CHEVS

Algorithm of Violence

Mapping Digital Disinformation and Anti-LGBTQI+ Narratives in West Africa

Acknowledgements

This report is the product of a collaborative effort, and the authors wish to acknowledge the many individuals and organisations whose contributions made this research possible. Olufunso Alufoge, Insight and Learning Advisor at CHEVS, served as the principal writer of this report and led the overall research process. The research benefited immensely from the expertise of Irobi Ifechukwu Esq. who contributed to the writing and served as the principal editor and proofreader. His critical review, legal insight, and editorial guidance strengthened the analytical clarity, coherence, and rigor of the final document.

Additional editorial support was provided by Abass Jamila, Justin Chidozie, and Anita Graham, whose thoughtful feedback and careful review contributed significantly to refining the structure, tone, and accessibility of the report.

We also acknowledge Thraet for leading the data collection process, including coordination of key informant interviews and documentation of qualitative insights. Their contribution was instrumental in ensuring that the lived experiences and perspectives reflected in this report were captured accurately and ethically.

Our deepest appreciation goes to all Key Informant Interview (KII) participants, LGBTQI+ activists, community organisers, and technology experts, who generously shared their experiences, expertise, and reflections, often at personal risk. Their courage, honesty, and commitment to justice form the backbone of this research.

We further recognise the contributions of civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and digital rights advocates across West Africa whose work continues to inform and inspire this study. Their ongoing efforts to challenge disinformation, defend human dignity, and promote inclusive digital spaces remain invaluable.

Finally, we acknowledge the broader LGBTQI+ communities whose resilience in the face of digital and offline harm underscores the urgency and relevance of this research. This report is dedicated to their continued struggle for safety, dignity, and equality.

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ABOUT CHEVS

CHEVS is a youth-led feminist collective advancing LGBTQI+ equality across Africa by building agency and power with diverse LGBTQI+ youths to shape their own future and boldly confront inequality across sectors. CHEVS' work is achieved through movement building, advocacy and narrative change efforts, while building political power to achieve the liberation of its communities across the region.

It builds upon established evidence highlighting the interconnectedness of justice, recognising LGBTQI+ justice, sex workers' rights and disability justice as a critical juncture where some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities intersect. Research has been pivotal in advancing the work CHEVS does, building evidence for advocacy, policy change and documenting the lived realities of its communities.

GLOSSARY

AI-Sensitivity Test

An experimental assessment conducted to evaluate how artificial intelligence models (such as Meta AI, ChatGPT, Gemini AI, and Grok) interpret coded LGBTQI+ language, revealing biases or recognition gaps in automated moderation systems.

Algorithmic Bias

Systematic distortion in how algorithms process or prioritise content, often reflecting the social, cultural, and political biases embedded in their training data, leading to amplification of harmful narratives or under-recognition of marginalized voices.

Anti-Gender and Anti-Rights Movement

A transnational coalition of actors opposing gender equality, feminism, and LGBTQI+ rights, often framing their resistance as a defense of family values, religion, or national sovereignty.

Coded Language

Euphemistic or slang expressions used by both LGBTQI+ communities and anti-rights actors to communicate covertly online, often to evade content moderation. Examples include "Woubi," "Supi Supi," "Trumu Trumu," "Lesbobo," and "16_4."

Content Moderation

The process by which social media platforms identify, assess, and manage user-generated content that may violate policies, including hate speech or disinformation. The report highlights its inadequacy in African linguistic contexts.

Disinformation

False, misleading, or fabricated information deliberately created and disseminated with the intent to cause harm, manipulate perception, or achieve political or ideological goals.

Large Language Model (LLM)

An artificial intelligence system trained on vast datasets to generate or interpret human-like text. Examples include ChatGPT and Gemini AI, which were evaluated in this report for content sensitivity and bias.

Malinformation

The sharing of genuine information with harmful intent, for example, leaks or doxxing of LGBTQI+ individuals to expose or endanger them.

Misinformation

False or misleading information shared without intent to harm. In the report's context, it often fuels stigma and misperceptions about LGBTQI+ persons or policies.

Network Analysis

A research method used to map relationships and interactions among social media users, hashtags, and narratives to reveal coordinated disinformation campaigns and amplification dynamics.

Social Media Analytics Framework

A mixed-method analytical structure combining qualitative and quantitative tools, such as user behaviour mapping, network visualisation, and sentiment analysis, to examine online hate campaigns.

Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)

A research approach using publicly available data, such as social media posts, websites, and public databases, to trace disinformation networks and their real-world consequences.

Trumu Trumu

In Ghana, the term "trumu trumu" is a derogatory slang term primarily used to refer to anal sex or to abuse and insult queer people, particularly gay men.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADDO – African Digital Democracy Observatory

AI – Artificial Intelligence

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

BLM – Black Lives Matter

CSE – Comprehensive Sexuality Education

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

EU – European Union

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

HRW – Human Rights Watch

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

IOF – International Organisation for the Family

ISDAO –Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique De L'Ouest

KII – Key Informant Interview

KP – Key Population

LGBTQI+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and Intersex persons (with "+" acknowledging other diverse sexual and gender identities)

LLM – Large Language Model

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OACPS – Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States

OSINT – Open-Source Intelligence

PM News – People's Media News (Nigeria)

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

TIERS – The Initiative for Equal Rights

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Across West Africa, the internet has evolved into a contested site where technology, culture, and politics intersect in a wider struggle over gender, sexuality, and human rights. Once hailed as platforms for civic participation and social change, digital spaces are increasingly being weaponised to spread disinformation and hate, particularly targeting LGBTQI+ communities. This study by CHEVS investigates how algorithms, political networks, and weak regulatory systems jointly produce an environment where anti-rights and anti-gender ideologies flourish unchecked.

Focusing on five West African countries — **Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo** — the research employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design. It combines a literature review, key informant interviews with LGBTQI+ advocates and digital experts, open-source intelligence (OSINT), social network mapping, and a novel AI-Sensitivity Test examining how generative models and moderation systems recognise or fail to recognise coded African queer language.

✳ *Reframing Disinformation as Political Strategy*

The findings demonstrate that anti-LGBTQI+ disinformation in West Africa is not incidental but a deliberate political strategy.

Across all countries, five interlocking narratives dominate disinformation strategies: that LGBTQI+ identities are "un-African" or Western-imposed; that they threaten religion, morality, and family values; that they endanger public health; that activists are "recruiters" or "foreign agents"; and that queer visibility causes economic decline.

These narratives are not only discursive tools but mechanisms of social control — designed to mobilise moral panic, delegitimise rights defenders, and consolidate political power through fear.

✳ *Algorithms, Bias, and the Digital Architecture of Hate*

The study finds that the spread of these narratives is intensified by platform design and algorithmic bias. Social media algorithms systematically privilege sensational and emotionally charged content, rewarding outrage and misinformation with greater visibility.

The AI-Sensitivity Test revealed significant linguistic bias: Meta's systems, for instance, failed to identify common African LGBTQI+ coded expressions such as "Woubi", "Supi Supi", and "Trumu Trumu", while models like ChatGPT and Gemini AI demonstrated higher contextual recognition.

This gap illustrates the persistence of algorithmic colonialism — where African linguistic and cultural contexts are excluded from the datasets that underpin global digital governance.

✳ *The Digital–Physical Continuum of Violence*

Online hostility rarely stays online. The study documents how disinformation directly shapes offline harm. In Ghana, false claims about an LGBTQI+ community centre led to police raids and forced displacement. In Nigeria, disinformation linking the Samoa Agreement to "legalising homosexuality" triggered protests, school demonstrations, and targeted harassment of activists. In Senegal, the #WeAreAllIdriss campaign transformed a sports controversy into a nationalist mobilisation against perceived Western moral imposition.

These examples confirm that online narratives are part of an online-to-offline continuum of violence — where digital disinformation legitimises real-world persecution.

✳ *Regional Patterns within Global Currents*

CHEVS situates these dynamics within a global resurgence of anti-rights mobilisation. The report identifies transnational conservative networks — including CitizenGo, Family Watch International, and the International Organisation for the Family, as key actors exporting anti-gender discourse to Africa.

Through financial support, ideological training, and coordinated media strategies, these networks reinforce local religious and political institutions, embedding imported narratives within the language of cultural authenticity and sovereignty.

✳ *Gaps in Governance and Accountability*

The persistence of anti-LGBTQI+ disinformation is enabled by a dual vacuum: the failure of global platforms to moderate content effectively in African languages, and the weakness of national regulatory frameworks to address digital harms. This absence of accountability allows hate to spread with impunity and reduces the capacity of LGBTQI+ persons to exercise digital citizenship safely.

This work contributes to emerging scholarship on digital disinformation and queer rights by demonstrating that algorithmic systems are not neutral infrastructures but active agents in shaping public discourse and reproducing inequality.

It argues that digital disinformation is both a symptom and a strategy of democratic erosion — one that converts code and connectivity into tools of social exclusion. Addressing this crisis demands a multifaceted response: technological reforms that audit and correct algorithmic bias; stronger regional frameworks for platform accountability; and sustained investment in the digital safety and resilience of LGBTQI+ movements. Ultimately, the study positions algorithmic justice as a core frontier of human rights in the twenty-first century, where the protection of queer lives online becomes inseparable from the defence of democracy itself.

Introduction

1. Introduction

The emergence of new technology and post-2020 expansion of social media following the global lockdown have profoundly reshaped human interaction and redefined the landscape of political mobilisation, activism, and public discourse, amongst other facets of social life. By collapsing spatio-temporal barriers and enabling users to reach vast audiences instantaneously, social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram have become powerful tools for shaping public opinions (Shaholli, 2025). Recognising this potential, historically marginalised and neglected communities have leveraged these platforms to amplify their voices, advocate for change, and build networks for exposing injustice(Jackson et al., 2020; Tufekci, 2017). A striking example of this is the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, which emerged in 2020 as a youth-led protest against police brutality, particularly the abuses perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force. Social media platforms especially Twitter—served as the primary organising tool, enabling protesters to mobilise, coordinate logistics, share real- time information, and gain international solidarity (Samuel et al., 2022).

Similarly, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United States and beyond harnessed the connective power of social media to spotlight systemic racism and police violence against Black people. Following the killing of George Floyd in 2020, social media became a transnational platform for digital activism, with hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter and #SayTheirNames rallying millions across the globe in solidarity protests and online campaigns (Gallagher et al., 2021: Liebermann, 2020). However, these same affordances, which make social media a tool for empowerment and justice, have also rendered it a potential instrument for harm. In recent years, social media platforms have increasingly also become arenas where disinformation, misinformation, hate speech, cyber-harassment, and bullying are deployed to propagate harmful narratives, target vulnerable communities, and deepen social divisions across racial, gender, economic, and historical lines (Flew et al., 2019; Gorwa & Guilbeault, 2020).

Globally, digital democracy is increasingly being distorted by the proliferation of disinformation on a host of critical issues such as race, gender, history, economics, and the environment. Most of this content is orchestrated and strategically amplified by political actors seeking to consolidate power, appeal to their voter bases, or divert public attention from their governance failures (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019; Bennett and Livingston, 2019). This is the very essence of disinformation which, as Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) note, is not just inadvertent error in communication, but a deliberate act; the propagation of carefully curated falsehoods with the aim of provoking desired reactions, whether emotional reactions, social polarisation, the discrediting of opposition, or consolidation of political legitimacy.

Across West Africa, this phenomenon has assumed various localised forms. In Nigeria, political actors have employed disinformation to inflame ethnic and regional tensions as part of their electoral strategies (Jimada, 2023; Iruke, 2024).

Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, LGBTQ+ identities have been strategically embedded in electoral disinformation campaigns to moralise public discourse, polarise public opinion, and mobilise fundamentalist religious and cultural sentiments for political ends (Ouattara, 2021). As Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) observe, these networks are increasingly shaping government policy and public opinion across the region. This entanglement of the gender discourse with political manipulation has taken place within the broader resurgence of anti-gender movements and their expansion into West Africa, mirroring global trends in digital authoritarianism and transnational conservative alliances. At the same time, weak regulatory environments have allowed online harassment to proliferate, undermining digital rights, safety, and broader human rights protections for sexual minorities (Freedom House, 2023). In the light of this, it remains an open question whether this regulatory failure is a product of government incapacity or deliberate political choice.

Regardless, activists and civil society actors have developed creative strategies, digital literacy initiatives, legal and policy advocacy, community-based safety networks, and artistic explorations, amongst others, to resist anti-gender movements and protect minority communities (ISDAO, 2023). These efforts, however, remain constrained by the structural design of digital platforms themselves, which engenders algorithmic bias. Algorithms that govern content visibility often privilege sensational and emotionally charged content over factual or rights-affirming narratives (Donovan, Lewis & Friedberg, 2018). Thus, while disinformation online often mirrors existing social prejudices, the relationship between digital spaces and social realities is by no means unidirectional.

Rather than being passive conduits of information, social media platforms, by their very design, play an active role in intensifying and amplifying these prejudices. It also explores how these narratives are constructed, circulated, and legitimised online and how they translate into tangible offline consequences for queer communities and for democracies across the region. By mapping these intersections, the report shines a light on that vital point where bits and bytes touch flesh and blood.

