SitRep

Tracking the weaponisation of hate speech to shape political narratives in Kenya

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Situation Report

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1. Introduction

From homophobic AI-generated content to ethnic boycotts, the past few months have seen a sustained and visible onslaught on Somali nationals or Somali-born Kenyans and the LGBTQIA+ community. These attacks are not only about legitimate government concerns or frustrations but have crossed the line to hate speech.

These divisive narratives are increasing as Kenya moves closer to the campaign period in the buildup to the 2027 elections. There is deliberate weaponisation of identity – particularly ethnic bias and homophobia – to manipulate public sentiment and discredit political opponents. These narratives, disguised as political discourse, cross into hate speech when they incite violence, dehumanise communities, or spread disinformation.

The United Nations (UN) defines hate speech as communication that attacks or discriminates against individuals or groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, or other element of identity. In Kenya, hate speech has been used to manipulate public sentiment, discredit opponents, and fuel ethnic tensions.

With digital platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X, hate speech spreads faster, reaching wider audiences with inflammatory rhetoric. A 2022 study by the Stimson Center found that Kenyan political leaders spread ethnic grievances and false narratives, reaching millions within minutes and distorting the information environment, leaving voters misinformed ahead of the elections.

Already back in 2014, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) raised concerns about ethnic stereotypes and coded language fuelling political violence. Ahead of the 2022 elections, NCIC banned 20 words in English and vernacular languages, arguing they could incite violence. Despite these measures, hate speech content spread, increasing tensions.

Hate speech in the country has reached untenable levels, forcing the government to enact new laws to curb hateful and dangerous utterances, particularly in ethnic and political contexts. Though the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, it excludes speech that incites violence, promotes hatred, or causes harm. Article 27 reinforces protections against discrimination based on ethnicity, race, or religion. Despite these safeguards, online hate speech remains rampant.

The national cohesion and integration act (2008) created the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) to address ethnic divisions and hate speech. Section 13 criminalises hate speech and incitement to violence, and section 62 targets explicitly ethnic hate speech in media, online platforms, and public discourse.

[The penal code](#) (Cap 63) similarly criminalises incitement to violence, particularly speech that fuels ethnic, racial, or religious divisions. The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act ([2018](#)), section 22 criminalises the spread of false information that promotes hate speech or incites violence. Meanwhile, the Media Council Act ([2013](#)) holds journalists and media houses accountable, prohibiting content that spreads hate speech or undermines national cohesion.

Yet, enforcement remains inconsistent. Kenya's legal framework provides tools to combat hate speech, but the digital landscape continues to challenge regulatory efforts, requiring constant adaptation.
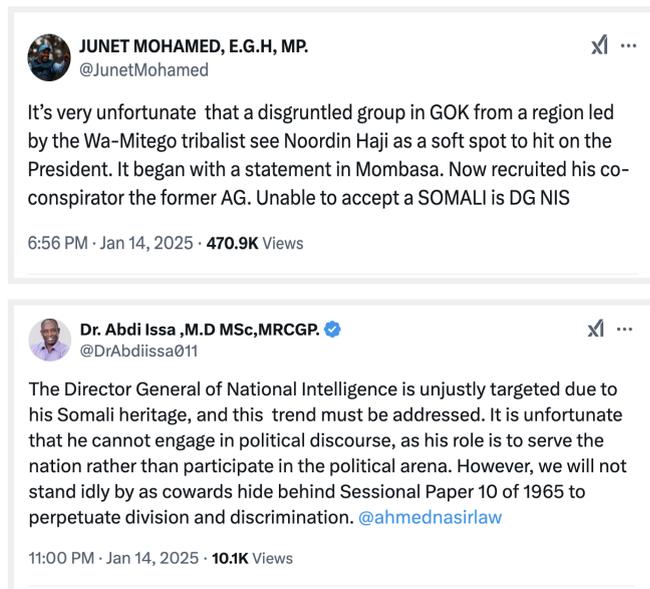
2.   When words have crossed the line

Kenya's current discourse on the political and economic influence of its Somali community reflects both genuine frustrations and growing hate speech. The difference lies in framing – criticising policies and individuals remains fair, but targeting entire ethnic groups fuels division. If left unchecked, these tensions could escalate beyond rhetoric.

a.   Tribal superiority and inferiority: Hate speech vs growing tensions *(Ivy Kemunto and Moffin Njoroge)*

