

# Independent Media Monitoring Unit (GECOM)

Report for the period of July 2 – 25, 2006

Some media houses have shown measurable improvement during July; others continue to breach certain aspects of the Media Code of Conduct. After five months of monitoring and analysing media output, the Unit is of the view that there is still a considerable way to go to meet the standards set out in the Media Code of Conduct.

It has been observed that since our last report there has been some positive movement towards fairness and balance in terms of reporting the news. For instance, some News Editors/Reporters are now more inclined to make contact with stakeholders relating to a particular issue or event to afford them an opportunity to comment whenever allegations or criticisms are made. The Unit is encouraged by this. On the other hand, a few media houses need to take urgent action if the basic tenets of journalism - accuracy, balance and fairness - are to be achieved across the board.

In terms of television talk shows, the Unit noted with much concern that some continue to be grossly partisan and offer viewers minimal if any balanced and accurate information. The programmes '**Square Talk**' and '**Guyana- the Way Forward**' are two such programmes that fall into this category. Notwithstanding the fact that Talk Shows are recognized and defined as opinion-based programmes, hosts of these shows still have an obligation to abide by the principles governing the Media Code of Conduct, which they themselves and/or the stations they are using have duly signed. In this elections period, Talk Show hosts should ensure that information disseminated to the public is accurate, balanced and presented in a fair manner. The public deserves no less.

In a few of the media outlets monitored by the MMU it has been observed that generally there is need for more in-depth investigative reporting on matters of importance. The Unit has found that in some instances information was presented to the public without any proper research or investigative work being done, leaving consumers of the media without the requisite information necessary to understand and interpret important issues, particularly those relating to the upcoming elections. Examples of this are documented in this report.

With regards to the airing of GINA programmes in both the state and private media, for example: '*The President's Diary*', '*The Fact*', '*Weekly Digest*' and '*GINA Features*', the Unit notes with some concern that though, some of these programmes contain issues related to national development, others are clearly political and intended to advance the cause of the ruling party. This gives the incumbent PPP/C Government an unfair advantage over the other political parties. Moreover, after continuously monitoring and analysing the contents of some of these programmes the Unit has found that they include elements of partisan political campaigning in the guise of 'Government business'.

In this report we have included a brief analysis of the Berbice-based television stations. These stations did not sign the Media Code of Conduct in the initial stage,

however, they have agreed to do so soon. Included also are charts which show the degree and share of media coverage given to political parties by each of the media houses. Also noted in this report are examples of lack of balance, accuracy and fairness, as well as other areas of concern set out in the Media Code of Conduct.

**N B: In the following examples where a lack of balance, accuracy and fairness has been documented, the Unit has established a criterion of three days to find out if the views of relevant stake holders relating to a particular issue or event have been given publicity in that particular medium.**

**RADIO**

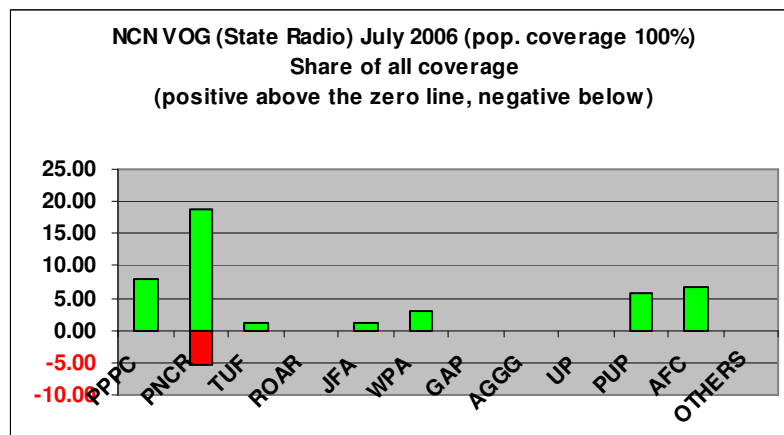
**(Chart figures shown in minutes. Population source - Bureau of Statistics)**

**NCN Radio Voice of Guyana**

Potential population coverage 100% short wave, 93.2%AM, 56.2%FM

- On July 5<sup>th</sup> (18:00 hrs) and July 6<sup>th</sup> (07:00hrs) ‘**VOG News**’ aired a news item regarding the PPP/C’s optimism about the early holding of the 2006 General and Regional elections. A significant amount of airtime was given to the General Secretary of the PPP/C to criticize the opposition-nominated GECOM commissioners, alleging that they (opposition-nominated commissioners) are taking the position of the PNCR to frustrate the electoral preparations by GECOM. No response was aired from the said commissioners or PNCR regarding this allegation.

*(Reference to Articles C (1) and E (3) of the Media Code of Conduct)*



On the quantitative side, VOG has succeeded in giving a widespread balance of coverage in the past month. On the whole it can be said to have provided a very fair distribution of news coverage which, if matched in the campaign period, will be a praiseworthy achievement. Limiting negative news to the largest opposition party spoils an otherwise promising profile.

