media, regardless of their ownership or political loyalty*

The significance of these principles is that if they are breached, the objectives of informing the electorate and maintaining its confidence in the process will be damaged, sometimes irreparably. In new democracies, with a history of tight government censorship or control over the flow of information, these principles may be a break with old habits. But the temptation to hold back information, or to provide it selectively to favoured journalists, is one that electoral officials must resist. (Ibid).

As argued, the role of media in elections is so crucial that this responsibility during election periods mainly rests on election administrators. This often goes to the extent that election management bodies must be clear with the media about their activities. They must also outline transparent and defensible guidelines for access of the media to EMB events and briefings. The cornerstones of EMB-media relationships are understanding, transparency and trust and confidence. (IMAPCS, 2001:2).

With this understanding of the role of media in elections, the other important aspect needed is trust and credibility on the side of the media professionals. In this case the role of "Good Journalism in Election Reporting" (IMPACS, 2004:8) is worth considering. For citizens to make well informed decisions in an election, there must be free media. But the media must be more than free. It must be reliable. It must be trusted. It must have the opportunity to form independent and diverse views. (Ibid).

Journalists around the world have developed principles with codes of conduct or standards of "Good Journalism". Most of them are accepted by more than 150 professional journalists' associations and media organizations in different countries. According to IMPACS (2004:8-10), these include:

1. Accuracy:

Getting the correct information, their words must be reported carefully to accurately reveal their meaning, and to explain the context without exaggerating the meanings.

2. Impartiality (Fairness and Balance)

This is an important part of standards of 'Good Journalism'. To achieve impartiality a good journalist will seek to produce a report that is balanced.

To be balanced means is to include both sides. Looking for more than one opinion helps to overcome bias or favouring one side. But the balance needs also be fair. Even if they work for media that supports one party, professional journalists should try to be unbiased and include balance in their reporting. Even if they are working for the government media, their reports should include news about the opposition parties. A journalist's impartiality means that a reporter must not take an active role in any election as a campaigner, offer financial or other support to a party or take gifts from a party.

3) Responsibility

Journalists have obligations to the people they report about, and the society to whom they report the news. Journalists have responsibility to protect their sources. Many people will not tell journalists important news about political corruption if they fear their names will be revealed. Responsible journalists also use only honest methods to obtain the news, which means their work should be guided by internationally accepted professional standards.

Summing up, IMPACAS (2004:10) states that responsible journalism is not defamatory, 'Good Journalism' does not repeat inaccurate allegations and insults, 'Good Journalism' does not simply repeat what has been reported somewhere else without checking the facts, and should never be malicious. Professional journalists should not misuse their power by twisting the news and using it as a personal weapon to deliberately harm anyone, they should not be corrupt and should not accept bribes or special favours from any party or politician. These are the basic standards which produce journalism people can trust. This is called professional or reliable journalism.

“Good journalism is like good medicine. The values should not be political, cultural or racial. It helps support the good health of Democracy” (Ibid).

2.4.1.1 The ‘Watchdog’ role of media in Elections

It has been repeatedly argued that media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. Discussion of the media’s functions usually focuses on their “watchdog” role. Lange and Ward (2004:209), in their book “The Media and Elections”, write about the 'watchdog' role of media before and during times of electoral campaigns as follows:

The watchdog function of the media is especially crucial during times of electoral campaigns and elections themselves for ordinary people, the press and broadcast media are often the source of information on the candidates, their former achievements, and future programs and on issues under current debate.

In this case, the media's role in covering elections is twofold: to inform citizens that the power to weigh the issues and demand accountability from elected officials rests in their hands; and to point out problems and explore solutions, raise questions and give a voice to opinions and concerns, and set the stage for accountability and the rule of law (Schnellinger, 2001:4).

In playing its watchdog role, the media have a responsibility during elections in controlling fraud, corruption and unfair practices. In doing so, it exposes electoral corruption which includes bribery of voters, raising campaign funds by making promises of illegal benefits such as favourable government contracts as payoffs to donors, bribing opposing candidates to withdraw and other malpractices during elections (Ibid:5).

Since there are many ways that elections can go wrong or can be corrupted, the media has to watch and be aware of the following things according to IMPACS (Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society), (2004:13):

Voters' rights:

- *Are all illegible citizens on the voters list registered to vote?*
- *Are all voters free to hear and discuss the parties and issues without fear?*
- *Do parties threaten voters or election officials, or tell voters for whom to vote?*
- *Do party officials try to bribe voters with money, large gifts, or promises of jobs?*
- *Do voters understand their role and importance of voting, and do they know their choices?*
- *Do women and minorities feel safe in voting?*

Candidates' and party rights

- *Are all qualified parties and candidates allowed to run in the election?*
- *Are the election rules and limits applied equally to all parties?*
- *Are the police and army protecting all parties as they campaign, distribute information and hold public meetings?*
- *Are any powerful interests spending large amounts of money to support one particular party and are parties willing to disclose where they get their money?*
- *Are the government officials neutral and not using government money or resources such as vehicles to favour one party?*
- *Is the political party that is in government making many announcements of new projects just when the election campaign begins? This is unfair to the opposition parties who cannot use government money this way.*

The election process

- *Do voters easily understand the voting instructions?*
- *Are there security arrangements to protect the ballot boxes so nobody can stuff them with false ballots?*
- *Is the election commission seen as impartial, independent and honest?*
- *Are there international and independent observers who are monitoring the election, and how do they see the election commission?*
- *Does the election commission investigate and stop violations of the election law? Are violators penalized in any way?*
- *Are the media, non governmental organizations and international observers able to monitor and report to the public about the election process without interference or fear?*
- *Is the state media providing reliable coverage of all the candidates and parties? Is the coverage accurate, impartial, responsible, and fair?*
- *Do the private media provide reliable and fair reporting and treat all parties' advertising equally?*

These are the most important points that professional and credible journalists should ask for and at all times report as a service to citizens at large, and not simply for their readers and listeners, since their reports' influence extends beyond those who buy newspapers and hear broadcasts. (Schnellinger, 2001:4).

After checking the registration process, the media is also responsible during the voting process, when the ballot boxes are sealed, when they are opened, when votes are counted, and when the ballot boxes are transported, to disclose or to cover the whole story of the election, including what went wrong and what went right, which party won or lost, and finally changes and developments from the post election and many other related issues. (IMPACS, 2001:7).

2.4.1.2 The Agenda Setting Role of the Media

It has been argued that media play a crucial role in modern election campaigns. Naturally, this pertains only to societies with democratic traditions, and in political systems where media have been formed as an independent power, and are functioning within specific frames, established traditions, rules and regulations. But even in totalitarian countries where elections represent a drama with a predictable scenario, the media still remains one of the characters in the play. Even if their influence on the outcome of the election process might not be significant, activities of the press have an immense importance, as political culture is being formed and active involvement of the press is being introduced. The watchdog role of the press, (which is the main focus area of this thesis) is thoroughly discussed above, but the role of media also extends to include delivery of political information, agenda-setting, and serving as political socialization. (Kraus and Davis, 1976: 216).

