

Assessing the Role of Radio Political Talk Shows in Shaping Democratic Participation in the Forthcoming Nigeria's 2027 Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses how radio political talk shows in Nigeria serve as vital platforms for information dissemination, voter education, political socialization and public enlightenment in the build-up to Nigeria's 2027 presidential election. Despite the proliferation of online media and social media platforms, radio continues to be one of Nigeria's most popular mediums for political communication because of its affordability, linguistic diversity, mobility, outreach and high degree of penetration in both rural and urban areas. While not all political talk shows on radio are created equal, programmes that are opinion-shaping drive political awareness, influence voter choice and foster democratic participation through agenda-setting and media framing functions. Utilizing Agenda-Setting Theory and Media Framing Theory, this study takes a closer look at radio talk shows and their effects on voter education, political consciousness, civic engagement, voter turnout and government accountability in Nigeria's growing democracy. The paper relies on archival analysis using previous scholarly works, current media narratives and Nigerian radio stations such as Nigeria Info FM, RayPower FM, Wazobia FM and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria to make qualitative assessments on radio political talk shows. Results show that radio political talk shows have aided democratic participation by providing open platforms that allow citizens such as rural dwellers, youths, women and first-time voters to discuss governance issues, ask questions that hold politicians accountable and are informed on their electoral rights. Findings from the study also highlight some challenges such as political propaganda, misinformation, commercialization of airwaves, media capture by politicians and owners as well as politicized ethnicity as possible threats to achieving a successful democracy and credible election through radio political talk shows. The study concludes by reiterating that radio political talk shows will continue to play significant roles in nurturing Nigeria's young democracy but their capacity to enhance democratic participation will depend on how ethical, balanced and independent radio presenters and radio houses will be going into the 2027 presidential election.

Keywords: Broadcasting, radio, political communication, media, elections

INTRODUCTION

In today's 21st century democratic societies shaped by algorithm-driven communication and inundated with digital media technologies, radio has remained one of the many media channels used for political participation, civic engagement, public debates, candidate assessment, electoral decision making process, ideological competition as well as political education and mobilisation. According to Adeoye, Rabiun and Igyuve (2025), radio has remained one of the longest serving and influential media in Nigeria because of its low cost, ease of transportation, and wide reach. It connects people in urban and rural communities cutting across literacy and

geographic lines. Despite the popularity of social media channels, radio broadcast continues to be one of the most effective means of political communication in Nigeria since colonial times. In a similar vein, Sujoko, Rahmiati and Rahman (2023) posit that radio can be used to shape the way people think and serves as an avenue for political communication. Essentially, this suggests that radio plays an important role in political communication studies, fosters democratic participation as politicians and the public serve as a platform to exchange opinion, address concerns and deliberate on various issues without leaving out underprivileged members of society at the grassroots.

On a global scale, recent data from Statista revealed that Finland currently has the highest percentage, as 77% of listeners are people who use radio. Greece and Portugal follow with approximately 72% usage (Statista, 2025). In Nigeria, about 55% of the population currently uses radio while listening to the radio in parts of Nigeria is about 89% daily showing how the radio still dominates as a channel for political communication, public enlightenment, and audience engagement (Statista 2025; Audience Measurement and Media Studies Reports, 2025). Radio maintains its dominant position because it is easily accessible and influence masses despite the prominence of social and digital media. Also, radio reaches a wider audience at the grassroots level than any other digital media platform.

Radio has remained influential in Nigeria because it is accessible in both rural and urban areas. While social media requires smart devices, data subscription and stable electricity to power gadgets, radio can be accessed through battery-powered radio sets. Most Nigerians can afford a radio, and local-language radio stations allow citizens in remote villages to participate in national politics. In many communities, there is also a culture of congregating around a radio. Artisans, traders, farmers, transport guilds, and women market associations convene around a radio to listen to news. This has helped spread political information to the grassroots. Political decisions and policies discussed on air are quickly deliberated on by these groups who constitute a large percentage of the population. Thus, radio serves as a critical channel of political communication to millions of Nigerians who would otherwise be excluded from digital sources of political communication (Suleiman & Peter, 2025).

Notably, the upcoming 2027 presidential election is expected to capture the attention of many Nigerians. There are widespread political, economic, and security concerns among citizens such as insecurity, unemployment, corruption, economic hardship, ethnic violence and demanding accountability from political leaders. Against this backdrop, political talk shows will offer one of the most significant opportunities for ideological contestations about the 2027 election. Unlike primetime news broadcasts where listeners only receive information from journalists or election coverage teams, political talk shows allow broadcast stations to discuss issues affecting the 2027 election with people from rural and urban communities. Through phone calls, interviews, and verbal contributions from listeners, political talk shows create a platform for politicians, political commentators, party officials and citizens to discuss issues about the election and national development. Some political talk shows in Nigeria include Morning cross fire hosted by Freedom Info FM Lagos, Democracy Today by Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (FRCN) Abuja, Hannu Da Yawa by Freedom Radio, Political Voices by Arewa Radio 99.9, Issues of the Day by Solid FM Lagos among many others radio stations hosting political talk shows.

Abubakar (2017) further explained that talk shows allow for democratic engagement. Listeners are allowed to share their opinions, debate and contribute to public discourse. Political talk shows could swing voters' opinions, mobilise citizens to vote and enhance political participation during the election. Mass media when mounting campaign to bring about political participation lures the people by telling them of the solution they will provide if voted for. These could be provision of water, electricity, good road to mention but few (Ojoh, 2018). Radio documentaries could also be used to sensitize them about the need to participate in politics. Since radio is used by every class of person, languages such as English language, Pidgin English or the tribe's language can be used to create an understanding amongst the people.