## TELEVISION

(Chart figures shown in minutes. Population source - Bureau of Statistics)

**GWTV Channel 2** Potential population coverage 53.2%

- In its July 13<sup>th</sup> edition of ‘News 2’ a news item was featured regarding GECOM’s preparedness for the 2006 polls. An executive member of the PNCR severely criticized GECOM’s management of the electoral process and accused the organization of impropriety. The following was said by the PNCR official:

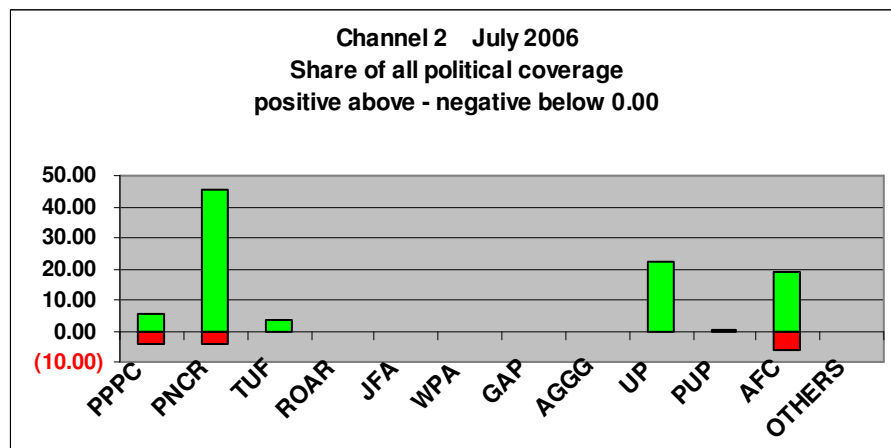
*“GECOM included house to house verification in its project plan and was allotted money to get it done. Its attempt now to drop house to house verification is a scam on the Guyanese people”.*

While this can be justified as a legitimate political comment, it is a serious charge that requires the offer of a response. No response was aired from GECOM.

*(Reference to Article E (3) of the Media Code of Conduct regarding balance and impartiality).*

- On July 20<sup>th</sup> ‘News 2’ aired a story relating to NCN Ch 11 pulling the advertisements of the Alliance for Change party from airing on the station. An Executive Member of the AFC was given time to criticize the PPP/C saying that the party’s hierarchy instructed NCN Ch 11 to pull the advertisements. No response was aired from the PPP/C or from NCN regarding this matter. As a standard procedure we checked the stations output over a three-day period for a response from the PPP/C or NCN Ch 11 but none was found.

*(Reference to Article E (3) of the Media Code of Conduct regarding balance and impartiality).*



Channel 2’s unbalanced distribution of coverage (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July) demonstrated in the above chart is similar to that recorded in previous reports.

## CNS Channel 6 Potential population coverage 53.2%

We have continued to notice many instances on the ‘**Voice of the People**’ programme especially during visits to various communities by the host, where serious accusations are being made against public officials and organisations without an opportunity being given to those who are accused to respond. This goes against the notion of accuracy and balance in the dissemination of information. One such example follows:

- During the July 11<sup>th</sup> broadcast of the programme, residents of Mahaica complained about the flooding of their homes. Regional Officials were blamed for the state of affairs in the area by the residents and the host agreed with the sentiments expressed. On more than one occasion the host referred to named officials as being “*negligent and incompetent*” without giving these officials an opportunity to respond to the accusations.

Basic journalism practice requires that contentious social issues – such as the one highlighted above – should be properly researched and investigated so that viewers are afforded the opinions of both or all the sides involved. The host’s journalistic responsibility is to present the facts to the public and leave it up to them to make their own judgments.

*(Reference to Article C (1) of the Media Code regarding balance and fairness).*

Further, in the live call-in segment of the programme that followed a number of unsubstantiated statements were made by the host; one such example follows:

***“We have criminals as Ministers...”***

The above statement is the continuation of a trend whereby the host shows a lack of concern for the irreparable damage that can be inflicted on people’s character through his libellous and unsupported statements.

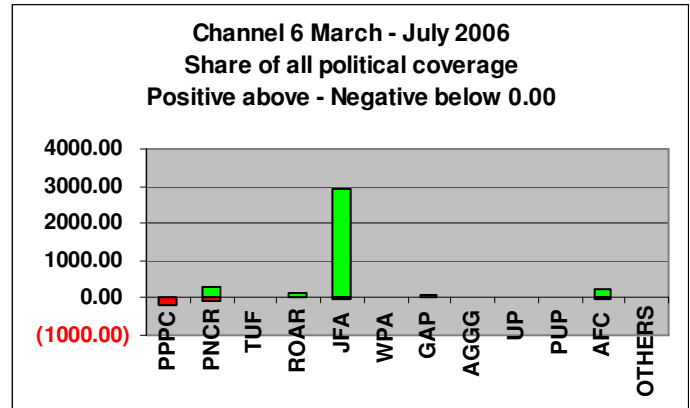
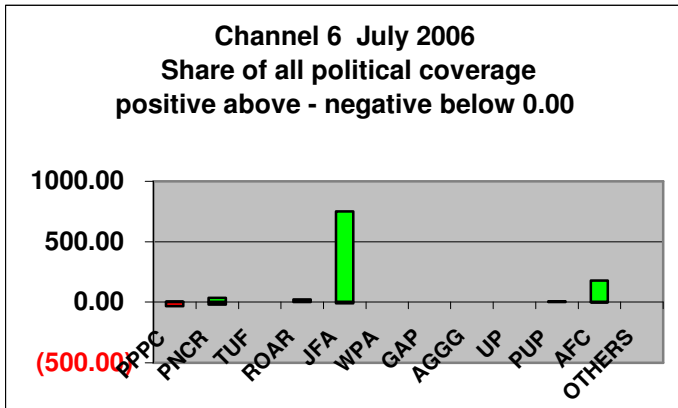
- On July 17<sup>th</sup> the host of ‘**Voice of the People**’ alleged that an official in the Ministry of Human Services was engaged in wrongdoings. The host claimed that the official ‘sleeps’ with abused victims who are sent by him (the host) to the Ministry for help. At no time was any evidence presented to support this serious allegation being made against the unnamed Government official.  
*(Reference to Article C (1) of the Media Code of Conduct that relates to providing truthful, comprehensive, accurate and balanced information).*
- During the programme ‘**The Big Question is Why?**’ aired on July 19<sup>th</sup> the host made the following statement in relation to persons of Indian descent:

***“...because we can’t hurt our own Indian, you see Indians become bigger in the bigger picture, it doesn’t matter if you murder a young lady, you rape a young lady, what you do, once is an Indian rape you or murder you that’s okay, that’s why you are not seeing Indians protesting because they accept it...”***

The above statement clearly implies that Indians who are in breach of the law cannot be dealt with. This statement is not only unsubstantiated but also subtly racist since it negatively stereotypes a particular ethnic group within the

society. Even though this may be unrelated to the upcoming elections, the host's utterance of such unfounded remarks is both unprofessional and unethical.

