

Nexus between women voters' radio exposure and grassroots electoral participation under the new devolved political dispensation in Kenya

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DOI: 10.30547/worldofmedia.2.2020.3

Abstract

This article examines the nexus between women voters' radio exposure and participation in the 2013 Kenyan general election in Kakamega County located in the western part of the country. This research grounded in political mobilization theory and uses and gratifications theory utilized a descriptive quantitative correlational research design. Data was collected from 372 women voters using a survey-interviewer administered questionnaire. Data gathered was analyzed through descriptive statistics and hierarchical multiple regression. Results reveal medium to high radio exposure and limited electoral participation among women voters. Consistent with past findings, the correlation between women voters' radio exposure and electoral participation is positive and statistically significant. This has implications to radio practitioners and political stakeholders' approaches towards promoting gender equality in electoral participation in Kenya. We propose an increase in gender-sensitive political education radio programmes targeting women based on their socio-demographics. This article contributes to knowledge on the relationship between radio exposure and electoral participation in developing democracies in which the legacy medium of radio remains dominant. A nation-wide study on the influence of radio exposure on women voters' electoral participation in Kenya is suggested.

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Keywords

Electoral participation, Kakamega County, Kenya, media use, radio exposure, women voters.

Introduction

Political information is an important resource in raising women's political awareness and participation (Uwem & Opeke, 2015). In Kenya, radio is the dominant news medium for accessing such information (Mbeke, 2010; Schulz-Herzenberg et al., 2015). Radio exposure can, therefore, influence women's electoral participation essential to the attainment of gender equality in political participation as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Kenya's 2010 Constitution. This Constitution introduced a new political structure in which resources and power are devolved in 47 counties in the country. As Bouka et al. (2019) acknowledge, women's political participation strengthens democracy and advances their development agenda. Therefore, there is a need to examine women voters' grassroots electoral participation in the 2013 Kenyan polls, the first to be held under the country's new devolved democracy.

Despite women's large voting bloc and affirmative actions towards their political participation, their electoral engagement in Kenya remains low (Federation of Kenya women lawyers – Kenya [FIDA-Kenya], 2013). This raises two fundamental questions. First, why is women voters' electoral participation still low even under the devolved political dispensation in Kenya? Second, what is the contribution (if any) of radio on women voters' electoral participation at the county level in Kenya? These questions can be answered using sociological, psychological and communication approaches to political participation. This article takes a communication approach to examine the nexus between women voters' radio exposure and participation in the 2013 general election in Kakamega County. This is motivated by Mvukiyehe (2017) who argues that providing information through the media is one of the easy-to-address barriers to women's political participation.

This research departs from prior studies which have tended to assess the relationship between media use and voting participation in Kenya among both male and female respondents. Our study focuses on the influence of radio exposure on voting and election campaign participation among women voters under the devolved political system in Kenya. This article seeks to answer three research questions. First, what was the level of women voters' radio exposure during the 2013 general election? Second, what was the extent of women

voters' participation in this election? Finally, what is the relationship between women voters' radio exposure and participation in the 2013 polls in Kakamega County?

Background

Kenya located in East Africa has a vibrant and diverse broadcasting sector, with radio as the main source for information and news (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013). There are about 194 radio stations in Kenya, with 122 (62.9%) broadcasting in English and Kiswahili and 72 (37.1%) in local languages (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2020). Almost 6.5 million (74%) of the households in the country own radio sets (KNBS, 2010) and 95% of Kenyans regularly listen to the radio (Media Council of Kenya [MCK], 2012). Radio has advantages of pervasiveness, affordability, portability and broadcasting in local languages (Gillwald et al., 2010; Myers, 2009; Nyabuga & Booker, 2013; Simiyu, 2010).

