



Online gender-based violence against female politicians in Ghana:

evidence from selected online platforms from August 2024



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Introduction

The internet has been described as a great tool for popular participation and inclusion. With the advancement in technology, rise in internet penetration rates and increased access to smartphones and other internet-enabled devices, the online/digital space offers prospects for a more equal and equitable society/future. This is, however, possible when all barriers are removed for all individuals, including women, to fully and meaningfully access the internet and its opportunities.

A lot of women are offline for economic reasons (difficulty in acquiring devices and/or data). However, some women are offline, or online but with limited online activities or complete self-censorship as a result of inadequate digital knowhow or online gender-based violence (OGBV). Thus, whereas the internet and digital spaces could serve as an opportune platform for women to innovate, create, build and pursue their ambitions, the reasons cited above, especially OGBV, have been limiting the actualisation of their aspirations.

The situation is relatively more precarious for female politicians. Whereas the internet and other digital tools could serve as effective tools for women in politics and in public life to sell their ideologies and campaign messages, increase their visibility, and improve engagement with their constituents, perpetrators of online gender-based violence capitalise on the same possibilities of the internet to silence them. They attack, intimidate and harass such women through the maligning of character, body-shaming, threats and dissemination of false news. The harm caused by OGBV is not only the silencing of the females in politics, but curtailing the aspirations of other women, especially the young ones who may be nursing such ambitions.

As one of the major findings of a recent study by the Media Foundation for West Africa on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana showed, “OGBV is very costly to female politicians, forcing them to self-censor, acquiesce to problematic norms or miss out on opportunities¹” such as leveraging social media platforms to garner votes to become Parliamentarians or District Assembly Officials. Indeed, “digital inclusion is not possible without digital safety.”² OGBV is frustrating and limiting female politicians in reaching and engaging voters, and this has contributed to the largely poor representation of women in political positions. A lot needs to be done to mitigate the menace and minimise the harm to ensure inclusivity in all aspects of governance.

¹ Media Foundation for West Africa (2024). Online Gender-Based Violence Against Female Politicians in Ghana – Nature, Prevalence and Experiences

² UNFPA. Preventing Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF GBV). Responding to the 2030 Agenda and "Our Common Agenda" by proactively mitigating technology-facilitated gender-based violence by enhancing product design, data privacy and security, and legal frameworks to hold offenders accountable.

In response to this challenge, ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana in December 2024, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), with funding support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana, is implementing a project on *Improving the safety and use of social media for female politicians in Ghana*. The project aims to address women's safety issues on social media, and build the capacity of female politicians to better use the internet in advancing their political ambitions, especially towards Ghana's 2024 general elections, and beyond.

As part of the project, a mapping report on online gender-based violence against female politicians in Ghana has been produced highlighting the nature, prevalence and experiences of female politicians. The mapping report seeks to inform public debates about the challenge and its impact, and to contribute to shaping policy considerations. A number of women in politics are also being trained on social media use and safety practices online. To complement these efforts, the organisation is also monitoring and reporting on the use of OGBV across five online platforms to name and shame culprits and to discourage others from the practice.

This report focuses on the monitoring and reporting of OGBV for the month of August 2024. The methodology used, as well as the findings from the report are detailed below.

Methodology

The monitoring and reporting of OGBV in Ghana was guided by a [monitoring instrument](#) that was developed and validated by experts in academia and industry. The content of the instrument, especially the definition and operationalisation of the different types or categories of OGBV, were informed by existing literature on the subject. Once the instrument was validated, monitors were selected through a competitive process of publishing a call, shortlisting applicants and interviewing. A total of 10 monitors were recruited for the task. The monitors were trained on the validated instrument, and carried out pretesting sessions before the actual rollout of the monitoring exercise.

A total of five online platforms have been selected for the monitoring. These are Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and Ghanaweb. The selection of these platforms was informed by existing literature, findings of the MFWA's recent mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana, and experiences and learnings from the social media context in Ghana. Although four of the platforms (Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok) are social media platforms that allow for content generation and engagement, Ghanaweb, an online news portal, was added because its comments section functions in a similar pattern as the other social media platforms. It allows for conversations around specific themes.

Ghanaweb was also added because from MFWA's previous monitoring of social media platforms during electioneering campaigns, the findings showed that a lot of conversations (including some OGBV content) take place at the comments section of the platform.

