Preface

Developing nations have often been characterized by high levels of poverty, low levels of industrialization, low literacy levels, authoritarian regimes, huge economic inequalities, civil wars, ethnic conflicts and strict media control and censorship. The media in developing countries is a key player in politics and as a result, it is often under strict control by authoritarian regimes that often use it to achieve their own political interests at the expense of public interest. This book was necessitated by the fact that, today, the primary source of political information in Africa and the developing world is the media whose existence provides a platform for various interest groups. Consequently, political journalists are under constant pressure to create a platform for political discourse for the public. While journalists have a right to protect public interest, they are constantly grappling with numerous challenges that range from ethnic; access to information; objectivity; training; media ownership; editorial policy; to regulation and censorship. However, creating platforms for political expression in Africa is not the sole responsibility of the media. To create a forum conducive for the free expression by citizens there is need for all political actors and interest groups to take responsibility in ensuring that everyone can express their political opinions regardless of the political climate in their relevant countries.

This book seeks to undertake an analysis of the media as actors and influencers in politics in developing countries and thus analyses the structure of the media in these nations and how it affects its coverage of political events. Press freedom and liberalization of airwaves is also discussed in detail as a key component of democracy. Different developing countries have varying levels of press freedom and liberalization of airwaves. For instance, while countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana have experienced liberalization of airwaves, countries such as Burundi, Eritrea, Burma, Syria and Equatorial Guinea rank among countries with the high levels of censorship by the political system. Politics and governance are major issues in developing nations, and questions need to be critically raised about the role of the media, particularly the new media formats. The book goes further to identify various forms of media formats in developing countries and how they can be adopted to appropriately report political events. In addition, the book engages in discussions on how media ownership, editorial policies and other players such as advertisers significantly influence the coverage of political news by the media.

RATIONALE

The idea for this book was born out of numerous conversations and concerns about the state of governance in developing countries and the place of media in the various countries. The conversations were between colleagues carrying out research on media, politics and governance in developing countries.
Often controversial, was the role of the media was in politics. Is it a neutral agent or a political actor? How significant is the media as a political actor in developing countries? The book intends to answer those questions and also take a step further by giving direction on what role the media can play in shaping the political landscape of developing countries.

Contributors to this book have critically analyzed the emerging new technologies with regard to coverage of politics, access by the users, propagation of hate speech and negative ethnicity. They have also explored the underlying dynamics of the relationship between media and politics in a fast changing developing world and detailed how media institutions in Africa and the rest of the developing world are shaping the political landscape. It is therefore hoped that this book can be used as a premier reference source by academics, researchers and media practitioners. It is also an important textbook for advanced level undergraduates and postgraduates, particularly those studying media and politics. The book will also be a useful source of reference for the civil society organizations and other Non-Governmental engaged in promoting democracy, safeguarding press freedom and governance issues in developing nations.

**QUEST FOR ANSWERS**

The question of whether the media is a key player in influencing the politics of developing nations is what led us to embark on the book project with hopes of getting various views from researchers, scholars and media practitioners in developing countries. The question was constantly raised during informal discussions among colleagues, and also during seminars, workshops and conferences. These conversations were also enriched by discussions in the lecture rooms that we have had with various groups of students over the years both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The editors in conjunction with Winston Mano (University of Westminster) were also involved in a conference on media and elections in Africa that was held in March 2014 in the University of Westminster, United Kingdom. The conference was organized by Africa Media Centre, University of Westminster and Moi University, Kenya, in association with the UK-AFRICA Media and Democracy Research Network. A follow up workshop was held in Kenya in May 2014 on Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa, and was part of an on-going project on media and democracy in Africa. The events were funded by The British Academy, and after the workshop, it became obvious that there was need for a book that would detail the state of media and its role in political change in developing countries.

As the editors of the book, we are pleased that we are able to present such a book volume that tackles the question of the political influence of the media in developing countries from a critical perspective. There has been a need for a book that details the relationship between the media and politics in developing countries, from the perspective of the media as a key player in the relationship, and we hope that this book meets that expectation. In the course of working on the book the editors attended several workshops and conferences on media and politics in order to critically assess the ongoing discourses on the state of the media in developing nations.

