POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA

Frank Windeck

Frank Windeck runs the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's media program for Sub-Saharan Africa with its office in Johannesburg.

There are several difficulties when analyzing political communication and new media in Sub-Saharan Africa. The sheer size of the region and the concomitant political, religious, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity this entails make it almost impossible to make any kind of generalizations, since these differences necessarily result in political methods and behaviors that can, and do, vary greatly from one country to another. While, in the event of a political crisis, one state may aspire to implement a professional communications concept, the answer in another may be to mobilize troops. Furthermore, there are very few scientific studies examining this issue, while statistics are often outdated and sometimes difficult to verify. Thus, any attempt to provide an overview must concentrate on a small select number of countries by means of an example, without claiming to depict all aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, trends are evident and similar behavioral patterns can be discerned in the regional context.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN AFRICA

In a Westernized democratic state, the media take on the role of the fourth power. They control those in power and report to the citizens. This demands a certain degree of institutional independence from the political system. In reality, however, there is a clear interdependence between the media and political systems. This lies in the trade-off inherent in the systems of both sets of players, in the course of which information from the political system is exchanged for coverage in the media system, and vice versa. The media is dependent on the supply of information

from politics, while politicians are dependent on the media conveying their message to the electorate.[1] Political communication not only serves as a political means, it is effectively the motor in the decision-making process and thus "… itself also politics."[2] As a result, the media represent a permanent process that continually influences politics – not only during the election period, but generally, at all times and everywhere.

If one proceeds from the assumption that the political system in a country influences the media system in that country, this means that the various African political systems are accompanied by different kinds of media systems with various interpretations of freedom of speech and press freedom. This is coupled with the dependence or independence of governments and other factors that can influence an individual media system. Such varied political and media systems mean that political communication also differs from one country to the next, both in its intensity and form and the methods employed. Primarily, it is the players involved that can be seen as the constant. While these vary in terms of the means selected and the intensity of their presence within the respective system, as a rule they are involved in all of the different systems.

PLAYERS IN COMMUNICATION HAVE CHANGED

As the traditional transmitters of political communication in a triangular system, the political parties are in one corner (headed by the governing parties). In reality in Africa, following many years of governing responsibility, these are often identical with the state and the administration, which controls state broadcasters. The media represent the second cornerstone in the communication triangle. They act as intermediaries between the parties and their message on the one hand, and the electorate as the recipients on the other. In addition to this mediating role, they also communicate in their own right, either through active communication, e.g. in the form of political commentary or editorials, or through targeted questioning in interviews with representatives of political parties and representatives

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1 | cf. Otfried Jarren and Patrick Donges, *Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft*, 2nd edition, 2006 on the various models of political communication.
2 | ibid, 22.

of the government, with whose help they control the quality of the communication. The citizens themselves complete the triangle of political communication, in the first instance merely as passive recipients. Their communication occurs only on the micro-level, when discussing politics and attempting to convincingly convey specific opinions. This passive recipient position has changed over the last few years on account of interest groups in civil society (some of which are more strongly anchored than others), strengthening organized public participation. The introduction of the Internet (in particular Web 2.0) and mobile telecommunications in Africa at the beginning of the millennium has significantly altered this communication structure. The original structures have shifted from a "top-down approach" to a polycentric communications system. Thus, it can be said that political communication by the population is greater today that the mere expression of will in polls. The new technologies have promoted citizens' position to that of equal partners in the communications structure.

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TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS HERALDED CHANGE

However, the hopes pinned on the rise of the Internet have not come to fruition. Speculation that Africa's political systems would alter due to increased use of the Internet, facilitating greater participation in the democratic process and democracy, were premature. High Internet costs coupled with slow connections and a lack of IT knowledge meant that only a small elite were able to surf the net, transforming the Internet into a luxury good whose potential is only now slowly beginning to develop, almost 15 years after its introduction. Crippling regulations in individual countries are gradually being replaced and new intercontinental high-capacity connections are being introduced throughout the entire region. This has already resulted in faster connections in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Prices, meanwhile, are decreasing. Further progress in these two aspects can be expected over the next few years. This will allow for the development of new user groups and significantly better applications. Cell phones, meanwhile, never encountered these kinds of initial problems in Africa.

