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SitRep

Targeted coordinated influence operations

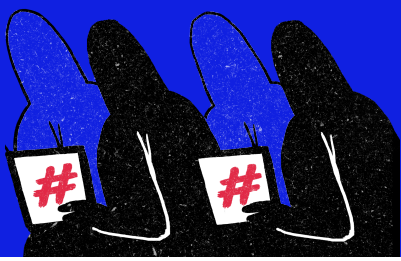
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Situation Report

Targeted coordinated influence operations



1. Introduction

Blood Parliament, a documentary by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about the killing of demonstrators in the protests against the Kenya Finance Bill in 2024, received more than 7.7 million views on YouTube when it was published on 28 April 2025. Between then and 02 May 2025, it received 43.6 million views on X.

The documentary, which used open-source intelligence (OSINT) and forensic methods to identify the victims and alleged perpetrators of the killings, prompted the hashtag #BloodParliament on X, which was used to condemn the government and security forces for the killings.

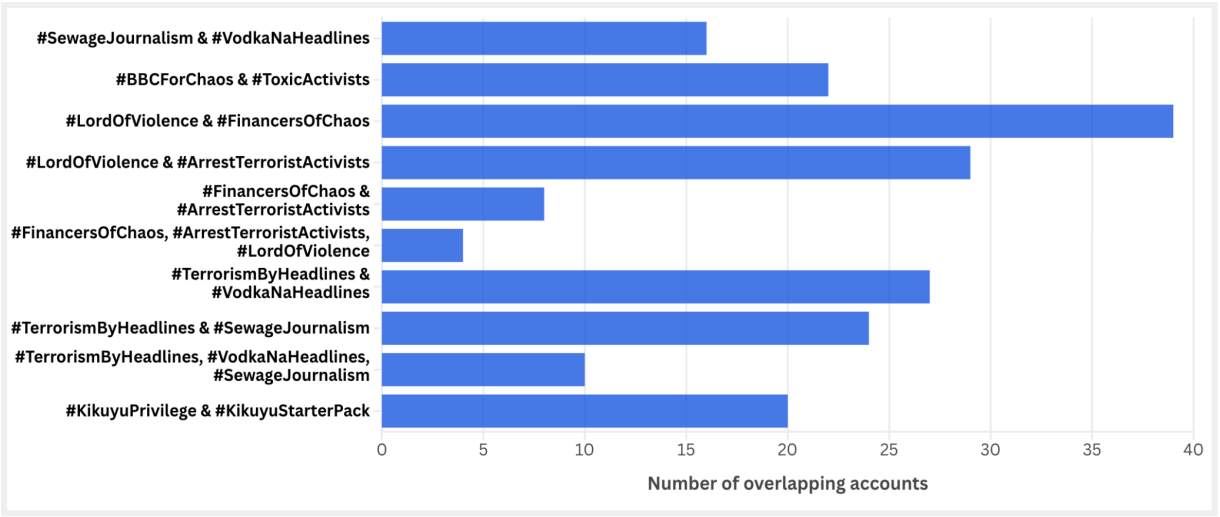
However, the conversation quickly transformed into a coordinated campaign against the BBC and the activists featured in the film. #BBCForChaos served as the campaign anchor. The campaign generated 16,639 mentions and 4.9 million views on X.

This is just one example on the digital battleground of Kenya's online spaces, where a wave of coordinated influence operations has swept across X from January to July 2025, targeting media houses, activists, ethnic groups, and political figures.

This report exposes a sophisticated web of disinformation campaigns aimed at eroding trust, inflaming divisions, and reshaping narratives ahead of the 2027 Kenyan general elections. From smear campaigns against the Standard Group and Royal Media Services, activists like Hanifa Adan Farsafi and Boniface Mwangi, and figures like former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua, to ethnically charged hashtags vilifying the Kikuyu community.

Out of the 17 campaigns highlighted in this report, analysis revealed significant overlap among participating accounts, indicating coordinated networks. For instance:

- Sixteen X accounts were active in both #SewageJournalism, which accused the Standard Group of biased reporting, and #VodkaNaHeadlines, which falsely tied the media house to Russian influence.
- Similarly, 22 accounts participated in both #BBCForChaos and #ToxicActivists.
- Thirty-nine accounts participated in both #LordOfViolence and #FinancersOfChaos, 29 in both #LordOfViolence and #ArrestTerroristActivists, and eight in #FinancersOfChaos and #ArrestTerroristActivists, with four accounts active across all three.
- Additionally, 27 accounts actively participated in #TerrorismByHeadlines and #VodkaNaHeadlines, 24 in #TerrorismByHeadlines and #SewageJournalism, and 10 participated in all three campaigns.
- Twenty accounts also amplified both #KikuyuPrivilege and #KikuyuStarterPack, highlighting perceived economic advantages of the Kikuyu community.



Graph showing overlapping accounts across campaigns (CfA using Flourish)

Employing the Disinformation Analysis and Risk Management (DISARM) framework, this report identifies 11 tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), from crafting viral hashtags to forging news articles and deploying AI-generated deepfakes.

2. Institutions or groups that have been targeted

a. Media houses

i. Campaigns attempt to undermine the Standard Group's credibility and independence

The use of campaigns has become a major tactic in coordinated online campaigns aimed at discrediting the Standard Group, one of Kenya's largest and oldest media companies, which operates The Standard newspaper and the KTN television channel. These hashtags accuse the organisation of biased reporting, acting as a mouthpiece for foreign interests, and spreading misinformation.

- **Kaswende media**

The earliest campaign, 'Kaswende Media', ran on X between 19 and 22 February 2025. It used the Swahili word 'kaswende' (syphilis) to label mainstream media as corrupt, diseased, and spreading harmful misinformation. The first post originated from @Weetu, a now suspended X account that had 59,697 followers. Posts accused media organisations, including the Standard Group, of misrepresenting Kenya's role in the war in Sudan. The campaign emerged amid international criticism of Nairobi hosting representatives of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, who launched a parallel government while in Kenya. The campaign generated 5,217 mentions, 1,702 interactions, and 79,526 views.

