Kenyan Politics: Determinants of Legislators' Coverage in Newspapers' Pictorial News

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Content analyzing 491 photographs, the present research explores whether noninstitutional characteristics (gender, ethnic group size, and seniority) and institutional attributes (party size and political leadership) predicted newspapers' pictorial coverage of 349 Kenyan members of Parliament (MPs) between 2013 and 2017. Findings indicate that political leadership was the overall predictor of the MPs' photographic coverage. The implications of these are also discussed.

Keywords: content analysis, Kenya, newspapers' visibility, pictorial coverage, politicians

Political communication research on the media visibility of politicians has for years largely focused on analyzing newspapers and television content to establish who dominates news coverage (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Tresch, 2009; Veblen, 1981; Wagner & Gruszczynski, 2017; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). Recently, however, there seems to be a slow evolutionary shift in research toward understanding how media images shape coverage of political actors (Boomgaarden, Boukes, & Iorgoveanu, 2016). The shift could be linked to assertions that visual information is as powerful as text (Paivio & Csapo, 1973). As a result, several studies have been undertaken to demonstrate the centrality of "picture superiority" in politics (Barrett & Barrington, 2005; Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011; Wanta, 1998).

In this regard, Coleman and Wu (2015) provide two excellent arguments regarding why politicians' images matter in political communication scholarship. First, many public office seekers are assessed not only on the issue stances they embrace but also on their images—self-presentation, emotional displays, and personal attributes. For instance, in the Netherlands, Aaldering, Van der Meer, and Van der Brug (2018) demonstrate that media coverage of party leaders' character traits affects voters; positive images increase support for the leader's party, while negative images decrease support. Second, in spite of numerous studies on the influence of mediated agendas on politics, most studies examine texts only; however, the news

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media do not deliver words alone. As such, Coleman and Wu (2015) aver that the impact of visuals on people's perceptions is too important to ignore in political communication research.

The increase of visual studies in politics has exclusively been approached from the perspectives of affect-effect, information processing, framing, and second-level agenda setting (Carpinella & Johnson, 2016; Coleman & Wu, 2015; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Redlawsk, 2006)—without a trace of politicians' pictorial visibility in print media in terms of ranking (most-covered) and variables that contribute to their coverage. This is despite the fact that politicians' images have remained a permanent fixture in print media news "ever since journalists first began to irritate kings and popes in early modern Europe" (McNair, 2005, p. 25).

Therefore, to contribute to this research gap, the present study founded on the theoretical perspective of media coverage based on news values examines whether noninstitutional characteristics (gender, ethnic group size, and seniority) and institutional features (party size and political leadership) predicted pictorial coverage of 349 Kenyan members of Parliament (MPs) in four national newspapers between 2013 and 2017.

Studies that examine media and politicians mostly focus on the nature of coverage accorded to elected leaders, especially from the standpoint of media effects theories (Coleman & Wu, 2015; Ireri, 2013; Squires & Jackson, 2010; Tolley, 2016), while giving less weight to variables that propel politicians to news headlines. This is a research area still not fully exploited in political communication, more so in growing democracies like Kenya. Notably, studies of politicians' visibility in news media are lopsided in favor of texts (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Tresch, 2009; van Santen, Helfer, & van Aelst, 2013; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974), ignoring the all-powerful visual ingredient. Even when research focuses on visuals, scholars largely prefer television news (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Graber, 1990; Squire, 1988; Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor, 2010; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011), yet visuals also include still images in print media.

The focus on television visuals while commendable, is somehow unfair considering that newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and have significant influence as agenda setters, particularly in a Global South country like Kenya (Ochieng, 2023). They serve as important sources for studying the visibility of politicians due to some unique characteristics. First, newspapers offer longevity, allowing readers to retain and reference them over an extended period. Second, they have online versions, providing cost-effective access to a wider audience. Third, newspapers actively engage audiences through their presence on online platforms like Twitter and Facebook, enhancing their content and visual choices. Relatedly, like in television news, newspapers' pictorial coverage also makes events more credible and interesting, resulting in "picture superiority" as Coleman and Wu (2015) described (p. 99). Thus, one overarching goal of the present study is to fill the void of the existing literature, which predominantly focuses on visual coverage of politicians gathered from texts and television.

