

## Faith-based radio and strategic peacebuilding: Programming for electoral calm in Kenya

Isaac Wamalwa Manje<sup>1</sup>  
 Egara Kabaji<sup>2</sup>  
 Lydia Anyonje<sup>3</sup>  
 Kizito Muchanga<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>isaacmanje@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>egarakabaji@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>lydinyonje@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup>kmuchanga@mmust.ac.ke

<sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1812-9467>

<sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9000-9549>

<sup>3</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1487-7191>

<sup>4</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5430-4558>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This study set out to examine the faith-based radio programs in Kenya that were specifically designed to promote strategic peacebuilding during general elections. Employing a descriptive case study design, the research used purposive sampling to select seven faith-based radio stations: MBCI Radio, Biblia Husema Broadcasting, Radio Waumini, Sayare FM, Upendo FM, Hope FM, and Family Radio 316. Key personnel including radio presenters, program managers, and producers were also purposively selected, resulting in a total sample of 49 respondents drawn from the seven stations. Primary data was collected using key informant interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and questionnaires. Findings revealed that all the sampled stations aired dedicated programs aimed at fostering peace, targeting audiences such as the youth, general public, voters, leaders, and parents. These programs employed a variety of formats, including religious sermons, gospel music, radio dramas, interactive talk shows, and community-based youth engagements. The content focused on promoting peace and highlighting the consequences of conflict. Overall, the programs were found to be effective in advancing strategic peacebuilding. Most stations had systems in place to assess their impact, using tools such as audience feedback mechanisms, peace indicator monitoring, impact evaluations, and broadcast surveys to measure the effectiveness of their programming during the election period.

**Key words:** Faith-Based Radio, General Elections, Strategic Peacebuilding, Radio Programs

### I. INTRODUCTION

Elections and campaign periods in many parts of the world are often marked by heightened tension, anxiety, and uncertainty. This is usually driven by the public's varied expectations around election outcomes. Such uneasy atmospheres are especially common in countries with authoritarian regimes or in societies deeply divided along religious, ethnic, socio-economic, or tribal lines (Adebayo, 2015).

Like many other nations, Kenya continues to face challenges in managing elections effectively, sometimes with serious consequences. Maintaining peace during general elections is crucial, particularly because elections take place regularly every five years as mandated by law. Peace is not only essential for good governance but also plays a vital role in ensuring the smooth running of national affairs, preserving national unity, and safeguarding the rights and interests of citizens (Young & Jones, 2022). Achieving and sustaining peace requires the involvement of multiple actors, including both the media and religious institutions.

According to Frederick (2022), identifying and understanding the radio programs developed by faith-based broadcasters for strategic peacebuilding during general elections is important. These programs, which aim to educate the public about electoral processes, promote peaceful coexistence, and provide platforms for dialogue and reconciliation, can significantly contribute to a peaceful electoral environment.

In Kenya, election seasons often carry the weight of past political tensions and memories of violence, making the promotion of peace not just desirable but urgent. While much has been written about the influence of mainstream media and the rapidly growing reach of digital platforms, the quieter yet consistent voice of faith-based radio remains largely in the background of academic discourse. These stations reach deep into rural and peri-urban communities, often

in the local languages people trust most, and speak from moral and cultural standpoints that resonate beyond the political noise (Mwangi, 2020).

Yet, despite their moral authority and wide listenership, little is known about how faith-based radio stations strategically plan, produce, and deliver peace-focused messages during election periods. There is limited documentation of the kinds of narratives they promote, the degree of interaction they foster with audiences, and the ways in which these messages translate into peaceful attitudes or actions (Manje, 2022). This gap is particularly significant because without such understanding, both scholars and practitioners risk overlooking a potentially powerful peacebuilding tool in contexts where every voice for unity counts.

This study positions itself at the intersection of media studies, religious communication, and peacebuilding, focusing specifically on faith-based radio programming during Kenyan general elections. By examining program content, delivery strategies, audience engagement, and perceived impact, the research explores how these broadcasters contribute to electoral peace. In doing so, it responds to a pressing national and scholarly need, offering insights that can guide media practitioners, religious leaders, electoral agencies, and policymakers in amplifying voices that can bridge divides, calm tensions, and nurture the fragile hope for lasting peace during moments when the nation's unity is most at risk.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Sustainable peace is a key foundation for good governance, effective administration, national development, and the protection of citizens' interests. In Kenya, managing elections remains a persistent challenge, often leading to serious consequences such as violence, displacement, economic setbacks, and widespread political frustration. A striking example is the 2007 general election, which led to the loss of over 1,300 lives and the displacement of more than half a million people (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2024). Ensuring lasting peace requires the active involvement of various stakeholders. Among these, the media and religious institutions play critical roles.

For more than three decades, Kenya has made deliberate efforts to promote peace during general elections. While there have been some notable achievements, the country still experiences repeated incidents of electoral violence, dating back to the early 1990s. This recurring problem continues despite the work of various peacebuilding actors, including government agencies, civil society, and faith-based organizations. Among the media, radio has proven to be a particularly powerful platform for shaping public opinion and driving social change (Ludovic, 2021).

Religion also holds a significant place in Kenyan society. It is widely regarded as a source of unity, love, peace, and social harmony (Chepkorir, 2019). However, some studies point to challenges in how religious actors contribute to peacebuilding during elections. In particular, the influence of politics on religious leadership has raised concerns. When religious leaders are closely aligned with political figures, their perceived neutrality is compromised. This can affect the credibility of the faith-based radio stations they are associated with, ultimately weakening their ability to promote peace.

