

Factors informing media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya's 2022 general election

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Abstract

This study investigated the factors informing media coverage of presidential candidates during Kenya's 2022 General Election, focusing on the differences between The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper. The research addresses potential biases and priorities in media reporting that could influence public perception and voter decision-making. The study utilised a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to analyse journalist responses. The evaluation considers the impact of factors such as candidates' political history, policy proposals, and poll ratings on the prioritisation of news stories. Results indicated that The Standard emphasised candidates' past political history and policy proposals while The Daily Nation primarily focused on poll ratings. Both outlets recognised the candidate's manifesto as the most critical factor driving Coverage. The study also highlighted media bias, which was reported as systematic and anecdotal. Systematic biases stemmed from editorial policies and ownership influence, while anecdotal biases reflected individual journalist preferences. This bias shaped public opinion by influencing which aspects of candidates were most visible, potentially affecting voting choices. The study underscores the media's pivotal role in shaping public opinion and the necessity for balanced reporting. The study's recommendations included promoting diverse candidate coverage, enhancing bias-awareness training for journalists, implementing robust editorial guidelines, and fostering a feedback culture to ensure more impartial and comprehensive election reporting. These measures aimed to empower voters with the necessary information for informed decision-making in future elections.

Key terms: Election, informing, media coverage, presidential candidates, newspaper

INTRODUCTION

Kenya has a vibrant and diverse media landscape, encompassing many print, broadcast, and online outlets. The media plays a crucial role in Kenyan society by providing a platform for public debate and holding the government and other powerful institutions accountable (Kameri-Mbote, 2015; Odhiambo, 2016). For instance, in 2016, investigative journalist Mohammed Ali uncovered corruption within the National Youth Service (NYS). The investigative report led to legal action against public officials and heightened public awareness about the misuse of state resources. In the realm of print media, two major players dominate the Kenyan market: the Nation Media Group (NMG) and the Standard Group (SG) (Media Council of Kenya, 2022). These companies publish various newspapers, magazines, and other publications.

Additionally, several smaller independent print publications are contributing to the media landscape. The broadcast media sector in Kenya is also primarily dominated by a few key players. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which is state-owned, is the oldest and largest broadcaster in the country. Additionally, numerous privately owned television and radio stations add to the diversity of voices and content (Mwangi & Ng'weno, 2018).

The online media sector in Kenya is rapidly growing, and some media outlets like The Star, Kenya Moja, and Tuko are among the best online media for this generation. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are also critical influencers of populace opinion, opinion makers, conversation enablers, and conduits of citizen journalism (Ojwang & Oyaro, 2017). Unlike traditional media, online social media gives the impression of an immediate and more engaging way of addressing those vying for political positions, addressing an audience directly. For instance, leaders often employ Twitter to express opinions, give out statements and further their agenda with little or no editor interference. Furthermore, internet media is more open to post-modernism messages from anyone and everyone, activist groups, and minorities, thereby being less repressive of debate than traditional media.

However, the Kenyan media faces various challenges. One significant challenge is political interference, with

the government being accused of influencing media outlets and leading to self-censorship. Economic struggles are also prominent as the media industry grapples with high production costs, low advertising revenue, and a relatively high illiteracy rate. Technological challenges further complicate matters, as the media must adapt to new technologies like the internet and social media, which bring opportunities and obstacles (Mwangi & Ng'weno, 2018; Wanyama, 2019).

Despite these challenges, the Kenyan media remains an essential and vibrant part of society. It is critical in holding the government and powerful institutions accountable and serves as a public discourse and debate platform (Kameri-Mbote, 2015). In recent years, the Kenyan media has become more independent and critical of the government. This shift has exposed high-profile scandals and increased government accountability (Odhiambo, 2016). While the Kenyan media still faces obstacles, it continues to grow in importance within Kenyan society. It actively promotes democracy and good governance and amplifies the voices of marginalised communities (Wanyama, 2019). This paper will explore the Kenyan media's role in shaping political discourse, influencing voter behaviour, and promoting democratic processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The inclusion of editorial material in modern media has been linked to a range of factors, such as media owners, media managers, government entities, editorial policies, sponsors, viewers, and information sources that influence the choice of news coverage (Wang, 2022). In urban areas, people prefer to get information through televised broadcasts, while rural populations rely on compact radios to be informed about current global events. These differentiated consumption patterns determine what stories are considered essential for dissemination by media tools and how political events such as Kenya's 2022 elections, where candidates' narratives differed significantly depending on the medium used.