*(Reference to Article B (4) of the Media Code of Conduct regarding stigmatising or demonising of persons on the grounds of ethnicity).*

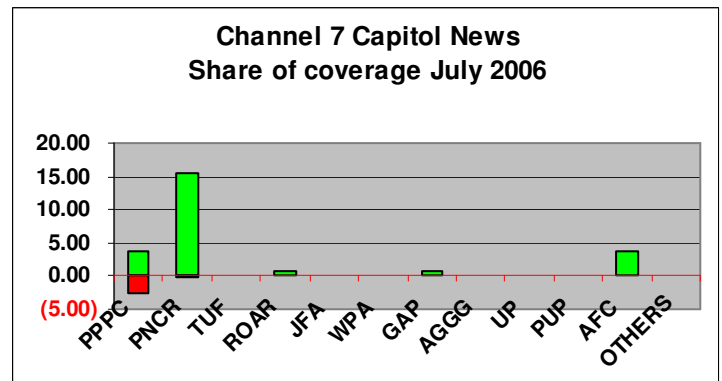
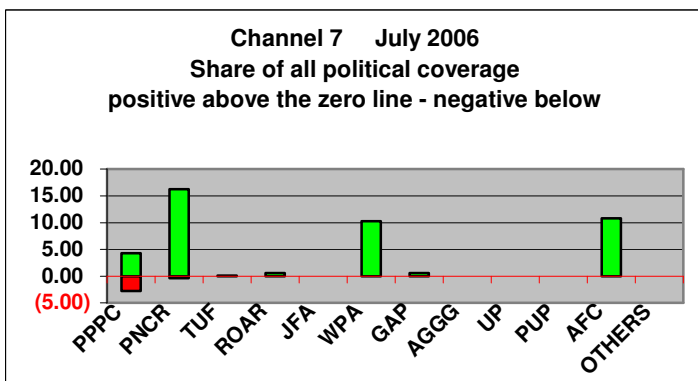


The expected imbalance, due to the fact that the owner and main presenter is a presidential candidate, is difficult to justify in terms of the Media Code. Since March, JFA has had 3000 minutes (50 hours) of positive advantage on this channel. In these entirely legal circumstances, the owner should continue to urge representatives of other parties to be interviewed about their manifestoes.

While Channel 6 is criticised in this report for a number of examples of one-sided reporting and the large share of time given to JFA, the owner and publisher has been outspoken in rejecting any hate speech for which he is to be commended.

### WRHM Channel 7 Potential population coverage 53.2%

For the period under review (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July) we have not noticed any significant infringement of the Media Code by this Channel in qualitative terms. The Unit hopes that this is not an aberration but a trend that will be continued. While the overall balance is reasonable but could be improved, there is some positive benefit to half a dozen parties.

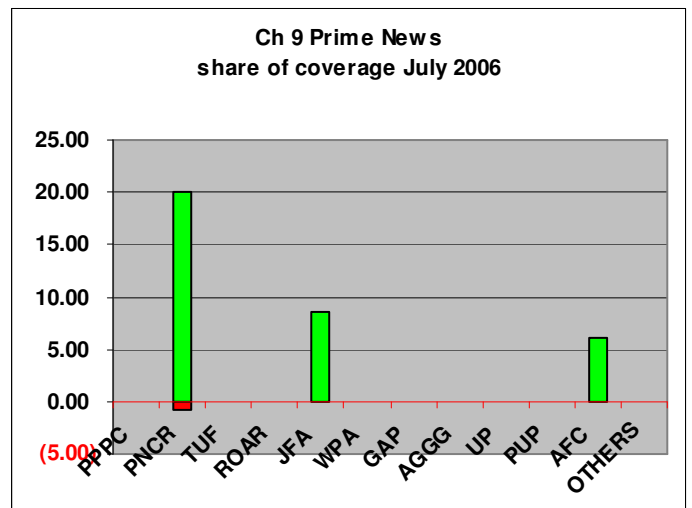
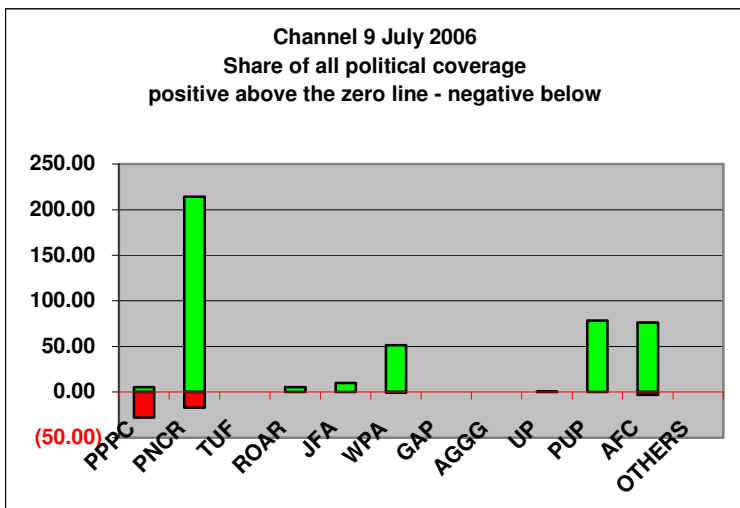


