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CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2. METHODOLOGY	11
3. BACKGROUND	13
3.1 'GEN Z' PROTESTS IN 2024 AND 2025	13
3.2 DIGITAL VIOLENCE IN KENYA AND THE LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE	15
4. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK	20
4.1 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, RIGHT OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY	20
4.2 RIGHT TO PRIVACY	22
4.3 RIGHT TO LIBERTY AND SECURITY OF PERSON, RIGHTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	22
4.4 RIGHT TO HEALTH	23
4.5 CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS	24
5. DIGITAL ACTIVISM	25
5.1 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES' ROLE IN PUBLIC MOBILIZATION	25
5.2 USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES DURING THE PROTESTS	27
6. MERGING DIGITAL AND TRADITIONAL MEANS OF STATE REPRESSION	29
6.1 ONLINE HARASSMENT	29
6.2 TECH-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	34
6.3 NETWORKED PRO-GOVERNMENT DISINFORMATION AND ATTACKS ON CIVIL SOCIETY	40
6.4 INTERNET DISRUPTION	46
6.5 SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY	48
6.6 LEGAL HARASSMENT AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTEST UNDER KENYA'S COMPUTER MISUSE AND CYBERCRIMES ACT	52
6.7 ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND KILLINGS OF ONLINE PROTESTERS	53
7. INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND REDRESS	57
8. FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY	59

8.1 X'S FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY	59
8.2 SAFARICOM'S FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY	60
9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	62
RECOMMENDATIONS	63
10. ANNEX	66

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The protests that took place in Kenya throughout 2024 and 2025, led mainly by young people and widely referred to as “Gen Z protests”, revealed how digital platforms and technologies can both empower political mobilization and enable state repression. Amnesty International documented the state’s violent response to these largely peaceful, youth-led protests, estimating that excessive use of force by security agencies resulted in at least 3,000 arbitrary arrests, 83 enforced disappearances and 128 killings since June 2024. Building on the organization’s prior documentation of these serious human rights violations, this report more narrowly examines the Kenyan government’s escalating suppression of online protests and the role of modern technology within a broader set of repressive tactics.

Social media platforms rapidly brought together young people around shared frustrations over the 2024 Finance Bill, which many saw as deepening economic hardship, leading to massive public protests in Nairobi and other cities in June 2024. TikTok and X played a central role in mobilizing Kenya’s young population and creating a formally leaderless protest movement. Young people created social media-savvy content discussing the contentious Finance Bill and corruption cases, used online platforms to crowdsource funding in support of those who got arrested amidst the protests and used chatbots to share key information.

Kenyan state authorities responded by violently cracking down on young people’s exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly through online intimidation, threats, incitement to hatred and unlawful surveillance. Prominent social media voices were arrested or forcibly disappeared. As Mombasa-based human rights defender (HRD) Mwalimu* put it: “The government actually fears when young people come together on social media.”

Kenya’s descent into violent suppression underscores the dangers of equipping state actors with a long-standing record of the unlawful use of force with advanced tools to monitor and manipulate the public narrative and track down influential protest leaders.

This report draws on desk research, social media analysis and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 31 young human rights defenders (HRDs) between the age of 18 and 28, alongside seven older HRDs who were involved in the 2024 protests and shared their perspectives on changes to protest mobilization and challenges to human rights activism in Kenya over the past decade or more. The young HRDs interviewed for this report were united by their participation in the 2024 “Gen Z protests”. They represent diverse causes and groups, from student movements to social justice centres (a nationwide network of community-led organizations campaigning for the needs of residents of informal settlements), feminist, LGBTI and climate justice activists and children’s rights defenders. Many participants come from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds who viewed their activism as part of a broader struggle for social justice in post-colonial Kenya.

Amnesty International researchers also spoke with journalists and representatives of digital and human rights organizations involved in the documentation of state violence in 2024 and 2025 as well as a key informant from within Kenya’s disinformation-for-hire industry.

The youth-led demonstrations, which took place in June and July 2024 marked one of the largest public protests in recent history and a pivotal moment in Kenyans’ struggle for justice and accountability. Outrage had been building up for some time at a proposed Finance Bill that was seen to push an already struggling young population deeper into economic despair. The Finance Bill sought to impose a heavier tax burden on essential goods and services of daily life, from food to transportation, communication, and banking services.

The protests began in Nairobi and quickly spread to 44 out of Kenya’s 47 counties, evolving into a broader demand for systemic reforms under the slogan “Ruto must go”. The demonstrations remained largely

peaceful, but the state responded with unlawful and excessive force. A week of gradually increasing turnout culminated in the mass protests of 25 June 2024, which saw protesters entering parliament in response to the passing of the legislation and an escalation in police use of force, including live and rubber bullets, water cannons, tear gas, and batons against peaceful protesters. President William Ruto later that day described the protests as “treasonous”.

Shortly after protesters entered parliament on 25 June 2024, Kenyans began to notice internet disruptions. Amidst fears of an impending shutdown ahead of the mass mobilization on 25 June, Kenya’s Communications Authority had stated a day earlier that it had “no intention whatsoever to shut down internet traffic or interfere with the quality of connectivity. Such actions would be a betrayal of the constitution as a whole, the freedom of expression in particular and our own ethos.” Access Now, which monitors internet shutdowns across the world, reported later that “starting at approximately 4pm local time on June 25, connectivity dropped nationwide by nearly 40% across at least 20 networks according to measurements from IODA and Cloudflare. Signal and X also saw an increase in anomalies in Kenya due to connectivity issues, mostly on Safaricom [Kenya’s largest telecoms provider].”

In the following weeks and months, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of alleged protest organizers and prominent protest voices on social media became routine. By the end August 2024, the Law Society of Kenya reported that 72 people had been abducted/forcibly disappeared, released or were still missing in relation to the protests. Human Rights Watch found that officers involved in the enforced disappearances were “largely drawn from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, supported by the Rapid Deployment Unit, military intelligence, Anti-Terrorism Police Unit, and the National Intelligence Service.”

In June 2025, a year after the Gen-Z protests, young human rights defenders took to the streets again in their thousands to protest bad governance, police brutality and the lack of accountability and redress for the killings. The violent death in police custody of 31-year-old Albert Ojwang, a young digital creator who was arrested in connection with his online activity, shortly before the anniversary protests, only added further fuel to the already palpable public anger. Once again, the protests saw intense clashes with police who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds, while failing to stop and even accompanying violent agitators (“goons”) who targeted protesters.

Amidst the state’s increasingly violent response to the protests, online harassment and smear campaigns have become a core tactic to undermine the credibility and reach of government critics. They have helped to suppress further mobilization and force online protesters to censor themselves, escalating pre-existing challenges to HRDs’ online safety.

Online harassment was common across Kenya even before the recent wave of online and offline protests, particularly in relation to women HRDs and young advocates championing issues such as abortion rights, LGBTI rights, and comprehensive sexuality education. Social media platforms have significantly contributed to the rapid spread of discriminatory language and the opportunistic use of inflammatory rhetoric for political gain, often infused with disinformation that uses the language of anti-colonialism to falsely portray LGBTI identities and feminist values as “alien” or “Western” concepts.

Civil society research has shown that Kenyan politics have been rife with coordinated disinformation campaigns organized through paid networks of troll accounts in the 2020s. As digital platforms have become increasingly integral to activism and advocacy, the risks associated with online engagement have escalated, leading to a concerning rise in targeted abuse, threats, and smear campaigns against young people who stand up for human rights. The frequency and gravity of the threat now not only undermine the critical work of HRDs but also create an atmosphere of fear, intimidation and violence that stifles dissent and hinders human rights progress.

Nine of the 31 interviewed young HRDs told Amnesty International that they had received personal violent threats through direct messages on various online platforms, including X, TikTok and Facebook as well as the online messaging service WhatsApp during the 2024 protests linked to their outspoken support of the demonstrations.

Mariam*, a 27-year-old HRD based in Mombasa who was forcibly disappeared by police for two nights reported:

“I had people coming into my inbox and telling me, ‘You will die and leave your kids. We will come and attack you. What you’re doing is not right’... I even had to change my child’s school. Someone sent me my child’s name, the age, the stream that they are in, the school bus number plate. And they told me, ‘If you continue doing what you’re doing then we will take care of this child for you’.”

Grace*, a 23-year-old popular political commentator on TikTok received a direct message on TikTok from a man identifying as a police officer in his profile, threatening her with words such as “they’ll come for you”.

Amnesty International’s research reveals a pattern of themes and narratives pushed through coordinated online harassment campaigns, supporting young HRDs’ assertion that state-sponsored trolls play a prominent role in spreading and amplifying hatred towards them. Student leader Joshua Okayo, a survivor of enforced disappearance, explained:

“They want to maintain their social media image, and that means anytime you post something about certain ministry or certain individual, they always send what we call the 527 bloggers. These are government paid bloggers whose job is to abuse you, to say very dehumanizing, demeaning things.”

Monica*, a child rights and climate advocate spoke about the impact of this abuse amidst the wider crackdown on dissent:

“A lot of things have changed in Kenya since the abductions last year and you find that nowadays, as a youth activist, even if something is true, you can't just post it online. The online harassment creates fear, especially among the marginalized communities, the youth, women and children, when they try to speak up and lead campaigns. It shrinks the civil space online and it limits the right to expression and participation in public discourse.”

Prominent young HRD Hanifa Adan is regularly targeted with gender-based and Islamophobic harassment. Hanifa gained a large following on X due to her crucial role in the Gen Z movement’s fundraising efforts for survivors and victims of state violence and has publicly called for accountability for the unlawful use of force by police during the protests. She described how government-sponsored bloggers, clearly acting in coordination, targeted her identity as a young Muslim woman by spreading lies about her personal life in an apparent effort to vilify and isolate her from her own community. Speaking about the impact of these attacks, Hanifa said:

“Having strangers say things about you every single day, being targeted every single day, it's hard. It took away the spark, the joy. It took away who I was.”

The chilling effects of such harassment and incitement to hatred and violence extend beyond the immediate targets, sending a warning signal to anyone interested in political discourse on social media platforms that they may be targeted next. Self-censorship is the most evident outcome, with young people either policing their choice of topics and their use of language or quitting platforms entirely. All of Amnesty International’s young research participants spoke of changes they made to their online posting behaviour in response to this increasingly hostile environment. A less visible impact is the mental health toll, which both young women and men highlighted in their interviews with Amnesty International. Young HRDs described feeling anxious, afraid and “overwhelmed”, doubting themselves and the value of their activism amidst the heightened risks presented by the hostile environment they operate in.

Young women, like Hanifa, and LGBTI HRDs face additional challenges online, navigating tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TfGBV) and disinformation aimed at inciting hatred. The violence these young activists face online is intricately linked with experiences of gender-based violence offline, including testimonies of physical and sexual abuse by police officers. Young women HRDs who participated in the “Gen Z protests” and the #EndFemicideKE protests told Amnesty International about vicious attacks online in the form of misogynistic comments, body shaming, threats, doxing and AI-generated pornographic images produced to shame, threaten and silence them. TfGBV is further endangering marginalized young people online and offline and stripping their rights to privacy, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly from them. Many young people prevail and are determined to continue to speak up, and yet most also acknowledged self-censoring to varying degrees and suffering at times paralysing effects on their mental health.

“I have been harassed. I have been doxed. I have been threatened. I have been told I will beat you up”, said Sarah*, “We are being forced to shut up, it’s an attack on our voice, on our bodies.”

LGBTI activists highlighted how TfGBV inciting homo-, transphobia and hatred, rooted in the pre-existing marginalization of LGBTI people and the criminalization of same-sex relationships, is being exploited as part of the government’s disinformation campaigns.

Kisumu-based Agnes* shared that, “Most of the time we get attacked for advocating for queer people...People say being queer is satanic, being queer is demonic, so people killing these women was them doing God’s work.”

For instance, in July 2024, a coordinated disinformation campaign emerged on X, discrediting the protesters as driven by the interests of LGBTI people in Kenya, purportedly undermining Kenyan “family values”. Many posts contained AI-generated images of same-sex couples kissing at the protests. Taking a closer look at the X profiles of accounts engaging in posting behaviour typical of a coordinated inauthentic campaign, researchers found that accounts regularly amplified both anti-protest and pro-government hashtags, indicating likely sponsorship by the same government client.

Through social media analysis and network mapping, testimonies of affected HRDs and an interview with a disinformation-for-hire influencer, Amnesty International was able to more closely examine the tactics employed by Kenya’s shadowy disinformation industry in hijacking X’s trending topics and spreading pro-government and anti-protest narratives. Researchers found evidence of repeated coordinated attacks discrediting prominent young HRDs as “paid” or “commercial activists” and “liars” in response to their struggle for public accountability for human rights violations. Other false and harmful narratives included claims that young survivors of enforced disappearances abducted themselves and lied about their ordeals. An interview with John*, a young man who runs paid coordinated campaigns on X for various political and commercial clients offered further insights into this disinformation machinery. John explained that he’s part of a network of around 20 individuals organized through WhatsApp who are paid to promote and amplify the government’s preferred messaging with the aim of reaching the top five daily trends on X in Kenya at a total cost of 25,000 to 50,000 KES (approx. USD \$190-390) per day. During large public protests, the network created counter-campaigns and hashtags in real time to drown out trending protest hashtags.

Additionally, tech-facilitated surveillance is widely believed to have played a crucial role in the state’s repressive response to the protests. HRDs interviewed by Amnesty International believe that state surveillance aided by Safaricom allowed clandestine police units to track and forcibly disappear activists who were involved in the protests. In October 2024, the Nation reported that “Kenya’s security agencies have for years had virtually unfettered access to mobile phone customers’ sensitive call data records, along with location data” held by Safaricom. Lending support to this allegation, in September 2025, a police officer stationed at Safaricom, who was called as a witness in court proceedings against university student David Mokaya, admitted that call triangulation and tracing was performed in the case without a court order. Mokaya was accused of publishing false information about President Ruto on social media in November 2024, prompting an investigation and search for the student. During questioning by Mokaya’s lawyer, the officer stated that he was not aware that a court order was a legally required for a third party to access phone records.

Amnesty International asked Safaricom questions about its operations and due diligence processes. Safaricom responded by stating that the company “only shares customer data through lawful means and for lawful purposes.” It added that Safaricom “confirms that their systems are not designed to track the live location of any subscriber, and such functionality does not exist within their operational architecture. All data handling is regulated by the Kenya Information and Communications Act, the Data Protection Act, the National Intelligence Service Act, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, among other applicable laws. These statutes define, with precision, the limited circumstances under which data may be lawfully accessed or shared — including national security and counter-terrorism contexts — and always under the authority of lawful agencies and in accordance with due process.” The full response can be found in the annex of this report. In its response, Safaricom did not indicate that any investigation into the allegations had taken place. It also did not share any further information on its human rights due diligence processes, despite repeated calls from organizations such as Access Now and Amnesty International to fulfil its corporate responsibility to conduct appropriate human rights due diligence in a transparent manner.

The allegations against Safaricom must be placed in the wider context of a steep increase in surveillance capabilities by Kenyan police and intelligence services over the past decade, including the roll-out of facial recognition cameras in Nairobi’s central business district and the alleged use of spyware.

The widespread suspicion that social media monitoring and tech-facilitated surveillance may be enabling state security operatives to locate and forcibly disappear social media activists has instilled fear across Kenyan society. The long-term damage to human rights activism and freedom of expression cannot be overstated; respect for human rights depends on people’s ability to speak up and demand accountability where violations occur, free of fear of reprisals. Instead, many parents now plead with their children to stop putting their lives at risk for as little as criticizing the police and government online or protesting in the street.

Finally, Kenya’s legal system is also increasingly being weaponized to frame peaceful online protest as cyber-attacks, whilst denying genuine targets of tech-facilitated violence access to justice and redress. Kenya has a legislative framework for protection against surveillance and online harassment including the Constitution of Kenya, the Data Protection Act, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act and the Kenya Information and Communications Act. In practice however, Kenyan law provides only partial protection, as several legal

provisions either contain gaps or face enforcement challenges, while others, such as the overly broad provisions of the Cybercrimes Act, have been used to target protestors.

Whilst the focus of this report has been on state abuses, it would have been incomplete without also briefly addressing the role of X as the main stage of Kenya's political upheaval in the digital realm. Despite prior warnings, the company has allowed its platform to be abused and its algorithms to be manipulated to discredit, attack and incite violence against young HRDs. X must urgently overhaul its trust and safety practices and human rights due diligence process to stop government and disinformation actors from exploiting a platform owned by a self-proclaimed "free speech absolutist" to clamp down on Kenyans' right to freedom of information and free expression.

Amnesty International approached X, the Kenyan authorities and key individuals named in this report, CitizenGo and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) for comment. The Office of the Interior Cabinet Secretary responded by pointing to public statements made by the Cabinet Secretary on 16 June 2025 and 26 June 2025, in which he shared updates on police reforms to affirm the security services' respect of the Constitution. The Cabinet Secretary also condemned acts of violence and lawlessness by "organized gangs" during the protests, which he characterized as an attempted coup in public comments on 26 June 2025. The response further stated that "any officer implicated in unlawful conduct bears individual responsibility and is subject to investigation and sanction in accordance with the law." Contrary to this assertion, Amnesty International has identified systemic institutional failures with regards to holding police officers accused of unlawful behaviour to account.

The National Intelligence Service responded by stating, "the Service is aware of the allegations and will advise the relevant authorities on its findings, in line with its constitutional mandate." Lastly, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner stated that it "affirms its commitment to upholding the values and principles of the Constitution of Kenya." The Independent Policing Oversight Authority provided a response shortly before the publication of this report, which can be found in the annex. X, CitizenGo, KCCB and other state authorities did not respond to the allegations in this report.

The following recommendations lay out a path towards accountability and institutional reform, beginning with an immediate halt to the current attacks and an independent inquiry into the grave human rights violations committed by state actors since June 2024. The dedication shown by young protesters to continue their peaceful struggle in this hostile climate must urgently be honoured by government action, recognizing this critical moment in Kenya's history and ensuring its pursuit of social justice and universal respect of human rights.

TO THE KENYAN GOVERNMENT:

- Immediately cease all forms of tech-facilitated state violence against peaceful protesters and civil society organizations. Immediately halt the practice of orchestrating or tolerating troll campaigns and smear narratives that vilify dissenters as "paid activists" or "foreign agents." This includes dismantling state-linked blogger networks such as the "527 bloggers", responsible for coordinated abuse.
- Amend overly broad provisions of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act that are open to abuse by state actors. Align the law with Kenyan constitutional protections and international human rights law and standards. Specifically, amend Sections 3, 6, 27 and 30 to strike out vague, ambiguous and subjective language that risks criminalizing satire, investigative journalism, legitimate criticism, dissent and the access to information provided for under Article 33 and 34 of the constitution of Kenya and Article 19 of the ICCPR (further details in the full list of recommendations).
- Ensure effective investigations into unlawful surveillance, enforced disappearances and unlawful killings by state actors in the context of the "Gen Z protests". Guarantee comprehensive reparations to victims of unlawful use of force and family members of those who have been killed, including by ensuring that they are adequately compensated.

TO X:

- Undertake a comprehensive review and overhaul of human rights due diligence at X, including by mainstreaming human rights considerations throughout the company's operations, especially in relation to the development and deployment of its algorithmic systems and its content moderation as well as the detection and removal of coordinated inauthentic behaviour on the platform.

TO SAFARICOM:

- Submit to an independent investigation into allegations of unlawful customer data sharing with Kenyan police and intelligence services, conduct proactive human rights due diligence processes to identify, prevent, mitigate and address potential and actual human rights abuses and proactively publish information on this process and its results.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report documents the escalating use of tech-facilitated violence against young human rights defenders (HRDs) by President William Ruto's government in the context of the 2024 "Gen Z" protests in Kenya. At a time of mass online mobilization, Kenyan state authorities have cracked down on young people's exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly through intimidation, threats and state violence, extending from the digital realm into gross human rights violations in the offline world, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Amnesty International has documented hundreds of human rights violations in the wider context of the June 2024 protests and the subsequent escalation of arrests, enforced disappearances and killings.¹ This report is more narrowly focused on the Kenyan state's increasingly brutal suppression of online protests and the role of modern technology within a broader set of repressive tactics.

This is the second output in a larger research project examining the impact of tech-facilitated violence against child and young human rights defenders worldwide within a context of rising authoritarian practices, following on from the 2024 Amnesty International report *"I turned my fear into courage": Red-tagging and state violence against young human rights defenders in the Philippines*.² It also forms part of Amnesty International's wider efforts to document tech-facilitated gender-based violence³ and to hold Big Tech companies to account for their failures to fulfil their corporate responsibilities to respect human rights.⁴

The report is based on desk research, social media analysis as well as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 31 young HRDs between the age of 18 and 28, with additional contributions from seven HRDs beyond the "Gen Z" age range who were involved in the 2024 protests and shared their perspectives on changes to protest mobilization and challenges to human rights activism in Kenya over the past decade or more. The young HRDs interviewed for this report were united by their participation in the 2024 "Gen Z protests". They represent diverse causes and groups, from student movements to social justice centres (a nationwide network of community-based and community-led organizations campaigning for the needs of residents of informal settlements such as accountability for police use of unlawful force and access to public services), feminist groups and LGBTI activists to climate justice and children's rights defenders. Many participants come from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds and placed their participation in the 2024 protests in a wider struggle for social justice in post-colonial Kenya.

¹ Amnesty International Kenya, "Kenya: 25 June 2024: End Police Use of Unlawful Force, Time for Accountability and Justice", 25 September 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/kenya-25-june-2024-end-police-use-of-unlawful-force-time-for-accountability-and-justice/>; Amnesty International Kenya, "Joint Statement on Police Conduct During December 30th 2024 Nation Wide Protests", 30 December 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/joint-statement-on-police-conduct-during-december-30th-2024-nation-wide-protests/>; Amnesty International, "2024 Annual Report: Still here", 18 March 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/2024-annual-report-still-here/>

² Amnesty International, "I turned my fear into courage": Red-tagging and state violence against young human rights defenders in the Philippines (Index: ASA 35/8574/2024), 14 October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/8574/2024/en/>

³ Amnesty International, "Being ourselves is too dangerous": Digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand (Index: ASA 39/7956/2024), 16 May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/7955/2024/en/>; Amnesty International, "Everybody here is having two lives and phones": The devastating impact of criminalization on digital spaces for LGBTQ people in Uganda (Index: AFR 59/8571/2024), 23 October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr59/8571/2024/en/>; Amnesty International, "Online violence", July 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/technology/online-violence/>

⁴ Amnesty International, Surveillance Giants: How the Business Model of Google and Facebook Threatens Human Rights (Index: POL 30/1404/2019), 21 November 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/1404/2019/en/>; Amnesty International, The Social Atrocity: Meta and the Right to Remedy for the Rohingya (Index: ASA 16/5933/2022), 29 September 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/5933/2022/en/>; Amnesty International, Driven into Darkness: How TikTok encourages self-harm and suicide ideation (Index: POL 40/7350/2023), 7 November 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol40/7350/2023/en/>; Amnesty International, I feel exposed: Caught in TikTok's Surveillance Web (Index: POL 40/7349/2023), 7 November 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/POL40/7349/2023/en/>

Amnesty International researchers also spoke with journalists and representatives of digital and human rights organizations involved in the documentation of state violence in 2024 and 2025 as well as a key informant from within Kenya's disinformation-for-hire industry.

The research was conducted between December 2024 and October 2025, with in-person interviews and focus group discussions taking place in March 2025 in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu and further online interviews conducted between February and September 2025. All three cities saw major public protests in the context of the #RejectFinanceBill movement in June 2024 as well as further protests in the context of the #EndFemicide movement.

Various security and well-being processes were implemented by Amnesty International with due regard for the high-risk environment, in which Kenyan HRDs currently operate and the acute impact of recent traumatic experiences on the research participants. Informed consent processes were observed, and interviewees were informed about the research plan and objectives, how information would be used, and explicit informed consent obtained for each interview. Interviewees were given the option to pause or stop the interview, rescind consent, be off the record, and to speak to a consultant mental health professional.

The information provided by the research participants was corroborated and contextualized with extensive desk research, including the review of relevant human rights law and standards, domestic legislation and reports by local and international organizations and Kenyan and international news media.

Researchers also collected and analysed social media content on X (formerly Twitter), filtering for known hashtags and key terms associated with viral disinformation narratives on the platform and built up a map of accounts that participated in coordinated disinformation and harassment campaigns.

The research was shaped in a participatory way with inputs from scoping interviews and community consultations held by Amnesty International Kenya between December and February 2025 as well as a participatory campaigns workshop involving around twenty mostly young HRDs held in Nairobi in April 2025.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 ‘GEN Z PROTESTS’ IN 2024 AND 2025

The youth-led demonstrations, which took place in June and July 2024, widely known as the “Gen Z Protests”, marked one of the largest public protests in recent history and a pivotal moment in Kenyans’ struggle for justice and accountability. Outrage had been building up for some time at a proposed Finance Bill that was seen to push an already struggling young population deeper into economic despair. The Finance Bill sought to impose a heavier tax burden on essential goods and services of daily life, from food to transportation, communication, and banking services.

The protests began in Nairobi and quickly spread to 44 out of Kenya’s 47 counties, evolving into a broader demand for systemic reforms under the slogan “Ruto must go”. The demonstrations remained largely peaceful, but the state responded with unlawful and excessive force, violating the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly as well as people’s right to life, to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, and the right to liberty and security of person.⁵

A week of gradually increasing turnout culminated in the mass protests of 25 June 2024, which saw protesters entering parliament in response to the passing of the legislation and an escalation in police use of unlawful force. President William Ruto later that day described the protests as “treasonous”.⁶ Police deployed live and rubber bullets, water cannons, tear gas, and batons against peaceful protesters. Amnesty International investigated the events of the day and found that security forces violated international human rights law and standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement.⁷

In the following weeks and months, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances of alleged protest organizers and brutal crackdowns became routine. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), human rights organizations facilitated the “release of over 300 persons illegally detained” on 25 June. As of the end August 2024, the Law Society of Kenya had documented the cases of 72 people that had been abducted, released or were still missing in relation to the protests.⁸ Thirteen disappeared on the 25 June and a further twenty-three went missing within seven days of this protest. Human Rights Watch found that officers involved in the enforced disappearances were “largely drawn from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, supported by the Rapid Deployment Unit, military intelligence, Anti-Terrorism Police Unit, and

⁵ BBC, “Police battle anti-tax demonstrators as Kenya protests spread”, 20 June 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce55egymvyro>; Amnesty International Kenya, “Kenya: 25 June 2024: End Police Use of Unlawful Force, Time for Accountability and Justice”, 25 September 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/kenya-25-june-2024-end-police-use-of-unlawful-force-time-for-accountability-and-justice/>; Irungu Houghton, “Protecting protesters and upholding constitutionalism in Kenya through strategic litigation”, 21 March 2025, <https://www.irunguhoughton.org/post/protecting-protesters-and-upholding-constitutionalism-in-kenya-through-strategic-litigation>

⁶ CNN, “Kenya’s president calls protests ‘treasonous’ after police fire live rounds at demonstrators”, 26 June 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/25/africa/kenya-protests-tax-rises-intl>

⁷ Amnesty International Kenya, “Kenya: 25 June 2024: End Police Use of Unlawful Force, Time for Accountability and Justice”, 25 September 2024 (previously cited).

