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Impact of Social Media on Youth Political Participation in Electoral Processes: a comparative study of Nigeria and Kenya

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against the backdrop of the digital era, the role of social media and its influence on electoral processes, notably in terms of voter perceptions, political behaviour, and social mobilisations is an evolving discourse. In Africa and the Global South generally, accelerated use of social media is changing the political landscape, both positively and negatively. Social media has been used by marginalised voices to raise issues of concern within the society, mobilise youth groups, and hold political leaders accountable for their campaign promises. On the other hand, social media has also been utilised as a divisive tool by political leaders to spread disinformation or fake news about their opposing parties, often escalating tension and exacerbating the risk of electoral violence.

The use of social media has been associated with youth as it is widely used and consumed by young people worldwide, shaping their perceptions, behaviours, and communication. In Africa, where half of the population is under the age of 18, internet users have doubled within five years. In this context, the youth bulge theory, a concept that equates the rising youth population as volatile with a high risk of violence, is highly prevalent. Regarding the youth population in Nigeria and Kenya, this perception of violent youth has been linked to the lack of socio-economic opportunities, youth unemployment and poverty, and underlying ethnoreligious conflicts. In both countries, there is a common overarching theme of mistrust in the central government, corruption, and the prevalence of fake news, undermining democracy, and the rule of law.

This research aims to address the extent to which social media is influencing youth political participation during electoral processes. To do so, we divided the research into three parts:

- Youth, Social Media, and Politics
- Youth, Fake News, and Electoral Violence
- Disinformation, Democracy and Youth Engagement in the Electoral Processes

For the purpose of this research, youth is defined as persons between the ages of 18 to 35 years old, taking into account both Nigeria and Kenya's youth ranges. Our scope of analysis was limited to three social media platforms - WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook as these digital applications were identified to be most used among youths in the two countries. We conducted

google form survey, from which we gathered 175 survey responses and conducted in-depth interviews with 10 professionals (4 experts from Kenya and 6 experts from Nigeria). Our findings from the survey responses and in-depth interviews strengthened some pre-existing notions of youth in the political sphere but it also highlighted the ambiguity of social media's impact. Some of our findings are as follows:

- The scope of youth was much broader than anticipated, with many identifying anyone under the age of 60 as a youth,
- Social media is influential, and its usage has increased but this trend does not necessarily correlate with the actual voting patterns and behaviour. In other words, online activities do not translate into votes during the elections,
- Based on our surveys, many were not satisfied with their country's elections and therefore chose not to participate in the voting process. The respondents blamed their lack of enthusiasm on factors such as lack of transparency, corruption, failed economy, and the poor electoral infrastructure, and
- Lack of young and female representatives in the leadership positions in the political sphere

With these findings in mind, some of our recommendations are as follows:

- Ensuring the process of obtaining voter cards and casting votes is more efficient, accessible and an easier process for those involved, by establishing new technologies.
- While youth and women are active participants, their demography is not always reflected in the hierarchy of leadership positions, thus we need more youth and women to be appointed in leadership positions.
- Regulate social media with independent fact checks to ensure that there are evidence-based facts and information online, decreasing the chances of spreading disinformation or fake news, and
- Finally, media literacy training should be implemented to raise politically engaged and well-informed citizens.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALISATION

1.1 Background

In Africa, like the rest of the world, social media plays a significant role in influencing electoral processes. Social media constitutes an essential tool for promoting political participation. However, it may be used to drive disinformation and in extreme cases, weaponised to exacerbate conflicts (Kasenally & Awatar, 2017; Smyth & Best, 2013; Tenhunen & Karvelyte, 2014). With growing internet access across the world, social media plays a significant role in influencing its users, the majority of whom are young people. About 60 per cent of Africa's population are below the ages of 25 years old, making it the youngest continent in the world (Gates, 2018; Yahya, 2017). Social media has the potential to increase youth participation in the political processes. In an era where people visit social media outlets for stories, ideas, content, and 'basic news,' media platforms significantly influences the actions and decisions people make or take. Thus, Maweu (2017) posits that "at its best, social media allows people to express themselves and take action, and at its worst, it allows people to spread misinformation, disinformation and corrode democracy." Indeed, the influx of technology vis-à-vis social media is influencing the misuse of information. In many countries, even though social media platforms are used for political discussions, they are also used to mobilise, incite, spread, and counter hate speech for violence purposes (Mutahi and Kimari, 2020).

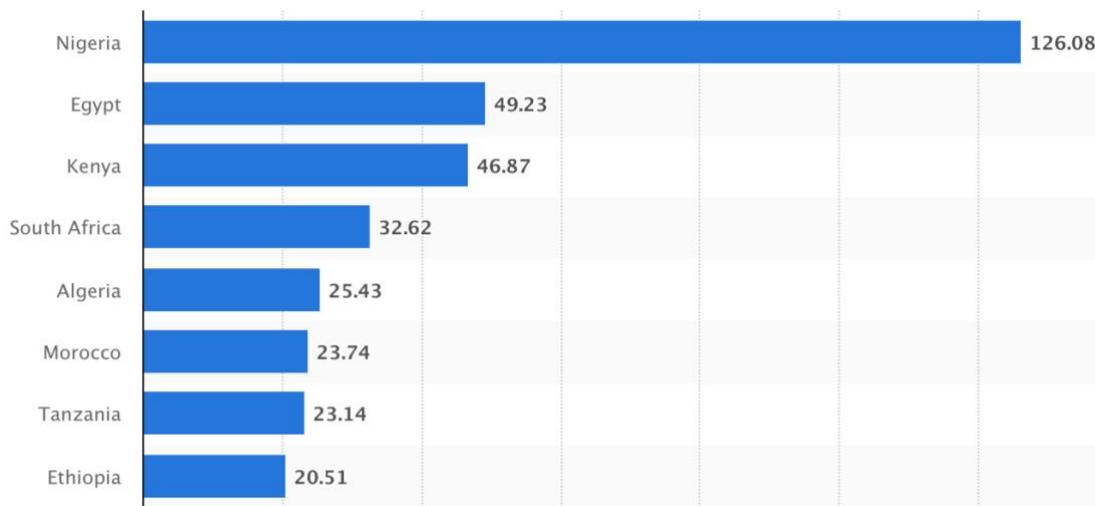


Figure 1: Number of internet users in selected countries in Africa as of June 2019, by country (in millions)

Source: Statista, 2020

As shown in the figure above, countries like Nigeria and Kenya constitutes the highest number of internet users in Africa. This is made possible due to the prevalence and access to mobile and smart phones. In countries like Nigeria and Kenya, mobile usage makes up 60-80 % of all internet traffic (Steup, 2019). Of all the social media outlet, WhatsApp ranks as the "most-loved

messaging app” in the region (Ibid).

The increase in social media use is often accompanied by the increasing spread of misinformation and fake news mainly because disinformation campaigns are conducted through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (Woolley, 2020). For instance, an analysis of Twitter activity in South Africa uncovered a community of tweeters, or a ‘troll army,’ consisting of about 150 fake accounts (Wasserman, 2020). Nonetheless, disinformation is not easily defined as it depends on the context where it is used, and because disinformation takes many forms. In the context of Africa, disinformation may be “false information spread through graphics, photos and videos or distorted image and video content, where controversial elements are shopped in innocuous ways to elicit outrage or indignation” (Maweu, 2020). Studies have pointed out the paradoxical effect of social media on democratic elections in both Kenya and Nigeria. While social media plays a crucial role in mobilising and disseminating information during election cycles, it has also been used to incite hatred and violence through disinformation and hate speech (Bajo, 2019). For example, the image below shows ways in which disinformation can be displayed. The left image is the fabricated image of the original news on the right.



Source: Maweu, 2020

Understanding the impact of social media on youth participation in elections is paramount to institutions that are committed to free and fair democratic elections. By examining the influence of social media and the role of youth in preventing or contributing to the spread of disinformation, this research will be an addition to an existing scholarship on youth, social

media and its influence on elections. Nonetheless, this research adds a new dimension to existing research by doing a comparative study of Kenya and Nigeria, two African countries that have both experienced political violence in the past. Also, this research study could be useful for the local, national, and international electoral boards. Moreover, this paper has the potential to aid observation groups, electoral management bodies, social media platforms, as well as state departments responsible for electoral management in both Nigeria and Kenya. At the end of this research, further insights on disinformation through social media and youth engagement in political processes could help address the problem of fake news not only in Nigeria and Kenya but across the continent of Africa.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This research study builds its understanding of youth on the premise that the operational definition of youth often varies from country to country, depending on the socio-economic factors, culture, institutions and political factors (N. UBI, 2017). While the United Nations defines youth as between the ages of 15-29 years old, in countries like Nigeria, youth is between 18-35 years old and similarly Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) defined youth as persons aged between 15 to 34 years. Thus, to encompass the broad definition of youth, we incorporated both Nigeria and Kenya youth range and our research study defined youth as somewhere between ages 18 to 35 years old.

Aside from the youth definition, this research examined the extent to which social media has influenced youth political participation during electoral processes. To do so, this project analysed the use of social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) and observed how these platforms contribute to the spread of disinformation. These three social media platforms were selected because they are part of the most widely used media platforms on the continent and specifically in Kenya and Nigeria (see figure 1). This research project examined how the spread of disinformation in Nigeria and Kenya undermines democracy and the role of youth in political processes in the region. Finally, this paper links the association between the spread of disinformation and electoral violence in the two countries.

