

MONITORING THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2005 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN PALESTINE

Final report February 2005



The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of
Global Dialogue and Democracy

In cooperation with



OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION: NETWORK MEDIA PROGRAMME

International Media Support



Centre for Media Policy and Development

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Introduction

The participants conducted monitoring of the media for the official campaign period of the presidential elections from 25 December 2004 to 7 January 2005 in Ramallah using international methodological standards of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The project assesses the performance of the media in its coverage during the official campaign period. There is a specific focus on the coverage of the media using normative principles, including the right of access, allocation of coverage and balance in the mass media.

In addition the legal framework that pertains to the role of the media in covering the elections was reviewed to assess its effectiveness. The qualitative analysis and quantitative monitoring of media coverage was undertaken over the duration of the official campaign period and it was conducted by a Palestinian team under the training and supervision of an international expert, David Ward of the Centre for Media Policy and Development (UK) and Wafa' Abdel Rahman of The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) who initiated and organised the project and conducted part of the qualitative component of the monitoring. The project was organised in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation – Network Media Programme and International Media Support.

Methodology for the analysis of media coverage

The monitoring unit observed media coverage of elections in order to assess:

- whether political parties and candidates gained fair access to the media;
- whether political parties and candidates were covered in a unbiased and equitable manner;
- whether the media and the authorities abided by the rules and regulations covering their conduct during the campaign – both in terms of national legislation and international standards;
- the effectiveness of media law pertaining to the media and election coverage.

Between 25 December 2004 and 7 January 2005 the monitoring covered the public channel Palestine Television, the privately owned television channel Watan which covers the Ramallah area, and the two pan-Arab channels Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera. These channels were monitored daily at peak time between 18.00-23.00 hours throughout the official campaign period. The unit also monitored the two privately owned newspapers Al Ayyam and Al Quds as well as the state supported title Al Hayat Al Jadida. The Internet portal of Wafa, the official news agency was monitored as well as the public radio station Voice of Palestine.

The actors for the quantitative analysis were defined as the presidential candidates and the parties, where relevant to these candidates, four of which stood for election as independent candidates. It has not classified other actors in the analysis such as those political parties that did not put forward a candidate for the presidential elections or other political figures. As well as measuring the time and space allocated to political actors, parties and candidates, the media unit also measured the tone of media coverage according to a three level scale (positive, negative and neutral) in order to assess the overall tone of the media outlets towards contestants and the different political parties.

The quantitative analysis for the newspaper coverage was categorised into the following pages: business, culture, arts and entertainment, election specials, first page, foreign news pages, politics, local affairs, foreign affairs, religion, sport and others. The format of the news coverage was also categorised based on: headlines, article, editorial comment, photos, paid advertisements, cartoons, news item, and news report. Positive and negative coverage was recorded only if the monitoring team agreed on judging it to be unequivocal.

Table 1: Newspapers monitored

Title	Ownership	Period
Al Ayyam	Private	25.12.04-7.1.05
Al Hayat Al Jadida	Public (financially assisted)	25.12.04-7.1.05
Al Quds	Private	25.12.04-7.1.05

Table 2: Broadcasters monitored

Channel	Ownership	Hours monitored	Period
Palestine Television	Public	18.00 – 23.00	25.12.04-7.1.05
Watan	Private	18.00 – 23.00	25.12.04-7.1.05
Al Jazeera	Private	18.00 – 23.00	25.12.04-7.1.05
Al Arabiya	Private	18.00 – 23.00	25.12.04-7.1.05
Voice of Palestine	Public	07.00-11.00	25.12.04-7.1.05
Wafa (Internet)	Public*	25.12.04-7.1.05	

* The Internet portal of Wafa, the official public news agency in Palestine

Media monitors

Abeer Ismail
Ala'a Farid Krajh
Eva Afghani
Fatima Barqawi
Ghada Ghareeb Khalil

Ghassan Abu Eid
Lama Abu Sumayyah
Mohammad Alawi
Mohammad Nawahada
Mohammad Hameedeh

Mousa Qous
Reem Abed Alhamid
Salah Zaghloul
Thabet Zarra'
Yassin Mostafa Ali Abass

Recommendations

- The Press Law was universally criticised by stakeholders. It clearly lacks clarity, direction and adequate provisions to guarantee that the media provide independent and plural coverage. A new law with adequate provisions both for the media in general and specifically in the media's coverage of the elections should be drafted and replace the existing framework for both broadcast media and the press to provide solid foundations for the development of the media. This law should cover both commercial and public media and should be underpinned by the establishment of an independent regulatory body that operates at arm's length from the state and commercial interests.
- There is an urgent need to provide a satisfactory framework for financial issues related to the official campaign. This should not only be in the area of a ceiling on spending by candidates, but rates for access to commercial broadcasters and the press should be clearly established before the official campaign period and media companies should demonstrate that these rates have been equally applied to all candidates.
- Commercial broadcasters should be encouraged to provide a greater amount of local news as part of their obligations to the Palestinian viewers and listeners. There was little information broadcast by Watan Television with the exception of the series of programmes it allocated to the candidates and the paid advertising spots on the commercial broadcaster monitored. Although international news is an important aspect of information it should also be complemented with local news and information programmes. In this respect local media should be encouraged to invest in local programming that serves local needs and interests.
- The position of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida should be clarified as to whether it is legally obliged by the same terms as other public media. If so, then it should have the same responsibilities in providing free access and coverage for future elections.
- Palestine Television and Radio demonstrated clear bias in their duration in news coverage of the elections and the FATAH candidate enjoyed a central place in their coverage. The broadcasters' role and independence should be established in law and as a publicly financed broadcaster it should be obliged to provide a public service that remains impartial and objective.
- General coverage of the candidates and the elections should be encouraged in the media as a part of their editorial policies. Critical and balanced editorial coverage is not a negative characteristic of the media's coverage of the elections and all media outlets should be encouraged to engage with election issues and the manifestos of the candidates in an impartial and balanced manner in order to inform the electorate.
- The powers of the CEC should be reinforced on the basis that it should be transparent and independent from political forces and combined with judicial review in order that a sufficient framework is in place to process complaints and guarantee equal, fair and transparent access to the mass media.
- There was wide support for the development and support of an industry organisation that represented the rights of journalists that was truly independent from external forces. Such a body is a crucial part of a media system that protects and promotes journalistic standards and develops a satisfactory code of conduct for journalists and should be established as soon as practicable. Such an organisation could act to raise standards in

the industry and assist in preparing a range of programmes to strengthen the role of journalists in serving the public interest.

Summary Findings

- The overall coverage of the elections by Palestine Television was fairly balanced. However, this is a result of the free airtime granted to the candidates pursuant to the Election Law. In its news programmes election frontrunner Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) dominated the space dedicated to the election candidates. There was a clear lack of critical coverage of the elections in general by the channel and its coverage was characterised by an overwhelming focus on Abu Mazen at the expense of the other candidates.
- Watan TV provided coverage that favoured Mustafa Barghouti. Apart from the free access it granted to the candidates there was comparatively little coverage of the elections on Watan TV. The channel carried significant amounts of paid advertising from the candidates, but there was very little in its news and current affairs coverage about the elections.
- Palestine Radio remained balanced in its coverage. Though this must be seen in the context of a very small amount of coverage of the elections beyond that granted to the candidates as free airtime pursuant to the Election Law.
- Overall the press coverage of the elections clearly focused on Abu Mazen who received a little over 48 per cent of all coverage in the newspapers. He was followed by Mustafa Barghouti and Tayseer Khaled who both received approximately 14 per cent of coverage allocated to the elections in the coverage by the newspaper titles. Although there was some variation as to the space devoted to the candidates in the different titles and the newspapers provided a greater degree of coverage of other candidates than television and radio, Abu Mazen remained the dominant focus of coverage.
- The legal framework that is designed to ensure the media cover the elections in a balanced and even manner was inadequate during the official election campaign. The lack of an effective instrument setting out the rights and obligations of the media during this period, as well as the lack of adequate broadcasting and print laws was perceived by the stakeholders to be a major systemic weakness in the development of norms and standards in the media sector.
- There were a number of positive trends in the media's coverage of the elections. The free airtime granted to the candidates on Palestine Television and Radio as well as the time granted on Watan and Al Jazeera were positive public services. Interviews with the stakeholders also suggested that there was universal consensus as to the need to develop the media system and the legal framework to better serve the public a range of quality information.

Qualitative Analysis

Background to the elections

The 2005 presidential elections were held with the FATAH candidate, according to polls, having a significant majority of support. The only other candidate polling significant public support was Mustafa Barghouthi standing as an independent candidate. The elections followed local elections in Palestine and were the first such elections since 1996. The backdrop to the elections is one of continued conflict and occupation by Israeli security forces in the region that has seen Israeli security services introduce draconian measures restricting the rights and freedoms of the Palestinian people, especially movement. The candidates at the start of the official campaign period were:

Table 3: Candidates standing for election as of the 25.12.04

Candidate	Party
Mustafa Barghouthi	Independent
Abu Mazen	FATAH
Tayseer Khaled	DFLP
Abdel-Karim Shubair	Independent
Abdel-Halim Ashkar	Independent
Hussien Baraka	Independent
Bassam Salhi	PPP

The media environment

The media sector in Palestine suffers from five central influences that act to restrict its full potential to serve the people of Palestine quality and objective information. In order of priority given by interviewees these are: restrictions imposed by Israel and its occupation, the lack of an adequate legal framework, the omnipotent role of FATAH in the political life of Palestine and in the Administration, the lack of professionalism and a sound economic base for the development of the mass media in general.

The environment for journalists is also extremely difficult due to the security situation and relations with Israel. A 2004 report by Reporters without Frontiers concluded that the Palestinian media are in a period on probation and has pressures of self-censorship in the media itself, pressures from the Israeli occupation as well as pressures from the Palestinian Authorities. Despite this fact they conclude that there are many independent media outlets throughout the region. This being said, the proliferation of media outlets means that these are more than often small and are financially very fragile. The report cites numerous incidents by the Palestinian Authorities against journalists in 2003 including arrests and closures of newspapers, particularly those outlets that are seen to be close to the militant Islamist group, Hamas.

The legal framework for media and elections

Freedom of speech in Palestine is set out in Article 19 of the Basic Law that states every citizen in Palestine has the right to freely publish material that complies with the principles established in the Law. Furthermore, Article 27 establishes the fundamental principle that all citizens have the right to establish a newspaper or broadcaster on the basis that the law is supposed to guarantee that "freedom to print, publish, transmit, together with the freedom of individuals working in this field, is guaranteed" (Article 27). The article provides that there should be no censorship of the media in Palestine.

The Press Law of 1995 also contains provisions to technically guarantee that citizens have access to a free and independent media pursuant to Article 2. There are no restrictions in the Law preventing political parties from owning a newspaper and as an extension to this, the parties from owning broadcast outlets. Certain obligations are also placed on the press under the Law in that they should:

- Present material in an objective, integrated and balanced form (Article 8, Sb);
- Strive for accuracy, integrity and objectivity in commenting on news and events (Article 8, Sc).

Although the technical groundwork for free and independent media is established in the Press Law a number of features of the Law suggest that there are anomalies and serious inadequacies in the Law which does not meet international standards in this field. It is also unclear to what extent the Press Law encompasses the audiovisual sector and there is confusion about what, if any, law is established to regulate the audiovisual media. In general the Law is vague, non-specific and far too abstract to regulate the principles that underpin an independent media system that serves citizens and the democratic development of Palestine. It has been a major handicap in setting the parameters and obligations of the media's coverage of elections. It is especially unclear as to whether there is any law whatsoever that is relevant to the audiovisual media.

Election Law and the media

The Election Law of 1995 establishes the framework for the elections in Palestine and in Section 4 Article 54 et seq. the official campaign for the elections is set out as well as the principles governing the role of the media in the campaign. The official campaign period was established as 14 days (Law as amended 1995) with a moratorium imposed on campaigning 24 hours before the polling date. There are also provisions to guarantee candidates equal access to public broadcast media on non-discriminatory grounds. As well as a requirement that candidates should submit their campaign expenses after the elections, pursuant to Article 93 (4). In general reflecting the Press Law the articles in the Election Law that pertain to the role of the media are vague and abstract and it lacks the attention to detail and regulations that would provide a satisfactory framework in this field.

Assessment

Access to public media

Article 57 (1) of the Election Law assigns the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) the duty to liaise with the public media to provide equal and free access to the presidential candidates. The CEC notified Palestine Television and Radio of their obligations to provide free access and an agreement was signed between the parties. The allocation of airtime was decided by lot between the candidates and slots for each candidate were allocated for seven nights running up to the election moratorium. All of the candidates had access to these slots that were broadcast in peak time.

These party political broadcasts were complemented by a talk show format of a duration of one hour and a half per candidate to be broadcast nightly in prime time before the party political broadcasts of the candidates. The talk show was partially funded by the CEC and sponsored by two private companies. The talk show was repeated at 22.30 on the night of the original broadcast. This was changed from the original time slot for the repeat programme in order to comply with the moratorium.

The content of the candidates' broadcasts were editorially independent. However, their content was checked prior to the broadcast of the programmes to ensure compliance with the provisions in the Press Law and the provisions against inciting racial hatred by the CEC, though it is unclear as to whether the present media law actually covers audiovisual media. There were no reported infringements. The system was very successful in granting the candidates equal airtime for these slots and is a constructive innovation. The system was widely seen as a success by all stakeholders.

Table 4: Talk show slots of the candidates on Palestine Television

Candidate	Date	Start time	End time	Duration (minus commercial breaks) seconds
Bassam Salhi	1.1.05	19.30	21.00	4300
Tayseer Khaled	2.1.05	19.30	21.00	4300
Hussien Baraka	3.1.05	19.30	21.00	4440
Mustafa Barghouthi	4.1.05	19.30	21.00	4704
Abdel Halim Ashkar	5.1.05	19.30	21.00	4525
Abdel Karim Shubair	6.1.05	19.30	21.00	4463
Abu Mazen	7.1.05	19.30	21.00	4332

Note: All talk show programmes for the candidates were repeated at 22.30 on the same evening

Bassam Salhi complained that the election specials were only advertised in the press a day after his slot and thus the promotional material for the programmes was unequal. However, he also stated that there were no problems with the programme content and no editorial interference. All of the candidates' offices who were interviewed were content with the free airtime granted to them on Palestine Television and a number of them suggested that it was a positive trend that allowed balance and access between the candidates.

The slots for the candidates to access public radio were allocated in a similar manner as the television slots with each candidate receiving five slots of three minutes' duration on Voice of Palestine. One candidate did not take up the slot due to a failure of the campaign office to produce a programme for the airtime allocation.

The public media suggested that they had problems with fully covering the elections in their general programming that were produced by a combination of factors. They recognised that there were problems due to the priority of the local news agenda that provided greater amounts of coverage for Abu Mazen due to his administrative duties as chairperson of the mainstream Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). They cited problems of resources that were inadequate and of the checkpoints of the Israeli armed forces hampering the movement of personnel and technical equipment within the Palestinian territories. Both of these factors were seen as serious obstacles in providing quality coverage of the election campaign on public radio and television.

