

**MEDIA AND COVERAGE OF DEMOS:  
A BALANCE BETWEEN ETHICS OR  
AGENDA SETTING?**



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## INTRODUCTION

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This report is therefore a comparative analysis of the media coverage of the demonstrations vis-à-vis government national events for the quarter ending on March 31, 2023. In this context, national events including government agenda is perceived as any citizen-oriented activity with government official's presence or a government announcement via mainstream media.

Kenya is synonymous with protests and political tensions after every elections and this has been evidence since the introduction of multi-party system in 1992. Multi-party system in Kenya helped in the increase of political competition and promotion of democracy. However, it has also led to a fragmented political landscape, with many small parties that often lack the resources and support to compete effectively in elections. The Presidential System in Kenya has also been a recipe for violence when the opposition feels disfranchised in a general election.

The most memorable post-election violence was 2007-2008 that pitted incumbent President Mwai Kibaki against challenger Raila Odinga, with both sides claiming victory. The disputed results led to widespread protests and violence, clashes between ethnic groups were witnessed and over 1,000 people died, and hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes. In the 2013 and 2017 elections, there were also reports of isolated incidents of post-election violence. In the 2017 election, which pitted President Uhuru Kenyatta against Raila Odinga, Odinga contested the results and alleged electoral fraud, which led to protests and clashes in some parts of the country. In 2022 general election, President William Ruto victory was upheld by the Supreme Court after the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Alliance faction went to court to contest the result. The decision by the Supreme court was not welcomed by the opposition and the talks of protests begun to emerge.

The media in Kenya has over the years been applauded and castigated in equal measures. Sometimes it is caught in the crossfire and misuse by leaders. In some situations, it has abdicated its role of setting the agenda, gathering, packaging, and disseminating relevant data and information to the public and allowed messages of discord with the fabric of the public. Professionalism has suffered big time.

During the 2022 elections and beyond, the media has played a crucial role in reporting on events and issues, informing the public, and shaping public opinion. By reporting accurately, fairly, and ethically, media can contribute to a more informed and engaged public and help to build a more democratic society.

The drivers of the demonstrations have been reported to have emanated from electoral justice and demand of lowering the cost of living that affect majority of Kenyans. In the beginning, a section of opposition leaders termed the Kenya Kwanza (KK) government illegitimate, and for about three months they traversed the whole country mobilising Kenyans around these issues. This climaxed to the ongoing demonstrations dubbed #MaandamanoMonday, #MaandamanoThursday to #MaandamanoTuesday. The Month of March 2023 was characterised by violence and streets protests in various parts of the country.

In April 2023, the government and the opposition called for a ceasefire allowing room for negotiations. This was after several people were killed and journalists injured and lost their equipment while covering the demonstrations that were marred with violence.

During the ensuing of the protests, from media reports and observation it was noted that most reporters were not well equipped with protective gear and had little knowledge on protective measures to ensure their safety while covering news. The lack of protective gear can be attributed to either lack of adherence to safety and protection protocols by media houses and journalists at large, the economic down turn of the media industry,

or simply failure by their employers to equip them accordingly.

During the protest the Council recorded a total of 25 journalists who were attacked, injured, and arrested while some had their equipment and media house vehicles destroyed. Out of the 25 reported cases our monitors noted that 18 cases were attacks by the members of the public 'goons' while seven cases were perpetrated by the police. Amongst valuables lost by journalists during the demonstrations included personal effects and a Citizen TV vehicle that was vandalised by goons in Kibra Constituency.

As the media grapples with challenges on safety and protection as evidenced during the protests, it is expected to continue conducting their responsibilities. The current government has for a while castigated the media especially after the 2022 Election. In various media reports the government claimed they have been inadequately covered by the media and blamed the media for shifting its focus to the coverage of Azimio Party.

The Council has been involved in monitoring media content during and after the protests by the onset of political contestation where the current opposition felt they were denied victory.

The report is therefore a comparative analysis of the media coverage of demonstrations vis-à-vis government national events for the quarter ending on March 31, 2023. In this context, national events including government agenda is perceived as any citizen-oriented activity with government officials' presence or a government announcement via mainstream media.

