GHANA 2024 ELECTIONS

A Risk Assessment of the Online Information Space

IRI INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE

Advancing Democracy Worldwide

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IRI is one of the world's leading international democracy development organizations. A nonpartisan, nongovernmental institute, IRI supports civil society organizations, journalists, democratic governments, and other democratic actors around the world since 1983. IRI operates around the globe, in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and currently works in over 100 countries with a presence in over 80 worldwide. IRI's Technology & Democracy Practice promotes digital democracy, civic and government technology, internet freedom, and information integrity in every region of the world.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ghana will hold general elections on December 7, 2024, for president and members of parliament.[1] The incumbent president, President Nana Akufo-Addo, is term-limited and is ineligible to run again.

Despite the fact that Ghana has 27 political parties, the country is a *de facto* two-party system. The two main parties are the New Patriotic Party, the center-right liberal-conservative political party, and the National Democratic Congress, the social democratic political party. The leading political contenders for the upcoming 2024 elections are the current Vice President, **Mahamadu Bawumia**, from the New Patriotic Party, and former President **John Mahama**, from the National Democratic Congress.[2] Initially a top contender for the National Patriotic Party presidential nomination, ex-Trade Minister **Alan Kyerematen** broke away from his party after being passed over for the presidential ticket, forming the Movement for Change, and is running as an independent, aiming to break Ghana's political duopoly.[3] On January 7, 2024, real estate developer Nana Kwame Bediako announced he would run for president under the New Force Movement, also with the aim of challenging Ghana's two main parties.[4]

A July 2024 Global Info Analytics poll offers a snapshot of the presidential race at that time:[5]

- **John Mahama,** National Democratic Congress: 51.1 percent
- **Mahamadu Bawumia,** New Patriotic Party: 38.2 percent
- **Alan Kyerematen,** Movement for Change: 5.3 percent
- **Nana Kwame Bediako,** New Force: 4.6 percent

The final 0.08 percent of respondents indicated they would vote for "other."

Key dates in the political contest:[6]

- **September 9 -13:** Receipt of nominations, parliamentary & presidential elections
- **September 23:** Balloting for positions on presidential ballot paper
- **September 24:** Balloting for positions on parliamentary ballot paper
- **December 7:** Election Day
- **December 28:** Runoff

As in the 2020 election, the 2024 election process and results will likely be contested.[7] Corruption, growing political violence, and vote buying remain severe issues for the country; citizens perceive vote buying as commonplace.[8]

WhatsApp is the leading online media platform in Ghana, used by 10.1 million people, almost half of all Ghanaians with access to the internet.[9]

1 Harbath, Katie, and Khizanishvili, Ana. "Election Cycle Tracker." Anchor Change, 2023, anchorchange.com/election-cycle-calendar
2 Adombilla, Maxwell Akalaare. "Presidential candidate of Ghana's ruling party outlines main policies." Reuters, 7 Feb. 2024, reuters.com/world/africa/presidential-candidate-ghanas-ruling-party-outlines-main-policies-2024-02-07/.
3 Bagnetto, Laura Angela; Nyabor, Jones. "Ghana: Alan Kyerematen, independent future president?" The Africa Report, 8 Feb. 2024, theafricareport.com/336286/ghana-alan-kyerematen-independent-future-president/
4 Ankrah, Nana Oye. "Ghana's mystery presidential candidate pulls off his mask." Semafor, 9 Jan. 2024, semafor.com/article/01/09/2024/ghanas-mystery-presidential-candidate-removes-his-mask-gives-government-jitters.
5 "National Opinion 2024 General Elections 2nd July 2024 – Governance and General Elections." Global Info Analytics, 2 Jul. 2024, https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AO%2DgwpdfoRgTBEs&id=E1B11D01E64A3039%2120067&cid=E1B11D01E64A3039&parId=root&parQt=sharedby&o=OneUp
6 "Programme of Activities for 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections" Electoral Commission Ghana, 7 Mar. 2024, ec.gov.gh/programme-of-activities-for-2024-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections.
7 Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
8 Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition. "GACC Corruption Report 2023. » 8 December 2023, Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition, gaccgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/GACC_Report_Jan_23-1.pdf.
9 "WhatsApp Users by Country 2024." World Bank, accessed 25 April 2024, worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/whatsapp-users-by-country.

As in previous elections, both the ruling party and the opposition are actively using WhatsApp to spread their messages.

Facebook is the next most popular platform, with 7.4 million users.[10] The two main political parties use Facebook to spread disinformation[11] and attack their opponents.[12] Although **X** (previously Twitter) is not as popular, with only 1.17 million users in Ghana, it is still a key platform for discussion of national issues.[13]

Information integrity, which refers to the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of information, is a concern in Ghana, especially during the pre-election period.[14] The ruling party and the opposition both use disinformation and smear campaigns which are rapidly distributed through social media and other online platforms such as closed messaging apps. The main narratives spread through social media include: the ruling party exaggerating government achievements to secure a third term and the opposition criticizing the ruling party and undermining trust in election systems. Both leading parties rely on targeted attacks on their opponents, including hate speech and name calling.[15] **Online hate speech is primarily targeted at journalists, women, the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) community, and tribal groups.**[16]

