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The Power of Communities

Generational shifts?
Civic tech in Kenya's Anti-Finance Bill protests

REJECT FINANCE BILL 2024

REJECT NOT AMEND

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Executive Summary

The government of Kenya tabled the finance bill 2024 in June. This bill proposed a raft of measures aimed at fulfilling its fiscal responsibilities. Key provisions of the bill, such as increased Value Added Tax (VAT) on essential goods, levies on motor vehicle ownership and higher excise duties, were particularly contentious. These proposals were going to significantly raise the price of some essential products and services, thereby impacting the livelihood of many Kenyan households. This sparked widespread public opposition due to concerns about increased financial burdens on citizens already struggling with the high cost of living.

In addition, the scrapping of the school feeding programme and various subsidies was felt to be punitive.

> *Unlike earlier protests which were usually mobilised by political mostly leadership in opposition and associations, or special interest groups in public spaces, the anti-finance bill protests were organised and co-ordinated on digital platforms.*

The Gen Z's, millennials and other Kenyans responded to this bill by widespread online mobilisation, protests, and extensive use of social media and other digital tools to discuss, breakdown the contentious bill, and voice their displeasure.

Key findings and insights from the research

There was innovative use of technology for coordination and mobilisation for the anti-Finance Bill 2024 protests. Technology was also adapted to serve civic goals such as civic information and education; mobilisation and accountability for community funds; and sending messages to legislators regarding the Finance Bill. The use of technology tools to suit local needs demonstrates high domestication technology, and calls for localisation of infrastructure, data and data processing methods.

However, there was also massive disinformation and misinformation posted by both pro-government bloggers and protesters. This affected the public's right to seek, receive and impart meaningful information.

The response by the state where protesters were arrested in their homes suggest that there was mass and targeted surveillance by national security agencies. This calls for concerted efforts to end mass surveillance and regulate targeted surveillance to prevent human right violations.

Besides the state, businesses also aided in surveillance and tracking of individuals linked to the protest. Companies that were repeatedly mentioned by protesters for sharing data such as customer location and residences include Safaricom, Kenya's largest mobile network operator and Kenya Power and Lighting Company, the retail power monopoly. There is a need for the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner to investigate claims of illegal data sharing and audit data sharing practices by the companies.

Other forms of digital authoritarianism like bandwidth throttling, hashtag shadowbanning and internet disruptions were noted. Users reported shadow banning or repression of visibility of content related to protests on platforms such as X, Facebook and Instagram. They also reported slow loading of X during the height of the protests (bandwidth throttling). These forms of information controls are more difficult to prove and call for investment in network measurement tools to enable the public to seek accountability from internet service providers, platforms and the state.

Summary of recommendations

Policy makers need to embrace online spaces in addition to offline meetings for important policy processes such as public participation. It is now important to embrace online as well as offline spaces to provide feedback on the outcome of policy views and ideas expressed by the public, and utilise the lessons from the Anti-finance bill protest in making laws on emerging areas such as artificial intelligence.

Regulators should investigate public agencies and businesses for human rights violations arising from internet and power outages during the protests, and investigate claims of surveillance through data of customers of power utility company Kenya Power.

Businesses should protect human rights of citizens particularly in important political moments such as protests, remedy harms caused due to human rights violations during the anti-Finance Bill protests and support digital tools innovators to ensure that they carry usability tests to increase adoption.

Civil Society Organisations should enhance digital literacy programmes to empower more citizens to participate in civic and other societal issues, promote media literacy that enable people to discern and take action against disinformation and misinformation. This will empower citizens to deal with security threats and privacy issues while adapting quickly in the information society. They should also exert pressure on authorities, to always keep the internet open and accessible.

Researchers and academics should develop technologies that activists can use to track and measure the progress of their campaigns and identify areas that need adjustments, design technologies that co-opt the concerns of minorities who always feel left out, and explore how the longevity of digital movements can be sustained while keeping the government of the day in check.

> *Researchers and academics should develop technologies that activists can use to track and measure the progress of their campaigns and identify areas that need adjustments, design technologies that co-opt the concerns of minorities who always feel left out, and explore how the longevity of digital movements can be sustained while keeping the government of the day in check.*

2. Background and Context

a. Background on the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests

Kenya is a moderately free democracy. It also has relatively good internet penetration in major towns. The country is no stranger to protests and in the past decade or so, many of the protests have taken place online, earning Kenyans the tag 'KOT/KOX' or Kenyans on Twitter/X. Examples of previous protests include the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) demonstrations of 2017, and protests against the high cost of living in 2023. The Finance Bill of 2023 sparked public outrage but government-allied legislators used their majority in parliament to pass the bill with little debate; setting ground for the first popular tax protests mobilised by opposition parties1 . With time, the protests fizzled out after the government reached out to the opposition leaders but muted public debate continued.

A key driving factor in the 2024 protests was the high public debt. Kenya's external debt has skyrocketed in the recent past raising serious questions about the country's ability to honour its financial obligations. Despite the alarming trend, Bretton Woods institutions have continued to extend loans to the Kenyan government. The loan conditions forced the Kenyan government to introduce austerity measures that included cutting subsidies, increasing taxes on essential goods and services such as fuel, bread, cancer treatment, wheelchairs, tyres and sanitary pads among others, through the 2024 Finance Bill.

 It also proposed new taxes like the motor vehicle tax, tax on digital content creators and significant budgetary cuts to sectors like health and education. Such measures and actions were perceived to disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable members of the society leading to widespread alarm and displeasure from the public. This was aggravated by the failure of the legislators to adequately consider the views of the public during the consultation process[2]. A repeat of 2023 happened with the Finance Bill 2024! This sparked public outrage, but government-allied legislators used their majority in parliament to pass it with little debate; setting ground for the protests. The GenZ protests in Kenya were organised through the public space of contemporary youth communication and engagement namely social media[3].

Leaderless, partyless and tribeless' has been one of the main slogans driving the protests. While the millennials played a coordinating role, the GenZ were the face of the demonstrations, they did the groundwork and hugely mobilised other protesters through social media. The GenZ came from a wide array of tribes, and regions articulating issue based demands with a vision of progress, accountability and tangible action. Elements of influence and humour activated the demonstrations and kept it going. Influential videos could gain viewership of up to 2 million, locally and internationally. Ordinary accounts gained instant fame and their handles rose to leadership as they also gained huge influence on the direction of the protests.

Decentralised organising meant that people printed and edited the main posters around the same theme and distributed the materials from their own incentive and cash. Online content creators, influencers, and long-time social justice activists were some of the identified leaders, while others emerged organically to fill the gaps in the organising mobilisation.

The leaderless, partyless and tribeless phenomenon of the GenZ protests could be attributed to the young people's widespread distrust towards conventional political actors. Being leaderless was a source of strength for the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Kenya, as it was difficult to victimise people. This helped put the government on its toes, even as it struggled to arrest and abduct the vocal contributors in the social media debates, trying to brand them the 'leaders of the movement'.

As evidenced by these protests, social media creates opportunities for the development of leaderless protest movements as postulated by Castells (2015)[14.]

1. Magale, E. & Schmidt, M. (2024). Kenya protests show citizens don't trust government with their tax money: can Ruto make a meaningful new deal? https://theconversation.com/kenya-protests-show-citizens-dont-trust-government-with-their-tax -money-can-ruto-make-a-meaningful-new-deal-234008#:~:text=Even%20though%20there%20was%20clear,protests%20mobilised%20by%20opposi- tion%20parties.
2 Jurist Staff (2024). Gen Z Leads Digital Uprising Against Economic Injustice in Kenya. https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2024/07/gen-z-leads-digi- tal-uprising-against-economic-injustice-in-keny

3 Zeleza,P. (2024).The Gen Z Uprising in Kenya. https://www.theelephant.info/opinion/2024/07/02/the-gen-z-uprising-in-kenya/

b. Rationale for the study

In the era of digital activism, there exists a range of dynamics associated with any protest. This study aims to provide a holistic understanding on how different digital tools and techniques support and impede social movements with a case study of Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests in Kenya. It will be of great value to policy makers, academicians and other stakeholders as it contributes to the study of digital activism in Africa and the globe.

c. Research objectives

This report seeks to:
- Analyse the role of social media and digital platforms in mobilising and coordinating the protests against the Finance Bill 2024.
- Assess the impact of digital activism techniques on public awareness and engagement with the Finance Bill.
- Review the government's response to the protests, including both digital countermeasures and physical interventions, and their effects on protest dynamics.
- Assess the long-term implications of the protests on Kenya's political landscape, including potential shifts in public engagement with economic policies.
- Make recommendations to key stakeholders.

d. Scope

The scope of the report was defined to examine the anti-finance bill 2024 protests that occurred in Kenya between 12th June and 24th July 2024. Popular social media platforms were identified for this research namely: Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Tiktok, chat platforms and other technological tools utilised by different participants during the protests. A critical evaluation of how the tools were applied to either facilitate or counter the protests was done. This report therefore discusses some of the dynamics of digital media organising witnessed during the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests.

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3. Literature Review

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Universally, protests have been known to thrust issues onto the national or global agenda to agitate for change or champion an agenda or ideology. Civic space in Africa has been diminishing at an alarming rate; and according to CIVICUS[1], it remains open only in the Island states of Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Principe . Consequently, digital activism has become very popular and the alternative option in the recent past; especially in areas where the civic space is diminished. Kenya is among countries with an active digital public sphere.

The country had a mobile penetration of 68 million in March 2024 up from 66.7 million in December 2023[2], and internet subscriptions at 50.5 million by the end of December 2023 marking an increase of 6.6% from the previous year[3]. Together with private partners, the Kenyan government has improved the affordability of Internet services, ameliorated the cost of smart phones through the pay-as-you-go model. In addition, there is expanding Internet coverage and capacity building for the digital economy among other measures as part of establishing a robust digital ecosystem.

Kenya is regarded as a bastion of free expression that came at a cost highlighted by hard worn battles fought by activists, academicians, lawyers, students and other stakeholders[4]. Case in point is 24 years ago on July 7, 1990 when Saba Saba movement[5] was birthed to fight for the repealing of the constitution that later led to multipartyism. Many who had gathered for the protest were injured, others were arrested and tortured. The status of freedom improved considerably especially with the promulgation of the constitution of 2010. However, there have been low moments when the government has contested the freedom of expression. For example, in January 2018 during the 'swearing in' of opposition leader Hon. Raila Odinga as the people's president, media houses were threatened that their licences would be revoked if they broadcasted the event[6].

Young people have always been indispensable in modern social movements as activists and organisers[7] and not as casual participants, using #(hashtags) to mobilise. Examples abound! In the USA, the Black Lives Matter movement was galvanised by young people who mobilised their peers from social media activism to street protests [8]. High school students were at the forefront of Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, while young people were key

1 CIVICUS (2020). People Power Under Attack 2020, Johannesburg: CIVICUS. https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/GlobalReport2020.pdf

2. CAK (2024). Third Quarter Sector Statistics Report Financial Year 2023/2024. Communications Authority of Kenya. https://www.ca.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-06/Sector%20Statistics%20Report%20Q3%20FY%202023-24.pdf
3. CAK (2023). Annual Report for the financial year 2022-2023.Communications Authority of Kenya.https://www.ca.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-01/Annual%20Report%20Financial%20Year%202022-2023.pdf
4. Amnesty Kenya (2023).Kenyans have travelled the long route to acquire freedom of speech. https://www.amnestykenya.org/kenyans-have-traveled-the-long-route-to-acquire-freedom-of-speech/
5. Onyango-Obbo, C. (2020). The Saba Saba day: A Kenyan story and an African moment. https://nation.africa/kenya/blogs-opinion/opinion/saba-saba-day-kenyan-story-african-moment-1447374
6. Article19 (2018). Kenya: Media shutdown ahead of Odinga "swearing in" ceremony. https://www.article19.org/resources/kenya-media-shutdown-ahead-odinga-swearing-ceremony/
7. Yuen, S., & Tang, G. (2023). Instagram and social capital: youth activism in a networked movement. Social Movement Studies, 22(5-6), 706-727.
8. Tisdall, E. K. M., & Cuevas-Parra, P. (2022). Beyond the familiar challenges for children and young people's participation rights: The potential of activism. The International Journal of Human Rights, 26(5), 792-810.

players in #endSarsMovement in Nigeria of 2020 protesting against the extortion and brutality of Nigerian youth. Other examples of social movements jolted by youths include #ThisFlag protest in Zimbabwe and the #RhodesMustFall demonstration in South Africa among others which demonstrated that digital tools have accentuated activism.

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The #Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests were labelled as the Gen Z protests.[9] Although the GenZ commonly referred to as the internet generation, were born between 1997 and 2010 and have always had the internet as part of their lives[10]. This implies that they have always been exposed to a vast array of information from a tender age. In Kenya, this is the generation that grew up in the era when universal free education was introduced and as a result, they have the highest literacy levels compared to the older generations. This coupled with the exposure to technology and a plethora of information has made them independent thinkers unlike previous generations.

Toots et al. (2014)[11] found that the young refrain from participating in any formal organisation but heavily rely on social media. The number of social media users in Kenya at the start of 2024 was equivalent to 23.5 percent of the population[12].

Coupled with the high internet penetration in Kenya and vibrant online communities, the Gen Z protests witnessed innovative uses of technology in protests. Technological tools like computers and other digital devices have been commonly used for a myriad of activism and civic purposes including: campaigning, news delivery, and political discourses among others. The ease of acquiring and installing software coupled with the user-friendliness of applications invigorates usage in different ways such as activism. Digital media can play a significant role, especially in a networked movement without centralised leadership[13] and have become the hallmark of contemporary contentious politics[14].

These movements feature spontaneity, reliance on the internet for discussions, and have a sense of togetherness. However, as argued by Tufecki, just as technological tools are powerful, they can equally expose fragilities in movements[15].

