

SitRep

Political intimidation: State-sponsored tactics in Kenya (2024)

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1. Introduction

This report explores the systemic erosion of democratic freedoms in Kenya, spotlighting human rights violations that occurred between June and August 2024. It details a rise in [abductions](#), [arbitrary arrests](#) and [extrajudicial killings](#) during protests that were sparked by proposed [tax increases](#) and [rising living costs](#). [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) has documented instances where the government's response to the protests involved arbitrary arrests and abductions. Security forces targeted protest leaders and activists, subjecting them to torture and abuse in undisclosed detention facilities. Human rights groups such as [Amnesty International](#) and the [Kenya Human Rights Commission](#) (KHRC) condemned these actions, calling for accountability and the release of detainees.



Hashtags created after abductions (Source: [Amnesty Kenya](#))

The government [refuted](#) these allegations and pro-government voices on social media [accused](#) abductees of concocting incidents to elicit international sympathy and financial support. Social media played a crucial role, amplifying both the testimonies of victims and mis-/disinformation campaigns, shaping public narratives regarding these human rights issues.

2. Laws protecting against arbitrary arrests and detentions

In Kenya, laws have been established to govern police conduct and protect the rights of those arrested, detained or imprisoned. These laws aim to prevent arbitrary arrests, ensure fair treatment and uphold human dignity throughout the criminal justice process. Below is an overview of the primary legal provisions in Kenya designed to safeguard these rights:

1. The Constitution of Kenya (2010)

The Kenyan Constitution's Bill of Rights protects arrested or detained individuals. Articles 49, 50 and 51 focus on safeguarding these rights.

[Article 49](#) specifies the rights of arrested persons, including the right to understand the reasons for their arrest, remain silent and communicate with a lawyer. It also mandates that arrested persons be brought to court within 24 hours of their arrest or on the next available court day, barring exceptional circumstances.

[Article 50](#) guarantees the right to a fair trial, ensuring that individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty and are provided with adequate time and facilities to mount a defence. This article also guarantees the right to a public trial without undue delay and to be represented by legal counsel, including a state-provided lawyer if necessary.

[Article 51](#) ensures that detained or imprisoned individuals retain their fundamental rights and freedoms, except where these are incompatible with their detention.

2. The Criminal Procedure Code (CPC)

The [Criminal Procedure Code](#) (CPC) sets guidelines for arrests, detentions and searches.

Section 21 permits arresting officers to physically engage with the individual to arrest unless the person submits voluntarily.

Section 24 limits the use of excessive physical force, allowing only the necessary force required during an arrest.

Section 25 allows officers to search individuals upon arrest for safety reasons, but these searches must respect legal boundaries to protect individual dignity and prevent unnecessary restraint.

3. The National Police Service Act (NPSA)

[The National Police Service Act](#) (NPSA) specifies officers' conduct during arrests or protests, emphasising the use of reasonable force and respect for human rights. Key provisions include:

Section 49 outlines the general powers of police officers, including duties during arrests.

Section 58 governs the power to arrest without a warrant, specifying conditions under which this is permissible.

Section 59 details the procedures for making arrests and detentions, ensuring they comply with legal standards.

Section 61 regulates the use of firearms, allowing them only under strict conditions to prevent escape or in self-defence.

Section 95 prohibits torture or cruel treatment, aligning with international human rights standards.

4. The Prisons Act

[The Prisons Act](#) governs the treatment of individuals in detention facilities, focusing on ensuring the welfare and rights of prisoners. The act establishes standards for prison conditions and requires prison authorities to provide medical care, maintain humane treatment and ensure access to rehabilitation programmes. The Prisons Act aims to protect the dignity of those in custody by setting clear guidelines for how they should be treated while incarcerated.

5. Habeas corpus

The writ of [habeas corpus](#) is a legal remedy in Kenya, aligned with international human rights standards and enshrined in the constitution. Articles [25\(d\)](#) and [51\(2\)](#) of the Kenyan constitution guarantee the right to petition the court for a review of the legality of one's detention. This provision enables individuals, or any interested party, to challenge unlawful detention and secure release if they are held without charge or for an excessive period. By providing a judicial check on arbitrary detention, habeas corpus plays a crucial role in safeguarding personal freedoms and ensuring accountability within the criminal justice system.

3. State of the nation

In August 2024, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights ([KNCHR](#)) [documented](#) at least 71 abductions and enforced disappearances. However, HRW reported that due to [threats and pressure](#) from high-ranking officials, three senior staff members said that the commission had stopped providing public updates. The same report highlights that many of the abducted were young protesters. Some were later found alive, far from where they were taken, while others remain unaccounted for, with some tragically found deceased in [abandoned quarries](#). Families of the disappeared faced challenges in locating their loved ones, often [hindered](#) by state officers. People wearing civilian clothing and in civilian cars had abducted the victims. They held them in undisclosed locations, complicating efforts to track them down.

According to the NGO Freedom House, Kenya is categorised as 'partly free'. The [report](#) highlights that brutal tactics by security forces and a lack of strong adherence to due process under the constitution remain significant issues. Corruption and misconduct within the police service are prevalent, accompanied by reports of extrajudicial killings. Despite the establishment of the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) in 2011 to address these issues, only 17 officers have been convicted out of over 20,000 complaints and nearly 3,500 investigations that had been conducted through 2021.



Kenya's score in global freedom (Source: CfA using [Freedom House](#))

Former cabinet secretary for the ministry of interior and national administration, professor Kithure Kindiki, has consistently denied the government's involvement in the abductions, reaffirming this stance on multiple occasions.

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- i. On 04 July 2024, in an [interview](#) with Citizen TV, Kindiki insisted that no abductions had occurred. He claimed that the individuals in question had been lawfully arrested.
- ii. On 26 September 2024, while appearing before the National Assembly Security and Administration Committee, Kindiki [stated](#) that ‘only 42 Kenyans’ had died in the anti-government protests between June and August 2024. This figure contradicted that of multiple human rights organisations, which reported a death toll of [61](#). Kindiki maintained that the government had ‘nothing to hide’ and pledged to investigate the circumstances of the deaths while denying any official policy which condoned abductions or extrajudicial killings. He also [reported](#) that at least 132 protesters had been officially listed as missing in 2024. However, human rights groups [argued](#) that the true number was likely higher, with many individuals still unaccounted for.

In the wake of public discontent over the controversial [Finance Bill 2024](#) in Kenya, [X](#) became a powerful tool for mobilisation and expression. The hashtags [#RejectFinanceBill2024](#) and [#OccupyParliament](#) dominated the platform.

- i. [#RejectFinanceBill2024](#) generated 21.3 million mentions, 58.2 million engagements and 1.31 billion views.
- ii. [#OccupyParliament](#) generated 2.2 million mentions, 6.55 million engagements and 202 million views.
- iii. [#TotalShutDownKE](#) generated 458,129 mentions, 1.25 million engagements and 41 million views.

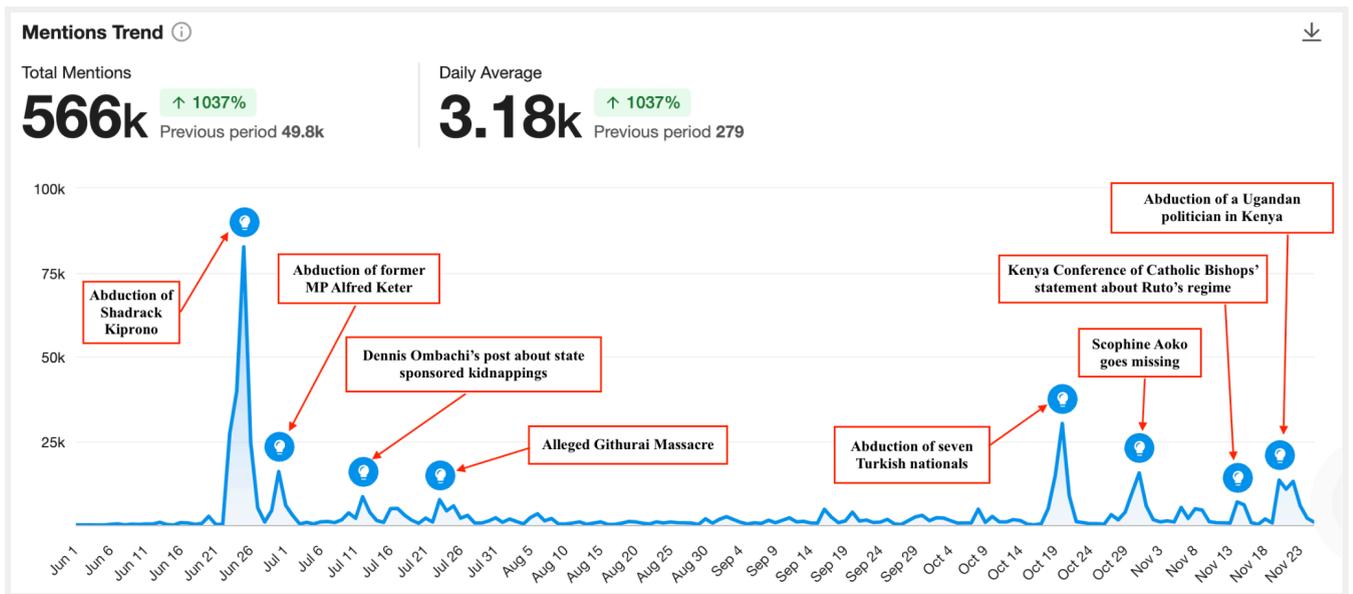
The platform became a medium for [organising demonstrations](#), sharing [real-time protest updates](#) and [voicing grievances](#) against the government through posts and [spaces](#).

