# Truths, Lies & Votes

## Assessing the Impact of Social Media on the 2023 Elections in Nigeria

TYPES OF MISINFORMATION/ DISINFORMATION | GENDER OF PERPETRATORS OF FAKE NEWS | DISCUSSION

# INTRODUCTION

Elections are a vital part of the democratic process. In early 2023, Nigeria underwent a crucial election cycle that started with presidential and National Assembly elections on February 25, and ended with gubernatorial and state assembly elections on March 11, with the swearing in of a new president, governors, and national and state legislators on May 29, 2023.

Clearly, political actors and their supporters have over the years used viral false and misleading narratives to undermine confidence in the Nigerian electoral system and erode the faith of Nigerians in our democracy. The 2023 election was not different. Before the 2023 elections, mis- and disinformation was pervasive. It was prevalent throughout the campaign, the election, and its aftermath, spreading across all social media platforms. These contents were pushed out and shared using social media. Unfortunately, some citizens consumed the content and moved a step further to share without verifying the authenticity and the source.

Vulnerabilities in the pre- and post-election mis/disinformation environment in Nigeria require urgent collective action. Mis/disinformation, fake news, and hate speech thrive when curiosity is widespread and authentic information is scarce or unavailable. But the negative impact of fake news, divisive, and detrimental information, can be weakened by the work of professionals, researchers, and engaged citizens interfacing with social media platforms and policy makers.

In the framework of promoting media information literacy and peaceful, just and equitable society, where everyone has power to influence the decisions affecting their lives, the African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL) implemented this project, with the support of Luminate to identify, analyse and document mis/disinformation in the lead-up to, during, and after the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, and provide recommendations for addressing these issues in the context of the information ecosystem in the country.

The project objectives are as follows: identify sources of mis/disinformation in the digital media before, during and after the 2023 elections; identify key channels and platforms that were used to convey mis/disinformation during this period; document the dominant issues of mis/disinformation before, during and after the elections; determine the extent to which mis/disinformation influenced

voters' choice during the elections; investigate the influence, if any, of mis- and disinformation on the outcome of the elections; and identify measures that could be adopted to mitigate the dissemination of mis- and disinformation before, during and after elections in the country.

Over a nine-month period, the research team worked actively to: conduct content analysis, track and analyse mis/disinformation; and determine the dominant issues of various online media platforms (online news outlets and other sources of digital information); collate data from various online media platforms; and collaborate with a survey team to provide empirical data on mis- and disinformation around the 2023 elections.

From this research, it was evident that there is a growing need for media and information literacy (MIL) competency, for critical thinking skills and gainful decision making among citizens. The research identified the importance of building and enhancing institutional and human capacities on the use of MIL tools and the need to integrate MIL in the school curriculum at all levels as well as in policies and strategies, and to bridge the digital and knowledge gap, through the development of digital skills and competencies.

The essence of this project is to address the challenges of mis/disinformation, to track and document mis/disinformation around the 2023 elections on social media; to gather evidence on how mis- and disinformation was shared before and during the campaign season, as well as during and immediately after the elections, to learn more about the mechanisms involved in the mis- and disinformation drive around the elections – the actors involved, and recommendations on appropriate policy responses.

The aim is to empower citizens, particularly young people, to use MIL as a tool to think critically, click wisely and share information responsibly in the use of digital tools at their disposal during elections.

We hope readers, students, parents, educators, researchers, civil society actors, public and private institutions, and policy makers, will find the salient points and recommendations in this research useful.

**Chido Onumah, PhD**
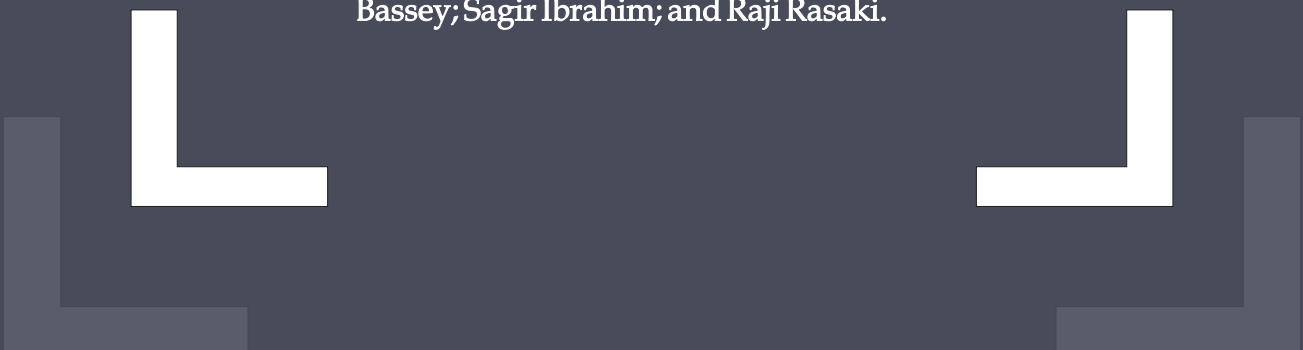Project Coordinator
September 2023

# Acknowledgements

# Executive Summary

This research on mis/disinformation on social media before, during and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria provides an insight into the extent, impact, and sources of mis/disinformation during these critical phases for democratic processes and electoral outcomes.

The study employed triangulation methods for generating data. It deployed the mixed-methods technique, combining quantitative survey data and content analysis data to gain insights into the issues that underpin the research. Data was generated from different social media platforms.

Accordingly, the key findings of the research show that mis/disinformation was rampant before, during, and after the 2023 elections, with a significant surge in the spread of false information compared to previous elections. Issues around mis/disinformation revolve around electoral rules, candidate profiling, biased reportage and false stories, all aimed at manipulating public opinion and voters' preference for or against a candidate or political party.

The amplification mechanism of the report shows that social media platforms played crucial roles in disseminating mis/disinformation, and the tonality of conversation often prioritised sensational, inflammatory, and moderate content to influence the choice of voters advertently.

The report identifies the impact on electoral integrity and democracy as follows: the dissemination of mis/disinformation eroded public trust in the integrity of the electoral process and institutions as well as the electoral outcome; mis/disinformation also led to polarization that made voters experience difficulty in the way they expressed

their electoral preference; there were various sources of mis/disinformation, which included political actors, foreign actors, fringe media outlets, and sponsored young social media activists who spun mis/disinformation. There was sustained mis/disinformation aimed at manipulating public opinion and sentiment to influence electoral outcome.

We recommend that social media platforms strengthen their content moderation and fact-checking mechanisms to curb the incidence of mis/disinformation; there should be a conscious effort to refine and prioritise credible sources to either reduce or eliminate the amplification of false information. In the same vein, public education campaigns should focus on media and information literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship, to empower users to identify and appreciate genuine information.

Transparency and accountability are also vital. Social media platforms should strengthen their internal operations to provide greater transparency in their content moderation and algorithmic process of decision making. Government and civil society should hold social media platforms accountable for the spread of mis/disinformation on social media. Social media platforms that break the law should be made to face the full weight of the law.

The research suggests and amplifies the urgency for immediate action to redress the growing incidence of mis/disinformation on social media in the context of electoral processes and outcomes.

It is pertinent for the government to collaborate with civil society and social media companies to identify,

counteract mis/disinformation, and track the sources and trajectory. This intervention is critical and compelling to ensure the integrity of the electoral process and guarantee that democratic outcomes are not imperilled by the growing incidence of mis/disinformation.

Effective and coordinated strategies are important to enhance electoral trustworthiness and must include promotion of media and information literacy, social media platform responsibility, effective and non-partisan legislative instrument to curb mis/disinformation and serve as deterrence for those who infract on the law. The government should promote fact-checking initiatives and independent verification of information to mitigate the impact of mis/disinformation. This will help in inculcating in citizens critical thinking skills that will empower them to discern factual information from mis/disinformation. This is important to ensure the safeguard of the democratic foundations of society.

Undoubtedly, mis/disinformation on social media platforms had significant impact on the 2023 election in Nigeria, from the pre-election period and after. It is important that a multi-faceted approach is adopted with combined regulatory efforts, collaboration with social media tech companies and media and information literacy to engender a more informed electorate and safeguard the integrity of future elections. Government must strengthen the regulatory gaps by enacting effective legislations that would monitor and track social media content and sources and enforce appropriate sanctions to secure the society and deepen democratic culture.

# BACKGROUND

**S**ocial media has become a defining feature of the Nigerian electoral process. Inspired by the election of former United States President, Barack Obama, by the Facebook generation in 2008, the Nigerian youth have become significant actors and actresses since the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. In that election, President Goodluck Jonathan campaigned widely on Facebook resulting in the publication of his book, *My Friends and I*, reflecting on his social media experience as it affected his electoral campaign.

**Ever since**, social media has become a veritable tool in successive political campaigns in Nigeria. Significantly, Data Reportal, an online reference library, pointing to the huge colony of social media users in Nigeria, unveiled statistics that shows that as of January 2022, Nigeria had approximately 32 million social media users that excluded 90 million WhatsApp users. In addition, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), also estimated that there were 150 million internet users in Nigeria as of 2022. Heinrich Boll Stiftung, an independent political foundation, in one of its report, notes that the average Nigerian social media denizen spends almost four hours daily on social media, compared to the rest of the world.

**Significantly**, the foundation also stated that a third of the voting population spends copious time surfing social media. The implication of these statistics is that social media has become a critical feature of the Nigerian demographic and electoral space. It is expected, therefore, that politicians would take their messages to where they could have a significant audience and attention. Indeed, the Centre for Democracy and Develop-ment (CDD) in its report titled, "Online Operations: Nigeria's 2023 Social Media Election Campaigns," contends that 63% of the infractions highlighted by the Nigeria Peace Committee were on the social media.

**The** 2023 presidential election in Nigeria witnessed an unprecedented surge in mis/disinformation, with various social media platforms disseminating misleading and inaccurate information that heightened anxiety and mistrust in government and its institutions, and generated unprecedented polarization that speaks to the fault lines of the country.

**This** report analyses the core factors that contributed to the spread of mis/disinformation, the prevalence of mis/dis-information and its possible impact on electoral outcomes. Further, this report identifies the major social media platforms that were used for the amplification of mis/dis-information prior to, during, and after the 2023 presidential election. In addition, the report also highlights the potential consequences of mis/dis-information on the democratic process and offers recommen-dations for tackling mis/dis-information in future elections.

**Whilst** there is a semblance of decorum in the legacy media, the same cannot be said of social media which are easily accessible to citizens. People have access to WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter even while in transit, and they get exposed to hateful and fake content, sometimes from unidentifiable sources.

**Information** manipulation for political gains is not new to the Nigerian political process. During the 2019 electoral process, politicians and their strategists used fake news as campaign strategies. While it was the same period that the Nigerian government launched campaigns against fake news, it was also the period in which the use of false content for election campaigns became a source of huge concerns as politicians and even government officials leveraged social media to weaponize false information against rival political parties.

**Reports** have shown how the 2023 elections threw up all sorts of fake content in the mainstream and social media spaces. Premium Times (2019) reported how Ms Lauretta Onochie of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and a presidential adviser tweeted a false photograph to de-market Atiku Abubakar, a presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). It also reported how Messrs Femi Fani-Kayode and Yinka Odumakin, who were both critics of the APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, peddled false information that the house of the then-suspended Chief Justice of the Federation, Walter Onnoghen, had been surrounded by the operatives of the EFCC, a government anti-corruption agency.

**The** dynamism in the elections which threw up old and new political heavyweight contenders was such that ignited the barrage of mis/disinformation that was witnessed during the period. In some critical instances, Peter Obi, a Christian, and Labour Party presidential contender, was framed in fabricated content meant to pitch him against Muslim voters who detest alcohol. In another instance, Atiku Abubakar, the Hausa/Fulani People's Democratic Party's presidential contender was framed as an ethnically-biased politician, a narrative meant to tarnish his image in the consciousness of another potential ethnic group of voters. There were also false reports made against the APC vice presidential candidate, Kashim Shettima, that he was a financier of Boko Haram, an Islamist militant organisation based in northeastern Nigeria. Politicians, and indeed political parties, leveraged religious and primordial sentiments to share divisive content, highlighting how emotionally charged the voting public can be with such tactics.

**Politicians** deliberately spread mis/disinformation to either feather their own nests to win the election or de-market their opponents. Reports have shown how social media influencers were paid to spread false information to influence voters' decisions or instigate them against political opponents. The recent report of the European Union Election Observation Mission corroborates the fact that known political party strategists and even senior government officials openly and brazenly deployed social media to perpetrate mis/disinformation.

**As** the window of political campaigns opened on September 28, 2022, and having understood the negative impacts of this menace on the electoral process, the Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition (NFC) including major newsrooms in Nigeria, civil groups and independent fact-checkers embraced a kind of synergy that put political candidates, political parties, and supporters in check against mis/disinformation during the 2023 electoral process.

**The** coalition fact-checked a series of political claims, including participating in live fact-checking of political debates, starting with the Arise News presidential town hall meeting on Sunday, November 13, 2022. Some of the strategies used by fact-checkers during the period include fact-checking process and media and information literacy/explainer tools to clean up mis/disinformation in the public space.

**Of** course, the preponderance of dis/misinformation and hate speech in the media has increased the decibel of the call for more aggressive promotion of media and information literacy (MIL) right from secondary school. This has led development partners and MIL advocates to push for MIL inclusion into the school curriculum.

**The** magnitude of mis/disinformation in the period leading up to, during, and after the 2023 elections, needs to be established. As much as close observation of the political communication landscape had revealed a seeming increase, it is difficult to conclude that such preponderance had an impact on the voters and on the outcomes of the elections. This study, therefore, seeks to

provide some empirical evidence upon which an informed conclusion could be reached.

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## Misinformation

Misinformation refers to the spread or dissemination of false or inaccurate information, often unintentionally. It can take various forms, including rumors, false news stories, misleading data, or deceptive images.

Misinformation can be spread through various channels, such as social media, traditional media, word of mouth, and online platforms. The rapid dissemination of information on the internet and social media has facilitated the quick spread of misinformation, sometimes leading to widespread belief in false ideas or misconceptions.



## Disinformation

Disinformation is a more deliberate and intentional form of false information spread with the purpose of deceiving or manipulating people. Unlike misinformation, which may be spread inadvertently, disinformation involves a deliberate effort to create and disseminate false or misleading content with the intention of achieving specific goals. These goals can include shaping public opinion, sowing discord, influencing elections, or advancing a particular agenda.

Disinformation campaigns often involve the use of various tactics, such as spreading fabricated news articles, creating fake social media accounts, manipulating images and videos, and exploiting existing social and political divisions. State actors, political organizations, interest groups, and individuals may engage in disinformation campaigns for strategic reasons

# FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CULTURE OF
# MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

**L**ack of Media and Information Literacy: There is a lack of media and information literacy amongst Nigerians, including those that are educated. This problem creates a daunting challenge to differentiate between false and accurate information.

**The Demographics** and Social Condition of the Nigerian Youth: The Nigerian youth constitutes a significant demography of the Nigerian population. Official statistics points to the fact that they constitute more than half of Nigeria's population. Yet, the youth are victims of bad governance that is manifested in poverty, staggering unemployment, and high inflation. This situation provides a context for their desire to seek alternative means of giving their narratives in the social media on issues around governance and participatory politics, with little or no consideration for the security of the country. The youth often display little confidence in the professionalism of conventional mainstream media (print and electronic) to report accurately on issues in the country.

**Partisan Political Interest:** Some groups and individuals deliberately spread mis/disinformation to achieve a political advantage over groups that are considered to be exclusive or opposing to their interests. The "we vs they" politics is often driven by the premium on power, corruption in government, the ethnicization of governance, and primordial politics that is usually deployed to leverage electoral outcomes.

**Social Media Amplification:** The anonymous character and viral nature of social media provide a context for the orchestration and facilitation of falsehood and mis/disinformation. Given the fact that it is quite challenging to track the source of mis/disinformation on social media, discretion is not usually exercised in disseminating mis/disinformation despite the Cyber Crime Act of 2015 that made the dissemination of fake news punishable by imprisonment of three years or a fine of seven million Naira or both.
Weak Legal Framework: There is no strong legal framework that addresses how government and official institutions should contain or punish those that spread mis/disinformation. This problem is compounded by the incapacitation of the government (because of poor technology infrastructure) to identify those who use social media to peddle mis/disinformation. This challenge has encouraged those who spread mis/disinformation to become unabashed in the use of social media for the amplification of mis/disinformation for political goals. Despite the provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act that prohibits the use of inflammatory and intemperate expressions, there has been weak enforcement of the law. Clearly, the Nigerian government lacks the control to effectively monitor social media in Nigeria.

**The bias of Conventional Mainstream Media:** The conventional mainstream media-print and electronic—has not been professional and ethical in the way information is disseminated to the public, owing largely to its ownership structure, issues around poor remuneration, and poor working conditions of journalists that have made proprietors and journalists to indulge either in self-censorship for economic gains or outright sale of stories for pecuniary ends. These challenges have constrained the mainstream media to be partisan in its reportage, fuelling a perception that the conventional media represents the interest of the government and the few rich people who enjoy patronage from the government. This is why social media has overtaken the mainstream media in information dissemination. Consequently, the information ecosystem has become decentralized, pushing the mainstream conventional media to the periphery at any stage of the 2023 presidential election.

## Research Objectives
Specifically, the following objectives guided the study:
1. Identify sources of mis/disinformation in the digital media before, during and after the 2023 elections;
2. Identify key channels and platforms that were used to convey mis/disinformation during this period;
3. Document the dominant issues of mis/disinformation before, during and after the 2023 elections;
4. Determine the extent to which mis/disinformation influenced voters' choice at the polls;
5. Investigate the influence, if any, of mis/disinformation on the outcome of the 2023 elections; and
6. Identify measures that could be adopted to mitigate the dissemination of mis/disinformation before, during, and after the 2023 elections.

## Research Methodology
The research method used is a combination of content analysis and survey which are described below:

### Content Analysis
Content analysis was used to gather information from online platforms. This study developed a Google form as its data collection instrument. The instrument, which was designed and subjected to a peer review during a Google Meet consultative meeting involving academic researchers, research assistants and analysts, was later deployed to track mis/disinfor-mation dominating the public sphere before, during, and after the 2023 elections. A 14-item coding schedule was converted to Google form and administered by a cohort of nine research assistants between June 12-24, 2023. The study covers February 2022 to July 2023. This period covers the commencement of political activities for the 2023 elections as declared by the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It took care of the pre, during, and after the 2023 elections. This report of the content analysis addresses research questions 1-3 above.

### Data Collection Procedure
Part of the procedures for the data collection was the adoption of the online and social media search,

using specific keywords such as "2023 election fact-checks", "2023 election fake news", "Cross-Check Nigeria, "Dubawa Nigeria", "fact-checks on Twitter", "fact-checks on Facebook", "fact-checks on Instagram", etc., to determine what constitutes mis/disinformation.

Data gathered through the search engine were later stored on a Google spreadsheet for ease of data cleaning and analysis. At the close of the research instrument, a total of 355 responses were collected and stored in a database that was built using the spreadsheet.

To clean up the data, the identification of the relevant false claims in the selected digital media was determined by fulfilling certain parameters:

We included mis/disinformation identified primarily as fact-checking reports that check and verify factual statements and claims with the aim of establishing the truthfulness, correctness or authenticity of the assertion based on verifiable facts (n=263);

· We excluded statements/ claims that were published as opinions and innuendoes on digital/social media platforms (n=56);
· We excluded contents similar to claims that were not fact-checkable (n=21)
· We also excluded content that were neither claims nor innuendoes etc., (n=13).
· Claims that did not focus on the 2023 elections (n=2) were also excluded.

In essence, while a total of 355 responses were received, 263 false claims were relevant for the analysis of this study. A total of 92 responses were considered invalid and, consequently, excluded.

**Survey**
There have been many reports of political narratives and contents that have been either described or established as mis/disinformation. However, the magnitude and impact if any, of mis/disinformation in the period leading up to the 2023 elections, as well as during and after the elections, needs to be empirically established.

This survey, therefore, sought to provide some empirical evidence

upon which an informed conclusion could be reached. With a structured 29-item questionnaire, the study sought to establish the dominant issues in mis/disinfor-mation before, during and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria; identify sources, key channels and platforms that were used to convey mis/disinformation during these periods; determine the extent to which fake news, mis/disinfor-mation influenced voters' choice at the polls in Nigeria's 2023 elections; investigate the influence (if any) of mis/disinformation on the outcome of the 2023 elections in Nigeria; as well as identify measures that could have be adopted to mitigate the spread of fake news and mis/disinformation before during and after the 2023 elections.

