

# The Sinusoidal Representation of the Kibaki<sup>1</sup> Presidency in the Kenyan Media: 2002-2006<sup>2</sup>

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*If language is lucid, that is enough*

**Confucius**

## **I. Introduction**

Inform, educate and entertain. These three cardinal tenets of journalism are evident both in print and electronic media. In Kenya, for instance, the ever-increasing democratic space since the mid-1990s has triggered off an avalanche of FM stations, myriad journals, newspapers and pamphlets. All these media purport to subscribe to the same mantra of informing, educating and entertaining the public.

But even more importantly, many investors view the democratic expansion as an opportunity for business. The information industry thus becomes a business like any other, whose prime objective is to make money. Within this paradigm, news is a product for sale. Therefore, there is need to create it, fashion it, perfume it (where necessary), package it, and present it for general human consumption. Moreover, the news product has to be marketed aggressively in a context like Kenya's where there is a cut-throat competition between the media houses.

A third paradigm, closely linked to the first two, is political. Here, the media seeks to influence, shape and control public opinion on matters political. In this logic then, the media becomes hegemonic as it attempts to sway public opinion about the government of the day. In brief, the media implicitly or explicitly challenges an existing political order and paves way for regime change.

In this perspective, the press and the presidency are entangled in a deadly game of control. Whose opinion should the general public accept as the truth? Chief executives are wont to control or dominate the press on critical issues in a country. This seems to be the case in countries reeling under the effects of dictatorship, mainly in the developing world. But the trend is also discernible in the so-called developed world. The press is not likely to take things lying down, since it has a stake in the information control game.

The fourth dimension views the media as playing a watchdog role. Here, the media protects the rights of the people against all manner of abuse. It also plays an advocacy role to pressurize the political leadership for positive change. As members of the Fourth

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<sup>1</sup> Mwai Kibaki, Kenya's third president.

<sup>2</sup> This article was made possible by Florence Omtokoh, my graduate research assistant at the United States International University. Many thanks to her for the thorough background research.

Estate, media practitioners carve a niche for themselves as the custodians of the interests of the common people. This job description puts them on a collision course with the powers that be.

Although the four roles may seem distinct they are in fact interrelated. Indeed, the manner in which information is collected, analyzed, packaged, advertised and presented reveals the ideology of the media ownership. The political, economic, social and cultural convictions, thoughts and beliefs of a media ownership distill inadvertently or by design into the final product that is news. This fact explains the "spin" or the "angle" given to a news item when and if it survives a "spike".

The world over, newspapers are labeled as *liberal*, *neutral* or *conservative* depending on the prism through which they analyze events, i.e. their ideological leaning. Many scholars argue convincingly that there is no neutral way of describing news in so far as the reporter has a mind that also interprets what he/she observes as facts (Jacobs, 1999). But, no doubt, if there is a source, print or electronic, that approximates to neutrality, then such a source is more desirable. In any case, perceptions influence our judgment almost all the time; their veracity is yet another matter.

A careful analysis of the press may cast new light on the extent to which a media house can influence, shape, mold or create true or false impressions about a presidency.

## **II. Rationale**

In Kenya, the newspaper is viewed by many as a credible source of information. The information includes news, advertisements, and entertainment. In addition, most Kenyans are more than eager to read the news in order to get the major drift of events in the country. In this manner, the newspaper becomes a critical opinion-shaping instrument.

The import of the press becomes more decisive in the highest office in the land: the presidency. The relationship between the press and the presidency can be cozy and mutually beneficial or coarse and disastrous for one of the parties. It is therefore worthwhile to examine this relationship closely in as much as it has a direct bearing on the future leadership of Kenya. Felicitous press-presidency relations would guarantee safe passage to the Kibaki regime; an ominous rapport will almost certainly portend doom to Kibaki's presidency.

