

**IMPACT OF NBS TELEVISION PROGRAMMES ON VOTER PARTICIPATION IN  
THE FEBRUARY 2016 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN KAMPALA CITY**

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE AWARD OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN  
MASS COMMUNICATION OF  
KAMPALA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

## DECLARATION

I **AKANYI BARBRA. F.** declare that this work contained and presented in this dissertation is original in context done and compiled on my own research and has never been produced and presented to any institute or University for any academic qualification.

Date.....25<sup>th</sup> / Sep / 2016.....

Signature..........

Akanyi Barbra. F.

## APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation on “impact of NBS television programmes on voter participation in the February 2016 general elections in Kampala City” has been done under my supervision

Name of supervisor. .... Octavo A. A. A.

Signature..... [Signature]

Date ..... September 26, 2016

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this piece of work to my loving mother Sgt. Oloya Teddy a traffic police officer who has managed to extend support in all aspects as far as the success of my academics is concerned and I pray to the Almighty God to bless and “long live her.” I also dedicate this work to my family members and friends who have been there for me in guidance. May God reward you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am thank full to almighty God for keeping me alive and guiding me throughout my studies.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all the people who generously assisted me in one way or another in the time of preparing this dissertation and the readers, Am grateful to my supervisor Mr. Ochwo Geoffrey for being supportive till the last moment despite his busy schedules.

I am equally indebted to my mother Sgt. Oloya Teddy brothers and sisters, as well as my friends especially Bwogi Geoffrey who have supported me financially and morally thought my studies.

I am grateful to Mr. Ogwang Cyprian (SEO) and his beloved wife Hon. Alum Santa Sandra Ogwang for their tremendoys support through my education.

Lastly I pay attribute to my late parents “Though not present I believe they are present”. I pray that the Almighty God rests their souls in eternal bliss

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examined the issues concerning elections and the media during the February 2016 general election with the topic as the impact of NBS television programs on voter participation in the February 2016 general elections. As a result of low voter turnout in the 2016 general elections the topic based on three major research questions for the study namely, What types of television election programmes were used? How did voters participate in the elections? and What are the effects of TV programmes on voter participation in electoral process/elections. The study used analytical and presentation method which enhanced in the interpretation and presentation of findings of collected data with a sample size of 50 respondents from the Kampala city were surveyed using purposive sampling method of collecting data. The findings showed that, during the general elections of 2016 there was a massive increase in the private televisions in Uganda that involved the hiring of news reporters for the coverage of electoral programmes to provide voter information however voter turnout was still low, almost the same as 2011 general elections.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the general background leading to formulation of the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, definition of operational terms and conceptual framework.

#### **1.1 Background to the study**

The usage of television programmes in political activities can be traced back in early 1960s at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the bid of promoting democracy in United States of America, television has been used as a tool to further political ambitions. According to World Bank (1997), United States and Canada attest far more television-centric than average (along with Southern Mediterranean Europe and much of Latin America), while other nations like Norway and Sweden (along with much of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe) remain more newspaper-centric. To Roderick Hart (1994), television is a charm used in modern politics to sway masses into an illusion of political participation and information, while encouraging couch potato passivity, thereby seducing America. To date, serious political debates, serious policy problems, serious election coverage have found their way onto television hence setting provoking political engagements of different stakeholders (Neil Gabler, 1998). Gabler (1998) echoes these claims, arguing that political coverage has come to be the predominant value on television news, in this respect political process in the disguise of election programmes has been repackaged into show business.

In the case of Africa, the function of the media in all its diversity has been coupled with a political-ideological dimension in order to create a consensus in favor of a national ideology (Head, Sydney, 1976). This explains, and in many ways justifies, the subsequent function of television and above all, its role as an instrument of political power. Recent findings by Djankov et al., (2003) noted that, two-thirds of African television stations have state monopolies in television broadcasting and reach 85% of the audience. Television news forms are an important segment of the daily TV fare. Thus, TV programmes has become purveyors/spreader of political

gymnastics as it is clear today political campaigns and television election programmes has proved to be a decisive channel for communication in contemporary Africa, assuming a role of propaganda and articulating peoples' views to the government. In spite of their poor and limited election programmes, voter participation have become surprisingly influenced.

Television election programme refers to a broadcast on television and radio which persuades voters to vote or not to vote for a political party or the election of any person at an election, advocates support for or opposes a candidate or a political party, notifies meeting held or to held in connection with an election..

To date television media has become the source of shared images and messages relating to political communication dominated by voting preference and agenda setting (McCombs, 2004). In the electoral context, television news coverage has made political participation and communication exciting due to its visual interaction as events unfold during campaigns. With the increased ownership of television sets in African states like Uganda, politicians and voters have found it more effective to exposure and promote political milestone through televised channels thus, giving reporters a dynamic role in political journalism.

According to Merriam Webster a Voter is a person who has a legal right to vote. This includes being a citizen for a state, in Uganda it includes also a person above the age of 18 and must be registered with the electoral commission.

Althaus and Trautman (2008) echoes that voter participation is also referred to as voter turn up which is the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in the election (who is eligible varies by country, and should not be confused with the total adult population. For example, some countries discriminate based on sex, race, and /or religion. According to Stromberg. D. (2015) age and citizenship are usually among the criteria, different countries have very different voter turnouts. For example in the United States 2012, presidential election turnout was 55%. In Belgium, which has compulsory voting, and Malta, which does not, participation reaches 95%. These differences are caused by a mix of cultural and institutional factors. In African states including Uganda the voter turnout is commonly low because of disenfranchisement caused by avoidable and logistical failures. In today's political atmosphere, voter participation includes

engaging political figures with the electorate in such a way that, ideas and responses from different stakeholders are brought to the front before decision-making day (Norris, 2002).

