

# Addressing Information Disorders Ahead of the 2024 National Election: Context, Drivers, & Recommendations

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# Background and Expertise

RIA has extensive expertise in telecommunications, data & AI governance. This team has been actively studying misinformation in Africa for 3 years

- ❖ RIA is a Pan-African organisation HQ'ed in Cape Town
- ❖ 25 Full time employees based across the continent
- ❖ This team focuses on the political, economic, social & cultural drivers of information disorders
- ❖ We look at how actors intervene to address information disorders
- ❖ We also study AI, democracy, & platform injustices
- ❖ We have produced 4 technical reports, 6 policy briefs, 6 op-eds .
- ❖ Our methodology includes legal analysis, evaluative reviews, stakeholder interviews, event tracking & techniques from comparative political sociology

# Agenda

Focus on contextually relevant recommendations

- ❖ The context in which information disorders operate
- ❖ The challenges with addressing information disorder
- ❖ Emerging trends and what to look out for in elections
- ❖ Recommendations for:
  - election officials
  - elected representatives
  - civil society organisations
  - journalists
  - ISP and platforms
  - the public

# Context

Democracy involves challenge, contention & disagreement, this extends into meanings, understandings and presumed implications

- ❖ Platforms are central venues where actors struggle over the creation of narratives to gain power
- ❖ WhatsApp appears to be the headwater for information disorders in African countries
- ❖ Elections are friction points for information disorders
- ❖ Information disorders predate the 'post-truth era' in Africa & can be connected to the marriage of corporate media & state sponsored propaganda
- ❖ While connectivity has improved, digital divides means much misinformation is spread by word of mouth, even if the misinformation originated online

# Challenges

Slow detection on the presence & the effect of misinformation on the elections

- ❖ People share misinformation not because they think it is true, but because it signals affiliations & allegiances
- ❖ Reinforces existing beliefs
- ❖ Platforms provide tools to report misinformation & other harms but tend to be slow to act on reports
- ❖ Deceptive design: issue of likes & opinion shaping
- ❖ Lack of funding for fact checkers; most are media houses or independent fact checkers working in the public interest
- ❖ Fact checkers lack of access to data to research & train AI content moderation
- ❖ Currently AI content moderation is unreliable; it may never be reliable
- ❖ Lack of standardized terminology

# Recommendations for Election Officials

Multi-layered, multi-modal method of voter engagement campaigns

- ❖ Online resources such as FAQs & branded video tutorials
- ❖ Educational resources in voters' preferred languages
- ❖ Prepare rumour control pages
- ❖ Reduce distance between authoritative independent sources & the public
- ❖ Leverage civil society groups, all parties & candidates, business groups, & the media to amplify accurate election information
- ❖ Early & active enforcement of political advertising regulations
- ❖ Press briefings & workshops with parties & civil society groups to cover election regulations, political advertising, personal data protection
- ❖ Provide funding for / collaborate with fact checking organisations

# Recommendations for Elected Representatives

Give existing bodies a greater mandates while inviting companies to parliamentary hearings

- ❖ Request ISPs & platforms furnish company specific policies about their approach to the upcoming election
- ❖ Request ISPs & platforms provide written submissions on changes they have implemented to their election policy since the 2019 national elections were held
- ❖ Active liaison with CIRTs to prevent election & voter interference
- ❖ As 'misinformation comes from the top', hold colleagues accountable & correct their factual inaccuracies

# Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

Develop contacts among election officials & independent democracy experts

- ❖ Provide accurate election information & tools to identify misinformation to community constituencies
- ❖ Provide accurate information in preferred languages & formats
- ❖ Develop partnerships with trusted messengers to ensure community education efforts ‘travel further’
- ❖ Focus on high yield interventions & large audiences



# Recommendations for Journalists

Cultivate authoritative sources on elections, including election officials

- ❖ As leaders are creators & boosters of information disorders, exercise their muscular democratic watchdog capabilities
- ❖ Cultivate authoritative sources on elections, including election officials
- ❖ Report pre-election stories on confusing or new topics
- ❖ Provide accurate context & perspective in covering commonplace glitches or delays
- ❖ Consult with independent experts to help prevent misinformation
- ❖ Publish & amplify objective, accurate, authoritative election information
- ❖ Avoid the trivialisation of politics

# Recommendations for ISPs & Platforms

Publish clear & transparent policies to minimise election misinformation

- ❖ Create infrastructure to impede election misinformation, such as effective education tools & algorithmic interventions that slow the spread of misinformation
- ❖ Collaborate with local fact checkers/news agencies to better contextualise & deal with misinformation, which may include capacity building & funding
- ❖ Defend election official websites & accounts against hacking & interference
- ❖ Active liaison with CRITs
- ❖ Transparent labelling around online political advertising
- ❖ Enforce policies against voter interference & misrepresentations about basic election information

# Recommendations for Citizens

Share accurate voting information with your networks when you observe troubling election-related claims

- ❖ Learn how to recognise online misinformation & build media literacy
- ❖ Recognise that parties & their supporters can make emotional appeals
- ❖ Verify new information with IEC sources
- ❖ Share accurate voting information with your networks when you observe troubling election-related claims

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# References & Further Reading

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# Thank you

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