Documented Disinformation Campaigns in Africa

Target Country	Year Started	Key Actors	Objectives	Tactics	Impact
Global (targeting South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria)	2022	Undetermined (pro-Russia)	• Spread pro-Kremlin narratives of Russia's invasion of Ukraine • Create the appearance of global support in the leadup to the UN vote to condemn the invasion	• Thousands of new, fake, and hacked accounts began a massive, coordinated campaign on March 2, 2022, to artificially game Twitter's algorithm so that two pro-Russian hashtags would trend	• 23 million tweets posted the hashtags #IstandwithPutin #IstandwithRussia (primarily in BRICS countries)
Nigeria	2022	Undetermined (pro-Russia)	• Spread pro-Kremlin narratives of Russia's invasion of Ukraine	• The social media accounts of authentic Nigerian journalists and social media users were hacked through the platform Buffer • Once accessed, these accounts were used to post pro-Russian propaganda	• Through Buffer, 1,552 accounts were accessed, out of which 618 accounts were used to post 766 unauthorized messages across Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn • Significant follow-on sharing of Russian propaganda was reported
Mali	2021	Wagner Group (Russia)	• Spread anti-French, anti-UN, and pro-Russian messages • Burnish Wagner's human rights record prior to its arrival in Mali	• A coordinated campaign of false and misleading messaging appeared on Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook • Moderation was circumvented by using puns with multiple meanings	• Fake photos were disseminated to the 5,000 members of one Telegram channel alone

Kenya	2021	Undetermined. Operated through opaque private companies during the High Court of Kenya's review of constitutional amendments relating to the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)	• Control the narrative around the judicial review of BBI • Tarnish the integrity and competence of the High Court • Discredit targeted journalists and activists • Distort public opinion around the release of the Pandora Papers	• Individuals were paid to post synchronized malicious content to game algorithms into making the content trend on Twitter (astroturfing) • Activities were coordinated on WhatsApp and paid for through M-Pesa to avoid detection • Verified users were paid to "rent" their accounts	• Consisting of 3,7000 accounts, this network spread 23,000 tweets and 31 artificial hastags • Journalists and activists reported being harassed and resorting to self-censorship
Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger	2020	Groups claiming to be nonprofits, charities, and community pages	•Denigrate democratically elected leaders to soften the ground for the military coups •Promote military juntas and delay holding elections •Advocate for a "revolution" in the broader Sahel region	• Facebook pages posted coordinated and misleading pro-Russian and anti-French/Western content • One-third of posts across the pages were posted within 60 seconds of one another in the leadup to Mali's 2020 coup and the arrival of Wagner mercenaries in Mali	• These pages were followed by 140,000 accounts and posted 24,000 times

Africa-wide, especially Mali, CAR, Cameroon, South Africa, and Mozambique	2019	African influencers backed by Prigozhin/Russian-affiliated entities	• Promote antidemocratic, anti-EU, anti-UN narratives through African voices. • This network has been especially vocal promoting Russian propaganda around its invasion of Ukraine	• Recruitment, instruction, and financing of African social media influencers, intellectuals, and media figures starting at the Sochi Summit • Influencers promote Russian disinformation on social media, radio, and television shows (such as Lengo Songo, Radio Révolution Panafricaine, and Afrique Média TV), and in the publications of Russian-backed "think tanks" (such as AFRIC). • Much of this content comes directly from Russian state media outlets such as RT and Sputnik. RT registered at least four new African domain names prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and plans to set up an editorial office in Nairobi, Kenya	• Widespread direct and indirect exposure of Africans to these messages • Over 600 African news websites picked up Sputnik and RT content "as normal sources"
Tanzania	2021	Accounts supportive of the Tanzanian government	• Silence opposition and civil society leaders by gaming Twitter's moderation of copyrighted material in order to have these leaders' accounts removed from the platform	• 268 accounts connected to the Tanzanian ruling party (and formerly used as Russian personas) coordinated adversarial reporting to harass Tanzanian opposition and civil society leaders • Fake web pages were created with the targeted leaders' content, after which copyright complaints were submitted leading to the removal of the leaders' accounts • These accounts also promoted pro-government hashtags and amplified government accounts	• Twitter removed at least two of the civil society leaders' accounts • Other leaders were intimidated by the harassment

Eritrea	2021	Scholar connected to the ruling party	• Deny allegations of Eritrean forces' abuses in Tigray	• A pseudo-fact-checking report was published to disingenuously claim bias • The report was later promoted by Eritrean and Ethiopian officials • The report accused western media and officials of disinformation	• Leaked audio allegedly captured Eritrean officials praising this report and encouraging similar efforts along these lines to support its denials
Ethiopia	2020	Diaspora supporters of Ethiopian or Tigrayan forces during conflict	• Shape the narrative of the Tigray conflict	• "Click-to-tweet" campaign of supplying pre-written sensational social media posts for users to post and direct at international actors to game algorithms • Creation of impersonator accounts	• A barrage of inaccurate and unverified information about the Tigray conflict confounded accurate analysis
Uganda	2020, leadup to January 2021 Presidential Election	Network of accounts linked to: 1) Ministry of Information and Communications Technology and National Guidance 2) A spokesperson for Lt. General Muhoozi Kainerugaba 3) Entities claiming to be public relations firms/news organizations	• Disparage political opponents • Disrupt opposition efforts to organize and share accurate election information on social media	• Fake and duplicate social media accounts posted fabricated claims about political opponents • Accounts amplified one another's content	• The network reached a large following (over 10,000 followers) and a widespread reach on social media in the leadup to the election • Uganda blocked social media prior to the election in response to Facebook removing the disinformation network
South Africa	2020	South African First party (nationalist political movement)	• Promote xenophobic and Afrophobic sentiment	• Anonymous Twitter handle was created that deceptively claimed other people's images and artificially increased its follower count	• Gained over 50,000 followers and contributed to the growth of xenophobic groups and hashtags on South African social media

