



Media Synergy and Elections in Burundi: A SWOT Analysis of the 20 May 2020 Triple Ballot

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Abstract: This article aims to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Burundian media synergy during the May 20, 2020, triple ballot. Media coverage of the elections is crucial to ensure that they are democratic, free, peaceful, transparent, and inclusive and that the information disseminated during the campaign is neutral and impartial. Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The results showed that media experience, nationwide coverage, media access to sources of information, multilingual news presentation, and dissemination of results are the main strengths of media synergy. Its weaknesses include few reporters, news coverage interruptions, and unbalanced reporting. However, the government's will, trust in the media, the safety of journalists, their collaboration with electoral commissions, and the electoral partners' validation of results announced by the media are the principal opportunities for media synergy. Misinformation, the rejection of results, and the lack of foreign partnerships specific to the media are some of the media synergy threats. The SWOT analysis shows that media synergy reduces the violence and tensions created by the speeches of certain candidates. This article is structured around four sections: Introduction, Methodology, Presentation of Results, and Discussion of Results.

Keywords - Burundi, elections, media synergy, media coverage, SWOT

1. Introduction

Elections are the foundation of democracy; they enable voters to choose those who will represent them and exercise a share of public authority on their behalf. Elections are also regular deadlines for taking stock, at the end of a term of office, of a team's management of power and for allowing citizens to continue to place

their trust in the same representatives or to change them (Frère, 2010). Media coverage of elections is essential if they are to be transparent and inclusive. For this reason, the information disseminated during the campaign must be neutral and impartial if it is to be valid and run smoothly. Not only do the media provide information to voters, but they also monitor elections to prevent corruption and avoid major mistakes being made (Howard, 2004). During the electoral campaign, the media's role is to inform voters about the electoral calendar, encourage people to register, inform voters about the political parties and candidates running in the elections, announce the political programs of the political players, and teach voters how to vote. The media also have a role to play in denouncing any attempts at fraud and closely monitoring the collation and proclamation of election results. At least three essential elements must be covered by the press during the election campaign: political parties and candidates, issues, and the electoral process (Howard, 2004).

In Africa, as in the DRC and Burundi, election coverage has taken the form of media synergy, a joint media coverage mechanism based on the pooling of human and material resources (Frère, 2015) and the dissemination of common electoral information, thanks to journalists scattered throughout the country. The organization of a common editorial line in favor of tolerance and peace in Burundi, especially through media synergy, showed its value-added during the previous democratic elections held in 2005, 2010, and 2015. The media synergy remains a good benchmark on a professional level. Furthermore, it contributed to a force of resistance against manipulation of all kinds. The media synergy aims to contribute to the electoral process by informing as many voters as possible about what's at stake in the elections and the change it will bring to the country. It also aimed to respond to the primary concerns of foreign partners: neutral and factual information, establishing the media as "watchdogs" of the electoral process, ensuring the monitoring and control of voting operations, promoting the adoption of an editorial line favoring information by all participating media, encouraging the circulation of results through an alternative channel, likely to confirm or invalidate the results disclosed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (Frère, 2015). In other words, the 2020 media synergy focused on the transparency of the vote. This transparency concerned the opening time of polling stations, the presence of political representatives and election observers, electoral materials like ballot boxes, ballot papers, and polling booths, to name just a few, security conditions, the number of registered voters and voters, difficulties linked to the use of the single ballot paper, the closing time of polling stations, and the counting of ballot papers. As watchdogs of democracy (Binette-Pierre & Champagne-Poirier, 2022), journalists should guarantee the accuracy of information, impartiality, and accountability. However, some journalists have become mouthpieces for the camps for real interests that include money, gifts, promises of employment, etc., and are losing their editorial independence in the election process.

The 2020 elections and the 2020 media synergy occurred in a particular context, with the COVID-19 pandemic at the top of the list and the absence of observation by the regional community. The 2020 elections were the first to be organized without international aid. For the first time in Burundi, a single election brought together three elections: the presidential, legislative, and communal elections. Since 2017,

the Government of Burundi has been collecting voluntary contributions from Burundian citizens under the pretext of financing the May 2020 elections (Group, 2020). First, the government of Burundi fully financed the 2020 elections to the tune of ninety-seven billion Burundi francs. The same government funded the media synergy with one hundred and ninety-seven million one hundred and seventy-two thousand six hundred Burundi francs (197,172,600 BIF). The government of Burundi aimed to demonstrate its independence from its traditional backers, notably the European Union, the United States, and other Western countries. Second, to broadcast the elections live and in real-time, media synergy was organized on April 17, 2020, to kick off the election campaign. It continued on May 20, 2020, the day of the first-ever triple ballot in Burundi's history. Third and lastly, ethnic and gender factors remain dominant in the legislative elections, with 60% Hutu, 40% Tutsi, and at least 30% women (*Constitution de la République du Burundi*, 2018), as stipulated in Article 169. Nevertheless, the Batwa community is co-opted.

