

CONTRIBUTION OF RADIO PROGRAMMES TO WOMEN POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite increased media attention to gender inclusion in politics, women's active participation remains limited, questioning the effectiveness of broadcast media like the radio. Anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory, this study evaluates how radio programmes shape discourse, engagement, and participation outcomes in mobilizing women for political participation in Makurdi Local Government area of Benue state. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining quantitative content analysis of 50 political programme episodes from *Agate Radio* and *Radio Benue* from June to December 2025 with qualitative semi-structured interviews involving six relevant participants. Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal that interviews (40%) and panel discussions (34%) dominate programme formats, while participatory formats such as phone-ins were limited (14%). Thematically, radio messages largely centered on barriers to women's political participation (32%). The tone of messaging is predominantly supportive (64%). Also, while interactive platforms exist, women's participation is hindered by socio-cultural barriers, limited access, and low confidence levels. The study concludes that radio programmes function effectively as agenda-setters by elevating the issue of women's political participation but fall short in facilitating transformative engagement and active political involvement. It recommends a shift from problem-focused narratives to empowerment-driven content, increased participatory programming, and stronger institutional support for female gender empowerment broadcasting.

Keywords: Radio Programme, Politics, Women participation and Mobilization.

Introduction

Radio is a major mass medium in Africa in terms of reach and listenership. Unlike the print media, radio reaches both literate and illiterate audiences. Radio is a pillar of communication in any country, as an information provider to support national development (Ibrahim & Wahab, 2020). Radio has the ability to influence people's thinking; hence it can be used as a means of political communication. (Ibrahim and Wahab, 2020). Its relevance is especially pronounced in developing contexts, where it serves as a primary medium for political communication, civic education, and national development.

The role of radio as an instrument of social change has been consistently highlighted by scholars. Roskin, Cord, Medeiros, and Jones (2015) argue that radio facilitates the exchange of ideas necessary for societal interaction and democratic participation, acting as a conduit through which citizens engage with political processes. Therefore, radio broadcasting plays a vital role in sustaining democratic values by promoting awareness, dialogue, and participation.

In Nigeria, the prominence of radio is further reinforced by its extensive availability. The National Broadcasting Commission (2023) reports that there are over 439 radio stations across the country, broadcasting in diverse languages to cater to Nigeria's heterogeneous population. This wide reach positions radio as a strategic tool for political mobilization, particularly among marginalized groups such as women. Radio programmes have the potential to educate, inform, and encourage women's participation in politics, thereby contributing to gender inclusivity in governance (Anorue et al., 2012).

The effectiveness of radio in enhancing political participation is however influenced by several contextual factors. While studies such as Bosch (2020) and Kivikuru (2006) emphasize radio's importance in fostering political engagement in Africa, others argue that media influence which includes radio is not absolute. Durante and Gutierrez (2014) note that variables such as access to information, financial resources, and individual socio-cultural factors also shape political participation.

The issue of women's underrepresentation in politics remains a significant concern both globally and within Nigeria. Globally, there has been a gradual increase in women's political representation. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2023), women hold 11.3% of head-of-state positions and 9.8% of head-of-government roles. Regional variations persist, with Europe and North America recording higher representation compared to regions such as Central and South Asia. In Africa, countries like Rwanda and South Africa have made notable progress, while Nigeria lags behind with significantly lower representation (Musau, 2019). At the sub-national level, the situation is even more concerning, as seen in Benue State, where women's representation remains minimal (Kyegh, 2024).

Although women in Nigeria constitute a substantial proportion of the population, their participation in political leadership and decision-making processes remains disproportionately low (Oluyemi, 2016). Various initiatives, including the Young Women in Politics Forum (YWiPF) and programmes by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), have been introduced to address this imbalance, progress has been slow, particularly when compared to global trends (Olaniru et al., 2020; Oyewole et al., 2017).

