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Media Ownership and the Coverage of the 2013 General Election in Kenya

Democracy at the Crossroads

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between journalistic freedom and media concentration in Kenya through the lens of the propaganda model (Baker, 2007) as well as the Media Ownership Theory, as propounded by Shoemaker and Reese (1991). It concludes that media ownership and media concentration have led to a constriction of the diversity of viewpoints in Kenya. The research is based on two surveys: (1) a survey of the public's confidence in the conduct of journalists during the 2013 general election in Kenya, and (2) a survey of journalists' perceptions of the influence of media ownership on journalistic independence in Kenya.

The findings indicate that 71% of journalists believe media diversity in Kenya is at risk, whilst 69% of the respondents believe that the risk is occasioned by unhealthy media ownership trends in Kenya. While almost every journalist surveyed agreed that independence of the media is important to democratic life, more than half (52%) of journalists said media owners had direct editorial influence on their work. The perceived climate of distrust dogging the mainstream media in Kenya and the resultant viewpoint constriction explain why more Kenyans are turning to citizen journalism as an alternative source of information. This survey raises further questions about future implications for journalistic independence given the emergence and dominance of media concentration in Kenya.

Keywords: *public confidence in journalists, media concentration, 2013 general election, media freedom and democracy*

I. Introduction

The media has often been perceived as a political campaign tool to mop up support for and against influential political elites. The journalist and press critic A. J. Liebling opines that freedom of the press belongs to those who own it (as cited in Baker, 2007). This rather cynical remark makes ownership an issue of central focus in media studies today. It could also explain

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why politicians have often demonstrated a penchant for the acquisition of media outlets, namely to propagate their political ideologies to the electorate.

Dean Alger (1998) opines that the news media are absolutely central to the functioning of democracy today, and entertainment and other features and programmes in the mass media, in the aggregate, have powerful effects on society more generally. Further, he contends that how news organizations in particular are operated and, ultimately, who owns and controls the main media we all rely on for information, exchange of ideas and basic images are fundamental in determining whether the democratic process works as intended, or whether it falters or is subverted.

Globally, media ownership has become increasingly concentrated, dominated by a few key players. Perhaps most powerful amongst them is Rupert Murdoch, the founder and CEO of News Corporation. Recently, Murdoch became the subject of a backlash from those who believe his presence is becoming too powerful given his inclination to dabble in European politics and beyond (Reuters, 2012). Murdoch's hegemony is further evidence that the mainstream news that influences the way we think, act and behave comes from an increasingly concentrated source. Another well known media mogul is Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who has a vast media empire controlling three of Italy's largest private television stations, and a further three public stations whilst in office. Berlusconi's media empire has unceasingly become a target of public opprobrium for its potential to sway political gimmickry in Italy in ways that weaken the public sphere and the existence of a plural democracy (Doyle, 2002).

In Kenya, it was observed that as early as 2009 there was a dangerous media ownership trend emerging: Media Ownership Concentration (Mbeke, Ugungu, & Okello-Orlale, 2010, p. 42). Politicians increasingly patronized the media perhaps with an eye to the 2013 general election.

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As the stakes in Kenyan politics rose, politicians increasingly took advantage of media liberalisation directly or indirectly to acquire media interests with which to secure their place in politics. During this period, content from sections of the media outlets were noted to be biased (Simiyu, 2013).

Given the prevailing political environment and the emerging media ownership concentration, the overriding question is whether it was plausible to have the media play the most significant watchdog function in the coverage of the 2013 general election in Kenya?

Mara Einstein (2004) opines that the more concentrated the media industry, the more the constriction of diverse public opinion across the communications landscape. Indeed, critics of the media denounce the hegemony of the media and the ever increasing power of the consolidated media conglomerates. Baker (2007) contends that concentrated media ownership creates the possibility of an individual decision maker exercising enormous, unequal and hence undemocratic, largely unchecked, potentially irresponsible power. Gillian Doyle (2002, p.12) avers that "political pluralism" is about the need, in the interests of democracy, for a range of political opinions and viewpoints to be represented in the media. Democracy would be threatened if any single voice, with the power to propagate a single political viewpoint, were to become too dominant.

A. Problem Statement

The overall research problem addressed in this study is that, despite Kenya making significant strides in realizing freedom of expression in the media industry, media concentration and overbearing political regimes have often conspired to undermine journalistic independence. Theodore Glasser and Marc Gunther define journalistic independence as simply conditions in

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which a journalist can live and operate without entanglements that the journalist may feel as real or potential conflicts of interest (as cited in Geneva Overholser & Kathleen, 2005).

Thus, journalists must be willing, if fairness and accuracy require, to voice differences with their colleagues, whether in the newsroom or the executive suite. This stimulates the intellectual diversity necessary to understand and accurately cover an increasingly diverse society. This intellectual diversity can only be nurtured in a diverse media landscape. Though Kenya seems to have adequate media diversity, the hidden danger is that the "diversity" that the public receives may not be genuine. Only when diverse viewpoints also come from diverse media sources and communicative power is maximally dispersed is the public interest represented in the media in the truly democratic sense.

It is against this backdrop that this study focuses on the emerging media ownership trend in Kenya and journalistic independence and on how interplay of these two factors could have affected the coverage of the 2013 general election.

B. Objectives

1. Determine journalists' perceptions of the influence of media ownership on journalistic independence in Kenya.
2. Determine the public's perception of journalistic independence in Kenya during the coverage of the 2013 general election in Kenya.

C. Hypothesis

The primary research hypothesis is that media ownership in Kenya sways political gimmickry in ways that weaken the public sphere and the existence of a plural democracy. █

II. Conceptual Framework

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This study is premised on the Propaganda Model as propounded by Chomsky and Herman (2002) as well as the Media Ownership Theory as developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991). This model traces the path by which finance and the prevailing power matrix are able to constrain viewpoint diversity and churn out only news content that best serves the interests of the owners of the privately held media outlets. In further lending credence to this model, Chomsky and Herman (2002) assert that news content is the reproduction of the hegemonic interests of the elite. Chomsky (2004) further contends that rather than functioning as the fourth estate, the mass media have taken on the role of mass propagandists, serving as little more than a mouthpiece for the government and the corporate elite.

The Media Ownership Theory, on the other hand, postulates that owners of a media organization have the definitive power over the news content of the newspapers. Shoemaker (1987) found that news organizations financed primarily by "interest" sources are far less likely to place great emphasis on impartiality and newsworthiness. Rather, the news content will more likely be reflective of the psyche of the hegemony.

In buttressing both the Media Ownership Theory and the Propaganda Model, Parenti (1997) avers that the mistakes of the media cannot all be innocent in nature. He outlines six key tools the corporate mass media use to stay on message, specifically the message that suits their corporate masters. These include:

1. Suppression by omission: "Manipulation often lurks in the things left unmentioned" (Parenti, 1997, p.1)
2. Attacking and destroying the target: "The media move from ignoring the story to vigorously attacking it" (Parenti, 1997, p. 2).
3. Labeling: "Media people seek to predetermine our perception of a subject with a positive or

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negative label" (Parenti, 1997, p. 2).

