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The Kenyan election 2013: the role of the factual discussion programme *Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks)

Angela Githitho Muriithi and Georgina Page

Contents

1.	Executive summary	2
2.	Introduction	4
3.	The role of media and communication in governance	5
3.1	BBC Media Action's approach to governance	5
3.2	Governance and elections	6
4.	<i>Sema Kenya</i> and the Kenyan context	7
4.1	Kenya speaks – the <i>Sema Kenya</i> programme	7
4.2	The <i>Sema Kenya</i> audience profile	8
4.3	The Kenyan governance and media context	8
5.	The research methodology	11
5.1	Qualitative research with audiences and experts	12
5.2	Quantitative audience survey	13
6.	The role of the media in the Kenya 2013 election	13
6.1	Audiences' perceive the media to exert considerable influence during elections	13
6.2	Successful voter education but a lack of depth in analysis	14
6.3	Various platforms for interaction between leaders and citizens	16
6.4	The “peace lobotomy” and the sacrifice of accountability and inclusion?	18
6.5	The leveraging of identity politics to maintain peace	21
7.	Supporting accountability, peace and inclusion: qualitative findings from election time	23
7.1	Supporting accountability – informing and educating audiences	24
7.2	Supporting accountability – a constructive platform from which to question	25
7.3	Supporting accountability – achieving a response	26
7.4	Supporting peace and inclusion – constructive moderated discussion	27
8.	Supporting accountability, peace and inclusion: quantitative findings from post-election	28
8.1	Accountability	28
8.2	Knowledge	30
8.3	Peace and inclusion	31
9.	Implications	32
9.1	Policy learning: The media's role in Kenya's 2013 elections	32
9.2	Project learning: Media support for state-society relations	33
9.3	Research learning: Considerations for future research	34
10.	Conclusion	34
11.	References	38

I. Executive summary

This paper seeks to identify the extent to which the national TV and radio programme *Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks), part of BBC Media Action's governance work in Kenya, supported accountability, peace and inclusion at the time of the 2013 Kenya election. It shows the specific value placed on *Sema Kenya* by audiences and experts at election time.

These issues are explored using qualitative data from two samples: a panel of 17 media and governance experts, and a broad cross-section of *Sema Kenya*'s TV and radio audience. In-depth interviews, using semi-structured interview guides, were completed with both samples in June/July 2013, several months after the 2013 Kenya election. In addition, quantitative data from a nationally representative survey of Kenyan adults (aged 15 and over), completed in July 2013, provides overall audience perceptions of the role of the media during the Kenya election as well as attitudes towards *Sema Kenya* among regular viewers and listeners of the programme's second season (which launched in June 2013).

Sema Kenya is a weekly programme involving a panel discussion led by questions from the audience. Each episode is recorded in a different region of the country. *Sema Kenya* is not an election programme, which allowed it to tackle local and national governance issues and present a diversity of views and dialogue at a time when the rest of the Kenyan media maintained a very narrow election focus. The impact of *Sema Kenya* may therefore be more sustainable than other media programming broadcast during the election period. By providing a platform for dialogue, where citizens were visibly empowered to question, the programme made a contribution to supporting individuals to hold government officials to account. The quantitative data showed that 94% of regular viewers and listeners agree that *Sema Kenya* is playing a role in holding government to account.

However, questions remain about how far such a programme can go in helping to foster accountability and hold to account under-performing leaders. In particular, the data explored here focuses on the impact of *Sema Kenya* at an individual level only. As yet, there is little evidence of *Sema Kenya*'s impact reaching beyond this level. This will be revisited in subsequent research to fully understand the long-term impact of the programme and its format.

To understand the specific contribution of *Sema Kenya*, this paper explores in parallel the overall role of the Kenyan media in the 2013 election. The research reveals that the Kenya 2013 election saw a conflict in media responsibilities between promoting peace (a top-down pressure from authorities and within the media sector) and acting as a watchdog and guardian of public interest, exposing wrongdoings and failures around election time (a bottom-up pressure from the general public). The media appears to have swung from one extreme in the previous Kenya election in 2007, when it was complicit in the post-election violence, to the opposite in 2013, when it self-censored to avoid instigating violence. This occurred to the extent that the media largely abdicated its watchdog responsibilities.

The research also shows that at a time when media coverage and debate was influenced by a peace agenda, resulting in an avoidance of sensitive issues, *Sema Kenya* provided the public with constructive, moderated, audience-driven discussion and arguably more detailed information than other media sources.

The audience and community-driven moderated discussion in *Sema Kenya* appears to have provided substantial opportunity to educate and inform audiences. Moreover, presenting dialogue and discussion from different areas of the country ensured that the programme was relevant to audiences outside the capital – sharing learning and exposing commonalities. Diverse groups and viewpoints were represented within the dialogue, and opposing views were discussed without friction in a peaceful and constructive manner.

Background

BBC Media Action, the international development organisation of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), uses the power of media and communication to support people to shape their own lives. Working with broadcasters, governments, other organisations and donors, we provide information and stimulate positive change in the areas of governance, health, resilience and humanitarian response. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) supports us to work with the media in 14 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. This project will contribute to state-society relations and support the empowerment of individuals to hold their government to account.

In addition to building the capacity of local media, BBC Media Action has designed a combination of different broadcast formats to address the specific governance priority outcomes identified in each country. These include factual discussion and debate programmes, magazine shows and drama. Since 2005, BBC Media Action has made political debate programmes on radio and television in a range of developing countries – including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal and Palestinian Territories.

This multi-country programme of governance work provides an unprecedented opportunity to understand the impact of governance programming on individual-level outcomes in a range of political and social contexts. Through such cross-cultural comparative research BBC Media Action aims to contribute to the international development evidence base in the field of media, communications and governance.

The research explored in this paper uses data captured at just one stage of the BBC Media Action Kenya governance project, looking primarily at the *Sema Kenya* programme during election time. Further research, addressing broader project needs, is planned, and formative, pre-testing and baseline research have all been completed.

2. Introduction

Using the specific context of the Kenya 2013 election, this paper explores the effectiveness of *Sema Kenya*, a factual discussion programme. The programme is part of a BBC Media Action governance project in Kenya seeking to support more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state-society relations. The paper seeks to address the following research question: What was the role of *Sema Kenya* in supporting accountability, peace and inclusion at the time of the 2013 Kenya election?

Elections often cast a spotlight on a country's social, economic and identity fracture points, and the extent to which the political process mitigates or exacerbates them. As a result, elections remain a key element in debates about governance. The next section of this paper (section 3) lays out BBC Media Action's approach to governance, and discusses the role of media and communication in governance, arguing that free and fair elections are fundamental moments in any democracy.

Section 4 introduces the programme *Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks), an audience-led, multimedia, factual discussion programme.¹¹ The programme is produced in the Kenyan national language of Swahili in collaboration with the BBC Swahili service and broadcasts on national TV and radio. *Sema Kenya* is filmed and recorded around the country, offering a platform for ordinary citizens to address their leaders directly on issues affecting them and their community.

Section 4 also presents the Kenyan governance and media context. Season one of *Sema Kenya* coincided with the Kenya 2013 election. The media was subject to scrutiny from within and outside the media and civil society sectors in the run-up to, and immediately following, the election. This was in large part due to an outbreak of violence following the 2007 Kenya election, in which the media was understood to have played a significant role in inciting the violence (Abdi and Deane 2008). Section 4 gives an overview of these events and their impact on the media and its approach to the 2013 election.

Section 5 explains the data sources, methodologies and analytical approach used in this paper. The paper focuses on research undertaken as part of the *Sema Kenya* project's midline evaluation, which provides audience and expert reflections on *Sema Kenya* and the media in general around the time of the Kenya 2013 election. The use of multiple data sources provides the opportunity for triangulation and helps us to understand in more depth the impact of the programme.

Section 6 explores the role that the media overall played during the 2013 Kenya election using expert and audience qualitative data, and quantitative audience data.

Section 7 looks in detail at the value placed on *Sema Kenya* by its audience to understand whether and how *Sema Kenya* supported accountability, peace and inclusion at the time of the 2013 Kenya election.

Section 8 summarises some preliminary data from the quantitative survey undertaken as part of the midline evaluation of *Sema Kenya*, completed shortly after the start of season two of the programme

¹ The factual discussion format is explored in more detail in Larkin and Were (2013) Factual debate and discussion programmes and their influence on political participation, political knowledge and political efficacy. BBC Media Action Working Paper. The underlying principles of this format include the relevance of information to audience needs, the inclusivity of voice, and effective moderation to ensure balance of perspectives, comprehension and respect for all participants.

(several months after the election). This data provides additional insight regarding the impact of the programme.

Finally, section 9 draws together policy, project and research learning and section 10 provides some conclusions.

3. The role of media and communication in governance

3.1 BBC Media Action's approach to governance

BBC Media Action's governance work supports more accountable, peaceful and inclusive states and societies. Lack of government accountability, the presence of conflict, and political and social exclusion can prevent people from living safely and freely, and from exercising their rights. These factors can act as significant barriers to equitable development. Peace, together with accountable and inclusive government, can contribute to poverty reduction and the creation of more equal societies.

The role of media and communication as a driver of change in governance is relatively poorly researched (Dahl-Østergaard et al, 2005). There is continued and varied debate on the role of media and communication relating to the individual concepts of accountability, peace and inclusion. Further evidence exists highlighting the competing nature of these concepts, particularly in fragile states (Allen and Stremmlau, 2005). Underpinning BBC Media Action's approach is an understanding of the interdependent nature of these three concepts in supporting governance. A particular gap in evidence exists when seeking to identify the specific potential of an approach encompassing all three.

While there is near-universal consensus on the importance of governments being properly accountable to citizens, how this is best achieved is the subject of much debate. Answerability and enforcement are central to the definition of accountability used by BBC Media Action (Larkin and Reimpell, 2012). "Answerability" relates to the obligation of governments to provide information on (and explain) what they are doing. "Enforcement" refers to the capacity of a principal, either an individual citizen or a collective force such as mass media or civil society, to impose sanctions on power holders who have violated their public duties (Schedler, 2009).² Media can support improved accountability when it is able to provide people with trusted, accurate and balanced information, to convene inclusive and constructive public dialogue and debate, and to require those in power to explain and answer for their actions.

