

## **IPARTISAN BIAS IN THE ELECTION NEWS COVERAGE: ON THE STUDY OF THE GENERAL ELECTION 2015 IN MYANMAR\***

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### **Abstract**

Free and fair elections are a core principle for democratic development. Moreover, Election is vital equipment in the lives of democratic society especially in transition period for political communication. Then, concerned the Political bias of the mass media becomes an important argument especially at the election time. So, partisan bias is a crucial question to evaluate the election process. Various researchers have studied how media bias or how political orientation runs especially in the election campaign. Thus, this study analytically evaluated the partisan bias could present in the newspaper. The content analysis method through Myanmar newspapers applies to verify the partisan bias. The findings from the pioneer study pointed out newspapers have their party supported in the election.

**Keywords:** Myanmar, Partisan bias, election process, newspapers

### **Introduction**

The primary endeavor of this research is to point out the partisan bias of newspapers in the election reporting coverage. Analyzing the Myanmar newspapers will carry on this research. Firstly, it will introduce why the idea of election is considered in this research; secondly, the reason of why 2015 election in Myanmar is chosen for this study will be discussed; and finally, it will calculate some research questions in pursuit of the objective.

First of all, it can be said that election is one of the vital components for the democratic country. In every modern society, the democratic government held the election. And, most of democratic elections are transparent and accountable. Nevertheless, the idea of elections is incomplete without media. To be a free and fair election, it is not only about to vote freely but also to engage the participatory process where voter involves in the public debate and supports the adequate information about parties and candidates.

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Therefore, the print media, broadcast media and social media provide the primary site with the role of election. This means that media have to participate in supplying the information of election and disclose sometimes hoax and fraud of the opinion polls because the public should be informed. Moreover, media is also a conduit of parties and candidates to get the interactive connection with public. Therefore, the healthy coverage of media in the election is the basic role to embark the free and fair election for the future of the democratic country.

Without democratic government, there cannot be a freedom of speech in the media. In addition, without media freedom, there cannot be a free and fair election. So, these things are not separable. The international conference World Press Freedom Day in 2005 produced a declaration that mentioned: “independent and pluralistic media are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and participation as fundamental elements of good governance and human-rights based development”. This means that the media need to be professional, accuracy and impartiality in the coverage but there should be a guarantee for the media freedom. Media scholars argue that “the media in the complex society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gain in significance during these periods of campaigning and voting; the professional functioning of television is therefore of utmost importance for free and fair elections” (Lange and Ward, 2003:210). It supports clear explanations that press freedom and election is related and reinforced for the process of democracy. So, in an attempt to understand and evaluate the media, this study focused on how media play the role in the election period because election is the basic ground to test the political orientations of the media.

Secondly, the environment of media in Myanmar used to the strict censorship and repression regulation. And this is why Myanmar 2015 election can be said that the country’s first and full free general election to terminate almost fifty years of military rule. The army took power in the coup in 1962, turning Myanmar into an authoritarian one-party state. The control of junta made the country a pariah state, subject to Western sanctions. This lead to the people sink into poverty and the country plunged into isolation. The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Su Kyi, won the 1990 election, but the junta ignored the results and she was placed under the house

arrest for twenty years. The election in 2010 was boycotted by the NLD. Subsequently, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed victory in the election though it is neither free nor fair. The NLD contested the by-elections in 2012 and won a landslide victory and Ms. Suu Kyi was sworn into Parliament. The general election that took place on Sunday (8 November 2015) was the first contested by the NLD in 25 years. The election was for 498 seats in both houses of Parliament, as well as hundreds of seats in state assemblies. So, this point makes the researcher curious to find out the media's role in Myanmar especially in the transition period of the democracy.

Election reporting is considered as a long-term process rather than one-off event. According to a traditional electoral cycle, it can typically differentiate into pre-election, election, post-election and consolidation period. But, this study analyzes a somewhat different approach in extending the three periods of election: pre-election or campaign period, election and post-election period. The role of media is vital in each stage of the election that is concerned with the future of the country. So, election reporting can be said that a major long running news story. Meanwhile, journalists are especially responsible to report the information fairly to the public in order to make an educated decision.