4. Face-value transmission: "One way to lie is to accept at face value what are known to be official lies, uncritically passing them on to the public without adequate confirmations"(Parenti, 1997, p. 3).

5. False balancing: "Both sides are seldom accorded equal prominence" (Parenti, 1997, p. 3).

6. Framing: "By bending the truth rather than breaking it ... communicators can create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy" (Parenti, 1997, p. 3).

Parenti (1997) avers that these six tools ultimately help avoid displeasing those in political and economic power. McChesney and Nichols (2002) opine that it is this shift in emphasis that ultimately poses a direct threat to the expansion of the democratic space in societies.

McChesney (1999) argues that any inquiry into how media ownership in monopoly capitalism inhibits the capacity of citizens to attain a democratic genuinely egalitarian participatory democracy must include studies of how system-wide propaganda that favors the system itself is maintained. McChesney (1999) argues that Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1988) is essential insofar as it provides a framework of filters for understanding how news systems operate to produce opinions that favor the political economic status quo. Looked at from this perspective, it will be foolhardy for one to argue that bias in media content is more of an individual journalist's liberal bias than a corporation's conservative bias. Suffice it to say that such a view completely ignores those that journalists work for. Granted, reporters could be as liberal as they wish; however, this would not change what news they would be allowed to report or how they could report it.

III. Media Coverage of the General Election in Kenya

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Many journalists in Kenya allege that their inaction in failing to point out electoral malpractices was due to the fear of the consequences in the 2007 post-poll chaos, regarding which they (journalists) were largely indicted for fuelling tensions in the electorate. Ahead of the 2013 general election, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) jointly with the Media Owners Association (MOA) and editors developed and signed a code of conduct to guard against their journalists fanning violence, as happened in 2007. Media outlets were asked to avoid reporting in a manner liable to incite the public. By extension, media outlets were also asked not to conduct their own vote tallies as they did in 2007 but instead to rely on the IEBC official tallies.

However, some of the guidelines relating to hate speech and incitement in the said document are ambiguous. Such ambiguity could provide a fertile ground for an overbearing political regime to constrict journalistic freedom. In fact, such hastily developed electoral guidelines actually inhibit the presentation of controversial issues of public importance to the detriment of the public and in degradation of the editorial prerogative of broadcast journalists. It is plausible that constrained by such policies, journalists could condone acts of politically inclined individuals who profess to do something for an honourable, publicly declared motive while really doing it from a disreputable hidden one.

Henry Maina of Article 19 (Kenyan Chapter) opines that it is incumbent upon journalists of repute to point out yawning gaps between a society's democratic ideals and its practice. He sees media's inability to probe or take to task Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) over the polling procedure and allegations of vote-rigging as irresponsible journalism. Such journalism is characterized by partisanship and/or the brown envelope syndrome.

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According to Shitemi Khamadi of Internews an international media development organization, it would seem that the biggest concern in Kenya today is the willingness of individual journalists to kowtow to corporate and government interests given the fact that media organizations are owned and controlled by some of the largest and richest corporations which are in turn owned and controlled by individuals who dabble in politics. It would, thus, be difficult for such media moguls to employ or keep in their employment journalists who consistently cover news in a political tone that they do not like. This could perhaps explain why journalists in the employment of such media outlets allegedly left so many things unsaid and said many things inaccurately.

According to McQuail (2000), organizational imperatives tend to override personal preferences except at the highest level, and media organizational "policy" is more a collective than an individual phenomenon. Such "policies" are more often than not determined by an organization's political allegiance. These ensure that only those journalists with similar political orientations are hired in their organizations. Besides, given the fact that most journalists are in the middle class, they are likely to be subservient to their benefactors read employers.

Gans (1979) opines that the middle-class position of the journalistic profession is a guarantee of their subservience to the capitalist system. In this regard, journalists see and interpret the world through similar lenses, in much the same way as the real holders of power. Herein, the real holders of power are media moguls who are also powerful politicians and who have created monolithic media empires with a view to propagating their political ideologies to the public. Chomsky (2002) concurs with this view when he opines that because much of the mainstream media is owned by corporate conglomerates, the media's coverage of political issues often

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reflects these corporate interests. They do this by deliberately outlawing opinions that media owners do not like.

McQuail (2005) avers that diversity of media content stands in opposition to monopoly, uniformity, conformity and consensus, but is the liberalization of the airwaves a panacea to such maladies? This is not necessarily the case. Political elites may buy existing media and/or establish new ones to ensure that what is referred to as "media landscape" is skewed in their favour. McQuail (2005) doubts the efficacy of privately held media outlets in serving the public interest. McQuail (ibid) argues that such media are likely to be in the monopolistic ownership of a capitalist class, nationally or internationally organized to serve the interests of that class. In this respect, the media work ideologically by disseminating the ideas and world views of the ruling class, denying alternative ideas which might lead to change or to growing consciousness of the proletariat.

Baker (2007) captures the affront to democracy when he opines that media concentration is a major impediment to the provision of quality media products as well as to the accomplishment of the democratic standard concerning classless dispersal of communicative power. In media concentration, as media firms unite and profit becomes the main priority, the quality of the product and the numbers of viewpoints represented are perilously constricted.

Baker (2007) however, focuses on the fact that media concentration will bring unequal democratic power to the large corporations that own many of the media outlets. His view is rooted in a normative theory of democracy that values democracy as an end, not merely as a means, because it embodies the values of equality and autonomy. Increased concentration leads inevitably to a public loss of democratic power.

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This loss of democratic power comes from a lack of diversified media sources. He further states that a single media entity could potentially provide an elaborately diverse system of viewpoints, but these viewpoints would run the risk of sharing crucially similar elements since they are indeed products of the same source. Thus, although diverse viewpoints might satisfy the public, the hidden danger is that the "diversity" they receive is not genuine. Only when diverse viewpoints also come from diverse media sources and communicative power is maximally dispersed is the public interest represented in the media in the truly democratic sense.

Bagdikian (2004) opines that such concentrated ownership ultimately gives media moguls more power than exercised by any despot or dictator in history. He notes that the steady increase in media power enjoyed by media conglomerates has translated into a steady accumulation of power in politics. Croteau and Hoynes (2001) suggest that the structural constraints created by the primacy of business concerns have prevented the media from "promoting active citizenship, education, and social integration" through their messages. Instead of media that are diverse, innovative, substantive, and independent, we have media whose content is homogenized, imitative, trivial and constrained. Such ownership abrogates the right of journalists to operate professionally. As Gans (2003) argues, journalists find themselves in a situation of "disempowerment," precisely due to the corporate and commercial imperatives of the industry. The humanity of journalists is evident in some content, as much when they break with the official line as when they consciously convey propaganda.

This is in part informed by the fact that mass media production is primarily a business, and that the metrics for a successful business are different from those for a successful democracy. In short, the interests of media producers may not intersect with the interests (or at least the ideals) of the consumers. As an example of this viewpoint, James Squires, former editor of the *Chicago*

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Tribune, referred to the modern press as "no longer an institution dedicated to the public interest, but rather a business run solely in the interest of the highest possible level of profitability" (as cited in Miller, 1998, p. 21).

