Information integrity in Côte d'Ivoire: between multiple stakeholders and internal and external coordination

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Executive summary

The main objective of this study is to strengthen the reliability of information and public confidence in media content, with a view to consolidating democratic processes and the information ecosystem in Côte d'Ivoire. Conducted in a pre-election and election context marked by strong protests surrounding the candidacy of Alassane Dramane Ouattara and the ineligibility of major figures such as Tidiane Thiam and Laurent Gbagbo, this research highlights how disinformation poses a systemic threat to information integrity and social cohesion. Based on a qualitative methodology combining netnography and semi-structured interviews with information integrity experts and fact-checkers, the study identifies the actors involved in disinformation (both internal and external), their strategies, the narratives constructed and disseminated, and their effects on the credibility accorded to the media, trust in institutions, social cohesion, and political stability. The results reveal increased political polarization, amplified by partisan media, social networks, and transnational interference. The document concludes with recommendations focused on institutional transparency, coordination of fact-checking and media and information literacy initiatives, and co-regulation of media and digital spaces.

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire, a former French colony, gained independence in 1960. Under the presidency of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the country's first president, Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed relative stability and a prosperous economy (thanks to cocoa and coffee). Politically, the country was based on a centralized system and a single party, the PDCI-RDA. However, this period poorly concealed latent ethnic tensions, exacerbated by internal migration, policies that made strategic use of ethnic issues, and a polarized public sphere with a largely opinionated and partisan press. Upon Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993, Henri Konan Bédié succeeded him and introduced the concept of Ivorian identity, a form of cultural nationalism aimed at political exclusion, notably of Alassane Ouattara, who was accused of being of Burkinabe origin. 1993 marked the beginning of a long period of political instability against a backdrop of ethnic manipulation. After several periods of violent political crisis, Côte d'Ivoire experienced a lull with a process of national reconciliation. Today, in the context of the presidential elections scheduled for October 2025, Côte d'Ivoire is facing a resurgence of the Ivorian identity issue, this time linked to the candidacy of Tidiane Thiam, who was ultimately excluded from the presidential race amid a backdrop of information turmoil.

Côte d'Ivoire is facing an intensification of information disorder that threatens democratic stability and public confidence. Close observation of the Ivorian context reveals a crisis of legitimacy and widespread mistrust of the media, institutions, and political actors. Media pluralism, which is supposed to promote diversity of information, has paradoxically accentuated polarization, transforming the media into an instrument of ideological confrontation and an amplifier of the ideas and positions of the dominant parties. In the context of the presidential elections, one of the important factors is the highly advanced political polarization in Côte d'Ivoire. This is confirmed by two of our interviewees, who point out that despite a diverse media landscape, the Ivorian press remains strongly influenced by political and partisan affiliations. This applies to both traditional and online press, as well as digital platforms

Observations of the Ivorian context and interviews with stakeholders show that disinformation practices are very real in Côte d'Ivoire, widespread and often biased. Furthermore, these disinformation activities reveal the existence of several types of actors, which we have classified into two main categories: i**nternal actors and external actors.** In this context, understanding the mechanisms, networks, and logic of disinformation becomes essential for building resilient information governance. Beyond that, it is also necessary to identify problematic narratives that are promoted, as well as those who promote hate speech or discriminatory discourse. All in all, this can undermine social cohesion in Côte d'Ivoire, which has experienced serious periods of political turmoil and deep identity divisions.

Research overview

The research is based on two complementary methodological approaches: **netnography**, in other words online observation of media and digital content on social media platforms. We focused mainly on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This **netnography** is combined with semi-structured interviews with researchers, experts, journalists, and fact-checkers. These approaches enable us to analyze:

- The nature and motivations of disinformation actors;
- The types of dominant narratives;
- The methods used to produce and disseminate misleading content;
- The observed socio-political impacts.

The study distinguishes between two main categories of actors:

- **Internal actors,** present in the Ivorian political and media spheres;
- **External actors,** operating from the diaspora or in collusion with foreign structures.

