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This chapter discusses media performance during the democratization process in the Eastern African countries of Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda, which form a regional union called the East African Community (EAC). The analysis is inspired by over 200 seminal academic studies and expert texts from various disciplines, mostly on East Africa, to assess how these governments influence media performance during their wave of democratization. The chapter examines a range of issues that demonstrate the autocratic means of building a government agenda, such as restrictive press laws, sectarianism, election malpractice, political and ethnic violence, and influence peddling. It shows how this agenda-building approach exercised by the EAC member states undercuts the contributions of the media to the democratization process. The authors demonstrate how the emergence of independent media and religious institutions in some of the EAC member states constitute the most vigilant and influential part of civil society. Further, the argument is that media performance is most successful when its agenda mobilizes citizens to challenge the structures of authoritarian rule by promoting human rights, economic empowerment, and the rule of law.

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, a wave of democratization has spread to the regimes in Eastern Africa, particularly in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. During this wave, new challenges have surfaced in understanding the influence of governments on the general public and on news media performance in transitioning democracies. These challenges deserve exploration by political communication scholars and the attention of global leaders.

This chapter discusses how East African governments influence media performance during their wave of democratization. Media intimidation, suppression of information, and government propaganda still exist in East Africa (Mwenda, 2007; Rubungoya, 2007) and affect more than just the media. In emerging and transitioning democracies, citizens need free and independent media to inform them on how the societal system works, before they can
participate in policy debates (Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Miller, 1991). The majority of Africans lead parochial lives with limited political understanding (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Ocitti, 2006). The media could play a major role by helping citizens evaluate how they are governed. Thus, undue influences by regimes impact not only the media but also the process of public participation.

This chapter demonstrates how the state-owned media in all five countries still remain subjected to undue state influence and coercion, whereas the privately owned outlets remain fiscally dependent due to the undeveloped market economy. Through this domination and control by privileged elites and the government, the East African media have become guardians of state propaganda and by-products of partisan interest groups. Further, the analysis exposes another concern: that media viability, autonomy, and continued existence may potentially be hampered by these countries’ legal frameworks and monitoring policies through which press freedoms are hampered. We theorize and speculate that an agenda-building tradition has occurred during this wave of democratization in East Africa and may continue to thrive if the challenges to media performance persist.

Comparative research offers unique learning prospects about the interaction of states within the international order, as mass communication, politics, interstate trade and business foster deep global connections (Joseph, Kesselman, & Krieger, 2000). Only a cross-national perspective can enhance understanding of the imperatives taken for granted within one particular system (Esser & Pfetch, 2004). Therefore, it is important to concurrently assess media performance and democratic governance in the five East African nations because of the nature of the polity and formation of each state. Some of the issues addressed here reflect problems encountered in most other sub-Saharan countries, and therefore this analysis can benefit the study of the larger African community.

The chapter is organized into six sections. The first section provides an overview of each East African country and the region’s socioeconomic status and prospects for integration. The second section discusses the agenda-building perspective as a theoretical proposition for governmental influence over media performance. The next section conceptualizes democratization and the rule of law in East Africa. The fourth section reviews the literature about media performance in East Africa and specific cases of the relationship between media and government. The next section integrates media performance with the agenda-building tradition in the entire region. We demonstrate this agenda-building function as a process through which East African governments either construct the propaganda or undercut independent media performance through interference, censorship, and mobilization. We also present prospects for democratic governance and the kind of media performance required to achieve democratization in the region. The final sixth section provides a summary.
Overview of East Africa

East Africa is located on the eastern coast of sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1960s and 1970s, the term referred exclusively to the countries of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, but geographers later incorporated Rwanda, Burundi, and Ethiopia. Politically, the phrase often refers to the East African Community (EAC). The EAC includes Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi and is the focus of this chapter.

EAC Political Integration

In 1967, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda formed the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation for regional collaboration (Sircar, 1990). Ten years later, the initiative failed for a lack of political will. In the 1980s, while working to divide the assets and liabilities of the commission, the three member states agreed on another attempt. In 1990, they called for a restoration of the tripartite agreement to strengthen their economic, social, cultural, political, and sustainable development and to foster the common interests of East Africans (Aseka, 2005). The heads of state set the bar high by calling for a peaceful settlement of political and ethnic conflicts among and within member states, a common monetary currency and, ultimately, a political federation.

In 1999, the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community was signed at the EAC headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, and enacted a year later. Since then, the EAC has established its own Legislative Assembly, a common passport, and a new flag. In 2007, Rwanda and Burundi joined. Meanwhile, the debate continued into 2009 about the election of a common president under universal suffrage, who would have executive power over the EAC.

In addition to the EAC membership, each country has a unique political culture and ideology, which sometimes contradict the common political, economic and administrative goals. For example, Rwanda and Burundi have a Francophone legacy, while Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have English traditions. In late 2006, the Rwanda government changed its official language from French to English to create closer bonds with its EAC neighbors. Currently, Burundi is still debating this move.

While the creation of the EAC is supported by some scholars (e.g., see Kamanyi, 2006), others argue that it rests upon theoretically sound but practically unachievable premises (Aseka, 2005; Kaiser & Okumu, 2004). According to the critics, a political federation could cause further volatility because of variations in the military, judicial, and economic status of each country. These differences are rooted in the distinct history of each state. Uganda has emerged from a long period of civil conflict under President Milton Obote in the 1960s and 1980s and numerous coup d’états during President Idi Amin in the 1970s. Tanzania held a socialist philosophy under President Julius Nyerere in the 1960s-early 1980s, and joined capitalism under Ali Hassan Mwinyi in the 1980s. Kenya endured a long regime of monocracy and absolutism under
Presidents Jomo Kenyatta in the 1960s and 1970s and Daniel arap Moi in the early 1980s to the late 1990s. Rwanda and Burundi have had similar political and economic challenges since independence in the 1960s and rely heavily on the EAC for support for their efforts to disarm and demobilize rebel forces from neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

From early 2006, the member-states have debated regularly to move towards a political federation. The EAC treaty stipulates a union government with central authority and regional autonomy and distinctiveness. This future political federation is not clearly defined, however, because of disagreement about constitutional confederacy and basic justice which would supersede national laws (Kasaija, 2004). Thus far, no institutions have been created within the EAC legislative chambers to address those irreconcilable differences and facilitate the establishment of a political federation. It remains unclear how the EAC will achieve political integration given its members’ profound disagreement on constitutionalism.

**EAC Socioeconomic Integration**

The formation of the EAC has contributed significantly to the establishment of a common economic bloc through the East Africa Customs Union. The creation of a common currency is also an ongoing debate. To foster monetary integration, the central banks had to promote convertibility of their currencies amid low volume of cross-border trade and investment flows (Podpiera & Cibaik, 2005). Economists argue that the progress towards harmonization of monetary and fiscal policy is hampered by disparities in measuring macroeconomic indicators such as inflation (Goldstein & Ndung’u, 2003).

Further, economic disparities themselves impede the harmonization of micro and macroeconomic performance. For instance, by the end of 2007, Burundi was the poorest member state with a purchasing power of less than 500 USD per capita, while Rwanda’s was at 609 USD (Lawson, 2008). Tanzania’s is less than 780 USD, compared to Kenya’s at 1,540 USD, and Uganda’s at 1,820 USD. Kenya has the largest economy in the region, although Uganda has experienced faster growth in the past 12 years. In 2007, Kenya’s share of the regional GDP declined from 33% to 30%, while Uganda’s grew from 32% to 33%. Tanzania’s declined from 27% to 26%. Rwanda’s and Burundi’s share remained at 15% (Lawson, 2008).