Figure 1: BBC Media Action's approach to governance



² It should be noted that while some definitions of accountability incorporate "responsiveness", the definition presented above is narrower, in that it conceptualises responsiveness as a possible and desirable outcome of accountable state-society relations, see Schedler, A (1999) *Conceptualizing Accountability*. In Diamond, L, Plattner, M and Schedler, A (eds) *The Self-restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*. Colorado, US: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

There is greater consensus about how increased contact between groups of people experiencing conflict can lead to the development of more positive attitudes towards others and a reduction in prejudice – “intergroup contact theory” (Pettigrew, 1998). The media has the ability to facilitate contact between different groups, potentially supporting improved understanding of the “other”, an increase in empathy and a reduction in anxiety. This can support breaking down boundaries between different groups in society.

Media and communication can help societies to negotiate “difference” peacefully by creating public platforms for dialogue that can make a contribution to supporting the development of inclusive political settlements, as opposed to violence. In countries where geography, poverty and poor infrastructure make face-to-face interaction between disparate communities difficult, media can play a vital role in connecting these groups with each other, and with national debates and discourse on governance.

3.2 Governance and elections

BBC Media Action understands elections as part of the wider conversation regarding the role of media and communication in supporting governance and as the “litmus test” of accountability. The Kenya 2013 election reflects a point in time when issues of accountability, peace and inclusion rose to the forefront in the country.

The ballot box throws into sharp relief a country’s social, economic and identity fracture points, and the extent to which the political process mitigates or exacerbates these. In such a context, media and communication interventions are most effective when they shine light on the past and future promises of prospective candidates, while also building trust and tolerance of the views of others across all sections of society.

Beyond scrutiny of the electoral process and candidates, media and communication can provide audiences with the information they need to become more informed, engaged and active citizens. Media and communication often play a key role in the voter education required to ensure an informed citizenry. They are also used by electoral management bodies (EMBs) to disseminate information.³³

Timely, accessible and relevant information can increase an individual’s knowledge of their rights and freedoms, political and democratic processes, and the practices and beliefs of different groups within societies. Politicians have been shown to be more responsive to citizens’ needs if citizens have access to information on political decisions (Besley and Burgess, 2002). Media is thus seen to support genuine accountability, to improve the quality of public discourse and ultimately government responsiveness.

In environments where political elites build negative legitimacy by exploiting intolerance of the “other” – rather than by developing and delivering policies that address issues affecting the everyday lives of ordinary citizens – voting can be marred by electoral violence. The intolerance of “other” is often closely linked with issues of ethnicity. Snyder (2000) went as far as to suggest that “naively

³ For example see Department for International Development (DFID) *How to Note* on elections. DFID (2011) *How to Note*. London: DFID.

pressuring ethnically divided authoritarian states to hold instant elections can lead to disastrous results.” Recent research suggested that elections in transitional or war-torn countries can become a hindrance rather than a solution to building peace and nations (Jarstad and Sisk, 2008). In fact, elections can generate conflicts rather than solve them (Paris, 2004; Collier, 2009). In this respect, the media can play a vital role in building trust and tolerance of others.

Stremlau and Monroe (2009) identified three roles of the media immediately after elections: **mirror**, reflecting the state- and nation-building process; **amplifier**, facilitating the sharing of information, particularly through new technologies; and **enabler**, performing a positive role through providing a platform for dialogue and mediating difference. There is considerable overlap between these roles and the concepts identified in BBC Media Action’s approach to governance.

4. Sema Kenya and the Kenyan context

4.1 Kenya speaks – the Sema Kenya programme

Part of BBC Media Action’s governance work in Kenya,⁴ *Sema Kenya* offers a platform for ordinary citizens to address their leaders directly on issues affecting them and their community.

Sema Kenya launched in October 2012 on Kenyan national TV and radio. In its first season, the show travelled to locations in 13 different counties, broadcasting weekly. The first season ended on 31 March 2013 and therefore coincided with the period immediately before and after the Kenya election on 4 March. The programme is produced in Swahili and presented by Joseph Warungu, former head of the BBC’s African news and current affairs department.

A live audience of approximately 100 people is recruited from the area local to the recording location. On arrival at the programme shoot, each audience participant submits a question or issue they would like to see addressed during the panel discussion. The production team reviews these questions before selecting a number of people to put their questions directly to the panel. The panel generally consists of four local leaders and decision-makers. Panellists do not know in advance what the questions will be.

Sema Kenya has facilitated dialogue on issues ranging from public security and unemployment to ethnicity, devolution and land reform. It has also touched on culturally sensitive subjects such as women’s rights and alcoholism.

The BBC Media Action project team designed *Sema Kenya* to:

- Create a national conversation to help rebuild trust in the democratic process in Kenya
- Play an “inform and educate”⁵ role, by improving audiences’ access to reliable, trustworthy information and increasing their knowledge on the new constitution, the implications of devolution and the electoral process

⁴ The *Sema Kenya* project is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) Global Grant. This was awarded to BBC Media Action in 2011 to implement projects in 14 countries around the world over a five-year period in the broad areas of governance, health and resilience, and humanitarian response.

- Increase the diversity of views in public fora in ways that inform national and community discourse rather than incite enmity and hostility among communities

4.2 The Sema Kenya audience profile

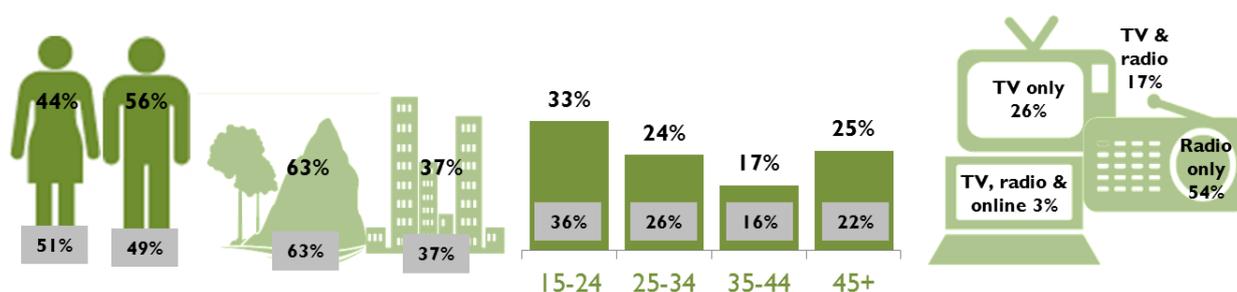
The quantitative midline survey carried out in July 2013 showed that 23% of Kenyan adults aged 15 and above had watched or listened to *Sema Kenya* since its launch in October 2012 – an estimated 5.7 million people across the country⁶. More than two million adults report watching or listening to the programme regularly (at least every other episode).

Sema Kenya achieved a diverse audience, with regular viewers and listeners representing a broad range of demographics (see figure 2 which shows the breakdown of the *Sema Kenya* audience by key demographics alongside the general characteristics of the Kenyan population for comparison). Audiences were also making the most of the range of partner media outlets on which the programme is available, watching it on TV and listening to it on variety of radio stations.⁷

Figure 2: Sema Kenya audience profile

Base: Regular *Sema Kenya* viewers and listeners (280)

Profile of all Kenyan adults highlighted in grey (source: 2009 census)



4.3 The Kenyan governance and media context

Odhiambo-Mbai (2003) argued cogently that since independence in 1963, Kenya has been plagued by bad governance, divisive ethnicity-based politics and violence, violations of human rights, dehumanising poverty, high-level corruption, economic stagnation and the impunity of those in power. Following the introduction of multi-partyism in 1992, initial steps were made towards increasing leaders' accountability to the Kenyan public. However, it was not until 2002 that Mwai Kibaki ended nearly 40 years of KANU⁸ rule with his landslide general election victory. Even then, levels of accountability remained low because the "new" leadership continued to operate in the old ways.⁹

⁵ Informing and educating is a cornerstone of public service broadcasting and BBC editorial values.

⁶ The 5.7 million figure is calculated using the 2012 population estimate for Kenya provided by the Population Reference Bureau of 25 million adults aged 15 and above.

⁷ Season one of *Sema Kenya* broadcast on KTN (national TV channel), BBC Swahili radio and a range of other local and national radio stations.

⁸ The Kenya African National Union (KANU) is a Kenyan political party that ruled for nearly 40 years after Kenya's independence from British colonial rule in 1963 until it lost the election in 2002.

⁹ Many of those making up the post-2002 government had held high-level roles in previous governments.

A new Kenyan constitution came into effect in 2010, introducing a devolved government. Wolfgang Fengler, the World Bank's lead economist in Kenya, described Kenyan devolved government as "arguably the most radical [decentralisation programme] in the world today".¹⁰ He also argued that Kenyans had unrealistic expectations of what devolution would bring and that poorly-managed decentralisation could exacerbate existing tensions in the country.

The report *The Media We Want: The Kenya Media Vulnerabilities Study* (Oriare et al, 2010) revealed that the mainstream Kenyan media has had a reputation for being vibrant and assertive in its role as the "fourth estate". The media contributed significantly to the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992 and regime change in 2002. In fact, the media in Kenya has gained a reputation for exposing corruption, acting as a platform for public debate and being a guardian of the public interest against state power. However, following the post-election violence of 2007-08, parts of the media were widely accused by international and local observers of being complicit in inciting the conflict.

The 2007 Kenya election and its aftermath had a significant impact on the way in which the media approached the 2013 election. Within six weeks of the Election Commission of Kenya declaring incumbent Mwai Kibaki the winner of the 2007 election, more than 1,000 people across the country had died as a result of violence following the political opposition's allegations of electoral malpractice. An estimated half a million people were driven from their homes.¹¹ Analysis following the 2007 election (Abdi and Deane, 2008) highlighted the media's role in inciting this violence. Three of the four Kenyans eventually indicted before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for various crimes during the post-election violence have media interests. One is a local-language radio journalist.¹² The context of the 2013 election and the impact of the media's role in the 2007 election and its aftermath are crucial to understanding the environment in which *Sema Kenya* season one aired. In the next section Joseph Warungu, a Kenyan broadcaster and former head of the BBC's Africa news and current affairs department (and the presenter of *Sema Kenya*) describes the events leading up to the Kenya 2013 election, particularly the apparent impact on the media of the 2007-08 post-election violence.

¹⁰ Fengler, W (December 2011) *Decentralizing Kenya: Four Paradoxes, Africa can end poverty* [online] Available from: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/african/decentralizing-kenya-four-paradoxes> [Accessed 26 September 2013]

¹¹ UN estimate, available from: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/02/11/world/main3815702.shtml> [Accessed 26 September 2013]

¹² Joshua Sang, head of operations at Kass FM, was indicted along with Uhuru Kenyatta, William Ruto and Francis Muthaura.

