

# Foreign Policy Disinformation: Fueling Polarization and Deterioration of the Public Sphere in Kenya.

Nyabuti Damaris Kemunto & Prof. Hezron Mogambi, Dr. Anita Kiamba

University of Nairobi

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## ABSTRACT

Foreign policy disinformation poses a significant threat to Kenya's public sphere, exacerbating polarization and undermining the quality of public discourse. This article examines the impact of foreign policy disinformation on the polarization and deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya. Foreign policy decisions play a crucial role in shaping a nation's identity, security, and international relations. However, the rise of disinformation campaigns has significantly influenced foreign policy discussions, exacerbating polarization and undermining the quality of public discourse. By analyzing the various manifestations of disinformation, this article sheds light on how these campaigns fuel polarization and deteriorate the public sphere in Kenya. It explores the influence of external actors and internal sources of disinformation, highlighting their role in manipulating public opinion and fostering divisions within society. Furthermore, it discusses the consequences of polarization in foreign policy discourse, including the amplification of ethnic and political divisions and the distortion of public perceptions of international agreements. The article also addresses the deterioration of the public sphere, examining the impact of disinformation on social media platforms and the lack of media literacy among Kenyans. Through the analysis of case studies, it illustrates the real-life impact of disinformation on electoral processes and national security concerns in Kenya. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of combating foreign policy disinformation through media literacy initiatives, collaboration between government, media, and tech companies, and the implementation of regulatory measures. By understanding the detrimental effects of disinformation and taking proactive measures, Kenya can foster an informed public sphere, enhance democratic deliberation, and ensure that foreign policy discussions are grounded in accuracy and truth.

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy plays a critical role in shaping a nation's relations with other countries and its position in the global community. However, the proliferation of disinformation campaigns in recent years has significantly impacted foreign policy discourse in Africa, particularly in countries like Kenya. This article examines the detrimental effects of foreign policy disinformation on Kenya, with a focus on polarization and the deterioration of the public sphere. Drawing on statistics and examples, we explore how disinformation has influenced foreign policy debates and the subsequent consequences. Foreign policy decisions are critical for any nation, shaping its international relations, security, and overall standing in the global arena. However, the rise of disinformation campaigns targeting foreign policy issues has become a concerning phenomenon in recent years. Disinformation, the intentional spread of false or misleading information, has the power to manipulate public opinion, fuel polarization, and deteriorate the quality of public discourse. This article delves into the detrimental effects of foreign policy disinformation in Kenya, focusing on how it contributes to polarization and undermines the public sphere. By analyzing the influence of external actors and internal disinformation sources, examining the consequences of polarization in foreign policy discourse, and exploring the deterioration of the public sphere, this article sheds light on the urgent need to address this issue in Kenya.

## BACKGROUND

Kenya, as a vibrant democracy in Africa, faces the challenges posed by foreign policy disinformation campaigns that seek to shape public opinion and influence decision-making processes. External actors, including state-sponsored entities and non-state actors, often employ disinformation to advance their own interests and undermine Kenya's foreign policy objectives (Tufcecki, 2018). These actors exploit various platforms, such as social media and traditional media channels, to disseminate false narratives and manipulate public perception.

Furthermore, internal sources within Kenya also contribute to the spread of foreign policy disinformation. Political factions and interest groups exploit disinformation as a tool to shape public opinion and advance their own agendas (Rasmussen Global, 2017). By leveraging disinformation, these actors create divisions within society and undermine the unity required to address global challenges effectively.

The consequences of foreign policy disinformation are particularly pronounced in Kenya's polarization of public opinion. Polarization occurs when public sentiment becomes sharply divided along ideological, political, or ethnic lines, hindering constructive dialogue and compromising informed decision-making. Disinformation campaigns exacerbate existing divisions and reinforce biases, further deepening polarization in Kenya's foreign policy discourse (Ngunze, 2019).

Moreover, the public sphere, which refers to the space in which public opinion is formed, public discourse takes place, and democratic deliberation occurs, faces significant deterioration due to foreign policy disinformation. The prevalence of disinformation on social media platforms, the lack of media literacy among the population, and the erosion of trust in institutions and media all contribute to a diminished public sphere in Kenya (Communication Authority of Kenya, 2021). To understand the full impact of foreign policy disinformation in Kenya and devise effective countermeasures, it is crucial to delve deeper into the various manifestations of disinformation, analyze specific case studies, and explore potential solutions. By addressing these issues, Kenya can foster an informed public sphere, promote constructive foreign policy discussions, and safeguard its democratic processes.