Ghana's constitution **guarantees freedom of speech and assembly**, but the legislature passed a law, currently up for signature by the president, that criminalizes those who use the internet to advocate for or support LGBTQI+ activities.[17] Despite these constitutional guarantees, journalists in Ghana are vulnerable to intimidation, hate speech, and harassment.[18]

Ghana held peaceful elections from 1992, the beginning of its existence as a democracy, until 2020. In this election cycle, the country faces potential **offline violence** due to underlying tribal animosities and political rivalries, with tensions currently manifesting mostly online.[19] Other challenges include concerns about the potential behavior of politically motivated young people and memories of the violence in 2020. Despite a ban on vigilante groups, informal, often partisan organizations sometimes use violent or disruptive activities to support or oppose political agendas and influence electoral outcomes. These groups heighten fears about 2024, particularly if the results are contested.[20]

Concerns about the impact of **generative AI (GenAI)** on the upcoming elections are growing, though any major effects of GenAI on the information space thus far is still fairly minimal.

IRI's assessment reveals the country's vulnerabilities in the pre- and post-election periods. From the risk of growing violence, tension, and concerns over corruption, election results will be under intense scrutiny. These challenges serve as a reminder of the crucial need to support the country's civil society and other groups fighting to ensure a free and fair election process both on- and offline.

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10 Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2024: Ghana." Datareportal, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ghana.
11 Disinformation is false or inaccurate information spread intentionally to deceive.
12 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; MFWA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
13 Kissi, Astante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
14 "Information Integrity on Digital Platforms." United Nations, 2023, un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf.
15 CDDGH. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024; Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 202; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
16 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024.
17 "Ghana: President Should Veto Anti-LGBT Bill." Human Rights Watch, 5 Mar. 2024, hrw.org/news/2024/03/05/ghana-president-should-veto-anti-lgbt-bill
18 MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
19 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; "Ensuring an orderly presidential election in Ghana." Centre for Public Impact, 13 April 2016, centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/maintaining-peace-election-ghana/
20 Nyabor, Jonas. "Ghana: Youth violence amber warning for 2024 elections." The Africa Report, 7 October 2023, theafricareport.com/326078/ghana-youth-violence-amber-warning-for-2024-elections/.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure accurate and evidence-based information on Ghana's pre-election digital landscape, IRI conducted an assessment between April and May 2024. This assessment report aims to provide an understanding of Ghana's current pre-election online information space and serves as a tool to inform local stakeholders, technology partners, and other interested parties to encourage informed decision-making for programming strategies to better prepare for the upcoming elections to manage risks and capitalize on opportunities.

To address gaps identified during the desk review, the assessment team conducted structured interviews with local partners, including civil society and fact-checking organizations. These interviews aimed to cover all relevant issues and, for improved accuracy, validate the information gathered during the desk research.

Based on findings from the desk review and from interviews, the assessment team performed thematic and content analysis to evaluate existing data and incorporate new information received from partners. These findings were used to develop a comprehensive report identifying valuable and reliable information on Ghana's pre-election information environment and digital ecosystem. The report provides an overview of political systems, online trends, potential risks, the state of information integrity, and the most vulnerable groups affected by the electoral process.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Population
34,654,355[21]

Voting Age (18)
17,931,673[22] (over 18 as of 2021)

Registered Voters
17,027,641[23]

Mobile Phone Owners
38.95 million[27] (Many people have more than one mobile connection)

Internet Users
24.06 million[28]

Social Media Users
21.5% of population[30]

Map of Africa, with Ghana highlighted.

69.8%
Population with Access to the Internet in 2023[29]

72.29%
Average Turnout[24]

59.5%
Population in Urban Area[26]