The status of the newspaper Al Hayat Al Jadida which is subsidised using public money was also unclear as to whether the newspaper should come under the same positive obligations as the public radio and television outlets. It was excluded from these obligations and it is unclear whether such exclusion is in line with the legal provisions setting out the positive obligations of public media during the election campaign period. The public media's regulatory status was also unclear and the lack of an independent and clear mandate meant that Palestine Television and Radio were uncertain as to their role in serving the Palestinian people. This being said, the stakeholders were divided on Palestine Television and Radio's coverage. On one hand, a number of stakeholders suggested that the stations had at least tried to remain objective and balanced and they understood that the excessive coverage granted to Abu Mazen was a result of his role in the Administration. On the other hand, there was criticism that Palestine Television and Radio simply served the FATAH party and its candidate.

Access to private media

One of the major issues during the media's coverage of the elections was paid political advertising spots on commercial television and in the press. In the private channel monitored there was little coverage of the elections except for paid political advertising which was in abundance on Watan and according to interviewees on local commercial television outlets throughout the region. Watan did, however, broadcast a nightly programme for the candidates during prime time that was a positive contribution to the media's coverage of the campaign. Abu Mazen declined the offer to use the slot, according to Watan.

Palestine Television was not allowed to carry paid political advertising. What appears to be completely unregulated access to airtime on commercial television meant that paid political advertising was a major factor in coverage by channels such as Watan. There were no standard rates established by the authorities for political advertising in the press or audiovisual media. A number of the offices of the candidates complained about the rates, which were far in excess of normal advertising rates in the press and in some cases prohibitively so due to the small size of some of the candidates' budgets.

Table 5: Advertising rates in Al Quds

Black and white	Israeli Shekel (=US\$ 0.25)	Colour	Israeli Shekel
25% of page	12,000	25% of page	15,000
50% of page	25,000	50% of page	30,000
		full page	50,000

It was suggested that these rates were fairly consistent across newspaper titles. The Mustafa Barghouthi campaign was the only office to buy advertising space on Al Arabiya at an estimated US\$ 18,000 for a 40 second spot. The interviewers were unable to gain access to the rates for commercial television advertising on Watan and local television outlets, but it was suggested that these were considerably lower than advertising rates in the press.

Although there are some provisions in a draft law currently under development at the Palestinian Authority to establish a ceiling of the equivalent of one million US\$ on campaign budgets there is clearly a lack of clarity in nearly all aspects of the regulation and role of paid political advertising on commercial television and radio channels and the press. This includes the financial aspects of paid political advertising and a system to ensure that candidates have access to paid advertising slots. There are no legal provisions except incitement and official campaigning related to commercial media.

The only provision that relates to financial transparency appears to be that all of the candidates are required, pursuant to Article 93 (4) of the Election Law, to submit a report 20 days after the announcement of the election results of their expenses for the campaign. There are no regulations in place to ensure transparency in how the rates are established and whether they are applied consistently across the political spectrum. There was also some confusion from the offices of the candidates as to whether all candidates were obliged to submit a financial report or whether it was only the winning candidate who was obliged to do so.

Paid political advertising was also very prominent in the press. A very encouraging move was made by at least one newspaper to offer free advertising for some of the financially disadvantaged candidates, though in reality this achieved little in readdressing the unequal coverage of the candidates.

Watan television also provided access to the candidates in the form of a talk show. The slot scheduled for Bassam Salhi was rescheduled, allegedly due to the fact that the appointed moderator could not get through a checkpoint. The programmes were one of the few examples of coverage of the candidates on Watan television except for paid advertisements. The fact that Watan relies on the Al Jazeera news bulletin for its evening news meant that although there was some coverage of the elections this was not to any significant degree in terms of programming.

Table 6: Allocation of airtime on Watan for the candidates (talk show format)

Date	Candidate	Duration (seconds)	Time start
1.1.05	Abdel Karim Shubair	3000	20.00
2.1.05	Hussien Baraka	3060	20.00
3.1.05	Abdel halim Ashkar	2940	20.00
4.1.05	Bassim Salhi	rescheduled	rescheduled
5.1.05	Tayseer Khaled	3000	20.00
6.1.05	Bassam Salhi	2820	21.00
7.1.05	Mustafa Barghouthi	3000	21.30

Bassam Salhi's spot was cancelled and rescheduled due to the moderator being held at a checkpoint. It was rebroadcast on 6 January. Abu Mazen declined the invitation to participate in the slot allocated to him.

Satellite channels

The importance of satellite television in Palestine meant that the two pan-Arab stations Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera were seen to be crucial platforms for the election coverage. This was also supported by the fact that journalists working for pan-Arab stations enjoy a greater degree of access and freedom of movement than their local counterparts and do not suffer from the same degree of restrictions.

Al Jazeera declined to carry paid political advertising from any of the candidates and Al Arabiya was the only satellite broadcaster to carry paid political advertisements, which were purchased by Mustafa Barghouthi and were financed through, what the office of the candidate suggested, was a local donation. Both satellite broadcasters were criticised by the interviewees as to their coverage of the campaign and what they perceived to be excessive coverage of Abu Mazen. Al Jazeera, however, provided a platform for the candidates in a spot in their 22.00 news bulletin that consisted of a combination of a presentation of the elections in general, an outline of the relevant candidate's manifesto and an interview with the candidate. The interviews varied considerably in terms of their duration with Abu Mazen enjoying the most airtime.

Table 7: Duration of airtime granted by Al Jazeera for the candidates (interviews)

Candidate	Date	Duration of interview (seconds)
Abdel Karim Shubair	2.1.05	522
Hussien Baraka	3.1.05	258
Bassam Salhi	4.1.05	245
Tayseer Khaled	5.1.05	360
Mustafa Barghouthi	6.1.05	495
Abu Mazen	7.1.05	825

Al Arabiya's coverage of the elections was only really contained in news bulletins that covered the activities of Abu Mazen with some marginal coverage of Mustafa Barghouthi, Bassam Salhi and Tayseer Khaled.

Central Electoral Commission

The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) was generally perceived to have a high degree of moral integrity and independence by stakeholders. It was however, criticised for not dealing with violations of the Election Law. Many candidates submitted complaints, usually about what they perceived to be excessive coverage of Abu Mazen on television and in the press and they felt these complaints had not been adequately addressed. The Ministry of Information also stated that it believed there had been more violations than the number which they had referred to it by the CEC.

The main concern expressed about the role of the CEC was that it simply did not enjoy the necessary instruments or powers to regulate the elections and media coverage of the elections and perceived violations continued throughout the campaign period. As one interviewee suggested 'violations just continue and the CEC is ineffective as the media do not care as there are no rules to enforce against them'. The opinion is generally representative of the views of the stakeholders interviewed: that the CEC conducted itself in an independent manner, but lacked legal and enforcement powers that reduced its potential role in regulating the Election Law significantly.

Pressures on journalists

The movement of local journalists was restricted by the continued presence of Israeli army checkpoints. The major media outlets circumvented this problem to some extent by the fact that they employ regional journalists that enabled them to cover the elections throughout Palestine. The big Arab satellite broadcasters were perceived to have better conditions than local media outlets and local journalists have less freedom of movement and access to candidates than their counterparts working for the pan Arab satellite broadcasters. Journalists also complained about the pressure put on them from candidates and their offices in terms of accusations of bias either for or against certain candidates.

The moratorium

The 24 hour moratorium was infringed by all of the newspaper titles. On the 8 January all of the titles contained news and information about some of the candidates. Abu Mazan and Mustafa Barghouthi both received significant coverage during the moratorium period. There were also advertisements placed in the newspapers that, although not directly pertaining to the election campaign itself, clearly aimed to promote the relevant candidate beyond the permitted threshold established by the 24 hour moratorium. None of the monitored broadcasters infringed the moratorium.

Coverage in general

All of the candidates' offices interviewed suggested that media coverage was unbalanced and favoured Abu Mazen. They complained that their own coverage was marginalised and events in their campaign schedules were ignored by the media. This was especially the case, according to the interviews, when events were held outside Ramallah.

News coverage was dominated by Abu Mazen and although there was some attempt to separate his administrative duties from his candidature the coverage and priority given to the candidate in terms of space in the media was not proportional.

The Voice of Palestine suggested problems with fully covering the elections in their general programming were produced by a combination of factors and they recognised that there was a problem in the priority of the news agenda that provided greater amounts of coverage of Abu Mazen due to his administrative duties. They cited problems of resources that were inadequate and the movement of technical equipment within the territories as serious obstacles in providing quality coverage of the election campaign. They also suggested the fact that public media's regulatory status was unclear and the lack of an independent and clear mandate meant that the institution was uncertain as to its role in serving the Palestinian people.

There were also complaints from journalists that they received constant pressure from the candidates in terms of accusations of bias and the lack of objectivity. However, this does not appear to have affected their coverage, but it should be noted that the relatively weak position of journalists in Palestine makes them prone to this kind of pressure.

Generally the candidates perceived their coverage to be poor and they suggested there had been numerous violations that enabled Abu Mazen excessive coverage. At the same time the investment in paid political advertising of the campaign for Mustafa Barghouti meant that, especially on local television, Mustafa Barghouti received a great deal of coverage, though in terms of local news there was little broadcast by Watan television on the elections or general coverage of the candidates.

All of the daily newspapers demonstrated similar trends in their coverage of the candidates during the official election campaign period. The dominant actor in press coverage of the elections was Abu Mazen who enjoyed significantly greater coverage than any of the other candidates standing for election. Al Ayyam was the title that allocated the greatest amount of coverage to the other candidates, though Abu Mazen remained the dominant actor in its coverage. If paid political advertising is subtracted from the percentage of coverage, the coverage that was allocated to Abu Mazen is even greater as a percentage of total coverage.

There was a clear lack of critical coverage of the elections and the candidates in all of the media in terms of editorial policy. The majority of coverage of the elections consisted either of the free spots allocated to the candidates on television channels or political advertising. The lack of editorial coverage and programmes that engaged in election issues more broadly was an important gap that should have been filled by all media outlets.

Conclusion

There were areas in the media's coverage of the elections that demonstrated some positive trends in terms of the media's performance during the official campaign period and these were widely supported by the stakeholders as a progressive and welcome innovation. Clearly, one of the major successes of the Palestinian media during the election was not only the free airtime granted by the public media, but the extension of this principle to other television outlets such as Watan and including one of the satellite channels. This must be seen as a positive public service.

However, despite this positive trend there remained significant issues as to the quality of access and coverage of the individual media outlets in their coverage of the election candidates. General coverage of the elections and the candidates was largely absent from the radio and television schedules. Newspapers performed slightly better in this respect, but at the same time the dominance in their coverage in terms of space was favourable to Abu Mazen.

Stakeholders were generally supportive of the need to make the current legal framework governing the role of the media more robust including the financial rules that pertain to access to the media making them more equitable and transparent. There was also a broad consensus as to

the source of the major weaknesses in the media's coverage and wide support to provide legal and institutional remedies to these problems.

Quantitative Analysis

Press

Overall the press coverage of the elections clearly focused on Abu Mazen who received a little over 48 per cent of all coverage in the newspapers. He was followed by Mustafa Barghouthi and Tayseer Khaled who both received approximately 14 per cent of coverage allocated to the elections in the coverage by the newspaper titles.

Chart 1: Overall coverage (space) devoted to the Presidential candidates in the print media

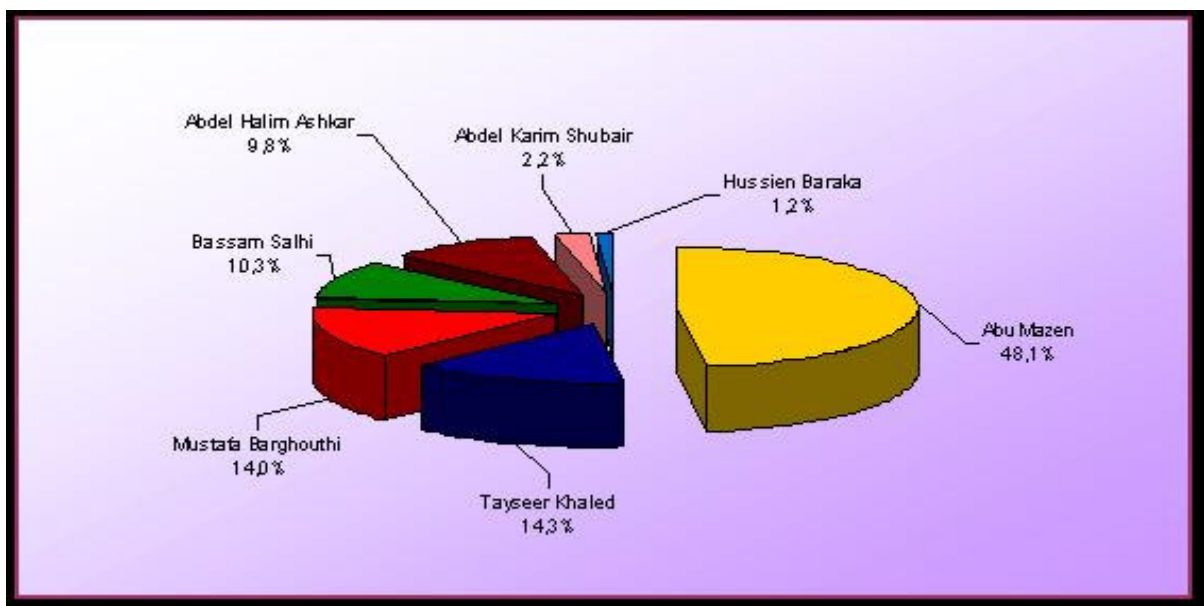
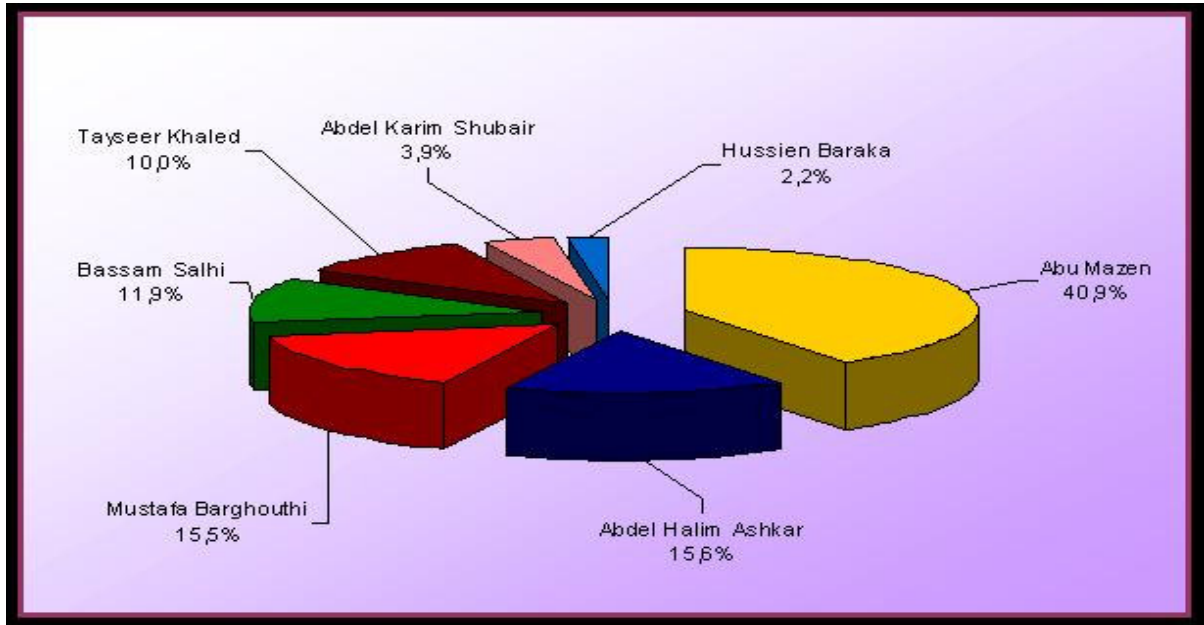


Chart 2: Share of coverage (space) devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Ayam



Al Ayyam devoted considerable coverage to Abu Mazen during the official campaign period with the candidate receiving 41 per cent of coverage over the period including paid for political advertisements. Abdel Halim Ashkar received the second greatest amount of coverage of nearly 16 per cent in Al Ayyam.

