DEFENDERS PROTECTION INITIATIVE

POLLICY

CONFIDENCE & SAFETY
IN EVERY VOICE

DIGITAL RESILIENCE BASELINE

# BASELINE REPORT 2026

## Strengthening Digital Resilience of Women in Media & Politics

BEFORE · DURING · POST THE 2026 ELECTION PERIOD · UGANDA

A baseline study of 20 women in media and politics across Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono.

01

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# OBJECTIVES



1. Strengthen digital safety and security mechanisms for women journalists and politicians.

2. Develop and roll out a psychosocial support referral pathway for survivors of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV).
   - Advocate for safe online and offline spaces
   - Convene women leaders to speak on lived experiences
   - Map the women's rights and media-support network
   - Strengthen links between women in media and women in politics

3. Conduct strategic advocacy to influence policy reforms and institutional safeguards.

4. Raise public awareness through social media campaigns and stakeholder engagement.

## FOCUS AREAS

### Digital Safety

Strengthening security practices and tools for women in media and politics.

### Psychosocial Support

A referral pathway for survivors of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

### Platform Formation

Building networks and coalitions to amplify women's voices online and offline.

### Advocacy & Awareness

Policy reform, public campaigns and stakeholder engagement on digital rights.

SUMMARY RESULTS

# AT A GLANCE

**18**/20
experienced online violence or harassment

**20**/20
use the internet — all via a smartphone

**17**/20
go online every single day

**14**/20
lack confidence detecting phishing attempts

**13**/20
never accessed psychosocial support afterward

**17**/20
unaware of any organisation offering support

### WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE

18 of 20 respondents indicated that they would use a confidential online platform for psychosocial support, and 18 of 20 were willing to participate in future social media campaigns on online violence.

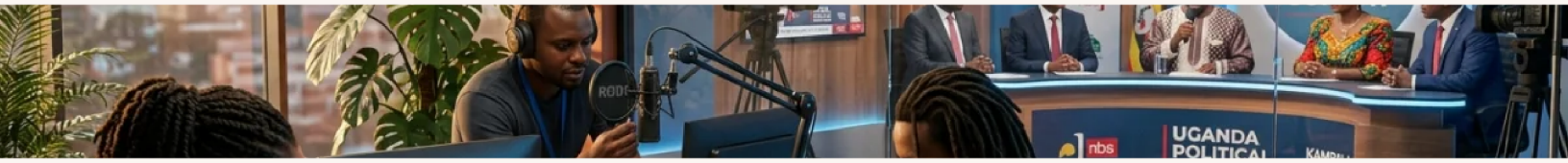
### MOST REPORTED FORMS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE




04

PART A

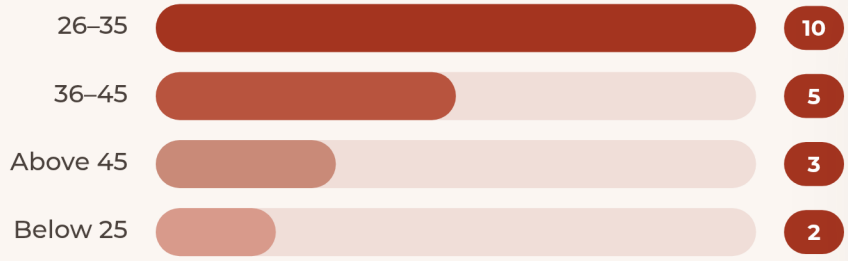
# BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS




01 · AGE

## Age group (years)

TABLE 1 · AGE GROUP (YEARS)

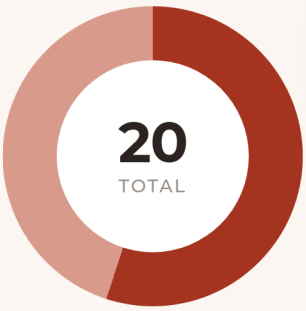



**50%**

Most respondents — 10 of 20 — are between 26 and 35 years of age, indicating a relatively young and active group.

02 · PROFESSIONAL ROLES

## Classification of respondents by professional role




Politician
**11**

Media Practitioner
**9**

Politicians hold diverse roles — mainly at sub-county, district and municipal levels — often combining political-party responsibilities with elected leadership. Media practitioners work across journalism, editing, producing, social-media management and media ownership, with several holding multiple overlapping roles.

03 · DISTRICT REPRESENTATION

## Primary district(s) of operation

TABLE 3 · PRIMARY DISTRICT(S) OF OPERATION

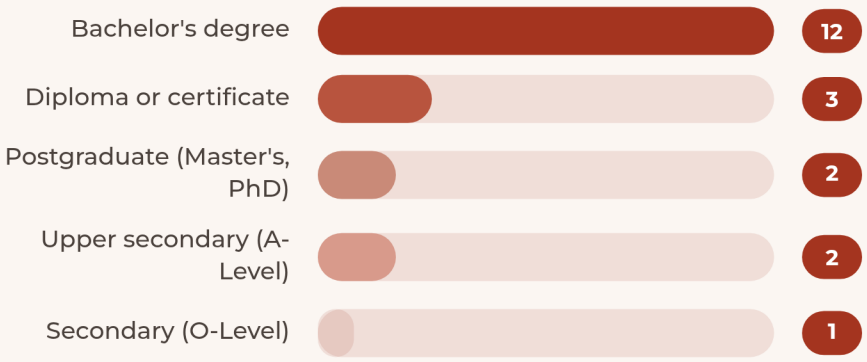



Respondents operate across three districts — Kampala (12), Wakiso (8) and Mukono (2).

04 · EDUCATION LEVELS

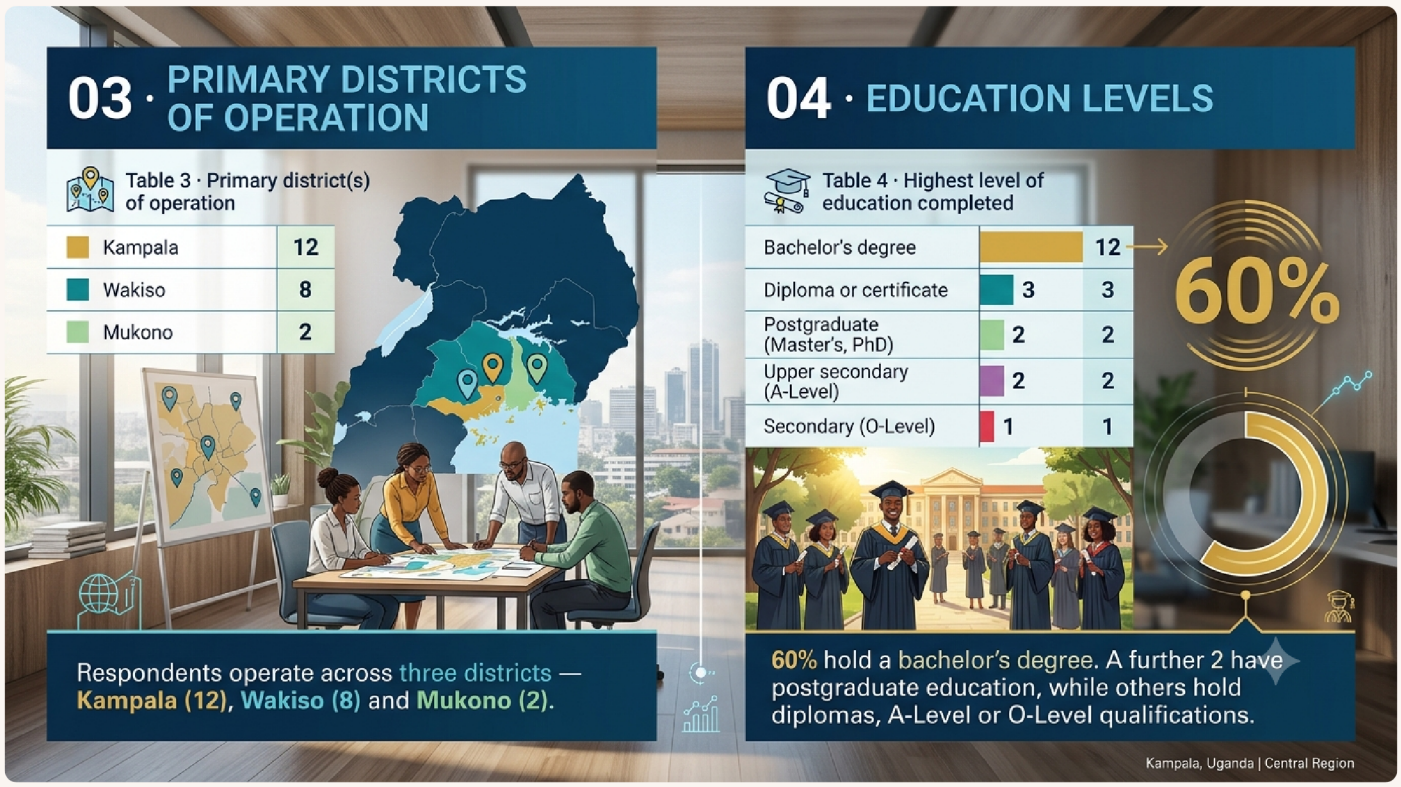
## Highest level of education completed

TABLE 4 · HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED




**60%**

hold a bachelor's degree. A further 2 have postgraduate education, while others hold diplomas, A-Level or O-Level qualifications.