The media are not the sole source of information for voters, but in a world dominated by mass communication, the role of media is increasing to set and determine the political agenda. Kraus and Davis (1976:216) argue:

The press is more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling the people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its reader what to think about. The editor may believe he is there by putting a claim on their attention powerfully determining what they will be thinking about and telling about, until the next waves laps their shore.

The continuous flow of information enables the public and policymakers to evaluate existing policy commitments in the content of individual concerns. By just paying attention to some issues while ignoring others, the press (deliberately or incidentally) may shape public opinions on issues existing with in a country (Ibid: 217-219).

According to Ghorparde (1986:23), "Agenda-setting is a rational concept that specifies a transfer of salience from agenda primers (media) to agenda adopters (consumers)." McCombs, in his paper "The Agenda-setting Role of the Mass media in the shaping of public opinion" (1991:1) describes this as follows:

The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few public issues, is an immense and well documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news.

Agenda setting by the media can be practically shown particularly through newspapers providing a host of cues about the salience of the topics in their daily news by making it a lead story on page one, and through broadcasters like television by making it the opening (lead) story on the news cast, or by giving more time to the story, or by repeating it day after day to effectively communicate the importance of the issue or the topic at hand. In other words, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention by consistently raising a small group of issues around which public opinion forms (Ibid).

It is important to note that the notion of agenda-setting is a positive association between the media and the audience. Agenda-setting shifts the focus of attention away from immediate effects on attitudes and opinions, to longer-term effects on attitudes, opinions, and cognitions. The notion of agenda-setting relies on the transfer of issues from the media to the public (Protest and McCombs, 1991:2)

Media agenda setting effects can easily be detected particularly in the volume of coverage and tone of the message, and it can result in forming public opinion. McCombs (1991:14) states that:

Mass communication effects can result from the sheer volume of exposure. First level agenda- setting effects demonstrate that phenomenon. But as both attribute agenda-setting and priming demonstrate, closer attention to the specific content of mass media messages - including the tone of those messages - provides a more detailed understanding of the pictures in our heads and of subsequent attitudes and opinions grounded in those pictures.

Moreover, he argues that effects of tone are not limited to attitudes and opinions about political leaders. For instance, negative newspaper headlines

about the economy influences the public's perception about the health of the economy.

Therefore, it can be argued that the agenda-setting role of the mass media, which may range from positive to negative, in election times may substantially influence voters' attitudes and consequently public opinion to a great extent.

2.5 Historical Overview of Press in Ethiopia

Historically, the modern press in Ethiopia began during the reign of Emperor Menelik II. However, history recounts the publishing of religious books in Ethiopia beginning in the 17th century (Amanuel, 2003:98). Emperor Menelik II, as a pioneer in introducing modernization endeavours in the history of modern Ethiopia, launched communication and education programs that were the nucleus for modern media in the country (Ibid: 99). 'Aemro', which appears to have been universally accepted as Ethiopia's first periodical, appeared around 1901 (Amanuel, 2003:99). Writing about the first periodical, Amanuel states that:

The periodical was aimed to be circulated in the royal court, and used to be prepared handwritten in limited copies to be read by the literate nobility with the intention to enlighten them about new events around the world. Its first circulation was 24 copies and then 200 following the importation of a copying machine.

Thus, newspapers during Menelik's time had no significant political value in society. It is noted by many researchers that in Ethiopia the idea of press in

general and the idea of propaganda in particular emerged during Emperor Haile Selassie's period. Right from its establishment, Haile Sellasie's press was authoritarian in character. It was designed to be a major instrument for propaganda. The only task of the press was to praise God and the King (Shimeles, 2000:18). In addition, Abdisa (2003:100) writes about the development of press products in Emperor Haile Selassie's reign as follows:

In 1925, a weekly government owned newspaper, Berhanena Selam by the then regent, Ras Teferi (later Haile Selassie I) represented a landmark in the history of the Ethiopian press. After that, such influential and long-lasting weekly papers as Addis Zemene and the Ethiopian Herald come into the scene in 1914 and 1943, respectively, both become dailies added to the list of newspapers. Between the years 1941 and 1974 (the reign of Haile Selassie), for 33 years of period both daily and weekly newspapers and other press products, with the exception of a few, being government owned and catering to a limited circle of elite readership mostly top bureaucrats and members of the urban-based intelligencias (sic).

Thus, during the imperial regime, media was exclusively monopolized and operated under the control of the state. The newspapers of that time - *Addis Zemen* (Amharic) and the *Ethiopian Herald* (English) served as the official press organ of the state and as the main sources of information for literate people (Shimeles, 2000:12).

In the aftermath of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and during the early times of the Derg regime, there was relative relaxation and the emergence of alternative papers and magazines entertaining various views on issues of public interests such as on land tenure, on the form of government that should be formed in the country, and on the issue of democracy (Maieregu, 2000:130). However, this was just temporary; the Derg regime consolidated

itself and began to reinstate the former fashion of monopolizing the media. Any ideas which were incongruent to or critical of the government were suppressed under the banner of antirevolutionary (Shimeles, 2000:13). Amanuel (2003:100) describes this as follows:

The period of military dictatorship from 1974-1991 was one of total control of the media and the flow of information. This was in line, for instance, with proclamation NO 26/1967, which was issued to regulate the operation of the media. Centralized command, control, and censorship contributed negatively to the development of the public mass media.

Therefore, during the Derg regime, in spite of the short lived change, only government and Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) owned publications were allowed to operate. In addition to the previous *Addis Zemen* and *Herald*, papers included *Meskerem*, *Sertoader*, and *Yezareyitu Ethiopia*. (Roe et al, 1999:8).

Hence, in the previous two regimes, dictatorial rule was the norm of the day. The press in both regimes, which were fundamentally authoritarian in character, devotedly acted, for over half a century, as an instrument of inflated and monotonously similar propaganda of self-ingratiating and aggrandizement (Shimeles, 2000:11). Both regimes used the media of their time, with few exceptions, as simple loudspeakers of their respective ideology (Roe et al, 1997:7)

After the fall of the Derg regime and the takeover of power by EPRDF (Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front) in 1991, a new regime in

the pursuit of forging a new country in line with democratic ideas and principles was created and has shown a clear departure from the past two regimes. Unlike the past regimes, which had monopolized ownership of the mass media in general and that of the press in particular, the present regime, if not totally, has initialised a fresh start of opening up of media and creating living space for private media ownership for the first time in Ethiopia (Shimeles, 2000:5&8).

Following the government's recognition of the freedom of expression along with its adoption of free market policies, an incredibly large number of newspapers and magazines appeared. This serves as an indication of democracy, which envisages the free flow of ideas which in turn depends on the press which publishes wide-ranging and opposing views. As a result the streets become full of periodicals of all kinds which are privately published. The number of privately owned news papers and magazines reached about 287 by 1997 (Amanuel, 2003: 100).

The inauguration of liberalization of media ownership is the outcome of the transitional period charter, the press law and the FDRE constitution. Thus the present government so far has made a great departure from the past regimes that monopolized mass media ownership. But ever since the birth of private newspapers, a state of belligerency has arisen in the realm of Ethiopian media. This is a result of the division of the media into two blocks,

with the government on one side monopolizing the state-owned print and electronic media, and the private press on the other hand. And a frictional and confrontational relationship between these two blocks has started to take shape (Araya, 1998:8). The government considers the private press a 'political organ' with hidden motives which stand to denounce democracy, peace and security. On the other hand, the private press claims that the government is trying to muzzle their liberty to write (Ibid).