Chart 3: Share of coverage (space) devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Hayat

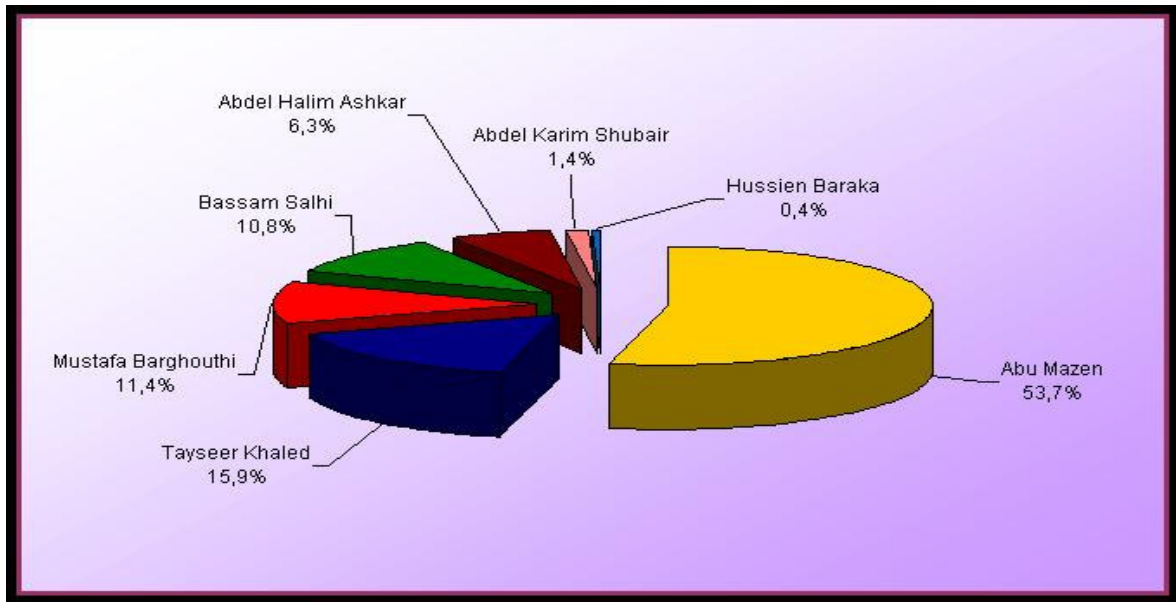
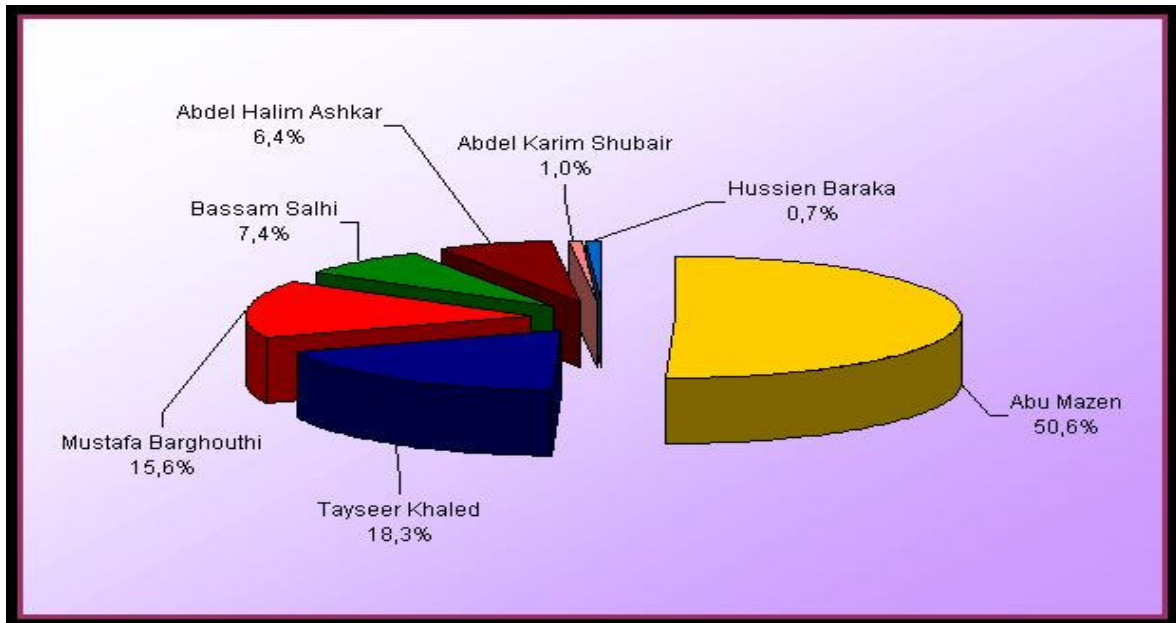
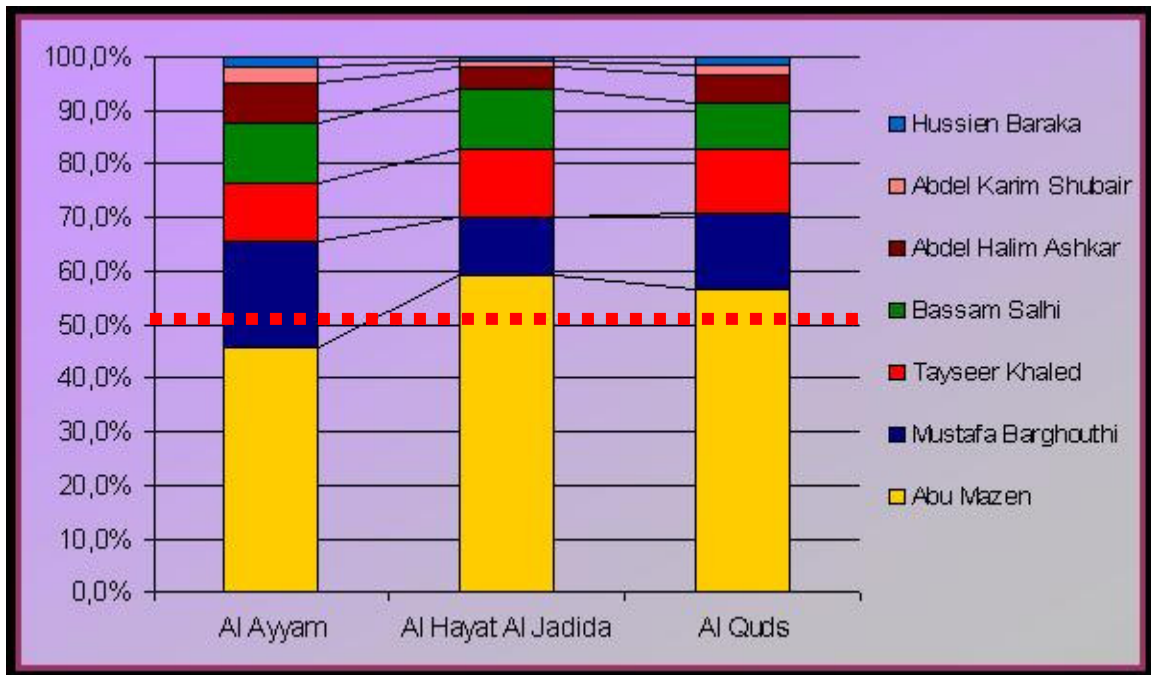


Chart 4: Share of coverage (space) devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Quds



Al Hayat Al Jadida dedicated even more coverage to Abu Mazen and he received 54 per cent coverage in the reporting of the candidates and their parties including paid for political advertising. Though as is the case with Al Ayyam there is a division of coverage dedicated to other candidates. The coverage of Al Quds remains between the other two titles in terms of the space allocated to the candidates. In Al Quds 51 per cent of space was allocated to Abu Mazen.

Chart 5 : News report coverage in the daily press (all titles) of the Presidential candidates



An important factor in newspaper coverage was that the administrative duties of Abu Mazen were widely reported. As the President of the PLO Abu Mazen undertook certain administrative duties during the official campaign period. These events were very high in the news agenda and received wide coverage that favoured Abu Mazen's campaign considerably. In terms of news reports a similar pattern is evident in the coverage by the titles with Abu Mazen receiving a large percentage of coverage.

The tone of the coverage in all of the newspapers was largely positive and there was a distinct lack of critical coverage of the candidates during the campaign period. This reflects a very positive editorial approach by all of the newspapers to all of the candidates.

Chart 6: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates in the press (excluding paid advertisements)

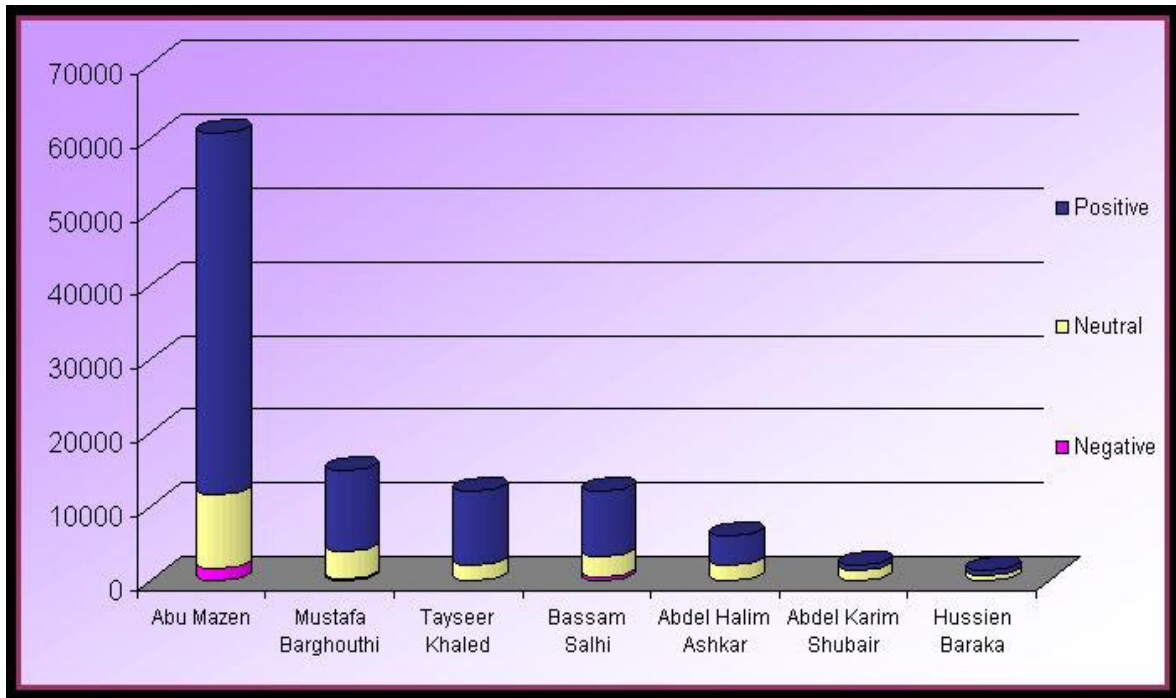


Chart 7: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Ayyam (excluding paid advertisement)

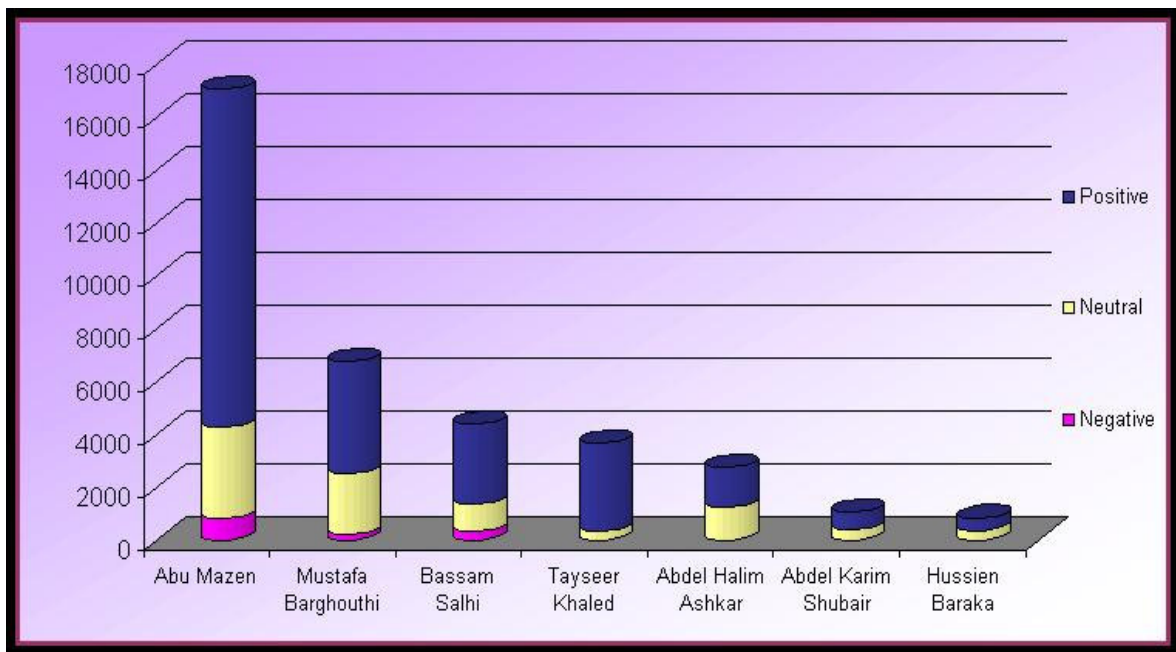


Chart 8: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Hayat (excluding paid advertisement)