The study is also significant as it sheds more light on the extent to which Kenyan legislators are visible in the national press and which variables predict their coverage—from a pictorial news dimension. Relatedly, the research highlights the extent to which media reporting reflects news values and political reality in Kenya's ever-vibrant political scene—thus contributing to the scholarship on the visibility of political actors in news media from a photography point of view. More important, studies on the visibility of elected

leaders have mostly been undertaken in Western democracies (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Tresch, 2009; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974), with little evidence in the less-developed world like Kenya. The present study also aims to bridge this research gap and could help draw comparisons between Kenya (an African setting) and Western nations on variables that shape media coverage of politicians. Yet with limited studies on the pictorial coverage of politicians, the present work is a useful contribution that could inspire more scholars to explore this research path. In general, the research contributes to the growing literature on the variables that determine the media visibility of politicians advanced by Tresch (2009), Vos (2014, 2016) and in Africa by Ireri (2012), Ireri and Ochieng (2020), and Ochieng and Ireri (2022).

Political Actors in News Media and Literature Review

There are five theoretical perspectives advanced by political communication scholars to explain factors that shape visibility of politicians in news media: Media coverage based on news values, media coverage as a mirror of political reality, political parallelism, media logic, and media economy. Vos (2014) further organized the five approaches around the "typology of micro-level of politicians" (p. 2447) and classified them into two categories: Who a politician is and what a politician does. Who a politician is comprises of noninstitutional attributes (politician's individual background like gender, tribe, nationality, education, and political orientation) and institutional characteristics (political standing like a majority leader in the Senate). These are what Sheafer and Wolfsfeld (2004) categorize as individual-level and institutional-level factors. What a politician does involves political work and media work. Vos (2014) notes that institutional attributes are taken to be naturally important for successful politics, adding that politically, who a politician is should have the greatest impact on the amount of coverage, while nonpolitical traits, such as attractiveness, have become an important factor.

Touching on visual attributes, the focus of the present study, Lobinger and Brantner (2016) observe that the literature identifies three clusters that contribute to politicians' coverage in news media—visual imagery relating to human interaction, visual imagery relating to photographic setting and appearance, and visual imagery relating to photographic production values. The visual attributes relating to human interaction include politicians' activities—or what a politician does (see Vos, 2014). The visual attributes relating to photographic setting and appearance focus on the visible context within the picture frame, for example— the presence or absence of family members (Lobinger & Brantner, 2016). The visual attributes related to photographic production values are a result of the photographer's and the editor's choice of representational techniques, which fall within the media logic theoretical context.

Media coverage based on news values (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), determines the importance of an event or an individual for being included in the news. Caple and Bednarek (2016) conceptualize news values from three perspectives—material, cognitive, and discursive. The discursive focuses on how news value is constructed in texts through multiple semiotic resources, which include images (Caple & Bednarek, 2016), the focus of the present study. Journalists apply their own standards of "newsworthiness" based on audience-centered routines or what is basically deemed acceptable to the consumer (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Thus, it is safe to conclude that the more news values a political actor exhibits, the greater his or her news importance. While this might be the case, journalists have the liberty to decide what angle to take in a news story based on production values such as drama,

timeliness, vividness, color, and terseness (Cook, 1998). In a similar vein, Gans (2004) highlighted four factors that shape sources' access to journalists: Incentives, power, ability to supply suitable information, and social proximity to journalists. In view of this, politicians and journalists engage in what Cook (1998) terms as "negotiation of newsworthiness" (p. 90).

Tresch (2009), who defines media visibility as "media prominence," observes that the elite status of an actor has proven to be an important guideline for the selection of news by the media. In visual reporting, eliteness is signified by showing known and easily recognizable figures (such as political leaders), self-reflective elements like microphones/cameras, media scrum, or people flanked by military or police (Caple & Bednarek, 2016). The news value theory, however, has been criticized for its notion of passive media, which automatically respond to external and presumably objective elements of events (Vos, 2014). Arguing against this viewpoint, Tresch (2009) explains that media outlets do not act passively as their news decisions reflect the organization's own working mechanisms, preferences, and interests—a reflection of media logic and media market theories.

Age, gender, seniority, ethnic group, and attractiveness constitute some of the noninstitutional characteristics. Gender has especially been widely examined (Hooghe, Jacobs, & Claes, 2015; Omojola & Morah, 2014; Wagner, Trimble, Sampert, & Gerrits, 2017). In Canada, Wagner and colleagues (2017) found that gender does not influence the media visibility of party-leadership hopefuls. But in Europe, Hooghe and colleagues (2015) reported that women politicians receive less coverage than their male counterparts, while in Nigeria political coverage shows a gender differential that is lopsided in favor of men (Omojola & Morah, 2014).

Relatedly, Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover (2009) observe that Bulgarian male politicians receive significantly more photographic coverage than their female counterparts. Likewise, a 10-year study examining coverage of politicians in Austria during political campaigns arrived at similar findings (Hayek & Russmann, 2022). When it comes to ethnic group, Ireri (2012) found that Kenyan MPs from the five big ethnic communities received more coverage than those from smaller ethnic groups.

