# Why trust the media?

Research-based explanations for a high level of trust in Radio Ndeke Luka in the Central African Republic

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Executive summary

While several contextual factors in the Central African Republic militate against the high trust in media outlets, especially those that receive foreign funding, a large share of the population trusts Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL).

Trust describes a relationship between the media (i.e., the trustee) and its audience (i.e., the trustors). The audience makes itself vulnerable to media content based on the expectation that the media will perform satisfactorily. However, what satisfactory media performance means depends on the specific context of the media outlet.

Research-based explanations suggest that the characteristics of individual audience members, the attributes of the media outlet, and the media environment itself matter for whether people trust a media outlet. For RNL in the Central African Republic, the patterns of media consumption and the dominance of radio are likely key to explaining the high level of trust in RNL.

Research also suggests that several attributes of RNL explain high trust in the station, including the proximity of its content, medium, and journalists to local audiences; the high quality of reporting (e.g., clarity, objectiveness, and educational value); and its fact-checking efforts. Finally, the absence of credible domestic alternative media sources and the lack of state-provided public services may contribute to high trust in RNL.

Survey-based methodologies are suitable for examining these expectations in the Central African Republic. Open-ended questions should be integrated into surveys to gain a more profound understanding of the nature of media trust and its determinants in this particular context. Survey experiments can help assess how objective variation in RNL media content affects trust.

In the Central African Republic, most people listen to RNL via hand-held FM receiver radios. RNL's FM signal coverage is broad, and it largely fulfils its mission to provide reliable information to people in conflict-affected areas. However, it does not yet cover all urban areas (e.g., Kaga-Bandoro is outside RNL's signal coverage) and neglects some violence-prone border areas in the northwest.

Using audience surveys from 2022 and 2024 in and around major towns in the Central African Republic, our preliminary analysis suggests that media consumption patterns (e.g., the dominance of radio over TV and social media) are indeed key to explaining high trust in RNL. We also find that perceptions of RNL reporting, e.g., its clarity, balance, and objectivity, explain trust in RNL.

As expected, the audience survey data furthermore suggest that several context-specific characteristics likely explain variation in trust across locations in the Central African Republic. For example, state presence and public goods provision seem to correlate with lower trust in RNL.

Finally, we show that RNL extended its coverage over time to areas where credible information provision is most needed, i.e., areas suffering from high levels of violence. However, more analysis is needed to assess RNL's peacebuilding or violence-reducing effects.

1 Introduction

Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) is by far the most popular radio station in the Central African Republic. Audience surveys in 2022 and 2024 conducted by the Fondation Hirondelle, the parent organization of RNL, suggest that 98% of the population living in areas covered by RNL have already listened to the station. Beyond its notoriety, 96% of this population thinks of RNL as useful, and 31% of this population even claims that they could not live without RNL. Only 4% find the radio to be of little use. Finally, when asked about the radio stations that they trust the most, 90% indicate RNL. By contrast, below 3% of the population mention the state-sponsored radio station, the UN-sponsored radio station, or the Russia-sponsored radio station as their most trusted radio. **Why does RNL enjoy extraordinarily high levels of trust?**

This question is not trivial. Several **contextual factors militate against high trust in media** outlets in the Central African Republic. First, the country has suffered from multiple armed conflicts since its independence in 1960. The latest **conflict episode started in 2012**, pitting the predominantly Muslim rebel coalition Séléka from the north of the country against predominantly Christian militias and state forces from the south (Arieff, 2014, 1-3; Mandon, Nossek, and Sandjong Tomi, 2024, 1). Resulting insecurity continues to hamper newsgathering and serves the current government as an excuse for tightening free speech (as evidenced by the 2022 law that criminalizes poorly defined "press offences"). Conflict-related **polarization** means that even accurate information is at risk of being interpreted as biased for or against one side. Together, these conditions likely impede the ability of RNL and other media outlets to win audience trust.

Second, the Central African Republic is burdened by its **long history of foreign exploitation**, starting with slave raids by Arab traders in the 17th to 19th centuries and French colonial rule and its murderous use of forced labor in the 20th century. In the postcolonial period, persistent French tutelage and Chadian interference contributed to political instability, while multiple international peacekeeping operations, inter alia by the UN, did not fulfill people's legitimate expectations for peace and stability (Smith, 2015). In recent years, Russian **disinformation campaigns** have deepened suspicion of UN, French, and European actors in the Central African Republic (Trithart, 2022). Thus, citizens in the Central African Republic have good reason to be skeptical of foreign intervention, including foreign-sponsored media outlets like RNL.

In this issue brief, we first **review existing research** on determinants of trust in media and specific media outlets. Based on this **literature review**, we deduce several plausible expectations about explanations for the extraordinarily high levels of trust in RNL. Next, we present a **survey-based methodology** to examine the empirical validity of these explanations. Specifically, we offer an example survey questionnaire that allows Fondation Hirondelle to measure trust in RNL and to assess the determinants of this trust. In addition, we use radio signal propagation modelling and quantitative analyses of survey and event data to answer three questions: **Where can RNL be captured by FM radio,** and how many people in the Central African Republic have access? (Section 3) Why do people trust RNL? What are the **individual-level and regional determinants of trust in RNL?** (section 4). How does RNL contribute to **peacebuilding** and the reduction of violence (section 5)?

1.1 Defining trust in media

While there is "no single definition" of trust in the media (Fisher, 2016, 454), researchers agree that trust is a relationship involving a trustor (e.g., a citizen) and a trustee (e.g., a media outlet), where the trustor expects certain benefits from the trustee under conditions of uncertainty (Strömbäck et al., 2020, 141). This issue brief defines trust in the media as "the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform satisfactorily" (Hanitzsch et al., 2017, cited in Knudsen et al., 2021, 2348). What satisfactory performance means depends on the context but usually includes—to varying degrees—satisfaction with (i) the journalistic selection of topics and facts that get reported, (ii) the accuracy of the reported facts, and (iii) the assessments made by journalists, e.g., whether criticism is expressed in an adequate manner (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

1.2 How individual characteristics affect media trust

Trust in the media and specific media outlets is affected by the characteristics of individuals (Knudsen et al., 2021; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Fawzi et al., 2021; Brosius, Ohme & De Vreese, 2022), including demographic and socioeconomic variables, political and interpersonal trust, political orientation, and news consumption. In principle, the distinct distribution of **individual characteristics in the Central African Republic may help explain the high level of trust in RNL**, because RNL dominates the domestic media with by far the highest audience share (56.0%).[1] Yet, with the exception of prevalent media consumption patterns in the Central African Republic, individual-level determinants cannot explain the high level of trust enjoyed by RNL.

First**, media consumption behavior by people in the Central African Republic likely supports high trust in established radios like RNL**. Specifically, high-quality radio programs of RNL and Radio France International (RFI) enjoy the largest audience shares (i.e., 56% and 9% respectively). People still have limited access to pro-government television. Together, both features foster trust in RNL.[2] Research shows that news consumption affects media trust. If individuals engage with a variety of high-quality news outlets rather than a single source, then they tend to perceive media as more balanced and to show more trust in different media outlets (Tsfati et al., 2023; Brosius, Ohme, and De Vreese, 2022). By extension, **growing social media use in the Central African Republic will potentially take its toll on trust in RNL**.

Second, **the distribution of socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, income, and education, likely does not explain why RNL enjoys high trust**. Age and gender are not consistently related to media trust (Moehler & Singh, 2011; Gronke & Cook, 2007; Tsfati & Aiely, 2014). Lower education and income are correlated with higher trust in low-quality private media compared to high-quality media (Moehler & Singh, 2011;

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[1] Audience shares of all other radio stations are below 9%, including Radio Republique Centrafrique with 7.8%, Radio la voix de l'évangile with 5.2%, Radio Guira FM with 5.1%, and Radio Notre Dame with 3.5%. The non-listed radio stations have neglectable audience shares below 2.2% (see Audience Survey of Fondation Hirondelle 2022, 2024).

[2] According to the audience survey by Fondation Hirondelle, RNL and RFI have the highest audience shares among radio stations. Regarding television, the government channel TVCA only has the second highest audience (11.7%). The first and the third to fifth place are occupied by French television (that are, France 24 16%, Canal+ 11.3%), Canal+ sport 9.7%, and A+ 8.8%).

Knudsen et al., 2022; Fawzi et al., 2021, 159). Yet, since RNL is characterized as a high-quality medium due to its unique professionalism and independence (Dos Santos, 2021, 191), limited access to secondary education and widespread poverty can hardly be responsible for high trust in RNL.[3]

Third, **high trust in RNL is likely unrelated to the fact that it tends to mainly broadcast in urban areas**. Research demonstrates that in African countries, rural dwellers have higher trust in private media compared to urban dwellers, even though private media tends to be of lower quality than state media (Moehler & Singh, 2011, 283). However, for anglophone African countries, von Doepp and Young (2023, 208) find that media trust does not significantly differ between rural and urban dwellers. While the place of residence may not have a direct effect, it could indirectly affect media trust, for example, by influencing media consumption patterns (Kone & Conroy-Krutz, 2024, 6), political trust (McKay, Jennings & Stoker, 2023), or education and political sophistication (Moehler & Singh, 2011, endnote 29).

Finally, **patterns of political and interpersonal trust in the Central African Republic likely do not explain high trust in RNL**. Interestingly, while trust in the government is positively correlated with trust in the media in Europe and North America (Bennett et al., 2001; Jones, 2004; Lee, 2010), trust in the government is related to support for restrictions on the press in African countries (Conroy-Krutz, 2024). Yet, governments' anti-media rhetoric is not consistently associated with support for media restrictions (ibid.). The latter finding may explain why **RNL enjoys high trust in the population in the Central African Republic despite government-imposed restrictions** (Reporters Sans Frontieres, 2025).[4]

In section 4.1, we examine whether individuals' characteristics (e.g., media consumption) help us explain the high level of trust in the station.

1.3   How perceived attributes of media outlets affect media trust

First, **the proximity of RNL to its listeners likely explains why it enjoys an extraordinarily high level of trust**. RNL is characterized by its presence in local communities, participative elements that enable listeners to interact with RNL, and reporting in local languages. These factors resemble community radio stations (Schnyder, 2016). Research suggests that local and community radios tend to provide more locally relevant news and offer greater access to otherwise marginalized people, thereby gaining trust among their listeners (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016; Matsilele et al., 2002; Koetsenruijter, & de Jong, 2023).[5]

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[3] According to the audience survey of Fondation Hirondelle, more than 65% of the respondents had not more than primary education. Moreover, according to the World Bank (n.d.), the Central African Republic is ranked 191st out of 193 countries in the 2022 Human Capital and Development Index.

[4] Moreover, survey research in Europe and North America finds that people tend to trust the media when they also trust political institutions (Steindl et al. 2024; Hanitzsch et al. 2018) or their fellow citizens (Brosius, Ohme, and De Vreese, 2022; Bennett et al., 2001). By contrast, people tend to exhibit lower media trust when they hold populist views (Fawzi, 2019) and extreme political positions (Gunther, 1988). These individual political predispositions can even override the trust-reducing effect of actual media biases (Lee, 2012). Unfortunately, these relations have not been tested in African countries, let alone, the Central African Republic

[5] However, Archer and Peterson (2025) also suggest that high trust in local news media may be a function of their lower degree of politicization and lower degree of attention in anti-media elite rhetoric.

In addition, the high trust in RNL compared to, e.g., state television may also relate to the fact that **radio remains the most trusted and frequented medium** in the Central African Republic, as elsewhere on the continent (Conroy-Krutz, Amakoh, & Amewunou, 2024). Existing research also suggests that **community listening in the form of "groupes d'écoute,"** a phenomenon of importance in Francophone African countries, enhances participation around radio content in local communities (Damome, 2020). Community listening could also enhance trust in RNL.

