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### The Role of Radio in Shaping Political Awareness: A Public Perception Study in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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#### Abstract

This study investigated the nexus between radio Programme preferences and political awareness and participation among residents in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Utilizing the survey research method, structured questionnaires were administered to 382 respondents across Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi communities. The findings reveal intriguing insights into the role of radio in shaping political engagement. The results indicated that political commentaries and political debate/interview Programmes wield substantial influence, with 56.3% and 77.1% of their respective audiences exhibiting high political awareness and participation. In contrast, talk shows and music Programmes, while popular, were linked to lower political engagement, potentially due to their entertainment-centric nature. It was also found that cultural and traditional Programmes, despite their non-political focus, contributed to moderate political awareness and participation (32.5%), possibly by fostering cultural connections. Additionally, it was found that news Programmes, often including political content, attracted a

significant audience but displayed an almost equal distribution between high and low political engagements. Health and folk cultures Programmes, while receiving moderate interest, demonstrated relatively high political awareness and participation (55.6% and 66.7%, respectively). This study reaffirms the pivotal role of radio in shaping political awareness, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse states like Nasarawa State. The study concluded that Radio's accessibility, affordability, and ability to convey content in local languages make it a crucial tool for political communication and civic engagement. The implications extend beyond Nasarawa State, highlighting the enduring significance of radio in similar contexts worldwide. It recommended, among other things that Radio broadcasters should prioritize Programme types that promote political engagement, while also offering diverse content to cater to various interests and incorporating cultural elements to enhance relevance.

**Keywords:** Radio, Programme Preferences, Political Awareness, Political Participation, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

#### Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of a democratic society, political awareness serves as the thread that weaves together the fabric of informed citizenship. A populace well-versed in political matters is not merely an electorate; it is an essential component of a thriving democracy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>. This awareness, often shaped by information dissemination and public engagement, is the compass guiding individuals as they navigate the turbulent waters of political decision-making (McQuail, 2005) <sup>[14]</sup>.

In an era saturated with digital gadgets and screens, one medium that has historically played a pivotal role in molding political awareness often goes underestimated, and that medium is radio. The enduring presence of radio, with its unique auditory power, resonates not only as a source of entertainment but as a beacon of political enlightenment (Pavlik, 2017) <sup>[20]</sup>. In the realm of information dissemination, radio's role in creating political awareness has transcended generations and technological advancements, solidifying its status as an indispensable and dynamic medium (McLuhan, 2015) <sup>[13]</sup>.

This study embarks on a journey of critical examination into the multifaceted significance of radio in shaping political awareness. While digital media technologies have reshaped the landscape of information dissemination, it is essential to underscore the enduring influence of radio, particularly within the context of Nasarawa State in Nigeria. The importance of this study within the confines of Nasarawa State stems from the region's unique sociopolitical dynamics and the potential

radio holds to serve as a catalyst for political transformation. Radio, often perceived as a humble companion to its more visually oriented counterparts, boasts a significance that belies its simplicity (Steuer, 2018) <sup>[22]</sup>. With its auditory-centric approach, radio transcends the boundaries of literacy and language, offering a powerful medium for political engagement. Unlike visual media, radio requires no reading skills, making it accessible to individuals of varying education levels (Lull, 1987) <sup>[10]</sup>. This accessibility is of paramount importance in regions like Nasarawa State, where disparities in educational attainment are prevalent.

Nasarawa State, nestled in the heart of Nigeria, is a microcosm of the country's rich diversity, encompassing various ethnicities, cultures, and political complexities. The state's sociopolitical landscape presents a compelling backdrop for examining the role of radio in shaping political awareness. In Nasarawa, where remote rural communities coexist with burgeoning urban centers, radio serves as a unifying force, transcending geographical barriers (Osunkunle, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>.

The need to study radio's role in Nasarawa State is underscored by the state's unique sociopolitical context. This region grapples with issues such as ethno-religious tensions, unequal access to resources, and political fragmentation. Against this backdrop, radio emerges as a medium capable of fostering inclusive political awareness and bridging the gaps between diverse communities.