**MEDIA AND POLITICS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS**

It has often been argued that the delicate task of reporting politics must be given to those who have acquired the professional tools, have good interpretation of political events and are able to operate without
Preface

allowing the sentiments of politicians to affect their judgement (Okolo, 1994). Theoretically it is a good idea, but practically; it is difficult to enforce it. For instance, one can argue that while it might be easier to determine the level of education of journalists, it is not as easy to determine which particular journalists are more likely to get influenced by the opinion of politicians. The proliferation of media outlets in Africa, has led to the huge rise in the number of institutions with departments and faculties of media studies, communication or journalism. This has been occasioned by the fact that journalists are going back to study in order to gain more knowledge about new trends and technologies that can to enable them improve in their practice of journalism (Musa, 2009). Therefore, while a journalist without a college degree is a rarity in newsrooms today, possessing a diploma does not automatically make someone a better journalist (Foreman, 2010). However, because the mass media is an agent of political education (Heywood, 2007), a well-trained and articulate political reporter is expected to essentially have a firm background in the political process as well as an understanding of current events happening in the country and the continent (Agba, 1994). This has occasioned by their need to gain knowledge and familiarise themselves with several statutory regulations concerning political activities in the country (Agba, 1994). Further, there has been a need to specialize in specific areas of politics ranging from covering election campaigns, parliamentary reporting, to covering stories on corruption, as each speciality will pose an entirely different challenge (Okolo, 1994). Therefore, college education in journalism signifies better preparation by the journalist for the challenges of a complex profession (Foreman, 2010) which is often confounded by numerous challenges in developing countries.

While journalists are enrolling in classrooms to gain more knowledge, unfortunately, some media houses, particularly, commercial radio and community media and other emerging forms of media sometimes employ people who are ill-trained (Okolo, 1994), yet, as in any field, a political reporter who is not prepared cannot rush in, grab a key story about political development, and run back to his/her newspaper or broadcast medium to win a prize (Agba, 1994). There is need therefore, for political reporters to be constantly exposed to trends in political thinking, changing public opinion, and new skills in reporting (Okolo, 1994). To cope with the challenge, organised study groups could also be set up by journalism schools, media houses and even journalists themselves to quantitatively analyse political issues to guide reporters and editors (Okolo, 1994). This is with the view to help political reporters become aware of major movements in political practice, acquire knowledge on the debates in political philosophy and economy, and understand the elements of government and politics (Agba, 1994).

Developing countries such as Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria have seen an expansion in broadcasting with new independent channels during the past decade (Helander, 2010), however, a significant proportion of media houses are now owned by individuals or corporations whose primary goal is to make profit from their business ventures (Leighley, 2004). Therefore, while commercial broadcasters can play an important role in promoting the public interest through their program services (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008), their profit oriented nature constrains the degree to which they can contribute to wider public goals, including good governance (Ibid, 2008). Consequently, although freeing the media from state domination has been widely acclaimed in the last decade, the media is now susceptible to pressures of the market (Helander, 2010). For instance, the press as a mass medium is used to produce information in commodity form, and to maximize advertising revenue by selling that information to the largest possible number of readers (McNair, 2007).

The profitability of the press depends on the audience and commercial sponsors (Duplat, 2003), and therefore broadcasters constantly face pressures to improve their bottom-line results by reducing costs and maximizing audiences (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). In an intensifying competitive
environment, the political process comes to be seen by journalists as the raw material of commodity which must eventually be sold to a maximum number of consumers (McNair, 2007). This then promotes a focus on cheaply produced programmes, popular or imported entertainment formats and mass-marketed programs, with minimal investment in specialist or more costly public interest program content (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). Market forces also tend to prevent commercial broadcasters from serving the public interest through in-depth news, analysis and information (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). For instance, in addition to determining what resources media houses have to work with, corporate managers also emphasize the importance of maintaining good relationships with advertisers (Leighley, 2004). Often, advertisers try to influence news coverage and thus the underlying tension over maintaining advertising revenue is very real (Leighley, 2004), and the media sometimes feels obliged to restrain itself in order to remain in the favour of the sponsors, advertisers and lobby groups (Duplat, 2003).