- **#SewageJournalism**

Between 22 February and 05 March 2025, #SewageJournalism emerged on X, amassing 5,731 mentions, 4,635 interactions, and 423,839 views. The first post was by @OleItumbi, an account belonging to Dennis Itumbi, the head of special projects and creative economy at president William Ruto's office, which has 2.4 million followers. The campaign accused Standard Group of biased reporting that highlighted Ruto's failures while overlooking his achievements. Many posts included the phrase 'Flush The Standard', with users sharing the newspaper's past headlines as evidence of perceived bias. These headlines, which cast the government in a negative light, were circulated to

support claims of the outlet's sensationalist, misleading, and agenda-driven reporting. Several accounts accused the paper of prioritising propaganda over factual reporting, claiming it lacked objectivity and was advancing an anti-government agenda.

- **#VodkaNaHeadlines**

On 04 April 2025, the X campaign #VodkaNaHeadlines falsely accused the Standard Group of acting as a mouthpiece for Russian interests for financial gain. The hashtag translates to 'Vodka with headlines'. Several posts questioned how the media house was still operating despite its financial difficulties. Some posts alleged that investment from the Russian multinational energy corporation Lukoil was sustaining its operations, while others claimed that Lukoil had become the media house's majority owner. Users warned that these alleged ties posed an existential threat to Kenya's media independence and democratic process. However, a review of Standard Group's official list of shareholders reveals no mention of Lukoil.

The campaign generated 5,760 mentions, 5,882 interactions, and 249,046 views and was amplified by 18 accounts. Seven accounts from this network published more than 110 posts using the hashtag on 04 April 2025. One account posted 23 original posts and amplified the hashtag's reach with 279 reposts, all within 24 hours.

The campaign also spread the narrative that the Standard Group's critical coverage of Ruto was part of a Russian-backed covert agenda to support a supposed 2027 presidential bid of former senator Gideon Moi, whose family is the Standard Group's majority owner.

Other posts alleged that former Standard Group journalists had staged demonstrations outside the company's offices over unpaid salaries and being coerced into pushing anti-government narratives. Some users, falsely citing ex-Standard Group journalists, claimed that the organisation had received substantial payments from political actors to drive particular storylines.

The controversy intensified after the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) on 15 April 2025 announced that it had initiated proceedings to revoke Standard Group's broadcasting licences. It said the move was prompted by Standard Group's failure to remit necessary licence fees and levies. However, the media house decried the move as an attack on press freedom and a retaliation against its critical coverage of the Kenya Kwanza administration. On 16 April 2025, the Communications and Multimedia Appeals Tribunal temporarily halted the CA's decision pending a hearing. As of 09 September 2025, the matter appeared unresolved, with the tribunal's final decision still pending.

- **#TerrorismByHeadlines**

On 24 July 2025, the coordinated X campaign under the hashtag #TerrorismByHeadlines accused The Standard of sensationalism, spreading misinformation and using fear-driven reporting to divide audiences and incite unrest.

The hashtag had 4,181 mentions, an engagement of 5,784 and 109,917 views. The account @KenyaWeWant_ published the patient zero post, which accused The Standard of publishing targeted, sensational headlines that undermine journalistic standards and aim to 'bring the country down'. The post contained three images (1, 2, 3) of headlines published by The Standard, all criticising Ruto, his administration or close associates. It received an engagement of 53 and 8,828 views.

The account made a total of 24 posts (1, 2, 3) using the hashtag on 24 and 25 July 2025, which received an engagement of 93 and 11,000 views – approximately 9.02% of the total views the hashtag received. At least 85 posts mentioned The Standard and the term 'misinformation.'

One of the posts claimed that Ruto had performed well as president but The Standard was 'working overtime to bury [his] progress under a flood of misinformation'. The post also said: '#TerrorismByHeadlines has become the tool of choice; spreading fear, twisting facts, and fuelling public anxiety. This is not journalism. It is a deliberate disruption. Kenyans must reject emotional manipulation and demand a media culture grounded in truth and responsibility.'

Another X post described misinformation as the deadliest weapon in the digital age and accused The Standard of knowingly spreading it daily. One user criticised the outlet for citing vague 'sources close to…' without presenting facts, while another claimed that it was using misinformation to 'sell fear'.

ii. #SwitchOffRoyalMedia pushes for closure of RMS

Between 20 and 23 February 2025, #SwitchOffRoyalMedia trended on X, accusing Royal Media Services (RMS), one of Kenya's largest media companies, of illegally operating frequencies acquired in 2003. Posts featured terms like 'unauthorised', 'RMS', 'frequency' and 'broadcast', arguing RMS held an unfair advantage. The campaign generated 2,768 mentions, 770 interactions, and 103,285 views. @plambakim, an account without followers, made the initial post.

Users of the hashtag highlighted concerns about fairness, transparency and accountability in media operations. They also urged regulatory authorities to enforce compliance by shutting down RMS's reportedly unauthorised broadcasts, stating that no media house should operate above the law. Notably, in February 2013, the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) shut down 17 RMS transmitters including Nanyuki, Narok, Migori, Nakuru, and Mwingi, claiming they were 'self-assigned frequencies' that interfered with aircraft signals. The move, which occurred during an election period, was framed by RMS as politically motivated. This action came just weeks before a general election, and with RMS owner S.K. Macharia openly supporting opposition leader Raila Odinga, election observers argued the shutdown resulted in RMS journalists being unable to carry out their work freely, as they faced heightened obstruction and intimidation from rival political supporters who perceived them as biased. While a High Court temporarily halted CCK's actions, the government and the CCK defended the decision as a legal and safety measure.

RMS continues to face accusations of being critical of the government, making it a recurring target of politically charged campaigns.

iii. Campaign attacks BBC following release of 'Blood Parliament' documentary

The BBC's 'Blood Parliament' documentary investigates the fatal shootings of demonstrators during the protests against the Kenya Finance Bill 2024 on 25 June 2024. Protesters marching towards parliament encountered a heavy police and army force, which used tear gas, batons, and gunfire, resulting in multiple deaths. No one has been held accountable so far.

The documentary uses open-source intelligence (OSINT) and forensic methods to identify the victims and alleged perpetrators of the killings. It features testimonies from student journalist Allans Ademba, activists Hanifa Adan Farsafi and Boniface Mwangi, Law Society of Kenya president Faith Odhiambo, and Embakasi East member of parliament (MP) Babu Owino, who speak as frontline participants, responders, or witnesses.

Between 28 April and 02 May 2025, the documentary received 288,966 mentions and 43.6 million views on X. On Facebook, 147 posts mentioned it, generating 28,129 views and 2,816 interactions. Most users expressed sadness over the events depicted and urged others to watch the film. On YouTube, where it was originally published, the documentary received more than 7.7 million views and 238,841 engagements.