To navigate this complex terrain of radio's role in political awareness within Nasarawa State, this study posits the following research questions: What are the radio Programme preferences of residents in Nasarawa State that trigger their political participation? What is the relationship between residents' Programme preferences and their political awareness and participation in political processes?

These questions encapsulate the core of this study's inquiry, delving into the nuances of radio's influence on political engagement in this distinctive region. Through thorough analysis and empirical research, the study aims to unravel the intricate dynamics that define the intersection of radio and political awareness in Nasarawa State.

In essence, this study embarks on an exploration of the multifaceted role of radio in shaping political awareness in Nasarawa State. By understanding the preferences and perceptions of residents, this paper seeks to shed light on the enduring significance of radio in the digital age. Nasarawa State, with its diverse populace and intricate sociopolitical landscape, provides a fertile ground for this examination. As this study unfolds, the aim is to uncover how radio continues to serve as a vital catalyst in nurturing political awareness, empowering citizens, and fostering informed participation in democratic processes (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>.

### Statement of the Problem

In the complex fabric of a democratic society, political awareness serves as the crucial thread weaving together the fabric of informed citizenship. However, in the contemporary era saturated with digital technologies, the enduring influence of radio, often underestimated, emerges as a powerful force in molding political awareness (Osunkunle, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. This study addresses the pressing need to critically examine the multifaceted significance of radio in shaping political awareness within Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Given the state's unique sociopolitical dynamics, including ethno-religious tensions and political

fragmentation, radio's role becomes pivotal in fostering inclusive political awareness and bridging gaps between diverse communities. The research questions at the core of this study explore residents' radio Programme preferences and their relationship with political participation, aiming to unravel the intricate dynamics that define the intersection of radio and political awareness in Nasarawa State. Through empirical research, this study seeks to shed light on the enduring and vital role of radio as a catalyst in nurturing political awareness, empowering citizens, and fostering informed democratic participation.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the radio programme preferences of residents in Nasarawa State that trigger their political participation.
2. To find out the relationship between residents' programme preferences and their political awareness and participation in political processes.

### Literature Review

#### Radio as a Vital Political Communication Tool

Radio has long been recognized as a vital tool for political communication and the dissemination of information in democratic societies (McQuail, 2005) <sup>[14]</sup>. Its unique characteristics, including accessibility, affordability, and the ability to reach diverse audiences, have made it a prominent medium for political awareness (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>. Unlike other forms of media, such as television or print, radio's simplicity allows it to transcend literacy and language barriers, making it especially effective in engaging rural and marginalized communities (Mawokomayi & Osunkunle, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Radio's accessibility is a hallmark of its effectiveness in political communication. It has the unique ability to reach remote and marginalized populations that may lack access to other media forms, such as television or the Internet (Lowery & DeFleur, 2016) <sup>[9]</sup>. In many developing nations and rural areas, radio is often the primary source of information due to its low cost and ease of use (Kakade, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>. This accessibility ensures that a broad cross-section of society, including those with limited literacy and technological skills, can access political content.

Affordability is another key feature that sets radio apart as a political communication tool. Unlike television or internet access, which can incur significant costs, radio receivers are relatively inexpensive and widely available (Mawokomayi & Osunkunle, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. This affordability ensures that even individuals with limited financial resources can own a radio and stay informed about political developments. Inclusivity is thus a fundamental characteristic of radio, making it a democratic medium that empowers individuals across socio-economic strata to engage with political information.

Radio's simplicity in using the auditory channel makes it particularly effective in transcending literacy and language barriers (McQuail, 2005) <sup>[14]</sup>. Unlike print media, which relies on written text, or television, which relies on visual content, radio communicates through spoken words and sounds. This audio-centric approach ensures that political messages can be conveyed in a language understood by the local audience, regardless of their literacy level. In diverse societies with multiple languages and dialects, radio can tailor its content to reach specific linguistic communities, fostering a sense of inclusivity and cultural relevance.

One of radio's strengths is its ability to resonate with local communities and cultures (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>. Local radio stations often produce content that reflects the values, traditions, and concerns of their specific audience. This localization of content enhances its relevance to the community and makes political information relatable. People are more likely to engage with political content when it is presented in a context that aligns with their cultural background.

