



Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

Briefing Paper

2025



ANAMBRA INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

**Evaluating Disinformation Risks Ahead of the November 8,
2025, Governorship Election in Anambra State**

**Chioma Iruke
Ahmad Aluko
Raji A. Olatunji
Valeria Ogide**

**Editor-in-chief:
Lassane Ouedraogo, PhD**



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

CDD-West Africa Briefing Paper

ANAMBRA INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

Evaluating Disinformation Risks Ahead of the November 8, 2025, Governorship Election in Anambra State

EDITOR:

LASSANE OUEDRAOGO, PHD

AUTHORS:

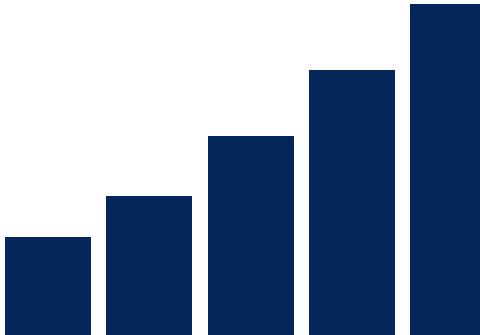
**CHIOMA IRUKE, AHMAD ALUKO, RAJI A. OLATUNJI &
VALERIA OGIDE**

OCTOBER 2025



Table Of Contents

Map of Anambra.....	ii
Executive Summary.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Information Assessment Methodology.....	3
Media Landscape and Information Flow Patterns.....	5
Analysis of Stakeholders' Preparedness.....	8
Information Manipulation Trends in Pre-Election Period.....	11
Gender Representation and Information Disorder.....	15
Political Dynamics and Disinformation Effects.....	18
Conclusion.....	22
Recommendations.....	25
References.....	26
About CDD-West Africa.....	27
Photos.....	28
Acknowledgements.....	29





Map of Anambra State



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Anambra State prepares for its November 8, 2025, governorship election, this comprehensive information assessment reveals a complex landscape where traditional electoral challenges intersect with sophisticated information manipulation threats. The assessment, conducted across all three senatorial districts, identifies critical vulnerabilities in the state's information ecosystem that could undermine electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy. The key findings are:

Unequal Information Ecosystem Structure: Anambra's information landscape is characterised by a hybrid model combining traditional media (radio, television), digital platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok), religious institutions, and community networks. While urban areas enjoy high digital connectivity, rural communities and vulnerable demographics, particularly women and older populations, rely heavily on radio broadcasts and community intermediaries for information access.

Stakeholder Preparedness Gaps: The assessment reveals significant preparedness deficits across key stakeholder categories. Government institutions like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) lack dedicated anti-disinformation programs, while security agencies face credibility challenges that make them vulnerable to manipulation narratives. Media professionals demonstrate foundational understanding but require enhanced verification tools and training. Youth population, despite high digital engagement, shows limited information literacy skills that increase susceptibility to manipulation.

Emerging Disinformation Trends: Seven critical manipulation patterns have been identified, namely: targeting of security institutions with partisan bias claims; exploitation of religious divisions between Anglican and Catholic communities; manipulation of political endorsement narratives, particularly around Peter Obi's influence; weaponisation of insecurity concerns and unknown gunmen activities; language-based misinterpretation of Igbo campaign statements; narratives questioning INEC's competence and preparedness; and gendered disinformation campaigns targeting women's political participation.

Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities: Women face particular risks from information manipulation, with documented cases of weaponised disinformation targeting female politicians like Senator Uche Ekwunife. Despite achieving 30% cabinet representation under Governor Soludo, cultural barriers and systematic disinformation campaigns continue to discourage women's political engagement. The intersection of traditional gender norms with modern disinformation tactics creates compound vulnerabilities for women's democratic participation.



Electoral Implication Risks: The assessment identifies three critical risks, namely: voter apathy driven by disinformation narratives about predetermined outcomes and institutional bias; community polarization along intra-religious and ethnic lines through targeted manipulation; and potential post-election violence fueled by contested narratives about electoral fraud and security force partisanship.

It is thus recommended that:

- INEC should adopt a proactive communication strategy that anticipates and counters disinformation rather than merely reacting to it, leveraging regular press briefings, publication of electoral procedures, and real-time clarification of rumours to rebuild confidence.
- Political parties should be accountable for their use of disinformation, with civil society and media organisations monitoring and naming bad actors.
- Community leaders and religious institutions should engage trusted intermediaries, equipped with accurate information and verification tools to counter rumours at the grassroots.
- NOA and local journalists should leverage resources and training to support monitoring of information disorder, professional reporting, and engagement in timely debunking of disinformation and misinformation.
- Civil Society should implement targeted programs that address gender-based disinformation and supports women's political participation.



INTRODUCTION

As Anambra prepares for the governorship election scheduled for November 8, 2025, the state's political landscape remains tense, shaped by heightened insecurity, political unrest, and a growing influence of non-state actors, particularly the so-called unknown gunmen (Umuoma). While security challenges often dominate headlines, an equally pressing but less visible threat is unfolding beneath the surface: the rise of information manipulation. This phenomenon manifests in misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, and has become an indispensable tool for political actors, non-state groups, and other stakeholders seeking to shape the information ecosystem and ultimately influence electoral outcomes.

Traditionally, manipulation of political communication in Nigeria has relied on communal rumour networks, campaign propaganda, and clerical endorsements. Today, however, the dynamics have shifted toward computational propaganda. That is, the deliberate exploitation of algorithms and digital platforms to amplify falsehoods, distort facts, and overshadow credible voices. These manipulated narratives traverse several social media platforms, particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and other online channels, where purposeful human interaction and coordinated amplification often push them to virality. Offline spaces are not left out either, as word-of-mouth campaigns and community influencers recycle and reinforce these narratives.