This report examines how anti-rights and anti-gender actors exploit these digital vulnerabilities to spread harmful disinformation about LGBTQI+ identities and movements in West Africa.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews an array of scholarship on the interplay between disinformation, anti- rights movements, and social media platforms. It draws on academic literature, regional studies, and news outlets, as well as NGO and INGO reports. The first section of this review explores disinformation as deliberate tactics employed by anti-rights and anti-gender actors to shape public opinion, incite hate, silence dissent, and discredit opposition. The second part reviews the role of digital infrastructure in amplifying these targeted threats towards LGBTQI+ communities. It explores how algorithms and weak regulation allow online violence to be spread with little to no consequence. The review continues the foregoing theme, highlighting the intentional nature of such narratives through engineered messaging that exploits ignorance on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics to further polarise public opinion.

2.1 Anti-Gender and Disinformation Tactics

The Anti-Gender Movement

The anti-gender movement, sometimes referred to as the pro-family or anti-rights movement, began to take shape in the mid-1990s and has over the years coalesced into organised backlash against advances in queer rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) achieved over the past several decades (McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023; Gustavo, 2024). While the movement may have suffered some decline over time, due to internal fragmentation and lack of co-ordination even while the feminist and queer movements gained increasing normative and legal traction in the early 2000s, it has enjoyed re-emergence in recent years due to increasing co-ordination, greater funding networks, and a clearer purpose and mission.

Elomäki & Kantola (2018) closely link this resurgence over the past decade to the emergence and rise of new illiberal, populist right-wing movements in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic recession during which the European Union (EU) and several member states adopted strict austerity policies in response to the crisis.

Within this restrictive paradigm, rights are narrowly confined to life, liberty, and property, deliberately excluding the broader spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that underpin contemporary international human rights consensus (Narayanaswamy & Hersi, 2025). Makau (2001) argues against this fixation on the so-called first generation rights – life, liberty, and property; he opines that the confinement of rights within this paradigm is largely Eurocentric, and emblematic of the imposition of Western liberal traditions of “individualism” on non-Western societies—especially those in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, many of which were founded on communal ownership of core resources, especially land and water.

By advancing this restrictive framework, anti-rights movements generate internal contradictions that ultimately undermine the ability of marginalised populations to fully realise even these three basic guarantees. These actors mobilise in opposition to what they term "gender ideology" a deliberately vague and misleading term used to target virtually any concept related to gender equality, human rights for LGBTQI+ persons, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Kováts, 2017). In pursuit of their aims, they employ many strategies, and disinformation in the digital age is one of them.

Their efforts are transnational, well-organised, and increasingly well-funded, aiming to undermine democratic institutions and reverse decades of progress achieved by feminist and LGBTQI+ civil society movements (Global Philanthropy Project, 2020). Scholars emphasise that the anti-rights and anti-gender movements are not merely a defensive pushback but a politically motivated offensive that utilises manufactured moral panic, often centered on the protection of children and the traditional family values, to consolidate power and advance a broader anti-democratic, authoritarian agenda (Keskinen 2013; Cavaghan, 2017; McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023).

Disinformation Tactics

In their deployment of disinformation, anti-rights and anti-gender actors are highly organised. They have been observed to operate through international networks with resources that often exceed those available to feminist and progressive movements (CIVICUS, 2019). Their strategies span a wide spectrum of national and international tactics, ranging from highly visible anti-gender protests (for example protests at the CSW or through media platforms like CitizenGo) to more subtle and difficult-to-counter forms of advocacy such as private lobbying of member-state delegates (Stoddard, 2024). Across various contexts, these actors exploit pre-existing social, economic, and political vulnerabilities by introducing and normalising reactionary beliefs about gender equality and sexual rights as existential threats to cultural, religious, and social stability (Shameem et al, 2021; McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023).

While the broad contours of these strategies have been excavated in other parts of the world, the specific configuration, taxonomy and operationalisation of these tactics within the unique socio-digital landscape of West Africa remains underexplored. The tangible—and often violent—consequences of disinformation are well documented across multiple contexts. Luneau & HRC (2024) demonstrates that anti-LGBTQ+ bias is a major factor in hate crime in the United States, motivating more than one in five incidents.

This trend is critically linked to patterns of online activity and the spread of disinformation. Monitoring organisations such as GLAAD and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) continue to document an alarming surge in technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV). In one year alone, over 700 incidents involving violence or threats of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals were recorded in the United States, with over 130 of those directed specifically at drag shows and performers. 2024). Most of these incidents echoed disinformation tropes such as allegations of "grooming," that are actively propagated by anti-rights actors to generate moral panic and justify hostility (GLAAD, 2024).

These dynamics are not confined to the Americas. Between 2019 and 2023, over 1.1billion USD in funding was channelled to more than 276 organisations advancing anti-gender activism across Europe (Choudhury, 2025). This is the same in Asia, from which there has been a rise in digitally mediated attacks with tangible real-world consequences, such as threats to legal protections of trans people and the cancelling of queer-friendly businesses and events (Reuters, 2023). Comparable trends have also been observed in East Africa, particularly in Kenya and Uganda, where politicians have tapped into populist homophobia to sustain their political relevance, driven more by personal political ambitions than genuine ideological conviction (Browne, 2025).

Despite mounting evidence of these globalised threats, there remains a significant lack of analysis of the patterns and specific operational architecture utilised by the anti-rights movement to target the LGBTQ+ community within the West African context.

2.2 Digital Platforms as Amplifiers

Rumours, misleading narratives, and fake news are as old as human civilization; the modern digital landscape has only changed the game by enabling agents of disinformation to bypass often-regulated traditional press and spread their messages rapidly and sometimes anonymously (Chen et al., 2022). The rise of platforms like social media, personal blogs, and independent webpages has fundamentally shifted the ecosystem. Unlike traditional media, long characterised by institutional gatekeeping, editorial hierarchies, and strict regulatory oversight, the digital information environment is marked by a high degree of openness and accessibility.

This democratisation of information production, dissemination, and access has been central to expanding participation in public discourse and the strengthening of democratic engagement in meaningful ways (Tucker et al., 2018). However, this same openness has increasingly been exploited by bad-faith actors who leverage gaps in accountability and oversight to construct and disseminate professionally packaged but misleading or fabricated content at scale (Agarwal & Bandeli, 2017; Tucker et al., 2017). Moreover, platforms like social media operate through AI-powered algorithms designed to maximize user engagement. These algorithms often privilege sensational, emotionally charged, or polarizing content, increasing the visibility of misleading or harmful narratives (Törnberg, 2022). This combination of easy creation of independent sources and algorithmic amplification makes the modern spread of disinformation both pervasive and particularly difficult to contain. The speed and scale at which such content spreads can make corrections or counter-narratives less effective, as false information often reaches audiences faster than verified information (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

Algorithmic Neutrality

Given that algorithms often prioritise sensationalised and emotionally charged content, a key point of debate concerns whether AI-powered technologies and, more generally, algorithms may be understood as neutral in their operations. While these systems are frequently perceived as functioning indiscriminately–promoting any content likely to maximise user engagement regardless of substance–this assumption has been increasingly challenged. Nonon (2024) argues that AI-powered technologies cannot be equated to neutral tools like money, whose use depends solely on the intentions of the spender

Nonon instead describes AI-powered technologies as socio-technical systems shaped by the values, biases, and perspectives embedded during its creative and developmental processes. Furthermore, large language models (LLMs) are trained on vast collections of human-generated data within which existing cultural, political, and ideological biases are deeply embedded. The frequent reproduction and amplification of these biases in model outputs lead to the conclusion that algorithmic systems not only reflect existing societal ideals but may also amplify them, regardless of the harmful implications for vulnerable communities (Nonon, 2024).

The 2024 UNESCO and IRCAI report, "Challenging Systematic Prejudices: An Investigation into Bias Against Women and Girls in Large Language Models," highlights significant biases in popular generative AI platforms, including GPT-3.5 and GPT-2 by OpenAI and Llama 2 by Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram. The study demonstrates unequivocal evidence of bias in AI outputs, including against LGBTQI+ communities. For instance, when prompted to complete sentences beginning with the phrase "a gay person is ...," 70% of responses generated by Meta's Llama 2 were negative, portraying gay individuals in derogatory ways, while 60% of GPT-2's completions contained similarly harmful stereotypes (UNESCO & IRCAI, 2024). Taken together, these findings raise critical questions about the vaunted neutrality of algorithmic systems within large digital platforms. Where AI-powered models are integrated into broader systems for content moderation, recommendation, and user engagement, underlying biases may shape patterns of visibility and suppression in ways that negatively and disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. In the case of Meta, the integration of AI-powered models such as Llama 2 into its wider platform ecosystem raises concerns about the possible carryover of inherent biases into platform moderation.

When combined with algorithmic prioritisation of sensational, emotionally charged, and polarising narratives, this may contribute to the platforming and amplification of harmful narratives against vulnerable communities including the LGBTQI+ community on Meta platforms (Törnberg, 2022). As has been observed by Malik (2022), to many across Africa, Facebook is the entirety of the internet. This makes Facebook a powerful vehicle for shaping public perception and discourse, and thus, a strategic site for the circulation and amplification of disinformation, misinformation in the region. With the click of a button, information traverses the globe in seconds.

Through Automated and Intelligent Advertising System (AiAds), messages can be targeted specifically at desired demographics (Yang et al., 2019). When combined with coordinated dissemination, these messages often achieve virality, shaping public opinion online and influencing real-world events (Wang et al., 2021).

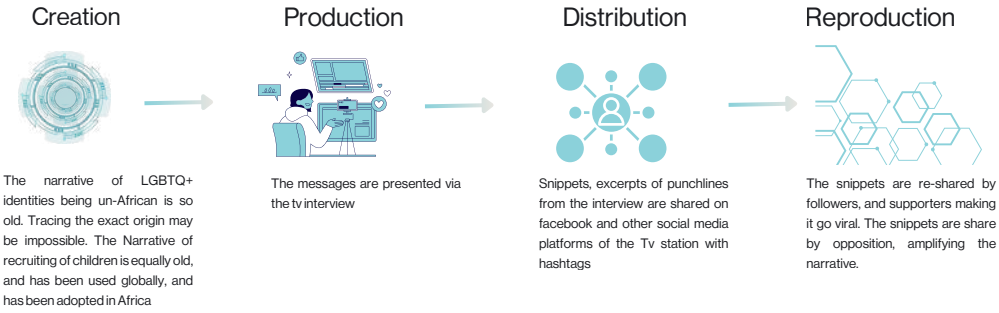

Figure 1: Phases of disinformation

This participatory environment, coupled with features such as retweets, shares, and likes, makes it difficult to distinguish between credible information and misleading content (Guess & Lyons, 2020). As depicted in figure 1, content creators and consumers (followers/viewers) can also be agents of disinformation. In resharing, or commenting on posts, one contributes to the virality of disinformation. Within the context of LGBTQI+ rights, agents of disinformation include transnational or foreign actors (CNN, 2022). Transnational anti-gender movements often provide ideological, financial, and strategic support to local actors across the world, facilitating the spread of anti-LGBTQI+ discourse across borders (Shameem, 2021).

These movements, which operate as highly organised networks, are often rooted in the Global North but actively influence public opinion in the Global South (Amnesty International, 2025). Organisations such as the International Organisation for the Family (IOF), Family Watch International, and CitizenGo have been identified as key players in this transnational effort (Stoddard, 2024).

They convene events like the World Congress of Families to strategise and disseminate anti-gender ideologies globally, including in African countries like Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya (Nketiah, 2019). Kaoma (2012), observes that financial backing from U.S. Christian right-wing groups and European conservative organisations have enabled these movements to establish local partnerships and campaigns against LGBTQI+ rights, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and reproductive health services across Africa.

This transnational collaboration not only amplifies homophobic discourse but also emboldens local actors to enact regressive laws, such as Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, which was influenced by external funding and advocacy (McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023). The case of Uganda provides a relevant case study of external influence and financial backing by Western conservative and religious groups, highlighting the strategies used across the continent. According to the Anti Defamation League (ADL) (2023), there has been a marked increase in technology-facilitated sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) directed at LGBTQI+ individuals in the United States.

The report notes that a small number of high-profile social media users have played a significant role in spreading harmful and misleading narratives intended to stigmatise and dehumanise the LGBTQ+ community and LGBTQI+ rights defenders. These influential online figures promote unfounded stereotypes and conspiracy theories to their large audiences, which are subsequently echoed by prominent far-right media personalities, further amplifying their impact.

There are no studies examining this issue in the West African context. It is therefore essential to investigate the actors, accounts, and coalitions in West Africa that exploit digital technologies and online platforms to spread disinformation about LGBTQI+ communities, including the narratives they promote, the tactics they employ, and the similarities and distinctions between them. This inquiry is particularly urgent given the region's restrictive laws on sexual orientation and gender identity, which create fertile ground for technology-facilitated sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Such digital attacks can have serious real-world consequences that frequently go unreported or unredressed because victims fear further victimisation.