## **III. Scope of study**

The current study will focus on two main newspapers, namely the Daily Nation and the East African Standard, the most-read newspapers in Kenya. The alternative newspapers, being low in circulations will not be reviewed in this research. Moreover, the review does not make any mention of the electronic media, i.e. television and radio. However, it is worth noting that the print media under review here also own television stations. The Nation media group, owner of Daily Nation, also owns NTV, while the East African Standard has KTN. This study makes the assumption that the views

expressed by the two media houses are echoed in both their newspapers and TV stations. But the newspapers are likely to have more impact on Kenyans due to their pricing, availability, and the principle of “sharing a newspaper” that is so common among Kenyan people. On the other hand, television sets are still expensive for the majority of the people. This limits their potential to reach many people, and *ipso facto* their ability to influence them.

#### IV. The methodology

The research involves a linguistic as well as a pragmatic study of words or phrases employed by the media in describing the Kibaki administration. Of particular interest are the describing words like adjectives and adverbs in news items.

The premise is that the choice of words expresses or belies an ideological slant. Therefore by studying words (linguistic) and their context of use (pragmatics), we can begin to understand the ideas, biases and prejudices that a writer seeks to purvey.

In this study, the *Daily Nation* and the *East African Standard* newspapers were examined for words, expressions and sentences that describe or allude to Kibaki’s presidency. The method included physical searches of the newspapers as well as electronic searches via the Internet, since the two are posted on the net.

The period under review is from 2002 to 2006. 2002 marks the beginning of the Kibaki administration. Let us now review each of these newspapers.

#### V. The East African Standard

The East African Standard started in 1902 as a newspaper for and by settlers in colonial Kenya. Ideologically, it was a newspaper for promoting settler interests in a country where the majority of the African people had no rights whatsoever. Disenfranchised, disinherited of their ancestral lands, uprooted from their culture, subjugated and dehumanized, the Africans had no voice in this newspaper.

At the advent of independence in 1963 and subsequent years the newspaper was to evolve to become Kenyan in character and ideology. Although in the minds of many Kenyans, it remained a newspaper for the whites and the nascent African elites.

Under the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi<sup>3</sup> administrations, the EAS, then known simply as *The Standard*, was viewed as a pro-establishment publication. It did little by way of criticizing the political establishment. This may be explained by the fact that it is owned by Kenyan businessmen-cum-politicians. However, this general observation should not drown the fact that in some episodic moments *The Standard* came into confrontation with the powers that be.

In terms of circulation, the newspaper comes second, after the *Daily Nation* and the *Taifaleo*<sup>4</sup>. The latter are products of the Nation Media Group to which we now turn.

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<sup>3</sup> Kenya’s first and second presidents respectively, 1964-78, 1978-2002.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Joe Mbuthia, Chief Sub-Editor, Sunday Nation, for the correct ratings.

## VI. The Nation Media Group

The NMG is by far the most powerful media house in Eastern Africa. Starting as a newspaper championing African interests in 1960, the *Nation* grew in leaps and bounds to snowball in the 1990s into the now imposing NMG. In its fold, it has several newspapers and magazines.

As a crusader for African rights before independence, the *Nation* metamorphosed into a powerful information network to check the excesses of the new African leadership. It became to be identified with voicing the interests of the ordinary citizenry. In this position, it was termed as anti-establishment, and hence its popularity. Since independence, it has been the leading newspaper in Kenya in terms of circulation. For many, it came close to "neutrality". In part, this impression may have been nurtured by the fact that the newspaper is owned by His Highness the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismailia community, whose residence is in France.

NMG boasts a large circulation for each of its newspapers, i.e. the *Daily Nation*, the *Sunday Nation* and *Taifaleo* (published in Kiswahili). However, the *EastAfrican*, also a derivative of NMG, has had mitigated success as a regional weekly newspaper.

Politically, the NMG, previously the *Nation*, has been at loggerheads with the political leadership. Kenyatta like his successor Moi had little patient for the *Nation* and invariably accused it of "serving foreign masters", in clear reference to its foreign ownership. But the newspaper never relented.

