

Reporting Politics in a Democracy

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Politics is the mainstay of democratic governance where the people's right to know is given prominence and the citizens are courted for their goodwill without which politicians cannot attain positions of governance. To consent to any politician or a political party's bid to lead the polity, the people must be knowledgeable in the prevailing political narratives lest they make choices that merely gratify parochial inclinations that do not bear the public interest. This paper represents political reporting as an activity in furtherance of the people's right to know the processes involved in political leadership recruitment and accentuates the coreness of this variety of journalism to the democratic processes in any nation. It explicates the genres of political reporting to show its encompassing scope and spotlights the principles guiding the political reporter's job, his challenges as well as responsibilities. The significance of attribution to make for credibility in political news writing is stressed as the subtle differences in meaning of attributives are featured to guide the reporter's use of same in context. The paper equally exposes citizens to the indices by which the reporter's attributed sources could be weighed for reliability. Through findings from a survey of library sources (physical and online) it presents an extensive guide for the political journalist and news consumer on the path of building a politically aware society.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Politics, Democracy, Political reporting, Attribution, News credibility.</p>
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Introduction

News gathering, verification and dissemination constitute the fulcrum of the mass communicate process. Without news and its sister concept information, mass communication would virtually have nothing to transmit. On this basis, the mass communication media or mass media are consentingly called news media. The mass communication practitioners place society on surveillance for what to report and by this action have become watchdogs of society. They monitor powerful individuals, government, institution and organization to ensure protection of public interest by exposing wrong-doing thereby subjecting every public officer and industry operatives to prudence. In so doing, media practitioners have become sentinels and lookouts for the public interest on behalf of the masses (Dominick, 2007).

Media practitioners monitor and scrutinize processes to ensure due diligence. They expose untoward interferences in time, so activities and actions initiated for public good

are not overturned eventually, by self-seeking individuals or groups. One of such processes is the electoral process or voting system expected to produce those who will protect public interest in governance. Public interest/good is the centerpiece of democratic governance which well-meaning democratic actors are expected to have at the foreground of their thoughts. Once infractions let alone major breeches of public interest in governance pass unnoticed, society squarely puts the blame on the sentinels (journalists/reporters). This owes to the given that timely reportage of events and incidents in society for the information of the citizens checkmates anti-people tendencies and that is the bounden duty ascribed to media practitioners (Omoere & Musah, 2021). Once they fail in this duty, society loses its source of authentic news and information which members use to orient themselves to the forces that stimulate change or enable adaptation to our ever-evolving world.

Again, media practitioners are identified with selfless projection of the public interest in the news and other journalistic writing formats. Their absence or dereliction of duty practically leaves society dumb and deaf or rudderless, as a sense of direction could arise only from informed mind-sets. Similarly, the ability to comply with informed directives is an offshoot of a proper understanding of issues, following exposure to current information. Thus, the media practitioner's relevance to society is defined by the extent to which he is able to satisfy the information needs of his society so they could informedly define what interests them.

The journalist's protection of public interest is represented in his efforts to:

- Detect and expose crime or serious misdemeanor
- Protect public health and safety
- Prevent the public from being misled by the actions and statements of self-centered individuals or groups and organizations
- Expose misuse of public funds or other forms of corruption by public bodies
- Reveal potential conflicts of interest by those in positions of power and influence
- Expose corporate greed
- Expose hypocritical behavior by those holding high public office (NUJ, 2002)

The media spotlight these issues because they connect with governance and the manner in which they are handled define the character of the government in place. Through these efforts the media are able to reveal to the public the backstairs dealings of politicians to overreach other political actors, compromise governance self-seekingly and arrogate to themselves undue power and influence that negatively impact wellbeing and social relationships in society.

Keeping government under surveillance helps to ensure accountability and limit corruption. It attempts to stop arbitrary decision making or exercise of power. It equally controls disregard for the rights and interests of the citizens. This happens because government is aware that it is watched by society through the media and the citizens can react to this excesses and shortcomings. Once their reaction amount to withdrawal of support, the goodwill of the people on which any democratic government survives will be lost.

