



MEDIA FOCUS
ON AFRICA

Gender and Politics in Kenya's August 2022 poll:

A Media Monitoring Study



A Media Focus on Africa Publication

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Kenya's August 9, 2022 poll generated immense interest among aspirants, with intense campaigning taking place for legislative, gubernatorial, and presidential posts. Among these political candidates were large numbers of women seeking to serve as members of county or national assemblies, and senators.

Media Focus on Africa conducted the second season of the Ms. President during this period, alongside a media monitoring research project. The project sought to understand the nature of political news coverage in regards to gender, the decision-making behind the coverage, and the ways in which audiences perceived the coverage. Data was collected through content analysis of select print, broadcast and online publications, as well as focus group discussions with audiences and journalists. This report presents and discusses those findings.

Much gratitude goes to the research assistants and media monitors behind the data collection. They were:

Research Assistants: Risper Mugambi and Wambui Ndegwa.

Media Monitors: Sylvia Moraa Bokindo, Mercy Chepkirui, Tatyanna Kennedy, Aaron Kituku, Pauline Makotsi, Yvonne Miyawa, Grace Njuguna, and George Onginjo.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the findings from a study of gender issues in Kenya's 2022 election. The study assessed both primary and secondary data, the former being drawn from monitoring of news media content, holding roundtables with journalists, and engaging news consumers in focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data were drawn from written accounts of past elections, reports from civil society organizations and government agencies, and news media coverage.

The primary data generated were both quantitative and qualitative, with the latter providing audience and newsroom perspectives to the content analysis. Of the 612 stories monitored from community, commercial, and public media, 48% were from radio, 24% from television, and 28% from online and print publications. Two roundtables yielded discussions with rural-based correspondents and Nairobi-based editors, while focus group discussions were held in sites across the country, selected as representative of eight regions. There was an average number of 10 participants across the eight FGDs with both genders represented in each.

Key findings from these varied interactions indicated that while women faced considerable cultural, financial, institutional, linguistic, personal, and structural limitations in their quest to hold public office, they had

also received substantial support in vying for and engaging in politics in this election season. Compared to past elections, they were more visible in the positions they were vying for, including deputy president, governor, senator, member of parliament, and member of county assembly. The gender agenda was also made more manifest in the efforts politicians made in selecting running mates for presidential and gubernatorial seats, the more deliberate inclusion of both female and male analysts on political news shows, and the behind-the-scenes activities of political strategists and mobilizers. But while they were seen, women were not always heard at campaign events, in sharing their political agenda, or in how they were covered in the news media.

Commercial and public media were lauded for making the effort to provide more equal coverage of both men and female aspirants, and to include more female voices in talk show discussions and analyses. Yet discussions with editors also revealed that including women's voices in political stories - be it those of aspirants, citizens or other political stakeholders - required consistent deliberate effort.

In several FGDs, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation received praise for its neutral reporting of different genders, politicians, and political groupings. A roundtable discussion with editors indicated that the

public broadcaster had made deliberate efforts to include more women in newsroom decision-making, as sources, and in political analysis. Yet FGD participants observed a perceived bias of commercial media which tended to be beholden to profit-making interests, which were also allied to political personalities and entities.

Within newsrooms, women tended to avoid the political beat - which tends to receive frequent prominence in coverage - and there were relatively few of them holding senior management positions across commercial newsrooms. Commercial interests remained a significant factor in editors' selection of story angles, sources, and sites of news gathering and packaging of political stories. However, there were more women holding leading positions in community and digital news media outlets, and their decision-making was a consideration in the inclusion of more diverse sources during news gathering.

A variety of newsrooms promoted greater representation of women such as by creating gender desks in newsrooms and inviting more women to serve as political analysts. This contributed towards improved gender equity. But certain practices - such as the creation of

gender desks - perpetuated the perception that matters 'gender' are essentially only about women.

In the focus group discussions, citizens of various ages indicated that alongside mainstream news media, social media and gossip were among their primary sources of news. The data showed that while mainstream news media remained an important source of political information about candidates and their issues, citizens also sought and found information from other sources including social media, interactions with politicians at rallies and other fora, and sharing information amongst themselves as citizens.

The report made recommendations for different groups including the news media, civil society, political and governing authorities, and citizens. These recommendations included campaign finance reform policies, more deliberate efforts in editorial decision-making to include women's voices and perspectives alongside those of their male counterparts, and efforts to create a more just and equitable socio-economic environment for both women and men.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'gender' is loaded with meaning, in some contexts going beyond the two biologically based terminologies of 'female' versus 'male' to comprise a wider range of expressions or roles and expectations assigned to different individuals in a society¹. In scholarship and general discourse, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often used interchangeably to denote the biological expressions of 'female' and 'male,' some of the discussions incorporating other expressions beyond those two (Rushton, Gray, Canty & Blanchard, 2019; Wamunyu & Maleche, 2020)). This study confines itself to the binary definition focused on 'women' and 'men' in as far as their engagement in Kenya's recently concluded general election of 2022.

In matters gender, Kenya's Election 2022 was a departure from the norm. From the campaign period to the settling in of the national and county governments, the presence and visibility of women was high among candidates and political parties. The news media provided a range of coverage about both female and male candidates, and made a concerted effort to have members of both genders cover the election or participate in political analysis and reporting.

Three out of four of the candidates cleared to run as deputy presidential candidate were women, and out of more than 20 women who ran for governor, seven were elected to serve in the counties of Embu, Homa Bay, Kirinyaga, Kwale, Machakos, Meru, and Nakuru, In a rare set of circumstances, the lone aspirant across all electoral races in the country

to sail through unopposed was the women's representative for Kericho County.² The members of the National Assembly were sworn in by the first female Clerk of the National Assembly, who was serving in an acting capacity.

In the presidential race, the William Ruto-Rigathi Gachagua ticket was declared winner but a dispute from the Raila Odinga-Martha Karua ticket led to the election outcome being presented before the Supreme Court where the Chief Justice and Deputy Chief Justice are both women. The Registrar of the Political Parties is also a woman, heading a government agency that regulates the funding and registration of political parties, the primary vehicle through which politicians vie for electoral offices.

On the news media front, political coverage was largely dominated by men, though there were efforts made to incorporate more women as news sources, political analysts, political debate moderators and political talk show hosts. A couple of news media outlets established gender desks in the leadup to the election but this was not common practice³.

This research undertook to study aspects of gender in the news coverage leading up to August 9, 2022 poll, with insights further drawn from select audiences and journalists. It was clear that the wins and presence of members of both genders in important electoral events and positions marked significant gains in the electoral process, undergirded by years of work by civil society, the news media, leaders of both genders,

¹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6843806/>

²<https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/beatrice-kemei-kericho-politician-elected-unopposed/>

³<https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2021/05/gender-desks-key-in-newsrooms-to-amplify-women-girls-issues/>

and citizens themselves. However, the study established that in comparison to men, women continued to be subject to cultural, resources, and personal barriers in their quest to hold public office.

Between the months of June – July 2022, Media Focus on Africa engaged in a study of gender issues in Kenya's leadup to the August 9, 2022 general election. Study data comprised of monitored news media content, roundtable discussions with journalists, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with news consumers across the country.

The study took place in a season when an unprecedentedly large number of women across the country had chosen to vie for seats ranging from governor to member of county assembly. Nakuru County scored a historic first in being the only county to have women win the gubernatorial and senator seats alongside several female winners of member of parliament and member of county assembly races⁴. Figure 1 shows a wall of campaign posters in Nyeri promoting candidates aspiring for various seats prior to the August 9, 2022 poll.

Figure 1: A cross-section of campaign posters on a stadium wall in Nyeri County. The posters showed gubernatorial, senatorial, women's representative, MP, and MCA aspirants. The women featured were vying for MP, senator, and women's representative. Photo credit: Wambui Wamunyu

⁴<https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/78373-unprecedented-times-women-leaders-sweep-almost-all-seats-nakuru-county>



METHODOLOGY

The research took a mixed methods approach that was founded on primary and secondary data. The former comprised of data drawn from three sources namely: content analysis of political news content over commercial, community, and public news media outlets; focus group discussions with citizens in eight sites across the country; and roundtable discussions with two groups of media practitioners.

The secondary data was drawn from reports about past elections and related literature from civil society organizations, government agencies, and news media coverage. A review of this information is presented in the next section.

The content analysis was undertaken by media monitors who collected data over their assigned stations/newspapers/digital outlets mostly between June 13-19 using a codesheet which enabled the capture of data around given indicators. The emphasis was on the manifest content, which refers to what was immediately evident from the coverage. The media outlets monitored were: Bahari FM, Daily Nation, Inooro TV, Kass FM, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), KTN News, Mbaitu FM, Pamoja FM, Radio Citizen, Ramogi FM, The Standard, Tuko.co.ke, and West FM. Each monitor was required to monitor between 8

to 10 news items per day. The two research assistants then compiled and analyzed the data.

Roundtable discussions with media practitioners were held, one each in the months of June and July. One discussion was held with Nairobi-based editors and representatives of journalism organizations, while the other was with rural-based journalists in Nyeri town. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in eight counties, namely Homa Bay, Busia, Nakuru, Samburu, Kirinyaga, Kitui, Kilifi, and Nairobi. The FGDs each had between 8 to 10 participants with both genders equally represented in each focus group. The FGDs were conducted in English or Kiswahili. Quotes in this report are in English and are presented either verbatim or are translated from Kiswahili.

A summary of the findings is presented later in this report. FGD and roundtable participants are identified by the initials FGD or RT respectively, as well as by a number and the place of the discussion e.g. Nyeri RT 1 or Homa Bay FGD 1.



GENDER IN KENYAN ELECTIONS: BACKGROUND

The recognition that men and women are not equal in political access, participation, and processes globally has been established by a variety of players including bodies such as the United Nations, government, local civil society organizations, and women leaders.

The UN has held four conferences focused on women's issues in Mexico (1975), Denmark (1980), Kenya (1985), and China (1995). Declarations issued at those conferences continue to resonate in contemporary times. For instance, the 1985 conference issued the Nairobi Declaration which included the following:

“Governments and political parties should intensify efforts to stimulate and ensure equality of participation by women in all national and local legislative bodies and to achieve equity in the appointment, election and promotion of women to high posts in executive, legislative and judiciary branches in these bodies. At the local level, strategies to ensure equality of women in political participation should be pragmatic, should bear a close relationship to issues of concern to women in the locality and should take into account the suitability of the proposed measures to local needs and values”⁵ (The Nairobi forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women).

Even with these recommendations, a 2019 UN report indicated that Kenyan women remained “seriously underrepresented” in political leadership despite a Constitution that promoted their participation.⁶ The report noted an observed increase in the public participation among women citizens at county level in the discussion of budgets and development plans⁷. But negative gender norms and general resistance still hampered the implementation of aspects of law that promoted women.

A 2019 policy paper from the Ministry of Public Affairs, Youth and Gender indicated that mass media remained an important influence in the representation and perception of both men and women. It noted the gains made among women in their work as reporters, news anchors and radio presenters. However it noted that there were three thematic tendencies in gender coverage within the media namely: men tended to have much more representation in the media compared to women, both genders often were portrayed stereotypically, and the relationship between men and women normalized traditional roles as well as violence or abusive interaction⁸.

Gender-based violence has also been a recurring feature of elections since 1990. Over multiple elections, women leaders and citizens have experienced politically motivated physical, sexual or virtual violence

including beatings, rapes, and sexual assaults in the presence of family members. Cyber bullying and harassment are more recent digital iterations of the various forms of violence to which women are particularly vulnerable (Awino & Mujesia, 2022; Godia, n.d.; National Gender and Equality Commission, 2021). The motivations behind the attacks have included intimidation of aspiring leaders or of fellow citizens of ethnicities that differ from those of their attackers.

