

Media and Democracy in Kyrgyzstan: The Electoral News Coverage in the 2010 General Elections*

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Abstract

This paper provides a picture of the components of newspapers coverage during general elections and analyzes the final four weeks of three newspapers in the 2010 Kyrgyz parliamentary elections. Using content analysis, 191 news are analyzed for topic, big story, sub story, frame, format, geographic focus, party and lead newsmaker. Methods/categories used in News Index study of the Pew Research Center Journalism Project (formerly known as the PEJ Project for Excellence in Journalism) are used as the basis of determining categories in this project. It offers insight into the types of information the audience received about the parties and candidates, and the topics affecting the choices surrounding those elections. This paper further shows that the selected newspapers focused heavily on election process rather than social issues, and tactics and strategy frame for election coverage.

Keywords: Elections, Media, Democracy, News coverage

Kırgızistan'da Medya ve Demokrasi: 2010 Genel Seçimlerinin Basında Sunumu

Özet

Bu makalede 2010 Kırgızistan seçimlerinde üç gazetenin seçimden önce son dört haftası analiz edilmektedir. İçerik analizi aracılığıyla Kırgızistan'da üç gazetede yayınlanan 191 haber, konu, alt konu, çerçeve, format, coğrafik odak, önde gelen parti ve liderler tanımlanarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmadaki kategorilerin belirlenmesinde Pew Araştırma Merkezi PEJ (Habercilikte Mükemmeliyet Projesinin) News Index çalışmasında kullanılan yöntem/kategoriler esas alınmıştır. Makale okurların parti ve adaylar hakkında aldıkları bilgi türlerini ve bu seçimleri etkileyen konular hakkında bilgi sağlar. Bu çalışma, seçilen ülkedeki gazetelerin konu olarak sosyal sorunların yerine seçim sürecine, haberleri çerçevlendirme olarak taktik ve stratejiye odaklandığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Seçimler, Medya, Demokrasi, Seçimlerin basında sunumu

* This paper is a part of unpublished doctoral dissertation written by Nadirabegim Eskiçorapçı in 2016 "Politics, Media and Democracy: The Electoral News Coverage in the 2010 Kyrgyzstan and 2011 Turkey Elections".

Introduction

Elections offer a unique opportunity to analyze democratic media when political parties struggle for parliamentary power. Analyzing election campaigns through newspapers' election coverage of Kyrgyzstan offer an interesting and important case study of politics, democracy and media.

Ideally, the media should disseminate the full range of political opinions; whereby the public can rely on it to make decisions on politics and enter into national life. What does the media do in practice? What does the coverage provided in the three newspapers in Kyrgyzstan explain about the status of the elections' news media? What are the implications of the coverage provided? Are these media contributing to the democratic media standards?

Analyzing democratic media during elections using data from newspapers provides the complete picture of elections by evaluating what topics were covered, how they were framed, which political parties and actors showed up mostly and which format were utilized by newspapers.

Literature Review

Theories of media communication acknowledged the ways in which our understanding and practice of communication are shaped. When discussing the situation that exists today and the possibilities of the new democratic media environment compared to today's mainstream media, the value of critical media theories as references is great. The mass media are from Marxist perspectives, a 'means of production' that exist in the larger context as the property of the ruling class in a capitalist society. According to this perspective, the class, which has the means of material production, also controls the means of mental production (Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 67). Walter Benjamin's "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" is one of the most significant material in media theory. In this work, Benjamin demonstrated why the cinema could only exist in an era of mechanical reproduction as opposed to simple production of unique works. In his view, the very principle of mechanical reproduction rendered the old conception of what he calls 'auratic' art obsolete (Mattelart and Mattelart, 2004).

The Frankfurt School's researchers studied the process of industrialization of mass produced culture and investigated the commercial imperatives that drove the system, thereby became the authors of the term "culture industries". The critical theorists analyzed all mass-mediated cultural artifacts within the context of industrial production, in which the artifacts of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: commodification, standardization and massification (Kellner, 2003). According to the

'propaganda model' put forward by Herman and Chomsky, the media are servants of the powerful, subordinated to the interests of dominant classes and acting as instruments of propaganda tools over the public. They "serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity" (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. 1). When the first newspapers began to operate their modern function they did huge job of facilitating debate amongst the emerging bourgeois and educated classes, supplying information but also opinion, comment and criticism. Habermas locates the development of the public sphere in the eighteenth-century Britain where the newspapers started to accomplish the functions above (McNair, 2011, p.18).

Agenda setting has the special space and one of the most important within the theories in political communication. Important theorist in this field – Walter Lippmann, highlighted the identifying role of the mass media in democracy and its capacity to form public opinion. Lippmann (1922 p.29) in his classic, *Public Opinion*, beginning with the title "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads" noted that the news media are an essential source of those pictures in public heads about the larger sphere of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind". His thesis was that the news media, our windows to the vast world beyond our direct experience, determine our cognitive maps of that world (McCombs, 1972). As Bernard Cohen (1963, p.13) has argued, that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about". Cohen describes the ways in which the news media can set the agenda for public thought and public discussion, because so many people use the mass media to help them sort information they receive through important political issues before they vote (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002).

Agenda setting signifying that there is a strong correlation between priorities that the mass media give to particular issues (based on space given by newspaper or time in television, or amount of coverage) and the priorities attributed by mass audiences to these particular issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The more interest and importance newspapers or television news give to some programs or issues, the more likely are target audiences of those media regarding them as being more salient and more efficient (Glynn et al., 1999. p. 389).

Newspapers repeatedly underlying the importance of cues they provided can set the agenda and draw publics' attention to that small group of issues selected by them, thus contributing in the formation of public opinion (McCombs, 2002). In the first level of agenda setting, it is centers on the issues, political authorities or political and social events of the media agenda, and also the perception of audience about what issues were decent for attention

(McCombs, 1992). In the second level of agenda setting, it is important to answer how people think about a problem, social issue or political candidate. Also, it answers how the issue, the problem or the candidate are framed by news outlet and describes the object and the tone of issues' coverage (Kim and McCombs, 2007). This study captures the first level and partly the second level of agenda setting by explaining what issues selected newspapers in Kyrgyzstan covered and how were those issues framed by the newspapers.

The media provides content for audience consumption in societies and its function is a very important element for democratic practice. Some scholars besides criticizing of the status of modern mass media have forwarded the steps, system, and ideas to create an informed citizenry that is an essential part of a functioning democratic society (Bennett, 2007; Schudson, 1998; Hackett & Carroll, 2006). Steps and/or concepts provided ways through which to assess the content of the newspapers coverage against a democratic ideal.

Lance Bennett has advanced the steps to create an informed citizenry that is an essential part of a functioning democratic society. He has arguments about the role of media in the production and dissemination process in the United States. He believes that American press is in crisis (Bennett et al, 2007) and criticizes that political news is more about personalities than about ideologies (Bennett and Entman, 2005). For Bennett (2007), political news is a combination of the things that newsmakers (politicians and other political actors) believe to be timely, important, or interesting.

Specific standards of an idealized democratic media have been developed and through this democratic framework, the value of media content for citizen engagement could be achieved. According to Bennett (2007) presenting news through these values will help to achieve better level in citizen knowledge and democracy: independent issue agendas, diverse voices, analysis of how politics operates with news events, historical context of issues/problems, coverage of citizen political activists and better use of interactive technologies. The explanation of each value helps to enhance the content of news described in the conclusion part of this paper with implementation of them in Kyrgyz newspapers.

