Information Ecosystems ahead of Ghana's 2024 Elections

Assessing Misinformation/Disinformation Threats And Patterns, Voter Competence and Media Readiness

CJID
CENTRE FOR JOURNALISM INNOVATION & DEVELOPMENT

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Acknowledgements

The Authors

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Acknowledgements

1.0   Introduction: Problem statement

The year 2024 has been dubbed the 'year of democracy' because almost half of the global population is expected to go to the polls this year to decide the fate and trajectory of their countries for the next few years. Already, countries like Senegal, South Africa, India, Venezuela, the United Kingdom, France, and many others have concluded their elections, with a handful of others yet to hold. Among these include countries like the United States, Austria and Ghana, where about 17 million people are expected to vote in the upcoming December 7 elections. However, as with every other election that has been held or is scheduled to hold this year, the threat of information disorder (misinformation, disinformation, malinformation) is a key area of concern, especially because with the evolution of trends relating to Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), computational propaganda, expanding capacities, strategies, and resources used to manipulate public opinion around the world, the stakes and ability to create and share highly deceptive information have become even more pronounced.

Following the Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. presidential election, there has been much discussion about the influence of disinformation on election outcomes. Beyond these elections, there is a growing recognition that, in several countries across the world, disinformation has emerged as a significant electoral trait (Bader, 2018). In the Ghanaian context, this was echoed in the comprehensive research report commissioned by Dubawa Ghana on information disorder in the Ghana 2020 elections, where Sikanku (2021) noted that the conduct of clean, professional campaigns, the expansion of democracy in Ghana, and the seamless functioning of elections are all seriously threatened by information disorder. In light of the need to create news quickly, the popularity of vlogging as a means of gaining attention, and the political desire for negative publicity and smear campaigns, misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and other forms of information disorder have become the means by which social and political reality is constructed, events are framed, and issues are interpreted, distorting and undermining democratic progress.

Thus, voter access to accurate information about candidates and important issues is essential to maintaining election integrity. Such material typically originates from political campaigns or media outlets. These reliable and open sources of information play a crucial role in ensuring that elections are conducted effectively. However, due to the significant influence that messaging can have on voter behaviour, intentionally fabricated information by hostile actors can potentially undermine legitimate elections (Gerber et al., 2009; DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007).

A clear demonstration of efforts to disrupt access to accurate information in Ghana's previous election was highlighted by Sikanku (2021) as the cloning of important news and fact-checking websites such as Ghanafact.com became ghanafactcheck.com, bbc.

com, myjoyonline.com, citinewsroom.com and many others in the lead up to the 2020 elections. As a result of these active attempts to disrupt the information ecosystem, fact-checkers serve as frontline contractors for information disorders.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Itodo (2024), elections in many African countries are often a zero-sum game defined by ethnic, religious, and regional distrust and rivalries – a fact that tends to threaten voters' rights, electoral credibility, and information integrity. More so, the spread of AI-generated misinformation and disinformation poses a threat of further exacerbating the existing tensions of ethno-religious divisions within African countries. Effoduh (2024), for example, voiced grave concerns about the effects of AI-generated content that is extremely realistic, or "deepfakes," on the already precarious democracies that exist in many African countries – a warning that radical organisations might use AI to widen these societal divides, sway public opinion, and weaken democracy, which would ultimately result in voter disenfranchisement and the spread of false information. This reality was expressed by Sikanku (2021) to be similar to what is obtainable in Ghana.

Therefore, to efficiently design a comprehensive and effective response to curtail the threats of information disorder in Ghana in the lead-up to the crucial 2024 general elections, it is necessary to first identify and understand the nature of the prevalent threats as well as the patterns with elections in Ghana. This involves assessing the evolution of the information ecosystem within the period of the last election and the recent months leading up to the December elections, understanding the perception and knowledge of electorates especially first-time voters, as well as evaluating the skill level and preparedness of the country's media professionals in countering false narratives in the upcoming elections.

1.1 Literature Review

The study of information disorder (misinformation, disinformation, malinformation) as an important dimension of election research has been around for a while. However, it has received more attention in recent years with the growth and expanding nature of social media use for political information sharing. This recognition has driven the expansion of the conversation about the relationship between elections and disinformation as well as other important dimensions to it.

According to Bader (2018), after the Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. presidential election, information disorder has come to be recognised globally as having a critical influence on election or electoral outcomes. Beyond these elections, there is growing recognition that disinformation has emerged as a significant electoral trait in several countries across the world. In a bid to expand the understanding of the different dimensions of the phenomenon of disinformation in elections in both democratic and

undemocratic environments, and discuss measures to reduce its scope and negative impact, Bader evaluated what he refers to as "the most common forms of disinformation in elections" including the sharing of 'fake news' in to discredit political opponents and/or to influence the electoral process, the manipulation of polling data, and the use of fake election monitoring and observation.

Globally, this has been reflected in the preoccupation of election and political communication research. This preoccupation can be grouped into four main categories: social media influence, voter behaviour, sources/types of disinformation, and mitigation strategies. It is important to note that two or more of these categories often overlap as can be seen in the studies reviewed in the subsequent sections.

In Italy, Pierri et. al (2019) examined the existence (and impact) of disinformation spread on Italian online social networks during the five months leading up to the 2019 elections for the European Parliament. They gathered an extensive set of tweets linked to thousands of news stories posted on Italian websites known for sharing disinformation and found that the majority of the false material that circulated on Twitter throughout the observation period, which concentrated on divisive and contentious issues like immigration, national security, and (Italian) nationalism, came from a small number of sources. In the time leading up to the elections, also discovered evidence of links between Italian disinformation sources and various disinformation publications in Russia, the United States, and Europe that included similar, even translated, stories. Their findings reflect the fact that the threats posed by information disorder have both local and global implications.

Similarly, in Kenya, Maweu (2020) looked at the ways that misinformation and online propaganda were disseminated during Kenya's 2017 general elections via social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter and found that the increase in dissemination of misinformation, "fake news," and online propaganda was accompanied by this upsurge in online activities which raised doubts about the validity of the election results. Using data collected through qualitative content analysis of some texts circulated on social media; she identified three forms of information disorder: misleading, fabricated, and imposter content which fits into with the formats of disinformation, malinformation and misinformation proposed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2018).

In the US, Nisbet et. al (2021) found that widespread political disinformation poses a threat to the integrity of American electoral democracy. By carrying out an online study of 2,474 Americans, particularly Democrats and Independents, paying more attention to political news increases of what they referred to as "presumed influence of disinformation (PIM)" on others rather than oneself, they contend that PIM could be as ubiquitous and harmful as any actual impact that political disinformation could have on voters and in turn, this

weakens the "virtuous circle" between news and democracy, thereby decreasing trust and satisfaction with American electoral democracy and potentially reducing long-term commitment to democracy.

In Austria, Kušen and Strembeck (2018), conducted a sentiment analysis of the 2016 Austrian presidential election discussion on Twitter specifically extracting and examining a data collection of 343,645 tweets about the 2016 Austrian presidential election. Their analysis which integrated sentiment analysis and network science techniques discovered that: a) the election winner (Alexander Van der Bellen) sent more tweets with neutral sentiment scores than his opponent (Norbert Hofer), who preferred emotional messages (tweets with positive or negative sentiment scores); b) negative information about both candidates persisted in spreading for a longer period than neutral and positive information; c) there was a pronounced polarisation in terms of the sentiments spread by the two presidential candidates' Twitter followers; d) the winner received significantly more likes and retweets than his opponent; and e) the winner's Twitter followers significantly contributed to the spread of disinformation about his opponent. Kušen and Strembeck's finding speaks to the categories of social media influence, sources of disinformation, as well as voter behaviour.

With regard to voter behaviour, recent studies have brought attention to the concerning effects of disinformation on voter behaviour and election results. Research has demonstrated that being exposed to misleading information might skew voters' opinions and perhaps affect the outcome of elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Guess et al., 2019). The ability of fake news to influence public opinion is increased by its viral character (Lazer et al., 2018). We still don't fully understand why people are vulnerable to such misleading content, even though the detrimental effects of disinformation on political decisions are becoming more and more obvious. The majority of previous studies have concentrated on the effects of disinformation, analysing how it affects political beliefs and voting patterns (Bursztyn et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

Souza Fonseca and Santos Neto (2019) studied the disinformation process as a product of political, social, communicational, and cultural influence. It examines voter behavioural profiles resulting from the phenomenon of influence of the spread of fake news disseminated in digital media and observes the behavioural relationships established in these processes by understanding how the use of fake news can influence the informational behaviour of voters/residents of the East Zone of the city of Manaus/Amazonas in the decision of the vote for the municipal elections of 2020. The study's application was based on the Theory of Political Action with data gathered through remote questionnaires and interviews conducted using Google Forms, which were made accessible and controlled in WhatsApp groups. The findings demonstrated that voters' behaviour, both in the informational domain and in the political and social context depicted in the study, was

highly diverse. It was also noted that voters tended to favour more conventional forms of communication, like radio and television, even though news broadcasts on social media and instant messaging groups were the primary sources of information.

However, the contrary was the case for Cantarella et al (2023) who examined how votes for populist parties in the 2018 Italian elections were impacted by fake news using the historical variation between voters who speak Italian and German in the Trentino Alto-Adige/Südtirol area of Italy as an exogenous source of exposure to fake news. By analysing the impact of false news exposure on the vote for populist parties in the 2013 and 2018 elections using municipal data collected from pre-election Facebook postings of Italian parties to present a new populism indicator. The results confirmed the idea that regardless of prior support for populist parties, exposure to false news benefits them. But they also maintained that fake news by itself is unable to account for the majority of the growth in populism.

Similarly, there have been numerous studies focused on ways to mitigate election disinformation across different countries. For instance, in their study, Wilder and Vorobeychikthey (2019) examined a zero-sum game in which an attacker tries to sabotage an election by disseminating false information through a variety of advertising channels while a defence tries to lessen the attacker's influence. In this game, it was difficult to compute an equilibrium because even players' pure strategy sets were exponential. They proved the existence of polynomial-time approximation techniques, however, for calculating the defender's minimax optimal strategy in several scenarios, including models of the information each player had access to and various population structures. The results revealed that their algorithms offer near-optimal defender methods and demonstrate how the defender's resources and knowledge affect the difficulty of defending elections. Chang et al (2021) on the other hand, investigated disinformation and online activity on three platforms: Line, Twitter, and Taiwan's Professional Technology Temple (PTT), which is the country's version of Reddit, and found that discussions regarding the incumbent President Tsai generated the most dissent. In contrast to issues like COVID-19, Chinese users exhibit emergent coordination and selective conversation about China, Hong Kong, and President Tsai. They also found that Tsai's political presence on Twitter was unbalanced, which pointed to partisan tactics in the control of misinformation. The situations in Taiwan and China illustrate a developing pattern in which the general public, empowered by new media, may both promote and obstruct the spread of false information. Beyond the veracity of the content itself, the study draws attention to a neglected dimension of disinformation studies: the conflict between cultural history, ideas, and practices that are significant to democratic principles.

Pereira et al. (2022) investigated whether the prevalent theory of misinformation holds true in contexts with varying political configurations and how successful it is at rectifying

misinformation in emerging democracies. Based on a survey experiment conducted during the 2018 Brazilian elections, they discovered that although fact-checking corrections in Brazil are not successful in lowering misinformation, they occasionally fall short when they are most likely to be successful—among nonpartisans and when they validate people's political inclinations. Partisan-motivated reasoning is not the primary cause of corrections' (in)effectiveness, even though it does anticipate opinions based on misleading information. Their study highlights the difficulties in containing political disinformation in emerging democracies and calls for more research to improve our knowledge of how fake news behaves in various settings.