While electoral malpractices such as violence, ballot snatching, voter intimidation, and open bias remain persistent threats,¹ the centrality of information flows makes manipulation particularly dangerous. Every aspect of the electoral process, be it the reporting of security incidents, INEC's voter education campaigns, or parties' mobilisation strategies, depends on the accuracy of the dissemination of information. If distorted, the consequences are far-reaching. Oftentimes, it has led to confusion among voters, mistrust of institutions, voter apathy, and the delegitimisation of process/outcomes. Hence, information manipulation does not merely accompany other vices; it actively magnifies them and undermines confidence in the entire democratic process.

Furthermore, the risks and vulnerabilities are not abstract. In previous Nigerian elections, misleading claims² about INEC's server, doctored videos of violence, fake results sheets, and hate speech targeting ethnic or religious groups have left deep scars on the credibility of elections and the legitimacy of elected leaders. Such incidents illustrate how manipulated information can weaken electoral bodies,

^[1] Vanguard: Electoral Malpractice: We Fear The Worst In 2027 – Nigerians. August 23, 2025

^[2] Chiagozie Nwonwu & Fauziyya Tukur: Nigerian elections 2023: False claims and viral videos debunked- February 28, 2023



compromise security institutions, polarise political actors, and disorient the electorate.³ Importantly, unlike ballot snatching or isolated violence, information manipulation has ripple effects that extend well beyond election day, eroding trust in governance long after votes are counted.

As the 2025 Anambra governorship election approaches, ensuring the integrity of information flows is as important as safeguarding Nigeria's democracy. Pre-emptive measures, including fact-checking, civic education, robust monitoring of digital platforms, and early warning mechanisms, will be crucial in countering the narratives peddled by bad actors. Failure to act decisively risks allowing manipulated information to distort public perception, suppress participation, and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the electoral outcome.

It is on this premise that efforts such as this information assessment (report) and establishing contact with relevant stakeholders, including government officials, electoral authorities, media organisations, and civil society groups, will help to coordinate efforts to combat information manipulation before, during, and after the 2025 Anambra State gubernatorial election. Similarly, training and capacity-building initiatives, especially for basic information verification, fact-checking, and open-source collection of claims relating to trending online and offline disinformation at the community level, are explored. An information assessment visit, held in August 2025, therefore, enabled CDD to identify the knowledge gaps to provide training and resources to carefully selected *Soldiers of Mouth*⁴ and journalists, while simultaneously providing a support system to relevant stakeholders and bolstering their efforts to identify and counter false information.

Following this introduction, the report first outlines the methodology adopted for the study. It then examines the media landscape and prevailing patterns of information flow, while also assessing the level of preparedness among key stakeholders. The analysis further explores trends in information manipulation during the pre-election period. In addition, particular attention is given to gender representation in relation to information disorder, as well as to the broader political dynamics and the effects of disinformation. Then it concludes and makes recommendations.

^[3] Afeez Rabi: Nigerias' Digital Democracy: Analyzing Political Manipulation in the Age of Information – Part 1. March 18, 2024

^[4] Soldiers of mouth are credible, non-partisan individuals with strong community presence and a commitment to civic engagement. They serve as trusted grassroots informants, identifying and reporting MDH narratives within their communities, as well as providing insights to effectively counter them.

INFORMATION ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The data collection process on the information landscape in Anambra State, particularly about prevalent trends regarding the subnational electoral process, involves documenting the realities of the people across Anambra State. Relying on comprehensive datasets acquired through well-documented audio-visual recordings and field observations, the assessment methodology leveraged visits to public spaces, engagements with key government institutions and actors, focus group discussions (FGD), and key informant interviews.

During this pre-assessment exercise held in August 2025, the CDD West Africa Team, spread across the three senatorial districts of Anambra State, conducted extensive interviews with relevant stakeholders across, including engagements with the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). More specifically, the assessment facilitated robust discussions with media professionals, student leaders, youth groups, community leaders, traditional rulers, persons with disabilities through the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), gender-based organisations, and political actors.

The comprehensive stakeholder engagement approach ensured geographic coverage across Anambra Central, Anambra North, and Anambra South senatorial districts, capturing diverse perspectives and regional variations in information ecosystem dynamics. To ensure representativeness across diverse communities and perspectives, the assessment strategically engaged local mobilisers who helped identify and convene a balanced mix of participants from various walks of life. The data collected brought to the fore the most widely shared and potentially damaging false claims, which, when combined with identity-driven political rhetoric by various actors, have the potential to confuse voters and undermine information integrity ahead of the November 8, 2025, governorship election.

Importantly, during this information assessment, the data collected identified the respective roles being played by various actors in the information landscape, including potential sources of disinformation campaigns such as social media accounts, websites, or individuals who may spread false information. The information assessment was able to document emerging trends and patterns of information manipulation, especially in the context of how false narratives might evolve and spread across different demographic groups and geographic areas within the state.

The assessment methodology also revealed the demographics that may be more susceptible to disinformation, the gendered dimensions of information manipulation, and the varying levels of digital literacy and media consumption patterns across different communities. Additionally, the study documented the prevalence of offline information networks and the acceptance of various narratives among different communities, providing insights into both traditional and digital information dissemination channels that could be exploited during the electoral period.



MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND INFORMATION FLOW PATTERNS

The information ecosystem of Anambra State is shaped by a complex interplay of traditional media, social media, cultural institutions, and informal community networks. As Anambra State approaches the November 8, 2025, governorship election, understanding this ecosystem is essential for evaluating disinformation risks and identifying potential vulnerabilities that could undermine electoral integrity. Evidence from field engagements in Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi indicates that while access to information is relatively high in urban centres, disparities remain in rural areas, especially among women, older demographics, and those without smartphones. These patterns create uneven exposure to both accurate information and disinformation, emphasising the need for tailored interventions.