Various factors must be fulfilled in order for an innovation to be adapted by the population. These include a high perceived benefit in the use of the new product, lack of complexity of the product and high compatibility.[3] Unlike the Internet, cell phones featured all of these characteristics. The lack of landline services meant that cell phones were often the only available means of communication. They are straightforward to use and the comparably inexpensive handsets needed only to be connected to a power source, such as a car battery. Unlike Internet connections, mobile phones brought huge benefits in Africa, which explains their massive success. Additional incentives for the acceptance of cell phones were factors of observability and testability. The first cell phones were used in public long-distance call shops. This was how many people in Africa first came into contact with cell phones, and were able to try them out themselves for the first time. One could argue at this juncture that this is also the case with respect to Internet cafés. However, one must keep in mind that it was, and still is, considerably easier to purchase a cell phone in Sub-Saharan Africa than it is to set up a fast Internet connection. In many countries in the region, the number of cell phones already exceeds the number of landline connections.

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The third phase in the development of new media in the region, the introduction of Web 2.0, will result in the partial fusion of these first two waves. Online services such as Facebook and Twitter and an active blogger community have made the Internet interactive, facilitating a form of democratic participation that has been hoped for since before the turn of the millennium. The other side of this new development is the merging of web content and cell phone functions into hybrid systems. Nowadays, there are various new functions available besides the classic cell phone capabilities of calls, SMS, photo and video. Providers such as South African company MXit enable SMS services via Internet-capable cell phones at a fraction of the normal price and also provide web applications such

3 | cf. Everett Rogers, *Diffusions of innovations* (New York: 2003) on the diffusion theory.

as chatrooms for both PC and cell phone.[4] This means that content and functions are now available to a user group that can no longer be described as an elite and, as such, is becoming increasingly important for the democratic development and political communication in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.[5]

The main advantage of the current development is that the services are interactive. New media facilitate (theoretically at least) direct exchange between all participants in the triangle of political communication. This can take place on discussion platforms in traditional media or via social media such as Facebook. The hoped-for communication with those in power is now technically feasible, but has nevertheless not yet been achieved in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. How far removed the region still is from a satisfactory level of democratization of political communication can be seen in the controversial Kenyan presidential elections of 2007.

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CASE STUDY 1: KENYA'S ELECTION IN DECEMBER 2007

THE PARTIES

The use of new media as a means of political communication was nothing new for the East African country in the Kenyan presidential elections in December 2007. Even before the election in 2002, the major parties and some individual politicians had an online presence. The obvious advantage of direct communication with the voter was readily accepted, as the Kenyan media were, and are, for the most part, partisan and aligned along ethnic or political boundaries. Indeed, many forms of media, in particular

4 | cf. the provider's homepage: http://www.mxitlifestyle.com/ (accessed April 5, 2010).
5 | In South Africa in 2008, around 3.5 million Internet users had their own connection, while just under 45 million South Africans (90 percent of the total population) had their own cell phone. At the same time in Kenya only 407,000 people had their own Internet connection. Slightly fewer than 3.5 million Kenyans used Internet cafés and similar facilities to go online. In comparison, more than 16 million Kenyans owned their own cell phone. Source: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx# (accessed April 5, 2010).

radio stations that broadcast in the local language, are even owned by politicians. The new media trend continued in 2007. Again, all of the parties used the opportunity to present themselves. Those expecting deeper insights, hoping for an interactive discussion of the political objectives or even seeking party political support for democracy and development, were disappointed. The parties in Kenya, a structurally weak state and, as such, particularly dependent on the leadership, promoted a personality cult on their party political and candidate web pages, thereby continuing their standard political approach in the online sphere. A visit to the official websites of the eight main candidates quickly made clear the kind of Internet-based political communication the parties in Kenya had in mind. While attempts were made to target young voters with online content, the parties and candidates were not interested in any form of real communication with the electorate. None of those involved provided interactive functions: only half had an e-mail feature and only two published their e-mail addresses; five of the sites stated a contact phone number. Evidently, those responsible were not entirely convinced of the benefits of online communication.[6] This use of the Internet as a party voting machine is, however, not a peculiarly Kenyan phenomenon, but is found in the majority of the countries in the region.

Another characteristic of these party sites is their inherent 'expiry date'. None of the eight Kenyan candidate websites was maintained and updated any longer than just after the actual election date. All bar one have now disappeared from the Internet. Short-term political calculations are given priority over the long-term voter base in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This can also be seen in digital election campaigns, as a mirror image of the party-political reality. The parties become very active just before the elections, introducing typical campaign measures. After the election, however, the parties very soon return to the autocratic patterns that dominated prior to the election. Kenya's elections in 2002 and 2007 are exemplary of this.

