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Analysis of the Public Perception of the Nigerian Broadcast Coverage of Women in Politics

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Abstract

This study, which examines the broadcast coverage of Women in Politics with Radio Benue in Makurdi, as a case study. The survey research method was employed, utilizing questionnaire and oral interviews as instruments for data collection. The study sample consisted of 150 respondents. The chi-square and t-test analytical tools were used. Findings showed that there is poor coverage given to women in politics and that they have a negative perception in that light. It is recommended among others that broadcast media should give women in politics more airtime during news broadcasts and feature them in more programmes, increase funding for such programmes, and women politicians themselves should make themselves easily and readily available for coverage.

Keywords: Public Perception, Broadcast, Coverage, Women,

Introduction

The broadcast media is the veritable tools for managing information and communication in any political process. In contemporary democratic societies, the media serve as a powerful tool for political mobilisation, civic engagement and public enlightenment (McQuail, 2021).

The Nigerian broadcasting code serves as a guidepost for Independent Television and Radio under the supervision of the National Broadcasting Commission(NBC)(Aroh, 2020). The role of the media in politics cannot be emphasized. Political participation is fundamental to democratic governance, and broadcast media, comprising television and radio have historically played an essential role in informing, educating and mobilising citizens (Norris, 2019). It is for this reason that when campaign teams draw up their media plan, a consideration is given to progressive coverage of their activities."



Agbaje (2021) contends that the media have a responsibility to promote inclusive political participation by giving women adequate representation and visibility. Their responsibility to the public is not negotiable. During political campaigns and elections, the media play a crucial role by mobilising the masses to participate and closely monitoring the political activities, and keeping the masses informed. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), women constituted only 9% of the total candidates in the 2023 elections, despite forming nearly 50% of the population.

By this act, the people are motivated to participate actively in both electoral and apolitical processes and also form judgment on what is going on. They also create a forum for public debate, help in public formation, and some other functions like status conferral and agenda setting. Voters deserve to know if a party is making different promises to different people. They need to know about party leaders, party policy, and records.

According to Ire (2025), “one of the critical challenges facing women's political participation in Nigeria is the prevalence of gendered disinformation”. During the 2023 elections, several female candidates faced online and broadcast media attacks aimed at discrediting their candidacy (Afolayan, 2023).

Ire, (2025) stated that the representation of women in broadcast media during the 2023 election was quite minimal compared to that of male politicians. Most political programs and news segments focused on male candidates, leaving little room for female aspirants to showcase their plans and manifestos. When women were featured, the coverage often lacked depth, with broadcasters emphasising personal traits rather than political competence. There were also instances where the media subtly reinforced gender stereotypes, portraying female candidates as either too emotional for leadership or as mere supporters of male politicians rather than contenders in their own right. According to Ross (2017), Media representation shapes public perceptions, influencing how female politicians are viewed by the electorate and how women perceive their own potential for political leadership. In another study, Afolayan, (2023) suggests that in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, women in politics receive less media coverage than their male counterparts, and when they do, the focus is often on their gender rather than their political capabilities. This reinforces gender stereotypes, proving it difficult for women to be taken seriously as political leaders.

For instance, according to legislation in 2005 in Mali, ‘10% of public funding is proportionately shared among political parties which have women elected as deputies or municipal councillors 5% of the amount is for female members of the National Assembly and the other 5% for female municipal counsellors’ (Government of Mali, Loi N° 05-047/ du 18 Août 2005 Portant Charte Des Partis Politiques) (International IDEA, 2021).

The study therefore, assess the extent to which the broadcast media provides political information, education, and mobilization for women in politics, thereby shaping their chances in the electoral process. The study will also investigate how broadcast media portrayed women in politics and whether such representations encouraged or discouraged women's active involvement in politics. Finally the study will find out the benefits of covering women in politics

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Agenda-Setting theory. Agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Dr. Max McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 presidential election. In the 1968 "Chapel Hill Study," McCombs and Shaw demonstrated a strong correlation between what 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, thought was the most important election issue and what the local and national news media reported was the most important issue (McCombs & Shaw



1972). Key assumptions include the idea that media have a significant impact on public priorities, that individuals rely on media for political information, and that repeated exposure to specific political narratives influences audience opinions and actions (Shaw, 2012).