Maloiy (2018) observed that politics in Kenya is mostly linked to men and seen as dangerous for women⁹. From colonial times, politics and political news coverage in Kenya have been dominated by men. There are multiple documented accounts of Kenya's 'founding fathers,' a reference to the indigenous Africans who were at the forefront of the Independence movement. These included Jomo Kenyatta, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, and Tom Mboya,^{10,11}

The women who have served in politics tend to be less well-known, but have also made a significant contribution not only to gender representation, but to the political and governance strength of the Kenyan state. As Macharia (2010) observed, "[d]efinition of 'gender' often assumes automatically a relation of inequality between men and women... However, this simplistic reading of victim/oppressor in the collusion of men in the subordination of women fails to capture women's agency in exploiting available opportunities to empower themselves" (Macharia, 2010, p. 127). In participating as political leaders, candidates, or officials and members of political organizations, many women have

defied stereotypical categorizations and socialization, stood against violence, and surmounted multiple cultural, economic and political barriers compared to men (Maloiy, 2018; Oduol, 1993).

In 1964, Ruth Habwe was the first woman to vie for elective leadership in the post-Independence era. She had served as leader of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, an association devoted to the promotion of women's issues. The ruling party denied her support and after she chose to run as an independent candidate, she was struck off the party roll and would eventually not win. Grace Onyango was Kenya's first woman to successfully vie for a member of parliament seat in the post-Independence era. She won election for Kisumu Constituency in 1970¹² after first having served as Kenya's first female mayor when she led Kisumu.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, only a few other women would successfully vie for member of parliament seats including the three women who won their MPs seats in 1974, namely Phoebe Asiyo (Karachuonyo Constituency), Julia Ojiambo (Busia Central) and Chelagat Mutai¹³ (Eldoret North Constituency). In 1988, Grace Ogot (Gem Constituency) and Agnes Ndetei (Kibwezi) were the only female parliamentarians to win their elective seats. Nyiva Mwendwa joined them as a nominated MP, which amounted to 3 women serving as parliamentarians out of a total of 202 members.¹⁴ The successfully elected female leaders had several characteristics in common including high levels of professional achievement and supportive family backgrounds (Kamau, 2010).

1964

Ruth Habwe

First woman to vie for elective leadership in the post-Independence era.

1970

**Grace Onyango
Kisumu Constituency**

Kenya's first woman to successfully vie for a member of parliament seat in the post-Independence era.

1974

**3 women who won their
MPs seats**

- Phoebe Asiyo (Karachuonyo Constituency),
- Julia Ojiambo (Busia Central)
- Chelagat Mutai (Eldoret North Constituency).

1988

**3 women serving as
parliamentarians out of a
total of 202 members.**

- In Grace Ogot (Gem Constituency)
- Agnes Ndetei (Kibwezi)
- Nyiva Mwendwa (Nominated)

While the number of elected female leaders remained small, their engagement in seeking even higher offices beyond member of parliament increased. In 1997, Wangari Maathai and Charity Ngilu declared intention to vie for the presidency. Both had experienced multiple setbacks in their political careers including violence and chauvinism (Nyabola, 2015; Simmons, 1997). While neither of them won the presidency, their persistence constituted a form of victory in enabling women to be taken more seriously in their access to and presence in politics. More women would unsuccessfully seek to run for presidency including Nazlin Umar in 2007¹⁵, and Martha Karua and Kingwa Kamencu in 2013. Karua would be the lone woman among the final eight contenders who all participated in the inaugural presidential debate¹⁶. In 2022, nearly 50 individuals had indicated interest in vying for the presidency, several of them women¹⁷. However, only four were eventually cleared to run, all of them men¹⁸.

In the 21st century, there have been incremental gains made by women in political leadership though these gains remain slow and dismal (Kamau, 2010). In 2001 three legislators founded the Kenya Women's Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA), namely Ngilu, Martha Karua, and Beth Mugo. The organization has since grown in membership. The three founder members would later serve in senior positions in different governments. Karua also made a bid for the presidency in 2013 and was the running mate to Raila Odinga's presidential bid in the 2022 election.

In 2007, 15 women were elected to serve as MPs, while six were nominated¹⁹. The promulgation of the Constitution (2010) introduced a bi-cameral parliament made up of 350 MPs in the National Assembly and 68 senators in the Senate. It also introduced 47 gubernatorial seats, three of which were won by women in the 2017 election. That same year, 23 women won member of parliament seats. The 2010 Constitution also introduced nominated legislative seats reserved for special interest groups including women, people living with disabilities, and youth.

Prior to the 2022 election, there were 23 female members of parliament, 47 women representatives (a seat reserved for women aspirants) and six female nominated members of parliament. The six countries in Eastern Africa - the others being Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda - have set aside a 30% quota of elective seats reserved for women with Kenya trails behind in achieving that representation. Even in the 2022 general election, Kenya did not fulfill the constitutional quota.²⁰

Efforts by multiple actors contributed to the large numbers of women who vied for multiple seats in this election. Bodies such as UN Women variously supported the participation of women in politics such as by championing their races, or providing networks, legal aid, media programming, and training in managing and running political campaigns. Social media applications allowed politicians to present themselves and

1997

Wangari Maathai and Charity Ngilu declared intention to vie for the presidency

2007

Nazlin Umar vied for Presidency
5 women were elected to serve as MPs, while six were nominated

2010

The promulgation of the Constitution (2010)

2013

3 women governors out of 47 elected
23 women won member of parliament seats
Martha Karua and Kingwa Kamencu vied for Presidency in 2013.

their policies to a wide range of audiences with relatively few resources.

Civil society organizations such as Media Focus on Africa and the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) have also contributed to gains made in the electoral process. For instance, in preparation for the 2022 election, FIDA established in 2021 the Women Leadership Academy which aimed to build the capacity of an estimated 350 female political aspirants. The academy was part of the Vote a Dada campaign which sought “to integrate the intersectional participation for women in the country to demand action from the State, the Legislature, and all other governance institutions in promoting women’s leadership.”²¹ FIDA also provided various types of support to female aspirants including access to legal services and training in political campaign management.

Media Focus on Africa - which sponsored this study - produced a 26-episode reality show titled Ms. President. The show made its debut in 2019 and has another season in production. It invites women leaders from across the country to participate in elimination challenges that culminate in a winner titled ‘Ms. President.’ Some of the contestants have used the show as a catalyst to increased participation in politics. One illustration is Vivienne Taa, a contestant from the first season, who joined the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) as a member and in the 2022 election, served as the party’s young women caucus coordinator²².

⁵<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/otherconferences/Nairobi/Nairobi%20Chapter%201.pdf>

⁶<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Kenya.pdf>

⁷<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Kenya.pdf>
Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender. (2019). National Policy on Gender and Development.

⁸<http://psyg.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NATIONAL-POLICY-ON-GENDER-AND-DEVELOPMENT.pdf>

⁹<https://books.openedition.org/africae/1868?lang=en>

¹⁰<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/tom-mboya-one-of-kenya-39-s-founding-fathers-mohamed-amin-foundation/MAXxnsuBCASqlw?hl=en>

¹¹<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001347915/founding-fathers-kenya-s-road-from-parliamentary-to-presidential-system>

¹²http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2018-04/24_History_of_the_Parliament_of_Kenya.pdf

¹³<https://www.awaazmagazine.com/volume-18/issue-1-volume-18/special-feature-issue-1-volume-18/chelagat-mutai-the-lioness-of-nandi>

¹⁴http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2018-04/24_History_of_the_Parliament_of_Kenya.pdf

¹⁵KTN News. (2018, June 21). Nazlin Umar: My votes were also stolen in the 2007 election. KTN News. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/ktnnews/video/2000156911/nazlin-umar-my-votes-were-also-stolen-in-the-2007-election>

¹⁶KTN News. (2013, February 12). Kenya Presidential Debate 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i89bSa88dOE>

¹⁷Mukami, L. (2022, May 3). Full list of 46 independent presidential aspirants seeking to succeed Uhuru. Daily Nation.

<https://nation.africa/kenya/news/politics/full-list-of-46-independent-presidential-aspirants-seeking-to-succeed-uhuru-3802912>

¹⁸Kalekye, M. (2022, June 7). IEBC clears four candidates to vie for presidency in August. KBC. <https://www.kbc.co.ke/iebc-clears-four-candidates-to-vie-for-presidency-in-august/>

¹⁹http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2018-04/24_History_of_the_Parliament_of_Kenya.pdf

²⁰Obiria, M. (2022, August 18). Election 2022: More women elected but Kenya still tails in EA bloc. <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/gender/election-2022-more-women-elected-but-kenya-still-tails-in-ea-bloc-3918758>

²¹<https://www.fidakenya.org/2022/07/08/women-leadership-academy-voteadada-2/>

²²<https://nation.africa/kenya/news/gender/how-tv-reality-show-ms-president-changed-my-thinking-3340058> went on to

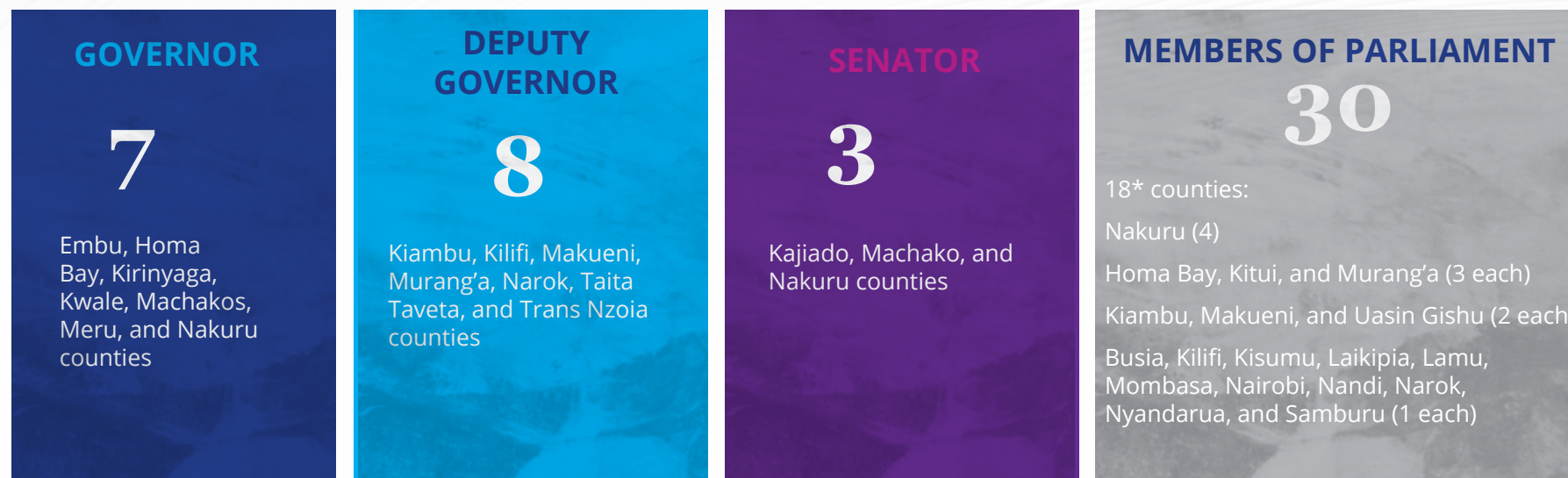
THE 2022 ELECTION - AN OVERVIEW

Prior to the 2010 Constitution, Kenya was divided into eight administrative units known as provinces. Historically, Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western provinces tended to produce larger numbers of elected female representatives compared to the other provinces (Kamau, 2010). In the 2022 election, two of those regions stood out in their gender representation with Homa Bay County (formerly in Nyanza Province) and Nakuru County (formerly in Rift Valley Province) alongside five other counties electing female governors. Nakuru also stood out countrywide for the number of female aspirants who successfully vied for all elective posts from governor to member of county assembly.

Kenya saw the largest number of women running for elective seats ranging from governor to member of county assembly in the General Election of 2022. This also translated to the number of women who successfully ran for elective seats, as indicated in Table 1. The Women's Representative position, is a legislative seat representing women's issues and concerns at county level. It is a seat that automatically goes to a woman.