## II. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE

The media remained resilient amidst intimidation and attacks by government operatives, opposition (who issued a boycott notice for some media houses) and members of the public. The Council's media monitoring team will provide evidence of how media covered both the demonstrations and government agenda for the period between March 12 & 25, 2023.

The media made efforts to have a balanced reporting by focusing on the details of the protests – the impact of the protests on the economy, the rising cost of living and less on individuals, contrary to previous events. However, live coverage was undertaken throughout the street activities, with broadcast media covering live the Azimio's principals making addresses.

Here are some items:

- **NTV Kenya** had 'memos', especially the March 20, 2023, memo on Police is trained and paid with taxpayer funds to serve all Kenyans—critiquing their tough stance against protesters.
- **NTV Kenya;** March 20th anti-government protests by Azimio, residents of Kisumu took to the streets protesting the high cost of living and Raila Odinga alludes to an assassination attempt on his life.
- **TV47;** Azimio leaders led by Raila Odinga on Sunday attended a church service at Tononoka Shalom Miracle Church Mombasa, Azimio leader Raila Odinga had declared Monday public holiday, Kenya Kwanza & SUPKEM call on Raila to shun away from the demonstrations and calls for peaceful demonstrations.
- **KBC Channel 1** - Azimio piles pressure on government in its quest for economic and electoral reforms, ICT CS Eliud Owalo wants 28 former Nyanza politicians into Ruto's UDA party, March 20th is unstoppable and asks Raila asks supporters to turn out in large numbers, President Ruto warns the Opposition against unlawful acts ahead of the much-anticipated mass action, Ruto dilemma on mass action as UDA reaps from more defections, MPs divided over the objectivity of Monday's mass action.
- **K24 TV** – March 20, President Ruto has maintained that Azimio's mass actions engineered by former prime minister Raila Odinga can proceed uninterrupted as long as they don't destabilize the nation.
- **Citizen TV** - Nairobi Police Commander Adamson Bungei declared Azimio protest illegal, Azimio leader Raila Odinga at ATG Deliverance Church in Rongai, 4 opposition MPs arrested during demonstrations, Azimio leader Raila Odinga with Azimio La Umoja Principals held rallies in Eastleigh, Pumwani and Mathare, anti-government protests in the lakeside city, Azimio leaders led by Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna condemned police action on protests, Azimio la Umoja Leader Raila Odinga, addressed a press conference, The Kenya Editors' Guild and The Media Council of Kenya condemned a statement issued by opposition leader Raila Odinga calling on Kenyans to boycott the Radio Africa Group media and National Police Service Inspector General Japhet Koome dismissed the claims by the opposition that police officers used excessive force in handling protesters.
- **NTV Kenya** - President Ruto hit at the Azimio leader Raila Odinga saying his calls for mass action have no basis, Opposition leader Raila Odinga says the protest will begin at the KICC before proceeding to the State House, Nairobi County commander Adamson Bungei dismisses the much-popularized mass demonstrations in Nairobi.

- **TV47** - Raila Odinga announced that all set for Azimio demonstration that is set for Monday, 6 Azimio la Umoja MPs led by Ugunja MP Opiyo wandayi and Kilifi Senator Stewart Madzayo were arrested at KICC.
- **KTN News** - Azimio Protests brings operations in the city stand still and broadcast standards during Monday protest.
- **KBC Channel 1** - President Ruto back talks as Raila protests start, Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua has urged Kenyans to ignore calls by the Opposition for weekly demonstrations, 4 opposition legislators arrested for leading mass protests in Nairobi.
- **Radio Maisha** -Gachagua terms the ongoing protests post-election violence, IG Koome says one police officer killed, 20 Others injured during Thursday protests, Rarieda MP alleges nobody has powers to stop Azimio protests, LSK condemn attacks on journalists. Media council of Kenya and Editors guild condemn attacks on journalists, MHA regrets the deaths and property damage during Azimio protests, Police officer succumbs following injuries sustained in a protest and Police on the spot for Journalists attacks.
- **Radio Citizen** -Water CS Alice Wahome condemns Azimio demos, Amnesty International questions police conduct during Monday's protest and CS Wahome calls out Raila for leading demos.