This study adopted purposive sampling technique: Population that were 18 years and above and residing in all the geo-political zones of Nigeria were deliberately sampled. 1,532 questionnaires were administered, out of which 1,071 were returned.

Therefore, a total of 1,071 respondents from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria participated in the survey. They provided both quantitative and qualitative data which were further analysed and interpreted as presented below:

**Results of Content Analysis**
The content analysis method adopted for this study sought to achieve three main objectives: to identify mis/disinformation on social media before, during and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria; to establish the dominant issues of mis/disinformation that characterised the whole process; and document the dominant issues of mis/disinformation before, during and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

To achieve this, the unit of analysis was the dominant issues of mis/disinformation, the types of fake news, and the dominant media used to perpetrate fake news. Other units of analysis included the assessment of the critical period that witnessed much information disorder, the most common format of false information, the key sources/channels/platforms for mis/disinformation, and the main political actors/actresses at the

centre of mis/disinformation.

Identifying Types of Mis/Disinfor-mation in the Electoral Process
Mis/Misinformation in the 2023 general elections took the form of fabricated content, false connections, and false context. There were also impostor content, manipulated content, misleading content and satire/parody.

Of the 263 cases of mis/disinfor-mation recorded, the most common type was misleading content (39.5%, n=104), followed by fabricated content (28.5%, n=75) and manipulated content (9.5%, n=25%). Others include false context (8.7%, n=23), satire and parody (6.1%, n=16). Those with less frequent usage were false connections and impostor content each at (3.8%, n=10).

The pre-election period was characterised by misleading content mostly used as a form of mis/disinformation (37.3%, n=44), followed by fabricated content (25.4%, n=30) and satire/parody (11.1%, n=13) as well as manipulated content (12.7%, n=15). Aside from false context (8.5%, n=10) being used during the period, false connection and impostor content (2.5%, n=3) were each used at equal pedestal.

During the election, satire/parody was not recorded. However, misleading content remained the most common type of mis/disinformation used (57%, n=45), (for example, the 2019 photos reshared in February 2023 online to depict massive turnout for the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate Bola Tinubu's campaign in Katsina; followed by fabricated content (13.9%, n=11) such as content fabricated and shared on February 26, 2023, to claim Atiku secured 25% in 25 states and manipulated content (10%, n-8). Others were false context (7.6%, n=6), impostor content (6.8%, n=5) and false connection (5%, n=4). Post-election period, fabricated content became dominant (51.5%, n=34). Misleading content was less used (22.7%, n=15)., followed by false context (10.6%, n-7). Others include false connections and satire/parody each of which was at par (4.5%, n=3). Impostor content and manipulated were also at par each (3%, n=3).
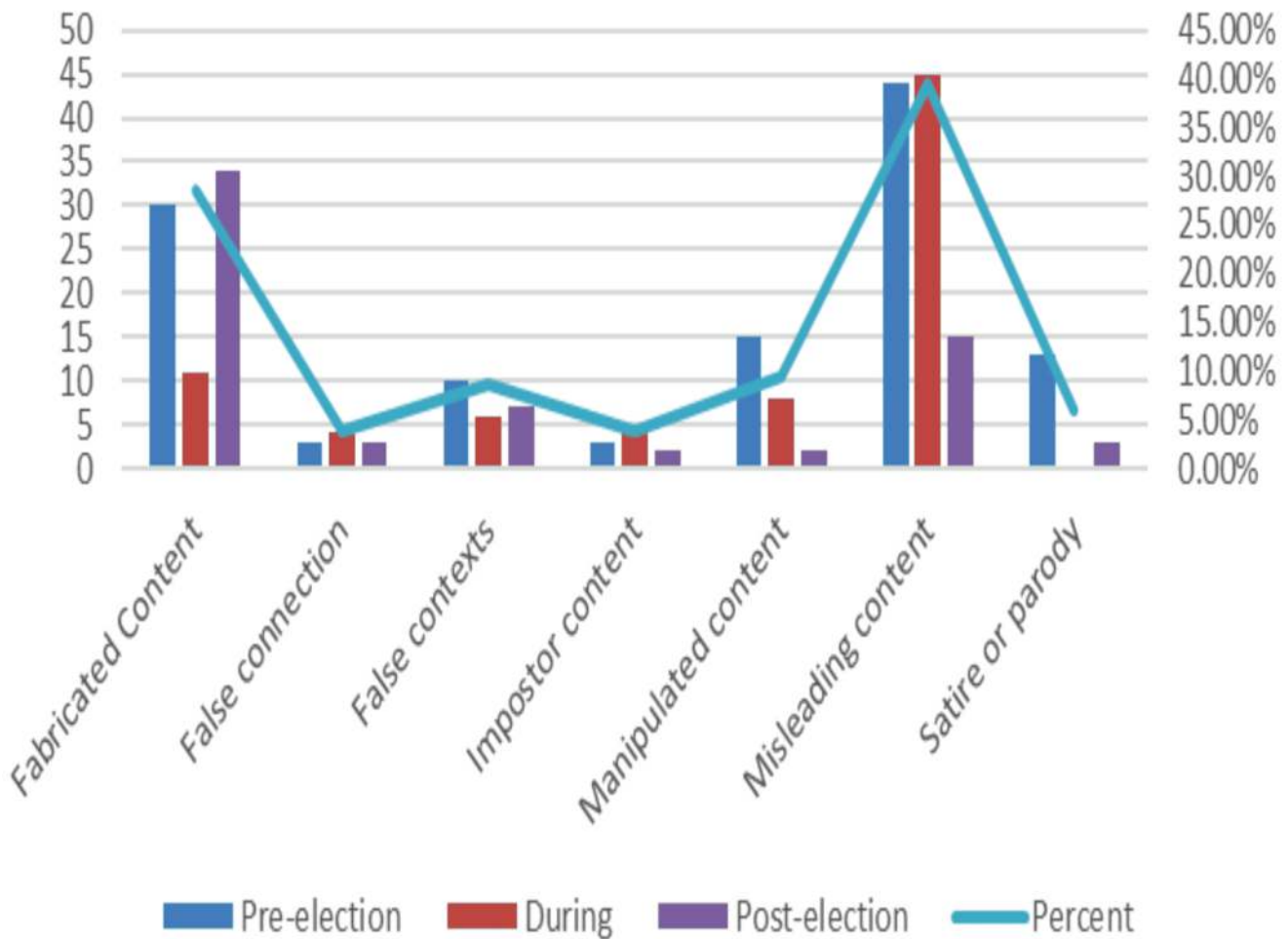
*Figure 1: Types of Mis/disinformation*

## DOMINANT ISSUES OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

The dominant issues of mis/disinformation throughout the periods include the issues of the economy, politics, religion, and social discourse, among others.

Generally, of the 263 cases, fake news (64.6%, n=170) revolved around politics, followed by issues around social discourse (13.7%, n=36) and the economy (10.3%, n=27). Only a few cases (3%, n=8) focused on religion while others stood at (8.4%, n=22).

Pre-election period, 118 cases of false news were relevant and more than half of the cases (52.5%, n=62) focused on politics, followed by social

issues (19.5%, n=23) and economy stood at (15.3%, n=18) while few cases focused on other issues (9.3%, n=11).

During the election, there were 79 cases. Of these, the dominant issues were on politics (75.9%, n=60) (for example, a claim *shared on March 1 on WhatsApp that the DSS arrested the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi.*; followed by social issues (12.7%, n=10); while issues on economy recorded 6 cases (7.6%). Only one relevant case (1.3%) was recorded.

Post-election, 66 issues were recorded. Almost half of these had to do with politics (72.7%,

n=48). Fake news on the economy and social issues remained at par each at (4.5%, n=3). Religion recorded very few (3%, n=2), a parodied account on Twitter which claimed on March 26, 2023, that Boss Mustapha, a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, said, "I am now 100% against Binani becoming the Governor of Adamawa as it goes completely against the teachings of Islam," while 10 other cases (15%) were also tracked.
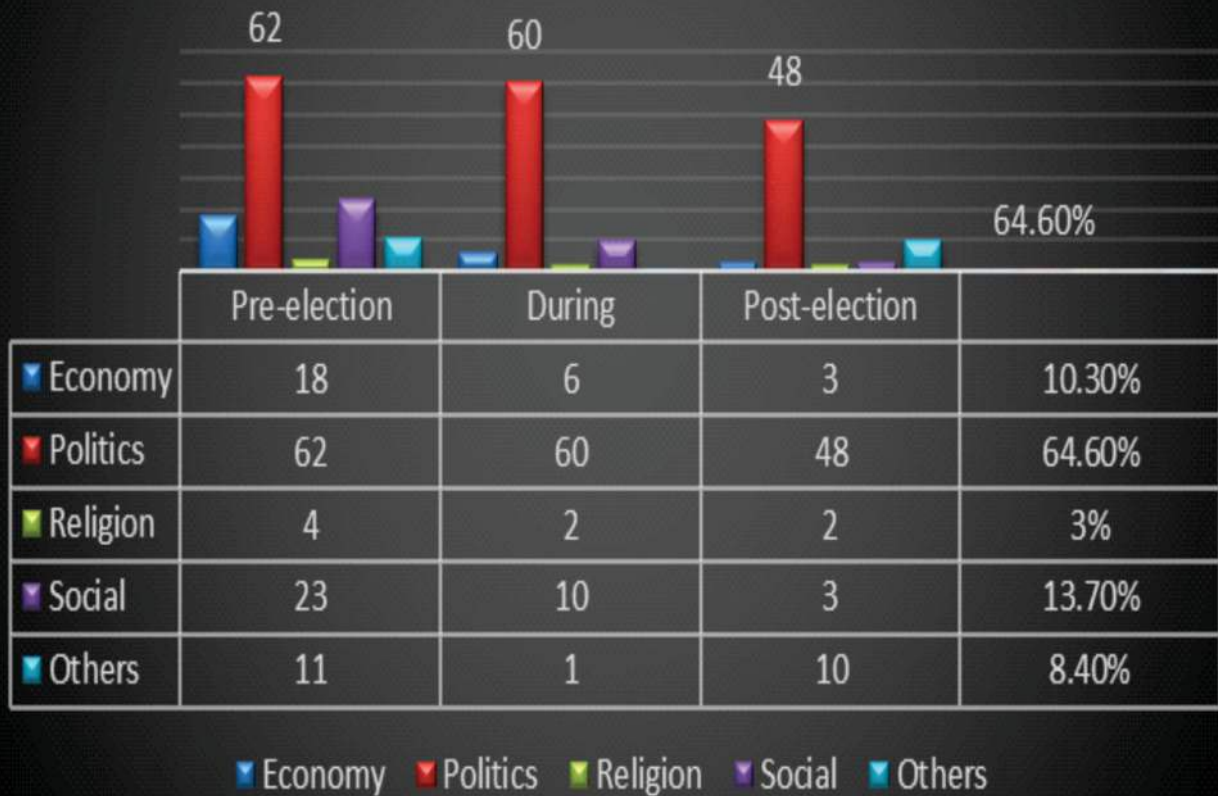
**Figure 2:** *Dominant issues of mis/disinformation*

## DOMINANT SOCIAL MEDIA USED

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp are the dominant social media platforms that were used to perpetrate false information in the 2023 electoral process. Throughout these periods, more than half of the mis/disinformation (51.7%, n=136) emanated from Twitter followed by Facebook (22.6%, n=64). WhatsApp was less used (4.9%, n=13), Instagram (0.7%, n=2) while other media were scantly used (17.9%, n=47).

Pre-election period, Twitter was the most dominant social media used (39.8%, n=47) (an example is a story shared in January 2023 on Twitter that Baze University owned by Labour Party vice

presidential candidate, Yusuf Baba-Ahmed is the costliest university in Nigeria," closely followed by Facebook (28.8%, n=34). WhatsApp was less used (4.2%, 5), with an insignificant amount on Instagram (0.9%, n=1). Others featured very scantly (26.3%, n=31).

During the election, Twitter maintained its lead (54.4%, n=43), followed by Facebook (25.3%, n=20) and WhatsApp (5.1%, n=4), while only one item was featured on Instagram (1.3%, n=1). Other media were less used (12.7%, n=10).

Post-election, Twitter remained dominant (69.7%, n=46). Facebook came second (15.2%,

n=10). Facebook was used to share a claim in March 2023 that "the president-elect has said he will work with China if US president Joe Biden doesn't personally congratulate him." WhatsApp (6.1%, n=4), and other media (9%, n=6) were less used.
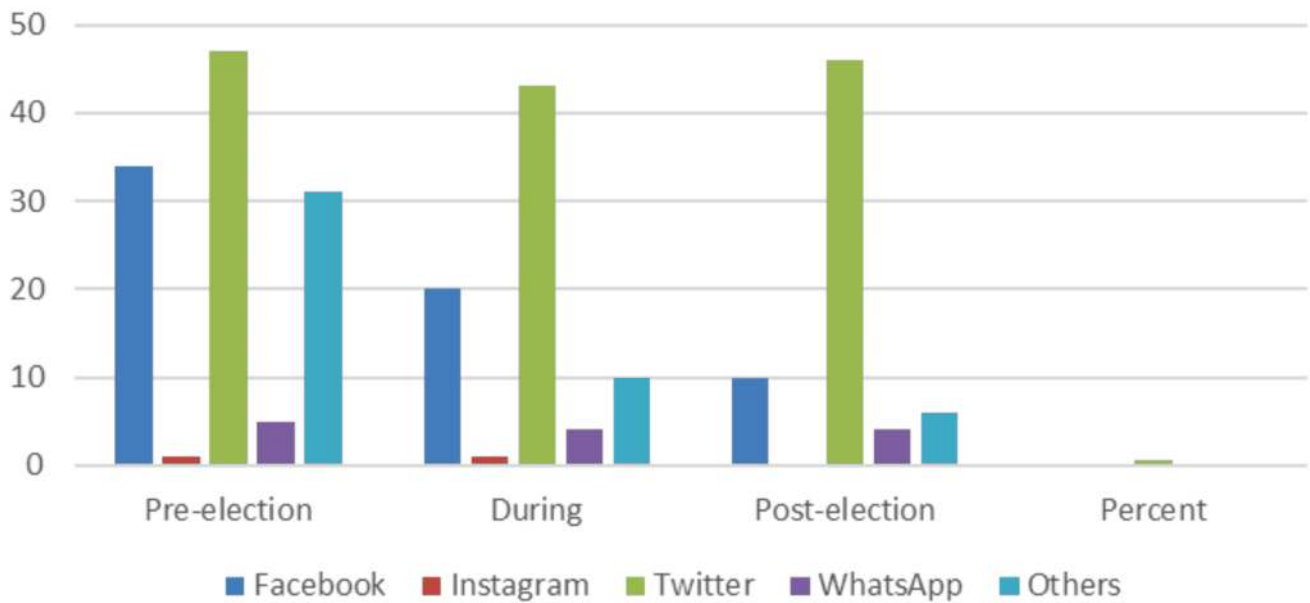
# DOMINANT SOCIAL MEDIA USED FOR MIS/DISINFORMATION



*Figure 3: Dominant social media used*

## ASSESSING CRITICAL PERIODS OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

Information disorder held sway in the pre-election, election, and post-election periods. Of these, the pre-election period witnessed the highest number of fake news (46.6%, n=120). In February 2022 "**the photo of an unknown aged man was circulated by one Bayo on Twitter as Engr Segun Oni (an aspirant)**. The cases during the period surpassed what was viral during the election (30%, n=79), while the post-election period witnessed less volume of information pollution (24.3%, n=64).
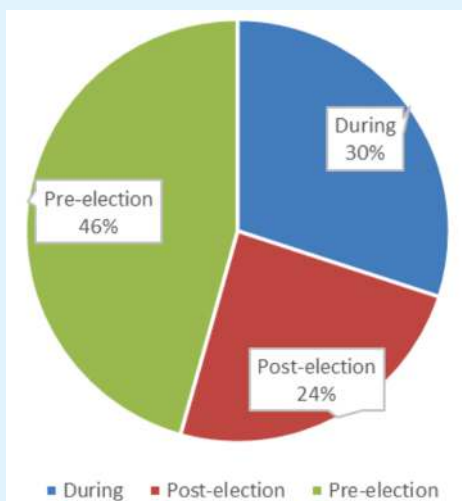
## FORMATS OF STORY



*Figure. 4: Critical periods of mis/disinformation*

We were also interested in the format of presentation of the mis/disinformation content in different social media platforms tracked. The formats include audio, video and multimedia formats. In general, the highest percentage of fake news was conveyed in multimedia formats (86.7%, n=228) followed by video (12.9%, n=34). Audio usage was very insignificant (0.4%, n=1).

Pre-election period, most mis/disinformation stories were conveyed in multimedia format (89.8%, n=106) with far fewer items appearing in video (10.2%, n=12). No case featured in audio format before the election.

**During** the election, the majority of mis/disinformation news also appeared in multimedia format (82.3%, n=65) while a few were conveyed in video (17.7%, n=14). For instance, a WhatsApp post in circulation on March 12, 2023, **"Bola Tinubu Support Organisation (BTSO) was giving out N25,000 to every Nigerian citizen"** appeared in a multimedia format.

**Post**-election witnessed one item conveyed in an audio format (0.4%, n=1). While only a few emerged in videos (12%, n=8), most appeared in multimedia (86.4%, n=57).

## FORMATS USED TO CONVEY MIS/DISINFORMATION
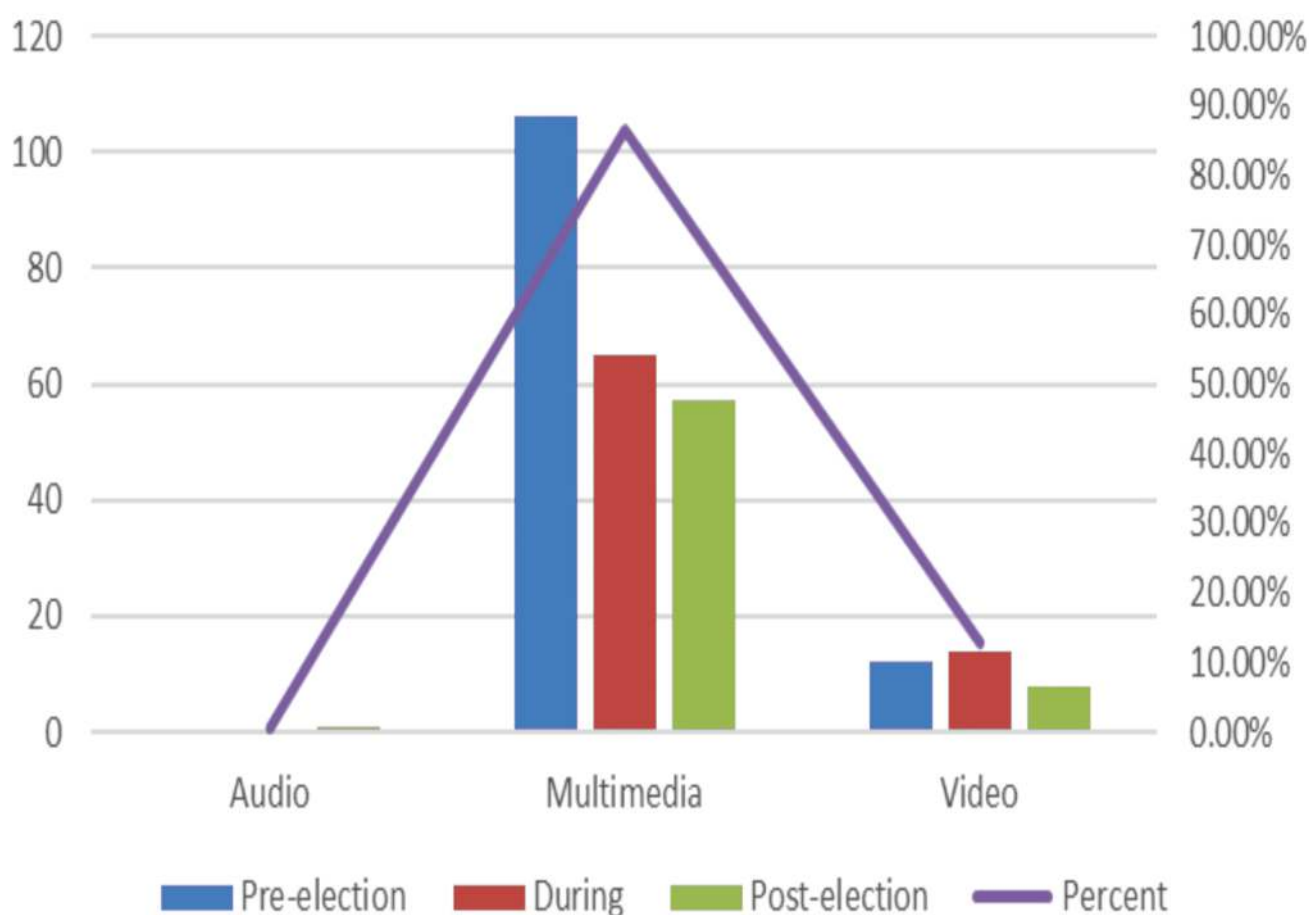


*Figure 5:* *Formats of mis/disinformation*

## MAIN SOURCES OF STORY

Results show that members of the public (48.7%, n=128) the major sources of mis/disinformation in the 2023 electoral process, followed by politicians (19.4%, n=51) and unknown sources (9.9%, n=27). Data also showed public figures (8.7%, n=23) perpetrated mis/disinformation and political parties (1.9%, n=5). Aside from other sources of mis/disinformation at (10.3%, n=27), religious leaders (0.4%, n=1) and community leaders (0.8%, n=2) were sources of negligible cases of mis/disinformation.

