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Assessing the Effectiveness of Community Radio in Promoting Voter Registration in Mufulira: A Case Study of Mafkeni Radio

[1] Suwilanji Nachalwe, [2] Chifukushi Chola David
[1, 2] Media and Communication Studies, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: **Suwilanji Nachalwe**

Abstract

This study assesses the effectiveness of Community Radio in Promoting Voter registration in Mufulira focusing on Mafkeni Radio on Mufulira District. In Zambia, low voter registration rates and limited civic engagement, particularly among youth and rural populations, present a challenge to inclusive democratic participation. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting data from Mafkeni Radio staff and Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) officials as well as the members of the public. The research examined three core areas: the reach of voter registration programs, messaging strategies employed, and the effect on voter registration behaviour. Findings reveal that Mafkeni Radio has significant reach among youth and urban listeners, largely due to strategic programming during peak listening times and the use of Bemba and English languages.

Messaging strategies, including jingles, talk shows, interviews, and interactive call-ins, were found to enhance clarity, cultural relevance, and listener engagement. Evidence from both interviews and questionnaires indicates that the broadcasts positively influenced voter registration, motivating listeners to register and encourage others within their communities. Limitations were noted in reaching older populations, rural areas, and minority language speakers, as well as in program airtime and scheduling. The study concludes that Mafkeni Radio serves as an effective civic education tool and partner to the ECZ, promoting democratic participation. The implications of the study include increasing program airtime, diversifying language use, strengthening collaboration with the ECZ, expanding interactive platforms, and sustaining civic education beyond registration periods.

1. Introduction
1.1 Background

Democracy relies on the active participation of citizens, particularly through voting. In Zambia, low voter registration levels have become a growing concern, especially among youth and rural populations. Community radio has emerged as a powerful communication tool for reaching underrepresented and geographically dispersed communities. Mafkeni Radio, based in Mufulira District, is one such station involved in civic awareness campaigns, including promoting voter registration. Understanding the impact of such initiatives is essential for strengthening democratic processes and enhancing future civic campaigns.

Voter registration plays a crucial role in the democratic process by ensuring that eligible citizens are included in electoral rolls and can participate in choosing their leaders. Globally, various governments and civil society organizations have adopted diverse strategies to enhance voter registration, especially among marginalized groups. However, many countries continue to experience low levels of registration due to limited access to civic information, political apathy, and logistical barriers (International IDEA, 2021). Media has been identified as a critical driver of civic awareness and voter mobilization. Among the various media platforms, community radio stands out for its accessibility, local relevance, and ability to communicate in indigenous languages, especially in areas where mainstream media may have limited penetration. In regions such as South Asia and Latin America, community radio has been effectively used to increase political literacy and voter registration through tailored content that resonates with local communities. For example, in India, community radio initiatives have successfully targeted tribal populations by broadcasting voter education in native dialects, resulting in increased political participation (Roy,

2014). These successes are attributed to community radio's interactive and participatory approach, which promotes trust and relevance in communication (Girard, 2007) [28].

In Zambia, voter registration remains a significant concern. Although the country has made strides in strengthening democratic processes, several challenges persist, especially in the area of civic engagement. These include low awareness of voter registration periods, limited civic education, and logistical barriers such as long distances to registration centers and lack of national identification cards. Young people and rural dwellers are particularly affected by these issues (ECZ, 2021) [22]. Recognizing these challenges, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) has increasingly partnered with the media to disseminate voter information. Among these media partners, community radio stations play a central role in reaching remote and peri-urban populations. According to the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA), there are over 120 licensed community radio stations across the country. These stations often broadcast in local languages, tailor content to suit community needs, and have established trust with their audiences due to their proximity and cultural relevance (ZICTA, 2022).

Mafkeni Radio, based in Mufulira District on the Copperbelt Province, is one such station. It broadcasts in Bemba and English and has become known for its coverage of governance, health, and education issues. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Mafkeni Radio has aired voter education programs, particularly in collaboration with ECZ and local NGOs. However, the extent to which these broadcasts have led to increased voter registration in Mufulira remains unclear. This gap in empirical evidence raises important questions about the actual impact of community radio in shaping civic behavior at the local level. Given that Mufulira is a politically active area with a mix of urban and peri-urban communities, it offers a unique setting for assessing the role of community radio in promoting voter registration. Understanding whether and how Mafkeni Radio has influenced voter registration behavior will offer valuable insights for electoral bodies, development partners, and media practitioners aiming to strengthen democratic participation through grassroots media.

Despite global recognition of community radio's potential, there remains limited academic literature on its role in promoting electoral participation in Zambia. Most studies on media and democracy in the country tend to focus on national broadcasters or urban-based platforms, leaving a knowledge gap concerning rural and peri-urban stations. The research will investigate the station's audience reach, the nature of its voter education messages, and the perceived influence of these messages on listeners' decisions to register. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to both the academic literature and practical strategies for civic mobilization in Zambia's electoral process.

1.2 Problem Statement

Zambia's democratic framework is heavily reliant on active citizen participation, and voter registration stands as a cornerstone for ensuring that eligible citizens exercise their constitutional right to vote. Despite ongoing campaigns and policy interventions aimed at increasing voter turnout, Zambia continued to face significant challenges in attaining satisfactory voter registration rates, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. This issue remained persistent across electoral cycles, raising serious concerns about political inclusivity, citizen engagement, and the overall credibility of the democratic process (ECZ, 2021) [22]. A 2020 report by the Electoral Commission of Zambia indicated that a substantial portion of the population, particularly among the youth and first-time voters, did not register to vote in the general elections due to a combination of factors, including limited access to information, lack of civic education, apathy, and logistical challenges in reaching registration centres (ECZ, 2020).

Community radio has emerged as a potentially transformative tool in bridging the communication and awareness gap, particularly in rural settings where mainstream media may not penetrate effectively. Community radio stations such as Mafkeni Radio in Mufulira District provided localized content, often in local languages such as Bemba, making them more accessible and culturally relevant to the local population (Mwale, 2018) [50]. Unlike national broadcasters, community radio is better positioned to engage citizens on a more grassroots level, tailoring messages to reflect the unique socio-political and economic realities of specific communities. However, while these stations are widely acknowledged for their role in civic education and social mobilization, empirical data on their actual effectiveness, especially in encouraging voter registration, was scant.

The critical question remained: are these efforts by community radio stations translating into tangible results, such as increased voter registration and civic participation? Numerous studies have examined the broader role of media in influencing public opinion and behavior (Frere, 2011 [27]; Banda, 2013), but most of this research focused on urban-centric or national media platforms. There is a noticeable dearth of academic inquiry into the efficacy of community-based media, particularly in how they influence political engagement and voter behaviour in rural and peri-urban contexts. This gap is particularly significant in a country like Zambia, where a large proportion of the population lives in rural areas, often far removed from centralized communication channels and electoral institutions.

Mafkeni Radio, which broadcasts to the Mufulira District, conducted numerous voter education campaigns and civic-focused programs, particularly in the periods leading up to national and local elections. These programs included live discussions, call-in shows, interviews with electoral officers, and public service announcements encouraging eligible citizens to register and vote. While these initiatives are commendable, there was no comprehensive assessment of whether such content led to actual increases in voter registration. Questions remained about the station's penetration rate, the credibility of its messages, the demographic profiles of its listenership, and the overall impact on voter mobilization particularly among marginalized groups such as women, youth, and first-time voters (Tembo & Phiri, 2022).

This study aimed to address this critical knowledge gap by conducting an in-depth assessment of Mafkeni Radio's involvement in the voter registration campaigns in Mufulira District. Specifically, the research explored the reach and listenership patterns of Mafkeni Radio, the nature and framing of its civic messages, and the influence of its broadcasts on individual attitudes and actions concerning voter registration. The findings of this study not only contribute to academic discourse on media and democracy

in Zambia but also provide practical recommendations for media practitioners, electoral bodies, and civil society organizations involved in civic mobilization. By evaluating the effectiveness of community radio as a tool for increasing voter registration, this study seeks to inform strategies that enhance political participation and strengthen democratic governance in Zambia.

1.3 Objectives
1.3.1 General Objective
The general objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness of Community Radio in promoting voter registration in Mufulira focusing on Mafkeni Radio in Mufulira District.
1.3.2 Specific Objectives
1. 1.To ascertain the reach of Mafkeni Radio's voter registration programs in Mufulira District.
2. 2.To examine the messaging strategies used by Mafkeni Radio to promote voter registration.
3. 3.To assess the effect of Mafkeni Radio on individual decisions to register as voters.

1.4 Research questions
1. 1.What is the extent of Mafkeni Radio's audience reach in relation to voter registration programs?
2. 2.What messaging strategies does Mafkeni Radio use to promote voter registration?
3. 3.How does Mafkeni Radio effect individual decisions to register as voters?

1.5 Theoretical framework
This study was grounded in the Agenda-Setting Theory, a foundational communication theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) [40]. The theory is particularly relevant for understanding the influence of mass media on public priorities. It posits that the media may not tell people what to think, but it plays a significant role in telling them what to think about. In other words, the issues emphasized in media content tend to be perceived by the public as more important.