6 | cf. on the use of new media by the Kenyan political parties: George Nyabuga and Okoth Fred Mudhai, "Misclick on Democracy: New Media Use by Key Political Parties in Kenya's Disputed December 2007 Presidential Election", in: Okoth Fred Mudhai, et al. (eds.), *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere* (New York: 2009), 41 - 57.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The traditional media in Kenya means a diverse and complex media landscape. In addition to the state broadcaster, there are a number of private media companies operating in print, radio and television, as well as online versions of these media; some are even successful in the international arena; one example is Nation Media Group. Unfortunately, the Kenyan media were unable to use these highly positive conditions to expand their independence. On the contrary: in the course of the last few years, the country's media have increasingly turned to specific political camps. Now, the individual media companies can be allocated either to certain parties or are owned by specific politicians. This leads to self-censorship, partisan reporting and, ultimately, to a widespread loss of credibility among the population, as was the case with the state KBC (Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation), which is widely seen as the government's mouthpiece. The major media companies produce content in the two national languages, English and Swahili. In addition, as mentioned previously, there are also radio stations that broadcast in one of around 100 local dialects, as well as local media at the municipal level. Despite the problems outlined here, given the circumstances, the media's reporting in the run-up to the election was balanced and endeavored to provide the electorate with comprehensive information.

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NEW MEDIA AS THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

As outlined above, there are considerable impediments to Internet use in Africa. In addition to the technology, the user must have the requisite financial means to be able to afford an Internet connection. In June 2009, this applied to just 3.3 million users in Kenya - around 8.6% of the population. This places Kenya seventh in terms of Internet use in Africa.[7] What is particularly surprising is the large number of bloggers. They obviously come mainly from the large – and growing - Kenyan middle class. On

7 | Source: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm# africa (accessed March 10, 2010).

the one hand, they can afford the expensive technology, including an Internet connection, and on the other, have enjoyed an above-average education. The various blogs are at times extremely detailed and show that the new technologies do indeed make more democracy, transparency and civic participation possible. An example is the blog "Mzalendo", the objective of which is greater control of the parliament. The trigger for this was an increase in expenses allowances for members of parliament in 2003. Two individuals wanted to find out the background behind this increase and know more about the working processes of Kenyan members of parliament. They started the project in 2006. Since then, the website has been growing continually and now encompasses the work of parliamentary committees and parliamentary proposals.[8]

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Cell phones have had an even greater effect on the Kenyan market. With 11.7 million users in 2008, more than 30 percent of the population owned a cell phone – and growing rapidly. SMS campaigns are thus the order of the day and are used intensively by all players in political communication, particularly during the election period. However, there is a downside to this seemingly good news, as the use of new media in the Kenyan election and following the publication of the results showed.

THE ELECTORAL RESULT AND THE REACTIONS OF PLAYERS IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

When the electoral commission published the official results on 30 December 2007, three days after votes were cast, unrest brewed across the country, resulting in the death of more than a thousand people and 700,000 displaced persons. The highly complex situation was characterized by very rapid developments and the inability of the majority of players to cope. The government reacted the very same day, banning all live reports on radio and television. Most channels had implemented the ban by the evening. The country was hit by a kind of media blackout. The major media companies not only complied with the ban, they

8 | http://www.mzalendo.com/about/ (accessed March 10, 2010).

went a step further. Fearful of a second Rwanda, the major media companies restricted their reporting to repeated calls for peace and non-violence, sometimes even in concerted action. The management echelons of the media were haunted by the specter of the Rwandan broadcaster Radiotélévision libre des milles collines (RTLM). In 1994, it had systematically called for the murder of members of the political and ethnic opposition in the country, inciting genocide against the Tutsi. While journalists were praised for their repeated and widespread calls for national unity, the media nevertheless neglected their task as the fourth state power. There were barely any informative reports on the unrest. The instigators remained anonymous. Kenyan journalists were subsequently openly criticized for this lapse into self-censorship.[9]

Within a very short space of time, Kenya's bloggers assumed the role of reporters, at times employing highly unusual methods. The bloggers used information provided to them via SMS from all over the country to enrich their content. "Ushahidi" (Swahili for "testimony") alone, set up on 9 January 2008 in response to the lack of media coverage, reached almost 45,000 users within just a few days.

The small radio stations that broadcast in the local language paint a very different picture. Some of these stations were suspected of inciting hatred between the ethnic groups. The popular talk shows provided citizens with an opportunity to express their opinion, live on air. Many callers used this to badmouth their unpopular neighbors from other tribes or to actively call for violence. While the responsible managers later provided assurances that they quickly cut off these calls, ordered the presenters concerned to restore order or even cancelled programs entirely, the reality was in some instances quite different. In this situation of escalating physical and verbal violence, with a range of parties forming along ethnic boundaries, highlighting the question of the winner of the election and a media system locked between prohibition and self-censorship, the new media developed an unforeseen power. At that point in time, only around 5% of Kenyans had their own Internet connection. However, the use of the Internet increased exponentially when the government issued the live broadcasting ban. This reflects the population's huge thirst for up-to-date and impartial information. Within a very short space of time, Kenya's bloggers assumed the role of reporters, at times employing highly unusual methods. The bloggers