Information Channels in Anambra

Traditional mass media, particularly radio and television, remain critical sources of information. Stations such as *Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS)*, *Wazobia FM*, *Ogene*, *Authority*, *Choice*, and *Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)* were identified as reliable by stakeholders, though some expressed caution that even established media occasionally broadcast inaccurate or politically biased content. Radio in particular has strong rural penetration, bridging literacy gaps by disseminating information in local languages. A participant in Onitsha observed that *“our grandmothers rely on radio and town criers; they do not follow social media,”* highlighting generational divides in media consumption among the demographics in Anambra State.

Social media platforms, especially *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, serve as primary sources of political information for younger demographics. Internet access in Anambra State is high among youth and urban residents, but lower in rural communities, where basic phones predominate. While social media offers rapid information flow, it is also the most significant channel for disinformation, as unverified claims spread widely without editorial checks. One youth participant in Nnewi remarked that *“everyone competes to post first online, even if the story is not correct,”* illustrating the prevalence of speed over accuracy in order to get a viral post.

Religious and community institutions also shape information flows. Churches play a dual role as both sources and filters of information. Religious leaders frequently verify rumours before addressing congregations, thereby restoring trust. Similarly, community leaders, Igwes' cabinets, and town unions act as conduits of political communication. However, reliance on these intermediaries can also enable manipulation, particularly where leaders are politically aligned. A key staff member of INEC in Awka noted that *“town unions can mobilise or demobilise voters, depending on the narrative they spread.”*



Civil society and state agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), National Council for Women Societies (NCWS), and youth councils undertake voter sensitisation and political education. Their activities include theatre-for-development programmes, voter education during August meetings, and awareness campaigns against apathy. Nonetheless, their impact is constrained by limited resources, inconsistent programming, and the absence of systematic tracking of misinformation trends. For example, NOA reported that it currently does not have a database for monitoring misinformation trends. However, the agency expressed strong interest in building this capacity and welcomed possible CDD-West Africa support in training staff on data gathering, analysis, and database development.

Patterns of Information Flow

Information access and trust are mediated by geography, gender, and socio-economic factors. Urban residents tend to rely on both mass media and social media, while rural populations depend more on radio, community leaders, and religious institutions. Gender divides are visible: market women, especially in Anambra North senatorial district, often rely on town criers or local gatherings due to limited digital access. Youth dominate online information spaces, but their limited verification skills make them highly vulnerable to manipulation. A recurring observation is that while information availability is high, accuracy is not guaranteed; misinformation and half-truths often gain traction faster than factual reporting. As one participant in Onitsha stated, *"information is everywhere, but the truth is scarce."*

Disinformation Risks within the Ecosystem

Several risks emerge from the current landscape. First, reliance on informal networks such as churches and community leaders can be double-edged. While they sometimes play corrective roles, their political alignments risk enabling partisan narratives. Second, low information literacy among key stakeholders, including journalists, undermines their resilience to manipulation. Both field findings and prior studies suggest that many stakeholders lack the tools to distinguish misinformation from disinformation. In Onitsha, during the stakeholders' training, the majority of them lack the basic understanding of the information manipulation ecosystem. Third, social media dominance among youth accelerates the spread of false claims. Viral narratives, such as rumours of electoral malpractice or insecurity, have already circulated widely. Finally, there are significant trust deficits: particularly the perceptions that state-owned media like ABS radio and NTA favour incumbents, and that INEC is not transparent reinforces public susceptibility to conspiracy theories and disinformation. One NUJ representative in Nnewi lamented that *"journalists themselves are not trained enough"*



to counter fake news,” highlighting institutional weaknesses and lapses that allow mis/disinformation to spread.

Implications for the 2025 Election

The uneven media landscape and fragmented information flows increase the risk that disinformation will distort voter perceptions, depress turnout, and erode trust in electoral outcomes. Voter apathy, already pronounced in the 2023 general elections where turnout fell below 30%, is likely to be compounded by narratives of insecurity, electoral fraud, and disillusionment. If unaddressed, these dynamics may enable political actors and non-state groups to exploit information disorder to their advantage, heightening the risk of electoral manipulation and violence.

ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDERS' PREPAREDNESS

The pre-assessment revealed varying levels of preparedness across different stakeholder categories in Anambra State's information ecosystem. This analysis is based on comprehensive engagements conducted across the three senatorial districts, providing insights into institutional capacities, knowledge gaps, and readiness levels ahead of the November 8, 2025, governorship poll.

Government institutions demonstrated moderate but incomplete preparedness for addressing information manipulation challenges. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) showed ongoing voter education programs focused primarily on technical voting procedures and civic participation, but acknowledged significant gaps in their approach to information disorder, confirming they currently have no dedicated programs specifically targeting misinformation or disinformation in Anambra State. NOA expressed strong interest in building capacity for database development and staff training on tracking disinformation trends, indicating recognition of their limitations but willingness to improve. Security agencies, including the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), showed mixed preparedness levels, with NSCDC reporting confidence in their election duties while acknowledging that security personnel frequently become targets of disinformation themselves, with narratives portraying them as tools of the ruling government undermining their credibility and effectiveness.

Traditional and community leadership structures revealed both awareness and vulnerabilities in their capacity to address information manipulation. Traditional rulers represented by the Igwe of Omasi demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of disinformation as a tool for political reputation damage but reported limited direct exposure to such campaigns in the current electoral cycle. However, their responses revealed structural changes that may have reduced their traditional security oversight roles under Governor Soludo's administration, potentially creating gaps in community-level information monitoring and response systems. This shift from traditional rulers serving as chief security officers to becoming patrons of community unions may have weakened local information governance structures.

