



Trends in Gendered Disinformation during Togo Elections





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1 INTRODUCTION

The Africa Women Journalism Project (AWJP), founded by former ICFJ Knight fellow Catherine Gicheru in July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, supports women journalists with training, mentorship and grants. Our goal is to promote nuanced and evidence-based journalism on underreported issues and amplify the voices of marginalised groups and under-explored issues.

As part of our fellowship programmes, the AWJP team has integrated Fact-Checking and Verification into our core skills training. We emphasise these skills because we believe they are crucial for reshaping narratives, particularly concerning gender and applying a gender lens to reporting on health, education, development and governance issues.

During the Reporting on the Pandemic Fellowship in 2020, our fellows produced stories that highlighted the impact of COVID-19 measures on blood donation in Ghana, [vulnerable groups](#)

[such as malaria patients, sickle cell patients and in childbirth in Nigeria](#) and [mental health services in Uganda](#).

They also explored how communities in Kenya utilised radio for mental health care during the pandemic. However, as the global situation intensified, both our fellows and the AWJP editorial team noticed a rise in COVID-19 misinformation, particularly concerning purported “cures.” For instance, Soila Kenya’s report on [fake force field devices being sold to Kenyans](#) as protection against COVID-19 underscored the necessity to monitor misinformation and its effects on women and other marginalised communities.

In 2021, the Health Misinformation Fellowship was established with support from Meedan and Article-19 under the EC-funded project, C-19 Response in Africa. Building on themes and trends identified in prior fellowships, the AWJP team delved deeper into specific areas of misinformation. We moved beyond general COVID-19 misinformation to examine gendered health misinformation and disinformation

affecting minority groups including people living with HIV and intersex persons

Despite significant progress over the past decade in training fact-checkers across Africa for election integrity, there remains a notable gap in understanding and monitoring the impact of gendered disinformation on women's participation in electoral processes.

The WA GBV Reporting Fellowship, involving journalists from Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, highlighted how gendered disinformation adversely affects women's access to government services and creates unsafe online and offline environments, particularly in political engagement.

“Building on themes and trends identified in prior fellowships, the AWJP team delved deeper into specific areas of misinformation.”

Despite significant progress over the past decade in training fact-checkers across Africa for election integrity, there remains a notable gap in understanding and monitoring the impact of gendered disinformation on women's participation

in electoral processes.

Research indicates a [correlation between the spread of online misinformation targeting women's roles, campaign beliefs and actions in politics and the harassment and abuse they endure as a consequence](#). A 2016 global survey of women parliamentarians revealed that had 41.8% reported encountering humiliating or sexually explicit images circulated online. According to women politicians and experts interviewed, this targeted abuse, often fueled by misinformation, poses a significant barrier to women's political engagement.

Amnesty International's 2018 research further underscored the widespread and daily occurrence of online abuse and gendered misinformation has had significant implications for women who are withdrawing from public life, both online and offline, due to feelings of being unable to express themselves freely. This isolation from online platforms deprives women of the potential benefits of visibility, particularly when the internet serves as a critical source of political information and engagement with the citizens.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute only 27% of the parliamentarians, a figure slightly higher than the global average of 26.9% as of January 1, 2024, according to data referenced [in this Africa Renewal article](#).

Despite the goals outlined in SDG 5 to ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities across political, economic and public sectors, achieving gender parity in national legislative bodies by 2063 remains a distant prospect at current rates of progress.

In the African context, there is a lack of research examining the types, occurrences, and patterns of gendered disinformation during elections and its impact on women’s involvement in electoral processes, whether as political candidates or voters. There is a pressing need for increased civic education on gendered election disinformation and its implications for the political landscape. Additionally, legislation and frameworks are required to empower governments, political parties, platform providers and media across the continent to effectively eradicate Gendered disinformation in both online and offline spheres.

To develop effective interventions, we must continuously monitor online spaces for gendered misinformation, especially during elections. The Togo Gendered Election Disinformation Project, aimed to determine whether online gendered disinformation could impact women’s participation in the election process. It also aimed to identify the types, channels and emerging trends of such disinformation. This monitoring exercise serves as a

foundational step in identifying the necessary tools, information and skills needed to conduct similar work across the continent.





2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Togo Gendered Election Disinformation Project was co-designed with the Meedan team. The first phase involved setting up a tip line on Check, a tool developed by Meedan that makes it easy for organisations to create conversational bots to connect with audiences on messaging services such as WhatsApp, Messenger and Viber. The goal was to identify misinformation trends and to track instances of Gendered Disinformation (GD) in the months leading up to and after the elections.

Togo has been pursuing a democratic government that respects the views of its citizens. The 2019 elections were conducted under strained conditions following nearly a year and a half of protests, boycotts, and strikes against the president, who pushed through a constitutional amendment reinstating presidential term limits. However, this amendment does not apply retroactively, allowing President Gnassingbe to potentially run for re-election when his current term ends in 2025.

The legislative and regional elections, originally scheduled for December 2023, were first postponed to April 20 but were further delayed to April 29 due to another controversial constitutional reform. This reform shifted Togo from a presidential to a parliamentary system, giving the 113 members of the National Assembly the authority to elect the president for a single six-year term. Opposition leaders argue that this change is another attempt by the president to prolong his hold on power.¹

While activists and citizens focused on highlighting the anti-democratic actions of the ruling party and how to overthrow the regime, our project monitored and fact-checked traditional election disinformation.

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/elections-togo-what-happens-when-world-isnt-watching>

This context provided us with an opportunity to investigate whether instances of gendered disinformation affecting women’s political participation.

Our outlined goals were:



Collect at least 200 instances of GD



Conducting a public education campaign on GD and its impact on women’s political participation



Promoting the tip line to encourage the public to report instances of GD online.



Developing a comprehensive report analysing the claims and outcome of the project.

For this project, we defined GD as :

“Gendered disinformation refers to false or misleading information that specifically targets and impacts individuals based on their gender. This type of misinformation often reinforces harmful stereotypes, biases, or discriminatory narratives related to gender, affecting how people perceive and engage with individuals of different genders.”



3 COUNTRY CONTEXT

a. History of disinformation and gendered disinformation in Togo

Disinformation in Togo has historical roots in political manipulation and propaganda. During periods of political unrest, disinformation and media manipulation has been used to influence public opinion, sway electoral outcomes and undermine trust in democratic processes, sometimes leading to disastrous consequences. Traditional media outlets have historically been controlled or influenced by the government limiting diverse perspectives and fostering an environment ripe for disinformation.

The historical roots of political manipulation and propaganda trace back to its colonial and post-independence eras. During colonial rule, French authorities controlled the flow of information to serve colonial interests, suppressing dissent and shaping public opinion through state-controlled media. Following independence in 1960, political power struggles intensified, leading to the use of propaganda by successive regimes to consolidate power and suppress opposition. During periods of political unrest and electoral contests, deliberate misinformation campaigns have been employed to sway public sentiment, undermine trust in democratic institutions, and influence electoral outcomes. For instance, during the 2005 presidential elections, rumours and false information circulated widely, impacting public trust in the electoral process and leading to protests and violence.