The documentary prompted the hashtag #BloodParliament on X, appearing in 169,566 mentions and drawing 21.8 million views. Posts using the hashtag condemned the government and security forces over the killings. However, the conversation quickly shifted as a coordinated campaign against the BBC and the activists featured in the documentary emerged. It featured counter-hashtags such as #ArrestBabuOwino, #BabuOwinoMustPay, #BBCForChaos, and #ToxicActivists. #BBCForChaos served as the campaign's anchor.

X user @ke_mtaani published the first post featuring the hashtag on 28 April 2025. #BBCForChaos was used with the other three hashtags between 28 April and 01 May 2025 to amplify narratives framing the documentary as foreign interference attacking the government and propaganda. The campaign generated 16,639 mentions and 4.9 million views on X.

Some posts using the hashtag accused the BBC of pushing a foreign-sponsored agenda aimed at inciting unrest and undermining Kenya's military. These users further claimed that the documentary was part of a broader 'media invasion' by Western outlets ahead of the tabling of the Finance Bill 2025 on 30 April 2025. Some posts called for the banning of international media outlets and non-governmental organisations operating in the country. Other posts framed the documentary as an 'intentional provocation' by Western powers in response to Ruto's deepening diplomatic and trade ties with China, which include major infrastructure deals and trade agreements. Thirty-five posts referenced these claims. Some users questioned the timing of the documentary's release and its motives, while others labelled it as 'ill-driven'.

b. Activists

i. #ToxicActivists

After the release of the Blood Parliament documentary, between 28 and 30 April 2025, the coordinated X hashtag #ToxicActivists targeted Farsafi and Mwangi, who featured in the documentary. Some X users dismissed the documentary as commercially driven activism by the two.

#ToxicActivists also portrayed local civil society and protest figures, including Farsafi and Mwangi, as willing collaborators with malicious external actors, who are driven by donor funding. An X user, @ojiamborashid, published the first post featuring the hashtag on 28 April 2025, which received 98 views and five engagements. The hashtag campaign, which frequently appeared alongside #BabuOwinoMustPay and #BBCForChaos, generated 992 mentions, 2,190 interactions and 366,932 views on X.

ii. Activists' arrest incident

Several Kenyan nationals were arrested and deported from Tanzania while attempting to attend the treason trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu between 18 and 23 May 2025. Among those detained were Kenyan human rights activist, Hanifa Adan; the former chief justice of Kenya, Willy Mutunga; the executive director of the civil society organisation Haki Africa, Hussein Khalid; senior Kenyan politician and former justice minister Martha Karua; a lawyer and media personality, Lynn Ngugi; and a Kenyan constitutional lawyer, Gloria Kimani. Ugandan lawyer and media rights advocate, Agather Atuhaire, and renowned Kenyan photojournalist and activist Mwangi were allegedly abducted in

Tanzania, subjected to torture and sexual assault, and later found near the borders of their respective countries.

Between 17 and 28 May 2025, conversations around this incident generated 131,728 mentions, 32.7 million views and 943,959 engagements on X.

A coordinated hashtag campaign, #DogsOfWar, emerged on X, generating 6,754 mentions and 731,150 views between 21 and 24 May 2025. The hashtag was used to push the narratives that activists were being supported by a foreign-funded network trying to sow unrest in East Africa.

The account @Trini_Mx, which has 14,823 followers, made the first post using the hashtag. Posts advancing this line of messaging generated 3,217 mentions, 289,639 views, and 3,948 engagements.

Between 25 June and 12 July 2025, a coordinated network of X posts pushed disinformation campaigns under the hashtags #FinancersOfChaos and #ArrestTerroristActivists, targeting civil society leaders, protest organisers, and journalists. These campaigns framed activists and media houses as foreign-funded agitators responsible for violence during the protests and as violent aggressors against law enforcement. The hashtag was coupled with sensational imagery showing people covered with blood, other images with flames, vampire fangs.

The hashtag #FinancersOfChaos generated 5,510 mentions, 59,600 views, and 4,750 engagements on X, while #ArrestTerroristActivists drew 3,439 mentions, 299,663 views, and 5,547 engagements. Facebook also carried 10 posts under these hashtags with 17,288 views and 338 interactions.

The campaigns targeted prominent activists, including Mwangi, Farsafi, Wanjira Wanjiru, Hussein Khalid, and Khelef Khalifa, accusing them of channelling foreign funds to incite unrest and vandalism. Between 25 June and 11 July, such claims totalled 1,016 mentions, 130,325 views, and 1,888 engagements on X. Posts linking them to donor funds added another 153 mentions, 41,365 views, and 340 engagements.

iii. Youth-led protests are designed to destabilise Kenya

On 24 July 2025, there was a noticeable spike in a coordinated campaign promoting pro-government narratives. The campaign, #RejectAnarchists, emerged in reaction to the June 2025 protests.

The #RejectAnarchists campaign generated 3,515 mentions on X, reaching 22,625 views and 3,100 engagements. Posts using the hashtag portrayed the protests as attention-seeking acts of destruction rather than genuine calls for reform, alleging they were driven by ‘powerful elites’ exploiting tribal and political divisions. The campaign further claimed the demonstrations sought to destabilise the government, serve political brokers and roll back national progress.

One post read: ‘Kenya’s unrest isn’t accidental – it’s engineered. Powerful elites use tribal and political divisions like chess pieces, igniting chaos whenever their grip on power feels threatened. The people pay the price, always. #RejectAnarchists Stop The Chaos.’

Notably, posts with the hashtag #RejectAnarchists were accompanied by two videos sourced from VEED, an online AI-powered video editing platform. The first said the protests potentially benefitted ‘enemies of Kenya’, both foreign and domestic and warned that ‘anarchy delays justice and deepens poverty.’ The second contrasted narratives of disruption and violence with those of progress and revolutionary zeal, framing actions such as setting buses on fire or looting shops as criminal rather.

c. Ethnic groups

i. Allegations surface of Kikuyus being set against other Kenyan tribes

Between 20 and 25 January 2025, a coordinated campaign, #43against1, launched on X, accusing former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua and his allies – Nyandarua senator Methu John Muhia, Githunguri MP Gathoni Wamuchomba, and Kiambu senator Karungo Paul Thang'wa – of attempting to isolate the Mt Kenya region, particularly the Kikuyu community, from the rest of Kenya for their own interests. The '1' symbolises the Kikuyu community and '43' represents the rest of the country's ethnic groups. The campaign generated 537 mentions, 1,147 interactions, and 113,686 views.

ii. Claims that Kikuyu extremist group wants to secede Mt Kenya region

Between 22 and 26 January 2025, a coordinated campaign, #MukimoMafia, launched on X. Mukimo is a reference to a traditional Kikuyu dish.