CHAPTER THREE

3. Design of the Study

The study backs up its analysis using a theoretical exposition about the characteristics of democratic elections, the role of media in democratic elections, and election management bodies.

Since the study consists of a comparative analysis of private and state newspapers concerning their coverage of the independence of the NEBE in its conduct of the May 2005 national elections in the country, content analysis has been employed as the major method used to investigate the issue. To this end, two newspapers – one from the government-owned sector and one from the private sector - have been selected for analysis.

In addition the study also uses as a supportive method qualitative analysis, stemming from interviews with key stakeholders, mainly voters. In this case, voters from the capital city Addis Ababa, and other cities including Awassa, Nazereth, Debere-Zeit and Shasheme were chosen as interviewees. The major reason behind choosing voters from these cities was because of ease of proximity, and time constraints for the study. Moreover, these cities have the largest distribution of newspapers and thus the largest readership.

The information gathered through these various means was analyzed using SPSS computer software and presented and interpreted using graphs and charts for the content analysis. In addition, the study has also included some of the responses that were gathered through interviews from voters to elaborate on issues addressed through the content analysis. This latter part of the data is not presented in its entirety in the analysis, as it contains some flaws and biases, and consequently only supplementary data has been utilised.

3.1 Sampling Strategy

The main purpose of the study is to compare state vis-à-vis private press in their coverage of the neutrality of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopian (NEBE), and briefly to assess the attitude of major stakeholders as to what they believe the responsibility and role of the press in covering the functioning of democratic institutions such as the election management body in the country should be. To this end, the study has deployed a content analysis of two newspapers, one from the government-owned sector, and another from the private sector. *Addis Zemene*, a daily Amharic newspaper which is state-owned, and *The Reporter*, a bi-weekly newspaper which is privately owned, have been selected for analysis. The rationale behind selecting these two major newspapers is based on ownership, circulation, duration of publications and number of pages and columns. According to the Ministry of Information's audit figures quoted in the Media Monitoring report (2005:7):

There are 85 newspapers in circulation in a variety of languages that cover a wide range of issues from news to sports. Most newspapers are distributed weekly, fortnightly, or monthly and only a handful on a daily basis. The most prominent titles are the Addis Zemen and the Daily Herald (both public), the Reporter (private) and the Addis Admas (private). The press sector is extremely limited in terms of distribution and the high rate of illiteracy in the country restricts the growth of print media. The majority of titles have a print run of fewer than 3000 copies. The largest title is the state owned Addis Zemen that is published in Amharic. The Reporter and the Addis Adamas are the largest private newspapers with the former having one English edition weekly and an Amharic one twice weekly and the latter an Amharic language weekly edition.

Therefore the two selected newspapers are ideally the most prominent papers to be the sample newspapers for the content analysis purpose of this study.

The study employs purposive sampling for the selection of the time of publication of the two newspapers, based on the schedule for the implementation of the May 2005 election by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), which was formally started on October 30 2004, when constituencies and polling station offices commenced work, up to the verification and official declaration of results at a national level, which occurred on September 6 2005. Because the Wednesday's publication of the *Reporter* newspaper began on December 29, 2004, only Sunday publications of both papers from October 30 2004 up to December 26, 2004 are taken. In the remaining time, i.e. from December 26 2004 up to September 6 2005, Wednesday and Sunday publications of both papers are included in the analysis. The main reason for considering these two days is because the *Reporter* newspaper is bi-weekly and only published on those two days.

The study also employs qualitative analysis as a supportive method, consisting of interviews with voters, to assess the extent to which they think the role of the media in reporting and covering the functions of election management bodies should be.

To select the population upon which the qualitative approach was administered, a convenient sampling technique was applied. Since the purpose of applying qualitative analysis in this study is merely to support the results that are obtained through content analysis, the researcher deliberately sought out responses from key stakeholders, mainly voters. Accordingly, the study adopted convenient sampling to choose 10 respondents from each of the following cities: Addis Ababa, Nazereth, Awasa, Deber Zeit and Shashemene.

3.2 Sampling Unit

The study's sampling unit for the content analysis includes all the Wednesday and Sunday publications of the two sample newspapers, starting from October 30 2004 to September 6 2005. Therefore, the study covers 94 publications from each newspaper, totalling 118 publications of both newspapers. In addition, the sampling unit consists of all the stories that appear in the two sample newspapers on those days which refer to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study adopts key-word strategy as qualifying criteria to identify stories that specifically refer to the NEBE for the purposes of investigation.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the content analysis of the study constitutes each story item that specifically deals with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. Accordingly, a total of 575 story items that made specific reference to NEBE and appeared in the two sample newspapers are considered for investigation.

3.4 Coding Categories (Variables)

The following variables have been selected, counted, measured and determined in order to examine the extent to which the two sample newspapers have covered the neutrality of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE).

1. Number of page: This refers to the number of page the relevant subject is collocated in (1,2,3---)
2. Page category: This refers to the type of page that the relevant subject has appeared is (Front page, Editorial, Inside page)
3. Actor: this refers to the direct reference of the story item to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)
4. Tone of coverage: This refers to whether the stories are favourable or unfavourable towards the actor.

The tone of a story item that deals with the NEBE has been decided using a three-level scale: positive, negative, and neutral. The criteria to decide upon a story item as positive, negative or neutral depends on

statements that are used in the story item. If more negatively loaded statements exist in a story item, then it is considered as unfavourable toward the actor, while if there are more positively loaded statements, it is considered as favourable towards the actor. If there are statements that do not contain either positively or negatively loaded statements in a story, it is considered neutral. Positive and negative coverage are designated only when the coders and main researcher agreed on judging it to be unambiguous.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The main purpose of this comparative analysis of the two major Amharic newspapers, the *Addis Zemen* (government owned) vis-à-vis the *Reporter* (privately owned), is to assess the way in which the two papers differ in their coverage about the independence of NEBE in relation to its activities of the May, 2005, third parliamentary and regional council elections in Ethiopia.