Criticism extended to the church, with one user accusing it of [enabling](#) state corruption and oppression. Activist [Mwabili Mwagodi](#) [began](#) the [#OccupyChurches](#) movement, whose mandate was to confront the church over its perceived complicity with state actions. This campaign led Lavington United Church to [cancel](#) its 30 June 2024 fundraiser, which was set to feature Kenya’s first lady, Rachel Ruto. On 28 June 2024, Mwabili announced the cancellation in two [posts](#), one of which included a [screenshot](#) of the church's reverend confirming the decision. The hashtag has so far recorded ~467,000 mentions with ~44.8 million views and ~1.37 million interactions.

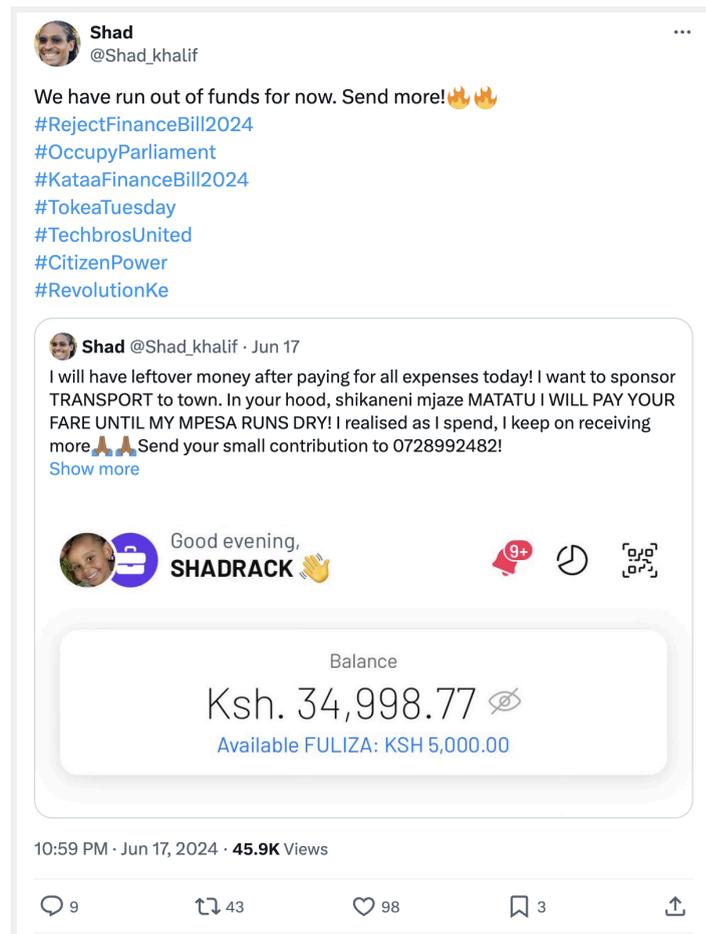
4. State-sponsored intimidation tactics in Kenya

Between June and November 2024, Kenya witnessed various [state-sponsored](#) suppression tactics, including [abductions](#), [arbitrary arrests](#) and [intimidation targeting protesters](#), activists, journalists and human rights defenders. Allegations of [corporate complicity](#), such as providing data to security agencies, deepened concerns about the erosion of human rights.

Between 01 June and 25 November 2024, mentions of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and abductions in Kenya totalled 566,361 posts. These posts amassed 1.93 million engagements and 58.3 million views, with 63% reflecting negative sentiments.



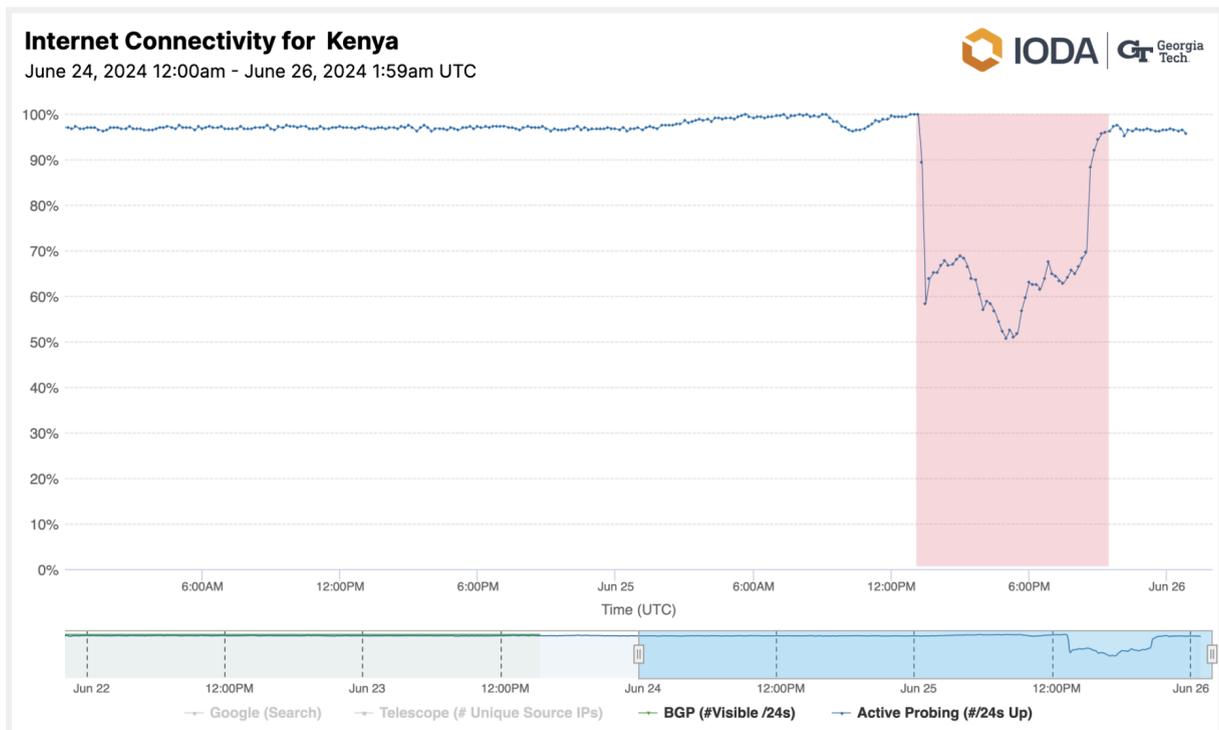
- On 20 June 2024, police allegedly fired a live bullet at Rex Masai, who [died](#) of his injuries. He was a 29-year-old Kenyan, who tragically lost his life during protests against the Finance Bill 2024 in Nairobi. [Shot](#) by anti-riot police while participating in peaceful demonstrations, his death sparked nationwide calls for justice and highlighted the sacrifices made in the fight for accountability and constitutional rights. On X, there have been 99,323 mentions of this incident so far, leading to 290,424 engagements and 6.96 million views.
- On 22 June 2024, Leslie Muturi, the son of former attorney-general [Justin Muturi](#), was allegedly [abducted](#) near Kilimani by police officers in black combat gear, who forcibly removed him from his blue SUV and transported him in a white Land Cruiser, as captured by [CCTV footage](#). He was taken to the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) offices in Upper Hill, where he was detained and questioned, before being released on the evening of 23 June at around 6:30 pm. However, the specific reasons for his questioning have not been publicly disclosed. Embakasi West MP [Mark Mwenje](#), who first [disclosed](#) the incident, condemned the act alongside the Muturi family, demanding accountability. The motive behind the alleged abduction remains unclear.
- On 23 June 2024, Dr Austin Omondi, known as [@Japrado](#) on X, was allegedly abducted at [Sikh Union](#) while conducting a blood donation drive. This sparked the [#FreeJaprado](#) hashtag, which garnered 415,846 mentions, leading to 940,022 engagements and accumulating 15.7 million views on X. Omondi had organised [pro bono](#) efforts involving 1,000 medics aiding injured protesters under the ‘Medics for Kenya’ umbrella. He had previously reported [death threats](#) linked to this pro bono work. The Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentist Union (KMPDU) secretary-general [Davji Atella](#) warned that unless Omondi was released within six hours, a nationwide [doctors’ strike](#) would shut down public and private medical services. Atella confirmed Omondi’s release that evening. President of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK), [Faith Odhiambo](#), assisted him in recording a [statement](#) about his abduction.
- On the same day, banker Shadrack Kiprono, also known as [@Shad_Khalif](#), was [abducted](#) in South B, Nairobi, by men suspected to be plainclothes detectives who had trailed him in unmarked vehicles. Kiprono’s disappearance, linked to his vocal opposition to the Finance Bill 2024, sparked widespread condemnation, with calls for his immediate release. He had actively provided [civic education](#), [printing and distributing posters](#) and [flags](#). His disappearance prompted the hashtag [#FreeShad](#), which gained 1.15 million mentions, leading to 2.39 million engagements and accumulating 41.2 million views. He was [released](#) on 25 June 2024.