Traditional media outlets were often co-opted or censored, limiting diverse perspectives and fostering an environment conducive to disinformation. State-controlled media outlets have historically propagated misinformation to suppress opposition voices and maintain political control. For example, newspapers like Togolese National and Le Libéral have been used to promote government agendas and discredit opposition figures through biased reporting and selective coverage.

Radio has been a powerful tool for disseminating disinformation, such as during the Gnassingbé Eyadéma era, where state radio stations were used to broadcast pro-government propaganda and marginalised dissenting views. Traditional media's influence extends beyond news reporting to cultural programming that reinforces political narratives, shaping public opinion and perpetuating misinformation over time. This has contributed to a climate of distrust among citizens, undermining democratic principles of transparency and fairness.

This historical backdrop entrenched a culture of media manipulation and political propaganda, setting the stage for modern challenges posed by digital platforms in disseminating and amplifying misinformation during electoral processes.

Disinformation has historically wielded a significant impact on public opinion and democratic processes in Togo.

“State-controlled media outlets have historically propagated misinformation to suppress opposition voices and maintain political control. For example, newspapers like Togolese National and Le Libéral have been used to promote government agendas and discredit opposition figures”

b. Specific impact of social media during past elections

The advent of social media has profoundly changed the disinformation landscape in Togo (Eg.) Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are widely used to disseminate false information, manipulate public sentiment, and amplify political messages. During elections, social media has been instrumental in spreading rumours, false narratives, and divisive content aimed at discrediting opponents or promoting specific agendas. This has led to heightened polarisation, distrust in electoral processes, and challenges in discerning credible information from falsehoods.

Gendered misinformation often targets candidates and political figures based on gender stereotypes and biases. This misinformation is often used to discredit

female candidates and political rivals. Since Togo gained independence in 1960, the participation of women in political office in Togo has been historically low, reflecting broader challenges in gender equity and representation in politics across many countries. This is partly due to social pressures and the fear associated with misinformation.²

Women candidates frequently encounter false narratives questioning their competence, morality, and suitability for leadership roles. Conversely, male candidates may be portrayed through exaggerated positive attributes, reinforcing traditional gender norms and expectations.

However, the 2024 legislative and regional election marked a notable increase in female participation, with 593 women running for Parliament and 438 women for the regional councils, according to figures obtained from the independent National Electoral Commission (read the article [here](#))

Despite this progress, gendered misinformation remains a growing concern as women increasingly engage in politics and public life. This phenomenon impedes their ability to fully exercise their political rights and duties, perpetuating violence² and injustices related to disinformation that prevents them from fully enjoying their political rights and duties.

During the recent elections in Togo, gendered misinformation manifested itself in the following forms:

• Character Assassination:

Women candidates faced false allegations of corruption, immorality, or incompetence aimed at damaging their reputations and electoral prospects.

• Stereotypical Portrayals:

Misinformation propagated harmful stereotypes, portraying women as emotionally unfit for leadership or men as inherently more capable and authoritative.

²<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/benin/05205.pdf> page 71

These definitions were designated as part of our civic education plan/communication [here](#) after reviewing the types of gendered disinfo that we received on the tipline and was used to finalise the codebook.

The advent of social media has profoundly changed the disinformation landscape in Togo. Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are widely used to disseminate false information, manipulate public sentiment and amplify political messages.

A recent survey indicated that 85.3% of journalists and human rights defenders incorporate these social media tools into their work. WhatsApp, in particular, is favoured for its popularity and extensive reach, facilitating the rapid spread of misinformation. Facebook comes a close second in popularity with 83.8% of the respondents saying they preferred this platform due to their proficiency in using this tool (Read the article [here](#)).

The use of WhatsApp is widespread among the citizenry facilitating the rapid spread of misinformation. This includes tactics such as artificial intelligence, bots, identity theft, and manipulated videos, which amplify gendered misinformation and pose significant challenges to combating false narratives.

In the context of misinformation, tactics such as artificial intelligence, bots, identity theft, and video editing are commonly used to spread false information through media like WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter. These tools amplify gendered misinformation, making it more difficult to combat.

c. Challenges in Addressing Gendered Disinformation

Togo does not have specific laws and regulatory mechanisms to combat gendered misinformation, limiting legal recourse against perpetrators.

However, existing laws related to defamation, hate speech, and cybercrime may be applicable in cases involving gender-based disinformation. These laws aim to protect individuals from harm, preserve public order, and uphold the integrity of public discourse. These laws include [the Penal Code in its Article 177](#), [the Law 2017-006 on the orientation of the information society \(LOSITO\)](#), and [the Law No. 2012-018 of December 17, 2012, on electronic communications](#), amended by Law No. 2013-003 of February 19, 2013 (LCE).

³https://www.togowatch.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_d_analyse_usage_des_medias_sociaux_par_les_journalistes_et_osc_togo-foe_2023.pdf

Addressing gendered misinformation requires concerted efforts across several fronts. First, promoting media literacy among voters, journalists and civil society is crucial to empower individuals to recognise and combat gendered misinformation effectively.

Secondly, establishing and enforcing robust legal frameworks specifically targeting gendered misinformation is essential. These frameworks should include stringent penalties for both perpetrators and platforms that facilitate the dissemination of such misinformation.

Furthermore, collaboration with social media platforms is necessary to enhance content moderation, ensure transparency in advertising practices, and enforce community standards rigorously. These measures are vital in curtailing the spread of misinformation including gendered falsehoods.

Lastly, providing targeted support for women candidates who are disproportionately targeted by gendered misinformation is crucial. This support should include legal aid to address defamation and psychological assistance to mitigate the personal and professional impacts of misinformation campaigns.

“Addressing gendered misinformation requires concerted efforts across several fronts. First, promoting media literacy among voters, journalists and civil society is crucial to empower individuals”



4 METHODOLOGY

a. Selection of Tip line Messaging Platform

To determine the appropriate messaging platform for the tipline set up, the team conducted a review of Togo’s online traffic and internet usage. Data from DataReportal⁴ indicated that as of January 2023 Togo had 3.13 million internet users representing a 35% internet penetration rate. Analysis of online sources revealed that Facebook dominated web traffic referrals from social media (see image below). However, anecdotal reports from local contacts emphasised that WhatsApp was the most widely used messaging platform in the country, despite data indicating lower social media usage compared to cellular mobile connections, with 6.15 million cellular mobile connections, and 775.6 thousand social media users as of January 2024.