1.2   Ghanaian Elections and Disinformation

Since the country first returned to multi-party elections in 1992, after 11 years of military dictatorship, Ghana's democratic journey has seen several significant landmarks. Hence, there has been countless research bordering on elections in Ghana from as early as the first republic to the present day. The earlier studies have often focused on various key aspects of elections, including Ghana's political parties (Ninsin and Drah, 1993), the credibility of Ghanaian elections (Jeffries and Thomas, 1993; Jockers et al., 2010; Parku, 2014), elections and conflict (Meissner, 2010), how manifestoes affect election outcomes (Ayee, 2011) and democratic development (Abdulai and Crawford, 2010; Kumah-Abiwu and Darkwa, 2020).

However, more recent studies have seen a shift in preoccupation, with areas of study focusing more on political participation, social media, and disinformation. For instance, Dzisah (2018) studied the different functions and contributions that the media—especially social media—have played in Ghana's democracy. Focusing on the elections of 2012 and 2016, he examined the existing body of research and used exploratory factor analysis to interrogate the political knowledge, efficacy, and political participation among youth. By profiling the respondents according to their age, gender, levels of education, type of social media, as well as the frequency of social media usage, his study surveyed 230 journalists working for major media organisations and answered questions about the propagation of false information, the corresponding legal and policy restrictions, and ways to manage the threat. Results refute the theory that political and economic factors influence the creation and spread of fake news, with 72.17% of respondents citing the need to break the story first as a key motivator. The results also found that the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which were in power, made use of fake news, with social media emerging as a key contributor to the threat.

Another research by Lynch et al. (2019) explored what they termed the "hidden cost of social media use in elections", using Ghana as a case study specifically in the context of electoral campaigns. They uncovered that the pervasive spread of false information

by politicians and their campaign teams has the potential to exacerbate tensions within communities and worsen the general sense of cynicism in the political process, which is another subtle damaging consequence. This is not dissimilar to the findings of Jamiu (2022), who used the social media influence of actors and non-actors on conventional media to study the risks of information pollution to democracy and governance in Ghana and Nigeria from the standpoint of digital platforms. Using in-depth interviews, content analysis, document analysis, and surveys as research tools, he implemented a sequential exploratory study design he found that that although political and non-political actors spread misinformation more frequently in Ghana than in Nigeria, actors in Nigeria before the two elections primarily used misinformation and disinformation, with members of political institutions primarily responsible for spreading disinformation or messages among the actors. In Ghana, the majority of communications and information were delivered by politicians, candidates, and nonpolitical party organisations deliberately or inadvertently.

With regards to mitigation strategies against the effects of information disorder, Kwode (2022) investigated the concern of disinformation in light of Ghana's presidential elections in 2020 and 2006. About 230 journalists working for major media organisations responded to questionnaires about the propagation of disinformation, the corresponding legal and policy restrictions, and ways to manage the threat. The results support the idea that political and economic factors do influence the creation and spread of fake news since 72.17% of respondents said that breaking the news quickly was a key element. The results also demonstrated that the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which are in power, made use of fake news, with social media emerging as a key contributor to the threat. He also argues that a strong culture of fact-checking, professional ethical practice, and periodic media literacy training can all help to curb Ghana's propensity for fake news and propaganda.

In addition, adopting a qualitative approach, particularly semi-structured interviews, Agyepong and Adams (2022) investigated how two organisations, Dubawa Ghana and Ghana Fact, conducted political fact-checking during the 2020 general election in Ghana. According to the study, these organisations' political fact-checking efforts during the elections included: providing journalists and media organisations with more capacity; looking for political claims on various social media platforms; assessing the fact-check's credibility; using desktop and digital research tools; obtaining information from trustworthy and accessible sources; creating the fact-check report; and rendering a decision.

Thus, in order to effectively develop a comprehensive and effective response to reduce the risks of information disorder in Ghana in the run-up to the important general elections in 2024, it is first necessary to recognise and comprehend the types of threats that are most common as well as the trends in Ghanaian elections. This entails analysing the

way the information ecosystem has changed since the last election and in the months preceding the elections in December, as well as the perceptions and knowledge of voters, particularly those who are voting for the first time, and the capacity and readiness of the nation's media professionals to combat misinformation in the elections that are coming up.

1.3 Objectives

• To assess the state of the political information disorder ecosystem in Ghana ahead of the 2024 general elections.
• To ascertain the election literacy competence of first-time voters ahead of the 2024 elections in Ghana.
• To evaluate the readiness of journalists and media experts in combating election-related information disorder ahead of the 2024 Ghana elections.

1.4 Research Questions

• How has Ghana's political information disorder ecosystem evolved, and what changes have occurred leading up to the 2024 elections?
• What is first-time voters' election literacy competence ahead of the 2024 elections in Ghana?
• How prepared are journalists and media experts in combating election-related information disorder in the lead-up to the 2024 Ghana elections?

2.0 Methodology

The research will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining both content analysis and surveys to address the objectives of the study comprehensively. This combination allows for a nuanced understanding of both the landscape of political disinformation and the readiness of key stakeholders to confront it. Mixed-methods research has proven to be effective in studies of media and information disorders, as it leverages the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex issues.

2.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis will be employed to explore the state of political information disorder in Ghana. This method will systematically evaluate published fact-checks, categorizing various forms of misinformation (e.g., disinformation, malinformation) within the political domain. Content analysis is suitable here because it enables the researcher to analyze patterns, trends, and typologies of information disorder over a sustained period.

2.2 Data Collection

The content analysis will focus on verified claims published by prominent fact-checking organizations: DUBAWA, Ghana Facts, and Fact-Check Ghana. These organizations are members of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and have extensive experience in tracking and debunking disinformation in Ghana's media ecosystem. The credibility of these sources lies in their adherence to IFCN's principles of non-partisanship and transparency, making them reliable for inclusion in the study. Fact-checks offer a solid foundation for this analysis because they are vetted based on the principles of claim virality, potential public harm, and impact on public discourse. Published fact-checks already categorize these claims into various types of information disorders, simplifying the extraction of relevant data.

2.3 Data Timeline

The timeline for data collection will span from January 2021 to September 2024. This period is appropriate as it covers the aftermath of the 2020 Ghana elections and captures the evolving disinformation landscape leading up to the 2024 general elections scheduled for December 7, 2024. The data will provide a longitudinal perspective on how political misinformation has shifted over this electoral cycle, covering nearly four years.

Start Date (January 2021): This marks the first month after the last general elections in December 2020, offering insights into the post-election disinformation environment.

End Date (September 2024): With three months remaining before the 2024 general elections, this period will allow for an understanding of emerging disinformation trends close to the election date, reflecting the intensity and nature of last-minute false claims.

2.4 Data Search Criteria

To ensure a comprehensive and accurate collection of fact-checks relevant to political disinformation, specific search terms will be used. Three separate researchers will be assigned to the three fact-checking organizations to avoid duplication and ensure that each fact-check is included once. If multiple organizations have fact-checked the same claim, only one verified instance will be considered.

Search Terms:

S/N	Search Terms	Context/Definition
1	Elections	A democratic event is scheduled for Dec. 7 to elect members of parliament and a president.
2	Nana Akufo-Addo	Ghana's current president. (2016- 2024)
3	Political Misinformation	False information put out by a political figure unintentionally.
4	2024 Ghana Elections	A major political/democratic event which will be held on Dec. 7, 2024, to elect a president and members of parliament to represent the various constituencies.
5	Electoral Fraud claims	Claims regarding electoral discrepancies and other related issues that have been fact-checked.
6	National Democratic Congress	One of the major political parties in Ghana. Currently, the biggest opposition party (2016 till present)
7	New Patriotic Party	One of the major political parties. Currently the ruling party from 2016.
8	John Dramani Mahama	Former president and current flag bearer of the NDC.
9	Prof Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang	Running mate to John Mahama in the 2016 and 2024 elections.
10	Dr Mahamudu Bawumia	Current vice president and flag bearer for the NPP
11	Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh	Former minister of energy and running mate to Dr Bawumia in elections 2024
12	Electoral Commission (EC)	A constitutionally established body in charge of all elections and electoral processes.
13	Jean Mensa	Ghanaian lawyer and chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana.
14	Ghana Police Service	
15	Johnson Asiedu Nketiah	Former general secretary and current chairman of the NDC
16	Stephen Ntim	National chairman of the ruling party, NPP

- Political Misinformation
- 2024 Ghana Elections
- Electoral Fraud Claims
- National Democratic Congress (NDC)
- New Patriotic Party

- John Dramani Mahama
- Prof Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang
- Dr Mahamudu Bawumia
- Dr Mathew Opoku Prempeh
- Electoral Commission (EC)
- Jean Mensa
- Ghana Police Service
- Johnson Asiedu Nketiah
- Stephen Ntim

2.5   Data Analysis

The data collected from the content analysis will be categorized into relevant themes to assess political information disorder within the Ghanaian media ecosystem. Categorization by theme allows for a systematic examination of how misinformation manifests, enabling insights into the nature, platforms, and actors involved in spreading political disinformation. The thematic categories will be derived from the fact-checked claims and the verdicts established by the fact-checking organizations. This approach is essential for identifying the "claimant" (the individual or group responsible for the claim), the level of engagement, and the social media platform used to disseminate the disinformation.

2.6   The themes for the content analysis will include:

Out-of-Context Theme:

This category includes political claims that have been misrepresented or taken out of context, altering the original meaning. Such claims are misleading because they present false information by removing crucial parts of the context, affecting public perception.

Inter-Party or Candidate-Based Theme:

This theme covers claims involving political parties, candidates, or their officials. It focuses on disinformation campaigns between rival groups aimed at discrediting opponents, weakening their political standing, or manipulating voter opinions. Understanding this dynamic is crucial in evaluating how political competition can fuel disinformation.

AI-Related Theme:

This category includes deepfakes, cheap fakes, and other AI-generated disinformation. AI-driven tools have increasingly been used to fabricate political content, and this theme will capture the role of technology in amplifying false claims during the election period.

This is significant as AI-related disinformation is becoming a global concern.

Ethno-Religious Theme

This theme focuses on political claims or disinformation that target or exploit ethnic or religious identities. These types of information disorders often seek to manipulate tensions, incite conflicts, or sway public opinion by framing political issues through the lens of ethnicity or religion. Ethno-religious disinformation can be particularly harmful in diverse societies like Ghana, where it can exacerbate existing divisions or influence voting behaviour along ethnic or religious lines.

Policy-Based Theme:

This theme deals with claims related to specific government policies or proposed political agendas. Disinformation or misinformation under this category typically revolves around distorting facts about political candidates' policy platforms, government initiatives, or development plans. It seeks to mislead voters about the potential impacts or failures of policies, often to influence their support for or against particular candidates or parties.

2.7 Survey

The survey will be employed to achieve two main objectives:

To assess the knowledge level of first-time voters ahead of the 2024 elections in Ghana. To evaluate the preparedness of journalists and media experts in combating election-related information disorder.
Separate approaches will be designed to collect data from these two distinct groups to ensure that the information gathered is tailored and relevant.

2.8 Data Sampling Strategy

The survey population is divided into two categories:

Sample A: First-time voters who have never voted in a general election but intend to participate in the 2024 elections. This group includes citizens with valid voter cards across all eligible age groups.

Sample B: Journalists, media professionals, and information experts responsible for disseminating public-related information, especially related to Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and public education content. These professionals play a key role in shaping public opinion and ensuring the integrity of information.

This segmentation ensures the collection of focused and relevant data. Sample A will provide insights into the knowledge gaps and vulnerabilities of first-time voters, such as their susceptibility to misinformation or disinformation. Sample B will explore the readiness of journalists and media professionals to counter election-related information disorder, evaluating their capacity to spot and address misinformation effectively.