The campaign cautioned against the rise of 'Itungati' (self-appointed guardians of Kikuyu identity and values) in Central Kenya and their mission to secede the Mt Kenya region.
The region, home to the Kikuyu, Meru, and Embu communities, holds significant political sway due to its large voting population and economic power. Its support has been crucial historically in determining presidential election outcomes, making it a vital battleground for political alliances.

The hashtag was contained in X posts, all of which featured the words 'Mt Kenya,' 'Itungati militia,' 'secession,' or 'secede.' The campaign generated 5,867 mentions, 5,916 interactions, and an estimated 256,920 views on X.

Some users shared fabricated newspaper covers to support the claims, including a falsified Mt Kenya Times front page from 21 January 2025 that falsely linked Gachagua to Itungati and an alleged destabilisation plot. The actual publication contained no such claims.

An analysis of the sentiment surrounding #MukimoMafia reveals 74.2% of mentions expressing criticism, or outright opposition to the campaign. Some users actively called out individuals pushing the narrative, alleging that they were government-affiliated bloggers, propagandists or operatives working to divide the Mt Kenya region.

iii. Perceived economic and infrastructural privileges associated with the Kikuyu community

#KikuyuPrivilege, which trended on X between 26 January and 08 February 2025, received 6,100 mentions, 548,200 views, and 7,500 engagements. The hashtag appeared alongside keywords such as 'Mulembe Nation', representing the Luhya community, and 'Luo Lives Matter'.

The hashtag gained significant traction on 27 January 2025, with 94.9% of related posts appearing by 11am.

The hashtag highlighted frustrations over perceived economic and infrastructural privileges associated with the Kikuyu community. Many posts pointed to the concentration of wealth, opportunities, and development in Central Kenya, predominantly inhabited by the Kikuyu community, compared to other regions. Discussions called for a more equitable distribution of resources across the nation.

While many posts expressed strong sentiment against the Kikuyu community, the broader conversation focused on the perceived disparities in resource allocation and infrastructure development.

iv. Coordinated messaging undermining traditional electoral power structures in Kenya

Between 05 and 09 June 2025, a coordinated campaign emerged on X under the hashtag #SmallVotesBigDamage, generating 6,172 mentions, 163,356 views, and 6,105 engagements. The first post was published on 05 June by the account @theboyfk, which has 12,023 followers. The post said that the 2027 elections will not be about big rallies or familiar faces; it will be about quiet deals, strategy, and small but calculated moves at the ballot.

The campaign promoted the narrative about the erosion of the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru (GEMA) communities' electoral dominance. Users stated that voter fatigue and fractures within the political leadership of Mt Kenya meant that the region was losing its political influence. One user suggested that electoral power is shifting to swing regions like Kajiado, where small changes in turnout could significantly impact Mt Kenya's historical hold on power. Another reinforced the idea that real political momentum now rests with previously marginalised communities whose strength lies in turnout, not ethnic legacy. Another described the mountain as 'melting', saying GEMA's former leaders were unsettled by the rise of turnout-based politics and the emergence of new power centres under the 'tyranny of small numbers'. The phrase 'GEMA ghost bloc' was repeatedly used.

v. GEMA communities enjoy systemic political and economic privileges at the expense of other communities

On 11 July 2025, the X account @contentcur_ published a post with the hashtag #KikuyuStarterPack, alleging systemic inequalities in Kenya that favour the GEMA communities. Part of the post, which was patient zero, read: '...#KikuyuStarterPack exposes GEMA Privilege that shapes opportunity. WeAreNotAll Equal – and pretending we are won't fix it.'

Between 10 and 13 July 2025, there were 6,207 mentions of the hashtag #KikuyuStarterPack on X. The hashtag appeared alongside keywords such as 'WeAre NotAll Equal' and 'GEMA Privilege'. The mentions generated a total engagement of 6,800 and 297,000 views. There was a spike in mentions of the hashtag on 11 July 2025, with 6,133 mentions, before declining to 64 on 12 July 2025.

d. Politically exposed persons and people in government

i. Tribal fires stoked by politicians

Between 25 June and 12 July 2025, two opposing hashtag campaigns, #LordOfViolence and #WeAreAllKikuyus, created conflicting narratives on X regarding the nature and leadership of the protests.

- **#LordOfViolence**

Between 25 June and 08 July 2025, the #LordOfViolence coordinated campaign emerged on X, generating 4,360 mentions, 153,000 views, and 4,190 engagements. Over the same period, there were 17 posts featuring the hashtag on Facebook, collectively garnering 18,800 views and 262 interactions.

The X account @Johnson441452, which has 147 followers, published the first post featuring the hashtag on 26 June 2025. It included an image of Meru politician Mithika Linturi saying that where there were protests, the politician was close by.
Leaders from the Mt Kenya region were accused of hijacking the protests and stirring up violence for their own gain. Named figures included Gachagua, Naivasha MP Jayne Kihara, Kajiado senator

Samuel Seki Lenku, aspirant for Waithaka ward in Nairobi Fanya Mambo Kinuthia, Mukurweini MP John Kagucia, Laikipia senator John Kinyua, and Manyatta MP John Gitonga Mukunji.

One post claimed that politicians had used the protests as a platform to settle political scores and boost their profiles. One user argued the demonstrations were driven by 'optics and numbers' rather than justice, while another accused them of using young protesters as pawns. Visuals accompanying some of these posts depicted maps in flames and linked some of the named individuals to protest hotspots, branding them 'regional commanders of chaos'.

- **#WeAreAllKikuyus**

In response to the #LordOfViolence campaign, the counter-campaign #WeAreAllKikuyus emerged between 07 and 12 July 2025, gaining 512,940 mentions, 48.9 million views, and 1.93 million engagements on X. In a symbolic act of defiance, multiple users adopted Kikuyu names to express solidarity, declaring that if calls for justice and dignity were being labelled as Kikuyu issues, then 'we are all Kikuyus'. Posts using the hashtag affirmed the protests as a citizen-led movement rooted in national, not ethnic, demands for justice and accountability. Posts on X argued that tribalism was a political distraction used to deflect attention from economic hardships affecting all Kenyans.

ii. Kenya's UN vote in support of LGBTQ+ rights is a betrayal of the country's cultural values

Between 10 and 12 July 2025, a coordinated campaign using the hashtag #YouBetrayedUs emerged on X in reaction to Kenya's vote in favour of renewing a United Nations mandate on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) rights.

