The role of the media in voter education: The case of the 2007 Nairobi City Council elections.
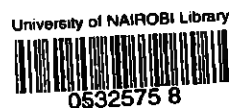
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A Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies, School of Journalism, University of Nairobi.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research paper is my original work and has not been previously published or presented for award of a degree in any university.

Signed _____   Date 18/11/2011

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Supervisor approval

This research paper is submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

Signed _____   Date 15/03/2012

Dr Karambu Ringera

DEDICATION

This research paper and all the work that went into it is dedicated to my wife Annerose Nyambura, who continues to support my passion and ideas for a reformed local government system in Kenya.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALGAK	Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya
ECK	Electoral Commission of Kenya
LA	Local Authority
LATF	Local Authority Transfer Fund
MP	Member of Parliament
NMG	Nation Media Group
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
ODM-K	Orange Democratic Movement - Kenya
PNU	Party of National Unity
UK	United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role played by media in the electoral formations and running of Local Authorities (LAs) in Kenya with a specific focus on the Nairobi City Council. Within the context of the 2007 general elections, the study explored the role played by media in providing salient and insightful content for voters that could have been relied upon to make informed decisions in the election of civic leaders in that election year. Specifically, the study examined the media content and nature of information availed to voters with regard to the election of Councillors to the Nairobi City Council.

The study was primarily motivated by the well-documented phenomena of a failed local government system in Kenya symbolised by endemic corruption, deplorable delivery of services such as sanitation, infrastructure and security among other basic services required for the wellbeing of residents within LAs jurisdictions. The study shows from various commentators and scholars that failure of the system to deliver is largely attributable to the low-quality civic leadership that manages the local authorities. This leadership is characterized by low levels of educational qualifications, frequent political infighting and the mismanagement of local resources. The study therefore examined the electoral processes that appear to regularly deliver low caliber leadership into these institutions, and the basis on which voters elect their civic representatives. The study further investigated the role played by the mainstream media in educating voters on the leadership choices available at this level of governance in Kenya.

The basic qualifications and management competencies of elected Councillors were also examined with compelling secondary data suggesting that many civic leaders lack the educational qualifications and work experience needed to tackle the challenges of running LAs competently. The study investigated the possible reasons behind the low qualifications threshold for civic offices, why these elective positions have not attracted

higher caliber individuals over the years and how the media tackled this subject during the 2007 general elections.

The study also conducted an assessment of the Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) and its quality of management by civic leaders. The study argues that the LATF has not achieved the desired aims for which it was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1999. This is largely blamed on civic leaders who have been accused of mismanaging and misappropriating the funds over the years. The study unravels the intricate linkages between this poor performance and the basic qualifications of civic leaders in terms of managerial experience and educational levels, while examining information availed by the media in regards to the profiles of aspiring civic candidates during the last general elections.

The study provided a brief comparative look at the role played by media in voter education in other countries during local government elections and the implications of this for our media. By looking at Botswana and the United Kingdom, the study investigated media best practices in the coverage of local government operations and elections in democratic countries that have well-managed cities.

Finally, the study delved into the operations of LAs under the new constitutional dispensation where local governments will be superseded by the devolved County Governments after the 2012 general elections. The study explored opportunities arising for the media in influencing better management of the County Governments through voter education and enlightened citizen participation in the election of their county representatives. The study findings therefore come at an opportune time when the country is grappling with the future of Local Governments under the new constitutional framework that commenced after 27th August, 2010.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the problem

Over the years, there has been very little information in the Kenyan media regarding candidates for civic office during general elections. Because of this, voters have been denied sufficient information to assess the leadership capabilities of civic candidates in order to make informed decisions with regard to the most appropriate leader to elect. This has resulted in Kenyan voters regularly electing low caliber Councillors to manage their Local Authorities (LAs) during civic elections, leading to rampant mismanagement, abuse of resources and poor service delivery.

In a September 2007 interview with *The Standard* newspaper, former Nairobi Mayor John King'ori (1996-98) regretted that LAs were frequently projected negatively because of the odious behaviour exhibited by low caliber civic representatives. Such behaviour includes the ignominious physical fights they engage in at the expense of constructive debates (see newspaper reports cited in this paper on the violent July 2006 and August 2008 Nairobi mayoral elections). He said that in order to change that image, better-endowed citizens with the necessary education, experience and exposure must present themselves to be voted in as Councillors. "It is wrong to vote in people whose levels of education cannot be traced beyond primary schools or mere deadbeats groping about for something to do," he said.[1]

Indeed this comment appears to reflect the state of local governance not just in Kenya, but also in many African countries. All too often local Councillors in Africa have proved to be so uneducated, or so caught up in political competition for minimal resources, that they have proved unable to perform the quite complex tasks allotted to them (Southall and Wood, 1996: 502).

Just prior to the 2001 general elections, BBC News reported that some Kenyan Councillors including the then Mayor of Mombasa Mwalimu Masoud

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[1] The Standard, Friday, September 28th, 2007

Mwahima, had registered to sit for that year's secondary school final examinations. This was in a bid to circumvent a proposed Parliamentary Bill that stated only those educated to secondary school level could qualify for election to local councils. The BBC press report highlighted that Mayor Mwahima and other Councillors were known to avoid courtesy calls by diplomats and businessmen apparently because they could not speak English.[2]

It is imperative for Kenyan voters to consider the negative impact of electing such lowly qualified individuals as civic leaders to manage their local resources. The general elections offers a once-in-five-years opportunity to evaluate critically all the candidates offering themselves for election to these offices in order to settle on the right ones. The media can play a significant role in helping voters make suitable and informed election choices beneficial to citizen's welfare.

1.2 Background

At the return of multi-party elections in 1992, Nairobi residents finally got back their right to elect their City Council leaders after thirteen years of management by three successive non-elected commissions. Following the results of the general elections held in December 1992, one renowned local publication, the *Weekly Review* of 22 April 1994, lamented that the voters chose *matatu* touts, semi-literate men and women and many other representatives who could not be expected to understand much of what was required of them at City Hall. Such public representatives exhibited enormous talent for 'thuggish behaviour' and allocating themselves 'council land and property, including public toilets', yet none at all for the more technical tasks of running a major city (Southall and Wood, 1996: 523).

With three other general elections having taken place since then, the leadership quality has not changed much at the local government level.

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[2] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1617511.stm (Accessed on 4th August, 2011).

Commenting on the 2009 Nairobi City Council Mayoral elections, an opinion piece published in *The Standard* newspaper described civic leaders as having "sunk beyond contempt" for demanding KSh 100,000 from Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Mayoral aspirants. They eventually accepted KSh 50,000 each to buy their support during the August 3, 2009 elections (Owuor, 2009).[3]

The consequences of this type of civic leadership have been a deplorable legacy of resource mismanagement, frequent infighting, inadequate planning and poor service delivery standards in our local governments (Barasa and Eising, 2010). These systemic failures are numerously attested in Ministry of Local Government policy statements (see Minister's press remarks cited in this paper), private-public sectors reports (Transparency International-Kenya, 2006; NCC, UNEP & UN-Habitat, 2007), government audit agencies (KACC, 2007) and newspaper articles (see various press reports cited in this paper). The biggest losers remain the taxpayers, ratepayers and residents of many LAs in Kenya.

1.3 The scope of the study

The study topic was motivated by the well-documented phenomena of a failed Local Government system in Kenya. As seen elsewhere in this paper, government policy statements, press reports, academic papers and non-government organization studies over the years have continued to document the failure of most Local Authorities (LAs) in the country in meeting the expectations of their residents. This is in terms of poor delivery of basic services such as sanitation, infrastructure and security among other services required for the wellbeing of residents. This failure has largely been blamed on the poor quality civic leadership obtaining in the LAs (Barasa and Eising, 2010; Southall and Wood, 1996; various media reports cited in this paper).

The study strived to investigate this phenomenon, examining the electoral processes that appear to regularly deliver low caliber leadership into these

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[3] The Standard, Tuesday, July 28th, 2009, pp 17.

institutions, examining the basis in which voters elect their civic representatives and delving into the role played by the mainstream media in educating voters on the leadership choices available at this level of governance in Kenya. The study was guided by the hypothesis that voters have lacked sufficient information from the media to make the right decisions while electing their civic representatives, inevitably resulting in low-caliber leadership.

Kenya has 175 LAs categorised into counties, towns, municipals and one City Council. Due to constraints of time and resources, the study is limited to the largest LA in Kenya, the Nairobi City Council (NCC). The motivating reason for this is because Nairobi has the major concentrations of the productive capacity (skilled labour, capital and industries) through which economic conditions of Kenya can be improved. It is the national, regional, and most important, state and government administrative center in Kenya. Finally, it is the center of political activity as well as the socio-cultural base for the urban activities of the nation (Werlin, 1974). Therefore the way it is managed is of profound interest not only to its residents, but also to the rest of the citizens in the country. The study intended to bring up examples from other LAs inside and outside the country to illustrate and fulfill the overall objectives and hypothesis contained in the study.

In examining the establishment of the NCC through the democratic electoral processes contained under the Local Government Act Cap 265 of the constitution of Kenya, the study was largely limited to the last general elections held in Kenya. Specifically, the study examined the political campaigns leading to the elections of Nairobi City Councillors on December 27, 2007, and the coverage of these in the mainstream media, specifically the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard Newspapers* (both print and online versions).

The reasons for the periodical and geographical limitations were three-fold. Firstly, the 2007 general elections provided a remarkable amount of readily available information from media archives (a critical source of secondary data for the study) on the campaigns leading to the elections. In addition, the

events around those elections hold the element of currency and relevance to changing political scenarios in the country, especially due to the new constitutional dispensation, which commenced after August 2010. The new constitution was realised after nearly two decades of sustained deliberations and negotiations by diverse groups and interests in the country. This was in no small measure influenced by the events surrounding the 2007 general elections and the aftermath from the deplorable post-election violence of early 2008.

Secondly, the importance of Nairobi to the political and economic wellbeing of the country and the region cannot be overemphasized. As the administrative and economic center of the country, the nature and quality of its local governance has profound implications for the rest of the country, setting the standards of performance by which other Local Authorities can be reasonably measured.

Thirdly, the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers are the highest and second highest circulating independent dailies in the country respectively. Besides these two, other mainstream local newspapers during the 2007 general election campaigns were the: *People Daily, Nairobi Star, Kenya Times, East African, Taifa Leo* and the short-lived *Daily Metro* (BBC World Service Trust, 2008:8). The latter three are part of the Nation Media Group.

