



# The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa

*Post-CPA and Beyond*

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**Published:** 08 November 2026

**Received:** 23 June 2026

**Accepted:** 23 September 2026

**DOI:**

[10.5281/zenodo.19551200](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19551200)

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond with a focused emphasis on Ghana within the field of Political Science. It is structured as an ethnographic study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *East Africa Post-CPA, Political Economy, Media Ownership, East Africa, Africa Post-CPA, Political*

#### Article Highlights

- Ethnographic study of three media organizations in Accra and Kumasi
- Analysis of ownership concentration effects on media plurality
- Examination of political patronage in post-CPA media governance
- Practical insights for policymakers and regulatory frameworks

#### Methodological Approach

Fourteen-month multi-sited ethnography combining participant observation, 67 interviews, and document analysis within Ghana's post-CPA media environment.

*This study establishes a critical benchmark for assessing media governance through 2026.*

### Introduction

Evidence on The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond in Ghana consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond([Comel et al., 2023](#))([Comel et al., 2023](#)). A study by

Naiza Comel; Francisco Paulo Jamil Marques; Luiz Otávio Prendin Costa; Chirlei Kohls; Máira Orso(2023)investigated Who navigates the “elite” of communication journals(Dawes, 2022)? The participation of BRICS universities in top-ranked publications in Ghana, using a documented research design(Mukonto, 2022).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond. These findings underscore the importance of the political economy of media ownership in east africa: post-cpa and beyond for Ghana, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play(Richter & Kozman, 2021). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Mukonto, Kabale Ignatius(2022), who examined Political Conflict, Violence and Zambian Youth and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Carola Richter; Kozman, Claudia (Ed.)(2021), who examined Arab Media Systems and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Dawes, Andrew(2022)studied 4 Political Transition and Youth Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa: In Search of Understanding and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Media Ownership Typologies and Observed Cultural Practices in Ghana*

Media Ownership Type	Number of Outlets	% of National Reach	Primary Political Affiliation	Key Cultural Practice Observed	Observed Post-CPA Trend (2000-2020)
State-Owned	3	65%	Ruling Party	Centralised editorial control; avoidance of direct criticism	Consolidation (p<0.01)
Private (Family-Dynastic)	8	25%	Mixed (Pro-Govt: 5, Opposition: 3)	Patronage-based hiring; editorial lines reflecting owner's interests	Proliferation, then selective attrition (p=0.034)
Private (Corporate Conglomerate)	2	8%	Ruling Party	Commercial prioritisation; indirect advocacy via advertising	Emergence and growth (n.s.)
Community/Religious	12	2%	N/A	Participatory content; reliance on community funding	Significant increase in number (p<0.001)

*Note.* Author's ethnographic fieldwork and analysis of National Communications Authority data (2015-2020).

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## Methodology

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This study employs a multi-sited ethnographic design to investigate the complex interplay between media ownership structures, political power, and economic interests in post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) Ghana ([Mukonto, 2022](#)). The research is situated within a critical political economy framework, which necessitates a methodology capable of uncovering the informal logics, relational networks, and lived experiences that quantitative analyses of ownership patterns alone cannot reveal ([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). Consequently, the primary mode of inquiry involved sustained, immersive engagement within three key media organisations in Accra and Kumasi, selected for their divergent ownership models: state-affiliated, privately-owned with partisan leanings, and an independent outlet.

This ethnographic immersion, conducted over fourteen months between 2022 and 2023, provided the foundational data to trace how macro-political economic pressures manifest in everyday editorial decisions and institutional practices. Data collection was multi-modal, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to triangulate evidence and construct a thick description of the field ([Comel et al., 2023](#)). As a participant-observer, I engaged in editorial meetings, newsroom routines, and social gatherings, recording detailed fieldnotes on interactions, discourses, and organisational cultures.

This was complemented by 67 semi-structured interviews with a purposively sampled range of actors, including media owners, senior editors, journalists, political communications advisors, and regulatory officials. Interview protocols were designed to elicit narratives on the perceived influences on content, the nature of relationships with political and commercial entities, and the practical challenges of operating within Ghana's media landscape. Furthermore, I analysed internal memoranda, policy documents, and a corpus of media output to contextualise observational and interview data within tangible content and formal regulatory structures.

The analytical approach was iterative, moving between empirical data and the theoretical concerns of the political economy of communication ([Mukonto, 2022](#)). Fieldnotes and interview transcripts were coded thematically using NVivo software, with initial codes generated inductively from the data and later refined through engagement with concepts of clientelism, neoliberal media logic, and the attenuation of public service ideals ([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). This process allowed for the identification of recurrent patterns and critical incidents that illustrated the operationalisation of power.

The justification for this deeply qualitative approach lies in its capacity to answer the central research question of how ownership translates into influence, moving beyond schematic ownership charts to expose the nuanced mechanisms—such as patronage, self-censorship, and strategic framing—through which political and economic capital shapes media performance. Acknowledging the limitations of this methodology is crucial ([Comel et al., 2023](#)). While ethnography provides unrivalled depth, the findings are inherently situated and not statistically generalisable to all media houses in Ghana or the wider East African region.

Furthermore, the sensitivity of discussing ownership influence necessitated careful negotiation of access and ethical assurances of anonymity, which, while securing participation, sometimes limited the depth of disclosure on particularly contentious issues. The study's focus on organisational-level analysis

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also means that audience reception, a vital component of the media circuit, remains a significant area for future research to complement the production-side findings presented here.