Civil society organisations exhibited significant variations in preparedness and understanding of information disorder challenges. Organisations like the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPwD) showed active engagement in voter education but limited capacity for information verification and counter-disinformation activities. The National Council of Women in Nigeria (NCWS) demonstrated organised approaches to voter education through community



networks, while religious organisations, particularly the Anglican Church, through the Society for Equity, Justice and Peace (SEJUP), showed extensive reach across all 21 local government areas but minimal specialised training on information disorder. These organisations represent valuable networks for information dissemination but lack the technical skills and coordination mechanisms necessary for effective counter-disinformation efforts.

Media professionals and information practitioners demonstrated the strongest foundational understanding of information manipulation concepts. However, significant capacity gaps were identified in verification tools and techniques, with traditional media outlets showing better editorial gatekeeping compared to citizen journalism platforms. Practitioners consistently requested more sophisticated training and cutting-edge counter-disinformation tools, while the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) expressed strong interest in sustained collaboration for capacity building beyond the election period. This sector represents the most prepared stakeholder group, but still requires substantial technical and resource support to effectively combat information manipulation.

Youth and student groups revealed vulnerability patterns that highlight broader generational challenges in information literacy. While some youth leaders demonstrated good conceptual understanding of information manipulation, broader youth populations showed limited skills for independent information verification. The assessment identified young people as particularly susceptible to manipulation, often lacking critical evaluation skills when consuming and sharing information on digital platforms. Youth organisations, including the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) and student groups, showed enthusiasm for learning but acknowledged that they required comprehensive training programs to build effective resistance to information manipulation tactics.

Digital literacy and information access patterns showed significant variations across demographics and geography, creating uneven vulnerabilities across the state. While stakeholders reported high internet penetration among youth with smartphones, rural areas, and women in markets often rely on basic phones, limiting their access to digital information verification tools. Participants estimated that only 50% of the population has meaningful internet access, with particularly low penetration in the Anambra North senatorial district. This digital divide creates vulnerability to misinformation spread through traditional networks that may be harder to monitor and correct, while also limiting the effectiveness of digital counter-disinformation strategies.



The training sessions, organised by the CDD team, were conducted in three senatorial districts, revealed critical knowledge gaps and coordination challenges that undermine collective preparedness for addressing information manipulation. Only a handful of participants could accurately define and differentiate types of information manipulation before training, with most associating the concepts simply with “fake news” or “lies.” Coordination mechanisms between stakeholders appeared weak, with minimal evidence of systematic information sharing or joint response protocols. While individual organisations showed commitment to their mandates, the absence of integrated approaches may limit the effectiveness of counter-disinformation efforts. Financial and technical resources emerged as significant limitations across most stakeholder groups, with NOA requesting support for database development and staff training, while media organisations sought access to verification tools and sustained capacity building programs. Community structures showed both strengths and vulnerabilities, with religious networks demonstrating strong information-dissemination capabilities and internal fact-checking practices but requiring proper training to prevent potential amplification of misinformation through these same trusted channels.

INFORMATION MANIPULATION TRENDS IN PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

Security Institutions as Targets of Disinformation

The personnel of the Nigerian Police and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) highlighted recurring claims that they “work for the ruling party” during elections. They believe this narrative fuels the attacks meted out on them by thugs and the public, especially during elections. These narratives erode public trust and often incite hostility against security personnel, leading to loss of lives.

In a similar pattern, the security situation in the state is already tense and volatile, with most of the participants at the stakeholders’ dialogue attesting to the attacks on security personnel. It is little wonder that an NSCDC officer wore a cardigan on her uniform while coming for the stakeholders’ dialogue and kept her combat boots in her bag.

The implication is that most false and misleading narratives and claims tend to centre around these existing security situations. The method usually involves several claims alleging that security personnel and facilities were attacked before, during, and after the election. Moreso, there are expectations of weaponised narratives against security deployments during the election. They are then labelled as partisans and working in favour of the ruling party, whose candidate is the incumbent governor and chief security officer of the state.

That is how such narratives trend on social media and go viral based on the existing bias and sentiment among the people.

Religious and Sectarian Divisions

One of the topical issues discussed during the engagements and meetings is the religious and sectarian divide. Stakeholders identified the Anglican-Catholic rivalry as a key driver of election narratives in Anambra State. They mentioned that, even though unofficial, the religious bodies are gearing their members to support their candidates. This religious fiasco, fused with candidate endorsement, could be exploited to polarise voters and delegitimise opponents.

The implication is that across Nigeria, religious-based narratives have been weaponised and used to spread disinformation, cause civil unrest, and nurture inter-religious and communal clashes etc. This pattern is shaping up in Anambra State (ahead of the gubernatorial election) as disinformation exploiting religious identity faultlines has started trending across online and offline spaces. It is therefore expected that claims and narratives along religious and sectarian divisions will be on the rise in Anambra State.



Notably, during and after the election, this narrative could increase hostility among sect followers and escalate into community-level divisions. It could also impact governance, such as appointments and infrastructural developments, which could be intentionally channelled in favour of people along the same religious divide.

Political Endorsement Narratives and Peter Obi Factor

For every election, a recurring narrative is the political endorsement of candidates by stakeholders such as political bigwigs, religious and traditional leaders, prominent groups, opinion shapers, among others. In this Anambra instance, there are some political bigwigs whose endorsement means huge voter turnout and support for whichever candidate they support. One of such bigwigs is Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra State under the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and erstwhile presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP).

Stakeholders, during the discussion, noted the Peter Obi narrative and alleged support for his preferred candidate. They agreed that most people who are (currently) indecisive about who to vote for are waiting for Obi's signal and announcement of his choice of candidate, adding that they will express their support for such a candidate. While this is fair in our polity, the implication is that information manipulation narratives will be tailored towards this support. That is, we expect viral broadcast messages and offline narratives to be shared regarding who Obi is allegedly supporting. Particularly, we expect the resuscitation of old videos and audio clips of Obi endorsing candidates when, in an actual sense, they are old or manipulated media formats.

