

Mediatized Governance: Analysis of the 2013 Presidential Debate in Kenya

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Abstract: Media is an influential institution that has proved capable of directing good governance everywhere. As society's mouthpiece, media has allotted itself an indisputable 4th estate position. In Kenya media went ahead to showcase its power of influence when it successfully organized the two presidential debates before the March 4th, 2013 general elections. The position of this paper is that this debate's impact on the election outcome is a pointer to media's power of influence that can be tapped to advance good governance. Poor governance is largely as a result of people making uninformed decision at the ballot. Presidential debate is a forum in which media gives people a chance to evaluate and interrogate their future leaders and consequently make informed decision in the ballot. The two presidential debates before the 2013 general elections aimed at providing the electorate a chance to evaluate the candidates. The article concludes that since bad governance bedevils many sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya and the media can be an apt platform for mitigating against this.

Keywords: Mediatized Governance, Presidential Debate

Introduction

In the past few decades, good governance has become a significant concept for attaining sustainable democratic development in the world. Governance refers to a process of decision making or leadership that defines expectations, verify performance and grant power by the government- an institution entrusted by people to manage them and their social, political and economic resources [1]. Governance has a potential to operate and function for good or bad purpose. Kenya is among the countries that have made remarkable steps towards attainment of good governance through multipartyism, constitutionalism, and freedom of press. Poor governance has been a concern in both developed and developing countries, which have been struggling with for example issues of corruption and poor leadership. Government systems and institutions have been used by those in power to perpetuate poor governance through dictatorship [2]. The media, as the forth estate of the government is supposed to be the voice of the people and a watchdog of the government regimes. One area where the media has been seen vividly in governance is that of presidential debates.

A presidential debate is a publicized discussion that is held late in the election cycle featuring the presidential candidates who have been nominated by their political parties [3]. In some cases, like the case of the 2013 presidential debate in Kenya, the debate was

attended by all eight presidential candidates. In a presidential debate, the candidates congregate in a large hall before an audience of citizens and the whole event is covered live by the national televisions and radios. During the debates, the questions to be discussed are posed by journalist moderators and in other cases, members of the audience [4]. For example, in the Kenyan 2013 presidential debate, the questions were gathered from the public then compressed into common issues that Kenyans wanted to know from the candidates. These debates are not mandated by the constitution, but they are considered a *de facto* election process that gives the candidates a chance to discuss factual policies and issues [5]. In most cases, presidential debates target undecided voters who are not partial to any political ideology, party or candidate. The debate is also aimed at convincing voters from some candidates who may not articulate issues of significance to the people and thus it functions as a yard stick to assess candidates away from their issue-politics [6]. In the United States, presidential debates have become a custom during presidential elections. In these debates, only the candidates from the two big parties, currently the Republican Party and Democratic Party engage in the debate [7]. Notably, the topics of the debate are mostly the controversial issues of the time and political analysts have contended that these debates have had huge influence on the voters and thus considerable impact on the election outcome.

The 2013 Kenyan Presidential Debates

The idea of the presidential debate in Kenya was launched by Nation Media Group and Royal Media Service in 2012 and intended to hold the debate in August 2012 [8]. It later was decided that the debate would be held on 11th and 25th of February before the March 4th elections and all the eight candidates attended [9]. Two moderators were selected by a steering committee which was composed of representatives from various media outlets. The committee had requested the members of public to post questions they would like to be tackled by their aspiring leaders from which over half a million questions were compiled. To collect the questions, the organizing committee relied on short messages services (SMS), FaceBook, Twitter and e-mail. The bulky issues were later compressed into a few questions which catered for major controversial topics of public interest.

The debate was aired live by 8 television stations and 34 radio stations in Kenya [10]. The debate took three and a half hours and all through, the YouTube covered the debate through a live streaming. This debate was viewed in Kenya and across its borders and it was the first of its kind [11]. According to the reviewers and analysts after the debate, the debate was a significant step for Kenya as it helped to give the public the issue-based politics away from the personality and tribal inclined campaign trails throughout the country.