9 | cf. the country report by Reporters without Borders: "How far to go? Kenya's media caught in the turmoil of a failed election", http://www.rog.at/berichte/landerberichte.html (accessed March 12, 2010).

used information provided to them via SMS from all over the country to enrich their content. "Ushahidi" (Swahili for "testimony") alone, set up on 9 January 2008 in response to the lack of media coverage, reached almost 45,000 users within just a few days. Here, outbreaks of violence as well as attempts to put a stop to the violence were reported via Internet and cell phone. The makers of the website turned the information collected into an interactive map.[10] Thus, thanks to "Ushahidi" individual cases were documented by a central body, and violence was given a face, since the other reports, based solely on figures, were supplemented with photographs, videos and text. This made it easier to illustrate to the international community what was really happening in the country. The project was so successful that the concept, as well as the open source software developed by the makers, has been used several times around the globe, inter alia to document xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008 and following the earthquake in Haiti in January of this year.

However, the new media in Kenya was also used to call for violence against other ethnic groups. This trend began some time before the election. In December 2007, the Kenya National Commission for Human Rights published a report in which it expressed its concern regarding this matter. During the crucial phase of election campaigning the number of mass-SMS with political contents increased, until, at the outbreak of violence, messages were being sent almost once per minute. The content of these messages grew increasingly aggressive and violent.[11] Given the situation, the government wanted to shut down the SMS services of the market leader, Safaricom. However, Safaricom successfully convinced the government not to, and instead sent calls for peace to its nine million customers. The 'blogosphere' was also hit by propaganda and hate speeches. The popular site "Mashada.com" had to shut down its forum because the makers were simply unable to cope with the volume of

The Kenyan example clearly illustrates that popular journalism and new media can be an important tool to support democracy and transparency in developing countries, particularly if the media are caught between press freedom on the one hand, and premature self-censorship on the other while party politics are tied up in trench warfare.

10 | cf.: http://www.ushahidi.com (accessed March 12, 2010).
11 | cf. BBC World Service Trust, "The Kenyan 2007 elections and their aftermath: the role of the media and communication" (April 2008).

ethnically controversial comments.[12] The Kenyan example clearly illustrates that popular journalism and new media can be an important tool to support democracy and transparency in developing countries, particularly if the media are caught between press freedom on the one hand, and premature self-censorship on the other while party politics are tied up in trench warfare. At the same time, the example of the presidential election in 2007 also highlights the limits of popular journalism and new media. The uncontrolled dissemination of opinions in discussion fora and political propaganda sent via mass-SMS provide new options for those powers that serve not democracy but only personal interest. Filtering the content of SMS is a balancing act that can also have negative effects on society, since it can affect issues of freedom of speech, as well as other fundamental freedoms.

The communication usually carried out by free media is thus extremely weak. The traditional mass media are firmly under government control, shifting the communication structure towards the mere communication of statements.

Nevertheless, measures of this kind must be carefully reviewed and used to prevent the radicalization of society and the escalation of violence this can entail. This is, of course, only possible on the basis of careful legal checks that take account of issues relating, for example, to restrictions on freedom of speech.

CASE STUDY 2: THE ZIMBABWEAN ELECTION OF 2008

While even for the Kenyan media there are certain limitations, the situation for journalists in Zimbabwe is even more challenging.[13] Since the governing ZANU-PF party lost the constitutional referendum in February 2000, marking the first ever electoral defeat for Robert Mugabe, the government has done everything within its power to prevent the recurrence of such events. New laws introduced in the interim period have placed restrictions on a large number of human and civil rights, including press freedoms and freedom of speech, as well as the citizens' right to unrestricted access to information.

12 | cf. ibid, 11.
13 | In 2008, Kenya was ranked 97 for press freedom, while Zimbabwe was placed 151 of a total of just 173. cf.: http://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de (accessed April 2, 2010).