## HBTV Channel 9 Potential population coverage 53.5%

- On July 14<sup>th</sup> ‘Prime News’ aired a story relating to the PNCR’s preparation for the upcoming 2006 General and Regional elections. An Executive Member of the PNCR was allowed significant amount of air-time to present his party’s views, during which several accusations were levelled against GECOM. One such example follows:

*“Many of the recent decisions at GECOM have been made by the Chairman and the PPP/C nominated commissioners only...GECOM has repeatedly and wilfully ignored the advice of its own technical officers”.*

The Unit observed that no response was sought/aired from GECOM to these serious charges levelled against the organization.  
(Reference to Articles C (1) and E (3) of the Media Code of Conduct relating to balance and impartiality).



However Channel 9 needs to consider giving the ruling party some exposure (other than purely negative) in order to give its viewers some idea of the choices to be made at the ballot box. Prime News gave little or no time at all to PPP/C in the period 2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July.

## NCN Channel 11 Potential population coverage 80.8%

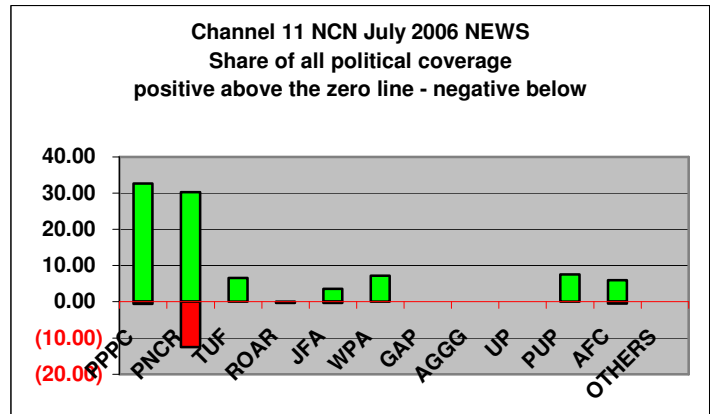
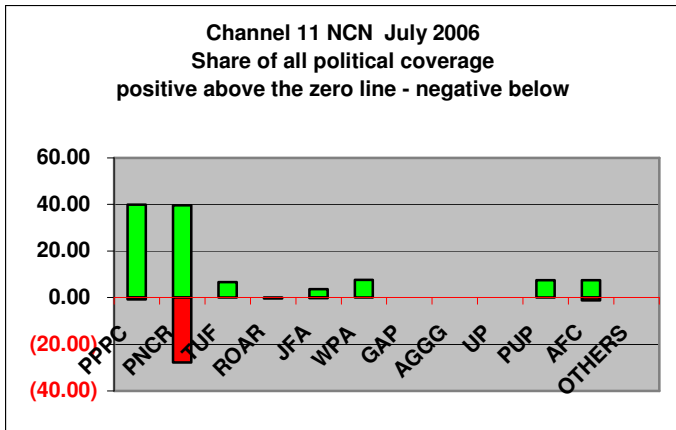
The MMU continues to notice cases of insertion of opinion as against fact by hosts/reporters in programmes produced and presented by GINA. The Unit maintains that it is highly unprofessional and unethical for hosts/reporters to make unattributed partisan statements during the presentation of information purported to be news. One such example follows:

- During the July 11<sup>th</sup> broadcast of GINA’s programme ‘The Fact’ the following statement was made by a reporter:

***“This inflammatory and ridiculous claim by the main opposition is in keeping with its campaign to create an atmosphere of mistrust and confusion in an attempt to conceal their associations, collusion and endorsement of criminal activity...”***

While we have noted the concerns expressed by NCN to distance itself from GINA’s programmes, our view is that as licensee the station takes the responsibility for general programme output, hence infringements found in the programmes aired on this channel will be listed as violations of the Media Code of Conduct.

*(Reference to Articles E (4) of the Media Code regarding separation of news from comment)*



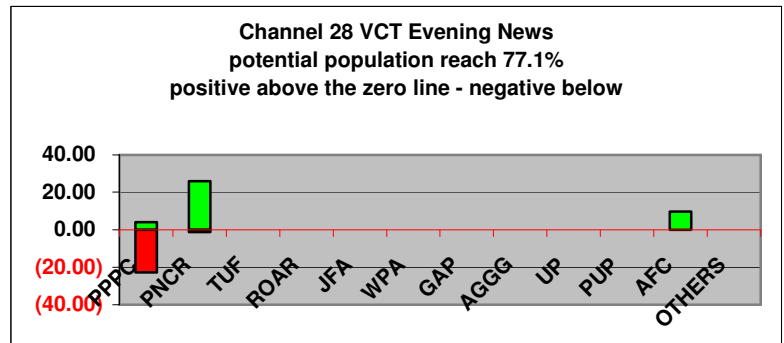
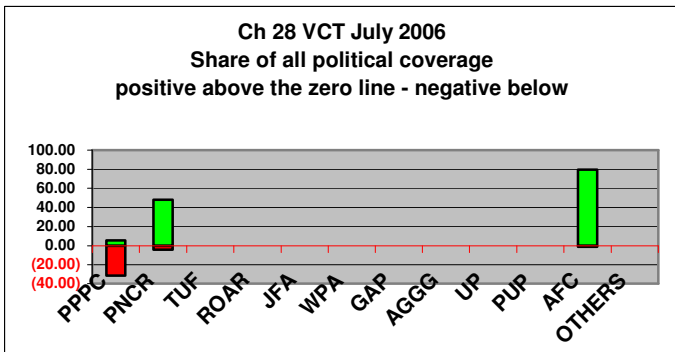
Once again the level-pegging of positive coverage of the two main parties is spoiled by the substantial negative coverage of PNCR. On a positive note, a number of smaller parties featured during the month. (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July)

**VCT Channel 28 Potential population coverage 77.1%**

- In his ‘Commentary’ during the broadcast\* of ‘Evening News’ on July 18<sup>th</sup> the host continued to refer to the Head of the National Frequency Management Unit (NFMU) as **“Mickey mouse”** clearly violating the norms of good taste and standard journalism ethics.