The government's prioritisation of social protest coverage fosters a heightened media bias (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). Governments often want to influence the media through various approaches ranging from

rigorous regulation and coercion to support and diversification. Avraham and Ketter (2016) provided a distinct advantage in examining the prevalence of corruption within news events, which are usually used to credit or discredit the government. This bias is promoted by mutually beneficial arrangements where media outlets provide favourable coverage in exchange for financial compensation, leading to significant ethical and economic ramifications, such as reduced newspaper circulation (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014). These dynamics can be connected to Kenya's elections of 2022 since the government is likely to have emerged as the force that influences the media narratives of its presidential contenders, deciding which scandals make a candidate more undesirable and which may be concealed from the public.

Wanjala (2017) further noted that the government can exert influence on media coverage by implementing censorship measures, engaging in acts of harassment, and using tactics of intimidation against journalists. The government of Kenya has faced allegations of using these strategies to stifle critical reporting on its actions. In 2018, a cohort of journalists in Kenya encountered physical aggression from those aligned with the government after disseminating a news article detailing corruption charges involving a government official. In the year 2019, a journalist from Kenya was compelled to flee the country due to imminent danger to his life, as he had been subjected to threats of death (Wanyama, 2019). These threats were a direct consequence of his investigative reporting on the actions undertaken by a militia organisation operating inside the local community. These acts have a 'chilling' effect; journalists downscale their analyses of subjects of political sensitivity. However, in the 2022 election context, such intimidation may reduce the ability of journalists to publish critical content about the presidential candidates, thus reducing the ability of the public to fully appreciate the quality of the candidates and their proposed policies.

In another research study, Petrova (2012) explored the role of broadcast media based on organisations with special interests and used a comparative evaluation to consider how mass media works with these interest groups. This research discovered that these groups promote media policies that have their principles as

they dictate news sources and editorial discretion. Business associations, churches, political action committees and other lobbying organisations bribe journalists with information and sources and blacklist media outlets that do not fairly portray the interests of such organisations and businesses. This leads to a situation where media bias is worse, given that it is complemented by support from dominant interests in some instances. In this case, the findings show that this interaction dramatically influences the media's objectivity. Interest groups whose goals are agreed upon with a particular media source can cause the media outlet to provide coverage spread only spread groups' stories while excluding other views. This phenomenon is common during election campaigns or any period of social unrest or conflict. For instance, in Kenya's 2022 elections, such dynamics may have played a role in how different media stations portrayed presidential candidates, whereby groups of people seek to tailor opinions in favour of specific desires in specific candidates or dump the undesirable opponents; this underscores the critical need for balanced media practices to mitigate the undue influence of powerful factions on public discourse.

Interest groups have a significant influence on media coverage via a range of strategies. Various entities, such as companies, religious organisations, and political parties, can influence narratives by carefully providing journalists with information, sources, and exclusive stories (Petrova, 2012). Petrova (2012) stated that by adopting this approach, individuals may guarantee that their viewpoints and objectives are well represented, often resulting in a bias in the broader media dialogue. Petrova (2012) further observed that these interest groups can influence media organisations by suggesting the potential for boycotts or adverse repercussions if their concerns are not presented positively. This interplay presents a nuanced challenge for journalists, as they are tasked with striking a careful equilibrium between maintaining journalistic integrity and yielding to the pressures exerted by these prominent groups. Consequently, media coverage can be influenced, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the agendas of different factions, possibly modifying the public's understanding of many matters.