This process is a feature of liberal democracies where rule of law is accorded prominence and the place of the media as the forth estate of realm is undenied. In such democracies, the role of the media go beyond merely watchdogging government for misrule, to participation in the electoral process that produces political leaders. In this

process, the media are interested in the rules and procedures that lead to acceptability of election results. In other words, they watchdog the electoral processes for compliance with rules determining qualification for elections and voting, movement of ballot papers or election materials, campaigning procedures, vote counting, security situation and many others activities by which the votes of the people translate to election result reflecting constitutional provisions and other electoral laws.

In Nigeria, specific issues pertaining to the electoral system that affect the credibility of elections of results include voting age, party membership, campaign spending, ballot paper movement and security of electoral officials and materials. Others include biases of the electoral umpire, ruling party interference with the process, provocative utterances by politician, violence, media coverage and reportage etc. These are issues the media and expected to highlight while ensuring that the elections are not misreported on purpose or by inadvertence. They are the indices by which political reporting is explored in this work.

Politics

Politics is about the most bandied concept when public discuss shifts focus to the systems, processes and structures by which organizations, institutions and nations are directed and controlled. It is a contested concept given that there is no universally accepted definition encompassing enough to represent all there is in politics. Of all vocations, it is deemed most consequential to human well-being because politics sets the norms and standards that have bearing on human well-being. It equally establishes the principles and standards of distributive and penal justice so there is peace in society hence regarded as the architectonic (Gbadegesin, 2022).

In its pristine nature politics was deemed a noble vocation because of its essence. However, politics is observed today in a debased sense which has eclipsed its original sense (Gbadegesin, 2022). Whatever form politics takes, it is seen as the art and science of government (Hague & Harrop, 2013) or that which comprises all the activities of cooperation, negotiations and conflict within and between societies (Leftwick, 2004). As some authorities see politics as that which concerns the state (open University, 2025). **Jottings** and others express a similar view, by referring to it as the activity of government and those involved in the process of governing (Etrita & Troolin, 2023).

Governance connects with all processes of governing whether undertaken by government, family, tribe or in a formal or informal organization or territory. It can happen through laws, norms, power etc (Bevir, 2012). These views suggest that wherever there is government, politics exist by

all means. Therefore, politics occurs in tribes and clans of traditional societies, modern local governments, companies, institutions, sovereign states and the international arena (Brady, 2017).

The definition of politics as the art and science of government validates the assumption that politics is inherent in military regimes same as other oligarchies and authoritarian regimes. However, the form it takes in other forms of government is different from what obtains in democracies. In military regimes for instance, power is concentrated in the hands of the junta or military leadership and there is little space for dissent or political participation (Petpreta & Trooling, 2023). Even so, military regimes formulate policies for the smooth running of government, engage in international relations and manage the economy of the state to service other critical sectors like defence, education, health etc. Political factionalism is also a feature military regime as competing interests and goals of different factions are noticed. This situation gives rise to power struggles that culminate in coups. (Preteta & Trollin, 2023).

Military regimes politick when they solicit and co-opt civilians to provide expertise in critical sectors on governance. Such efforts are seen as attempts to gain legitimacy just as democratically elected government seek social inclusion to legitimize itself.

The foregoing shows that politics is fundamental to governance in all forms of government and is of four types according to Preteta and Troolin (2023). They are:

- International politics which happens between sovereign nations
- National and domestic politics occurring within a nation
- State politics, relating to the processes of governance within the state and
- Electoral politics which focuses on winning elections.

Politics and Democracy

Democracy and politics, without prejudice, are comparable to conjoined twins. The two concepts are inextricably and complimentary connected with politics being the process by which democracy functions and is shaped. Democracy is a system where citizens participate in governance often through political parties and the political arena is where citizens engage in debates and make decisions. On the other hand, politics in its broad sense is the activity through which people make preserve and amend the general rules under which they live (Heywood, 2023). In some rare instances politics equates democracy in common parlance. Democracy vests power in the people to express their will,

predilections and aversions about government. The people are provided with opportunity to make their choice of leaders through membership of political parties and participation in elections. Democracy thus provides the framework for political activities and ensures that power is exercised responsibly through checks and balances (Heywood).

