

TOWARDS AN EXAMINATION AND EXPANSION  
OF THE AGENDA SETTING THEORY:  
DID THE MEDIA MATTER IN KENYA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, 2007?

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the usefulness of the agenda setting theory in communications research outside its traditional European and American habitat. It examines Kenya (Africa), with the research question: Did the media matter in Kenya's 2007 presidential election? Furthermore, it examines the media's role just before and after the election in Kenya, to ascertain whether the media anticipated the nation-wide violence that rocked the country, and how that event was subsequently covered.

Research results suggest issues, cognitive and affective media agenda setting influence on the public agenda, and positively answered the research question. Respondents also perceived media influence in their choice of political candidates.

This study also found that the media did not anticipate or point to the possibility of a violent outcome from the election, but deeply resorted to peace journalism when the violence erupted and spread. Content analysis and survey were used in the study.

Overall, this research adds to attempts to universalize the agenda setting theory. It shows that the theory is a learning process that affects decisions, not just showing media influence on what their audiences think about. It also points out the failure of the media in not going beyond horse-race issues in an election. On the other hand, it demonstrates the media's capacity as a force for cohesion and unity in times of national tragedy.