The *Daily Nation* at an average daily circulation of 205,000 copies is the largest newspaper in East Africa. The newspaper also maintains a website, which hosts online editions of the daily and Sunday editions with links to its other titles, across the region. Access is free and the site's daily hit rate is more than three million.[4]

The Standard newspapers with a 20% market share[5] (and an estimated daily circulation of 60,000 copies) is the oldest newspaper in the country. It also

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[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_Nation (Accessed on 6th August, 2011).

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Standard_(Kenya) (Accessed on 6th August, 2011).

has a website hosting its daily online version. Subsequently, these newspapers are the most widely read publications in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi. Their selection for the study was therefore informed by the factors highlighted above.

To meet the study objectives more comprehensively, the researcher also conducted sample interviews of Nairobi voters who participated in the 2007 general elections. This was to establish voters' knowledge of their civic candidates, their primary source of information on the civic campaigns, and what factors influenced their choice of Councillor in the 2007 general elections.

The above parameters provided the context in which the research was undertaken. Notwithstanding this approach, the study occasionally referred to relevant examples from past elections held in the multi-party political era beginning in 1992, merely to illustrate and make clearer certain points in the narrative. This approach also applied to newspaper editions as secondary sources of information relevant to the study's objectives.

1.4 The objectives of the study

The study sought to:

- Examine the local print media for news content and information detailing aspiring candidates' profiles, their experiences, educational qualifications and visions, which targeted Nairobi voters in regards to the Council elections in 2007. The study specifically focused on the coverage of civic elections by the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers over the 6-month period (July 1st to December 31st) leading to the 2007 general elections of 27th December 2007.

- Examine the impact and extent to which newspaper coverage of the civic campaigns during the 6-month period under review influenced the voting patterns and results of the 2007 Nairobi City Council elections.

- Provide a brief look at the role played by media in voter education in other countries during local government elections and the implications of this for our media. In this way, the study investigated media best practices in the coverage of local government operations and elections in two democratic countries that have well-managed cities: Botswana and the United Kingdom.

- Establish the reliability of newspapers as mediums for disseminating voter education content during election campaigns.

- Make recommendations on how best the print media in Kenya can take advantage of opportunities presented under the new constitution to increase voters knowledge and interaction with Local Authorities and county governments for the good management of these institutions.

1.5. Justification for the study

1.5.1 Deplorable civic leadership

No other elective position in Kenya attracts as much derision as the one occupied by civic leaders, going by readers' comments and letters to the editor reacting to Local Authorities news items in our print and electronic media. The Kenyan media is replete with numerous incidences of Councillors behaving badly. All too often, this portrayal has created a negative perception of civic leaders in the minds of voters – that they are corrupt, ineffective, unqualified and opportunists who are out to enrich themselves at the expense of the communities they purport to serve (Barasa and Eising, 2010: Post and Mwangi, 2006).

Probably the worst form of this perception is witnessed almost every time LAs across the country are ordered to conduct Mayoral and chairpersons of committees' elections by the Local Government Minister. This occurs every two years as required by law. In these internal elections, Councillors constitute themselves into an electoral college, voting for their colleagues to head committees in charge of various council departments such as health, housing, public works and education. The elections are supervised and conducted by the councils' Chief Executive Officers, the Town Clerks, who

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take on the role of Returning Officers for the votes cast (Local Government Act, 2007).

Over the last few years when these elections have taken place at the Nairobi City Hall, Councillors have spectacularly failed to live up to the dignity and decorum expected of their positions by resorting to violence and intimidation rather than rational debate. The following examples will suffice to illustrate this.

In the August 2008 Mayoral elections in Nairobi for instance, the Mayor of Nairobi and the Town Clerk were whisked away to safety and a Councillor injured as elections for committee chairmen and deputies turned chaotic. *The Standard* newspapers reported that trouble erupted when a proposal to retain Mayor Geoffrey Majiwa as the chair of the General Purposes Committee was rejected by mainly Party of National Unity (PNU) Councillors, but their opponents in the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) seconded the decision.[6]

Two years before this ignoble incident, violence had rocked Nairobi's City Hall during the election of Mayor. The *Daily Nation reported that* during the chaotic and disputed elections, several Councillors were injured and another arrested. A gun was drawn as Councillors exchanged blows during the elections that saw Mr Dick Wathika retain his seat as Mayor. Some people were also injured in the melee that resulted in broken furniture at the City Hall. Journalists were also caught in the crossfire as they scrambled to save their recording machines and microphones. Remarkably, the civic leaders turned some of the media equipment into weapons.[7]

These are just two typical examples of newspaper stories in the recent past reflecting the undignified behaviour of elected civic leaders in Kenya. Such incidents have been reported so frequently that media commentators have

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[6] The Standard, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

[7] Daily Nation pp 3, Thursday, July 20, 2006

wondered how voters get to elect such caliber of leaders to manage our local authorities.

In reference to the second incident, this is how the *Daily Nation* columnist Macharia Gaitho put it: "If the people we elect to our Local Authorities normally exhibit such behaviour, is it any wonder that they are never up to the job?"[8]

Musikari Kombo, the then Minister for Local Government also commented on the incident. "As I wind up, I would like to say that the mayoral elections were barbaric and it is something we must deal with. I undertake to bring amendments to Cap 265, that will deal with that area and also ensure that a better caliber of Councillors are elected into the local authorities" (Parliamentary Hansard report, 2006).

In a special report carried in the weekly *East African* newspaper (August 24-30, 2009), violence in local government institutions was commonplace not just in Kenya, but also across the East Africa region and beyond with the notable exception of Rwanda. Referencing a study commissioned by Kenya's City Hall Board of Trustees, the report stated that theft of public coffers and political expediency informs most incidents of violent confrontations in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. Only Rwanda's local government has broken with this tradition, following a process of national healing after the 1994 genocide.

1.5.2 Local government reforms initiatives

Interestingly, civic leaders have in the past cited the Local Government Act Cap 265 as a major obstacle in the management of Local Authorities and for their performance below expectations. Mombasa Municipal Councillor for Mwembe Tayari ward, Abdallah Ibrahim Abdalla, resigned in September 2009 citing his inability to deliver to his voters due to lack of powers. He explained that he had been frustrated by the fact "Councillors have to literally beg

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[8] Daily Nation pp 3, Thursday, July 20, 2006

Council Chief Officers for services to their wards." He said the Local Government Act Cap 265 makes Councillors subjects of the Chief Officers, which beats the purpose of having local governments. The media report described the resignation as a rare occurrence among leaders in Kenya.[9]

Other commentators have noted that the Act provides immense powers to the Minister for Local Government to the extent that he has to approve virtually all matters resolved by local authorities. This often hampers decision-making processes in the councils and delays the commencement of projects (Barasa, and Eising, 2010; Stamp, 1986; Werlin, 1966).

In 2009, the Ministry of Local Government sought to introduce far-reaching changes to the Act through the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, 2009. Outlining the purpose of the amendments, the Bill stated (pp 16): "To provide for Local Authorities which are accountable, responsive, participatory and able to deliver efficient and effective services to their residents; to provide for the direct election of Chairpersons and Mayors by residents of Local Authorities and to provide for connected purposes."

Commenting on these reform efforts in January 2010, the Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya (ALGAK) Secretary General Hamisi Mboga, lamented that the existing Act had failed to provide for wealth-creation, leadership, transparency, accountability, order and residents/ratepayers participation in the running and management of Local Authorities. In remarks carried by The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA) website,[10] Hamisi gave suggestions on what needed to be done. "Therefore, Kenya urgently needs a review of the current Act to address various challenges bedeviling the Local Authorities and more specifically on their viability and attendant ability to offer effective and efficient public services in a sustainable way. In view of these, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, 2009 provides an opportunity to address the historical and systemic challenges within Kenya's local government system."

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[9] The Standard, Wednesday. September 2, 2009

[10] Remarks carried at http://www.tisa.or.ke/website/local-government.html (Accessed on 22 March, 2011).

Regrettably, the Kenya parliament had not passed these amendments by the time the new constitution of Kenya was endorsed in a referendum on 4th August 2010. The Local Government Act of 2007 is therefore still operational.

This delayed legislation should not excuse Councillors' unbecoming behavior as leaders, especially when conducting internal affairs of their councils. Such intense competition for council seats as seen in the above incidences raise disturbing questions as to why the control of these elective bodies, borders on life and death duels. Frequently accompanying such contests are accusations of corruption, complimenting widespread reports of such practices in the usual conduct of the business of the councils, both rural and urban. Since these elections are limited to the Councillors and thereby exclude the public, such vote buying, to the extent it occurs, is usually more difficult to verify, regardless of its magnitude (Transparency International-Kenya, 2006).

This negative commentary is indicative of a bankrupt civic leadership, an observation supported by a growing body of evidence (Barasa and Eising, 2010; Southall and Wood, 1996; various media reports cited in this paper) clearly showing that poor civic leadership in Kenya has led to the running down of most of the 175 Local Authorities in Kenya. According to a March 2007 Report by the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission (KACC) on the *systems, policies, procedures and practices of the City Council of Nairobi*, the Council is the most highly indebted local authority in Kenya, whose resources such as the publicly funded Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) are also the most mismanaged and abused (KACC, 2007).

In a 2006 parliamentary debate, the MP for Yatta Constituency Hon. Charles Kilonzo succinctly described the alarming situation this way: "I would like to touch on the issue of Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) money. The LATF is like a country called Alaska. Everybody knows about it and nobody wants to go there. Why? Because Councillors have taken LATF money to be their pocket money" (Parliamentary Hansard Report, 2006).

Despite the fact that voters in Nairobi turn out in large numbers to elect their representatives to the City Council every five years, many hardly seem to know the people they are electing into City Hall. The answer to this conundrum may be found in examining the amount and nature of information available to voters *before* the general elections, regarding civic candidates. As Kahn (1991: 350) posits, by knowing the content of the information available, we can gain insights into what voters may learn during campaigns and what factors may influence their vote.

1.5.3 Media and emerging opportunities in local government

The media have shaped and will continue to play a central role in shaping Kenya's democracy (BBC World Service Trust, 2008: pp 2). With the re-introduction of multi-party politics in 1992, local newspapers have continued to play a crucial role in voter education and expansion of the democratic space. In the 2007 elections for example, the print media paid particular attention to the role of the Electoral Commission of Kenya, and the whole electoral regime. Most aspects of the electoral process were extensively covered and reported on. There were also some very insightful analyses and commentaries authored and published in the major newspapers, namely, the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2008:20).

For a majority of people residing in urban settings, newspapers remain an important source of information when it comes to governance and political issues (InterMedia, 2009). This is backed-up by literacy rates in the country, which are considered relatively high in Africa as shown by the Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey (KNALS) conducted between June and August 2006. The survey showed that Kenya had a national adult literacy rate of 61.5 % with Nairobi having the highest urban adult literacy rate at 87.1 % (KNBS, 2007).