- **The Disappearances**
  Between 13 and 17 January, public service cabinet secretary Justin Muturi's [allegations](#) that the National Intelligence Service (NIS) was involved in the [abduction](#) of his son in 2024 generated ~9,940 mentions, ~56,000 engagements, and ~1.83 million views on X. He said his son had been returned only after he reached out to president Ruto. While some online users framed the abduction as government impunity, others turned it into an ethnic battle, [accusing](#) Somalis of monopolising power, as Noordin Haji, a Kenyan of Somali ethnicity, heads NIS. Similar patterns emerged in discussions about Somali officials in government security institutions. Though there are legitimate concerns about government involvement in the disappearance of certain critics, the narrative has now included hate speech suggesting that Somali leaders were [complicit](#) in abductions because of their ethnicity. Public figures such as cabinet secretary for Environment [Aden Duale](#) and Suna East member of parliament Junet Mohammed [condemned](#) this as profiling. Other political leaders, such as political commentator [Abuga Makori](#) and deputy governor of Isiolo county, Dr [Abdi Issa](#), warned against holding an entire community responsible for the actions of a few.

JUNET MOHAMED, E.G.H, MP.
@JunetMohamed

It's very unfortunate that a disgruntled group in GOK from a region led by the Wa-Mitego tribalist see Noordin Haji as a soft spot to hit on the President. It began with a statement in Mombasa. Now recruited his co-conspirator the former AG. Unable to accept a SOMALI is DG NIS

6:56 PM · Jan 14, 2025 · **470.9K** Views

Dr. Abdi Issa ,M.D MSc,MRCGP.
@DrAbdiissa011

The Director General of National Intelligence is unjustly targeted due to his Somali heritage, and this trend must be addressed. It is unfortunate that he cannot engage in political discourse, as his role is to serve the nation rather than participate in the political arena. However, we will not stand idly by as cowards hide behind Sessional Paper 10 of 1965 to perpetuate division and discrimination. @ahmednasirlaw

11:00 PM · Jan 14, 2025 · **10.1K** Views

Screenshots of X posts ([top](#) and [bottom](#)) highlighting ethnic tensions surrounding Haji's role (Source: CfA using X)

- **A decree that's divided the nation**
  On 05 February, president William Ruto published a [decree](#) abolishing identification vetting for national identity card issuance in northern Kenya, a region that shares borders with Somalia and Ethiopia. Some viewed this decision as making Kenya susceptible to security concerns, including Al-Shabaab attacks. In Kenya, identification vetting involves thoroughly verifying an individual's details against government records and security databases to confirm their identity and eligibility for a national identity card. This practice had disproportionately affected communities in border counties, which is predominantly inhabited by the Somali community. Some online users [praised](#) the decree as a step towards equality, while others [saw](#) it as a national security risk. Between 05 and 18 February, discussions on 'Somali' and 'vetting' generated ~3,030 mentions, ~17,800 engagements, and ~789,000 views on X. On 05 February 2025, [Senator Ledama Olekina](#), representing Narok county, [backed](#) Ruto's move to end ID vetting for Somalis, calling them 'my Abties' and urging the same for the Maasai, to which one user [responded](#) by questioning how the issuing office would distinguish between Kenyan Somalis and those from Somalia or Ethiopia if ID background vetting were abolished. Another user [argued](#) that the Somali community would strongly support Ruto in 2027, citing improved conditions under his regime and loyalty driven by long-term economic marginalisation. One user [called](#) Ruto's immigration declaration in Wajir historic, ending Northeastern Kenya's long-standing unfair vetting. One X user [warned](#) that Kenya could face security risks like Sweden and Finland, where Somali refugees allegedly committed violent acts, citing a recent killing in Stockholm as an example of the dangers of unchecked immigration. On 9 February 2025, Trans Nzoia Governor George Natembeya [criticised](#) Ruto's directive to abolish vetting for national identification in Northern Kenya, warning it poses serious security risks by allowing individuals linked to outlawed terror groups to obtain identification and infiltrate Kenya's security forces, stating, "some of them might even penetrate our security forces—including the police, military, or even the President's escort team.". Some of the conversations centred around the potential [infiltration](#) of Al-Shabaab militants from neighbouring Somalia and [voter fraud](#). However, the conversation shifted into hate speech when it framed Somalis as 'terrorists' and illegal citizens.
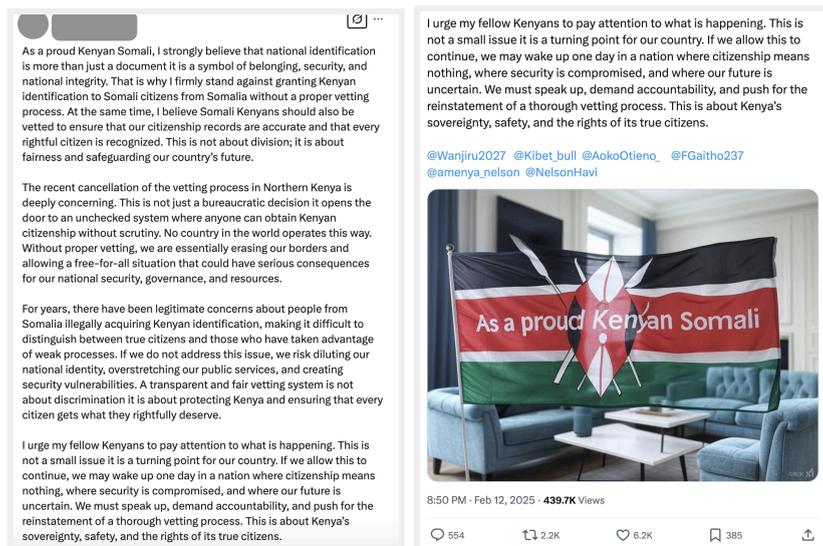
Screenshots of an X [post](#) criticising the cancellation of the identification vetting process in northern Kenya (Source: CfA using X)