2.9 Data Sample Size

Sample A (First-Time Voters): The sample size for this group will be determined based on the total number of first-time registered voters in Ghana. According to the Electoral Commission of Ghana, as of May 12, 2024, there were 251,149 new registered voters aged 18-21. Using this population size, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, Survey Monkey's sample size calculator suggests a sample size of 495 respondents.

Sample B (Journalists and Media Experts): For this group, no precise population size is available. However, following the guidance of Wimmer and Dominick (2006), a sample of 200-300 respondents can serve as a representative population for groups with undefined sizes. This study will aim to engage 300 respondents, including journalists, media experts, bloggers, and influencers actively involved in Ghana's media and public information spaces.

2.10 Survey Data Collection

The data collection process will be separated for the two samples to ensure the collection of appropriate and meaningful data.

Sample A (First-Time Voters): A set of paper questionnaires will be distributed to first-time voters across various regions of Ghana. The questionnaire will assess their understanding of the voting process, sources of election-related information, and their vulnerability to disinformation. Special attention will be paid to their media consumption habits (e.g., social media, traditional media) and the platforms they frequently use. The aim is to identify knowledge gaps and the potential influence of misinformation on their electoral decisions.

Sample B (Journalists and Media Experts): Data from this group will be collected via an online survey using Google Forms, which offers easy access and distribution, particularly among media professionals who are accustomed to online tools. The survey will ask about their preparedness to combat misinformation, the tools they use to verify news (e.g., fact-checking platforms, social media monitoring), and their level of understanding of election-related information disorder. The questionnaire will also include scenario-based questions to assess practical knowledge of identifying and addressing disinformation,

particularly in an election context. This combination of targeted sampling and diverse data collection methods will ensure that the survey captures the necessary information to achieve the study's objectives.

# 3.0   Survey Data Analysis

3.1 Demography

Data were collected regarding the demographic spread of the first survey participants, including their age group, disability status, gender, education level, employment status, region, and place of residence. This is primarily to understand the makeup of the respondents to better understand subsequent responses and effectively design a comprehensive response to the overall outcome of the survey.

Number of Participants by Age Group
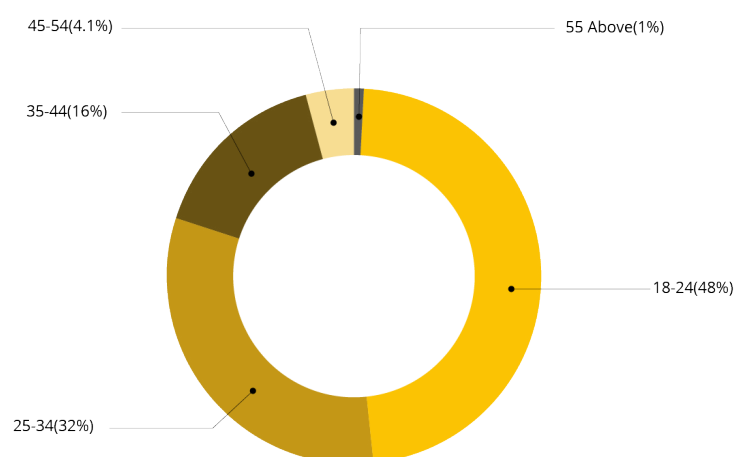
Participants by Gender
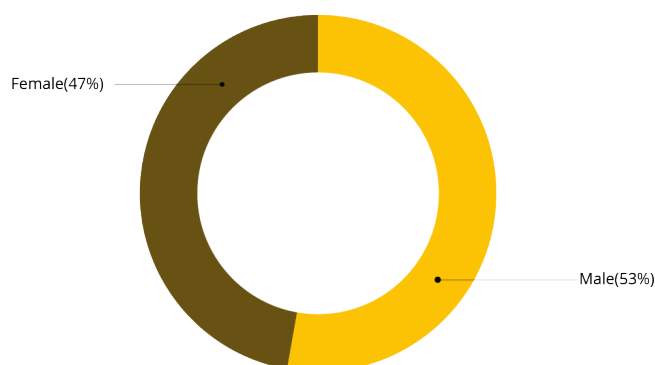
The survey findings indicate that young individuals aged 18 to 24 constitute the largest group of respondents at 46.4%, followed by those aged 25 to 34 at 31.8%, and 35 to 44 at 16.3%. In terms of gender, male respondents represent 52.7%, surpassing female respondents at 47.3%.

These statistics align with broader trends observed in Ghana's voter demographics. Historically, the Electoral Commission of Ghana has reported a higher percentage of female registered voters compared to males. For instance, in the 2020 elections, males accounted for 52.79% of registered voters, while females comprised 47.21%.

The prominence of younger age groups in the survey reflects Ghana's youthful population structure. According to the Ghana Statistical Service, a significant portion of the population falls within the 15 to 35 age bracket, underscoring the importance of engaging young voters in the electoral process.

These insights highlight the critical role of young and female voters in shaping Ghana's democratic landscape, emphasizing the need for targeted policies and outreach to address their unique perspectives and concerns.

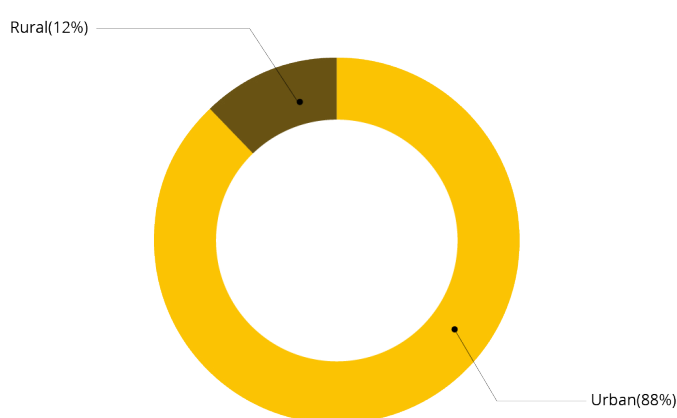## Are you a person with disability?

Yes(2.8%)
No(97%)

Level of Education

No Formal Education (0.8%)
Primary Education (0.8%)
Postgraduate Education (29%)
Tertiary Education (59%)
Secondary Education (29%)
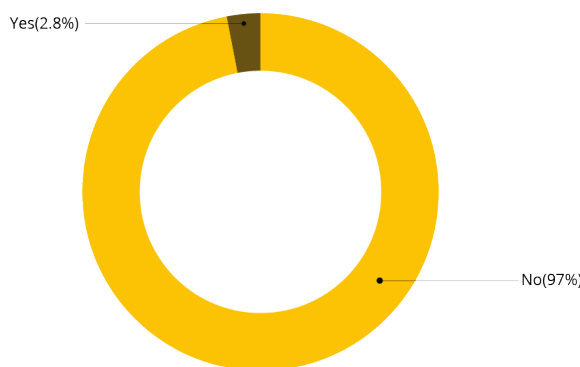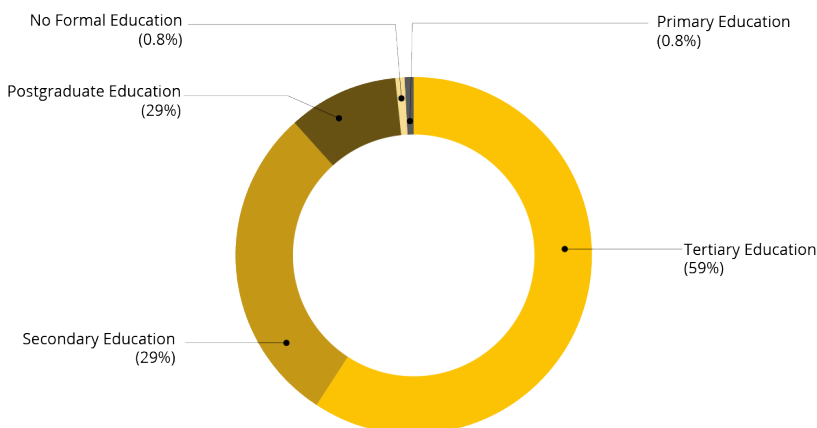
The responses show that 97.2% of the respondents are people with no disability, while 2.8% identify as people with disabilities. The responses from the highest level of education showed that 59.4% had tertiary education, which was the highest. 29.1% of the respondents had a secondary education. Also, 9.9% had postgraduate education, while 0.8% had no formal education. The variation of the employment status of the respondents shows that 43% are students, 29.3% are employed full-time, 15.8% are self-employed, 7.9% are unemployed, and 3.4% choose others as their status of employment.

Participants by region type

Rural(12%)

Urban(88%)

Participants by region

Eastern(1.4%)

Nothern(1.6%)

Ashanti(4.1%)

Other(4.5%)
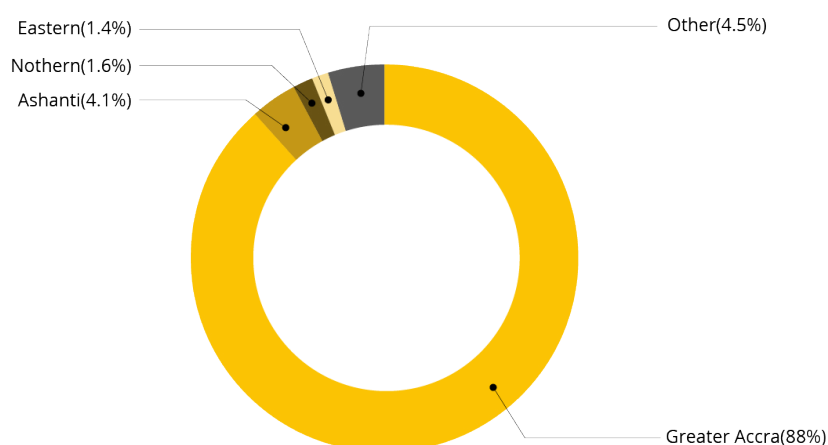
Greater Accra(88%)

The respondent's employment status shows that 43% are students, 29.3% are employed full-time, 15.8% are self-employed, 7.9% are unemployed, and 3.4% choose others as their employment status. The highest region where the respondents reside is Greater Accra, which had 88.1%. This was followed by Ashanti, 4.0%, Northern, 1.4%, and Eastern region, 1.4%. 87.9% of respondents currently reside in urban areas, while 12.1% reside in rural areas.
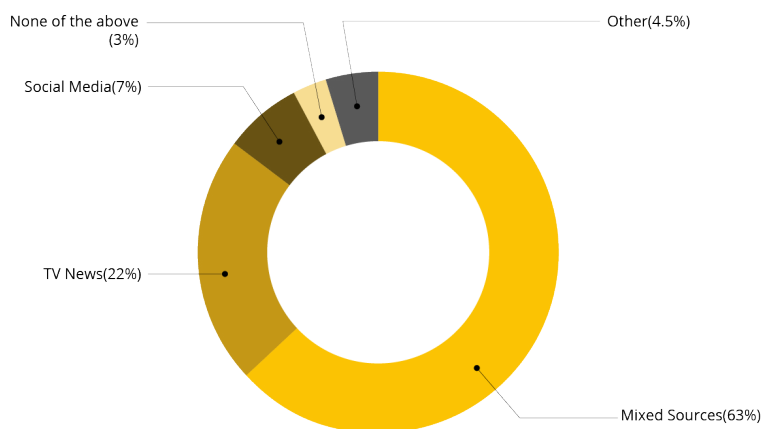
3.2 Trust in Media

The chart below illustrates the sources respondents trust most for election information, revealing a preference for social media, followed by television news. This trend underscores the evolving media landscape, where digital platforms play a pivotal role in disseminating information.