The mandate is non-binding and does not require states to adopt specific legislation, such as same-sex marriage laws or particular educational curricula.

The campaign recorded 3,691 mentions, 25,730 views, and 3,299 engagements during the three-day period. The first post was from the account @contentcur_, which said: 'Kenya Rejects LGBTQ not from hate, but from love for African values. President Ruto's YES vote traded cultural sovereignty for global trends. #YouBetrayedUs and failed to #ProtectAfricanValues that millions cherish.'

Posts, often using similar graphics, under the hashtag expressed disapproval of the government's position and falsely claimed the government would be changing marriage laws. The narrative was often paired with the hashtag #ProtectAfricanValues, which registered 3,701 mentions, 27,641 views, and 3,308 engagements on X between 10 and 12 July 2025.

A consistent theme within the #YouBetrayedUs campaign was the framing of Kenya's vote as a decision influenced by foreign agendas.

An X user argued that the president had turned away from those who placed their trust in his leadership, prioritising global approval over domestic cultural expectations. Another user argued that he had sided with international interests. Another said that the vote contradicted the expressed will of the majority, who had already rejected LGBTQ+ rights, and framed the move as submission to foreign influence. One said: 'President Ruto pledged to uphold Kenya's values. But when it mattered most, he stood with foreign powers – not his people. That is not what we voted for.'

iii. Pastor Dorcas Gachagua is having an affair with a bishop

Between 23 and 27 July 2025, the hashtag #DorcasBoyfriend surfaced on X, targeting Dorcas Gachagua, wife of former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua, with unverified allegations of an affair with House of Grace Bishop David Muriithi. The campaign originated from a post by @kanairofinest and generated 5,743 mentions, 163,287 views, and total engagement of 5,130.

The campaign against Gachagua began after Kikuyu MP Kimani Ichungwa publicly alleged she was having an affair with a bishop.

Within the campaign, some posts alleged that her sermons and tone now echoed Muriithi's, her prayers were no longer her own and the spiritual connection represented a betrayal. Some phrases used included 'Lover Bishop,' 'Check Your Wife,' and 'Spirit of Lust', generating 490 mentions, 3,251 views, and 385 engagements on X.

Additional posts cast Dorcas Gachagua's closeness to Muriithi as a risk to her husband's public image, political authority and his legacy, while others questioned her loyalty and pointed to perceived contradictions between Rigathi Gachagua's family-values messaging and alleged discord at home. The post generated 649 mentions, 6,571 views, and 629 engagements.

This was the first time she had been directly targeted in a coordinated smear campaign, although her husband had faced regular online attacks following his political fallout with the ruling administration.

3. Tactics used in these campaigns

The DISARM is designed for describing and understanding different parts of disinformation incidents. It sets out best practices for fighting disinformation through sharing data and analysis and can inform effective action. The framework has been developed, drawing on global cybersecurity best practices. DISARM uses two primary frameworks: DISARM Red, which focuses on outlining the behaviours of incident creators, and DISARM Blue, which addresses potential response actions.

TTPs refer to the behaviour and methods threat actors use to engage in cyber crimes or malicious online campaigns. Tactics are the objectives the attacker is trying to achieve, using specific approaches (techniques), which follow an application procedure. In the context of online disinformation, these tactics and techniques can be used to exploit social media safety features and manipulate search algorithms to avoid account suspension.

Using the DISARM framework, CfA identified 11 TTPs used by coordinated accounts and key actors on social media platforms to either evade detection or to amplify the above in a coordinated manner.

a. Create dedicated hashtag

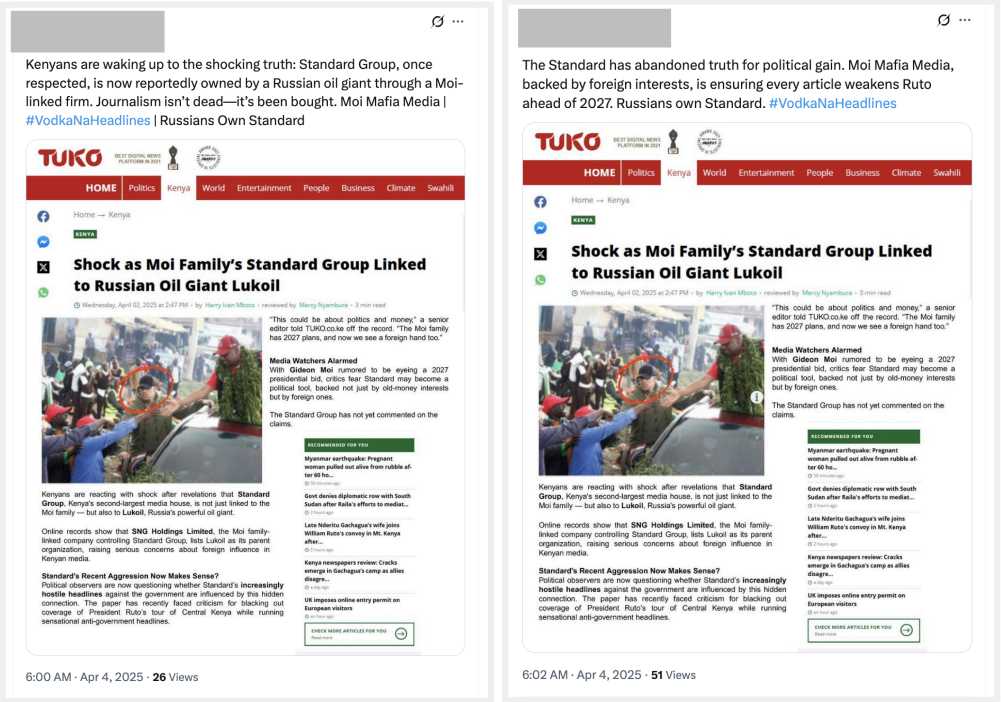
This tactic involves launching a coordinated hashtag campaign to shape public discourse and amplify a narrative. The repeated use of the hashtag enhanced search visibility, encouraged participation, and gave the impression of widespread, organic concern. By naming the narrative, the campaign shaped public discourse and increased engagement, even in the absence of verified evidence behind many of its claims.