# Current role for women politicians

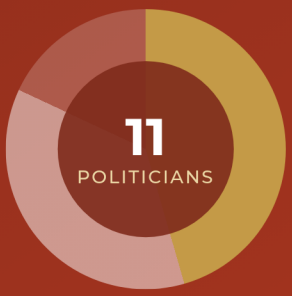
TABLE 5 · CURRENT ROLE FOR WOMEN POLITICIANS (N=11)

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Sub-county or Division Councillor |
| 1 | City Councillor · PWD representative, District Disability Committee |
| 1 | District Councillor |
| 1 | District Councillor · Aspiring Political Candidate |
| 1 | District Councillor · Party Leader (National/Local) · Party Member |
| 1 | District Councillor · Party Member · Aspiring Candidate |
| 1 | Municipality Councillor |
| 1 | Political Party Leader (National or Local) |
| 1 | Sub-county or Division Councillor · Party Leader (National/Local) |

Positions are diverse — councillors at sub-county, district and municipal levels — with several respondents combining party leadership, aspiring candidacy and representation for persons with disabilities.

PARTY AFFILIATION

## Respondents' political party affiliation




| | |
|---|---|
| National Unity Platform (NUP) | 5 |
| National Resistance Movement (NRM) | 4 |
| Democratic Party (DP) | 2 |

# MEDIA PROFILE

### TABLE 8 · MEDIA ROLES — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 25)

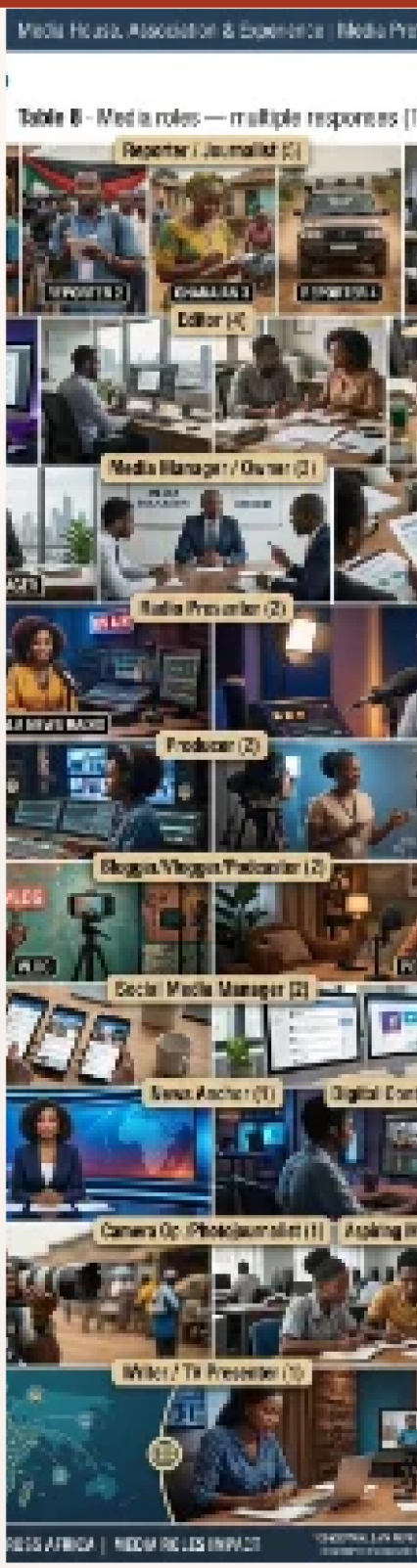
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reporter / Journalist | 5 | Editor | 4 |
| Media Manager / Owner | 3 | Radio Presenter | 2 |
| Producer | 2 | Blogger/Vlogger/Podcast | 2 |
| Social Media Manager | 2 | News Anchor | 1 |
| Digital Content Creator | 1 | Camera Op./Photojournalist | 1 |
| Aspiring Media Practitioner | 1 | Writer / TV Presenter | 1 |

### TABLE 10 · MEDIA HOUSES (N=9)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mama FM | 2 |
| Uganda Broadcasting Corp. (UBC) | 2 |
| Radio Sapientia 94.4 FM | 1 |
| Bukedde TV / Newspaper | 1 |
| Radio Simba | 1 |
| Msnews Uganda — online | 1 |
| Freelance | 1 |

### TABLE 11 · ASSOCIATIONS (N=9)

| | |
|---|---|
| None | 2 |
| UMWA — Uganda Media Women's Assoc. | 2 |
| Vision Group | 1 |
| Catholic Radio & TV Stations | 1 |
| Farm Radio International & Infonile | 1 |
| YouTube & TikTok | 1 |
| Posts, articles & images | 1 |



**25**

total media roles across 9 practitioners

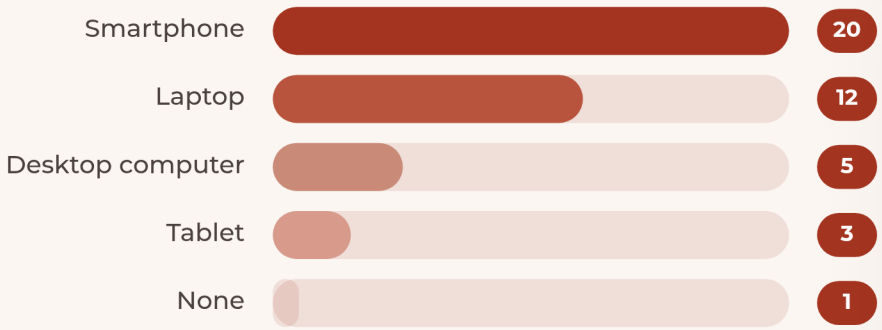
PART B

# ACCESS TO DIGITAL DEVICES & INTERNET USE

07 · DEVICE OWNERSHIP & INTERNET USE

## Ownership or regular access to digital devices

TABLE 12 · DEVICE ACCESS — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 41)

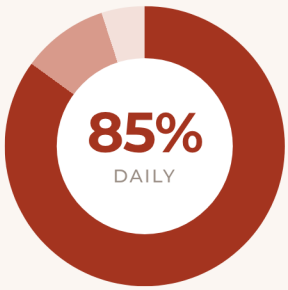



**20/20**

All respondents use the internet and own a smartphone. Laptops follow (12); desktops (5) and tablets (3) are less common. One respondent has no access to any digital device.

08 · FREQUENCY OF INTERNET USE

## Frequency of internet use




| | |
|---|---|
| Daily | 17 |
| Several times a week | 2 |
| A few times a month | 1 |

# PRIMARY PURPOSE OF INTERNET USE

## A Professional & Work-related

- Publishing stories online and conducting work-related research
- Uploading content on platforms such as YouTube
- Sharing field updates with supervisors
- Communicating with and booking programme guests
- Searching for media opportunities — awards, trainings

## B Research & Information Access

- Conducting general research using Google
- Reading local and international news
- Following political trends and programme updates
- Identifying story ideas and reading other journalists' work
- Academic research and studying

## C Content Creation & Engagement

- Creating content around business and politics
- Advocacy on disability inclusion and human rights
- Posting updates on social-media platforms
- Managing political content and programmes

## D Communication & Networking

- Using WhatsApp, Facebook and X for messaging and group updates
- Connecting with friends and family
- Engaging with constituents
- Networking and collaborating with colleagues and peers

## E Education & Learning

- Studying through online platforms
- Accessing learning resources and participating in online educational discussions

**20**/20

respondents use the internet — all via a smartphone, every single day for professional and civic work.

TABLE 13 · INTERNET USE PURPOSE

10 · BARRIERS TO ACCESS

## Reasons for limited or non-use of the internet

TABLE 15 · N=7 (MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

| | |
|---|---|
| Poor or expensive internet connection | 3 |
| Unstable electricity — must charge phones away from home | 1 |
| High data costs | 1 |
| Low digital skills | 1 |
| Safety or privacy concerns | 1 |

11 · POINTS OF ACCESS

## Internet access points

TABLE 16 · N=20

**12**

rely on a personal data bundle only (MTN, Airtel, etc.)

