

24

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AN ANALYSIS

OF MEDIA REPORTAGE OF CONFLICT DURING THE 2007, 2013 AND 2017 IN KENYAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: A PEACE JOURNALISM APPROACH

UN ANÁLISIS AL REPORTAGE DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN SOBRE LOS CONFLICTOS DURANTE LOS AÑOS 2007, 2013 Y 2017 EN LAS ELECCIONES PRESIDENCIALES DE KENYA: UN ACERCAMIENTO AL PERIODISMO DE PAZ

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role the media play in conflict management and particularly focuses on identifying the approach adopted by the media when reporting electoral conflicts during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 in presidential elections in Kenya. The study was hinged upon the Peace Journalism model first proposed by Johanne Galtung and progressed by Lynch and McGoldrick. This study recommends that future studies seek to find out how other factors such as demographics, government interference and socio-economic status of individuals moderate the influence of media on conflict escalation or de-escalation.

Keywords: Conflict management, Peace building, Media, Peace Journalism, War Journalism, Communication.

RESUMEN

Este estudio investigó el papel que juegan los medios de comunicación en la gestión de conflictos y se centra particularmente en identificar el enfoque adoptado por los medios de comunicación al informar conflictos electorales durante las elecciones presidenciales de 2007, 2013 y 2017 en Kenia. El estudio se basó en el modelo de Periodismo de Paz propuesto por primera vez por Johanne Galtung y progresado por Lynch & McGoldrick (2005). Este estudio recomienda que los estudios futuros busquen descubrir cómo otros factores como la demografía, la interferencia del gobierno y el estado socioeconómico de las personas moderan la influencia de los medios en la escalada o disminución del conflicto.

Palabras clave: Gestión de conflictos, construcción de la paz, medios de comunicación, periodismo de paz, periodismo de guerra, comunicación.

Keywords: Colombian educational policies, continuing didactic training, Teachers of Primary Basic Education

INTRODUCTION

Violence in the Horn and East African region which include eight countries; Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Tanzania has seen a steady increase from the early 1990s up to the 2000s. There is a general fear that the conflict in this region might be difficult to resolve because of the social complexity, poverty and longtime degradation of social systems and local environments.

Kenya is a home to about forty ethnic groups; the largest of these groups being the Kikuyu which makes up roughly 17% of the total population (about 6.6million). The country apart from being multi-ethnic is also multi-religious, with the vast majority being Christians and a significant Muslim population of about 4.4 million people. Over the years, Kenya has experienced high levels of violence which has destabilized a large portion of the country and has encouraged increased terrorist attacks in the capital (Okwengu, 2010). Between 2007 and 2008 around the election period, post-electoral violence caused the death of over 1100 people and displacement of large portions of the population, most noticeable in the rift valley.

The media has been instrumental during the crises and conflicts that have occurred in Kenya over the years. Oyugi (1997), in his studies on the role of the media in Kenyan elections alludes to the fact that the media played a role in instigating and inciting violence in the country. His claim stems from the fact that the media did not report on issues in an ethical manner which in turn might have mitigated the violence.

It is often said, that there is a sort of social contract between democracy and journalism, where democracy provides and guarantees freedom and independence of the press and journalism on the other hand informs society and keeps elected officials in check. Media influence election dynamics within a country, as well as how the election is perceived beyond the country or by the outside world (Howard, 2004). Accordingly, it is media's independence and objectivity that gives it credibility, in-terms of informing people and influencing them to make changes towards peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The media has at least three important subjects to report on during electoral process, these include; the political parties and the candidates, the issues brought forth by each of the political parties and their candidates and the voting process. It is expected that the media should provide equitable or fair amounts of free advertising or free airtime for each political party. It is also expected that the media should accept all parties' advertising, except when such advertisements contravenes journalistic ethics and

codes of conduct as laid out by the electoral commission. The media's role in election is crucial because they act as an intermediary between the electoral process and the voters. Howard (2004), explains that for the media to effectively play its role, it must not be only free, but must be seen to be reliable, trusted and unbiased.