This theory elaborates the connection in term of relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put as an issue and the media audiences or the public's reaction or attributes to such issue (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determines public opinion. Since the 1968 study, published in a 1972 edition of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, more than 400 studies have been published on the agenda-setting function of the mass media, and the theory continues to be regarded as relevant.

Shaw (2012) adds that one of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass communication is the time frame for this phenomenon. In addition, different media have different agenda-setting potential. Agenda setting occurs through a cognitive process known as accessibility. Accessibility implies that the more frequently and prominently the news media cover an issue, the more instances of that issue become accessible in the audience's memories. When respondents are asked what the most important problem facing the country is, they answer with the most accessible news issue in memory, which is typically the issue that the news media focuses on the most. The agenda-setting effect is not the result of receiving one or a few messages but is due to the aggregate impact of a very large number of messages, each of which has a different content but all of which deal with the same general issue.

Agenda-setting theory implies that the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. It is assumed that the media sets the agenda for our general discussion. Literature on agenda setting research indicates that researchers either choose issues in collectivity or focus on single issues. The significance of this is that researchers can choose to attempt to either generalize the effects of agenda setting to different environments (e.g. Hester & Gibson 2003; Yang & Stone 2003; Althaus & Tewksbury 2002), or understand the processes of agenda setting through probing particular issues and communities (e.g. Kim et al. 2003; Callaghan & Schnell 2001; Cassara 1998).

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position... the mass media may well determine the important issue, that is, the media may set the 'agenda' of the issue.

This theory shows that political campaigns are aimed at placing a candidate seeking election in the mind of the electorate as the solution to their problem. Thus, the role of the agenda-setting theory of the mass media deeply explains the crux of this study. Radio Benue sets the agenda for the public on topical issues and the coverage it gives to these women participating in politics.

The relevance of the Agenda-Setting Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the extent to which the broadcast media gave coverage to women in politics by highlighting or marginalizing gender-specific political issues. Given the historically low participation of women in Nigerian politics, the degree to which radio Benue covered female political candidates during the 2023 elections is critical.



Method

The survey research method was adopted for this study. The survey design was used for the study because of its outstanding qualities, particularly in social science research. Commenting on this design, Muhammad (2024) states that “Survey research is a popular method of collecting data that involves asking questions to gather information about people’s opinions, behaviors, experiences, or demographics.” Listener (public) and radio workers constitute the target population for this study. The study covered the entire Benue State, which forms the immediate radio listenership. The population of Benue State, according to 2022 City Population projection is 6,141,300 P, with 23 local government areas and three Senatorial districts. However, due to the large population, listener of Radio Benue were drawn from three Local Government Areas for convenience. It was believed that what applies in these local governments from the springboard for projectors to other local government areas in Benue State. Katsina-Ala represents Zone A senatorial zone of the State, Makurdi represents Zone B, and Otukpo represents Zone C. Thus, ensuring the coverage of the three senatorial zones of the state.

The sample size for this study was 400. This sample size was determined using a published sample size determination statistical table by Glenn Israel. According to Glenn (2013), when the population size of the study is greater than 100,000, the sample size under the confidence level of 95% and precision level of +5% will be 400.

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select one local government area from each of the three senatorial districts in Benue State. Thus, Makurdi, Katsina-Ala, and Otukpo Local Government Areas were selected from zones A, B, and C, respectively. This was done to include all the senatorial districts in Benue State to make the study balanced and authentic. Each of the three local government areas was stratified into various components, thus:

Katsina-Ala has: Katsina-Ala township, Gaambe-ya, Ikyurav-Tiev and Tongov; Makurdi Local Government Area has North Bank, Wadata, High-Level, Wurukum, and Ankpa Quarters, and Otukpo Local Government has Otukpo district, Ugboju, Ado, and Akpa districts.

