



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEDIATING DEMOCRACY: THE PLACE, ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE MEDIA IN KENYA'S 2013 ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of the media Kenya's 2013 elections. While the media plays a critical role democratic processes and many celebrate its role in the provision of information and platform for the engagement with issues and various actors, Kenya's media has sometimes failed to offer meaningful coverage, analysis and interrogation of various political actors, activities and documents, including politicians, political parties and their manifestoes and promises. Using the 2013 general election, this article argues that the failure of the media is a consequence of numerous factors including ownership, control and manipulation, the incapacity of journalists to critically interrogate issues, political actors, actions and documents as well as self-censorship.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the role of the media in Kenya with specific focus on the 2013 general election. It posits that while the media plays an important role in political and democratic processes, it is important to critically interrogate the place the media plays in Kenya's highly contested politics. This is especially vital given the challenges currently facing the media. For example, questions abound around whether the media is a credible, reliable and trustworthy source of information important to decision-making processes, or if it is a genuine public space for sharing ideas, and rational discussions or debates. These lingering questions offer opportunities for a (re)examination of the roles and obligations of the media in Kenya. Under the overarching theme of media coverage of the election, this article also examines the roles of opinion polls, op-ed columnists, and TV 'expert' panels. It first looks at some theoretical arguments relating to media and politics and democracy.

Media, politics and democracy

The media is often been said to play a critical role in any political and democratic process, offering information and a platform for the articulation, aggregation and formation of public opinion which in turn informs and influences political behaviour and decision-making.

The media ostensibly mobilises the electorate, helping them make informed choices and participate effectively in politics, and political and democratic processes. Pippa Norris has suggested that in representative democracy, the media has three core roles, namely: to offer a "civic forum encouraging pluralistic debate about public affairs, as a watchdog guarding against the abuse of power and as a mobilizing agent encouraging public learning and participation in the political process".¹ These roles, functions or obligations are seen through the prism of the normative theory of the media. These normative functions are often based on the characteristics of representative or liberal democracies which relate to what Norris details in her book *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*.² From the above arguments, it is theoretically possible that the media enhances deliberative and participatory democracy³ by facilitating or constituting a public sphere (a conceptual space within various venues and groups) where an exchange of information and views of common concern can take place.⁴ It is within this space that people get the opportunity to form, express and exchange and discuss public opinion. In addition, the space allows the people to communicate and negotiate issues and

¹ Norris, Pippa (2000) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Norris, Pippa (2000) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ See, for example, Curran, James (2011) *Media and Democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁴ Habermas, Jürgen (1974) 'The Public Sphere', *New German Critique*, 3 (Fall), pp. 49-55.

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meanings that contribute to their understanding of issues. It is a platform that ideally equalises participation, eliminating any forms of domination, elite or otherwise, and in the process enhancing inclusion in democratic processes. In other words, the media provides an arena or space for public debate and reconstitute private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.⁵ Another theoretical perspective that is frequently bandied about is that the media sets the agenda⁶ by providing information, selecting and framing events and issues in particular ways, and giving them prominence so that they can be discussed in the public sphere. Media framing is often concerned with selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration of issues considered salient.⁷ To Robert Entman “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”⁸ On his part, Maxwell McCombs has suggested that “framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed.”⁹

Despite the arguments above, however, there are serious questions over whose agenda is being set (are they those of the media, the powerful or the political elite?), and who determines media framing where there are competing interests. Such arguments are galvanized by evidence suggesting that the media panders to political interests, and that a lot of editorial content comes from different and especially influential and powerful parties, and groups, including public relations companies that seek to develop and maintain positive press or image for whoever pays for their services. Granted, that the media is an agent of democracy, change and good governance has long been the basis for academic and even popular discourse. Some have even suggested that the media is a powerful agent that influences political actions and outcomes.¹⁰ This can be explained by the hypodermic needle or magic bullet theory that implies that the mass media have a direct, immediate and powerful effect on its audiences. In effect, the theory suggests that the mass media influences large groups of people directly and uniformly by ‘shooting’ or ‘injecting’ them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response. But in serious academic circles (away from the dogmatic popular discourse), we often ask whether the media possess the power they are said to have and whether (and how) they influence the political and democratic processes. In other words, even though it has been agreed that the media provides information and a platform or space for political actors particularly politicians, political parties, civil society and

ordinary people to articulate issues that should concern the electorate, aggregate opinion and thus contribute to opinion formation and political decision-making, we ought to critically interrogate what kind of effects the media have on political processes and outcomes. To echo a question raised by Tiziana Terranova, is it possible to talk of the media as a public sphere in an age of mass propaganda, media oligopoly and information warfare?¹¹ Is it possible to speak of the media as the genuine and ‘transformed’ public sphere when this is fragmented and contentious – a crowded, noisy, chaotic, competitive, and rancorous communication space? Do these questions and concerns challenge the rather popular but dogmatic notion that the media is a ‘genuine’ public sphere or space for democratic growth and consolidation?

