



ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE POLITICIANS IN GHANA:

evidence from selected online platforms
- November 2024

Funding Support:



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Introduction

The digital gender gap, does not only mirror existing offline gender inequalities, but also has the potential to compound existing offline gender disparities. The digital revolution and technological advancements were seen as the needed development to bridge societal inequalities. This has, however not been the experience. Increased internet penetration rates and improved access and ownership of internet-enabled devices have not bridged the digital gender divide. Men and women are not having equitable access to the expanded opportunities the internet and digital technologies offer. According to the [International Telecommunications Union](#), as of 2023, 42 percent of males in Africa were using the internet as compared to 32 percent of females.

Some of the factors contributing to this disparity in Africa, and in specific countries on the continent such as Ghana, are issues of access and affordability, digital knowhow, and Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV). A [2020 research](#) by the Web Foundation and World Association of Girl Guide and Girl Scouts, cited by [UNICEF](#), revealed that “half of young women and girls in the global survey have experienced online abuse” and “87% of young women surveyed think the problem is getting worse.” As rightly noted by a Centre for International Governance Innovation article, “... even when women have the means and know-how to connect to the Internet, online harassment can be a barrier to their full and equal access.”

OGBV remains one of the major hurdles for women in engaging or staying online. For women in politics and public life, however, unwillingness or limited engagements online with the hope of avoiding or limiting OGBV comes at a great cost. It comes with losing the opportunity to sell their ideologies and campaign messages to their constituents; reducing their levels of engagement and visibility, and ultimately, losing votes and popularity/familiarity.

Perpetrators of OGBV often attack the intelligence, character, credibility and physical looks of women to make them feel less confident and less qualified for any position or office. As Ghana heads for the general elections in December 2024, OGBV perpetrators are likely to actively pursue female politicians in online spaces in their bid to silence and discredit them.

To help manage the menace and mitigate its impact, 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.

A mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana has been produced as part of the project to highlight the nature, prevalence and experiences of female politicians. Capacity building on social media use and safety practices online is also being offered to female politicians in general and some aspirants in particular. To complement these efforts, the organisation is also monitoring and reporting on the use of OGBV across five online platforms to discourage the practice; and gather scientific evidence on the issue to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

This report focuses on the findings of the monitoring in the month of November 2024. The daily monitoring reports received from recruited and trained monitors have been collated and analysed. The methodology used and the findings from the monitoring are presented below.

Methodology

The monitoring and reporting of OGBV in Ghana is 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.

Five online platforms have been selected for the monitoring – Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and Ghanaweb. The selection of these platforms was informed by existing literature, findings of MFWA’s recent mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana, and experiences and learnings from the social media context in Ghana. Whereas four of the platforms (Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok) are social media platforms that allow for content generation and engagement, Ghanaweb is an online news portal. Ghanaweb 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 findings of MFWA’s previous monitoring of social media platforms during electioneering campaigns, a lot of conversations (including some OGBV content) take place at the comments section of the platform.

The accounts being monitored were purposively sampled to ensure that as much as possible, the accounts of many female politicians in the country could be covered. The accounts selected include the those 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.

The social media accounts of some social media influencers and popular individuals were also sampled for the monitoring. The social media accounts were randomly assigned to the trained monitors.

Using the validated instrument and a coding schedule, the monitors undertake daily monitoring (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and record their findings. Each monitor submits daily monitoring reports to the MFWA accompanied by URLs, screenshots and videos for crosschecking. The reports are vetted, collated and analysed monthly using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by a team of researchers who 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 covers findings from the monitoring undertaken in the month of November 2024.

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Findings

Findings from the November 2024 daily monitoring of the five online platforms selected for the monitoring activity are presented below under two broad subheadings: Incidents of OGBV and Types of OGBV recorded.