Because the monitoring focuses on OGBV against female politicians, the accounts³ being monitored were purposively sampled. The accounts selected include the account of all female parliamentarians on the four social media platforms selected and that of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the major political parties in the country (New Patriotic Party (NPP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), Convention Peoples' Party (CPP), People's National Convention (PNC), Movement for Change and one of the four Independent Candidates recognised by Ghana's Electoral Commission). Also, the social media accounts of political party communicators and the spokespersons of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates on the four social media platforms were monitored. In addition, the social media accounts of some social media influencers and popular individuals were also monitored. The social media accounts were randomly assigned to the monitors.

The monitors do daily monitoring (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and record their findings on the monitoring instrument shared with them. Each monitor submits daily monitoring reports to the MFWA. The reports are vetted, collated and analysed monthly using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by a team of Researchers who ultimately use the findings to produce monthly reports. The reports are then designed and published to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

The monitoring spans, five months (August to December 2024). The report below, which is the first edition, covers findings from the monitoring undertaken in the month of August 2024.

Findings

The finding from the daily monitoring carried out in August 2024 are presented below under the following two broad subheadings: incidents of OGBV and types of OGBV recorded.

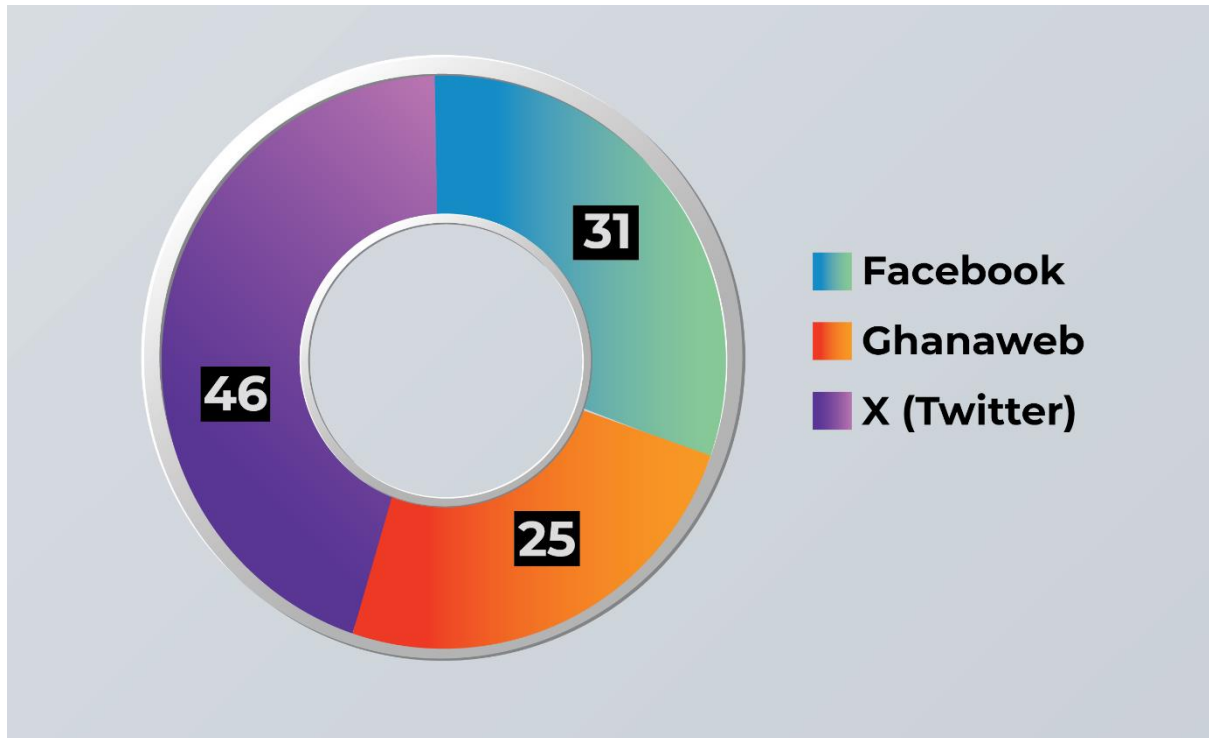
Incidents of OGBV recorded

Altogether, 336 reports were received from the 10 monitors assigned to the accounts being monitored under the project. Out of the 336 reports, 103 Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) were cited for this report. Instagram and TikTok did not record

³ The accounts monitored are attached below as Appendix A

any OGBV. The 103 OGBV were, thus, recorded on three platforms, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Ghanaweb. Although X recorded the highest (46) incidents of OGBV, the frequencies recorded on Facebook and Ghanaweb, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, were equally significant.