⁸ Amnesty International Kenya, “Kenya: 25 June 2024: End Police Use of Unlawful Force, Time for Accountability and Justice”, 25 September 2024 (previously cited).

the National Intelligence Service.”⁹ The human rights organization found that protesters were taken “from their homes, jobs, and the street, and detained for prolonged periods without being charged, even though Kenyan law requires arraignment of suspects in court within 24 hours.” In some cases, bodies of people previously reported missing were found bearing signs of torture.¹⁰

December 2024 saw a renewed wave of enforced disappearances of vocal young online activists, ending a year of escalating state violence with a devastating human toll. Amnesty International estimates that security forces’ unnecessary and excessive force in the context of the public protests resulted in 63 deaths, 83 abductions and 2,000 arbitrary arrests 2024.¹¹ The Kenya National Commission of Human Rights (KNCHR) counted 82 “abductions or enforced disappearances” between June and December 2024.¹²

Amnesty International wrote to the National Intelligence Service and other state authorities. The Service responded by stating, “the Service is aware of the allegations and will advise the relevant authorities on its findings, in line with its constitutional mandate.”¹³

3.1.1 REPEAT IN 2025

In June 2025, a year after the Gen-Z protests, young human rights defenders (HRDs) took to the streets again in their thousands to protest bad governance, police brutality and the lack of accountability or redress for the killings in 2024. The violent death in custody of 31-year-old Albert Ojwang on 8 June 2025, a young digital creator who was arrested in connection with his online activity, only added further fuel to the already palpable public anger.¹⁴ Once again, the protests saw intense clashes with police who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds.

What began as a civic act of protest quickly descended into chaos after masked aggressors infiltrated the demonstrations and unleashed coordinated violence on protestors. Amnesty International Kenya’s monitoring confirmed that hundreds of attackers, armed with tyre whips, wooden batons, and knives were mobilized, transported, and deployed across Nairobi’s streets. “Protest observation in the streets and mass media analysis reveal that the police at times intentionally accompanied, supported and directed their operations”, the Police Reforms Working Group stated.¹⁵

More than 400 protesters and bystanders were reported injured, and at least 16 killed, mostly from gunshot wounds.¹⁶ Among them was Boniface Mwangi Kariuki, a bystander and mask vendor, shot at close range by police, who succumbed to his injuries two weeks later.¹⁷ While two police officers responsible for shooting Boniface have since been arrested and arraigned, authorities have yet to provide a public update on investigations into the organized violent groups.

On 7 July 2025, thousands of Kenyans nationwide took to the streets to protest, commemorating the historic Saba Saba Day, a day remembered for the 1990 pro-democracy demonstrations that challenged the one-party rule under the Kenya African National Union (KANU) regime. The day has since become a symbol of the people’s collective demand for democratic governance and civil liberties.

The 2025 commemorations were marked by large-scale demonstrations across the country, with Nairobi and its surrounding areas recording some of the highest turnouts. In an apparent effort to limit the protests, the National Police Service cordoned off Nairobi’s Central Business District, making it inaccessible to demonstrators. This unprecedented action forced most protesters to gather in satellite towns such as Ngong, Kiserian, Rongai, and Bulbul, where demonstrations continued.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Kenya: Security Forces Abducted, Killed Protesters”, 5 November 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/06/kenya-security-forces-abducted-killed-protesters>

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Kenya: Security Forces Abducted, Killed Protesters”, 5 November 2024 (previously cited), Reuters, “How Kenya police hid killings of anti-government protesters”, 6 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/how-kenya-police-cover-up-killings-anti-government-protesters-2025-01-06/>

¹¹ Amnesty International Kenya, “2024 Annual Report: Still here”, 18 March 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/2024-annual-report-still-here/>

¹² KNCHR, “Statement on the Recent Surge of Abductions/Enforced Disappearances in Kenya”, 26 December 2024, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya>

¹³ National Intelligence Service responses to Amnesty International, 6 November 2025.

¹⁴ BBC, “Protest hits Kenya after shock death of man held by police”, 9 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy3eqpgqnzo>

¹⁵ Amnesty International Kenya, “Police reforms working group statement on yesterday’s anarchy in the capital city of Nairobi”, 18 June 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/police-reforms-working-group-statement-on-yesterdays-anarchy-in-the-capital-city-of-nairobi/>

¹⁶ CNN, “16 dead and hundreds injured in Kenya protests, Amnesty International says”, 26 June 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/06/25/africa/kenya-anti-tax-anniversary-protests-intl/>

¹⁷ BBC, “Kenyan vendor shot by police during protests dies after life support switched off”, 30 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp9005z1pljo>

At least 38 people were killed, and over 500 members of the public and police were injured, according to the Police Reforms Working Group.¹⁸ Additionally, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions resorted to charging protesters with crimes under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, murder, robbery with violence, malicious damage to property, theft, and unlawful assembly. The majority of those killed, arrested and charged with the crimes as mentioned earlier were young people between the ages of 20 and 29 years.

The Interior Cabinet Secretary, while visiting police stations that were vandalized during the June 25 protests, ordered the police to shoot anyone approaching police stations “with criminal intent” (see also chapter 6.6).¹⁹ His remarks were supported by the Chairperson of the National Assembly Defence Committee and Member of Parliament for Belgut.

Between the 2024 and 2025 protests, Amnesty International estimates that excessive use of force by security agencies resulted in at least 3,000 arbitrary arrests, 83 enforced disappearances and 128 killings.²⁰

When approached for comment by Amnesty International, the Ministry of the Interior pointed to public statements made by the Cabinet Secretary on 16 June 2025 and 26 June 2025, in which he shared updates on police reforms to affirm the security services’ respect of the Constitution. The Cabinet Secretary also condemned acts of lawlessness by “organized gangs” during the 25 June protests, which he characterized as an attempted coup in public comments a day later. The response further stated that “any officer implicated in unlawful conduct bears individual responsibility and is subject to investigation and sanction in accordance with the law.” Following considerable public pressure, the Cabinet Secretary announced a new policy directive on “conditions as to the use of force and firearms by police” on 18 July 2025.²¹

As chapter 7 discusses in greater detail, Amnesty International has identified systemic institutional failures with regards to holding police officers accused of unlawful behaviour to account.

3.2 DIGITAL VIOLENCE IN KENYA AND THE LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE

Online harassment was common across Kenya even before the recent wave of online and offline protests, particularly in relation to tech-facilitated abuse directed at women HRDs and young advocates championing issues such as abortion rights, LGBTI rights, and comprehensive sexuality education.²² Politicians and church leaders have spread anti-LGBTI rhetoric, boosted by internationally operating anti-rights Christian interest groups amplifying calls for anti-LGBTI and restrictive sexual and reproductive rights policies in recent years.²³ Some of this rhetoric has risen to the level of advocacy of hatred, with utterances including the then Deputy President’s description of “LGBTQ actions” as based on “satanic beliefs” and “repugnant to morality”.²⁴ As this report will lay out, online and offline abuse targeting LGBTI people and LGBTI activists is having a profound chilling effect on their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the context of Kenya’s criminalization of same-sex relations and high rates of violence against LGBTI people.

Online platforms have significantly contributed to the rapid spread of discriminatory language and the opportunistic use of inflammatory rhetoric on these issues for political gain, often infused with disinformation

¹⁸ Amnesty International Kenya, “Joint statement on the aftermath of the Saba Saba demonstrations and Ngong investigative findings”, 15 July 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/joint-statement-on-the-aftermath-of-the-saba-saba-demonstrations-and-ngong-investigative-findings/>; the IPOA documented 65 fatalities through its monitoring of protests on 12, 17 and 25 June and 7 July 2025, IPOA, “IPOA monitoring report on police response to public protests - June and July, 2025”, 24 July 2025, https://x.com/IPOA_KE/status/1948292372770558271

¹⁹ The Star, “LSK condemns Murkomen’s ‘shoot-to-kill’ directive as illegal”, 27 June 2025, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-06-27-lsk-condemns-murkomens-shoot-to-kill-directive-as-illegal>

²⁰ Amnesty International, “2024 Annual Report: Still here”, 18 March 2025 (previously cited), Kahawatungu, “IPOA Report Reveals 65 Deaths, 513 Injuries During June–July Protests”, 24 July 2025, <https://kahawatungu.com/ipoa-report-reveals-65-deaths-513-injuries-during-june-july-protests/>

²¹ Kipchumba Murkomen, statement on X on 18 July 2025, <https://x.com/kipmurkomen/status/1946171634991149432>

²² Article19, “Kenya: Break the bias to protect women journalists and human rights defenders”, 8 March 2022, <https://www.article19.org/resources/kenya-protect-women-journalists-and-whrds/>; UNFPA, “BodyRight campaign: Meet the young Kenyans calling for an end to technology facilitated gender-based violence”, 27 March 2023, <https://kenya.unfpa.org/en/news/bodyright-campaign-meet-young-kenyans-calling-end-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence>; Guardian, 2 October 2023, “As social media grows in Kenya, so does the disturbing and toxic ‘manosphere’”, <https://amp.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/oct/02/as-social-media-grows-kenya-so-does-disturbing-toxic-manosphere>; France24, “‘Nowhere to hide’: Anti-gay crackdown grips East Africa”, 15 March 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230315-nowhere-to-hide-anti-gay-crackdown-grips-east-africa>

²³ Global Voices, “Are 90 percent of Kenyans homophobic?”, 20 August 2024 (previously cited); Sueddeutsche Zeitung, “Entwicklungshilfe für katholische Lobbyarbeit: Fördergeld gegen Gleichstellung”, 27 October 2024, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/kenia-kirche-homophobie-queerfeindlichkeit-entwicklungszusammenarbeit-lux.NwTWYD5k2SzCE7xswH4tJu>

²⁴ NTV Kenya, “Gachagua on LGBTQ: Those are satanic beliefs”, 2 March 2023, <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/gachagua-on-lgbtq-those-are-satanic-beliefs/>

that uses the language of anti-colonialism to falsely portray LGBTI identities and feminist values as “alien” or “Western” concepts.²⁵

Kenyan digital rights activists interviewed by Amnesty International have observed a rise in government-sponsored disinformation narratives targeting civil society groups and HRDs since 2013/2014, amplified by parliamentarians’ claims at the time that foreign-funded civil society groups were colluding with the International Criminal Court in the cases against former President Kenyatta and his Deputy at the time, William Ruto.²⁶ Wider concerns have also been raised going back to 2013 about political actors’ alleged use of disinformation and covert campaigning on social media platforms in the context of the international Cambridge Analytica scandal.²⁷ In 2018, company representatives were filmed by undercover reporters boasting about their role in swaying the 2013 and 2017 elections in Kenya. The international scandal centred around the targeting and alleged manipulation of social media users through the collection of personal data without users’ knowledge or consent. More recent civil society research has shown that Kenyan politics have been rife with coordinated disinformation campaigns organized through paid networks of troll accounts in the 2020s.²⁸

This is happening despite the fact that Kenya has a legislative framework for protection against surveillance and online harassment including the Constitution of Kenya, the Data Protection Act, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act and the Kenya Information and Communications Act, discussed in detail below. In practice, Kenyan law provides only partial protection, as several legal provisions which could in theory protect rights in the context of protests either contain gaps, or face enforcement challenges in practice, while other provisions have been used to target protestors.

3.2.1 CONSTITUTION OF KENYA

It is crucial to examine the provisions of the constitution, as it is the supreme law in Kenya. All other laws either originate from it or are created and amended to conform to its principles and provisions. The Bill of Rights has various provisions aimed at protecting all Kenyans (including human rights defenders (HRDs)) from surveillance and online harassment by the government and/or its agents during their work.²⁹

Article 31 of the Constitution states that all persons are entitled to privacy, which includes not having the privacy of their communications infringed upon, their homes searched, or information about their families disclosed unnecessarily. Furthermore, articles 32 and 33 emphasize that Kenyans have the freedom to hold, form opinions, and express themselves, and that these beliefs should not be used to prejudice them. Freedom of expression, as envisioned in the Constitution, extends to social media and artistic expression. It protects protesters, HRDs, bloggers, and social media users from being surveilled, tracked, or persecuted for sharing their beliefs within the confines of the law.³⁰

The Constitution further clarifies that the rights mentioned must only be exercised within lawful limits, which include restrictions against incitement and advocacy of hate. Additionally, Article 24 of the Constitution proceeds to define the grounds on which a right, including those specified above, may be limited. The Constitution states that a right should be interpreted broadly to prevent unjustifiable or unreasonable limitations that could undermine a democratic and free society. When considering limiting a right - such as the rights to privacy, media expression, and freedom of conscience and opinion - the relevant authorities, including government agencies seeking to restrict the right, must consider all pertinent factors, including:

- a) the nature of the right or fundamental freedom;
- b) the importance of the purpose of the limitation;

²⁵ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), January 2025, “Game of Tropes: The Strategic Use of AntiGender Narratives in Kenya”, https://www.swp-berlin.org/assets/afrika/publications/MTA_working_paper/WP17_H%C3%B6rter_GameofTropes.pdf; CfA iLAB, “Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate increases in Kenya after court ruling”, 25 April 2024, <https://disinfo.africa/anti-lgbtqia-hate-increases-in-kenya-after-court-ruling-68991ee50891>

²⁶ Interview, Nairobi, 19 March 2025; Standard, “MPs want rights groups to reveal foreign funders”, 17 October 2014, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/politics/MPs-want-rights-groups-to-reveal-foreign-funders/>

²⁷ BBC, “Cambridge Analytica’s Kenya election role ‘must be investigated’”, 20 March 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-43471707>; FRANCE 24, “Facebook campaign: Cambridge Analytica filmed boasting of Kenya election role”, 22 March 2018, <https://youtu.be/DxPfMLgqWAK>

²⁸ BBC, “Kenyan influencers paid to take ‘guerrilla warfare’ online”, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-58474936>; Mozilla Foundation, 2021, “Inside the shadowy world of disinformation for hire in Kenya”, 13 September 2021, https://assets.mozoprod.net/network/documents/Report_Inside_the_shadowy_world_of_disinformation_for_hire_in_Kenya_5_hcc.pdf

²⁹ Constitution of Kenya 2010, Chapter 4.

³⁰ *Katiba Institute & 8 others v Director of Public Prosecutions & 2 others; Ayika (Interested Party) [2024] KEHC 2890 (KLR)*; *Wanuri Kahiu & another v CEO - Kenya Film Classification Board Ezekiel Mutua & 2 others*; *Article 19 East Africa (Interested Party) & Kenya Christian Professionals Form (Proposed Interested Party) [2020] KEHC 6500 (KLR)*.

- c) the nature and extent of the limitation;
- d) the need to ensure that the enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms by any individual does not prejudice the rights and fundamental freedoms of others; and
- e) the relation between the limitation and its purpose and whether there are less restrictive means to achieve the purpose.

3.2.2 THE DATA PROTECTION ACT

The Data Protection Act came into effect in 2019 to operationalise Article 31 of the Constitution and establish systems and controls on data protection in Kenya, ensuring that the government and private data controllers and processors have a lawful framework within which they may process data.³¹

The Act articulates principles of data processing, which include data minimization, accuracy, and conditions for transferring data outside Kenya.³² The act also sets out the rights of data subjects, which apply to all data processors and controllers, who must be registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. It emphasizes the importance of obtaining consent at every stage of data processing, especially for sensitive personal data. As an enforcement mechanism, the Act establishes the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC), which is tasked with ensuring that the provisions of the Act are adhered to.³³ These include the requirement to report any data breaches,³⁴ register, and continually improve data protection standards.

ODPC has played a significant role in shaping decisions related to safeguarding personal data, including the authorized sharing of information. However, it remains uncertain how effectively the office can manage state surveillance for national security and policing purposes, as the Act does not explicitly address this issue, especially when involving state agencies and large tech companies, which possess greater influence and resources to mount a defence.³⁵ Additionally, despite the admirable provisions within the Act, enforcing data protection regulations remains a challenging task for the ODPC, mainly due to its reliance on limited government funding and occasional operational guidance from the Ministry of Information, Communication, and Technology.

Budgetary restrictions and a lack of independence have increasingly hampered ODPC's ability to investigate violations, including those related to surveillance. The Act does not sufficiently guide the sharing of information between agencies, leaving loopholes for government bodies to monitor individuals and unlawfully transmit or share personal data.

3.2.3 COMPUTER MISUSE AND CYBERCRIMES ACT (2018)

The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act was enacted in 2018, prior to the passing of the Data Protection Act. The stated aim of the Act is to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of computer systems, programmes, and data, while addressing cybercrimes such as unauthorized access, interception, and cyber espionage, and to enable lawful surveillance for investigative purposes.³⁶ Additionally, the Act criminalizes unauthorized access to computer systems and imposes fines of up to six million shillings (approx. USD 46,000)³⁷ for anyone found guilty of breaching this provision. It also enables police officers with court warrants to collect real-time traffic data for up to six months, as well as content data for up to nine months, to support investigations.³⁸

The 2025 amendments to the Act introduce expanded powers that raise further concerns for the protection of digital rights and civic space. Notably, Section 6 empowers authorities to render websites or applications inaccessible if they are deemed to promote 'unlawful activities,' 'terrorism' or 'religious extremism.' These

³¹ Data Protection Act 2019, Section 25.

³² Data Protection Act 2019, Section 26 – 43.

³³ Data Protection Act, 2019, Section 3.

³⁴ Data Protection Act 2019, Section 29.

³⁵ KICTANet, Five years of Kenya's Data Protection Act; Reflections and Considerations For the Future, (2024)

<https://www.kictanet.or.ke/new-report-identifies-achievements-challenges-and-recommendations-to-enhance-data-protection-in-kenya/>

³⁶ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018, Preamble.

³⁷ XE exchange rate, 5 August 2025, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter>

³⁸ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018, Sections 52 and 53.

terms are undefined and risk arbitrary interpretation, potentially enabling the suppression of activist-run platforms or protest coordination tools without adequate judicial safeguards.³⁹

The Act has been misused by security agencies not only to surveil individuals perceived as threats to the government but also to file false charges against HRDs in Kenya. An example is the case of Rose Njeri, a software developer who was arrested and charged under Section 16 of the Act for allegedly interfering with the National Assembly's Finance Committee email system (further details in chapter 6.5).⁴⁰ This arose from a system she designed to allow Kenyans to send emails to the committee and voice their dissatisfaction with the 2025 Finance Bill. Charges against her were ultimately dropped after the High Court of Kenya found she had no case to answer. This illustrates how the provisions of this law can be misused by security officials, not only to surveil but also to build cases against bloggers and activists who post views perceived as anti-government.

The 2025 amendment to Section 30 expands the definition of prohibited communication to include emails and calls, which could further criminalize legitimate advocacy efforts such as mass email campaigns phone-based mobilization. This risks a chilling effect on civic engagement and peaceful protest coordination.⁴¹

The overly broad provisions of the Act can lead to abuse if not interpreted correctly and with caution and proper oversight. Finally, the Act is not up to date with technological changes and advancements as it has failed to consider the human rights risks of newer forms of digital surveillance, which are far more intrusive and less targeted than the conventional means of covert communications surveillance. It might result in inefficiencies in addressing modern-day surveillance, as has been observed in Kenya's "Gen Z protests", where facial recognition technologies, call data records, and other technologies are alleged to have been used to surveil or track HRDs, leading to their arrests and violations of their rights (see also chapter 6.4).⁴²

The insertion of Section 46A introduces further risks to digital freedoms. It allows courts to order the removal or deactivation of websites, devices or systems where a person has been convicted of vaguely defined offences such as promotion of unlawful activities. Crucially, it also permits 'authorized persons' to apply for such orders pre-trial, based on suspicion rather than conviction. This undermines the presumption of innocence and may facilitate pre-emptive censorship of activists' content or digital infrastructure.⁴³ The amendment to Section 27 introduces criminal liability for actions 'likely to cause another person to commit suicide.' While this may be intended to address cyberbullying, the vague phrasing risks being misapplied to critical speech or satire. Without clear interpretive guidance, this provision could be weaponized to silence dissent.⁴⁴

Prior studies have found that "while the country's Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018 addresses technology-facilitated gender-based violence including sharing of intimate images, cyberbullying, and online harassment, inadequate implementation of the law remains a challenge for survivors seeking justice".⁴⁵ Police are reported to lack awareness and training and reporting rates are low amidst low levels of trust in the police, compounded by high levels of violence against women and the marginalization of the LGBTI community.⁴⁶

3.2.4 KENYA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS ACT

The aims of the Act are to facilitate the development of the ICT sector and electronic commerce while protecting consumers. The 2019 amendments expanded its scope to include cybersecurity and electronic transactions.⁴⁷ The act protects individuals from unlawful interception of their communications and imposes

³⁹ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2025, Section 6.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International Kenya, Statement for Immediate Release on the Arrest Of Rose Njeri Over The Long Madaraka Weekend, 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-for-immediate-release-on-the-arrest-of-rose-njeri-over-the-long-madaraka-weekend/>

⁴¹ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2025, Section 30.

⁴² JEPAA, "The State of Surveillance in Kenya: The Precarious Balance Between National Security and Privacy Rights Amidst Nationwide Disappearances", 9 February 2025, <https://www.jepafrica.com/insights/ljf0z9snpkosumvut2wb2opl279g64>

⁴³ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2025, Section 46A.

⁴⁴ Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2025, Section 27. A case challenging the constitutionality of various sections of the Amended Act, including section 27 has been filed before the High Court and was pending determination at the time of writing.

⁴⁵ UNFPA, 27 March 2023, "BodyRight campaign: Meet the young Kenyans calling for an end to technology facilitated gender-based violence", <https://kenya.unfpa.org/en/news/bodyright-campaign-meet-young-kenyans-calling-end-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence>

⁴⁶ Article 19, "Women journalists' digital security", May 2016, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38757/Women-Journalist's-Digital-Security-Kenya-2016.pdf>; Global Voices, "How gendered disinformation on social media harms Kenyan women seeking political office", 25 April 2024, <https://advoc.globalvoices.org/2024/04/25/how-gendered-disinformation-on-social-media-harms-kenyan-women-seeking-political-office/>; Global Voices, "Are 90 percent of Kenyans homophobic?", 20 August 2024, <https://globalvoices.org/2024/08/20/are-90-percent-of-kenyans-homophobic/>

⁴⁷ Kenya Information and Communications Act 1998, Preamble.

penalties of up to three years' imprisonment for any violations. Subsidiary regulations of the Act prohibit service providers from monitoring or disclosing subscriber information without legal authorisation.⁴⁸ Further regulation introduced under this Act in 2015 obliges customers registering SIM cards to supply their name, ID card and date of birth. Kenyan civil society organizations have warned that mandatory SIM card registration threatens Kenyans' right to privacy in the absence of sufficient data protection safeguards.⁴⁹

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is also relevant because, although it does not have specific provisions on surveillance, it allows for the interception or interference with the communication of a person to aid in terrorism investigations or the prevention of acts of terrorism.⁵⁰ This Act has been instrumental in disrupting protests and used to charge HRDs during the 2025 protests in an effort to access their information and secure punitive bail terms for them and other protesters arrested during the nationwide anti-government demonstrations.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kenya Information and Communications (Consumer Protection) Regulations 2010, Section 15(1).

⁴⁹ Strathmore University, "Mandatory sim card registration: Why this is alarming for data protection and the right to privacy of Kenyans", 20 May 2022, <https://cipit.strathmore.edu/mandatory-sim-card-registration-why-this-is-alarming-for-data-protection-and-the-right-to-privacy-of-kenyans/>

⁵⁰ Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2012.

⁵¹ Amnesty International Kenya, "Joint statement on the aftermath of the Saba Saba demonstrations and Ngong investigative findings", 15 July 2025 (previously cited).

4. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

4.1 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, RIGHT OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Freedom of expression is protected under international human rights law, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of any kind both online and offline. Its fulfilment therefore plays a crucial role in guaranteeing a free media and enabling the right to defend human rights.⁵² Closely connected to this, the right of peaceful assembly, enshrined in Article 21 of the ICCPR, protects the individual's ability to gather non-violently with others. It is now widely recognized that the right of peaceful assembly also protects the right to come together in virtual spaces as well as the right to mobilize online for people to exercise their right to peaceful assembly offline.⁵³

The right to freedom of expression is not absolute, but restrictions need to be provided by law and must be necessary and proportionate to one of the limited legitimate aims established in the ICCPR, which are the “respect of the rights or reputations of others” as well as for “the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals”.⁵⁴ The UN Human Rights Committee, the expert body in charge of monitoring compliance with the ICCPR, has specified that these legitimate reasons to restrict this right “may never be invoked as a justification for the muzzling of any advocacy”, nor “under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of his or her freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest, torture, threats to life and killing, be compatible with Article 19.”⁵⁵

Addressing widespread threats posed by State actors to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the digital age, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association recommended in 2019 that States:

“End all acts of government-sponsored online trolling, intimidation and disinformation targeted at civil society actors. States should investigate these acts, provide effective remedies, and adopt and implement preventive

⁵² UN General Assembly resolution 53/144: Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 9 December 1998, Article 6, UN Doc. A/RES/53/144

⁵³ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No.37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, 17 September 2020, para. 4.

⁵⁴ ICCPR, Article 19.

⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34, 12 September 2011, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 23.

measures. In this context, States should identify and address gender-specific forms of online violence and barriers preventing women from accessing justice.”⁵⁶

States must promote adequate conditions for the full enjoyment of the right, including by lifting any barriers that may hinder people’s ability to freely express their ideas and opinions. For instance, States must actively eliminate “structural and systemic forms of gender discrimination” to protect freedom of expression “on a basis of equality”.⁵⁷ Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights law instruments, sexual orientation and gender identity are protected categories from discrimination.⁵⁸ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the ICCPR also contain a prohibition of advocacy of hatred that incites discrimination, hostility or violence.⁵⁹

Advocacy of hatred is described as a clear showing of intent to incite others to discriminate, be hostile (experience intense and irrational emotions of opprobrium, enmity and detestation) toward, or commit violence against, the group in question. When certain expression constitutes advocacy of hatred, States have an obligation to prohibit it (though not necessarily to criminalize) through a law that is formulated precisely to allow individuals to modify their behaviour in accordance with it. The law and its application must also comply with the ICCPR’s provisions on the right to freedom of expression, and in particular must meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality, in compliance with the three-part test in Article 19(3) of the ICCPR. In order to determine if certain expression meets the threshold of advocacy of hatred, the Rabat Plan of Action posits a six-part threshold test to guide States’ implementation of this prohibition. The six factors that need to be assessed when determining if an expression amounts to advocacy of hatred are: i) context, ii) speaker’s position or status, iii) intent, iv) content and form, v) extent of the speech act, and vi) likelihood, including imminence, of harm.

In recent years, Amnesty International has extensively documented the increased use of social media platforms and other technologies to discriminate and incite violence against women and LGBTI people globally, representing a key challenge to the realization of the right to freedom of expression.⁶⁰ In 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, noted that “gender equality in freedom of expression remains a distant goal”, further explaining:

“The most pervasive and pernicious form of gendered censorship is the use of online sexual and gender-based violence, hate speech and disinformation to silence women. Digital platforms have provided a vital space for women’s engagement and activism but they have also perpetuated gender power structures, normalizing sexualized attacks online. Female politicians, journalists, human rights defenders and feminist activists, especially those with intersecting marginalized identities, are disproportionately targeted by State and non-State actors.”⁶¹

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, also noted that young HRDs, especially women and girls, often face “gendered attacks online” including efforts to “harass, control, blackmail or humiliate” them.⁶² She warned that “such abuse can silence the victims or lead them to engage in self-censorship or to leave social media platforms and digital spaces altogether, further contributing to the restriction of their civic space.”⁶³

⁵⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Report: Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, 17 May 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/41/41, para. 79.

⁵⁷ United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 30 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/258, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/212/16/pdf/n2121216.pdf>, para. 51.

⁵⁸ CEDAW, General recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (1992), 26 July 2017, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC

⁵⁹ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Article 4; ICCPR, Article 20.

⁶⁰ Amnesty International, “Being ourselves is too dangerous”: Digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand (Index: ASA 39/7956/2024), 16 May 2024 (previously cited); Amnesty International, “Everybody here is having two lives and phones”: The devastating impact of criminalization on digital spaces for LGBTQ people in Uganda (Index: AFR 59/8571/2024), 23 October 2024 (previously cited); Amnesty International, A thousand cuts: technology-facilitated gender-based violence against Poland’s LGBTI community on X (Index: EUR 37/0098/2025), 1 September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur37/0098/2025/en/>

⁶¹ United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 30 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/258 (previously cited), paras 4 and 102.

⁶² UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defender, “We are not just the future”: Challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders (previously cited), paras 43-44.

⁶³ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Report: “We are not just the future”: challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders, 17 January 2024, UN Doc. A/HRC/55/50, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5550-we-are-not-just-future-challenges-faced-child-and-youth-human>, para. 44.

4.2 RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The right to privacy is protected under Article 17 of the ICCPR, which provides that no one should be subject to “arbitrary or unlawful interference” with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, and that this should be protected by law.⁶⁴ International law and standards require that any state interference with the right to privacy must be lawful, necessary and proportionate.⁶⁵ It must serve a legitimate aim and be subject to safeguards adequate to prevent abuse, such as being subject to judicial oversight for a defined purpose and period.⁶⁶

Adapting to the ever-increasing role of digital technology in collecting and analysing personal data, the UN Human Rights Committee has clarified that such protection includes regulating “the gathering and holding of personal information on computers, data banks and other devices, whether by public authorities or private individuals or bodies.”⁶⁷ Digital surveillance, whether it be targeted on an individual or mass surveillance, poses one of the foremost threats to the right to privacy, and has direct implications for the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Amnesty International has repeatedly documented how digital tools including social media monitoring and sophisticated spyware tools are employed by States to violate HRDs’ right to privacy and to stifle dissent.⁶⁸

4.3 RIGHT TO LIBERTY AND SECURITY OF PERSON, RIGHTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The right to liberty and security of person are guaranteed by Article 9 of the ICCPR, Article 37 of the UNCRC and various regional human rights instruments.⁶⁹ The right to security of person requires States to refrain from inflicting harm and to protect individuals from foreseeable harm and to address “patterns of violence” against at-risk groups, including HRDs and journalists.⁷⁰ In relation to the right to liberty, the UN Human Rights Committee has specified the meaning of the key concept of arbitrary arrest:

“An arrest or detention may be authorized by domestic law and nonetheless be arbitrary. The notion of “arbitrariness” is not to be equated with “against the law” but must be interpreted more broadly to include elements of inappropriateness, injustice, lack of predictability and due process of law, as well as elements of reasonableness, necessity and proportionality.”⁷¹

Another key instrument, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, obliges States to criminalize enforced disappearances, investigate cases thereof and provide victims with access to justice and reparation.⁷²

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,⁷³ adopted by consensus at the UN General Assembly, is another key document reaffirming that States have an obligation to “recognize, protect, respect and fulfil the right to promote, defend, and to strive for the protection of all human rights”⁷⁴ and that they must ensure a safe and enabling environment for all HRDs.⁷⁵

⁶⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 12 and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 17.

⁶⁵ ICCPR, Article 19. UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 on Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, 12 September 2011, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34.

⁶⁶ Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Report on surveillance and human rights, 28 May 2019, UN Doc. A/HRC/41/35, para. 50(c).

⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment 16: The Right to Respect of Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence, and Protection of Honour and Reputation (Article 17), 8 April 1988, para. 10.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, 31 January 2023, “Rights Back At You: Facial recognition and policing protesters”, <https://amnesty.ca/podcast-facial-recognition-and-policing-protesters/>; Amnesty International, 23 July 2021, “Uncovering the Iceberg: The Digital Surveillance Crisis Wrought by States and the Private Sector” (DOC 10/4491/2021), 23 July 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/doc10/4491/2021/en/>

⁶⁹ African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, Article 6, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 7, ECHR, Article 5.

⁷⁰ UNHRC, General comment No. 35, 16 December 2014, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/35, para. 9.

⁷¹ UNHRC, General comment No. 35, 16 December 2014, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/35, para. 12.

⁷² UN, *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance*, 2006.

⁷³ UN General Assembly resolution 53/144: Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 9 December 1998 UN Doc. A/RES/53/144

⁷⁴ ISHR et al, *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders +25: A supplement to the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: 25 years on*, 2024, <https://ishr.ch/defenders-toolbox/resources/declaration-25/>

⁷⁵ Elements of a safe and enabling environment have been articulated by Margaret Sekaggya, a Ugandan lawyer and former Special Rapporteur on human rights defender and include: a conducive legal, institutional and administrative framework; access to justice and an end to impunity for violations against defenders; strong and independent national human rights institutions; effective protection policies and

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders recommended that States “adopt specific laws and policies enhancing protection for child and youth HRDs at the national level” as well as “explicitly refer to child and youth human rights defenders in model draft laws on human rights defenders.”⁷⁶ Raising alarm about the prevalence of death threats and killings of human rights defenders, the UN Special Rapporteur recommended that States “protect and enhance existing human rights defender protection mechanisms”, “ensure that they are gender-sensitive” and “ensure an enabling environment to protect human rights defenders, properly resource existing protection mechanisms, introduce such mechanisms where necessary and undertake further research on the effectiveness of such protection mechanisms, with a view to their improvement”. The UNGA Resolution on Women Human Rights Defenders further calls on States to take positive steps to provide adequate, gender-sensitive protection to women and girls defending human rights.⁷⁷ States must equally tackle threats faced by LGBTI HRDs and ensure their protection.⁷⁸

The 2023 UNGA Resolution on HRDs further calls upon States

“to take appropriate measures for the prevention of all forms of violence, intimidation, threats, harassment and attacks against human rights defenders on the Internet and through digital technologies and tools, to refrain from the use of surveillance technologies against human rights defenders, in a manner that is not compliant with international human rights obligations, and to protect human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, in online spaces and to consider adopting laws, policies and practices that protect them against online threats of violence and intimidation while also affirming the rights to freedom of expression and privacy, and further encourages social media companies to condemn attacks against human rights defenders when they occur on their platforms.”⁷⁹

The UNGA Resolution’s list of protections for HRDs related to technology further includes a call

“to refrain from Internet shutdowns, network restrictions or any other measures aiming to disrupt or prevent human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, from having access to and disseminating information and communicating safely and securely, including interference with the use of technologies, such as encryption and anonymity tools, and to ensure that any restrictions thereon comply with the obligations of States under international human rights law.”⁸⁰

To address the harms to HRDs’ mental health associated with online harassment (further details in section 4.4), the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders further recommended that social media companies “in consultation with human rights defenders” should “establish and publicize easy to access, public, rapid response mechanisms to remove threatening context”.⁸¹

4.4 RIGHT TO HEALTH

The right to health is enshrined in several human rights instruments including the UDHR, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in Article 12, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in Article 24. It requires States to ensure that sufficient health care facilities

mechanisms paying attention to groups at risk; specific attention given to women human rights defenders; non-state actors that respect and support the work of human rights defenders; safe and open access to international human rights bodies; and a strong and dynamic community of human rights defenders, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, 2013, UN Doc. A/HRC/25/55.

⁷⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, “We are not just the future”: challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders (previously cited), para. 117.

⁷⁷ UN General Assembly, Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: protecting women HRDs, 18 December 2013, UN Doc. A/RES/68/181.

⁷⁸ Joint statement by UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, 24 March 2022, ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/03/defenders-human-rights-lgbt-persons-constantly-risk-warn-un-experts

⁷⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution 78/216: Implementing the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms through providing a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders and ensuring their protection, 19 December 2023, UN Doc. A/RES/78/216, para. 21.

⁸⁰ UN General Assembly Resolution 78/216, 19 December 2023 (previously cited), para. 22.

⁸¹ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: Final warning: death threats and killings of human rights defenders, 24 December 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/46/35, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/355/11/pdf/g2035511.pdf>, paras 104 and 110.

and services are available, within reach and affordable to all sections of the population.⁸² Mental health care in particular remains widely under-resourced and neglected globally.⁸³

HRDs worldwide face distress and trauma from intimidation and harassment, often with severe negative impacts on their mental health, compounded by limited access to affordable mental health services. Child and young HRDs, who often have no access or control over their own financial resources, face increased psychological risks from attacks in online spaces.⁸⁴

Finally, the right to health is also closely linked to the realization of equality and non-discrimination, as the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health observed in 2017:

“The right to mental health is also dependent on equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of all other human rights that can themselves be considered an underlying determinant. Multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination continue to impede the ability of individuals, including women and persons from racial and ethnic minorities with disabilities, to realize their right to mental health. Discrimination and inequality are both a cause and a consequence of poor mental health, with long-term implications for morbidity, mortality and societal well-being. Discrimination, harmful stereotypes (including gender) and stigma in the community, family, schools and workplace disable healthy relationships, social connections and the supportive and inclusive environments that are required for the good mental health and well-being of everyone. Likewise, discriminatory attitudes influencing policies, laws and practices constitute barriers for those requiring emotional and social support and/or treatment. Consequently, individuals and groups in vulnerable situations who are discriminated against by law and/or in practice are denied their right to mental health.”⁸⁵

4.5 CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS

Companies have a responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate in the world and across all their business activities. This is a widely recognized standard of expected conduct as set out in international business and human rights standards including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles) and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD Guidelines).⁸⁶ It is independent of a State’s own human rights obligations and exists over and above compliance with national laws and regulations protecting human rights.⁸⁷

The corporate responsibility to respect human rights requires companies to avoid causing or contributing to human rights abuses through their own business activities and to address impacts in which they are involved, including by remediating any actual abuses. To meet these corporate responsibilities, companies should have in place an ongoing and proactive human rights due diligence process to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their actual and potential impacts on human rights. If, in this process, a company finds that it could be causing or contributing to abuses through its own services and operations, it must cease or prevent the adverse human rights impacts.⁸⁸ In the event that the abuse has already occurred and a company has contributed or caused this abuse, the company should provide remedy to those affected, in addition to ceasing the harm.⁸⁹

⁸² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 14, 11 August 2000, UN Doc. E/C.12/2000/4.

⁸³ UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health), Report, 15 April 2020, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/48.

⁸⁴ UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, “We are not just the future”: challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders, 17 January 2024 (previously cited).

⁸⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Report, 28 March 2017, UN Doc. A/HRC/35/21, paras 45-46.

⁸⁶ Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework, 2011, endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UNHRC Resolution 17/4: Human rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises, adopted on 16 June 2011, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/17/4; and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, 2011, <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/mneguidelines>. In accordance with the UN Guiding Principles, corporate responsibility to respect human rights is independent of a State’s human rights obligations and exists over and above compliance with national laws and regulations protecting human rights. See UN Guiding Principles, Principle 11 and Commentary.

⁸⁷ OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework, 2011, UN Doc. HR/PUB/11/04, [ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf), Principle 11 including Commentary.

⁸⁸ UN Guiding Principles (previously cited), Principle 19 and Commentary.

⁸⁹ UN Guiding Principles, Principle 22.

5. DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Around the world, digital platforms and technologies are now critical tools for human rights activism. They enable public communication and mobilization at unprecedented scale, create access to otherwise censored information, encrypted messaging and new creative tools and facilitate direct access to political leaders. For Kenya's youth – who make up most of the population in a country with a median age of 20⁹⁰ – digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok are key spaces of political discussion and mobilization. The young HRDs who participated in this research unanimously highlighted the importance of social media and popular messaging apps such as WhatsApp in enabling young people to speak up and mobilize support for young people's concerns and frustrations in a political system that is dominated by older generations.

5.1 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES' ROLE IN PUBLIC MOBILIZATION

“Currently, the young people feel like they've been left out, especially in the political space... Most Kenyans get their updates through social media, so social media is such a powerful tool. As Kenyans, our Constitution says that we have the right to speak up. And social media has been used as a tool for the people to express their anger, to express their issues.”

24-year-old youth leader and aspiring political candidate⁹¹

Echoing previous research on this topic, interviewees highlighted the importance of social media platforms for raising awareness and mobilizing support for the rights of underrepresented and marginalized groups, including women, children and LGBTI activists.⁹²

Kenyans' intense use of X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, for political arguments, satire and mockery has led to the creation of a distinct acronym, “KOT” (Kenyans on Twitter).⁹³ Former President

⁹⁰ Database.earth, Median Age of Kenya, 2025 (accessed 11 June 2025), <https://database.earth/population/kenya/median-age>

⁹¹ Interview, Nairobi, 19 March 2025.

⁹² Amnesty International, “I turned my fear into courage”: Red-tagging and state violence against young human rights defenders in the Philippines (previously cited), interview, Nairobi, 20 March, 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

⁹³ George Ogola, “Digital (Dis)order, Twitter Hashtags, and the Performance of Politics in Kenya”, in *Cryptopolitics: Exposure, Concealment, and Digital Media*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/ji.9891559.7>

Uhuru Kenyatta said he left the platform after feeling “bullied” by KOT.⁹⁴ Yet most HRDs see the platform as a critical source of information and live updates as well as a means of direct public communication with politicians. Under massive public pressure, President Ruto participated in an X space with youth leaders (a live-recorded conversation between users of the platform) at the height of the public mobilization against the 2024 Finance Bill and Ruto’s government itself.

TikTok, long seen as more of an entertainment app, also gained relevance as a platform for political education and satire in 2024 as increasing numbers of its young users became involved in the protest movement and videos of the protests went viral.

When the June 2024 protests moved onto the streets, it garnered widespread international attention, but the political discontent – and the accompanying mass mobilization around it – had been growing online for some time, in a clear illustration of the link between online and offline rights in the context of the right to protest. Interviewees repeatedly highlighted that political frustrations had long been building up online:

“When it finally boiled over, it wasn’t a surprise to us. But it was a surprise to the rest of the world. Because on social media, the climate was already there. People were already angry and frustrated, so it just required one person to say, ‘This is the day we’re going to the streets’ and people showed up.” Grace*, 23-year-old TikTok user and HRD.⁹⁵

Discussing online platforms’ role in creating a movement for change, many young HRDs shared their sense that online platforms enabled a shared sense of the need for mobilization that would transcend traditional ethnic and regional fault lines in Kenyan politics:

“I think the offline protests would not be possible without the online ones. If anything, the online ones create that momentum for people to show up. They created that mobilisation, that organisation. In June 2024, the protests were very organic. No political leader. In fact, one of the tag lines that Kenyans were using for those protests was that we are leaderless. We are tribeless.”⁹⁶

Mombasa-based HRD Mwalimu* said: “The government actually fears when young people come together on social media.”⁹⁷ Several interviewees contrasted this organic growth of a popular movement online with widespread suspicions that public rallies in the offline realm are often fuelled by political candidates and leaders paying members of the public for their participation. Interviewees reported that this corruption had eroded trust in genuine protests and public activism.

Representatives of multiple social justice centres participating in a focus group discussion in Nairobi similarly explained that they felt that the 2024 protests had managed to overcome the long-standing vilification of protesters in Kenyan society as paid minions of powerful elites: “Our President, on social media, we have beaten him to his own game.”⁹⁸

In substance, many interviewees linked the build-up of public anger at President Ruto’s policies and governance to the clash between the public image which Ruto had created during his election campaign of a “hustler” President promoting the interests of the economically disadvantaged and the reality of his economic policies, which were seen to increase the burden on the poorest.⁹⁹ Emerging technologies then enabled young people to translate their frustrations into catchy and easy-to-understand messages that reached a wide audience, adapting them for different age groups across the various online platforms.

Examples of this creative use of technology included creating content, including accessible videos, in local vernacular:

“In my tribe, there was someone who translated the Finance Bill, broke it down to very simple language. You know when you translate something to my language, I’ll relate to it more than when I see it in English. So that had a very huge impact because many people now could see that the draconian bill was very bad for them and it will actually affect the future of their children.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ The Nation, “Uhuru back on Twitter? Not so fast”, 4 October 2023, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/uhuru-back-on-twitter-not-so-fast--4388614>

⁹⁵ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025.

⁹⁶ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025.

⁹⁷ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

⁹⁸ Focus group discussion, interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025.

⁹⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, focus group discussion, interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025; BBC, “El Chapo & Deputy Jesus - why Kenya’s president has so many nicknames”, 14 May 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cewd120d8lxo>;

Al Jazeera, “‘Kenya is not asleep anymore’: Why young protesters are not backing down”, 24 July 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/7/24/kenya-is-not-asleep-anymore-why-young-protesters-are-not-backing-down>

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

Participants in a focus group discussion in Nairobi said that whilst most of their peers are not part of the social justice movement, they could nonetheless be reached through political content on TikTok.¹⁰¹ They explained that “Gen Z” TikTokers were “explaining the Finance Bill section by section in the simplest language”, so that others in their peer group “saw the reasons why they should come out in the streets”. They added that from TikTok, young people took those conversations into their families and communities who would not otherwise have been mobilized.

More advanced uses of technology included young activists building platforms for bulk-messaging MPs, creating chatbots to answer questions about the Finance Bill and using generative artificial intelligence tools (Gen AI) to create memes and imagery.¹⁰²

5.2 USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES DURING THE PROTESTS

Once the online protests tipped over into the first major street protests on 18 June 2024, technology again played a major role in allowing protesters to coordinate, including through unusual means such as Zello, a walkie-talkie-style communications app that was downloaded 40,000 times in Kenya during the protest week.¹⁰³ Smartphones and social media also allowed HRDs to document the protests and the first wave of illegal arrests of peaceful protesters. Several HRDs felt it was the gripping imagery of the first protests and young activists’ courage in the face of widespread misuse of police powers that triggered the evolution into the mass movement it would become over the following days.¹⁰⁴ One such example is a video created by young HRD Grace*, who filmed her group of young protesters enthusiastically chanting protest slogans in the back of a police van following their arrest (more on her experiences in chapter 6). She posted the clip on X, from where it was reposted on TikTok, where it went viral within hours, reaching hundreds of thousands of views and gathering massive support in the comment section.¹⁰⁵

“I remember thinking when we were arrested and these guys didn't even wear uniforms. Why are you wearing guns? And you're arresting us in plain clothes. And so the first thing that came to my mind was to record a video. Like right now, as these people are arresting us and we told each other, guys, get out your phones, take pictures, take videos. So we took videos and I posted it on Twitter and said we've been arrested.”

Throughout late June and again during the #EndFemicide protests, photojournalist and student HRD Salim* documented the street protests in Mombasa and posted his pictures on X and other platforms, “leveraging online spaces as a tool to disseminate information and using social media as an archive of history. This was also a reminder that there is power when it comes to storytelling and photojournalism.”¹⁰⁶

Feminist human rights defender Sarah* commented on the collective impact: “Because we posted, the next time Kenyans came in their millions. If we had not posted, nobody would have known that we did anything.”¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International was unable to find exact numbers for how many people participated in the protests across the country; there was however a marked increase between the first day of major protests on 18 June and the final day of mass protests during that period, which culminated in protesters storming parliament on 25 June 2024. At least 13 people were reported to have been killed during the protests that day, with multiple protesters shot dead with live ammunition by police and security forces.¹⁰⁸

Video footage and imagery shot by protesters that day and posted on social media has since been used by the BBC to identify military and police officers involved in the extrajudicial killings of protesters, underlining the importance of protesters’ documentation of the events.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025.

¹⁰² The Continent, “Kenya’s government has a blueprint for digital tyranny. It is working – for now”, 18 August 2024, <https://thisisafrika.me/politics-and-society/kenyas-government-has-a-blueprint-for-digital-tyranny-it-is-working-for-now/>

¹⁰³ Rest of World, “Kenya’s biggest protest in recent history played out on a walkie-talkie app”, 16 July 2024, <https://restofworld.org/2024/zello-walkie-talkie-kenya-protests/>

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, focus group discussion, interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, Nairobi, 21 March 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025.

¹⁰⁸ BBC, “Thirteen killed and parliament set ablaze in Kenya protests – medics”, 25 June 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cerv93yx1mo>; BBC, “Pressure mounts to probe Kenya police and army after BBC exposé”, 29 April 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy9vrz4q1v8o>

¹⁰⁹ BBC, “Blood Parliament”, 17 May 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002c44g>

For those involved in the protests, filming was felt to have provided the best available defence against police use of unlawful force.¹¹⁰ “We were our own security”, said 22-year-old HRD Mary*.¹¹¹ Finally, when incidents of unlawful force began to mount, young people took to social media and digital fundraising tools to mobilize financial support for those who were injured or lost family members during the protests.

Digital technologies thus played a critical role in providing tools for public mobilization, advocacy, communication, resistance, documentation and fundraising for young HRDs. As the following section will highlight, however, they also became a core part of the Kenyan state’s playbook of repression and intimidation.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

¹¹¹ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

6. MERGING DIGITAL AND TRADITIONAL MEANS OF STATE REPRESSION

6.1 ONLINE HARASSMENT

Online harassment targeting young human rights defenders (HRDs) has emerged as a critical issue in recent years in Kenya, posing significant challenges to freedom of expression, the right to protest, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the safety and security of individuals advocating for human rights. Amnesty International's interviews with young HRDs surfaced a wide variety of tech-facilitated forms of violence, from threats and intimidating comments to abusive language, doxing and gender-based violence including digitally altered pictures and body shaming. In some cases, HRDs were able to identify state and political actors as perpetrators, although attacks by anonymous accounts, including some believed to be paid troll accounts, were found to be the most common.

As digital platforms have become increasingly integral to activism and advocacy, the risks associated with online engagement have escalated, leading to a concerning rise in targeted abuse, threats, and smear campaigns against young people who stand up for human rights. The frequency and gravity of the threat not only undermine the critical work of these activists but also create an atmosphere of fear, intimidation and violence that stifles dissent and hinders human rights progress.

Nine out of the 31 interviewed young HRDs told Amnesty International that they had received personal violent threats through direct messages on various online platforms, including X, TikTok and Facebook as well as through the online messaging service WhatsApp during the 2024 protests in the context of their outspoken support of the demonstrations.

Mariam*, a 27-year-old HRD based in Mombasa who was also forcibly disappeared by police for two nights reported:

"I had people coming into my inbox and telling me, 'You will die and leave your kids. We will come and attack you. What you're doing is not right'... I even had to change my child's school. Someone sent me my child's name, the age, the stream that they are in, the school bus number plate. And they told me, 'If you continue doing what you're doing then we will take care of this child for you'."¹¹²

Joseph*, received a direct message on X:

"You are the ones who are telling these people to come and disrupt the peace of this nation. We are coming for you."¹¹³

¹¹² Interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025.

¹¹³ Interview, Nairobi, 19 March 2025.

Grace*, a 23-year-old popular political commentator on TikTok received a direct message on TikTok from a man identifying as a police officer in his profile, threatening her with words such as “they’ll come for you”.¹¹⁴ Another prominent young female HRD reported that she had received messages from unknown numbers threatening to rape her.

In June and July 2024, five HRDs received threatening phone calls and warnings of potential retribution for their involvement in online mobilization. Three of them left their homes for days or even weeks after receiving calls from people they believed to be police officers or linked to state security officials because they felt these were credible threats in the context of the stark rise in enforced disappearances of HRDs in 2024. Two interviewees who were victims of enforced disappearances in 2024 were warned through phone calls that they might be abducted before they were forcibly taken. These testimonies underline how online platforms are increasingly becoming another tool for state violence, merging traditional offline and new digital means of intimidation, surveillance and harassment.

