

**CENTRE FOR
INFORMATION
INTEGRITY IN
AFRICA**

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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Stellenbosch
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CINIA

Centre for Information Integrity in Africa
IZiko leNgqibelelo yolwazi eAfrika
Sentrum vir Inligtingsintegriteit in Afrika

Introduction

The year 2025 marked the first full year in which the Centre for Information Integrity in Africa (CINIA), located within the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University operated as a fully visible and active Centre.

CINIA positions itself as a response to an era in which digital media and social polarisation fuel the rapid spread of disinformation and harmful content online. Its work is coordinated across three core pillars: advancing research on information, supporting investigative journalism, and enhancing public engagement and media literacy.

Within its first year, CINIA has already made an impact across all three these pillars. It has produced research publications in academic outlets, policy briefs and popular platforms; embarked on investigative journalism projects and convened public events and workshops while disseminating media literacy content in multimedia formats.

In addition to seed funding received to establish the Centre, further funding has been raised this year to strengthen CINIA's viability and ability to expand its activities further in future, to reach beyond the African continent to other parts of the Global South, through building collaborative networks and partnerships.

Appointments

Several appointments were made at the beginning of the year, in order to enable work in the Centre to proceed.

- Karen Allen was appointed as a senior researcher;
- Yossabel Chetty as a researcher;
- Daniel Roodt as social media and marketing coordinator;
- Abigail Cardinal as financial administrator.

These members work alongside Herman Wasserman (Director), Dani Madrid-Morales (research fellow) and ad hoc contract researchers recruited to work on specific projects.

Research Projects

The following research projects have been conducted this year:

- Resisting information disorder in the Global South: This year was the final year of a three-year collaborative project combining academic and action-oriented research drawing on the expertise of teams based in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada and led by Herman Wasserman as Principal Investigator, the project considered the drivers of information disorder in regions of the Global South and evaluated counter-strategies. The final project workshop was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in October and an open

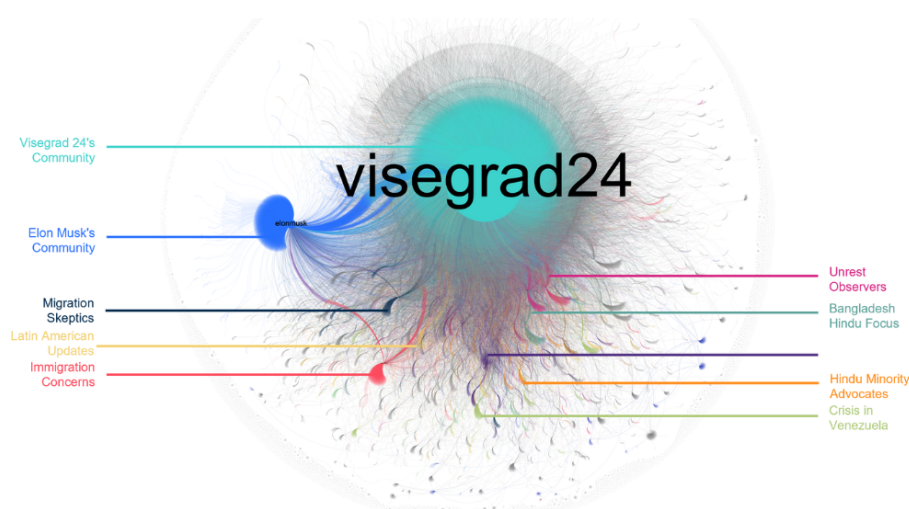
access, online publication with main findings is to be published by the end of the year. More information can be found at <https://idrc.sun.ac.za>

- A new, three-year project, supported by a grant of around R20 million from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), was started in August. This project, “Strengthening Information Integrity and Convening Strategic Partnerships in the Global South”, will run over three years. CINIA will act as a central hub to facilitate collaborations between various research organisations, practitioners and activists in Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Latin America and Asia. The first phase of the project involves a convening of partner organisations in Stellenbosch in January 2026, and online preparatory meetings have already started.
- A major book project, The Routledge Handbook of Disinformation and the Media, is underway. Edited by Herman Wasserman and commissioned by the International Communication Association, the book will provide a state-of-the-art overview of the field of disinformation studies. A first draft of the manuscript has been submitted to the series editors, and comments have been received. Revisions on the manuscript are now underway and submission of the manuscript to the publishers is planned for July 2026.