However, the reliance on social media raises concerns about misinformation. While these platforms offer rapid information sharing, they are susceptible to the spread of false or misleading content. A study by the International Republican Institute highlights the risks of disinformation in Ghana's 2024 elections, emphasising the need for vigilance in information consumption.

Which sources do you get your information on elections?

Family and Friends (1.4%)
TV News(4.5%)
Social Media(10%)
Other(2.3%)
Mixed Sources(82%)
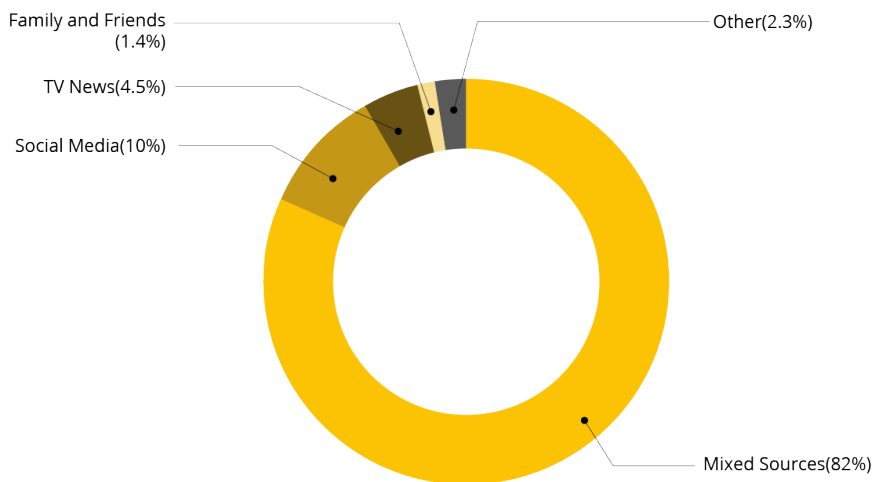
Which sources do you trust most for elections information?

None of the above
(3%)

Social Media(7%)

Other(4.5%)

TV News(22%)

Mixed Sources(63%)

In contrast, traditional media outlets, such as television news, often adhere to established journalistic standards, providing more reliable information. The Media Foundation for West Africa reports that 85% of media content related to elections was deemed factual and impartial, contributing to the credibility of the electoral process.

3.3 Citizen Participation

The doughnut chart indicates that 93.1% of respondents are aware of the requirements to register as voters in Ghana. Conversely, 3.3% are unaware, and 3.7% are uncertain about the registration process. This high awareness level is encouraging, as it reflects a well-informed electorate prepared to engage in the electoral process. Regarding voter registration status, 90.7% of respondents are registered to vote, while 9.3% are not. This suggests strong civic engagement among the majority, though efforts are needed to encourage the unregistered minority to participate.

Knowledge of voting requirement

Not sure(3.3%)

No(3.3%)

No response (0.6%)

Yes(93%)

## Registered to vote

No (9%)

Yes (91%)
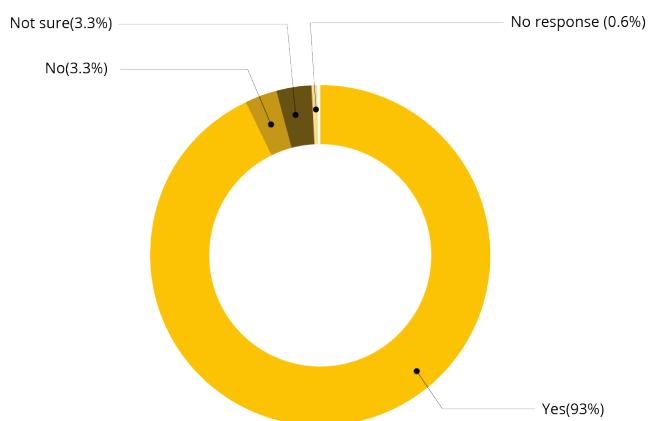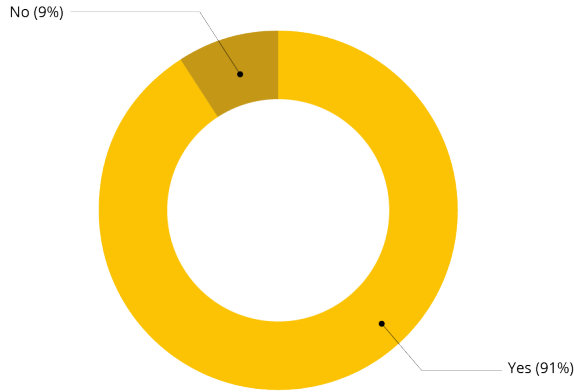
The data reveals that 41.8% of respondents are first-time voters, whereas 58.2% are returning voters. The 16.4% difference between these groups indicates a healthy influx of new participants into the electoral process, underscoring the importance of targeting first-time voters with educational and motivational campaigns to ensure their active participation.
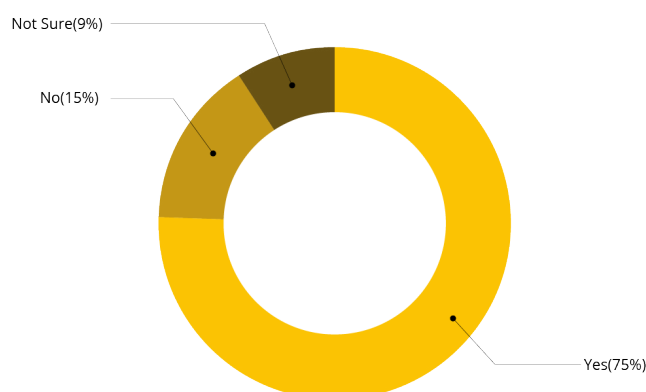
Are you a first-time voter?

Yes (42%)

No(58%)

Voter's Card

No(5%)

Yes(95%)
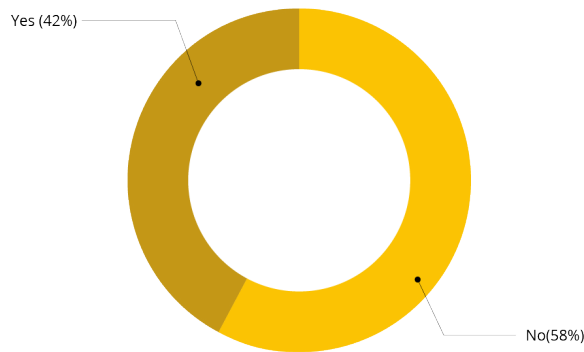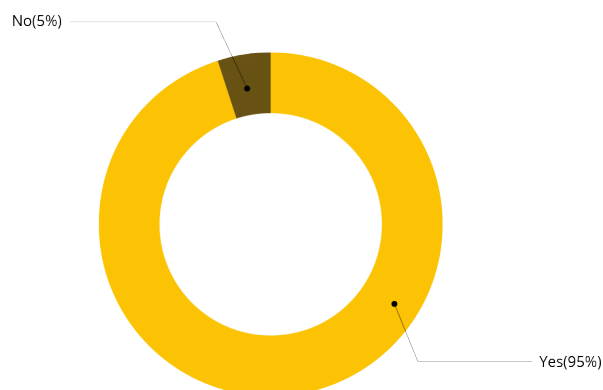
Interest in the upcoming election is high, with 94.7% of respondents having secured their voter cards. However, 5.3% do not possess a voter card, highlighting a need for targeted outreach to ensure all eligible voters are prepared. When asked about their intention to vote, 64.5% are certain they will participate, 19.2% are unsure, and 14.3% do not plan to vote. These figures underscore the importance of campaigns designed to increase voter confidence and commitment. Understanding the voting process is crucial to minimising errors and vote loss on election day. The survey found that 75.2% of respondents are familiar with the voting procedure, indicating a solid foundation of voter knowledge. However, 15.8% admitted to not knowing the process, and 9.1% were unsure of how to proceed on election day. This highlights a critical need for voter education programs focused on clarifying voting procedures to ensure that all eligible voters can cast their ballots confidently and correctly.

Awareness of voting process

Not Sure(9%)

No(15%)

Yes(75%)

Will you be voting in the upcoming election?


No(14%)

No(19%)

Yes(66%)
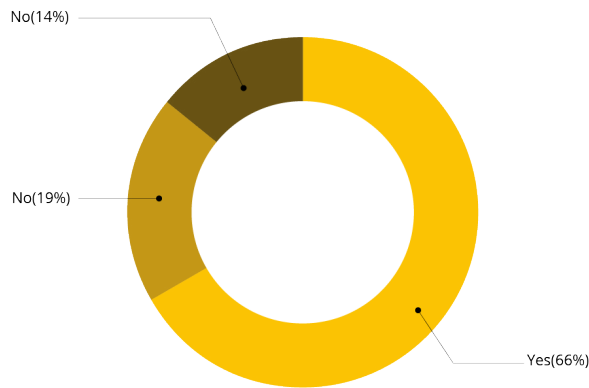
While the majority of respondents demonstrate readiness and knowledge for the upcoming elections, targeted efforts are necessary to engage first-time voters, reach those who remain unregistered, and enhance voter education to bridge knowledge gaps regarding election day procedures. Addressing these areas will be essential for fostering higher participation rates and ensuring an informed and empowered electorate.

3.4 Political Parties, Campaigns and Candidate

The level of knowledge that voters possess regarding political parties, candidates, and their respective platforms significantly influences their voting decisions. As reflected in the survey data, 63% of respondents reported being very familiar with the political parties contesting in the 2024 election, suggesting a strong base of political awareness. On the other hand, 29% indicated partial familiarity, while 8% were not familiar with the parties and their platforms at all.

Familiarity with political parties/platforms

Not familiar (8%)

Partially familiar(29%)

Very familiar(63%)
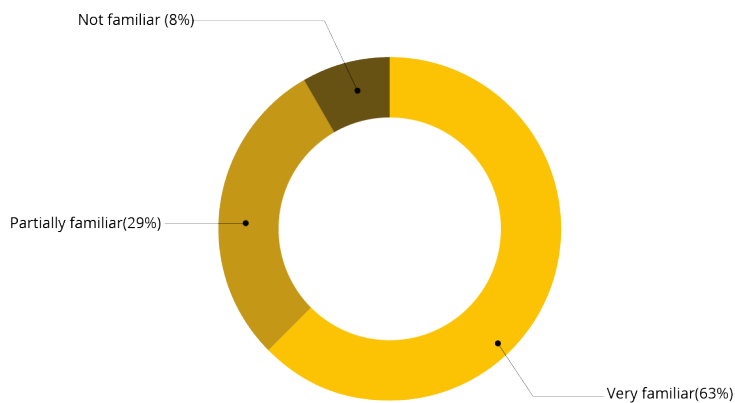
This knowledge base is crucial for electoral decision-making, as voters with a clear understanding of the candidates' policies are more likely to make informed choices. It also underscores the importance of political campaigns in disseminating information to the electorate. A better-informed electorate can lead to more democratic outcomes by ensuring that voting choices align with personal values, preferences, and the political direction the voters hope to see in the country's future.

Furthermore, the variations in familiarity with political parties may signal a gap in electoral education, particularly in regions or demographics where political information is less accessible or less prioritised. This highlights the need for targeted information campaigns, especially in areas where political awareness is lower, to mitigate the effects of misinformation and ensure voters can engage meaningfully with the electoral process.

Will a party's track record determine your willingness to vote?

