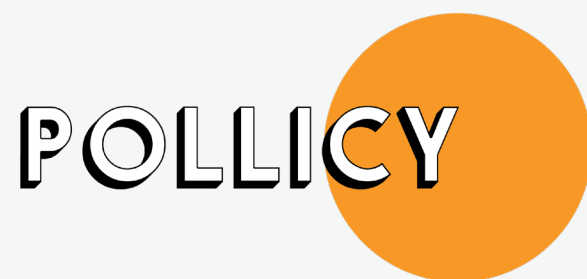


The Evolving Role of
deepfakes

in Shaping Gendered Disinformation
Targeting Women in Politics in Africa.





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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

CSOs: Civil Society Organisations

PROTEGE QV: Promotion of Technologies that Guarantee Environment and a better Quality of Life

US: United States

WOUGNET: Women of Uganda Network

AFP: Agence France-Presse

Executive Summary

The rapid expansion of digital technologies, particularly generative AI is reshaping communication during civic and electoral periods across the African continent. While AI offers opportunities for innovation and wider communication, it has also facilitated the creation and dissemination of deepfakes defined as synthetic videos, audio recordings and images that convincingly impersonate real people.

This article examines how deepfakes are increasingly used as tools for disseminating gendered disinformation targeting women in politics drawing on monitoring and analysis from Uganda, Tanzania, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire.

The findings show that deepfakes amplify pre-existing patterns of technology facilitated gender based violence, disproportionately undermining women's credibility, safety, and political participation. Additionally, women in politics experience gendered disinformation in different ways. Some are targeted based on sexuality, others on morality, appearance, family roles, or personal relationships. These experiences are not uniform, and generalisation is not appropriate. The analysis further showed that silencing women is the primary objective of gendered disinformation and the ultimate goal of perpetrators is to force women in politics out of public discourse and political engagement. Analysis also showed that social media platform responses remain slow and inconsistent allowing images, videos and audio recordings remain in circulation for extended periods thereby amplifying their reach, entrenching false narratives, and compounding psychological and reputational harms experienced by targeted women.

Conclusively, the analysis shows that gendered disinformation spreads very rapidly, often much faster than factual information. False allegations, particularly those involving affairs or moral judgement, circulate quickly and widely which highlights the need for early detection and rapid fact-checking as well as training women in politics, media personnel and the general public in verifying and debunking fake news. Recommendations emphasized the need for continuous training for women in politics on digital safety and security, alongside establishing support networks and mechanisms to protect and provide timely support to those targeted by gendered disinformation. Political parties were mentioned as key stakeholders in shaping women's participation in political discourse with a call to action for them to actively uphold women's dignity and protection from violence and harassment. In addition, political parties should institutionalize mandatory training on gender and digital safety to equip all members with knowledge and values needed to promote respectful, safe and inclusive political participation.

Introduction

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across Africa is accelerating as governments and regional bodies publish national strategies, and AI start-ups are increasing in number and expanding across the continent.¹ At the same time significant constraints persist including uneven readiness, limited indigenous datasets and language resources, governance and privacy gaps, and uneven enforcement capacity.² Approximately 80 percent of African states lack sufficient regulatory frameworks, human skills, and institutional capacity to manage the risks associated with AI effectively, including the misuse of generative technologies such as deepfakes.³ All these shape how harms such as mis/disinformation caused by deepfakes emerge and are handled across the continent.

Generative AI tools now enable convincing synthetic deepfake video and audio that can impersonate voices, images or fabricate statements leading to increasing AI generated mis/disinformation.⁴ One of the most alarming risks AI presents in political campaigns is its potential to spread mis/disinformation. AI tools, especially generative AI, can create realistic deepfake videos, audio recordings and images, which can deceive voters into believing false information.⁵ This creates opportunities for bad actors to create and distribute fake content that appears legitimate, such as videos of candidates making harmful statements or fake endorsements. These AI-generated materials are often indistinguishable from real content, making it difficult for voters to know whether what they're seeing or hearing is real. This misuse of AI can severely undermine voter trust, erode public confidence in elections and create chaos in the political process.⁶

1 Convergence (2024), *2024 Q3 AI in Africa Summary Report. Navigating Policy, Innovation & Capacity Building*

2 Turner,E and Yusuf, Z. (2024) *AI Governance in Africa: Current Landscape and Key Challenges*

3 Edjo, M. (2025). *Africa vs. deepfakes: The new frontline in digital disinformation*. We Are Tech Africa. <https://www.waretech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/africa-vs-deepfakes-the-new-frontline-in-digital-disinformation>.