In the clamor for multiparty politics in the 1990s the *Nation* was a crusader for more democratic space and therefore it was perceived as anti-government. Similarly, the pressure the NMG exerted in the political arena contributed significantly in the change of regime following the 2002 General Elections. In this perspective, the hegemonic role of the NMG cannot be contested. By contrast, the EAS remained conservative and defended the outgoing regime, probably because it was owned by it.

Mwai Kibaki has been in power since the General Election of December 2002 and this study attempts to analyze how he has been represented by the two leading media houses.

## VII. The findings

### 1. 2002: Victory over dark forces of KANU – Change of guard

The Book of Isaiah (11: 1-9) aptly describes the expectant mood of Kenyans as they voted massively to end the 24-year stranglehold of the Kenyan African National Union (KANU)<sup>5</sup>. Like the haggard and bleary-eyed people of Israel in the Bible, Kenyans were looking for a leader who would be like a river flowing through a desert, a rock to shelter them from strong winds.

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<sup>5</sup> The party that ruled Kenya since 1963.

The Daily Nation (the DN forthwith)<sup>6</sup> notes *Kenyans are looking for a prince to pamper but a chief who will give us our money's worth*. It further talks of Kenyans *putting their broken dreams in Kibaki's pocket*. At last this seems to be the leader that Prophet Isaiah had seen for his oppressed people, and for Kenyans Kibaki was their messianic chief. *It is safe to conclude that Mr. Mwai has won an overwhelming mandate to lead Kenya for the next five years* the newspaper surmises authoritatively. For sure, the 2002 General Election held on 29 December was almost a walk-over for Kibaki.

On 31 December 2002, when Kibaki was sworn in as the third president of Kenya, the newspapers were very clear on what Kenyans expected of the messiah. The DN<sup>7</sup> notes *a jovial Mwai Kibaki left his Muthaiga residence for a historic swearing-in ceremony at Uhuru Park*. It further describes the affair as a *brief, jubilant* ceremony where the standard of president Kibaki was *solemnly* raised. The out-going president, Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, paid a *glowing* tribute to Kibaki describing him as a man of *integrity and courage*. The newspaper notes that Kibaki *will fix the economy* that had been *badly* ravaged by years of misrule and ineptitude.

Here the DN indirectly indicts the Moi regime for the political and economic ruin of Kenya. The time for a turnaround had arrived. Indeed, Kibaki in his applause-laden speech noted *corruption will now cease to be a way of life in Kenya* and sent a clear message to the effect that *there will be no sacred cows in my government*. To conclude the buoyancy and goodwill of the Kenyan people to the new ruler, the DN notes that *NARC's triumph is a journey to the Promised Land*. The quasi-Biblical wait had borne dividends. The prince had emerged from Muthaiga, arguably the richest neighborhood in the country reserved for the blue-blooded post-independence Kenyan elite and the foreign missions.

## 2. 2003: The promise and great expectations – most hopeful nation in the world

The upbeat mood of the country continues into 2003 where more praise is heaped on Kibaki. The East African Standard<sup>9</sup> refers to Kibaki's *resounding victory* and describes the hand-over of power as a *swift and peaceful transition*. However, it is quick to remind the new chief executive of his responsibility: *the ball is now in President Kibaki's court*.

Similarly, the DN<sup>10</sup> describes Kibaki as a *consensus-builder* and a *moderate*. Two days later, the DN<sup>11</sup> talks of Kibaki taking *drastic* measures to ensure that state organizations perform to the expectations. His moves are further described as *intelligent*. The newspaper also quotes the President George Bush of the US *looking forward* to working with the new Kenyan president. Bush notes: *the elections have opened a hopeful new chapter in Kenya's history. The election, he continues, was a testimony of Kenyan's confidence in him* (Kibaki). The hope, Bush is talking about is at an all-time high in the history of the nation. Indeed, around this time, Kenya was voted *the most hopeful nation in the world*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> DN 29 December 2002.