The Democratic Republic of the Congo	2020	Congolese politician, Honoré Mvula, and his political party, Force des Patriotes	• Build followers for Mvula and his political party	• Inauthentic social media accounts managed by university students ran pages posting sensational news, which were then opaquely rebranded to support Mvula	• 1.5 million likes were accumulated from the pages
Guinea	Leadup to October 2020 election	President Alpha Condé's political party: the Rally of the Guinean People and its network of paid political communicators	• Flood Facebook in Guinea with pro-Condé content in the leadup to his controversial bid for a third term	• Coordinated content was promoted on Facebook through a large network of accounts and pages with fake names, which did not disclose that they were paid political communicators for Condé's party • Several page administrators were based in Turkey	• Content reached 800,000 followers in a country of 13 million people
Sudan	2019, 2021	Prigozhin-linked entities and Russia's Internet Research Agency	• Promote Russia and Prigozhin as friends of Sudan • Support Sudan's Rapid Support Forces • Portray Sudan's civilian leaders as pawns of the United States	• Fake social media accounts claimed to be Sudanese politicians or media organizations • Sudanese citizens were hired to operate some of these pages	• The disinformation network gained a following of over 440,000 user accounts
Togo and Côte d'Ivoire	2019 and 2020	Tunisian digital communications firm Ureputation	• Promote the controversial election bids of longtime Togo President Faure Gnassingbé in February 2020 and that of former president Henri Bédié in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2020 • Additional pages targeted Chad, Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Senegal	• Coordinated inauthentic content was spread through networks of fake accounts that posed as locals and independent news organizations in the countries targeted	• 900 accounts, groups, and pages affiliated with the UReputation operation had a combined 3.8 million followers
Somalia	2019	Private firms based in Egypt and UAE	• Pushed claims that the Qatar government had sponsored terror attacks in Somalia as part of Gulf State competition in the Horn of Africa	• Created false claims of Qatar sponsorship of terrorist attacks, which were amplified via pages posing as regional news outlets	• Pages had more than 13.7 million followers across North Africa and the Middle East

Algeria, Angola, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia	2019	Israeli political marketing firm Archimedes Group and the political actors that hired them	• Promote designated politicians while smearing others	• The campaign engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior on Facebook, including creating fake and misleading "fact-checking" pages and "leak" pages that posted fake information about politicians	• Globally the network of inauthentic pages was followed by 2.8 million users
Nigeria and Egypt	2019	Private firms, MintReach based in Nigeria, and Flexell in Egypt	• Promote positive content about the UAE, including its activity in Yemen • Promote criticism of Qatar, Turkey, and Iran, as well as the Iran nuclear deal	• The campaign spread coordinated inauthentic content	• Nearly 500 accounts, groups, and pages gained a total of 1.4 million followers
South Africa	2019 election	Prigozhin/AFRIC (Russia)	• Support the re-election of the ANC Party and deepen Russian ties with its leaders	• Plan to spread disinformation that would discredit the Democratic Alliance Party and Economic Freedom Fighters	•Uncertain
Global including Chinese embassies in 27 African countries. Those with greatest artificial amplification were: **Angola, Liberia, South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Djibouti, Mali, Chad**	2018	China	• Artificially amplify the messages of the Chinese Central Propaganda Department	• Chinese officials amplified state-run media reports • Armies of fake accounts then boosted officials' posts through retweets	• Chinese diplomats in a majority of African countries had their tweets artificially amplified • Tens of thousands of fake retweets • Twitter suspended 30,000 accounts linked to this campaign

Cameroon, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan	2018	Russian entities linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin	• Provide political cheerleading for ruling party candidates • Fan anti-French sentiment • Champion Russia and Russian interests, especially around mineral extraction and arms deals	• Disseminate coordinated inauthentic content through fake accounts based abroad and "franchised" national accounts (where locals are paid to post)	• The inauthentic pages posted 48,000 times, received more than 9.7 million interactions, and were liked by over 1.7 million accounts
South Africa	2016	Bell Pottinger, British PR firm retained by Gupta brothers (accused of massive corruption as part of state capture scandal)	• Stoke racial animosity to distract from the Gupta's role in state capture	• Campaign involved 100 fake Twitter accounts and bots to generate 220,000 tweets to amplify hate-filled websites and speeches • Content was amplified by media outlets owned by the Gupta brothers	• Disinformation damaged trust and dialogue around issues of economic reform in South Africa—features that continue to shape South African political discourse
Libya	2014	External interests in Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates	• Promote Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar • Advance pro-Russian narratives of the Libyan conflict • Sow polarization, confusion, and distrust in Libyan digital spaces	• Networks based in the UAE and Saudi Arabia created fake Twitter accounts posing as Libyans • Wagner Group affiliates hired Libyans to produce disinformation around the Libyan conflict	• Disrupted Libya's nascent digital information networks • Amplified the polarization of Libyan society