

Shadow Wars

Exposing & debunking influence ops + disinfo in Kenya & Africa.

2023-01-25



Allan Cheboi

I am CfA's pan-African manager for investigations, and lead the forensic iLAB at the African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR). Prior to CfA, I was a cybercrime investigator and forensic auditor at KPMG. My iLAB team consists of data scientists and OSINT technologists in 8 African countries. I am also a fellow at the African School of Internet Governance (AfriSIG).



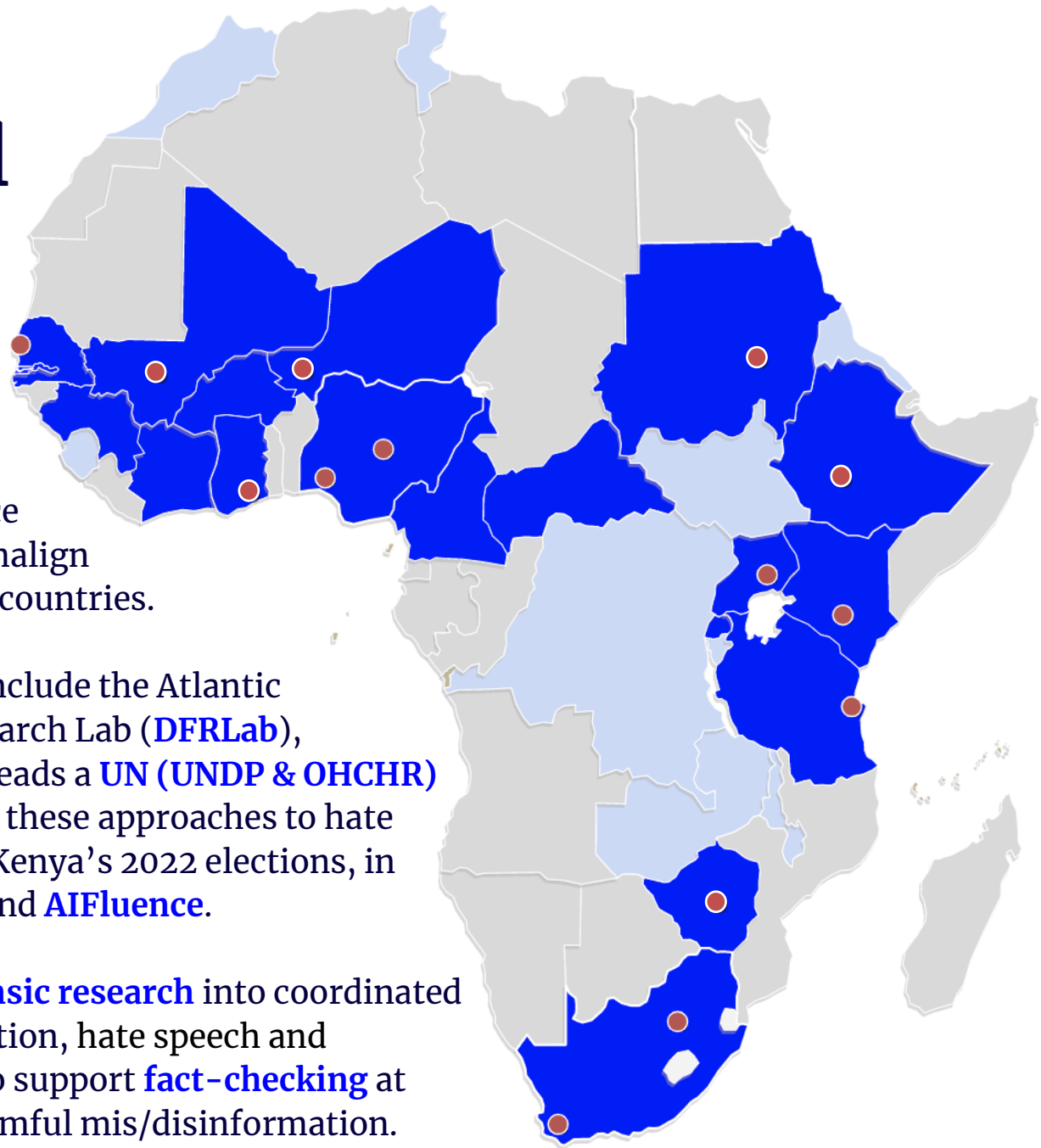
Find me on Twitter at [@Allan_Cheboi](https://twitter.com/Allan_Cheboi) or at [LinkedIn/AllanCheboi](https://www.linkedin.com/in/AllanCheboi)

Continental Footprint

Code for Africa (CfA) is the lead in four separate consortia that track coordinated influence operations by extremists and malign nation states across [21](#) African countries.

Our partners in the consortia include the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab ([DFRLab](#)), and the [DT Institute](#). CfA also leads a [UN \(UNDP & OHCHR\)](#) supported consortium to apply these approaches to hate speech & online incitement in Kenya's 2022 elections, in partnership with [Shujaaz Inc](#) and [AIFluence](#).

We conduct [investigative forensic research](#) into coordinated networks that seed disinformation, hate speech and propaganda. The consortia also support [fact-checking](#) at watchdog media to debunk harmful mis/disinformation.





Disinfo Observatory

CfA is helping to build a robust pan-African coalition of researchers focused on influence ops.

ADD0 mobilises both **non-profit & for-profit** orgs to better coordinate efforts, pool resources, share expertise, harmonise methodologies, and explore synergies for local coalitions.

Partners include commercial due diligence / risk advisory companies & demographic polling / survey institutes, with specialist academic researchers, human rights CSOs & watchdog media.



African Digital
Democracy Observatory



RESOURCES RESEARCH ABOUT

Follow



Call for Applications: Research into influence operations that subvert African democracies

ADD0 is calling for applications for research on foreign government influence in 21 countries in Africa



African **Fact-Checking** Alliance

Ecosystem building

CfA is also growing a pan-African ‘self-help’ network for fact-checking desks in 384 newsrooms in 28 countries. The consortium commits to ongoing incremental skills plus seed resources for proof-of-concept projects with *Meta* support for Sahel media.

ADD6 ADDO
Nov 17 · 26 min read · Listen

How hate speech trolls targeted Kenya's 2022 elections

Paid influencers and other 'keyboard warriors' used a clear playbook to amplify toxic content to polarise voters.



This report outlines the investigative insights and recommendations from the **Mapema Coalition** that worked with the United Nations (UN) and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) to detect online hate speech and coordinated disinformation and digital incitement targeting the elections. Find out more about the Mapema Coalition at the bottom of the report.

COP, LOOK, LISTEN

ISSUE 4 | Saturday 12 November

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: Africa's Gas Lobby Comes to Sharm

OUR VERDICT:

Decarbonisation Day (11 November) is shaping up to become a major platform for oil and gas lobbyists in Sharm, who continue to argue for the "vital role of fossil fuels in the energy transition". The counter-narrative should be loud and clear: we need accelerated deployment of more resilient and cheaper renewable energy, not further oil and gas. [Don't let](#) the industry's frauds say otherwise, and wherever possible pass the mic to groups like [Don't Gas Africa](#) instead. As the [NAACP has documented](#), polluters have a specific version of the disinfo playbook for the minority communities most affected, and [co-opting community and political leaders](#) is a key tactic.

For more details on climate disinfo, influence operations and vested interests in the region, please refer to CAAD partner / Intelligence Unit contributor [Caleb the African](#), as well as climate justice champions like Vanessa Nakule and experts like Mohamed Adow (Power Shift Africa). Carbon Brief and the Reuters Institute have also launched a [Global South Climate Database](#) to ensure local expertise and science remain at the forefront of discussion!

Yesterday's [bulletin](#) looked at how Russia and China, polluting companies and delayist pundits are "woke-washing" their opposition, co-opting progressive messaging to thwart the green transition. The fossil fuel industry is also active across Africa, and has adopted the same disinformation playbook perfected around the world. This [includes](#) the use of [trade associations and front groups](#) to falsely broad support for what are highly unpopular policies, the co-opting of climate action in order to greenwash, and the strategic use of spokespeople to launder the industry's profit aims into the mainstream.

African Energy Chamber



Oil and natural gas will be playing an ongoing role in Africa's energy mix for years to come. Renewables are expensive, unreliable and can't do the heavy lifting for now. We need to drill for Gas and Make Energy Poverty History while fighting Climate Change. [#cop27regret #COP27](#) &



At COP27, [#StopEACOP](#) activists like [Patience Njokulya](#) are [calling for](#) "climate finance & investing in a just transition to renewable energy" and not "fossil fuel projects like the East African Crude Oil Pipeline". Activists like [Korinna Thewissen](#) [speak](#) about how Africans are the least responsible for climate change, yet face the most devastating consequences of continued fossil fuel use.

Nonetheless, [one of the top tweets leading into the summit](#) was [from Njoku Ayuk](#), chair of the African Energy Chamber (AEC). The AEC is an industry trade group that lobbies for increased fossil fuel use across the continent, [although as David Farwell pointed out](#) [Climate Hope on Windchange](#) (9 November), Njoku Ayuk (young himself was "convicted of fraud in the US for impersonating

ADD6 ADDO
Nov 10 · 14 min read



Video Stars: Russia's viral video propaganda in Africa

This report forms part of our ongoing ad-hoc analysis of Africa-focused Russian influence operations that appear designed to shape public support for Russian interests



Summary:

Pro-Russian campaigners are successfully using sophisticated video propaganda to shape public narratives and undermine democratic watchdogs across Africa, using increasingly slick production standards and coordinated amplification.

The video campaigns are deliberately designed as entertainment that glorifies the Wagner Group's mercenaries. They are targeted at audiences who traditionally avoid mainstream news using formats that range from full-length feature films and short animated 'viral social' productions, to deliberately provocative humorous 'crisis response' counter-messaging.