Foreign observers often cited the press in Kyrgyzstan as a shining example of Central Asian democracy in the very first year of its independence (Haghighyeghi, 1997). Kyrgyzstan as a country of transition to democracy was effectuated with a well-established political infrastructure already in place from prior regimes. It has specific challenges with ethnic minorities. Problems center on ethnic divisions that is with Uzbeks.

Kyrgyzstan is the country that had democratic transition from Soviet totalitarianism, from communist internationalism to nation state formation. Kyrgyzstan has survived two

forceful regime changes since independence. It has been the only post-Soviet country that has experienced revolutions in 2005¹ and the latest of the post-communist revolution in 2010² where authoritarian regime fell and oppositional leaders began a new democratic transition. Also Kyrgyzstan became the first parliamentary democratic nation in Central Asia.

In Kyrgyzstan, the government holds in its hands the main printing press in the country; TV transmitters and frequencies are also entirely governmental. Due to economic situation, independent or oppositional media's survival is difficult. Kyrgyz newspapers studied are published once a week.

Methodology

The primary question guiding this study is “what is the performance of media in Kyrgyzstan during parliamentary elections and especially its role in the process of democratization?” In answering this question, elections, political parties, the relationship between the media and the government, the current state of the media and the larger political situation in the country were deemed important. In order to conduct the examination of newspapers, the following research questions will guide the analysis:

- What is the news related to the elections in the Kyrgyz media?
- Among the selected newspapers, which have given more space to the elections?
- Which political party received more coverage?
- Which election subtopics received more coverage?
- What issues were covered by the selected newspapers during the final four weeks of the elections?
- How were those issues framed? Were there differences between the selected newspapers in framing behavior?
- What was the distribution of political parties and actors (candidates) in newspapers?
- What was the format of the selected newspapers during the final four weeks of the elections?
- What does the coverage provided on the three newspapers in Kyrgyzstan show us about the status of the news election media? Are these media contributing to the democratic media standards?

¹ March 24, 2010 is an important date, this day the Tulip Revolution officially began and it led to President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev's fall from power.

² The Kyrgyz revolution of 2010 began in April, with the ousting of Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev and on April 8, opposition politicians declared an interim government.

The dates that were analyzed in this study were the 10th of September and the 10th of October (election day) in Kyrgyzstan because these are the dates of the parliamentary elections, and were days of intense election coverage and a crucial point for public voting decisions. Using content analysis, 191 news items are analyzed for topic, big story, sub story, frame, format, geographic focus, party and lead newsmaker.

Findings

The Kyrgyz Elections

In Kyrgyzstan, tabloid newspapers in general, have eight to sixteen pages for each issue, averagely, they have twelve pages. The Friday editions contain advertisements of often up to fifty percent and the largest in volume with thirty-two pages. Newspapers studied in this research are also published once a week on Fridays, except *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, which also has an edition on Tuesday. Advertising rarely exceeds (except Friday editions) twenty percent of the content and in non-governmental newspapers this percentage may be as low as one percent (GMMP, 2010).

The universe of this study includes three newspapers. State controlled, governmental newspaper *Kyrgyz Tuusu* is the oldest national newspaper in the country which was first published on the 7th of November, 1924; in Tashkent (the capital city of Uzbekistan) *Erkin Too* by name. From August 1927, it was published as *Kizil Kyrgyzstan* (Red Kyrgyzstan) as a main organ of Soviet power, and from 1956 to 1991 it published and functioned as *Sovetik Kyrgyzstan* (Soviet Kyrgyzstan). After the collapse of the Soviet regime, it received its current name *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Kyrgyz Flag) and distributed around the country and attracts adult, middle-aged and youth, including variety of columns for different ages and groups. The laws of the country are first published in this official state paper before implementation.

Agym, a Kyrgyz language newspaper which is published once a week, was established in 2001, during which time it was published by Bakyt Jamalidinov and owned by Melis Eshimkanov, who also served as its editor-in-chief. As the newspaper was an oppositional weekly to the government in the country, it was seen as leaning to the opposition in 2007. Alexander Kim who also owns the Russian language newspaper, *Vecherniy Bishkek*, became the owner of *Agym* in February 2009 (Akipress, 2014). The paper was owned and published by Begaly Nargozuev in the later years. The average circulation of *Agym* was 10,000 copies in 2009 and in 2011, it rose to 15,000 copies. Readers of *Agym* are people with oppositional view.

Kyrgyz Ruhu is the only independent Kyrgyz language newspaper, which was first published on the 14th of August, 1991 in Kyrgyzstan. Advertisers do not choose it due to the

fact that they have no interest in reaching only the target audience of this national, governmental, Kyrgyz language newspaper in Kyrgyzstan (Haghayeghi, 1997, p. 17).

Election coverage by source

In this section, figure 1. Illustrates Kyrgyz parliamentary election stories breakdown by source. It helps to understand which have given more space to the elections, among the selected newspapers.

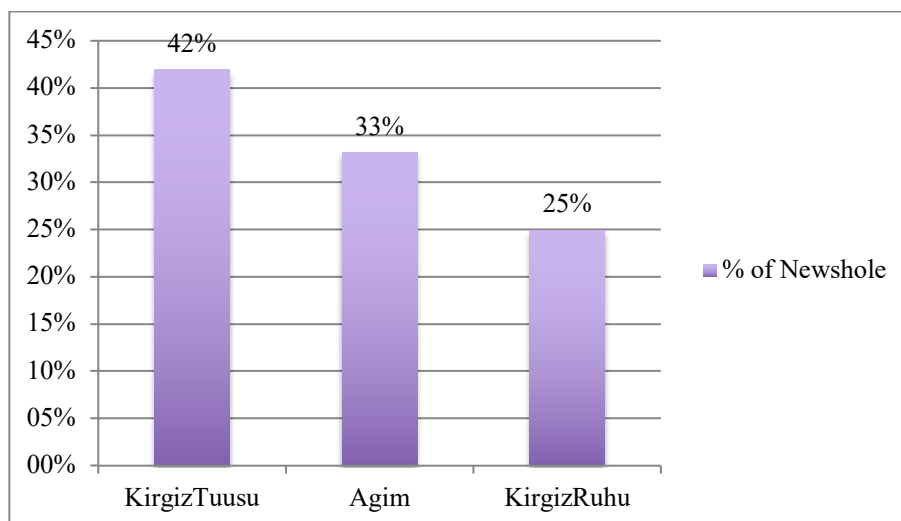


Figure 1. Kyrgyz Election Stories Breakdown by Source

Governmental newspaper Kyrgyz Tuusu had 74 stories; oppositional newspaper Agym had 69 stories and independent Kyrgyz Ruhu had 29 stories. Kyrgyz election stories breakdown by source shows that Kyrgyz Tuusu has given more space with 42% newshole to the elections, Agym was the second with 33% newshole and Kyrgyz Ruhu was the last with 25% newsholes.

The general timeline of the 2010 Kyrgyz parliamentary elections

The time frame under study for the coverage of the Kyrgyz parliamentary elections was between 10 September and 10 October (the day of the election). Figure 2 shows overall timeline of 2010 Kyrgyz general election stories. A look into the coverage timeline revealed that the coverage was continuously changing.