Seniority is another widely researched characteristic (Kahn, 1991; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). Sellers and Schaffner (2007) found that seniority of senators in the United States attracted greater interest and media coverage. Similarly, Cook (1986) reported seniority as a central determinant of media visibility before or after the introduction of televised floor proceedings. In Kenya, seniority predicted the coverage of 349 MPs between 2013 and 2017 (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020). Thus, it appears reasonable to conclude that "politicians with more political experience have more authority and therefore pass the media gates more often" (Vos, 2014, p. 2448). However, this might not be the case in some instances because other studies show that seniority does not necessarily determine the visibility of politicians (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008; Fogarty, 2008; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974). Therefore, this literature review paves the way for the following hypotheses:

H1a: Gender predicts MPs' pictorial visibility in national newspapers' news.

H1b: Ethnic group size predicts MPs' pictorial visibility in national newspapers' news.

H1c: Seniority predicts MPs' pictorial visibility in national newspapers' news.

Turning to institutional characteristics, political standing, such as being a party leader, committee chair, or belonging to a major party, has remained a central fixture in studies of politicians' visibility in the media (Fogarty, 2008; Gershon, 2012; Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Midtbo, 2011). Studies have demonstrated that political standing is strongly associated with the coverage of politicians in news media (Arnold, 2004; Gattermann & Vasilopoulou, 2015). Gattermann and Vasilopoulou (2015), for instance, found that political office and party leadership had a positive effect on the news visibility of members of the European Parliament.

In Kenya, Ireri (2012) reported that being a cabinet minister had a significant effect on the coverage of MPs in the national press. Still in Kenya, political leadership emerged as a major determinant of MPs' visibility (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020). Similarly, Arnold (2004) reported that being a party leader has a positive and significant effect on the visibility of political actors in news. Weaver and Wilhoit (1974) found that the committee prestige of American Republican senators produced a significant effect on total news magazine visibility. Sellers and Schaffner (2007) reported that committee and party leaders won more coverage compared with non-leaders. Thus, this literature review leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a: Party size predicts MPs' pictorial visibility in national newspapers' news.

H2b: Political leadership predicts MPs' pictorial visibility in national newspapers' news.

The Kenyan Newspaper Landscape

Liberal-commercial, authoritarian-development, and advocacy-protest are the traditions that characterize the development of the press in Kenya. The main features of the liberal-commercial are privately owned media that are competitive, commercial, and independent from government censorship (Heath, 1997). Under this tradition, the news media act as watchdogs of the government and provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about public affairs (Heath, 1997). Thus, in this context, Kenyan newspapers provide an important arena for robust public debates on democratic reforms, government accountability, observance of human rights, and respect for the rule of law (Choto, 2019; Kagwanja, 2019; Odote, 2020; Onyango-Obbo, 2019).

The main assumption of the authoritarian tradition is of mass media as powerful forces of influence and persuasion (Ellul, 1965). This model was prominent during the 24-year reign of former president Daniel Moi—between 1978 and 2002. Like other African authoritarian regimes, Moi used the media as a weapon to propagate his political agenda—creating a harsh environment that constrained media freedom (Aling'o, 2007; Ireri, 2015; Kalyango, 2011). When it comes to the advocacy-protest tradition, it is grounded in enlightenment notions of human rationality, popular sovereignty, and free marketplace of ideas (Heath, 1997). Though this model became visible following Kenya's transition from single-party politics to pluralism in 1991, it is still very active today as newspapers remain at the forefront of advocating for democratic reforms (Choto, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Ireri, 2015).

In political parallelism, Kenyan newspapers have no ideological leanings that clearly differentiate them (Obonyo, 2003). Instead, their political leanings are influenced by ownership, ethnic considerations, and business interests (Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009). While newspaper circulation stands at 22.3% (Media Policy

Research Center, 2015), the Nation Group and Standard Group dominate the print media industry. The former owns *Daily Nation, Sunday Nation, Saturday Nation, Business Daily,* the *East African,* and *Taifa Leo*—a popular Swahili-language daily publication*.* The latter publishes the *Standard, Sunday Standard,* and the *Nairobian*. Both *Daily Nation* and the *Standard* are the staples of print journalism in Kenya. They control between 87.0% (Media Council of Kenya, 2021) and 88.9% of the national readership (Media Policy Research Center, 2015). The *Standard* is the oldest mainstream newspaper, established in 1902. Founded in 1960, *Daily Nation* is the most influential newspaper in the Eastern Africa region and the agenda setter of news in Kenya. It controls 55% of the newspaper circulation (Media Policy Research Center, 2015).