Election Commission (2016), pointed out that the recent general elections in Uganda saw the growing usage of television medium as a means to influence electorates as well as increase in reporter participation to capture news making stories as they happened. NBS television commonly known for being bold, accurate and authoritative service produced a live coverage of nearly every political event that was in relation to the February 2016 elections. In that, television news coverage has in one way or another increased the voters' participation something that need to be assessed to establish the level of significance. From day one of 2016 general elections in Uganda, voters have been in the face of television capturing and reporting about what was happening from different political camps. This prompted the researcher to investigate the kind of effect NBS television programmes has had on voter participation in the February 2016 general elections in Kampala city.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

With the mushrooming private televisions in Uganda, political campaigns and news reporting in election processes has been tremendously changed. Hiring of road news reporters and deploying of television news anchors has seen new breed of reporters engaged in news gathering and reporting than it were before. Increase in political advertisements and political imaging of political actors has attracted their voters to thus, bridging the gaps between the political actors and voters. However the voter turnout is stil low for example in Kampala the percentage was 41.9% in July 2011 is low, according to the Electoral Commission, election report 2011 and 2016 voter turnout is almost the same about 30%. This explains the voter turnout of voters in the February 2016 general elections (General electoral report 2010 – 2011). It is in this context that this study seeks to determine the extent to which NBS television election programmes has improved voters' participation in the February 2016 general elections in Uganda specifically in Kampala city.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The main aim of this study is to examine the extent to which television election programmes has influenced voters' participation in February 2016 general elections in Uganda specifically in Kampala City.

### **1.4 Specific objectives**

The following specific objectives were used as a guide in this study;

- i. To find out the types of television election programmes.
- ii. To find out how voters participate in the elections.
- iii. To find out the effect of TV programmes on voter participation in electoral process/elections.

### **1.5 Research questions**

- i. What types of television election programmes were used?
- ii. How did voters participate in the elections?
- iii. What are the effects of TV programmes on voter participation in electoral process/elections

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

#### **1.6.1 Content scope**

The study was confined to establish the relationship between television medium and voter participation.

### **1.6.2 Geographical scope**

The study was conducted in the areas of Kampala including urban based television namely National Broadcasting Service (NBS). NBS Television is a Ugandan national television that started in mid-2007 drawing on candid reflections of successful television networks from across the world. NBS is 100% owned by Ugandans. Surveys on local content by Uganda communication commission (survey by UCC 2014), put NBS television as number one local content provider.

### **1.6.3 Time scope**

The study covered a period between 2011-2016; specifically, this time scope caters for the duration for the election process in Uganda.

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

The following individuals may benefit from this study;

It is expected that policy makers in media communication and electoral commission may use the data collected to professionalise as well as improve on their practices. It is in the interest of this study to unearth the appropriateness of reporters and electoral commission activities to increase on their preparation and electoral processing thus, the findings may be used to inform as well as be a guide in policy formation.

The management of television stations may use the generated information to develop their reporters and news anchors when it comes to quality and reporting in terms of objectivity.

It is also expected that the generated data will be useful to reporters as it will inform them of the gaps and offer possible recommendations to improve on their performance when it comes to reporting news.

The electorate will also benefit from the data generated as it will educate as well as inform them of their role and right when it comes to electoral processing.

Lastly, findings generated will be useful to future researchers; it is expected that, academicians and students may use these findings as a point of references for similar studies.



### 1.8 Definition of key terms

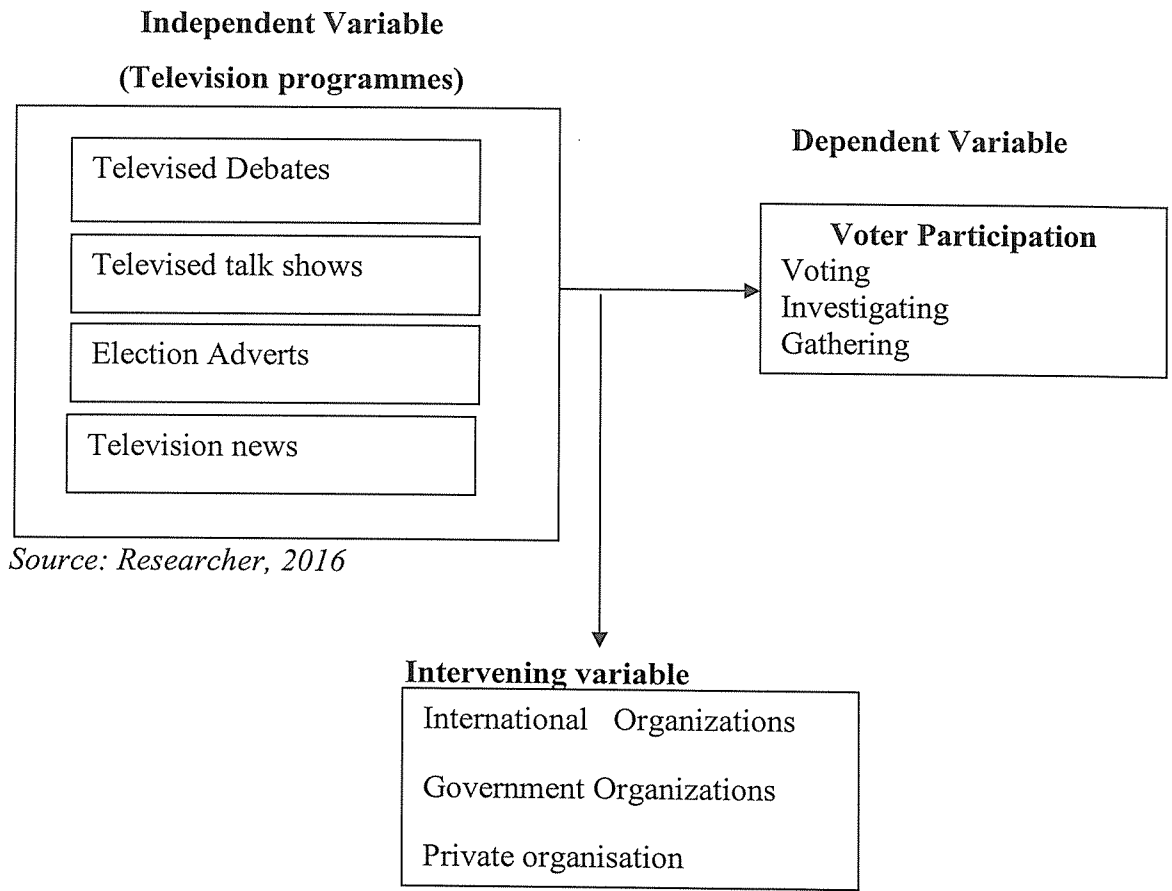
**News coverage:** In this study, news coverage will refer to the extent to which news making stories are exposed or reported in media.