Figure 1: Selected Local Government Council

S/NO	Zone	Local Government Area
1	A	Kastina-Ala
2	B	Makurdi
3	C	Otukpo

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The second stage was the selection of the council wards from each of the chosen local governments. Here, a simple random sampling technique will be employed because. Having found that the distribution of the questionnaire is so complex, the researcher had to resort to sampling in stages. Having this in mind, therefore, four (4) council wards were selected in Otukpo, three (3) council wards in Kastina-Ala, and nine (9) council wards were selected in Makurdi local government area. The disparity in the selection of these council wards was based on the reception of the radio stations. Thus, more council wards were chosen in Makurdi and Otukpo. This, however, does not invalidate the result. In each of the local governments selected, names of council wards were written and dropped into three baskets, and after shuffling to ensure confidentiality, a research assistant was asked to pick one piece of paper from each of



the three 3 baskets. This was repeatedly conducted until the council wards were selected from each of the three local governments.

The selected council wards are tabulated below.

Figure 2: Selected Council Wards

ZONES	SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT	COUNCIL WARDS
R		
Zone A Kastina-Ala	Township, Ikurav 2, Utange	
Zone B Makurdi	Modern Market, Wailomayo, Agan, North Bank I, Fiidi, Wadata, North Bank II, High Level, Achusa	
Zone C Otukpo	Ewulo, Township I, Township II, Ugboju	

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The third stage is the selection of the streets or main roads in each council ward. Purposive sampling was used for selecting the streets or roads, because the study aimed at selecting streets or roads that form a catchment area and have a higher number of educated inhabitants in each selected council. A street was preferred, but in council wards where streets are not clearly demarcated, a major road was considered in place of a street. Three (3) streets/main roads were selected in each council ward in Kastina-Ala, Otukpo, and Makurdi. This means nine (9) main roads were selected in Katsina-ala, twelve (12) streets were selected in Otukpo, while twenty-seven (27) streets were selected in Makurdi, bringing the total number of selected streets/main roads to forty-eight (48). More streets/roads were selected in Otukpo and Makurdi because of the good reception of Radio Benue in these areas.

The fourth stage was the selection of households. Here simple random sampling technique was used to select compounds from each of the selected streets/main roads. A total of four (4) houses were selected on each street/main road; the first house and the last houses on each side of the streets/main roads were selected, bringing the total number of houses selected to one hundred and ninety-two (192) households. Two respondents were purposively selected in each house, bringing the total number of respondents to three hundred and eighty-four (384); the remaining households refused to participate, so were left out; this selection was based on their level of literacy and access to Radio Benue. It was not easy to identify each respondent by name because of the large number of households selected. More households were selected in the township because there was able to get educated respondents who had access to Radio Benue. The number of households selected was based on the relative size of each local government. Every member of all the households selected could not be studied; therefore, only males and females of ages 20-25, 26-30, 31- 40, 41 and above were selected. The study carefully selected those who were educated and could speak with the researchers.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument for gathering data was pre-tested using a pilot study which was conducted in an attempt to avoid time and money being wasted. On getting the results, modifications in the instrument were made to fill the gaps and lapses that were observed in the initial instrument. Face validity was conducted and used to measure the validity of the research instrument that was adopted to gather data. The validity test helped to identify potential needs for modifications of some of the questions where necessary. Since the study is an empirical one, the data for this study was obtained from information gathered mainly from questionnaire which was self-administered face to face to the respondents and the data obtained from the



field survey was analyzed qualitatively using descriptive statistics. Data collected were collated and analysed using statistics of simple percentages and tables of summary to ease comprehension and appreciate observed variables of the research outcome. Three weeks were used for administering the instrument and retrieving them.