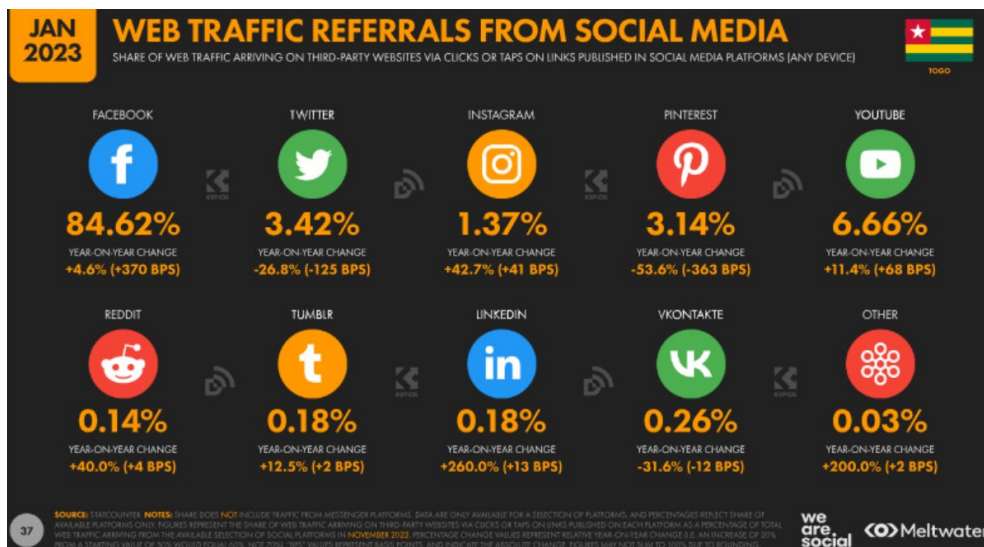


Figure 1: Togo Web Traffic Referrals from Social Media Jan 2023

⁴ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-togo>

However, attempts to get a WhatsApp tip line setup for AWJP's Togolese partner TogoCheck were unsuccessful. As the election period drew closer, a decision was taken to use Facebook Messenger to ensure sufficient time for set up and to run the campaign.

b. Audience Engagement

i. Team Expectations

Our community engagement plan relied on thorough research to understand and target our audience effectively through the TogoCheck-hosted tip line for reporting GD. We anticipated that using TogoCheck to host the Tipline would instil trust among the people and lend our campaign credibility. This was also aimed at enabling TogoCheck to use it as a starting point for launching its initiatives in gendered misinformation and gendered fact-checking.

Additionally, we aimed to leverage the organisational power of feminist activist groups and women journalists groups in the country despite men constituting the majority of Togo's social media users at 69.7% as of January 2023 by employing online and offline campaign methods.

While the potential risk of the internet being shut down loomed, we expected the election to proceed peacefully and as scheduled.

Crucially, the success of the project depended on two primary expectations:

- i) The occurrence of instances of GD to be collected
- ii) The Togolese people's interest in GD and its effects on women's participation would prompt them to share instances of GD encountered

ii. Community Engagement Strategies

The AWJP implemented a systematic approach to define campaign objectives, formulate questions that needed to be answered and determine messaging while the Meedan team prepared to guide the AWJP and Togo Check through an audience engagement plan.

Before identifying campaign goals, the team undertook extensive research into Togo's demographics focusing on:

- i) Women's representation in governance
- ii) Areas of activism and prevailing electoral messaging
- iii) Togolese use of social media for activism and campaigning
- iv) Popular type of images/ graphics in Togolese online spaces.
- v) Possible amplifier/influencers within the community.

Our findings revealed that the activism around the elections was primarily focused on monitoring the ruling party's anti-democratic and advocating for regime change, echoing sentiments from 2019 as highlighted in [this article](#).

Moreover, we uncovered instances indicating the progress for women's rights in Togo underscoring the imperative for Togo to [focus on advancements for women to ensure that there is political, educational and financial equality between both genders](#).

Although specific data on Togolese voting trends wasn't available, 2018 data revealed that out of 26 ministers only 23% were women and a mere 5% or two out of the 39 Territorial Prefects were women, despite women comprising 49.7% of the population.

The primary objective of the campaign was to encourage people to report instances of GD on the tip line (see image below), aligning our campaign messaging with the core goals of promoting democratic participation and educating the population about GD and its detrimental impacts on women's political participation.

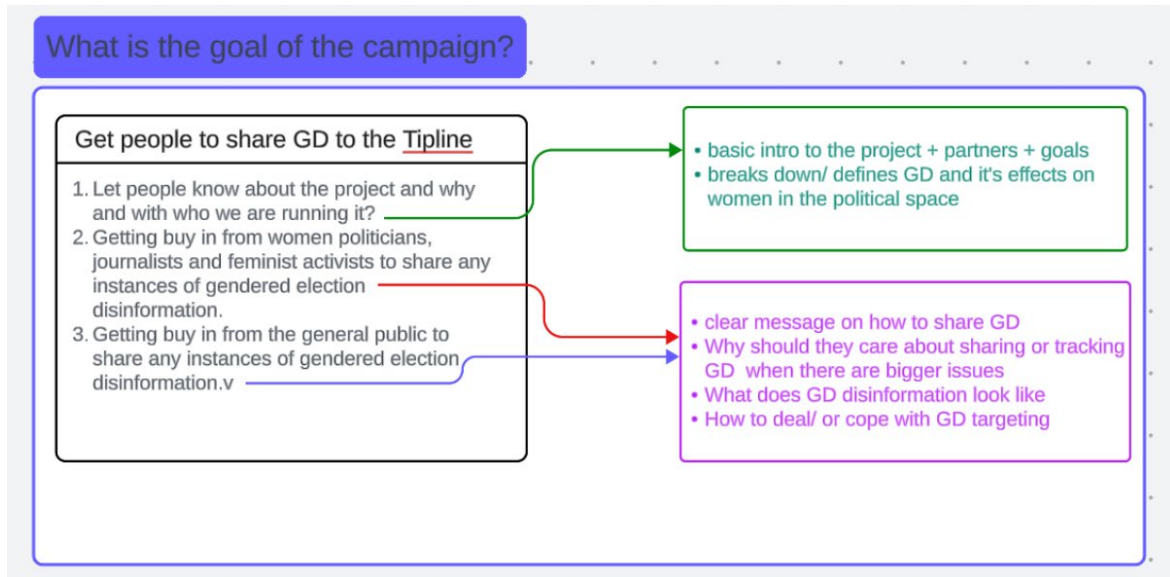


Figure 2: Screenshot of AWJP Comms team campaign design brainstorm.

The Audience Engagement sessions with the Meedan team, helped us to better understand our and TogoCheck’s social media strategies, enabling us to craft a campaign plan suited to our needs. We decided to utilise both Tog Check’s Facebook platform, to reach their community that was already engaging with them on the project, and AWJP’s platforms on LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook to reach our audience who would be key influencers and amplifiers working in those spaces.