A variety of actors in the field of information disruption: disinformation practices organized by internal and external actors

There are a variety of profiles among the internal actors. On the one hand, we see avatar accounts (people hiding behind figurines or cartoon characters) and local media. On the other hand, we note political or state actors. For avatars, we observed the account of Chris Yapi, an anti-Ouattara and pro-Bédié activist, an emblematic figure of online disinformation. Chris tries to act anonymously, creating a fake name (Chris Yapi) and an animated character (cartoon character). Other notable figures include Johnny Patcheko, Souleymane Gbagbo Koné, Aminata 24, Cyril Makosso, and Big Douahou Officiel. All of them gear their output towards their political camp and against their opponents. The Ivorian national media are also internal actors that can take actions that have negative repercussions on the reliability of information.

Due to polarization and overt ideological bias, the Ivorian media landscape is divided between camps that favor one politician or another, or, on a case-by-case basis, the ruling party and opposition parties. Numerous online "fake media" outlets, such as Zone Presse, Boush de Côte d'Ivoire, and Cash Ivoire, contribute to the dissemination of partisan and polarizing content. Certain parties and institutional outlets deliberately spread biased messages. Disinformation campaigns are strategically used to influence public opinion.

By external actors, we mean all individuals (alone or in groups), structures (movements, collectives, parties, state structures, companies) acting outside Côte d'Ivoire's borders and carrying out initiatives that have an impact on the Ivorian public and political sphere. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies launched a mapping of the wave of disinformation in Africa, available since April 1, 2024. This document provides a clear overview of the types of foreign actors engaged in large-scale disinformation campaigns in Africa, as well as the contexts of reference. One example is Russia's numerous attempts. Indeed, the report "Mapping the Wave of Disinformation in Africa," published by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in April 2024, tells us that all regions of Africa have been targeted in disinformation campaigns. At least 39 African countries have been the target of a specific disinformation campaign. In addition, the Russian Federation remains the main source of disinformation in Africa, sponsoring 80 documented campaigns, compared to at least 22 countries. Another important point is that, according to the report, African elections provide particularly favorable contexts for the proliferation of disinformation. The report provides information on the use of disinformation mercenaries and mentions the Israeli company "Team Jorge" as the main architect of disinformation campaigns to disrupt more than 20 African elections since 2015. Beyond this interference by certain states such as Russia and China, we note other actors, notably cyber activists affiliated with pan-Africanist ideology and supporters of AES countries. We can cite individuals such as "Maï la guêpe" (Maï the Wasp), a Burkinabe citizen living in the US, who explicitly states on her social media pages her pro-EAC, pro-Russian, but anti-France and anti-Ouattara political affiliation. These are actors who, established in the diaspora, initiate and coordinate massive disinformation campaigns for specific purposes. Similarly, the authors emphasize that "Russia is increasingly attempting to sow discord by sponsoring influential local figures who enjoy greater credibility among the local population. Sometimes this is done through a political party that can capitalize on anti-government sentiment, an angle that some members of Laurent Gbagbo's PPA-CI party seem to be employing." There are now several organizations sponsored by Russia, including Solidarité panafricaniste Côte d'Ivoire, Alternative Citoyenne Ivoirienne, Jeunesse panafricaine Côte d'Ivoire, Mouvement Citoyen Panafricain Sursaut Africain, and Total Support for Vladimir Putin in Africa. This Russian practice is referred to as **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).**

Amplification via traditional media, digital platforms, and offline spaces

Traditional media, through their increased polarization and political allegiances, no longer simply act as vectors of information; they are increasingly becoming **tools in mass disinformation strategies. Offline spaces such as "grins" are also vectors of dissemination and amplification. Momar Azil Lo, a fact-checking journalist at Africa Check, discusses the case of "grins" as places where disinformation is disseminated and proliferates.** These agoras, where mainly young Ivorian men gather, encourage the circulation of disinformation among peers, which indicates a legitimization or even a social anchoring of disinformation.