Unarguably, radio continues to be influential compared to other social media channels because it is immediate, interactive, and broadcast in different languages that cut across the country. Majority of Nigerians rely on radio as their primary source of political information. Many people especially in rural areas depend on radio due to

the lack of access to the internet. That is why you will see political office holders paying for airtime to promote their campaigns on radio via interviews or sponsorship of political programmes during election. Political communication through the broadcast media has been found to influence voters and alter democratic participation among citizens (Suleiman & Peter, 2025).

Furthermore, renewed debates over media regulations following growing concerns around misinformation campaigns and divisive political broadcasts recently emerged ahead of the 2027 general elections. Back in April 2026, the NBC threatened broadcasters to commit infraction against the Nigerian Broadcasting Code while imposing heavier penalties on presenters and stations culpable of airing inflammatory political programs that breach professional neutrality (Reuters, 2026). Also, Media Rights Agenda (2026) warned that strict regulations on broadcasting during elections would minimise hate speech but would limit media freedom and democratic expression if overused.

However, while research on political communication and broadcast media practices continues to grow in Nigeria, there is still a gap in understanding how radio political talk shows impact democratic engagement with specific regards to Nigeria's 2027 presidential election. Nigeria's political communication landscape is also faced with the challenges of misinformation, propaganda, political polarisation and widespread public distrust of institutions. The radio may serve to uplift democratic ideals by reinforcing political education and mobilising citizens to participate civically or may incite political tensions if misinformation spread by partisan actors dominates airtime. Therefore, it is critical to examine how radio political talk shows may affect democratic participation in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Radio

Radio evolved from the discoveries of wireless among other appliances. Successful radiotelephony experiments over time and capitalistic ventures helped birth today's colossal radio transmitting industry; however radio still remains relevant in today's society. Radio is not just announcers, news, and music it also provides companionship; radio develops sentimental relationships with its listeners (McLuhan, 1964; Scannell, 1996). Guglielmo Marconi is credited for creating radio but Indian physicist Jagadish Chandra Bose also helped with early research on radios. Radio technology was used during both World War I and World War II as an effective communication medium for the military; however, it was post World War I when the technology started to become recognized as public communication device. The British Broadcasting Corporation was the first company to exploit radio as a means of relaying public issues. On the 22nd of February 1923, the BBC held a communism debate which was received well by members of the public.

Africa's history with radio started with its introduction to the continent as tool for helping colonial powers propagate their goals. Over time, people have referred to radio using different terminologies including, "magic box", "Africa's medium" "blind medium" (Owens-Ibie & Obasi, 2023) among others. However, my favourite terminology for radio has to be "Africa's medium". Africa's medium means radio is one of the commonest means of mass communication used by Africans and their most trusted medium of information dissemination (Owens-Ibie & Obasi, 2023; Ajisafe, 2021; Apuke, 2017; Nkwam-Uwaoma et al., 2021). Obasi et.al. (2025) adds that radio's popularity in Africa can be described using its earliness-listened medium. This means radio is portable, convenient and easily transportable. This allows anyone who owns a radio to tune into radio programmes whether they are in the village or the city at any time.

It is estimated that Africans who listen to radio range from 60% to 80% of Africa's estimated population of 1.4 billion people (The Conversation, 2024). When quoting from Francis Nyamnjoh's publication in "Education as liberatory practice in Africa", Nkoala et al. (2024) discussed how he argued that as soon as radio established itself as a mass communication medium in the 1920's, the European colonial overlords quickly saw the strategic advantages of appropriating radio technology for dominating and subordinating weaker cultures around the world. Without much consternation, we can all agree that the first official radio transmission in Africa happened

on 18 December 1923 in Johannesburg, South Africa. And so with time, Kenya was introduced to radio in East Africa in 1927. Radio arrived in West Africa in 1934 in Sierra-Leone.

Radio transmission was made through wireless before the said time but when radio programmes were introduced to Ghana in 1935 and Nigeria in 1936 transmission was done through wired distribution. Audiences who became subscribers had loud speakers fitted in their houses which were connected to the central radio stations by wire. Listeners were able to receive radio programmes through this service. The services were set up with the native African as their target audience. By 1936 the British government had decided it would expand and institutionalize radio services in their African colonies.

Radio began operations in Nigeria when the British Broadcasting Corporation inaugurated Britain's overseas radio service known as the British Empire Broadcasting to Nigerians. Radio in Nigeria is said to be the biggest source of news getting to the people (Media Landscapes, 2020). According to Udosimar (2017), One of the duties of this corporation was to broadcast the BBC's overseas service through wired loud speaker systems. This service was called Radio Diffusion System (RDS). The RDS became the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in April 1951 and later that same year the NBS Act was established in 1956. By 1957 the RDS was dropped and replaced with Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) which was meant to provide a local service that would represent the country and an external service. Taking advantage of the concurrent powers given to both the federal and regional government on ownership of broadcasting stations as they agreed on amendments to the colonial-constitution of Nigeria at the time. The western regional government owned both television and radio stations that were launched in 1959. Ensuring impartialness of information getting to the people and representing divergent views but with cultural consideration of the country was given to the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) (Kurfi et al., 2021).

