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Conflict Sensitive Journalism and Elections: Analysis of the media coverage of the 2017 elections in Kenya

KIREMA BONFACE & MARTHA MOKERA.
DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATYION.
KABARAK UNIVERSITY
Bonifacekirema100@gmail.com
ABSTRACT.

In any electoral process, the media plays a crucial role of informing the public and acting as a watchdog in ensuring a credible and fair election. Media influences the election dynamics and perceptions, how and what the media reports, builds or breaks the credibility of that election. Media influences people by the way of reporting and causes people to make changes either by the way peaceful resolution or even end up in conflicts. It therefore instrumental in conflict resolutions and peace building. Although in some instances, the media has been accused of fueling election-related violence through its reporting. Violence related to elections is increasingly a problem around the world, including in many African countries.

In Kenya, where incidents of violent conflict are frequently experienced information collection and dissemination are part of the systems that create mutual distrust between the actors in conflict. The media is faulted for poor reporting and for amplifying hate speech that inflame tension and lead to retaliatory attacks. Media houses and Journalists have reported unconfirmed reports, aired inciting messages from politicians, or perpetuated view point that have created political discourses that fun violent conflict. The media ought to report freely, fairly and be neutral during elections during elections without fueling violence. In an effort to conflict sensitive journalism, the Media Council of Kenya offers trainings on code of conduct, developed election reporting guidelines and encourage conflict sensitive journalism.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine the role played by media in the electoral processes in Kenya, analyze media coverage of the 2017 elections, establish the extent to which the media escalated and/or de-escalated election violence in Kenya.

Primary authors: KARANI, KIREMA (BONFACE); MOKERA, Martha

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