*[\* N.B. The report for the next period will include the fact that Channel 28’s owner having become a candidate has chosen the occasion to separate his commentary from the news bulletin and hand over the role of publisher to someone else. These are two substantial moves in support of the Media Code to be commended]*

Channel 28 continued >

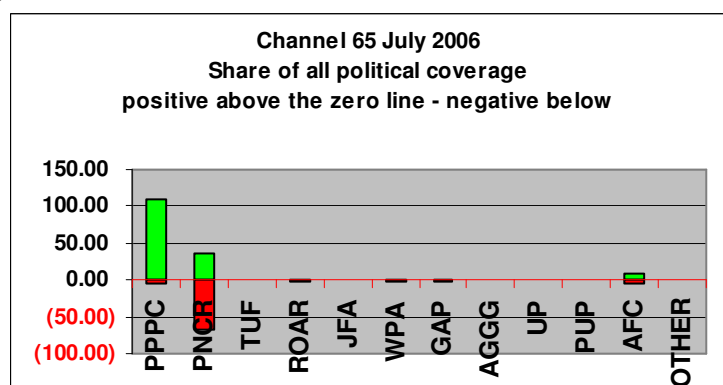


Channel 28 has narrowed its coverage to three parties. Evening News has concentrated its coverage on the two largest parties to the overall benefit of PNCR. The large amount of coverage in the overall output of AFC (including news and all other political programming) reflects the substantial advertising campaign launched by that party in July. (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July)

### MTV Channel 14/65 Potential population coverage 53.2%

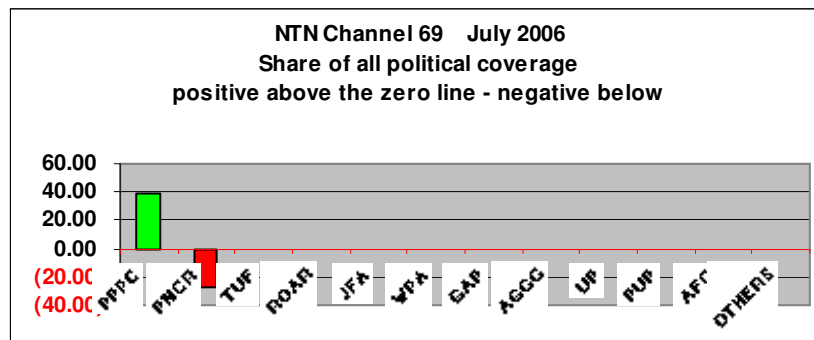
- The Programme ‘**Getting It Right**’ aired on July 10<sup>th</sup> dealt with among other matters, elections related issues. Both the host and the guest communicated pro-PPP/C views and positions on the issues raised and used the programme to criticize other political parties, particularly the PNCR. No representatives from other political parties were present to give the viewing public the benefit of a wider range of views regarding the issues discussed.  
(Reference to Article E (3) of the Media Code of Conduct relating to balance in the presentation of information to the public).
- In its July 18<sup>th</sup> broadcast of ‘**News Update**’ a news item was aired about the Ethnic Relations Commission’s (ERC) proposed monitoring exercise to combat race-hate during the upcoming elections. During the airing of this news item, footage of a large group of Afro-Guyanese in the act of protesting was shown directly before and after an insert of the Chairman of the ERC condemning persons whom he referred to as “**hate-mongers**”. The juxtaposing of the video clips subtly inferred or suggested that the Chairman was referring to persons of a specific ethnic group (that is Afro-Guyanese). This is certainly unacceptable media behaviour and should be avoided, especially in this elections period, since it was clear that persons of a particular ethnic group were being portrayed in a negative light.  
(Reference to Article B (4) of the Media Code relating to the stigmatising people on the grounds of race).

Channel 65 maintains a balance very much in favour of PPP/C. Coverage of other parties is either small or negative. (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July)



## NTN Ch 18/69 Potential population coverage 53.2%

- On July 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> editions of ‘**Square Talk**’ the host levelled a series of accusations against the opposition PNCR regarding electoral and other issues. During both broadcasts a logo reading “**PNCR and DECEPTION**” was superimposed on the screen indicating the host’s political bias and confirming the lack of impartiality of the programme. The host continues to exhibit unprofessional and unethical journalistic behaviour in the conduct of this programme, publicly serving the interest of a specific political party even though this programme is not advertised as a sponsored party programme. *(Reference to Article B (6) of the Media Code relating to journalists being independent and free from any political control and direction).*



Channel 69 covered the two largest parties only and in a familiar pattern, consistent since this monitoring project began in March i.e all positive coverage for PPP/C and all negative coverage for PNCR. (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July)

## VTV Ch 46/102 Potential population coverage 53.2%

- On the Programme ‘**Guyana the Way Forward**’ aired on July 14<sup>th</sup> the host made a number of allegations against GECOM and in particular GECOM’s Chairman. The following was said by the host:

*“The entire opposition would like to be able to get the list cleansed ...and GECOM is ignoring these calls, not GECOM but a section of GECOM that are devoted to the PPP and Dr. Surujbally who is taking a very partisan interest in the exercise”*

The above statement accuses a section of GECOM and particularly the Chairman of carrying out their duties in a politically partisan manner without any supporting evidence. Also no attempt was made to get a response from GECOM officials with regards to this accusation which has the potential to undermine the credibility of the elections process.