The phrase participatory politics represent the means by which citizens, men, women and youth get involved in politics or the policy making processes. The people participate in politics or governance by serving in government positions such as judges, civil servants, appointed officials etc. This enhances a good relationship between government and the citizens. It strengthens democracy as everybody is empowered to participate in the governance process. This situation cultivates an informed civil society that can interact meaningfully with government (The institute for inclusive security, 2017).

Participatory politics expects citizens' involvement in democracy that goes beyond mere vote-casting to collaboration with government in policy formulation and providing support for implementation both as participants in governance or as citizens. It addresses elite dominance in the political processes by allowing dialogue to take place between politician and active citizens without inevitable intervention of party machinery. Participatory politics reverse the top-down politics of tightly organized political parties that make policies unilaterally and mobilize support behind them with minimal negotiation and sometimes without grassroots input (McQuail, 2009).

Politics usually refers to election in English speaking countries and it centers around national state and local elections in the United States (Petreta & Troolin, 2023). It is central to democracy to the extent that once elections are flawed, the democratization process is destroyed or defective (Chittaoarporn, 2017). That of course is the practice deal or defective, given that in African for instance, is the end that justifies the democratic means.

Political activities that define democracy include support for political causes such as: Party membership, campaigns, voting and attending rallies. Others are lobbying, writing or signing petitions, protests and demonstration etc. (Budryte, 2014). Through the first five factors, preferred leadership is often produced. However, where there is interference or failure of elected leaders to provide good governance political activism characterized by the last three surfaces in the democratic process. This and a lot more happens in that, democracy vests political power on the people or the population of the state (Prizeworski, 2024) and is linked to the guarantees of civil liberties, human rights and suffrage occasioning competitive elections (Dahi, Shapiro & Chieub, 2023).

The UN commission on Human Rights declared some essential elements of democracy in 2002 that include:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law
- The holding of periodic, free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organization
- Separation of powers
- The independence of the judiciary
- Transparency and accountability of public administration
- Free, independent and pluralistic media (United Nations, nd)

These elements serve as indices by which the performance of a democratically elected government can be measured. Thus political reporting keeps close watch on all of this to find out if they are observed and even more during election.

The Concept of Political Reporting

Habitually, professional journalist has the responsibility in society, of collation and publication of news. They set agenda for public discuss, influence public opinion and mobilize the citizenry towards establishing and sustaining a democratic society (Leman, 2015). Just as we have established the link between politics and democracy, journalism's contribution towards sustainability of democracy come under political reporting or journalism. Democracy being a form of government, democratic issues relate to governance concerning what the people do by themselves and for themselves while the political reporters place is to inform the masses about the activities of the political class as they affect the wellbeing and expectations of ordinary citizens.

Apart from crime and disaster, political news courts the anxiety of the people more than anything else. In fact, it attracts more attention than the former because of its mass appeal given that. politics is the pedestal upon which societies are able to operate (Troolin, 2021). Authorities hold that political reporting is the news reportage that provides the people with information to formulate their own political opinion and participate in community or local, national and international matters that impact their wellbeing and interest (Garba & Inobemhe, 2022). What is

significant in the definition is that political news connects with the wellbeing of the people. It further alludes to the fact that politics is largely about the relationship between government and the citizens (The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2017) and the wellbeing of the people is central to it. Evidently; the gathering, analyzing, and dissemination of news stories and features related to political events, figures and policies qualify as political reporting or political journalism. This reportage focuses on governance, political campaigns and decisions, inter alia that affect societal structures and informs the public about the works and activities of politicians (Garba & Inobehem, 2022).