Much of the online violence experienced by young HRDs takes place out in the open, in public posts and comments on social media. Taking a closer look at the harassment faced by prominent youth movement leaders reveals a pattern of themes and narratives pushed through coordinated campaigns, supporting young HRDs’ assertion made in interviews with Amnesty International that state-sponsored trolls play a leading role in spreading and amplifying hatred towards them. Student leader Joshua Okayo explained:

“They want to maintain their social media image, and that means anytime you post something about certain ministry or certain individual, they always send what we call the 527 bloggers. These are government paid bloggers whose job is to abuse you, to say very dehumanizing, demeaning things.”¹¹⁵

Monica*, a child rights advocate and climate change campaigner spoke about the impact of this abuse:

“A lot of things have changed in Kenya since the abductions last year and you find that nowadays, as a youth activist, even if something is true, you can't just post it online. The online harassment creates fear, especially among the marginalized communities, the youth, women and children, when they try to speak up and lead campaigns. It shrinks the civil space online and it limits the right to expression and participation in public discourse.”¹¹⁶

Chapter 6.2 explores in greater detail how X (formerly Twitter) in Kenya is being instrumentalized by paid pro-government networks spreading disinformation and smear campaigns. For these networks, mass-posting repeated messaging is a core part of hijacking X’s algorithm aimed at maximizing visibility on the platform. In several cases, this tactic is evident in the harassment campaigns which Amnesty International observed as well.

Prominent young HRD Hanifa Adan, a Kenyan of Somali descent, is regularly targeted with gender-based, xenophobic and Islamophobic harassment. Hanifa gained a large following on X due to her crucial role in the Gen Z movement’s fundraising efforts for survivors and victims of state violence and has publicly called for accountability for the unlawful use of force by police during the protests. The screenshots of X posts and comments below show examples of xenophobic statements othering Hanifa as Somali and advocating for her “to be returned” to “failed country Somalia”. Speaking to Amnesty International, she described how government-sponsored bloggers, clearly acting in coordination, had targeted her identity as a young Muslim woman by spreading lies about her personal life in an apparent effort to vilify and isolate her from her own community.¹¹⁷ Speaking about the impact of these attacks, Hanifa said, “Having strangers say things about you every single day, being targeted every single day, it’s hard. It took away the spark, the joy. It took away who I was.”¹¹⁸ In 2024, she quit her job, feeling overwhelmed by the constant attacks brought upon by her increasing prominence amongst young protest leaders. She explained, “I questioned it [the activism] every day.” She said she was driven to continue her advocacy by her anger and frustration over government corruption and the violent response to the protests.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025.

¹¹⁶ Interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

¹¹⁷ Interview, remote, 9 September 2025.

¹¹⁸ Interview, remote, 9 September 2025.



One example of the many coordinated harassment campaigns she has been exposed to by suspected state-sponsored trolls is the #ToxicActivists campaign of April 2025. Hanifa was viciously targeted after she was interviewed in the BBC documentary “Blood Parliament”, which investigated the shootings of several protesters on 25 June 2024, revealing the involvement of members of Kenya’s military. The documentary became subject to a censorship campaign, including government pressure to cancel its public screening and a coordinated disinformation campaign under the hashtag #BBCforChaos on the day of its release.¹¹⁹ Organized trolls repeating the same or very similar posts dozens of times within minutes of each other created Islamophobic imagery of a headscarf-wearing snake and discredited Hanifa and other prominent activists as “commercial” and “toxic activists”, echoing a long-standing vilification strategy against members of civil society in Kenya as financially motivated and corrupt. Amnesty International’s research revealed that profiles of accounts that were involved in the coordinated campaign openly advertise that these profiles are available for hire with bios including prompts such as “DM [direct message] for promos/ repost plug/comment plug”. According to an analysis by African Digital Democracy Observatory, the #BBCforChaos “hashtag campaign generated 16,639 mentions and 4.9 million views on X”.¹²⁰ The associated #ToxicActivists campaign featured dozens of coordinated X posts by a network of users, reaching more than 360,000 views.¹²¹

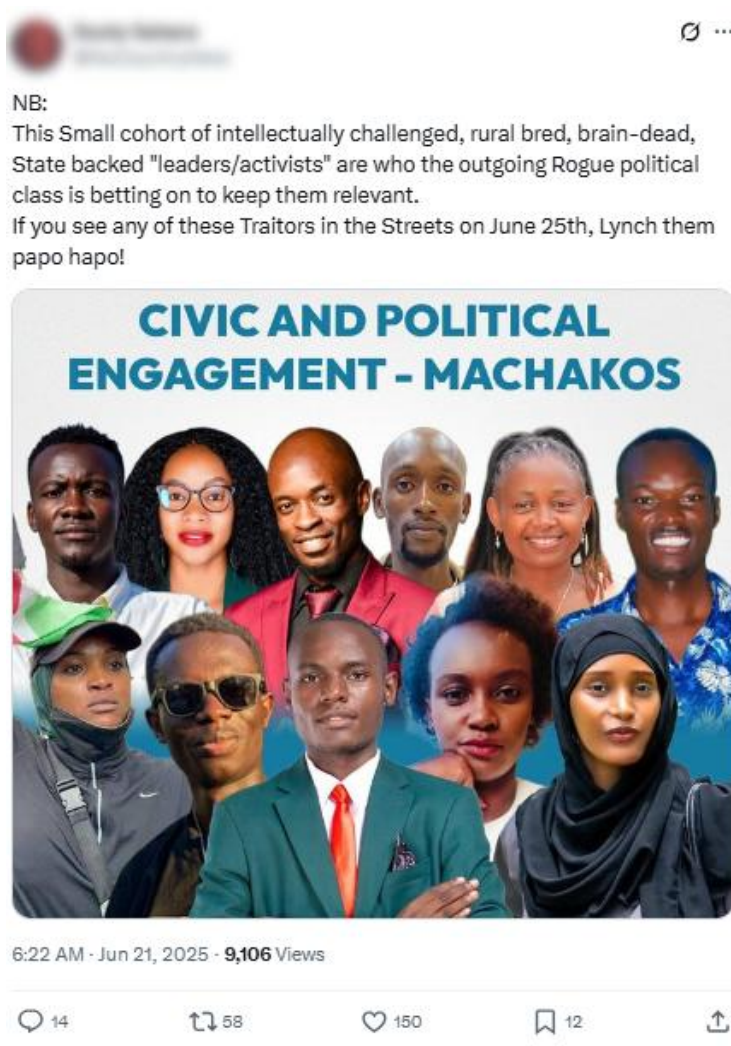
¹¹⁹ ADDO, “Hashtag campaign targets BBC after Kenya protest film”, 14 August 2025, <https://disinfo.africa/hashtag-campaign-targets-bbc-after-kenya-protest-film-15a93a2dd06c>

¹²⁰ ADDO, “Hashtag campaign targets BBC after Kenya protest film”, 14 August 2025 (previously cited).

¹²¹ ADDO, “Hashtag campaign targets BBC after Kenya protest film”, 14 August 2025 (previously cited) and Amnesty International’s own content review in August 2025.



Such coordinated campaigns show how X is failing to take adequate steps to address these threats, notwithstanding its own policy against “coordinated inauthentic behaviour”, turning the platform into fertile ground for disinformation and harassment. The toxicity of such campaigns and Kenyan political discourse reverberates across X, other online platforms and society at large, shifting public attitudes and legitimizing and encouraging further acts of discrimination and violence through abusive and inciting language.



Incitement to violence against HRDs on X ahead of the public protests to mark the first anniversary of the 25 June "Gen Z protests".

The chilling effects of such harassment and incitement to violence extend beyond the immediate targets, sending a clear warning signal to anyone interested in political discourse on social media platforms that they may be targeted next, undermining freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly online. Self-censorship is the most evident outcome, with young people either policing their choice of topics and their use of language or quitting platforms entirely.¹²² All of Amnesty International's young research participants spoke of changes they made to their online posting behaviour in response to this increasingly hostile environment.

A less visible impact is the mental health toll, which both young women and men highlighted in their interviews with Amnesty International. Young HRDs described feeling anxious, afraid and "overwhelmed", doubting themselves and the value of their activism amidst the heightened risks presented by the hostile environment they operate in.¹²³ Adding to this strain, at least three interviewees reported that friends and contacts had distanced themselves because they feared repercussions from being associated with them amidst these harassment and vilification campaigns.¹²⁴ One HRD further reported being asked by her landlord to move out of her apartment, underlining the severity of the real-world impact of tech-facilitated violence and disinformation.¹²⁵

¹²² Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

¹²³ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

¹²⁴ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025; interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025; interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025

¹²⁵ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025

Whilst X stands out as a particularly political platform and the main vehicle for coordinated disinformation and smear campaigns in Kenya, less prominent young HRDs told Amnesty International that for them, experiences of online harassment were also common on other major social media platforms.¹²⁶ Grace* and Monica*, two of the youngest research participants, additionally highlighted their frustration with frequent comments minimizing their right and capacity to mobilize online audiences due to their young age.¹²⁷ These testimonies echo prior research findings highlighting the chilling effects of ageism and patriarchal societal attitudes towards children and young people's (online) activism, acting as inhibitors of young people's exercise of the right to protest.¹²⁸

These testimonies also indicate that online harassment is concerningly normalized, as interviewees expressed little hope in either platform content moderation mechanisms or law enforcement.¹²⁹ Interviewees repeatedly criticized platforms for acting too slowly and ineffectively upon their flagging of harassment and argued that reporting tools should be more accessible.¹³⁰ Notifying police of incidents of online harassment was not considered a viable option by any of the interviewees, given that many identified state actors as the main or most powerful perpetrators of violence against HRDs.¹³¹

6.2 TECH-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In addition to these chilling forms of online violence, many young women and LGBTI HRDs experience additional forms of tech-facilitated gender-based violence, targeting their bodies and identities to cause long-lasting mental harm and pressure them into silence.

Beyond the #RejectFinanceBill protests, 2024 also saw thousands join public protests under the hashtag #EndFemicideKE in response to a stark rise in the number of murders of women and girls. According to police statistics, close to 100 women were killed in acts of gender-based and/or domestic violence between August and October 2024 alone.¹³² Staff at the Nairobi Women's Hospital treated 4,000 cases of gender-based violence every month.¹³³ 41 per cent of women who have been married in Kenya have experienced physical violence, according to the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey.¹³⁴ Amnesty International researchers have observed challenges faced by survivors of gender-based violence in receiving help through emergency response systems, accessing medical care and justice mechanisms.¹³⁵

For many of the young HRDs whom Amnesty International interviewed for this report, the violence that women and LGBTI people face *offline* is in many ways linked and arguably in no small part incited and propelled by the misogyny and violence faced by outspoken advocates of gender justice *online*.

Young women HRDs who participated in the "Gen Z protests" against the 2024 Finance Bill as well as the #EndFemicideKE protests spoke to Amnesty International about vicious attacks online in the form of misogynistic comments, body shaming, threats, doxing and AI-generated pornographic images produced to shame, threaten and silence them.

"I have been harassed. I have been doxed. I have been threatened. I have been told I will beat you up", said Sarah*.¹³⁶ She is part of the movement "Feminists in Kenya" who played a key role in organizing the #EndFemicideKE protests. The protests were an outcry against the most brutal forms of gender-based

¹²⁶ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

¹²⁷ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025

¹²⁸ Amnesty International, "Left to their own devices: The chilling effect of online harassment on young human rights defenders In the Philippines", 4 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.ph/2025/04/left-to-their-own-devices/>; Amnesty International, "Three out five young activists face online harassment globally for posting human rights content", 1 July 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/three-out-five-young-activists-face-online-harassment-globally-for-posting-human-rights-content/>

¹²⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March, interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

¹³⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, interview, remote, 5 June 2025.

¹³¹ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March, interview, Nairobi, 19 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025, interview, remote, 9 September 2025.

¹³² Nation, "Unpacking 2024, Kenya's leap year of femicides and cold-blood murders", 2 January 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/unpacking-2024-kenya-s-leap-year-of-femicides-and-cold-blood-murders-4876050>

¹³³ Fuller Project, "This Could Be The Deadliest Year On Record For Kenyan Women", 9 December 2024, <https://fullerproject.org/story/this-could-be-the-deadliest-year-on-record-for-kenyan-women/>

¹³⁴ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, "Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022", January 2023, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR143/PR143.pdf>

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, "A Call for Change: Insights from the 'End Femicide Kenya' March", 10 March 2024, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/a-call-for-change-insights-from-the-end-femicide-kenya-march/>

¹³⁶ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025

violence as well as the everyday experiences of many women of misogyny, violence and patriarchal structures, which Amnesty International found reflected in online comments.



Sarah argued that widespread access to online platforms had created a new outlet for pre-existing hatred:

“The ‘manosphere’ has always existed, it's just that you didn't have the word for it. It's becoming more vicious because now it's easy and it takes a click of a finger for you to go and find posts that will radicalize you against women and human rights. In the same way that women are being radicalized towards fighting for their rights, men are being radicalized into thinking that giving us our rights is oppression for them.”¹³⁷

One common narrative identified by at least four female HRDs is that they are accused of being vocal to enrich themselves, echoing broader patterns of disinformation against HRDs who participated in the Gen Z protests circling around themes of corruption, a portrayal of gender justice struggles as a “foreign agenda” and covert sponsorship of the protests (see also chapter 6.2).¹³⁸ Often, this narrative is interwoven, however, with distinctly misogynistic comments about women’s relationships, bodies and sexuality. “Usually, the women we are told that we are eating money, we are becoming rich, or we have slept our way up”, said Sarah*.¹³⁹

Kisumu-based Agnes* shared similar experiences of online harassment based on gender tropes:

“African women are seen as women who need to be in the kitchen and having babies, that is how we’ve been perceived for the longest time. And so the moment you're on the front lines, often you get attacks: You'll be told that is why you're not married, because you're hot-headed. This is not a space for you. You need to go take care of your kids. Who have you left your kids with?”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025

¹³⁸ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025

¹³⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025

Agnes' observations are backed up by evidence from surveys conducted by Article 19 and Pollicy, finding that women journalists, HRDs and politicians in Kenya are widely targeted with negative stereotypes and misogynistic attacks dismissing women's contributions and reducing their societal role to that of mothers and caregivers.¹⁴¹ These stereotypes are actively being spread on major online platforms by misogynistic influencers subscribing to a globally connected "manosphere", a patriarchal counter-movement to feminism most prominently associated with the influencer Andrew Tate.¹⁴² CNN carried out an analysis of Kenya's "manosphere" between 2020 and 2024 and found that popular terms associated with the movement such as "red pill" and "incel" had gained significant traction across X, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram.¹⁴³ In 2023, Kenya "consistently ranked in the top 10 of countries globally using known manosphere words and phrases (in English) across the platform", despite its comparatively low number of users, according to the same analysis.

Highlighting the role of modern technology in facilitating new forms of attacks, young female HRDs especially repeatedly spoke of personal and witnessed experiences of women's faces being edited onto pornographic images to intimidate and silence them, either through photo-editing or the use of generative AI:¹⁴⁴

"A female activist is vocal online. The bloggers will create something completely different. Maybe divert the conversation because you have posted something pretty critical. The following day you wake up, you find a picture, not your picture, but your face is placed on someone who is naked."

Mary*, 22-year-old HRD in Nairobi¹⁴⁵

A focus group discussion held by Amnesty International in Kisumu revealed how this leads young female HRDs to worry about being seen in swimwear on the beach or other public spaces for fear of someone taking photos and posting them online with the intention of shaming them.¹⁴⁶ Mary* further highlighted how young female HRDs felt constantly policed to dress and behave in ways that conform to certain values or risk being attacked online. These testimonies add to the broader theme of the links between online discourse and the rise of the "manosphere" and women and girls' freedoms, safety and security online and offline.

¹⁴¹ Article 19, "Kenya: Break the bias to protect women journalists and human rights defenders", 8 March 2022, <https://www.article19.org/resources/kenya-protect-women-journalists-and-whrds/>; Pollicy, "Byte Bullies", 9 July 2023, <https://pollicy.org/projects/byte-bullies/>; see also Council for Responsible Social Media, "National 2022 Report on Disinformation & the Role of Big Tech in Kenya", 2022, https://www.accountablebigtech.com/documents/68/Big_Tech_Harms_Disseminated.pdf

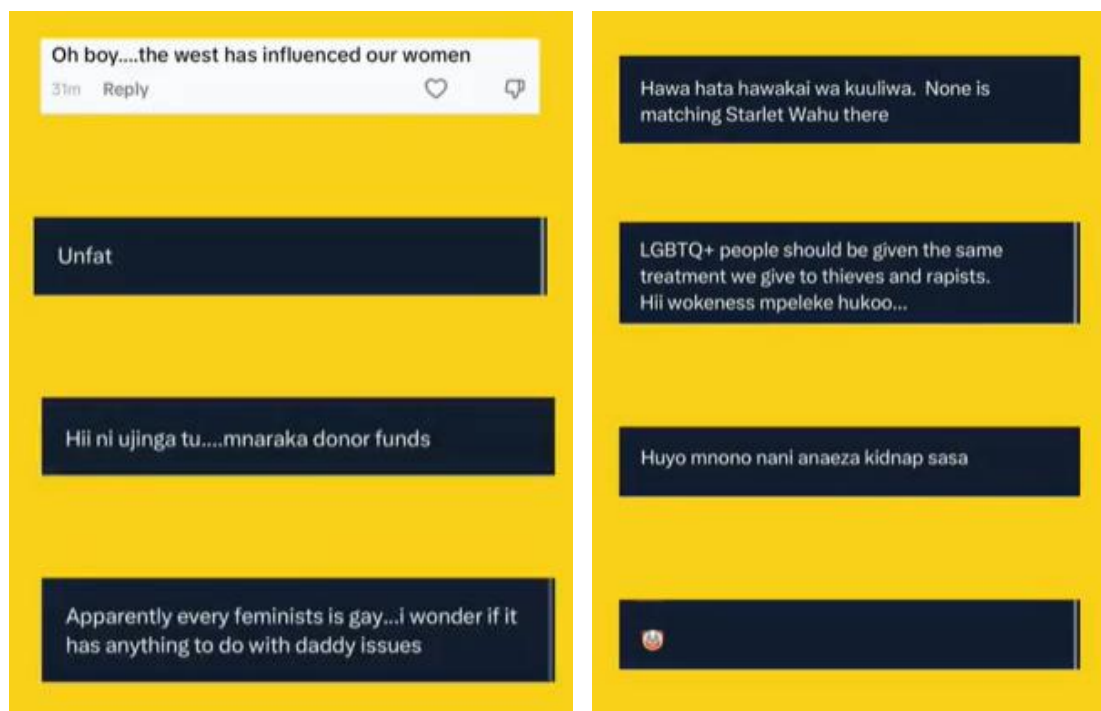
¹⁴² Steven Roberts, Callum Jones and others, "Beyond the Clickbait: Analysing the Masculinist Ideology in Andrew Tate's Online Written Discourses", *Cultural Sociology*, 0(0), January 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17499755241307414>

¹⁴³ CNN, "'The hostility was something I'd never experienced before': The cost to women of the overlooked rise of Kenya's manosphere", 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/asequals/kenya-manosphere-toxic-masculinity-as-equals/>

¹⁴⁴ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025; focus group discussion, Kisumu, 25 March 2025

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

¹⁴⁶ Focus group discussion, Kisumu, 25 March 2025



 ↑ Examples of tech-facilitated gender-based violence documented by Feminists in Kenya:
 "Hii ni ujinga tu....mnaraka donor funds" translates to "This is just stupidity,,,you just want donor funds". "Hawa hata hawakai wa kuuliwa. None is matching Starlet Wahu there" translates to "These ones do not look like the type to be killed." (The post implies that the women spoken about are considered unattractive and "not the type to be killed" unlike Starlet Wahu, a woman who was murdered in a case of gender-based violence whom they consider beautiful.)
 "Huyo mnono nani anaeza kidnap sasa" translates to "That fat one, who can even kidnap her".

"We are being forced to shut up, it's an attack on our voice, on our bodies", said Sarah* discussing the impact of gendered online harassment.¹⁴⁷ Agnes*, the feminist activist in Kisumu said she had left Instagram due to the online violence she personally experienced on the platform.¹⁴⁸

Emily*, a Nairobi-based volunteer at a feminist community centre in an informal settlement highlighted that whilst social media platforms are a key means of raising awareness about gender-based violence and women's rights, she and other volunteers feel they must constantly assess the risks of what they share and how in the knowledge that harassment and threats are common and can be precursors of violence offline. The community group has seen some success with counter-speech, discouraging harassers through facts and encouraging community support and positive mobilization in response. She nevertheless also acknowledged the psychological impact, highlighting how it can be "overwhelming" to read comments justifying and minimizing femicide and gender-based violence.¹⁴⁹

At least five HRDs interviewed by Amnesty International who are active on these issues shared that posts about sexual and reproductive health and rights and LGBTI rights were particularly likely to attract harassment and abuse online, reflecting the hostile climate around these issues in Kenyan society.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025

¹⁴⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa 27 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March

6.2.1 TECH-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI ACTIVISTS IN KENYA

“Most of the time we get attacked for advocating for queer people... People say being queer is satanic, being queer is demonic, so people killing these women was them doing God's work.”¹⁵¹

Kenya, like its East African neighbours Uganda and Tanzania, has seen increased hostility towards LGBTI rights and violence against queer rights defenders in recent years, driven by the incendiary rhetoric of political and church leaders as well as international interest groups amplifying pre-existing harmful narratives and promoting discrimination.¹⁵² Consensual same-sex conduct is criminalized in Kenya under laws first passed during the colonial era. A 2023 report by Amnesty International and the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission found that “abuse of the rights of LGBTI people is widespread and well documented, including physical violence, death threats, harassment by state officials, stigma, expulsion from educational institutions, blackmail, extortion, poor access to health care and medical research abuse.”¹⁵³ Yet LGBTI rights organizations have been allowed to openly operate and work for the rights of LGBTI people in Kenya and in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against a petition to ban LGBTI groups.¹⁵⁴ The ruling prompted public protests, spurred on by political leaders’ public criticism of the court’s decision. President William Ruto reacted by saying homosexuality was a “foreign practice” that Kenya’s “customs, traditions, Christianity and Islam cannot allow”.¹⁵⁵ Disinformation claiming that homosexuality has not historically been part of African cultures is ever-present in public discourse and has further entrenched homo- and transphobia, stigma and hatred.¹⁵⁶

This long-standing narrative is now increasingly merged with disinformation narratives seeking to undermine wider human rights and social justice initiatives as being driven by an imported foreign agenda benefiting only a small subsection of society. Section 6.2 discusses in greater detail how in July 2024, a new disinformation and smear campaign emerged on X, discrediting the Gen Z protests as being driven by LGBTI groups intent on undermining “Kenyan values”. It was created and amplified by a disinformation network that regularly amplifies undeclared pro-government campaigns. There are evident parallels between this recent Kenyan disinformation narrative and similar trends observed by Amnesty International in Uganda, where homophobia has been used as a political strategy to divert attention from issues such as corruption and to scapegoat and criminalize a marginalized minority.¹⁵⁷

Christian interest groups in Kenya and worldwide have also played a key role in undermining LGBTI rights as well as education about sexual health and reproductive rights. Similarly to President Ruto, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) aggressively attacked the 2023 Supreme Court ruling on freedom of assembly of LGBTI organizations, stating, “We fault the determination of the Supreme Court of Kenya and declare it as an effort towards the promotion of LGBTQ+ ideology which seeks to destroy life” and called

¹⁵¹ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025

¹⁵² Amnesty International, “We are facing extinction: Escalating anti-LGBTI sentiment, the weaponization of law and their human rights implications in select African countries” (Index: AFR 01/7533/2024), 9 January 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr01/7533/2024/en/>

¹⁵³ Amnesty International, “Justice like any other person: Hate crimes and discrimination against LGBTI refugees”, 19 May 2023, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/just-like-any-other-person/>

¹⁵⁴ Supreme Court of Kenya, *Non-Governmental Organizations Co-Ordination Board v Eric Gitari & 5 others, Supreme Court Petition No.16 of 2019* [2023]; Amnesty International, “Press statement on the Supreme Court Judgement on the freedom of association of LGBTQ+”, 2 March 2023, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/statement-on-supreme-court-judgement-on-the-freedom-of-association/>

¹⁵⁵ France24, “‘Nowhere to hide’: Anti-gay crackdown grips East Africa”, 15 March 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230315-nowhere-to-hide-anti-gay-crackdown-grips-east-africa>; Capital News, “I will not allow men to compete with women for other men, President Ruto says of homosexuality”, 2 March 2023, <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2023/03/i-will-not-allow-men-to-compete-with-women-for-other-men-president-ruto-says-of-homosexuality/>

¹⁵⁶ DW, “Why homosexuality is not unAfrican”, 13 March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/gay-pride-why-homosexuality-is-not-unafrikan/video-71915638>; Amnesty International, “Making love a crime: Criminalization of same-sex conduct in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Index: AFR 01/001/2013), 25 June 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR01/001/2013/en/>

¹⁵⁷ Amnesty International, “Everybody here is having two lives and phones”: The devastating impact of criminalization on digital spaces for LGBTQ people in Uganda (Index: AFR 59/8571/2024), 23 October 2024 (previously cited).

homosexual acts “intrinsically disordered”.¹⁵⁸ CitizenGO, a Spain-based organization, which has campaigned for the criminalization of LGBTI relationships and against sexual education and reproductive healthcare rights across East Africa, has reportedly made use of Kenya’s disinformation networks on X in 2021 and circulated a petition containing false claims about public attitudes towards LGBTI people in support of Kenyan politician Peter Kaluma’s 2023 proposal to ban homosexuality as part of an amended Family Protection Bill.¹⁵⁹

Gender justice HRDs such as Sarah*, Agnes* and Salim* highlighted how such campaigns have trickled down into everyday societal discrimination, from which neither law enforcement nor civil society itself is exempt, also emboldening “ordinary” users to spread discriminatory and abusive language online.¹⁶⁰

Police were seen as disinterested and insufficiently trained to adequately investigate tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

“The police officers are not trained on documenting that. An example is somebody shared your photos that you're not comfortable with, or somebody body shames you. You go report and then the police tells you: 'but you are fat, they say the truth'.”¹⁶¹

Sarah*, who has experienced and reported physical and tech-facilitated gender-based violence to the police, said, “I can't say I trust our police to do anything. And this is me speaking as a person who's been a victim who reported it, and nothing was done.”¹⁶²

Emily*, the volunteer leader at a feminist centre in one of Nairobi’s informal settlements argued that TfGBV was still widely seen as less important or harmful than physical violence and that the links between online and offline violence were poorly understood.¹⁶³

Concerningly, two feminist activists shared that discrimination is also common in civil society spaces, making even these spaces at times unsafe and burdensome.