Meanwhile, the broader economic environment remains backward and volatile. In terms of doing business and trading across borders in 2008 and early 2009, Tanzania ranked 103rd out of 181 countries, Uganda placed 145th, Kenya was 148th, Rwanda ranked 168th, while Burundi ranked 170th (World Bank, 2008). The concern is that economic disparities and poor social capital in one state could trigger a move of labor forces towards the better economy of another and thus destabilize the region. The uncertainty of this economic integration is further increased by poor fiscal discipline, corruption, and embez-

Arguably, economic development is necessary in East Africa for a vibrant and independent media. The more industrialized and economically viable a society is, the greater the diversion of resources from investments and commercial markets to the masses through media advertisements (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2005). Consequently, if the private media and civil society are successful in securing a fair share of revenues from competing business and commercial services, they could restrict dictatorships and demand resource accountability, so that democratic institutions and a middle class are established and the regimes begin to act in general societal interest.

Overview: Kenya

The power center in Kenya is the presidency, and the first president was Jomo Kenyatta. He led the country to independence from Britain in 1963 and ruled until his death in 1978. The successor, Daniel arap Moi, ruled until 2002 through political nepotism, which solidified his influence. He was supported by his own ethnic group, the Kalenjin, and political beneficiaries, such as Maasai leaders, the Luo, and the Luyia. The Kikuyu people, who lived around the nation’s capital, Nairobi, were mostly neglected. Ethnic fragmentation within the power structure intensified regional economic imbalances and the unequal provision of social services, as some ethnic groups used their presidential patronage to exploit government resources in the healthcare and welfare sectors.

In 1991, Kenya started a new era of transition to democratic governance, when Moi’s totalitarian regime was pressured by civil society and donor governments to re-introduce multiparty electoral democracy. In December 1992, the country held the first national elections since independence (Klopp, 2001). However, the 1992 and 1997 elections were marred by malpractices, including impropriety in providing opportunities for all presidential contestants and sporadic clashes between supporters of the incumbent and the opposition parties. Moi, the then-incumbent, won both elections amidst the opposition’s claims for fraud (Klopp, 2001). In 2002, Kenyans affected a regime change in multiparty national elections by electing Mwai Kibaki as president. This was the first time an incumbent had been democratically unseated by the opposition (Anderson, 2003).

Overview: Tanzania

Tanzania is a union of the mainland Tanganyika and the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. It has had four presidents since 1961, when Tanganyika received its independence from Britain. The colonial rulers left behind a multiparty tradition, but in 1964 then-president Julius Nyerere established a single-party system (Pratt, 1976). A major event in Nyerere’s presidency was the issuing of
the Arusha Declaration in 1967, which called for the establishment of socialism, and a focus on human development and self-reliance (Smith, 1998). In 1975, Nyerere strengthened the legitimacy and supremacy of the party over parliament and the government through constitutionally establishing the Tanzanyika African National Union (TANU) as a leading institution (Pratt, 1999), which controlled the politics of the mainland throughout his rule. Two years later, TANU transformed into the party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and continued its domination.

The first multiparty elections occurred in 1985 after Nyerere resigned. They ushered in Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who was reelected in 1990 and retired in 1995. Benjamin Mkapa became the third president, again through multiparty elections, and completed two terms in 2005. The current president is Jakaya Kikwete, former minister of foreign affairs under Mkapa and chosen by him to head the ruling CCM party. Kikwete won 80% of the national vote despite the decreasing popularity of CCM.

Tanzania now has 12 political parties, but CCM has governed since independence. Opposition leaders have argued that the country was experiencing a de facto one-party system and a reversal to the consolidation of democracy (Hossain, Killian, Sharma, & Siitonen, 2003). CCM controls government resources and uses them to reward supporters with state posts and loans. All opponents have been destroyed politically through media rhetoric by the supporters of the president (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001). This dominance has begun to diminish in the last 15 years due to the work of independent journalists and organized critical debates on current affairs talk shows. In the lead up to Jakaya Kikwete’s election in December 2005, Tanzanians had continuously used the media to voice displeasure with the ruling party over rampant unemployment, corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and the overall economic stagnation. In early 2006, after the presidential elections, the government weakened press freedom laws to demobilize and suppress the callers who had been politically vocal.

Overview: Uganda

Uganda has gone through several political changes since the current president, Yoweri Museveni, and his National Resistance Army (NRA) seized power from General Tito Okello Lutwa’s government in 1986. Before that (1971–1979), the country was under the military dictatorship and despotic tyranny of President Idi Amin Dada (Rubongoya, 2007), who used the military to instigate violence against real and imagined opponents. During President Milton Obote’s reign (1980–1985), the regime continued the militarization of the state as a way of sustaining the president’s political fortunes (Kabwegere, 1995). Yet, Obote allowed multiparty politics and rose to power through a rigged general election. The recognition of political contestation and election of leaders under multiparty activities during Obote’s regime in the early 1980s were seen as the first wave of democratization.
The second wave of democratic transition in Uganda started during Museveni’s leadership. In the late 1980s–1990s, Museveni imposed legal restrictions on multiparty activities to suppress political dissent over his stronghold on the presidency. Parallel to that though, local institutions with elected village councilors were created and parliament was restored, thus allowing for opposing views in parliamentary debates (Joshua, 2001). Although the country has transitioned to multiparty electoral democracy, scholars and international observers have criticized its inconsistencies of governance (Kannyo, 2004; Mugisha, 2004).

One such contradiction occurred in 2005 when Museveni reached the constitutional two-term limit on elected office. He aggressively lobbied the parliament to run a referendum amending the constitution and lifting the presidential term limit (Afako, 2006). The referendum was subsequently supported by voters. This change resumed multiparty competition, while allowing Museveni to run for the presidency again. Another contradiction came as he continued to influence the legislative assembly, which rubberstamps all bills and constitutional changes (Oloka-Onyango, 2004). The president also exercises significant influence over the judiciary and parliament. Yet another democratic incongruity is the excessive participation of the military in civilian governance, as commanders serve in the cabinet, parliament, and other institutions.

Overview: Rwanda

Unlike the EAC founding members Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, which trace their colonial past to Britain, Rwanda’s goes back to Germany and later Belgium, the latter of which influenced its Francophone background. Rwanda’s ethnic composition, politics, history, culture, and economy are quite similar to Burundi’s. In both countries, for instance, the colonial rulers treated the minority Tutsi ethnic groups as superior to the Hutus, and politically empowered them to subjugate the Hutu majority (Manirakiza, 2005).

While the 1994 genocide is often seen as a watershed, other smaller-scale clashes have dated back to the 1950s. The culmination of the recurrent ethnic violence came when a plane carrying President Juvenale Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down in 1994. The Tutsi were blamed (Chalk, 1999; Prunier, 1995), and Hutu civilians, the national army, the militia, and the Presidential Guard were mobilized to kill all Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Schabas, 2000). Local officials orchestrated the genocide through the mass media (Gourevitch, 2000; Prunier, 1995), which disseminated war propaganda and called this extermination a “self-defense response” (Rotberg & Weiss, 1996).

After the genocide, the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) rebel group, which ousted Habyarimana’s army and government, named a Hutu politician, Pasteur Bizimungu, to preside over the government, so the Hutu majority could become part of the “new Rwanda” (Gourevitch, 2000). The RPF leader, Major General Paul Kagame, became vice president and in 2000 assumed the
presidency after Bizimungu resigned. The resignation triggered protests from leading Hutu politicians and members of parliament when Bizimungu accused Tutsi legislators of selectively persecuting Hutu politicians. Since then, President Kagame has condemned his opponents for instigating ethnic anxieties and his RPF government has suspended political party activities and forcibly co-opted political opponents into his party. Kagame held the first presidential elections since the genocide in 2003 and received 95% of the votes.