This article aims to conduct a SWOT analysis, i.e., the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Burundian media synergy during the 20 May 2020 triple ballot, which brought together the presidential, legislative, and communal elections, using the legislative elections as a case study. This analytical tool will enable us to assess the internal and external factors of media synergy and avoid the electoral violence and tensions generated by the political communication of election candidates. In this article, the following four questions were raised: What are the strengths of media synergy during the 2020 elections? What were the media synergy's weaknesses? What were some opportunities, and then what were the media synergy's threats? The underlying hypothesis is that "media synergy reduces predictable violence due to tensions created by the speeches made by certain candidates". The methodology used for data collection is listed below.

2. Materials and methods

In this second section, we present the study area, its duration, population, actors, instruments, and methods.

2.1. Study area

Our study was conducted in Burundi, one of the East African countries. It covers an area of 27,834 km² and is surrounded by three countries: Tanzania to the east, Rwanda to the north, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. Our research targeted 49 Burundi media outlets that covered the 2020 elections through the so-called "media synergy".

2.2. Duration of the study

The study lasted 23 days, including 2 for contacts, 6 for data collection and processing, and 15 days for analysis. Our study focuses on the media synergy of April 27, 2020, which coincides with the launch of the triple ballot electoral campaign, and the media synergy of the May 20, 2020, triple ballot, which corresponds to a voting day. The data collection period ranged between May 20 and May 22, 2020, as the

three days coincided with voting and counting operations as well as the announcement of the election results.

2.3. Research population

The research population is made up of media synergy reporters and desk managers. We chose a non-probability sample for our survey. This means that the researcher chooses a sample that provides reliable information.

2.4. Actors

The current study focuses on two categories of actors: thirteen political parties that ran candidates in the 2020 parliamentary elections, as well as special envoys who reported on the elections on May 20, 2020. These political parties include the ruling CNDD-FDD party (2005 to date), CNL (the main opposition), the former ruling UPRONA party two consecutive times (1962–1993 and 1996–2003), the former ruling SAHWANYA-FRODEBU party (1993–1996 and 2003–2005), FNL, FRODEBU NYAKURI, KIRA BURUNDI, APDR, Coalition COPA, CDP, UPD, SANGWE PADER, and FPN-IMBONEZA. The present study targeted the first three parties (CNDD-FDD, CNL, and UPRONA), as they received two percent (2%) of the national vote for seats in parliament.

2.5. Data collection tools

The data used in this article were of two kinds: primary data and secondary data. The primary data collection tools were made up of a questionnaire for the quantitative method and an interview guide for the qualitative method. The questionnaire, which was distributed to 26 Burundian journalists who have worked for the 2020 media synergy, contained four questions to look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the media synergy of the 2020 Burundian triple ballot. In the radio category, these journalists consisted of four from Burundi National Radio and four from Isanganiro Radio. In the TV category, our respondents include four from Burundi National Television. In print media, they comprised four from the state-owned print media, four from the Iwacu private print media, four from the Burundi Eco private print media, and two from the Burundi News Agency. During our survey, we also used the interview guide. We privileged individual interviews, personal surveys, and telephone calls. The individual interviews were recorded. The data collected from telephone calls were written on pieces of paper for further analysis.

As far as the secondary data are concerned, these were collected from the press releases of government institutions like the Ministry of Communication and Media, the National Council of Communication (CNC), and Burundi's Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). Other secondary data were obtained through media reports and the websites of political parties as well.

2.6. Methods

To achieve my main objective, which is to carry out a SWOT analysis of media synergy during the 20 May 2020 triple ballot in Burundi, we used published books, media reports, and official election reports when developing our methodology. We employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method consisted of gathering, listening to, and analyzing radio reports that are part of the 27 April 2020 launching campaign and the 20 May 2020 triple ballot coverage by the media synergy. The analysis was mainly focused on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of media synergy. Media reports that are part of our study were broadcast in French (the official language) and Kirundi (the mother language) at the central newsroom of Burundi National Radio and Television (RTNB) from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. The quantitative method involved displaying the findings of quantitative investigations as statistical tables or graphs.

3. Results presentation and interpretation

The present study aimed to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of media synergy in the May 20, 2020 elections. The outcomes of our survey were presented in the tables. The questionnaire was comprised of four questions.

The first question sought to recognize the strengths of media synergy during the 2020 elections. Table 1 displays the findings of our investigation.

Table 1: Strengths of media synergy

Strengths of media synergy	Frequency	%
Media experience of working in synergy	19	73,08
Public and private media solidarity	24	92,31
Nationwide coverage (18 provinces)	17	65,38
Easy access to information sources through all media	20	76,92
News presentation in Kirundi, French, English, and Kiswahili languages	23	88,46
Media announcement of election results	25	96,15

Table 1 shows that when it comes to media synergy, 73.08% of our respondents affirmed that the media had experience in election coverage, and 92.31% spoke of the cooperation between the public and media synergy professionals. All 18 of the nation's provinces were covered, according to 65.38% of our respondents. 76.92% of respondents emphasized that all media synergy professionals had relaxed access to information sources, and 88.46% were proud of presenting their news in Kirundi, French, English, and Kiswahili spoken languages. However, 96.15% of our respondents said the announcement of the election results was the main strength of the media synergy's journalists.