Second**, RNL's comprehensive and clear, objective, trustworthy, and educational reporting likely explains why it enjoys high trust**. Indeed, research shows that media outlets enjoy more trust when their organization is perceived as independent of political and commercial interests and their reporting is accurate and balanced. Conversely, distrust in the media stems from perceptions of biases or slant, hidden agendas, partisan reporting, commercial interests, and selective storytelling (Newman & Fletcher, 2018; Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Fisher, 2016).

Third, **RNL's strong engagement in fact-checking likely helped neutralize trust-reducing effects of mis- and disinformation or hate speech**. Survey research in South Africa shows that the perceived exposure to "fake news" tends to correlate with lower levels of trust in media outlets (Wasserman & Morales, 2019). Likewise, experimental research in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda suggests that violence-inciting information causes citizens to support government-imposed media restrictions (Conroy-Krutz, 2024). As research in different African countries demonstrates, media outlets engaged in fact-checking may inoculate citizens against believing mis- and disinformation, thereby safeguarding trust in accurate media reporting (Bowles et al., 2015; see also Blair et al., 2024).

Fourth, **foreign sponsorship of RNL generally does not detract from its popularity and trustworthiness** (see Gondwe, 2018; Fiedler & Frère, 2016; Frère & Fiedler, 2018; Conroy-Krutz, 2024 for similar findings). RNL is financed through international donors and, thus, neither relies on government funding nor commercial revenue. Due to foreign sponsorship, it can operate relatively more freely compared to domestic broadcasters (Frère, 2015). Therefore, we do not think that foreign sponsorship is an attribute that detracts from RNL's trustworthiness. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to examine whether RNL's **transfer of ownership** to a local organization in 2008 further increased its trustworthiness (see Dos Santos, 2021, 185-186).

In section 4.1, we examine whether individuals' perceptions of RNL's work (e.g., its proximity to the audience, its high quality, and its fact-checking capacities) indeed help us explain the high level of trust in the station.

1.4 How contextual characteristics affect media trust

RNL does not operate in a vacuum but is embedded in a particular political environment and media landscape. Contextual characteristics likely affect people's trust in RNL.

First, RNL's independence and professionalism stand out in the "pluralist-authoritarian" media landscape of the Central African Republic. Hence, **the absence of credible domestic media sources may potentially relate to high levels of trust in RNL**. Conversely, as more media outlets become available, trust in RNL may decrease.

Second, **the radio's provision of public goods—especially during times of crisis and armed conflict—may explain the high level of trust in RNL**. A long-standing political science literature holds that the provision of effective governance and public goods is a key source of state legitimacy (Easton, 1975). According to the report by International

Media Support and Panos Europe (2014), RNL has become a public goods provider in times of crisis, given the lack of governance provided by the state government. For example, RNL served as the **entry point for people facing trauma** during the conflict. Moreover, filling the vacuum of reliable coverage of the conflict by the state's broadcasting agencies, RNL has also provided **early warnings on threats**. Finally, RNL's **public education program** for reconciliation and peacebuilding is another public good that likely helped the station win trust among the population.

Last but not least, **we expect that RNL's longevity in the Central African Republic is important for explaining people's high level of trust in the station**. RNL has continuously and faithfully accompanied people in the country in the past 25 years. Thus, it is the longest-lasting independent (non-state) radio broadcaster in this context. It started broadcasting in March 2000 in the capital, Bangui. Since then, RNL has continuously expanded its coverage to almost all parts of the country.

In section 4.2 we explore whether some of these contextual factors—absence of alternative media sources, the absence of public services provided by the state, and the longevity of RNL's presence—can explain variation in the proportion of people who trust RNL in different areas of the Central African.

2 Designing empirical inquiry

Surveys and survey-experimental research, combining closed-ended and open-ended questions, are a promising way to empirically evaluate expected drivers of media trust in RNL in the Central African Republic. Below, we outline **important aspects to consider when designing such survey-based methodologies.**

2.1 Measuring trust in the media

When asking people for their level of trust in the media, they may think of different media outlets (e.g., tabloid press rather than quality newspapers) or channels (e.g., social media rather than traditional media). These hidden reference points in people's minds may reduce the **comparability of self-assessments of trust in the media** (Daniller et al., 2017; Kohring & Matthes, 2007, 242). Thus, to ensure that respondents consistently interpret references to "the media", they can be instructed to evaluate the question based on the specific media (e.g., only traditional media) or based on media that they usually consume.

To ensure valid comparisons of people's level of trust in the media, trust could also be assessed in relation to how media reports on a salient topic, e.g., unemployment (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, 242). Finally, **open-ended questions and qualitative focus groups** may help researchers to assess what people understand to be "the media" and "trust" (Brosius, Hameers & van der Meer, 2022).

Researchers using surveys to measure trust in the media debate whether trust should be assessed on a **unidimensional scale or a multidimensional scale** (see Sapir, 2022; Strömbäck et al., 2020; World Values Survey Association, 2020; European Union, n.d. for the unidimensional scale; see Kohring & Matthes, 2007 for a multidimensional scale). When a survey chooses a unidimensional scale, it asks respondents whether they tend to trust or tend not to trust the media (or a specific media outlet) and offers ranked answer possibilities, e.g., from full distrust to partial distrust, partial trust, and full trust (see Sapir, 2022). When a survey chooses a multidimensional scale, it asks respondents to evaluate different dimensions of the media, for instance, its selectivity of topics, its selectivity of

facts, its accuracy of the depiction of facts, and its journalistic assessments (see Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Empirical research suggests that a **unidimensional scale of trust in the media is sufficient** because respondents' evaluations of theoretically plausible subdimensions of media trust rarely significantly differ from each other (e.g., Strömbäck et al., 2020, 142). That is, if a respondent trusts the selectivity of topics of a media outlet, she also trusts the selectivity of facts and the journalistic assessments. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that distinct subdimensions of trust in a media outlet—e.g., in the media corporation, journalists, or content—may relate to specific consequences—e.g., attention for this media outlet—in different ways (e.g., Williams, 2012). Hence, asking survey respondents to evaluate different dimensions of media trust may have value in itself and not only for measuring trust in media accurately.

2.2 Examining explanations for media trust

Survey-based research can test how the characteristics of individuals, the perceived and objective attributes of media outlets, and context-related features (e.g., the number of credible domestic media sources available in a country) influence trust in a media outlet or the media more generally. In **conflict-affected contexts**, face-to-face surveys are often the most adequate. If census data is unavailable, sampling frames may use random walks and other methods to achieve a sample of respondents that is representative of the population. The inaccessibility of conflict-affected territories can result in sampling biases, and insecurity-related fears and trauma can influence survey results. Both should be considered during survey design (see e.g., Rickard et al., 2023).

For examining individual-level determinants of media trust, surveys tend to incorporate a standard battery of questions for asking about socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Of course, it is important to adapt the questions to the context, e.g., assessing levels of education with school forms that are available in a country rather than generic labels for educational levels. Since **media consumption patterns** are a significant determinant of trust in media (including trust in RNL), surveys inquiring about media trust usually include several questions in this regard. Specifically, they ask respondents which media (radio, television, newspapers, the internet) they use to obtain news and how regularly they use them (e.g., from daily to never). Moreover, surveys may also ask people to list the media outlets that they know and/or consume, or which media they have consumed yesterday or in the past week or month (see e.g., Afrobarometer).

Different methodologies have been proposed **to examine the effect of the attributes of a media outlet** on media trust. Hereby, we can distinguish between approaches that focus on audience perceptions of media content and approaches that examine the impact of actual differences in media content. For the former approach, surveys can be used to examine **audience perceptions of the quality of media content** produced by an outlet, e.g., factual accuracy, balanced representation of viewpoints, selectivity of topics, and the framing used in reporting. Regression analysis can then examine the association between perceptions of whether a media outlet possesses a specific attribute and reported trust in that outlet (Fisher et al., 2021).

Regarding the latter approach, experiments embedded in a survey help to assess how the **objective quality of media content** influences trust in the media outlet. For example, survey experiments may expose one group of respondents (randomly selected) to high-quality content and another group of respondents (randomly selected) to low-quality content reporting on the same topic and produced by the same media outlet. Afterwards,

the difference in trust between the groups is the effect of content quality on trust (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Borah, 2013, as cited in Appelman & Sundar, 2016).

To **design the experimental media content treatment**, researchers can draw on existing definitions of high- and low-quality content. For example, high-quality media content avoids sensationalism, clickbait headlines, and biased narratives, all of which can undermine audience trust (Fisher et al., 2021; Wanda et al., 2021). Instead, trustworthy content prioritizes relevance to the audience's daily life, especially in conflict-affected societies, where accurate and locally relevant reporting can directly influence public safety and peacebuilding (Williams, 2012; Dos Santos, 2021).

Second, surveys together with focus group interviews can be **used to investigate whether an audience perceives a media outlet as a public service provider** (e.g., in providing services usually associated with the government, see Section 1.3) and whether this perception contributes to the high levels of trust placed in the outlet. Unfortunately, however, we have not found a single study that has developed a specific methodology to inquire into this matter.

Third, different methodologies have been proposed **to examine whether fact-checking by a media outlet affects trust in the outlet**. Bowles et al. (2025) explored the effects of sustained fact-check exposure through a six-month field experiment delivering WhatsApp messages to participants, finding that while fact-checks can inoculate citizens against misinformation, broader behavioral changes in media usage remain challenging.

Fourth, the literature suggests several qualitative methodologies to **inquire about how the proximity of the media content, channel, and organization affects people's trust in the media outlet** (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016; Matsilele et al., 2002; Koetsenruijter & de Jong, 2023). However, experimental designs (as suggested by Appelman and Sundar (2016); see above) could also be employed, varying the perceived proximity of news articles by adjusting the "closeness" of content or reporter characteristics.

Finally, existing research also proposes survey-based methodologies **to evaluate whether foreign influence on the media outlet leads to lower trust in the outlet**. For example, Conroy-Krutz (2024) uses a unique survey experiment that varies the identity of the media outlet across randomly selected groups of respondents.

2.3 Example survey questionnaire

Insights from the literature review above inform our example survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). In this section, we first provide general information relevant to the survey design. Next, we explain each section of the survey questionnaire in detail.

2.3.1 General information on surveying the population of the Central African Republic

First, the questionnaire is in English. We recommend that **translations to French and Sango** adapt phrasing to local language norms. The translated questionnaire should be pilot-tested in a small sample. Second, we deliberately vary the **order of answer options** (i.e., items), sometimes starting with a positive option and other times with a negative option, to (i) avoid response bias and (ii) ensure respondents remain attentive. For the same reasons, we suggest randomizing the order of the answer options for the following questions: Q9, Q13, Q19, Q20, Q22, Q30.

Third, we recommend **capturing response times** to each question because they reveal the strength of underlying belief and respondent confidence in their answer (Benkert et al. 2025). Finally, we recommend collecting basic **information about the interviewer** (e.g.,

gender, age, language spoken, region of origin, ethnicity) to assess later whether these characteristics might influence response patterns (Adida et al., 2015).

2.3.2   Structure of the Survey

The survey questionnaire is designed to move from general to specific, starting with media use and trust in general, and then more specifically targeting radio consumption and trust.