Figure 1: Frequency of OGBV recorded on the selected Platforms



The Instagram and TikTok handles selected for the monitoring were largely inactive, and for those that were active, the handles themselves did not put up content that contained OGBV or content that were somewhat contentious to elicit OGBV. This may likely account for the no incidents of OGBV on the two platforms.

The main issues or subjects of discussion during which the 103 incidents of OGBV were made were political in nature. Three issues engendered almost half (48.54%) of the 103 OGBV recorded. These were the campaigning activities of the Vice-Presidential Candidate of the major opposition party, National Democratic Congress (NDC); the campaigning activities and rhetoric of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition NDC, and the manifesto launch of the two parties. The statistics of the three issues and the other subjects of discussion that resulted in the use of OGBV on the platforms monitored are provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Subjects of discussion that elicited OGBV

Subject matter that elicited OGBV	Frequency
NDC Vice Presidential Candidate's (Prof. Opoku Agyemang) campaigning activities	20
General campaigning activities by the NPP & the NDC	20
Launch of manifesto of the NPP & the NDC	10
Women's caucus threaten legal action against John Dumelo	6
Akosua Manu's explanations	6
Samira Bawumia's campaign activities	5
EC-related activities/issues	4
PolITICAL confrontation/ banter	4
Social issues	4
Shamima Muslim's online posts & politicking	3
Joyce Bawa Mogtari's online posts & politicking	3
Other (including issues of education, telecommunication, health and cocoa production)	18
Total	103

The “others” as captured in Table 1 above is a combination of the subjects of discussion out of which one or two incidents of OGBV occurred. Some of the subjects of discussion captured under the “other” covered social, educational, health and telecommunication issues.

English was the main language used in expressing the OGBVs recorded. Specifically, 85 OGBVs were expressed in English, and the remaining 18 were expressed in one Ghanaian language or another, but dominantly Akan.

Most of the OGBVs were made by accounts belonging to individuals, although about 4 of the OGBVs were made by business and group accounts. For the individual accounts that made the OGBVs recorded, 69 of them were males and two were females. The gender of 28 could, however, not be determined.

In terms of the political affiliation of the culprits, because the monitoring exercise does not make inferences, only accounts that were known to be affiliates of specific political parties could be identified and reported upon accordingly. In line with that, the monitoring identified 26 accounts with political affiliation –17 of them were individuals affiliated with the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and nine were affiliates of

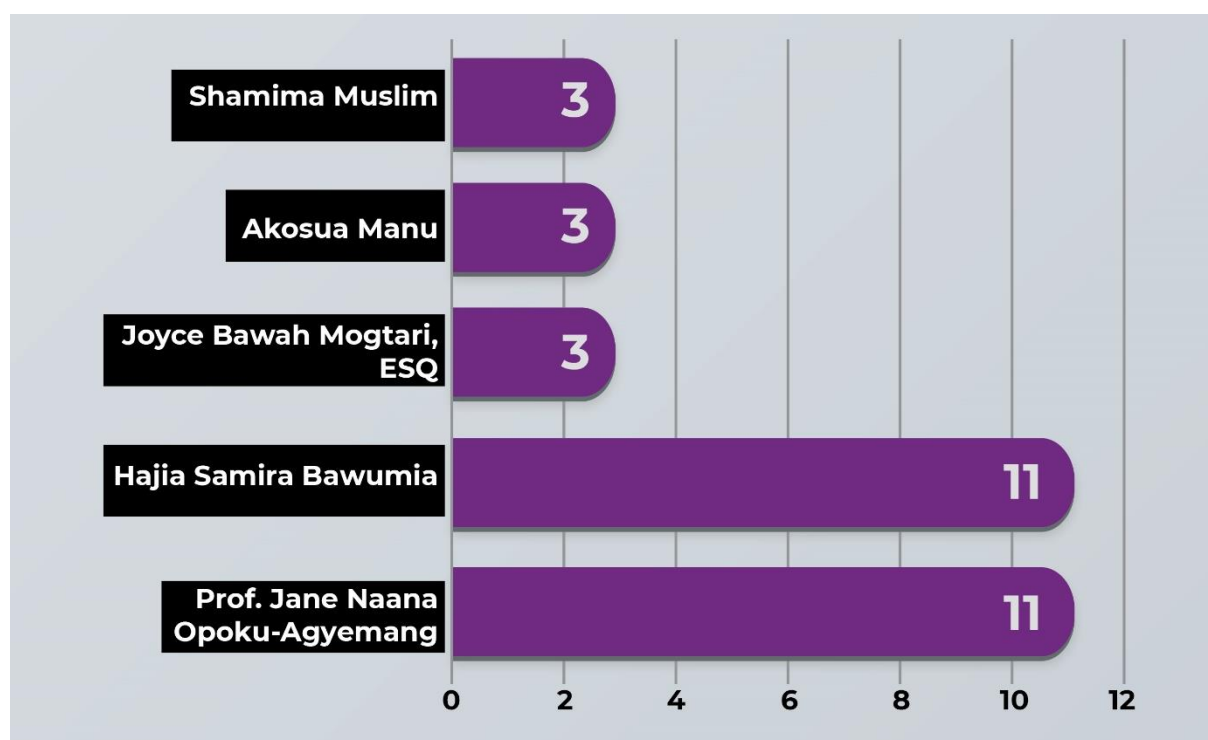
the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The political affiliation of the remaining 73 individual accounts/handles could not be determined.