In addition, we often hear that the media is the fourth estate – sitting alongside the three other pillars of state – the executive, legislature and judiciary. This institutional status raises the status of the media to that of a pillar of democracy, and an important one at that because the actions of state are represented, debated and evaluated in that public space, or what is commonly known as the public sphere. As the fourth estate, the media as an institution of democracy ought to scrutinise the operations of power.¹² When there is state and other abuses of power, journalism and the media ought to move beyond mere reportage, interpretation and commentary to exposure, criticism, and advocacy and thereby become political actors in their own right.¹³ What’s more, the media is considered a watchdog because it ostensibly watches over on behalf of the public against any excesses and exposes the same so that people, the public can agitate for change, and participate in governance. Realistically, however, we romanticise the media, and think they genuinely facilitate the practice of democracy because the expression of popular will and public opinion is disseminated through the media.¹⁴ Most of these are often ideals which are difficult to actualise especially in a hypercommercialised media environment where profitability and support for elite political ideology is commonplace. Besides, ownership has become highly contested in Kenya as politicians seek to own and control the media.

Ownership, concentration, control and power (without responsibility?)

Media ownership is often controversial in Kenya. This is based on the apparent politicisation of media ownership and their effects on politics, elections, electoral activities and outcomes. The media are not an independent and abstract entity consisting of enabling media technologies. They are part of a wider political and economic fields and contexts. This influences the process of media production and consumption. The media are embedded in the business of media industries. There is a high degree of concentration in the ownership of media corporations in Kenya with the Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services, Radio Africa, and Mediamax being the leading players. That the media in Kenya

⁵ Curran, James (1996) 82-83) ‘Mass Media and Democracy Revisited’ in Curran, James and Gurevitch, Michael (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*. 3rd ed. London: Arnold, pp.81-119.

⁶ McCombs, Maxwell & Shaw, Donald (1972) ‘The agenda-setting function of mass media’. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, pp.176-187.

⁷ See, for example, Tankard, J., Hendrickson, L., Silberman, J., Bliss, K., and Ghanem, S. (1991) ‘Media Frames: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement’. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Boston, MA; and Entman, Robert (1993) ‘Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm’. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp.51-58.

⁸ Entman, Robert (1993) ‘Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm’. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp.51-58. This quote p.52.

⁹ McCombs, Maxwell (1997) ‘New Frontiers in Agenda Setting: Agendas of Attributes and Frames’. *Mass Comm Review*, 24(1&2), pp.32-52. This quote p.37.

¹⁰ Lasswell, Harold (1927) ‘The Theory of Political Propaganda’. *The American Political Science Review* 21 (3), August, pp. 627-631.

¹¹ Terranova, Tiziana (2004) *Networks Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto, p.4.

¹² Lister, Martin, Dovey, Jon, Giddings, Seth, Grant, Ian and Kelly, Kieran (2003) *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, p.17.

¹³ McNair, Brian (2006) *Cultural Chaos: Journalism, News and Power in a Globalised World*. London: Routledge.

¹⁴ McNair, Brian (2006) *Cultural Chaos: Journalism, News and Power in a Globalised World*. London: Routledge, p.139.

is part of economic and political structures influenced by agents with powerful and skewed interests, the government, the corporate world and their leaders, and others with vested interests is hardly in doubt. Accordingly, because journalism is seen as private business, the owners seek to control content, or output. They use the media to advance their own agendas, economic or political. Take the case of S.K. Macharia, the owner of Royal Media Services. As part of the Coalition of Reforms and Democracy (CORD) party Summit, he promised to provide content that was favourable to presidential candidate Raila Odinga and his team. Similarly, Kenyans were doubtful of Mediamax's impartiality given that it is owned by President Uhuru Kenyatta's family. The same applies to the Standard, and Radio Africa groups whose owners are leading politicians in Kenya. The foregoing evidence illustrates the fact that there is an increasing trend of proprietorial control and manipulation of editorial content. In essence, in an environment where media owners have the capacity to determine and sometimes control content, it is clear that media ownership is important to political actors whose intention is often to skew, influence and even manipulate political and democratic processes.

