

# LONDA



2021

**Côte D'Ivoire Digital Rights and Inclusion Report**

# LONDA

**CÔTE D'IVOIRE DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2021 REPORT**

A PARADIGM INITIATIVE PUBLICATION

**Published by Paradigm Initiative**

374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: [media@paradigmhq.org](mailto:media@paradigmhq.org)

[www.paradigmhq.org](http://www.paradigmhq.org)

Published in May 2022

Report written by Constant Konan

Editorial Team: 'Gbenga Sesan, Kathleen Ndong'mo, Hlengiwe Dube, Margaret Nyambura

Ndung'u, Mawaki Chango, Nnenna Paul-Ugochukwu and Thobekile Matimbe.

Cover Page design by Kenneth Oyeniyi

Design & Layout by Luce Concepts

Images credit @ Pexels

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial use in any form provided due credit is given to the publishers, and the work is presented without any distortion.

Copyright © 2022 Paradigm Initiative



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**01**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**02**

INTRODUCTION

**03**

DISINFORMATION AND HATE  
SPEECH IN COTE D'IVOIRE

**05**

CURRENT DIGITAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

**06**

CONCLUSION

**07**

RECOMMENDATIONS

**LONDA**

CÔTE D'IVOIRE DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2021 REPORT

A PARADIGM INITIATIVE PUBLICATION

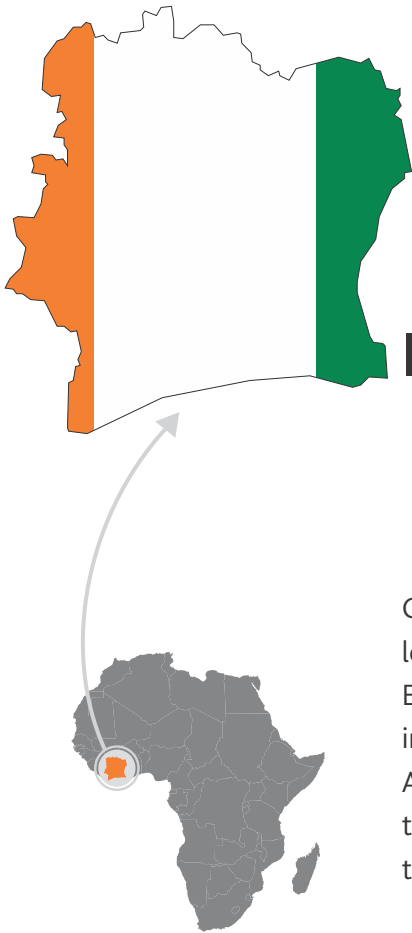
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among the classic requirements of democracy are not only freedom of expression, but also transparency in accessing, processing and disclosing information. However, these requirements seem to undergo critical reversals due to a set of paradoxes which, without being really foreign to the daily life of modern societies, have been amplified by the popularization of the Internet and social networks.

For Côte d'Ivoire, the issue of misinformation and hate speech is at the heart of the new challenges facing the government, the population and all development actors. This report will address several issues and propose recommendations to strengthen the resilience of the population to the threats that misinformation and hate speech pose to social cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire,.

Reflections will include an overview of the state of misinformation, a better understanding of the legal framework of misinformation and related challenges, and best practices to support awareness raising among Internet users.





## INTRODUCTION

# DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Covering an area of 322,462 km<sup>2</sup>, Côte d'Ivoire, is a West African country located in the northern hemisphere between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator. Its population, mainly young, is estimated at 28 088 455 inhabitants in 2021.<sup>1</sup> The main economic power in French-speaking West Africa, the country has one of the most dynamic economic growths (from 6 to 11% between 2012 and 2019) in the world and maintains its position as the world's leading producer and exporter of cocoa beans and cashew nuts.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of internet and telecommunication consumption, Côte d'Ivoire, has one of the highest internet penetration rates in the West African region with

an average of 46.8% in January 2021.<sup>3</sup> The penetration rate of fixed Internet is 1.2% while that of mobile Internet is 77%.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of the population connected to the Internet is estimated at 12.50 million, representing an increase of 2.5% between 2020 and 2021.<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that 22.1% of the Ivorian population uses social media networks, which is equivalent to nearly 5.90 million users. Côte d'Ivoire, is in 3rd place in West Africa in the field of ICT.<sup>6</sup>



