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# Media Coverage of the 2011 Presidential elections in Uganda: A comparative content analysis of New Vision and Daily Monitor newspapers

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN UGANDA: A  
COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE *NEW VISION* AND *DAILY MONITOR*  
NEWSPAPERS

by

Bob Roberts Katende

B.A. in Mass Communication, Makerere University, 2010

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science

In the Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
December 2012

RESEARCH APPROVAL

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN UGANDA: A  
COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE *NEW VISION* AND *DAILY  
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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:

Karan Kavita, PhD, Chair

Graduate School  
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November 7, 2012

## AN ABSTRACT OF RESEARCH PAPER OF

BOB ROBERTS KATENDE, for the Masters of Science degree in PROFESSIONAL MEDIA AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT STUDIES, presented on December 15, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN UGANDA: A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEW VISION AND DAILY MONITOR NEWSPAPERS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Karan Kavita

This study analyzed the content of two newspapers, namely the government owned *New Vision* and the privately owned *Daily Monitor* for their coverage of the 2011 presidential elections. A total sample size of 499 news articles was analyzed for coverage, structural and selection biases. The results indicated that although the presidential race involved eight candidates, the incumbent Yoweri Museveni received more coverage in both newspapers than other candidates. He was followed by his main challenge Kiiza Besigye. Third party candidates received minimal coverage from both newspapers. The *New Vision* was also found to have given more favorable coverage to the Museveni than other contenders. On the other hand *Daily Monitor* was also found to have provided more favorable coverage to opposition candidates than Museveni, reinforcing the literature of how media partisanship influences election coverage. Lastly, although *New Vision* carried more articles about the election than *Daily Monitor*, the latter provided greater depth of coverage of the election in terms of article length.

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this academic milestone to the memories of both my parents but especially my mother, Mary Gorreth, may your soul rest in eternal peace. You were the first to hold my hand teaching me how to write; how I wish you were here to celebrate with me.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Elections around the world today are focus of intense media attention and coverage. The elections in the United States draw attention across the world, with innovative strategies being studied, analyzed and adapted in planning election campaigns in most democracies. Election strategies and issues also get extensive coverage (Graber, 2010).

The greater dependency on media for getting information on the electoral process, the parties and campaigns in the media are closely followed by citizens for deciding on their voting behaviors and over the years new media technologies are being extensively used in reaching the electorate and also for interacting with the electorate (Jackson & Lilleker 2009; Zittel, 2009). Like in many African countries south of the Sahara desert, Uganda is one of the countries that are in transition to a democracy since 1996 after the military dictatorship ended in 1979. The media system is gradually developing and there is greater dependency on the media especially newspapers, which show distinct support for the political parties and give wide coverage during elections.

This study through a content analysis of two newspapers examines the coverage given to the last presidential elections in 2011.

As Moehler and Singh (2011) chronicle, at one of the central streets of Kampala, there is a twenty foot-tall red billboard advertising the *Daily Monitor*, Uganda's largest privately owned newspaper. A giant pair of scissors cuts through hanging ropes, and bold lettering pronounces, "You get the truth because we've no strings attached. The one to trust—*Daily Monitor*." The newspaper's regular slogan, "Truth every day," is written across the bottom. The billboard is a

thinly veiled dig at the independence of the *Daily Monitor*'s larger rival, the predominantly government-owned *New Vision* newspaper (p.276). This rivalry between the privately owned *Daily Monitor* and the government-owned *New Vision* is played out daily across Uganda, and the rivalry for audience trust is amplified during a presidential election cycle.

The coverage of presidential elections in developing democracies presents an awkward moment for the news media, where they ought to strike a balance between fair coverage of all candidates as well as tapping into the advertising boom that an election cycle offers. But the election's end opens another door for media scholars to delve into the questions of who did what and how.

### **Uganda –Country Overview**

Uganda is located in the eastern part of Africa. To the east is Kenya, to the north is newly independent South Sudan, west lies Democratic Republic of Congo, southwest is Rwanda, to the south is Tanzania. Like all members of the East African Community (Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and new entrants Rwanda and Burundi), Uganda did not fight for her independence by use of guns, but by an agitation that involved economic sabotage by boycotting foreign goods.- is this the only reason... Britain's colonization of Uganda that had began in 1894 finally ended on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1962 when she was granted independence.

Prior to independence, present day Uganda had been a territory composed of different tribes organized under different kingdoms. The biggest and most powerful was the Bunyoro Kingdom whose ruler had fought against colonial rule. The second biggest was Buganda Kingdom, which was used as base by the British to extend colonial rule to other parts. Other smaller kingdoms included Ankole in the western part of the country, Busoga in the eastern part and several other smaller chiefdoms in the northern part of the country that included the Alur and

Adhola. This study through a content analysis of two newspapers examines the coverage given to the last presidential elections in 2011.

