

# Messaging apps and electoral disinformation in Namibia and Ghana

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# Heard in this room yesterday...

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**“People tend to *believe* (dis)information when it comes from close sources that they know, like family members or friends.”**

# In this presentation ...

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- We explore how applicable is the previous statement in the context of **electoral disinformation**.
- We examine how **messaging apps** such as WhatsApp or Telegram contribute to the diffusion of electoral disinformation
- We provide some **very preliminary** modelling on the diffusion and acceptance of electoral disinformation.

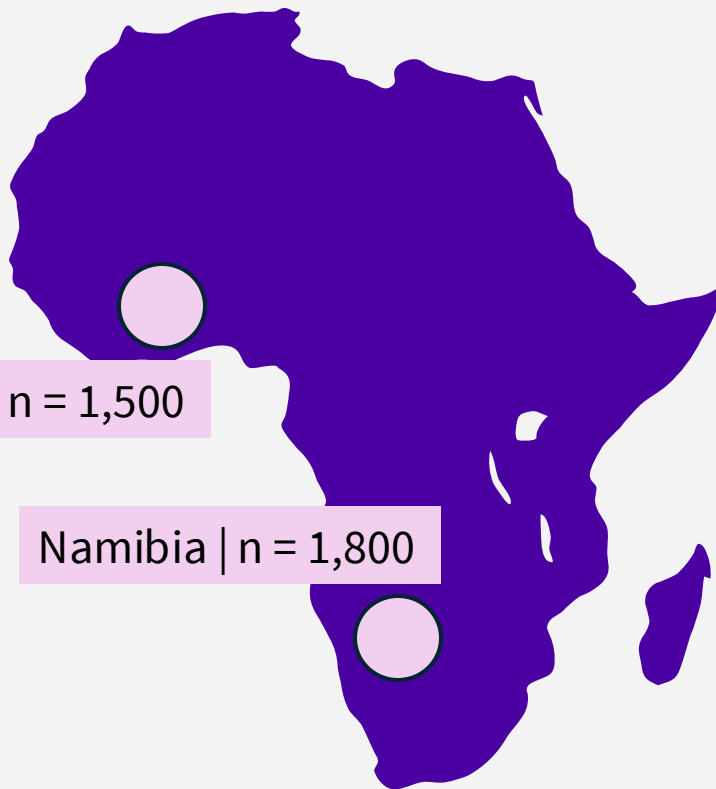
Yes, and no.

No surprise here.

The usual suspects.

# A word of caution ...

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Ghana | n = 1,500

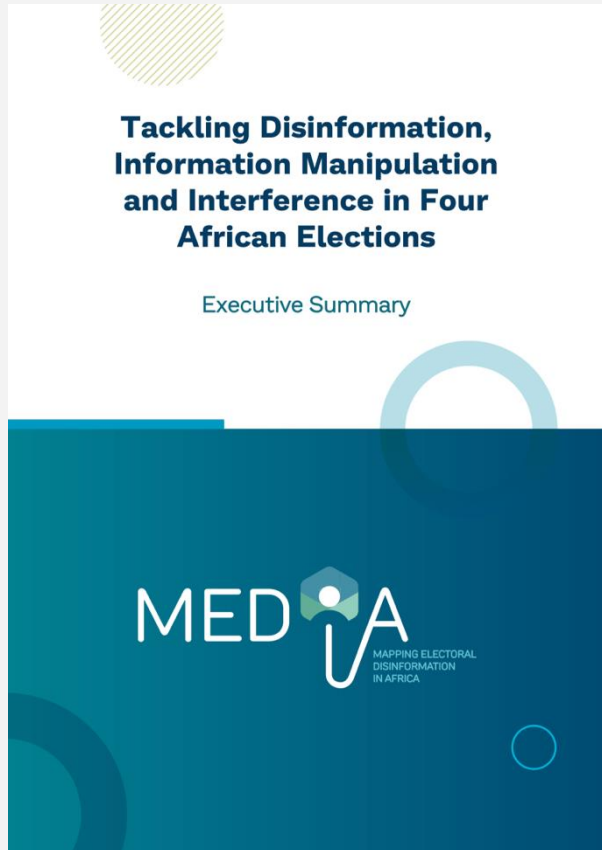
Namibia | n = 1,800

We use survey data with self-reported measures.

We only test the prevalence of pre-selected falsehoods.

Online administered surveys are far from representative.

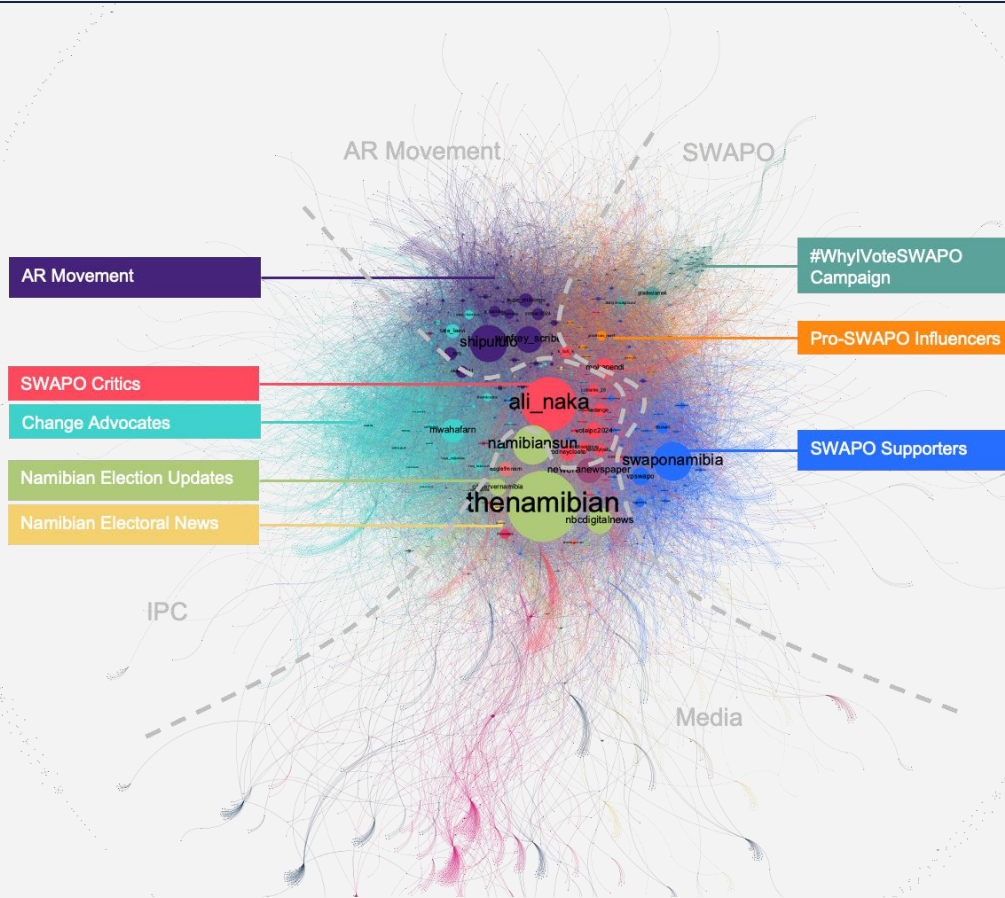
# Part of a larger project – Election Monitoring



Typology of narratives, actors and responses (TL;DR : nothing new, but at scale)



# Part of a larger project – Social Media Analysis



Online conversations were defined by two vectors: election legitimacy and political contestation.

TikTok and YouTube are far more dynamic (and overlooked) than X/Facebook.

A new hierarchy of political influence is configuring around the continent.