Multi-faceted approach

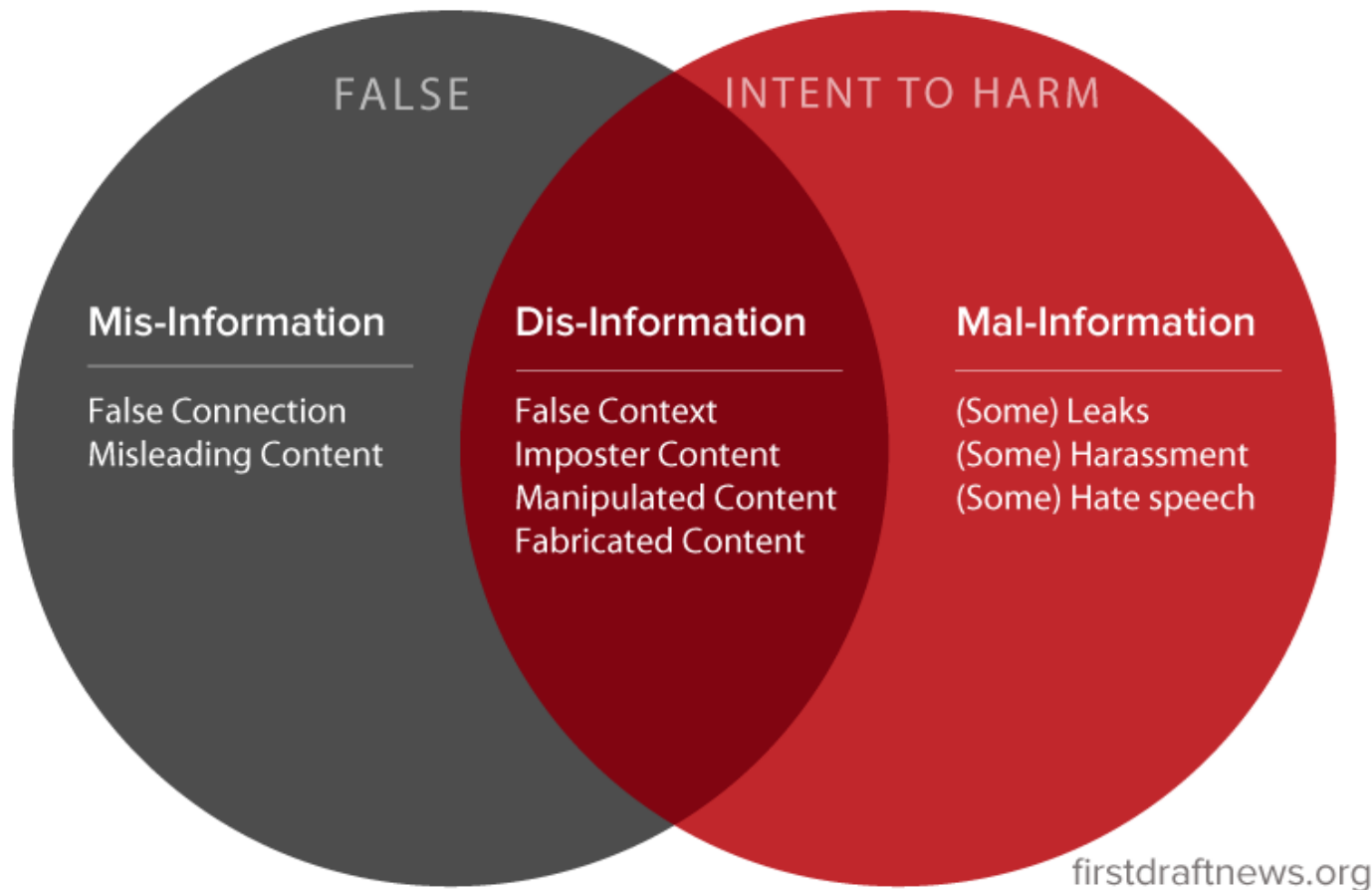


Disinformation is profitable, therefore CfA is part of consortiums that fight disinformation from all fronts, including investigating disinformation related to elections, climate extremism and foreign interference/influence in the African continent.

Overview

Understanding information disorder problem

INFORMATION DISORDER



Understanding the problem

'Fake news' is a complex problem created a diverse set of 'bad' actors that ranges from viral sharing of both 'innocent' mistaken info & deliberately created misleading info, to toxic hate speech designed to incite. The only way to fight it is to have diverse toolsets

DISINFORMATION

Harmfull

to Democracies,
Societies, Values,
Security etc

Not illegal

Hatespeech,
Terrorist content,
Extremist content,
Legal instruments
etc

Manipulative

Bot accounts, Sock-
puppet accounts,
fake media etc

Intentional

Not
misinformation,
influencing
decisions, pursuing
a goal

Coordinated

Use of different
media e.g. social
media, media,
blogs etc

STATE AND NON STATE ACTORS

Disinformation

Intention is a key component, but the following are also focus areas. Its also not only a political enterprise, but can also be used for economic gain. Further, state actors are using this tools for their own goals. The **ABC model** is used for investigations.



Disinfo is profitable

Disinformation is a fast growing **industry**, with profiteers deliberately finding/amplifying discord so they can monetize it.

They use **ever cheaper & easier-to-use tools** to do this, on an **industrial scale**.

This underground shadow economy of **‘political public relations’** includes **digital strategists & paid social influencers or rented pundits**.

They compete to win **public mindshare** (often through re-usable ‘audiences’).



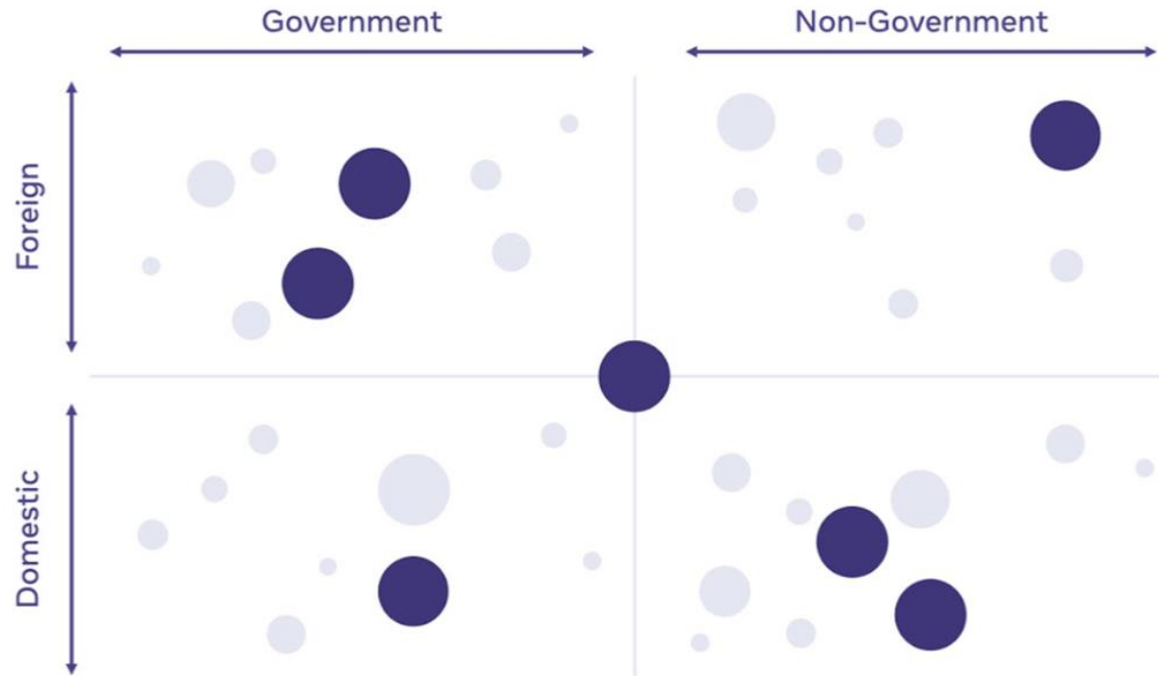
Kenya's keyboard warriors

How opposing online groups coordinated to amplify political narratives against each other on social media

03 / 2021



Influence operations



Information operations

Influence operations tend to fall into two broad categories: domestic and foreign, and also can be driven by state actors or non-state actors.

Domestic: Kenya Case

Dynamics shaping influence strategies in Kenya

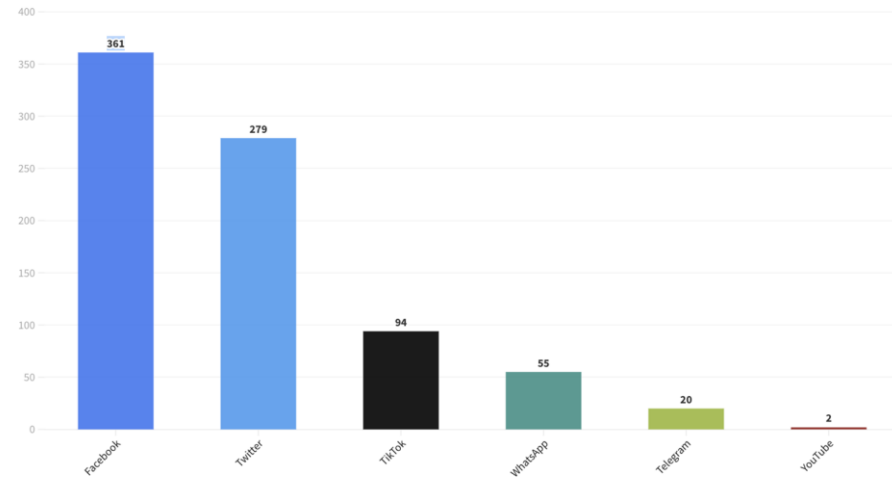
Kenyan Election: Platforms Trend

A total of 812 cases of hate speech and incitement were identified. These were the cases validated by NCIC during the monitoring period.

There was a marked decrease in hate speech and incitement content/ cases identified after the announcement of election results.