Table 1: Summary of number of women who successfully vied for a range of four elective positions

Total no. of women elected



Source: National Gender and Equality Commission²³

Seat
Gove
Depu
Senat
Mem

However, the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) observed that women candidates alongside aspirants from other special interest groups (youth and people living with disability) were disadvantaged by a lack of enforcement of campaign financing regulations, meaning that the candidates did not have sufficient resources to run wide-spread campaigns²⁴.

In the 2022 election, gender played an increasingly visible role in the selection of presidential and gubernatorial running mates.^{25,26,27} Additionally, there were efforts made by institutions to achieve the constitutionally mandated two-thirds gender rule requirement, civil society support for women and previously marginalized groups,^{29,30} creation of gender desks and support for female journalists in newsrooms, and the efforts to reach women voters.^{32,33}

The media were a key player in providing information about the various races and candidates, generating and contributing to political narratives. For instance, a May 20, 2022 tweet from Ramogi FM commented on the selection of the deputy presidential running mates for two of the four presidential candidates William Ruto and Raila Odinga. The post used a snapshot of the front pages of Kenya's leading daily newspapers Daily Nation and The Standard which had the images of Rigathi Gachagua and Martha Karua, who are allied with presidential aspirants William Ruto and Raila Odinga respectively. Ramogi FM is a radio station that broadcasts in the Dholuo language, reaching the Luo population that mostly resides in the Western part of the country.**

← Tweet



RIGATHI KOD KARUA,
Pek Ratil oyiengore Kon mane?
Ng'wech osechakore .. ⚖️
#Kogwen2022
mana Kawuono e gaset #NonroMarOboke



6:14 AM · May 20, 2022 from Nairobi, Kenya · Twitter for Android

Figure 1 shows a snapshot of the May 2022 tweet.

The tweet compared the potential of Gachagua and Karua as deputy presidents by questioning their suitability and capability, and stating that the race had begun. The weighing scale illustrated the point.

Gender-based coverage in mainstream news outlets had received past research scrutiny with an emphasis on commercial media (Media Council of Kenya, 2015; Macharia, 2016). However, this held less true for community, public and digital news media of which the latter include online-based publications.

In the 2022 general election, several organizations engaged in media monitoring in the leadup to Kenya's general election of 2022, with an emphasis on quantitative data collection among commercial and public news media. The African Centre for Media Excellence³⁴ and the Media Council of Kenya(MCK)^{35,36}, were among those organizations both focused on monitoring content on commercial media outlets on print, broadcast and online platforms. They also assessed the public broadcaster's content.

Gender issues featured in the two reports which both confirmed that male politicians tended to garner more coverage compared to their female counterparts and there was a predominance of male sources in the telling of the stories. These studies focused on a content analysis of coverage whose gender aspects are largely confirmed by this research report.

This report sought to expand on the study of political news coverage by gender through including community media alongside commercial, digital-only, and public news media outlets. The report also sought the perspectives of news content creators (journalists) and consumers (citizens in the focus group discussions) enabling a deeper understanding of 'how' and 'why' gender issues were a significant factor in this election.

²⁷<https://www.ngeckkenya.org/news/8270/commission-lauds-record-sigs-elected-in-the-2022-general-elections>

²⁵<https://www.citizen.digital/news/from-55-to-4-the-presidential-aspirants-iebc-has-cleared-to-run-for-the-top-office-n299596>

²⁶<https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2022-05-19-gender-card-shaping-battle-for-taita-taveta-top-seat/>

²⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73uBb2BLtJM>

²⁸https://www.iebc.or.ke/news/?Political_Parties_Must_Adhere_to_Two-Thirds_Gender_Rule,_Commission_Warns

²⁹<https://www.fidakenya.org/press-release-6th-may-2022/>

³⁰https://www.fidakenya.org/ishypixi/2022/04/Policy-Gap-Report..-1_compressed-1.pdf

³¹<https://amwik.org/amwik-and-unesco-train-60-female-community-journalists-on-safety-and-security/>

³²<https://www.theafricareport.com/213606/kenya-2022-election-ruto-woos-women-voters-to-counter-railas-running-mate/>

³⁴<https://acme-ug.org/wp-content/uploads/KENYA-MEDIA-COVERAGE-REPORT-revised-1.pdf>

³⁵<https://mediacouncil.or.ke/sites/default/files/downloads/Media%20Monitoring%20%20Research%20Report%20on%20Election%20Coverage%20April-%20June%202022.pdf>

³⁶<https://mediacouncil.or.ke/sites/default/files/downloads/REPORT%20ON%20MEDIA%20PERFORMANCE%20DURING%20THE%202022%20GENERAL%20ELECTION.pdf>



FINDINGS

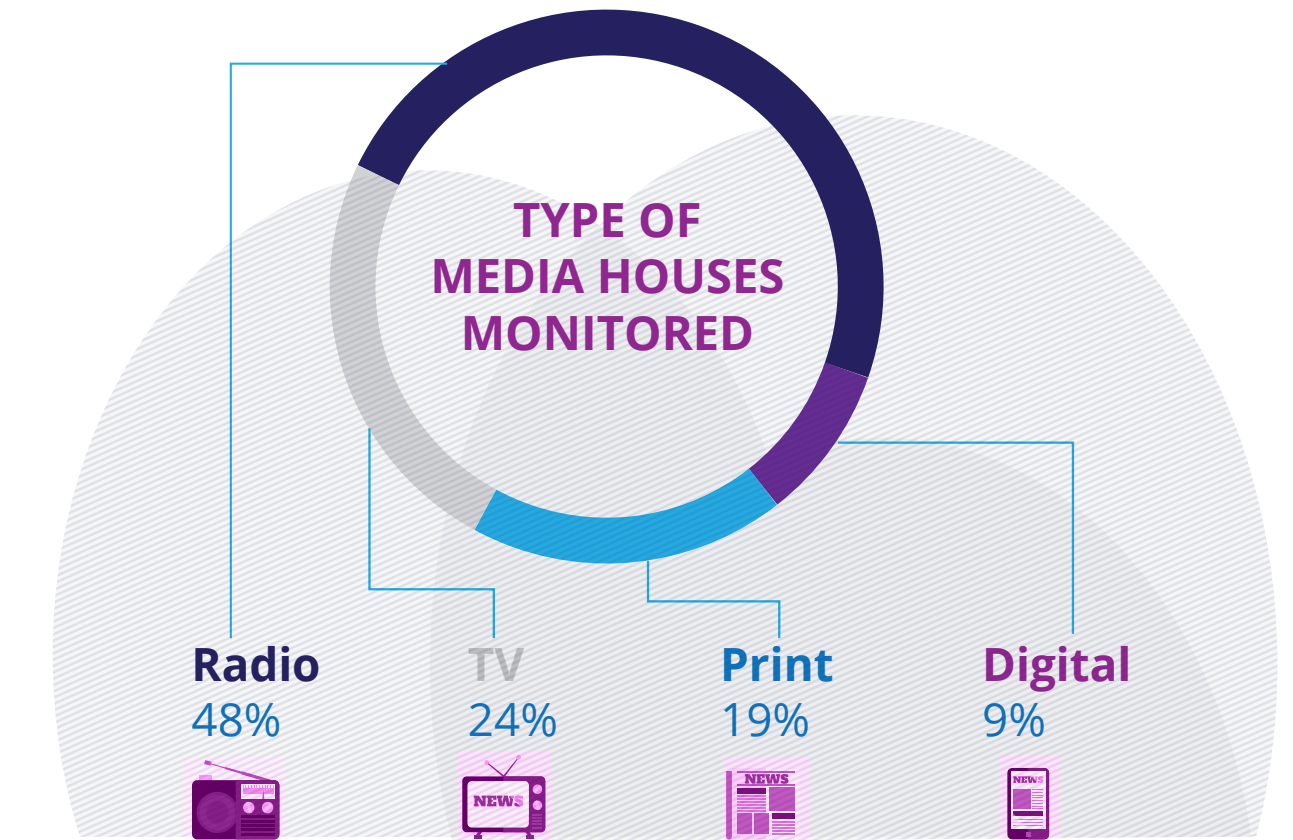
The first set of findings addresses news coverage as follows: news coverage by gender in stories monitored, decision-making concerning the news, and audience sources and perceptions of news. The second set of findings addresses the dominant themes that emerged from the roundtables and focus group discussions.

News coverage by gender in stories monitored





















Between June 11-19, there were 612 stories were monitored covering the commercial, community and public broadcast media, one digital news outlet, and two newspapers.

Early in the monitoring, several monitors analyzing local or regional radio stations found it difficult to get consistent political news coverage. Some stations played music much of the time, or repeated a small range of political news stories in news bulletins aired at different times of the day. For instance, with Bahari FM the monitor encountered the same limited number of political news stories, with the station emphasizing on entertainment or music. She switched to Msenangu FM, with the hope of finding more news content but found the station also had limited political news content. The two stations are based at the coast and owned by different commercial companies headquartered in Nairobi.



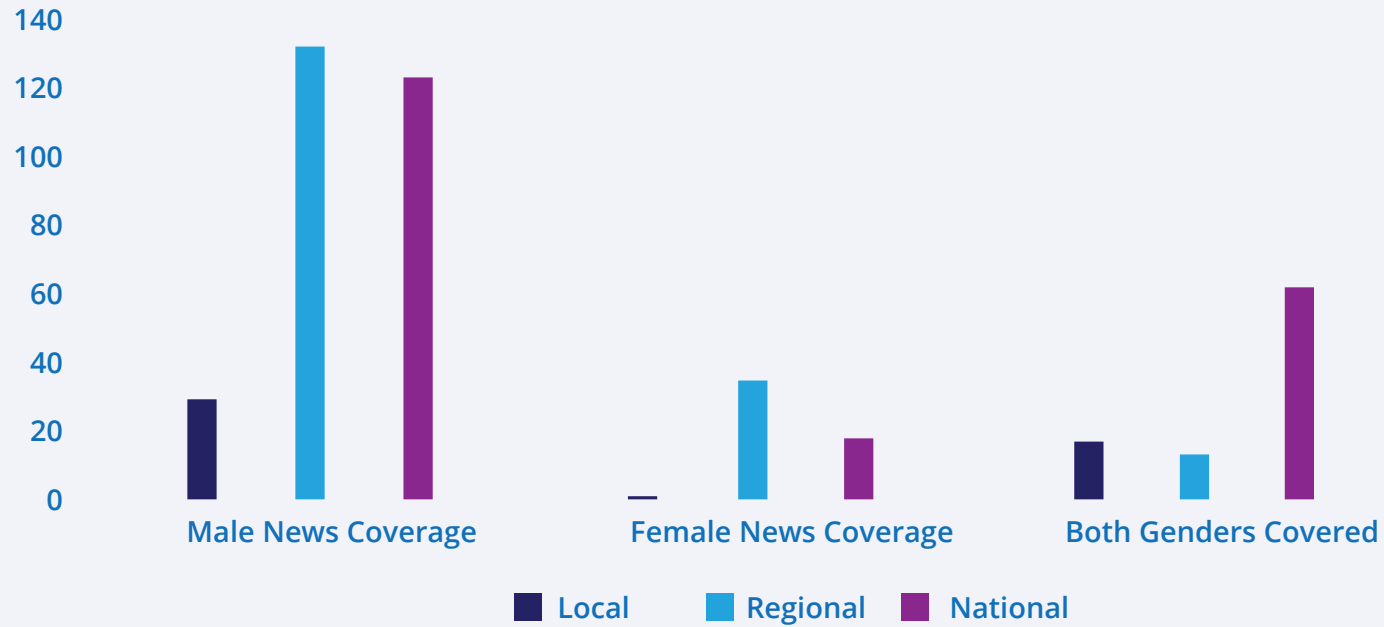


Based on patterns from previous elections and on the proportion of men versus women running for office, there was the expectation that men would likely receive more coverage than women. For instance Tables 2 and 3 below provide an overview of the number of aspirants and eventual winners in two of the eight regions where focus groups were held. The appendix section presents more comprehensive information on the eight counties in which the focus group discussions were held.