The following specific research questions, as highlighted by the partner organisation, were used during the research:

- ⇒ *How do social media platforms - Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp shape youth political participation in Nigeria and Kenya?*
- ⇒ *Does disinformation or fake news undermine democracy and youth engagement in electoral processes? If so, how does it play out in Nigeria and Kenya?*
- ⇒ *What is the association between the spread of disinformation and electoral violence in Nigeria and Kenya?*
- ⇒ *How will the lessons learned strengthen the electoral environment to hold peaceful and legitimate elections in Nigeria and Kenya?*

2.0 EXISTING LITERATURE

2.1 Africa

The trend towards an accelerated use of social media is changing the political landscape of Africa (Dwyer & Molony, 2019). More political leaders have become aware of this phenomenon. While some utilise social media for their political outreach and campaign, countries like Chad has highlighted and framed it as a threat (Ibid). The increasing rise in Social media has also been complimented by censorship and ‘fake news’ in Africa. While ‘fake news’ can be traced back to platforms like Radiotélévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTL) and the magazine *Kangura*, which were means by which hate speeches were disseminated, the prevalence of mobile phones and mass availability of communication channels has opened a new outlet and access for citizen participation. For this research paper, ‘fake news’ is synonymous with the term disinformation, misinformation, and or the ‘deliberate creation and sharing of false information’ and “rumours, hoaxes, conspiracy theories and propaganda” (Mutahi & Kimari, 2020; Maweu, 2020). Some examples of disinformation through social media could be the use of credible sources in the wrong context. For example, using an authentic picture with a ‘fake caption’ or manipulating videos, graphics, and images using photoshop (Ibid).

Within five years, internet users in Africa have doubled and about 250 million Africans have less than five years of experience using the internet (Bajo, 2019). Half of the population is below the age of 18, and the average age is 19 years old. The Youth Bulge Theory is a concept that equates rising youth population as historically volatile and especially observes the presence and increase of young men as it relates to the possibility of violence (Hendrixson, 2003). This concept is used to understand the trends in the Global South, where the youth population has dramatically risen over the past decade. In the same vein, this theory is highly relevant and often used to understand and analyse youth in the context of Nigeria and Kenya.

According to a study by Bradshaw and Howard (2018), there has been an increase in disinformation trend from 28 countries to now 48 countries, mostly from the global south, where at least one political party or government organisations are employing social media manipulation campaigns, and computational propaganda. Many political parties are increasingly spending more money on research strategies, development, and carrying out ‘psychological operations’ that involves the manipulation of public opinions over social media.

While some countries have used this to counter extremism, in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, it involves the spread of misinformation during election cycles often resulting in violence and instability. For instance, during Kenya's general election in 2017, opposition parties falsified reports of violence in a bid to heighten tensions during the ongoing electoral violence. Likewise, during Nigeria's 2019 elections, the spread of disinformation during the electoral process heightened ethnic tensions, and ethnic-based violence. One of the extreme manners in which the governments of Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Uganda have tried to prevent or tackle the spread of misinformation and fake news is by cutting off internet access during intense election periods (Tannous, Belesiotis, Tchakarian, & Stewart, 2019).

2.2 Kenya

2.2.1 Background

To analyse the political structure of post-independent Kenya, it is important to acknowledge the complex interplay between British colonialism, and the socio-economic and political structures of the Kenyan society. Elischer (2010) argues that except for the 2002 elections, "the return of multiparty democracy in Kenya has exacerbated the country's dominant ethnic cleavages...between the Kikuyu and the Luo as well as between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin". For instance, the ODM grassroots campaign used the issue of ethnic tension to fuel campaigns of disinformation, contending the Kikuyu against other ethnic groups (Chege, 2008). The campaign portrayed Kikuyu's domination in the country and blamed them for the marginalisation and sufferings of other ethnic groups (Ibid). Kenya's major parties can be labelled as ethnic in character (Elischer, 2010). This was observed when president Kibaki's former chief of staff contended that "power sharing would have divided Kenyans along ethnic lines" (Chege, 2008).

This ethnic divide can be traced back to colonialism (Abbink, 2005). The European occupation of the central region resulted in a variety of divisions between elite Kikuyu (who owned land and had land rights) versus the landless Kikuyu who were forced into manual labour in cities like Nairobi. Many other ethnic groups like the Luo, Luhya, and the minority groups of Kalenjin and the Maasai did not undergo land shortages. However, the lack of European colonial reach in the rural areas also meant that resistance against colonialism was absent, followed by the lack of developments associated with these resistances such as urbanisation, education advancement, and the emergence of modern political parties and trade unions (Elischer, 2010). Finally, the 'emergency period' between 1952-1960 was dominated by the Mau Mau uprising during which

the colonial government prohibited political activities at a national level and only allowed at the district level (Ibid). This political structure was inherited by post-independent political parties with a weak central system and ‘powerbrokers’ at district and regional levels. This was observed when President Kenyatta rewarded cabinet positions to those district leaders who ensured that their community voted for his party KANU (Ibid).

2.2.2 Youth political engagement

Against this backdrop of colonialism and political structure is also the evolution of the role of youth in the Kenyan society. Until recently and in the context of Kenya, youthfulness has been considered a negative attribute and has been associated with inexperience, ‘societal burdens’, and something to be cautiously ‘handled’ (Murunga & Nasong’o, 2007). The period between 1990 and 2005 brought about ‘aggressive youth discourse’ where youths have claimed their agency and rightfully demands a reconfiguration of societal roles and responsibilities. The definition and conceptualisation of youth are dependent on context. According to the National Youth Policy Steering Committee (NYPSC), a Kenyan youth is one aged between fifteen and thirty, and it considers the “physical, psychological, cultural, social, biological and political definitions of the term”. However, according to chapter 20, article 307 (30) of the National Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC), youth is someone between 18- 35 years old. There is a lack of distinction between ‘adolescent’ or ‘teenager’ which could misrepresent the youth’s lived experiences. Thus, authors like Murunga and Nasong’o (2007) state that youth are retaining the category ‘youth’ while seeking out more roles and responsibilities that are traditionally meant for ‘adult’ or ‘elders’, challenging the new paradigm shift and the important roles that youth are playing in the political sphere.

Social media has been largely embraced by youth to organise protest movements such as the Occupy Parliament Movement (OPM), which heavily relied on social media to mobilise protestors (Mukhongo, 2014). Many have linked the OPM movement to the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement of New York. Web 2.0, which allows internet users to contribute and collaborate with each other has been used in both public and private spaces by the Kenyan youths. In many instances, social media has empowered and encouraged grassroots youth engagement without the control of people in a higher power (Makinen and Kuira, 2008). However, the prevalence of post-electoral violence is high. For instance, the 2007 post-election clash between Kibaki and Odinga left more than 1000 people dead and 500,000 displaced (Ibid). The use of Short Message Services (SMS) was disabled by the government to prevent people

from disseminating ‘provocative messages’, and sites like *mashada.com* were shut down for ‘hate speech’.

The increasing spread of disinformation and fake news through social media has been attributed as a major cause of violence during and post elections. Thus in 2018, Kenya passed the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act which criminalised fake news, with a fine of up to 50,000 USD and or imprisonment for 10 years (Maweu, 2020). This law has caused public uproar and controversy as it undermines and infringes upon the Kenyan people’s freedom of speech and of media (Ibid). Furthermore, the spread of fake news challenges the prospects of democracy in Kenya where ethnic-based political parties and a deep history of ethnic divisions and distrust towards the government is still present.

2.2.3 Building Bridges to a United Kenya (BBI) report 2020

The recent report “Building Bridges to a United Kenya: from a nation of blood ties to a nation of ideals” highlights the vision of Kenya, considering the current global pandemic and the country’s dynamic political history (BBI report, 2020). The report, one of the most extensive, detailed exercise in Kenyan history, builds on the knowledge gathered from conducting comprehensive consultations. About 7000 citizens from all ethnic groups, genders, cultural and religious backgrounds, and various social and economic sectors were consulted. The taskforce also heard from 400 elected leaders both past and present, prominent local leaders, youth, citizens and 123 individuals represented major institutions, including constitutional bodies and major stakeholders from public and private sectors. From these consultations, the report highlights Kenya’s nine core challenges:

- 1) lack of a national ethos
- 2) responsibilities and rights of citizenship
- 3) ethnic antagonism and competition
- 4) divisive elections
- 5) inclusivity
- 6) shared prosperity
- 7) corruption
- 8) devolution
- 9) safety and security

In response to these challenges, in January 2020, HE President Uhuru Kenyatta established the Steering committee taskforce to validate and implement the Building Bridges to a United Kenya (BBI) report. The steering committee held consultation with national stakeholders, regional delegates' meetings, regional public meetings, received written submissions, incorporated external experts and drafters to engage and undertook desktop review.

In the taskforce report (2020), Kenyans expressed the country's lack of national ethos, and ethnic antagonism and competition as a major threat to Kenya's success. The need for urgent reform of the electoral system to be more inclusive and to end ethnic violence caused by the winner-take-all election system was expressed. Furthermore, the need to regulate and counter hate speech, particularly in the context of political campaigns was expressed. Another major theme that emerged was the lack of inclusivity and the need include the marginalized, the under-served, the poor, people living with disability (PWDs), the elderly, youth, women and girls. The lack of inclusivity is also reflected in the divisive and conflict-causing elections. Additionally, to address the challenge to shared prosperity, Kenyans feel that there is an urgent need to provide sufficient jobs and employment, particularly for young people. Furthermore, there is a general recognition of corruption being a threat to the existence and wellbeing of Kenya. Another core challenge is the view that devolution has led to the marginalisation in county governments where some groups find themselves discriminated by the majority. Finally, public safety and national security with regards to natural hazards and disasters, food insecurity, terrorism, cybercrimes, among many others were expressed by Kenyans.