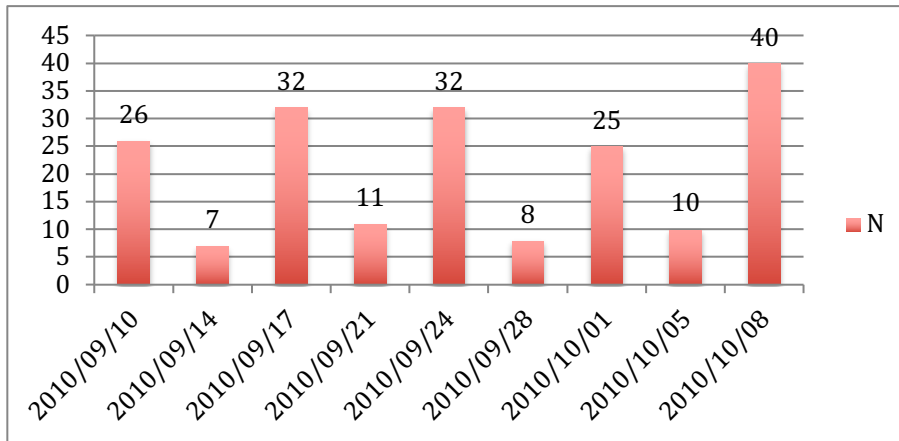


Figure 2. Overall Timeline of 2010 Kyrgyz Election Stories

Agym and Kyrgyz Ruhu are published once per week. On the 14th, the 21st, the 28th September and the 5th of October in the timeline, there are only Kyrgyz Tuusu’s stories that were published twice a week. The dates that received the highest amount of stories within this time frame was October 10th (with 40 stories which was 22.7 % of the Kyrgyz parliamentary election stories newshole).

The major topics and storylines of the election

Data on the topics covered among the three newspapers studied, provides information on the diversity of topics that were accessible for audiences. The coding included the broad story topics. Figure 3 shows the major topics of the Kyrgyz general election coverage overall and answers the question: what is the news related to the elections in the Kyrgyz media?

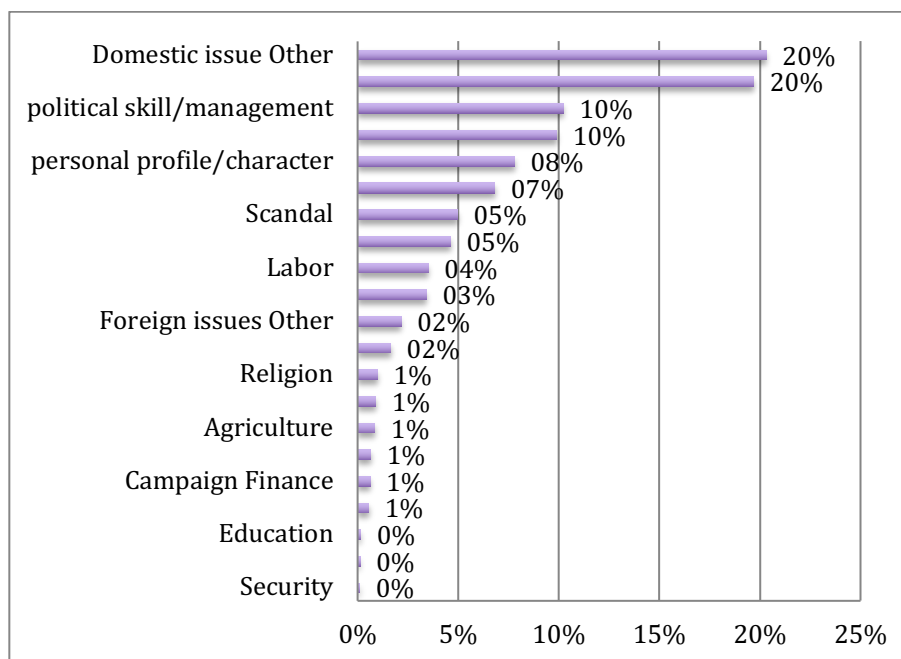


Figure 3. Major Topics of the Kyrgyz Election Overall

Analysis of the major topics of the Kyrgyz parliamentary election coverage overall in the press shows that most of the attention was devoted to Domestic issue/other and election process analysis (20% of the newspaper newshole) and the domestic issue /other analysis (10 % of the newshole). After these analysis, major topics that received upper 1% of the newshole were: Political skill/ management (10%), Political Philosophy/Ideology (10 %), Personal Profile/Character (8 %), Civil rights/Liberties (7 %), Scandal and Business economy topics received 5% of the newshole each. Labor (4 %), Crime incident / Trends (3 %), Foreign issues/ Other and Culture/Arts topics received 2% of the newshole each. In other topics, religion, agriculture, education, transportation were mentioned in a smaller number of stories.

Newspapers allocated spaces, particularly, to each of the other topics related to the 2010 election. Table 1 provides information about topics covered by newspapers and was accessible to the public. The differences and similarities between newspapers topic coverage could be evaluated in this table and helps to explain what issues were covered by the selected newspapers during the final four weeks of the elections.

Table 1. Newsholes and Number Distribution of Topics Covered by Story by Source

	SOURCE					
	KirgizTuusu		Agim		KirgizRuhu	
	Total	Column N	Column N	Column N	Total N	Column N
	N	%	Total N	%	Total N	%
Agriculture	1	1,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Business Economy	3	4,1%	5	7,2%	1	2,1%
Campaign Finance	0	0,0%	2	2,9%	2	4,2%
Civil rights/Liberties	5	6,8%	2	2,9%	0	0,0%
Crime incident/Trends	3	4,1%	2	2,9%	0	0,0%
Culture/Arts	0	0,0%	1	1,4%	2	4,2%
Education	1	1,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Election process	14	18,9%	18	26,1%	15	31,3%
Environment/Energy	1	1,4%	1	1,4%	1	2,1%
Labor	3	4,1%	3	4,3%	1	2,1%
Religion	0	0,0%	2	2,9%	2	4,2%
Court / legal system	1	1,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Transportation	0	0,0%	1	1,4%	0	0,0%

Scandal	1	1,4%	4	5,8%	3	6,3%
Security	1	1,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Domestic issue Other	11	14,9%	10	14,5%	10	20,8%
Foreign issues Other	1	1,4%	4	5,8%	1	2,1%
personal profile/character	3	4,1%	6	8,7%	4	8,3%
political skill/management	8	10,8%	3	4,3%	2	4,2%
political	15	20,3%	4	5,8%	4	8,3%
philosophy/ideology						
Other	2	2,7%	1	1,4%	0	0,0%
Total	74	100,0%	69	100,0%	48	100,0%

There was the important difference among the newspapers with regard to the topic. Kyrgyz Tuusu devoted higher newshole to political philosophy/ ideology (20.3 %) than Agym (5.8. %) and Kyrgyz Ruhu (8.3 %). Kyrgyz Ruhu devoted higher newshole to the election process analysis (31.3 %) while Agym (26.1 %) and Kyrgyz Tuusu (18.9 %) gave much lesser space to this topic.

Domestic issue/ other coverage: Kyrgyz Ruhu (20.8 %), Kyrgyz Tuusu (14.9 %) and Agym (14.5 %). Agym (9.6 %) dedicated higher newshole to coverage of the business/economy than its counterparts – Kyrgyz Ruhu (2.1. %) and Kyrgyz Tuusu (4.1. %).