We expect this trend to go viral due to Obi's cult-like popularity in Anambra State, and such narratives can swing voter sentiment, especially in the offline space.

Insecurity and Non-State Actors

Insecurity and civil unrest remain pressing issues in Anambra State. Concerns have also grown regarding the activities of vigilante groups, unknown gunmen (*Umuoma*) and clashes among non-state actors. In response, there is said to be heavy military deployment, which was evident especially in border communities across the state and hotspot local government areas like Ihiala, Nnewi South, and Orumba South.

While some stakeholders see this heavy security deployment as early response measures for the protection of lives and property, the majority see it as intimidation. The latter stakeholders alleged that such deployment is expected to increase ahead of the election, and such security personnel, especially the military men, will be deployed for voter intimidation and suppression.



The implication is the growing fear and the narrative of voter suppression and rigging, which will be supervised by these security personnel. This narrative is being reinforced by past events and happenings during elections, where the participants at the stakeholders' dialogue attested to the use of security men for rigging and voter suppression, especially on election day. In addition, this could lead to low voter turnout while there are pointers to violence, and some youth groups vowed to resist such attempts in the coming governorship election.

In some instances, due to this precedence, we expect false and misleading narratives around insecurity and other activities of the unknown gunmen (*Umuoma*), towards heightening the tension in an already volatile landscape.

Language, Context, and Interpretation

Most campaigns are in the Igbo language, with a mix of English and pidgin. This is a loophole that could fuel information manipulation. Stakeholders revealed that some campaign statements, especially in the Igbo language, are being misinterpreted and spread to mislead the people.

We found one such instance in Governor Soludo's Igbo-language campaign statement on Nnewi taxation. While he made the statement in Igbo, some of the participants had different interpretations of his statement, and these versions have different narratives. These conflicting translations are sources of disinformation.

The implication is that in translating most of these campaign statements and claims, their context is either lost or intentionally weaponised to fuel information manipulation. Moreso, participants at the stakeholders' dialogue revealed that the Igbo language has some specific contexts which, if the speaker does not contextualise or explain, could have multiple interpretations.

This trend will likely go viral and could be a huge loophole for bad actors to capitalise on.

Narratives of Incompetence and Weak Preparedness of Electoral Umpire

The bye-election to fill the vacant Anambra South senatorial district serves as a litmus test for the political parties and the electoral umpire, INEC. With the visit across the senatorial district and engagements with stakeholders, there seems to be less effort from INEC regarding publicity and voter awareness. Similarly, some stakeholders said political parties are more visible in mobilisation than INEC, which appears absent. They added that since INEC announced the timetable, they have remained silent, and it is political parties that are making announcements, such as the ongoing continuous voter registration.



The optics around this silence and lack of citizenship engagement are those of incompetence and weak preparedness ahead of the election. As usual, some of the participants alleged that the electoral umpire has concluded the election results and has “declared a winner.” Hence, there is no need to exert effort in publicising a process that has already been concluded.

The major implication is the growing dissatisfaction and rumours of INEC’s “unreadiness” for the November 8 guber poll. Also, there is a growing mistrust in the electoral umpire and process before voting day.

GENDER REPRESENTATION AND INFORMATION DISORDER

Progress in Political Representation

Anambra State currently achieves a notable 30% women's representation in Governor Charles Soludo's cabinet, with six women serving as commissioners⁵ out of 20 total positions. This advancement extends beyond the executive level, as Soludo appointed eight women out of 18 permanent secretaries⁶ in the state's civil service, demonstrating a commitment to gender inclusion across government structures.

However, despite these significant strides in women's political representation, the increase in women holding positions of power has not translated into reduced information disorder targeting women. Instead, a complex web of social norms, traditional practices, and politically motivated gendered disinformation continues to undermine women's full participation in public life.

Persistent Cultural Barriers

Deep-rooted cultural practices continue to limit women's political engagement across the state. Traditional norms that restrict women from attending certain meetings or prevent them from speaking in cultural and religious gatherings remain prevalent in various communities. These practices effectively stifle many women's ability to voice concerns about injustice or freely express their views on public matters.

The persistence of harmful practices like the 'Osu' caste system, despite government interventions,⁷ further demonstrates how entrenched cultural barriers continue to marginalize certain groups, particularly affecting women's social mobility and political participation.

Disinformation as a Political Weapon

One critical issue that keeps women away from political involvement is the weaponisation of disinformation. Senator Uche Ekwunife, who is the deputy governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Anambra State's governorship election, recently had to dispel disinformation regarding her educational certificates.⁸ Her opponents alleged that Ekwunife submitted fake certificates to INEC ahead of the November 8 election.

^[5] Chiagozie Nwonwu & Fauziyya Tukur: Full list of Commissioners, special advisers appointed by Soludo. Vanguard- March, 2022.

^[6] Joe Chukindi: NewsSoludo swears in Abia, Osun indigenes, 16 others as permanent secretaries in Anambra. Daily Post- March 12, 2024

^[7] Agency Report: Eradicate Osu caste, Obiano tells Igbo traditional rulers. The Punch newspapers- June 13, 2019

^[8] Emmanuel Uzor: Ekwunife denies fake certificate claims. The Sun- August 4, 2025.



This represents a pattern of attacks against Ekwunife, who has repeatedly faced disinformation campaigns throughout her political career. In 2020,⁹ the Senator alerted the public about swindlers impersonating her character. By 2023,¹⁰ she was again decrying blackmail and forgery allegedly aimed at discrediting her reputation and tarnishing her public image by political opponents.

Broader Implications for Women

During CDD's stakeholder assessment, various participants highlighted that malinformation (blackmail) and explicit disinformation are rampant in Anambra State. Significantly, these incidents are not exclusively targeted at women politicians but women generally, with particularly high rates among young women.