# Part of a larger project – Digital Ethnography



**Hookup Girls will be given licence for their work to make boys happy in the country.**



**2024 MANIFESTO HIGHLIGHTS**

**A promise to build Liposuction Centers for women who want to enhance their backs and breast.**

www.johnmahama.org

JD Mahama

FOR THE GHANA WE WANT

**She is Hygienic**  
tap here for group info

I Just got mine

Click Here 📌  
<https://lnkshk.com/Get-500GHS>

9:30 PM

~ Adena Dorothy +233 54 086 8555

John Dramani Mahama 500GHS  
Campaign's Funds For Ghanians

John Dramani Mahama 500GHS  
Campaign Funds For Ghanians

**HOW TO GET IT**

Click the link below and answer the following questions and you will receive 500 GHS instantly.

I just got mine

Click Here 📌  
<https://lnkshk.com/Get-500GHS>

10:08 PM

+233 59 877 7681 left

We experimented with photo diaries; social media walkthroughs and WhatsApp focus groups.

Challenged by the prevalence of “everyday disinformation”.

Gendered disinformation is ubiquitous.

# Namibia Election Snapshot

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- **Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (NNN)** of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) was elected as Namibia's first female president.
- Her main opponent, Panduleni Itula of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) **contested the results**, citing electoral irregularities.
- SWAPO, which has governed since independence in 1990, retained a parliamentary majority but saw its seats reduced from 63 to 51. This decline reflects **growing dissatisfaction** amid economic challenges.

# Ghana Election Snapshot

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- **Ghana's 2024 general elections** were highly contested, featuring a rematch between John Dramani Mahama from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia from the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP)
- **Mahama secured victory**, marking a return to power for the NDC after eight years in opposition.
- **Key election issues** included economic hardship, corruption, unemployment, and governance reforms, with many voters expressing dissatisfaction with the NPP government's handling of the economy.

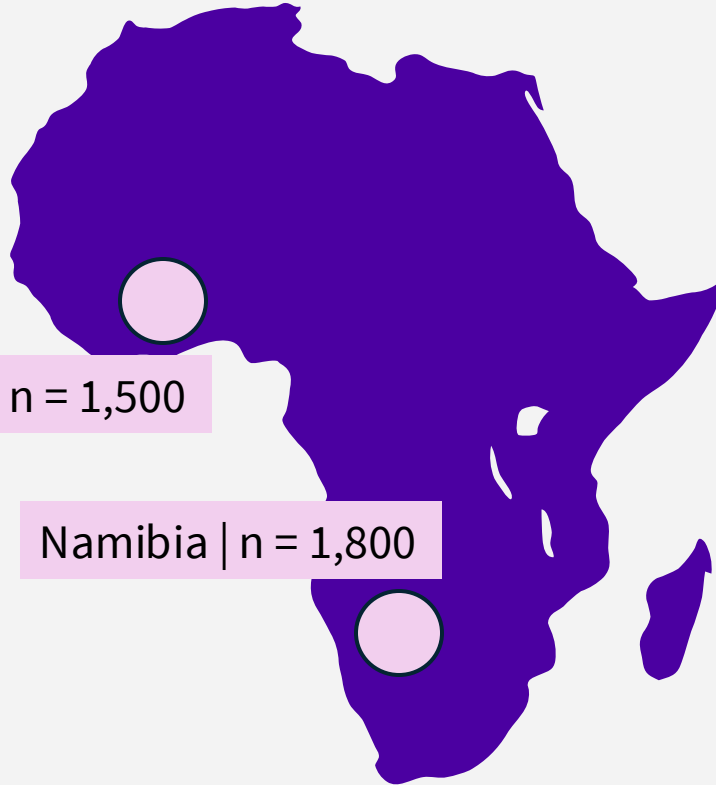
# Broader context of 2024 elections in Africa

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- **Challenging year for incumbents:** Across several African countries — including Botswana and South Africa, for example — ruling parties faced mounting public dissatisfaction and declining electoral support.
- **Rising tensions:** In some cases, this dissatisfaction sparked conflict and unrest, as seen in Mozambique. Elsewhere, it fuelled political uncertainty and intense election-related polarization.
- **Restrictive responses:** Authorities in various countries responded by clamping down on information flows, including blocking internet access or suppressing dissent on digital platforms.

# Method – Survey - Data

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Ghana | n = 1,500

Namibia | n = 1,800

We presented survey respondents with 8 headlines, five of which were false or misleading.

We asked respondents to evaluate the truthfulness of the headlines they had seen before.

We asked to try to recall where they had come across the headlines they had seen before.

# Misleading/false news headlines - Namibia

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Namibian Constitution was written by Western countries, says Itula

False (Domestic Politics)

Top ECN official offered N\$2 million to help Swapo win the upcoming election

False (Domestic Politics)

Criminals are posing as Home Affairs officers to rob homeowners

False (Domestic)

Fruit from Bill Gates' farm linked to toxic products that may cause death

False (Global)

Immigrants in the US state of Ohio found stealing and eating neighbour's pets

False (Global)

# Misleading/false news headlines - Ghana

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Napo resigns as Bawumia Running mate for 2024 general election

False (Domestic Politics)

John Mahama: "NPP has placed Ghanaians under an Indian spell"

False (Domestic Politics)

Captain Smart selected as running mate for the Convention People's Party

False (Domestic Politics)

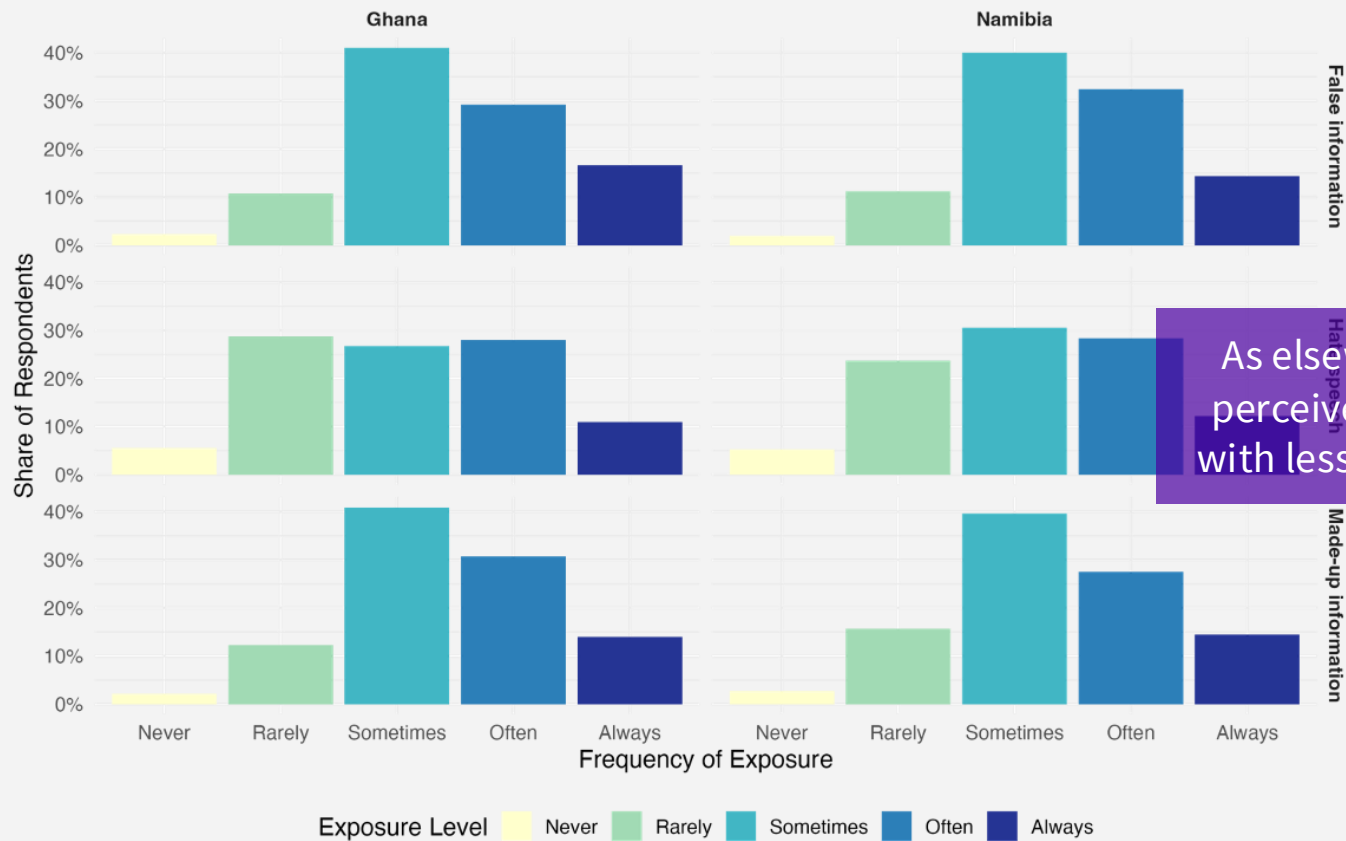
Malaria cases surge after Bill Gates funded project releases genetically modified mosquitoes in Mali