### **Population, religious composition, and distribution**

According to the last population census in 2002, Uganda had 24.2 million people. The average national population growth rate was 3.2%. Of the 24.2 million people, 51 % are females and 49 % men. 12 % of the population lived in urban centers and 88% in rural areas. The Baganda comprises the largest single tribe at 18 %, followed by the Banyankore at 10 %. Christianity was the dominant faith: Catholics constituted the largest group with 42%, followed by 37 % Anglicans. The Moslems were 12 % and other religions constituted 9 %. The population of Uganda was younger, with 56 % of the population below 18 years. However, the current population estimates from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics puts the population at 34 million people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

The data showed also showed that marriage in Uganda was still a highly respected institution that begins much earlier among females than males. Fertility levels remained high with a total fertility rate of about seven children per woman (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Child mortality rate per 1000 live births was 63. Life expectancy at birth (total years) was 53.1(World Bank, 2012)

### **Education and Literacy**

Uganda enjoys a liberalized education sector divided into levels that include primary, secondary and tertiary education. Universal primary education that began in 1996 to increase literacy levels has enabled all school age going children to have access to free primary education. According to the 2002 census, the literacy level was 70 % among persons aged 10 years and above, the female and male literacy rates were 62 % and 77 % respectively. The literacy levels

were higher among the urban population at 88 % compared to the rural population at 67 %. The Literacy rate among adolescents between 15 – 24 years was 81 % (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

English is the language of instruction in schools and the official language spoken by many people outside the office. A local dialect *Luganda* and Swahili are the most spoken languages in most towns where commerce takes place. However, with the revitalization of the East African Community, Kiswahili remains the potential medium of communication in conducting business across borders. Neighboring countries like Kenya and Tanzania have Kiswahili as the national language.

### **Economic Activity**

As of 2002 the Ugandan labor force consisted of persons aged 14 to 64 years who are either in paid employment, self-employed or unpaid family workers. About 71 % of the working persons were subsistence farmers, with more females (80 %) compared to males (63 %). People with no formal education were more likely to be engaged in subsistence agriculture than their counterparts with some level of education. The unemployment rates differed with locality. It was high in urban centers than rural areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

The 2010 World Bank statistics showed that the Gross Domestic Product per capita was \$509 ([web.worldbank.org](http://web.worldbank.org)).

### **Political system**

Political space for multiparty politics was opened after the 2005 referendum on political parties after pressure from within the ruling party and the international donor community (Makara, Rakner and Svasand, 2009). Currently there are over 38 registered political parties with the Electoral Commission (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The two oldest political

parties are the Democratic Party (DP) and Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC). Others include: National Resistance Movement (NRM), Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), Peoples Development Party (PDP) and Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA) (Electoral Commission, 2012). Several other small parties have no operational party structures that extend down to the villages. Many of them are heard of in times of elections and once they are over, they disappear from the political scene until the next election cycle. The formation, organization, regulation, financing, and registration of political parties is guided by the Political Parties and Organization Act, 2005 (Uganda Online Library, 2012).

### **The Electoral Commission and elections**

The function of organizing elections is bestowed upon the Electoral Commission (EC). It is headed by a Chairperson, assisted by a deputy Chairperson and Secretariat of five members appointed by the President with the approval of Parliament. Its major functions among others include: ensuring regular, free and fair elections conducted every five years, demarcation of constituencies and compilation and maintenance of an up to date the voters' register (Electoral Commission, 2012).

The commission has so far organized four general elections, beginning with two under a single party rule in 1996 and 2001. The other two in 2006 and 2011 were conducted under the multiparty system. NRM leader Yoweri Museveni has won all the elections. However, opposition parties have lambasted all elections organized by the commission as fraudulent, arguing that its composition is not representative of all participating political players, therefore it plays to the whims of the president who selects it (Makara, 2011, p.5).

NRM's electoral support has been dwindling in past elections. In the 1996 presidential elections, it received 76 % of the votes cast compared to the opposition's abysmal 23 %. In 2001,

NRM presidential candidate got 69 % while the opposition main challenger Kizza Besigye got 27 %. In 2006, it further dropped to 59 % while the opposition's challenger Kizza Besigye rose to 37 %, DP's candidate Sebana Kizito got 1.6% and UPC's candidate Miria Obote had 0.8%, and independent candidate Abed Bwanika got 1% (Makara, 2011). The decline in Museveni's support was attributed to a number of factors that included but not limited to internal power struggles within his party over his leadership style forcing some to join opposition ranks, widespread corruption, unemployment and nepotism (Makara, 2009, p.18). Therefore the 2011 presidential elections were regarded as a do or die for Museveni with many thinking that his support would not make 51%, the required percentage by law for one to win the presidency.

### **Media system**

In the decade between 1990 and 2000, Uganda experienced dramatic developments in both the media and political fields. For Uganda to continue getting international aid, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the donor community advised her to open up the electronic media space to the private sector to allow for more freedom of expression (Kirevu, Unpublished Manuscript, p.69).

### **Radio and Television**

Liberalization of the electronic media was granted in 1993 and the first private FM radio station Radio Sanyu was inaugurated in November that year. Since then, the number of registered radio stations scattered across the country is skyrocketed to over 120 stations (Kirevu, p.71). In the new liberalized media landscape the government owned broadcast media competes alongside privately owned media enterprises. The government owns Uganda Broadcasting Corporation TV and radio, and other smaller booster stations in different parts of the country. However, the government also holds majority shares in the publicly traded New Vision Group, which has five

FM radio stations and two free to air television stations. Each of the five radio stations targets a particular audience. For example *Radio Rupiny* targets northern Uganda audience, Etop radio serves the eastern part of the country, Radio West for the western part and Bukedde for the central region. Bukedde TV serves the central region and TV West for the western region (Vision Group, 2012). Other private radio and television stations include KFM and NTV, both owned by the Nation Media Group. With its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, NMG is the largest independent media house in the region with media outlets in East and Central Africa (Nation Media Group, 2012). However, media scholars have chastised the new liberalized environment as one where diversity in programming has been sacrificed for duplication where almost different media outlets air the same content under different names. As a result of stiff competition, the large industry owners have edged many radio stations out of business. In general, radio listenership still accounts for 64% as a source of information, 3% television (Pavia, 2006).