27
Political Parties[25]

21 "Ghana Population 2024 (Live)." World Bank, accessed 24 April 2024, worldpopulationreview.com/countries/ghana-population.
22 "Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census General Report Volume 3B." Ghana Statistical Service, accessed 25 April 2024, census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/subreport.php?readreport=MjYzOTE0MjAuMzc2NQ==&Ghana-2021-Population-and-Housing-Census-General-Report-Volume-3B - Population%2018%20years%20and%20older%20by%20sex.
23 "Registered Voters" Electoral Commission Ghana, accessed 4 June 2024, ec.gov.gh/.
24 Ibid.
25 "Political Parties." Electoral Commission Ghana, accessed 24 April 2024, ec.gov.gh/.
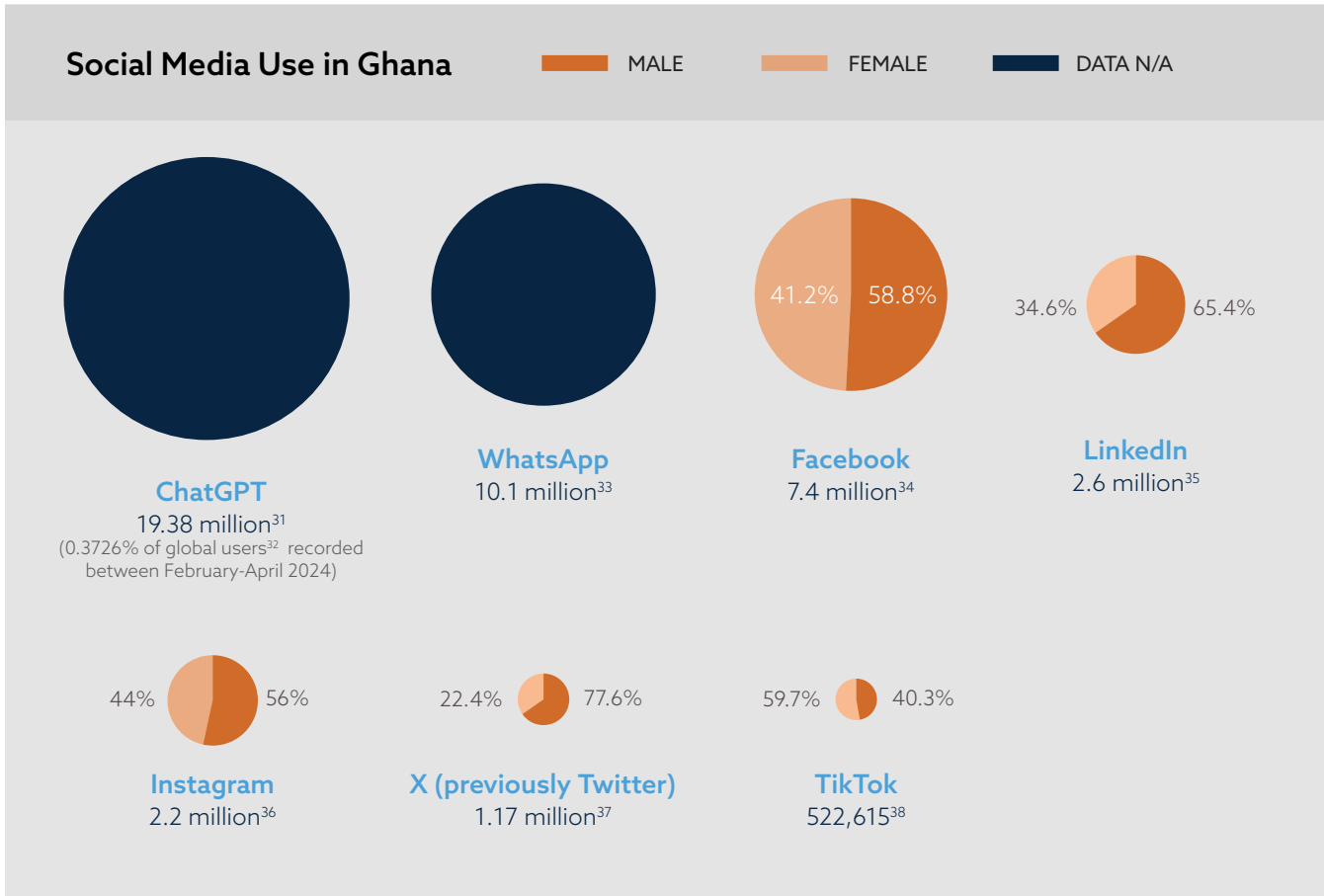26 Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2024: Ghana." Datareportal, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ghana.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

Social Media Use in Ghana

MALE   FEMALE   DATA N/A

ChatGPT
19.38 million[31]
(0.3726% of global users[32] recorded between February-April 2024)

WhatsApp
10.1 million[33]

Facebook
7.4 million[34]
41.2% 58.8%

LinkedIn
2.6 million[35]
34.6% 65.4%

Instagram
2.2 million[36]
44% 56%

X (previously Twitter)
1.17 million[37]
22.4% 77.6%

TikTok
522,615[38]
59.7% 40.3%

POLITICAL CONTEXT

As established in the 1992 Constitution, Ghana operates under a democratic political system with a multi-party electoral framework.[39] The Constitution establishes a president as the head of state and government, a unicameral parliament, and an independent judiciary. Ghana's legislative branch is a unicameral parliament consisting of 275 members. Members of Parliament serve four-year terms.[40] Ghana's judicial branch is divided into two sections: the Superior Courts of Judicature, as outlined by the Ghanaian Constitution, and the lower-level courts and tribunals, established on an as-needed basis by parliament.[41]

Ghana's Superior Courts of Judicature is comprised of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, and the High Court and Regional Tribunals. Ghana's Supreme Court, which is comprised of the Chief Justice and at least nine other justices, is the final court of appeals in Ghana, and all lower-level courts are required to abide by the Supreme Court's decisions.[42]

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31 "ChatGPT Website Analytics Report (Feb 2024 – Apr 2024)." Similarweb, accessed 4 June 2024.
32 Note: Ghana ranks 55 out of 156 countries of recorded ChatGPT users between Feb-Apr 2024; Ibid.
33 "WhatsApp Users by Country 2024." World Bank, accessed 25 April 2024, worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/whatsapp-users-by-country.
34 Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2024: Ghana." Datareportal, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ghana.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2024: Ghana." Datareportal, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ghana.
38 "TikTok Users in Ghana." Start.io, Mar. 2023, start.io/audience/tiktok-users-in-ghana.
39 "Constitution of Ghana 1992 (Rev. 1996)." Constitute, accessed 25 April 2024, constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.

