

This article was downloaded by: [Kalyango, Yusuf]

On: 12 November 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 916845954]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Radio & Audio Media

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t775653665>

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Online publication date: 12 November 2009

To cite this Article Kalyango Jr., Yusuf(2009) 'Political News Use and Democratic Support: A Study of Uganda's Radio Impact', Journal of Radio & Audio Media, 16: 2, 200 — 215

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/19376520903279399

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19376520903279399>

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Political News Use and Democratic Support: A Study of Uganda's Radio Impact

Yusuf Kalyango Jr.

This study examines the role of radio during the democratization process in Uganda. It tests whether the use of political news and information on radio in Uganda leads to support for democracy, accounting for public interest in politics. Radio is the most accessed medium for current affairs in Africa, and remarkably so in Uganda. Public opinion survey data show considerable use of radio for political information, but no direct influence on support for democracy. Greater use of radio to get political news was strongly related to measures of political interest; which is also a moderating variable to democratic support. The utility of this study and its implications are discussed in detail.

Introduction

This study examines the relationship between the use of political news on radio and support for democracy during the current democratic transition in Uganda. It also tests whether public interest in politics has a direct influence, or is a moderating variable between radio news use and democratic support. Whereas some educated working class and urban elite access newspapers and the Internet in most of Africa, radio continues to dominate as the most accessible source of public affairs information and news in urban and rural areas (Hyden, Leslie & Ogundimu, 2002; Ocitti, 2006). Radio is regarded in Africa as a medium that narrows the knowledge gap on current affairs and as an outlet for sociopolitical expression (Madamombe, 2005; Wanyeki, 2002). It is also considered the most viable and pervasive medium in Uganda (Mwesige, 2004a).

Several scholars have argued the importance of using the mass media to sensitize and mobilize the voting public to support democracy (Ansah, 1994; Coles, 1998; Mwesige, 2004b). However, sensitization of citizens about democratic governance in Uganda has been insufficient and ambiguous (Rubongoya, 2007; Tabaro, 2006).

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Existing media laws and government restrictions have hampered the news media in East Africa to have a profound effect on citizens to make rationale decisions in support of democratic governance (Gariyo, 1993; Okoye, 2004; Wanyande, 1996). In spite of that, some Ugandan journalists, radio talk show hosts, and news editors have fought hard for press freedom to provide vital checks to abuses of power through a combination of defiance, legal measures, and parliamentary lobbying (Baguma, Lugalambi & Zawadi, 2000; Mwesige, 2004a).

In light of those challenges, FM radio stations in East Africa have been in the forefront of political education by fostering public debate and sensitizing society about the virtues of a democratic system through their news and public affairs programs (Kannyo, 2004; Mwesige, 2004b). Radio journalists have taken a strong position to report on all aspects of a failed-state and have provided a platform to those in political opposition to address issues of democratic governance (Baguma et al., 2000). The assumption here is that being the most powerful medium in most of Africa, radio can sensitize and accelerate the democratic process among the voting public.

Empirical research on media effects on political participation and democratic support is largely confined to Western developed democracies where media accessibility and use is abundant, far-reaching, and multifaceted (Gussin & Baum, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). There is little empirical evidence to support this theoretical assumption in any East African country (Baguma et al., 2000; Kalyango, 2008). This study looks at how the use of political news impacts Ugandans by considering the assertions that radio is the most viable, pervasive medium, and a harbinger of sociopolitical expression. Does the use of political information on radio lead to support for democracy or does prior public interest in political information contribute to support for democracy?

The analysis is based on public opinion data from the 2005 Afrobarometer conducted in Uganda. Afrobarometer is a publicly funded non-for-profit research organization, which conducts regular comparative public opinion surveys on democracy, market reform, and civil society in Africa. The "data are a public good," which are released via their website¹ and other academic outlets.² Ugandans were asked about their media choice for political news; political interest, their preferences for a one-party or pro-democratic multiparty system; plus other variables related to political news use and support for democracy.

Political News Use

The central theoretical framework driving this study is that some people use radio for exposure to political information and to fulfill individual political interests; and that such interest and keenness leads to supporting democracy. Calvert (1999) determined that consistent use of radio to get political news may result in increased or decreased interest in political affairs as people seek to satisfy their curiosity. Calvert's idea evolved from early works on the uses and gratifications approach

(Perse, 1990; Rubin, 1994) with a premise that people select a news medium based on how well it fulfills their curiosity and interests. McMillan (2006) and Newhagen (1994) conceptualize this line of argument as a media use perspective.