Findings

Table 1: Respondents' Response on Frequency of Listenership

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
How often do you listen to radio	(a) Once in a week	30	7.8
	(b) Twice in a week	60	15.6
	(c) Daily	130	33.9
	(d) Occasionally	150	39.1
	(e) None of the above	10	2.6
	(f) Missing system	4	1.0
Total		384	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Analysis of data in table 1 shows that 39.1 % of the respondents listen to radio occasionally. By implication of this finding, a greater number of the respondents studied indicated that they listen to radio occasionally.

Table 2: Programme on Women in Politics

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Does Radio Benue Broadcast Programmes on Women in Politics?	(a) Yes	200	52.1
	(b) No	60	15.6
	(c) Not sure	100	26.0
	(d) Missing system	24	6.3
Total		384	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In table 2 the analysis indicates that 52.1% of respondents agree that Radio Benue has broadcasts programmes on women in politics. Based on the finding it implies that radio Benue indeed has broadcast programmes on Women in politics and the respondents are aware with a greater number of the respondents agreeing to that.

Table 3: Frequency of Radio Benue Broadcast of Programme

Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
How frequently does Radio Benue Broadcast programmes on women in politics?	(a) Very frequently	90	23.4
	(b) frequently	210	54.7
	(c) Not frequently	60	15.6
	(d) Missing system	24	6.3



Total	384	100.0
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Source: Field Survey, 2025

In table 3 the analysis indicates that the majority of respondents 54.7% believe that Radio Benue broadcasts programmes on women in politics *frequently*. From the finding therefore, it implies that majority of the respondents listen to radio Benue broadcast programme Women in politics frequently and are aware of its existence.

Table 4: Title of Programme on women in politics

Question	Response	Percentage	Frequency
	Women today	110	28.6
	Women in politics in Nigeria	50	13.0
	Women in focus	20	5.2
	Jigida	25	6.5
	Benue scope	15	3.9
	Personality programme	10	2.6
	Women forum	14	3.6
	Women empowerment	10	2.6
	No idea	140	36.5
	Total	384	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The analysis in table 4 shows that a greater number of the respondents sampled 36.5% said they have no idea about the title of programmes on women in politics. By the implication of this finding, it means that some respondents listen to programmes on women in politics but, do not know the title of such programmes.

Table 5: Benefits of covering women in politics

Question 3	Response	Frequency	Percentage
What are the benefits of giving adequate coverage to women in politics?	(a) Awareness of women's potential and relevance in politics	180	46.9
	(b) Knowledge of discrimination against women in politics	100	26.0
		50	13.0
	(c) The need to vote for female candidates in elections	20	5.2
	(d) Realization of women's ability to campaign	24	6.3
		10	2.6
	(e) Others		
	(f) Missing systems		
	(g) Others, please specify		
	Total	384	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025



In table 5, the analysis shows that majority of the respondents 46.9% said there is an awareness of women's potential and relevance in politics. By implication this finding implies that a greater number of the respondents are aware of women's potential and relevance in politics and the need to vote female candidates in elections.

Discussion

Findings show that majority of the respondents listen to radio. This is in agreement with Norris (2019) who said that, political participation is fundamental to democratic governance, and broadcast media, comprising television and radio have historically played an essential role in informing, educating and mobilising citizens. The study also found that, radio Benue indeed has broadcast programmes on Women in politics and the respondents are aware. This aligns with Agbaje (2021) submission that, the media have a responsibility to promote inclusive political participation by giving women adequate representation and visibility.

It was revealed that majority of the respondents listen to radio Benue broadcast programme Women in politics frequently and are aware of its existence. Although there are other programmes about issues concerning women in general, though not specifically targeted at women in politics, but have often covered and featured women in politics and their contribution to societal development. This is not in agreement with what Ire, (2025) stated that the representation of women in broadcast media during the 2023 election was quite minimal compared to that of male politicians. Most political programs and news segments focused on male candidates, leaving little room for female aspirants to showcase their plans and manifestos.