Insights from these sessions combined with AWJP’s research on internet usage in Togo, revealed a risk of excluding a significant portion of the population due to limited internet access and a poor understanding of the subject matter. Togo had a population of 8.95 million in January of 2023 and only 3.13 million internet users in the same time period.⁵

The AWJP enlisted university students as annotators to gather information in everyday settings such as taxi ranks, market places etc. These students, along with the AWJP and TogoCheck team, underwent training on GD by the DRF team and received guidance on how to use the Check Platform and how to annotate content.

A [campaign strategy](#) was collaboratively developed and refined by AWJP and TogoCheck teams to ensure clarity on campaign goals, integrating insights from various sessions. A workflow system was established to facilitate the simultaneous development of content in English and French.

In total, 34 posts were shared on TogoCheck’s Facebook page and 99 posts across AWJP’s social platforms from December 2023 to March 2024. The tipline Bitly link generated 503 engagements during this period, see figure below. This data is part of the project’s content tracker, accessible in the project report which can be found [here](#)

“The primary objective of the campaign was to encourage people to report instances of GD on the tip line (see image below), aligning our campaign messaging with the core goals of promoting democratic participation and educating the population”

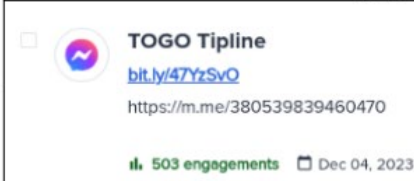
Togo GD Project: SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT				
Number of Posts	We posted on both AWJP & TogoCheck social media pages. FB, X & LI for AWJP & FB for TogoCheck. For AWJP we had 99 posts across all platforms. For TogoCheck we had 34 number of posts			
The Best Performing posts	The AWJP			
	Performance of posts are based on the number of engagements and impressions		Impressions	
	Twitter: Your Voice Matters! 🌐 Come across women-centric gendered disinformation? We want to know! Rest assured, 😊 your identity and personal info will be handled with utmost confidentiality. Send us the claims via Facebook Messenger here-> https://bit.ly/47YzSvO . 🗣️! https://x.com/theawjp/status/1757057546509033503		135	12
	Facebook: 🔍 Something BIG is brewing! 🌟 Get ready to separate fact from fiction! We're gearing up to unveil an exciting fact-checking campaign soon! Stay tuned for updates and join us on a mission to uncover the truth! 🗣️ #ShareDisinfo https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=862524415882534&set=a.464409385694041		467	7
	LinkedIn: 👩 Women in leadership boosts community productivity! Don't let #gendereddisinfo block their inclusion! Share doubtful and unfavourable content towards women with #Naka via @TogoCheck tip line on FB messenger https://bit.ly/47YzSvO for fact-checking! 🗣️ #ReportGenderedDisinfo https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7186317627407908864		105	11
	TogoCheck			
Facebook: 🗣️ Les récits genrés erronés posent des obstacles aux femmes en politique, sapant leurs efforts! Signalez les récits faux et soyez une force pour des informations précises et émancipatrices! 🗣️❤️ Participez en partageant de telles informations avec nous via Facebook Messenger à https://bit.ly/47YzSvO ! 🌐 #ReportGenderedDisinfo https://facebook.com/togocheck/posts/pfbid02Lx2QvQJrH2hyxK4xquhCECWfuvz9Rg7xAcCTsCYfGSt7d6kqtNdUeykyZi6T2QI		485	11	
Link Engagements	Bitly:		Engagement	
	 <p>TOGO Tipline bit.ly/47YzSvO https://m.me/380539839460470 503 engagements Dec 04, 2023</p>		503	
Notable mentions	https://sh1.sendinblue.com/3g7m32jxzbpxpfe.html?t=1708348474&fbclid=IwAR2eocZkzK-d1W3XKYuGYQfh-VmFnOLRLQ4_dqb-8-FrgGjwnifytRcMy8			

Figure 3: Screenshot of Togo GD in Elections Project Analytics Report

3.3 Data Analysis

a. Cleaning and selecting submissions

The data cleaning involved several steps. First, we deleted test rows and empty columns (tags, created by organisation, published at and reviewed by organisation). Next we added the claims into the sheet one by one since most of them were not initially included in the Claims section of the Check platform. Additionally, some claims came into the Check platform in bulk and had to be separated into different rows.

Since the AWJP Data Team does not speak French, they translated the claims and tipline question columns from French to English using the =GOOGLETRANSLATE function in Google Sheets. For unclear claim translations, the team used the AI translator [DeepL](#).

Claims that were submitted as images and screenshots from social media were transcribed and translated using [Google Lens](#).

To facilitate the analysis, the team used a modified version of the codebook provided by Meedan.

Theme	Code Name	Code
Gender-based violence	Lewd sex-oriented attacks	A.1
	Descriptions of idealized violence against person or people	A.2
	Calls for violence against person or people	A.3
	Circulation of revenge porn	A.4
Disinformation	False claims about personal life	B.1
	False claims about professional life	B.2
	False claims about sexual encounters	B.3
	False claims about women	B.4
	False claims about trans people	B.5
Hate speech	Sexist statements	C.1
	Transphobic statements	C.2
	Dehumanization	C.3
	Use of gender-based slurs	C.4
Manipulated media	Falsified or manipulated revenge porn	D.1
	Use of individua's image in sexualized image (not porn)	D.2

Figure 4: Screenshot of Meedan's original codebook

Since most of the claims identified as gendered disinformation were specifically of a sexist⁶ non-violent nature, they were categorised primarily under codes B.4 (False claims about women) and C.4 (Use of gender-based slurs). Consequently, these two codes were subdivided further into subcodes.

For B.4, the following codes were added:

- B.4.A - Women in politics lose their femininity
- B.4.B - Women are too emotional to be in politics
- B.4.C - Women in politics are immoral
- B.4.D - Women are incompetent so cannot lead
- B.4.E - Women are spend-thrifts so cannot lead

For C.4, the following codes were added:

- C.4.A - Attacks on age
- C.4.B - Attacks on marital status and age
- C.4.C - Attacks on body and age
- C.4.D - Accusations of promiscuity

The AWJP Team also introduced a code for 'ignorance' to categorise claims that doubted the suitability of women in politics out of concern for their safety or from a perspective of pure misunderstanding. These included:

E.1 - Assertions that women are incapable of certain tasks/roles; A viewpoint suggesting that women are unsuited for politics. These statements are not meant to harm or insult but reflect genuine ignorance. A student annotator collected this claim ***“For me, I don’t find it abnormal that we say that a woman is in power but who is going to do the domestic work?” which illustrates this type of ignorance.***

E.2 - Caution or scepticism regarding certain roles of women; Genuine concern for women entering politics; questioning their ability to handle the pressures that come with the role. An example is this claim submitted by a student annotator ***“misinformation about women does not guarantee the success of this woman in elections, and the people will not have confidence, it tarnishes the image of women, there is a lack of confidence in women”***

After incorporating these additional codes and subcodes, we provided an example from the dataset for each. Further efforts were made to identify claims gathered by the students.