The Kenya elections, 2007 and 2013

By Joseph Warungu

The 2007 election and its aftermath were very dark moments for Kenya and its media. A BBC Media Action policy briefing published in April 2008 (Abdi and Deane), shortly after the violence had died down and a power-sharing government formed, summarised:

“On 22 January 2008, international reports began to appear, claiming that media, and particularly local language (commonly called vernacular) radio stations in Kenya, were responsible for fanning ethnic hatred and fuelling violence.”

These accusations prompted the Kenyan media to go into a period of self-reflection to find out what went wrong and why, and ensure that lessons were learned so that mistakes would not be repeated. One section of the media that was singled out for blame was local-language (or vernacular) radio. These stations have a huge following – especially in rural areas of the country – and some were accused of inciting fear and hatred, particularly during the post-election violence. The 2008 BBC Media Action policy briefing observed that talk shows provided the greatest opportunities for hate speech and that talk show hosts were not trained in conflict reporting or moderation. The briefing further noted that many in the mainstream media felt that their sector’s performance “... over recent weeks, months and years constituted a collective failure to defend the public interest.”

This internal soul-searching and self-criticism was powerfully articulated by Frank Ojiambo of the Editor’s Guild of Kenya “I wish we could have done a better job”, he wrote in a report published in early 2008 jointly by Article 19, Reporters without Borders and International Media Support.¹ “I feel embarrassed being a journalist... had we played our role as media, perhaps hundreds of people would not have died. Perhaps billions of [Kenyan] shillings [millions of US dollars] would not have gone up in smoke... I have been a journalist since 1974 and I must say that... I have never seen anything as shocking. Journalism is no longer what it was.” He argued that the media in Kenya was “seriously corrupt” and had lost its professionalism.

Five years after the post-election violence that rocked the country in 2007-08, indications were that some of the wider causes of the turmoil were yet to be addressed. In a report released about six weeks before polling day, the International Crisis Group warned that the risk of political violence was still unacceptably high:¹

“Despite the reforms, many structural conflict drivers – continuing reliance on ethnicity,¹ competition for land and resources, resettlement of internally displaced people (IDPs), and poverty and youth unemployment – underlying the 2007-08 violence remain unresolved and may be cynically used by politicians to whip up support.”

There were also concerns about the possible outbreak of violence – another reason for the media to maintain caution. The Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation monitoring group, which was heavily involved in securing sustainable peace, stability and justice in Kenya after the 2008 violence, issued a report shortly before the 2013 election, expressing concern over insecurity in some parts of the country:¹

“Pre-election violence, comprising inter-communal [ethnic] and resource-based conflicts, has caused human displacement especially in some parts of coastal and northern Kenya. Some of those displaced may not vote in the next general election if the situation will not have improved. Some of these conflicts are linked to struggles for political power and, in particular, competition to gain control of the devolved system of government. The causes of anxiety in these areas include pre-election strategies by different communities to gain control of power through the elections. Also, the formation of ethnic alliances at the national level is reproducing similar alliances at local levels, where some community leaders are agreeing on how to share political power or distribute electoral posts. Where competition is intense, violence is also mobilised.”

So it was with a huge sense of responsibility that the media approached the 2013 election. In a public debate assessing the media's performance in the 2013 election, Linus Kaikai, the managing editor of NTV [the national TV channel of the Nation Media Group], said the media was operating in a "very delicate context". Referring to the last election and its aftermath, Kaikai said "the burden of the events of 2007-08 is still very heavy on the shoulders of not just the media but all the stakeholders in the electioneering process in this country." He acknowledged that this therefore made the media over-cautious: "... [given] the context [of] 2007 – who will pull the trigger in 2013? The media was determined not to be the one to take the blame this time if anything goes wrong."¹

The media also had to contend with a complicated election – the numbers involved were mindboggling and posed a logistical challenge for the media, especially in deploying staff in the field. There were 33,000 polling stations, and voters were required to elect a president from eight candidates. Kenyans were also to elect 47 county governors, 337 members of the National Assembly, 47 senators, 47 women's representative to sit in the National Assembly and 1,450 county ward representatives.

In a bid to put 2007-08 firmly behind them, many donor and media organisations such as the Media Council of Kenya and Internews organised training sessions for the media across the country to enhance their skills to cover the election. Many of these initiatives focused on conflict-sensitive and ethical journalism.

When polling day finally arrived in 2013, the Kenyan media was walking gingerly in the shadow of 2007-08, and had been sensitised and trained about peace so much that perhaps peace became everything.

5. The research methodology

This paper seeks to answer the following research question: What was the role of *Sema Kenya* in supporting accountability, peace and inclusion at the time of the 2013 Kenya election? It explores the extent to which *Sema Kenya*, part of a BBC Media Action governance intervention, designed to support more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state-society relations, was able to achieve its aim during the specific context of the Kenya 2013 election.

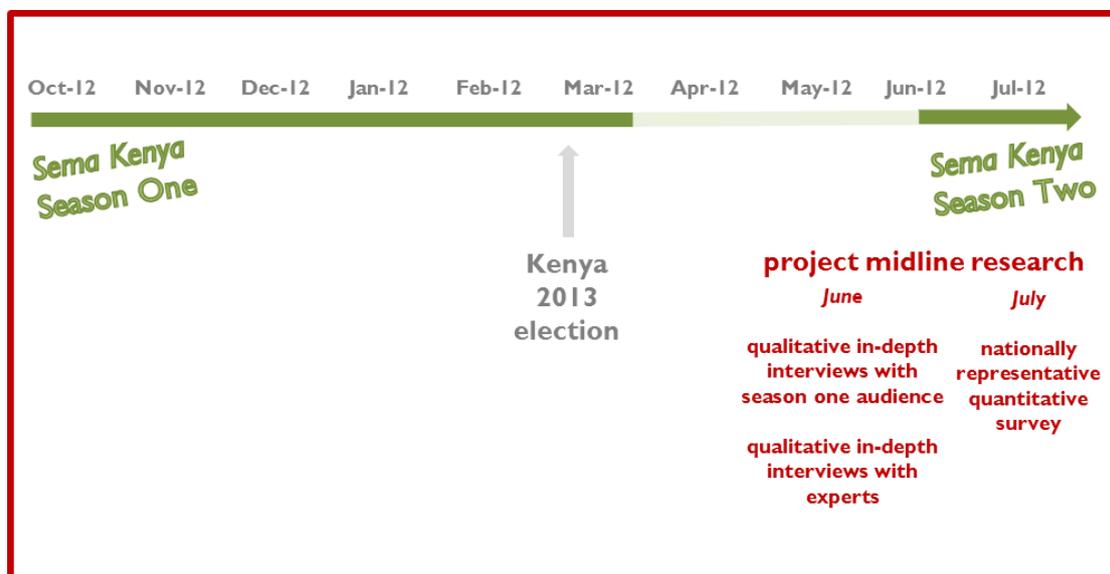
To gain an in-depth understanding of the issues surrounding this question, this paper also examines the overall role played by the Kenyan media in order to identify and contextualise any specific contribution made by *Sema Kenya*.

The paper focuses on data captured as part of the *Sema Kenya* project midline evaluation.¹³ The fieldwork was undertaken largely in the break between season one and two of the programme. The midline research employed mixed methods to provide a clear picture of the project's progress against its objectives. Qualitative methods were used with two sets of participants – an expert panel and general audience members (in June and July 2013). A nationally representative, quantitative survey of adults aged 15 and over was also completed in July 2013 (five episodes into *Sema Kenya*'s second season). Using these mixed methods allowed for the triangulation of data, providing an

¹³ The *Sema Kenya* project is supported by a programme of research to inform and evaluate the intervention. In April 2012 30 focus groups were conducted in all eight regions of Kenya as part of the formative phase of research. In August-November 2012 baseline research consisted of a nationally representative quantitative survey of Kenyans aged 15+ and 14 in-depth interviews with media and governance experts (the first round of the "expert panel").

opportunity to better understand the impact of BBC Media Action programming (Yeasmin and Rahman 2012).

Figure 3: Sema Kenya broadcast and research timeline



5.1 Qualitative research with audiences and experts

A panel of 17 experts was drawn from three overlapping spheres: governance, the media and civil society. Experts were drawn from local, national and international contexts. The panel was initially constituted by BBC Media Action during the baseline phase of the project to explore the potential impact of *Sema Kenya* on the relationship between government and citizens. Panel participants were purposively selected on the assumption that they would be “information-rich” (Patton, 1990), and would have substantive knowledge of the media and governance context in Kenya. Members of the expert panel watched episodes of *Sema Kenya* throughout its first season, which ended three weeks after the election. They were therefore in a position to offer their views on the programme itself as well as other programmes broadcast at the same time.

The qualitative audience sample comprised 24 participants principally recruited from *Sema Kenya*'s season one broadcast audience. Members of this sample were purposely selected from three different areas of the country: Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. All participants were recruited primarily for their exposure to *Sema Kenya* season one (they had to have watched or listened to a minimum of three or more episodes and therefore have good recall of the programme to meet the study sample criteria). In addition, a sample of those not exposed to *Sema Kenya* was included (a quarter of the total) to ensure that the general audience was represented for the purposes of drawing conclusions about the media overall. Key sample criteria included: platform of exposure (TV only, radio only, both, none), age, gender and location type.

Both sets of interviews were semi-structured and were moderated by BBC Media Action researchers using strict ethical guidelines. All the qualitative data was coded and analysed using qualitative analysis software to ensure that no themes were overlooked during analysis and that both expected and unexpected outcomes were explored. During the primary thematic analysis it became

apparent that sections of both the expert and audience data included interesting ways of thinking or talking about particular issues. Accepting that these discourses have power in creating social reality, research analysis included exploring discourses present in the data. This helped to increase understanding of the motivations and perceptions of the experts and audience members interviewed.

5.2 Quantitative audience survey

In addition, a nationally representative midline survey was conducted in July 2013. This is used in this paper to provide contextual information on the Kenyan media landscape and add insight to some of the programme impacts highlighted in the qualitative data. The survey's total sample of 3,006 respondents was nationally representative and interviews were completed face to face, using mobile data collection. Kenya 2009 census data was used to ensure geographical representation in the sampling approach. The same information was used to create a weighting for the final data set to correct small imbalances in age and gender.

6. The role of the media in the Kenya 2013 election

In order to contextualise findings on how *Sema Kenya* was able to support accountability, peace and inclusion at the time of the Kenya 2013 election it is important to explore the overall role played by the rest of the media.

The research reveals that although the media did, to some extent, inform, educate and provide space for dialogue, it also practiced considerable self-censorship because of the way in which it adopted the prevailing "peace" discourse. One expert called this the "peace lobotomy." Many experts agree that overall the media failed to fulfil its role as watchdog, to expose wrongdoings and to act effectively in the public interest.