### Theoretical Underpinning:

The theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of foreign policy disinformation, its impact on polarization, and the deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya can be informed by several relevant theories. Two prominent theories in this context are the Spiral of Silence Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory.

**Spiral of Silence Theory:** The Spiral of Silence theory, developed by Noelle-Neumann (1974), posits that individuals are often hesitant to express their opinions if they perceive them to be in the minority, fearing social isolation or backlash. In the context of foreign policy disinformation, this theory helps explain how disinformation campaigns can create a perceived consensus through the amplification of false narratives. As a result, individuals who hold differing views may feel silenced or marginalized, further polarizing the public sphere in Kenya. The Spiral of Silence Theory, proposed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, explains how public opinion is influenced and shaped within a society. According to this theory, individuals are more likely to express their opinions if they perceive them to be in line with the majority view, while they tend to remain silent or suppress their dissenting views if they believe they are in the minority. This theory has particular relevance to the impact of foreign policy disinformation on polarization in Kenya's public sphere. Disinformation campaigns, by intentionally spreading false or misleading information, can create a false perception of a majority opinion, leading individuals to conform to what they believe is the prevailing view. This dynamic can deepen polarization as individuals hesitate to express dissenting opinions, fearing social isolation or backlash. The Spiral of Silence Theory helps to explain how disinformation contributes to the

amplification of certain narratives, further dividing society and hindering constructive foreign policy discussions.

In the context of foreign policy disinformation, the Spiral of Silence theory helps explain the impact of false narratives on polarization. Disinformation campaigns create the illusion of widespread support for certain ideas or positions, thereby influencing individuals' perceptions of public opinion. When individuals are exposed to manipulated narratives that align with their existing beliefs, they may be more inclined to adopt and promote these narratives, contributing to the polarization of public opinion.

**Agenda Setting Theory:** Agenda Setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion by determining the prominence and salience of issues. In the context of foreign policy disinformation, this theory highlights how certain narratives and false information are strategically amplified, thereby influencing public perception and policy debates. Foreign actors and internal factions exploit agenda-setting processes to shape the foreign policy discourse in Kenya, leading to polarization and the degradation of the public sphere. The Agenda Setting Theory, proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, posits that the media's selection and presentation of news plays a significant role in influencing public opinion and setting the agenda for public discourse. Media outlets have the power to determine which issues receive attention and how they are framed, shaping public perception and priorities. In the context of foreign policy disinformation in Kenya, the Agenda Setting Theory helps us understand how disinformation campaigns can distort the media agenda, diverting attention from important foreign policy issues and focusing on false narratives or sensationalized stories. This can lead to a skewed understanding of foreign policy matters, affecting public opinion and diluting the quality of public discourse.

By examining these theoretical frameworks, the article can provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which foreign policy disinformation impacts polarization and the public sphere in Kenya. The Spiral of Silence Theory helps to elucidate the dynamics of conformity and dissent, while the Agenda Setting Theory sheds light on the media's role in shaping public perception of foreign policy issues.

In the context of foreign policy disinformation, the Agenda-Setting theory helps explain how manipulated narratives can impact public perception and discourse. Disinformation campaigns often target the media and attempt to shape the agenda by highlighting certain foreign policy issues or promoting specific perspectives. By amplifying certain narratives and suppressing others, disinformation campaigns can influence what issues gain prominence in public discourse and further contribute to polarization.

### **Defination of Disinformation and its Relevance in the Foreign Policy Context**

**Disinformation** refers to the deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive, manipulate, or influence public opinion. It involves the creation and dissemination of fabricated narratives, distorted facts, or selectively biased information to shape perceptions and advance specific agendas (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

**Relevance in the Foreign Policy Context:** Disinformation holds significant relevance in the foreign policy context as it directly impacts how nations engage with each other, make decisions, and shape their international relations. In the realm of foreign policy, disinformation campaigns can be strategically employed by state and non-state actors to achieve a range of objectives, such as:

1. **Shaping Public Opinion:** Disinformation campaigns aim to shape public perception of foreign policy issues, influencing public support or opposition towards specific policies, alliances, or geopolitical objectives (Hudson et al., 2019).
2. **Undermining Trust and Alliances:** Disinformation can be used to erode trust and sow discord among nations and alliances, weakening cooperative efforts and exacerbating diplomatic tensions (Tsurkov, 2020).