**Television News coverage:** in this study, it refers to the use of television to report or expose news as it happens at the scene.

**Voter:** Is a person who has a legal right to vote

**Voter Participation:** Is also referred to as voter turn up which is the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in the elections

### 1.9 Conceptual Frameworks



The figure above reveals the relationship between the study variables; it entails the contexts in the programme coverage in which voters' participation is noticeable.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses and reviews similar or related researches and literature published by other authors' articles, books, journals, reports and previous dissertations related to the topic in question and its variables in order to give an insight into the study as well as expressing the need for this study.

#### **2.1 Media and elections**

Newton (1999) stated that the advantages of an exit poll are that they provide the public with an immediate gauge of the likely election outcome. This is all the more true given the advantages of immediate broadcast via new media, such as Twitter. Exit polls can act as a valuable safeguard against counting fraud. The potential pitfalls however, are obvious: voters may provide misleading information or refuse to take part; a sample size may not be adequately representative, and so forth. Well-constructed exit polls, however, are usually an extremely accurate means of predicting the result; hence their popularity with the media.

Althaus and Tramtmann (2008) confirmed that information gathered in exit polls can often be complex. Detailed demographic information – sex, age, ethnicity, and income, for example – will allow more reliable predictions. Sometimes, exit pollsters also gather additional information about why voters made the choice they did. In reporting exit polls, the same considerations apply as with opinion polls. Only exit polls run by reputable organizations should be reported. Gentzkow (2006) included that reporting should include information about the location of the polling and sample size, along with the margin of error. However, since exit polls are not, strictly speaking, predictive, there are various other questions to consider: Will reporting of exit polls influence those who have yet to vote? This is a particular concern in large countries where voting takes place across different time zones. What conclusions should be drawn if the actual voting result does not correspond to the exit poll findings?

Della and Kaplan (2007) clarifies that the inconsistencies between exit polls and results are only indicative. They do not prove that there was rigging or malpractice. As in Venezuela, further

investigation would be needed to establish the cause of inconsistency between results. There would be cause for concern, however, if news media did not try to explore and explain these inconsistencies, as in the US in 2004. And, of course, actually altering exit poll findings is seriously unethical.

What has also become a matter of controversy is the reporting of exit poll results before actual voting has finished. This is particularly an issue in large countries spread across several time zones. The country where this has been a particular issue is the United States – spread across several time zones and with widespread Internet access. The main argument against reporting exit poll findings before the end of voting is that these might influence people who have not yet voted. Journalists maintain that just because they have acquired a piece of information (like an exit poll result) does not mean that they have to publish it immediately. Sometimes journalists may consider it an ethical obligation not to do so. This is a debate that has no definitive resolution.

Enikolopov and Zhuravskaya (2011) unfolds that unofficial quick counts are a parallel counting mechanism that is important to distinguish from exit polls. A quick count is a partial count of actual results (whereas exit polls are simply a variation of an opinion poll), used to predict the actual full result. A quick count may often be used as a means of forestalling any manipulation of the results. For the media, of course, the interest is similar to that of an exit poll in that a quick count enables them to run an early results story. Much the same as with exit polls, it is crucial that media report quick counts with precision and contextual information (what count actually measures, where, and how the information was gathered).

Several interviewees point out that recent laws, such as the 2010 Regulation of Interception of Communication Act<sup>19</sup> and the Anti-Terrorism Act,<sup>20</sup> have threatened Constitutional rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest (The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995). But the latest uproar relates to two pieces of proposed legislation: the Public Order Management Bill (POMB), now before Parliament, and the Press and Journalists (Amendment) Bill (PJAB). The latter surfaced in 2010 before vehement and concerted outcry from such organizations as the Article 29 Coalition and Freedom house forced it, temporarily, off the table. It is still reported to be under consideration by the Government and would a newspaper to obtain an annual license from the Media Council

on condition that the newspaper does not publish material that endangers national security, unity, stability or foreign relations.

According to the UCC (2010) confirmed that there are also increasing cases of journalists on duty being physically assaulted by security personnel and officials of the ruling party, and having their equipment confiscated. In a report in late 2010, the human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (hRNJ-U) said it had recorded at least 50 cases of violence against journalists that year, with most violations committed by police officers (16) and members of the public (13). Violence was particularly pronounced in 2011 during the election season, the Walk-to-Work protests against soaring commodity prices and other disturbances. In one incident reported by hRNJ-U in early 2011, six reporters were assaulted by alleged supporters of the ruling party's mayoral candidate in Kampala.

## **2.2 Types of television programmes aired about elections**

### **2.2.1 Local television news and national political campaigns**

Jenssen (2008) discovered that the arrival of local television news onto the national political scene did not occur suddenly in 1992. As far back as Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign, presidential candidates sought local news coverage through campaign trips, often simply flying into a regional airport and offering television interviews from the tarmac.' Not until 1992, however, did the local media become a major vehicle for transmitting political messages.