Screenshot of a sample [post](#) supporting Shad Khalif (Source: Cfa using X)

- On 24 June 2024, Kenyan journalist and outspoken government critic [Gabriel Oguda](#) was [abducted](#) from his home in Nairobi. His brother, [Zachary Oguda](#), [confirmed](#) that armed men had taken him. The incident sparked the hashtag [#FreeOguda](#), which gained significant traction with ~448,000 mentions that received ~22.4 million views and ~933,000 interactions.
- On 25 June 2024, mentions of abductions spiked to 82,589 on X. Several factors drove the surge: [demonstrators breaching parliament](#), reports of police shooting [several protesters dead](#), [sightings of snipers](#) and continued [abductions](#) of purported protest organisers, alongside the use of [live bullets and teargas](#) during the protests. Posts condemned the Kenyan government’s response, accusing president William Ruto of [authoritarianism](#), and encouraging [police brutality](#) and [human rights violations](#). The leader of the Wiper Democratic Movement, [Kalonzo Musyoka](#), former member of Uganda’s parliament, [Bobi Wine](#) and LSK president [Odhiambo](#), called for accountability and international awareness. The posts received a cumulative 6.27 million views, with 83.5% of them expressing criticism of the government. On the same day, the hashtags [#FreeShad](#), [#FreeFranje](#), [#FreeDrey](#) and [#FreeOsama](#) amplified demands to release [missing](#) individuals.
- Later that day, four plain-clothed men allegedly abducted anti-Finance Bill activist [John Frank Githiaka](#) (also known as ‘Franje’) from his office in Kahawa Sukari, Nairobi. [CCTV footage](#) captured the incident and was shared on X by [@C_NyaKundiH](#). The hashtag [#FreeFranje](#) emerged in response, generating ~298,000 mentions with 10.3 million views and ~530,000 interactions.
- On 25 June 2024, Kenya experienced significant internet disruptions during protests, with reports from [IODA](#), [Cloudflare Radar](#), and [OONI](#) confirming connectivity drops. While

[Safaricom](#) and [Airtel](#) attributed the issue to submarine cable outages, social media and advocacy groups like [Access Now](#) suggested [possible intentional disruptions](#). By 26 June, internet connectivity had returned to normal, but the exact cause of the disruption remains unclear. On X, users expressed outrage over this [disruption](#) and accused the government of [intentionally](#) throttling connectivity to suppress dissent. These conversations led to 40,265 mentions, 93,879 engagements and 2.09 million views.



(Screenshot of internet connectivity in Kenya showing disruptions during the protests, as recorded by IODA (Source: CfA via [Internet Society](#))

- Following the breach of parliament during anti-Finance Bill protests on 25 June 2024, Ruto labelled the events as [‘treasonous’](#) and vowed to uphold constitutional order, directing security forces to ensure the safety of all Kenyans.
- In the evening of the same day, allegations of a [violent crackdown](#), [killing](#) of innocent civilians and an alleged [massacre](#) in the Githurai neighbourhood of Nairobi emerged on X. The alleged killings were linked to government forces amid the anti-Finance Bill protests. However, there were conflicting reports of what actually happened, with residents accusing law enforcement of indiscriminate shootings that led to multiple deaths, while the [police claimed](#) the protests turned violent, forcing them to respond with live ammunition and tear gas after officers and their vehicles were attacked. A British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) [investigation](#) found no evidence of a massacre despite widespread rumours on social media. There were 14,761 mentions of this incident on X, leading to 85,931 engagements and 2.39 million views.
- On 28 June 2024, the high court sitting in Malindi [stopped](#) the use of tear gas and water cannons against protesters. Justice Mugure Thande said that the police should also not use live ammunition, rubber bullets, and other crude weapons or any form of violence against protesters. The court also prohibited the inspector-general of the police and the CS interior from committing any extrajudicial killings, arrests, abductions, intimidation, torture or cruel, degrading treatment of people protesting against the Finance Bill.

- On 30 June 2024, mentions of abductions on X spiked to 15,859. Concerns over abductions and enforced disappearances in Kenya drove this spike in discussions, highlighted by the abduction of former Nandi Hills MP [Alfred Keter](#) by unknown individuals. Many users criticised Ruto’s administration for either allegedly enabling these incidents or [failing to effectively address them](#). Criticism also targeted Ruto’s [remarks](#) denying [extrajudicial killings](#), such as, ‘*There will be no extrajudicial killing in Kenya... and I have made sure that there is no extrajudicial killing in Kenya*’. The posts and comments further criticised the government and law enforcement, accusing them of dishonesty and a lack of accountability for their actions, with many expressing anger at their perceived indifference. The posts garnered 2.13 million views and 60,264 engagements, with 98.3% expressing negative sentiments directed towards the Kenyan government.

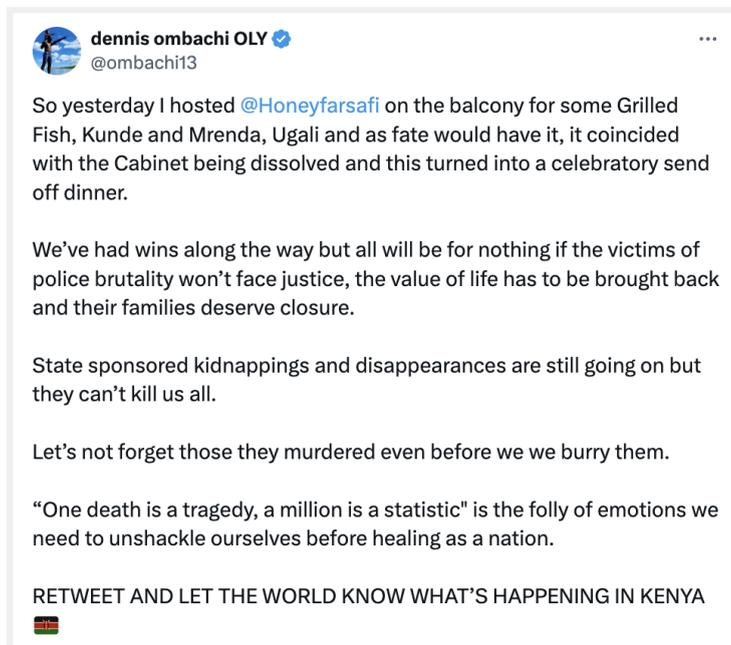


Screengrabs of some of the posts on 30 June 2024 discussing Ruto’s statement and the abduction of Keter ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Souce: CfA using X)

- On 06 July 2024, 23-year-old student [Denzel Omondi](#)’s body was [discovered](#) floating in the deserted Mashinani quarry in Juja, on the outskirts of Nairobi. He had participated in the Gen Z-led protests and had been [reported](#) missing 10 days before the discovery of his corpse. Mentions of Omondi on X are so far ~232,000 with ~13.3 million views and ~756,000 interactions.
- On 12 July 2024, mentions of state-sponsored abductions spiked to 8,401. This increase was driven by a [post](#) from popular chef and social media influencer [@ombachi13](#), who highlighted ongoing state-sponsored kidnappings and disappearances. He stated, ‘*We’ve had*

wins along the way, but all will be for nothing if the victims of police brutality won't face justice, the value of life has to be brought back and their families deserve closure. State-sponsored kidnappings and disappearances are still going on, but they can't kill us all. Let's not forget those they murdered even before we bury them.'

The post attracted 1.68 million views, with 95.9% of the mentions expressing negative sentiments toward the government.



X post by Ombachi13 about state-sponsored kidnappings (Source: CfA using X)

- On 17 July 2024, police [abducted](#) veteran journalist [Macharia Gaitho](#) at the [Karen police station](#) in Nairobi as he was going to seek assistance, and later detained him there. The authorities claimed that his detention had been a case of [mistaken identity](#), but Gaitho expressed [scepticism](#) of this in subsequent interviews. His abduction sparked outrage among [media](#) and [human rights groups](#), amplifying calls for accountability and the protection of press freedom. Mentions of Gaitho on X amounted to 119,213 with a total of ~471,000 interactions and 13.3 million views.
- On 23 July 2024, mentions of abductions spiked to 7,524. This surge followed [allegations](#) of mass abductions and killings in low-income settlements like Githurai. Public outrage highlighted systemic issues, including police brutality and enforced disappearances. The posts received a cumulative 582,719 views and 30,167 engagements on X, with 54.9% of them expressing negative sentiments directed at Ruto's government for allegedly using '[torture and murder](#)' to maintain control.