Investigative Journalism

Several investigative journalism research projects were undertaken, including:

- A report investigating anonymous accounts sharing xenophobic misinformation about African foreign nationals. Yossabel Chetty worked with an investigative journalist, Tabelo Timse, to uncover the spread of this misinformation narrative, culminating in a [news report published](#) in the Mail & Guardian.
- An investigative project in which a CINIA team, led by researcher Yossabel Chetty, collaborated with the social media analysis group Murmur Intelligence and Polish journalist Tadeusz Michrowski, exposed a Polish news aggregator, Visegrad24, whose former principal officer is heavily backed by Polish state funds and who used a US-based non-profit entity to push a global conservative narrative. The [report](#) was picked up by News24 and republished as an [article](#) that generated 115 comments from the public. The report led to a [further article](#) in the Central European publication Vsquare, based on the findings of the report.



Interaction network visualisation of @visegrad24's 'footprint' on X based on 212,791 posts (1% sample) by 144,439 unique X users between 1 May 2024 – 21 May 2025

- CINIA also drew on the expertise and services of experienced journalists to develop playbooks and policy briefs relating to information integrity. These include a series of blog posts by Karen Allen based on her engagements with the Thompson Reuters Foundation Trust conference in London and a private workshop

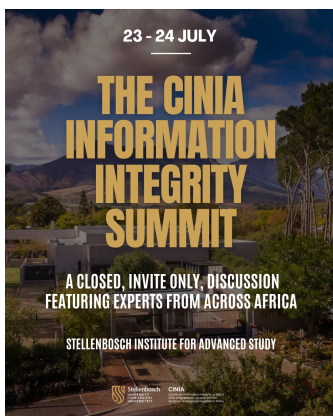
hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace examining the use of Russian Information Operations in Southern Africa; [a report](#) by Allen on journalism, press freedom and artificial intelligence highlighted by the Media20 (M20) stakeholders, and [an article](#) by Janet Heard summarising the M20 deliberations on information integrity aimed at influencing the G20 meeting of world leaders.

Public Engagements

Members of CINIA presented research findings at several academic conferences and participated in and addressed industry meetings. These include:

- The Thomson Reuters Foundation Trust conference in London (Karen Allen participated);
- The South African Human Rights Commission Disinformation Summit in Gqeberha (Herman Wasserman gave a keynote address);
- The Association of Internet Researchers, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Herman Wasserman participated in a panel);
- Symposium, “The Encryption Debate: Disinformation and Extreme Speech on WhatsApp, Telegram and Global Messaging Apps”, Munich, Germany (Herman Wasserman presented a paper);
- Investec Thought Leaders Lecture, Stellenbosch University (Herman Wasserman presented an invited lecture);
- The South African Communications Association (SACOMM) at Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha (Yossabel Chetty was a panelist addressing the commissioner of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights);
- Thomson Reuters Foundation Building Resilience in African Newsrooms, Cape Town (Yossabel Chetty attended);
- AI for Africa Conference’ hosted by the Presidency, in conjunction with the African Union and with the support of the G20 and UNESCO (Herman Wasserman participated in a panel on information integrity and AI);
- DW Freedom Talk: From encryption to influence – WhatsApp’s role in shaping public discourse (Herman Wasserman participated in a panel);
- Mediawijs Strategic Meeting on Media Literacy, University of the Western Cape (Yossabel Chetty participated).

In keeping with its aim of acting as a hub for fostering interdisciplinary solutions to the problem of information disorder, CINIA convened and co-organised several gatherings of researchers, civil society stakeholders, journalists and activists:



- The inaugural CINIA Information Integrity Summit was held in June at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies. The Summit featured leading researchers, policy activists, industry roleplayers and media practitioners to address pressing issues facing the integrity of the information ecosystem. Featuring over 40 participants, it brought together fact-checkers, researchers, journalists, policy advocates and other key industry figures. Present were representatives from organisations such as Meta, the Independent Electoral Commission, Media Monitoring Africa, the South African National Editors’ Forum, and the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies.