According to Ajibade and Alabi (2017) radio stations which belonged to the western region were renamed Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) and it became official in May 1960. The other regions were not left out as they followed western region's footsteps. Even after the military had a grip on power from 1966 to 1979, ownership didn't change. The regions that were carved out into states had their own separate radio stations. However in 1978 the military government decided to split up NBC and the corporation was renamed Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria popularly known as FRCN.

Only the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) broadcasts stations that reach every part of the country. FRCN began Africa's first FM stereo broadcasting channel at Radio Nigeria in Lagos in April 1977 (Msughter et al., 2023). The FRCN currently has several sub-stations across the states of the federation. When President Obasanjo did a micro-level review of the NBC policy in 2003, some of the AM stations were converted to FM stations such as Coal City FM (Enugu), Paramount FM(Abeokuta), Heartland FM(Owerri), Treasure FM (Port Harcourt), etc. FRCN relocated its headquarters to Abuja. The federal government also broadcasts internationally for Nigerian and foreign audiences with its Voice of Nigeria (VON) commentaries.

In terms of definitions, Radio according to Udomisor (2013) is described as sound broadcasting service broadcast via the airwaves as radio signals from a transmitter to a radio antenna and then onward to a receiver. Stations may also be networked together as radio networks to share common radio programmes, which are either broadcast in broadcast syndication, simulcast or sub channels. According to Uyo (1987), the word RADIO was gotten from radius, a Latin word that means "to radiate". From this, we can deduce that radio is means of passing signal through some electromagnetic processes. Radio signals are broadcast from a transmitting point to reach enormous audiences who receive them through an antenna that connects to their receiver. Sambe (2008) described radio as the short form of Also, radio could be described as a medium through which messages are sent through electrical waves by which one can transmit his message.

Furthermore, radio can be seen as a technology that aids the transmission of signals through the air magically with the help of electronic waves. Also, it covers the programs that are sent out to be listened to by the people (Idebi, 2008:1). BBC English Dictionary described radio as the technique that permits sound to be transmitted from one place to the distance through electrical signals. (1992:946). Apuke (2014) stated that radio is one of the essential types of communication. You can broadcast what you say through the air to different corners of the world with the help of radio. One can also send out music through it as well as other means of communication.

Epistemological Assumptions of Radio programs

Olukunle and Onabajo (2022) stated that there have been several technological changes in mass communication over time. Today, the internet platform is leading in terms of technological innovation with a larger patronage and increase in information store worldwide. Despite these changes, radio remains the most available, affordable and adaptable medium of communication in developing countries.

Radio does not just inform and educate people but should also help to stimulate people to participate in developing programs. Radio programs must be directed at reaching the entire people in the developing world; such programs when sent through radio will reach the illiterate and those in the society who are less privileged with information that will empower and educate them until the gap between Africa and the rest of the world is bridged. Weisenhorn et al. (2021) agrees that radio is influential in helping people acquire skills and it has a positive impact on learners of radio. Radio when used for developmental purposes will yield great results if the programs are intended to let the rural people know how they can be empowered in their various crafts and trades, how they can observe personal hygiene and how they can make maximum use of the gadgets and machines that are given to them by the government. They also need to be educated about government policies, what the policies are meant for, how they can benefit from them and what their rights are so as not to be ignorant and deceived.

If you look at a successful indigenous radio program, they must be designed along the lines of interest of their target listeners. The more people that tune in to listen to your program, the higher the likelihood of creating a fan base that will help in improving participation which can help in helping achieve a change of mindset or behavior. According to Oso (2002), producers of these programs need to have empathy for their target listeners and study the socio-cultural background of these people so that these programs can be designed along their social reality. Some radio stations buzzing with indigenous programs are; OGBC Morning Flight, Sisi Ologe, Health Matters, E to mi labe ofin and Splash FM's Man and the Law program. Although these programs have fans that listen to them, some scholars believe that you are more likely to create social or individual change by embedding education-entertainment approaches like radio soap operas in your indigenous programs. Manyozo (2008) stated that individual's self- efficacy and ability to change behavior as a result of radio campaigns are dependent on remembering particular message traits because it is what will influence them to take action and change. In radio terms, listening to your indigenous radios programs one or more times per week will have a greater impact on that listener's behavior and will help the movement more than if the listener had heard the radio campaign one time.

Media and Elections in Nigeria

Media no longer informs and connects voters during elections in Nigeria. In many ways, media construct political reality, confer democratic legitimacy, manufacture consent and votes, and set the pace of democratic participation. As such, many scholars view Nigerian media space as agenda setters that can be used "as avenues to hyping political actors and positions, confer legitimacy on candidates, and framing political events during elections" (Tejedor Calvo, Cervi, & Ikokwu, 2022).

The 2015 presidential election marked a turning point in how media could influence electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Unlike the presidential elections that preceded it, broadcast media in Nigeria collided with digital political communication processes to set the tone for the 2015 election. Radio political talk shows, television programmes, newspaper editorials, hashtags, and tweets created and fuelled strong narratives on corruption, insecurity, poor governance, and leadership failure. According to Chukwu and Chiadika (2025), the pervasive ways in which media framed the election along the line of rescuing Nigeria from failed leadership became instrumental to the heightened level of political consciousness during the period. Voters participated more because they now understood what was at stake. Politically, media constructed the "change mantra."

The media did so by, among others things, positioning Muhammadu Buhari as the antidote to corruption and insecurity in Nigeria. Stations like Nigeria Info FM, RayPower FM, media professional fora, and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria scheduled hourly political programmes that centered on poor governance. These media agenda-setting functions and issue-framing on insecurity and corruption elevated the prominence of these

issues among voters. Instead of being the communication pipeline during the election, the media became the weapon used to sway voters.