The pre-election period can be said to be a developing stage for the public to get the right information about parties and candidates in order to make the right decision. Journalists are expected to inform citizens of their right to vote- why it is important for them to exercise their right and where, when and how they must vote. In addition, they will be given a chance to hear the voice of voters so that political leaders can hear their concerns. The most important thing in the pre-election process is to inform citizens about the differences in the respective policies of the political parties or candidates. The coverage of news stories among the political parties should be equal and fair. At that time, media plays the main stage to communicate the public and the party in order to hear a voice of each side. But, media becomes an issue when the candidates and parties do not have equal access. Besides, some of the media's owners who are business people show preferences for viewpoints in their political orientations. Thus, covering an election is never an easy job for journalists.

The voting on Election Day is the most crucial news event for the journalists. So, they must monitor every voter in order to get their franchise and also watch out all ballots are corralled and safely transferred for counting because the abuse of polls are common in most elections. They also observe irregularities, fraud and threats of violence on Election Day. Aftermath, monitoring of the post-election period is also as crucial as the pre-election campaign period because the country can lead to the conflict when the media spread the hate speech after the election while their favorable party failed the election. They must careful to make sure that checked and factual data is used.

Finally, this paper will analyze the election news coverage of the Myanmar 2015 presidential election. The aim of this paper is to investigate Myanmar's election news coverage focusing on partisan bias of newspapers. In pursuit of that objective, this paper will address these following questions. These questions are based on theoretical literature and empirical studies.

- (1) Do newspapers give equal coverage to political parties?
- (2) Are the newspapers focusing on the personality of the candidates or the policy of the parties?
- (3) Which journalistic style (either an interpretive style or a descriptive style) do newspapers prefer to report an election?

This research questions has been targeted to prove the partisan bias that presents in the newspapers especially in the election. To look more in-depth findings of these questions, this study proposes the following hypothesis to explore the journalists' dissemination of election news. Thus, it is possible that Hypothesis: There is a concern that newspapers have their own hidden supported or favored party.

Overall, it is hoped that a critical understanding of the key issues is exhibited. Moreover, the research questions and hypothesis are designed in order to substantiate the partisan bias of newspapers. This will be carried out through the content analysis based on the election coverage of three different newspapers. But, in this research, the behavior of partisan bias by those newspapers will not be proof and this could do in the further research. This research mainly aims to document that partisan bias is present in the election.

## **Methodology**

This study uses content analysis methodology to test the hypothesis and responses in the research questions listed above. The unit of analysis was highlighting the pre-election, election and post-election process that were expressed in three different newspapers.

Most of the researchers carried out two prominent research methods to achieve the data: positivism or quantitative method and interpretivism or qualitative method. According to the positivist paradigm researchers, knowledge is received directly through the senses and the only reliable way of knowing the world is through observation. It is widely accepted that “knowledge comes from our understanding, not directly from our experiences in it” by interpretive researchers.

Denicolo and Becker (2012:64) compare the trivial differences in two perspectives; for positivism, “reality is objective, singular and apart from/uninfluenced by the researcher who can investigate it in a value and bias-free way”. Positivist research is used for objectivity to utilize numerical forms of measurement and leads to quantifiable data. The emphasis on quantifiable data is the rationale that it is related with quantitative research. Moreover, the research design is not swayed by unpredictable human behavior. Preece (2000; 42) states that quantitative research is particularly characterized “by the counting of the occurrences or frequencies of qualities, or by determination of their mean values for numbers of individuals”. That is why this type of research is associated with the quantitative by applying experiments, surveys, and statistics.

Interpretivism hold that “reality is subjective and multiple as it is interacted with by participants in the study, including the researchers, who in turn have to recognize and declare their inevitably value- laden and biased approach” (Denicolo and Becker, 2012:64). Participation and observation by people is primary function in this research. Gunter (2000:5) identifies “it emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of the text, which could refer to a conversation, written words or pictures”. This technique focuses on interviews, observation and case study. So, this method is suitable for finding in-depth meanings.