Kuypers (2002) affirms that the media demonstrate an effortless readiness to press forward with their own principles concerning appropriate public policy (as cited in Miller, 1998, p. 202). Kuypers (2002) believes that the whole purpose of the mass media is to employ frames through the use of "certain keywords, metaphors, concepts, and symbols" (p. 199) which work together to create the relevancy of one issue over another. Kuypers (2002) found out that press coverage runs under the mask of an explicit agenda whereby the media manipulate their own people on contentious issues.

IV. Media Ownership, Concentration and Political Patronage in Kenya

- *Media and Political Patronage in Kenya*

There is no gainsaying that the political class in the country has invested heavily in the media industry. Media Max, a group associated with Uhuru Kenyatta, has taken over *The People Daily* of veteran politician Kenneth Matiba, *K24 TV*, and the Kikuyu language radio station *Kameme FM*, both formerly owned by media entrepreneur Rose Kimotho. (Mbeke et.al, 2010). TV Africa Holdings is also owned by the Kenyatta family. In 2007, TV Africa Holdings bought *STV* from renowned journalist Hilary Ng'weno and now uses the channel to transmit *Al Jazeera*. The latest addition to Media Max is *Milele FM*.

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Kalee Ltd, associated with Deputy President William Ruto, has *Kass FM*, *Kass Weekly*, and *Kass TV*. *Kass FM*, a station named as guilty of inciting violence in the 2007 post-poll chaos, had (by the time of this research) allegedly sold a 49 percent stake to William Ruto. The latter is also associated with *Change FM*, a radio station that broadcasts to a largely Kalenjin audience in the expansive Rift Valley region of Kenya.

Charity Ngilu, a former Cabinet Minister and one of the allies of Uhuru Kenyatta has also acquired *Mbaitu FM/SioKimau*, a Kamba FM station broadcasting in upper eastern Kenya. Three other allies of Uhuru Kenyatta have invested in the media industry in Kenya. These include Najib Balala who bought *Sheki FM* and *Pilipili FM* that broadcast in the coastal town of Mombasa. Ali Mwakwere owns *Kaya FM*, which he aggressively used at one time to re-gain his seat in a by-election in 2011. Kenya Prime Minister Raila Odinga also owns an uptown FM station, *Radio Umoja*, which targets the youth. A political ally of Raila Odinga, Jakoyo Midiwo, on his part owns *Lake Victoria FM*.

Other media outlets include KBC, the state broadcaster that owns over 20 radio stations while Nation Media Group (NMG) owns seven newspapers, and several magazines. NMG also owns Nation Television (NTV). According to Othieno Nyanjom (2012), previously NMG was perceived to be against the Moi regime and in time for Kibaki. Othieno further states that it is unsurprising that NMG supported Kibaki's re-election bid and his Party of National Unity (PNU) in 2007 for in fact an NMG director was at the heart of the PNU campaign effort.

The Standard Group (SG), whose largest shareholder is Baraza Limited (owned by the family of former President Daniel Moi), endorsed Uhuru Kenyatta to vie for the country's presidency in 2002. Othieno (2012) further points to anecdotal information which suggests that Moi controls

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an estimated 85% of the company (much of it through proxy), thereby making other shareholders functionally inconsequential.

In terms of newspaper circulation, the *Daily Nation* leads, followed by the *Standard*, *Taifa Leo*, *The Star*, *Business Daily*, and *The People*. While circulation is low in Kenya with figures in 2010, for example, indicating that only 320,000 newspapers were bought daily, the readership is significantly higher given the fact that about 10 people share a newspaper daily. This is supported by findings by Ipsos-Synovate that says Kenya's daily print readership stands at slightly over 3 million while the weekend figure is slightly over 6 million. Weekly newspapers like *Saturday Nation*, *Sunday Nation*, the *Standard* on Saturday, the *Standard* on Sunday, *The East African*, as well as *Citizen Express* all have a wide readership.

A. Media Concentration in Kenya

A common threshold for declaring an industry highly concentrated is if the top four companies control 50% or more of the industry's revenue. This research will therefore look at media concentration in the newspapers, Free to air TV, and radio.

1. Newspapers

Using the Concentration Level for the first Four Companies (CR4) ratio, only in respect to the percentage of sales, indicated that the percentage of the first two and four newspapers was 81.2% and 96.7% respectively. See figure 1 below.

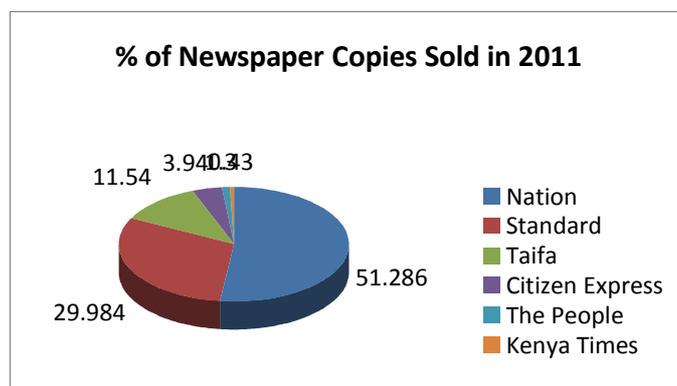


Figure 1. Newspaper copies sold in 2011

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying that the Kenyan media market is heavily concentrated.

2. TV

The free to air TV market is also concentrated most notably in terms of viewership. *Citizen TV, NTV, KBC* and *KTN TV* had 39%, 20%, 19% and 12% respectively.

3. Radio

In the radio industry, there is moderate concentration at the Group level. There are five main radio groups, with no player having a market share above 35-40%. There is also a long tail of independent radio stations with shares below 5%.

B. Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya

Media laws in Kenya are scattered in various government laws, documents and reports in various ministries and semi-autonomous government agencies (SAGAs). The key policy instruments that guide media policy in Kenya are the ICT Policy (2007), the ICT Strategy (2006), ICT Bill (2007), Media Act 2007, CCK Act 1998, and Freedom of Information Bill 2008. Some of the provisions in these key policy instruments are an antithesis to freedom of media. Furthermore, Kenya does not have a single editorial policy. Instead, media houses have their own

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which are generally customized from global standards. It is also instructive to note that unlike America, Kenya does not have anti-trust laws which limit media concentration.

V. Research Methodology

This is a survey research. Two separate surveys were conducted with a view to ascertaining:

1. Public's confidence in the conduct of journalists during the 2013 general election in Kenya.
2. Journalists' perceptions of the influence of media ownership on journalistic independence in Kenya.

There was a piloting of the structured interview to a small representative sample after which journalists were interviewed between the 10th of April 2013 and the 20th of April 2013. In the first and second surveys, the correlation was found to be 82% and 86% respectively, thus meeting reliability standards. (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000).

In the first survey, a survey of voting-age people was carried out in five counties in Kenya. An eleven-item closed-ended questionnaire was developed and administered to one hundred respondents in towns from the five counties. The counties covered by the study were: Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu, Nyeri and Uasin Gishu. This provided for an adequate national demographic configuration for the study. Within each of the five zones, a total of 20 persons were selected to respond to the question items in the questionnaire. The respondents were selected based on a dimensional sampling approach to make sure that the dimensions of sex, age and education, and the social economic status (SES) are represented.