Prior, M (2006) highlights that, at this time, changes in technology and audience demographics, along with a growing awareness of major differences between local and national coverage, encouraged campaigns to use local television news actively in order to bypass the national media. Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya (2011) the new capability of most local television stations to conduct remote interviews through two-way satellite hookups,' and the widespread acquisition of mobile satellite trucks allowing stations to offer live coverage of campaign events in distant parts of their markets,' removed many geographical constraints on local television news coverage. For the first time, local news stations were able to offer timely coverage of national events.

Kubey, R and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) echoes that at the same time, audiences for local television news have steadily grown, providing candidates with access to a voter base that often matches or exceeds the size of the local audience watching network television news. This confluence of forces-along with a heightened sense of the unique hospitality of the medium to certain types of political messages-led the Bush and Clinton campaigns to seek out local television news coverage in 1992.

Snyder and Stromberg (2010) discovered that those local television newscasts which were actively courted, displaying a new independence from the networks and facing their own internal pressures, responded to the overtures by providing extensive coverage of the presidential campaign. By some estimates, local television news came to inform almost as many Americans about the presidential campaign as did network news.

Olken (2009) argued that the growing eagerness of campaigns to bypass the national media in favor of local television, and the equally significant trend toward increasing numbers of Americans turning to local television for their news about national campaigns, has taken place against a backdrop of mounting criticism of the national news media's coverage of presidential campaigns. Before considering the way local television news covered the presidential campaign of 1992, we should review the research that has been undertaken on national news coverage of political campaigns (Phyllis Kaniss 1993).

### **2.2.2Televised election debate**

Debates have been broadcasted live on television, radio, and in recent years, the web. The first general election presidential debate was held on 26 September 1960 between U.S. senator John F. Kennedy, the democratic nominee and vice president Richard Nixon the republican nominee in Chicago at the studios of CBS's WBBM-TV. The first debate for the 1960 election drew over 66 million viewers out of a population of 179 million, making it one of the most-watched broadcasts in U.S. television history.

In Africa, presidential incumbents are commonly known for boycotting the presidential debates for example the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan of the APC decided to boycott because of the unhidden bias and campaign of calumny by some key organizers of the programme, against the corporate political interest of the party and its candidates. In East of Africa the national

resistance movement leader in Uganda, president Museveni snubbed the first pre-election debate in February 2016, saying such events were for schoolchildren.

### **2.2.3 Election adverts**

Election advertising is advertising used during the period beginning 60 days before a campaign period and ending at the end of the campaign period to promote or oppose, directly or indirectly, a registered political party or the election of a candidate, including an advertising message that takes a position on an issue with which a registered political party or candidate is associated.

According to Enikolopov, Petrova, and Zhurauskaya (2011) found that in politics, campaign advertising is the use of an advertising campaign through the media to influence political debate, and ultimately, voters. These advertisements are designed by political consultants and political campaign staff. Many countries restrict the use of broadcast media to broadcast political messaging. In the EU, many countries do not permit paid-for TV or radio advertising for fear that wealthy groups will gain control of airtime making fair play impossible and distort the political debate in the process.

Dahl and Bastiansen (1999) found that in both the United Kingdom and Ireland, paid advertisements are forbidden, though political parties are allowed a small number of party political broadcasts in the run up to election time. The United States has a very free market for broadcast political messaging. Canada allows paid-for political broadcasts but requires equitable access to the airwaves. Campaigns can include several different media (depending on local law).

Prior M (2005) clarifies that, the time span over which political campaign advertising is possible varies greatly from country to country, with campaigns in the United States lasting a year or more to places like the UK and Ireland where advertising is restricted by law to just a short period of weeks before the election. Election adverts are as influential in the voter's participation as used in South Africa when the voice of Nelson Mandela is heard in the ad, posted on YouTube. A young woman is in a polling booth considering voting for the governing ANC.

As Nelson Mandela's voice is heard calling for justice, peace, work and bread, she then decides to vote for the Democratic Alliance (DA) instead. This caused a lot of controversial statements right from the Mandela family and the strongest opposition party.

According to the Electoral Commission (2016) states that, in Uganda, the electoral commission have full authority to ban unlawful election adverts especially those misleading the voters for example the commission ordered the Citizen's Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU) to stop airing its "topowa" campaign message on NBS TV. It said CCEDU is airing partisan voter education information to the public through media. The 'Topowa' campaign is the third voter education message that CCEDU has designed in this year. It started with two campaigns dubbed 'Violability' which mean to mobilize Ugandans to participate in the update of the voter's register. Topowa is running in both electronic and print media.

#### **2.2.4 Talkshows**

A talk show is a television programming or radio programming genre in which one person (or group of people) discusses various topics put forth by a talk show host.

Usually political talk shows include a group of politicians who are learned or who have great experience in relation to whatever issue being is discussed on the show for that episode and the politicians are optimistic to change many of voter's minds in their favor. Gay Byrne, Steve Allen, Jack Paar, Oprah Winfrey and Graham Norton have hosted notable talk shows; in many cases, the shows have made their hosts famous.

NBS TV also host talk shows for example the morning breeze hosted by Simon Kaggwa Njjala and Mildred Tuhaise and the frontlines hosted by Odongtho

### **2.3 How voters participate in the elections**

Voter's participation is fundamental to a healthy democracy. As low turnout is attributed to political disengagement and the belief that voting for one candidate/party will do little to alter public policy, established democracies tend to have higher turnout than other countries.

#### **2.3.1 How voter's turnout is measured**

Voter turnout can be measured in different ways, with different denominators. It can be expressed as a percentage of the number of eligible voters ("voting eligible population turnout"), registered voters ("registered voter turnout") or the population that is old enough to vote ("voting age population turnout") (The Electoral Commission Report 2010-2011).