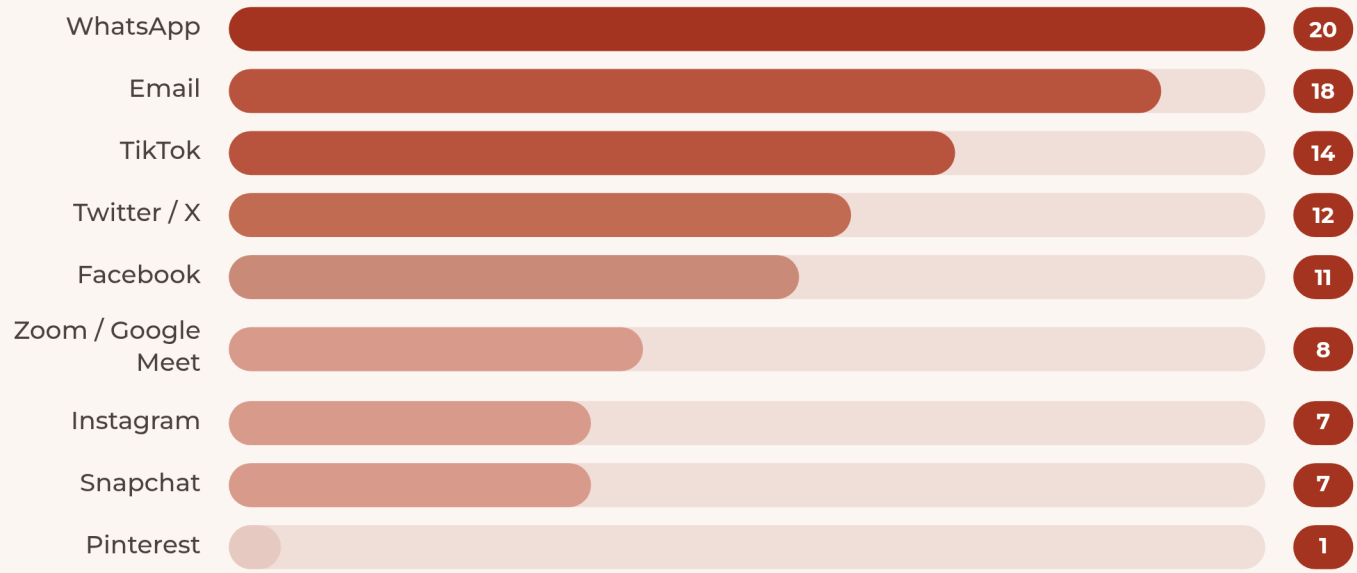
**8**

use both a personal bundle and workplace / Wi-Fi

12 · DIGITAL PLATFORMS REGULARLY USED

## Regularly used digital platforms

TABLE 17 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 98)



# Confidence levels in key areas of digital safety

Table 18 · "On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you in the following areas of digital safety?" (n=20)




### CONFIDENCE GAPS THAT MATTER

**14** low confidence in detecting phishing

**11** struggle to identify misinformation

**8** unsure adjusting privacy settings

**11** low or no confidence using VPNs

**11** low confidence with secure comms tools

**8** low confidence creating strong passwords

PART C

# ONLINE THREATS & HARASSMENT

14 · PREVALENCE & NATURE OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

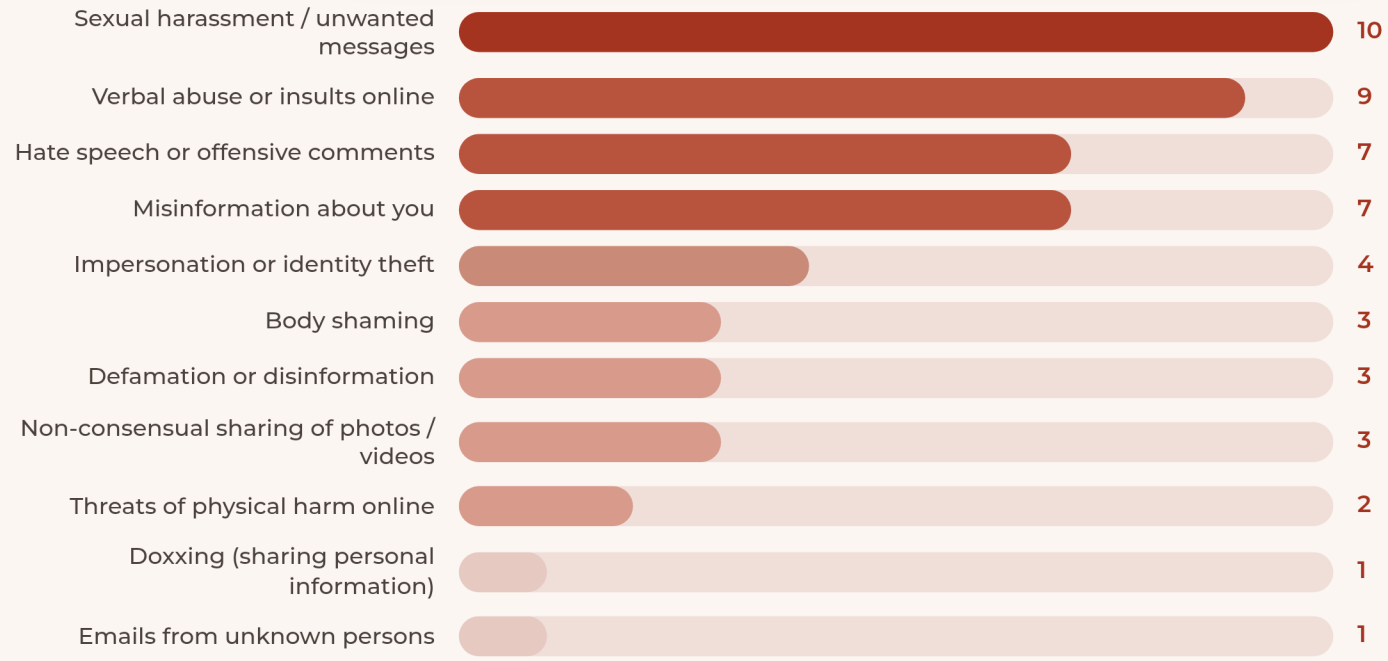
## Experience of online violence or harassment




TABLE 19 · EXPERIENCE OF ONLINE VIOLENCE OR HARASSMENT (N=20)

**18 of 20 respondents** reported experiencing some form of online violence or harassment. Only 2 said they had not.

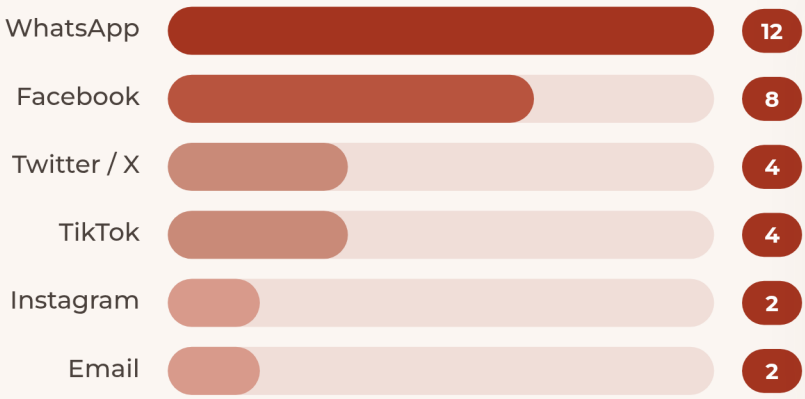
TABLE 20 · TYPES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 50)



15 · PLATFORMS WHERE VIOLENCE OCCURRED

## Platforms where harassment occurred

TABLE 21 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 32)




The most common platforms where harassment was experienced were WhatsApp (12), Facebook (8), Twitter/X (4) and TikTok (4); Instagram and Email had lower counts (2 each). Snapchat and Zoom/Google Meet recorded none.

16 · PERIODS OF INTENSIFIED THREAT

## Period of most severe digital threats

TABLE 22A · PERIOD OF MOST SEVERE DIGITAL THREATS (N=20)

| 8 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Before elections | During elections | No difference across phases | Not sure |

17 · THREATS ACROSS ELECTION PHASES

# Perceived changes in the nature of digital threats across election phases

Table 22b · Perceived changes in the nature, sources, intensity and targets of digital threats across the electoral cycle.

BEFORE · DURING · AFTER

## Before Elections

GRADUALLY INCREASING · COORDINATED BUT LESS VISIBLE

NATURE OF THREATS

- Disinformation and propaganda
- Cyber harassment and trolling
- Targeted smear campaigns
- Monitoring and online profiling
- Threats based on political affiliation

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Political party loyalists
- Fake accounts and bots
- Political activists
- Foreign digital influencers

GROUPS MOST AFFECTED

- Journalists
- Young political actors
- Women politicians and activists

## During Elections

VERY HIGH · REAL-TIME ATTACKS, CHAOS, EMOTIONAL PRESSURE

NATURE OF THREATS

- Verbal abuse and personal attacks
- Fake results and rigging claims
- Gendered harassment and doxxing
- Cyberbullying and digital profiling
- Attempts to discredit journalists
- Internet disruption or throttling

PRIMARY SOURCES

- State agencies (in some settings)
- Politically aligned cyber groups
- Opponents and political rivals
- Hacktivists

GROUPS MOST AFFECTED

- Female journalists and political candidates
- Media houses
- Civil society actors

## After Elections

MODERATE BUT SUSTAINED · DEPENDS ON WHETHER ELECTIONS WERE PEACEFUL

NATURE OF THREATS

- Retaliatory threats (especially toward losers)
- Mudslinging and mockery of outcomes
- Silencing journalists who critique outcomes
- Decline in political engagement with media
- Continued polarisation online

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Supporters of winning or losing parties
- Politicians avoiding scrutiny
- Polarised digital communities

GROUPS MOST AFFECTED

- Media professionals
- Losing candidates
- Politicians facing public criticism





## Additional observations

The threats are distinctly **gendered** — female journalists and politicians face sexualised attacks and threats that extend to their family members.