<sup>7</sup> DN 31 December 2002.

<sup>8</sup> National Rainbow Coalition, the party that defeated KANU in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> EAS 4 January 2003

<sup>10</sup> DN 2 January 2003

<sup>11</sup> DN 4 January 2003

<sup>12</sup> Observation gleaned from *Straight Talk Africa* of Voice of America.

In 2003, the EAS is also full of praise for the new king. Indeed, the EAS<sup>13</sup> quotes Mr. Edede, an official of the Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU) as saying that Kibaki's decision to appoint chancellors for public universities was *most commendable*. This was a significant departure from the administration of the two former presidents, Jomo Kenyatta and Moi, who had made themselves chancellors of all public universities.

Kibaki was not yet done with the administration of public universities. Later, he directed that the vice-chancellors would no longer be presidential appointees; rather they will be recruited professionally through competitive interviews. The two major steps endeared Kibaki to the academics in the country and in the Diaspora. The EAS further observes that *the president has done a good thing*.

More symbolically, Kibaki appointed supposedly eminent Kenyans to the positions of chancellors of public universities. In the past, the head of state had been the Chancellor of all public universities. The decision further endeared him to the intelligentsia who saw in it the much-desired disengagement of the Chief executive from Academic affairs of the university.

On corruption, the EAS<sup>14</sup> describes Kibaki as *having a light moment* with the President of Transparency International, Dr. Peter Eigen. This could be construed as a cordial rapport with the anti-graft institution. It further describes Kibaki's position on the matter of graft in Kenya. *I have offered to be the first to declare my wealth, and that is real*, said Kibaki. For those engaging in the practice in his government, Kibaki swore that he would deal with them *ruthlessly*. As for the genesis of corruption, Kibaki noted that *corruption starts from the top*. The promise would prove a tall order in subsequent years. Graft still dogs Kibaki's government, seriously undermining his credibility as anti-graft campaigner.

### 3. 2004: The Disenchantment

In the study of African literature, the period coming in the wake of political independence is aptly referred to as the period of disenchantment or disillusionment. The new African leaders were nothing more than white oppressors in black skins. The hope that had inspired the oppressed Africans died out within a decade as they realized that the new rulers were only intent on maintaining the reigns of power at the expense of redeeming the people. The prophets that Isaiah had in mind had turned out to be ruthless oppressors. Franz Fanon had already anticipated these false prophets in his insightful book, *black skins white masks* in 1954. Were things any different after Kibaki took power?

By January 2004, barely two years after the dawn of the Kibaki era, the Sunday Nation<sup>15</sup> was ready to draw blood. It acrimoniously notes that *for the last one year the president has aimed at nothing*. Again, *the president has no passion for his job*.

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<sup>13</sup> EAS of 18 June 2003.

<sup>14</sup> 24 July 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Sunday Nation 18 January 2004.

The EAS<sup>16</sup> also becomes impatient with Kibaki. It talks of *political sterility* in the country and takes swipes at Kibaki's apparent weak leadership. The newspaper notes *the silence Kibaki has adopted in the face of all these problems threatens to plunge the country into a serious crisis of leadership*. There are many exhortations to the president to stamp out the political fires started by his detractors following the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) debacle (discussed further):

*When the country is in mourning, the president should be the comforter in chief*

*When the country is on fire the president should be the chief fire fighter*

*In a moment of darkness, it is the president who should shine a torch down the tunnel.*

The impression created here is that Kibaki was a lame-duck president, very much like King Louis XVI during the French revolution of 1789 (Peacock 1974). The benign king, unlike his despotic predecessor, was utterly incapable of managing his country's political and economic crises and was subsequently deposed, and guillotined. His queen, the mercurial, imposing and insensitive Marie-Antoinette faced a similar fate. Clearly, the masses do not suffer weak kings kindly.