### **2.3.2 What affects voter participation rates**

Turnout varies greatly by constituency. Many different factors influence voter turnout level (The Electoral Commission Report 2010-2011).

**2.3.2.1 Electoral competitiveness:** one of the most important factors is the competitiveness of the presidential election in each constituency.

**2.3.2.2 Election type:** (Dallas 1999), low turnout is mostly pronounced in primary elections and local elections for example in united states, a 2013 study of 340 mayor elections in 144 states from 1996-2012 found that voter turnout in those cities averaged at 25.8%, in many cities mayors have been elected with single-digit turnout .

**2.3.2.3 Voting laws:** Voter's registration laws, voter identification laws, early voting, and polling place accessibility can also affect voter turnout, though not always in the ways that we might expect. For example, in United States the introduction of early voting, which was intended to make voting easier and increase turnout, appears to have actually decreased turnout (Lassen 2005).

**2.3.2.4 Demographic:** Taken together, voters tend to be older, wealthier and more educated than non-voters are.

*Age:* young people are much less likely to vote than older ones.

*Ethnicity:* Voter turnouts also vary by race. In 2012, turnout rates among eligible white and black voters were 64.1% and 66.2%, respectively, while it was only 48.0% and 47.3% among Latino and Asian American voters respectively. The 2012 election was the first presidential election since Reconstruction ended in which black turnout exceeded white turnout.

*Gender:* Women's voter turnout has surpassed men's in every presidential election since 1980. In the 2012 election, 7.8 more women than men voted. Interestingly though, older women are actually less like to vote than older men. In 2008, 72.2% of men 75 years and older voted, compared to only 64.9% of women that age.

*Socio-economic status:* Wealthy Americans vote at much higher rates than those of lower socio-economic status. During the 2008 presidential election, only 41% of eligible voters making less



than \$15,000 a year voted compared to 78% of those making \$150,000 a year or more. Studies have shown that this difference in turnout affects public policy: politicians are more likely to respond to the desires of their wealthy constituents than of their poorer constituents, in part because more of their wealthy constituents vote

### **2.3.3 How can we increase voter turnout**

Researcher advocates a number of systemic electoral reforms that reverse the contextual reasons for low turnout.

**2.3.3.1 Fair Representation Voting** for legislative elections would allow for outcomes that better represent the diverse beliefs of the electorate, and could therefore combat the low (The Electoral Commission Report 2010-2011). Voter turnout that we see in many winner-take-all plurality districts, where choices are limited.

**2.3.3.2 A National Popular Vote (NPV)** for president, which would make every vote in every constituency equally valuable in every election, would expand presidential campaigns from just ten states to all 50. As voter turnout is markedly lower in constituency that receive no presidential campaign attention, the reallocation of campaign resources to include non-battleground constituencies would likely increase turnout in those constituency. (The Electoral Commission Report 2010-2011).

**2.3.3.3 Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)** for other single seat offices like mayor and councilors would better represent the views of third party and independent voters, as more candidates would be inclined to run. Therefore, voters who might not feel that their views are represented in a two-party race would turn out to the polls to support their preferred candidate (The Constitution 1995 (As amended)).

### **2.4.0 The effect of television programmes on voter participation**

In an influential study, Matthew Gentzkow (2006) found that the introduction of TV in the US caused a major drop in voter turnout. In contrast, the current analysis shows that public broadcasting TV can increase political participation.

### **2.4.1 Media coverage of Presidential elections**

News coverage of political campaigns has come under increasing criticism in the last decade, with three major weaknesses frequently cited: an overemphasis on the "horse race," the over-reliance on and misuse of public opinion polls, and the growing respectability of investigating the private lives of candidates. These criticisms are described below.

Della and Kaplan (2007) found that media coverage of presidential elections have presented a common criticism: the media focus too much on the "horse race"-who is likely to win and lose-and too little on substantive issues and the qualifications of candidates to govern. For example, Thomas Patterson found that the heaviest emphasis in campaign reporting is on "the simple mechanics of campaigning-the candidates' travels here and there, their organizational efforts, their strategies-as well as voting projections and returns, likely convention scenarios, and so on.

Schoenbach and Lauf (2002) noted that "reporters tend to focus on the campaign's competitive aspects," or what he calls the "game perspective." Patterson concluded that election news concentrates on competition and controversy instead of basic policy and leadership questions. In a study focusing exclusively on newspaper coverage of presidential elections, Erica King discovered similar results. Her comparison of USA Today and New York Times coverage of the 1988 presidential primaries found that the horse race was the predominant campaign theme in both the general audience and elite newspaper. In addition, she found both papers were relatively inattentive to substantive issues.

Gerber and Bergan (2009) also noted that media election coverage is characterized by an "inordinate amount of attention to campaign hoopla and the horse race aspects of the contests. They slight political, social, and economic problems facing the country and say little about the merits of the solutions proposed, unless these issues can be made exciting and visually dramatic.

Della and Kaplan (2007) concluded that voters receive relatively little help from the media in evaluating candidates on the basis of issues.' Similarly, Dean Kathleen Hall Jamieson's study of the 1988 presidential election found that the media rely overwhelmingly on a "strategy" rather than an "issues" schema in their reporting. She argues that the strategy schema "disengages" the electorate in a number of ways. First, it provides an understanding of candidate strategy without

explaining the country's problems and which candidate is more likely to solve them. In addition, it invites audiences to critique a campaign as if it were a performance in which the electorate is a passive spectator. She found that a focus on strategy by the news media also led to a reduction in the amount of information campaigns attempt to communicate and induced cynicism into the political process.

#### **2.4.2 The increasing use of polls**

Besbey and Burgess (2002) highlights that the media's overwhelming focus on the horse race has come a concomitant increase in the use of polls-often commissioned by the media themselves-to project candidates' standing with the voters at various points in the campaign. In examining this proliferation of poll results, commentators have cited several important uses of polls. For example, polls may be used to check candidates' claims about the direction of popular opinion and, in turn, inform candidates about the nature of public sentiment on a variety of issues.