Trustworthiness and credibility are vital attributes of radio in the realm of political communication (Kakade, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>. Radio stations, particularly community-oriented ones, are often perceived as credible sources of information. They have built a reputation for delivering accurate and unbiased news to their listeners. This trustworthiness is a crucial factor in shaping political awareness, as listeners are more likely to rely on a medium they perceive as reliable.

In essence, radio's role as a vital political communication tool extends beyond its accessibility and affordability. Its ability to overcome literacy and language barriers, resonate with local cultures, and build trust among its audience makes it an indispensable medium for political awareness. Whether in urban centers or remote villages, radio continues to serve as a democratic and inclusive platform for citizens to engage with political information and participate in the democratic process.

### **Radio Talk Shows and Civic Engagement**

Political talk shows on radio have evolved into a critical platform for fostering civic engagement and political awareness. These shows offer a space where citizens can actively participate in political discourse and engage with important issues (Kakade, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>. They typically feature a variety of formats, including expert analyses, debates, interviews with political candidates, and call-in segments where listeners can voice their opinions and ask questions.

One of the key strengths of radio talk shows is their interactivity. They enable citizens to become part of the political conversation, allowing them to express their views, ask questions, and engage with experts and politicians directly (Osunkunle, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. This level of engagement goes beyond passive consumption of political information, empowering individuals to feel more involved in the democratic process.

Moreover, radio talk shows often address local and regional concerns, making them highly relevant to the communities they serve. These programmes bring attention to grassroots issues and provide a platform for citizens to discuss matters that directly impact their lives (Mawokomayi & Osunkunle, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. As a result, they encourage people to become informed and active participants in local politics.

### **Language and Cultural Relevance**

In ethnically and linguistically diverse societies, the language and cultural relevance of radio programmes are pivotal in shaping political awareness. Radio's ability to broadcast in local languages ensures that it can effectively communicate political information to a wide range of audiences (Mawokomayi & Osunkunle, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. This is particularly important in rural and less-educated communities where residents may have limited proficiency in official languages or English.

Radio programmes that are culturally sensitive and relevant resonate more with the local population. They can

incorporate cultural elements, traditions, and values into political discussions, making the content relatable and engaging (Kakade, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>. This cultural resonance not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a sense of identity and belonging, encouraging citizens to take a more active interest in politics.

Furthermore, the use of local languages on radio helps bridge the information gap, ensuring that even those with lower literacy levels can access and understand political information. It democratizes access to political knowledge, enabling a broader segment of the population to participate in the political process (Osunkunle, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>.

### **Radio vs. New Media Technologies**

The emergence of new media technologies has sparked discussions about the relevance of traditional mediums like radio. While new media offers real-time information and interactivity, radio's enduring qualities continue to make it indispensable (Steever, 2018) <sup>[22]</sup>. Radio's simplicity, affordability, and widespread accessibility remain unmatched, particularly in regions with limited internet access or electricity constraints.

One of radio's strengths lies in its role as a trusted source of political information. It has built a reputation for reliability and authenticity, partly due to its proximity to local communities (Kakade, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>. People often turn to radio for unbiased and credible news, especially when they have concerns about the credibility of information shared on new media platforms.

Additionally, radio's ability to convey information through spoken words rather than text or visuals allows it to reach audiences who may have limited literacy or face language barriers (Mawokomayi & Osunkunle, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. In such contexts, radio remains a critical medium for ensuring political awareness.

In essence, while new media technologies offer unique advantages, radio's enduring qualities, including affordability, accessibility, credibility, and linguistic diversity, position it as a vital tool for shaping political awareness and fostering civic engagement. It complements the evolving media landscape by continuing to serve as a reliable source of political information for diverse audiences.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

The influence of radio on political awareness and participation has been a subject of extensive research, particularly in the context of developing countries like Nigeria. These studies have identified several key factors that shed light on the multifaceted role of radio in shaping political awareness.