While it is still embryonic to assess how the BBI report will be implemented, measured and or evaluated, it nevertheless presents a promising future where policies reflect and take into account public opinions and addresses the nation's core challenges in a democratic and inclusive manner.

2.3 Nigeria

2.3.1 Background

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, and the country has been at the forefront of leading peacekeeping operations and managing of epidemic crises, such as Ebola, in the region (Osumah, 2016). However, despite its enormous potential, the country battles with high youth unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and infrastructural deficit. Some studies (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013) have contended that 'ethnic sentiments', a tool used by the British colonials, was carried

over to post-colonial governance structure in Nigeria. Much like in Kenya, the prevalence of ethnic unrest and instability in the region has continued to undermine the political structure of Nigeria. This was reflected by Africa Check report which claimed that in general, the Nigerians had ‘low levels of trust towards democracy’ and displayed a decrease in political participation processes (Tannous, Belesiotis, Tchakarian, & Stewart, 2019).

The increasing use of social media has enabled the spread of misinformation, exacerbating the pre-existing and underlying ethnic, cultural, and religious divisions within the Nigerian society (Ibid). The religious division between the north and south can be traced back to the British colonial structure when Christianity was introduced in the ‘colonial Southern Nigeria Protectorate; but excluded from the Muslim majority in the north (Ibid). This division is also observed and reflected in the media when in June 2018, 11 Muslim men were killed because of ‘socially divisive faked images’ that was spread on Facebook (Ibid). Furthermore, in the general elections of 2019, a misinformation campaign was launched against a Muslim candidate who was falsely portrayed as attempting ‘to instil Sharia laws’ or aligning with the ‘LGBTQ community’ to deliberately target and discredit him. Studies (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013; Tannous, Belesiotis, Tchakarian, & Stewart, 2019) have also highlighted the division and fragmentation between the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo (Ibo), and Yoruba major ethnic groups with a deep-rooted lack of trust. This societal fragmentation in Nigeria is heightened by the increase in fake news and disinformation and thus, poses danger to the prospects of democracy and stability in the region.

2.3.2 Youth political engagement

Many studies that have analysed the history of elections in Nigeria have emphasised the prevalence of malpractices and violence. Some scholars like Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) have even questioned if electoral votes still count when the political class undermines citizen participation through monopolisation and manipulation of the electoral process. According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001), the youth population in Nigeria is aged between 18 and 35 years old. This translates to a youth population of 171 million people in the country (Osumah, 2016). More than 70 per cent of Nigerians are under the age of 30 and Nigerians between 18-35 have used social media to obtain political news and information during the 2015 elections (Onyechi 2018; Owen and Usman 2015).

Some scholars (Mutisi, 2012; Boyden and De Bery, 2004; Thorup, Foreword, & Veliaj, 2005;

and Alokpa, 2017) have highlighted the important role that youth plays in bringing about social changes, often referring to the Arab Spring. This perspective of positive youth political participation has been a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, and before the 2015 general elections, youth were associated with electoral violence. In many instances, youth vigilante groups were politicised and ‘hired’ to support or carry out the political agendas. For instance, the Bakassi Boys, a youth vigilante group, was allegedly sought after by political party’s like the All-People’s Party and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) (Ukiwo, 2002). Fast forward to the 2015 elections where the role of youth shifted towards social agents for change, and this was reflected in the political space. For instance, Jonathan highlighted his young age as an appeal towards young voters whereas Muhammadu Buhari campaigned to address and fight youth unemployment, corruption, and security challenges. Buhari even recruited 25,000 college graduates to help with his campaign (Nwosu 2015).

Since the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1999, the elections of 1999, 2003, and 2007 were all deemed largely flawed except for the 2011 elections and the 2015 elections. Before the 2011 election, electoral reforms were initiated under the leadership of Attahiru Jega. For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) formed a strategic partnership with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and there was also the renewal of the ballot system (Osumah, 2016). While these changes were crucial in the electoral reform process, it did not stop the post-electoral violence. Many of the violent participants were the ‘lumpen youth’. According to the Human Rights Watch report, the 2011 April elections were the ‘fairest’ in the country’s history of violent elections, but it was also ‘among the bloodiest’. About 800 lives were lost, more than 65,000 youths were displaced and over 350 churches were either burnt or destroyed as a result of the post-election violence (Jozwiack 2015).

The 2011 elections were also marked by the adoption of social media, especially Facebook, by politicians and political parties for political participation (Udejinta, 2011). For instance, President Goodluck Jonathan announced his intention to run for president on Facebook, as of September 2010, about 27 million Nigerians are registered on Facebook and about 22% of Nigeria's connected population are on Twitter. Studies have indicated that almost all the institutions involved in the 2011 Nigerian election conducted aggressive outreach through social media including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, candidates, media networks, civic societies, and the police officials (Adibe, Odoemelan, and Chibuwe, 2011). Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) stress the role of social media in fuelling the

violence as many Facebook pages were filled with rumours and gossip, creating tensions between groups. SMS was used to spread false election results as well. This brought about a ‘social media war’ where online attacks between opposition sides using abusive languages were observed.

On the other hand, proponents of social media have highlighted the 2008 Obama's political campaign success. Many online platforms such as “Enough is enough Nigeria, Reclaim Naija, WangoNet and IamLagos” were established to allow citizens to report election-related incidents using pictures, videos, text messages, and voicemails. Additionally, smartphone applications such as ‘Revoda’ designed by Gbenga, an IT consultant were utilised to upload complaints or report any forms of delay in voting materials or presence of gangs at the local polling stations. This way of reporting allowed many users from within and outside the country to follow the election process. There were ‘social media activists’ who looked out for riggings and the potential spread of bombing at polling stations. According to Omenugha (2011), the extensive use of social media played an important role in the 2011 elections which made it the ‘freest and fairest’ Nigeria’s election history. This suggests the extent to which social media offers participatory democracy, promoting transparency, citizen engagement, greater accuracy in the political process, and overall speedy release of election results (Okora & Nwafor, 2013).

When it comes to youth political participation in the electoral processes, the 2015 elections in Nigeria have been praised by many (Osumah, 2016 and Alokpa, 2017). The reason is due to the peaceful campaigns conducted by youth organisations throughout the country in various forms such as “peace promotion, popular participation, political education, election monitoring and polling administration” (Osumah 2016). Youth organisations such as the Youth Initiatives for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa, the Youth Alliance on Constitution and Electoral Reform, Niger Delta Coalition for Change (NDCC), the Young-starts Development Initiative (YDI), and the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) campaigned for a peaceful election. They did so by urging youth to not commit violence and stressing that politicians do not utilise youths to commit acts of violence before, during, and after elections. The Youth Peace Accord was signed on February 3, 2015, by faith-based youth groups, civil societies, and youth development organisations to display their commitment to peaceful elections (Jozwiak, 2015 and Alokpa, 2017). Additionally, youth groups also took active steps towards voter education and utilised social media to carry out voter education on national issues (Osumah 2016).

2.4 Similarities: Nigeria and Kenya

It is important to note the limitations and lack of existing literature and or comparative analysis that specifically examines the influence of social media and the extent to which disinformation/fake news in Kenya and Nigeria have undermined the prospects of democracy and youth political participation and engagement in the digital age. One of the overarching themes brought up around the issue of youth and violence is the lack of socio-economic opportunities and an increase in youth unemployment and poverty. In the case of Nigeria, this was linked to ethnoreligious conflicts (Jega, 2007). Similarly, in Kenya, youth exclusion and their negligence by political leaders was identified as the contributing factors to post-electoral violence in 2007-2008, where about 70% of the participants were youths (Mutisi, 2012). The vulnerability and the extent of electoral processes to be manipulated were studied by Brian and Tully (2019) analysed the coverage of Cambridge Analytica in Nigerian and Kenyan Newspapers. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed Nigeria's 2015 elections and Kenya's 2013 and 2017 elections when the company manipulated news (Bajo, 2019).

Finally, both countries have political structures that, in some shape or form, can be traced back to British colonialism with a common tie to ethnic tensions and fragmentations that have shaped the political parties in both countries. Other common themes are lack of trust in the central government, electoral violence, the prevalence of fake news, and the increasing role of youth in the political sphere.

3.0 SOURCE MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research project draws data using both quantitative and qualitative sources; comparative data from Kenya and Nigeria, that looks at the impact of social media on youth participation in electoral processes. There are some existing research on this issue, for instance: “Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General Elections: the Lapses and the Lessons” by Kenneth Adibe Nwafor, a paper discussing the role of social media on the 2011 General Elections that put Goodluck Johnathan in power; “Examining the Relationship Between Media Use and Political Engagement: A Comparative Study Among the United States, Kenya, and Nigeria” a paper exploring the use of social media in political and electoral processes in both Nigeria and Kenya by Oluseyi Adegbola; and the United Nations Development Programme and the Focal Point on Youth (UNDESA) report and fact sheet titled “Youth, Political Participation and Decision Making” was given on youth participation in the constitution in Nigeria but very little on the combined effect of social media and youth in electoral processes.