False (Global)

Immigrants in the US state of Ohio found stealing and eating neighbour's pets

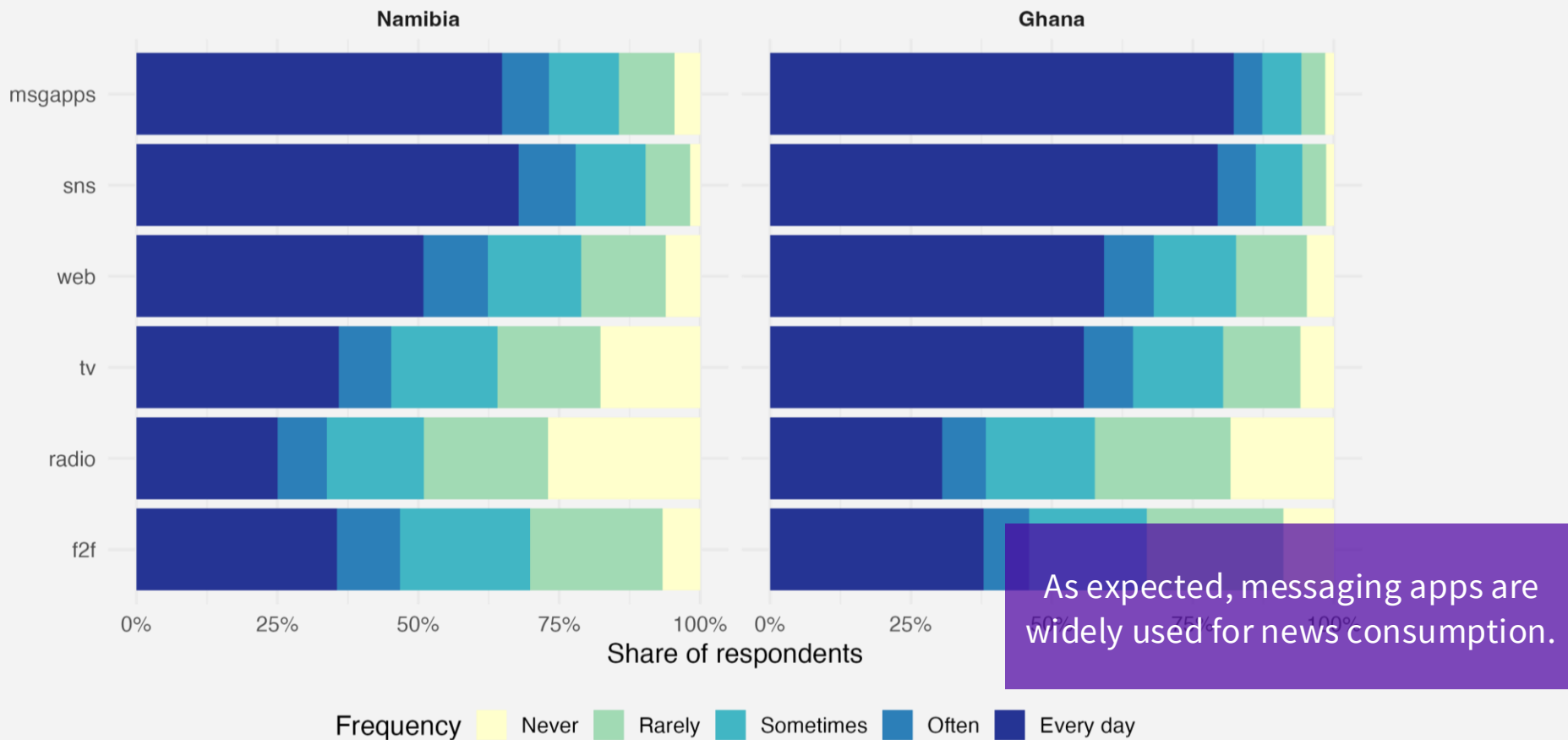
False (Global)

# Overview | High Prevalence of Extreme speech



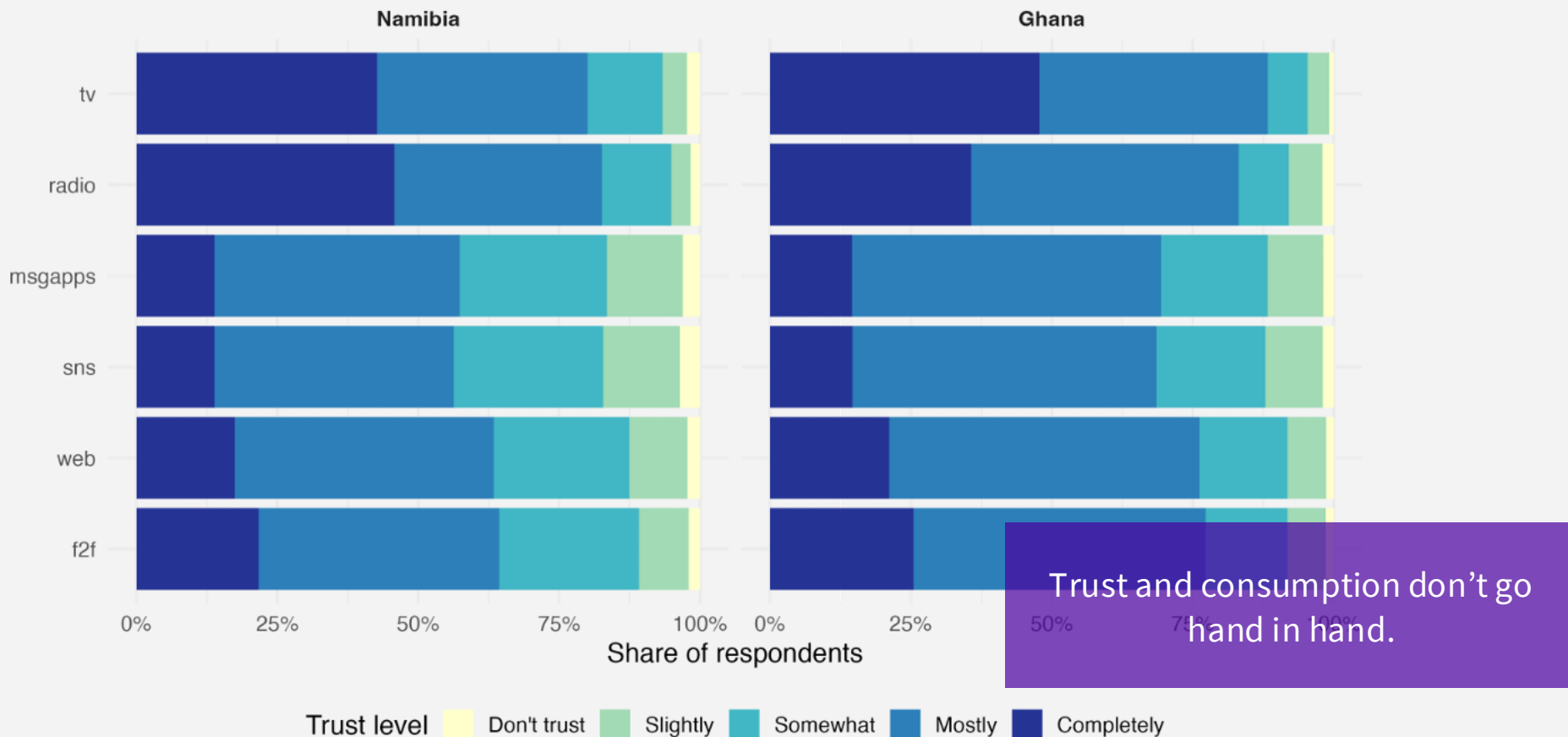
As elsewhere on the continent, perceived exposure is very high, with less than 6% saying “Never”.

