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Chapter 16

The Role of Mass Media in Women's Participation in 2013 Kenya General Election

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses the role and performance of the Kenyan media in women's participation in 2013 Kenya general election with particular emphasis on radio, television and newspapers. Kenya has a diverse, vibrant and largely free media whose coverage of the election was useful in informing, educating and mobilizing women to vote. However, limited and biased media coverage of women candidates, inadequate civic and voter education may have inhibited women's electoral participation as few women contested and won electoral seats in the 2013 Kenyan polls. Therefore, the media should enhance the visibility of women, political rights and issues of women as the country endeavours to enhance gender equality in political representation. To achieve this, the media should partner with women, the electoral body, government, political parties and other stakeholders in Kenya in order to improve women's media coverage and political participation.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter assesses the role of Kenyan media in women's participation in the general election held in Kenya on March 4, 2013. Further, a discussion of how the media system and consumption habits in Kenya contribute to media's political influence on women is presented. The objective of this chapter is to assess the role and performance of Kenyan media in women's participation in 2013 Kenya general election, with emphasis on radio, television and newspapers. This evaluation is done by examining how electoral coverage in the media and exposure to the media influenced women's electoral participation. In addition, a discussion of the possible factors responsible for media's performance in political participation in Kenya is provided. Finally, the chapter suggests solutions and recommendations on the role that the media should play in order to enhance women's electoral participation in Kenya, more especially when the country is required to enforce the constitutional requirement of gender equality in political representation.

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BACKGROUND

The focus of this chapter is Kenya which is an emerging democracy in Africa. Kenya is located in Eastern Africa, bordering the Indian Ocean, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan. The country is divided into 47 counties, 290 constituencies and 1,450 County Assembly (CA) Wards. Kenya has a population of 38, 610,097 persons, with women comprising 50.3 percent (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics ([KNBS], 2010) and 49.1 percent of the 14,352, 533 registered voters (Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission [IEBC], 2013a). In Kenya, women turn up for elections more than men (*ECK News Newsletter*, 2007; Okwengu, 2010), however, few of them contest and win elective posts. Kenya has held 11 general elections since its independence in 1963. The 2013 general election was the fifth after the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1991 and the first after the country's new constitution promulgated in 2010. The Constitution of Kenya [CoK] (2010) provides for citizens' political and electoral rights, affirmative actions toward women's political representation, freedom of expression and media, and access to information. In spite of the affirmative actions, women's representation in Kenya's 11th parliament is low as it stands at 19.1 percent and 18 percent for the National Assembly and Senate respectively. In CAs, women's representation stands at 34 percent (Federation of Kenya Women Lawyers [FIDA], 2013). This political marginalization of women in Kenya has been witnessed in the past four multi-party general elections held in 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. This marginalization raises pertinent questions on the political influence of the media in women's electoral participation in Kenya.

The media in Kenya which is considered to be diverse, vibrant and largely free comprises of radio, television and newspapers (Media Council of Kenya [MCK], 2012a; Nyanjom, 2012; Oriare, Ugungu & Okello-Orlale, 2010). The country also has a vibrant new media sector comprising of the Internet and mobile telephony. This makes the media critical players in Kenya's politics. MCK (2012) indicates that Kenya has 301 and 83 television (TV) and radio stations respectively categorized as being "on-air," six daily national newspapers and, at least, 11 weekly newspapers. Simiyu (2014) observes that the media scene in Kenya is dominated by four groups, namely: the Nation Media Group, the Standard Media Group, the Royal Media Services Ltd and Radio Africa, each engaged in print, broadcast and online media.

Kenya's radio sector is characterized by public radio; mainstream privately-owned Kiswahili and English language stations, ethnic language stations and community radio (Ugungu, 2012). Radio is the most popular and accessible news medium that 'talks' the language of a large mass of the Kenyan population (Bowen, 2010; MCK, 2012a). Almost 75 percent of households in Kenya own a radio (KNBS, 2010). The top five radio stations in Kenya in terms of audience size are: Radio Citizen, Milele FM, KBC Kiswahili, Jambo FM and QFM (Kenya Audience Research Foundation [KARF] & Advertising Practitioners Association [APA], 2012). These radio stations broadcast in Kiswahili and operate 24 hour services and in the author's opinion are important sources for information in Kenya. With about 70 percent of the rural folk neither served by newspapers nor TV, radio becomes an important source of information in Kenya (Mbeke, 2010). For instance, in the 2013 Kenyan polls, voters identified radio as their main source of information when making their voting decisions (Muriithi & Page, 2013). The implication of this is that the media influenced the electorate in the 2013 Kenyan polls.

The political influence of radio emanates from its features of pervasiveness, portability through transistor radios and other mobile devices, and affordability. Radio is also easy to operate. Therefore, radio has a large audience base in Africa compared to other media (Hungbo, 2012; Kivikuru, 2006). Radio overcomes language and illiteracy barriers. This is critical for women in Kenya as majority of them are

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