TRADITIONAL MASS MEDIA:

The consequences for the Zimbabwean media landscape and for political communication were and continue to be serious. A number of restrictive media laws, persecution of journalists, the closure of several critical newspapers as well as the restructuring of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holding (ZBH) into a traditional state broadcasting company with an absolute national monopoly, both in radio and TV, resulted not only in a very one-sided media landscape, but also in a one-sided communication structure. While the communication triangle described at the outset still exists in Zimbabwe, the conditions have changed markedly. While there are still two independent newspapers, they have very little scope for action. The communication usually carried out by free media is thus extremely weak. The traditional mass media are firmly under government control, shifting the communication structure towards the mere communication of statements. Expressed in figures, this means that e.g. Zimbabwe TV (ZTV), Zimbabwe's only television station, dedicated 80 percent of electoral reporting prior to the vote in March 2008 to the activities of the governing party, while ZBH's two radio stations focused as much as 84 percent of reports on the governing party.[14] This approach is not unusual in Zimbabwe, but was particularly prevalent during the previous election periods. In the run up to the run-off ballot on 27 June 2008, all reports about the opposition were banned from state-run media. The state media not only undermined journalistic standards but also spread untruths and hate speeches against the political opposition. This entailed a conscious disregard of the law, for which those responsible were never called to account. In this context it is hardly surprising that political communication in the traditional Zimbabwean media runs along political camps. The journalists on both sides are irreconcilable, indeed hostile, as expressed in an unusually aggressive language. Impartial journalism is the exception rather than the rule; there is no scope for political criticism. Accordingly, independent media have very little influence

The governing ZANU-PF relied mainly on the website "Newsnet", which pursued the government's information policy on the Internet as part of the ZBH. "Newsnet" treats the electorate as a passive target group. Interactivity and dialogue are secondary.

14 | Comprehensive analysis can be found in: *Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe: The Propaganda War on Electoral Democracy, A Report on the Media's Coverage of Zimbabwe's 2008 Elections* (Harare: 2009).

on political communication. However, the state media have lost a great deal of trust among the population on account of their blatant partisanship.

Meanwhile, independent reporting is taking place via other channels, such as on the radio station "South West Radio" which broadcasts on shortwave from abroad[15].

THE PARTIES:

Similarly to Kenya, the parties in Zimbabwe use new media to communicate with their voters. Internet sites, blogs, social networks and cell phones were used by both sides during the election campaign.

The governing ZANU-PF relied mainly on the website "Newsnet", which pursued the government's information policy on the Internet as part of the ZBH. "Newsnet" treats the electorate as a passive target group. Interactivity and dialogue are secondary. Patriotic propaganda stories took centre stage during the freedom fighting. These news items were intended to show who was worthy of the people's support. The opposition was portrayed as being counter-revolutionary and described as enemies of the state. The government consistently used these terms, but attempted during the election period in particular to instrumentalize the distinction between "us" (the good guys – the governing party) and "them" (the bad guys – all critics of the government). This ideological distinction then served as an argumentational aid to counter critics. The opposition, first and foremost the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), used the new media to circumvent the partisanship of the state media. In the elections of 2000 and 2002, the MDC already made use of the possibilities provided by the Internet and e-mail to communicate with voters. The fact that this form of communication is vital for the party can be derived from the official party website and the homepage of party president, Morgan Tsvangirai. Both are professionally designed and are regularly updated – a real rarity in the context of political parties in Sub-Saharan

Of course, election supervision via SMS also has its weaknesses. The example of Sierra Leone clearly illustrates that the entire supervision system can be crippled simply by shutting down the mobile phone system.

15 | cf. http://www.swradioafrica.com/index.php (accessed April 2, 2010).

Africa. On election day, the opposition set out on a new path of digital media use, which proved to be a decisive factor when it came to evaluating the outcome of the vote.

THE USE OF NEW MEDIA AT HOME AND ABROAD:

The first technical facilities for the use of e-mail services were set up in Zimbabwe as long ago as 1994; the Internet followed three years later. The country now has a whole range of national and international Internet providers. Due to the predominant lack of impartial journalism, new media is widespread. This is carried out on the one hand through private bloggers and on the other by organizations in civil society, who express their opinions online in the shadow of the constant threat posed by the Interception of Communications Act (ACT). An example is the website "Kubatana.net", which provides a platform for human rights issues and other subjects relevant to civil society, supplementing these with links to hundreds of other civil society sites, providing a partial index of Zimbabwean civil society.[16] Many private and political blogs are run by the millions of Zimbabwean nationals living abroad.[17] There are also professional media sites, the most prominent of which is "newzimbabwe.com", an online version of the weekly newspaper of the same name published in England.[18] The site has built itself a good reputation on account of its balanced reporting and also provides a voice to Zimbabwean government officials in discussions. During the election campaign a large number of different forms of digital media were employed, some with considerable creative potential. The Internet site "Sokwanele", for instance, (meaning "enough is enough") collected data on election irregularities, linking these using an interactive map, comparable with Ushahidi in Kenya[19]. Films on YouTube, photos of acts of violence on Flickr, various groups on Facebook and Myspace as well as political e-cards and twitter updates rounded off the