# Overview | Messaging App Use



As expected, messaging apps are widely used for news consumption.

# Overview | Messaging App Trust

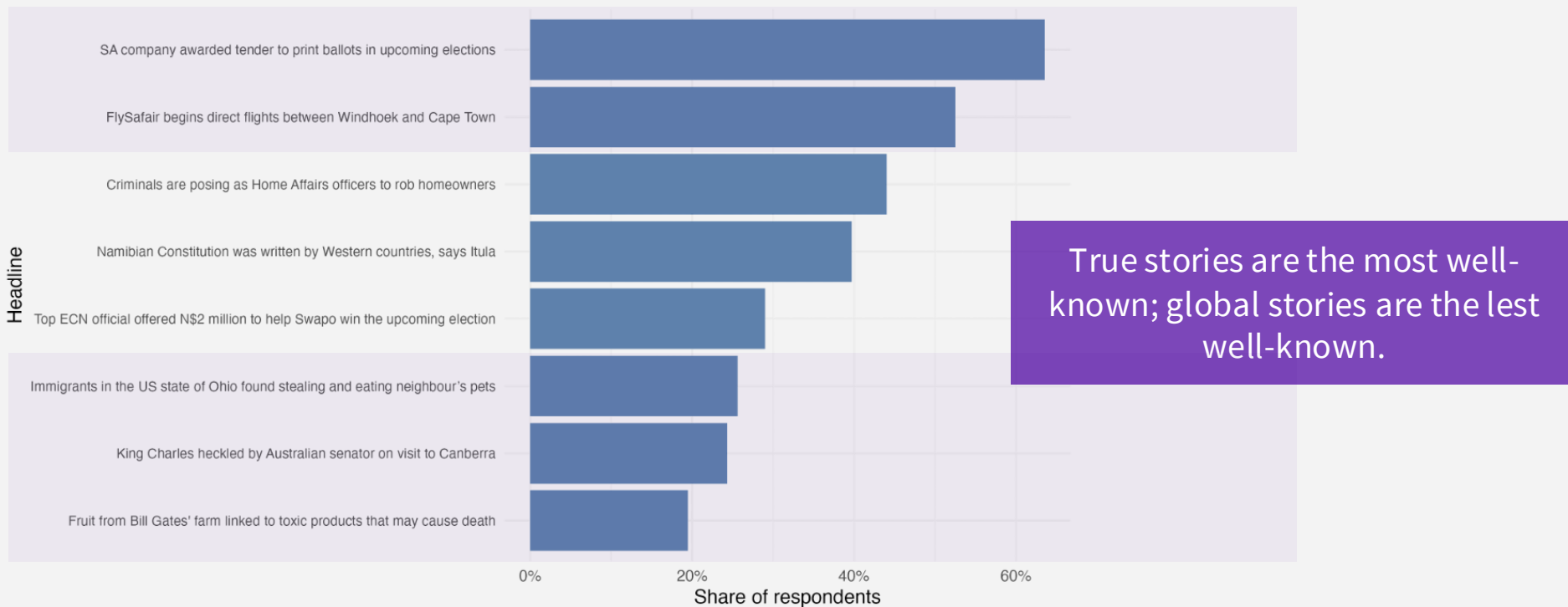


Trust and consumption don't go hand in hand.