Overview: Burundi

When Burundi gained its independence from Belgium in 1962, the new post-colonial government established a constitutional monarchy, which was overthrown 4 years later by the military, and a series of one-party regimes followed until 1992. Throughout those 30 years under a Tutsi party called the Union for National Progress (UPRONA), internal conflicts transformed into armed rebellions between the authoritarian Tutsi governments and the militia groups led by the Hutu opposition (Jennings, 2001). Much of the oppression in Burundi was done by the Tutsi minority on the Hutu majority; whereas in Rwanda, the Hutu majority suppressed the Tutsi minority until 1994.

The socioeconomic struggles in the 1990s resulted from political instability from the ethno-political fragmentation (Ould-Abdallah, 2000). The 1990s saw politically motivated executions based on ethnic identity and assassinations of Hutu politicians (Ould-Abdallah, 2000). The assassinations of two Hutu presidents, Melchior Ndadaye in 1993 and Cyprien Ntaryamira in 1994 (the latter was in the plane with Rwandan President Habyarimana), led to mass uprisings, civil unrests, and unlawful detentions (Reyntjens, 2004). The Burundi government answered with violent retaliation (Ould-Abdallah, 2000; Reyntjens, 2006).

President Pierre Buyoya tried in early 2000 to mitigate the escalating ethno-political conflicts by inviting former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, to mediate a peace agreement, which resulted in signing the Arusha Peace Accord (Neethling, 2003). Yet, clashes continued in some areas and perpetuated a cycle of violence.

Consequent attempts to democratize Burundi did not yield the stability and peace Buyoya wished for (Neethling, 2003). He adopted a new constitution, which aimed to restore democratic principles, but generated hostility from warring parties who did not participate in drafting it (Gahama, Makoroka, Ndite, Ntahombaye, & Sindayizeruka, 1999). Nevertheless, the country slowly progressed towards reconciliation and stability; local and national elections were held in 2005, the first since 1993.

The above overview demonstrates the various macro-level challenges faced by the EAC and the individual advances and problems of the member states. Despite the vast differences in each county’s development, a common theme is the strong governmental control on political life, which maintains a prevalent and often absolute agenda on society, the media, and civic life. This approach is examined through the concept of agenda building in the following section.
Agenda Building as a Government Influence

Most literature on Africa shows that the media provide political leaders with an outlet for their agendas, rather than engage in independent reporting (Hyden, Leslie, & Ogundimu, 2002). This finding relates to the theory of agenda building, which addresses who influences the media’s agenda. For some scholars, agenda building is especially appropriate for comparative analysis because “it occurs in every political system from the smallest to the largest, from the simplest to the most complex, while at the same time there are important variations in its form and structure” (Cobb, Ross, & Ross, 1976, p. 127).

This theory is pertinent to media performance and democratization in the EAC because the governments have not only controlled and dominated the discourse on national media for almost four decades, but have also used the media for state propaganda. For instance, after independence in the early 1960s, the new regimes demanded and received favorable coverage from the national media. They appointed ministers of information, whose duties included controlling the media and ensuring that journalists subscribed to their agenda of unity, solidarity, and development (Mamdani, 1996).

While traditional agenda-setting research has focused on how the media influence public opinion, agenda building examines what contingent conditions affect this process (Johnson et al., 1996). Such contingent conditions come from news editors, policy makers, PR practitioners, and the interests of audiences (Sallot, Cameron, & Lariscy, 1997; Sheafer & Weimann, 2005; Walters, Walters, & Gray, 1996). Political actors have also been identified as influencers but in varying degrees (Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, & McCombs, 1989), which has suggested the existence of intervening variables, such as the personality of the politician (Wanta et al., 1989), the nature of the issue and real-world events (Johnson et al., 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Many Western scholars have placed increasing attention on news sources and real-world events (conflicts or disasters) as key determinants of media agendas (Berkowitz, 1987; Johnson et al., 1996).

Individuals in power, who are also major news sources, build sociopolitical ideas they propagate through the press, and the press imparts them as salient issues to the public (Weaver & Elliot, 1985). In emerging democracies like the EAC member states, government sources influence, and in extreme cases control, both the media messages and the type of issues debated by the public on state-owned media. However, one can argue that media ownership and the rule of law are also intervening factors that shape the selection of issues on media and public agendas. For instance, Kalyango (2008) found that governments in Africa build an agenda based on regional ethno sectarianism to maximize their political power by taking advantage of citizens who are less educated and who lack basic understanding of their political rights.

Three different conceptual models of agenda building have been identified (Cobb et al., 1976). The first model, outside initiative, relates to instances when issues arise at the non-governmental/civic level, reach the public agenda and,
finally, the formal government agenda. The second, mobilization model, is said to occur when politicians want to move an issue from their formal agenda to the public, as when newly accepted political doctrines need to be implemented in society. The third model, inside access, is proposed to occur when groups or individuals with close access to the government initiate issues and place them on the formal agenda but without making the issue public. The authors cautioned that these models were conceptual rather than empirical and a different combination of them may appear under various circumstances. The mobilization model is most applicable to East Africa’s media performance. The EAC member states have controlled the media since the 1960s and thus have mobilized support for their antidemocratic propaganda and autocratic agenda. These practices have continued during the transitional democratization period.

This discussion has touched on four different agendas presented in the literature primarily from Western media systems: media, public, source, and policy. The first two are typically the focus of agenda-setting research as it relates primarily to the Western media systems (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In East Africa however, the agenda-setting function is not the primary vehicle for driving issue salience, because the state-owned media do not autonomously investigate and disseminate new information to the public without having the content filtered by state-appointed gatekeepers in the news organization. Source agenda pertains to how newsmakers try to influence the media, which is studied by agenda-building research (e.g., Johnson et al., 1996). The last type, policy agenda, pertains to how media coverage and public opinion influence political decision making (Cobb et al., 1976).

One of the few agenda-building studies on Africa (Wanta & Kalyango, 2007) examined the role of the four agendas in a political communication process involving 20 African nations, including the five EAC member states. They found support for a source agenda in that President George W. Bush successfully influenced the New York Times’ coverage of the African nations through his public statements. The study also found a connection between the New York Times’ media agenda and the U.S. administration’s policy agenda when the media used a terrorism news frame. The more coverage a country received linking it to terrorism, the more U.S. foreign aid went to the country to fight terrorism. The authors speculated, however, that the relationship between media and policy on the issue of terrorism could be a result of a particularly strong source agenda, where the president was able to influence both the media and the policy of his administration in the direction of his public statements.

Considering the political culture of the EAC explicated throughout this chapter, the agenda-building effects on the media could be stronger compared to the Western media because of the poorer training of local journalists and the stronger influences of autocratic leaders. In East African societies, many untrained journalists are still learning about the values of democratic governance and thus could be unaware of the influences they are under. East African presidents have long sustained their political legitimacy by exploiting citizens’ lack of understanding of their political rights to participatory democracy.
(Weiler, 1997). In addition, the proposed interrelatedness and dynamic among the media, public and policy agendas could be stronger than in Western societies because of the larger influence of the governments’ policy agenda over the media and the public and the tight control that local leaders exercise on both media and public.