CANDIDATES	GOVERNOR		SENATOR		MP		MCA	
								
SAMBURU	0	5	0	4	1	13	5	37
NAIROBI	3	6	4	9	25	120	139	882
WINNERS								
								
SAMBURU	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	15
NAIROBI	0	1	0	1	1	16	3	82

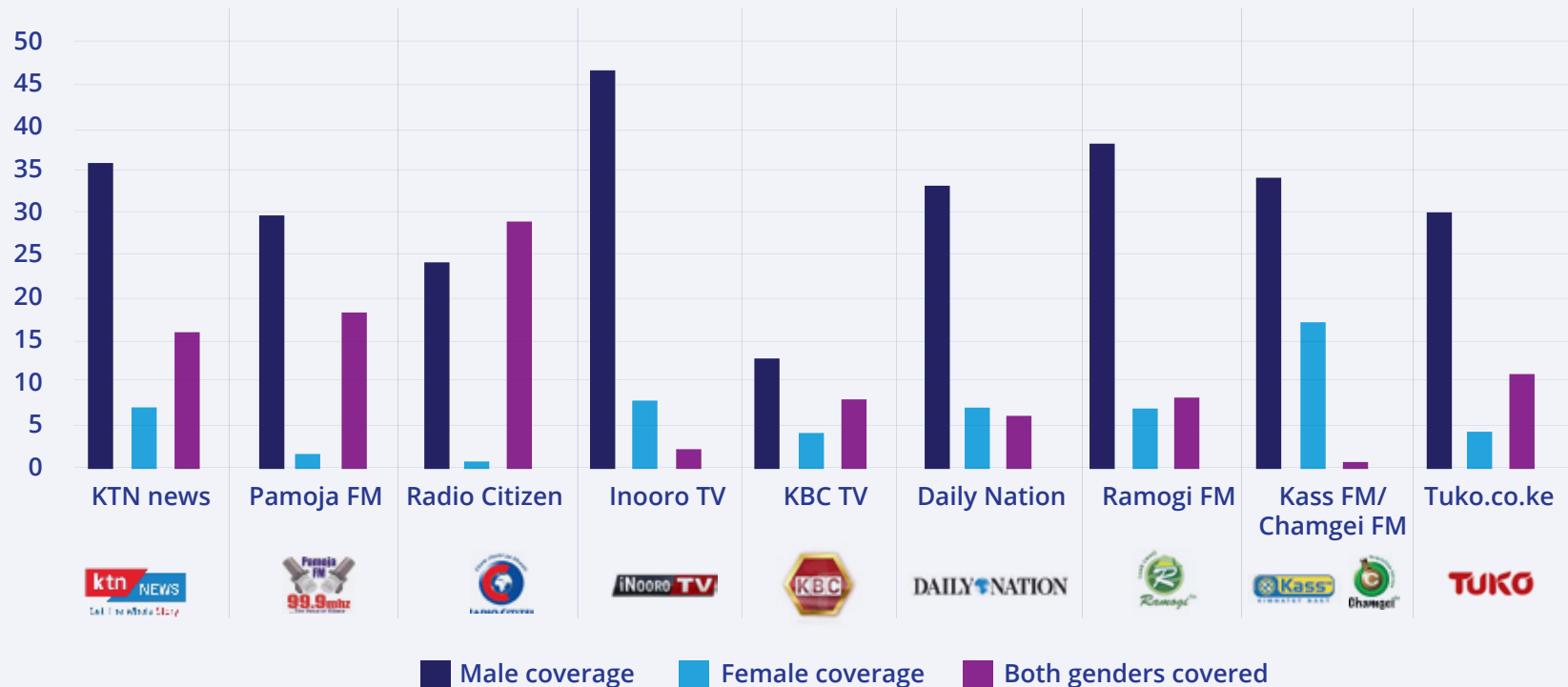
As expected, the coverage of men tended to dominate across local, regional and national news media as shown in Figure 2. In this study, the community media were characterized as 'local' media, given their close relationship and location to the populations they serve. Regional media was the term given to local language stations targeted at particular linguistic communities, while national media referred to publications or broadcasts in Kiswahili or English that reached multiple parts of the country.

Figure 2: Breakdown of News Coverage by Gender across Local, Regional and National Media



In the stories monitored, national media had the most stories that each covered both genders. The individual media platforms also tended to provide more attention to male aspirants. Radio Citizen had more even coverage for both genders during the monitoring period as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Gender coverage by select media houses



However, there were other factors beyond the proportion of men versus women running for elective offices.

News stories at national and regional level tended to focus on prominent personalities within those areas. William Ruto and Raila Odinga consistently received much more media attention compared to their counterparts George Wajackoyah and David Mwaure. Their running mates experienced similar treatment with Rigathi Gachagua and Martha Karua receiving frequent coverage compared to Justina Wamae and Ruth Mutua. At gubernatorial level, strong contenders also generated extensive coverage in regional media outlets irrespective

of gender. The emphasis would end up creating the impression of a two-horse race, a well-used approach in media reporting.

Other factors included the willingness of political aspirants to receive news coverage and the editorial decisions made in the newsroom. In the journalists' roundtable, participants spoke about the difficulty of persuading politicians of both genders but women in particular to accept to be interviewed or featured in the news media. In one instance, three of the participants discussed a particular candidate running for a member of parliament seat but who was extremely media shy and repeatedly declined to be interviewed.

“ I did a story on her but it was just an effort to create rapport with her. **She completely refuses (to be interviewed).** She says her campaign is at the grassroots not in the media. (Nyeri RT 2).

At the editors' roundtable, participants discussed the choices editors made and the impact this has on the sources they have for stories. Perspectives from both male and female participants exposed the different ways in which an event/issue may be viewed from a gender lens.

One male roundtable participant indicated that political rallies are good sources of news because they are visually interesting, and are likely to yield exciting soundbites or comments from the speakers. This in turn is appealing to audiences. However, women may not always be visible at rallies, observed his female counterpart.

“ **Women don't go to rallies.** So if rallies are the only things you cover, then that's where you determine the news that's going to be covered. You need to find women where they are. **Women are where they are, making news where they are.** (Nairobi RT 2).

News decision-making

The two journalist roundtable discussions exposed the editorial decision-making revolving around gender issues in the political coverage. The journalists indicated that political aspirants of both genders had tended to be less visible and less aggressive compared to their counterparts in previous years.

In some instances, female political aspirants shied away from media house invitations and there were instances given of the journalists reaching out to particular candidates only to be denied interviews or talk show participation. However, the journalists indicated that even male aspirants have shied away from media coverage. The reasons

for the refusals for both genders included: not wanting to answer 'technical' questions related to governance and law; fearing questions that touched on their personal or professional pasts; and being ill-prepared for the interviewer.

The journalists also indicated that political aspirants - particularly newer candidates - often did not have media contacts or experience. There were occasional security concerns in covering certain candidates or meetings, which made politics particularly difficult for female journalists to cover.

In the editors' roundtable discussion, participants indicated that human



and financial resources, as well as intentional decisions made during story deployment contribute to how different genders are presented or included in the news. There were six editors in the group of 10, the other four being members of civil society, an independent media consultant, and the Media Council of Kenya. However, they spoke of greater effort made in this election to ensure more equitable coverage of both genders. Martha Karua was also seen to have had an effect on coverage as one Nairobi roundtable participant indicated.

“With regards to coverage, the media seemed to start covering more women after Martha was nominated. And then again, after other political parties, other presidential candidates also announced that they were having women as their running mates. (Nairobi Roundtable 6).

A community media house editor observed that she deploys reporters with the instructions to ensure that they get the perspectives of both genders in any story they are assigned. The community media are located within the geographical locations in which they broadcast, which also contributes to their knowing their audiences more and ensuring they are well represented in the news given to them.

An editor at a digital publication indicated that among the staff of 40, one woman sat on the political and current affairs desk. Because of personnel constraints, stories with an overt gender angle – such as those focused on particular women or men – were mostly covered when they were unusual. One such story was of Linet Chepkorir, the United Democratic Alliance nominee and eventual winner of the women’s representative seat in Bomet County.

In the leadup to Election 2022, among the choices media houses had made was to include more female perspectives in various aspects of news sourcing and production. The national broadcaster – Kenya Broadcasting Corporation – had an editorial team that included women news editors and was the lone media house to send a female journalist to cover exclusive stories. One such instance was the Odinga-Karua talk to the nation with five journalists – among them Nancy Okwara - on June 22, 2022³⁷.

³⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6-ntTSPpdQ>

“We’ve made a deliberate effort as editors. We will not have manels [all male discussion panels]. We have talks shows that speak to the political space. When getting sources for shows, we insist on women... We send female reporters to serious live interviews (NRB RT 2).

Another Nairobi roundtable participant observed how worthwhile the effort to have more women serving as analysts was.

“For the deputy presidential debate, that was the very first time I have ever seen a ‘womanel’ (a political analysis panel made up exclusively of women). How did we suddenly come up with smart women this time? It means they’ve been there all the time. But this time there was precedent in the deputy presidential candidates, having three out of four women... There [were] so many women [analysts]. I couldn’t believe it. It was almost a shock to see that and they were smart, they were spot on and they analyzed it well (NRB RT 3).

The commercial media also sought to have more diverse news sources, such as by running political analysis panels that were female-only or included both men and women. They also invited well-known leaders - such as former Governor Charity Ngilu and (former Murang’a County Women’s Representative) Sabina Chege – to contribute to political discussions. Figure 4 illustrates a poster marketing a panel discussion on Citizen TV.



Figure 4: Citizen TV marketed a May 18, 2022 panel discussion on one of its social media pages.

Additionally, particular media houses had created gender desks in the newsroom. However, participants in the Nairobi editors' roundtable expressed mixed views concerning the creation of the gender desks. There were those of both genders who supported their existence. However, others also of both genders indicated that the desks further reinforced the notion of 'gender' as being primarily about women. One female roundtable participant referred to gender desks as sites of 'ghettoizing women's issues.' A male participant explained why he was opposed to them.

“... it's not about setting up a desk, it's about making a deliberate effort to change the mindset of all the journalists and empowering more female journalists. If you set a gender desk, it will target a certain product [such as the production of] pullouts. A pullout is just a weekly thing but if you empower journalists that each time they go out, they have gender issues at the back of their minds. (NBI Roundtable 1).

Latest articles written by Gender desk team:

A letter to Martha Karua

Her nomination as deputy president unleashed a celebratory mood across Kenya

Gender Jun 03



Gender-agenda: How your county has performed

In Nyanza and Western regions, there are no budget allocation for gender and the departments are understaffed

Gender May 16



Decorated widows' organisation leader finds love

They re-established their connection at a time when both were nursing the scars of past relationships.

Lifestyle May 01



The young and restless

There is no stopping these girls; they are ready to face off with the giants and claim their space at the table of Kenyan politics.



Other factors also influenced editorial decision-making, including company profit margins and owner interests. One journalist roundtable participant made the following observation about owners having an interest in the coverage emanating from a media house.

“ *In Kikuyu there is a saying that ‘kienjagwo mwene oiga’ (the head is shaved when the owner says so) so [one] cannot contradict [an owner] (Nyeri RT 3)*

There were audience members who noted the efforts the news media had made in regards to gender representation in the media, and what those efforts meant. One Busia FGD participant who usually watched Citizen TV or Ramogi TV made the following observation;

“ *I have a daughter in Form 3 who tells me ‘Mum, let us watch Citizen to see what’s going on in the country.’ **I too like watching because I see both men and women on the news.** So I tell my daughter ‘if you study hard, you too can be among those we watch on TV.’ And I see [the journalists] cover politics well. That is what I like. (Busia FGD 6).*

Figure 5 provides a screenshot of a selection of stories written by members of Nation Media Group’s gender desk.

Figure 5: Sample stories presented on the Nation Media Group’s gender desk webpage.