The use of Agenda-Setting Theory in this study was justified by its strong applicability to civic education and political engagement in media environments, particularly in low-information settings. Mafkeni Radio, as a community radio station serving Mufulira District, played a critical role in disseminating civic information to the public. By consistently broadcasting programs related to voter registration, such as public announcements, expert interviews, and community discussions, the station had the capacity to shape listeners' perceptions of what issues mattered most.

This theory also incorporates a second dimension known as attribute agenda-setting, which explains how the media not only elevates the importance of issues but also influences how those issues are understood by the public. For instance, Mafkeni Radio might have framed voter registration as a tool for empowerment, a civic responsibility, or a means to community development. This approach made the issue more personal and could boost the chances of behavioral change, like registering to vote.

The relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory is further supported by previous research in similar contexts. Studies in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, such as those by Ochilo (2016), have shown that community radio can influence

political participation by highlighting and framing issues of civic importance. In rural and peri-urban areas, where alternative sources of information may be scarce or inaccessible, the agenda-setting function of community radio became even more critical.

Given the objectives of this study on assessing the effectiveness of Mafkeni Radio on voter registration patterns, the Agenda-Setting Theory provided a suitable and focused analytical lens. It allowed for an examination of how the prominence and framing of voter registration content in radio programming could shape public awareness, perception, and ultimately civic action among the listeners in Mufulira District.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Thematic Area from Objective One
To ascertain the reach of Mafkeni Radio's voter registration programs in Mufulira District.

Studies worldwide have examined how effectively community radio campaigns reach their audiences, and these offer useful parallels for understanding Mafkeni Radio's work in Mufulira. In Sierra Leone, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems collaborated with national and local broadcasters in 2018 to disseminate voter education messages. The initiative used radio adverts in English and several local languages across dozens of stations; its evaluation employed media monitoring and surveys, finding that tailored messaging increased awareness and understanding of electoral procedures among the general populace (IFES, 2018) [30]. In the United Kingdom, Operation Black Vote conducted over 100 in-person and radio events in 1996, distributing registration materials within minority communities. Although not strictly radio-based, their strategy demonstrated how local outreach combined with media can measurably elevate registration rates among underrepresented groups (Wikipedia, 2025).

In Asia, especially in South Asian and Southeast Asian contexts, community radio's reach has also been the subject of systematic study. While specific methods vary, these typically combine audience surveys, focus group discussions, and broadcast analysis to assess both technical coverage and actual listenership. In India and Nepal, researchers have found that stations using local dialects and participatory formats tend to enjoy higher regular listenership, although few studies isolate metrics related to civic campaigns like registration.

Across Africa, and particularly in Ghana, the Ghana Community Radio Network has quantified reach by mapping station frequencies and conducting audience tracking through mixed-method surveys. These studies showed that localized broadcasting in indigenous languages, supported by participatory programming, leads to higher listener penetration in rural areas (GCRN, 2025). In Malawi and Zambia, Banda's 2022 [6] Communication study on radio listening clubs employed qualitative interviews and cluster sampling to examine how organized listener groups not only increased listening time but also strengthened community influence over regional programming (Banda, 2022)[6].

In Southern Africa more broadly, evaluations by BBC Media Action (2011- 2019) used large-scale household surveys, content analysis, and participatory workshops to demonstrate that community station programming reached more than a third of the national audience aged over 14 in

Zambia. The research showed that regular listeners of governance-related content were significantly more knowledgeable, confident, and politically active than non-listeners, with these findings holding after controlling for demographics (Media Action Zambia, 2024).

Turning specifically to Zambia, archival research examining Mazabuka Community Radio within both urban and rural settings adopted a mixed-method design. Using a sample of 100 survey respondents, five interviews, and two focus group discussions, the study revealed that despite wide technical coverage, actual engagement varied, with women participating less in programming decisions. This highlights the difference between broadcast potential and real listener interaction (Siakacha, 2015). Additionally, a BBC Media Action initiative from 2011 to 2013 combined training for four community stations with listener feedback mechanisms. Qualitative interviews showed that radio provided platforms for public concern, and phone-in segments enabled citizens to interact directly with local officials' strong signal of effective reach and engagement (BBC Media Action, 2013).

In sum, global and regional evidence consistently shows that effective reach requires more than technical coverage it demands multilingual broadcasts, participatory formats, and explicit listener measurement. Mafkeni Radio's Bemba-language programming and community focus aligns with successful practices identified elsewhere. However, as with other Zambian stations, the absence of formal audience measurement tools limiting accurate reach assessment will necessitate the use of surveys, focus groups, broadcast logs, and content mapping in this study. By collecting these data, the study will determine not just how far the station's signal travels, but who listens to voter registration campaigns, how frequently, and whether key demographics such as youth and women are being reached. These insights will support a robust analysis of the station's potential influence on civic behavior.

2.2 Thematic Area Developed from Objective Two
To examine strategies used by Mafkeni radio to promote voter registration.

The way in which Mafkeni Radio crafts and delivers voter education messages can be understood through studies conducted across multiple regions. In Sierra Leone, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) collaborated with the National Electoral Commission and several NGOs before the 2018 elections to develop radio adverts in English, Creole, and local dialects that included voting procedures, appeals for peace, and information for persons with disabilities. The messages were delivered via local networks such as Radio Democracy and broadcast monitoring alongside audience surveys revealed significant increases in voter awareness and understanding (Greg-Obi, 2018). This illustrates the value of inclusive and linguistically diverse messaging strategies in community radio campaigns.

In Ghana, NDI tech and CODEO implemented an interactive voter education model in 2013 using Freedom Fone IVR technology linked to community radio. Radio stations could access pre-recorded voter education clips in multiple local languages by dialing in. Evaluation based on usage rates and feedback suggested that this interactive approach enhanced both message delivery and station engagement with civic content (Verclas, 2013). This model

underscores the importance of participatory and accessible formats in rural and peri-urban African settings.

In Asia, community radio stations in India have played active roles in voter education. Community Radio JIMS Vasant Kunj in New Delhi aired voter awareness programs under the SVEEP initiative in 2019, employing talk shows, interviews, phone-ins, storytelling and oral history formats (Wikipedia, 2024). Similarly, in Nepal youth-oriented programs such as "Saathi Sanga Manka Kura" and "Kamka Kura" blended peer storytelling, interviews, and drama to engage young listeners on civic issues (Wikipedia, 2023). These examples demonstrate how interactivity and culturally embedded storytelling consistently enhance relevance and retention in civic messaging.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, the Ghana Community Radio Network has long emphasized participatory, language-diverse programming to strengthen media plurality and local engagement (Wikipedia, 2024). A study on HIV/AIDS radio messaging in Zambia using questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in five districts, highlighted that messaging quality improved when informed by audience participation, technical expertise, and pre-broadcast consultations echoing the need for credible and culturally appropriate framing (Comminit, 2010).

In Zambia, BBC Media Action's "Radio Waves" evaluation from 2024 examined programming from 2011 to 2019 across twelve community radio stations. Using household surveys, content analysis and workshops, the study found that governance-oriented programming reached nearly one-third of citizens aged 14+ (approximately 1.6 million people), improving political knowledge and participation especially among youth, even when controlling for age, gender and education (Penny and Chasimpha, 2024). This underlines how local language, credible voices, and consistent framing around civic responsibilities effectively shape listener attitudes and behaviors.

Additional Zambian research has pointed to limitations within local stations, where reliance on under-trained volunteers can compromise messaging consistency and ethical standards (National Assembly debate, 2008). However, programs like BBC Media Action's civic training and phone-in shows between 2011 and 2013 successfully bridged informational gaps, confirmed by listener testimonials and interviews that they helped clarify procedures and empower citizen voices (BBC Media Action, undated).

In summary, global, regional and national evidence shows that effective voter education messaging by community radio relies on localization (language and cultural framing), interactive formats (call-ins, IVR, public forums), emotionally engaging storytelling, credible local spokespeople, and structured audience feedback. Mafkeni Radio's use of Bemba, locally trusted voices, drama, and call-in segments aligns well with these proven strategies. This study will adapt mixed-methods content analysis of broadcast logs, quantitative recall surveys, qualitative interviews and focus groups to evaluate which formats resonate most with listeners in Mufulira and whether they report registering as a result of the messaging.

2.3 Thematic Area Developed from Objective Three
To assess the effect of Mafkeni radio on individual decisions to register as voter

Research globally has established links between media exposure especially community radio and actual voter behavior. In Kisii Town, Kenya, a 2014 study surveyed listeners of Sayare Radio (n=approximately 250) using questionnaires and interviews, finding that 79 percent of respondents relied on the station for information about presidential candidates, with 24 percent reporting that radio content influenced their choice of candidate. This underscores how local radio can shape not only awareness but electoral decisions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, evidence from Ghana and Kenya demonstrates that community radio can increase voter registration and turnout. Okigbo and Eribo (2004) used a mixed-methods design in Ghana, combining district-level election data with content analysis of local broadcasts. They reported noticeable increases in turnout in areas with strong community radio presence, attributing this to frequent civic messaging. Similarly, Ochilo (2016) employed surveys and focus group discussions around Kenya's 2010 referendum to show community radio's role in motivating rural populations to register and vote.