Qualitative research is accused of being “unscientific, unrepresentative, open to bias and, even to manipulation, conscious or unconscious”(Preece,2000:43). In contrast, quantitative methods are criticized as “reductionist, as using pre-conceived or half-understood concepts and thus as open to bias or manipulation in a different way”(Preece,2000:43). Both types are useful depending on what you want to achieve and have their place, but both types cannot be perfect because of human fallibility.

Thus, it was decided that content analysis is the best method to adopt for this study because content analysis can be applied not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Krippendorff (2004:21) defines content analysis as a research technique “for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context”. Furthermore, Babbie et al. (2001:491) argue that content analysis is a research method that examines words or phrases within a wide range of texts, including books, book chapters, essays, interviews and speeches as well as informal conversation and headlines. There is no doubt that content analysis needs a set of texts as input, and then texts must be collected according to some theoretical and statistical rules of selection. Krippendorff (2004) asserts, “content analysis demands a systematic reading of a body of texts, images and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author’s or user’s perspective. Therefore, content analysis entails a research method by which a researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communication by systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis.

Gunter (2000:56, cited in Berelson, 1952:18) contemplates “content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. Generally, the meaning of objective is that the researcher’s prejudgment or bias is not present in the results. That is why the findings from this always yield the same results whoever replicate it again. The term systematic means that a research may not select those pieces of content that support a hypothesis, but must reply on all that is relevant. Content analysis is quantifiable but pure quantitative analysis may not only be of unimportance. So, some researchers use forms of qualitative method to reveal deeper meanings.

Berger (1998:26) distinguishes the advantages of using content analysis stating that “it is an inexpensive method of getting information about

text”. The researcher can collect the data of printed media in libraries and online archives. This is shown by the use of archive newspapers. The second advantage of using this method is easily available to attain material. According to Bertrand and Hughes (2004; 184), it is very easy to get material from the past especially for press analysis because complete archives usually exist”. And, finally, this method is reliable and obstructive. Berger (1998:26) confirms, “content analysis is a way of avoiding the problem of researcher influence on individuals”. So, it reduces ethical problems. Another researcher can also reproduce the results to test whether it works or not.

However, there are certain drawbacks in content analysis associated with the use of sampling. Sampling is a term to describe selecting any material to symbolize a large group allowing generalizations from the results. It is hard to tell from the sample studied whether it represents the complete range. That means there is no right rule on finding the right amount of sample size that is suitable for the research. However, there are two forms of sampling methods organized by Bertrand & Hughes (2004:66) depending on probability and non-probability condition. Probability sampling method involves a generalization of the whole group, so, repeated sampling would yield similar results and sampling error can be calculated in this method. In contrast, the non-probability sampling method cannot give knowledge whether any other sample would produce similar results; thus sample error cannot be measured in this case. So, the researcher often studies a sizeable amount of material depending on the purpose of the research to avoid this sampling problem. A major disadvantage of the content analysis is that it can lead to misinterpretation. This method can measure the manifest content but it cannot explain the nature of the process or the hidden content. Bertrand & Hughes (2004:66) assess that “content analysis does not tell how the content came to be that way”. This kind of answer can be done by intellectual framework.

This test is widely available and several studies on election coverage have been used the content analysis. Berger (1998) explains that “content analysis is one of the more important techniques used in research concerning the mass media”. Dunaway et al (2015) used content analysis to examine the objectivity of campaign news stories from statewide elections in three specific years. Moreover, the study carried out by Stromback (2001) used a content

analysis to compare election coverage between British and Swedish elections focusing on elite newspapers from these two countries. This study also focuses on three newspapers in each country. So, the number of choosing newspapers derives from the research by Stromback (2001) in their comparative study of election coverage in two countries. In addition, Cushion et al (2016) applied the method of combining quantitative and qualitative content analysis in order to evaluate the UK campaign. The study conducted by Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) in which they examined news coverage in election campaign in Sweden and United States. Thus, content analysis is the appropriate method for this comparative research to get valid and reliable data.