Using the Peace Journalism model as developed by Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), this study aims to identify and explain the approach of the Kenyan media in reporting the news during electoral conflict and the resultant effects of such approach during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 presidential elections in Kenya. The peace journalism model seeks to explain why violence might be escalated or de-escalated based on the approach adopted by the media. This model is particularly relevant to this study because it shows how the media can play an active role in ensuring that peace is sustained.

According to Curran & Girevitch (2000), news media outlets are governed by traditions, and beliefs developed over time by practitioners in the field, and while Journalism plays a significant role in politics, it does not define the political field, neither is it defined by politics. It is therefore imperative that one understands the boundaries between political players and the media. Curran & Girevitch (2000), notes that, the 'mediatization' of politics is one in which the journalist can challenge political 'thuggery' and arrogance and can also stand as the spokesperson for civil societies.

In Africa, there is a distinct relationship between politics and the media, according to Kasoma (1995), the African press has long been politically biased and as a result operates as a political tool used to influence electoral outcomes. He goes on to explain that African politicians have a long history with the press, and in a lot of cases are directly involved in the everyday running of the media either through direct ownership or as a proxy of a political party or figure. This involvement with the press can take the form of forcing the press to report on favorable news about them, attack the press for a perceived slight or insult, use the platform provided by the media to rally political support among the masses and many more.

Waldhal (1998), also asserts that there is indeed a relationship between the media and politics and goes a step further to highlight this relationship. He explains that it is the job of the media to report on and monitor political life and to draw the attention of the society to how politicians perform their duties. Odhiambo (2017), while acknowledging that the press has a responsibility to report and monitor political life in the society, he explains that to truly do this, there is a need to place a high premium on the value of plurality and debate. The implication, according

to Odhiambo, is that such a press must not be controlled by the government or any special political interest groups if debates are to be encouraged.

In a country like Kenya, the need for the press to be able to provide a balanced reporting of everyday news worthy activities is crucial to the electoral process. Lippmann (1965), observed that *“journalists point a flash rather than a mirror at the world”*, meaning that the media highlight only what they deem important. This is even more so in African societies, where there is a lot of influence by governments and corporate bodies that journalist and media houses can only illuminate what they are allowed to.

The researchers therefore reiterate that the press is indeed powerful and that for the press to effectively play its role as the watchdog of society, interferences from the government should be very minimal if not non-existent. However, it has been empirically proven that it is not only interference from government that causes the media to fail in its duty, things like partisanship of news media houses and political ambition of their owners have caused a lot of media houses in sub-Sahara Africa to become increasingly subjective in their reporting which in turn has allowed for the easy weaponisation of the press. Oyugi (1997), in his study on the Kenya 1992 elections, stated that a lot of post-election violence has occurred mainly because of the way the press chose to report the news. Subsequent studies showed how vernacular radio stations became a tool for inciting violence and rile up an already unsettled population. It is therefore imperative that the press should be truly independent. Independent from political, financial and societal influences.

Oyugi (1997), in his work on ethnicity and the electoral process during the 1992 Kenyan general elections explained the relationship between tribalism and the electoral process in Kenya. Oyugi (1997), found out that the elections in Kenya at the time showed how the political class capitalizes on ethnic cleavages to promote their sectional interests. In his study, Oyugi (1997), found out that a lot of Kenyans supported political figures based on ethnic bias - the feeling that only a person from their ethnic affiliation can best serve their interest as a group. This position is supported by Kwatamba (2008), in her work on ethnicity and political pluralism in Kenya. Kwatamba argues that ethnicity is a major variable in the electoral process in Kenya and dates as far back as 1963 during the Jomo Kenyatta regime. Archer (2009), in his work on the rationale behind Kenyan electoral behavior also concluded that Kenyans vote along ethnic lines mainly for economic reasons; they believe that a political candidate from the same ethnic background as them would serve them better economically. He however took it a step further, by explaining

that his observations in Korogocho indicate that Kenyans would circumvent ethnicity and embrace a political candidate, if he or she has performed well in the past. To further show how important ethnicity is to the electoral process in Kenya, Sigrid confirmed in his study that, they are usually bribed by politicians, but that these bribes have very little or no influence on their decision to vote for a candidate, as they would still prefer to vote for a candidate from a similar ethnic background. Similarly, Yego (2015), confirmed that ethnic divisions play a major role in the electoral process in Kenya and are the major cause of electoral violence in the country.