In the newspaper business, Vision Group dominates the market in Uganda with five publications. Its flagship newspapers printed daily are *New Vision*, published in English and serves the affluent class and *Bukedde* published in local language, *Luganda* targeting the central region where *Luganda* is widely spoken. Its other local language sister papers published weekly are: *Orumuri* published in Runyankore and serving the western Uganda market, *Rupiny* for northern Uganda and *Etop* for the north eastern audience. Vision Group also publishes three magazines focusing on societal issues like fashion, entertainment and weddings (Vision Group, 2012). The *Daily Monitor* is the largest selling private newspaper in Uganda. It is part of the National Media Group (Nation Media Group, 2012). Other weekly newspapers include the Observer owned by the Observer Media, The weekly Independent Magazine owned by The

Independent Publications. The Pepper Publications publishes The Redpepper and The Onion, which are tabloids in nature.

Newspaper circulation is less than 100,000 copies per day and a copy is shared among five people. Many ordinary Ugandans still rely on word-of-mouth for their information therefore making radio crucial to selling political messages while the newspapers remain important in the analysis of policy by the Well Informed Persons (WIPs) who include Members of Parliament, CSOs and professionals (Pavia, 2006).

Important to note is that in addition to government's electronic media entities enjoying wider reach compared to privately owned ones, government officials or its supporters make the bulk of the privately owned media. According to the Internet statistics (2010), only 9.6% of the population uses the Internet in Uganda (Internet world stats, 2012).

### **Legal framework for media**

The media industry derives its legitimacy from a number of statutory instruments. The Ugandan constitution under Article 29(1)(a) provides for the right to freedom of expression and speech, which includes freedom of the press and other media (Uganda Constitution 1995). The Electronic Media Act provides for the setting up of a broadcasting council to deal with the licensing and regulation of radio and television stations and the arbitration of matters pertaining to the electronic media (Electronic Media Act, 1996). The Journalist Act ensures freedom of the press and provides for a council to regulate print media (The Press and Journalist Act, 1995). The Information Act provides for access to information held by public and private bodies, which is necessary for the exercise of any right, and compelling public bodies to publish information of significant public interest (Access to Information Act, 2005).

### **Political and historical background**



The print media trace their origin to religious movements like the Church Missionary Society that published the first newsletter, *Mengo Notes* in 1902 and since the National Resistance Movement took over power “there has been an average of a dozen publications available in Kampala (Tabaire, 2007, p. 23) The broadcast media (radio) media on the other hand came into existence with the help of the colonial government in 1953 (Kirevu, 1999, p.20). Over the years the number of local radio stations has swelled to over 103 international channels.

As elsewhere in Africa, when the clamors for independence or self-rule began sweeping across the continent in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Uganda witnessed a birth of political activism. This was expressed in its embryonic press operated by political parties, whose leaders had traversed western countries and experienced freedom of the press. The leaders published and distributed newsletters clandestinely to supporters highlighting the ills of the colonial government, and at the same time promising better wages and representation in the national legislature. This form of activism was collectively referred to as the “agitation press” (Ibid, p.21). These newsletters like many others in countries under colonialism were instrumental in advocating for independence and contributed to nation building (Karan, 2009).

But as time went by, the political struggle for independence in Uganda took on tribal and religious undertones. For example, Uganda’s oldest political party, Democratic Party (DP) founded in 1954 and led by its Catholic leader Benedict Kiwanuka, who was also a *Muganda* by tribe founded *The Democrat* newsletter as its mouthpiece. DP felt comfortable rallying the Baganda and Catholics first to its support base. Another major political party called Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) headed by Apollo Milton Obote an Anglican and a *Langi* by tribe founded *The People* newsletter whose target audience was the *Acholis*, *Langis* and Anglicans.

Another small political party without a national outlook was Kabaka Yekka (KY) headed by the Buganda Kingdom king Edward Muteesa, but this had no newsletter (Kirevu, 1999, p. 23).

The two big political parties: DP and UPC contested in the first national assembly elections in 1962. An alliance between UPC and KY won the majority seats in parliament and thus formed the post independence government. The KY leader Edward Muteesa became the titular head of government or president and the UPC leader Milton Obote as the first executive Prime Minister who assumed power from the British on Independence Day, 9 October 1962 (Kirevu, 1999, p.25).

However, soon after independence, a simmering power struggle between the president and the prime minister engulfed cabinet culminating into a stand off where the president issued an ultimatum for the executive prime minister Apollo Milton Obote to take his government off land owned by the Buganda Kingdom to which Mutesa was king. The prime minister reiterated by ordering the invasion of Muteesa's palace on May 25, 1966, on the assumption that he was plotting his downfall. After a fight that lasted hours, Muteesa escaped and went in exile in the United Kingdom, where he died in 1970. The prime minister abrogated the country's federal constitution and replaced it with another that effectively turned Uganda into a republic with the president enjoying almost absolute powers (Kirevu, p.27-29).

The prime minister's brazen usage of the military to settle political scores heralded the militarization of politics in the country for next two decades as coup d'états became the new form of changing governments. His army commander Colonel Amin Dada later deposed Obote on January 25, 1971. Amin's reign was characterized by an iron hand. Elections of any kind were suspended and the constitution was replaced by decrees. Journalists faced a harsh time as reports critical of the president and his government were supplanted by praise singing accounts

of the president and his cronies. On April 6, 1979, a guerrilla war outfit called Uganda National Liberation Forces (UNLF) with the help of Tanzania Defense Forces toppled Amin's regime forcing him into exile in Saudi Arabia where he died in 2003 (Ibid, p. 31).