This study was conducted in Kakamega County located in western Kenya. Politically, the county is divided into 12 constituencies each represented by a Member of Parliament (MP). There are 60 County Assembly Wards [CAWs] with each represented by a Member of County Assembly [MCA] (County Government of Kakamega, 2018). With a population of 1,867,579 comprising of 970,406 (52%) females and 897,133 (48%) males, the county is the topmost with more females than males in Kenya (KNBS, 2019). Out of 970,406 females in Kakamega County, 875,526 (90.2%) and 94,880 (9.8%) reside in rural and urban areas respectively. The voting age population (18 years and above) in the county is 924,142, with 496,949 (53.8%) and 427,193 (46.2%) being females and males correspondingly.

Over 90% of the females in Kakamega County have low levels of education [pre-primary to secondary school] (KNBS, 2019). A quarter of the households in the county have electricity connection (KNBS, 2019). The poverty level in the county is 49.2%. (County Government of Kakamega, 2018). These socioeconomic characteristics contribute to the wide use of radio in Kakamega County. Radio ownership in households in the county stands at 77.8% (KNBS, 2010), making it a major source of information for the residents (County Government of Kakamega, 2018). In western Kenya in which Kakamega County is located, residents have a keen interest to tune into their favourite radio programmes (Simiyu, 2010).

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) introduced a devolved system of government consisting of 47 counties. It also provides for affirmative actions

toward women's political participation, citizens' political rights and freedom of the media. The first general election under this new political structure was held on March 4, 2013. This election was the tenth since the country's independence in 1963. The 2010 Constitution provides for six elective posts, with the presidency at the national level. At the county level, there are five elective seats: governor, senator, county woman representative, Member of national assembly and MCAs. Before this, there were three elective posts: president, MP and councillor. A total of 14,388,781 were registered for the 2013 general election with 49.1% of them being females. Kakamega County had 567,460 voters consisting of 287,325 (50.6%) females registered through biometric technology (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission [IEBC], 2013).

Theoretical framework

This article is anchored on Flanagan's (1996) political mobilization theory and uses and gratifications theory (UGT) advanced by Katz et al. (1974). Political mobilization theory postulates that media use directly influences political knowledge and stimulates political attitudes that subsequently impact on political participation. The theory also assumes that socio-economic status (SES), social networks, sex, age and urbanization influence people's media use. Flanagan (1996) identifies partisanship as a predictor of political knowledge and electoral participation. Partisanship is predicated on political party affiliation (Mbeke, 2010). Building on political mobilization theory, we conceptualized socio-demographic and political disposition characteristics as control variables in this research.

This article uses UGT to explain the consequences of radio consumption through women voters' electoral participation. UGT considers media use as a function of the gratification of social or psychological needs of individuals (Katz et al., 1974). For instance, voters may be motivated to listen to the radio to obtain political information (surveillance gratification) and retain it for use in interpersonal political discussions within their social networks (social utility gratification). Therefore, UGT relates to political mobilization theory which identifies media use as a predictor of political knowledge and attitudes and the role of social networks in influencing electoral participation.

UGT conceives an active audience seeking media sources that best fulfil their gratifications (Katz et al., 1974). For instance, during elections, people are likely to choose media outlets and content that they perceive to be supportive of their

political party identities (Mbeke, 2010). This suggests that exposure to partisan media can deepen voters' partisanship. Political mobilization theory identifies partisanship as a political attitude that predicts political knowledge.

Katz et al. (1974) assert that audience characteristics influence media access. In agreement, Uwem & Opeke (2015) note that socio-demographics influence women's information accessibility. This is in harmony with political mobilization theory which identifies such factors as determinants of media use. UGT further postulates that 'many of the goals of media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves' (Katz et al., 1974). Grounded on this premise, we gathered data based on women voters' self-reported radio exposure and electoral participation.