Given this context, the role of radio in influencing political awareness and participation by women becomes increasingly important. Although Radio has been widely used in political campaigns and voter education initiatives, with studies indicating high listenership levels among Nigerians (Alingo & Gatimu, 2015) the extent to which radio content specifically influences women's political mobilization has apparently not been actively explored by way of women audience engagement as active listeners are more likely to internalize and respond to political messages than passive listeners (Padmakumar, 2015).

Against this backdrop, this study examines the contributions of radio programmes to women's political mobilization in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. Focusing on selected programmes—*Beyond the Ballot* and *The Platform*—broadcast on Agate Radio and Radio Benue, the study aims to evaluate how radio content shapes awareness, engagement, and participation among women to provide empirical evidence that can inform media practice, policy formulation, and strategies aimed at enhancing women's inclusion in political processes.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the contributions of radio programmes to women political mobilization in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. Specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the programme formats used to discuss women political mobilization in *Agate Radio* and *Radio Benue*.
- ii. Determine the dominant themes in radio messages on women political mobilization in *Agate Radio* and *Radio Benue*.
- iii. Determine whether the selected radio programmes provide opportunity for

women, experts, and political leaders to interact with listeners.

Literature Review

Review of Concepts:

Radio Programme

Radio involves the process by which messages are sent through electrical waves. In other words, sound could be sent and received through these waves, (Sambe, 2008). Radio is one of the most ubiquitous, the most effective and cheapest medium of communication available to man today. It gives man the opportunity to understand both his immediate and distant environment.

Highlighting the importance and advantage of radio Daramola (2003) stated that radio can present news as it happens; bring the voice of newsmakers and artists into the homes of listeners. It also provides the absence of visuals for the reason radio enjoys the advantage of simultaneity. It requires little effort of its consumers to comprehend its message. Daramola further stated that it can also be heard while eating, driving, cooking, resting in the bedroom, and even on the farm. It is therefore a good companion that entertains and informs the listeners. This shows that the radio is the only medium that can beat all communication barriers and is most efficient in disseminating information to a desired target audience per-time. This underscores why radio programming has long been positioned as an instrument of civic education, not just entertainment. The concept of a radio programme therefore is the basic ideas, purposes, and elements that shape what is broadcast to an audience. In simple terms, a radio programme is planned audio content created to inform, educate, entertain, or persuade listeners (Idebi, 2008).

Women Political Participation

According to Nwoye and Okafor (2014) political mobilization is a process of initiating citizens into a desired political action by focusing on their greatest political

needs and expectations. In addition, political mobilization is the process of encouraging individuals or groups to become actively involved in political action, such as voting, campaigning, protesting, or advocating for a cause. It usually aims to influence power, policy, or public opinion (Chenoweth, 2015). The resources that groups have to mobilize and the manner in which they are deployed, as well as the actions of the state authorities to restrict such resources, determine the success of the political mobilization. The politically relevant resources are education and access to information; a particular social outlook or ideology which defines a social or political issue or problem in terms of right and wrong and offers a guide to action to set the wrong right; leadership; money and the time it buys for political activity, communication networks, symbol; commitment of the participant to the cause. All factors are seen to determine whether political mobilization is successful or not (Indian Institute of Legal Studies, 2024). Within the context of this study, women's political mobilization refers to the process of encouraging and enabling women to engage in political life such as voting, contesting for office, and participating in public political discourse (UN Women, 2020).

Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical studies has examined the relationship between broadcast media and women's political participation in Nigeria and comparable contexts, though with varying emphases and methodological approaches. Fanawopo and Ifeduba (2023) investigated the influence of radio on women's political mobilization in Ede North, Osun State. Using a survey-based approach, the study found that radio significantly enhances women's awareness and participation in politics. However, the persistence of low female political representation suggests limitations in the

depth of mobilization achieved. The study is limited by its narrow geographic scope and insufficient interrogation of structural barriers, leaving a gap in understanding how media exposure translates into sustained political engagement.

Similarly, Abiodun and Emmanuel (2023) explored the use of radio for women's political participation in the same locality using questionnaire-based data from 100 respondents. Their findings reinforce the positive role of broadcast media in mobilization. However, the study's small sample size and lack of longitudinal analysis weaken its general application and fails to capture long-term behavioural change.