Incidents of OGBV Recorded

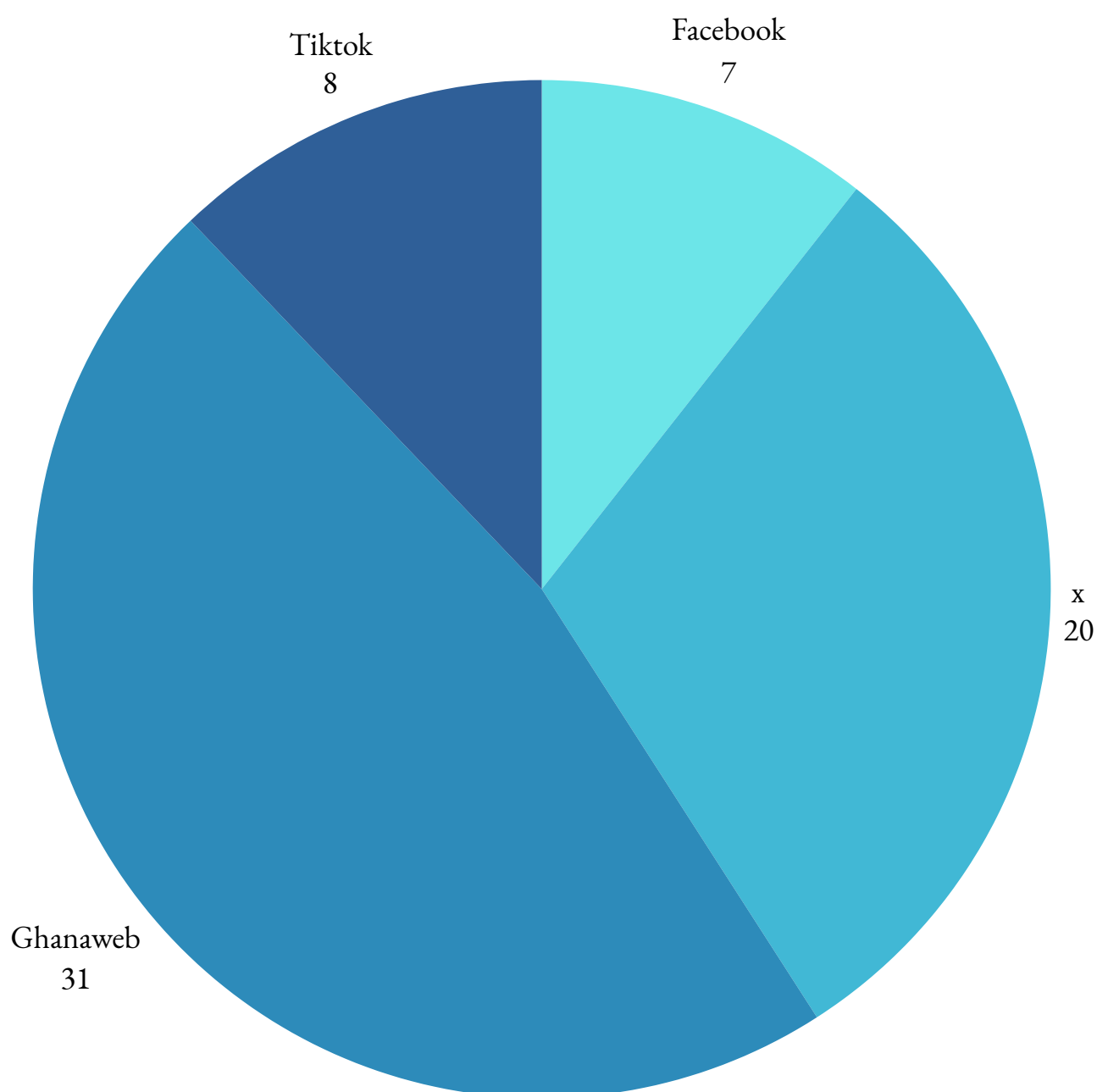
Altogether, 344 monitoring reports were received from the monitors assigned to the sampled accounts. Some of the social media accounts sampled for the monitoring were very active, but others were somewhat active (with occasional posts and engagements), and others, inactive throughout the monitoring period. For the sampled accounts on Instagram and TikTok, a good number of them were inactive.

A total of 66 Online Gender-Based Violence posts were recorded in the month under review. The 66 incidents mark a 42.11 percent reduction in the incidents of OGBV compared to the month of October 2024, which recorded 114 OGBV posts; and a 37.71 percent reduction from the month of September 2024. That makes a three-month consecutive decline in the incidents of OGBV. Table 1 below presents a brief outlook of the reduction in the incidents of OGBV since September 2024.