4 Vaccari, C & Chadwick, . (2020). *Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News*. *Social Media + Society*. 6. 205630512090340. 10.1177/2056305120903408.

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

Africa is still in its nascent stages of adoption and integrating AI into its systems and services and this limited presence makes it difficult to detect and respond to manipulated content which can erode trust and distort discourse.⁷ The continent largely plays catch-up or is stuck with existing AI technologies built without local contexts in mind, making Africans more as AI customers instead of innovators.⁸

The rise of deepfakes poses a great challenge to electoral integrity and democratic participation globally. In Africa where political communication is increasingly occurring on social media and encrypted platforms, deepfakes present a timely and understudied risk especially for women in politics who already face disproportionate levels of technology facilitated violence and gendered disinformation. Disinformation remains a seductive tool for intentionally undermining democracy. Across the world, electoral disinformation is being deliberately deployed by malign actors, despite full knowledge of its devastating impacts. Its appeal lies in its ability to bypass traditional checks, distort public discourse, and manipulate citizens at scale, turning democratic processes into contested battlegrounds and paving the way for authoritarian consolidation.⁹ In countries with diverse populations who speak different languages, politicians are using AI to replicate their voices in a variety of languages for outreach.¹⁰ In addition to politicians using AI, individuals are creating memes and songs representing the likeness of politicians, which beyond humor can be the source of malicious deepfakes.¹¹ The proliferation of AI is lowering the cost for campaigns and individuals to harness the technology to spread a particular message. A review on deepfakes targeting women in politics in Uganda, Cameroon, Tanzania and Cote d' Ivoire and how they shape disinformation was necessary for several reasons.

Firstly, the four countries conducted elections in 2025 and 2026, moments in which political manipulation, misinformation, and smear campaigns tend to intensify. Deepfakes tend to proliferate most aggressively during election periods, shaping public perception, amplifying political polarization and undermining candidate credibility.¹² Reviewing how these AI technologies intersect with election dynamics in these countries is important for proactive risk mitigation.

7 Nyauntu, N., Munene, T., Ainomugisha, A., Ligo, J., and Ninsiima, M., (2025). *Code and Crisis: Artificial Intelligence and Political Misinformation in East Africa*. JEPA Africa. <https://www.jepafrica.com/insights/ai-for-misinformation-in-east-africa>

8 Eboasetale J. O. (2024), *AI in Africa Adoption Challenges, Impact and Growth Opportunities*.

9 Intel Watch (2022), *Building Digital Resilience A Counter-Electoral Disinformation Guide for Sub-Saharan African Countries*

10 Enzo, M., (2025). *Lessons on AI from Francophone and Lusophone Africa to the world #6*. <https://www.idea.int/news/lessons-ai-francophone-and-lusophone-africa-world-6>

11 Ibid

12 Pawelec M. (2022). *Deepfakes and Democracy (Theory): How Synthetic Audio-Visual Media for Disinformation and Hate Speech Threaten Core Democratic Functions*. *Digital society : ethics, socio-legal and governance of digital technology*, 1(2), 19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44206-022-00010-6>

Secondly, extensive research across Africa shows that women in politics face disproportionate online abuse and gendered disinformation with deepfake images and fabricated statements increasingly used to delegitimize women leaders and discourage political participation and weaponize patriarchal norms. This analysis allows for a systematic understanding of the harms produced and how they manifest in specific political cultures.