Psychological effects include **reduced self-esteem, emotional distress** and reluctance to engage online.

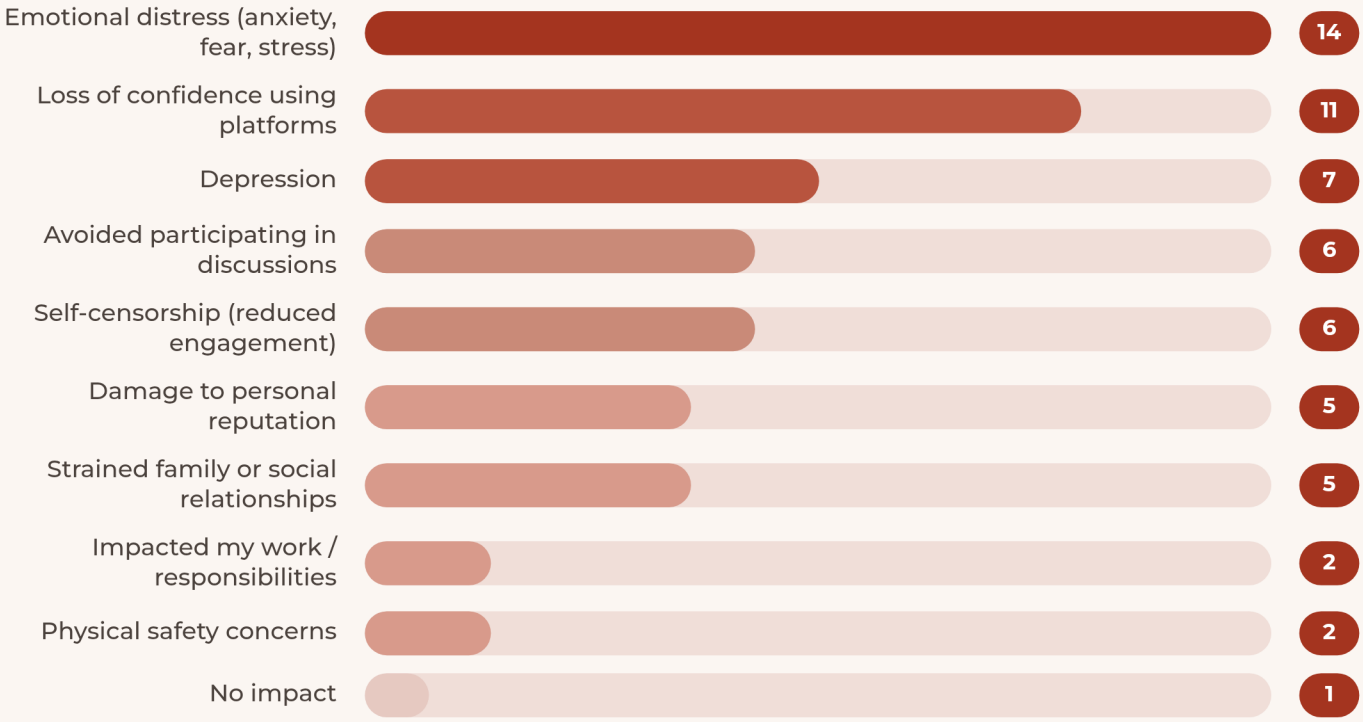
Threats have grown **more sophisticated** as technology evolves and new digital platforms emerge.

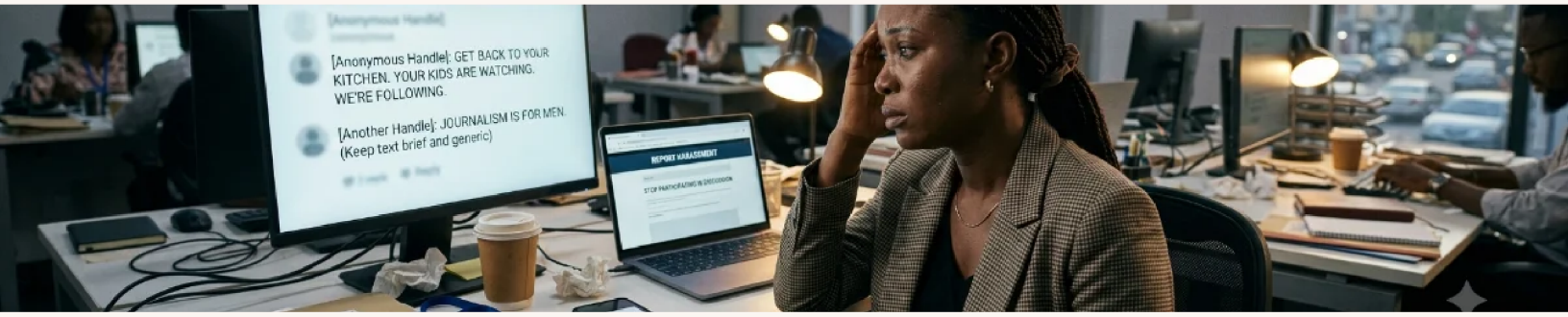
A pervasive **lack of trust** in online spaces was expressed by several respondents.

EFFECTS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

## Effects of online violence on respondents

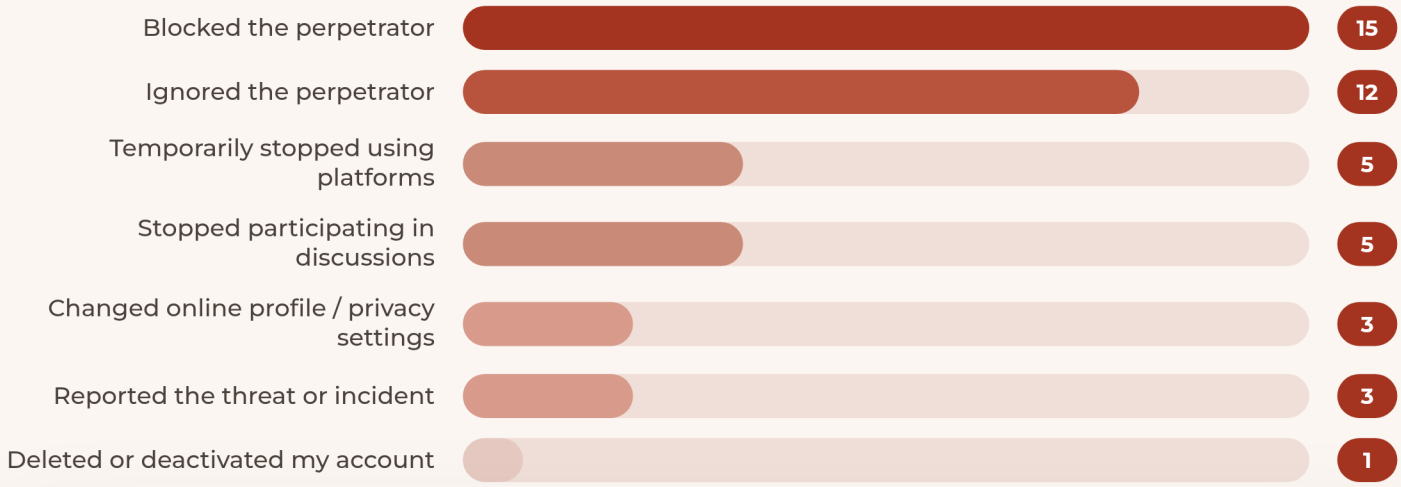
TABLE 23 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 59)






# Responses to online threats or harassment

TABLE 24 · RESPONSES TO HARASSMENT — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 44)