Empirical literature review

Audience surveys by Gillwald et al. (2010) and Ipsos Synovate (2013) reveal that females in Kenya spend almost 5.3 hours per day and 33 hours per week listening to the radio respectively. After the 2013 general election, Schulz-Herzenberg et al. (2015) conducted a nation-wide survey which shows that 82% of the respondents listened to the radio, with 61% tuned to it daily. Similarly, Yankem's (2015) research in the capital city county of Nairobi indicates that 76% of the participants listened to the radio during the 2013 election. This level of radio listenership and exposure can enhance women voters' access to political information that they need for their electoral participation in Kenya.

Radio informs, educates and mobilizes citizens for electoral participation in Africa (Abdollahyan & Machika, 2017; Edegoh et al., 2015; Yankem, 2015). As Umem & Opeke (2015) acknowledge, access to information builds women's political knowledge and this enhances their electoral participation. Buttressing this, Mvukiyehe's (2017) research on the 2011 general elections in Liberia reveals a positive correlation between radio exposure and women's electoral participation as mediated by political efficacy and group dynamics. Conroy-Krutz (2018) also reports that radio availability is a significant predictor of citizens' political participation in Uganda as it increases their political knowledge. Moreover, studies from Nigeria demonstrate a positive correlation between voters' radio exposure and electoral participation in Enugu, Kano and Anambra states (Abdollahyan & Machika, 2017; Didiugwu et al. 2014; Edegoh et al., 2015).

Large-scale studies in Africa depict a positive correlation between radio exposure and voter turnout in Africa especially in rural areas (Isaksson et

al., 2014; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2005, 2007, 2011). Rural areas are heavily populated with women, have high levels of illiteracy and poverty (Heywood, 2018; Myers, 2009). The current study focuses on women in the predominantly rural Kakamega County with high poverty levels (KNBS, 2019). These socio-demographics contribute to the relevance of radio in Kakamega County. Radio has the advantages of affordability, overcoming illiteracy barriers through local language broadcasts and it blends with oral culture which is dominant in Africa (Heywood, 2018; Myers, 2009).

Past research in Kenya shows that radio exposure predicts voter turnout (Mbeke, 2010; Muriithi & Page, 2013) and through radio, citizens are politically mobilized (Yankem, 2015). Furthermore, Mbeke's (2010) study on political participation among youth in Kenya's Nakuru district (now Nakuru County) shows a positive correlation between radio exposure and participation through voting and financial contribution to campaigns during the 2007 general election.

A few studies present contradictory findings to the foregoing results. Reviewing over six studies in Nigeria, Didiugwu et al. (2014) identify a weak association between women's radio exposure and electoral participation. The researchers argue that political messages on the radio may not be packaged in clear and persuasive ways that facilitate women's electoral participation. Similar shortcomings exist in Kenya as political talk radio shows aired during the 2013 polls are criticized for being poorly researched and lacking pre-editorial guidance (Muriithi & Page, 2013).

Adegbola & Gearhart's (2019) comparative study involving the USA, Kenya and Nigeria indicates that radio exposure does not predict political participation in the two African countries. The study involved 1,775 respondents: the USA (502), Kenya (502) and Nigeria (474). The researchers argue that prior studies in Africa use small case studies and this might be contributing to the positive results between radio exposure and political participation. Our study is county-specific involving 372 respondents compared to 502 from Kenya in the aforementioned research. Another study by Kipkoech (2019) reveals that there is no significant correlation between radio consumption and political participation in Kenya. Kipkoech attributes this finding to political disinterest among the respondents. The researcher adds that listening to the radio is just a theoretical construct that does not influence political behaviours in Kenya.

The present study was motivated by Bouka et al. (2019) as they echo the need to understand women's political participation within the newly created devolved political system in Kenya. Consistent with Mbeke's (2010) observation

of mixed and inconclusive findings on the effects of media use on political participation, our review of the literature reveals similar trends. Overall, there is a dearth of research on the role of radio in women's electoral participation in Africa (Conroy-Krutz, 2018) and political mobilization in Kenya (Yankem, 2015). According to Kasomo (2012), women are marginalized in both politics and academic research in Kenya. Our findings are thus considered useful to a better understanding of the nexus between women voters' radio exposure and electoral participation in Kenya and other developing democracies.