The study was carried out with the help of five trained research assistants from March 10, 2013 to April 14, 2013. However, the research frame made reference to events six months before

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and two months after the general election. This is the period immediately before and after the elections when the memory of the media coverage was more likely to be fresh in people's minds.

In the second survey, journalists working for the mainstream media outlets in Kenya were interviewed to establish whether there was a plausible link between ownership of the media outlets and manifest bias in the news content. Participants were obtained through snowballing. A total of one hundred journalists from both the print and broadcast media participants responded to a series of questions rated using a Likart Scale model. All the respondents were assured of complete anonymity to facilitate candid answers.

VI. Findings

A. Public Perception of Media

The initial question that the respondents were asked was whether they were generally satisfied with the media coverage of the 2013 general election. To what extent were you satisfied with the amount of media coverage of the 2013 general elections? See figure 2 below.

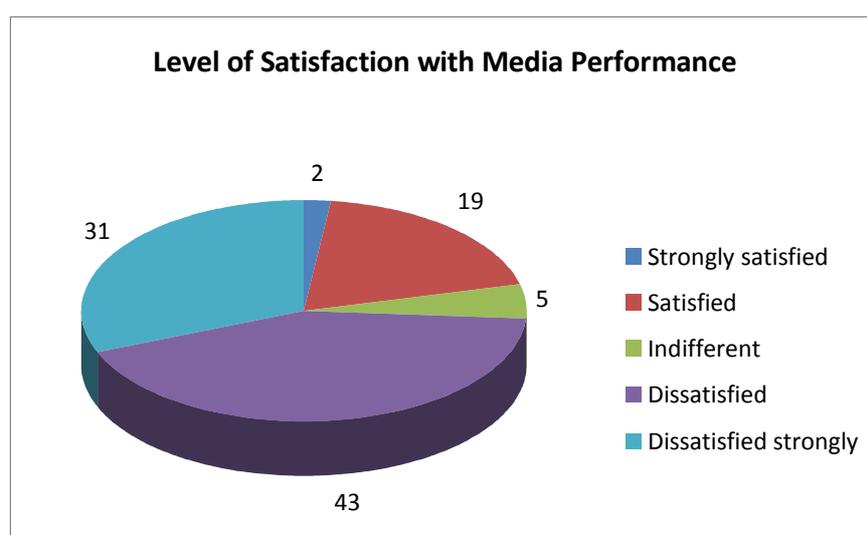


Figure 2. Level of satisfaction with media performance

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The findings indicate that 74 percent of the respondents were generally dissatisfied with the media performance of the 2013 general elections whilst 21 percent of them were generally satisfied.

In order to assess the reachability of the print and broadcast media, the respondents were to respond to the following question: Between broadcast media (Radio/TV) and print media (newspapers/ magazines), which of these media gave you a more comprehensive account of the 2013 general elections?

The findings indicate that 66% of the respondents agreed that broadcast media gave them a more comprehensive account of the 2013 general elections while 32% of the respondents paid tribute to print media. The remaining 2% of the respondents felt that none of the above media were satisfactory in their coverage of the election. It can, therefore, be concluded that more people in Kenya get their news from radio and television compared to newspapers. See figure 3 below:

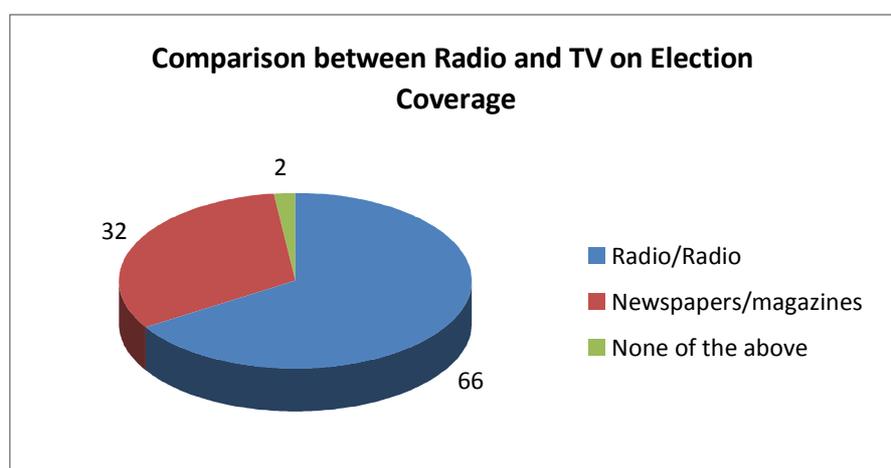


Figure 3. Comparison between radio and TV on election coverage

The research also sought to investigate the perception of the public confidence and trust in the performance of the publicly-owned/state radio and TV stations. In this regard, the respondents

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were to rate the performance of public broadcasting (KBC Radio and TV) stations in the coverage of the 2013 elections in terms of public confidence and trust. See figure 4.

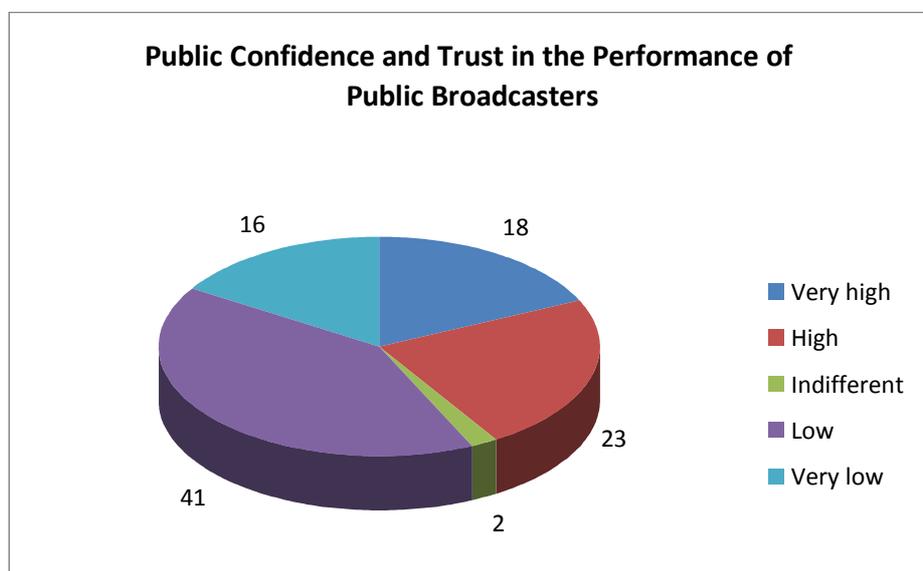


Figure 4. Public confidence and trust in the performance of public broadcasters

The question above is crucial and the responses indicate a general climate of distrust of the public media. Only 18% of the respondents rate the public broadcast media very high. In a contrast between high and low, 23% of the respondents rated the performance of public broadcast media in the election as high whilst 57% of them perceive the state media performance in election coverage as low. 2% of the respondents were indifferent to this question item.