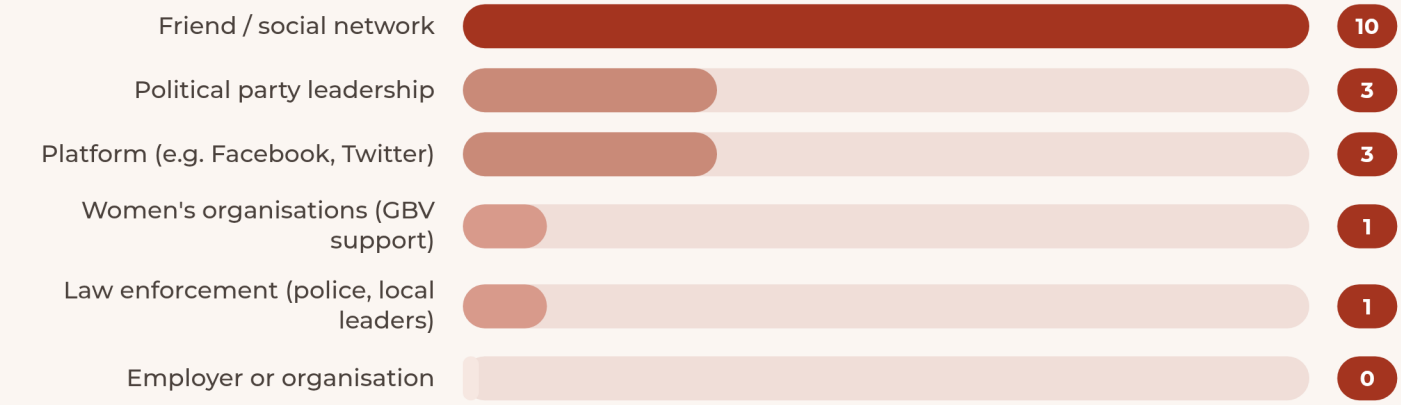


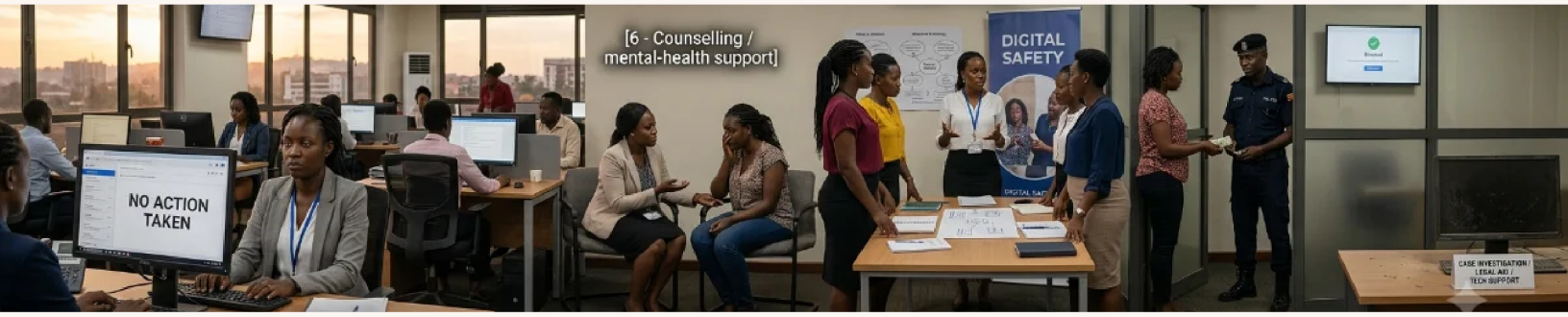

The most common responses were blocking the perpetrator (15) and ignoring the perpetrator (12). Five respondents temporarily stopped using platforms and five stopped participating in discussions, while only 3 reported the threat or incident and 1 deleted or deactivated their account.

WHO SURVIVORS TURN TO

# Entities to whom respondents reported online threats

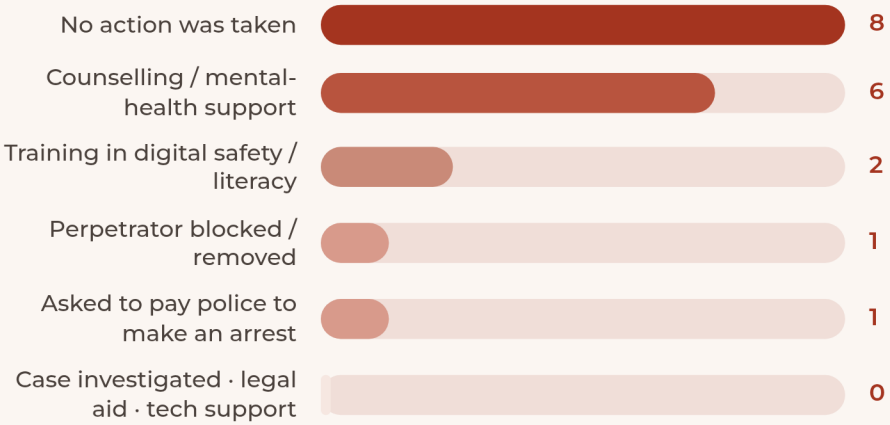
TABLE 25 · ENTITIES REPORTED TO — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 18)






# Support received after reporting online threats

TABLE 26 · SUPPORT RECEIVED — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 18)



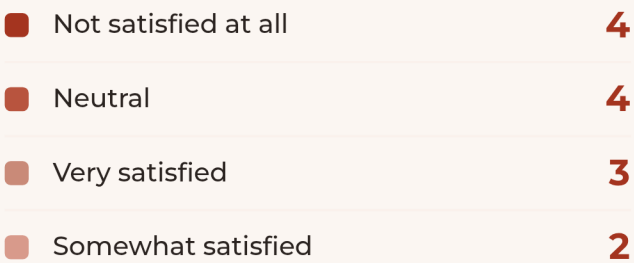

**8**

of 18 reports resulted in **no action at all.** No case was investigated, and no legal or technical support was provided.

SATISFACTION

## Satisfaction with support received

TABLE 27 · SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT (N=13)




WHY MANY STAY SILENT

## Reasons for not reporting incidents of online violence

TABLE 28 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 25)




The leading reason was a belief that **reporting would not help (6)**. Difficulty collecting evidence (4) and privacy concerns (3) were also significant; fear of retaliation, lack of clear reporting channels and lack of support were mentioned by 3 each, and only 1 cited cost.

PART D

# DIGITAL SECURITY & SAFETY

18 · AWARENESS OF PHISHING

## Awareness of phishing emails

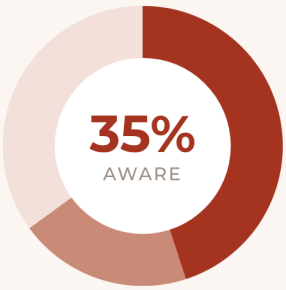


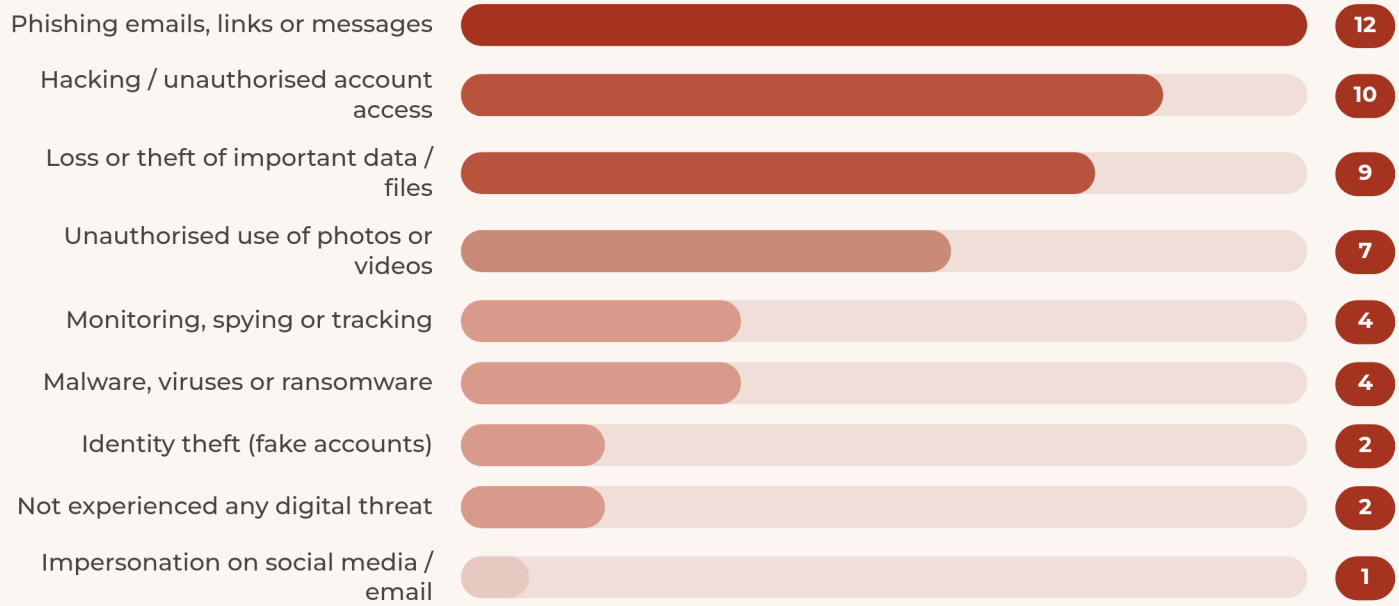

TABLE 29 · AWARENESS OF PHISHING EMAILS (N=20)