From the foregoing, it is clear that ethnicity is a major factor in the electioneering process in Kenya. In fact, from the works of Oyugi (1997), it is clear that politicians exploit ethnicity in the campaign and political strategies. However, Yego (2015); and Oyugi (1997), have failed to explain if it is a possibility that a number of factors combine to influence the elections, and if it is possible that there are more pertinent issues apart from ethnicity that influenced voters during the elections under study. As interesting as Archer's (2009), study is, he failed to explain what happens when a politician from the same ethnic background as the voters has failed in providing any economic benefits to his people and is contesting for reelection- will ethnicity still be a deciding factor in this?

On the role of the media in Kenyan elections, Ogenga (2008), argued that the media plays a significant role in the growth and development of any democratic nation. He explained that the media played a very important role during the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya and was successful in mobilizing the electorates. He however noted that the media failed to protect various aspects of the election process. He explained that the media did a great job during the pre-election period i.e. covering the campaigning period of the political parties involved and providing airtime for political candidates in a fair manner, constantly taking opinion polls and making the results of those polls public in a timely and orderly manner. Ogenga (2008), however noted that the media could have done a better job of interpreting the message to the electorates. For instance, the media organized and constantly updated polls, showing who was leading, but the polls were not properly explained to the electorates (especially the possibility that the actual results might end up being significantly different than what was predicted in the polls). This failure to interpret and explain the polls to the electorates led to violence when the election results were finally released and did not align with the expectations of the masses based on the polls they previously received-people felt the elections were rigged in favour of

the winning candidate. Okwengu (2010), also studied the role of the media during the 2007 Kenya elections and like Ogenga (2008), concluded that the media played a key role in the election. She explained that the government in Kenya blames the media for fuelling the conflict while the media defended their actions by claiming they have a duty to inform the electorates of newsworthy events in the society including the electoral process. Researchers like Howard (2009); Mercier (2009), concluded that the media played a significant role in the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, particularly the radio stations that broadcast in vernacular. Most of these radio stations were issued operational license by the government, just immediately before the elections - an indication of a biased motive behind their activities. Another factor that led to post election violence was the sweeping ban of some media houses. Odhiambo (2017), after critically studying the role of the media in election-related violence in Africa, with particular attention on Kenya, reiterated the recommendations of the Kriegler and Waki commissions of 2008, which suggested that journalists in Kenya should be trained on journalism ethics and should also embrace peace journalism. This further proves that there is indeed a relationship between the mass media, general elections processes and post-election violence in Kenya.

It is clear from the works of Ogenga (2008); Okwengu (2010); and Odhiambo (2017) that the media indeed is a pivotal player in the electioneering process in Kenya. Ogenga (2008), in his work highlighted the different roles of the media during the election process- before, during and post-election periods. However, he did not conclusively explain how the media can be used as a tool for manipulation and inciting violence. Howard (2009); and Mercier (2009), focused on the role of the media and it was their conclusion that the media did in fact play a significant role during the elections of 2007. They implied through their research, that the government used the radio to spread misinformation and try to manipulate the electorates.

Galtung in a speech delivered in 1997 stated that 'War journalism not only legitimizes violence but it is violent in and of itself' (cited in Abdul-Nabi, 2015). In their criticism of the way the Norwegian press reported international conflicts, Galtung & Ruge (1965), concluded that the Norwegian press focused on the following principles of newsworthiness: threshold, frequency, unexpectedness, negativity, unambiguity (Lynch, 2007). The implication being that the Norwegian press of the time considered only negative news as newsworthy and failed to report positive news when it comes to reporting international issues or stories. As a response, Galtung (1986), proposed the concept of peace journalism. Galtung categorized news