Introduction: Inspired by Afrobarometer (cf. Afrobarometer, n.d.), the introduction is designed to reduce social desirability bias by assuring respondents that their answers are anonymous. It ensures transparency and ethical treatment by revealing the identity of who is conducting the survey (i.e., Fondation Hirondelle), what it is about, and how long it will take. Importantly, the introduction avoids framing the concept of trust too narrowly and avoids mentioning RNL, thereby minimizing priming effects related to the survey's focus.

Sociodemographic information (section 1): This section gathers background information influencing media trust. Age, gender, language, and education (including literacy) are measured in Q1-5. Q6 assesses whether participants have a job paying a cash income to estimate their income class. Q7 and Q8 ask about the participants' living situation. Q9-12 ask about general trust, interest in politics, and support for and satisfaction with the government. The information can be used to identify correlations between individual characteristics and levels of trust in the media.

Media consumption (section 2): Q13 asks about different kinds of media sources and how often they are consumed for news and information. If a participant answers "never" for radio here, the survey shall skip Q14-Q17 (i.e., specifics of radio consumption) and proceed with Q18-20, 22, 24-26, 29, 31-36. We note that Q16 may trigger social desirability bias. Inspired by our literature review (see section 2.2), the section includes an open-ended question on why respondents listen to the radio.

Trust in media (section 3): This section examines respondents' extent of trust in the media in general. Comparison with answers given in section 2 helps detect potential discrepancies between usage of and trust in different media. Inspired by our literature review (see section 2.1, Brosius et al., 2022; Daniller et al., 2017), Q18 is included as an open-ended question to explore how participants in the Central African Republic understand "trust in media." Placing this open-ended question at the beginning avoids biasing responses with survey language and helps uncover local, context-specific understandings of media trust. Q19 asks about trust in information from all media sources, whereas Q20 focuses on specific radio stations. Here we include all stations with an audience share of over 9% (see footnote 1).

Role of media in society (section 4): To understand the social impact of RNL in a conflict-affected context, Q22 asks which media source a person would turn to in times of crisis, such as during health emergencies, natural disasters, or armed conflict. Once the person has identified their preferred source, we follow up by asking for the specific media (e.g., radio, TV, etc.) and outlet (open-ended) that a person trusts most. If a respondent names RNL as her trusted source during crises, it provides evidence of the station's perceived role as a provider of public goods.

Q23 asks which public goods and services specific radio outlets provide (e.g., providing valuable information and fostering dialogue and peacebuilding). This question is asked twice (i) for the respondent's preferred radio station (identified by the open-ended question Q21) and (ii) for a randomly assigned radio station (from the list in Q20). Since the survey aims to identify drivers of trust in RNL, if the respondent's preferred radio station is *not* RNL, then the second radio station is always RNL. This approach allows us

to assess whether specific social roles are uniquely assigned to RNL or also to other radio stations.

We note that Part iii) of Q23 draws from Kohring & Matthes (2007), who argue that trust in media is not a simple, one-dimensional concept but consists of several underlying components: trust in the selection of topics, trust in the selection of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in journalistic professionalism. Rather than asking directly whether they "trust" a station, these more specific evaluations provide a richer and more reliable understanding of how trust is built and maintained. Moreover, Q24 draws on evidence by Tsfati et al. (2023), who showed that people who consistently engage with varied, but established, news outlets tend to perceive media in a more balanced way than those considering only a single source.

Experiment on message credibility (section 5): We propose a short experiment to evaluate how the quality of radio content affects audiences' assessment of the credibility of the content and trust in the source (see Appelman & Sundar, 2016, on the distinction between perceptions of message credibility and trust in the source). Insights from this survey experiment help RNL assess whether their journalists' ability to produce high-quality reports drives trust in the station.

Respondents are randomly assigned to listen to one of two anonymized 1-minute radio reports, i.e., without reference to the source. The treatment group receives a report presenting information in a specific and balanced manner. The control group receives a report presenting information in a vague and unbalanced way. Both versions contain factually accurate content on non-polarizing topics for ethical reasons. Participants are explicitly instructed to focus solely on the content (i.e., not on the broadcaster, journalist, or any other contextual information). Then, they are asked to indicate their trust in the source of the content and rate the report based on accuracy, authenticity, and believability.

Specific report (treatment group): "During the rainy season, road conditions in the Central African Republic can quickly become hazardous. According to the Ministry of Transport, over 35% of road accidents in the last year occurred between May and August. Experts recommend drivers reduce speed, maintain a safe distance, and ensure vehicles are equipped with working lights and brakes."

Vague report (control group): "Many people know that rain makes roads slippery. Sometimes, accidents happen, especially when it's wet outside. Driving slower is probably a good idea, but that depends on the driver. People say the roads aren't great in some areas, and that causes problems, too. Everyone should be careful, but it's not clear what exactly can be done."

Perceived Media Characteristics (section 6): This section asks respondents to evaluate radios' proximity and community orientation (sub-section 6.1) and perceptions of foreign influence (sub-section 6.2).

In sub-section 6.1, Q27 and Q28 evaluate perceptions of community radio features of RNL (Heywood & Yaméogo, 2022; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018; Fawzi et al., 2021). We note that Q28e, f, and g assess proximity to journalists (e.g., their identity and language skills) since Gallagher (2024) highlights the importance of (language-)identity politics in the Central African Republic (see also, dos Santos, 2021). To evaluate whether these features are perceived to be unique to RNL or apply to other radio stations as well, Q28 is asked twice for RNL and another randomized station.

In section 6.2, we employ Q29, Q30a and b, and Q31 to assess whether historically rooted skepticism towards foreign intervention decreases trust in media outlets and whether the

transfer of ownership of RNL from Fondation Hirondelle to a local entity helps increase trust in RNL. Macro-level studies emphasize that local ownership and community embeddedness are crucial drivers of trust (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Frère & Fiedler, 2018).

Open-ended questions on trust in media (section 7): Open-ended questions contribute to a deeper understanding of underlying relationships. Therefore, Q32 captures audience's personal interpretations and lived experiences of media trust and what shaped this trust (Hanitzsch et al., 2017, as cited in Knudsen et al., 2021, p. 2348). Q33 aims to assess the extent to which RNL is seen as a first point of contact for tasks beyond typical radio functions. Qualitative insights gleaned through these questions may complement the quantitative data and help us understand how trust is formed or broken in the Central African Republic.

Closing questions (section 8): At the end, participants are asked three open-ended questions to share additional thoughts about media in the Central African Republic, provide feedback on the interview, and indicate who they believe sent the interviewer. The latter helps assess and control for how perceived affiliation affects survey responses. For example, if RNL is specifically named as the sending organization (although the introduction of the survey questionnaire only mentioned Fondation Hirondelle), the response can be used in regression analysis to control for social desirability bias. The closing questions also serve as a debriefing tool.

3 Where people can receive RNL

Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) is an essential source of news and information in the Central African Republic. However, the reach of its broadcasts remains under-specified. In this section, we therefore estimate RNL signal coverage across territory and population. Specifically, we use radio signal propagation software (RadioMobile) to estimate coverage and statistical software (R and RStudio) to create RNL coverage maps. We then overlay the coverage maps with subnational data on population size to identify the proportion of the population that has and has not access to RNL. Finally, we overlay the RNL coverage maps with data on violence against civilians to assess whether populations affected by violence are within the broadcast range of RNL, and to identify priority regions where access to reliable information is lacking.

3.1 Theoretical background

In Sub-Saharan Africa, FM radio remains the most widely trusted and accessed news media. Its popularity stems from low costs and low access barriers, including for illiterate people in remote areas. Radio provides vital services to the population in developing countries, ranging from critical information to mundane entertainment (Myers, 2008; BBC Media Action, 2012). In the Central African Republic specifically, the dominance of FM radio also stems from the widespread access to mobile phones with built-in FM receivers and portable radios.

However, the simplicity of FM receivers imposes practical limitations, reducing the ability to capture weaker signals and lowering the potential coverage of radio transmitters (Scott & Gagliardone, 2017). FM transmitters propagate radio waves, which can be blocked by topographic features as well as by adverse climatic features such as high humidity and other factors (ITU, 2017). While the Central African Republic does not feature high mountains, climatic conditions that can hamper FM signal propagation are common (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025). These factors, along with obstacles due to Earth's

curvature and the urban location of most radio transmitter antennas, suggest that significant parts of the country will lack access to reliable radio services.

3.2   Data sources

The estimation of RNL signal coverage is based on a range of input data sources, which we describe in detail below.

Radio antenna parameters: RNL provided us with the following information on its 13 FM transmitter antennas in Bambari, Bangassou, Bangui, Beloko, Berberati, Birao, Bossangoa, Bouar, Bozoum, Bria, Mobaye, Ndele, and Obo:

- Geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) of each transmitter site
- Transmitter power (ranging from 300W to 1000W)
- Antenna height (from approximately 35m to 72.5m)
- Antenna gain (3dBi or 6dBi)
- Transmission frequency (uniformly 100.9 MHz across all sites)
- Operational start date per location

Data on terrain and climatic conditions: The radio signal propagation software (RadioMobile) provides online access to terrain, climatic, atmospheric, and soil conditions that affect signal coverage. First, terrain elevation is measured with the NASA's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) data on obstacles like hills, mountains, or valleys, which may block or reduce the strength of the FM signal. Second, surface refractivity and ground conductivity are calibrated to reflect the typical Central African soil content and atmospheric conditions, determining how much of the signal is absorbed or distorted.

Third, climate conditions were classified as equatorial in terms of temperature variations and humidity, which may alter signal strength over extended distances. Finally, the radio propagation software also takes into account the curvature of the Earth, which can indeed explain the range of signal propagation. By taking these characteristics into account, a previously simplistic radius-based FM propagation estimate becomes a geographically sensitive map of RNL's accurate broadcasting footprint.

Data on population size: To assess the size of the potential audience of RNL, the WorldPop dataset provides population density estimates using satellite images at 1km spatial resolution (see Figure 1). Data can be accessed here.
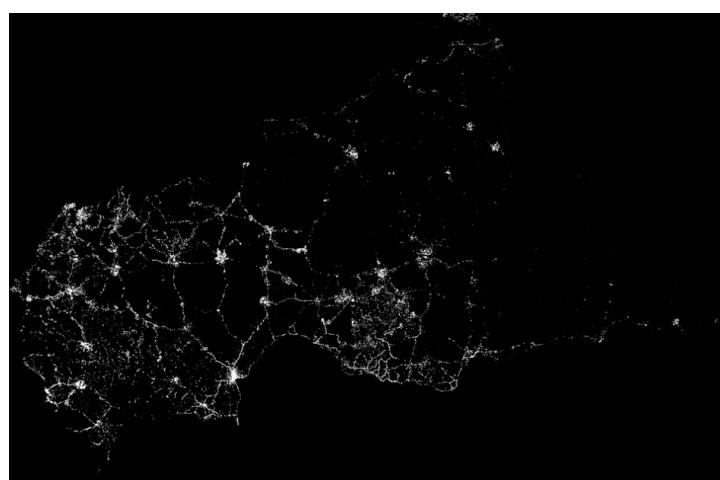
Figure 1. Satellite image of the population in the Central African Republic

Data on violence: To contextualize RNL's broadcasting reach within the political and security landscape of the Central African Republic, conflict event data from the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) project was incorporated. The dataset includes geo-referenced records of violent incidents – including battles, civilian targeting, and riots – from 1997 to 2024. Data can be accessed here.

3.3   Simulation of radio signal propagation

To estimate RNL's geographic coverage, we use the RadioMobile software. It is essentially software for any type of radio signal propagation simulation, including FM signals (i.e., high-frequency signals).