The new constitutional dispensation that commenced on 27th August 2010 provides an excellent opportunity for media houses to continue striving and engaging positively with society in order to effect beneficial change in the way institutions are governed. Indeed since that time, media houses notably the

Nation Media Group (The *Daily Nation*, Nation Television (NTV) and *The Standard* newspapers commenced coverage of socio-economic issues from the new devolved units of governance by introducing 'County editions' as part of their regular news presentations.

Through investigative journalism, interviews and on-site reporting, these weekly editions have presented viewers with in-depth information on history, cultural lifestyles, resources, social-political dynamics, business investments and opportunities for economic growth that can be found in various counties around the country. The editions have stated their aim of covering all the 47 counties before the 2012 general elections.

Media interest in the operations of LAs would also help highlight the ones that are performing well and defying the stereotypes attached to these institutions. For instance, under financial reforms introduced by the Local Government in collaboration with the European Union dubbed Local Authority Integrated Financial Operations Management System (LAIFOMS), Thika County Council was declared a model local authority after its 2006/2007 accounts were recently given a clean bill of health by the Kenya National Audit. It is the first local authority to have successfully implemented the LAIFOMS reforms (Rural Poverty Reduction and Local Government Support Programme News, 2010). LAIFOMS, the only e-government initiative in LAs, is a computer-based system that integrates their financial and business transactions. Its implementation began in 1999 (Waema and Mitullah, 2009).

Recognising that Local Authorities are uniquely positioned institutions that were created to catalyse and support development at the grassroots level of governance (Barasa and Eising, 2010), it is in the public and taxpayers interest to entrust these bodies to the right caliber of people. The media can play a crucial role in ensuring that this becomes a reality through voter education focused on Local Authorities, and the profiles of candidates who aspire to lead them. Such information will go a long way in demystifying the operations of LAs and help stimulate greater debate and involvement of the citizenry in the proper management of these institutions. By highlighting civic

candidates profiles during general elections, the media will help voters identify individuals capable of providing solutions to the many challenges faced by LAs.

As the main beneficiaries of service delivery, the citizens should play their role in checking the LA's performance to ensure the highest possible service delivery at the lowest possible cost. This is the bottom-up monitoring approach versus the more common top-down approach by Central Government. It is urged that a citizen awareness campaign be conducted on rights and duties of citizens in local governance and accountability in general, and their role in monitoring in particular (Barasa and Eising, 2010).

The media in Kenya can play a significant role in this proposed awareness and monitoring campaign. Ultimately, it is the oversight role by citizens that will help propel LAs to live up to their mandate and meet the aspirations and expectations of Kenyans.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 How local governments in Kenya are established

For greater clarity on the subject of local government representation and its effectiveness in the delivery of services, it's important to commence by examining how Local Authorities (LAs) in Kenya are broadly established and structured to support grassroots governance in the country. That is, providing a platform for communities across the country to have a voice in government and hence a measure of influence in the management of their local resources.

LAs are governed by the Local Government Act Chapter 265 of the Laws of Kenya. According to Barasa and Eising (2010), the Act creates three categories of LAs, namely, the Municipal Councils; the County Councils; and the Town Councils. Members to the Councils (Councillors) are elected during the general elections and a few are nominated after the election in accordance with the Local Government Act. The Act excludes the Provincial Administration and constituencies, which are governed by different Acts. Local governance thus refers to the three categories of Local Authorities as highlighted above.

According to Post and Mwangi (2006: 23), Councillors can span a bridge between the local community and the council, providing residents access to the state bureaucracy and decision-making circuits. These elected civic officials are therefore uniquely positioned to positively influence matters that touch on the wellbeing of communities at the grassroots. However, as this paper demonstrates, this has largely not been the case in Kenya.

Councillors have been blamed by various studies of running down a majority of LAs in the country over the years to the detriment of the residents they are supposed to serve. Private and public sector collaborative reports (NCC, UNEP & UN-Habitat, 2007; Post and Mwangi, 2006; Transparency International-Kenya, 2006), government audit agencies (KACC, 2007) and newspaper articles (see various press reports cited in this paper) indicate that

mismanagement and rampant corruption have been the hallmark of these public bodies over the years. The overall indictment seems to be that LAs have not achieved much within their areas of jurisdiction to justify their existence, and majority are on the brink of insolvency.

Katumanga (2005: 510) observes that Nairobi residents have over the years responded to poor governance, the lack of services and the grabbing of public utility spaces by civic leaders and well-connected individuals in diverse ways. These ranged from self-help to more direct forms of engagement. Middle class groups often organised themselves into supportive networks that extracted additional 'taxes' from their members to pay for services such as security, garbage collection, street lights and road repairs which the local authority no longer provided. Its important to note here that this scenario was the precursor to the emergence of residents or neighbourhood associations[11] across Nairobi to replace City Council services that were not being availed. The Karengata Residents Association precedent-setting legal tussle with the Nairobi City Council over rates payment is a case in point worth mentioning. [12]

The Council sued the association members (residents of Karen and Langata) in 1998 for refusal to submit their annual land rates. Karengata residents insisted that they were within their rights not to comply due to non-provision of basic infrastructural services such as roads, water, lighting, sanitation and the non-accountability of their funds by the Council. They wanted to continue paying the rates to their own association, which was providing the services the Council had failed to provide. In a landmark decision passed on 12th March 1999, the Nairobi High Court held that Karengata residents had the right to pay their land rates directly to their association. [13]

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[11] For more information: Visit the Kenya Alliance of Resident Associations (KARA) website, www.kara.or.ke

[12] Karen & Langata Residents District Association 'rate saga' webpage: http://test.kida.or.ke/kida/spip.php?rubrique6 (Accessed on 6th August, 2011).

[13] Karen & Lang'ata District Association v City Council of Nairobi & another [1999] - www.kenyalaw.org (Accessed on 6th August, 2011).

2.2 The Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF)

The Karengata case commences an intriguing glimpse into issues of financial unaccountability by the Nairobi City Council. Nothing better illustrates this more than Councillors' poor governance record in their management of the LATF. This fund was established in 1999 through the LATF Act No. 8 of 1998 with the objective of improving service delivery, improving financial management, and reducing the outstanding debt of Local Authorities (KIPPRA, 2006; Centre for Governance and Development - CGD, 2007: pp 44).

LATF is also one of the 12 operational de-centralised funds that are financed from public taxes through the government Exchequer. Others are the well-known Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Free Primary Education Fund (FPEF), both established in 2003. In addition to these are: the Road Maintenance Levy Fund (RMLF) established in 1993; the Constituency HIV and AIDS Fund established in 1997; the Rural Electrification Programme Levy Fund (REPLF) established in 1998; the Poverty Eradication Revolving Loan Fund (PERLF) established in 1999; the Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF) established in 2002; the Constituency Bursary Fund (CBF) established in 2003 from the Secondary School Education Bursary Fund (SEBF) of 1993; the Disabled Fund (DF) established in 2003; the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) established in 2006; and the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) established in 2007 (Centre for Governance and Development - CGD, 2007).

LATF comprises 5% of the national income tax collection in any year, and it makes up approximately 24% of local authority revenues (KIPPRA, 2006). LATF primarily aims to reduce socio-economic disparities and improve the well being of citizens at the grassroots level. In setting up the LATF, the government consequently also established the Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) in 2001. The LASDAP is a three-year rolling programme of activities and projects that sets out LAs priorities for improving provision of local facilities and services. It is the only official framework available for local communities to interact with LAs (Barasa and Eising, 2010).

A 2006 survey carried out by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) established that seven years after its inception, LATF was the least known fund in the country. Free Primary Education was the only fund that recorded consistently high levels of awareness (at over 90%) with LATF being the least visible fund at less than 30%. Similarly, the Free Primary Education Fund recorded the highest rating for impact (positively transforming the lives of the intended beneficiaries), with over 90% reporting a positive impact. The fund rated as having the least impact was LATF.

2.3 Proposals for system overhaul

Various Local Government Ministerial statements have in the past indicated that nearly 75% of the 175 Local Authorities are financially insolvent. Speaking at an Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya (ALGAK) event in November 2009, the Deputy Prime Minister and Local Government Minister Hon Musalia Mudavadi admitted that out of the 175 Councils in the country, less than 45 could sustain themselves financially. The Minister said most of the Councils were in the red and were a liability to the Exchequer, adding that they were formed for political expediency and not economic viability. He indicated that the government was planning to reduce these Councils to 46 by the 2012 general elections.[14]

The Local Government Minister's revelation is hardly surprising. There is clearly an urgent need to overhaul the management of our Local Authorities into the grassroots service delivery institutions they were meant to be. Several reasons have been advanced for their failure to deliver as shown below.

Taking a historical approach, Stamp (1986: 19) has posited that the local government system in Kenya failed from the start due to inherent ideological contradictions in its structure inherited from the colonial government. Although the colonial era local government was fashioned after the British functional and democratic model, it was primarily intentioned for control while overriding

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[14] Daily Nation, Tuesday, November 25, 2009

African traditional forms of government. In contrast, the system in Britain had at its foundation a concept of partnership in service delivery, with the central government respecting a degree of autonomy in elected local authorities.

The stage was thus set after Independence in 1963 for antagonism between the central government and the local authorities. By the early 1970s, the latter had lost autonomy and control through the Ministry of Local Government and the Provincial Administration. Werlin (1966) corroborates this view by providing a glimpse into the tensions that existed in the early 1960s between the first African Mayor of Nairobi Charles Rubia, and the Minister for Local Government Samuel Ayodo. Rubia felt that there was undue interference from the Minister, who he accused of "failing to realize the need to exercise positive rather than negative control, to give advice and help rather than to frustrate, and to let the City government carry on by itself until it proves irresponsible or incompetent." On his part, the Minister argued that the City Council members were generally too inexperienced to be fully trusted as yet and that increasing Africanization of the staff would necessitate further governmental guidance. This position did not impress the Mayor and the conflicts between the Council and the Ministry continued well into the early 1970s until the former lost out.

Recent and perhaps more compelling reasons cited for failure range from official corruption, lack of leadership capacity and weak institutional structures in areas of procurement and governance systems (Barasa and Eising, 2010). Southall and Wood (1996: 523-524) have aptly observed that, those who have served as Councillors have been, on the whole, poorly educated and materially motivated. On further assessment they assert that: "Until only well-educated men and women of integrity and good leadership qualities are appointed and elected to the City Council and its administration, Nairobi's citizens will continue to wallow in filth and the consequences of greed."