Although religious leaders and organizations have engaged in peacebuilding through radio broadcasts, election-related violence continues to be a recurring issue in Kenya. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the role of faith-based radio in advancing strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

To explore the existing faith-based radio programs geared towards promoting strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's 2022 general elections.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

#### **2.1.1 Peace Journalism Theory**

This study was guided by the principles of peace journalism theory, which advocates for a style of reporting that seeks to uncover the root causes of conflict. The goal is to encourage both journalists and the wider society to consider and pursue non-violent solutions to conflict (Arregui et al., 2020).

### **2.2 Empirical Review**

Faith-based radio programming, as defined by the National Religious Broadcasters (2025), involves the intentional production and broadcast of radio content rooted in religious beliefs and values. Unlike general religious broadcasts that may broadly focus on spiritual teachings and outreach, faith-based programming takes a more deliberate approach by weaving together spirituality with real-world social concerns, moral guidance, and active community engagement. It spans multiple formats, including sermons, gospel music, prayer sessions, theological debates, radio dramas, and interactive talk shows. However, many academic discussions still portray faith-based media as either

apolitical or solely evangelistic. This study challenges such assumptions by investigating how faith-based radio stations in Kenya contributed to strategic peacebuilding during the 2022 general elections.

While some faith-based radio programs are commercially sponsored, others operate through listener donations, religious institution support, or community-led fundraising (Peacock, 2024). These stations do more than offer spiritual nourishment. They promote positive behavior change and social unity. Yet, there is limited exploration in existing literature about how different funding sources influence editorial decisions, particularly during politically sensitive times. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between funding models and content choices during election periods.

Technological advancements, especially mobile technology and internet streaming, have significantly broadened the audience reach and accessibility of faith-based radio. These tools have reduced the costs of producing and distributing content while also allowing for real-time interaction with listeners across regions (Frederick, 2022). Despite these changes, many studies treat technological growth as a neutral development, overlooking its potential as a strategic tool for peacebuilding. This research responds to that oversight by exploring how faith-based stations leveraged digital platforms to promote messages of unity, reconciliation, and civic engagement.

As Onyemaobi and Okpoko (2023) observe, many faith-based stations have embraced digital media, expanding their presence through mobile apps, live streaming, and social media. This transition has allowed them to diversify their content, adding programming that includes religious news, educational discussions, community dialogues, and peace-focused messaging. In doing so, faith-based radio continues to evolve beyond traditional religious broadcasting to become a powerful voice in shaping public discourse, upholding moral values, and addressing urgent societal challenges.

Faith-based radio has a long and rich history that dates back to the early days of radio itself. In the 1900s, as radio began to reach large and distant audiences, churches and religious groups quickly saw its potential for outreach. By the 1920s, religious music and sermons were being aired in the United States (Lee & Chow, 2022). One of the earliest examples was KDKA, a Pittsburgh station licensed in 1921, which broadcast Calvary Episcopal Church's Sunday evening vespers service. This historical foundation helps explain the ongoing relevance of faith-based broadcasting, especially in efforts related to peacebuilding.

McDonnell (2023) notes that although early religious broadcasts began with small audiences, their popularity grew rapidly. Encouraged by radio's reach and driven by an entrepreneurial spirit, many other religious groups launched their own ministries. Evangelists like Paul Rader, Aimee Semple McPherson, Charles Fuller, and Fulton Sheen were among the first to embrace radio for spreading the gospel during the 1920s.

According to Young and Jones (2022), religious content was initially limited to segments within mainstream radio. However, this changed in the 1960s with the rise of independent religious networks in the United States. Stations like the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) began offering dedicated religious programming around the clock. This growth accelerated globally with advances in FM radio, satellite broadcasting, and internet streaming. Following World War II, there was also a notable rise in religious radio programs focused on peace, often combining preaching, music, and prayer to reach wider audiences (Paul & Soukup, 2023).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

A descriptive case study research design was adopted. The goal was to observe, record, and present facts as they are. The researcher wanted to paint a detailed picture of the situation, rather than explain causes or test a theory.

#### 3.2 Target Population

Seven faith-based radio stations that broadcast in areas that are mostly affected by violence during elections, namely MBCI Radio, Biblia Husema Broadcasting, Radio Waumini, Sayare FM, Upendo FM, Hope FM and Family Radio 316 were targeted. Radio presenters and radio programs managers and producers from these stations informed this study.

#### 3.3 Sampling Technique and Size

Purposive sampling was used to select the seven faith-based radio stations that broadcast in areas that are mostly affected by violence during elections. Purposive sampling was also used to select radio presenters and radio programs managers and producers. A sample size of forty-nine (49) respondents from all the seven radio stations was selected comprising of program directors, radio presenters, and radio producer from each radio station.

#### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

Primary data was gathered using key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. Secondary data was obtained through library-based research and document review.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

The primary data, initially recorded in note form, was organized and analyzed based on the study objectives and key thematic areas. The three-step method of data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification were used to analyze qualitative data. The data was presented descriptively through narrative explanations, supported by basic descriptive statistics such as graphs, pie charts, tables, and infographics. Both primary and secondary data were then synthesized, interpreted, and used to inform the study's conclusions and recommendations.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Response Rate

The study targeted 49 journalists, including radio program directors, presenters, and producers from seven faith-based radio stations. Of these, 35 journalists from five stations participated by completing questionnaires, and taking part in focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

### 4.2 Existence of Radio Programs Purely Dedicated to Strategic Peacebuilding

Respondents were asked whether their faith-based radio stations had programs specifically dedicated to strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections. All respondents (100%) confirmed that their stations aired such programs, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**  
*Radio Programs Purely Dedicated to Strategic Peacebuilding*

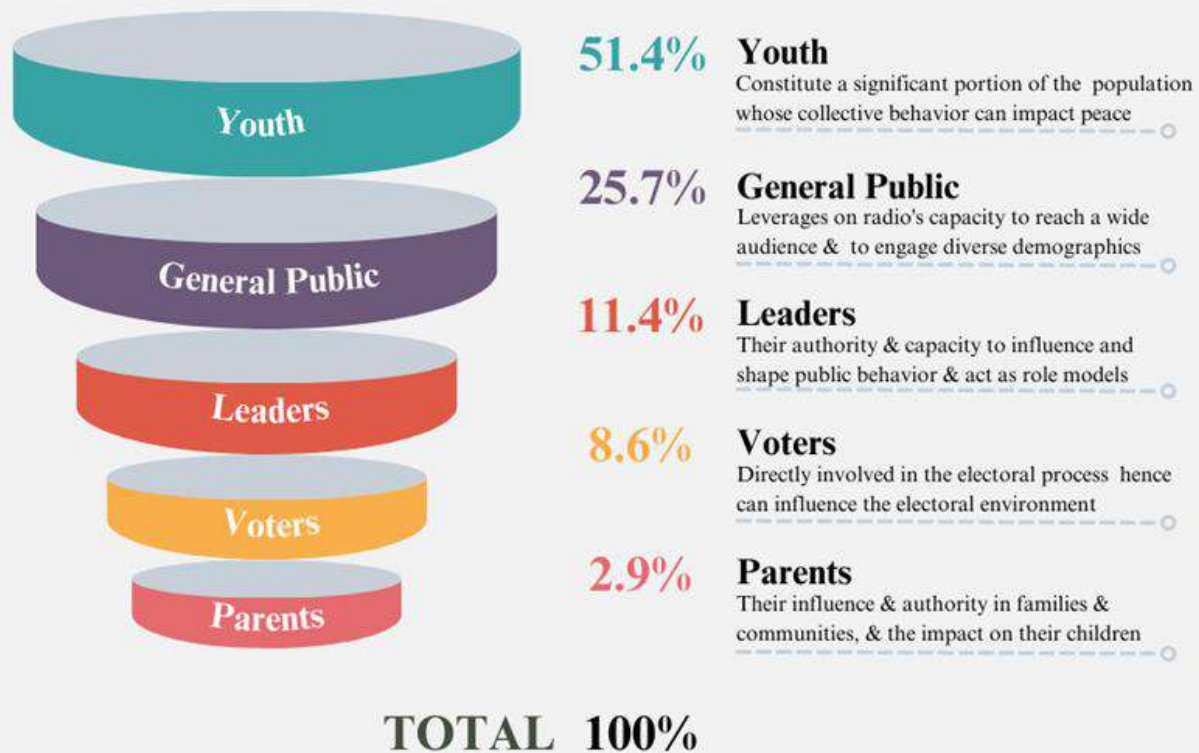
These findings align with Barry and Pul (2020), who found that radio programs can reduce violence by promoting peaceful behavior, largely because listeners trust them. Similarly, Korir and Nabushawo (2021) observed that faith-based radio programs focused on peacebuilding not only support calm during elections but also encourage long-term peace, inclusivity, and counter misinformation by sharing accurate, reliable content. When effectively used, such programs can spark meaningful conversations around peace, justice, dialogue, and reconciliation.

### 4.3 Target Audience for Peace-Focused Radio Programs

Respondents were asked to identify the main target audience for their peace-focused radio programs during Kenya's general elections. The majority targeted the youth (51.4%), followed by the general public (25.7%), leaders (11.4%), voters (8.6%), and parents (2.9%), as illustrated in Figure 2.



## Target Audience for Faith-Based Radio Programs Purely Dedicated to Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya



**Figure 2**  
*Target Audience for Radio Programs Purely Dedicated to Strategic Peacebuilding*

These findings align with the United Nations Development Project (UNDP, 2023) Project Report on youth participation in sustaining peace during elections, which advocates for prioritizing the youth in peace-focused radio programs. The report highlights the youth's significant influence and active involvement in modern political processes. Respondents cited the demographic weight of the youth as the main reason for making them their primary target audience.

### 4.4 Faith-Based Content/Teachings Intended to Promote Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked to identify the key content and teachings featured in their radio programs dedicated to strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections. The responses highlighted several thematic areas: religious sermons promoting peace (63.3%), music and radio dramas with peace messages (16.7%), peace-oriented talk shows and discussions (10%), youth and community engagement initiatives (6.7%), and programs emphasizing the consequences of conflict and lack of peace (3.3%), as illustrated in Figure 3.