When asked to assess the coverage of private radio and TV stations in the coverage of the 2013 election in terms of public confidence and trust, the findings clearly showed that the public's lack of confidence in the private media is much higher than that in public media: 64% and 57% respectively. Compare figure 4 above and figure 5 below.

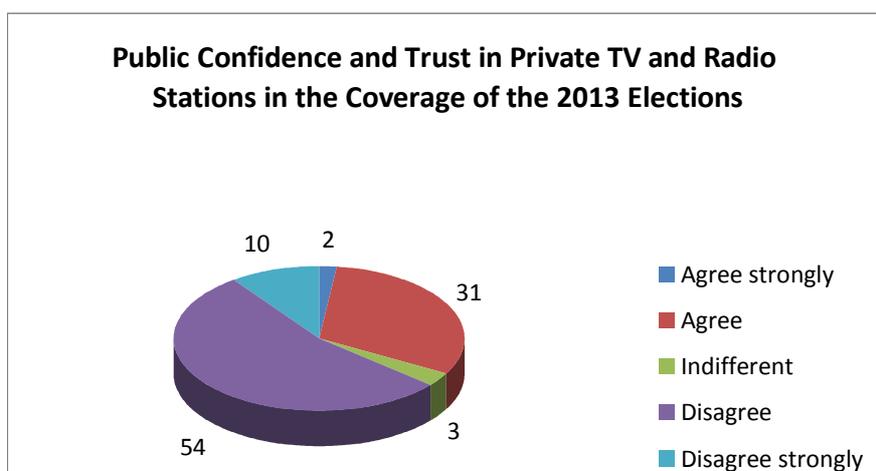


Figure 5. Public confidence and trust in private TV and radio stations in the coverage of the 2013 elections

With regard to the public's evaluation of the performance of the print media in the election coverage, over half of the respondents felt that the print media's performance was below par. See figure 6.

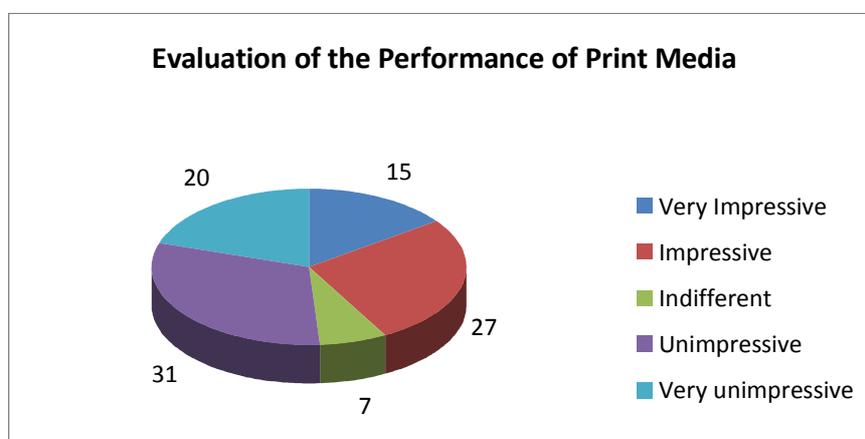


Figure 6. Evaluation of the performance of print media

This question is crucial in respect to the public's confidence in the performance of Kenya's print media. The survey shows that 51% of the respondents think that the print media were unbalanced.

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There is also a cloud of distrust by the public regarding the freedom of journalists. The majority of the respondents were of the view that the journalists did not enjoy reasonable press freedom during the coverage of the 2013 elections. See Figure 7.

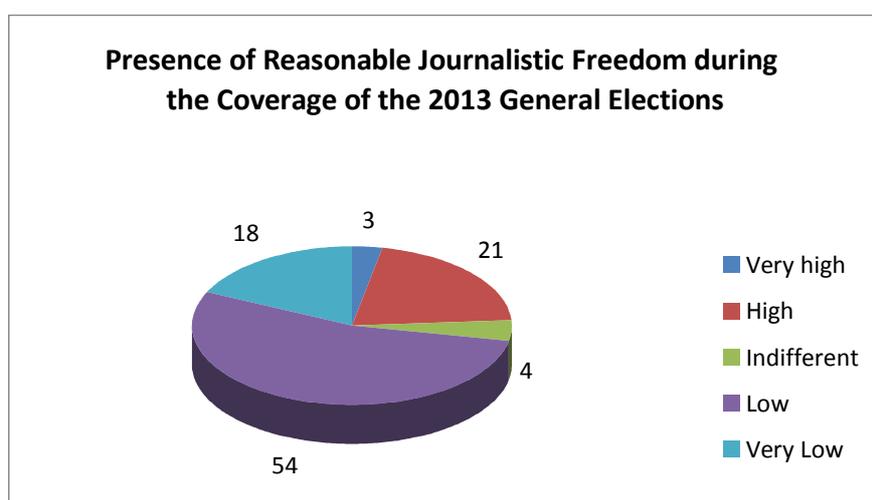


Figure 7. Presence of reasonable journalistic freedom during the 2013 election coverage

The above findings indicate that only 21 percent of the respondents think that journalists were working under conditions of reasonable press freedom during the 2013 general elections, while 72 percent claim there was no reasonable press freedom.

Even though most respondents would not have a very comprehensible or detailed understanding of how journalists work, there was a widely shared perception that the conditions for freedom of expression in Kenya were largely unfavourable to journalists.

Quite crucial too was whether the principle of equal coverage of political parties and candidates was adhered to by media establishments in the 2013 general election. The findings indicate that there was a general perception in the public that the media's coverage was skewed to favour certain political parties and individuals.

Only 6 percent of the respondents agreed that there was equal coverage of political parties and candidates during the 2013 general elections. However, 77% of the respondents said there was

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no equal coverage of political parties and candidates by media practitioners during the elections. There was a general perception that the media were not providing a balanced, fair coverage of different political options other than that of Jubilee and CORD coalitions. See Figure 8 below.

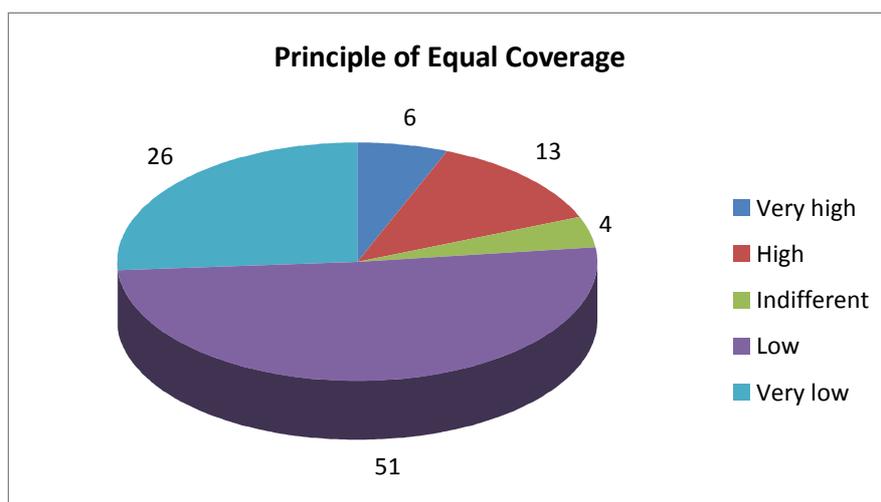


Figure 8. Principle of equal coverage

When asked to rate the perception of bias in the media's handling of the election, 63% of the respondents thought that there was presence of bias. See figure 9.