AUDIENCES:

Sources of news

The FGDs were conducted in eight counties in the following order: Homa Bay, Busia, Nakuru, Maralal, Kitui, Kilifi, Nairobi, and Kirinyaga. There were 80 participants in total, 46% of whom were women and 54% men. They ranged from 21 to 67 years with an average age of 38 years. A breakdown of the participants and their gender is provided in Table 1. While every effort was made to ensure equal representation of both genders in each focus group, circumstances sometimes prevented it. In Maralal, a family emergency led to one of the female participants leaving before the discussion begun. In Busia and Kirinyaga, the FGDs were each held on a Saturday morning and the mobilizers found it a challenge to get female participants on those days within the time frame given.

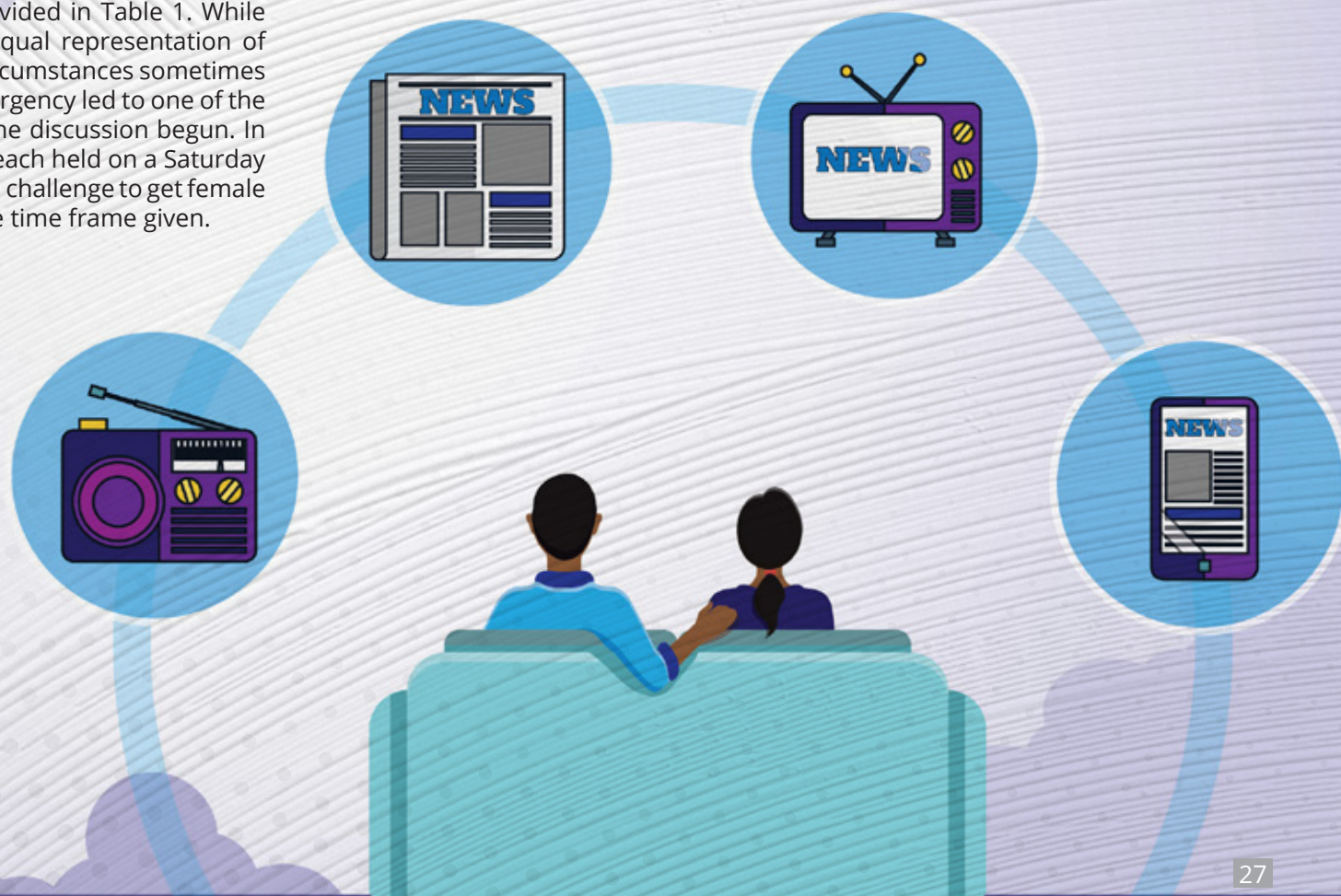
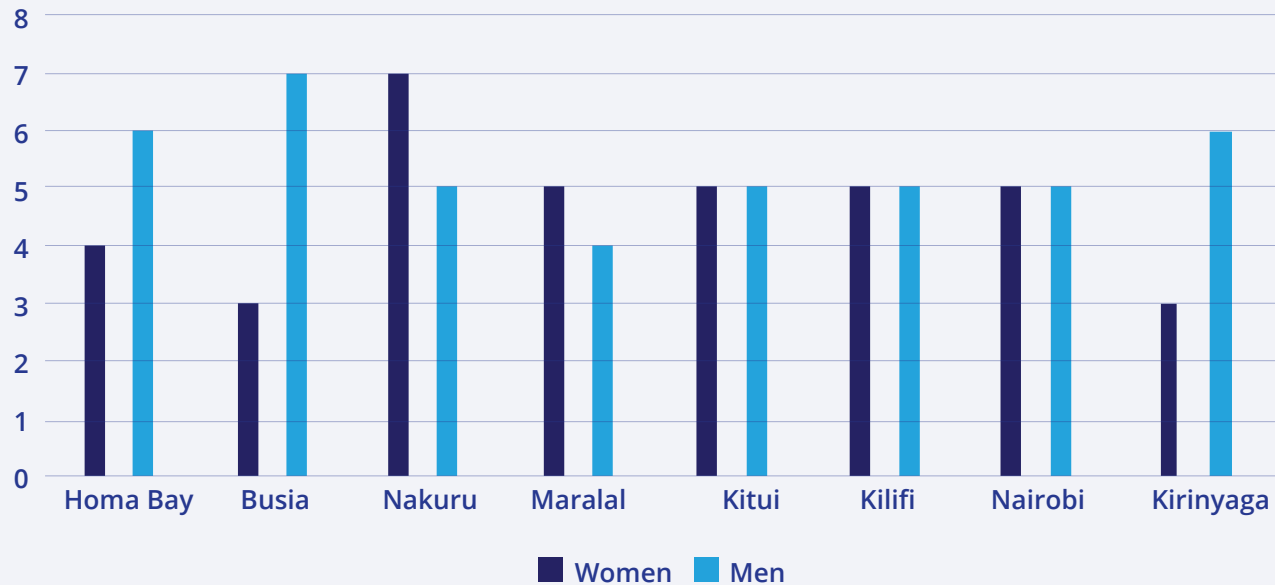


Figure 6: FGD participants across the eight counties by gender



The data indicated a growing reliance on social media groups even among older news media audiences, declining consumption of traditional commercial news media, and audience perceptions of bias in the commercial media.

The participants' sources of news included radio, television, and social media but with varying patterns across the country. For instance, the Samburu and Kitui FGD participants had an average age of 28 and 25 years respectively. Both groups indicated that their sources of

news were primarily social media such as Twitter, Facebook political/community groups, and Whatsapp. Instagram was also mentioned as a source of information. In both focus groups, participants said their parents and those of older generations tended to rely on mainstream commercial and/or community media, as illustrated by the following comments from participants in Samburu and Kitui.

“The media we use mostly as **youth is social media** and the **local people use radio**, Serian FM, maybe TV (Samburu FGD 2).

Really most of the **youth most of the information we consume comes from social media. TV not so much.** TV is for the old though some of us still do it. But mostly speaking for myself, I get information from Twitter, TikTok, Instagram. I prefer Twitter (Kitui FGD 2).

More surprising however was that in Kilifi, where the average age of the FGD participants was 44 years, the majority of participants also indicated that their primary sources of news was social media, specifically Facebook political/community groups and Whatsapp. Their peers in Busia, where the average age was 45, the primary sources of news were radio or television with stations such as Mulembe FM (for its Rhumba music), Citizen TV, and Nyota TV. The average age in the Kilifi and Busia FGDs was 44 and 45 years respectively.

FGD participants in Nairobi and Nakuru indicated that both mainstream and social media were used as sources of news, with social media enabling citizens to engage in the process of sharing and distributing information.

“In Nakuru we follow the TV stations yes but the most effective way of spreading and informing people it comes from **Facebook na sana sana Whatsapp.** Whatsapp is available even to people in the villages]. When there is breaking news, everyone knows it will be on Whatsapp. Whatsapp and Facebook have many groups) (Nakuru FGD 12).

I get most of my news from Twitter... [We] do 'Twitter marathons' just to sensitize and reach people through hashtags then those hashtags they just trend and we get information from all places. I will be honest. I'm a youth. I don't listen to radio as per now and if I do I go diverse. There is no specific channel that I listen to to get news because social media is the very first platform where I get news. (Nairobi FGD 2).

AUDIENCES: Perceptions of news coverage

The audience members who gave their views in the focus group discussions gave varying perspectives on the presence of women and men in the news stories. Overall, there was a perception of an increased presence and visibility of women in news alongside their male counterparts. But men and prominent individuals of both genders were more likely to have news coverage for various reasons including being already well-known or having the resources to facilitate the coverage.



FGD participants in Nairobi, Nakuru and Samburu provided these observations:

“*What I would say is that the two-thirds gender rule is taking light this time round; **the number of women who have come out to vie for these seats has been amazing and it's because of the interventions that have been made in the media.** I have been in spaces where media have been told how to do coverage when it comes to women, not having stereotypes around women. To be honest women have been seen but the change is very gradual. Attention has been so much on Martha Karua because she is a political big fish. The other women are seen once in a while. But at least that is change. (Nairobi FGD 1).*

*In my view among the **news media outlets such as TV, there is no gender balance because** they mostly highlight men and well known people. (Nakuru FGD 3).*

***Airtime on media favours men because they have money.** (Samburu FGD 7).*

The participants also shared their perceptions of editorial decisions. In Busia County for example, three participants indicated there was an increased visibility of female political candidates and reporters, but some media stations did not give equal representation of political media analysts.

“***Media coverage of women today is very high.** Even on TV the coverage of both genders is balanced. (Busia FGD 3).*

***There is balance as far as women in media are concerned because you see a lot of them as reporters.** (Busia, FGD 10).*

***I like Nyota TV [a Bungoma-based regional media outlet] because of its political analysis even though I've noticed they don't have female analysts, only men.** It would be better if they also had women because they have the ability. Women drive trailers and operate heavy machinery. So why are they fearful in politics? (Busia FGD 2).*

The representations of women in the news was also attributed to their efforts at being visible or having to stand out or be unusual compared to their male counterparts, as was indicated by FGD participants in Nairobi and Kitui.

“On coverage, I think women and girls are receiving increasing coverage. For example like with Raila [Odinga] and Martha [Karua], women’s issues are now being talked about a lot in the media. So we can’t say media is belittling women. It also depends on how a woman comes out to be seen by the media. Then she will be given an upper hand but if you hide nobody will know your issues. In Makina Ward there is a young lady vying to be an MCA called Aisha on a UDA ticket. She speaks and she is known; so we can’t say women are not known despite their age (Nairobi FGD 3).

When you talk about coverage, **if we have person A is a woman, person B is a man. They are both doing the same thing in the same way. But more spotlight will go to person B because he is a man.** For a woman to get the spotlight, she must do extra, she must work more than a man when it comes to the political arena. (Kitui FGD 3).

Women were also viewed as being less willing than men to use the news media to their advantage as an FGD participant in Nairobi pointed out.

Media gives a platform to people who want

“to be seen and heard. If you come out you will be seen and heard but most women want to hide. Martha Karua is always on TV because she talks. But people like Mishi Mboko of Mombasa, I don’t see them nowadays. They don’t talk. So the media cannot give you airtime if you hide behind people and you don’t talk. (Nairobi FGD 8).