#### 4. The Constitutional Review Process

The year 2004 was dominated by the Constitutional process mainly at Bomas of Kenya, an expansive Kenyan cultural center on the southern-western fringes of the Nairobi City. Here again were played out all the political differences stemming from the abortive MOU. In the main, the anti-Kibaki group rooted for cropping the powers of the presidency in an effort to transform Kibaki into a *ceremonial* president. On the other hand, Kibaki's group was determined to safeguard a strong executive presidency. But during the entire hullabaloo, Kibaki maintained a deafening silence.

The EAS<sup>17</sup> notes sarcastically that *ever since president Kibaki stopped drinking alcohol, his politics, style of government have become dull and boring*. It further writes that Kibaki in the past had been insulted as a *fence-sitter, an aloof man*, and this was proving to be true. *Never before has his interest in politics been this low*, the EAS continues.

By mid-year, things had not improved. The EAS<sup>18</sup> depicted a government under siege. *President Kibaki and Raila have agreed to have tit-for-tat no-confidence votes in parliament*. By this time, it was clear who was fighting whom. There was the Raila-led group and the Kibaki-led team. Raila was still a minister in Kibaki's government. In the meantime, and for a long time to come, Uhuru Kenyatta<sup>19</sup>, the official leader of the Opposition, would remain largely irrelevant to Kenyan mainstream politics.

The EAS<sup>20</sup> talks of Kenyans being tired of *persistent wrangling* in the government and calls on Kibaki to put an end to it. *It is time for president Kibaki to take the country out of 18 months of paralysis*, it notes.

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<sup>16</sup> EAS, 18 March 2004.

<sup>17</sup> EAS 26 March 2004

<sup>18</sup> EAS, 23 June 2004

<sup>19</sup> Son of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president.

<sup>20</sup> EAS, 30 June 2004.

The year turns sour as the NARC leaders fall apart around the Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU had been signed prior to the 2002 General election by all NARC leaders including Kibaki. Broadly, it specified how political power or the *national cake* would be divided among the NARC leaders upon winning the presidency. However, Kibaki was not in a hurry to respect the terms of the MOU, preferring instead to effect piecemeal changes.

Once in power, Kibaki seemed to have lost interest in the terms of the MOU. His acolytes traversed the country explaining how the MOU was a ruse to get Moi out of power but not a method of sharing power. With this position of Kibaki, the pressure started building up against him from some NARC leaders, especially Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka. The two had been promised the powerful positions of Prime minister and second Vice-president respectively. The heat was now on Kibaki to deliver a new constitution to the country. All eyes were on the new Constitution which, it was hoped, would create the desired positions for the renegade NARC leaders.

The ensuing press war was fierce. All the newspapers wrote extensively on the failed MOU. The EAS even produced a copy of the said MOU. Kibaki was painted as a dishonest, calculating leader who had turned all the lucrative positions to the Meru community, the stronghold of his Democratic Party. Other significant positions, it seemed, had been allocated to the Gikuyu people, Kibaki's ethnic community. This impression earned the Central Province politicians the infamous appellation of *the Mt. Kenya Mafia*. The nation was polarized largely along ethnic lines as Karega-Munene had noted in an earlier article entitled *polarization along ethnic lines*.<sup>21</sup>

Most of the Gikuyu, Akamba and Luhya supported Kibaki's refusal to honor the terms of the MOU. They argued that there was no way Kibaki could appoint an executive Prime minister (read Raila Odinga), since the latter would ultimately usurp his power. On the other hand, other ethnic communities were up in arms as they saw their leaders sidelined in the powerful political lineup. For instance, The Luo community and most of the Coastal peoples were bitter about the MOU. They demanded a new Constitution in order to blunt Kibaki's political edge and grant them their piece of the national cake (read political positions). For most part of the year, the buzz word was *new constitution*.