9. Mwaura, J. (2024). Kenya protests: Gen Z shows the power of digital activism - driving change from screens to the streets. https://theconversation.com/kenya-protests-gen-z-shows-the-power-of-digital-activism-driving-change-from-screens-to-the-streets-233065
10. Cottrell, S. (2024). A Year-by-Year Guide to the Different Generations. https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/style/generation-names-and-years-a-cheat-sheet-for-parents/
11. Toots, A., Worley, N., & Skosireva, A. (2014). Children as political actors. The SAGE handbook of child research, 54-80.
12. Kemp, S.(2024). Digital 2024: Kenya. (Data Reportal).https://datareportal.com/reports/Digital-2024-kenya#:~:text=There%20were%2022.71%20million%20internet%20users%20in%20Kenya%20in%20January,January%202023%20and%20January%202024.
13. Lee, F. L., & Fong, I. W. (2023). The construction and mobilization of political consumerism through digital media in a networked social movement. New Media & Society, 25(12), 3573-3592.
14. Fong, B. C. (2023). Leaderless Movements? Rethinking Leaders, Spontaneity, and Organisation-Ness. Political Science, 75(2), 105-121.
15. Tufekci, Z. (Nd). Twitter and Teargas: The Power And Fragility of Networked Protest. https://www.twitterandteargas.org/

In the 21st century, it has become almost impossible to think of public mobilisation without the use of digital tools. A variety of technological tools and techniques have been employed for different purposes in social movements. Mass mobilisation in protests has been achieved through social media tools which are used to shape movement narratives and mobilise protest actions. Social network ties, strength(power in numbers) and density is a key ingredient in recruitment, motivation and mobilisation[16].

Many people join protests when invited by family, friends or those they hold in high esteem, while others do so based on their membership in certain organisations. The use of social media for social movements has been replicated across many countries like the United States of America where the mass public often gather to protest old and new issues by taking on social media platforms[17] in movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #OccupyWallStreet and #MarchForOurLives.

Castells theorised that the horizontality of social media has enabled protesters to exercise coordination while undermining needs for leadership[18].

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The following mechanisms through which the Internet and social media can increase public mobilisation potential: (1) social media facilitates the citizens' access to information that is relevant to protest coordination such as information about police presence, violence, arrests or possible medical and legal help; (2) social media helps in spreading motivational and emotional messages regarding the protest[19] .

In the section below, we discuss popular social media platforms, messaging tools and other applications used in opening up the civic space and for activism.

a. Social media platforms

Instagram is a free online application that allows users to take and upload photos and videos, apply digital filters and then share. Through Instagram, individuals can share videos and info graphics to a wide audience and thereby encourage digital activism. Instagram infographics were extensively used during the 2020 BlackLivesMatter protests in the USA to illustrate police brutality and to break down exactly what it means to defund the police[20].

In HongKong, teenagers used Instagram to coordinate one another and conduct protests in relation to the amendment of the city's anti-extradition bill[21] .

X (formerly Twitter) is a popular microblogging application. The power of X is emphasised by Fisher(2020) who acknowledges that while one tweet will not change the world, thousands of them can disseminate beliefs that will[22]. When people share a belief, they come together which shows that it does not only end at clicktivism but results in activism in the real world. Tweeting can capture citizen attention, elicit support and an emotional response. This was a key strategy used by students in the South African 'Fees must Fall' protests of 2015[23]. X was also used as a resource mobilizer by young revolutionaries in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain to organise their ranks/actions and quickly communicate news updates to their people [24].

Facebook is a famous social networking platform that is commonly used for mobilisation during demonstrations. It was used during the Arab Spring revolution of 2011 by young Egyptians to schedule protests[19]. The #EndSARs protest of October 2020 used Facebook comments to demand accountability from the Nigerian government, highlight ills of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) officers and to demand for social change [25].

16. Onuch, O. (2015). EuroMaidan protests in Ukraine: Social media versus social networks. Problems of post-communism, 62(4), 217-235.
17. Abdul Reda, A., Sinanoglu, S., & Abdalla, M. (2024). Mobilizing the masses: measuring resource mobilization on Twitter. Sociological Methods & Research, 53(1), 153-192.
18. Castells, M. (2015). Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements# in the Internet age. John Wiley & Sons.
19. Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., ... & Tucker, J. A. (2018). How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks. Political psychology, 39, 85-118.

20. Bowman Williams, J., Mezey, N., & Singh, L. O. (2021). # BlackLivesMatter—Getting from contemporary social movements to structural change.
21. Urman, A., Ho, J. C. T., & Katz, S. (2020). "No Central Stage": Telegram-based activity during the 2019 protests in Hong Kong.
22. Fisher, R. (2020). The subtle ways that 'clicktivism' shapes the world. BBC FUTURE, 16.
23. Bosch, T., & Mutsvairo, B. (2017). Pictures, protests and politics: Mapping Twitter images during South Africa's fees must fall campaign. African Journalism Studies, 38(2), 71-89.
24. Arafa, M., & Armstrong, C. (2016). " Facebook to Mobilize, Twitter to Coordinate Protests, and YouTube to Tell the World": New Media, Cyberactivism, and the Arab Spring. Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective, 10(1), 6.
25. Aboh, S. C. (2024). 'It will never be well with SARS': A discourse analytic study of the# EndSARS protests on social mediaDiscourse & Society, 35(2), 153-173.

YouTube is a user generated content video hosting platform that is majorly used to share video content and for real time broadcasting. In the absence of any coverage in mainstream media, YouTube has transformed the landscape of political protests[26] . It can be used to appeal for support from the public and to share personal experience about protests. The 2010 marginalised minority group protests of Toronto, built heavily on platforms like YouTube for reporting on the demonstrations with the hashtag '#g20report'[27].Through YouTube's recommendation algorithm, it suggests similar videos which empower a viewer with information about particular topics of interest.

TikTok is a free and easy to use social media app for making and sharing short videos with features that enable functional organisation via hashtags[28]. This platform is popular among young people and has interactive features like comments and duets which increase engagement with content. The playful, humorous nature of TikTok-based political expression encourages young adults to develop participatory, political selves[29]. Over the recent years, it has become instrumental in encouraging civic participation. TikTok gained significant interaction and potentially influenced the 2020 US presidential election[30]. It was also used for protest mobilisation during the winter 2021 mass actions that took place in Russian cities[31].

b. Messaging and Chatting platforms

Whatsapp is a popular application for chatting, voice calls and sharing different forms of multimedia. It is quite attractive due to its affordability in comparison to conventional calls and SMS. Its wide adoption is due to its affordance of connectivity and encryption capability which gives an aura of trust[32]. It has been used in fundraisers, work collaboration, community policing, reunions, school activities among other activities. Existing literature underscores the importance of

WhatsApp in political mobilisation through massive news sharing processes[33]

Studies show that WhatsApp was successfully used to mobilise against the 2016 controversial impeachment of President Dilma Roussef in Brazil[34]. It was also used to mobilise and plan the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria[35]. Whatsapp also helps forge communities of interest on civic matters including politically inactive persons[36].

Telegram is a free cloud based encrypted messaging application that allows high volume information flow and discussions to take place while participants remain anonymous[16]. Its anonymity, secret chats, difficulty in searching for new channels, encryption, absence of algorithmic filtering, public and private channels are some of the features that make it attractive for civic participation. Telegram is very difficult to block, spam or hijack in comparison to apps like X and Facebook[15]. It was used in Hong Kong's anti-ELAB protests of 2019 for coordination, and to discuss updates about national level events in the Belarus protests of 2020[37] .

SnapChat is an instant messaging service that allows users to easily share videos and photos with friends and the public audience. The photos and videos on SnapChat can be set to disappear after they have been viewed. During the Ferguson students protests of 2014, SnapChat was used to relay messages from other platforms instantaneously[38]. It was also utilised during the #BlackLivesMatter protests to share information in real time as situations unfolded[39].

SMS (Short Messaging Service) was among the first digital tools used to open up the civic space. Between the year 2000 and 2010, SMS activism was widely used in Africa. In Zimbabwe, bulk SMS was used by activists to spread civic education information during the 2013 elections[40] while in Ethiopia it was used to mobilise protests and disseminate calls to action initially posted on the web during the opening of the civic space before the 2005 elections[41]. By the year 2019, most Af-

26. Sikandar, S., & Fatima, A. (2024). Mobilizing for Justice: Social Media as a Transformational Tool for Student Activism in Pakistan. In Exploring Education and Democratization in South Asia: Research, Policy, and Practice (pp. 221-237). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

27. Poell, T., & Borra, E. (2012). Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr as platforms of alternative journalism: The social media account of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests. Journalism, 13(6), 695-713.

28. Herrman, J. (2019). How TikTok is rewriting the world. The New York Times, 10, 412586765-1586369711.

29. Moffett, K. W., & Rice, L. L. (2024). TikTok and Civic Activity Among Young Adults. Social Science Computer Review, 42(2), 535-553.

30. Hess, A. J. (2020, November 18). The 2020 election shows Gen z's voting power for years to come. CNBC.

31. Brodovskaya, E. V., Lukushin, V. A., & Davydova, M. A. (2021, November). Mobilization of protest activism on «TikTok»: Scale, features and threats. In International Conference on Electronic Governance and Open Society: Challenges in Eurasia (pp. 132-144). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

32. Baulch, E., Matamoros-Fernández, A., & Johns, A. (2020). Introduction: Ten years of WhatsApp: The role of chat apps in the formation and mobilization of online publics. First Monday, 25(1).

33. Valenzuela, S., Halpern, D., Katz, J. E., & Miranda, J. P. (2019). The paradox of participation versus misinformation: Social media, political engagement, and the spread of misinformation. Digital Journalism, 7(6), 802-823.

34. Jinkings, I., Doria, K., & Cleto, M. (Eds.). (2016). Por que gritamos golpe?: Para entender o impeachment ea crise política no Brasil. Boitempo.

35. Uwalaka, T. (2024). Social media as solidarity vehicle during the 2020# EndSARS Protests in Nigeria. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 59(2), 338-353.

36. Milan, S., & Barbosa, S. (2020). Enter the WhatsApper: Reinventing digital activism at the time of chat apps. First Monday.

37. Slobozhan, I., Brik, T., & Sharma, R. (2023). Differentiable characteristics of Telegram mediums during protests in Belarus 2020. Social Network Analysis and Mining, 13(1), 19.

38. Clark, L. S. (2015). Participants on the margins: examining the use of Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter among political newcomers during the student Ferguson protests. AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research.

39. Reeves, C. (2020). Front of house: The rise of social media activism in 2020. UWIRE Text, 1-1.

40. Karekwaivanane, G. (2017). The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

41. Gagliardone, I. (2016) The Politics of Technology in Africa: Communication, Development, and NationBuilding in Ethiopia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

rican governments introduced mandatory SIM card registration[42] which removed the affordance of anonymity and increased the possibility of being tracked.

Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) is a simple and accessible GSM communications protocol used on mobile phones to communicate with mobile phone network operators. This communication channel that is normally mapped by mobile carriers is secure and provides interactive communication. Several mobile operators offer their users access to Facebook through USSD[43]. The USSD based MPesa payment is widely used in Kenya to pay for government services including business registration, birth registration, and university fees, civic education processes and other social services.

c. Other tools used to promote digital activism

Internet news sites are online platforms that provide up-to-date information on current events, trends, and developments from various fields. Online news sites have an active role of sharing information in political participation as they are considered more reliable[44]. Internet news sites in nations with vibrant civil society organisations are used to report more protest events than those in authoritarian regimes[45]. These sites were extensively used to disseminate information during the Euromaidan revolution[12].

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Smartphones were significantly used in the protests, a fact illustrated in most images of the protestors circulated online and on print media, depicting the GenZ carrying Kenyan flags, water bottles and smart phones as they marched across major towns. The protestors employed their smartphones to capture and broadly transmit eye witness accounts of the protests.

The smart-phone was also used as the tool that facilitated access to a range of services and features such as social media, USSD among others.

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However, since these devices leave digital footprints, they may have been utilised to track down, abduct and arrest some of the protestors.

d. Technological tools and techniques for suppressing   digital freedoms

A range of technological tools and techniques are used to monitor individuals and control information flow. These make it harder for citizens to organise, mobilise and agitate for their agenda consequently narrowing the space for civil society and quelling dissent. Citizens' digital rights can be suppressed through a range of measures that are taken by governments which may include: bandwidth throttling, digital surveillance, bans, disinformation, misinformation, blocking of social media and arrests of activists. In the digital era, most of these oppressive actions are facilitated by digital tools and in fact governments are building their own capacities to dominate online spaces using such tools[46] .

Misinformation and disinformation are commonly used interchangeably but refer to different things which are a threat to civic activism. Misinformation is spreading facts tinged with some falsehood without necessarily intending to mislead and is a key tactic used by different players in the civic space. Social bots were used to spread misinformation through millions of Twitter posts during and following the 2016 US presidential campaign by publishing articles from low-credibility sources and amplifying them[47].

Disinformation is intentionally sharing information that is deliberately misleading or biased. It gives people false information that causes them to make decisions not in their best interest and pushes them to extremes with no room for compromise. In the 2017 Kenyan elections,

42. Privacy International (2019, August 5) 'Africa: SIM Card Registration Only Increases Monitoring and Exclusion', Privacy International, https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/3109/
africa-sim-card-registration-only-increases-monitoring-and-exclusion#:~:text=Prepaid%20SIM%20card%20use%20and,social%20
networks%2C%20and%20education%20and
43. David-West, O., Oni, O., & Ashiru, F. (2022). Diffusion of innovations: Mobile money utility and financial inclusion in Nigeria. Insights from agents and unbanked poor end users. Information Systems Frontiers, 24(6), 1753-1773.
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46. Roberts, T. (2021). Digital rights in closing civic space: Lessons from ten African countries. Institute of Development Studies (IDS)..
47 Shao, C., Ciampaglia, G. L., Varol, O., Yang, K. C., Flammini, A., & Menczer, F. (2018). The spread of low-credibility content by social bots. Nature communications, 9(1), 1-9.

the political elite spent millions of dollars on fake news and covert disinformation campaigns to manipulate voting behaviour[48]. The Jubilee government used disinformation on its achievements to sway and influence voters via social media keywords and hashtags "Jubilee delivers" and #GOKdelivers while the opposition NASA spread disinformation about an impending election rigging through the collusion of IEBC and the government[49].

Technologies like spying malware, high resolution cameras and automotive text analysis enable governments to easily carry out surveillance on their citizens. Surveillance powered by AI allows the automation of tracking and monitoring of individuals in less intrusive ways[50].

In 2014, the Cambodian government announced the creation of the Cyber War Team, tasked with monitoring the Internet to flag anti government activity online. The Chinese Communist Party collects personal data then uses AI to analyse this information and compile "social credit scores," which it seeks to use to set the parameters of acceptable behaviour and improve citizen control [46].