The Supreme Court deals with all matters related to interpreting the Constitution and evaluating excess use of power by parliament or other figures of authority.[43] In addition, the High Court of Ghana has jurisdiction over all civil and criminal matters and appeals.[44] Freedom House's Freedom in the World report, which assesses the state of civil and political rights, rated Ghana as free, with the highest score (4/4) in all three criteria of the electoral process.[45]

Ghana's election process is primarily governed by the 1992 Constitution.[46] The Electoral Commission of Ghana manages elections in Ghana. It plans and prepares for, conducts, and supervises elections and referendums; trains and educates election officials; promotes technology in elections; investigates allegations of electoral disputes; and fosters cooperation among the government, political parties, and civil society regarding elections.[47] The commission is made up of seven members – a chairperson, two deputy chairpersons, and four other members. The President of Ghana appoints all members of the commission. A person is not qualified to be appointed as a member of the commission unless qualified to be elected as a Member of Parliament.[48] In 2008, Ghana signed the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, which guarantees certain human rights and fundamental freedoms for individuals.

The president is elected to a single four-year term and can serve no more than two terms. The electoral procedure follows a two-round system. The candidates are elected by majority votes (at least 50 percent plus one). If no candidate achieves a majority, the election moves to a runoff between the two top candidates from the first round. Before the presidential election, the candidates for the office of president designates a candidate for the office of vice-president.[49] All 275 members of Ghana's Parliament are elected to four-year terms through the first-past-the-post system, where voters cast a vote for a single candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins the election.

The voting age in Ghana is 18, and voting is eligible through citizenship by birth or law. In 2012, Ghana adopted a biometric voter registration that uses fingerprints and photographs to register and verify voters and prevent fraud.[50]

The 2020 Ghana presidential election took place on December 7, 2020, with the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party seeking re-election against his main challenger, former President John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Congress. Despite fears about the COVID-19 pandemic, all parties, especially the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, engaged in vigorous campaigns ahead of the election.[51] Election observers from the African Union and the European Union (EU) described the election as well-organized and generally peaceful, but EU monitors criticized a lack of campaign finance regulation and a misuse of state resources for electioneering purposes contributed to an uneven playing field among candidates.[52]

The incumbent president, Nana Akufo-Addo, was reelected for a second term. However, his opponent, John Dramani Mahama, rejected the results. He claimed that President Akufo-Addo took steps, such as using military force to intimidate voters and sway them in his favor.[53]

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 "Freedom in the World 2024 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 25 April 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2024.
46 "Constitution of Ghana 1992 (Rev. 1996)." Constitute, accessed 25 April 2024, constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.
47 "Functions of the Departments." Electoral Commission of Ghana, accessed 25 April 2024, ec.gov.gh/functions-of-the-departments/.
48 "Mode of Appointment of the Commission." Electoral Commission Ghana, accessed 25 April 2024, ec.gov.gh/mode-of-appointment/.
49 "Constitution of Ghana 1992 (Rev. 1996)." Constitute, accessed 25 April 2024, constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.
50 Mantey, Joana. " Ghana Confronts Challenges of Biometric Voter Registration." VOA, 18 Mar. 2012, voanews.com/a/ghana-confronts-challenges-of-biometric-voter-registration-143308506/181380.html.
51 Knott, Stacey. "Fears Grow of Further COVID-19 Spikes Ahead of Ghana's Election." VOA, 1 Dec. 2020, voanews.com/a/africa_fears-grow-further-covid-19-spikes-ahead-ghanas-election/6199020.html.
52 "Freedom in the World 2024 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 25 April 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2024.
53 News Wire. "Ghana opposition candidate Mahama rejects 'fraudulent' election results." France 24, 12 Nov. 2020. france24.com/en/africa/20201210-ghana-opposition-candidate-john-mahama-rejects-election-result.

In addition, Mahama claimed that there was double voting, vote padding, and other forms of illegal voting.[54] Mahama brought a legal challenge to the Supreme Court, which determined his allegations to be insufficiently backed by evidence and affirmed Akufo-Addo's victory.[55]

Corruption, growing political violence, and vote buying are major issues in the country. There is evidence of political corruption, including the looting of state assets by elected officials. The Office of the Special Prosecutor, created in 2017, is one of the legal and institutional frameworks set up to investigate official and private corruption. However, political corruption remains a problem in Ghana. According to a July 2022 report from the Ghana Integrity of Public Services Survey, corruption led to more than five billion cedis ($346 million) of financial mismanagement, undermining public confidence in the government.[56] During the 2020 parliamentary elections, 95 percent of candidates reported experiencing some form of political violence, often perpetrated by their own and other political parties during the primary and general election campaigns.[57] The most common form of political violence in Ghana includes degrading talk and false rumors, while other forms such as intimidation, physical violence, and threats are also prevalent.[58] The Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition has noted the increasing incidence of vote buying during elections, especially during political parties' internal election processes, and it is now considered commonplace in Ghana.[59]

INTERNET FREEDOM AND THE ONLINE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

Freedom House's "Freedom on the Net" report evaluates internet freedom across various countries, assessing factors such as access, user rights, and content limitations to provide a comprehensive overview of global digital freedom. The 2023 "Freedom on the Net" report rates Ghana at 65/100 and partly free. Despite having an information space that is largely free from censorship, the president is set to vote on draft legislation that would criminalize on- and offline activities that portray LGBTQI+ relationships positively, increasing concerns over the erosion of fundamental freedoms and democratic principles.