Mainstream media houses were also perceived to be biased in their coverage, with Royal Media Services being singled out in particular due to the owner’s open declaration of support for the Azimio la Umoja coalition. One Kilifi FGD participant indicated that he hardly followed political coverage on mainstream media outlets because it was not neutral. But he hailed KBC for being objective and credible while suggesting that its news packaging be more appealing to younger audiences. An FGD participant in Kirinyaga made a similar observation as follows:

“In terms of gender, there is equality and there is no favoritism of men or women. But for me like in Inooro TV [a Royal Media Services outlet], Raila is given more airtime but news with Ruto we are only shown the headlines or something very small then its cut) (Kirinyaga FGD 2).

The public broadcaster was seen to be fair in its coverage, as compared to its commercial media counterparts. Social media was also seen to be an alternative source of information that enabled audiences to capture events in ways different from those framed by news media houses. One FGD participant from Kilifi made this observation as he alluded to the open support the RMS owner had given to the Azimio la Umoja coalition and the perceived bias against the Kenya Kwanza coalition:

“All privately owned media like Citizen TV, NTV, Kameme are all biased. I had paid-services digital TV in my home but I decided I will not pay for it again because of the bias. So I only watch KBC because they are neutral and fair. If there was someone from KBC here I would have thanked them... If in Royal Media stations, Kenya Kwanza have gone somewhere and there is a small fight that is the only thing they will air. But if like in Azimio there was a meeting last week and chaos emerged, [Royal Media] didn't air that. But we have social media - Facebook, Twitter Whatsapp groups and we follow what is happening. (Kilifi FGD 6).

FGD participants in Kitui and Kirinyaga reinforced the audience's perception of media bias or media framing of women in vulnerable/inferior positions.

“I am addicted to news. When I get home I must know what's going on. When with my friends, I'm like let's watch some news. I feel so good when I am watching news when I get information pertaining to politics and other things. I watch Citizen TV. I think that's my favorite, though at times it's biased. (Kitui FGD 4).

There is the issue of women being intimidated by men. A woman wants to vie for a position but the fellow male candidates abuse her and we see it on media. This makes women fearful and that's why many women are not coming out a lot to vie for political seats. (Kirinyaga FGD 10).

The data indicated that there was often a focus on conflict or sensational news in how news was packaged and that this focus filtered to audiences. For instance, the Roots Party candidate Prof. George Wajackoyah, who entered the presidential race a few months prior to the election, generated media interest over his proposals to use medicinal marijuana and snake farming as investment vehicles. The screenshot in Figure 7 provides a sample of recent stories generated around his candidacy.

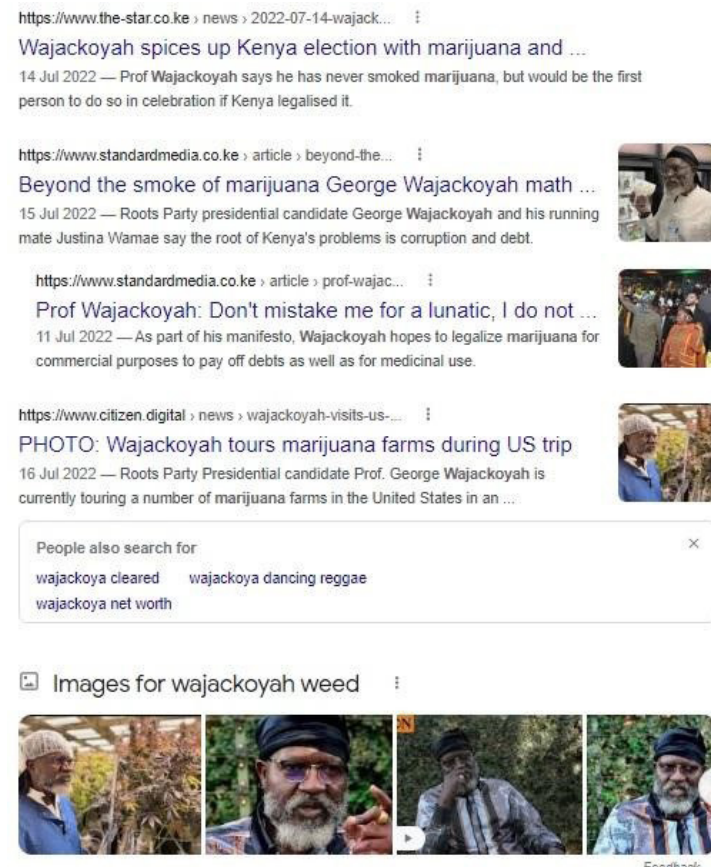


Figure 7: Screenshot showing sample stories about Prof. George Wajackoyah.

Another illustration of a focus on sensational news or conflict came from a June 11, 2022 West FM news bulletin. One news item focused on an exchange and tussle over a microphone that had taken place at a funeral between two women leaders, one of them being Women Representative Elsie Muhanda. Muhanda, who had been accused of not having worked for the people she had been elected to serve, gave the following rejoinder: “mpaka wizuri mu skirt khu ndio uliindi Kakamega County” (meaning: for you to get to lead in Kakamega as a woman, you should wear your skirt well).

There was a sense from some of the FGD participants however that the political candidates needed to understand the tough, competitive nature of politics and that getting media coverage required effort on their part.

One FGD participant in Kilifi made the following observation, particularly about women aspirants:

“ **I think women need to understand that they should not come into politics trying to be women.** That’s the problem with our women leaders, they want to be treated like women. It’s a harsh world. If politics is dirty and you want to participate in it you need to go the same way; so now [women leaders] are seated somewhere hoping some media house will notice them and go and air them. They need to come out and demand for the coverage; do the crazy things that other leaders do to be noticed so that they can be covered. Once they are noticed now they give out their ideas. **But in their leadership style they want to be bembelezwad,(begged)**

“ **wanting to be recognized as women. There is no time for that in politics – it needs you to be firm, to be crazy, to be there receiving insults and be ready for the insults.** If you want to cover yourself and say amenitukana, amesema matusi (I have been insulted) it won’t work in politics. So this is why [women aspirants] also do not receive airtime (Kilifi FGD 5).

Social media was also an important source of news particularly about candidates in lower-level races such as member of parliament and member of county assembly. These races did not receive consistent coverage in the news media though community media outlets were more likely than commercial and public media - which have larger audience reach - to give visibility to these lower-level races. A Kirinyaga FGD participant made this observation as she revealed her sources of news:

“ **On the radio I listen to Inooro Fm, Radio Citizen and on TV I watch Inooro TV and Citizen TV.** On social media there is a group called Kangai Oversight on Facebook and they talk about the MP and MCA. (Kirinyaga FGD 2).

THEMES FROM THE DATA

There were several gender-related themes that emerged from the roundtable and FGD data, reflecting the context in which this election took place. The themes showed that journalists and audiences alike had observed gains in the political participation and news coverage of both women and men. But the participants also acknowledged the reasons that enabled men to retain a more dominant hold in politics, including deep-rooted societal and cultural practices as well as access to financial and other resources. This section presents eight themes that emerged from the data.

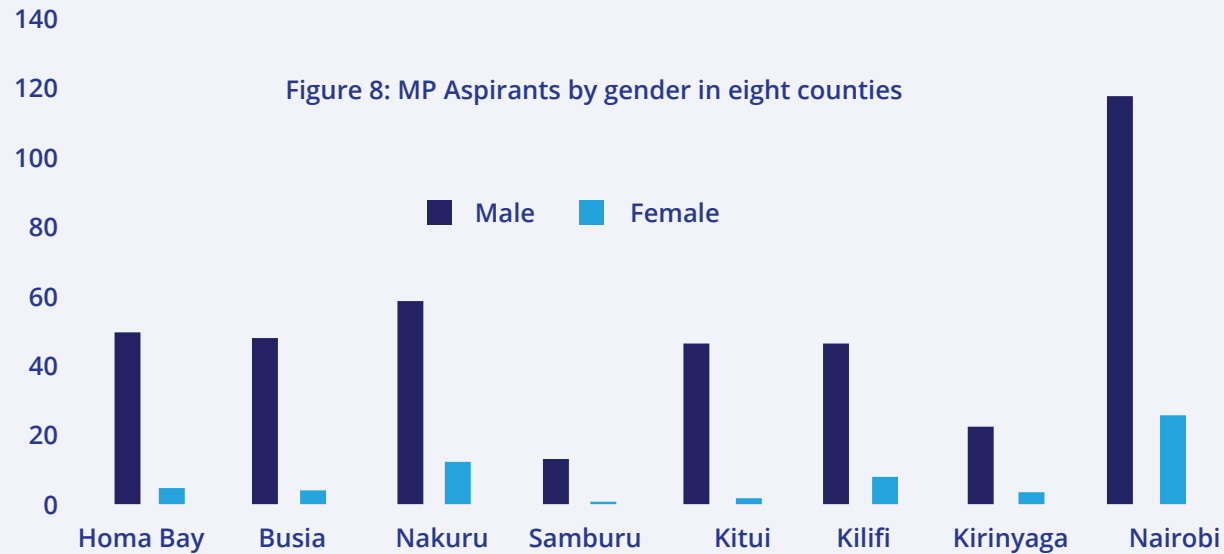
Theme 1: Men dominated as women made gains in political engagement

The roundtable and monitoring data provided evidence of the importance and recognition of gender in this particular election season. Men continued to dominate in the political sphere compared to women in terms of number of aspirants, media attention given, and attendance and visibility in different political spaces.

In this election, all four of the candidates cleared to run for president by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) were male. Three of the four deputy presidential running mates however, are women as are more than 20 gubernatorial candidates from Kisumu and Homa Bay to Kilifi and Taita Taveta counties. In Kirinyaga County, one poll indicated the two leading contenders for the gubernatorial race were women,³⁸ which was unprecedented in the 10 years since the first group of governors occupied their roles. The range of candidates for legislative seats also showed individuals of both genders had chosen to vie, but with men remaining in the majority.

For instance in the eight counties in which the FGDs were held, 87% of the 468 member of parliament aspirants were male. Figure 8 provides a breakdown of aspirants by gender across eight counties.

³⁸<https://www.tuko.co.ke/politics/464838-wangui-ngirici-beat-anne-waiguru-kirinyaga-gubernatorial-race-poll/>



Source: IEBC

FGD participants from Kilifi and Homa Bay made the following observations about women getting party support and vying for various seats in this election season.

“*This time around women have really ventured into politics, particularly the MCA seat. In the Sokoni and Teso wards, we have women aspirants. Aisha Jumwa is vying for the governor seat and her challenger Gideon Mung'aro also has a female deputy running mate. It's now upon the citizens to decide whether to support the women who tend to be marginalized. They have no voice and are not as aggressive as men.* (Kilifi FGD 3).

“*In 2013, we had only one woman for Abouch North Ward who won a ticket. In fact in 2007 and 2013, [the Orange Democratic Movement] did free and fair nominations whereby one woman got a ticket in Abuoch North Ward, Ndhiwa Sub County. Then again in 2017, we had 3 of them. **This year we have about 7 who were given ODM tickets** (Homa Bay FGD 5).*

Nairobi and Nakuru had the leading number of female MP aspirants, with 26 and 12 women vying for seats in the two counties respectively. Samburu had the lowest number of total aspirants, 14 in total. Honourable Naisula Lesuuda was the only female aspirant among them. Women were also engaged in other aspects of the political races, such as in attending political meetings and rallies, mobilizing citizens to attend meetings, lobbying for special interest groups including people living with disabilities, and campaigning for particular candidates.