- CINIA partnered with several Canadian organisations to host a colloquium in Toronto in June on the topic “Reporting News in a Disbelieving Age”. This colloquium served as the launch for a [comparative project](#) led by Prof Ivor Shapiro (Research Fellow, Stellenbosch University Department of Journalism) and Dr Meli Ncube (Researcher, Stellenbosch University Department of Journalism) which will investigate standards of practice amid the crisis in journalism’s credibility.

An important part of CINIA’s public engagement strategy is marketing and communication. In 2025, CINIA has implemented a multi-faceted communications strategy, coordinated by Daniel Roodt. Five editions of the monthly newsletter [Under the Influence](#) have been distributed, offering a roundup of CINIA’s work. The newsletter currently has 135 subscribers, with the number growing as each edition is sent. CINIA has also released seven podcast episodes, four of which were produced under the rebranded title [For Facts’ Sake](#). Hosted and produced by Tebadi Mmotla and Charles Leonard, the podcast features interviews with industry experts on topical issues relevant to CINIA’s work. These podcasts will continue as monthly installments.



Alongside these efforts, CINIA maintains an active presence on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#). The content shared is a mix of CINIA updates, such as conference attendance, media engagements, and industry news. LinkedIn remains the strongest platform, with the page attracting more than 600 followers to date.

Members of CINIA have also appeared on television and radio. More details about these public engagements can be found on the website [here](#).

In order to further collaborative efforts, CINIA is spearheading a community of practice called the Digital Accountability Research Collective. It is a collective that is designed for professionals and practitioners who are passionate about shaping the future of ethics, policy, and accountability for social media platforms and artificial intelligence. The first meeting was held in October with a second session planned for December. The rapid growth of digital platforms and AI presents a critical need for research-informed governance. This collective will serve as a hub for South African based practitioners to; share insights and best practices on research into digital developments, collaborate on research and initiatives that promote digital integrity; and discuss and find solutions for the specific policy challenges regarding digital research in our region.

Publications

Publications produced by members of CINIA span a range of outlets, from conventional academic journals and books to journalistic articles and columns.

[Books:](#)

Udupa, S. & **Wasserman, H.** (2025). (Eds.) *Whatsapp In the World: Disinformation, Encryption and Extreme Speech*. New York: New York University Press.

Allen, K. & Nehring, C. (2025). *AI-Generated Disinformation in Europe and Africa*. Johannesburg: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Journal Articles

Davies-Laubscher, N., Madrid-Morales, D., **Wasserman, H.** (2025). Too aggressive' or 'slay queens': Gendered attacks, threats and disinformation in Kenyan elections. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*.

Madrid-Morales, D. & **Wasserman, H.** (2025) Cynical or critical media consumers? Exploring the misinformation literacy needs of South African Youth. *African Journalism Studies*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2025.2475761>

Gondwe, G., Madrid-Morales, D., Tully, M. & **Wasserman, H.** (2025). Misinformation and Digital Inequalities: Comparing How Different Demographic Groups Get Exposed to and Engage with False Information. *Mass Communication and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2025.2474139>

Moon, R., Hellmueller, L. & **Wasserman, H.** (2025). Introduction: The Future of Global Journalism – Relationships, Tools, and Power. *International Journal of Press/Politics*.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/19401612241311083>

Training

The CINIA website serves as a repository of resources about information integrity, including a [playbook](#) for detecting disinformation during elections and a [report](#) with findings from a project on disinformation in African elections and links to [research articles](#).

This year CINIA also provided dedicated training to students. Carina van Wyk, from the organization NetSavvy gave a workshop on disinformation and fact-checking to journalism students, a workshop on online safety for students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and a public lunchtime lecture on disinformation. Herman Wasserman gave a lecture on disinformation to students in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences.

CINIA also contributed to the administration of an online course, the Professional Certificate on Media and Digital Policy in Africa, which is hosted by the Department of Journalism, by providing a series of '[Info Bites](#)' summarizing key parts of the course and providing links to registration for the full course.

Postgraduate Research

Several MA and PhD projects related to information integrity, supervised by Herman Wasserman, are underway and in different stages of completion. Two PhD scholarships and one MA scholarship have been offered to students.