Additionally, we ran a text analysis as well as a sentiment analysis of the claims on Python using the [Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner \(VADER\) model](#). This model is used to determine how negative or positive a body of text is. In order to do this we cleaned the claims further by removing parts of speech from the claims to get a more meaningful analysis.





5 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

a. What was the nature of gendered disinformation? In what ways were women and gender nonbinary people targeted?

A total of 345 claims came in between 1st December 2023 and 3rd May 2024. Among these, 173 were identified as gendered disinformation and 126 pertained to politics.

345

CLAIMS



Type of claims	No. of claims
Gendered disinformation	173
Not Gendered disinformation	170
Gendered disinformation Political	126
Gendered disinformation Non-political	44

Source of Claims	
Student Annotators	287
NAKA Bot (Organic)	49
Public Page	54
Direct Messages	6

Table 1: Nature of Gendered Disinformation Collected and Source of Claims

Types of Claims as a % of total claims

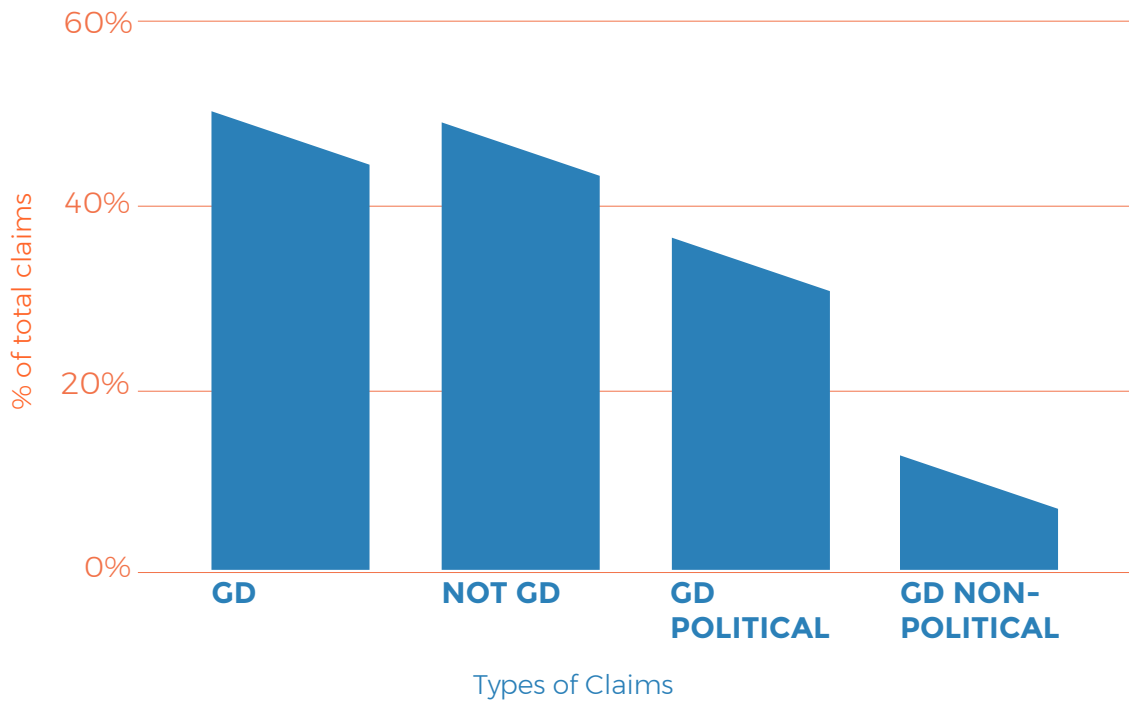


Figure 5: Types of claims as a % of total claims submitted

Most of the claims that came through NAKA Bot were from public Facebook pages (15.7%) while very few were from direct messages (1.7%). This does not account for the claims that were collected by the students (83.2%), which was the most effective way of collecting the public’s points of view on women in politics.

Source of claims as a % of total claims

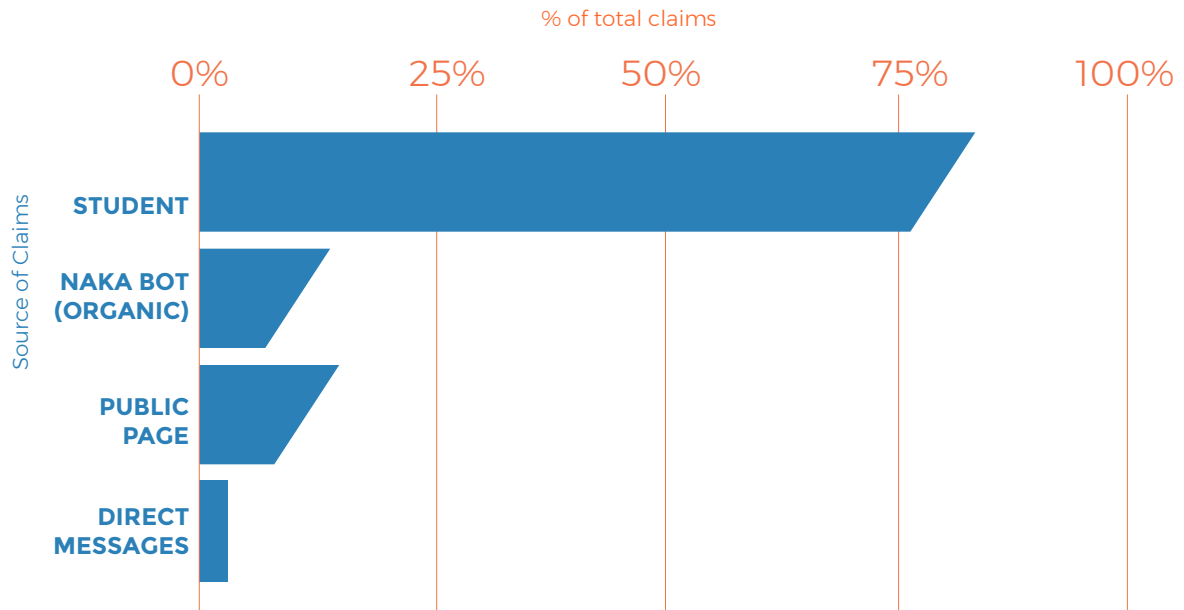


Figure 6: Source of Gendered Disinformation Claims

As mentioned, most gendered disinformation claims were sexist but non-violent and fell into the codes B.4 (False claims about women) and C.4 (Use of gender-based slurs)

“Most of the claims that came through NAKA Bot were from public Facebook pages (15.7%)”

CODEBOOK			
Code or subcode	Code or subcode name	No. of claims	Description
A.4	Circulation of revenge porn	2	Sharing of explicit (but real) sexual materials
B.1	False claims about personal life	3	Untrue statements about the personal life of a specific individual