Thirdly, all four countries; Uganda, Cameroon, Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire share characteristics that increase susceptibility to synthetic media manipulation such as high reliance on social media platforms for political mobilization and communication, limited AI governance frameworks and weak enforcement of digital harms. Uganda has begun developing an AI governance framework and operates under a data protection law, but lacks comprehensive, AI-specific regulations.¹³ Tanzania and Cameroon currently have no specific AI governance frameworks, relying on existing data protection and cybersecurity laws, which are often insufficient for AI.¹⁴ Côte d'Ivoire is in a similar position, with no dedicated framework, though a general digital strategy is being developed.¹⁵ Across all four countries, there is a significant gap in explicit AI-specific regulations. For example, governments have not enacted laws to regulate the use of AI in political campaigns, such as requiring disclaimers when AI-generated content is used. As AI's role in elections and democratic processes continues to grow, it is essential to prioritize comprehensive national legislation that addresses both data privacy and the responsible use of AI in political campaigns.¹⁶

Fourthly, existing scholarship on deepfakes is mainly Global-North centric focusing on US or European elections. Little research examines how deepfakes function in African political ecologies and how they manifest. Moreover, women in politics are nearly invisible in global literature on deepfakes. This article, therefore, establishes a foundational evidence base needed to guide future empirical research and equip stakeholders with evidence to protect women's political participation and the integrity of democratic processes.

13 Asiimwe, B. (2025). *Strengthening AI Governance in Uganda: Key Insights from the January 28, 2025 Webinar*. <https://thecfma.org/2025/02/07/strengthening-ai-governance-in-uganda-key-insights-from-the-january-28-2025-webinar>.

14 CIPESA, (2025). *State of Internet Freedom in Africa 2025. Navigating the Implications of AI on Digital Democracy in Africa*. https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/reports/State_of_Internet_Freedom_in_Africa_Report_.pdf

15 Njoya, S., (2025). *Côte d'Ivoire Unveils AI and Data Governance Strategy* <https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/cote-divoire-unveils-ai-and-data-governance-strategy>

16 Watson, N. (2024), *Protecting Voter Data Privacy in the Age of AI: Deepfakes, targeted ads, just the tip of the iceberg*

How Do Deep Fake Campaigns Manifest?

Our project partners from each of the four countries including Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) from Uganda, Promotion of Technologies that Guarantee Environment and a better Quality of Life (PROTEGE QV) from Cameroon, LeadAfricanes from Côte d'Ivoire and Zaina Foundation from Tanzania monitored gendered disinformation targeting women in politics. Drawing on insights from their presentations, complemented by a literature review conducted online, this section synthesizes key observations on the nature of gendered disinformation through deepfakes in the four project countries.

Uganda

Campaigns for presidential and parliamentary elections commenced in November 2025 and continued shortly just before the elections in January 2026. Campaigns involved both presidential and parliamentary candidates traversing the country speaking to the electorate, sharing their political manifestos and seeking votes for the 2026-2030 term.¹⁷ With this politically charged environment, disinformation specifically gendered disinformation emerged as a pivotal concern as misleading, manipulative information that specifically targets groups or individuals based on gender aiming to undermine credibility, intimidate or silence women in public or political life.

During the election cycle, deepfakes emerged as a deliberate strategic tool of gendered disinformation.¹⁸ Monitoring Social media platforms by WOUGNET revealed a pattern of AI generated videos, images and audios targeting prominent women politicians particularly through sexualized narrative, false health claims and accusations of immorality and disloyalty. These were primarily circulated on X formerly Twitter and TikTok.

One widely circulated case involved a young woman aspiring for a youth member of parliament position who became a target of a viral AI generated video purporting to show her in a compromising situation. In the video, her face was manipulated and superimposed onto another person's body.¹⁹ Her supporters denounced the footage as a deep fake designed to undermine her credibility and weaken her candidacy. At the same time, critics circulated counter-rumors suggesting she could have leaked the video herself to gain visibility. The swirl of accusations, conspiracy theories and digital manipulation illustrates how deep fakes not only threaten the personal dignity of women candidates but also destabilizes electoral discourse by turning truth into speculation. These allegations are deliberately crafted because perpetrators recognize that such narratives gain traction in a society that is strongly grounded in moral conservatism.²⁰ This leads to women in politics being subjected to public judgment which in many cases influences how constituents ultimately perceive them and make their electoral decision making.