The presidential debate organized by the media in Kenya was a big step in the promotion of open governance and democracy in Kenya [12]. This position was emphasized by even the analysis of the international media which covered the event after. The international media brands that lauded the debate include BBC, TIME, Washington Post, ABC News, Aljazeera, The Guardian, New York Times, Yahoo News, VoA, Fox News, Global Post among others [13][14]. The Kenyan debate was largely made possible by the involvement of an influential media and it is a case study for developing countries. In developing countries like Kenya, which are still awash with politics driven by personalities and tribal loyalty, the politics based on issues and ideologies is inevitable for them to achieve good governance.

Post Debate Poll

The leading opinion poll research company in Kenya, Ipsos Synovate conducted a survey one day after the debate and on 13th February and released the results. According to the results, the researcher company held that if elections were to be held one day after the debate Uhuru Kenyatta would win with 40% followed by Raila Odinga's 33 percent [15]. Considering that the researcher's former polling always had Raila Odinga leading in the polls, this is an indication that the presidential debate was a game changer. Further, the poll indicated that Uhuru Kenyatta

had an exemplary performance compared to other candidates in the debate with 37% of the interviewed being pleased by the performance compared to the 23 percent who favored Raila Odinga's performance.

On the other hand 74% of the people interviewed held that the debate did not influence voter decision while 24 percent said it did have an impact [16]. However, 44 percent of the initially undecided voters said they would vote for the jubilee candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta [17]. The results of the poll concluded that Raila Odinga, Mudavadi, Peter Kenneth and Martha Karua lost in terms of support base after the debate because of the way they handled the questions.

The March 4th Presidential Election Outcomes

After the 11th and 25th February presidential debates Kenya held its elections on 4th March. The final presidential results of the election announced by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission were as follows:

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Uhuru Kenyatta | 6,173,433 | | 50.07% |
| Raila Odinga | 5,340,546 | | 43.31% |
| Musalia Mudavadi | 483,981 | | 3.93% |
| Peter Kenneth | 72,786 | | 0.59% |
| Mohammed Dida | 52,848 | | 0.43% |
| Martha Karua | 43,881 | | 0.36% |
| James Kiyiapi | 40,998 | | 0.33% |
| Paul Muite | 12,580 | | 0.10% |
| Rejected | 108,975 | | 0.88% |
| 12,330,028 | | | 100.00% |

(Data taken from the IEBC website, 2013 Presidential Election Final Results)

These results may have taken Kenyans by surprise because of two reasons. One, Kenyans expected a run-off because all along the campaign, the opinion polls and political analysts predicted that no candidate would manage to win the elections in the first round. Two, although they did not expect him to win, most Kenyans expected Raila Odinga to be leading as per the opinion polls and political analysis by experts.

In this case, the presidential debate turned to be the reasons for the changing of events. Since presidential debates largely targets undecided voters, the post debate polls had indicated that Uhuru Kenyatta had won the hearts of undecided voters [18]. He also had won the hearts of 40 percent Kenyans against 42 percent who were pleased by his main rival Raila Odinga. Another interesting twist and influence of the broadcast debate was the performance of Dida as shown in the above final results tabulation. From the beginning of the organisation of the debate, the organizers never had Abduba Dida in sight. In fact, the advertisements that went on air through the 17 television channels marketing the debate did not have his picture and that of Paul Muite featured. The picture below captures Prof.

James Ole Kiyiapi, Martha Karua, Uhuru Kenyatta, Raila Odinga, Musalia Mudavadi and Peter Kenneth

(from left to the right).



[This image is taken from the online posts of captured ads that features on TVs]



[This image is taken from the online posts of captured advertisements that features on TVs]

After Muite went to court and won against media exclusion, the poster was revised and Muite was included, but Dida's image was left blank.

Abduba Dida was simply inconsequential. However, Kenyans were so much pleased with him at the debate that most decided to prefer him over Martha Karua, James Kiyiapi, and Paul Muite who are all seasoned politicians and public figures.

The Debates as Real Game Changers

Presidential debates are thought to be used to reinforce the existing views that voters have for candidates [19]. The US, which has a consistent history of holding presidential debates, and the Kenyan cases are evidence that presidential debates can be real game changers. The first presidential debate in the US was between Nixon and JFK, and it proved that television is the ultimate political medium especially when it comes to physique [20]. Since the issues of outlook and drama in the debate are avoided, today both radio and television stands almost the same chance of influencing

and what the candidates says and they argue their opinion matters the most.