CODEBOOK

Code or subcode	Code or subcode name	No. of claims	Description
B.4	False claims about women	19	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group
B.4.A	Women in politics lose their femininity	13	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group that insinuate that they can no longer keep a husband, get along with in-laws or run a home
B.4.B	Women are too emotional to be in politics	2	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group that insinuate that women are only emotional creatures and that will lead to them making poor decisions for the country
B.4.C	Women in politics are immoral	19	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group that insinuate that in order for women to get into politics, they have to sleep with men
B.4.D	Women are incompetent so cannot lead	15	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group that insinuate that women cannot lead without getting assistance from a man
B.4.E	Women are spend-thrifts so cannot lead	3	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group will spend the nation's money on frivolous items like make-up and clothes
C.1	Sexist statements	32	Any statement that invokes sexism that does not fall into any above category. This code applies to statements that are someone's opinion and doesn't involve direct violence or call for violence. However, these statements still may be abusive or violent in nature
C.3	Dehumanization	1	Any statement that aims to dehumanize a person or group of people based on gender identity. Dehumanization is the process of depriving a person or group of positive human qualities. An example of dehumanization would be comparing someone or a group of people to animals/insects
C.4	Use of gender-based slurs	3	Any statement that employs a gender-based slur that does not fit into one of the above categories

C.4.A	Attacks on age	12	Any statement that employs a gender-based slur that attacks a woman for her perceived (probably untrue) age
C.4.B	Attacks on marital status and age	10	Any statement that employs a gender-based slur that attacks a woman's lack of husband at a perceived (probably untrue) old age
C.4.C	Attacks on body and age	3	Any statement that employs a gender-based slur that attacks a woman's perceived deteriorated body due to the woman's perceived (probably untrue) old age
C.4.D	Accusations of promiscuity	11	Untrue blanket statements about women as a group that insinuate that they can no longer keep a husband, get along with in-laws or run a home
D.2	Use of individual's image in sexualized image (not porn)	1	A worldview that says that women are not meant for politics. These statements are not meant to harm or insult but represent genuine ignorance.
E.1	Suggestion that women are incapable of certain tasks/ roles	7	A worldview that says that women are not meant for politics. These statements are not meant to harm or insult but represent genuine ignorance
E.2	Caution or disbelief on certain roles of women	9	Genuine concern for women who step into politics; a question into their ability to handle the pressures that come with the role

Table 2: Code book developed for analysis

There were no transphobic claims. However, we received one AI-generated image, which did not qualify as gendered disinformation.

We encountered only two image claims that loosely fit into the sexual materials category. One image depicted a woman in a sexually suggestive pose (though nothing explicit) with text implying that the poster has a sex tape of her. The other image featured Cameroonian influencer Coco Emilia with the Former Minister of Arts and Culture of Cameroon Narcisse Mouelle Kombi at the opening of her beauty salon in 2021 accompanied by a suggestion that she was romantically involved with him, along with an image of her in a bikini. This was the only claim we received that was not about Togo.

During our analysis, we identified a number of local gender-based slang slurs in use such as “*tchiza*” which means mistress and “*djandjou*” meaning a woman who is perceived to seek material gain through seduction. These terms were used to denigrate random women online (not targeted at women political aspirants or candidates) without any confirmation of the truthfulness of the allegations, but rather as a means to insult targeted individuals and damage their reputations.

There were 16 claims under the newly added E.1 and E.2 ignorance codes. Examples include;

E.1 - “Women don’t go into politics. Is there money in it? I’m not interested in politics. I’m looking for money.”



Figure 7: Text Analysis Word Cloud

As we annually coded the dataset, we confirmed certain patterns reflected in the word cloud, which associated women with traditional roles such as “mother,” “wife,” “kitchen,” “children,” “married,” “family,” and “husband.”

The sentiment analysis using the VADER model aimed to assess the claims on a scale from -1 to +1, measuring polarity (negative to positive). A score of 0 indicates neutrality, 0 to +1 denotes positive sentiments, and -1 to 0 indicates negative sentiments. Interestingly, the model struggled to grasp the context of gendered disinformation and the concept of gender inclusivity leading to inaccurate ratings of the claims as either negative or positive.

b. What were the media formats that were in circulation while spreading gendered disinformation?

The majority of the claims came in text format, submitted as screenshots from social media. Additionally, we received claims in video, blog and image formats. The students collected 287 claims through brief physical interviews, which they then entered into a Google form. These were included in the count of the text claims.