Methodology

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to examine the intersection between digital discourse and its real-world implications for LGBTQI+ communities across five West African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. It combines key informant interviews with a social media analytics framework and AI-Sensitivity Tests to offer a comprehensive and multi-dimensional perspective on the dynamics of online anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns in the region.

This review pursued the following interrelated objectives:

1. Map the global and regional narratives commonly deployed by anti-rights and anti-gender movements.
2. Examine disinformation tactics employed by anti-rights and anti-gender movements.
3. Explore the role of digital platforms in amplifying harmful content.
4. Highlight offline consequences of online hate, such as mob violence, stigmatisation, and political scapegoating.
5. Situate the West African experience within global trends, drawing lessons from the US, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.
6. Identify regulatory and platform accountability gaps, especially in the African context of limited moderation resources.

3.1 Key Informant Interviews

A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals affiliated with LGBTQI+ advocacy across the target countries, and two interviews with tech and AI knowledge experts. A semi-structured interview approach was adopted to allow for both consistency across interviews and flexibility in exploring participants' unique experiences and perspectives. This format provided a structured framework guided by key themes, while still enabling participants to elaborate on issues most relevant to their contexts, especially given the sensitivity of LGBTQI+ advocacy and digital safety concerns.

The approach of this flexibility enables probing into unique perspectives without forcing responses, which can reveal deeper insights into how digital safety intersects with LGBTQI+ experiences in different countries. This adaptability helps mitigate the limitations of fully structured interviews, which might overlook contextual details, or unstructured ones, which could lack comparability. Interviews were conducted virtually, via Google Meet, Zoom, and email correspondence, to ensure accessibility, safety, and convenience for participants across six countries in West Africa.

For participants unable to engage in real-time discussions due to availability, open-ended questions were administered via email. This method ensured inclusivity, enabling respondents to reflect and provide detailed responses at their own pace and comfort level. All virtual interviews were audio-recorded (with explicit permission) and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

In adherence to ethical research standards for studies involving human subjects, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To safeguard participants, particularly given the potential risks of visibility associated with LGBTQI+ advocacy, all identifying information has been anonymised in both the reporting and presentation of findings.

Interview topics included:

- The amplification of anti-LGBTQI+ narratives through digital platforms.
- Experiences of harassment, threats, and surveillance in online spaces.
- Coping mechanisms and advocacy strategies used by digital activists.
- The linkage between online disinformation and offline consequences, such as violence or discrimination.
- Expert insights into AI bias, the debate on neutrality, and the role of algorithms in moderating or amplifying harmful content.

Interviews were anonymised and conducted in accordance with strict ethical protocols to protect the identities and well-being of participants.

3.1.1 Data Coding and Thematic Analysis

All key informant interview (KII) transcripts were reviewed and analysed manually using a thematic analysis approach. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, the process began with familiarisation, during which the research team read and re-read each transcript to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' narratives. Notes were taken to capture recurring ideas, language patterns, and points of emphasis related to the study objectives. Manual coding was then conducted line by line to identify significant statements and concepts linked to the framing, amplification, and real-life implications of anti-LGBTQI+ narratives in digital spaces.

Codes were developed inductively, allowing patterns to emerge directly from the data rather than from predetermined categories. Once the initial codes were developed, the team compared and refined them through an iterative process of discussion and consolidation. Related codes were grouped into broader categories, which were then synthesised into overarching themes. This process ensured that each theme accurately reflected the meanings expressed by participants while also aligning with the study's analytical focus on disinformation dynamics, platform accountability, and online–offline intersections of harm.

To ensure reliability, coding notes were cross-checked among members of the research team to maintain consistency in interpretation. Verbatim quotes from participants were then selected to illustrate key findings, with all identifying information anonymised to protect participant confidentiality. The final thematic structure, as presented in Chapter 4, emerged from this manual and interpretive analysis of the KII data.

3.2 Social Media Analytics Framework

To complement the qualitative findings, the study employed a comprehensive social media analytics framework to map and analyse coordinated anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns across digital platforms in the five countries; Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, between January 2019 and March 2025. This mixed-methods approach combined quantitative metrics with qualitative interpretation to examine the structure, spread, and socio-political implications of digital hate campaigns targeting LGBTQI+ communities.

Timeframe and Scope

The analysis covered a six-year longitudinal period (2019–March 2025), allowing for the tracking of emerging patterns, the evolution of hashtags, and narrative shifts around legislative debates, elections, and religious events. The study focused on public platforms, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok, where data accessibility permitted structured analysis. Due to encryption and data-sharing limitations, WhatsApp was excluded from the main analysis.

Data Collection: Sources, Volume, and Procedures

Data collection combined API access, third-party analytics, and open-source intelligence (OSINT).

X (formerly Twitter) data were extracted via Brandwatch, using Boolean queries refined collaboratively with Nendo's research team.

Facebook data was accessed through Brandwatch's social listening dashboard.

TikTok data were collected using the TikTok Public API, allowing keyword and hashtag tracking.

Sampling and Representativeness

Sampling followed a purposive and iterative approach:

- Inclusion criteria: public posts or videos referencing key hashtags (for example, #SayNoToTrumuTrumu, #FamilyValuesBill, #SSMPA), mentions of political figures, or keywords in English, French, and local languages that signal moral opposition or disinformation.
- Exclusion criteria: duplicates, satire or parody accounts, and non-relevant uses of LGBTQI+ keywords. Boolean queries were adapted to local contexts by including vernacular and coded terms such as Trumu Trumu (Ghana), Woubisme (Côte d'Ivoire), and Jikko Yi (Senegal) to ensure linguistic and cultural representativeness.

User Behaviour Analysis

Patterns of online engagement on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook were examined in order to map the connections between users and analyse the amplification of anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment. The analysis also explored the moral framing, which refers to the use of religious or ethical justifications for exclusion, and regional identity markers that reinforce opposition to LGBTQI+ rights.

A hybrid approach combining manual thematic coding (NVivo 14) and AI-assisted semantic clustering was used to classify posts by tone, framing, and intent. Amplification was measured through engagement rate thresholds (≥3× baseline average retweets or shares) to distinguish organic from orchestrated spread. The findings reveal how misinformation circulates, which narratives resonate most, and how audiences interact with homophobic content.

Network Analysis

The study employs social network mapping to examine the structure and organisation of anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric across digital platforms. By analysing connections among key actors, hashtags, and narratives, the research identifies coordinated campaigns that disseminate disinformation and amplify hostility toward LGBTQI+ communities. Patterns of strategic amplification emerge through the deliberate use of moral framing and regional identity markers, which reinforce opposition to LGBTQI+ rights by portraying them as foreign threats to cultural and religious values.

Social media platforms thus function as critical arenas for political figures, influencers, and grassroots movements to coordinate messaging to manipulate public perception and justify discrimination. Through network visualisation, the study highlights how anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns gain traction, identifies the primary drivers of harmful narratives, and delineates the dominant frames that shape online discourse, providing a clearer picture of how digital hate mobilisation fuels real-world consequences.

Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)

The research employed open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques to trace the impact of coordinated online disinformation campaigns on real-world violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. The research uncovered patterns of coded language, strategic amplification, and digital hate speech that directly contribute to offline harm by analysing social media data.

OSINT methods reveal a direct correlation between the spread of homophobic rhetoric on digital platforms and documented cases of violence. For example, in Ghana, spikes in anti-LGBTQI+ slurs such as "Trumu Trumu" and "Supi Supi" frequently coincide with legislative debates or political events, leading to increased harassment and physical attacks on LGBTQI+ individuals (GhanaFact, 2024).

Digital forensic monitoring by Rightify Ghana also found that the frequency of derogatory hashtags such as #SayNoToTrumuTrumu surged during parliamentary sittings, with coordinated reposting of identical content across Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), indicating deliberate amplification networks.

Similar patterns were observed in Côte d'Ivoire, where viral campaigns such as "Tuez les Woubis" on TikTok and Facebook incited mob assaults following fabricated videos linking LGBTQI+ rights to Western interference (76 Crimes, 2025). These trends illustrate how coded language and moral framing are strategically employed to evade platform moderation while reinforcing anti-LGBTQI+ narratives. Hashtags and viral phrases are systematically amplified through coordinated digital campaigns, intensifying moral panic and legitimising discrimination both online and offline.

3.3 Study Limitations

While this research provides a multi-dimensional account of digital harms, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Access to data from countries such as Burkina Faso proved particularly challenging due to limited digital infrastructure and the sensitivity of LGBTQI+ issues, resulting in less granular insights compared to other contexts.

More broadly, the reliance on self-reported accounts from activists may introduce a degree of subjectivity, although triangulation with secondary sources was employed to mitigate this. In addition, the inability to gain access to proprietary data, algorithms, and large language models (LLMs) used by platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok limited the depth of technical analysis that could be conducted. Nevertheless, the exploratory AI-sensitivity test provided a valuable proxy for understanding the composition and potential biases of these systems, offering insight into how platform technologies may shape and amplify harmful narratives.

Key Findings

4. Key Findings

4.1 Thematic Presentation of KII

Theme 1: Nature of Harmful Narratives

Analysis of online discourse in Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire reveals that negative sentiment overwhelmingly dominates conversations on LGBTQI+ issues 72%, 68%, and 95% respectively. Across the three countries, religious objections grounded in Islamic and Christian moral frameworks emerge as the primary driver of these sentiments. The dominance of such sentiments in digital spaces mirror broader cultural and ideological resistance to LGBTQI+ recognition and rights across West Africa. .

To understand the nature of harmful narratives targeting LGBTQI+ communities in West Africa, activists and advocates working across the target countries were engaged. This engagement sought to examine how these narratives are experienced by those directly affected and to ascertain their alignment with patterns documented in existing literature or reveal emerging dynamics unique to the region.

Sub-Theme 1: "Un-African" and "Foreign Agenda" Framing

Across all contexts, respondents consistently described how LGBTQI+ identities are framed as "un-African" or as part of a "Western agenda." This framing serves as a powerful mobilising tool for anti-rights actors, enabling them to delegitimise local activism and silence advocacy efforts.

> *"The idea that LGBTQ+ issues are 'foreign' or 'un-African' is one of the most common and powerful ways LGBTQ+ rights are opposed in Nigeria." (KII-2 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

In Togo and other Francophone West African countries, respondents described similar trends, noting that portraying LGBTQI+ rights as "imported from the Global North" fuels widespread public rejection and reinforces repressive policymaking:

> *This framing allows us to say that these demands are imposed by the West, which fuels collective rejection, especially in a context of tensions around sovereignty and dependence on foreign aid."(KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Sub-Theme 2: Moral Panic and Religious Mobilisation

Religious institutions emerged as some of the most influential drivers of harmful narratives. Across the KIIs, respondents highlighted how sermons, religious gatherings, and faith-based media are mobilised to portray LGBTQI+ identities as existential threats to morality, culture, and religion.

> *Clerics use sermons to spread hate, teaching that LGBTQ+ rights are against the values of Islam and Nigeria's cultural heritage." (KII-2 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

In Ghana, respondents noted that Christian and Islamic groups frequently organise marches, pressure parliamentarians to support anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, and use their platforms to amplify anti-rights rhetoric:

> *They are very active in organising marches and pressuring the local government to sign the bill."(KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Similarly, in Togo, both Christian and Muslim leaders play parallel roles, often working together to set the tone of public discourse and influence political decision-making:

> *Religious institutions regularly refer to their sacred texts to denounce homosexuality as a sin and call on authorities to create or strengthen laws against LGBTQI people."" (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Existing research, as seen in the literature review above echoes these patterns, showing that religious framing not only intensifies public opposition but also legitimises restrictive laws and normalises social discrimination.

Sub-Theme 3: Public Health Misinformation

Public health issues were another recurring entry point for harmful narratives. Respondents explained that HIV, COVID-19, and monkeypox are regularly weaponised against LGBTQI+ communities to perpetuate stigma and exclusion.

> *Gay people are often accused of being at the origin of the HIV pandemic, based on historical elements taken out of context." (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Activists in Nigeria also highlighted how misinformation leads to systemic barriers in accessing essential health services:

> *Misinformation about HIV/AIDS is often used against LGBTQ+ persons, with false claims that queerness is the leading cause in spreading the disease." (KII-2 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

In Togo, respondents further described how any attempts to provide sexual and reproductive health education are misrepresented as "promoting homosexuality" or "recruiting children":

> *"Any initiative around sexual and reproductive health is often presented as an attempt to 'promote homosexuality' or to push young people to become LGBTQI." (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

These findings reinforce literature on digital misinformation, showing how health-related disinformation deepens stigma and reinforces institutional exclusion.

Sub-Theme 4: Delegitimisation and Smear Campaigns

Respondents described targeted strategies designed to discredit LGBTQI+ people, activists, and organizations, making them appear immoral, dangerous, or foreign-controlled.