As a first step in our estimation procedure, **we input the technical details of RNL's radio transmitter sites into the Radio Mobile software**. These inputs included the exact position of each transmitter as latitude and longitudinal coordinates alongside more technical parameters, following guidelines by Crabtree & Kern (2018). As described above, we chose built-in values for atmospheric, climatic, and soil conditions that fit the Central African Republic and loaded terrain data from SRTM into the RadioMobile software.

As a second step, we chose **default values for the receiver antenna**. Specifically, we assume that people in the Central African Republic listen via hand-held radio receivers and that the average antenna height is 1m. We also estimate that the receiver antenna has a 0.5 dBm loss.

As a third step, RadioMobile **software predicted signal strengths over a 400-kilometer radius around each transmitter antenna site**. Figure 1 shows the output image for the transmitter antenna in Bangui, depicting the expected received signal strength in dBm. The signal strength per image pixel was then exported as a .txt file and saved for each RNL transmitter antenna.
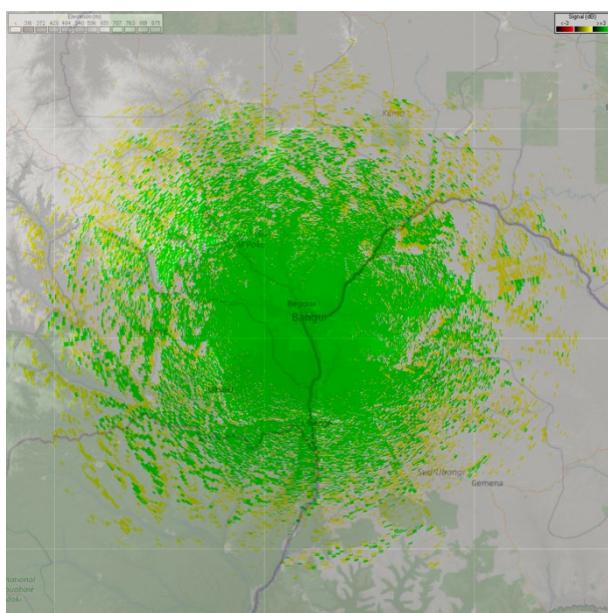

Figure 2. RNL radio coverage estimate for Bangui
(Green refers to a high equality signal above -80 dBm, and yellow to a medium quality signal above -93 dBm).

3.4   Data processing in R

Using the statistical software R, we aggregated the pixels of the image of radio coverage into 5km x 5km grid cells that cover the whole territory of the Central African Republic. Specifically, the mean signal strength of RNL was calculated for each grid cell and each month from the launch of RNL in Bangui (the 27th of March 2000) to the 31st of December 2024. Moreover, the population data was also aggregated in this way.

3.5   Interpretation of results

Figure 3 displays the map of RNL signal propagation in the Central African Republic. **Strong coverage is found in major towns and cities** (e.g., Bangui, Bambari, and Bria). Signal strength decreases with distance from the transmitter antenna and is further weakened by terrain like hills and valleys. The areas below the lower reception threshold of -93 dBm (light blue) are mostly commonly found in the north of the country.
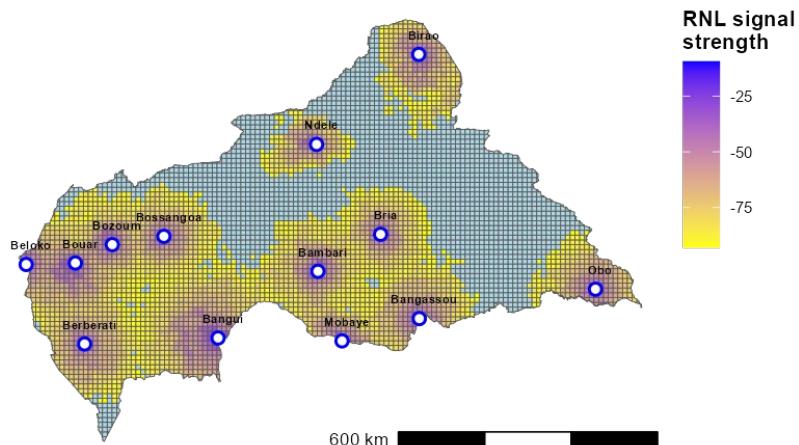
Figure 1. Estimated RNL signal coverage

As illustrated in Figure 4, the radio coverage is overlaid with incidents of violence against civilians (red dots) from ACLED. **RNL is present in many violence-prone areas** (e.g., around Bossangoa, Bozoum, or Bangui). This finding suggests that RNL fulfils its mission of reaching vulnerable populations in times of conflict. Insecurity makes people particularly prone to rumors, propaganda, and disinformation. To mitigate these effects further, RNL could extend coverage in the Kaga-Bandoro area.
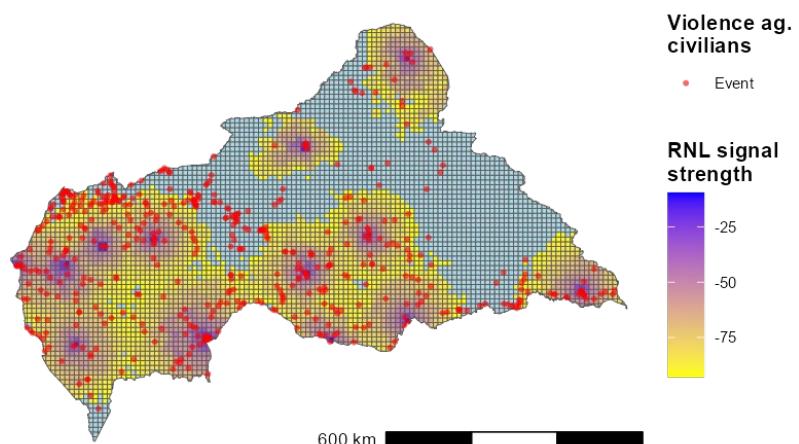
Figure 4. Estimated RNL signal coverage and violence against civilians

In addition to the spatial analysis, overlaying the geographical coverage with spatial population estimates reveals another dimension of RNL's reach. Figure 5 shows the number of people living in areas with RNL signal strength equal to or above -80 dBm over time. This threshold value is considered strong enough for reliable reception of radio. At the start of its radio operations in March 2000, the **size of the potential audience of RNL was 10 million**. With the expansion of the antenna network to Bambari and Bouar in 2010, to Bozoum and Ndélé in 2014/15, to Berbérati and Bossangoa in 2018, to Bangassou, Bria, and Mobaye in 2020, and to Beloko, Birao, and Obo in 2021/22, **the potential audience of RNL grew to an estimated 3.6 million by the end of 2024.**
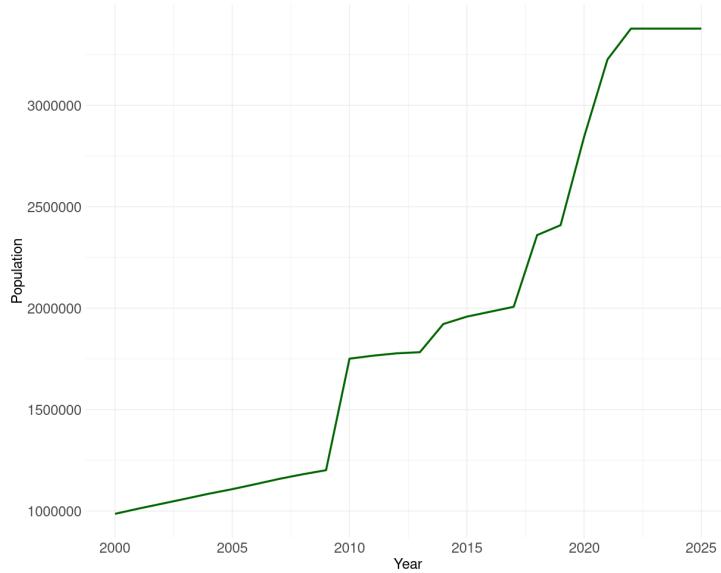

Figure 5 Estimated population covered by RNL Signal, 2000-2024

Notably, these technical improvements coincide with a period of persistent instability in the Central African Republic, marked by repeated outbreaks of violence and humanitarian crises (UN Security Council, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2023), underlining the growing importance of RNL's role in crisis communication. Appendix B provides a detailed year-by-year breakdown of the estimated population living within RNL's effective broadcast range.

3.6   Limitations

We note that the **signal propagation estimates rely on approximations**. Although the RadioMobile software incorporates numerous critical physical and environmental parameters such as terrain elevation, ground conductivity, and climate conditions, these parameters are generalized. They do not account for temporal variation, e.g., due to fluctuating climatic conditions and unforeseen physical changes in infrastructure.

Additionally, although widely utilized and generally accurate, the underlying Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) data used for terrain elevation modelling possesses **resolution limitations**. Areas with highly varied terrain could experience discrepancies in predicted versus actual signal strength. Furthermore, the use of a standardized 5 km x 5 km grid for aggregating signal strength data provides a relatively coarse spatial resolution. This scale may obscure nuanced variations within smaller, more localized

areas, particularly in areas with heterogeneous topography or complex urban environments.

4 Why people trust RNL

Next, we present our preliminary analysis of the expected determinants of trust in RNL, which we have detailed in section 1 of this issue brief. For the analysis, we largely rely on two audience surveys conducted in the Central African Republic in 2022 and 2024. Specifically, the survey covers both urban and rural areas in and around Bangui (the capital), Bambari, Beloko, Birao, Bouar, and Obo in 2022 and Bangui, Bangassou, Berbérati, Bossangoa, and Bria in 2024. The survey is largely representative of the population in these areas regarding individual-level characteristics such as age and gender.

To examine trust in RNL, we use the question: "*Which radio station is your most trusted source of information when something happens in the Central African Republic?*". Answers to this variable are recoded into a binary variable that is 1 for respondents who trust RNL the most and 0 for respondents who trust another radio station the most.

4.1 Individual-Level characteristics and perceived attributes of RNL

In this section, we focus on **our expectations** regarding the relationship between trust in RNL and characteristics measured at the level of the individual, namely

- media consumption patterns (see section 1.2),
- perception of the proximity of RNL (see section 1.3),
- way of listening to RNL (see section 1.3),
- perceptions of attributes of RNL (see section 1.3), and
- perception of RNL as a fact-checking source (see section 1.3).

Methods: We use logistic regressions to estimate how expected determinants of trust in RNL impact the probability that the respondent cited RNL as its most trusted source of information. To ensure that demographic characteristics do not confound the estimated effects of our determinants of trust in RNL, we control for age group, gender, education level, income, and whether the respondent lives in an urban or rural area.[6] In addition, we include the survey year to account for temporal shifts in the political and media environment in the Central African Republic between 2022 and 2024.

Results in brief: The results of our preliminary analysis are depicted in Figure 5. The vertical axis lists the variables used to operationalize the above-mentioned determinants of trust in RNL. The horizontal axis shows the size of the coefficient estimate. The points represent the average effect of a determinant on trust in RNL, and the horizontal lines around the points represent the 95%-confidence interval, i.e., the range in which 95% of similar estimates will fall.

Importantly, if the point estimate and the horizontal of a determinant of trust in RNL is above 0 (dashed vertical line), then this determinant positively affects trust in RNL. If the point estimate and the horizontal of a determinant of trust in RNL is below 0 (dashed vertical line), then this determinant negatively affects trust in RNL.