PhD:

- Ajibola Amzat ("Information disorder: Evaluating factchecking agenda during Nigerian election");
- Vuyelwa Sibindi ("Misinformation in Zimbabwe: Journalists' perspectives on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its implications for fact-checking");
- Pete du Toit ("An exploration of journalists' perceived potential to contribute towards sustainable peace in new democracies");
- Ellen Agnew ("Aestheticising algorithmic violence as a strategy for decoloniality in sub-Saharan Africa").

- Yossabel Chetty (“Using ethnography to identify existing literacies that can inform digital media literacy curricula in South Africa”);
- Daniel Roodt (“Beyond a traditional view of media freedom: How private actors are using strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) and information disorder-driven online campaigns to limit media freedom in South Africa”);
- Elizma Nolte (“How can AI contribute to Misinformation Literacy among WhatsApp users in South Africa?”).

MA:

- Joan van Zyl (“Vertroue in Afrikaanse aanlyn nuusmedia: ’n verkennende studie”);
- Siyavuya Mzantsi (“An exploration of African Community Media Journalists’ attitude towards Artificial Intelligence tools in their newsroom routine and practices”);
- Nande Mbekela (“Decolonising the Algorithm: How Iliso Labantu News and Dizindaba Navigate Visibility in South Africa’s Platform-Dependent Media Landscape”);
- Estel de Beer (“The Fight for Credibility: Afrikaans Journalists’ Perceptions of Their Role in Addressing Disinformation”).

Postdoc

A postdoctoral fellowship was awarded to and accepted by Dr Safianu Omar. Dr. Omar is an Information Systems researcher and policy analyst specializing in digital governance, social media, and disaster communication. He holds a PhD in Information Systems from the University of Cape Town, where his doctoral research examined the role of social media in emergency and disaster response in Ghana. Dr Omar, a Ghanaian citizen, has however been trying for several months to obtain a visa to South Africa, and has had to postpone his arrival. It is still unclear when he will be able to take up the position.

Finances

Thanks to a generous donation by Mr Ton Vosloo, CINIA could start its work this year and lay the foundation for future work. Remaining funding from the IDRC project coming to an end in December 2025 added further financial support to ongoing work, and a new IDRC grant of R20m was awarded which will see a significant expansion of the Centre’s work across the Global South. Expansion of the Centre’s core team through an additional postdoctoral fellowship and more research capacity building are priorities for 2026.

Plans for 2026

- Tracking narratives ahead of 2026 local government elections, with a focus on xenophobia and disinformation about the Just Energy Transition. We are already working with a contract researcher to identify disinformation narratives, and partnering with the University of Pretoria’s Centre for Human Rights to convene a stakeholder engagement meeting on Information Integrity, Human Rights and Peace in the Digital Age, in the context of elections.
- As part of a drive to understand the impact of emerging technologies on journalism, we have secured funding from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung to undertake research to investigate the operational use of AI in South Africa’s newsrooms. The study will be the first deep dive into if and how AI is used to support daily newsroom tasks such as research, transcription, translation audio to text as well as editing functions including headline and strap creation as well as re-versioning material. The study will provide a baseline

assessment of what future training needs may look like and CINIA intends to explore partnerships in order to deliver this.

- A second study, commissioned by the Deutsche Welle Foundation is examining how AI is represented by journalists in South Africa and Kenya. The objective is to scope the sentiment, tone and subject matter of stories about AI in South African and Kenyan media, identify gaps in understanding the possibilities and perils of such technologies in a global south context and build greater situational awareness among journalists writing on these topics.
- There are ongoing efforts to try to develop a project to broaden access to AI factchecking tools – such as those offered by the UK based Full Fact - to support journalists during elections. Although CINIA was unsuccessful in securing a donor to apply this during the Ugandan elections of January 2026, there is scope for building donor interest in such a project for the South African local government elections in 2026. The French government will be among those being approached with France having a dedicated tech ambassador to spearhead this docket who CINIA is engaging with.
- Herman Wasserman has been invited to join a consortium led by Prof Viktoria Spaiser from Leeds University to bid for a EU Horizon Grant on climate disinformation. The bid submission is only due in April 2026, and if successful, the project will start in 2027.
- Yossabel Chetty will be applying to Meta for access to their content library on behalf of members of the Digital Accountability Research Collective. Community members from Rhodes University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria, the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), among others, have shared ideas for projects to focus on with the content library access.



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