Tama and Maiwuya (2022) examined women's political participation in Taraba State, motivated by the persistent marginalization of women in governance. Employing a descriptive research design, they concluded that women's participation remains a "struggle," despite their recognized socio-economic contributions. While the study provides valuable insights into gender disparities, it does not consider the role of media as a mobilizing agent, thereby limiting its relevance to media-driven participation frameworks.

Beyond Nigeria, Masoud (2022) analyzed the role of television in mobilizing women politically in Zanzibar, using a case study of ZBC TV. The study identified key barriers such as financial constraints, insecurity, and lack of institutional support as factors undermining women's participation. Although the findings underscore the importance of media, the focus on television rather than radio, limits applicability to contexts like Nigeria where radio remains more accessible and pervasive.

Iheanacho and Orji (2022) investigated radio broadcast and political education among women in Imo State using mixed methods (questionnaires and focus group discussions). Their findings reveal a

paradox: while awareness of political programmes was relatively low (49%), exposure to radio significantly influenced participation levels (84.7%). This suggests that content effectiveness may outweigh reach. However, the study is constrained by its emphasis on political education rather than direct mobilization, leaving a gap in understanding behavioural outcomes beyond awareness.

Aredem and Oji (2022) extended the discourse by examining radio broadcasting and political participation in South-South Nigeria. Their quantitative analysis established a significant relationship between radio exposure and political knowledge. Nevertheless, they found that increased knowledge did not translate into active political candidacy, highlighting a critical limitation in media-driven mobilization. The study does not explain this disconnect, particularly among women, thereby exposing a gap in gender-specific analysis.

Apata and Azeez (2019) focused on motivations for participation in radio phone-in programmes in Osogbo. Their findings indicate that audience engagement is driven by programme relevance, format, and presenter appeal. While this study contributes to understanding audience behaviour, it does not explicitly link such engagement to political mobilization outcomes, limiting its applicability to the current research focus.

Earlier work by Adeniyi (2015) examined barriers to women's political participation in Sokoto State, identifying lack of political knowledge as a major constraint. Although the study predates recent media proliferation, its findings remain relevant in highlighting structural and informational deficits. However, it does not consider the evolving role of media platforms in addressing these gaps.

Across the reviewed empirical studies, a consistent pattern emerges: broadcast media, particularly radio, plays a

significant role in enhancing political awareness and, to some extent, participation among women. However, several critical gaps persist. First, most studies emphasize awareness and knowledge acquisition without sufficiently examining how these translate into active political engagement or candidacy. Second, there is a tendency to generalize findings across populations, with limited focus on women-specific mobilization dynamics, particularly at the local government level. Third, methodological limitations—such as small sample sizes, cross-sectional designs, and geographically restricted studies—undermine the robustness and generalizability of findings. Furthermore, there is inadequate integration of theoretical frameworks to explain the relationship between media exposure and political behaviour. Many studies remain descriptive, lacking critical engagement with underlying socio-political structures that shape women's participation. Importantly, none of the reviewed studies provides a focused analysis of the effect of radio programmes on women's political mobilization in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, creating a clear contextual and empirical gap. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge these gaps by offering a theoretically grounded and empirically robust examination of how radio influences women's political mobilization within this specific context.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the agenda-setting theory. Originally formulated in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, the theory explains the relationship between the emphasis that the mass media place on issues and the importance that media audiences attribute to those issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This theory started out as an explanation of media impact on political behaviour and attitudes during election years - specifically, the ways that news media

coverage can prioritize issues, or set the agenda for the public (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

According to Littlejohn (2002), two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda setting. First, that the press and the media do not reflect reality, rather, they filter and shape it and second, that media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than others. According to McCombs (2004), across the world, the mass media strongly influence how we picture public affairs. In describing this media influence on what we think about and how we think about it, setting the agenda also discusses the sources of these media agenda, the psychological explanation for their impact on the public agenda, and the subsequent consequences for attitudes, opinions and behaviour. McCombs debates the role of the expanded media landscape on agenda setting, the impact of the internet on the power of legacy media and the role of agenda setting beyond the realm of public affairs.