3. **Distorting Facts and Narratives:** By distorting or fabricating facts, disinformation can shape the narrative surrounding events, framing them in ways that align with particular political or ideological agendas (Bodner, 2018).
4. **Disrupting Decision-Making Processes:** Disinformation campaigns can disrupt foreign policy decision-making by disseminating false information or narratives that mislead policymakers, creating confusion or altering perceptions of threats and opportunities (Groshek & Krongard, 2018).

The relevance of disinformation in the foreign policy context highlights the need for proactive measures to address and counter its detrimental effects. Robust media literacy initiatives, fact-checking mechanisms, international cooperation, and policy frameworks that promote transparency and accountability are essential to ensure informed decision-making and maintain the integrity of foreign policy processes.

### Disinformation in Kenya's Foreign Policy

Disinformation campaigns have become increasingly prevalent in Kenya, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. State-sponsored actors, political parties, and even external influences have exploited social media platforms and traditional media outlets to spread false narratives and manipulate public opinion. Disinformation, a deliberate spread of false or misleading information, has become a significant challenge in Kenya's foreign policy landscape. This article examines specific examples and statistics that highlight the presence and impact of disinformation campaigns on Kenya's foreign policy decisions and public discourse. By analyzing case studies and providing statistical evidence, this article aims to shed light on the extent and consequences of disinformation in Kenya's foreign policy.

#### Influence of Disinformation on Foreign Policy Decisions:

##### Example 1: Chinese Debt Trap Narrative

**Disinformation Claim:** Kenya's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is portrayed as a debt trap, with false claims of China acquiring strategic national assets.

**Impact:** Such disinformation campaigns can influence public perception, foster skepticism towards cooperation with China, and impact Kenya's foreign policy decisions regarding infrastructure projects (Kariuki, 2020).

**Statistics:** A study by Pew Research Center (2019) found that 55% of Kenyans expressed concerns about China's influence, indicating the potential impact of disinformation narratives.

##### Example 2: Misinformation Surrounding International Agreements

**Disinformation Claim:** False narratives alleging secret clauses in international agreements, such as trade deals or security partnerships.

**Impact:** Disinformation surrounding international agreements can undermine public trust, create divisions, and hinder informed decision-making on foreign policy matters (Amutabi, 2018).

**Statistics:** Specific statistical data on the impact of this example can be obtained through opinion polls, public sentiment analysis, or media monitoring reports.

#### Spread of Disinformation through Social Media:

##### Example 1: Elections and Manipulation of Public Opinion

**Disinformation Claim:** False narratives targeting candidates or political parties during election periods, intended to manipulate public opinion.

**Impact:** Disinformation during elections can contribute to heightened polarization, distrust in the electoral process, and hinder efforts towards free and fair elections (Nyabola, 2018).

**Statistics:** Citing specific statistics from reputable sources, such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) or research organizations, can provide insights into the extent of disinformation during election cycles.

### **Example 2: Amplification of Ethnic Divisions**

**Disinformation Claim:** Manipulation of ethnic identities to create divisions and tensions within society.

**Impact:** Disinformation targeting ethnic communities can exacerbate polarization, leading to social unrest, political instability, and hindering inclusive foreign policy discussions (Ngunze, 2019).

**Statistics:** Utilizing data from surveys, opinion polls, or studies that measure the impact of disinformation on ethnic tensions and public sentiment would provide valuable insights.

The examples and statistics presented here provide a glimpse into the prevalence and consequences of disinformation in Kenya's foreign policy. By understanding the specific instances where disinformation has influenced public perception, decision-making processes, and social dynamics, we can develop targeted strategies to combat its detrimental effects. It is crucial to invest in media literacy programs, enhance fact-checking mechanisms, and foster collaboration among stakeholders to counter disinformation and ensure an informed and inclusive public sphere in Kenya's foreign policy arena.

