



# Ghana

2004 Presidential Election and Political  
Disinformation around Galamsey

# Credits

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## Executive summary

Democracy in Ghana, like many other African nations, faces significant challenges due to the spread of misinformation and disinformation both online and offline. Political disinformation surrounding corruption and illegal gold mining – known locally as “galamsey” during Ghana's 2024 presidential election appears to have exposed the vulnerabilities of the nation's media system and the citizen's resilience to disinformation as the country strives towards ensuring information integrity in her information ecosystem and communication landscape. Political disinformation surrounding “galamsey” during the Ghana's presidential election highlights the dynamics of social media platforms, witnessed active influencers engagement, impact of partisan political gladiators and weaponization of political narratives which inform the urgent need for media, information and digital literacy coupled with appropriate legislation as a strategic response to ensure information integrity and ensure public trust in governance.



## Introduction

The chronic challenge of illegal gold mining - known locally as galamsey - was a major issue in Ghana's 2024 election campaign and a source of concern for voters, triggering protests, arrests and criticism against the outgoing government (NPP). Disinformation and misinformation by partisans of the major political parties (NPP and NDC), both on the campaign trail and in the traditional and social media about Galamsey, grew exponentially in the lead up to the presidential elections thereby disrupting citizens' perception of truth and their ability to make an informed electoral decision while undermining the Ghanaian democratic institutions.



Galamsey is a big problem to Ghana's economy which has spanned some decades. The term is a corrupted version of two words “gather and sell,” which connote the gathering and selling of gold. Galamsey played a significant role during the 2020 election but not on the same scale as the presidential election in 2024. The debates around galamsey were centered around health, environment and economic issues but the environmental angle coupled with its health implications was seized upon to gain advantage during the 2024 election. Galamsey was linked to an increase in kidney and liver diseases as well as the environmental pollution sparking serious environmental disaster with destruction of livelihood, cocoa farmlands and water resources (Ahiabu and Aboagye, 2024). Economically, according to Burrow and Birds (2017) galamsey costs Ghana's economy \$2.3 billion yearly. However, the fact remains that galamsey always dominates public discourse and gets weaponized during election times in order to gain political advantage. Hence, at any point in time, galamsey mis(dis) information narratives becomes a formidable political tool in the hands of any political party (either ruling or opposition) depending how it is being wielded to achieve electoral victory.

For instance, the opposition party (NDC) during the 2024 Ghana election seized an opportunity to gain advantage over the ruling NPP by emphasizing the environmental issues around galamsey (JoyOnline, 2025) . In recognition of the likely negative effects of the galamsey debate on the outcome of the 2024 election, the government (NPP) attempted to suppress the voices amplifying the negative effects of illegal mining in Ghana by getting some protesters arrested (Media Foundation for West Africa, October 3, 2024) leading to another social media campaign #FreetheCitizens movement (Reuters, October 11, 2024). The NPP felt that debates about galamsey were too close to the election and it was likely to damage the chances of the party in the election. However, the then opposition party (NDC), ironically, when in power treated galamsey with the kid gloves with the then President Mahama reported by Joynews saying “whether legal or illegal, the money comes to the state, not private pockets”). Nonetheless, as an opposition party, it leveraged on public outcry against galamsey to push its rhetoric against the complicity of the NPP on galamsey especially in Ashanti region, a stronghold of the NPP.

Despite being an age-long activity, the NDC promoted messages to stress that the party was ready to stop galamsey in weeks if voted into power (Modern Ghana, August 27, 2025). It is however noteworthy that the issue of galamsey in Ghana is deeply rooted in the survival of many citizens livelihoods, foreign illegal miners and powerful politicians which appear to support galamsey and thereby are pushing the narratives of galamsey economic gain in a way that discredit and trivialized the environmental and health hazard associated with it (Africa Confidential, 2024). Hence, pushing the narratives that illegal mining (galamsey) can be ended a few weeks by the opposition party (NDC) if voted into power when in actual fact, failed to do so previously when in power, and the attempt to discredit and silence the agitations against galamsey environmental hazards by the ruling party (NPP), constitutes the nexus of misinformation and disinformation that have come to bear on freedom of expression, human rights infringement, media mistrust, erosion of public trust and distrust in the country's democratic institutions. Galamsey became a point of political weaponization of mis(dis)information judging from the fact that none of the parties have outlined a clear, enforceable strategy nor legal framework to tackle the illegal mining.