The relevance of the agenda setting theory to this study is that before, during and after elections, radio stations can project, lay emphasis on, or attach more importance to particular topical issues concerning preparations for a forthcoming election or the election proper, and consequently cause the audience to constantly think or discuss in that light. As the Agenda setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine all that the audience thinks, it is right to say that agenda setting theory which the radio uses, is mainly used for political campaigns.

There are certain elements involved in agenda setting theory that are usually employed by the media: The quantity or frequency of reporting. The prominence given to the reports through jingles, phone-in/discussion programs, or scheduling on radio, as well as the degree of conflict

produced in the reports, and the possibility for agenda building by the radio medium, gets intensified when the value system of a society is in flux (continual change; condition of not being settled) (McCombs, 2004).

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative content analysis and qualitative semi-structured interviews to provide a comprehensive assessment of the role of radio in mobilizing women for political participation. The use of content analysis enables systematic, objective, and replicable examination of media messages (Riffe et al., 2014), while interviews provide deeper insight into programme production processes and audience engagement dynamics (Stacks, 2011).

The population for the content analysis comprised all political programmes broadcast on Agate Radio and Radio Benue that addressed political participation within the study period (June–December 2025). Preliminary mapping of programme schedules identified a total of 34 relevant political programme episodes, distributed as follows: 17 episodes from Agate Radio and 17 episodes from Radio Benue. In addition, a total of 16 programme scripts were obtained (Agate Radio = 6; Radio Benue = 10), particularly for segments not available as recordings.

Given the manageable size of the population, the study adopted a census sampling technique, where all identified relevant programmes and scripts were included for analysis. This approach eliminates sampling bias and ensures comprehensive coverage of media content relating to women's political mobilization within the selected stations. For the qualitative component, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with direct involvement or

experience in political broadcasting and women's political engagement. The sample consisted of six (6) participants, including: two programme producers/presenters (one from each station), two female political participants/listeners, and two subject experts/political commentators. This selection ensured a diversity of perspectives across content creators and audience stakeholders. The units of analysis included:

- a) Full recorded political programme episodes,
- b) Programme segments specifically addressing women's political participation, and
- c) Available programme scripts.

Each unit was treated as a discrete analytical item for coding and interpretation.

Data Collection Procedure

Audio recordings and scripts were obtained directly from the archives of Agate Radio and Radio Benue. All recorded programmes were transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed analysis. Each episode was listened to multiple times to ensure accuracy and depth in coding. For the interview component, a semi-structured interview guide consisting of six open-ended questions (expanded from the initial three to improve depth and reliability) was developed. The questions explored issues such as programme inclusiveness, opportunities for audience participation, and perceived effectiveness of radio in mobilizing women politically. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with participants' consent.

The study developed a structured coding sheet informed by literature and theoretical frameworks. The key content categories included:

- i. **Awareness Creation** (information on political rights, processes, and opportunities),

- ii. **Mobilization Appeals** (calls for participation, voting, or candidacy),
- iii. **Leadership and Representation** (visibility and voice of women in programmes),
- iv. **Engagement Format** (phone-ins, interviews, panel discussions),
- v. **Candidacy and Political Participation** (voting, campaigning, standing for public office)
- vi. **Civic Engagement and Advocacy** (Media engagement, CSOs related campaign for women, lobbying)
- vii. **Tone of Message** (supportive, neutral, discouraging), and
- viii. **Barriers Highlighted** (financial, cultural, institutional constraints).

Each category was operationalized with clear coding rules to ensure consistency. Frequency counts and thematic patterns were recorded for quantitative and qualitative interpretation. Quantitative data from content analysis were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify patterns in media coverage and messaging. Qualitative data from both content analysis and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and deeper interpretation of meanings within the data.