6.1 Audiences' perceive the media to exert considerable influence during elections

Quantitative audience midline data

Media and communication (radio, TV, press, mobile phones and the internet) were reported as the main source of information when deciding who to vote for during the election for 44% of those Kenyan adults who voted in the 2013 election. Radio came top, with one in four (26%) reporting that this was their main source of information. Radio has more coverage than any other media platform in Kenya, and the country has a vibrant local radio landscape. There was a gap of nine percentage points between radio and the second most common source of information relating to voting decisions – "friends".

Figure 4: Main source of information when deciding which candidates or party to vote for during the election (single response only)

Base: Respondents who voted in the 2013 election (2349)

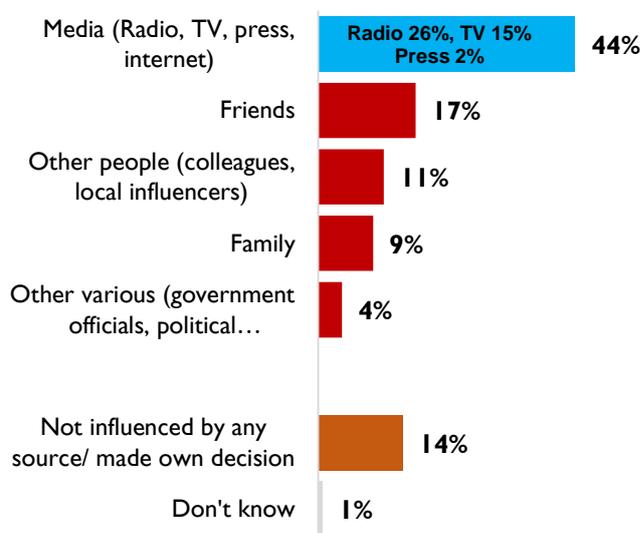
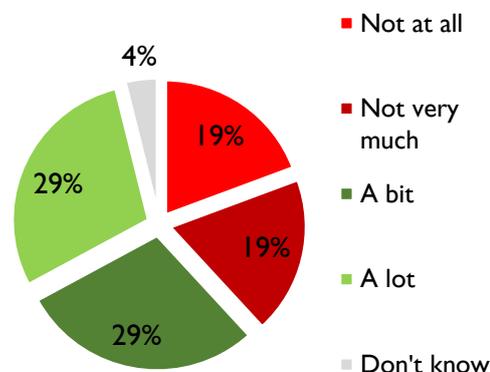


Figure 5: Whether information and debate in the media influence decisions on who to vote for

Base: Respondents who voted in the 2013 election (2349)



The midline survey also showed that more than half (58%) of adult Kenyans who voted in the 2013 election answered that information and debate in the media influenced their decision on who to vote for. While the true extent of this influence is not revealed by the quantitative data, responses suggest that a large part of the Kenyan population believe the media played some role in their voting decisions.

The next section provides further insight into the extent to which the media informed and influenced the election and more generally fulfilled its role in bringing together diverse interests and viewpoints to debate issues of public concern.

6.2 Successful voter education but a lack of depth in analysis

Qualitative audience and expert data, and quantitative audience data

There was unanimous agreement among the experts that the media, at least to some extent, succeeded in informing and educating the Kenyan public. Through various platforms, the media provided detailed information on the electoral process. This information was especially crucial in the context of the Kenya 2013 election as it was the most complicated election ever to be held in the country.¹⁴ The new constitution created new governance structures, such as county governments, that were in turn to be headed by a new level of leadership. The positions of governor, senator and county women’s representative, among others, were created. According to some experts, the media gave people insight into these roles.

“An important role that the media played of course was the... education of the electorate. It was the first time we were having six ballots. It was a novelty. I can’t think anywhere in the

¹⁴ In addition to selecting a presidential candidate, Kenyans were also to elect county governors, National Assembly members (including women’s representatives), senators and county ward representatives. For the first time in Kenya the system of voter registration and voting was meant to be electronic, in order to reduce election irregularities and speed up the process.

world actually it happens... so this was quite unique and the media through the various platforms [played a role] in educating people about what was different from previous elections we have had, about the colour coding and electronic registration, which I don't think many had come to grips with.”
Media practitioner

“[Did the media do a good job?] They did on the side of how to vote and the number of leaders that you will be voting for, they were educating people about this all the time and also they were telling us about the colours of the papers for the different leaders so when you go there you will know which leader you are voting for when you are given the paper.”

Female, rural Kisumu, 25-44, TV only

Many qualitative research participants credited the media for their understanding of how to vote and even how to conduct themselves on election day. Participants also commented on how the media kept the public informed about many logistical aspects before, during and after election day and in the subsequent days of vote counting and tallying.

These findings are validated by data from the quantitative study, which indicated that nine in 10 (90%) Kenyan adults (aged 15+) agreed that the media informed and educated people on their rights and responsibilities (see figure 6).

In addition to information on the technical aspects of the ballot, the media was seen to give insight into pertinent issues related to the election, such as the new constitution, the state of the nation, unresolved issues that awaited incoming leaders and who should be elected. Campaign speeches and election candidates' statements were often analysed by media houses to check their veracity, particularly in news bulletins. Print media such as *The Daily Nation* included pull-outs with facts and issues from different counties.

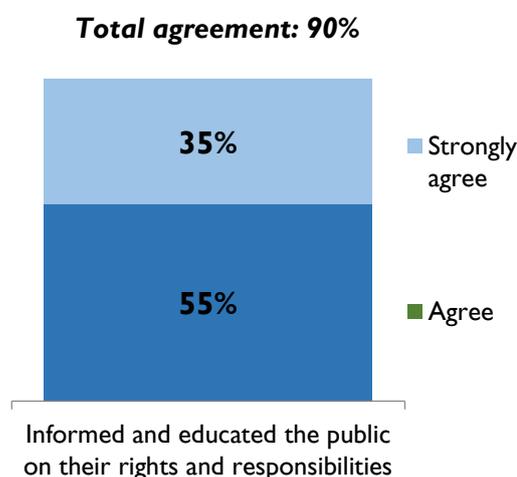
“Some media houses went to the extent of using... campaign rallies to do something like 'fact or fiction' or what is true, what is false, what was said in the heat of the campaign, and generally trying to do fact-checking of what the candidates were saying on the campaign platforms.”

Governance expert

In spite of this, experts criticised the media for not conducting in-depth analysis of election candidates and the issues surrounding the elections. Several experts felt that much of the analysis present in the media was “lacking in depth” and “very sensationalist” (governance expert). Some experts also described how the media was “too obsessed with personality politics and looking at people [politicians] rather than looking at issues” (media, civil society expert). Even when there were attempts to discuss issues, broadcast programmes were poorly researched and lacked proper

Figure 6: Agreement the media “informed and educated”

Base: All respondents (3,020)
Four point agree/disagree response scale used



editorial guidance. Both qualitative research participants and experts commented on the failure of the media in this respect.

“I felt like when they were interviewing most of the leaders, they were just scratching the surface, ‘What do you intend to do for the people?’... You know, if you look at the issues of the IDPs, it was mostly brushed through very fast to kind of avoid any... potential problems.”

Male 15-24, urban Nairobi, TV

The poor handling of interviews with experts, political analysts and candidates and the poor moderation of debates and discussion may have contributed to the impression that there was a lack of in-depth analyses during the election period. Several experts noted that in some programmes, those being interviewed “were allowed to take their own direction,” and that there was no in-depth probing. Hard questions to do with candidates’ track records in leadership, as well as critical analysis of some of their promises and claims, were apparently missing. Even the presidential debates (see box on page 20) were not exempt from this criticism.

“[The presidential debates] were really shallow. It was good that we were having them for the first time, but I thought the moderation was weak and they [moderators] did not probe as much as they could have.”

Governance expert

Findings from the expert panel also pointed to the media’s possible failure in serving all segments of the population. They criticised the technical language around the election and constitution used in some TV and radio programmes, with one governance expert claiming it was inaccessible to the ordinary Kenyan and needed to be “downloaded a bit more” so that the general public could fully understand the issues being discussed.

6.3 Various platforms for interaction between leaders and citizens

Qualitative audience and expert data, and quantitative audience data

The use of different media formats helped Kenyans to interrogate candidates and their platforms, directly and through journalists, political commentators and experts. A media practitioner remarked that the media provided a “medium through which the electorate could interface with the people they expected to elect”.

There was high agreement from midline survey respondents – 86% – that the media fulfilled this function during the 2013 election.

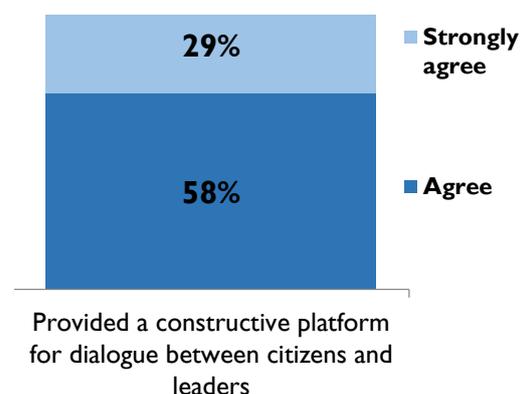
Audience members who participated in the qualitative research also spoke of the way in which the media put the spotlight on candidates and parties, and aired discussion on the issues that

Figure 7: Agreement that the media provided a platform for dialogue

Base: All respondents (3,020)

Four point agree/disagree response scale used

*difference in total due to rounding



Kenyans wanted to see addressed, giving ordinary citizens the chance to put forward their views in the run-up to election day. They mentioned a variety of formats that enabled the media to do this, including televised debates, news and analysis, and political talk shows.

“Through these public debates that they [the media] had organised, I would see that they used to invite the leaders at the local level, like in Kisumu they invited the MPs, the aspirants who were vying for different positions to engage with *mwananchi* [citizens/the common man].”

Male, urban Kisumu, 25-44, TV and radio

The presidential debates

A key media output that played a major role in the 2013 Kenyan election was the presidential debates. A media-led initiative, the debates were broadcast live by eight national TV stations and 34 radio stations with broad reach across the country. For the first time in Kenya’s history, presidential candidates were questioned on various issues of national interest and held accountable for their previous performance in office. For the most part, experts felt that this was one of the more “positive stories around the elections” (social media expert and blogger).

“They [the presidential candidates] all had the same opportunity to project their vision, to show their temperament, to show their ability to debate and [de]liberate concisely, articulately... under the spotlight of the cameras and the broad national audience both on radio, TV and online, and dare I say international audience also, because people all over the world were picking this up including the Kenyan diaspora. The media was then able to put all the candidates on one platform... get them to state their positions on various issues and also get the electorate to give their views... to see these candidates in a different kind of light away from the campaign platform, where they [the politicians] were usually in charge, to a place where they had to give their own points of view based on facts and be challenged by an independent panel.”