To understand the extent to which political disinformation surrounding “galamsey” undermined the information integrity of the Ghana 2024 election, focus group discussion involving key informants of the major actors in Ghana's presidential 2024 election was carried out. The respondents include individuals from major print, electronic and online media as well as major factchecking organizations, the academia, youth, and members of civil organizations as identified in the preliminary literature review. Two sessions of focus group discussions comprising 14 respondents organized in two groups were carried out. The respondents were asked to respond to questions bothering on major determinant to level of exposure, gullibility and victim of political disinformation about “galamsey” in Ghana, how political misinformation about galamsey is generated and spread through the media, the nature of galamsey political mis(dis)information content and the actors involved, implication of political mis(dis)information on “galamsey” on civic participation considering gender perspective, political processes, institutional trust, media landscape and democratic governance in Ghana and if Government regulation and initiatives in addressing political mis(dis)information in Ghana infringe on people's fundamental rights or empower them in building resilience against galamsey political disinformation.

## Analysis of Research Findings

The respondents were assured of anonymity while their responses were aggregated and content analysed to inform findings of the study hereby discussed under the following heading below:

### **Social media determinism and influencers trending narratives**

The findings highlight social media platforms particularly X and Tiktok as a major determinant to level of gullibility on political disinformation about “galamsey” in Ghana. The contention bothered on narratives that trivialized or amplified the environmental degradation and health hazards associated with galamsey and the seemingly blurred lines that define its legality or illegality of its operation either as an industrial licensed operation or as a small-scale mining enterprise. There are also heated debates on the social media of over exaggerated narratives of the environmental hazards of galamsey to gain political advantage and the over emphasis on its economic advantage for individual livelihood and national prosperity. While some people push for galamsey as an alternative means of ending poverty and gaining economic livelihood, others criminalize it for health and environmental hazards. Youths, political parties, members of the parliament, social media influencers and civil societies became major actors with the trending hashtags such as #StopGalamseyNow, #Galamsey, #FreetheCitizens movement.

### **Media vulnerability**

Due to a deluge of misinformation on galamsey, some legacy media became vulnerable and subject of manipulation either in reinforcing the existing bias or amplifying prejudice on galamsey. Though notable media houses in Ghana jointly condemned galamsey and tried to enlighten masses about its danger, yet the powerful minority dissent voices appear to hold sway. For instance, a certain media house owned by a notable politician uses his ownership influence to spread disinformation regarding the galamsey and prevent alternative narratives to be aired on his media platform. There were also paid political commentators and influential traditional rulers who appeared on media platforms to dismiss the environmental health hazard on galamsey rather, insisting on its economic fortunes. Pavement media were also rife with unverified information, gaining traction and weaponized on social media and legacy media.



## **Gender perspective**

Gender perspective shows a disparity based on education, economic status and literacy as the rural women with low level of education, literacy and economic status were more vulnerable to gamamsey disinformation.

## **Literacy deficiency**

While misinformation and disinformation around gamamsey spreads rapidly in urban centers due to easy accessibility to media and social media, rural areas were more vulnerable due to lower levels of digital literacy and limited access to fact-checking resources.

## **Government ineptitude**

The effort of the government then to control narratives around gamamsey were found to infringe on people's freedom of expression thereby leading to trust deficit, mistrust in public institutions and democratic process. For instance, in late 2024, 53 members of the "Democracy Hub" group who were arrested during an anti-gamamsey protest were charged with offenses including unlawful assembly and were detained for several days with Government officials, including the Attorney General, defending the unlawful action (BBC NEWS, Oct 3, 2024).

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a white ballot paper, preparing to insert it into a wooden ballot box. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and other people, suggesting an outdoor polling station. A green rectangular box with the word 'Recommendation' in white text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

## Recommendation

Obviously, most of Ghana's 2023 election political misinformation on galamsey was based on ignorance and weaponization of ignorance to score political points. Hence, it is recommended that any effective regulation of the information landscape must be based on education. The government must educate to regulate. While curriculum intervention on Media, Digital and information literacy should be a priority, the intervention should be inclusive and diverse enough to cater for the non-formal sector and should be anchored on human right and multilinguistic approaches.



Political disinformation in relation to galamsey as witnessed in Ghana's 2024 elections points to the need for educated citizens that are media, information and digital literate. Information integrity that is needed in achieving an equitable, sustainable, open and viable democratic governance must be built on citizen's access to verifiable and transparent data and information. Hence, there is a need for information integrity and media and information literacy policy in Ghana that will serve as a framework for effective platform regulation, human rights and citizens' empowerment in building individual and community resilience against mis(dis) information.



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