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16 | cf. http://www.kubatana.net/index.htm (accessed April 2, 2010).
17 | Many of these pages are summarized or linked at http://www.zimbablog.com/ (accessed April 2, 2010).
18 | cf. http://www.newzimbabwe.com/ (accessed April 2, 2010).
19 | cf. http://www.sokwanele.com/ (accessed April 2, 2010). In contrast to Ushahidi, however, in this instance only the official media were used as sources, which left white areas on the map, since many media channels were not permitted to report from opposition strongholds.

diverse selection of information. However, it was first and foremost the cell phone that played a crucial role. It began with mass-SMS sent by the parties, photos and ringtones through to political jokes that rapidly spread across the country, representing an important means of political expression. However, the crucial step for the evaluation of the election results was made by a website called "ZimElectionResults.com". It made use of a provision of Zimbabwean electoral law pursuant to which the votes in the individual voting stations have to be counted in the candidate's presence and published on a notice immediately afterwards. These lists were photographed using cell phones by employees of various NGOs and supporters of the opposition and the pictures sent to a central counting body. This provided the opposition with an unofficial but nevertheless meaningful result, long before the Zimbabwean election committee was able to publish its result. While this does not completely prevent vote-rigging and manipulation, it makes it significantly more difficult. The last elections in Ghana and Sierra Leone, where cell phones were used across the board to evaluate the results, illustrate just how well this can work. Since this led to a run-off ballot between the officeholder Mugabe and his challenger Tsvangirai, the government amended these rules. The publication of "preliminary" election results was banned from that point onwards, making control via mobile communications impossible. Nevertheless, new media brought greater transparency to the counting of votes and thus made a vital contribution to the creation of the current Zimbabwean unity government.

South Africa's citizens do not live in fear of persecution for expressing their opinion. The greatest problem in South Africa is the huge economic imbalance between a small elite and a large, extremely poor lower class.

Of course, election supervision via SMS also has its weaknesses. The example of Sierra Leone clearly illustrates that the entire supervision system can be crippled simply by shutting down the mobile phone system. Furthermore, these types of systems inevitably have a margin of error on account of human error or targeted misinformation by certain individuals or, in the worst-case scenario, entire groups of helpers. Despite these evident weaknesses, these new systems represent great progress in the evaluation of election results and have a considerable degree of legitimacy.

**CASE STUDY 3: SOUTH AFRICA'S PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS OF 2009**

South Africa differs in many respects from the examples
cited thus far. It has a pronounced democratic landscape
and, with the fourth free presidential election in succession
in 2009, has already established a democratic tradition.
The media landscape of the country is diversified; freedom
of speech and press freedom, as well as
unrestricted access to information are
anchored in the constitution and are for
the most part exercised without restriction.
While from the European perspective, and
assuming an ideal situation, there are still a number of
points of criticism, such as the strong influence of the
ruling ANC (African National Congress) on the TV and radio
stations of the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corpo-
ration), compared with other countries in the region, South
Africa is well placed and there are no serious restrictions of
press freedom. The government would, for example, never
dream of prohibiting live reporting. On the contrary: every
effort is being taken to ensure that information reaches
even those members of the population living in remote
rural areas. There are no restrictions on civil society and
public discourse either. South Africa's citizens do not live
in fear of persecution for expressing their opinion. The
greatest problem in South Africa is the huge economic
imbalance between a small elite and a large, extremely
poor lower class. Consequently, in 2009 only around 10%
of the population were able to afford expensive permanent
Internet access.[20] On the other hand, more than 90% of
South Africans own a cell phone.[21] The prevalence of cell
phones has triggered fierce competition among providers,
which has led to further reductions in the price of calls over
the past few years. Furthermore, many cell phones are
now Internet-capable.

> Although the ANC clientele, similar to that of the IFP, generally does not have broadband Internet access, the party has a strong Internet presence.

THE PARTIES:

The parties in South Africa use new media as an additional
element to supplement their political communication
portfolios. All of the major parties hoped in 2009 to mobilize

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20 | cf. http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/
    Indicators.aspx (accessed April 3, 2010).
21 | cf. ibid.

additional voters and ultimately win more votes through the use of new telecommunications methods. In general, it was considerably more difficult for the ANC and the IFP (Inkhata Freedom Party) to reach the target group than it was for the COPE (Congress of the People) which was established in 2008, or the DA (Democratic Alliance). The latter both focused on the slowly expanding middle class in the country. The majority of the ANC's voter base is in the black majority, most of whom live in abject poverty and often have little or no education. In addition, many black South Africans still do not have the necessary financial means to be able to afford their own Internet connection or mobile Internet access. The IFP appeals to a similar target group as the ANC, but concentrates mainly on KwaZulu-Natal. Depending on their requirements, the parties employ various different strategies. While all four parties have a website, the "middle-class parties" COPE and DA, whose supporters can afford Internet and expensive broadband connections, have a more prominent presence in social networks like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, have more interactive websites and, seen in relative terms, have a larger number of "followers" than the ANC. In this context, IFP takes a backseat, with just 173 'friends' on Facebook. In other areas also, IFP does not fully exploit the available opportunities. Its homepage has hardly any interactive features, and there is no mechanism for the involvement of volunteers.