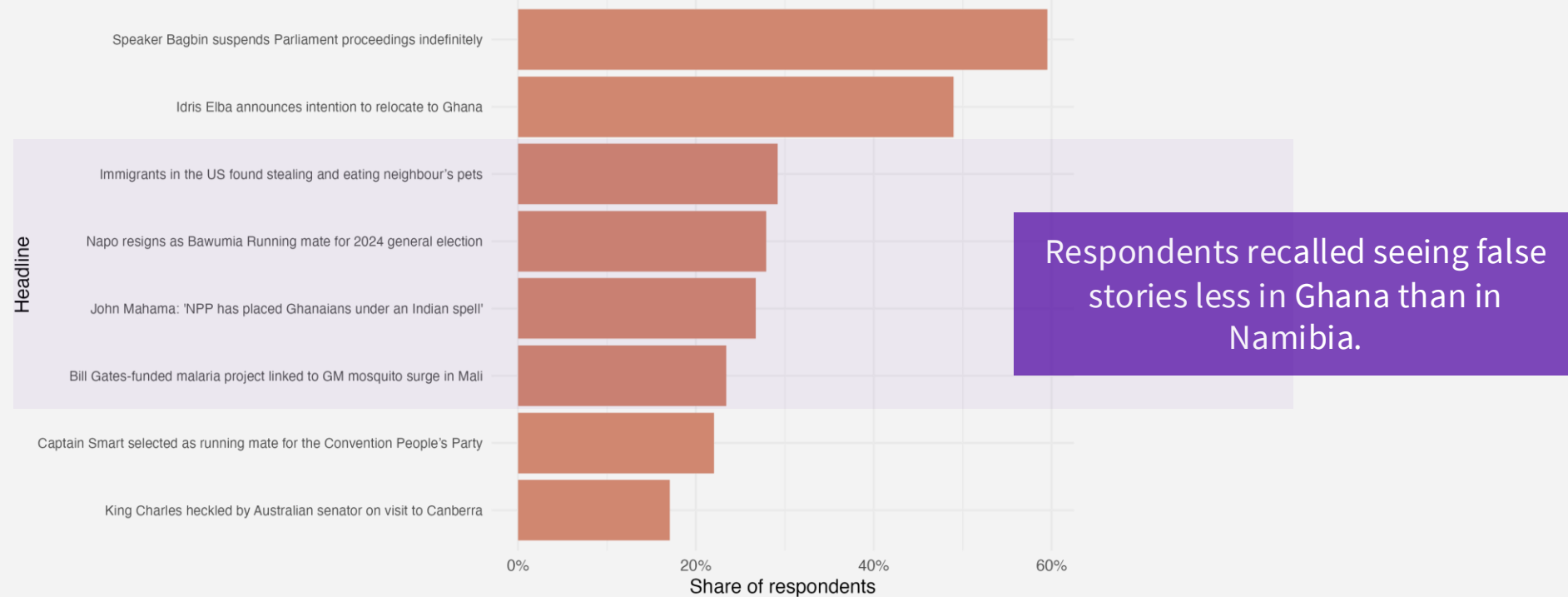
**Ever heard of  
these headlines?**



# Namibia – Overall Prevalence



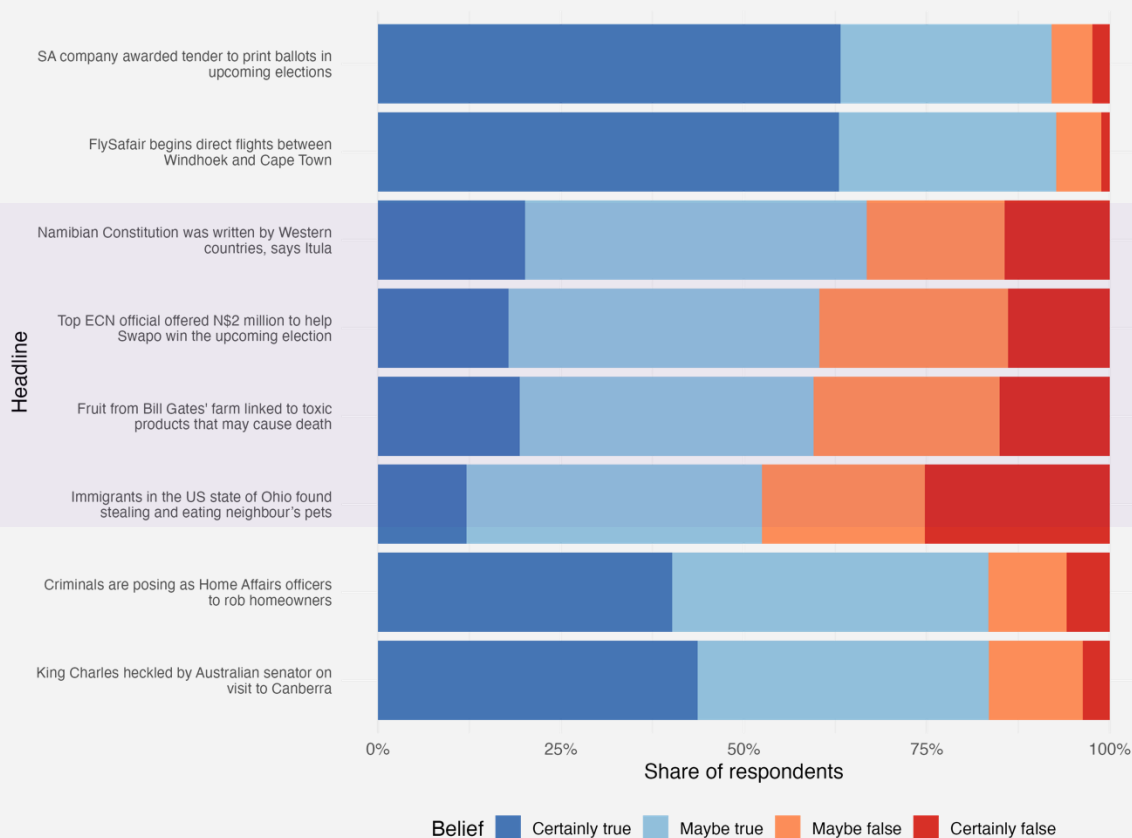
# Ghana – Overall Prevalence



**Do you think these  
are true or false?**

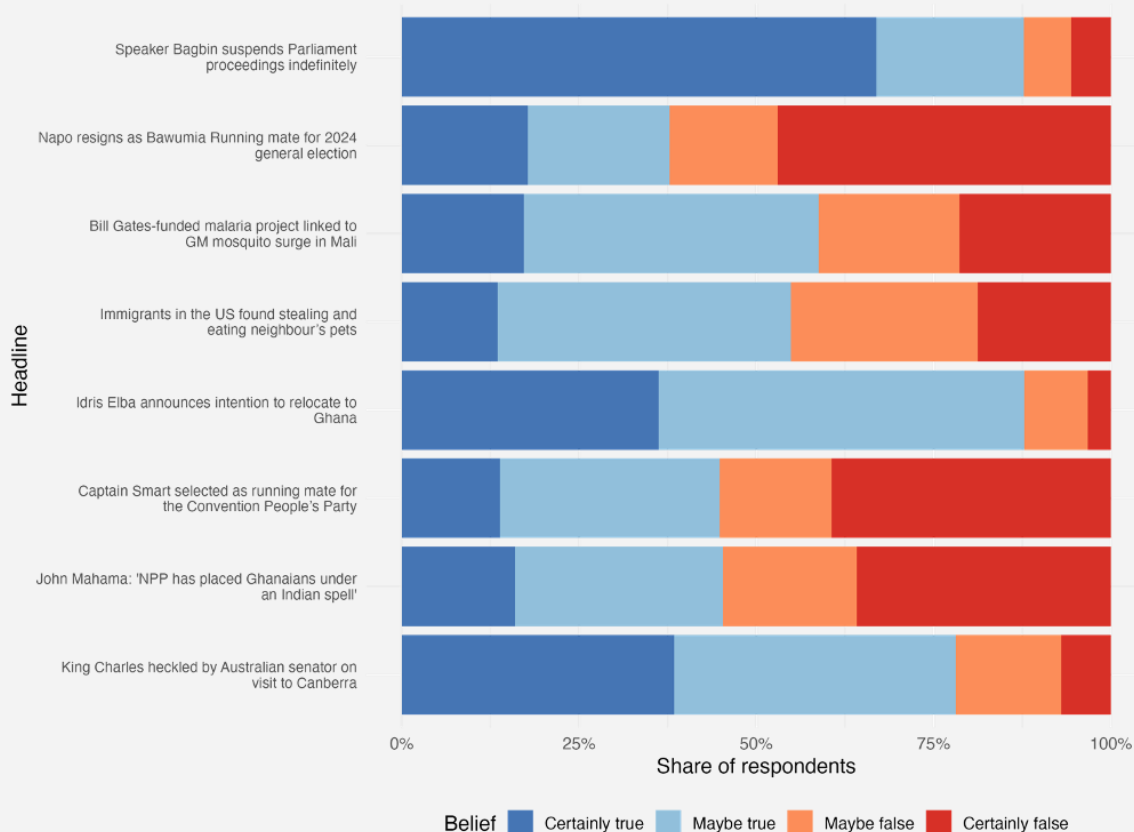


# Namibia – Believability of headlines



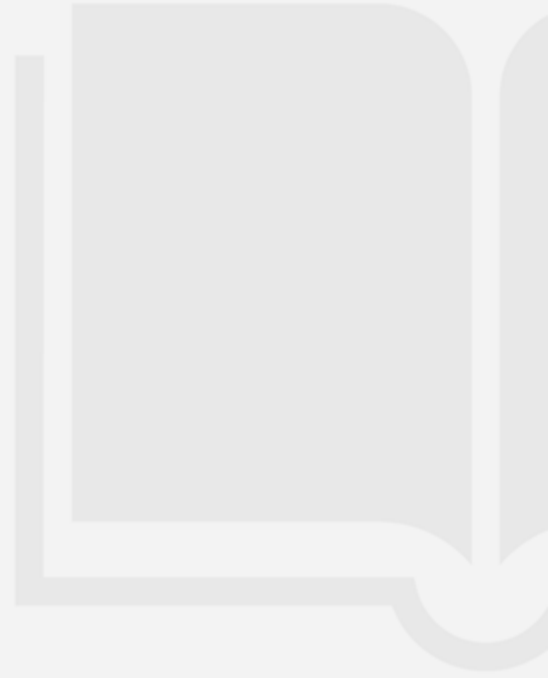
False political stories are perceived as truthful than nonpolitical ones.

# Ghana – Believability of headlines



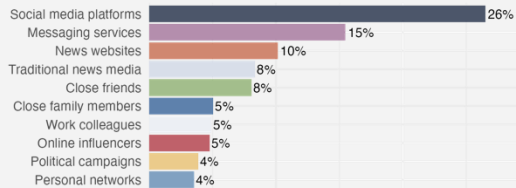
Ghanaians are more skeptical—  
false stories are met with stronger  
disbelief overall.

