



## Community Radio, Electoral Engagement, and Political Socialisation

*A Comparative Analysis of Freetown's Local Elections (2000–2024)*

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### ABSTRACT

Community radio is posited as a critical medium for political engagement in post-conflict democracies, yet its specific impact on local electoral processes in urban African contexts remains under-researched. This study comparatively analyses the influence of community radio stations on voter turnout and political knowledge during successive local elections in Freetown. It aims to determine the mechanisms through which radio programming shapes political socialisation and electoral participation. A mixed-methods comparative design was employed, integrating quantitative analysis of electoral data with qualitative content analysis of radio broadcasts and semi-structured interviews with station managers, listeners, and local election officials. A strong positive correlation was found between sustained listenership to civic education programming and higher levels of self-reported political knowledge. However, its impact on actual voter turnout was more nuanced, showing a significant effect only in constituencies where radio discussions directly addressed hyper-local issues, with a measured increase of approximately 8-12 percentage points compared to similar areas without such focused coverage. Community radio serves as a potent agent for political socialisation and knowledge dissemination, but its capacity to mobilise voters is contingent upon the localised relevance of its content rather than mere availability. Policymakers and station operators should develop co-produced programming frameworks that explicitly link national political discourse to immediate local governance concerns. Donor support should prioritise content generation over infrastructure alone. community radio, electoral engagement, political socialisation, voter turnout, local governance, Sierra Leone This paper provides the first longitudinal, comparative evidence on the conditional impact of community radio on local electoral behaviour in an urban West African setting, introducing a refined mechanism linking content localisation to

mobilisation efficacy.

**Keywords:** *Community radio, Electoral engagement, Post-conflict democracy, Urban Africa, Political socialisation, Freetown, Voter turnout*

**Article Highlights**

- Civic education radio programming strongly correlates with increased political knowledge among listeners.
- Voter turnout increased 8–12 percentage points only where broadcasts addressed hyper-local issues.
- Impact on turnout was conditional, not guaranteed by station availability or general political coverage.
- Findings advocate for co-produced programming that links national discourse to local governance.

**Policy Imperative**

Donor strategies should shift from funding infrastructure alone to supporting localized content generation and co-production frameworks with communities.

*This analysis offers comparative, longitudinal evidence from a pivotal urban West African context.*

## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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