Audience members seek mass media to indulge their needs based on institutional interests, keenness, and their political and social beliefs (Hofstetter, 2001). Keenness is a uses and gratifications concept which delineates mass mediated campaigns through issue sensitization, social interaction, knowledge facilitation, and enabling audiences to gain insight into circumstances that shape their milieu (Harwood, 1999; Lull, 1990). The political news use has been applied to the idea of public keenness on the political activity of leaders and as an abstraction of information seeking dependency (McMillan, 2006). The media use perspective treats the public as not merely passive audiences but treats audiences as actively involved in utilization of media content to satisfy particular information needs. The audience makes use of the media to make rationale decisions about circumstances that shape their lives. This theorization is primarily concerned with consumption of political information on radio for purposes of using the new knowledge on activities like support for democracy.

The relationship between radio news use and support for democracy in transitioning states in Africa, such as Uganda, has not been empirically examined. But elsewhere in the world, Pinkleton and Austin (2001) found that press coverage of political news in Western democracies can play a positive or negative role in the democratic process, depending on how the public uses and perceives a particular medium of interest. Morrell (2003) also found that U.S. citizens who have higher confidence in the news media also tend to develop political knowledge and interest in the political process, which influences their political beliefs and actions. In the same vein, Pinkleton and colleagues (1998) stated that issues considered important in the mass media lead to political awareness and interest; and the political knowledge gained can influence support and active participation in politics. These attributes are key components to understanding the relationship between media use, political interest, and support for democracy particularly in Africa where radio is considered the most pervasive, viable, and accessible source information and news (Madamombe, 2005; Ocitti, 2006).

Historical Perspective

In 1980, the current president of Uganda, General Yoweri Museveni, waged guerrilla warfare against an elected civilian government and came to power in 1986. His motivation was the regime's alleged violation of election laws and the constitution. When Museveni took power, he severely restricted multiparty politics and banned political party activities. He claimed that such politics was divisive along tribal and religious lines (Mamdani, 1996; Ocitti, 2006). For 19 years, President Museveni governed Uganda under a unique political system, called the National Resistance Movement (NRM).

Succumbing to international pressure, Museveni asked Ugandans to choose between the existing movement system and a multiparty system in a referendum in June 2000 (Therkildsen, 2002). The president canvassed the country campaigning against multiparty politics and persuaded voters that political parties would divide people and create ethnic tension. Radio news programs and the current affairs talk shows debated the pros and cons of a one-party movement system and backed the opposition politicians, who called for a return to multiparty politics (Therkildsen, 2002). Instead of supporting a return to electoral democracy, Ugandans sided with the authoritarian government in support of the president, who won the referendum by 90.7% of the vote, as shown in Table 1. No known study has examined why Ugandans went against the radio news campaign which advanced the return to multiparty politics.

The president's stay in power became constrained by the constitutional two-term limit of elected office under his "Movement" political system. In his efforts to get around this constraint, Museveni reversed his doctrine of the single-party system in favor of multi-party politics, against which he had initially campaigned. The price for this reversal was elimination of term limits. To this end he succeeded

Table 1
The June 2000 and July 2005 Referenda Data

Type of Political System	Votes	Vote % Age	Referendum Date
Registered voters	9,609,703		29 June 2000
"Yes" to Movement system	4,471,681	90.7%	29 June 2000
"No" to Multiparty system	442,843	09.3%	29 June 2000
Total votes (voter turnout)	4,914,524	51.1%	29 June 2000
Invalid votes	148,800		29 June 2000
Registered voters	8,524,230		28 July 2005
"No" to Movement system	297,865	07.6%	28 July 2005
"Yes" to Multiparty system	3,736,367	92.4%	28 July 2005
Total votes (voter turnout)	4,034,232	47.3%	28 July 2005
Invalid votes	93,144		28 July 2005

Note: The two referenda held in Uganda on June 29, 2000 and July 28, 2005 seeking the wish of the people to open up the political space for multiparty democracy; a landmark in Uganda's democratization process.