1. The World Factbook / Côte d'Ivoire, in <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cote-divoire/> consulted on the 13th of January 2021 at 11:23 hrs
2. In <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/cotedivoire/overview> consulted on the 10th of January 2022 at 12:10 hrs
3. In <https://www.artci.ci/index.php/marches-regules/11-observatoire-du-secteurs-des-telecoms/service-internet/75-abonnes-service-internet.html?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default> consulted on the 12th of January 2021 at 00:45hrs.
4. In <https://www.artci.ci/index.php/marches-regules/11-observatoire-du-secteurs-des-telecoms/service-internet/75-abonnes-service-internet.html?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default> consulted on the 12th of January 2021 at 00:45hrs
5. In <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-cote-divoire> consulted on the 15th of January 2021 at 12:10hrs
6. Mamadou Sanogo, « ICT Sector, Coe d'Ivoire 3rd in West Africa » in <https://www.7info.ci/secteur-tic-la-cote-divoire-3e-en-afrique-de-louest/> consulted on the 10 of January 2021 at 9:10hrs



## DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The rise of the Internet and social networks has considerably transformed interactions in the public space, which has become increasingly virtual. In Côte d'Ivoire, cases of misinformation are becoming more widespread, especially over the last five years. Indeed, the spread of a whole range of forms of disinformation is increasingly apparent, especially on Facebook. The rise of virtual discussion forums has amplified fake news given the confrontation between supporters of different political parties.<sup>7</sup>

This reality was also evident during the 2020 and 2021 electoral cycles. Indeed, Côte d'Ivoire, is not immune to the phenomenon of misleading political advertisements and false information that are unleashed on web platforms.<sup>8</sup>

Among the examples, we can cite the numerous conspiracy theories related to the Corona virus disease. Indeed, a report published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Ivory Coast states that the misinformation surrounding Covid-19 initially led the entire Ivory Coast population to question Ivory Coast's ability to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the fight against the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

This questioning had considerable impacts on the further management of the pandemic and the respect for digital rights, especially in the city of Abidjan.<sup>10</sup>

According to Anderson Diédri,



**The fake news spread  
misled citizens and led them  
to behave unreasonably.**



*"We have seen people destroying the screening center that was under construction in Yopougon<sup>11</sup>{a suburb of the city of Abidjan}, believing that this center was going to receive patients who were going to contaminate them, when in reality it was a screening center that was supposed to help improve care and support in the fight against the disease".<sup>12</sup>*

In addition, accusations of assassination plots against prominent politicians, unsubstantiated allegations of election fraud, manipulated photos to spread false political narratives and false statements attributed to politicians played a prominent role in amplifying false information and hate speech during both the October 2020 presidential elections and the 2021 legislative elections. In fact, *"Election periods are characterized by political excitement that results in many irregularities."*

7. The Democratic Observatory of Côte d'Ivoire (ODCI) is one of the most influential Facebook discussion groups in Côte d'Ivoire. With a community of more than 400,000 members, this group is a space for exchanges in which Ivoirians discuss social issues, especially political ones. In <https://newsgeek.ci/2020/06/03/odci-le-plus-grand-forum-facebook-de-cote-divoire-ferme-pour-pedopornographie/> consulted on the 20th of January 2022 at 11:23hrs.

8. Pascal Hérard, "Presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire: can Facebook fight against Fake News?" » in <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/presidentielle-en-cote-d-ivoire-facebook-peut-elle-lutter-contre-les-fake-news-380296> consulted on the 14th of January 2022 at 11:21hrs.

9. National Democratic Institute, Report on Disinformation in Côte d'Ivoire, 1st case study, September 2020, in <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Final%20French%20Case%20Study.pdf>

10. Report on digital rights and inclusion in Côte d'Ivoire, in [https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Droits-Num%C2%AEriques-et-Inclusion-au-Cote-D\\_ivoire.pdf](https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Droits-Num%C2%AEriques-et-Inclusion-au-Cote-D_ivoire.pdf)

11. Municipality of the City of Abidjan

12. Ruth Assoko, "Coronavirus epidemic, feedback on an information crisis" in <https://www.lemediacitoyen.com/epidemie-de-coronavirus-retour-sur-une-crise-de-linformation/> consulted on January 10 2022 at 06:30 min.