No(20%)
Yes(46%)
Maybe(34%)
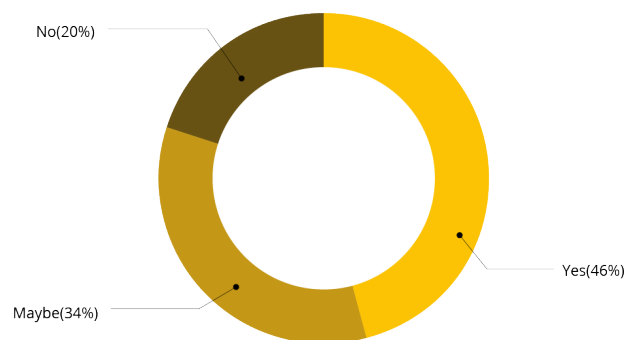
Will the candidates' manifestos influence your vote?


No(23%)
Not Sure(24%)
Yes(53%)
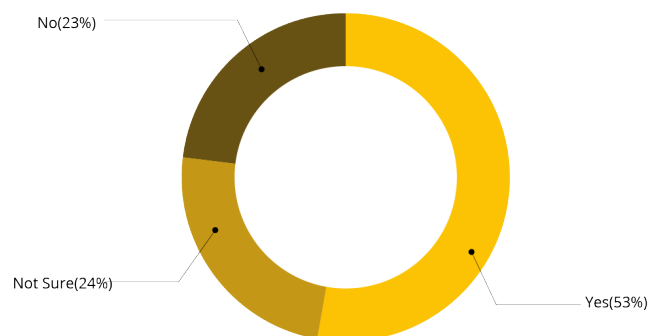
Understanding voters' perceptions of political manifestos and party track records is crucial in shaping electoral outcomes. The survey indicates that 34.8% of respondents have a clear understanding of the candidates' manifestos. Despite this, a significant 53.7% believe that these manifestos will influence their voting decisions, while 23.6% remain uncertain, and 22.2% feel that the manifestos will not impact their choices. Regarding party track records, 46.5% of respondents consider a political party's history as a determining factor in their vote, whereas 33.9% are unsure, and 19.6% believe it will not influence their decision.

These findings suggest that while a majority of voters acknowledge the importance of manifestos and party track records, a substantial portion remains uncertain about their influence on voting behaviour. This underscores the need for political parties to effectively communicate their policies and past performances to the electorate. Additionally, the Afrobarometer survey highlights that Ghanaians prioritise a candidate's honesty (90%), character (88%), and campaign promises (59%) as major factors influencing their voting decisions. This emphasises the multifaceted nature of voter decision-making, where personal attributes and policy proposals collectively shape electoral outcomes.

3.5   Perception of Ghana's Electoral Process

Recognizing the pivotal role of electoral officials in the electoral process, the survey reveals that 64.9% of respondents are aware of their impact on elections. In contrast, 19.3% are unaware, and 15.8% remain uncertain about the role of these officials. This awareness is crucial, as the effectiveness and impartiality of electoral officials directly influence the credibility and transparency of elections. The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC), established under the 1992 Constitution, is mandated to oversee all public elections and referenda, ensuring free and fair processes.

**Do you uderstand the role of electoral officials
and their impact on the elections?**

No response(0.4%)
Not Sure(16%)
No(19%)
Yes(65%)
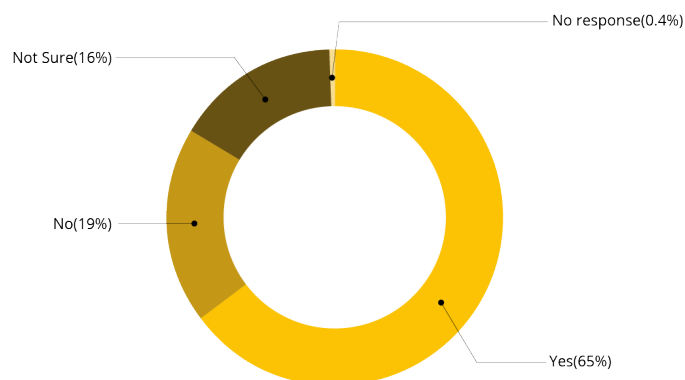
Do you believe your vote will count?

No(9%)

Not sure (11%)

Yes (80%)
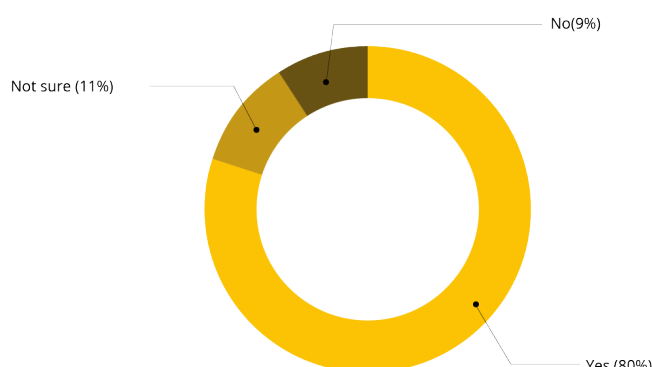
The EC's responsibilities include voter registration, delimitation of electoral boundaries, regulation of political parties, and the conduct of elections and referenda. By effectively executing these duties, the EC upholds democratic principles and fosters public trust in the electoral system. The survey findings suggest that while a majority of respondents recognize the importance of electoral officials, a significant portion remains either unaware or uncertain about their roles. Additionally, 80% of respondents believe their vote will count during the election. Also, 10.7% are not sure, and 9.3% do not believe their vote will count.

3.6   Voter Education

The survey indicates that a significant majority of respondents, 70.9%, have not participated in any voter education programs or workshops, while only 29.1% have engaged in such initiatives. This disparity highlights a critical gap in civic education, which is essential for informed and active participation in the electoral process. Voter education programs play a pivotal role in enhancing citizens' understanding of their rights and responsibilities, the electoral process, and the importance of their vote.

Have you participated in any voter education programs of workshops?

Yes (29%)

No (71%)
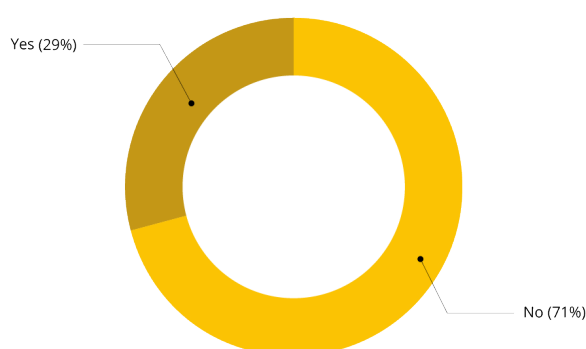
Organizations like the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) are instrumental in promoting and sustaining democracy through civic education. The NCCE's flagship programs aim to enhance activities in communities and schools across Ghana, delivering civic education to all Ghanaians and working towards sustaining Ghana's democracy.

Additionally, initiatives such as the Youth Bridge Foundation's "Youth Vote" program focus on providing information and knowledge acquisition for responsible youth participation in elections, inspiring the youth to participate in all political processes. The low participation rate in voter education underscores the need for intensified efforts to reach and engage citizens, particularly in underserved areas, to ensure a well-informed electorate. Such engagement is crucial for the health of Ghana's democracy and the integrity of its electoral processes.
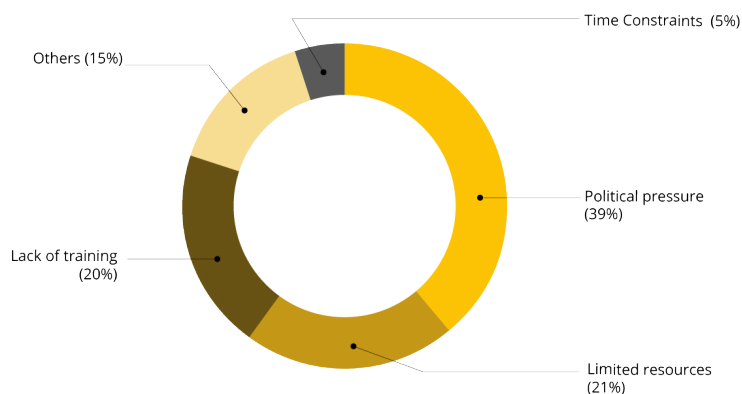
Section B

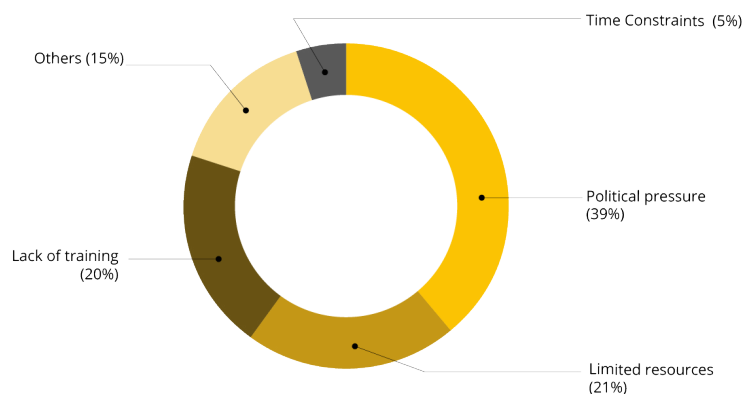## 3.7 Election coverage by journalist

Journalists in Ghana face several challenges in addressing election-related disinformation. The survey indicates that 38.8% of respondents identify political pressure as a significant obstacle, while 20.8% cite limited resources and 20.2% point to a lack of training. Additionally, 5.1% mention time constraints, and 15.2% report other challenges.

These findings align with broader concerns about the media landscape in Ghana. The International Republican Institute (IRI) notes that both the ruling party and the opposition actively use platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to spread messages, including disinformation and smear campaigns. This rapid dissemination of falsehoods poses a significant challenge for journalists striving to maintain information integrity

Challenges facing journalists

Time Constraints (5%)
Others (15%)
Political pressure (39%)
Lack of training (20%)
Limited resources (21%)

Have you ever covered election as a journalist?

Time Constraints (5%)
Others (15%)
Political pressure (39%)
Lack of training (20%)
Limited resources (21%)

Journalists play a pivotal role in the electoral process by providing timely and accurate updates, thereby ensuring transparency and accountability. However, the survey reveals that a significant majority, 93.9%, of respondents have not covered elections as journalists, while only 6.1% have engaged in such coverage.

This disparity suggests a need to enhance the capacity and involvement of journalists in election reporting. The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) has recognized this necessity and has revised its guidelines on election coverage to serve as an essential reminder for journalists and media houses during major elections. The GJA emphasizes the importance of balanced, fair, and accurate reporting, urging journalists to avoid sensationalism and bias. They advocate for the empowerment of diverse voices to ensure fair and balanced coverage, particularly as Ghana approaches its December 7, 2024, elections.

3.8 Fact-checking elections

Information disorder poses a significant challenge during elections, potentially undermining the integrity of the electoral process. Effective fact-checking is essential to combat misinformation and ensure voters have access to accurate information. The survey indicates that 61.4% of respondents are unaware of how to fact-check claims during elections. Interestingly, 19.6% are not sure, and 19.0% confirm they know how to fact-check claims.

This data underscores the need for comprehensive media literacy and fact-checking training among the electorate.

Do you know how to fact-chack claims in elections?

Unsure (19%)

Yes (20%)

No (61%)
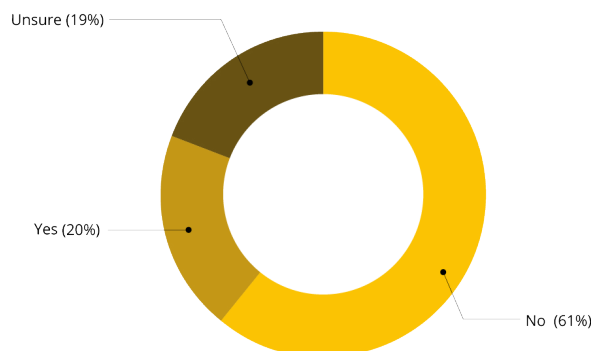
Have you attended any fact-checking training before?