The sub stories composed of subtitles of the main story, have the purpose of specifying the story, and clarify which parts of the story are emphasized. If the story didn't fit within the categories provided, coder created new ones. Many of the sub stories (for example; ethnic clashes, the 7th April, regionalism) were created during the coding because topics did not fit the pre-coded sub story categories. This allowed sub stories to be developed from the data and from the news stories. Figure 4 shows the major sub stories of the Kyrgyz general election overall.

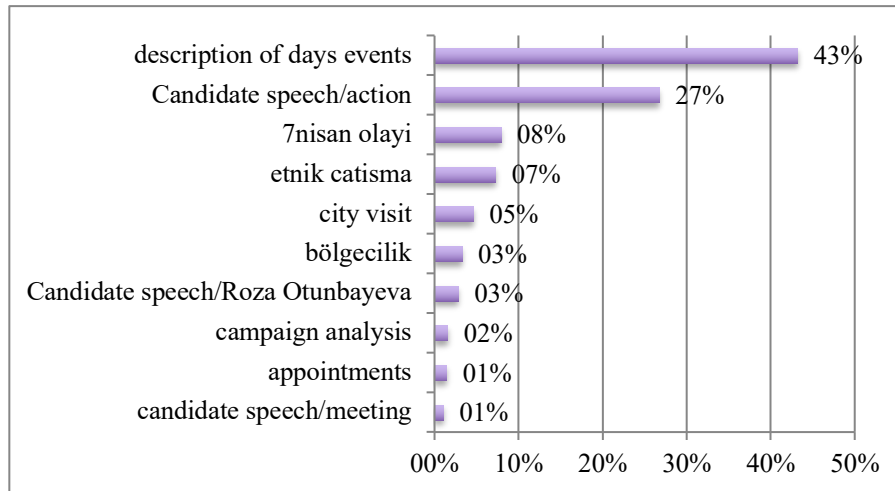


Figure 4. Major Sub stories of the Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Overall

Analysis of the major sub stories of the Kyrgyz parliamentary election coverage overall in the press shows that most of the attention was devoted to the description of the day's events analysis (43 % of the newspaper newshole). The second sub story that received most coverage was candidates' speeches / actions with 27 % of newshole. 8 % of newshole devoted to 7th April events. Political turmoil started in the country when demonstrators expelled President Kurmanbek Bakiyev from his office on 7th April, 2010. Before this happened, political opposition criticized some aspects of Bakiyev's governing. It included: energy tariffs increase, several media outlets closed by the government, corruption increase all around the country, influential political leaders from opposition have been imprisoned. They also expressed in their demonstrations that Bakiev's authoritarianism is growing (World report, 2011). 7 % of newshole was devoted to ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks happened on June 10-13, 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan. This conflict resulted in at least approximately 470 deaths and nearly 2000 injures.

Frame

The following section examines the utilization and distribution of the six established news frames (PEJ, 2009) in the coverage of election news stories during the time period studied.

Figure 5 illustrates the frame of Kyrgyz parliamentary election stories overall and helps to answer the question: how were issues framed by the selected newspapers during the final four weeks of the elections?

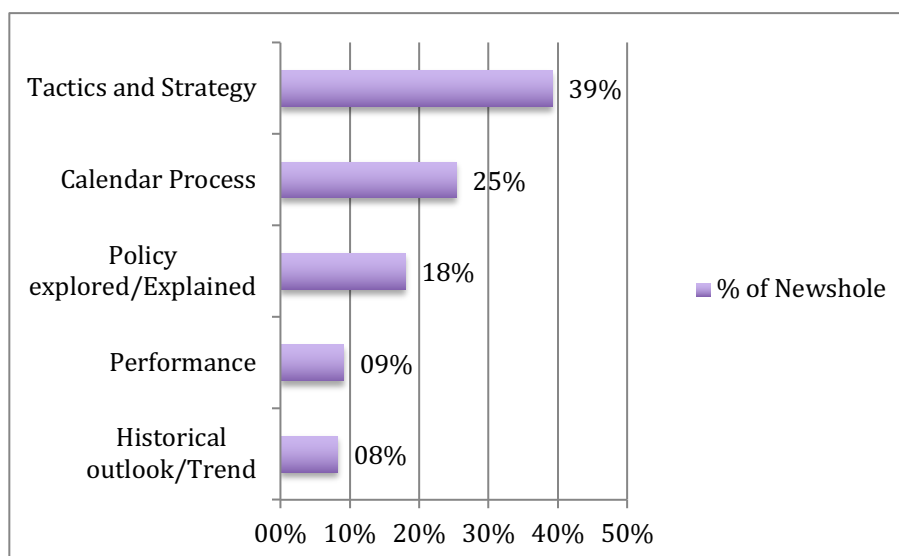


Figure 5. Frame of Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Stories Overall

Data shows that election stories coverage was predominantly framed as involving tactics and strategy. A close look within the storyline level shows that 39 % of the straight election stories were framed as tactics and strategy. Overall, 25% of all Kyrgyz election stories newshole were framed as calendar process. 18 % of the newshole was framed as policy explored, 9% as performance. Only 8% of the newshole was framed as historical outlook overall.

Table 2 shows the newsholes and number of distribution of stories by frame and by source and answer the question: Were there differences between the selected newspapers in framing behavior?

Table 2. Newsholes and Number Distribution of Frames by Sources

	SOURCE					
	KirgizTuusu		Agim		KirgizRuhu	
	Total N	%	Total N	%	Total N	N %
Calendar Process	28	37,8%	15	21,7%	20	41,7%
Historical outlook/Trend	4	5,4%	1	1,4%	3	6,3%
Battleground/Conflict	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Performance	8	10,8%	3	4,3%	3	6,3%
Policy explored/Explained	21	28,4%	11	15,9%	4	8,3%

Wrongdoing exposed	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Tactics and Strategy	13	17,6%	39	56,5%	18	37,5%
Other	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Total	74	100,0%	69	100,0%	48	100,0%

There was a substantial difference in the use of framing across the three newspapers. Agym had 56.5 % of newshole framed as tactics and strategy devoting the highest rate to this frame, while in Kyrgyz tuusu (17.6 %) and Kyrgyz Ruhu (37.5 %) of the newsholes used the same frame.

In Kyrgyz Ruhu (41.7 %) and Kyrgyz Tuusu (37.8 %) of the newshole were framed as calendar process as most used frame. In Agym, 21.7 % of the newshole was framed as calendar process.

More coverage were framed as Policy explored (28.4 %) in Kyrgyz Tuusu than its counterparts. It is important to note that Kyrgyz newspapers did not use battleground / conflict and wrongdoing exposed frames at all.

Frame and topic

In this section, data and information are examined on the use of frames by topics on each of the three selected newspapers in this section. For the purposes of frame, it has limited the discussion to stories covering election process and domestic issue/other due to the fact that the substantial majority of stories on all three newspapers were those covering election process or domestic issue/other. Comparing frames with their associated topics presented further insight into the framing behavior of each of the newspaper during the general election in Kyrgyzstan. It is important to evaluate which topics utilized each frame to accurately analyze the type of information and content presented to the audience. Figure 6 shows the newshole distribution of stories by frame and topic.