Mediamax Network Group and Radio Africa Group are the other organizations in the newspaper business—publishing *People Daily* and the *Star*, respectively. The former was established in 1993 as *People Weekly* but transformed into *People Daily* in 1998, and on July 1, 2014, it became Kenya's first free newspaper. During President Moi's regime, the publication served as the mouthpiece for the opposition—reporting on stories that *Daily Nation* and the *Standard* feared to write about (Obonyo, 2003). When it was launched in 2007, the *Star* was known as *Nairobi Star* before its rebranding to the current name in 2009. Following its relaunch in 2016, it now prides itself as Kenya's political newspaper for the digital age. Kenya also has several magazines, weekly newspapers, monthly newspapers, and what is commonly referred to as the "gutter press"—well known to carry sensational stories touching on politics and sexual affairs. The gutter press is poor in writing, editing, layout, printing, and photographs.

The Kenyan Parliament, 2007–2017

Kenya remained a one-party state from independence in 1963 to 1991, when Section 2A of the independence constitution was repealed to usher in pluralistic politics. The only exception was when the Kenya People's Union attempted to compete against the ruling party—the Kenya African National Union in the late 1960s. Since independence in 1963 to date, ethnic identity remains the fulcrum around which politics revolve in Kenya (Oloo, 2015)—majorly dictating who gets elected to a political office. For instance, the competition for presidency and other influential elective positions has been dominated by the five major ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba)—a signifier for the place of ethnic identity in Kenyan politics.

In the 2007 elections, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party captured the majority of the seats in Parliament. The vast majority of the MPs were from the Luo, Kalenjin, and Luhya ethnic groups. ODM's presidential candidate was Raila Odinga—a Luo. Mwai Kibaki—a Kikuyu and the candidate for the Party of National Unity (PNU) won the presidency. Both PNU and ODM won the vast majority of parliamentary seats in their ethnic base regions of Central and Nyanza, respectively (Asingo, 2015; Ngau & Mbathi, 2010; Oloo, 2015). In stark contrast, neither of the two parties won a single parliamentary seat in each other's ethnic base, further demonstrating the centrality of the ethnic identity factor in Kenyan politics and elections.

Two major ethnic coalitions competed for presidency and other elective positions in the 2013 watershed elections—Jubilee Coalition and Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD; Asingo, 2015; Nyong'o, 2015; Oloo, 2015). Jubilee was dominated by two ethnic groups—Kikuyu under The National Alliance (TNA) party, and United Republic Party (URP) affiliated with Kalenjin ethnic group. The CORD

brought together ODM (a Luo party), the Wiper Democratic Party (WDP) for Kamba, and Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-K) for Luhya. The parliamentary seats were shared as follows among the parties constituting the two ethnic coalitions—ODM (93), TNA (86), URP (72), WDP (25), and FORD-K (10; Asingo, 2015).

The two coalitions remained during the 2017 elections. CORD changed its name to the National Super Alliance (NASA) but maintained the same ethnic alliance of 2013 constituted by ODM, WDM, and FORD-K and brought onboard Amani National Congress and Chama Cha Mashinani (Oloo, 2020). Jubilee Coalition transformed into the Jubilee Party, which continued to enjoy the support of the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. Jubilee won 171 parliamentary seats, ODM 76, WDM 23, and (FORD-K) 12 (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, 2017).

Gender is the other notable demographic in the Kenyan Parliament, specifically women's representation. The percentage of women in Parliament has risen from a paltry 1.2% in 1969 to 21.8% in the 2017 elections (Mitullah, 2020). Before the 2013 elections, the number of women in Parliament stood at 10% (22/222) but rose to 21.8% (76/349) in the 2017 elections (Mitullah, 2020), with three counties electing women as governors (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, 2017). The low numbers of women in the Kenyan Parliament are attributed to various socioeconomic and political barriers, including the patriarchal culture; the widespread perception of politics as a dirty game, which involves violence; high levels of poverty among women; and limited presence in the key decision-making organs of political parties (Nasong'o & Ayot, 2007; Oduol, 2015).

Methods

Quantitative content analysis was employed to establish the pictorial coverage of 349 MPs over a four-year period in *Daily Nation,* the *Standard, People Daily*, and the *Star*—all national English newspapers. However, only 182 MPs (52.2%) appeared in the photographic news during the period under analysis. Of the 182, 149 (81.9%) were male legislators and 33 (18.1%) females. Content analysis is the most suitable data-collection technique for the present research because political communication scholars have successfully used it to study politicians' visibility in news media (see Danielian & Page, 1994; Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Ochieng & Ireri, 2022; van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006).