## Faith-Based Content/Teachings Intended to Promote Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

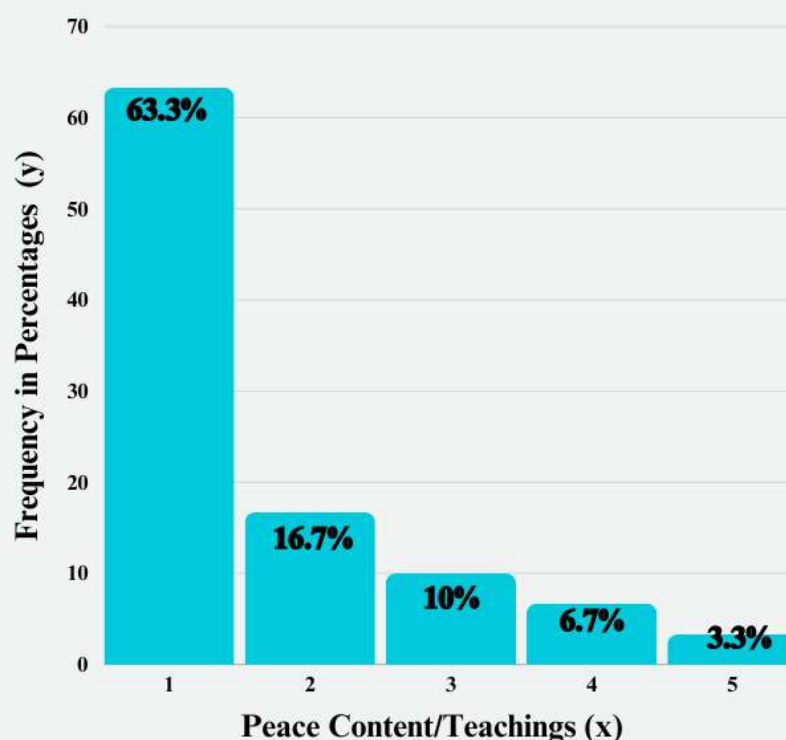
1. Religious sermons that emphasize the importance of peace (63.3%)

2. Music and radio drama containing peace messages (16.7%)

3. Host peace-centered talk shows & discussions (10%)

4. Youth and community engagement programs (6.7%)

5. Emphasis on the detriments of lack of peace (3.3%)



**Figure 3**

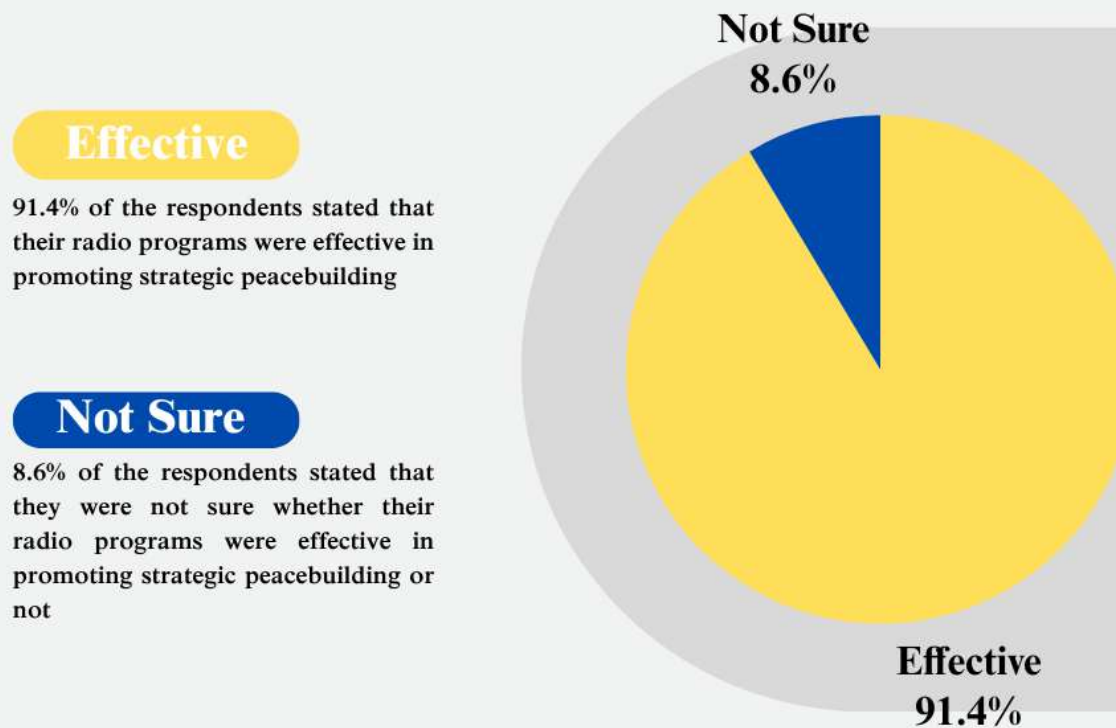
*Faith-Based Content/Teachings Intended to Promote Strategic Peacebuilding*

Omer and Tarusarira (2023) demonstrate that religious sermons emphasizing the value of peace can serve as powerful tools for strategic peacebuilding during election periods. Given the strong influence that religious leaders often hold over their congregations, delivering peace-oriented messages can help foster a calm and tolerant electoral environment. These sermons typically draw from scriptural teachings that highlight themes such as brotherhood, love for one's neighbor, reconciliation, forgiveness, non-violence, and unity.

### 4.5 Effectiveness of Faith-Based Radio Programs in Promoting Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of their radio programs in promoting strategic peacebuilding during general elections in Kenya. The majority (91.4%) indicated that the programs aired by their respective stations were effective in fostering peace during elections. Meanwhile, 8.6% of the respondents reported uncertainty about the effectiveness of their station's programs in achieving this goal, as illustrated in Figure 4.

## Effectiveness of Faith-Based Radio Programs in Promoting Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya



**Figure 4**  
*Effectiveness of Faith-Based Radio Programs in Promoting Strategic Peacebuilding*

Respondents from Sayare FM noted that their radio programs were effective in promoting strategic peacebuilding, especially during the 2022 general elections. They observed a significant shift in people's attitudes and behaviors toward maintaining peace in Eldoret. In the lead-up to the elections, all Christian radio stations in Uasin Gishu County collaborated to air a joint live show promoting peace before, during, and after the elections. This broadcast attracted an exceptionally large listenership. One of the radio presenters at Sayare FM shared the following:

*"Yes, the programs are very effective. There was a lot of change even during the last election, when many radio stations came together to campaign for peace. For instance, in Uasin Gishu, all Christian stations aired a live show simultaneously to call for peace. The number of listeners and the positive feedback we received in response to our peace message was quite overwhelming."* (KI 001).