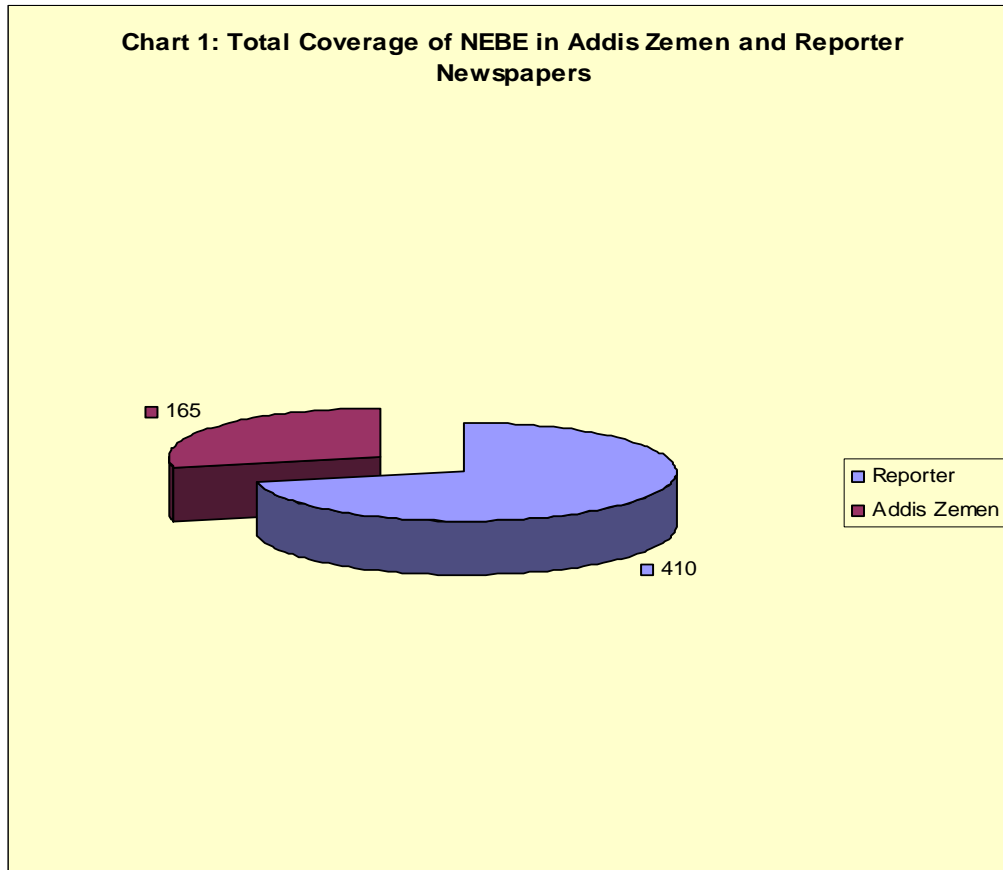
4.1 Quantitative analysis

This study covered the two sample newspapers (*Addis Zemen* and *Reporter*) Sunday publications starting from October 30 2004 until December 26 2004 and, since the Wednesday publication of *Reporter* newspaper only began on December 29 2004, this study further included the Wednesday publications of both newspapers until September 6 2005. Therefore, the study covered 94 publications from each newspaper with a final total of 118 publications from both newspapers. Moreover, the study has also counted, measured and determined a total of 575 story items that specifically deals with the actor, NEBE, from both the sample newspapers. The data gathered through the content analysis was analyzed using SPSS and spreadsheet computer programs and presented in the form of charts and graphs.

Following is the presentation and analysis of data gathered through the content analysis method.

4.1.1 Total Coverage of NEBE in *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter*

Chart-1: Total coverage of NEBE in Addis Zemen and the Reporter



The above chart shows the total number of stories devoted to the actor (NEBE). Out of the total of 575 stories reported in both newspapers, while the *Reporter* ran 410 (79%) stories dedicated to NEBE related issues, *Addis Zemen* ran only 165 (21%) stories. This chart demonstrates a marked difference in the two newspapers' coverage of NEBE linked stories. As can be clearly seen from the chart, *Reporter* provided far more stories of NEBE related accounts when compared to *Addis Zemen*. This indicates the significance

Reporter dedicated to issues associated with NEBE – far more than that of *Addis Zemen*. The closer attention that *Reporter* paid towards NEBE connected stories is interesting: in terms of agenda setting theory, a great deal of consideration given to specific content provides a more detailed understanding of the subject in the readers' heads and of the subsequent attitudes and opinions grounded. Moreover, McCombs (1972) states that:

From the pattern of the total news coverage, the public learns what journalists consider the important issues are and who the prominent public figures of the day are. From the details of this coverage – the agenda of attributes presented by the news media – the public forms its images and perspective about these issues and public figures.

Therefore, taking into consideration the total coverage provided to stories specific to the NEBE, *Reporter* newspaper made more significant difference than *Addis Zemen* as it undoubtedly highlighted the issue and helped it receive considerable attention among readers during the May 2005 general election. Such coverage of a certain issues in large amounts in the media has obvious implications concerning public opinion formation regarding the issue. McCombs (1991) clearly states that “ The power of the news media to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news”. Furthermore, McCombs argues that what we know about the world is largely based on what the media decides to tell us. More specifically, the result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media

strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind.

However, it should be noted that the large difference in total coverage among the two sample newspapers could have resulted due to the nature of the papers' publication, in other words the fact that *Reporter* happened to be published twice a week may have obliged the newspaper to condense its reports about NEBE events that happened over the week in two days, whereas the daily *Addis Zemen* could have reported NEBE events as they happened on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the difference in total coverage of the two newspapers is so significant that it indicates emphasis given to the issue by *Reporter* newspaper.

4.1.2 Page category

The following two charts (charts 2 and 3) depict coverage of NEBE in terms of page categories in the two sample newspapers.

Chart 2: The page category that NEBE appeared in the Addis Zemen

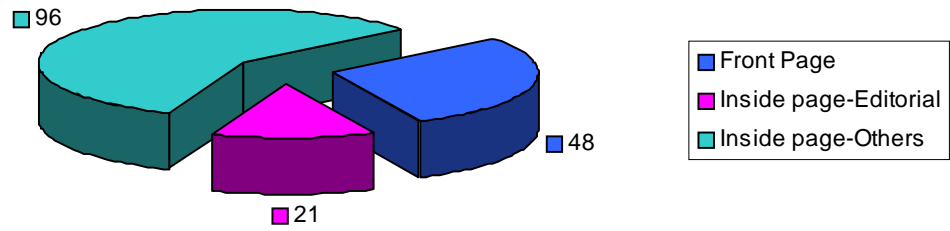
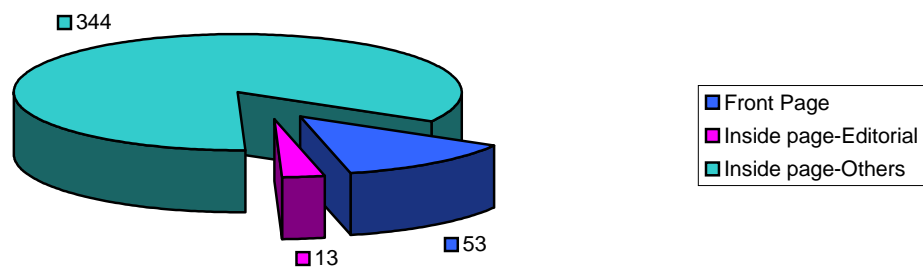


Chart 3: The page category that NEBE appeared in the Reporter



The above two charts show the number of stories, out of the total number of stories reported about issues on NEBE, committed in both the *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter* newspapers according to three different page categories: front page, editorial and inside page others. The classification of page categories into three different types of pages serves to indicate the significance and attention given by the newspapers to issues connected to the actor. Stories reported on the front page, for instance, highlight the emphasis placed on the issue in the news. Moreover, front page news stories are also believed to have a considerably higher effect in attracting readers' attention than those on inside pages. According to McCombs (1991), newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in their news by making it a lead story on page one and through front page displays such as large headlines and so on, thereby setting the agenda for the public's attention to the issues around which public opinion takes form. In addition, the editorial section of the newspaper is of importance in signifying the stand of the newspaper about the issue at hand. Other stories on the inside pages are considered to have less significance where the issue is concerned in comparison with front page and editorial coverage.