Contrary to the notion that government agenda was not covered by the media, it was evident that media coverage of government news was equally prioritised as well as the coverage of the protests. The sustained and programmed nature of the protests in some parts of the country's necessitated the increased reporting on the matter, including news reports, discussions, and live coverage.

Therefore from a media monitoring perspective, the media did not only dedicate airtime to the demonstrations but maintained balance in reporting other affairs like looting and robbery during the demos, issues related to climate change and its impact on the country; the onset of rains, which featured challenges affecting farmers during this period, education, trade, and digital economy matters.

Other topics affecting the government covered during this period included: the fight against banditry, construction of the Arror and Kimwarer dams, nominations by President Ruto of various individuals to various positions, calls for dialogue between government and opposition, counselling and wellness desks in all Huduma Centres, distribution of relief food and animal feed, distribution of semi-organic fertilizer, a privatisation bill, and the state of prisons.

The report lists some topics on the editorial segment of government news based on the Council's media monitors' Weekly Reports.

- **Citizen TV** - "On Sunday March 12, 2023, President William Ruto attended a thanks giving service in Chuka, Tharaka Nithi County told off Azimio leaders over their planned demonstrations in Nairobi County on Monday March 20, 2023, saying protests won't deter the development agenda. Ruto defended the appointment of IEBC selection panel, saying it was above-board". March 12, 2023, Citizen TV 9PM.
- "In the Story produced by Gatete Njoroge, alcohol abuse situation in Mt Kenya Region remains dire 4 months after President Ruto and DP Gachagua ordered National Police Service and Regional Administration to crackdown on dealers of illicit brew". March 13, 2023, Citizen TV 9PM.

- **NTV Kenya** - Interior CS Kithure Kindiki vacation orders to sections of Baringo, Laikipia, Samburu and Turkana counties residents, 28 politicians from Raila Odinga's Nyanza stronghold are set to formally join UDA on Tuesday, Kenya and Italy to revive the corruption-dotted construction of dams in Aror, Kimwarer and Itare dams, investigations into the malpractices in the 2022 KCSE and government has fired yet another warning shot at maize farmers it alleges are hoarding stock, budget policy statement.
- **TV47** - fight against banditry, newly appointed Kenya Ports Authority (KPA) managing director Captain William Ruto has assurance to employees, construction of Aror and Kimwarer dams, Kenya Railways Corporations take over SGR operations and CAS appointments.
- **KTN News** - World Bank Expand Kenyan Loan Kitty by 129bn, Tax Waivers beneficiaries, KPA employees welcomed their New MD William Ruto.
- **KBC Channel 1** - First Lady leads relief food distribution, KBC partners with the ICT Authority for the upcoming Connected Kenya Summit 2023, disbursement of county funds, WFP makes Shs.7B famine pledge, President William Ruto appoints 50 Chief Administrative Secretaries and Education CS Ezekiel Machogu on climate change effects on learning.
- **K24 TV** - resumption of talks around the construction of Aror, Kimwarer and Itare dams, fight against banditry and President Ruto unveils 50 cabinet assistant secretaries list.

The conduct of media during the period of mass protest can be termed as deliberate, public interest-oriented, critical, and professional. However, objectivity, journalists' safety, political pushback, and access to information are some of the issues the media is facing and needs to be conscious of going forward.