However, the role of the media in deepening democratic participation in 2015 was juxtaposed with heightened political propaganda. Experts observed an increase in political misinformation and emotive story angles deployed by political parties to tarnish the image of opponents and sway voters (Adegbola & Zhang, 2023). From newspapers to WhatsApp newsletters, political discussions became highly divisive along ethnic and ideological lines. Publicly, many voters resorted to attacking those who held opposing political views on social media. While the media performed its democratic role of mobilizing voters, it further polarized political debates and citizens who accessed news on social media platforms.

Nigeria's 2019 presidential election, however, suggested a more ambiguous relationship between media influence and democratic participation. While media platforms remained hegemonic structures in political communication, citizen confidence in political institutions dipped drastically. According to Tejedor Calvo et al. (2022), the outcome of Nigeria's 2019 presidential election reporting showed signs of "mediatization" where media reported elections as entertainment; contests among political elites and parties rather than reporting issues that would deepen democratic participation. Consequently, news about politicians struggling for political advantage trumped reports that sought to highlight policy differences between political parties.

For instance, mainstream media amplified the electoral commission's eleventh-hour postponement of the 2019 presidential election. While they met their journalistic obligation of informing citizens of the development, continuous analysis on radio stations and televised debates achieved more than informing the electorate. Media elected stations questioned the independence of the commission, why the election was postponed, and what Nigerians could trust INEC to do. Following the continuous media coverage, Nigerians lost confidence in the electoral process and largely stayed away from voting unlike in 2015.

Obukoadata, Okon, and Obogo (2024) posit that Nigerian politicians significantly deployed propaganda-steeped media communication strategies during the 2019 general election. Newspapers turned into handbags, radio talk shows, and television screens appeared heavily sponsored by politicians. Objective journalism took the backseat as political parties stooped low by utilizing the media to fan the embers of violence. Political campaign advertisements from the parties focused on negative campaigning by inciting fear rather than highlighting policy alternatives to move Nigeria forward. Nigerian media have increasingly become commercialized and sold to the highest bidder; thereby weakening the democratic potentials of the media.

However, radio remains the most critical source of election information at the grassroots. Several indigenous language radio programmes aired in Nigeria before, during, and after the election spanning the four dominant languages – Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin English – helped consolidate democratic participation. Scholars like Sabo and Kente (2024) have argued that radio political talk shows remain one of Nigeria's strongest tools for deepening democratic participation because they allow communicative democracy by bridging the gap between the political class and marginalized groups shut out of digital political communication.

The newest data show that the 2023 presidential election also affected the media's role in electoral participation in Nigeria. Unlike the previous elections controlled by the political elites and traditional political institutions, Nigerians voted in the 2023 elections with a clear understanding of how decentralized political communication had become through citizen journalism. Although a mere political movement on social media, the creation of the "Obidient movement shaped the way forward for decentralized political campaigns." Social media became central to voter education, donation, mobilization, and sensitization to vote. Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok videos, and WhatsApp messages became useful tools for registering voters who hitherto were left out of the country's political map. Nigerian youths, who made up the bulk of the supporters of the movement, became major drivers of political information concerning the election. Thus, the youth now vote differently because they have access to and understand decentralized political communication.

However, broadcast media still played a critical role. Political talk shows on radio helped shape politics online by broadcasting political discussions that were held online to the physical public. Citizens discussed politics online and off-line, giving rise to a cybernetic version of politics. "The interaction between radio and cyber

politics helped to create what Suleiman and Peter call hybrid politics where both radio shows and social media supported each other politically” (2025). Research from Osieme and Anthony on social media and voter participation echoes similar thoughts of how social media influenced the turnout during the elections. Conceptually, one major takeaway from the analytical review of the 2023 elections is how media communication in Nigeria is no longer just top-down from how citizens can engage and use media to push back on political candidates, influence voter participation, and take collective political action. The Labour Party had the least physical presence of any political party that ran in the elections, but they were able to gain enough media traction through strategized online voter participation and engagement.

The media helped democratize the 2023 elections by allowing for citizens to take nonviolent collective action. Although, this open participation also allowed for deepfakes, misinformation, and other forms of media manipulation to spread like wildfire. News outlet Reuters (2023) found that before and after the elections, “deepfake videos of Nigerian politicians, false claims of who won the election, and disinformation flown on social media” were recorded widespread.

Political pundits, such as Ibrahim and Ekdale, have explained how political actors used emotional keywords and other technology to manipulate political ideals and voters while exacerbating political polarization (2025). Technology and social media helped open up the space for participation, but it also left citizens vulnerable to misinformation and made them less likely to believe in election results.

Along with how BVAS and IReV were discussed on media outlets, some believed that how the media covered the inability of the tech to transmit results on time was a sign of how “INEC failed to control the narrative” of the election (Time Magazine, 2023). Coverage of the delays on radio stations, television stations, and social media led people to believe the election was a sign of how inept the institution was and whether the election had been compromised.

In conclusion, the media serves a democratic role and an undemocratic role in Nigeria. The media allows for political socialization, voter participation, civic engagement, and holding politicians accountable. Yet, problems such as commercialization, political parallelism, propaganda, misinformation, and sensationalism have made it difficult for the media to take on that democratic role.