**Democratization and Rule of Law**

The complexities of the theoretical explication of democratization call for exploring the concept through the lens of the East African experience. We undertake this to make a case for agenda building as a theory that explains how the governments influence the media to report about the democratization process. The transformation of regimes in East Africa from military juntas to civilian dictatorships and, ultimately, to multiparty political systems cannot be fully explained by the conceptualization of democracy from the Western perspective. Therefore, we explore an alternative conceptualization from the East African experience. The first concept is the transition stage. In the EAC, transition refers to the process of dissolving authoritarian regimes into political contestation and thereby enabling citizens and groups to compete for political power and economic resources under some form of an egalitarian system. The second concept is economic and political liberalization. It refers to the enabling of basic rights that protect citizens from arbitrary coercion or censure of their freedoms to associate with groups and other citizens, communicate via mass media, and express individual or collective dissent. It also refers to the endorsement of wealth accumulation and competition in commerce, and the pursuit of modernization through mass appeal. The final concept is the rule of law, which we explicate later in this section. In East Africa, the democratization process has been slow because it threatens the authority and autocracy of the regimes.

Diamond (1999) and Sen (1999) offered differing definitions and conceptualizations of the democratization process. While Sen saw democracy as a universal value, which all nations of the world will ultimately embrace, Diamond emphasized the attaining of successive free, fair, meaningful, and competitive elections before making a judgment about its universality. O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) and Shin (1994) argued that democratization should be based on gradualism, moderation and compromise. Huntington (1991) conceptualized democracy as a dichotomous variable, with democratic qualities based on fragility of legitimacy, stability of alternation, and sovereignty of the people. Although this is beyond the scope of our chapter, it is important to point out Huntington’s observation that sometimes authoritarian regimes that do not democratize can nonetheless become liberalized, more open and competitive, and less repressive.

Freedom House’s reports on freedom in the world provide a rough comparative overview of the democratic developments in the five countries, as indicated in Figure 12.1.
Some African scholars have argued that democratization in sub-Saharan Africa did not start with Huntington's (1991) third wave of democratization between 1974 and 1990. Mamdani (1996) and Kirschke (2000) claimed that democracy had deeper roots, as Africans organized and governed themselves starting with the traditional local chiefs and ending with the administrative political rulers. Democratization in Africa began as a political struggle within and against the nation-state during colonial days (Ocitti, 1999). This resistance was enforced by tribal-clannish factions and other domestic forces, such as labor struggles and peasant groups. They engaged in political violence with the post-colonial dictatorships in the 1960–1980s and fought for freedom and self-determination (Mamdani, 1996).

In East Africa, the struggle for democracy has always been accompanied by violence (Klopp, 2001). Violent political action is particularly common as ethnic groups begin to suspect the ruling clan or political elite of being unrepresentative and lose hope for peaceful redress of grievances (Snyder, 2000). Such disaffection has been evident since colonial days, as social or communal groups were targeted, estranged, and completely excluded from power (Crescenzi, 1999; Klopp, 2001). Mamdani (1996) noted that throughout postcolonial regimes, the informal civil society demanded the rule of law, liberalization, and free expression, thus achieving a degree of normalcy. These forces, which emerged before political parties in East Africa, expressed popular sentiments through violence and thus influenced governments to be more responsible (Kannyo, 2004; Young, 2002).

The rule of law works in conjunction with other concepts of democracy and ensures political rights, instruments of accountability, and civil liberties, and thus leads to equality of all citizens. Hayek (1972) defined the rule of law as a reflection that a government is held accountable for all its actions. This means

![Figure 12.1](image-url)
that societies under the rule of law have sufficient individual liberties and citizens enjoy equal rights, protection, and privileges from the state. For Henderson (2003), an independent judiciary, free media, and an informed and engaged civil society are crucial for achieving the rule of law. According to Mahoney (1999), societies are more likely to be stable democracies and achieve fast economic growth if they enjoy the rule of law. Deutsch (1977) and Mahoney (1999) argued that respect for the rule of law contributes to international order. Weak states adopting the rule of law pacify society during institution-building. The rule of law guarantees that a regime’s power and influence are legitimately exercised according to openly disclosed rules and acts enforced on established procedure (Deutsch, 1977). In this chapter, the rule of law is defined as a set of formal rules and principles of democratic governance and the existence of leaders who exercise political authority to safeguard the constitution and to govern by those rules and rights.

**Rule of Law in East Africa**

In East Africa, state actors and law enforcement agencies refer to the rule of law in these broad terms: constitutionalism, a well-functioning judicial system, and respected or sufficient legal policy (Schmitz, 2006). East African leaders do not address or consider contemporary political events, respect for civil and political rights and other political virtues as tenets of the rule of law (Shivji, 1995). In most cases, their characterization is so lax that it allows contradictory interpretations of the law between the enforcement agencies and the judiciary.

Article 7(2) of the EAC Treaty talks about the rule of law and preservation of human rights, but it is unclear how East African governments enforce it. The challenges for improving the rule of law seem to be affected by the pace and scope of democratization. In light of the growing but contested political federation, Kamanyi (2006) outlined some key necessities for the restoration of the rule of law in the EAC: presumption of innocence, the right not to be imprisoned without trial, equal rights before the law, and independence of the judiciary. However, each EAC member state has faced its own challenges in applying these principles. These are briefly outlined below.

In Uganda for instance, the police regularly detain suspects beyond the constitutional limit of 48 hours (Schmitz, 2006). The Human Rights Watch of 2005 reported that torture had become commonplace. The government has come under increased criticism for the political instability instigated by the Uganda police. Press reports and election observers have said that the police and military have dispersed opposition campaign rallies, beat up and detained followers, and sometimes charged them with treason (Baker, 2004). More than 120 politicians and independent local journalists have been charged with engaging in or supporting terrorism since the Ugandan government passed the
2002 Anti-terrorism Act (Mwenda, 2007). This has impeded civilians from freely engaging in the electoral process.

Tanzania has also suffered episodes of country-wide political violence. In the late 1990s, citizens became agitated by the increased arrest of human rights activists and some journalists on weak charges of being idle and disorderly. The disintegration of civil order and collapse of the rule of law increased political dissatisfaction, violence, and insecurity (Kaiser, 2000a). Press reports alleged that President Benjamin Mkapa’s government overlooked the situation when the administration of justice was based on status-quo patronage. The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party enjoyed police protection for the atrocities committed in line with their political activities (Kaiser, 2000b). When some CCM bureaucrats faced criminal charges for killings and corruption, they were released for lack of evidence. During the 2001 general elections at the island of Pemba, armed security forces massacred more than 30 opposition demonstrators who demanded new presidential elections. Human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gathered eyewitness testimonies but the government never pressed charges. During and soon after the past two election cycles in 2000 and 2005, many citizens believed to be antagonistic to the CCM were arrested for several days (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001).

In Kenya, violent outbreaks during the presidential and parliamentary elections of the late 1980s–1990s killed hundreds and displaced thousands (Brown, 2003). Moi’s regime (1980s–1990s) held suspects without trial (Steeves, 2006). During the second and third multiparty elections, opposition supporters suffered constant violations of human rights by the Kenya African National Union (KANU; Brown, 2003). Dozens were killed and hundreds arrested during outbreaks of ethnic violence (Brown, 2003). Many of these deaths have remained unsolved, and international human rights advocates attempting to file these cases in the courts have been threatened with deportation. A 2005 annual Human Rights Watch report found widespread use of excessive, unnecessary, and lethal force on civilians by the police during arrest and under detention.

In Rwanda, the ethnic propaganda of the Habyarimana government inspired political violence, while the regime destroyed the judicial infrastructure and killed most moderate judges in 1994 (Werchick, 2003). Lawmakers and the state police were unconcerned or even encouraged the ethnic killings (Mamdani, 1996). In the post-genocide era, the government set up a tribunal to prosecute the offenders, which was supervised by the International Criminal Justice based in The Netherlands. But the Rwandan government’s agenda to build the legitimacy of the command justice, an institution meant to promote peace and reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi, instead politicized perpetrators as Hutus and victims or survivors as Tutsis. Consequently, in the first decade of the tribunal, Kagame’s refusal to prosecute some of the RPF rebel commanders accused of war crimes generated the notion of an ethnocratic regime (Tiemessen, 2004). Since 2000, the Kagame government has used the
national media, especially radio and television, to dismiss allegations from the opposition that Tutsi politicians and army receive state-backing to subjugate the majority Hutu peasants.

