



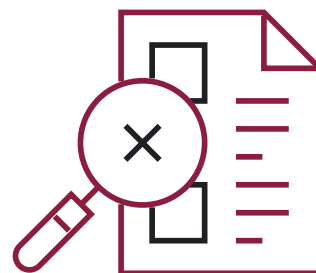
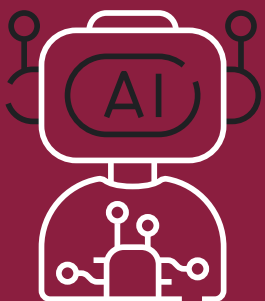
Digital Democracy
Initiative

POLICY BRIEF B

A Nigerian Women in Politics Digital Defence Helpline

From advocacy to a service female aspirants can call

Submitted to civil-society partners, donors, and gender-rights coalitions





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A Nigerian Women in Politics Digital Defence Helpline

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Drawn from the

**Manufactured Doubt:
A Pre-Election Digital Threat Assessment
for Nigeria's 2027 General Elections**



At a glance

Women who run for office in Nigeria, advocate publicly, or hold visible political roles face gendered disinformation, online gender-based violence (OGBV), and sexualised attack content. The 2023 cycle produced viral campaigns of this kind at a scale that the response - uncoordinated, under-resourced, and reactive - was unable to match. Generative AI has sharply reduced the cost, skill threshold, and time required to produce sexualised images, synthetic audio, impersonation content, and coordinated attack narratives. Without a coordinated service-level response, the 2027 cycle is likely to produce attacks at materially higher volume than 2023, risking withdrawn candidacies, activist exit, and reduced participation. This brief proposes a pilot-plus-surge Nigerian Women in Politics Digital Defence Helpline, operational from October 2026 through February 2027, as a consortium-managed service.

THE CASE IN THREE NUMBERS



47.5%

Women as a share of registered voters, 2023
44.4m of 93.5m registered voters



4.43%

Women's representation across key elected offices after 2023 ElectHER/EU-SDGN figure; verify CDD attribution if retained



<20%

Women in President Tinubu's first cabinet
AP reported that women made up fewer than one-fifth of the August 2023 cabinet

1

The problem

In the build-up to the 2023 Lagos State governorship election, a photo of a woman smoking shisha in a club circulated virally on social media and was falsely identified as Abiodun Islamiyat Oyefusi - the running mate to the Labour Party's gubernatorial candidate. Dubawa and Africa Check both found no evidence that the image showed Oyefusi, and the Labour Party formally refuted the identification. The false claim spread widely before fact-checks and party rebuttals could correct the record. The case is archetypal: an image calculated to exploit Lagos-specific class, religious, and patriarchal sensitivities was matched to a real female candidate's name to mobilise

disapproval across identity axes. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) has framed these patterns as gendered information disorder: sexualized content, sexist and misogynistic content, and doctored images or videos aimed at ridiculing women based on their gender. These attacks are not incidental campaign noise. They are a structural cost of being a politically active woman in Nigeria, and the Nigerian cases show the same pattern Carnegie documented internationally: women are targeted not only for political positions but also for appearance, sexuality, family roles, and perceived morality.

"Female politicians are not only targeted disproportionately but also subjected to different forms of harassment and abuse. Attacks targeting male politicians mostly relate to their professional duties, whereas online harassment directed at female politicians is more likely to focus on their physical appearance and sexuality and include threats of sexual violence and humiliating or sexualized imagery."

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2020)

Generative AI is an accelerant

The Wilson Center's Monetizing Misogyny study found that during the U.S. 2020 election, false claims about Vice President Kamala Harris were shared at a peak rate of 3,000 times per hour on Twitter. This is a comparative example, not Nigerian evidence. While Nigeria has not yet documented gendered disinformation activity at this scale, the same production and amplification tools are now widely available.

- AI-generated 'lifestyle' content: deepfaked or AI-composited imagery placing female candidates in fabricated compromising scenes.
- Voice-cloned audio: synthesised

statements attributed to female candidates, distributable through WhatsApp at minimal cost (audio deepfakes were already the dominant 2023 WhatsApp deepfake category).

- Coordinated persona-network campaigns: AI-managed networks of fake accounts simulating organic grassroots disapproval of named female candidates.
- Indigenous-language attacks: Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo content that platform AI moderation systems cannot detect.

Digital attacks have offline consequences

Online attacks against women in politics are not confined to the screen. They can compound across the female electorate by signalling that visible political participation is unsafe. Gendered disinformation may also intersect with identity-based attacks, including allegations of sexuality, religion,

or morality. Offline gendered intimidation, including culturally coded restrictions on women's movement, shows how digital harassment can reinforce physical exclusion from civic participation where credible observer or media evidence exists.