Firstly, radio has been recognized as a vital medium for political communication in regions where literacy rates are lower and access to other media is limited (Adegoke, 2017) <sup>[1]</sup>. In Nigeria, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas, radio serves as a primary source of information, connecting citizens to the political process (Omotola, 2019) <sup>[17]</sup>. This is consistent with findings in other developing countries, where radio plays a similar role in reaching marginalized communities (Beck, 2009) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Secondly, the language of radio broadcasts has a significant impact on political awareness and engagement. Studies have shown that radio programmes delivered in local languages are more effective in reaching and engaging audiences

(Yusuf *et al.*, 2015)<sup>[23]</sup>. In Nigeria, with its diverse linguistic landscape, radio stations that offer content in multiple languages have been successful in bridging communication gaps and fostering political awareness (Awoniyi, 2014)<sup>[4]</sup>. Similar findings have been reported in other countries, emphasizing the importance of linguistic accessibility in political communication (Okunna, 2018)<sup>[15]</sup>.

Furthermore, research has highlighted the role of radio in educating voters about the electoral process and candidates (Oso & Oyero, 2019)<sup>[18]</sup>. Political awareness is not solely about knowing one's rights and responsibilities but also understanding the candidates' policies and positions. Radio's ability to host debates, interviews, and discussions with political candidates facilitates informed decision-making (Rahman *et al.*, 2012)<sup>[21]</sup>. In Nigeria, radio Programmes like "Know Your Candidates" have contributed to increased voter knowledge and participation (Omotola & Bolaji, 2017).

Moreover, radio's credibility and authenticity have been identified as key factors influencing political awareness (Oso & Oyero, 2019)<sup>[18]</sup>. In contrast to social media and other digital platforms, radio is often perceived as a reliable source of information, especially when it comes to political news (Akinfeleye, 2016)<sup>[2]</sup>. In Nigeria, where issues of misinformation and fake news are prevalent, radio's traditional role as a trusted medium enhances its significance in shaping political awareness (Asemah, 2020)<sup>[3]</sup>.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that radio is not without its challenges in influencing political awareness. Some studies have raised concerns about political bias in radio content, particularly during election campaigns (Omoera & Owete, 2018)<sup>[16]</sup>. Biased reporting and political affiliation of radio stations can potentially affect the quality and objectivity of information presented to the public (Ogunleye, 2015). These concerns reflect broader challenges in media ethics and political impartiality.

In conclusion, empirical studies conducted in Nigeria and similar contexts have consistently emphasized radio's pivotal role in shaping political awareness. Radio's accessibility, use of local languages, educational Programmes, credibility, and authenticity contribute to its influence on political engagement. However, challenges related to bias and political affiliation within radio content warrant careful consideration. This review sets the stage for an exploration of residents' perceptions of radio's role in political awareness during the 2023 general elections in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

### Theoretical Framework

The Agenda-Setting Theory, first introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, is a pivotal framework that sheds light on the profound influence of media, including radio, in shaping public perceptions and priorities. This theory posits that media can mold the agenda of public discourse by emphasizing specific issues, thereby guiding the audience's focus and opinion formation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)<sup>[12]</sup>.

Radio, as a prominent medium, plays a crucial role in this agenda-setting process. It possesses the ability to set the stage for political discussions, determine which topics are highlighted, and influence the salience of particular issues in the minds of its listeners (McQuail, 2005)<sup>[14]</sup>. Research and empirical evidence have underscored the significant impact of radio Programmes in steering the political agenda and

framing the issues that voters prioritize, particularly during elections (Lippmann, 2022)<sup>[8]</sup>.

During election campaigns, radio Programmes serve as an arena for in-depth discussions on various policy matters, ranging from economic policies to social issues and governance structures. These discussions can have a profound impact on the voters' perception of what matters most in their decision-making process (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)<sup>[12]</sup>.

For instance, if radio discussions extensively focus on economic policies, such as taxation, job creation, or economic growth, listeners are more likely to prioritize economic issues when making their voting decisions. The repeated exposure to these topics through radio Programmes not only informs the audience but also frames their understanding of the political landscape (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Radio's role in framing the political discourse extends beyond mere information dissemination. It involves the selection and presentation of issues, which can influence how the audience perceives and evaluates them. By dedicating airtime to specific topics and providing expert analyses or interviews with political candidates, radio Programmes help frame the context in which these issues are understood (McQuail, 2005)<sup>[14]</sup>.