The charts above demonstrate the number of stories that appeared in *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter* newspapers on the three different types of pages. Accordingly, as can be seen from chart 2, *Addis Zemen* newspaper, out of the total of 165 stories presented about NEBE, 48, 21, and 96 stories appeared

on front pages, editorial and inside pages respectively. Whereas *Reporter* newspaper as is represented in chart 3, out of the total of 410 stories reported about the NEBE, dedicated 53,13, and 344 to front pages, editorial, and inside pages respectively.

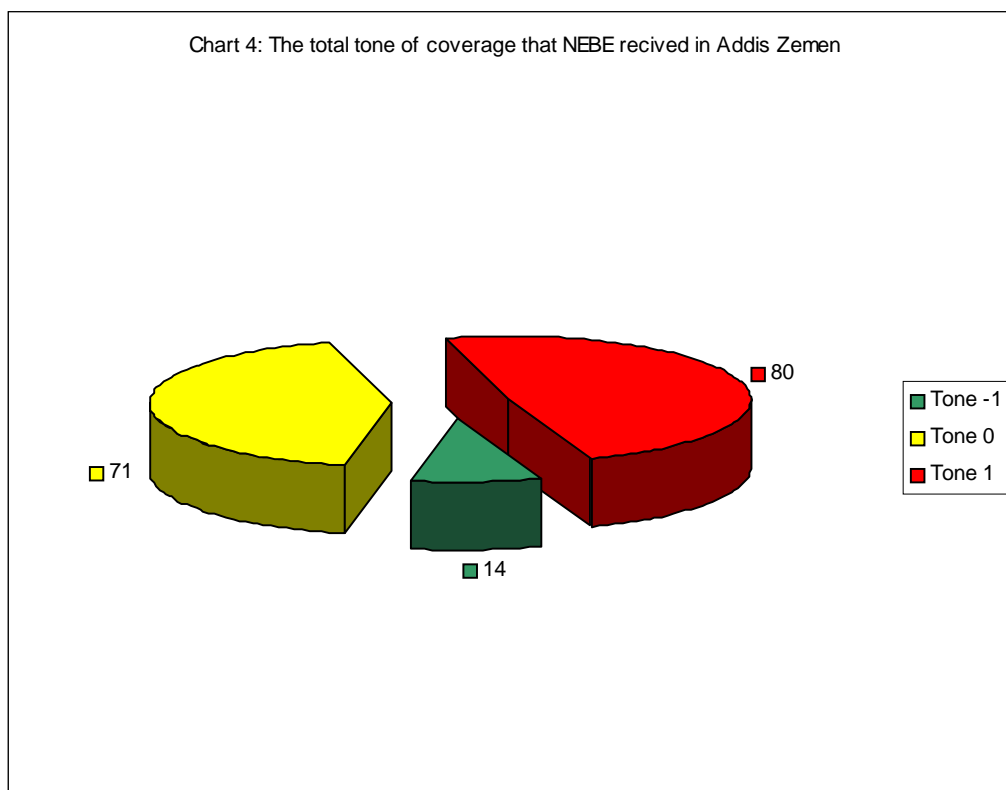
It is not surprising that a great deal of stories in both newspapers appeared on the inside pages - 96 out of 165, and 344 out of 410 in *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter* newspapers respectively. The coverage of both sample newspapers display some differences in that *Addis Zemen*, out of 165 total stories about NEBE, placed 48 stories on the front page, whereas *Reporter*, out of 410 stories about NEBE, placed 53 stories on the front page. As it is mentioned earlier, important stories are run on front pages. This illustrates the emphasis given to the issue by both newspapers.

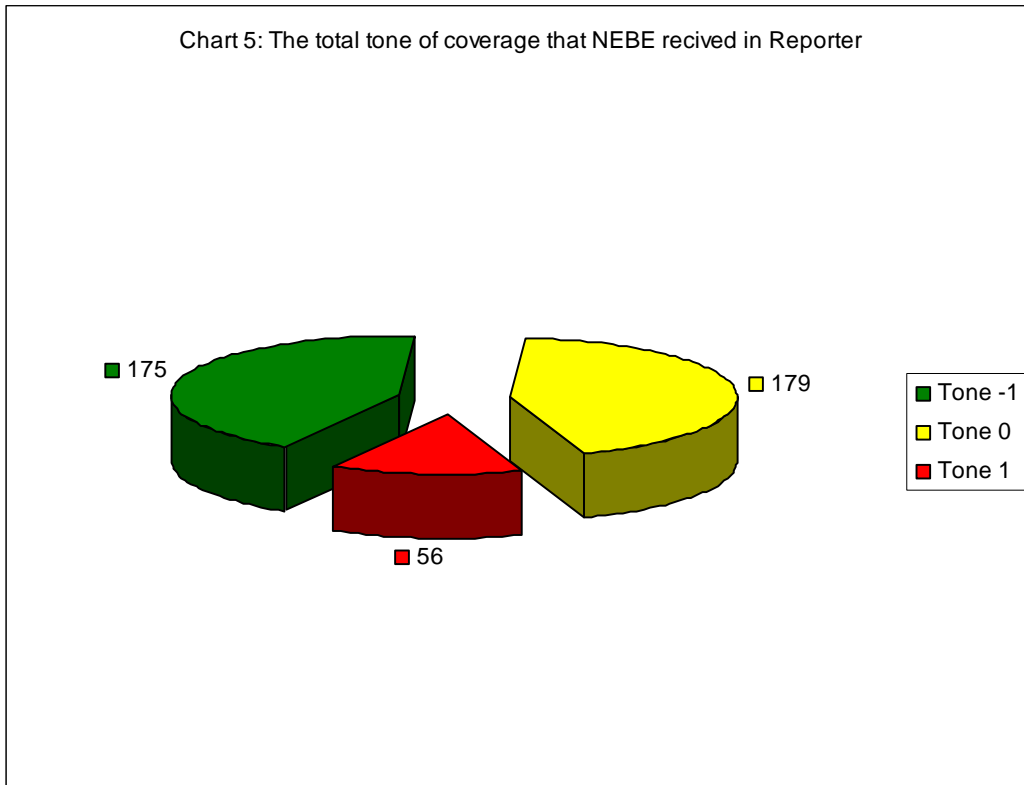
In the editorial sections of both newspapers as illustrated in the charts above, *Addis Zemen* ran 21 of 165 stories on the editorial page, while *Reporter* ran 13 out of 410 stories on the same page. This demonstrates that *Addis Zemen* proportionally gave more editorial space to stories than *Reporter*. This clearly indicates that *Addis Zemen* gives more attention to expressing its political stance about the impartiality of NEBE than *Reporter*, which concentrates more attention on the inside pages in order to entertain different opinions from readers and contending political parties about NEBE. This is also

apparent from the next charts which describe the total tone of coverage in each category.

4.1.3 The tone of total coverage

Chart 4 and chart 5 illustrate the tone of total coverage that the actor (NEBE) received in *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter*.





In the above two charts the tone of total coverage NEBE received in both newspapers is described in the form of positive, neutral and negative based on the content of the stories.

