

How civil-society coalition-building affects information integrity during elections: Evidence from four African countries

Dani Madrid-Morales, University of Sheffield & Centre for Information Integrity in Africa (CINIA)

Herman Wasserman, Centre for Information Integrity in Africa (CINIA), Stellenbosch University

Nicola Davies-Laubscher, University of Cape Town

Fatoumata Sow, Université du Sine Saloum El Hadj Ibrahima Niass (USSEIN)

ECREA 2026 Pre-conference, "Communication and Democratic Resilience" | Brno, 7 September 2026



Why information integrity, not disinformation

Sidesteps definitional fights. Avoids the contested boundaries between mis-, dis- and mal-information.

Moves from content to system. Failures come from weak infrastructures and misaligned incentives, not only from malicious falsehoods.

Avoids a politicised label. Governments have used “fake news” to justify censorship, so the term itself has become a tool.

“The accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the information content, processes, and systems necessary to sustain a healthy information ecosystem.”

UNDP (2024, p. 5)

During elections this means trustworthy election information, confidence in credible journalism, and access to a plurality of views.

The gap, and two questions

The UN, OECD and UNESCO all prescribe a “**whole-of-society**” response. Very little work examines how such coalitions are actually built, who joins them, and whether they survive between elections.

- RQ1** How do civil society actors in the **DRC**, **Kenya**, **Senegal** and **South Africa** respond to the presence or absence of policy and regulatory frameworks to safeguard information integrity during elections?
- RQ2** How do these actors build coalitions to enhance information integrity, platform accountability and democratic processes?

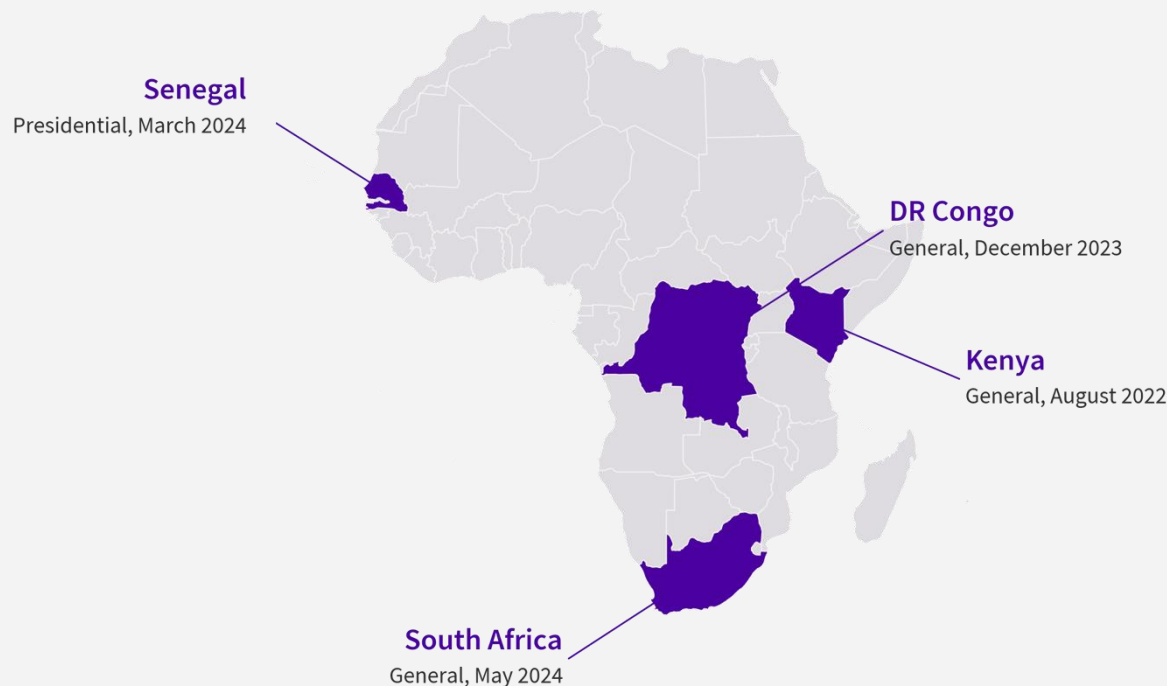
Methods

- Semi-structured interviews, June to August 2024, in English and French.
- Purposive sampling across fact-checking organisations, media houses, civil society, academia and state-affiliated bodies.
- Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021), building country-level typologies before comparing across cases.
- Four cases chosen for differing media environments, electoral histories and regulatory frameworks.

36

interviews across four
countries

Four countries, four elections



DR Congo: Incumbent re-elected, result contested.

Kenya: Narrow win, upheld in the courts.

Senegal: Opposition win after postponement crisis.

South Africa: Governing party lost its majority.

RQ1

How do civil society actors in the **DRC, Kenya, Senegal** and **South Africa** respond to the presence or absence of policy and regulatory frameworks to safeguard information integrity during elections?



RQ1: Three ways formal regulation failed

Absence

Oversight built for broadcast, with nothing covering online speech.

“We don’t have a law adapted to follow the internet.”