The EAS<sup>22</sup> launches a salvo at Kibaki about his wealth. It notes that *Kenya's two first families and the family of Mwai Kibaki are the biggest land-owners in the country*. It further dismisses Kibaki as an economic redeemer by noting that *the economy was in better shape during Moi's reign. Today many Kenyans are poor*.

The DN<sup>23</sup> talks of Kibaki *defending his hands-off style of management*. His critics accuse him of *laid-back style* and lack of a *high public profile*. Kibaki is also accused of being *silent* on critical issues like the MOU. The feeling here is that Kibaki is not ruling the country but someone else is, the Mt. Kenya Mafia.

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<sup>21</sup> *Wajibu*, vol. 18, number 1-2, May-July 2003.

<sup>22</sup> EAS 1 October 2004

<sup>23</sup> DN 13 December 2004

### 5. 2005: New constitution and Kibaki Defeat at Referendum

In 2005, John Githongo<sup>24</sup>, the St. George slaying the corruption dragon in Kenya, fled the country and resigned. The EAS<sup>25</sup> talks of the resignation as a *devastating blow to the government's anti-corruption programme*. It further notes that the departure *creates the worst political confidence crisis for Kibaki since he came to power in 2002*. The departure is also described as a *complete disaster for the president*. Kibaki is urged to act quickly to take control of events in the country: *Time has come for Kibaki to demonstrate that there is a herdsman still in the Boma*<sup>26</sup>. The phrase alludes to the leadership vacuum that Kibaki seemed to have created in the country.

In the wake of Githongo's resignation, the DN, in a front page story, declared total war on corruption. Wilfred Kiboro, the NMG CEO, minced no words about the newspaper's commitment to blow the whistle on corrupt officers.

The two newspapers undermined Kibaki's credibility to the core. The attacks by the bilateral donors, namely Britain and Germany, did not make things any better. The Kibaki government was seen as steeped in corruption.

The newspapers carried stories indicting powerful Kibaki ministers as steeped in high-level corruption. These were Mr. Kiraitu Murungi and Dr. Chris Murungaru, Ministers for Justice and Constitutional Affairs and Internal Security respectively. Pressure mounted on the president to dismiss them but he stayed put. The move was misconstrued to mean that Kibaki condoned high-level corruption. The political repercussions were deep and gravely hurt Kibaki's image during the referendum that ensued on the draft Constitution.

The so-called Wako<sup>27</sup>'s Draft Constitution was ready and well-circulated in 2005 in readiness for a Referendum in November. As a result, battle lines were drawn and, to no one's surprise, they replicated the ones emerging from the failed MOU. It was a political showdown between forces allied to Kibaki and those behind Raila Odinga. The campaigns are intense but the anti-Kibaki (read Gikuyu) sentiments are at the Zenith. The colorful and dramatic rallies of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) under the flamboyant mantle of Raila contrast sharply with Kibaki's lackluster and pitiful gatherings. Clearly, the president had no campaign strategy.

John Githongo released his corruption report from London on Kibaki administration the very day the referendum results were announced. The timing could not have been better to discredit the Kibaki administration. The results were as expected. The "no" vote carried the day as the ODM savored victory over the Kibaki group. Put in another way, Raila defeated Kibaki in the national referendum.

Kibaki thereafter "rewarded" Raila and his group by sacking them from his government. The EAS<sup>28</sup> notes that Kibaki *had declared a clean break from referendum politics, saying the country must move on*. For Kibaki, it was *business-as-usual*. However,

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<sup>24</sup> Permanent Secretary for Ethics and Governance

<sup>25</sup> EAS 8 February 2005

<sup>26</sup> Maasai homestead. The Maasai are pastoralists.

<sup>27</sup> Amos Wako, Kenya's Attorney-General.

