

Hopeless Republics: An Exploration of International Media Frames in Coverage of African Elections

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Abstract

Countries in Africa have long endured underreported or sensationalized news coverage as images of violence, poverty, and corruption often dominate the international press. Coverage of election processes in the developing world also portrays the continent as hopeless and incapable of democratic elections. This study explored news frames in presidential election coverage in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe by three renowned international news organizations: CNN International, BBC World News, and Al Jazeera. The study applied a two-step content analysis by identifying keywords, sources, news frames, and visual elements like images and videos, in 135 news articles. The author concluded that repetitive news frames of violence, corruption, and regression versus progression reinforce audience perceptions that democracy in these countries is unachievable. Additionally, the author found repeated elements, sources, and narratives of the state of democracy in the sampled African nations across each international network, prolonging stereotypes and narratives that these African countries are hopeless republics.

I. Introduction

On May 11, 2000, the British magazine *The Economist* published a series of controversial articles in an issue titled “Hopeless Africa.” The cover’s artwork featured a civilian holding a large gun in the center of the continent’s layout. One of the articles inside the edition described the continent as one that is ravaged by disease and poverty whose “few candles of hope are flickering weakly” (“The Heart of the Matter,” 2000). It also asserted that Africa is especially susceptible to corruption, brutality, and despotism, suggesting “the world might just give up on the entire continent.” Eleven years later, the publication changed its tone on Africa and published a special report titled “Africa Rising,” with a cover featuring an illustration of a boy flying a rainbow-colored kite in the shape of the continent. In an article titled “A Hopeful Continent,” the publication lists foreign investment as an avenue for salvation (“A Hopeful Continent,” 2011).

The magazine’s contrasting reports reveal two recurrent perceptions of Africa in the news media. The first narrative portrays Africa as a continent plagued by chaos, disease, violence, and corruption. In the second narrative, Africa is portrayed as an emerging region with significant improvements in economy, security, and democracy. Regardless of which narrative is applied, such broad, sweeping depictions of a continent run the danger of systematically reproducing stereotypical, racist and colonial representations of

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Africa (Nothias, 2016). These news frames underscore a lack of depth in understanding the many issues involved in international development, and they can lead audiences to generalize Africa as one country rather than a continent that is rich in diversity and home to 17 percent of the world's population ("World Population Review," 2019). Concerns about simplistic and negative representations are especially at play when international news networks cover elections in Africa. These perceptions date back to the age of colonialism, where colonists used terms like "tribes" and "savages" for the purpose of dehumanizing African natives (Wa'Njogu, 2009). Cook (2013) suggests that these terms follow a Westphalian model, which privileges Western elites and the Eurocentric nation state and their notions of power, ideology, and democracy. The Westphalian paradigm thus separates developing countries from the elite and immortalizes news of African elections in two frames: one captures a move toward a resurgent continent, while the other focuses on social and economic despair (Sy, 2017). While news media have an obligation to report on international conflict, Cook concludes that a lack of analysis and historical context in stories on African election conflict perpetuates the idea that Africa cannot achieve the standards of democracy that the West demands, thus advancing a Eurocentric narrative of power (2013).

This study investigates trends in the framing of news coverage of elections in three African nations by three global news services: *CNN International*, *BBC World News*, and *Al Jazeera*. The author applied a comprehensive content analysis to examine the frequency of frames used in recent coverage of elections in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, and explored the narratives that those frames convey.

II. Literature Review

As background for this study, the author researched scholarly works to determine common frames used by international media when covering African conflict. These previous studies offer historical context that provide crucial understanding in recognizing how the various media frames are applied.

Framing Theory in African Conflict

Serving as one of the most common theories in mass communications, framing theory "selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item prescribed" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The chosen frames place a certain level of meaning on events, which influences audience members' decision-making processes and overall grasp of information. Additionally, media frames provide boundaries around a news story, determining what is newsworthy and what is not (Eze & Elegbe, 2018). In international reporting on conflict in Africa, news frames are often repeated. Research shows that conflict and scandal attract one-sided and repetitive framing, which can be detrimental to an audience's understanding of global issues (Lecheler, Keer, Schuck & Hänggli, 2015). Additionally, news consumers who are exposed to a specific positive or negative news frame tend to search again for this frame and are more likely to discard competitive frames later on (Lecheler, Keer, Schuck & Hänggli, 2015).