For this research study, we used both primary and secondary data sources including but not limited to literature reviews, statistical reports and data, other online and library resources, interviews, surveys, and questionnaire. The entire research was conducted remotely, but some members of this project had access to contacts in these countries and political circles, physically and online. In this case, we ensured that there were no biases, and interviews were carried out in a controlled and uniform process with full transparency.

Although, our team initially planned on observing the electoral cycle divided into pre-election, election, and post-election, this approach was made nearly impossible by lack of resources and the Covid-19 pandemic which interfered with our chances to do fieldwork. Thus, this research draws on critical perspectives from field experts with extensive experience in the electoral processes and youth engagement in the country. We first tackled this by reaching out to youth leaders, experts, and academics in this area. In many ways, these diverse perspectives have enriched and enhanced the research process and outcomes.

To observe the electoral patterns, we analysed the general election data from the previous elections in both countries that involved social media and the dissemination of false information. In Nigeria, this included the elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019 which happened

to be the most controversial elections in the history of Nigeria. In the same vein, it also helped look at the 2007 elections as this too was equally seen as a turning point in the Nigerian electoral process regarding fraud and electoral manipulation. In the case of Kenya, they have had a lot more elections, so we looked at the most recent in terms of social media and technology. This included the ‘notorious’ 2007 elections, which brought in a new electoral act and constitution and rendered over 1000 people dead because of violence caused by electoral manipulation of which social media had a hand to play. We also looked at the following elections that took place in 2013 and 2017.

The main source for this apart from the government of the countries would be the highest independent electoral bodies. In Kenya that would be the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Aside from these, data from non-governmental organisations, private businesses in the countries, and foreign organisations too, were useful; for example, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, records from the United Nations Electoral Observation Missions. Also, companies like StateCraft run by REDAfrica, a youth-led political platform and governance communication company that operates in numerous African countries, Centre for Democracy and Development Nigeria, or Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, to name a few. For this research we also drew on the relevant legal framework in both countries, regarding social media, youth, and elections, and how, that is if they do, impact the electoral processes; this included the data provided by the Kofi Annan Foundation.

We also observed various social media platforms, mainly WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, and through this, we collected data on real-time evidence of youth impact in electoral processes. Both countries recently had their general elections, 2019 for Nigeria and 2017 for Kenya. As expected, the effects are still being felt for the more recent elections, and on the other hand, many are gearing up for the upcoming elections, so we can actively observe on these social media platforms, following and observing the conversations undertaken using relevant hashtags such as “#Change” or “#Buharifixthis” in Nigeria. Another important source of information was interviews, surveys, and questionnaires with youth leaders, young political advisers, some politicians, civil society groups, members of the corporate sector (as they were usually heavily involved in electoral processes), and other community members.

In regards to our audience for google form surveys, our sample constituted university students, general youth, and contacts from interviewees in these countries. For our interviewees, our sample constituted experts who either identify themselves as youth, have worked or are working with youth, and have extensive knowledge about youth engagement and mobilization in the political sphere. Besides our survey and interview audiences, we also observed the main political parties in these countries and their use of youth, social media campaigns, and data on general social media usage in the countries, using statistical websites and the likes.

3.2 Limitations

As we undertook this research, we encountered some challenges regarding the collection of data and our previously proposed methodology mentioned. Our biggest limitation is the current pandemic, COVID 19, and the social unrest in Nigeria. The political unrests and the pandemic were a challenge and limited our team in terms of the fieldwork prospects and access to necessary information. However, these limitations did not prevent us from conducting detailed desk-research, social media observations, in-depth online interviews, and surveys.

Contrary to our initial understanding of the limitation when it comes to accessing government officials and politicians, this was not the case. Almost all our interviewees agreed to be recorded during the interviews. This was mainly because these experts did not directly work with the government. Instead, they were from fact-checking organisations, non-governmental sector, and international organisations. Nonetheless, these interviews and surveys were incredibly useful, as we gained information directly from those involved and we did not have to infer or rely on dated data. Finally, our team acknowledges that our intended sample frame is prone to bias as it is small, survey responses were disproportionate with more participation from Nigerian youths compared to Kenya and the survey focused heavily relied on students; this is not representative of the majority of youth in the country.

4.0 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This section is dedicated to findings from the interviews and survey responses, and our interpretations based on the research objectives. The main objective of the research was to critically assess the influence of social media - Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp on youth participation in the spread of disinformation. These three social media platforms were used as they were among the most widely used social media platforms on the continent and specifically in Kenya and Nigeria. This project also analysed how the spread of disinformation in Nigeria and Kenya undermines democracy and the role of youth in political processes in the region. Finally, this paper aimed to verify the hypothesis regarding the spread of disinformation and electoral violence in both countries.

Pseudonyms are used in this section to ensure the ethics and confidentiality of our interviewees and survey respondents. Some of the quotes have been edited for clarity purposes. We use participants, respondents, and interviewees to refer to all those individuals who contributed to the research either through interviews and or surveys. While conducting our research, we made sure to attain these objectives and the following sections are the interpretations concerning existing literature. The analysis consists of four main parts and their sub-divisions. Each part is dedicated to interpreting one of the research questions.

4.2 Youth, Social Media, and Politics

4.2.1 Introduction

The emergence of social media has undeniably surfaced and amplified marginalized voices such as that of the youth, minority groups, and women. Through our interviews conducted with experts and youth leaders, there is a resounding agreement that social media plays a crucial role in this digital age and since the younger generation is often deemed as tech-savvy, it is mostly the youth who tend to utilize social media to spread the news and engage in digital activism. However, when comparing and mapping the extent to which digital engagement translates to electoral participation or voting, it paints a different picture.

For this research, social media was limited to Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, although the surveys and interviews that we conducted mentioned the use of other social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. From the 175 survey responses, about 92% of the youth

used WhatsApp as their social media platforms, 84% used Instagram, 76% used Twitter and 42.3% used Facebook. These 4 social media platforms were most popular and prominently used by youth regularly. These youths can share, tweet, and post news they find intriguing on social media platforms and among friends and colleagues. This ease and efficiency with which people can tweet, comment, and share allow for the fast spread of news with no gatekeepers and or regulation of the content's validity. This is something social media users have mentioned quite too often. In contrast to traditional media such as newspapers and or radio stations, social media allows freedom of expression on a whole different level.

4.2.2 Influence of Social Media

The effect of social media and its influence on electoral processes or outcomes in Nigeria and Kenya is highly contested. According to our survey, 40% of responses leaned towards the claim that social media is not influential in the country's electoral processes and outcomes. Whereas 30.9% thought that social media was influential in the electoral processes. Similarly, an interviewee, who works for Africa Check, a non-profit organization that prides itself in promoting accurate facts and figures in public debate and media throughout Africa, claimed that social media was effective and highly influential otherwise political figures would not bother with their online image and election campaign. A case in point is Buhari's Twitter analysis which shows that he joined Twitter 5 months before the election, this was highlighted by AD, a male interviewee.

While social media is an important factor of analysis, its usage and effectiveness have been ambiguous. 57.1% of our survey responses indicate that social media was not used effectively for electoral processes in the country with only 14.3% believing that social media was useful. The remaining 28.6% of the responses were unsure whether social media platforms were used effectively or in a positive manner. According to our interviewees, although internet penetration was not strong in rural regions compared to urban cities, there were more voter turnouts in rural parts with more elderly participation than that of youth. Secondly, when examining the effectiveness of social media, it's important to consider the nature of different social media platforms, and how it enables one to disseminate information is also important to consider. For instance, the encrypted nature of WhatsApp allows a degree of anonymity as one cannot trace who sent or shared the messages. This emboldens political candidates and their supporters to spread "fake news," increasing the risk of electoral violence. The role of WhatsApp in

disseminating fake news was observed during the 2019 Nigerian elections (Cheeseman, Fisher, Hassan and Hitchen, 2020).

When asked about the prevalence of fake news on social media platforms, an overwhelming 88.3% agreed with the statement and about 56.5% of respondents believed that fake news was influential in their country's electoral system. One of our interviewees stated that people who propagate this fake news do so out of fear. In the context of Kenya where tribal politics and clashes come to play, fake news is utilized to push a certain narrative and to win votes from certain tribes. Additionally, fake news targeted toward female politicians or political candidates is disproportionately high. The social biases towards women and lack of female representations in the political space have negatively affected their online image on many of these social media platforms.

4.2.3 Social Media and Voting

At its core, social media has equipped youth with the tools and techniques to freely express themselves and be part of social and political movements. However, it is unclear whether these online activities translate to actual electoral participation via voting at the polls. Many of our interviewees have expressed that while youth in urban cities like Nairobi and Lagos are engaged with politics online, they do not necessarily go out and vote. In contrast, the older generation in rural regions are the ones going out and vote in person. There's something to be said about the higher voting participation among older people who use little to no social media. This sentiment aligns with the findings by Afro barometer publications, whereby in comparison with older citizens, "Africa's youth tend to vote less and express a lower level of partisanship" and similarly, the youth are less likely to protest than older citizens (Resnick and Casale, 2011). According to one of our survey respondents in Northern Nigeria, many of the voters who vote do not always have access to smartphones or any social media accounts.