The tone of total coverage clearly indicates the way both newspapers inform the public about the impartiality of NEBE while conducting the May 2005, third parliamentary and regional council elections in Ethiopia, starting from the registration of candidates, during the campaign, voting and counting of ballots up to the announcement of election results. Some reports even go back in covering the performance of NEBE on the elections it conducted since its establishment, in order to contextualise its current practices. Moreover, some

stories about NEBE go to the extent of criticizing its past experiences and the mode of selecting board officials.

In *Addis Zemen*, the government owned newspaper, out of 165 stories, the largest share i.e. 80 stories are positive and 71 stories are neutral, only 14 stories are negatively toned. This is not surprising since *Addis Zemen* is published by the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) which is a governmental organization. However, *Reporter*, a privately owned newspaper, displayed more proportional tone in its total coverage, although including a significant number of negative stories about NEBE. Out of its 410 stories, 179 stories are neutral in tone, with 175 stories negative and 56 stories positive.

The tone of newspaper stories in covering the functions of electoral management bodies is a vitally important function of the media during elections, as part of its role is to inform citizens fully about the election process. IMPACS (2004:13) has pointed out that the media, in playing its watchdog role during election time, should be aware of the voters' rights, candidates and parties' rights, and most importantly the functions of Election Management Bodies, keeping tabs on whether EMB's are impartial, independent and honest in conducting free, fair and periodic democratic elections. The media have a responsibility to watch the electoral boards' performances and disclose this to the public, including what went wrong and what went right. In this case the reports have to be accurate, impartial (fair

and balanced), clear, and unbiased. Elaborating on this, Schellinger (2001:4) said professional and credible journalists ask for and at all times report to the service of citizens at large, not simply for their readers and listeners, since their reports' influence extends beyond those who buy the newspapers and hear the broadcasts. In particular, the tone of stories in covering EMB's during election time is a very sensitive issue as it can affect political stability and the legitimation of the election process and election results.

The tone of the coverage of newspapers is consequently of enormous importance during election times in influencing voters' attitudes towards the election results. McCombs (1991), in his theory on the agenda-setting role of media influence of the voters during election times, argues:

People do not, indeed, can not, pay attention to everything. Moreover, in making judgments - whether in casting a ballot on election day or simply in responding to a pollster's question - people use simple rules of thumb and intuitive shortcuts. Rather than engaging in a comprehensive analysis based on their total store of information, citizens routinely draw upon those bits of information that are particularly salient at the time judgment must be rendered. In other words, citizens rely upon the agenda of salient objects and attributes in their minds, the agenda that is shaped to a considerable degree by the mass media.

McCombs, discussing the role of agenda setting in relation to the tone of the stories and its impact on the public about the issue raised, adds:

Mass communication effects can result from the sheer volume of exposure. First level agenda-setting effects demonstrate that phenomenon. But as both attribute agenda-setting and priming demonstrates, closer attention to the specific content of mass media messages including the tone of those messages, provides a more detailed understanding of the pictures in our heads and of subsequent attitudes and opinions grounded in those pictures.

The media's role in tone of coverage is not limited to shifting the attitudes of the voters or the general public in the country. But it undoubtedly affects public perceptions about the whole democratic process and the importance of the issue, in this case the election in general and the credibility of the election management body in particular.

For more explanation of the tone of total coverage in both sample newspapers, the next chart will show the tone of total coverage in the type of page category.

4.1.4. The tone of total coverage in terms of page category.

Chart 6 and Chart 7 indicate the tone of event coverage about the actor (NEBE) in terms of page categories for both sample newspapers. This is illustrated by the tone of coverage (positive, negative or neutral) that the actor NEBE received in each of the three page categories – that is, on the front page, editorial and inside page.

Chart 6: The tone that NEBE received n terms of page category in Addis Zemen

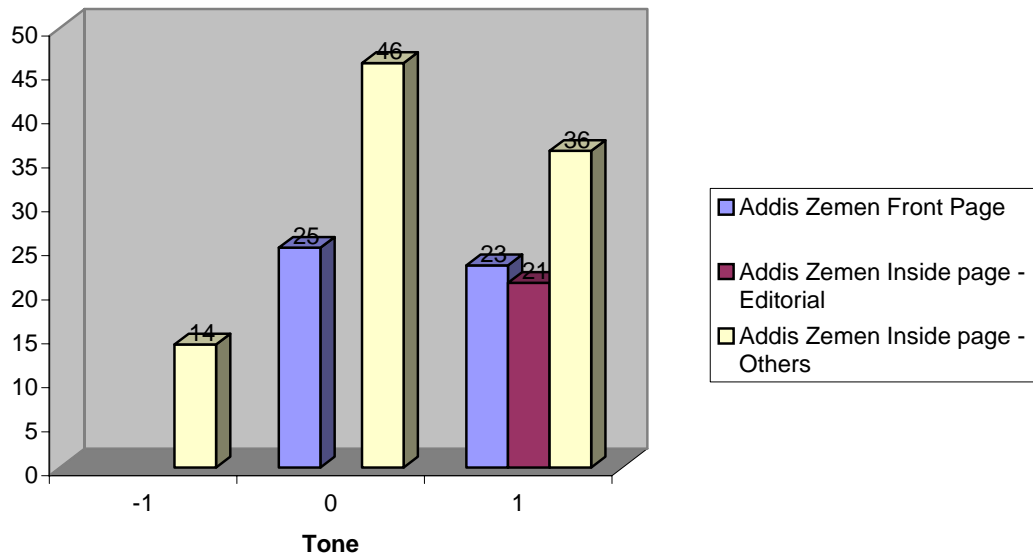
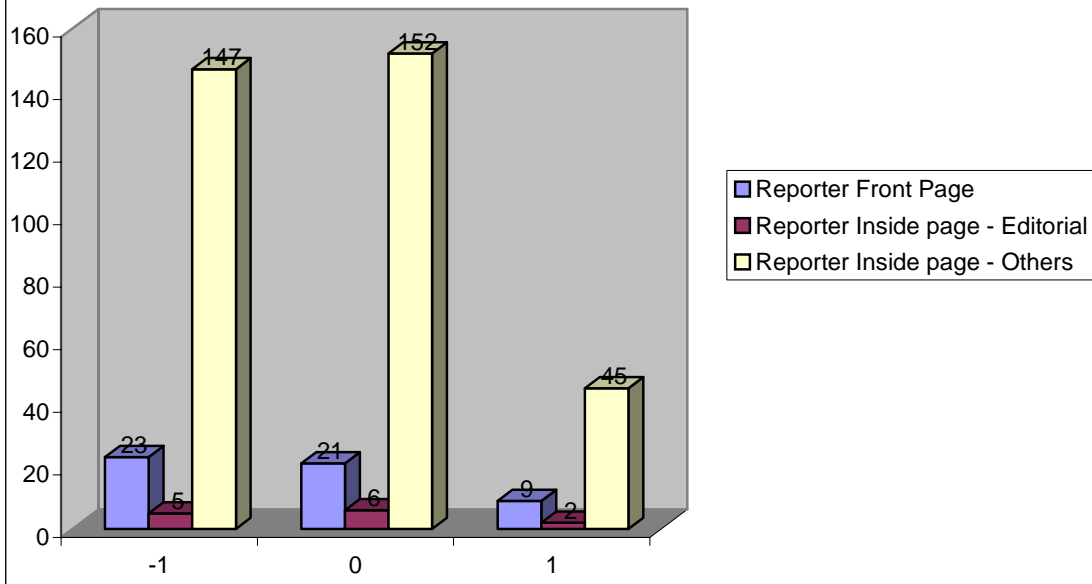