In 1980, the new interim government organized general elections and the contested results saw deposed former president Milton Obote become president for a second time. One of the disgruntled presidential candidates, Yoweri Museveni waged a protracted guerrilla war that lasted until 1986 with the capture of capital city, Kampala from Okello Lutwa's forces who had mounted a successful coup d'état against Obote's government in 1985 (Ibid, p. 35).

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni who overthrew Okello Lutwa's forces on January 25, 1986 heads the current regime. The first presidential elections under Museveni were conducted in 1996 (Ibid, p.40).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elections across the world are a state of intense political and media activity. Election campaigns, strategies and issues get extensive coverage, as electoral strategies become the focus of attention for voters to make electoral choices (Graber, 2010; Ha, 2009).

Croteau and Hoynes (2003) point out that from the “privacy of our living rooms to the public forums of presidential debates, the media serve as the informational network connecting the many elements of our society (p.30)”. Lange and Ward (2003) add that in the contemporary world, the idea of elections without the mass media would be unthinkable as broadcast media and newspapers have become the “primary site where an election is actually taken to the electorate (xiii).” Current elections are now regarded as three-way alliance that involves the voter, the contestants and the media, with the media acting as the link between the other two. The media filled the power void created by the waning influence of political parties (King, 1997, p. 29).

Graber (2006) points out that the media extends its role further by not only surveying and bringing the day’s events to the public and private attention, but also interprets the events’ meanings and putting them into context, and at times speculating about their consequences (p. 9). The media also tell people which issues and activities deserve particular attention to be ranked highly on the public’s agenda of political concerns. This importance is indicated through cues as banner headlines, front-page placements in newspapers (p. 170). Frequent coverage also implies significance, of which stories placed in the front section are regarded as more salient and accessible to readers than those in other sections, such as sports or business (Ha, 2009, p. 40).”

In addition to the traditional tools of communicating electoral messages like television, radio and newspapers, is the latest application of new media technologies like online social media to enhance reach and interactivity (Jackson & Lilleker 2009; Zittel, 2009). After the phenomenal usage of new media during President Obama's campaigns in 2008, there has been marked surge in the usage of new media in elections across the world (Karan, Gimeno, 2010, p.7). Karan, et al. (2009) in a study about Philippines elections found You Tube to be an excellent medium for advertising for overseas voters, particularly for parties with few resources to afford advertising through the mainstream media.

In many parts of the Africa continent where Internet penetration is still low, the usage of social media in elections is slowly catching pace. In some elections mobile phones have been used to transmit election results to a common data center as the case was in the 2007 elections in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In Kenya's December 2007 election, a group of local digital activists developed and implemented a citizen reporting platform that allowed Kenyans to report and track post-election violence when the media experienced a government blackout. "The data collected by citizens themselves still remains one the best resources about the crisis" (Heacock 2009, p.6).

While the media have been credited with playing a big part in educating the populace about politics, other scholars have found that while people use media information to make sense of public issues, what they know about these issues is not limited to the information supplied by the media (Croteau, 2003, p. 245).

Although the media provides verifiable information about candidates and issues, it is also true that influence of the media in election period comes from the media's capacity to provide the public with prejudiced information about candidates or specific issues by overly emphasizing

or disclosing one aspect of the realities (Ibid, p. 19). The rationale for this might be the desire for increased revenue since at times commercial revenue takes precedence over the news media's ability to report accurate news (Chomsky N. and Herman E., 1988).

### **Media and Political Bias in Elections**

Although media's role in elections is undisputed, scholarship in this field in many African countries remains little as evidenced by the limited academic literature (Temin, Jonathan, Smith and Daniel, 2002, p.585). Further, while elections in the U.S. and the western world are vigorously examined through the prism of the modern mass communication theories, there is little effort to apply theory to understand electoral news coverage in the African continent (Ibid, p.592.)

The 2006 presidential elections in Uganda saw several irregularities and fraudulent practices. A Human Rights Watch study carried out a month prior to the 2006 general elections found that political environment in Uganda was mired in fear and intimidation with several electoral laws being applied selectively. Further, Gloppen, (2006) found that there were problems and irregularities at various stages of the election cycle that tilted the playing field and compromised the integrity of the 2006 general elections (p.21). An Open Society Institute of East and Southern Africa study that measured Uganda's readiness towards the 2011 general elections found that although Uganda's legislative framework was in compliance with international and African standards, many laws were brought in as late as 2010 "making it difficult to ensure that all those who need to be familiar with them, including staff of the EC, could be educated on their content (Sekaggya, 2010, p.45)." Another study on the presidential elections in Uganda found that the electoral commission had several problems in the organization of the 2011 elections that included missing voter's names on the register (Makara, 2011).

One other way, the 2006 election was skewed was evident in the lack of fairness in the news coverage, especially the coverage and attention that political parties and candidates received in the government-owned media. Pavia (2006) examined the performance of the state owned media in the 2006 presidential elections found that the incumbent president Yoweri Museveni received 88 % of the electronic media time allocated to all presidential aspirants. The study also noted that Museveni had received more space in the print media compared to other contenders. The issue of coverage bias is discussed in detail later in this chapter. This election period was so tense that in bid to control information flow during elections, a foreign correspondent was expelled for what the government regarded as a threat to state (Tabaire, 2007).

Since the 2006 elections, while the broadcast media remains under greater government control and surveillance, the readership and reach of the private owned newspapers has escalated (Moehler and Singh, 2011).