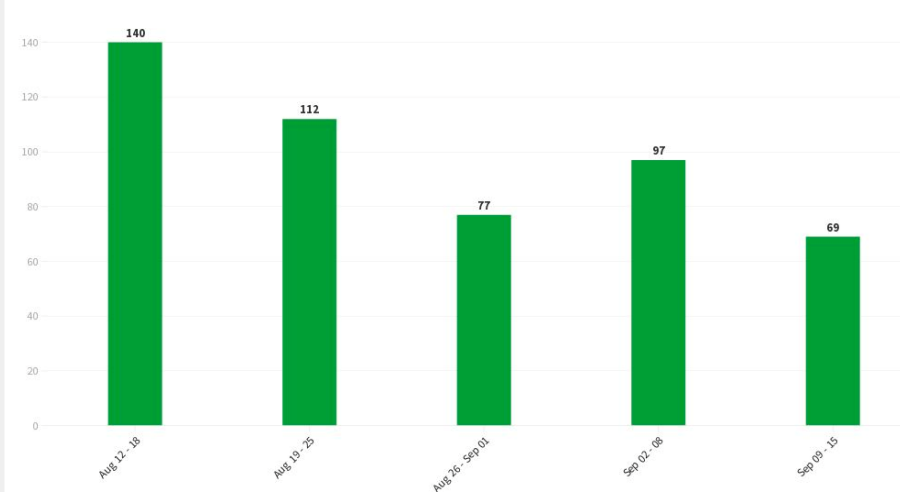
Facebook and Twitter still account a higher proportion of toxic content. However, we believe this is significantly lower compared to the actual number of similar content on platforms.

Social Media Monitoring: Identified Hate Speech Cases from 01 Jun - 15 Sep
Number of identified hate speech cases on social media



Source: Code for Africa

Social Media Monitoring: Identified Hate speech Cases from Aug 12 - Sep 15
Number of identified total hate speech cases on social media



Source: Code for Africa

Tactics & Techniques

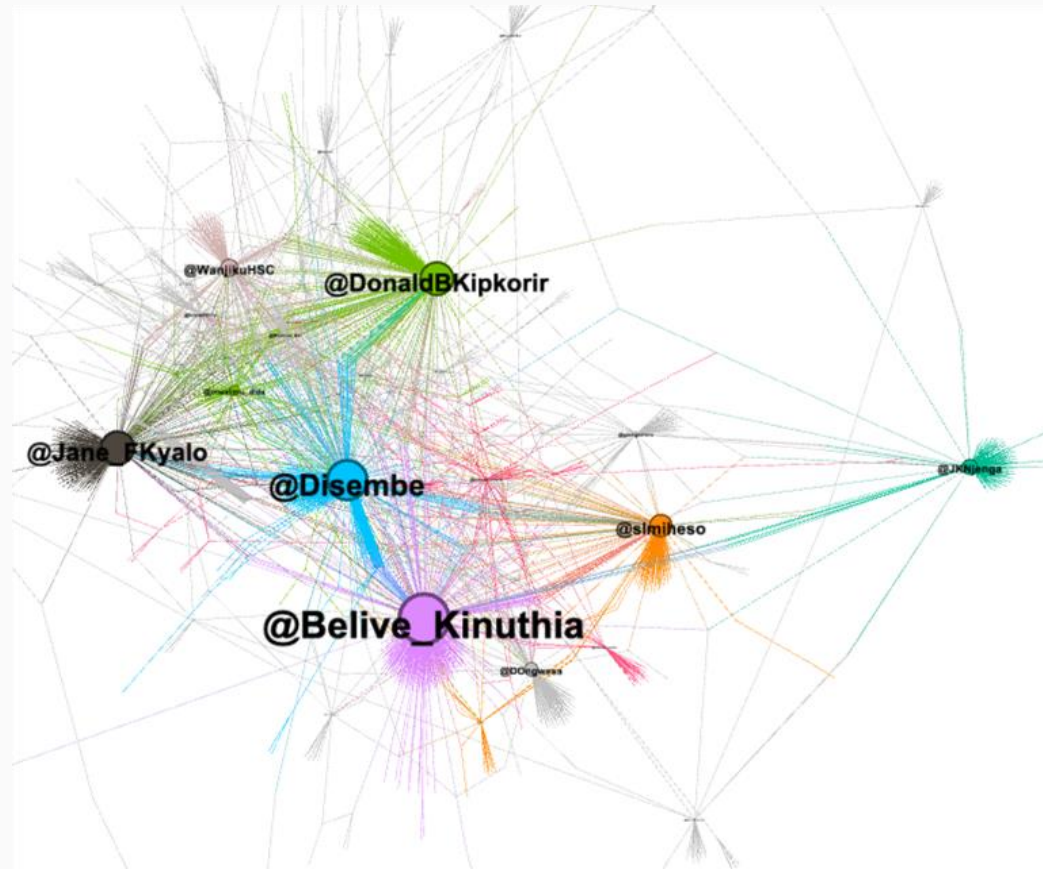
How was the influence peddled on social networks?

Keyboard warriors

There is a growing shadow economy of professional ‘keyboard warriors’, who run campaigns using their own existing networks of sock-puppets.

The networks are leveraged for **multiple clients**, which makes it harder for AI tools to identify + track.

This underground ‘public relations’ industry includes digital strategists and (increasingly) otherwise legitimate real-life social **influencers** or **paid pundits** who compete to win public mindshare for their political clients.



Trend manipulation

Twitter and Meta both describe Kenya as a leading global ‘idea factory’ for new ways to manipulate its algorithms that manage trending topics.

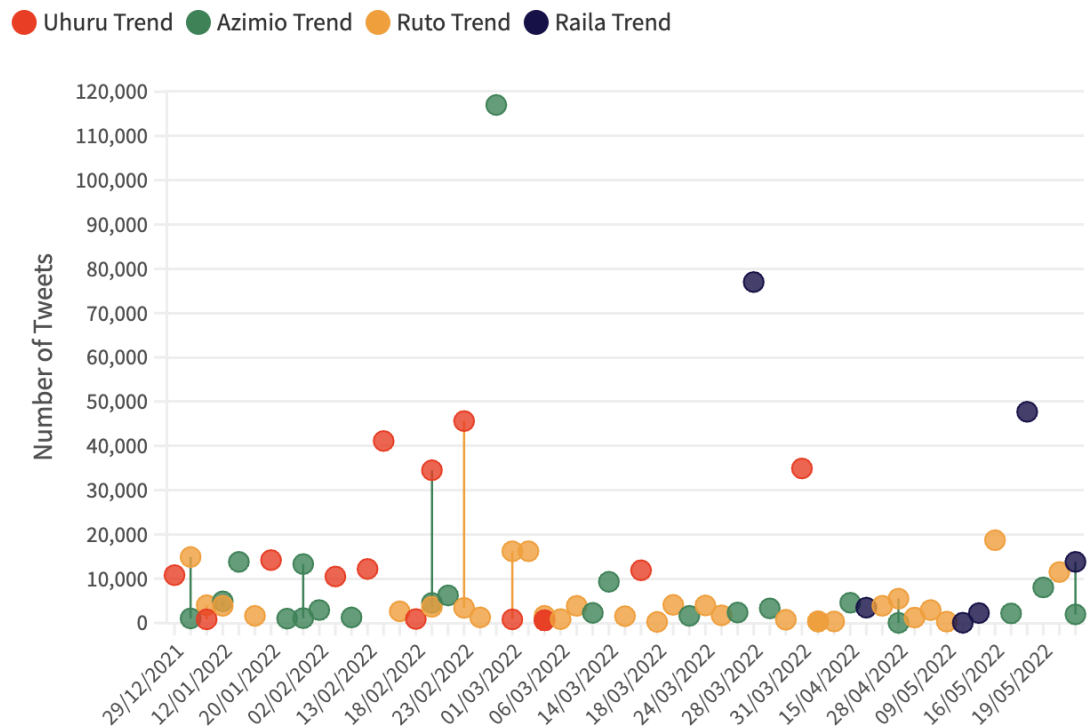
Subverting algorithms allow local bad actors to get their disinformation, hate speech & propaganda content into more people’s feeds.

Trend manipulation see actors mention the top candidates in the upcoming elections, or specific trending issues/hashtags as a way to piggyback on authentic public interest.

This creates an amplification feedback loop.

TRENDING HASHTAGS IN KENYA (POLITICS)

Collected hashtags mentioning Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto.



Source: iLAB's Hashtag Monitor, 2022

Bot armies

Armies of **automated bots** are being used to turbocharge coordinated campaigns.

The bots are used to **drown out** reasonable voices, or try boost/amplify narratives that undermine and disrupt the public conversation in Kenya.

The bots are also successfully making **genuine but divisive** political conversations trend on social media.


This leads to **accelerated polarisation**, by boosting the voices of **extremist or fringe** commentators at the expense of centralists.




mukhtar.parkar @ParkarMukhtar



Intelligent  Translate

Activity: **High** Influence: **Normal**

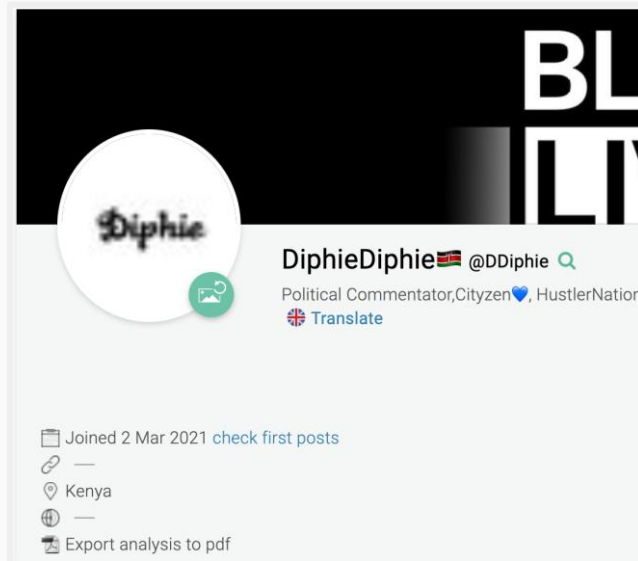
Bot Indicators:  90%


  




Joined 4 Jan 2021 [check first posts](#)





Tweets 3.1K Following 1.3K Followers 1.5K Listed 0



DiphieDiphie  @DDiphie

Political Commentator,Cityzen , HustlerNation   Translate

Joined 2 Mar 2021 [check first posts](#)

  Kenya  

Recently (last 2200 posts)

367

tweets/day

Sock puppet influencers

Consistent use of suspicious accounts to amplify political messaging, with no real persona

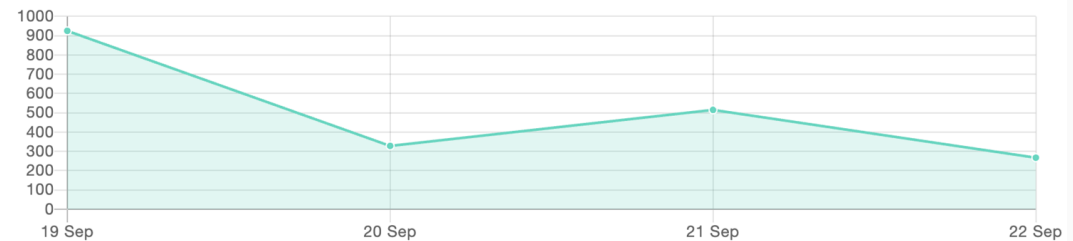
The content undermine the integrity of public conversations, particularly using disinfo, memes or sarcasm, and consistently churn out high volumes of posts every day.