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive quantitative correlational survey as it answers the research questions by describing and predicting relationships among the study variables. A survey is cost-effective and time-saving in data collection from a large population such as Kakamega County. The sample size for this study was computed from the targeted population of 287,325 women registered to vote in the 2013 election in Kakamega County using Yamane's (1967) formula:

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

Where:

n = desired sample size

N = the finite size of the population

e = margin of error of 5%

1 = a theoretical or statistical constant

$$n = \frac{287,325}{1 + 287,325(0.05)^2} = 400$$

We used a sample size of 400 women voters selected through a five-step multi-stage sampling procedure, involving the selection of:

1. Six constituencies using purposive sampling to ensure those chosen had both rural and urban CAWs. These constituencies are Lugari, Likuyani, Malava, Lurambi, Mumias West and Butere.
2. A rural and urban CAW using purposive and random sampling respectively from each of these six constituencies sampled.
3. Two sub-locations from each of the sampled CAWs using purposive and random sampling methods for rural and urban CAWs respectively.

4. Households at the level of sub-locations by systematic random sampling.
5. Women voters using proportionate stratified sampling based on the number of registered female voters in each CAW. In each household, only one interview was conducted with a participant selected through the Kish grid method.

Data collection and analysis

Data for this study was collected from women voters using an-interviewer administered questionnaire. The data was analyzed by descriptive statistics and hierarchical multiple regression using SPSS Version 21 and then presented in tables. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the questionnaire was validated by two media studies lecturers. We pre-tested and piloted the questionnaire on 12 and 48 women voters respectively selected through convenience sampling from CAWs not sampled for this study. The test-retest results yielded a strong Pearson correlation coefficient, $r = .734$.

Operationalization of variables

In this study, the dependent and independent variables are electoral participation and radio exposure respectively. Socio-demographic and political disposition characteristics and use of other media are controlled.

Electoral participation. Participants answered 'Yes' (1) or 'No' (0) on whether they engaged in the following during the 2013 general election in Kakamega County: rallying up voters to try to get them to turn out and vote; canvassing for votes; attending political meetings or rallies; political volunteerism in leadership positions or as members in political support groups; distributing campaign literature; wearing or displaying campaign materials; financial assistance to support candidates and political parties; and voting. The eight items were summed up to create an index of electoral participation ranging from 0 to 8 activities.

Radio exposure. Respondents were asked to indicate approximate days in a seven-day typical week and hours in a typical 24-hour day that they spent accessing information and news on politics and current affairs on the radio. Responses to these two questions were then used to create a radio exposure index which ranged from 0 to 56 hours.

Age. Each respondent was asked to indicate her age which was finally categorized as follows: 1 = 18–35 years; 2 = 36–50 years; and 3 = above 50 years.

Marital status. Each participant was asked to indicate her marital status, later characterized as follows: 1 = single; 2 = married; 3 = separated, divorced or widowed.

Level of education. A respondent's highest level of formal schooling completed under the following categories: 1 = no formal schooling; 2 = primary school; 3 = secondary school; and 4 = middle-level college and university education.

Household income status. Combined monthly income (in Kenya Shillings [Kshs.] for all individuals sharing a household and categorized as: (1) low = Kshs. 20,000 and below, (2) medium = Kshs. 20,001–50,000, and (3) high = above Kshs. 50,000. 1 USD exchanged at between Kshs. 86.4 and 84.9 in January 2013 and April 2013 respectively

Residential location. Each participant was asked to state her place of residence either as 1 = rural or 2 = urban.

Political affiliation. A respondent's indication of a particular political party that she supported in Kenya during the 2013 polls.

Partisanship. A woman voters' strength of loyalty to a political party supported in Kenya during the 2013 polls based on a three-point scale ranging from 1 (not so strong) to 3 (very strong).