reporting during conflicts into two broad categories – Peace Journalism (PJ) and War Journalism (WJ) and based this classification on four orientations, namely; 1. Peace or War, 2. Truth or propaganda, 3. People or elites and 4. Solutions or victory (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), developed the peace journalism model and defined it as a 'broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories'. They went on to explain that, 'PJ is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report, and how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict' (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Lynch & Galtung (2010), compared Peace Journalism to 'health journalism' where the goal is to draw attention to diseases or problems, explore the causes and highlight or propose possible solutions to the problems or propose ways to prevent a recurrence of the problem. They compared War Journalism to 'sports journalism' where the goal is simply to win and nothing more. From the works of Lynch & McGoldrick, it is clear that they assume that how conflict is reported can lead to an increase or reduction in violence and that these two approaches can act as the catalyst for either depending on which approach is adopted by the media houses. They however warn that adopting the peace journalism approach does not necessarily mean overlooking violence rather it is more about the approach one uses in reporting the violence.

This model was adopted for this study because it clearly shows a relationship between media approach to reporting conflict and conflict management. This study posits that the approach adopted by media houses can lead to an escalation or de-escalation of conflict. The conceptual model in Figure 1 explains this relationship.



Figure 1. Conceptual model – Relationship between media reportage and conflict resolution

The model above shows the relationships that this study seeks to establish and explains. The media can choose to report conflict using one of the two approaches (War or Peace Journalism approach) and this can lead to either an escalation or de-escalation of violence in affected or violence-prone areas.

METHODOLOGY

This uses a mixed method of a quantitative content analysis and in-depth interviews to collect and analyze data. For the content analysis, the researchers systematically

categorized and recorded text, audios and videos for the purpose of analysis.

Using the peace journalism model to code the contents of media reports during the periods under review, the researchers developed the coding sheet below (Table 1).

Table 1. Coding for media approach to conflict reportage.

S/N	Peace Journalism		War Journalism	
1	Peace	Reports focusing on reconciliation, compromise and peaceful co-existence	War	Reports that highlight the conflicts, or blames one party for the conflict
2	Truth	Reports that focus on presenting the truths but in a conciliatory tone	Propaganda	Presentation of half-truths or outright lies to promote the agenda of one party to the conflict
3	People	Reports that highlight the human consequence of a conflict, how it might affect people.	Elite	Reports that promote the point of view of the power brokers, technocrats and influential people in society while leaving out the plight of the common man
4	Solutions	Reports that seek solutions to the problem; That seek to bring people together by focusing on commonalities rather than what divides	Victories	Highlighting the problems and the divisions. Promoting the successes of one party and focusing on the failures of the other

For the in-depth interviews, key stakeholders in the media, police and political organizations were interviewed and the responses thematically analyzed for the purpose of this study.

Sample Size

Since this study is focused on examining media coverage of conflict during 3 election circles in Kenya. The researchers opted to analyze media reports of prominent and national media houses. The researchers collected a total of 360 items as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample size breakdown.

S/N	Media type	Media houses	Sample size
1	Television	Kenya Television Network	60
		Citizen TV	60
2	Radio	Kameme FM	60
		Kass FM	60
3	Newspaper	Daily Nation	60
		The Standard	60
Total Sample Size			360

For the qualitative data (from interviews), the following respondents were (Table 3) interviewed:

Table 3. Respondents for qualitative data.

Category of Respondents	Number Sampled	Sampling Technique
Radio and Television Stations	09	Purposive Sampling
Civil Society Organizations	06	Purposive Sampling
Political Organizations	09	Purposive Sampling
Community Leaders	10	Purposive Sampling
Security Agencies	01	Purposive Sampling
Communications Commissions of Kenya	03	Purposive Sampling
Total	38	

The above respondents were purposively selected to be interviewed: they comprised of administrative/ senior staff of the selected radio and television stations; civil society organizations; members of political organizations; community leaders; staff of the independent electoral and boundaries commission; staff of the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK); and the security agencies. These categories were chosen because it is believed that they possess in-depth knowledge of the subject under investigation.