Between January and July 2025, coordinated hashtag campaigns were deployed to discredit different groups and shape public discourse. For example, #VodkaNaHeadlines targeted the Standard Group by falsely linking it to Russian influence, while #ToxicActivists portrayed civil society leaders and

activists as foreign-funded disruptors. Ethnic narratives were pushed through hashtags like #43against1 and #MukimoMafia, which framed political figures and communities as divisive. Meanwhile, #LordOfViolence and #FinancersOfChaos sought to delegitimize protests by painting activists as violent and externally driven. Collectively, these campaigns amplified pro-government narratives while undermining media, activists, and minority groups.

b. Develop inauthentic news articles

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as creating false or misleading news articles to advance a specific narrative or political agenda. In the #VodkaNaHeadlines campaign against the Standard Group, a fabricated headline, designed to appear as if it originated from the Kenyan news website TUKO, circulated on X. The fake headline claimed Moi could leverage the Standard Group as a political asset for his 2027 presidential bid with Lukoil's support. PesaCheck debunked the article on 11 April 2025, exposing it as disinformation designed to manipulate public opinion.



Screenshots of sample posts circulating the fake news article (left, right) (Source: CfA using X)

This tactic was also employed during the #DogsOfWar campaign, where actors mimicked the visual and editorial style of legitimate outlets such as Citizen Digital, Daily Nation, NTV, Standard Media Group, and The Africa Report to lend credibility to misleading narratives. One notable example involved a falsified version of an Africa Report article about Karua's deportation from Tanzania. Although the fabricated article retained the original byline, timestamp, and design, the headline and framing were altered to depict the event as part of a broader crackdown on foreign-funded activism.

Similarly, this tactic was used during the #SmallVotesBigDamage campaign, where actors mimicked the visual and editorial style of legitimate sources, such as Citizen Digital, Standard Media, Daily Nation, and The Star to make their content look legitimate.

During the #DorcasBoyfriend campaign, fabricated front pages of The Standard and The Nairobian were circulated. Additionally, fabricated bulletin headlines from YouTube, imitating those of Citizen

TV and TV47 Kenya were also circulated, replicating the design and branding of these media houses to present the false claims as authentic news.

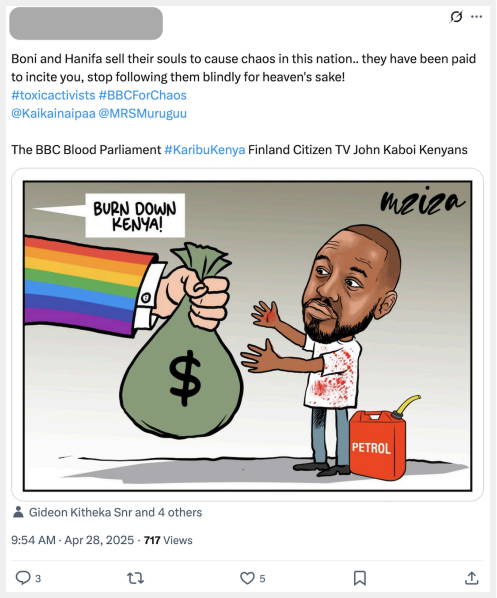
By mimicking legitimate media sources, these doctored images lent credibility to disinformation, increasing the likelihood of public acceptance and engagement. This strategy is particularly effective in amplifying emotional reactions and fuelling online discourse, as users unknowingly or intentionally reshared the manipulated content. Through repeated exposure, the false narratives gained traction, further blurring the line between fact and fiction. By blending real branding and stylistic cues with fabricated content, the campaign exploited public trust in established news sources to increase the reach and legitimacy of its disinformation.

c. Develop competing narratives

The primary TTP deployed in the campaign against the BBC aligns with the DISARM framework's tactic of promoting contradictory narratives. This tactic tries to confuse the audience through denying established facts, deflection, and counter-accusations. This tactic was evident in the #BBCForChaos and #ToxicActivists counter-hashtag campaigns, which sought to discredit the BBC documentary and delegitimise its contributors. By portraying the documentary as foreign propaganda, attacking the credibility of featured activists, and reviving unrelated past scandals, campaign actors diverted attention from the state-sanctioned violence the film exposed. However, some X users pushed back by repurposing the counter-hashtags to express support for the film.

d. Develop image-based content

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as developing and editing false or misleading visual content to support misleading narratives within disinformation campaigns. A disinformation campaign under the counter-hashtag #ToxicActivists targeted activists featured in the BBC documentary on X. A widely circulated cartoon falsely depicted Mwangi with blood-stained hands and clothing, receiving a bag of money from a white figure whose sleeve bears the colours of the LGBTQ+ flag. The cartoon further portrays the figure instructing Mwangi, who is standing next to a red jerrycan labelled 'PETROL', to 'BURN DOWN KENYA!' The cartoon falsely suggests that foreign entities associated with the LGBTQ+ community have paid Mwangi to destroy Kenya.



Screenshot of a post under the #ToxicActivists hashtag, falsely suggesting that Mwangi is paid to incite violence (Source: CfA via X)

e. Dismay

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as threatening critics or narrators of events, including journalists or media outlets, to suppress dissent and disrupt public discourse. This approach was evident in the government's response to the BBC documentary. The broadcaster cancelled a planned private screening of the film, citing 'pressure from authorities', but did not disclose specific details. Authorities arrested four filmmakers in connection with the documentary, but the BBC denied any affiliation with them or their involvement in the film's production. These government actions reflect a broader strategy to intimidate the press, silence investigative reporting, and limit public access to critical content that challenges official narratives.