After the 2012 presidential debate in the US, polls showed that most American voters had already made a decision [21]. The post debate polls showed that both candidates were almost at a par but when the elections were over, president Obama won by a landslide [22]. In the Kenyan case, the post debate polls showed that most Kenyans did not change their already fixed decisions. Although Uhuru Kenyatta was polled to have won the debate and Abduba Dida won the hearts of many viewers, the impression was that most Kenyans would vote for Raila Odinga as he was polled ahead of Uhuru Kenyatta. However, the Ipsos Synovate warned that the debate provided another event that could swing voter decision to both popular and unpopular candidates [23]. It all depended on how the candidates articulated issues raised; their confidence, and plausibility of their responses. After the elections, the performance of Abduba Dida was extremely impressive, rising from oblivion to beat seasoned and long standing politicians like Martha Karua, Prof. James Ole Kiyiapi, and Paul Muite. It was in the debate that Kenyans met Abduba Dida for the second time, from the time they first knew him as he presented his nomination papers. Shockingly, Uhuru Kenyatta beat Raila Odinga in the elections and he did so in the first round, something which was not expected by opinion polls and political analysts alike. It was after this turn of events that Kenyans felt the impact of the 2013 presidential debate on the voter decision and on the election outcome.

Media and Governance

From the onset, it is significant to note that poor governance starts in the ballot when uninformed voter casts the vote. According to Pande [24] voter decision is malleable, and informing voters about the political process and the performance of politicians improves their accountability in the electoral process. Moreover, the quality of governance across different countries in the world is dependant on the quality of elected government and the voter's ability to make informed decisions [25]. Therefore, poor governance is correlated to the poor decision that people make on the ballot if they are not adequately informed about their choices. Media is the mirror of the society and as such, it plays an important role of educating and informing society members on matters affecting them [26]. For example, disclosure of government information by media informs citizens and enables them to exercise their right to information, expression, and helps people to appreciate their right to participate in leadership making through electoral process.

In a well governed state, the government can function in line with the needs of its citizen and take responsibility for every decision it makes and implements [27]. This is a people-centred ideology that

prioritises the needs of the people in a good governance system. For this to be seen to work, good governance must take the public interest, be transparent, be accountable and be responsible for making policies that drive a sustainable economic growth and development [28].

In Kenya, the significance of information has taken time to be appreciated since the start of multiparty system, which was a milestone in Kenya's democratisation process [29] [30]. When the NARC government took office in 2002, the government sought to give freedom to the media and from this time, information disclosure and whistle blowing has gained popularity, especially when poor governance is highlighted. The climax of this freedom was when the freedom of media was encapsulated in the constitution that was promulgated in 2010. Article 35 of Chapter 4 of the constitution, freedom of the media, is wholly dedicated to this cause. As it has been expected, Kenyan media has tried to take the duty to bring the new concepts of governance to the attention of the society.

In an event like the presidential debate in Kenya, all presidential candidates were forced to be more prudent about their decisions and policies because they were aware that millions of Kenyans would hold them accountable. Such an event is able to force policy makers to be more careful when dealing with matters that affect the society and its development [31]. By managing to bring together the presidential candidates in one podium and interrogating them on behalf of Kenyans, the media was able to have people informed about the true nature of politicized issues of land, future governance, integrity of the aspiring leaders, and their ability to conceptualize and actualize the policies they put in their manifestos. This can not be done by an institution that is not influential [32]. The event was a lesson to the leaders that they should be ready to be transparent, accountable and responsible when they come in power knowing that their acts will be brought to the public attention by the media. The event also offered the public a chance to be informed of the kind of leaders they would vote for and know that they had all power in their votes to bring good government in place.

Media as an influential institution that is able to direct and promote good governance has been recognized by international policy makers. A "Survey of Policy Opinion on Governance and the Media" published by BBC in 2009 analyzed that:

...there seems to be increasing recognition of the media's role in governance in the development community. There are also some indicators that media are being more recognized by the policy-makers as

having a central role in development (p.1).