From the above, we noticed that media experience in joint election coverage, a fraternity of public and private media, nationwide coverage, easy access for all media to sources of information, the presentation of newspapers in several languages, and the dissemination of election results were the major strengths of the media synergy.

The interviews conducted and the analysis of secondary data showed that there are other forces of media synergy. These include the creation of a common editorial line, censorship among journalists, their reporting on the political parties' projects and citizens' expectations, the cooperation between media and the election partners, notably the independent electoral commissions, political parties, and civil society organizations, and journalists' self-determination acting as a watchdog throughout the entire electoral process.

The second question aimed to identify weaknesses in media synergy during the 2020 elections. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Media synergy weaknesses

Media synergy weaknesses	Frequency	%
Small-scale special envoys	26	100
Synergy interruption of 25 minutes	24	92,31
Unbalanced information	20	76,92

In terms of weaknesses in the media synergy, Table 2 shows that the majority of our respondents identified the small size of the media synergy special envoys as the most important weakness. Those confirming that the disruption of the media synergy and the unbalanced information were the weaknesses of the 2020 media synergy represent 92.31% and 76.92%, respectively.

Looking at the responses to the second question, it was evident that the decrease in the number of media synergy special envoys, the disruption of the media synergy, and the sharing of unbalanced information weakened the media synergy.

Other weaknesses identified through interviews and the analysis of secondary data were notably the lack of funds proper to media synergy, the media impossibility to cover more than one commune, the broadcast of long and short reports, self-censorship, the non-respect of ethics and deontology, the spread of rumors, and the rejection of the election results by some election partners.

The third question looked to identify opportunities for media synergy in the 2020 elections. The findings of our investigation are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Media Synergy Opportunities

Media synergy opportunities	Frequency	%
The Government's will to hold elections	26	100
Confidence from electoral partners	21	80,77
Special envoys' security	24	92,31
Cooperation between electoral commissions and journalists	20	76,92
Validation of election results by a large number of election partners and countries	23	88,46

In terms of opportunities for media synergy, Table 3 shows that the majority of our respondents indicated that the government's determination to carry out the elections is one of the major opportunities for media synergy. 80.77% of our respondents mentioned the confidence of the electoral partners as another opportunity. 92.31% of our survey participants mentioned the security of special envoys as an additional opportunity. 76.92% said that the collaboration between electoral commissions and media synergy journalists was an added opportunity, while 88.46% said the validation of the election results by several local electoral and international election partners was also an opportunity for media synergy.

Based on the findings in Table 3, we can admit that the government's will to consolidate democracy through organizing elections, the election partners' trust in the media synergy, the security of the media synergy's special envoys throughout the country, the cooperation between the election commissions and journalists, and the general acceptance of the election results by local and international election partners were the main opportunities for media synergy.

Opportunities mentioned through interviews and the analysis of secondary data were particularly the government's consolidation of peace and security nationwide, the operationalization of political parties and their agreement on the 2020 election roadmap, the existence in Burundi of national and international laws, the presence of local observation and Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Nigerian observation, a collaboration between media synergy professionals, the independent electoral commissions and local observations, and the validation of the election results by most of the election stakeholders.

The fourth question seeks to examine threats to media synergy during the 2020 elections. The findings of our study are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Media synergy threats

Media synergy threats	Frequency	%
Lack of technical and financial partners	23	88,46
Misinformation through social networks	20	76,92
Rejection of election results by some local election partners	16	61,54

Table 4 shows that 88.46% of our respondents pointed out the absence of technical and financial sponsors as the main threat to media synergy. 76.92% reported that the misinformation, like rumors through social media via Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, was another threat to the synergy. Moreover, 61.54% of the

survey participants said that the disapproval of the election results by some of the election partners was an additional threat to media synergy.

According to the answers to the fourth question, we could admit that false information, notably rumors, the distrust of the election results, and the lack of local and international technical and financial sponsors for media synergy were some of the threats to media synergy. Other media synergy threats, as revealed in our interviews and secondary data, include the COVID-19 pandemic, the existence of the journalists' code of conduct to limit their freedom, the absenteeism of international observation, the lack of international resources, the cut-off of the internet and social media, and the lack of cooperation between media professionals and chiefs of polling station bureaux.

4. Discussion of the results

We summarized and analyzed the survey's findings. The findings demonstrated that media synergy has strengths (Table 1), weaknesses (Table 2), opportunities (Table 3), and threats (Table 4).

4.1. Strengths of media synergy

The main strengths of media synergy, as shown in Table 1, were the experience of the public and private media working together since 2005, the solidarity of journalists, media coverage of all 18 provinces of the nation, easy access to information sources, the dissemination of electoral information in various languages, and the announcement of results. According to the interviews conducted and the analysis of the secondary data, the creation of a common editorial line, restrictions among media professionals, the broadcast of the political parties' projects and citizens' expectations-related activities, the collaboration between media and the election partners, as well as journalists' self-determination, were other strengths of media synergy.