Chart 7: The tone that NEBE received n terms of page category in Reporter



The above two charts clearly indicate the tone of the coverage about the NEBE in terms of page categories. *Addis Zemen*, the government-owned newspaper, out of its total coverage of 165 stories, showed the largest tone coverage for the inside pages, where out of 96 stories, 46 stories are neutral, 36 stories are positive, and only 14 stories are negative in tone. The inside pages are of course less important when compared with editorial and front pages, as has been mentioned previously. Since *Addis Zemen* is a government newspaper, most of its neutral and its smaller negative toned stories about NEBE are discussed in the least significant category of the newspaper. This thesis argues that these negatively toned stories are seen as insignificant and consequently presented on the inside pages, nominally as opinion from readers and some opposition parties, in order to manipulate the information to the advantage of the incumbent government in general and the NEBE in particular. To elaborate, *Addis Zemen* displayed 25 neutral stories and 23 positive stories, out of 48 stories, in the front page category, with not one single negative story. This clearly illustrates the partisan nature of the newspaper. It is not surprising that on the editorial pages, where the political stand of the newspaper is clearly evident, that *Addis Zemen* ran only positive coverage. All 21 stories of editorial coverage were positive in presenting issues about NEBE. One can conclude from these editorial comments that the newspaper has adopted a partisan stance towards the incumbent government.

However, the tone of coverage that the NEBE received in terms of page categories in the *Reporter*, a privately-owned newspaper, as is indicated in chart 7, is very different. *Reporter* displays all tones in all page categories, unlike *Addis Zemen* which ignores neutral and negative tones on its front pages. Although the *Reporter* significantly displays a negative tone and coverage of the actor, in its inside pages, out of 344 stories, 152 stories are neutral, 147 stories are negative and 45 stories are positively toned. On its front pages, *Reporter* ran 53 stories about the NEBE. Out of these, 23 stories are negatively toned, 21 stories are neutral and 9 stories are positive. In the editorial section of the *Reporter*, out of 13 stories about the actor, five stories are negative, six stories are neutral and two stories are positively toned.

In summing up the quantitative analysis, the study indicates that there is a clear difference in the two sample newspapers concerning their coverage of the independence of the NEBE. This analysis of total coverage of both sample paper is vital as it serves as the basis for analyzing the content of the tone of the total coverage of both newspapers, most importantly the tone of coverage the actor NEBE received in terms of page categories in both newspapers. Furthermore, this study in its quantitative analysis used detailed data, some of which is total coverage in terms of types of formats. This is important and thus these charts are included in the appendices.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

This study employs qualitative analysis as a supportive method. As it is explained in the design of the study, this mainly focuses on analysing interview answers taken from key stakeholders, mainly voters in the selected sample areas. The questions presented during the interview concern what the voters or the general public expect from both government and private media in their reports during elections about the election management body, in this case the NEBE, during election times, i.e. prior, during and after elections. The researcher administered these questions orally and attempted to take into consideration the biases of the interviewees, which proved largely impossible as was mentioned under limitations in chapter one. Nevertheless it is the researcher's firm belief that analyzing and presenting the results could have some advantages for the study.

It has been argued that the role of the media during elections is among other things vitally important. The media's role in building a democratic society includes the delivery of political information, agenda setting, serving as an informal check on the government and the independence of democratic institutions, election commissions, the police force, the court system rule of law and so on, and in defending the democratic and human rights of citizens at large. Moreover, the media during election time have a responsibility to watch and report about the independence, impartial and non-partisan

behaviour of electoral institutions in order to help monitor the conduction of free and fair elections. The media is therefore expected to provide accurate information, without delivering any political judgment, and recount objective reports of practices of the electoral commission. Abdi (2004) states, "As the media is the main means of communications, communicating information to the public first of all requires objectivity on the part of the media institution". One can clearly understand from his statement that the mass communication media itself need to be impartial in its coverage.

In light of the above introduction, an analysis of the ideas and different opinions of the key stake-holders (voters) is important in order to ascertain what the average Ethiopian voter expects from the media. Judging by the opinion of the majority of the respondents, many of them believed that the characteristics of press, whether government or private, was partisan in reports about NEBE as well as other political events. They considered this partisanship going to the extent of supporting political parties without any consideration given to checking of reports. Moreover, most of these respondents who criticized both the private and government press said that media reports, both through information gathering and dissemination, were highly distorted, very sensational and strongly partisan.

Some of the respondents argued against the private press by saying that they were generally very sensational, sensationalism being widely noted as a

common feature. They noted that private press stories would carry huge front page headlines which were attractive, but the stories themselves lacked substance. Where the NEBE was concerned, the majority of respondents were concerned that stories about the board were handled irresponsibly, with little consideration being given by the media to the impact those reports would have on the ongoing democratic process, peace and stability in Ethiopia. Respondents tended to argue that the media was simply trying to attract consumers for profit-making purposes.

On the other hand, a significant number of respondents pinpointed the government press for distorting information much more than the private media. They argued that in the government media, the quality and style of their presentation of news was unattractive and monotonous, and mostly government and NEBE-supporting news was presented. For example, it was pointed out that every speech made by local and federal government officials was considered a hot issue in the government press, even if it had little relevance to the public.

Under such circumstances, the press in Ethiopia seems far away from the international standards of "good journalism", which are, according to IMACS (2001:2): "Good journalism is accurate (getting the correct information), impartial (fair and balanced), responsible (to the people they report, and to protect their sources)." Moreover, a professional journalist does not repeat

inaccurate allegations and insults a person or an institution and he does not report without checking the facts. The consequences of losing professional quality in the practice of media in the Ethiopian press, have serious implications for their creditability.

On the part of government media, many of the respondents agreed in that the government media has lost its credibility, while the role of opposition parties seems to be generally accepted by the private press and foreign broadcasts. Respondents frequently mentioned what they had heard on the Voice of America (VOA), and the Voice of Germany (Douche Welle) the previous day. Most respondents agreed that the attitude of many people towards the government media was observed to be in decline, illustrated by falling audience figures in radio and television news programs and readership figures of public newspapers, whereas there was increasing interest in private newspapers and international media.

Interestingly, however, the private press was also believed to be unprofessional, in that they were perceived to be constantly (and sometimes unreasonably) critical of government policies. Respondents indicated that they believed the private media consistently tried to impose their own beliefs and behaviour on the public. They said the private media also raised issues of the partisanship of the NEBE, arguing that it was not free but dependent on the incumbent government, and the perception was that the private media did not

consider the advantages of the NEBE but rather attempted to undermine its constitutional power.

In summing up, according to most of the key respondents, what is important in this country is that a mutual understanding between government and the press in general develops. They wish to see professional journalism, which works to the advantage of the public at large in controlling fraud and corruption during election time. The press in its watchdog role, according to respondents, should be critical but also accurate in covering the activities of the NEBE. Moreover, the press should expose the malpractices of the election board, whether journalists are working for the government media or the private press. The feeling was that this would help to enhance the ongoing democratic process in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, it was also believed that the government has a responsibility to promote the different views of political parties and interest groups in the public media. This highlights the importance of the role of media in playing their significant role in the democratization process of the country.