- **The 'Somali oligarchs'**
  Resentment over Somali influence [extends](#) beyond governance to the community's perceived [economic dominance](#) and preferential access to public services. Between 13 January and 05 March, there were 22,171 mentions of the phrase 'Somali oligarchs' on X. The mentions generated a total engagement of ~90,700 and ~6.87 million views. Some online users linked perceived Somali-Kalenjin alliances to an agenda against the Kikuyu - Kenya's largest ethnic group - while others drew on religious tensions, claiming Somalis want to [establish](#) an Islamic state in Kenya.

Screenshot highlights [claims](#) of a plot against former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua, potential conflict in 2027, and an alleged Kalenjin-Somali anti-Kikuyu campaign. (Source: CfA using X)

Expressions of frustration over Somali economic and political influence crossed into hate speech when they escalated from concerns about perceived favouritism to [claims](#) that Somalis were taking over Kenya and needed to be stopped. The distinction lies in how grievances are framed – one demands fair policies, while the other incites hostility.

Dear Fellow Kenyans,

I am Francis Gaitho, and I stand before you today with a message of urgency regarding the economic landscape of our beloved nation. It has become increasingly clear that the pervasive influence of Somali oligarchs in key sectors like real estate and sugar threatens the very fabric of our economic sovereignty.

Real Estate:

The real estate sector in Kenya, once a bastion of opportunity for native entrepreneurs, has been significantly infiltrated by Somali oligarchs. These individuals possess vast resources, often derived from dubious sources, allowing them to outbid local investors and monopolize lucrative markets. Their presence has led to an artificial inflation of property prices, making homeownership an unattainable dream for many Kenyans. This market manipulation not only stifles local economic growth but also erodes the potential for wealth accumulation among our citizens. It's imperative we recognize this and act judiciously.

Sugar Industry:

Similarly, the sugar business in Kenya has been co-opted, with these oligarchs gaining disproportionate control over importation and distribution, often at the expense of local producers. This has led to market distortions where local sugar mills struggle to compete, facing closures that jeopardize the livelihoods of countless Kenyan farmers and workers. The recent proposal by the Kenya Sugar Board to increase taxes on sugar, suspiciously coinciding with strategic appointments within the industry, further underscores the manipulation at play. Such actions not only undermine our agricultural heritage but also our national food security.

A Call to Action:

It is time for us to divest from the greed that has blinded us. We must boycott businesses run by these Somali oligarchs in both real estate and sugar sectors. By doing so, we are not only protecting our economic interests but also advocating for a fair market where Kenyan entrepreneurs can thrive.