One of the most common and incessant news frames for events – especially those involving conflict or politics in Africa – is the so-called third world construct. Common during the Cold War era, the term *third world* refers to any or all of the underdeveloped countries of the world, especially in Asia or Africa that are collectively identified by ideology, ethnic background, or disadvantaged status (Greene, 1980). Subsequently, the term suggested "a world divided into adverse camps-- 'us' versus 'them'" (Greene, 1980, p.14). Within the third world construct are several other news frames, including violence, corruption, economic consequences or benefits, terrorism, human-interest, and regress versus progress.

The violence frame is used to display bombings, post-election riots, sexual assault and rape, war, genocide or religious unrest, among others. It is common that high threshold events, especially political events characterized by violence, are more likely to be featured in the news (Demarest & Langer, 2018). In fact, authors William Hachten and James Scotton (2007) observed that 50 percent of American television coverage of the developing world portrays violence. These frames not only convey the often-inaccurate idea that these countries are plagued with violence, but also may also spur Western nations to offer humanitarian aid (Cook, 2013). Similarly, corruption framing underscores the presumed political and social instability of African democracies. Words describing civilians as "poor" or "impoverished" and political figures as

“oppressive” and “autocratic” are routine in coverage. Nothias (2018) observed that media representations of political conflicts in African states involve negative stereotypes and themes of “ancient hatreds” and “tribalism” to further highlight corruption. Corruption framing may also emphasize a terrorism frame, particularly on stories in regions north of the Sahara and along the Horn of Africa. While terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in West Africa do pose credible threats, this frame may cause non-African audiences to infer that terrorism is a widespread problem across the continent (Lecheler, Keer, Schuck & Hänggli, 2015).

Other frames may appeal to foreign interests, such as those describing economic consequences and benefits, which focus on the economic impact on a group or individual (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Kalyango (2011), who completed an analysis of Ugandan civilians’ reactions to conflict coverage by the West, found that a focus on the downfall of African economies consistently reinforces American ideals and policies. The human-interest frame, also known as “human impact,” refers to an effort to personalize, dramatize, or “emotionalize” the news, in order to capture and retain audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Finally, stories on African conflict often carry a frame of regress versus progress. This refers to the continent’s tendency to either regress in oppression or rise to become a democracy. Kalyango suggests the frame pits the African struggle against the Western world’s dominance and influence, which asserts the West’s authority over the developing world. Harth says this frame “promotes the idea that Africans are isolated from global processes and cannot fix their own political or economic systems unless they are provided foreign aid” (2012, p. 11).

The Role of Colonialism in Coverage

Coverage of Africa is known to systematically produce colonial representations that assert Western dominance. This idea is known as Afro-pessimism, which is defined as a consistently negative view that Africa is incapable of progressing economically, socially, or politically (Evans & Glenn, 2010). Afro-pessimism can be presented in language, ideology, or stereotypes that are symbolic of colonialism’s social, political, and cultural exploitation of Africans until the continent’s decolonization in the twentieth century. The framework for Afro-pessimism presents itself in three ways. First, African countries and its residents are systematically referred to as “tribal” or “ethnic,” which categorizes Africa as “the other.” Second, Africa is presented as one homogenous entity, which results in a false understanding that Africa is one country. Third, Africa can only rely on Western voices for aid (Nothias, 2016). These representations reveal “a tendency to rely on simple, all-encompassing descriptive and analytical language to frame the reporting of the conflict – focusing on tribal and ethnic issues to the virtual exclusion of broader and deeper analyses of factors involved” when it comes to media coverage (Somerville, 2009, p. 527). When the framework for Afro-pessimism is applied to news coverage, audience members may infer that the stereotypes and messaging of various frames apply to Africa as a whole.