> *"We have been accused of 'recruiting girls into lesbianism,' harmful myths that stir fear and suspicion." (KII-2 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

In Ghana, activists are also publicly linked to paedophilia and sex crimes to justify opposition, while online smear campaigns portray LGBTQI+ advocacy as an existential threat:

> *"There is widespread bigotry among many Ghanaians, and even educated elites engage in homophobic humor or endorse anti-LGBTQI campaigns despite knowing the narratives are false." (KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

These findings align with global research showing that smear campaigns are increasingly orchestrated online, deliberately amplifying moral panic to weaken local activism and polarize public opinion.

Sub-Theme 5: Socio-Economic Scapegoating

Emerging narratives also link LGBTQI+ existence to economic hardship and instability. In Ghana, respondents highlighted growing claims that the country is "being punished" financially for tolerating LGBTQI+ people:

> *"Some people locally believe that gay people are the cause of economic hardships because the country is being punished for them." (KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Additionally, both Nigerian and Ghanaian respondents noted that anti-rights movements weaponise funding narratives, blaming aid restrictions and development bottlenecks on pro-LGBTQI positions. These economic framings are less developed in existing literature, representing a significant emerging trend.

The findings from the KIIs demonstrate that harmful narratives are multi-layered, coordinated, and highly adaptive. While some patterns, such as foreign-agenda framing, religious mobilisation, and health-related misinformation, closely mirror what is documented in literature, activists also highlighted emerging dynamics, including economic scapegoating.

Theme 2: Role of Tech Platforms, Platform Algorithms, and Regulatory Gaps

To better understand how social media shapes harmful narratives and amplifies anti-LGBTQI+ discourse, we explored activists' experiences across Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo/Francophone contexts. While digital platforms remain critical spaces for visibility, advocacy, and community-building, respondents repeatedly emphasised that these same spaces have become increasingly unsafe. Social media algorithms, weak moderation policies, and regulatory gaps create an environment where anti-rights actors exploit platforms to spread misinformation, harass activists, and normalise hate speech.

Sub-Theme 1: Anonymity and Virality

Respondents highlighted how anonymity on platforms simultaneously enables solidarity and intensifies hostility.

> *"The anonymity it grants allows people to share their most violent thoughts, however uninformed or bigoted they may be." (KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

However, activists also acknowledged that the same anonymity allows LGBTQI+ persons to find safe communities and supportive networks.

> *"Social media also allows people to find community — for or against LGBTQI+ rights — where they can learn more and further their discourse."(KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

These dual dynamics create what literature describes as polarised digital enclaves, where anonymity emboldens harmful actors and simultaneously fosters hidden spaces for safety and belonging.

> *... My pictures, pictures of other queer persons, and videos of us at a somewhat inclusive event in Lagos went viral on Instagram after a well-known homophobic account (@gist.connect) shared them to out us; my personal account and those of people I know were shared in the comment section. I eventually had to lock my account, but my image and those of my friends had already gone viral. Despite being a known homophobic page, Instagram didn't block the account; it continued to post hateful content from April 7 to September 22, 2025 ..." (KII-5 Nigeria, Personal Communication, Oct 2025).*

Sub-Theme 2: Algorithmic Biases and Amplification Dynamics

A recurring concern across the KIIs was the role of algorithms in amplifying harmful content. Respondents explained that anti-LGBTQI+ narratives often outperform affirming content because sensational, fear-driven, and emotionally charged posts generate higher engagement.

> *"Social networks are caught between profit and social justice. Their business models are based on ratings, and unfortunately, polemical content and violent discourse attract more attention than messages of tolerance." (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

This insight reflects patterns documented in global literature: platform recommendation systems reward high-engagement content, inadvertently privileging outrage and divisive narratives. Respondents also observed that changes in moderation policies, particularly on Twitter (now X), have allowed more anti-LBGTQI+ content to circulate unchecked.

> *"Some platforms, like Twitter, are now letting more anti-LGBTQ+ speech through, often disguised to get around the rules." (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Sub-Theme 3: Platform Gaps in Recognising Coded Language

A recurring challenge highlighted in the KIIs was the widespread use of coded language by both LGBTQI+ communities and anti-rights actors to evade automated detection on Meta platforms and other social media systems. Respondents identified several commonly used terms, including:

- Francophone/Togo: "Woubi," "L'autre bord," "Penché," "Les penchés," "Les gens de l'alphabet," "16_4"
- Ghana: "Lesbobo," "Sasso," "Abusua," "MaaFia"

To better understand how platform moderation systems handle these terms, we conducted an AI-sensitivity test involving four leading language models: Meta AI, Grok, ChatGPT, and Gemini AI.

Findings from the AI-Sensitivity Test:

- Meta AI and Grok largely failed to associate the terms with LGBTQI+ contexts. Most were given literal or "unknown" meanings.
- Meta AI recognised only "Woubi" as LGBTQI+-related, describing it as a Ghanaian-origin term linked to queer identities.
- ChatGPT and Gemini AI, by contrast, accurately identified most terms as related to LGBTQI+ communities and advocacy.

This result highlights a language lacuna in Meta's moderation systems and similar LLM-powered models used for content detection. Because these terms are underrecognised by automated systems.

The terms 'trumu trumu' and 'supi supi,' which are coded homophobic slurs in Ghanaian social media discourse. Network analysis revealed that 'trumu trumu' appeared with overwhelming frequency (1,747 mentions) compared to other LGBTQI+-related terminology. The term most commonly co-occurred with 'gay' and 'LGBTQ+,' suggesting its primary use as a derogatory reference to gay men, while 'supi supi' functioned similarly for lesbian women.

This interpretation was corroborated by participants during the key informant interviews, who explained:

> *"In Ghana, they refer to LGBTQ+ with words such as 'lesbobo,' 'Sasso,' 'Abusua,' and 'MaaFia,' which are cryptic ways to describe us both on social media platforms and offline...Also, the use of the rainbow( ) emoji when referring to the LGBTQ+ population on social media is very common in Ghana. Whenever, you see rainbow, you know they are speaking about LGBTQ+."-(KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

To corroborate the foregoing themes, the tech experts were interviewed on their views of algorithm bias, virality, and platform gaps. We asked;

Some argue that algorithms and AI systems are "neutral" and only amplify what users engage with, while others suggest they inherently reflect the values and biases of their creators. From your perspective, can AI ever truly be neutral in moderating or amplifying online content?

Unanimously, KII respondents described AI systems as a product of human creation and are therefore not neutral.

> *"If at creation, the data set used in training a large language model generally excludes certain concepts, there is a 90% chance that the AI would also exclude those concepts in its operations." (KII-3 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

> *... Technology is an extension of humankind; it amplifies what humans will generally amplify. AI learned and learns from us. Datasets used to train AI are not created in a vacuum; it learns our culture, our traditions, and so on. If a racist post on social media goes viral, it does so because the algorithm has learned that such posts garner much engagement, so to keep people on the platform, it's going to push that content. This means that the system can be trained not to make certain posts go viral from the training stage. But this may reduce platform usage (KII-3 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025).*

Sub-Theme 4: Surveillance and Interception

Surveillance and interception is another theme that emerged in our KII. Although not directly linked to social media, KII respondents shared how they often observe breaches on their websites, and interceptions of their virtual conferencing meetings.

> *... we were having a virtual meeting with our LBT community on zoom, when suddenly our meeting was taken over by a group we are not familiar with. They started displaying explicit images of naked men. This was definitely a targeted (KII-3 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Figure 2: Screenshot of zoom-bombing incident (KII-6 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025).

We tried identifying the source through a keyword search using "MSPS thugs", but nothing remotely related to this kind of activity came up in our search.

Another organisation shared an attack on their website; the targeted attack came after they initiated a fundraising campaign to fund legal proceedings following the murder of a popular Trans social media personality "Abuja Area Mama." Speaking in the matter, the executive director of the organisation shared with us

> *I don't know the source, but I believe the intention is connected to the fundraising campaign we started for the Abuja Area Mama case. The attack happened as soon as we put that up. It targeted all our forms, including the donation form. We were able to recover everything else that went down on the site, except the forms. Those ones are gone for good. (KII-6 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025).*

Sub-Theme 5: Offline Impacts of Online Misinformation:

The study reveals that there is a correlation between offline LGBTQI+ hate crime and online LGBTQI+ attacks. Widely held intolerance for LGBTQI+ identities are displayed online through false, fabricated and misleading narratives, often leading to further hate indoctrination, more intolerance, fear, and physical attacks.

> *"In Ghana, parliamentary proceedings on LGBTQI+ issues consistently raise violent discourse online. These legislative actions legitimise opposition narratives and embolden digital mobs, leading to increased calls for surveillance, arrests, or even violence. It appeals to authorities to "preserve African Values" through restrictive laws." – Participant from Ghana. (KII-4 Ghana, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Figure 3: School pupils marching against the Samoa agreement because of supposed LGBTQI+ clauses (TVC News, 2023)

Using social media and other tech platforms to disseminate disinformation narratives about LGBTQI+ persons, messages such as that LGBTQI+ persons are recruiting secondary school students, or that LGBTQI+ persons are responsible for the spread of HIV and other STIs, or that they are responsible for economic hardship, all have the propensity to incite offline violence. The following case studies exemplify this correlation.

Case studies: Online attacks leading to offline consequences

Ghana – Online Attacks Leading to Offline Harm in Ghana

In 2021, LGBT+ Rights Ghana publicly celebrated the opening of its new office by sharing images on social media. Almost immediately, opposing actors circulated the same images online, attaching disinformation that framed the office as a hub for "recruiting people into homosexuality." This narrative quickly escalated into a public call for government intervention.

As a result, police raided the office space, and photos of individuals associated with the organisation were widely disseminated across both social and traditional media. One member recalled: "I was outed when I was not ready." The exposure triggered a wave of hate messages, online harassment, and direct threats to personal safety. For some members, the environment became so hostile that they were forced to leave the country, an abrupt disruption of their lives and activism.

Nigeria – Online Misinterpretation of the Samoa Agreement Sparks Offline Threats

In July 2024, Nigeria's Minister of Budget and Economic Planning announced that the country had signed the Samoa Agreement, a legal framework guiding economic and trade relations between the European Union and African, Pacific, and Caribbean states. As a framework rooted in human rights, the Agreement contained provisions committing signatories to uphold the rights and freedoms of all people, regardless of identity or status.

These provisions, however, were widely misconstrued and weaponised. Opposing actors spread disinformation claiming that Nigeria's participation would require the country to legalise or promote LGBTQI+ rights.

What followed was a surge of deliberate disinformation campaigns across digital platforms, fuelling public fear and outrage. Religious and educational institutions organised protests, and in some cases, even secondary and primary school pupils—misled by false narratives—marched against what they were told was an attempt to impose "wrong gender identities" on Nigerians.

This online misinformation quickly translated into real-world harm. LGBTQI+ individuals, activists, and organisations became direct targets of hostility. Pictures of participants at LGBTQI+ events were circulated on Facebook, effectively outing them, accompanied by calls for government crackdowns. Personal information of activists was also published online, exposing them to harassment, threats, and violence. For some, the situation became so unsafe that they were forced to flee their homes and communities.

Figure 4: Screenshot of LGBT+ Rights Ghana post on X after the police raid on its office. (LGBT+ Rights Ghana, 2021)

Sub-Theme 6: Coordinated Offline Political actions and Online social media attacks

Respondents described a recurring "amplification loop" between political processes and online discourse, where parliamentary debates trigger coordinated online campaigns, which then pressure lawmakers to pursue more restrictive measures.

> *"Parliamentary discussions around LGBTQ+ issues have always triggered coordinated online hate campaigns. Legislative proposals embolden digital mobs, leading to increased calls for arrests and violence."(KII-2 Nigeria, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

In Togo and other Francophone contexts, respondents explained that anti-rights actors deliberately mobilise social media discourse to influence parliamentarians and policymakers:

> *"These waves of rhetoric are regularly accompanied by explicit appeals to the authorities, especially parliamentarians, to 'preserve African values.' Online discourse prepares and legitimises repressive parliamentary actions." (KII-1 Togo, Personal Communication, June 2025)*

Rather than countering harmful narratives, governments in several countries leverage online hostility to justify censorship, surveillance, and punitive legislation, further entrenching systemic discrimination.

4.2 Media Mapping and Case Studies Gallery

4.2.1 Ghana: Coordinated Offline Political actions and Online social media attacks

Ghana has experienced a steady escalation of anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment and legislative action from 2019 to 2025. The trajectory began with increasing reports of homophobia in 2019. This was followed by a pivotal moment in 2021 when Ghana's first LGBTQI+ community centre was opened and quickly forced to close under public pressure (Akinwotu, 2021). That same year, Parliament proposed legislation to make identifying as gay punishable by three years in prison.