Some governments have responded to protests by shutting down the internet. For instance In 2013, Cambodian authorities closed down 40 internet cafes and one ISP temporarily blocked Facebook[46]. When citizens in some African countries use social media to voice opposition, some governments block it or introduce Internet price hikes to make it unaffordable[51]. For example; In May 2018, the Ugandan government introduced an excise tax of $0.05 per use per day of social media platforms[47], a move that barred entry and access to social media. As a consequence, the tax reduced the number of internet users by 5 million within 3 months of its introduction42.

An Internet shutdown is any attempt at stopping all internet activity for a group at a particular point in time, resulting in inaccessibility of online information by the end user [52].Internet shutdowns, which is considered a violation of the freedom of expression and human rights, is commonly used by authoritarian governments to quell protests.

Rod and Weidmann (2015) note that during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the government mandated internet shutdowns which disconnected the population of an entire nation from the rest of the world[53].

4. Methodology

The primary methodology for this study is a qualitative content analysis of social media posts during the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests. This methodology generates research that is valid, rigorous, reliable and replicable[54]. A non-random sample of tweets and posts from #RejectFinanceBill2024 and #RejectFinanceBill during the weeks of 12 –28 June 2024 on different social media platforms was examined. This was a very active period during the protests. The profile associated with the tweet or post was also analysed. Articles that covered the protests from June 12th to July 24th 2024 were also reviewed. Qualitative data was collected through case studies which examined how digital tools were used during the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests in Kenya. The case studies were supported by posts of discussions from social media and other digital platforms used in the protests. All these data sources were used in a way that enabled them to complement and validate each other.

This study took the form of hashtag analysis, focusing on tweets, posts, reels and other online discussions on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) that used the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024. It also used narrative identification to understand how different forms of multimedia were used in the protests.

Hashtags are central to organising information around a topic on social media. Hashtag analysis was carried out to determine the visibility and community engagement of #RejectFinanceBill2024 keyword.

Ethical considerations were made in the study by taking extra care to anonymize the participants as a means of ensuring their privacy. Bias was avoided by maintaining objectivity, avoiding plagiarism and adhering to data protection laws.

48 Molony, T., & Macdonald, R. (2019). Re-evaluating international observation of Kenya's 2017 elections. Journal of eastern African studies, 13(4), 601-620.
49. Maweu, J. M. (2019). "Fake elections"? Cyber propaganda, disinformation and the 2017 general elections in Kenya. African Journalism Studies, 40(4), 62-76.
50. Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, Erica Frantz, and Joseph Wright. "The digital dictators: How technology strengthens autocracy." Foreign Aff. 99 (2020): 103.
51. Nanfuka, J. (2019, May 1). How Social Media Taxes Can Burden News Outlets: The Case of Uganda. Retrieved December 16, 2020, from Centre for International Media Assistance: https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/how-social-media-taxes-canburden-news-outlets-the-case-of-uganda/
52. Joshi, N. (2021). Internet shutdowns during protests: A practice in digital authoritarianism.

53. Rød, E. G., & Weidmann, N. B. (2015). Empowering activists or autocrats? The Internet in authoritarian regimes. Journal of Peace Research, 52(3), 338-351.
54. Sampert, S. & Trimble, L. (eds) (2010) 'Appendix', in Mediating Canadian Politics, Pearson Education, Toronto, ON, pp. 326–337.

5. Findings

This section focuses on the findings of the protests dubbed #RejectFinanceBill2024 to rally against the Finance Bill of 2024.

5.1 Overview of Demonstrations

The tide of the anti-finance bill of 2024 protests that swept throughout Kenya between 12th June and 28th June 2024 highlighted the role of modern ICT and social media tools in civic participation and its impact which was felt not only locally but also globally.

Public dissatisfaction with governance issues such as management of public finances in Kenya has been simmering over several years. The initial #RejectFinanceBill2024 was posted on X on 12th June 2024 and by 18th June 2024, the first anti-finance protest took place in Nairobi, giving rise to #OccupyParliament and #RutoMustGo. According to Nendo (2024), as the bill passed the second stage, the second street demonstrations was initiated with over 2.3 million mentions of #RejectFinanceBill2024 hashtag , reaching a peak of over 5,450,882 mentions on 26th June 2024 with authors using the tag to share events of the protests worldwide[58]. Accordingly:

- The youth turned up for the protests following directions that were provided on social media platforms.
- The myriad of videos shared online made it possible to investigate incidents of police brutality as the victims and perpetrators could be easily identified. Larry Madowo, a correspondent with CNN used multiple videos posted on social media to identify the perpetrators.
- Organisation and coordination was made publicly on X, thus nodes of leadership could be identified, and these kept changing from time to time.
- The high hashtag visibility, retweets, reposts and mentions emboldened like minded Kenyans worldwide and as a result, demonstrations were held in London, Berlin, Washington DC, The Hague and other cities. In addition, celebrities, sportsmens and politicians from other countries came out and showed their support for the protestors online. For instance, a video of award winning anchor Shishka Arora taking on the #AngukaNayo challenge in the streets of New York was largely shared online[55.]

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55 Ghafla Kenya (2024).Anguka nayo challenge in New York. https://x.com/GhaflaKenya/status/1812911833507901474

Photo: freepik.com/free-photo

- Using social media, the GenZ protests have forced concessions from the government such as the sacking of cabinet and the withdrawal of the finance bill of 2024[56] which set a positive feedback loop, eventually leading to belief and motivations among the young generation.
- In an unprecedented move, President Ruto met the GenZs in their 'own space' as he sought to pacify and calm the situation[57]. This was the first time in the history of Kenya that a sitting president came to a 'town hall' where the government had no control.
- The Kenyan Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests inspired similar protests in Nigeria and Uganda[58]. For instance X user SaveNaijaNow called on Nigerian youth to turn up for the #OccupyAbuja protests[59] while the Kampala Journal reported that Ugandan GenZs were bracing for a Kenyan like #March2Parliament[60] protest in a bid to stop corruption.
- Crowdfunding was applied in raising funds for medical bills, legal advice, and funeral expenses.
- Misinformation and disinformation were witnessed from both sides of the divide with AI used in the generation of fake misleading content.
- Twitter spaces were leveraged for real-time discussions and interactions about the finance bill 2024 and other emergent issues as the protests progressed.
- Forms of digital authoritarianism were noted with bandwidth throttling and Internet shutdowns reported.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) played a critical role in mobilising public opinion and pushing for digital rights.
- Doxxing a.k.a "Salimia" (swahili for greeting someone) emerged as a key trend to sway parliamentarians to vote against the finance bill and to call out public officials who seemed to support the bill

56 Bhalla, N. (2024). From protest to power? Kenya Gen Z seeks end to politics as usual. https://www.context.news/money-power-people/from-protest-to-power-kenya-gen-z-seeks-end-to-politics-as-usual
57. Soy, A. (2024).Historic first as president takes on Kenya's online army. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv2g14dy4dlo
58 World Politics Review (2024). Protests in Kenya Inspire Ugandan and Nigerian Activists. https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/daily-review-kenya-uganda-protests/
59 Save Nigeria (2024). Williams Ruto did everything to stop Kenya protest which even resulted to the usage of snipers to kill his own citizens. But guess what? https://x.com/SaveNaijaNow/status/1820364840663167210
60 The Kampala Journal (2024).Ugandan Gen Z are bracing for a Kenya-like protest to end the corrupt regime at parliament. https://x.com/KampalaJournal/status/1806318026230313002

Photo: freepik.com/free-photo

5.2 Role of Technology

Article 33 of the 2010 constitution of Kenya guarantees its citizens freedom of expression and as a result they can freely express their opinion on social media and other channels of communication. A wide range of digital tools were used in a myriad of ways to support the dissemination of information, mobilisation of resources and in opening up the space for citizens to engage in political and civic affairs of the nation. Some tools were utilised overtly while others were used covertly based on the sensitivity of the discussions therein. This study categorised the use of technology by protestors based on the function(s) it was used for, then analysed responses by state agencies and private companies. Below is a discussion of the way these tools and platforms were used in the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests.

Photo: freepik.com/free-photo

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY	HOW PROTESTORS USED TECH	REPORTED PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
Coordination and Mobilization	• Tagging legislators in messages dissuading them from voting for the finance bill of 2024. • Utilised WhatsApp forums and government websites to retrieve politicians' and government officials' contacts. • Rallied protest supporters to spam IMF official emails via X • Users shared content/screenshots of emails sent to official IMF mail boxes. • Registered IMF official email contacts to pornographic websites. • Unfollowed influencers and parliamentarians who supported the finance bill of 2024 on major social media platforms. • Held spaces attracting many listeners and speakers, with one X space reaching over 1.2 million listeners[65] • Signal Apps were used for sharing confidential information during the protests.	• Users reported shadow banning or repression of visibility of content related to protests on platforms such as X, Facebook and Instagram • Users reported slow loading of X during the height of the protests (bandwidth throttling) • Utility companies such as Safaricom and Kenya Power suspected of aiding surveillance of protestors	• Politicians and other leaders joined X spaces as listeners • The President organised his own X space to respond to some of the issues raised by protestors • Legislator Geoffrey Ruku has sponsored the Assembly and Demonstration Bill, 2024[65] that seeks to regulate demonstrations by introducing prior procedures, approvals and liability for public protests • Several protest organisers have been reported missing or abducted by police, leading to litigation for their production.

64. Parliament: National Assembly (2024).The Assembly and Demonstration Bill 2024.
http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-06/THE%20ASSEMBLY%20AND%20DEMONSTRATION%20BILL%2C2024.pdf
65. Media Council of Kenya (2024). Report on Online Mobilisation of Anti-Government Protests in Kenya.
https://mediacouncil.or.ke/sites/default/files/downloads/Online%20Mobilisation%20Report.pdf

Messaging	• Text messages and MPESA were used to confirm if shared MPs contacts were genuine. • Spamming politicians and other leaders with calls, texts and Whatsapp messages on Finance Bill and other issues. • Phone calls and SMS to legislators dissuading them from voting for the finance bill of 2024. • Used X (formerly Twitter) to send messages 'Kusalimia' to legislators dissuading them from voting for the 2024 finance bill		• MPs used X to explain their actions as relates to the finance bill of 2024. • Office of the Data Protection Commissioner issued a statement cautioning the public against sharing personal data of politicians
Civic education and information dissemination	• Developed Github projects [66] to encourage e-participation and put the government in check. Whatsapp was used to amplify well crafted anti-finance bill messages through members' use of the forward function • Professional groups and Kenyans in the diaspora used WhatsApp for technical discussions on various elements of the finance bill • TikTok was used to translate and break down the finance bill's pro-	• Increased engagement with young people by local technology companies through virtual town halls • Increased use of social media by traditional media • Increased engagement with young people by some social media companies e.g. TikTok. • Provision of VPN services and tutorials on how to bypass blocking mech-	• Government considering a social media policy for its officers • Increased engagement and dissemination of information by government e.g. the president and other public officials joined X-spaces to explain their actions in different discussions. • The government relayed information on their schedule of

66. GitHub (2024).Build and ship software on a single, collaborative platform ...https://github.com/

	posals into different local languages and sign-language. • Artificial Intelligence was applied via custom GPTs (Generative Pre-training Transformer) that were employed to improve users' understanding of the finance bill by giving feedback in real time and to expose corruption scandals associated with the government. • Use of YouTube and Tiktok to livestream protests. • Telegram channels used as platforms for deliberations and co-ordination among protestors. Though not evidenced, it is believed that uncensored information such as disturbing images of killings were shared via Telegram. • USSD was used to provide protestors with a catalogue of resources such as: information on meeting and regrouping points, and ambulance services. • 'Nairobi command channel' was set up in the Zello app for the provision of live updates on the areas to avoid so as not to clash with police officers[67] , and in the coordination of emergency services.	anisms during Internet shutdowns and bandwidth throttling. • Investment by alternative Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to provide low cost internet service using satellite technology.	press briefings and other engagements on social media. • - Documents like the memorandum on the withdrawal of the finance bill of 2024 were shared on government websites and other social media platforms. • Used official government social media platforms to clarify the government's position against perceived misrepresentations. • The police used social media platforms like X to relay their warnings against protests and respond to various allegations in the media. • Pro-government digital content creators employed AI in generating songs to support government actions and to elicit patriotism.

67. Wangari, S. (2024). Kenya's biggest protest in recent history played out on a walkie-talkie app.https://restofworld.org/2024/zello-walkie-talkie-kenya-protests/

| Funds mobilisation and accountability | • Community crowdfunding campaigns were set up on M-changa to collect funds for the injured, and arrested protestors as well as fatalities.
• Google sheets (cloud application) were shared to account for how the funds collected were spent.
• X was used to highlight cases of fraudsters trying to take advantage of the funds mobilisation campaign. | | • Government has sponsored a Bill on Public Fundraising[68] viewed by protestors as an attempt to curtail public fundraising appeals as witnessed during the protests. |

Civil Society Response

Several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) played a pivotal role in mobilising collective public action and advocating for digital rights. Organisations such as KICTANet in partnership with partners such as CIPESA, Paradigm Initiative, Internews, Association of Progressive Communications (APC), Access Now, #KeepItOn Coalition, Mzalendo, Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), Watoto Watch Network, Internet Sans Frontieres, Internet Society - Kenya Chapter, Africa Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA), and Tribeless Youth, stood out in calling out threats to digital rights.

They also actively monitored the situation and issued statements and called on the government to uphold its commitment to internet freedom amidst concerns of potential disruptions. The CSOs condemned attempts by the government to stifle online dissent and highlighted the importance of safeguarding digital rights as an integral component of democratic engagement under Kenya's constitution. Also, the protests underscored the critical intersection between internet governance and civic freedoms, prompting calls for more transparent and inclusive governance in Kenya.

The following are the interventions by CSOs:

1. Two Joint Statements were issued and published under different coalitions such as the KenSafeSpace Partners, regional partners and the #KeepItOn Coalition on the internet shutdown and harassment of journalists.
1. KICTANet provided a security helpdesk, hotline and training for social justice organisations and human rights defenders in the period around the #FinanceBill2024 protests through the Tatua Digital Resilience Centre.
2. KICTANet did a sensitization and overview of misinformation and disinformation in collaboration with Mzalendo Trust on 25 June 2024.

Overall, civil society's proactive engagement during this period not only amplified voices against the Finance Bill 2024 but also reinforced the necessity of protecting digital spaces for future activism.

68. Parliament:Senate (2024). The public fundraising appeal BILL, 2024.
http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-08/36-The%20%20Public%20Fundraising%20Appeal%20Bill%2C%202024.pdf

From the above, it can be discerned that technology played a key role in the Anti-Finance Bill 2024 protests. It was effectively utilised in the coordination, mobilisation and organisation of the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests. There was high use of technology platforms such as SMS (text) messages, private messaging apps such as Whatsapp, social media, repositories, generative AI as well as special apps such as radio calls.