In 2004, Ghana implemented the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy for Accelerated Development,[60] a plan for digital transformation, which resulted in improvements in internet infrastructure, access, and quality in Ghana. Despite these improvements, the relatively high costs of access and taxes mean large portions of the population cannot afford internet service, and many rural areas in Ghana still lack internet infrastructure.[61]

Network disruptions and deliberate degradation of internet quality are not expected to occur during the election in Ghana. Ghana has never experienced internet shutdowns during elections. However, Access Now, a non-profit focusing on digital civil rights, has put Ghana on its 2024 Election and Internet Shutdowns Watch list due to concerns over mis- and disinformation on social media. Many governments across the globe have used this issue to justify shutting down the internet or blocking specific platforms.[62]

54 "Why election outcomes are being challenged, and why it matters. Ghana as a case in point." The Conversation, 23 Mar. 2021, theconversation.com/why-election-outcomes-are-being-challenged-and-why-it-matters-ghana-as-a-case-in-point-156593.

55 Stephens, Chris. "Ghana Supreme Court affirms election victory of Akufo-Addo." JURSITnews, 8 Mar. 2021, jurist.org/news/2021/03/ghana-supreme-court-affirms-election-victory-of-akufo-addo/.

56 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ghana." U.S. Department of State, accessed 25 April 2024, state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ghana.

57 Bauer, Gretchen; Darkwah, Akosua K. "The Cost of Doing Politics in Ghana: What does violence against politicians look like?" Chr. Michelsen Institute, Mar. 2024, cmi.no/publications/9161-the-cost-of-doing-politics-in-ghana-what-does-violence-against-politicians-look-like.

58 Ibid.

59 Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition. " GACC Corruption Report 2023. » 8 December 2023, Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition, gaccgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/GACC_Report_Jan_23-1.pdf.

60 "The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4D) Policy." Republic of Ghana, 2003, nita.gov.gh/theevooc/2017/12/Ghana-ICT4AD-Policy.pdf.

61 "Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 10 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023

62 "2024 Elections and Internet Shutdowns Watch." Access Now, accessed 10 May 2024, accessnow.org/campaign/2024-elections-and-internet-shutdowns-watch/#Ghana.

Under existing law, internet users in Ghana can face criminal penalties for posting online content that is deemed to be false. "False" can be broadly defined.[63] For example, ahead of the 2020 election, journalist David Tamakloe was arrested by police in Accra for allegedly spreading false news with a report claiming pre-election irregularities in the Ashanti Region. Tamakloe was later released on bail amidst calls for the charges to be dropped and concerns over police intimidation.[64] These cases are generally rare in Ghana, but those who have been charged by the Ghana Police service with false publication are primarily online journalists.[65]

In July 2023, Parliament passed the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill. If signed into law, those who use internet services to advocate for or support LGBTQI+ activities would face criminal penalties, including prison sentences of up to 10 years. This proposed law has raised concerns among human rights groups.[66]

Several laws allow the president and law enforcement to intercept and monitor communications, sometimes without a court order.[67] However, there have been no credible reports that the government monitors private online communication without appropriate legal authority.[68]

TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

1 CHATGPT

Between February and April 2024, Ghana had 19.38 million users on ChatGPT, which is 0.3726% of all global users.[69] So far, political parties and journalists are mostly using ChatGPT to generate campaign materials and stories.[70] As this is an emerging technology, there are not many cases of its use in Ghana yet, but as the election draws nearer, it is expected that tools like ChatGPT to generate deepfakes will be used to influence political processes.[71]

2 WHATSAPP

With 10.1 million users, WhatsApp is Ghana's dominant platform for information sharing and communication. In previous elections, such as in 2020, WhatsApp has been used to spread disinformation across party lines, creating false narratives that spread widely and are challenging to monitor.[72]

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63 "Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 10 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023.
64 CPJ. "Ghanaian journalist David Tamakloe arrested on false news charges – CJP." Premium Times, 17 October 2020, premiumtimesng.com/foreign/west-africa-foreign/421344-ghanaian-journalist-david-tamakloe-arrested-on-false-news-charges-cpj.html?tztc=1.
65 "Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 10 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023.
66 "Ghana: President Should Veto Anti-LGBT Bill." Human Rights Watch, 5 Mar. 2024, hrw.org/news/2024/03/05/ghana-president-should-veto-anti-lgbt-bill.
67 "Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 10 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023
68 "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ghana." U.S Department of State, 2022, state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/415610_GHANA-2022-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf.
69 "ChatGPT Website Analytics Report (Feb 2024 – Apr 2024)." Similarweb, accessed 4 June 2024.
70 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024.
71 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024
72 CDDGH. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024.