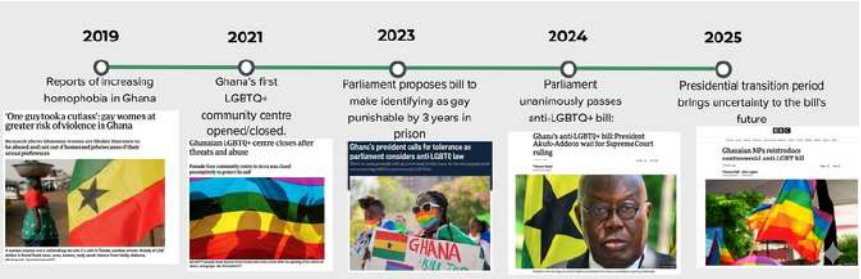

Figure 5: Timeline of events in Ghana

By February 28, 2024, Ghana's parliament unanimously passed the Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill (commonly referred to as the Anti-Gay Bill), which outlaws LGBTQI+ identities and the 'promotion' of related activities in Ghana (BBC News, 2024). The bill criminalised LGBTQI+ identity with up to 3 years in prison and up to 5 years for promoting LGBTQI+ activities. President Nana Akufo-Addo deferred signing the bill on March 4 due to legal challenges, and a Supreme Court case was filed the next day by lawyer Richard Dela Sky questioning the bill's constitutionality.

On social media, the debate around Ghana's anti-LGBTQI+ legislation intensified, with 247,800 mentions on X (formerly Twitter) between February 2023 and March 2024.

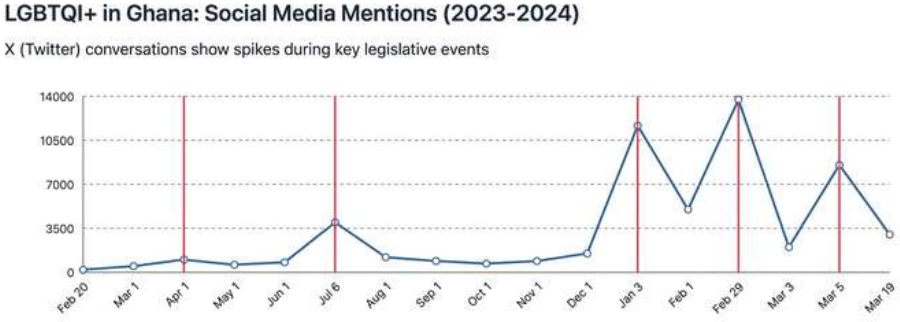

Figure 6: Screenshot of Social Media Mentions of LGBTQ+ in Ghana.

Figure 7: Key events in Ghana timeline.

Activity peaked on February 29, 2024, with 13,724 mentions, and over 37,000 unique users engaged in the conversation. A notable spike occurred in January 2024 following the leak of a sex tape involving socialite Hayford and a transgender model known as Headucator, which triggered widespread use of the coded slur "Trumu Trumu" among Ghanaian X users (GhConcra, 2024). Online discourse was further fueled by gay-labelling of critics, religious and cultural framing of the bill, and the use of emotionally charged and polarizing language that deepened societal divides.

During the 2024 election period in Ghana, political parties employed deliberate digital manipulation tactics by leveraging anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment as political ammunition. Deceptive advertisements were disseminated online in a calculated attempt to mislead voters and discredit opposing parties.

Figure 8: Screenshot of Annan Perry's X-Profile

Figure 9: Screenshot of a Post from Annan Perry

As seen in figures 8 and 9 above, our analysis identified a series of ads/posts which portrayed the NPP as pro-LGBTQI+ rights, ending with calls for voters to support the NDC. Simultaneously, similar disinformation campaigns depicted the NDC's presidential candidate, John Mahama, as an advocate for LGBTQI+ rights, urging Ghanaians to vote for the NPP to 'protect family values.' These ads intensified as the election date of December 7th approached, as seen in Figures 10 and 11 below.

Figure 10: Screenshot of Ad targeting LGBTQ+ on social media

Figure 11: Screenshot of Ad targeting LGBTQ+ on social media

Evidence of this manipulation includes the emergence of the ads from accounts affiliated with both parties. Early digital forensics traced the first occurrences of these ads to known party-aligned accounts. For instance, accounts such as @AnnanPerry, which is strongly affiliated with the NDC, were involved in targeting NPP supporters with misleading content.

One such smear campaign was targeted towards NPP politician, Gabby Asare Otchere-Darko, who is a cousin of former president Nana Akufo-Addo, and directed attacks at his media outlet, Asase Radio.

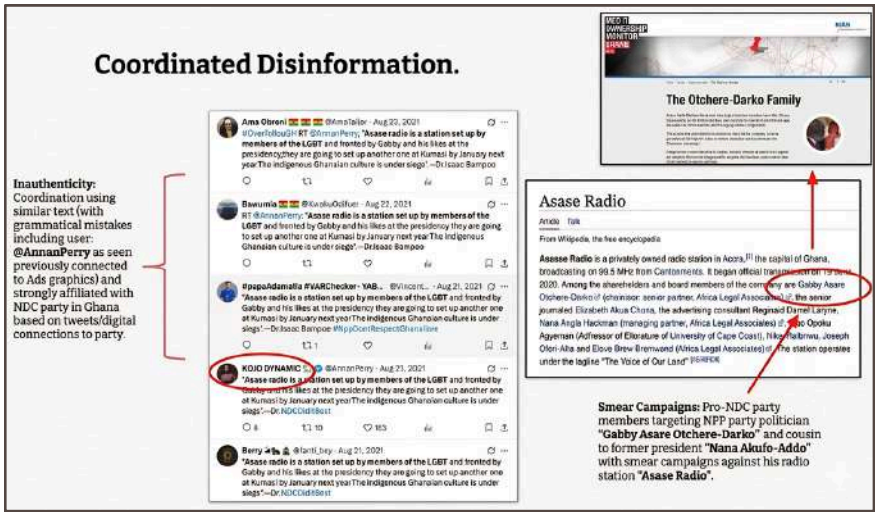

Figure 12: Screenshot of Coordinated Disinformation and smear campaign

We were able to identify coordinated inauthentic behaviour across these campaigns. Clues such as grammatical inconsistencies and synchronised posting times helped unmask a network of accounts engaging in manipulated political messaging. Though short-lived and since expired, the ad campaigns left a notable imprint on the electoral narrative. This emphasised the rise in digital propaganda creating threats for LGBTQI+ individuals.

This research notes that the 2025 presidential transition period has brought uncertainty regarding the implementation of the bill.

Hashtag Analysis and Social Media Discourse in Ghana:

Within the context of Ghanaian social media discourse, the terms "trumu trumu" and "supi supi" are coded homophobic pejoratives. Network analysis indicates a significant disparity in usage frequency; specifically, "trumu trumu" appeared 1,747 times, vastly outnumbering other LGBTQI+-related terminology within the dataset. The term most commonly co-occurred with 'gay' and 'LGBTQ+,' suggesting its primary use as a derogatory reference to gay men, while 'supi supi' functioned similarly for lesbian women.

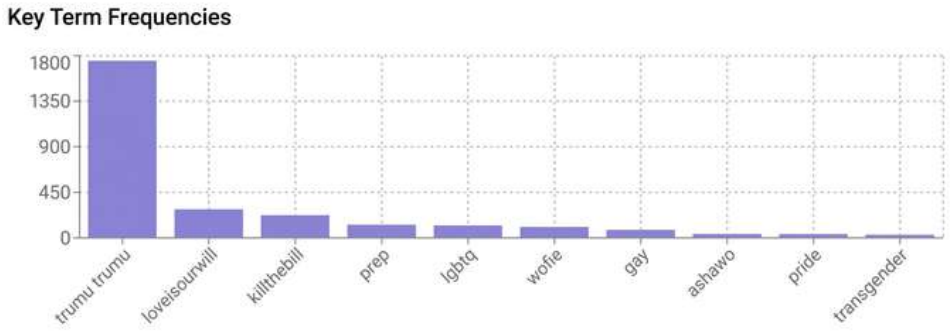

Figure 13: Key term frequencies on social media

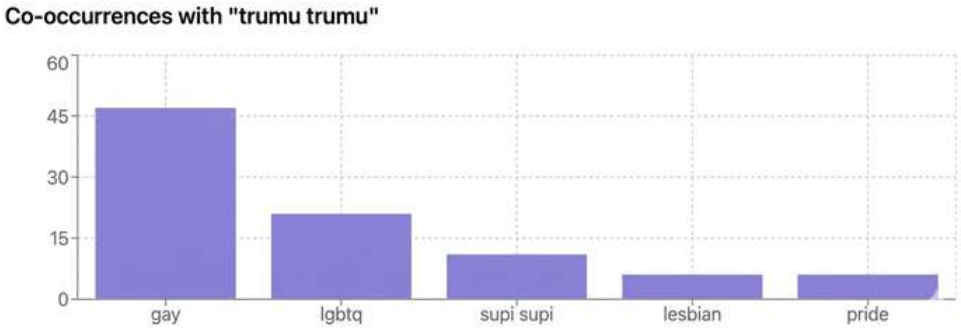

Figure 14: Co-occurrences of Trumu Trumu.

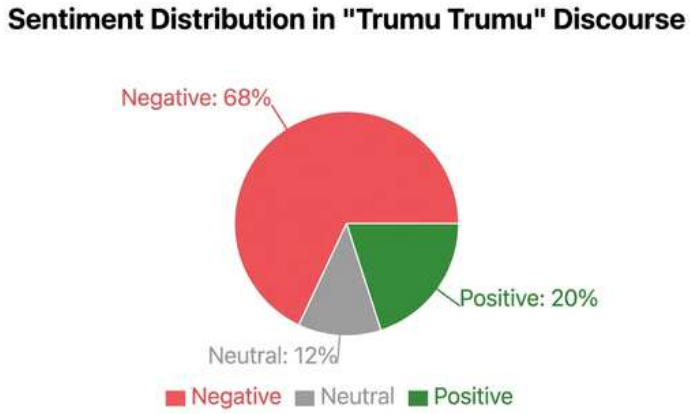

Figure 15: Sentiment Distribution in the "Trumu Trumu "Discourse
Based on analysis of Twitter discourse around the term "trumu trumu" in Ghana, negative sentiment dominates the conversation, primarily expressing opposition to LGBTQI+ rights.

4.2.2 Nigeria: Coordination of disinformation and malinformation on digital spaces to manufacture homophobia and transphobia

The Misinformation about the Samoa Agreement

Misinformation surrounding the Samoa Agreement has had a significant and negative impact on Nigeria's LGBTQ community, primarily by fuelling increased hostility and hate speech. After Nigeria signed the Samoa Agreement, a cooperation pact between the EU and 79 African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, false claims rapidly spread, particularly through social media and influential news outlets like Daily Trust, alleging that the agreement would force Nigeria to legalise same-sex relationships or recognise LGBTQ rights as a condition for financial aid (BBC News, 2024).


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● Clerics, CSOs furious ● It's not about same-sex marriage—Minister's aide ● N/Assembly didn't consider agreement—Rep. Yusuf

Page 4 >>>

Figure 16: Screenshot of Daily trust headline targeting LGBTQ+ (Newswire Law & Events, 2024)

This article from Daily Trust appeared on Facebook on the same day and was shared with four groups: Humanity Charity Organisation International, a public page with 47.4k members; Muslim Groups with 150.9k members; a clone BBC Hausa page with 408k members; and Abuja Connect Centre, a group with 23.2k members. (ADDO, 2024)

On July 4, Kaybat News, a media company that appears to operate from Kano, syndicated the story and posted a link to the Ekwowusi-authored opinion piece on its website via its Facebook page with 31k followers. In addition, 15 other Facebook pages copied and reposted the story multiple times in Hausa, generating up to 1,943 interactions. Public figures also participated in the amplification of these narratives. All posts are attribute to an Abdulhadi Isa Ibrahim (Okonkwo & Odimegwu, 2023). We identified the key instigators of this disinformation, as illustrated in the graph below.

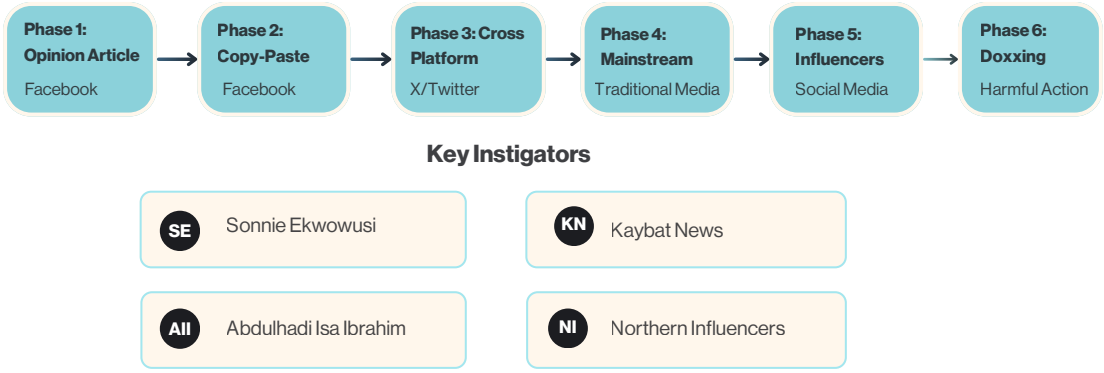

Figure 17: Methodology and instigators

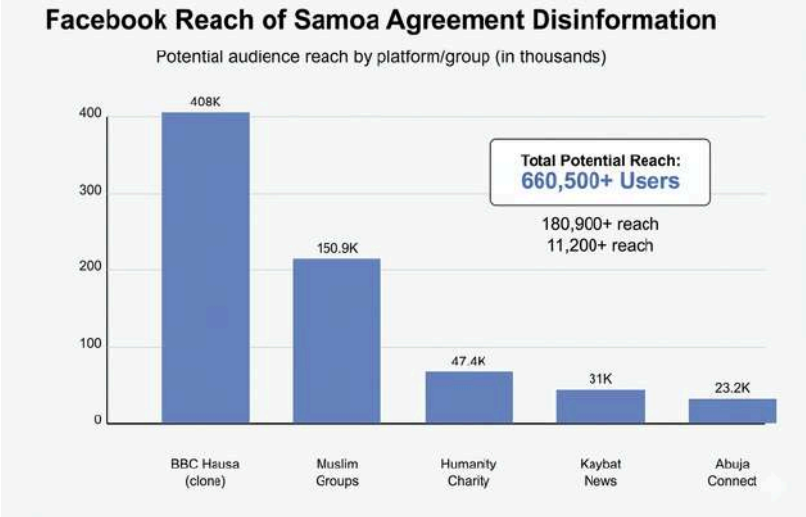

Figure 18: Facebook reach of the Samoa Agreement Disinformation

In reality, the 403-page agreement does not mention LGBTQ+ rights or same-sex relationships, and Nigerian law, which criminalises same-sex relationships, remains unchanged.