At MBCI Radio, the general view of the respondents from the focus group discussion was that their radio programs had been effective in promoting strategic peacebuilding during general elections in Kenya. According to one of the respondents, their programs had a great impact, especially during elections. They often received feedback from listeners indicating that the messages helped them remain calm and encouraged others to avoid inciting violence. This was taken as an indication that people were listening and changing how they responded during tense political moments. *"Our radio programs have played a big role in encouraging positive behavior change. After sharing messages about peace, we've noticed a shift in how our audience speaks and acts. Many listeners even mention our religious shows on social media as they promote peace and call for calm."* (KI002).

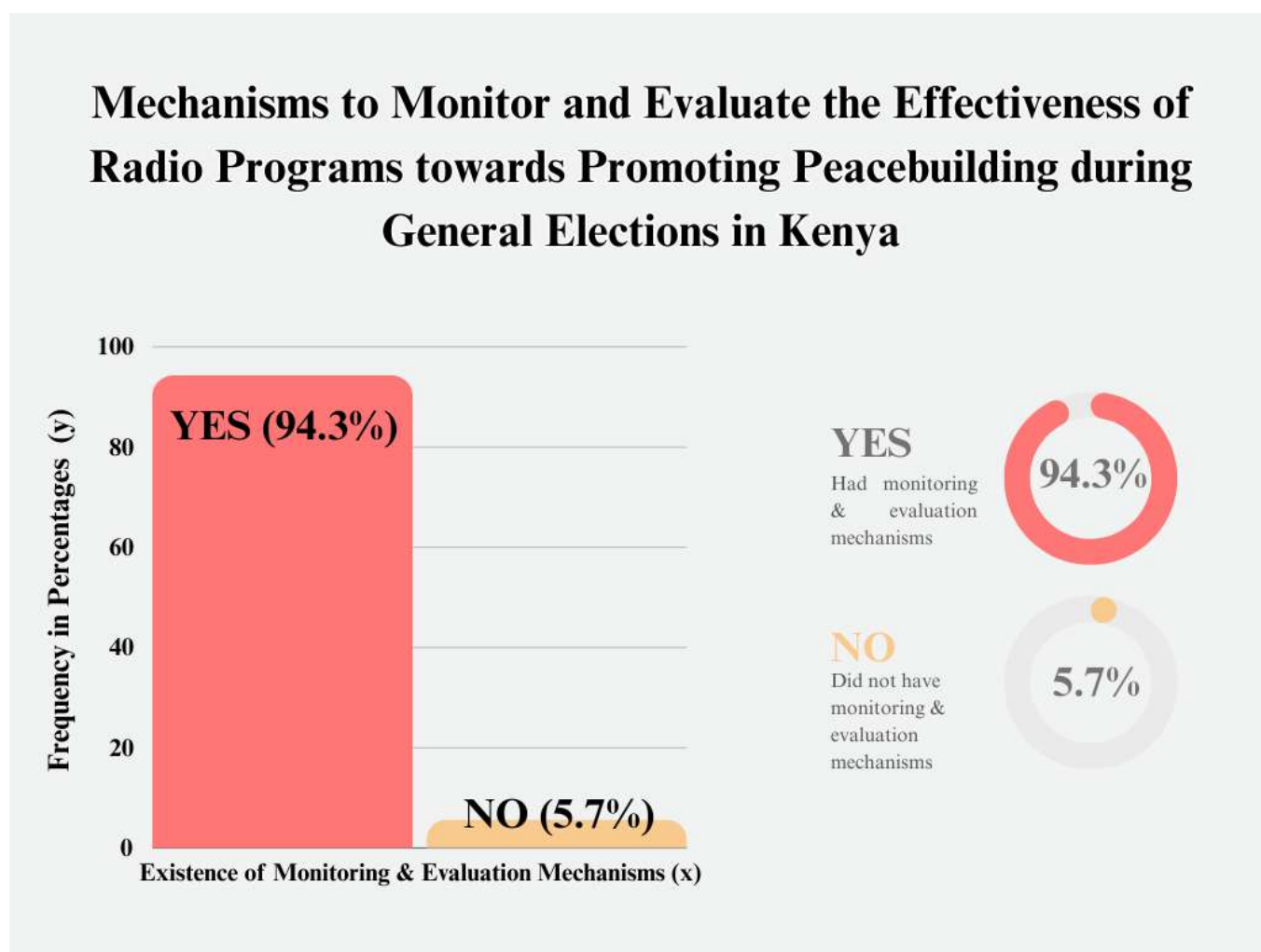
Some respondents who expressed uncertainty about the impact of their radio programs on strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections did not provide any explanation for their views.

These findings align with those of Paul and Soukup (2023), who found that faith-based radio and TV programs play a significant role in promoting peace during elections. By tapping into the moral influence of religion and the widespread trust in religious institutions, these programs have effectively promoted messages of unity and

reconciliation. Consistent broadcasts centered on peace help reinforce its importance, especially in tense moments like election seasons.