Some amplify suspicious hashtags, while others drive narratives targeted at entities e.g. judiciary (#AkissForMwilu)

 Activity analysis based on the last **2198** tweets of the total **41894** posted by @mlipuzii

Weekly Activity

Posts per day by @mlipuzii during the last week



HITLÉR™
41.9K Tweets



HITLÉR™
@mlipuzii

You snooze you loose 🐼
Certified bully || Certified memer ||
@arsenal biggest fan ❤️
Follow my backup account @mlipuzii_

📍 Kenya 📅 Joined September 2020

9,571 Following 10.4K Followers

Posting Frequency

Post frequency (posts/day) by @mlipuzii

Overall (since 16-09-2020)



Recently (last 2198 posts)



Activity: **High** Influence: **High**

Bot Indicators:  **60%**

 SPAM

 SILENCE

 SUSPICIOUS FOLLOWERS

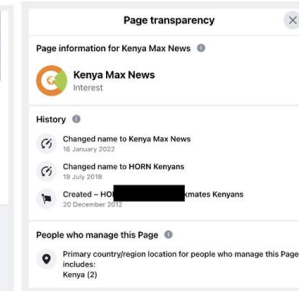
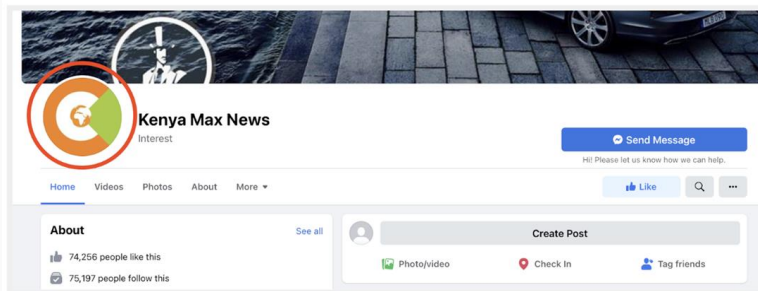
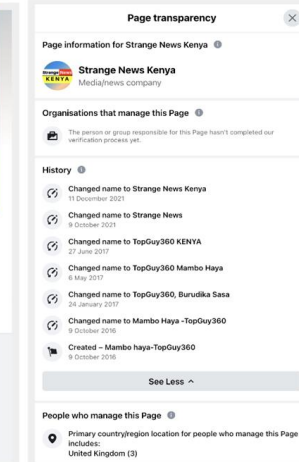
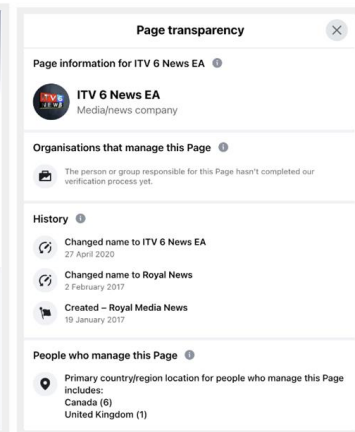
Imitating media

There is a marked increase in malign actors in Kenya on social media impersonating media.

They present themselves as legitimate sources of news, and package conspiracy theories or overt propaganda/disinfo as news articles.

This includes increasing numbers of pages/groups that impersonate legitimate media outlets such as Citizen TV.

Many of these pages are profit-seeking clickbait initiatives, that deliberately amplify inflammatory or polarising content.



False poll tallies

We observed a spike in the number of social content announcing the results of the poll tally, before the official announcement by the Independent Electoral & Boundaries Commission (IEBC).

Proactive efforts by Twitter & TikTok to flag and label such type of announcements helped to deter the spread of content that could polarise the public and create anxiety within the country. Such content could not be debunked by our fact checking & investigative teams.



Weaponising satire

Bad actors are increasingly using visual communication techniques to transmit their message, often disguised as satire. Visual messages appeal to younger audiences, but animated images & GIFs are better at evading Twitter & Facebook's AI-based threat detection algorithms.

Amusing/ satirical visual messages are also re-shared more often with friends & family, as memes, on dark social networks on WhatsApp or Telegram or Signal.



Paint a Picture

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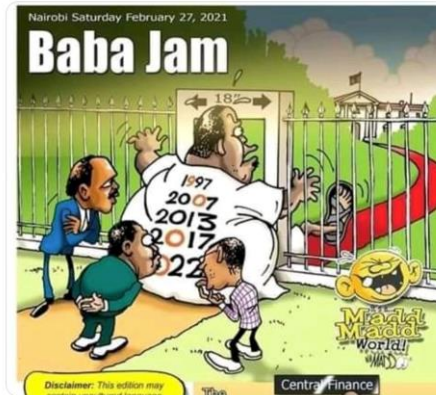
Amusing/satirical visual messages are also **re-shared more often** with friends & family, as **memes**, on dark social networks on WhatsApp or Telegram or Signal.



Kenyan Vote
@arnoldj_

ODM is dead in other parts of the country. It has been officially declared Nyanza party. ODM and Rao are rejects and they won't go anywhere.

[#RailaTheLIAR](#)



TURKANA FINEST  @tigerdepunisher · Jul 10

Raila will tell you that some people who oppose him are corrupt but when they start singing his tune they aren't corrupt anymore they are clean

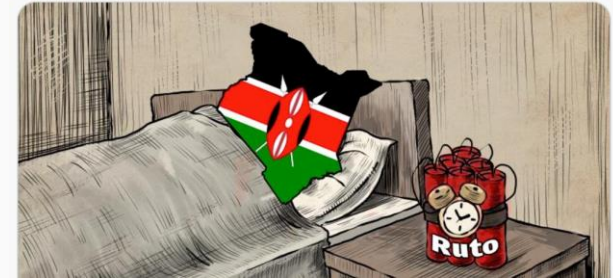
[#RailaTheLIAR](#)



SEE @RadiSmallz · Aug 9

The environment for the next General Election is becoming increasingly divisive as politicians continue to mobilize along ethnic lines

[#RutosViolencePlan](#)



Emotive Incitement

Graphic photoshopped images, often **involving violence**, are another distinctive trend in Kenya.

The messages are designed to polarise or incite citizens by exploiting existing tribal/ethnic, religious or political faultlines.

The images are created using fairly complex editing software, and require a degree of design competence.

The campaigns particularly target semi-literal and/or rural/remote communities.



No way Will this man ever be my president.
[#RutoPlanningViolence](#)



7:30 AM · Aug 4, 2021 from Kilifi, Kenya · Twitter for Android



Currently the DP and his henchmen are leading a Revolution that is meant to silence all those who will be against William Ruto in Rift Valley come 2022. Their aim is to scare people and make them not to go against him.

[#RutoPlanningViolence](#)



10:07 PM - 3 Aug 2021



Aug 9
Ruto had a hand in the 1992 clashes and the 2007-08 Post Election Violence.
The two conflicts led to the death of thousands of Kenyans and displacement many Kenyans. [#RutosViolencePlan](#)



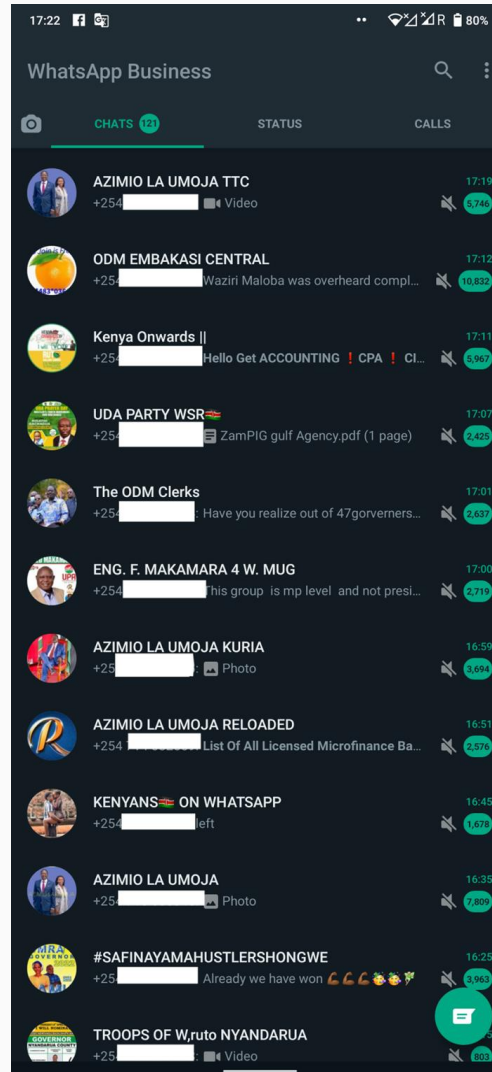
Aug 9
The Deputy President seeks to use the people as a weapon to clinch power. He has managed to turn the public against the same government he is part of, and has made claims recently, that there is a plan to rig him out in the upcoming general election
[#RutosViolencePlan](#)



Invisible mobilisation

Dark social groups may be invisible, but they can quickly reach a significant scale. Conversations in some of the groups we monitor hit upwards of ~15,000 messages during peak debates, but tend to average ~1,000 messages per group every two weeks.

Much of the communication is grassroots planning or logistics, for local rallies or other events/concerns. But, organisers regularly use inflammatory content to incite or mobilise followers.