On the other hand, **digital platforms,** through their virality and penetration rates, are the main vectors of disinformation. Indeed, disinformation actors systematically adopt a multi-channel strategy to optimize their presence and impact on platforms. These actors are increasing their presence on platforms in order to adapt to their "followers" and multiply their outlets by creating several formats ( ) that are conducive to the dissemination of their messages. Thus, the same political influencer can be on Meta, X, TikTok, and YouTube at the same time. It must be said that this is also a way of reaching different types of audience and, above all, of circumventing various forms of censorship. For example, cyber activist Johny Patcheko, who had his accounts closed on various platforms, launched a television channel and a mobile app. In addition to his political cyberactivism, he is now working to circumvent censorship and optimize his economic situation by collecting money from his subscribers in exchange for the content he offers.

Three major types of dominant narratives and observable impacts:

The activities of the disinformation actors mentioned in this summary note have a number of impacts, including narratives. These narratives are developed stories that influence perceptions and interpretations of facts, events, and situations. As such, narratives are strategically important in influence operations. In our research, we identified three dominant narratives. The political narrative is characterized by rhetoric that frames Alassane Dramane Ouattara's fourth term as electoral fraud, a violation of the Ivorian constitution, and a coup d'état. This political narrative is linked to a geopolitical and security narrative that places Alassane Ouattara's candidacy and subsequent victory within an agenda set by Western foreign powers, which, according to the promoters of this narrative, control the country in a logic of continuing colonial domination. This type of narrative is conveyed by actors such as Chris Yapi, Johnny Patcheko, and Maïmouna Camara "maï la guêpe" (Maï the Wasp), who are generally cyber activists involved in pan-Africanist movements and groups, supporters of the AES countries. This narrative instills mistrust of institutions by delegitimizing the authorities (judicial, police, and administrative) involved in governing the country and managing elections (the CEI). Furthermore, this narrative posits that Alassane Ouattara is allied with active terrorist groups and is one of the main instigators of the destabilization of the Sahel countries.

Another narrative that has been noted is one with an ethnic slant, which reintroduces the issue of Ivorian identity into the political arena, particularly through the candidacies of Tidiane Thiam and Alassane Dramane Ouattara. This issue of Ivorian identity is integrated into a dichotomy between the north and south of Côte d'Ivoire.

The north is seen by some actors as a territory favorable to Alassane Dramane Ouattara, but above all as a territory home to foreign and non-Ivorian populations. As a result, ethnic communities are directly targeted, particularly the Mandinka, including the Dioula and Malinke. Alassane Dramane Ouattara comes from this community. This narrative is constantly invoked during election periods in Côte d'Ivoire to discredit candidates in the running or to try to justify the difficulties faced by the population due to the significant presence of foreigners in the country. These narratives raise a number of issues. We can identify issues that may affect:

- A crisis of legitimacy and political tensions: the pre-election, election, and post-election periods were characterized by episodes of political tension, which became more acute as the election approached. These tensions, which were moderate in intensity and largely under control , led to sporadic unrest in certain areas and disruptions at some polling stations.
- Hate speech and possible identity divisions.
- Mistrust of the state and institutions, against a backdrop of systematic protest.
- Loss of confidence in the media and rise of conspiracy theories, with the delegation of the informational mission to cyber activists.
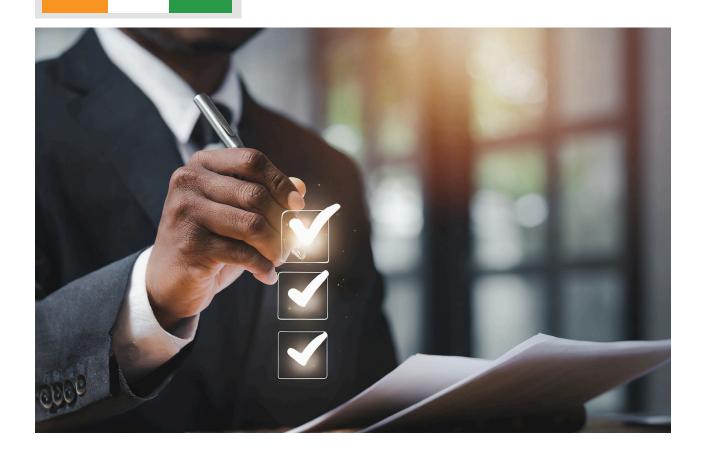- Weakening of state legitimacy and the role of regulatory bodies.