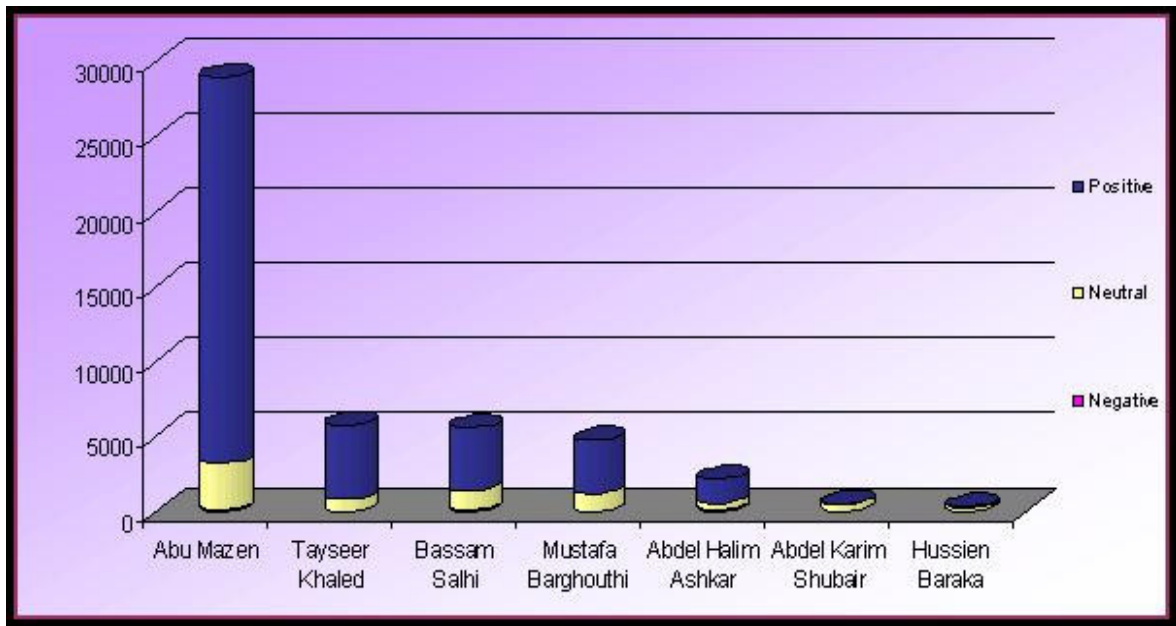


Chart 9: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates Al Quds (excluding paid advertisement)

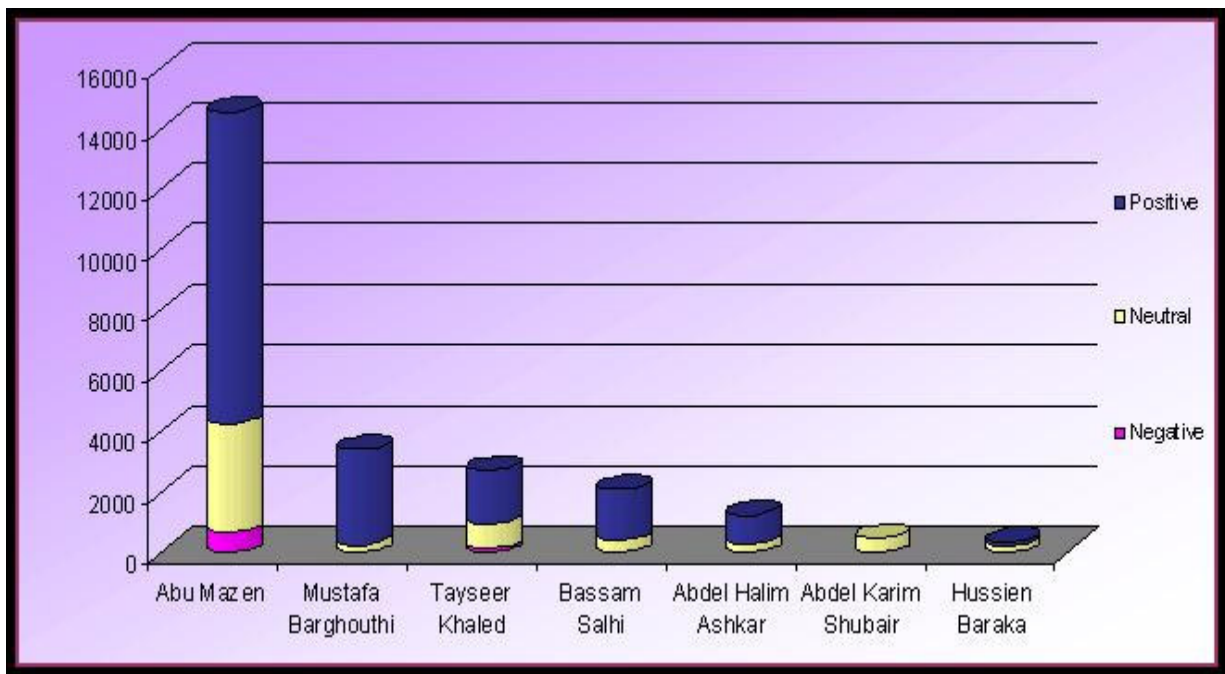
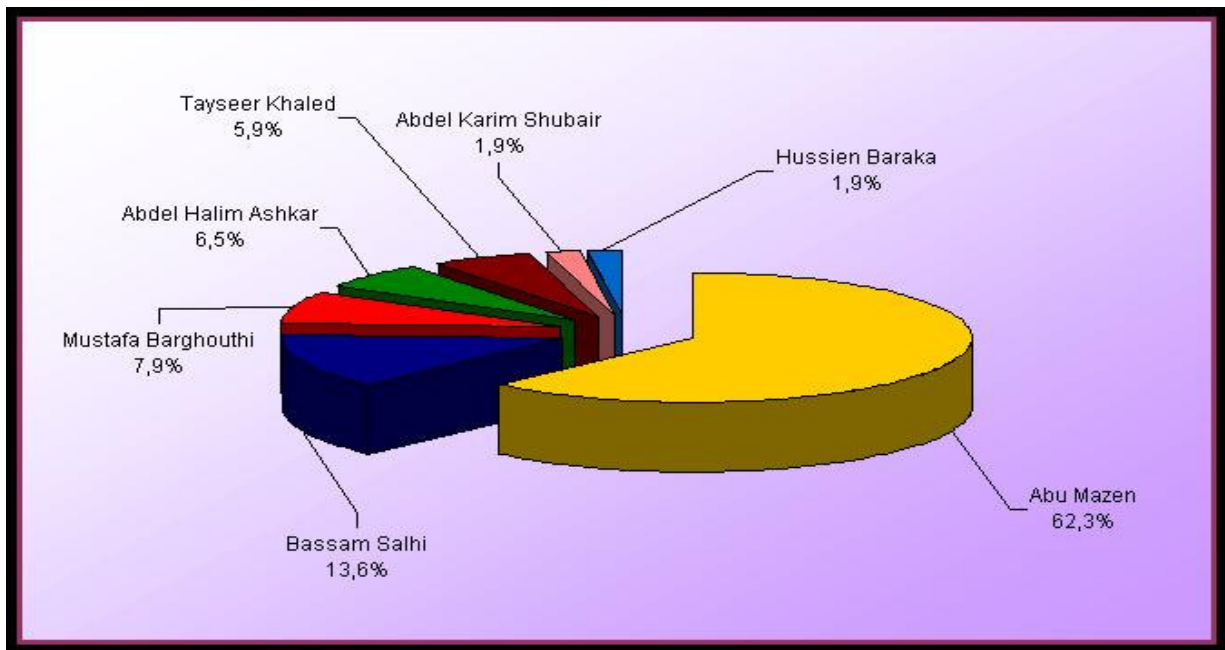
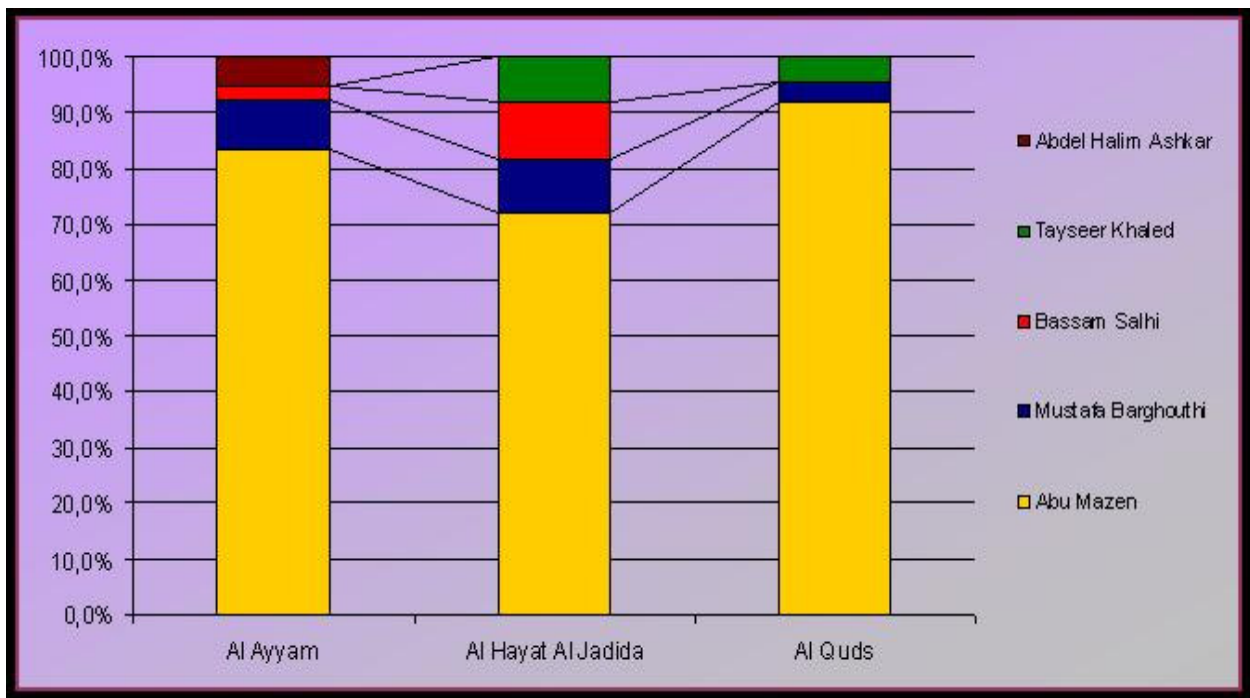


Chart 10: Photos devoted to (space) Presidential candidates in all press (excluding paid advertisement)



The overall dominance of Abu Mazen in the daily press was also evident in terms of the coverage of the candidates on the front pages of the titles. Abu Mazen received between 70 to a little over 90 per cent of front page coverage allocated to the candidates during the official campaign period in the different newspapers.

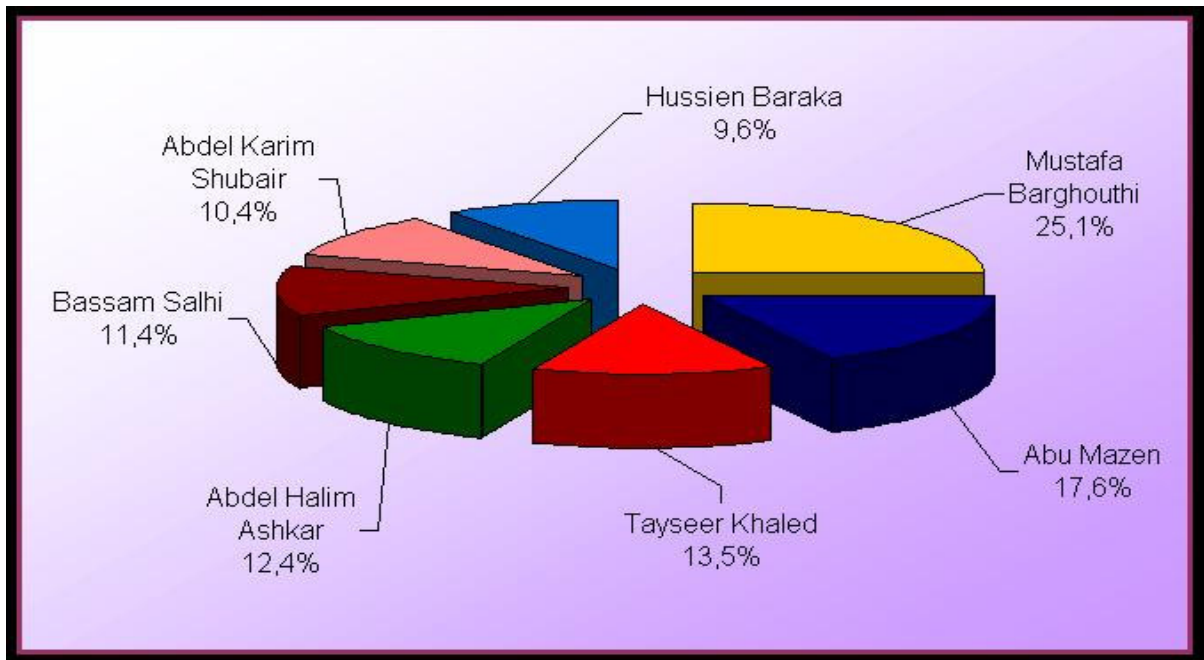
Chart 11: Front page coverage (space) devoted to Presidential candidates in the press (excluding paid advertisement)



Television channels

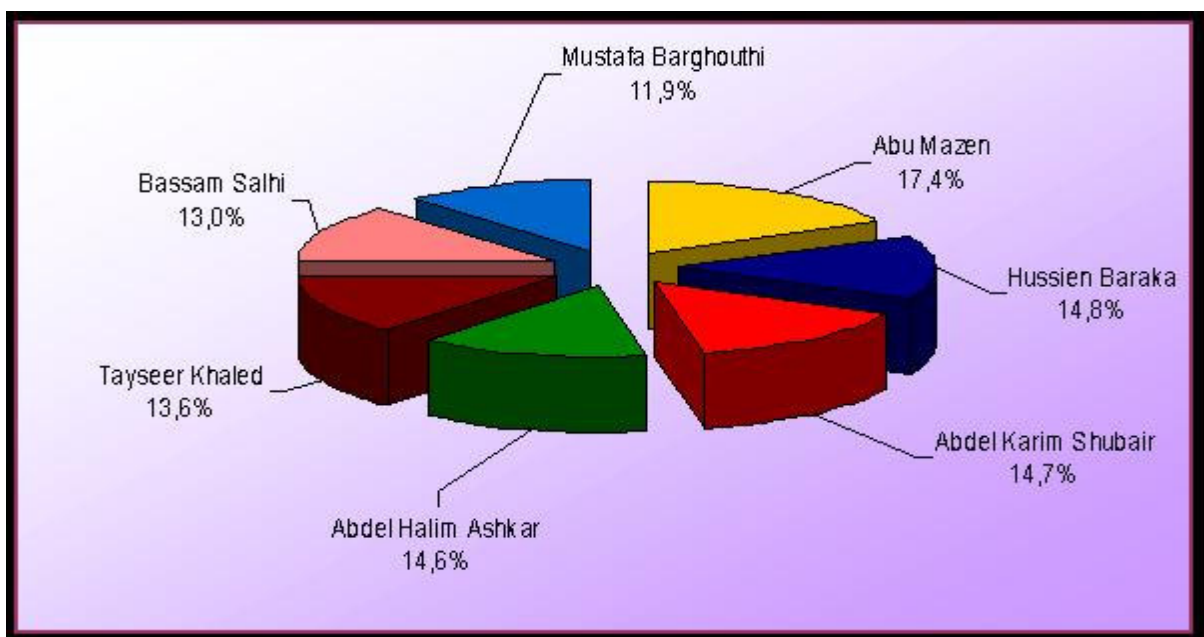
The two television channels monitored demonstrate a wide range of coverage of the candidates in terms of duration. However, this must be put in the context of the allocation of free airtime to the candidates that provided candidates access to both Palestine Television and Watan.