A study on the relationship between the press and politics in Nigeria during the first republic, noted that the character of political reporting in the print media was entirely dependent on media ownership structure and the owners’ relationship with the political system (Grant, 1975; Quoted in Okolo, 1994). It is thus a common assertion these days that excessive concentration of ownership in broadcasting can have many of the same effects as media monopoly (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). This is because it can lead to excessive and partisan political influence and constrain diversity of content (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). It is necessary to also check on ownership of television, radio and newspapers because concentration of ownership reduces overall scope for diversity (Stiglitz, 2008). Therefore, excessive concentration of ownership is to be avoided not simply because of its effects on competition, but because of its effects on the key role of broadcasting in society, and the latter requires specific and dedicated measures (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). For instance, in South Africa, no one may directly or indirectly exercise control over more than one private television license, or over more than two private FM or AM services (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). However, in many African countries, there is a growing incidence of a few media houses, owned by the same members of a small elite group with direct or indirect interests in the politics of the country and often the politicians establish the media institutions to propagate their political ambitions and such propagation may be detrimental to the interests of the public (Obonyo& Nyamboga, 2011; Okonkwo, 1994).

On the other hand, the goal of regulation in the public interest approach to media is to tread a path that mediates among several interests, encouraging and offering incentives and, where necessary, imposing obligations and constraints on each group, while evading capture by any specific interests (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). Several countries have appropriate legal and policy measures in place and the existence of a regulating body for the media; however, the governments are yet to demonstrate their willingness to fully renounce their capacity to influence the broadcast media, and the ability to follow through (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). The political machinery often attempt to cow and control the press, and in some African countries, where journalists have been strong enough to resist direct or indirect control by the government, they have often ended in prison (Okolo, 1994). Governments’ attempts to control journalists show clearly that the former recognises the powers of the latter, in at least setting the agenda for public discussion, and ultimately, public opinion (Ibid, 1994). The right to freedom of expression and liberalisation of broadcasting is an integral part of the development of democratic rule (Helander, 2010), and in a democracy, open criticism of government and public authorities is of vital importance. The government agencies and departments play a central role in development of a nation and must be held to account, even if doing so sometimes involves robust and even unjustified criticism (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). This is symptomatic of the relationship between media and
Preface

Politics and how each is heavily reliant on the other, and consequently, the way the government regulates the media and the way the media in turn seek to influence such regulation is another important aspect of the government-press relationship (Leighley, 2004).

The media is thus among the forces that have shaped, and continue to define, the establishment of democracy in developing nations (Tettey, 2001). However, censorship is a major challenge facing the media in developing nations. Censorship refers to a policy or act of control over what can be said, written or published or performed in order to suppress what is considered to be morally or politically unacceptable (Heywood, 2007). Direct state control is always open to potential government manipulation. The reliability of news and information on government controlled broadcasters is often in doubt since they have a particular point of view and interest to protect. The lack of trust in government controlled news and information can result in a cynical, rather than an engaged, public (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). Political participation thus depends on the ability to ventilate criticism of government publicly through the media, and therefore constraints on investigating and reporting on political matters can severely compromise almost every aspect of media performance and impede its ability to sustain and promote good governance (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). In Africa, where the role of the media in democratization is unquestionable, media are interested in the process of self-regulation and as a result, we are witnessing the emergence of institutionalized bodies such as the Media Council in Kenya (Duplat, 2003). Self-regulation is a process originating within the media and from the audience, and is a way to implement non-government control of media with the aim of making media professionals more responsible in their daily work (Ibid, 2003). In Kenya, the Media Council (who comprises of media owners, editors, journalists, lawyers and lecturers) is charged with the responsibility of maintaining professionalism and safeguarding media freedom.