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[6] Living in an urban environment and possessing higher levels of education has a strong negative correlation with trust in RNL. Income is also correlated with trust: people with lower and medium incomes (from less than 33'000 XAF to 660'000 XAF) lend RNL more trust than people with higher incomes.
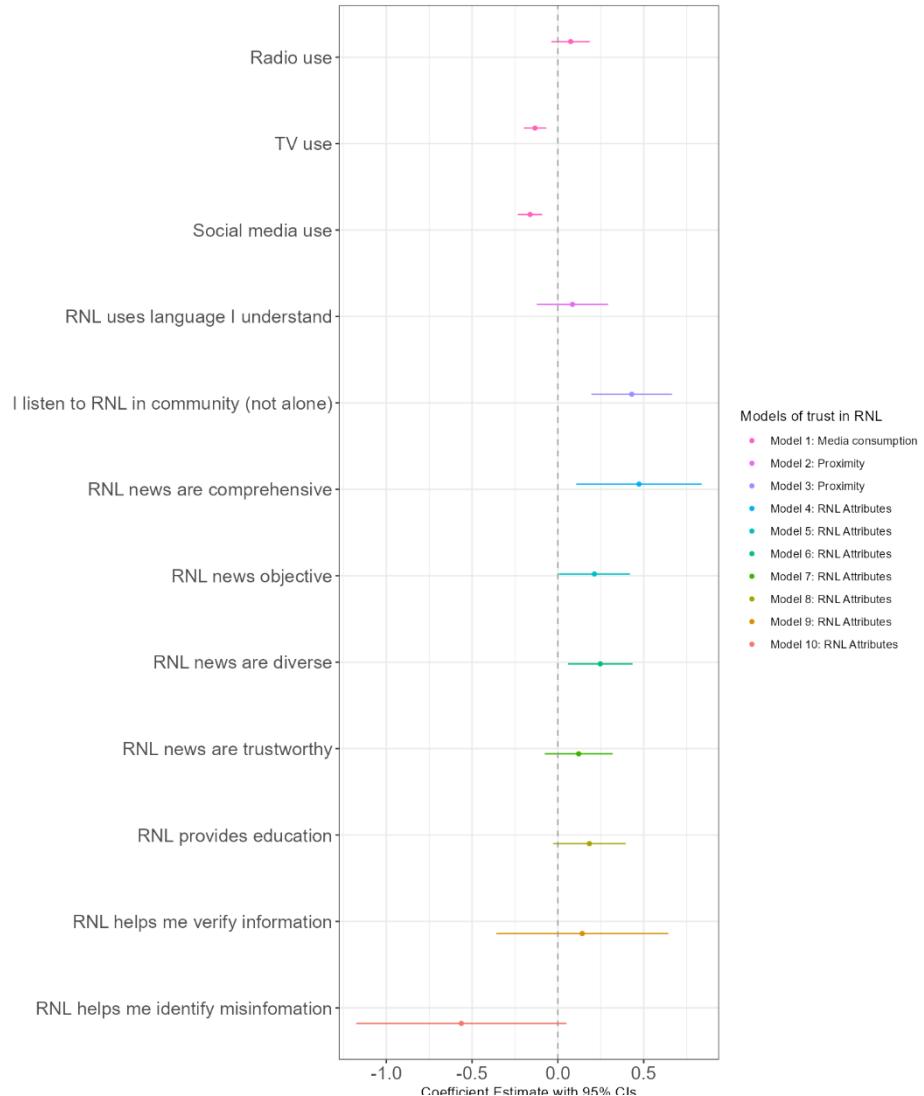
Figure 6. Estimated effects of expected determinants (listed on the left side) on trust in RNL

4.1.1 Media Consumption

First, we explore how media consumption patterns influence respondents' trust in RNL. Drawing on insights from the literature, we hypothesize that individuals in the Central African Republic who consume news from sources other than radio, mainly from social media, are expected to show lower trust in RNL (see section 1.2).

To test this hypothesis, we employ three survey questions on whether a respondent has consumed radio, TV, and social media in the past. The answer possibilities range from never to more than 30 days ago, between 8 and 30 days ago, between 2 and 7 days ago, and just yesterday.

The results seem to support our hypothesis. While radio is positively but not significantly associated with trust in RNL, television and social media use are negatively associated with trust in RNL. In other words, **the more frequent use of both TV and social media by individuals in the Central African Republic is associated with a lower likelihood of considering RNL as their most trusted news source**.

Implication: For Fondation Hirondelle and RNL, these results seem to indicate that having a presence in other media platforms, especially social media (whose use is growing over time), may be critical to sustaining the high level of trust currently conferred to RNL.

4.1.2 Perception of Proximity of RNL

Second, we evaluate the effect of language proximity on the public trust in RNL. As RNL broadcasts in both French and Sango, we expected that respondents who can listen to RNL in the language they use in their daily life are more likely to consider it as their most trusted source of news (see section 1.3).

To test this hypothesis, we use a binary variable that is coded 1 if a respondent indicates that she can listen to RNL in the language she uses the most, and 0 otherwise.

The results do not support our hypothesis. **Listening to RNL in one's language does not seem to be associated with trust in RNL**.

We speculate that this result may stem from the fact that most respondents who use a language other than French or Sango in daily life still have sufficient comprehension of these two languages, which does not impact their trust in RNL. Additionally, it would be interesting to test whether "ultra-local" radio stations broadcasting in other languages display higher levels of trust in their respective localities.

4.1.3 Community listening

Third, we explore the role of another proximity component identified in the literature: the practice of community listening (see section 1.3).

To assess this relationship, we used answers to the question: "*When you listen to the radio, are you most often alone, with family, friends, or acquaintances?*" We then code a binary variable that is 1 for a respondent who did not answer "alone", and 0 otherwise. This operationalization allows us to test whether listening to the radio with family, friends, or acquaintances is associated with a higher likelihood of citing RNL as the most trusted source.

The results support our hypothesis. There is a statistically significant **positive association between listening to the radio with a group of people and the likelihood of considering RNL as its most trusted source of information**.

We note that this result should be considered with care because the survey question refers to radio listening habits in general, and not specifically to RNL.

4.1.4 Perceptions of attributes of RNL

Fourth, we examine how the respondents' perceptions of several attributes of RNL drive their trust in RNL. More precisely, we assess our expectation that perceptions of RNL's content as clear and comprehensive, diverse, interesting, trustworthy, and educational are associated with a higher chance of indicating RNL as the most trusted radio station (see section 1.3).

To measure professionalism, diversity, appeal/interest, trustworthiness, and educational purpose of RNL, we rely on five different survey questions for each of these subcomponents of journalistic quality. The first question asks to which degree the respondent agrees that the content of RNL is **clear**. The second question asks to what extent a respondent agrees that RNL gives access to **objective** information on the country. The third question asks how much the respondent agrees that

the informational content from RNL is **diverse** (i.e., balanced).[7] The fourth question asks how much a respondent agrees that the content from RNL is **trustworthy**. Finally, the last question asks to what extent a respondent agrees that the content from RNL is **interesting and educational**. All questions are recorded on a scale from 1 (not at all agreeing) to 4 (fully agreeing).

The results largely confirm our hypothesis. Specifically, perceptions of comprehensiveness, objectiveness of news, diversified information, trustworthiness of news, and educational value are positively associated with trust in RNL. All variables are significantly related to trust in RNL except perceptions of trustworthiness and education value, which slightly miss conventional levels of statistical significance. Inserting all five attributes in the same model confirms that **perceived clarity, objectiveness, and balance (diversification) of news content best predict trust in RNL.**

Implications: These results suggest that RNL's efforts to ensure that populations in crises have access to reliable information effectively generate trust.

4.1.5 Perceptions of RNL's value for fact-checking

Lastly, we assess our expectation that RNL's strong engagement in fact-checking influences the trust that individuals place in the radio station. We hypothesize that RNL's fact-checking efforts help listeners verify information and develop their ability to identify disinformation, contributing to increasing their trust in the radio station (see section 1.3).

To test this hypothesis, we use the categorical survey responses to the questions: "*To what extent do you agree with the following statement? RNL helps me to check whether a piece of information I have heard is true or not*" and "*to what extent do you agree with the following statement? RNL helps me to improve my judgment to better differentiate between true and false information.*". We code responses on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 4 (fully agree).

The results do not allow us to confirm that positive perceptions of RNL's fact-checking efforts are associated with trust in RNL. Surprisingly, the statistical analysis even suggests that respondents who view RNL as helpful in identifying misinformation are less likely to consider RNL their most trusted source of information. However, the standard error of this estimate is too large for the result to be considered robustly significant.

Further exploration into this surprising result is needed, using alternative methods such as field or survey experiments.

4.2 Context-level characteristics

In this section, we analyze the **relationship between contextual factors in different areas of the Central African Republic and average levels of trust in RNL in these areas**. These areas are defined as cities and their surroundings, including Bambari in 2022, Bangassou in 2024, Bangui in 2022 and 2024, Beloko in 2022, Berbérati in 2024, Birao in 2022, Bossangoa in 2024, Bouar in 2022, Bria in 2024, and Obo in 2022.[8]

Following our literature review, we formulate the following expectations (see section 1.4). Specifically, we expect that trust in RNL increases,

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[7] A similar question asks for satisfaction with balance of the topics reported in RNL, which gives similar results to those reported below.

[8] Unfortunately, we lack the precise geo-coordinates of respondents. Hence, we cannot map where exactly the surveyed respondents are located within and around these cities.

- the lower the presence of domestic and other foreign radio stations,
- the lower the government capacity in an area and the higher the level of insecurity and violence against civilians, and
- the longer RNL is established in an area,

4.2.1 Competitor stations in an area

We assess whether trust in RNL is high due to the absence of credible domestic and foreign-sponsored alternative radios (see section 1.4).

As Figure 7 illustrates, the proportion of people who are aware of one of the three most well-known domestic radio stations and the proportion of people indicating that they trust RNL the most in an area (yellow bar). The distribution suggests that **high trust in RNL in an area is not explained by the lack of alternatives**. We note that, unsurprisingly, the higher the proportion of people knowing RNL, the higher the average proportion of trust in RNL in an area.[9]
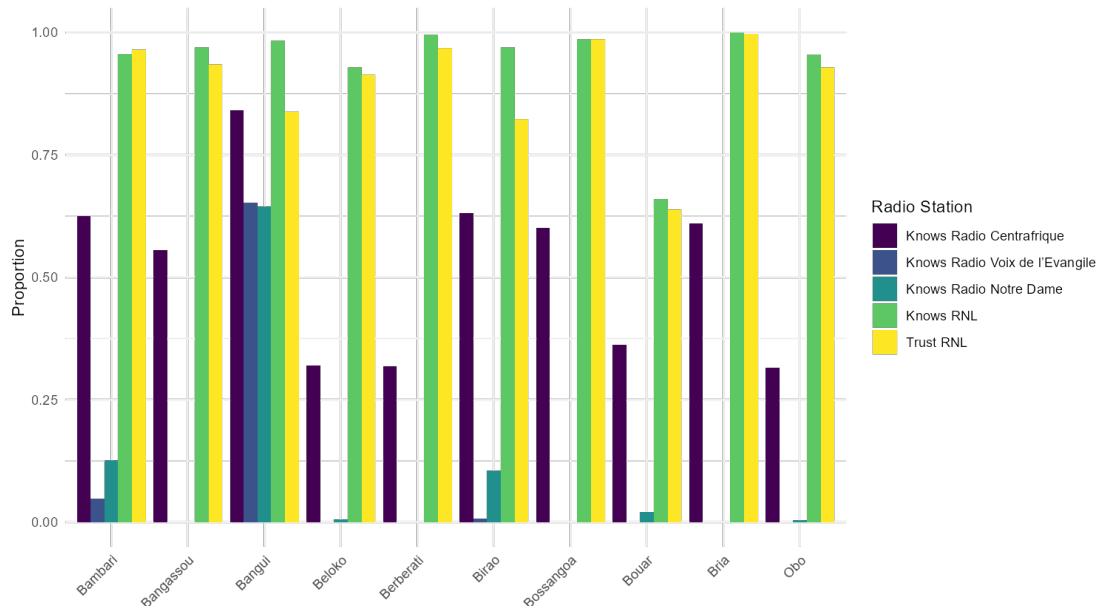
Figure 7. Proportions of people knowing domestic radio and of trust in RNL by area

To assess whether the prevalence of alternative foreign-sponsored radios in an area affects trust in RNL in that area, we assess people's awareness of three foreign-funded radio stations, i.e., the UN-sponsored station Radio Guira FM, the Russia-sponsored local Radio Lengo Songo, or the French station RFI.