In this report, it was argued that media's role is significant in any society that wants to benefit from good governance. The success of Kenyan media to perform the function of directing good governance depends highly on its independence. This was the first time under the current constitution when media collaborated with the Kenyan public to interrogate their future leaders following the declaration of the constitution that the people are sovereign and the constitution that makes this declaration is supreme.

As the society moves towards good governance, it is important to recognize that the public and the media are not the only players; the government and the political rulers must be responsive and do so in a positive manner [33] [34]. For example in Kenya, the previous attempts to hold presidential debates could not succeed because the involved political leaders did not cooperate. In 2007, president Kibaki turned down an invitation to do so and the same had happened in 2002 on the pretext that he was having health issues [35]. The second president of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi also refused to avail himself for such debates even when they were organized by single media outlets [36]. This way, politicians must cooperate with media so as to have it play its role in propagating good governance. Moreover, productive response from the government can also involve giving media full support when it comes to matters of public interest. In this case, Louw [37] analyzes that this step involves giving the media broad access to public information when it comes to issues of transparency as well as ensuring that freedom of media is covered by law.

Moreover, the concept of mediatisation has rendered media a powerful institution, and this has played in favour of the public interest [38]. Since politics have been mediatised, it has become an inevitable function of the media to direct even the most powerful politicians [39]. With this ability, media has been accorded a chance to interrogate, on behalf of the public, the aspiring leaders, no matter how powerful they are or they were before the contest. It is this power that media can use in the developing countries to ensure that they mediate the leadership and the people and this way, people will better understand the real persons they vote for based on true information rather than propaganda [40]. The 2013 presidential debate in Kenya stands to be a case study because the media managed to draw the attention of all Kenyans to the debate and their participation was proof that media can consolidate and direct the agenda in the society.

How the Media came in?

The influence of the media comes in from two directions of the Kenyan presidential debate. First, this

debate was organized by media and all media houses in Kenya were represented with 8 television stations and 34 radio stations involved in advertising and broadcasting the event live. Needless to say, the social media had the presidential debate the most trending event when it whenever it was broadcast. Second, is the fact that media was able to have millions of Kenyans watch the event and gave them a chance to participate from the onset by sending questions and watching the debate. This way, were it not for the media's idea to organize event, call on Kenyans to participate by sending questions, bringing together the candidates, advertising profoundly for the debate and broadcasting the event; the impact of the presidential debate on the election would not have been there and may be things would have been different. Therefore, if Kenyans were informed by the debate and were able to make better decision based on issues raised in the debate, then media is all to reward for enhancing informed voter decision that instills good governance. This means then that media can use their influence to direct good governance and presidential debates is one of the avenues that can be used in developing countries.

Conclusion

Presidential debates are known to impact greatly especially on the voter turnout and voter decision [41]. Although this position is frequently disputed, the history of presidential debate has it that even inconsequential things during the debates can have balloon effects. For example, what cost Nixon his presidency was a mere lack of make-up; likewise, George W Bush lost his presidency in the 1992 debate when he kept peeping at his watch and this was interpreted as impatience. It was later realized that he was timing the debate, after he lost the elections to Clinton.

Although the voting process is remarkably linked to ethnicity in Kenya [42], it cannot be gainsaid that the historic presidential debates of 2013 had some profound influence. Abduba Dida managed to win hearts of Kenyans because he was humorous and uncomplicated in his talking. Most analysts held that Dida articulated issues of the common man and thus identified with them more than any other presidential candidate in the debate. After the debate, the public opinion polls conducted by the three leading opinion poll research company Ipsos Synovate.

The report held that most Kenyans felt that the debates did not change their voter decisions regarding the candidate they planned to vote for. Second, the report ranked Uhuru Kenyatta as leading in terms of how well the candidates answered their questions. Kenyans were pleased by Uhuru Kenyatta's composure even when he was confronted with elephantine questions, regardless to say he answered such questions most satisfactorily. Third, the reports showed that

Kenyan had identified with Mohamend Abduba Dida because of the way he kept the debate lively and his articulation of common man's issues without fear.