Radio as Medium of Political Communication

Political communication has evolved over the years ever since democracy found footing. Pamphlets were used during the early days which later gave way to social media as a tool for politicians to reach out to the people. Radio which is the focus of discussion changed the game for politicians seeking to reach out to their people. ‘Radio as a medium of political communication’ is an extensive topic that looks at how radio changed political communication. To fully grasp the concept of radio as a medium of communication, one has to compare other media of political communication and also look at radio’s immediate effect (McQuail, 2010).

Newspapers and Magazines

The use of print media dominated the sphere of political communication before the 1900s came. Political speech and messages could spread faster and reach wider using radio than newspapers. On radio stations, speeches are passed across quickly however using newspapers and pamphlets requires one to have the knowledge of how to read and write which narrows your target audience (Street, 2011). Print media also offers in-depth analysis of views passed across.

Television

Television dominated the 1900s as a greater portion of the world had access to television sets. With television, politicians not only had to sound right but also look good. Body gestures and language tone could be studied on TV. Television requires mobilization of resources to own a television station. It favors politicians who are good-looking and can act thereby producing a bias towards fair complexion politicians (Postman, 1985). Radio has a more aggressive audience since people can listen to political broadcasts while working.

Social Media

Social media is the dominant medium of political communication in the world today. Leaders use social media to reach out to the people. Social media is cheaper compared to television and reaches many people. Social media seems to have failed the world politically because it has been known to spread false information that may alter the thought of the public. Using social media, politicians can customize who gets to see their posts through the use of algorithms (Small, 2011). Radio reaches everyone unlike social media which targets people using algorithms.

Use of radio as political communication

Politicians recognized radio's potential as a means of communication. President Roosevelt used radio to reach out to the Americans during the great depression. Through the radio, he was able to connect with Americans by making them feel like he was conversing with them inside their homes. Using radio as a tool of communication, he was able to restore trust and gain support of the American people during a time of crisis (Douglas, 2004). Hitler also used it as a means of propaganda to communicate with his people.

In third world countries, radio was used to pass political information across to the citizens. In countries like Nigeria, radio was the most common method of communication as majority of Nigerians are below the poverty line and cannot afford television and computers. Also, majority of the people cannot read and write making radio the most common source of communication (Asemah, 2011). Civics was passed across on the radio and citizens were able to connect with their governments. Up until today, radio has found its way into politics through talk the radio and internet radios where citizens can voice their opinion.

Radio as compared to other forms of political communication has had the most impact. Other forms of media might have dominated certain eras but radio cut across these borders. It did not require one to read and write like newspapers and journals. Radio reached out to the rural area that television could not due to its high costs of production. Politicians had to perfect the art of public speaking as their looks did not matter. Radio reaches a wider range of people than social media. Radio maintained its political relevance by reaching out to the majority of the people.

Political Radio Talk shows as a Tool for Democratic Discourse

Political talk shows are media platforms where members of the public participate in political debates and discussions aimed at enhancing democracy. Democratic participation in recent times has seen an upward trend with the increasing influx of political talk shows on radio, television, and online broadcasting services. They are used to mobilize public opinion against policies and foster democratic values. However, the increasing influence of political talk shows in shaping citizens' political views also poses the danger of promoting political polarization, misinformation, sensationalism, and ideological politics. Against this backdrop, political talk shows can play a dual role in democratization as effective tools for democratic engagement and political malpractice.

Over the past few years, Nigeria has seen an increase in the rate of political radio talk shows hosted on federal radio corporations, state-owned media houses, and privately-owned radio stations. Some of these programs include the Political Platform aired on Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Morning Crossfire on Nigeria Info FM station, political interviews/conversation on Wazobia FM, and public affairs programmes on RayPower FM station, among others. These radio programmes offer enlightening debates on democracy, governance, politics, electioneering campaigns, insecurity, corruption, and national development. Listeners have the opportunity to listen to politicians, civil society actors, electoral stakeholders, activists and everyday citizens as they engage in topical discussions about Nigeria while sculpting public opinion. This process is further enhanced by phone-in sessions on air programs, where listeners are afforded the opportunity to contribute to political discourses (Emmanuel Zelinjo, 2024).

Political talk shows significantly influence democratic discourse because they help educate the populace about democracy, set the political agenda and galvanize public opinion on topical issues. Habermas (2022) opines that democratic engagement thrives where citizens can participate in rational-critical debates on matters relating to

public life. Habermas' theory of the public sphere seems to be applicable to political talk shows. By design, political talk shows take political discourse to the people and make politics accessible to everyone. Political talk shows interview politicians, seek clarifications on issues affecting the country while offering listeners a chance to call in and ask questions or give their opinions. Democratic talk shows also breakdown difficult political concepts and encourages listeners to become civically responsible. For developing countries where citizen interactions with political elites are limited political talk shows offer one of the few channels where citizens can engage politicians and express public concerns.

Studies have also shown that political talk shows promote democratic disintegration by bolstering ideological polarization along party lines. Benkler, Faris and Roberts (2018) argues that modern media ecology amplifies falsities and politically divisive opinion as opposed to narratives that bolster democratic consensus. Furthermore, Stroud (2019) argues that partisan individuals tune into politically congruent media channels where debate is either skewed in favor of their political ideology or avoids confronting their political views altogether. Added to this notion is the sensationalist aspect of political talk shows. Political talk shows have become more performative than informative with more emphasis placed on who shouts the loudest instead of who has better policy plans to move the nation forward. Iyengar and Krupenkin (2021) argue that partisan media diets fuel rising affective polarization.