According to interview responses, the reasons why youth's online presence does not translate to offline political participation in the form of voting is because of the lengthy and arduous voting processes. One of our interviewees who herself identified as a youth said it best when she said: "our election [process] is not easy...it is like running a marathon" (Hash, 27, female, Nigeria). To elaborate her statement, she stated that citizens have to go get a voter card a few months before the election. The process of obtaining a voter card could take hours in a queue and or days. The technology is not advanced enough and when coupled with a poor internet

connection, the process is highly inefficient. Moreover, there is a lack of motivation and pessimism among youths who feel that the laborious voting process is not worth going through with the prevalence of corruption, the tendency for the nullification of votes, and politicians who don't serve the youth's interests. This attitude was reflected in our survey responses where only 39.4% of respondents stated that they plan to vote in the next election cycle. When asked whether the youths think their votes make a difference, about 41.1% believed that their votes did not make a difference whereas 25% believed it did with 33.7% who felt indifferent.

4.3 Youth, Fake News, and Electoral Violence

4.3.1 Introduction

Describing disinformation can prove difficult as it takes various forms, can have a plethora of origins, and is, therefore, dependent on context. As mentioned in the beginning and for this research, “Fake news” or disinformation is the spread of inaccurate information through the use of “graphics, photos, and videos or distorted image and video content” where dubious elements are displayed in ways to elicit outrage or fury (Maweu, 2020).

As Bajo (2019) posits, social media plays a crucial role in mobilising and disseminating information during election cycles and that it has also been used to incite hatred and violence through disinformation and hate speech. This part focuses on the influence of fake news on electoral related violence, comparing data from our surveys and interviews to the existing literature. By doing this, this paper explores the link, if any, between the spread of disinformation and electoral violence in Kenya and Nigeria.

4.3.2 Fake News and Ethnic Violence

With the rise in social media usage in Kenya and Nigeria, 88.3% of the survey respondents agree that fake news is prevalent while 9.4% disagree. Notwithstanding, only 56% think that fake news affects their country's electoral system. Almost all the interviewees assert that fake news can fuel existing violence but hardly will any news on social media create ‘new conflict.’ Rather, they claim that social media is used to exacerbate violence and fake news is used as a strategy to incite already existing violence. This confirms Tannous, Belesiotis, Tchakarian, & Stewart's (2019) argument that the increasing use of social media has enabled the spread of fake news, intensifying pre-existing and underlying ethnic, cultural, and religious divides within the Nigerian society.

Even though our research questions did not contain any questions related to ethnic tensions and tribal divides, most of the respondents, both from the surveys and interviews brought it up. For example, when we asked Aba about the contribution of fake news to electoral violence, she said:

“.....our politics is basically tribal, and now social media fuels community problems around land distribution- something that exists since independence in Kenya...” (Aba, 24, Female, Kenya)

Aba posits further that the 2007 electoral violence in Kenya is deeply rooted in ethnic divides and that the role of social media is mild. Her postulations confirm Maweu (2017) argument that Kenyan politics has always been informed by ethnic consciousness rather than ideological consciousness. Like all the other general elections in Kenya, there is political rhetoric with strong ethnic undertones and mobilization that is likely to divide the country along ethnic lines. Similarly, in Nigeria’s 2019 general election, a misinformation campaign was launched against a Muslim candidate who was portrayed as abetting with the LGBTQ community. Oak (an interviewee) asserts that the religious and ethnic misunderstanding in Nigeria has been politicised, taking advantage of social media to spread fake news against each other. The use of disinformation before an election to promote existing ethnic violence corresponds with the survey responses as 66.3% of the respondents were dissatisfied with their countries last elections, with only 0.6% who were satisfied with the electoral activities/results. For those who were dissatisfied, corruption, ethnic violence, and obscurity in the electoral system are the recurring reasons that influence their decisions.

Therefore, the available data shows that young people in both countries- Nigeria and Kenya believe social media has expanded the frontier for political participation. However, the spread of disinformation through social media platforms (particularly Twitter and WhatsApp) exacerbate existing ethnic tensions.

4.3.3 Fake news, Government Regulations, and Violence

Another concern of our respondents was the involvement of the state in restricting free speech-limiting access to the internet. Kenya has been polarised using hate speech, resulting from ethnic tensions, and this was apparent during the 2007 post-election period (Nanfuka, 2014). The government disabled SMS following the political and ethnic violence to prevent people from disseminating ‘provocative messages.’ Some of the respondents from both countries were

concerned about the state's involvement in 'restricting media free-speech.' For instance, Mosa posits during the interview:

"...media is not free due to high involvement of the state and its security, an attempt by the government to limit free speech and spread disinformation..."

(Mosa, 34 years, Male, Nigeria)

He was concerned about the 'high involvement' of the Nigerian government in limiting freedom of speech in the country. This can be seen through the reintroduction of the Hate Speech Bill, the Social Media Bill, and the NGO regulation bill. The involvement of the government in social media is prevalent in Kenya as well. According to Wew, in 2013, the Kenyan government had to restrict media usage to prevent 'trending opposition activities.' A key concern since the 2007 election is moving hate speech from SMS to social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Nanfuka, 2014). This was followed by the Kenya Information and Communication (Amendment) Bill, also known as 'Social Media Bill', tabled in parliament in October 2019. Although the bill is vague in Kenya, undoubtedly, the government claims it will limit the flow of fake news and prevent political and ethnic related violence. Perhaps this could be supported by 57.1% of the total survey respondents who think social media is not used effectively for electoral purposes in their country. Also, the regulation of media activities by the state- 'to reduce disinformation' is seen as a limitation to 'freedom of speech.' Hopefully, this has nothing to do with the 90.3% of respondents who do not associate with any political party in their country due to unfavourable 'electoral related conditions.'

4.4 Misinformation, Democracy and Youth Engagement in Electoral Processes

4.4.1 Introduction

The rise in social media usage has brought with it an unprecedented growth in the issues of fake news and disinformation. Attributed to the relaxed and ever-changing nature of social media, which causes an inability to regulate and check the spread of information on these social media platforms. From what we have researched, social media does play a significant role in the mobilization of youth and the dissemination of information during electoral processes. Social media is known to spread disinformation that has and can lead to violence, induced by hate speech and other divisive elements. This section aims to understand the extent to which disinformation undermines democracy and youth engagement in electoral processes in Nigeria and Kenya.

4.4.2 Disinformation and Democracy

Democracy is less likely to thrive where people are poorly informed. In countries with disinformation and no access to free media; there is a high chance that the citizenry will cast their votes and make decisions based on their biased information. This will most likely result in the election of incompetent and corrupt leaders. Research carried out by the HRV Transparency Project in their latest publication “*Information, Democracy and Autocracy: Economic Transparency and Political (In)Stability*”, shows and supports this. Using this logic, if those elected are not a fair and accurate representation of the people’s choice, then democracy has not been achieved. We have come to realize that the freeness of the media does not categorically curtail or increase the spread of disinformation. In cases where the government might benefit from fake news and misinformation, the media being free and available to fact check that information might prove problematic to the agenda at hand. On the other hand, without media regulation, there is a chance of misinformation spreading. At least, in this case, there is free media and speech to counter the narratives spun by the fake news.

Fake news delegitimizes elections and undermines the authority of electoral bodies, and this is usually perpetuated by opposing political parties. An interviewee mentioned how “...social media is used to publish fake results on election days, and this can trigger violence” (Mosa, Community Organizer). Social media can manipulate popular conversations and debates, through the spread of disinformation. These debates usually fuel popular opinion and can, directly and indirectly, affect elections, increase tensions within the country, and spread hate and violence. We found that in Nigeria and Kenya, religion and ethnicity have been utilised as political tools to create divisive narratives and disinformation played a central role in causing division, undermining democracy, and stifling the democratic processes.

When asked what issues disinformation fuels, one of our interviewees, stated the outcome of fake news in Nigeria is:

“...*Ethnic clashes and silence*...”. (Ray, Male, 37 years, Nigeria)

Fake news changes and shifts the narrative; when the citizenry realizes this, they tend to trust the government and the status of their democracy less. Due to the lack of trust in their government and the electoral process, fewer people are eager to participate in the elections, and in cases where there are no means of fact-checking and transparency, the spread of this fake news worsens as citizens are poorly informed and they find it challenging to distinguish right

from wrong. This hampers the trust between citizens and their governments and the overall democratic process within the country.

To summarise, fake news is increasingly undermining democracy regardless of where it is taking place. Fake news preys on the prejudices, fears, impressionable nature, and illiteracy of the people. Ultimately misinformation influences voting choices and behaviours and coupled with poor infrastructure for the dissemination of information gives fake news the edge it has in society. As freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, many governments are finding it difficult and have not placed a ban or tried to curtail the spread of disinformation on these social media platforms.

“... We want a society where people can make better-informed decisions and have the right. The information has been weaponized. If we are not careful, it can cause a crisis. As a country with historical military rule and junta, I don't believe in censorship but more so media literacy. People should be able to know what they are reading. Journalists and the media should push out the right information. (based on data and facts). Evidence-based journalism should be promoted on all fronts...” (Ajei, Male)

4.4.3 Disinformation and Youth Engagement in Electoral Processes

It proved difficult to link disinformation and youth political engagement in Nigeria and Kenya. According to our surveys and interviews, disinformation is mainly an issue that plagues the older generations. Examples being a lack of transparency at the polls, electoral violence, corruption, and a lack of competent candidates, are some of the reasons respondents mentioned for not voting or taking part in electoral processes.