Stakeholders explained that this climate of digital harassment has made women increasingly reluctant to contest political positions, especially given the high tendency to be exploited or victimised in a society that places so much premium on female virtue and reputation.

Security Concerns and Gender-Based Violence

Recent events have heightened concerns about women's safety in Anambra State's political landscape. The state has made headlines for gender-based violence, including an incident where the government's security outfit¹¹ (Agunchemba) assaulted a woman and stripped her naked in public. Additionally, the state university recently suspended a female student who had been a victim of malinformation¹² from her alleged ex-boyfriend while sparing the perpetrator from consequences.

These incidents reflect a broader pattern of institutional responses that often victimise women twice, first through the initial abuse, then through inadequate or counterproductive institutional responses.

Electoral Violence Against Women

The security risks facing women in Anambra State politics became starkly evident during the 2021 governorship election, when the state recorded over 52 cases¹³ of electoral violence specifically targeting women. This statistic underscores the dangerous intersection between gender-based violence and political participation.

^[9] The street reporters newspapers: FRAUD: Senator Ekwunife Disclaims Fake Social Media Accounts. August 21, 2020

^[10] Uzoma Nzeagwu: Ekwunife laments fake news, false allegations against her. The Guardian- February 16, 2023.

^[11] Godfrey George: Vigilantes dragged me naked, threatened to dump my corpse in the bush – Corps member, Elohor. August 23, 2025

^[12] Shola Akinyele: Outrage as female student assaulted and suspended after reporting revenge porn at Anambra University. Tell Magazine- August, 2025.

^[13] The nation Newspaper: Anambra election: 52 cases of violence against women recorded. November 14, 2021



While the Nigerian Security Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) maintains that they are better prepared to curb all forms of insecurity and gender-based violence, many stakeholders question these assurances. They point to the significant disparity in security levels between the state capital, Awka, and other areas such as Onitsha, Nnewi, Ihiala, Orumba, and Mbosi, where women face heightened risks.

Overall, while Anambra State has made commendable progress in women's political representation, the persistence of gendered disinformation and violence exposes a deeper manipulation of public perception that undermines electoral legitimacy. Women are disproportionately targeted with smear campaigns, blackmail, and fabricated scandals designed to question their integrity and competence, tactics rarely used with the same intensity against male counterparts. This sustained online and offline harassment not only deters women from contesting political positions but also shapes voter attitudes, erodes public trust, and reinforces patriarchal narratives that delegitimize female leadership. Consequently, gendered disinformation functions as both a political weapon and a barrier to inclusive democracy in Anambra State.

POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND DISINFORMATION EFFECTS



The political dynamics of Anambra State ahead of the November 8, 2025, governorship election are characterised by a mixture of entrenched traditions, shifting alliances, and the growing influence of disinformation. Anambra has long been regarded as a politically active state where zoning, party loyalties, and religious affiliations shape electoral outcomes. However, the increasingly complex information environment, coupled with insecurity and declining trust in electoral institutions, is reshaping political competition in ways that deepen the risks of manipulation and voter apathy. Drawing on insights from fieldwork in Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi, we explore how political structures, actors, and narratives intersect with disinformation to influence the state's electoral trajectory.

Zoning, Party Structures, and Voter Behaviour

Zoning remains a central organising principle of politics in Anambra State. Stakeholders consistently observed that the expectation of rotational power-sharing among senatorial districts has created both stability and tension. A traditional ruler in Awka emphasised that *"Voters are currently focused on allowing the Anambra Senatorial District to complete its turn in the governorship cycle. Once this rotation is completed, subsequent elections are expected to move to the next zone."* In Anambra North (Onitsha), another participant stated that *"No single party or Senatorial Zone can claim control of the state"*, suggesting that the governorship is as much about honouring political conventions as it is about party strength. In this context, the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) retains a significant advantage due to its deep roots in the state, yet its dominance has been increasingly contested by the Labour Party (LP), which rides on the momentum of Peter Obi's national profile, and the All Progressives Congress (APC), which benefits from federal presence and presidential influence.

Despite the competitive field, voter apathy threatens to undercut political mobilisation. In Onitsha, several participants noted that turnout has consistently declined, from 26% in the last general election to barely 10% in the 2021 governorship election. Many attributed this trend to insecurity, disillusionment with governance, and a widespread belief that votes do not count. According to a women's leader, *"people are breaking their voter cards because they believe the outcome is already written."* Such sentiments illustrate how disinformation narratives about electoral malpractice intersect with real grievances to weaken participation.

The Influence of Key Actors

The role of political personalities looms large in Anambra's contest. Governor Charles Soludo, running under APGA, is both strengthened and constrained by his incumbency. While some participants commended his infrastructural projects and



revenue reforms, others criticised his heavy-handed taxation policies, accusing him of *“using touts to harass traders and hawkers to collect taxes that have no defined name.”* His policies have thus become a focal point of partisan disinformation, with opponents amplifying narratives of exploitation and insensitivity.

Peter Obi, though no longer directly aligned with state-level politics, remains a figure of symbolic importance. His supporters see him as a moral compass whose influence could sway Labour Party’s fortunes, yet others argue that his impact has diminished since his defection and failed presidential bid. As one participant in Nnewi remarked, *“Obi is big in Abuja, but here in Anambra, people want to know who can fix our roads and keep us safe.”* In Akwa, the same view was raised with a traditional ruler stating that *“ Peter Obi’s influence does not extend significantly to regional elections. While Obi remains a prominent national figure, his popularity may not translate directly into governorship outcomes in Anambra.”*

Similarly, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s role is seen through the lens of federal might, with speculation that his influence could strengthen the APC candidate’s prospects by mobilising state resources or security structures in their favour.