Broadly, the uses ranged from messaging, coordination and mobilisation, civic education and public participation, legal support and information dissemination. This study further observed a rise in the use of technology to spread mis and disinformation by protestors as well as pro-government social media users. The use of digital technologies and responses by various stakeholders is still evident even in the post-protest period, leading to the inference that the protests will shape civic space in years to come.

5.2.1 Coordination and Mobilisation

The initial #RejectFinanceBill2024 tweet was posted on X on 12th June 2024. This created a centralised platform where all the citizens could share information and discuss the Bill and related issues. X (formerly Twitter) was instrumental in the dissemination of information regarding the finance bill of 2024 protests' activities and in the mobilisation and coordination of human and material resources.

Discussions were carried out on X with trending hashtags such as #OccupyParliament, #RutoMustGo (this hashtag started trending in June, and continued to trend beyond the duration under review for this study) and #RejectFinanceBill2024 which had a global reach of 24,989,246 mentions between 12th June and 1st July 2024[69] . At the peak of the protests, international celebrities, sportsmen and politicians showed their support for the protestors on X by retweeting #RejectFinanceBill2024.

Some of the ways in which mobilisation could be observed was in professionals offering their resources to the protest. For example, graphic designers created posters that were shared using the common hashtag. Similarly, doctors through an initiative dubbed Medics for Kenya, set up medical camps and coordinated the treatment and transfer of victims of police brutality during

the protests online. Dr. Austin Omondi (who goes by the identity 'JaPrado on X) a key mobilizer of the medical team reported that 'Medics for Kenya' had reached 3000 volunteers and was live in all the 47 counties on 20th June 2024 (See Figure 1)[70] . He termed this initiative 'the biggest hospital without funding'.

Figure 1: Medics mobilization update on X (Omondi, 2024)

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69. Nendo (2024).The #Reject Revolution: When Tweets Take to the Streets. The Story of 25 Million Posts Powering Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests". https://www.nendo.co.ke/post/the-reject-revolution-kenyan-rejectfinancebill2024-protests
70. JaPrado(2024).Update: The medical team has reached 3000 medics across the country. https://x.com/Dr_AustinOmondi/status/1804564126326276581
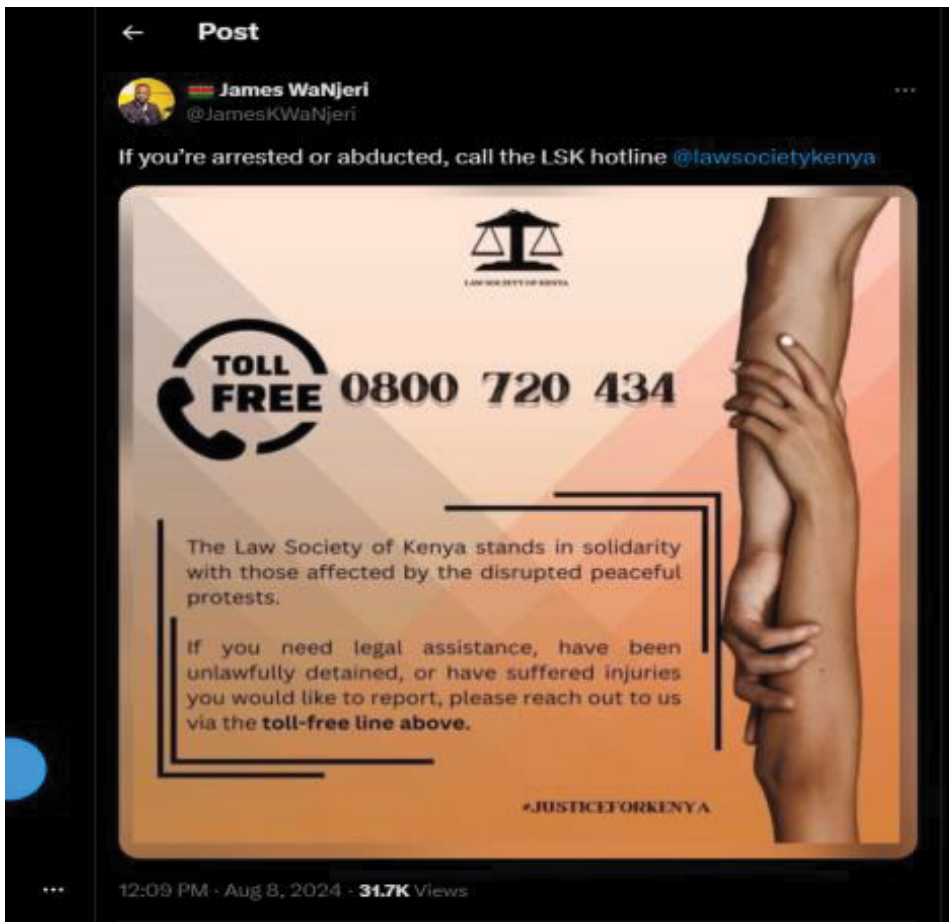
Figure 2: Law Society of Kenya offering legal assistance via toll free number (WaNjeri, 2024).

The Law Society of Kenya (LSK) provided a hotline to be used for reporting cases of arrests[71], which was amplified on X as illustrated in Figure 2. LSK also provided regular updates on the status of the cases of arrested protestors via this platform. Influencers and public figures developed art, music and short videos with embedded protest messages.

Songs like 'Anguka Nayo' by Wadagliz became the anthem of the protests[72] offering inspiration to protestors. "Anguka Nayo" loosely translated to mean 'drop with it' has a deeper meaning which is 'say it as it is' or… 'aura for aura'[73]. The catchy song and dance style were also used in creating varied content that was widely shared on platforms such as Tiktok, Whatsapp and X as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 : Protestors jigging to the popular song "Anguka Nayo" (Sim, 2024).

71 WaNjeri, J. (2024). If you're arrested or abducted, call the LSK hotline
@lawsocietykenya. https://x.com/JamesKWaNjeri/status/1821473785725223148
72. Slim__g(2024). #rejectfinancebill2023 #kenyantiktok   #viral #tiktok #trending
AnguKa Nayo (Wadagliz)- From The Hood Music.
https://www.tiktok.com/@slim__g/video/7384708286970481926
73. Were, O. (2024). Kenya: How hit song 'Anguka Nayo' became Gen Z protest symbol. https://www.theafricareport.com/355486/
kenya-how-hit-song-anguka-nayo-became-gen
-z-protest-symbol/

Influencers, alongside young people appeared at the protests, on social media as well as traditional media such as television and radio shows. Musicians and others in the show business organised concerts in various cities in memory of all who had lost their lives in the protests.

All these cases demonstrate use of tech for crowdsourcing and crowdfunding human resources. X was also instrumental in mobilising the public to boycott business establishments owned by parliamentarians who voted for the finance bill of 2024, with users listing businesses owned by parliamentarians and other public officials as shown in Figure 4[74] .

In some cases, there was looting of businesses and homes associated with politicians. In other cases, content creators dissociated with businesses perceived to be supporting the government to curtail the protest. For instance Mike Muchiri, an influencer who had previously worked with Safaricom announced that he had cut ties with the telecommunication company[75] .

In the same vein, social media users coordinated shunning events attended or presided over by key government officials as a way of demonstrating their dissatisfaction. For example, activist Mwabili Mwagodi used X to mobilise the public to stay away from a church service in Nyahururu that was graced by the president on 23rd June 2024 (see Figure 4) [76]. Pictures and videos of people walking out of public events were circulated on social media as well as private messaging apps.

This massive mobilisation also saw infiltration of platforms by agents and sympathisers of government officials. Due to this infiltration of online coordination meetings such as X spaces, and in order to avoid surveillance, protestors shifted to the use of Signal App for communication and sharing of confidential information[77]. Signal is a private messaging app with end-to-end encryption for both voice and text messages, among other security features.
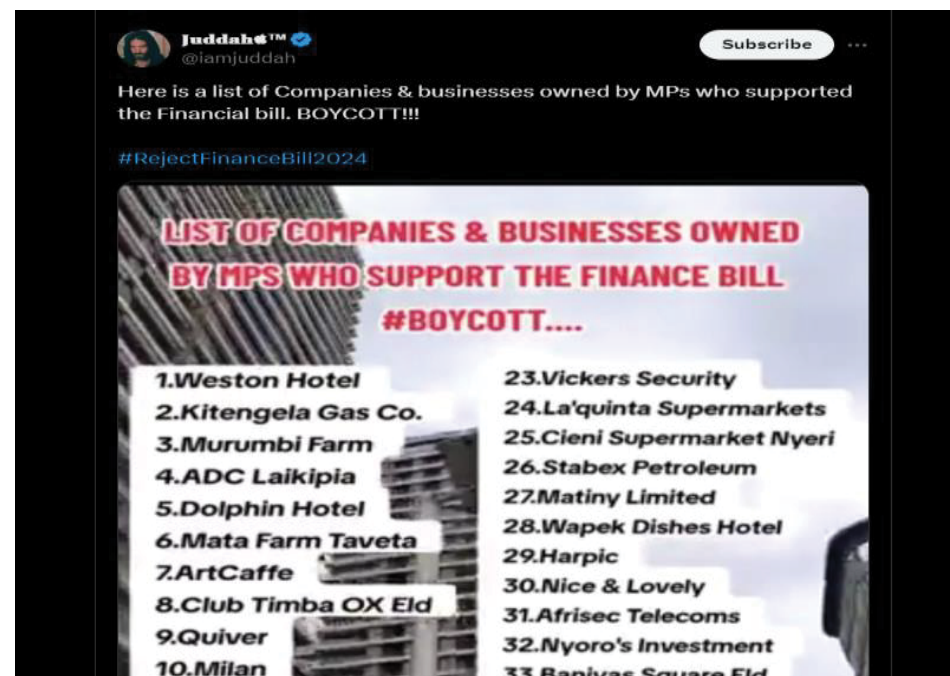

Figure 4: An X user shares a list of businesses to be boycotted during the Anti Finance Bill protests (Juddah, 2024).

In addition to preparations for the protests, technology was also key during the actual protests. For example, protesters used Zello[78] walkie talkie app to conveniently stay in touch over the internet and coordinate various aspects of the protest among different groups. Zello uses a fraction of the bandwidth that a conventional call uses which implies that even if the signals get jammed, calls made through the app can still go through. Public and private channels can be set up for

74. iamJuddah(2024).Here is a list of Companies & businesses owned by MPs who supported the Financial bill: BOYCOTT!!!https://x.com/iamjuddah/status/1805132374188941777
75. Ngina, F. (2024). Kenyan influencers sever ties with Safaricom amid Finance Bill backlash. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/sports/newsbeat-tech/article/2001497895/kenyan-influencers-sever-ties-with-safaricom-amid-finance-bill-backlash

76. Mwagodi,M. (2024). We need massive reinforcements in Nyahururu my church ACK is hosting this thief of Taxpayer resources…https://x.com/mwabilimwagodi/status/1804364089180741936
77. Gachago, N. (2024).Move all your #RejectFinanceBill2024 or Maadamano whatsapp groups to Signal. https://x.com/Nyandia_G/status/1804866767640019308
78. Zello has previously been used to recruit and coordinate volunteers, manage the recovery needs of disaster victims, and deploy resources in the field during hurricanes and floods in coastal Louisiana and Texas as well as in other nations for crowdsourced public safety. Its application in the Finance Bill 2024 protests may have been inspired by its successful use in such cases.

Figure5: An X user mobilising protestors not to attend a church function graced by the president (Elder, 2024).

discussions and updates. Due to its features, 'Nairobi command channel' was set up in the Zello app for the provision of live updates on the areas to avoid so as not to clash with police officers[79], and in the coordination of emergency services. Data from Sensor Tower indicates that Zello recorded downloads of over 40,000 at the height of the protests between 17th and 25th June 2024 signifying its utility[80].

During the finance bill 2024 protests, USSD was used to provide people with a catalogue of resources. USSD service codes can be acquired from telecommunication providers and used to develop applications that handle USSD requests. By dialling USSD code *665*971# a range of resources were provided including: information on meeting and regrouping points, ambulance services, contributions to the cause, direct lines to legal assistance for arrested protestors, to report police brutality, and to find out how their MPs voted on the finance bill[81]. Due to its properties such as non-reliance on internet access, cost effectiveness and automation, USSD served as a powerful tool for delivering much needed services especially to protestors in areas with limited internet connectivity.