Media practitioner

Qualitative data further suggests that audience involvement in media-facilitated discussion before the election may have contributed to those exposed feeling like they had more of a stake in the whole process and a responsibility to fulfil their role in elections (although other forms of discussion, like community discussion, were also mentioned).

The presidential debates were also a highlight of election programming (see box ‘The presidential debates’).

Both audience and expert data shows that the media attempted to hold to account leaders who had been in office in the previous government and attempted to give some insight into how to select the “right” kind of leaders.

“There were a lot of politicians who were profiled and who would not have been profiled before. They [the media] put many women ... [on air], there was a search for a fresh kind of leadership, there was a critical review of the constitution, there was an attempt to hold the politicians... in power accountable.”

Governance expert

[What did the media do?] “Civic education, about what a leader is, how to elect a good leader, the characters... You could learn so much from it and it also tried to update us on how things were working out...”

Male 25-44, urban, Kisumu, non-exposed

However, one governance expert pointed out that although civil society – through TV programmes like *Uongozi* (Leadership) – was encouraging Kenyans to vote for good leaders, “it is unclear exactly who a good leader is in the Kenyan context”. Kenyans have traditionally voted along ethnic lines, and so it was not always clear whether calls for good leaders were based on ethnic underpinnings or more noble but vague characteristics of good leadership. There was agreement among the experts that there was a lack of constructive discussion around what makes a good leader.

Some research participants believed that the media’s civic education attempts were at least partly driven by a desire to ensure that the majority of the population would accept the election outcome, thereby avoiding a repeat of post-election violence.

There was one potentially worrying difference of opinion between experts and laypeople. While experts criticised the quality and depth of the media’s analysis during the election period, audience members who participated in BBC Media Action’s qualitative research credited the media with educating them on how to choose the right leader. This suggests that although experts felt the media had not fully delivered on its obligation to inform the electorate, there were large sections of the audience that felt they had sufficient information from the media to make informed choices. A failure to provide audiences with the in-depth information they require to make informed voting decisions is symptomatic of a much more general failure on the part of the media to fulfil its watchdog function.

6.4 The “peace lobotomy” and the sacrifice of accountability and inclusion?

Qualitative audience and expert data, and quantitative audience data

Across all research samples, by far the most damaging criticism levelled against the media was that it practiced “self-imposed censorship” before, during and immediately after the 2013 election with respect to sensitive topics and topics that might incite violence. Experts described the media as “very cautious”, “very restrained”, “careful”, “reticent” or “hesitant”. They maintained that, “there was too much self-censoring”, and said, “the media lacked courage and objectivity and did not delve deeply enough.” They even mentioned “suppression of stories”.

According to the expert panel, the prevailing “peace” discourse at the time of the election was the fundamental reason why the media self-censored. As the 2007 election had been followed by violence, there was a general feeling in Kenya that violence should be avoided in 2013. As a result, there was a barrage of peace messages from both the government and civil society urging Kenyans to maintain the peace and accept the results of the election. At the same time, the media was reeling from having accepted culpability for the violence that took place in 2007-08 and was determined not to be blamed for another round of violence.

“In the newsroom and media houses, the dominant thinking, particularly because the media was blamed for the 2007 violence, was ‘let’s not get there again.’ Various reports blamed the media, the government ...the church blamed the media, the Waki and Kriegler reports¹⁵

¹⁵ The Waki Commission, officially the Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence (CIPEV), was an international commission of inquiry established by the Government of Kenya in February 2008 to investigate the post-election violence of 2007/8. The Kriegler Commission, officially the Independent Review Commission

tended to blame the media ... these studies tended to mention the media in a blanket way as having played a role in the violence that ensued.”

Media expert

Experts described efforts among media owners to balance the national interest (peaceful elections) against the public's right to know, including avoiding reporting live anything that could incite ethnic tensions. Issues the media appeared unwilling to cover in-depth ranged from election-related issues – such as the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission’s (IEBC) lack of preparation, the failure of the electronic voting and vote tallying systems, and the sporadic violence during the election period – to broader issues such as land and ethnicity. One media expert claimed the media displayed remarkable “unity of purpose”.

“I think most of us bought into the same narrative – protect the integrity of the IEBC, the police and the court – those were the three institutions that will ensure that Kenya remains peaceful, so [if] concerns were raised about the IEBC it was considered as not part of the narrative so it was not aired.”

Media expert

“There was suppression of stories... I had to edit my column before it was published and that has never happened to me.”

Governance expert

While nine in ten Kenyans (91%) agreed that the media set the agenda for peaceful elections, fewer than six in ten (59%) agreed that the media exposed wrongdoings and failings during the election process. The majority (81%) also agreed that the media avoided sensitive issues to avoid inciting controversy or violence.

Quantitative data supports the assertion that audiences generally expect the media to fulfil the role of watchdog, protecting their interests and exposing wrongdoings and failures.

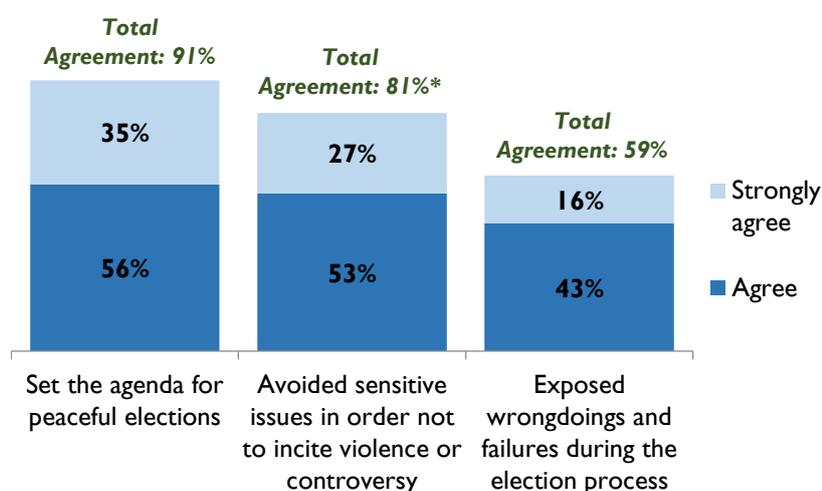
When asked to select the statement that most represented their opinion, almost three-quarters (72%) of Kenyans chose: “Kenyan media during elections should constantly investigate and report on all issues relevant to elections” over

Figure 8: Agreement that the media supported peace and exposed wrongdoings

Base: All respondents (3,020)

Four point agree/disagree response scale used

*difference in total due to rounding



(IREC), was an international commission of inquiry established by the Government of Kenya in February 2008 to inquire into all aspects of the 2007 general election with particular emphasis on the presidential election.

“Too much reporting by Kenyan media during elections on negative events and controversial issues only harms the country”.

Figure 9: Statement that best describes views on media coverage during elections



Base: All respondents (3,020)

5% responded that neither statement described their view, and 3% responded “don’t know”

The experts described the resulting negative effects of the (at the time) prevailing peace discourse as “the tyranny of peace”, “the peace lobotomy”, “peace at all costs” and the “peace caravan”. This discourse is seen to have resulted in the media’s abdication of its responsibility to interrogate issues and leaders and act as a watchdog, exposing wrongdoings and failures and supporting citizens to sanction leaders. Qualitative research participants were also aware of the cost of this peace-building approach to the media’s watchdog role. Audiences indicated some awareness that contentious and sensitive issues and events were avoided completely, or not covered at all.

“I think it [the media] was very obvious in its absence, in its ability to really interrogate, be the watchdog or ask the questions that really needed to be asked. They were operating under conditions of somewhat blackmail. It was an effective ideological moral blackmail.”

Media practitioner

[Did the media provide adequate information?] “They did not, the information from the media was half-baked according to me. They were there, they saw what happened and they knew what was going to happen but they did not report it.”

Male 45+, rural Kisumu, radio

“They were not reporting such things because that would lead to violence... if they would have reported on the chaos then violence would have erupted.”

Female 45+, rural Mombasa, non-exposed

While many experts criticised the media, some experts absolved the media for failing to act as a watchdog, arguing that they were acting out of excessive caution so as not to cause a repeat of the 2007-08 violence. They argue the media itself was the victim of a strong patriotic consciousness and push for peace throughout the country – from the government, civil society and citizens themselves. In fact, these experts, who were in the minority, did not share other experts’ view that the peace discourse had compromised the media. They felt that these accusations were unfair, and that there was a correlation between media behaviour and peace.

“I do not think it is entirely fair [to blame the media]. Media standards must be in line with their context... the truth needs to be told but you must be in the context. I don’t agree with

the criticism... they were to the needs at the time. You cannot blame the media for everything.”

Governance expert

“By and large, I saw a lot of restraint and that is what responsible media should do.”

Media, civil society expert

To some extent these feelings were echoed in the audience research. While critical of the media’s abdication of its watchdog role, many understood this was driven by the media’s (and other key stakeholders’) desire to uphold peace. According to research participants, in addition to educating voters, the media played a significant role in maintaining peace.

These efforts were recognised by audience members as having made a positive contribution to the 2013 Kenya election. Data indicates that audiences believed the peace messages in the media contributed to the absence of election-related violence. The strength and volume of peace-related messages in the media, and the ways in which the audience described the role of the media around election time, also reveal that audiences equate peaceful elections with successful elections.

Qualitative research participants also observed that the peace discourse emphasized the importance of respect for other people’s opinions. This message was, according to research participants, driven by the media’s desire to encourage audiences to accept the outcome of the elections. The media attempted to build an understanding of the “other”.

When asked how the media did this, research participants frequently offered explanations using the same terminology and phrases that appeared in the media at election time. Considering that the research took place several months after the election, this was indicative of the powerful impact of the media campaigns.

[Did the media change the way you behaved?] “I remained calm, I was just in the house following procedures on TV, I did not go out to influence people to do things.”

Female 15-24, urban Kisumu, radio

Despite the views of a minority of experts, and a number of qualitative research participants, who believed that the media acted in a responsible manner, the view prevailed (particularly among four of the experts) that it was not the role of the media to preach peace and that this was an unfair burden on the sector. The fact that Kenyans relied on the media so heavily to ensure a peaceful election reflected the failure of other Kenyan institutions. The majority of the experts thought that the peace discourse contributed to the “delegitimisation of any kind of contestation or disagreement” (governance expert) and a failure to fulfil the media’s expected role of watchdog.