Religious institutions also exert considerable influence, particularly the Catholic and Anglican churches, which dominate the state’s spiritual and social landscape. Several respondents stressed that candidates’ denominational affiliations could sway voter behaviour. In Onitsha, a participant explained that *“the Catholic Church is the majority here, and their subtle support matters as the incumbent governor is also Catholic,”* suggesting that political alignment with religious authorities may act as an informal endorsement.

Insecurity, Vigilantes, and Federal Might

The spectre of insecurity continues to cast a shadow over Anambra’s political space. Areas such as Ihiala, Orumba, and Nnewi South LGAs have been repeatedly cited as hotspots where violence, kidnapping, and the presence of unknown gunmen have deterred participation in past elections. Vigilante groups, often patronised by state actors to do their bidding, were described by respondents as both protectors and instruments of coercion. One participant in Onitsha noted that *“vigilantes tell observers they will protect them during the election, but you must do what they say,”* highlighting the blurred lines between security provision and political manipulation.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and their calls for sit-at-home actions add another layer of uncertainty. Although participants suggested that IPOB’s influence has waned since 2021, the lingering fear of violence continues to discourage voter



turnout. At the same time, perceptions of federal intervention remain contested. Some see the presence of security forces as essential for safe elections, while others view it as intimidation, fuelling disinformation that the federal government is working to suppress opposition.

Disinformation Narratives and Their Effects

The pre-assessment visits revealed multiple strands of disinformation already shaping political discourse. A prominent example is the so-called “Soludo tax saga,” where statements made in Igbo about local revenue collection were interpreted in conflicting ways, with some accusing the governor of maligning Nnewi residents for tax evasion. This narrative, amplified on social media, has deepened resentment against the state government in the state’s industrial hub. Similarly, rumours that the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) had “already written the results” have circulated widely, undermining trust in INEC’s neutrality. A key INEC staff member acknowledged that such claims are difficult to dispel without proactive communication, admitting that “silence allows rumours to grow stronger than facts.”

Other disinformation trends include exaggerated reports of insecurity, such as claims that “Anambra is burning,” which spread rapidly but lacked specifics. Narratives targeting vulnerable groups were also evident, particularly among persons with disabilities (PWDs), who recounted hearing that the Soludo administration “detests people with disabilities” despite evidence of employment and empowerment programmes for them. Women participants emphasised that disinformation intersected with entrenched gender biases, as stories portraying female politicians as unfit or immoral discouraged women’s participation in public life.

These narratives have tangible effects. They not only reinforce voter apathy by convincing citizens that their votes will not count, but they also polarise communities along partisan and religious lines, and fuel insecurity by amplifying fear. Perhaps most damagingly, they delegitimise institutions, creating a fertile ground for post-election disputes and violence.

Implications for the 2025 Election

The interplay of political traditions, personalities, insecurity, and disinformation poses serious risks to the credibility of the November 2025 Anambra governorship election. If zoning expectations clash with partisan ambitions, disinformation campaigns could be weaponised to delegitimise outcomes. Should insecurity persist, narratives of fear may further depress turnout, particularly in rural areas.



Meanwhile, distrust in INEC, fed by rumours of pre-written results and biased officials, risks undermining confidence in the electoral process. The cumulative effect is a fragile political environment where disinformation not only distorts voter choices but also threatens democratic stability.



CONCLUSION

The November 8, 2025, Anambra State governorship election faces unprecedented challenges from information manipulation that threatens to undermine democratic legitimacy and electoral integrity. This assessment reveals that while traditional electoral malpractices are a concern, the strategic deployment of disinformation has emerged as a primary threat multiplier that amplifies existing vulnerabilities and creates new risks for democratic governance.

The evidence demonstrates that information manipulation in Anambra operates as a sophisticated ecosystem that exploits cultural divisions, institutional weaknesses, and technological vulnerabilities. Unlike isolated incidents of electoral violence or fraud, disinformation campaigns create lasting damage to democratic trust that extends far beyond election day. The targeting of security institutions with partisan bias narratives, exploitation of religious divisions, manipulation of political endorsements, and weaponization of legitimate security concerns represent coordinated efforts to shape electoral outcomes through information distortion rather than democratic competition.

The gendered dimensions of information manipulation deserve particular attention, as they reveal how traditional cultural barriers intersect with modern disinformation techniques to systematically exclude women from political participation. The documented attacks against female politicians like Senator Uche Ekwunife illustrate how disinformation serves as a tool of political exclusion that undermines democratic representation and governance quality.

Most concerning is the assessment's revelation of widespread stakeholder unpreparedness for addressing information manipulation challenges. The lack of dedicated anti-disinformation programs across government institutions, limited verification capabilities among media professionals, and low information literacy among youth populations create a permissive environment for malicious actors to operate with impunity. This preparedness gap is compounded by weak coordination mechanisms between stakeholders and insufficient resource allocation for counter-disinformation initiatives.

The implications extend beyond the immediate electoral cycle. If left unaddressed, the documented patterns of information manipulation will likely establish precedents for future elections, normalise the strategic use of falsehoods in political competition, and further erode public trust in democratic institutions. The declining voter turnout rates from 26% in general elections to 10% in the 2021 governorship election already signal dangerous levels of democratic disengagement that information manipulation threatens to accelerate.



However, the assessment also identifies significant opportunities for intervention. The strong network effects of religious institutions, the extensive reach of traditional media, the enthusiasm for capacity building among civil society organizations, and the foundational understanding among media professionals provide robust platforms for building information resilience. The willingness of institutions like NOA to develop anti-disinformation capabilities and the recognition among stakeholders of information manipulation as a serious threat create enabling conditions for effective interventions.