Chapter 5

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The obvious intention taken by the press in general and private newspapers in particular to criticize and report on certain infringements and fraudulent practices of elections and exposing of the malpractices of electoral boards at different levels was found to be encouraging. This paves the way for more media organisations to be much more critical of their reporting about the board and other institutions that are supposed to be independent of any outside influence. Many, if not all, the reports that appeared on the front pages of the private newspapers about the electoral Board of Ethiopia and its neutrality depicted the board as unfair and totally dependent on the ruling party and most condemned the board for being the instrument of the government in power. As Ethiopia is a country in the early stages of democratization, the reports on the malpractices of the electoral board indicate the extent to which the media is free to criticize and to freely express their ideas in the present day, which was totally impossible during the previous authoritarian regimes of this country.

From most of the private newspaper reports, one can conclude that the National Electoral Board's reputation and ability to conduct free and fair elections is at stake. If the public loses confidence in the credibility of the practices of the board, then it follows that the public will lose confidence in the elected ruling party as well. Therefore the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia should reflect on some of its practices and attempt to solve some of the problems that place its very existence in question.

Nonetheless, the private newspaper under scrutiny was also usually anti-government in its approach. This study has also identified some of the problems in private newspapers. Similar to the government press, which as shown, rather than watching for the malpractices of some institution like NEBE, was always in favour of them, *Reporter* tended to do the opposite. As if there is no mistake in at all in their practices. It is acceptable for the media to offer opinions or commentaries on the elections, but when it comes to hard news they should be as balanced and fair as possible. Failing to live up to professional standards might discredit the media. On the contrary, if the media show a higher standard of professionalism, they will be able to play a significant role in the democratisation process. Even if it is difficult for the media to be completely objective in their reporting, they should strive to reach a level where they can play a constructive role for the welfare of the public at large.

This research employed mainly content analysis, with supporting critical analysis of voters' opinion, to investigate and compare the reports of both government and private media using a sample newspaper from each sector, about the independence of NEBE in its activities of the 2005 general election. The research examines its hypothesis by formulating three main research questions based on the objective of the study.

Data was collected from both newspapers, *Addis Zemen* and *Reporter*, by enumerators, while for the qualitative analysis interviews were administered with 56 key informants during in-depth interviews and observation of their attitudes. The results were analyzed using a relevant computer program - SPSS – while the interviewees' responses were critically analysed. Based on the findings, the research arrived at the following conclusions:

- The government-aligned newspaper *Addis Zemen* is highly partisan in its reporting on the independence of the NEBE. Its partisan stance is clearly indicated on its front pages and especially in its editorial sections. It shows overall positive coverage of the independence of the NEBE.
- The private newspaper *Reporter* shows significant negative reporting about the independence of the NEBE. But *Reporter*, unlike *Addis Zemen*, does have some positive reports on the front pages and editorial sections.

- Voters' attitudes towards the media is somewhat mixed, but it is clearly indicated that the government media lost credibility more than the private press, though both are criticized for their different bias.
- The most serious problems faced by newspapers in the lack of professionalism in their reports about the independence of NEBE. This problem is seen in most private newspapers which generally suffer from finance shortages, with some of them are run by only a few members of staff and without having enough material and offices. Moreover, the private press is highly criticized for its sensational reports and considered as if it has forgotten professionalism and is working for profit only.
- Generally the press in Ethiopia is criticized by scholars in the media field, for the profession having suffered due to a shortage of skilled manpower.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research, the researcher has offered the following recommendations:

- Since democracy is a long process requiring continuous effort, the press must be made aware of its vital role in informing citizens on government activities, not always negatively, but also positively, thus contributing to the democratization process.

- The government press and the private press should create a condition of mutual tolerance but without compromising their profession.
- The government press should strive to serve the public at large without partisanship; since it belongs to the public at large, it has to be based on professional ethics.
- Private newspapers should behave ethically; they have to equip themselves with professional know-how and they have to forward criticism as necessary, not for the mere reason of criticising the government.
- The government on its part has to tolerate criticism, as this is necessary for good and democratic governance; it must open the doors for the private press and give out necessary information.
- The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia in its part must be clear, open and transparent for all media equally. It should cultivate good relations with all media and use them for educating the electorate during election times.
- A serious problem in Ethiopia is the continuing lack of media professionals in both government and private media; this has to be resolved through continuous training and education.

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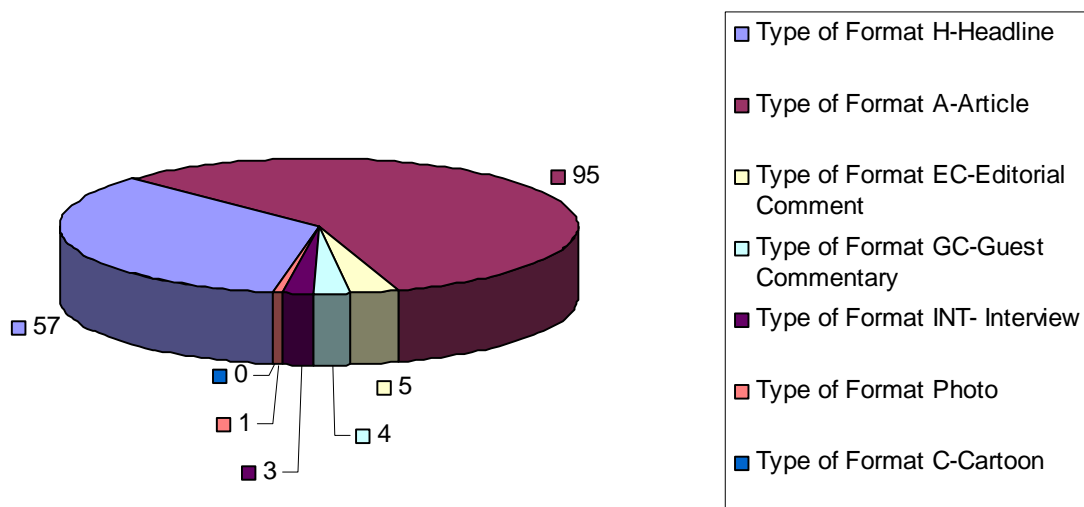
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Appendix 1

Type of Format * Type of News paper Crosstabulation
Count

		Type of News paper	
		Addis Zemen	Reporter
Type of Format	H-Headline	57	140
	A-Article	95	242
	EC-Editorial Comment	5	4
	GC-Guest Commentary	4	1
	INT- Interview	3	18
	Photo	1	3
	C-Cartoon	0	2

Chart 4: The type of format that NEBE collocated in Addis Zemen Newspaper



Appendix 2

		Type of News paper
		Reporter
Type of Format	H-Headline	140
	A-Article	242
	EC-Editorial Comment	4
	GC-Guest Commentary	1
	INT- Interview	18
	Photo	3
	C-Cartoon	2

Chart 5: The type of format that NEBE collocated in the Reporter newspaper