Let us not be swayed by short-term gains or the allure of seemingly unending wealth. The long-term repercussions on our society, our culture, and our economy will be far more detrimental if we continue to allow foreign oligarchs to dictate our economic narrative.

The Path Forward:

I implore each of you to make an informed choice; choose to support local businesses, to invest in Kenyan ventures, and to uphold the integrity of our economic framework. Boycotting now might seem drastic, but consider this: the damage these oligarchs could inflict on the fabric of Kenyan society is immeasurable if left unchecked.

Let this boycott be our declaration of economic independence. Let it be our stand against those who would exploit our nation for their gain. Together, we can ensure that Kenya remains a land where opportunities flourish for Kenyans, by Kenyans.

Stay vigilant, stay united, and let's reclaim our economic destiny.

Yours sincerely,
Francis Gaitho

Screenshots of an [open letter](#) by a blogger on X calling for Kenyans to boycott Somali businesses (Source: CfA using X)

On 20 January, [@nocountryhere](#) shared a TikTok [video](#), which gained ~2,382 views and ~254 interactions. In the video, @nocountry endorses the call by blogger and government critic [Francis Gaitho](#) for a [national strike and boycott](#) against Somali businesses. @nocountryhere says that this boycott does not constitute an attack on the Somali community, arguing that the attacks are directed at a small group of oligarchs reportedly involved in illegal activities, such as smuggling sugar through the Somali port city of Kismayo and holding disproportionate economic power. The video only received four comments in support of its message.

Separately, two X posts called for the election of a president who would deport all Somalis. The [first post](#) had one like and no replies, while the [second](#) had one like and one comment criticising the call for Somali deportation. Another [post](#) on 04 March featured a clip of Saboti MP Caleb Amisi stating that he did not want to see any Somali winning a tender in Kakamega, a county in western Kenya. The post generated a total engagement of 530 and had

~35,100 views. A sample of the first five comments showed negative sentiment towards Amisi's utterances, with one comment criticising the NCIC for failing to take action towards the legislator.

- **Ethnic divisions on all sides**

There has also been a rise in the use of ethnic slurs such as *'bantu', 'jareer', 'gaalo', and 'nywele ngumu'*, which serve to mark individuals as the 'other.' 'Bantu' has become a loaded term, with some Somalis using it disparagingly to refer to non-Somalis. Similarly, 'jareer', a Somali word that describes a hair texture, specifically kinky or tightly coiled hair, can be used neutrally but is often employed pejoratively to single out individuals, particularly Somali Bantus, and reinforce racist stereotypes. In the same way, the Swahili term "nywele ngumu" translates directly as 'hard hair' (with 'nywele' meaning hair and 'ngumu' meaning hard) and is used in a derogatory manner to mock and denigrate people based on their natural hair texture.

During the scan period between 01 January 2025, and 03 March 2025, these terms received approximately 4,310 mentions, 11,300 interactions, and an estimated 1,090,000 views on X. The discourse also included accusations of openly waving the Somali flag within Kenya and claims by some that Eastleigh is not part of Kenya. One user described Eastleigh as a ticking time bomb, alleging that 'imported Somalis' are smuggling guns and warning that it could soon face widespread shootings similar to those in Compton, California. Many Kenyans have expressed frustration over these terms, citing their racist undertones. Some questioned whether Somalis view non-Muslims as inferior, pointing to derogatory terms like 'kaffir' and 'gaalo' in online discussions. Another user claimed that, unlike other Kenyan communities, many Somalis do not identify as Kenyan and should, therefore, be treated with contempt. The claim sparked a broader discussion on whether a lack of shared national identity justifies dismissive treatment. Some argued that stressing non-identification reinforces harmful stereotypes and divisions, insisting no community deserves contempt, while others maintained that using ethnic or national markers in disputes distracts from the real issues. Others went further, accusing Somalis of defending injustices perpetrated by their own. Despite this, another user expressed mixed feelings, stating that while they love their Somali brothers and sisters, Somalis can sometimes be condescending and problematic. Following Aden Duale's comments, a user expressed the belief that Kenyan Somalis from Ogaden dislike 'nywele ngumu,' a term commonly used to refer to non-Somali Kenyans. One user also claimed that this group has taken over key sectors in Kenya, particularly in security, and voiced frustration over the situation. Another further criticised the use of 'nywele ngumu' and highlighted the irony of blaming non-Somalis for violence while Somali inter-clan conflicts are often fueled internally.