| | |
|---|---|
| No — unaware | 9 |
| Yes — aware | 7 |
| Not sure | 4 |

THREATS EXPERIENCED

## Types of digital threats experienced

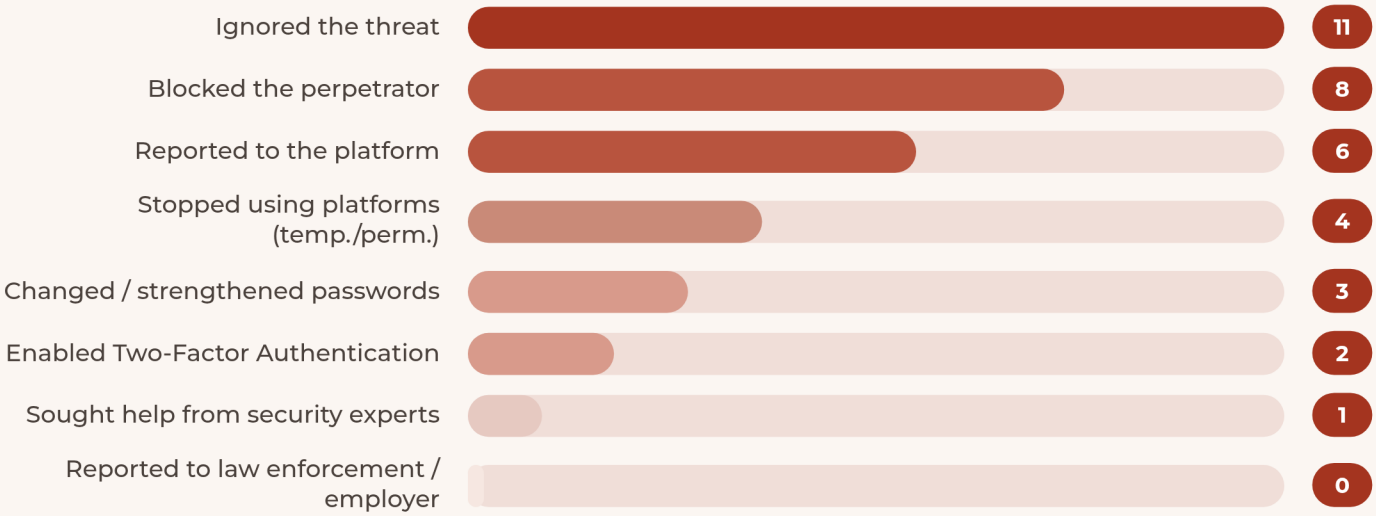
TABLE 30 · TYPES OF DIGITAL THREATS EXPERIENCED — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 51)



19 · RESPONSE TO DIGITAL THREATS

# Responses to digital threats or incidents

TABLE 31 · RESPONSES TO DIGITAL THREATS — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 35)




The most common responses were ignoring the threat (11), blocking the perpetrator (8) and reporting to the platform (6). Very few sought expert help or made security adjustments, and **no one** reported to law enforcement or their employers.

20 · USE OF SECURITY TOOLS

# Use of tools or methods to protect information

TABLE 32 · USE ANY TOOL? (N=20)

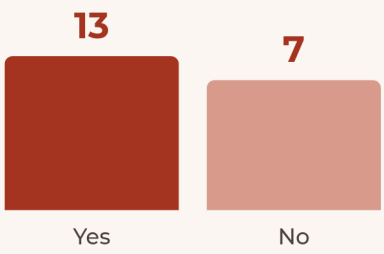
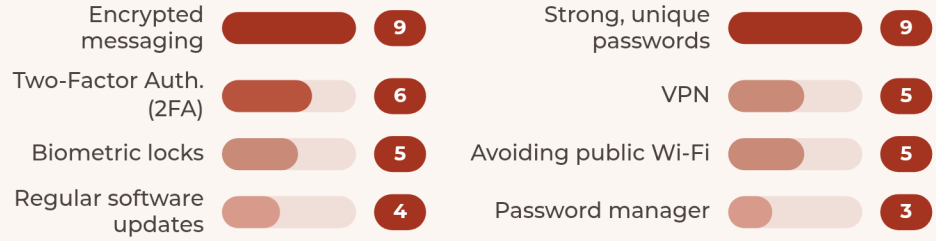



TABLE 33 · TOOLS IN USE — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 46)

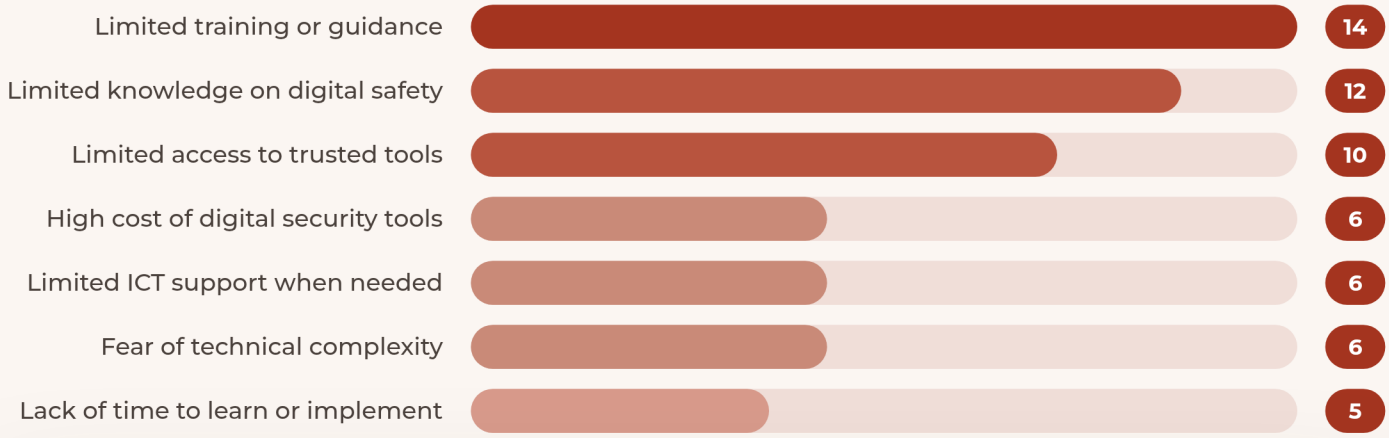



13 of 20 use some protection — most often encrypted messaging and strong passwords (9 each). Still, **7 respondents use no tools at all.**

21 · BARRIERS TO BETTER DIGITAL SAFETY

# Barriers to improving digital security

TABLE 34 · BARRIERS TO IMPROVING DIGITAL SECURITY — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 59)

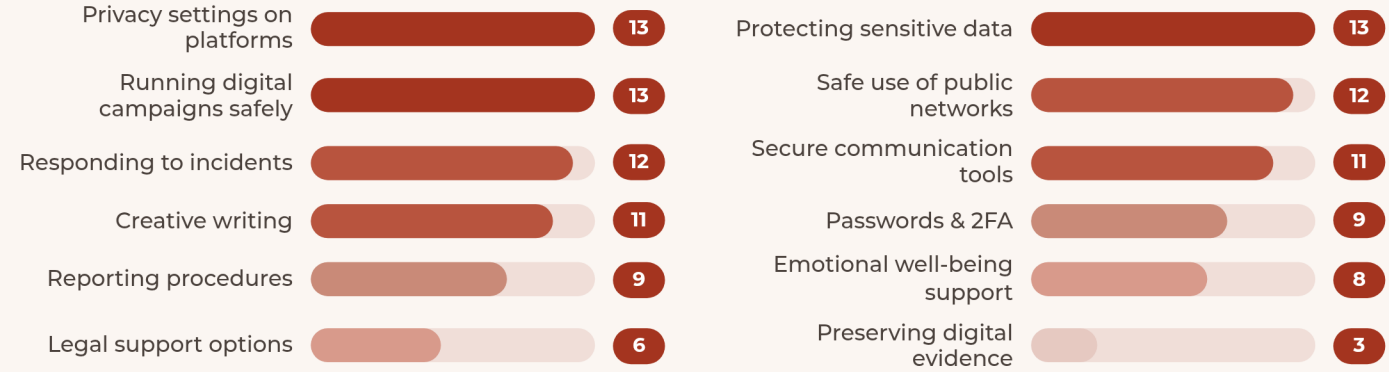



Major challenges included **limited training or guidance (14)**, lack of knowledge on digital safety (12) and limited access to trusted tools (10). High cost, complexity and lack of ICT support were also mentioned.