Sample [post](#) expressing outrage over abductions (Source: CfA via X)

- On 19 August 2024, a group of individuals abducted the ‘[Kitengela three](#)’, consisting of activist [Bob Micheni Njagi](#) and brothers [Aslam and Jamil Longton](#) in Kitengela, Kajiado County, Kenya, following their participation in anti-government demonstrations. The name ‘Kitengela three’ originated from the location of their abduction. They were released days later in a remote area near Kiambu County, later giving a harrowing account of the [torture](#) they had endured, adding to the accounts of brutality faced by protesters.
- On 20 October 2024, mentions of incidents related to abductions surged to 30,150, following reports of the [abductions](#) of seven Turkish nationals in Kenya, three of whom were later released. The tweets expressed urgent concern over the abduction of Turkish nationals in Kenya and called on Kenyan authorities to [act swiftly](#) and prevent further kidnappings, with many stressing the [violation of human rights](#) and Kenya's [sovereignty](#). The discussions generated 1.43 million views and 67,399 engagements, with 54% expressing negative sentiments, condemning the illegal abduction of these foreign nationals and criticising the Kenyan authorities for their involvement and inaction.
- On the same day, [Hussein Khalid](#), a human rights activist and the [CEO](#) of Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL) Africa, a movement dedicated to amplifying grassroots communities and public-minded leaders across Africa, was [arrested](#) while attempting to organize an event at Nairobi's Uhuru Park to honour victims of police brutality. Police blocked the entrance to the park and [used tear gas](#) on youth who had gathered for the event. On X, there were 3,385 mentions of this, leading to 16,128 engagements and 467,542 views.
- On 27 October 2024, unidentified individuals [abducted](#) Kenyan photojournalist, politician and activist [Boniface Mwangi](#) from his home in Machakos County. His wife, Njeri Mwangi, confirmed that six people had abducted him at about 7.15 am. Mwangi was later found at Kamukunji police station in Nairobi and released [without charges](#). The abduction took place a day after Mwangi [initiated](#) an online campaign urging Kenyans to ‘occupy’ the Standard Chartered Marathon in Nairobi, using the [#OccupyStanChart](#) hashtag, where he encouraged his supporters to wear clothing that opposed the Kenya Kwanza government. His abduction

had 52,732 mentions on X on that day, leading to 289,101 engagements and 9.85 million views.



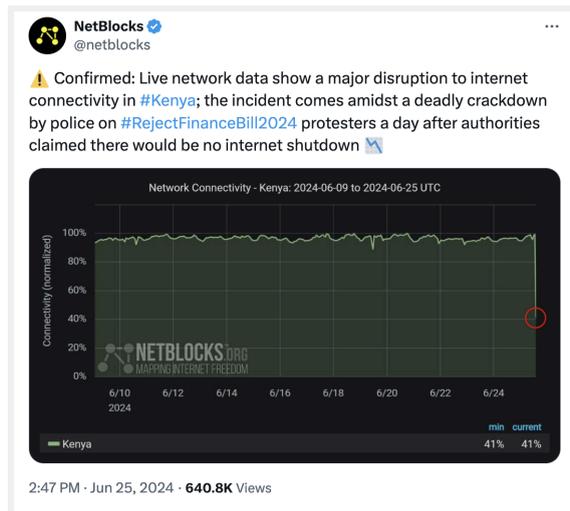
Post announcing Mwangi's abduction by unidentified individuals (Source: CFA using X)

- On 31 October 2024, mentions of such incidents spiked to 15,452. This increase followed reports of [X influencer](#) Scophine Aoko being [listed as missing](#), with suspicions of abduction and potential harm by state agents. Users also implicated Safaricom for allegedly facilitating such actions. [Leaders](#) and [human rights organisations](#) amplified calls for accountability, with the hashtags [#FreeAoko](#) and [#BoycottSafaricom](#) trending alongside these narratives.
- On 14 November 2024, these mentions about state-sponsored abductions spiked to 6,864. This surge occurred following a [statement](#) from the [Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) criticising the Ruto administration for excessive taxation and human rights abuses, including abductions. The statement garnered ~580,400 views and ~12,400 interactions. Some of the comments also expressed scepticism on the sincerity of the church leaders, considering their initial [support](#) of the government, and questioned whether they spoke out due to a cut on [funding](#) supply from the government.
- On 20 November 2024, mentions of abductions in Kenya surged to 13,330. This spike followed discussions about the transnational '[kidnapping](#)' of Ugandan opposition politician, Kizza Besigye, from Kenya. He was then transported to Uganda for trial in a military court. This sparked [condemnation](#) from various individuals expressing concern over the violation of international norms and laws related to extradition and cross-border detentions. One user [stated](#), '*Kenya being the abduction capital of the world was not on my bingo card this year*'. Hashtags like [#FreeUganda](#) and [#FreeDrBesigyeNow](#) accompanied these posts. The mentions garnered 2.49 million views, with 68.9% expressing negative sentiments majorly towards the Kenyan government for its perceived inability or unwillingness to prevent such actions.

5. Corporates and state agencies accused of complicity in the abductions

a. Safaricom

On 25 June 2024, global cybersecurity and internet governance monitoring watchdog NetBlocks [confirmed](#) a 'major network disruption' in Kenya (from 100% to 42% internet connectivity strength) during the crackdown on [#RejectFinanceBill2024](#) protests. This contradicted the [assurances](#) given on 24 June 2024 by the Communications Authority of Kenya ([CA](#)) that no intentional disruptions would occur. CA director-general David Mugonyi had [emphasised](#) that '*interfering with internet traffic would violate constitutional freedoms and harm Kenya's digital economy*'.



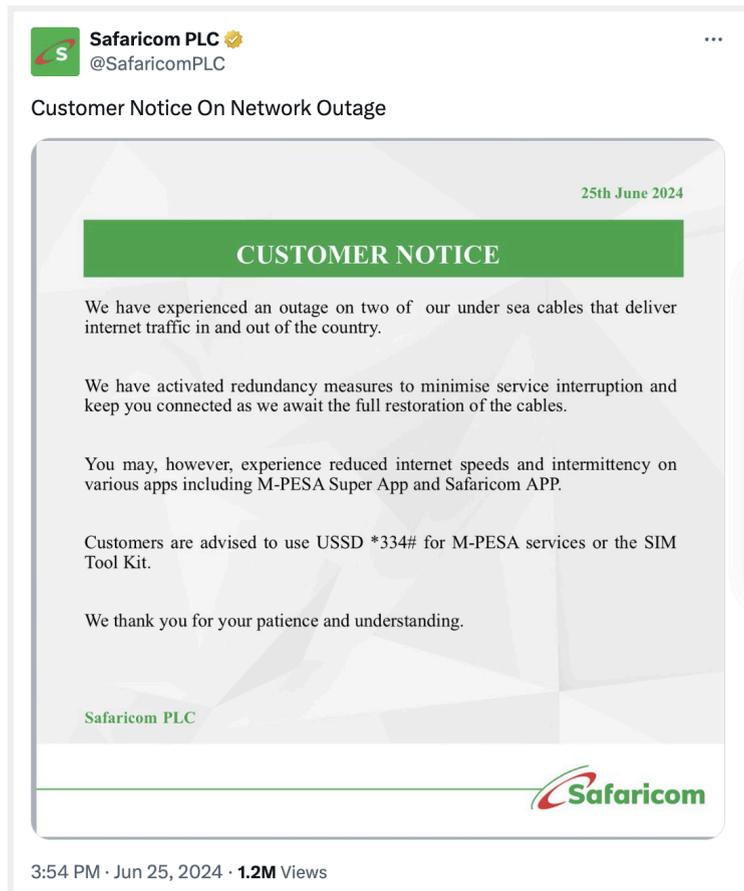
Screenshot of NetBlocks confirming the internet outage (Source: CFA using X)

On 25 June 2024, protesters initially reported [slow](#) internet connections, with platforms like X becoming intermittently [inaccessible](#), leading many to use [VPNs](#) and [Zello](#), an app which allows users to use smartphones as walkie-talkies. Amid these intermittent network disruptions, unverified rumours of an alleged [massacre](#) in Githurai surfaced, sparking widespread public outrage, including calling Safaricom ‘sellouts’.

Safaricom chief executive officer Peter Ndegwa was compelled to issue a statement amid mounting calls for a [boycott](#) from Kenyans and [online influencers](#), who had in recent years formed the bulwark of the telecommunications company’s marketing and PR programmes. He said, ‘*I want to start by sincerely apologising for the network outage that started on 25 June 2024. This outage was occasioned by reduced bandwidth on some cables that carry internet traffic.*’



Screenshot of one of the [influencers](#) calling for a boycott of Safaricom amid intentional internet disruption allegations (Source: CFA via X)