9%

DECREASE IN HATE  
SPEECH ON

172

FACEBOOK GROUPS,  
PAGES AND PROFILES.

The phenomena of misinformation, which has always existed, nowadays, with the Internet, social networks and some media that have an editorial line of false information, takes an unprecedented scale. There are more and more obvious links between the constellation of disinformation actors and the traditional political parties which, for many reasons, exhibit an extreme use of "Fake news".<sup>13</sup>

Online hate speech, on the other hand, has been fluctuating mainly during the year 2021. In fact, in the period from 15 to 21 July 2021, there was a 9% decrease in hate speech on 172 Facebook groups, pages and profiles according to the monitoring carried out by Internews Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>14</sup> The monitoring also reveals that from September 30 to October 6, 2021, hate speech dropped from 121 to 95. Conversely, the report shows a 41% increase in online hate speech, particularly on Facebook, from November 4 to 10, 2021.<sup>15</sup> The second week of 2022, for example, goes from 110 to 105, a 5% decrease.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the above-mentioned statistics reveal that online hate speech varies according to the country's political news and generally manifests itself in virtual exchange forums, particularly on Facebook. It should also be noted that in order to reduce the impact of misinformation and hate speech, several initiatives such as awareness raising, training and monitoring activities have been implemented by the government and civil society organizations.<sup>17</sup>



**Election periods are characterized  
by political excitement that results  
in many irregularities.**

13. Christian Gambotti, "THE MONDAY CHRONICLE- Ivory Coast: How "fake news" tries to intervene in the presidential election or decryption of the Vice Media article", in <https://www.lintelligentdabidjan.info/news/la-chronique-du-mondi-cote-divoire-how-the-fake-news-are-trying-to-intervene-in-the-presidential-election-or-decryption-of-the-vice-media-article/> consulted on 14 January 2022 at 9:21 p.m.

14. Online hate speech monitoring is an activity of the USAID-funded Political Transition and Inclusion (PTI) Program implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Internews, and a coalition of Ivorian civil society organizations. In <https://www.fratmat.info/article/214185/societe/discours-de-haine-en-ligne-en-cote-divoire-2e-baisse-consecutive-depuis-le-debut-du-mois> consulted on January 21, 2022 at 03:32 min.

15. Danielle Tiémélé, "Côte d'Ivoire-AIP/ A 41% increase in hate speech on the web in one week (Observatory)", in <https://www.aip.ci/cote-divoire-aip-une-ascension-of-41-hate-speeches-on-the-canvas-in-one-week-observatory/> consulted on January 24, 2022 at 01:34 min.

16. Eugène Sahi, "Haine en ligne Côte d'Ivoire: More good news" in <https://www.afrique-sur7.ci/484253-haine-en-ligne-cote-divoire> consulted on January 23, 2022 at 05:32 min.

17. Délorès Pie, "Disinformation online around the ballot, the OIDH recommends the maintenance of political dialogue", in <https://www.lemediacitoyen.com/desinformation-en-ligne-autour-du-scrutin-loidh-preconise-le-maintenance-du-dialogue-politique/> consulted on January 05, 2022 at 01:30 min.



## CURRENT DIGITAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Côte d'Ivoire has an extensive system of digital regulations. The strengthening of this sector is indeed a consequence of the rise of cyber-crime and the rampant digitalisation of Ivorian society over the last ten years. Regarding legislation, it should be noted that the country has adopted several legal instruments including Ordinance No. 2012-293 of March 21, 2012 on telecommunications and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), designed to govern the telecommunications sector. Information and Communication (ICT), intended to govern the telecommunications sector.