Telegram channels were also used as platforms for deliberations and co-ordination among protestors. A telegram channel named 'GenZ#TotalShutdown'[82] was set up to make arrangements for the #OccupyParliament and Total shutdown Kenya protests of 25th June 2024. Telegram was suitable for the coordination of the protests probably due to its covert nature.While technology was key in mobilising protesters,
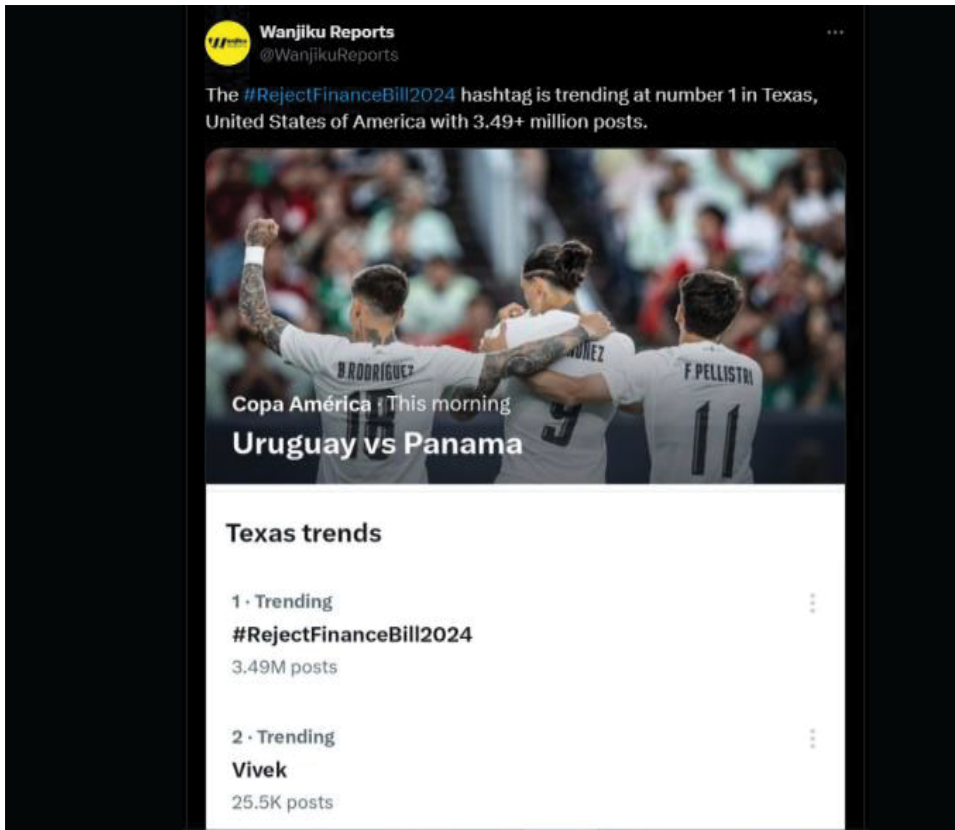
> " *Social media users within and outside Kenya reported discrepancies between how hashtags were listed in different jurisdictions. For instance on June 24th, #RejectFinanceBill trended at number 1 in Texas, United States of America on X with 3.49+ million posts[83] and at number 1 in Botswana with over 3.58 million [84] posts but was not listed as trending in Kenya (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).*

79. Omondi, D. (2024). How technology powered Gen Z 'Occupy Parliament' protests. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/sci-tech/article/2001497618/how-technology-powered-gen-z-occupy-parliament-protests
80. Mwangi, K. (2024).Walkie-talkie app posts record downloads in Kenya during GenZ protests. https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/corporate/technology/walkie-talkie-app-posts-record-downloads-during-genz-protests-4694812
81. Kombo, S. (2024). #OccupyParliament Day 2: Tech is Central as Kenyans Utilize USSD, AI, Zello and Satellite Communication. https://techweez.com/2024/06/20/occupyparliament-tech-initiatives/

82.. OccupyBunge254(Nd). Kenya Ni Home.https://t.me/s/occupybunge254
83. WanjikuReports(2024).The #RejectFinanceBill2024 hashtag is trending at number 1 in Texas, United States of America with 3.49+ million posts.https://x.com/WanjikuReports/status/1805287462144549209
84. Jamil, G. (2024).Am here in Botswana and I can see you people are not joking #RejectFinanceBill2024. https://x.com/Gamal-brb/status/1805320975652630953
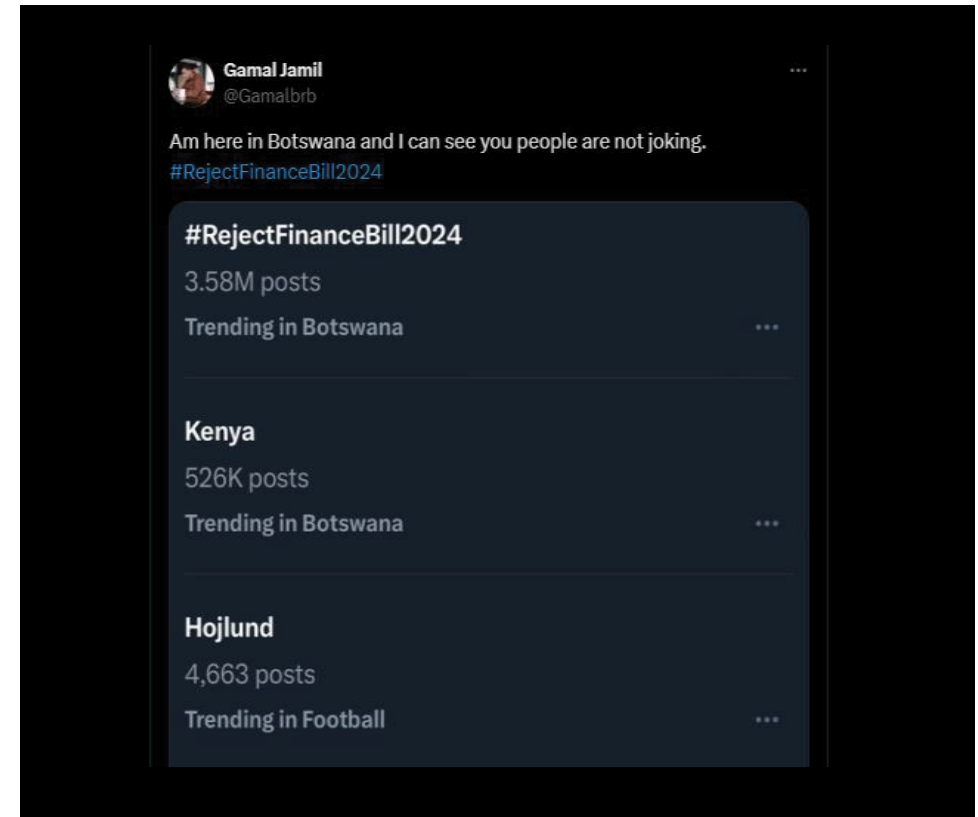
Figure 6: Hashtag shadowbanning during the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests (Wanjiku, 2024)

This led to the contention that shadowbanning[85] was applied on the X platform to suppress the visibility of trending hashtags. Among the reasons for this was that unlike typically when a trending hashtag autocompletes, the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024 would not autocomplete and had to be typed manually; signalling that it had been suppressed.

It was also noted that some hashtags associated with the protest such as #RutoMustGo were marked as offensive[86] (see Figure 8), implying that they might have been reported or flagged as hate-inducing or abusive. Other users noticed that the hashtag had been hijacked with misspelt hashtags to derail it from trending by driving traffic to unintended discussions thus making the original hashtag less visible. To avert such hijacking, users informed protestors of the correct hashtag and called out accounts with misspelt hashtags as illustrated in Figure 9[87] . One X user, John Doe innovated a website through which a user could tweet using #RejectFinanceBill2024 without encountering any issues as illustrated in Figure 10 [88]

.The varied use of hashtags demonstrate the key role that social media platforms increasingly play in public discourse. This calls for X (formerly Twitter) and other platforms that were widely used for discourse to invest in localisation of content moderation in order to avoid interrupting democratic processes such as discussions on a Bill under a specific hashtag.

Figure7: #RejectFinanceBill hashtag trending in Botswana (Jamil 2024)

85. Shadow banning involves reducing the visibility of content. This practice has been a topic of controversy and discussion due to its implications for free speech and content moderation.
86. Njagi (2024). Excuse me @elonmusk, @twitter why is #RutoMustGo being labelled as offensive content? https://x.com/_Njagi_/status/1807291289999696096
87. Sir-Rap-A-Lot(2024). Beware of these misleading hashtags :The official hashtag is #RejectFinanceBill2024. https://x.com/Osama_otero/status/1804927815751512256
88. Masinde, S. (2024).Guys, I have a simple solution for our hashtag problem. https://x.com/StanleyMasinde_/status/1805192558588379266

The varied use of hashtags demonstrate the key role that social media platforms increasingly play in public discourse. This calls for X (formerly Twitter) and other platforms that were widely used for discourse to invest in localisation of content moderation in order to avoid interrupting democratic processes such as discussions on a Bill under a specific hashtag.
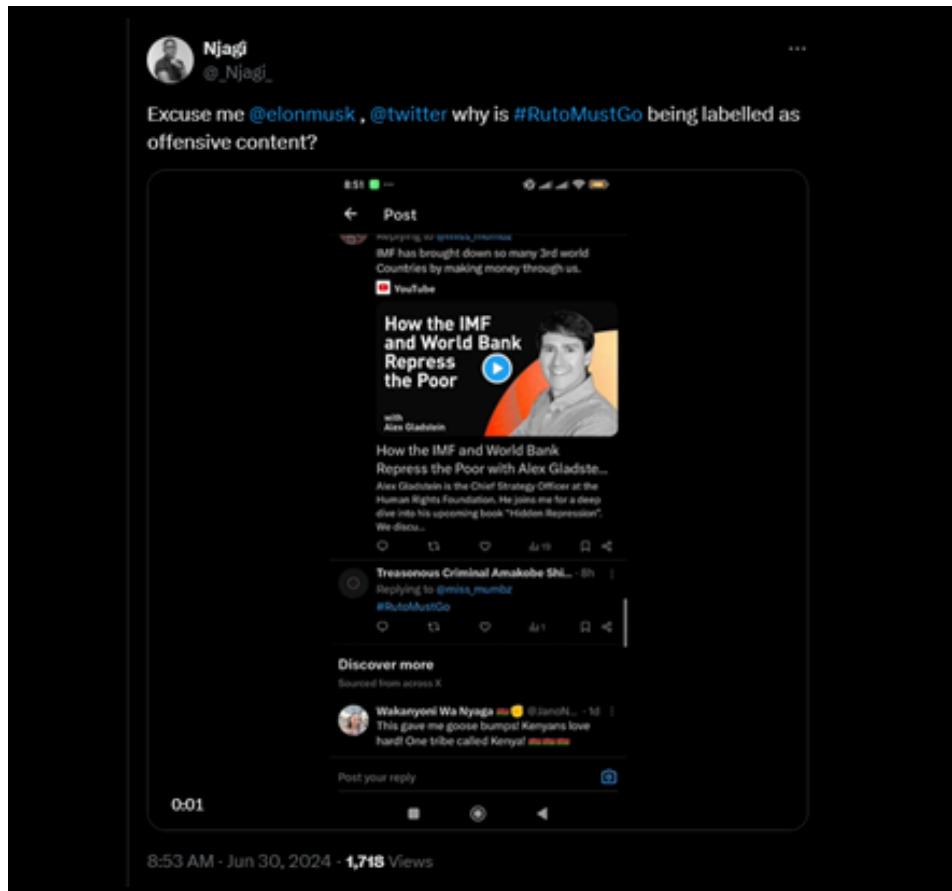

Figure 8: Concerns raised by users on some hashtags being marked as offensive (Njagi, 2024).

In what appeared to be a response to the coordinating power of digital technologies, government officials joined X and other spaces and attempted to engage the public on key concerns. At the same time however, vocal digital activists were arrested and some were taken to unspecified police stations. In response, social media was used to highlight such cases and call for release of the activists. In one case, an X space was run for over 7 hours that continuously called for the release of popular blogger Billy Simani also known as 'Crazy Nairobian' who had been arrested on

21st June 2024 [89] . The space attracted senior government officials who were all called to account for missing persons. While Crazy Nairobian was eventually released, protesters continued to be arrested and detained extralegally, as their charges or place of detention was not known. Many of the cases came to the limelight after social media users noted low activity on the activists accounts. Sadly, some of them are yet to be found, while others have been found dead. An example
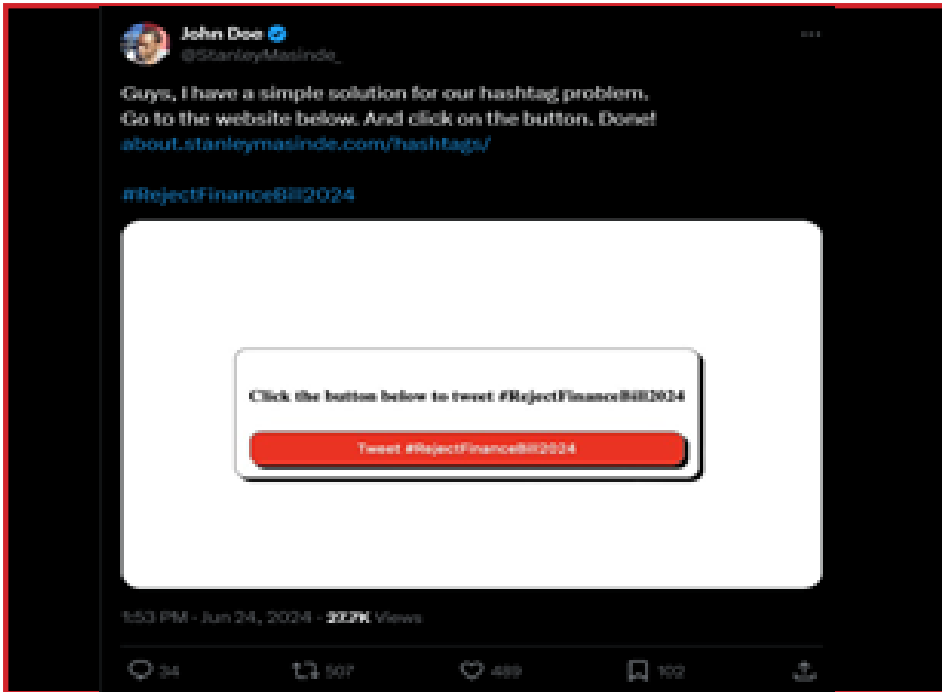

Figure 9: Misleading hashtags (Otero, 2024)

is Denzel Omondi, a student leader whose body was found in a quarry in Juja after engaging in the anti-finance Bill protests at parliament buildings[90] . Such extra-legal arrests led some protesters to publicly present themselves to the police to pre-empt being arrested or detained clandes-

89. Moturi, N. & Ogetta, D. (2024).Twitter Space like no other: For seven-hours, 1.2 million views, tweeps go hard on State, tax plans.https://nation.africa/kenya/news/-twitter-space-like-no-other-for-seven-hours-1-2-million-views-tweeps-go-hard-on-state-tax-plans-4666166
90. Abich, A. (2024). Denzel Omondi murder: Calls for justice as slain JKUAT student is laid to rest.https://www.citizen.digital/news/denzel-omondi-murder-calls-for-justice-as-slain-jkuat-student-is-laid-to-rest-n346402

Figure 10: An innovative tool to ensure users typed the correct hashtag (Masinde 2014)

tinely. Even then, arrests derailed key messages of the protest, with significant energy being spent advocating for the release of protesters online.

Another response to the protests is an attempt to control organising of protests through legislation. The Assembly and Demonstration Bill, 2024 that is sponsored by government allied MP Goeffrey Ruku seeks to introduce prior procedures and approvals for public protests. This Bill also introduces liability for protest organisers for damages during protests. Digital activists and members of the public view the Bill as an attempt to curtail freedom of assembly and picketing. They have been mobilising against the Bill and sent memoranda to Parliament[91]. The government action shows a disconnect with its charm offensive because the Bill goes against the aspirations of the public which were expressed online.