In the pre-election period, members of the public (44.1%, n=52) were the main sources of most mis/disinformation, followed by politicians (24.6%, n=29) such as a claim by Senator Dino Melaye in February 2022 that "no politician from APC commended Buhari for signing the Electoral Act into law" and public figures (13.6%, n=16). Aside from fewer cases originating from community leaders (0.8%, n=1) and religious leaders (0.8%, n=1), unknown sources (11.9%, n=14) and others (4.2%, n=5) were also sources of fake news.

During the election period, members of the public (60.8%, n=48) constituted the main source of mis/disinformation, followed by politicians (12.7%, n=51). While nothing was traced to religious leaders during the period, public figures (5.1%, n=4) and political parties (2.5%, n=2) instigated fake news. Unknown persons (7.6%, n=6) and others (10%, n=8) were also sources of fake news.

In the post-election period, members of the public (42.4%, n=28) remain the dominant sources of mis/disinformation, followed by politicians (18.2%, n=12). Political parties (4.5%, n=3), and public figures (4.5%, n=3) were sources in fewer cases while unknown sources (9.1%, n=6) and other actors (21.2%, n=14) were major sources.
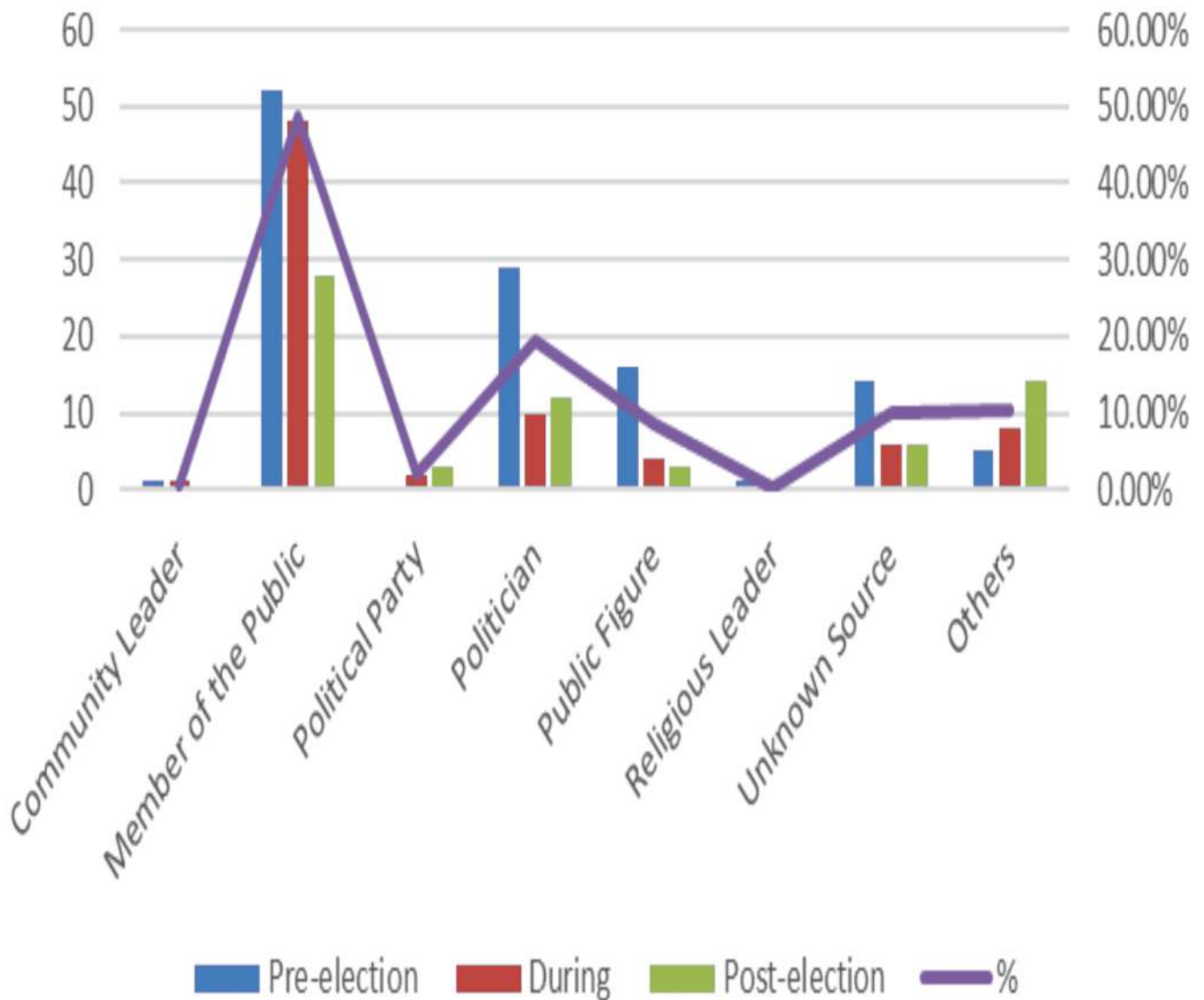
**MAIN SOURCES OF MIS/DISINFORMATION**

*Legend:* Pre-election, During, Post-election, %

***Figure 6:*** *The main source of mis/disinformation*

## DATELINE OF STORIES

Part of the interest of this study was identifying the place and time mis/disinformation occurred. The majority of the identified issues occurred locally in Nigeria (98.9%, n=259) unlike very few cases, yet weighty issues of misinformation, connected to foreign lands (1.1%, n=3).

For instance, the three major cases of foreign stories occurred less before the election (e.g., a video, in April 2022, of cloned drone footage of an armed bandit cooking in the forest purportedly shared to be bandits in Nigeria but turned out to be a video of a cattle-rustler in Kenya) and more during the election (e.g., Senator Dino Melaye shared a video in March 2023 of a session in the UK parliament and falsely captioned it, "**Game over for the APC as UK parliament confirms election was rigged**)" and another one (shared by a Twitter user in March 2023 of a screenshot of a purported AP headline showing the president of the USA, Joe Biden, calling for the cancellation of Nigeria's presidential election).
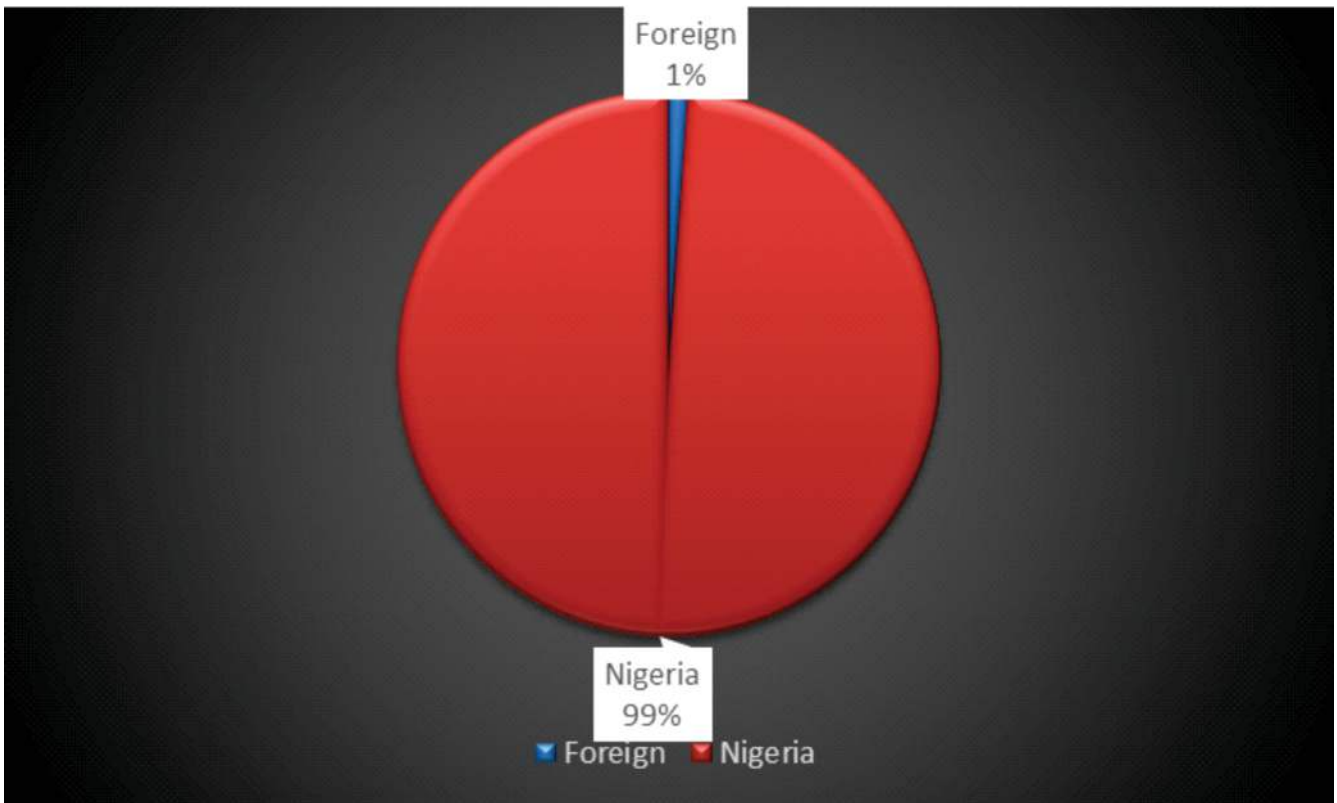
*Figure 7. Dateline of stories*

## GENDER OF MIS/DISINFORMATION PERPETRATORS

Results show most mis/disinformation perpetrators were male (91.6%, n=241) and, in very few cases, females also contributed at (8.4%, n=22).
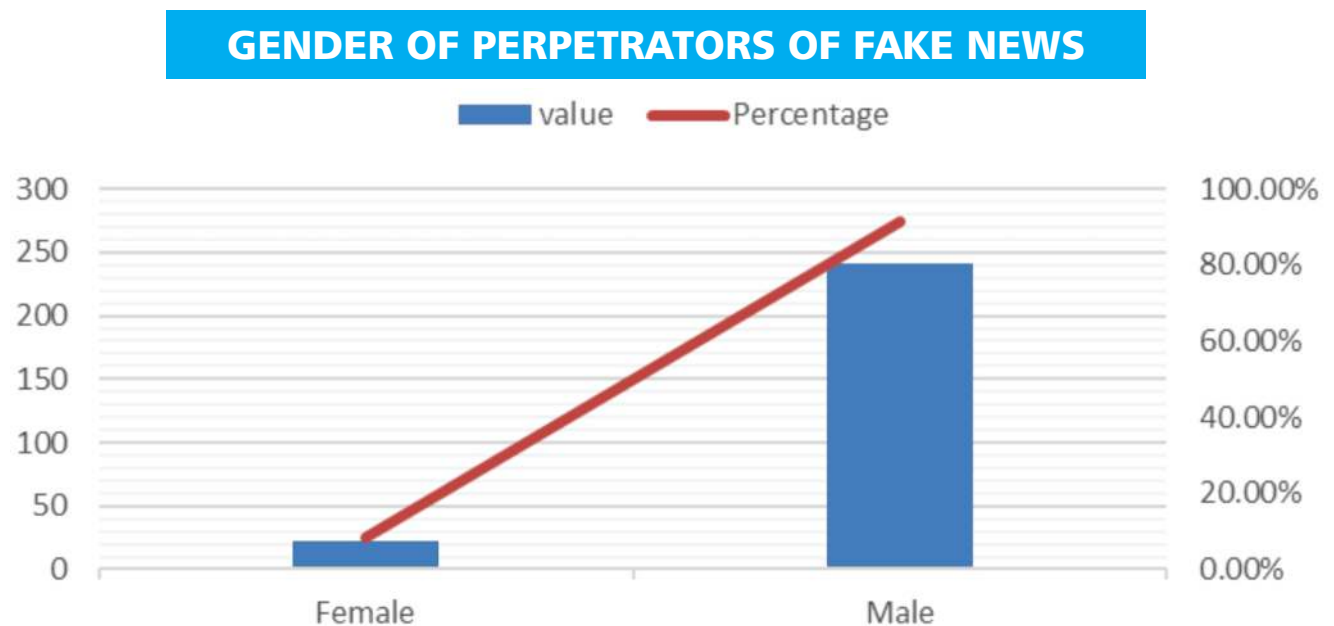


*Figure 8. Gender of mis/disinformation perpetrators*

## DIRECTION OF STORIES

Much of the mis/disinformation during the electoral periods was directed to impact negatively (at 63.1%, n=166) and deliberately on the targets of mis/disinformation, followed by viral neutral cases (31.2%, n=62) and very few cases that played positive roles (5.7%, n=15).
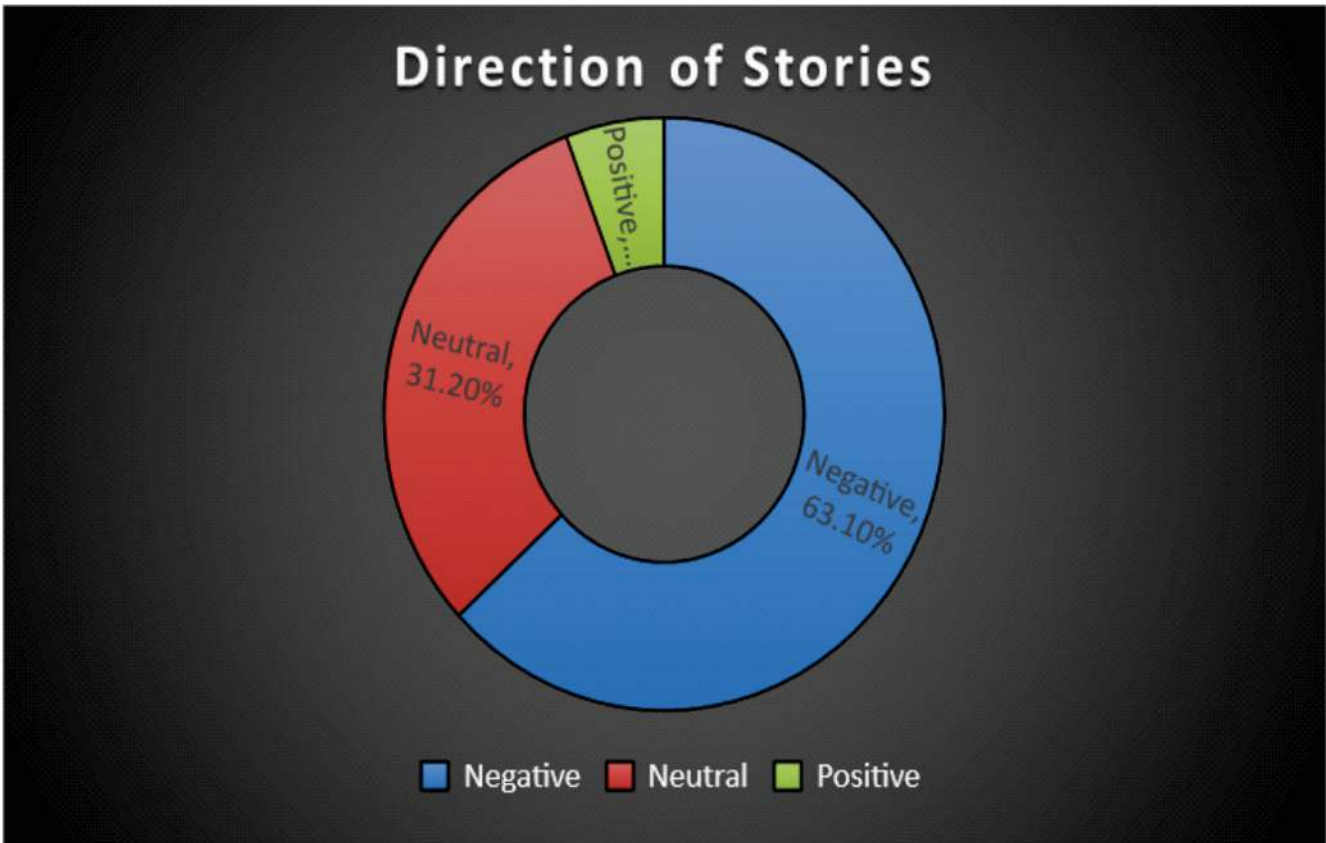
**Figure 9.** *Direction of stories*

## TONE/LANGUAGE OF MIS/DISINFORMATION SHARED

Findings show that the tone of mis/disinformation in the 2023 electoral process was generally inflammatory, sensational, and moderate. Specifically, the tone of fake news was sensational (46%, n=121) and, on some occasions either inflammatory (at 27%, n=71) or moderate (27%, n=71).
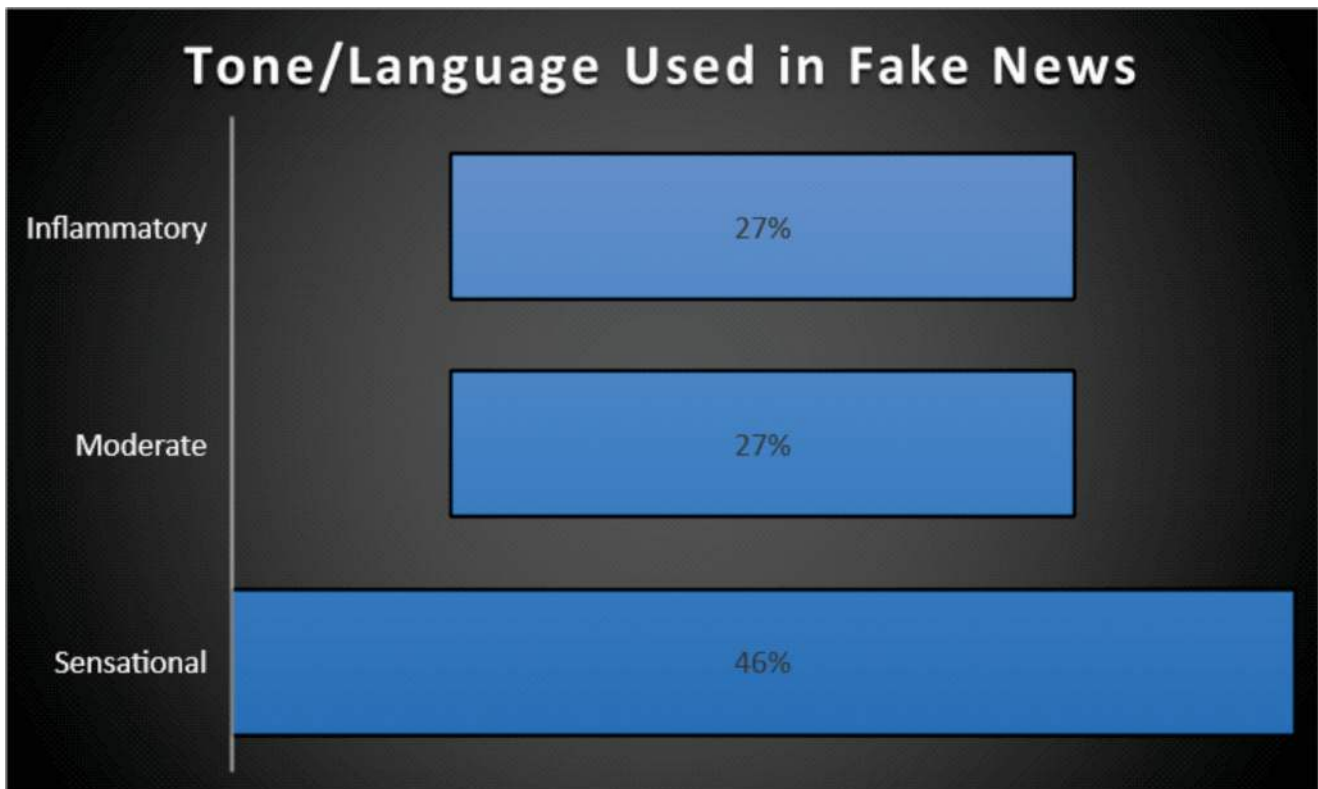


*Figure 10. Tone/language of stories*

# MAIN POLITICIANS MENTIONED IN CASES OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the presidential candidate of APC and incumbent President, was the most mentioned (23.2%, n=61) in more than half of the cases of mis/disinformation recorded, closely followed by Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of Labour Party (LP) (20.2%, n=53) and other aspirants (10.6%, n=28). Party officials (5.7%, n=15) and state governors were also mentioned (5.3%, n=14), including Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of PDP (4.6%, n=12). Rabiu Kwankwaso, the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) was mentioned (12%, n=3) the least among known politicians. Others include State/National Assembly members (2.7%, n=7).