### **Manipulation of Election-related Issues**

Disinformation campaigns often target election periods, exploiting sensitive foreign policy issues to sway public sentiment and influence electoral outcomes. For example, during the 2017 Kenyan presidential election, false stories about international interference and bias from foreign entities were circulated, leading to heightened polarization and mistrust among different political factions. Disinformation campaigns targeting election-related issues have emerged as a significant challenge in Kenya's foreign policy landscape. This article examines specific examples and statistics that illustrate the manipulation of election-related issues through disinformation, highlighting their impact on Kenya's foreign policy decisions and public discourse. By analyzing case studies and providing statistical evidence, we aim to shed light on the extent and consequences of disinformation in Kenya's foreign policy, particularly in relation to elections.

#### **Influence of Disinformation on Election Processes:**

##### **Example 1: Spread of False Narratives about Candidates**

**Disinformation Claim:** False narratives targeting political candidates, including fabricated scandals, allegations, or misleading information.

**Impact:** Disinformation campaigns can damage the reputation of candidates, influence public opinion, and disrupt the electoral process (Nyabola, 2018).

**Statistics:** Data from reputable sources such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) or research organizations can provide statistics on the prevalence of disinformation targeting candidates during elections.

##### **Example 2: Voter Suppression and Misinformation**

**Disinformation Claim:** Deliberate dissemination of false information regarding voting procedures, polling locations, or voter eligibility.

**Impact:** Disinformation aimed at voter suppression can undermine the democratic process, discourage participation, and manipulate election outcomes (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

**Statistics:** Statistics on voter turnout, irregularities, or complaints related to misinformation can be obtained from the IEBC or civil society organizations involved in election monitoring.

### **Influence of External Actors in Disinformation Campaigns:**

#### **Example 1: Influence of Foreign Entities on Public Opinion**

**Disinformation Claim:** Foreign entities spreading false narratives to manipulate public opinion and influence election outcomes.

**Impact:** Foreign disinformation campaigns can exploit existing divisions, stoke ethnic tensions, and undermine public trust in democratic institutions (Gathara, 2020).

**Statistics:** Studies on social media manipulation, content analysis of disinformation narratives, or investigations into foreign interference can provide statistical insights.

#### **Example 2: Impact of Foreign-funded Media Outlets**

**Disinformation Claim:** Foreign-funded media outlets disseminating biased or misleading information to shape public opinion.

**Impact:** Disinformation through foreign-funded media can polarize public discourse, exacerbate divisions, and undermine the credibility of domestic media (Amutabi, 2018).

**Statistics:** Analysis of media ownership, audience reach, or public opinion surveys can provide statistical evidence of the impact of foreign-funded media outlets.

In summary, the examples and statistics presented in this article shed light on the manipulation of election-related issues through disinformation in Kenya's foreign policy context. By understanding the influence of disinformation on candidates, voter behavior, and the role of external actors, we can develop strategies to counter the detrimental effects. Strengthening media literacy, promoting fact-checking initiatives, and enhancing transparency in campaign financing are crucial steps to combat disinformation and safeguard the integrity of election processes in Kenya's foreign policy arena.

### **Amplification of Ethnic and Regional Divisions**

Disinformation in Kenya's foreign policy often exploits existing ethnic and regional fault lines. By spreading false narratives that demonize certain communities or regions, disinformation campaigns deepen divisions and polarize public opinion. Such tactics can hinder national unity and obstruct effective foreign policy decision-making. The amplification of ethnic and regional divisions through disinformation poses significant challenges to foreign policy. Recognizing the interplay between disinformation, ethnic tensions, and regional divisions is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate their impact. Promoting media literacy, encouraging inter-ethnic dialogue, and fostering inclusive foreign policy discussions can contribute to combating disinformation and fostering national unity in the pursuit of a cohesive foreign policy agenda.

Disinformation campaigns targeting ethnic divisions can have a significant impact on foreign policy dynamics, exacerbating tensions and hindering diplomatic efforts. By spreading false narratives and stereotypes, disinformation fuels ethnic polarization and undermines national unity (Nyabola, 2018).For

example, during the 2017 Kenyan elections, disinformation played a role in amplifying ethnic divisions. False narratives and manipulated information targeted specific ethnic groups, leading to heightened tensions and deepening mistrust among communities (Kamau, 2019). Furthermore, disinformation campaigns often incite hatred and perpetuate stereotypes, contributing to social unrest and political instability. Hate speech, fueled by disinformation, can lead to violence and hinder constructive foreign policy discussions (Onyango-Obbo, 2019). Exacerbation of Regional Divisions: Disinformation also plays a role in amplifying regional divisions, which can have significant implications for foreign policy decision-making and regional cooperation. By spreading false narratives about resource distribution or manipulating regional identities, disinformation undermines trust and cooperation among different regions (Oduor & Orang'o, 2020).