Contrary to our expectation (see section 1.4), as shown in Figure 8, **the proportion of people indicating that they trust RNL the most in an area (yellow bar) does not co-vary with knowledge of foreign-sponsored radio stations**. If anything, the more well-known foreign-sponsored stations like Radio Lengo Songo, the more aware people are of RNL and the more they

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[9] The survey indicates that the share of people knowing RNL is slightly lower than the share of people trusting RNL in Bambari. We think that this might because respondent interpreted the question about whether they know about RNL as whether they have already listened to it. It is possible that even people who do not listen to RNL trust the station by word of mouth.

indicate that they trust RNL the most. RNL seems to stand out as the most independent and professional among the stations with foreign funding.
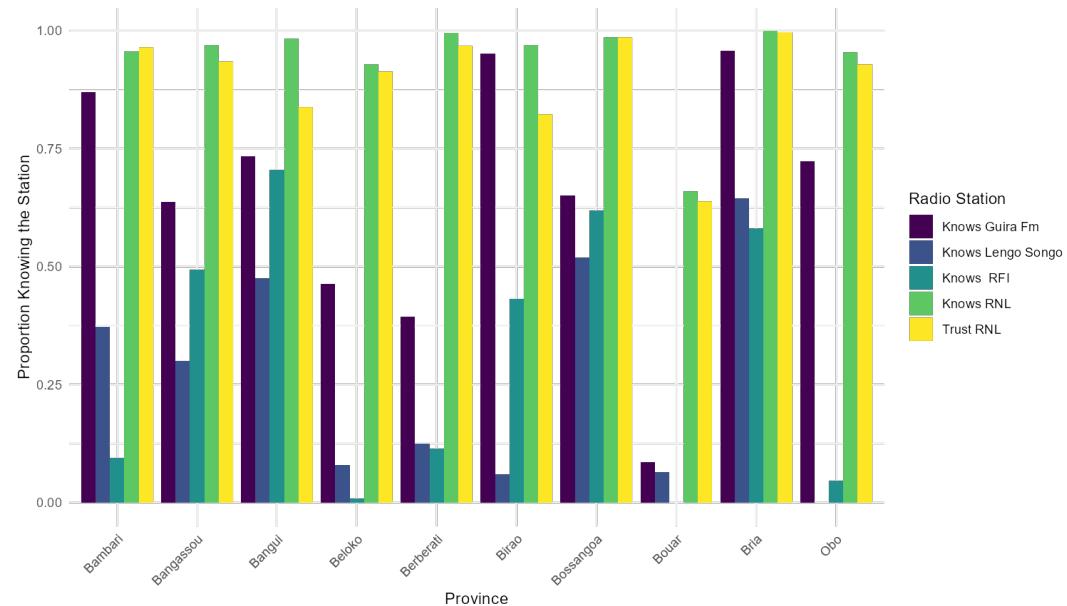
Figure 8. Proportions of people knowing foreign-funded radio and of trust in RNL by area

We note that the above analyses only rely on variation across 10 provinces. If we analyzed more fine-grained variation (e.g., the relationship between an individual's access to media sources other than RNL and this individual's trust in RNL across thousands of individuals), we may find evidence for the expectation that the lack of alternative media sources is a factor in explaining high trust in RNL. Moreover, the data does not reflect the quality or professionalism of domestic radios. Hence, it could still be the case that the absence of *high-quality* domestic radio stations in a given area explains high levels of trust in RNL in that area.

4.2.2   Government capacity in an area

We expect that greater government capacity in a province leads to less trust in RNL (see section 1.4). To assess this hypothesis, we utilize data on road density[10] as an indicator of greater government capacity. These data are only available for seven areas of Bambari, Bangassou, Bangui, Berbérati, Bossangoa, Bouar, and Bria.

Somewhat in line with our expectation, there seems to be a **null or slightly negative relationship between mean road density (horizontal axis) and mean trust in RNL by areas** (vertical axis). The only outlier is Bérbérati, where road density is relatively low at 27.0 km², but the mean proportion of people with trust in RNL remains relatively low as well, at 0.84.

Again, we note that it is difficult to draw conclusions based on very few data points (i.e., seven provinces for which road density data is available).

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[10] Data was collected by Carl Müller-Crepon and Philipp Hunzinger and is available and described here: https://www.carlmueller-crepon.org/project/road_data/
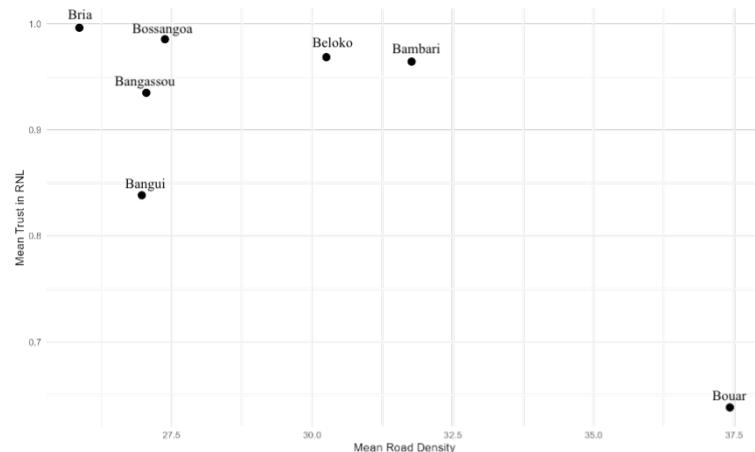
Figure 9. The relationship between mean trust in RNL and mean road density by area

4.2.3 Violence against civilians in an area

Related to government capacity, we hypothesize that insecurity due to violence against civilians increases trust in RNL. The station may provide especially crucial public services to populations in times of crisis, such as reconciliation assistance and early warnings (see section 1.4).

As illustrated in Figure 10, contrary to our expectation, there seems to be a **negative association between the mean level of violence against civilians in the survey year[11] and the proportion of people who indicate that they trust RNL the most in that survey year.**
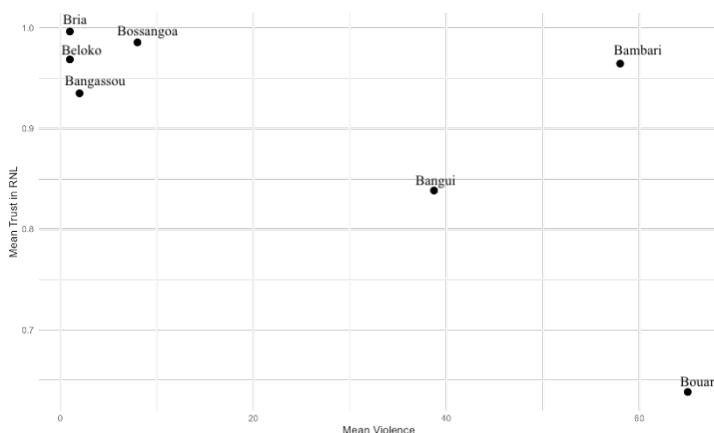
Figure 10. Relationship between mean violence against civilians and mean trust in RNL

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[11] Data comes from the above-referenced ACLED database.

4.2.4   Longevity of the RNL transmitter site in an area

Finally, we expect that the longevity of RNL antennas in a province has a positive effect on trust in RNL (see section 1.4). To assess this expectation, we employ data on how many days have elapsed since the antennas in an area became operational.

As visualized in Figure 11, there seems to be a negative relationship with trust in Radio Ndeke Luka. Areas with relatively recently established antennas (e.g., Bangassou, Bossonga, and Bria) show very high trust in RNL, while provinces with long-established antennas (especially Bouar but also Bangui) show relatively low trust levels. The data, therefore, do not support our expectations.

Importantly, the longevity of RNL as a *country-wide* media institution may still explain the high level of trust in the station overall in the Central African Republic. Moreover, the finding is largely driven by Bouar, which has the highest levels of violence, and Bangui, which is the more densely populated capital. Both population density and violence may be responsible for reducing trust in RNL more so than the longevity of its presence in these places.
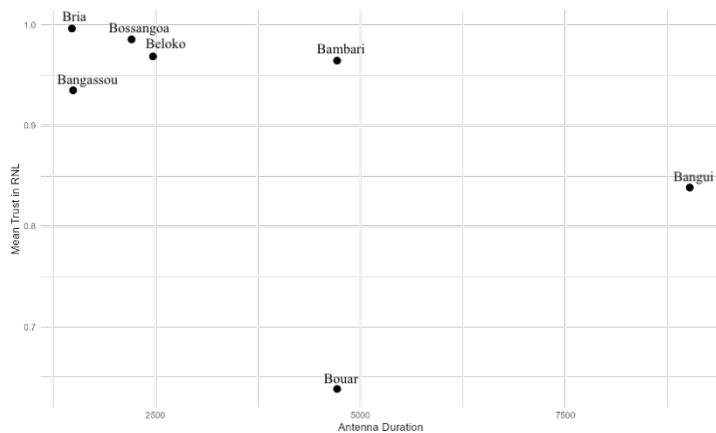

Figure 11. Relationship between trust in the RNL and the duration of local antenna by area

5   Does RNL contribute to peace?

To explore RNL's potential contribution to peacebuilding efforts in the Central African Republic, we created an **interactive time-lapse map** overlaying radio signal coverage with violence event data provided by ACLED by year. The goal was to visually assess whether changes in RNL's broadcast reach over time correlate with the occurrence and distribution of violent incidents.

5.1   An interactive time-lapse map

RNL's signal strength was categorized into three groups to easily identify levels of accessibility:

- Below -93dBm: Cannot listen
- -93dBm to -80dBm: Can barely listen
- Above -80dBm: Can listen

Four types of violence events were used for the analysis:

- Violence against Civilians
- State vs. Rebels
- Non-state Actors vs. Non-state Actors (NSA vs. NSA)

- Communal Conflict

To avoid overlapping classifications of the same event, a rule-based priority system was used. Each event was assigned a single type based on the first condition it met in the hierarchy of event types above. For instance, if an event belonged to both "Violence against Civilians" and "Communal Conflict", it was labeled as the former given that condition appeared earlier in the code.