Since Rwanda and Burundi share a common border and are closely linked ethnically, the ethno-political events in one often influence and precipitate similar reaction in the other (Gahama et al., 1999). The 2000 Arusha Accord, spearheaded by Nelson Mandela, led to the drafting of a new constitution and a 2005 referendum. It established a democratic foundation, while allowing for the development of a multi-party system. The legal system is based on both traditional tribal customs and the German and French models. One of the major challenges is the administration of justice for political prisoners (Reyntjens, 2006). The Tutsi-dominated military and police have detained and imprisoned suspects for being sympathizers of armed rebellion. By late 2006, there were more than 5,500 political and petty crime prisoners still awaiting trial or judicial review (Reyntjens, 2006; Van Eck, 2004).

The examples provided here demonstrate the breakdown of the rule of law within the EAC members due to uncertainties in the state leaders’ governance. This governance has been conditioned by ethnic and regional identities, thereby causing injustices and the proliferation of armed insurrections at the expense of the majority of ordinary citizens. Consequently, throughout the 1990s, the governments of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda stayed committed to ensuring that they monopolize and cling to power using military control and occupation of key political positions. The governments resorted to intimidation and draconian laws, which suffocated civil society and left its imprint on the consciousness of the people to accept permanent military rule. In the late 1990s, the governments directed their attention to the liberalized mass media, which had started exposing state corruption, social injustice, and state autocracy. Since 1996, the predicaments in Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi triggered civil disobedience and unrest, which led to rapid delegitimization of their military governments; while in Kenya and Tanzania, civil societies opposed the military states’ engagement in politics, inspired by their neighbors.

**Media Performance in East Africa**

Most communication literature emphasizes that the professional role of the news media is to advance democratic governance and the welfare of society. Recent scholarship in political communication and journalism has also debated the professional values and ideologies of journalists in relation to democratization (Bennett, 2004; McChesney, 2000; Ocitti, 2006). Hughes and Lawson (2004) provided some convincing evidence that the news media are either predominantly an entity of major concentrated commercial interests in the industrialized world or owned and controlled by governments in the developing countries. Accordingly, most literature from the developing nations of...
Latin America and Africa shows that media ownership and partisan bias in political news coverage have generated concerns for the legitimacy and independence of the media and have eroded public trust in emerging democracies (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Lawson, 2002).

A major obstacle for the freedom and professionalism of the African press is the conflict between reliance on official sources and the agenda-building practices of these sources and the state agencies behind them (Bourgault, 1995). Evidence from media scholars (McQuail, 1992) and independent observers, such as The Freedom Forum, suggests that the news media rarely resist the framework provided by government officials. The reliance on authoritative and often government-supported sources presents a daunting challenge for the unsophisticated audience, which is ill equipped to critically evaluate political news.

On the other hand, state-owned news media in Africa have been subject to censorship and direct political control for years (Ochs, 1987; Wanyande, 1996). In the dawn of post-colonialism, the media engaged in self-censorship for self-preservation as part of development journalism (Faringer, 1991). Some African states outside the EAC still endorse development journalism, the basic premise of which is that the government must mobilize the news media for nation building to increase political consciousness and further economic development (Faringer, 1991; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Critics see development journalism as another form of governmental PR but proponents call it an opportunity for investigative reporting (Ogan, Fair, & Shah, 1984). In practice, the idea was often used to manipulate the media into accepting and promoting government propaganda. Thus, although development journalism is not synonymous with self-censorship per se, the two often coexist in the same media systems.

Since 1963, the Kenyan governments have curtailed press freedom by requiring the state-owned and privately owned media to embrace nationalism, nation building, and project the head of state as a symbol of the nation (Heath, 1997; Maloba, 1992). President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania also developed a social media policy in the late 1960s, which placed responsibility with the media to strictly preserve traditional African values of collective communism, self-reliance, socialism, sharing, and hard work (Grosswiler, 1997). The limited press freedom in Tanzania and Kenya persisted until the mid-1990s, when the two countries liberalized the communication sector. Meanwhile, various regimes in Uganda until the mid-1990s used intimidation, prosecution, and imposing of an advertisement ban on the privately owned press as a means of curtailing press freedom (Robins, 1997). In the early 1960s, the Rwandan and Burundian governments imposed stiffer regulations on national broadcasting and state newspapers to focus their coverage on educational information about health care delivery, morality, national peace, and food security (Frere, 2007). That was before the early 1990s when the media in both countries were used to fuel sectarianism as a means of dividing the population along ethnic lines.

Performance and use of sources in East Africa are related to the media’s professional norms and editorial policies created partly by the type of own-
Media Performance, Agenda Building

Media have been classified as state- or privately owned (Bourgault, 1995; Hyden et al., 2002; Norris, 1997). Except for Kenyan newspapers, all news media in East Africa were initially owned and controlled by the state. This continued until the international community, spearheaded by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, pressured these governments in the early 1990s to liberalize the media under the Structural Adjustment Programs (Ocitti, 2006). Through these programs, some of the state-run media organizations turned into publicly owned corporations or were completely privatized. Still, the regimes continued to own and control the most influential outlets in each country, mainly the national television and radio. Consequently, media ownership in East Africa has been central to the agenda-building process (Kalyango, 2008).

Commercial media systems also have their shortcomings. Curran (1991) and Norris (1997) argued that in a capitalist society, the private news media respond to the interests of the marketplace rather than the expectations of the public and government officials. Private ownership in North America has been criticized for encouraging the tabloidization of the news under the pressure of market forces (Esser, 1999; McChesney, 2000).

Not every aspect of the media in East Africa, however, is sanctioned by the government. Some studies have found that a few independent media outlets frequently cover citizen oppression (Hyden et al., 2002) and have consistently taken a strong position to report all aspects of a failed state. The independent media provide political opponents and civic activists a platform to convey their message (Zafiro, 2000). The regime counteracts that by using its influence directly through material inducements or by disseminating favorable messages through the state-owned media (Lush, 1998).

Media in Kenya

Presently, Kenya is considered EAC’s regional center for mass communication and international news media. It has allowed the emergence of independent journalistic enterprises, but the regimes since President Moi have continued to intimidate and influence most news media outlets, particularly radio and television (Klopp & Zuern, 2003). The privately owned radio stations, for instance, are licensed to broadcast only in designated zones, while only the state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) broadcasts to the entire country. More than 80% of radio frequencies have been assigned arbitrarily to friends of the political establishment (Matende, 2005). In other instances, the judiciary has restricted press freedom by the imposition of heavy fines on journalists and news outlets and through the licensing and accreditation of journalists (Matende, 2005).

A few independent news outlets, such as the Nation newspaper, advocated for civil liberties in the 1990s and brought the discussion of nepotism and authoritarianism to the forefront. The relative press freedom in the 1990s pro-
vided a considerable outlet for the voicing of political dissatisfaction, but this press coverage was quelled by intimidation and journalists’ accreditation in 2000. Accredited journalists must adhere to professional standards set by the government and failure to do so leads to suspension from practice.