Demystifying the media's role in the March election

We can illustrate the above arguments with examples from the 2013 general election. In that election, the media did what it often does – it provided information and occasionally, particularly during the presidential debates, a platform through which the electorate could engage with the presidential candidates. The media also covered the numerous rallies conducted throughout the country, reporting but rarely critiquing the pronouncements of the candidates as part of being 'responsible', 'accountable' and 'peaceful' agent of democracy. The media opted to 'keep the peace', what a presenter in a media conference called peace mongering¹⁵ by steering clear of hate-speech, 'irresponsible' campaigns and scaremongering characteristic of previous elections. However, by seeking to promote peace and stability, the media chose collective self-censorship, and failed to play their social responsibility of providing accurate and 'truthful' reporting that people needed to make informed choices. They also failed to expose serious malpractices and anomalies experienced during that election, and hatemongers who should have been held accountable for their words and deeds.

What's more, when the *Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission* results transmission system failed and was thus unable to transmit results, the media were incapable and unwilling to question the IEBC leadership and incapacity or failure to conduct competitive, free, open and fair elections and the overall integrity of the election.

The assertions above are what we may call amplifying official position,¹⁶ and even propaganda. In other words, instead of challenging and contextualising the issues, and giving deeper meaning to serious issues in Kenya, the media and journalists chose to acquiesce to official pronouncements and positions. In short, the media abdicated its their responsibility – to fulfil its democratic postulate of accurate and truthful reporting – by

engaging in a self-imposed embargo and 'peace' journalism. This failure was driven by fears that it could be accused of fanning or promoting hatred as it was after the bungled 2007 presidential poll. That fear coupled by popular dogmatic belief that the media was somewhat culpable for the post-election violence means journalists and media workers were unwilling to disturb the peace, the fluid and fragile society and young but 'flourishing' democracy.

Pandering to that guilty mentality, the media became hugely emasculated and incapable of offering space to the so-called hate mongers, scaremongers and the like. And by doing this, they denied Kenyans the information they needed to know and understand the candidates, and the leadership they could thus elect and expect. Michela Wrong, a journalist who has covered Africa for nearly two decades, reporting for Reuters, the BBC and *The Financial Times* and author of *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower*, posited that:

... [D]uring briefings by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission at the tallying center in Bomas, just outside Nairobi, when what had been billed as a high-tech, tamper-proof election began to unravel spectacularly. The Kenyan media of old would have gone for the jugular. But when the commission chairman, Issack Hassan, after describing yet another puzzling technical glitch or mysterious delay, asked, "Any questions?" the response was stunned silence. Shortly before handing Uhuru his winner's certificate, the chairman of the election commission congratulated the Kenyan media on their "exemplary behavior." As he did, the screen above his head was showing figures that did not add up. Any journalist worth their salt should start feeling itchy when praised by those in authority. The recent accolades will chafe as more polling irregularities become public. The media should be asking themselves whether, in their determination to act responsibly, they allowed another major abuse to occur right before their eyes.¹⁷

Wrong's assertion above is given credence by Rasna Warah, a Kenyan media commentator, who posed that:

... [W]hen the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission announced a technical glitch in the newly-acquired biometric voter registration system, virtually no media house thought of investigating the cause of the malfunction, or its implications on the election results.

... [A]t that time, the Media Owners Association defended the media's propensity not to report disturbing news by stating that the media did not want to fuel violence, as it had after the 2007 election.¹⁸

In essence, the media failed its democratic responsibility of providing accurate or truthful and robust reporting. They merely echoed state, political parties and political propaganda

¹⁵Brice Rambaud in his keynote presentation on media coverage of elections on 15 November 2013 at the Annual Media Summit organised by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya, 13-15 November 2013.

¹⁶ See, for example, Nesbitt-Larking, Paul (2007) *Politics, Society, and the Media*. 2nd ed. Plymouth: Broadview Press.

¹⁷ Wrong, Michela (2013) 'To be Prudent is to be Partial', *New York Times* [online], 14 March. Available at <<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/14/erring-on-the-side-of-caution-kenyas-media-undercovered-the-election/>> [Accessed 25 August 2013].