Conclusion

With a fragile socio-political climate, Côte d'Ivoire remains under threat of political unrest that could have serious consequences as major elections approach. Under fire from several problematic narratives, combined with effective propaganda and mass disinformation strategies, particularly in the context of foreign information manipulation and interference, informational integrity has been severely compromised, as have social cohesion, which is at times called into question, and political and institutional stability. It is therefore necessary to put in place targeted and comprehensive legislative, legal, political, and community actions capable of guaranteeing rights, individual freedoms, and cohesion.

On the government side, regulatory, legal, and law enforcement solutions accompany extensive awareness campaigns. However, there is concern that the issue of information integrity and its implications could be misused by legislators as a tool to curtail individual freedoms, freedom of expression, and political participation. And on the part of political actors, there is a fear that this issue will be used to disqualify an opponent. In any case, it would be important to question the perception and relationship that legislators and political actors have with this issue of information integrity and disinformation.

The media and national and international civil society actors are implementing numerous initiatives. These initiatives have achieved a number of significant results, such as promoting fact-checking practices within the Ivorian media. However, these programs would benefit from better coordination in order to avoid the dispersion of means, resources, and energy, which can impact the effectiveness of the initiatives and programs created.

Recommendation

The Ivorian government has implemented several initiatives to preserve information integrity. These include the creation of the **PLCC** (Platform for the Fight Against Cybercrime), the **ANSSI** (National Agency for Information System Security), and the **"En ligne tous responsables" (All Responsible Online)** campaign. Civil society and the media are also contributing to this effort. Examples include the actions taken by GIZ, Internews, Paradigm Initiative, and Dubawa, as well as media outlets and media coalitions in the fight against the proliferation of hate speech and disinformation. This is the case of the "Anti Dohi" coalition launched on July 12, 2025, in Abidjan under the leadership of Africa Check, bringing together Ivorian media outlets specializing in fact-checking—Abidjan Fact Check, Le Média Citoyen, **AFIN** (Anti Fake News Unit), Eburnie Today, and Ivoire Check (Repprelci), as well as four civil society organizations: **Ovillage, Amazoon du Web, Wikimedia Côte d'Ivoire, and Les Bénévoles de l'EMI.**

Disinformation in Côte d'Ivoire is a multidimensional phenomenon, rooted in political rivalries and social divisions, but amplified by transnational actors. The response must be collective, coordinated, and sustainable. Strengthening the public's resilience to information manipulation is now a **democratic imperative** and a **matter of sovereignty.** That is why we are making the following strategic recommendations:

- **Institutional transparency and proactive communication:**

The state must gradually move towards greater transparency in its actions to regulate the media and digital space, as well as in its fight against disinformation and problematic content. This is necessary to preserve human rights, in particular freedom of expression and freedom of political demonstration. It has been observed that, under the pretext of defending national security, political opponents have been banned from organizing demonstrations, and activists have been arrested and tried. The National Human Rights Council, through its president, took stock of the pre-election situation between October 11 and 21. Namizata Sangaré reported six deaths during opposition demonstrations and more than 700 people arrested and facing legal proceedings.

- **National coordination and creation of a national observatory on information integrity:**

Create a media-CSO-state coalition against disinformation in order to harmonize initiatives, but also create an observatory that can study the issue of information integrity, its dynamics, and new threats over the long term. This observatory will serve as a scientific laboratory but also as a place for proposing appropriate and proactive laws to public decision-makers.

- **Media and information literacy (MIL):**

Integrate EMI into school and university curricula; develop local campaigns via community radio stations (medium term), traditional authorities, and community spaces.

- **Co-regulation of platforms:**

Create an inclusive framework for co-regulating online content. This could involve strengthening local partnerships with Meta, X, and TikTok for contextualized content reporting (medium/long term).

- **Citizen counter-narratives:**

Support local initiatives and promote ambassadors of integrity (medium term). Drawing on "grins" and alternative spaces for exchange and dialogue, encourage the establishment of citizen exchange forums on social networks to raise awareness of democratic culture and the preservation of a peaceful digital space.

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