Data source: The Uganda Electoral Commission

- The June 2000 Referendum Question: *Which political system do you wish to adopt, Movement or Multiparty?*
- The July 2005 Referendum Question: *Do you agree to open up the political space to allow those who wish to join different organizations/parties to do so to compete for political power?*

in securing passage of a resolution in favor of a national referendum seeking to amend the constitution to lift the presidential term limit. Museveni aggressively used the influence of money and patronage in parliament to secure support for the referendum (Afako, 2006).

Long-time political party crusaders and opposition politicians saw the 2005 referendum as a smokescreen for keeping Museveni in power (Afako, 2006). Museveni, who had constitutionally executed the policy of non-party politics and swayed the public to believe that political parties divide people and create ethnic tension, this time, traversed the country seeking support from voters for a return to multi-party politics. Politicians and the elite, who had long advocated a reintroduction of political parties, this time called for a boycott and denounced the government's move to return to multiparty politics. Uganda's independent FM stations, led by political commentators, journalists and talk-show hosts, debated the issue and publicly supported the opposition by calling on voters to reject a return to multiparty politics.

Despite the popular *Democracy Now Special Report* radio shows and daily *Save the Constitution* political campaigns on FM radio call-in public affairs programs which challenged and denounced Museveni's move to amend the constitutional presidential term limits, the public once again sided with the president in a 2005 referendum by 92.4% to 7.6%. The return to political pluralism assured the president that he can campaign for the highest political office until retirement. It is yet unknown why Ugandan voters ignored the radio viewpoint but supported the president who flip-flopped on the issue. No study has yet explored why, in both cases, Ugandans rejected the endorsement by the independent FM radio stations.

The turnout from the 2005 referendum was the lowest at 47% (see Table 1), despite the president's call for a big turnout, which pushed the opposition to declare partial victory. The low turnout and lack of participation in the democratization process had dashed the government's hopes for a nationwide consensus to return to multiparty democracy (Kalyango, 2008; Tabaro, 2006). Some political commentators in Uganda wondered whether voters understand what they vote for and whether the radio stations have any influence to mobilize the public to support democracy (Afako, 2006). These events, whereby the public has twice voted in favor of the president who has changed his political ideology on multiparty democracy, despite radio stations vainly de-campaigning anti-democratic policies, also justifies the present research endeavor.

Radio in Uganda

The struggle for freedom of the press in Uganda started as early as 1959 towards the end of British colonialism (Sekalala, 1968). When Uganda gained independence in 1962, the departing colonial rulers handed over the radio and printing press to the incoming government of King Edward Muteesa, who became the first post-colonial Ugandan president. The king had favorable coverage from the national

radio because the media at that time were used to advocate for liberty, socio-economic opportunities for the indigenous people, and the right to self-rule. The government expected favorable news and called for the media to promote "unity, solidarity, and development" (Kabwegyere, 1974). So, from the 1970s until the early 1990s, the state-owned national radio stations lacked independence from government censorship and control, and struggled with professional integrity and commercial sustainability (Ocitti, 2006).

Ocitti (2006) recounted that since Uganda attained its independence from Britain in 1962, freedom of the press has been curtailed in various degrees by the assassination of investigative journalists in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the harassment and detention of senior journalists and editors in the 1980s. In reality, however, this harassment continued as government demanded the news editors to promote "developmental programs." All electronic media, both television and radio stations in Uganda, were state-owned until the late 1980s and were subject to censorship and direct political control since independence (Carver, 1995). The emergence of press freedom started when Museveni liberalized the media in 1992. Museveni allowed the launch of privately owned radio stations, but did not give editorial and managerial autonomy to state-owned radio (Kannyo, 2004).

For the time being, the liberalization of the media enabled the launch of dozens of FM (Frequency Modulation) radio stations countrywide, plus a few independent newspapers and a handful private television stations. The privatized FM radio underwent significant changes throughout the 1990s, modeled after the current affairs formats of the BBC's *Africa Service* of Britain and the Deutsche Welle International Radio of Germany. The first independent radio station was launched in January 1993 and by the end of 2007, there were over 70 privately owned FM radio stations in Uganda. These FM radio stations attempted to foster debate within the public sphere about the rule of law and also called for political accountability (Mwesige, 2004b; Shrivastava & Hyde-Clarke, 2004). Veteran journalists who used to work for the state-owned media started their own newspapers and FM radio stations that exposed incompetence and corruption (Tripp, 2000). According to Dicklitch and Lwanga (2003), these stations were quite independent, as they launched investigative journalism and consequently exposed human rights violations and fraud.