Aside from polarization, political talk shows also have the power to frame issues and set the political agenda thereby influencing how people understand political information. Guest selection, issue framing, and how hosts moderate callers contributes to how listeners process information shared on political talk shows. Echoing this point, Vreese, Esser and Hopmann (2017) argue that modern political journalism gravitates towards sensationalizing stories and framing issues as strategic battles instead of debating ideas. If this trend continues democratic conversations will be skewed towards entertainment instead of informed debate. Despite all these criticisms, political talk shows can positively influence democratic conversations when done right. Responsible journalism that promotes diversity of opinion, inquires about pressing national issues and calls out political office holders help promotes democracy by creating informed citizens.

Radio continues to play an important democratic role, although there are salient arguments that problematize how democracy is fostered through radio communication. While many authors focus on social media and digital communication as key drivers of democracy in the twenty-first century, these assumptions marginalize how radio still function as a communication tool for grassroots individuals. Habermas' (1989) proposes that medi[a] platforms serve as a public sphere which allows for citizen engagement and democratic deliberation. Dahlberg (2004) counters this argument by highlighting how modern media platforms have failed to cultivate democratic spaces that promote inclusion and equality. Given that radio station ownership in Nigeria is influenced by political patronage, the debate therefore becomes, to what extent do political radio talk shows promote democratic conversations or reinforce dominant political ideologies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media generally has always played a role in politics. They can influence and shape political opinions among other things. For instance radio political talk shows which analyses political activities going on around the country or provides a platform for politicians to be interviewed prior to a political event such as election gets the citizens thinking about who they want as their next leader and what they want from a leader. How do radio political talk shows affect democratic participation in Nigeria as 2027 election approaches? Social science theories about media can help answer this question. Both agenda-setting theory and media framing theory can be useful in critically analyzing the role radio political talk shows have on democratic participation in Nigeria 2027.

Agenda Setting Theory

McCombs Maxwell and Shaw Donald, developed agenda-setting theory in their 1972 research paper. The main premise of this theory is that Mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think but they are successful in telling us what to think about. This has lots of implications on how radio political talk shows affect democratic

participation in Nigeria as we prepare for the year 2027 election. Radio is the most consumed medium of information dissemination in Nigeria. It cuts across every stratum of Nigerian society; from Village communities to urban businessmen and women, radio is dominant. So when radio hosts and their guest consistently talk about problems of insecurity in the North East, Poor economy, credible election or lack thereof and unemployment especially among the youth. They in turn are telling their listeners (which is majority of the Nigerian population) that these are the problems plaguing Nigeria and that these should be the major topics you should be asking candidates vying for presidency in 2027. As a result there will be more participation democracy because the people have been made aware of what should be asking about as candidates battle it out. Although if these radio talk shows focus on the religious and ethnic impressions of each candidates, it will have the effect of reducing democratic participation. Politicians buy air time on radio stations like Channels Radio, Nigeria Info FM or even the state owned radio stations to reach listeners. Talks about good governance, corruption and what they will do to move Nigeria forward if elected in 2027 will encourage democratic participation because people who have not shown interest before will be moved to get out and vote.

Media Framing Theory

Erving Goffman originally coined the term “Frame Analysis”. The study of media framing is based on Goffman’s theory and was further expanded by Robert Entman. Framing in essence looks at how news and information is packaged. It is not just about what you say, but how you say it. It involves types of frames, story construction, and background information used to deliver news. How will radio political talk shows affect democratic participation in Nigeria during the 2027 general elections? If radio stations frame these politicians in terms of their religion or ethnicity and not what they can do to better the lives of Nigeria in terms of policy and previous records in positions held. It will reduce the ability of the public to fully participate in democracy. They will line up and vote according to where they come from not minding what the candidates have to offer. On the other hand, if these radio political talk shows are framed in terms of bringing the citizens’ attention to issues of good governance, holding these politicians to their campaign promises and giving them a platform to tell Nigerians what they can do if voted in as President in 2027. It will increase the ability of Nigerians to participate in democracy. They will come out and vote not because someone of their ethnic background is contesting but because the elected candidate has brought the better change.

Agenda Setting and Media Framing theories can be used to determine how radio political talk shows affect democratic participation in Nigeria come 2027. While agenda setting will tell us what the citizen will likely be focusing on come election day. Framing will determine how they are going to focus on that particular issue. However, if we want to see a better Nigeria and an increase in the ability of citizens to participate in democracy, radio talk show owners, producers and hosts should always have the citizens in mind when framing and setting agendas for their shows.

Radio Political Talk Shows and Democratic Participation in Nigeria’s 2027 General Elections

Radio political talk shows continue to be among Nigeria’s most potent instruments of democratic participation. In a country where infrastructural deficits, income inequalities, and illiteracy disproportionately affect access to print and online media, radio broadcasting remains the most popular channel of political communication because it is relatively inexpensive, portable, can be formatted in local languages, and reaches remote rural communities. Despite increased political communication through social media platforms in recent years, radio maintains grassroots-level political relevance across Nigeria. Experts posit that radio’s resilience in Nigeria and other emerging democracies is because of persistent inequalities in digital connectivity and access to information technology resources (Ukpabi, Musa, & Okwuachi, 2025). Ahead of Nigeria’s next presidential election in 2027, radio political talk shows present an underutilized democratic tool with the power to shape voter education, political awareness, civic engagement, voter turnout, and public accountability.