Chart 12: Share of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates on all television channels



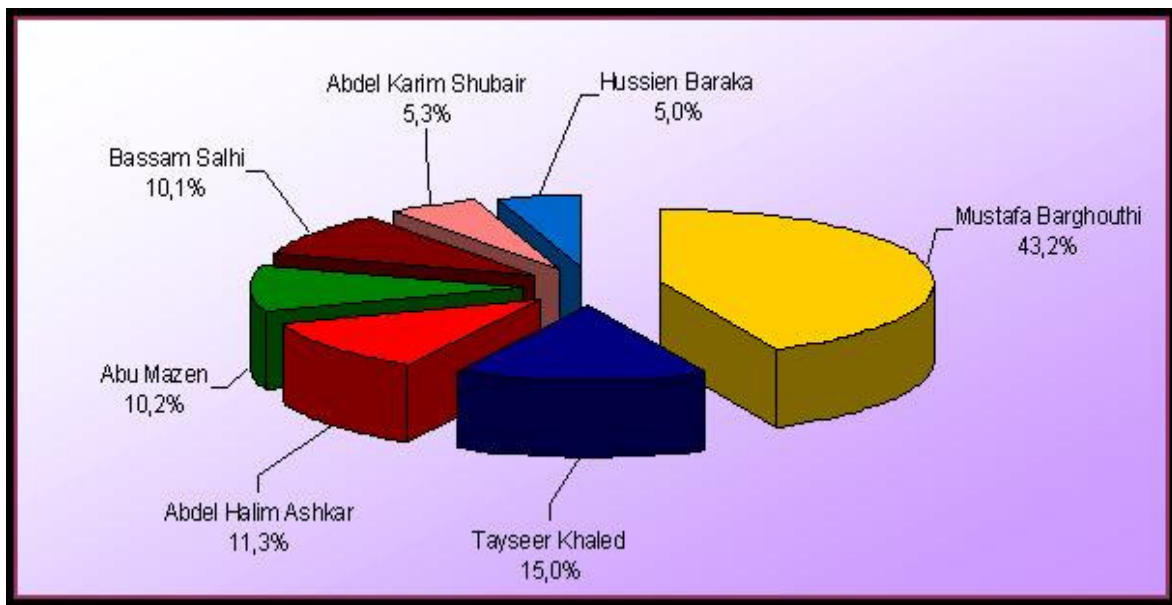
Although the news was dominated by Abu Mazen and his party and administrative duties, the presence of free airtime that was granted to the candidates on an equal basis means that the coverage of the elections by Palestine Television was balanced overall.

Chart 13: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates by Palestine TV (all programmes)



This balance must, however, be understood in the context of the relatively significant free broadcast time allocated to the candidates pursuant to the Election Law. The lack of any analytical or critical coverage of the elections and the candidates during the campaign period over and beyond the free access granted to the candidates meant that only events during the campaign period that were high on the news agenda, which were essentially administrative ones of Abu Mazen, were covered. In this respect, the division between institutional (and institutional resources) and campaign activities of Abu Mazen was blurred in the news and other forms of content on Palestine Television.

Chart 14: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates by Watan TV (All programmes)

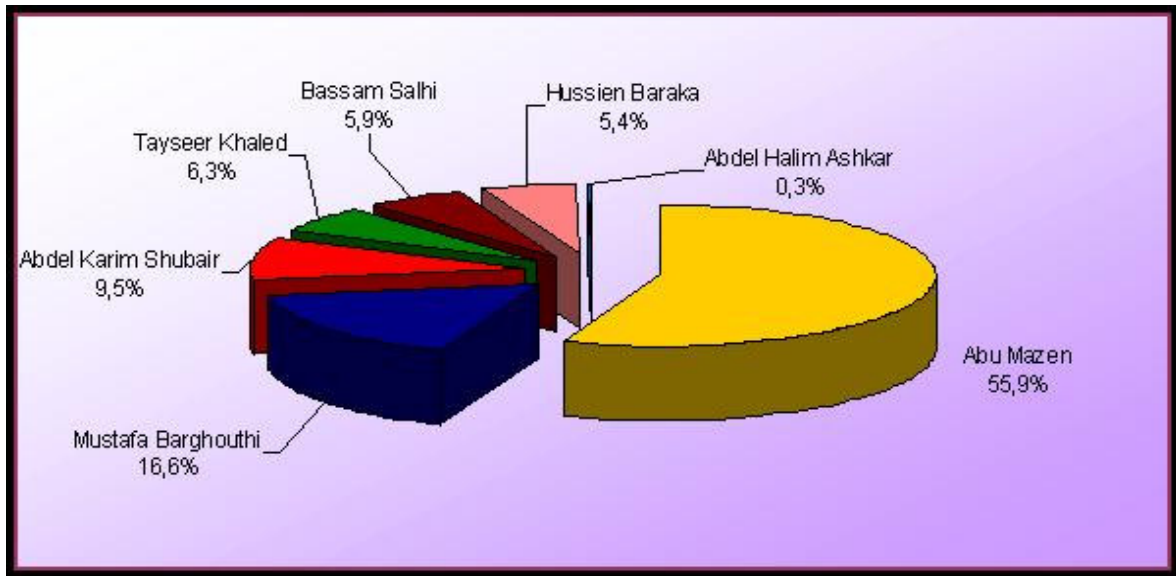


Watan's coverage of the elections consisted of three parts. Firstly, and most abundantly there was, relatively, a huge amount of paid for political advertising on the channel. Secondly, Watan provided airtime for the candidates in a talk show format and finally there was a marginal amount of news covered by the Al Jazeera evening news bulletin that is broadcast on Watan. The candidate Mustafa Barghouti's free airtime that was broadcast on Palestine Television was repeated a number of times on the Watan channel and the coverage of the candidates is highly skewed in favour of Mustafa Barghouti who received a little over 43 per cent of coverage (including paid for political advertising).

Watan's election coverage was therefore threefold: firstly, it unequivocally promoted the candidature of Mustafa Barghouti. Secondly, it aired large amounts of paid political advertising that according to the candidates was available and accessible. Finally, it provided a platform for the candidates, although the benefits of providing this airtime were somewhat diluted by the repeated broadcasting of Mustafa Barghouti's programme that was produced for the free airtime slot on Palestine Television, on Watan.

Given the importance placed on satellite television in Palestine the pan Arab satellite channels were perceived to be of particular importance in the election campaign. Despite the perceived importance of these channels there was marginal coverage of the election campaign on Al Arabiya. Abu Mazen was the candidate who received the major share of coverage on Al Arabiya and a large percentage of this coverage can be attributed to the role of Abu Mazen as PLO Chairman and the interest of the Arab world in Palestinian affairs.

Chart 15: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates by Al Jazeera (All programmes)



Al Jazeera granted the elections a more prominent position in its programme schedule. The introduction of a daily slot within the evening news bulletin of Al Jazeera where the candidates' manifestos were outlined followed by an interview with each of them was a positive innovation. The duration of these slots varied considerably with Abu Mazen enjoying significantly more airtime in terms of his own manifesto and interview than the majority of candidates. Overall, Abu Mazen remained the dominant figure covered by Al Jazeera.

Chart 16: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates by Al Arabiya (All programmes)

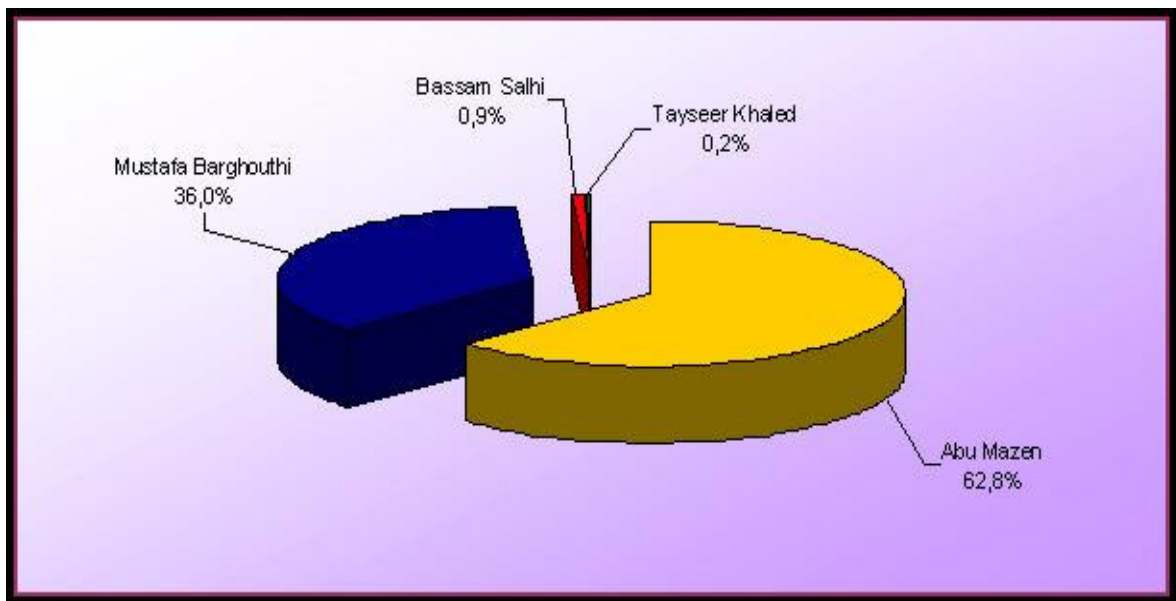
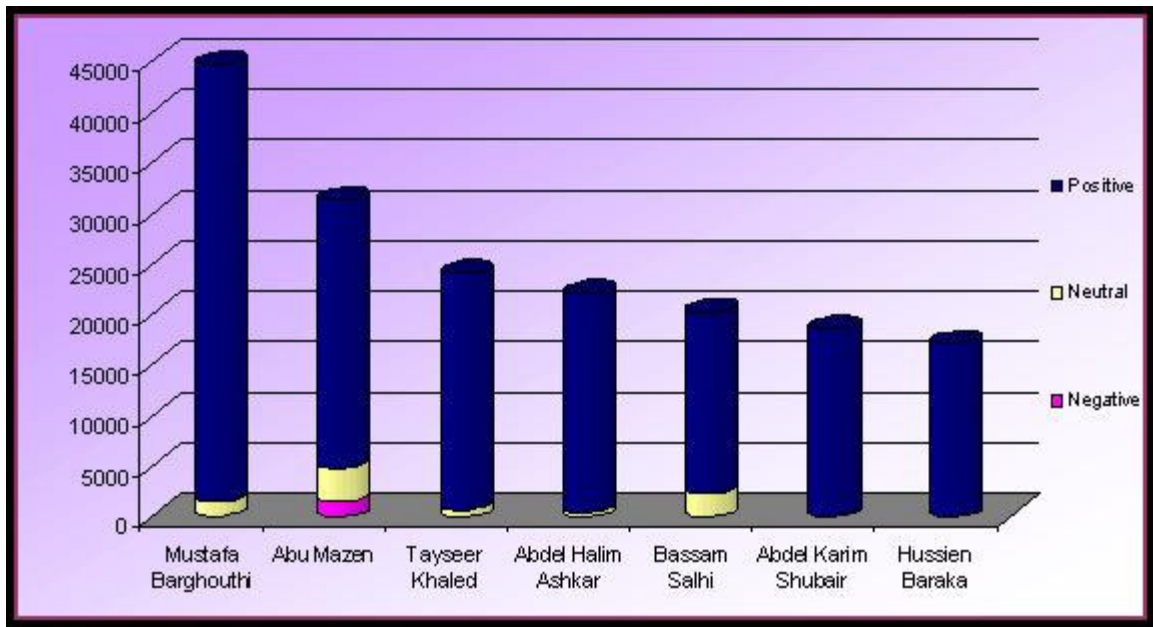


Chart 17: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates by television channels (All programmes)



Demonstrating a similar trend as in the press the tone of the coverage of the television broadcasters was positive and there was very little negative coverage of the candidates.