#### 4.6 Mechanisms to Monitor and Evaluate the Effectiveness of Radio Programs towards Promoting Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked whether their radio stations had systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs in promoting strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections. The majority (94.3%) confirmed that such mechanisms existed at their stations. In contrast, only 5.7% reported that their stations lacked any monitoring and evaluation structures. These results are illustrated in Figure 5.



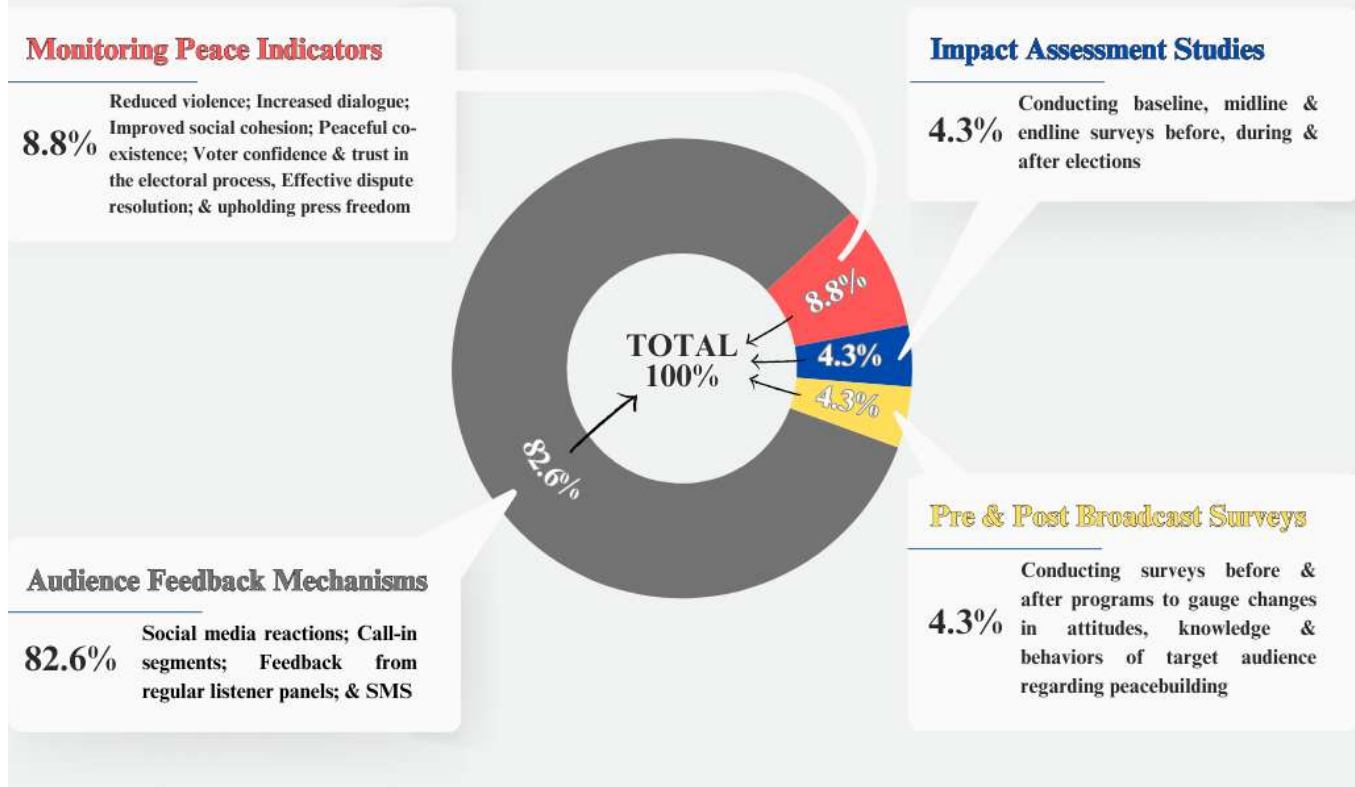
**Figure 5**

*Mechanisms to Monitor and Evaluate the Effectiveness of Radio Programs towards Promoting Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya*

The mechanisms used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of radio programs aimed at promoting strategic peacebuilding during Kenya's general elections included: audience feedback mechanisms (82.6%), monitoring of peace indicators (8.8%), impact assessment studies (4.3%), and broadcast surveys (4.3%). These findings are presented in Figure 6.