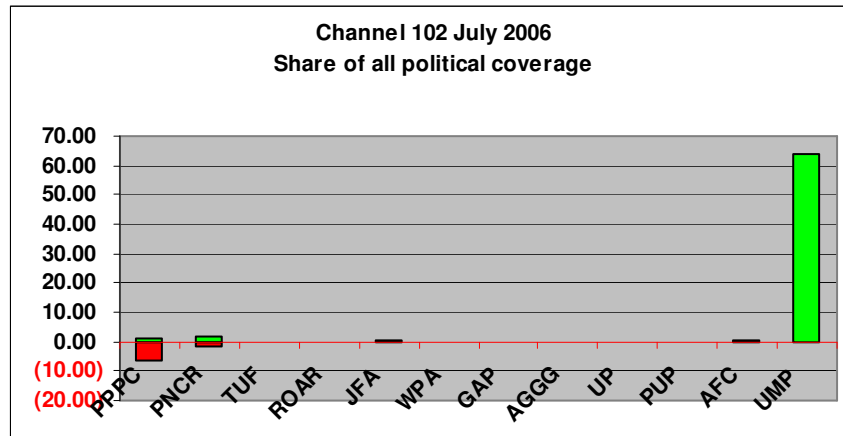
- During the June 17<sup>th</sup> broadcast of ‘**Guyana the Way Forward**’ a series of inflammatory remarks were made by the host. One such example follows:

*“The news came out tonight that they are looking at the possibility of removing Mr. Corbin, the Leader of the People’s National Congress*

*from competing in this elections...they and whoever set them up to do that has got to be abysmally foolish...if they want this country erupt like a volcano they can try that”.*

This is not only a highly inflammatory remark but an undisguised threat which has the potential to cause persons to react in ways that can lead to political unrest during the elections period.

*(Reference to Article B (1) of the Media Code relating to the publishing or broadcasting of any matter with the potential for causing public disorder).*



Clearly, in July (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July) the bulk of political coverage was given to the United Muslim Party.

### **Berbice Television Stations**

On July 13, 2006 the Media Monitoring Unit dispatched a team of two staff members, Mr. Jainarine Deonauth (Deputy Manager) and Ms. Naomi Jones (Media Monitor) to conduct a media monitoring exercise in Region 6 (East Berbice/Corentyne) for a period of one week (July 13 – 20, 2006).

The team recorded, monitored and analysed all local television programmes that contained political content and programmes that may have some kind of impact on the upcoming elections. In addition, discussions were held with News Editors and reporters regarding the Media Code of Conduct, and the work of the MMU as it relates to the raising of journalism standards and in particular the media’s role in nurturing an environment conducive to the holding of free, fair and transparent elections in 2006.

### **Findings (Berbice stations)**

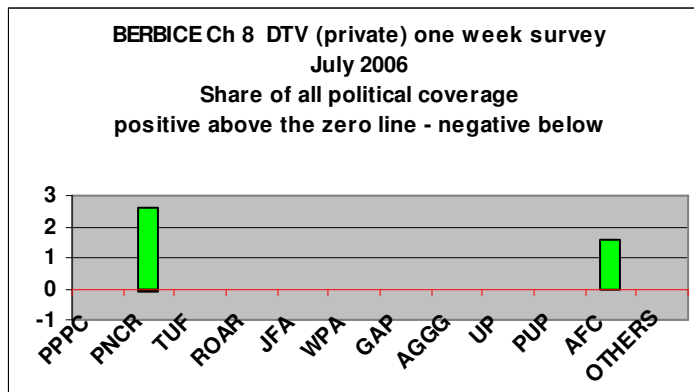
There are basically five television stations in the Region, two of which relay signals from Georgetown. These stations are: DTV Channel 8, LRTV Channel 10 and CCBTV Ch 19.

The two that relay signals are: VCT Channel 12 and NCN 15/21. There are no other media outlets in the Region. Some parts of Region 5 (Mahaica/Berbice) could also access signals from these stations.

**DTV Ch 8 (New Amsterdam)** potential population reach 16.6%

For the period in question we have not found a large number of local programmes that contain political content, however this station carries a local newscast ‘**DTV Channel 8 News.**’ for Berbice viewers three times per week.

While the station’s owner maintains that he personally does not broadcast any political programmes, ‘**Prime News**’ is aired on this station. This being the case, it should be pointed out that in future if any infringement of the Media Code of Conduct is noted during the airing of Prime News or any other relayed programme on this station, the owner must accept responsibility for such infringement, since as Licensee, he is responsible for the entire programme output of the station.

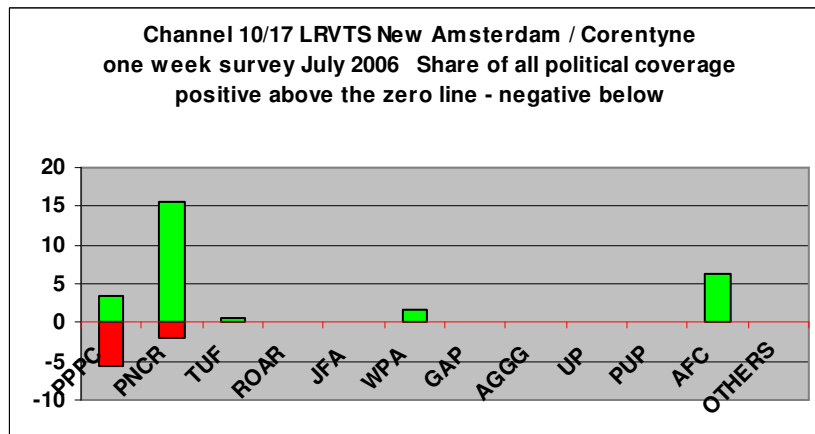


In this limited survey there was no coverage given to any party other than PNCR and AFC