The diversified market of traditional South African mass media allows the country's journalists to carry out all forms of discourse, thereby ensuring that the media are able to fulfill their role as information providers and the fourth state power.

Although the ANC clientele, similar to that of the IFP, generally does not have broadband Internet access, the party has a strong Internet presence. This was due, on the one hand, to the huge financial options available to the governing party and, on the other, to the fact that the ANC attempted to target voters in this way who would not traditionally be part of their clientele. In May 2009 alone, the site had 50,000 hits. To expand its election campaign it set up the site "myanc.mobi", which integrated cell phone users more in the campaign, offering interactive features. This meant that SMS could be used on a grand scale. While the use of cell phones was never a central component of the communication strategy of the DA, the party's digital campaign is nevertheless on the whole extremely innovative. Fora moderated by bloggers, sites calling on

the public to report corruption and specific target group communication pursuant to various criteria rounded off the parties' campaigning. In order to convince the large number of first-time voters, who accounted for around 11 percent of votes, the youth groups of the various parties in particular tried to exploit new media.

THE YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND THE HYBRID SYSTEMS

Young South Africans use their cell phones as part of traditional mobile technologies. Only a small number use their cell phone to go online, due to the high costs. The majority of users use hybrid systems to communicate with friends, colleagues or even strangers. These hybrid systems work on the basis of the Internet, requiring an Internet-capable telephone, but then use normal text messages, provided a free software program has been loaded to the cell phone. The users pay very low charges for Internet use, since hardly any bandwidth is required. SMS messages, as well as additional functions like chatrooms, are free. Users can also upload their own content. A provider of such services is the South African MXit.[22] Due to the huge volume of users, MXit would be the perfect partner for the parties in the fight to win young voters, but refused any form of organized cooperation, citing its editorial guidelines, which prohibit any religious or political content. Doubtless, discussions concerning every aspect of the election will have taken place via MXit, but these were neither organized, nor did the company permit political content to be uploaded. In the search for alternatives, the parties found a similar service in the form of Mig33, although it has fewer customers in South Africa and was based in the USA.

Overall, however, the media were well able to fulfill their role of mediating and explaining between the politicians and the electorate. Only the sometimes-unprofessional communication of the parties occasionally hampered the flow of information - editors working to modern editorial timescales do not have the time necessary to process eight-page press releases issued by party press offices.

The ANC, COPE, DA and two smaller parties all set up "Mig33 groups", of which the ANCYL (ANC Youth League) was the most successful. While this may be down to ANCYL's large following, it is certainly also attributable to the party's financial opportunities. At times, there were

22 | According to MXit, in 2009 it had 15 million users worldwide, 13 million of whom were South African.

more than 10,000 registered active users in its forum. The other parties' ventures into Mig33 were not nearly as successful. The ANCYL used special formats, such as the "chat stadium" where mass events can be held and the party leaders can communicate with up to 5,000 supporters at any one time. In addition, Mig33 involvement fitted well with the ANC's overall strategy. It was used to publicize large rallies or local ANC events or to discuss topics that arose elsewhere.

TRADITIONAL MASS MEDIA:

The diversified market of traditional South African mass media allows the country's journalists to carry out all forms of discourse, thereby ensuring that the media are able to fulfill their role as information providers and the fourth state power. These freedoms are guaranteed by a by-and-large independent regulation of the media market as well as a robust set of media laws, anchored in the South African constitution. Independent studies by the NGO "Media Monitoring Africa" confirm that

Nine of the ten most popular blogs in Africa are from South Africa. However, only the "Thought Leader Blog" mentioned above regularly tackles socio-political issues.