## Specific Monitoring & Evaluation Tools of the Effectiveness of Radio Programs Dedicated to Strategic Peacebuilding

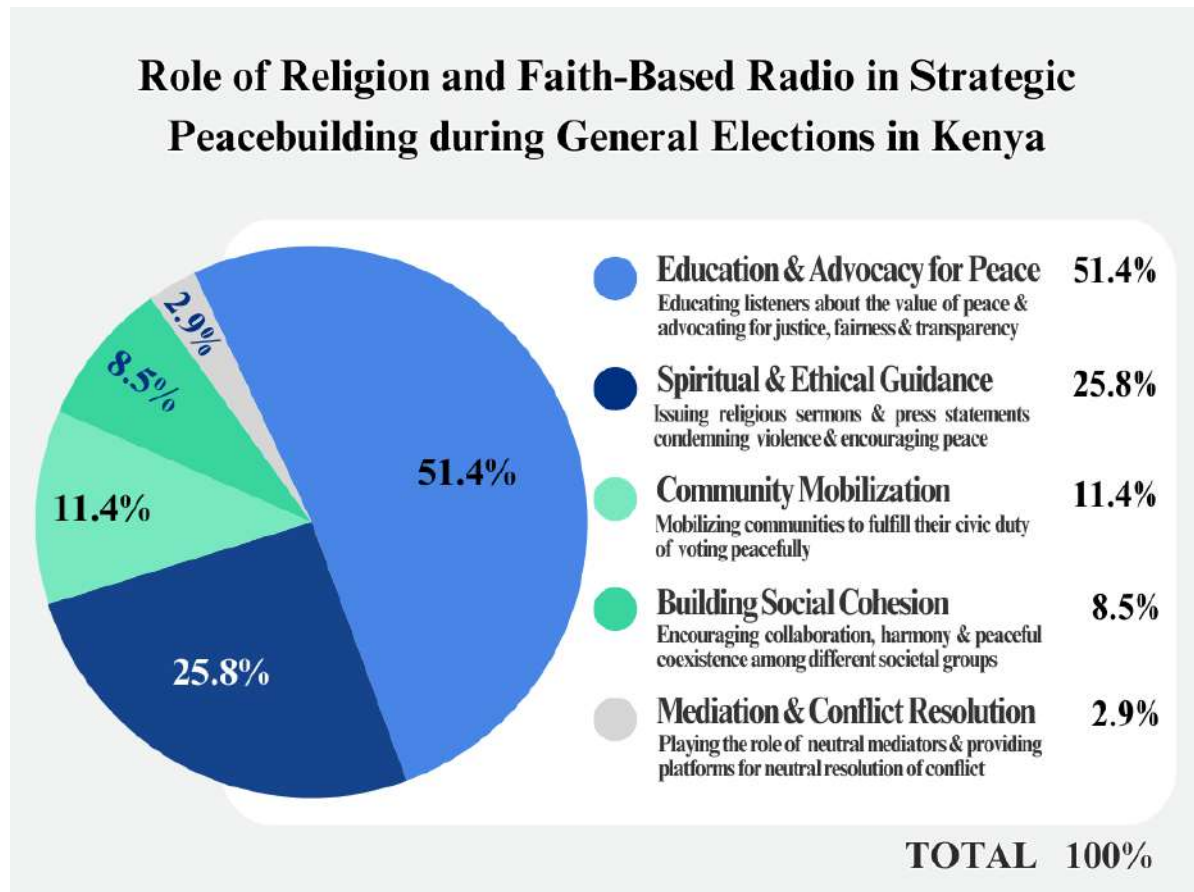


**Figure 6**  
*Specific Monitoring & Evaluation Tools of the Effectiveness of Radio Programs*

These findings are consistent with those of Mwangi (2020), who explored the role of media in conflict management during general elections in Kenya. Mwangi emphasized the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of media-led peacebuilding efforts. He noted that this could be achieved by establishing systems to collect audience feedback on how programming influences peacebuilding outcomes during elections. Additionally, he recommended regular tracking of peace indicators to assess the effectiveness of such initiatives. According to Mwangi, effective monitoring and evaluation allow radio stations to gauge impact, make informed strategic decisions, allocate resources appropriately, improve continuously, and guide future content development.

### 4.7 Role of Religion and Faith-Based Radio in Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked to identify the role of religion and faith-based radio in strategic peacebuilding during general elections in Kenya. The roles highlighted included: providing education and advocacy for peace (51.4%), offering spiritual and ethical guidance (25.8%), mobilizing communities (11.4%), fostering social cohesion (8.5%), and supporting mediation and conflict resolution efforts (2.9%). These responses are illustrated in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*Role of Religion and Faith-Based Radio in Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya*

These findings align with the conclusions of Taiwo et al. (2023), who emphasize the critical role of religion in strategic peacebuilding during general elections. According to their study, religion, drawing on its moral authority, can effectively promote peace by providing education and advocacy, mediating conflicts, offering spiritual and ethical guidance, mobilizing communities, and fostering social cohesion. Similarly, Young and Jones (2022) highlight the role of religious sermons in spreading peace messages, noting that many religious leaders continue to use media platforms to reach their followers and advocate for peace.

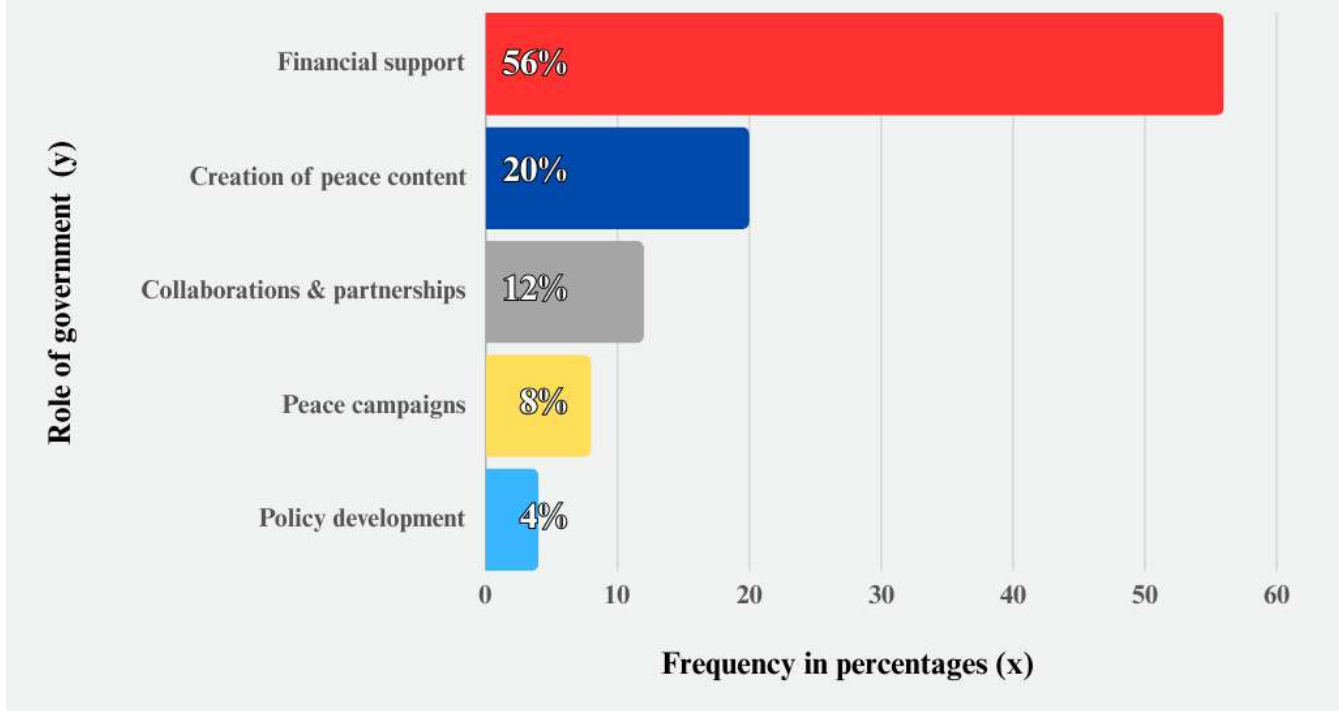
#### 4.8 Audience Engagement/Participation in Peace Programming