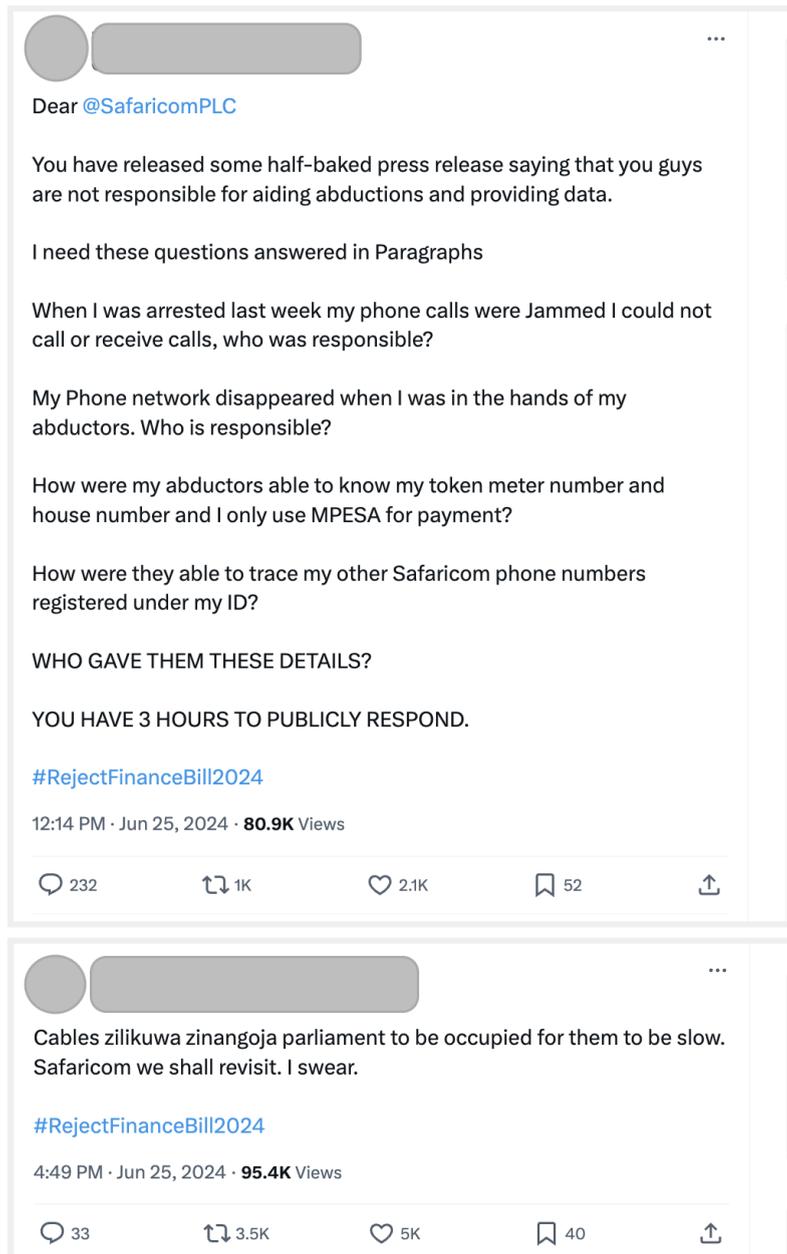


Screenshot of Safaricom apologising for the internet outage (Source: CfA via X)

However, [NetBlocks](#) later [reported](#) that [possible unscheduled maintenance](#) had caused the outage, as accounted by Netblocks [director of research Isik Mater](#), while [Access Now](#) attributed it to [possible intentional disruptions](#) due to the targeted nature of the disruptions.

Human rights organisations, including the [KHRC](#), criticised [Safaricom](#) for allegedly undermining civil liberties. The KHRC accused the company of ‘*collaborating with security agencies by providing consumer data without court orders, leading to severe privacy and security violations*’. In an [open letter](#), the commission urged Safaricom to uphold its responsibility to protect user data and respect constitutional rights. Another human rights organisation, [Article 19](#), called on the Kenyan government to ensure uninterrupted internet access and end the surveillance of protesters.

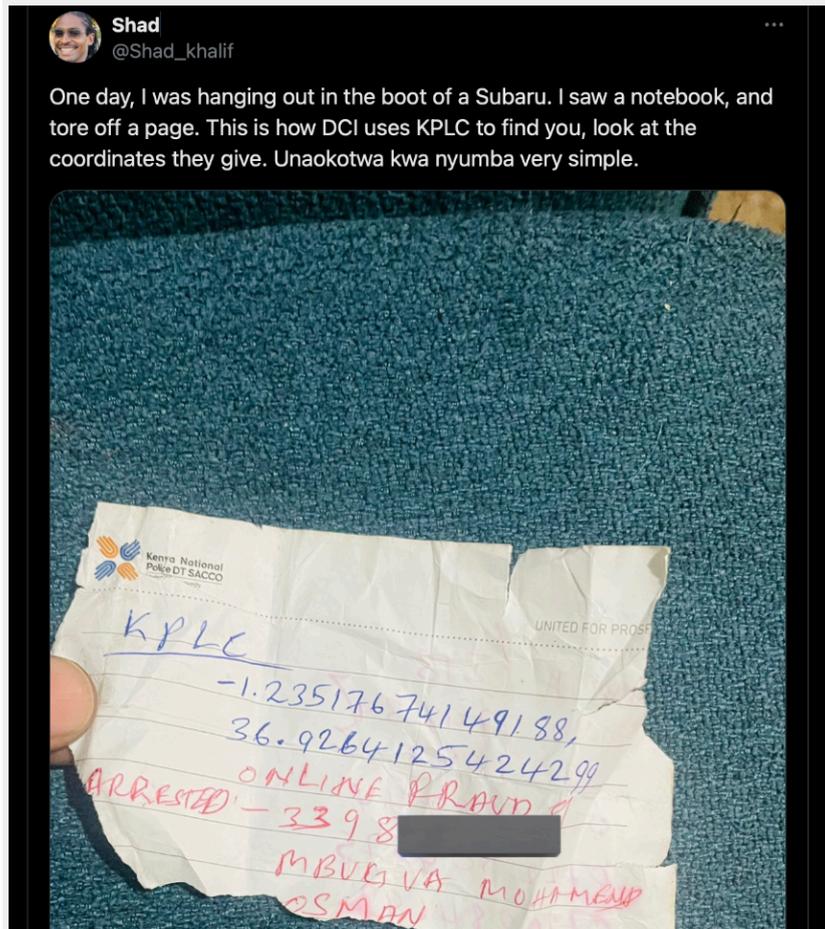
Safaricom faced widespread [criticism](#) on X, with 53,838 mentions accusing the company of [sharing user data](#) with security agencies and [aiding the abductions](#). These claims sparked 154,625 engagements and reached 2.95 million views, amplifying calls for boycotts and network switching.



Examples of posts suggesting that Safaricom deliberately slowed down the internet ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

b. Kenya Power Plc (KPLC)

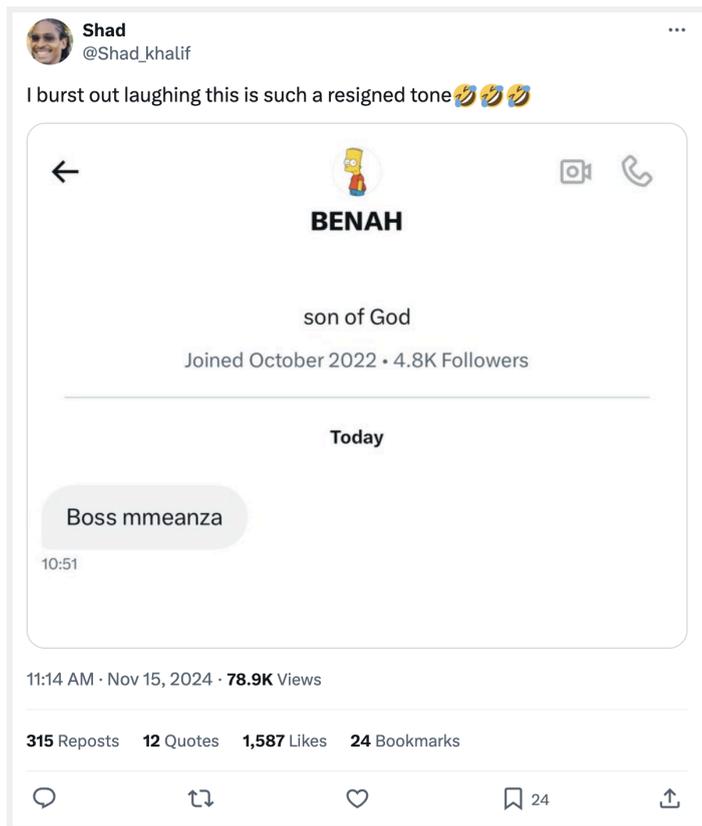
Upon his [release](#) on 25 June 2024, Khalif recounted his abduction, stating, ‘One day, I was hanging out in the boot of a Subaru. I saw a notebook and tore off a page. This is how DCI uses KPLC to find you, look at the coordinates they give. Unaokotwa kwa nyumba (‘You’re abducted from your house’), very simple’. He alleged that the KPLC provided location coordinates, enabling authorities to track and abduct activists with ease. This post received ~460,300 views and 10,190 interactions.



X post by Khalif alleging KPLC's involvement in the abductions (source: CfA using X)

c. State security agencies and armed facets

After his release, Khalif reported continued subtly threatening contact from his abductors. On 23 July 2024, Khalif reported that he received a text from his alleged abductor to '[check on him](#)'. On 15 November 2024, after hinting that he would join the protests, Khalif received a direct message [reading](#), 'Boss mmeanza!' ['You have started!'].



Screenshot of a message directed at Khalif (Source: CfA via X)



Screenshot of a message directed at Khalif by his alleged abductor (Source: CfA via X)

The CEO of [Dubai Curtains](#), [Jimmy Irungu Kabuga](#), was abducted on 13 November 2024, in broad daylight, at his [Dubai Curtains Hotel](#), formerly known as Philadelphia Hotel, in PI, Kirinyaga County. This followed his recent [arrest](#), where he had been accused of supplying water to Gen Z protesters and allegedly financing malicious damages during the demonstrations. Irungu's abduction sparked the hashtag [#FreeJimmy](#), which garnered ~236 mentions and 11,900 views.