Africa in the News

Not only is the reporting on Africa sensationalized, stereotypical, or sometimes falsified, but it also is minimal and often selective. A 2008 investigation of content in foreign news found that Africa represented just 4 percent of coverage in contrast to 76 percent of coverage focusing on North America and Europe. It concluded that Africa is the least covered continent (Wilke, Heimprecht & Cohen, 2012). Another study shows that the American news media devote less time to developing countries than the news media of any other major world power (Dorman, 1986). A justification for this narrow coverage is the costs of newsgathering abroad. After the end of World War II, the number of foreign correspondents decreased from 2,500 to 430. Today, only major news organizations post correspondents overseas. Dorman suggests that as a result, correspondents hop from crisis to crisis, a practice that led to the coining of the term “parachute journalism” (1986, p. 421).

Elections in Africa

As this study examines coverage of African elections, some background on the continent’s electoral processes is important. While many African countries have been able to hold free and fair elections, others have experienced a more chaotic process. Two of the main concerns are election rigging and post-election violence. In a study of Nigerian media and electoral violence, Oboh (2016) found that most of the cases of election fraud occur near the tail end of a voting exercise. Electoral violence follows and occurs for several reasons. First, it hinders people from voting. Second, it prevents a certain candidate from campaigning. Third, it is a public cry of discontent with election results. Finally, it can be a means to overturn the results of an

election by the opposition. The author chose to explore news frames in election coverage in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, which all held presidential elections within the past three years.

Located in West Africa, Nigeria has a population of over 190 million people, making it the most populous country in Africa. The oil-rich nation has one of Africa's largest economies, although it faced an economic crisis in 2014 that caused spikes in unemployment and poverty. The country is divided into 36 states and one federal capital territory. Presidents are elected using a modified two-round system. A candidate must receive a majority of the vote and over 25% of the vote in 24 of the 36 states (Election Guide, 2019). The second round occurs when no candidate prevails in the opening round. In 2019, the two major candidates out of a field of 73 were incumbent Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. Buhari had won the presidency in 2015 with 55 percent of the votes. Post-election violence raised concerns among Nigerians and international election observers; major world powers questioned whether Nigeria was capable of holding free and fair elections. Following a tumultuous election in 2007 of irregularities and violence, fears for future elections lingered. Boko Haram, known as the Islamic State in West Africa, also sought to disrupt election processes, creating a deeper divide between Northern and Southern Nigeria.

Kenya boasts East Africa's largest economy and more than 70 ethnic groups. Kenyans have criticized international news media for their coverage of conflict in their country. A CNN executive flew to Nairobi in 2015 ahead of President Barack Obama's visit to Kenya to apologize for his report, which called Kenya a "hotbed of terror" and suggested that Obama might be attacked during his visit (Mutiga, 2015). But elections in Kenya have historically been violent. After Kenya entered multi-party politics in 1992, electoral violence became common, often a result of ethnic divides. These divisions are a consequence of inequalities associated with allocation of resources, which primarily includes land ownership. Other factors that apply to electoral violence and corruption in Kenya include a high youth unemployment rate, human rights abuses, and a highly centralized and controlled government (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

In Kenya's 2007 election, violence erupted quickly after election results came in. An estimated 1,200 people died and nearly 700,000 were displaced. The 2013 election, which international media reported as surprisingly peaceful, gave Kenya a brief respite from the consequences of its past. But Kenya's most recent election in 2017, which pitted incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta against longtime rival Raila Odinga, would bring other problems. Kenyatta originally won 54 percent of the vote, but Odinga refused to accept the result. Subsequently, Kenya's Supreme Court deemed the results invalid due to voter fraud and a new election began within 60 days. Odinga eventually withdrew from the race, giving Kenyatta another win. Kenyatta has been a controversial politician and was a suspect of crimes against humanity for inciting violence during the 2007 election. Human rights abuses and ethnic divisions continue to play a role in Kenya's development.

For over 40 years, Zimbabwe has been under the control of a military-backed regime and an autocratic president. Robert Mugabe, who was the oldest living head of state at 93 years old, led the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) to victory after years of British colonial rule. But Mugabe's leadership presented decades of challenges for Zimbabwe. Its once robust economy sunk as a result of mismanagement, social services shut down, and the Mugabe regime's human rights abuses crippled hopes for democracy (Latek, 2018). The frustration culminated in an attempted coup d'état amid tensions in the ZANU-PF party. As a result, Mugabe resigned after 37 years as president, which sparked celebrations across the country, and he was replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe's former deputy.