However, despite the increased numbers of women vying, there was the anticipation prior to the election that the constitutional mandate to achieve at least 30% representation by any one of the two genders would not be realized. A Nairobi roundtable participant made this observation:

“*To go back to the representation of women in this particular election. I feel like we had a lot more women who put themselves out there for election but the majority were edged out at the nomination stage. And so even though we have more women now vying, one of the realities is that in the 13th parliament, we will still not achieve their two thirds gender threshold, which is unfortunate (Nairobi RT 5).*”

Theme 2: 'A woman cannot lead the herd' (Cultural/ societal beliefs)

The Samburu saying that provides the title for this sub-section was mentioned during the Samburu FGD which was partly comprised of young women who wish to vie for political office in future. The saying in Samburu is 'Mejing nkitati tekwe nkishu'. Cultural and societal beliefs still contribute to the slow progress of women in politics. This was evident in the relatively limited number running for political office not only in Samburu County but in other regions across Kenya.

In Homa Bay County, Gladys Wanga was perceived to have the potential to be a good governor. But being a woman posed a challenge for her and other women aspirants as two FGD participants indicated.

“Wanga can be a good governor but men don't want women to lead. They feel that if women get ahead they will not honour men at home. But we as women are ready to work so I am glad if a woman can be a governor. (Homa Bay FGD 4).

Men now are fearful of letting their wives get into politics because they leave their husbands. Female MCAs and MPs have

³⁹<https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/rift-valley/2016-12-16-samburu-women-unite-team-up-to-challenge-men-in-election/>



many husbands. One has had the husband arrested several times and another has three homes. We will not support women in politics because they leave their homes when they get the seat] (Homa Bay 2).

However, these attitudes are slowly changing and are being dismantled partly by the women themselves³⁹. In Samburu County, honourables Maison Leshomo and Naisula Lesuuda were vying for women's representative and member of parliament respectively. Hon. Lesuuda would eventually win her seat. One of Hon. Lesuuda's campaign posters is shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9: A campaign poster featuring Samburu West parliamentary aspirant Naisula Lesuuda in the Kisima area, near Maralal town.

In the Samburu FGD, participants observed that the two women were a big inspiration to other women and that the two leaders would likely not have entered the political scene by first vying for an elective seat since no woman has entered Samburu politics without first getting a nomination.

“ *I think women like Naisula and Maison showing us that they can do it, then other women that if they can do it, then let us start, step by step (Samburu FGD 1)*

An FGD participant from Nairobi made a comparison between the self-presentation of female leaders from past and present elections.

“ *I will not give a good example with Martha [Karua] but I will give a good example with Beth Mugo. During one of her 1997 campaigns she said ...“let me talk to these people since I'm in a hurry. I am going to cook for my husband.” This was a person who knew she was a wife not a politician at a certain time. The difference with the politicians that I have seen this time, most of the young generation now you will see them on posters. Like an MCA who was vying in Kileleshwa, the poster that she is advertising herself with as compared to what was used some years back it's totally different. It's either she is advertising herself as a woman not politically. (Nairobi FGD 10).*

Across the country, different FGD participants indicated similar cultural and societal beliefs that lead to women and men political

leaders being viewed differently. A view of women as inferior or fearful, as having to play to cultural expectations to be accepted, and not having the support of female voters were among the views shared. One Busia FGD participant proposed that women need to change tactics so that as political leaders, they build other women up.

“ **Women fear their fellow women. A female aspirant will have a male bodyguard or assistant.** She should instead have fellow woman supporting her within her circle so that as they work closely together, they learn the game. But that doesn't happen. (Busia FGD 1).

FGD participants in Nakuru and Samburu made the following observations about the cultural barriers that women faced in comparison to men. The Samburu FGD participant was female.

“ *I think the reason most women are not in power is that in most developed countries women are allowed to lead. **But in Africa, like in Kenya for example, people still have the traditional belief that women are inferior and men are superior.** So it is not easy for women to be listened to. (Nakuru FGD 2).*

“ **Men are more respected. They command more respect due to the cultural aspect of the elders being the controllers of the community.** So when I sit in the office [her place of work], when the older men come, they ask 'who is here?' and I am just seated there. So they ask 'can I talk to someone?' and I am just seated there. I tell them I am the one who is managing the place. So it is very biased (Samburu FGD 6).



Theme 3:

Women are seen but not always heard

Across the country, the number of women who vied for a variety of seats in the 2022 election was higher than that seen in past elections. However, the journalists and FGD participants both indicated that women were visible but they were not always 'heard' in terms of political aspirants speaking at events and sharing their policies/platforms.

There were varying reasons for this including culture and societal expectations, their relationship or affiliation with (prominent) male leaders, emphasis on physical appearance, ability to use news media to their advantage, or the news media's decision on whom to cover. Women found it difficult to campaign at night unlike their male counterparts, and tended to serve in subordinate roles as entertainers and ushers. For political aspirants, women tended to speak less than men. The following quotes from FGD participants in Busia and Nakuru illustrate those various factors.

“ Women need to be close to politically successful men and be their campaigners and see how the process is and get used to it. After that the women should be consistent, keep trying. Men attempt to vie many times and eventually they succeed. Like now we in Busia we will give a lady called Catherine Omanyo the seat because she has supported other candidates [in the past] but this time she is in the race.(Busia FGD 1).

When it comes to campaigning, as a man I can do it even at night but a woman seen outside at night is considered a prostitute. [Campaign] money is distributed at night. (Nakuru FGD 3).

In different parts of the country, attendees at campaign events included members of both genders with an increasing number of young women attending, as one Nairobi FGD participant indicated.

“ Rallies have changed this year; in the rallies you will find girls or youth are the majority but for men aged 30 years and above you will not see them. If you see them there, they must have been invited and they will get something. (Nairobi FGD 4).

Women at rallies attended to listen to candidates or cash in on campaign money. But they also played other roles including entertaining audiences or in more behind-the-scenes roles such as arranging seats or ushering guests to their chairs. Women were also less likely than men to serve in prominent roles at campaign events and female aspirants also did not speak as often as men as an FGD participant in Kilifi observed.

“ I have attended rallies and many women attend. Women comprise the majority of the voters, women sing and entertain crowds in these rallies. But those who speak in the political rallies tend to be men, both the candidates and those who are not vying. You will even find the [master of ceremonies] is male. Rarely will you find a female MC in a rally. Secondly women arrange seats and welcome guests but they are not seen on the dais. (Kilifi FGD 5).

Theme 4: The Karua effect

Martha Karua's presence in this election season elicited positive responses from both women and men across the country. Karua is a lawyer with reformer and activist credentials and has been in politics for more than 30 years. She is the party leader for the NARC-Kenya political party, was the deputy presidential candidate for the Azimio la Umoja political coalition, vied for presidency in 2013, and was a long-serving member of parliament in Kirinyaga County.



Figure 10. A billboard of Martha Karua in Mwea town, Kirinyaga County. The billboard refers to her as 'Mother of the Nation' and 'Our Hope.'

NARC Kenya fielded candidates in the 2022 election and her selection as deputy presidential nominee for the Azimio la Umoja coalition was cited in multiple FGD sessions across the country as a big boost to current and future female political aspirants.

“ Political parties have hardly enabled women to rise to leadership. But the Azimio coalition has made me happy because they have chosen Martha Karua. We are even seeing her campaign vigorously. In those other parties, I only see men. But Martha Karua now is battling hard and she is uplifting other women and I believe they should change their views to know that they too are capable. (Busia FGD 6).

Karua received wide-ranging news coverage as a subject and source of information. Of the three female deputy presidential candidates, only she generated consistent and prominent coverage, confirming a trend also seen among male politicians that it is those who are already established public figures or well-known.

A Nairobi roundtable participant observed that Karua was among a group of political activists in the 1990s who were vocal in the push for the country to return to multiparty politics and for regime change. As the activists did not get much airtime on the public broadcaster KBC, they were featured on KTN, Kenya’s first privately owned television station.

Various FGD participants alluded to her impact, much of it positive and part of it tied to media coverage.

“ Martha has come and in one month is known all over Kenya because when she talks whether in Samburu land, North Eastern, Mombasa or anywhere in the country,, she says what the common people want to hear. (Nakuru FGD 7).

“ I think we Kitui ladies, this is the time people are waking up. People are getting enlightened and I’m so sure come 2027, we will have very many women running for elective positions. And then for Karua, it has an impact towards women not only because she is a woman but because Karua can work (Kitui FGD 4).

Media has a role to play in giving everyone a level playing field to share their ideas. It starts at an early age. So as a student go back and read the history of the two Marthas (Martha Karua and Chief Justice Martha Koome). These ladies started shaping their careers in primary and high school. At an early age, there should be programs to support young ladies or girls. They should build their confidence at an early age. (Nairobi FGD 4).

However, FGD participants in Kitui and Kirinyaga indicated that Karua had not had much of an impact for various reasons.

“ I don’t think Martha has changed anything in Kirinyaga because if we remember well even the DP position is way below the presidential seat she vied for in 2013. Even in her home constituency she didn’t get anything. So I don’t think her being on the ballot as a DP will change us in any way. (Kirinyaga FGD 8).

In my area, Kitui West Constituency, there is no Karua impact at all on women because the first woman that time was Nyiva Mwendwa and she retired; we expected to see more ladies vying for the MP seat; but we only have Edith Nyenze only. No woman in Kitui West Constituency is vying for an MCA position. (Kitui FGD 9).

Theme 5: 'The air is polluted with cash'

Money is the oil that fuels campaigns and enables the mobilization of voters and public meeting attendees. There are multiple euphemisms that were used to refer to the money that politicians are using, particularly to mobilize voters. These terms included 'samula' (in Kilifi), and 'tingiza mti' (in Busia). However, the findings showed that compared to men, women political aspirants often did not have as much money as men, and were seen to rely on sympathy rather than money to appeal to voters. In Nakuru for instance, an FGD participant explained why women were disadvantaged in their access to money.

“Concerning money, you'll find that since the beginning men have had access to money. A man can decide to sell a piece of land or a house to fund a political campaign. For a woman, what wealth do you have? Is the plot of land registered to your name? So you'll find men have the financial strength and are able to vie because of that muscle and because we [citizens] like to get a little money. I don't know how it will be in future. Maybe we will start paying attention to what people do. (Nakuru FGD 7).

Election 2022 took place in a difficult year for Kenyans who had experienced the COVID-29 pandemic and its attendant disruptions of life, an extended period of drought, rising inflation, and a high cost of living⁴⁰⁴¹. It was unsurprising then that access to money was important for politicians to finance campaigns and mobilize campaign event attendees. Two Nairobi FGD participants explained how transactional the political campaign process was where a politician and the citizens would trade money and praise/votes respectively.

“ I can tell in which hotel [a politician] is, so I will tell my friends ‘[the politician] is somewhere. Come with 20 boda bodas to this hotel.’ **So once they get there they will wait and once [the politician] gets out they will praise him, chase after him, get paid, and that’s the end of it. (Brian, Nairobi FGD 10).**

*In the past we never used to care much about politics. We always waited to go and vote. But right now we are so interested because there is money involved and that’s why politicians fear us now. **If a politician comes here, we want to know what he has carried for us in his pockets not his head. (Nairobi FGD 3).***

Election events had a commercial flavour where attendees of both genders were often mobilized by receiving cash from the political aspirants or their agents. This drove up the price of campaigning and put those without money at a great disadvantage, more so women as was indicated by two FGD participants from Kilifi.

“ **Women are still marginalized because of lack of economic empowerment. Most women will vie for leadership positions but will lose because they don’t have money and this is what makes most women not to progress politically. (Kilifi FGD 3).**

The incumbent politicians are calling people to give them a little money like Kshs 200. But the other leader has no money to give yet he or she is the true leader. What are you telling those people? Because you can’t call people and convince them without money. This lady here has struggled and she is in a position to be a leader but she doesn’t have money. The air is polluted with cash. (Kilifi FGD 2).