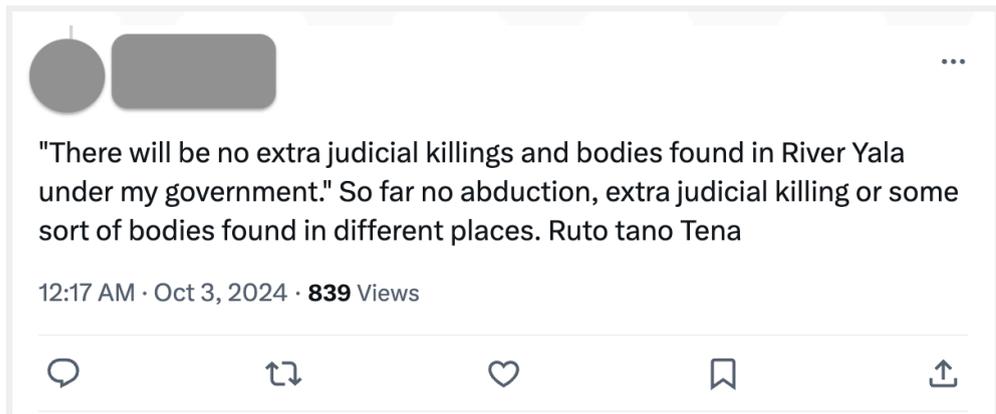
The police raided businessperson [Jimi Wanjigi](#)'s home on 08 August 2024 due to suspicions that he was [financing the protests](#). He denied doing so, stating that the movement was driven by citizen action. Wanjigi, in an [interview](#), then said, *'But let me tell you if there were somewhere to fund them, I would fund them. If there was some channel I could take the little money I have to make sure that they have water and that they have toothpaste so that they can handle this tear gas that is illegally thrown at them, I would do it'*. Following the raid, he [reported](#) the presence of cars with signal-jamming devices outside his residence for a week.

6. Counternarratives

A. The government is not involved in the abductions

In response to the surge in abductions and enforced disappearances, Ruto firmly [denied](#) any state involvement in these activities.

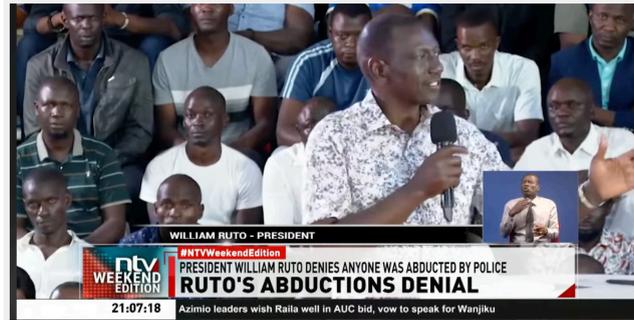
1. On 29 August 2024, during a [town hall session](#) in Kisumu, Ruto denied that security agencies had conducted any abductions during the Kenyan protests. He claimed that he was unaware of any such incidents and urged the families of missing individuals to forward their names to interior principal secretary, Raymond Omollo. He made this statement while some families were still searching for their [missing relatives](#) who had participated in the anti-government demonstrations. The [KHRC](#) condemned Ruto's remarks, calling them a 'blatant lie'. It noted that [mainstream media](#) had widely reported the alleged abductions and disappearances and that these had been documented by various organisations. In a [press release](#), the commission criticised Ruto for downplaying human rights violations during his 25 June 2024 national address, in which he had reported [six deaths and 214 injuries](#) from the protests. The KHRC and the Police Reforms Working Group-Kenya (PRWG-K) disputed these figures, citing a nationwide [death toll of 23](#) as of 25 June 2024, while the KNCHR reported [22 fatalities](#). The PRWG-K also recorded 22 abductions by security agencies between 21 June and 25 June 2024. Ruto's denial generated 4,845 mentions on X, accumulating 25,400 engagements and 750,000 views, with 98.5% of users expressing negative sentiments. Eight TikTok [videos](#) discussing his statements garnered a total of 183,406 views.



Screenshots of X posts mentioning Ruto and alleged abductions ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

2. In his State of the Nation [address](#) on 21 November 2024, Ruto emphasised that forced disappearances and abductions had ‘[no place in Kenya](#)’, urging citizens with information about such incidents to report to the Directorate of Criminal Investigations ([DCI](#)) and [IPOA](#).

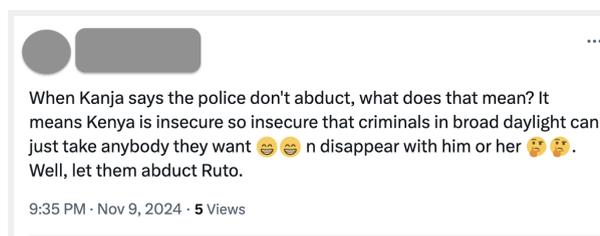
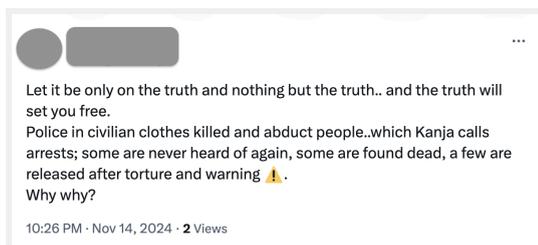




Sample posts about Ruto denying protest killings and abductions ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using TikTok and YouTube)

The Kenyan police [denied](#) involvement in abductions, describing these incidents as lawful arrests and distancing security forces from them.

- a. On 05 November 2024, HRW [reported](#) that security forces had abducted and killed protesters. HRW interviewed 75 individuals in Nairobi’s Mathare, Kibera, Rongai, Mukuru Kwa Njenga and Githurai neighborhoods, including former abductees, witnesses, journalists, parliamentary staff, relatives of abducted individuals and human rights activists. The report revealed that officers involved in the abductions were largely from the DCI, supported by the Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU), military intelligence, the ATPU and the National Intelligence Service (NIS). Speaking to Voice of America ([VOA](#)), Mausi Segun, head of HRW’s Africa division, stated, ‘*Whoever the initial abductors were, the police were involved because people were taken to police stations and many times, the torture happened while people were in police custody*’.
- b. On 07 November 2024, inspector-general of police, Douglas Kanja, while appearing before the National Assembly Committee on National Administration and Internal Security, [denied](#) police involvement in the abductions of Kenyans during the protests. He [asserted](#) that the police only arrested and detained individuals in gazetted police stations before forwarding their cases to the courts. However, the majority of social media comments about Kanja’s statement refuted his claims, insisting that security agents were responsible for the abductions. Human rights organisations also attributed the abductions to security forces. Kanja’s statement generated 3,293 mentions on X, leading to 14,200 engagements and 486,000 views. Of these posts, 80.3% expressed negative sentiments, 19.5% were neutral and only 0.2% were positive.



Screenshots of X posts refuting Kanja’s statements about abductions and kidnappings ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

- c. On 14 November 2024, in a press release on X, [Kanja insisted](#) that police actions followed due process and committed to investigating cases of abductions. He [argued](#) that police interventions were necessary to address violent elements within the protests, claiming that these endangered public safety and disrupted economic activities.



Screenshots of the press statement from the office of the inspector-general (Source: CfA using X)

B. Activists are staging their arrests and abductions

Two X accounts discredited the arrests and abductions of protesters, activists and influencers, targeting prominent individuals such as Morara Kebaso and Khalif. These accounts accused them of staging their arrests to gain popularity, sympathy and donor funding.

1. Between 30 September and 01 October 2024, an X account under the handle [@Kaikainaipaa](#) posted three messages targeting Kebaso. The three posts collectively garnered 2,850 engagements and 201,000 views.
 - The first [post](#), on 30 September 2024, alleged that Kebaso had staged his own arrest, comparing it with alleged self-abductions by activists two months earlier. The author accused Kebaso of ‘clout-chasing’ and manipulating the emotions of young Kenyans but provided no evidence.
 - On 01 October 2024, a second [post](#) questioned Kebaso’s neat appearance in court, despite claims of abduction, suggesting that such arrests were staged to ‘manufacture rage for money-hungry activists’. This post also lacked proof of such claims.
 - A third [post](#) on the same day claimed that Kebaso had not been abducted, but lawfully arrested. It included a photo of a charge sheet naming [businessperson David Langat](#) as the complainant. However, the DL Group of Companies Ltd, where Langat serves as chairperson, released a [statement](#) denying any involvement in Kebaso’s arrest or filing the complaint mentioned in the charge sheet circulating online.

I wonder how an abducted Morara is appearing very neat in Milimani Law Court for his Arrest hearing 😏.

Kenyans who were really abducted by the real government like Alai and Babu Owino know that you will stay out of light for at least a week before your family gets a hint of your location.

Hizi zenu is just to manufacture rage for bloody thirst activists to make money for Christmas holiday, seems the one they made 2 months ago zimeisha.



BREAKING NEWS: Morara Kebaso has staged his arrest in Kahawa Sukari just like how blood thirsty activists self abducted themselves 2 months ago. His purpose is to clout chase and whip emotions from naive young Kenyans. Hii mchezo YA Taoni 😏😏



4:48 PM · Sep 30, 2024 · 136K Views

933 162 811 18

Screenshots of X posts claiming that Kebaso had staged his own abduction ([left](#), [right](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

- On 27 July 2024, an X account with the handle [@MuchiriGichuri](#) shared three posts targeting Khalif. The three X posts generated 6,490 views and 30 engagements.
 - The first [post](#) accused Khalif of faking his own abduction and demanded that he reveal whom he had paid to help him do this, including the amount, or face exposure.
 - The second [post](#) accused Khalif of 'clout-chasing using the DCI's name' and warned him to 'stop the nonsense' or face the consequences.
 - The third [post](#) reiterated allegations that Khalif had staged his own abduction, claiming to have knowledge of those involved, the amount paid and individuals benefiting financially from external donors. None of the posts provided evidence to support these allegations.



