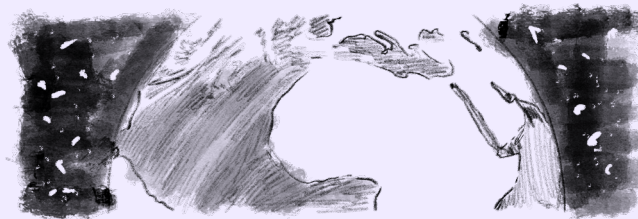

'2024: Year of Democracy' Inception Phase Report

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A. Overview



62 civil society organisations, experts and stakeholders meaningfully engaged, from MENA, Sub-Saharan African, Asia, Europe and the Americas



25 countries represented, including South Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mexico, Iraq, India and the USA



66% of campaign working group are from Global South



7 events hosted or spoken at

Timeline

April 2022
Global Alliance Against Digital Hate and Extremism launched and letter sent to Big Tech

June 2022
Workshop with civil society organisations to introduce 2024: Year of Democracy campaign

September 2022
Hosted event at Freedom on the Internet Forum in Africa (FIFA) to engage Sub-Saharan Africa partners

October 2022
Hosted event at Bread & Net conference in Lebanon to engage MENA partners

November 2022
Spoke at People vs Big Tech retreat about campaign

February 2023
Working group co-create campaign asks, Digital Action speaks at African Internet Rights Alliance seminar on platform accountability and the Nigerian General Election

March 2023
Campaign asks presented at global convening of engaged partners

May 2023
Webinar on corporate structures & influencing

June 2023
2024: Year of Democracy campaign launch
RightsCon Costa Rica

September 2023
G20 Leaders Summit, New Delhi

October 2023
Argentina and Pakistan General Elections

November 2023
Training & event at Bread&Net, Beirut

Training & event at Freedom on the Internet Forum in Africa

December 2023
Media events in US & EU

May 2024
European Parliament elections and South Africa General Elections

July 2024
Mexico General Election

August 2024
Rwanda General Election

October 2024
Ethiopia General Election

November 2024
US General Election

B. What is the “2024: Year of Democracy” campaign?

Since starting in 2019, Digital Action has gained a unique vantage point on the startling inequity that exists between regions when it comes to protections from harm by tech platforms - from disinformation, hate and incitement to manipulation of democratic processes. We have seen that tech companies headquartered in the global north - and the regulators responsible for them - are negligent when it comes to dealing with the impact of tech on the global majority. That is why in spring 2022 we refined our strategic focus to build an ambitious three year campaign plan with a global network of partners.

The campaign will launch in summer 2023 and peak in 2024, a once in a generation “Year of Democracy”, as over 70 countries are expected to hold elections. The list includes the world’s biggest democracies: the United States, India, South Africa, and Mexico; countries currently in active conflict, like Ethiopia; and countries where democracies are fragile and at heightened risk of a deterioration in human rights. When it comes to the widespread use and impact of social media across the world, 2024 will be the make-or-break year for democracy globally and a test for ad tech companies’ readiness to support free and fair elections. It is a potent moment of reckoning for tech companies.

This campaign is built around a theory of change that media and elite pressure in the US and EU can lead to increases in platform investments outside of those regions. It also aims to shape a cohesive global narrative and movement around which the next wave of globally impactful governance frameworks and enforcement is built.

“Ad tech companies that are based in the US and in Ireland are causing harm in every part of the world. We also know they’ve started to take some action especially on the things that end up in the press - but mitigation and accountability don’t seem to be reaching beyond a handful of wealthy, mostly English-speaking countries.”

Participant in Digital Action’s roundtable
June 2022

“Very few experts from the Global South get to engage with the platforms directly. If you are not looking at the platforms outside the US and EU, then you do not know what is missing.”

Participant in Digital Action’s roundtable
June 2022

B. What is the “2024: Year of Democracy” campaign?

Campaign objectives

1/3

To run an agenda-setting global campaign which increases the pressure on social media companies to take preventative and remedial action on electoral harms.

2/3

To support frontline partners in key countries holding elections in 2024 to reach global media outlets, by providing strategic support, building peer networks etc.

3/3

To shift the research ecosystem towards building a global evidence base of harms, and building the case for effective and equitable regulation of global impacts of tech.

Campaign goal

Major ad tech companies – Facebook (Meta), Twitter and Google/YouTube – being compelled to establish effective and equitable safeguards against the risks their products and policies pose in the context of elections across the world by 2024, the biggest and most significant year for elections globally this century.