The four newspapers were selected for this study because they enjoy a wide national circulation. *Daily Nation* is the most influential newspaper and the agenda setter of news in Kenya and commands more than 55% of the newspaper circulation (Media Policy Research Center, 2015) and a national readership between 53% and 59% (Media Council of Kenya, 2021, 2022). The *Standard* is Kenya's oldest newspaper and the second most popular after *Daily Nation*, and its national readership falls between 22% and 28% (Media Council of Kenya, 2021, 2022). *People Daily* is the only daily free newspaper, with a readership of 5% (Media Council of Kenya, 2021). The *Star* prides itself as Kenya's political newspaper in the digital age and enjoys a readership of 3% (Media Council of Kenya, 2021).

The sampling period was between April 9, 2013, and April 9, 2017—a four-year time span that covered the first term of President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration. The period was suitable because the

2013 election ushered in a new era of leadership known as "devolved system of governance" (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020, p. 8). Kenya's constitution, promulgated in 2010, introduced 47 devolved units of governance in addition to the traditional central administration, which was in place since independence in 1963. Also, this was the period when the provisions of the new constitution under the devolved governance were penciled in to be fully implemented and MPs were expected to play a significant role in shaping the future of devolution. As such, the important contributions of MPs during this period qualify as fertile ground to examine their pictorial press coverage.

Six constructed weeks samples were developed for each newspaper. This sampling technique was suitable for the present research because Luke, Caburnay, and Cohen (2011) established that sampling a minimum of six constructed weeks was the most efficient procedure for both one- and five-year populations in content analysis. Six constructed weeks also ensure that the findings have external validity. Constructed weeks' samples involve identifying all Mondays and randomly selecting one Monday, then identifying all Tuesdays and randomly selecting one Tuesday, and so on to "construct" a week that ensures that each source of cyclic variation, that is, each day of the week, is represented equally (Lacy, Riffe, Stoddard, Martin, & Chang, 2001).

The six constructed weeks resulted in 156 newspaper editions (*Daily Nation* = 42; the *Standard* = 42; *People Daily* = 36; the *Star* = 36). *People Daily* and the *Star* do not publish on weekends, hence the fewer editions. The 156 editions yielded 491 photographs of MPs. Of the 491 photographs, 150 (30.6%) appeared in the *Standard*, 145 (29.5%) in the *Star*, 102 (20.8%) in *People Daily*, and 94 (19.1%) in the *Daily Nation*. Only printed editions of the four publications were used in analyzing the photographs. The selection involved identifying all news photographs in which an MP appeared. Photos related to sports, entertainment, lifestyle, and analysis were excluded. Sports photographs were excluded because in the Kenyan media, it is very rare to find politicians' coverage in events of this nature. Entertainment, lifestyle, and analysis were excluded as their coverage is not guided by the principle of objectivity in journalism practice as is the case with straight news—the focus of the current research.

Based on the study purpose, a total of six variables were scrutinized—one dependent and five independents. The dependent variable was an MP's pictorial visibility in newspapers, while the independent variables were ethnic group size, gender, big party affiliation, political leadership, and seniority. Over the years, political leadership and seniority have been widely examined in studies of politicians' visibility in news (Cook, 1986; Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1974).

"Newspaper visibility" is the amount of coverage that a political actor receives in the four newspapers' photographic news coverage. "Big ethnic group" identifies a politician who belongs to one of the five dominant ethnic communities in Kenya—Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo, Kamba, and Luhya. "Big party" means a politician affiliated with one of the four major parties at that time—TNA, ODM, URP, and WDP. "Political leadership" designates an MP who chairs a parliamentary committee or holds a senior party position. "Seniority" applies to MPs who have served for more than two terms in Parliament, including the one under examination. Visibility, big ethnic group, big party, seniority, and committee or party leadership were measured within each picture, which was the unit of analysis. Thus, a single photograph could carry more than one MP or independent variables.

Before undertaking the content analysis, a pretest was administered using 15% of the 491 photographs. Two coders highly familiar with Kenyan politics were used to code the photographs. This activity yielded a mean kappa's reliability of 1.0 across the five independent variables (gender, party affiliation, seniority, political leadership, and ethnic group affiliation). This means that each variable yielded a perfect reliable coefficient of 1.0. To establish the predictors of politicians' coverage in the four publications, an ordinary least-square regression analysis model was developed that included ethnic group size, gender, party size, political leadership, and seniority.