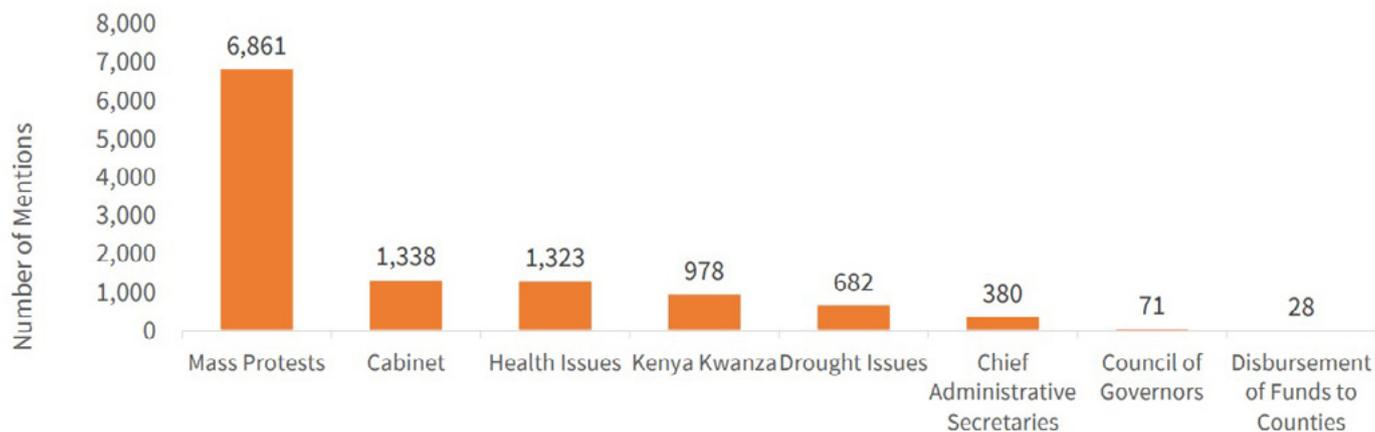
### III. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS' ANALYSIS

The report covers mostly mainstream media and prime time news reporting; Citizen TV, NTV Kenya, KTN News, K24 TV, TV47, KBC Channel 1, Hot 96, Milele FM, Radio Jambo, Radio Maisha, Spice FM, Classic 105 and Radio Citizen. The data was collected between 10th March and 1st April 2023 across mainstream media platforms.

The report looks at four main categories of:

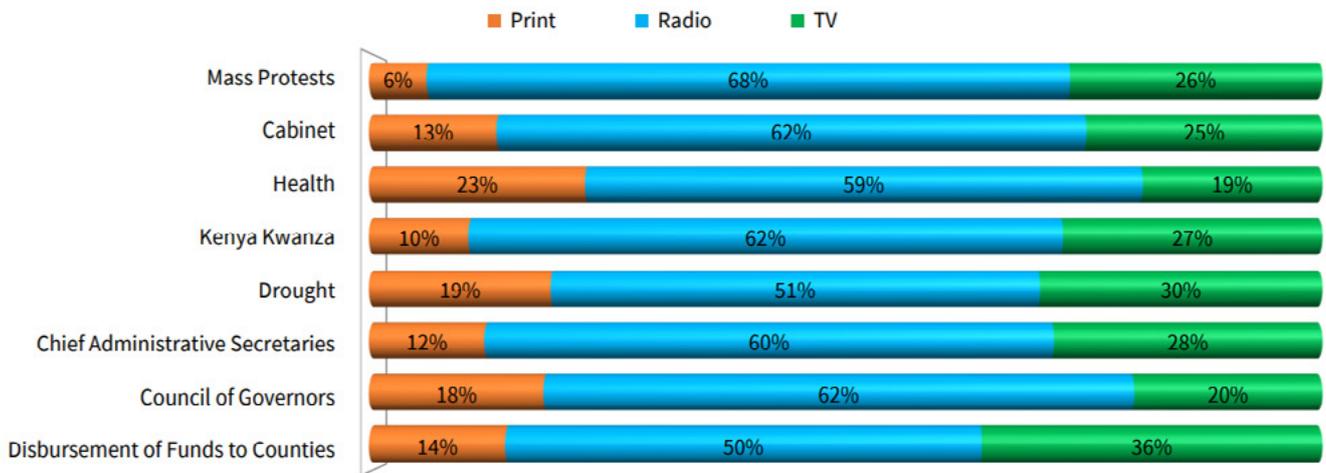
- Distribution & Trends
- Space Consumption
- Coverage Category Placement
- Thematic Highlights