The media synergy was able to cover the opening of the electoral campaign and the triple on May 20, 2020. As media professionals decided to join hands in the coverage of the election, the censorship of journalists working for Media Synergy was carried out by the central editorial staff rather than by the country's authorities. The media synergy experience was shown in their ability to organize a common editorial line and cover the official launch of the April 27, 2020, electoral campaign. In that respect, twenty (20) radio stations, four (4) television stations, the print media, and the online press joined forces to broadcast live the official launch of the electoral campaign. Some journalists of the media synergy covered the official launch of the ruling CNDD-FDD party's campaign along with its allies, made up of 27 political parties in Gitega political capital, in Gitega central province. Others covered the official launch of the main opposition party's campaign, CNL, in Ngozi's northern province. Other journalists covered the official launch of the SAHWANYA-FRODEBU opposition party's campaign at Bujumbura commercial capital, Bujumbura western province; the campaign launch of the KIRA-BURUNDI coalition of political parties at Muramvya, in central province, and the UPRONA party at Mwaro, central province, to name just a few.

Their experience allowed the media to cover the projects of political parties, coalitions of political parties, and independent candidates, as well as the expectations of the Burundian population in the socio-economic

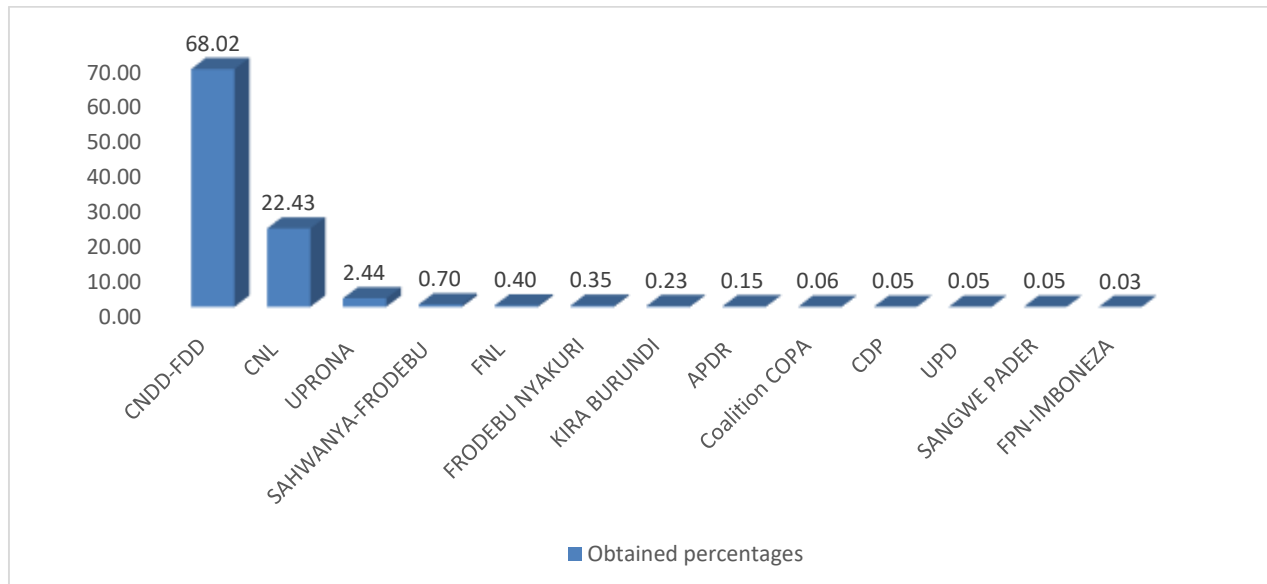
field. The parties' campaign projects that the media covered include agriculture, livestock, fisheries, tourism, environment, industry, infrastructure, drinking water, trade, education, health, social security, social housing, justice, religion, employment, repatriation, and ICT; most of them are the expectations of the population.

The media synergy experience was also shown in their capacity to play their role as a watchdog of the electoral process. It is why they covered the start and closing times of voting operations, hand-washing kits to protect against the coronavirus, and the availability of electoral materials, notably ballot boxes, polling booths, ballot papers, voting envelopes, voters' lists, and indelible anchors, to name just a few. The media synergy also reported on the observers of political parties, civil society associations, coalitions of political parties, and independent candidates. The solidarity of journalists was seen in their mission to advance democracy and peace through the accomplishment of their duties, regardless of their ethnic diversity (Hutu and Tutsi), place of origin, or political party. Reporters and desk managers in both public and private media are schooled in a spirit of fraternity, big and small, as Burundi lacks a school of journalism. Through fraternity schooling, journalists acquired more skills from their peers on how to gather electoral information, treat it, and broadcast it. Working in synergy facilitated the gathering of electoral information as media synergy had access to both official and opposition sources. As all radio stations, public or private, provide unique electoral information, all sources remain available for media synergy. The media synergy has an additional advantage in that it utilizes four languages: English, French, Kirundi, and Kiswahili. Frankly speaking, apart from the media synergy, Burundi National Radio and Television is the only medium that broadcasts information in four languages. There are two reasons behind the use of those four spoken languages. The first reason is to inform Burundians that the latter, whatever their ethnic group (Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa), speak the same language, Kirundi (or simply Rundi), a Bantu language. In addition to Kirundi (the mother tongue), French (the official language), English, and Kiswahili are other spoken languages in Burundi. The second reason is to inform the regional and international communities about the electoral process, starting with Burundi's English-speaking neighbors like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, French-speaking countries, and Kiswahili-speaking communities, as it is the African language with the largest number of speakers in East Africa. The media synergy used the four spoken languages to allow the Kirundi-speaking community, French and English-speaking countries, as well as Kiswahili speakers wherever they are, to enlighten the electoral process. Despite their fatigue, the media were able to give the first trends in the provisional and partial results of the May 20 elections.