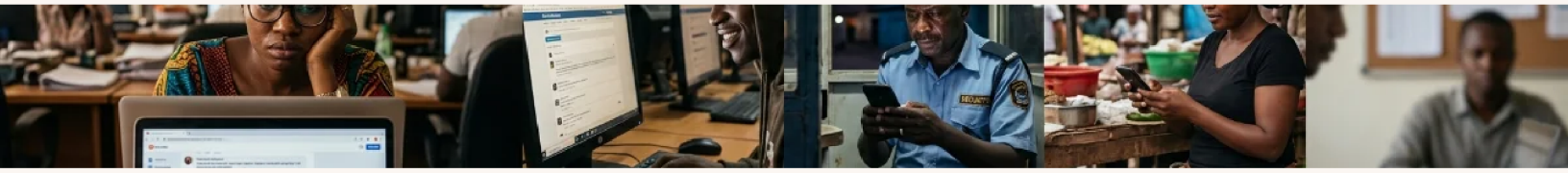
22 · TRAINING PRIORITIES

# Priority digital security topics respondents wish to learn

TABLE 35 · PRIORITY DIGITAL-SECURITY TOPICS — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 120)



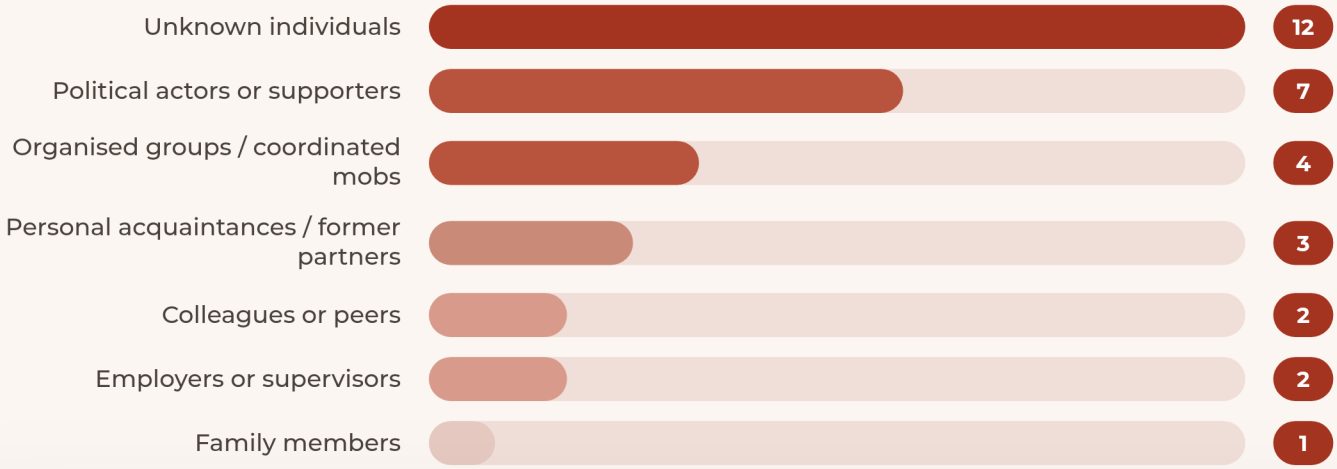
# PERPETRATORS OF DIGITAL THREATS



23 · WHO IS BEHIND THE THREATS

## Identified perpetrators behind digital threats and online harassment

TABLE 36 · IDENTIFIED PERPETRATORS — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 31)

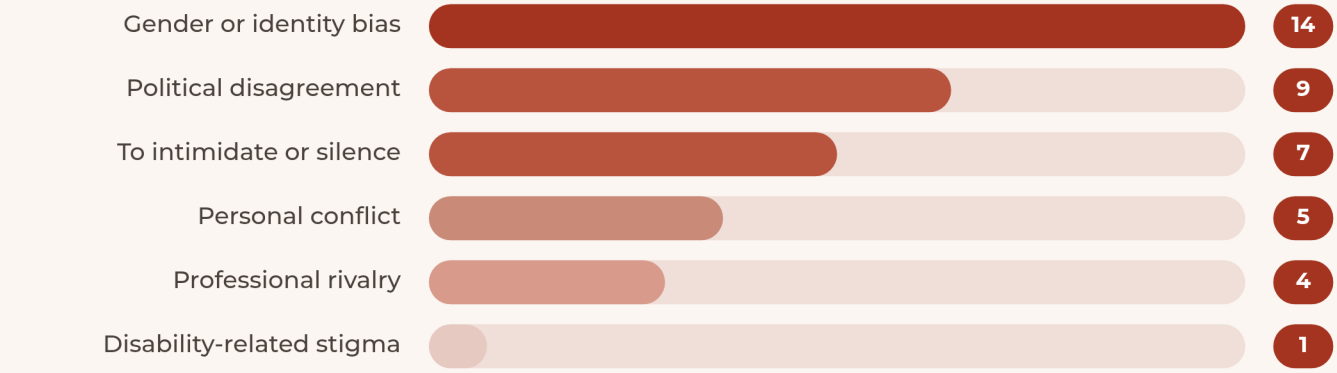



Anonymity shields most perpetrators — **unknown individuals (12)** top the list, followed by political actors or supporters (7) and organised online mobs (4). A minority of threats came from colleagues, acquaintances, supervisors and even family.

24 · PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS

## Perceived motivations behind digital threats

TABLE 37 · PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS BEHIND DIGITAL THREATS — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 40)




*"On my profile I indicated I am a 'hard of hearing lady,' they use this against me." Other reasons included professional rivalry and personal conflict; 1 person reported being targeted for being hard of hearing.*




PART F

# PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT & REFERRAL SYSTEMS

25 · ACCESS TO SUPPORT

## Access to mental health or psychosocial support

TABLE 38 · ACCESSED SUPPORT? (N=20)

| | |
|---|---|
| No | 13 |
| Want to, but don't know where | 4 |
| Yes | 3 |

27 · KNOWLEDGE OF ORGS

## Knowledge of support organisations




Table 40 · 17 of 20 knew of no support organisations; only 3 were aware of any.

ORGANISATIONS MENTIONED

Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda · Mental Health Uganda · Safe Spaces Uganda

26 · PREFERRED FORMS OF SUPPORT

## Preferred forms of psychosocial support

TABLE 39 · PREFERRED FORMS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 56)

| | |
|---|---|
| Safe spaces for sharing experiences | 11 |
| Peer-to-peer support groups | 10 |
| Online mental-wellness resources | 8 |
| Counselling services | 10 |
| Trauma-informed safety trainings | 10 |
| Emergency hotlines | 7 |

28 · CONFIDENTIAL PLATFORM

**18/20**

would use a confidential online platform for psychosocial support (Table 42). Only 2 were unsure.

29 · CONCERNS RAISED

## Concerns about confidential platforms

Fear of **privacy violations**, citing past experiences where private information had been shared publicly.

Doubts about the **security** of information shared through such platforms.




SECTION G

# ADVOCACY & SOCIAL-MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

30–31 · PAST & FUTURE PARTICIPATION

## Awareness, participation and willingness in campaigns

TABLE 44 · PARTICIPATED BEFORE? (N=20)

**2** Yes · 18 No

TABLE 46 · WILLING TO IN FUTURE? (N=20)

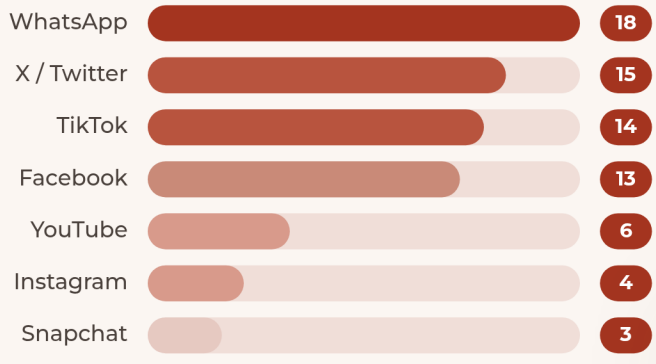
**18** Yes · 2 Maybe

Only 2 respondents had taken part in a campaign on electoral or online gender-based violence — one cited *"Creating a safer internet for children and women"* by the Brave Movement. Yet 18 of 20 are willing to engage in future campaigns.

32 · PREFERRED PLATFORMS

## Preferred social media platforms for advocacy

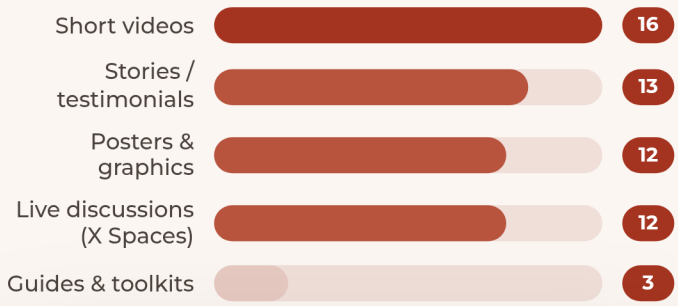
TABLE 47 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 73)




33 · PREFERRED CONTENT

## Preferred types of campaign content

TABLE 48 · MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 56)




Engaging, relatable formats win: **short videos (16)** and testimonials (13), delivered through WhatsApp and X.