In Zambia, the "Radio Waves" project by BBC Media Action used household surveys, content analysis, and participatory workshops across twelve community stations from 2011 to 2019. This 2024 evaluation (n≈1,600,000 adults) found that regular listeners to governance programming not only knew more but also reported higher civic confidence and participation than non-listeners, controlling for demographics (bbc.com). These findings support the idea that community radio can foster real behavior change.

Academic literature on radio in Zambia is more limited. Mundia Mwangala's 2017 descriptive study of ZNBC Radio One in Central Province surveyed 100 rural listeners and conducted interviews with station staff. It concluded that political and civic messaging was limited, and listeners instead relied on local leaders for political information. Banda's 2022 [6] study on radio listening clubs found organized listener groups significantly improved civic knowledge and interpersonal influence on radio content, suggesting participatory models amplify behavioral impact.

To assess Mafkeni Radio's influence, this study will examine three mechanisms: awareness, motivation, and action. It will measure listener self-reports of changes in registration or voting, knowledge gains, discussions prompted by broadcasts, and actual registration or turnout. Unlike studies that stop at self-reported intent, this research will cross-validate with ECZ records where available, and capture behaviors such as discussing politics, encouraging others to register, and post-election civic activities.

However, community radio does not operate in isolation. Intervening factors include political distrust, competing partisan media, cultural norms, gender roles, and economic barriers. Studies warn that without addressing these, radio influence may remain limited. This study will therefore collect contextual data to disentangle the radio's effect from the broader environment.

If Mafkeni Radio is found to influence voter behavior significantly, it will offer a strong case for policy and practice. The Electoral Commission of Zambia could partner more closely with community stations, civil society organizations might scale radio-driven civic campaigns, and media development agencies could provide targeted training and resources to amplify impact.

2.4 Personal Critique of Literature Review

The literature reviewed in relation to the three thematic areas radio reach, messaging strategies, and behavioral influence offers a useful foundation for understanding the role of community radio in promoting voter registration and civic participation. However, while the review draws on a wide range of sources from global, regional, and Zambian contexts, several critical gaps and limitations are evident. These gaps are both theoretical and empirical in nature, raising concerns about the generalizability and depth of existing knowledge in the specific context of Zambia, and more precisely, in semi-urban districts such as Mufulira.

Firstly, literature on community radio's reach in rural and semi-urban African settings tends to be descriptive rather than analytical. Although there is a broad consensus that community radio is widely accessible and linguistically appropriate, few studies systematically quantify audience size or evaluate actual listenership habits in relation to specific campaigns such as voter registration. Much of the literature reviewed, such as that by Myers (2008) [51] and Banda (2013), rightly emphasizes the structural role of community radio in media plurality, but they fall short of empirically linking radio reach to civic action. This gap is particularly evident in the Zambian context, where national broadcasting data often excludes community radio, and most evidence is anecdotal or inferred from broader studies. Consequently, while the importance of reach is acknowledged, its actual measurement remains underdeveloped.

Secondly, in the area of *messaging strategies*, literature is stronger in detailing techniques such as localization, emotional framing, and participatory programming. Studies such as those by Manyozo (2012) [38] and Chiumbu (2013) highlight how interactive formats, and culturally grounded narratives enhance message credibility and listener engagement. These insights are highly relevant and consistent with communication theory, yet they are rarely evaluated through behavioral or outcome-based frameworks. While it is widely assumed that certain messaging styles are more effective, few studies investigate *which* formats lead to *which* outcomes, and among *which* segments of the population.

The literature on *behavioral influence* is perhaps the most underdeveloped of the three thematic areas, especially in the Zambian setting. While several studies from Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa provide empirical evidence that community radio can increase voter registration and turnout, similar studies in Zambia are almost non-existent. The few that exist, such as those from BBC Media Action, often measure changes in civic knowledge rather than concrete voter behavior. Furthermore, many studies do not distinguish between correlation and causation, leaving unanswered questions about whether radio causes behavioral change or simply coincides with other factors such as NGO interventions or electoral trends. The review also acknowledges the presence of intervening variables economic hardship, political distrust, and cultural constraints but stops short of integrating them meaningfully into analysis. Without accounting for these, conclusions about radio influence risk being overly optimistic or simplistic.

In summary, while literature provides important conceptual and contextual insights, it is largely limited by a lack of empirical rigor and geographical specificity. The Zambian

context remains underexplored, and there is a heavy reliance on extrapolation from other African settings. There is also a methodological gap in measuring the effectiveness of radio interventions on actual voter behavior rather than stated intent or awareness. This study seeks to address these limitations by focusing on primary data collection in Mufulira, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess reach, message impact, and behavior change. The critique therefore underscores the importance of context-specific research that moves beyond theoretical assumptions and general narratives to evidence-based conclusions that can inform electoral policy and community media practice in Zambia.

2.5 Establishment of Research Gaps
A review of past studies on community radio reach, messaging strategies, and how radio influences voter behavior shows that there is not enough research on these topics in Zambia. These gaps underscore the necessity for focused, empirical investigations to generate context-specific knowledge that can inform electoral communication strategies and community media practices.

One major research gap lies in the *empirical measurement of community radio reach* in semi-urban and rural districts of Zambia. While studies from Kenya, Ghana, and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate the potential of community radio to disseminate information widely, there is a scarcity of data quantifying actual listenership in Zambia. Most existing reports, such as those by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and BBC Media Action, are either national in scope or rely on anecdotal evidence. There is limited documentation of audience demographics, program reach, or listener frequency specific to voter registration campaigns. Without this data, it becomes difficult to assess the effectiveness of stations like Mafkeni Radio in achieving the foundational requirement of media influence audience exposure.

A second research gap pertains to *the evaluation of message content and strategy*. Although the literature acknowledges the importance of culturally grounded, linguistically accessible, and emotionally resonant messaging, there is little empirical work linking these strategies to tangible civic outcomes in Zambia. Messaging frameworks such as emotional appeal, use of local influencers, and participatory formats like call-ins are well-documented in the literature, yet their actual effectiveness in prompting voter registration has not been systematically assessed. The gap is not just in the description of strategies, but in the absence of evaluative studies that test which approaches yield the highest impact on different demographic groups particularly youth, women, and first-time voters in peri-urban areas.

The third and most critical gap involves *the lack of data linking radio exposure to behavioral outcomes*. While regional studies have shown correlations between radio campaigns and increases in voter turnout or registration, there is a dearth of such studies in Zambia. Existing research either focuses on awareness and knowledge, or general attitudes toward civic participation, without assessing whether community radio exposure leads to real-world behavior change such as registering to vote, encouraging others to register, or participating in political discussions. Moreover, few studies incorporate mechanisms for validating self-reported data with actual voter registration records, limiting the reliability of conclusions drawn about

behavioral influence.

An additional layer to these gaps is the *limited consideration of intervening variables*. Socioeconomic conditions, political trust, cultural norms, and institutional credibility all affect whether media messages translate into action. While these factors are acknowledged in literature, they are seldom integrated into empirical models that assess community radio's impact. This creates a narrow view that overlooks the complex realities in which media consumption and civic participation occur. In particular, the role of barriers such as gendered media access, political disengagement, and misinformation is insufficiently studied in the Zambian electoral communication landscape.

Lastly, the methodological gap is evident. Much of the reviewed literature relies on qualitative case studies or descriptive surveys, with limited use of mixed methods approaches that could triangulate findings and enhance credibility. There is also a lack of longitudinal research that tracks the effects of sustained community radio exposure over time, which is essential for understanding not just short-term influence but long-term shifts in civic behavior.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Design
This study used a mixed method approach; qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of Mafkeni Radio station in promoting voter registration in Mufulira District. A mixed-methods approach is particularly relevant for research that seeks to understand both measurable outcomes and the underlying processes that produce them. In this case, the study aimed to assess not only the extent of the radio station's reach and its influence on voter behavior, but also the ways in which listeners engage with its civic content, how messages are interpreted, and why certain strategies may or may not lead to action.

The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative data was gathered through structured surveys targeting a representative sample of Mafkeni Radio listeners in Mufulira. These surveys helped collect data on listenership patterns, exposure to voter education programming, knowledge of electoral procedures, and self-reported registration or voting behavior. These helped in providing empirical evidence on reach and behavioral outcomes, allowing for the identification of trends and general patterns across the population.

At the same time, qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and content analysis of Mafkeni Radio's civic programming. These methods offered deeper insights into the messaging strategies used, the emotional and cultural resonance of the content, and audience perceptions of credibility and relevance. Through these narratives, the study explored how different demographic groups interpret radio messages and what motivates or hinders them from acting on the information received.