The publication of the election results gathered at various polling places and centers by the media synergy increased popular trust in the media. This resulted from the media's cooperation with the Independent Communal Electoral Commission (CECI), the Independent County Electoral Commission (CEPI), and the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), as well as their joint efforts.

The graph below displays the election results that were communicated to each political party by the media.

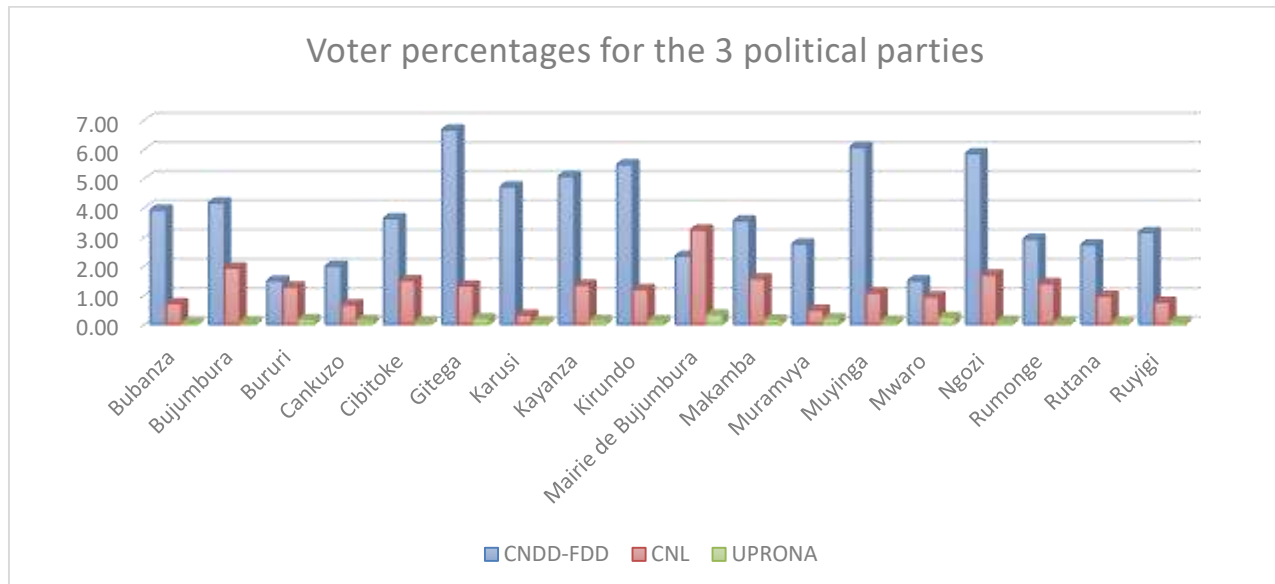
Graph 1: Summary of electoral results for the 2020 legislative elections



Graph 1 shows that the CNDD-FDD party won 68.02%, followed by CNL with 22.43%, UPRONA with 2.44%, SAHWANYA-FRODEBU with 0.70%, FNL with 0.40%, FRODEBU NYAKURI with 0.35%, KIRA BURUNDI with 0.23%, APDR with 0.15%, Coalition COPA with 0.06%, CDP with 0.05%, UPD with 0.05%, SANGWE PADER 0.05%, and FPN-IMBONEZA 0.03%.

Three political parties in Burundi, CNDD-FDD, CNL, and UPRONA, have been granted permission to enter the legislature by Article 108 (*Code Electoral du Burundi*, 2019). Only the political party or coalition of political parties that received at least two percent (2%) of the total national votes cast are allowed to hold seats in parliament, according to this article. The graph below displays the voter participation rates for the three political parties.

Graph 2: Summary of electoral results for the 18 provinces in the 2020 legislative elections



In our opinion, the strengths of media synergy lie in the skills and know-how of media professionals. They acted as real witnesses and intermediaries between the election candidates and the electorate because they highlighted the candidates' plans for society and the electorate's aspirations during the election campaign. Moreover, media professionals became watchdogs of the electoral process and intermediaries between the Burundi Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and its branches, as various clarifications on the election practical modalities were passed to the commission via the media. In Burundi, the media invites the chairperson of the Burundi Independent Electoral Commission to give some clarifications during the election period at any time in their studio. To succeed, media synergy remains a priority. Media synergy made the media and journalists more responsible and less vulnerable. Media professionals have duties that require them to monitor and report on the progress of voting operations, report errors, send incomplete results, analyze the data at hand (turnout), and cover the reports provided by independent observers (Frère, 2010). These positions require them to know voting procedures.