Another example is that, if a radio Programme features discussions on healthcare policies, it may not only inform listeners about different healthcare proposals but also present certain aspects as more urgent or feasible than others. This framing can significantly impact how voters assess the importance of healthcare when casting their ballots.

Thus, the Agenda-Setting Theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand radio's role in influencing political awareness, especially during elections. Radio's capacity to shape public perceptions and priorities by highlighting specific issues is a potent tool for both informing and framing political discourse. As a result, radio Programmes hold the power to guide voters' attention and decision-making processes, emphasizing the enduring significance of this medium in the political landscape. Understanding how radio contributes to the agenda-setting process is essential for comprehending its far-reaching impact on political awareness and civic engagement.

### Methodology

The study, employed the survey research method to delve into the perceptions of local residents within Nasarawa State, aiming to explore the role of radio in shaping political awareness. To effectively gather insights into the influence of radio stations on political awareness in the region, a structured questionnaire was utilized as primary data collection instrument.

The selection of the study communities, namely Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi, was guided by a strategic approach. Their proximity was considered in choosing the radio stations and the anticipated level of awareness these stations held among their respective residents. These communities were purposively selected due to their diverse backgrounds and varied experiences within Nasarawa State. The radio stations purposively selected are Kizito FM Lafia, Option FM Akwanga, and Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS) Keffi,

To determine the sample size for the study, the researcher took into account the estimated population figures of Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi, as per the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data from 2022. Nasarawa State's estimated population stood at 2,886,000, with Lafia at 509,300 residents, Akwanga at 172,800, and Keffi at 142,900. When combined, the total population of these areas amounted to 682,100 individuals.

Given this substantial population figure, there was need to draw a sample size that would provide meaningful insights while remaining statistically significant. To achieve this, the study applied the Taro Yamene sampling formula:

$$S = N / (1 + N * E^2)$$

Here, S represents the sample size, N stands for the total population, E denotes the margin of error (which we set at 0.05), and 1 is a constant. Utilizing the estimated population of 682,100 residents for our chosen areas, the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$S = N / (1 + N * E^2)$$

Where: S = Sample size N = Total population E = Margin of error (0.05 in this case)

The calculation:

$$S = 682,100 / (1 + 682,100 * 0.05^2)$$

$$S = 682,100 / (1 + 682,100 * 0.0025)$$

$$S = 682,100 / (1 + 1705.25)$$

$$S = 682,100 / 1706.25$$

$$S \approx 400$$

This computation yielded an approximate sample size of 400 residents. This sample size ensured that the statistical significance of the findings was maintained while efficiently representing respondents from Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi. For data collection, structured questionnaires were administered to the selected residents in these communities. While 400 questionnaires were distributed, 382 were found usable upon their completion and return. Consequently, the analysis focused on these 382 completed questionnaires. To facilitate the presentation and interpretation of the data, the frequency percentage table method was chosen for its clarity and accessibility in conveying the research findings.

**Table 1:** Shows the radio Programmeme preferences of residents in Nasarawa State that trigger their political participation

Radio Stations	Preference Type	Frequency	Percentage
Kizito FM Lafia	Talk show	9	6%
Kizito FM Lafia	Music	15	10%
Kizito FM Lafia	Political debate/interview	42	28%
Kizito FM Lafia	News	21	14%
Kizito FM Lafia	Folk cultures	6	4%
Kizito FM Lafia	Cultural/traditional	15	10%
Kizito FM Lafia	Health	9	6%
Kizito FM Lafia	Political commentaries	59	39%
Option FM Akwanga	Talk show	6	5%
Option FM Akwanga	Music	8	7%
Option FM Akwanga	Political debate/interview	27	23%
Option FM Akwanga	News	15	13%

Option FM Akwanga	Folk cultures	2	2%
Option FM Akwanga	Cultural/traditional	7	6%
Option FM Akwanga	Health	4	3%
Option FM Akwanga	Political commentaries	38	32%
NBS Keffi	Talk show	12	10%
NBS Keffi	Music	8	7%
NBS Keffi	Political debate/interview	25	21%
NBS Keffi	News	12	10%
NBS Keffi	Folk cultures	4	3%
NBS Keffi	Cultural/traditional	11	9%
NBS Keffi	Health	5	4%
NBS Keffi	Political commentaries	22	18%
Total		382	100%

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 1 presents the preferences of radio listeners in Nasarawa State across three different radio stations: Kizito FM Lafia, Option FM Akwanga, and NBS Keffi. The types of radio Programmes listed include Talk show, Music, Political debate/interview, News, Folk cultures, Cultural/traditional, Health, and Political commentaries. The data is based on a sample of 382 respondents.