This harsh assessment is echoed by Werlin (2006: 42) when he provides more insights into this subject: "Under colonial rule, the Nairobi City Council was dominated by British professionals and businessmen who had an easy

working relationship with officials of a similar educational and social background. The Africans who took over politically after independence largely lacked the experience and education to make them comfortable supervising professional staff or even in understanding the requisites of a complex organization."

It therefore cannot be overstated that voters need all the relevant information they can get on civic candidates profiles, educational qualifications, relevant experiences, management capabilities and their leadership visions in order to elect suitable caliber of Councillors to run these institutions. As a basic requirement, these council candidates would need to be individuals with proven and positive track records in the professional management of public or private institutions, with at least a college diploma or University degree in their educational backgrounds. This is to ensure that Councillors are in a good position to draft policies, propose and amend by-laws, understand and interrogate various council reports, budgets, audits, and other relevant documentation that require rigorous examination as part of appropriate local government management processes.

2.4 Best practice examples on the management of local governments

Several countries around the world such as the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain and the United States of America have evolved electoral systems, often founded on a rich communal heritage that ensures mostly qualified and competent individuals get to manage their local or city governments (Nickson, 2011: pp 3; Stamp, 1986: pp 19; Cohen, 2004). In Africa, cities such as Kigali (Rwanda), Gaberone (Botswana) and Johannesburg (South Africa) are excellent examples of professionally managed local governments.

Through careful planning and management, the city of Gaberone has been described as "boasting adequate and modern civic and commercial centers; modern functional infrastructure including water, electricity, roads and sewage systems; access to land for virtually all people; adequate housing provided by both the public and the private sectors and for the low income, the adoption of

a very successful program of squatter upgrading and self-help housing"
(Mosha, 1996).

Visitors to Kigali City have often described it as green, safe and spotlessly
clean.[15] On the 6th of October 2008, the city was granted the Habitat Scroll of
Honor Award during the global celebration of the World Habitat Day in
Angola's capital, Luanda. This was in recognition of work carried out in human
settlements development. Kigali was the first city in Africa to win the accolade
(IPP Media, 2010).

In October 2007, a four-person delegation from the Association of Local
Government Authorities of Kenya (ALGAK) on a learning visit to
Johannesburg (reported in that city's official website)[16] were impressed by the
way the city had turned around its finances with capital budgets quadrupling
over the previous five years. "Capital budgeting at the Nairobi City Council is
particularly negligible," said the Chief Economist in the Ministry of Finance,
Josephine Kanyi.

Among the Kenyan delegates was the secretary-general of ALGAK, Hamisi
Mboga, and the Nairobi City Council Town Clerk John Gakuo. Hamisi
informed the host city officials that Kenya was undertaking comprehensive
reforms that involved a total constitutional review. "Local government
structures and the role local governance played were also up for
reconsideration," he said. He therefore viewed the visit as a fact-finding
mission, with the team hoping to learn from other cities that had successfully
undergone similar changes. "I am told you are the best, so we want to learn
from the best," he candidly shared.

In contrast to the above cities, Nairobi has been described in a 2007 study
sponsored by the UN-Habitat as a city that lacks an approved master human

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[15] The Standard online newspaper of 9th June 2011 – *Rwanda: beauty that defies a violent past.*
http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/archives/InsidePage.php?id=2000011250&cid=453& (Accessed 09/08/2011).
[16] Official website of the City of Johannesburg: http://www.joburg.org.za

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settlement plan or physical development plan. The only operational plan approved for Nairobi is the 1948 master plan, as the revised 1973 version was never approved. Most urbanisation of Nairobi and its environs is therefore taking place in a planning vacuum. This is from a report, *City of Nairobi Environment Outlook*, launched in April 2007 during the 21st session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council. The report was compiled by the Nairobi City Council in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS).

Speaking at the launch which was reported in *The Standard* newspaper,[17] Mr Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director said: "This report is a sobering assessment of a city in East Africa in the early 21st century facing, as so many urban areas do in developing countries, a significant array of challenges. Many of these are inextricably linked with poverty and the provision of basic services."

Despite this gloomy assessment, there's still confidence that Kenya can emulate the local government success stories from other African countries for the benefit of its citizens. Our local media can rise up to the challenge and play a vital role in promoting this paradigm shift by consistently highlighting areas that require urgent improvement in the governance of our local authorities. The media can also provide forums in which citizens can openly participate, obtain information and offer ideas on the running of their local councils. As things stand today, information on Local Authorities highlighted by the local media is typically filled with acrimonious, chaotic and often violent council meetings, especially during the in-house mayoral elections that come round every two years in the five-year term of the councils.

2.5 Local government and the new Kenyan constitution

The new constitution endorsed by Kenyans on 4th August 2010 and promulgated later on the 27th day of that month created 47 counties from the

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[17] The Standard, Thursday, April 19. 2007

eight provinces, realising the concept of devolved governments. Each county will be comprised of several constituencies and wards, and it's expected that this will radically change Kenya's governance after the 2012 elections as explained below.

Headed by an elected Governor, it is envisioned that the county governments will empower Kenyans at the grassroots to participate in the way they are governed. This will be in sharp contrast to the current system in which all major decisions are made in Nairobi. Counties will also have an assembly of representatives directly elected by voters from each ward. A number of questions have thereby arisen regarding whether these entities will have the resources to govern themselves appropriately and fulfill the expectations of their people.

2.6 Reviewing the role of the media for good local governance

With the above issues in mind, it is imperative under the new constitutional dispensation for Kenya's media practitioners to conscientiously educate voters on the new constitution and nature of devolved governance. This would entail tackling topics such as the meaning of grassroots participation in governance and the operations of public funds such as the LATF, which are still expected to be instrumental in supporting development projects in the new counties.

A minimum condition of democratic citizenship is that people have access to information on issues that shape their lives. Without it, they cannot make informed democratic choices. Citizenship also requires people to be able to communicate their perspective into public debate, and to have spaces for public discussion on issues that most affect them (BBC World Service Trust, 2008: pp 3).

The media can support this by inviting queries, debates and positive participation of citizens in our new governance institutions. For example, through interactive media forums on radio and television talk shows, journalists can pro-actively raise discussion queries with their audiences regarding a public fund such as the LATF as follows:

- Are members of the public aware that 5% of taxes from the government budget is given out to their local Councillors every year to initiate and complete various projects in their wards?

- Are Kenyan voters aware that these funds have consistently been paid out to their local councils every year since 1999?

- Are the taxpayers aware that their Councillors do not have ward committees (akin to the CDF committees) to oversee the use of these funds in the ward?

- Can Kenyan voters confidently point out past LATF projects in their respective residential wards?

- How will the new county governments' work relate to existing Local Authorities in all the counties?

- What is the role of citizens in safeguarding county funds and resources?

- How can citizens keep their local leaders accountable in the various counties?

- What recourse do they have in case they need to raise complaints regarding the running of their county government?

- Above all, what can citizens do if they realize that their leaders are not doing a good job? For example, can they sack them since they are the ones who elected them? How can they do this?

It is envisaged that in this manner, the public awareness levels of these funds, local government institutions, the new county governments, and the people mandated to run them for the benefit of citizens will be openly appraised through various media platforms. This is likely to result in greater awareness and demand for higher service delivery standards from these institutions by citizens. Ultimately, this approach if adopted is likely to create voter demand

for highly qualified civic candidates aspiring to lead Local Authorities and similarly for the new representatives of county assemblies.

2.7 Local government systems, media and elections

The subject of local government representation and service delivery effectiveness has attracted wide-ranging examination and analysis from several writers, especially in Western democracies. For example, Kelleher (2005) examines whether local governments in the United States of America respond to public opinion. She argues that local governments have a clear incentive to heed citizen opinion. However, she contends that this is mediated by elements of their own institutional design and ideological influences on their leadership.

More recently, Accenture (2011: 1-5) demonstrates how the global financial crisis that began in 2008 has presented an unprecedented opportunity to creatively redefine how local governments work and deliver services in the UK. Due to massive spending cuts, their report argues that not only will the relationship between central and local government need to be redrawn, but many of the old public sector models of localism, managerial leadership, community engagement, information technology, and service delivery will need to be redefined.

In pragmatically reviewing the core purpose of local authorities, the Accenture report raises such questions as: what services should a council deliver, stop delivering or get someone else to deliver? In addition, the report observes that current economic pressures act as a catalyst for the inevitable revolution in how technology is used to reshape both local government operations and its interactions with citizens. The impact of new technology has implications for senior managers in local government, demanding a new leadership focus on openness, collaboration, inclusion, transparency, authenticity, personalization and choice. The report notes that technology is already enabling citizens to take up the role of armchair auditors and hold government to account. It therefore advocates greater engagement by local authorities with their citizens through social media networks (pp 30). Thus, the financial crisis has

presented a scenario where local authorities in the UK have to adapt to the new economic reality of delivering services with significantly less cash.

Taking a critical look elsewhere, Nickson (2011), evaluates the scale and impact of decentralization in Latin America while making comparisons with two types of ideal local government systems - 'managerial' and 'governmental'. On the basis of this comparative framework, Nickson tentatively concludes that the 'managerial' system is gaining ground in the region, thereby defining the primary purpose of local government as the efficient delivery of services. The writer highlights critical aspects of decentralization that are most important while developing policies on decentralization. For example, the changing role of local government, greater formal political autonomy and financial strengthening of local authorities under decentralized systems is of tremendous interest to Kenya as we establish the new county governments across the country.

Unfortunately, the role of the media in contributing to more effective, accountable and responsive local government systems has received a somewhat tepid interest in the overall research. This is acutely more evident in literature covering African local governments in comparison to the West, and especially on the political process of establishing local authorities and media treatment of the same. Nonetheless, the limited literature and reports available on this topic abound with insightful observations and analysis relevant to this study.

Among the most current and incisive literature on the subject of reforming Local Authorities for better service delivery, Barasa and Eising (2010) advocate the promotion of community participation in Local Authorities with the help of the media. They discuss the important role the mainstream media can play in publicising the consultative processes in local councils and by enhancing public awareness of ongoing activities. On the role of the media after the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Kenya, Southall and Wood (1996:510) provide some insightful observations. They aver that the national

media accorded local government elections relatively less importance compared to the presidential and parliamentary contests while relaying results of the 1992 general elections. This was indicated by an overall delay in registering election results, noting that no national newspapers reported the results at the civic level.

The two writers have further attempted to provide an explanation for this low media interest in civic elections by observing the way Kenya conducts its general elections. "The holding of civic elections in tandem with the presidential and parliamentary elections meant, almost inevitably, that issues of local government became almost wholly subordinated to the competition for power at national level. Worse, the implication was that those who were contesting seats for local government were fighting for the scraps left over by the bigger politicians, an impression heightened by the lack of attention focused upon local issues during the campaign."