¹⁸ Warah, Rasna (2013) 'By abdicating its watchdog role, the media paved way for regressive law', *Daily Nation* [online], 4 November. Available at: <<http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/Opinion/Media-paved-way-for-regressive-law/-/440808/2058582/-/dx2neaz/-/index.html>>. [Accessed 4 November 2013].

without challenging it; they offer mere reportage without serious critique. This view is at odds with the popular idea that the media in Kenya is independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth¹⁹. Accordingly, we must start to question whether the media is independent, whether it is really committed to 'truth', and if it merely reflects the world as the powerful and the elite want it. Perhaps by refusing to speak truth to power, and seeking 'peace' instead of 'truth', the media helped manufacture consent by amplifying and supporting official positions and propaganda.²⁰ The arguments above can be supported by numerous arguments. That the media has grown in Kenya is key to democratic growth. Kenya now has diversity of content and opinion. The country has a multiplicity of sources from whence audiences or people can draw information, or robustly engage with others. But the media competition in Kenya has intensified in recent years due to the proliferation of both legacy and new media platforms. In such environment, sensationalism, scandal, the vulgar and trivia have become more common and more marketable. In other words, the entertainment-agenda news and content now seem to supplant more serious forms of journalism and content. The news media have become more prurient and sensationalist. In effect, the line between serious and less serious journalism is becoming ever more blurred. Many TV and radio stations have lost the public service principle, and become more commercial, obsessing about profitability rather than genuine public interest content. Consider the case of Classic FM's morning show hosted by Maina Kageni and Mwalimu Kingangi. There is no doubt in the minds of many discerning radio consumers that Classic FM and particularly the show use a heady-mix of sex, scandal, and promotional giveaways to stay ahead of competition. This is something comparable to journalistic pornography, exposing that which should be hidden to arouse or generate listenership. Such arguments beg several questions: Of what, 'serious' value is it to society? Is that content of genuine public interest? Whose interest is served by such content?

The move towards entertainment is often based on financial and corporate needs and realities than public interest and civic needs that the media ought to fulfil. This view resonates with arguments that the media is increasingly privileging entertainment at the expense of hard and serious content. Because of changing priorities, the "news media have increasingly become part of the entertainment industry instead of providing a form for informed debate of key issues of public concern".²¹ Just like many parts of the world:

Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty; the intimate relationships of celebrities from soap operas, the world of sport or the royal family are judged more 'newsworthy' than the reporting of significant issues and events of international consequence. Traditional news values have been undermined by new values; 'infotainment' is rampant.²²

In addition to Bob Franklin's argument above, Carl Bernstein posits that:

In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and the loopy are more important than real news. We do not serve our readers and viewers, we pander to them. And we condescend to them, giving them what we think they want and what we calculate will sell and boost ratings and readership. Many of them, sadly, seem to justify our condescension, and to kindle at the trash. Still, it is the role of journalists to challenge people, not merely to amuse them.²³

It is thus evident that the media increasingly pandering to commercialism, where journalistic products like news and current affairs are seen as commodities for sale. In this case, the Kenyan media is changing rapidly from a public service media to a commercial media interested in the financial bottom-line rather than editorial excellence. In essence, market demands require that the products are not only useful but also interesting. The media is thus obsessing with 'interesting' and 'relevant' content, style, and presentation. In short, content must be interesting. The style of presentation must also be appealing and interesting. The presenters must be beautiful, and sexy, and dress properly and attractively. In the broadcast media, it has been said that the focus is now on style over substance. Besides, there is growing coverage of celebrities and socialites who seem to capture and retain audience interest in what could be called 'sleazoid' and 'tabloid' media and journalism.²⁴ Most of these changes are a consequence of changing media trends and commercial and other pressure which demand that products must have use and exchange value for potential customers. Besides, the production of journalism is a business of an industry concerned with the production of media products. As often a private property, many people (including politicians and other such actors who seek to use the media to advance commercial, cultural and political interests), have invested a lot of resources, mostly money, and energy to build and run media business. And it's fairly obvious and commonsensical that they seek returns (like profits and influence) from their investments. Ownership is thus a huge factor, and one of the key determinants, of how the media operates, and what it privileges, focuses on or gives attention.

The fallacy of 'independent' opinion polls

There is an increasing use of opinion polls in Kenya, and they have become part of routine news reporting and current affairs programmes. There is growing use of opinion polls on even mundane issues, like the kind of women Kenyan men prefer, and that men prefer their women in skirts and dresses. While some of these issues are what the media call soft news, the publication of such opinion polls and attendant live radio discussions reveal the extent to which the trivial has triumphed over the weighty. There is of course no doubt that opinion polls are important, and they often provide a "systematic and empirically grounded form of data"²⁵ that can make interesting

¹⁹ Herman, Edward and Chomsky, Noam (1994) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. London: Vintage, p.xi.