Yes (18%)

No (82%)
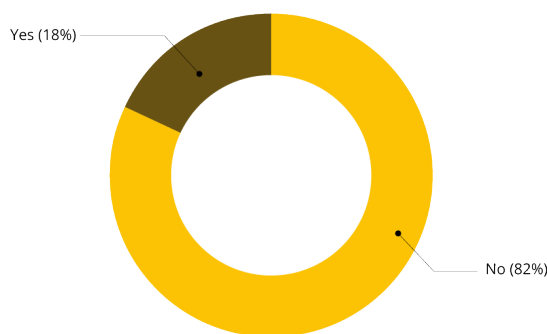
82.0% of respondents valid that they have not attended any fact-checking training before while only 18.0% have attended a fact-checking training. This shows the knowledge gap in fact checking training in Ghana. Also, about 15.6% of respondents of those who attended fact checking training only did on election while 84.4% stated that the training is not specifically on election. The survey reveals a significant gap in fact-checking training among respondents, with 82.0% indicating they have not attended any such training,

while only 18.0% have participated in fact-checking programs. This disparity underscores the need for enhanced fact-checking education in Ghana.

Among those who have received training, 15.6% attended sessions focused specifically on elections, whereas 84.4% participated in general fact-checking training not centred on electoral processes.

This gap highlights the critical need for targeted fact-checking training, especially in the context of elections, to ensure the integrity of information and support informed decision-making among the electorate.

3.9   How often do people fact-check news and information?

40.2% of respondents sometimes fact-check news and information, 26.5% of respondents rarely fact-check the news, 13.1% often check, and 10.9% never check. Interestingly, 9.3% always fact-check news or information. These findings suggest a moderate engagement with fact-checking among the respondents. While a majority occasionally verify information, a notable portion does not consistently engage in this practice.

How would you rate your level of confidence in detecting misinformation or disinformation related to the 2024 elections?

Not confident (8%)

Very confident (15%)

Failr confident (43%)

Confident (34%)
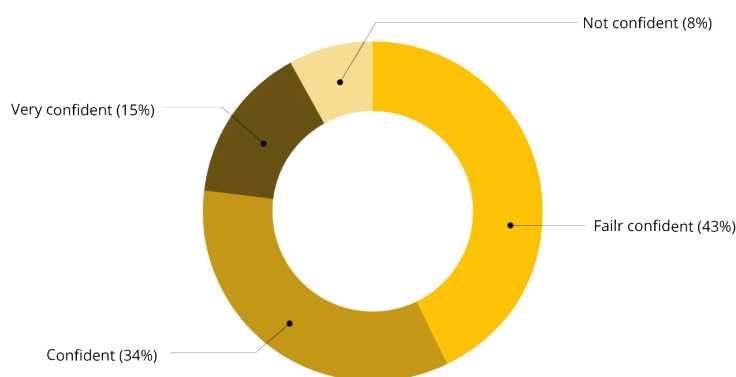
Do you have access to the necessary tools and resources to verify the accuracy of election-related information?


No (48%)

Yes (52%)
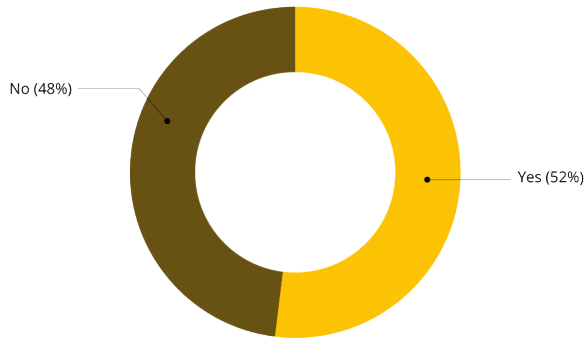
The gap between those with access to tools to verify election-related information and those without access is 4.2%. In particular, 52.1% of respondents have access, while 47.9% do not have access to tools and resources to verify election-related information. 52.1% of respondents who have access to verify election related information, the majority uses television while others use the internet, phone, and radio.

3.11 Organisation preparedness in combating the spread of false information

47.9% of respondents affirmed that their organisations are somewhat effective, 37.4% were very effective, 12.3% are not effective while 2.4% are ineffective in combating the spread of election related false information. These findings suggest that while a majority perceive their organisations as effective, a notable portion feels that efforts to combat misinformation are insufficient.

How effective do you think your media organisation is in combating the spread of election-related false information?

Ineffective (11)

Not effective (11)

Somewhat effective (237)

Very effective (11)
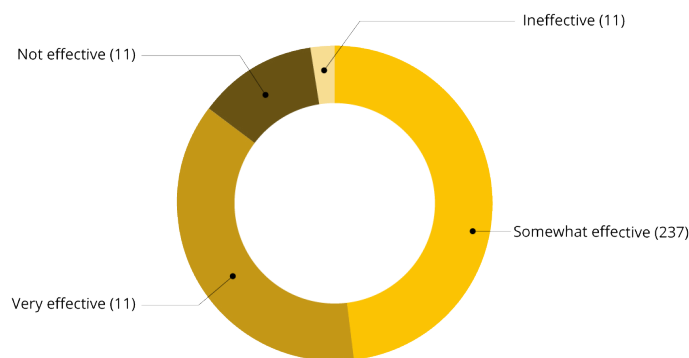
50.9% of respondents agreed on not having specific guidelines or protocols in place within their organisation to handle election-related misinformation. Meanwhile, 26.3% of respondents are unsure, while only 22.8% have what it takes to combat election misinformation.   This highlights a significant gap in preparedness among media organisations to effectively manage and counter misinformation during elections

3.12 Response to election misinformation and collaboration

How people respond to misinformation determines how soon it will spread or be curbed. Upon receiving false or misleading information, 45.7% respondents admit to investigating further, 23.6% signify to ignore it while 11.5% decide to report it. About 19.2% choose to take other action.These findings underscore the critical role of individual actions in the dynamics of misinformation spread. Proactive measures, such as reporting or investigating, can help curb the dissemination of false information. Conversely, ignoring misinformation may inadvertently contribute to its spread.

How do you respond when encountering false or misleading election information in your work?

Report it (12%)
investigate further (46%)
Ignore it (24%)
Other (19%)
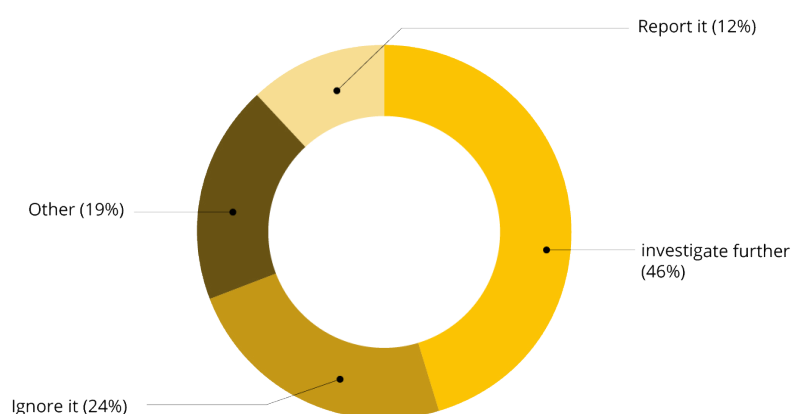
Do you collaborate with fact-checking organisations or experts in combacting election-related disinformation?

Yes (26%)

No (74%)
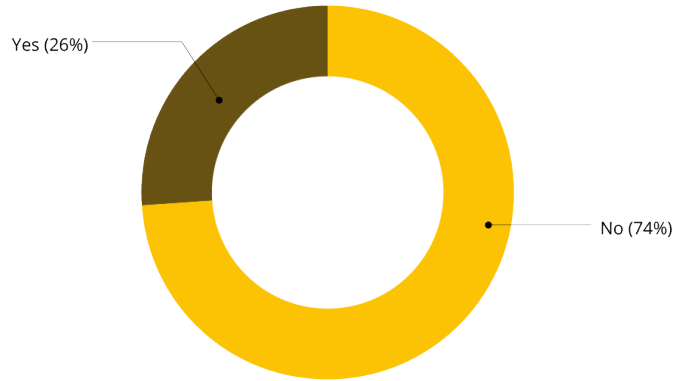
Seeking collaboration with fact-checking organisations or experts in combating election-related disinformation is paramount for the collective fight against misinformation. Surprisingly, only 26.3% of respondents agreed to have engaged in a collaboration of any sort, while 73.7% do not engage in partnership against election-related disinformation. This disparity highlights a critical gap in collective action against misinformation during elections. Collaborative initiatives are essential for pooling resources, expertise, and networks to effectively counter disinformation.

4.0 Content analysis

This analysis, based on 72 fact-checks from 2020 to 2024 conducted by prominent fact-checking organisations—DUBAWA, Ghana Facts, and Fact-Check Ghana, all members of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)—provides insights into the nature and spread of disinformation in Ghana. The content analysis will explore how these verified claims were categorised and their implications across different themes, shedding light on disinformation trends and the strategies used in this period.

The following sections will discuss the yearly distribution of themes, platform-based dissemination, disinformation strategies, source attribution, and the impact of various content types on public engagement.

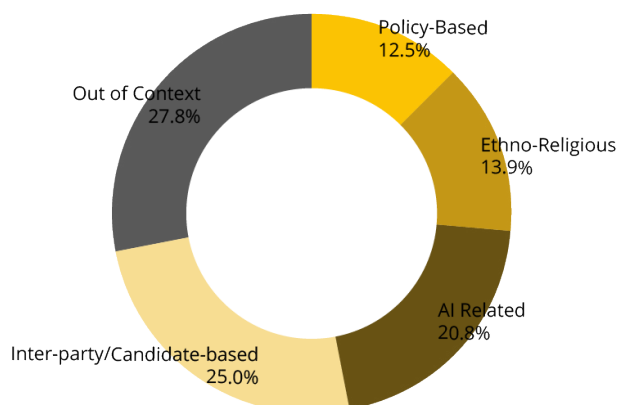**4.1 Distribution of Information Disorder Themes (2020-2024)**

An analysis of fact-check categories in Ghana from 2021 to 2024 reveals significant trends in disinformation. Out-of-Context Claims (27.8%) was the most prevalent, highlighting the

frequent manipulation of genuine content to mislead audiences. For instance, a few days before the 2020 elections, a video falsely claimed that President Akufo-Addo received a $40,000 bribe in 2017 to avoid sacking the Director of Urban Roads, Alhaji Abbas. This video was widely disseminated with various edited versions, including one branded with opposition party insignia, misleadingly framing it as evidence of corruption. Inter-Party/Candidate-Based Disinformation (25.0%) politically motivated attempts to discredit opponents, especially during election years, were common. For example, during the 2020 elections, misleading information about the health of the two main candidates was shared on social media. Some asserted that President Akufo-Addo should not be in office since he had flown outside for medical care, while others claimed that John Mahama was gravely sick and unsuitable to govern the nation.

AI-Related Disinformation (20.8%) is linked to the increasing use of technology in spreading false narratives. The emergence of AI-related disinformation in 2022, with marked increases in 2023 and peaking in 2024, underscores the growing utilisation of sophisticated technological tools in spreading misinformation. Ethno-Religious Content (13.9%) tied to Identity-based claims were found in some instances to deepen social divides. With the growing interest in regional and ethnic political dynamics in Ghana, instances of misinformation have emerged. For example, a viral flyer claimed that former President John Mahama remarked that it is typical of the Akan ethnic group to 'answer questions with questions' in response to questions posed by Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia.