To ensure content validity, the coding categories and interview guide were developed based on established literature and aligned with the study objectives. The instruments were further subjected to expert review by two scholars in media studies to assess clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. A pilot test was conducted on five programme episodes (excluded from the main sample) to refine the

coding scheme. Inter-coder reliability was enhanced by re-coding a subset of the data after a two-week interval, and discrepancies were resolved through consistent application of coding rules.

Results

A total of 34 relevant episodes and a total of 16 programme scripts of political programme exclusively dedicated to women political mobilization were obtained from *Agate Radio*, and *Radio Benue*. The dominant themes used by Radio Benue and Agate Radio for women political participation in Benue State were awareness, leadership, and advocacy. Both stations predominantly emphasized under-representation of women in Makurdi Local Government area of Benue State and the need for women in to be involved in politics and decision-making roles. The themes are as shown in tables 1-3 below.

Table 1: Engagement Format used in radio messages on women political mobilization in Agate Radio and Radio Benue

Engagement Format	Agate Radio	Radio Benue	Total
Phone-ins	4(8%)	3(6%)	7(14%)
Interviews	6(12%)	14(28%)	20(40%)
Panel discussions	11(22%)	6(12%)	17(34%)
Vox pop	2(4%)	4(8%)	6(12%)
Total	23(46%)	24(54%)	50(100)

The data shows that interviews (40%) are the most frequently used format across both stations, followed by panel discussions (34%), phone-ins (14%), and vox pop segments (12%). Radio Benue relies heavily on interviews (28%), while Agate Radio uses more panel discussions (22%). This suggests Radio Benue prefers structured, expert-driven engagement and Agate Radio leans toward more deliberative, multi-perspective discussions

Table 2: Dominant themes in radio messages on women political mobilization in Agate Radio and Radio Benue

Themes	Agate Radio	Radio Benue	Total
Awareness Creation	2(4%)	2(4%)	4(8%)
Mobilization Appeals	4(8%)	3(6%)	7(14%)
Leadership and Representation	5(10%)	4(8%)	9(18%)
Candidacy and Political Participation	3(6%)	6(12%)	9(18%)
Civic Engagement and Advocacy	2(4%)	3(6%)	5(10%)
Barriers Highlighted	7(14%)	9(18%)	16(32%)
Total	23(46%)	24(54%)	50(100)

The most prominent theme is “Barriers Highlighted” (32%), followed by Leadership and Representation (18%) and Candidacy and Political Participation (18%). Other themes such as awareness creation (8%) and civic engagement (10%) appear less emphasized. This implies Radio programmes focus more on challenges facing women rather than solutions or empowerment strategies. Moderate attention is given to active participation and leadership, suggesting some encouragement but not dominant.

Table 3: Tone of Message in radio messages on women political mobilization in Agate Radio and Radio Benue

Tone of Message	Agate Radio	Radio Benue	Total
Supportive	17(28%)	15(30%)	32(64%)
Neutral	6(12%)	9(18%)	15(30%)
Discouraging	00	3(6%)	3(6%)
Total	23(46%)	27(54%)	50(100)

The tone is largely supportive (64%), with neutral (30%) and minimal discouraging content (6%). This indicates a generally positive media environment for promoting women's political participation. However, the presence of neutral and some discouraging tones suggests inconsistency in messaging.

Interview Responses and Thematic Interpretation

To address this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, comprising programme producers/presenters, female listeners/political participants, and subject experts. The responses are presented thematically below:

a. Availability of Interactive Platforms

Most participants agreed that the selected radio programmes provide structured opportunities for interaction, particularly through phone-in segments, live discussions, and audience feedback channels. A programme presenter from Radio Benue stated:

“Our political programmes are designed to be interactive. We allocate time for listeners to call in, ask questions, and contribute to discussions, especially on issues concerning women in politics.”

Similarly, a producer from Agate Radio noted that:

“We deliberately include phone-in sessions and sometimes social media feedback to ensure that woman and other stakeholders can engage

directly with experts and political actors.”