²⁰ Herman, Edward and Chomsky, Noam (1994) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. London: Vintage, p.xi.

²¹ Franklin, Bob (1997) *Newszak and News Media*. London: Arnold, p.4.

²² Franklin, Bob (1997) *Newszak and News Media*. London: Arnold, p.4.

²³ Bernstein, Carl (1992) 'The Idiot Culture', *The New Republic*, 8 June, pp.22-28. This quote pp.24-25.

²⁴ See, for example, Allan, Stuart (2004) *News Culture*. 2nd edition. Maidenhead: Open University, p.194.

²⁵ Lewis, Justin and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005) 'Active Citizen or Couch Potato? Journalism and Public Opinion' in Allan, Stuart (ed.) *Journalism: Critical Issues*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp.98-108. This quote p.105.

news. This is because opinion polls are seen as 'relatively scientific and objective forms of citizen representation'²⁶, and should ideally contribute to participatory democracy and influence political behaviour. However, given the 'credibility' of major pollsters like Ipsos Synovate and Infotrak Research and Consulting that conducted many of the opinion polls on political parties and candidates before the election, there is growing concern about their objectivity, accuracy and representativeness and how they are used in the media. Such concerns have fuelled demands for opinion polls to be regulated, and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in fact sought to have opinion polls controlled before the March election. The reason advanced by IEBC chairman Issack Hassan was that opinion polls could polarise the country, spur anxiety and plunge the country into violence if unregulated. He wanted opinion polls stopped at least three months before the election.²⁷

In addition, some political parties also wanted legislation to regulate opinion polls. During debates in Parliament, particularly in support of the Publication of Electoral Opinion Polls Bill, some politicians and in particular the then Garsen Member of Parliament Danson Mungatana said that "... foul opinion polls when consistently released to the public are a recipe for chaos when citizens decide contrary to foul ratings. Kenyans were treated to this in 2007 and we do not want a repeat of the same during the forthcoming elections".²⁸ The subsequent Publication of Electoral Opinion Polls Act now bans pollsters and media from publishing results of such polls five days from the polling day. Section 7(1) of the Act provides that: "A person shall not publish the results of any electoral opinion poll on the day of the election or during the period of five days immediately preceding the date of an election." The provisions of the Act notwithstanding, it is important to point out that the media in Kenya is incapable and even unwilling to critically interrogate opinion polls, to unveil the falsity sometimes employed by the pollsters to sway and even manipulate public opinion, and to 'manufacture consent' among the populace based on fallacious and even false predictions. In addition, even though journalists may be smitten with the findings of opinion polls, and respect the 'scientific' independence of polling data, they may not deeply understand them and the methodologies used to generate the information. In fact, journalists in Kenya hardly question the methods used to collect the data, its analysis and the conclusions. This may in effect affect and even invalidate the credibility of the data or information offered via the media. What seems to interest journalists and media owners and executives are news values that they present. And it is often clear that the more sensational the better. What is more, the powerful are able to 'manage public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns' including financing and manipulating opinion polls and their publication in popular journalistic media.²⁹

The banality of 'experts'

Experts, pundits, and political commentators are often used the world over by media organisations to digest or interpret issues on behalf of media consumers. This is especially important at election time when the media seems and is expected to move towards interpretive style of journalism. The experts or pundits thus become important as they offer explanations and 'expert' opinions on the substance of politics, democracy, voting and elections. In Kenya, there is a growing body of experts who offer all sorts of interpretations to issues. Ideally, the experts or pundits are expected to be opinion leaders, people with expert knowledge and significant experience in their areas of professional training and expertise. However, during Kenya's March election, the media mostly used lawyers, political scientists, scholars, politicians, and election experts, among others.

This was especially common as people waited for the transmission of results and the outcome of the vote. From a media perspective, political, democracy and election experts can be examined using the two (or multi-) step flow theory which posits that individuals (opinion leaders) pay close attention to the mass media and its messages. The opinion leaders then pass on their own interpretations in addition to the media content. This means opinion leaders may influence people's understanding of issues and ultimately the decisions they take.³⁰ However, there seems to be increased scepticism towards experts as people start to question their independence, impartiality and 'objectivity' particularly when they come from particular ethnic backgrounds, if they have previously expressed particular political viewpoints and if they have consulted for particular political groupings. As a result, there was increased scepticism about the impartiality of commentators like Prof. Makau Mutua, Mutahi Ngunyi, Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o, Barrack Muluka, Ahmednassir Abdullahi, Maina Kiai and others whose overt bias and past political pronouncements placed them in particular political camps.