Use of other media. The same approach used for operationalizing radio exposure was adopted to measure time spent on TV, reading newspapers, surfing the Internet and using mobile phones.

Results and discussion

Out of 400 copies of questionnaires administered, 372 (93%) were completed, returned and used for data analysis, reflecting a very high response rate. *Table 1* indicates that 72% of the participants were aged 18–50 years, 74.8% were married, separated, divorced and widowed. Slightly over four-fifths (81.8%) of the respondents were those with low levels of education ranging from no formal education up to secondary school. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents were from low-income households, 58.3 % were residing in urban areas, 58.4% were affiliated to ODM (44.4%) and UDF Party (14%). Not so strong to strong partisanship was reported by 72.4% of the politically-affiliated respondents.

Table 1

Profile of participants

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Age		
18-35	162	43.5
36-50	106	28.5
51+	104	28.0
Marital status		
Single	92	24.7
Married	222	59.7
Separated, divorced and widowed	56	15.1
No Response (NR)	2	0.5
Education		
No formal schooling	72	19.4
Primary school	161	43.3
Secondary school	71	19.1
Middle-level college and university	66	17.7
NR	2	0.5
Household income status		
Low	197	53.0
Medium	130	34.9
High	22	5.9
Don't Know [DK] & NR	23	6.2
Residential location		
Rural	155	41.7
Urban	217	58.3
Political party affiliation		
None	96	25.8
Orange Democratic Party (ODM)	165	44.4
United Democratic Forum Party (UDF) Party	52	14.0
Others	51	13.7
DK/NR	8	2.2
Partisanship		
Not so strong	126	47.0
Strong	68	25.4
Very strong	58	21.6
DK & NR	16	6.0

Level of radio exposure

Table 2 shows that almost three-fifths (58.6%) of the participants' level of radio exposure ranged from medium to high ($M = 16.44$, $SD = 13.46$). This is in line with earlier findings that established radio as an important source of voter information during the 2013 election (Muriithi & Page, 2013; Schulz-Herzenberg et al., 2015; Yankem, 2015). Our results can be linked to high radio ownership in the respondents' households (86.8%), low educational and household incomes for the majority of the participants.

Table 2

Level of weekly radio exposure

Radio exposure	Frequency	%
None	54	14.5
Low	81	21.8
Medium	113	30.4
High	105	28.2
DK& NR	19	5.1
Total	372	100.0

Extent of electoral participation

Table 3 reveals that 52.4% of the respondents' level of electoral participation ranged from none to low ($M = 3.53, SD = 2.34$). This is consistent with past research which shows limited women's electoral participation in Kenya (FIDA-Kenya, 2013; Kasomo, 2012; Mbeke, 2010). This can be linked to among others, socio-demographics which as espoused in political mobilization theory impact on both media use and electoral participation (Flanagan, 1996). In this study, majority of the respondents' marital status suggests family responsibilities. Most participants reported low levels of education and household income.

Table 3

Level of electoral participation

Level of participation	Frequency	%
None	28	7.5
Low	167	44.9
Medium	128	34.4
High	49	13.2
Total	372	100.0

Relationship between radio exposure and electoral participation

In the four-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis (Table 4), radio exposure and electoral participation were the predictor and outcome variables respectively. Socio-demographic and political disposition characteristics and use of other media were controlled. The assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity were examined and met. Model 4 is the most important for reporting our regression results.