Prior (2005) analyzed and claimed that polls help voters make informed decisions at election time, allowing them to know when they might be throwing away their vote because a candidate has little chance to win. However, there are serious problems with the use of polls in election coverage. Because of the way they are presented in the media, poll results may lead to the evaluation of candidates on the grounds of electability rather than on their substantive policy stances. Particularly when polls are covered prominently early in campaigns, they may give a decided advantage to candidates with higher name recognition over unknowns, since news coverage of strong standing in the polls often leads to a greater ability to raise funds. Alternatively, polls may provide an advantage to the "underdog" who outperforms expectations. Most seriously, perhaps, prominent coverage of poll results suggests to voters that contests are decided before election day, thus depressing voter turnout.

Stromberg (2015) added that, while polls vary greatly in quality and accuracy, the media may actually face an incentive to use the most surprising results. That is, while campaigns demand precision from their own internal pollsters, the media may have a preference for polls of poorer quality that offer more surprising (and therefore more interesting) results and are also less expensive to produce.

Prat and Stromberg (2005) blames News organizations have also been faulted for heralding only the results of their own polls, rather than providing the perspective of the full array of media polls. At the same time, they rarely use reputable pollsters to critique unexpected results.

#### **2.4.3 The question of character**

Besley and Bergess (2002) states that the 1988 presidential election marked the first time that the question of a candidate's "character" took on a position of prominence in media coverage. When Paul Taylor, a political reporter for the Washington Post, asked Gary Hart during a televised press conference whether he had ever committed adultery and reputable news organizations stationed reporters outside of Hart's residence to prove that he was guilty of marital infidelity, a new standard was set whereby journalists considered investigating the private lives of candidates an acceptable practice. Such concern with so-called character issues blossomed in the 1992 election. When Gennifer Flowers claimed in January of that year to have had an affair with Bill Clinton, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times immediately picked up the story. Eventually, every mainstream news outlet in the country followed suit. A few weeks later, after the Wall Street Journal published a story recruiter that Clinton had evaded the draft,<sup>19</sup> allegations of draft-dodging became a continual focus of stories in major newspapers through both the Spring primary season and into the Fall campaign. Similarly, the question of Clinton's marijuana use was front-page news in many respected publications.

Campante and Hojman (2013) argued that in defense of such prominent coverage of personal issues, journalists have argued that character is a valid subject for coverage because a president needs to possess qualities such as moral goodness, strength of will, judgment, and leadership. Other observers have criticized the media's new preoccupation with character. As Judith Lichtenberg has noted, "the politics of character tends to drive out the politics of substance. Hojman (2013) explains that because discussions of character are so interesting, they often draw the attention of voters away from serious issues. Additionally, she claims that despite the media's fascination with a politician's sex life, "[sexual behavior] rarely tells us anything about a person's fitness for political office.

Denny and Doley (2008) concluded, traditional media coverage, featuring poll results prominently and lavishing much time and attention on investigating the private lives of candidates, has been criticized because it takes the focus of campaign coverage away from the country's problems and from analyzing which candidates might be best qualified to solve them. At the same time, such coverage has been found to engender cynicism and disaffection among an electorate that is presented with the candidate as pure strategist or personally flawed.

#### **2.4.4 The increasing role of television in election coverage**

Host (1999) clarified that while criticisms have been directed at print and broadcast media alike, scholars have increasingly come to focus on the unique characteristics of television news and its role in election reporting. This interest has resulted from a recognition that television has largely supplanted newspapers as they about the claims of an Arkansas ROTC medium Americans use to educate themselves about their world, and in particular about elections. For example, the Roper Organization found that in December of 1990, sixty-nine percent of Americans reported getting most of their news from television. Forty-four percent said they relied on television as their only major source of news.

Jenssen (2008) noted that the concern about the growing role of network television news in politics is its brevity of coverage, particularly the limited amount of time a candidate is allotted to make her case to the American people. Daniel Hallin's study of network news coverage of presidential elections found that the average "sound bite" (the amount of time a candidate is shown speaking) has shrunk from forty-three seconds in 1968 to nine seconds in 1988.' Hallin notes that the trend is disturbing because "the public never has a chance to hear a candidate- or anyone else-speak for more than about twenty seconds.

Curran and Salovaara (2009) discovered that while the sound bite has been shrinking, network news coverage has become more mediated. That is, the role of the journalist has changed from passive stenographer of campaign rhetoric to political analyst deconstructing campaign strategy. This mediation has often taken the form of interpreting the political meaning behind the candidates' words rather than analyzing the substance of their proposals. As a result, television election coverage has become increasingly more negative in tone, as campaign plans and positions are cast in an entirely opportunistic perspective.

Television news coverage is also susceptible to manipulation by candidates and campaign workers who have learned how to use visual images to undermine criticism or analysis. By understanding how to feed television's continual appetite for dramatic visual events, campaigns are able to use highly orchestrated photo opportunities to send positive messages about their candidates.

Gey (2006) stated that the technique of using positive visual appearances to counter unpopular decisions, such as visiting with senior citizens at a nursing home right after funds for nursing home care had been cut. Particularly during the 1988 campaign, network television reporters were faulted for allowing the candidates to direct news coverage into photo opportunities at flag factories or in armored tanks, rather than pressing candidates regarding their stands on issues of importance to the American people. Largely in response to the criticism of their performance in 1988, national broadcast journalists made some improvements in their approach to campaign reporting in the 1992 election.