### **Media Samples**

This study used three national daily newspapers for analyzing process. The Global New Light of Myanmar, Myanmar Times and The Eleven Daily Newspapers were chosen as samples for election news. For a half-century, the government owned the Global New Light of Myanmar and now it is affiliated with a private company. Moreover, the ownership of the Myanmar Times and the Eleven Daily newspaper are private companies. Thus, these three newspapers were chosen for this research because of diverse ownership.

Only news stories were selected and counted to measure the coverage between parties from each newspaper. So, only the news concerned with the election in the headline or the first or three paragraphs. The election news from those newspapers is analyzed as pre-election, election and post-election. But, each newspaper gave an exposure of five days in Myanmar, in which for the entire election period in Myanmar, the date of October 29, 30, November 9, 16, 17 of 2015 were chosen for analysis. These dates were randomly chosen a week before the election and three days after the election. The day after Election Day was chosen in order to identify what was reported on the Election Day because newspapers and print media, cannot report live events like broadcast media. So, the choice of time for this study also covered the pre election to the post election period.

In gathering data, all of the data from the newspapers was manually selected. In all, the study comprises 104 news reports in total that includes



38 from the Myanmar Times, 22 from the New Light of Myanmar and 44 from the Eleven daily newspaper.

### **Measures**

In order to study the visibility of partisan bias in the press, the first stage of this study evaluated election news items from these three newspapers. The news items were coded to answer the question of “do the newspaper give equal news coverage to all political parties contesting the election?”. To figure out that question, election news was divided according to each political party and compared with other parties by measuring which party had the most favorable coverage.

For example, to find out whether the news report was about the NLD party, this research used the following criteria; the party’s name or one of the prominent party leader’s name mentioned in the headline, its appearance as in the lead or two or three paragraphs and finally, whether the general idea of the news was mainly aimed at that party. Another example is the headline, “Elections officially begin with early votes” by the Myanmar Times newspaper reported on 29, October of 2015. Such news is not clear which party they want to support. So, this kind of news is categorized simply as “election related news” with no preference.

To verify the alternative way of equal newspapers coverage between parties, the tone of the story is also considered in this analysis. The story is regarded as a positive story, when the story gives credit to the policy or the candidate of the specific party with good comments. The news that highlights the bad reputation of the candidate or the weakness of policy of a party in the story with bad comment from certain sources; that kind of news is labelled as a negative story. When a story neither includes the positive or the negative comment of contesting parties then it is classified as a neutral coverage.

To test the second research question, “are the newspapers focusing on the personality of the candidates or policy of the party in the election”, the second part of this study endeavored to examine more closely on whether the news covered the policy of the party or the personality of the candidates. When the news mentions the specific party’s name and the manifesto of the party, that kind of news consider as the policy of the party. The news about

the candidate's personal life or remarks made in a speech is concerned with the personality of the candidate. The news differentiates between the personality of the candidate and the policy of the party.

Moreover to look beyond a solely quantitative analysis, this study looks deeper into the election reporting style for Myanmar newspapers. Gulati et al. (2004; 243) says that "many journalists consider that it is irresponsible to describe the campaign without delving into the candidates' motivation or without exploring why particular campaign decisions were made". Therefore, the journalistic reporting style of each election news story is evaluated as either descriptive (news story told in a rather straight forward style) or interpretive (news story in which a situation is analyzed, evaluated or explained which also describing part of it).

Descriptive reporting mainly emphasizes the facts but the theme around which the story is built represents interpretive reporting because interpretive journalism goes beyond the basic facts of an event or topic to support context, analysis and possible consequences. This distinction was introduced from the measurement of interpretive journalism written by Salgado and Strömbäck (2011). For the interpretive story, the story is checked with these criteria; firstly, it includes a journalistic explanation or the reason behind action or events, secondly, the story uses at least two side of quotations and finally, it also includes the future consequences of events. The news story included the basic facts of 5Ws story (why, when, where, who and what) and the quotation that used in the story just provided only one side was coded as descriptive writing.

In brief, this chapter describes the method that is used to evaluate the deep insights of the hypothesis. Moreover, it has discussed with some explanations with a clearer picture of choosing the media samples and time periods about this study. The next stage will focus on data analysis.