Media formats of claims as a % of total claims

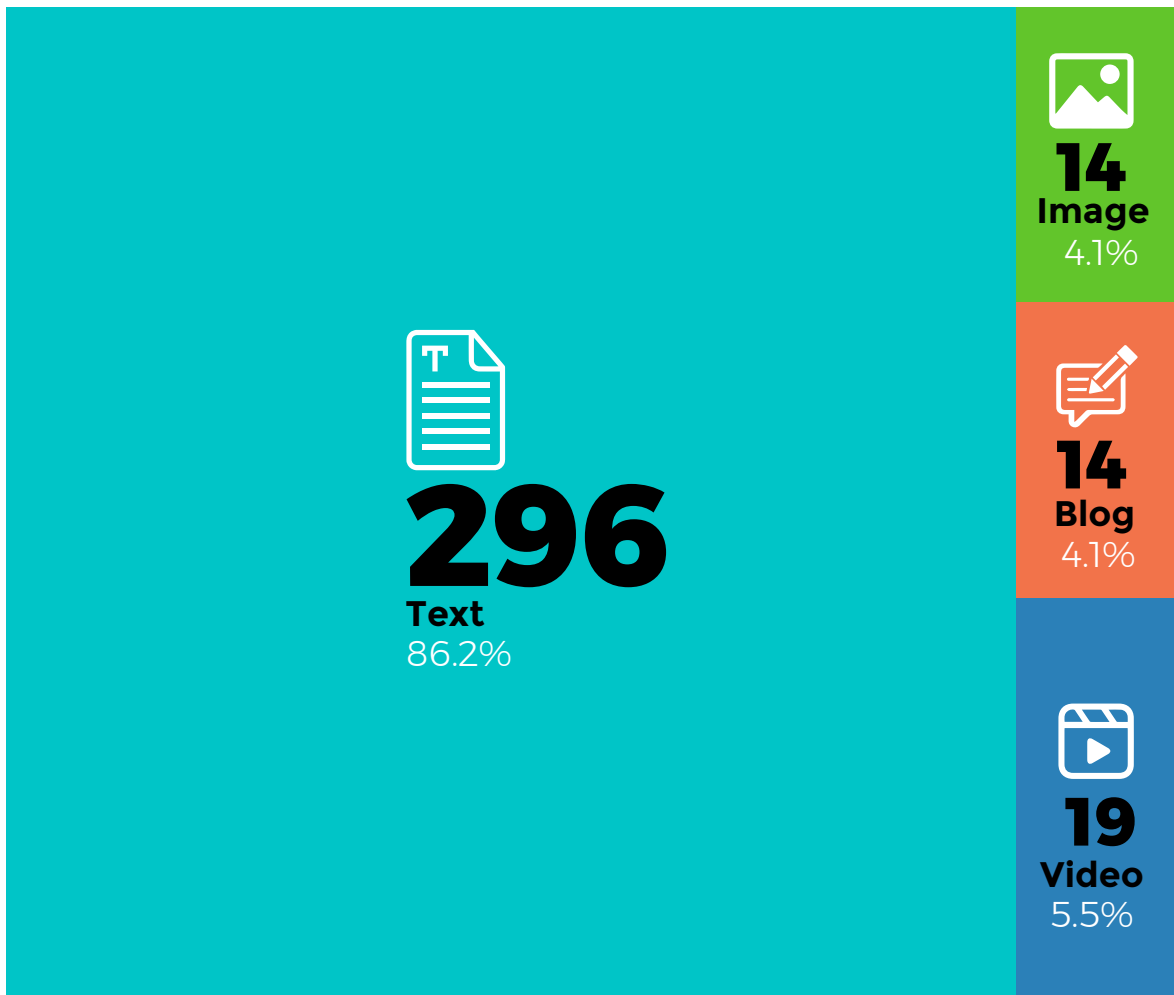


Figure 8: Media formats of claims collected as a percentage of total claims collected

c. What indications of coordination were there, if any?

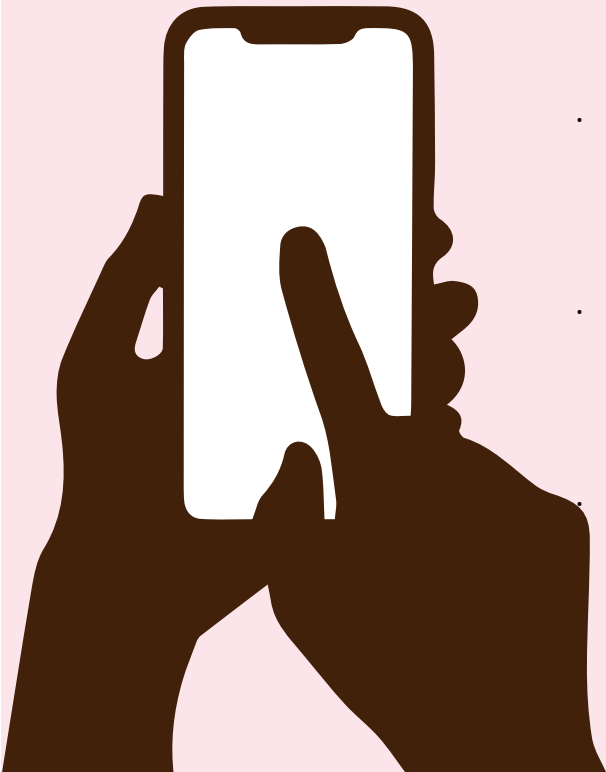
Among the political claims, we found no evidence of coordination. However, a feminist and author in Togo reported harassment she was receiving from Togolese netizens due to comments she made about a popular Senegalese footballer.

She posted on her Facebook page: *“He marries a 19-year-old student in Terminale class. Everyone applauds #Sadio Mane”*

This sparked a barrage of hate comments directed at her, both on this specific post and on her other Facebook posts. Some individuals went beyond commenting and created their own posts, as well as sending direct messages to her on Facebook. Approximately 12.5% of the total claims we received were related to this incident. The claims targeted her age, marital status and other personal aspects of her life. Most of these claims came from men, as indicated by their Facebook names.

Examples of the comments she received:

- “I understand your frustration at 50 you are still single”
- “What is he going to do with a feminist who jumps from bed to bed looking for a man who refuses to play the role of a husband (head of the family)”
- “A girl can get married at age 18. How old are you? I give you 35 years. You are already old and fat. Sadia mané looking for a younger and fresher”
- “Better than taking a withered and semi-menauposed[sic] 28 or 30 year old!!! You jealous single girl”
- “I was reading someone’s comment the day before yesterday on Tiktok who said that she divorced her husband because he cheated on her. Today she has become the mistress of her ex-husband and that of another married man too (mistress of two married men)”



d. Patterns observed in the submissions

All the claims labelled as gendered disinformation targeted women. No particular political party was singled out; most claims focused on women in politics generally. There was a notable increase in claims on the following days;

Days with the highest number of claims received

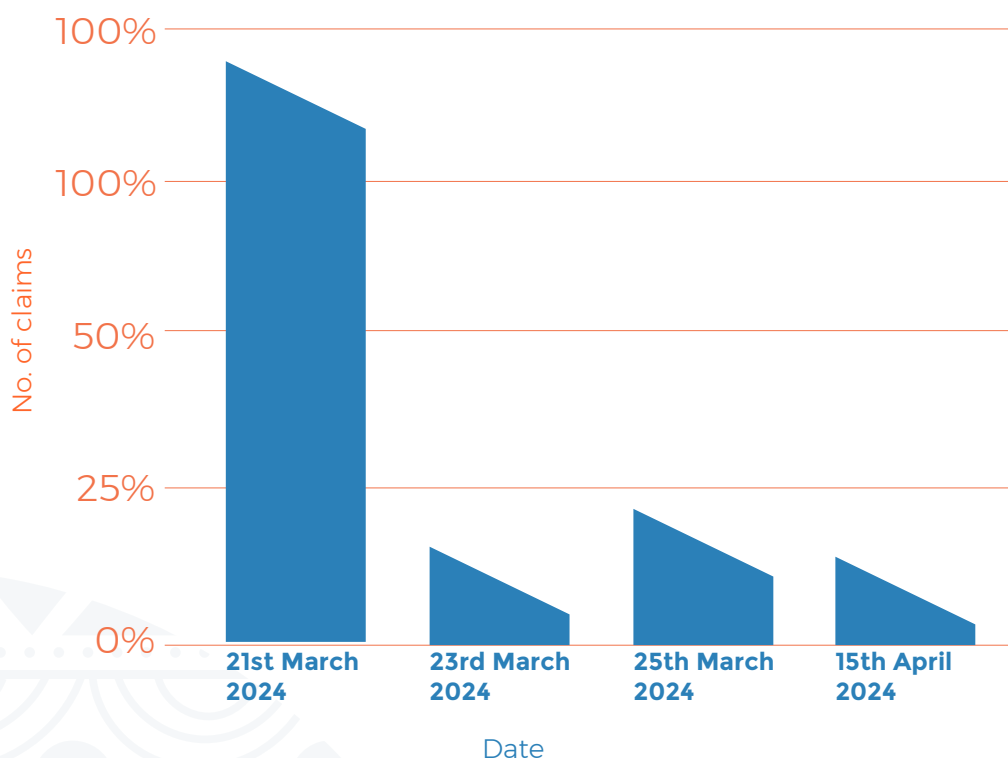


Figure 9: Days with increased number of claims

The Togolese legislative elections took place on April 29th 2024 following several postponements and amid a period of political changes that caused instability in the country. The significance of these events took place on 25th March 2024 when [Togo adopted a new constitution](#) that changed its presidential system into a parliamentary one. Under this new system, parliament has the power to elect the president of the republic. This sparked [unrest](#) as the Togolese resisted these reforms.

e. Examples of gendered disinformation collected

The students contributed 35.9% of the political claims, primarily responding to the question they posed: “Que pensez-vous des femmes en politique?/What do you think of women in politics?”