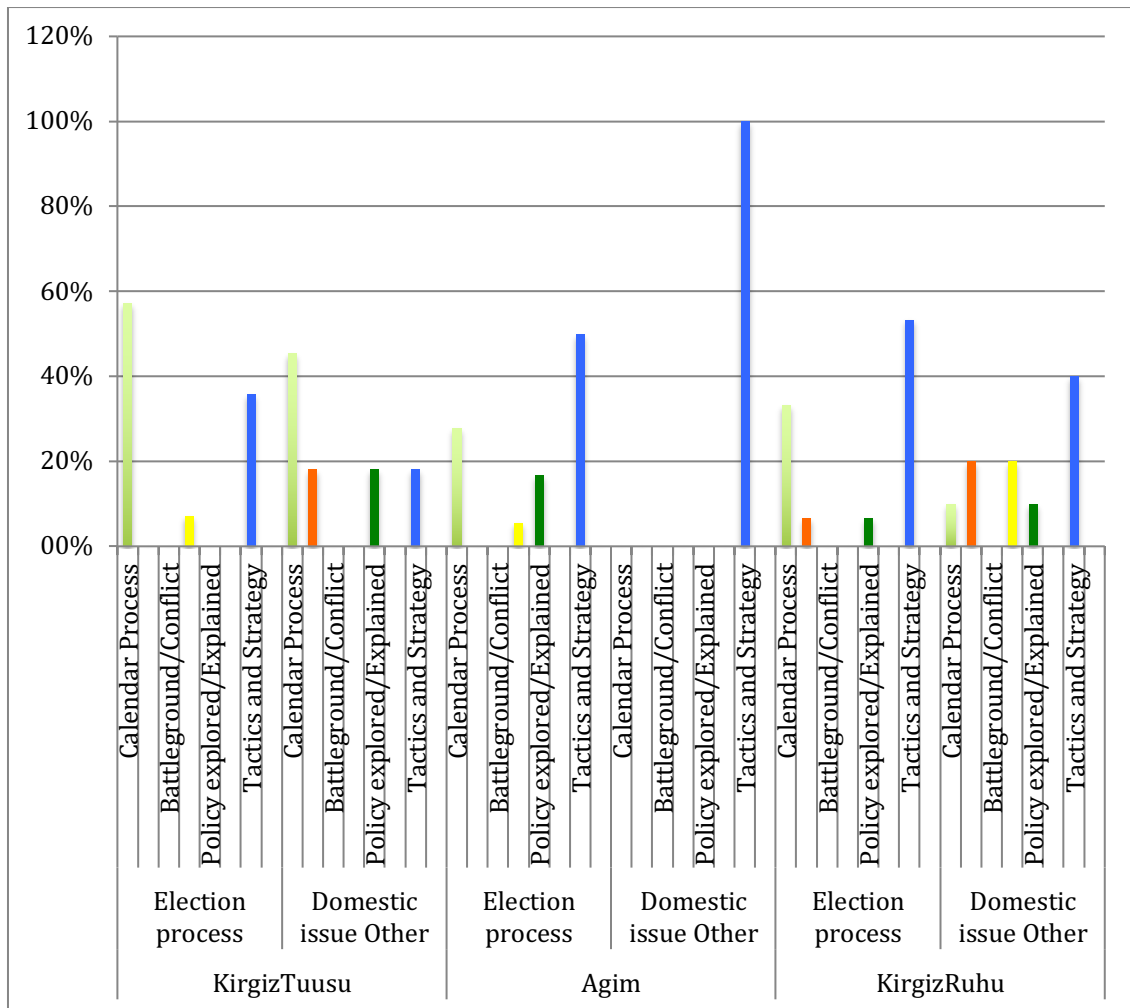


Figure 6. Newshole Distribution of Stories by Frame and Topic

In Kyrgyz Tuusu, the calendar process frame accounted for 57 % of all newshole allocated to election process stories. The calendar process frame was most considerable only in Kyrgyz Tuusu. 45 % of newshole allocated to domestic issue/other was frames as calendar process as well. The majority of election process stories were stories including campaigns, party programs, candidates' speeches and actions. The calendar process frame was the most utilized in the election process stories only in Kyrgyz Tuusu.

In Agym all news, 100% of all newshole allocated to domestic issue/other was framed as tactics and strategy. Like in Agym, the calendar process frame did not account for the highest percentage of newshole for any other topic. In contrast to Kyrgyz Tuusu, most of the election process stories framed as tactics and strategy account for 53 % of the newshole in Kyrgyz Ruhu. Historical outlook (20 %) and Performance (20 %) frame was the second in framing behavior of domestic issues/other stories in Kyrgyz Ruhu after tactics and strategy frame (40%). Kyrgyz Ruhu also used a wide variety of frames for stories on domestic issue/ other.

In Agym the tactics and strategy frame accounted for 50% of all newshole allocated to election process stories. 28% of the newshole on election process stories was framed as calendar process. Domestic issue/other stories in Agym and election process stories in Kyrgyz Ruhu did not use a wide variety of frames for stories.

Format

Choosing topics to cover and the way in which they will be covered (how they will be framed) are two elements in the creation of information in political discussion. Another element is format. How newspapers choose format when covering a story is important. The decision to use internal staff reports or opinion columns, use wire story or outside contributor are important elements of content presentation to audiences. "Format measures the type and origin of stories. It designates, whether the news story is a product of original reporting, or drawn from another news source / outlets. It delineates stories within the publication, while measuring the stories' type and origin" (PEJ, 2009). All stories were a straight news stories: internal staff report with byline and no byline (determining the

authorship of the story); Wire stories (Kabar Agency); opinion columns internal staff report with byline and outside contributor.

Figure 7 shows the Kyrgyz Parliamentary election stories format overall and answer the question: What was the format of newspapers during the final four weeks of the elections? In this figure information that capture all the three newspapers are studied.