Sampling technique

The media reports were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Only reports from 2 months before the elections to 2 months after were considered for this study. Therefore, for the 2007 elections, newspaper reports from October 2007 to February 2008 were considered for this study. For 2013, reports from January –May 2013 were considered. For the 2017 elections, only reports from June-October 2017 were considered. For each of these months, four (4) reports from each media house was selected, bringing the total to 120/ election circle and the grand total to 360 for the three election circles under study.
2. Only reports that made it to the front page of the newspapers were selected and for electronic media, the researchers selected only reports that were broadcast during prime times. The rationale was to get reports that could make the most impact.
3. The reports must be addressing conflict that is linked directly or indirectly to the elections. So reports about cattle rustling or inter-communal violence during these periods were not considered, unless the report linked them to the ongoing elections.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Media Approach to reporting electoral conflict and their effect on escalation or de-escalation of conflict

The results of the content analysis are presented in the table 4:

Table 4. Content analysis results.

Election Period	Approach			
	PEACE	FREQUENCY	WAR	FREQUENCY
2007	Peace	12	war	48
	Truth	20	Propaganda	40
	People	15	Elite	45
	Solutions	24	Victories	36
Total		71		169
2013	Peace	25	war	35
	Truth	28	Propaganda	32
	People	32	Elite	28
	Solutions	27	Victories	33
Total		112		128
2017	Peace	42	war	18
	Truth	35	Propaganda	25
	People	37	Elite	23
	Solutions	45	Victories	15
Total		159		81

From the results of the content analysis in table 3 above, it is clear that in 2007, the media adopted the war

journalism approach focusing more on the elites, point of view. War journalism can be described as making journalistic choices that promote violence or conflict in the society by using propaganda, promoting the victories of one side of the conflict and projecting only the failures of the other and generally instigating violence or hatred towards the 'other'. It is therefore not unfathomable to deduce that indeed this approach to reporting the news during the Kenyan presidential elections contributed significantly to the violence of 2007 that claimed the lives of over 1000 Kenyans and displaced tens of thousands of people. This finding supports that of Ogenga (2008), who found out in his studies on the role of media in the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya, that the vernacular radio stations where one of the chief instigators of violence in during that time.

The finding was also supported by the responses of the key informants interviewed during the course of this study. When asked about the cause of the violence during the 2007 presidential elections, a top Kenyan police officers that was stationed at one of the volatile areas during the 2007 elections explained that:

“Since the country is divided along ethnic lines and interest, sometimes you also find the media airing items which would otherwise promote violence that is why you find that at one time there was an allegation that at certain time, for few hours the media houses were shut, because they were promoting violence. As much as there is right to information by the media, they must know what they are giving. Bad things may happen, but they must know how to report or cover those things.” (Personal Communication, August 24, 2018)

A TV journalist in one of the national TV stations in Kenya, also blamed the media for the violence of 2007, she had this to say:

“In 2007, the media was really blamed in escalation of violence as a result of how it covered the elections. During that time, I could say the media was not sensitive in that, they didn't know how to report about an occurrence in a certain place. For example, if there was violence in community A, they will say directly that there is violence there, and people who do not belong to that community are being chased out. So if I am from a certain community and I know that my people are being chased out, then we will also chase people of that community from where we live. So this made the attacks becomes sporadic, and people were just retaliating. The media was really blamed for that, and even there is a journalist who went to Hague to respond to similar charges on promoting hate speech and violence. A similar case is in Rwanda, where

the journalist who was on air on that day, escalated violence by telling people that, they have cockroaches in their midst, and those cockroaches should be dealt with.” (Personal Communication, August 14, 2018)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the violence of 2007 presidential elections in Kenya was partly exacerbated by the media. In 2013, there was a gradual shift towards the peace journalism approach, but not all the way through. The result was still skewed towards the war approach, but it is obvious that the media took a more guided approach to reporting the conflict.

We can deduce, from the results shown in table 3 above, that the media took a more balanced approach to reporting the news, but not fully adopting the peace journalism approach. The result of this is manifested in the fact that there was a significant reduction in violence during and after this election. Although, some might argue that this reduction in violence, can and should be attributed to the measures taken by the government to forestall a repeat of the 2007 mayhem. The government heavily patrolled conflict prone areas, the constitution was revised to appease disgruntled regions in the country and the media council set new rules for engaging the public when reporting on volatile issues. Perhaps these measures played a role in reducing violence, but the efforts of the media (which can be seen through their reportage of conflict during this period) should be taken into consideration when considering the reduction of violence in 2013.

