Kenyan Elections:
What Trust & Safety teams need to know

August 2022

On August 9, Kenya will host one of the most contested presidential elections in recent history. A high risk event, Trust & Safety teams must be prepared to counter resulting online harms.

The impact of this highly controversial election will be felt both on the streets and online. ActiveFence's team has compiled this guide to inform teams of the most significant risks, including terror, hate speech, social unrest, and disinformation and misinformation.

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Background

On August 9, Kenyans will go to the polls in its most contested elections in recent history, highly influencing online discourse. As of January 2022, Kenya has 11.75 million social media users, making up 21% of the total population, with 2021 witnessing the largest increase. Used as a major medium for political discourse in Kenya, social media platforms are likely to be abused by users and political actors.

Kenya - A History of Election Violence

In the last 15 years, Kenya has had four elections, each of which were impacted by violence

2007-2008: Highly contested election, exacerbated by ethnic divides and polarization. **At least 1,000 people were killed and another 600K displaced.**

2010: New constitution introduced

2013 & 2017: Elections are less violent but marred by human rights abuses including unlawful killings and beatings by police during protests and house-to-house operations

What makes this election unique?

It is expected that this election will be **the most tightly contested** in Kenya's recent history. As a candidate must receive over 50% of the vote and at least 25% in 24 of the 47 counties, a runoff is likely. Second elections are expected to take place on **September 15**.

Each candidate in this election is controversial, given:

➜ The current president supports the opposition leader, Raila Odinga

➜ For the first time, a woman is on the ballot for deputy president

➜ Candidate William Ruto was formerly indicted in the ICC for instigating violence in a previous election

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Risk Matrix of Kenyan Elections

This election carries risks across multiple categories, including the spread of hate speech, social unrest, and mis- and disinformation. These risks are summarized below, with more context in the following pages.

	Hate Speech	Social Unrest	Misinformation	Disinformation
Context	Volatile political landscape based on ethnic divisions	This is a high stake election with a history of political violence	Online discourse has become a powerful tool in Kenyan elections	Kenya is known for its disinformation industry
Posed by	Politicians and their followers	Inter-communal groups, candidate supporters	Highly engaged internet users	Domestic political actors and commercially motivated authentic, and inauthentic accounts
Reasoning	Platforms may become echo chambers of hate and discrimniation	Varieties of local languages and dialects, and use of culturally coded language create detection challenges	Exposure of average users to political disinformation	Complex networks of inauthentic actors manipulating platforms and average internet users

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Hate Speech

In 2018, Kenya enacted legislation to protect citizens from cybercrime, including harassment and hate speech. However, ethnic and misogynistic hate speech persist, posing a risk to user generated content platforms.

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Ethnic Hate Speech

- Much of Kenyan political mobilization is ethnically-focused, creating political rhetoric based on class war dynamics.
- Ethinic hate speech in traditional media fueled much of the violence in 2007, the same messaging is now resurfacing on social media.

Misogynistic Hate Speech

- Gender-based slurs in a number of local languages are used across the online space.
- Despite Kenya having the lowest rate of women in politics in East Africa, this election features its first female deputy on the ballot.
- Female MPs are witnessing a rise in online abuse and harassment.

Social Unrest

The potential for violence during August's elections stands at 53%, according to Kenya's National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC).

- Kenya is already experiencing social unrest related to:
  - ➔ Food shortages and soaring inflation
  - ➔ High unemployment of youth

- Increased attacks by armed groups, specifically in Mombasa, one of Kenya's largest cities

- Both international observers and the candidates are raising red flags about corruption and the validity of electoral processes

- Violence is expected to be instigated by:
  - ➔ Exploitation of localized conflicts and land disputes
  - ➔ Challenged election results in the the Supreme Court

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Disinformation & Misinformation

Kenya is well known for its industry of coordinated disinformation which has frequently impacted elections. Cambridge Analytica was used in both the 2013 and 2017 elections, specifically by the Jubilee party in 2017.

Disinformation Actors

- Disinformation is being propagated by both:
  - **Authentic actors**: armies of social media influencers hired to spread misleading political content.
  - **Inauthentic Actors**: individuals hired to promote predefined hashtags using multiple "sock puppet" accounts.

Disinformation Narratives and Tactics

- False rumors about candidates
- Manipulated videos and text
- Inflating the perception of candidate support

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How we can help

As global events develop and infiltrate the online space, Trust & Safety teams are often left reacting to damage after it is done. The ability to proactively plan around potentially impactful events allows platforms to detect harms before they come, minimizing risk. ActiveFence's solution delivers:

➔ Quick, accurate visibility on the most harmful on-platform entities
➔ Mapping and analysis of the most complex networks of inauthentic behavior
➔ In-depth reporting of coordinated influence campaigns.
➔ Attribution and motivation analysis, as well as TTPs gathered by our subject-matter experts, through proprietary sources and technology.
➔ Insights on trends such as risk level, reach, and relevant keywords

To learn more about how ActiveFence can help keep your platform safe in times of crisis

Contact Us

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ActiveFence is the leading tool stack for Trust & Safety teams, worldwide. by relying on ActiveFence's end-to-end solution, Trust & Safety teams—of all sizes—can keep users safe from the widest spectrum of online harms, unwanted content, and malicious behavior, including child safety, disinformation, fraud, hate speech, terror, nudity, and more.

Using cutting-edge AI and a team of world-class subject-matter experts to continuously collect, analyze, and contextualize data, ActiveFence ensures that in an ever-changing world, customers are always two steps ahead of bad actors. As a result, Trust & Safety teams can be proactive and provide maximum protection to users across a multitude of abuse areas, in 70+ languages.

Backed by leading Silicon Valley investors such as CRV and Norwest, ActiveFence has raised $100M to date; employs over 270 people worldwide; and has contributed to the online safety of billions of users across the globe.