Nickson (2011:2) appears to observe a similar trend in Latin America, that local government elections tend to be afflicted by this lack of 'focus on local issues.' He describes the local elections as often being superseded by national campaigns when he states: "Voter turnout at local government elections tends to be low, and local voter preferences are determined primarily by national political considerations."

With regard to the election processes in Kenya and the media, Mudhai (2007) presents several compelling arguments showing that the media's role has often been less than noble in the objective dissemination of information to voters. He argues that during general elections, politicians have tended to influence journalists for favourable coverage at the expense of their opponents. While this problem has been explained as resulting from low pay among journalists, he asserts that some of the top well-paid editors are often the culprits in this practice.

In more advanced democracies such as the United States of America, the media's role in the coverage of political contests has been examined at the

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level of how individuals process, interpret, and use issue coverage in choosing among candidates (Shah, Domke and Wackman, 2000). The authors theorise that issues commonly discussed in an ethically charged manner may not only influence voting behavior *directly*, because of citizens' acceptance or rejection of candidates on the basis of issue stands, but also *indirectly* as thoughts about these issues trigger other political evaluations (such as assessments of candidate character or rights-based issue interpretations) that contribute in an important way to electoral choices.

On the role played by civic education to enhance citizen political participation, Finkel (2002) presents several observations that provide insights into the mass media's role of disseminating information that influences political choices for voters. He mainly observes that adult civic education varies considerably from the classroom-based civics training that students receive in school systems throughout advanced and developing democracies. He posits that in most democratising contexts, adult civic education is conducted almost exclusively through secondary group associations – these being trusted but distant sources such as the media, political or religious leaders in society. This was evident during the 2010 constitutional referendum campaigns in Kenya when these opinion shapers played the role of primary source of information on the so-called "contentious issues" in the new constitution. Hence, the investigation of civic education's effect on political participation provides a means of assessing the ways that the appeals contained in civics programs are reinforced and amplified by other group-related mobilisation processes.

Finally on the apparent power of the media to influence varied voter choices, and drawing from the 1988 Canadian elections, Mendelsohn (1996) argues that part of the reason for vote instability during election campaigns is the media's role in priming the character of leaders. Although voters come to election campaigns with an array of opinions on candidates, issues, and parties, because candidates' personal qualities are highlighted by the media and parties are ignored, those voters more highly exposed to the media become increasingly likely to base their vote on candidate evaluations, and

increasingly unlikely to base the decision on their party identification. On the other hand, he goes ahead to demonstrate that interpersonal communications can act as a buffer to this tendency. Talking about politics over the course of the campaign ends up priming the issues.

Contrasting remarkably from this viewpoint is a study on the hypothesis of 'mediamalaise' – that the modern mass media have a malign effect on modern democracy, tending to induce political apathy, alienation, cynicism and a loss of social capital (Newton, 1999:578). Noting that others have argued that this is the result of media content, others posit that it is the consequence of the form of the media, especially television. For example, the writer argues that television news items are covered in an increasingly brief and superficial way, and the public is presented with a ceaseless flow of fast changing and barely explained events - news bites - which roll over each other with bewildering speed. This 'fast forward' effect is said to create political confusion, fatigue, alienation and distrust among the many citizens who lack the information, understanding and the motivation to make sense of the news.

In his overall examination, Newton (1999) compares mediamalaise to the mobilisation hypothesis – which states that the mass media in conjunction with rising educational levels, helps to inform and mobilise people politically, making them more knowledgeable and understanding. He investigates both hypotheses, and finds little to support the former. Reading a broadsheet newspaper regularly is strongly associated with mobilisation, while watching a lot of television has a weaker association of the same kind. Tabloid newspapers and general television are not strongly associated with measures of mediamalaise. It seems to be the content of the media, rather than its form, which is important.

2.8 Review of theoretical works

A number of mass communication theories underpinned and informed this research. The following review expounds on these theories.

2.8.1 The Agenda-setting function of the mass media

This is the theory that the mass news media have a large influence on audiences by their choice of what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them. The theory's central thrust is *salience* and *transfer*, or the ability of the mass media to transfer importance of items on their mass agendas to the public agendas.

The original study of the agenda-setting influence of the news media was conducted by Professor Maxwell McComb and Donald Shaw in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. They examined a month during the 1968 United States of America presidential election contest between the Republican party nominee Richard Nixon, incumbent Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey of the Democratic party and former Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama who ran as the candidate of the American Independent Party.

This study asked a sample of voters to rank what they believed to be the key issues of the campaign. While this was going on, researchers examined newsmagazines, newspapers, and television newscasts, and they prepared a ranking of campaign issues according to the time and space the media devoted to each issue.

Among its major findings, the study found out that that a considerable amount of campaign news was *not* devoted to discussion of the major political issues but rather to *analysis of the campaign itself*. This may give pause to those who think of campaign news as being primarily about the *issues*. Thirty-five percent of the major news coverage of Wallace was composed of this analysis ("Has he a chance to win or not?"). For Humphrey and Nixon the figures were, respectively, 10 percent and 25 percent. In addition, the media appear to have exerted a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign (even though the questionnaire specifically asked them to make judgments without regard to what politicians might be saying at the moment).

The evidence in this study showed that voters tend to share the media's composite definition of what is important, strongly suggesting an agenda-setting function of the mass media. The study helped to expound and illustrate on the agenda-setting function of the media. The agenda-setting theory says the media (mainly the news media) aren't always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about (Cohen, 1963; Dominick, 2005: 475).

This theory is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. Although different people may feel differently about the issue at hand, most people feel the same issues are important. The theory decisively moved away from the *magic bullet theory*, which did not address the question of interpretation, unlike the agenda-setting theory.

The conclusions of the Chapel Hill study matched McComb's and Shaw's hypothesis: That the mass media positioned the agenda for public opinion by emphasizing specific topics (*agenda building*) and the way those topics are presented (*framing*). McCombs and Shaw's work contributed tremendously to other communication theories relevant to this paper's hypothesis. Subsequent research on agenda-setting theory provided evidence for the cause-and-effect chain of influences.

2.8.2 The cause-effect relationship between public and media agendas

One particular study made leaps to prove the cause-effect relationship. The study was conducted by Yale researchers Shanto Iyengar and Mark Peters, and the University of Michigan's Donald Kinder. The researchers had three groups of subjects fill out questionnaires about their own concerns and then each group watched different evening news programs, each of which emphasized a different issue. After watching the news for four days, the subjects again filled out questionnaires and the issues that they rated as most important matched the issues they viewed on the evening news (Iyengar et al, 1982).

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The study demonstrated a cause-and-effect relationship between media agenda and public agenda. Since the theory's conception, more than 350 studies have been performed to test the theory. The theory has evolved beyond the media's influence on the public's perceptions of issue salience to political candidates and corporate reputation.

2.8.3 Links to Spiral of Silence theory

The Chapel Hill study went a long way in illustrating the dynamic nature of the media's role in the formation of public opinion. It can be linked to theories such as "the spiral of silence," a concept originated by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1984. In her conceptualization, audience members search the information environment for evidence that their personal opinion is or is not shared by others. Their search might involve reading articles in newspapers, magazines, watching news programs, monitoring Internet newsgroups, results of public opinion polls and so forth. If after scanning these sources, a person discovers a great deal of support for his or her position, that person becomes more willing to express that viewpoint in public. On the other hand, if a person finds that a minority supports his or her position, then that person becomes less willing to express such an unpopular view in public (Dominick, 2005: 475).

This unwillingness may be due to a fear of becoming isolated from the majority. Over time, the minority becomes even less vocal, and the spiral of silence results, leading to a situation in which the minority viewpoint has little impact in matters of public policy. This theory is especially relevant while examining personal influences on voting habits. Noelle-Neumann acknowledges circumstances in which those who hold a minority opinion might be more likely to voice it, particularly if they think that their opinion is becoming more wide spread. Such indicators of growing support would ultimately come from mass media sources. The theory therefore portrays the influence of the mass media in shaping public opinion and thereby setting the agenda on topical issues of the day.

2.8.4 Media Dependency Theory

From the Chapel Hill study, another theory emerged to strengthen the agenda-setting theory. This was the media dependency theory propagated by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976. This theory states that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976).

The theory is based on the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* and ties into the *Agenda Setting Theory*. Uses and Gratifications identifies how people use and become dependent upon the media. People use the media for many reasons. Information, entertainment, and social relationships are just a few of them.

The Dependency Theory says the more a person becomes dependent on the media to fulfill these needs, the media will become more important to that individual. The media will also have much more influence and power over that individual. If someone is so dependent on the media for information, and the media is that person's only source for information, then it is easy to set the agenda. The individual falls victim to *Agenda Setting*. These three theories intertwine quite a bit. ⊓

2.8.5 Uses and Gratifications Theory

This theory was developed by Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz in 1974. It suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The theorists say that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. Instance of this can be seen in the varied choice of print publications that were offering relevant campaign information to the voters during the Chapel Hill study. There were varied and divergent reasons why voters would choose one publication as opposed to another as their main news source. The uses and

gratification theory provides crucial answers to this question (Blumler and Katz, 1974).

2.8.6 The Two-step flow theory of communication

Additionally to this study although not arising from the Agenda Setting theory is the *two-step flow model* propounded by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz. Also known as the *Multistep Flow Model*, this theory is based on a 1940's study on social influence that states that media effects are indirectly established through the personal influence of opinion leaders. According to Lazarsfeld and Katz, majority of people receive much of their information and are influenced by the media secondhand, through the personal influence of opinion leaders (Lazarsfeld and Katz, 1955). These are the people with the most access to media, and having a more literate understanding of media content, explain and diffuse the content to others. This communication model laid the foundation for diffusion of innovations theory.

2.8.7 Diffusion of innovations theory

To round off the review of theoretical works is the Diffusion of innovations theory. This is a theory that seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. Everett Rogers, a professor of rural sociology, popularized the theory in his 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*. He said diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Significantly, he posited that social systems determine diffusion, norms on diffusion, roles of opinion leaders and change agents, types of innovation decisions, and innovation consequences.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The central problem the study strived to address is the question of information gaps arising at the level of local government elections in Kenya. It puts forward the hypothesis that voters have lacked sufficient information from the media during political campaigns to make the right decisions while electing their civic representatives, inevitably resulting in low-caliber leadership in our local authorities. As explained elsewhere in this paper, the study limited its research to the December 27, 2007 general elections and specifically, the election of Councillors to the Nairobi City Council. It did this by examining whether the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers provided information on the civic campaigns that voters could have relied upon to elect their Councillors. This information comprised candidates' profiles, their experiences, educational qualifications and leadership visions.