Chart 18: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates by Palestine TV (All programmes)

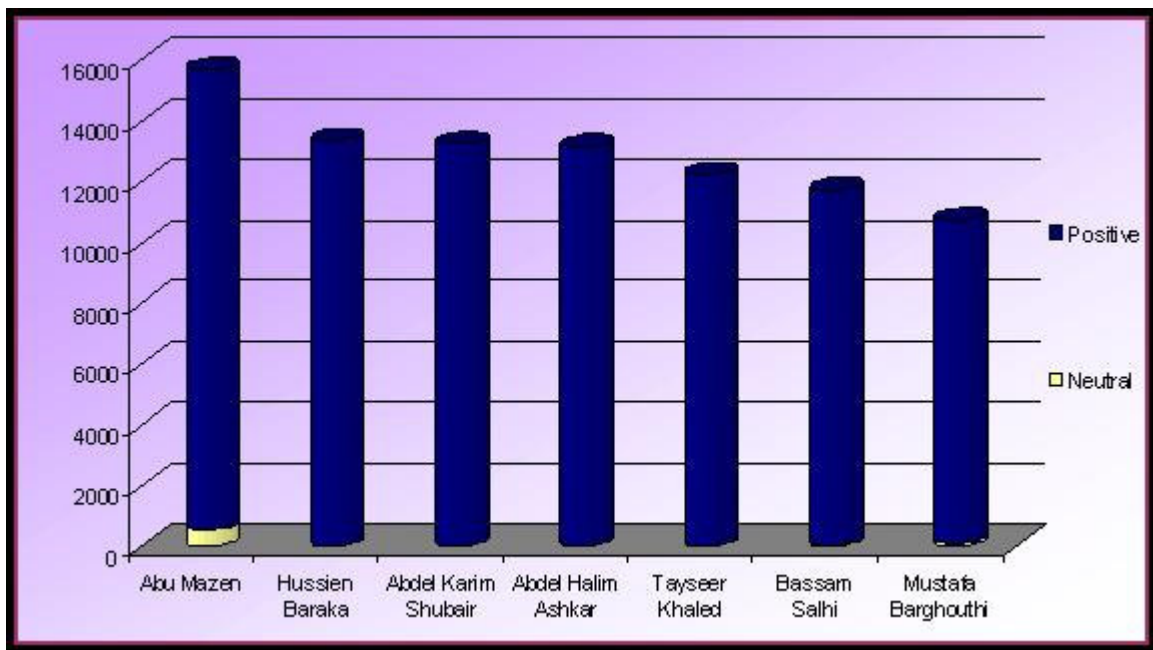
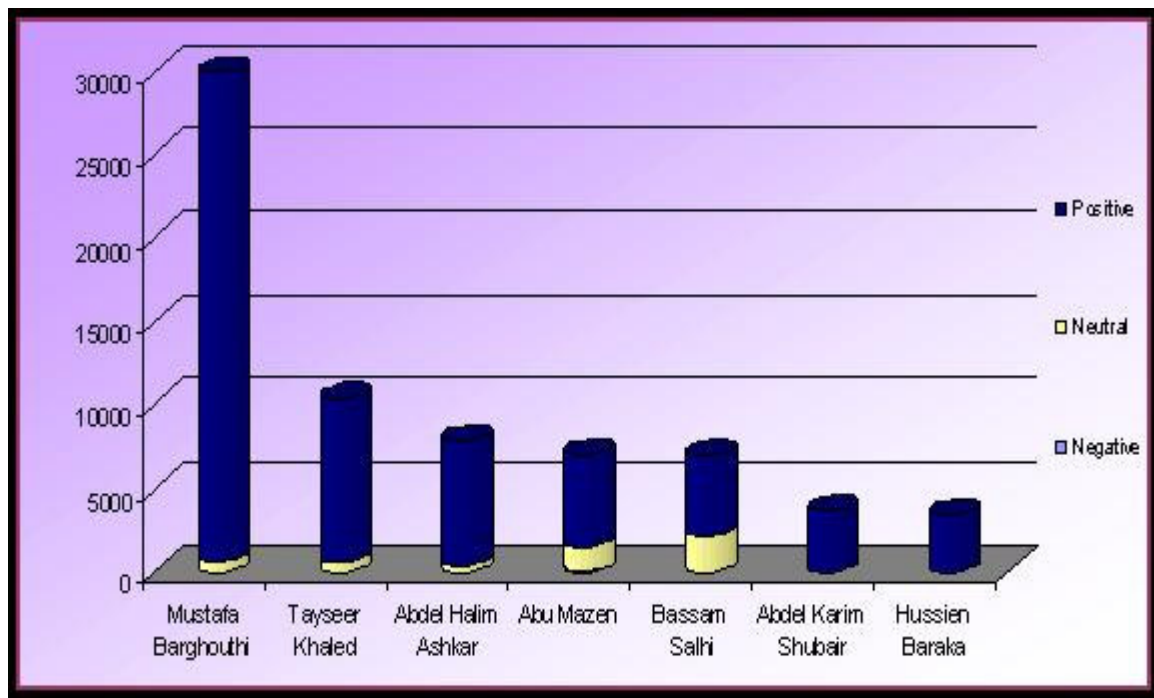


Chart 19: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates by Watan TV (All programmes)



Only on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya was there some negative coverage of the candidates. In this respect although coverage remained positive overall of Abu Mazen some critical voices were aired on the channels of Abu Mazen's proposed election manifesto and particularly the issue of relations with Israel.

Chart 20: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates by Al Jazeera (All programmes)

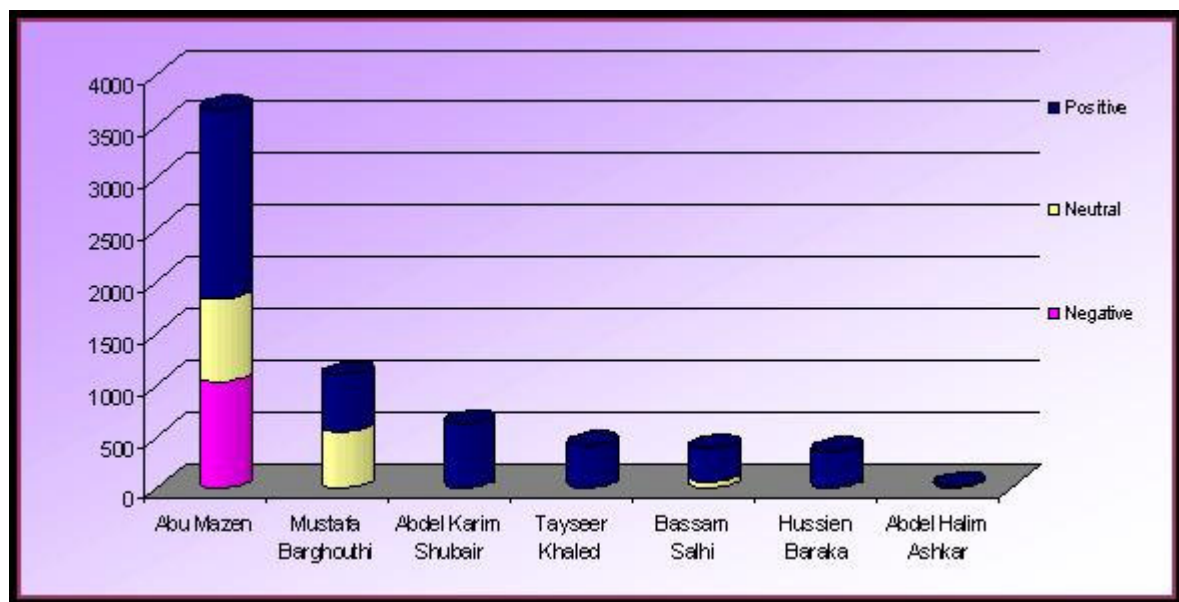
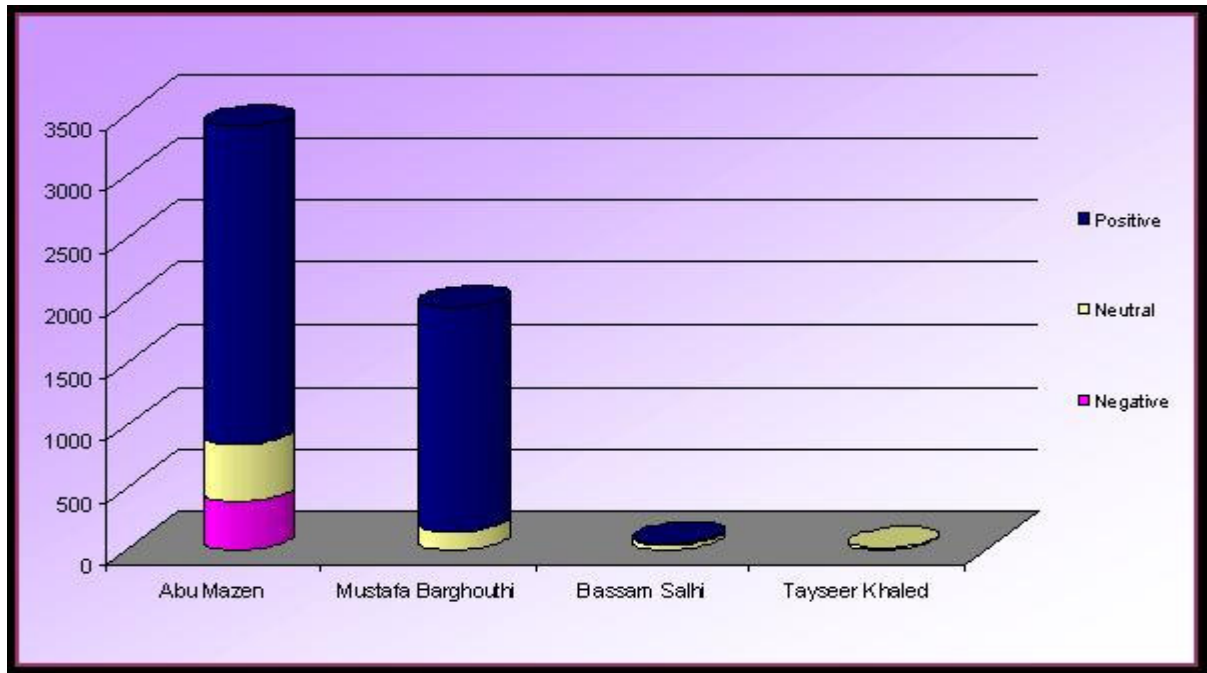


Chart 21: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates by Al Arabiya (All



programmes)

In terms of news coverage Abu Mazen was the dominant candidate covered. This was most extreme on Palestine Television on which the candidate received nearly 92 per cent of coverage in the news. Apart from Mustafa Barghouti who received 5 per cent, coverage of the other candidates, was almost absent from news programmes on the channel.

Chart 22: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates in news programmes on Palestine TV

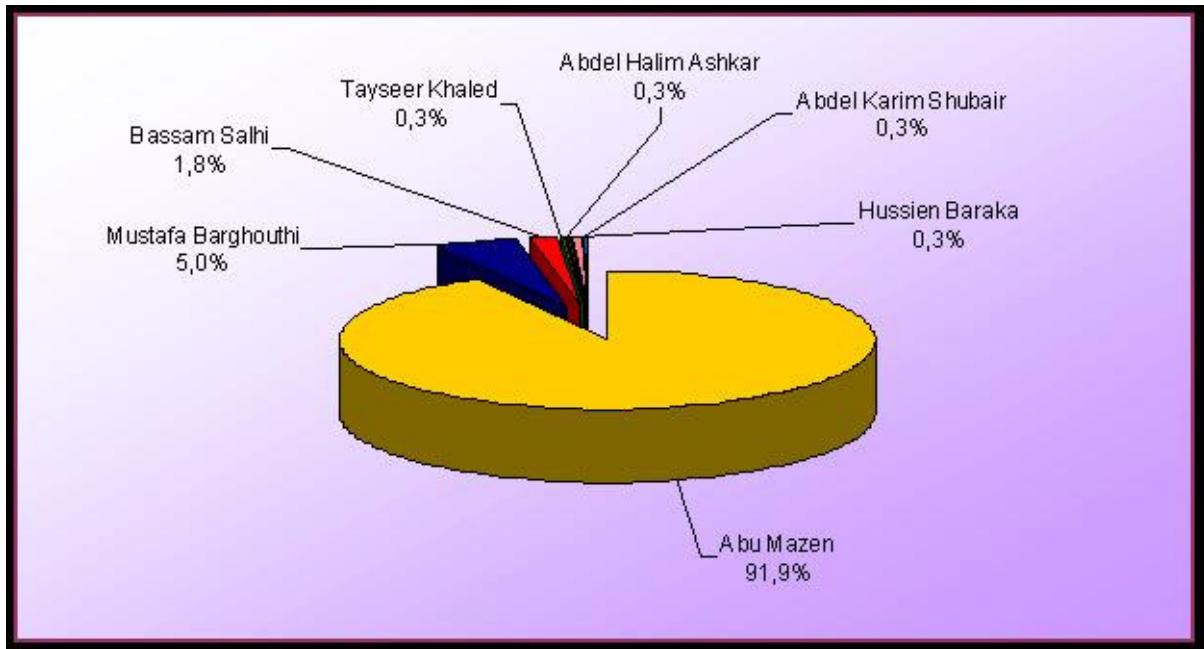
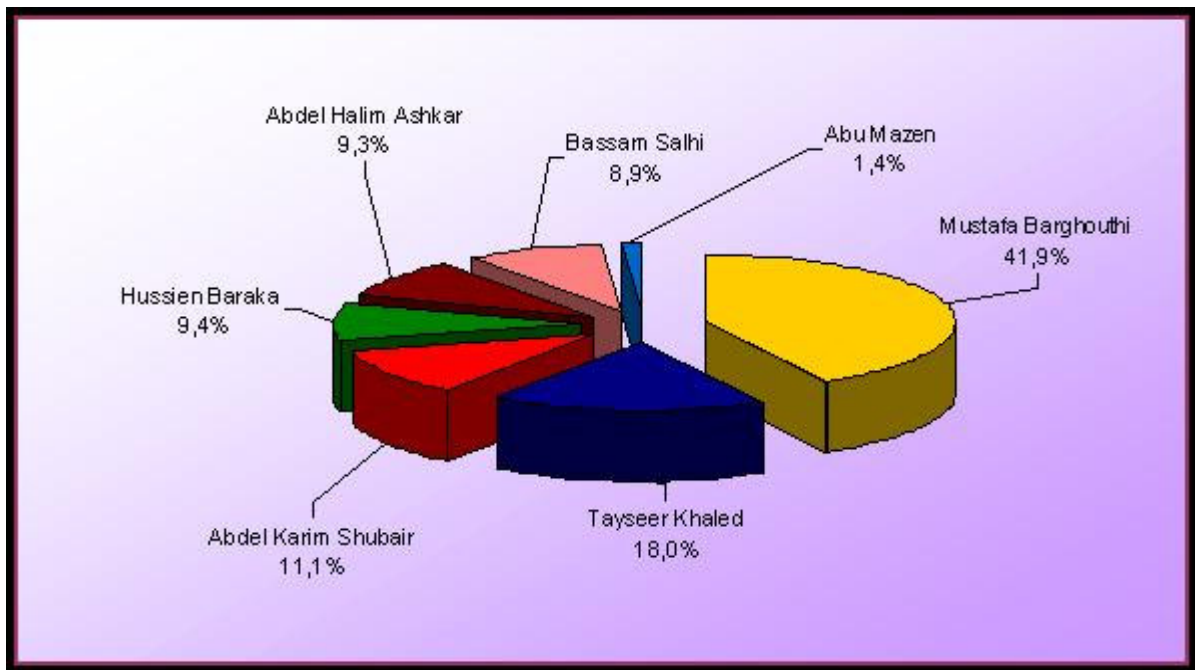


Chart 23: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates in current events programmes on Watan TV (Watan broadcasts the Al Jazeera news bulletin)



Watan's news and current affairs programming reflected its general programme output and demonstrates a clear dominance of Mustafa Barghouti. The candidate received nearly 42 per cent of news and current affairs coverage on the channel. Reversing the trends in the other channels Abu Mazen received an extremely small part of the coverage and this was accentuated by the fact that he rejected the offer to appear on the channel as part of its free access programmes for the candidates.

Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya demonstrated a similar pattern in their output covering the candidates on their news and current events programmes. Coverage of Abu Mazen dominated both of the channels during the official campaign period. The candidate received 79.4 per cent of the coverage of the elections in news and current affairs programming on Al Jazeera and an even higher amount of coverage on Al Arabiya amounting to nearly 87 per cent of coverage in these programme genres.