A variety of professional skills, including accuracy of information, impartiality, neutrality in the workplace, and responsibility, are reflections of their interpersonal abilities (Howard, 2004). Article 17 of the press law states that "all information professionals are bound by the laws and regulations in effect as well as by the code of ethics and professional conduct of the Burundian press" when exercising their freedom to inform. They must only disseminate fair material whose origin, authenticity, and accuracy have been established and thoroughly checked, and they must resist any pressure that would tend to taint the information's accuracy (Loi n°1/ du 14 September 2018 portant modification de la loi n°1/15 du 9 mai 2015 régissant la presse au Burundi, 2018). Furthermore, their expertise is demonstrated by their refusal to "disseminate information containing slander, defamation, insult, racial discrimination, unfounded accusations, arguments based on the region, ethnicity, and religion of the candidates for the various elections, as well as all those who support them, lies, incitement to electoral fraud, or any malicious comment against political parties and their social projects, and any denigration of political parties or candidates"(Code de Conduite des Médias et des journalistes en période Electoral, 2020).

Not only does the publication of the election results by the media synergy increase popular trust, but also the government's and other election stakeholders' trust. For instance, the press release that the Communication and Media Ministry issued on June 4, 2020, illustrates factors contributing to the success of the 2020 media synergy. These include the organization of a common editorial line, the application of techniques and knowledge learned in the pre-election period, the respect of law, ethics, and deontology in the journalistic craft, the advice from media professionals and experts in journalism and communication, as well as the good collaboration between media and all election stakeholders. The self-determination of media professionals was also another factor that led the media synergy to success. They covered elections for three days and two nights, a period that exceeded the planned media coverage, for the interests of the nation and the population, which proved their patriotism.

4.2. Weaknesses of media synergy

The findings in Table 2 show that the small size of special envoys, disruption of synergy, unbalanced election news, and conflicts of interest were the key media synergy weaknesses. Moreover, the lack of resources allocated to media synergy, the media's impracticality of covering more than one commune, the broadcast of long and short reports, self-censorship, the non-respect of ethics and deontology, the spread of rumors, and the rejection of the election results by some election partners were other weaknesses of media synergy.

Several errors have been noted since the launch of the election campaign. The electoral campaign itself was covered by the media, each in its way according to its capacities. Some radio stations were subject to political manipulation. The Communication and Media Ministry denounced the behavior of some journalists who openly became communicators for the election candidates or broadcast unbalanced news. The ministry accused media professionals of being monetized by political players. For instance, some media give more than five minutes to one candidate without saying anything about the others.

As far as the 20 May 2020 triple ballot is concerned, eighty-two (82) special envoys, including 84 reporters and 18 heads of desks, were dispatched throughout Burundi's 18 provinces from May 19 to May 22, 2020, to cover 14,665 polling places. They had to carry out their role as democracy watchdogs on an hourly basis, for example, which presented significant obstacles (Binette-Pierre & Champagne-Poirier, 2022) and assessed voter behavior. The journalists mentioned the difficulties of media coverage, notably the impossibility of one journalist to cover two communes and the question of security on the ground. Print and online journalists covering the elections in Ngozi province had to make do without freedom of movement. The absence of foreign technical and financial partners specific to the Burundian media and the broadcasting of press releases and advertisements to generate financial income caused a twenty-five (25) minute interruption from noon to twenty-five minutes past noon. This interruption may give rise to suspicions of electoral fraud.

Conflicts of interest through monetization and promotion were sources of the unbalanced information reported, especially in the electoral campaign. This practice occurred in other countries. For example, in May 2012, after the left came to power in France, four companions or wives of French presidents and ministers were journalists (Gerbaud, 2013). Journalists who seek promotion or who are corrupt do not report the electoral offenses of the sympathized party. Journalists who supported both the ruling CNDD-FDD party and the opposition CNL party found it difficult to separate themselves from the identity of their political party. They broadcast both long and short reports. Due to mission expenses funded by the party or the government, some journalists were reluctant to report the facts objectively. Article 7 of the Code of Ethics and Deontology states that "the journalist must defend freedom of expression, freedom of information, and the balance of information, as well as the freedom to collect, process, and disseminate rigorously verified information whose sources are credible. The Burundian government fully funded the 2020 Media Synergy and had no foreign observer missions. The Burundian media's reliance on outside funding is, in my opinion, one of their biggest issues. According to (Howard, 2004), there are still journalists who are forced to work against their better judgment because of pressure from strong people or governments. Funding has the potential to hurt journalistic freedom. However, some media, notably online and social networks, did not respect professional ethics and deontology. The Ministry of Communication and Media had accused Iyakure TV and Burundi Online of not respecting professionalism, not verifying sources of information, and spreading rumors. Another challenge for the media synergy is that the main opposition CNL party and the Catholic Bishops of Burundi have rejected the election results reported by the media. The CNL party accused media synergy of announcing false election results. Some journalists censor themselves and distort reality on the ground for fear of being punished and accused of offenses.