“In the HRD space, some men tend to think they can handle this better than women. We see men feeling that they are superior or they're more powerful than women. And that that would bring a disconnect and the discrimination is both within the society and the HRD space.”¹⁶⁴

The cumulative effect of these frequent experiences of discrimination and harassment puts HRDs at greater risk of mental health harms and self-censorship, resulting for some in their withdrawal from activism and online platforms. The level of HRDs’ exposure to such violence reported by interviewees demonstrates how far Kenyan state authorities are falling behind their obligation under international human rights law and standards to respect, protect and fulfil their right to non-discrimination. Urgent measures are necessary to combat the widespread physical and digital violence, including stronger enforcement of existing legislation, training programmes for law enforcement and educational programmes addressing prevailing stereotypes and increased online radicalization against women and LGBTI people. The greatest challenge, however, lies in the prevailing widespread propagation of such attitudes, including through statements amounting to advocacy of hatred by political and religious leaders. Former Deputy President Gachagua’s assertion that “LGBTQ actions” are “repugnant to morality”¹⁶⁵ and the KCCB’s description of homosexual relations as “intrinsically disordered”¹⁶⁶ are just two examples of leading figures’ statements that are incompatible with LGBTI people’s right to non-discrimination and which risk inciting online and offline violence, harassment and stigma.

¹⁵⁸ ACI Africa, ““Seeks to destroy life”: Catholic Bishops in Kenya on Pro-homosexual Right Court Ruling”, 10 March 2023, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/7849/seeks-to-destroy-life-catholic-bishops-in-kenya-on-pro-homosexual-right-court-ruling>

¹⁵⁹ Mozilla Foundation, “Exporting Disinformation: How Foreign Groups Peddle Influence in Kenya through Twitter”, <https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/campaigns/exporting-disinformation-how-foreign-groups-peddle-influence-in-kenya-through-twitter/>; Global Voices, 20 August 2024, “Are 90 percent of Kenyans homophobic?”, <https://globalvoices.org/2024/08/20/are-90-percent-of-kenyans-homophobic/>; Amnesty International, “We are facing extinction: Escalating anti-LGBTI sentiment, the weaponization of law and their human rights implications in select African countries” (Index: AFR 01/7533/2024), 9 January 2024 (previously cited).

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025.

¹⁶¹ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025.

¹⁶² Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025.

¹⁶³ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025.

¹⁶⁵ NTV Kenya, “Gachagua on LGBTQ: Those are satanic beliefs”, 2 March 2023 (previously cited).

¹⁶⁶ ACI Africa, ““Seeks to destroy life”: Catholic Bishops in Kenya on Pro-homosexual Right Court Ruling”, 10 March 2023 (previously cited).

6.3 NETWORKED PRO-GOVERNMENT DISINFORMATION AND ATTACKS ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Coordinated disinformation and paid smear campaigns against civil society actors serving the interests of Kenyan politicians and international ultra-conservative anti-rights interest groups such as CitizenGO are eroding public discourse online.¹⁶⁷ Civil society research has previously shown that the Kenyan X (Twitter) space is rife with undeclared coordinated campaigns in breach of the platform's policies on political advertising, "coordinated inauthentic activity" and harassment. In 2021, Mozilla Foundation documented the mechanics of a "a lucrative, well-oiled machine" of "Twitter influencers for political hire", exploiting Twitter's features to "exhaust critical thinking and poison the information environment by annihilating truth."¹⁶⁸

The 2024 Gen-Z protests saw an escalation of these trends: Paid influencers shared coordinated disinformation portraying the protests as driven by a pro-LGBTI agenda exploiting the pre-existing marginalization of the LGBTI minority¹⁶⁹, or variously as only advancing the interests of a privileged middle-class section of Generation Z¹⁷⁰ as well as implying a Russian influence operation was taking place, in apparent efforts to dissuade social media users from participating in the protests.¹⁷¹ Some of this disinformation was also openly shared by the government and Kenyan public authorities; for instance, in July 2024, the Public Benefit Organizations Regulatory Authority asked the Directorate of Criminal Investigations to investigate civil society groups for allegedly receiving funds from the Ford Foundation to sponsor the protests.¹⁷² President Ruto also singled out the Ford Foundation in public remarks, accusing it of sponsoring "violence and mayhem", without offering any evidence for this claim.¹⁷³ The allegations echoed a destructive narrative that is all too familiar for Kenyan HRDs and civil society groups, who have previously been branded as "paid activists" and "NGOpreneurs" in an effort to undermine the legitimacy of peaceful protests.

Through social media analysis and network mapping, testimonies of affected HRDs and an interview with a disinformation-for-hire influencer, Amnesty International was able to more closely examine the tactics employed by this shadowy industry in hijacking X's trending topics and spreading pro-government and anti-protest narratives. Researchers found evidence of repeated coordinated attacks discrediting prominent young HRDs as "paid" or "commercial activists" and "liars" in response to their struggle for public accountability for human rights violations. As discussed in the chapter 6.1, Hanifa Adan was viciously attacked by trolls publishing dozens of similar and evidently coordinated posts on X containing a mixture of disinformation and xenophobic and Islamophobic hatred after appearing in a BBC documentary on the killings of protesters on 25 June 2024. Joshua Okayo, a student leader based in Nairobi, who was forcibly disappeared and assaulted in late June 2024, and Boniface Mwangi, a prominent Kenyan HRD who was detained and tortured in Tanzania in May 2025 after travelling to Dar es Salaam to observe the trial of detained opposition politician Tundu Lissu,¹⁷⁴ were both repeatedly targeted with disinformation accusing them of "commercial activism". Other false and harmful narratives included claims they abducted themselves and lied about their ordeals.

Playing into pre-existing vilification tactics, the number of posts, often using the exact same or very similar wording, suggest that these posts are part of a coordinated campaign aimed at discrediting popular protest leaders to undermine human rights activism itself. The effects of such coordinated attacks on prominent HRDs trickle down to the grassroots level, as interviewees highlighted in Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa.¹⁷⁵

"It hinders us from doing this protesting effectively because you find that they claim that we protest because we are being paid. And so when you mobilize people to come for the protest, people don't want to come, or they feel like 'why should I go and protest with someone who is going to be paid at the end of the day?'", explained 24-year-old HRD Joseph*.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ Mozilla Foundation, 2021, "Inside the shadowy world of disinformation for hire in Kenya" (previously cited); Mozilla Foundation, "Exporting Disinformation: How Foreign Groups Peddle Influence in Kenya through Twitter", <https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/campaigns/exporting-disinformation-how-foreign-groups-peddle-influence-in-kenya-through-twitter/>

¹⁶⁸ Mozilla Foundation, 2021, "Inside the shadowy world of disinformation for hire in Kenya" (previously cited), p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Genderit, 9 October 2024, "Spinning Protests: Kenya's Pro-Government Bloggers Push Anti-Queer Smears" (previously cited).

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025.

¹⁷¹ DFRLab, 20 December 2024, "AI tools used in Kenya to discredit protesters and allege Russian connections", <https://dfrlab.org/2024/12/20/ai-tools-used-in-kenya-to-discredit-protesters-and-allege-russian-connections/>

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch, 2025, "World Report 2025", <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/kenya>

¹⁷³ AlJazeera, 18 July 2024, "Why is Kenya's Ruto accusing the Ford Foundation of stoking protests?", <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/18/why-is-kenyas-ruto-accusing-the-ford-foundation-of-stoking-tax-protests>

¹⁷⁴ BBC, "'Struggling to be alive': Kenyan activist speaks of 'sexual torture' in Tanzania", 3 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy6x7jgx75o>

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Nairobi, 20 March 2025, focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025.

Interviewees repeatedly shared suspicions that this online disinformation was tied into ‘real-world’ government efforts to undermine the peaceful protests by hiring “goons” to blend in with the crowds and create chaos and loot shops. Indeed, one repeated message spread by online trolls is that protesters were creating “chaos” and “anarchy” to the detriment of local businesses (see screenshots below).



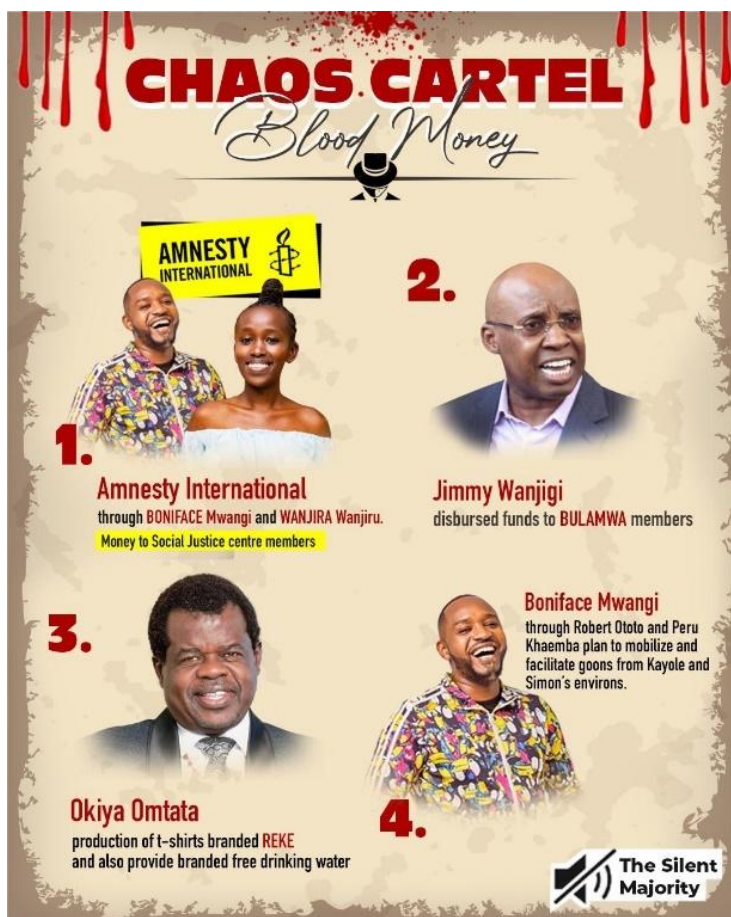
At the height of the protests on 25 June 2024, the day state security forces shot lethal rounds into a crowd of protesters as they were leaving the parliament grounds following their brief occupation of the building, President Ruto stated that “criminals” had “hijacked the protests”, speaking of “treasonous events” and putting “on notice the planners, financiers, orchestrators, abettors of violence and anarchy”.¹⁷⁷ UN spokesperson for the Secretary General Stephane Dujarric later warned that “it is very important that the rights of people to demonstrate peacefully be upheld”.¹⁷⁸ President Ruto’s remarks and the online disinformation campaign echo a pattern of public vilification of young HRDs, which Amnesty International has previously documented in other national contexts marked by state violence, including the Philippines and Thailand.¹⁷⁹

On 24 June 2025, the day before thousands of protesters mobilized to mark the anniversary of the 2024 protests and killings, yet another coordinated campaign spread disinformation under the hashtag #ChaosCartel, falsely alleging that Amnesty International was funding protest logistics to facilitate unrest under the guise of human rights work. Once again, a network of accounts shared identical or very similar messages and imagery, suggesting direct coordination and reliance on a common source. The rapid succession of posts within a two-hour window further points to a coordinated campaign.

¹⁷⁷ BBC, “Kenyan president vows to restore order after deadly tax hike protests”, 25 June 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/c7222r7mgz2t>

¹⁷⁸ BBC, “Kenyan president vows to restore order after deadly tax hike protests”, 25 June 2024 (previously cited).

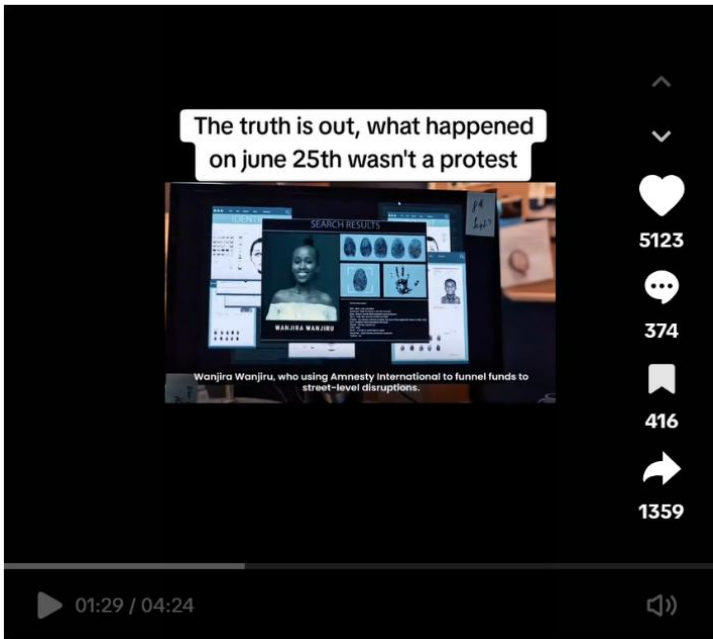
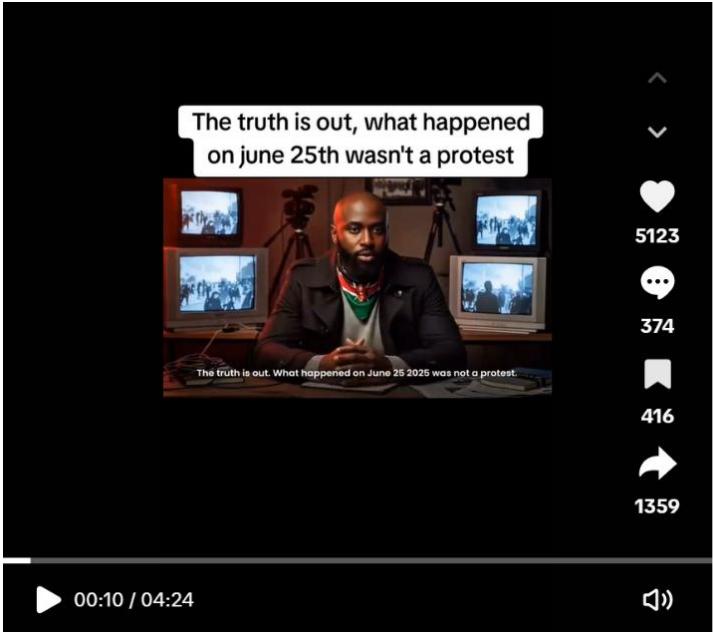
¹⁷⁹ Amnesty International, “I turned my fear into courage”: Red-tagging and state violence against young human rights defenders in the Philippines (Index: ASA 35/8574/2024), 14 October 2024 (previously cited); Amnesty International, “Being ourselves is too dangerous”: Digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand (Index: ASA 39/7956/2024), 16 May 2024 (previously cited).



Examples of the June 2025 coordinated disinformation campaign on X



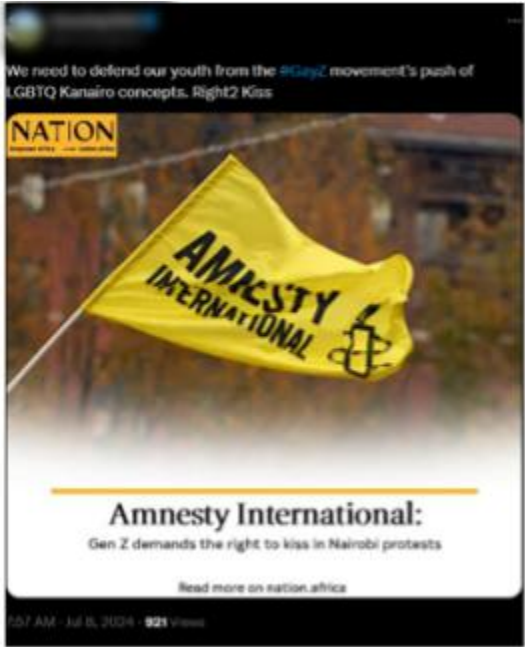
In July 2025, the same disinformation campaign entered a new dimension with a 4-minute-long AI-generated video being spread on TikTok and X, making the same unfounded allegations of a conspiracy between activists, CSOs, international journalists and Senator Okiya Omtatah to overthrow Kenya’s government. Within three days, the video generated thousands of likes and reshares on TikTok.



6.3.1 COORDINATED DISINFORMATION TARGETING THE LGBTI COMMUNITY TO UNDERMINE PROTESTS

In addition to the key disinformation theme portraying the protests as inauthentic and secretly sponsored, in early July 2024, another disinformation narrative emerged, again part of a coordinated campaign comprising

hundreds of posts.¹⁸⁰ This time, the focus shifted to discrediting the protesters as driven by the interests of LGBTI people in Kenya, who already face a host of challenges in accessing their day to day human rights, purportedly undermining Kenyan “family values”. Many posts contained AI-generated images of same-sex couples kissing at the protests. Others included fake posts manipulated to look like news stories reporting on fake statements from Amnesty International.¹⁸¹ Taking a closer look at the X profiles of accounts engaging in posting behaviour typical of a coordinated inauthentic campaign (based on indicators like the volume of posts, repetitions of the same text and AI-generated images and networked posting, amplification and interaction between accounts), researchers found that accounts regularly amplified both anti-protest and pro-government hashtags, indicating likely sponsorship by the same government client.



¹⁸⁰ Genderit, “Spinning Protests: Kenya’s Pro-Government Bloggers Push Anti-Queer Smears”, 9 October 2024, <https://genderit.org/feminist-talk/spinning-protests-kenyas-pro-government-bloggers-push-anti-queer-smears>

¹⁸¹ Genderit, 9 October 2024, “Spinning Protests: Kenya’s Pro-Government Bloggers Push Anti-Queer Smears” (previously cited).

An analysis by Kenyan data journalist Linda Ngari showed that about 200 accounts posted over 3,000 tweets on the morning of 8 July 2024.¹⁸² The originators of these posts belong to a coordinated network and regularly participate in undeclared pro-government campaigns. Whilst some of the accounts have since been suspended, active posts can still be found on X under the campaign's main hashtags and key terms, #GayZ and LGBTQ Kanairo, despite the evident breach of the platform's policy on "coordinated inauthentic activity" and possibly also its policy on "hateful conduct".¹⁸³ This smear campaign represents an insidious attack on the rights and lives of LGBTI people in Kenya, who already face violence, harassment and stigma in their day-to-day lives, alongside challenges in accessing basic human rights and protections. Despite years of civil society research into Kenya's disinformation networks on X, the company continues to fail to take enforcement action even where disinformation is deliberately enmeshed with homophobic smears inciting hatred in an already hostile environment.

6.3.2 INSIDER INFORMATION ON STATE-SPONSORED DISINFORMATION NETWORKS IN KENYA

To better understand the dynamics of government-sponsored disinformation, Amnesty International researchers spoke with John*, a young man who runs paid coordinated campaigns on X for various political and commercial clients, including government figures. These are undeclared, covert advertising campaigns made to look like posts of ordinary platform users to manipulate public discourse in favour of the client, in breach of X's policies. John* confirmed that he had participated in multiple covert pro-government campaigns during the protests of 2024 and 2025, though he said he did not participate in the #GayZ campaign.



¹⁸² Genderit, "Spinning Protests: Kenya's Pro-Government Bloggers Push Anti-Queer Smears", 9 October 2024 (previously cited).

¹⁸³ X, "Help Centre: Rules and policies", <https://help.x.com/en/rules-and-policies> (accessed 18 August 2025)

“Most of the things you see trending in Kenya, I’m among the people doing that.”¹⁸⁴ John explained that he’s part of a network of around 20 individuals organized through WhatsApp who are paid to promote and amplify the government’s preferred messaging with the ultimate aim of reaching the top 5 daily trends on X in Kenya at a total cost of 25,000 to 50,000 KES (approx. USD \$190-390) per day. John said he was aware of five such networks, each composed of some 20 members. He said the key messages are determined by his government contact, which the network of paid propagandists then turn into social media-friendly messages accompanied by catchy hashtags and imagery. They often rely on AI tools to create fitting images, confirming Amnesty International’s findings from its review of various trending pro-government and anti-protest campaigns.

John reported that the network begins to post by 6am when users start browsing the platform, publishing similar posts every few minutes as well as amplifying each other’s posts to manipulate the platform’s algorithms. That way, a team of about 20 create up to 3,000 posts in a single morning to reach the top trends. Each individual in the network typically runs a dozen or more accounts, often serving multiple campaigns at the same time with back-up accounts in place in case accounts are identified and suspended for breaching platform rules. John said building up the necessary following of at least 10,000 users per account to qualify for this type of covert campaign can take up to a year. He also shared that, in his experience, account takedowns had become much less frequent since Elon Musk bought X and weakened enforcement of the platform’s policies.

During large public protests, the network created counter-campaigns and hashtags in real time in response to trending protest hashtags. The popular protest hashtag #RutoMustGo for example was countered with #RutoMustGoOn. More recently, Amnesty International found that during the June 2025 protests against the unlawful use of force by police following the death in custody of Albert Ojwang,¹⁸⁵ protest hashtags such as #endpolicebrutalityke were countered with a coordinated campaign of posts repeating the keywords “I Appreciate Police”, reaching the top ten trends in Kenya for several hours.¹⁸⁶

Kenya’s online information space is increasingly being flooded with coordinated disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting HRDs and civil society organizations and undermining critical reporting on human rights violations in Kenya. They increasingly mix disinformation with overt harassment and incitement of hatred against prominent individuals and minority groups, already causing real-world harm to those who have been targeted and undermining the right to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly. Beyond this immediate harm, these campaigns also risk inciting acts of violence against those who have been targeted amidst an already hostile environment, in which state security agents are able to break the law, all too often with impunity, and under the cover of a state-sponsored narrative that legitimizes their actions by framing activists as criminals.

6.4 INTERNET DISRUPTION

Internet shutdowns have become an all-too-common state response to public protests and political conflicts around the world, with a record-breaking 296 shutdowns in 54 countries recorded in 2024.¹⁸⁷ They represent an attack on the rights to freedom of expression, access to information and peaceful assembly online and are all too often employed to suppress reporting on serious human rights violations. At worst, shutdowns can also hamper emergency responses and deny protesters critical information on safe pathways out of incidents of police use of unlawful force.

Amidst fears of an impending shutdown ahead of the mass mobilization on 25 June 2024, Kenya’s Communications Authority stated on 24 June 2024 that it had “no intention whatsoever to shut down internet traffic or interfere with the quality of connectivity. Such actions would be a betrayal of the constitution as a whole, the freedom of expression in particular and our own ethos.”¹⁸⁸ Yet shortly after protesters entered parliament amidst the escalation on 25 June 2024, Kenyans began to notice disruptions.

Access Now, which monitors internet shutdowns across the world, reported later that day:

¹⁸⁴ Interview, remote, 13 June 2025.

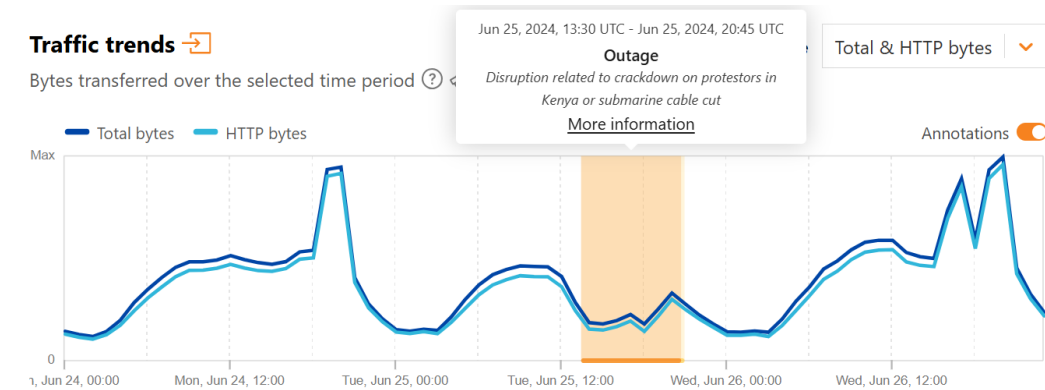
¹⁸⁵ BBC, “Protest hits Kenya after shock death of man held by police”, 9 June 2025 (previously cited).

¹⁸⁶ Trends24, “Trends X (Twitter) trends for the last 24 hours”, 18 June 2025, <https://trends24.in/kenya/>

¹⁸⁷ Access Now, “Emboldened offenders, endangered communities: internet shutdowns in 2024”, February 2025, <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/KeepItOn-2024-Internet-Shutdowns-Annual-Report.pdf>

¹⁸⁸ TechCrunch, “Internet goes dark in Kenya in the wake of major protests over finance bill”, 25 June 2024, <https://techcrunch.com/2024/06/25/internet-goes-dark-in-kenya-in-the-wake-of-major-protests-over-finance-bill/>

“Starting at approximately 4:00 pm local time on June 25, connectivity dropped nationwide by nearly 40% across at least 20 networks according to measurements from IODA and Cloudflare. Cloudflare reports impacts on major networks including Safaricom, Wananchi, and JTL (Jamii Telecommunications). Signal and X also saw an increase in anomalies in Kenya due to connectivity issues, mostly on Safaricom. Safaricom sent a customer notice claiming the disruptions to both internet services and the M-PESA electronic payment app are a result of “an outage on two of our undersea cables.” Airtel issued a similar notice, indicating disruptions to undersea cables have impacted their services.”¹⁸⁹



↑ Cloudflare data shows the drop in connectivity on the afternoon of 25 June 2024

Analysing the timing and impact of the sudden disruption, NetBlocks Director of Research Isik Mater raised the possibility that an “unscheduled maintenance” cycle may have been (intentionally) deployed.¹⁹⁰ Access Now similarly found that “the timing of the shutdown and relatively swift restoration of services suggests the disruption may have been a deliberate attempt by authorities to quell protests.”¹⁹¹

A year later, whilst the 25 June 2025 commemorative protests were reaching a high point, NetBlocks reported restrictions on the popular messaging service Telegram.¹⁹² The Communications Authority of Kenya had earlier banned all live TV and radio coverage, going so far as to raid NTV and Citizen TV to force them off air.¹⁹³ The Law Society of Kenya secured an order from the High Court to reinstate all radio and TV signal later that day on the grounds of a potential violation of the Kenyan Constitution.¹⁹⁴

Amnesty International invited the government to comment on allegations of an internet shutdown, but the government did not respond. Amnesty International also put this to Safaricom, which stated: “Safaricom categorically denies any involvement in the alleged internet shutdown during the June 2024 protests. The temporary internet disruptions experienced across the country were the result of simultaneous failures in the undersea fiber optic cables that served Safaricom and the larger telecommunications industry, which led to reduced bandwidth.” Despite the denials, the lack of transparency and information around the cause of the shutdown¹⁹⁵ as well as the timing have caused significant concerns amongst civil society. Following this, in May 2025, the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) and six other organizations filed a landmark public interest case before the High Court of Kenya to challenge the arbitrary and unlawful disruptions of internet access in the country.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ Access Now, “Authorities in Kenya must immediately restore internet access and #KeepItOn throughout protests and unrest”, 25 June 2024, <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/kenya-protests-internet-shutdown/>

¹⁹⁰ TechCrunch, “Internet goes dark in Kenya in the wake of major protests over finance bill”, 25 June 2024 (previously cited).