③ FACEBOOK

Facebook is Ghana's second most popular platform, with 7.4 million users. Ghana's two main parties use Facebook to spread disinformation and attack their opponents.[73] In 2020, organizations such as the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDDGH) worked with Facebook on fact-checking during the election period.[74] Facebook was a preferred tool for voter engagement, mobilization, and campaigning during the 2020 elections.[75] Both the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress spent thousands of dollars on Facebook advertisements for extensive voter mobilization.[76]

④ INSTAGRAM

In Ghana, Instagram had a reach of 2.2 million users in early 2024.[77] Both major political parties in Ghana have Instagram accounts and have used them for information dissemination and public participation during past elections.[78]

⑤ X (PREVIOUSLY TWITTER)

X is another key platform for discussing national issues in Ghana. Both the incumbent and opposition parties in Ghana are active on X and use the platform to influence the election by spreading disinformation. X has also been a key place for the opposition party to attack government policies, discredit electoral institutions, and go after opponents.[79] During the 2020 election, X was another preferred tool for voter engagement, mobilization, and campaigning.[80] Since Elon Musk bought (and renamed it) X, its sole Ghanaian office in the capital, Accra, closed. This impacted nearly 20 staff, some of whose responsibilities include referring inappropriate content to a "trust and safety" team for removal. The office's closing raised concerns over content moderation and oversight in Ghana and across Africa.[81]

⑥ TIKTOK

In Ghana and around the world, TikTok is popular among young people.[82] So far, political parties in Ghana have not been very active on the platform.[83] Young people use TikTok to share information, including misinformation[84] and disinformation.[85] However, this dissemination is less extensive when compared to other platforms such as Facebook and X.[86]

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73 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; MFWA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
74 CDDGH. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024.
75 Anson Boateng, K.J. and Buatsi, R. "Analysis of Facebook and Twitter Usage in Ghana's 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections." Digitisation, AI and Algorithms in African Journalism and Media Contexts, 14 December 2023, emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/978-1-80455-135-620231007/full/html.
76 Ibid.
77 Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2024: Ghana." Datareportal, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ghana.
78 Amenyeawu, Beatrice Eyram. "Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana." Clark Digital Commons, May 2021, commons.clarku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=sps_masters_papers.
79 Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
80 Anson Boateng, K.J. and Buatsi, R. "Analysis of Facebook and Twitter Usage in Ghana's 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections." Digitization, AI and Algorithms in African Journalism and Media Contexts, 14 December 2023, emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/978-1-80455-135-620231007/full/html.
81 Akwagyiram, Alexis and Alexander Onukwue "Twitter's staff cuts are helping spread misinformation in Africa." Semafor, 26 January 2023, semafor.com/article/01/26/2023/twitter-cuts-africa-misinformation.
82 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
83 Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
84 Misinformation is false or inaccurate information spread unintentionally.
85 IRI Ghana Staff. Personal interview. 6 June 2024.
86 Ibid.

CANDIDATE BEHAVIOR

Both the ruling party and the opposition spread disinformation and promote smear campaigns online. According to the stakeholders IRI interviewed for this report, pre-election narratives are centered on propagating hate against opponents and attempting to discredit opponents on social media. Ruling-party messaging mainly focuses on exaggerating the success of government projects. Opposition narratives criticize the ruling party, attacking its actions and policies. The opposition also tries to undermine trust in Ghana's election systems by discrediting the Election Commission. Both the ruling party and the opposition amplify or defend statements made by their candidates, and neither works to educate or prepare voters ahead of the election. Both political parties rely on social media to spread malicious hashtags such as #BawuLIAR and #MahamaIsAThief.[87]

MALIGN TRENDS ONLINE

According to Freedom House's "Freedom of the Net" report, Ghanaians using social media platforms are faced with misinformation daily. According to Afrobarometer, an Africa-wide research group, 78 percent of Ghanaians identified politicians as key sources of misinformation in 2020.[88] Political parties' use of hate speech is also high.[89] Such malign online behavior is primarily aimed at journalists, women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and specific tribal communities. According to stakeholders IRI interviewed, the ruling party is censoring radio stations critical of the government since the National Communications Authority,[90] which licenses media organizations, is under the Ministry of Communications and is aligned with the ruling party and its interests.[91] Political parties control the narrative, whether through the use of disinformation, hate speech, or harassment. This has become a well-established trend within the online space in Ghana. Both the ruling party and the opposition employ this strategy to exert influence.[92]

CITIZENS MOST LIKELY TO BE TARGETED

Attacks on Journalists

Journalists in Ghana are vulnerable to intimidation, hate speech, and harassment.[93] Ahead of the 2024 election, there has been a surge in attacks on journalists by political actors and security agencies. These attacks include physical assault, intimidation, and cyber threats.[94] Between 2019 and 2023, there have been a total of 45 documented cases of attacks against journalists and media organizations.[95] Due to these threats, some journalists are choosing to self-censor to protect themselves.[96] In May 2021, the government launched the Coordinated Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists, tasked with filing and investigating complaints of attacks against journalists.

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87 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; CDDGH. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024; Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
88 "Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 10 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023
89 "Country Graph." V-Dem, accessed 22 June 2023, /v-dem.net/data analysis/CountryGraph/.
90 Note: The head of the National Communications Authority, the director general, is appointed by the president of Ghana.
91 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
92 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
93 MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
94 "Season of intimidation: Attacks on Ghana press escalate ahead of 2024 polls." Al Jazeera, 8 Jan 2024, aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/8/season-of-intimidation-attacks-on-ghana-press-escalate-ahead-of-2024-polls.
95 Ibid.
96 Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.