17 Electro Commission, (.2024). Revised Summary Roadmap 2025/2026 General Elections. <https://ec.or.ug/roadmap>

18 Gore, R., (2026). How AI-Driven Misinformation Threatens Uganda's 2026 Elections. <https://nilepost.co.ug/index.php/2026-election-watch/313511/how-ai-driven-misinformation-threatens-ugandas-2026-elections>.

19 Campusbee, (2025). Kakwanzi Accused of Leaking Her Own Tape to Boost Political Popularity. <https://campusbee.ug/news/kakwanzi-accused-of-leaking-her-own-tape-to-boost-political-popularity/>

20 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021), Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa

In another case reported by WOUGNET, manipulated videos and images portrayed a senior woman political leader as not only aging but seriously ill and incapacitated. These were paired with comments such as **“she should die”**, **“good for her that she is bed ridden”**, **“ she may be in the late stages of HIV and is not adhering to her medication”**. This particular woman political leader later addressed this on her verified social media account and clarified that the image was not of her. These statements go beyond disinformation and constitute incitement of voters to reject this particular woman politician, they dehumanise her, legitimise online violence and reinforces exclusionary norms that seek to push women out of political life altogether. Such content also functions as a deterrent to political participation signaling to other women that entry into politics carries severe reputational and personal costs.²¹ Gendered disinformation like this contributes to a shrinking civic space for women in political leadership as their voices are silenced from public debate.²²

In another case, a university student and online content creator pleaded guilty to creating and sharing a fake TikTok video that falsely portrayed the Speaker of Parliament as publicly criticizing the President over a public apology to Buganda Kingdom.²³ The AI-generated audio clip that mimicked the Speaker’s voice, which went viral on TikTok in May 2025 claimed that the Speaker of Parliament condemned the President’s apology as selective, accusing him of ignoring atrocities committed in other regions of Uganda and portraying her as publicly condemning his leadership and past actions. The speaker later disowned the audio clip stating that it was not her voice describing it as a smear campaign. The audio clip circulated just days before she collected nomination forms to contest for a senior leadership position within the ruling political party suggesting the intention was politically motivated.²⁴ This case demonstrates how AI generated audio was used to manufacture controversy, incite public hostility and damage the credibility of the speaker as woman political leader, The viral spread of the video-audio on social media platforms; TikTok and X, shows how content can quickly spread in an environment with low media literacy that could have fact-checked the content before spreading it. The timing and nature of the attack indicate how deep fakes are increasingly becoming a new extension of gendered character assassination against women political leaders and discouraging their advancement within party and electoral structures.

These cases highlight Uganda’s growing vulnerability to AI-enabled gendered disinformation and limited regulatory safeguards amidst a rapid spread of manipulated content on digital platforms increasingly on TikTok and X. In the video, faces of women political leaders are manipulated and pasted onto other people’s bodies. These patterns present a case for further research to understand how deepfakes are reshaping the landscape of political participation and safety of women in political life. The public rebuttal and debunking by parliament and individuals signals institutional awareness of disinformation.

21 Matovu M (2024), *How gender focused misinformation impacts women in Ugandan politics*

22 *Ibid*

23 Campusbee, (2025). *Makerere University Student Faces Jail Over Fake Anita Among TikTok Clip*. <https://campusbee.ug/news/makerere-university-student-faces-jail-over-fake-anita-among-tiktok-clip/>

24 *Ibid*

Cameroon

Cameroon's presidential election took place on October 12, 2025. Electoral periods commonly involve the intentional spread of false or misleading information aimed at manipulating public opinion or discrediting political opponents. From the start of the campaign season in September 2025 through the tense post-election weeks of October, the political situation in the country was often amplified by disinformation circulating on social media.²⁵