### Data Presentation, analysis and findings

Firstly, this category was further analyzed on a coverage bias case depending on the number of news coverage for each of the presidential political party. The coverage of the presidential election news in pre election period disseminated from the Eleven Daily newspaper, Myanmar Times Newspaper and the New Light of Myanmar newspaper are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Number of election news reported on Pre-Election period by Newspapers (October 29, 30 of 2015)

Categories	Eleven Daily Newspapers		Myanmar Times Newspaper		New Night of Myanmar	
	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total
NLD	16	57.14%	3	25%	1	14.28%
USDP	4	14.28%	1	8.3%	2	28.57%
Ethnic Parties	1	3.5%	3	25%	0	0%
Other related Election News	7	21.42%	5	41.66%	4	57.14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

According to Table 1 above, Eleven daily was the leading newspaper in the coverage of election with 28 news items in two days, 57.14% more than half of the total number of news covered about the NLD. In contrast, USDP got the most favored coverage than the other party in the New Light of Myanmar. Moreover, the other election related news got nearly half of the coverage (The other election related news means the coverage of UEC (Union Election Commission), Early voting process and advance polling checked news). However, in Myanmar Times newspapers, NLD and the ethnic parties coverage were the same. When the analysis took a close look on the news coverage of the political party from each newspaper, surprisingly, the results can be said that two of them gave an emphasis on the election related news than the coverage of political party. So, Myanmar newspapers mainly reported the electoral process on the pre-election period.

**Table 2:** Number of News reported on Election Day by Newspapers (November 9, 2015)

Categories	Eleven Daily Newspapers		Myanmar Times Newspaper		New Night of Myanmar	
	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total
NLD	2	28.57%	2	11.76%	0	0%
USDP	2	28.57%	2	11.76%	1	14.28%
Ethnic Parties	0	0%	3	17.64%	0	0%
Election Related News	3	42.85%	10	58.82%	6	85.71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

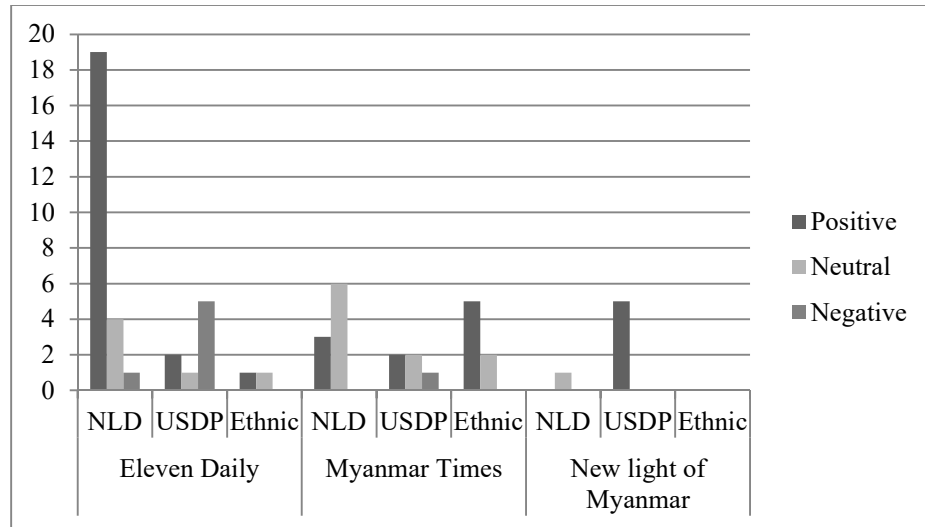
Table 2 demonstrated that there were statistically significant variations across the sample media. The interesting thing in this table was that these newspapers did not show the significant coverage between parties like the pre-election period. Moreover, the result showed the considerable percent of election related news story had been covered the most than the party's news. (The election related news story on the Election Day included about story of the voting process on the election and the story about studying the election from the external organizations like the NGOs.) NLD and Ethnic parties got 0% coverage in The New Light of Myanmar newspaper. Myanmar Times newspaper was the only one that reported on the ethnic parties.