97 percent of party reporting during the election campaign in 2009 was impartial and fair. This is also true of the quasi-public broadcaster SABC; despite the progressive infiltration of the station by the ANC. The limits of this fairness could be seen in the case of the COPE. According to opinion polls at the time, the party by all means had the potential to threaten the ANC-majority in the country and wanted to publish its manifesto for the first time to kick-off its election campaign. Instead of reporting live and in depth from the event, as they had done for other, considerably less important parties, only a short feature was broadcast. SABC subsequently justified the decision, referring to the fact that election reporting by the "public broadcaster" was to be proportional to the number of representatives in parliament. Since COPE did not yet have any seats in parliament, only a short recording was broadcast. For a station claiming to be a public service broadcaster, this is a questionable journalistic decision. Overall, however, the media were well able to fulfill their role of mediating and explaining between the politicians and the electorate. Only the sometimes-unprofessional communication of the parties occasionally hampered the flow of information – editors working to modern editorial timescales do not have

the time necessary to process eight-page press releases issued by party press offices. The South African media themselves used new electronic elements during the election campaign to provide the population with more comprehensive information than was previously the case.[23]

The weekly newspaper Mail & Guardian, for example, set up a "Thought Leader Forum", in which prominent bloggers and opinion leaders presented columns. Across Africa, this forum was the second most popular blog.[24]

THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLOGOSPHERE:

While new media provides many citizens of Sub-Saharan Africa with an opportunity to report unfairness and encourages discourse between various groups, in South Africa a new dimension has arisen. Here, political communication between the electorate, the media and politicians for the most part functions without difficulty. Nevertheless, the South African blogosphere has the most entries and websites on the continent, and it is continuing to expand continuously.[25] Due to the political situation described above, the large majority of South African bloggers are unimportant in terms of political communication. Nine of the ten most popular blogs in Africa are from South Africa. However, only the "Thought Leader Blog" mentioned above regularly tackles socio-political issues. In addition, there are a large number of blogs that deal with issues relating to HIV/AIDS, xenophobia or problems of racism and provide important impetus for political debate. Thus, this is a media sphere that could by all means help achieve a large share of the vote, or even majorities in the presidential elections of 2014. Nevertheless, new media cannot yet, nor will they be able in the foreseeable future, to replace the traditional media and classic forms of party communication in South Africa.

23 | One option was www.saelections.co.za. However, the site provides only a limited amount of information on the major parties (accessed April 5, 2010). During the election period, however, it summarized the various services of the Avusa publishing group in a very creative manner, providing a great deal of information and references.
24 | cf. www.thoughtleader.co.za/ (accessed April 5, 2010).
25 | In July 2009, Afrigator ran around 6400 blogs from South Africa. By April 2010, the figure was almost 8500. cf. http://afrigator.com/blogstats/countries (accessed April 5, 2010).

CONCLUSION:

The new media have become an integral part of political communication in Sub-Saharan Africa, irrespective of the situation in the individual countries. While the Internet and Web 2.0 have not achieved their full potential, growth rates indicate that they will continue to grow in importance in the near future. At present, the use of mobile technologies in the region, above all due to the sheer mass of cell phones in use, has considerably more power. The high costs of bandwidth still represent a major hurdle. The hybrid systems referred to above help circumvent these costs and thus lead to further dissemination of political communication. It remains unclear whether companies like MXit would be well-advised to keep out of political discourse and to generally prohibit these types of discussion on their platforms.

The technological developments have repeatedly altered political communication over the course of the last ten years. The increased importance of political content is ultimately the crucial outcome of this technical progress and in the mid-term will lead to a paradigm shift, since it is likely to result in a reduction in political personality cult and party obedience to be replaced with discussion. The more members of the population have access to the relevant information, the more will take decisions based on impartial information. This, in turn, will have a lasting effect on the political communication of all players involved.

Despite the positive evaluation of the new tools of political communication, these also have their limits and weaknesses. For instance, SMS services used to monitor election results are dependent on the service provider and are at risk of manipulation by staff.

In order to be successful in the future, the parties will have to concentrate more on content and convincing arguments. In the medium term, it will no longer be enough only to target voters shortly before election day. Long-term strategies instead of short-term electioneering will be the order of the day. Already, the traditional media cannot survive without their new counterparts. If they are to remain competitive in future, they will also have to develop further, to engage more than they have to date in new technologies and to use the additional findings these technologies provide to prepare balanced, comprehensive reports. Where this trend may lead can be seen already in South African cooperation projects between the traditional media and bloggers.

Despite the positive evaluation of the new tools of political communication, these also have their limits and weaknesses. For instance, SMS services used to monitor election results are dependent on the service provider and are at risk of manipulation by staff. The fact that SMS campaigns and the new media are difficult to monitor makes them valuable instruments in restrictive systems. Nevertheless, this uncontrollability also entails a risk of abuse, as the example of Kenya spectacularly proves. The demand for control is thus understandable and important, but must be carefully evaluated. There is a significant risk of restricting the freedom of speech and the right to access information in this context. Thus, methods are required to prevent the transfer of content that glorifies violence, without robbing the new media of any of their power. At present, however, despite the growing importance of new media, political communication generally takes place in Sub-Saharan Africa via the traditional media channels. Those wishing to successfully communicate politically in the future will have to master these new instruments and to integrate new media as an important component in their communication strategy.