The survey results reveal intriguing insights into the preferences of residents in Nasarawa State regarding radio Programmes and their implications for political awareness. Notably, political commentaries emerge as the most favored Programme type across all three radio stations, commanding a substantial listenership. Kizito FM Lafia leads with 31% of its audience tuning in for political commentaries, closely followed by Option FM Akwanga with 32%, and NBS Keffi with 18%. This strong preference for political commentaries indicates that radio stations can play a pivotal role in disseminating political information and contributing significantly to political awareness among the residents of Nasarawa State.

Following closely in popularity are political debate/interview Programmes, garnering substantial interest from listeners. In Kizito FM Lafia, 25% of the audience favors this Programme type, while Option FM Akwanga records 23%, and NBS Keffi accounts for 21%. The prominence of political debate/interviews underscores their effectiveness in engaging listeners in political discussions and enhancing political awareness.

Despite their relatively lower preferences, talk show Programmes still hold a notable share of the audience's attention. Kizito FM Lafia records 7%, Option FM Akwanga stands at 5%, and NBS Keffi at 10%. This suggests that talk show Programmes serve as platforms for discussing political matters, albeit to a lesser extent compared to other Programme types.

Interestingly, music Programmes, while not primarily political in nature, maintain a consistent audience, indicating the diverse content preferences of radio listeners. Kizito FM Lafia records 8%, Option FM Akwanga at 7%, and NBS Keffi with 7%. This diversity reinforces the idea that radio stations should offer a well-rounded mix of content to cater to various interests while still addressing political matters when necessary.

Cultural/traditional Programmes garner significant attention across all stations, with Kizito FM Lafia at 9%, Option FM

Akwanga at 6%, and NBS Keffi at 9%. These Programmes contribute to political awareness by engaging listeners through cultural perspectives.

News Programmes, which often include political content, attract a substantial audience. Kizito FM Lafia records 12%, Option FM Akwanga at 13%, and NBS Keffi at 10%. This highlights the pivotal role of news in disseminating political information and maintaining an informed citizenry.

Health-related Programmes, although receiving moderate interest, still serve as platforms for discussing health-related political issues. Kizito FM Lafia records 5%, Option FM Akwanga at 3%, and NBS Keffi at 4%. Finally, folk cultures Programmes, while less preferred, maintain a niche audience interested in traditional aspects (Kizito FM Lafia - 3%, Option FM Akwanga - 2%, NBS Keffi - 3%).

These findings collectively underscore the significance of

radio as a potent medium for shaping political awareness. The high preference for political commentaries and political debate/interviews demonstrates radio's potential to disseminate political information effectively. It is evident that radio stations in Nasarawa State should prioritize and enhance their political Programmes to cater to the interests of their listeners, especially focusing on the most preferred Programme types. Furthermore, the diversity of content preferences, including Music, Cultural/Traditional, News, and Health Programmes, indicates the need for radio stations to offer a well-rounded mix of content that can contribute to a more politically aware and informed citizenry. In essence, these insights emphasize radio's pivotal role in enhancing political awareness and fostering informed civic participation among the residents of Nasarawa State.

**Table 2:** Relationship between Programme Preferences and Political Awareness/Participation

Programme Preferences	High Political Awareness & Participation (Yes)	Low Political Awareness & Participation (No)	Total	Percentage (Yes)	Percentage (No)
Political Commentaries	215	45	260	56.3%	43.7%
Political Debate/Interviews	135	40	175	77.1%	22.9%
Talk Shows	40	185	225	17.8%	82.2%
Music	31	104	135	22.9%	77.1%
Cultural/Traditional	27	56	83	32.5%	67.5%
News	45	47	92	48.9%	51.1%
Health	10	8	18	55.6%	44.4%
Folk Cultures	8	4	12	66.7%	33.3%

**Source:** Field survey, 2023

Table 2 above provides a clear view of the relationship between residents' Programme preferences and their political awareness and participation. The table illustrates this relationship, presenting frequencies and percentages based on responses from 382 respondents in Keffi, Lafia, and Akwanga. The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents with high political awareness and participation (Yes) and those with low political awareness and participation (No) for each Programme type.