Findings

In the 156 editions of the four newspapers, there were 182 MPs who featured in 491 photographs, which were distributed as follows: The *Standard* 150 (30.6%), the *Star* 145 (29.5%), *People Daily* 102 (20.8%), and *Daily Nation* 94 (19.1%). This translates to a mean appearance of 2.7 per legislator across the four publications. Of the 491 photos, 424 (86.4%) and 67 (13.6%) were of male and female MPs, respectively. And by demographics and related characteristics, of the 182 legislators, 112 (61.5%) belonged to the five dominant ethnic groups, 151 (83.0%) were affiliated with the four major political parties, 34 (18.7%) held positions of political leadership, and a vast majority were male (149; 81.9%).

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c stated that gender, ethnic group size, and seniority predict MPs' pictorial visibility in the four newspapers. Table 1 shows that none of the three independent variables predicted the coverage of the 182 MPs in pictorial news: Gender ($b = .14, p > .05$), ethnic group size ($b = .03, p > .05$), and seniority ($b = .07, p > .05$). As such, H1a, H1b, and H1c are not confirmed. When it comes to institutional characteristics, H2a and H2b predict that party size and political leadership are determinants of the MPs' coverage in newspapers' pictorial news. As reported in Table 1, only political leadership emerged as a predictor of the MPs' coverage ($b = .28, p < .05$); party size did not ($b = .10, p > .05$). Hypothesis 2a is therefore not confirmed, while H2b is supported. Thus, because political leadership determined the media coverage of the MPs, it could mean that institutional positions attracted journalists in their selection of who to include in the pictorial news compared with demographic attributes, hence diminishing the influence of noninstitutional characteristics in visual news inclusion. Also, it appears that in Kenyan newsrooms, the eliteness of an MP is an important guide to the visual coverage of elected leaders.

Table 1. Predictors of MPs in Newspapers' Pictorial News.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	.55	.77		.71	.480
Political leadership	2.12	.58	.28***	3.64	.000
Gender	1.05	.55	.14	1.91	.058
Party size	.79	.56	.10	1.41	.162
Seniority	.47	.51	.07	.92	.359
Ethnic group size	.20	.44	.03	.45	.654

Note. Adjusted $R^2 = .10$; $F(5,182) = 4.81$; $N = 182$.

Discussion

This discussion focuses on four important outcomes: (a) the centrality of institutional attributes in defining the pictorial news coverage of politicians in Kenya's "high-octane politics" (Ireri & Ochieng, 2022, p. 426), (b) why ethnicity did not predict the pictorial coverage of the MPs (despite being at the core of Kenyan politics), (c) the place of gender in the coverage of the MPs (as it emerged second as a predictor of coverage though not statistically significant), and (d) why close to a half of lawmakers (167) failed to make it into pictorial news. As the findings demonstrate, political leadership is the main variable (institutional attribute) that shaped the four newspapers' visual coverage of the 182 politicians. Wolfsfeld (2011) likens political leadership to political power, which translates into power over the news media. In the present context, it could mean that Kenyan MPs' institutional positions trigger more interest from journalists compared with their demographic backgrounds—thus undermining the place of noninstitutional characteristics in the pictorial coverage of political actors.

From a theoretical perspective, the important role of political leadership in the photographic reportage of Kenyan politicians could be seen through the prism of media coverage based on news values. This theoretical dimension determines the importance of an event or an individual to be included in the news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Thus, the prominence and prestige of a political actor seem to be an integral guideline to the visual coverage of Kenyan MPs—because their actions directly affect the nation's policy agendas. What this implies is that newsrooms' gatekeepers in Kenyan journalism exploit the news value of "prominence" (in the political power hierarchy) in deciding which politicians should appear in the national press pictorial coverage.

For example, from the 491 photographs of the 182 MPs, the politician ranking first is Aden Duale (then MP for Garissa Township constituency)—the majority leader in the National Assembly of Kenya. Similarly, six of those in the top 10 of the photographic news coverage held positions of leadership (as committee chairs or party officials), again demonstrating how political prominence matters in news reporting. It means that the majority leader—courtesy of holding a ranking position in Parliament enjoys greater newsworthiness than his or her fellow elected colleagues—something that attracts journalists. To further solidify this argument, Vos (2014) has observed that the more news values a political actor exhibits, the higher his or her newsworthiness in the mass media menu. In a nutshell, the elite status of a politician has proved to be an important guideline for the media while selecting him or her to be in the news (Tresch, 2009). Figures 1, 2, and 3 give examples of some of the most visible Kenyan MPs, courtesy of their political leadership.