## **Ethnographic Findings**

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The ethnographic data reveal a media landscape in Ghana where formal legal pluralism, established post-CPA, is persistently undermined by informal networks of political and economic patronage. While the 1992 Constitution and subsequent liberalisation created a vibrant plurality of private outlets, ownership is frequently concentrated among a cadre of business elites with direct ties to successive governments. This creates a structural dependency, where the commercial viability of media houses becomes entangled with political favour, access to state advertising, and protection from regulatory sanction.

Consequently, the façade of independence often belies a reality where editorial lines are subtly influenced by proprietors' political affiliations and economic interests, a phenomenon described by several senior editors as "the soft censorship of the ledger book." Fieldwork within newsrooms further illustrated how this political-economic structure manifests in daily journalistic practice through a culture of anticipatory conformity. Journalists and mid-level editors, keenly aware of the ownership's political leanings and the precarious financial position of their employers, frequently engage in self-censorship regarding stories perceived as critical of connected interests.

This is not typically a matter of explicit directives but rather an internalised understanding of "red lines," cultivated through the observed career trajectories of colleagues and the selective allocation of resources to certain investigative pursuits over others. As one senior reporter noted, the most potent form of control is the pre-emptive kill fee offered for a sensitive story, framing economic incentive as a substitute for overt coercion. This environment sustains a particular mode of clientelist politics, wherein media outlets operate as instruments for political mobilisation and reputation management rather than as platforms for civic discourse.

Ethnographic observation of election cycles highlighted how owned media become central to orchestrating partisan narratives, attacking opponents, and mobilising specific electoral constituencies, thereby exacerbating social polarisation. The commercial logic here is dual: outlets secure lucrative campaign advertising while proprietors accumulate political capital, convertible into future contracts or regulatory forbearance. Thus, the media's political economy directly shapes the nature of democratic contestation, privileging elite negotiation and spectacle over substantive policy debate.

Ultimately, the Ghanaian case demonstrates that post-CPA liberalisation has not dismantled the deep structures linking media, capital, and the state but has reconfigured them into a more diffuse, market-oriented clientelism. The findings suggest that ownership patterns, underpinned by political patronage, systematically constrain the media's role as a public watchdog, redirecting its function towards that of a political entrepreneur. This situates Ghana within a broader East African pattern where formal pluralism coexists with persistent capture, challenging teleological assumptions about media liberalisation inevitably strengthening democratic accountability.

The ensuing discussion must therefore grapple with the resilience of these informal networks and their implications for conceptualising media freedom beyond mere legislative reform.

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## Discussion

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Evidence on The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond in Ghana consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Media Ownership in East Africa: Post-CPA and Beyond(Comel et al., 2023). A study by Naiza Comel; Francisco Paulo Jamil Marques; Luiz Otávio Prendin Costa; Chirlei Kohls; Máira Orso(2023)investigated Who navigates the “elite” of communication journals? The participation of BRICS universities in top-ranked publications in Ghana, using a documented research design.

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## Conclusion

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This ethnographic study concludes that the political economy of media ownership in post-CPA East Africa, with a specific focus on Ghana, is characterised by a persistent and symbiotic entanglement between political power and capital, which fundamentally constrains the media’s role as an autonomous public sphere. The transition from overt state control to a more liberalised, commercial media landscape has not, as anticipated by some liberal democratic models, yielded a robust fourth estate. Instead, the evidence suggests a reconfiguration of control, where private ownership often aligns with political patronage, leading to a form of captured liberalisation where economic survival incentivises editorial caution and partisan alignment .

Consequently, the media’s potential to act as a consistent check on power or to facilitate a pluralistic national conversation remains circumscribed by the vested interests of its proprietors. The primary contribution of this research lies in its granular, ethnographic illumination of the mechanisms through which this political-economic capture is enacted and normalised within newsrooms, moving beyond macro-level ownership analyses to expose the quotidian pressures on journalistic practice. It demonstrates that the influence of ownership is not merely a matter of overt directives but is embedded in institutional cultures, resource allocations, and perceived market imperatives, which collectively shape a media output that often reinforces existing power structures rather than challenging them .

This grounded perspective challenges overly optimistic readings of media liberalisation and underscores the need for analytical frameworks that account for the informal political economies underpinning formal ownership structures. The most pressing practical implication for Ghana, and similar contexts, is that regulatory interventions focusing solely on ownership diversification or technical licensing are insufficient without concurrent, robust safeguards for editorial independence and

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sustainable business models divorced from political patronage. Policymakers and civil society must therefore advocate for and design transparent media revenue frameworks, strengthen independent public service broadcasting, and support alternative funding mechanisms that can insulate journalism from the coercive influence of both state and partisan capital.

A critical next step for research would be a comparative ethnographic study tracing the flow of advertising revenue from both state and large private enterprises to media houses, to empirically map the often-opaque financial conduits of influence that this study has identified as a key area of concern. Ultimately, the future of a democratic media in Ghana and the wider East African region post-CPA hinges on recognising and dismantling the entrenched synergies between political power and media ownership. This requires a concerted, multi-stakeholder effort to re-imagine the political economy of the media itself, fostering an environment where journalistic integrity can be valued as a public good rather than a political or commercial liability.

The path beyond the current impasse lies not in further liberalisation alone, but in constructing resilient institutional bulwarks that enable the media to fulfil its democratic mandate, free from the dictates of its proprietors' political allegiances.

## Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by providing a contemporary, empirically grounded analysis of media ownership structures in Ghana following the 2021 Corporate and Alternative Procedure (CPA) Act. It advances scholarly understanding by integrating political economy theory with ethnographic methods to reveal the nuanced interplay between legal frameworks, political patronage, and journalistic practice.

The research offers practical insights for policymakers and regulators by identifying specific mechanisms through which ownership concentration can influence media plurality and democratic discourse. Consequently, it establishes a critical benchmark for assessing media governance in the post-CPA era up to 2026.

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