Fake messages, conflicting footage, and fabricated election results blended with genuine political messages spread on WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages to produce an information fog that blurred reality for millions of Cameroonians but also became a textbook example of how digital misinformation can shape political outcomes and post-election narratives.²⁶ Screenshots of the fake communication were shared thousands of times, accompanied by angry commentary and despairing memes, several campaign posters and short videos circulating on social media featured AI-generated imagery.²⁷ For the first time, deepfake-style disinformation entered mainstream political communication in the country, raising urgent questions about the capacity of regulators, journalists, and fact-checkers to detect such content during critical democratic moments.²⁸

According to monitoring conducted by PROTEGE QV, beyond traditional forms of disinformation, a distinct and sustained wave of sexist disinformation emerged that targeted women in politics in Cameroon with the intention of discrediting them and damaging their public image. Gender disinformation targeted women's identity, morality, and bodies in order to delegitimise them as political actors. It shifted voters' attention away from policy positions and towards women's private lives. In the cases monitored, women candidates were accused of fund embezzlement and alleged to have sexual relationships with senior officials in the President's office. These claims were unsubstantiated and served to undermine their credibility rather than engage with their political platforms.

Women that contested for political positions were consistently depicted as intruders in a male-dominated political space. The two female candidates were described as naturally unfit to run a state. One of these cases involved a political candidate named Bijo. She is an entrepreneur and was bullied online for being unfit to be in politics and represent people of her country. To avoid continuous backlash she dropped from the political race. Other women like Kahwalla, were attacked based on their marital status and clothing choices and were accused of undermining family structures. Single women were portrayed as incapable of managing a household, let alone a country. Married women were described as unruly.

The ultimate goal of gendered disinformation appeared to be twofold. First, to force women to self-censor or withdraw from political races in order to protect themselves and their families from shame. Second, to discourage other women from entering politics by framing participation as a threat to

²⁵ Lawal, M., (2025), *How Disinformation Shaped Cameroon's 2025 Election & its Aftermath*. Factcheckafrica.

²⁶ Lawal, M., Factcheckafrica (2025), *How Disinformation Shaped Cameroon's 2025 Election & its Aftermath*. Factcheckafrica.

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ *Ibid*

dignity and safety. Instances of gendered disinformation targeting men in political spheres were also reported, typically through narratives portraying them as incompetent or unfit for leadership. However, the forms and intensity of attacks documented in this analysis disproportionately affected women in politics, with content structured around gender norms, morality, appearance, and family roles in ways not observed in attacks against men.

Côte d'Ivoire

In the tense period surrounding the October 2025 Côte d'Ivoire's presidential elections, social media users exploited the heightened political environment to circulate false and misleading information. Numerous Facebook accounts, amplified unverified claims through copy-and-paste technique while others recycled images from past events to lend credibility to new and unfounded allegations.²⁹ These tactics were deliberately used to manufacture and legitimize fake news during the pre-election period.

Our project partner Leadafricaines based in Côte d'Ivoire monitored several social media platforms during the pre-election period in Côte d'Ivoire and documented images and comments that reflected these dynamics. Three prominent women were targeted during this period. Two were presidential candidates while the third one was a young woman who publicly criticised the government for restricting freedom of expression and failing to create opportunities for young people. Although she was not a candidate, her public visibility and political engagements placed her within the scope of online attacks.

The first case involved a former First Lady and influential public figure whose former spouse, a past President of Côte d'Ivoire, remains popular among a significant segment of the population. Online narratives repeatedly compared her to her former husband with comments that elevated his leadership credentials while simultaneously undermining hers. Broader online narratives focused on gender assumptions such as questioning her legitimacy as a candidate on grounds that no woman has yet served as a President in Côte d'Ivoire explicitly suggesting that women are less fit to lead. Notably, similar framing was actually used in reporting by media personnel on her campaign trail.³⁰ In addition, misleading images and texts were also documented that paired her image with statements or claims she never made thus aiming to delegitimize her candidacy. One such example was an image paired with false claims attributed to her and her political party that was circulated several times on social media platforms about inciting violence that happened in the central-west part of the country.³¹ These claims were later disowned by her political party.