A broader view of the concept represents it as a branch of journalism that deals with all aspects of politics or coverage of civil government and political power. Its primary goal being provision of voters with information to formulate their political choices (Morrissey, 2016). Given the intricacies that characterize politics or political activities, the political beat reporter is expected to be versed in political science to be able to provide context to his reports or stories. He should not be unfamiliar with political science research that would provide him with intellectual and professional capacity to independently process and present political information with media logic, instead of political logic (Garba & Inobehem, 2022). Genres of political reporting include:

- Electoral political reporting
- Parliamentary political reporting
- Tribunal reporting
- Specialized reporting of ministries, departments and agencies connected with politics
- Political speech analyses
- Policy analysis and reporting (Garba & Inobehem, 2022).

Though political reporting is as represented and manifests in the genres provided above, authorities appear to accord election reporting special attention due to the pivotal nature of elections to politics. It is sometimes equated with and used to represent the gamut of genres in political reporting. Nevertheless, election reporting focuses on and analyzes developments related specifically to elections, election campaigns and fallouts therefrom. This type of reportage or journalism provides information to the electorate, that can educate and help the citizens to form opinions that empower a specific vote (Bravo, 2010). Under election journalism, trends in political parties and their candidates are reported. At times, candidates and manifestos are compared to previous ones or those in opposition parties for the education of the masses (Nyan & Sides, 2011).

Elections are preconditions for democratic governance. It is through elections that the citizens of a country choose freely

and on the basis of law, the persons that can legitimately govern in their name or in their interest. The conduct of democratic elections take into account fundamental human rights and freedoms. The fact that the electoral processes are based on the rule of law ultimately contributes to the eventual setting up of procedures and institutions that form good governance (Council for Europe Handbook for Civil Society Organizations, nd.). Though election reporting is part of political journalism, it is circumscribed within activities that directly connect with choices of politicians that would eventually constitute the government of the day. It encompasses display of voter's register, production of ballot papers and boxes movement of same to election venues, security of election materials and personnel, voting behavior, collation/sorting of ballots, ballot counting and final announcement of results.

Parliamentary political reporting concerns activities of the legislature members of which are legislators or lawmakers. They also get to parliament through elections and are responsible for passing laws, approving the governments annual budget, confirming executive appointment, ratifying treaties, watchdogging the other arms of government and performing other oversight functions in the polity (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). The political reporter that has the parliamentary beat is expected to keep an eye on all of this and report informatively as well as educatively to the masses. Reporting ministries and agencies is similar to the above. It requires the political reporter to visit relevant government offices from which political news could be obtained. Such offices include: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Office of the Secretary to the federal/state government, The Interparty Advisory Council etc.

Reporting the elections tribunal is yet another aspect of political reporting. Elections tribunals are formed immediately after the election to address various points of contention arising from the conduct of elections. Tribunal processes are longwinded and methodical. The political reporter has to follow through all the stages given that any overlooked step affects the smooth understanding of proceedings by the citizens. He has to capture and report the initiation of the petition paying attention to the party or individual submitting a formal written complaint to the election tribunal. He should note if petitions were submitted within stipulated time limits or reliefs obtained to file out of time. The election/political reporter must be able to identify and report the grounds on which petitioner is challenging the election result. Such grounds usually include allegations of malpractice during the elections, irregular voting behaviours, perceived bias by electoral umpire officials, eligibility of the candidates etc. with reference to partisan politics as we have in Nigeria, parties

to a petition which have to be specified in his report include the aggrieved party/petitioner and the respondent and his party. The electoral umpire is in most cases made a party in the petition so it could provide legal justification for instance, for declaring the respondent the winner of the contest.

Election tribunal entertain fact-based issues with supporting evidences to pass judgement. Such documents could be result sheets, voter registers, photographs, audio recordings, videos etc to prove his case and earn judgement at the tribunal. These exhibits are presented to the tribunal through legal representatives. knowing such legal representatives on both sides of the case by name and their chambers is of the essence to his reportage. He should also be able to identify them by rank especially if a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) is involved. The prehearing sessions and exchange of pleading as well as the substantive or main hearing are very important stages in the process the political reporter would not overlook. The main hearing is when evidence is given, witnesses are called and cross-examined. At this stage legal representatives address the tribunal on points of law building their cases or doing damage to their "learned friends'" cases. The culmination of all of this is the judgement which sustains or annuls the victory announced by the electoral umpire. The judgement could also provide remedies such as ordering a rerun, payment of cost etc. (Policy Pedia, 2023).