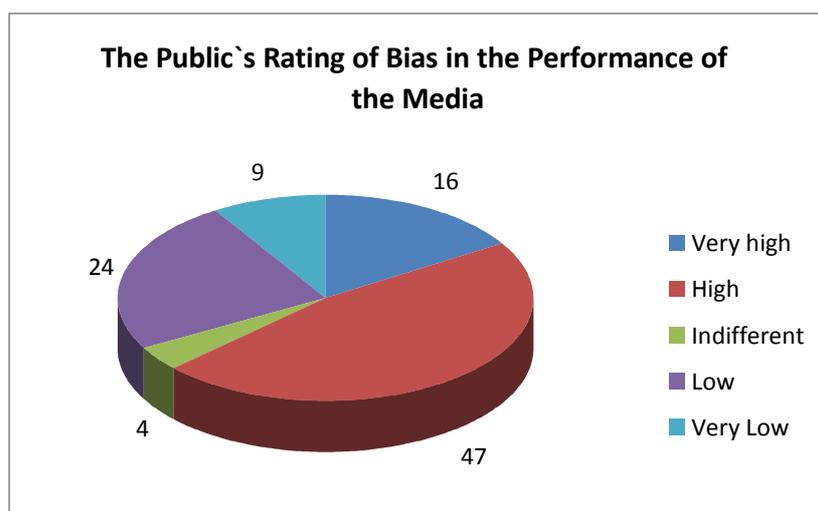


Figure 9. The public's rating of bias in the performance of the media

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The research then sought to discover the source of bias in the coverage of the election. In this regard, the following question was asked: Was there bias in the media content? If yes, what was responsible for the bias in news and other reports by the media during the 2013 general election? The findings indicate that most respondents (55 %) identified ownership and control structure of media organizations as a major reason for biased reporting during the 2013 general elections whilst 22% of the respondents blamed the scenario on the brown envelope syndrome in the media circles. 23% of the respondents identified irresponsible journalism as the reason for bias in news and other reports during the 2013 general elections.

On the issue of public confidence in the media performance in the 2013 general election in Kenya, the respondents were asked to state the degree to which they think that the media in Kenya probed the results of the elections as announced by IEBC.

The findings show that out of the 120 respondents, only 14 percent said that the media probed the results of the elections as announced by the IEBC while 84% of the respondents claimed that the media did not, despite widespread charges of vote count anomalies. See figure 10.

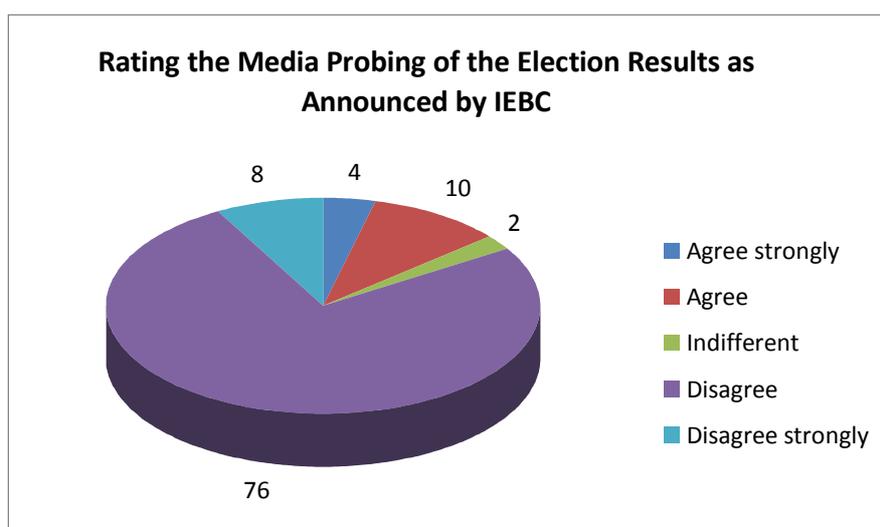


Figure 10. Rating the media probing of the election results as announced by IEBC

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This research is also intended to assess the role of citizen journalism in the communicative landscape in the country. In this regard, this research asked the following question: To what extent do you agree that citizen journalism played a positive role in the coverage of the 2013 general election in Kenya? See Figure 11.

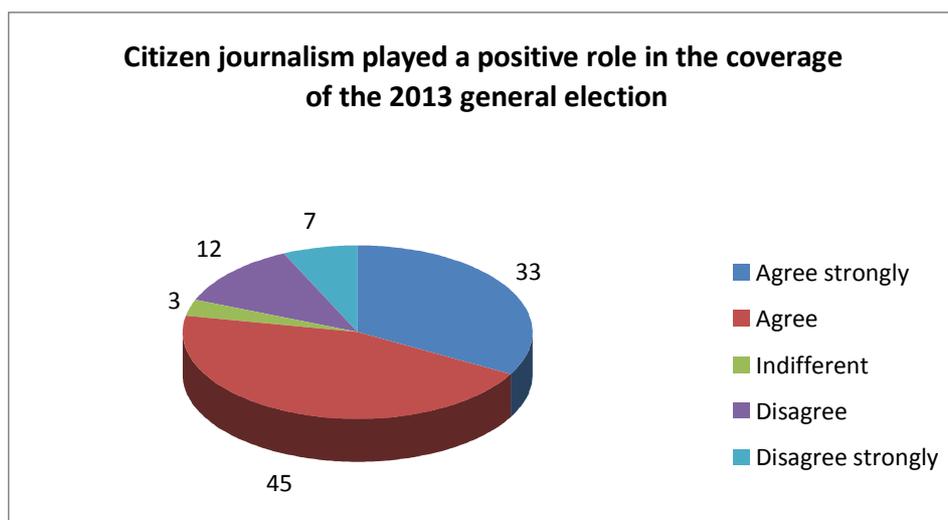


Figure 11. Citizen journalism played a positive role in the coverage of the 2013 general election

The findings show that the majority of respondents agreed that the new media/citizen journalism played a positive role in the coverage of the 2013 general election in Kenya. 78% of the respondents agreed that the new media were instrumental in the coverage of the 2013 election. 19% of the respondents disagreed whilst only 3% of the respondents were indifferent.

B. Journalists' Perception of Media Ownership Influence on Journalistic Independence

A seven-item closed-ended questionnaire was developed and administered to one hundred journalists on a snowballing basis. This was deemed the most appropriate method given that some media houses had forbidden journalists in their employment from granting any interviews on matters touching on the conduct of their organization in the coverage of the 2013 general election. The researcher and the research assistants had to thus purposively

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identify a few journalists who led them to other journalists willing to grant the researcher an interview in privacy.