In Zimbabwe's most recent election, Mnangagwa was re-elected in a two-round system. Election observers from the European Union initially disputed the election results, citing voter intimidation and a lack of media coverage for opposition parties and candidates. (Banerjee, 2018). While Mnangagwa promised national reconciliation, security, and economic reform, he is also associated with some of the atrocities committed by Mugabe. Known as "the crocodile" for his political shrewdness, Mnangagwa has been accused of planning attacks on opposition supporters after the 2008 election and was the country's spymaster during Zimbabwe's civil war. Post-election violence and ongoing opposition of Mnangagwa continues to leave the country's government in limbo.

III. Methods

Based on the literature review, the author developed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do major news networks portray election processes in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe?

RQ2: What trends to these news organizations share in their coverage of these elections?

This study applied a qualitative and quantitative content analysis to document the narrative conveyed through international media coverage of elections in Africa from 2010 to present day. The qualitative content analysis focused on the characteristics of language in communication with attention to content or contextual meaning in each article (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A quantitative analysis was used to code news articles into specific categories and measure the frequency of news frames by percentages. Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe were selected for two primary purposes. First, these countries all held a general election within the past three years. Second, they each represent a different region of the African continent: Kenya in Eastern Africa; Nigeria in the West; Zimbabwe in the South. The study coded news articles (comprised of text, video, and photographs) from three widely renowned global news organizations with bureaus worldwide: CNN International, BBC World News, and Al Jazeera. The author also examined other media elements embedded into the articles, including photographs, videos, and the quality of sources.

The three news organizations were selected for this study because they are some of the few news outlets to have foreign correspondents posted throughout Africa. While worldwide coverage of the continent remains shallow, these networks often send correspondents on the scene to follow major events such as civil wars, epidemics, terrorist attacks, and elections.

CNN International launched in 1985 and is now one of the top three global 24-hour news networks. While world headquarters are located in Atlanta, CNNI has 31 international bureaus, with an Africa bureau in Johannesburg, South Africa. Although CNN prides itself on being an international organization, research has shown that audiences perceive CNN as an American network that appeals to American interests. This result is rooted in an idea called the “CNN effect,” which suggests that the network’s compelling images, such as images of a humanitarian crisis, cause U.S. policymakers to intervene in a situation that they may not initially have interest in (Gilboa, 2005). These images and videos often depict war, bloodshed, or disease. But Cook’s research shows that the CNN effect may elicit an opposite response (Cook, 2013). While journalists have an obligation to report on conflict to comply with norms of fairness and neutrality, their coverage further feeds Western interests without sparking any foreign humanitarian action. This result ultimately leaves an audience with permanent images of violence with no possible reconciliation, thus reinforcing the idea that Africa is a hopeless continent.

Unlike CNN, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a public service broadcaster with programs that are funded by government grants (Teng’o, 2008). The BBC World Service broadcasts through radio, television, and an online platform in multiple foreign bases. In Africa, there are 80 FM radio stations and more than 15 bureaus for newsgathering and production.

The BBC is strict on neutrality guidelines, which means there are few editorials. This does not prevent in-depth analyses through various platforms. Some of these platforms have been banned in African countries, forcing BBC correspondents to operate undercover. In 2001, the BBC had a disagreement with Zimbabwe’s information minister, resulting in the ban of all BBC services in the country. In 2008, the BBC could openly and legally report in Zimbabwe without fear of punishment. Despite its dedication to impartiality in reporting in Africa, Gilboa (2005) found that BBC’s coverage has an influence similar to the CNN effect, concluding that BBC’s coverage of Africa often influences British foreign policy and interests.

