

MEDIA PERFORMANCE AND DEMOCRATIC RULE IN EAST AFRICA:
AGENDA SETTING AND AGENDA BUILDING INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the media influence and the government influence on public attitudes on issues concerning democratic rule in the East African Community (EAC). I proceeded under the assumption that the influence of media on public attitudes could be undermined by regional variations in political experiences with the central government; and that public opinion could be shaped by regional alignment, ethnicity, political identity, and level of education. A total of 1,395 respondents from the EAC were surveyed using a multistage cluster random sampling. Results showed that the agenda setting on public attitudes towards regime legitimacy and the rule of law in each region varied across East Africans of different education levels and gender. The most revealing finding here was that EAC governments have a stronger influence on public attitudes towards democratic rule than the news media. This study shows that agenda setting is associated with regime legitimacy but not with agenda building while agenda building is associated with the rule of law and not agenda setting. I conclude that looking only at the role of media in shaping public opinion in East Africa on issues of democratic rule may not be sufficient without considering the government influence and the nature of geopolitical sectarianism in each partner-state.