4.3. Opportunities for media synergy

The government's willingness to organize elections, the safety of special envoys, and cooperation between electoral commissions and journalists are undeniable opportunities for media synergy, as shown in Table 3. In addition, interviews and the analysis of secondary data revealed that the government's consolidation of peace and security nationwide, the operationalization of political parties, their agreement on the 2020 election roadmap, the existence in Burundi of national and international election-related laws, the presence of local and regional observers, the collaboration between media synergy professionals and the independent electoral commissions and local observations, as well as the validation of the election results by most of the election stakeholders, added to media synergy opportunities.

The will of the government is a tremendous opportunity to consolidate democracy. As far as the 2020 elections are concerned, the government of Burundi became a major financial partner of media synergy as it wholly sponsored the 2020 elections in general and the media synergy in particular, through the massive voluntary contributions of Burundians. These contributions came from monthly deductions from civil servants' salaries and the payment of 2,000 Burundian francs a year for peasants and 1,000 Burundian francs

a year for students and schoolchildren. In addition, the Burundi government's consolidation of peace and security throughout the country, the functioning of political parties, and the roadmap agreement on the 2020 elections by political parties were an extra opportunity for media synergy. In electoral campaigns, media professionals' reports are focused on political parties' electoral programs and on election results that each political party has obtained.

The existence of national and international election-related laws in Burundi is another opportunity for Burundi. The Government of Burundi passed national and international laws to consolidate democracy on one hand, and to regulate the elections on the other hand. These kinds of laws protect media professionals from any kind of trouble. As far as international laws are concerned, the Government of Burundi is a signatory to international treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The treaty comes to deepen democratic culture as elections are better covered in democratic countries than in non-democratic countries. The international treaty is another opportunity for media professionals as it provides the rights and place of people in elections as well as the ways of choosing their representatives. In clauses (1) and (3), Article 21 of the said Declaration stipulates that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives" and that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures" (*Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'homme*, 2015). Apart from the international laws that Burundi has ratified, the government has also passed several national laws. These include the Constitution, the Electoral Code, the Press Law, the 2020 Elections Code of Conduct for the Media and Journalists, and other laws. The role of the said laws is to guarantee the independence and integrity of the electoral process. Both national and international laws are for media professionals their sources of protection in their daily duties in general and within the electoral period in particular. The above laws provide media synergy professionals with several rights. For instance, the Code stipulates that journalists have the right of access to sources of information (Article 10), to the security of their person and equipment (Article 11), and to facilities granted by the government to accomplish their mission (Article 15). Respect for ethical principles based primarily on intellectual honesty, integrity, rigor, impartiality, and a strong sense of fairness protects the journalist's legitimacy and credibility. Article 20 of the Burundian Code states that journalists have an inalienable right to personal safety, security of work equipment, legal protection, and respect for their dignity. More specifically, the 2018 press law protects journalists. Despite freedom's limits in the 20 May 2020 triple ballot, as in the cases of a special envoy in Ruyigi, the TV Rema team in Karusi, and two journalists, one from CCIB FM+ and another from Rema FM, our respondents admitted that special envoys of the media synergy generally received security.

Local and regional election observation was one more opportunity for media synergy, as it increased the transparency of the polls. The African observers sent by the Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Nigerian embassies visited various polling stations to see how the elections were conducted. Likewise, there were

representatives of political parties, coalitions of political parties, independent candidates, and independent observers, such as civil society. The existence of local and regional observation was the source of information and witnesses to the media synergy on the electoral process.

The collaboration of media synergy professionals and the managers of the Independent Electoral Commissions was an added opportunity for media synergy to succeed. For instance, polling station managers, the Independent Communal Electoral Commission (CECI), and the Independent County Electoral Commission (CEPI) generally collaborated with media professionals in general and media special envoys in particular. Since special envoys and polling station managers could not be present everywhere at once during the count, the Independent Communal Electoral Commission officials and the Independent County Electoral Commission officials were their preferred sources for obtaining trends at the communal and county level.

The validation of election results by the election stakeholders was an additional opportunity for media synergy. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), lots of political parties (the ruling CNDD-FDD parties and its 27 allies, the opposition parties, except the main opposition, CNL), and civil society organizations except the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi, validated the results announced by the media synergy. The Constitutional Court has so far validated the election results. Media professionals are proud of contributing to the consolidation of the country's peace, security, and democracy because they played a major role in the institutions Burundi has today.

4.4. Threats to media synergy

Table 4 shows some of the threats to media synergy, including misinformation, the small size of technical and financial partners, and the rejection of results. From the results obtained through the interviews and from the analysis of secondary data, the existence of the media professionals' controversial code of conduct, the nonattendance of international observation, the privation of international resources, the cut-off of the internet and social media, and the lack of cooperation between media professionals and some chiefs of polling station bureaux were some of the treats of media synergy.

The COVID-19 pandemic was listed as a major threat to media synergy. As stated by media synergy professionals, the triple ballot on May 20, 2020, took place in special circumstances, with the COVID-19 pandemic at the top of the list, which prevented elections from being held abroad. In other words, the coronavirus prevented Burundians living abroad from voting.