Table 1: Reduction in incidents of OGBV from September – November 2024

Month	OGBV incidents recorded	Margin of reduction
September 2024	183	
October 2024	114	69 (37.71%)
November 2024	66	48 (42.11%)

The 66 OGBV posts were cited on four out of the five online platforms being monitored. The platforms that recorded the OGBV posts are: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Ghanaweb and TikTok. Since the monitoring started in August 2024, this is the first time OGBV cases have been cited on TikTok. The platform, along with Instagram, had not been cited for any OGBV from August to October 2024, mainly due to the fact that the accounts monitored on the two platforms have been largely inactive. Instagram, however, did not record any incident of OGBV in the month under review (November 2024). Again, for the first time since the monitoring started in August 2024, X (Twitter) did not record the highest incidents of OGBV, but Ghanaweb. The frequencies of OGBV recorded on Facebook, X, Ghanaweb and TikTok are presented below in Figure 1.



The issues around which the 66 OGBV posts were made have been outlined in Table 1 in a descending order (per the frequency of OGBV made per issue). For the general politicking issues, out of 27 OGBV posts made during online discussions about campaigning and politicking issues, majority (21) were made during discussions about campaign activities of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP). And out of the 21, 19 OGBV comments were made around campaigning activities of the wife of Ghana's Vice President, Samira Bawumia. Matters arising over the four vacant seats in Parliament also elicited 15 OGBV posts. The other OGBV incidents were made during discussions about some social issues as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Subjects of discussion that elicited OGBV

Issues	Frequency
General politicking by the NPP & the NDC	27
Social issues (including Daddy Lumba's birthday celebrations)	17
Vacant seat in Parliament & matters arising	15
Other issues (including the EC and its work, Democracy Hub protests and matters arising and some random posts)	7
Total	66

The monitoring reports for this month show that with the exception of two original posts that were made on social media, the remaining 64 cases of OGBV were comments made in response to the two original posts, some news items, or a comment that had been made about a post. Again, with the exception of two that directly related to the original posts, all the other OGBV comments cited either related only indirectly to the issues (from the two posts, news items and comments made by others) or was not related at all.

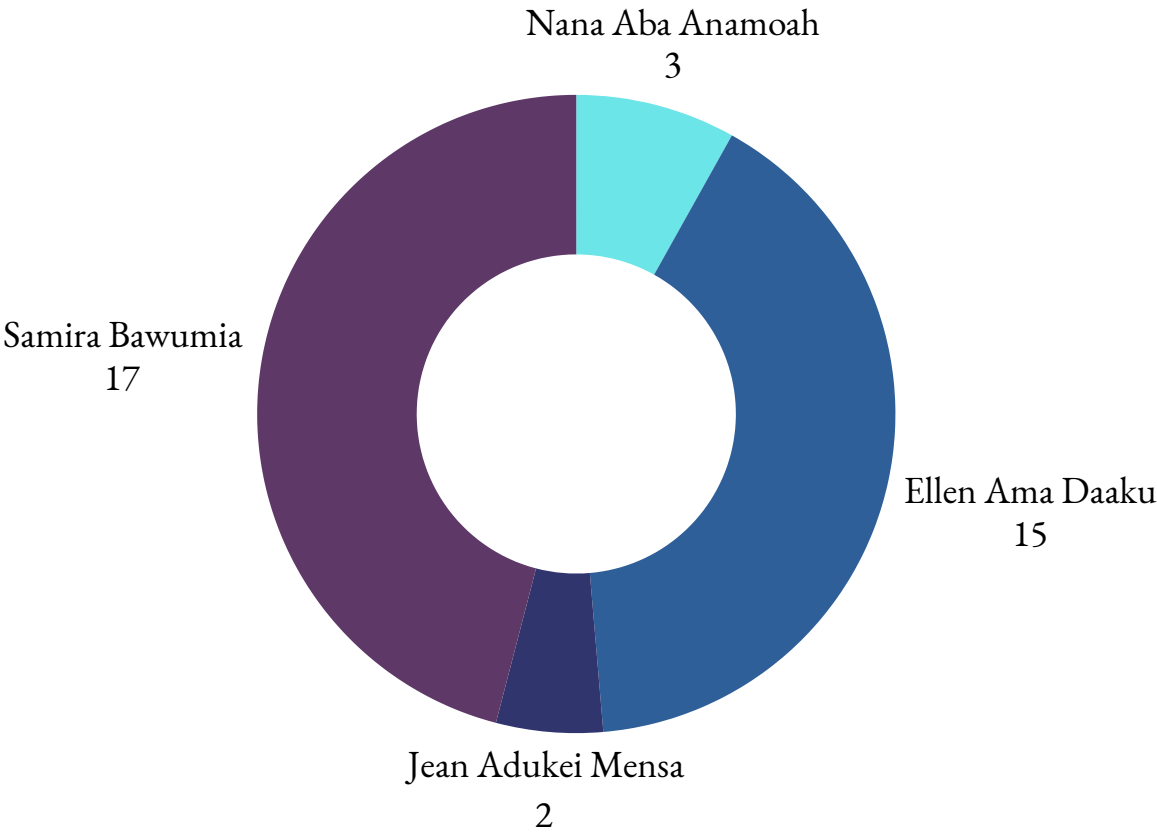
No group or corporate account was used to make any of the 66 OGBV posts cited. They were all made with individual accounts, a number of which bore pseudo names, which made it challenging to determine the identity of the people behind such accounts.