**Table 3:** Number of News reported on Post Election period by Newspapers (November 15,16 of 2015)

Political Parties	Eleven Daily Newspapers		Myanmar Times Newspaper		New Night of Myanmar	
	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total	No. of news	% of total
NLD	6	66.66%	4	44.44%	0	0%
USDP	2	22.22%	2	22.22%	2	25%
Ethnic Parties	1	11.11%	1	11.11%	0	0%
Election Related News	0	0%	2	22.22%	6	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

According to table 3, interestingly, this correlation is related to Table 1. NLD is the most prominent coverage by Eleven Daily and Myanmar Times newspapers with 66.66% and 44.44% respectively. Less surprisingly, the NLD party and ethnic parties were placed at the bottom by The New Light of Myanmar newspapers. USDP get favorable coverage among parties as usual. (Election related news means the story of UEC announcement for the election results in the post election period.) The election related news was mostly covered by the News light of Myanmar than the other papers.

Overall, the data from the Eleven Daily newspapers displayed that it leaned the NLD party with more than half percent of total coverage in pre-election and post-election period. However, Myanmar Times Newspaper was the only one newspaper that covered the ethnic parties in all these three period. Meanwhile, The New Light of Myanmar Newspapers covered any news about it. The percent of coverage among political parties by Myanmar Times is fluctuated and do not show clearly which parties favor the most. But, The New Light of Myanmar newspaper give attention on the incumbent party, USDP. So, it can be said that The Eleven Newspapers has a strong partisan about the NLD in all three periods, and The New Light of Myanmar has only interest on the USDP party. The interesting thing is the election related news has the favorable coverage in all three period of election among all of the newspapers.

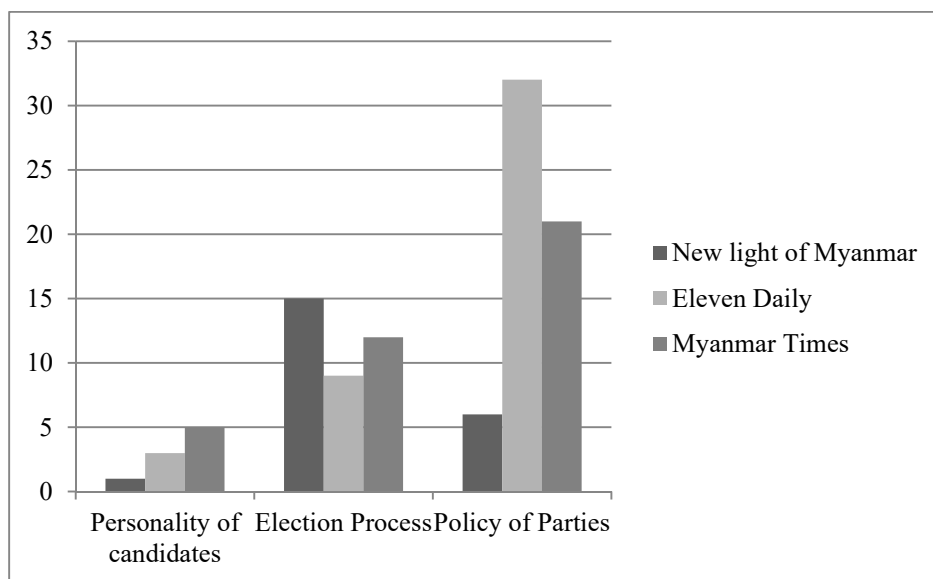


**Figure 1:** the tone of news used by Myanmar Newspapers for each party.  
(see more detail in appendix)

To confirm more about coverage bias, this study evaluates the tone of story coverage as positive, neutral and negative between political parties. The data from the figure 1 are consistent with the above table 1,2,3. As expected, the tone of story used in The Eleven Daily Newspapers about NLD is positive because NLD was mostly covered in the Eleven Daily at pre-election and post-election. As shown in figure 1, it is obvious that NLD was predominantly positive while the coverage about USDP was addressed negatively in The Eleven Daily. Most of the coverage about ethnic parties among three newspapers was not significantly different. Nevertheless, Myanmar Times newspapers covered Ethnic parties positively while New Light of Myanmar showed positive coverage about USDP on Pre-election period. Overall, this figure indicates that the coverage of news story is coherent with the tone using for the story. According to the results about the relationship between the coverage and the tone used for the story, it indicated that Myanmar newspapers have partisan bias and they do not cover the news fairly between parties.