These independent FM stations created public affairs programs and talk shows which expanded the breadth of political news coverage, provided limited but vital checks to abuses of power and acted as a mouthpiece for civil society interests on issues of good governance (Matende, 2005; Mwesige, 2004a). Mwesige's and Matende's case studies demonstrate that the independent FM radio stations created weekly or daily shows like *The Capital Gang*, *Save the Constitution*, *Political Spectrum*, and *Parliament Yamwe* about political accountability, democracy, and governance. The public affairs programs and special reports generated popular live interactive call-in debates between politicians and listeners. From a theoretical perspective, this could be an indicator of greater interest in politics, which could lead to public support for the democratization process.

Journalists investigated the misconduct of political elite, corruption, and abuse of power by government. However, as the private radio stations took on the watchdog function, the government resorted to a heavy-handed approach using constitutional provisions to prohibit the autonomous performance of the liberalized media. Ugandan authorities continued to use sedition and libel laws to detain and charge journalists on trumped up charges of defamation (Mwesige, 2004b). The sedition, libel, and treason laws that the state constitutionally imposed on civil society became an impediment to the functions of a free press in this transitioning semi-democracy. As a result, the right to full political information and civic education was hampered by these gags.

The heavy-handed approach of government to stifle press freedoms has persisted throughout the post-independence era. Ocitti (2006) found that manipulation of the private FM radio stations by proprietors and the government is as common as the control of state-owned radio stations. A key constitutional change in the last decade has been the reinforcement of press freedom by the Uganda Supreme Court. A decision in 2004 declared that sedition and libel laws were unconstitutional in their present statutory form.

The Uganda constitution still provided adequate press freedoms in 2008, but the government occasionally suspended operating licenses of critical FM radio stations, accusing them of producing content likely to damage their reputation (Ocitti, 2006). The Uganda government still owned and controlled a few radio stations like *Radio Uganda*, *Uganda Broadcasting Corporation*, *Star FM*, and others. Several political elites from the ruling political party also own the majority of FM radio stations in Uganda. In 2008, government control ranged from providing media proprietors with investment incentives, especially if they are business-minded, to providing them with free licenses to broadcast (Kalyango, 2008). This kind of media manipulation existed in other parts of the third world, including Eastern Europe (Karlowski, 2003). According to Karlowski, the media in these countries could not perform well when governments had a stake or direct control.

A survey, commissioned by the International Republican Institute³ (IRI) and sponsored by USAID,⁴ found that by January 2006, 47% of Ugandan voters did not know that the presidential elections would be held in February 2006. Forty-nine percent of voters did not even know they were voting under a multiparty political system. International election observers reported that Ugandan voters were not well informed about the 2000 and 2005 referenda (Tabaro, 2006). Considering the ongoing intimidation of journalists and suppression of information, the question arises as to whether all of these important political campaigns and the current affairs interactive discourse on radio between content providers and listeners significantly lead to support for democracy.

One would expect use of political information on radio to lead to support for democracy in Uganda if there is any interest in politics, particularly since earlier case studies in several African countries have shown radio's potential to mobilize the masses (Hyden et al., 2002). However, the recent political developments in Uganda tell a different story, particularly in instances where the president mobilizes

the voting public to reject multiparty democracy and thwart radio news with its public affairs that support it. With the Ugandan press operating under those prevailing circumstances, to what extent does political news use lead to support for democracy? To what extent does political interest account for any relationship that exists between radio news use and democratic support?

Based on this model, the following hypotheses are tested.

- H₁: The more Ugandan voters use radio to get political news, the stronger their interest in politics.
- H₂: The more Ugandan voters access coverage of political news on radio, the higher their support for democracy.
- H₃: The higher the level of political interest, the greater the level of support for democracy.

Data, Design and Sampling

A survey conducted by Afrobarometer in Uganda in 2005 systematically measured public opinion on democracy, governance, quality of life, as well as radio news use. Data collection was timely because Uganda had just conducted referenda to determine the fate of multiparty democracy, which were shortly followed by presidential and parliamentary elections. Complete data and the survey codebook are released to the public for independent research and replication every 2-year period after the survey.