Figure 1. Aden Duale, then MP for Garissa Township constituency in Garissa County, served as the majority leader in Kenya's 11th National Assembly—a political leadership position that always attracted media coverage. He ranked number one in the photographic visibility of MPs during the period under study—April 9, 2013, to April 9, 2017. In this photograph of April 14, 2016, Duale was briefing the media at Parliament Buildings in Nairobi. Photo courtesy Njau (2016).

Furthermore, the importance of political leadership (institutional attributes) in news media coverage of elected leaders is not new in political communication literature, only that the current evidence comes from pictorial coverage, which is an under-researched area. Numerous studies demonstrate that politicians who hold highly regarded positions in governance architecture attract significant media coverage (Vos, 2013, 2016; Wagner & Gruszczynski, 2017; Wolfsfeld, 2011). For instance, analyzing a 20-year coverage of the U.S. Congress, Wagner and Gruszczynski (2017) reported that party leadership and committee chairs predicted media visibility. Therefore, political ranking, for example, chairing a parliamentary committee, remains a central determinant of politicians' media coverage. This is because political standing is an important attribute that attracts coverage from journalists who select the politicians to include in the news.
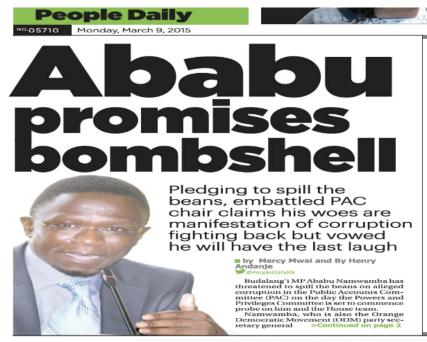
Figure 2. During the period under analysis, Ababu Namwamba, then MP for Bundalang'i constituency in Busia County, served in several prestigious positions of leadership including ODM secretary general and chair of the influential Public Accounts Committee in Parliament. He ranked number two overall in the pictorial coverage of MPs. Photo courtesy **People Daily** *(2015).*

Relatedly, though ethnic identity drives the election of politicians in Kenya, it was not a significant predictor of their pictorial coverage. A good example is Aden Duale, then MP for Garissa Township constituency, who ranked first in the pictorial coverage of the legislators even though he belongs to a small, marginalized ethnic group in the North Eastern region. Thus, Duale might have been propelled to the apex of news headlines because of being the majority leader—the senior-most leadership position in Kenya's National Assembly. By being in charge of a powerful political office, Duale and colleagues in similar leadership positions had a great influence on the policy-making and legislative processes, which made them more attractive to the media.

That ethnicity did not predict the coverage of the lawmakers could suggest that the ethnic backgrounds of Kenyan journalists do not necessarily influence their photographic coverage of politicians they share the same ethnic affiliation with as reported by Ireri (2012). Rather, it could be a pointer to the independence with which Kenyan journalists carry their editorial responsibilities in choosing who to include in pictorial news. Similarly, because the vast majority (91%) of Kenyan journalists are trained in journalism or mass communication (Ireri, 2018), while selecting photographs for news, they put a high premium on the concept of objectivity, a key principle in journalism training and practice. Similarly, it also could suggest that in the media coverage of politicians during nonelection cycles, the power of ethnicity is watered down as it competes with other multiple variables, which might fit well into journalists' criteria to be included in the news. As such, the four newspapers'

gatekeepers might have given more attention to a variable like political leadership, which seems to be a stronger factor for MPs' inclusion in the news, as opposed to ethnic group size.

The findings also challenge the long-held assumption that political actors' news visibility comes with seniority. This goes against the expectation that senior politicians have a better working relationship with journalists, an association that could accord them enhanced coverage. For the Kenyan MPs seeking to take advantage of the pictorial effect on their visibility, it is safe to conclude that ethnic group affiliation or seniority does not necessarily matter in attracting media coverage. Thus, going forward, politicians are better advised to compete for political leadership so as to enhance their media visual coverage.

Interestingly, that media coverage based on news values (institutional factors) plays a central role in the press pictorial visibility of Kenyan politicians is contrary to findings of two similar studies (Ireri & Ochieng, 2020; Ochieng & Ireri, 2022) that examined the text coverage of MPs and county governors over the same sampling period. In both studies, the researchers concluded that media coverage as a mirror of political reality (politicians' activities) was more pronounced in determining politicians' visibility in news stories (texts) compared with media coverage based on news values. Thus, in the Kenyan journalism practice, it is fine to conclude that media coverage based on news values seems more applicable in pictorial reporting of politicians, while reportage as a mirror of political reality has more traction in text news. This is a valuable insight, demonstrating that journalists do not employ the same criterion when including Kenyan politicians in visual and text news.