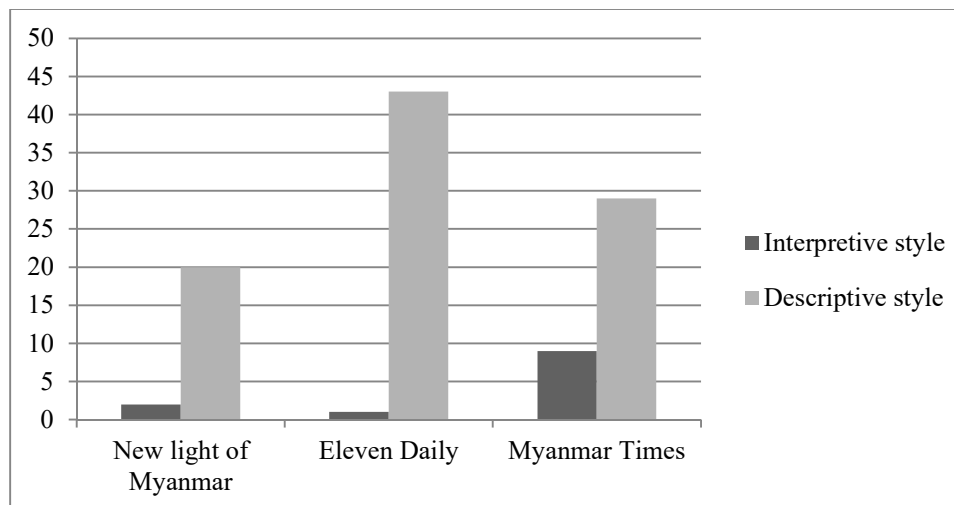
The first step of attempting to identify the partisan bias of election news coverage in newspapers, the interesting and prominent results are emerged. As expected, the two leading political parties in Myanmar, the

National league for Democracy (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party had the most obvious coverage in newspapers than other political parties. So, the correlation between the coverage and the tone of story was interesting because the newspapers showed significantly coverage for their supported party with a positive tone. The findings regarding with the question of “do newspapers give equal coverage to political parties?”, the finding clearly show that the newspapers have partisan bias and they have supported parties in coverage and specific tone.



**Figure 2:** main categories of election news coverage by Myanmar newspapers

In an attempt to identify the focus of newspapers whether they support the personality of candidates or the policy of parties, the data is collected all of the election news from the newspapers and differentiated into each categories. As shown in Figure 2, it illustrated the main categories covered by newspapers during in the three period of election. Obviously, these three Myanmar Newspapers did not cover very much about the personality of candidates. Eleven daily newspapers covered the most about the policy of the parties. Meanwhile, The New Light of Myanmar report the electoral process the most but the coverage of electoral process do not show big differences among newspapers.



**Figure 3:** journalistic style of election news by the Myanmar newspapers

As the last step to see whether the newspapers follow the interpretive style or descriptive style when they report election news, each of news is questioned which news reporting style is used for the election news. It obviously showed that Myanmar newspapers followed the descriptive journalistic style of news reporting. So, the journalistic style of reporting in the Myanmar newspapers was based on the factual reporting. And the gap between the descriptive and interpretive journalistic style reported in the newspapers was extremely high. But, the interpretive journalistic style was seen in the Myanmar Times newspapers than the other newspapers. Nevertheless, the majority of Myanmar newspapers use the descriptive journalistic style.

### Discussion

This section summarizes the findings according to the research questions and it is discussed as follows:

The first research questions, “Do newspapers give equal coverage to political parties?”, of this study was analyzed to identify the coverage of bias. This is the first attempt to prove the partisan bias exists in the newspapers, among all of them, The Eleven Daily newspapers supported political parties and they reported most of the election news about the NLD party. This study



concentrated on an additional check of the coverage bias by evaluating the tone of story used for a particular party. This finding indicated that the Eleven Daily newspapers used a positive tone when they reported about the NLD party. The USDP party was positively reported in the New Light of Myanmar newspapers. Thus, the findings show clearly that Myanmar Newspapers have a partisan bias.