Key narratives

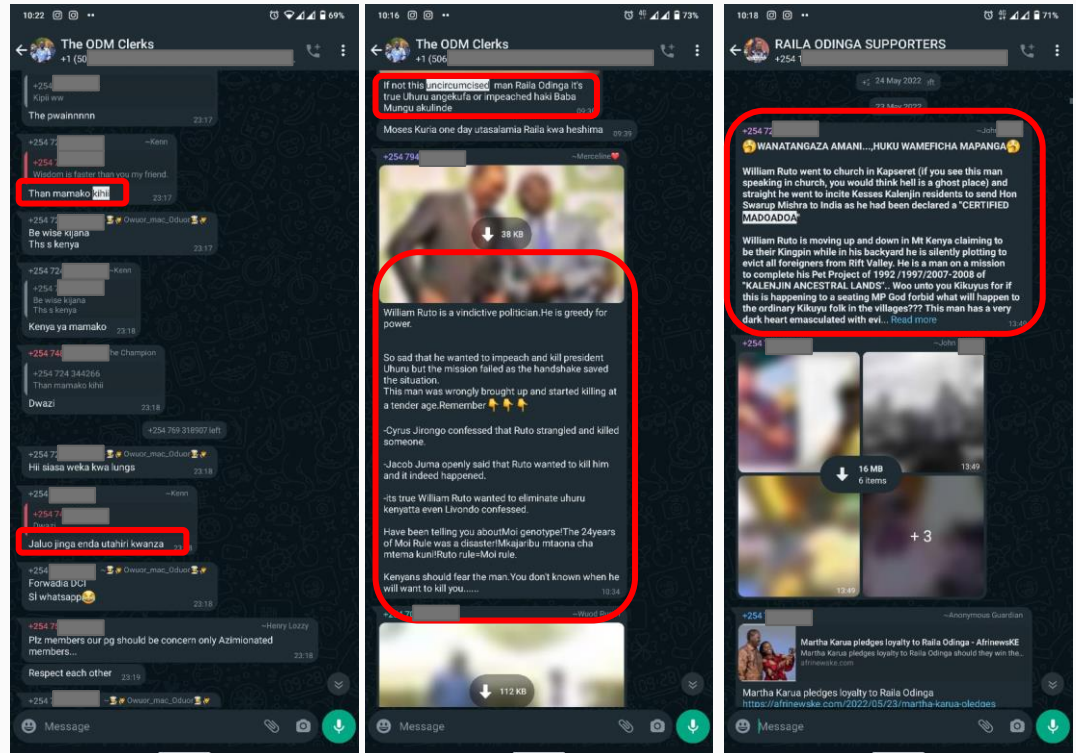
What was being peddled on these social networks?

Blinded to toxic posts

These closed groups are used to openly converse around political issues, but some members use banned hate speech words to attack each other.

This originates from both camps since members of these groups tend to be a mixture of supporters from both sides of the political divide.

We continue to monitor these chats since it is expected the groups can be used for incitement during and after the poll date.

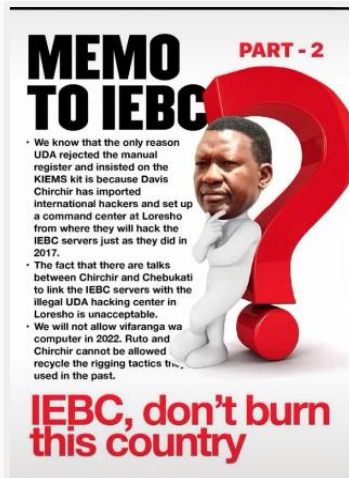
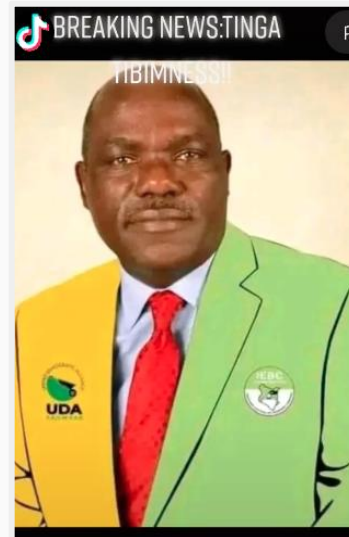


Discrediting institutions

The campaigns have since moved into platforms such as Tiktok, indicating a concerted effort to target the youth.

The identified content attempts to insinuate that the electoral body has allegiance to one political party.

IEBC Chairperson Wafula Chebukati has been included in the majority of the manipulated (photoshopped) pictures and videos in an attempt to propagate a narrative that he is allied to the UDA party.



Gender Slurs & Misogyny

After the announcement of election results, women candidates who lost, have been subjected to gender slurs and misogynistic language.

Such content tend to imply that women-candidates are not deserving of leadership positions and that they primarily use their femininity to solicit for votes during campaigns.

We are yet to see coordinated attacks however, we continue to monitor for such content and building a watchlist database for such terms.





Hate Speech and disinfo

Hate speech is disinformation when the perpetrators are propagating hate speech with an intent to cause harm and also they are aware that they are sharing misleading information.

In most cases, the hate speech disinformation is propagated through inauthentic means such as coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Not all cases of hate speech are disinformation or misinformation.



ADDO

Nov 17 · 26 min read · [Listen](#)



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Foreign interference

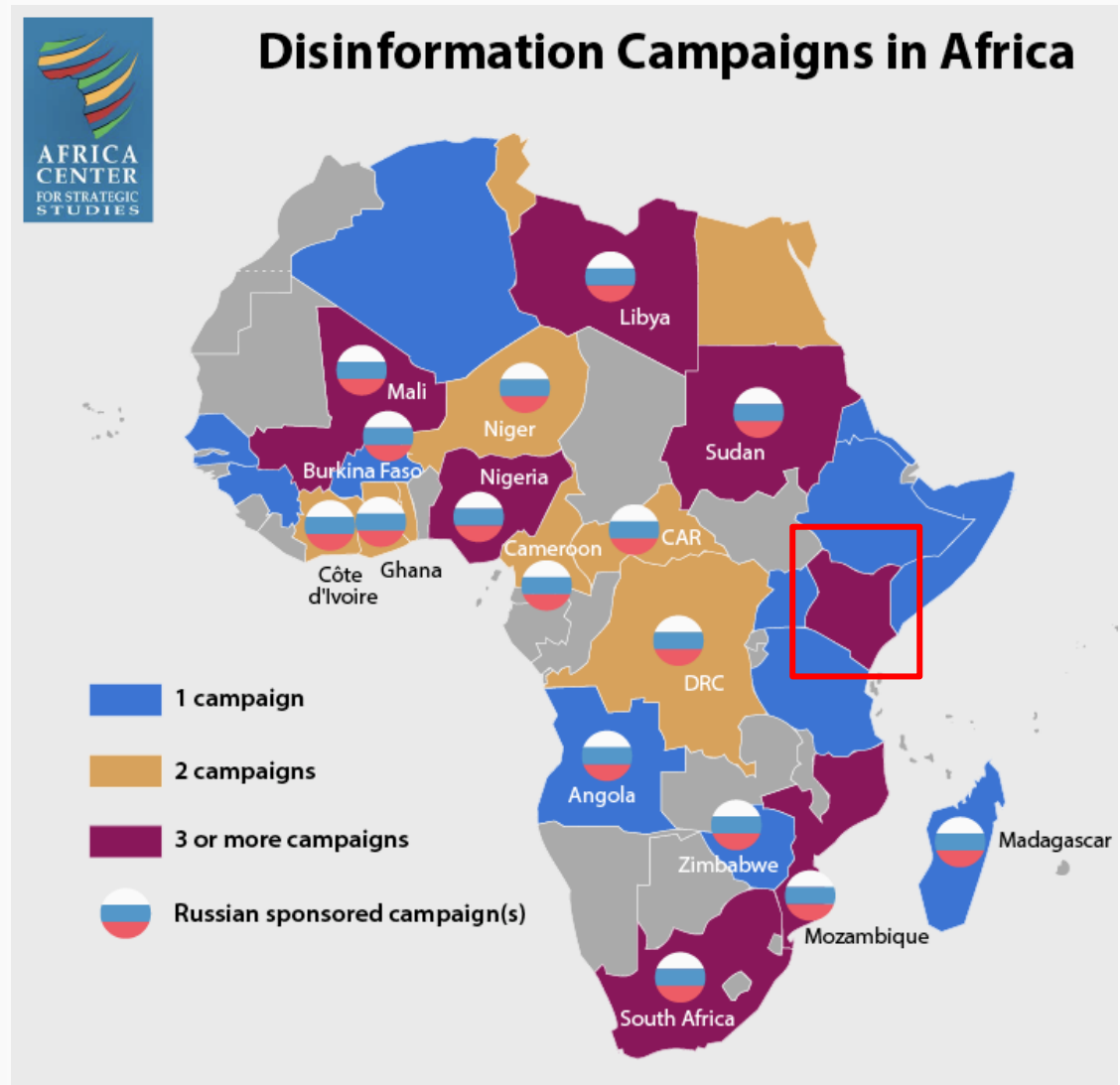
The intersection with dynamics shaping influence strategies in Kenya and the rest of Africa

Global turf war

Non-African nation states & warmongers or crime cabals are **seeding + amplifying** disinfo that is fuelling armed conflict from the CAR + Mali, to Ethiopia + Mozambique.

They are ‘**franchising**’ the frontline work to African proxies/contractors, and are using **coordinated networks** & professionally produced **multimedia content** to **weaponise** their messages.

They are increasingly using ‘**infotainment**’ formats to bypass media watchdogs, & to **target youth** or to catch **unsuspecting audiences**.



Regional Infrastructure

Regional networks of co-opted or sockpuppet accounts continue to grow, controlled by administrators in multiple countries.

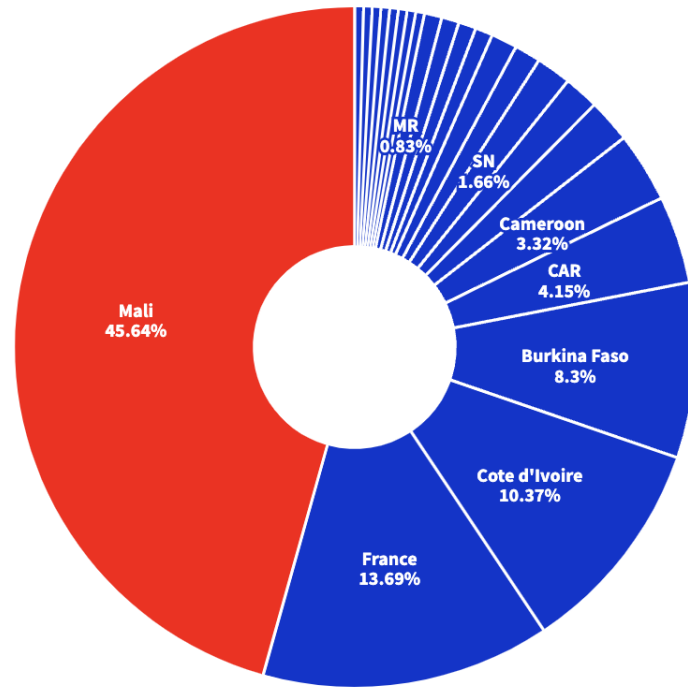
While **Mali** is currently the epicentre for control of these networks, the node in **France** is also noteworthy.

