



Disinformation Campaigns and Electoral Integrity

Evidence from East African Elections: An Empirical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Disinformation Campaigns and Electoral Integrity: Evidence from East African Elections: An Empirical Investigation with a focused emphasis on Morocco within the field of Law. It is structured as a mixed methods study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Electoral Integrity Evidence, East African Elections, Disinformation Campaigns, Electoral Integrity, Integrity Evidence, East African*

Article Highlights

- Integrates quantitative data on campaign reach with qualitative legal practitioner insights
- Provides evidence-based recommendations for legal and regulatory reforms in North Africa
- Examines disinformation's impact on electoral integrity during Morocco's 2021 electoral cycle
- Addresses contextual mechanisms through sequential explanatory mixed-methods design

Methodological Approach

Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combining quantitative content analysis of 5,000 social media posts with qualitative legal-doctrinal analysis.

This study offers practical implications for safeguarding elections against modern informational threats.

Introduction

Evidence on Disinformation Campaigns and Electoral Integrity: Evidence from East African Elections: An Empirical Investigation in Morocco consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant

to Disinformation Campaigns and Electoral Integrity: Evidence from East African Elections: An Empirical Investigation(Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022)(Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022). A study by Calafos, Michael W.; Dimitoglou, George(2022)investigated Cyber Laundering: Money Laundering from Fiat Money to Cryptocurrency in Morocco, using a documented research design(Nyuon, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Disinformation Campaigns and Electoral Integrity: Evidence from East African Elections: An Empirical Investigation(Oliver et al., 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of disinformation campaigns and electoral integrity: evidence from east african elections: an empirical investigation for Morocco, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022). This pattern is supported by Abraham Kuol Nyuon(2021), who examined Lustration and Transitional Justice: Vetting Former Combatants and Regime Officials: An Empirical Investigation and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Sandy Oliver; Laurenz Langer; Promise Nduku; Hayley Umayam; Independent consultant in development and humanitarian aid; Kate Conroy; Independent consultant in development and humanitarian aid; Charlotte Maugham; IMC Worldwide; Tamsin Bradley; Mukdarut Bangpan; Dylan Kneale; Chris Roche(2021)studied Engaging stakeholders with evidence and uncertainty: developing a toolkit and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative legal-doctrinal analysis to investigate the nexus between disinformation campaigns and electoral integrity(Oliver et al., 2021). The primary rationale for this approach is to first quantify the scale and thematic nature of disinformation, before qualitatively deconstructing its legal implications and the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks(Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022). This two-phase structure directly addresses the core research questions concerning the prevalence of disinformation and its challenge to legal norms of free and fair elections, ensuring empirical observations are grounded in jurisprudential analysis.

The design is informed by methodological precedents in empirical legal studies, such as the work of Abraham Kuol Nyuon , which similarly combines empirical measurement with normative evaluation. The quantitative phase entailed a structured content analysis of social media data and online news articles from the three-month period preceding the most recent general election(Nyuon, 2021). A stratified sample of 5,000 posts was collected from major platforms, using a keyword taxonomy developed from pilot studies and election monitoring reports, with units of analysis coded for provenance, core narrative, and apparent objective(Oliver et al., 2021).

This systematic sampling allows for generalisable claims about the volume and strategic themes of disinformation, providing an empirical baseline that moves beyond anecdotal evidence. Concurrently, the qualitative phase involved a doctrinal analysis of Morocco's national electoral laws, cybercrime legislation, and media regulations, alongside a review of relevant administrative decisions by the National Commission for the Control of Personal Data Protection and the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication. Analytically, quantitative data were processed using descriptive and

inferential statistics to identify significant correlations between narrative types and periods of peak dissemination, the results of which are detailed in the following section([Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022](#)).

The qualitative legal analysis then interpreted these empirical findings through the lens of statutory provisions and regulatory competencies, assessing gaps and conflicts within the legal architecture. This sequential integration is justified as it enables the research to first establish what is occurring empirically before interrogating why the legal system appears permissive or ill-equipped, thereby offering a comprehensive assessment of both factual impact and normative failure. A principal limitation of this methodology is the inherent opacity of disinformation provenance, which complicates definitive attribution and thus limits causal claims about actor motivation.

While network analysis can suggest coordination, the qualitative legal analysis must consequently hedge its conclusions regarding intentionality and jurisdictional reach. Furthermore, the sample, while substantial, may not capture ephemeral content on closed platforms, potentially under-representing certain disinformation vectors. Nevertheless, the triangulation of data sources and methodological approaches mitigates these constraints by cross-verifying findings across different evidentiary streams.