¹⁹¹ Access Now, “Emboldened offenders, endangered communities: internet shutdowns in 2024”, February 2025 (previously cited), p. 15.

¹⁹² NetBlocks, “Kenya restricts Telegram as govt bans live coverage of June 25 protests: ‘Restrictions in effect’”, 25 June 2025, <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/politics/government/kenya-restricts-telegram-as-govt-bans-live-coverage-of-june-25-protests-restrictions-in-effect/>

¹⁹³ Tuko, “Kenya Restricts Telegram as Govt Bans Live Coverage of June 25 Protests: ‘Restrictions In Effect’”, 25 June 2025, <https://www.tuko.co.ke/kenya/594071-kenya-restricts-telegram-govt-bans-live-coverage-june-25-protests-restrictions-effect/>

¹⁹⁴ Law Society of Kenya, Public statement on X (formerly Twitter), 25 June 2025, <https://x.com/FaithOdhiambo8/status/1937902326150308317>

¹⁹⁵ IODA, “The Kenya June 25, 2024 Internet Disruption: Subsea Cable Cut or Shutdown?”, 14 May 2025, <https://ioda.inetintel.cc.gatech.edu/reports/the-kenya-june-25-2024-internet-disruption-subsea-cable-cut-or-shutdown/>

¹⁹⁶ Afrifex, “CIPESA Joins Six Civil Society Organisations in Landmark Case Challenging Internet Shutdowns in Kenya – Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)”, 30 May 2025, <https://www.africafex.org/country-highlights/cipesa-joins-six-civil-society-organisations-in-landmark-case-challenging-internet-shutdowns-in-kenya>

The ban on live coverage and the apparent government shutdown of a key digital communication tool also violated multiple human rights, including media freedom and freedom of expression, denying protesters vital access to information during a largely peaceful protest marred by police use of unnecessary and excessive force.

6.5 SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The failure of both state authorities and corporate actors to investigate credible claims of unlawful tech-facilitated surveillance - contrary to what international human rights law and standards require - undermines human rights by fostering widespread chilling effects on the right to expression and peaceful assembly.

In October 2024, the Nation reported that “Kenya’s security agencies have for years had virtually unfettered access to mobile phone customers’ sensitive call data records, along with location data” held by Kenya’s largest telecoms provider, Safaricom.¹⁹⁷ The article alleges that police officers embedded within the “Law Enforcement Liaison Office, attached to Safaricom’s headquarters” and “managed by a senior Safaricom employee”, were able to access and pass on phone records to police without due legal process. Safaricom holds close to two thirds of the Kenyan market share in mobile phone subscriptions and is partly owned by the Kenyan state.¹⁹⁸ It also runs Kenya’s dominant mobile payment system, making the company omnipresent in Kenyan daily life and a uniquely powerful data holder, not least in the context of Kenya’s mandatory SIM card registration. The allegations against Safaricom align with a 2017 report by Privacy International based on extensive interviews with active and retired law enforcement, military or intelligence officers; the report found that:

“Communications surveillance is being carried out by Kenyan state actors, essentially without oversight, outside of the procedures required by Kenyan laws. Intercepted communications content and data are used to facilitate gross human rights abuses, to spy on, profile, locate, track – and ultimately arrest, torture, kill or disappear suspects, as this report documents.”¹⁹⁹

In September 2025, a police officer stationed at Safaricom who was called as a witness in court proceedings against university student David Mokaya, seemingly lent support to these claims by admitting that call triangulation and tracing was performed in the case without a court order.²⁰⁰ Mokaya was accused of publishing false information about President Ruto on social media in November 2024, prompting the investigation and search for the student. During questioning by Mokaya’s lawyer, the officer stated that he was not aware that a court order was a legally required for a third party to access phone records.

In response to the October 2024 report by the Nation, Safaricom had repeatedly denied violating its customers’ privacy and sharing call data records without a court order.²⁰¹ Following the publication of the article, Safaricom, which is also the largest advertiser in Kenya, pulled all advertising from the Nation Media Group and threatened it and the journalists with legal action.²⁰²

A week after the publication of the article, the Nation was further targeted with a smear campaign on X under the hashtag #WhatsNMGHiding (referring to the Nation Media Group), displaying familiar tactics of mass-posting identical or close to identical disparaging messages and images, including a false letter from

¹⁹⁷ Nation, “Exclusive: How Kenyan police use mobile phones to track, capture suspects”, 29 October 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/exclusive-how-kenyan-police-use-mobile-phones-to-track-capture-suspects-4804416#story>

¹⁹⁸ The Kenyan Wall Street, “Safaricom’s M-PESA Market Share Drops, Airtel Gains Marginally-CA”, 14 October 2024, <https://kenyanwallstreet.com/safaricom-s-m-pesa-market-share-drops-airtel-gains-marginally-ca/>; Reuters, “Kenya’s government to sell more of its stake in Safaricom, finance minister says”, 26 May 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyas-government-sell-more-its-stake-safaricom-finance-minister-says-2025-05-26/>

¹⁹⁹ Privacy International, “Track, Capture, Kill: Inside Communications Surveillance and Counterterrorism In Kenya”, 2017, <https://privacyinternational.org/report/43/track-capture-kill-inside-communications-surveillance-and-counterterrorism-kenya>

²⁰⁰ Nation, “Safaricom gave student’s data to police without court orders, over post about President Ruto”, 9 September 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/safaricom-gave-student-s-data-to-police-without-court-orders-over-post-about-president-ruto-5186004#story>

²⁰¹ Nation, “Exclusive: How Kenyan police use mobile phones to track, capture suspects”, 29 October 2024 (previously cited); Safaricom statement, X, 31 October 2024, <https://x.com/SafaricomPLC/status/1851977039277891600>; Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, “Kenya: Safaricom accused of aiding state surveillance & facilitating abductions of government critics; Safaricom denies allegations”, 7 January 2025, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/kenya-safaricom-accused-of-aiding-state-surveillance-facilitating-abductions-of-government-critics-safaricom-denies-allegations/>

²⁰² Reporters Without Borders, “Kenya: the telecommunications operator Safaricom is pressuring Nation Media Group due to its investigation into widespread surveillance”, 17 December 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/kenya-telecommunications-operator-safaricom-pressuring-nation-media-group-due-its-investigation>

the Media Council of Kenya claiming that the news media group was under investigation.²⁰³ At least two accounts identified by Amnesty International as driving the smear campaign also frequently engage in undeclared pro-government campaigns and a coordinated campaign equating the public protests in June 2025 with anarchy and an attack on businesses under the hashtags #RejectAnarchy and #ReceiptsofDestruction. The account activities point to a highly organized effort to undermine critical reporting and public protests targeting Kenya's government.

HRDs interviewed by Amnesty International widely believe that tech-facilitated surveillance aided by Safaricom has played a key role in allowing clandestine police units to track and forcibly disappear activists who were involved in the protests, leading to further human rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings.²⁰⁴

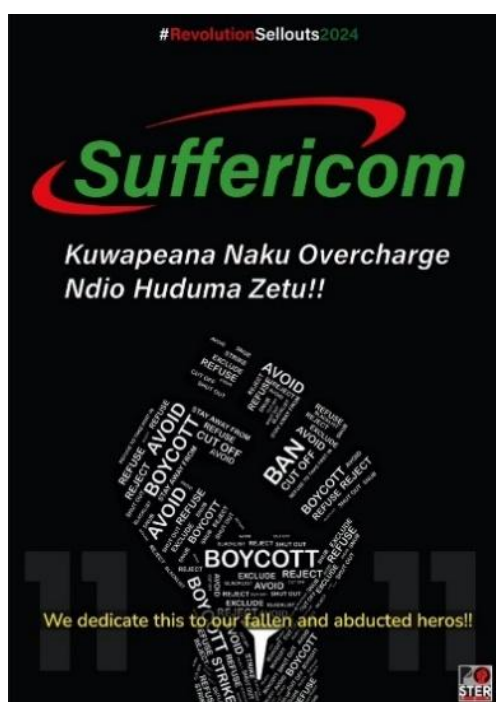
In interviews and focus group discussions, HRDs said:

“They [protesters] avoided using Safaricom, which is the biggest network provider in Kenya because of the privacy concerns that they will share your data, your location.”²⁰⁵

“We were told that Safaricom was involved, maybe they track you.”²⁰⁶

“They see us as violent, yet we are fighting for what is right. The Constitution protects freedom of expression, right to privacy, but you will find still that the government comes to surveil you.”²⁰⁷

In an affidavit, Bernard Kavuli shared that he received suspicious calls shortly before being forcibly disappeared for more than two weeks (further details in section 6.6), potentially indicating that his captors rang his number to generate location data.²⁰⁸ Another young human rights defender reported that calls to his mobile phone number and those of friends had repeatedly seemingly been redirected, whilst a third HRD observed suspicious network problems, raising their suspicions that their phonelines had been monitored.²⁰⁹



The interviewees' statements are echoed by commentators on X who shared memes calling for a boycott of Safaricom, dubbing it “Suffericom”. Whether or not the activists' allegations can be further substantiated in the current context, the widely held belief that the telecoms provider may have aided security agencies to monitor and track protesters – coupled with the failure of Safaricom or state authorities to investigate these claims – is having chilling effects on protesters' online activity and their trust in digital devices. Limited digital security awareness has led some to adopt practices that might further undermine their digital security, for example by relying on “dumbphones” (old-fashioned phones with keypads which are limited to phone calls and short text messages) and less secure, unencrypted call and messaging options.²¹⁰

In July 2025, digital rights group Access Now, alongside several human rights organizations, called on Vodacom Group as a major shareholder in Safaricom to “to launch an urgent, independent, and publicly accessible assessment into the company's role in potential human rights violations in relation to the ongoing protests in Kenya”, noting that the company's annual reporting does

²⁰³ Reporters Without Borders, “Kenya: the telecommunications operator Safaricom is pressuring Nation Media Group due to its investigation into widespread surveillance”, 17 December 2024 (previously cited).

²⁰⁴ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025, focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, interview, Kisumu, 24 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March

²⁰⁶ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

²⁰⁷ Interview, Mombasa, 28 March

²⁰⁸ Constitutional Petition Nr E714 (2024), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1klu5sbkzb5v6v4PKXvhk3teHAJZpLW5g/view?usp=sharing>

²⁰⁹ Interview, Mombasa, 27 March 2025, interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025.

²¹⁰ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

not include information on its human rights due diligence process.²¹¹

Amnesty International approached Safaricom with questions about the allegations and its due diligence processes. Lawyers acting on behalf of Safaricom responded through a letter, stating that “Safaricom only shares customer data through lawful means and for lawful purposes. Our client confirms that their systems are not designed to track the live location of any subscriber, and such functionality does not exist within their operational architecture. All data handling is regulated by the Kenya Information and Communications Act, the Data Protection Act, the National Intelligence Service Act, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, among other applicable laws. These statutes define, with precision, the limited circumstances under which data may be lawfully accessed or shared — including national security and counter-terrorism contexts — and always under the authority of lawful agencies and in accordance with due process. Access to customer information is permitted only where supported by appropriate legal instruments or in other clearly defined circumstances permitted by law.”

In reference to the Nation’s reporting, the letter further stated:

“The allegations currently circulating largely originate from a series of inaccurate and misleading articles published by Nation Newspaper. Safaricom has formally lodged a complaint before the Media Complaints Commission, which is pending determination.

As the matter is *sub judice*, Safaricom will refrain from further comment, save to note that the publications contained falsehoods that have unjustly exposed the company and its employees to widespread and abusive commentary on social media.”

Safaricom, through its lawyers, further stated that the decision to pull its advertising from the Nation Media Group “is not punitive, but a lawful exercise of commercial discretion.”

Addressing the police officer’s court testimony in the case of David Mokaya, the letter stated:

“Safaricom is aware of ongoing court proceedings in which media reports have cited the testimony of a Safaricom employee. The matter is actively before the courts, and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on selective or decontextualized media clips.”

The letter did not address Amnesty International’s questions as to whether the company had conducted an investigation into the allegations or planned to publish results of its human rights due diligence in this regard.

The full letter can be found in the annex of this report.

WIDER CONTEXT OF INCREASING SURVEILLANCE CAPABILITIES

The allegations against Safaricom must be placed in the wider context of a steep increase in surveillance capabilities by Kenyan police and intelligence services over the past decade. It is well-established that in situations where transparency and other legal safeguards are lacking, the widespread fear of surveillance that results can cause unlawful chilling effects on a range of human rights, underscoring the urgent need for Safaricom to meaningfully and transparently address allegations of their involvement in unlawful surveillance.

Nairobi’s central business district, where all major public protests in Nairobi take place, is densely monitored through facial recognition cameras installed as part of a “smart city” initiative introduced in 2014.²¹² In its response to Amnesty International, Safaricom stated that:

“The Government of Kenya contracted Safaricom PLC in 2014 to design, build, and transfer a National Surveillance, Communication, and Control System, under a five-year agreement. The project was part of a national security initiative initially implemented in Nairobi and Mombasa, and it included the installation of CCTV cameras in key public areas.

The objective of the system was to enhance national security by providing real-time footage to a centralized command and control center, enabling coordination among security agencies and improving crime monitoring and emergency response.”

Amnesty International is campaigning globally for a ban on facial recognition systems as a form of mass surveillance that violates the right to privacy and threatens the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and

²¹¹ Access Now, “Halt human rights abuses: Safaricom and its shareholders must ensure transparency and accountability in Kenya”, 9 July 2025, <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/halt-human-rights-abuses-safaricom-and-its-shareholders-must-ensure-transparency-and-accountability-in-kenya/>

²¹² The Conversation, “State surveillance: Kenyans have a right to privacy – does the government respect it?”, 28 November 2024, <https://theconversation.com/state-surveillance-kenyans-have-a-right-to-privacy-does-the-government-respect-it-244660>

expression, precisely because these systems allow for the monitoring of protests and the identification of individuals who might later face reprisals for their role in public demonstrations.²¹³ Facial recognition technology can also pose even greater risks to rights if used in a non-transparent manner and/or in combination with other technologies, such as social media monitoring, leading to even greater threats to rights, including chilling effects.

Civil society research has unearthed further evidence of likely government purchases of spyware from internationally operating surveillance companies including NSO Group and Circles.²¹⁴ In 2018, Citizen Lab documented likely infections of devices with NSO Group's Pegasus spyware in 45 countries, including Kenya.²¹⁵ It is unclear who the operator behind these infections of Kenyan targets was. In September 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that spyware had been found on the mobile phones of two Kenyan filmmakers.²¹⁶ Forensic analysis of the phones by Citizen Lab showed that the phones were infected with "FlexiSpy" whilst the filmmakers were in police custody in May 2025. According to CPJ, the filmmakers had been falsely accused of involvement in the production of the BBC's "Blood Parliament" documentary, which was subject to a coordinated disinformation campaign on X in April 2025 (see also section 6.1). The proliferation of powerful spyware tools is a deeply concerning development given the wider context of its widespread abuse worldwide and the deeply troubling track record of unlawful use of force and extrajudicial killings by Kenyan police.²¹⁷

State overreach has also been noted in relation to police use of protesters' pictures and videos to gather evidence of alleged incitement against the state: In December 2024, fourteen people detained during the anti-abduction protests were charged with unlawful assembly and incitement to violence.²¹⁸ The director of public prosecutions requested to have the fourteen protesters detained for two weeks and to be granted access to their mobile phones and social media accounts as part of the investigation. The court denied the request, but the motion itself was emblematic of increasing overreach and efforts to criminalize protest. Furthermore, several young HRDs interviewed by Amnesty International reported that they were forced to grant access to their phones through threats and/or violence, either in police stations or during their illegal detention and enforced disappearance.²¹⁹ In some cases, police appear to have sought to suppress the publication of video material, rather than seeking to secure evidence. Two young female HRDs reported being physically or sexually abused by police officers who sought to find or delete videos from the protests, and in one case evidence of police use of unlawful force, stored on their phones. One of them, 23-year-old Grace* shared:

"When that video went viral, they removed us from the cells and the attitude of the police changed. Now they were hostile. During the search they were touching our private parts and they just crossed lines because they had to find that phone."²²⁰

Finally, a Canadian Kenyan software developer, Mary Wachuka Maina, has alleged in court proceedings against four men working closely for or with President Ruto that she was hired in late 2023 to create a digital surveillance and propaganda system to improve President Ruto's public image and silence critics.²²¹ At the time of writing, Mary Wachuka Maina is seeking compensation for the botched surveillance deal resulting from discussions between her and senior officials including President Ruto's speech writer and a businessman close to President Ruto, in which she says she was instructed to provide a "confidential software with the capacity to spy on targets" with the aim of "gain[ing] control of the digital narrative".²²² The tool was reportedly meant to manage the President's social media pages, hiding negative comments and interacting with positive ones, monitor opposition figures, government critics and journalists, track public sentiment based on ethnicity and predict negative stories and attacks on Ruto to allow government officials

²¹³ Amnesty International, "Ban dangerous facial recognition technology that amplifies racist policing", 26 January 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/ban-dangerous-facial-recognition-technology-that-amplifies-racist-policing-2/>

²¹⁴ Surveillance Watch, "Known targets map", <https://www.surveillancewatch.io/?menu=countries&country=Kenya> (accessed 25 July 2025).

²¹⁵ Citizen Lab, "Hide and Seek: Tracking NSO Group's Pegasus Spyware to Operations in 45 Countries", 18 September 2018, <https://citizenlab.ca/2018/09/hide-and-peek-tracking-nso-groups-pegasus-spyware-to-operations-in-45-countries/>

²¹⁶ CPJ, "Spyware installed on Kenyan filmmakers' phones in police custody", 10 September 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/09/spyware-installed-on-kenyan-filmmakers-phones-in-police-custody/>

²¹⁷ Amnesty International Kenya, "Sustain pressure until we end extrajudicial killings," 7 November 2022, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/sustain-pressure-until-we-end-extrajudicial-killings-disappearances/>; Amnesty International Kenya, "Missing Voices Annual Report 2024", 7 May 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/missing-voices-annual-report-2024-brutal-policing/>

²¹⁸ DW, "Why abductions in Kenya pose a threat to national security", 31 December 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-abductions-in-kenya-pose-a-threat-to-national-security/a-71191494>

²¹⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 21 March 2025, BBC, 28 June 2024, "Kenya protesters traumatised by abductions – lawyer", <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgkmkz5d0vo>

²²⁰ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025

²²¹ Nation, "Propaganda system court case exposes infighting among State House aides", 22 May 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/propaganda-system-court-case-exposes-infighting-among-state-house-aides-5051832>

²²² Nation, "President Ruto men sued over 'classified' software to spy on Kenyans", 27 November 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/president-ruto-men-sued-over-classified-software-to-spy-on-kenyans-4836164>

to pre-empt these with communications undermining their credibility. The software was also meant to “operate a troll farm”, improving on the existing setup of pro-government accounts run on X to post supportive comments, evidence of which she alleges she was shown as part of the planning discussions.²²³ The deal reportedly fell through when Wachuka Maina was not paid following alleged infighting amongst President Ruto’s aides, and Wachuka Maina says she received anonymous death threats. The defendants have all denied Miss Wachuka Maina’s claims.²²⁴

6.6 LEGAL HARASSMENT AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTEST UNDER KENYA’S COMPUTER MISUSE AND CYBERCRIMES ACT

The arrest of 28-year-old blogger and social media campaigner David Morara Kebaso in September 2024, in connection with alleged cyber-harassment, highlights the risk posed by Kenya’s Cybercrimes Act to freedom of expression in the country.²²⁵ Kebaso is well-known for his videos and social media posts exposing government corruption. Amnesty International Kenya stated at the time of his arrest: “We are alarmed by the arrest of Kebaso Morara. We demand his immediate and unconditional release and an end to the targeted harassment of bloggers, activists, journalists, and HRDs. These arrests violate the right to free expression.”²²⁶

The Cybercrimes Act was passed in 2018 and has since been used to arrest several bloggers and social media users. Sections 22 and 23 of the Cybercrimes Act criminalize the false publication of information online “that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or violence among citizens of the Republic, or which is likely to discredit the reputation of a person”. The Kenyan UPR stakeholder report of 2024 argues that “such cybercrime legislations that are characterized by broad and vague definitions, contrary to the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, allow for arbitrary or discretionary application and result in legal uncertainty, presenting serious dangers to the exercise of fundamental rights due to their criminalizing effects which, in turn, deepen inequalities.”²²⁷ A recent survey of Kenyan bloggers identified threats of legal action and actual charges under the Cybercrimes Act as one of the foremost threats to their work.²²⁸

In another blatant attempt to intimidate critics of government policy, police arrested Rose Njeri, a young software engineer and coder, and raided her home in Nairobi, seizing her phone and her computer. Njeri had created a protest website, flagging aspects of the Finance Bill 2025 that she argued would increase the cost of living as well as allowing visitors to email parliamentarians asking for the bill’s withdrawal. She was detained over the Madaraka Day weekend in late May 2025 without access to legal representation. Prosecutors eventually charged her with “unauthorized interference with a computer system”, arguing that her email tool had interfered with the National Assembly’s systems. Her arrest sent shockwaves across the tech and human rights communities²²⁹. Following widespread public outcry and legal pressure, the court dropped all charges against Rose Njeri and released her unconditionally.

Merely a week after Rose Njeri’s release, another arrest of a digital activist, 31-year-old Albert Ojwang, in connection with his suspected online activity, ended in his violent death in custody. His case will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.6.

6.6.1 NEW CONCERNING PROPOSALS TO LIMIT ONLINE FREEDOMS AND PRIVACY

On 16 January 2025, Kenya’s Foreign Ministry published a statement condemning “organized cyber attacks by a few social media influencers” that “seek to delegitimize government initiatives” and “discourage high-level visits” through “deepfakes, fabricated narratives, widespread misinformation campaigns, and

²²³ Standard, “Whistleblower exposes state’s spyware scheme to silence critics”, 23 May 2025; Nation, “Propaganda system court case exposes infighting among State House aides”, 22 May 2025 (previously cited)

²²⁴ Nation, “President Ruto men sued over ‘classified’ software to spy on Kenyans”, 27 November 2024 (previously cited).

²²⁵ BBC, “Uproar as Kenyan activist in court over cyber-crime”, 1 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1wngd0d0n2o>

²²⁶ Amnesty International Kenya, 30 September 2024, statement on X, <https://x.com/AmnestyKenya/status/1840758297831293338>

²²⁷ Joint stakeholder report: Human rights in the digital context in Kenya, 2024, <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/kenya-upr-joint-stakeholder-report-2024.pdf>

²²⁸ Paradigm Initiative, “Devolved Impunity – The State of Safety and Security of Bloggers in Kenya (2019 – 2024)”, 14 March 2025, <https://paradigmhq.org/report/devolved-impunity-the-state-of-safety-and-security-of-bloggers-in-kenya-2019-2024/>

²²⁹ Standard, “ICT experts, activists warn new Bill is a plot to snoop on Kenyans online”, 26 May 2025 (previously cited).

coordinated auto-generated emails” and promising partners that “all efforts are underway to address these challenges including but not limited to the development of a Technology Responsibility Charter”. The statement appeared to be a direct reaction to an online campaign calling on the King and Queen of the Netherlands to cancel their planned state visit in March 2025 amidst the wave of enforced disappearances and other serious human rights violations. Whilst the statement remains vague on detail, the Ministry’s apparent rewriting of the narrative of acts of public protest online as coordinated disinformation and cyber-attacks appears to be yet another government attack, and a particularly hypocritical one given the government’s use of covert online campaigns, on the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and online protest. When read in conjunction with the illegal arrest of Rose Njeri in May 2025 in connection with her creation of a mass emailing tool, the apparent portrayal of mass email protests as a form of “cyber-attack” is a clear example of state overreach intended to silence online protest and to legitimize the state’s crackdown.

In May 2025, a new bill was proposed that threatens to empower the state to monitor individual internet users’ activities and searches. The Kenya Information and Communications (Amendment) Bill would introduce a “metered billing system capable of monitoring customer usage”, assigning each user a unique number to track their internet usage.²³⁰ Internet Service Providers would have to monitor their customers and convert the data into “readable details” transmitted to the Communications Authority. Amnesty International rejected the proposal as an “invasive and extensive data collection and surveillance of citizens”, adding that, “This then means that the Communications Authority would have vast amounts of data on virtually everyone in the country and what they do on the internet.”²³¹ The proposal is a clear threat to the right to privacy and could have further chilling effects on the right to access information, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly online.

6.7 ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND KILLINGS OF ONLINE PROTESTERS

Shortly before the commemorative protests in June 2025, the death in custody of social media blogger and teacher Albert Ojwang confirmed in the most tragic way the legitimacy of the fear of violent retribution expressed by many Kenyan digital activists in Amnesty International’s interviews. Ojwang had been arrested after police linked him to an online post alleging that the Deputy Inspector General of Police was under investigation for possible corruption.²³² He was arrested in Homa Bay and driven 350 km to Nairobi where he was found unconscious in a cell in the early hours of the following day before being declared dead upon arrival at a local hospital. Police initially claimed Albert Ojwang died by suicide in his cell, but a postmortem conducted by both independent and government pathologists ruled out self-harm, revealing blunt force trauma to the head, neck compression, and multiple soft tissue injuries — evidence pointing to torture and a cover-up.²³³ The case echoed a disturbing pattern of custodial deaths and led to renewed mass protests.²³⁴

It marked the latest escalation amidst a steady increase in violence against outspoken young protesters since June 2024. Already on 25 June 2024, whilst the protests were still building up, Amnesty International and the Police Reforms Working Group Kenya condemned the abductions of at least 12 people amidst the #RejectFinanceBill protests.²³⁵ By the end of the year, the number was reported to have surpassed 80, with many still missing and several found dead.²³⁶ Amnesty International places these abductions in the context of Kenya’s long-standing record of enforced disappearances, based on survivors’ testimonies and partial admissions of state involvement by President Ruto and other high-ranking officials.²³⁷

²³⁰ Standard, “ICT experts, activists warn new Bill is a plot to snoop on Kenyans online”, 26 May 2025,

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001520054/ict-experts-activists-warn-new-bill-to-stalk-kenyans>

²³¹ Standard, “ICT experts, activists warn new Bill is a plot to snoop on Kenyans online”, 26 May 2025 (previously cited).

