

Kenya: media growth and restriction

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Polis is in Nairobi, Kenya, for a research trip looking at 'local' media and development. Yes, thank-you, the weather IS lovely. But the political climate is also slightly overheated. Yesterday, the Kenyan government passed a [new law](#) which allows them to seize the equipment of broadcasters and other media outlets during emergencies.

This is a direct response to the violent conflict in the wake of December's elections. A very thorough and detailed [report](#) by the BBC World Service Trust put part of the blame on commercial FM stations which whipped up the flames of hatred. You talk to people here and they confirm this. These commercial stations have exploded in the last few years as the media market has been liberalised. They hire popular DJs who are not experienced in news. So the talk shows went for the feisty heat of ethnic-based argument rather than the light of conflict resolution.

People here are also clear that this was only a minor factor but it shows the importance of media in a society so complex and political as Kenya. By the way, all the people I talk to say that it was an ethnic-based dispute, despite attempts by many experts in the International community to suggest that poverty or politics was the cause, not identity. Things are surprisingly calm now. Activists seem to feel that the divisions did not run deep and that the economic problems facing Kenya have taken centre stage. The media itself has rapidly corrected itself and tuned out the ranters.

Which is why it is so disappointing that this new media law has been enacted. Everyone doubts that the current administration would use it, but what if a more Mugabe-like president emerged? Kenya is evidence that media can make ghastly mistakes but self-regulation is always preferable.

More from Kenya anon.

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