DRC, academic (CG_AC001)

Weaponisation

Existing law enforced selectively against critics, while governments hired bloggers to push favourable narratives.

“They are being applied to kill dissidents and critical voices.”

Kenya, civil society (KE_CS001)

Silence

No right to information, so official clarification arrives long after a claim has spread.

“The first problem is having access to the real information.”

Senegal, civil society (SN_CS002)

“There’s a famous political blogger, and he has been charged with spreading false news because he said: ‘the president is stupid.’ That is how ... disinformation laws are being applied.”

Civil society advocate, Kenya (KE_CS001)

Six responses across four settings

i Quasi-regulatory monitoring and exposure

Politoscope tracks hate speech in the DRC; Real 411 lets South Africans report content to the IEC and MMA.

iii Strategic neutrality and positioning

iVerify was placed at the University of Lubumbashi rather than with a regulator seen as partisan.

v Platform engagement and takedown

Trusted partner channels with Meta and TikTok in Kenya; advocacy for moderation in local languages in South Africa.

ii Advocacy for legal and institutional reform

Congolese actors sought to bar candidates who use disinformation; Senegalese actors pushed for an access-to-information law.

iv Education and resilience-building

Media and information literacy embedded in Senegalese journalism curricula; 400 South Africans trained to spot and report content.

vi Partnerships that fill enforcement gaps

CENI worked with Internews in the DRC; co-regulatory coverage guides with CNRA and CORET in Senegal.

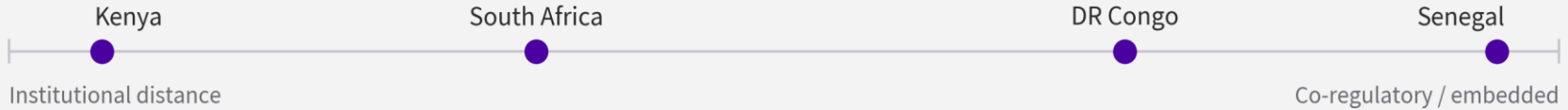
RQ2

How do these actors build coalitions to enhance information integrity, platform accountability and democratic processes?



RQ2: Coalitions vary on three dimensions

Integration with formal regulation



Positions are analytic, drawn from how interviewees described their own coalitions.

RQ2: Coalitions vary on three dimensions

Integration with formal regulation



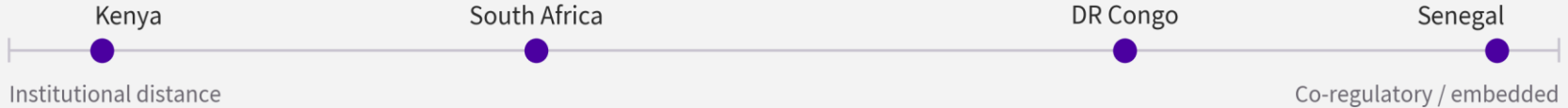
Durability between election cycles



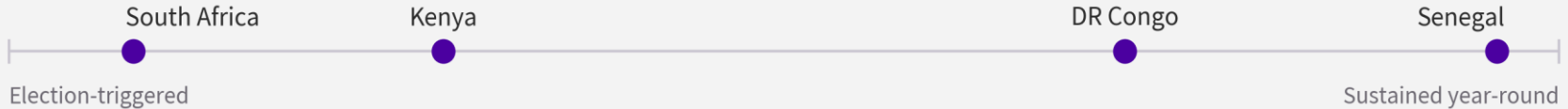
Positions are analytic, drawn from how interviewees described their own coalitions.

RQ2: Coalitions vary on three dimensions

Integration with formal regulation



Durability between election cycles



Scope of international linkages



Positions are analytic, drawn from how interviewees described their own coalitions.

“There’s lots of money that comes in an election year ... but there’s very little in the downtime, as if misinformation goes to sleep after the results are announced.”

Media expert, Kenya (KE_ME002)

Coalitions as governance infrastructure

Governance function	Where it formally belongs	Who performed it in these elections
Monitoring	Broadcast regulator	Politoscope hate-speech reports, Internews weekly bulletins (DRC)
Standard-setting	Regulator, media council	Election coverage guides co-produced with CNRA and CORET (Senegal)
Accountability	Courts, sanctions regimes	Published rankings imposing reputational cost, no formal sanction
Escalation	No statutory channel	Real 411 reports into the IEC (South Africa), platform partner channels (Kenya)
Civic education	State curriculum	Media literacy in journalism schools (Senegal), public training (South Africa)

What follows

Limits. Intermediary vantage point, four cases, no citizen interviews. Next step is to test whether coalition interventions intersect with everyday information practices, particularly in rural areas.

For research. Coalition durability should be treated as a design criterion alongside diversity of participation and reach.

For policy. Funding cycles that peak at the vote actively undermine success. Institutional location shapes perceived neutrality and shapes effectiveness.

For the platform debate. Some forms of governance of the information environment are also happening well outside platform policy, in radio studios, universities and WhatsApp groups.



University of Sheffield



d.madrid-morales@sheffield.ac.uk

Scan for the paper. Open access in *Information,
Communication & Society*

doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2026.2647360

Funded by Open Society Foundations (OR2023-91027)