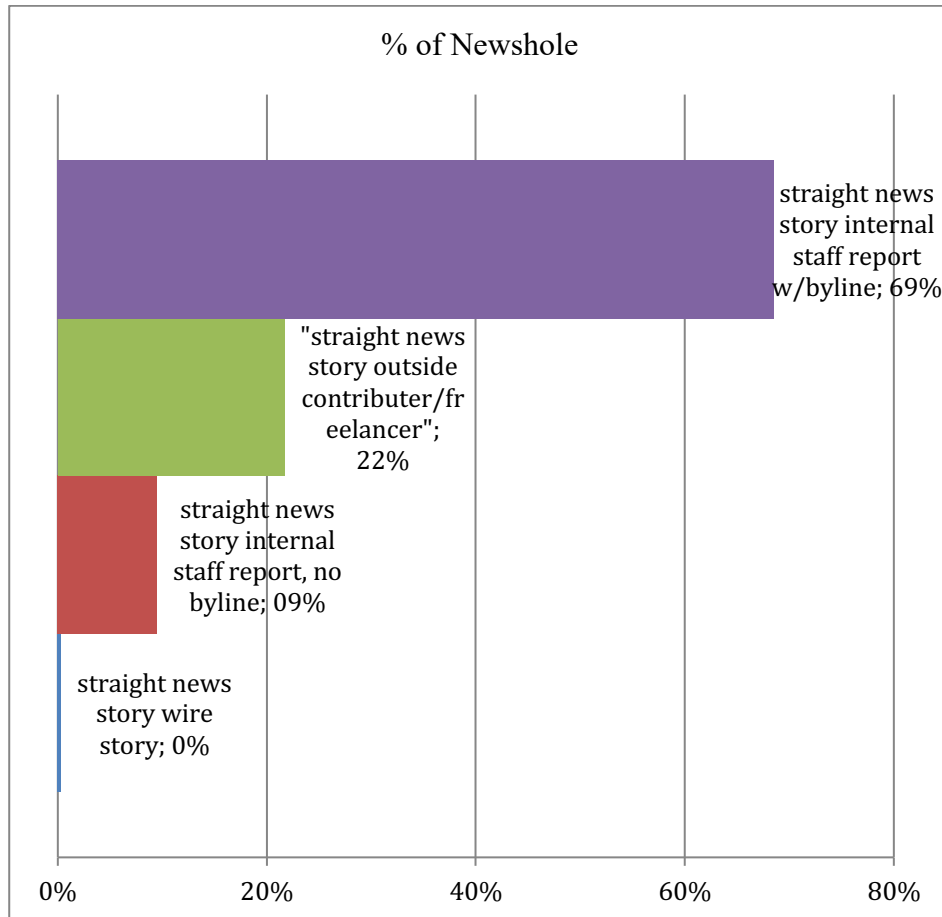


Figure 7. Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Stories Format Overall

A close look reveals that 69 % of the stories were written by internal staff byline. And 22% of newshole were written by outside contributor. 0. 9 % of the stories were written by staff, no byline. It is important to note that, wire story format used lesser among Kyrgyz newspapers. The most used format amongst Kyrgyzstan newspapers was straight news story internal staff report byline. The majority of stories with the format straight news story outside contributor / freelancer were stories sponsored by political parties.

Table 3 shows the distribution of format by sources. Differences and similarities in between newspapers are achieved here to understand about formats that media outlets choose to use.

Table 3. Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Stories Format by Sources

	SOURCE					
	KirgizTuusu		Agim		KirgizRuhu	
	Total N	% of Newshole	Total N	% of Newshole	Total N	% of Newshole
straight news story internal staff report w/byline	37	58,1%	51	83,4%	26	66,2%
straight news story internal staff report, no byline	4	4,3%	10	5,5%	18	23,6%
straight news story wire story	1	,2%	3	,8%	0	0,0%
"straight news story outside contributor/freelancer"	32	37,4%	5	10,4%	4	10,1%
Total	74	100,0%	69	100,0%	48	100,0%

The dominant format of all three newspapers was straight news story internal staff reports byline: Kyrgyz Tuusu (58.1 % of newshole) and Agym (83.4 % of newshole) and Kyrgyz Ruhu (66.2 % of newshole). The second format of Kyrgyz Tuusu (37.4 %) and Agym (10.4 %) was straight news stories written by outside contributor. Kyrgyz Ruhu used the internal staff report no byline at a higher rate than its counterparts (23.6 % of the newshole); Kyrgyz Tuusu (4.3. %) and Agym (5.5).

Only (0.2 %) in Kyrgyz Tuusu and (0.8 %) in Agym were wire stories.

The main parties of the 2010 Kyrgyz parliamentary elections

Over 3000 candidates from 29 parties competed for the 120 seats in The Supreme Council (Jogorku Kenesh Of Kyrgyz Republic) in 2010. These political parties entered the

Parliament as follow: Ata-Jurt (28 deputies), SDPK (26 deputies), Ar Namys (25 deputies), Respublika (23 deputies), Ata Meken (18 deputies).

Figure 8 shows the parties of the Kyrgyz parliamentary election coverage and answer the question about which political party received more coverage.

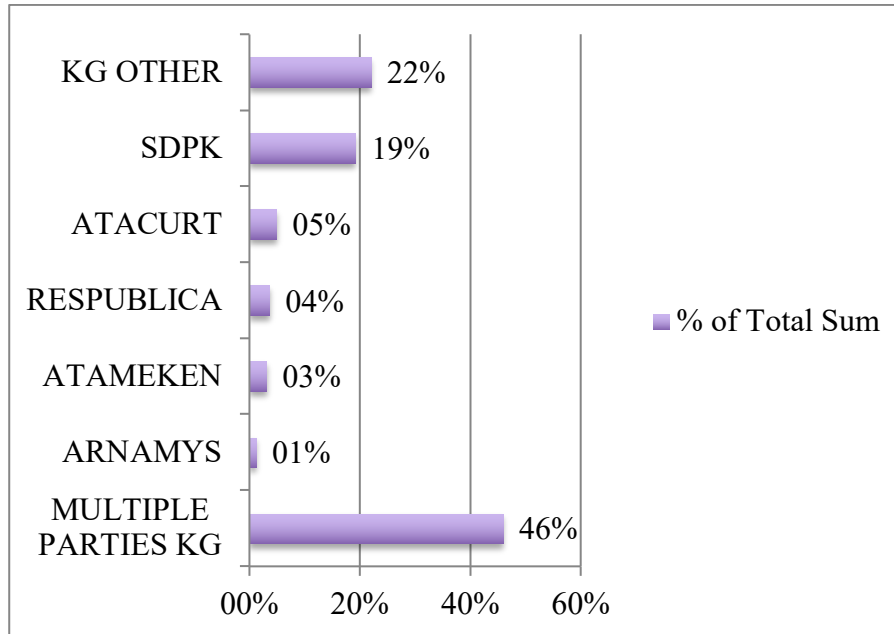


Figure 8. Parties of the Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Coverage

Data shows that the party that received the highest amount of stories was SDPK – ruling interim government’s party (19 % of the election stories newshole). Atacurt, which won a plurality of seats was the second (with 5 % of the newshole) and Respublika was the third (with 4 % of newshole). Ata Meken received 3 % of the newshole and Ar Namys was the last with 1 % of the newshole. 22 % of the newshole was devoted to other parties in Kyrgyzstan, such as: Butun Kyrgyzstan, Zamandash, Ak Shumkar, etc. Stories that include more than one party in one story were coded as Multiple Parties and received 46% (almost half overall) of the election stories newshole.

Lead Newsmaker of the 2010 Kyrgyz parliamentary elections

Political leaders strengthen their power by votes in democratic countries. Figure 9 shows the lead newsmakers of Kyrgyz Parliamentary election coverage and answer the question: what was the distribution of political actors in newspapers studied?