Another media synergy threat was the introduction by the National Council of Communication (CNC) of a journalist's code of conduct that limits journalists' freedom to report in real-time. In line with Article 10 of the said code, journalists are obliged "not to publish or broadcast, via any channel whatsoever, including the Internet, the provisional or final results of an election other than those officially announced by the National

Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) or its branches, that is, the County Independent Electoral Commission (CEPI), and the Communal Independent Electoral Commission (CECI).

The absence of international observation and international resources was an added media synergy threat. The 2020 elections were the first to be held without international observers, such as the African Union, and the international community, such as the United Nations, as well as without international assistance, such as from the European Union, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and China, to name just a few. According to media synergy professionals, this impacted their way of fulfilling their mission. They said they were lacking international sources of information and worldwide witnesses to the electoral process. They added that the lack of resources from technical and financial partners prevented them from fulfilling their mission accordingly.

The cut-off of the Internet and social media networks on May 20, 2020, the day of the vote, was an additional threat to media synergy. A such situation increased rumours about falsifying election results, which in turn, put into question the election provisional results. A such strategy is used in combatting fake news to preserve national security. In China and the DRC, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are routinely cut off for security reasons.

One more threat to media synergy was the lack of cooperation between media professionals and chiefs of polling station bureaux. Some of them said they had difficulties collaborating with some of the polling station officials. Media synergy special envoys explained that they were accused of not acting in the public interest. This contradicts Article 16 of the Code of Ethics for the Burundian Press, which states that "journalists, in the exercise of their profession, have access to all sources of information and have the right to freely investigate all facts that affect public life". Moreover, journalists were bound by several laws, including the Constitution, the Media Act, the Penal Code, the Civil Code, the Code of Ethics (moral values), and the Code of Deontology. The impact of these laws is currently observed when journalists are professionally breaking them. Lawbreaking may lead journalists to jurisdictions. Unfortunately, no media professional was reported to be brought into the courts for slight or major mistakes he or she made in the election coverage. Moreover, no media or journalist was fined in the 2020 elections. Only advice was privileged.

Despite the weaknesses and threats of media synergy, journalists in general, and media synergy professionals in particular, are said to be satisfied with working in synergy when covering elections. They expressed their wish for ongoing media synergy practices from the launch of the election campaign until the proclamation of the election results. Based on this assertion and the results obtained from our respondents, the hypothesis that "media synergy reduces foreseeable violence due to the tensions created by the speeches made by certain candidates" is confirmed. Consequently, it is imperative to set up training programs designed to enhance journalists' skills in the coverage of the elections and to strengthen the democratic culture among political and electoral players. The Burundi press house and media are encouraged to

mobilize their resources to be used in the election campaign, and these may come from media financial partners. This will raise the independence of the media during the election coverage, especially when acting in synergy. The organization of the media synergy is of paramount importance in the election period. Media professionals should organize an uninterrupted media synergy, that is, from the launch of the election campaign to the publication of the election results. Media coverage remains vital for democratic, free, peaceful, fair, and inclusive elections.

Conclusion

The SWOT analysis of media synergy enabled us to identify its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats it presents.

In terms of its strengths, we were able to identify the media's experience in joint coverage of elections, the cooperation of all media, including public and private, coverage of the whole country, easy access for all media to sources of information, the presentation of newspapers in several languages, and the dissemination of election results. Additional strengths of media synergy included the establishment of a shared editorial line to provide common electoral information, the censoring of electoral information among journalists to make the media and journalists less vulnerable and more accountable, the dissemination of information about the policies and plans of political parties and the expectations of the public, the collaboration between media and independent electoral commissions, between media and political parties, between media and electoral partners, and the self-determination of media professionals.

As for the weaknesses of media synergy, we were able to identify the decrease in the size of special envoys, the interruption of synergy, the imbalance of electoral information, the lack of funding for media synergy, the media's inability to cover multiple communes, their broadcasting of both lengthy and brief reports, their self-censorship, their disregard for deontology and ethics, the propagation of rumors, and their rejection of the election results by certain election partners.

Regarding opportunities for media synergy, we have identified the government's willingness to organize elections, the confidence of electoral partners in the media, the safety of special envoys in the country, collaboration between electoral commissions and journalists, and the validation of results by numerous partners and countries. Other opportunities were the government's efforts to ensure peace and security throughout the country; the political parties' operationalization and agreement on the 2020 election schedule; the existence of national and international laws in Burundi; the presence of local observers as well as those from Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria; the cooperation of media synergy professionals; the independent electoral commissions and local observers; and the majority of election stakeholders' validation of the results.

As for threats to media synergy, we noted misinformation, rejection of results, and the absence of technical and financial partnerships specific to the media. Other added threats to media synergy were the COVID-19 pandemic, the existence of a code of conduct for journalists that restricts their freedom, the lack of international resources, the absence of international observation, the shutdown of social media and the internet, and the lack of collaboration between leaders of polling station bureaux and media professionals. The results we obtained enabled us to confirm our initial hypothesis.

Authors' contributions

NINTERETSE Léonidas conducted the study and wrote the article, NDAYISABA Léonidas, GOUBA N. Firmin, MPAWENIMANA Hélène, NIYONIZIGIYE Pacifique, NDUWAYO Pierre all provided comments and feedback.

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