3.2 Target Population
The target population for this study comprised 60 individuals drawn from three key stakeholder groups directly or indirectly involved in civic education efforts through Mafkeni Radio. These groups included Mafkeni Radio staff, Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) officials, and members of the general public in Mufulira

District who regularly engaged with the station's voter education programming.

Mafkeni Radio contributed 20 individuals to the population. These included station managers, program producers, presenters, civic education content developers, and technical support personnel who were actively involved in the planning, production, and dissemination of voter education programs. This category represented the internal operational and editorial dimension of the study.

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) accounted for around 10 individuals based in Mufulira District. These officials were directly engaged in voter education, outreach, and collaboration with local media institutions such as Mafkeni Radio. Their inclusion in the target population ensured institutional insight into how partnerships between the ECZ and community radio contributed to electoral awareness.

The general public category included 30 individuals, representing regular listeners, community leaders, and residents who had interacted with Mafkeni Radio's voter education content. Their inclusion was crucial in assessing audience reception, levels of awareness, and behavioral outcomes such as voter registration and participation. However, due to limited time, resource constraints, and varying levels of willingness to participate, the number of general public respondents who could realistically be reached was reduced. Despite this, their representation provided meaningful insight into the effectiveness of Mafkeni Radio's civic education initiatives from the audience perspective.

This distribution of the target population ensured comprehensive representation across content producers, institutional partners, and community recipients, thereby offering a balanced and holistic understanding of the role Mafkeni Radio played in promoting voter registration and civic participation in Mufulira District.

3.3 Sampling design

The sampling strategy for this study was designed to align with the mixed-methods approach while focusing exclusively on Mafkeni Radio and, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) officials operating within Mufulira District. As the research was not extending to the public, the sampling design concentrated on individuals directly involved in the planning, production, and dissemination of voter education content.

Stratified random sampling was used to select participants from within Mafkeni Radio. Staff members, including program managers from vernacular, English and sports section, presenters, producers, and civic education content developers were chosen to ensure that each eligible individual has an equal chance of being included in the study. This approach helped to reduce selection bias and allowed for a broader range of perspectives on the station's messaging strategies, operational methods, and influence on voter behavior. In other words, using stratified random sampling allowed the study to collect diverse viewpoints from individuals involved in voter education efforts, offering balanced data while still focusing on key stakeholders in the radio and electoral sectors.

In addition, the study employed a purposive sampling method for officials from the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) based in Mufulira District and senior staff at Mafkeni radio. The rationale of this method is that the ECZ

officials in Mufulira have a special role in providing institutional insights into their collaboration with Mafkeni Radio and the effectiveness of radio-based voter education campaigns.

3.4 Sample size determination

To determine a representative sample from the total target population of 60 individuals, Yamane's (1967) formula for finite population sampling was applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size
N = population size (60)
e = margin of error (0.10)
Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{60}{1 + 60(0.1)^2} = \frac{60}{1 + 0.6} = \frac{60}{1.6} = 37.5$$

Since a sample size must be a whole number, the result of 37.5 was rounded 38 to ensure a manageable and practical number of participants for the field study. The decision to use 38 respondents was guided by both logistical considerations and the need for proportional representation across all key stakeholder groups. A total of **38 participants** were therefore selected and distributed as follows:

12 respondents from Mafkeni Radio staff, 6 respondents from the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) officials, and 20 respondents from the general public. This distribution reflected the study's goal of ensuring diverse perspectives from those directly involved in civic education and voter sensitization at both institutional and community levels. The composition was also consistent with the data collection strategy, where the questionnaire primarily targeted the general public and Mafkeni staff, accounting for approximately 95–97% of the total questions, while the interview guide covered both Mafkeni Radio and ECZ officials throughout the study.

The number of participants chosen allow for more efficient data management, ensured full participation, and maintained the integrity of data collection within the limited research timeframe. The final sample of 38 thus provided a balanced, representative, and practical basis for analyzing how Mafkeni Radio contributed to voter education and civic engagement in Mufulira District.

3.5 Triangulation

Triangulation in this study refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives to ensure a more robust, comprehensive, and credible understanding of how Mafkeni Radio influences voter registration behavior in Mufulira District. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the study aims to cross-verify findings, reduce biases, and enhance the validity of the research outcomes.

Firstly, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The quantitative data from structured questionnaires provided measurable insights into listeners' behaviors, perceptions, and knowledge regarding voter education on Mafkeni Radio. In contrast, the qualitative data collected from interviews with key informants and

document analysis offered deeper insights into the strategies and perspectives of radio staff and stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). By combining these methods, the study ensures a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the issue.

Secondly, data source triangulation was used by collecting data from different sources. The first source involves the Mafkeni Radio staff, including program managers, presenters, and content producers, who are directly involved in the creation and dissemination of voter education content. The second source is the ECZ officials in Mufulira District, who can offer insights into how the radio station's civic programming aligns with official voter education initiatives. Finally, data from the target population (community members) provided an audience perspective, allowing for a comparison of how the messages are received and interpreted by listeners.

Furthermore, investigator triangulation was implemented by involving multiple researchers in the process of data collection, coding, and analysis, ensuring that the interpretation of findings is not solely dependent on a single individual's perspective. This helps to mitigate researcher bias and strengthen the reliability of the study's conclusions.

Lastly, theoretical triangulation also played a role in the study by applying multiple theoretical frameworks, such as the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, to interpret the data. These theories guided the analysis of how radio messages influence voter behavior and how audiences actively engage with the content to fulfill their civic needs.

By using triangulation across these dimensions, this study seeks to provide a more holistic, credible, and validated understanding of the role of Mafkeni Radio in promoting voter registration and enhancing civic engagement in Mufulira District.

4. Results/Findings
4.1 Presentation of results on background characteristics of the respondents

Table 4.1.1: Age group of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
18–24 years	10	26%
25–34 years	12	32%
35–44 years	10	26%
45–54 years	4	11%
55 years and above	2	5%

Source: Field Data, 2025

A total of 26 percent fell within the age brackets of 18 to 24 years, and 32 percent of respondents fall in the age brackets of 25 to 34 years. This indicates that most of the respondents are part of the active youth population that forms the core of Zambia's voting-age group and radio audience. The representation of individuals aged between 35 and 44 years accounted for 26 percent, while those aged between 45 and 54 and those above 55 years made 11 percent and 5 percent respectively. These figures show that the study was dominated by younger participants who are more likely to engage with radio programming and civic initiatives, particularly those focusing on voter registration. The low representation of older respondents implies that radio outreach may be more effective among youth, with limited engagement among older adults in the Mufulira District.

Table 4.1.2: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	20	53%
Female	17	45%
Other (stated)	1	2%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The table illustrates the gender distribution of respondents, reflects near gender balance, with 53 percent of respondents identifying as male and 45 percent as female, while 2 percent identified as other. This distribution indicates inclusivity in participation and shows that both men and women engage with Mafkeni Radio, although slightly more men participated in the study. The balanced gender composition also suggests that the findings represent perspectives from both genders, ensuring that insights into voter registration awareness are not gender skewed.

Table 4.1.3: Highest level of education completed by Respondents

| Education Level	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
None	2	5%
Primary	6	16%
Secondary	10	32%
Tertiary	20	47%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings reveal that the majority, 53 percent, attained tertiary education, while 26 percent reached secondary level. About 16 percent had primary education, and only 5 percent reported having no formal education. This trend indicates that most respondents possess at least basic literacy skills necessary to understand radio messages, especially those related to voter registration. The relatively high number of respondents with tertiary education also demonstrates that Mafkeni Radio's audience is composed of educated individuals who can interpret complex electoral information. However, the presence of participants with lower education levels justifies Mafkeni's approach of simplifying messages to make them easily understood across all audiences.