In discussing ethics in multiparty elections in Tanzania, Chaligha (2002) castigated the Tanzanian public media for positively favoring the ruling party while denying the opposition parties access to the media, thus limiting their ability to compete favorably (p.3). Waldahl (2004) in his study about Zimbabwe elections found that the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) enjoyed monopoly of both the electronic and print media. The author also found that information from both pro-government and pro-opposition media was inadequate to fully inform voters about the election issues. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and other opposition parties concentrated much more in criticizing the government than on what solutions they had to improve the situation (p.40). The same thing happened in Singapore where a study about its 2001 general elections found that ruling People's Action Party (PAP) party received

twice as much space and time in newspaper and television respectively compared to the opposition parties (Karan et al, 2005).

### **Theoretical framework**

There are a number of communication theories that have guided political communication research over the years. For example, Ha (2009) found framing suitable for her comparative study of 2008 U.S presidential election in both South Korean and American newspapers. Framing differs significantly from these accessibility-based models, because it claims that the media can influence how audiences accept or interpret realities. It adds that new media suggest to the public how to think about issues. Framing is also based on the assumption of how an issue characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences (Cited in Ha, p.14). “Besides comparing reports on two similar events by the same media organization, frame analysis can also be made by comparing the way a certain event/issue or character is presented by two or more media organizations” (Meseret, 200, p.523). Entman (1993) points out that:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such as way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

(p. 52)

Review of literature suggests there are three broad theoretical constructs of political news bias—selection bias, coverage bias and structural bias. First, the selection bias also called as “gatekeeping bias” (D’Alessio & Allen, 2006) or “selectivity bias” (Hofstetter & Buss, 1978) refers to the tendency among news writers and editors to select stories from one news frame and present them to the public, while deselect or ignore therefore omit the mass audience from being



informed about the stories from a different news frame (Donohew, 1967; White, 1950). There is dearth of studies in the literature that exhibit support for the gatekeeping hypothesis (McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996; McKain, 2005; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail & Augustyn, 2001).

The second construct that can methodologically detect political bias in news is termed as coverage bias. Coverage bias refers to the physical amount or volume of coverage a news story receives from the media (D'Alessio & Allen, 2006). A plethora of studies have highlighted the political bias in the number of paragraphs (e.g. Niven, 2003), number of words or number of articles (e.g. McCarthy & McPhail, 1996; Schiffer, 2006) one side of the story, as opposed to the other side, receives from the national print media. Further, studies analyzing the national news television networks also showcase the differences in the amount of time devoted to different sides of an issue (e.g. Groeling & Kernell, 1998). A few studies have also counted headlines (e.g. Lott & Hasett, 2004) and photographs (e.g. Waldman & Devitt, 1995) in order to test the detection of partisanship in news coverage.

The third construct that can explain political bias in the news media is referred to structural bias (Hofstetter, 1972), also referred to as statement bias (D'Alessio & Allen) or ideological bias (Lowry & Shidler, 1995). Hofstetter (1972) also called it as "value assertion" bias, wherein members of the media can infiltrate their own beliefs and value systems and thereby produce bias in news reporting. A structural bias is methodologically derived in terms of "favorable" versus "unfavorable" (Groeling & Kernell, 1998), "conservative" versus "liberal," (Lowry & Shidler, 1995), "Democrat" versus "Republican," (Schiffer, 2006) or "positive" versus "negative" (Niver, 2003).

Entman (2003) also sees the utility in understanding how and when a news frame is minimized or highlighted in media's reporting to fit and promote elite interpretations. Framing,

according to (Entman 2003), entails “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (p.417). Further, the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by its ability to trigger support for or opposition to different sides of the political discourse. According to Entman (1991), the essence of issue framing from the media is sizing, in other words:

magnifying or shrinking elements of the depicted reality to make them more or less salient. The frame of a news portrait can be enlarged so that media reports may penetrate the consciousness of a mass public that is minimally aware of most specific issues and events. Or the frame can be shrunk to miniaturize an event, diminishing the amount, prominence and duration of the coverage. (p.8)

In critical discourse analysis, according to one of its principal architects, Van Dijk (2008), is to identify “ideological squares” in a discourse. “Ideological squares” refers to ideologically biased discourses that are “typically organized by emphasizing the positive representation of ‘Us’ (the in-group) and the negative representation of ‘Them’ (the out-group)” (p.194).

Similarly, discourses are also organized by mitigating the negative representation of “Us” and the positive representation of “Them.” The news discourses on politicians, public figures, and institutions and their actions are often ideologically polarized, for instance, “Whereas WE are democratic, THEY are not, and whereas Our soldiers, or those who share our cause, are freedom fighters, those of the Others are obviously terrorists” (Van Dijk 1997, p.28). This positive representation of the “self” versus the negative representation of the “other”, the “us versus them” and the “in-group versus out-group often is the undercurrent that drives editors and reporters to exercise selection bias, coverage bias and structural bias.

Having analyzed the different theories, the present study used the framing theory. This is because unlike other political issues, elections are taken seriously by ruling governments because of their continued hold onto power hinges upon election outcomes. Evidence abound in many African elections indicating that ruling parties are willing to pull all stops to win elections.

So, other than providing the electorates with what to think about as the agenda setting theory suggests, government controlled media would prefer directing the thought patterns of the electorates towards the government's campaign messages or policies (Chaligha, 2002; Waldahl, 2004).

### **Hypotheses and Research questions**

To study the coverage given to candidates and electoral issues of the leading political parties that participated in the presidential elections, and to find out the differences in the coverage given to these candidates and parties. The study tests three hypotheses and investigates the following research questions.