The increased financial reliance on advertising makes this problem even worse because marketers have significant control over media content. Chebii (2012) pointed out that since advertisers can pull their financial support as a reason to refuse any form of undesirable Coverage by media organisations, they concentrate on the stories that serve the purpose of advertisers' interest to avoid losses. This factor leads to self-sensitisation and hampers journalism and investigation of matters that may incline advertisers to pull out their advertisement patronage. According to Maltseva (2017), it diminishes the journalistic focus area, as the news that might be negative or uncomfortable for the advertisers is filtered out. As a result, the necessity of covering operating expenses forms a paradox for the media, which is the challenge of the perpetual struggle for profitability and principles. These dynamics define the given issue, especially in high-risk situations like elections. For instance, when targeting the Kenyan 2022 electoral process, interest groups and advertisers had some part to play in determining the portrayal of the presidential candidates and, in a larger scheme of things, concerning citizens' perceptions and the election process. This puts under pressure the need to have credibility and uphold ethics to retain democracy, equal representation and accurate portrayal in the media.

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patronage. According to Maltseva (2017), it diminishes the journalistic focus area, as the news that might be negative or uncomfortable for the advertisers is filtered out. As a result, the necessity of covering operating expenses forms a paradox for the media, which is the challenge of the perpetual struggle for profitability and principles. These dynamics define the given issue, especially regarding high-risk situations like elections. For instance, when targeting the Kenyan 2022 electoral process, interest groups and advertisers had some part to play in determining the portrayal of the presidential candidates and, in a larger scheme of things, concerning citizens' perceptions and the election process. This puts under pressure the need to have credibility and uphold ethics to retain democracy, equal representation and accurate portrayal in the media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A descriptive analysis of the respondents' perceived factors reporting media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya's 2022 general election was done. Hypothesis testing and, finally, the discussion of the results followed this.

Prioritisation of News Stories during the Election Campaign during the Daily Coverage of Presidential Candidates

This study examined how news stories were prioritised during the daily Coverage of the 2022 presidential candidate campaign. In the context of the specific question posed, poll ratings, past political history, candidate's name, and policy proposals were some factors journalists considered when prioritising news stories during the daily Coverage of presidential candidates' campaigns. Respondents were asked to choose among the elements. Table 1 presents the results of the study.

Table 1: Prioritisation of News Stories during the Election Campaign

		Media organisation							
		The Daily Nation		The Standard Newspaper		Total			
		Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	chi-square(pdf)	p-value

In your daily Coverage of presidential candidates, how do you prioritise news stories during the election campaign?	Based on the candidate's name	0	0.0%	4	1.6%	4	1.6%	51.979(3)	<0.001
	Based on the candidate's past political history	13	5.0%	85	32.9%	98	38.0%		
	Based on the candidate's policy proposals	28	10.9%	43	16.7%	71	27.5%		
	Based on the candidate's poll ratings	54	20.9%	31	12.0%	85	32.9%		

Table 1 shows that journalists from The Standard Newspaper are more likely to prioritise news stories based on the candidate's past political history (32.9%) and policy proposals (16.7%). In comparison, journalists from The Daily Nation are more likely to prioritise news stories based on the candidate's poll ratings (20.9%). This difference in prioritisation may be due to several factors, such as the different editorial policies of the two media organisations or the various perspectives of the journalists who work for them. It is also possible that the difference is simply due to sampling error.

The chi-square test's significant value shows a substantial difference in how journalists from The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper prioritise news stories during their daily Coverage of presidential candidates. The p-value is less than 0.001, meaning there is less than a 0.001% chance of obtaining a result this extreme if there is no real difference between the two groups. This may suggest that there is a real difference in the way that journalists from the two media organisations prioritise news stories.

Editorial Stances and their Influence

The Daily Nation has been considered to have a more market-orientated angle towards it. It presents a centrist to a slightly critical view of the political parties

picking up the news with broader appeal and time-sensitive features like poll ratings. This aligns with their trend of speaking to a broader population and providing fundamental but quantifiable results that will likely go down well with the electorate. On the other hand, The Standard Newspaper has trended towards analysis and history in the past, which is why they fixated on the history of a candidate and his policy stand. This position stands along the editorial policy of printing a qualitative discourse of a candidate's experience and ability to manage if voted into the position for the reader interested in more excellent analysis. These knowledge holders can make meaning regarding several bias points in Coverage by creating these editorial biases.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that journalists from The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper prioritise news stories differently during their daily Coverage of presidential candidates. This difference in prioritisation may be due to several factors, such as the different editorial policies of the two media organisations or the various perspectives of the journalists who work for them. These findings are significant because they suggest that the media may shape public opinion about presidential candidates. By prioritising specific news stories over others,

journalists may influence the aspects of a candidate's campaign that are most visible to the public. This study also has implications for how voters consume news about presidential elections. Voters should be aware of the potential biases of different media organisations and should try to get information from a variety of sources.