**Where did you  
hear about them?**

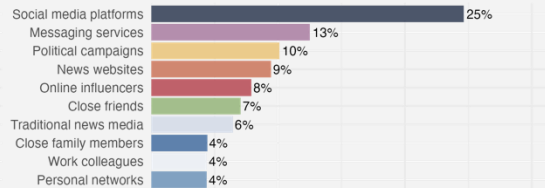


# Namibia – False/Disputed Headlines

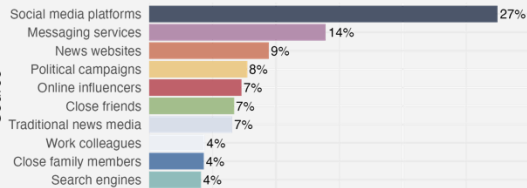
**Criminals are posing as Home Affairs officers to rob homeowners**



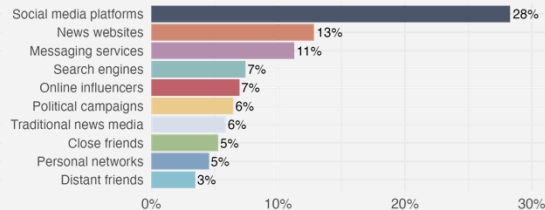
**Namibian Constitution was written by Western countries, says Itula**



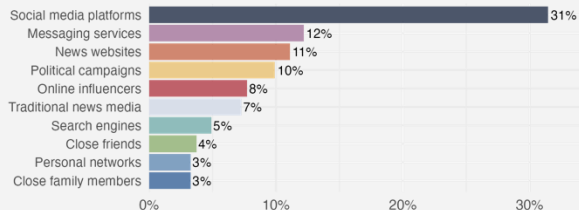
**Top ECN official offered N\$2 million to help Swapo win the upcoming election**



**Fruit from Bill Gates' farm linked to toxic products that may cause death**



**Immigrants in the US found stealing and eating neighbour's pets**

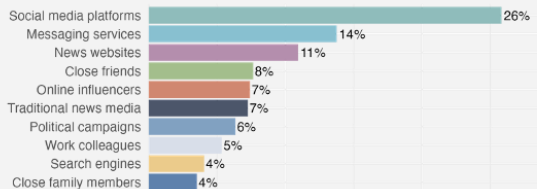


Percentage

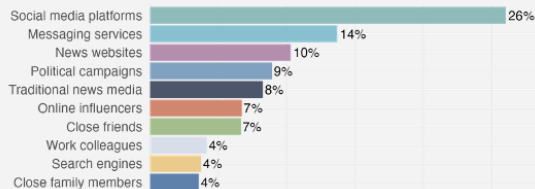
False stories in Namibia are most often encountered through social media and messaging apps.

# Ghana – False/Disputed Headlines

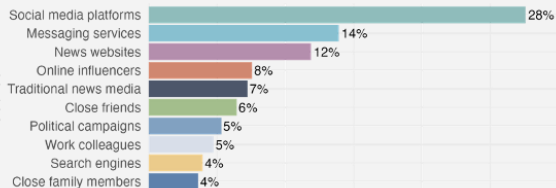
**Napo resigns as Bawumia Running mate for 2024 general election**



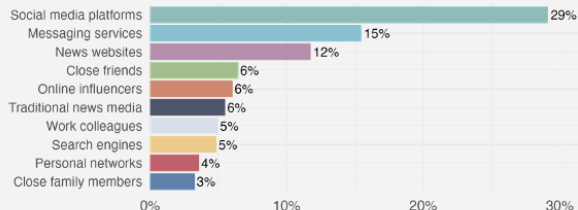
**John Mahama: "NPP has placed Ghanaians under an Indian spell"**



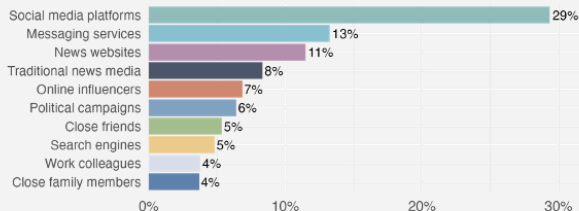
**Captain Smart selected as running mate for the Convention People's Party**



**Bill Gates-funded malaria project linked to GM mosquito surge in Mali**



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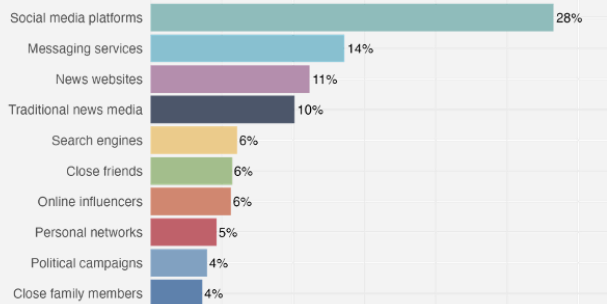


Percentage

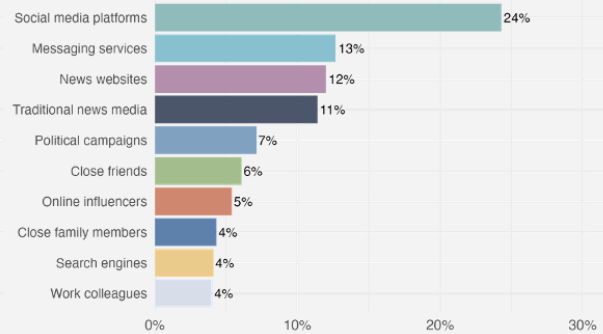
Social media dominates as a source of exposure to disputed stories in Ghana.

# Namibia – True Headlines/Stories

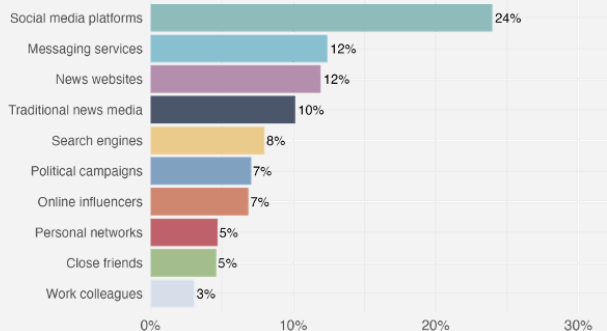
**FlySafair begins direct flights  
between Windhoek and Cape Town**



**SA company awarded tender  
to print ballots in upcoming elections**



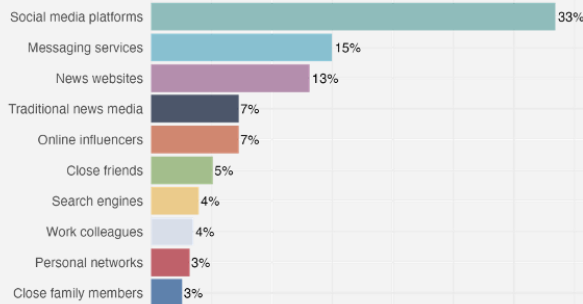
**King Charles heckled by Australian senator  
on visit to Canberra**



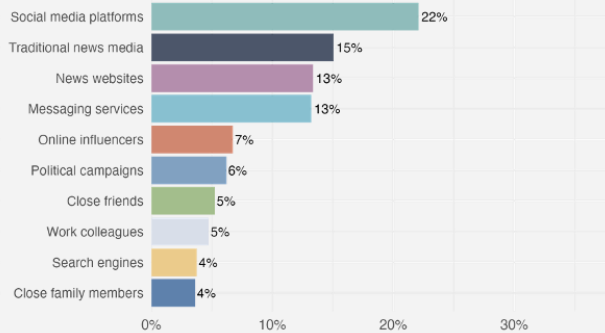
Even for true headlines, social media and messaging apps are the most common points of contact in Namibia.

# Ghana – True Headlines/Stories

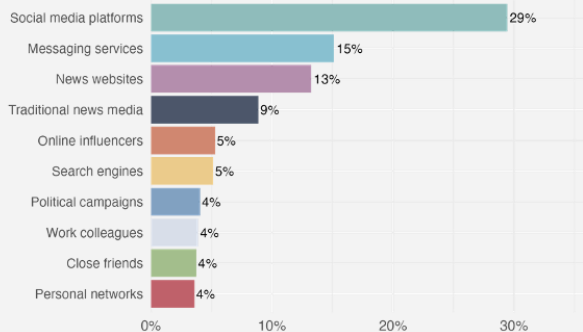
**Idris Elba announces intention to relocate to Ghana**



**Speaker Bagbin suspends Parliament proceedings indefinitely**



**King Charles heckled by Australian senator on visit to Canberra**



Percentage

Ghanaians hear even verified stories primarily through social media, not traditional media.