Newton (1999) clarified that in particular, network journalists have become wary of manipulation through photo opportunities and media events that make for good visuals. In the last presidential campaign, they were more likely to take an active role in debunking the strategies of the campaigns and in contrasting candidate claims with actual records and plans. Also in 1992, the networks routinely assigned "truth squads" to investigate the validity of candidate claims in debates, and most networks performed "adwatches" which set out to check the claims made in television ads. At the same time, there was increased coverage of substantive issues in lengthy pieces which were selected not by campaigns, but by the news programs themselves.

However, Narud and Valen (2006) admits that despite the trend towards more substantive and critical reporting, the new mediated journalism of network news "puts the image-making at the center of politics and pushes real political debate to the margins. and when a modern campaign report devotes significant time to issues, the main story line typically focuses on strategy and tactics, often on the question of whether the candidate made a 'good move' in focusing on a particular issue. He emphasizes that the connection between horse race coverage and soundbite journalism remains very strong.

#### **2.4.5 The growing role of local television news**

Unlike American newspapers, which trace their roots back to the founding of the colonies, local television news is a relatively young medium. Begun in the 1940s, local newscasts were originally aired only to comply with the public affairs requirements of the Federal Communications Commission; and until the 1960s, even the longest local news shows did not exceed fifteen minutes.

Host (1999) discovered that in the 1970s, local television stations began to recognize that news programs could be highly profitable since they were relatively inexpensive to produce and had considerable audience draw. At the same time, stations could retain all of the advertising revenues received during local news time, as compared to only a fraction of the revenues derived from network programming slots.

Newton (1999) pointed out that as a result, stations have consistently resisted attempts by network news to expand the time allotment for network newscasts, which have remained at one half-hour only.

Research on television news has shown that its unique appeal to audiences lies in what has been called the "para-social relationship" that viewers come to form with on-air personalities.<sup>4</sup> Viewers enjoy a kind of "intimacy at a distance" with television news anchors and reporters that seems to be as important as the news itself in audience retention.

Putnam (2000) stated that a survey conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, for example, found that people had a significantly higher trust in television anchors than in newspaper reporters.

Host (1999) found that while forty percent of respondents rated the honesty and ethical standards of television anchors to be high, only eighteen percent did the same for newspaper reporters. The study suggested that the trustworthiness of TV anchors seems to be aided by the fact that viewers feel they know them. By contrast, newspaper editors and reporters are less well known. A case could be made that viewers form an even stronger tie with their local television anchors than with the more remote and geographically distant network anchors. Local television stations actively try to encourage this kind of trust and affinity between viewers and anchors by running.

Althaus and Trautman (2008) noted that as a result of such factors, audiences for local television news and the number of local news programs produced have expanded over the past two decades. Thus, in many media markets of the country, ratings (expressed as a percentage of the regional audience watching a program) for local news have come to closely match those for network news. For example, as many households in the Denver market watch the early evening local news as the network news, while in Cleveland the size of a local newscast audience is even larger than that for the network news.

Stromhack and Shehata (2010) stated that comparisons between a single local newscast and network newscast, however, actually underestimate the differences between the size of the local news audience as compared to the network news audience. As noted above, while the networks are limited to one half-hour of news per day, local television stations offer as many as seven newscasts in a twenty-four-hour period (for example, in the early morning, at noon, in the early evening, and late night.) For example, consider the case of WABC in New York City. Ratings for February 1993 indicate that ABC's network news, *World News Tonight*, reached an average of 894,000 households in the market. However, local newscasts on the same ABC affiliate reached 162,000 households at six a.m., 299,000 at noon, 760,000 at five p.m., 775,000 at six p.m. and 806,000 at eleven p.m.' While some of that viewership is duplicated-for example, someone watching at five may still be tuned in at six o'clock-unquestionably much of it is



discrete. Even if we assume that half of household's watch more than one newscast, we see that local newscasts draw double or triple the audiences of network newscasts. Similar patterns of audience size for local as compared to national newscasts were found for other markets examined, with audiences for the three network news programs outweighed by audiences for the ten to fifteen local newscasts broadcast throughout the day.

Bruns and Himmeler (2011) argued that the size of local television news audiences has also come to exceed by far the size of metropolitan newspaper audiences in the same region. For example, in Philadelphia, while weekday circulation of the metropolitan dailies, the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Daily News, stood at 502,740 and 197,481 respectively in 1993, the number of households reached by all local newscasts in the market at six p.m. alone was over a million.

Prior M (2006) clarifies that local television newscasts are becoming a vehicle for political communication on a par with network newscasts and metropolitan newspapers. Survey research bears out the growing power of the medium. The, more Americans said they became best acquainted with candidates running in local elections from television (forty three percent) than from newspapers (forty percent).

Wooldridge (2002) discovered that by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press found that almost as many voters said they got most of their news about the presidential campaign from local television news as from network television news (thirty-seven percent for network, thirty-six percent for local). The recognition that growing numbers of voters are getting all or much of their news from local television has encouraged national political campaigns and officeholders to become far more aggressive in pursuit of coverage on the medium. Local television has clearly become the news medium of choice for many Americans. There is, however, another factor leading politicians and

Officials to the doors of the local TV station: the perceived ease in getting a message across relatively unimpeded.

Althaus and Trautman (2008) caution that Campaigns have come to recognize that there is a major distinction between how local television stations cover the news and how it is covered by

either network television or local newspapers. In order to understand the impact of local television news, we must explore these distinctions more fully.

#### **2.4.6 News decisions of the local television station**

Wooldrige (2002) stated that despite its growing influence on the American public, local television news has received relatively little serious analysis. The assumption is that local television news is a kind of country cousin to its network counterparts, subject to the same pressures and constraints as national news, only on a smaller and more provincial scale. At the same time, local television is dismissed as a more sensational version of the morning newspaper, with scant attention paid to the reasons why print and broadcast media in the same region should in fact so diverge in their content.

