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Can vernacular radio be conflict sensitive? An analysis of vernacular radio programming in Western Kenya

The media influences how political conflicts are perceived and understood, shaping narratives about the actors and the drivers of conflict (Ahere, 2019). The Government of Kenya has persistently argued that the community radio stations that broadcast in local languages were responsible for the post-election violence in 2008 (Howard, 2009). Indeed, Kenya's political context is heavily shaped by historical domestic tensions and contestation associated with each electoral cycle. With attendant post-election violence witnessed after every election cycle, including the 2017 elections, this article seeks to find out the influence of vernacular language radio programming on the audience's perception of electoral conflict and violence in Western Kenya. The Western Region in Kenya is perceived to be historically politically marginalized. The objectives of the study will be to: (i) identify the nexus between radio programming and the escalation or de-escalation of political violence in Western Kenya, (ii) determine to what extent vernacular radio outlets understand and implement the principles and practice of peace journalism, (iii) establish the influence of radio programming on audience's perception of electoral conflict and violence in Western Kenya. The study will be guided by the Agenda Setting Theory, whose main postulate is salience transfer. A descriptive survey design will be adopted. Mulembe FM Community radio will be selected purposively and an analysis of its programming content made. Further, a random sample of 400 listeners of Mulembe FM will be selected from Busia, Kakamega and Bungoma counties since they have common linguistic intelligibility. Questionnaires will be used to obtain quantitative data from the sampled respondents. A purposive sample of 10 radio producers, programmers and reporters will be selected for in-depth interviews. A research permit will be obtained from the National Council of Science and Technology in Kenya.

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