Additionally, Policy-Based Disinformation (12.5%) tied around efforts to distort public perception of governance and policies were noted. For example, during the 2020 elections, misleading information about the health of the two main candidates was shared on social media. Some asserted that President Akufo-Addo should not be in office since he had flown outside for medical care, while others claimed that John Mahama was gravely sick and unsuitable to govern the nation.

Percentage of fact-check categories in Ghana (2021-2024)

4.2 Yearly Distribution of Information Disorder Themes (2020-2024)

A closer look into the total 72 fact-checks from 2020 to 2024 collected for this study reveals distinct trends in the prevalence of disinformation themes aligned with electoral cycles. Inter-Party/Candidate-Based and Out-of-Context disinformation were notably prevalent during the 2020 and now leading up to the 2024 elections in Ghana, reflecting intensified political rivalries. For instance, during the 2020 elections, misleading information about the health of the two main candidates was shared on social media. Some asserted that President Akufo-Addo should not be in office since he had flown outside for medical care, while others claimed that John Mahama was gravely sick and unsuitable to govern the nation.

The emergence of AI-related disinformation in 2022, with marked increases in 2023 and peaking in 2024, underscores the growing utilisation of sophisticated technological tools in spreading misinformation. Ethno-Religious and Policy-Based disinformation also demonstrated a significant rise, particularly in 2024, indicating targeted efforts to manipulate public sentiment. These findings highlight the adaptive nature of disinformation strategies and emphasise the necessity for comprehensive countermeasures to address evolving threats in the electoral context.
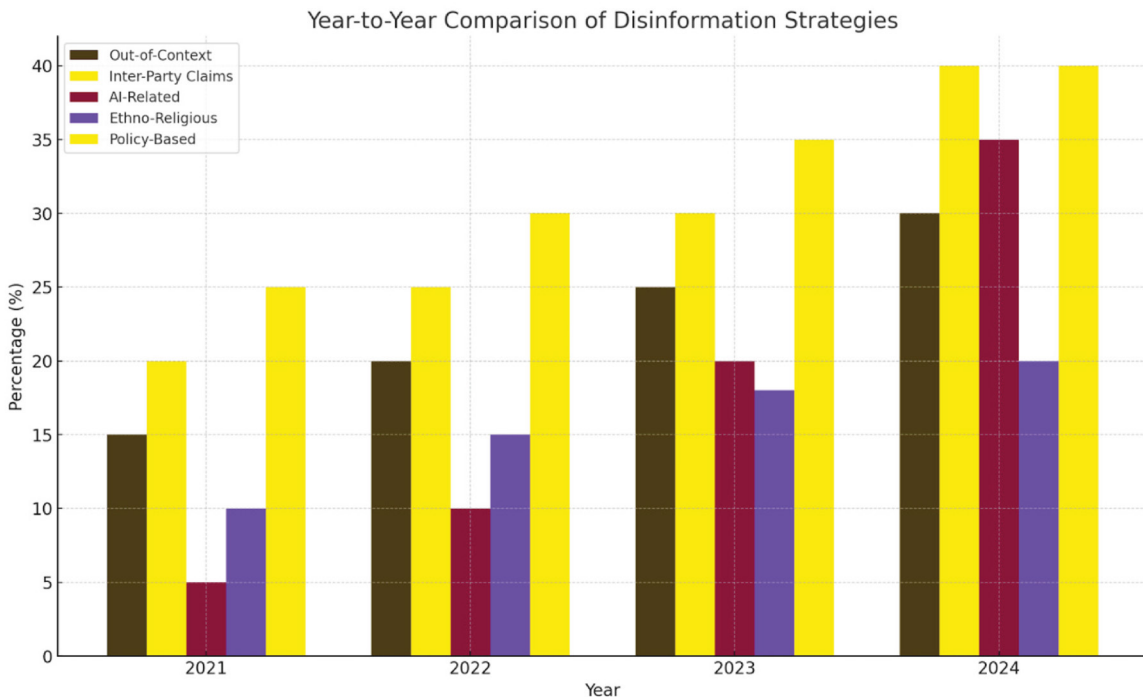
4.3 Platform-Based Disinformation (2021-2024)

An independent examination of platform-based disinformation from 2021 to 2024 in Ghana reveals that Facebook was the leading platform for spreading various types of misinformation. It was particularly prominent for Out-of-Context and Ethno-Religious disinformation, capitalising on its wide user base and the ease of sharing content to amplify misleading narratives. WhatsApp followed closely, serving as a key channel for the rapid dissemination of similar disinformation themes due to its closed network nature and high penetration rate. X was notably influential for Inter-Party/Candidate-Based and Policy-Based disinformation, leveraging its platform's real-time discussions and politically active user base. AI-related disinformation was detected across platforms but had a significant presence on YouTube, where deepfakes and manipulated content could be effectively shared through videos. These findings underscore the strategic exploitation of different social media platforms based on their characteristics and audience reach. The dominance of Facebook in spreading misinformation highlights the platform's role as a central vector for disinformation in Ghana, necessitating targeted countermeasures to mitigate its impact.

Percentage Distribution of Disinformation Types Across Platforms (2021-2024)
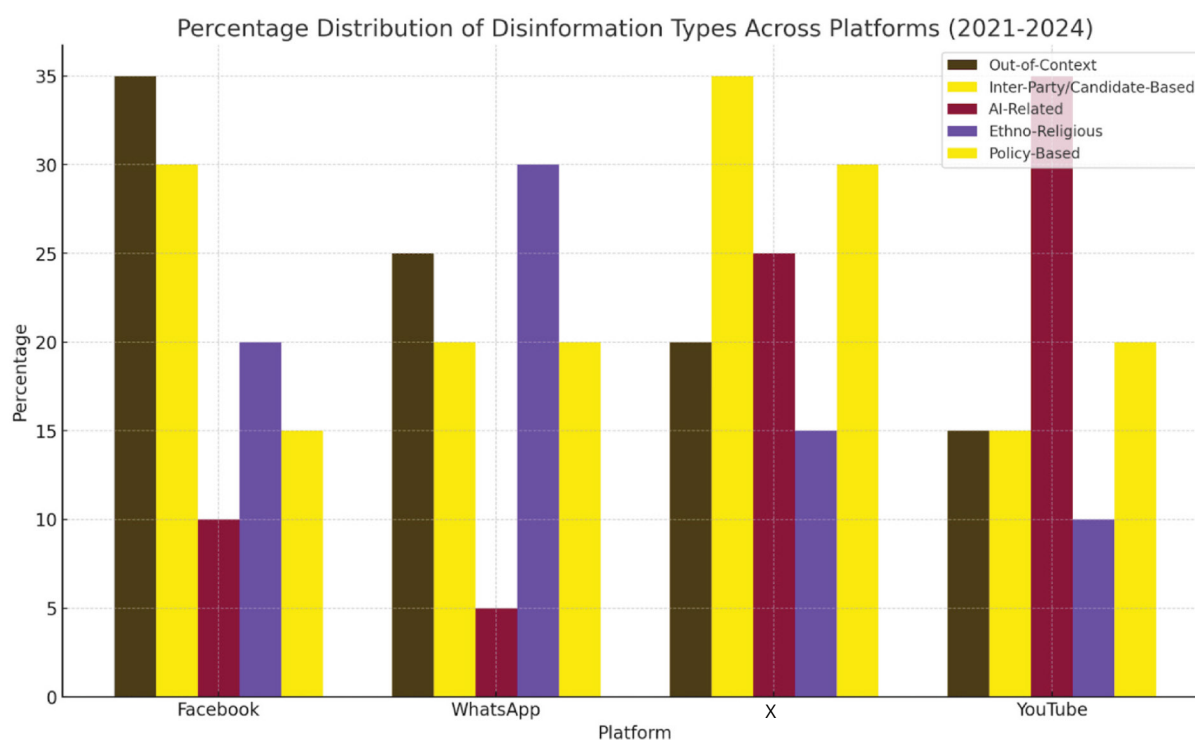
4.4 Year-to-Year Analysis of Disinformation Strategies (2021-2024)

The year-to-year analysis of disinformation strategies in Ghana's elections from 2021 to 2024 shows a marked increase in the use of various tactics, with notable shifts in sophistication. "Inter-Party Claims" and "Policy-Based" disinformation have become

increasingly dominant, both rising to 40% by 2024, highlighting the use of false narratives as strategic tools in political rivalries. Most striking is the surge in "AI-related" disinformation, which grew from 5% in 2021 to 35% by 2024, indicating the growing role of technology in amplifying false content. While "Out-of-Context" and "Ethno-Religious" themes have also shown increases, the sharp rise in AI-driven strategies points to an urgent need for stronger fact-checking and media literacy programs to counter these evolving threats ahead of the 2024 elections.

Year-to-Year Comparison of Disinformation Strategies
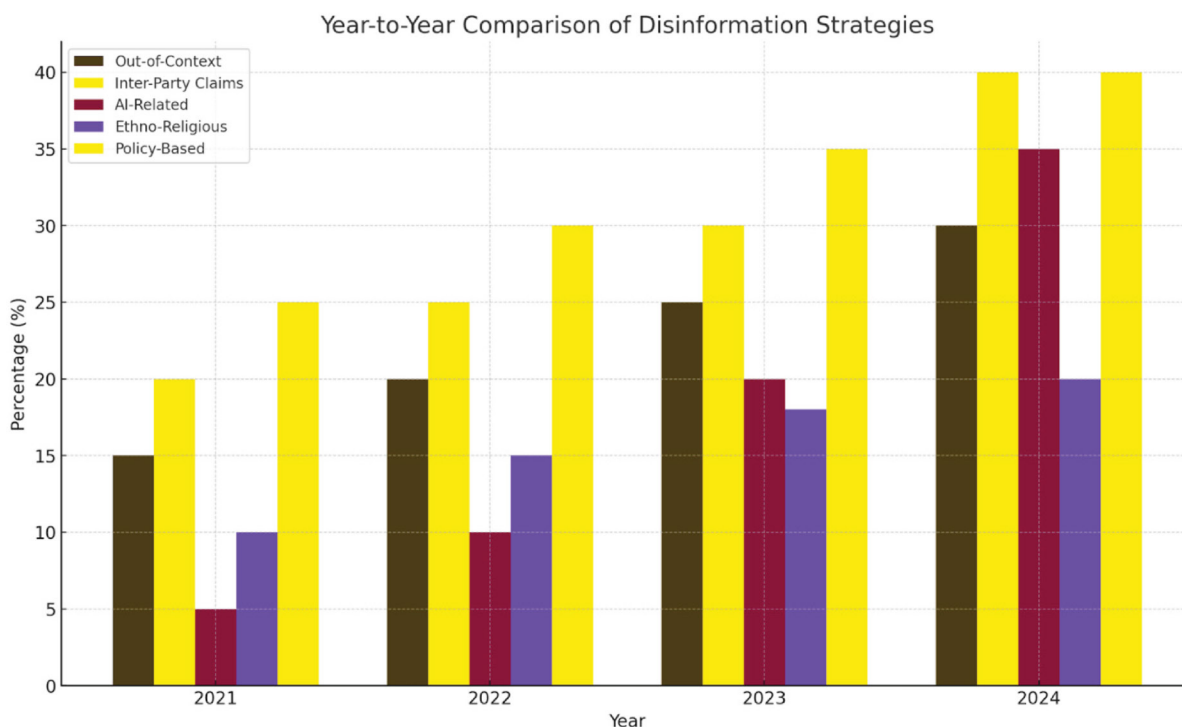
4.5 Source Attribution Analysis (2021-2024)

An analysis of disinformation sources in Ghana from 2021 to 2024 reveals that political figures were the most contributors, accounting for 40% of the disinformation. This indicates their prominent role in manipulating narratives during key events such as elections. Influencers followed at 25%, showcasing their ability to leverage social media platforms for widespread dissemination of false or misleading content. For example, during the 2020 elections, misleading information about the health of the two main candidates was shared on social media. Some asserted that President Akufo-Addo should not be in office since he had flown outside for medical care, while others claimed that John Mahama was gravely sick and unsuitable to govern the nation.