#### 1. Thematic Volumes Distribution



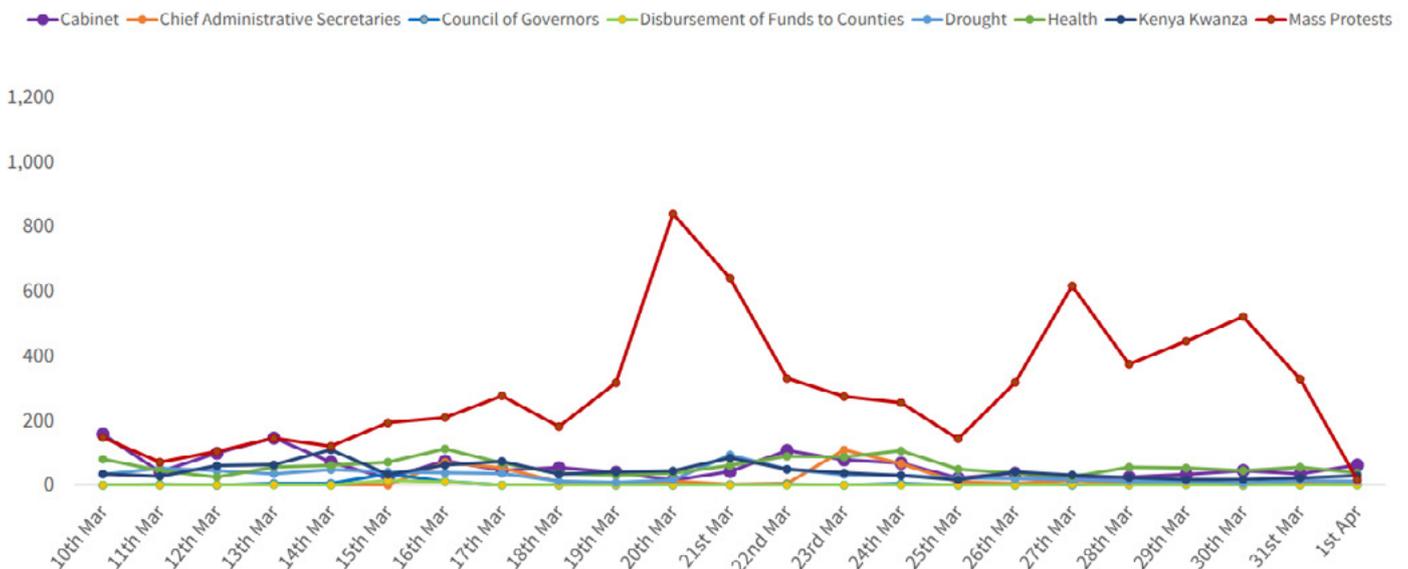
- Media coverage undisputedly shifted focus to the opposition mass action, from the time the calls were made by Azimio leaders, throughout the period when the actual protest took place across different parts of the country.
- Real time updates on the opposition pronouncements, live feeds of the demonstrations, and political discussions during interviews, were the norm in the past couple of weeks when anti-government activity peaked.

## 2. Thematic Issues Distribution by Medium



- Varied topical issues during this period received coverage spanning from all the mainstream media, but with a notable chunk coming from the radio platform. Disbursement of funds to counties was largely covered by TV stations.
- This occurrence can largely be attributed to involvement of many radio stations, most with significant coverage frequency across the county. Most mainstream media houses have coverage across the country.