6.5 The leveraging of identity politics to maintain peace

Qualitative audience and expert data, and quantitative audience data

Qualitative research participants described the way that the media leveraged the idea of “one Kenya” advocating that any violence would only bring suffering to, and hold back, the country. The media successfully drew individuals together to maintain peace by highlighting their individual roles and

stake in a national action to maintain peace during the election. This peaceful media approach capitalised on the underlying fear among the general public of a repeat of the 2007-08 violence.

“They preached peace so most of the people were seeing there was no need of fighting because at the end of the day we are the ones suffering.”

Female 15-24, rural Kisumu, non-exposed

In describing how the media achieved this, participants made references to the media’s “preaching” and “promoting” of peace during the 2013 election period. The language used by audience members who participated in the qualitative research reflects findings from the experts, which suggested the “top-down” nature of the peace campaign.

Experts explained that the media gave the impression that Kenyans were inherently violent and that they needed to be bombarded with peace messages so that “they don’t attack their neighbours” (governance expert).

It would appear that while the majority of the peace messages originated from the government and certain civil society organisations, the fear and perceptions of the media and the general public played a role in the powerful escalation of those peace messages into a “peace lobotomy”. The peace discourse appeared to create an environment in which there could be no disagreement. Peace was the imperative, a matter of national importance, and anyone going against the grain was heavily criticised.

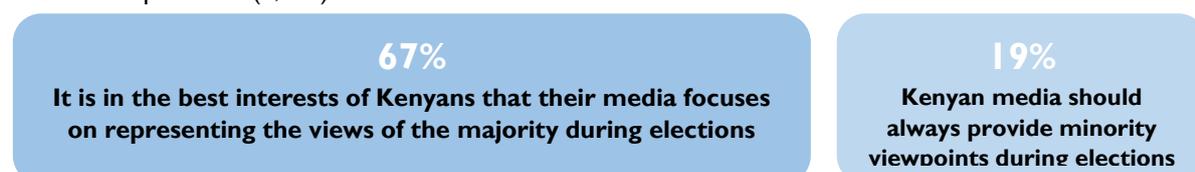
“The peace agenda superseded and engulfed anything else that was at play during the electoral season. The donors and the government were pouring money into peace campaigns. Even we [in civil society] exercised ourselves with restraint, we did not criticise the IEBC, we did not want to rock the boat too much... destroy public confidence in the election. And looking back, it was quite naïve of us.”

Governance expert

The influence of the peace campaign might explain why two-thirds (67%) of Kenyan adults report that the statement: “It is in the best interests of Kenyans that their media focuses on representing the views of the majority during elections,” better reflects their views than the statement: “Kenyan media should always provide minority viewpoints during elections” (19%). What underlies these responses is not entirely clear from the quantitative data. However, this finding might support the qualitative finding that the media successfully leveraged a Kenyan national identity as part of the peace campaign. The fact that the majority (67%) of Kenyans felt it was in the best interests of the country for the media to focus on the views of the majority, rather than the minority, speaks to a perception among Kenyans that a broad focus in the media (rather than an inclusive approach) was in the in the best interests of the country at election time.

Figure 10: Statement that best describes views on media coverage during elections

Base: All respondents (3,020)

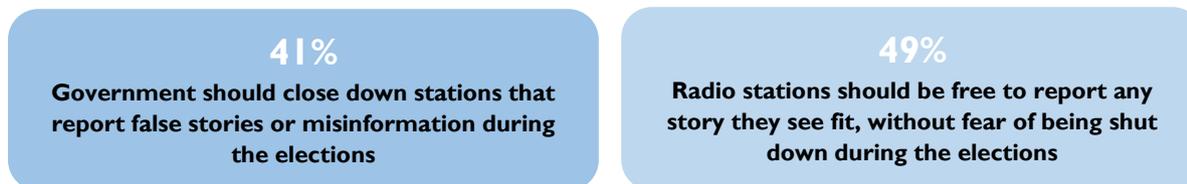


11% responded that neither statement described their view, and 3% responded “don’t know”

Another finding from the quantitative data is that four in ten adult Kenyans (41%) feel the government should close down stations that report false stories or misinformation during the elections. This attitude is likely aligned with the fear that misinformation will incite violence. Notably, the 2010 Kenyan constitution includes clear direction on the protection of freedom of expression as long as it does not incite violence or hatred.¹⁶

Figure 11: Statement that best describes views on media coverage during elections

Base: All respondents (3,020)



6% responded that neither statement described their view, and 3% responded “don’t know”

7. Supporting accountability, peace and inclusion: qualitative findings from election time

This section covers qualitative audience and expert data examining the extent to which Sema Kenya achieved its overall objective of supporting more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state-society relations at the time of the Kenya 2013 election.

Quantitative audience data from the midline survey is not used in this section because the timing of fieldwork meant that survey respondents were recently exposed to season two of Sema Kenya (which launched in June 2013), making the sample unsuitable for analysis specific to season one (which was on air before and just after the election). Preliminary data from the midline, exploring the impacts discussed in this section, follows in section 8.

Figure 12: Empowerment indicators and measures of requiring an account

Indicators	Measures
Awareness of right to take action	People like me are entitled to question government officials about their decisions and actions
Understanding of how to take action	There are ways for people like me to question government officials about their decisions and actions
Intention to take action	If there was a way for people like me to question government officials, I would raise an issue that mattered to me
Achievement of outcome	I am satisfied with the account that government officials currently give of their decisions and actions

¹⁶ Article 33 limits freedom of expression by stating that it does not extend to propaganda for war, incitement to violence, hate speech or advocacy of hatred that constitutes ethnic incitement, vilification of others or incitement to cause harm.

7.1 Supporting accountability – informing and educating audiences

The *Sema Kenya* audience described how the programme fulfilled its “inform and educate” role, as did the media in general around the time of the 2013 election. The programme did this in two specific ways – by providing in-depth, locally-driven information on issues and by improving its audience’s understanding of their rights and role in the democratic process.

“Informative” and “educative” were adjectives frequently used by *Sema Kenya*’s audience to describe the programme, reinforcing the value they placed on its educational content. Experts described the programme’s role as one of “sensitisation”.

“It’s a very educative, informative and interesting programme and they should definitely try it out.”

Male 25-44, rural Mombasa, radio

“I think *Sema Kenya* was a useful tool through public engagement, in terms of the public understanding the issues, understanding the leadership, understanding the kind of country they would like to have, post-election, and one of the best ways in terms of understanding the country is listening to other voters far from you.”

Media practitioner

Viewers and listeners appreciated receiving information on issues through in-depth moderated discussion. They commented that the discussion of issues from diverse geographic areas helped them to understand not only what was happening in other parts of the country, but also how this might relate to their own area. The fact that much of the information was provided through discussion involving people from the affected communities lent *Sema Kenya* credibility – information was seen to be reliable because it was “coming from people’s mouths”.

The programme’s credibility was also strengthened by the skill of the presenter, who was adept at moderating discussion. The community-led flow of information set *Sema Kenya* apart from a large proportion of the media around the time of the election. While audience members did speak of local coverage in the rest of the media, much of that media coverage (and sometimes even its tone), was quite uniform – largely defined by the underlying peace narrative overwhelmingly adopted by the media in general.

“I think [during the election period the programme was] part of the larger mosaic of informing Kenyans and mobilising Kenyans to play an informed part, because if you look at the topics that you were dealing with... all these things are conversations that helped inform, and I think it got people debating and reflecting since after the discussion then the debate begins. So I think [*Sema Kenya*’s] part, just like the other programmes, was significant – you have facilitated dialogue and... many pieces that came together to get Kenya to transit the next level.”

Governance expert

Experts observed the difference between the information provided by *Sema Kenya* and the rest of the media, pointing to how much of the discussion in the rest of the media was about personalities

rather than issues, which should have been investigated in-depth at election time. At a time when even audiences suspected they were not getting the full picture, the information provided by *Sema Kenya* was deemed credible, reliable and relevant.

The programme's audience was in agreement regarding the appeal of the audience-driven discussion and dialogue format – and the opportunity for citizens to contribute “freely”. Frequent use of this term “freely” indicates the underlying perception that other programmes might be controlling or manipulating audience interaction.. Audiences felt that questions raised during *Sema Kenya* were identifiably coming from the audience members themselves, with clear support from the programme's presenter – and not overly controlled or manipulated as in other programmes. This stood *Sema Kenya* apart from many of the other programmes mentioned by the qualitative research participants. Participants rarely described these other programmes as having positive audience involvement in quite the same way. Participants further noted that they would like to see even more questions from the audience, as this generated the dialogue and discussion that they felt most relevant to them.

7.2 Supporting accountability – a constructive platform from which to question

As well as highlighting and exploring the issues experienced in different parts of the country, *Sema Kenya* helped audiences to understand who they should be demanding answers from and raising issues with, by putting these people in front of their communities. In a 2012 paper, BBC Media Action (Larkin and Reimpell, 2012) set out an approach to measuring accountability, identifying four key empowerment indicators for individuals (see figure 12).

There is evidence that for audiences, *Sema Kenya* influenced each of these indicators, and did so during the crucial election period. *Sema Kenya*'s audience described how the programme increased their awareness of an individual's right to question and may have increased their confidence to question those in power.

“You feel like also the audiences who were there... had the power to voice out the issues.”

Male 15-24, urban Nairobi, TV

“The citizens will not be afraid since everyone had been given the ability through that programme to address the government.”

Female 15-24, urban Mombasa, radio

Participants also highlighted two ways in which the programme helped to build understanding of how to take action. Firstly, the programme itself provides a way for Kenyans to question their leaders, underlining the media's role in helping to facilitate public questioning. Secondly, information on the right of citizens to question their leaders, and the mechanisms by which they can do so, is covered in the programme's content. Research participants described this contribution with reference to “Kenyans”, “we” and “people like me”, demonstrating the various ways in which they identify with the people about whom they are speaking. The use of inclusive language points to a resonance both at an individual level and with a national identity.

“I learned that at least Kenyans can be given a chance to air their views and nothing can be done to them, [it is their] democratic right [to] talk without any fear.”

Female 15-24, urban Kisumu, radio

Sema Kenya also encouraged some research participants to raise issues themselves, and actively engage in the process of questioning and demanding answers of their leaders, within the programme and beyond. There was also strong evidence that the programme helped to reduce fear of recrimination, a key barrier to audiences holding leaders to account. There was still a strong perception among a variety of ages that challenging leaders presented risks. The programme directly countered this by providing a safe platform to question and an environment that encouraged and even confirmed that it is an individual's right to question those in power. Alongside this was the access to leaders that *Sema Kenya* provided, putting leaders in front of people in their community to respond directly to questions during the programme. This addressed another key barrier to accountability identified by audiences:

“There is somebody like me and you... when you watch, it kind of inspires you to want to be like this other person, you know it makes you ask yourself – ‘if this person is participating, why am I not participating?’ – because you know most of the time people don’t participate because they feel the political process is for the elites, you know.”