Screenshots (left and right) of X posts reporting the cancellation of the BBC documentary's screening (Source: CfA via X)

f. Recruit malign actors

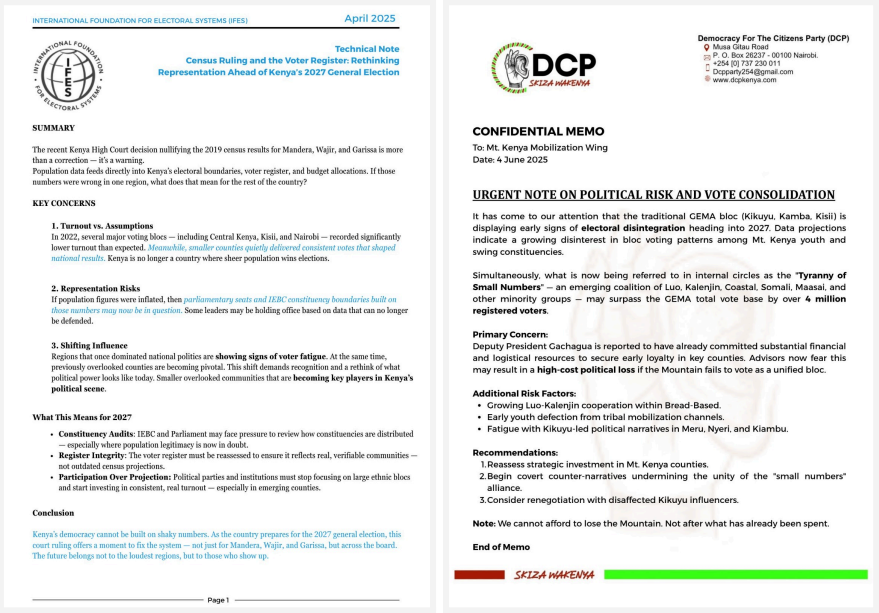
The DISARM framework defines this tactic as the process by which operators enlist bad actors, whether by payment, ideological alignment, or coercion, to carry out coordinated disinformation activities. In the #DogsofWar campaign, this tactic was evident in the mobilisation of identifiable partisan influencers and loyalist accounts, which consistently promoted pro-government narratives. These actors operated primarily on X, where a pattern of synchronised posting, shared hashtags, and repetitive phrasing across multiple profiles suggested deliberate coordination.

Although most accounts used real names and appeared organic, the frequency and uniformity of their content, often copy-pasted or reposted in bursts, raise flags of inauthentic behaviour. Visuals featuring opposition figures or activists were also used to reinforce messages and provoke emotional responses.

The targeting was strategic, with content timed around politically sensitive moments and aimed at Kenyan audiences.

g. Alter authentic documents

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as the manipulation of real documents, whether public or non-public, to advance the goals of an information operation. The altered documents are made to appear authentic and are often disseminated at later stages of a campaign to boost credibility. This tactic was used during the #SmallVotesBigDamage campaign. Two fabricated institutional documents were posted. One appeared to be a confidential memo from the Democracy for the Citizens party (DCP), warning of political risk tied to GEMA bloc fragmentation and the rise of a 'Tyranny of Small Numbers'. The second resembled a technical note from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) stating that voter influence had shifted from large ethnic blocs to smaller, high-turnout counties. Both visuals adopted familiar formatting, branding, and language to appear legitimate. The tactic relied on institutional mimicry to lend credibility to otherwise unverified claims.



INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS (IFES) April 2025

Technical Note
Census Ruling and the Voter Register: Rethinking Representation Ahead of Kenya's 2027 General Election

SUMMARY

The recent Kenya High Court decision nullifying the 2019 census results for Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa is more than a correction — it's a warning.
Population data feeds directly into Kenya's electoral boundaries, voter register, and budget allocations. If those numbers were wrong in one region, what does that mean for the rest of the country?

KEY CONCERNS

1. Turnout vs. Assumptions
In 2022, several major voting blocs — including Central Kenya, Kisii, and Nairobi — recorded significantly lower turnout than expected. *Meanwhile, smaller counties quietly delivered consistent votes that shaped national results.* Kenya is no longer a country where sheer population wins elections.

2. Representation Risks
If population figures were inflated, then *parliamentary seats and IEBC constituency boundaries built on those numbers may now be in question.* Some leaders may be holding office based on data that can no longer be defended.

3. Shifting Influence
Regions that once dominated national politics are **showing signs of voter fatigue**. At the same time, previously overlooked counties are becoming pivotal. This shift demands recognition and a rethink of what political power looks like today. Smaller overlooked communities that are **becoming key players in Kenya's political scene**.

What This Means for 2027

- **Constituency Audits:** IEBC and Parliament may face pressure to review how constituencies are distributed — especially where population legitimacy is now in doubt.
- **Register Integrity:** The voter register must be reassessed to ensure it reflects real, verifiable communities — not outdated census projections.
- **Participation Over Projection:** Political parties and institutions must stop focusing on large ethnic blocs and start investing in consistent, real turnout — especially in emerging counties.

Conclusion

Kenya's democracy cannot be built on shaky numbers. As the country prepares for the 2027 general election, this court ruling offers a moment to fix the system — not just for Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa, but across the board. The future belongs not to the loudest regions, but to those who show up.

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DCP SKIZA WAKENYA

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CONFIDENTIAL MEMO
To: Mt. Kenya Mobilization Wing
Date: 4 June 2025

URGENT NOTE ON POLITICAL RISK AND VOTE CONSOLIDATION

It has come to our attention that the traditional GEMA bloc (Kikuyu, Kamba, Kisii) is displaying early signs of **electoral disintegration** heading into 2027. Data projections indicate a growing disinterest in bloc voting patterns among Mt. Kenya youth and swing constituencies.

Simultaneously, what is now being referred to in internal circles as the "**Tyranny of Small Numbers**" — an emerging coalition of Luo, Kalenjin, Coastal, Somali, Maasai, and other minority groups — may surpass the GEMA total vote base by over **4 million registered voters**.

Primary Concern:
Deputy President Gachagua is reported to have already committed substantial financial and logistical resources to secure early loyalty in key counties. Advisors now fear this may result in a **high-cost political loss** if the Mountain fails to vote as a unified bloc.

Additional Risk Factors:
- Growing Luo-Kalenjin cooperation within Bread-Based.
- Early youth defection from tribal mobilization channels.
- Fatigue with Kikuyu-led political narratives in Meru, Nyeri, and Kiambu.

Recommendations:
1. Reassess strategic investment in Mt. Kenya counties.
2. Begin covert counter-narratives undermining the unity of the "small numbers" alliance.
3. Consider renegotiation with disaffected Kikuyu influencers.

Note: We cannot afford to lose the Mountain. Not after what has already been spent.