Campaign asks

We demand each Big tech company establish and publish fully and equitably resourced 2024 Action Plans to protect democratic processes globally and for each country holding elections.

C. Inception phase 2022

Testing the appetite

In June, we kicked off the inception phase for the campaign by bringing together civil society, institutional and international stakeholders from Africa, the Middle East, India, Latin America, Europe and the United States. Over 30 organisations heard from thought leaders such as Katie Harbath, former Director of Public Policy at Facebook, Janet Love, Vice-Chair of the South African Election Commission and activists directly fighting tech harms around the world. The event demonstrated interest in collectively working to tackle platform neglect of the global majority and the risks to 2024's global election cycle. Pre-event, Digital Action prepared a [briefing note](#) highlighting the risks and opportunities of 2024 and we followed-up with a [private briefing](#).

Engaging corporates

One of our partners, Conscious Ad Network, approached us to facilitate the engagement of global civil society actors with Meta and with Google on global harms. We discussed the need for clearer definitions of hate speech, and their inclusion into company policies. In addition, in August, Digital Action and representatives of our Global Alliance against Digital Hate and Extremism met with Meta's staff working on their Dangerous Organizations and Individuals policy to discuss the policy and its enforcement.

Co-creating the campaign

We then produced a [formal campaign proposal](#) to consult civil society organisations. Ashanut Okille from the African Internet Rights Alliance told us 'collective pressure works and the focus on the company headquarters is important. I agree there needs to be more global southern voices, and the timing is good for the campaign.'

International advocacy in action

To experiment with how civil society partnerships could operate, we coordinated a [joint letter](#) from 26 organisations covering Africa, America, Europe and Middle East supporting Brazilian organisations' work to protect their elections. This letter was used by Brazilian civil society in meetings with META and Brazil's election regulator to demonstrate global concern for the role social media would play in the election.

“What happens in the North affects the South. Platforms are unbelievably rigid and refuse to see an alternative view or seek to take an alternative action that falls outside what has been agreed on in North America or the EU.”

Participant in Digital Action's roundtable June 2022, working in the Global South

C. Inception phase 2022

Building relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa

We held in-person events at the Freedom on the Internet Forum in Africa (FIFA) in Lusaka in September, co-hosted with Media Monitoring Africa, to discuss how civil society can work together to ensure social media companies uphold democracy and human rights during elections in Africa. We were also invited to speak at the Steering Committee of the African Internet Rights Alliance to discuss possibilities for collaboration in the scope of the campaign. We've since been asked for input into the development of a proposed study on political microtargeting in elections in Africa, and we spoke at AIRA's event ahead of the Nigerian elections.

Building collaboration in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The Digital Action team co-hosted an event with The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy to discuss digital threats to MENA elections and the campaign proposal, on the sidelines of Bread&Net in Lebanon. Attendees from Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Iran, Iraq, reflected on tech harms in past elections - including online threats to voters and candidates that were felt offline - and how platforms like TikTok have increasing influence on younger generations of voters pre-election. We are now working on a white paper to capture tech harms and platform failures pre, during and post election. This will be an evidence-based tool for advocacy with the media, the tech companies and governments.

Mobilising the European tech accountability ecosystem

We spoke at the People vs Big Tech's (PvBT) retreat about the synergies between the 2024 campaign and European tech accountability goals. PvBT has since developed a draft Action Plan including a strategic objective to amplify our 2024 campaign, and specifically the campaign launch mid-2023.

“Truth is we do not have a clear picture of how the companies spend their money...for example, in Brazil, Facebook is labelling posts for the elections, but they did not do that in France and we do not know why they made that decision.”

Participant in Digital Action's roundtable June 2022

D. Campaign activities in Q1 2023

Formalising campaign asks

We kicked off 2023 with a working group of 20 people from organisations around the world to develop joint campaign asks to the social media companies (and potentially government regulators); identify the needs for civil society actors in countries with elections; and assess what kinds of tools, assets, training and cooperation would help them. Participants in our first workshop joined from Nairobi, Beirut, Santiago de Chile, Ramallah, Cape Town, Mexico City, New Delhi, London, Vancouver and Alabama, amongst other locations.

Mobilising the coalition

The campaign asks shaped by the working group were presented to a global virtual convening in March to the entire network of organisations and stakeholders we've engaged with to date. This kicked off the formation of the coalition and how it works, laying down the building blocks for Q2 activities.