Stromback and Shehata (2010) noted that although newspapers are largely unrecognized, there are clear reasons why the content of local television news differs from either that of network television or newspapers—reasons that lead directly to an explanation of why so many became significant vehicles of national political coverage in the last presidential election.

#### **2.4.7 Political fragmentation of target audiences**

Compante and Hojman (2013) argued that while local television and network news share some important common ground—such as the need for good visuals and short, snappy sound bites—there is one fundamental but overlooked difference between the two media: the structure of government representing the target audience. Network news targets an audience united by at least one common set of political institutions: The United States Government. All Americans watching Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw or Peter Jennings are governed by the same President and Congress and are interested in a common set of political stories. However, the same statement does not hold true for local media markets since media markets are set regionally.

Pratt and Stromberg (2005) clarify that local television stations confront a market composed of one or more cities, as well as hundreds of suburbs, smaller towns, and even rural areas, each with its own form of local government.

As a result, the fundamental dilemma facing the local television newscast is how to cover politics and government when the target audience is fragmented among hundreds of political jurisdictions, where people may be passionately interested in the affairs of their own township but care little about the decisions of a zoning board in a neighboring borough. This dilemma is particularly troublesome when it comes to deciding how to cover campaigns and elections, and is a problem that national television news rarely faces.

#### **2.4.8 Competitive markets and limited reporting staffs**

Schoenbach and Lauf (2002) argued that there are other factors which influence the distinctive nature of local television reporting and make it distinctive from newspaper coverage. Metropolitan newspapers are also faced with the dilemma of covering local news for an audience which is composed of hundreds of jurisdictions. Their response has been to strengthen their suburban news coverage by enlarging their reporting staffs and embarking on ambitious "zoning" plans through which different geographic areas in a region receive different local news sections.

Wooldrige (2006) discovered that local television stations have approached the problem differently. Because local television news operations are more technology intensive than newspapers, they have invested in updating sophisticated equipment (e.g., acquiring new mobile satellite trucks) rather than increasing the size of the reporting staff. In addition, because their success has been linked to audience rapport with on-air anchors and reporters, stations have tended to pay far higher salaries than a newspaper pays its reporters.<sup>53</sup> As a result, staffing levels at a local television station tend to be radically lower than at a local newspaper.

Host (1999) found that while the typical major city metropolitan newspaper has hundreds of reporters on staff, a television station in the same market will rarely have more than a dozen reporters charged with covering a similar or even larger market area. In recent years, as a result of increasing competition for audiences, resources available to local television stations have been on a downward swing.

Schoenbach and Lauf (2013) found that while metropolitan and local newspapers in America have largely developed into monopolies in their markets, local television stations have faced an increasing level of competition, making profitability a larger concern than ever. In most markets,

television stations face competition not only from two or three other newscasts but from an increasing array of cable programming.

Gentzkow, Shaprio and Sinkinson (2011) clarifies that even as audiences are fragmenting, newscasts have increasingly become profit centers for local television stations and, in turn, for the larger conglomerates which have come to own them. Just as they are being depended upon to generate sizable profits, local newscasts are faced with slowly dwindling audiences and market shares.

Prat and Stromberg (2011) as a result, local newscasts have been forced to cut back on newsroom budgets and keep expenses to a minimum. Because of such limited resources, local television news, unlike newspapers or network television newscasts, has tended not to assign reporters to specific "beats." A beat structure uses specific reporters for different geographic or substantive areas. As a result, a reporter can become experienced in the issues of that area and develop a set of sources through which to discover news. In contrast, local television stations tend to use reporters for "general assignment," because it allows for more efficient use of a small number of journalists.

Wooldrige (2002) found that this assignment system places local television reporters at a distinct disadvantage when compared to their national or print counterparts. They must depend much more heavily on eager sources to provide them with news, unlike newspaper or national television reporters who can actively seek out stories.

Prat and Stromberg (2005) confirms that local television news stations are particularly passive in their search for news because of the need to expend minimal resources and keep profits high. He found that local television news predominantly gets its ideas for stories from press releases, video feeds, police and fire checks, and the local newspaper. Rarely do local TV reporters cultivate sources, search documents, or attend government meetings. As a result, local television news is particularly susceptible to manipulation by sources who know how to provide good stories at relatively low cost to the station.

Gey (2006) discovered that local television reporters also have the additional burden of being responsible for locating video to accompany their pieces. In contrast, the typical network television reporter is assigned a producer who can line up interviews, assemble video, and work with video editors, freeing the reporter to uncover information. With only limited time to report and produce video for their stories, local television reporters are far more dependent than network or newspaper reporters on political sources who can provide them with appealing visual images. Therefore, while network reporters have become increasingly resistant to being used by campaign photo opportunities, local broadcast journalists do not have this luxury. Local television reporters often make news selection decisions as a result of resource constraints.

Prior M (2006) coined the term "information subsidy" to indicate how sources are able to influence news agendas by reducing journalists' costs of collecting information showing how local television news stations are particularly dependent on such information subsidies. Therefore, understanding the unique needs of local television news and can provide information which meets those needs will be most likely to get their stories, as well as their own angle on those stories, covered.

Althaus and Trautman (2008) stated that it is the combination of these two factors-the need to appeal to a politically fragmented market and the need to collect the news with minimal reporting resources-which explains the perfunctory way local television covers local politics and elections, as well as the seemingly paradoxical trend towards increased coverage of presidential elections.

#### **2.4.9 Local television news and the coverage of government and politics**

Besley and Burgess (2002) confirms that though research on the coverage of politics and government by local television stations is relatively limited, the studies which have been carried out indicate that local television news has hardly distinguished itself in its coverage of either national or local elections. In particular, research has shown that local television news gives little attention to local political races and, when it does, the content tends to focus on the most trivial aspects of the election. For example, David H. Ostroff, who examined local television news coverage of the 1978 Ohio gubernatorial campaign during the month preceding the election,