The media under the current president, Mwai Kibaki, is less free compared to his predecessors, Moi and Kenyatta. Through his first term in office, Kibaki kept silent when his political party was discussing the Kenya Media Bill in parliament, which sought to regulate reckless and irresponsible journalism. The bill obliged journalists to disclose all sources and be accredited before they can practice, which also required the payment of an annual fee. Hundreds of journalists, diplomats, and members of civil society, such as human rights groups, protested the new media bill. Kibaki was finally forced to reject the repressive clauses in late 2007. This was a critical victory and a good indication that a vibrant civil society with fairly critical independent media can succeed in mobilizing the masses against repression. The civil activism and adversarial press have begun to unravel the presidential monocracy and absolutism in Kenya.

The news media played a major role in recent presidential elections. In 2002, they were critical of the incumbent’s candidate pick, while the opposition parties all united behind one opponent, Kibaki. The media were called antidemocrats and protagonists of anti-regime protests by the incumbent party and threatened with imprisonment, which curtailed their independence, and led to self-censorship (Kagwanja, 2003). Eventually, the opposition’s candidate Kibaki won with a landslide of 62%. Then, in the next presidential elections in December 2007, the outcome between the incumbent Kibaki and the opposition party was split along ethnicity. Accusations of impropriety followed and violence erupted across Kenya. Most independent broadcast media were temporarily closed. The minister of information banned live broadcasts and threatened independent journalists who criticized the government for the violence, while simultaneously using state-owned media to disseminate non-violence news that promoted the government’s agenda.

Media in Tanzania

Press freedom in Tanzania was growing between 2000 and 2005, although access to information was still controlled by public officials such as the police, city or district councilors (Kambenga, 2005). The media in Zanzibar are more limited because of the hostility of the local political leadership. Since independence in 1964, politicians there have continued to suppress newspaper and radio journalists who expose their abuse of power (Ochs, 1987). In a country with more than 100 community and major newspapers in five different languages, including 14 major dailies and 59 weeklies, authorities have continued to suppress each one of them. Despite the existence of some 30 radio stations and 20 commercial TV stations, the electronic media cover no more than a quarter of the country and journalists are subjected to constant harassment (Kambenga, 2005).
The press belonged exclusively to the CCM party and government leadership until the mid-1990s. After the liberalization of the press in 1995, it began to increasingly expose political corruption and misappropriation of public and donor funds. But during President Hassan Mwinyi’s era (1985–1995) these reports were regularly suppressed and journalists were coerced by law enforcement agents into retracting damaging stories. Some journalists, especially editors, were under intense pressure to stop criticizing the government and were obliged to mobilize for a collective promotion of the Ujamaa principles, which are similar to development journalism. They refer to the family-based concept of socialism introduced by Nyerere in 1964 as a distributive policy associated with socialist communal livelihood (Shivji, 1995).

Throughout Nyerere’s reign, development journalism thrived, since the government forced the press to reflect the spirit of Ujamaa in all coverage. The CCM government warned the independent news media against what they referred to as Western imperialist style of journalism. Tanzania today, under the leadership of President Jakaya Kikwete, allows the oppositional viewpoints of the mostly private media, since it is becoming increasingly difficult to suppress alternative political voices in the new liberalized vibrant media environment.

Election coverage has been especially challenging because of the inherent violence, especially in the semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001). In September 2005, *The Guardian* newspaper in Tanzania reported that more than 30 demonstrators were shot dead at five different campaign rallies within a week. The impact on media performance after these particular incidents was not ascertained, but similar harassment in the 1985 elections led the national media to rely on official state propaganda to serve the agenda of the incumbent CCM party and journalist to exercise self-censorship to remain in good standing with the government (Ogunade, 1986).

**Media in Uganda**

While the media have played a central role in the fight for human rights, most journalists have also practiced increased self-censorship (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003) because of the existing libel and treason laws. The constitution guarantees media freedom but through the years governments have occasionally shut down critical outlets for producing material likely to damage their reputation (Ocitti, 2006).

Before the 2001 elections, more than 100 FM radio stations were registered, and most did not follow the government’s election coverage guidelines. Popular FM talk shows, which broadcast live listener calls on a range of subjects, were shut down indefinitely. The ban affected many radio stations, including the four most popular ones: Central Broadcasting Service, Radio One, K-fm, and Radio Simba. Journalists sent 6,000 signed petitions to the government opposing the ban, but it was lifted only after the elections. Some FM stations run by the president’s friends and military personnel operate without a broad-
cast license. This allows them to evade licensing fees and to avoid being scrutinized by the council that regulates electronic media.

Constitutional changes since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1996 have resulted in the removal of some restrictions on the media. The emergence of press freedom started with the liberalization of the media, which had been controlled by the government since colonial days (Kannyo, 2004). In Tanzania and Uganda, veteran journalists, who used to work for the state-owned media, opened their own newspapers, magazines, and newsletters, which criticized incompetence and corruption in the government and investigated human rights violations (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003; Hossain et al., 2003). The same regimes, however, continue to intimidate journalists by charging them with libel, sedition, treason, and defamation whenever they become too critical of the political elite and the establishment (Mwesige, 2004).

Media ownership influenced the coverage of the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections. State-owned radio and TV stations were used to selectively label opposition politicians as terrorists and thus dissuaded critics from launching a successful campaign. Both the government-owned press, such as The New Vision, and the independent media, such as The Daily Monitor, however, reported on the violent outbreaks and law abuses during the campaign. The Daily Monitor uncovered that the national army, clad in the incumbent’s party attire, killed 17 civilians nationwide, all supporting the opposition, a report that was not challenged by the state.

Media in Rwanda

The newcomer in the EAC, Rwanda, is a prominent case study on how the media can be detrimental to democratic values. The media instigated the ethnic cleansing of more than half a million Tutsis and told the Hutu majority how to do it (Frohardt & Temin, 2003; Mamdani, 1996). The news organizations involved heavily were RTLM and ORINFOR, which were owned and controlled by associates of the Hutu President Juvenale Habyarimana and the Rwandan government respectively.

The Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), which overthrew Habyarimana’s government to end the genocide, faced an enormous challenge to rehabilitate the national media. Major General Paul Kagame, who has presided over Rwanda since the 1994 genocide, has gradually reformed the public and private press (Karnell, 2002). The government secured funds from international agencies such as the IMF, UNESCO, and others to renovate and rebuild newsroom equipment and train young journalists (Karnell, 2002). This local and international training lasted more than a decade. The new generation of reporters has been charged with sensitizing citizens to respect human dignity, peace, reconciliation, tolerance, human rights and the rule of law. Yet, despite all of these positive developments, the Rwandan government had its own agenda.

The Kagame government passed a media law in July 2002, which established the High Press Council to guarantee freedom of the press. This body
regulates electronic broadcasting and censors the press under the pretense of preventing a repeat of the 1994 hate speech (Reyntjens, 2004). The first privately owned independent radio station was established in 2004, but all private media face government restrictions and exercise self-censorship (Reyntjens, 2004). Some proprietors of the so-called privately owned press are members of the governing council with close ties to the presidency.

Many critics have been alarmed by the government’s harsh restrictions and intimidation whenever Rwandan journalists investigate corruption, authoritarianism and abuse of public office (Franklin & Love, 1998). Seventeen well-known journalists have been incarcerated in the past 10 years, some without trial, on charges and allegations of treason, inciting genocide, and hate speech. Many young journalists have disappeared without a trace. Rwanda lacks a daily independent newspaper. Some topics are forbidden, such as covering the military, justice department, state house, and any tyrannical acts committed by the ruling RPF.