The youth involved in the spread of fake news; are usually actively aware of the nature of the information they are spreading but do so due to unemployment and the need to survive. They are used as pawns in the hands of these politicians and their parties to spread narratives. When asked who the drivers of disinformation were, most of our interviewees placed the blame on both parties being the youth and political powers that be. Members of the youth are vital in this social media spread of disinformation as they are the main demographic on these platforms and have a better understanding of the platform's functioning. An interviewee agreed with this saying:

“...Yes, as we (youth) are on it more and more tech-savvy and can be paid on social media to promote such. Politicians who hire bloggers to promote their agendas, pay to mar the image of the politicians. But only done as they have no means, to support daily living.” (Wew, Kenya, Policy Fellow)

The issue of fake news in Kenya and Nigeria, dates to the invention of news itself, the only difference being that social media has become a vector for the rapid dissemination of this information. In conclusion, fake news is not the most pressing issue when it comes to electoral processes in general and electoral processes that centre the youth. There are more pressing issues causing divides, undermining democracy, and reducing youth participation in these democratic processes.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed to explore the extent to which social media platforms- Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp influence youth participation in Nigeria and Kenya. The findings indicate that social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter has enabled youth in both countries to spread and contribute to the news with little or no regulations. Each platform plays a different role in electoral processes. While WhatsApp is usually used to share information, Twitter is used as the ‘medium’ contributing to politics. However, due to the onerous and ‘untrusted’ voting process, youth engagement in political activities using social media platforms does not construe voting turn-up. In both Nigeria and Kenya, we found an association between disinformation and electoral violence. Social media platforms, according to our data, are used to spread disinformation and exacerbate ethnic tensions. As a result, governments have been apparent in regulating social media platforms to ‘prevent’ people from spreading disinformation and sharing ‘provocative’ messages leading to ethnic and electoral violence. Government involvement in regulating social media is seen as restricting individual freedom. From our finding, while the profound increase in fake news undermines democracy, youth do not see fake news as a pressing concern for electoral processes. Young people believe there are more pressing issues and fake news is not an issue paramount to the problem of electoral integrity.

Our findings, though accurate, should be treated with caution because they were based on a qualitative interview with 10 experts (6 from Nigeria and 4 from Kenya) and their responses do not reflect the larger population. Nonetheless, our research findings have led us to make recommendations on ‘strengthening the electoral environment in Nigeria and Kenya to hold peaceful and legitimate elections.’

Recommendations

1. As the research findings indicate, voter turnout is low because of the arduous electoral processes in Nigeria and Kenya. For this, we recommend establishing an ‘advanced’ digital technology compared to the traditional paper-based procedures in both countries. This will provide accurate voter registration, vote casting, and counting, as well as result transmission and tabulation. Not only has digital technologies aided in elections in Europe but it has been helpful in Tanzanian and Somalia as well (Russel and Zamfir, 2018). But like every other election, polls conducted using digital technology must comply with the [general principles](#) laid down in Article 25 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Nigeria and Kenya both meet the minimum

requirement to apply advanced technology for an easy, safe, and transparent election. Therefore, specific policies targeted at enhancing electoral processes through digital technologies will be ideal for both countries. It is important to note the drawbacks of such advanced electoral technology, especially in areas that this technology will be on trial for the first time. The main drawbacks being the increased chance of electoral fraud and manipulation and a failure of the systems supporting this technology. The above issues have been proposed as reasons not to adopt electronic voting in other countries, for example, Switzerland.

2. While youth and women are active participants, their demography is not always reflected in the hierarchy of leadership positions, thus we need more leadership positions for youth and women in politics. The lack of youth and female representations in the political space in both Nigeria and Kenya is not only disheartening but also impedes the country's efforts towards inclusivity and democracy. In Nigeria, the 'Not Too Young To Run Bill' was passed in 2019 as part of the advocacy role of YIAGA AFRICA – The Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement. This bill resulted in an increase in youth candidacy from 21% in 2015 to 34.2% in 2019. However, less than 1% of the youths were voted into political leadership positions (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019). Similarly, in Kenya, the 2010 constitution introduced constitutional and legal reforms to encourage increase participation of youth and women. The new constitution dedicated seats for women at the country level and seats for youth in the senate (Carter Center, 2018). However, despite these progressive reforms, the Carter Center's research findings revealed that political parties themselves were often a barrier for youth and women's participation. Youth and women faced “serious financial, societal, and cultural challenges to full participation, including intimidation, harassment, and violence” (Ibid). Therefore, we recommend both governments to develop ‘affirmative-action measures’ to integrate and involve youth and women into leadership positions within the electoral system. Additionally, there needs to be a safe space for both youth and women to freely express their opinions without the fear of intimidation, discrimination, harassment, and violence.
3. To quell the spread of misinformation on social media, regulations should be put in place to ensure that information spread online is based on evidence and facts. We suggest independent fact-checking organizations, for example, Africa Check, Dubawa, and

PesaCheck be employed to sift through the information shared across the platforms. On the other hand, we understand the regulation of social media may open the flood gates for the infringement of fundamental human rights, for example, the freedom of expression, an issue now being faced by the Nigerian government with the recent talks of regulating social media (Seun Opejobi, 2020) amidst the recent protests in the country. For this reason, we suggest independent and non-governmental bodies be used. At the same time, social media platforms should implement methods of fact-checking on their applications. For example, the recent feature on Twitter (Seana Davis, 2020) reminds you to ensure the information you are retweeting, or liking is credible, it asks you to take another look and ensure the credibility of the information you are spreading. On other platforms like Instagram and Facebook (Shayan Sardarizadeh, 2020), posts (stories, photos, and videos) deemed 'fake' by the application programmers are flagged and stopped from being shared. Measures like this ensure social media users take time to read and ensure the information they are about to share is credible and will not endanger those receiving it due to its 'fake' nature. All in all, we believe actions like these and the involvement of the above-mentioned organizations or similar, will culminate in a reduction in the spread of fake news and disinformation.

4. Integrating media literacy into the educational systems and curriculums of these countries is important as it aids the development of free-thinking and inquiry concerning media and information. It enables one to critically evaluate, examine, understand, appreciate, and process information from a plethora of media. It also provides critical thinking skills and aids in the understanding of the power and role of media in society. This kind of education is needed, especially with the rise in technology and social media, which has increased access to and the spread of information and on the downside, misinformation. An ability to decipher what information is credible and what information is not will come in handy especially with this new and growing social media generation.

The idea of media literacy is not new to the Kenyan and Nigerian society, but as it is a relatively foreign notion, it has been difficult to understand and therefore implement, without the full backing of a government or state organizations. Private institutions, schools, and other non-governmental bodies have been left with the task of ensuring media literacy is a core part of the country's curriculum. For example, in Nigeria the

African Centre for Media Literacy (ACML) is aimed at “raising awareness among children, teachers, adults, parents, and policymakers of children’s rights and the value of children’s participation in community and national development,” says Chido Onumah, ACML’s founder and director. According to a report by the Centre for International Media Assistance, the initiative has successfully created a working curriculum and is partnering with the Nigerian officials to share this knowledge countrywide. An example in Kenya is the Digital Learning Programme, set up by the government to arm the country’s youth with the necessary skill set to function and thrive in the growing digital world. According to a report by the World Bank (Kennedy Ogolla), teachers have seen increased development in their student's educational conduct towards media and other new ideas, since the implementation of this programme. Initiatives like this should become commonplace to raise politically engaged and well-informed citizens.

It is important to note that media literacy comes in various forms and cannot be applied generically. One needs to understand the background of the society and people that will be applying the lessons learned. Before initiatives like the above mentioned are set up a critical assessment of the country’s educational curriculum should be carried out to ensure smooth integration and effective use of such initiatives.

To summarize, our comprehensive research study has contributed in laying the foundation for further research studies and policy briefs in areas of youth, political engagement, need for inclusivity, rebuilding trust, and finally the urgent need to regulate social media in order to prevent the exacerbation of electoral violence resulting from fake news, disinformation, and or misinformation. The emerging role of private technology companies and their contribution to peace and security in the region needs in-depth examination. Thus, future studies that examine the influence of social media and youth political participation in the region could highly benefit from examining the important role that technology companies play, the role of women, especially young women in the political sphere and the overall role of youth in shaping the political landscape in the contemporary digital era.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I: Interview Guide

Good morning/day/evening. My name is.....I am part of a group of students from the Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland. As part of our programme, we are working with the Kofi Annan Foundation, researching the Impact of Social Media on Youth Political Participation in Electoral Processes in Kenya and Nigeria. I will be grateful if you would take some time to respond to a few questions. I assure you that any information given will be treated with the highest confidentiality and will not be disclosed.

A. Demographic Characteristics:

1. Can you please introduce yourself briefly (Name, age, where you're from, and your profession)

B. Knowledge of Social Media Influence:

2. Which social media platform are you familiar with (probe: why this particular one platform, how many hours do you spend on the platform)?
3. In what ways do you think social media influences our lives? (probe:)?
4. In your opinion, do you think social media is influential in your country's election (probe: which specific one, were you involved in any way, etc.)?
5. Based on the previous response- do you think the influence was positive or negative (probe: did it dis/advantage your political party)?

C. Knowledge/Factors Influencing Disinformation/Fake News:

6. Do you trust news outlets in your society and how free is the media in your country?
7. How do you define freedom of speech and expression and are they present (esp. related to politics) in your country?
8. Have you heard the term fake news before (probe: how about disinformation, any difference, in context did you hear it)?
9. What is fake news or disinformation to you- based on the context you first heard?
10. What do you think contributes to the spread of fake news in elections (probe: social media- which of them,)?

