



Defending Information Integrity: Actions for Election Stakeholders

Action Coalition for Information Integrity in Elections

United Nations Development Programme
Global Policy Centre for Governance

Information Integrity in Elections

In 2024, some 2 billion people in 72 countries, about half the world's adult population, will have the chance to vote, far more in one year than ever before. As always, voters have the right to accurate, timely and trustworthy information about the electoral process and candidates. But this significant electoral year takes place against a backdrop of highly polluted information ecosystems, with new and emerging threats such as generative artificial intelligence (AI) creating further challenges. There are growing concerns about the dissemination of false and misleading content online and offline to sway outcomes, confuse or dissuade voters, heighten polarization and delegitimize electoral processes. On a more fundamental level, these efforts can undermine the very systems of governance that are sustained through elections.

Led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and governed by six member organizations,¹ the Action Coalition on Information Integrity in Elections (the 'Action Coalition') is a global platform which brings together experts from electoral support organizations, the private sector, the United Nations (UN), government agencies and civil society. The Action Coalition's overall aim is to produce actionable recommendations to help protect the integrity of information ecosystems during elections.

The following recommendations are drawn from three main sources: the Action Coalition's 2023 paper "[Promoting information integrity in elections: global reflections from election stakeholders](#)", Action Coalition discussions convened in 2023, and the Global Coalition for Tech Justice's [#yearofdemocracy campaign](#). The recommendations provide actionable options to protect information ecosystems, improve coordination, streamline responses and respect human rights.

Background of the Action Coalition

UNDP is the foremost provider of electoral support within the UN system. With the aim to build a collective understanding of the challenges and responses to information pollution impacting electoral processes,² UNDP launched a global platform in 2022 for exchange among electoral support stakeholders engaged in this relatively new field. Under the leadership of UNDP's [Global Policy Centre for Governance](#), the Action Coalition convenes regularly with the following objectives:

- **To improve information sharing and coordination** among key stakeholders in electoral assistance and support, including representatives from the technology sector.
- **To assess and understand** the most concerning impacts of disinformation on electoral integrity.
- **To gather and examine** best practice and case studies to develop effective programmatic recommendations and guidance and, when relevant, to coordinate responses to threats to information ecosystems.
- **To critically assess** emerging analysis, approaches and recommendations within this field and seek to develop and contribute new thinking and positions on relevant issues.

¹ UNDP, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), PANOS Institute Southern Africa, the Samir Kassir Foundation, the Africa Freedom of Information Centre and the Centre for Elections, Democracy, Accountability and Representation of the University of Birmingham.

² False, manipulated or misleading information about the administration of electoral processes (e.g. eligibility requirements, where and when to vote, election results) in an attempt to suppress or change voting behaviour.

Recommended actions for electoral stakeholders

Online platforms

- Publish **detailed election strategies** for 2024. These should provide a full spectrum of the tools which will be employed, and the procedures for oversight, transparency and accountability.
- **Do not treat elections as discrete events**, but rather, from an electoral cycle perspective, with pre-emptive interventions to prevent information pollution and post-election strategies designed to respond to electoral complaints and outcomes.
- **Establish relationships** with Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), electoral support organizations and civil society early in the electoral cycle to develop effective partnerships.
- **Respond in a timely way** to support requests from EMBs and **dedicate sufficient staff** to respond adequately. Ensure that EMBs have information on how to raise concerns or violations and are aware of the support available to them.
- Before, during and after elections, **actively promote and boost non-political civic and voter education content** from public interest media, EMBs and civil society sources.
- Work in **close collaboration with the international electoral support community** to identify online dangers, particularly in high-risk elections and in less developed countries, regardless of market size.
- Contribute to **pre-emptive, participatory, conflict-sensitive analyses** of local contexts and information landscapes in advance of elections.
- Respond rapidly, in accordance with policies, to accounts, networks and content that actively propagate **false or misleading information about the administration of elections, incite political violence or threaten election officials**.
- Develop and test systems to **identify and label AI-generated written and audiovisual content** created through third-party tools.
- Recognize the **importance of local languages and cultural contexts** in content moderation, and partner with fact-checking organizations, civil society groups and local experts to address these gaps.
- Ensure consistent **real-time monitoring** across all elections, not just those in strategically important markets.
- Provide rapid and equal **data access** for election researchers, civil society, independent media and election monitors, regardless of their geographic location. Refrain from restricting application programming interfaces (APIs) or putting data behind unaffordable paywalls.