In the pre-election period, Bola Tinubu was mentioned the most in mis/disinformation cases (17.8%, n=21), followed closely by Peter Obi (16.1%, n=19) and other unidentified aspirants (11%, n=13). The percentage for party officials was (6.8%, n=8) and Atiku Abubakar (6%, n=7), followed by state governors (5.1%, n=6) and National Assembly members (5.1%, n=6). Other persons (29.7%, n=33) were also mentioned in various cases.

During the election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu was mentioned the most in mis/disinformation news stories (20.3%, n=16), closely followed by Peter Obi (19%, n=15) and other unidentified aspirants (17.2%, n=14). State governors were next (8.9%, n=7), followed by Atiku Abubakar

(5.1%, n=4) party officials (2.5%, n=2), Rabiu Kwankwaso (1.3%, n=1) and State/National Assembly members (1.3%, n=1). Other unknown persons were also mentioned (24.1%, n=19).

In the post-election era, Bola Ahmed Tinubu remained the most mentioned politician (36.4%, n=24), again closely followed by Peter Obi (28.8%, n=19) and party officials (7.6%, n=5). The least mentioned were Atiku Abubakar (1.5%, n=1), state governors (1.5%, n=1) and other aspirants (1.5%, n=1). Aside from other unknown persons that had (22.7%, n=18), Rabiu Kwankwaso and State/National Assembly members were not mentioned in fake stories in the post-election period.
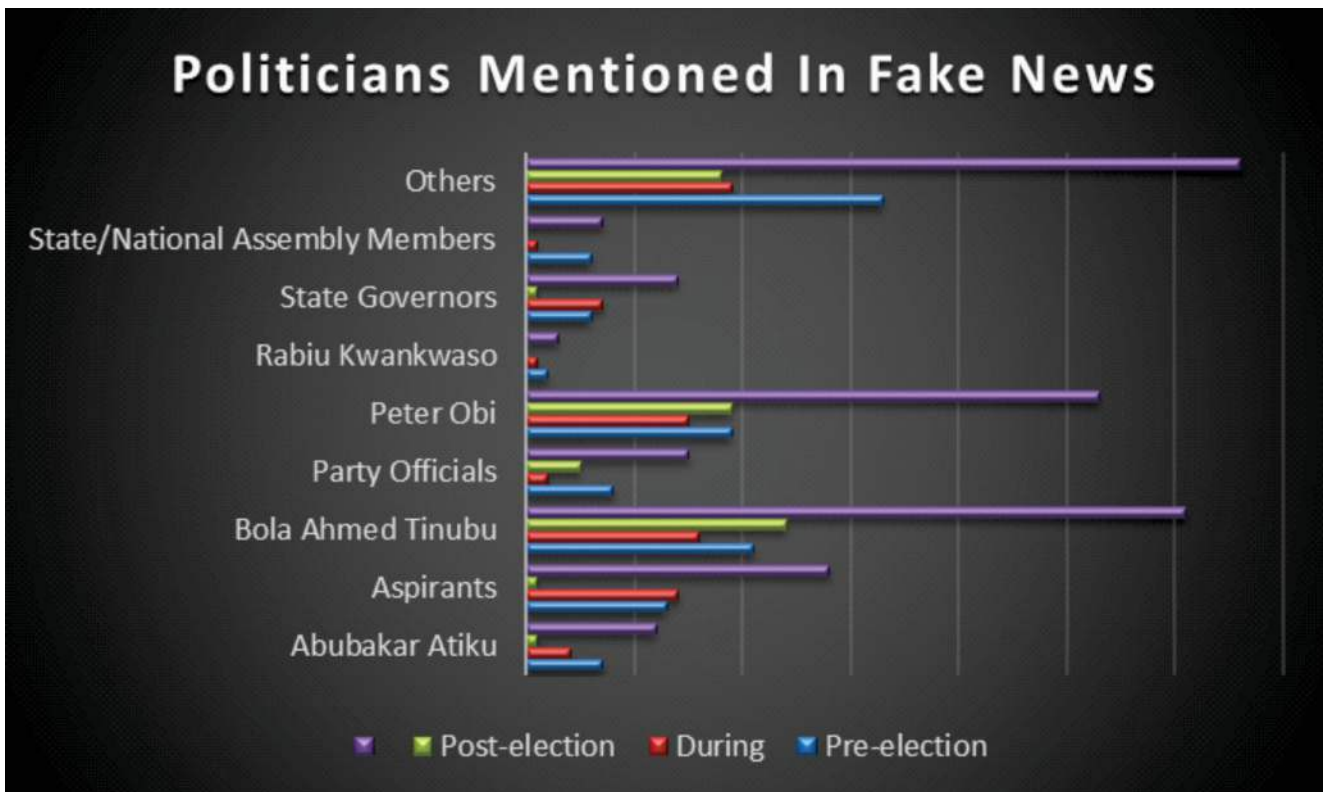


*Figure 11. Politicians mentioned in mis/disinformation stories*

# BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria have come and gone, but the events and incidents before, during, and after, are still reverberating and shaping the contemporary political communication discourse, especially at this period that many elections petition cases, including the presidential, are still pending in various Elections Tribunals around the country. Some of the key incidents recorded before, during, and after the 2023 general elections, included electoral violence as exemplified by attacks on voters, ballot box snatching and smashing, harassment of voters resulting in voter apathy, and ethno-religious profiling and stereotyping. In all these, observers and communication experts fingered the preponderance of fake news,

hate speech, misinformation and disinformation as the key enabler.

Whilst electoral violence is not new in Nigeria's political landscape, however, it wasn't until the 2015 general elections that misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech got into the consciousness of Nigerians. The 2023 elections moved a notch higher in terms of volume and frequency of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech against political opponents and their political parties.

The media has remained at the centre of this emerging trend of weaponizing information through deepfakes, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, and the social media is the major conveyor because of their accessibility

and the functionality that enables users to create and share contents, even when in transit. Social media has turned many people to citizen journalists with inordinate urge to be the first to share content without any care about the integrity of the information. This tendency manifests across the popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

This survey on the appraisal of misinformation and disinformation before, during, and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria, therefore, is a bold step towards contributing to efforts at countering the prevalence of mis/disinformation on social media and de-weaponizing information in the political space.
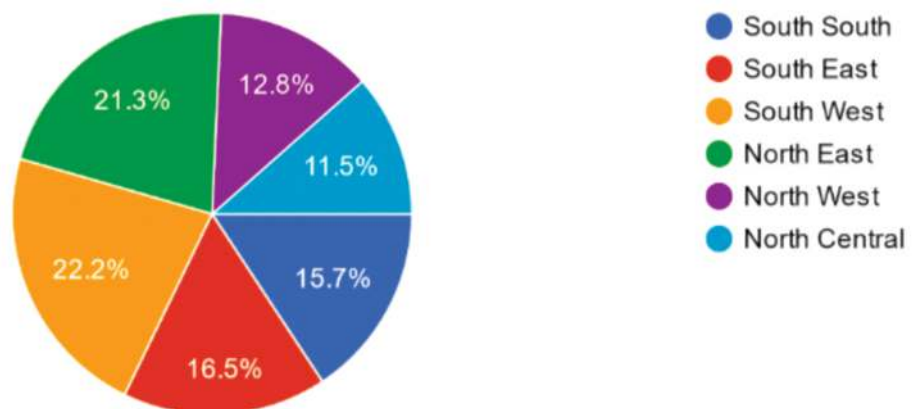
## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF SURVEY

## 1.0 DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

**Figure 1:** *Geographical zones of respondents*

Indicate your geo-political zone?
1,071 responses



- South South
- South East
- South West
- North East
- North West
- North Central

21.3% / 12.8% / 11.5% / 15.7% / 16.5% / 22.2%

Given the above finding in figure 1, survey participants from the South West geo-political zone dominated the study. This may be a reflection of the high literacy level in the zone over and above other geo-political zones in the country. This

finding is also suggestive of the fact that the "Lagos factor" could be responsible for the dominance of the South West zone in the study. Lagos is the most populous state in Nigeria and a commercial hub in the African continent, where active users of social media and digital

natives are mostly found. Importantly, however, figure 1 clearly shows that all geo-political zones in the country were duly and adequately represented in the study as none of the zones has less than 11% of the survey participants

*Figure 2:* *Gender of respondents*

## Gender
1,071 responses



- ● Male
- ● Female

38.7%

61.3%
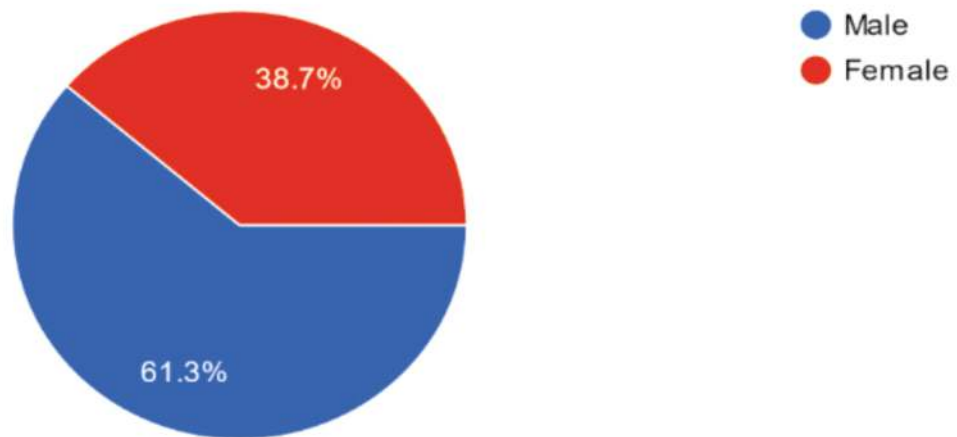
The finding in figure 2 above further establishes the usual trends in Nigeria, where males have always dominated in the scheme of things: politics, economy, education, technology, leadership, etc. This finding may then be interpreted to imply that the digital media activism and exploration in Nigeria is widely dominated by the males with almost two-third of the survey participants in the male category. This finding is consistent with many other previous studies affirming the dominance of the males in almost all spheres of the polity.

*Figure 3:* *Age distribution of respondents*

## Age (years)
1,071 responses



- ● 18-25
- ● 26-35
- ● 36-45
- ● 46-55
- ● 56-75
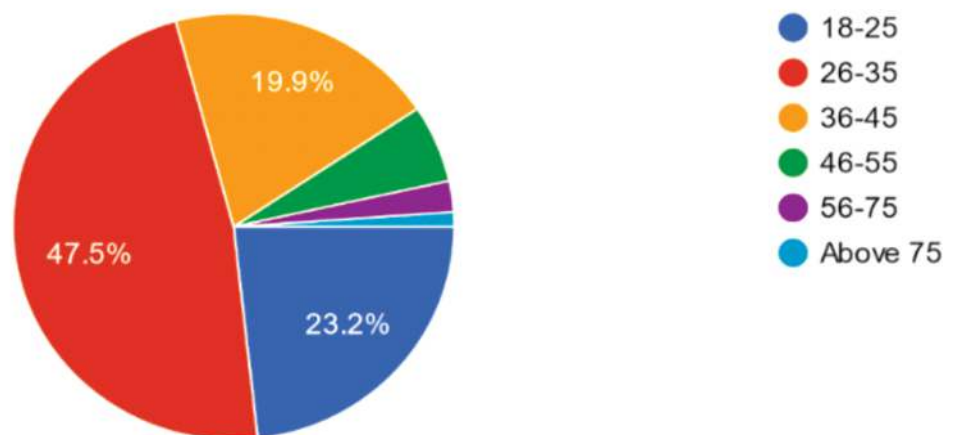- ● Above 75

19.9%

47.5%

23.2%

Figure 3 further confirms the activeness of the younger generation, popularly called digital natives, on social media. This may also be connected to the route or manner the survey instrument of this study was administered. The survey instrument, which was administered electronically through Google Form, reflects the active presence and online engagement of young people, especially within the age bracket of 26-35.

Similarly, the same trend is discovered, as reflected in figure 3, that participants within the age bracket of 18-25, who fall within the category of digital natives or netizens, participated in this study. It is understandable that ages 56-75 and above recorded the lowest level of participation in this survey as they fall within the category of people with technophobia and somewhat inactive on digital platforms.

**Figure 4:** *Education status of respondents*

## Educational Qualification
1,071 responses



As expected, first degree holders are in the majority (54.6 percent) in the education status of respondents. Figure 4 further reveals that Nigerians seem to have embraced Bachelor's Degree (B.Sc.) more than Higher National Diploma (HND) because of the uncertainties surrounding HND. However, figure 4 reflects that the survey participants are generally widely educated.

**Figure 5:** *Occupation of respondents*

## Occupation
1,071 responses
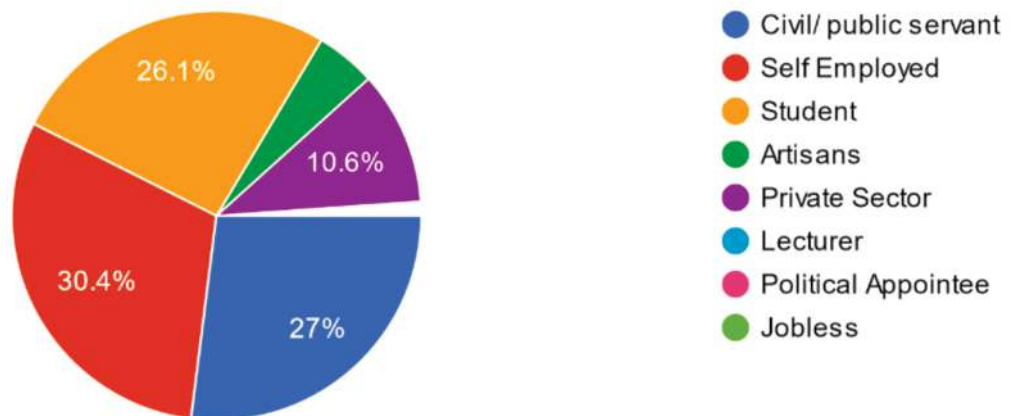


Three categories of participants dominated this survey, viz: the self-employed, lecturers, and students. Figure 5 further lends credence and shows a strong connection between its finding and the findings in the education and age demographics of the survey participants.

The education variable of this survey indicates the dominance of the first-degree holders while participants within the age bracket of 18-35 also massively participated in the study. This may, therefore, imply that the latter findings seem related to those that constitute the three categories of the self-employed, lecturers, and students in figure 5.

*Figure 6:* *Marital status of respondents*

## Marital Status
1,071 responses



Legend:
- Married
- Single
- Seperated
- Divorced
- Widowed

(62.7% Single, 28.9% Married)
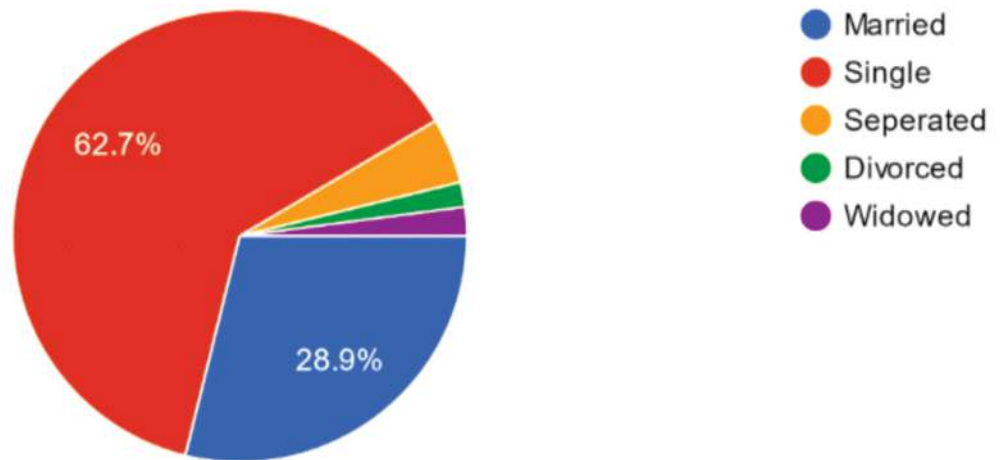
The finding in figure 6 indicates the dominance of those who are single, which accounts for 63% of the survey participants. This finding may not be surprising considering the nature of this study, which focuses on social media, and the dominant users/players on social media, popularly called digital natives or netizens, fall within the single marital demography. More so, the fact that the survey was conducted online or electronically may explain the dominance of single marital demography in the study.

## 1.1 SOURCES OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

*Figure 7:* *Familiarity with mis/disinformation*

1. Are you familiar with misinformation / disinformation circulating in Nigeria before, during after the 2023 elections?
1,071 responses



Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Can't say

(81.4% Yes, 10.6% No, 7.9% Can't say)
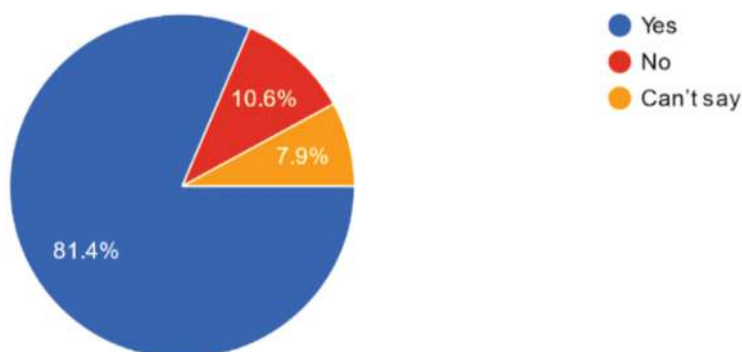
The finding in figure 7 of this survey is not surprising considering the dominant age bracket, education, and relationship of the participants with digital media. The affirmation of familiarity with mis/disinformation may be a function of the active presence and online engagement of the survey participants. Interestingly, most of the posts/news on mis/disinformation before, during, and after the 2023 elections, took place on social/digital media. Therefore, the affirmation by over 80% of the survey participants may be connected to the youthfulness and level of education and their presence on digital media.

*Figure 8: Reading of posts/news online which was later discovered as false*

## 2. Have you at any time before, during or after 2023 elections received or read posts/news items online which you later found out was false?
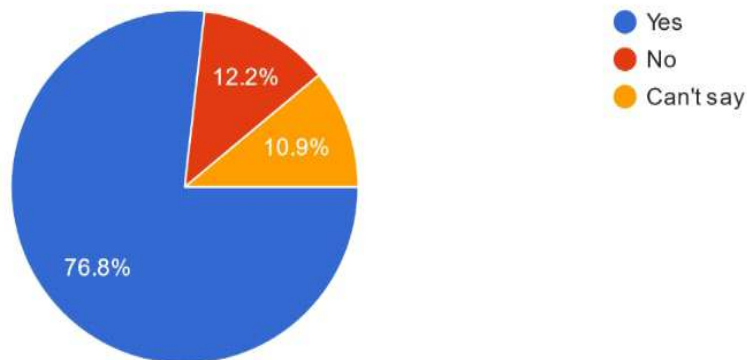
1,071 responses



Figure 8 shows that the overwhelming majority of the survey participants (81.4%) were not only aware or familiar with mis/disinformation b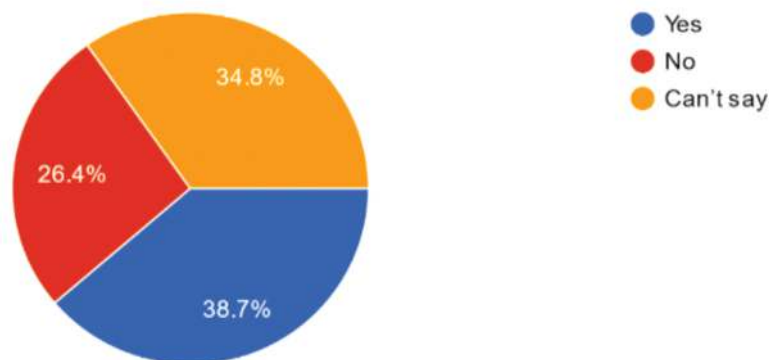efore, during and after the 2023 elections, they also, largely (76.8%), received and read online posts or news items that were later found to be false. The implication of this finding speaks to the fact that the survey participants appear to have demonstrated active online presence first for being familiar, and secondly, for discovering that such posts earlier received and read were actually false.