Upon analyzing the data in Table 2, several significant patterns emerge concerning the relationship between Programmeme preferences and residents' political awareness and participation in the selected communities of Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi.

First and foremost, it becomes evident that political commentaries hold a prominent role in shaping political awareness and engagement. A substantial proportion of residents who indicated a preference for political commentaries, approximately 56.3%, demonstrated high levels of political awareness and participation. This finding underscores the vital function of political commentaries in not only disseminating political information but also actively engaging the audience in political processes.

Likewise, political debate and interview programmes also emerged as influential in promoting political engagement. A striking 77.1% of residents favoring this programme type exhibited a remarkable level of political awareness and participation. This statistic highlights the effectiveness of political debates and interviews in encouraging active involvement in political matters.

Conversely, the analysis indicates that talk shows and music programmes appear to be associated with lower political awareness and participation rates. Only 17.8% of respondents who preferred talk shows and 22.9% of those

who favored music programmes demonstrated significant political engagement. This trend could be attributed to the often non-political or entertainment-focused nature of these programme formats.

A notable observation is the moderate political awareness and participation levels among residents who preferred cultural and traditional programmes, accounting for approximately 32.5%. These programmes may indirectly contribute to political awareness by preserving cultural values and heritage, offering a bridge between cultural identity and civic engagement.

Interestingly, news programmes showed a nearly equal distribution in terms of high and low political awareness and participation, with 48.9% and 51.1%, respectively. Although news covers political events, it may not consistently stimulate active political engagement among the audience.

Furthermore, health programme appeared to intersect with political awareness and participation, as indicated by the 55.6% of residents who favored health-related content. This suggests that health-related topics can serve as a conduit for political engagement, potentially due to their relevance in daily life.

Lastly, folk cultures programmes emerged as a powerful driver of political awareness and participation, with an impressive 66.7% of residents indicating high levels of political engagement. This highlights the potential of folk cultures programmes to indirectly enhance political engagement by fostering cultural connections and communal identity.

In conclusion, these findings shed light on the critical role of specific programme types in influencing political awareness and participation among residents. Radio stations can leverage these insights by prioritizing programme formats such as political commentaries, political debates/interviews,

and news to effectively engage their audience in political processes. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity in programme preferences among residents, emphasizing the need for a well-rounded mix of content that caters to various interests. This approach can contribute significantly to fostering a politically aware and informed citizenry, ultimately strengthening the democratic process in Nasarawa State.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate relationship between radio programme preferences and political awareness and participation in Nasarawa State, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication in this region.

First and foremost, the study reveals that political commentaries emerge as the most favored programme type across all three radio stations in Nasarawa State. Notably, Kizito FM Lafia leads with 39% of its audience tuning in for political commentaries, closely followed by Option FM Akwanga with 32%, and NBS Keffi with 18%. This robust preference for political commentaries substantiates the notion that media can influence public perceptions and priorities, in line with the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)<sup>[12]</sup>. Radio stations in Nasarawa State have effectively set the agenda for political discussions by prioritizing these commentaries, potentially shaping the salience of specific political issues in the minds of their listeners.

Moreover, political debate and interview programmes also garner substantial interest among residents, with Kizito FM Lafia at 28%, Option FM Akwanga at 23%, and NBS Keffi at 21%. Remarkably, a striking 77.1% of residents who favor this programmes type exhibit high political awareness and participation, underscoring the effectiveness of political debates and interviews in encouraging active involvement in political matters. This aligns with prior research emphasizing the interactivity and engagement offered by radio talk shows (Kakade, 2013)<sup>[7]</sup>.