With the exception of eight, all the OGBV recorded were targeted at politicians. For six of them, the OGBV targeted not only them, but their families and/or relatives as well. And for 12 of them, the OGBV targeted them and their political parties.

The main female politicians targeted with majority of the OGBV captured were the vice-presidential candidate of the opposition NDC and the wife of the presidential candidate of the NPP. The NDC vice-presidential candidate; Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, was derogatorily referred to as Abrewa (or Aberewa) at least eight times and as old woman, three times. Abrewa is an Akan expression for old woman. The derogatory references to the candidate as Abrewa, and not the use of her name or title by political opponents, was aimed at mocking her and her age. It is, however, worth noting that although the NDC vice presidential candidate is just two years older than the sitting President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President is scarcely referred to as old man.

On her part, the wife of the NPP presidential candidate, Hajia Samira Bawumia, was ‘derogatorily’ referred to as Fulani (in a condescending manner) at least seven times and as “slay” or “slay queen”, four times. Other female politicians who were directly attacked with OGBV included Joyce Bawah Mogtari, Esq., aid to the NDC presidential candidate, Akosua Manu, NPP parliamentary candidate for the Adentan Constituency, and Shamima Muslim of the NDC.

Figure 2: Frequency of OGBV targeted at specific female politicians

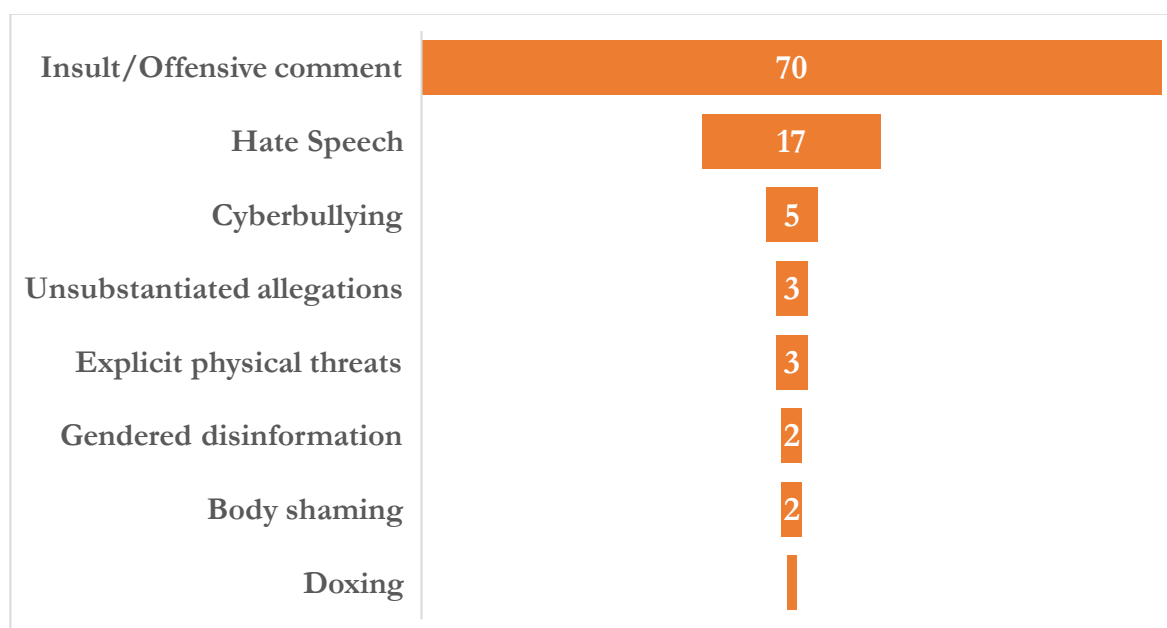


With the exception of one incident, all the OGBV posts captured under the monitoring did not receive any direct response or reprisal.