## Daily Publicity Trends



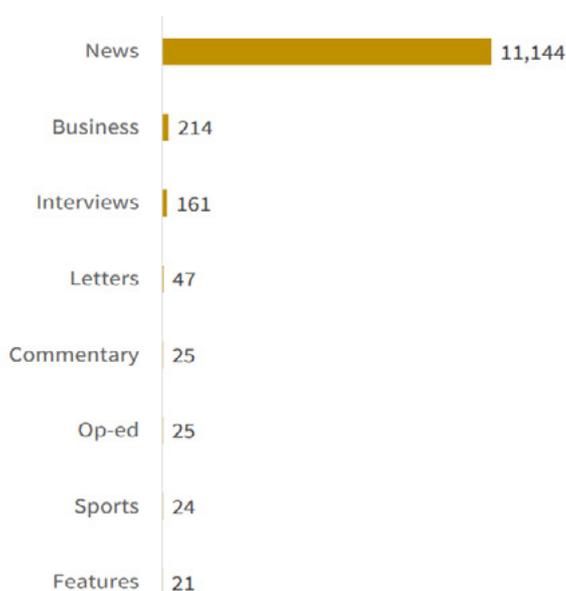
- The coverage of the protests peaked on March 20, 2023. A week later the coverage was dismal, this could be attributed to the attacks against the media by the police and the public. Communications Authority's (CA) statement on media breach of the programming code could have led to some media houses shying off from reporting the protests. Notably, the statement was challenged in court, to which the media celebrated.

### 3. Thematic Media Space Consumption

Theme	TV (Secs)	Radio (Secs)	Print (ColCms)
Mass Protests	762,072	413,360	24,624
Kenya Kwanza	143,710	67,395	5,525
Health	90,725	82,416	16,150
Cabinet	93,466	60,617	9,067
Drought	68,450	30,559	6,438
Chief Administrative Secretaries	18,495	16,263	2,854
Council of Governors	2,303	3,107	485
Disbursement of Funds to Counties	1,408	718	159
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,180,629</b>	<b>674,435</b>	<b>65,301</b>

- Coverage of the mass protests and demonstrations as organised by the Azimio Coalition, consumed the biggest media space across all the mainstream media platforms. Print media gave more coverage to other matters of national importance and less time to mass protests.
- There were live coverage and updates on the movements of the protestors and developments in different parts of the country, particularly on the hotspots where citizens took to the streets to protest the high cost of living.
- Different media houses, mostly TV outlets, hosted political analysts and pundits who gave insights during lengthy interview sessions, as events unfolded across the country.

### 4. Overall Coverage Placement



#### Category Volumes Distribution by Medium

Category Name	Radio	TV	Print	Grand Total
News	7,314	2,791	1,039	11,144
Business	120	44	50	214
Interviews	17	139	5	161
Letters	12	4	31	47
Op-ed			25	25
Commentary	1		24	25
Sports	11	7	6	24
Features	4	9	8	21
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7,479</b>	<b>2,994</b>	<b>1,188</b>	<b>11,661</b>

- A whopping chunk of the coverage during the period under analysis spanned on the News segment, across all the traditional media platforms.

- A big chunk of the coverage during the period under analysis spanned in the news segment, across all the traditional media platforms.

Figure 3: How TV Content is Accessed

**5. Media Space Consumption by Category**

Category	TV (Secs)	Radio (Secs)	Print (ColCms)
News	664,385	632,137	58,708.0
Interviews	496,393	33,432	621.6
Business	10,648	6,608	1,908.8
Features	5,315	616	794.3
Sports	3,196	690	232.8
Letters	692	934	480.2
Op-ed	-	-	1,341.1
Commentary	-	18	1,214.6
Grand Total	1,180,629	674,435	65,301.3

- Updates on latest happenings during the protests in the country headlined the news segment on all the mainstream media stations.
- TV news and interviews were lengthy and media spaces were notable as the media made efforts to keep their audience up to date with the vast developments across the country.

**6. Highlights of the coverage.**

**Mass Protests & Demonstrations Highlights**



*As of March 10, Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition built steam for its nationwide protests and appeared to be targeting several companies they deem to be promoting President William Ruto's regime.*

*On March 10, Azimio la Umoja one Kenya coalition leader Raila Odinga announced the beginning of countrywide mass protests and civil disobedience against the Kenya Kwanza government, after failing to address their concerns during the 14 days ultimatum.*

*On March 15, President William Ruto warned opposition leader Raila Odinga against holding unlawful protests that will result in the destruction of lives and property or the paralyzation of business operations in the country.*