**H1.** The *New Vision* is likely to give more favorable coverage to President Museveni than any other presidential candidates.

**H2.** The *Monitor* will more likely give favorable coverage to opposition candidates than President Museveni.

**H3.** There will be differences in the way the two newspapers cover electoral issues of both political parties.

**R.1** What is the difference in amount of coverage each presidential candidate received in *Monitor* and *New Vision*?

**R.2** What was the difference in coverage valence in both newspapers?

**R.3.** What were the general issues covered in the Monitor and New Vision newspapers during the study/ election period?

**R.4** How did the two newspapers differ in their coverage of electoral issues?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was gathered through a content analysis of two newspapers. Content analysis is defined as “a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables” (Kerlinger, 1973, p.525) as quoted in (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2008, p.24). The data for this study were news stories published by two newspapers: *Daily Monitor* and *New Vision* published in Uganda during the period between October 25, 2010 and February 18, 2011. This chosen period lies between the first day of the campaign period as declared by the Electoral Commission, and the final polling or voting day. The two newspapers were chosen because of their different perceived ideologies based on their ownership i.e *New Vision* is government owned and *Daily Monitor* is the oldest privately owned newspaper and has an opposition leaning slant. The unit of analysis was a news story. The researcher selected a sample of articles that fell within the period under study because it is “impossible to examine all relevant content units in the population” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 111).

It should be noted that the general election campaigns for the president and members of parliament took place at the same time. However, this study’s main focus was on the presidential elections coverage. Therefore, all news stories that involved members of parliament and campaigns were excluded, unless a member of parliament made direct mention or campaigned for any of the presidential candidates.

#### **Population and sample size**

The author used LexisNexis Academic to retrieve all news stories published within the study period. The primary search terms were: “Museveni”, “Besigye”, “Abed Bwanika”,

“Bidandi Ssali”, “Beti Kamywa”, “Olara”, “Lubega”, “Mao,” these being names of the presidential contenders. While LexisNexis is not a perfect source of transcripts (cf. Weaver & Bimber, 2008) it was very satisfactory for this study, given that the primary purpose was to look for published news stories only. The search terms yielded 1080 stories for *New Vision* and 863 for *Daily Monitor*. Once the news stories were downloaded, they were then read to select a sub-sample of all news stories relevant to the election. Stories that were repeated and commentary or opinions were also deleted. After the story screening process, the number of stories collapsed to 286 and 213 for *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor* respectively, thus leaving a total sample size of 499 stories.

**Unit of measurement:** The unit of measurement was the words in the story. The words in each article were counted to measure the size of the story. Coding was conducted with the help of a doctoral student; the author concluded the rest of the research. Inter-coder reliability was attained by sampling 10% of the of the sample size.

### **Operational definitions**

The stories were then exclusively put in fifteen different categories that included: Electoral Crimes (It was a story that mentions bribery, intimidation, arrests, beatings of supporters of opposing views), Infrastructure (An article that mentioned building better roads and bridges), Corruption (fighting embezzlement of public funds and reprimanding culprits), Democracy/ governance (referred to a story that mentioned the rule of law or free and fair elections or restoration of term limits), Security (A story mentioned peace, strengthening the army and the maintenance of law and order for all citizens), Economy (A story that mentioned financial services, industrialization, science and innovation, tourism, agriculture, mining, oil, gas, and the sustainable environment), Health (increasing the number of regional referral hospital and

stocking enough medicines), Education (improving the education system that emphasized job creators rather job seekers), Federalism (A story that mentioned the creation of regional/-decentralized governments), Reconciliation (A story that mentioned establishing a truth and reconciliation commission between all Ugandans especially people affected by the conflict in northern Uganda), Reconstruction (rebuilding the war ravaged northern Uganda and quickening resettlement efforts), Welfare (improving the livelihood of civil servants through better remuneration and housing), Jobs ( an article that mentioned putting in place mechanisms to help small businesses and bringing down unemployment rates, Regional Cooperation (A story that highlighted the essence of good neighborliness and a good relationship with other nations of the international community), Others (issues that did not fall in any category).

**Valence:** Valence was defined as the extent to which a story was positive, negative or neutral.

**Data Analysis:** The content analysis data was coded and entered into the SPSS for the analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Size of Coverage**

The number of words for the selected story determined the size of coverage. Overall, the sample for analysis included 286 news articles from government-owned *New Vision* and 213 news articles from the private newspaper, *Daily Monitor*. Nearly 44% of the articles in *Daily Monitor* ranged between 251 and 500 words, another 39% of the articles ranged from 501 words and 1000 words. 11 % of the articles were brief with the length less than 200 words and 7 % were with more than 1000 words. In *New Vision*, approximately 57% of the articles ranged between 251 and 500 words, 20% of the articles ranged from 501 words and 1000 words and another 20% of the articles were brief with the length less than 200 words. In *New vision* less than 5% articles were with more than 1000 words. In other words, while the state-owned paper devoted more space for the presidential election than *Daily Monitor*, the private-paper showcased greater extent of coverage in terms of the number of words used.



**Table 1:**  
*Story Size Differences Between New Vision and Daily Monitor*

Story Size	New Vision (N= 286)	Daily Monitor (N= 213)
Less than 250	(58) 20.3%	(23) 10.8%
251-500	(159) 55.6 %	(94) 44.1%
501-1000	(56) 19.6 %	(82) 38.5%
1001+	(13) 4.5 %	(14) 6.6%

### **Attention Bias**

**R.1:** What is the difference in amount of coverage each presidential candidate received in *Daily Monitor* and *New Vision*?