The response gap

As of mid-2026, there is no widely visible, election-focused Nigerian service that a female aspirant, campaign staff member, woman journalist, activist, or civic leader can contact to: (a) secure digital accounts before a campaign; (b) document and preserve attack evidence when an incident

occurs; (c) escalate serious cases to platforms through civil-society relationships; and (d) receive referrals for legal, SGBV, safety, or psychosocial support. The available resources are fragmented. Each piece exists. The integration does not.

What we are proposing

A consortium-managed pilot-plus-surge helpline - not a new organisation - that integrates existing service capacity from confirmed partners and proposed referral partners into one intake and triage pathway for female political actors during the active electoral cycle.



2

The service offer

The helpline provides five service streams, deployable separately or in combination, based on the case-handler's intake assessment.

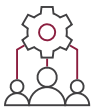
S/N	Service	What the caller receives
S1	Proactive Digital Security Audit	Group digital-safety clinics for basic account protection, followed by one-on-one audits for high-risk aspirants. Review account hygiene, two-factor authentication, password management, doxxing exposure, device security, and family/staff threat modelling. Follow-up checklist after 14 days.
S2	Reactive Incident Response	When an attack is in progress: rapid evidence preservation, content authentication, risk assessment, and case assignment. WhatsApp and web-form intake operate 24/7 with automated acknowledgement and emergency triage. Voice support operates Monday-Friday, 09:00-18:00, with after-hours escalation for high-risk cases.
S3	Platform Escalation and Safety Advocacy	Documented escalation to relevant platform channels. Tracking of platform response, guidance on parallel reporting options, and support for public rebuttal where appropriate. The helpline cannot guarantee takedowns.
S4	Legal and SGBV Referrals	Proposed referral partners include FIDA Nigeria, Legal Aid Council, NAPTIP, Mirabel Centre, and state-level SGBV services until written agreements are signed. Cases involving threats, doxxing, extortion, or non-consensual intimate imagery follow an emergency safety protocol.
S5	Psychosocial Support Referral	Opt-in, trauma-informed referral to vetted mental-health practitioners and survivor-support networks. Psychosocial support is handled separately from public advocacy or fact-check publication decisions.

3

Operating model

Consortium governance

The helpline operates as a consortium service, not a new organisation. The model is intentional: a new organisation would consume scarce resources on registration, governance, and visibility-building during the very window in which service delivery is the priority.



Anchor partners (operational)

BBYDI and FactCheck Africa provide the case-management infrastructure, communications, and project-management spine.



Service partners (case-level)

CDD-West Africa, FIDA Nigeria, NAWOJ, the Initiative for the Advancement and Development of Women & Youth Leadership, and Rising Child Foundation contribute thematic expertise and case-handling capacity on a referral basis.



Technical partners

MyAIFactChecker (deepfake assessment), EVIT (incident registration), and NFC platform-relationship channels (takedown advocacy).



Advisory partners

international and regional networks including IFCN, APC, Policy, and the African Digital Rights Network for methodological alignment and learning exchange.

Access channels

The helpline is accessible through multiple channels, recognising that women in different parts of Nigeria use different platforms by default:



Dedicated WhatsApp Business number (primary channel)



Voice helpline (Mon–Fri, 09:00–18:00, with after-hours triage routing)



Email and web-form intake on a dedicated subdomain of yvotenaija.org and factcheckafrica.net



Referral routes from FIDA Nigeria, NAWOJ, party women's wings, and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

Confidentiality protocol

Confidentiality is the operational foundation. PII is held only by the assigned case-handler and is stored on encrypted infrastructure compliant with the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023. Aggregated reporting at the platform and regulator level uses anonymised case classes only. Callers receive a written privacy notice at intake and may withdraw consent at any time, including for retroactive deletion of case records.

4

Implementation timeline

The helpline provides five service streams, deployable separately or in combination, based on the case-handler's intake assessment.

Phase	Window	Milestones
Partner confirmation	Jun-Jul 2026	Confirm partners, budget, data-protection lead, service scope, referral protocols, and consortium decision authority.
Recruitment and systems	Aug 2026	Recruit and train case-handlers; deploy case-management system; finalise privacy notice, consent forms, and escalation templates.
Pilot and stress test	Sep 2026	Pilot with limited cases, test platform escalation, language coverage, legal referral, safeguarding, and reporting workflows.
Public launch and peak operations	Oct 2026-Feb 2027	Launch publicly; provide 24/7 digital intake with triage; weekly case review; monthly aggregate reporting; quarterly Digital Safety Index.
Evaluation and transition	Mar-Apr 2027	Post-election case review, impact evaluation, continuation decision, and inter-cycle handover.

5

Measurement and learning

The helpline contributes to two distinct measurement streams: operational accountability to donors and the broader baseline-to-endline measurement of gendered disinformation that anchors Outcome 3 of the project Results Framework.