Factors Considered when deciding to give Prominence to Specific Candidates over others in your Reporting

The study sought to determine the factors journalists consider when giving prominence to specific candidates over others in their reporting. Some of the

factors that journalists were deemed to consider when deciding to give importance to particular candidates over others in their reporting included the relevance of the candidate's campaign news, the level of public interest in the candidate, the candidate's engagement with the media and candidate's accessibility for interviews. The respondents were allowed to choose among the factors to ascertain what they consider when giving prominence to specific candidates. Table 2 below shows the results of a study that examined the factors that journalists from The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper consider when deciding to give prominence to specific candidates over others in their reporting.

Table 2: Factors Considered when deciding to give Prominence to Specific Candidates

		Media organisation							
		The Daily Nation		The Standard Newspaper		Total			
		Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	chi-square(pdf)	p-value
What factors do you consider when giving certain candidates prominence over others in your reporting?	Candidate's accessibility for interviews	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	1.425(3)	0.7
	Candidate's engagement with the media	7	2.7%	17	6.6%	24	9.3%		
	Level of public interest in the candidate	23	8.9%	35	13.6%	58	22.5%		
	Relevance of candidate's campaign news	66	25.6%	109	42.2%	175	67.8%		

Table 2 above shows that the most critical factor for both groups of journalists is the relevance of the candidate's campaign news (67.8%). This is followed by the level of public interest in the candidate (22.5%) and the candidate's engagement with the media (9.3%). The candidate's interview accessibility is the least important factor for both groups of journalists.

The p-value is 0.7, meaning there is a 70% chance of obtaining a result this extreme if there is no real difference between the two groups. This suggests that journalists from the two media organisations prioritise factors when giving prominence to specific candidates over others in their reporting.

Understanding "Relevant" Campaign News

The findings suggest that judgment of relevant campaign news is the leading criterion journalists use in choices of candidate visibility. Nevertheless, the idea of relevance deserves additional discussion. For many journalists, relevance might include the candidate's policy agenda, economic blueprints, or position on various social questions. However, what is considered relevant may be swayed by factors such as media hype, contentious issues or ingredients that make the candidate go viral on social media platforms. For instance, a candidate involved in a scandal or giving an excellent debate speech does get a great deal of attention regardless of the issues addressed. This raises broader questions within political communication about whether it helps or hinders voters from prioritising such news. Despite the popularity that controversy or an intriguing drama can attract, it distorts the voter's perception regarding the choice of policy issues, and the general performance and outlook of the candidate might overshadow outstanding policy issues that impact voters' preferences.

Implications for Media's Role in Elections

The emphasis on the prioritisation of relevance as a guiding factor is, therefore, a reminder of media as

both an informer and a shaper of public perception. In this way, by selecting what they consider relevant, journalists implicitly establish what parts of the campaign a candidate can make most conspicuous to the voters. This can have a massive impact on the voters and their perception of the candidates: while it might be beneficial to have a policy detail, cheerful record, or record of success, it might not matter if the media constantly brings up an aspect like controversy or charisma. In ensuring that self-preserving audiences of media organisations are informed and necessarily interactive with presidential candidates, media organisations must strike a healthy balance between audience interaction and information provision. In return, voters must realise bias in the media coverage of the campaigns and look for relevant news from other sources.

Critical Factor Driving Media Coverage of Presidential Candidates in Kenya

The study sought to find what media professionals perceive as the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya. Table 3 below contains the results and analysis of a study on the essential elements media professionals perceive as media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya.