<sup>28</sup> EAS 13 December 2005

the newspaper notes that *Kibaki had lost touch with what was happening* and by virtue of his cabinet reshuffle *for the first time in history we have a minority president and a minority government*. The newspaper quotes Raila describing Kibaki's clique as *a coterie of hard-line political advisors*. Prof Anyang Nyong'o<sup>29</sup> is less flattering as he notes metaphorically *When animals don't hear or see, they find themselves in a hole*. The referendum results should have been a clear signal for Kibaki. The voters, notes the newspaper, had *handed the government a humiliating defeat by rejecting the proposed constitution*.

The same newspaper quotes Raila describing the politicians consulting with Kibaki as *hungry sycophants behaving like crows scrambling for a carcass*. He further chastises Kibaki by claiming that *Kibaki's minority government was a recipe for continuing political upheaval that bodes ill for all of us*. Raila further warned Kibaki to desist from *playing survival politics*.

#### 6. 2006: A besieged presidency?

The DN<sup>30</sup> while pledging that Kibaki *has our full support in the fight against graft*, also challenge the president to come out clean. It notes *if Kibaki wants to save Kenyans he should save himself and his disciples first*.

The EAS<sup>31</sup> notes boldly that *it is now official that the office of the President is perceived to be the most corrupt*. By the end of the month, the EAS<sup>32</sup> describes NARC as a *fast-fading dream*.

Politically, The DN<sup>33</sup> describes NARC as *breaking rank* with Kibaki as he supports a NARC-Kenya candidate in a by-election. NARC leadership accused Kibaki of *betraying* the voters elected him on a NARC ticket. The newspaper notes that Kibaki became the first sitting president to *abandon* his party in office. The NARC-Kenya candidate won.

The EAS<sup>34</sup> was less forgiving. It described Kibaki as *lacking the goodwill to undertake any changes to the Constitution*. It states that NARC is *non-existent* and that Kibaki was in a *bad coalition*. By supporting a NARC-KENYA candidate, the president *drove the last nail on NARC's coffin*.

Be it as it may, one thing is clear. Since then, the anti-Kibaki forces have now coalesced into the ODM party while NARC has been left as an empty shell. It is not clear whether all pro-Kibaki forces are under the NARC-Kenya<sup>35</sup> umbrella. However, Kibaki seems to have a *soft spot* for this new kid on the block (DN of 2 October 2006).

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<sup>29</sup> Then Minister for Physical Planning.

<sup>30</sup> DN 14 February 2006

<sup>31</sup> EAS 6 July 2006

<sup>32</sup> EAS 28 July 2006

<sup>33</sup> DN 24 July 2006

<sup>34</sup> EAS 28 July 2006

<sup>35</sup> New party for most of Kibaki's supporters.

The Sunday Standard<sup>36</sup> cites an ODM operative, Mutula Kilonzo<sup>37</sup>, claiming that *President Kibaki is scared of ODM-Kenya and that is why he has continuously hurled insults at us in public*. No doubt, the hatchet between Kibaki and the MOU warriors has never been buried.

### VIII. Discussion of the findings

Although these findings are preliminary, it is nevertheless clear that there is a common thread running through them. Firstly, the DN was extremely positive with respect to the Kibaki administration in 2002 and 2003. The EAS is less enthusiastic about the regime change considering its ownership.

Secondly, following Kibaki's handling of the MOU in 2003, both the NMG and the EAS products castigate the government vehemently. The year 2004 overheats with the clamor for a new constitution spearheaded by the anti-Kibaki group. The two media houses are at the forefront in the clamor. Kibaki is seen as denying Kenyans a new constitution in a bid to perpetuate his political domination, and more importantly the Gikuyu are seen as greedy people who do not want to share the *national cake* with other ethnic communities.

Thirdly, the Kibaki administration is far from being media savvy. Its reaction to criticism, both fair and unfair, was and still remains unimpressive. Worse still, at one time, Kenyans did not know the position of the government on any matter. Individual ministers contradicted each other and the president; the government spokesman was contradicted in public, etc...But the worst was when the government attacked the East African Standard media house.