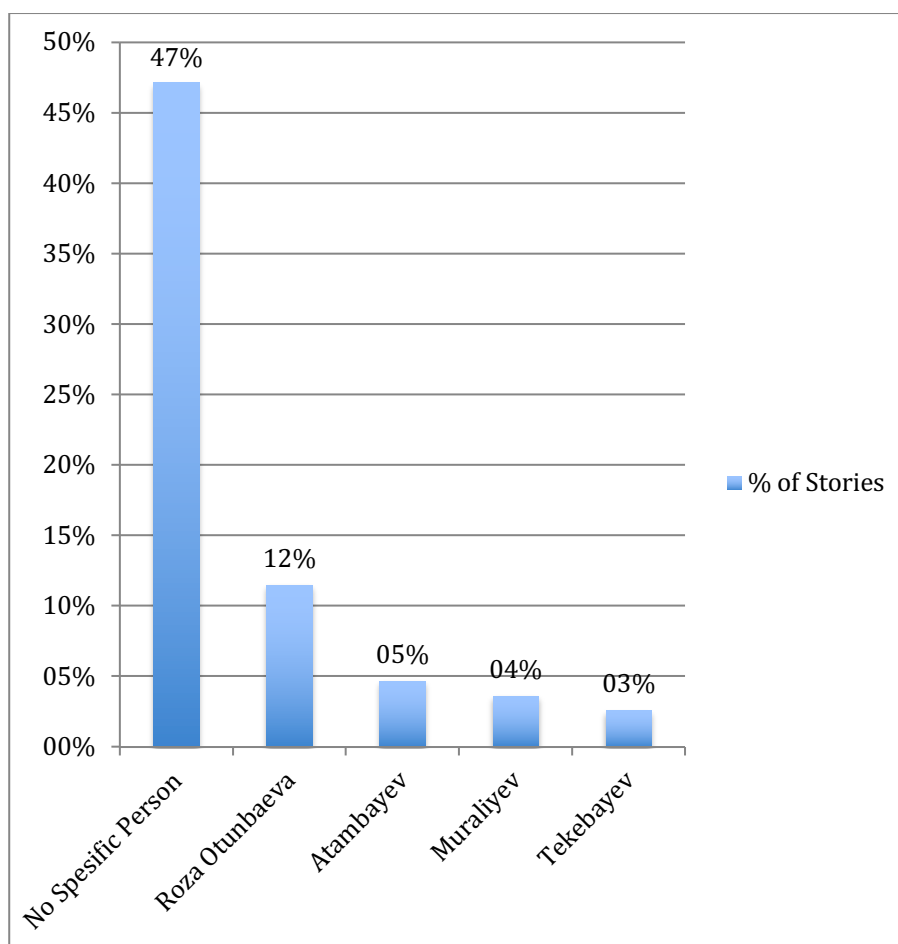


Figure 9. Lead Newsmakers of Kyrgyz Parliamentary Election Coverage

The leaders of interim government Roza Otunbayeva and Almazbek Atambayev naturally became the lead newsmaker of the election coverage. With 12% of the stories Roza Otunbayeva, president of the interim government, emerged as the main newsmaker - meaning at least 48% of a story was about her - (about 47% of the stories did not have a lead newsmaker). Almazbek Atambayev, first deputy chair of the interim government was the second-leading newsmaker, registering at 5%. Amangeldi Muraliyev, was number three at 4%. Omurbek Tekebayev, the chairman and founder of Ata Meken was the fourth lead newsmaker with 3% of the newshole.

Other newsmakers are: Omurbek Babanov, the chairman and leader of Respublika (2.1 %), Azimbek Beknazarov, the chairman of Birikken Eldik Kyimyl (United People’s Movement) Party had (2.1 %), Adahan Madumarov, the chairman of Butun Kyrgyzstan Party had (1 %), Temir Sariyev, the chairman of Ak Shumkar Party had (1%).

Cekshenkulov, Tuleev, Abdullayeva, Borbiyev, Capanov etc. All newsmakers in the stories were political candidates.

Table 4 shows the percentages of stories featuring Kyrgyz candidates by newspapers studied.

Table 4. Percentage of Stories Featuring Kyrgyz Candidates by Sources

	KirgizTuusu % of Newshole	Agim % of Newshole	KirgizRuhu % of Newshole	Total % of Newshole
Atambayev	15%	68%	22%	31%
Roza Otunbaeva	85%	27%	26%	55%
Tekebayev	0%	5%	52%	13%

Throughout the study time period, Roza Otunbayeva, Almaz Atambayev and Omurbek Tekebayev were featured on news through speeches, events, meetings. Data shows that in Kyrgyz Tuusu, almost more than half of the stories was devoted to Roza Otunbayeva with 85 % of newshole. 15 % of newshole Kyrgyz Tuusu gave to news about Almaz Atambayev, and no newshole devoted to Tekebayev. In Agym more than half of news were about Almaz Atambayev, with 68% of newshole, to Roza Otunbayeva it dedicated 27 % of newshole and only 5% of newshole was about Tekebayev. In Kyrgyz Ruhu, almost half of news was about Tekebayev with 52 % of newshole, to Roza Otunbayeva, it dedicated 26 % of newshole, and 22% of newshole to Almaz Atambayev.

Comparison of Kyrgyz newspapers

The data gathered has provided a picture of the similarities and differences among three newspapers in the 2010 general elections in Kyrgyzstan, in terms of the topic, party and candidates coverage. Each of them use different frames and formats to cover these election stories. Evaluating these similarities and differences provided an important perspective to the discussion as each newspaper contributes to the public sphere.

Topic. Agym and Kyrgyz Ruhu were more alike while Kyrgyz Tuusu stood alone. For example, the first three topics for Kyrgyz Ruhu and Agym were the same. They were the Election process, domestic issue/other and personal profile/character. Kyrgyz Tuusu gave more space to political philosophy and ideology rather than its counterparts. Agym covered a more diverse range of topics than Kyrgyz Tuusu and Kyrgyz Ruhu.

Format. The dominant format of all the three newspapers was straight news story internal staff report byline. For the format, Agym and Kyrgyz Ruhu presented the same performance. The second most used format for them was straight news stories internal staff report no byline and the third was stories from outside contributors. For Kyrgyz Tuusu, the second most used format was outside contributor / freelancer and third was stories by internal staff report no byline. It is interesting that only (0.2 % of newshole) in Kyrgyz Tuusu and (0.8 % of newshole) in Agym were wire stories that was transferred from Kabar Agency.

Frame. In terms of story frame, Agym devoted the highest rate to the tactics and strategy, compared with Kyrgyz Tuusu and Kyrgyz Ruhu. Kyrgyz Tuusu and Kyrgyz Ruhu gave more space on calendar process when framing the news. While in Agym the third most used frame after calendar process was policy explored/explained, for Kyrgyz Tuusu, it was tactics and strategy.

When each of the three newspapers used distinct methods of topic coverage, framing and format utilization, all of the three covered the 2010 Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan from different perspectives. Despite these different perspectives, several common themes did emerge and these themes contain the information summarized and the information gathered from these three Kyrgyz newspapers.

Election Coverage Themes

What were the themes that emerged during general elections in Kyrgyzstan?

1. In Kyrgyz newspapers, a total of 40 % of stories were about the election and domestic issues/others, which confirmed that the leading framing of newspapers was to highlight the election campaigns at the expense of social issue coverage (for example, education, healthcare, labor, poverty etc.). Even when newspapers covered social issues, the content of stories did not include plans and proposals on how to improve the situation. The vast majority of stories were written by internal staff as a format. The freelancers' stories in Kyrgyz newspapers were paid off news about parties and candidates. After election campaign stories, there were stories enhancing political ideology (10 %), where political parties' ideologies were described

in detail. Other social issues – education, poverty and women’s right - got no newshole within studied three newspapers and did not provide the readers with information about proposals and plans of these social issues.

2. Personal characteristics of political leaders (candidates) played an important role in the election coverage. In Kyrgyz newspapers, personal characteristics of political leaders (candidates) also played an important role in election coverage. Personal profile character has 8%, being the fifth topic within major topics of the election overall. The candidates of the interim government president, Roza Otunbayeva and Atambayev were lead newsmakers of the election stories. This shows that newspapers covered a personal characteristics of leaders more often rather than the social issues side. In state financed media Kyrgyz Tuusu and in independent newspaper Kyrgyz Ruhu the president and other state officials of interim government covered positively. In oppositional newspaper Agym coverage in news consisted predominantly of paid-for reports.