Table 3: Critical Factor Driving Media Coverage of Presidential Candidates in Kenya

		Media organisation							
		The Daily Nation		The Standard Newspaper		Total			
		Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	chi-square(pdf)	p-value
As a media professional, what do you perceive as the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya?	Candidate 's manifesto	64	25.0%	95	37.1%	159	62.1%	2.016(3)	0.569
	Influence from media owners	11	4.3%	28	10.9%	39	15.2%		
	Public interest	19	7.4%	33	12.9%	52	20.3%		
	Scandals	2	0.8%	4	1.6%	6	2.3%		

Table 3. shows that the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya is the candidate's manifesto (62.1%). This is followed by public interest (20.3%), influence from media owners (15.2%), and scandals (2.3%). The chi-square test for independence shows no statistically significant difference in how media professionals from The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper perceive the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya. The p-value is 0.569, meaning there is a 56.9% chance of obtaining a result this extreme if there is no real difference between the two groups. This suggests that the way that media professionals from the two media organisations perceive the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya is the same.

The findings of this study suggest that media professionals from The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper perceive the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates in Kenya

similarly. The most crucial factor for both groups of media professionals is the candidate's manifesto. The findings of this study are significant because they suggest that the media plays a role in shaping public opinion about presidential candidates. By prioritising the candidate's manifesto in their Coverage, journalists can help voters understand the candidates' policies and plans for the country. This study also has implications for how voters consume news about presidential elections. Voters should be aware of the potential biases of different media organisations and should try to get information from a variety of sources.

Instances of Biases during Coverage

The study sought to identify media bias towards or against specific candidates during your reporting. The respondents were asked if they had encountered media bias towards or against particular candidates during their reporting. Table 4 below shows the results of the study.

Table 4: Instances of Biases during Coverage

		Media organisation							
		The Daily Nation		The Standard Newspaper		Total			
		Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	chi-square(pdf)	p-value
Have you encountered media bias towards or against specific candidates during your reporting?	No, media coverage is impartial	22	8.5%	88	34.0%	110	42.5%	30.402(3)	<0.001
	Not sure	2	0.8%	3	1.2%	5	1.9%		
	Yes, bias against specific candidates	19	7.3%	33	12.7%	52	20.1%		
	Yes, bias in favour of specific candidates	53	20.5%	39	15.1%	92	35.5%		

The study results found in Table 4 above show that 52 (20.1%) respondents reported instances of bias against specific candidates during their reporting. 92 (35.5%) reported bias cases favouring particular candidates. This suggests that media bias is a problem in Kenya and affects the Coverage of presidential elections. The table also shows that journalists from The Standard

Newspaper were more likely to report coming across instances of media bias than journalists from The Daily Nation. This suggests that there may be systematic differences in how the two media organisations cover presidential elections.

Potential Sources of Bias

Media bias can be explicitly deliberate or unconscious influences that make up its content and approach to presenting the news. Advertiser influence is particularly crucial since many media owners rely on widespread advertising revenues; where political supporters or specific interests are advertisers, they exert pressure on newsrooms to pull for favoured candidates. Involvement in politics or support of political parties and candidates can also lead to 'naked' or 'hidden' bias of reporters or proximal editorial endorsement. Another factor is ownership bias, whereby media houses owned by individuals or organisations with political affiliations may report on information favouring them. Moreover, the audience may even contribute to the reproduction of biases; this is because when sharing stories, journalists are influenced by the target audience and deny substantive content so that the audience retains only a stereotypical vision. However, self-organised prejudice arising from the Journalists' convictions, cultural biases, or even presumptions affecting their Coverage of the candidates may pervasively occur.

Impact of Bias on the Electoral Process

Bias in media reporting significantly impacts the other processes in the general electoral system. Preference given to covering specific candidates means that their

clips are aired so often that the audience may append to their status without influence from outside force. On the other hand, stereotyped negative information about other candidates may lead to their reputation's deterioration or miss their relevant policies. Inferentially, it affects people's trust in the media, and therefore, the democratic process lowers the value of ethical journalism. When voters perceive the press as partial or biased in any way, they may start disbelieving the election results or reduce voter turnout.

Mitigating Bias in Media Coverage

Media organisations must independently implement strategies for battling bias, as the existing remedies do not sufficiently address these difficulties. These strategies range from obligatory editorial control to a news organisation's staff diversity and reporters' education on implicit bias. It is also possible to clear up the picture regarding the sources of funding and the policies of editorial boards to reach the population.

Handling Potential Biases while Reporting

They sought to determine how media professionals handle potential biases in reporting on different presidential candidates. The respondents were asked to identify ways to address potential biases while writing. Table 5 below shows the results of the study.