Press freedom is a cornerstone of democracy (Duplat, 2003), and the liberty to criticize and express dissenting opinions however unpopular or obnoxious must remain absolute. Covering politics will be a most difficult task if we do not allow journalists complete freedom in their choice of topics and adoption of presentation styles (Okonkwo, 1994). Thus, the complete freedom of speech is not merely a benefit to democratic principles but a necessity for it (Okonkwo, 1994). People perceive the press as an element of control and a fourth power, and thus, freedom of the press is considered to be part and parcel of democracy (Duplat, 2003). The existence of a free press is one key feature of democratic governance (Heywood, 2007), due to the fact that the media must be free and independent in order to actively cover politics (Stromberg and Snyder Jr., 2008). One of the underlying assumptions of the interpretation of the guarantee of freedom of the press has been that the sphere of public debate, in which the press is expected to play an important role, is a marketplace of ideas; therefore government control of what is published is anathema to citizen’s fundamental rights (Leighley, 2004). However, countries such as Rwanda, have often been criticized for censoring press freedom and public debates. The preservation of democracy demands that the freedom to speak and publish be absolute. It is not, however, the absolute and prior right of every human being to speak without restraint; but it is the absolute requirement of a democratically governed community that its citizens be entirely free to speak and criticize (Okonkwo, 1994). Freedom does not imply absolute license. Every country imposes some limitations on what may be published or broadcast. It is nowhere considered legitimate to spread malicious lies attacking someone’s reputation, and most countries ban incitement to hatred on the basis of ethnic origin or race (Buckley, Duer, Mendel and Siochru, 2008). The challenge therefore has been the proliferation of hate speech with the rapid adoption of new technologies in developing nations. The challenge for the governments in developing countries therefore is to find a common ground with users of new technologies (such as social networks,
mobile phone texts, blogs) where each can appropriate it to achieve their end without infringing on another person’s privileges and rights. The media is also challenged to find a way of appropriating new technologies in their broadcasts yet not compromise their objectivity, reliability and professionalism.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

The book comprises of fifteen chapters, which are divided into four broad sections, namely: media democracy and political transitions; media, participation and political debates in developing countries; new media technologies and politics; and lastly gender media and politics. A brief description of each theme is as follows:

Media democracy and political transitions: This section undertakes a detailed analysis of the role of the media during political transitions in times of political crisis. It further also details the role of the press in the emergent political class and how press freedom and free speech impacts on the growth of democracy in developing countries.

Media, participation and political debates in developing countries: This section discusses how talk radio had opened up spaces for civic engagement and allowed previously marginalized groups to actively participate in politics. In addition, this section looks at how participatory radio channels can be used to communicate democracy to audiences by promoting political discourses and debates among audiences. This section goes further to also analyse presidential debates and their role in electoral outcomes by analyzing how the structure and format of the debates affect how audiences perceive presidential candidates during televised presidential debates.

New media technologies and politics: The role of new media technologies in politics is widely explored in this section. The authors discuss how marginalized groups such as the youth and women have embraced new media technologies (social media and mobile phone technologies) as tools for political communication. Government departments and agencies have therefore recognized the proliferation of new media technologies and thereby adopted them as part of their communication processes in order to reach previously inaccessible target groups and audiences. However, the new technologies are not without challenges and this section further detail the challenges brought by such technologies, such as the proliferation of hate speech and violence; and the subsequent difficulties in regulation and censorship of negative ethnicity messages, particularly during electioneering periods.

Gender media and politics: The last section analyses media coverage of elections from a gendered perspective, noting that often coverage is gender biased with women getting less coverage in the media than the men. And further argues that even among the male candidates, the coverage is still not fair as politicians with more influence are more often in the news than those political candidates who wield less influence in politics. The biased coverage of political candidate subsequently affects electoral outcomes, and the overall state of politics in developing nations.

**CONCLUSION**

The role of the mass media in a democratic society is largely defined by the extent to which the public is involved in politics, such as through popular elections and public opinion, the public’s influence on governance, and the way elites use the mass media to inform, persuade, or mobilise the mass public (Leighley,
Preface

2004). It is common to castigate the press for failures of the political establishment in the belief that journalists, by setting the agenda for discussion, have a responsibility to direct both government and the people to achieve desirable national objectives, however with the emergence of new media technologies, users have also become sources of news for larger audiences and the media does not have the monopoly of setting the agenda for political discourses in a country. However, it is key to point out that advances in media technology cannot obliterate the need for professionalism in journalism (Okonkwo, 1994). If the politics of African countries is to improve, a new approach must be sought for more objective reporting of politics in the light of the changing roles of the media in setting the agenda for the people (Okolo, 1994), and the emerging new audiences (now being referred to as prosumers), who are now playing a role to play in creating the message and not just acting as recipients of messages. We therefore hope that the discussions will help answer the following question that set us on this road towards working on the book project: What is the role of media and journalists in influencing the politics of developing nations?

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REFERENCES