*Figure 9: Identities of authors of false online posts/news*

## 3. Were the posts you found to be false before, during or after the elections have their authors' identities stated?

1,071 responses



It is not surprising to discover in figure 9 that the identities of authors of false posts or news before, during and after 2023 elections were stated. This may not be unconnected with the open-door policy, liberalisation, and lack of gatekeeping model that characterize the social media system. Every author on social media, where most of the false posts or news flourish, enjoys excessive openness and plurality, which may be responsible for such false posts.

**Figure 10:** *Identification of authors of mis/disinformation content received*

4. Who would you identify as the authors / sources of misinformation and disinformation content you read/received before, during or after the 2023 elections? (You can choose more than one option)
1,071 responses



- Candidates
- Political Party officials
- Random supporters
- Social media Influencers
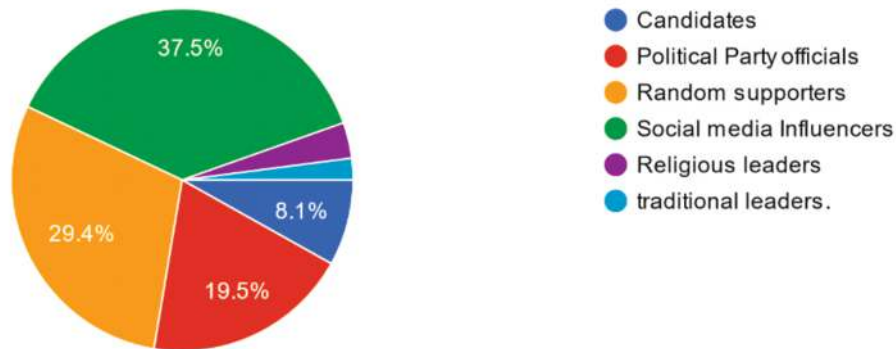- Religious leaders
- traditional leaders.

Figure 10 confirms the overwhelming influence of social media influencers and what they are capable of doing in the digital space. Their authorship of false posts and news before, during and after the 2023 general elections dominates other social media actors in this survey. This may not be unconnected with the fact that most of the political parties find the engagement of social media influencers more strategic and effective in controlling social media and achieving their political agenda.

**Figure 11:** *Volume and frequency of misinformation and disinformation*

5. How would you rate the volume and frequency of misinformation and disinformation before, during and after the election?
1,071 responses



- Extremely high
- High
- Low
- Extremely low
- Can't say
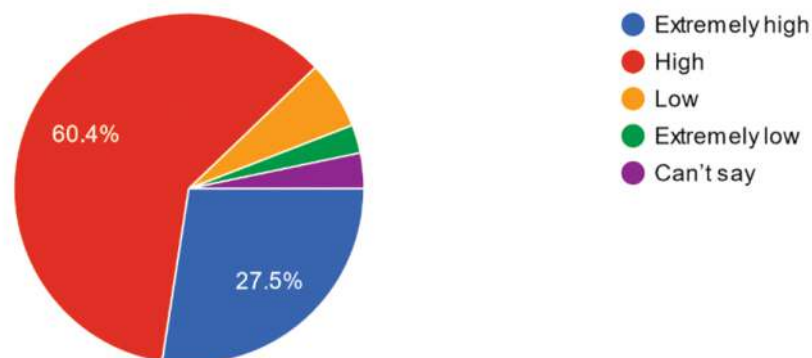
The implications of the finding in figure 11 are alarming and require some attention. If the political space before, during, and after the 2023 elections, witnessed 88% volume/frequency of misinformation and disinformation, the open-door and over liberalisation of the social media may need some critical attention. This finding further confirms the inapplicability of gatekeeping theory of the media in the social media landscape.

*Figure 12: Period of misinformation and disinformation prevalence*

## 6. Which election period do you think that dis/misinformation was more prevalent?
1,071 responses



- ● Pre-election
- ● During election
- ● post-election
- ● All of the above
- ● None of the above
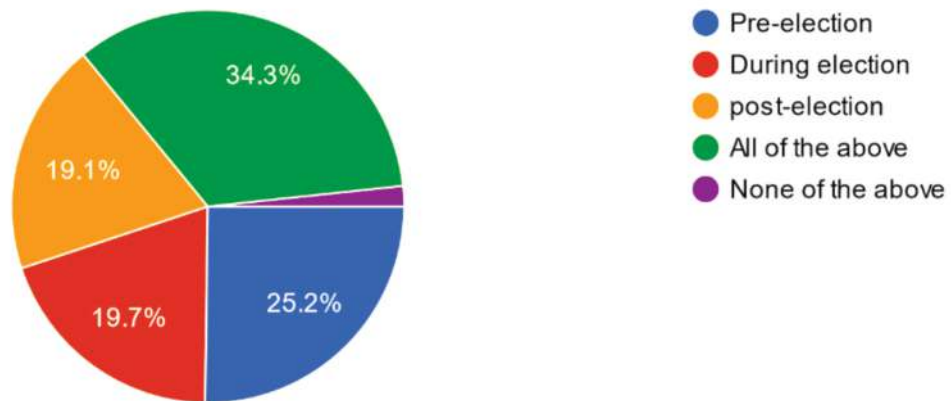
There is a strong connection between the findings in figure 11 and that of figure 12. As shown in figure 11, the spread and prevalence of mis/disinformation was overwhelming with 88%. Based on this finding, it is then apropos and logical to conclude that the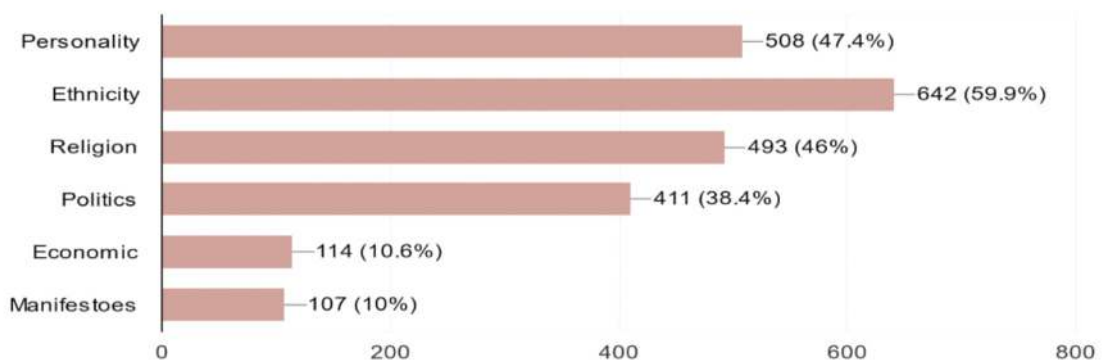 spread and prevalence of mis/disinformation permeated all the seasons related to the 2023 elections in Nigeria: pre-election season, the election season, and post-election season.

## 1.2 DOMINANT ISSUES OF MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

*Figure 13: Dominant issues of misinformation and disinformation*

## 7. What issue would you consider dominant in the spread of misinformation and disinformation before, during and after the elections? Tick all that apply.
1,071 responses



| | |
|---|---|
| Personality | 508 (47.4%) |
| Ethnicity | 642 (59.9%) |
| Religion | 493 (46%) |
| Politics | 411 (38.4%) |
| Economic | 114 (10.6%) |
| Manifestoes | 107 (10%) |

The finding in figure 13 reflects largely what the general atmosphere of the political space looked like before, during and after the 2023 elections. More clearly, the political space during the 2023 elections in Nigeria was largely dominated by all the variables in the figure: personality, ethnicity, religion, and politics. It may be interpreted that the survey participants seem to be very active and had a deep political involvement and engagement which reflected in their opinions.

*Figure 14: Recognition of election-related misinformation and disinformation posts*

8. Did you recognise election-related posts as a piece of misinformation/disinformation when you received them?

1,071 responses
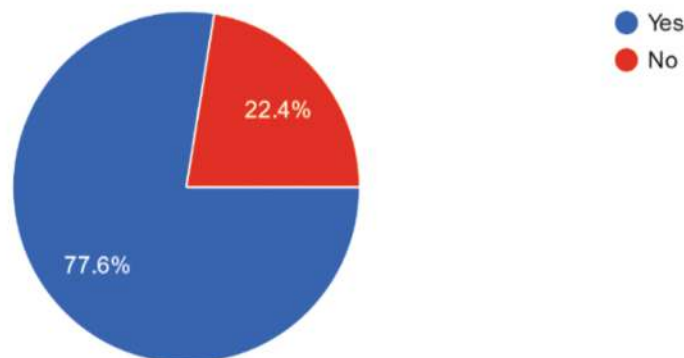


The dominant opinion in figure 14 is not surprising considering the political engagement and activism on social media of the survey participants. The affirmation of the recognition of election-related misinformation and disinformation posts may imply a good level of political consciousness owning to social media activism

*Figure 15: Action taken after receiving negative information about candidate or political party*

9. What did you do when you received a piece of negative information about a candidate or a political party before, during and after the elections?

1,071 responses
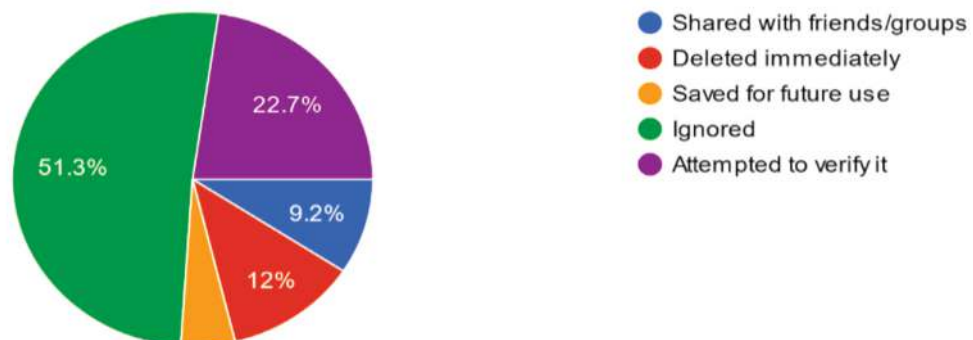


The finding in figure 15 reflects the interplay of information seeking on social media and the application of media and information literacy or the critical mind of the survey participants. With a response rate of 51% of the respondents who ignored negative information about candidate or political party, and 22% response rate that claimed deleting the same kind of information about candidate or political party, it may be interpreted that the survey participants are critical of the information they receive and have media/digital literacy skill. It may also imply that individual or other people's experiences in the past guided and influenced the actions taken by the majority of the survey respondents.

**Figure 16:** *Social media and encounter with mis/disinformation*

10. On which of the social media did you encounter misinformation/disinformation related to the electoral process? (TikTok all that apply)
1,071 responses
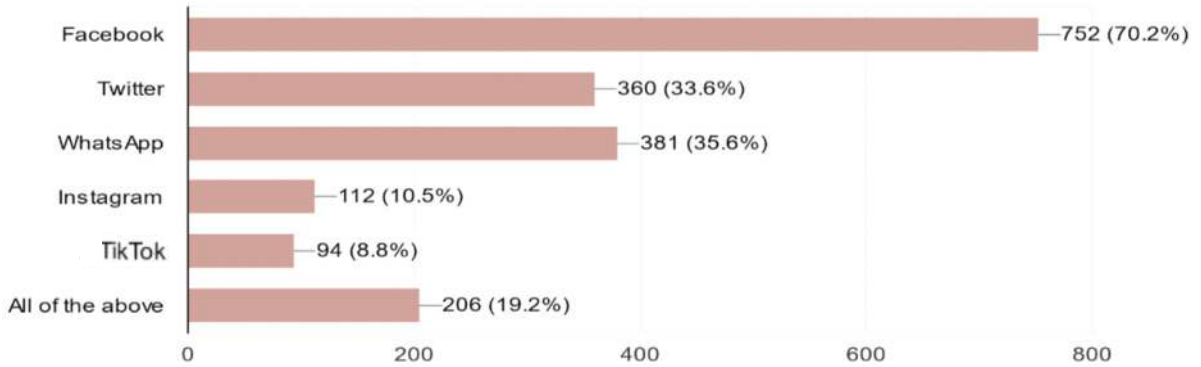


The relevance, popularity and seeming supremacy of Facebook among social media users over other social media platforms is further confirmed in figure 16. In spte of the fact that Facebook is an "old" social media platform, it still commands a good reckoning among social media users in many social engagements, including political issues. But the interesting thing about the finding in figure 15 is that all the social media platforms seem to be popular in varying degrees among survey participants.

**Figure 17:** *The most popular social media platform in spreading misinformation and disinformation*

11. Which of these channels would you consider mostly used to spread misinformation and disinformation before, during and after elections?
1,071 responses
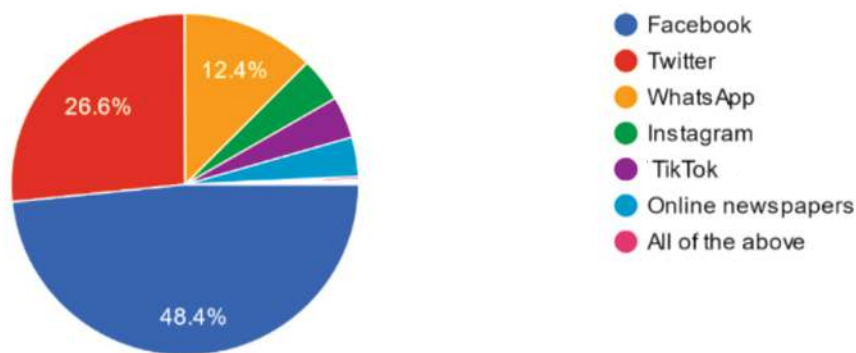


Figure 17 above shows that the most popular social media platform that was used for the spread of mis/disinformation is Facebook. The data shows that 46.4% of the survey respondents identified Facebook as the most dominant social media platform that was used to spread mis/disinformation prior, during and after the 2023 elections.

Twitter ranked second (26.6%) as the social media platform that was used to spread mis/disinformation while 12.4% used WhatsApp to spread dismisinformation prior, during, and after the election. The data shows that Facebook and Twitter were the major social platforms used for mis/disinformation. Future research should examine why these two platforms are mostly used for spreading of mis/disinformation before, during and after electionsin Nigeria.

12. How frequently did you encounter misinformation and disinformation during the election process?

1,071 responses



- More than once daily
- Daily
- Weekly
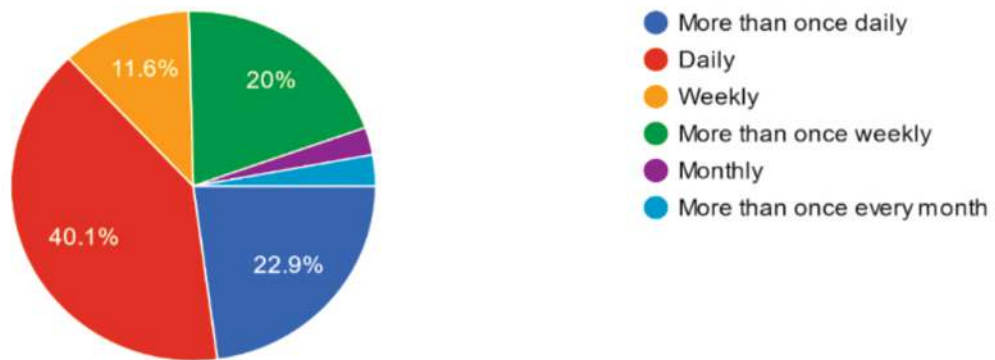- More than once weekly
- Monthly
- More than once every month

The figure above shows how frequently digital citizens commonly referred to as netizens encountered mis/disinformation. Majority (40.1%) of the respondents said they are active natives on social media, and that they encountered mis/disinformation on a daily basis. Incidentally, 22.9% of the respondents corroborated the views of the majority that they encountered mis/disinformation more than once every day. Significantly, the data revealed that 60% of the respondents claimed that they encountered mis/disinformation every day.

The consequence of this is that mis/disinformation has become a serious social problem in the media space in Nigeria. The implication of this for public policy is that both state and non-state actors should collaborate to tackle this phenomenon before it grows into a serious social problem that could destroy the cohesion of the Nigeria state. It is also important to intensify research on this issue to identify the reasons social media has become a platform for the expression of mis/disinformation during elections in Nigeria.

## 1.4 MIS/DISINFORMATION AND VOTERS' CHOICE/OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS

*Figure 19: Participation in voting*

13. Did you vote in the 2023 elections?

1,071 responses



- Yes
- No
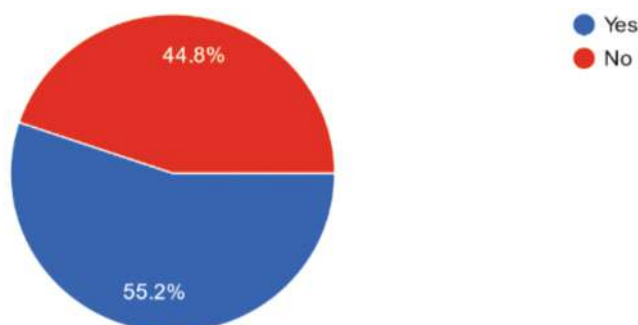
Figure 19 above shows the consequence of mis/disinformation for political participation and civic responsibility in the electoral process. The data reveals a somewhat high degree of political apathy among the survey respondents. For example, 44.8% of the respondents said that they did not vote during the 2023 elections. Considering that none of the respondents was less than 18 years, which is the legal voting age, it shows a growing detachment of the youth demography from the political process and elections.

It is important for future research on this issue to be directed towards establishing the nature of the relationship between social media, mis/disinformation, and political apathy. However, it is not unlikely that the huge volume of mis/disinformation may not be unconnected with the growing level of political apathy among the youth population in Nigeria. The reason for this assertion is that the data revealed in table 20 below shows that 62% of the respondents said their decision to vote for a candidate was informed by what they read on social media.

*Figure 20:* *Voting for candidate based on what was read on social media*

14. If Yes to Question 13 above, Did you vote for a particular candidate due to what you read about him/her on social media?

952 responses



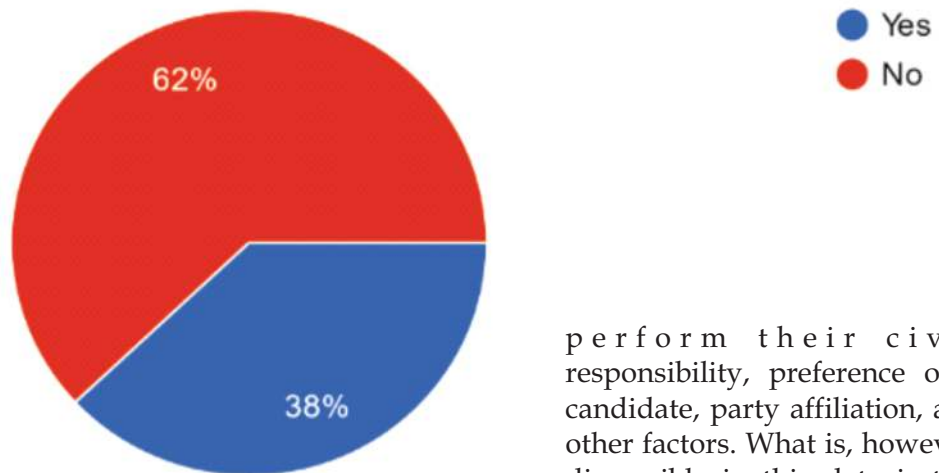Figure 20 above shows the responses to the question of whether they were influenced to vote for a particular candidate on the basis of what they read on the social media. Majority (62%) of the respondents said the social media influenced the choice of the candidate they voted for in the election. Incidentally, 38% of the respondents said they were not influenced by what they read social media.