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91. BungeLaMayut (2024).Amkeni! Wanataka kuzima maandamano!https://x.com/BungeLaMayut/status/1830878025946214783

From a technology policy perspective, this calls for targeted digital literacy among public officers as well as increased research into ways of resolving emerging tensions between technology and democracy. In addition, civil society needs to continuously translate well known human rights such as the right to opinion, assembly and petition to realities of the digital age. In addition, it should exert pressure on authorities to always keep the internet open and accessible.

5.2.2 Sending Messages

Protestors encouraged social media users to send messages to their members of parliament to persuade them not to vote for the Finance bill 2024. This was mainly observed on X as well as WhatsApp groups where cell phone numbers of members of parliament were widely shared un-

Figure 11: Hon Osoro complains after his phones were spammed by protestors (Kinuthia, 2024).

der a practice that became known as 'kusalimia'. Kusalimia roughly translates as 'sending greetings' and it involved many people sending messages to the legislator's phone numbers resulting in spamming of the legislators lines. For example during the period of the protests, South Mugirango MP Hon.Silvanus Osoro claimed to have received over 3000 messages, half being about the finance bill while the rest were insults and requests for financial aid (see Figure 11 above) [92].
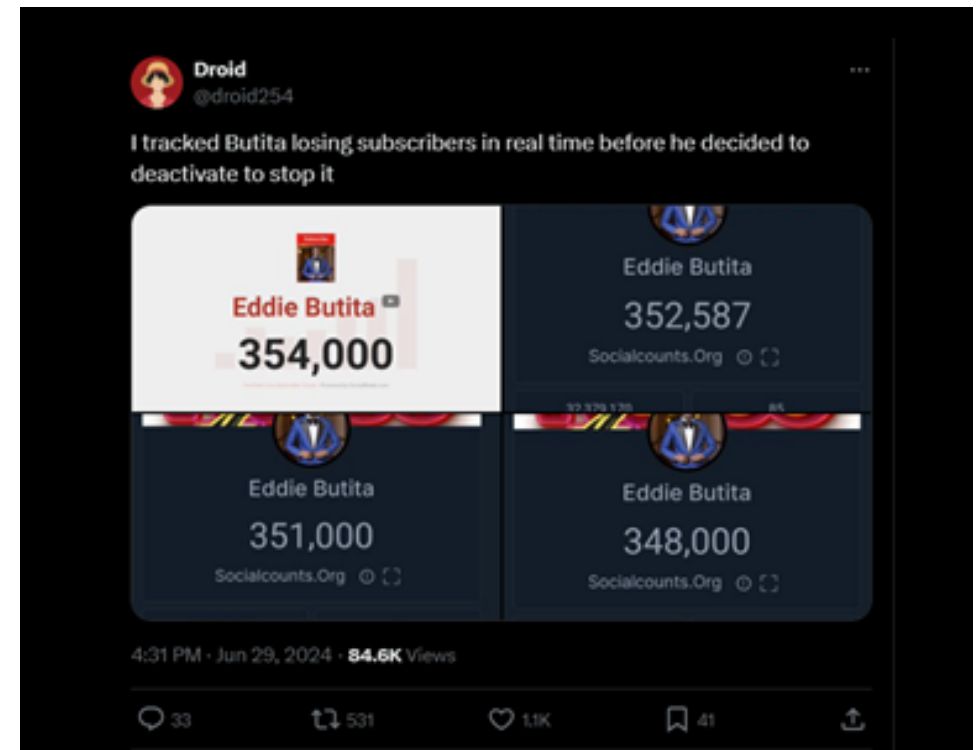
The messages were not only sent to legislators on SMS but also on Whatsapp. WhatsApp with its high penetration rate in Kenya, plays a big role in the kenyan political campaign organising, and community governance. Collective governance groups such as church prayer groups, community residential areas are all mainly governed through whatsapp. It was therefore no wonder

that private cell phone numbers could be easily accessed. To confirm the identity of the persons owning the cell phone numbers, people sent money through Mpesa and after the transactions the full names of the recipients were revealed. This aided in confirming if the recipient was the parliamentarian being sought. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that local community groups were of significant importance in the coordination and distribution of the anti-finance bill and other protest information.

Besides legislators, leaders and institutions viewed as key in the finance Bill were also messaged. Protestors encouraged Kenyans to email the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to relay their discontent with the proposed finance bill. Protesters linked many of the harsh proposals in the Finance Bill to recent IMF intervention programmes which included the introduction of a 2.5 per-

Figure 12: Reports of KRG the Don's TikTok account having been blocked after massive reporting (Nyakundi, 2024).

Figure 13: Tracking Eddy Butita's loss of subscribers on social media (Droid, 2024).

92. Kimani, B. (2024). Osoro, Salasya receive over 8000 messages as Kenyans ask MPs to reject Finance Bill 2024. https://www.citizen.digital/news/osoro-salasya-receive-over-8000-messages-as-kenyans-ask-mps-to-reject-finance-bill-2024-n343930

cent housing levy for employed people, an increase on fuel VAT from 8 to 16 percent and withdrawal of fuel and fertiliser subsidies[93] . The IMF further advanced a loan that helped Kenya avoid defaulting on a $2bn Eurobond loan.

An X user rallied a section of Kenyans to target the IMF managing director's account and other IMF official accounts with protest posters aimed at pressuring the organisation to stop loaning money to Kenya[94] . In addition to sending messages, protestors also attempted to deplatform political and cultural leaders who supported the Bill. Parliamentarians and influencers who supported the finance bill or were against the demonstrations were unfollowed and reported on social media. Kenyan influencer KRG the Don's TikTok Account which had over 400,000 followers, was banned after massive reporting (see Figure 12)[95] . Eddie Butita, a Kenyan comedian who was seen to support the government, lost many of the subscribers to his YouTube channel, making him deactivate it to avoid further losses. Results from a tool tracking the number of subscribers lost by Eddie Butita is shown in Figure 13 below[96] . The protesters also registered IMF's emails to pornographic websites.

In response to crowdsourcing of legislators' mobile phone numbers and 'kusalimia', the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) cautioned the public against unauthorised sharing of personal data. The data commissioner interpreted 'kusalimia' as doxxing which is contrary to Article 31 of the Constitution of Kenya, the Data Protection Act, 2019 and its attendant regulations[97], and could thus lead to prosecution. Several public officials had decried the harassment[98] and the data commissioner called on aggrieved parties to raise complaints with the ODPC.

Doxxing and spamming of public officials raises a debate on whether public officials in public duty have a right to privacy with regard to their contact details. It is notable that many of the officials have not published information on the channels through which the public can reach them. To address this public interest, there is a need for these leaders to provide official communication channels that are active and very responsive.

5.2.3 Civic Education and information dissemination

Some of the most innovative uses of technology during the protest were in creating informational and educational materials for civic education and future actions such as litigation and petitions. The online repository for open source coding projects Github and other platforms were innovatively used to encourage e-participation in the finance bill discussions and other civic matters. Examples of projects developed by individuals and communities include:

1. A website[99] documenting every insult that the president's advisor Dr. David Ndii had launched against the populace in preparation for a Chapter 6 lawsuit;
2. Power to the People[100] ', an online platform which provides information to Kenyans to hold their members of parliament and county assembly representatives accountable;
3. HakiHub'[101] , an application to empower Kenyans with up-to-date knowledge of politics and laws;
4. A project collecting ideas about tools for digital activism[102] to support the ongoing protests; and
5. 'Ruto Lies', [103] an interactive digital portrait of President Ruto representing sentiments of Kenyans on false statements attributed to him.

Such projects benefitted from materials such as source code available in the repository in turn speeding up the development time while reducing costs. The projects majorly used open data available on government sites or crowdsourced from social media users.

Generative AI was applied in boosting civic engagement on the finance bill. Technologists developed localised GPTs that the public could leverage on to garner information related to the Finance Bill and other emerging topics. Generative Pre-training Transformer (GPT) is a generative artificial intelligence platform with an engaging conversational interface and real time feedback. Examples of GPTs developed during the protests include The Kenya Law Guide [104] created by Kev-

93. Lawal, S. (2024).What do the IMF and foreign debt have to do with Kenya's current crisis? https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/7/why-are-kenyans-angry-with-the-imf
94. Wekesa, N.A. (2024). Kenyans Go After IMF Boss, Ask Her to Stop Giving Govt Loans. https://thekenyatimes.com/trending-news/kenyans-go-after-imf-boss-ask-her-to-stop-giving-govt-loans/#:~:text=Kenyans%20Spam%20IMF%20Managing%20Director,to%20Stop%20Giving%20Govt%20Loans&text=Kenyans%20online%20on%20Monday%2C%20June,Kristalina%20Georgieva%20with%20protest%20posters.
95. Nyakundi, C. (2024).Influencer KRG TikTok Account with over 400,000 followers banned after massive reporting.https://x.com/C_NyaKundiH/status/1804496190395855340?t=Y9m8ZCG26-Riz2tIvCGmnQ&s=19
96. Droid254 (2024). I tracked Butita losing subscribers in real time before he decided to deactivate to stop it. https://x.com/droid254/status/1807044279434371314
97. Makong, B. (2024). Kenyans cautioned against sharing leaders' phone numbers without consent after MPs' lines were circulated. https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2024/06/kenyans-cautioned-against-sharing-leaders-phone-numbers-without-consent-after-mps-lines-were-circulated/
98. VibeKinuthia (2024).MPs decry after private contacts leaked.https://www.tiktok.com/@vibekinuthia/video/7380089446852545797?_r=1&_t=8ngIsoEe74H

99. Indiignity (2024). A website built to record the long lists of insults and grossly insensitive things President Ruto's advisor David Ndii has said to the Kenyans whose taxes pay him and fund his office. https://indiignity.co.ke
100. Kaka-Ruto (2024). Carpitan: For political accountability and power to the people.https://github.com/kaka-ruto/carpitan
101. HakiHub(2024). Haki Hub: Empowering Kenyans with updates on ongoing bills, protest information, and essential data for informed civic engagement. https://haki-hub.vercel.app/
102. Kenya Accountability: Public tallying system, by developers for the people. https://github.com/kelvinndmo/ke-accountability/issues?q=is%3Aissue+is%3Aopen+sort%3Aupdated-desc
103. Thraets Team (2024).Ruto Lies: A Portrait. https://ruto-lies.thraets.org/
104. Ndemo, K. (2024). https://chatgpt.com/g/g-UvOnmgprA-kenya-law-guide

in Ndemo that provides detailed responses about the finance bill. AI4Wananchi.com developed 'Corrupt politicians GPT'[105] that displays corruption cases associated with Kenyan politicians. Through such applications of generative AI, civic participation is empowered across the divide as the government's open and accessible data is synthesised and made available in an understandable format. The resources also demonstrated the growing capacity of Kenyan technologists to create civic tech.

Figure 14: Reports of Internet disruptions by major telecommunication companies (NetBlocks, 2024)

X spaces which are live audio streams were used to discuss different issues. These issues included airing concerns about ongoing events like abductions and to demand the release of arrested protesters. Between 12th and 30th June 2024, X Spaces focussing on the Anti Finance Bill 2024 discussions had a lot of listeners tuning in with records of between 59,000 and 130,000 concurrent live listeners[106].

However, these resources were not always available for the public. Users reported that the internet was slow during the protest and that some digital platforms such as X were sporadically available [107]. On June 25th 2024, the country experienced a major internet shutdown that also affected neighbouring nations like Burundi and Uganda [108]. There were reports to the effect that Kenyan network operators like Safaricom attributed the disruptions to outages experienced in its undersea cables (see Figure 14)[109]. Protesters and the public appeared not to trust that the network outage was unintentional, citing that it occurred at the height of the protests. There were many posts linking Safaricom, the dominant mobile network operator to surveillance and collaboration with national security agencies. On the introduction of satellite internet by international operator Starlink, protestors celebrated the new means of access to the internet, viewing it as viable competition to Safaricom.

5.2.4 Funds mobilisation and accountability

Protesters used social media platforms to mobilise the general public to crowdfund medical bill payments and funeral costs. For instance, through mobile money platforms, protestors mobilised funds that were used for various activities such as informational material, food and water as well as medical and legal aid.

A notable effort was a fundraiser dubbed "Care for the Injured " where supporters of the protests managed to mobilise over 20,000 USD. It begun as a fundraiser for funeral expenses of the first two recorded fatalities of the protest, Rex and Evans [110]. Social media personality Hanifa Farsafi who had previously fundraised for other emergencies, set up an M-changa account through which the funds were collected. Together with other protestors, she posted images of payment receipts whenever they went to visit the injured in hospital, a move that boosted public confidence in the work that they were doing. For instance on 14th July 2024, she assured users that M-Changa maintained a google sheet detailing every transaction as well as receipts of Kshs. 13, 047, 404 spent so far, and that would be shared in due course. Receipts of amounts paid through Mpesa with their associated paybill numbers were publicly shared on X [111].