In Uganda, Afrobarometer covered a randomly selected sample of 2,400 respondents in 2005. According to Afrobarometer, these sampling designs reduce the likelihood that different ethnic or language groups are left out of the population sample. Stratified, area probability and multistage random sampling were employed to ensure that more populated geographical areas had a proportionally greater probability of being selected into the sample. Data represented a cross-section of all voting citizens over 18 years old, with individuals randomly selected from a household which was also randomly selected. Interviews were conducted in English and in eight Ugandan languages that are spoken by 80% of the national population: Luganda, Lusoga, Luo, Ruyankole, Rutoro, Rukiga, Ateso, and Lugbara.

Afrobarometer used some questions grouped in subparts with a distinctive variable name such as democratic support, democratic participation, and quality of life, among others. The same questionnaire was used in all languages containing identical items to produce scientifically reliable data. Only the data related to radio news use, political interest and support for democracy were analyzed. Multiple scale responses such as *refused to answer*, *not applicable*, and *other*, were excluded from the analysis. Also excluded were skipped responses and missing data. A total of 2,000 cases were used.

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to determine how many principal components should be retained to adequately describe the variance in a system

Table 2
Principal Component Factor Analysis of Key Indicator Variables

MV and DV	Indicators	Cum. Var.	% Total Var.
Political interest	Understand politics & keenness	.83	20.401
	Our votes matter	.71	
	Question actions of my leaders	.52	
Democratic support	Political parties (un)necessary	.82	20.804
	Pro-democracy or no democracy	.77	
	Is Democracy worth it?	.67	

Note: Varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalization was used to extract components for the indicators of political interest and support for democracy. This total model predicts 79.1% of the cumulative variance. MV and DV refer to the moderating variable and dependent variable respectively.

Raw data source: The Afrobarometer

of indicator variables (Thomson, 2004). As Table 2 shows, data were extracted for the key indicator variables using Varimax rotation from a set of questions with almost the same sampling weights. In other words, the PCA was performed on the key indicator variables for the DVs and turned into one factor, but not performed on the two IVs. Results from the overall model clarified the structure of the loadings matrix, with a prediction at 79.6% of the cumulative variance of indicators being preserved.

Since all of the variables are continuous, OLS regression was then used to determine how much of the variance could be explained. The statistical analysis sought to determine the relationship between radio news use and political interest; and ran tests on whether radio news use has a direct influence on the respondents' support for democracy. Also assessed was whether political interest is a moderating variable for the relationship between radio news use and democratic support. Statistical interpretation of key descriptive factors, coefficients, collinearity, and an explanation of all possible assumptions of the regression models were detailed using the stepwise method (Osborne & Waters, 2002). First, cross-tabulation produced descriptive results on correlations to establish voters' opinion on the key indicator variables.

Results

This study examined whether public consumption of radio news on political affairs leads to support for democracy. Also examined was political interest; whether it is a moderating indicator of radio news use and support for democracy. On the

question of political news use, 73% of respondents indicated that they use the media, especially radio, to get news about politics and government. Overall, 68.3% said they use the media for political information everyday, while 25% use a medium of choice a few times a week.

Cross-tabs results showed that respondents are interested in politics, discuss politics, and hold strong beliefs about the impact of their votes on their leaders. With all key indicators of political interest entered in the model, 83% of respondents said they were interested in what was going on during the democratization process.

Regarding democracy, Ugandans were asked how strongly they are committed in their expressed support of democracy. Overall, 79.6% strongly supported democracy. Likewise, 71.2% of Ugandans expressed active involvement in politics while a slim majority favored a change from the autocratic movement system created by President Museveni, to a multiparty political system. These findings are consistent with Bratton et al.'s (2005, p. 89) earlier analysis of the 2002 Afrobarometer results: "most Ugandans pronounce themselves both supportive of democracy (80%) and satisfied with democracy (72%). When asked whether they preferred a system of electoral democracy with no presidential term limits, nearly three quarters (73%) supported the president's political platform of no presidential term limits." This is in striking contrast to what radio news and current affairs had consistently opposed to be detrimental for democracy.