It is not unlikely that those who were not influenced by social media could have been influenced by primordial factors such as ethnicity and religion, performance of a political party in or out of power, the urge to perform their civic responsibility, preference of a candidate, party affiliation, and other factors. What is, however, discernible in this data is that social media has become a potent instrument for influencing the decision of the electorate in the choice of a candidate to vote for or against in an election. It, therefore, suggests that there is no serious politician or aspiring candidate that would want to discountenance social media in his/her political calculation.

*Figure 21:* *Refusing to vote for candidate due to what was read on social media*

15. If Yes to Question 14 above, Did you refuse to vote for a particular candidate due to what you read about him/her on social media?

927 responses
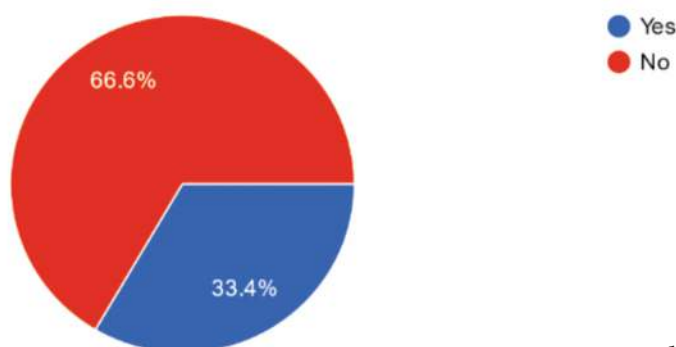


Figure 21 above shows the views of respondents on the decision not to vote for a candidate as a result of what they read on social media. Majority (66.6%) of the respondents said they decided not to vote for a candidate as a result of what they read on the social media. Incidentally, (33.4%) of the respondents said their decision to vote for a candidate was not affected by what they read on social media.

The data above shows that social media is important in influencing the voting behaviour of the electorate. In other words, voters rely on the information provided on social media in deciding whether to vote for or against a candidate. For those voters who were not influenced by social media, it means there are broader societal issues that influenced their choice of a candidate

*Figure 22: Reasons for not voting*

16. If No to Questions 13 above, Why did you not vote?

693 responses



- Fear of security personnel
- Fear of attack by political thugs
- Because my vote won't count
- Unable to locate my polling centre
- Just not interested

Figure 22 above provides the reasons that were given by the electorate in deciding against voting in the election. The data reveals that majority (33.3%) of the respondents explained that they were not just interested in the election. This is a reflection of the level of voter apathy amongst the respondents. Another major reason that was identified by (27.6%) of the respondents for their choice not to vote in the 2023 election was the fear of political thugs. This suggests that political violence constitutes a threat to political participation of citizens in the electoral process.
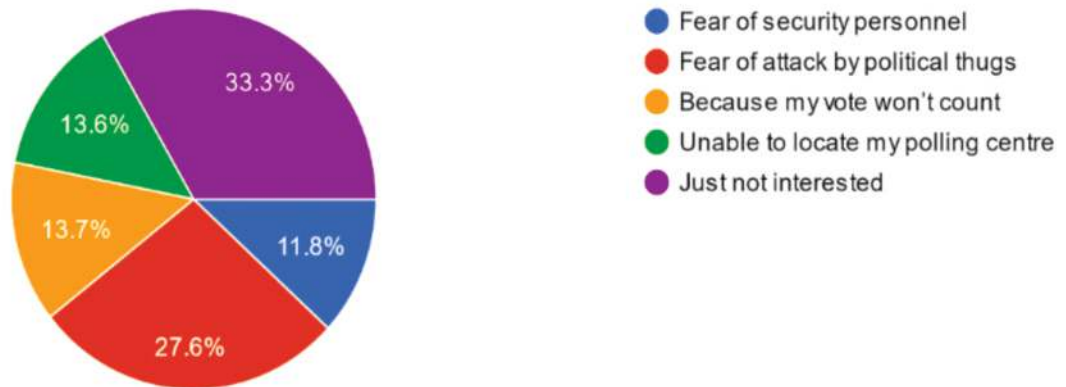
Importantly, (13.7%) of the respondents said they decided not to vote because of their belief that their vote would not count. This is an indication that respondents believe that electoral heist accounts for the emergence of candidates as winners. Respondents do not believe that election constitutes the means through which leaders are elected. Furthermore, (13.6%) of the respondents said they could not vote because of their inability to locate their voting centres. This is an indication that the electoral body needs to do more to ease the challenge faced by voters on election day. It is important to state that (11.8%) of the respondents decided not to vote because of the fear of security personnel drafted to the voting centres. This shows that the militarisation of the electoral process inhibits voter participation.

*Figure 23: Voters' choice of candidates and influence of mis/disinformation*

17. Do you believe that voters' choice of candidates during the 2023 elections was influenced by misinformation and disinformation about candidates and their political parties?

1,071 responses



- Yes
- No
- Can't say
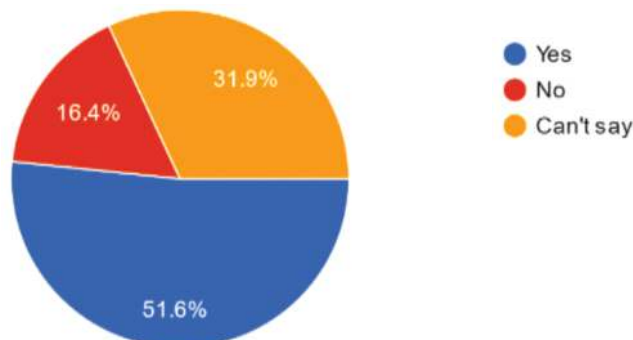
Figure 23 above shows respondents' attitude to the influence of mis/disinformation on voters' choice of candidate in the 2023 election. Majority (51.6%) of the respondents were of the view that mis/disinformation influenced the choice of candidate in the election. This data underscores the fact that social media has become an important platform through which voters make their choice of their candidates.

However, an insignificant number of respondents (16.4%) believe that voters' choice of candidates was not affected by mis/disinformation on social media. Furthermore, almost one third (31.9%) of the respondents could not say if mis/disinformation influenced voters' choice of candidates. What is clear is that more than half (51.6%) of the survey respondents believe that mis/disinformation influenced voters' choice of candidates during the 2023 elections.

*Figure 24: Political message and voting decision*

18. How did the political messages (positive and negative) you received about the various candidates influence your voting decision?
1,071 responses



Legend:
- They changed my decision
- They didn't change my decision
- They are in line with my initial believe
- Indifferent

Pie chart values: 30.3%, 13.6%, 11.1%, 45%

Figure 24 above shows the position of respondents to the influence of political messages on social media on their voting decision. Majority (45%) of the respondents said political message social media did not change their voting decision. A significant number of respondents (30.3%) said they were indifferent to political messages. An insignificant number of respondents reinforced and corroborated their prejudices and beliefs. A marginal number of the respondents (11.1%) said the political message changed their voting decision. The data reveals that a significant number (45%) of the survey respondents were of the view that political message on social media did not change their voting decision.

*Figure 25: Influence of misinformation and disinformation on the outcome of 2023 elections*

19. Would you say disinformation / misinformation influenced the outcome of 2023 general election in Nigeria?
1,071 responses



Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Can't say

Pie chart values: 31.7%, 17.7%, 50.5%

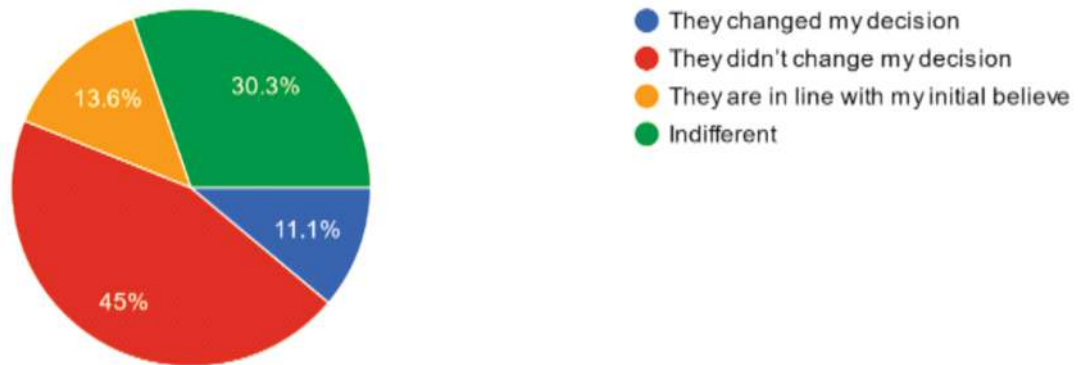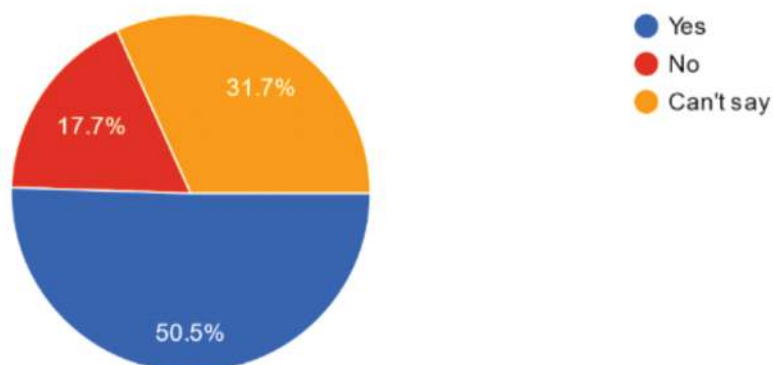Figure 25 above contains data on the influence of mis/disinformation on the outcome of the 2023 elections. Half (50%) of the survey respondents believe that mis/disinformation influenced the outcome of the 2023 elections. About one-third of respondents (31.7%) could not say if mis/disinformation in the 2023 elections influenced the outcome of the elections.

However, an insignificant number (17.7%) of the survey respondents said mis/disinformation did not influence the outcome of the 2023 elections. The data reveals that half (50%) of the respondents believe that mis/disinformation influenced the outcome of the 2023 election. This data implies that mis/disinformation has become a potent tool used by politicians, their allies and proxies to influence the outcome of elections in their favour.

*Figure 26:* *Citizens' role in tackling mis/disinformation*

20. Do you think citizens can help in tackling misinformation, disinformation during and after elections?

1,071 responses
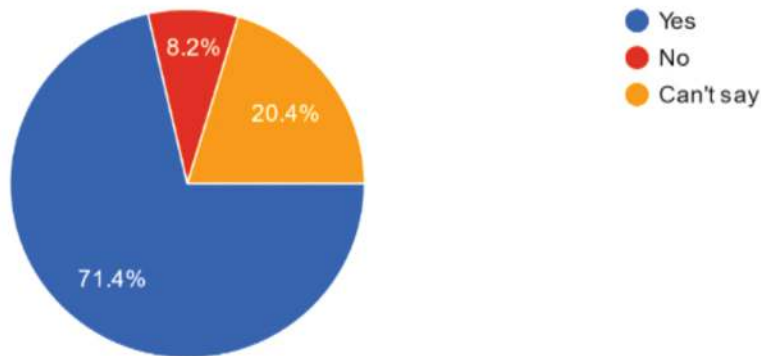


This data reveals the role of citizens in tackling mis/disinformation. A significant number (71.4%) of survey respondents believe that citizens have a role to play in tackling mis/disinformation. An small number (8.2%) of respondents said citizens do not have a role to play in tackling mis/disinformation. However, (20.4%) of the respondents said they could not say if citizens have a role to play in tackling mis/disinformation.

The data reveals that citizens appreciate that they constitute critical stakeholders in the effort to tackle and contain the deleterious effect of mis/disinformation on electoral outcomes. The challenge here is how a population that is ravaged by illiteracy, afflicted by poverty and whose decisions are largely controlled by primordial sentiments would have the capacity to contain and tackle mis/disinformation.

*Figure 27:* *Knowledge of fact-checking*

21. Do you know how to fact-check messages and information on social media?

1,071 responses
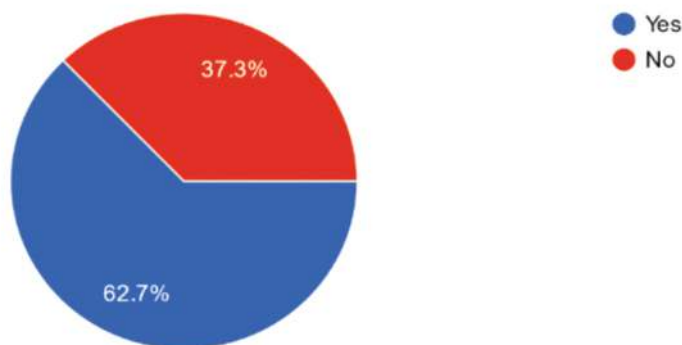


Figure 27 contains data on the capacity of the respondents to fact-check information they read on social media. A considerable number (62.7%) of the respondents said they have the skill to fact-check information they receive on social media. However, more than a third (37.3%) of the respondents said they do not know how to fact-check information they receive on social media. It is interesting that in spite of the fact that majority (62.7%) of the respondents have the skill to fact-check information on social media, the challenge mis/disinformation poses to the electoral process continues to be an encumbrance to the deepening of democracy.

*Figure 28: Verification of accuracy of information*

22. If yes to Question 21 above, did you attempt to verify accuracy of information received before, during and after the 2023 general election period before sharing them?

992 responses



- Yes
- No
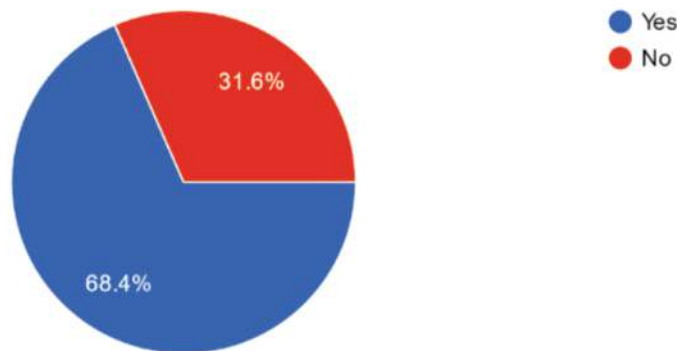
The figure above contains data on the verification of the information that is read on social media before it is shared. Majority (68.4%) of the respondents said they made attempts to verify the accuracy of the information they receive on social media before it is shared. However, almost a third (31.6%) of the respondents said they did not make an attempt to verify the accuracy of the information they read on social media before it is shared.

If majority (68. 4%) of the respondents claim they make conscious effort to verify the accuracy of information they read on social media before it is shared, it is surprising that mis/disinformation is a serious social problem for state and non-state actors. Significantly, the data reveals that there is an appreciation on the part of the respondents to verify the accuracy of information before it is consumed and shared.

*Figure 29: Specific steps for verifying the accuracy of information*

23. What specific step or steps did you often take to verify accuracy of information received before, during and after the 2023 general election period before sharing them

1,071 responses



- Confirmed if information was published…
- Considered the political bias of the auth…
- Considered the antecedent of the autho…
- searched online for evidence supportin…
- Indifferent
- Nil
- I try to correlate the information and co…
- None

Figure 29 above contains data on the steps that are usually taken by the respondents to check the accuracy of information. Some of the respondents (39.6%) say they would have to confirm if the information they receive has been published by other platforms. 34.5% of the respondents say they would have to search online if the information they receive has been previously reported. Incidentally, 15.6% of the respondents say they would have to consider the antecedent of the author and 9.1% of the respondents say they would have to consider the political bias of the author. The result implies that survey respondents have the requisite skills to process information they receive on social media so as to verify its authenticity.

*Figure 30:* *Verification of political ads/campaign before dissemination*

24. Do you think claims in political ads or campaign messages should be required to be verified before being disseminated to the public during elections?

1,071 responses



Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Can't say

7%
21.1%
71.9%
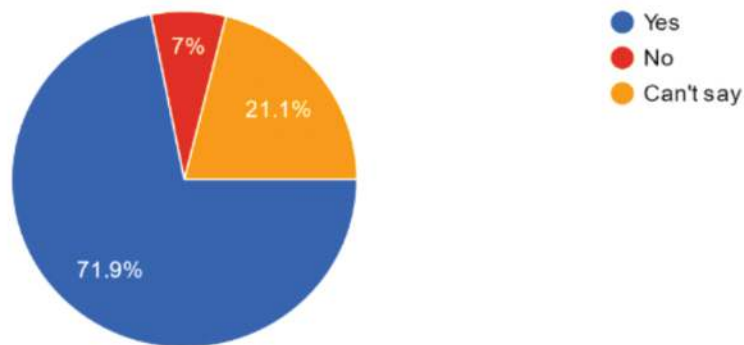
Figure 30 contains data on responses to the question on the need to verify political and campaign advertisements before dissemination. A dominant number (71.9%) of the respondents say political/ campaign advertisements should be verified before they are disseminated. An insignificant number (21.1%) of the respondents can't say if political/campaign advertisements should be verified. Furthermore, 7% of the respondents say they do not consider it necessary to verify political /campaign advertisements before dissemination. In general, the data suggests that respondents appreciate the dire consequences of political/ campaign advertisements that are not verified before dissemination.

*Figure 31:* *Facts and credible information for informed voting practices*

25. Facts and credible information will help create engaging and well-informed voting practices in Nigeria?

1,071 responses



Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Indifferrent
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

43.9%
8.8%
42%
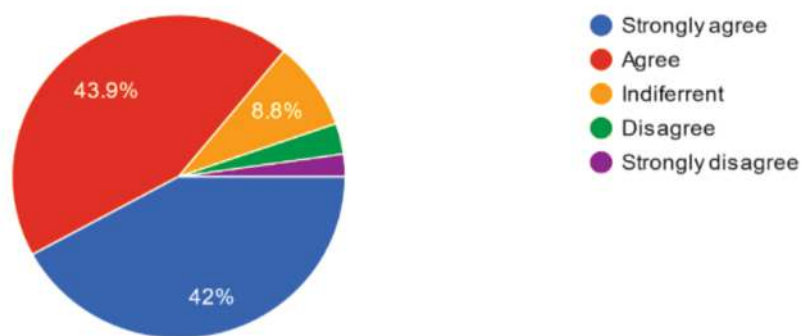
Figure 31 reveals the views of respondents to the relationship between credible information and informed voting practices. A dominant number (43.9%) agrees and 42% of the survey respondents strongly agree that credible information is a sine qua non for informed voting practices. However, a marginal number (8.8%) of respondents expressed indifference. In terms of concurrence, majority (87.9%) of the survey respondents expressed the view that factual information is a necessity for informed voting behaviour. The data reveals that respondents are conscious of the fact that factual information provides the guide for voters to express their preference in the choice of their candidates in an election.

*Figure 32:* Adoption of technology by government to tackle misinformation and disinformation

26. Government should tackle misinformation and disinformation around elections using technology.

1,071 responses



- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Indifferent
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
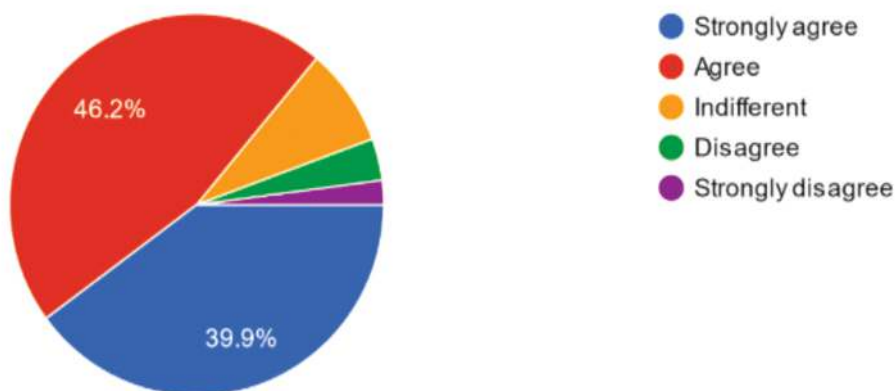
Figure 32 contains data on how government should use technology to tackle the growing problem of mis/disinformation. Majority of the respondents (46.2%) agree and (39.9%) strongly agree that government should deploy technology to contain the growing problem of mis/disinformation to the society and electoral outcomes. In general, 86.1% of the respondents expressed the view that the most effective and result oriented containment effort is for the government to deploy technology to tackle the problem of mis/disinformation. Moreover, respondents are also aware that social media is a product of technology and the most effective way to manage it is through technology.