The findings to address the second questions prove that election reporting emphasizes the policy of the parties. These findings reflect the fact that the newspapers in their coverage do not give prominence to the politics of individual candidates. Secondly, it indicates clearly that the main focus of the newspapers is on the election process. In general, it seems that Myanmar newspapers tend to introduce the reader with the process of the election in order to enable them to make the right decision when they vote their franchise. Thus, the newspaper endorse and give favorable coverage to the party they support.

Another important concern about the coverage of newspapers is the writing style of the election news. So, the third point to be noted is which journalistic style is common to their newspapers in their coverage. The journalists play a role as an observer in a descriptive style. Meanwhile, the journalists act as an analyst in the interpretive style. According to the findings, the style of election news coverage is predominately descriptive in these newspapers. But, the descriptive journalistic style is popular in the Myanmar newspapers and it acknowledges that most of election news in Myanmar newspapers depends on the facts provided by the specific sources. That can be also assumed that the journalists do not take a position to shape the news in the journalistic reporting and the story had happened in a straightforward style.

Overall, content analysis of election news from all of three newspapers has a similar trend in most of the findings. The descriptive style is mostly popular in all of them. Similarly, coverage about the policy of parties is also common among them. In addition, election related news has been covered in all three period of election. However, they also supported their favorable party by reporting a significant amount of news with positive tone coverage.

## Conclusion

The most common source of information for the public concerning elections held in democratic societies in transition around the world is the media. At that time, to be taken into account the role of media in the election, this paper examines the presence of the partisan bias in the election news coverage. It also investigates whether the newspapers have their supported party or not by using three alternative measures (i.e. the number of coverage story among party, the tone used for the story and writing style for the story). The empirical content analysis through the study of 104 election news stories by the three newspapers; New light of Myanmar, Eleven Daily newspapers and Myanmar Times newspapers has been analyzed to verify the hypothesis.

First of all, according to the analysis, only the Eleven Daily newspaper indicated a strong bias toward the NLD party although the NLD won 2015 elections and mostly retained 67% of the parliamentary seats. So, the performances of the newspapers do not led to the NLD victory. But, that was not this paper's aim. One of the papers used in the research, the New Light of Myanmar, give a favorable coverage to the incumbent party. But the Myanmar Times newspapers do not give a hint which party they support the most. Thus, according to the findings, both the Eleven Daily newspaper and the New Light of Myanmar newspapers have the partisan bias. The alternative supporting results for the hypothesis is that the tone used for the story is mainly positive for the party supported.

The second major finding to prove the hypothesis is that all three newspapers are mainly focused on the policy of the parties to give more information about the party. So, the results from this paper tested the hypothesis that the newspapers have their supported party in the election period. Finally, all newspapers gave the story a straightforward style rather than analyzed style. So, newspapers do not go beyond the facts of an event or topic to support the context.

Rivolta (2011) asserted, "Media and politics are intertwined so that most media can be labeled with respect to bipartisan lean or bias". So, election is the best suitable situation to find out the bias of the media. That is why; partisan bias exists when media favors one particular party than the others. The norm of objectivity is vital in the electoral process to be non-partisan and

balance. So, one of the newspapers in this research do not show partisan bias and focus the objective reporting in the election.

The finding from this paper is empirical and relevant to the current situation because the election is vital in the democratic country especially in a developing country like Myanmar. However, this research like any other study experienced certain difficulties and handicaps. Therefore, this paper does not draw any conclusions regarding the conditions that led to the partisan bias of the newspapers in Myanmar in their reports on the elections. Neither does it claim to answer the question as to the extent of the partisan bias present. There is a need for further empirical research on the 2020 elections in order to determine relevant factors to obtain more comprehensive and in-depth results. Further, for a more comprehensive test of this hypothesis, it would be necessary to look more systematically at how the press support the coverage for the specific party it supports. However, practices of media coverage can enrich the citizen's awareness and abilities to criticize the information they receive. Thus, the findings of this research on election news can provide guidelines for establishing criteria for best election reporting for the country.

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