In all instances of political action, speeches are made or delivered. Notably, these speeches are laden with elements of persuasion, deception, assurance, hate, commendation etc. depending on the goal a speaker intends to achieve or how he is affected by aftermaths of legal proceedings. More often than not, speeches are made to overreach the opponent, cause the audience to take specific action, exonerate self or party from blame or extol the speech maker's party among other goals to be achieved. On the other hand, the beneficiary of a political court/tribunal judgement would extol the judicial system of the nation while the judgement debtor berates same sometimes disappointingly. The intricacies in reporting political speeches are that politician are decidedly inconsistent in what they say. They easily disaffirm their utterances once animosity is roused, by complaining of being quoted out of context thereby passing the buck on the reporter (Geis, 1987). The political reporter therefore is expected to be enterprising in his business but advised to observe circumspection all the way so he does not imperil his career by inadvertence.

Principles of Political Reporting

News is the livewire of politics in that, politics is about the people and for the people and their government. For politics to live up to the billing, every political development must

be made known to the concerned audiences. That can happen only when such developments are reported by the mass media in the various journalistic writing formats including the news, commentaries, feature stories, opinions, columns, editorials etc. Following this perception, the preponderating format in which political events are circulated (the news) is seen as the livewire of politics.

Fundamentally, the political reporter is expected to be apolitical. He must keep his emotions in check and be dispassionate in coverage. He has an obligation to so be, since he has a bounden duty to assist the masses to make rational political choices and vote wisely during elections (Onubere, 2016). The principles of political reporting include:

- **Know your subject:** Political reporting involves straight news reports, interviews and investigative reports. The reporter must be versed in the techniques of the business to report properly. Knowing the subject defines his focus and enables him to identify the salient aspects of an issue or events to report. He can choose the right news angle and appropriate frames to use with advantage of hindsight on human or issue-based subjects.
- **Protect confidentiality:** This involves keeping sources protected from possible backlash for information released to the reporter. The idea of confidentiality requires that a source that gives information in confidence must not be betrayed while using his (the source's) contribution in the report. Politicians are vengeful and virtually unforgiving. A source that decides to leak a piece of information in public interest must not be made to face consequences. Where the reporter violates this principle, his sources suffer and he can run out of news sources.
- **Cultivate sources and contacts:** The political reporter must build and maintain sustainable relationship with those that are knowledgeable in what he wants as a political reporter. He must identify potential sources and relate with them cordially not bringing personal biases for or against politicians about whom information is sort.
- **Be suspicious:** Being suspicious keeps the political reporter alert so he is not hoodwinked by opportunistic politicians. He is encouraged under this principle to verify information before publishing. He must remember that it is part of the game that politicians overreach and undo each other to score political points but he must not be a ready tool for their use.

- **Know your audience:** The political reporter must be conversant with his audience. News is not reported in vain but with the expectation that some audience is interested in and has to be informed about what he has come across. Knowing your audience entails having fore-knowledge about how inclined they are in politics. His choice of words and use of jargon would be informed by how much he understands his audience. This will ensure that his reports are not lost on the audience in view (The news manual, nd.)

Aside the above, his reportage must bear the conventional qualities of a good news report including objectivity, accuracy and clarity (Ogunsiji, 1989) to make this reports worth the while of his audience.