**Media in Burundi**

The media have been severely hurt by the country’s political and economic conditions. The government still controls the one national radio and one TV station. The main media outlets are Radio Television Nationale du Burundi (RTNB), *Le Renouveau* newspaper, and an official weekly *Ubumwe* (Frère, 2007). In 1994, there were 22 newspapers, but by 1999 they dropped to four and another 13 appeared irregularly (Philippart, 2000). The only private and partially independent newspaper is *Ndongozi*, which is owned by the Catholic Church and enjoys some international financial backing. Similar to Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania, radio has been the most important source of information for ordinary Burundians. Private radio stations have played an essential role in promoting pluralism (Frère, 2007). Unlike in Rwanda, where radio became the medium of state propaganda, in Burundi newspapers were the weapons of war during political campaigns and responsible for reinforcing ethnic stereotypes (Frère, 2007).

Since the early 1990s, the Press Freedom Index has consistently classified both the Burundian and Rwandan press as not free. The 1992 law which guaranteed freedom of expression and speech also protected institutions like the army and state security from any unauthorized news coverage about personnel (Frère, 2007). The government suspended press freedoms in 1996, and the regime used the media to spread its messages of ethnic sectarianism (Nyankanza, 1998; Sullivan, 2005). In 1997, a new law banned dissemination of information deemed as propaganda or an embarrassment to state officials and the people of Burundi (Freedom House, 2008). The government argued that such restrictions were necessary to protect the public from messages that would fuel hatred and incite Rwanda-like genocide (Frère, 2007). A more liberal press law was adopted in 2003, which however imposed fines and prison terms of up to 5 years for defamation and attacks on the president. In addition, Article
31 of the 2005 Penal Code–16.9 states that 1 year of imprisonment will be imposed on “anyone who has willfully and publicly imputed a specific fact likely to undermine the honor or the reputation of that person or to expose him to public contempt.”

The government continues to harass the media by arresting journalists or closing publications critical of its activities. The National Council of Communication (NCC), which oversaw press freedom and respect for the law, closed two newspapers and suspended the license of a private FM radio due to messages considered extreme and dangerous to national security (Frère, 2007). The press remains under heavy control despite laws that formally guarantee freedom. The 2008 Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders (RWB) ranked Burundi 94th and Rwanda 145th out of 173 countries in the world (RWB, 2008). In 2006, Burundi was ranked as Africa’s third leading jailer of journalists by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, 2007).

Agenda Building, Media Performance, and Democratization

The assessment of media performance in the five EAC countries through the concepts of agenda building and democratization is a new approach to understanding the central importance and role of the East African media for democratic governance. Much of the previous mass communication research from East Africa, and consequently much of the literature examined here, is non-theoretical. Thus, the agenda-building perspective is a relatively new theoretical proposition that is currently being advanced (Kalyango, 2009b; Kalyango, 2008; Lancendorfer & Lee, 2003) to explain the conditions through which governments in Africa influence media performance. For instance, Kalyango (2008) determined that audiences exposed to the media in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda perceive the state-owned media as the voice of the nation, promoting peace and security, and fostering public debate on good health and economic empowerment. The majority of East Africans also indicated that state leaders use the media to positively infuse their authority directly to the people in order to garner public support on issues concerning nation building, unity, peace, and poverty alleviation.

The East African governments exercise an agenda-building influence on the media through a variety of approaches. The media, in turn, transfer this influence to the public through the uncritical coverage of issues they have received from above. The media could potentially influence public opinion about democratic governance by mobilizing citizens to politically challenge the authoritarian structures. This process, however, is only in its very primitive stages. Still, if such public mobilization were to develop further, it could be bidirectional because as societies become more democratic, they influence the media by lessening restrictions and increasing rights and opportunities. More democratic societies will also exert different agenda-building forces. In the EAC, it would require the media to promote economic and political lib-
eralization, equal rights, free choices, and self-development. We propose that the agenda-building influences on both the state-owned and privately owned media in East Africa fit the overall framework in the following ways, as illustrated in Table 12.1.

We see the agenda-building influence on the media in East Africa as a mixed function. On the one hand, abuse of power and repression of the media are widespread, but on the other, certain positive developments, such as the relaxing of state monopoly of the national media and growing independence of privately owned media, are encouraging. Agenda building is central to the political control of messages and has helped some EAC leaders like President Museveni of Uganda, President Kagame of Rwanda and President Kibaki of Kenya to sustain their grip on power. Our assessment also suggests that despite the continued political violence and intimidation of the press, these politically inspired actions have not completely curtailed the media’s vigilance during elections, political mobilization, and the reinforcement of a participatory society in political discourse, which engenders the EAC’s transition to democracy.

Not all of the conceptual models of agenda building reviewed earlier (Cobb et al., 1976) fit the East African context. For instance, the outside initiative,
under which issues arise at the non-governmental level and then reach the public and finally the government agenda, has not applied to the East African experience of the past two to three decades. NGOs and civil society in general are disempowered by the states, and their mobilization potential is undermined by the governments’ administrative and policy control over civil society. Inside access does not fit the East African context either. It is said to occur when groups or individuals with close access to the government initiate agendas and place them on the formal agenda but without making the issue public. This approach has not been common in the region.

The mobilization agenda-building model, however, applies. This model occurs when politicians want to move an issue from their formal agenda to the public through the media. Some of the agenda-building techniques used by East African governments to influence the media include coercion and strict supervision, regulation, such as political censorship and laws banning critical adversarial journalism, financial control, such as heavy taxation, and interference in appointments of media managers and editors. Editors and their journalists who work with state-owned media are state employees. These journalists depend upon the government to provide most of the content they publish and broadcast, which makes state-owned news organizations merely public relations institutions that are dictated by political expediency and manipulation.

Another aspect through which agenda building occurs and thrives in East Africa is the lack of adequate investments and commercialization in the free market economy to demonopolize media ownership. Most of the state-owned and privately owned media, including radio and television studios, have not upgraded to modernized newsrooms with fast Internet services and efficient computers. Further, the inadequate training of journalists has contributed to stagnation in the quality of journalism, which again contributes to the agenda-building process.

A few case studies (e.g., see Kalyango, 2009b) have demonstrated how agenda building thrives in situations where the rule of law is disregarded. East African governments have often constrained journalists’ freedoms through archaic media statutes, anti-terrorism statutes, and anti-defamation laws, which have been used to intimidate, arrest, and punish journalists for exposing corruption and abuse of public office in state institutions (Kagwanja, 2003; Kalyango, 2009a). Over the past 20 years, the media have become dependent on government mercy and power because of legal requirements to practice journalism with a government-issued license.

The media and religious institutions constitute the most vigilant and influential part of civil society in most of Africa, including the EAC member states. In a democratic society, institutional frameworks such as the independent media (provided the existence of press freedom) help to advocate for the rule of law. The media, however, have in some ways failed to serve as free and independent outlets to propel emerging democracies to consolidation (Kambenga, 2005; Matende, 2005; Ocitti, 2006). Instead, the state-run media and some journalists in the privately owned media have condoned state-inspired political vio-
In the examples presented throughout this chapter, media performance and the current governance in the EAC cannot be considered equivalent to those of fully democratic states. Notwithstanding those constraints, the news media in East Africa are still relevant and central to providing the electoral masses with a forum for public debate.

Yet, in East Africa, citizens who lack civic education perceive democracy merely as an elite’s struggle for national power. The fact that the media have often been used as a tool for spreading antidemocratic propaganda and supporting an autocratic agenda has contributed to citizens’ inability to form basic political attitudes and to their mistrust in democracy (Ochs, 1987). Because of that, politicians who use the media to damage the reputation of other candidates through ethno-sectarian tactics usually win the parliamentary elections (Hughes, 2005). Consequently, we argue that the state-run national media throughout the EAC can also be seen as a threat to the consolidation of democracy because they are used as a political propaganda tool that maintains and reinforces the state’s interests and unequal relations of political power.

