Ondo and Edo Elections 2020:
A Typological Analysis of Information Disorder
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Content

- Introduction 2
- Methodology 3
- Limitations of Study 5
- Findings from Edo Election 5
- Findings from Ondo Elections 8
- Conclusion 10
- Recommendations 10
1. Introduction

Elections, according to Robert A. Pastor, ‘are both the supreme political act and a complicated administrative exercise’¹ at the heart of democracy. Pastor suggests that democracy is easily compromised where the state structure is viscerally weakened to points of illegitimacy while its bureaucratic capacity becomes bedraggled as is the case in fragile and illiberal democracies like Nigeria. The challenges facing such democracies have been heightened in recent times with the rise of new media and their use as platforms for creating ‘information disorder’ as a way of affecting political behaviour and choices.

Information disorder is categorized into three conceptual frameworks:²

- Misinformation: Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm.
- Disinformation: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country.
- Malinformation: Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country.

Information disorder presents a unique challenge for public discourse and information flow and communication practices - before, during, and after election cycles on a global scale. Fact-checking organizations and media houses have stepped up to counter and debunk such information disorder products and narratives. An example of such an effort is Dubawa.³

This study analyzes and studies the typologies present in the information disorder ecosystem studied by Dubawa during the Edo and Ondo Gubernatorial elections held on September 19th and October 10th, 2020.

The report identified that most of the misinformation and disinformation targeted at the 2020 Edo and Ondo gubernatorial elections were executed through diverse social media platforms two months to the election day. Also notable, was the gradual increase in the number of misinformation “claims” prior to the election which reached its peak on the day of the election.

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¹ Valerie J. Bunce, Sharon L. Wolchik (2010): Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries
² https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/coe-report/
³ www.dubawa.org
This report also identified key platforms that were used to share mis/disinformation, as well as key characters (i.e., claimants) who held and promoted these claims. Given the dynamic nature of information disorder, the report has categorized these claims into types and established a correlation with the dates (before, after, and on election day), verdicts.

2. Methodology

This report runs a content analysis on the available data and extracts trends and insights relating to the common events or key issues concerning election execution. To successfully interrogate the available data and extract the trends, we adopted themes\(^4\) to aid in the categorization of the claims (subject matter/issue in contention) fact-checked by the Dubawa platform. These are:

- **Violence**: Violent disruptions in the electoral process, occasioned by thugs or security forces’ actions which either lead or have the potential of leading to injuries or total/partial stoppage of the process.

- **Voter Inducement**: This includes activities that tend to swindle eligible voters to vote in favor of a particular political party. This can be monetary, gifts, or “stomach infrastructure” (food supplies given as a bribe to voters to sway the polls).

- **Governance**: These are issues that do not have any direct bearing with the election but are brought in because political actors are in power or have connections with people in power.

- **Disenfranchisement**: Issues of denial to vote in elections by conscious and concerted efforts by either political thugs, polling unit agents, security forces, or party agents. This category can be on a personal or group basis.

- **Natural Disaster**: Incidences that are not man-made but also have adverse effects on the election or electoral process. Incidents like boat capsize, fire, flood, etc.

- **Intra/Inter-Party squabble**: Issues of infighting within or across political parties. Issues can include counter-accusations, candidacy litigations, or substitution.

- **Result declaration**: attempts to rig or manipulate already announced results. It also includes results tweeted or tweets about results either through official channels or otherwise.

\(^4\) https://ptcij.org/blog/challenges-and-solutions-for-a-free-and-credible-electoral-process/
This study utilized data that was extracted from DUBAWA’s database. The scope of this study comprises all the fact checks DUBAWA carried out on the 2020 Edo and Ondo gubernatorial elections (i.e., before and on the election day) from the month of August to September 2020.

To further draw insight from the available data, a number of key characteristics of the data were used in our analysis. These are listed and defined below:

- **Characters**: The source of the claim or the claimant to the misinformation or disinformation.
- **Date**: the exact date the claim was shared by the claimant/character (Before Election, Election Day).
- **The platform**: This pertains to the channel or medium that the claimant used to share the claim. i.e., Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.
- **Verdict**: This describes the veracity of any claim. Dubawa’s verdict system can be found below:
  - **True**—A fact-check is deemed true when all elements of such a claim pertain to factual information. It is also used contextually and verifiable at the time of assertion.
  - **False**—A fact-check is deemed false when all elements of such a claim do not pertain to factual information at the time of assertion. In essence, imposter, manipulated and fabricated content will be considered false.
  - **Mostly true**—A fact-check is deemed mostly true when some elements of such a claim pertain to factual information; used contextually and verifiable at the time of assertion. Usually, this rating will be assigned to fact-checks with three or more claims.
  - **Misleading**—A fact-check is deemed misleading when elements of a claim are too complex to be termed true or false.
  - **Insufficient evidence**—when the claim(s) is unverifiable; usually pertaining to urban myths or unquantifiable data.