PART H

# STAKEHOLDER & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

34 · PROTECTIVE POLICIES

## Existence of organisational protective policies

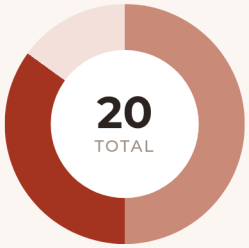


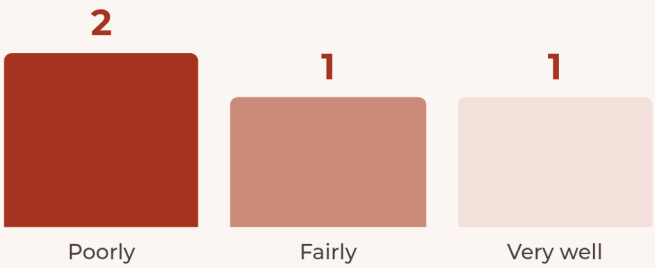

TABLE 49 (N=20)

| | |
|---|---|
| Not sure | 10 |
| No policies | 7 |
| Yes | 3 |

35 · ENFORCEMENT

## Effectiveness of policy enforcement

TABLE 51 · EFFECTIVENESS (ONLY 4 RESPONDED)




MEASURES OBSERVED IN PRACTICE

## Observed measures and practices

Although media houses and political parties largely lack formal written policies on online violence against women, several measures and practices were observed:

### Reporting & emotional support

Staff who experience online abuse are helped to report incidents to relevant authorities and receive moral and emotional support from the organisation.

### Policy in development

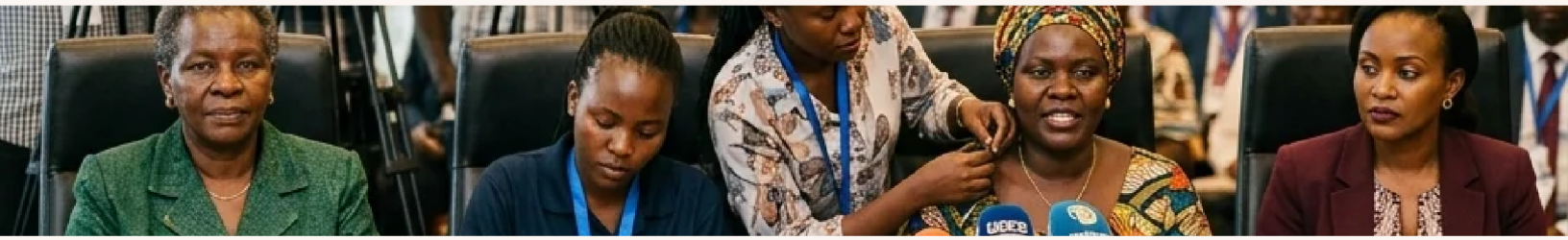
Discussions are in progress to establish a structured digital-safety policy, with a particular focus on protecting female journalists.

### Compliance with national law

Organisations comply with Uganda's national laws on cyber harassment and gender-based violence, and staff are encouraged to follow safe digital practices.

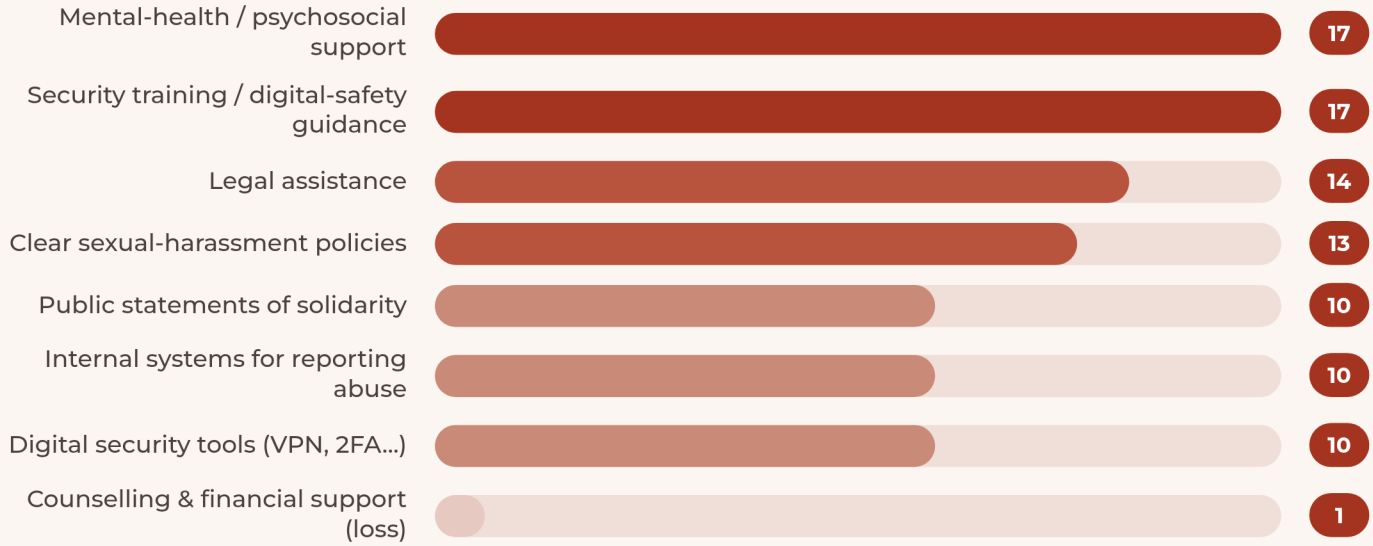
### Internal consequences

Violations carry internal consequences — for example, hacking into a colleague's account at the office is treated as a punishable offence.



# Expected forms of support from media houses or political parties

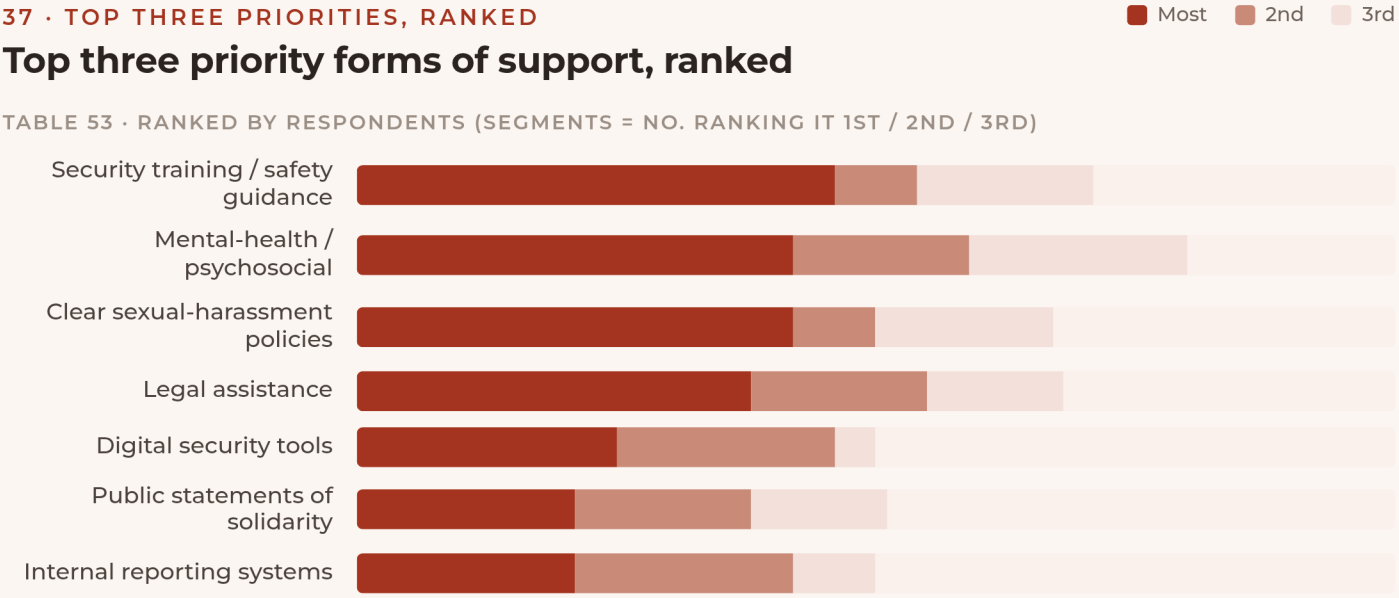
TABLE 52 · EXPECTED SUPPORT FROM MEDIA HOUSES / PARTIES — MULTIPLE RESPONSES (TOTAL 92)




37 · TOP THREE PRIORITIES, RANKED

## Top three priority forms of support, ranked

TABLE 53 · RANKED BY RESPONDENTS (SEGMENTS = NO. RANKING IT 1ST / 2ND / 3RD)




> *When asked to rank, security training and digital safety guidance was selected as most helpful by* **11 respondents**, *mental health or psychosocial support by* **10**, *and legal assistance by 9.*

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