**LRTV Ch 10 New Amsterdam / LRTVCh 17 Corentyne**

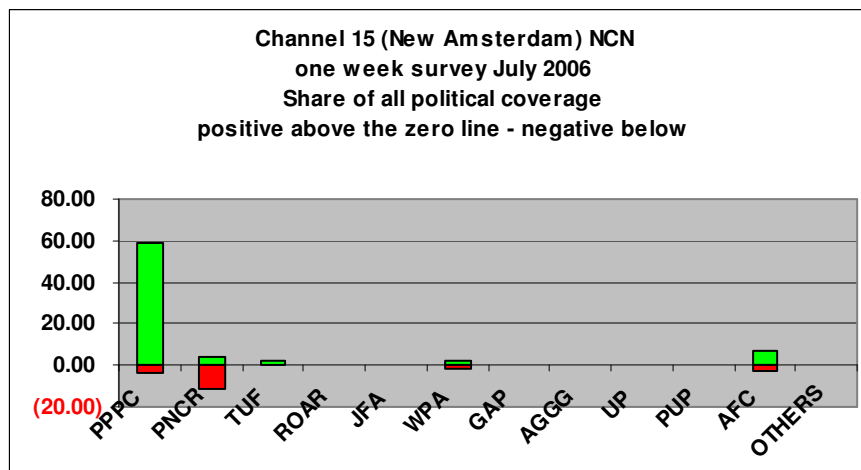
Potential population reach 20.1%

A number of local programmes are aired on this station including a local nightly news cast, ‘**LRTV News Watch**’. In terms of a quantitative analysis we have observed that some effort was made to give coverage to at least five political parties. This is shown in the chart below. This station also airs ‘**NCN News Magazine.**’



### NCN Ch 15 New Amsterdam

Most of the programmes aired on this station are relayed from the main network in Georgetown (NCN Ch 11). While in Berbice the Unit received several complaints from media operatives and residents that NCN Ch 15 interrupts its normal programme schedule to broadcast local political programmes of the PPP/C specifically produced for Berbice viewers. This could be viewed as using the national network for partisan political purposes by the ruling political party. Balanced broadcasting in a democracy would require some matching programming reflecting other political viewpoints. As has been said before by this Unit and elsewhere, the state-owned media belongs to the people and should serve all the citizens of this country.



This channel failed in the course of this short survey to achieve even the limited balance of the main NCN service

### VCT Ch 12 (Berbice)

The programmes aired on this channel are those relayed from the main network in Georgetown (VCT Ch 28). We have not noticed any local political programme specifically produced for the Region 6 viewers that are not captured in our monitoring in Georgetown.

### CCCBTV Ch 19

We did not receive any signal from this station in New Amsterdam where we were staying since this station is located in Corentyne. Residents indicated to us that this station airs a limited amount of local programmes and we will try our best to capture its output in our next trip.

### **Observations (Berbice stations)**

Generally we have not noticed a great deal of political programmes, for example; talk shows, interviews and other public affairs shows, but we were informed that this is very much likely to change now that the elections campaign is in full swing.

For the period in question nothing alarming was found, such as, incitement to racial hatred, criminal behaviour or public disorder. However, other observations were made regarding journalistic practices that may be helpful in raising media standards in general. There is evidence of a lack of balance in reporting the news, for example, several news reports were presented regarding the voters' list where political parties were given time to criticize GECOM, however, no comment was sought from officials at GECOM in relation to these criticisms. At the moment we cannot conclude that this is a policy of the media houses in Berbice; it may very well be a result of a lack of proper training.

## **NEWS PAPERS**

Apart from one example, the MMU found no qualitative contraventions of the Code in July.

### **The Guyana Chronicle**

The Unit found no cause to make any qualitative comment for this period.

### **Stabroek News**

The Unit found no cause to make any qualitative comment for this period.