These claims reflected individuals’ opinions on feminism and women in politics in Togo. Of the political claims, 36.5% were categorised as gendered disinformation, revealing significant levels of sexism within the country.

Examples include;

- “Since when do women give orders? Whose? A woman in politics will give what order? Ah the order to women there ok otherwise what man will be subject to the laws of a woman?”
- “The woman at the head of a country can never manage all situations alone; she will always be boosted by a man in the shadows.”
- “It’s a crime against humanity, I think. What exactly do women want to achieve in politics?”
- “Women in politics sell their sex, or become scumbags before reaching a position of responsibility.”



6 LIMITATIONS & GAPS

a. Problems faced during the collection of data

- There was a reported lack of trust from the population with people being scared about what data could be collected which led to few claims being shared on the tip line directly.
- Feedback from the Togo Check team was that most people used WhatsApp instead of Facebook Messenger and that this would have resulted in more tips. A solution for this was proposed (using Meedan's WhatsApp tip line) less than a month to the elections which would have led to confusion and further eroded the trust in the campaign.

b. Verifying if data was truly gendered disinformation or mis/ malinformation

Each member of the AWJP team double-checked every claim identified as gendered disinformation to confirm its classification. This verification process involved at least three people including someone from Togo Check using the Check platform to classify each claim upon submission. Some submissions posed challenges for categorisation due to issues like the *'lost in translation'* phenomenon (French to English) as well as mixed signals regarding perceived intention.

For example, the claim "For me, women can seek positions of responsibility where we see that men cannot do so. Women are seen as arrogant when they are in a position of responsibility" is vague because it is unclear if the sender is talking about their own opinion or is disagreeing with the perceived common opinion of society at large.

Another example is the claim “I say ohhh.... Old lady, what was the purpose of your publication... if it really wasn’t to cause controversy? In a marriage where everyone agrees.... The old woman is in the habit of putting ice cubes in your glass of water, it refreshes the heart and lowers it at the same time.” Due to the idiomatic nature of the French language, additional help was needed to further interpret such comments.

c. Insights on the tipline model

i) The design process of the tip line “bot” and the annotation process were quite robust, ensuring comprehensive understanding among all team members regarding the procedures and decisions made.

ii) Additionally, enabling submissions through Google Forms was an added feature that provided flexibility to our student annotators. The design should however allow for additional information to be captured such as gender, approximate age and occupation of the subjects. This would help add more context to the data collected for analysis.

iii) A major usability flaw was that the team could not download data directly from the platform for continuous analysis/ monitoring of collected data. This could be rectified by providing download access to tip line managers or implementing an API that updates a Google Sheet at regular intervals.

iv) Multilingual teams could benefit from having both English and French versions for all aspects of the tip line including submissions and annotation. To accommodate team members who are not bilingual, we have established a standard practice of including both languages in all our documents and forms. See figure 8. below. This allows team members of either language to review, assess and understand the data or information captured without waiting for translation to be done.

Section 2 of 6

Collaborative Tools | Outils de collaboration ⌵ ⋮

AWJP works with a range of collaborative tools to manage training sessions and story production. Please let us know your proficiency with these applications.

AWJP travaille avec une série d'outils de collaboration pour gérer les sessions de formation et la production d'histoires. N'hésitez pas à nous faire part de votre maîtrise de ces applications.

Have you used Google products before? *
Avez-vous déjà utilisé des produits/Outils de Google ?

Yes / Oui

No / Non

If your answer to the question above is no, please share your reasons. *

Si vous avez répondu par la négative à la question ci-dessus, veuillez en préciser les raisons.

Haven't had the need / Je n'en ai pas eu besoin

Don't know how to use them / Je ne sais pas comment les utiliser

Don't know what products Google has / Je ne connais pas les produits de Google

Don't know the professional applications for Google products / Je ne connais pas les applications profes...

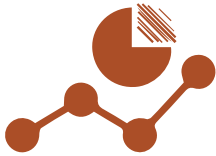
Not sure of costs

Figure 10: Screenshot of AWJP's multilingual forms



7

LESSONS LEARNED AND PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS



Enhancing Analytical Tools for Gendered Disinformation

One of the key takeaways from this research project is the potential benefit of developing a robust coding model capable of identifying and assessing the severity and nature of gendered disinformation within textual content. Such a tool would significantly enhance our ability to analyse claims effectively, especially in the face of increasing prevalence of gendered disinformation online.



Importance of Early Initiative in Combating Gendered Disinformation Ahead of Elections

Starting and executing projects aimed at combating gendered disinformation before elections is crucial for several reasons. The period leading up to elections typically experiences a rise in misinformation and disinformation campaigns, which can sway public opinion and erode trust in electoral procedures. Beginning early would have provided sufficient time for preparing and enhancing tools like coding models and educational initiatives, essential for detecting and addressing disinformation effectively. It would also have allowed us to build trust and engage stakeholders such as the media, civil society, and the public



Building Trust and Continuous Engagement

Building trust and sustaining public awareness requires implementing projects that continuously engage with the population. We've learned that to cultivate internal expertise within newsrooms and foster advocacy champions through collaboration with civil society, training and mentorship fellowship programs like those implemented by AWJP are essential.



Importance of Partnerships

Effective partnerships are crucial when they align closely with shared objectives and demonstrate commitment. Throughout our project, we encountered challenges in aligning our partner's objectives with our project goals and methodologies. This alignment is essential for achieving meaningful impact and advancing collective efforts against gendered disinformation. The project has underscored the importance of identifying synergies with other organisations to enhance project outcomes. Moving forward, AWJP is restructuring to ensure that key roles such as outreach, annotation, and data collection are directly managed by AWJP team members. In hindsight, employing dedicated fact-checkers would have been more effective than relying solely on journalists from TogoCheck.



Project Implementation and Public Awareness

Effective project implementation hinges on public understanding and awareness of issues such as gendered disinformation (GD). Addressing gaps in comprehension through targeted awareness campaigns is vital, particularly in contexts where awareness of GD or related issues may be limited.



Mitigating Risks in Electoral Context.

The Togo elections, initially slated for December 2023, underwent multiple reschedulings ultimately moving to April 20, 2024, and further delayed to April 29, 2024. We learned firsthand the need to prepare for potential changes in election dates and adapt project timelines and strategies accordingly.

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**TOGO
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