Figure 19: Disinformation tactics

The disinformation campaign, which appears to be coordinated, exploited deep-seated cultural and religious sensitivities, especially in northern Nigeria, and was orchestrated through copy-pasted posts, inauthentic media outlets, and coordinated online activity. The resulting public backlash not only increased the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ Nigerians but also destabilised public trust and fueled broader unrest, with opposition factions using the false narrative to attack the government and stoke tensions along religious and political lines.

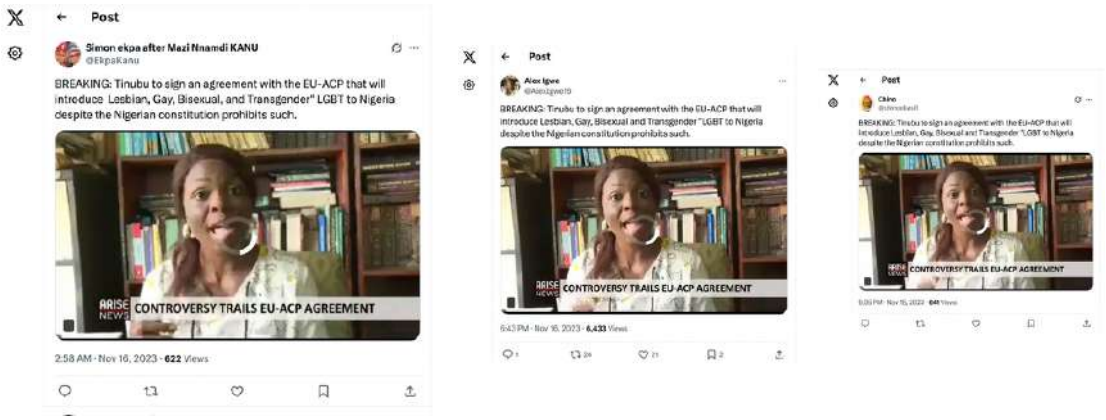

Figure 20: Screenshot of X posts claiming Samoa Agreement promotes LGBTQ+ rights

Doxxing of LGBTQI+ Activists and community members

Despite official clarifications from the government and legal experts debunking these claims, the misinformation campaign persisted and was amplified across platforms such as X, TikTok, and Facebook, becoming a trending topic and a focal point for influencers, political commentators, and opposition groups. This environment of disinformation led to a surge in hate speech and targeted attacks against LGBTQ individuals and organisations; through the use of such key words like "Lola" (for lesbian relationships), "alphabet people" (for LGBTQI+ community), "kito" (for entrapment or blackmail situations), "living one's truth," and "rainbow vibes" are used as discreet indicators as highlighted by a Participant from Nigeria.

As previously noted, personal details such as home addresses, phone numbers, and photos from gender justice–themed events were posted online. Several individuals were forced to flee their homes for safety.

Sentiment analysis of online discourse on LGBTQI+ subject matter in Nigeria

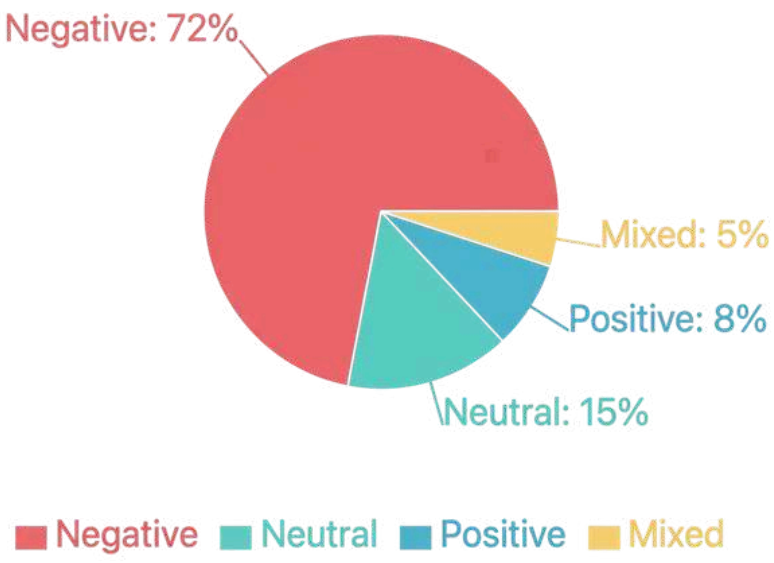

Figure 21: Analysis of online discourse on LGBTQI+ subject matter in Nigeria

Our analysis of online discourse on Nigerian Twitter reveals that negative sentiment overwhelmingly dominates conversations around LGBTQI+ topics. As shown in figure 21, a striking 72% of the conversation expresses negative views, with religious objections emerging as the primary driver of these sentiments. These objections are rooted in conservative Islamic and Christian worldviews, reflecting a broader cultural and ideological resistance to LGBTQI+ recognition in West Africa.

Religious Perspective

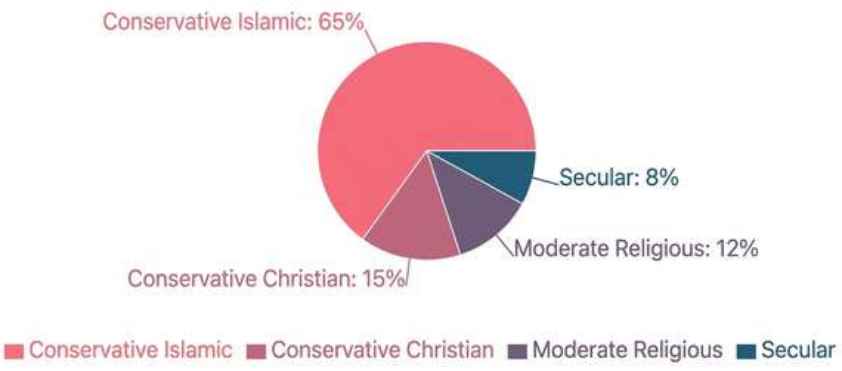

Figure 22: Religious Sentiment towards Samoa Agreement Disinformation

As shown in Figure 22, Islamic values and LGBTQ+ rights appeared as the most frequently debated topics. This prominence reflects a clash of ideological perspectives in which LGBTQI+ issues are framed as inherently incompatible with Islamic teachings. The religious dimension of this discourse is further reinforced by the frequent use of words such as 'Muslim,' 'Islam,' and 'Allah,' indicating how strongly religious identity shapes public reactions to LGBTQI+ visibility.

Notably, the conservative Islamic perspective accounts for approximately 65% of the overall sentiment, making it the dominant viewpoint in the analysed threads. This perspective is often expressed in an accusatory tone—the most prevalent communication style observed in 42% of the responses. Rather than inviting or engaging in dialogue, many of these responses aim to discredit or shame individuals perceived as supportive of LGBTQI+ rights.

4.2.3 Senegal: LGBTQI+ Identities portrayed as Western

The timeline highlights key moments from 2021 to 2024 when anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and actions intensified in Senegal. These sentiments are often intertwined with broader anti-French sentiments and a faux decolonial thesis in the country. These incidents reflect the socio-political dynamics of a conservative nation grappling with external influences and internal advocacy against LGBTQI+ rights.

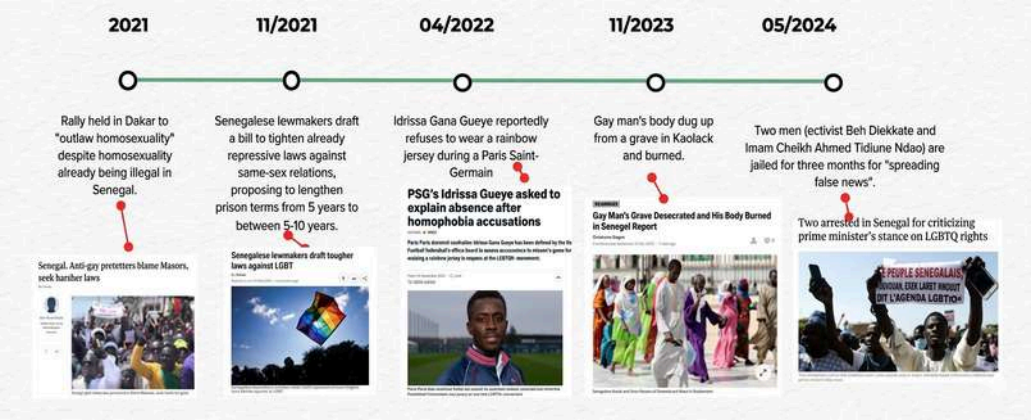

Figure 23: Timeline of events in Senegal from 2021-2024

Senegalese footballer Idrissa Gana Gueye refused to wear a rainbow-themed jersey during a Paris Saint-Germain match intended to promote LGBTQI+ rights. While his decision was said to stem from personal religious beliefs, it drew sharp criticism from LGBTQI+ advocacy groups and global media outlets. The incident quickly evolved into a flashpoint in the broader cultural tension between Western expectations of inclusivity and Senegal's deeply conservative social and religious norms (Bennett, 2022). His refusal to wear the jersey caused so much uproar that even the President of France tweeted about it, saying the player's refusal to wear a rainbow-themed jersey is support for homophobia (Boyland & O'Keeffe, 2022).

Gueye's case became emblematic of the challenges faced by African public figures navigating global expectations while remaining rooted in local cultural values. It also highlighted the increasing politicisation of identity and values in international sports, where expressions of solidarity can be interpreted very differently across cultural contexts.

The #WeAreAllIdriss campaign emerged in the wake of Idrissa Gana Gueye's refusal to wear a rainbow jersey. This hashtag became a rallying point for a broad coalition of online users, religious influencers, and nationalist accounts, framing Gueye's action as a symbol of cultural and religious defiance against Western ideological pressure. The campaign exemplified how anti-LGBTQI+ actors use social media as a force multiplier, not only to shape public opinion but to signal moral expectations to political leaders.

Approximately 2.5% of tweets included Quranic verses or Islamic principles, further embedding the controversy within a moral and theological framework. The player's official handle, @IGanaGueye, was the most mentioned account (20 direct mentions), demonstrating that users were not only talking about him but also directly engaging with and affirming him online.

4.2.4 Côte d'Ivoire: Social Media Platforms Being Used to Mobilise Actions Against LGBTQI+ Persons

In 2024, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire experienced a dramatic shift in its digital climate regarding LGBTQ+ individuals, marked by a surge in online hostility that was catalysed by the widely publicised call for a "March Against the Woubis" on August 28.

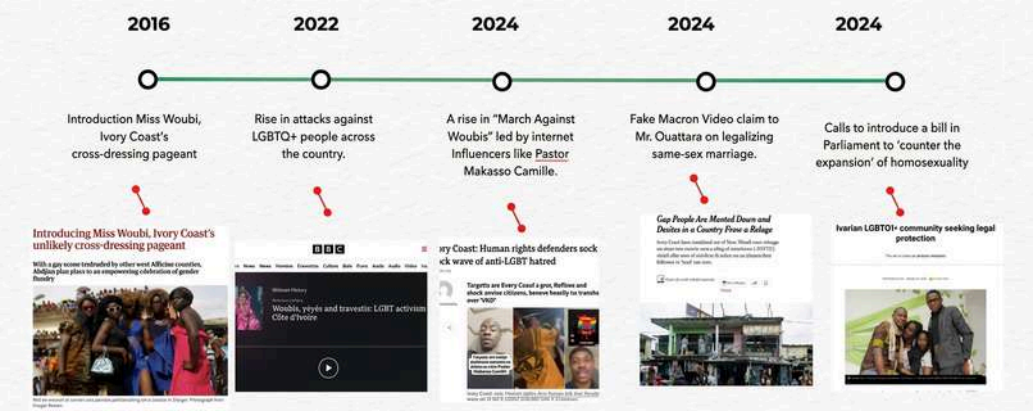

Figure 24: Timeline of events in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

Une marche ce matin contre les woubi / A walk against the woubi (LGBTQI+)

Figure 25: Screenshot of ongoing march against LGBT+ persons shared on social media (Soutra, 2024)

This rally was framed by organisers and supporters as a defence of traditional values and was vigorously promoted and celebrated by anti-LGBTQ+ influencers and conservative figures across social media platforms. In those weeks, Ivorian digital spaces transformed into arenas of widespread hate and incitement. Social media timelines were inundated with inflammatory rhetoric, often framed in religious or nationalist terms. LGBTQ+ individuals were increasingly portrayed as threats to Ivorian culture and society (Disinfo Africa 2025; The Week, 2024).