Political mobilization through both formal education and the mass media is needed to enable the electorate to understand basic tenets of democracy and fundamental human rights upon which to judge the legitimacy of their governments. Media performance is most successful when its agenda mobilizes citizens to challenge the structures of authoritarian rule by promoting human rights, economic empowerment, and the rule of law. In fact, being a populist mobilizer is one of the professional roles that American and international journalists envision for themselves (Weaver, 1998). While views about these roles are hardly universal among journalists, a focus on mobilizing citizens for democratic changes through education and empowerment could develop into a unique feature of African journalists.

One positive indicator of progress toward this goal is that the privately owned media have continuously reported and created public awareness of what constitutes good governance by exposing corruption, abuse of human rights, and state accountability. This has generated numerous mass protests and a sustained civil activism, especially in Kenya and Uganda. There is a good indication that vibrant civil societies in the EAC, with a fairly critical independent media, could play a central role in mobilizing the masses to force regime change through elections. In this respect, civil society and the privately owned independent press continue to change the political landscape toward democratization despite the persistent draconian measures.

The focus on the media’s mobilizing power should not be confused with the mobilization model of agenda building conceptualized by Cobb and colleagues (1976). According to that model, mobilization happens from the top down and the media are only used as a mouthpiece and a distribution channel. The model has been a major function for the relationship between the media and the democratization process in the region, as governments have used the media for one-way communication with their constituents to advance
the regimes’ political agendas but with little regard for feedback and alternative views.

The type of political mobilization we discuss originates from the media, not the government, and spreads to the audience first before it reaches the top to influence public policy. Thus, it is more in line with the outside initiative model by Cobb et al. (1976), which they argue happens mainly in egalitarian societies. The question is whether an egalitarian society needs to exist before this type of agenda building can occur, or whether this new approach to building public agendas can influence the establishment of egalitarian societies in East Africa. This chicken-and-egg question can only be answered through further research and professional involvement of journalists and civic leaders and organizations.

Despite the restrictive press laws still on the books, it has become increasingly difficult for the transitional EAC countries to curtail the emergence of consolidated democracies. These are still transitioning unstable democracies because although the regimes hold regular elections, the rule of law is on the decline, they engage in ethnocratic sectarianism, suppress information, and are partly responsible for the political violence. The conditions for consolidation of democracy are either minimally met or deliberately constrained through totalitarianism (Lindberg, 2006). At the moment, member states are engaged in regime policies and procedures that make some of these democratization gains reversible. For instance, Uganda and Rwanda have recently banned some political parties and ideologies through coercive control and electoral administrative procedures. Kenya and Tanzania have established an unattainably high threshold for the formation of opposition political parties and have restricted some opposition candidates who are admissible under the electoral commission laws. Most damaging to democratic consolidation is the current inability of the political opposition to solicit private funds for campaigns and grassroots mobilization. In addition, the opposition parties are usually denied media access to deliberate their political platform.

One could argue that East Africa’s democratization process has come to refer to some spurious aspect of a political culture whereby leaders such as President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Rwanda’s Paul Kagame scramble to guarantee some aspects of good governance, yet they guard their offices and positions against equal competition and strict accountability. It has also come to refer to a political culture where Tanzania’s leader Jakaya Kikwete has created a supra-partisan arrangement that discriminates against opposition parties and privileges the regime’s CCM party. East Africa’s democratization, to our knowledge, has come to mean a political culture where Kenya’s Mwai Kibaki and President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi either co-opt political opponents in case they are defeated in an election or eliminate political insiders who disagree with the regime. All these accounts of democratization may explain why those regimes (except in Tanzania) have either reverted to an authoritarian undemocratic mold or resorted to political violence once new actors emerge and mobilize popular upsurge to defeat the incumbents through
the electoral process. As we have surmised in the current and previous paragraphs, when a country is in the midst of a political violence outbreak and the rule of law is practically abrogated, agenda-building influences on the media become especially powerful and often morph into outright intimidation and violence towards journalists.

As pointed out earlier, the basic question of whether an appropriate agenda-building model can trigger the development of an egalitarian society or, conversely, such a society must exist before the agenda-building model can develop is a question best answered through further research and professional involvement of journalists and civic leaders. From a research standpoint, the performance of the news media and their impact on citizens to enhance democratic support and to facilitate political participation has not been adequately investigated. The next phase of research should consider how the privately owned and the state-owned media differ in their coverage of critical issues facing the polity of these countries. An examination of the populist mobilizer role among African journalists is also interesting because of the implications of these findings for the profession of journalism in the region and for the processes of democratization and agenda setting. Further, differences in public agendas and attitudes among countries should also be examined as a way to study the effects of media agendas in these same systems. Once enough research about these phenomena is accumulated, mass communication scholars should engage in a higher level of theorizing that advances theoretical development relevant to the region. Presently, such abstract views of the issues in East Africa are hampered by the insufficient theory-driven research from the area.

From a professional standpoint, one approach to improving media performance in these transitioning democracies is through training young journalists to make public officials accountable and to continuously engender applied comparative communication research that can improve the quality of journalism in this and other regions of Africa. For instance, there are only two universities in Uganda that have a journalism and mass communication program. Tanzania has two higher institutions that teach journalism, and Kenya has three. Rwanda has one journalism diploma-granting institution, while Burundi has no known degree-granting school of journalism. Moreover, less than half of all practicing journalists in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania have a bachelor’s degree. Consequently, a freer press can emerge if it can be supported with adequate training of journalists, a continued commitment to universal formal education for all citizens, a strong independent civil society, and respect for the rule of law.

**Conclusion**

Much of the previous mass communication research from East Africa, and thus much of the literature examined here, is non-theoretical. The agenda-building perspective is a relatively new theoretical proposition attempting to explain the conditions through which governments in Africa influence media perfor-
mance. Accordingly, East African governments exercise an agenda-building influence on the media through a variety of methods ranging from restrictive laws and regulations, to intimidation and state patronage. The media, on the other hand, fulfill and impose a variety of government-backed agendas on the public, both consciously and unconsciously. Journalists in state-owned media, for instance, consciously reinforce government propaganda through self-censorship and overall cooperation out of fear of either losing their professional licenses or being arrested. The media also unconsciously propagate the government agendas by not investigating and ascertaining facts, due to lack of professional training that would help them recognize these influences.

Either way, these media outlets deny the public its right to participate in the political life of the country. The public is given biased and insufficient information that does not allow it to make an educated choice or is simply unaware of its rights in the political processes of democratic governance. The lack of a strong and involved citizenry, in turn, supports the status quo of the regimes and their continued abuse of power. The way to break this vicious cycle is through empowering the media to act as a mobilizer of the masses and an educator. This could be achieved by understanding and applying the journalistic responsibilities and professional norms of fairness, skepticism, and balance. East African journalists can resist attempts by elite figures, particularly politicians, who fuel partisan agenda and propagate unsupported claims, by moderating contradictory discourse with impartiality and clarity. These and other media practices, if performed well, would make news a valuable institution for democratic transformation in East Africa. Such an outcome would also benefit the media, as a more relaxed societal structure would also relieve some of the governments’ pressures on them.

These societal changes can be sustained in the long term only by injecting revenue from competing markets into struggling East African media to promote the free flow of information, which can lead to the protection of investments, extension of liberalized markets, creation of jobs, and expansion of an informed society. An informed East African public can make rational choices ranging from products to political alternatives. Job creation and increased income also leads to better education and quality of life. A free and independent East African media can endorse and publicize market choices to promote consumption and the use of resources for economic growth, which inadvertently would increase the quality of life and democratization. The better informed, educated, and employed East Africans become, the more likely they are to embrace democratic values.

References


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