*Figure 33:* Legal framework for fact-checking against misinformation and disinformation on social media

27. Would you support a law to regulate the use of social media as a way of checking the spread of mis-disinformation during elections

1,071 responses



- Yes
- No
- No comment
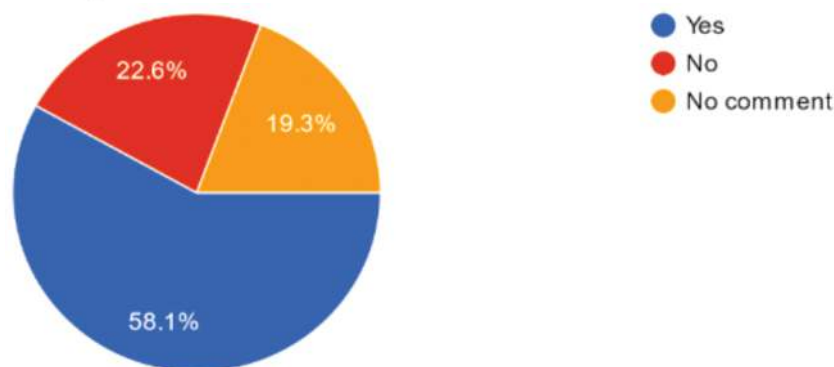
Figure 33 contains data on the attitude of respondents to their support for the government to use law to regulate social media. Majority (58.1%) of the respondents agree that the government should enact laws to regulate social media. However, 22.6% of the respondents do not support the use of legislation by the government to regulate social media. 19.3% of the respondents expressed indifference to any effort by the government to consider the use of legislation to regulate social media.

The data reveals that respondents are predisposed to any effort by the government to use legislation to regulate the social media space in Nigeria. The data also suggests that respondents are aware of the dangers that social media poses, and are of the view that the government must be decisive in tackling the problem of mis/disinformation in the country.

## DATELINE OF STORIES

One of the key objectives of this study is to identify the context in which mis/disinformation took place.

The content analysis shows that majority of the issues occurred locally in Nigeria (98.9%, n=259); though, very few cases that were weighty issues of mis/disinformation were also connected to foreign countries (1.1%, n=3).

Importantly, the three major cases of foreign stories occurred less before the election (e.g., a video, in April 2022, of cloned drone footage of an armed bandit cooking in the forest purportedly shared to be bandits in Nigeria but turned out to be a video of a cattle-rustler in Kenya) and more during the election (for example, Senator Dino Melaye shared a video in March 2023 of a session in the UK parliament and falsely captioned it, "game over for the APC as UK parliament confirms elections was rigged) and another one (shared by a Twitter user in March 2023 of a screenshot of a purported AP headline showing the president of the United States, Joe Biden, called for the cancellation of Nigeria's presidential election).
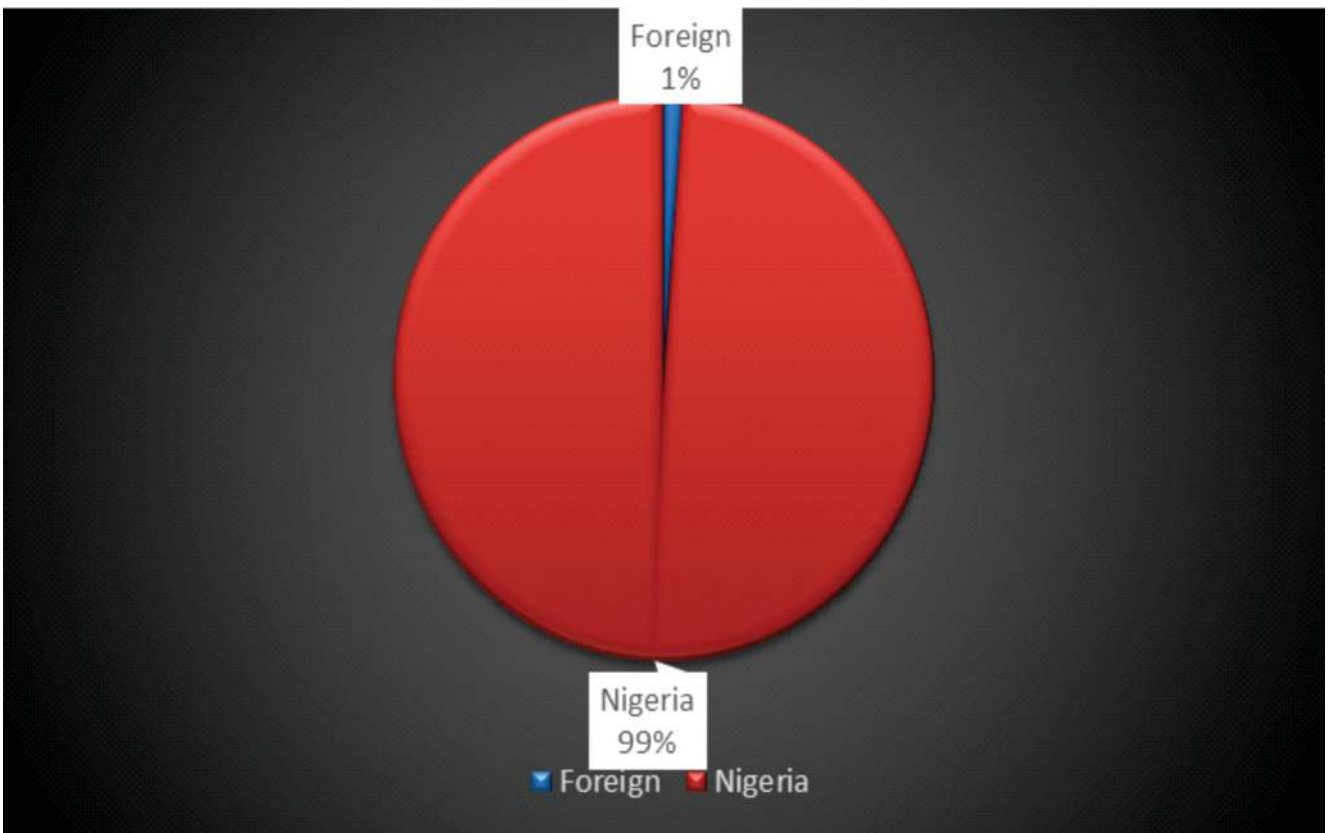


**Figure 7.** *Dateline of stories*

### GENDER OF PERPETRATORS OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

The data reveals that most perpetrators of mis/disinformation are male (91.6%, n=241) and, in very few cases, females also contributed at (8.4%, n=22). This may not be unconnected with the fact that issues around politics and governance are seen as the exclusive preserve of the male gender.
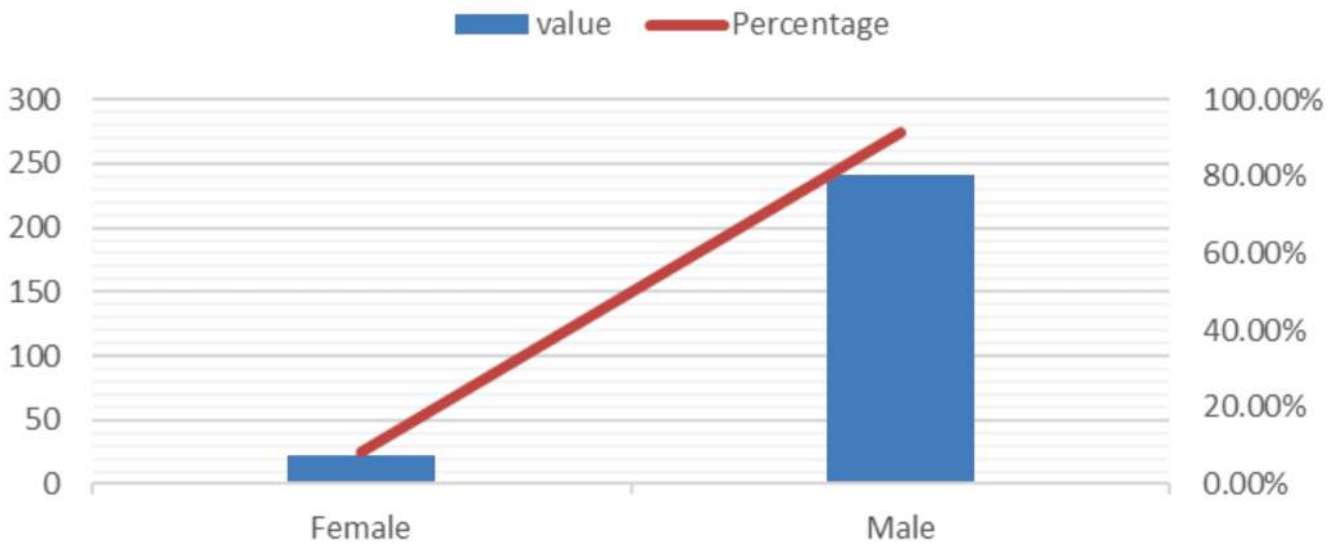
***Figure 8.*** *Gender of perpetrators of mis/disinformation*

## DIRECTION OF STORIES

The data contained in Figure 9 belows shows that mis/disinformation perpetrated during the electoral periods was directed to impact negatively (at 63.1%, n=166) on electoral outcomes. The data, however, reveals that (31.2%, n=62) of the mis/disinformation that went viral had some neutral colourations. Nonetheless, 5.7%, n=15 of the mis/disinformation was positive. This data suggests that the direction of mis/disinformation overall was negative to electoral outcomes and aimed at influencing voters' choice of candidates.
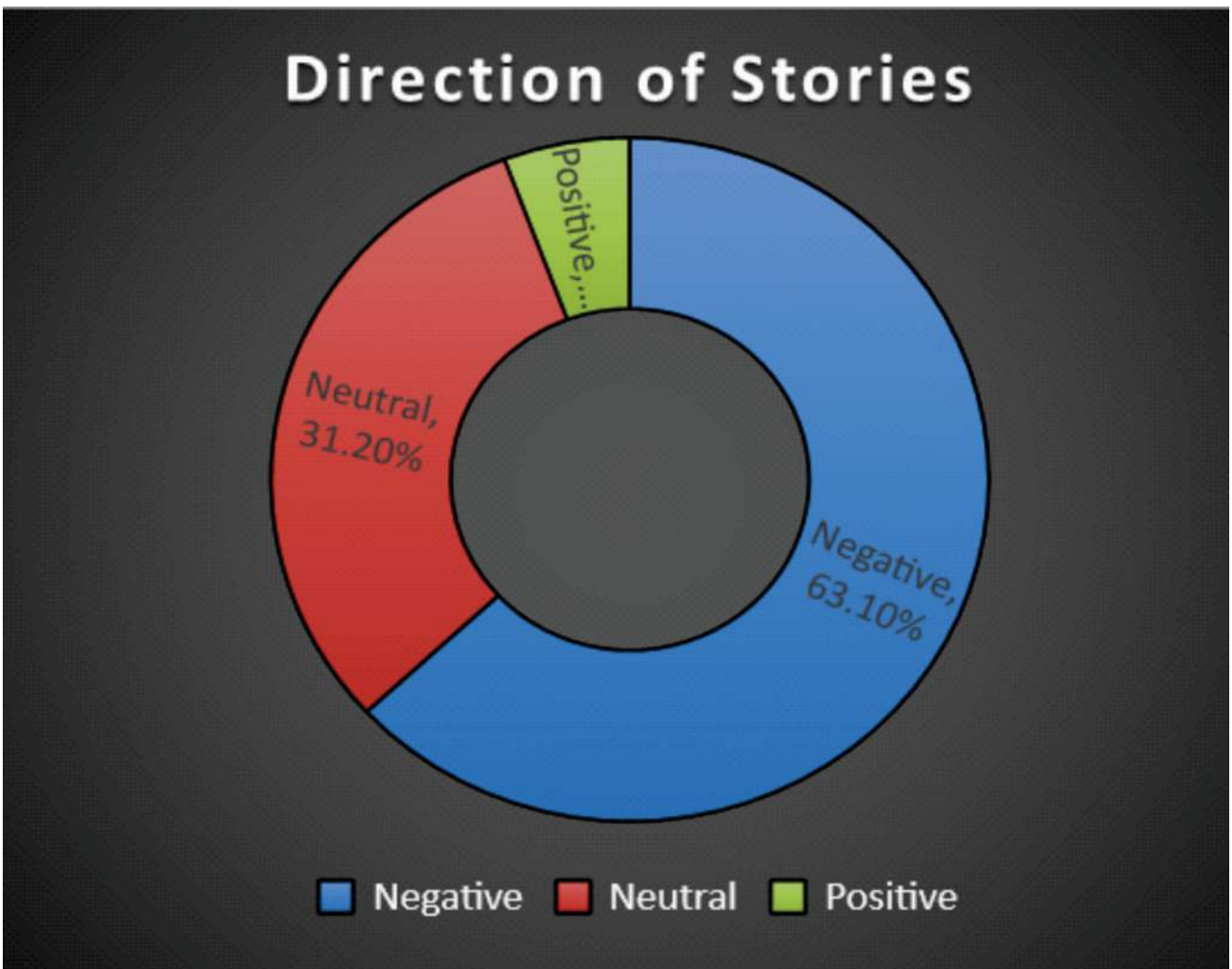


***Figure 9.*** *Direction of stories*

## TONE/LANGUAGE OF MIS/DISINFORMATION SHARED

Figure 10 reveals that 46%, n=121 of the tone of information on social media was largely sensational. The data also reveals that 27%, n=71 of the tone of information was inflammatory with the objective of creating a problem for the credibility of the election. However, the table also reveals that 27%, n=71 of the information was moderate. The probable reason almost half of the information on social media is sensational is not unconnected with the intention to influence voters' preferences with invented stories that might either be partially true or completely false.
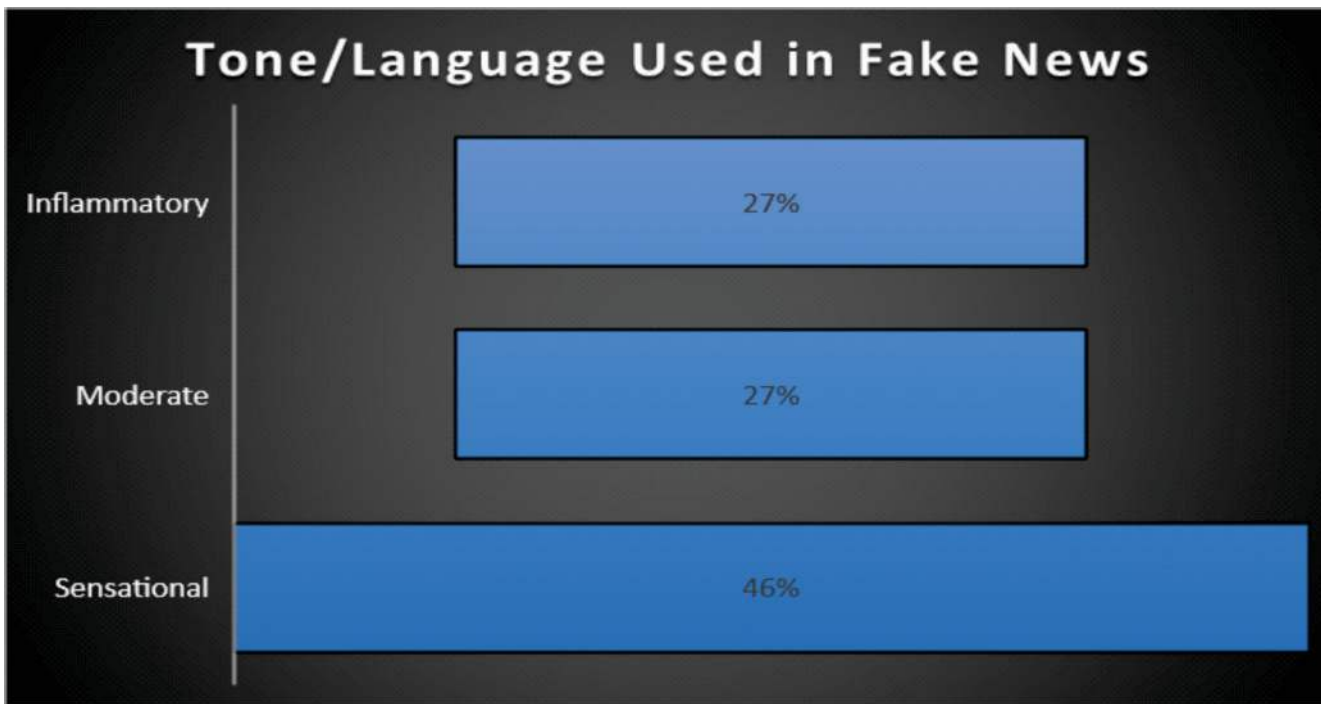


**Figure 10.** *Tone/language of stories*

## MAIN POLITICIANS MENTIONED IN CASES OF MIS/DISINFORMATION

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the presidential candidate of APC and incumbent president, was mentioned the most (23.2%, n=61) in more than half of the cases of mis/disinformation recorded, closely followed by Peter Obi (20.2%, n=53) and other aspirants (10.6%, n=28). Party officials were mentioned (5.7%, n=15), and state governors (5.3%, n=14). Atiku Abubakar was mentioned (4.6%, n=12), while Rabiu Kwankwaso was the least mentioned (12%, n=3) among known presidential candidates. Others include State/National Assembly members (2.7%, n=7).

In the pre-election period, Bola Ahmed Tinubu was mentioned the most in mis/disinformation cases (17.8%, n=21), trailed closely by Peter Obi (16.1%, n=19) and other unidentified aspirants (11%, n=13). Party officials (6.8%, n=8), Atiku Abubakar (6%, n=7), including state governors (5.1%, n=6) and National Assembly members (5.1%, n=6) followed. Other persons (29.7%, n=33) were also mentioned in various cases.

During the election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu was mentioned the most mis/disinformation stories (20.3%, n=16), closely trailed by Peter Obi (19%, n=15) and other unidentified aspirants (17.2%, n=14). State governors recorded (8.9%, n=7), followed by Atiku Abubakar (5.1%, n=4), party officials (2.5%, n=2) Rabiu Kwankwaso (1.3%, n=1), and State/National Assembly members (1.3%, n=1). Other unknown persons were also mentioned (24.1%, n=19).

In the post-election era, Bola Ahmed Tinubu remains the most mentioned politician (36.4%, n=24), again closely followed by Peter Obi (28.8%, n=19) and party officials (7.6%, n=5). Those that were least mentioned include Atiku Abubakar (1.5%, n=1), state governors (1.5%, n=1) and other aspirants (1.5%, n=1). Aside from other unknown persons that had (22.7%, n=18), Rabiu Kwankwaso and State/National Assembly members were not mentioned in fake stories in the post-election period.
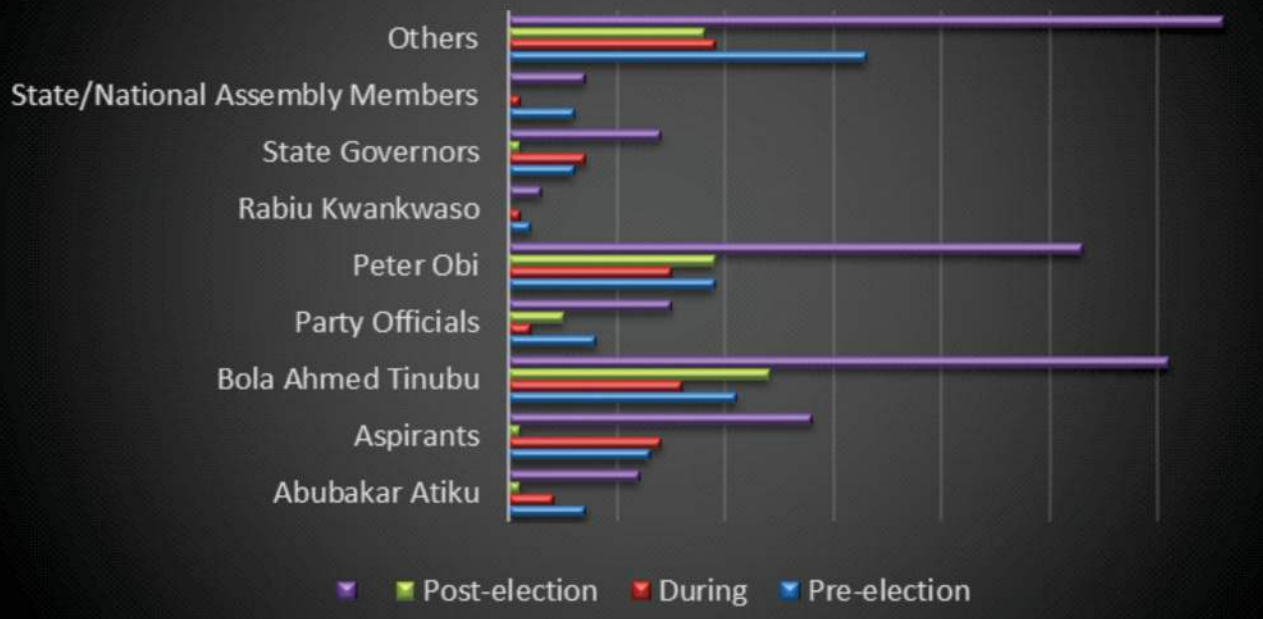
*Figure 11.* *Politicians mentioned in mis/disinformation*

# Discussion

This study is not limited to an attempt to revive the conversation on the impact of social media on electoral outcomes but to also (re)awaken the discussion on the persuasive potential effect of social media on electoral processes. It provides the empirical data for the relationship between mis/disinformation on social media and voters' choices prior, during, and after the 2023 elections. This objective is a reinforcement of the concerns that have gained the attention of scholars (Levitsky and Way 2012). As a result of the consequence of mis/disinformation, there has been a great interest in the real and potential deleterious effects of mis/disinformation among the political elite (Cissé, 2018; Okakwu, 2018; Olewe, 2018) and the public (Newman et al, 2020; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018).