Male 15-24, urban Nairobi, TV

7.3 Supporting accountability – achieving a response

Among a smaller number of qualitative participants, there was evidence that the programme increased their understanding and empowerment not only to question but to seek a satisfactory response and act accordingly if they felt they had not received it. A number of those exposed to the programme said it helped them understand how to sanction leaders who do not deliver on promises, by not re-electing them.

Audience members also described how the media itself, and *Sema Kenya* specifically, can (as a collective force) hold leaders accountable by putting leaders' promises on the record and helping to support the process of highlighting when they are not able to answer for their decisions and actions. This capacity to hold leaders to account is particularly important in the run-up to elections when citizens are deciding on who to vote for.

“... It’s like signing a contract, and it’s like we have evidence that you promised such and such a thing to be realised within a specified time. If they don’t perform, they can be kicked out in the next election.”

Female 25-44, urban Mombasa, TV and radio

“Because you are able to experience what other people from other areas are going through first-hand and get to know this is what is happening and this is what the government is working on, or this is what they promised to do so – it’s a good avenue.”

Female 25-44, peri-urban Nairobi, TV

The qualitative audience data suggests that, so far, the way in which *Sema Kenya* might contribute to holding government to account is by empowering citizens to question and censure underperforming leaders and by providing a platform to facilitate the discussion and dialogue that can support this process – although to what degree this has been fully realised is not clear from the qualitative data. To a lesser extent the data highlights how, over time, the programme might more directly contribute to holding leaders to account by putting leaders' promises on the record and exposing those who do not follow through on their promises.

7.4 Supporting peace and inclusion – constructive moderated discussion

Audience members participating in the qualitative research also noted the diversity of *Sema Kenya's* live audience. Those who had watched on TV described the visible range of demographics present in the audience (age, gender and ethnicity). This did not entirely rely on the visual element provided by TV however, as radio listeners also frequently commented on the diversity, which they were able to determine from audience-member questions and contributions to the discussion. Regardless of the platform through which audiences engaged, a common observation was on the way in which the different groups from local areas were brought together in peaceful, constructive dialogue. That the programme is in the national language, Swahili, further supports the inclusive approach central to the programme's format.

“I also like the fact that they do not discriminate – they ask everyone the questions equally.”

Female 15-24, urban Mombasa, radio

[I learned from *Sema Kenya* that] “you don't have to fear a leader, you can ask any question, Kenyans have a voice, Kenya is a beautiful country, and Kenyans can be peaceful. People try to bring out the worst in us but we are reasonable people... peaceful people aired their views without any friction.”

Female 25-44, urban Mombasa, TV and radio

Audience feedback on the programme's presenter also helps to identify the characteristics that the audience found engaging (and different from other media offerings, particularly around the time of the 2013 election). Moderating the discussion, facilitating audience questions, helping the audience to probe for responses and effectively chairing the panel all worked to facilitate a particular type of dialogue that, according to the *Sema Kenya* audience, was very positive.

“I liked that format because it's a different kind of discussion whereby you have a kind of a mediator who is linking the two of you and it is very important to have that person there – one to control time, and two also to control the content so that they'll make sure you don't get out of [time].”

Male 15-24, urban Nairobi, TV

Several experts observed that, relative to the rest of the media, *Sema Kenya* effectively covered some of the more sensitive issues, like negative ethnicity and IDPs, and that the local slant of the programme stood it apart from the rest of the media around election time.

“The media did not discuss the issues that *Sema Kenya* did so it went further.”

Media expert

“I think *Sema Kenya* stood on its own because it took the media to the people. It discussed very salient issues that the other media did not.”

Governance expert

Sema Kenya's choice to buck the wider media trend was demonstrated during a special election edition of the programme, broadcast several weeks before election day. This programme brought together citizens and senior representatives from some of the institutions identified (by the experts) as playing a key role in shaping the Kenyan election – the police, the IEBC and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). The questions raised by the audience reflected their desire and need for answers on some of the more contentious pre-election issues: the additional police presence in areas with known ethnic tensions and whether or not the IEBCs were actually prepared for election day.

At a time when media coverage and debate was being influenced by a top-down peace campaign resulting in an acknowledged avoidance of sensitive issues by the media in general, *Sema Kenya* provided the public with constructive, moderated, audience-driven discussion. This discussion provided in-depth information on issues chosen by audiences. It presented issues from different areas of the country in ways that made them relevant to audiences elsewhere (sharing learning and exposing commonalities). Diverse groups and viewpoints were represented within the dialogue and opposing views were discussed without friction and in a peaceful, constructive manner. The way that the dialogue in *Sema Kenya* was able to negotiate difference and facilitate inter-group contact potentially supported improved understanding of the “other”.

8. *Sema Kenya* supporting accountability, peace and inclusion: quantitative findings from post-election

BBC Media Action completed the *Sema Kenya* project midline survey of 3,006 Kenyan adults aged 15 and over in July 2013. Season two of *Sema Kenya* had been on air for five episodes at the time. Therefore, the programme's audience, as captured in the midline survey, is a mix of those who reported watching or listening to both season one and season two and those who only watched or listened to season two. For this reason the quantitative data is unsuitable for analysis of *Sema Kenya* at the time of the Kenya 2013 election.

The qualitative approach, which provides the data for earlier sections, was felt to be the most appropriate method for exploring the research question on which this paper focuses. However, the quantitative data does provide further insight into the value placed on *Sema Kenya* by its audience, adding to the qualitative findings specific to season one and the 2013 election context.

The midline data was only just ready for analysis at the time of writing, therefore the data presented in the following section is purely descriptive. Further analysis using inferential statistics is planned.

8.1 Accountability

Sema Kenya's audience reported high levels of agreement with statements describing the effectiveness of the programme in delivering various indicators of accountability. They were most positive about the programme's effectiveness in supporting answerability through providing an opportunity for people like them to question government officials (94% agreement) and they also agreed that the programme brings issues that matter to the attention of government officials (95% agreement).

Although still positive, there were marginally lower levels of agreement that the programme highlighted the provision of incorrect information and exposed wrongdoings and failures of government officials (92% and 86% agreement, respectively). A similar percentage of research participants agreed that the programme supports responsiveness, by making government officials react to the needs of ordinary citizens (90% agreement).

Table 1: Audience perceptions of *Sema Kenya*'s effectiveness in supporting accountability

Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280)

Four point agree/disagree response scale used

*difference in total due to rounding

		Agree	Strongly agree	Total agreement
Overall	Do you agree or disagree that <i>Sema Kenya</i> plays a role in holding government to account?	44%	50%	94%
Answerability	<i>Sema Kenya</i> provides an opportunity for people like me to question government officials about their decisions and actions	58%	36%	94%
	<i>Sema Kenya</i> brings the issues that matter to ordinary citizens to the attention of government officials	58%	37%	95%
Enforceability	<i>Sema Kenya</i> highlights where the information provided by government officials is untrue or insufficient	58%	33%	92%*
	<i>Sema Kenya</i> exposes wrongdoing or failures of government officials	55%	31%	86%
Responsiveness	<i>Sema Kenya</i> makes government officials react to the needs of ordinary citizens	61%	29%	90%

The survey also explored overall empowerment to challenge and hold government officials to account for their actions, using the indicators described earlier in the paper. Table 2 shows overall agreement with these indicators among those who had not watched/listened to *Sema Kenya*, alongside data for regular viewers and listeners.

Regular viewers and listeners were more likely than those who had not watched or listened to *Sema Kenya* to agree that they were “entitled to question” (85% vs. 78%) and to be “satisfied with the account” provided by government officials of their decisions and actions (56% vs. 46%). Regular viewers and listeners of the programme were far more likely than non-viewers and listeners to agree that there are “ways for people like me to question” (78% vs. 60%).¹⁷

Without controlling for confounders (other respondent characteristics which might result in the differences observed), further conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the extent of the association between exposure to *Sema Kenya* and empowerment to hold those in power to account. However, the quantified levels of agreement with the indicators among regular viewers and listeners support

¹⁷ To limit introducing bias these questions are towards the beginning of the survey, prior to any questions about media consumption or the *Sema Kenya* programme.

the findings from the qualitative data, which highlighted how the programme contributed to various aspects of citizens' empowerment.

Table 2: Empowerment to require an account indicators

Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280), non-viewers and listeners (2,332)

[occasional viewers and listeners excluded from this comparison]

Four point agree/disagree response scale used, total agreement (strongly agree and agree) shown

	Total agreement	
	Regular viewers/ listeners	Non-viewers/ listeners
People like me are entitled to question government officials about their decisions and actions	85%	78%
There are ways for people like me to question government officials on their decisions and actions	78%	60%
If there was a way for people like me to question government officials, I would raise an issue that mattered to me	89%	85%
I am satisfied with the account that government officials currently give of their decisions and actions	56%	46%

8.2 Knowledge

Another benefit of *Sema Kenya*, highlighted by the season one audience in the qualitative research, was the opportunity the programme offers for learning. More than nine in 10 of regular viewers and listeners agreed that they had learned something from the programme (92%), that it provides expert information (95%) that is useful to them and that the programme has improved their understanding of key governance issues (93% "a bit" or "a lot").