Responsibilities and Challenges of the Political Reporter

The conventional role of journalist/reporters is news gathering and dissemination. This many can do and have continued to do on a daily basis sometimes as generalists. However, going by the concept of beat reporting, the political reporter has quite a handful of specific roles to play. The political reporter has to be:

- The political reporter has to be instructive and informational in his journalists' efforts to equip citizens with the information necessary to participate in political activities. Emphasis is on curating and disseminating information while infusing integrity into journalistic narratives simultaneously so audience confidence is boosted in what they do politically.
- The political reporter has to be analytical and deliberative. He aims to analyze and contextualize current affairs by taking the position of an educator. He also takes up an active stance of engaging the audience in enlightening public conversation thereby fostering their political awareness and informed participation. (Riedi & Hanitzsch, 2024)
- The political reporter has a duty to report politics and government news stories to satisfy the political information needs of the citizens.
- He reviews and evaluate political reports for legal safety and ensures only ethically fit elements to pass to the consumer.
- He receives and carries out assignment from the editor concerning politics and governance.

- He partakes in brainstorming sessions with other editorial staff and key players to determine story priorities for the bulletin or issues of the day.
- He carries out background research on topical political issues to ensure they are adequately and accurately reported (Garba & Inobemhe, 2022)

In the cause of performing his responsibilities, he encounters situations that interfere with smooth delivery. They are difficulties and obstacles that have to be surmounted in the political reporters bid to inform his society and keep the citizens abreast with political developments. The challenges include:

- The influence of digital media and associated ills of bias reports and fake news to which the inadvertent political reporter could be susceptible.
- Threats and intimidation come the way of the political journalist for coverage that could be considered damaging, revealing, biased etc. depending on the disposition of the affected political actors. In some cases, those adversely affected come for the jugular and in extreme instances loss of life is recorded of the journalist.
- The competition culture identified with political pursuits resonates amply with political reporting. Politicians are in haste to achieve at their opponent's expense or thwart him before he achieves. Members of society want to know the direction or shape events take while they unfold. Thus the political news has to be reported piping hot else the reporter gets scooped or his audience remain uninformed.
- Deadline matters to the political reporter as it does to anyone in journalism. He must be up to the task of beating deadline no matter his personal worries.
- Getting access to sources or the right sources is a critical challenge. Those who have official capacity to give credible information cannot readily be accessed. Others that would play to the gallery offer their opinions and positions unasked. To verify information, you must meet the politician or government official himself yet the policeman guiding him is a reluctant neighbour of the journalist/reporter.
- Media ownership influence is no less a challenge than others. It affects the independence with which the political reporter is expected to frame his reports. Public media houses have become public relations outfits of the people in power hence the reporter is expected to play along in his job against

the principle of objectivity that guides him. Similarly, privately owned media organizations cannot objectively report the misdeeds of their owner's party. The reporter is therefore caught up in the dilemma of upholding the ethical principles of his trade and plying his trade protecting his master's interest always.

- Resisting the brown-envelope enticement is a daunting hurdle for the political reporter. It is always brought to the table by the politicians who desire to achieve undesirable ends. The reporter must be made to present his (the politician's) story in likeable frames that would contribute to victory. Sadly, the financial times reporters face have practically compatibilized brown envelope with journalism such that the reporter more or less also expects it. That impinges the neutrality with which news is expected to be reported (Kandel, 2024; Kevin, 2008 and Committee to protect journalists, 2023).

Political News Credibility and Source Reliability

In news reporting, the sources' believability translates to credibility of the information or news emanating from him. News sources are of different categories depending on the user or consumer of news. For instance, those at the scene of an event are sources to the reporter who acknowledges them in his report. The reporter is a source to the news organization it serves. The organization acknowledges him as such by giving him a byline. The masses in turn see the various news organization as their sources as the need arises. Thus we have human, institutional and documents or books as news sources.