*Azimio La Umoja One Kenya coalition leader Raila Odinga declared that there will be protests in Nairobi and many parts of the country every Monday and Thursday.*

**Cabinet Performance Highlights**



*Cabinet approved the Privatization Bill 2023 which will see non-performing public entities sold to private actors without the bureaucratic approval process by Parliament.*

*Legislators drawn from Azimio coalition strongly oppose the cabinet decision to approve a bill that by-passes parliament in privatization of parastatals.*

*Cabinet Secretaries will now be appearing before the National Assembly plenary with effect from March 23, 2023. This was after Members of Parliament approved changes to standing orders to allow the CSs to be appearing before the plenary every Wednesday afternoon to answer questions posed by members.*

*Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki topped the list of best performing ministers in the latest survey released by Tifa Research Polls.*

### Kenya Kwanza Government Mentions



Members of Parliament affiliated to Azimio la Umoja One Kenya clashed with their Kenya Kwanza Alliance counterparts at Parliament buildings over the mass protests. The leadership of the ruling coalition castigated the opposition for plotting a coup with an aim of causing destruction.

Six political parties under the umbrella of Kenya Kwanza Alliance folded to join President William Ruto's party United Democratic Alliance (UDA). The merger continued to elicit mixed reactions.

Azimio leader Raila warned the Kenya Kwanza government against police brutality during their planned demonstrations, saying such action could land the perpetrators at The Hague.

Azimio leader Raila Odinga accused the Kenya Kwanza government of poaching MPs from the opposition side.

Kenya Kwanza leaders claimed that former President Uhuru Kenyatta is the principal sponsor of the Azimio la Umoja planned demos.

According to a survey by Centre For Africa Progress, Kenyans voiced various views rating the current administration with others saying it should be given time.

According to a new report by TIFA, a majority of Kenyans have cited the high cost of living as the biggest issues that the Kenya Kwanza regime must tackle.

### Drought Highlights



The Cabinet allocated Sh23.96 billion for interventions in food assistance, water, livestock, peace and security for the period running April to October, amid concerns that the situation is getting worse in counties affected by drought.

Drought has caused severe hunger and deaths in many parts of the country, particularly in Northern Kenya, as well as many other negative consequences such as massive population displacements.

Health stakeholders in the country expressed concern over the rising cases of malnutrition among children due to the worsening drought situation.

Education CS Machogu said the effects of Climate Change are negatively affecting the education sector citing drought, hunger, and are seriously affecting school attendance and progression.

The National Steering Committee on Drought Response has raised KES 1 billion for drought mitigation as it targets one million Kenyans in the latest phase of food distribution.

According to National Drought Management Authority, the drought situation has continued to worsen in 23 counties including Kitui county.

Kenya received 30,000 metric tons of wheat from Ukraine to help families affected by drought and famine.

### Health Issues Highlights



Health Cabinet Secretary Susan Nakhumicha pleaded with medics to prioritize compassion for the sick as the government sorts out their grievances.

CS Nakhumicha on Friday launched the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan for the Nursing Council of Kenya.

CS Susan Nakhumicha said the government will reduce the charges of National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) from 500ksh to 300shs.

The Public Service Commission through Huduma Kenya is planning to offer mental health stations in Huduma Centers across the country.

Cholera outbreak in Machakos County.

Kenyan health workers intensified surveillance at the Kenya-Tanzania border following an outbreak of Marburg disease in Tanzania.

KMPDU accused counties of delaying doctors' payment and pushed for formation of Health Services Commission.

The Ministry of Health is working closely with Japanese engineers to streamline medical records and improve patients care.

MoH set to develop biometric system to streamline medical records.

MOH set to open an East African kidney institute in the country.