Figure 3. John Mbadi, then MP for Suba constituency in Homa Bay County, served as the chairman of ODM—one of the major parties in the 11th National Assembly. In this photo taken on January 1, 2015, he was addressing journalists at Parliament Buildings in Nairobi. In a 2014 audit of MPs' performance, Mbadi was rated as the most resourceful MP in Parliament (Ngirachu, 2015). He ranked number four overall in the pictorial coverage of MPs. Photo courtesy Daily Nation *(2015).*

Though not a significant predictor, gender came second after political leadership, meaning it had some influence on the coverage of the MPs. However, across ethnic group size, party size, and political leadership, men received more coverage than women, thus carrying more weight in the coverage of the MPs. In fact, in political leadership, being male significantly predicted the coverage of the 182 legislators, while in ethnic group size and party size, the male and female influence in the coverage was not statistically significant. The influence of male MPs could be attributed to four important factors. First, the majority of the legislators were men (80.5%) and therefore there was a lower representation of women in the Kenyan Parliament, leading to a higher probability of male MPs being included in the news. This confirms that male politicians get significantly more photographic coverage than their female counterparts (Hayek & Russmann, 2022; Ibroscheva & Raicheva-Stover, 2009). Second, men held most of the key leadership positions, which was the most defining predictor of visibility. Thus, because political standing attracts the media, male lawmakers enjoyed a huge advantage in being included in the visual news. Third, because Kenyan newsrooms are dominated by men—66% against 34% for women—a ratio of 2:1 (Ireri, 2017), there is a likely bias toward giving more prominence to male politicians.

Last, close to a half of the MPs (167) did not feature in pictorial news, probably because political leadership appeared to dictate inclusion. Since only 5.4% of those who failed to make it to news held leadership positions, it means journalists focused on the politicians with the most news value—preferably those in positions of power. Also, considering the limited space in newspapers to include most of the MPs, only those of high political standing secured coverage. In comparison, text news is obviously likely to include more political actors in the media coverage, unlike pictorial news which might only accommodate the most influential legislators.

Conclusion

The current research examined four newspapers' photographic coverage of 349 Kenyan MPs in a four-year period between 2013 and 2017. Specifically, within the context of media coverage based on news values, the study explored whether noninstitutional characteristics (gender, ethnic group size, and seniority) and institutional attributes (party size and political leadership) predicted the newspapers' pictorial visibility of the legislators. Findings indicate that of the 349 MPs, only 182 (52.1%) made it to the press' pictorial news, with political leadership being the overall determinant of inclusion.

The current study makes a useful contribution to media coverage based on news values as a central theoretical foundation for studies on the visibility of politicians in news media. This is because the Kenyan journalism practice related to the pictorial coverage of politicians seems to focus more on political prominence as a news value or what Vos (2014) categorizes as "who a politician is" (p. 2447). The research also contributes to the discursive perspective (visual or imagery) of the news values, an approach that remains understudied (Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Rössler, Bomhoff, Haschke, Kersten, & Muller, 2011) because even researchers who have studied news values versus press photography have focused more on the selection process (Caple & Bednarek, 2016). In implication, the present study shows that the discursive approach (the visual aspect) is as important as the other two approaches of news values (material and cognitive) in the selection of political actors to be included in the news menu. Thus, future research could examine the three perspectives collectively because there is a great potential for useful synergies in journalism practice, education, and research.

        While this study provides useful information regarding the visibility of Kenyan politicians in national press pictorial news, it suffers from a major limitation: The research was based on print media coverage of political actors. This left out television news, yet in Kenya, studies focusing on the visibility of political actors in broadcast media are nonexistent. Focusing on both newspaper pictorials and television visuals could provide even more useful insights on the visibility of Kenyan politicians in news media—in terms of similarities and dissimilarities. Importantly, in modern Kenya, where television is now the main source of news (Media Council of Kenya, 2020), the place of broadcast news in providing political information cannot be wished away, hence underlining why it is imperative to study television news as well. Similarly, because we now live in a digital communication world, which has revolutionized the traditional media landscape, future research could also explore the visibility of politicians on social media platforms, websites, and mobile messaging apps. In fact, research shows that Kenya ranks highest in the Eastern Africa region in terms of digital growth and demand (Chakravorti, Chaturvedi, Filipovic, & Brewer, 2020). And as of December 2020, Kenya's Internet penetration stood at 85.2% (InternetWorldStats, 2021), thus affirming the country's growth in digital media.

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