Wajackoyah’s campaign slogan – Tingiza Mti⁴² (Kiswahili for ‘shake the tree’) – had captured the imagination of news audiences. In Busia, the phrase had then been co-opted to refer to the money politicians were expected to attract or appeal to potential voters. A Busia FGD participant alluded to the slogan in this observation:

“ **Women are fearful and are tight-fisted. But in politics you must ‘shake the tree.’ When you ‘shake the tree,’ you get votes. (Busia FGD 2).**

⁴⁰<https://tradingeconomics.com/kenya/inflation-cpi#:~:text=Inflation%20Rate%20in%20Kenya%20averaged,percent%20in%20October%20of%202010>

⁴¹<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business/kenyan-banks-on-the-brink-of-a-fresh-crisis-3999396>

Other factors

Roundtable and FGD participants observed that Election 2022 had a few differences from previous polls in various respects. There was a much larger group of candidates of both genders vying for various seats, with women presenting themselves for gubernatorial to MCA races. However, there was a downside to the larger number of women running for various seats.

“ Women are now coming out more. They are more combative, unlike previous years. And I mean, I’m sorry to say this, but I am now even seeing women participate in election violence. They are funding things I was not used to three to four years ago, because I’ve covered the 2017 election. And now when you’re told that, for instance, that aspirant MCA, the lady is the one you know who rallied goons to go and blah, blah, then it tells you that now, I mean, it’s now a 50-50 thing (Nairobi Roundtable 10).

Apart from the more prominent races, such as those for the presidency or governor seats, the races were seen to be fairly muted compared to those in past elections, and were taking place in a relatively weak economy battered by COVID 19, as well as high rates of unemployment and costs of living. However, politicians and citizens engaged on social media such as through Facebook pages and Whatsapp groups, without either side having to rely on the news media.

“ Some media owners support particular candidates and give more airtime to them so people have lost confidence in mainstream media and now have more confidence in social

media and Facebook which are easily accessed with just a smart phone and bundles. People hardly buy newspapers anymore. (Nakuru FGD 5).

Royal Media Services was singled out as being biased, a perception linked to the owner’s open support for the Odinga-Karua ticket which run under the Azimio la Umoja coalition. The Ruto-Gachagua ticket - which was the primary opponent and eventual winner of the presidency - ran under the banner of the Kenya Kwanza coalition. Two FGD participants from Kitui and Kirinyaga made the following observations:

“ When Azimio are holding their campaigns and politics I see like they are given more airtime on Citizen TV [an RMS outlet] than the Kenya Kwanza team. When Raila speaks somewhere Citizen TV gives him more coverage than Ruto. [Raila] can come here with his followers and Citizen TV will give him airtime but if Kenya Kwanza comes here they will be shown for 2 minutes then it’s cut. (Kitui FGD 6).

Citizen TV is very biased. Some things we see on TV really hurt us. You find like when Azimio goes somewhere their news will be aired for 15 minutes but if it’s a Kenya Kwanza meeting, it will be aired for 3 minutes. Royal Media is a big let down because they take sides and that is bad). (Kilifi FGD 8).

⁴²<https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2022/06/tingiza-mti-wajackoyahs-slogan-trending/>

Discussion

This study specifically sought to address how gender was represented in the political news coverage across commercial, community and public media in Kenya in the leadup to the 2022 election; and how editorial decision-making and audience perceptions related to the coverage of gender/gender issues in the political news coverage.

In addressing those questions, the data further established six other themes related to audience and journalist perceptions of gender issues as follows: men dominated as women made gains in political engagement; cultural and societal beliefs remained a significant barrier for women political aspirants; women had increasingly become visible in the political arena but they were not always audible/easily heard; Martha Karua's prominence as a political leader of long-standing and her selection as the Azimio la Umoja's deputy presidential candidate had a largely positive impact; and the women and other marginalized groups were disadvantaged in getting access to the large amounts of money spent on campaigns.

The data established that there was extensive coverage of politics, but prominence was given to a limited number of races (national or select regional races) or individuals (mostly men). The vying of the largest number of candidates of both genders across races countrywide had led to increased competition for votes from a largely apathetic citizenry battered by a difficult economy and high cost of living.

The large commercial media provided a steady stream of political news content, but the regional and local outlets were less consistent. The resources to provide comprehensive frequent political news are usually lacking particularly for various media houses which resulted in repetitive coverage (such as the recycling of the same content in multiple bulletins in the day), and a focus on events and personalities rather than substantive issues.

Journalists indicated that they found the calibre of political candidates this election season to be less 'aggressive' compared to previous ones. The journalists were sometimes hard-pressed to find political candidates (of both genders) willing to be covered be it in broadcast or print. The

candidates were also not holding political events. The journalists also noted that potential voters expected or demanded money when they were mobilized to attend a political event, which was very expensive particularly for political aspirants in smaller races.

The lack of coverage then limited the exposure of aspirants running for regional or more localized races such as member of county assembly, member of parliament and senator. Women candidates and citizens were also less visible than men on the campaign trail, and the women leaders did not always have the space or did not choose to articulate their ideological positions. Women aspirants continued to face particular challenges in comparison to the male counterparts including harassment, name-calling and bullying. Yet some women had also adopted negative tactics such as the hiring of goons to cause violence against their competitors.

However, community, commercial and public media outlets made deliberate efforts to provide balanced gender representation such as in the selection of media analysts and news media anchors. Audiences perceived that sections of the media were biased, with Royal Media Services being singled out since its owner had openly allied himself with one political coalition. However, the public broadcaster KBC was praised for objective, even-handed coverage of political alliances and politicians of both genders.

The political news coverage beat was more popular with male journalists with various reasons cited, including the perception that female journalists preferred 'softer' beats such as health and environment rather than politics. Additionally, there was a concern that certain spaces where editors would send journalists included political rallies whose charged, crowded atmosphere was not always safe or comfortable for female journalists. There was also a perception that male perspectives were more likely to be incorporated in the stories compared to those from female sources.

Among both female and male political aspirants, it is the well-known or prominent individuals who were more likely to receive news media

attention. For example, the deputy presidential race had four aspirants, three of whom are women. Only Martha Karua receives consistent, high-profile news coverage. Female political aspirants tended to shy away from media house invitations and there were instances given of the journalists reaching out to particular candidates only to be denied interviews or talk show participation. However, the journalists indicated that even male aspirants shied away from media coverage. The reasons for the refusals for both genders included: not wanting to answer 'technical' questions related to governance and law; fearing questions that touch on their personal or professional pasts; and being ill-prepared for the interviewer. The journalists also indicated that political aspirants - particularly newer candidates - often did not have media contacts or experience.

The groundwork laid to engender better and more comprehensive inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups in the political space was visible in this election. This included the creation of gender desks in certain media houses, various forms of support for women political aspirants, and more even-handed coverage of women and men. However, within newsrooms, there were several dynamics at play, including the limited number of women who cover politics and the number of media outlets owned or affiliated with particular political candidates. The establishment of gender desks in a few of the media houses received mixed reaction with some editor roundtable participants seeing it as an opportunity to be inclusive of gender perspectives in story production. Others viewed it as a way to compartmentalize, rather than mainstream, matters gender.

In all, women and men aspirants faced various challenges in their efforts to win their chosen elective posts. It was also evident however, both female and male aspirants, had control in various aspects of the election.

Election analysis in the news media was more inclusive this season by making an effort to have both men and women serve as political analysts or political debate moderators. In the election seats, women chose to vie for multiple seats separate from the women's representative seat reserved for them. They continued to face multiple challenges including cultural and financial barriers in choosing to run, and politicians who did not have a prominent name were less likely to receive coverage compared to their more famous counterparts.

Women exercised agency in choosing to vie for a wide range of seats, and their efforts paid off as seen with the success of seven female governors, an increase from the three elected in the first election under the new Constitution. This showed the incremental progress that has characterised the participation and inclusion of women in the political sphere. The recognition of women as an important voting block was visible such as in the repeated efforts to have running mates of different genders among aspirants for the presidential and gubernatorial seats. But the number of women who successfully captured legislative seats was still relatively low and did not achieve the two-thirds gender rule.

The work of civil society, women leaders and citizens as a whole showed a recognition that leaders of both genders add value to the governance and policy-making in this country. The perceptions of audiences and the more deliberate efforts from the media to include both genders in news production processes, showed the possibilities of progress even in future polls.

One Kitui FGD participant made this positive observation.

People are getting enlightened and I'm so sure come 2027, we will have very many women running for elective positions.

Recommendations

Media



1. In editorial decision-making, there should be more deliberate efforts to include both women and men as political news sources, content producers, and analysts. Acknowledging that members of the two genders will be found in different spaces and hold differing perspectives on an issue provides a starting point for this strategy.
2. The cultural and societal limitations that women face appear to be directly linked to concerns from men about the authority the men hold in their homes and communities. Women in the past who successfully participated in politics came from financially secure homes and where married, the women's spouses had their own thriving careers. A strong economy where men have work, are able to provide for their families, and have the support and respect of their spouses would allay the men's fears of abandonment and financial emasculation.
3. greater support should be provided to regional and local media houses in allocating resources that enable more gender-balanced reporting. This includes a recognition of the usefulness of having both female and male perspectives in news production and sourcing.
4. both female and male journalists should receive requisite support to engage in political news coverage with the understanding that journalists of the two genders face different challenges when in the field e.g. charged, crowded political rallies may not be safe or comfortable environments for both female and male reporters but the support they may need in those spaces may differ, including which reporter to deploy and where, and the amount of security provided.
5. sensational, personality- or conflict-focused reporting often featured in the news. It is an approach that disadvantages news sources of both genders, by denying lesser-known politicians to the periphery and ignores the substantive plans that politicians may intend if elected. The diminishing or sexualizing of women also occurs in the selection of sources and story angles reflecting continued (un)conscious biases in editorial decision-making.
6. the perceived preferences of the news media, particularly the commercial, has led to a lack of trust from news consumers and increasing reliance on alternative sources of information. It is in the news media to engender trust among their audiences, as it is the media that have the resources - including experienced personnel of both genders - to provide credible, comprehensive information that enables the citizenry, to make informed choices about their leadership.
7. Community media are an underestimated sector and deserve greater support, such as through collaborations with their partners in commercial and public journalism, and diversified sources of funding to support their work.



Political and governance structures

1. The socio-economic environment contributes to the greater inclusion and acceptance of women playing leadership roles. FGD participants in different parts of the country raised concerns about women abandoning their homes or disrespecting their husbands once they attained leadership positions, which were associated with power and wealth. Historically, married women who have attained elective posts have received support from supportive spouses engaged in their own successful professional endeavors. It is therefore in the interest of all for elective leaders and governing authorities to strengthen the citizenry's overall economic and social wellbeing.
2. A review of campaign finance structures and mechanisms is essential to enable equality among both genders in how they fund their electoral bids. This would include policies related to the financial support political parties provide to candidates, and expenditure limits on electoral races



Civil society

1. The work of non-state actors including members of civil society in supporting the political bids of individuals from marginalized groups made an immense contribution in enabling women to vie, fight legal battles where necessary, and receive capacity building such as in media relations and handling campaigns.

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Appendix 1

Number of gubernatorial and senatorial aspirants of both genders and eventual winners in the various races across eight counties sampled

	Governor aspirants		Governor winners		Senator aspirants		Senator winners	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busia	0	4	0	1	2	6	0	1
Homa Bay	1	2	1	0	2	4	0	1
Kilifi	1	5	0	1	0	4	0	1
Kirinyaga	2	6	1	0	2	5	0	1
Kitui	1	3	0	1	1	8	0	1
Nairobi	3	6	0	1	4	9	0	1
Nakuru	1	4	1	0	1	9	1	0
Samburu	0	5	0	1	0	4	0	1

Appendix 2

Number of MP and MCA aspirants of both genders and eventual winners in the various races across eight counties sampled

	MP aspirants		MP winners		MCA aspirants		MCA winners	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busia	4	48	1	6	18	278	2	33
Homa Bay	5	40	3	37	22	244	8	32
Kilifi	6	38	1	16	36	396	2	33
Kirinyaga	4	23	1	3	25	158	1	19
Kitui	3	44	2	6	32	293	1	39
Nairobi	25	120	1	16	139	882	3	82
Nakuru	9	59	4	7	70	495	8	55
Samburu	1	13	1	2	5	37	0	15