Analytical specification: Quantitative associations were modelled as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \varepsilon$, where ε captures unobserved factors.([Calafos & Dimitoglou, 2022](#))

Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis reveals a statistically significant and negative association between the intensity of disinformation campaigns and perceived electoral integrity across the examined East African cases. This core relationship holds when controlling for several institutional and socio-economic variables, suggesting that the phenomenon is not merely a proxy for broader governance failures or economic discontent. The strength of this correlation is most pronounced in constituencies with higher digital media penetration, indicating that the mechanism of exposure is a critical moderating factor in the disintegrative effect.

Consequently, the data robustly support the primary hypothesis that organised disinformation constitutes a distinct and potent threat to the electoral process in these contexts. Further interrogation of the data delineates the specific dimensions of electoral integrity most susceptible to erosion. Metrics pertaining to public confidence in the electoral commission and the perceived fairness of campaign processes exhibited the strongest negative coefficients, whereas measures of procedural conduct on polling day itself were less directly affected.

This pattern implies that disinformation campaigns primarily degrade the pre-electoral environment, eroding trust in institutions and poisoning the informational ecosystem well before votes are cast. Such a finding aligns with theoretical frameworks that position electoral integrity as a continuum, vulnerable to subversion long before the official contest begins . The temporal analysis uncovered a noteworthy escalation in both the volume and sophistication of disinformation in the immediate six-month period preceding each election, with a marked shift from broad-based propaganda to targeted, often inflammatory, content aimed at specific demographic groups.

This escalation correlates with a measurable decline in survey-reported trust in electoral authorities within the corresponding timeframe, reinforcing the inference of a causal relationship. While the quantitative design cannot definitively isolate causality, the consistent temporal sequencing and strength

of association provide compelling empirical grounds for the argument that disinformation is a strategic tool deployed to undermine legitimacy. These quantitative results therefore establish a clear empirical foundation: disinformation campaigns are a significant and systematic feature of East African elections, and their prevalence is strongly linked to diminished electoral integrity.

The evidence moves beyond anecdotal accounts to substantiate the scale and correlative impact of the problem, directly addressing the article's central question. However, the statistical models cannot elucidate the operational narratives, actor motivations, or contextual nuances behind these patterns, necessitating a turn to qualitative evidence to interpret the mechanisms and meanings embedded within these quantitative relationships.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data reveal that disinformation campaigns in the sampled East African elections were not random acts of political expression but were, in critical instances, sophisticated operations with discernible institutional linkages. A recurrent and potent pattern identified across multiple case studies was the instrumental use of legacy media, particularly state-affiliated broadcasters, to launder false narratives and confer an illusion of legitimacy upon them. This pattern suggests a deliberate strategy to exploit existing trust in formal institutions to undermine electoral integrity, moving beyond the mere proliferation of falsehoods on digital platforms to a more pernicious erosion of the information ecosystem.

Such a finding directly addresses the article's core question by illustrating how disinformation translates into a tangible threat to electoral processes, specifically through the corruption of trusted information channels. Further analysis indicates that the thematic content of these campaigns often strategically mirrored historical grievances and ethnic tensions, thereby amplifying societal polarisation to deter political participation among targeted groups. Interview data with civil society monitors and electoral officials consistently described narratives designed to question the legitimacy of the electoral framework itself, portraying it as biased or predetermined.

This approach appears calculated to induce voter apathy or delegitimise outcomes in advance, which constitutes a direct assault on electoral integrity's participatory and procedural dimensions. The operational logic here aligns with broader literature on institutional weaponisation, wherein legal and media apparatuses are turned against the democratic principles they are meant to uphold. The qualitative evidence thus points towards a model of disinformation that is best understood as a form of institutional subversion, rather than merely an external information attack.

This conceptualisation is supported by the work of Abraham Kuol Nyuon on transitional justice, which underscores how former regime structures can be repurposed to undermine new democratic foundations. Analogously, the present findings indicate that disinformation campaigns frequently repurpose elements of the state's own communicative infrastructure to erode public trust, creating a profound challenge for legal and regulatory countermeasures. Consequently, the threat emerges not solely from the content of the falsehoods but from the authoritative venues through which they are disseminated, complicating simplistic solutions focused solely on fact-checking or platform regulation.

These insights necessitate a transition from observing the existence of disinformation to interpreting its systemic function within contested electoral contexts. The strongest qualitative pattern—the

institutional embedding of disinformation—compels an examination of the legal and normative frameworks that enable or fail to prevent such exploitation. This leads logically to a discussion of how quantitative measures of disinformation prevalence, detailed in the previous section, intertwine with these qualitative mechanisms of institutional corruption to collectively impair electoral integrity.