Table 5: Ways of Handling Potential Biases while Reporting

		Media organisation						chi-square(pdf)	p-value
		The Daily Nation		The Standard Newspaper		Total			
		Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %	Count	Table Valid N %		
How do you personally handle potential biases in reporting on different presidential candidates?	Attend bias-awareness training	9	3.5%	21	8.2%	30	11.8%	55.183(3)	<0.001
	Regularly self-assess for biases	53	20.8%	25	9.8%	78	30.6%		
	Seek feedback from colleagues	14	5.5%	19	7.5%	33	12.9%		
	Strictly follow	18	7.1%	96	37.6%	114	44.7%		

	editorial guidelines								
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Table 5 above shows that the most common way media professionals handle potential biases while reporting is to strictly follow editorial guidelines (44.7%). This is followed by regularly self-assessing for preferences (30.6%), attending bias-awareness training (11.8%), and seeking feedback from colleagues (12.9%). The table also shows that journalists from The Standard Newspaper were more likely to report following editorial guidelines to handle potential biases while reporting than journalists from The Daily Nation. This suggests that there may be systematic differences in how the two media organisations approach the issue of media bias.

The findings of this study suggest that media professionals in Kenya are aware of the potential for bias in their reporting and are taking steps to address it. However, the findings also indicate that there is room for improvement. For example, more journalists could attend bias-awareness training and seek colleague feedback. The results of this study have important implications for the media and the public. The media should continue to take steps to address the issue of media bias. This includes developing and implementing editorial policies that promote fair and impartial Coverage of political campaigns, training journalists on the dangers of media bias and how to avoid it, and creating a culture of openness and feedback within media organisations.

Discussion

The study explored the factors informing media coverage, uncovering notable differences between two major newspapers in Kenya, The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper. It was evident that these media organisations exhibited distinct priorities regarding covering presidential candidates. While The Standard Newspaper gave more weight to factors such as a candidate's past political history and policy proposals, The Daily Nation focused on candidates' poll ratings. This divergence may be attributed to differing editorial policies and the journalists' perspectives. The study highlighted the need for readers to be aware of such differences to comprehend better the media's role in shaping public opinion. The research also delved into what media

professionals considered the most critical factor driving media coverage of presidential candidates. The study indicated that the candidates' manifestos were perceived as the most vital factor, followed by public interest, influence from media owners, and scandals. The importance of policy proposals and public engagement in shaping media coverage was underscored. This finding emphasises the media's responsibility to facilitate informed decision-making by focusing on substantive issues rather than sensationalism or bias.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study effectively identifies vital factors influencing media coverage of presidential candidates during Kenya's 2022 General Election, revealing notable differences between The Daily Nation and The Standard Newspaper. It highlights that while The Standard prioritises a candidate's past political history and policy proposals, The Daily Nation focuses more on poll ratings. This divergence reflects distinct editorial policies and perspectives among journalists. Additionally, both media organisations recognise the candidate's manifesto as the most critical factor in driving Coverage, underscoring the importance of substantive policy discussions over sensationalism. Media bias was also prevalent, with a significant number of respondents reporting favouritism towards specific candidates, indicating a potential systemic issue in electoral reporting. Journalists acknowledged various methods to mitigate bias, predominantly through adherence to editorial guidelines. In conclusion, the study emphasises the media's crucial role in shaping public opinion and highlights the need for balanced, informative reporting that empowers voters. Improved awareness and training around media biases, alongside a commitment to covering diverse candidates and their policies, are essential for fostering a more informed electorate in future elections. However, Future research could explore longitudinal studies to track changes in media coverage over time or conduct comparative studies across different electoral contexts.

Recommendations: To enhance media coverage of presidential candidates in future elections, media

organisations should promote balanced reporting that prioritises substantive policy discussions and encourages diverse candidate coverage. Journalists should undergo bias-awareness training to recognise and mitigate biases, while robust editorial guidelines should be developed to ensure fairness and impartiality in political reporting. Additionally, fostering a culture of feedback among journalists can promote accountability and reflective practices. Implementing these measures will empower voters with comprehensive information, facilitating informed decision-making.

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