Another X post by an account was also used to spread disinformation claiming that the entire Kenya belonged to Somalia. The post included a map of Kenya covered by the Somalia flag. The post further called for the deportation of Luos, Kikuyus and Samburu 'back to their jungles'. The account has used several slurs targeting Kenyan communities. On 30 January 2025, the account referred to the Kikuyu community as *'Kikuyu apes'* while also claiming that the Somalis would take their land back from Kenya.

The entire Kenya belongs to Somalia. We just need to deport the Luo, Kikuyu and Samburu back to their jungles.
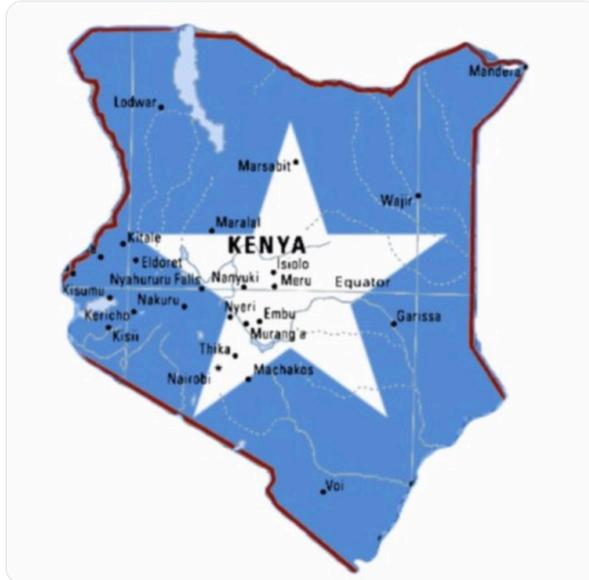
The level of animosity directed towards the Somali community is alarming and has reached a critical point. Somalis and pastoralists occupy 70% of Kenya's landmass, which holds significant wealth beneath it. If this hostility is not addressed swiftly, we may find ourselves with no
Show more
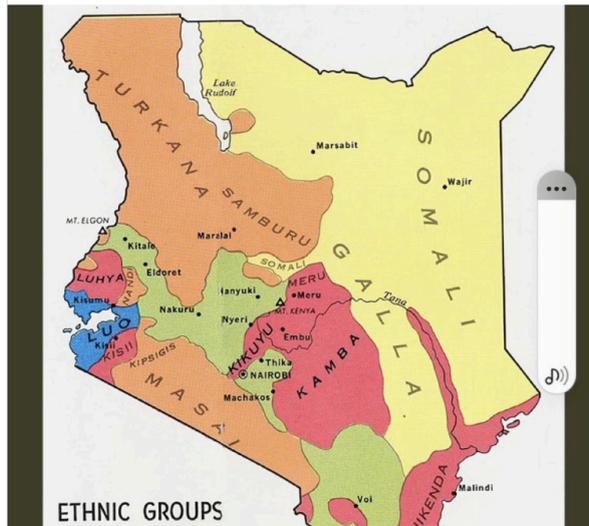
A screenshot of an X post calling Somalis the owners of Kenya (Source: CfA using X)

b. Weaponisation of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric *(Agape Karashi and Nirali Patel)*

Between January and March 2025, hate speech against LGBTQ+ individuals escalated into calls for violence. Political actors exploited homophobia, using LGBTQ+ rights as a litmus test for morality and governance.

Homa Bay Town MP George Peter Kaluma, a long-time opponent of LGBTQ+ rights, renewed his calls for criminalisation while lauding Donald Trump's anti-LGBTQ+ stance. Kaluma's previous

attempt to [criminalise](#) same-sex relationships and ban comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), which he argued introduces topics such as homosexuality to children, failed in 2023. However, Trump's resurgence reignited conservative sentiment, providing a fresh political opening. Kaluma's statements on X reinforced hate speech. His supporters echoed his stance, with one post declaring: '*We need leaders like Kaluma. This filth should not be allowed to spread. The government must arrest them before it's too late*'. By aligning himself with global conservative movements, Kaluma positioned LGBTQ+ persecution as a patriotic duty, encouraging both state and societal crackdowns.

