

## **Exploring Radio Messages towards Women Mobilisation and Participation in Politics in Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the role of radio messaging in mobilising and promoting women's participation in politics within Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Anchored on the agenda-setting and social responsibility theories, the study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method to gather data from 384 respondents, selected through availability sampling. Findings indicate that women in the study area demonstrate high levels of exposure to radio programmes focused on political participation, with substantial influence on their willingness to engage in political activities such as voting, contesting for elective positions, and discussing political matters openly. Data further reveal that radio broadcasts not only heightened political awareness among women but also helped to dispel socio-cultural and religious constraints traditionally impeding female political involvement. The study underscores the instrumental role of radio as an accessible and cost-effective medium for political education, particularly in regions where other forms of mass communication are less prevalent. It affirms that radio remains a powerful catalyst for behavioural and attitudinal change, thereby fostering democratic inclusivity. Drawing on empirical evidence and extant literature, the study concludes that increased representation of women in radio political programmes is crucial for advancing gender parity, as envisioned by Goal Five of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The study recommends that media houses, particularly radio stations, sustain and expand political content that addresses women's concerns and encourages their political engagement. Moreover, it advocates for legislative frameworks to promote gender equity in media representation. By foregrounding the intersection of media and female political empowerment, this research contributes to broader discourses on democratic participation, media influence, and gender equality in Nigeria's evolving political landscape.

**Keywords:** Women's Political Participation, Radio Mobilisation, Gender and Media, Political Communication in Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Participation in political activities is an important feature of a democratic government due to the fact it paves way for the citizens to keep eyes on how their resources are being managed by those elected or appointed to represent them. Political participation usually refers to the process where the people vote, join political parties, take part in political meetings, rallies and

other political discussion fora, talking to their political representatives to mention but a few. (Ahmad Said 2019). Participating in political activities through the identified forms above is important for a country's population to enjoy the dividends of democracy (Kaskazi & Kitzie 2023). Political participation of women in some countries such as the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States is comparatively high. In the UK, following the 2024 general election, women now make up 40% of the House of Commons (Cracknell & Danechi, 2024); in South Africa, women hold approximately 44% of National Assembly seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2024); and in the USA, women occupy about 28% of seats in the 119th Congress (Pew Research Center, 2024). The same cannot be said of in other countries like India, Afghanistan, and Mali and Nigeria, where women political participation has been low. In India, for example, only 9% of women were elected to occupy seats in the parliament in the last general elections, which fall short of the 25% global standard (TH News, 2024). The Afghan situation illustrates that since Taliban took over the country, there has been no woman serving in high-ranking position (Fox, 2021). Political pundits and analysts have attributed this trend to a number of factors, which include cultural, social, religious and lack of trust in some countries' political settings. Also, in Nigeria, women political participation has been low since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. According to the last general elections conducted in 2023, only 3 women were voted as senators and 4 as members House of Representatives (Change Endowment for International Peace, 2023).

This narrative has caught the attention of the mass media. Kenna and Hensley (2019) contend that media has remained one of the strongest societal structures that enable and empower people to take part in political developments. Through the instrumentality of the media, people can link up and discuss with others who share in their views on political matters. This implies that the media has provided the avenue for people of all gender to talk political issues with a view to changing the narratives. Arant et al (2023) argue that political participation and the media is inseparable because the media such as radio, television, newspaper, magazine, social media among others provide the people with up-to-date political news preparing them to actively participate in political issues such as voting, rallies, debates, to mention but a few. Aarts and Semetko (2003) further concur that people's political consciousness is in one way or the other linked to the role that the media play in the society. Therefore, access to mass media is critical to building people political knowledge, enabling them to be involved in political activities.

The broadcast media, particularly radio is one of the most effective means of political mobilisation due to its wide reach and cheap characteristics. Mbaave (2024) asserts that radio remains instrumental in building the people's political knowledge in all countries of the world and it is one of the most available media of mass communication in Nigeria. Abiodun and Ifeduba (2023) opine that radio, which has been tested for ages, remains a strong communication platform via which people can be mobilised; its commentaries, news, discussion, interviews and other programme formats, serve educational and information purposes. It is an important instrument for behaviour and social change; the primary function of radio in the society is to communicate happenings to members of the society and also for the people to talk with one other (Abiodun & Ifeduba, 2023). It equally paves ways for people to take actions and decisions that affect the progress and development of their communities in all ramifications, including political activities (Mbaave, 2024).