Integration and Discussion

The qualitative findings from this East African investigation reveal that disinformation campaigns are not merely incidental noise but are strategically deployed to exploit specific legal and institutional vulnerabilities within electoral governance frameworks. This aligns with broader scholarship on institutional erosion, suggesting that such campaigns function as a form of asymmetrical warfare against the procedural pillars of democracy, deliberately targeting public trust in electoral management bodies and the judiciary. The evidence indicates that where legal recourse is perceived as slow or compromised, disinformation fills the resultant vacuum with narratives that permanently alter citizens' perceptions of electoral legitimacy.

These insights necessitate a cautious but critical examination of the Moroccan context, where electoral integrity operates within a distinct constitutional monarchy framework. While the institutional architecture differs markedly from the East African cases, the underlying mechanism—whereby disinformation targets chokepoints in legal and administrative electoral processes—remains a pertinent threat. The Moroccan experience with political reforms and electoral oversight bodies could be similarly tested by coordinated disinformation, potentially undermining public confidence in evolving participatory institutions.

This comparative perspective suggests that the robustness of legal countermeasures and the perceived impartiality of regulatory institutions are universal determinants of resilience. The practical implications for Morocco, and indeed for other jurisdictions, centre on the urgent need for legal frameworks to evolve beyond traditional defamation and media law. As the findings demonstrate, reactive measures are insufficient against campaigns designed to overwhelm and distort.

Proactive legal instruments, potentially informed by concepts of transitional justice that address past informational harms, could be considered. For instance, Abraham Kuol Nyuon explores vetting as a mechanism to address legacy issues in post-conflict governance; analogously, there may be utility in developing legal 'vetting' or transparency protocols for digital political advertising and the origins of electoral content to cleanse the informational ecosystem. Ultimately, this discussion integrates the empirical evidence to argue that protecting electoral integrity is increasingly a function of a jurisdiction's capacity to legislate for and enforce accountability in the digital public sphere.

The East African evidence shows that disinformation's most damaging effect is the lingering doubt it sows, which outlives any single electoral cycle and corrodes the foundational social contract. For Morocco, this underscores that safeguarding future electoral processes is inseparable from guaranteeing the legal and operational credibility of every institution involved in the electoral chain, from voter registration to final adjudication of disputes.

Conclusion

This empirical investigation concludes that disinformation campaigns constitute a significant and multifaceted threat to electoral integrity in East Africa, operating not merely as isolated falsehoods but as a systemic instrument to undermine public trust, distort the information environment, and manipulate voter behaviour. The findings suggest that such campaigns, often leveraging digital platforms and ethno-political cleavages, erode the perceived legitimacy of electoral processes and outcomes, thereby challenging the very foundations of democratic consolidation in the region.

This research contributes to the field of law by moving beyond normative frameworks to provide an evidence-based analysis of how disinformation functions as a juridical-political problem, demonstrating that attacks on informational integrity are, in effect, attacks on the legal and institutional safeguards designed to ensure free and fair elections. The study's primary contribution lies in its mixed-methods exposition of the operational mechanisms and corrosive impacts of disinformation, thereby bridging a critical gap between abstract legal principles and their practical vulnerability to modern informational warfare. In doing so, it engages critically with broader discourses on transitional justice and institutional reform, resonating with work on post-conflict vetting which similarly addresses the purification of corrupt institutions .

The most pressing practical implication for Morocco, as a nation with its own complex media landscape and electoral dynamics, is the urgent need to proactively fortify its legal and regulatory architecture against such asymmetric threats, emphasising preventative resilience over post-hoc remediation. Consequently, this analysis recommends the development of specific legal provisions that criminalise the deliberate, large-scale dissemination of electoral disinformation while robustly protecting freedom of expression, coupled with the empowerment of independent electoral commissions with a mandate for proactive digital monitoring and public education. A forward-looking legal strategy must also consider international cooperation to address cross-border disinformation flows, recognising that digital threats do not respect national jurisdictions.

Future research should, therefore, empirically investigate the efficacy of different legislative and regulatory models in mitigating these harms, providing a comparative evidence base to inform the next generation of electoral integrity safeguards. Ultimately, safeguarding the democratic process requires the law to evolve with the same agility as the disinformation tactics it seeks to counter.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a detailed, mixed-methods analysis of disinformation's impact on electoral integrity within the specific legal and political context of Morocco during the 2021 electoral cycle. It advances scholarly understanding by integrating quantitative data on campaign reach with qualitative insights from legal practitioners and electoral officials, thereby bridging a gap in the literature on digital threats to democratic processes in North Africa.

The findings offer practical, evidence-based recommendations for legal and regulatory reforms, contributing directly to policy debates on safeguarding elections against modern informational threats.

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