Screenshots of X posts claiming Khalif staged his own abduction ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

C. Conflicting numbers and statistics

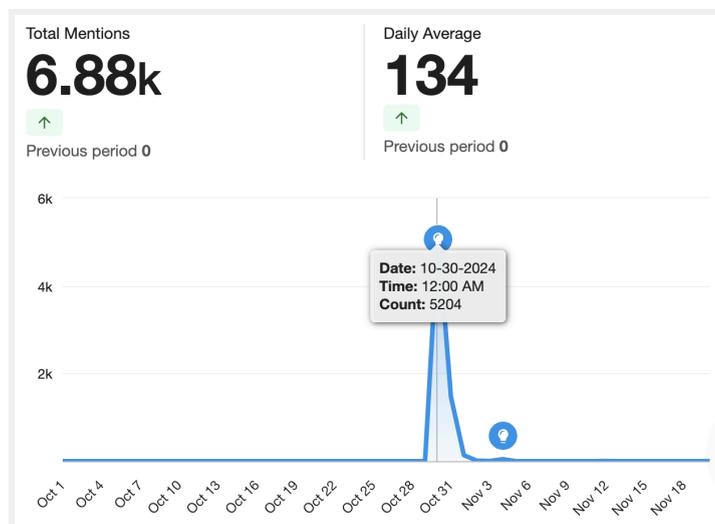
During the 2024 protests in Kenya, significant discrepancies emerged between government-reported figures on abductions, deaths and arrests and those from human rights organisations.

- On 30 August 2024, Ruto [denied](#) any abductions by security agencies during the protests. However, on 26 September 2024, then interior minister and current deputy president Kithure Kindiki [informed](#) the National Assembly Committee on Administration and internal security that 42 people had been killed, 132 were missing and 1,208 had been arrested during the demonstrations.
- On 07 November 2024, the inspector-general of police, Kanja, [updated](#) these figures, reporting 42 deaths, 57 abductions and 1,552 arrests since the protests had begun.
- On 11 November 2024, Amnesty International challenged these numbers, citing [data](#) from the KNCHR, which recorded 61 killings, 73 abductions and 1,765 arbitrary arrests. These figures far exceeded those acknowledged by government sources, highlighting the ongoing conflict over accurate reporting.

7. Influence operations

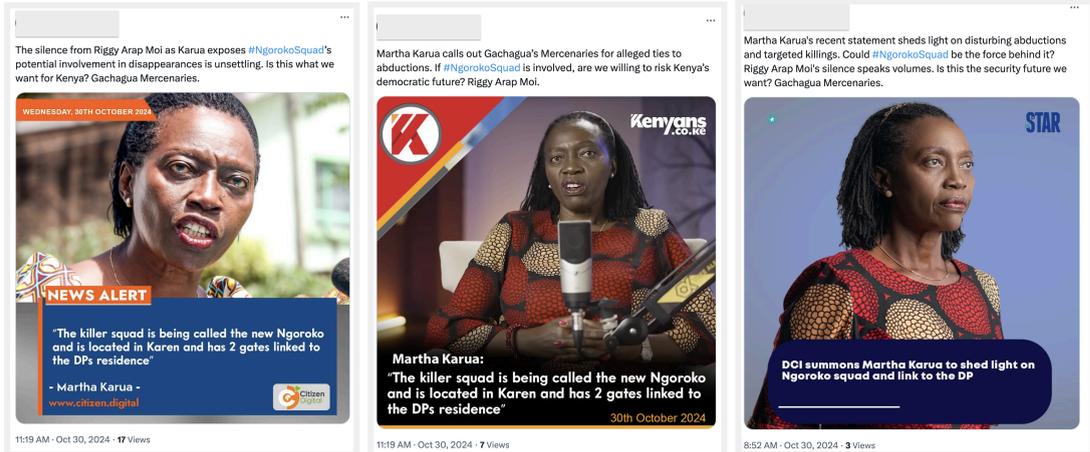
On 30 October 2024, a coordinated campaign emerged on X under the hashtag [#NgorokoSquad](#), focusing on the ongoing abductions and killings of youth in Kenya. The campaign, which continued until 05 November 2024, saw 75% of its posts made on the first day.

The initial 75 posts appeared in rapid succession, each posted within a minute or less of the previous one, all within 18 minutes of the hashtag's first appearance. To date, the hashtag has garnered 6,888 mentions, 14,552 interactions and 2.54 million views.



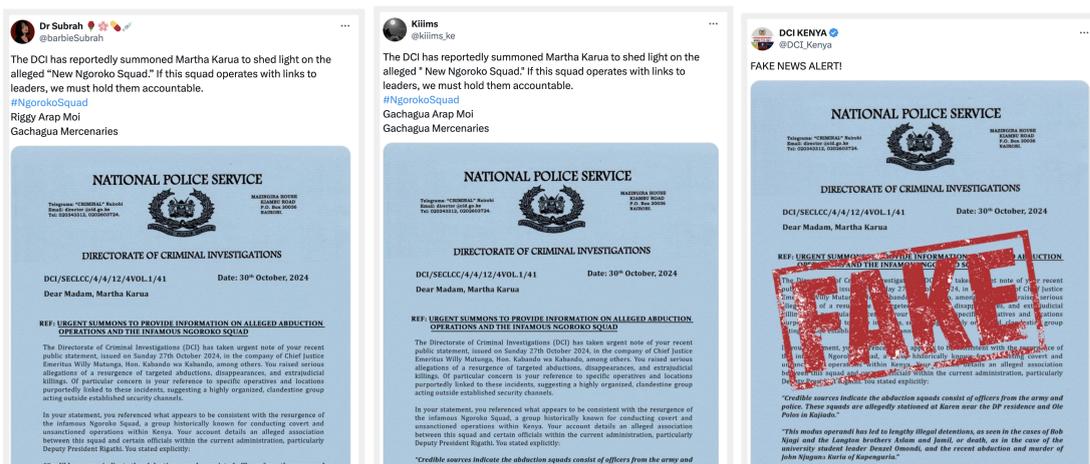
Trend analysis of #NgorokoSquad on X (Source: CfA using Meltwater)

We mapped 26 unique accounts involved in the campaign. Of these, 16 accounts reposted more than 30 times on 30 October 2024, with one account, [@musaueric](#), making 147 reposts. Additionally, 14 accounts contributed 30 or more original posts using the hashtag. Four accounts were both top amplifiers and seeders, accounting for the overlap.



Sample fake digital cards on Karua being summoned by the DCI [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) (Source: CfA using X)

2. **DCI summoned Karua on ‘new ngoroko’ squad:** Some posts claimed that the DCI in Kenya had summoned Karua to provide information about the alleged killer squad, ‘new ngoroko’. The circulation of a fabricated DCI summons letter bolstered these claims. The narrative was amplified through coordinated copy-and-paste posts, with accounts such as [@barbieSubrah](#) and [@kiiims_ke](#) sharing the claim 17 times on 30 October 2024. On the same day, the DCI [flagged](#) the letter as fake via its official X account. Additionally, Cfa’s PesaCheck [debunked](#) the claim on 06 November 2024.



Sample copy-and-paste posts of the fake DCI letter ([left](#), [right](#)) and the DCI’s response on the letter ([far right](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

8. Response by international/local organisations to this matter

The abductions, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings associated with the protests elicited widespread condemnation from both local and international organisations.

A. Responses from local organisations

1. [Amnesty International Kenya](#) condemned the abductions as a gross violation of constitutional rights. By the end of August 2024, the organisation had [reported](#) 72 cases of enforced disappearances and had highlighted systemic issues in Kenya’s security forces, including excessive use of force and disregard for due processes. It urged the Kenyan judiciary and

lawmakers to launch independent investigations and prosecute individuals found responsible for the violations.

2. Civil society organisations (CSOs) such as the [PRWG-K](#), the [Katiba Institute](#) (KI), the [Defenders Coalition](#) and [Haki Africa condemned](#) the abductions of citizens suspected of involvement in the protests and provided legal assistance to families of individuals who had disappeared, filed complaints with the judiciary and engaged in advocacy campaigns demanding reforms in the security sector. These groups called for the establishment of a truth and accountability commission to address the broader pattern of enforced disappearances.
3. The [KHRC](#) has been vocal in its condemnation of the abductions as it criticises the actions as violations of constitutional protections, particularly [Article 29 of the Kenyan constitution](#), which prohibits arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. The KHRC highlighted that these abductions had been state actions fostering fear and insecurity among citizens and undermining the rule of law. It [called for immediate cessation](#) of these activities and urged the government to release all individuals detained unlawfully. The KHRC also reaffirmed its commitment to offering legal and psychological support to victims and their families, while continuing to monitor and document human rights violations.
4. [KNCHR](#) has been at the forefront of documenting the abductions, [reporting](#) at least 71 cases since the protests began. The organisation decried the state's opaque handling of these cases and accused security forces of perpetuating a 'climate of fear'. The KNCHR [called for](#) disciplinary action against the inspector-general of police and high-ranking officials in the ministry of the interior, emphasising that justice and transparency were crucial for rebuilding public trust.
5. The [LSK](#) strongly condemned the abductions linked to the June protests. LSK president Odhiambo decried the forced disappearances and detentions of individuals like Khalif, a vocal protester against the Finance Bill, [emphasising](#) that such acts violated constitutional rights. She called for the [immediate release](#) of abducted individuals and criticised security forces for employing unconstitutional tactics, labelling the abductions part of a broader effort to suppress dissent. The LSK also [pledged](#) to take action to locate abducted individuals and identify their kidnappers, underlining its commitment to the rule of law.