There have been 45 documented cases of attacks as of 2023.[97] However, the Ghanaian government has taken no action on investigating attacks to date.[98]

Ghana's National Communications Authority operates with partisan interest and has silenced radio stations that are critical of the government, raising concerns about freedom of the press.[99] Ghana has a history of armed men invading media organizations, destroying equipment, disrupting broadcasts, and intimidating presenters and guests.[100]

Vulnerable Groups

Women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and specific tribal communities are among those targeted by hate speech and harassment on- and offline.[101] In 2024, for the first time, a woman is running for vice-president; hate speech aimed at female political candidates is common. Female politicians face disparaging comments about their competence and abilities.[102] Worse still, women in Ghana are subjected to extensive online abuse, including sexually explicit images and videos and hateful, abusive, and offensive comments.[103] In addition, many Ghanaians disapprove of homosexuality, which ensures that once someone is labeled as gay, their political career is effectively ended.[104] Both main presidential candidates have made comments opposing homosexuality; it remains unclear if either would sign the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill into law, which would punish LGBTQI+ people and those who promote gay rights.[105] Certain tribal groups are also subject to hate speech and harassment online.[106] Tribal groups such as the Akan use hate speech against groups like the Ewes in the Volta region of Ghana.[107] Tribal groups in Ghana affiliate themselves with political parties, opening themselves to slurs based on their affiliations.[108]

INFORMATION INTEGRITY

Disinformation and state-controlled online information get a two out of four on Freedom House's "Election Vulnerability Index," which assesses the potential for political violence, legal and constitutional challenges, and the influence of disinformation. The index measures the robustness of electoral processes in different countries and ranks Ghana at 13th among the 17 states currently tracked by the index; a higher rank suggests greater vulnerability.[109]

According to the stakeholders IRI interviewed, disinformation is the key concern in the pre-election environment. WhatsApp was a source of disinformation during the 2020 elections, as the encryption on the messaging app prevents any external oversight of the messages, making it challenging to identify and mitigate the spread of disinformation on WhatsApp.[110]

97 "Season of intimidation: Attacks on Ghana press escalate ahead of 2024 polls." Al Jazeera, 8 Jan 2024, aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/8/season-of-intimidation-attacks-on-ghana-press-escalate-ahead-of-2024-polls.
98 Ibid.
99 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
100 "Ghana: 14 attacks on media houses in ten years, only one redressed." MWFA, 12 October 2023, mfwa.org/ghana-14-attacks-on-media-houses-in-ten-years-only-one-redressed/.
101 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024.
102 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
103 "Gender-based interpersonal cybercrime." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed 28 May 2024, sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/gender-based-interpersonal-cybercrime.html.
104 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024.
105 Anders, Caroline. "Ghana's ruling party presidential candidates takes strong anti-gay stance." Semafor, 12 Apr. 2024, semafor.com/article/04/12/2024/ghanas-ruling-party-presidential-candidate-takes-strong-anti-gay-stance.
106 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024.
107 IRI Ghana Staff. Personal interview. 6 June 2024.
108 Ibid.
109 "Election Watch for the Digital Age." Freedom House, 24 May 2024, freedomhouse.org/report/election-watch-digital-age.
110 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024.

While organizations such as the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDDGH), the Media Foundation for West Africa, and Dubawa provide fact-checking and disseminate their findings online, the nature of false information and how quickly and widely it spreads makes it extremely challenging to counter already embedded falsehoods. In late 2023, the Electoral Commission supported the establishment of a national framework on the use of social media during national elections to reduce the spread of disinformation.[111] However, the framework has yet to be developed and the next election is merely months away. According to an Afrobarometer poll conducted in early 2024, citizens' confidence in the Electoral Commission is at the lowest level recorded in the past two decades.[112]

Foreign influence ahead of the election is also a concern. Reports from the African Digital Democracy Observatory state that Ghana has been a target of Russian disinformation campaigns.[113]

IMPACT OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The impact of generative AI on elections is a growing concern, as its capabilities can influence political processes.[114] Stakeholders interviewed expect both major parties and political activists to use generative AI to enhance campaign material and content and disseminate deepfakes.[115] Earlier this year, during the parliamentary primaries, a deepfake video falsely implicated a candidate in corruption.[116] Given that the video emerged hours before voting began, it is hard to know if the deepfake had an impact on voters. Ghana's Ministry of Communications and Digitalization is finalizing a draft AI policy and ethical guidelines document, which is currently awaiting cabinet approval. This new policy is intended to ensure AI's responsible development and application in Ghana.[117]

RISK OF OFFLINE VIOLENCE

Though Ghana has been relatively free of election violence since 1992, the stakeholders IRI interviewed for this report said there is a risk of offline violence ahead of the upcoming election.[118] These tensions are subtle and mainly expressed offline, but the potential for escalation exists. Enmity between tribes, especially in the northern regions but also around the country, could spark violence.[119] Offline violence could influence online conflicts and vice versa.[120] Given its current attempts to undermine support for the election system, the opposition could contest the outcome if it loses, further fueling tensions.[121]