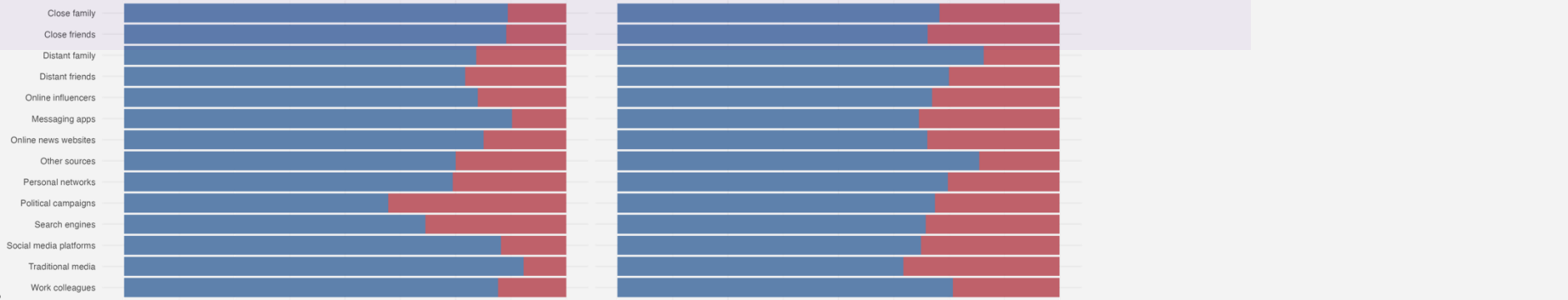
**Does the source  
matter?**



# Namibia – Believability & Source

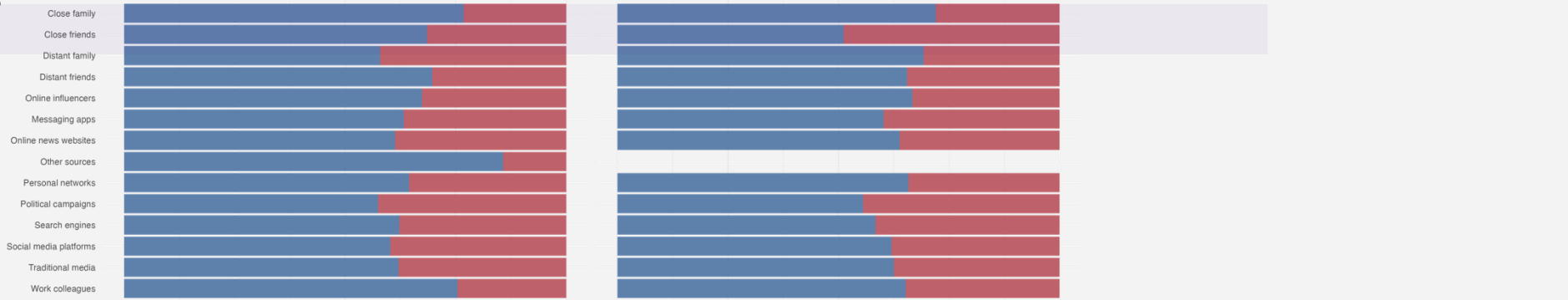
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Share of respondents