Studies have been conducted in line with media and political mobilisation and participation (Arant et al, 2023; Alodat, AL-Qora'n & Hamound, 2023; Abiodun & Ifeduba, 2023; Odunola, Babafemi & Adegoke, 2015; Mbaave, 2024). For instance, the study of Arant et al (2023) focused on the role of media in political mobilisation and participation in free and restricted countries. That of Alodat et al (2023) dwelled on the impact of social media on political participation of youths in Jordan. The thrust of Abiodun & Ifeduba (2023) research was on the impact of radio on women political mobilisation and participation in Ede North Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. However, there is still a dearth of literature on the extent and effectiveness of radio messages on women political mobilisation and participation in Nigeria. Therefore, the crux of this study is to assess the views of women in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria concerning radio messages towards their mobilisation and participation in Nigerian politics. The broad objective of the study is to

explore radio messages towards women mobilisation and participation in politics in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out if the women are aware of political programmes on radio aimed at mobilising them to participate in political activities.
2. Explore the extent of women listenership of such programmes.
3. Examine the influence of the political programmes on women mobilisation and participation in politics.
4. Extent of the Influence of Radio Political Programmes on their Participation in Political Activities

## **Review of Concepts and Literature**

Political participation refers to the process in which citizens get involved in political activities of their country. This participation can be in the form of voting, contesting for elective positions, debating on government policies and programmes, taking part in political primaries, rallies, joining political parties and protests, all with a view to strengthening their democratic institutions and governance structures. This implies that political participation is important due to the fact that it paves ways for people to air their views and opinions on national issues before decisions are taken (Alodat, AL-Qora'n & Hamound, 2023). Radio is one of the instruments of mass communication, which operates electronically. Furthermore, it is an interactive means of communication with all the dial-in programmes which give the listeners an opportunity to feature on radio. Onabajo (1992) cited in Abiodun and Ifeduba (2023) state that radio is a means for telling the story of different people and events happening in the society. It is one of the most effective and efficient mass media platforms used to reach out to many people in different locations simultaneously. It is instrumental in educating and enlightening members of the public on various issues.

The people's involvement in political activities remains significant in the fortification and strengthening of democratic societies (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Involvement in politics refers to the actions of the citizens that aim at changing political narratives and processes of a given entity (Dalton, 2008). The mass media as explained earlier is strategic in political activities of societies across the world. Boulianne (2019) submits that consumption of mass media messages by members of the society has become the foundation for expression of different opinions and these messages often serve as springboards for motivating the encouraging the people to debate exchange political developments, giving them opportunities for civic involvement of their societies.

Empirical studies have also been conducted in this regard. For instance, the focus of Alodat, AL-Qora'n and Hamound (2023) study was on the impact of social media use on political participation. The study collected data through the survey design from youth in Jordan. The investigation established that social media has become significant in the mobilisation of youthful population to take part in political activities of the country. Finding further indicated that gender was a strong factor in the frequency of participation in political activities through the social media, as the male gender was using this online platform more for political purposes. The finding of the study, therefore, underscores the importance of social media on young people towards changing the political narratives of Jordan.

Arant et al (2023) did a comparative analysis of the role of mass media in political mobilisation in free and restrictive countries. The study obtained data through the utilisation of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study found that those who use the traditional media more were more inclined toward future political participation if they were citizens of a free country and if they reported high levels of group efficacy. Although online media use also predicted future political participation, this likelihood was higher among citizens of restrictive countries who reported lower levels of group efficacy.

Furthermore, Odunola et al (2015) conducted a study on the contribution of radio messages on towards women participation in Nigeria's political activities. The study employed the survey research strategy, and was supported by the agenda setting, social responsibility and status

conferral theories. The research finding demonstrated that radio serves as an important mass communication medium in mobilising women to take part in Nigeria's political issues. The finding emphasises the fact that radio messages have indeed become imperative for building women political consciousness and participation in Nigeria. The study concluded that that radio political programmes has indeed been effective in mobilising women for political participation in Nigeria. The researchers therefore advocated that the media especially radio should continue to use its constitutional powers to educate, inform and persuade women to participate in Nigeria's political activities.

Similarly, Mbaave (2024) examined the role of radio in women political mobilisation and participation. The investigation collected data through the deployment of the survey research method from women in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted the agenda setting theory. Finding indicated that the women extensively listened to political programmes on Radio Benue titled "Platform" and on Joy FM titled "Political Trend". The study finding further revealed these political programmes on the two radio stations had positive influence on the women political involvement. Result of the research also showed that the respondents' most preferred radio programmes formats were discussion and Phone-in segment. The study concluded that the concerns of women in the country's political activities were well-captured in the two political programmes on Radio Benue and Joy FM. It was suggested that radio being of the strongest mass mobilisation media should be utilised more by to motivate and support women political development in the country.