There is also:

- Law No. 2013-867 of December 23, 2013 on access to information of public interest,
- Law No. 2013-451 of June 19, 2013 on the fight against cyber-crime,
- Law No. 2017-803 of December 7, 2017 pertaining to the orientation of the information society,
- the new Law No. 2017-867 of December 27, 2017 pertaining to the legal regime of the press, which takes into account the online press, and
- Law No. 2019-574 pertaining to the Côte d'Ivoire's Criminal Code. It is necessary to review this law addressing the presence of crimes of

defamation. This is the case of article 183 of the said Penal Code.

The main point to remember is that there is no specific legislation to deal with disinformation and hate speech online. The whole legislation is indeed governed by a collection of scattered articles across various laws but nothing specific. In fact, already in 2018, President Alassane Ouattara announced a law to curb the phenomenon of disinformation, but it never came into force.<sup>18</sup>

Also, while the legal and punitive component related to disinformation is promoted as an appropriate solution in view of the political, economic and social damage being inflicted, various criticisms are made by civil society stakeholders. For example, there is a growing concern that the fight against disinformation is a pretext for silencing dissenting voices and encroaching on freedom of expression, which is a fundamental element of democracy. Such situations make the legal framework of this phenomenon increasingly complex, with unprecedented consequences, especially for young people who are mostly present on social networks.

---

18. TV5 Monde, "Presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire: disinformation abounds on social networks", in <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/presidentielle-en-cote-d-ivoire-la-desinformation-pullule-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-381545> consulted on January 24, 2022 at 06:30 min.





## CONCLUSION

The fragility of the Ivorian socio-political climate over the past five years is largely due to the penetration of the digital space by political actors and their sympathizers.

The manipulation of information and public opinion for political purposes by these actors is a powerful way to consolidate the position of certain political movements and to eliminate potential opponents. In such a context, misinformation and hate speech were bound to increase significantly. This situation has had a major impact on human rights and social cohesion in the country.

Initiatives by civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also helped to mitigate and better monitor the impact of misinformation and hate speech in the run-up to, during, and after the presidential and legislative elections.

However, considerable efforts are still needed to better support the country's digital revolution. Between the unequal distribution of universal services, the misuse and abuse of digital platforms and the crisis of values related to bad practices on social networks, Côte d'Ivoire, through its government, will have to invest more in technological development and the management of change that is inherent to it. This change management must also be based on a solid basic education oriented towards new media.



***The manipulation of information and public opinion for political purposes by political actors is a powerful way to consolidate the position of certain political movements and to eliminate potential opponents.***



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The various stakeholders in the digital ecosystem in Côte d'Ivoire, public and private sector actors, civil society, technical and financial partners of the government have in this context issued several recommendations below with a view to promoting a healthy digital environment, legally framed with citizen and responsible actors:

- Citizens must refrain from speeches and acts likely to weaken social cohesion or deteriorate the socio-political climate and speech and publications (texts or videos, etc.) calling for violence, hatred or xenophobia;
- The government must take the necessary measures to avoid the propagation or dissemination of false and sensitive information by pages or accounts under their responsibility;
- The government must educate and train citizens on democratic practices and a gender-sensitive democratic culture;
- Citizens must prioritize content that has a credible source;
- The government must elaborate a common charter including sanctions against the authors of hate speech, xenophobic, racist, sexist or false information likely to disturb public order;
- The government and academia to conduct and promote local scientific research on digital issues in general and misinformation in particular;
- Civil society organisations must engage in an advocacy process for the production of a law that specifically addresses misinformation and online hate speech;
- The government must promote media and information literacy;
- Civil society organisations must create a synergy of action between civil society actors working on the issue of disinformation;
- Sensitize members of virtual groups or forums on the legal provisions repressing the dissemination of false news;
- The government to come up with a rights-respecting content moderation policy addressing hate speech, xenophobia or speech of a nature that disturbs public order.

**Londa 2021 expands on last year's report with findings from 22 countries, examining themes of privacy, freedom of expression, access to information, segmentation and exclusion, digital transformation, affordability, gender and others within existing legislative frameworks, and against the backdrop of a widening digital divide. This edition captures the gaps and proffers recommendations to achieve a digitally inclusive and rights - respecting Africa.**



**Paradigm Initiative**

374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: [media@paradigmhq.org](mailto:media@paradigmhq.org)

[www.paradigmhq.org](http://www.paradigmhq.org)

     @ParadigmHQ