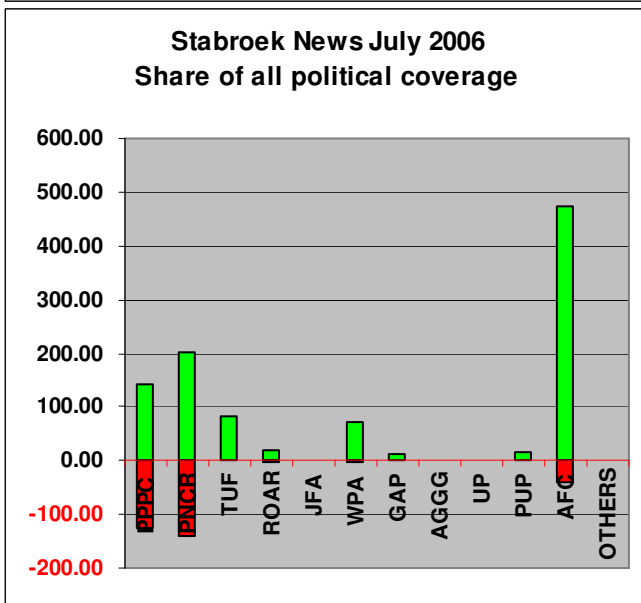
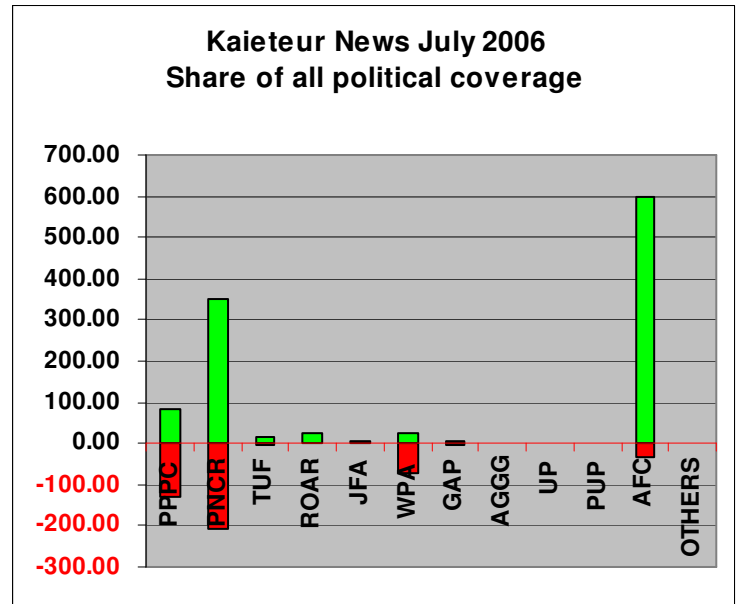
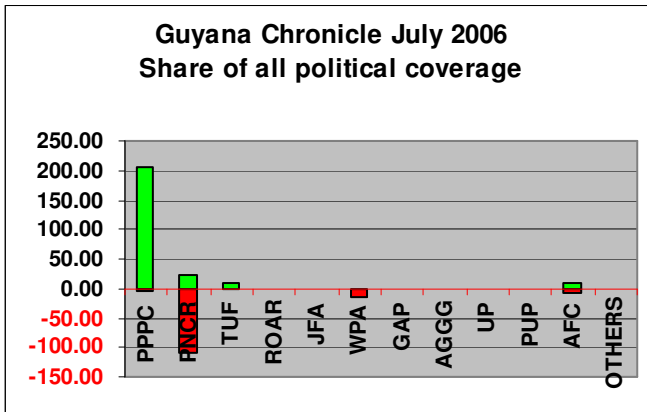
### **Kaieteur News**

- The July 11<sup>th</sup> issue (pg 4) of **this newspaper contained** a letter written to the Editor by Keane Gibson captioned **“Continuing controversy by Mahadai Das”** Its content included serious racial overtones and stereotyped a particular ethnic group. For example the author wrote in her missive:

***“An East Indian recently told me that there is a rule that Indians can’t have black people in their homes...”***

This statement is a regurgitation of alleged second hand and unsubstantiated information that is unsupported by any witnesses. In the interest of accuracy and the promotion of good race relations, especially in this elections period, the Editor should have exercised better editorial judgment by editing the contents of this racially insensitive and misinformed letter.

Comparison of newspaper share of coverage 2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2006. These charts include political advertising campaigns of which AFC's was the most substantial.



**Interesting facts:**

**In total, Kaieteur News gave more positive space to AFC (including Adverts) than did Stabroek News.**

**In total, Stabroek News gave more than two thirds the amount of the positive space to PPPP/C as was given by Guyana Chronicle.**

**In total, Guyana Chronicle gave less negative coverage to PNCR than either Stabroek News or Kaieteur News.**

**Judge for yourself which paper delivered the greatest balance in July (2<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>).**

Note: Since the publication of our last report we have noted the range of comments regarding our findings, many of which praised our work, while some questioned our methodology and professionalism. We welcome all of these comments. This is an indication that our reports are taken seriously and hopefully they are and will in future contribute to the larger debate of raising media standards in general. As we have stated before, our operational procedures are transparent and open for public scrutiny. We are monitoring for the benefit of voters as much as for the media houses.

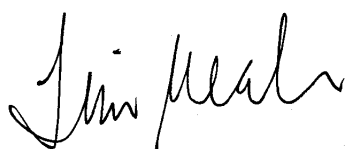
***MMU staff and their Approach to work.*** The Media Monitoring Unit is staffed with a multi-ethnic team of educated and intelligent men and women who have at all times shown a great deal of commitment to what they do. After a rigorous recruitment exercise was completed an intensive training programme was conducted for the entire staff regarding the application of quantitative and qualitative aspects of our methodology. Monitors were also briefed about the political history and culture of the country and the role of the media in promoting democratic and peaceful elections.

Regarding the approach to our work, whenever difficulty arises in deciding the measurement or rating of a particular news item or talk show etc, our supervisors are called in to listen to the various viewpoints of the monitors to arrive at a decision. If at this point there is still no common agreement, the Management team then makes a decision after consultation with the monitors and supervisors about the issue in question. No one person records, monitors or analyses a particular media outlet on consecutive days. Monitoring is interchanged continuously to ensure that no form of bias is nurtured in the execution of our daily monitoring exercises.

The Unit's Supervisors are Communication Graduates of the University of Guyana who are experienced in the field of journalism. The Management team comprises of the Commonwealth Media Advisor who has spearheaded several media monitoring efforts in other parts of the world and two career public servants who have worked outstandingly on the previous Media Monitoring Unit's project for the 2001 General and Regional elections. Hence our periodic reports reflect the work of a team of unbiased, well- trained and qualified persons working honestly, fairly and fearlessly in the national interest.

**To Glen Lall. The members of the MMU offer their condolences to the families and friends of the Kaieteur News staff who have suffered the grievous loss of so many of their colleagues and relatives in the appalling murders of Tuesday night. We were struck with your workforce's courageous and professional response in bringing out the paper on time.**

On behalf of the 18-member team that compiled this report...



Tim Neale - Commonwealth Media Advisor to GECOM

9<sup>th</sup> August 2006