Chart 24: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates in news and current events programmes on Al Jazeera

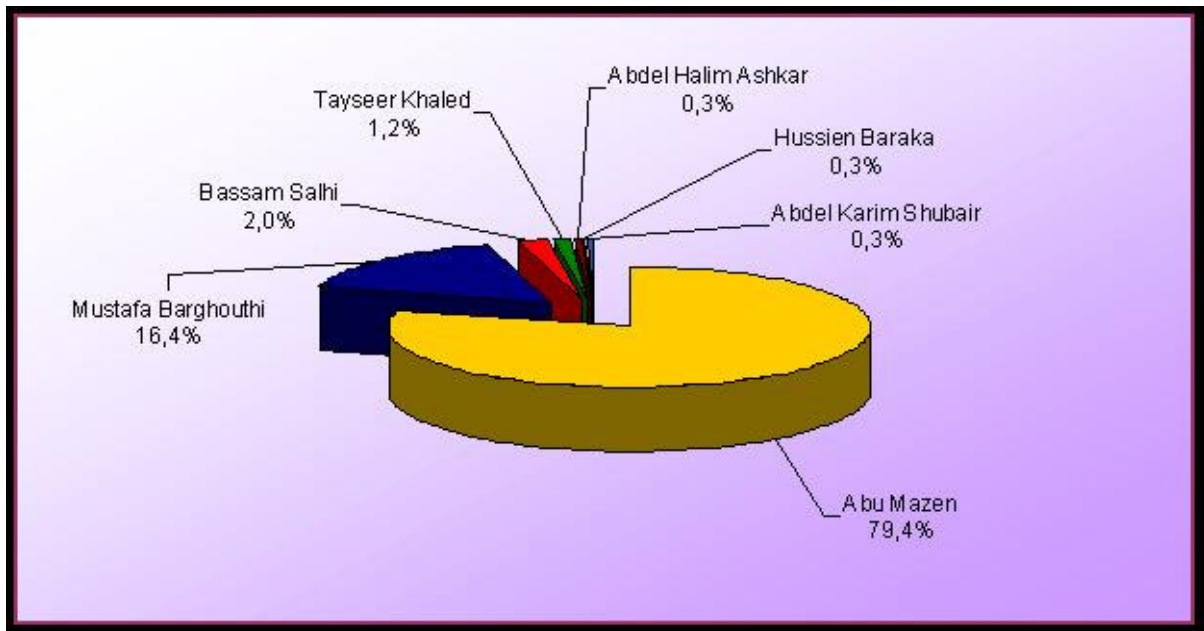


Chart 25: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates in news and current events programmes on Al Arabiya

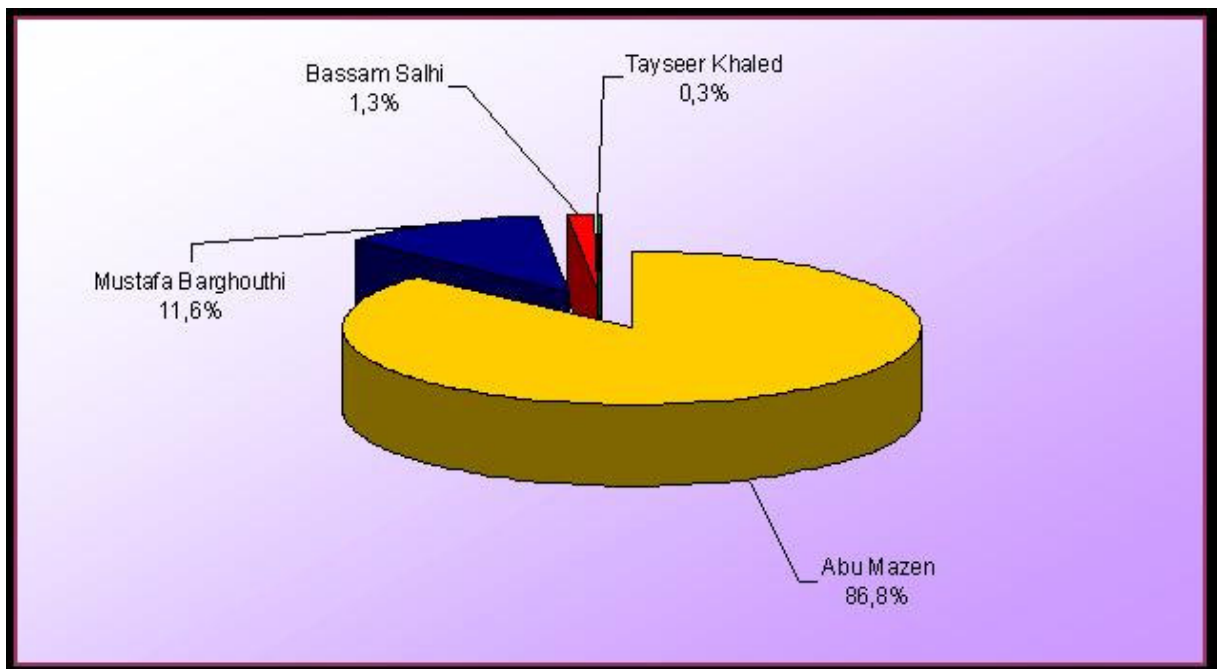
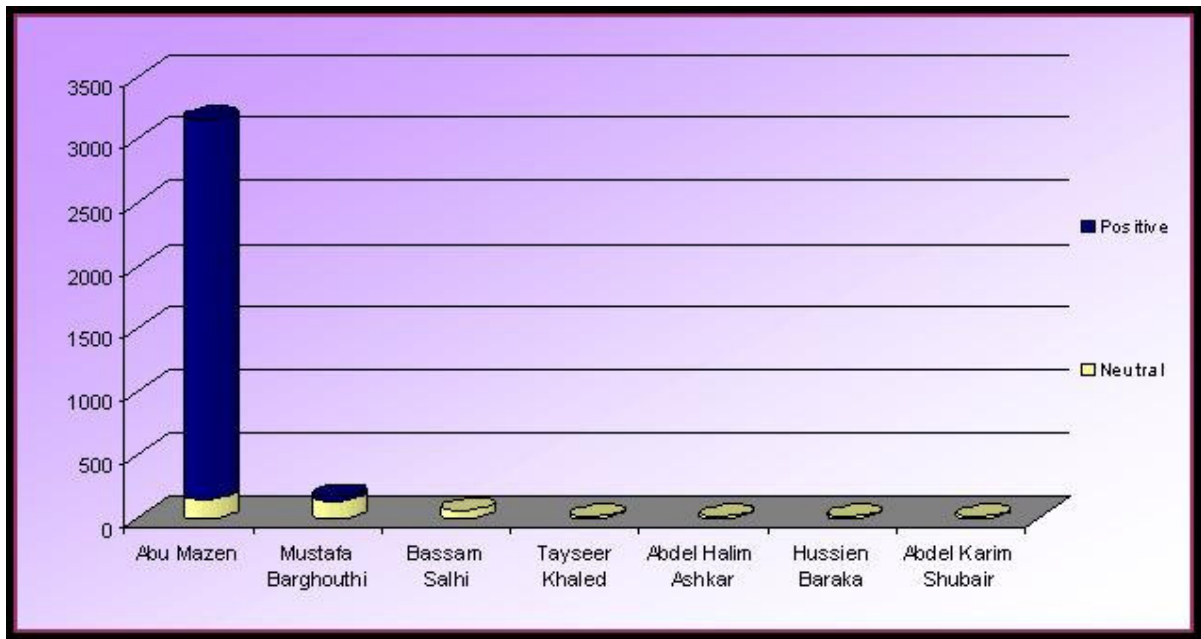


Chart 26: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates in news programmes on Palestine TV



Reflecting the overall output of the television channels news coverage was generally positive in its coverage of the candidates and although the two satellite channels' coverage was overall positive there was a greater degree of negative reporting in their news and current affairs programming than that which was broadcast on Watan and Palestine Television.

Chart 27: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates in current events programmes on Watan TV

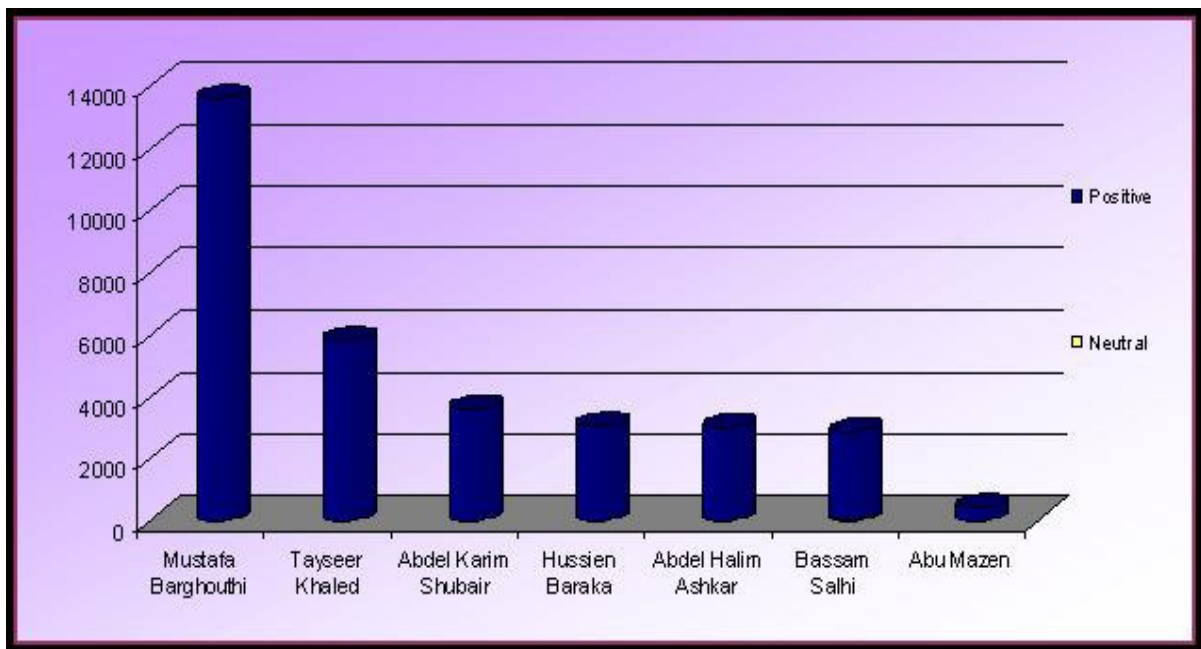


Chart 28: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates in news and currents events programmes on Al Jazeera

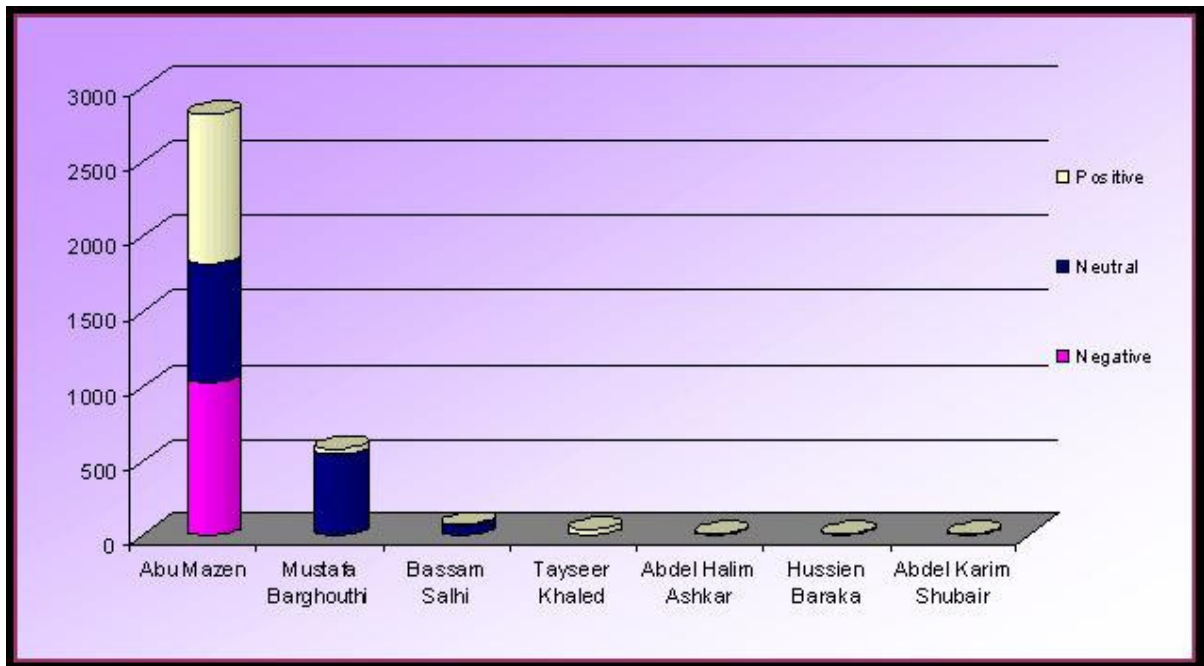
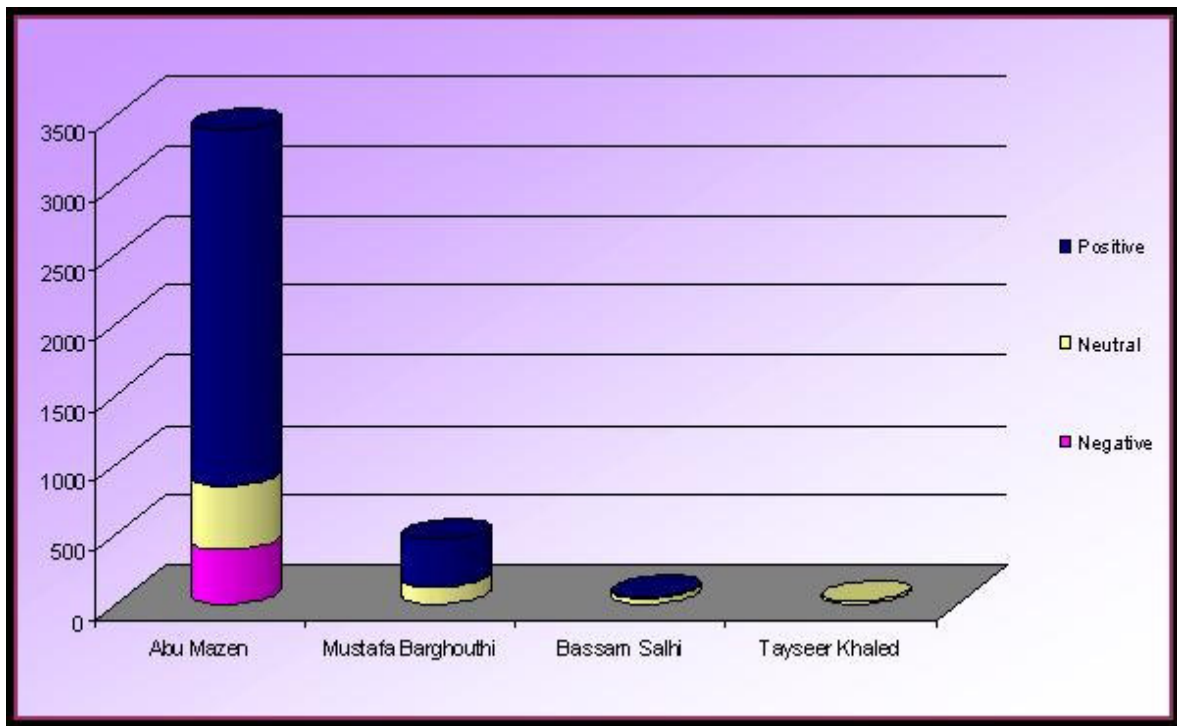


Chart 29: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates in news and currents events programmes on Al Arabiya



Radio stations

The Voice of Palestine's coverage of the elections mainly relied upon the daily three minute slots allocated to the candidates as free airtime. One candidate did not take up the offer of free access. The general lack of coverage on the Voice of Palestine meant that the free airtime allocated for the candidates provided balance and they remained editorially independent. The lack of any serious engagement with the elections and the almost complete absence of any analytical or informative programmes about the elections was a negative trend in the Voice of Palestine's coverage.