Operational indicators

Number of female aspirants and activists receiving security audits (target: 50+ aspirants in pilot states)

Number of incident-response cases opened, by attack typology, platform, language, and state

Mean time from intake to first response (target: ≤4 hours)

Number of platform takedown requests submitted; number actioned within 72 hours

Number of legal and psychosocial referrals completed (caller confirmed contact made with referred service)

Caller satisfaction (anonymous post-case survey)

Strategic indicators

Quarterly Digital Safety Index documenting volume and severity of attacks against female political actors, anonymised at the individual level

Comparison of female aspirant withdrawal rates between served and non-served populations (where ethical comparison is possible)

Self-reported confidence in digital civic participation among Outcome 3 survey cohort (Month 1 Digital Safety Audit baseline vs. end-line Safety Index survey)

Ethical safeguards on measurement

All measurements are conducted under the helpline's confidentiality protocol. Aggregated reporting includes no information that could identify an individual aspirant or activist. The Digital Safety Index uses minimum-cell-size rules to prevent inadvertent disclosure of small subgroup patterns. Callers may opt out of measurement participation without affecting their access to services.

6

Risks and mitigation

Risk	Severity	Mitigation
PII exposure through service operations	High	Written privacy notice at intake; explicit consent before storing sensitive case details; separate consent before sharing with platforms, lawyers, journalists, or SGBV responders; retention schedule; breach-notification protocol; role-based access; no storage of intimate images unless legally necessary and strictly controlled.
Perception of partisanship in case selection	High	Support is based on harm, severity and eligibility, not party affiliation, ideology, region, religion, or electoral viability. Publish eligibility criteria, anonymised party-distribution audits, and non-partisan advisory oversight.
Caller safety risk on contact	Medium	Multiple intake channels, including end-to-end encrypted; secure callback procedure; option for pseudonymous initial contact while trust is established.
Capacity overload during the peak window	Medium	Pilot-plus-surge model; triage protocol prioritising active incidents over routine audits; surge partner roster; group clinics for low-risk proactive support.
Sustainability beyond February 2027	Medium	Open-source case-management infrastructure designed to be operable on minimum staffing in the inter-cycle period; transition plan agreed at the outset; integration with the Ballot Eyes Working Group as a longer-term home.
False or malicious reports	High	Use evidence thresholds before platform escalation; separate support services from public claims verification; maintain audit logs.
Non-consensual intimate image handling	High	Do not download or redistribute intimate images unless strictly necessary for evidence preservation and legally reviewed; use screenshot-minimized or hash-based protocols where possible.
Staff trauma and burnout	Medium	Provide supervision, decompression protocols, maximum shift lengths, and mental-health support for case-handlers.
Platform non-response	Medium	Track platform response times publicly in aggregate and provide callers with non-platform options including public rebuttal, legal referral and safety planning.
Political capture	High	Publish non-partisan eligibility rules and establish advisory review across party, regional, religious and civic lines.

7

Specific asks

This brief makes three specific asks of three distinct audiences.

Of donors and DDI/CIVICUS

1. Fund the helpline as a discrete entity to strengthen Nigeria's electoral processes ahead of elections.
2. Provide bridge funding to keep a reduced-capacity service operational from March 2027 through the off-cycle gubernatorial elections (Ekiti, Osun), maintaining institutional continuity rather than dismantling the team.

Of civil-society partners

1. Sign the Consortium Operating Memorandum and commit to a documented referral pathway and minimum case-handling capacity during the peak window.
2. Co-publish the quarterly Digital Safety Index to give it cross-organisational legitimacy and prevent any single organisation from being framed as the sole source of contested findings.

Of platforms

1. Recognised the helpline as an accredited reporting partner for gendered-disinformation cases involving Nigerian political figures, with expedited review pathways during the November 2026 – February 2027 window.
2. Provide a documented point of contact for case escalation, particularly for high-severity content (sexualized imagery, voice-cloned audio, doxxing).

Why this brief, and why now

One of the most practical high-leverage interventions for women's political participation in 2027 is to make civic participation safer before, during, and after attacks. A coordinated helpline will not solve gendered political violence alone, but it can reduce isolation, preserve evidence, support platform escalation, and connect women to legal, safety, and psychosocial help now of greatest need.

CONTACT

Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI),

14 Station Road, City of Refuge, GRA, Ilorin, Kwara State.

Lead contact: **Olufade Halimat**

brainbuilderedu@gmail.com | +234 806 358 9052.

Technical partner: **FactCheck Africa — factcheckafrica.net.**

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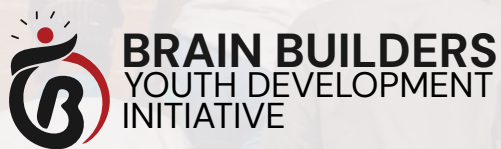
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Email: brainbuilderedu@gmail.com **Tel:** 07068775529

Nigeria Address: No. 12 T.O.S. Benson Crescent, Utako Abuja, 900108, FCT
2 Catchment Road, GRA, Ilorin, Kwara State

Cameroun Address: Yaoundé- Montee Jouvence, Patmos Church Street 8.560

US Address: 1301 S Bowen Rd STE 450 Arlington TX 76013

www.thebrainbuilders.org