²³² BBC, “Protest hits Kenya after shock death of man held by police”, 9 June 2025 (previously cited).

²³³ BBC, “Kenyan blogger was hit and assaulted to death, autopsy reveals”, 11 June 2025,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn9jw20nr5ro>

²³⁴ Citizen Digital, “20 people died in police custody in the last four months: IPOA”, 12 June 2025, <https://citizen.digital/article/20-people-died-in-police-custody-in-the-last-four-months-ipoa-n364504>

²³⁵ Amnesty International, “Kenya: abductions of citizens suspected of involvement in protests violate human rights”, 25 June 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/06/kenya-abductions-of-citizens-suspected-of-involvement-in-protests-violate-human-rights/>

²³⁶ Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, “Statement on the Recent Surge of Abductions/Enforced Disappearances in Kenya”, 27 December 2024, <https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1213/Statement-on-the-Recent-Surge-of-AbductionsEnforced-Disappearances-in-Kenya>; Human Rights Watch, “Kenya: Security Forces Abducted, Killed Protesters”, 5 November 2024 (previously cited)

²³⁷ On 28 December 2024, President Ruto said, “What has been said about abductions, we will stop them so Kenyan youth can live in peace, but they should have discipline and be polite so that we can build Kenya together”. In his New Year’s Address of 2025, Ruto further acknowledged that security officials had abused state power and carried out “excessive and extrajudicial actions”. CNN, “Kenya’s president promises to stop abductions following wave of disappearances”, 28 December 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/28/africa/kenya->

Testimonies from survivors point to clear patterns in the targeting of vocal protest leaders, mostly young people with large online followings, and the modes and motives of the captors' interrogations of abductees. Joshua Okayo, the president of the Kenya School of Law Student Governing Council and a vocal protest leader on X and TikTok, was picked up outside his home on 26 June 2024, forced into a car and blindfolded before being held for two days at an unknown location where his abductors repeatedly asked why people were protesting and who was financing it.²³⁸ Okayo says he was beaten and strangled between rounds of questioning. He was eventually released and abandoned in Murang'a County, central Kenya, on 28 June 2024, where local residents found him and alerted his friends. His phone had been returned to him, but WhatsApp had been deleted. Speaking with Amnesty International, Okayo said responsibility for the escalating incidents of violations by the police in Kenya lay "at the top".

Brothers Aslam and Jamil Longton were forcibly disappeared on 19 August 2024 and their whereabouts remained unknown for about a month. 36-year-old Aslam had been a vocal protest leader in Kitengela, his brother Jamil told news media that a local security official had warned him to tell his brother to stop participating in protests or "they might harm him".²³⁹ Both brothers' phones were confiscated and Aslam overheard one of the captors say that they had "arrested" the brothers. Aslam – like Joshua Okayo – said that the interrogators kept asking about who was funding the protests.

December 2024 saw a renewed wave of enforced disappearances of young activists, widely believed to be connected to the activists' online posts, which included cartoon memes and AI-generated images of the President in a coffin that were widely shared on social media.²⁴⁰ Bernard Kavuli, a 24-year-old student at Mount Kenya University and one of six young men to be taken in December 2024, laid out his ordeal in an affidavit submitted to the High Court of Kenya in coalition with the Law Society of Kenya, listing the National Police Service, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations and the National Intelligence Service as respondents, amongst others.²⁴¹ In the affidavit, Bernard Kavuli shared that he was forced into a car on the evening of 22 December 2024, having received suspicious calls earlier that day. He was told he was under arrest without being given any reasons, taken to an unknown location, stripped naked, handcuffed and subjected to physical assault during questioning. He was repeatedly questioned about his X posts and why he was "troubling the government". His captors denied him sufficient water and food during the first four or five days, whilst continuing interrogations. He was then taken to another location where he endured further abuse for 11 days before being released. Whilst still in captivity, he was told to stop criticizing the government by individuals who told him it was their job "to protect the presidency under whatever circumstances."

In January 2025, Public Service Cabinet Secretary Justin Muturi alleged in public comments and a statement to the DCI that his own son had been taken by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) on 22 June 2024.²⁴² According to his account, Leslie Muturi was abducted by hooded gunmen in central Nairobi, prompting his father, the Attorney General at the time, to call the NIS Director-General, the Inspector-General of Police as well as the Interior Cabinet Secretary and the President to help find his son. He stated that he later received a call from a friend in the NIS who confirmed that Leslie was being held by the intelligence service. Muturi then drove to State House to meet the President who after joking about "why anyone would want to arrest a young person over the Gen Z demonstrations" and commenting on the involvement in the protests of the sons of Muturi and other high-ranking officials, called the head of the NIS.²⁴³ According to Muturi, the President received confirmation during this call that Leslie was being held by the NIS and instructed his release. Leslie Muturi called his father an hour later to say he'd been freed. Justin Muturi was fired from his Cabinet post in March 2025.

[president-halt-abductions-critics-intl-latam](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2024-12-31-2025-new-years-message-president-rutos-full-speech), The Star, "2025 New Year's message: President Ruto's full speech", 31 December 2024, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2024-12-31-2025-new-years-message-president-rutos-full-speech>

²³⁸ Nation, "Joshua Okayo: My 72 hours at the hands of abductors over occupy Parliament riot", 10 July 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/joshua-okayo-my-72-hours-at-the-hands-of-abductors-over-occupy-parliament-riot-4685094>

²³⁹ AlJazeera, "Very worrying: Fear stalks Kenya as dozens of government critics abducted", 4 March 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/3/4/very-worrying-fear-stalks-kenya-as-dozens-of-government-critics-abducted>

²⁴⁰ BBC, "Five missing Kenyan youths freed amid uproar over abductions", 6 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ced8q1yxggqo>; Guardian, "Tortured over a tweet: how the war between Kenya's Gen Z and their president has moved online", 1 May 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/may/01/kenyans-tortured-for-a-tweet-president-ruto-satire-x-youth-gen-z>

²⁴¹ Constitutional Petition Nr E714 (2024), (previously cited).

²⁴² Nation, "Muturi: NIS abducted my son, freed him only after Ruto call, 15 January 2025, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/cs-justin-muturi-nis-was-behind-my-son-s-abduction-4889104>

²⁴³ Nation, "Muturi: NIS abducted my son, freed him only after Ruto call, 15 January 2025 (previously cited).

6.7.1 FROM DENIALS TO STATE SANCTIONING OF VIOLENT REPRESSION BY POLICE

After many denials, President Ruto finally acknowledged that security officials had abused state power and carried out “excessive and extrajudicial actions” in his New Year’s Address of 2025, under pressure from mounting online and offline protests.²⁴⁴ In May 2025, President Ruto further stated that, “All the people who disappeared or who were abducted have been brought back to their families and their homes, and I have given clear and firm instructions that nothing of that kind of nature will ever happen again. It was my commitment as I became President that the extrajudicial disappearance of Kenyans would not be part of what we are doing as a nation.”²⁴⁵

As chapter 7 will discuss in greater detail, Kenyan state institutions, including the Independent Police Oversight Authority, have thus far failed to reign in the widespread abuse of power by the police and survivors and victims’ families continue to be denied access to justice and redress.

Undermining his prior acknowledgement of abuses of state power in his New Year’s Address, President Ruto went on to insinuate that the largely peaceful protests were driven by “self-centred interpretations of rights” and blamed social media for “anti-social behaviour”:

“I urge every critical stakeholder to reflect deeply on the failures that have led people to adopt radical, individualistic, and self-centred interpretations of rights and freedoms, interpretations that often seem fundamentally opposed to the rights of others and the collective good. This tendency to promote a definition of rights and freedoms that undermines democracy and the public interest reflects a broader collapse of our value system and a serious strain on our moral fabric... These are clear signals that our moral fabric is at risk of decay, exacerbated by various factors, including the manipulation of digital technology, particularly social media, to amplify anti-social behaviour and erode moral values.”²⁴⁶

These statements echo many of the verbal attacks and smears the President has launched against protesters since June 2024. Amidst renewed escalations in police use of unlawful force and disruptions of largely peaceful protests by violent agitators, President Ruto said in July 2025 that “anyone caught burning another person’s business or property should be shot in the leg, hospitalized, and later taken to court. Don’t kill them, but ensure their legs are broken.”²⁴⁷ The remarks were read as a reaction to comments made days earlier by the Interior Cabinet Secretary, who said, “we have directed the police that anyone who dares approach a police station with criminal intent, shoot them.”²⁴⁸

These latest remarks are evidence of an ever more aggressive response by President Ruto’s government to a defiant youth-led protest movement. They amount to the sanctioning of unlawful force and a direct threat to protesters’ right to security of person and the right to life.

²⁴⁴ The Star, “2025 New Year’s message: President Ruto’s full speech”, 31 December 2024 (previously cited); Amnesty International, “The tragic climax of enforced disappearances looms”, 6 January 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/the-tragic-climax-of-enforced-disappearances-looms/>

²⁴⁵ AfrinewsKE, “Muturi takes Ruto head-on after acknowledging abductions”, May 2025, <https://afrinewske.com/muturi-takes-ruto-head-on-after-acknowledging-abductions/>

²⁴⁶ The Star, “2025 New Year’s message: President Ruto’s full speech”, 31 December 2024 (previously cited).

²⁴⁷ BBC, “‘Shoot in the leg’ - Kenyan leader orders police to curb violent protests”, 9 July 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9dgv5e6447o>

²⁴⁸ The Star, “LSK condemns Murkomen’s ‘shoot-to-kill’ directive as illegal”, 27 June 2025 (previously cited).

6.7.2 SILENCING THROUGH FEAR

“We know the ones that are speaking up are being targeted”

Grace*, 23-year-old TikToker and HRD²⁴⁹

Whilst many protesters are determined to continue their struggle, the silencing effect of the dozens of enforced disappearances and killings is grave and widespread. HRDs interviewed as part of this research shared that they have been censoring themselves with regards to how and what they post online out of the belief that being too outspoken could put them on the radar of government representatives and police and lead to retribution in the form of enforced disappearances.

“We've lost a lot of youths. And it's something that brought a lot of fear. A lot of people now have changed their perspectives on protests. People don't want to be in the limelight; people are just afraid”

Focus group participant, Nairobi²⁵⁰

“The numbers had dropped and it was a testament to how much fear had now entered people, and by then the abductions had also shot up. And it wasn't just any abduction, they were abductions targeting people that were vocal about the government either on Twitter or TikTok... Over the 80 people that have been abducted, it's a pattern.”

23-year-old TikToker and HRD

The relationship between online visibility, self-censorship and security featured in many of Amnesty International's focus group discussions and interviews. Whilst participants repeatedly highlighted the risks associated with being outspoken online in an increasingly hostile environment to HRDs, several thought that larger online followings could also act as protection, given that it was felt that public outrage at the disappearances of prominent online figures had ensured their ultimate release. No matter how young HRDs choose to navigate this environment, fear of retribution has become an ever-present consideration, severely impacting protesters' mental health and their relationships. Many spoke of the pressure they were under from parents, family members and friends to stop their activism amidst the increase in killings and enforced disappearances. Peer-to-peer support within activist groups is providing some relief, but research participants widely felt that they lacked adequate mental health support.

Despite the defiance and courage, which Amnesty International researchers encountered, it is evident that the Kenyan state's repressive response to the protests is inflicting long-lasting damage upon human rights activism in the country. The widespread unlawful use of force against peaceful protesters is an evident assault on the right to security of person and the right to life. Its chilling effects on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and the right to (mental) health are felt much more widely still, across Kenyan society.

²⁴⁹ Interview, Nairobi, 18 March 2025

²⁵⁰ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025

7. INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND REDRESS

Kenya has a regulatory framework in place for online harassment, but it is dangerously broad, allowing for its misuse against critical bloggers and journalists. Meanwhile, targets of legitimate online harassment cases report a lack of interest and capacity on the part of state authorities to pursue reported cases, leading to low reporting rates. Kenya does not have any online services regulations in place that would address systemic risks stemming from the surveillance-based business model of dominant social media companies. Most Big Tech companies also currently have no physical presence in the country or the region, except for subcontracted content moderation staff, for which Big Tech companies have repeatedly denied responsibility.

Safaricom has been accused of facilitating and aiding surveillance in Kenya. However, despite the complaints, no action has been taken by the Communications Authority or Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. These acts have been viewed as complacency or collaboration between the government and the communication company. When approached for comment by Amnesty International, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner stated that it “affirms its commitment to upholding the values and principles of the Constitution of Kenya. The office supports all endeavours towards the awareness and realization of the right to privacy of all Kenyan residents.”²⁵¹

The Directorate of Criminal Investigations is a unit within the National Police Service (NPS) tasked with investigating crimes. However, securing investigations of serious crimes against human rights defenders (HRDs) such as those described in this report has not been possible in the face of alleged state involvement, including by the National Police Service itself. In the case of Albert Ojwang,²⁵² the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), who made the complaint that led to the arrest and detention of Albert,²⁵³ was reported to have stepped aside as investigations proceeded.²⁵⁴ He later argued that he had simply taken voluntary leave when Kenyans thought that he had stepped aside to allow for investigations.²⁵⁵ At the time of this report, the

²⁵¹ Full response in the annex.

²⁵² As discussed in Section 6.6.

²⁵³ NTV, “IG Kanja confirms his deputy Lagat lodged complaint that led to Ojwang’s arrest”, 9 June 2025, <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/ig-kanja-confirms-his-deputy-lagat-lodged-complaint-that-led-to-ojwangs-arrest/>

²⁵⁴ BBC, “Kenya’s deputy police chief steps aside amid uproar over blogger’s death”, 16 June 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx24ggi6e8eo>

²⁵⁵ Kenya Insights, “DIG didn’t step aside but went on 18-day leave, court told”, 22 July 2025, <https://kenyainsights.com/dig-lagat-didnt-step-aside-but-went-on-18-day-leave-court-told/>

DIG has resumed duty and is fighting a petition which seeks his suspension from office over Albert Ojwang's death.²⁵⁶

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), which is an independent office tasked with overseeing police actions, has been slow in investigating serious injuries or death caused by police. Constant calls for them to expedite investigations and tighten procedures surrounding the collection of evidence and the conclusion of investigations in a timely manner have not been heeded. IPOA has cited budgetary constraints as one of the primary reasons for its inability to investigate and conclude cases in a timely manner. Additionally, the Authority has expressed frustration over the non-cooperation of the National Police Service and other government agencies during investigations into cases related to police use of force. This is despite legal requirements for the NPS to report any serious injuries and deaths occasioned by the Police and to cooperate with investigations.²⁵⁷ In June 2025, Kenyan media shared a video showing the Interior Cabinet Secretary vowing that the government would not cooperate with investigative agencies looking into killings committed by police officers when using their guns to “protect themselves or government premises”.²⁵⁸ IPOA's response to the findings of this report can be found in the annex.

Courts and the judicial system have also been slow in holding police officers accountable for unlawful acts, with cases taking years to be concluded.²⁵⁹

During the 2024 and 2025 nationwide protests, prosecutorial authorities were perceived as a tool for punishing activists or individuals who were vocal on online platforms or spoke out against the government. Numerous trumped-up charges were brought before the courts. Young protesters have also increasingly faced excessive and unreasonable bail terms amounting to economic discrimination of disadvantaged youths.²⁶⁰

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has also been accused of a broad interpretation of the law and aiding trumped-up prosecutions.²⁶¹ During the 2025 nationwide protests, the ODPP approved charges, including capital offences, against protesters and other bystanders arrested during the protests. The ODPP, an independent office established by article 157 of the Constitution, is required to maintain “the public interest, the interests of the administration of justice and the need to prevent and avoid abuse of the legal process”.²⁶² ODPP has guidelines on the Decision to Charge and Inter-Agency Guidelines on Cooperation and Collaboration in the Investigation and Prosecution of Terrorism and Terrorism Financing, which have not been followed amidst the alarming misuse of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against more than 100 protesters as of July 2025.

²⁵⁶ The Eastleigh Voice, Why Dig Eliud Lagat Was Not Suspended- Police Commission, <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/douglas%20kanja/184442/why-dig-eliud-lagat-was-not-suspended--police-commission>; Kenyans, “Court Declines DIG Lagat's Request to Dismiss Petition on Albert Ojwang's Death”, 3 October 2025, <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/116787-court-dismisses-dig-lagats-request-dismiss-petition-albert-ojwangs-death>

²⁵⁷ National Police Service Act (Act No. 11a of 2011), Sixth Schedule, Part A para 5 and Part B para 5; Citizen TV, IPOA Commissioner John Waiganjo: We want police commanders arrested for the killing of protesters, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg-K2TwaWY>

²⁵⁸ The Eastleigh Voice, X post dated 30 June 2025, <https://x.com/Eastleighvoice/status/1939586828090081376>

²⁵⁹ International Justice Mission, “#DelayedJustice in Kenya”, June 2021, <https://www.ijm.org/stories/delayed-justice-kenya>; IJM, “Eight-year trail ends for a policeman who murdered an innocent man”, 8 February 2024, <https://www.ijm.org/news/eight-years-trail-ends-policeman-who-murdered-innocent-man>

²⁶⁰ Amnesty International Kenya, “Being poor is not a crime — but for many young protestors in Kenya, it feels like one”, 22 July 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1068188278355029>

²⁶¹ Amnesty International Kenya, “July 2025 Issue of the Amnesty Kenya Gazette”, 31 July 2025, <https://www.amnestykenya.org/july-2025-issue-of-the-amnesty-kenya-gazette/>

²⁶² Constitution of Kenya, 2010, Article 157.

8. FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

8.1 X'S FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

The Kenyan government's abuses of technology to suppress peaceful protests are the focus of this report. However, Amnesty International's research has also highlighted critical failures on the part of X as a leading social media company in respecting the human rights of its users and preventing the algorithmically fuelled spread of harassment and disinformation, including by state actors.

As discussed in chapter 6.2, civil society research and journalistic investigations have previously documented the existence of highly organized networks spreading disinformation in the interests of the Kenyan government and internationally operating interest groups.²⁶³ X therefore knew or should have known given the amount of information in the public sphere of systemic issues in relation to what social media companies refer to as “coordinated inauthentic activity” or “troll farms” in common parlance.²⁶⁴ And yet this research project has confirmed prolific “inauthentic activity” from accounts operating in a networked fashion to smear and vilify peaceful protesters through a mixture of disinformation and misogynistic, homophobic and Islamophobic language and imagery. Whilst researchers found some evidence that accounts involved in these campaigns had been removed once they were subject to news reporting, more than a dozen accounts that Amnesty International tracked over weeks continued to break X's platform rules without any evident restriction, with some openly advertising their commercial use of the platform in their profiles. Harassing posts and comments, including examples of clear incitement to violence (“lynch them”), were allowed to stay on the platform for months.

Amnesty International's interview with John*, the professional pro-government disinformation campaigner (discussed in chapter 6.2), corroborated these observations and confirmed those of many of the research participants who identified false paid accounts as a key source of disinformation, harassment and trending pro-government hashtags on Kenyan X. His testimony underlines the scale of the Kenyan disinformation industry as well as the inadequate, and worsening, company response to trust and safety issues of the company under the leadership of Elon Musk, who describes himself as a “free speech absolutist”.

In and outside of Kenya, independent research has shown that the company has repeatedly failed to address and mitigate the spread of advocacy of hatred and the platform's misuse by disinformation actors, yet upon Elon Musk's purchase of the company, X laid off thousands of employees, including many who had worked on trust and safety, with a marked negative effect on platform safety.²⁶⁵ Research participants described the

²⁶³ Mozilla Foundation, “Inside the shadowy world of disinformation for hire in Kenya”, 2021 (previously cited); Mozilla Foundation, “Exporting Disinformation: How Foreign Groups Peddle Influence in Kenya through Twitter”, 2021 (previously cited); Genderit, “Spinning Protests: Kenya's Pro-Government Bloggers Push Anti-Queer Smears”, 9 October 2024 (previously cited).

²⁶⁴ X, “Rules and Policies: Authenticity”, April 2025, <https://help.x.com/en/rules-and-policies/authenticity>

²⁶⁵ Mozilla Foundation, “Inside the shadowy world of disinformation for hire in Kenya”, 2021 (previously cited); Amnesty International, “Toxic Twitter – a toxic place for women”, 21 March 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1-1/>; Amnesty International, UK: Technical explainer on X's recommender system and the 2024 racist riots (Index:

platform as full of “haters” and “government bloggers” spreading abuse, threats and gender-based violence, and expressed frustration at the company’s inadequate content moderation.²⁶⁶ They also spoke of at least seven individual and advocacy group accounts that had been unjustly suspended as a result of suspected mass reporting by other X users seemingly aimed at suppressing posts about contraception and abortion or criticism of government figures.

Under international business and human rights law and standards, X has a responsibility to identify, prevent, mitigate and address abuses of and risks to freedom of expression, including the spread of advocacy of hatred and potential attempts to suppress free speech. Amnesty International’s findings in this report indicate that the platform is failing to fulfil this responsibility. Additionally, the platform’s inadequate reporting on its human rights due diligence process and lack of public human rights impact assessments, together with its aggressive stance towards independent researchers and prohibitive data access policies,²⁶⁷ is hampering efforts to independently assess the company’s conduct in relation to its human rights responsibilities.²⁶⁸ Given the lack of information, Amnesty International can only conclude that it did not conduct adequate human rights due diligence, in addition to not implementing adequate measures to address the advocacy of hatred and possible attempts to suppress free speech. X should urgently overhaul its practices and policies to respect the right to freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination and incitement to violence and potential further adverse effects on human rights amidst the highly polarized political environment in Kenya.

Amnesty International wrote to X to put the allegations contained in this report to them and invited them to comment. X did not provide a response ahead of publication.

8.2 SAFARICOM’S FAILURES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

As laid out in chapter 4, to meet its corporate responsibility to respect human rights, a company must take proactive and ongoing steps to identify and respond to its potential or actual human rights impacts by conducting due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for any negative human rights impacts resulting from their operations or as a result of their business relationships with other actors. Companies should also remediate any human rights abuse to which they have caused or contributed.²⁶⁹

Safaricom, Kenya’s largest telecoms provider, has repeatedly been mentioned by HRDs and leading digital rights organizations in connection to Amnesty International’s research into tech-facilitated human rights violations and abuses covered in this report.

The company’s customers, together with those of other telecoms providers, experienced disruptions to their internet connectivity as part of an internet shutdown on 25 June 2024. The lack of transparency and information around the cause of the shutdown as well as the timing caused significant concerns amongst civil society. As stated above, companies have a responsibility to respect human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and access to information. If telecoms providers, including Safaricom, facilitated a government shutdown in reaction to the protests, it would have contributed to human rights violations.

Safaricom’s response to Amnesty International’s questions stated: “Safaricom categorically denies any involvement in the alleged internet shutdown during the June 2024 protests. The temporary internet disruptions experienced across the country were the result of simultaneous failures in the undersea fiber optic cables that served Safaricom and the larger telecommunications industry, which led to reduced bandwidth.”²⁷⁰

EUR 45/0618/2025), 6 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur45/0618/2025/en/>; Daniel Hickey, Daniel Fessler and others, “X under Musk’s leadership: Substantial hate and no reduction in inauthentic activity”, PLoS ONE 20(2): e0313293. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0313293>; CCDH, “Toxic Twitter: How Twitter generates millions in ad revenue by bringing back banned accounts”, 9 February 2023, <https://counterhate.com/research/toxic-twitter/>; Reuters, “Twitter’s head of trust and safety says she has resigned”, 2 June 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/twitters-head-trust-safety-says-she-has-resigned-2023-06-02/>

²⁶⁶ Focus group discussion, Nairobi, 21 March 2025; interview, Mombasa, 28 March 2025

²⁶⁷ BBC, “Elon Musk’s X anti-hate group case thrown out”, 25 March 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-68657840>

²⁶⁸ Amnesty International, UK: Technical explainer on X’s recommender system and the 2024 racist riots (Index: EUR 45/0618/2025), 6 August 2025 (previously cited).

²⁶⁹ UN OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework, Principle 15(c), 1 January 2012, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/reference-publications/guiding-principles-business-and-human-rights>

²⁷⁰ The full letter can be found in the annex.

Serious allegations have also been raised in 2024, echoing prior reporting by Privacy International from 2017, that Safaricom may have illegally shared customer data with Kenyan security agencies. Lending support to these allegations, in September 2025, a police officer stationed at Safaricom, who was called as a witness in court proceedings against university student David Mokaya, admitted that call triangulation and tracing was performed in the case without a court order. Testimonies from young HRDs underline that in the absence of any public evidence of a credible, independent investigation into the allegations, fears have taken hold amongst young protesters that they, too, may be or may have been subject to state surveillance in connection with possible illegal data sharing by Safaricom. There appear to be broader chilling effects from this widespread fear of surveillance, manifesting in young people's (misguided) use of dumbphones and changes to their online behaviour and use of digital communication tools, thus impacting people's right to privacy and freedom of expression.

Rather than ensuring public trust and upholding its corporate responsibilities to respect human rights by investigating these claims, Safaricom pulled all advertising from the media group behind the reports and threatened it and the involved journalists with legal action.²⁷¹

Amnesty International wrote to Safaricom to ask why the company has not undertaken an investigation, nor made public the findings of any such investigation into the claims by the Nation and the court testimony of the police officer. Amnesty International also asked what steps – if any – Safaricom has taken to exercise its leverage with state authorities to resist unlawful requests for data, or to restrict internet access (as discussed in section 6.3). Safaricom's response is cited in greater detail in section 6.4 and the full letter can be found in the annex, in summary however, Safaricom did not address these questions. The company rejected the allegations of illegal data sharing but did not indicate that any investigation into the allegations had taken place. It also did not share any further information on its human rights due diligence processes, despite repeated calls from organizations such as Access Now and Amnesty International to fulfil its corporate responsibility to conduct appropriate human rights due diligence in a transparent manner.