3. Balance of coverage was sought by political parties, not issues’ coverage. SDPK, the ruling interim government’s party was the first (19 % of the election stories newshole). Atacurt, which won a plurality of seats was the second (with 5 % of the newshole) and Respublica was the third (with 4 % of newshole). Ata Meken received 3 % of the newshole and Ar Namys was the last with 1 % of the newshole. The newspapers prioritized newsholes and formats, which had a balanced party representation. Most of the stories included party representatives when covering issues and stories focused on the representatives’ stand not the social issues that were debated.

Conclusion

Sources, Content and Historical Context

The final four weeks were days of intense election coverage and a crucial point for public voting decisions. All three newspapers’ stand, stated purpose to give reliable facts without biases, raises questions in regard to the role of newspapers in the promotion of democratization of society. The variables discussed, included topics, frames, news holes, sources, parties, candidates and format and geographic focus.

Bennett (2007, p.30) argues that if every news organization created *independent issue agendas*, it would provide an information environment with a more diversity. Media channels can select the content of stories, framing and format of coverage independent from electoral campaigns, candidates and the agenda of the political system. The media, which in this study, newspapers, can cover an issue that has importance to the larger society, which is not at the forefront of the political dialogue. The focus of the newspapers on election campaign and domestic issue/other shows that the newspapers prioritized these topics rather than others. As topics were framed as tactics and strategy most of the time, it provides an idea that it is because of the strong relationship between the media and political world.

Kyrgyz Tuusu is a government-run national newspaper, Kyrgyz Ruhu is the only independent Kyrgyz language newspaper and Agym, with its oppositional stand play their role to promote owners' values and creating the public opinion regarding them. The point is that the newspapers, during the election time, can cover public issues more than the news that from the political world. The evaluation of topics, frames, political actors, parties and format utilized does provide valuable information regarding the relationships between the newspapers and the political system. Its impacts on the independence of media coverage were also provided as a result of these parameters. Readers of newspapers received information about parties, candidates, party plans and proposals rather than public issues. The covered topics and how they were framed showed that most of the news coverage was about election process and domestic issue/other; and that debates among party leaders, party representatives were often discussions criticizing each other and tactics used by candidates and their parties to win votes. Ideally, it would be discussions about the validity of their policy proposals.

The media performances during the 2010 general election in Kyrgyzstan show that media outlets – the newspapers, did not develop independent agendas that would provide a more diverse information environment, which were related to social issues. On the contrary, the discussion and news presentation on newspapers centered on political system for the first place without researching the roots of that issues framed by them.

The more people engaged in politics as citizens, the closer one comes to the ideal of public sphere. However, the question is not only what segments of the population are legally eligible to participate in politics, but also what percentages of those groups actually exercise their political rights (Schudson, 2000). Those news organizations also need to go out of their way to bring into their reporting the perspectives of *diverse voices* from communities who have little opportunity for face-to-face deliberation (Bennet, 2007). Oppositely, the media choose to rely on persons, political party leaders, to respond to social issues. This shows that news has authority –disorder bias. Those leaders offer solutions to policy problems as “authorized knowers”.

It is evident that in Kyrgyzstan, newspaper stories lack diversity by selection of public figures, especially, political party leaders.

Bennet (2007, p. 30) argued that if media outlets provide more coverage of how *politics operates* behind the scenes of news events, it would help ordinary people to show the way of how they can become involved and also they will easily understand how political decisions are reached. The relationship between the media and political actors can offer a status of democratic practice and production of news process. Political world from its side want to control that the news are reported from their perspective and through press conferences, rallies, meetings, statements, news releases in order to manage the content of the news. On the other hand, in this way journalists gain access to political activities and reaching content for reporting. Under pressure of economic competition and negative impact of time limitation, journalists do not have much time to discuss and verify the information from different sources. The only important thing under these working conditions is not the accuracy of the news, but delivering them to the reader as soon as possible. Bourdieu called it the problem of “Cyclic movement of information” where with all its superficiality and mediocrity “cultural fast food” is a stand out (Köse, 2008).

This is a media side and discussing the opportunities for citizen involvement and showing them how the political system operates through media is the other side that would help ordinary people to understand how they might become involved. In this study, citizen involvement was participating in public opinion polls and using their votes. In an active citizenship, citizens take part in creating the dialogue between them and political world actively.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, only little space was dedicated to *political activists*. The enhancing individual citizen involvement and its coverage in the pages of newspapers is an important factor in the process of democratization of media (Bennet, 2007). However, the newspapers content did not provide information on how to develop individual citizen involvement due to the fact that it does not work on purposes of capitalist values. As an alternate method, the Internet provides a different way to interact with readers in the comment section of those that have such facility within their websites. Readers left comments but the content of comments were not heard.

Using *interactive technologies* – Internet- to link news audiences with each other, to civic organizations and the political world is significant (Bennet, 2007, p.31). In Kyrgyzstan, as only 16.3 percent (890.724) of population had access to Internet in 2010, and all of them from capital city of Bishkek, the situation with interactive technologies to serve better democracy was very restrained. First, even all newspapers have their websites, they did not activate them as an interactive tool. People cannot leave their messages. Newspapers' e-mail addresses and phone numbers were promoted, however, as only 16.3 percent of people have access to Internet and taking into consideration that newspapers, except Kyrgyz Tuusu, published once a week, the interest of people to discuss the public issues are minimal.

The growth of the Internet provides an alternative method in the public discussion of issues by capturing wider geographic audience. However, in Kyrgyzstan, it did not provide an alternative space for mobilization of thoughts, opinions and did not work as a tool between the public and the political world. The newspapers have not yet embraced the Internet as a tool of political communication. The voices left there also were not on the coverage of the newspapers.

When understanding the origins of the problem, social issue or political statement, media outlets' providing more *historical context* is significant. It helps establish the whole picture and it will limit the ability of politicians to reinvent history to suit their purposes (Bennett, 2007). It is important to have information about the candidates and/or previous policies about one concrete issue. For example, understanding the 2010 South Kyrgyzstan ethnic clashes requires knowledge about Kyrgyz and Uzbek relationship from Soviet period and discussion in regard to governmental international relations. These information

and knowledge are very important to readers when they will make their decisions about policies and candidates.

Without historical context, news will be more fragmented and to see the whole picture in this fragmentation becomes difficult. Improving the historical context in the news will give the readers more adequate information when making democratic decisions in regard to policies and also will limit the ability of politicians to reinvent history to suit their purposes. In Kyrgyz newspapers studied, in the coverage of the 2010 South Kyrgyzstan ethnic clashes, no history of relationship of nations had place in the coverage of the newspapers.

Mass media is the major mechanism through which issues are discussed. It has been the most important source of political information especially during elections. The role of the media as a channel of information dissemination (newspapers, tv, Internet) plays a crucial role in formulating a public dialogue between the political world, policies and elections, since it has the power to shape public opinion. The newspapers analyzed for this study each covered and presented the news in different ways, which created different dialogues and streams of information for audience members regarding the state of the election, the candidates and ideologies. As a result, differences among newspapers show their ability to create very different perceptions, through their presentation, framing behavior and flow of information on public issues' importance. The extensive coverage of election campaigns and domestic issue other provides that the newspapers do focus on political parties and its leaders' winning elections, not social issues. The newspapers' content analyzed for Kyrgyzstan in this study was limited on diversity, historical context, analytical reporting and citizen interaction.

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