Conceptually, political talk shows shape the epistemology of democracy by affecting how citizens perceive governance, politics, civic duty, electoral integrity, and democratic development. Because radio stations set political agendas and frame the manner information is presented to the public, political programmes influence what topics gain public attention and how citizens appraise political leaders. Adegbola and Zhang (2023) posit that media organisations in emerging democracies affect citizens’ political affect and behaviour by priming the

public towards certain topics of governance. On Nigerian radio, programming frames key political issues around corruption, insecurity, poor governance, unemployment, electoral reform, and leadership accountability ahead of general elections.

Political Enlightenment

Democratic theory postulates that citizens' political participation is weakened when voters lack adequate political knowledge, become victims of misinformation or cannot make informed decisions at the polls because of electoral ignorance. Radio talk shows enhance political enlightenment by demystifying complex electoral processes and broadcasting political information to millions of listeners. The Independent National Electoral Commission partners with radio stations to run voter sensitisation programmes on topics such as voter registration, PVC collection, polling centre locations, new electoral reforms, voting procedures, and election-day protocols.

Radio stations penetrate Nigeria's most politically-excluded rural and semi-urban communities where many voters cannot afford data or are disadvantaged by online media. Political radio programmes such as Nigeria Info FM, Wazobia FM, and programmes across the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria invite political analysts, civil society organisations, and INEC officials to explain the voting process and educate listeners about their democratic rights and responsibilities. According to Sabo and Kente (2024), radio programmes conducted in indigenous Nigerian languages promote political enlightenment because they allow listeners who cannot understand English to participate in the electoral conversation.

Radio might play a crucial role in promoting voter education ahead of Nigeria's 2027 elections because of increasing concerns about voter apathy, misinformation, and low confidence in Nigeria's electoral system after the 2023 general elections. Radio repetition of voting processes and encouragement of democratic ideals promotes well-informed voters that are more likely to make electoral decisions based on logic instead of emotional manipulation.

Political Awareness

Radio political talk shows also help to create political awareness among citizens. Political awareness captures citizens' knowledge of political happenings, government structures and operations, public policies, and national issues affecting citizens' democratic choices. Political programmes do not just inform citizens but rather construct political realities through which listeners make sense of governance and appraise political office holders. Programmes like Politics Nationwide aired on Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and Morning Crossfire on Nigeria Info FM regularly educate listeners about economic recession, insecurity, constitutional amendment, corruption, fuel subsidy removal, and electoral credibility. By repetitively framing these issues, radio political talk shows shape listeners' perception about politically relevant issues. The Agenda Setting Theory posits that citizens learn about priority issues from media institutions. Giving prominence to economic recession over other policy issues may lead citizens to regard economic performance as priority political agenda.

Analysing from a political science perspective, the relevance of political awareness to democracy lies in its ability to drive citizens' democratic behaviour. A politically aware person is more likely to participate in democratic processes by questioning government's performance and holding political leaders accountable. Emmanuel Zelinjo (2024) notes that political programmes discussing democratic governance influence people's political consciousness significantly because these programmes allow host degrees, callers, and guests to castigate governments' failures and brazen exposure on live radio. Radio political talk shows advance democracy by bolstering citizens' knowledge about politics and enabling voters to critically appraise political contestants ahead of elections.

Civic Engagement

Radio political talk shows also drive civic engagement among Nigerians beyond participating in voting exercises. Civic engagement in a democracy goes beyond participating in electoral exercises to involve oneself in public debates, discussing national issues at the local level, advocating for desirable policy change, and

speaking truth to power. Radio political shows afford listeners the opportunity to engage with governance issues by enabling listeners to phone in, request for airtime, or comment on live radio programmes.

Examining analytically, radio political talk shows serve as democratic platforms where listeners confer meanings to political issues and articulate collective perspectives about Nigeria's democratic challenges. Habermas' Public Sphere Theory can be deployed to understand how civic engagement through radio political talk shows enhances citizens' participation in democratic politics. Habermas argues that democratic engagement is heightened when citizens are provided channels to voice diverse opinions about governance and politics. Radio presents a viable platform for many Nigerians to call out their elected representatives and publicly air their displeasure about government policies.

Such civic engagement assumes significance within Nigeria's pluralistic society. Political programmes dispatched in regional languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin English contribute to levelling the playing field by reaching marginalised groups and allowing everyone to participate in democracy. Majority of Nigeria's rural dwellers – farmers, market women, commercial motorcyclists, artisans, and mini-bus drivers – participate in political conversations through radio political programmes. These demographics are often excluded from online political conversations due to poor digital literacy. According to Suleiman and Peter (2025), the resilience of old media in Nigeria speaks volumes about its significance in enhancing civic engagement in socially stratified communities.

Electoral Participation

Radio political talk shows can affect electoral participation. Political participation entails citizens' act of voting and being actively involved in electoral politics. Citizens' decision to vote or not is influenced by how confident they feel about the electoral process, their understanding of democratic rights, and believe they can influence political decisions. Media exposure can therefore affect citizens' decision to participate in elections or remain spectators.

Chukwu and Chiadika (2025) discovered that political communication influences citizens' political behaviour in Nigeria's electoral context. Citizens that tune into political discussions about elections are likely to participate during voting exercises. Radio programmes that broadcast topics about election violence, vote buying, electoral reforms, voting procedures, and voters' rights can influence listeners' willingness to vote. During Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, radio stations broadcast messages about the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), fuel scarcity, naira redesign policy, and security on election day. These issues dominated political conversations and shaped listeners' electoral behaviour.