3.2 Research questions

Informed by the research objectives, the following questions guided the conduct of the study.

- Did the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers over the 6-month period (July 1st to December 31st) leading to the 2007 general elections of 27th December 2007, provide information on Nairobi City Council civic candidates that voters could have used to elect their Councillors?

- Did the newspaper coverage of the civic campaigns during the 6-month period under review have any bearing on the voting patterns and results of the 2007 Nairobi City Council elections?

- What is the role played by media in voter education in other democratic countries, specifically the ones that have well-managed cities such as Botswana and the United Kingdom, during local government elections?

- Are there media best practices in the coverage of local government operations and elections in the above countries that the Kenyan media can adapt locally?

- Are newspapers reliable as mediums for disseminating voter education content for civic election campaigns in Kenya?

- How best can the print media in Kenya take advantage of opportunities presented under the new constitution to increase voters' knowledge and interaction with Local Authorities and county governments for the good management of these institutions?

3.3 Research design

To establish the answers to the above study questions, a qualitative approach using content analysis methods was adopted in the conduct of the research. This is anticipated from the nature of the investigation, which focuses on the media treatment of a political phenomenon that has had significant impact on grassroots social-economic development under Kenya's local government system. In addition, interviews will be carried out through a self-administered survey questionnaire that will collect primary data from voters who participated in the 2007 general elections.

Specifically using the case study of the Nairobi City Council and the election process that determines its leadership, the researcher chose a qualitative content analysis approach as the most appropriate in meeting the goals of the study. Kohlbacher (2011) argues compellingly for the integration of case study research as a research strategy, and qualitative content analysis as a method of examination of data material when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

The research was qualitative to the extent that it not only covers a re-current social-political behavioral phenomenon, but was also expected to include designs, techniques and measures that are not likely to result in discrete numerical data but predominantly words and pictorials (Mugenda, 1999).

On this point, Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) have explained that the quantitative approach produces numbers that can be manipulated with various statistical methods. By contrast, the qualitative approach usually produces descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world.

This approach was most appropriate for the subject matter under investigation – that is, the content of news articles from the two leading newspapers in Kenya, the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. The researcher therefore sought out the following types of information on the candidates' profiles:

- Professional or working experiences;

- Educational qualifications;

- Capability statements; and,

- Leadership visions.

The researcher aimed to examine the treatment of civic related news stories in terms of their frequency, prominence and placement. This examination was limited to the newspaper coverage of election campaigns of civic candidates to the Nairobi City Council during the 2007 general elections.

3.4 Research sample

Content analysis techniques focused on the print archives of the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, and to a lesser extent on the web versions of the same. The archived editions covered the 6-month period (July 1st to December 31st) in the lead-up to the 2007 general elections of 27th December 2007. The researcher expected that the newspaper materials would provide a sufficient basis from which the formulated hypothesis could be tested. Other secondary data that was examined comprised published documents and literature relevant to the study's overall premises and goals. Primary data was obtained from a self-administered questionnaire that targeted 20 Nairobi voters.

3.5 Data collection procedures

3.5.1 Content analysis

The advantage of the content analysis approach in meeting the research goals of the study was in the fact that it saved considerably on costs and time. This is because the material to be examined was readily available from the print and online archives of the two leading media houses (a critical source of secondary data for the study). Moreover, this approach allowed for rapid search and comparison of the information being sought. Contrasts could also be readily made with other media houses outside the country on the subject of election coverage at the local government level. From these, media best practices were inferred and suitable recommendations made.

3.5.2 Questionnaire

The researcher obtained primary data through a combination of a closed and open-ended self-administered questionnaire. This interview method was preferred due to its ability to provide quick feedback that would address the research goals. Therefore, the questions were designed to establish voters' knowledge of their civic candidates, their primary source of information on the civic campaigns, and what factors influenced their choice of Councillor in the 2007 general elections.

Respondents were drawn from Nairobi residents who voted in the 2007 general elections. Nairobi is comprised of 75 civic wards with an estimated population of nearly 3.2 million living in an area estimated at 684 km² (KNBS Census, 2009). For the 2007 general elections, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) registered approximately 1.27 million voters (Waki Report, 2008:193).

Due to time restrictions and the large geographical jurisdiction of the Nairobi City Council, the voter sample was obtained through purposeful sampling with a limitation on 20 respondents from one civic ward. This sample size was deemed most appropriate for analysis purposes. This is because the questionnaire was structured and mostly close-ended, providing multiple-

choice answers for respondents to select from. Feedback was therefore not likely to vary much with greater numbers of respondents. The questionnaire design also allowed for easier standardization of data during the analysis stage.

Voters targeted for the questionnaire were drawn from Kileleshwa ward in Westlands constituency. The ward was selected due to its accessibility and proximity to the researcher, who is a resident of the ward.

To determine which voters to include in the study, the researcher relied on demographic characteristics of gender and age to ensure equity in representation. According to the National Youth Council Act of 2009, a person aged between 18 and 35 years is defined as a youth. The 20 respondents therefore comprised five men and five women under the age of 35 (representing the youth), and five men and five women over the age of 35.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way that respondents were able to understand the questions easily and therefore respond quickly. From the voter sample size and geographical limitations, the researcher anticipated that data from this survey was not likely to allow for comprehensive generalisations regarding the overall voting patterns in Nairobi from the 2007 general elections. However, it was expected that information on voter knowledge, their primary sources of information and factors influencing candidate preferences would be obtained to meet the research goals.

3.6 Data analysis

This part of the study discussed the findings largely based on the secondary data obtained from the 2007 newspaper articles and the primary data obtained from the self-administered questionnaires. The analysis and interpretation of these findings were augmented with data gleaned from examining local government news content from the countries detailed in the research objectives. Additional data was obtained from related literature on the subject of local government elections and the media.

The researcher used qualitative data analysis techniques. Mugendi (1999: 203) explains that qualitative data analysis seeks to make general statements on how categories or themes of data are related. In qualitative research therefore, data is in the form of text, materials, photographs, etc, which describe events and occurrences. Data collection and analysis in qualitative research go hand in hand and are done simultaneously.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) further explain that qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner.

A careful description of the data and the development of categories in which to place behaviors or process have proven to be important steps in the process of analyzing the data. The data may then be organized around certain topics, key themes or central questions, and finally the data need to be examined to see how far they fit or fail to fit the expected categories (Kohlbacher, 2011).

Neuman (1997: 426) states that once a pattern is identified, it is interpreted in terms of a social theory or the setting in which it occurred and that the qualitative researcher moves from the description of a historical event or social setting to a more general interpretation of its meaning.

From the foregoing, the researcher adopted the following strategy in sifting through and interpreting the data:

• Data collected was processed before being subjected to analysis and interpretation. Processing of the data involved the organization of the same into categories related to the nature of material under study. For example when it came to the interview results, categories of data were tabulated in terms of age, gender and the issue being addressed such as news source and factors influencing choice of civic candidate.

- The researcher sought to identify various other categories in the data as shown above, distinct from each other, and establish the relationships between these for purposes of understanding the data more clearly.

- The researcher then evaluated and analyzed the data to determine the adequacy of information, credibility, usefulness, consistency and validation or non-validation of the stated hypothesis (Mugenda, 1999: 205). While the interpretation of contextual information remained paramount, inferential reasoning guided the overall process of comprehension and presentation of the findings.

3.7 Data presentation

The researcher focused on presenting the report findings through a narrative style of writing in order to evoke a memorable picture of the study context, and provided analytical viewpoints that capture the significance and wider implications of the study. Other "voices" or attributions were often used to make the report more descriptive and help buttress the main points being put across.

In addition, the findings presentation aimed to show various relationships arising from the data, make comparisons, look for similarities or differences and provide explanations that could be held up against the study's hypothesis. Finally, the report strived to show whether the findings arising from the study were similar or far removed from the researcher's expectations.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Newspapers investigation results

The documentary research of the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspaper editions of July 1st to December 31st 2007 obtained results that strongly validated the stated research hypothesis: that voters have lacked sufficient information from the media during political campaigns to make the right decisions while electing their civic representatives, inevitably resulting in low-caliber leadership in our local authorities.

A content analysis of the above newspapers for news, articles, advertisements, and opinion pieces documenting Nairobi civic candidates' profiles, their experiences, educational qualifications and leadership visions, was not productive. There was no relevant information from those categories over the 6-month review period in both newspapers that voters could have used or relied upon to elect their Councillors in the 2007 general elections. The newspapers simply did not cover the civic campaigns for the Nairobi City Council.

4.2 Voter interviews results

Results from the voter interviews conducted through self-administered questionnaires also indicated that newspapers were not a source of information that guided voters' choices of civic leaders. Out of 20 voters surveyed, 11 attributed their choice of Councillor to information relayed directly to them on the candidate's profile by friends, relatives or the ground campaigns through 'word of mouth'. Two had no idea who the candidates were and just chose based on party profiles while the rest were influenced by friends or relatives. Five abstained from the civic vote altogether because of not knowing whom to vote for.

A somewhat unexpected result from these interviews was the significantly fewer numbers of voters that indicated they had voted for their Councillor based on the party profile and policies. This is because the mainstream media

gave considerably more coverage to political party campaigns in the lead up to the general elections. However, it was apparent that of the voters who did vote for the Councillor based on personal profiles and policies, the decision appeared to have been influenced by word of mouth directly from the candidate rather than from their friends or relatives.

Quite notably from the interviews, nine voters out of the 20 interviewed had no idea who was running for a civic seat. Five of these voters therefore opted to abstain their vote at this level while the other four were influenced to vote for certain candidates based on the opinion of their friends or family. The other 11 voters clearly had some ideas who the civic candidates were, attributing this to word of mouth. Newspapers did not play any role in this information sharing. These results are clearly indicative of the media information gaps that exist during local government election campaigns as enumerated in the study's hypothesis.

As indicated in the literature review, the findings appear to co-relate with Finkel's (2002) observations on secondary group associations. He defined these as being trusted but distant sources such as the media, political or religious leaders in society playing a significant role in providing adult civic education. From the voter interview results, it appears that the definition for 'trusted sources' would need to be expanded to rope in close sources such as friends and family in the influence of electoral choices on voters.

Moreover, this appears to be consistent with Lazarsfeld and Katz's *Two-step flow theory*: whereby voter decisions are likely to have been shaped by opinion leaders who are trusted to have better access and understanding of the news content which they assimilate and pass on to a majority of people. This closely aligns with Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of innovations theory* to explain the rate and channels in which this information might be shared among voters and the role played by opinion leaders. In this study, word of mouth played a significant role as a channel of disseminating information on the civic choices.