There were differences in the amount of coverage each of the presidential candidates received from the two newspapers. But both newspapers heavily focused on president Museveni, followed by Besigye more than any other candidates. However, there was more than 30% difference in the coverage between Museveni and Besigye in both newspapers. The government-owned New Vision mentioned president Museveni 77% of the times in its news articles, on the other hand, the newspaper mentioned Besigye in only 44 % of the articles. The tertiary candidates received even lesser coverage (Mao: 19%; Olara: 18 %; Bidandi: 14%; Kanya: 14%; Abed: 14%; Lubega: 11%).

**Table 2:****Coverage percentage difference between *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor***

Candidate Name	(N=286) <i>New Vision</i> (%)	(N=213) <i>Daily Monitor</i> (%)
Yoweri Museveni	(N=221) 77.3%	(N=168) 79%
Kizza Besigye	(N=125) 44 %	(N=90) 42.3%
Norbert Mao	(N=55) 19.2%	(N=21) 10%
Olara Otunnu	(N=50) 17.5%	(N=31) 15.%
Beti Kamyia	(N=41) 14.3%	(N=17) 8%
Abed Bwanika	(N=40) 14%	(N=12) 6%
Bidandi Ssali	(N=39) 13.6%	(N=15) 7%
Samuel Lubega	(N=32) 11.2 %	(N=10) 5%

*Daily Monitor*, the privately owned media, mentioned president Museveni in 79% of its news stories, while Besigye was mentioned 42% of the total stories. Interestingly, *Daily Monitor* paid even lesser attention to third-party candidates than *New Vision* (Mao: 10%; Olara: 15%; Bidandi: 7%; Kamyia: 8%; Abed: 6 % Lubega: 5%).

Based on this study's results *New Vision*'s coverage bias of candidates would have been an accurate predictor of the eventual election winner of the election since its order of significance tallied exactly with the actual election results.

**Valence of Coverage**

**R.2** What was the difference in valence in the coverage of news stories in both newspapers?

Overall, *New Vision*, the state-owned newspaper, had significantly more positive stories (*New Vision*: 50 %; *Daily Monitor*: 34 %; and significantly less negative stories (*New Vision*: 11%; *Daily Monitor*: 24%) than *Daily Monitor*. About 39% of the stories in *New Vision* and 32% of the stories in *Daily Monitor* were coded as neutral or unclear.

The results seem to suggest that whereas elections create a tense environment between rival supporters, which in turn threatens law and order of the whole country, *New Vision*' positive 'spin' was probably meant to calm tempers and create a less emotionally charged election environment.

### **Issues in the elections**

**R.3.** What were the general issues covered in the *Daily Monitor* and *New Vision* newspapers during the study/ election period?

**R.4** How did the two newspapers differ in their coverage of electoral issues?

**Table 3:****Percentage difference in issues coverage between *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor***

Issue	New Vision =(N=281)	Daily Monitor (N=213)
Electoral Crimes	(N=68) 23.8%	(N=59) 27.7%
Infrastructure	(N=66) 23.1%	(N=30) 14.1%
Corruption	(N=32) 11.2%	(N=28) 13.1%
Democracy/governance	(N=13) 4.5%	(N=7) 3.3%
Security	(N=38)13.3%	(N=9) 4.2%
Economy	(N=83) 29%	(N=41) 19.2%
Health	(N=42)14.7%	(N=24) 11.3%
Education	(42)14.7%	(N=28) 13.1%
Federalism	(N=9)3.1%	(N=14) 6.6%
Reconciliation	(N=6) 2.1%	(N=4) 1.9%
Reconstruction	(N=21) 7.3%	(N=7) 3.3%
Welfare	(N=21) 7.3%	(N=7) 3.3%
Jobs	(N=33)11.5%	(N=15) 7%
Regional Cooperation	(N=6) 2.1%	(N=4) 1.9%
Others	(N=0) 0%	(N=0) 0%

In many issues covered by both newspapers there was a notable small percentage difference of below five points, suggesting that while the “spin” on how they cover the issues may differ, both newspapers ranked issues in more or less the same order of significance. However, *New Vision* gave a coverage bias of ten-percentage points to the economy more than *Daily Monitor*. It also gave a nine-percentage point coverage bias towards Infrastructure and security than *Daily Monitor*. The analysis shows that the economy (29 %), electoral crimes (24%) and infrastructure (23 %) were top three issues covered by *New Vision*. The other issues that received coverage in the newspaper include: corruption (11 %), governance (5 %), security (13%), health (15%), education (15%). federalism (3%, reconciliation (2%), reconstruction (7%), welfare (7 %), jobs (12%), and regional cooperation (2%).

In the privately owned *Daily Monitor*, a slightly higher coverage given to electoral crimes (28%), federalism (7%) and corruption (13%) more than *New Vision* (see table above). Other issues that were covered were: economy (19 %), infrastructure (14 %), and education (13 %), governance (3 %), security (4 %), health (11 %), federalism (7 %), reconciliation (2 %), reconstruction (3 %), welfare (3 %), jobs (7 %), and regional cooperation (2 %).

## Ideological or Structural Bias

**Table 4 for H1.**

<b>One-Sample Test</b>						
	Test Value = 0					
		f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Museveni	.949	20	.004	.1765	.059	.294
Other_Candidates	.813	80	.000	.3367	.239	.434

**H1.** The *New Vision* is likely to give more favorable coverage to President Museveni than any other presidential candidates.