Unlike *CNNI* and the *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*’s headquarters is in Doha, Qatar. While it is not classified as a Western news organization, it has 21 bureaus around the world, with six bureaus in Africa. The network launched in 2006 and is the Middle East’s first English-language news organization. When on the scene of elections, *Al Jazeera* relies heavily on its correspondents’ reporting, analyses, and perspectives. However, this reporting tends to be parachute journalism, as correspondents are only sent to the scene of the conflict and then leave without follow-up coverage. This approach, according to Musa (2013), has a tendency to raise questions about the credibility of the reports as correspondents’ access to local sources is hindered and their understanding of the local terrain is problematic.

The author selected 15 news articles from each country from *CNN International*, *BBC World News*, and *Al Jazeera*, totaling to 45 articles for each country and 135 articles altogether. All articles were selected at random using search engines from each of the news organizations. The author coded each article for the

following variables: frequency of keywords that portray Africa as violent, corrupt, or hopeless, the frequency of photographs and videos that reflect common media frames of Africa, and the number and quality of sources. The author then calculated these frequencies to compile a list of the top five keywords. The statistics drawn from this study were used descriptively to better understand news framing.

IV. Findings & Discussion

Based on the content analysis, the author discovered several trends in framing. First, nearly half of the news articles included a sentence that suggested these countries' political states are "marred by violence and unrest." Other similar phrases include negative words such as "plague," or "damaged" in headlines or in lead paragraphs.

Second, the articles focus more on the corruption of the voting systems and the candidates than policy. The corruption frame for many of the stories paints these countries as ones that cannot save themselves. Moreover, international observers constantly question the legitimacy of these elections. Fifty-five percent of all articles contained at least one international source from organizations and agencies like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the U.S. State Department, and the United Nations, among others. In one CNN International feature, the journalist writes, "Despite [Uhuru Kenyatta's] popularity at home, he is facing charges of crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court over the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, putting the West in a dilemma in its fight for human rights in the continent." Word choice in these articles suggests that the West carries the burden of democratizing Africa. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of the stories ignored presidential candidates' campaigns to discuss fraud in African voting systems. While these allegations are undeniable in some African countries, these news outlets tend to generalize election systems as representative of the entire continent.

Violence, corruption, and terrorism news frames were commonly used in reporting on Nigerian elections. The corruption frame applied to stories on voting delays and violent clashes in the streets after results were announced. The economic frame referred to Nigeria's plummeting economy and growing poverty rates. This was especially evident in *CNNI's* coverage, which often highlighted the importance of Nigeria's oil industry for the UK and the U.S. *Al Jazeera* and *BBC* were especially concerned with Boko Haram attacks and influence in the country. The most common frame used by all three networks portrayed election violence.

Table 1. Top Keywords in News Articles on Nigerian Elections

RANK	CNNI	AL JAZEERA	BC WORLD NEWS	Total
1	Violence	Violence	Boko Haram	Violence
2	Boko Haram	Security	Militants	Security
3	Security	Democracy	Corruption	Corruption
4	Corruption	Fear	Security	Boko Haram
5	Democracy	Boko Haram	Violence	Militants

Thirty-three percent of all news articles on Nigeria contained at least one image or video depicting bloodshed or violent protests. Additionally, 50% of all articles contained at least one source from a government agency or organization like Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International.

Most of the *CNNI* stories were hard-news stories or breaking news. A violence frame was found in 66% of the articles observed. Headlines and leading paragraphs in *CNNI* articles often portray Nigeria's politics as corrupt and fraught with danger. For example, one *CNNI* article noted that, "In Africa, elections can often be a matter of life and death."

Al Jazeera articles primarily applied corruption, violence, and terrorism frames. Nearly 70% of frames portrayed violence from terrorist attacks or post-election riots. Thirty-three percent of images and videos reinforced these frames. Some articles, however, offered in-depth reporting on the importance of Nigerian elections with graphics of the election and voting processes, as well as a detailed list of some of the primary presidential candidates and their parties. Additionally, 60% of the sources are international observers, including agencies and analysts from Canada and the U.S. Examples of *Al Jazeera* articles also suggest that

violence and corruption in the country is inevitable. “Nigeria has a history of election violence,” noted one article prior to the election, and afterward, *Al Jazeera* reported on “allegations of violence, vote-rigging, and voter suppression.”