After the elections, two most unexpected outcomes placed the presidential debate at the spot. First, Abduba Dida's performance reflected the views that Kenyans had after they were introduced to him in the debate. Abduba Dida gained fame during the debates which happened less than a month to the elections and that alone enabled him to garner more votes than the most seasoned candidates; Martha Karua and Paul Muite. Nothing can stand against the fact that Abduba Dida's performance was highly occasioned by the presidential debate and thus presidential debates are game changers.

Second, the opinion polls were all ranking Raila Odinga first and none ever ranked Uhuru Kenyatta of Jubilee coalition ahead of Raila Odinga of CORD. Moreover, the polls and political opinions were in agreement that there would be a run off and that presidential elections were not to be won in the first round. After the elections, Uhuru Kenyatta managed not only to beat Raila Odinga, but he also did so in the first round of the elections. This again reflected his performance in the presidential debate a month before the March 4th elections.

The March 4th elections in Kenya are a proof that presidential debates can be game changers in a political process. However, the presidential debate can not be so popular without the media that broadcasts the event and the advertisement it does for the event. Kenyan presidential debate was organized by media and the same media advertised it in unison so that every Kenyan was able to participate in sending questions and went ahead to commit time to listen over the radio and watch the debate on televisions. As a result, the media was able to set the agenda of February 11th as a day when all Kenyans were called to listen to their presidential candidates and then make informed decisions.

The concept of mediatisation also played the part in the debate organization and success. Politics in Kenya have been mediatised and no politician would take the debate for granted. For example, Paul Muite had to go to court to stop the debate as far as he and Abduba Dida were left out in the first debate. He won the case. Furthermore, after the first debate, Uhuru Kenyatta felt intimidated claiming that over 30 minutes in the debate were dedicated to questioning his integrity and none was dedicated to questioning other candidates' integrity. This would be corrected in the second debate on February 25th. The analysis of the effect of his absence in the second debate were that he would lose heavily and that must have made him to resolve to attend. All this happened because political

mediatisation and mediatisation of social life means that he public trust media than any other institution [43]. Therefore, disagreeing with media is disagreeing with the people who hold the power in their votes.

In conclusion, the Kenyan presidential debate is a case study that proved the role that media can play in directing good governance. If good governance is instilled by the people through informed voter decision; and if presidential debates offers a voter a change to make a decision based on issues rather than personalities and politics of propaganda, then presidential debates are a significant event to enable voters make voter decisions. Moreover, presidential debate have to be broadcast and this is where media comes in. the success of the presidential debates are wholly depended on the mediator, the media that organize the questions sourced from the public, advertises the events, moderates and broadcasts the event through their channels to reach the people. Given the influence of the media across society, it is therefore the best placed institution to conduct the presidential debates. This position is inherent and media is best placed to make sure good governance, based on informed ballot decision is in place.

2017 ELECTIONS PROSPECTS

Kenyans fight whenever the incumbent president is contesting election

The incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta will be contesting the 2017 elections. Kenya has, in many times, experienced violence after elections. The cycles started during the Daniel Moi's eras and notably the elections of 1992 and 1997 where post election violence took roots. Since 2001, the post election atmosphere depends on whether the incumbent president is contesting the election or not. In 2002, the then incumbent president Daniel arap Moi was not contesting the elections and there was peace. In 2007, the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki was contesting the election and there was violence. In 2013, the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki was not contesting the election and there was peace. In 2017, the incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta will be contesting the elections. This prospect calls for preparedness and especially on the side of the media and other stakeholders. The media has the greatest role in governance because as I once put it, when Kenya is bunt down the media will be no more. I like the saying from West Africa that the ears that refuse to hear accompanies the head when the head is chopped off. In order to avoid such an end, Kenyan media must up their peace journalism efforts. We saw the power the media wielded during the 2013 campaigns and especially in their organizing the first ever-presidential debate that gave Kenyans a lot of confidence in their presidential candidates. The candidates would close the debate by calling for peaceful elections and tolerance, a stance that played part in the 2013 post election calm. Kenyan

media should start as early as now to employ peace journalism in their reporting.

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