The one-sample t-test analysis found support for H1. (T value: 2.949; SD: .8896; df: 200; significance < .005). In the government-owned newspaper, President Museveni received significantly more positive coverage (39 %) than negative coverage (25 %). The valence coding for Museveni in another 36 % of the news stories in *New Vision* were neutral or unclear. Only one in five articles that mentioned Besigye, the primary opponent to the president had a positive spin. Other presidential candidates received significantly lower coverage and more negative than positive coverage

**H2.** The *Daily Monitor* will more likely give favorable coverage to opposition candidates than President Museveni.

**Table 5 for H2.**

<b>One-Sample Test</b>						
Test Value = 0						
		f	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Museveni	3.081	66	.002	-.2036	-.334	-.073
OtherCandid aesMea	1.995	28	.000	.60751	.5073	.7077

The one sample t-test analysis found support for H2 (T value: 3.081; SD: .8540; df: 166; significance < .005). In the private-owned newspaper, president, Museveni received significantly more negative coverage (88 %) than positive coverage (22%). On the other hand, the main political opponent, Besigye received more positive coverage (28 %) than negative coverage (4%). The remaining coverage was coded as either neutral or not clear. Other presidential candidates received fractional coverage and slightly more positive coverage than negative coverage.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

In a country with a political history of violence and dictatorship, restoring democracy through fair elections has been an arduous task for the election commission. The 2011 elections, on which this study is based saw extensive media coverage among the partisan media that supports the incumbent government and others that support the opposition. The study employed the content analysis method to comparatively look at how two newspapers namely: the government owned *New Vision* and the privately owned *Daily Monitor* covered the 2011 presidential elections.

The results revealed that *New Vision* devoted more space in terms articles published during the period under study than the *Daily Monitor*. The discrepancy in coverage can be attributed and not limited to a) more resources at the disposal of the government owned newspaper that might have enabled it to hire and pay several correspondents in different parts of the country where candidates campaigned to cover the elections. As mentioned earlier, Vision Group has sister papers printed in local languages targeting different audiences across the country, whose correspondents also write for the main flagship paper, *New Vision*. *Daily Monitor* does not enjoy such luxury and is dependent on local sources for coverage.

Secondly, it could have been ideologically prudent for *New Vision* to publish more favorable articles of the president Museveni to counter the ‘opposition propaganda’ published by *Daily Monitor*. The results also indicated that both newspapers gave incumbent Museveni more coverage than any other presidential candidate. This seems to suggest that both newspapers perceived the election as a referendum on the president since his winning margins were falling



drastically with each subsequent election since 1996 (75%), 2001(65%), and 2006 (59). Therefore with such falling percentages, many political observers thought that the 2011 Museveni would be tougher for Museveni to win without a second run off, thereby inadvertently making him a major focus of the news media.

Also, both newspapers offered scarce coverage to the third-party candidates. This was probably because newspapers largely frame presidential election as a two-way contest between an incumbent and another candidate with higher chances of winning. Secondly, as Chomsky & Edward (1988) point out, commercial news media are profit and power driven and do not necessarily devote themselves to the service of public interest. This means that they are more likely to concentrate on candidates with a potential to generate revenue in terms of copy sales, and these are people common in the public domain. This served in the interest of the main challenger Besigye who had faced off Museveni in the previous three elections. Also by extension, narrowing an election in terms of two candidates saves media houses coverage resources mostly likely to be incurred if there are more than two formidable candidates running in a presidential campaign.

Results suggested that the government newspaper focused more on the positive news stories than the private-owned newspaper. This implied an effort from *New Vision* to offer a positive-spin and frame the health of the nation in good light and portray a positive picture of the country under the Museveni regime.

Further, the results showed that the top three issues that captivated the attention of both newspapers in the presidential cycle were identical-- suggesting that the economy, corruption, and infrastructure were framed in the coverage as central issues of concern for the ordinary

Ugandan electorate. The prominence given to such “bread and butter issues” was similar to the findings of other studies (Waldhahl, 2004).

Since ideological bias can be looked at in terms of favorability of one side over the other (Groeling & Kernell, 1998), both newspapers demonstrated ideological bias—*New Vision* framed the ruling party candidate more favorably and *Daily Monitor* framed the president less favorably and the opposition candidates more favorably than president Museveni. This finding conformed to earlier studies done in Zimbabwe (Waldhahl, 2004), Tanzania (Chaligha, 2002) and in Uganda (Pavia, 2006).

Limitations: One of the limitations to the study was that images were not analyzed. Whereas images have the potential to convey electoral messages, LexisNexis is the available choice to retrieve printed articles and does not retrieve images. This provides an opportunity for further research into this area on the selection of images for political communication tools during elections. Secondly, although two newspapers were selected for this study based on the reasons cited, these study findings’ cannot be generalized to all media. Perhaps in future more newspapers could be added to offer a more clear understanding for how different newspapers cover the same presidential campaign period.

The primary conclusion of this study is that both structural and coverage bias were at the heart of both *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*’s coverage of the presidential election. *New Vision*’s coverage bias centered on incumbent president Museveni’s manifesto, while *Daily Monitor*’s coverage bias centered on the opposition’s main concern of the unevenness of the political playing field due to electoral crimes. Therefore, to call the privately owned newspaper “independent” might be somewhat a misnomer since the “independence” of a newspaper is usually reference to freedom from government control, but not from private interests as results of

this study demonstrated that *Daily Monitor* exhibited a notable selection bias toward the opposition's policies.

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