Table 4

Regression predicting electoral participation from radio exposure

Models	β	t	Sig
1: Socio-demographics			
Age	-.503	-7.507	.000**
Marital status	-.042	-.634	.527
Education	-.034	-.599	.550
Household income status	.017	.297	.767
Residential location	.162	2.832	.005***
R ²	.310		
Adjusted R ²	.294		
R ² Change	.310		
2: Political disposition			
Political affiliation	.119	2.030	.044**
Partisanship	.053	.900	.369
R ²	.325		
Adjusted R ²	.302		
R ² Change	.014		
3: Use of other media			
TV	.144	2.100	.037**
Newspapers	.027	.404	.686
Internet	-.154	-2.302	.022**
Mobile phones	-.010	-.167	.868
R ²	.355		
Adjusted R ²	.320		
R ² Change	.030		
4: Radio exposure			
Age	-.261	-3.832	.000*
Marital status	-.008	-.143	.887
Education	.036	.711	.478
Household income status	.093	1.826	.069
Residential location	.113	2.017	.045**
Party affiliation	.109	2.145	.033**
Partisanship	.010	.181	.857
TV	.031	.508	.612
Newspapers	.014	.239	.811
Internet	-.106	-1.794	.074
Mobile phones	-.024	-.460	.646
Radio exposure	.498	7.964	.000**
Total R ²	.508		
Final adjusted R ²	.479		
Total R ² Change	.153*		

Notes. * = p < .001; ** = p < .005; *** = p = .005.

Model 4 in *Table 4* accounted for 50.8% of the explained variance in electoral participation, $R^2 = .508$, adjusted $R^2 = .479$, $F(1, 204) = 17.532$, $p < .001$. Total R^2 change is .153 and statistically significant, thus radio exposure accounts for 15.3% variance in women voters' electoral participation. The final adjusted R^2 shows that 47.9% of the explained change in women voters' electoral participation is accounted for by the combined 12 predictors in Model 4.

The beta (β) coefficients for the significant predictors of women voters' electoral participation in Model 4 are: age ($\beta = -.261$, $t = -3.832$, $p < .001$); residential location ($\beta = .113$, $t = 2.017$, $p = .045$); party affiliation ($\beta = .109$, $t = 2.145$, $p = .033$); and radio exposure ($\beta = .498$, $t = 7.964$, $p < .001$). Radio exposure had the highest predictive power on electoral participation ($\beta = .498$), suggesting that an increase of one hour per week in listening to the radio increases women voters' electoral participation by .498.

Our results are in harmony with those that demonstrate a positive correlation between radio exposure and engagement in various forms of electoral participation in Kenya (Mbeke, 2010; Yankem, 2015). The findings correspond to those of large-scale studies in Africa which reveal a positive correlation between radio exposure and electoral participation (Isaksson et al., 2014; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2005, 2007, 2011). Through listening to the radio, individuals are exposed to political information which can enrich their political knowledge, shape their political attitudes and mobilize them for electoral participation (Abdollahyan & Machika, 2017; Flanagan, 1996). Information seeking and social utility gratifications advanced in UGT (Katz et al., 1974; McQuail, 2010) also contribute to political knowledge and interpersonal political discussions that facilitate electoral participation.

Conclusion

This study examined the nexus between women voters' radio exposure and participation in the 2013 general election in Kakamega County. Results reveal a positive and statistically significant correlation between women voters' radio exposure and electoral participation, with 15.3% variance to their political engagement attributed to radio consumption. This conforms to the findings of a direct effect of radio exposure on electoral participation established in prior studies in Africa. Radio exposure, thus, contributed to women voters' participation in the 2013 Kakamega County.

We focused on the direct effects of radio exposure on women voters' electoral participation, yet these effects may be mediated by political knowledge, attitudes and discussions. Additionally, correlational research

design adopted in this study does not consider causal relationships between variables. Despite these limitations, this article contributes to knowledge on the role of radio in political communication during elections in developing democracies in which radio dominates in the legacy media system. Our results, therefore, have implications to radio practitioners and political stakeholders' efforts in promoting gender equality in political participation as advanced in SDGs and the 2010 Constitution of Kenya. We propose increased gender-sensitive political education radio programmes targeting women based on demographic audience segmentation. A nation-wide study on the direct and indirect effects of radio exposure on women's electoral participation in Kenya is suggested.

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