A stepwise regression analysis was run to test H_1 which states that the more Ugandan voters use radio to get political news, the stronger their interest in politics. Hypothesis 1 was accepted. The "radio news use" values in that model produced strong predictors at .653 adjusted R^2 . This equation eliminates any chance or bias in the multiple correlations when all key indicator variables of media use are entered. In this model, 69.4% of the variance on political interest could be explained in radio news use, significant at the .05 alpha level.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported by these data. The stepwise model showed that the more Ugandan voters access coverage of political news on radio, the less their support for democracy. When asked whether Ugandans trust both the independent and the state-run radio, Beta coefficients indicated a negative relationship (-.199; and -.187). Even the adj. R^2 (.214) indicated that radio news use was not a strong predictor of the voters' support for democracy.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that the higher the level of political interest, the greater the level of democratic support. This assumption was statistically significant at an adjusted variance of .611 with a positive standard coefficient at .413 (Beta). Political interest was entered into the equation as an adjusted covariate to see if it was a moderating variable with positive regression coefficients between radio news use and democratic support. This was done using logistic regression. Both correlation and the logit were significant, with a 26% increase in variance in democratic support from the use of radio for political information. This important correlation indicates the impact of political interest as a moderating variable between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Table 3 provides more information on these results.

Table 3
Influence of Radio News Use and Political Interest on Democratic Support

Predictors	Model 1 (Beta) <i>S.E.</i>	Model 2 (Beta) <i>S.E.</i>	Model 3 (Beta) <i>S.E.</i>
Radio news use			
Source/choice	(.613) .057*		
Public affairs news	(.387) .041*		
Political interest			
Interested in politics		(.413) .054*	
Our votes matter		(.316) .049*	
Question leaders' actions		(-.103) .021	
Radio news use			
Source/choice			(-.199) .031
Public affairs news			(-.187) .029
N = 2000.	Adj. R ² = .653	Adj. R ² = .611	Adj. R ² = .214

Note: Model 1 shows predictors of radio news use on political interest; Model 2 shows predictors of political interest on support for democracy; Model 3 shows predictors if radio news use on support for democracy. The asterisk (*) indicates a statistical significance at the alpha level of .05.

Raw data source: The Afrobarometer.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine whether the use of political information on radio in Uganda leads to support for democracy or whether prior public interest in politics is a moderating variable to their support for democracy. Public opinion survey data show considerable use of radio for political information by Ugandans, but no direct influence on support for democracy. Greater use of radio to get political news was strongly related to measures of political interest; which is also a moderating factor between radio news use and the increased public support for democracy.

Election observers⁵ and international pollsters had reported that sensitization of the Ugandan public towards democracy by the government and the media was inadequate. They argued that the state had used the ignorance of voters to conduct referenda and to change laws that were antidemocratic. In support of uses and gratifications, data showed that greater use of radio by respondents to get political news lead to higher interest in politics. This supports H₁ that the more Ugandan voters use radio to get political news, the stronger their interest in politics. By use of radio, Ugandan voters developed individual interest in public affairs and their

keenness contributed to the political discourse in the democratization process. This supports earlier case studies that implied how radio remains the most accessible and pervasive medium in Africa (Berger, 2000; Mwesige, 2004a).

Despite this considerable use of radio for political news, there was no direct influence of radio news use on support for democracy. This rejects H₂ due to lack of direct influence of radio news use and the public support for democracy. In fact, the descriptive findings show that radio in Uganda contributes to public debate but with less trust in the state-owned radio. The use of radio was not a strong predictor of democratic support and this could possibly be explained by the negative influence it generates due to the question of trust. Government officials who own and operate several FM radio stations undercut public trust in the media and contribute to the journalistic norms of elevating autocracy (Rubongoya, 2007). Another reason the direct influence of radio to support democracy is non-existent could be the same explanation posited by Okoye (2004) and Wanyande (1996). The authors concluded that existing media laws and state restrictions have hampered the independence of the news media in East Africa and have had a profound effect on citizens to make rationale decisions in support of democratic governance.

On the question of political interest, more than two-thirds of Ugandan voters understand politics and say they have the ability to participate in democracy and influence political behavior. The findings support the media use hypothesis that the higher the level of political interest, the greater the level of democratic support. Political interest is significantly achieved through political keenness and information seeking from radio use of interactive political shows such as *Political Spectrum*, *Olutindo*, *Parliament Yamwe*, and *The Capital Gang*. The majority of Ugandans surveyed were pro-democracy and valued democracy as a worthwhile system. Yet the majority of respondents still supported a totalitarian president while a slim majority still desired the single-party government. What happened during Uganda's referenda does not reflect what some of the literature hypothesized about the impact of political news coverage on the democratization process. This could be explained by what Rubongoya (2007) and Nyamnjoh (2005) opined that "homogenization of political propaganda through the press orchestrated by government spinning" affects the political efficacy of illiterate voters who make up the majority of the electorate.