29 Africa Digital Democracy Observatory (2025), *False claims around Côte d'Ivoire elections. How coordinated posts, deepfakes and altered visuals fueled post-election confusion*

30 'Associated Press (2026). *Simone Gbagbo, Ivory Coast's iron lady, eyes presidential palace in unlikely comeback bid*. <https://www.courthousenews.com/simone-gbagbo-ivory-coasts-iron-lady-eyes-presidential-palace-in-unlikely-comeback-bid/>

31 Africa Check (2025), *Côte d'Ivoire: Fake press releases proliferated during the October 2025 presidential election, fueling disinformation* <https://africacheck.org/fr/fact-checks/blog/cote-divoire-faux-communiqués-elections-2025?utm>

The second case involved another woman presidential candidate who received numerous attacks portraying her as lacking charisma, unfit to be President, and incapable of governing the country. Her appearance was criticised instead of her political programme, leadership capacity, policy proposals or her constitutional rights as a citizen to contest for the presidency. The attacks focused on her physical appearance and personality, reinforcing gendered expectations of leadership, as documented in the monitoring report from Leadafricaines.

The third case documented during monitoring involved a young woman who had publicly criticised the government, particularly regarding the limited opportunities and inadequate support for young people. When she later accepted an invitation from the ruling party to collaborate on youth related initiatives, she became a target of intense online backlash. She was accused of lacking seriousness and integrity with little acknowledgement that participation within decision making spaces can be a legitimate path to achieving reform. The attacks against her were shaped by intersecting biases related to her age, gender, and decision to engage politically.

One key observation across the Côte d'Ivoire cases was that specific categories of women with high public visibility or political influence were targeted. These include women political candidates, women journalists and media moderators, influential female voices on social media, women activists, and young women, including first-time voters. In effect, any woman who was visible in the public or political space became vulnerable to attack. This was observed across platforms such as Facebook and TikTok.

The primary objective of these attacks appeared to be silencing women by constraining their participation in political debates. Additional attacks focused on marital status as women were criticised for being unmarried, divorced, or for allegedly neglecting their families. They were told to focus on domestic responsibilities instead of participating in political discourse.

In many cases, these attacks aimed to discourage women's political participation by undermining their confidence and self-esteem. When women lose confidence, they are less likely to remain visible or active in public discourse.

Tanzania

During the October 2025 General Election period, online hostility toward women intensified, revealing how digital spaces can be weaponized to silence women's voices and restrict their participation in public life.³² Our project partner in Tanzania; Zaina Foundation, conducted monitoring on various social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X.

According to the insights document from the monitoring by Zaina Foundation, gender stereotypes continue to shape public attitudes, with claims that women should remain at home to take care of their families rather than engage in politics. Women leaders are frequently questioned about why they are leaving their husbands to pursue political roles. Rumours are spread suggesting that senior women leaders are neglecting their families in favour of politics. Upon verification, much of this information is found to be false. Videos are also circulated widely, yet many are fabricated or taken out of context. A significant number of such incidents were observed during the pre-election period. The intention behind these narratives is to weaken women's confidence and capacity to participate in leadership.

Gendered disinformation was very common during the pre-election period. There were many issues related to gender stereotyping, false information, and targeted narratives, particularly against women. There were many incidents where people circulated harmful messages through WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and other platforms. Many challenges emerged during this period, especially given that Tanzania has a woman President and women contesting various positions, including parliamentary seats.

Women who declared their intention to participate in elections faced significant challenges. Many of the narratives focused on personal relationships rather than on women's competence or leadership capacity. Narratives were created around families and private lives, sometimes fabricating claims that women attained political positions because of personal relationships rather than merit.

The use of manipulated images increased as people used Artificial Intelligence tools to fabricate images with an aim of damaging reputations and undermining credibility. These incidents affected not only the woman President, but also other women who sought leadership positions. Two cases were documented that targeted the President.

The first documented case involved a manipulated video of the President of Tanzania that circulated on Facebook and Instagram falsely showing her appearing to praise a Kenyan journalist for reporting on protest-led deaths that happened in Tanzania. In the video she appears to say:

"I don't hate Larry Madowo. He is a very good journalist, he is talented, and he does his work with vigour and determination. I am willing to give him my daughter because I heard he is single."