When asked about their perception of how important independence of media was in enhancing democratic life (Q1), an overwhelming majority (98%) of the surveyed journalists across the three newspapers felt that independence of media is important to democratic life. However, when asked to rate the journalistic independence given to express their own individual position when commentating on the 2013 general election in Kenya (Q.2), 66% of the respondents felt that they had no independence to express their views on the general election. Only 33% of the respondents disagreed whilst only 1% could neither agree nor disagree with this statement. See figures 12.

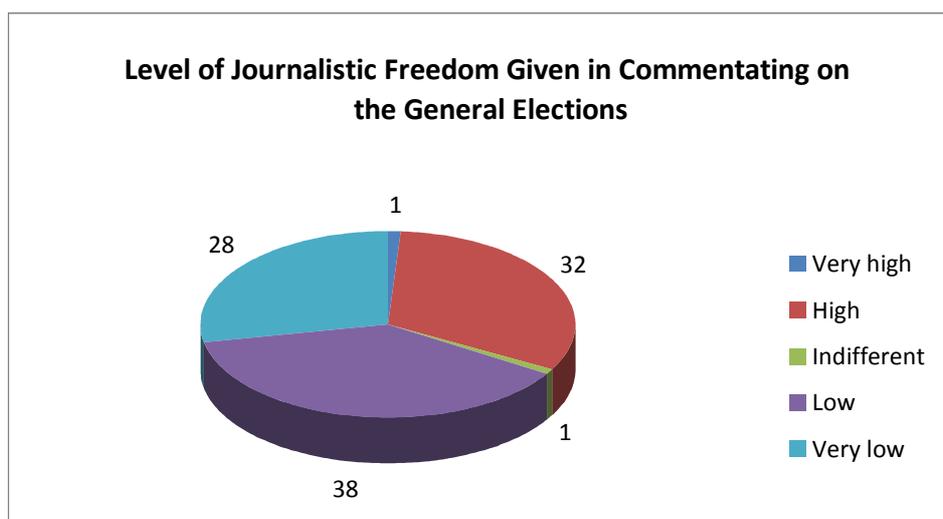


Figure 12. Level of journalistic freedom given in commentating on the general elections

When asked (Q.3) whether the owners of their respective media organizations did influence the editorial content during the coverage of the 2013 general election in Kenya, more than half of the respondents (51%) agreed that media owners influenced editorial content in the coverage of

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the 2013 general election whilst 41% of the respondents felt that the media owners did not influence the editorial content. See figure 13.

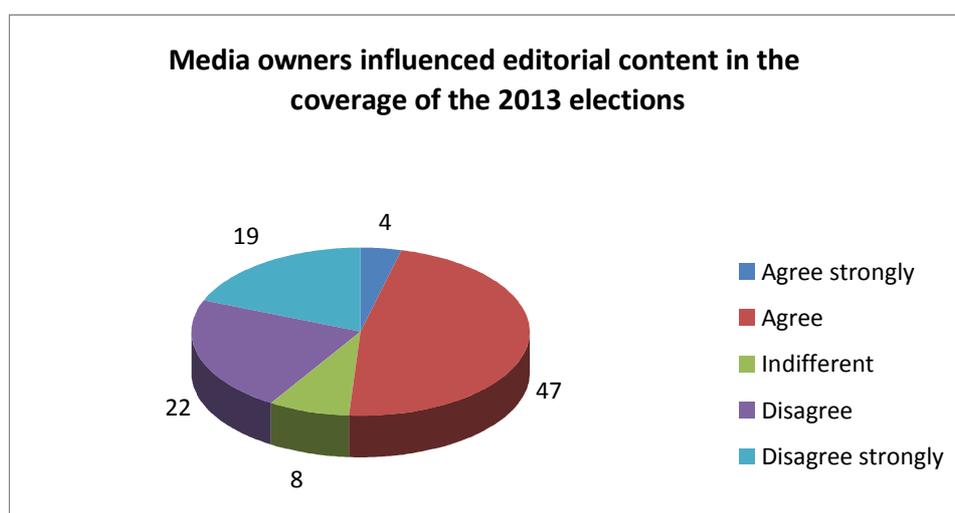


Figure 13. Media owners' influence on editorial coverage of the 2013 elections

Further, this research sought to discover whether there was a significant shift in the media outlets' editorial policy during the election period compared to other times (Q.4). 53% of the respondents felt that the editorial shift was high while 45% thought that the editorial shift was absent. Two respondents could neither agree nor disagree.

In exploring the question of media diversity in Kenya and its impact on journalistic work (Q.5), the following question was asked: To what extent do you agree that Kenya has adequate regulations to protect diversity in broadcast media? The findings indicate that the majority of journalists believe that media diversity in Kenya is threatened. See figure 14.

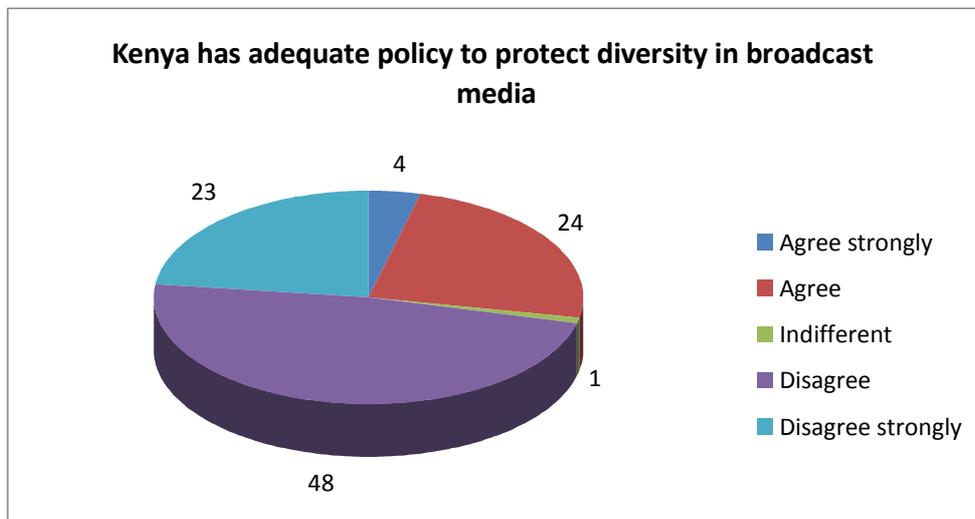


Figure 14. The existence of adequate policy to protect diversity in broadcast media

Only 28% believe the regulations to protect diversity in Kenya’s broadcast media is adequate. The fact that 71% of those surveyed do not believe that Kenya has adequate media diversity and agree that legislation is needed to protect diversity is indicative of a worrying trend insofar as journalistic freedom is concerned.

This survey also looked at private media ownership and what this means for journalistic independence (Q.6). Journalists were required to rate the extent of their agreement with the statement: Media diversity is at risk in Kenya due to media ownership trends. See Figure 15.