The Verdict category was extracted from Dubawa’s methodology which can be found here: [https://dubawa.org/about-us/our-fact-check-process/](https://dubawa.org/about-us/our-fact-check-process/).
3. Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study is the reliance on the fact-check database of the Dubawa project. This was necessary because to examine the misinformation during and around the election season, we need claims which were already disputed, debunked, or verified. Dubawa presented itself as the best source for such data. This choice is backed up by Dubawa’s subscription to the IFCN code of Principles. The policies in this Code most especially Non-Partisanship and transparency guarantee a reliable database. The drawback, however, is the limitation in scope and numbers of claims tracked and fact-checked.

4. Findings from Edo Election

1. Dubawa’s verdicts showed a predominance of inaccurate claims.

Only 23.8% of examined claims were true. This reveals a low degree of accuracy of contentious statements during the elections. More worrisome is the fact that of the inaccurate claims, the majority were outright falsities; it is also telling that these claims constituted 47.8% of all claims checked. Also noteworthy are the claims which were said to be Misleading. These constituted 19% of the overall sum. These findings stress the importance of fact-checking efforts during such elections. Figure 1 below shows the total distribution of the verdicts.

Dubawa’s selection process can be found here: https://dubawa.org/about-us/our-fact-check-process/
2. The volume of false claims peaked during the election proper

Examination of the sheer volume of false claims before and on the election day properly shows a clear dominance of false claims on election day as opposed to the days leading up to the elections. The data reveals that 75% of false claims debunked emerged on Election Day proper. This shows that as tensions and stakes rise, the tendency for falsities to thrive also increases. A picture of the importance of this perspective is the fact that the number of false claims on Election Day was equal to the total number of claims examined in the build-up to the elections.

![Bar chart showing claims 'Before' & 'Election Day' broken down by Verdicts]

Figure 2: Claims ‘Before’ & ‘Election Day’ broken down by Verdicts

3. Governance and Result Declaration Issues dominated the controversial circles

62% of the claims examined were generated as a result of debates that fell under the governance issues and result declaration controversies. These findings show the influence of current officeholders and political relationships in the framing of controversy and possible disinformation tactics. The results declaration claims show the last-ditch attempt made by partisan interests in swaying public opinion before and during the official declaration of results. As seen in the American example,

5 https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/election-integrity/

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is a tactic used to discredit the victory of opposing camps by likely losers at the polls and in some cases, drum up civil unrest.

![Figure 3: Types of Election related claims](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Count</th>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>False</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inter/Intra party squabble</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Mostly True</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Result Declaration</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Voters Inducement</td>
<td>False</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Voters Inducement</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Result Declaration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Voters Inducement</td>
<td>Insufficient Evidence</td>
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</tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Inter/Intra party squabble</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Disenfranchisement</td>
<td>False</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 4: Claims vs Verdicts](image)
5. Findings from Ondo Election

1. Again, most of the claims selected were “False”. With double the count as “True” claims.

Similar to Edo, inaccurate claims dominated the entire claim pool. With a majority of those inaccurate claims being outrightly false. Noteworthy is the fact that misleading claims were the next dominant inaccurate category. This shows some level of complexity in mis/disinformation efforts. This is due to the difficulty in identifying the veracity of such complex misleading claims. A process most of the electorate might not be prone to taking.

2. Like in Edo, False claims found on Election Day were far more than those found prior.

Even though the total number of claims during the Ondo polls do not equal that of the Edo polls, the pattern remained the same; with the number of False claims on election day being equal to the total number of claims during the election as a whole.
3. There was a more even distribution of issues in claims even though the leading issues in claims were matters that had to do with “Governance” and “Inter/Intra Party Squabbles”

The dominance of Governance and Inter/Intra Party Squabbles show the influence of the incumbent government and governance framework and performance on the information flow and debate leading up to and during the polls. The fact that the next three categories namely, Voter Inducement, Violence and Disenfranchisement were equally dealt with is telling on the Ondo polls. These suggest that common issues like vote buying, ballot snatching or stuffing and violent incidents were a major concern in discourse and attempts at manipulation these discussions were rife.

![Figure 2: Claims ‘Before’ & ‘Election Day’ broken down by Verdicts](image)

![Figure 3: Types of Election related claims](image)
6. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is clear that election mis/disinformation was used in discussing key issues like Governance, Result Declaration, and Voter behaviour. Due to the expected influence and importance of such issues, efforts have been made to shape the narrative and influence the public. Another key finding is the dominance of outright Falsities in these claims. This is either a testament to the selection process of the Dubawa fact-checking process or the general behaviour of election disinformers.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are important:

1. Due to the surge in misinformation during elections, and its inherent consequences, a unique event-based response from all stakeholders (media, governance, civil society) is required.

2. Such interventions should occur in three phases: before elections, during elections, and after elections. Most resources, however, should be deployed towards Election Day due to the surge in misinformation.

3. Stakeholders should create a strategy to preempt “Result Declaration” themed misinformation due to the volume and unique consequence on the entire election process.

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inter/Intra party squabble</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Inter/Intra party squabble</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Natural Disaster</td>
<td>Mostly True</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Voters Inducement</td>
<td>False</td>
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Figure 4: Claims vs Verdicts