End of Memo

SKIZA WAKENYA

Screenshots of altered documents circulated in the campaign (left: IFES technical note, right: DCP memo) (Source: CfA using X)

h. Integrate target audience vulnerabilities into narrative

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as the exploitation of pre-existing fears, frustrations, and identity-based grievances within a target audience. Rather than creating new vulnerabilities, influence actors identify weak points in the public information environment and build narratives around them to strengthen engagement and reduce resistance. During the #SmallVotesBigDamage campaign, this tactic was evident in how the messaging appealed to historically sidelined communities. Posts amplified the idea that smaller ethnic and regional groups, such as the Somali, Maasai, and coastal communities, had been excluded from national power, despite their turnout and political significance. A widely shared quote card featuring Senator Ali Roba framed the Somali vote as the true swing factor in 2027. Another visual cited Narok's high 2022 voter turnout, with Senator Ledama Olekina stating that real votes come from counties often treated as peripheral. This framing was reinforced by

portraying Central Kenya's declining dominance as an opportunity for smaller communities to reclaim influence.

i. Reframe context

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as removing an event from its original context in order to distort its meaning rather than denying that the event occurred. This approach was evident during the #LordofViolence campaign on X, where protests were reframed not as a nationwide youth-led movement demanding economic accountability, but as a Kikuyu-led insurrection.

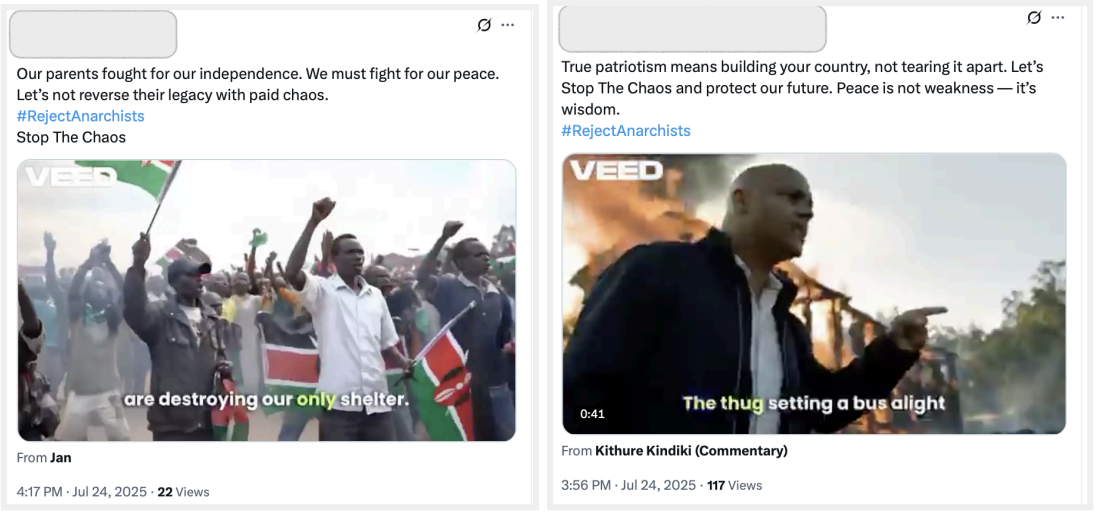
Multiple posts shifted focus away from the broader social and economic grievances driving the unrest, instead portraying Mt Kenya politicians as the architects of the chaos. The hashtag became a vehicle for assigning blame to individuals seen as representing Kikuyu interests, reframing the protests through an ethnic lens.

This narrative was reinforced by consistent messaging that highlighted Kikuyu identity, unrest in the central region, and supposed tribal motivations. While the campaign did not rely heavily on bots or visual propaganda, the steady volume and uniformity of the messaging suggest a coordinated attempt to reshape public perception of the protests.

j. Develop AI-generated videos (deep fakes)

The DISARM framework defines this tactic as the use of AI-generated fake media, such as audio, photos, or videos, in influence operations to create false scenarios by altering an individual's appearance, voice, and movements.

On 24 July 2025, this tactic was also evident in the #RejectAnarchists hashtag campaign, which featured two (1,2) AI-generated videos. The videos sought to discredit the recent anti-government protests in Kenya, warning against anarchy.



Sample campaign posts with the AI-generated videos (left, right)(Source: CfA using X)

Similarly, the #DorcasBoyfriend campaign featured an AI-generated video portraying pastor Dorcas and her alleged lover engaging in public displays of affection.

k. Create Cyborg Accounts

The DISARM framework defines Cyborg accounts as accounts that are partly manned, partly automated social media accounts. Cyborg accounts primarily act as bots, but a human operator periodically takes control of the account to engage with real social media users by responding to comments and posting original content.

The top five influencer accounts using the hashtag #TerrorismByHeadlines exhibited cyborg characteristics by posting a huge number of posts using the hashtag between 24 and 25 July 2025. These accounts were seen posting on average eight to nine posts an hour. These accounts posted the following number of posts within the two days:

- @africaelite_ with 426 posts
- @georgegona1 with 420 posts
- @tam_nj with 345 posts
- @gonageneral with 246 posts
- @victormuta54071with 223 posts.

4. Conclusion

The coordinated influence operations on X from January to July 2025 reveal a calculated assault on Kenya's democratic institutions, exploiting digital platforms to spread disinformation and deepen societal divides ahead of the 2027 elections. By deploying sophisticated tactics, these campaigns targeted media outlets, activists, ethnic groups, and political figures, undermining trust and fuelling polarisation. The significant overlap of accounts across campaigns underscores the orchestrated nature of these efforts, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced digital literacy, robust fact-checking, and collaborative strategies to protect Kenya's information ecosystem from manipulation and safeguard its democratic integrity.

*This report was written by CfA iLAB investigative data analysts **Nirali Patel, Dorcas Solonka, Moffin Njoroge, Agape Karashi,** and **Ivy Masese.** The report was reviewed by iLAB investigations manager **Jacktone Momanyi** and was copy-edited by iLAB chief copy editor **Leizl Eykelhof** and **Gloria Aradi**. The research was overseen by CfA iLAB editor **Athandiwe Saba** and commissioned by CfA editor-in-chief **Justin Arenstein**.*

Do you know of incidents of suspected information manipulation, coordinated influence operations or other forms of disinformation or weaponised toxic content that you think we should investigate? Share your leads with us, securely, on ilab@codeforafrica.org.



*This report contributes to a growing knowledge base that documents African-focused information manipulation, influence operations, and weaponised disinformation. The knowledge base is curated by the **African Digital Democracy Observatory** (ADDO). The research in this specific report was produced by analysts attached to ADDO member Code for Africa (CfA), including*

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*CfA's **CivicSignal** media monitoring lab, its **iLAB** forensic investigation unit, and its **PesaCheck** fact-checking team.*

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