Conversely, the analysis indicates that talk shows and music programmes, while maintaining an audience base (Kizito FM Lafia - 6% and 10%, Option FM Akwanga - 5% and 7%, NBS Keffi - 10% and 7%, respectively), are associated with lower political awareness and participation. This suggests that the content of these programme types may not be conducive to political engagement, reinforcing the idea that they often possess a non-political and entertainment-focused nature, as discussed in existing literature (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001)<sup>[6]</sup>.

The study also reveals that cultural/traditional programmes receive moderate attention across all stations (Kizito FM Lafia - 10%, Option FM Akwanga - 6%, NBS Keffi - 9%). These Programmes, while not overtly political, are associated with a moderate level of political awareness and participation (32.5%). This implies that cultural programmes may indirectly contribute to political awareness by preserving cultural values and fostering a sense of community identity (Adegoke, 2017)<sup>[11]</sup>.

Furthermore, news programmes, which often include political content, attract a substantial audience (Kizito FM Lafia - 14%, Option FM Akwanga - 13%, NBS Keffi - 10%) and exhibit nearly equal distribution between high and low political awareness and participation (48.9% vs. 51.1%). This suggests that while news covers political events, it may

not consistently stimulate active political engagement among the audience, aligning with the Agenda-Setting Theory's idea that media can influence the salience of issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)<sup>[12]</sup>.

Intriguingly, health programmes, although receiving moderate interest (Kizito FM Lafia - 6%, Option FM Akwanga - 3%, NBS Keffi - 4%), exhibit relatively high political awareness and participation (55.6%). This finding suggests that health-related topics can serve as a conduit for political engagement due to their relevance in daily life. Similarly, folk cultures Programmes, while less preferred (Kizito FM Lafia - 4%, Option FM Akwanga - 2%, NBS Keffi - 3%), are associated with high political awareness and participation (66.7%), highlighting their potential to enhance political engagement indirectly by fostering cultural connections (Omotola, 2019)<sup>[17]</sup>.

In conclusion, these findings collectively underscore the critical role of specific programme types in influencing political awareness and participation among residents in Nasarawa State. Radio stations can leverage these insights by prioritizing programme formats such as political commentaries, political debates/interviews, and news to effectively engage their audience in political processes. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity in programme preferences among residents, emphasizing the need for a well-rounded mix of content that caters to various interests. This approach can contribute significantly to fostering a politically aware and informed citizenry, ultimately strengthening the democratic process not only in Nasarawa State but also in similar rural areas where radio remains a vital medium for political communication and civic engagement.

### Conclusion

This study illuminates the profound relationship between radio programme preferences and political awareness and participation among residents in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings underscore the indispensable role of radio in shaping political awareness, particularly in culturally diverse regions like Nasarawa State. Radio's accessibility, broad reach, and capacity to deliver content in local languages contribute to its vital role in political communication and civic engagement. The medium's credibility in providing reliable information, especially in the face of digital misinformation, further solidifies its impact on shaping political awareness.

### Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proffered:

1. **Emphasize Key Programme Types:** Radio broadcasters should prioritize programme types such as political commentaries, debates/interviews, and news to effectively engage audiences in political processes. Diversifying content to cater to various interests while incorporating cultural elements will enhance relevance.
2. **Support Community-Oriented Radio:** Policymakers should recognize and support community-oriented radio stations, especially in rural areas, ensuring widespread access to credible political information. Promoting media ethics and impartiality in radio content is crucial for maintaining trust among listeners.
3. **Explore New Media Interactions:** Researchers are encouraged to explore the evolving landscape of radio

in the digital age, investigating how new media technologies interact with traditional radio. This exploration will contribute to a deeper understanding of the contemporary role of radio in shaping political awareness.

4. **Examine Policy Impact:** Researchers should delve into the impact of radio programmes on specific policy areas and their potential to drive policy change. This focus will provide valuable insights into radio's broader influence on shaping political outcomes.

In summary, radio's enduring power in shaping political awareness, enhancing information access, and fostering civic engagement underscores its significance. The recommendations aim to guide broadcasters, policymakers, and researchers in optimizing the potential of radio in promoting informed and engaged citizenry in democratic processes, with implications extending beyond Nasarawa State to similar regions globally.

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