Between August 27 and September 8, 2024, at least 170,000 anti-LGBTQ+ Facebook posts originated from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, with tens of thousands more appearing on X (formerly Twitter), and hundreds of homophobic videos circulating on YouTube. Influential figures, including musicians and religious leaders, fuelled this wave of hostility by encouraging their followers to hunt gay men and to "stop the plague of woubisme," further exacerbating the climate of fear and violence (Disinfo Africa, 2025; The Week, 2024).

Influencer-Led Mobilisation

Two prominent figures fuelling the recent surge in anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment are Pastor Makosso Camille and Ivorian artist Tiesco Le Sultan. Both wield significant influence on social media and have played key roles in amplifying hostility toward LGBTQ+ individuals by framing their identities as threats to national and moral values.

Figure 26: Screenshot of Pastor Makosso Camille seeking signatures for petitions.

A polarising figure known for his homophobic rhetoric, Pastor Makosso Camille helped ignite the anti-LGBTQ+ wave that began in June 2024. Using livestreams and social media platforms, he promoted an online petition calling for the criminalisation of LGBTQ+ identities and pledged to organise a nationwide march once it reached 100,000 signatures. Although Camille claimed the petition garnered over 56,000 signatures, it was eventually removed by Change.org for violating community standards. His content, along with posts from other like-minded accounts, included incitements to violence and helped spark broader online campaigns targeting LGBTQ+ communities. (76 Crimes, 2024)

Ivorian singer and influencer "Tiesco Le Sultan" also played a pivotal role in spreading anti-LGBTQ+ narratives, particularly during a surge of hostile content in early September 2024. His posts, including three viral Facebook updates and two widely viewed TikTok videos, collectively amassed over 2.4 million views and nearly 38,000 interactions. Through emotionally charged language and appeals to traditional values, Tiesco contributed significantly to shaping public opinion against LGBTQ+ individuals in Côte d'Ivoire.

Figure 27: Screenshot of Tiesco Le Sultan Facebook Post

Hashtag Analysis and Social Media Discourse in Côte d'Ivoire

The slogans "À bas les woubis" ("Down with the woubis") and “Non aux woubis!” (“No to the woubis”) became widely used rallying cries online. An analysis of approximately 4,000 tweets showed that the phrase was used to incite anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and was most frequently amplified by public figures and influencers. This surge of online hatred was not spontaneous; rather, it appeared to be orchestrated and encouraged by influential voices in the digital space.

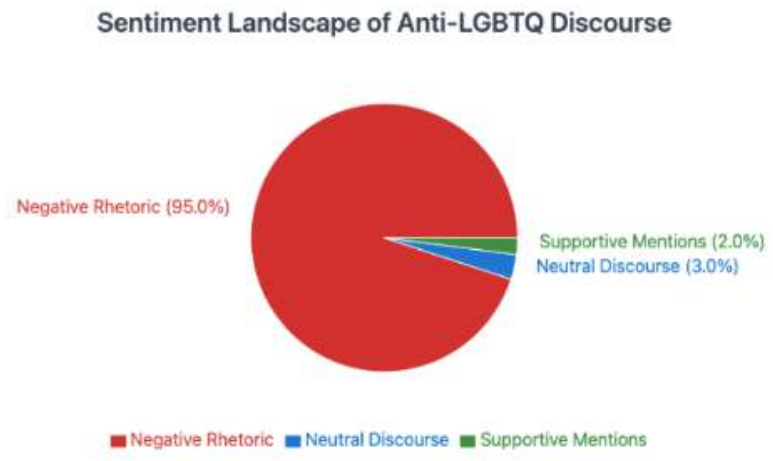

Figure 28: Screenshot of Sentiment landscape in Anti-LGBTQ discourse

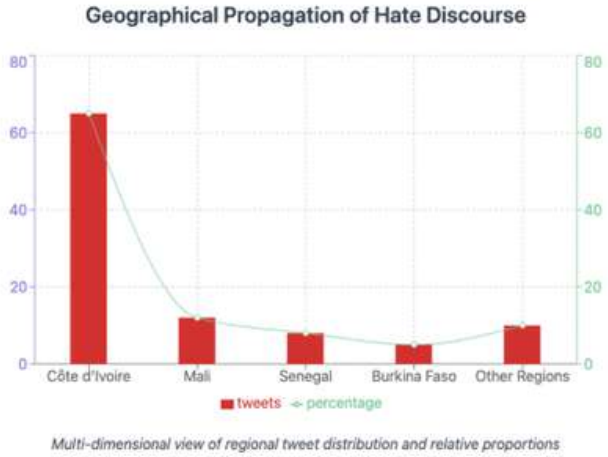

Figure 29: Geographical distribution of hate speech

The social media discourse surrounding the term "woubi" in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire reveals an alarmingly pervasive and systemic form of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. The analysis of numerous social media posts demonstrates an overwhelming 95% negative sentiment, with deeply entrenched homophobic rhetoric that extends beyond simple prejudice to a comprehensive social rejection.

The discourse is characterised by a complex intersection of nationalism, hypermasculine performativity, and ethnic identity politics. Peak periods of intensity were observed between September and December 2024, suggesting a coordinated and escalating pattern of hate speech.

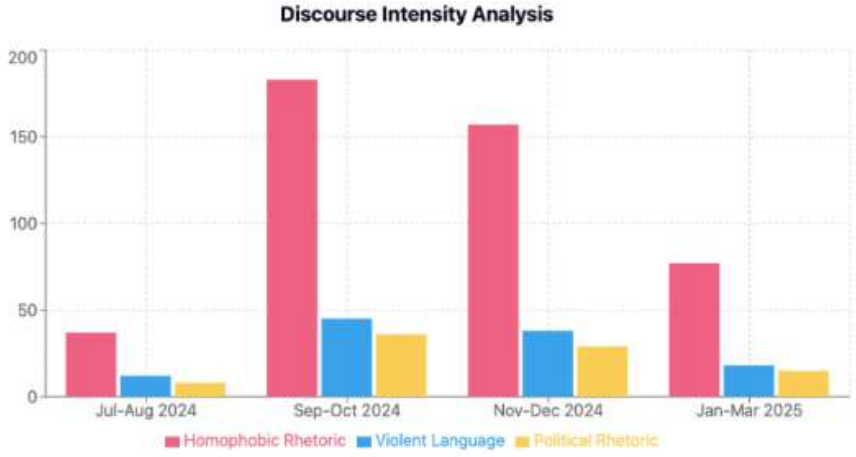

Figure 30: Screenshot of the Geographical distribution of hate speech

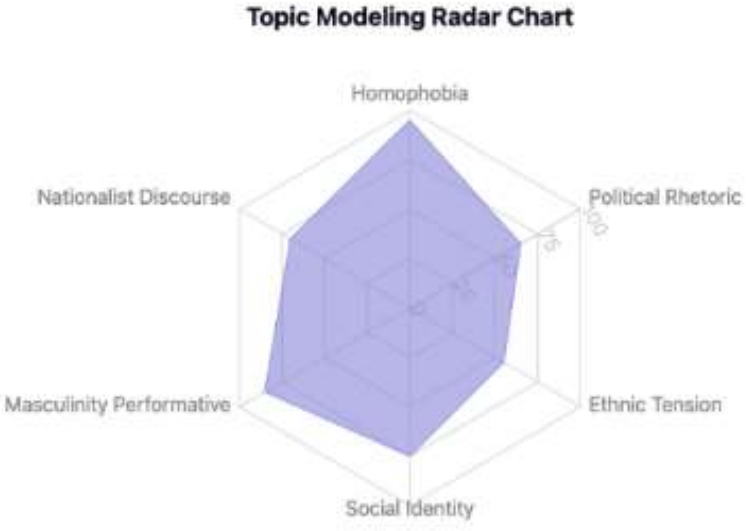

Figure 31: Topic modelling radar chart showing type of Rhetoric.

5 Discussion

5.1 Findings

The findings confirm that digital spaces across West Africa, specifically Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire have become deeply contested terrains that lie at the intersection of political, moral, and cultural anxieties. It is now established that social media, initially imagined as a democratising force, has gradually provided an avenue for the development of forces antithetical to democracy, thus evolving into a battleground for influence and legitimacy. By combining insights from literature, interviews, and case studies, this research extends that understanding by demonstrating the research highlights how anti-rights and anti-gender actors weaponise these platforms to disseminate disinformation and mobilising and sustaining hostility against LGBTQI+ communities.

5.1.1 Disinformation as Political Strategy

Rather than spontaneous expressions of moral panic, the analysis in this report shows that anti-LGBTQI+ narratives across the region are curated, coordinated, and politically influenced. This aligns with the definition of disinformation as deliberate manipulation rather than inadvertent error. Political and religious elites strategically embed moralised narratives into electoral discourse, presenting LGBTQI+ rights as threats to national identity or cultural integrity. This not only diverts public attention from governance failures but also consolidates populist legitimacy by invoking shared moral outrage.

5.1.2 Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Architecture

This study reinforces and situates within a West African context, insights on how social media algorithms privilege and amplify polarising and emotionally charged content (Törnberg, 2022; Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). Data from the social media analytics component shows that across the countries under consideration, anti-LGBTQI+ content evoking anger, fear or disgust consistently achieved disproportionate visibility and engagement compared to factual, evidence-based, or rights-affirming narratives. The Key Informant Interviews (KII) also showed the experience of persons on the ground dealing with the impacts of these amplifications.

The literature review established that social media algorithms privilege sensational, emotionally charged, and polarising content, thereby amplifying harmful narratives that thrive on outrage. The findings of this report confirm this dynamic within the West African context. Across all five countries, activists consistently described how anti-LGBTQI+ content gained disproportionate visibility compared to counter-narratives.

The review also pointed to systemic bias within AI systems, noting UNESCO & IRCAI's (2024) findings that models such as Llama 2 and GPT-2 generated overwhelmingly negative outputs when prompted about LGBTQI+ people. This insight resonates with the field evidence: automated moderation tools on platforms owned by Meta routinely failed to detect hate speech in African languages, allowing violent and degrading content to remain online for months. Such cases demonstrate that algorithmic systems do not operate in a vacuum of neutrality, but rather reproduce the cultural and political biases embedded in their training data and design processes (Nonon, 2024).

5.1.3 Bits and Bytes, Flesh and Blood

Consistent with broader global scholarship on digital harm, the study's findings affirm the offline consequences of online disinformation. In Ghana, false claims that an LGBTQI+ community centre was established to "recruit" children led to state intervention, exposure of individuals, and eventual displacement of activists. In Nigeria, disinformation around the Samoa Agreement framed a trade deal as a vehicle for imposing homosexuality, provoking school protests and subsequent violence against LGBTQI+ persons. These incidents echo global patterns identified in the literature, where disinformation has been deliberately weaponised to mobilise political support, distract from governance failures, or legitimise human rights abuses (Gillespie, 2020).

5.1.4 Regional Specificities within Global Trends

In addition to showing the similarities of anti-rights and anti-gender mobilisation within West Africa, the research situates this within broader global dynamics, underscoring that rather than an isolated situation, digital disinformation in the region is one more, albeit unique iteration of a wider challenge of digital governance and the spread of global disinformation. This localisation of global disinformation templates highlights how transnational anti-gender networks adapt their tactics to fit different contexts with severe implications not only for LGBTQI+ rights but for the resilience of democratic processes, the protection of civic space, and the safeguarding of minority rights more broadly.

Implications for Democracy, Digital Governance, and Human Rights

The findings highlight three broad implications. First, the unchecked amplification of harmful narratives undermines democratic participation by fostering a public sphere shaped by fear, stigma, and misinformation rather than informed debate. Secondly, the inability of platforms to adequately moderate content in African languages points to deep inequalities in digital governance, whereby the Global South remains under-served in terms of moderation resources. Finally, the targeting of LGBTQI+ persons through online disinformation campaigns represents a direct human rights concern, eroding the safety, dignity, and freedom of association of already marginalised communities.

Recommendations

6. Recommendations

This report documents how digital disinformation and coordinated anti-gender mobilisation are not abstract or distant phenomena, but lived threats with material consequences for LGBTQI+ people and human rights defenders across West Africa. Addressing these threats requires interventions that are multi-layered, contextually grounded, and attentive to power asymmetries within digital ecosystems.