Table 4.1.4: Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Media/Radio Staff	12	31%
Student	4	11%
Trader/Market Vendor	7	18%
Unemployed	3	8%
Farmer	2	5%
Teacher	4	11%
Civil Servant	6	16%

Source: Field Data, 2025

Table 4.1.4 on occupation reveals that 31 percent of the respondents were media or radio staff, which aligns with the study design that targeted both Mafkeni employees and public listeners. Students represented 11 percent of the sample, while traders and the unemployed each accounted for 18 percent and 8 percent respectively. Farmers made up 5 percent, and teachers and civil servants each represented 11percent and 16percent respectively. This occupational spread shows that the respondents came from diverse economic backgrounds, though media staff and students dominate.
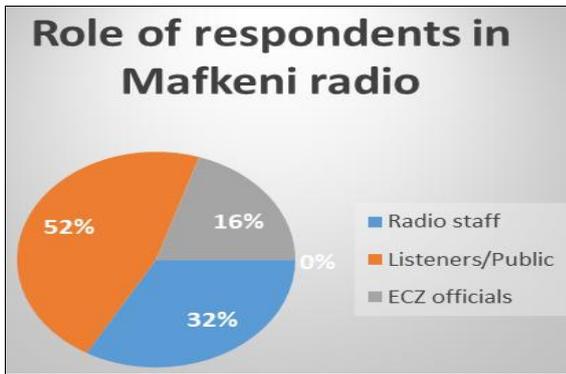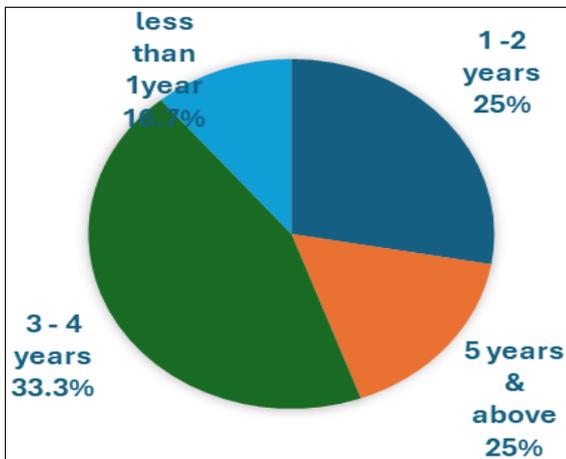
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.1.5: Role of Respondents in Mafkeni Radio

The Radio Staff, making up 32% of respondents, represent the internal operational team at Mafkeni Radio the content creators, presenters, and media personnel who are responsible for designing and broadcasting civic education messages. This portion of the sample is essential for evaluating how voter education campaigns are planned, structured, and perceived internally by those producing them.

On the other hand, the majority group (52%) is composed of listeners or members of the public, who consume Mafkeni Radio's programming while 16% represents ECZ officials. This public segment is critical for analyzing how the messages are received, understood, and whether they influence civic behaviour particularly voter registration.

The presence of both producers and consumers of information in the same dataset offers a balanced research perspective: one that captures both the intended purpose of the programming (from staff) and the real-life impact or reception (from the audience).

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.1.6: Length of staff in the role with Mafkeni Radio

The duration Mafkeni staff have served in their roles, shows that a third of the staff had been at the station for between three and four years, while 25 percent had worked for one to two years and another 25 percent had five or more years of experience. Sixteen-point seven percent had been with the station for less than a year. This distribution shows that Mafkeni has a relatively stable workforce with substantial institutional experience, which contributes to program continuity and the effective delivery of voter education initiatives.

Table 4.1.7: Language(s) mostly used when listening to the radio

Language Preference	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Bemba	20	53%
English	17	45%
Other (stated)	1	2%

Source: Field Data, 2025

Table 4.1.7 shows the language most commonly used by the public respondents (listeners) when engaging with radio content on Mafkeni Radio, which only broadcasts in Bemba and English most respondents.

53% indicated that they primarily listen in Bemba, reflecting the dominance of Bemba as the local and most accessible language in the Mufulira area. This supports the station's language policy of prioritizing Bemba in its broadcasts, especially for civic information like voter registration. 45% of respondents reported listening mostly in English, showing that a portion of the audience likely younger, educated, or urban-based also consumes content in the official language.

Only one respondent (2%) selected "Other," possibly indicating a preference or familiarity with a different language, although Mafkeni Radio does not broadcast in it. This response may reflect personal linguistic background rather than actual radio use.

4.2 Presentation of results based on thematic area developed from objective
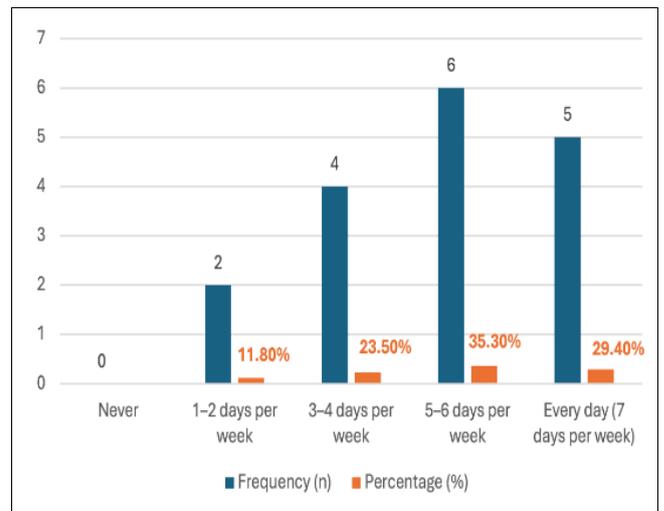
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.1: Frequency of Listening to Mafkeni Radio in a Typical Week
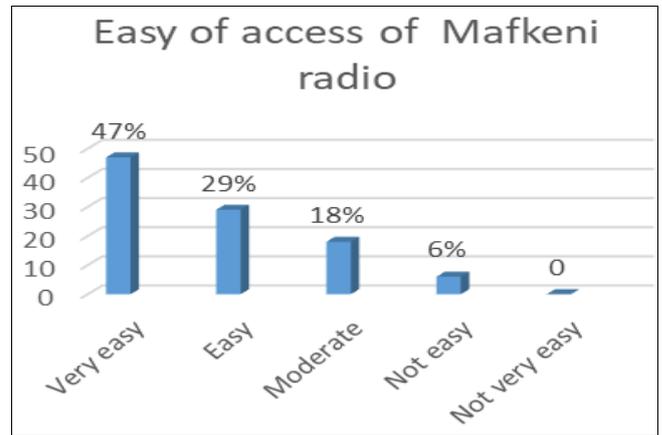
Figure 4.2.1 shows how frequently the public respondents listen to Mafkeni Radio each week. None of the respondents selected "Never," confirming that all are active listeners. Most respondents indicated high levels of engagement, with the majority listening either five to six days a week or every day. Specifically, 35.3% of listeners tune in five to six times weekly, while 29.4% listen daily. A smaller proportion, 23.5%, reported listening three to four times per week, and only 11.8% listen just once or twice. These findings suggest that Mafkeni Radio maintains a consistent and dedicated listenership, which is beneficial for ensuring that voter registration messages are heard frequently and retained by the audience.

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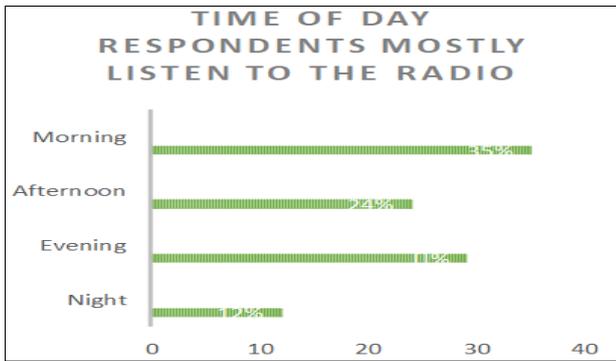
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.2: Time of Day Respondents Mostly Listen to Mafkeni Radio
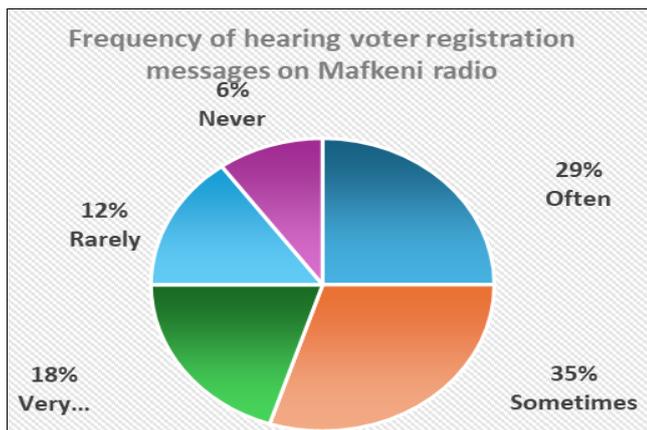
Figure 4.2.2 presents the preferred listening times of the respondents. Most listeners tune in during the morning, with 35.3% identifying this as their main listening period. This is followed by the evening, with 29.4% of respondents preferring that time slot. The afternoon is also a notable period, attracting 23.5% of listeners, while only a small portion, 11.8%, reported listening at night. The data suggests that Mafkeni Radio's voter registration messages would have the widest reach if aired primarily during morning and evening hours, which are the peak times for audience engagement.

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.3: Frequency of Hearing Voter Registration Messages on Mafkeni Radio

Figure 4.2.3 shows how frequently the public respondents hear voter registration messages on Mafkeni Radio. The most common response was "Sometimes," selected by 35% of the listeners, indicating moderate exposure to the messages. This is followed by 29% who said they hear them "Often," and 18% who reported hearing them "Very Often." Together, this suggests that a significant majority of respondents are regularly exposed to voter registration content. However, 12% said they "Rarely" hear such messages, and 6% claimed they "Never" do, pointing to some gaps in reach or scheduling. Overall, the data reflects generally good visibility of voter registration messages, though it also suggests there may be room for improvement in frequency or timing to maximize impact.