Types of OGBV recorded

The 103 OGBV recorded in the month under review can be categorised into eight different types of OGBV. The eight OGBV categories are detailed in Figure 2 below. Insulting/offensive comments were the dominantly used. On the other hand, only one incident of Doxing was captured.

Figure 2: Categories of OGBV recorded



Insulting and/or offensive comments were mostly used against female politicians. X (Twitter) recorded a little over half (36 out of 70) of the insulting and offensive OGBV comments made followed by Facebook (18) and Ghanaweb (15). A graphical representation of the platforms and the categories of OGBV captured on each is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Platforms and Categories of OGBV recorded

Name of Platform	OGBV recorded								Total
	Cyberbullying	Hate Speech	Unsubstantiated allegation	Insult/offensive comment	Body shaming	Doxing	Explicit physical threats	Gendered disinformation	
Facebook	5	3	1	18	2	1	0	0	30
X (Twitter)	0	5	2	36	0	0	2	0	45
Instagram	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ghanaweb	0	9	0	15	0	0	1	2	27
Total	5	17	3	70	2	1	3	2	103

For some of the comments recorded, although coded as insulting/offensive, they were also gender-stereotypical in nature, insulting the intelligence of women, and name-calling. Specific examples of these, as well as other OGBV belonging to other categories, but identified as quite worrying have been cited below as Appendix A. These specific examples are being reproduced with the sole intention of bringing to fore the nature and magnitude of the menace. Mention must also be made of the fact that the female genitalia (often of the mother of a target) was as an insult or an offensive/provocative remark. In certain parts of Ghana, the female genitalia (of a target's mother) is mostly used as an insult or an offensive/provocative remark, although the practice is generally frowned upon. The monitoring found at least six instances where this was used to attack or offend targets.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from the monitoring as presented above show that OGBV is quite prevalent on Ghana's social media space. An average of three OGBV are made on a daily bases on three platforms (Facebook, X and Ghanaweb), mostly against females who are politically exposed. While the frequencies are worrying, even more disturbing is the magnitude of the OGBV expressed and the possible impact it could have on the female politicians, as well as the up-and-coming female politicians.

Measures must, therefore, be put in place to address the challenge of OGBV and its impact as a matter of necessity. A lot of media and digital literacy is needed to counter the many OGBV made on a daily bases on the various social media platforms. Such literacy efforts must draw attention to the need to focus on issues and not personality attacks in discourse; the need for civility and political tolerance, and the implications of OGBV on female politicians.

While the literacy efforts are being pursued, policy considerations regarding how this menace can be minimised, should be pursued. All stakeholders, including government, platform owners, tech and telecom companies, civil society and academia must engage and discuss policy options that can help curb the challenge. There should also be more engagements with social media platform owners to discuss content moderation options in a transparent and an accountable manner as another layer in addressing the phenomenon.

Perpetrators of OGBV should also be sensitised to desist from the practice, and where possible, brought to justice. At the same time, female politicians must be empowered to understand how the perpetrators operate and how they can resist their tactics which are often intended to cow them into silence. Solidarity groups should be formed to facilitate group support, peer learning and peer push-back. Political parties must also stand up for their female aspirants when they are attacked. They must publicly condemn the act and where possible, support their candidates in seeking redress through legal processes.

Civil society organisations working on governance and women empowerment, and the media, on their part, must highlight OGBV issues in their engagements with government and industry players; reportage; and programming to help set agenda on the issue, and also educate the public against such practices. Public forums and policy dialogues will also be helpful in further distilling the issues and finding solutions through a multistakeholder process. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection must also pay more attention to this challenge as it limits women's use of the internet to improve their lives, and pursue their political ambitions.