³² Zaina Foundation (2026). *The Impact of Gendered Disinformation Targeting Women in Tanzania: The Case Study of General Election 2025*. <https://zainafoundationtz.org/report-the-impact-of-gendered-disinformation-targeting-women-in-tanzania-the-case-study-of-general-election-2025/?utm>

Africa Check, a fact checking organisation, closely examined the video footage and identified multiple indicators of manipulation. One key inconsistency was the location depicted in the video which appeared to show the president speaking at the United Nations General Assembly, an unlikely platform for making such statements. Further investigations established that the visual component of the clip came from an authentic video of her addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2021, four years before the Tanzanian elections. A careful review of her original speech confirmed that it contained no mention of the said journalist. The circulating clip had combined an authentic clip with AI-generated audio creating a false and misleading narrative. As a result, Africa Check subsequently declared the claims in the video as false and unreliable.³³ The video damages her credibility and undermines public trust in her judgement and leadership portraying her as making unprofessional statements on an international platform which could affect diplomatic relationships and her global reputation.

Two additional fake videos circulated on X falsely portraying unrest in Tanzania. One clip purported to show protesters marching along a street in Tanzania while chanting accompanied by the caption:

“Idi Amin Mama Samia is seeing bad things in Tanzania. It is boiling nicely!”

The phrase **“Idi Amin Mama”** is a derogatory moniker used to refer to Tanzanian president, drawing a comparison of her to the late Ugandan dictator Idi Amin Dada. However, reverse image searches conducted on keyframes from the video clip traced it to a TikTok post published on June 20, 2024, also in connection with Kenya’s anti-tax demonstrations. The footage was confirmed to have been recorded on Kenya’s Mburu Gichua road in Nakuru town.³⁴

The second clip published on X on October 29 claimed to show wide spread chaos in Tanzania. The post read:

“BREAKING!!! TANZANIA GOES UP IN FLAMES AS THE GEN-Zs ARE PROTESTING AGAINST THE BAD GOVERNANCE. The president of that country, Samia Hassan thought she could silence the voice of the people by arresting her critics forgetting that even elastic has limits, here we are.. (sic),”

The claim was traced back to a TikTok account and was published on October 14, 2025. Agence France-Presse (AFP) Fact Check conducted reverse image searches on keyframes from the video

³³ Africa Check (2025), *Manipulated video shows Tanzania’s president Samia Suluhu Hassan ‘praising’ Kenyan journalist Larry Madowo after report on killings*: <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/meta-programme-fact-checks/manipulated-video-shows-tanzanias-president-samia-suluhu?utm>

³⁴ Gachahi P, AFP (2025), *Old and unrelated images misrepresent unrest during Tanzania’s general election*, <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.82UB9ZQ>

clip and found that it was filmed in Nepal. The original video had been published by Al Jazeera on YouTube on September 9, 2025, with the title, **“Nepal parliament set ablaze amid anti-corruption protests.”**³⁵

Women’s participation in politics remains difficult in many parts of Tanzania due to perceptions about their capacity and leadership abilities. These attitudes are deeply influenced by cultural and traditional beliefs that do not fully recognise women’s power and leadership. From a gendered perspective, these fabricated videos reinforce harmful stereotypes that question women’s suitability for leadership by portraying the president as weak, chaotic or incapable of governing during moments of political tension. The use of derogatory language and comparison to a male dictator seeks to delegitimize her authority through gendered ridicule, amplifying both public hostility and undermining her credibility in ways that male leaders are less likely to face. Such disinformation not only damages an individual’s personal reputation but also contributes to a broader environment that normalizes online abuse against women in politics, discouraging their political participation and reinforcing structural barriers in leadership.

Although women’s participation in leadership in Tanzania has improved to some extent, progress remains limited. Harmful narratives and misleading continue to be used to discourage women from entering or remaining in public life. As a result, continuous awareness-raising efforts are necessary.