D. Perception of Youth involvement:

11. What is it like being a youth in your country- General (probe: your experience as a youth concerning politics in your country, electoral cycle-before, during, and after elections)?
12. Do most youths have a place in your country's politics (probe: what is mostly their roles)?
13. What do you think is the role of youth in spreading disinformation (probes: TBD)
14. What do you understand from democracy as well as the relationship between democracy and elections?
15. Does disinformation undermine democracy and youth involvement in electoral violence (probe:)?

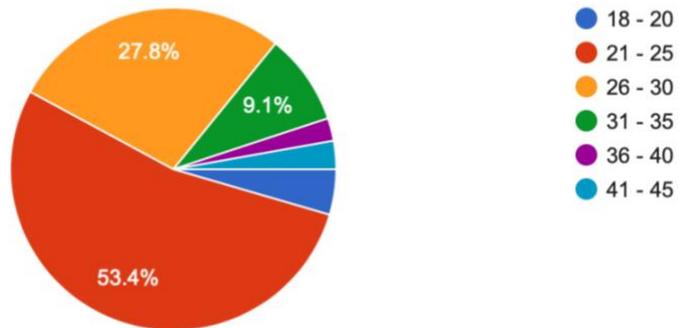
F. Suggestions/Recommendations

16. Do you have any suggestions/recommendations you think will be helpful to understand disinformation and electoral violence in your country?

Appendix II: Survey Results

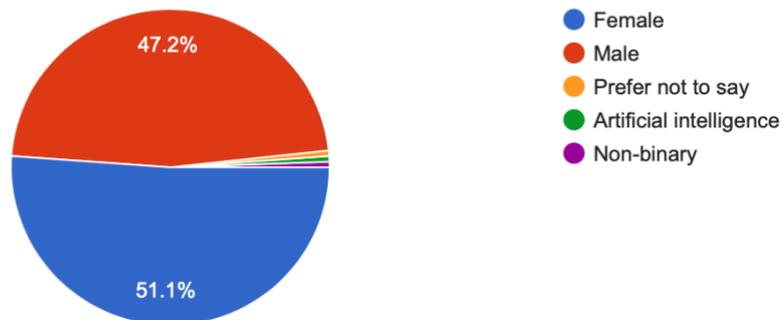
What is your age?

176 responses



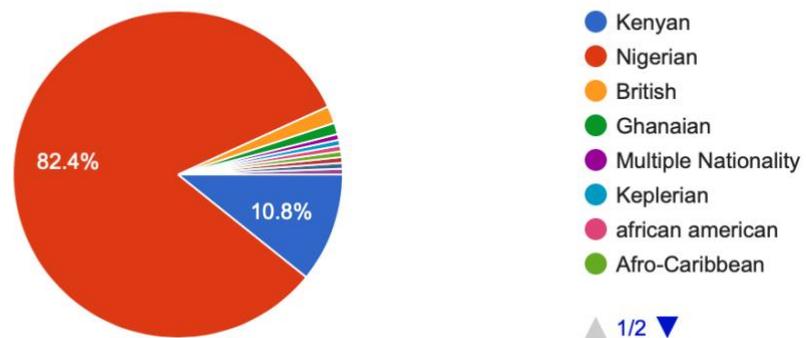
What is your gender?

176 responses



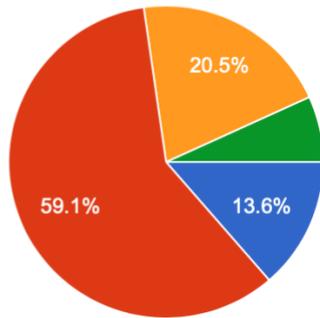
What is your nationality?

176 responses



What sector are you in?

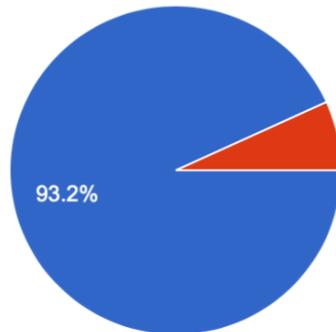
176 responses



- Education
- Private
- Public/ Government
- Non Governmental Organisation (NGO)

Would you consider yourself a youth?

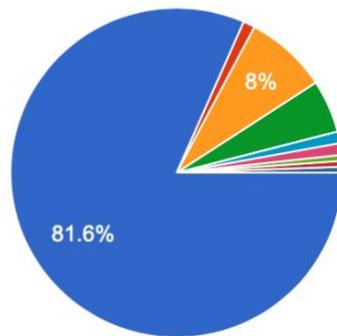
176 responses



- Yes
- No

What made you choose the answer above?

174 responses

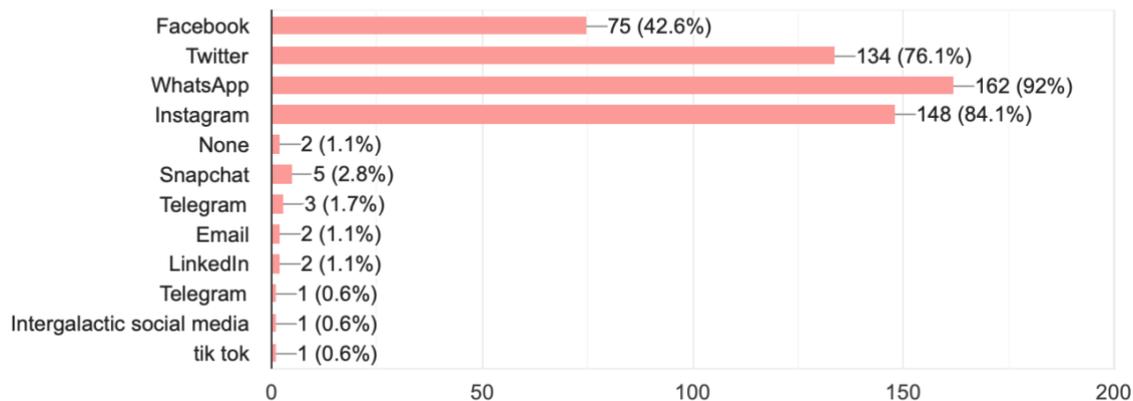


- Age
- Marital Status
- Responsibilities
- Culture
- Job
- State of mind
- No t being in touch with youth concerns
- African Youth Charter recognizes yout...

▲ 1/2 ▼

Which of the social media platforms do you use? (You can select more than one)

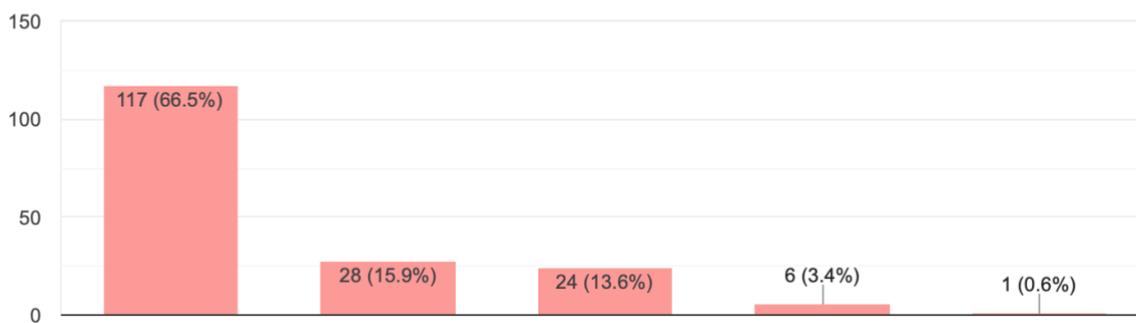
176 responses



Were you satisfied with your country's last elections?



176 responses



What made you choose the answer above?

163 responses

- Corruption
- I did not get to vote
- It was obviously rigged and it has negatively impacted my country
- The disregard of the contribution of youths
- Because of the turn out of events that occurred during the elections
- The candidates, the system & corruption
- It wasn't 100% transparent.
- Conspicuous electoral malpractice
- The results were contested

The same president that performed poorly was re-elected. The country is getting worse
Media reports of violence and intimidation
Shitty electoral process
The people in power are not reliable at all!!
Buhari won
Rigging and poor communication
the whole process was stressful and manipulated
There should be an online registration process for receiving voters card to allow youth participation
Veracity of election results. Actual voters/Viable voter ratio very low

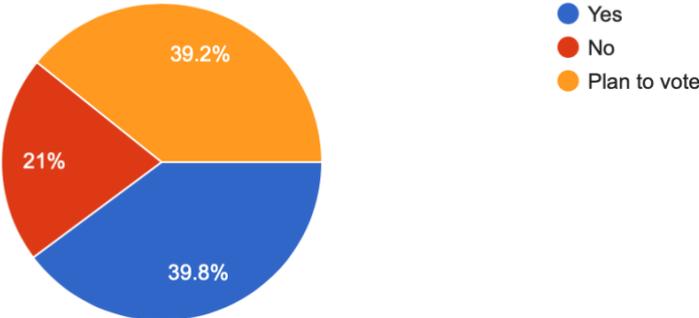
In what ways have you participated in your country's elections?