Credibility emanates from the positive characteristics of a source that make news consumers accept messages from him (Ohanian, 1990). Once the news from the source is adjudged credible, it invariably means that a particular source is reliable especially the human source. Since the reporter cannot be everywhere always, he needs human contacts that furnishes him with details of happenings in his absence and he assesses this sources for apparent reality in the information content received. The process highlights:

- Source truthfulness resulting in message accuracy
- Source expertise and message representativeness
- Source bias or absence of bias and personal perspective in the information (Weintraub & Austin, 1994)

To be reliable, the reporters source must meet the expectation of being

- Independent and neutral

- Informed and authoritative
- Identifiable by name or designation if he is not providing information anonymously
- Able to provide evidence that is verifiable to support his story
- In tune with trends concerning politics of the day. (Musah, 2019)

In another breath, credibility of information from a source could be considered on the basis of:

- **Currency:** Timelessness of the information. It has to be current and up-to-date.
- **Attribution:** Every fact, figure or statement's origin is unambiguously stated in the report.
- **Relevancy:** How relevant or important is the information to the reporter's audience.
- **Purpose:** For what purpose is this piece of information offered? Is it to inform, educate, sell, entertain, overreach or persuade?
- **Accuracy:** Truthfulness, correctness and exactitude of the information in terms of figures names, designations, timing, place etc.

Credibility and reliability of political news sources demands that the reporter before using a source or the information obtained from him should know who he is and determine how or the capacity in which he is in possession of the information he offers. The reporter should find out if the source is not involved in the issue in some way and whether his evidence is verifiable, if he is able to provide one. He can then use the source with proper attribution in the news.

Attribution and Attributives in Political News Reporting

Attribution is about acknowledging, mentioning or stating who said what in the report. Its relevance stems from the position that unless information is attributed to its source, it stands as the reporter's opinion, idea or statement by default. This makes the reporter guilty of plagiarism, an act antithetical to ethical and professional journalism practice. In other words, it implies that all information in the news must be credited to those who disclosed them to the reporter. However, some informants could remain unacknowledged upon understanding between the reporter and his source to allow the latter remain confidential or anonymous. Attribution lends credibility to the report and accountability to the reporter. It is advisable that the political reporter identifies and discloses the origin of his information to make his report truthful, credible and thus

make himself and his news organization trustworthy. Attributions come in the form of direct quotes and paraphrases of statements that make essential parts of the news.

Attributives are words and phrases the reporter uses to disclose to his news consumers the origin or source of the information that make news. One particular word that attributes is "said". It pegs a statement to a source unmistakably and unobtrusively (Laurenz and Vivian, 2005). Once it is used the source is expected to be quoted verbatim. It is the best attributive and no matter how commonplace it appears; it remains most explicit. The phrase "according to" is also frequently used and quite clearly introduces the news consumer to the right source of the information in the news. However, it subtly suggests the writer has some doubt about the statement quoted. Users of this phrase may be unaware of this connotation but it is most appropriately used when the writer is not very sure of the veracity of the information. In most cases the statement is paraphrased unlike direct quotes that do not allow even a tinge of doubt in the statement. Other useful alternatives to this two are; warned, suggested, urged, asked and disclosed used after the source has been mentioned and followed by the statement reported. The reporter should be aware that each of them adds specific implications to the ultimate message.

Words/phrases such as "stated and pointed out" implies indisputability of the statement attributed hence could be used with certitude. The word "claimed" used to introduce or attribute a statement clearly detaches the source from the action/statement. It suggests that the reporter does not have trust in the source or what was said but that is what he got from his source all the same. The police usually use it to discredit a criminal's statement when addressing reporters. The political reporter is expected to know the implication each of these attributives and remember to use them appropriately while they help to authenticate the news.

Conclusion

Activities and events that make news are those that are of significance to some audience in society. The news is reported of such events and incident so the masses could be aware, make sense of it and orient themselves to the realities of our dynamic society. Politics is among such aspects of societal life that courts the attention of elite and ordinary people alike and affects every section of society directly or indirectly. In consequence, political news is expected and reported in every newspaper issue and broadcast news bulletin to the relief of the waiting politically aware who in turn utilize same to direct the masses as political opinion leaders.

The significance of politics to society makes the political

beat special and requires specialization in reporting the news emanating therefrom. The paper analyzed what political news is and what the political news reporter's business is all about. It provides an exhaustive guide for those who reports politics and others if not everyone in society to whom politics certainly matters.

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