Table 3: Audience perceptions of *Sema Kenya* and the provision of information

Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280)

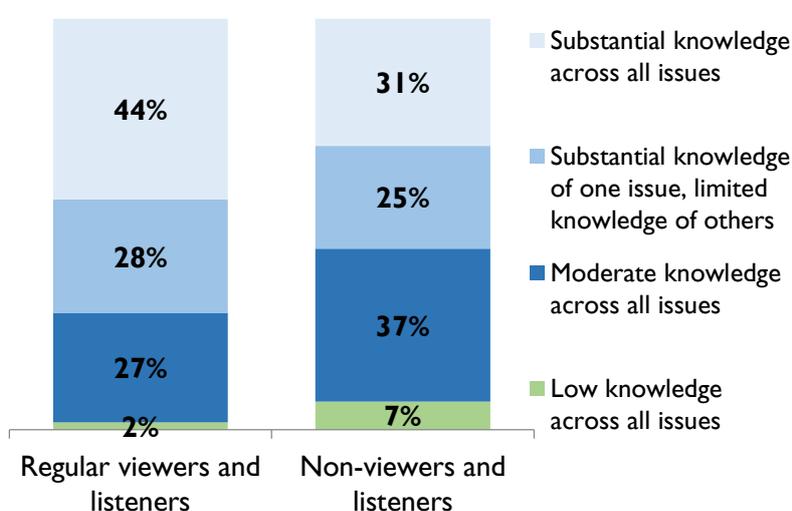
Four point response scale used, only positive categories of response shown

		A bit	A lot	Total
Overall	How much has listening to / watching <i>Sema Kenya</i> improved your understanding about these issues (devolution, security, unemployment and the new constitution)?	32%	61%	93%
		Agree	Strongly agree	Total agreement
Opportunity to learn	<i>Sema Kenya</i> provides expert information that is useful to me	59%	36%	95%
	I have learnt something from the information provided by <i>Sema Kenya</i>	58%	34%	92%
Quality of information	Information from <i>Sema Kenya</i> is accurate	59%	29%	88%
	<i>Sema Kenya</i> provides me with trustworthy information	62%	29%	91%
	Information from <i>Sema Kenya</i> is unbiased	59%	26%	85%

Agreement from the audience that the programme provides accurate, trustworthy and unbiased information is slightly lower (although still extremely high). This may be due to the amount of information provided during the programme that comes through the dialogue and discussion between the audience and the panel. Audiences often mention their caution in believing everything that leaders say and the programme relies on the audience-driven element of the discussion and careful moderation to ensure that the information provided is both stimulating and reliable. This is an on-going challenge for the programme.

Comparing self-reported knowledge of key governance issues among those who have regularly watched or listened to *Sema Kenya* and those who haven't indicates that regular viewers and listeners of *Sema Kenya* felt they were better informed about the governance issues that have featured frequently during discussion on the programme (44% of regular viewers and listeners report substantial knowledge across all four issues compared to 31% of non-viewers and listeners).¹⁸

Figure 13: Self-reported knowledge of key governance issues (devolution, security, unemployment and the new constitution)
Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280), non-viewers and listeners (2,332)



8.3 Peace and inclusion

The majority of *Sema Kenya's* audience agreed that the programme features people like them and covers topics relevant to them (92% and 94% respectively). When looked at alongside the audience profile, this suggests the programme is succeeding in reaching and serving a diverse audience.

Table 4: Audience perceptions of *Sema Kenya* – personal resonance

Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280)
Four point agree/disagree response scale used
*difference in totals due to rounding

		Agree	Strongly agree	Total agreement
Personal resonance	The topics <i>Sema Kenya</i> covers are relevant to my everyday life	52%	41%	94%*
	<i>Sema Kenya</i> features people like me in its discussions and reports	59%	33%	92%

¹⁸ Respondents were asked to report their knowledge of four separate governance issues, those featuring frequently during seasons one and two of *Sema Kenya*, using a four-point scale. These responses were then aggregated to provide an overall measure.

This is further supported by agreement with statements about the nature of *Sema Kenya's* discussion. There was high overall agreement that *Sema Kenya* provides diverse points of view on issues and topics (93%) and that it provides opportunities for different communities to engage in dialogue (96%). These elements no doubt contribute to the similarly high agreement (95%) that the programme helps Kenyans understand each other better.

As noted by research participants in the qualitative research, the programme also demonstrates how sensitive and controversial issues (and opposing views) can be discussed constructively and without conflict. This is reflected in the quantitative data, where there was high agreement that the programme demonstrates a desire to solve rather than escalate conflicts (91%) and that that it covers controversial issues and topics (93%).

Table 5: Audience perceptions of *Sema Kenya's* moderated discussion

Base: Regular viewers and listeners (280)

Four point agree/disagree response scale used

*difference in totals due to rounding

		Agree	Strongly agree	Total agreement
Improved understanding of the other	Helps Kenyans understand each other better	56%	39%	95%
	Provides opportunities for different communities to engage in dialogue	54%	42%	96%
	Provides diverse viewpoints on issues and topics	54%	39%	93%
Peaceful negotiation of difference	Covers controversial issues and topics	64%	28%	93%*
	Demonstrates a desire towards solving rather than escalating conflicts	58%	33%	91%

9. Implications

9.1 Policy learning: The media's role in Kenya's 2013 elections

The EU observer mission in Kenya for the 2013 election surmised that:

“Freedom of speech in the media was respected. The media were active in advocating for a peaceful process. They offered extensive coverage of elections and voters were able to access information about contestants and compare candidates in the broadcast debates. However it is also the case that the major broadcast media filtered potentially disagreeable messages that might not conform to their calls for calm and patience.”¹⁹

¹⁹ The European Union Election Observation Mission to Kenya assessed all aspects of the electoral process: the registration of candidates; the training of election staff; voter education; campaign activities of the candidates and political parties; media coverage; preparations for polling; and the complaints and appeals process. On election day, observers visited polling stations to observe the opening of the stations, voting and

It is apparent from the data collected for this paper that the Kenya 2013 election saw a conflict in media responsibilities between maintaining the peace and exposing failures during the electoral process (acting as a watchdog). The Kenyan media appears to have swung from one extreme in 2007-08 (being complicit in the post-election violence) to the opposite in 2013 (self-censoring to avoid inciting violence).

Aside from the issue of its role in potential violence, the Kenyan media in 2013 has been subjected to some criticism for its perceived failure to deliver on its watchdog responsibilities. Questions are also being asked about the extent to which it is the media's responsibility to foster peace during elections and whether this is compatible with its watchdog role. The longer-term impact of sacrificing this role in favour of the peace narrative remains unexplored.

9.2 Project learning: Media support for state-society relations

While *Sema Kenya* joined the mainstream media in terms of informing and educating the public and providing one of many different platforms for dialogue during the election period, audience members and experts identified some differences between *Sema Kenya* and much of the rest of the media during the election period.

In essence, *Sema Kenya* was not an election programme. This allowed it to tackle local and national governance issues and present a diversity of views and dialogue at a time when the rest of the media maintained a very narrow focus on the election. The impact of *Sema Kenya* may therefore be more sustainable than other programmes broadcast during the election period.

At a time when media coverage and debate was being influenced by a top-down peace campaign resulting in an acknowledged avoidance of sensitive issues by the media at large, *Sema Kenya* provided the public with constructive, moderated, audience-driven discussion. In this respect, *Sema Kenya* was based on quite a different model of journalism, one that allowed citizens themselves to set the agenda. This created an environment where issues, some of which were drivers of conflict (and to some extent avoided by the rest of the media), could be discussed in a constructive and peaceful manner. The audience-driven dialogue also provided more in-depth information than much of the other debate in the media immediately before, during and after the election, which experts felt tended to be personality-led and suffered from poor and superficial moderation. In addition, *Sema Kenya* did not shy away from tackling sensitive issues such as ethnicity and land.

Sema Kenya presented issues from different areas of the country in ways that made them relevant to audiences elsewhere – sharing learning and exposing commonalities. Diverse groups and viewpoints were represented within the dialogue and opposing views were discussed without friction and in a peaceful, constructive manner. The way that the debate in *Sema Kenya* was able to negotiate difference and facilitate inter-group contact potentially supported an improved understanding of the “other”.

While the locally-driven discussion of issues, framed in a way that was relevant to a broad audience, did work towards the “national conversation” mentioned in *Sema Kenya*'s objectives, the extent to

counting. Full report available from: http://eeas.europa.eu/eueom/missions/2013/kenya/pdf/eu-eom-kenya-2013-final-report_en.pdf [Accessed 26 September 2013]

which this conversation was able to build trust in the democratic process at a time when audiences observed the media avoiding its watchdog responsibilities remains unclear. While the project itself was able to successfully incorporate accountability, peace and inclusion, it operated in an environment where the media in general was in some ways sacrificing accountability and inclusion in favour of peace.

The audience and community-driven, moderated discussion in *Sema Kenya* appears to provide substantial opportunity to educate and inform audiences as well as providing a more sustainable “bottom-up” approach to supporting peace and inclusion around election time.

Data explored in this research paper also shows that *Sema Kenya* went some way in fostering accountability before, during and after the election. The qualitative audience data suggests that *Sema Kenya* contributed to holding government to account by empowering citizens to question and sanction under-performing leaders and by providing a platform to facilitate the discussion and dialogue that can support this process. To a lesser extent the data highlights how, over time, the programme might more directly contribute to holding leaders to account, by putting their promises on the record and exposing those who do not fulfil their promises.

It is clear that the factual discussion broadcast programme format has potential to help support individual level empowerment to hold leaders and potential leaders to account. However, questions remain about how far such a programme can go towards achieving accountability.

9.3 Research learning: Considerations for future research

Many of the findings summarised in this paper relate to impact at an individual level only. The data gives some indication of the potential for the programme to impact communities, by helping groups of citizens become more empowered and engaged, by giving them an improved “understanding of the other” and by following up on promises made by power-holders during the programme. As yet, there is little evidence of *Sema Kenya*’s impact reaching beyond the individual level. This should be revisited in subsequent research to fully understand the long-term impact of the programme and its format on increases in governance accountability.

Assumptions were made in the design of the main research underpinning this paper regarding the most suitable methodology to address the research question. Moreover, conducting two different types of qualitative research was intended to provide opportunities for triangulation of data. The level of insight that the qualitative audience and expert data yielded, both with respect to the media overall and *Sema Kenya* specifically, bear out the original assumptions around methodology.

10. Conclusion

The research reveals that the media in the 2013 Kenya election was torn between a responsibility to promote peace (a top-down pressure from authorities and within the media sector) and a responsibility to behave as watchdog and guardian, acting in the public interest by exposing wrongdoings and failures around election time (a bottom-up pressure from the general public). The media appears to have swung from one extreme in the previous Kenya election in 2007, when it was complicit in the post-election violence, to the opposite in 2013, when it self-censored to avoid

instigating violence. This occurred to the extent that the media largely abdicated its watchdog responsibilities.

The research also shows that at a time when the media was avoiding sensitive issues because coverage and debate was influenced by the peace agenda, *Sema Kenya* provided the public with constructive, moderated, audience-driven discussion and arguably more detailed information than other media sources. The impact of *Sema Kenya* may therefore be more sustainable than other media programming broadcast during the election period. By providing a platform for dialogue, where citizens were visibly empowered to question, the programme made a contribution to supporting individuals to hold government officials to account.

The audience and community-driven, moderated discussion in *Sema Kenya* appears to have provided substantial opportunity to educate and inform audiences. Moreover, presenting dialogue and discussion from different areas of the country ensured that the programme was relevant to audiences outside the capital – sharing learning and exposing commonalities. Diverse groups and viewpoints were represented within the dialogue, and opposing views were discussed without friction in a peaceful and constructive manner.

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