164 responses



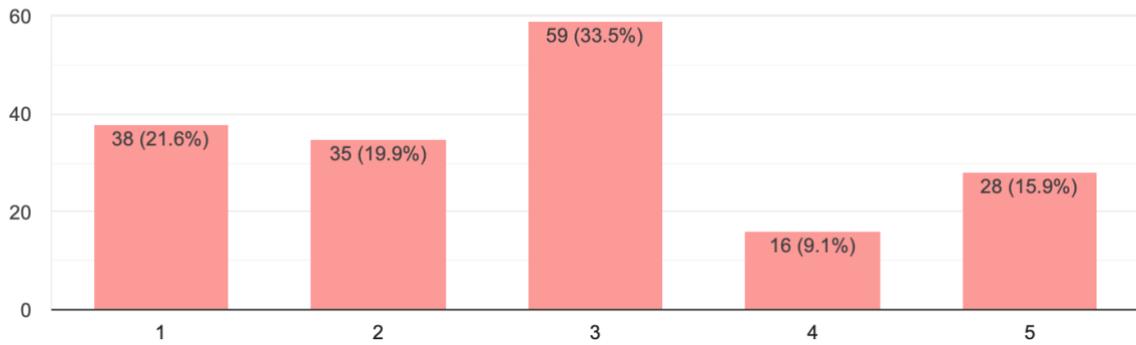
Have you voted or plan to vote in the next election cycle?

176 responses



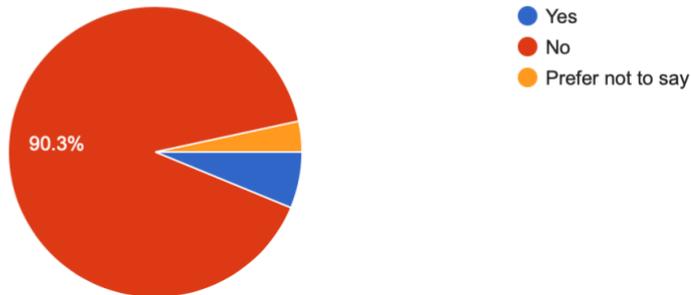
Please rate how strongly you agree OR disagree with the following statement: "My vote makes a difference"

176 responses



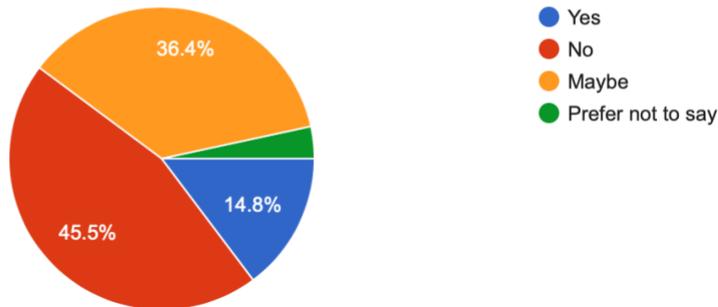
Are you a member of a political party?

176 responses



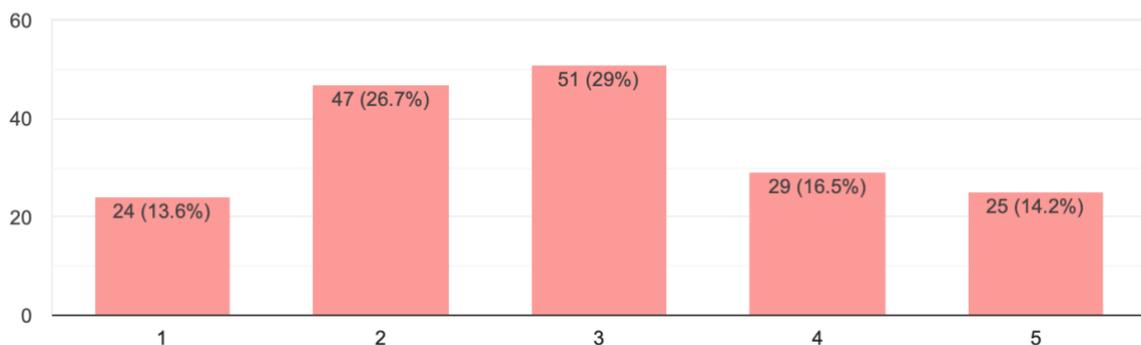
Do you plan on running for any position in the government?

176 responses



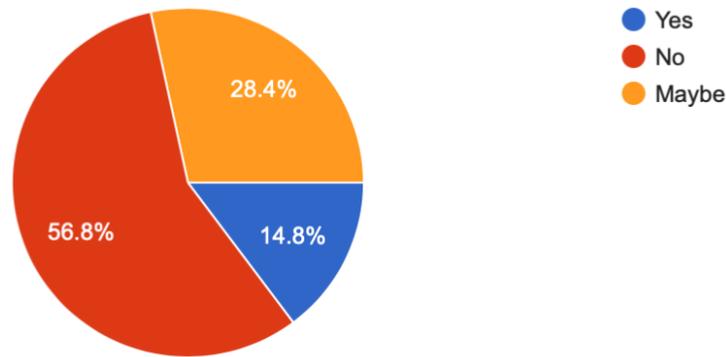
How much does social media influences electoral processes and outcomes in your country?

176 responses



Do you think social media is used effectively for electoral processes in your country?

176 responses



What made you choose the answer above?

140 responses

Social media is used by a very small percentage of the general population. Therefore it doesn't play a major role in shifting opinion of the public

Social media can be used and also misused for the electoral process

It could be more effective in terms of engagement

People views on how the leaders didn't do what they said in their manifesto, discouraged me from giving them another chance.

Exposing malpractices

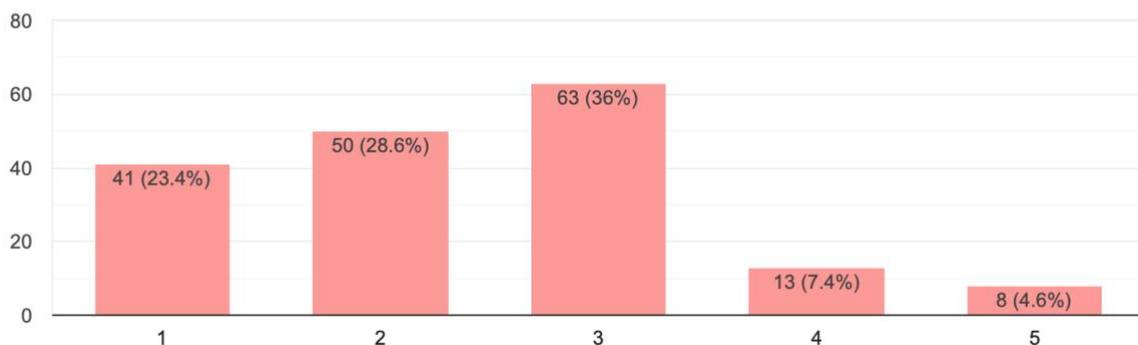
It's still fresh in the country

I see lots of campaigns online.

There's a lot of talk but it's impact can't be determined because the process is generally not free and fair.

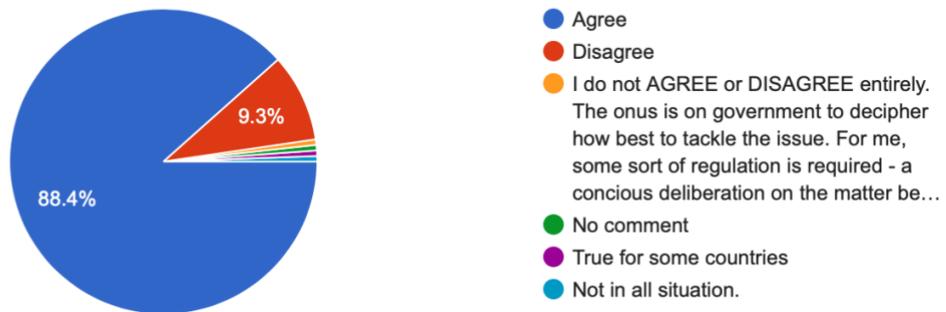
How biased is the media in your country?

175 responses



With the rise of social media fake news is highly prevalent in many countries. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

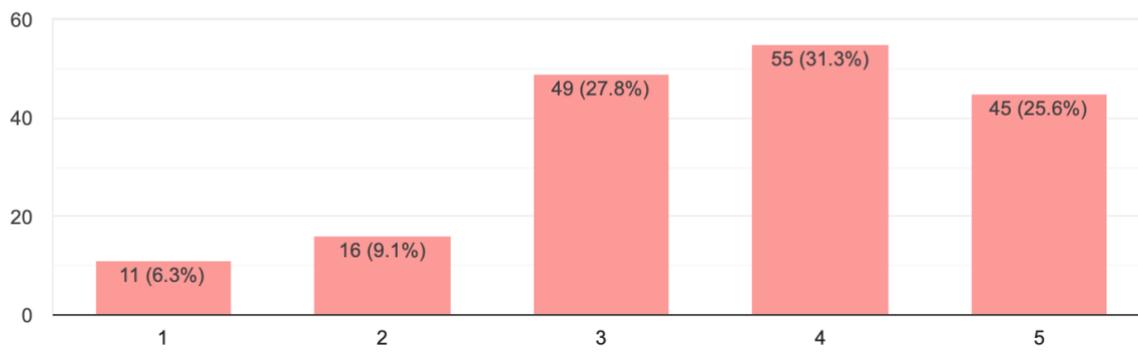
172 responses



How much influence does "fake news" have on your country's electoral system?



176 responses



For full report, please see here: <https://forms.gle/6RkyJzD9PqquSA7f8>