Thus questions arose over the capacity, objectivity, impartiality and efficacy of the experts. In fact, cultural scholar and analyst Joyce Nyairo has questioned the capacity of the pundits, commentators and experts, and suggests that they are often useless. This was particularly evident as Kenyans awaited the announcement of the outcome of the presidential vote. To Nyairo, local TV merely gave people "lousy "stomach fillers" in the name of political analyses Why did our media choose the far lazier route of stretching us out over the coals of great expectations from the tallying centre?"³¹ In other words, the analysts and experts engaged mostly in meaningless studio banter, exchanges that did not have much substance and which did not aid people's understanding of the political and democratic processes. In essence, although the experts and commentators play a role in elections, the media needs to rethink the place of such analyses, and use of experts. What's more, the pundits ought to be trusted and respected people with balanced political viewpoints rather than 'celebrities' or good talkers or orators and pontificators.

Press.

³⁰Weimann, Gabriel (1994) 'Is there a Two-Step Flow of Agenda Setting?' *International Journal of Public Opinion*, 6 (4), pp. 323-341.

³¹Nyairo, Joyce (2013) 'Did the political analysts on broadcast media add any value to Election 2013?' *Daily Nation*, 7 March. Available online at <<http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/opinion/440808-1714136-bi08yqz/index.html>> [Accessed 19 November 2018].

²⁶ Lewis, Justin and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005) 'Active Citizen or Couch Potato? Journalism and Public Opinion' in Allan, Stuart (ed.) *Journalism; Critical Issues*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp.98-108. This quote p.100.

²⁷Chanji, Tobias and Beja, Patrick (2012) 'Electoral team wants opinion polls regulated'. *The Standard* [online], 19 December. Available at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000073247&story_title=Kenya-Electoral-team-wants-opinion-polls-regulated> [Accessed 15 November 2013].

²⁸ Daily Nation (2012) 'Narc-K wants House to fast-track opinion poll Bill'. *Daily Nation* [online], 11 April. Available at <<http://www.nation.co.ke/News/politics/House+urged+to+act+on+opinion+poll+Bill/-/1064/1384216/-/9nb1b0/-/index.html>> [Accessed 16 November 2013].

²⁹See, for example, Lippmann, Walter (1997) *Public Opinion*. New York: Free

Conclusion

That the media is an agent of democracy and a key player in electoral politics is not in doubt. Besides, the media occupies an important place in society with the citizenry and the electorate now increasingly dependent on it for information to make informed political, electoral and democratic choices. However, the increasing rates of commercialism means the media is now part of the market system which panders to the views of the powerful, the government, the corporate world and their leaders, and others with vested interests. In doing this, the media fails to be a true public sphere, or platform and space for genuine and open democratic engagement. In other words, the media seems to have abdicated its social responsibility and failed to fulfil its democratic postulate of accurate reporting. Moreover, the media has become increasingly afraid to publish texts that 'promote' hatred. This is evidenced by the fact that prior to the last general election, the media demonstrated great reluctance (due to peace mongering, and fear of the International Criminal Court, the ICC) to publish material questioning the integrity of the election, and the capacity of the IEBC to effectively

conduct and manage a fair electoral contest. As indicated above, the media was keen on promoting and 'maintaining' peace by offering responsible content devoid of scare-mongering and hate speech. However, such 'peace-mongering' does not help people know the quality of their leaders. By carefully selecting and sanitising content, the media was largely emasculated and unable to be a genuine agent of change and democracy. Besides, as pointed out above, the media were largely incapable and even unwilling to critically interrogate opinion polls, to unveil the falsity sometimes employed by the pollsters to sway and even manipulate public opinion, and to 'manufacture consent' among the populace based on fallacious and even false predictions. In addition, pontificating and overtly biased election pundits did not advance the role of the media as a genuine space or public sphere for the advancement of democracy. The questionable credibility of some of the political commentators and pundits – given their avowed political viewpoints, and support for particular parties and candidates – means the media in Kenya is sometimes not a reliable and credible source of political and election information and opinion.
