
Appendix 1: Commonwealth Observer Group Reports

In the foregoing chapters, selected reports of Commonwealth Observer Groups (COGs) are used to illustrate the media's place in democracy. The examples focus on those segments of the reports that deal with the media.

The Commonwealth Secretariat asks observers to 'report on the credibility of the electoral process, whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the election results are credible'. Each group's report also contains practical recommendations to help improve election arrangements for the future. Part of the observers' mandate is explained below:

The 'election event' should not be seen in isolation: the Commonwealth therefore views the election in the context of the democratic process as a whole. Observers are concerned with the integrity of key processes that affect the election but begin well beforehand, and the Secretariat sees election observation as dovetailing with work to strengthen these processes well before and after the election. The observer group has to act impartially and independently and shall conduct itself according to the standards expressed in the International Declaration of Principles to which the Commonwealth is a signatory. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise, but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. In its Final Report, the group is also free to propose to the authorities concerned recommendations for change on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of future elections.⁵⁵

The COG reports are important to the extent that, first, they have a chapter or section specifically dedicated to the functioning of the media and, second, they outline specific recommendations to improve the environment, which the Commonwealth Secretariat doggedly follows up with governments to ensure a high rate of implementation.

The reports are honest in their assessment of the environment in which the media operates during an election, and the issues they raise will sound familiar to many readers. If a reader finds that a report, however low-key in tone, offers examples of situations they have dealt with in their own environment or that they seek to overcome, then its inclusion in this book is worthwhile.⁵⁶