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.4: Easy Access of Mafkeni Radio from Respondents' Location

Figure 4.2.4 reflects how accessible Mafkeni Radio is to the public respondents based on their location. Almost half of the respondents (47.1%) stated that access is "Very Easy," while an additional 29.4% described it as "Easy," showing that a strong majority find it convenient to tune into the station. A smaller portion, 17.6%, considered access to be "Moderate," and only one respondent (5.9%) found it "Not Easy." None reported it being "Not Very Easy," suggesting that there are no severe accessibility issues. This generally high level of access supports Mafkeni Radio's potential to effectively disseminate voter registration messages to its target community.

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.5: Language Mostly Used in Voter Education Content

In figure 4.2.5 most respondents (58.8%) said they mostly hear voter education content in Bemba, while 29.4% hear it in English, confirming that the two official broadcast languages are reaching listeners. None reported hearing content in Nyanja, which aligns with Mafkeni Radio's language policy. A small number were either unsure or believed all three languages were used, suggesting slight confusion or mixed perceptions about language delivery.
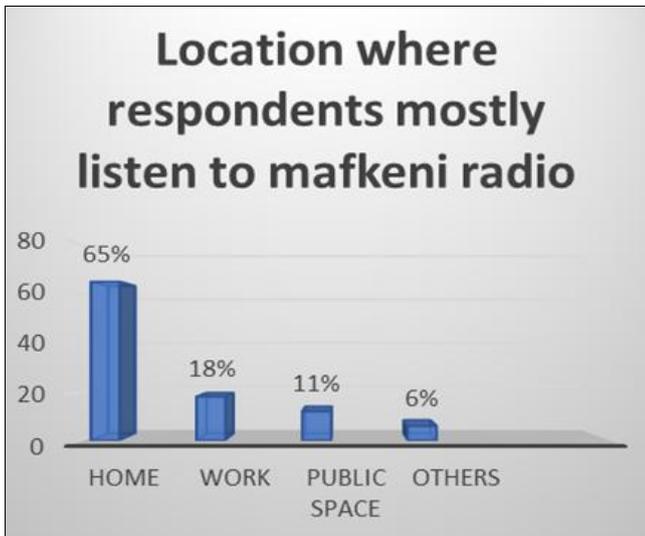
Source: Field Data, 2025

**Fig 4.2.6:** Location Where Respondents Mostly Listen to Mafkeni Radio

Most respondents (65%) listen to Mafkeni Radio at home, making it the most common location for radio consumption. Others reported listening at work (18%) or in public spaces (12%), while 6% of respondents listens in a different setting such as in transit. This pattern suggests that home-based messaging strategies may be the most effective for voter education outreach.
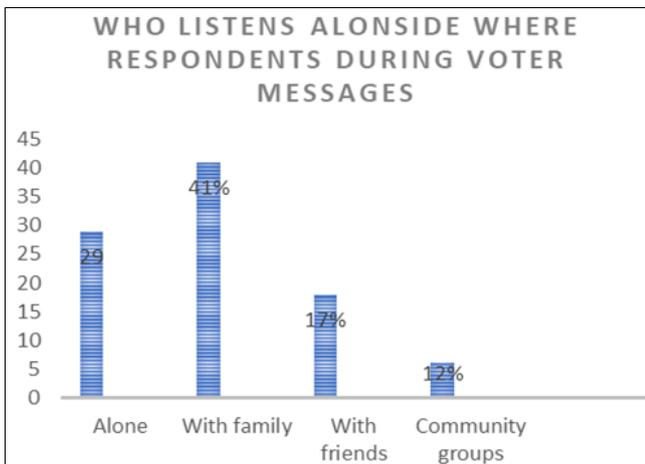
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.7: Who Listens Alongside Respondents During Voter Messages

In figure 4.2.7 the largest group of listeners (41%) reported hearing voter messages with family, while 29% usually listen alone. Others listen with friends (18%) or during community group gatherings (12%). These listening environments may influence how messages are received and discussed, especially in family or group settings, potentially enhancing impact through interpersonal communication.
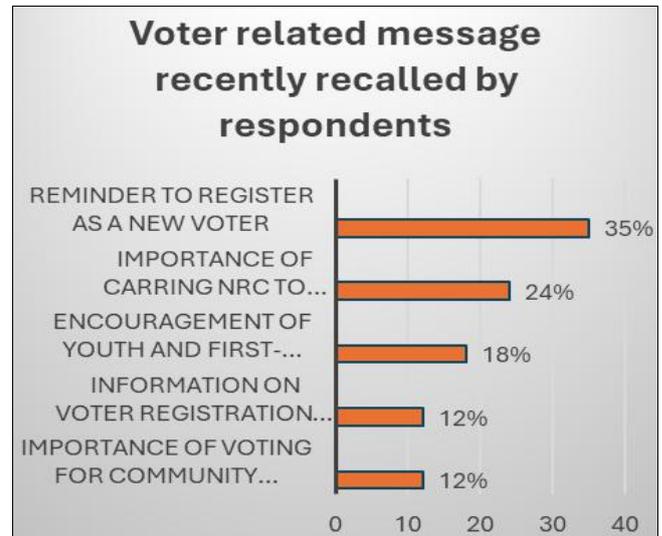
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.2.8: Voter-Related Messages Recently Recalled by Respondents

Figure 4.2.8 categorizes the types of voter messages that respondents could recall. The most frequently recalled message (35%) was a general reminder to register as a new voter, which reflects the core focus of Mafkeni Radio's voter education programming. Other common themes included carrying the NRC when registering (24%), and encouragement directed at youth and first-time voters (18%). Less frequently mentioned were messages about registration deadlines and centers (12%), and the importance of voting for national or local development (12%).

**Presentation of results based on thematic area developed from objective two**
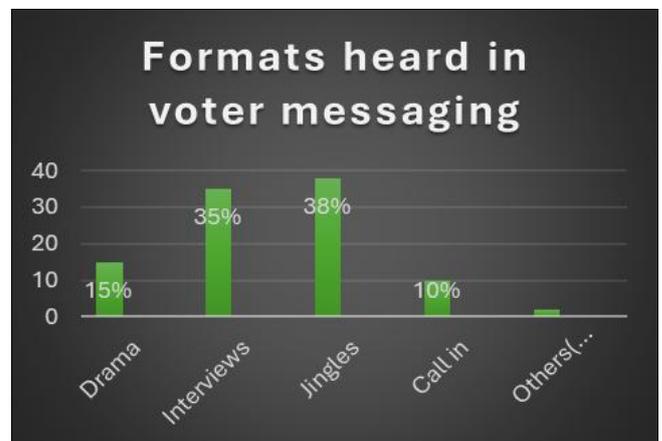
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.3.1: Formats Heard in Voter Messaging

Figure 4.3.1 shows the messaging formats that listeners recall hearing in Mafkeni Radio's voter education programs. Jingles (38%) and interviews (35%) were the most commonly mentioned, indicating that these are likely the

most used or memorable formats. Drama (15%) and call-in segments (10%) were also notable, suggesting an interactive and creative approach to messaging. A few respondents (2%) identified "other" formats like poetry, reflecting some content variety. The diversity in formats likely contributes to audience engagement and message retention.
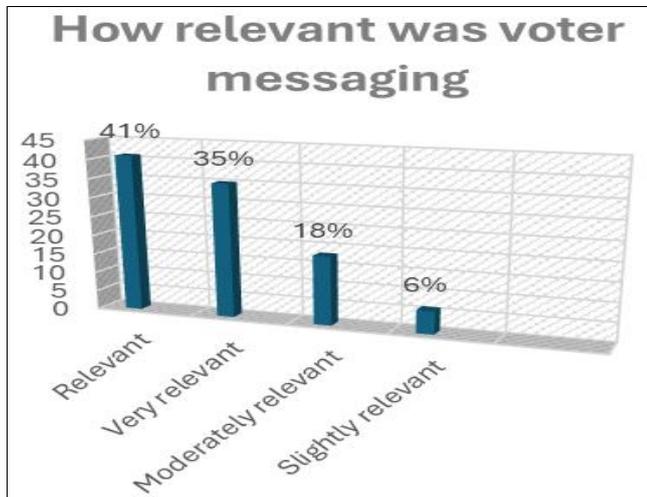
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.3.2: How relevant was Voter Messaging

In figure 4.3.2 majority of respondents (76%) found Mafkeni Radio's voter messages either relevant (41%) or very relevant (35%), indicating that the content aligns well with local culture and context. Only a small number found it slightly or moderately relevant with 6% and 18% respectively, and none found it entirely irrelevant. This suggests that the station is doing well in localizing its messaging in a way that resonates with the audience's values and traditions.
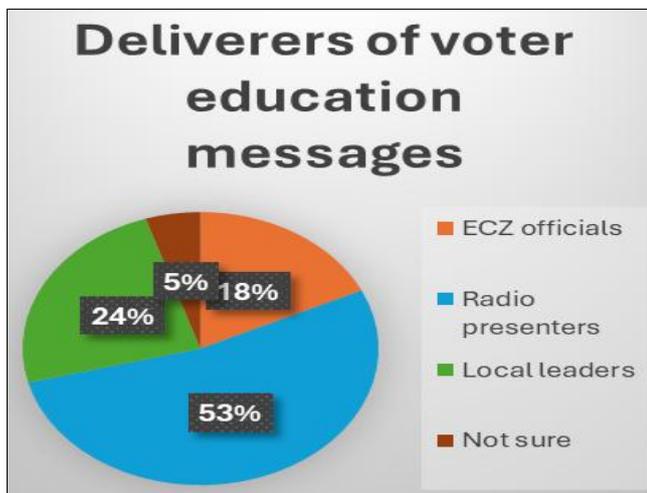
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.3.3: Deliverers of Voter Education Messages