The *BBC* offered in-depth reporting on the Nigerian election process before, during, and after elections. The network presented more of a policy frame than the previous networks, but still focused their stories on the effects of Boko Haram on the election, rioting after Atiku Abubakar rejected Muhammadu Buhari’s win in the 2019 election, and a lack of progress in Nigeria’s democracy. While the *BBC* didn’t reveal many of its sources by name, 70% of the sources were statements from presidential candidates. The *BBC* also relied on international organizations such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch for any analysis on security situations in Nigeria. Only 20% of images depicted violence and corruption, but the frames were still prevalent in news stories. For example, one 2019 article asserted that “further bloodshed appears almost inevitable,” while a 2011 article chronicled “allegations of blatant rigging and thuggery,” in past elections.

Articles for Kenyan elections focused on election processes in 2013 and 2017. A violence frame appeared in 60% of all articles sampled. Other common frames focused on ethnic tribes in Kenya, crime, and government corruption. “Violence” and “opposition” were the most frequent keywords used in all articles.

Table 2. Top Keywords in Articles on Kenyan Elections

RANK	CNNI	AL JAZEERA	BBC WORLD NEWS	TOTAL
1	Violence	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition
2	Uhuru Kenyatta	Uhuru Kenyatta	Crime	Violence
3	Opposition	Violence	Violence	Uhuru Kenyatta
4	Raila Odinga	Police	Court	Ethnic
5	Democracy	Ethnic	Human rights	Police

CNNI focused on post-election violence and the controversy regarding Uhuru Kenyatta’s victory. In 2017, Kenya’s highest court confirmed that the election results were “invalid” due to voter fraud and called for a new election. Coverage also focused on the role of ethnicity in elections. Stories did not include many photographs, graphics, or videos unless discussing the status of Kenya’s economy. In 37% of the articles, Western sources from international universities and agencies discussed human rights abuses. *CNNI* articles often suggested a failed democracy in Kenya. For example, a 2013 article noted challenges to the election result “on the grounds that it was flawed and marred by technical problems.” In a 2017 article, the murder of a governmental official “renewed concerns about Kenya’s ability to deliver a credible election.”

Al Jazeera included similar frames as *CNNI* in its coverage. Additionally, 60% of images used by *Al Jazeera* depicted violence such as the use of water cannons and slingshots. Words also reflected the violence frame. “Clashes plague the presidential election in Kenya as questions mount over the country’s political future,” noted one such article in 2017.

The *BBC* included several analysis pieces on the state of Kenya’s democracy, and 80% of the articles included at least one Western source, ranging from analysts, to university professors, to international election observers. A corruption frame, focused on human rights abuses and election crime committed by candidates, appeared in 73% of articles. More than half of the images and videos included reinforced the frame.

Election Coverage in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe’s authoritarian history under Robert Mugabe remained a popular topic across all articles. The violence and corruption frames were found in 72% of the articles. Violence framing applied to stories 62% of the stories, followed by economic and corruption frames. The author also found that a vast majority of articles on Zimbabwe’s election processes presented Zimbabwe as a failed democracy.

Table 3. Top Keywords in Articles on Zimbabwe Elections

RANK	CNNI	AL JAZEERA	BBC WORLD NEWS	TOTAL
1	Opposition	Economy	Violence	Violence
2	Police	ZANU-PF	Police	Police
3	Violence	Violence	Allegations	Economy
4	Security	Security	Economy	Security
5	Economy	Tension	Death	ZANU-PF

Violence and police clashes with protestors appeared in 60 percent of the CNNI images and video content. Common sources in stories included the U.S. Embassy in Zimbabwe's capital and international observers from the European Union. Additionally, *CNNI* articles framed the election in an economic light. "The country is anxious to ensure the elections are considered free and fair to lure back foreign investment and resuscitate its ailing economy," noted one such article in 2018.

Nearly half of *Al Jazeera's* articles were editorials, while the other half included breaking news stories and features. Its articles did not include many visual elements, but still reinforced frames of corruption and regress. For example, one editorial called out "Zimbabwe's objectively problematic and unjust election process," while another asserted that "whoever takes over the reins of power in Zimbabwe is unlikely to change the status quo."