Identifying and meeting needs in the ecosystem

Throughout the autumn, organisations in Africa and the Middle East particularly have flagged that they want additional resources to be able to protect their elections from digital threats and engage fully in global tech accountability campaigning. We've been working on what resources are needed – the working group will be an opportunity to discuss them collectively with a representative sample of organisations. We've also been identifying the mechanisms we think could work to invest them into the ecosystem. We will be coming back to funders with a briefing on this quarter.

Media impact

Our behind-the-scenes engagement has planted the seed that 2024 is a pivotal year for democracy and global harms due to big tech. Influential people who we've engaged with in our Inception phase are already speaking up in media outlets, a sign of things to come.

📄 The Guardian: [“Brazil, Kenya, the US – tech giants are putting democracy in peril the world over”](#) 25/01/23, sponsored by the Bill Gates Foundation, op-ed authored by Odanga Madung

📄 POLITICO: [“Digital Bridge: What to watch in 2023”](#), 15/12/22, authored by Mark Scott, Chief Technology Correspondent at POLITICO, mentions the 2024 elections

📄 POLITICO: [“How Musk’s Twitter takeover is playing out worldwide”](#), 29/12/22, authored by Mark Scott, Chief Technology Correspondent at POLITICO, on the global consequences of Musk’s takeover featuring quotes from some of those we put him in touch with

Internationalising the delivery team

We've embedded four globally-distributed, experienced campaign consultants in the team, to support Digital Action with campaign delivery, while we globalise our campaigns staff through new recruitments.

E. Campaign launch and delivery

Campaign launch

We plan to launch the campaign in mid-2023, ramping up advocacy and media work through to the end of 2023 to set up the narrative and imperative of social media companies to protect 2024's Year of democracy across global majority they have hitherto under resourced and neglected.

Expanding our reach

To date, we've held over 35 bilateral strategy discussions and brainstormings, with organisations, networks and stakeholders in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and internationally, including networks like AIRA in Africa and People vs Big tech in Europe, regional CSOs like CIPESA, public mobilisers like Avaaz and SumofUs, large and small NGOs. There's a high degree of buy-in and co-ownership of the campaign already. This year we will be building on our outreach, to engage a wider group of organisations and stakeholders within Africa and the Middle East who've not been actively engaged with digital rights, but which deal with the consequences of online harms. We're planning a series of regional and global virtual convenings, as well as in-person events at RightsCon in Costa Rica, the Freedom of the Internet Forum in Africa and at Bread&Net in order to deepen ecosystem engagement and ownership of the campaign.

Campaign activities in 2024

The 2024 campaign will be based on collaborations and partnerships with global majority organisations: connecting partner's evidence gathering/ research eg along key themes and including, where needed, connections to training partners and the establishment of peer support networks, improving understanding of axes of influence and change in the tech companies, brokering media access to key global outlets, and lifting stories and voices through a global campaign and bridge-building activities, to embed the global harms narrative and need for action amongst decision-makers in the US and Europe.

Appendix

List of stakeholders Digital Action has engaged with

Africa

African Internet Rights Alliance
Paradigm Initiative
Media Institute of South Africa
(MISA)
CIPESA (Collaboration on
International ICT Policy for East
and Southern Africa)
Kictanet
Digital Rights Lab
Media Monitoring Africa
Digital Africa Research Lab
Legal Resource Center
Article 19 Kenya
Digital Society Africa
Pollicy
Africa Check
Media Foundation West Africa
Inform Africa
Electoral Commission of South
Africa
Digital Citizenship
Phumzile van Damme

Asia

IT for Change
Digital Futures Lab
Amber Sinha
India Civil Watch International

Europe-based

External Action Service of the
European Union
Forum on Information and
Democracy
Institute for Strategic Dialogue
Global Partners Digital
Internet sans Frontieres
People vs Big Tech

Global

The Signals Network
International IDEA
Conscious Ad Network
Ekō
Amnesty International
Human Rights Watch
Democracy Reporting
International
Global Witness
Global Project against Hate and
Extremism
Centre for the Study of Democratic
Institutions, University of British
Columbia
Avaaz
The London Story
Thomas Reuters

Latin America

Article 19 Mexico
Socialtic
R3D
Derechos digitales

Middle East

Tahrir Institute for Middle East
Policy (TIMEP)
SMEX
Samir Kassir Foundation
Iraqi Network for Social Media
The Syria Campaign
Jordan Open Source Association
Lebanese Association for
Democratic Elections
Arab Facts Hub
Article 19 Tunisia
Egyptian Initiative for Personal
Rights

US-based

International Republican Institute
National Democratic Institute
Equality Labs
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Access Now

Digital Action

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