More than half of the respondents (53%) said radio presenters are the ones who usually deliver voter education messages, showing that the station relies on in-house talent. Local leaders (24%) and ECZ officials (18%) were also noted, suggesting some external collaboration. Only 5% of the respondents were unsure, indicating general clarity around who is mostly communicating civic content on Mafkeni radio.
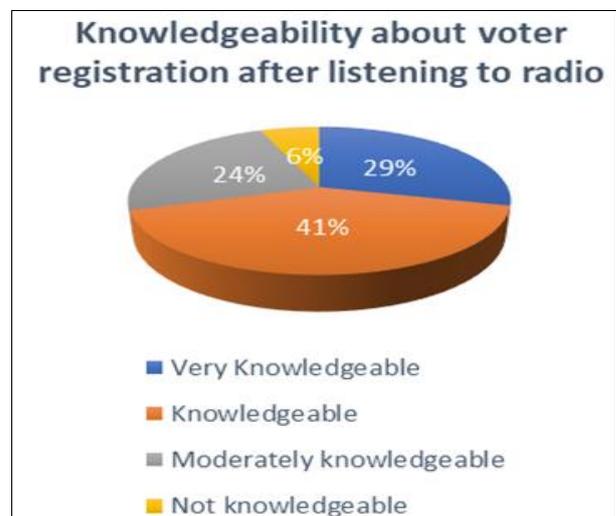

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.3.4: Clarity of Voter Registration Procedures in Messages

In figure 4.3.4 A combined 76% of respondents said that voter registration procedures were either clear (47%) or very clear with 29%, indicating strong communication effectiveness. A small group felt the explanations were only moderately clear with 18%, and 6% of respondents found them unclear. None rated the messaging as "not very clear," reflecting overall satisfaction with the clarity of procedural information.

4.2 Presentation of results based on thematic area developed from objective three

Source: Field Data, 2025

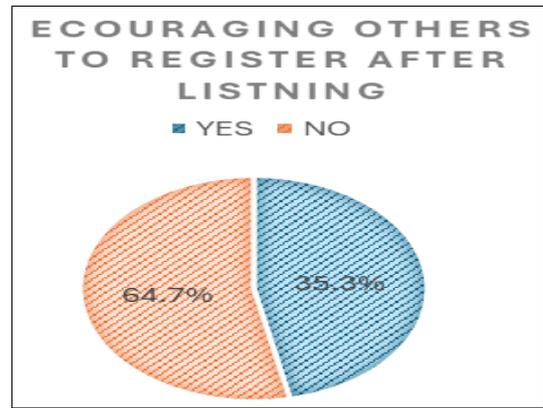**Fig 4.4.1:** Knowledgeability About Voter Registration After Listening

Figure 4.4.1 shows that most listeners felt their knowledge about voter registration improved after engaging with Mafkeni Radio. A large proportion, 70%, rated themselves as either knowledgeable (41%) or very knowledgeable (29%), suggesting that the station is effectively equipping its audience with essential information. About 24% felt only moderately knowledgeable, while just one respondent (6%) reported not gaining much knowledge. None rated themselves as "not very knowledgeable," highlighting that Mafkeni Radio is generally successful in enhancing voter awareness among its listeners.
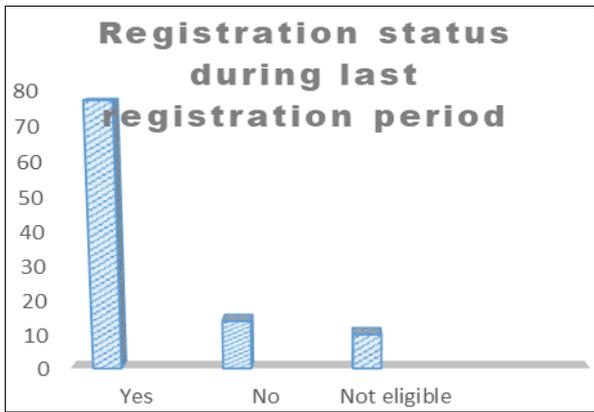
Source: Field Data, 2025

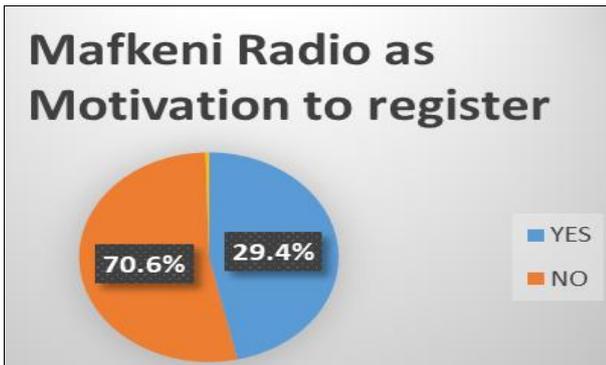**Fig 4.4.2:** Registration Status During Last Voter Registration Period

Figure 4.4.2 shows that most respondents (77%) reported having registered to vote during the last voter registration period. A smaller proportion (14%) did not register, while another % indicated they were not eligible, most likely due to age restrictions at the time. This suggests that Mafkeni Radio's voter education messages may have had a positive impact in motivating a significant share of its audience to register, though there remains a small segment that either did not take part or could not be due to eligibility barriers.

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.4.3: Mafkeni Radio as a Motivation to Register

Figure 4.4.3 shows that 70.6% of respondents felt that Mafkeni Radio motivated them to register to vote, highlighting the station's role as an influential source of civic engagement. However, 29.4% reported that they were not motivated by the station, suggesting that while programming has a strong impact on the majority, there is still room to strengthen its motivational strategies to reach and inspire all listeners.

Source: Field Data, 2025

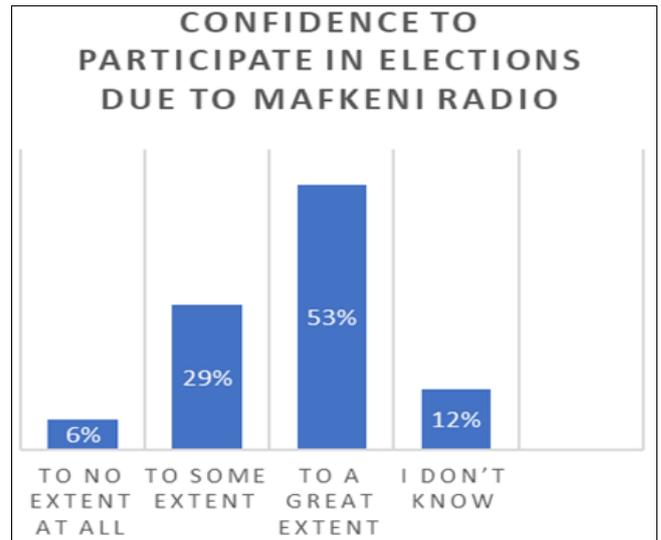**Fig 4.4.3:** Mafkeni Radio as a Motivation to Register

Figure 4.4.4 shows that 64.7% of listeners reported encouraging others to register to vote after hearing Mafkeni Radio, demonstrating a secondary effect of the station's voter education messaging, where listeners become advocates within their communities. However, 35.3% did not pass on the messages, indicating that while Mafkeni Radio's influence extends beyond direct listeners, its ripple effect does not reach everyone. This suggests opportunities to strengthen call-to-action messaging to inspire more community-level mobilization.

Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.4.5: Confidence to Participate in Elections Due to Mafkeni Radio

Figure 4.4.5 shows that the majority of respondents (53%) felt that Mafkeni Radio had increased their confidence to participate in elections to a great extent, while 29% said it did so to some extent. A small group (12%) were uncertain, and only 6% felt the station had not influenced their confidence at all. Overall, this suggests that Mafkeni Radio plays a significant role in boosting electoral confidence among its listeners, though there remains a portion of the audience that is either unsure or minimally impacted.
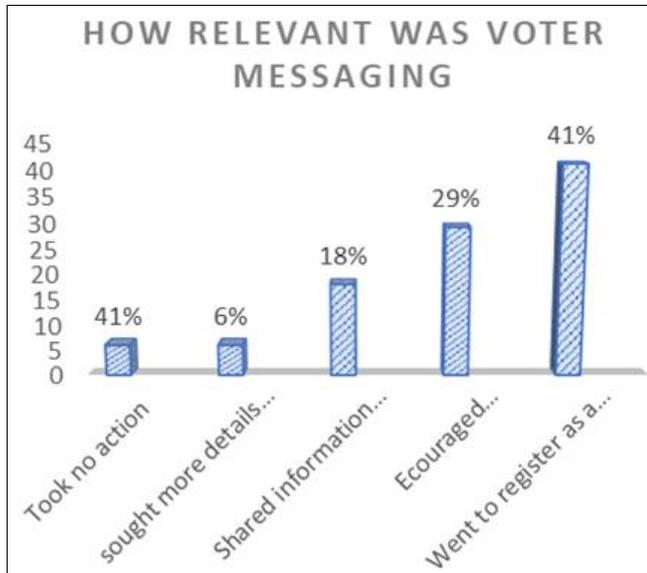
Source: Field Data, 2025

Fig 4.4.6: Actions Taken After Hearing Voter Registration Messages on Mafkeni Radio

Figure 4.4.6 shows that most listeners responded actively after hearing Mafkeni Radio's voter registration messages. The most common action (41%) was going to register personally, followed by encouraging family or friends to register (29%), and sharing the information within the community (18%). A few respondents (6%) sought clarification from leaders or ECZ, while another small group (6%) took no action. These findings suggest that Mafkeni Radio not only motivated direct voter registration but also triggered secondary advocacy behaviors, where listeners influenced others, thereby multiplying the station's impact.

4.2 Discussion of research findings

Qualitative findings revealed that Mafkeni Radio enjoys widespread listenership among youth and urban residents, with limited penetration among older age groups and rural communities. One staff member stated that, "Young people are our biggest audience, especially in the evenings after work or school. They are the ones who call in most when we run voter programs." ECZ officials confirmed this pattern, explaining that young people were the most responsive, often "turning up at registration centers immediately after hearing announcements on the radio."

These insights align strongly with Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [40], which argues that media influence what audiences think about by repeatedly prioritizing certain issues. By consistently placing voter registration at the forefront of programming, Mafkeni successfully made the topic salient among its youthful audience.

Language also played a key role. Both Mafkeni staff and ECZ officials emphasized that voter education broadcasts are delivered exclusively in Bemba and English, the two dominant languages in Mufulira. An ECZ officer noted, *"Radio in Bemba and English works for most people here, but we know it leaves out some rural voices."* This observation is consistent with Myers (2011), who emphasized the importance of local-language broadcasting while acknowledging challenges in multilingual inclusivity.

Quantitative findings confirm this reach pattern through clear before-after evidence. Before Mafkeni's targeted voter education programming, many listeners reported limited knowledge about registration procedures, irregular listening habits, and little awareness of deadlines. After the broadcasts became frequent and systematic:

The findings shows that 88% of respondents listened to the radio between 3-7 days per week, indicating stable exposure to civic content.

The respondents rated Mafkeni's signal as easy or very easy to access, showing the station has now become a reliable and trusted civic information source.

Bemba and English were the common languages in which listeners reported receiving voter education, confirming alignment with the station's strategy.

Together, these before–after results demonstrate that Mafkeni successfully expanded reach by increasing both the frequency of listening and accessibility of voter-related content.

Interviews with Mafkeni staff and ECZ officials revealed that jingles, interviews, and talk shows are the most effective formats. One producer explained, *"The jingles repeat key dates and requirements; they stick in people's minds."* An ECZ officer added that talk shows help *"break down procedures in a language people understand."* While dramas and bulletins are used less often, they still reinforce the main themes.

Message content typically emphasized eligibility requirements (such as NRC and age), registration deadlines, the importance of early registration, and civic duty. Mafkeni staff highlighted their deliberate effort to simplify content so that listeners with varying education levels could understand it. As one presenter put it, *"We avoid technical language. We explain using everyday examples so that even someone with little education can follow."*

These practices reflect Tettey's (2006) argument that community radio excels when it simplifies complex governance issues. Bratton (2013) [10] also emphasized that repeated, clear messages increase both awareness and action—an effect clearly visible in Mafkeni's audience.

Audience engagement was also significant. Mafkeni uses phone-ins, SMS, and social media to create an interactive environment. A station manager stated, *"When people call in, it's not just to ask questions. They also share their own experiences, and that motivates others listening."* ECZ officials described this as evidence of shared community responsibility in the registration process.

Quantitative results provide clear before–after support for these messaging strategies. Before exposure to Mafkeni's voter education content:

Listeners expressed limited knowledge of registration procedures.

Participation in civic discussions was inconsistent.

Many listeners were unaware of deadlines and requirements.

After repeated exposure to Mafkeni's messaging formats:

Most respondents rated the messages as clear, culturally relevant, and easy to understand.

A majority remembered key messages such as deadlines, registration requirements, and early registration campaigns.

Most listeners reported hearing voter education content often or very often, showing consistency in broadcast frequency.

Some respondents raised concerns about limited airtime and scheduling, aligning with Moyo's (2010) [46] findings that community radio stations often operate under resource constraints. Even so, the before–after comparison shows that Mafkeni's attention to message clarity and variety significantly improved understanding and engagement among its audience.

Interviews strongly suggested that Mafkeni Radio had a measurable impact on voter registration behavior. One ECZ official noted, *"Whenever Mafkeni runs a voter education slot, we notice a spike at registration centers the next day."* A Mafkeni staff member added, *"People tell us on air, 'I went to register after hearing your program.' That feedback shows we are making an impact."*

Both groups consistently reported that Mafkeni's broadcasts not only motivated individuals to register but encouraged them to influence others within their households. This ripple effect demonstrates Agenda Setting Theory in action: repeated emphasis on voter registration shaped public priorities and catalyzed collective action.

To demonstrate effectiveness, clear before–after results are evident in the quantitative findings.

Before exposure to Mafkeni voter education programming:

Many listeners had low to moderate knowledge of voter registration procedures.

Registration intention was uncertain for a large portion of the public.

Few people reported encouraging others to register.

After exposure to Mafkeni's voter education programming:

More than three-quarters registered during the last registration period.

Over 70% credited Mafkeni Radio as their main motivation.

Most respondents said they encouraged others to register, confirming the multiplier effect reported by ECZ officials.

More than half of respondents said Mafkeni increased their confidence to participate in elections, demonstrating an empowerment effect.

Many respondents took specific actions, including going to register, seeking more information, or sharing registration reminders with others.

These before–after shifts provide strong evidence that Mafkeni Radio influenced not just knowledge but concrete voter behaviour.

However, challenges still exist. Limited airtime and occasional inconvenient scheduling were noted by both staff and officials. One presenter acknowledged, *"Sometimes we only get short slots, which is not enough to go into detail. Listeners ask for more."* This aligns with Bratton, Bhavnani, and Chen (2012) [11], who argued that sustained exposure is necessary to maintain political knowledge and action.

Overall, the mixed-methods evidence shows that Mafkeni Radio has played a major role in promoting voter education and mobilization in Mufulira District. Its reach among youth, bilingual clarity, variety of messaging formats, and promotion of interaction have collectively resulted in higher registration rates, stronger civic awareness, and widespread behavioral influence. These findings support broader African research demonstrating the importance of community radio in strengthening electoral participation (Banda, 2019; Moyo, 2010 [46]).

5. Conclusion

The study set out to assess the effectiveness of Mafkeni Radio in promoting voter registration in Mufulira District, focusing on three key objectives: to evaluate the reach of Mafkeni Radio's voter registration programs, to examine the messaging strategies used, and to assess the effect of the broadcasts on voter registration behaviour.

The findings show that Mafkeni Radio has a significant reach among youth and urban listeners, largely because of its strategic programming during peak listening times and its use of Bemba and English as the main broadcast languages. However, its influence is less pronounced among older citizens, rural communities, and minority language speakers.

On messaging strategies, the station has employed a diverse mix of formats, including jingles, talk shows, interviews, and call-ins. These approaches, combined with the deliberate use of simple bilingual language and relatable examples, have made voter information clear and culturally relevant. Audience engagement through interactive platforms has further strengthened the effectiveness of the programs.

Most importantly, the study found that Mafkeni Radio has had a positive impact on voter registration behaviour. Both interview and questionnaire data confirmed that broadcasts motivated listeners to register, increased knowledge of registration procedures, and encouraged community mobilization, with many respondents reporting that they urged others to register. These outcomes demonstrate that Mafkeni Radio is not only a channel for information but also a catalyst for civic action.

At the same time, the research identified challenges such as limited airtime, inconvenient program scheduling, and gaps in reaching certain demographics. Addressing these issues would enable Mafkeni Radio to broaden its influence and strengthen its role as a strategic partner of the ECZ in enhancing democratic participation.

In conclusion, Mafkeni Radio has proven to be an effective platform for voter education and mobilization in Mufulira District, with clear evidence of its role in shaping awareness and driving voter registration. Strengthening its coverage, diversifying language use, and expanding program airtime would further enhance its contribution to Zambia's democratic processes.

7. References

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