APPENDIX A

Social media Accounts for Online Gender-Based Violence Monitoring

1. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo
2. Mahamadu Bawumia
3. John Mahama
4. Matthew Opoku Prempeh
5. Naana Jane Opoku Agyemang
6. Dennis Miracles Aboagye
7. Sam Dzata George
8. Okudzeto Ablakwa
9. Rebecca Akufo-Addo
10. Samira Bawumia
11. Akuka Albert Alalzuuga

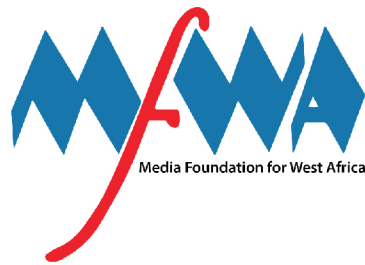
Female Members of Parliament

	Name	Constituency	Party	Regions
12.	Tina Gifty Naa Ayeley Mensah	Weija Gbawe	NPP	Greater Accra
13.	Sarah Adwoa Sarfo	Dome Kwabenya	NPP	Greater Accra
14.	Lydia Seyram Alhassan	Ayawaso West Wuogon	NPP	Greater Accra
15.	Sheila Bartels	Ablekuma North	NPP	Greater Accra
16.	Ursula Owusu	Ablekuma West	NPP	Greater Accra
17.	Dakoa Newman	Okaikoi South	NPP	Greater Accra
18.	Sophia Karen Ackuaku	Domeabra/Obom	NDC	Greater Accra
19.	Rita Naa Odoley Sowah	La Dadekotopon	NDC	Greater Accra
20.	Theresa Lardi Awuni	Okaikwei North	NDC	Greater Accra
21.	Zanetor Agyeman Rawlings	Klottey Korle	NDC	Greater Accra

22.	Agnes Naa Momo Lartey	Krowor	NDC	Greater Accra
23.	Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo	Shai Osudoku	NDC	Greater Accra
24.	Cudjoe Comfort Doyoe	Ada	NDC	Greater Accra
25.	Nana Dokua Asiamah Adjei	Akropong	NPP	Eastern Region
26.	Giftly Twum-Ampofo	Akim Abuakwa North	NPP	Eastern Region
27.	Abena Osei-Asare	Atiwa East	NPP	Eastern Region
28.	Mensah Betty Nana Efua Krosby	Afram Plains North	NDC	Eastern Region
29.	Gizella Tetteh	Awutu Senya West	NDC	Central Region
30.	Queenstar Pokuah Sawyerr	Agona East	NDC	Central Region
31.	Naana Eyiah Quansah	Gomoa Central	NDC	Central Region
32.	Mavis Hawa Koomson	Awutu Senya East	NPP	Central Region
33.	Cynthia Mamle Morrison	Agona West	NPP	Central Region
34.	Ophelia Hayford	Mfantseman	NPP	Central Region
35.	Joycelyn Tetteh	North Dayi	NDC	Volta Region
36.	Della Sowah	Kpando	NDC	Volta Region
37.	Dzifa Abla Gomashie	Ketu South	NDC	Volta Region
38.	Angela Oforiwa Alorwu-Tay	Afadzato South	NDC	Volta Region
39.	Helen Adjoa Ntoso	Krachi West	NDC	Oti Region
40.	Dorcas Affo-Toffey	Jomoro	NDC	Western Region
41.	Adelaide Ntim	Nsuta Kwamang Beposo	NPP	Ashanti Region
42.	Mavis Nkansah Boadu	Afigya Sekyere East	NPP	Ashanti Region
43.	Patricia Appiagyei	Asokwa	NPP	Ashanti Region
44.	Francisca Oteng Mensah	Kwabre East	NPP	Ashanti Region
45.	Ama Poma Boateng	Juaben	NPP	Ashanti Region
46.	Freda Prempeh	Tano North	NPP	Ahafo Region
47.	Elizabeth Ofosu Agyare	Techiman North	NDC	Bono East Region
48.	Zuwera Mohammed Ibrahimah	Salaga South	NDC	Savannah region
49.	Akanvariva Lydia Lamisi	Tempane	NDC	Upper East Region
50.	Lariba Abudu	Walewale	NPP	North East Region

Accounts affiliated to political parties

	Account name	Platform	No. of followers	Affiliation
51.	@AnnanPerry	X	49.6k	Pro NDC
52.	@cdzas	X	36.3k	Pro NDC
53.	@fanti_boy	X	16.6k	Pro NDC
54.	@BawumiaCampaign	X	5.2k	Pro NPP
55.	@TheTPatriots	X	17.2k	Pro NPP
56.	@yabbanx	X	27.8k	Pro NPP



MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA

Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo

Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327

Twitter: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

info@mfw.org

www.mfw.org



[@themfwa](https://twitter.com/themfwa)



www.mfw.org



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