111 Commey, Benjamin. "EC calls for framework to regulate social media use during election." Ghana News Agency, 19 Oct. 2023, gna.org.gh/2023/10/ec-calls-for-framework-to-regulate-social-media-use-during-election/.
112 Asante-Darko, David Kofi. "AD781: Ghanaians want fair and competitive elections but mistrust the electoral commission." Afrobarometer, 7 March 2024. afrobarometer.org/publication/ad781-ghanaians-want-fair-and-competitive-elections-but-mistrust-the-electoral-commission/.
113 ADDO."Is Ghana a new target for Russian influence ops?" Medium, 6 Sept. 2023, disinfo.africa/is-ghana-the-next-target-for-russian-influence-operations-85bafa731b71 ; IDEG. Personal interview. 9 May 2024.
114 CDDGH. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
115 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
116 Asante, Kwaku Krobea. "Deep fake video! Visa fraud allegation against Deputy Ambassador to China false." Fact Check Ghana, 27 January 2024, fact-checkghana.com/deep-fake-video-visa-fraud-allegation-against-deputy-ambassador-to-china-false/
117 Donkor, Issac. "AI not the problem, but rather how it's being used – Government hints at regulation." Modern Ghana, 25 January 2024, modernghana.com/news/1285271/ai-not-the-problem-but-rather-how-its-being-used.html.
118 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024; Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024; Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024; Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
119 Edudzie, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 7 May 2024.
120 MWFA. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.
121 Kissi, Asante. Personal interview. 10 May 2024.

Online platforms such as Facebook and TikTok have become arenas for name-calling and other provocative behavior, which could trigger real-world conflict. Tribal alignments with political parties and local power struggles further exacerbate the risk.[122] Lack of adequate healthcare, poverty, and a weak education system add to the agitation, making the possibility of violence on election day, particularly during the announcement of results and potential recounts, a real concern.[123]

In 2020, five people were killed as votes were being counted after a largely peaceful election day.[124] The violence came after the two main political parties announced their tallies indicated their candidate was in the lead. In 2024, the risk of real-world violence will be highest just after the election, as compared to before it, as there is again a possibility the results will be contested.[125]

Civil society has also raised concerns over young people's role in the potential for violence. Despite a 2019 law that bans party-affiliated vigilante groups, politically-motivated youth in Ghana have assumed the role of foot soldiers, organizing rallies and holding door-to-door campaigns. If tensions continue to rise, these actions could lead to violence.[126] In Ghana, there is an unspoken rule that those who go all out, including using violence in support of a political party, will be rewarded with political appointments, contracts, and scholarships.[127]

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122 Code for Africa. Personal interview. 14 May 2024.
123 Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
124 "Ghana President Nana Akufo-Addo wins re-election as 5 killed." Al Jazeera, 9 Dec 2020, aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/9/five-killed-in-ghana-election-violence-as-accusations-continue
125 Nyabor, Jonas. Personal interview. 21 May 2024.
126 Nyabor, Jonas. "Ghana: Youth violence amber warning for 2024 elections." The Africa Report, 7 October 2023, theafricareport.com/326078/ghana-youth-violence-amber-warning-for-2024-elections/
127 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Ghana has witnessed over 30 years of democracy, transitions of power, and ranks highest in Africa on the "Freedom in the World" report of 2024.[128] Nevertheless, this assessment brought to light Ghana's systemic vulnerabilities amid the 2024 elections. These challenges include corruption, blatant attacks on journalists and vulnerable groups, an unhealthy online information environment, and possible threats of violence.

Corruption and political violence are significant issues in Ghana, with evidence of elected officials looting state assets and persistent political corruption despite institutional measures like the creation of the Office of the Special Prosecutor. In the most recent election in 2020, most candidates reported they experienced political violence, often perpetrated by their own and other political parties.

Attacks on vulnerable groups such as journalists, women, LGBTQI+ persons, and tribal communities pose an additional threat to election integrity. These attacks, as well as hate speech, further exacerbate issues of free expression, independent media, and human rights.

Information integrity is another challenge for the 2024 elections. Both the ruling party and the opposition use disinformation and online attacks to discredit their opponents through hate speech and name-calling. While civil society organizations try to counter disinformation, debunking widespread falsehoods is extremely challenging in an environment where internet access is overall high, at 68 percent, and traditional media outlets, such as radio, are largely state controlled.

Ghana also faces potential **offline violence** ahead of the upcoming election. Although tensions are currently low and mostly offline, underlying tribal misgivings and political rivalries could escalate. The aftermath of the 2020 election, which saw violence despite a peaceful voting day, heightens concerns for 2024, particularly if results are contested. Civil society warns that politically motivated youth, despite a ban on vigilante groups, might exacerbate tensions.

The assessment findings paint a potentially challenging picture for Ghana's upcoming elections. The potential risks present a substantial danger to the integrity of the electoral process—particularly in the online realm. These difficulties highlight the necessity for a collective effort, including civil society organizations, activists, journalists, and international actors, to address vulnerabilities to advance truly free and fair elections.

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128 "Freedom in the World 2024 - Ghana." Freedom House, accessed 25 April 2024, freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2024.