It was also found that some respondents listen to programmes on women in politics but, do not know the title of such programmes. Though other titles like Women in politics in Nigeria, Women in focus, Benue scope, Personality programme, Women Forum, and women empowerment mentioned by the respondents were right, as the station do air such programmes. According to UN Women (2022), 'women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030'.

Finally the study found that majority of the respondents are aware of women's potential and relevance in politics and the need to vote female candidates in elections. Also, the majority of the respondents do know the day of the week or the time of day the programme on women in politics is broadcast by the station. When the broadcast media gives adequate coverage to a topic, event, or personality, the public is fully aware of it. This aligns with the journalism University (2026) where it was stated that, whether it's a radio or television debate, a newspaper editorial, a trending hashtag, or a 24-hour news cycle, the media plays a central role in shaping what we think about, how we think about it, and even whether we speak up at all.

Public perceptions and opinions towards issues and towards individuals who expose those ideas are shaped mainly by the broadcast media. For instance, the way an event is reported on the radio or on television can significantly influence the kind of image the audience will have about the event. Similarly, the way a political actor is portrayed on television can influence public perception about the political figure.

The results of data analysed from questions indicate that the public perception of broadcast coverage of women in politics, in reference to the case study Radio Benue Makurdi, is positive. According to the international IDEA website (2021), the mass media tend to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women.



It further said, “Admittedly, the mass media also tells stories about women politicians and about businesswomen and their successes, but this kind of coverage is rare and infrequent. More typical is the presentation of topics such as fashion competitions, movie stars, art, and the secrets of eternal youth. Not surprisingly, such views hardly promote women’s sense of self-worth and self-respect, of encourage them to take on positions of public responsibility”.

The answers to this third research question. Findings revealed that there are benefits of covering women in politics, as the majority of the respondents, said that the benefits of giving adequate coverage to women in politics are awareness of women’s potential and relevance in politics. They also that broadcast media will improve politicking by encouraging electorates to vote women into political offices.

Enumerating other benefits Radio Benue will derive from women in politics, the respondents said the station will enjoy increased patronage and more audience (listeners), generate more interest for the station in women in politics, and more of them will patronize them during campaigns and elections for promoting gender sensitivity and being gender friendly. They also said the station will have increased and better ratings on standard and popularity, and the station will have more advertisements from the increased popularity, thus generating revenue. With these findings, research question three on the benefits of covering women in politics is answered.

It is because of this that concern has been expressed in numerous resolutions and in the plan of action to corrects present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life which points out that the media can help to instill among the public the idea that women’s participation in political life is an essential part of democracy (and) can also take care to avoid giving negative or minimizing images of women and their determination and capacity to participate in politics, stressing the importance of women’s role in economic and social life and in the development process in general. The plan states that any stereotyped presentation of the image of women by any media should be prohibited by law. It encourages the media to publicize the contributions that women have made to the development process of human civilization and history.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Radio has the power to instruct, educate and provide wide-ranging information to listeners, allowing them to assess content and form opinions. Radio broadcasts can provide the audience with additional information, perspectives and succinct summaries of key points, therefore overcoming problems of information being lost through distractions during broadcasts.

This study has shown from the data analysis and summary of findings that women in politics are covered, but not much by the broadcast media, either in their news reports or other programmes. It has been shown that the members of the public are not well informed about the women politicians, their activities, and contributions in decision-making and governance, in particular, and the development of our nation in general.

In a nutshell, this research has not only proved that there is a need for broadcast media collaboration and partnership to strengthen women's participation in politics in Nigeria, but that the members of the public need to see effective coverage given to them, for as it is, in fact, an engine room that can propel their passage.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The broadcast media should begin to recognize women politicians, their voices, their contributions in decision-making, their highlighting of women’s issues, and the work they are



doing in their capacities as representatives of communities by giving them adequate coverage through reporting them more often during news and featuring them during their programmes.

2. The broadcast should give the women more time during the news cast and feature them in more programmes
3. The broadcast media should make more efforts to locate women politicians wherever they are, regardless of their number, and make them on par with the male politicians they feature during personality and talk shows.

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