Respondents were asked to indicate how their radio stations promoted audience engagement in their peace programming. The following methods were identified: studio panel discussions (44%), call-in segments (20%), SMS (16%), social media interactions (12%), and on-the-ground engagement (8%).

#### 4.9 Role of the Government in Supporting Faith-Based Radio Programs that Promote Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked to indicate the role the government can play in supporting faith-based radio programs that promote strategic peacebuilding during general elections in Kenya. They identified several key areas of support, including: financial assistance (56%), creation of peace-promoting content (20%), fostering collaborations and partnerships for peace (12%), organizing peace campaigns (8%), and developing supportive policies (4%). These findings are presented in Figure 8.

## Role of the Government in Supporting Faith-Based Radio Programs that Promote Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya



**Figure 8**

*Role of Government in Supporting Faith-Based Radio Programs that Promote Strategic Peacebuilding during General Elections in Kenya*

### 4.10 Conflict Analysis to Determine the Underlying Causes of Conflict during General Elections in Kenya

Respondents were asked whether their respective radio stations had ever conducted a conflict analysis to identify the root causes of conflict during general elections in Kenya. Conflict analysis involves a detailed examination of the factors that contribute to tension and violence during election periods. Notably, none of the faith-based radio stations reported having carried out a dedicated conflict analysis focused on the underlying causes of electoral conflict in Kenya.

Adanlawo and Reddy (2020) emphasize the importance of media conducting conflict analysis during election periods to ensure their peacebuilding efforts are well-targeted. Such analysis enables media houses to make informed decisions and strategically plan how to use their platforms to help mitigate conflict. It also supports more effective resource allocation, allowing limited resources to be directed where they can have the greatest impact on strategic peacebuilding.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

Faith-based radio broadcasters play a vital role in Kenya's strategic peacebuilding efforts, particularly during general elections. All the faith-based radio stations studied had programs specifically dedicated to promoting peace during election periods. These programs frequently featured political, religious, and opinion leaders, who were invited to engage in discussions and advocate for peace throughout the electioneering period. Talk shows calling for peace were aired before, during, and after elections, while radio dramas conveying powerful peace messages aimed at shaping audience attitudes and behaviors were regularly broadcasted. Consistent calls for peace were a key element of these programs across all phases of the election cycle.

The target audience for these peace-focused broadcasts included youth, the general public, leaders, voters, and parents. The content typically revolved around religious sermons emphasizing peace, music and drama with peace messages, talk shows and discussions centered on peacebuilding, youth and community engagement segments, and

programming that highlighted the consequences of conflict. Overall, the peace programs were reported to be effective in promoting strategic peacebuilding. This effectiveness was assessed through various means, including audience feedback mechanisms, monitoring of peace indicators, impact assessment studies, and pre- and post-broadcast surveys.

The role of religion and faith-based radio in strategic peacebuilding was identified as multifaceted: providing education and advocacy for peace, offering spiritual and ethical guidance, mobilizing communities, fostering social cohesion, and supporting mediation and conflict resolution. To ensure audience participation, the radio stations employed methods such as studio panel discussions, call-in segments, SMS, social media interaction, and on-the-ground engagement activities. However, despite these efforts, none of the sampled faith-based radio stations reported having conducted a dedicated conflict analysis to identify the root causes of conflict during general elections in Kenya.

## 5.2 Recommendations

To maximize their impact and address the challenges they face, faith-based radio stations should adopt collaborative and structured approaches that align with key stakeholders such as government agencies, electoral bodies, civil society organizations, conflict resolution experts, citizens, and community leaders. Strengthening these partnerships can enhance the credibility and reach of their peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, faith-based broadcasters are encouraged to increase and diversify their peace-focused programming by featuring messages from political leaders and contesters who advocate for nonviolence, tolerance, and mutual respect. Providing such figures with a platform to promote peace can positively influence their supporters and help reduce tensions. Furthermore, faith-based radio stations should regularly conduct conflict analysis, especially during election periods, to uncover the root causes of violence. This deeper understanding can help shape more informed and targeted messaging that contributes meaningfully to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

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