Likewise, the study by Santas, Asemah and Jumbo (2020) delved into the role that the mass media played during the 2019 governorship election. The area of the study was Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study obtained data via the survey research from women concerning the contributions of the mass media in mobilising them to participate in the election. The results of the research revealed that most of the respondents accounting for 58.4% posited that media messages were not enough to mobilise the women to participate in the election. The study, thus, concluded that mass media did not set the needed agenda on women political activities during the 2019 governorship election in Lafia, Nasarawa State. The researchers recommended that government should enact laws that will ensue that mass media does not show prejudice against the female gender when it comes to political reporting.

In the same vein, Abiodun and Ifeduba (2023) explored the deployment of the radio to mobilise women to take part in political issues. The study was conducted in Ede North Local Government Area of Osun State. It made use of the survey strategy. The study found that though radio was instrumental in mobilising women to participate in political matters in Ede LAG, the media as a whole is still lacking in giving equal opportunities for both men and women to speak on political issues in Nigeria. Conclusion was drawn that radio organisations aired political programmes to a large degree which motivated women to be involved in politics. The researchers recommended that the mass media should dedicate more of their airtime and pages to discussing women political matters, which will encourage the women to participate in politics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Agenda-setting as a concept can be traced back to the first chapter of Walter Lippman's 1922 book on public opinion. Lippmann argues that the mass media are the principal connection between events in the world and the images in the minds of the public. Without using the term 'agenda-setting', Walter Lippmann was writing what we today would call 'agenda-setting', (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, pp. 73-74). Next was Bernard Shaw who observed that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling the people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. The world will look different to different people". Cohen backs this, "depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors and publishers of the paper they read" (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, p. 74). Agenda-setting was finally brought to limelight through the efforts of Maxell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the study on the 1968 American presidential election. In the study, they demonstrated a strong correlation coefficient between what one hundred residents of Chapel Hill and North Carolina thought was the most important election issue and what the local and national news media reported was the most important issues. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's

perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determine public opinion. As noted by Griffin (2000):

McCombs and Shaw believed that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. They are not suggesting that broadcast and print media make a deliberate attempt to influence listener, viewer or reader opinions on issues. Reporters in the free world have a deserved reputation for independence and fairness, but McCombs and Shaw say that we look to news professionals for cues where to focus our attention, we judge as important what the media judge as important (p. 19).

The foregoing statement means that the mass media in all their forms, set agenda for the people to follow, thereby affirming the earlier statement that the mass media raise salient issues that are in the society for the public to start to think along that path. McQuail (2010, p. 512) supports the above assertion by insisting that the main idea behind agenda-setting lies in the fact that news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives and the main issues. This is, finally, supported by what Maxell McCombs and Donald Shaw wrote in 1972 that: In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its positions.

The extent of radio messages on women political activities will go a long way in popularising the women, hence, the agenda setting theory was found relevant in this study.

The Social Responsibility Theory

The Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, established in the United States of America in 1947 to take a second look at the definition of press freedom as stated in the Libertarian theory, is credited with given rise to social responsibility media theory. In other words, the theory came into limelight because the press abused the freedom given to them, which they enjoyed as a result of the free press. Social responsibility theory rests on the concept of free press acting responsibly. The press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible. The theory urges media practitioners to ensure representation of all facts not siding or becoming sensational in reportage but being balance and unbiased. This implies that a journalist ought to protect his image by being fair, objective, unbiased, thereby reporting events/occurrences as it happens without icing or decorating it. By so doing, a journalist is mandated to win the trust of his audience through credible and not biased reporting. The second tenet of the theory, which states that members of the public should be informed so that they can take independent decisions and actions, applies to this study.

The social responsibility theory, therefore assumes importance in this research because the media, radio to be precise could be used to inform and educate women on different political activities in the country, leading to the actualisation of goal five of the Sustainable Development Goals (gender equality). The point being emphasised here is that the radio stations need to avoid gender discrimination in reporting political personalities and events in Nigeria. There should be balance whether female or male are involved.

## **Methodology**

The survey research method was used for the study. This method, as elucidated by Creswell (2009), aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of a subject's viewpoints, offering a holistic perspective of the prevailing circumstances at a specific juncture. The survey method, a well-established approach in social science research, is particularly geared towards uncovering insights about people, including their opinions, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and behaviours on a subject of investigation. The rationale for selecting the survey research method is underpinned by the recognition that radio plays a crucial role in fields closely tied to human decision-making. Hence, this method was considered relevant for this study.

The study's population comprised of women living in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Available estimated statistics from City Population (2025), revealed that the total number of women in Lafia LGA was 161, 314. The population sample size of the

study was 384. This was determined through the use of sample size determination table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The study therefore employed the availability sampling technique in the distribution of the research instrument. The initial draft of the questionnaire underwent face validation by the researcher. After personal scrutiny and feedback, it was reviewed by two additional research experts, including lecturers from the Department of Mass Communication at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, to refine and enhance the instrument before administration. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using the test-retest method with individuals who are familiar with social media. Further, data presentation and analysis was done through the use of frequencies and percentages tables, mean deviation table of measuring scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). The acceptance and rejection criteria were put as 3.0 above and 2.0 below respectively.