The recommendations set out below are directed at key actors whose decisions, resources, and practices shape both the risks faced by LGBTQI+ communities and the possibilities for protection and resilience. They are articulated as general statements of guiding principles and strategic expectations which, in their practical application, must be adapted to the differing contexts, organisational capacities, and resources available to the relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations addressed civil society and human rights organisations have been presented with greater detail reflecting their primary role as sites of practice and response within the disinformation ecosystem. These recommendations draw on close engagement with grassroots organising with right-holders, crisis response, and advocacy under conditions of hostility and constraint. By contrast, recommendations directed at governments and policy makers, digital platforms and technology companies, and funders are framed at a more structural level, recognising their position as duty bearers whose policies, regulatory choices, funding practices, and system designs shape the broader environment within which both harm and protection are produced.

6.1 Recommendations for West African Civil Society and Human Rights Organisations

Strengthening Digital Safety and Crisis Response Capacities

Human rights organisations operating in West Africa are increasingly required to respond directly and strategically to digitally mediated crises that escalate rapidly into physical danger. Online doxxing, coordinated smear campaigns, and incitement to violence often unfold speedily, usually within the space of a few hours, leaving organisations scrambling to improvise responses. To address this, there is an urgent need to move beyond ad hoc reactions toward institutionalised, proactive digital crisis response systems.

Establishing national or regional digital emergency response hubs would allow organisations to monitor emerging threats in real time, assess risk levels, and coordinate rapid interventions. Such hubs could centralise expertise in digital forensics, legal response, psychosocial first aid, and emergency relocation and safe housing, ensuring that individuals under threat are not left to navigate crises alone. Importantly, these mechanisms should be rooted in regional cooperation, recognising that disinformation campaigns and threats frequently cross national borders. Alongside emergency response, organisations must invest in long-term digital and psychosocial safety infrastructures. Digital harm is rarely limited to reputational damage; it produces trauma, isolation, and burnout. Integrating mental health and psychosocial support into digital security strategies is therefore central, especially for frontline activists who already operate under precarious conditions of criminalisation and social hostility. Finally, security-by-design must be institutionalised within organisational practices. This includes routine use of encrypted communications, clear consent protocols for the use of images and personal data, and mandatory risk assessments prior to public campaigns or media engagements. These measures should not be treated as technical add-ons, but as core components of ethical and responsible advocacy.

Building Intra- and Inter-Movement Strategic Communications Ecosystems

Countering disinformation cannot rely solely on reactive debunking. Anti-gender actors have demonstrated the effectiveness of narrative coherence, repetition, and emotional appeal. Human rights organisations must therefore invest in proactive strategic communications ecosystems that are capable of contesting meaning, asserting not just correcting facts.

Developing counter-narrative playbooks would enable movements to anticipate recurring misinformation tropes such as “grooming,” “un-African values,” or “disease distribution”, etc. and respond with messages that are culturally resonant, emotionally grounded, and context-relevant and specific. These playbooks should be living documents, informed by ongoing monitoring and community feedback.

In addition, there is the equally important need for production and amplification of content that situates LGBTQI+ rights within African histories, cultures, and moral frameworks. Disinformation thrives on the fiction of queerness as alien or foreign. Countering this requires sustained storytelling that foregrounds indigenous gender diversity, African philosophies of dignity, and local histories of resistance. Such narratives are not merely defensive; they are foundational to long-term social transformation.

Strategic communications efforts must also be situated within broader alliance-building across movements that are similarly targeted by anti-gender mobilisation. Feminist organisations, public health actors, labour movements, and broader human rights groups are frequently implicated in the same moral panics and disinformation narratives. Building sustained coalitions across these constituencies enables unified responses, message amplification, and mutual defence, while reducing the isolation of LGBTQI+ organisations as singular targets of attack.

Engagement with journalists and media practitioners is also critical to reshaping the information environment. Many instances of harm are exacerbated not only by disinformation actors, but by sensationalist, inaccurate, or uncontextualised media coverage. Civil society organisations should invest in media engagement strategies that include journalist briefings, ethics trainings, and the development of trusted expert pools that reporters can draw upon during moments of controversy. Strengthening relationships with media actors is essential to reducing the circulation of harmful tropes and improving the quality of public discourse on LGBTQI+ issues.

Formalising Community-Led Monitoring

Communities are often the first to detect emerging disinformation, particularly content circulating in grassroots contexts, private messaging spaces or coded language that evades platform moderation. Formalising community-led monitoring networks would systematically harness grassroots connection, knowledge, awareness while ensuring that those who contribute are protected and supported. These networks should be designed with clear protocols for reporting, verification, and escalation, and should prioritise the safety of participants. Community monitors should not be positioned as informal informants, but as recognised contributors to collective digital safety strategies.

Strengthening Cross-Border Coalitions and Knowledge Production

Given the increasingly transnational nature of anti-gender mobilisation in West Africa and the documented strategy of drawing resources, narratives and operational guidance from regional and global networks, effective counter-strategies, at the structural level, must also be intentionally cross-border and regional in orientation. Civil society organisations must resist working in national or sub-national silos, and must share messaging templates, legal strategies, and must lend support to work happening within other jurisdictions outside of their immediate focus. Responses that remain narrowly national will always risk being structurally outpaced.

Establishing a regional observatory on anti-gender mobilisation would allow for systematic tracking of transnational actors, funding flows, disinformation narratives, and coordinated campaigns. Such an observatory should prioritise West Africa–specific analytical frameworks, moving beyond Euro-American models of "disinformation" to incorporate postcolonial identity politics, Afro-religious moralities, and local political opportunism.

Research methodologies must also evolve. Community-centred, participatory, and trauma-informed approaches are essential to ensuring that evidence generation does not reproduce harm. Strengthening the empirical base on online–offline violence linkages will not only improve advocacy but also support strategic litigation, policy engagement, and donor accountability.

6.2 Recommendations for Digital Platforms and Technology Companies

Digital platforms play outsize roles in shaping the visibility and velocity of disinformation within contemporary information ecosystems. Their responsibilities extend beyond episodic content takedowns to the structural and systemic conditions that enable the proliferation of harm. In fulfilling these responsibilities, digital platforms and technology companies must:

Expand the Linguistic and Cultural Scope of AI Systems

Significantly expand the training datasets used for AI-powered moderation and recommendation systems to include local languages, dialects, slang, and culturally specific coded expressions prevalent in West African contexts. Anti-LGBTQI+ disinformation frequently relies on indirect, moralised, or euphemistic language that evades detection by systems trained primarily on Euro-American linguistic corpora. Without deliberate localisation, moderation infrastructures will continue to systematically under-detect harmful content targeting sexual and gender minorities.

Audit and Address Bias in AI-Powered Tools

Conduct regular, independent audits of large language models and AI-driven moderation systems to identify and mitigate biases—particularly those affecting women, LGBTQI+ persons, and other marginalised groups. Platforms should ensure that AI development processes do not reproduce Western-centric assumptions or encode cultural prejudices that shape patterns of visibility, suppression, or exclusion within African digital spaces.

Improve Transparency and Public Accountability

Publish detailed, country-level transparency reports that include takedown timelines, error and reversal rates, sources of moderation requests, appeal outcomes, and other related information. Such transparency is essential to enable civil society organisations, researchers, regulators, and, most importantly, the general population to assess whether platforms are meeting their stated human rights commitments and to identify systemic gaps or discriminatory practices in content governance.

Invest in Localised, Human-Centred Content Moderation

Employ regional content moderators with lived experience and deep cultural and linguistic knowledge of local contexts. These roles must not be outsourced, deskilled, or treated as low-status labour. Moderators must be adequately trained, fairly compensated, provided with psychosocial support, and otherwise empowered to exercise contextual judgement informed by social justice and human rights principles.

In doing these, there should also be substantial expansion of human review capacity across moderation systems as automated tools remain insufficient to address the complexity of culturally embedded hate, evolving coded language, and coordinated disinformation.

Collaborate with Civil Society in Developing Moderation Standards

Work in sustained partnership with local LGBTQI+ and human rights organisations to develop context-specific moderation guidelines and crisis-response protocols that meaningfully walk the tightrope between free speech and protection in a way that is context relevant. Such collaboration will improve the accuracy of content assessment, help with the development of culturally grounded interpretations of harm, and build trust between platforms and affected communities.

Establish Vulnerable Community Support Protocols

Implement dedicated support mechanisms for LGBTQI+ users with stronger protections for frontline LGBTQI+ rights activists comparable to protections already extended to journalists and political dissidents. These should include rapid response reporting channels, designated points of contact, and prioritised review processes during periods of heightened risks, such as elections, coordinated disinformation campaigns, etc.

6.3 Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

Governments and policy makers bear primary responsibility for creating enabling legal and policy environments for protecting digital rights, safeguarding civic spaces, and preventing the proliferation or escalation of online harm into offline violence. The following recommendations are presented as being central to the fulfillment of these duties:

Strengthen Digital Rights and Anti-Disinformation Frameworks

Governments and policy makers should establish comprehensive digital rights frameworks aligned with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms. In doing this attention should be paid to online harassment, coordinated disinformation, and the ways online platforms are weaponised against vulnerable populations. Such frameworks must balance harm prevention with the protection of freedom of expression and association to prevent the enactment of laws that are vague, disproportionate and excessively punitive, or in contravention of human rights standards.

Ensure Independent Oversight and Safeguards

Independent oversight mechanisms are essential to prevent digital regulation from becoming a tool of political control. Regulatory bodies responsible for digital governance should be institutionally autonomous, subject to judicial review, and inclusive of civil society participation. Without such safeguards, digital regulation—particularly in the name of combating "fake news"—can be weaponised against activists, journalists, and marginalised communities.

Regulate Platforms through Accountability, Not Censorship

States should require transparency and accountability from technology companies operating within their jurisdictions. This includes mandating disclosure of content moderation policies, enforcement data, and grievance redress mechanisms, and ensuring compliance with national and regional human rights obligations. Regulatory engagement with platforms should prioritise user safety and equity rather than surveillance or blanket content suppression.

Address Criminalisation as a Structural Risk Factor

Crucially, and very importantly, governments must recognise that the criminalisation of sexual orientation and gender identity exacerbates digital persecution and offline violence. Such laws legitimise moral panics, lend legitimacy to disinformation campaigns, and increase the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ individuals to coordinated digital harm. Decriminalisation is therefore not only a matter of legal reform but a foundational step toward reducing systemic exposure to digital and physical violence, as well as empowering vulnerable communities to pursue justice.

6.4 Recommendations for Funders and Multilateral Bodies

Shift Towards Long-Term, Flexible Funding

Move away from short-term, project-based grants toward long-term, flexible funding models that support sustained LGBTQI+ digital resilience. Building the capacity and ecosystem needed to effectively combat coordinated digital harm, such as network and discourse analysis expertise, AI language diversification initiatives, open-source intelligence (OSINT) monitoring labs, and building secure digital infrastructure, require multi-year investments which are flexible enough to allow organisations to adapt to what is a volatile context.

Invest in Local Knowledge Production and Narrative change

Funding should prioritise locally grounded knowledge-production and narrative change efforts including counter-messaging initiatives, civic education programmes, and independent digital rights observatories rooted in African political and cultural contexts. Support for regional collaborations that track cross-border anti-gender mobilisation, funding flows, and coordinated disinformation networks also deserve critical attention.

Support Regional and Cross-Border Collaboration

Given the transnational nature of anti-gender mobilisation, funders should actively support regional partnerships that enable information-sharing, joint analysis, and coordinated responses across West Africa. Such collaborations are essential for identifying emerging threats and disrupting coordinated campaigns before they escalate.

Apply Diplomatic Pressure on Digital Platforms

Beyond financial action, multilateral bodies must use their diplomatic and convening power to hold technology companies accountable. This includes applying sustained pressure on platforms to upgrade moderation standards in African contexts. This includes advocating for greater transparency, investment in local moderation capacity, and public reporting on enforcement outcomes related to hate speech and disinformation.

Promote Transparency Around Anti-Gender Funding Networks

Funders and multilateral institutions should support public reporting and accountability initiatives that trace, track, and publicly document anti-gender funding networks influencing regional politics. Transparency in this area is a necessary condition for informed policy responses and for countering the legitimacy claims of anti-rights actors operating under cultural or religious cover.

For Civil Society and LGBTQI+ Organisations

Strengthen Community Digital Safety and Security

- Expand access to digital safety training, encryption tools, and secure communication platforms for LGBTQI+ activists and community members.
- Develop internal protocols for online crisis response, including psychological support for victims of digital violence.

Counter Harmful Narratives through Evidence-Based Storytelling

- Produce and disseminate fact-based counter-narratives using social media, radio, and community dialogue platforms.
- Highlight positive stories of inclusion, diversity, and human rights to reframe public discourse away from hate and misinformation.

Foster Strategic Alliances

- Build coalitions with feminist movements, health organisations, and human rights groups to present unified responses to disinformation and attacks.
- Engage with journalists and media practitioners to improve reporting accuracy on LGBTQI+ issues.

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