The *BBC* primarily highlighted corruption in voting in their coverage. Over half the articles included at least one image or video showing riots. Western sources were included in 46 percent of the articles, including British journalists and *BBC* correspondents, EU election observers, and human rights representatives. Some of the examples from articles generalize the issues in Zimbabwe politics as a continent-wide problem.

Overall, violence and corruption were the most frequently used media frames for all three countries (Table 4). Some articles used more than one frame, but all three news networks primarily used violence, corruption, and economic frames. The terrorism frame only applied to Nigeria for coverage on Boko Haram (Table 5). While some articles applied a human-interest frame or suggested progress was being made in African democracies, they only make up a small percentage of the articles. Only eight articles out of 135 included content on candidates' policies.

Table 4: Frequency of News Frames for Each Country by Percentage

Country	Economic	Terrorism	Violence	Corruption	Human Interest	Progress
Nigeria	15%	37%	51%	48%	8%	8%
Kenya	22%	6%	62%	60%	6%	8%
Zimbabwe	24%	0%	51%	44%	6%	6%

Table 5: Frequency of News Frames by Percentage

Network	Economic	Terrorism	Violence	Corruption	Human Interest	Progress
CNNI	24%	13%	64%	48%	4%	8%
Al Jazeera	20%	15%	53%	44%	8%	8%
BBC	17%	11%	44%	57%	6%	8%

V. Conclusion

News frames of corruption, violence, and regression that are applied to coverage of African conflict also apply to election coverage. Additionally, the repetitive framing shows that global perceptions of developing countries may not have changed. Moreover, the repetition of visual elements and sources highlights a sense of doubt among international election observers such as the EU and the United Nations. The media's concern over violence and corruption in past elections presents an idea that democracy is nearly impossible to achieve.

This study suggests that the CNN effect transcends *CNN* and reflects foreign policy interests in all three networks. Coverage of African elections further reflects Cook's Westphalian paradigm (2013), which promotes the interests of foreign elites. International news media's use of visual elements and text to encourage humanitarian action serves to heighten the status of foreign powers. The findings also reflect previous studies that suggest news frames reinforce stereotypical, racist and colonial representations of these countries

The framing in election coverage also reveals the amount of importance international media place on stories about African democracies. For example, many of the news articles were all published around the time each election was taking place, demonstrating the use of parachute journalism. This suggests reports on Africa are only newsworthy if it has any impact on foreign powers. Negative representations of election processes and a lack of deep analyses also frame the continent as "the other" and result in shallow reporting of the continent. When these representations are repeated, it is difficult for an audience to challenge those perceptions. While corruption is evident in some democracies, frequent news framing of corruption, violence, and chaos can cause audience members to inaccurately generalize those frames apply to other countries in Africa.

As with any research study, this paper has some limitations. One restriction is the study contained a small sample size of 135 articles. A larger sample size might provide more data that may include content that challenges global perceptions of Africa. However, this limitation may be difficult to navigate, as international coverage of Africa remains scarce. A second limitation is the sample size of countries selected for the study. Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe shared similar election outcomes of alleged election rigging and corruption. An extended study could include countries that held relatively peaceful elections to examine whether frames of violence, corruption, or regression are still present. A third limitation is the paper only mentions framing from international media organizations and does not include reactions from African media or civilians on how they are being covered. This added step for the content analysis could provide a deeper analysis of media frames in African elections.

These limitations also present avenues for further research. A follow-up study could double the sample size and select more countries to observe if negative representations are portrayed in presidential elections that were relatively peaceful. The countries would include a greater variety of election circumstances and locations, including countries above the Sahara. The study could also compare the coverage by international media to coverage by African media outlets to observe similarities or discrepancies in how they report on conflict in the region.

Media misrepresentations can reveal a lack of global understanding of the historical, political, and cultural context of African democracies, and highlight a lack of interest in global development unless it benefits foreign powers. The media should reassess its role in framing these processes and provide solutions rather than perpetuating images of fractured democracies that have no hope of reconstruction.

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