Radio political talk shows may also moderate voters' apathy ahead of Nigeria's 2027 elections. Politically inclined radio programmes that connect with youths, women, and new voters could be pivotal in entrenching democratic participation. Radio conversations that are able to adequately address listeners' dissatisfaction about insecurity, unemployment, and poor governance can stimulate political interest and inspire voters to head to the polls. Politically oriented phone-in programmes also allow voters to ask questions that will enable them to make informed political decisions. Candidate debates held on radio also allow voters to compare contestants' political manifestos, learning capacities, and leadership prowess.

Public Accountability

Perhaps the most analytically significant democratic function of radio political talk shows is their contribution to public accountability. Democratic accountability requires political leaders to justify their decisions, respond to public criticism, and remain answerable to citizens. Radio political programmes perform this watchdog role by creating platforms where government policies, political actions, and public institutions are openly scrutinized.

When political office holders appear on radio programmes, they are exposed to public questioning and criticism from journalists, analysts, and citizens. This weakens elite monopolization of political communication and strengthens democratic responsiveness. Adegbola and Zhang (2023) argue that media institutions influence democratic accountability by shaping citizens' perceptions of government legitimacy and leadership

performance. In Nigeria, political talk shows consistently interrogate issues such as corruption, insecurity, poor infrastructure, economic hardship, and electoral transparency, thereby pressuring political actors to justify governance decisions.

However, the accountability role of radio political talk shows is complicated by media commercialization, political ownership influence, and propaganda. Obukoadata, Okon, and Obogo (2024) argue that political elites increasingly manipulate media platforms during elections through sponsored political narratives designed to shape voter perception and discredit opponents. Consequently, radio political programmes may simultaneously function as democratic accountability mechanisms and instruments of political manipulation.

Despite these contradictions, radio political talk shows remain indispensable democratic institutions within Nigeria's electoral environment. Their ability to promote voter education, increase political awareness, encourage civic engagement, stimulate electoral participation, and strengthen public accountability demonstrates their continuing relevance within the country's democratic process. As Nigeria approaches the 2027 presidential election, the effectiveness of democratic participation may depend significantly on how responsibly radio political programmes facilitate political debates, manage electoral discourse, and promote issue-based political engagement.

Therefore, stakeholders including media regulators, electoral institutions, civil society organizations, and broadcasting corporations must strengthen the professionalism, inclusiveness, independence, and ethical standards of radio political programming to ensure that radio contributes positively to democratic consolidation rather than political polarization or misinformation.

CONCLUSION

Political talk shows continue to hold important roles in Nigeria's democratic conversations and electoral participation. This study shows that radio has not lost its democratic potency even in the age of digital and social media participation. This is because radio remains democratic (affordable, accessible, and indigenous-language programming) with larger reach than other media channels. As Nigeria gradually approaches its next presidential election in 2027, radio-based political programmes will continue to serve impactful democratic functions which will influence how citizens receive information about the election, participate politically, vote, and hold elected officials accountable.

Firstly, the study finds that radio talk shows serve democratic functions as they inform, engage, and shape political consciousness through agenda-setting and framing functions. Radio talk shows can determine what citizens think about come election by selecting which political problems to cover repeatedly. By covering stories about insecurity, corruption, poor governance, lack of transparency at election, unemployment, and suffering frequently, radio continuously alerts listeners about these concerns as they think about their voting choices. Hence, radio does not simply transmit democratic conversations but frames how citizens interpret political information.

Secondly, radio talk shows promote democratic participation by creating democratic public spheres for citizens to connect with political elites and democratically engage political issues. Radio programmes allow listeners to ask questions about government policies, criticize political leaders, fact-check political rhetoric, and discuss the qualities needed in a political candidate. Political talk shows also allow listeners to participate in phone-in programmes, interviews, or debates about electoral concerns affecting them. This aspect of democratic involvement matters in the Nigerian context where much of the population cannot access online platforms to participate politically. Many Nigerians that lack the opportunity to vote due to social and digital inequalities live in rural communities.

Thirdly, radio broadcasts help in voter mobilization before elections. Political talk shows help sensitise voters about their civic rights and responsibilities. Media organisations use radio to educate citizens about voting processes and registration, and important information about the elections. Radio programmes are also delivered in indigenous languages which helps in reaching marginal groups and communities. This will allow more citizens

to understand political conversations happening about the election. Many rural dwellers understand local languages better than the official languages of English and हिन्दी. Therefore, radio acts as a tool connecting political leaders to the grassroots.

Despite these democratic roles, radio political talk shows are plagued with challenges that can undermine democratic conversations. The study identifies problems such as political propaganda, misinformation, sensationalism, commercialisation of news, media ownership, and partisanship as threats to objective and professional broadcasting. Media partisanship can promote unhealthy democratic conversations by polarising voters along political lines, promoting hate speeches, and inciting the public against government institutions. This may cause a loss in public confidence during elections. Panic and misinformation have been spreading like wildfire just ahead of election.

In conclusion, radio political talk shows play democratic roles in fostering democratic participation and will continue to do so before the 2027 election. However, their ability to affect how Nigerians will vote in the upcoming election is dependent on how broadcast journalists handle political information. The news media, political broadcast organisations, and Nigeria Elections Broadcasting Organization should ensure that political conversations on air are ethical, balanced, and professional. Stakeholders should encourage responsible broadcasting that promotes issue-based voting instead of promoting divisiveness.

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