Hon. George Peter Kaluma, CBS. MP. ✔
@gpdkaluma

We are approaching that month when homosexuals/ LGBTQ persons come out of their hideouts to walk naked on the streets.
Engaging in homosexual acts is a crime in Kenya- the law allows you as good citizens to arrest and hand them over to the police for prosecution!
Save humanity💪

6:53 AM · May 21, 2024 · **9,785** Views

Hon. George Peter Kaluma, CBS. MP. ✔
@gpdkaluma

In Africa, Kenya included, Obama and his stupid Democratic Party administration made wokeness /LGBTQ perversion a condition for aid, grants, donations by Executive Order!
It is destroying our society and the whole humankind.
I'll ask for a meeting with @realDonaldTrump upon assumption of office to address this matter and seek his intervention to keep the West away and allow us to practice our culture as a people.

Hon. George Peter Kaluma, CBS. MP. ✔
@gpdkaluma

Biological Sex = Gender = 2.
Homosexuality if not just a perversion but also a crime in Kenya.
Obama, Biden, BigPharma LGBTQ empire is DEAD.
God Bless Trump.

Sample posts by Kaluma on the LGBTQ+ community ([top](#), [middle](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

On 02 January, an AI-edited video surfaced showing Farouk Kibet, an aide to Ruto, pecking the president on the forehead. This video received 90 views and no interactions. This video reflected a growing trend: AI-generated homophobic content designed to manipulate narratives.
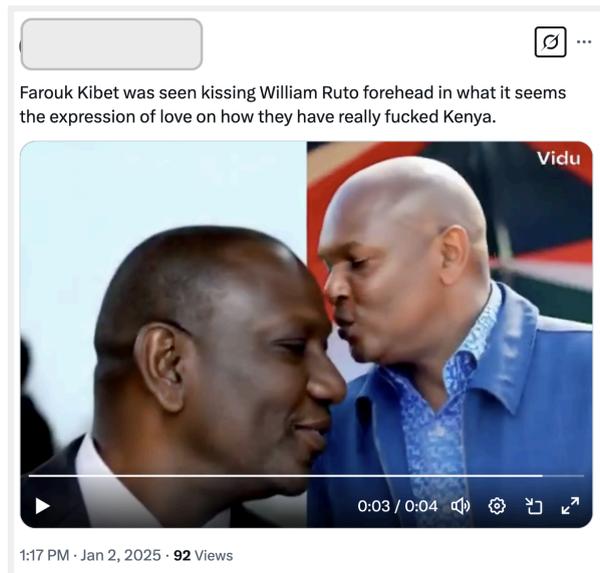
A screenshot of the AI-edited video of Kibet pecking Ruto (Source: CfA using X and Instagram)

● Later, on 29 January, another deepfake portrayed Ruto and majority leader Kimani Ichung'wah kissing. Two X accounts, @dan_nyagah and @MissLingard14, circulated the clip with the caption: 'Gen Z upgraded their fight.' The video amassed ~7,000 views and ~120 interactions. While many X users dismissed it as satire, some warned that older, more conservative voters might take it seriously. One viral comment noted: 'If this reaches the villages, voter regret will hit hard.' Ichung'wah later hit back, saying it was part of efforts to undermine his close ties with Ruto.

*Screenshot of the AI-edited video of Ruto and Ichungwa kissing (Source:CfA using X)*

● In late 2024, political activist Morara Kebaso's critics linked him to the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK+), using his supposed affiliation to question his sexuality to undermine his credibility.
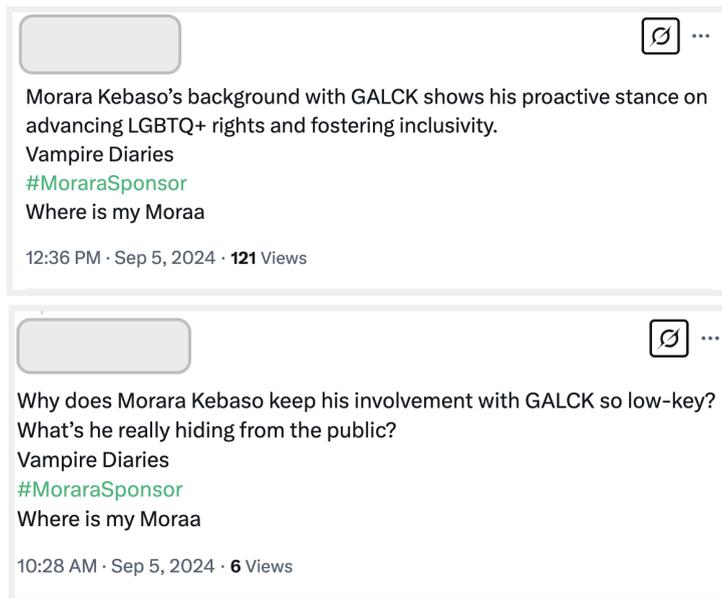
Sample posts alleging a connection between Kebaso and GALCK+ ([top](#), [bottom](#)) (Source: CfA using X)