The interactive time-lapse map developed with R[12] allows us to explore the evolution of RNL's coverage and the geographic distribution of violence between 2000 and 2024:
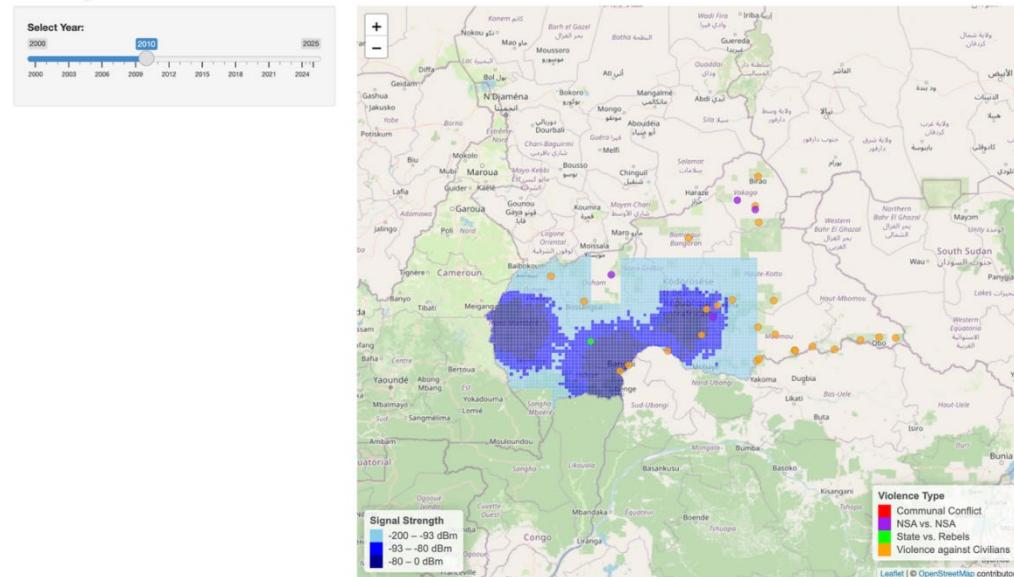
Figure 12. Before the start of the armed conflict in 2010 (antennas are in Bangui, Bouar, and Bambari)

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[12] This map can easily be recreated and modified with the data and code found in the following google drive:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qjcOpHn3y_zoqg5-J9oUnURJqtDs8vvC?usp=share_link
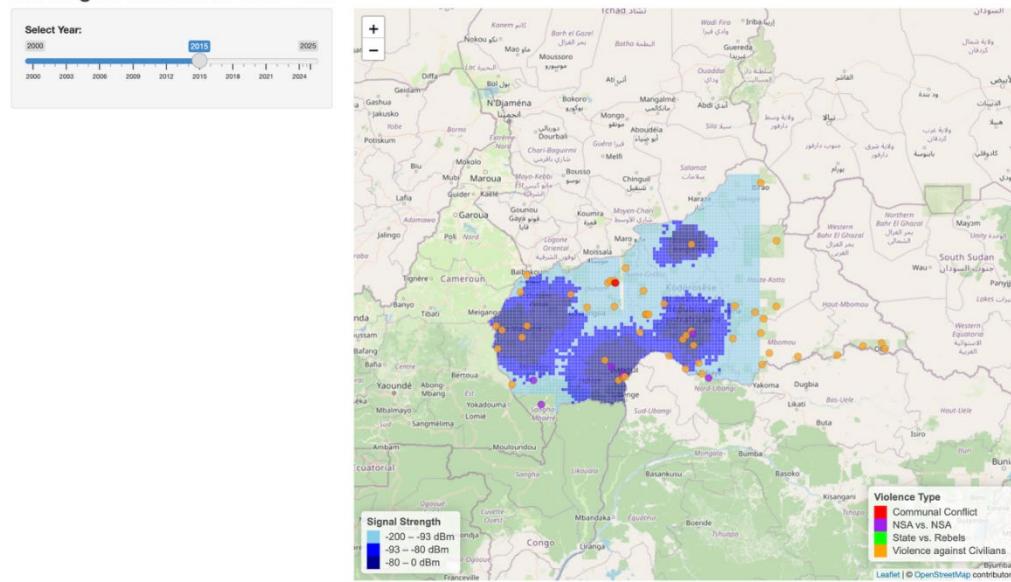
Figure 13. After the peace agreement and before elections in 2015 (antennas are also in Ndele and Bozoum)
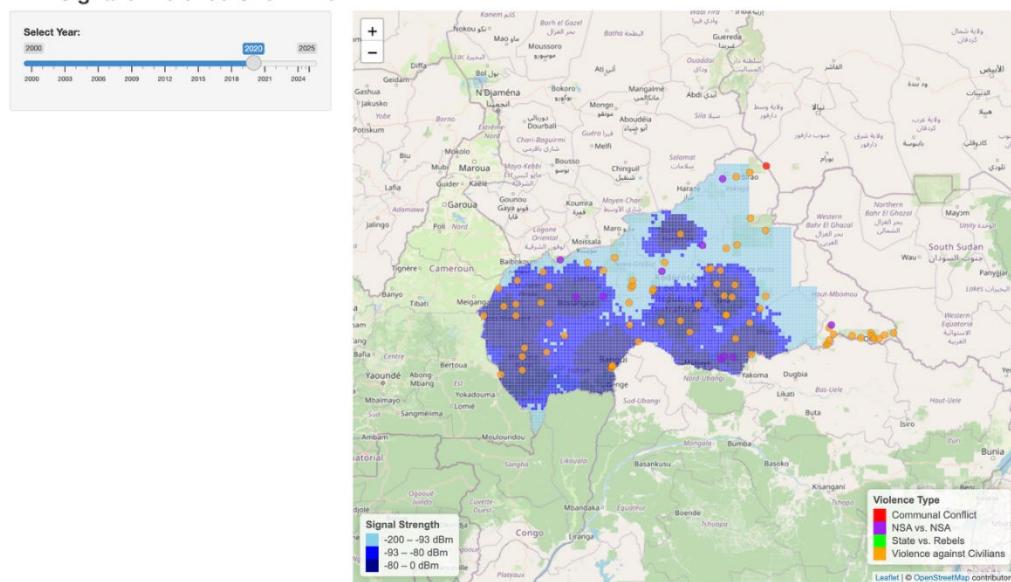
Figure 14. After the expansion of RNL sites in the year 2020 (antennas are also in Bangassou, Bria, Berberati, Bossangoa, and Mobaye)
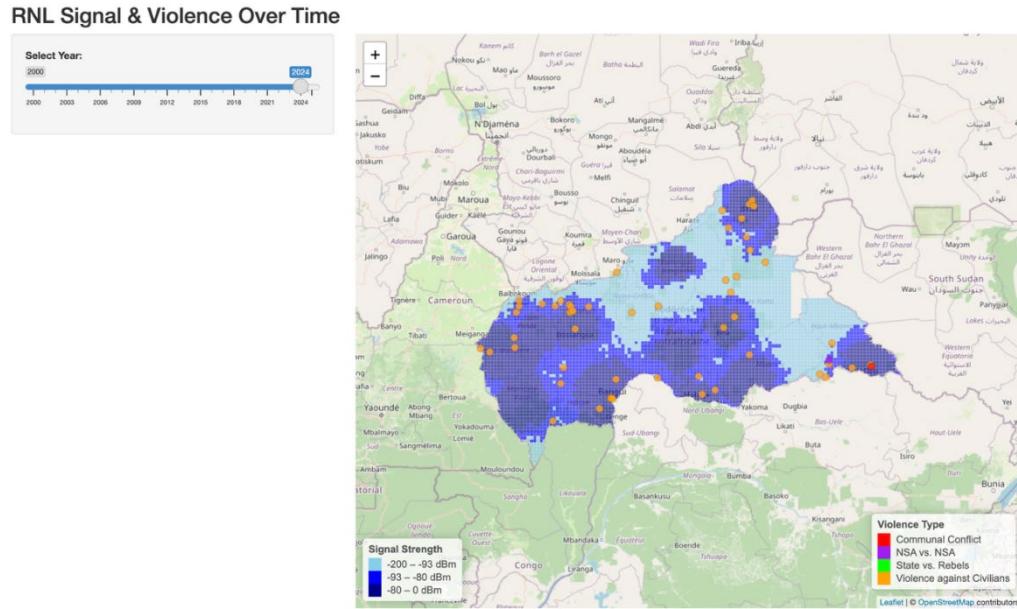
Figure 14. Using the most recent data in the year 2024 (antennas are also Beloko, Birao, and Obo)

5.2   Preliminary analysis of peacebuilding effects

The interactive time-lapse maps show that, **over time, RNL appears to have expanded its signal coverage, increasingly reaching areas affected by the conflict**. Notably, many violent events occur within provinces with moderate to strong RNL coverage, suggesting that RNL is present in areas where violence is concentrated.

However, the visualization of the data does not show a clear correlation, positive or negative, that would indicate violence-reducing effects of RNL coverage. Violence is present in areas with and without strong signal coverage, and the rise in violence over time seems to follow broader national conflict trends rather than shifts in radio coverage alone. Therefore, **it cannot be concluded that RNL either reduces or exacerbates violence based on this spatial-temporal mapping**.

Further statistical analysis is needed to better understand the role of RNL in peacebuilding in the Central African Republic. This could include event-based regression analysis to isolate the effect of access to RNL on incidents of violence or the analysis of surveys (for example, using the questionnaire described in sub-section 2.3 and Appendix A) to assess population perceptions of how RNL broadcasts affect civilian (in)security.

6   Concluding remarks

We like to thank Sacha Meuter and Nicki Bailey at Fondation Hirondelle for this opportunity to work on an exciting project and for their advice throughout the process. We hope that Fondation Hirondelle and the radio station RNL find our results useful for their important work.

Of course, we stand ready to offer further explanations and analyses. All data and code to replicate our analysis and to run the application of the interactive map of RNL coverage can be accessed here.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Introduction

[Intro by Interviewer:] Hello, my name is [Interviewer name], and I work in collaboration with Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss-based NGO specializing in the media sector. We are conducting a study on how people in the Central African Republic get their information and how they perceive the role of the media. I do not represent the government or any political party.

You, as a participant, were selected randomly, and your answers will be treated confidentially. They will be put together with [xxx] other people we are talking to, to get an overall picture. It will be impossible to pick you out from what you say, so please feel free to tell us what you think. This interview will take about 60 minutes. There is no penalty for refusing to participate. In addition, you can contact us at [telephone number] if you do not want us to use the information you have already provided later on. Do you have any questions?

Do you wish to proceed?

[If yes: proceed. If no: politely thank and stop.]

We can conduct this interview in French or Sango. Which one would you like?

Section 1: Sociodemographic Information

First, I would like to ask you some basic information about yourself.

1. What year were you born?
   - o Open-ended: _____

2. What gender do you identify with?
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Other
   - o Prefer not to say

3. What is the main language you speak at home?
   - o Sango
   - o French
   - o Other (please specify): _____

4. What is your highest level of education completed?
   - o No formal schooling
   - o Some primary schooling
   - o Completed primary schooling
   - o Some secondary schooling
   - o Completed secondary schooling
   - o Some higher education
   - o Completed higher education
   - o Don't know / Prefer not to say

5. How would you assess your ability to read and write?
   - o I can read and write easily without problems
   - o I can read and write, but with some difficulty
   - o I can read a little, but writing is difficult for me
   - o I can recognize a few words, but I cannot read or write easily
   - o I cannot read or write
   - o Don't know / Prefer not to say

6. Do you have a job that pays a cash income?
   - o No (and not looking)
   - o No (but looking)

       o   Yes (part-time)

       o   Yes (full time)

       o   Don't know / Prefer not to say

7. Where do you live?
   - o Urban area (city/town)
   - o Rural area (village)

8. How many people live in your household?
   - o Open-ended: _____

9. How much do you trust the following?

Group/Institution	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	A lot	Don't know
a) People in your community						
b) The national government						
c) Local community leaders or chiefs						
d) Media outlets						

10. How interested are you in national politics?
    - o Not interested at all
    - o A little interested
    - o Neutral
    - o Somewhat interested
    - o Very interested
    - o Don't know / Prefer not to say

11. How would you describe your attitude toward the government?
    - o Supporter
    - o Sympathizer
    - o Neutral
    - o Skeptical
    - o Opponent
    - o Don't know / Prefer not to say

12. How satisfied are you with the public goods and services the government provides (e.g., security, health, education)?