These responses indicate that interactivity is an intentional feature of programme design.

b. Inclusiveness of Women's Participation

While interactive opportunities exist, responses from female participants suggest that actual participation by women is moderate rather than optimal. One female listener remarked:

“The opportunity is there, but not many women call in. Sometimes it feels like men dominate the conversation, even when the topic is about women.”

Another participant highlighted socio-cultural constraints:

“Some women are not confident enough to speak on air, or they lack access to phones and airtime, which limits their participation.”

This suggests that structural and cultural barriers continue to restrict full utilization of available platforms.

c. Engagement of Experts and Political Leaders

All participants confirmed that experts and political leaders are frequently featured on the programmes and actively engage with listeners. A political commentator stated:

“These programmes often invite analysts and political figures who respond directly to callers' questions. This creates a bridge between the public and policymakers.”

However, another expert noted a limitation:

“The interaction is sometimes one-sided, as time constraints limit how many calls can be taken, and not all questions are adequately addressed.”

This highlight both the strength and limitation of expert engagement within broadcast time constraints.

e. Effectiveness of Interaction in Mobilization

Participants generally agreed that interactive formats enhance political awareness and interest, but their effectiveness in translating into active participation remains limited. A presenter observed:

“When women call in and share their views, it encourages others to participate. But turning that engagement into actual political involvement is still a challenge.”

A female participant added:

“Listening and calling in helps us understand politics better, but it doesn’t always mean we will contest or actively engage beyond that.”

The interview responses reveal that while radio programmes in Makurdi Local Government Area provide formal opportunities for interaction among women, experts, and political leaders, the depth and inclusiveness of this interaction remain constrained. Although interactive formats such as phone-ins and live discussions are well-established, socio-cultural barriers, limited access, and structural constraints reduce the extent to which women fully participate. Consequently, the interaction facilitated by these programmes is present

but not sufficiently transformative in advancing women’s political mobilization.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that interviews (40%) and panel discussions (34%) dominate radio programming, while participatory formats such as phone-ins are comparatively limited (14%) . From an Agenda-Setting perspective, this pattern suggests that radio stations are not only determining what issues are discussed but also how they are discussed, privilege elite voices (experts and political actors) over grassroots participation. This partially aligns with Iheanacho and Orji (2022), who found that structured formats enhance political education. However, it contrasts with Apata and Azeez (2019), who emphasize that participatory formats significantly increase audience engagement. The limited use of phone-ins indicates that while the media may set the agenda on women’s political participation, they restrict audience influence over that agenda, thereby weakening participatory democracy. Importantly, Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that salience is shaped by repetition and prominence. The dominance of elite-driven formats may therefore reinforce a perception that political discourse is expert-controlled, potentially discouraging women from seeing themselves as active political agents.

The prominence of “Barriers Highlighted” (32%) as the dominant theme demonstrates a clear agenda-setting function of radio in framing women’s political participation primarily as a problematic and constrained endeavour. According to Agenda-Setting Theory, the issues most emphasized by the media become the issues the public perceives as most important. This finding corroborates Masoud (2022) and Adeniyi (2015), who identified structural barriers as central to women’s political

exclusion. However, the current study advances this discourse by showing that continuous emphasis on barriers without equivalent focus on empowerment or success narratives may unintentionally normalize women's marginalization. In contrast to Fanawopo and Ifeduba (2023) and Abiodun and Emmanuel (2023), who report a positive mobilizing role of radio, the present findings suggest that agenda bias (problem-focused framing) may limit the transformative potential of media. Thus, while radio raises awareness, it simultaneously frames the discourse in ways that may constrain perceived possibilities for action.

The predominance of a supportive tone (64%), alongside neutral and minimal discouraging tones, reflects an ostensibly positive media environment. However, Agenda-Setting Theory, particularly its second-level dimension (attribute agenda-setting), suggests that how issues are framed is as important as what issues are covered. Although the tone is largely supportive, the simultaneous emphasis on barriers creates a mixed framing effect, where encouragement is undermined by persistent narratives of difficulty and exclusion. This aligns with Aredem and Oji (2022), who found that increased political knowledge does not necessarily lead to active participation. The present study suggests that this disconnect may be partly explained by contradictory media framing, where positive tone coexists with limiting narratives.