Electoral Management Bodies

- **Develop strategies and build capacity** to defend EMBs, their staff and the electoral process from unfounded attacks.
- Undertake or support monitoring to **identify disinformation threats** and integrate relevant messaging into strategic communications and voter education initiatives.
- Build **diverse, inclusive and solution-oriented national coalitions**, including **with trusted information sources** such as public interest media and online content creators, regulatory bodies, women's and youth organizations, and other stakeholders.
- **Establish relationships with internet companies** early in the electoral cycle, in coordination with media and telecommunications regulators as appropriate, in order to plan effectively, communicate concerns and risks, and agree on measures to be taken. Requests could include responding to inauthentic behaviour online, boosting official impartial information, and partnering with civil society, fact-checking organizations and independent media.
- Establish and maintain a **multi-skilled and diverse communications team**. Staff should be inclusive of the societies they serve, including women and representatives from ethnic and religious groups, linguistic minorities, indigenous people, youth and people with disabilities. This will facilitate a greater ability to design interventions that adequately respond to the concerns of the community and, therefore, build trust in the work of the EMB.

Governments and media regulatory authorities

- Develop **codes of conduct for political parties and candidates**, including comprehensive guidelines on the ethical use of social media during elections. Codes can be voluntary, non-binding or mandatory, but should allow for a political party to take responsibility for any violations.
- Develop **codes of conduct for media and content creators**, including bloggers, talk show hosts, social media influencers and podcast producers, to ensure they are held to similar journalistic standards and are working to protect fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information.
- In light of increased online campaigning by many political parties and candidates, consider measures to provide **transparency and oversight of online political campaign expenditure** to reduce abuses, manipulation of voters and corruption.
- Increase intergovernmental efforts to develop measures, in line with international human rights law, to hold **political actors and major architects of information pollution accountable**.
- **Strengthen legal frameworks and policies** supporting information integrity **and promoting positive and tolerant speech and accurate information**. The regulation of free expression and restrictions on free speech should be limited to speech that is prohibited under international law.

Media and news outlets and associations

- Develop **principles and guidelines for covering elections**, based on human rights, including practical provisions protecting the rights to freedom from discrimination, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of association and of peaceful assembly.
- Ensure that media professionals have the **basic tools to cover elections responsibly**, including knowledge of electoral processes and critical information regarding electoral regulations, laws and processes.
- Encourage the creation of media networks and partnerships with respected fact-checking entities for **collective fact-checking during elections** and to ensure consistency of electoral content. Create efficient mechanisms for media synergy such as situation rooms to allow journalists from diverse outlets to efficiently share coverage of election-related events.
- Provide resources and support for journalists who are disproportionately targeted by disinformation campaigns while reporting on elections, due to their gender, ethnicity, religion or other factors.
- Encourage **investigative reporting on online platforms' performance** during election cycles and on tracking and establishing the veracity of content, including identifying possible AI-generated content.
- Collaborate with fact-checkers and researchers to understand and **expose tactics used by disinformation operations** and to highlight internet companies' shortcomings.
- Participate actively in **multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms** combating information pollution.

International electoral support partners

- Advocate for more **pre-emptive, international assistance** before information pollution campaigns are mobilized and have begun to spread.
- Conduct or support thorough **mapping of information landscapes** and assessments of existing local stakeholder capacity and coordination mechanisms for information integrity programmes.
- Support **effective, coordinated and action-oriented coalition building** of stakeholders, including EMBs, election monitors and observers, media, representatives from technology companies, relevant government officials and security forces. Responses to threats should be timely and coordinated, with policies and strategies in place ahead of time.
- Improve **knowledge of strategies used to silence and intimidate individuals and groups**, such as women and minorities, including political candidates, journalists and election officials, who can be disproportionately affected by harassment and threats. Develop urgent measures to respond to these threats and support those impacted.
- Invest further in research to **explore the potential positive uses of technology and social media in elections in various contexts**, including the potential of AI to empower independent journalism, identify and remove harmful content, and deliver targeted voter education content.

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