The fastest growing nodes are Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, suggesting these countries are the focus for current/future operations.

The networks consistently promote pro-Wagner and anti-French narratives.

PRO-RUSSIAN NETWORK: ADMINISTRATION OF SUSPICIOUS ACCOUNTS

Actor watchlist of pro-Russian accounts across Meta platforms



Source: iLAB Actor Watchlist



Media Launderers

Content aggregation or syndication is a major amplifier of state-affiliated media content.

Aggregation is particularly popular in West Africa, with 'clickbait' sites like **Maliweb.org** & **bamada.net** re-publishing Sputnik or other state-media content often without attribution.

Syndication allows more direct targeting, with wire services such as ANA (**African News Agency**) injecting content into 1,000s of otherwise credible & unsuspecting media.

The screenshot shows the Sputnik International website. At the top is the Sputnik logo and a navigation bar with 'International' selected. Below the header is a large image of a microphone in front of a blurred background with the text 'TELLING THE UNTOLD'. Under the image is the copyright notice '© Sputnik / Konstantin Chalabov / Go to the mediabank'. Below this are three buttons: 'Subscribe', 'International', 'India', and 'Africa'. The main headline reads: 'Sputnik News Agency and Radio and Ethiopian News Agency signed a memorandum of understanding in Addis Ababa on Thursday. This is the first document in Sputnik's history concerning cooperation with the Ethiopian media.' The article text states: 'The parties agreed to increase cooperation both in the field of content exchange and with respect to joint projects. The document was signed by Vasily Pushkov, Director of International Cooperation at Sputnik, and Johannes Wondirad, Director of Public Relations and Strategic Partnerships at ENA.' At the bottom right is a 'Newsfeed' button.

SPUTNIK

International

TELLING THE UNTOLD

© Sputnik / Konstantin Chalabov / Go to the mediabank

Subscribe International India Africa

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Newsfeed

Co-opting Media

Foreign state-owned media are ramping up **content-sharing partnerships** with African media, injecting reportage that supports their policy positions into mainstream mass media across the continent.

Foreign nations are also increasing **media training**, via RT/Sputnik/CGTN, etc, alongside **equity investment** into African media.

There is also growing evidence of **outsourcing** or ‘**franchising**’ of social media campaigns to local content producers.

China's State-Controlled Media Holding Company Opens New HQ in Kenya



Media

Propaganda

Public Diplomacy

by Eric Olander

 Share



吴鹏 Wu Peng

@WuPeng_MFACHina

Glad to see the launch of Africa headquarters of [#China](#) Media Group. First hand reporting of a true [#Africa](#) to Chinese audience and vice versa!



China's top diplomat for Sub-Saharan Africa, Ambassador Wu Peng, announced **over the weekend** the opening of the China Media Group's (CMG) new headquarters in Nairobi.

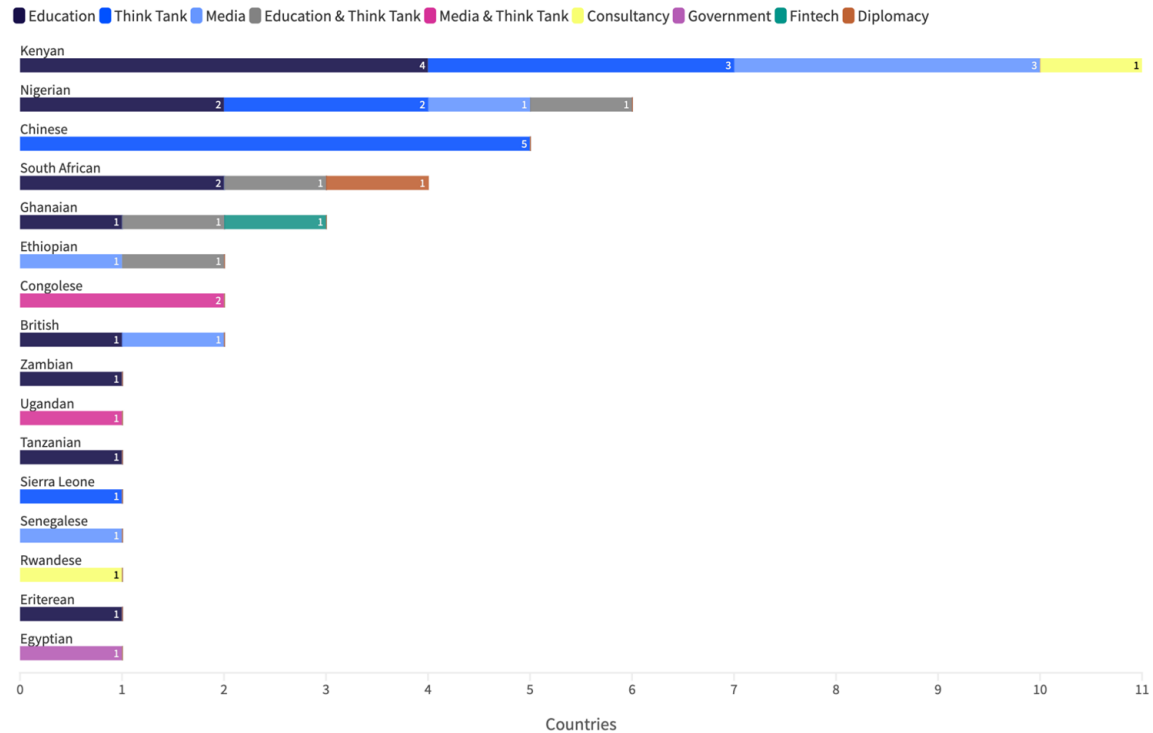
Actor mapping

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has recruited a total of 44 pan-African network of academics, political activists and media pundits who publish pro-Chinese 'think piece' articles in a wide range of local media without disclosing their links to Chinese state affiliated agencies.

Many of the opinion articles appear to be coordinated, published in multiple countries by multiple authors using identical phrases or wording.

PUNDITS MAPPING: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN & SECTOR

Number of individuals who frequently publish pro-Chinese opinion pieces in China-state affiliated media based on sector/ industry



Source: Pundits database



The narrative includes claims Russia has “*done a lot to protect Christians in Syria*”, and targets bodies such as AFROCOM.

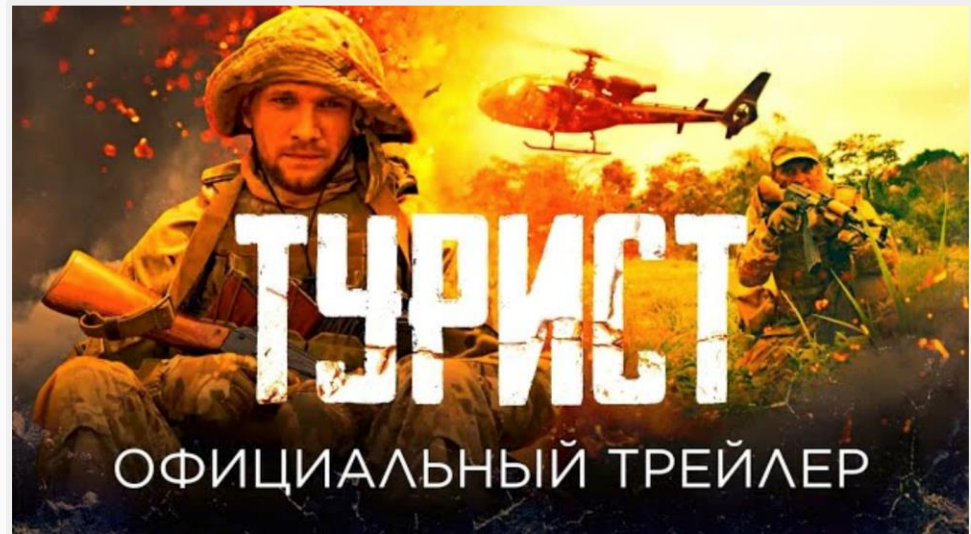
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በሮውን በአዲስ አበባ ከፈተ

Streaming influence

Blockbuster entertainment such as the “*Le Touriste*” movie has been so successful that a sequel, “*Granit*”, was produced in December 2021.

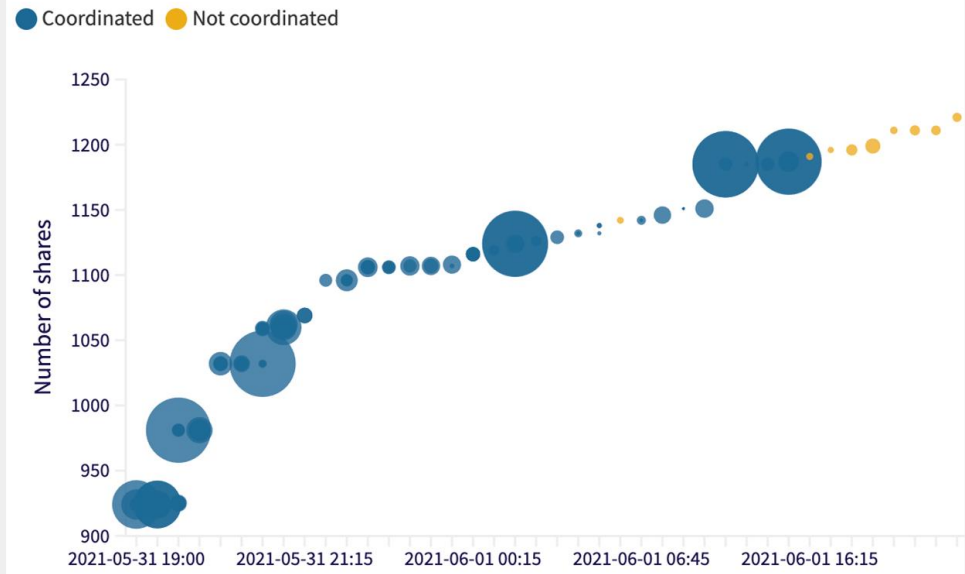
The French version of the “*Le Touriste*” movie was amplified using ~310 coordinated Facebook accounts over a period of 24 hours, and has now gone viral organically.