### Data Presentation

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of Women Political Programmes on Radio

Radio Political Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	366	93.3
No	18	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

The finding in Table 1 is indicative of the fact that radio is one of the media of mass communication that is used to reach a large number of people with different types of programmes, political programmes inclusive.

Table 2: Respondents' Extent of Listenership of Radio Political Programmes on Women

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very High Extent	81	22.1
High Extent	179	48.9
Moderate Extent	62	16.9
Very Low Extent	29	7.9
Low Extent	4	1.0
No Response	11	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>100</b>

From the result in Table 2, it could be deduced that there is high listenership of women political programmes on radio by the respondents, implying that the women have had high exposure to political issues concerning them on radio.

Table 3: Respondents' Views on the Influence of the Radio Programmes

Options	SA	A	SD	D	UD	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
The radio programmes influence you to mobilise women to vote and also be voted for in all	222	131	0	0	13	366	4.5	Accepted

elections in Nigeria									
The radio programmes serve as springboards for educating and enlightening you to be involved in all political matters in Nigeria	199	158	0	0	9	366	4.4	Accepted	
The radio programmes remove and dispel cultural, social and religious barriers in you regarding participation in political activities in Nigeria	260	86	0	0	20	366	4.5	Accepted	
The radio programmes motivate you to openly discuss political issues in Nigeria with other women	217	127	2	4	16	366	4.4	Accepted	
The radio programmes have increased your interest in contesting and holding political position (s) in Nigeria	273	90	0	0	3	366	4.7	Accepted	

Data as revealed in Table 3 inferred that women political programmes on radio contributed in promoting their participation in political activities such as come out to vote, contesting, talking to other women to take part in political issues, among others.

Table 4: Extent of the Influence of Radio Political Programmes on their Participation in Political Activities

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very High Extent	120	32.7
High Extent	159	43.4
Moderate Extent	32	8.7
Very Low Extent	19	5.1
Low Extent	23	6.2
No Response	13	3.5
Total	366	100

It could be implied by data in Table 4 that political programmes on radio significantly contributed in mobilising women to be involved in politics.

### Discussion of Findings

From the data collected and analysis made, the study finding indicated that the respondents had knowledge of women political programmes on radio stations (see Table 1). The study further found that the participants listened to women political programmes on the radio stations frequently (see Table 2). It could thus be inferred from these findings that women political programmes that are featured on radio stations in Lafia will set the needed agenda to encourage women to take part in political development of not only Nasarawa State, but the country at large. The finding of the study, therefore justifies the position of the agenda setting theory utilised in the study. This theory states that the amount of attention that the mass media gives to a particular issue, such issue will become pronounced among the people. This explains the frequency aspect of the agenda setting theory. In line with the finding of the study, the radio stations in Lafia have realised the importance of women in political development, thus they gave them more attention by discussing their political activities.

Additional data from the study revealed that radio stations in Lafia have contributed immensely to promoting women political mobilisation and participation. The finding indicated that the radio women political programmes have influenced the women, making them to see the need to come out and vote, contest elections, remove and dispel cultural, social and religious barriers regarding political participation among the women (see Tables 3 & 4). The finding of the study is in tandem with that Mbaave (2024), who established that radio political programmes on women have continued to serve as springboard for educating, enlightening women, mobilising them to be involved in the country's political activities. The finding here also corroborates the outcome of an earlier one by Odunola et al (2015), who drew the conclusion that radio political programmes have certainly been useful in mobilising the female gender in Nigeria to take part in politics. The finding here also justifies the adoption of the social responsibility theory. The theory states that the media owns every population segment of the society certain responsibility. Therefore, if goal five of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations is to be a reality in Nigeria, media needs to constantly educate and inform the women to take part in political development of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The focus of the study has been on exploring radio messages towards women mobilisation and participation in politics in Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. From the findings, the study concluded that the concerns of women mobilisation and participation in political activities in Lafia LGA through the instrument of radio have been addressed to some extent. This implies that radio stations in Lafia have set the agenda on women political engagements.

## Recommendations

1. The study recommended that media owners, especially radio stations owners should continue to produce more women political programmes as this will give the women more voice in the country's political space.
2. More women and those women that mostly speak on women issues should continue to explore the radio and other media platforms to actualise their political ambitions.
3. Women and their supporters should initiate a bill calling on the government to enact a law that will mandate media organisations against bias in featuring women on their programmes.

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