### CAS Appointment Highlights



*President Ruto nominated 50 CASs to serve in his government. This was after they successfully went through vigorous interviews conducted by PSC.*

*President William Ruto on Thursday morning, March 23, presided over the swearing-in of 50 Chief Administrative Secretaries at State House, Nairobi. This followed a communique on Wednesday, March 22, that the CASs would take the oath of office without being vetted by the National Assembly.*

*The 50 newly appointed CASs suffered a blow, when the High Court stopped them from assuming office pending determination of a suit by the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) and Katiba Institute, against the move by President William Ruto.*

*The government appeared to have ignored a court order by allowing Chief Administrative Secretaries to assume office despite a case filed against them.*

*Interior CS Kithure Kindiki assigned roles to the newly sworn-in Chief Administrative Secretaries even after the court stopped them.*

*Deputy president Rigathi Gachagua defended President William Ruto's 'bloated' Chief Administrative Secretaries list. He was speaking to a media interview with Kikuyu stations.*

*The Judiciary denied claims it presided over the swearing-in of the 50 CASs appointed by President William Ruto, while the matter was pending in court.*

### Council of Governors Highlights



*Uasin Gishu county was selected to host the 8th devolution conference which is expected to run from August 16 to 19, 2022.*

*County governments have made tremendous strides in enhancing food security through adoption of modern technologies, Council of Governors Chairperson Anne Waiguru said.*

*Governors rejected a push by senators to decentralize the functions of the Government Printer by establishing a printer in each of the 47 counties.*

*The Council of Governors (CoG) decried the exploitation of coffee farmers by unscrupulous businessmen and middlemen who have invaded the sector under the 'watch of the government.'*

*Governors can now breath a sigh of relief following the launch of a program that will see all county functions fully transferred from the national government.*

*Governors and their finance officers face possible prosecution over illegal payments of more than Sh 3.56 billion to the Council of Governors.*

*The council of governors urged the government to stop importing Sugar but instead revive the failed sugar companies.*

### Funds Disbursement to Counties Highlights



*The Council of Governors decried perennial delays in the disbursement of funds to counties by the Treasury. CoG Chairperson Anne Waiguru said no county has received funds for December 2022 through to February this year.*

*Senators summoned National Treasury Principal Secretary Chris Kiptoo over delays in the disbursement of funds that has caused massive cash crunch and disruption of services in the devolved units.*

*Contractors who are demanding millions in arrears from county governments will have to wait longer before getting their dues.*

*Operations in county governments face paralysis due to non-disbursement of funds by the National Treasury. For the first time in the history of devolution, outstanding disbursement to counties has surpassed Sh122.1 billion mark.*

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## IV. CONCLUSION

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From the media monitoring report, the media allocated more time to live broadcast, topical discussions, news items and the demonstrations. The focus was on areas that were mostly affected by the protests i.e., Kisumu, Nairobi, Migori and Homabay.

The coverage included politicians from both the political divide, though as noted it's hard to differentiate Kenya Kwanza political leaders when they speak from government position. It should be noted that coverage of the protests was not only an Azimio affair, but also Kenya Kwanza politicians got coverage on their statements and press conferences prior and during the demonstrations. Religious Groups also had a voice in the protests by either condemning politicians or goons who destroyed property.

The coverage by the media equally carried news from the government across media, allocating significant portion of the airtime to stories of national interest.

The media too was instrumental in ensuring the public is enlightened on what was going on in different parts of the country.

Journalists bore the brunt of attacks from both the public during the March 27 and 30, 2023 demonstrations. 25 journalists were attacked and injured, while some lost their equipment. This according to several articles and editorial is an attack against Press freedom.

Targeting media by the security agents and members of the public by extension is worrying and a major cause of concern. Media freedom is at stake and there is need for relevant government actors to assure journalism of its protection during and after the demonstrations.

Finally, the bigger issue in the ongoing demonstration and stand-off between government, Azimio and its supporters is the position taken by the two factions. While one feels media is favouring the other; the other is convinced they are biased against them. Azimio leadership has previously issued and retracted policy on boycott of media - The Star in particular for perceived bias. The government on the other hand feels mainstream media is generally biased against it, since the campaigns. In all this, journalism is caught in the middle as persecution of press freedom persists. Good journalism is on trial, whether it should be sacrificed at the expense of a few bad apples and the country's political imbroglio is a question that needs to be tackled immediately.



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