The films catch audiences in a relaxed ‘**suspension of belief**’ state-of-mind, when they are susceptible to plot-driven narratives about good vs evil.



Link sharing activity for Touriste Film

Between May 31 and June 2 2021, there were 310 cases of coordinated link sharing of the Afrique Media TV post



Cartoon heroes

State-affiliated influence strategists are ramping up use of sophisticated **animated videos** to target younger ‘non-political’ audiences on social media.

The videos are also shared as static ‘comics’. They glorify mercenaries as heroes, fighting for justice for ordinary Africans.

The videos are team-driven **big budget productions** with input from African creatives. We’re tracing the supply-chain & to ‘fingerprint’ what else these sub-contractors are doing.



Nathalia Dukhan
@NathaliaDukhan



Graphic content !

Nouvelle vidéo de propagande du Groupe [#Wagner](#) sur la [#Centrafrique](#) qui dépeint un climat de ténèbres où les forces du bien (Wagner) luttent contre les forces du mal (la CPC?)... en circulation sur les réseaux sociaux en langue russe...

[Translate Tweet](#)



2:56 AM · Jan 11, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

30 Retweets 12 Quote Tweets 57 Likes

Shadow boxing

The murky financing and secret leadership structures that extremist groups use to protect themselves are useful for IO strategists who feed conspiracist claims.

In Africa, both European and Russian influence ops have used public fear/rejection of jihadist extremists to frame their forces as the 'good guys' or to suggest that their opponents are secretly funding insurrectionists.

Russia's Wagner Group is using the strategy heavily everywhere from CAR to Mali.

**Afrique Média**

Follow

28 April · 

 Soit disant enlèvement d'un soldat russe par les terroristes au Mali (Regarder jusqu'à la fin). Partagez!
See less



 Soit disant enlèvement d'un soldat russe par les terroristes au Mali (Regarder jusqu'à la fin). Partagez! 

 Like

 Comment

 Share

  L'Afrique d'Abord 02 and 2.6K others · 434 comments · 77K views

Video Stars: Viral content

Pro-Russian campaigners are successfully using sophisticated video propaganda to shape public narratives and undermine democratic watchdogs across Africa, using increasingly slick production standards and coordinated amplification.

The video campaigns are deliberately designed as entertainment that glorifies the Wagner Group's mercenaries. They are targeted at audiences who traditionally avoid mainstream news.



ADDO

Oct 4 · 15 min read · [Listen](#)

Video Stars: Russia's viral video propaganda in Africa

This report forms part of our ongoing ad-hoc analysis of Africa-focused Russian influence operations that appear designed to shape public support for Russian interests



Summary:

Pro-Russian campaigners are successfully using sophisticated video propaganda to shape public narratives and undermine democratic watchdogs across Africa, using increasingly slick production standards and coordinated amplification.

Gift Horses: Aid diplomacy

The war in Ukraine has disrupted agricultural exports and fuel supplies across the Black Sea region, triggering widespread global cost increases and food/resource scarcity across Africa. Russia is increasingly seeking to blame the West's sanctions for the growing impacts.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has gone further, blaming the shortages and market disruptions on the West's response to the pandemic and on the West's 'green agenda', which he suggests prejudices developing nations.



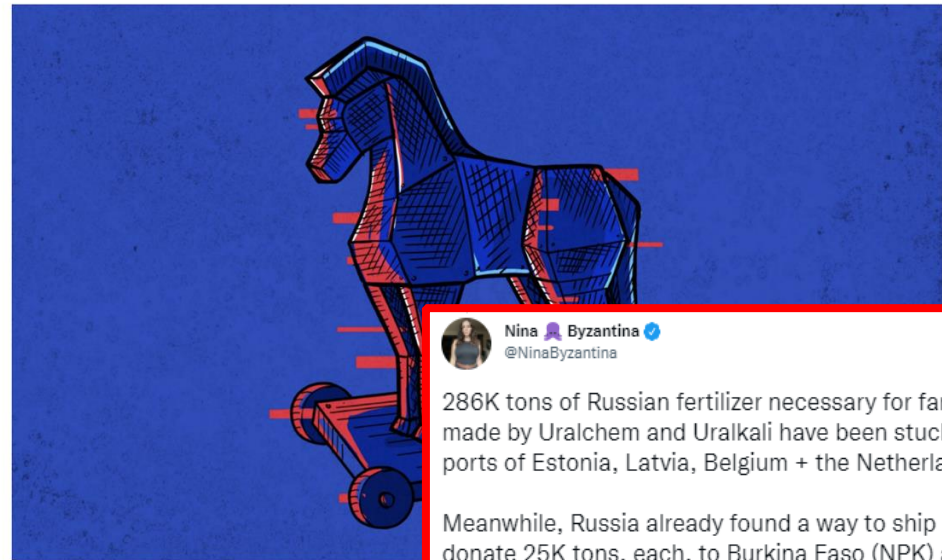
ADDO

Sep 30 · 14 min read · [Listen](#)



Gift Horse: Russia's African aid diplomacy

This report forms part of our ongoing ad-hoc analysis of Africa-focused Russian influence operations that appear designed to shape public support for Russian interests



Summary:

The war in Ukraine has disrupted agricultural exports and fuel supplies across the Black Sea region, triggering widespread global cost increases and food/resource scarcity across Africa. Russia is increasingly seeking to blame the West's sanctions for the growing impacts.



Nina Byzantina
@NinaByzantina

286K tons of Russian fertilizer necessary for farming made by Uralchem and Uralkali have been stuck in the ports of Estonia, Latvia, Belgium + the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, Russia already found a way to ship + donate 25K tons, each, to Burkina Faso (NPK) and Sudan (carbamide).

9:29 PM · Sep 10, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

52 Retweets · 2 Quote Tweets · 184 Likes

Food/fuel diplomacy

Increasing aid diplomacy, through food or fuel aid donations in CAR echo Russian influence strategies the DFRLabs first observed in Sudan.

Significantly, the donations are often accompanied by [communiqués](#) from the Wagner Group attributing the donation to 'Evgenii Prigozhin'.

The overt use of 'From Russia with Love' branding rather than Wagner branding cements the tie between security operations and humanitarian aid.



Mobilising IRL activists

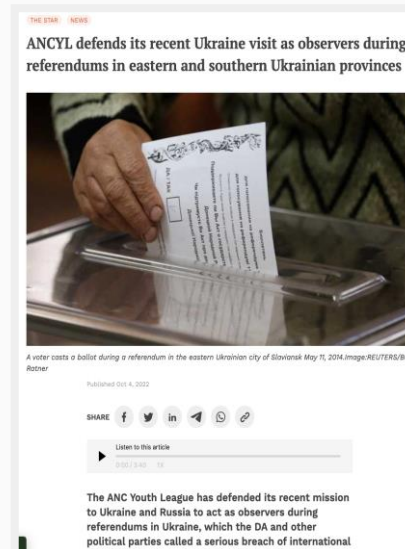
Russia is tapping into a growing grassroots social movements that campaign around pan-Africanist agendas.

An continental network of 72 campaigning CSOs was launched last week in Burkina Faso, with overt pledges of support for Russia amongst anti-French/anti-NATO rhetoric.

Elsewhere, mainstream political parties, such as the ANC Youth League in South Africa, are overtly supporting Russia and its war against Ukraine.



[Faso Lagam Taaba Zaka](#) public event on 18 October 2022 announcing launch of an international coalition of 72 pro-Russian pan-Africanist CSOs.



South African International Referendum Observer Team

Screengrabs of ANCYL press statement and and YouTube video of ANCYL international liaison head Khulekani Skosana leading pro-Russian chants in Donbass ([left](#), [right](#))

Local influencers

There is a significant growth in a network of pro-Russian nano influencers, who frequently record viral live videos, sharing their opinions about key events happening in the region.

These videos often receive significant engagement on Facebook – some with more than ~500,000 views, and the majority of the supporters congratulating or promoting a Russian/ Wagner military collaboration with the countries within the region in the comment section.



Nano and major influencers who advocate for engagement of countries within the Sahel with Russia ([Franklin Nyamisi](#), [Mabel Junior](#), to add, [Nathalie Dasilva](#), [Cheick Mohammad Baguian](#), [Kemi seba](#)) (Source: CfA using Facebook)

Citizen cheerleaders

The mobilisation isn't just online: increasingly social media is being used to trigger real-world rallies + protests.

The Ukraine war's impact on food/fuel prices + ineffective peacekeeping missions provide **topical flashpoints** for a growing pan-Africanist movement fueled by conspiracist disinfo.

The events often adopt **global iconography**, such as Russia's 'Z' symbol, as to build **compelling visuals** that feed back into online campaigns on both open + dark social platforms.

He's pro-Russian, anti-Zelensky and rallying for Putin in West Africa

The digital diet of a 30-year-old Burkinabe toy seller shows how Moscow is building the image of a superpo

By Danielle Paquette

April 21, 2022 at 4:00 a.m. EDT

 Listen to article 12 min



Toy seller Ismael Sawadogo attends a pro-Russian rally in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on March 27. (Danielle Paquette/The Washington Post)

The page, created in 2017, has about 55,000 followers and is administered in Cameroon. The pro-Putin and anti-West posts are mixed with clips of activists in Mali and Burkina Faso, among other African nations, advocating for closer relationships with Moscow.



Screenshots of various Facebook pages, including the L'Afrique Mon Beau Pays, or "Africa My Beautiful Country" page, that display similar pro-Putin and anti-West posts. (Code for Africa)

"I like the information they share," Sawadogo said, holding up his phone, which displayed a post of a tank captioned "THE RUSSIAN Z" with three flexed muscle emoji.

 Comment 208  Gift Article  Share

Feeding the flames

Pro-Russian networks are increasingly targeting **United Nations (UN)** peacekeeping missions in CAR and DRC, & WHO health campaigns.

The campaigns combine foreign + domestic actors and use coordinated narratives calling for **violent action**.