Cases of conmen who tried taking advantage of the generosity of those contributing funds towards the medical or legal bills of the affected protesters were highlighted with images of fake medical reports and messages being posted on X for scrutiny by the community as seen in Figure 15 [112]. In some cases, medics were called upon to verify some of the claims, a process that ensured all the money collected was put to good use. Attempts to defraud the public by alternate pay-
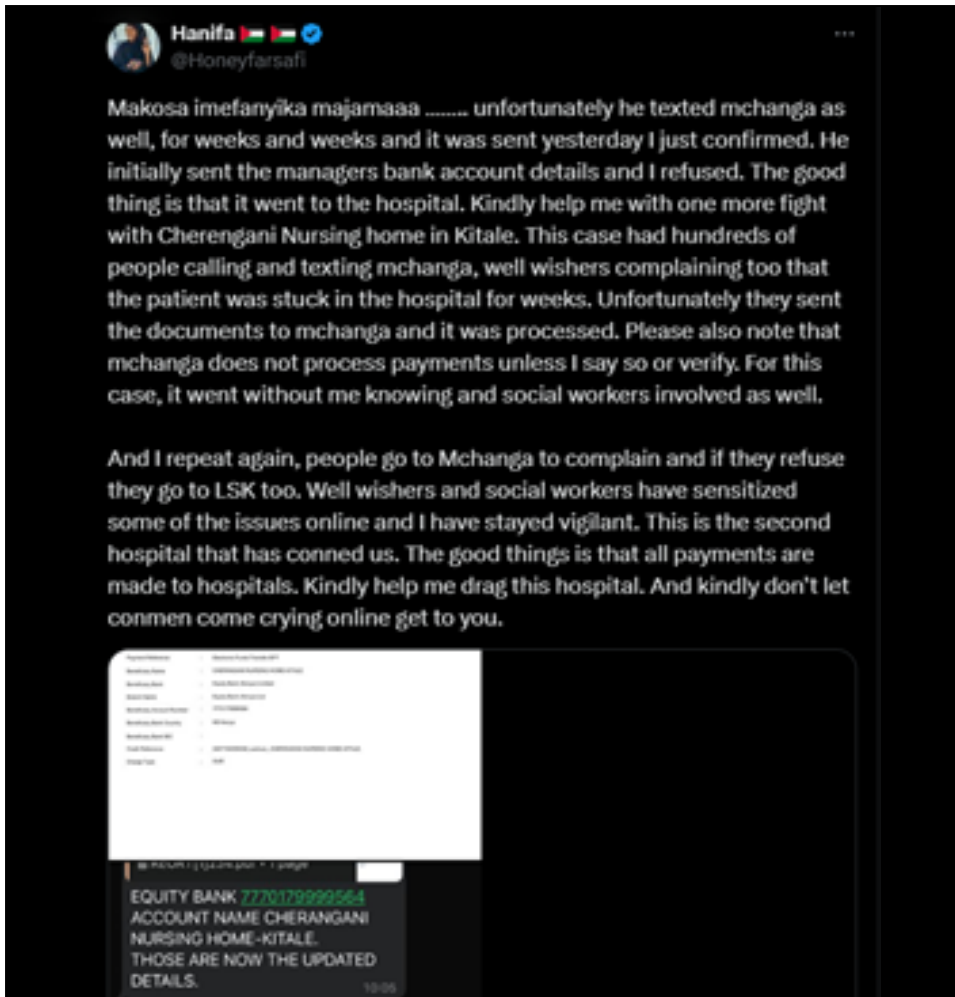
105. https://chatgpt.com/g/g-MVyroWjCS-corrupt-politicians-gpt
106. Nendo(2024). The #Reject Revolution: When Tweets Take to the Streets. The Story of 25 Million Posts Powering Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill2024 protestshttps://www.nendo.co.ke/post/the-reject-revolution-kenyan-rejectfinancebill2024-protests
107. Njanja, A. (2024). Internet goes dark in Kenya in the wake of major protests over finance bill.
https://techcrunch.com/2024/06/25/internet-goes-dark-in-kenya-in-the-wake-of-major-protests-over-finance-bill/

108. York, D. (2024).Kenya Internet Disrupted Amidst Protests.
https://pulse.internetsociety.org/blog/kenya-internet-disrupted-amidst-protests
109. NetBlocks(2024).While Kenyan network operator Safaricom now states that two of its undersea cables have experienced outages....https://x.com/netblocks/status/1805620062612553738
110. M-Changa (2024).Our Brothers Rex & Evans. https://www.mchanga.africa/fundraiser/100381
111. https://x.com/Honeyfarsafi/status/
112. HoneyFarsafi (2024). Makosa imefanyika majamaa..https://x.com/Honeyfarsafi/status/1813663113230835910
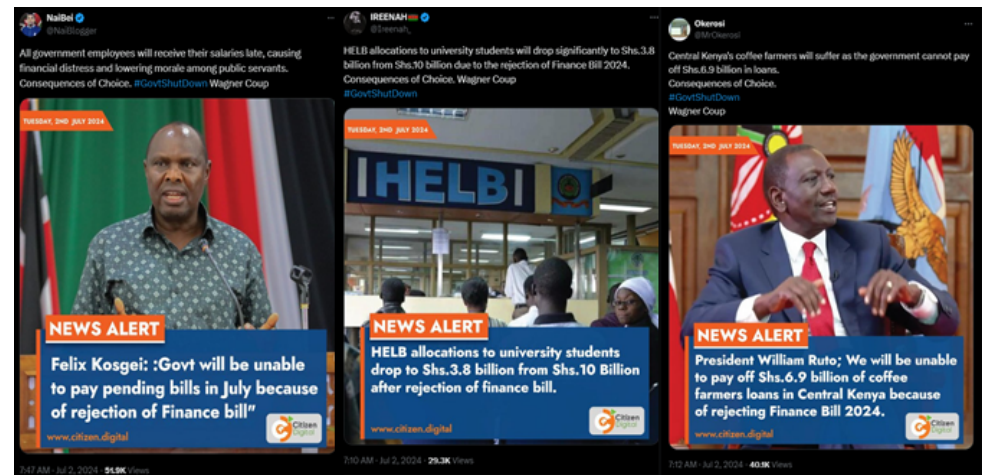
Figure 15: An incident of fraud highlighted during funds mobilisation (Farsafi, 2024).

bills and contribution platforms were met by stiff resistance. Details of the fraudsters were shared online and members of the public were called upon to pressurise them to refund the amounts channelled to their accounts. Other notable fundraisers were by the Law Society of Kenya for legal aid and the Medics for Kenya for medical aid. While there were no public receipts such as those by Care for the Injured Fund, tweets by users on X point to high public trust for these initiatives as users were able to get legal and medical help.

It is expected that technology companies may respond to public fundraisers by adopting innovative and affordable mobile money services to fill the gaps witnessed during the protests. For example, users complained of high charges levied for use of M-changa. There were also questions about how contributors can monitor expenditure from the fundraising platform. While initiatives such as Care for the Injured were handled with public involvement, the engagement was reliant on the goodwill of the organiser, as the platform was not designed for such transparency.

5.2.5 Disinformation and Misinformation

Misinformation and disinformation were equally used by both the protestors and the government. Examples of fake news spread by pro-government bloggers at the height of the protests included: that the government would be unable to pay pending bills due to the rejection of the finance bill[113] , Higher Education Loans Board allocations to university students would drop significantly[114] , increased suffering for coffee farmers[115] as highlighted in Figure 16 below. There was also an attempt to make it appear as if Gen Z posts were pro LGBTQ[116].

Figure 16: Examples of fake news shared by pro-government bloggers

113. https://x.com/NaiBlogger/status/1807999391883571555
114. Ireenah (2024). HELB allocations to university students will drop significantly to Shs.3.8 billion from Shs.10 billion. https://x.com/Ireenah_/status/1807990305464910046
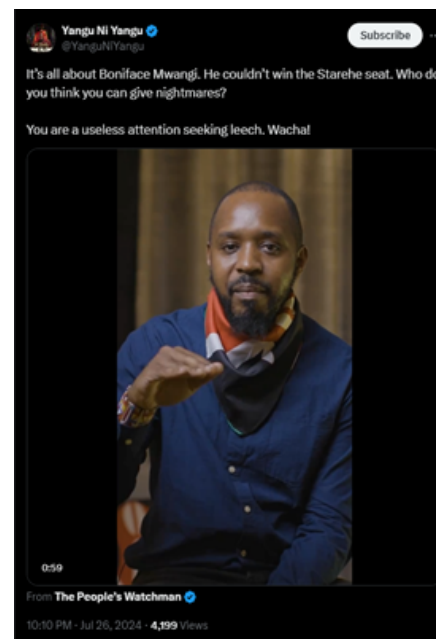115. https://x.com/MrOkerosi/status/1807990752451953006
116. African Digital Democracy Observatory (2024). LGBTQIA+ disinformation taints Kenya's GenZ protests. https://disinfo.africa/lgbtqia-disinformation-taints-kenyas-genz-protests-a290394b5615YanguNiYangu (2024).It's all about Boniface Mwangi.

Constructive discussions on social media platforms were trolled to seed doubts about the future of the protests. There was persistent trolling of vocal supporters of the protests, for instance Boniface Mwangi, a digital activist was trolled for being funded by the civil society and foreign powers to "destabilise the nation", and for being an attention seeker [117] (see an example of the trolls in Figure 17). He was trolled to a point that he could not take it anymore and so he deactivated his X account.

Pseudo accounts of some of the influential supporters of the protests used the same #RejectFinanceBill2024 hashtags to reach a wide audience in a disinformation campaign that caused confusion and distraction. After the alleged abduction of some social media activists and content creators on June 25th, 2024, some pseudo accounts of these influencers emerged online [118]. For instance, a pseudo account for Daily Nation columnist and social media activist Gabriel Oguda[119] named Gabriell_Oguda emerged on X after his release. These accounts may have been used to infiltrate the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests conversations and manipulate them in a particular manner.

AI image generation was employed in the production of digital activists' pictures which were shared to discredit them. These stunning pictures used by some bloggers who opposed the protests had some telltale signs of being AI generated due to the flat skin textures, mis-shapened iris and pupils, and inconsistent proportions. An example is the AI generated image of activist Hanifa Farsaf[120] reaping huge amounts of money from the protests (see Figure 18).

Fake news propagated by the protestors included a letter allegedly signed off by Kenya's Inspector General of Police authorising a nationwide demonstration on 20th June 2024 [121], a fake graphic of the local Daily Nation newspaper graphic in which the legislator for Kitui South MP Rachel Nyamai claimed that Kenyan lawmakers were paid KSh2 million to pass the finance bill [122], and news that a police officer who lost forearms during the Gen Z-led protests in June 2024 died, among other false claims [123].

Figure 17: A screen grab of popular Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi being trolled on X.

Figure 18: Example of AI generated fake news (MKenya 2024)

The generation of fake news by protestors ignited debate as to whether protestors should employ the same tactics as those employed by government allied bloggers. In a trend labelled "aura for aura" some protestors appeared to retaliate with propaganda, though the trend was not sustained for long [124]. Some social media users viewed 'aura for aura' as misinformation in public interest, raising questions on whether audiences were sufficiently resourced to identify the rationale for such misinformation[125]. Whether fake news was generated by pro-government bloggers or protesters, the role of fact checking by individuals, communities as well as organisations needs to be strengthened.

117. YanguNiYangu (2024).It's all about Boniface Mwangi.https://x.com/YanguNiYangu/status/1816913880867832283
118. Marita, B. (2024). Gabriel Oguda, popular social media activists allegedly abducted. https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2024-06-25-gabriel-oguda-popular-social-media-activists-allegedly-abducted
119. https://twitter.com/Gabriell_Oguda
120. https://x.com/MKenyaAsili100/status/1808462672649744531
121. https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/meta-programme-fact-checks/2024-finance-bill-ignore-fake-letter-claiming-kenyan-police
122. https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/meta-programme-fact-checks/fake-nation-graphic-used-claim-kenyan-lawmakers-were-paid
123. https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/meta-programme-fact-checks/ignore-claim-police-officer-who-lost-forearms-kenya's-gen-z

124. Muchiri, M. (2024). This, my friend, is not Kenya.https://x.com/MuchiriiMike/status/1806289912896819213
125. Chelagat, N. (2024). Official Gazzeti Notice: Aura for Aura. https://x.com/Nyamisa_Chela/status/1806654636222198243

6. Reflections on technology and digital activism in Kenya

6.1 Evolution of Digital Activism in Kenya

Observation of the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests in Kenya provide reflections on the evolution of digital activism within the nation and other similar places. Based on the uses of technology observed, it is evident that while digital technologies played a critical role, they were majorly used in coordinating the protest. Similarly, the most prominent responses by the government as well as the private sector appeared to be directed at curtailing further coordination and mobilisation. For example, shadow banning and throttling of bandwidth could have prevented more people from following the protest or offering their support.

However, the decentralised organising where various roles in the protest were distributed among many individuals and communities sustained the protest in the face of arrest of perceived leaders. The leaderless nature of the anti-finance bill 2024 protests mirrors the nature of other digital movements such as the anti-ELAB (Anti Extradition Bill) movement protests[126] that relies on a volunteer network which is fragmented and lacks a designated leader. As much as there was opinion leadership from notable individuals in the anti-finance bill of 2024 protest, it was not sustainable for long as most of them went mute when the government began cracking its whip against the protestors.

Though the anti-finance bill of 2024 protests had clear demands, its lack of leadership was a weakness that prevented its protestors and supporters from effectively negotiating with the government when the window of opportunity was open. Similar protests like the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) in Hong Kong faced the same fate as it was unable to take up more effective leadership in the city's pro-democracy movement due to its leaderless structure. The nature of such movement reflects the need for the stability of leadership as postulated by Cheng and Lee (2023)[127].

Another observation was the linkage between online activism to offline organising. Many of the protesters who took prominent roles in organising online had links to communities. For example, Hanifa Farsafi, who coordinated distribution of funds raised, had previously advocated for clearing

of garbage in several communities within the city[128]. Similarly, Kevin Ndemo who developed the Kenya Law Guide GPT is active in technology developer communities[129]. This linkage between the offline and online is consistent with other protest movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #Ferguson which combined digital activism with physical protests. As noted by Shi (2016) digital activism strengthens traditional activism which is still important as authorities find it difficult to ignore the physical methods of protesting[130].

6.2 Civic Tech and domestication of technology

A feature of evolution of digital activism that deserves mention was the innovative use of technology for civic purposes. For example, to counter the unavailability of the internet, protesters used tools like VPNs and low to no bandwidth technologies such as Zello and USSD. This can be termed as domestication of technology[131] to suit local needs. In addition to low bandwidth tools, widely used platforms such as Whatsapp and Tiktok were used to reach the masses, particularly for civic education and information dissemination.

Digital tools like WhatsApp have been domesticated in countries like India where they are appropriated in cultural specific contexts to vernacularize the concept of digital private space within everyday life[132] in turn yielding more participation among the populace. In the 2017 #Metoo movement, domesticated technology encouraged women to testify publicly about their experiences of sexual violence through social media platforms and this empowered them to challenge gender based violence[133].

The domesticated technologies have enabled the emergence of online communities where the youth have found a platform of self empowerment, access to role models and keeping the Kenyan government in check. Digital activism has led to a more politically engaged population in Kenya, where young people are actively taking part in political discourses and actions. Previously, the

26. Wong, H. T. (2021). Organizing an" Unorganized" Movement: Support and Logistics in the Anti-ELAB Movement of Hong Kong (Doctoral dissertation, Hong Kong Baptist University).

27. Cheng, E. W., & Lee, F. L. (2023). Hybrid protest logics and relational dynamics against institutional decay: networked movements in Asia. Social Movement Studies, 22(5-6), 607-627.

128. Njeri, C. (2024). Hanifa Farsafi: Meet Activist Who Played Leading Role in #OccupyParliament Protests.https://thekenyatimes.com/latest-kenya-times-news/hanifa-farsafi-meet-activist-who-played-leading-role-in-occupyparliament-protests/

129. Kelvinndmo(Nd.). Popular Repositories. https://github.com/kelvinndmo

130. Shi, B. (2016). Success of Digital Activism: Roles of Structures and Media Strategies. Silicon Valley Notebook, 14(1), 6.