Given the seriousness of the allegations and the tangible impact on human rights activism in Kenya, Safaricom should immediately demonstrate what steps it is taking as part of its responsibility to respect human rights and conduct due diligence – including by exercising leverage – to ensure the privacy of its customers' data and to resist possible government efforts to disrupt internet connectivity, which undermine people's right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly online. The company must urgently facilitate an independent investigation to establish the facts of its alleged role in enabling state actors to monitor and track Kenyans without court orders. Amnesty International also believes Safaricom should adopt, implement and publish human rights due diligence policies that establish how they will seek to identify risks and prevent human rights abuses in the future.

²⁷¹ Reporters Without Borders, "Kenya: the telecommunications operator Safaricom is pressuring Nation Media Group due to its investigation into widespread surveillance", 17 December 2024 (previously cited).

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report documents the escalating abuse of technology in the Kenyan government's brutal efforts to suppress nationwide youth-led protests in 2024 and 2025. Hailed early on as an example of the mobilizing power of modern platforms and digital tools, the "Gen Z protests" rapidly became subject to a coordinated campaign of tech-facilitated violence and disinformation, echoing global trends of increasing authoritarian practices by state actors. Kenya's descent into violent suppression of dissent is a stark warning of the disastrous consequences of empowering state actors with a long-standing record of the unlawful use of force with new technological tools to monitor and manipulate the public narrative and track down influential protest leaders.

Online harassment and smear campaigns have become a core tactic to undermine the credibility and reach of government critics. They have helped to suppress mobilization and force online protesters to censor or silence themselves. The testimonies of dozens of young human rights defenders (HRDs) reveal an online environment that is fundamentally unsafe, with many facing a daily reality of harassment, threats, vilification and organized efforts to suppress their voices. Young women and LGBTI HRDs face additional challenges online, navigating gendered violence and smears, including body-shaming, misogynistic abuse and AI-generated sexualized imagery intended to shame them into silence. The violence these young activists face online is intricately linked with experiences of gender-based violence offline, including testimonies of physical and sexual abuse by police officers. It is further endangering marginalized young people online and offline and stripping them of their rights to privacy, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Many young people prevail and are determined to continue to speak up, and yet most also acknowledged self-censoring to varying degrees and suffering at times paralyzing effects on their mental health.

Amnesty International's research has also highlighted the extent of the Kenyan government's disinformation campaign under President Ruto. X in particular has been flooded with covert propaganda and disinformation aimed at discrediting the legitimate grievances at the core of the youth-led protests and dominating the public conversation through paid content made to look like genuine support. Mixing disinformation with anti-LGBTI smears and falsehoods about leading HRDs, these campaigns have served to legitimize state violence and to intimidate and silence young activists. They also risk inciting further acts of violence against HRDs and communities at risk in a climate of high levels of discrimination, stigma and gender-based violence, stoked by incendiary rhetoric from political and religious leaders.

The widespread suspicion that social media monitoring and tech-facilitated surveillance – aided by possible illegal phone data record sharing, which may be enabling state security operatives to locate and forcibly disappear leading social media protest voices – has instilled fear across Kenyan society. The long-term damage to human rights activism and freedom of expression cannot be overstated; respect for human rights depends on people's ability to speak up and demand accountability where violations occur, free of fear of reprisals. Instead, many parents now plead with their children to stop putting their lives at risk for as little as criticizing the police and government online or protesting in the street.

Kenya's legal system is also increasingly being weaponized to frame peaceful online protest as cyberattacks, whilst denying genuine targets of tech-facilitated violence access to justice and redress. Kenya's Independent Policing Oversight Authority is failing in its mandate to hold police to account for the unlawful use of force witnessed over the last year and a half.

Whilst the focus of this report has been on state abuses, it would have been incomplete without also briefly addressing the role of X as the main stage of Kenya's political upheaval in the digital realm. Despite prior warnings, the company has allowed its platform to be abused and its algorithms to be manipulated to discredit, attack and incite violence against young HRDs. X must urgently overhaul its trust and safety practices and human rights due diligence process to stop government and disinformation actors from exploiting a platform owned by a self-proclaimed "free speech absolutist" to clamp down on Kenyans' right to freedom of information and free expression.

The following recommendations lay out a path towards accountability and institutional reform, beginning with an immediate halt to the current attacks and an independent inquiry into the grave human rights violations committed by state actors since June 2024. The dedication shown by young protesters to continue their peaceful struggle in this hostile climate must urgently be honoured by government action, recognizing this critical moment in Kenya's history and ensuring its pursuit of social justice and universal respect of human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE KENYAN GOVERNMENT:

- Immediately cease all forms of tech-facilitated state violence against peaceful protesters and civil society organizations. Immediately halt the practice of orchestrating or tolerating troll campaigns and smear narratives that vilify dissenters as "paid activists" or "foreign agents." This includes dismantling state-linked blogger networks such as the "527 bloggers", responsible for coordinated abuse.
- Amend overly broad provisions of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act that are open to abuse by state actors. Align the law with Kenyan constitutional protections and international human rights law and standards. Amend Section 3, Section 6 (1) (j) (a), Sections 27 (1)(b), (c), 2, and Section 30 to strike out vague, ambiguous and subjective language that risks criminalizing satire, investigative journalism, legitimate criticism, dissent and the access to information provided for under Article 33 and 34 of the Constitution of Kenya and Article 19 of the ICCPR.
- Ensure effective investigations into unlawful surveillance, enforced disappearances and unlawful killings by state actors in the context of the "Gen Z protests". Guarantee comprehensive reparations to victims of unlawful use of force and family members of those who have been killed, including by ensuring that they are adequately compensated.
- Implement police reforms to ensure that the National Police Service upholds its constitutional role in protecting life, facilitate peaceful protests, and hold officers accountable for unlawful use of force, including killings and serious injuries. They must address the proliferation of human rights violations by law enforcement officials, including enforced disappearances, torture and unlawful killings of human rights defenders.
- Immediately cease the deployment and use of facial recognition technologies in Nairobi's Central Business District. Enact legislation to ban the use, development, production, sale and export of remote biometric recognition technology for mass surveillance as well as remote biometric or facial recognition technology used for identification purposes by both state agencies and private sector actors, as technologies that are fundamentally incompatible with international human rights law.
- Guarantee protection for HRDs: Develop and implement a national HRD protection policy, including digital security measures and access to psycho-social support, particularly for women and marginalized HRDs disproportionately targeted by online harassment.
- Ensure that there are no internet disruptions incompatible with international human rights law and standards in the future, and respect the right to freedom of expression, including right to information and media freedom, during public protests.
- Implement police trainings to raise awareness and ensure effective investigations into acts of tech-facilitated violence, including gender-based tech-facilitated violence. Adequate resources must be allocated to ensure staff and resource capacity to effectively investigate such acts of violence taking a survivor-centred approach.

- Provide effective remedy in line with international human rights law and standards to survivors of tech-facilitated gender-based violence that are trauma-informed, survivor-centered and adopt an intersectional feminist approach, including by ensuring access to information about human rights abuses against them, guaranteeing equal and effective access to justice and providing appropriate reparations based on consultations with the survivors. Law enforcement and regulatory agencies must be provided with necessary human and financial resources to provide all necessary support to survivors and should be held accountable for any mistreatment of survivors.
- Proactively remove structural and systemic barriers to gender equality, including by undertaking legislative measures, social policies and educational programmes to eliminate gender stereotypes, negative social norms and discriminatory attitudes against women, girls and LGBTI people and create awareness about the phenomenon of tech-facilitated gender-based violence, its consequences and intersectional harms.
- Improve access to affordable mental health care services, especially for at-risk groups such as young HRDs.
- Support legislative amendments to prohibit advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence on the basis of gender and perceived or real LGBTI status both online and offline.
- Establish and enforce codes of conduct on public communications for public officials to ensure state actors do not engage in discriminatory speech, online harassment, including the use of gendered disinformation, against women and girls, LGBTI people, HRDs and organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE KENYA NATIONAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS:

- Exercise the Commission's mandate under Section 8 of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Act and investigate, report and make recommendations to improve the functioning of state organs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO X:

HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE

- Undertake a comprehensive review and overhaul of human rights due diligence at X, including by mainstreaming human rights considerations throughout the company's operations, especially in relation to the development and deployment of its algorithmic systems and its content moderation as well as the detection and removal of coordinated inauthentic behaviour on the platform.
- Ensure that human rights due diligence policies and processes address the systemic and widespread human rights impacts of X's business model as a whole and be transparent about how risks and impacts are identified and addressed.
- Elaborate internal professional standards that translate human rights responsibilities into guidance for technical design and operation choices for algorithms and other products and services.

CONTENT MODERATION AND RESOURCING

- Ensure that content moderation guidelines, rules and practices are based on – and consistent with – international human rights law and standards and implemented on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.
- Ensure reporting and appeals mechanisms are accessible to all users, sufficiently clear, responsive and timely.
- Ensure appropriate investment in local-language resourcing in content moderation in Kenya and throughout the world, with a particular emphasis on resolving existing inequalities that disproportionately impact Global South countries.
- Enable independent researchers to access and review data, which is in the public interest, including data pertaining to algorithmic systems and content moderation.

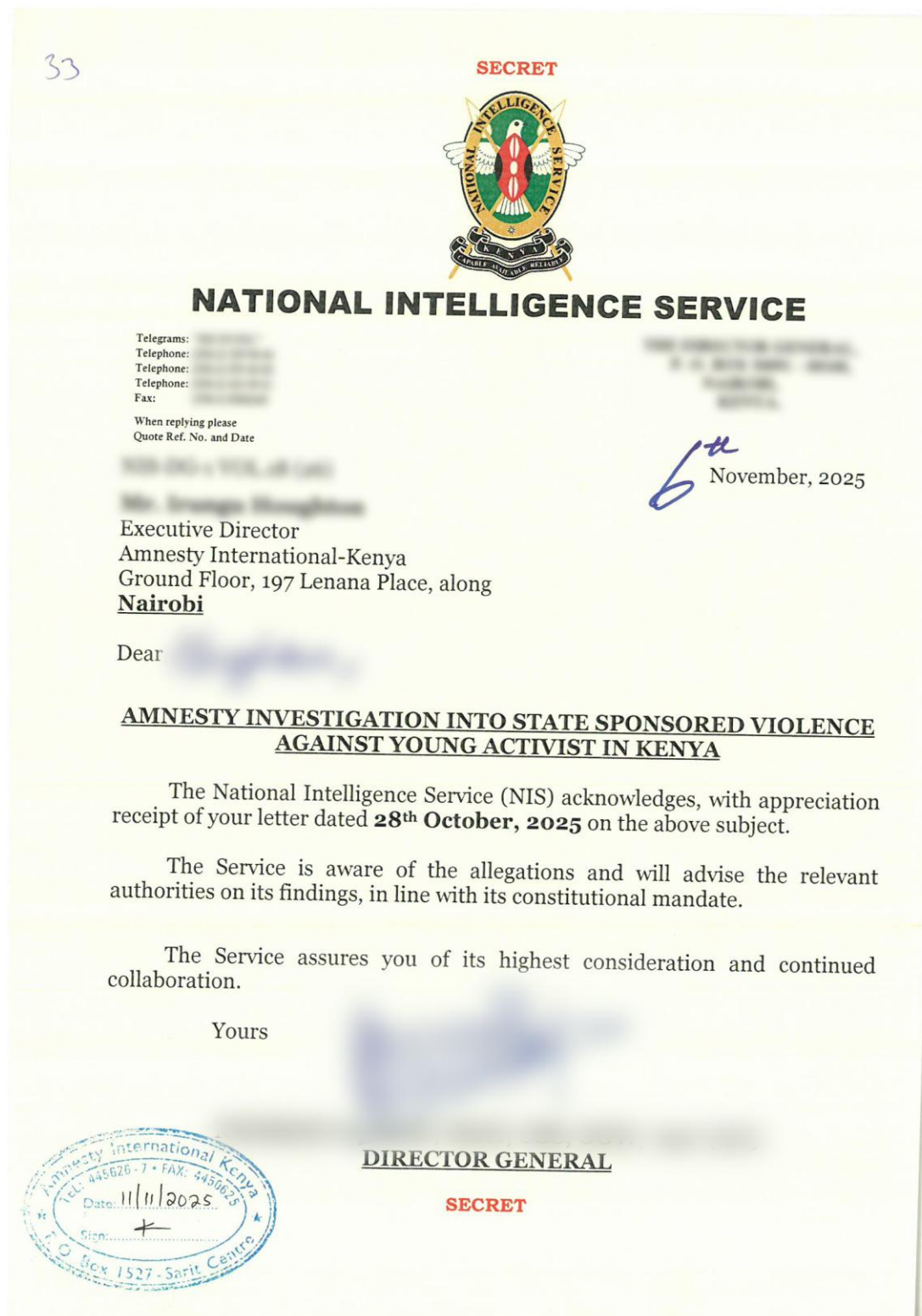
TO SAFARICOM:

- Submit to an independent investigation into allegations of unlawful customer data sharing with Kenyan police and intelligence services, conduct proactive human rights due diligence processes to identify, prevent, mitigate and address potential and actual human rights abuses and proactively publish information on this process and its results.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO FOREIGN PARTNERS OF THE KENYAN POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES:

- Conduct appropriate human rights due diligence and review existing collaboration agreements in light of documented serious human rights violations by members of the Kenyan police and intelligence services in recent years. This is particularly relevant to core security partners including the United States and the United Kingdom as well as other European and international development and security partners.

10. ANNEX





OFFICE OF THE DATA PROTECTION COMMISSIONER

**When replying please quote
Our Ref:** [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

6th November, 2025

Amnesty International Kenya
Ground Floor, 197 Lenana Place
Lenana Road
NAIROBI

Dear [REDACTED]

**RE: AMNESTY INVESTIGATION INTO ALLEGED STATE-SPONSORED
VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN KENYA**

Reference is made to your dated 28th October, 2025, on above subject matter.

The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner duly notes the contents of the subject matter research project and affirms its commitment to uphold the values and principles of the Constitution of Kenya. The officer further supports all endeavors towards the awareness and realization of the right to privacy of all Kenyan residents.

Yours [REDACTED]



Our Ref: [REDACTED]
Your Ref: [REDACTED]

Friday, 7th November 2025

The Programme Director, Amnesty Tech
Amnesty International
1st Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

Attn: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

RE: RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS CONCERNING DATA PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE

Safaricom PLC (our Client) acknowledges and appreciates the important work undertaken by Amnesty International (AI) in promoting and protecting human rights, transparency, and accountability. Our Client shares these values and remains firmly committed to upholding the rights to privacy, dignity, and security for all Kenyans in accordance with the Constitution and the law.

We have taken note of the allegations contained in your letter dated 24th October 2025, addressed to Mr. Peter Ndegwa, Safaricom CEO. We wish to clarify, on behalf of our Client, that **there is no truth in the allegations suggesting that Safaricom engages in unlawful data sharing or surveillance activities**. Safaricom's operations are governed by strict legal, technical, and ethical frameworks that ensure customer information is handled only in accordance with the law and for legitimate purposes.

1. On Allegations of Unlawful Data Sharing

Safaricom only shares customer data through lawful means and for lawful purposes. Our Client confirms that their systems are not designed to track the live location of any subscriber, and such functionality does not exist within their operational architecture.

All data handling is regulated by the Kenya Information and Communications Act, the Data Protection Act, the National Intelligence Service Act, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, among other applicable laws. These statutes define, with precision, the limited circumstances under which data may be lawfully

Page 1 of 3

accessed or shared—including national security and counter-terrorism contexts—and **always under the authority of lawful agencies and in accordance with due process**. Access to customer information is permitted only where supported by appropriate legal instruments or in other clearly defined circumstances permitted by law.

2. On the Nation Newspaper’s “Investigative Reports”

The allegations currently circulating largely originate from a series of inaccurate and misleading articles published by Nation Newspaper. Safaricom has formally lodged a complaint before the Media Complaints Commission, which is pending determination.

As the matter is *sub judice*, Safaricom will refrain from further comment, save to note that the publications contained falsehoods that have unjustly exposed the company and its employees to widespread and abusive commentary on social media. Safaricom remains open to engaging directly with Amnesty International to demonstrate how our systems operate and to dispel any misconceptions.

3. On the Ongoing Court Proceedings Referenced in Media Reports

Safaricom is aware of ongoing court proceedings in which media reports have cited the testimony of a Safaricom employee. The matter is actively before the courts, and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on selective or decontextualized media clips.

It is important to note, however, that Kenyan law permits limited sharing of information without a court order in specific, well-defined situations—such as emergencies, national security operations, or counter-terrorism efforts—under lawful authority and statutory oversight as provided in the National Intelligence Service Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

4. On Surveillance and CCTV Cameras

The Government of Kenya contracted Safaricom PLC in 2014 to design, build, and transfer a National Surveillance, Communication, and Control System, under a five-year agreement. The project was part of a national security initiative initially implemented in Nairobi and Mombasa, and it included the installation of CCTV cameras in key public areas.

The objective of the system was to enhance national security by providing real-time footage to a centralized command and control center, enabling coordination among security agencies and improving crime monitoring and emergency response. The care and operation of this system and attendant inter-agency coordination is a function of the National Police Service and not Safaricom.

CCTV installations are standard global security infrastructure, deployed in public spaces to deter crime, assist in investigations, and improve public safety. They operate in areas where there is a lower expectation of privacy and are subject to legal oversight. If any person believes that the cameras infringe their privacy rights, they are free to petition the courts or relevant regulatory authorities for redress.

5. On Advertising Decisions

Safaricom, like any private entity, retains the right to determine where and how it places its advertisements. The decision to withhold advertising from any media house that publishes inaccurate or harmful content is a legitimate business decision made to protect the company's reputation, shareholders, and customers. **This is not punitive, but a lawful exercise of commercial discretion.**

6. Internet Shutdown During the June 2024 Protests

Safaricom categorically denies any involvement in the alleged internet shutdown during the June 2024 protests. The temporary internet disruptions experienced across the country were the result of simultaneous failures in the undersea fiber optic cables that served Safaricom and the larger telecommunications industry, which led to reduced bandwidth. This outage affected not just Safaricom but the entire telecommunications industry in Kenya and the region. Safaricom's CEO, Mr. Peter Ndegwa, publicly clarified this at the time, and the same has been confirmed by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK). It would be foolhardy and contrary to Safaricom's commercial interests to intentionally disrupt services to its own customers.

Safaricom continues to empathize with all those who were injured, lost their lives, or disappeared during the protests.

7. Conclusion

Safaricom reiterates its unwavering commitment to the rule of law, good corporate citizenship, and respect for human rights. The company has been a victim of disinformation arising from flawed media reporting that has since been amplified through social media. On the same note, we are not aware of the alleged smear campaign directed at the Nation Media Group. We are, however, concerned that without any evidence or just cause, AI has attributed the campaign to Safaricom. Why would Safaricom follow due process to file a complaint with the Media Complaints Commission and then risk its reputation and standing before the Media Complaints Commission by replicating the very act of disinformation it has complained about? The unwarranted characterization of Safaricom as a 'cyberbully' is unfortunate and compounds the disinformation that has unfortunately been directed at the company.

Safaricom remains open to constructive engagement and would be pleased to host a technical briefing for Amnesty International to provide further insight into our Client's systems and the safeguards they maintain to protect customer privacy and data integrity.

CC: Client



REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
Office of the Cabinet Secretary

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Ministry of Interior and National Administration
P.O. Box 100000 - Nairobi
Kenya

When replying please quote:

Ref. *MIN/IA/001/2025*

11th November, 2025

Orange Houghton
Executive Director

Amnesty International Kenya
Ground Floor, 197 Lenana Place, Lenana Road
P.O. Box 1527 – 00606
Nairobi, Kenya

Dear Mr. Houghton,

RE: RESPONSE TO YOUR LETTER ON AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION

Reference is made to your letter dated 28 October 2025 on the above subject, which we acknowledge, and confirm that we have taken note of the matters raised as well as your intended publication.

Your attention is drawn to the public statements issued by the Cabinet Secretary on 16th June 2025 and 26th June 2025, wherein he comprehensively addressed allegations relating to the conduct of security agencies in the context of the youth-led demonstrations.

Further, the Cabinet Secretary, vide Policy Directive No. 1 of 2025 issued a Policy Directive on conditions as to the use of Force and Firearms by the National Police Service for consistent and transparent approach and in compliance with the constitution. (See attached the Policy Directive)

The statements, which remain the official position of the Ministry, provided an extensive update on the status of police reforms in Kenya and expressly affirmed that:

- The Government of Kenya does not sanction harassment, or violence against any citizen;
- All security agencies are required to operate strictly within the Constitution, the National Police Service Act, and all applicable laws; and
- Any officer implicated in unlawful conduct bears individual responsibility and is subject to investigation and sanction in accordance with the law.

The statements further reiterated the Government's continued commitment to safeguarding constitutional rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, association, assembly, and peaceful protest.

For clarity and official reference, those statements should be relied upon as the authoritative position of the Ministry regarding the matters raised in your letter.

We remain available to engage in structured dialogue and to provide any further clarification that may be required in the course of your review and documentation process.

A large, irregularly shaped grey box redacting the signature and name of the official.



IPOA/CEO/BOD/1/VOL. VII/ (166)

13th November, 2025

Mr. Irūngū Houghton,
Section Director,
Amnesty International Kenya,
197 Lenana Road, Kilimani,
NAIROBI

Dear Irungu



**IPOA POSITION ON ALLEGATIONS CONTAINED IN THE AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE AGAINST
YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN KENYA (2024–2025)**

Receive compliments from the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA).

The Authority takes note of the allegations contained in the yet-to-be released Amnesty International report concerning alleged state-sponsored violence against young activists during the 2024–2025 period. As a constitutional body established under the IPOA Act, 2011, IPOA remains committed to promoting accountability, professionalism, and human rights compliance within the National Police Service (NPS). The Authority therefore wishes to clarify its position as follows:

1. Unlawful and excessive use of force during the Gen-Z protests

IPOA investigations confirmed that the June–July 2024 demonstrations were largely peaceful. However, in some instances, security agencies responded with excessive and unlawful force resulting in fatalities and injuries. To date, 61 deaths have been recorded; three cases are before the courts, two files are pending review by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), four were closed internally, five were closed upon ODPP directive, and 47 remain under active investigation.

2. Allegations of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and killings

The Authority received 40 complaints relating to alleged abductions during the Gen-Z protests. Investigations have not produced sufficient evidence linking members of the NPS to these incidents. Complainants consistently reported that the abductors were in civilian attire, used unmarked vehicles, and held them in undisclosed locations, making identification impossible. While some victims were later found deceased, there is no verified evidence suggesting an institutional pattern or systematic policy of enforced disappearances or custodial killings by the police. Each death in custody is investigated independently, and no systemic trend of abuse has been established.

Ahmed Issack Hassan, CBS - Chairperson; Ann Wanjiku Mwangi - Vice-Chairperson; Commissioners: Dr. Micah Onyiego, PhD., OGW; Dr. Annette Mudola Mbogoh, PhD.; Hon. John Muchiri Nyaga, HSC.; Boniface Kipkemai Samati; Hon. Jackline Lukalo Mwenesi and Ken Williams Nyakomitah, OGW.; Elema Halake, SS - Director/ CEO.

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Website: www.ipoa.go.ke | Regional Offices: Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Garissa, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kakamega, Meru, Nyeri & Lodwar.

3. Alleged State surveillance and violation of privacy

IPOA reiterates that the unlawful use of spyware such as Pegasus or FlexiSpy contravenes Article 31 of the Constitution on the right to privacy. While oversight of the National Intelligence Service falls outside IPOA's jurisdiction, the Authority investigates any police involvement in unauthorised surveillance, intimidation, or data breaches. IPOA remains steadfast in safeguarding civil liberties and ensuring police adherence to constitutional and legal limits in surveillance activities.

4. Digital harassment, disinformation, and online violence

Allegations of coordinated online harassment of activists by police, including smear campaigns and disinformation, fall within IPOA's oversight mandate when connected to policing. IPOA is also working to integrate standards addressing digital misconduct into its investigative and policy framework to promote accountability and transparency in both online and offline policing environments.

5. Institutional capacity and allegations of impunity

The Authority acknowledges challenges in concluding complex investigations, particularly those involving killings and disappearances. Delays often stem from limited resources, logistical constraints, witness reluctance, and dependence on external forensic and prosecution agencies. IPOA operates within its statutory mandate but continues to face funding and staffing limitations that affect operational efficiency. Despite these challenges, IPOA has not encountered any verified evidence of interference or obstruction by the Executive in the conduct of its investigations. The Authority continues to function independently and without political influence, guided solely by the Constitution and the law.

In conclusion, IPOA remains committed to impartial investigations, transparency, and upholding the rule of law. The Authority recognises the concerns raised by your report and reiterates that all complaints against police officers are handled with professionalism and independence. It further calls for enhanced cooperation from all stakeholders including Amnesty International-Kenya to ensure accountability, justice, and the protection of human rights for all persons in Kenya.

Yours

Sincerely



**AHMED ISSACK HASSAN, CBS.,
CHAIRPERSON**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS
TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

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'THIS FEAR, EVERYONE IS FEELING IT'

TECH-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN KENYA

Kenyan authorities systematically deployed technology-facilitated violence as part of a coordinated and sustained campaign to suppress Gen Z-led protests against the introduction of a Finance Bill and corruption between June 2024 and July 2025. Social media platforms rapidly brought together young people around shared frustrations over the 2024 Finance Bill, which many saw as deepening economic hardship, leading to massive public protests across the country. Kenyan state authorities responded by violently cracking down on young people's exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly through online intimidation, threats, incitement to hatred and unlawful surveillance. Prominent social media voices were arrested or forcibly disappeared.

Through desk research, social media analysis and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young human rights defenders (HRDs) and expert observers, the report examines the links between digital and offline violence and highlights the harms to the young advocates and human rights activism itself. The report is an urgent call on Kenyan authorities to cease all forms of tech-facilitated state violence against peaceful protesters and civil society organizations and to ensure accountability and redress for the victims of unlawful use of force.