Unknown persons represented 20%, highlighting the complexities of tracing the origins of disinformation, particularly in closed networks like WhatsApp where anonymity is prevalent. Online users comprised 15%, pointing to the participation of individual accounts, both anonymous and identifiable, in the spread of disinformation. This breakdown

underscores the dynamic nature of disinformation sources.

4.6 Impact of Disinformation by Post Type (2021-2024)

The analysis of disinformation by post type from 2021 to 2024 reveals that videos were the most impactful medium, accounting for 50% of high-interaction cases. This underscores their potent role in engaging audiences and spreading disinformation. Image/Press statements followed at 20%, demonstrating a moderate impact likely due to their visual nature. Flyers and text-based posts showed diminishing influence at 15% and 10%, respectively, indicating lower engagement but still contributing to disinformation campaigns. News stories held the smallest share at 5%, suggesting limited public interaction compared to more dynamic formats. This analysis reveals the importance of targeting highly engaging mediums like video content when addressing the spread of disinformation.

These findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to combat disinformation, including media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and targeted interventions on popular platforms.

Impact of Disinformation by Post Type (2021-2024)
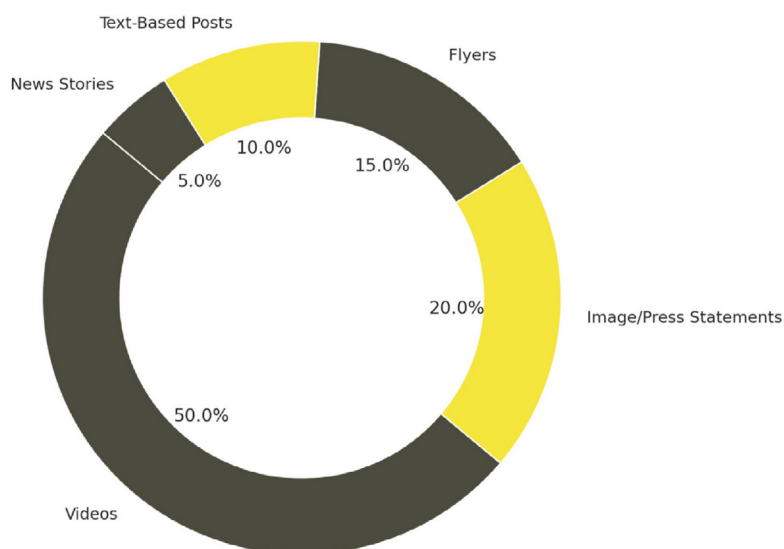
5.0   Discussion of findings

This research provides an in-depth examination of the state of political information disorder in Ghana ahead of the 2024 general elections. It highlights both the evolution of disinformation in the country's electoral process and the readiness of key stakeholders— voters, journalists, and media experts—in addressing these challenges. The findings underscore the growing sophistication of disinformation campaigns and their potential to significantly impact voter behaviour, particularly as Ghana prepares for what is expected to be a high-stakes election.

5.1 Evolution of Information Disorder in Ghana

The findings reveal that the Ghanaian electoral ecosystem has experienced an alarming increase in disinformation, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 elections. Analysis of content from 2020 to 2024 shows that the prevalence of disinformation has escalated, especially during election cycles, reflecting the intensification of political rivalries. The most common types of disinformation identified were Out-of-Context Claims, which account for nearly 28% of false narratives, followed by Inter-Party or Candidate-Based Disinformation (25%) and AI-Related Disinformation (20.8%). These findings highlight a clear pattern in the manipulation of political narratives, with fabricated content often targeted at discrediting political opponents, misleading voters about candidates' health, and distorting public perceptions of policies and governance.

Furthermore, the role of AI-driven disinformation, including deep fakes, is increasingly evident. The emergence of this technology has made it easier for malicious actors to create highly convincing but entirely false content. In 2022 and 2023, there was a marked increase in the use of deepfakes and other forms of manipulated media to influence voter opinions, and this trend is expected to continue through the 2024 elections. The widespread availability of AI tools and their growing sophistication means that disinformation campaigns will only become more difficult to detect, posing a serious challenge to the integrity of the electoral process.

5.2 The Role of Social Media

Social media platforms have become the primary channels for the dissemination of disinformation in Ghana. The research findings show that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are the most significant vectors for spreading false political content, with Facebook emerging as the leading platform. This is due to its vast user base and the ease with which content can go viral, regardless of its accuracy. WhatsApp, with its closed network nature, also contributes to the rapid spread of disinformation, often within localised communities.

The findings further suggest that platforms like Twitter are increasingly being exploited for inter-party disinformation campaigns, where rival political groups use social media to manipulate public opinion and undermine the credibility of their opponents. The lack of stringent monitoring and regulation on these platforms exacerbates the problem, allowing false claims to be shared unchecked, which can significantly sway public opinion and, ultimately, voting outcomes. Given that social media now plays such a critical role in shaping public discourse, addressing disinformation on these platforms is essential for maintaining a fair and transparent electoral process.

5.3 Voter Vulnerability to Misinformation

The survey data reveals that a large proportion of the electorate, particularly first-time voters, remains vulnerable to the influence of disinformation. While a majority of voters express confidence in their ability to navigate the electoral process, the knowledge gaps regarding political candidates, their policies, and the voting procedure remain significant. Particularly concerning is the finding that 41.8% of survey respondents were first-time voters, who, despite their high levels of enthusiasm and interest in participating, have limited exposure to accurate election-related information. This demographic is highly susceptible to manipulation through misinformation campaigns, especially when they lack the skills to critically evaluate the content they encounter online.

The reliance on social media as a primary source of election-related information exacerbates this vulnerability. The survey found that 97.2% of respondents rely on digital platforms for news and updates, underscoring the extent to which misinformation spreads within these digital spaces. Without proper guidance on how to verify online content, these first-time voters are at risk of being swayed by false information that distorts their understanding of key issues, candidates, and policies. This highlights the urgent need for targeted media literacy campaigns and fact-checking efforts to bridge these knowledge gaps before the elections.

5.4 Challenges Facing Journalists and Media Professionals

Journalists and media professionals in Ghana also face significant challenges in combating election-related disinformation. The research findings indicate that 38.8% of journalists identified political pressure as a major obstacle in their work, which can hinder their ability to provide accurate, impartial reporting. This is particularly concerning during election periods when media coverage is under intense scrutiny. The findings also highlight the lack of training in fact-checking and digital tools among journalists, with 82% of respondents reporting no formal training in how to address misinformation. This knowledge gap leaves many journalists ill-equipped to handle the complexities of disinformation, especially in an increasingly digital and AI-driven information ecosystem.

Additionally, limited resources and time constraints were cited by 20.8% of journalists as barriers to effective media monitoring and disinformation mitigation. These challenges, combined with the growing volume of online misinformation, make it difficult for journalists to keep up with the fast pace of disinformation campaigns. The need for greater resources, training, and collaboration among media organisations and fact-checking bodies is evident in these findings.

5.5 The Impact of Disinformation on Voter Behavior

The research also underscores the profound impact that disinformation can have on voter behaviour. The survey results show that while many voters are aware of the risks of misinformation, 33.9% of respondents expressed uncertainty or doubt about their ability to accurately detect disinformation. This vulnerability can significantly influence their voting decisions, especially when disinformation targets emotional, divisive issues like ethnic identity, candidate health, or national security. The prevalence of ethno-religious disinformation (13.9%) during past elections demonstrates how disinformation can manipulate voters along identity lines, deepening existing societal divides and potentially skewing electoral outcomes.

The polarising effects of disinformation are particularly concerning given Ghana's political environment, where competition between the two main political parties—NPP and NDC—is fierce. Disinformation campaigns that target political candidates' credibility or exploit ethnic divisions can lead to voter disenfranchisement, increased polarisation, and a decrease in trust in the electoral process. As such, the findings underscore the importance of addressing these issues comprehensively before the upcoming elections.

6.0   Recommendations

6.1 Enhanced Media Literacy and Voter Education Programs

The growing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation, especially among young voters and first-time voters, highlights the need for improved media literacy programs. These programs should aim to equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate the information they encounter, particularly on social media. Education should focus on recognizing misleading headlines, deep fake videos, and false narratives. Media literacy campaigns should be delivered through a variety of channels, including online platforms, schools, universities, and community organisations, ensuring accessibility across different demographics. In particular, first-time voters should be the focus of targeted educational campaigns, as they are more susceptible to the influence of misinformation. Moreover, interactive tools like quizzes and mobile applications can be developed to engage users actively, teaching them how to spot fake news in an entertaining and educational way.

6.2 Strengthening Fact-Checking and Media Monitoring Capacity

Fact-checking is an essential tool in combating disinformation during elections. The effectiveness of fact-checking organisations needs to be bolstered by providing them with more resources, technology, and training to handle the growing complexity and volume of disinformation. This includes enhancing skills in digital forensics, OSINT (Open Source Intelligence), and AI tools for detecting manipulated content. Collaboration among fact-checking organisations is also crucial to avoid duplication of efforts and to expand the reach of accurate information. Fact-checkers should work closely with electoral commissions to ensure swift and reliable debunking of misleading claims, especially those that could influence voter behaviour. Furthermore, the development of real-time monitoring platforms that use AI to identify disinformation as it emerges will help mitigate its spread and allow voters to access verified information quickly.

6.3 AI-Driven Disinformation Countermeasures

AI-driven content, such as deepfakes and synthetic media, is becoming a significant challenge in election disinformation. This technology enables the creation of highly realistic, manipulated content that is difficult for the average person to identify as false. To combat this, governments, fact-checking organisations, and tech companies should collaborate to develop tools capable of detecting and flagging AI-generated content. These tools should be widely accessible to both media professionals and the public. Additionally, awareness campaigns should be launched to educate voters about the existence and impact of deepfakes and AI-manipulated media, helping them to critically

assess the content they encounter online. Special attention should be given to platforms like YouTube and social media networks, where AI-generated content is likely to spread quickly, influencing voters' perceptions.

6.4 Targeted Interventions on Social Media

Social media platforms play a central role in the dissemination of disinformation. With the rise of misinformation, it is essential that these platforms implement stronger regulations and monitoring systems to prevent the spread of false political claims. Social media companies should be held accountable for failing to curb disinformation and should cooperate with fact-checking organisations to ensure that misleading posts are flagged and corrected promptly. Verified accounts from trusted sources, such as electoral bodies, candidates, and fact-checking organisations, should be given higher visibility on these platforms, helping users easily access accurate information. Furthermore, political campaigns should refrain from using disinformation, and instead, focus on transparent, fact-based communication. Social media influencers, who have significant sway over public opinion, should be engaged to promote accurate information and debunk disinformation.

6.5 Fostering Collaborative Efforts

Combating disinformation requires a collective effort from all sectors of society, including the government, media organisations, civil society, tech companies, and the public. By fostering collaboration between these stakeholders, Ghana can create a more coordinated and effective response to the growing problem of disinformation. A multi-stakeholder coalition should be formed to pool resources, share expertise, and develop joint strategies for monitoring and addressing election-related misinformation. This coalition should include media professionals, tech companies, civic groups, and political bodies. Collaboration should also extend to training programs, where journalists, fact-checkers, and civil society organisations can learn from each other and strengthen their collective capacity to tackle disinformation. Public engagement through community outreach, town hall meetings, and digital platforms will further amplify the impact of these efforts, ensuring that voters are well-informed and protected from disinformation.

7.0   Reference

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