B. Responses by international organisations

1. [Amnesty International](#) (Global) joined its Kenyan branch in [condemning](#) the allegedly state-sponsored abductions, calling for an urgent review of Kenya's security practices. It emphasised the role of international pressure in ensuring justice for victims and preventing further abuses.
2. HRW released a [report](#) on the Kenyan government's response to the protests, documenting patterns of abductions, torture and extrajudicial detentions. The organisation urged the [United Nations](#) (UN) to consider engaging with Kenya on these violations through its Special Rapporteur on Torture and Enforced Disappearances.
3. The US government, through its secretary of state Antony Blinken, [issued a statement](#) urging full accountability for security forces involved in the violence and abductions. It [called](#) on Kenyan authorities to uphold international human rights obligations and ensure independent investigations into these cases.
4. UN individuals involved in special procedures, including rapporteurs on human rights and extrajudicial killings, reportedly reached out to Kenyan authorities, seeking detailed explanations for and investigations into the abductions. The UN [called](#) for compliance with international human rights standards, including the right to peaceful protest and freedom from arbitrary detention.

9. Conclusion

The 2024 anti-government protests in Kenya exposed widespread human rights violations, including abductions, arbitrary arrests and targeted killings. State security agencies faced accusations of involvement in such actions, which drew condemnation from local and international human rights organisations. Social media platforms highlighted these issues, with hashtags amplifying calls for justice while also becoming tools for mis-/disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting the protests.

Conflicting accounts from the government, civil society and human rights groups revealed significant discrepancies in reported figures of deaths, abductions and arrests, further fuelling public mistrust. Local organisations documented numerous cases of abuse, while international bodies urged Kenya to uphold its human rights obligations and conduct independent investigations.

These events highlighted the need for accountability, adherence to the rule of law and the protection of fundamental freedoms to prevent further violations and restore public confidence in governance.

10. Annex

Those abducted or reported missing included the following:

1. [Bob Njagi](#), an activist and chairperson of the [Free Kenya Movement](#), went missing on 19 August 2024 in a [suspected police abduction](#) after taking part in the anti-government protests. After he had been missing for 32 days, LSK president Odhiambo [posted](#) on X that Njagi had managed to find his way to the Tigoni police station seeking assistance. In an [interview](#) with KTN News Kenya, posted on YouTube on 18 November 2024, Njagi described his 32-day ordeal, highlighting the torture he had endured. The hashtag [#FreeBobNjagi](#) had been used to advocate his release. It had 87,714 mentions, generating an engagement of 200,000 and 1.93 million views on X.
2. [Aslam and Jamil Longton](#): The brothers were abducted on the same day as Njagi while leaving their house in Kitengela, Kajiado County. The Daily Nation [reported](#) on 29 September 2024 that the brothers had been stripped naked, chained and whipped while in custody. The siblings and Njagi, who were dubbed the ‘Kitengela 3’, were all released by their abductors on 20 September 2024. The hashtags [#FreeAslamLongton](#) and [#FreeJamilLongton](#) had been used to advocate the brothers’ release. The hashtags had 55 mentions on X, generating an engagement of 93 and 3,110 views.
3. [Macharia Gaitho](#): The veteran journalist was [arrested](#) on 17 July 2024 at Karen police station. A [video](#) circulating online showed him being bundled into a private car by uniformed officers, as well as others in civilian clothing, and driven off. Gaitho had been in the company of his son when he noticed he was being trailed by unknown people in two cars and decided to seek refuge at the police station, where his abduction later took place. The video did not show any attempt by officers in the station to intervene or rescue him. Gaitho said that he had been sandwiched between two men in the car, where he was handcuffed and assaulted. He was released later on the same day, with DCI director-general Mohamed Amin calling it a case of [mistaken identity](#). Amin said that Gaitho’s captors had mistaken him for a blogger named Francis Gaitho, who had been the subject of their investigation. Macharia Gaitho disputed Amin’s statement, pointing out that he was almost twice the age of Francis Gaitho, that they did not reside in the same neighbourhood and that they also drove different vehicles. This, he said, proved that he had been the intended target. In an X post, Gaitho’s daughter [confirmed](#) that he had been taken back to the Karen police station in the same vehicle which had been used to abduct him. The hashtag [#FreeMachariaGaitho](#) had been used to advocate the

journalist's release. The hashtag had 6,679 mentions on X, generating an engagement of 12,600 and 214,000 views.

4. [Maverick Aoko Otieno](#): The popular blogger (whose real name is Scophine Aoko Otieno) went missing in late October 2024, with X users noticing that [she had not posted](#) since 22 October 2024. LSK [called for the immediate release](#) of the blogger, alongside all other missing persons. Politicians such as MP [Babu Owino](#), senator [Crystal Asige](#) and opposition politician [Musyoka](#) called for Aoko's immediate release. Owino [posted](#) on X on 13 November 2024 that Aoko had been found and was safe, but provided no further details about her abduction. Calls for her release had appeared on X using the hashtag [#FreeAoko](#) and the phrase ['Where is Aoko?'](#). Both the hashtag and the phrase had 854,876 mentions on X. The mentions generated an engagement of 2.23 million, with 87.2 million views.

Apart from the abductions related to the protests, there was a notable increase in the abductions of foreign citizens in Kenya, with some being repatriated to their home countries. These were mostly critics of their home countries' current regimes. The abductees included the following:

1. [Seven Turkish asylum-seekers](#): Mustafa Genç, his son Abdullah Genç, Hüseyin Yeşilsu, Necdet Seyitoğlu, Öztürk Uzun, Alparslan Taşçı, and his wife Saadet Taşçı- were [abducted](#) by unknown armed and masked men in Kileleshwa, Nairobi, on 18 October 2024. While three of the abductees were released, Kenyan authorities [announced](#) on 21 October 2024 that Mustafa Genç, Yeşilsu, Uzun and Taşçı had been handed over to the Turkish government after accepting an extradition request by Ankara. [The four](#) were believed to be followers of the Gülen movement, a powerful Islamic community with followers in Turkey and worldwide. The movement, which is known as Hizmet (meaning 'service' in Turkish) runs a network of schools in Kenya and around the world and was blamed for a 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. It was later [named a terrorist organisation](#) by some countries and international organisations including Pakistan, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Turkey.
2. Thirty-six [Forum for Democratic Change \(FDC\) members](#): The group, consisting of 33 men and three women who were Ugandan nationals, were detained in Kisumu, Kenya, on 23 July 2024 while attending leadership training. They were later handed over to the Ugandan authorities and [put on trial](#) on terrorism charges. They were remanded in Kampala's Luzira prison until 13 August 2024. The detainees revealed that they had been [brutally beaten and handcuffed](#). The female detainees also said that they had been undressed while they were handcuffed and forced to urinate under the soldiers' watch. [Those arrested included](#) Ahimbisibwe Owen, Apare Sarah, Bukonya Hakim, Charles Nkonge, George Ekwaro, George Wazinge, Henry Buyondo, Innocent Museveni, Karl Marx M'Mugeni, Maido Latif, Mpungu Henry, Nalunkunga Grace, Owamani James, and Ronald Muhinda. The activists were allied to former FDC president and opposition veteran Dr Kizza Besigye under the [Katonga Road faction](#), a splinter group of the FDC party led by Kampala mayor Erias Luwago.
3. [Dr Kifefe Kizza-Besigye](#): In an X [post](#), the executive director of the UN programme for HIV/Aids and wife of Besigye, Winnie Byanyima, posted about his kidnapping in Nairobi on 16 November 2024 while attending former Kenyan justice minister Karua's book launch. It was [reported](#) that Besigye had been taken across the border to a Ugandan military jail. On 20 November 2024, speaking in a Ugandan military court for the first time since his abduction, Besigye said that he and his friend, Haji Obed Kamulegeya, had been arrested together in Nairobi. During the heavily secured military court hearing, Besigye was [told](#) that he would remain in custody until 02 December 2024. He had then been arraigned on security-related charges, including the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition, with the prosecution claiming that the offences had [occurred in multiple international locations](#), such as Kenya, Greece and Switzerland. Calls for the release of Besigye were observed on X using the

hashtag [#FreeBesigye](#), which had 3,359 mentions. The mentions generated an engagement of 13,900 and 483,000 views.

*This report was written by CFA iLAB investigative data analysts **Nirali Patel, Dorcas Solonka, Moffin Njoroge, Agape Karashi and Ivy Masese**. The report was edited by copy editors **Gloria Aradi, Gwen Podbrey** and reviewed by iLAB investigations manager **Jacktone Momanyi**, and iLab systems manager **Mitchelle Awuor** and iLAB insights manager **Mwende Mukwanyaga**. The research was overseen by CFA iLAB managing editor **Athandiwe Saba** and commissioned by CFA editor-in-chief **Justin Arenstein***

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