35 *Ibid*

Conclusion

The cases documented across Uganda, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania demonstrate that gendered disinformation particularly through deepfakes constitutes a deliberate and evolving form of technology facilitated gender based violence in Africa's political landscape. These attacks are gendered in both design and intent disproportionately targeting women in politics by focusing on morality, sexuality, appearance and personal conduct; areas used historically to silence and delegitimize women leaders. Rather than engaging with women's political ideas and their leadership capacity, perpetrators seek to erode credibility, engineer public hostility and undermine legitimacy through AI generated and manipulated content.

The findings further show that women in politics are not the only targets, women activists too are increasingly subjected to gendered disinformation on accusations of loyalty and morality. The monitoring also suggests that comparatively fewer deepfake incidents were documented targeting men in political roles than women, although the absence of systematic gender-disaggregated data limits direct comparison. This highlights the need for future research applying an explicit gendered analytical lens to examine differences in frequency, form, and impact of deepfake-enabled disinformation targeting women and men.

As elections approach, such narratives often intensify resulting in shrinking civic space through intimidation, reputational harm, based on unfounded claims and allegations. These incidents expose women to heightened psychological harm, self censorship and withdrawal from public discourse thereby achieving the objective of silencing women.

Across all four countries, gendered disinformation spreads faster than factual information while awareness on fact checking and information verification remains low among the public. Platforms were found to be slow and inconsistent particularly where fake information was disseminated in the local languages that automated moderation systems fail to interpret accurately. At the same time, support systems for women remain weak with limited access to legal and professional assistance for those experiencing sustained online attacks.

Importantly, the evidence shows that most gendered disinformation occurs during pre-election and campaign periods, with post-election narratives continuing to reinforce moral judgement and dismiss women's participation as symbolic. When women disengage from online and political spaces as a result of sustained harassment, democratic participation itself diminishes. Given that women constitute half of the population across the four project countries, the erosion of women's digital presence and political participation during elections represents a loss not only to women but for democracy, peace and society as a whole.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were shared by project partners drawing from the insights derived from the monitoring exercise.

For Governments and Legislatures

Integrate a gender lens into election frameworks and roadmaps recognising that women experience disinformation during elections times differently and more intensely in gender-specific and disproportionate ways.

Establish clear legal and institutional mechanisms for reporting, investigation, and accountability to deter coordinated disinformation campaigns including those enabled by artificial intelligence and synthetic media.

Clearly integrate mis/disinformation and TFGBV risks in AI governance frameworks

For Electoral Management Bodies

Electoral processes should explicitly recognise and address digital violence. There should also be clear mechanisms to protect all women involved in elections, including candidates, journalists, activists.

Develop and publicise clear rapid reporting channels for electoral cyber harassment for example through toll-free numbers used for reporting physical violence, dedicated reporting mechanisms during election periods could help deter online abuse.

Collaborate with civil society organisations (CSOs) and fact checking organizations to ensure timely verification and public correction of false narratives. This can be extended beyond election day to include post-election periods when delegitimizing narratives often persist.

For Political Parties

Institutionalise a culture where women's dignity is a non-negotiable regardless of a woman's rank of position in the political party by publicly and consistently defending women in politics against gendered attacks signalling that an attack on them is an attack on the party.

Introduce mandatory training curricula for all party members on gender equality, digital safety and security.

For Civil Society Organizations and Women Networks

Continuously invest in digital safety and security training for women at different levels of political and civic engagement

Expand and strengthen survivor centered support mechanisms and strategies leveraging women-led organisations, networks and coalitions to provide protection and rapid response psychosocial support, and referral pathways.

Promote media and digital literacy to help the general public learn to distinguish between manipulated or false content and factual information.

Engage mainstream media to strengthen gender responsive reporting among journalists since biased or harmful coverage can be amplified and manipulated on social media contributing to gendered disinformation and violence against women.

Increase public awareness of the real world harm caused by spreading false information particularly the impact it has on women's participation in politics and democratic discourse.

For Social Media Platforms

Invest in improved detection and moderation of manipulated content, including in local languages, and ensure that human review complements automated systems, particularly during election periods

Proactively collaborate with electoral bodies, fact-checkers, and civil society organisations to flag emerging disinformation trends and limit the amplification of harmful content targeting women in politics.

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