A few could, however, be identified. At least 27 of those identified were affiliates of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) while six were affiliates of the NPP. By way of gender, 45 of the OGBV posts were made by males while five were made by females. The gender of those who made the remaining 16 OGBV posts could not be determined.

By way of the targets of the OGBV cases recorded, 49 percent were directed at two politically exposed women: Samira Bawumia, wife of the Vice President who is also the presidential Candidate for the NPP; and Ellen Ama Daaku, a member of the NPP communications team. Attacks against Samira Bawumia were mainly name calling and derogatory remarks about some allegations about her past campus life and the tribe she identifies with. Ellen Ama Daaku continued to face body shaming attacks as highlighted in the monthly reports of [September](#) and [October 2024](#). Her face, stomach and entire body were subjected to body shaming. In many instances, she was simply referred to as a ‘Man’ or ‘ManWoman.’ In one post, for example, she was referred to as “Mr Ellen.” In fact, all the 10 recorded cases of body shaming cited in this November report were directed at her.

The two other known females who were attacked with more than one OGBV were Jean Adukwei Mensa, Chairperson of Ghana’s election management body, and Nana Aba Anamoah, a broadcast journalist. Figure 2 displays the frequency of OGBV attacks directed at the above-mentioned women.

Figure 2: Frequency of OGBV targeted at specific females

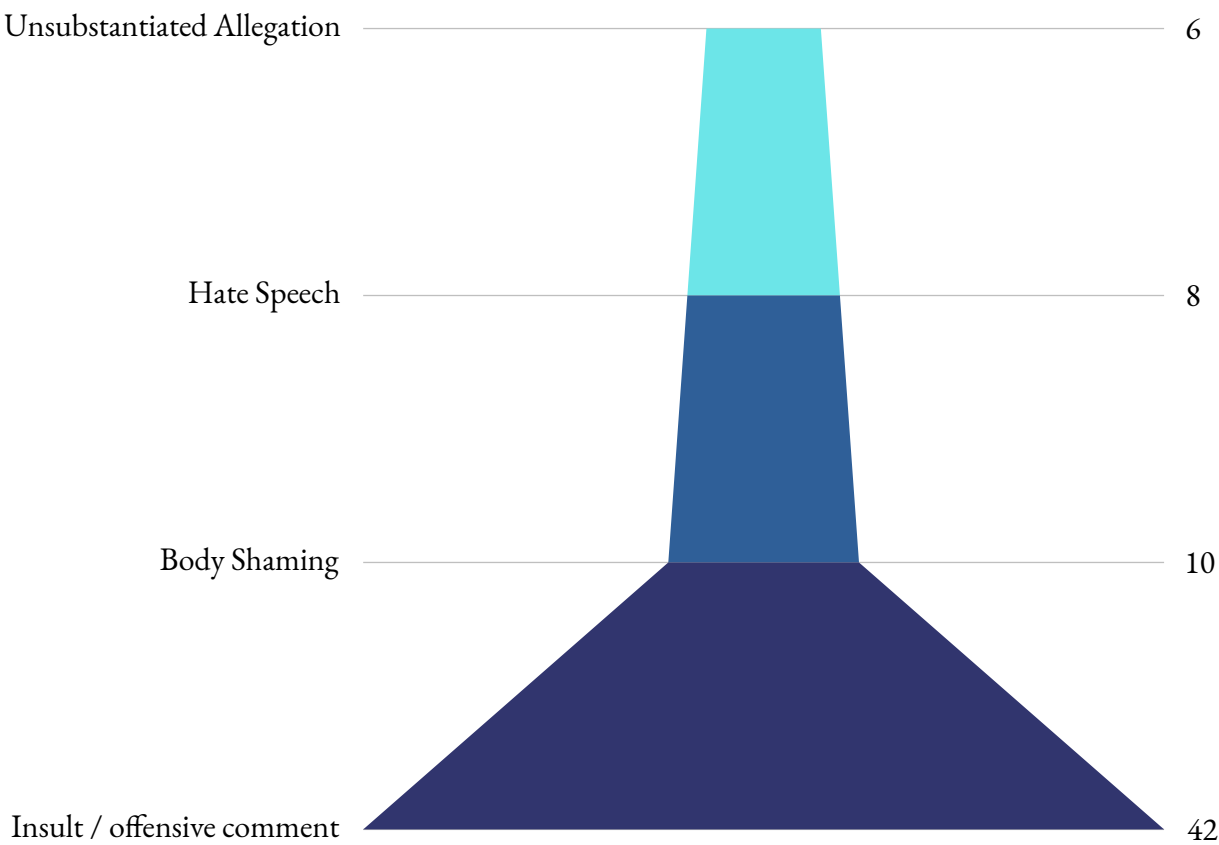


Most of the OGBV cases cited were directed at the targets only. A few, however, attacked the targets and their family or political party of affiliation. The OGBV posts were dominantly expressed in English, but Ga, a local language, was occasionally used in name-calling some of the targets.

Types of OGBV recorded

Four categories of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), as defined in the validated monitoring instrument, were recorded during the monitoring period – Hate speech, Unsubstantiated allegation, Insulting/offensive comments, and Body shaming. Insulting and/or offensive remarks dominated the OGBV cases cited, as has been the case since the monitoring started in August 2024. For this month, about 64 (almost two-third) of the OGBV cited fall within the insulting and offensive comments category. And they were mainly derogatory remarks, name-calling and other forms of attacks intended to malign or cause public ridicule of the targets. Figure 3 displays the frequency of OGBV cases recorded against each of the four categories.