Since the Ugandan independent media generally report and expose graft and unprofessional conduct in public service as well as the executive and legislative branches of government, Ugandan voters trusted President Museveni who apparently remains above media criticism. The president is generally still beyond media criticism as Aseka (2005) and Rubongoya (2007) earlier asserted, but the Ugandan cabinet ministers or other government bureaucrats are constantly criticized and their acts are exposed by public affairs radio shows and other political news programs. The media still do not connect the Ugandan president directly to his failing regime and graft within State House (Rubongoya, 2007). The criticism of his administration and other politicians makes voters rally behind the president, but not the independent adversarial press.

President Museveni normally promises voters that he is the only capable leader among politicians who can handle state problems (Afako, 2006). Rubongoya's (2007, p. 17). Seminal work on regime hegemony in Uganda showed that Museveni's government "repealed presidential term limits from the constitution by harassing media personalities, and intimidating the opposition." Democratic support is more popular among Ugandan voters, but barely equals their desire for a totalitarian system of government as a result of conflicting political information disseminated by the state-controlled national radio, which counters the privately owned independent FM stations (Kalyango, 2008). This shows that some independent radio paints a gloomy picture of a failed state, but the government counters those reports with their own spin through state-owned radio stations. The government's spin that becomes part of the political news propagates that what the regime has done and plans to do is in the best interest of citizens.

As indicated in the previous section on radio news use in Uganda, certain freedoms of speech and of the press are curtailed by the president and his lieutenants. To the ordinary voter, the democratization process becomes "politics as usual." This in theory is consistent with Shin's (1999 & 2006) assessment that democracy is known to mean different things to different people. To borrow Bratton and colleagues' words (2005, p. 89), the "concept of democracy in Uganda has become so flexible that it means all things to all people, thus losing any core content." Based on these findings and the case studies on Uganda's political leadership, one can conclude that Ugandan voters were not adequately informed about democratic principles and values by some prominent national radio and the state. This may explain why the majority of Ugandans did not cast votes in favor of basic democratic values during the two referenda on multiparty democracy despite their strong democratic support.

Conclusion

The more Ugandan voters access news coverage of political information on independent radio accounting for their interest in politics, the higher their support for democracy. Ugandans also see democracy as a political activity through which they fulfill an obligation of answering a president's call to renew his ideology and regime legitimacy. As a result, the president periodically gets away with changing his political ideologies in referenda despite radio news coverage, which oppose such unconstitutional political maneuvers. Without addressing presidential hegemony through which the government imposes despotic policies that undermine multiparty democracy, stifle political contestation, suppress a free press, and curtail political mass mobilization on independent radio, a reversal to full autocracy is inevitable.

The limitations of this study are primarily grounded in some of the unanswered questions that emerge from these findings. It remains unclear whether Ugandan voters truly recognize presidential hegemony in undermining the democratization process; this matter needs further exploration. Could there be other reasons that explain why the direct influence of radio to support democracy is unsupported? As

an ideological tool, could the national radio also build support for anti-democratic sentiments of those in power? Are there some underlying cultural institutions that are more important than democracy?

What we learn from this endeavor is just a first step at understanding radio use of political information disseminated through news and public affairs programs for the process of democratization in this part of the transitioning world. The implications from this study can add considerably to what we know about uses and gratifications in a third world country like Uganda: that if civil society gets citizens interested about politics, radio can play a major role at fostering public debate and sensitizing society through their news and public affairs programs to mobilize citizens to support democracy.

Notes

¹<http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

²<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/>, University of Michigan–Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social research.

³IRI stands for the International Republican Institute. It is a U.S. federally funded not-for-profit organization whose mission is to introduce and spread democracy worldwide through training citizens and election workers on their civil responsibility, principles of individual liberty and the values of electoral democracy.

⁴USAID is the United States Agency for International Development, whose mission in third world countries is to introduce strategic reforms for good governance plus financing programs for development, relief, food assistance, health recovery programs and education.

⁵The IRI was one of the international election observers. The Democracy Monitoring Group (DEM-Group) was another observer and an independent pollster. DEM-Group is a non-governmental, consortium of three Ugandan Civil Society organizations; namely, Action for Development (ACFODE), the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), and the Uganda Journalists safety Committee (UJSC)

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