- o Very dissatisfied
- o Somewhat dissatisfied
- o Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- o Somewhat satisfied
- o Very satisfied
- o Don't know / Prefer not to say

Section 2: Media Consumption Patterns

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about how you consume media.

13. How often do you use the following media sources for news and information?

Source	Never	Rarely	1-2 times a month	Weekly	3-4 times a week	Daily	Several times a day	Don't know
a) Radio								
b) Television								
c) Newspaper								
d) Internet/social media								
e) Word of mouth								
f) Other (please specify): _____								

[Continue with the survey if they didn't answer "never" for radio in question 13. If they answered "never" for radio, proceed only with questions 18-20, 22, 24-26, 29, 31-36]:

14. You mentioned using the radio for news and information. Please tell us which stations or channels you consulted in the following timeframes?

Timeframe	Station(s) listened to (Open-ended)
a) Yesterday	
b) In the past week	
c) In the past month	

15. Why do you listen to the radio?
    o Open-ended: _____

16. Compared to other sources of information (e.g., TV, newspaper, internet/social media), how would you describe the ease of accessing the radio?
    o Much easier than other sources
    o Easier than other sources
    o About the same as other sources
    o Less easy than other sources
    o Much less easy than other sources
    o Don't know

17. How do you usually listen to the radio?
    o   Alone on a mobile device (e.g., mobile phone, tablet)
    o   Alone but on a shared device
    o   Together with family members at home
    o   With a group of friends
    o   In public places (market, workplace, etc.)
    o   Other (please specify): _____
    o   Don't know

Section 3: General Trust in Media

In the next few minutes, I would like to ask you questions about how much you trust different sources of information.

18. What does trust in media mean to you?
    o   Open-ended: _____

19. In general, how much do you trust the following sources?

Source	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	Completely	Don't know/Never use
a) Radio						
b) Television						
c) Newspaper						
d) Internet/social media						
e) Word of mouth						

20. How much do you trust the following radio stations?

Radio Station	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	Completely	Don't know/Never listen
a) Radio Ndeke Luka						
b) Radio France International						
c) Radio Republique Centrafrique						
d) Radio la voix de l'évangile						
e) Radio Guira FM						
f) Radio Notre Dame						

21. From the radio stations in question 20, which is your preferred radio station [potentially repeat the options to the respondent]?
    Open-ended: _____

Section 4: Role of Media in Society

Next, I have a couple of questions for you on the role of media in society.

22. When you need reliable information during a crisis (e.g., armed conflict, natural disaster, food shortages, health emergencies):

a) Please rank the following media types in order of preference you would turn to, to receive information (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, etc.).

Source	Preference
a) Radio	
b) Television	
c) Newspaper	
d) Internet/social media	
e) Word of mouth	
f) Other (please specify): _____	

b) [Only ask for the first-ranked source in question 22. a)] Please specify the source or platform you would use:
   - o Radio: Which station? _____
   - o Television: Which channel? _____
   - o Newspaper: Which one? _____
   - o Internet/social media: Which platform? _____
   - o Word of mouth: From whom? (e.g., community leader, neighbor, family member) _____
   - o Other (please specify): _____

[Question 23 in the following is listed twice: Once for the preferred radio station and once for an additional randomized radio station in CAR.]

23. a)

i) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about [preferred radio station]:

Source	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
a) [Preferred radio station] provides information that helps me better understand local events and issues.						
b) [Preferred radio station] provides useful information in times of conflict or insecurity.						
c) [Preferred radio station] covers all sides when reporting on conflict-related issues.						
d) [Preferred radio station] helps mediate tensions between different communities.						
e) [Preferred radio station] promotes peaceful interaction and dialogue between different communities.						
f) I have learned where to go or what to do during crises (e.g., violence, natural disasters) thanks to						

[preferred radio station].						
g) In times of insecurity or confusion, [preferred radio station] provides more guidance than state authorities.						

ii) Please indicate how likely you are to...

Aspect	Not likely at all	Not very likely	Average	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Don't know
a) ...check information by using [preferred radio station].						
b) ...feel confident in the accuracy of information from [preferred radio station].						

iii) How would you rate the following aspects of [preferred radio station]?

Aspect	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good	Don't know
a) Accuracy of information						
b) Balance in coverage						
c) Thoroughness of reporting						
d) Quality of journalism						
e) Diversity of viewpoints presented						

23. b)

i) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about [a randomized radio station]:

Source	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
a) [Randomized radio station] provides						

information that helps me better understand local events and issues.						
b) [Randomized radio station] provides useful information in times of conflict or insecurity.						
c) [Randomized radio station] covers all sides when reporting on conflict-related issues.						
d) [Randomized radio station] helps mediate tensions between different communities.						
e) [Randomized radio station] promotes peaceful interaction and dialogue between different communities.						
f) I have learned where to go or what to do during crises (e.g., violence, natural						

disasters) thanks to [randomized radio station].						
g) In times of insecurity or confusion, [randomized radio station] provides more guidance than state authorities.						

ii) Please indicate how likely you are to...

Aspect	Not likely at all	Not very likely	Average	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Don't know
a) ...check information by using [randomized radio station].						
b) ...feel confident in the accuracy of information from [randomized radio station].						

iii) How would you rate the following aspects of [randomized radio station]?

Aspect	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good	Don't know
a) Accuracy of information						
b) Balance in coverage						
c) Thoroughness of reporting						
d) Quality of journalism						
e) Diversity of viewpoints presented						

24. How likely are you to use several different sources to verify information you receive?
   o Very likely
   o Somewhat likely
   o Average
   o Not very likely

o   Not likely at all
o   Don't know

Section 5: Survey Experiment - Assessing Message Credibility

In the next part of the survey, you will listen to a short radio report of about 2 minutes. Afterwards, I will ask you two questions about what you just heard. Please focus only on the content of the report itself.

[Play a short, pre-selected radio report once (around 1–2 minutes).]

Let me ask you two questions about this radio report now.

25. How much would you trust the radio station that produced it?
    o Completely
    o Mostly
    o Somewhat
    o A little
    o Not at all
    o Don't know

26. How well each of the following words describes the report?

Aspect	Very poorly	Poorly	Average	Well	Very Well	Don't know
a) Accurate						
b) Authentic						
c) Believable						

Thank you. Now we will continue with the next section of the survey.

Section 6: Perceived Media Characteristics

We are already halfway through the questionnaire. In the next ten minutes, I would like to ask you about media characteristics. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

[Question 28 and question 30 in the following section are listed twice (numbered a) and b)): Once for the preferred radio station and once for an additional randomized radio station in CAR.]

Proximity and Community Orientation

27. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Radio feels like a more personal medium than other types of media.
    o Strongly agree
    o Somewhat agree
    o Neither agree nor disagree
    o Somewhat disagree
    o Strongly disagree
    o Don't know

28. a) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about [preferred radio station]:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
a) My preferred radio station is "close to the people" by talking about issues affecting my community.						
b) I hear stories from my preferred radio station that sound like they could be happening in my own neighborhood.						
c) My preferred radio station reports stories that reflect my own experience.						

d) I feel more connected to my preferred radio station when I can interact with the radio station (such as feedback mechanisms).						
e) I feel more connected to my preferred radio station when I know that the journalist is from my own region.						
f) I feel more connected to my preferred radio station when the journalist speaks my own first language.						
g) Knowing the personal background of the journalists (e.g. own experience of violence or armed conflict) from my preferred radio station makes the reporting more meaningful to me.						

28. b) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about [randomized radio station]:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know

a) [Randomized radio station] is "close to the people" by talking about issues affecting my community.					
b) I hear stories from [randomized radio station] that sound like they could be happening in my own neighborhood.					
c) [Randomized radio station] reports stories that reflect my own experience.					
d) I feel more connected to [randomized radio station] when I can interact with the radio station (such as feedback mechanisms).					
e) I feel more connected to [randomized radio station] when I know that the journalist is from my own region.					
f) I feel more connected to [randomized radio station] when the journalist speaks my own first language.					
g) Knowing the personal background of the journalists (e.g. own experience of violence or armed conflict) from [randomized radio station] makes the					

reporting more meaningful to me.											

Perceptions of Foreign Influence

29. Who is in charge of the radio stations you know? [Repeat the radio stations that the person knows from question 20]

- o [Station A]: _____
- o [Station B]: _____
- o [Station C]: _____
- o Don't know

30. a) To what extent do you believe [preferred radio station] is independent from:

Influence source	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	Completely	Don't know
a) Government influence						
b) Political party influence						
c) Military influence						
d) Foreign influence						
e) Commercial influence						

30. b) To what extent do you believe [randomized radio station] is independent from:

Influence source	Not at all	A little	Neutral	Somewhat	Completely	Don't know
a) Government influence						
b) Political party influence						
c) Military influence						
d) Foreign influence						
e) Commercial influence						

31. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
a) I am generally skeptical of media that is funded or supported by foreign organizations.						
b) Foreign support helps improve the quality of journalism.						
c) I think it's important that Central African media are managed and owned by local people.						
d) Even if a media source is funded from abroad, it can still serve the interest of the local population.						

Section 7: Open-Ended Questions on Trust in Media

Thank you very much for answering all the previous questions. To finish, I have two more open-ended questions for you. Here, you can answer freely and in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers; we are simply interested in your personal thoughts and experiences. Please take your time.

32. Can you recall a specific instance when your trust in your preferred medium source was either strengthened or weakened? Please describe.
    o Open-ended: _____

33. Guided-Open-ended question:
[Listen carefully and record the answer in as much detail as possible. If necessary, summarize long answers carefully but keep the original meaning. Remain neutral at all times, never suggest what the "correct" action might be.]

a) [Read the question, pause, and let the respondent answer freely]: Imagine you find a passport lying on the ground that belongs to someone you do not know. What would you do with the passport?
    o Open-ended: _____
b) [If the answer is short, use the following gentle probes to deepen the response where suitable]:
    o *Can you tell me why you would choose to do that?*
    o *What would you be thinking about in that moment?*
    o *Would you be concerned about anything?*
    o *Where do you think the passport would finally end up after your action?*

Section 8: Closing Questions

This was the last part of the survey. I just have three final questions for you. After that, we are finished.

34. Do you have any other comments about the media in the Central African Republic, or your preferred media source specifically?
    o Open-ended: _____

35. Do you have any feedback about this interview?
    o Open-ended: _____

36. Who do you think has sent the interviewer?
    a. Open-ended: _____

Thank you very much for your participation and your time.

Appendix B: Radio coverage

Between 2000 and 2024, the estimated number of people in the Central African Republic with access to the RNL signal rose from around 986,000 to over 3.3 million. The most significant increase can be observed from 2010 onwards, which is presumably related to the commissioning of additional transmitter sites.

Table A1. Estimated size of the population with access to RNL in the Central African Republic

Year	Population size covered by RNL	% of total population
2000	986147.4	26%
2001	1011892	26%
2002	1036081	26%
2003	1060502	26%
2004	1085314	26%
2005	1107825	26%
2006	1132728	26%
2007	1158419	26%
2008	1181116	26%
2009	1201367	26%
2010	1751127	38%
2011	1765839	37%
2012	1777380	37%
2013	1783016	37%
2014	1922048	40%
2015	1958296	41%
2016	1982609	40%
2017	2006856	40%
2018	2360428	46%
2019	2409308	46%
2020	2843680	53%
2021	3226312	59%
2022	3378279	61%
2023	3378279	61%
2024	3378279	61%