The Noelle-Neumann's *Spiral of Silence theory* also described under the literature review would seem to encompass the 11 voters who had an idea of the civic choices available in their ward, and especially of the four others who were influenced to cast their votes by their family or friends. This latter voter behavior is consistent with what the theory espouses where perhaps the voters were increasingly uncomfortable of becoming isolated from the majority of their close associates, and so went along with suggested choices for Councillor.

Not surprisingly, television was found to be the second most important source of news on the civic elections and results, closely followed by newspapers. The likely explanation is that the voters were drawn from a civic ward considered affluent relative to other wards in the city. Kileleshwa ward is home to Lavington estate, considered by residents of Nairobi as a prestigious residential area occupied by high income earning professionals and business people. Television ownership and access would therefore be expected in most households within the ward. In addition, it is likely that newspapers were trumped by television as a preferred source of civic news because they simply did not offer coverage of the civic elections. This is in line with Blumler and Katz's *Uses and Gratifications theory*: that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. In the case of this survey, the television met this need for the voters at the civic level as compared to the newspapers.

This possibly ties well into Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's *Media dependency theory*, which explains that the more a person becomes dependent on the media to fulfill their information needs, the media will become more important to that individual. Therefore, the more dependent the person is to that media, the more likely for that media to set the news agenda for that individual. This latter phenomenon is well described under the *Agenda-setting theory* proposed by McComb and Shaw in this study's literature review section.

Overall findings from this survey suggests that voters relied more on 'word of mouth' direct information from the candidates, and to a lesser extent from

friends and relatives to make their choices known at the ballot. Age, gender and education did not seem to have any significant bearing on their choices. However, only one youth failed to vote (abstained) at the civic level compared to four voters over the age of 35 years. This would perhaps indicate a greater reluctance by older voters to cast their votes for candidates they don't know or understand well.

With the small sample size of voters that was contacted for these interviews from just one ward out of the 75 in Nairobi, its imperative to apply caution as these findings may not be transferable to the whole city. More research on this subject may need to be undertaken in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

4.3 Press coverage and its influence on voting patterns and results

From the foregoing, it was not possible to deduce with complete accuracy whether the lack of press coverage may have had a direct bearing on the voting patterns and results of the 2007 Nairobi City Council elections. Nonetheless, a number of interesting observations can be drawn from these results.

A review of the list of winning civic candidates as declared by the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) indicates a strong co-relation between their political party affiliation and votes garnered by their parliamentary and presidential candidates in their respective constituencies. For example, in wards where the ODM presidential candidate Raila Odinga had led the poll, followed by PNU's Mwai Kibaki and Orange Democratic Movement–Kenya party's (ODM-K) Kalonzo Musyoka, the parliamentary and civic results would take on a similar pattern with few exceptions. Where PNU's Kibaki led, followed by ODM's Raila, again the same pattern would be replicated by the winning parliamentary and civic candidates.

The civic election results for Nairobi as released by the ECK in early January 2008 strongly bears out the above observation. A total of 62 elected Councillors were declared with the ECK nullifying results of five wards in

Githurai, Nairobi-South, Kitsuru, Laini Saba and Savannah. Also nullified were results from Kamukunji constituency. From these, ODM managed to obtain 36 seats, PNU obtained 22 seats while the Social Democratic Party (SDP) Democratic Party (DP), Mazingira and Pambazuka won one seat each.[18] Civic contests were held in 75 wards in the eight constituencies of Nairobi.[19]

ODM's winning majority in the Nairobi City Council was similarly reflected by the number of Nairobi parliamentary seats that the party won. Out of eight seats, the party won six with the rest going to the PNU (International Republican Institute, 2008:45). It would appear then, that a majority of Nairobi voters were basing their Councillor choice on their choice for MP, and perhaps their choice for President.

Since the first multi-party elections of 1992, this voting phenomenon has over the years been locally referred to as the 'three-piece' style of voting. That is, electing your MP and Councillor based on the party of your favourite presidential candidate without necessarily any consideration to individual merit. On the eve of the 2007 elections, the wife of the ODM-K's presidential candidate, Pauline Musyoka, was reported to have encouraged voters to embrace this voting style.[20]

It's important to note at this point that the presidential and parliamentary campaigns received considerable coverage in the mainstream newspapers and the media in general over the six months leading to the general elections. It would therefore not be surprising if this had an extensive influence on the way voters made their choice in the civic elections. A further study with more

[18] http://kenyapolitical.blogspot.com/2008/01/who-will-be-next-mayor-of-nairobi.html (Accessed on 29/09/2011).

[19] Obtaining comprehensive records of the 2007 civic election results was not successful in the course of this research due to the dissolution of the Electoral Commission of Kenya in December 2008 by the Kenyan parliament. The ECK website was removed and all records of the 2007 results have became inaccessible. The records were apparently not transferred to the website of the Interim Independent Electoral Commission (www.iiec.or.ke - accessed on 29/09/2011) that was established in May 2009. Consequently, the election figures used here have been obtained from diverse media sources. The Nairobi City Council official website http://www.nairobicity.go.ke (accessed on 29/09/2011) does not have a listing of current elected and nominated Councillors.

[20] Daily Nation, Monday, December 24, 2007.

focus on these ballot relationships would probably clarify this point and shed greater knowledge on this issue.

4.4 Local government elections in Gaberone and London: The role of the media

4.4.1 City of Gaberone

The researcher examined this question and established that local government elections in the Botswana capital of Gaberone appear to follow the same pattern as the ones in Nairobi. Because they are held at the same time as the parliamentary and presidential elections, the city council elections are strongly influenced by choices made at national levels between the leading political parties. Just like in Kenya, Botswana holds 'tripartite' elections, i.e. the voters elect the President, the National Assembly and local councils on the same day, although there exist separate ballot papers for national and local office bearers (Hartmann, 2004: 231).

The city of Gaberone has been managed remarkably well by the opposition party Botswana National Front (BNF) since winning the city elections of 1984 (Lekorwe, 1998: 79). However, the national government has been under the control of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) since independence in 1966.[21] After 25 years in power, the BNF lost control of the city to the BDP in the 2009 elections.[22]

Somewhat similar to Kenya, national party politics appear to override individual civic campaigns in Gaberone. As Maundeni (2004: 33) observes, city Councillors need not promise their electorate anything locally-derived. All they have to say is what their national party would bring if elected into office. Thus, the concern is with the control of the national government and not with the local authority. Such politics marginalize local democracy by marginalizing local issues and by eclipsing individual character under the image of the party. These observations are consistent with Southall and Wood (1996: 510) who observed that the Kenyan national media similarly accorded local government

[21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botswana_Democratic_Party (Accessed on 29/09/2011).
[22] http://mn.gi.bw/index.php?sid=1&aid=2&dir=2009/November/Thursday12 (Accessed on 29/09/2011)

elections relatively less importance compared to the presidential and parliamentary contests while relaying results of the 1992 general elections. These findings are echoed by Nickson (2011: 2) who asserts that a similar trend exists in Latin America where local government elections tend to be afflicted by the lack of 'focus on local issues.'

Thus, the local media does not appear to have much impact on knowledge dissemination during city council elections with most coverage being reserved for national campaigns. An exception appears to be the *Botswana Daily News* produced by the Botswana Press Agency on behalf of the government. It is circulated freely to the public and is printed in both English and Setswana. Its coverage of the Gaberone City Council elections of 1999, 2004 and 2009 elections was remarkably detailed on numerous civic candidates on the campaign trail.[23]

Considering how well the city's management has been praised elsewhere in this paper (Mosha, 1996; Lekorwe, 1998:79), it was somewhat of a surprise to obtain findings that indicate Gaberone's civic leadership is beset with similar challenges described earlier in this paper for Nairobi. Maundeni (2004:33) explains that the quality of local representation is perceived to be low because most Gaberone Councillors have very little formal education, preventing them from understanding budgetary issues. He posits that the Gaborone City Council has been very unsuccessful in attracting educated people to be Councillors. This is a significant observation that would require further investigation to establish how such 'low quality' leadership is able to manage and plan so well for the city of Gaberone, and why this has not happened in Nairobi.

4.4.1 City of London

London, the capital city of England and the United Kingdom (UK) on the other hand is significantly different in terms of leadership quality compared to both

[23] http://www.dailynews.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=19990804 | http://www.dailynews.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=20040820 | http://www.dailynews.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=20090827 (Accessed on 29/09/2011).

Nairobi and Gaberone. With a rich heritage spanning nearly two hundred years of local government (Stamp, 1986:20), the city of London has developed into a metropolitan that is well managed and that serves far larger populations.[24] It is governed by an elected Mayor and the London Assembly, which is also an elected body that scrutinizes the activities of the Mayor.[25]

An interesting finding in regards to local government elections in London is that they are held every four years, separately from the parliamentary elections held every five years. For example, the London mayoral elections were last held in 2008 while the parliamentary elections were held in 2010. This separation of the polls has a significant impact on the way the media is able to cover local government elections in London.

The overt interest the mainstream media accords the process would otherwise not be possible under a system where the parliamentary and assembly races are taking place simultaneously. For example, in the 2008 mayoral elections, the leading newspapers in London carried several opinion polls between March and the actual election on 1st May of that year to try and predict the results.[26] These papers were the *Daily Telegraph, The Guardian* and *The Evening Standard*, later re-named the *London Evening Standard*. These papers provided extensive coverage of the mayoral contest and assembly elections. This was through in depth analyses covering the issues and debates arising from the two leading candidates for Mayor, Boris Johnson (Conservative party) and Labour party's Ken Livingstone.

A notable example is from *The Guardian* newspaper, which provided an insightful online article on the reasons for the incumbent Mayor Ken Livingstone's dramatic defeat in the 2008 elections by Boris Johnson. Interestingly, it attributes an intense coverage by the *Evening Standard* of the City Hall Grants scandal as possibly playing a major role in Livingstone's

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[24] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London (Accessed on 30/09/2011)

[25] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Assembly (Accessed on 30/09/2011)

[26] London mayoral election, 2008 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_mayoral_election,_2008 (Accessed on 30/09/2011).

defeat. This how the article put it: "The allegations against Livingstone were not, on their own, necessarily fatal. But they were pursued aggressively by the *Evening Standard*, London's monopoly paid-for evening paper, which published a relentless stream of anti-Livingstone stories. Media studies students will no doubt spend many hours investigating the exact impact this had, but one thing is certain: it didn't help."[27]

The above example demonstrates the powerful influence the media can exert on the election process. The *Evening Standard's* treatment of the financial scam stories prominently in the voters' view, made them worthy of their attention due to the level of importance accorded by the publication. This manner of influence aligns quite well with the *agenda setting theory* and the related *cause-effect relationship between public and media agendas* by Iyengar et al, earlier articulated under this study's literature review.