Between 04 and 09 September 2024, ~320 posts about Kebaso appeared on X, generating 47,600 views and 520 interactions. Hashtags such as #*MoraraSponsor, 'Where is my Moraa?' and 'Vampire Diaries'* drove engagement. The posts alleged Kebaso's affiliation with GALCK+ but also raised questions about his rise to power, his relationship with former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua and his connection with Wamunyoro investments, particularly about the car he drives.

Disinformation escalated when users circulated a fabricated letter from GALCK+, supposedly confirming Kebaso's membership, alongside AI-edited images of him holding hands with prominent lawyer Donald Kipkorir. PesaCheck debunked these claims, proving that both the letter and the images were fake. The smear campaign against Kebaso weaponised homophobia.
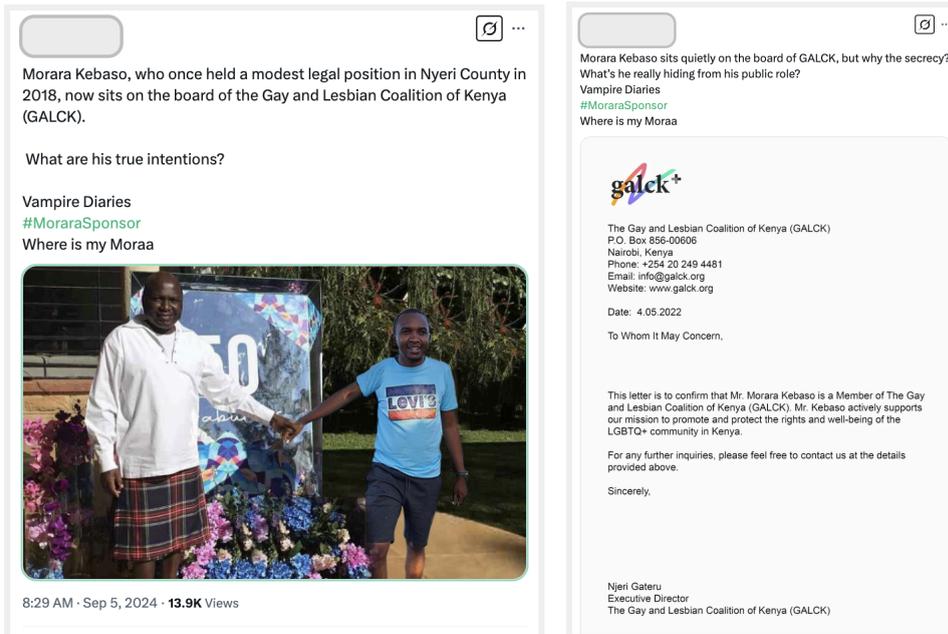
Screenshots of the AI-edited photo of Kebaso and Kipkorir and the fabricated letter of GALCK+ ([left](), [right]()) (Source: CfA using X)

3. Conclusion

Hate speech is not just a by-product of political competition but a deliberate tool to shape narratives and suppress dissent. Politicians and influencers weaponise identity, targeting Somali and LGBTQ+ communities. Digital platforms accelerate these attacks, outpacing weak regulation and enforcement. Without swift intervention—through enforcement, exposure, and dismantling the networks sustaining hate—this rhetoric will fuel division, incite violence, and undermine the 2027 elections.

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*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 editor **Gloria Aradi** and reviewed by iLAB investigations manager **Jacktone Momanyi,** iLab systems manager **Mitchelle Awuor, and** iLAB insights manager **Mwende Mukwanyaga**. The research was overseen by CfA iLAB editor **Janet Heard** and commissioned by CfA editor-in-chief **Justin Arenstein***

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