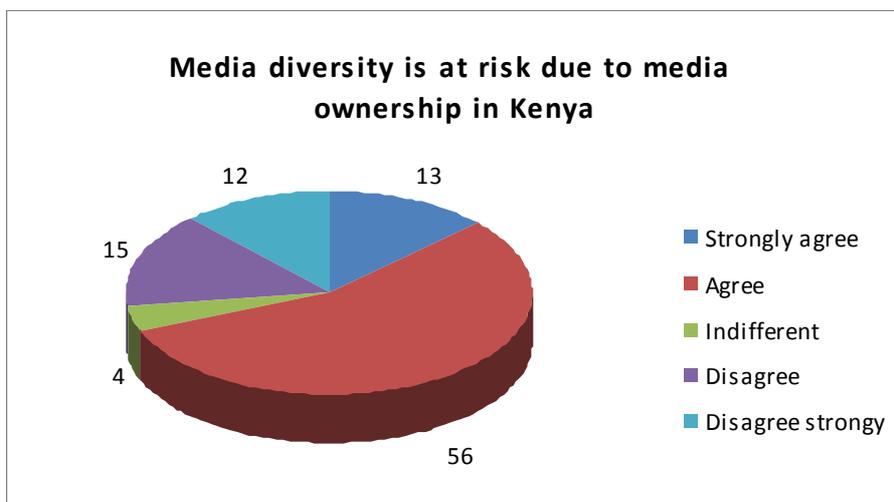


Figure 15. Media diversity is at risk due to media ownership in Kenya

Again, over 69 percent believe that diversity is at risk due to trends in ownership. There is no denying that this raises some very serious questions that the country must begin to address.

In order to find out the perception of the respondents regarding the role of the new media in Kenya (Q.7), the researcher asked the respondents to state the extent to which they agreed with the statement that citizen journalism protects media diversity in Kenya. See figure 16.

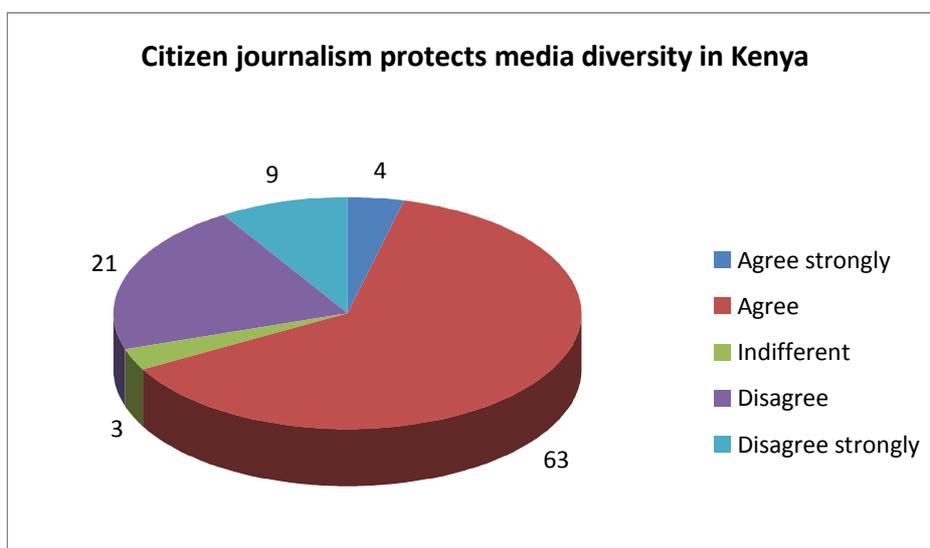


Figure 16. Citizen journalism protects media diversity in Kenya

The research established that 67% of the respondents agree that new citizen journalism is helping to protect diversity, while 3% were indifferent. A further 30.4% disagreed with the view that citizen journalism protects media diversity in Kenya.

Finally, in assessing the role played by the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), respondents were asked to rate the level of confidence that they had in the performance of MCK before and during the 2013 general election in Kenya (Q.9). See Figure 17.

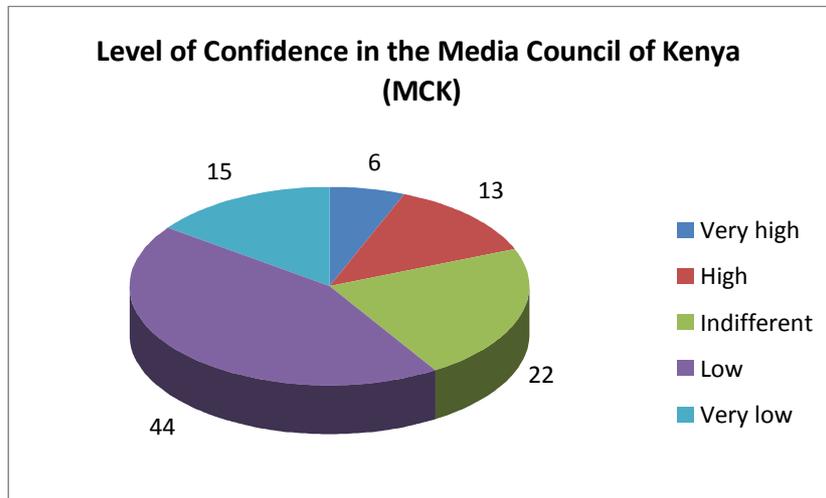


Figure 17. Level of confidence in the media council of Kenya (MCK)

The findings show that only 19 percent of the respondents rate the performance of MCK as high. This research could not independently verify why so many respondents (22 percent) were indifferent to this question. However, the fact that 59 percent of the respondents rate the performance of MCK as low is perhaps indicative of MCK's inability as a media regulator to act independently. This is disquieting insofar as regulation of the quality of journalism in Kenya is concerned.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

The thrust of this study was on the responsibility of the media in the election monitoring processes. It cannot be gainsaid that the media's watchdog role is instrumental in the expansion of democratic space. However, the media have not often lived up to this expectation. As this research indicates, the majority of the Kenyan electorate perceived bias and partisanship in the media's coverage of the 2013 election. Even more perturbing is the perception by journalists themselves that they did not enjoy journalistic freedom in the coverage of the 2013 general

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election in Kenya. These journalists believe that much of the perceived bias and partisanship is largely due to the media ownership concentration and often times an overbearing government. This observation reflects the argument of Chomsky and Herman (1988) that news coverage tends not to question information from government. Rather, these media outlets serve as megaphones for governmental and corporate propaganda.

This study proposes several recommendations to protect viewpoint diversity and journalistic independence. The first recommendation is the need to provide clear guidelines for monitoring hate speech and incitement in Kenya's broadcast and print media. The guidelines as currently constituted are ambiguous and thus provide a potential ground for an overbearing political regime to further constrict journalistic freedom. Secondly, there is need for the government to put in place an appropriate set of regulatory measures to address distortions in particular markets to guard against unhealthy media ownership trends that may eventually suffocate viewpoint diversity in news coverage. Thirdly, there ought to be safeguards for editorial independence. In this regard, declaration contracts must be signed by both editors and media owners to ensure that the latter do not interfere in editorial matters. Fourthly, there is a clear need for the promotion of citizen journalism in order to expand the diversity of information choices for the public. Finally, it is imperative that public institutes conduct an audit into the conduct of MCK in the period leading to and during the 2013 general elections. Currently, it would appear that MCK is either a captive of MOA or at best a facade for continued partisan interests. More importantly, there is need to review the Media Act to produce a more effective framework for MCK operations. MCK must get government funding without strings attached to make it independent of the colossal MOA.

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