Interview findings indicate that while interactive platforms exist, women's participation remains limited due to socio-cultural and structural constraints. Agenda-Setting Theory is particularly relevant here in distinguishing between agenda-setting (what to think about) and agenda-building (who gets to influence the agenda). The findings suggest that women are largely positioned as agenda consumers rather than agenda

contributors. Although radio programmes provide opportunities for interaction, limited airtime, male-dominated participation, and access barriers restrict women's ability to shape discourse. This supports Iheanacho and Orji (2022), who identified gaps between exposure and engagement, and extends Aredem and Oji (2022) by demonstrating that limited participatory access constrains the transition from awareness to action. It also challenges the more optimistic conclusions of Fanawopo and Ifeduba (2023), indicating that media influence is mediated by access, inclusivity, and structural conditions.

A critical insight from this study is the gap between issue salience and behavioural outcomes. While radio programmes successfully set the agenda by highlighting women's political participation as an important issue, they fall short in translating this salience into active political engagement or candidacy. This finding reinforces Aredem and Oji's (2022) assertion that knowledge does not automatically translate into participation. However, the present study deepens this argument by showing that agenda-setting without participatory inclusion and empowerment framing results in limited mobilization outcomes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that radio programmes in Makurdi LGA play a significant agenda-setting role in shaping discourse on women's political participation. However, this role is double-edged: while the media successfully elevate the issue, the dominance of elite-driven formats, emphasis on barriers, and limited participatory access constrain their effectiveness in achieving meaningful mobilization. Thus, rather than functioning as purely empowering tools, radio programmes operate as selective agenda-setters, shaping not only what women think about but also how they perceive their capacity to act within the political space.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the contribution of radio programmes to women's political mobilization in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, with particular focus on programme formats, thematic emphasis, tone of messaging, and interactive opportunities. Drawing on Agenda-Setting, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how radio shapes both awareness and participation. The findings demonstrate that radio programmes play a significant agenda-setting role in bringing issues of women's political participation to public attention. Through predominantly supportive messaging, the media have contributed to raising awareness and legitimizing discourse around women's inclusion in politics. However, this agenda-setting function is constrained by structural and communicative limitations. Specifically, the dominance of elite-driven formats such as interviews and panel discussions, coupled with the limited use of participatory formats like phone-ins, restricts the extent to which women can actively engage in political discourse. Furthermore, the overemphasis on barriers—despite a generally supportive tone—creates a paradox where women are made aware of political challenges without being sufficiently empowered to overcome them. This reflects a broader issue within media practice, where issue salience does not necessarily translate into behavioural change. The study also reveals that although interactive opportunities exist, women's actual participation remains constrained by socio-cultural norms, access limitations, and confidence gaps. As a result, radio programmes function more effectively as

tools for awareness creation than for transformative political mobilization. In sum, while radio remains a vital platform for promoting women's political participation, its current structure and content framing limit its capacity to drive meaningful and sustained engagement. The study therefore concludes that media influence is not merely a function of exposure, but of inclusivity, framing, and participatory depth. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Increase Participatory Programme Formats:** Radio stations should expand the use of interactive formats such as phone-ins, audience polls, and live feedback sessions. This will enhance inclusivity and allow women to move from passive listeners to active contributors in political discourse.
- ii. **Deliberate Inclusion of Women's Voices:** Producers should adopt gender-sensitive programming policies that ensure adequate representation of women as guests, contributors, and callers. Special segments can be dedicated exclusively to women's perspectives to counter male-dominated discourse.
- iii. **Capacity Building and Media Literacy for Women:** Stakeholders, including government agencies and NGOs, should invest in training programmes that build women's confidence, communication skills, and political awareness, enabling them to actively engage with media platforms.
- iv. **Future Research:** Further studies should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how media exposure translates into actual political outcomes over time, and to explore differences across regions and media platforms.

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