The path forward requires coordinated action across multiple levels. Immediate interventions must focus on building verification capabilities, establishing monitoring systems, and implementing early warning mechanisms to detect and respond to trending false narratives. Medium-term strategies should emphasize institutional capacity building, coordination mechanism development, and comprehensive digital literacy programs. Long-term success depends on establishing sustainable frameworks for information integrity that can adapt to evolving manipulation techniques while preserving democratic discourse.

The stakes could not be higher. The November 2025 election represents a critical test of Anambra State's democratic resilience in the face of sophisticated information manipulation. Success in maintaining electoral integrity will require unprecedented coordination between government institutions, media organisations, civil society groups, and community leaders. Failure to address these challenges risks not only the legitimacy of the immediate electoral outcome but the long-term stability of democratic governance in one of Nigeria's most politically significant states.

The assessment's findings underscore that protecting democratic integrity in the digital age requires more than securing polling stations and counting votes accurately. It demands building resilient information ecosystems that can distinguish truth from manipulation, preserve space for legitimate political debate, and maintain public trust in democratic institutions. For Anambra State, meeting this challenge successfully will serve as a model for addressing similar threats across Nigeria's democratic landscape.

The opportunity exists to transform this crisis into a catalyst for strengthening democratic governance through enhanced information integrity. The commitment demonstrated by stakeholders during this assessment process, combined with targeted interventions addressing identified vulnerabilities, can build the foundation for elections that are not only free and fair but also conducted within an information environment that supports rather than undermines democratic



legitimacy. The choice facing Anambra State is clear: act decisively to counter information manipulation or risk allowing false narratives to undermine the very foundations of democratic governance.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- INEC must adopt a proactive communication strategy that anticipates and counters disinformation rather than merely reacting to it. Regular press briefings, transparent publication of electoral procedures, and real-time clarification of rumours would help rebuild confidence.
- Political parties should be held accountable for their use of disinformation, with civil society and media organisations monitoring and naming bad actors.
- Community leaders and religious institutions must be engaged as trusted intermediaries, equipped with accurate information and verification tools to counter rumours at the grassroots level.
- NOA and local journalists need support through resources and training on monitoring information disorder, ensuring professional reporting, and engaging in timely debunking.
- Civil Society should implement targeted programs addressing gender-based disinformation and supporting women's political participation.

REFERENCES

Akinyele, S. (2025, August). Outrage as female student assaulted and suspended after reporting revenge porn at Anambra University. Tell Magazine.

Chukindi, J. (2024, March 12). Soludo swears in Abia, Osun indigenes, 16 others as permanent secretaries in Anambra. Daily Post.

George, G. (2025, August 23). Vigilantes dragged me naked, threatened to dump my corpse in the bush – Corps member, Elohor. Punch Newspapers.

Nwonwu, C., & Tukur, F. (2023, February 28). Nigerian elections 2023: False claims and viral videos debunked. BBC News Pidgin.

Nwonwu, C., & Tukur, F. (2022, March). Full list of commissioners, special advisers appointed by Soludo. Vanguard.

Nzeagwu, U. (2023, February 16). Ekwunife laments fake news, false allegations against her. The Guardian.

Rabiu, A. (2024, March 18). Nigeria's digital democracy: Analyzing political manipulation in the age of information – Part 1.

The Nation Newspaper. (2021, November 14). Anambra election: 52 cases of violence against women recorded.

The Punch Newspapers. (2019, June 13). Eradicate Osu caste, Obiano tells Igbo traditional rulers.

The Street Reporters Newspapers. (2020, August 21). Fraud: Senator Ekwunife disclaims fake social media accounts.

Uzor, E. (2025, August 4). Ekwunife denies fake certificate claims. The Sun.

Vanguard. (2025, August 23). Electoral malpractice: We fear the worst in 2027 – Nigerians.



ABOUT CDD-WEST AFRICA

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) was established in 1997 as an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation working to promote democratic governance, human security, and sustainable development across the West African sub-region.

With a core mandate to serve as a catalyst for change, CDD-West Africa brings together policymakers, civil society actors, academics, and development partners to advance evidence-based solutions to the region's most pressing challenges. The organisation's work spans rigorous research, strategic policy analysis, advocacy, capacity building, and civic engagement.

Through its programming, CDD-West Africa has led pioneering initiatives in election monitoring, anti-corruption, peacebuilding, countering disinformation, and strengthening democratic institutions. Its thematic focus areas include governance and transparency, peace and security, digital democracy, political inclusion, and the rule of law.

Headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria, with a strong regional network, CDD-West Africa plays a critical convening role in shaping democratic discourse and policy in West Africa. The Centre remains committed to amplifying citizen voices, defending civic space, and building a resilient, just, and democratic future for the region.





AUTHORS

Chioma Iruke

Ahmad Aluko

Raji A. Olatunji

Valeria Ogide

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Lassane Ouedraogo, PhD

EDITORIAL DESIGN

Faridha Salihu-Lukman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors extend sincere appreciation to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for its partnership and generous support in producing this report. NDI's commitment to strengthening democratic institutions and promoting information integrity across Nigeria remains invaluable.

We also acknowledge the dedication of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) team, whose collaboration across research, analysis, coordination, and logistics ensured the successful delivery of this assessment.

Special thanks go to the field researchers and partners whose contributions and insights across Anambra State enriched the quality and depth of the report.

This publication reflects a collective effort to advance credible information, accountable governance, and democratic resilience in Nigeria and across West Africa.



© 2025 Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa).
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Centre for Democracy and Development.

Cover image:
Koutchika Lihouenou Gaspard / Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Please direct inquiries to:
Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa)
Research Department
16-20, A7 Street Mount Pleasant Estate (CITEC)
Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Abuja
cddabv@cddwestafrica.org
[@CDDwestafrica.org](https://www.cddwestafrica.org)

This publication can be requested or downloaded at no cost at www.cddwestafrica.org