The online campaigns are mirrored by **street protests**.

In DRC there is evidence of **coordinated incitement** ahead of violent attacks on UN bases resulting in deaths of both peacekeepers & protestors.

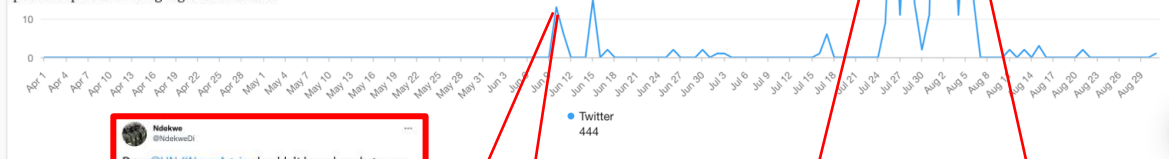
Death toll reaches 36 in eastern DRC as protesters turn on UN peacekeepers

With elections due next year, analysts fear political motives could be driving the rising violence and tensions in the region



Protesters target the UN peacekeeping mission in Goma in July. The perception is that Monusco is failing to stop attacks by armed groups. Photograph: Michel Lunanga/AFP/Getty Images

Fears of a new wave of violence in the restive east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are growing after weeks of **deadly protests** against UN peacekeepers and rising regional tensions.



Counter messaging efforts

Efforts to counter the spread of hate speech and inciteful content

Platform convenings

Social media companies were invited by the consortium and partners to discuss different issues related to the elections including:

A comprehensive overview of the national early warning and response during elections.

Overview of election plans to counter online hate speech/incitement in Kenya

Feedback on action plans by social media companies to curb the spread of mis/ disinfo + hate speech.

Collaborative approaches to solve the challenges + moderate content on platforms.

Re: Consultation on online hate speech in the Kenyan electoral context

External > Inbox x

Wed, 21 Sept, 09:12 (6 days ago)

@twitter.com, google.com, sharonn

Dear all,

This is a reminder of **tomorrow's meeting at 3pm Nairobi time**. Similar to previous meetings, the discussion will focus on trends, incidents and responses with a focus on the way forward and issues which remain of concern in the post-election phase.

Agenda

1. Brief opening remarks by UN Kenya
2. Presentation by MAPEMA consortium/Code4Africa on trends and concerns
3. Interventions by social media platforms and other actors on incidents and actions taken
4. Discussion on the directions of further action and engagement

We look forward to your participation in the discussion.

Best,

With these experts and potentially others, we would appreciate your virtual attendance of our inaugural meeting on Tuesday, **14 June 2022, between 14h00-16h00**.

Proposed agenda:

1. Overview of the national early warning and response during elections and UN & partners roles in Kenya.
2. Overview of election plans to counter online hate speech/incitement in Kenya:
 1. Google
 2. Meta
 3. Tiktok
 4. Twitter
3. How do we collaborate moving forward? How often do we meet and who needs to be with us?

We trust you will be able to attend and help us combat hate speech and online incitement. We look forward to your response, and partnership.

warm regards,

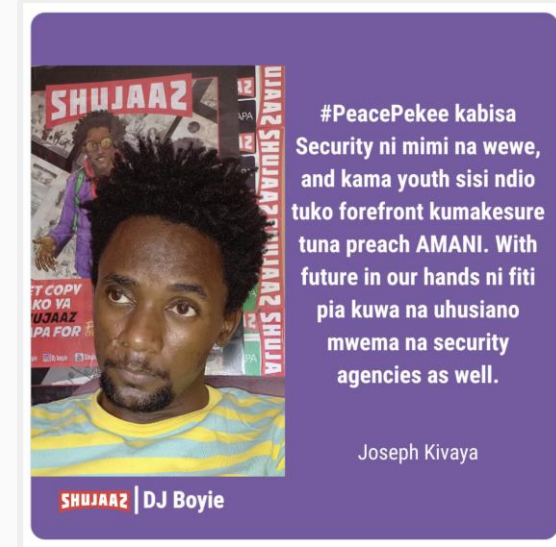
Viral Storytelling

Disinfo often succeeds because it is **mesmerising**.

It is visually striking, tells a compelling story and plants doubts or suspicions.

We've therefore partnered with East Africa's biggest & most **trusted** youth brand, **Shujaaz**, to leverage its two-time Emmy-winning **visual storytelling** through comics, animated video & viral social platforms.

Shujaaz youth ambassadors & its community of 7,5m 'heroes' will facilitate real-world dialogues.

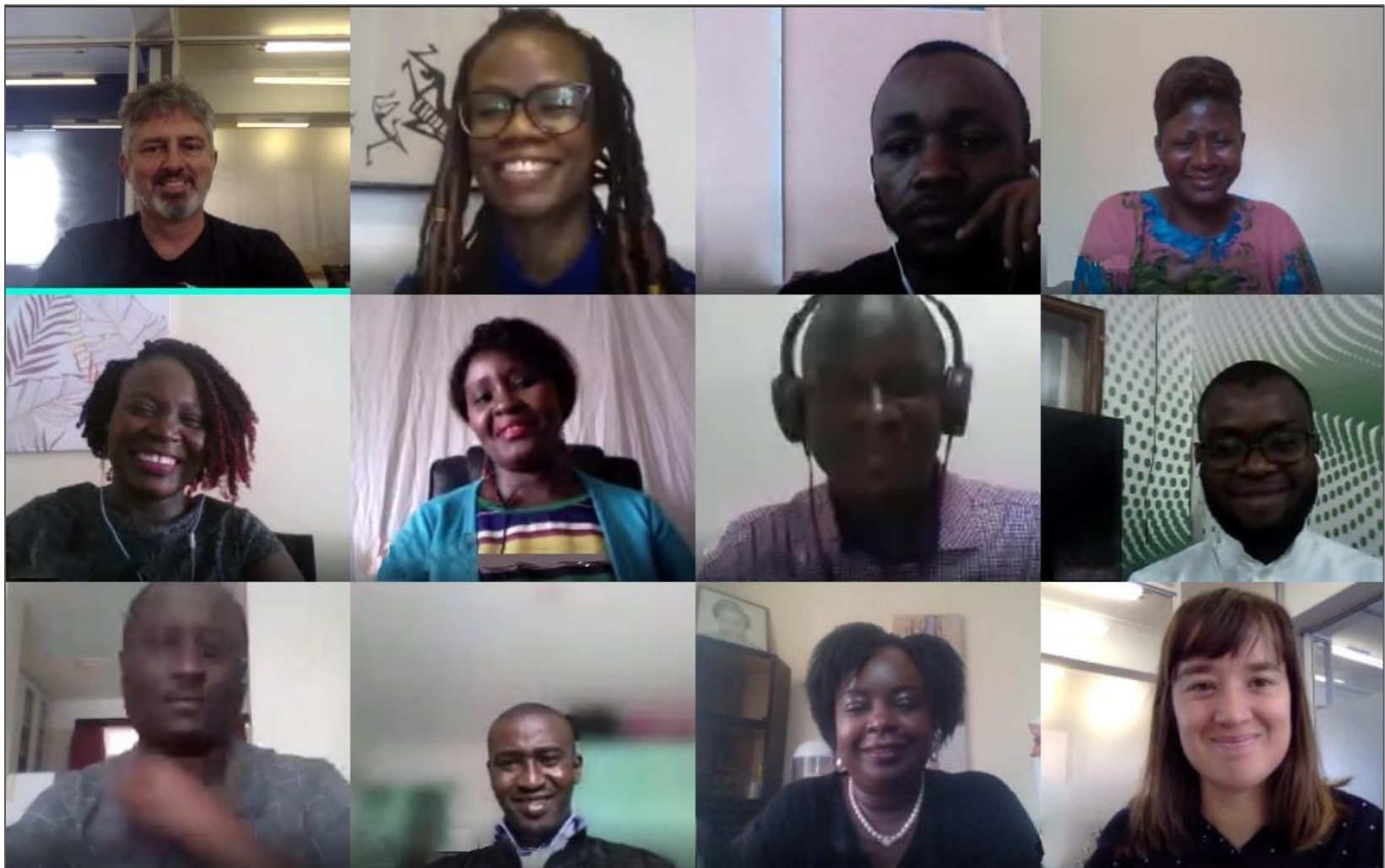


Social influencing

AIfluence focused its efforts in development of messaging focused on:

1. Sensitize the public on the reality of all elections – there is always a winning and losing candidate.
2. Encouraging social media users to remain peaceful while waiting for the supreme court's final verdict and avoiding the spreading of hate speech.
3. Standing up against tribalism by communicating that Kenya is home to a diverse collection of tribes, cultures, and religions.





Training, Mentorship & grants

We've been overwhelmed with the response to our workshops, training 576 journalists through 161 webinars so far, while also mentoring them and providing story grants to use the skills in producing investigative pieces on disinformation + hate speech + influence operations cases.



Convening Power

We use our convening power and ecosystem networks to focus attention on disinfo + hate speech, by co-hosting conferences such as the African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) and facilitate sessions or workshops at others' events.

Universities Courseware

Successful training is built on ongoing repeated lessons, over extended periods, so that new techniques/tools become part of journalists' core 'DNA'.

The consortium therefore works with major journalism schools/universities across Africa, to help develop curricula focused on disinfo, hatespeech or fact-checking.

We have partnerships with 37 universities. We'd be happy to explore synergies.



Some Solutions

How CfA partners are tackling disinfo/toxic networks

Drive up the costs

1. **Debunk** + **pre-bunk** conspiracies by exposing the hidden puppet-masters
2. **Dismantle** the sock-puppet infrastructure that gives access to audiences
3. **Deplatform** the 'linchpin' bad actors
4. **Demonetise** the underlying disinfo economy & blacklist the profiteers
5. **Dissuade** the digital creatives who produce the content

Build indigenous ecosystems

1. **Fund** institutions not projects
2. **Develop** infrastructure rather than storytelling
3. **Shift focus** from parachute-in training to peer-mentorship
4. **Nurture** indigenous technical expertise + technologies/tools
5. **Support** transnational collaboration
6. **Invest** into diversified 'information economies'



Questions?

Fire away!

Connect:

This presentation: <https://bit.ly/ACSSKenyaCase>

CfA: @Code4Africa

iLAB: @AfricanCIR

PesaCheck: @PesaCheck