By 2017, the media had significantly embraced the peace journalism approach, with the majority of their coverage on all platforms, being more conciliatory, objective and fairly reported. 2017, recorded the lowest incidence of violence during elections in Kenya and the media played a role in achieving this.

A respondent, when asked about the media approach to reporting and the perceived effect that had on the society and the media, the TV journalist responded by stating that;

In 2008, we were accused as the people who escalated the violence. In 2013, we were now again accused as just being peace crusaders, that we did not do anything, we did not report anything, we were just preaching peace. But all I can say is that as media, we learnt our lesson, and our journalists are more sensitive to any content that can escalate war in communities, and the journalists have tried so much to be partial and balanced in their reporting...”

A top member of the media regulatory body in Kenya when asked about the role of the media in reporting conflict, had this to say;

The media sets the agenda on what you want people to think of. If you want community A to be perceived as bad, that is what the people will think about. But if you want to bring people together and build the nation, then you will ensure that the kind of messages that you put out there will bring cohesion in the nation. So as a regulatory body, we emphasize the need for conflict sensitive journalism during elections. So we advise the media that whenever there is a conflict, you cannot send a journalist from that particular community to cover that story in order to avoid bias, but when they need background information on that community being covered, and then the journalist can avail that information. I think 2007, was worse scenario for Kenya in terms of coverage, 2013 was better...”

From the foregoing, one thing is clear, and that is media practitioners and regulators believe in the power of the media to influence behavior and as such took great care in 2017 to promote peace and peaceful coexistence.

Therefore, in response to RQ1, in 2007, the media adopted a war journalism approach which supports the findings of previous studies (Ogenga, 2008; Howard, 2009; Mercier, 2009). In 2013, there was an almost equal balance between the War and Peace approach, implying that some media houses used the war approach while others made use of Peace journalism approach.

On the role of the media in escalation and de-escalation of conflict during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 presidential elections in Kenya, the findings show that the media in 2007 through the reporting approach escalated violence. The key respondents interviewed in this study all alluded to the fact that the media in 2007, gave out false or misleading information about certain political candidates which caused the ire of their supporters. The media in 2007 in some cases, also incited violence by emphasizing ethnic differences and allowing the spread of hate speech on their platforms which further escalated the conflict.

In 2013, the media adopted a more balanced approach, but still tilted towards the war approach, this balance in their reporting saw a dramatic reduction in violence in 2013 and by 2017, there was no major violent incident that could be directly linked to the elections despite the suspicious presidential results.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the media's contribution in influencing voters' behavior and in de-escalation or escalation of violence in Kenya, it is not the main cause of violence in electoral periods. However, because of its immense power, it has the potential to escalate or de-escalate violence depending on how it reports on issues that can incite violence

during elections. This conclusion is reached after the study examined media behavior over 3 electoral periods; 2007, 2013 and 2017, the researchers were able to trace and document the evolution of media reporting of conflict in Kenya. The findings of this study showed a gradual shift from the War Journalism to the Peace Journalism approach. This shift also brought about a major change or reduction in violence and armed conflicts during elections in Kenya as can be seen in 2013 and more notably in 2017. The implication of this for scholarship and policy making is that media in Kenya need to understand the power they possess and understand that they have a responsibility to their audiences and country to ensure that they are more responsible in their reporting of sensitive issues – issues that border on ethnicity, politics, tribalism and religion to name a few.

To progress this study, it is the recommendations of the researchers that future scholars find out how other factors such as, demographic factors, socio-economic and government interference, might mitigate the influence of the media on conflict. The idea is that sometimes, the media might decide to use a certain approach, but if certain variables are present, then there is a possibility that the expected outcome might be avoided. A study of this kind will help clarify whether the media's role was the most important factor in predicting conflict resolution or other factors played a more significant role.

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