A group of hooded men attacked the media house, burnt newspapers and left with some tapes. Apparently, they drove in vehicles with government number plates. The Security Minister, Mr. Michuki, was hard put to explain who the attackers were. To date, the government has been unable to explain the attack.

Similarly, the Artur<sup>38</sup> brothers' saga was another embarrassment to the Kibaki administration. Who were these two East European, flashy men? Were they mercenaries, as claimed by Raila, brought in to scare or harm the anti-Kibaki group? Were they the men who attacked the Standard media house? Once again, the government was unable to explain the presence of these scary men in the country. Instead of apprehending them, it conveniently deported them to Dubai.

Moreover, the corruption scandals that appeared in the newspapers found very unconvincing responses from the government. On many occasions, the newspapers were baying for blood but the government remained adamant. Scandal after scandal and the state promised to investigate. The newspapers called for resignations from those adversely-mentioned in the graft charges but the Kibaki administration refused to buckle. It was clear that no-one of significance will ever get nailed over corruption.

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<sup>36</sup> Sunday Standard 22 October 2006

<sup>37</sup> Lawyer of Moi, Kenya's second president.

<sup>38</sup> Two strange Armenians who had popped into the scene from nowhere.

With mounting pressure from the media and the politicians a few pro-Kibaki leaders were dropped from government. But this was too little too late. The government appeared to be under siege, at least politically.

In a review by Barbara A. Bardes, Kern et al in *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign policy* note that the influence that the press and the presidency can exert on each other depends on three conditions, namely "the differences in the orientation and characteristics of the various newspapers; the differences in the context of the specific issues; and the differences in the way he (president) and his entourage managed the press relations on these issues" (p.10). The observation rings true in Kenya, more than 40 years after the Kennedy administration.

However, economically, graft-cases aside, the Kibaki administration seems to have delivered the goods. The economy has steadily moved from near-naught in 2002 to 5.8% today. Tax collection has improved with the current budget borrowing only 6% from the donors; the remaining 94% of the national budget is covered by local taxes. Better still, Kenyans have free education for their children, free malarial and HIV/AIDS drugs, operational clinics, better roads and better security. The economy is poised to achieve even better growth in the coming years. To be true, Kibaki seems to be a great economic leader. But in the political arena, the finance wonder boy is in dire straits.

But with a hostile media coupled with very poor media management skills, Kibaki's achievements have been drowned. Not even the state-owned KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) has been able to sell the achievements of Kibaki. In contrast, the anti-Kibaki forces have been better organized and more media savvy. Little wonder then, that they stole the referendum victory from Kibaki.

## **IX. Conclusions**

The media constitute an indispensable asset to any political organization. Positive media messages can propel a leader to power by influencing the voting patterns of the electorate. Conversely, negative messages, whether in the news columns or opinion pieces, can remove a leader from high office.

The media campaigns against the Kibaki regime in the years 2003, 2004 and 2005 succeeded in handing the government a resounding defeat at the referendum. The adversarial rapport between the presidency and the media is not unique to Kenya but a worldwide phenomenon. Indeed, eNotes.History Pass in *1950's Government and Politics: The Press and the Presidency* notes that "The relationship between the executive office and the White house press corps has always been more or less adversarial...". However, the poor management of the media by the Kenyan leadership is likely to further alienate the government from the people.

The government also needs a marketing mechanism to sell its work to the people. As Dr. Alfred Mutua, Government spokesman, put it to me, *selling a product without publicity is as successful as winking in the dark*. The government need to have a think-tank of intelligent, imaginative, high-integrity and highly-motivated Kenyans to advise it on how to market itself appropriately. As it stands, it looks very bad indeed.

In sum, no government should try to ignore the power of the media. It can only do so at its own risk and peril.

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