131. Nimrod, G., & Edan, Y. (2022). Technology domestication in later life. International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction, 38(4), 339-350.

132. Williams, P., Kamra, L., Johar, P., Khan, F. M., Kumar, M., & Oza, E. (2022). No room for dissent: domesticating WhatsApp, digital private spaces, and lived democracy in India. Antipode, 54(1), 305-330.

133. Salzinger, M., Ronceray, M., & Tadesse, L. (2022). From hashtags to the streets: Digital technologies for women's political activism. Discussion paper 326. Maastricht: ECDPM.

youth were disengaged from the political affairs of the nation. This is probably due to the fact that many adult-dominated activist spaces were too dismissive of the youth[134] . However, when the youth see their activism as meaningful, they are more likely to participate as was the case in the Save KPK movement of Indonesia which aimed to support an institution dedicated to eradicating corruption [135] .

The domestication of existing technologies provides lessons for technology development. These include the need for localisation of infrastructure and resources for technology development. Tools such as USSD were deployed because they are locally available. Private messaging app Signal was deployed particularly for sensitive communications. This is because the app provides end-to-end encryption, protecting the privacy of communications. The reliance on Signal was a reminder of the important role played by technologies such as encryption in protecting civic space.

The protests also showed Kenya's contributions to novel technologies such as artificial intelligence and exposed the gaps in existing regulations. In ongoing debates on artificial intelligence, there is a realisation that the pace at which AI innovations like Large Language Models (LLMs) are being churned challenges existing regulations which govern technology in Kenya.

6.3 Surveillance

The arrests and abductions of anti Finance Bill 2024 protest organisers and vocal online activists indicate that protestors' and supporters' emails, location and other forms of communications were being monitored by the state. Such surveillance is not new in Kenya. Reports by KICTANet [136], Privacy International [137] and Open Institute of Development Studies[138] show that historically, the state has undertaken mass and targeted surveillance, sometimes extralegally [139]. Discussions around arrests and abductions during the Anti Finance Bill 2024 protests indicate that many people are aware of surveillance. While this report did not delve into citizen responses on surveillance, itwas evident that surveillance undermines the exercise of many rights, from privacy, expression, assembly and healthy living. For example, it was observed that some previously ac-

tive persons became less active online following their arrests. Others appeared to have mental health issues after their arrests. For example, activist Boniface Mwangi posted cryptic messages on his official Facebook account[140] that were not in keeping with his usual persona.

> *Surveillance undermines the exercise of many rights, from privacy, expression, assembly and healthy living.*

As much as the issue of security versus privacy is contentious, Bessadi (2024) suggests that it can be resolved through striking a balance between privacy and security concerns in legislation, and taking into consideration the potential consequences of violating either right [141]. In the case of Kenya, researchers suggest that there is a need to eliminate mass surveillance and also increase transparency and accountability for targeted surveillance [142] . This would include judicial oversight prior to surveillance, notification of people who have been under surveillance, as well as periodic reporting to the public on the nature, rationale and impact of surveillance.

6.4 Dis and Misinformation

The protests and post-protest period demonstrate the increasing interference of public discourse by dis and misinformation. False information shared online led to a pollution of the space, making it difficult for the public to meaningfully seek, receive or impart information or ideas as provided for under Article 33 of Kenya's Constitution. The protest also brought forth debates on the extent to which misinformation can be used in public interest.

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Figure 19: Concerns raised by citizens about slow internet connectivity

However, the protests also demonstrated the impact of community education in calling out misinformation and informing the public on important public policy matters. For example, despite coordinated media campaigns to garner support for the Finance Bill 2024 and create fear of what would happen if the Bill failed, online communities used mass media tools such as Whatsapp and Tiktok to counter these narratives. There was also fact checking and alternative content on misinformation raised by leaders and government bloggers. Following Madung and Obilo's research that found that there are networks that disseminate disinformation in Kenya[143] .

6.5 Business and Human Rights

The role of technology business in the protests varied from provision of infrastructure, mobile networks, platforms as well as apps. While many players were ubiquitous, two businesses stood out for their impact in the protests. One is X, where most of the public discussions were coordinated. The company was accused of interfering with the hashtags associated with the protests, thereby affecting the protests visibility within and outside Kenya. There were also times when users reported the site as being slow, leading to suspicion that there was throttling of traffic to and from the site as seen in Figure 19. Questions that emerged among protesters and researchers were what the nature of the problem was and in the event that there was interference, who had ordered or influenced X to do so [144].

This has become a classical question in business and human rights, where businesses infringe on human rights in the course of a political event such as the protests. When businesses are faced with orders to interfere with human rights, should they follow the order or protect the rights of citizens? An additional question from the anti Finance Bill 2024 protests would be on business accountability. How should businesses disclose their human rights infringing actions and remedy harm caused to the public?

This question of accountability is relevant for local company Safaricom. Safaricom is Kenya's largest mobile network operator (MNO). Many of the protesters depended on Safaricom internet to participate and engage in online activities. Protesters claimed to have had intermittent access to the network at the height of the protests and thereafter.

Many believed that the company supported the government in curtailing the protests by throttling access to certain sites as well as sharing information of those viewed as key protest organisers with the state. It was against this background that when Safaricom announced a network outage on 25th June 2024, there was mistrust that the outage was due to technical difficulties. This case illustrates the link between promoting human rights and building public trust.

Besides Safaricom, another local company whose business and human rights practices were spotlighted during the protest is the electricity utility monopoly Kenya Power. While the company has in the past few years become notorious for sporadic power supply, its conduct during the protests was called into question for interruption of power during key moments and its suspected role in surveillance of persons. Protesters decried long and wide area power blackouts that prevented people from accessing their devices and important information about the protests.

One protester explained the key role played by the company in pinpointing the location of persons. This is because, while the country lacks a formal addressing system, the utility company has granular data about the location of each of its consumers. With the rise of the use of mobile money in paying utility bills, Kenya Power data can be triangulated with mobile money records to pinpoint the exact location where a subscriber is purchasing power. Protesters suspected that Kenya Power was complacent in protecting location data of its consumers. Kenya Power did not respond to the allegations. While the suspicions are unconfirmed, they raise issues about the use of data collected by utility companies such as Safaricom and Kenya Power and the potential for data misuse.

144. https://x.com/FundiwaDera/status/1803714337489445205
143. Mozilla (2021).INSIDE THE SHADOWY WORLD OF DISINFORMATION FOR HIRE IN KENYA.https://assets.mofoprod.
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7. Recommendations

7.1   Digital Security and Safety Issues

Best Practices for Using Technology in Demonstrations

Practical tips and strategies

Digital safety during demonstrations boils down to an individual, and calls for the consideration of all possible risks. Some of the practical tips that can be used to ensure digital safety and security include:

- When participating in online forums such as Whatsapp groups, it is important to share things that can be substantiated.
- Choose to utilise apps that are genuinely secured by design via end-to-end encryption. For instance it is advisable to use Signal instead of WhatsApp as it is open source and has more security features.
- When considering invading one's privacy during digital activism through acts like doxxing, before acting, it would be important to appreciate the potential harm it can cause the victim before acting.
- Anonymity is key especially when involved in organising protests; and this could be achieved through the use of an alias.
- Recognize the strengths of different social media platforms and digital tools and fully use them for what they are good at.
- Install a reliable VPN that can be used to circumvent censorship, encrypt online activity and safeguard your personal data.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

7.2.1. Policymakers and stakeholders should:

- Embrace online spaces in addition to offline meetings for important policy processes such as public participation. The anti Finance Bill protests demonstrated that important policy discussions occur in online spaces that policy makers may have considered informal.
- Use online as well as offline spaces to provide feedback on the outcome of policy views and ideas expressed by the public.
- Use lessons from the protest in making laws on emerging areas such as artificial intelligence. The lessons include the need for laws to enhance and not curtail the enjoyment of human

rights online and offline.
- Come up with an agreed upon definition of 'fair use' that does not infringe on copyright.
- Enforce the use of warning labels to alert users on the presence AI generated content in order to fight disinformation,
- Engage in global efforts of regulating tech-giants involved in AI innovation

7.2.2. Regulators should:

- Investigate public agencies and businesses for human rights violations due to internet and power outages during the protests.
- he Data Protection Commissioner should investigate claims of surveillance through data of customers of power utility company Kenya Power.
- The Data Protection Commissioner should audit data flows in telecommunication companies and other monopolies and issue guidance on the access of data by law enforcement agencies.

7.2.3   Businesses should:

- Protect human rights of citizens particularly in important political moments such as protests
- Remedy harms caused due to human rights violations during the anti-Finance Bill protests
- Support digital tools innovators to ensure that they carry usability tests to increase adoption of their innovations.
- Exert pressure on authorities to always keep the internet open and accessible in order for citizens to enjoy their rights including those of expression and association as provided for in Kenya's Bill or Rights in the Constitution.

7.2.4. Civil Society Organisations should:

- Enhance digital literacy programmes to empower more citizens to participate in civic and other societal issues.
- Promote media literacy that enables people to discern and take action against disinformation and misinformation.
- Empowerment of citizens to deal with security threats and privacy issues while adapting quickly in the information society through capacity building, media literacy among other measures.

7.2.5. Researchers and Academics should:

Develop technologies that activists can use to track and measure the progress of their campaigns and identify areas that need adjustments.

• Design technologies that co-opt the concerns of minorities who always feel left out in social initiatives.
• Explore how the longevity of digital movements can be sustained while keeping the government of the day in check.
• Conduct more research on how misinformation is organised during protests and come up with appropriate mitigation strategies.

7.3 Future Research Directions

Future research in this area might explore the following areas: how public sentiments are included in policy formulation, the innovative use of AI in civic engagement and a critical review of digital activism in Kenya through empirical studies.

Other studies can also explore how the longevity of such digital movements can be sustained while maintaining the same momentum of keeping the government of the day accountable. Additionally, new forms of data sharing which resulted in 'kusalimiana' emerged during the protests and these may raise a debate on the legality of public interest data sharing versus doxxing that needs to be researched in future.

8.0 Conclusion

The power of social media and other digital tools cannot be underestimated as they have been potent through their role in building the ant-finance bill 2024 protests with remarkable speed. They aided in recruiting new members, encouraging participation, offering logistical support for protestors and spreading information about the protests. Digital activism in the anti-finance bill 2024 protests caught most by surprise and has played a major role in awakening the collective conscience of Kenyans in civic matters.

It has provided a moment of opportunity for all stakeholders to engage; as a catalyst for change. It is undeniable that the world has moved to a point where it can be pretty hard to successfully mount a protest or other forms of activism without digital tools and technology. This report has also demonstrated how digital activism can galvanise political reform, where leaders are held accountable for their (in)actions, and contributes to the literature on the analysis of digital activ-

ism in Kenya and Africa in general. The findings of the study also help in the comprehension of the impact and effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the laws and policies around social media and other digital tools used in Kenya.

Photo: freepik.com/free-photo

Epilogue

In October 2024 when this report was going to print, the impact of Gen Z protests was still palpable. The issues that led to the protests remain largely unresolved. Kenya still has a huge debt problem, and the state, together with international development partners continue to push for measures similar to the impugned Finance Bill of 2024, though in piecemeal [145] . Part of these measures include the use of technology to grow government revenue by increasing the visibility of all financial transactions through tracking mobile money as well as consumer spending [146] . Many people however believe that the country does not need to increase taxes but reign in government excesses [147]. This is a narrative widely shared on social media.

Protestors continue to use civic tech to engage with policy makers as well as public policy processes. Every day on social media, there is content aimed at mobilising the public to protest against bad governance and misuse of public funds [148]. There is also content educating the public on emerging policy proposals and Bills. An example is the Senate Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill, 2024 that seeks to extend the terms of office for the President and Members of Parliament by two years [149]. Activists circulated a sample email widely on social media and private messaging apps[150] , urging citizens to copy, paste, and send it as memoranda to the Senate. This action was part of public participation efforts to oppose the proposal.

A technologist further created an automated email client through which the public could easily submit their memoranda on the Bill [151]. A day to the deadline for submission of memoranda, the Senate announced that their system had crashed due to the overwhelming number of emails received. They had to extend the deadline for memoranda submission by a day and open a new email address to maintain the opportunity for submission[152] . This incident demonstrates the need for diversification of technology tools for public participation. As noted in the recommendations, the rise of technology use in Kenya should not invite curtailing of the technology. Instead policy making institutions should extend the avenues with which technology can be effectively used, for example, encourage embracing interactive tools where the public can directly debate among themselves on sections of proposed bills, and track how legislators take up their proposals.

The state also continues to take a multi-pronged approach to technology as a tool for sharing information on its programs, control information access, and to reportedly track dissenters. An outstanding issue since the protests has been the enforced disappearance of protestors, with social media users claiming that hundreds of protestors from the June 25th entry to Parliament were thereafter abducted [153] . Intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been implicated in the disappearances, and protestors continue to use social media to push for accountability. Against this atmosphere, government allied bloggers continuously post a contrary narrative in an attempt to create a counter narrative. However, the protestors' claims are hard to ignore particularly as more abductions and forced disappearances are reported. In one example, protestors called for the release of three citizens who had been abducted from a public service vehicle in Kitengela area in the outskirts of the city. Despite the judiciary ordering the production of the three, law enforcement agencies denied any involvement. Social media pressure eventually led to their release [154]. Since then, there have been multiple abductions and killings of people who appear unrelated to organising the protests.

A common denominator among the cases of abductions is the use of technology in tracking and investigating the cases. People who have been arrested or abducted link their capture to tracking of their mobile phones [155]. There are reports that mobile phone companies give access to mobile subscriber location data to intelligence and law enforcement agencies [156]. While such reports are unsubstantiated, historical ties between these actors give some credence that a close working relationship endures[157] . This leads to the conclusion that the private sector plays a double role of providing technology services to the public on the one hand while providing data from these services to state agencies on the other hand .

All these experiences show that while the highest activity related to the anti-Finance Bill protests was witnessed in June 2024, the government response managed to fracture but not dissipate the protests. Similar to how the state is introducing piecemeal policies to meet the goal of the impugned Finance Bill, protestors are gradually adapting technology for civic action.
Kenya therefore remains a most fertile ground for civic technology, not just for protests, but for many other public interest purposes including participatory governance.

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