Figure 3: Categories of OGBV recorded



Conclusion and Recommendations

The level of reduction in the incidents of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) from September to November 2024 is commendable. It however signals the fact that it is possible to reduce the phenomenon to the barest minimum or even eliminate it. With increased sensitisation and advocacy, supported by the necessary and proportionate regulatory and policy framework, the online space can be sanitised of OGBV to encourage more female participation in online spaces. Female politicians can then engage their constituents confidently and solicit for their support and votes.


Therefore, advocacy efforts against OGBV that are informed by evidence from this monitoring and other research work should be intensified. The media, civil society actors, content creators and the government need to roll out educational and sensitization interventions that will promote issues-based public discourse, tolerance of opposing views, among other positive reinforcement interventions.

Public forums, policy dialogues and counter narratives should also be explored as part of a multi-faceted-layered approach to dealing with the OGBV menace. Capacity strengthening interventions must also be pursued to empower more females to safely navigate online spaces and strategically manage OGBV attacks directed at them online.

The government must also ensure that perpetrators of OGBV are duly punished to deter them and others from the practice; and political parties, on their part, must provide social support by publicly condemning OGBV against female politicians and supporting them to pursue justice through legal procedures.

Lastly, government should engage tech and social platform owners, along with other relevant stakeholders, to explore rights-respecting content moderation strategies that can help mitigate OGBV and their impact without compromising rights and freedoms, including the right to expression, information and privacy.

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