Chart 30: Share of coverage (time) devoted to the Presidential candidates on Voice of Palestine (All programmes)

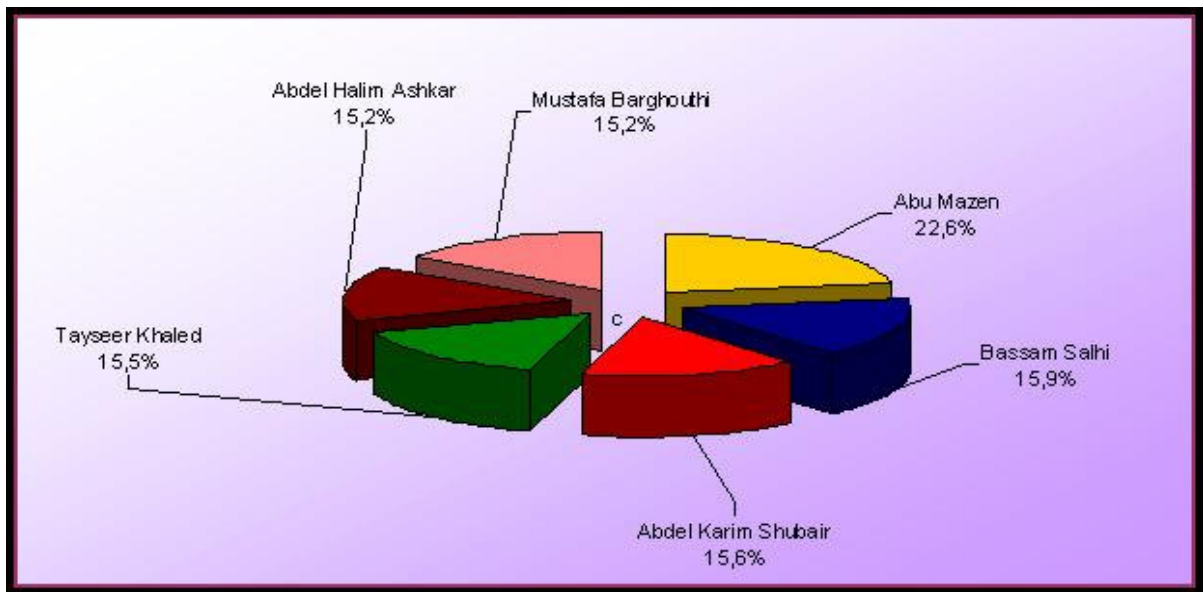
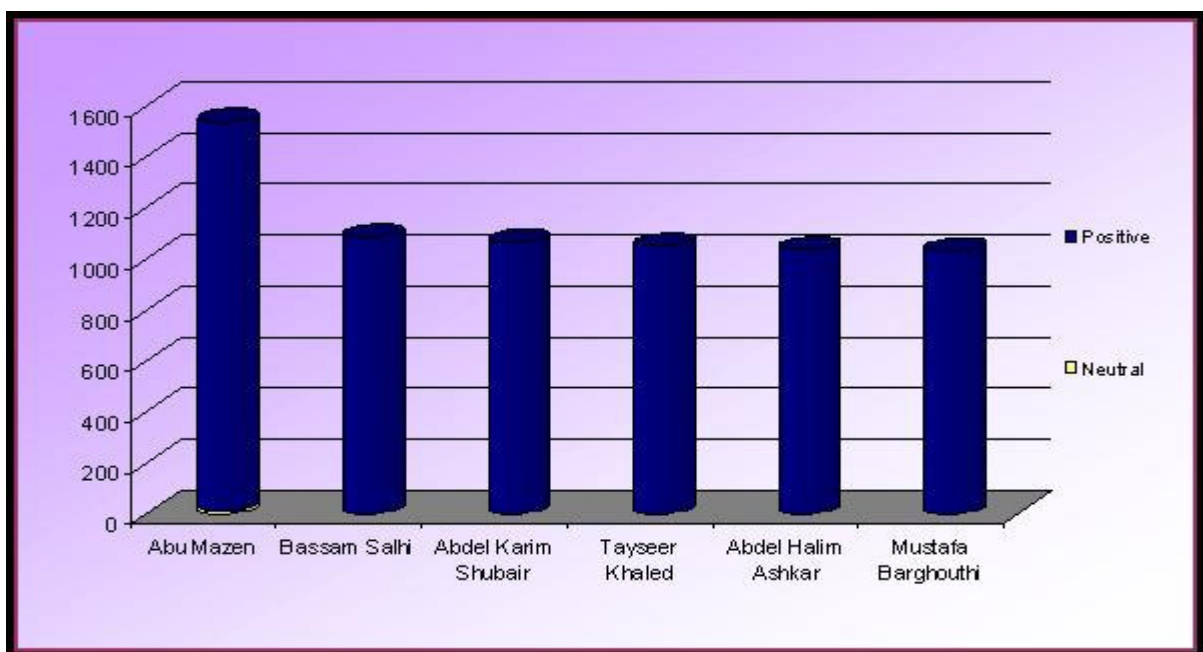


Chart 31: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates on Voice of Palestine



The information on Wafa's web portal was highly skewed towards Abu Mazen and the candidate enjoyed 69 per cent of space on the daily pages of the website. There was little sign that Wafa engaged seriously with the elections in terms of providing a balanced platform for the candidates.

Chart 32: Share of coverage (space) devoted to the Presidential candidates on Wafa News Agency (Internet)

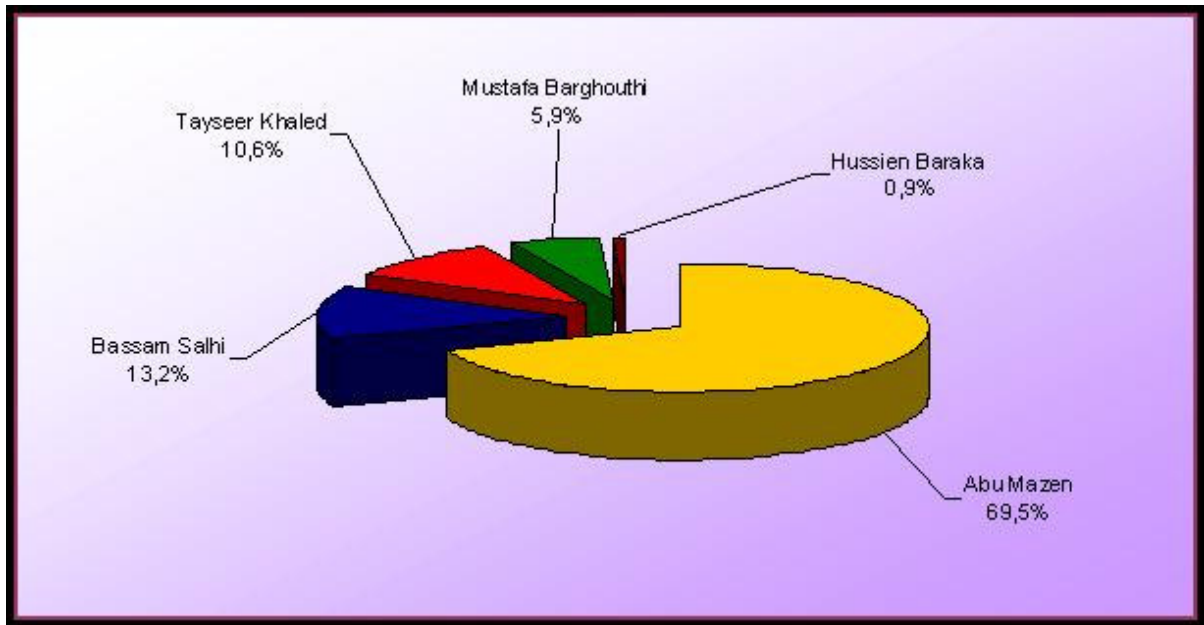


Chart 33: Tone of coverage devoted to the Presidential candidates on Wafa News Agency (Internet)



Conclusion

There are significant weaknesses in the current legal framework that need to be rectified. The elections were conducted in a spirit of progress and it was very much seen by the candidates as an opportunity to establish an agenda for institution building to help support the development of a political culture based on democratic elections. In this sense media coverage was perceived to be essential to enable the candidates to access voters. A major concern was campaign spending in the media and the lack of transparency in campaign financing. A second element of this factor is the establishment of advertising rates based on the lack of adequate regulation. The inflation of advertising rates during the election campaign period was seen to prohibit access to a number of candidates with limited budgets for their campaigns. The lack of regulations for paid political advertising in the commercial media is a source of concern and the lack of effective rules governing this area means that it is a priority to introduce legal provisions in order to provide a transparent and fair system for candidates to access paid for space in the commercial media. The newspapers also demonstrated some similar trends as the ones evident in the commercial broadcast media in terms of the abundance of paid political advertisements.

There were some welcome innovations in the media during the official campaign period. The programmes allocated to the candidates on Al Jazeera and Watan and the candidates' free access to the public media system were a constructive initiative in the media's coverage of the elections. The free airtime on Palestine Television was allocated and broadcast without any areas of interference and candidates were content with the system.

Overall, however, the media did not provide a balanced range of information about all of the candidates in terms of space. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the elections were dominated by two candidates with the remaining candidates having a marginal position in public opinion polls. There remain pressures on the media in their coverage of the election campaign which are due to a combination of factors. Firstly, the coverage of the elections was a relatively new experience in Palestine and a learning experience for all of the stakeholders involved. Secondly, the lack of an adequate media law and more developed instruments setting out the role of the media during elections means that there are areas (e.g. the regulation of the broadcast media and some form of supervision of paid political advertising etc.) that are unclear and need to be regulated in a transparent and satisfactory manner in terms of prices and access. Thirdly, the prominent position of FATAH and the administrative duties of Abu Mazen meant that the priority in the news agenda to administrative affairs afforded this candidate excessive coverage in the news programmes broadcast by the public media and reported in the press. This also *de facto* enabled the Abu Mazen campaign access to administrative resources.

This being said there were very encouraging signs in the media's coverage of the elections and the campaign, especially considering the extraordinary difficulties experienced in Palestine at the time of the elections that demonstrate a degree of willingness to support the development of the media in support of the democratic process. There were weaknesses in the media's coverage of the campaign that will need to be addressed by the authorities in order to improve the legal framework for all media outlets in Palestine and provide greater legal certainty as well as encourage greater degrees of professionalism and self regulation by journalists and editors to ensure editorial independence. This should be combined with clear provisions that guarantee that commercial and public media provide access both for the candidates to communicate their manifestos to the public and for the public to engage critically with election issues in order that they can make an informed choice on the candidates in future elections in a transparent manner.

Annex¹

Annex 1 - Outline of methodology for quantitative analysis of election and political coverage in the media

Foreword

Media monitoring can be defined as:

- A technique of scientific observation producing reliable and rigorous results;
- A way to study the production and the performance of the media in a systematic and impartial way;
- A tool to promote basic rights related to freedom of expression and right to participate in public life.

The monitoring involves not only the time devoted to subjects, but all the factors shaping a campaign on the media. Elections do not only consist of candidates, but also a whole set of dynamics and groups that play a role in the elections and are active in the processes and production of mass communication.

Media monitoring focuses on different aspects and targets:

- The visibility of political actors and groups;
- The quality of their coverage;
- The main bias related to their coverage;
- The issue of the campaign;
- The civic education produced for voters;
- The infringements of the relevant laws regulating and protecting media activity.

If properly conducted, media monitoring is a practical and constructive way to support democratic and fair elections. Findings and conclusions of media monitoring can have an influence on the awareness and behaviour of four main target groups:

- Regulatory bodies controlling media activity;
- Politicians and candidates;
- Citizens, voters and associations of civil society;
- Journalists and media professionals.

Media monitoring constitutes an effort to study and produce reliable information on media performance that are of growing and changing importance both for citizens and the political classes.

For this reason, it is vital to undertake it by employing methodological standards, professional commitment, rigour in data gathering and interpretation. This brief overview is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather it constitutes an attempt to provide media monitoring units with suggestions, pointers and reflections that can be helpful in their activities and that can support or increase the effectiveness of their work.

¹ The Annex was written by Giovanna Maiola (Tunisia, 2004).

Code of conduct²

Media monitoring should produce reliable and objective results and conclusions.

It is of basic importance that these findings are not only credible in themselves but also that they are perceived as such.

A mission statement about the goals and the code of conduct of the media monitoring team is to be drafted and always used as a set of guidelines in the observation of the media.

Media monitors should adhere to a code of conduct, written or informal, guaranteeing the rigour and impartiality of their work. Monitors must follow standards of:

- Professional commitment
- Objectivity
- Impartiality

They can have their own political opinions, but they must not let them interfere with their work; data recording and analysis should not be influenced by an individual's personal political preferences.

Monitors should be fully aware that their activity is the basis for a report that will affect somehow not only judgements on the election campaign, but also the credibility of the monitored media and the public trust in them. The responsibility of the monitors is far beyond the act of recording time and space in the media.

In addition, the fact of being perceived as partisan or biased will affect the credibility and the impact of the findings. On the contrary an organisation will receive more credit and the outcome of its project will have more chance to have an impact on the media situation if it is rigorous and objective.

² For a more detailed analysis of codes of conduct, see European Commission, Handbook for European Union Election Observation Missions, Brussels 2002 ; OSCE/ODIHR, The ODIHR Election Observation Handbook, Warsaw 1999; International IDEA, Ethical and Professional Observation of Elections, International IDEA, Stockholm 1997 ; ACE Project, Media and Elections, www.aceproject.org; ARTICLE 19, *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies*, ARTICLE 19, London 1994.