For the London Assembly elections, *The Guardian* newspaper's online edition had set-up an interactive webpage that provided voters with information on the candidates, their political parties and the final election results.[28] This webpage also carries a link to a dedicated Local Government section, which only carries news items from councils and town hall politics.[29]

On its part, *The Telegraph's* online edition has a dedicated section covering local elections. The newspaper has already commenced discussing issues that are likely to influence the outcome of the 2012 mayoral elections, which are once again expected to see current London Mayor Boris Johnson and former Mayor Ken Livingstone repeat their 2008 battle.[30]

This brief look at the role media plays in the London city elections found a remarkable observation - that the extensive coverage and interest in local

[27] http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/may/02/london08.livingstone (Accessed on 30/09/2011).

[28] http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/interactive/2008/may/01/london.assembly.elections (Accessed on 30/09/2011).

[29] http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/localgovernment (Accessed on 30/09/2011).

[30] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/london-mayor-election/ (Accessed on 30/09/2011).

government elections by mainstream media has spawned great interest among ordinary citizens on affairs of their local councils. A story published in *The Telegraph* just this year reported that a blogger had been arrested filming a local County Council meeting.[31] Jacqui Thompson, author of the blog *Carmarthenshire Planning Problems and More*,[32] was using her phone to record a meeting of the Carmarthenshire County Council during an angry debate on the closure of a day club for local elderly people.

From this study's literature review, this incident clearly serves to illustrate what Accenture (2011:30) meant when their report on *Redefining local government*, stated that: "The impact of new technology has implications for senior managers in local government, demanding a new leadership focus on openness, collaboration, inclusion, transparency, authenticity, personalization and choice. The report notes that technology is already enabling citizens to take up the role of armchair auditors and hold government to account. It therefore advocates greater engagement by local authorities with their citizens through social media networks."

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[31] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/8568612/Blogger-arrested-for-filming-during-Carmarthen-County-Council-meeting.html (Accessed on 30/09/2011)

[32] http://carmarthenplanning.blogspot.com/ (Accessed on 30/09/2011)

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has investigated whether the mainstream Kenyan newspapers, namely the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* played any significant role in voter education in the lead up to the December 27, 2007 general elections. The study specifically examined the role these papers played in disseminating important information on the candidates running for the office of Councillor in the Nairobi City Council. As stated elsewhere in this paper, the research was seeking information on civic candidates' profiles, educational qualifications, relevant experiences, management capabilities and their leadership visions – information that voters could use as a yardstick to elect suitable caliber of Councillors to run these institutions.

The overall study, specifically the documentary research on the two newspapers, and the complementing interviews of the 20 voters drawn from Kileleshwa ward in Nairobi, has demonstrated that newspapers did not cover the civic campaigns in Nairobi. Because of this reason, it can be inferred that voters did not view newspapers as a reliable medium of information when it came to the local government elections of 2007 in Nairobi.

Whilst the study examined the city of Gaberone and local media role during local government elections, it was not able to draw significant lessons on best media practices that could be adopted locally other than the fact that the *Botswana Daily News* does cover the city elections. However, it significantly brought out parallels between the civic leadership characteristics in that city and Nairobi with the most important difference being the quality of management. Further research is needed to establish why Gaberone is rated more highly in terms of management and good urban planning yet the quality of civic leadership is reported to be similar to Nairobi's.

The study's brief examination of London, and the role the media plays in voter education during local government elections, brought up a number of interesting observations that could enrich our mainstream media if adopted.

First, the leading newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* accord the mayoral and assembly elections extensive coverage. This includes analysis on the issues, dedicated sections on local government and interactive webpages that provide salient information for voters, which they can use in electing their local government representatives.

A vital difference with Nairobi and Gaberone elections is that London local elections are held in a separate year from the parliamentary elections. This is possibly advantageous for the media who don't have to be distracted by national issues. Nonetheless, there are lessons from London's media that can greatly benefit our mainstream media in the lead up to the 2012 general elections, where Governor contests are likely to take on greater importance than previous mayoral elections.

The results of this research support the idea that the city council of Nairobi and a majority of Local Authorities in the country have lacked good representation over the years because voters were denied appropriate information that could enable them elect the right caliber of individuals to manage those institutions. There's need for the mainstream media to bridge this gap for the wellbeing of residents in our local authorities.

The study has gone some way towards enhancing our appreciation of the critical relationship between voter knowledge and the quality of civic leadership through an open examination of local government elections. In view of the devolved county governments realized by the new constitutuion, this is a critical development that requires the attention of all Kenyans to avoid the pitfalls of the current local government system being transferred to the new county governments expected after the 2012 general elections.

The study acknowledges an important limitation that would have probably added important information to the findings. Informant interviews of newspaper editors and local government officials and independent experts would have provided in depth perspectives on the challenges facing local government. Editors from the two newspapers under investigation, the *Daily*

Nation and *The Standard,* especially would have been in a position to shed more light on the reasons for not according local government campaigns in Nairobi some level of importance during their coverage of the 2007 general elections. Further research on this subject would need to seek out and obtain the views of these media representatives and stakeholders in the local government sector.

Understandably, and just to explore these points further, it's important to appreciate that the 2007 general elections involved 2,486 local government electoral areas or civic wards (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2008:8). Providing media coverage for election contests taking place across these wards may be an uphill task and the media houses may not have the resources or manpower to do so. Various media commentators looking into our electoral systems have in the past touched on this issue, albeit, by way of proposals to stagger or delink our multiple general elections to allow for better scrutiny of the candidates by voters and the media.

In a compelling newspaper article indicting the media on the coverage of the 2007 general elections, one writer remarked: "There has been a relegation to the back burner of other important issues. A visitor to Kenya today could easily get the impression that what we have in December is only a presidential election. May be separate polls like happens in some countries could help Kenya to tackle one problem at time instead of being pre-occupied with the scramble for the presidency at the expense of other equally pressing matters."[33] In another opinion piece, former Taveta MP Jackson Mwalulu argued strongly that: "Parliamentary and civic elections should be separated from the presidential ones to check mischief makers. The history of Kenya's electioneering has proved that carrying out three polls simultaneously has the effect of bogging down the ECK, thus making interference by interested parties possible. Henceforth, Kenyans should elect their president at least three months after electing their MPs and Councillors."[34]

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[33] Daily Nation pp 12, Thursday, November 3, 2007

[34] Saturday Nation pp 11, Thursday. October 9, 2008

Interestingly, the short-lived NMG publication *Daily Metro*, carried an opinion poll on 25th August, 2008, on the question: Should presidential, parliamentary, and civic elections be held separately?[35] 80% voted in the affirmative. The reasons given for supporting the idea ranged from: reducing chances of vote rigging, enabling voters to focus and ensuring the electoral commission is not overwhelmed. The dissenters said it would be too expensive.

It would be interesting to carry out further research on this subject in the context of media coverage as part of enhancing our democratic practices as a country. It's important to note at this point that as a result of the new constitution enacted on 27th August 2010, Kenyans will for the first time in the 2012 general elections choose five officials in a single day! In addition to the President and MPs, voters will be expected to elect a Governor, a Senator and County assembly representatives (Constitution of Kenya, 2010: cap 7-9). This is likely to strain media resources further.

As noted earlier in this paper, the central role of the media in elections cannot be underestimated in developing democratic governance. It is therefore imperative under the new constitutional dispensation for Kenya's media practitioners to conscientiously educate voters on the new constitution and nature of devolved governance. This must start with a greater examination of our local government systems and especially the individuals who offer themselves for elections to manage those institutions. The Kenyan media is well placed to play a leading role in voter education in this new dispensation.

In conclusion, recent developments on the coverage of socio-economic issues from the new devolved units of governance by the leading media houses is the right way to go and should be encouraged and supported. The *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers have recently introduced 'County editions' as part of their regular news presentations. Earlier this year, the *Daily*

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[35] *Daily Metro* pp 6, Monday, August 25, 2008

Nation commenced with an in depth coverage of Kilifi County.[36] Afterwards, *The Standard* newspapers launched *The Standard County Weekly* in July 2011. Commenting on their launch event, an editorial write-up correctly pointed out that "majority of the newspapers and media outlets in Kenya today focus on national issues and rarely accord much space to regional news."[37] It is certainly time for the Kenyan media to change that situation.

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[36] Daily Nation County Edition, Thursday, February 24, 2011

[37] The Standard pp 6, Tuesday, July 5 , 2011

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ANNEX 1

Questionnaire

1. Please tick to indicate your age bracket.

   a) 18-25

   b) 25-35

   c) 35-45

   d) 45-60

2. Please tick to indicate your gender.

   a) Male

   b) Female

3. Please tick to indicate your level of education.

   a) Primary school

   b) Secondary school

   c) College diploma

   d) University

4. Did you vote to elect a Councillor to the Nairobi City Council in the 2007 general elections?

   a) Yes

   b) No

   (If you've ticked Yes, please ignore question no. 5)

5. If you did not vote for a Councillor, please tick below to indicate the reason.

   a) I did not know whom to vote for.

   b) I was not interested.

   c) My choice was not on the ballot paper.

   d) Other _____

6. What influenced your choice of Councillor?

   a) The candidate's profile and policies.

   b) The political party's profile and policies.

   c) Friends and family.

   d) Other _____

7. What source(s) of information influenced your choice of Councillor?

   a) Newspapers

   b) Television

   c) Radio

   d) Internet

   e) Word of mouth

   f) Other _____

8. How did you get to know the results of the civic elections?

   a) Newspapers

   b) Television

   c) Radio

   d) Internet

   e) Word of mouth

   f) Other _____

- Thank you for your feedback! -

ANNEX 2

Tabulated interview results

Table 1: Voting patterns by gender and age

	Over 35 years		Below 35 years		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Voted	3	3	5	4	15
Did not vote	2	2	-	1	5

Table 2: Factors influencing choice of Councillor

	Over 35 years		Below 35 years		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Candidates profile and policies	2	1	3	2	9
Political party's profile and policies	1	-	1	-	2
Friends and/or relatives	1	-	-	1	2
Other	-	-	-	2	2

Table 3: Main news sources on civic elections by gender and age

	Over 35 years		Below 35 years		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Newspapers	-	1	1	2	4
Television	1	-	3	2	6
Radio	1	-	-	-	1
Internet	-	-	-	1	1
Word of mouth	4	1	1	4	10
Other	1	1	1	1	4