Belief ■ Believes it's false ■ Believes it's true

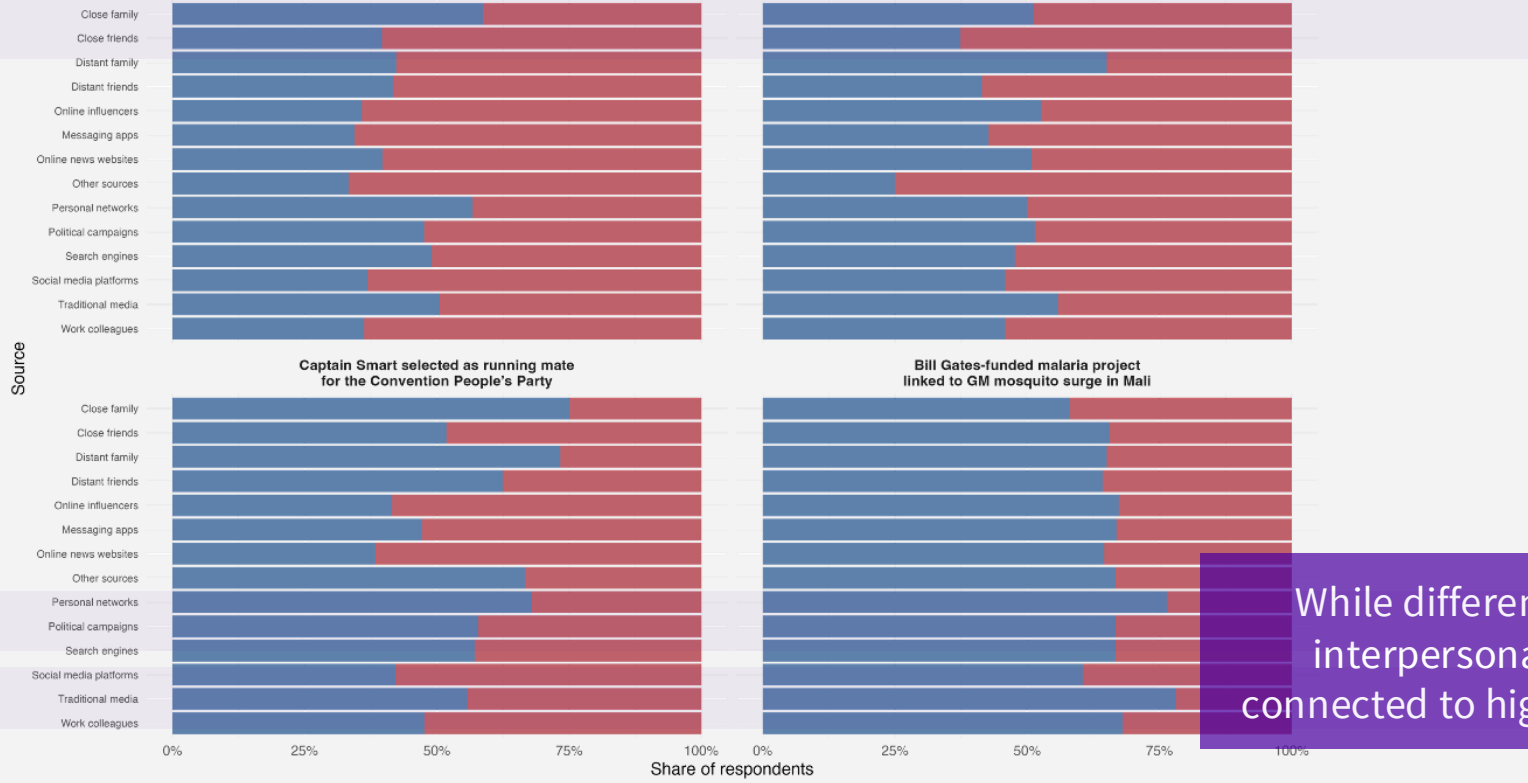
# Ghana – Believability & Source

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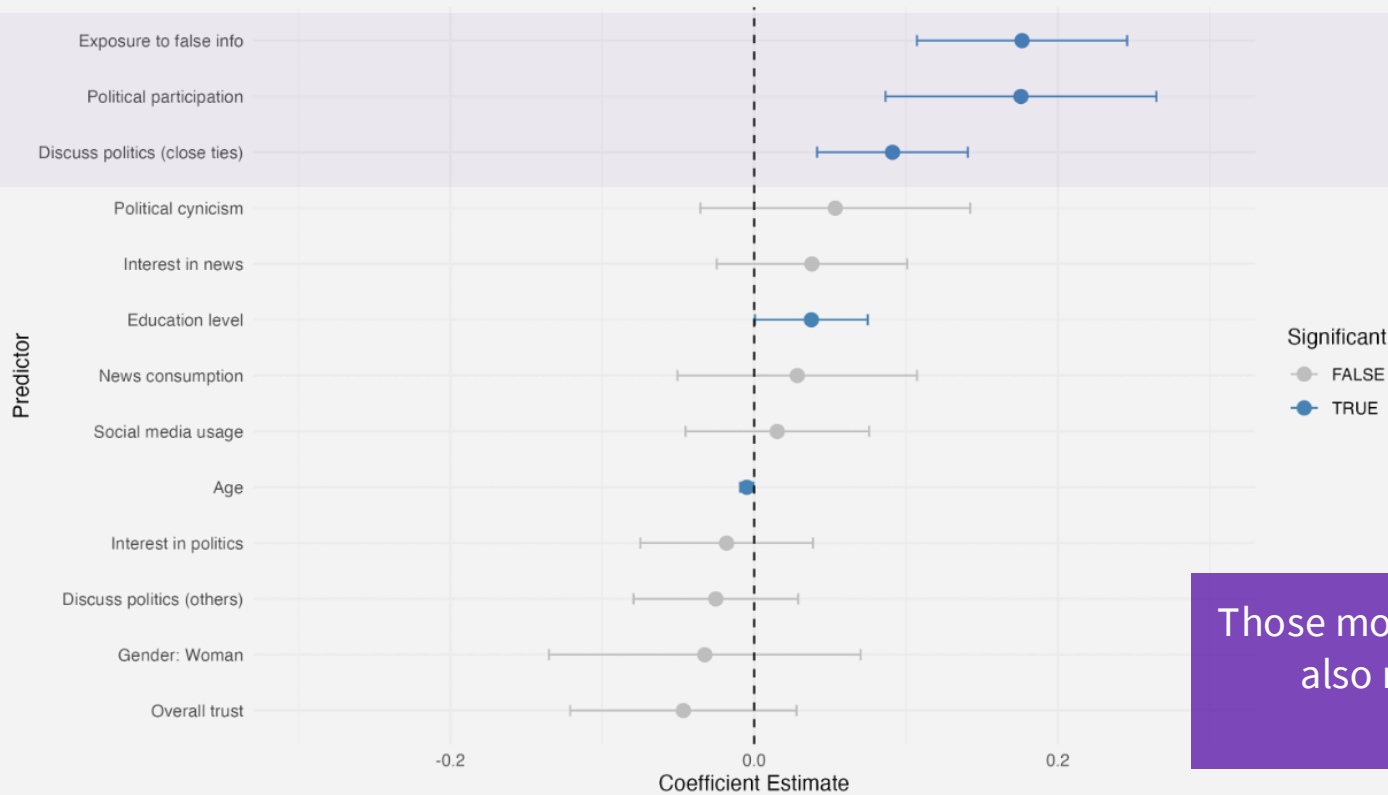
While differences are small, interpersonal sources are connected to higher believability.

Belief Believes it's false Believes it's true

**Who are the  
believers?**

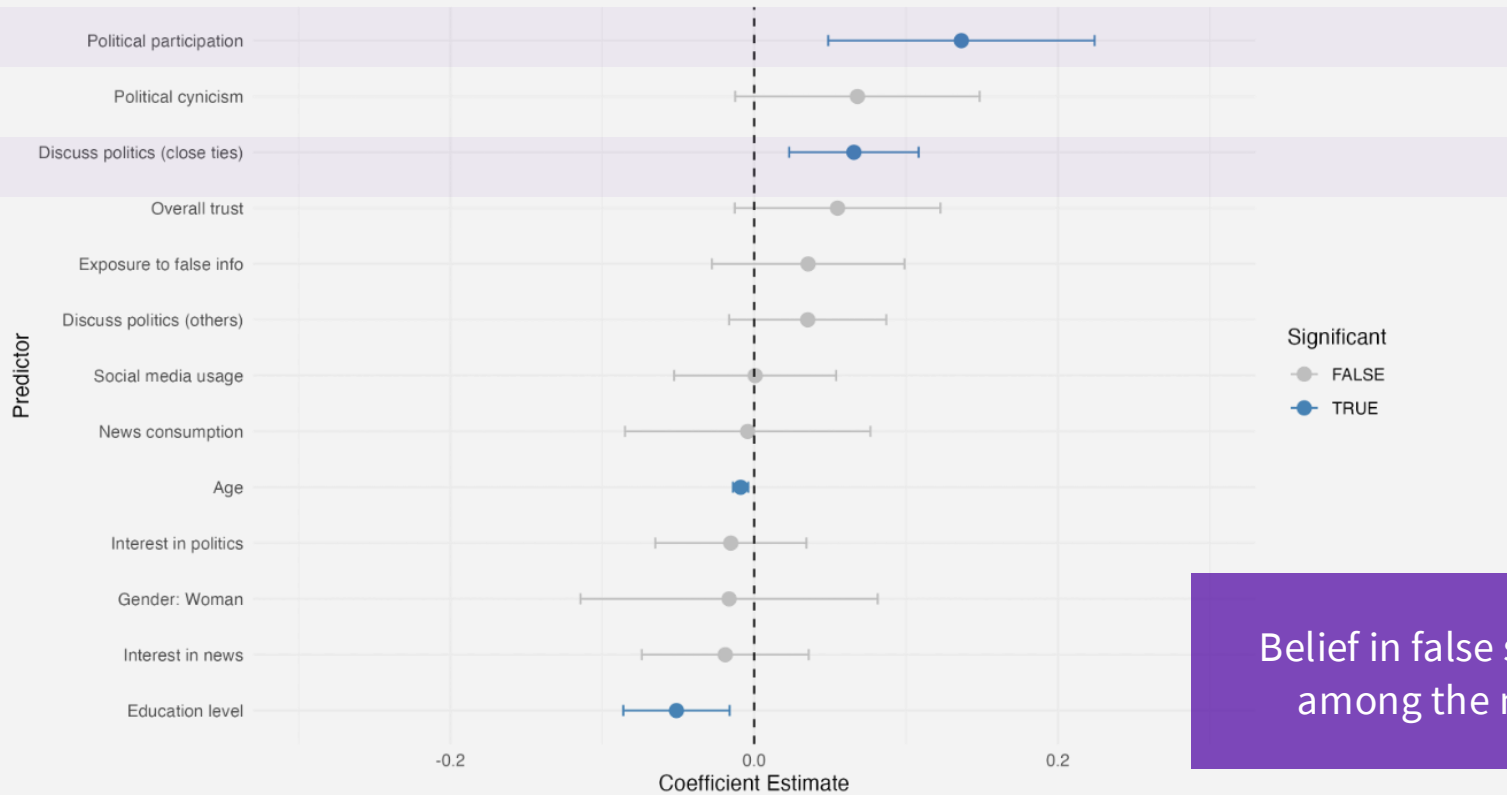


# Namibia – OLS on Perceived Truthfulness



Those most active and exposed are also most likely to believe falsehoods.

# Ghana – OLS on Perceived Truthfulness



Belief in false stories is highest among the most engaged.

# Final Ideas

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- **Belief in falsehoods often flows through personal networks**  
Respondents were more likely to believe headlines when they had seen them via **messaging apps** and through **someone close** (a friend, family member, or colleague). This relationship was stronger in Namibia but also present in Ghana.
- **True headlines are remembered and believed more**  
Across both countries, true stories were recalled and believed more than false ones — but many **false headlines still had significant reach and credibility**, especially if they touched on global issues or political controversy.
- **Interventions must go where trust lives**  
Efforts to combat disinformation need to focus on **interpersonal and community-based trust networks**. Messaging apps are not just tech platforms — they're where everyday information exchange happens.

# Messaging apps and electoral disinformation in Namibia and Ghana

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