The discussion would revolve around the data that was generated from both the content analysis and the survey report on mis/disinformation on social media prior, during, and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Admittedly, this is the reason content analysis shows the dateline of the stories that speak to mis/disinformation on social media. The data reveals that majority (98.9%, n=259) of the issues around mis/disinformation occurred locally in Nigeria. However, a few cases (1.1%, n=3) of mis/disinformation were connected to foreign countries. Since politics is essentially local, it is expected that issues around mis/disinformation would centre on Nigeria. This data reveals the growing force of influence of social media as a defining feature of Nigeria's electoral process.

The research corroborates the conclusions of Dzisah (2018) on the increasing intensity of social media as a key feature in Ghana's democracy. Furthermore, the data reveals that an overwhelming percentage of mis/disinformation on social media was perpetrated by males (91.6%, n=241) and, in very few cases, females also contributed at (8.4%, n=22). The reason for this is not unconnected with the dominant misogynistic perception that politics is a male activity. Incidentally, the patriarchal culture has also disempowered women from attaining any significant visibility in national discourse.

The assumption that voters are responsive to media content when expressing their electoral preferences has a long history with patchy empirical evidence. However, this study provides some empirical evidence to establish the relationship between media content and the choices/preferences of voters. The data also reveals that more than half (51.6%) of the respondents believe that voters' choice of candidates during the 2023 elections in Nigeria was influenced by the deluge of mis/disinformation about candidates and their political parties.

To corroborate the data for the survey, the content analysis data shows that much of mis/disinformation perpetrated during the electoral periods was directed to impact negatively (at 63.1%, n=166) on the 2023 electoral outcomes and (50.5%) of the survey respondents believe that mis/disinformation on social media influenced the elections. Both content analysis data and survey data corroborate the findings of (Zaller, 1992) that voters are believed to be influenced by directionally charged coverage in which competing parties and candidates are to be judged favourably or unfavourably.

This data reinforces the extant literature (Smyth & Best, 2013; Okoro & Santas, 2017; Dzisah, 2018) that social media platforms have implications for election processes across the globe, and impacts on the creation, circulation, consumption, and management of political information in the digital era (Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

Importantly, both print and electronic media have maintained some degree of objectivity and restraint in their reportage. Perhaps, this is made possible because they are not anonymous and for this reason it is easy to contain their activities within the regulatory framework.

However, social media has been plagued by the problem of the crisis of objective reportage. This problem has been well documented in literature (Vigna & Kaplan, 2008; Fang and Knight, 2011). The survey data reveals that (48.4%) of the respondents identified Facebook as the most dominant social

media platform that was used to spread mis/disinfor-mation during the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

This may not be unconnected with the fact that Facebook has the longest history among social media users in Nigeria. Another factor may be connected with the fact that it allows for more words to be used for the expression of one's feeling on any issue of national importance. Importantly, the content analysis reveals the tone of mis/disinformation on social media. Table 10 reveals that (46%, n=121) of the respondents believe that the tone of information on social media was largely sensational while 27%, n=71 of the respondents believe that the tone of information was inflammatory with the objective of creating a problem for the credibility of the election.

In contemporary society, social media offers a platform for communicating information to citizens (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). Nonetheless, the mis/disinformation on social media is pervasive and poses a threat to social cohesion social order. Indeed, 50.5% of the survey respondents believe that mis/disinformation influenced the outcome of the 2023 elections. Thus, the data corroborates the findings of (Lawrence, 2016) that biased media affects the understanding of voters of political events and issues. In addition, the data also reinforces the conclusions of previous studies that social networks can facilitate elections (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010), engender political change (Smeltzer & Keddy, 2010), help in the intensification of political activism (Guobin, 2009) and assist in the hunt for information during the times of elections so as to enhance political participation (Attia et al., 2011).

Importantly, the survey data also shows that (62%) of the respondents expressed the view that their choice of candidates during the election was not influenced by what they read on social media and (66.6%) of the respondents said they did not refuse to vote for a candidate based on what they read on the social media on a particular candidate. Thus, this data refutes the conclusions of Hopmann et al. (2010) that voters are expected to take the media's tone as "an important clue as to whether one should vote for a party or not." Nonetheless, the data suggests that there are different socio-political and economic as well as cultural and demographic factors involved in influencing voting behaviour (Bruce & Jagdish, 1985). The data suggests that there are other structural issues within the polity that could influence the way voters express their choices.

The data from the study reveals some concern among the respondents who feel that social media constitutes a problem for good governance and the cohesion of society and governance. In an appreciation of this problem, (39.9%) of the respondents strongly agree and (46.2%) agree that the government should deploy technology to tackle mis/disinformation on social media. In addition, (58.1%) of the respondents agreed that government should strengthen the legal framework so as check the spread of mis/disinfor-mation. The suggestions by respondents that government should strengthen the legal framework as a way of checking the spread of mis/disinfor-mation is in tandem with previous works (Cunliffe-Jones, 2022a; Graves, 2016) that called for solution to the problem.

On the issue of what can be done to authenticate the validity of information on social media, the data reveals that (62.7%) of the respondents say they know how to factcheck information on social media. In addition, (68.4%) of the survey respondents say they embark on the verification of the accuracy of information before they form an opinion. This data suggests that respondents have knowledge of the processes that are required to factcheck information.

Incidentally, (42%) of the respondents strongly agree and (43.9%) agree that facts and credible information on social media can enhance voting practices. This data can be construed to suggest that respondents believe that credible information on social media would enhance informed voting culture among voters. By extension, the digital revolution enhanced by social media is important in bringing hybrid interaction and communication methods that affect every aspect of the political process (Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

From the findings in both the content analysis and survey, the 2023 elections witnessed a heightened flurry of the generation and spread of mis/disinformation and underscore the need to pay greater attention to the causes, dynamics, magnitude, and possible remediation of the problem.

The first research question on the identification of mis/disinformation on social media before, during, and after the 2023 elections yielded so much information on the dynamics of information disorder. The content analysis shows the various types of information disorder as

identified by Wardle (2017). They include fabricated content, false connections, and false context. Others include impostor content, manipulated content, misleading content and satire/parody. Misleading and fabricated contents led the category and this corroborates the fact that producers of mis/disinformation are intentional in their mission. Their objective is to deceive and mislead their audiences to toe certain lines beneficial to the purveyors of information and not necessarily for their audiences or the society at large.

The preponderance of mis/disinformation was also corroborated by findings of the survey aspect of this research. Respondents attest to the awareness of the preponderance of mis/disinformation with 81.4% affirming their encounter with one form of mis/disinfor-mation or another before, during, and after the elections. Furthermore, over 60% of respondents encountered mis/disinformation at least once daily.

The second research question on the key channels and platforms used for mis/disinformation also provides critical insights. The content analysis results show that Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, were the leading platforms used with Twitter accounting for more than half of all mis/disinformation disseminated during the elections. Twitter is quite popular in Nigeria, especially among the youth, who are the most active on social media.

The dominance of young people on social media was confirmed by the survey report, which saw youth between the ages of 18-35 being the most active with 67.4% of survey respondents. The twin needs of engaging the youth and focusing on their popular platforms is highlighted here.

The data reinforces the conclusions of Apuke and Tunca (2018) that social media is an important tool for electoral scrutiny, which could assist in building public trust and confidence in the electoral process.

The survey results show that respondents encountered the most mis/disinformation on Facebook, followed by Twitter and WhatsApp. This data corroborates the findings of the content analysis data that identified two platforms, namely, Twitter and Facebook, as the dominant social media platforms used for the ventilation of mis/disinfor-mation. The content analysis data reveals that Twitter is the dominant social media platform that was used to disseminate mis/disinformation.

This data corroborates the earlier findings by Oso, Soremekun and Jimoh (2022:67) in their study on fake news and hate speech in the 2019 elections in Nigeria. The study confirms that, "Online news platforms have the highest with 36 counts (35%). Twitter takes the second position with 33 representing 33% of the total. This is a pointer to the increasing popularity of Twitter in the discourse on political issues in Nigeria. The data from this study reinforces the narrative on the increasing popularity of digital media as a platform for political discourse in Nigeria, and underscores the need to pay closer attention to the outcome of this study.

This research documents the dominant issues of mis/disinformation before, during, and after the 2023 elections. Expectedly, politics dominates the discourse, closely followed by the economy that reflects the major concerns of Nigerians. The survey results also shows that personality, ethnicity, religion, and politics, were dominant issues.

The discourse around religion was accentuated by the emergence of Muslim presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the APC. This issue divided the nation as many Christian bodies decried the move as insensitive to the diversity of the polity. They expressed the need for the inclusion of major segments of society to engender a sense of belonging and shared stakes in the Nigeria project.

# Conclusion:

**M**is/disinformation on social media was prevalent in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria and the degree was obviously unprecedented. The prevalence of mis/disinformation was disturbing and had impact on the electoral process and electoral outcome. One of the effects on the national psyche was that it reduced public trust in democratic institutions, and created a pall of doubt on the credibility of the election and electoral outcomes.

In light of the foregoing, it is considered imperative that the dangers social media pose to electoral processes and outcomes must be given adequate quality attention. It is required that such intervention and reflection must be inclusive, holistic, partici-patory and driven by a multi-pronged approach that includes responsible reporting culture, media and information literacy programmes, inclusive and effective legal framework and enforcement, quality fact-checking measures, and technological oversight of the social media platforms to contain abuses and excesses to protect the integrity of electoral process and outcomes in the country.

Even though most legal moves against mis/disinformation are targeted against social and traditional media, there is evidence that mis/disinfor-mation is spread by other means, no less dangerous to societal wellbeing. This point was illustrated by Cunliffe-Jones, Diagne, Finlay and Schiffrin (2021:121) when they noted that, "in total, the study of misinformation…identified false information being shared in a dozen different formats and on different types of channels. Regulations focused primarily on addressing misinformation circulating in traditional media thus risk missing much misinformation that is their declared target." Thus, in arriving at solutions to information disorder societies must go beyond enactment of laws and regulations.

*Mitigating the impact of mis/disinformation requires a multifaceted approach involving individuals, communities, technology platforms, and policymakers*



**M**edia and Information Literacy and education: Government at all tiers, civil society organisations and international organisations should promote media and information literacy pro-grammes among citizens to empower them to critically analyse and evaluate media messages and make informed judgments on information sources. Media and information literacy programmes should be included in the curriculum of schools from primary school to tertiary institutions to inculcate consciousness of the relevance of information to development and democracy.

The ability to critically relate with media and information in general, technically called media and information literacy, has now become essential the same way literacy became essential in fighting illiteracy centuries ago. Media and information literacy (MIL) skills empower citizens, particularly young people who are the digital majority, on how best to use the social media to overcome the menace of mis/disinformation during elections and in other areas of life. To this end, training institutions should be empowered to engage in training of youth, students, teachers, and practitioners in the information and communication ecosystem.

**Conventional mainstream media (print and electronic)** should adhere strictly to journalism ethics and professionalism in reportage and information dissemination by making correct and true information readily available to citizens. The mainstream media must ensure that information is disseminated to the public to solely protect the public interest. There appears to be wide scepticism about the willingness of mainstream media, for different reasons, including ownership structure, to provide the public the information they need, fuelling a strong belief among citizens that authentic information can only be sourced from social media. Once the conventional media platforms adhere strictly to professionalism and ethics as the guiding principle, there would be less enthusiasm among citizens to either use social media for sharing information or solely rely on the credibility of the information disseminated on/by social media.

**Fact-checking:** The government, civil society organisations, international partners and other critical stakeholders must make a concerted effort to establish fact-checking organisations that would help citizens to verify information and equally debunk falsehood or propaganda. This would help to contain the excesses that are associated with social media. Awareness must also be created to fact-check information before it is taken as a fact and shared.

**Establishment of a National Media Commission:** Government must consider the creation of this Commission to sanitise the information ecosystem. This Commission should compose of

government nominees, representatives of civil society organisations, the media, educational and research institutions, religious bodies, and other critical stakeholders, to ensure the social media space is closely monitored to ensure that it is not used for purposes that undermine credible information dissemination. The Commission must not be under the absolute control of the government and must be seen as an ombudsman.

**Social Media regulation:** It is important that government must initiate measures to regulate social media. Such intervention measures must be divested of political consideration so as not to muzzle and fetter social media and freedom of expression. Relevant stakeholders must be involved and listened to at every step that would lead to this decision to ensure that intervention measures are products of



inclusive and participatory deliberations. The objective of these regulatory measures would be to curb the spread of mis/disinformation on social media platforms.

**Responsible and Responsive Journalism:** Inclusive intervention measures must be taken by the government and relevant stakeholders to encourage media platforms to consider objectivity, impartiality and accurate information as not only important to reporting but also to the sustenance of society and democracy. This would ensure the cultivation of responsible self-censorship culture to check information that could be damaging to the democratic process and national cohesion.

**Partnership with tech companies:** Government and relevant stakeholders must ensure they work and collaborate with technology companies on content

moderation. This would allow a process of filtering the information mechanism system before it becomes detrimental to society as a whole.

**Data-based Monitoring Mechanism:** The government and relevant stakeholders must consider an effective process through which data-based organisations are central to containment measures that would either pull down inflammatory stories that promote hate speech or divide the society along ethno-religious cleavages. Setting up a mis/disinformation observatory manned by civil society organisations has become imperative.

This will enable citizens to track and counter mis/disinformation and also name and shame institutions and individuals involved in the act. This role cannot be left for government to avoid the observatory being used for political interest. There is an urgent need to support civil society organisation, including religious organisations, to lead campaigns against mis/disinformation during elections.

**Legal Action:** Government must enforce measures against those who are found guilty spreading mis/disinformation. Such deterrent measures must be divested of political interests.

Intensification of advocacy for policy change and diligent enforcement of existing regulations, laws on media practice, including the law of libel. In most cases it is the failure to enforce existing legal frameworks that fuel impunity.

# HOW TO IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS

*You may be wondering how to identify fake news on Facebook and other social media sites? As a student, how to avoid fake news? Or how to avoid accidentally sharing misinformation online? Here are ten tips to identify misinformation, recognize fake news websites, and think before you share:*



**Check the source:**
Check the web address for the page you're looking at. Sometimes, fake news sites may have spelling errors in the URL or use less conventional domain extensions such as ".infonet" or ".offer". If you are unfamiliar with the site, look in the About Us section.

**Check the author:**
Research them to see if they are credible – for example, are they real, do they have a good reputation, are they writing about their specific area of expertise, and do they have a particular agenda? Consider what the writer's motivation might be.

**Check other sources:**
Are other reputable news or media outlets reporting on the story? Are credible sources cited within the story? Professional global news agencies have editorial guidelines and extensive resources for fact-checking, so if they are also reporting the story, that's a good sign.

**Maintain a critical mindset:**
A lot of fake news is cleverly written to provoke strong emotional reactions such as fear or anger. Maintain a critical mindset by asking yourself – why has this story been written? Is it promoting a particular cause or agenda? Is it

trying to make me click through to another website?

**Check the facts:**
Credible news stories will include plenty of facts – data, statistics, quotes from experts, and so on. If these are missing, question why. Reports with false information often contain incorrect dates or altered timelines, so it's a good idea to check when the article was published. Is it a current or old news story?

**Check the comments:**
Even if the article or video is legitimate, the comments below may not be. Often links or comments posted in response to content can be autogenerated by

bots or people hired to put our misleading or confusing information.

**Check your own biases:**
We all have biases – could these be influencing the way you respond to the article? Social media can create echo chambers by suggesting stories that match your existing browsing habits, interests, and opinions. The more we read from diverse sources and perspectives, the more likely it is that we can draw accurate conclusions.

**Check whether it's a joke:**
Satirical websites are popular, and sometimes it is not always clear whether a story is just a joke or parody. Check the website to see if it's known for satire or creating funny stories.

**Check images are authentic:**
Images you see on social media could have been edited or manipulated. Possible signs include warping – where straight lines in the background now appear wavy – as well as strange shadows, jagged edges, or skin tone that looks too perfect. Bear in mind, too, that an image may be accurate but simply used in a misleading context. You can use tools such as Google's Reverse Image Search to check where an image originates from and whether it has been altered.

# HOW TO RECOGNIZE A FAKE NEWS STORY

1. READ PAST THE HEADLINE
2. CHECK WHAT NEWS OUTLET PUBLISHED IT
3. CHECK THE PUBLISH DATE AND TIME
4. WHO IS THE AUTHOR?
5. LOOK AT WHAT LINKS AND SOURCES ARE USED
6. LOOK OUT FOR QUESTIONABLE QUOTES AND PHOTOS
7. BEWARE OF CONFIRMATION BIAS
8. SEARCH IF OTHER NEWS OUTLETS ARE REPORTING IT
9. THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

*Image source:  "How To Recognize A Fake News Story" by Nick Robins-Early, Huffington Post, Nov. 22, 2016.*



# HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

**CONSIDER THE SOURCE**
Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.

**READ BEYOND**
Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?

**CHECK THE AUTHOR**
Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?

**SUPPORTING SOURCES?**
Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.

**CHECK THE DATE**
Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.

**IS IT A JOKE?**
If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

**CHECK YOUR BIASES**
Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

**ASK THE EXPERTS**
Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
With thanks to www.FactCheck.org

# Introduction to Media And Information Literacy

**Literacy**: The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning, wherein individuals are able to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society.

**Media**: The physical objects used to communicate with, or the mass communication through physical objects such as radio, television, computers, film, Etc. It also refers to any physical object used to communicate messages.

**Media Literacy**: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms. It aims to empower citizens by providing them with the competencies (knowledge and skills) necessary to engage with traditional media and new technologies.

**Information**: A broad term that covers processed data, knowledge derived from study, experience, instruction, signals or symbols.

**Information Literacy**: The ability to recognize when information is needed, and to locate, evaluate, and effectively communicate information in its various formats.

**Technology Literacy**: The ability of an individual, either working independently or with others, to responsibly, appropriately, and effectively use technological tools. Using these tools an individual can access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create and communicate information.

*Source: https://www.studypool.com/documents/21897469/media-and-information-literacy-grade-12-reviewer-*

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# ABOUT THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA & INFORMATION LITERACY (AFRICMIL)



The African Centre for Media & Information Literacy (AFRICMIL) is a pan-African centre that focuses on media, information, research, advocacy, and training. AFRICMIL works for the empowerment of citizens, particularly youth, through the promotion of media and information literacy.

Its objective is to deploy the opportunity that new media and information technologies offer in tackling socio-economic issues. It aims to promote media and information literacy as a key component in the enhancement of democracy and good governance and the promotion of accountability and orderly society.

# ABOUT LUMINATE



Luminate is a global foundation working to ensure everyone – especially those who are underrepresented – has the information, rights, and power to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

Luminate was established in 2018 by philanthropists Pierre and Pam Omidyar. For over a decade before this, the team worked on governance and citizen engagement issues as part of Omidyar Network.

# MIS INFOR MATION

# & DIS INFOR MATION

FAKE

FACT

# BAD INFO

**Exploring How Mis/Disinformation Work and Why it Matters**