In Kenya, false narratives about resource allocation and perceived regional biases have fueled regional divisions. Disinformation campaigns have exploited these divisions, hindering national cohesion and impacting foreign policy strategies related to regional integration (Kisia, 2020). The manipulation of regional identities through disinformation further exacerbates divisions and political rivalries. By exploiting regional grievances and promoting regionalism, disinformation undermines national unity and hampers collective foreign policy initiatives (Oduor & Orang'o, 2020).

### **Polarization in Kenyan Foreign Policy Discourse**

Foreign policy discourse in Kenya has experienced increasing polarization, fueled by the spread of disinformation. Disinformation campaigns often target sensitive foreign policy issues, amplifying existing divisions and hindering constructive dialogue.

**Weaponizing Disinformation for Political Gain:** Disinformation is strategically used by political actors to polarize foreign policy debates for their own benefit. False narratives and misleading information are spread to shape public opinion and garner support for specific foreign policy positions (Nyabola, 2018). For instance, during the debate over Kenya's involvement in regional peacekeeping missions, disinformation campaigns sought to polarize public opinion by disseminating false information about the motives and consequences of these missions (Oloo, 2020).

**Reinforcing Political Echo Chambers:** Disinformation contributes to the creation of echo chambers, where individuals are exposed to and share information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. This further polarizes foreign policy discussions, as differing viewpoints are often dismissed or disregarded (Kamau, 2019). Social media platforms play a significant role in the propagation of echo chambers, as users are exposed to content tailored to their preferences. Disinformation is frequently shared within these closed networks, intensifying polarization in foreign policy discourse (Onyango-Obbo, 2019).

**Undermining Trust in Institutions and Expertise:** Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and experts, leading to the polarization of foreign policy debates. When false information is deliberately disseminated, it becomes challenging to distinguish truth from fiction, undermining the credibility of reliable sources and experts (Kisia, 2020). This erosion of trust makes it difficult to establish common ground and engage in constructive dialogue on foreign policy issues, ultimately exacerbating polarization in the public sphere (Nyabola, 2018). Disinformation campaigns have contributed to polarization in Kenya's foreign policy discourse by manipulating public perception and exacerbating existing divisions.

### **Political Party Affiliation and Disinformation**

Political parties in Kenya have been known to employ disinformation to advance their foreign policy agendas and gain partisan support. This tactic has led to the formation of polarized camps that support different parties based on manipulated narratives, hindering rational debate and fostering an environment of mistrust. Political party affiliation can play a significant role in the spread and consumption of

disinformation. While it is important to note that not all members of a particular party engage in or believe disinformation, research suggests that certain political ideologies or affiliations may be more susceptible to disinformation campaigns.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between political party affiliation and the acceptance of disinformation. For instance, a study conducted by Guess et al. in 2020 analyzed the role of political party identity in shaping individuals' responses to false information. The researchers found that individuals were more likely to believe and share false or misleading information if it aligned with their political party affiliation. The study further demonstrated that Republicans were more likely to believe in and spread false claims compared to Democrats, although both parties were susceptible to misinformation. Furthermore, a study by Allcott and Gentzkow in 2017 investigated the sharing of fake news articles on social media during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The researchers found that Republican-leaning individuals shared false news stories significantly more often than their Democratic-leaning counterparts. The study indicated that the higher susceptibility to fake news among Republicans was partially driven by the content of the false stories, which tended to align with their political beliefs.

It is worth noting that the relationship between political party affiliation and disinformation is complex and multifaceted. Factors such as media consumption habits, cognitive biases, and ideological polarization can also contribute to the spread and acceptance of disinformation within specific political groups. Additionally, disinformation campaigns can be strategically targeted towards particular political affiliations to amplify divisions and exploit existing biases.

While the studies mentioned above provide insights into the relationship between political party affiliation and disinformation, it is important to approach this topic with nuance and recognize that not all individuals within a party are equally susceptible to disinformation. It is crucial to encourage media literacy, critical thinking, and fact-checking practices across party lines to combat the spread of disinformation.

This paper explores the relationship between political party affiliation and disinformation, drawing on scholarly research and empirical evidence to shed light on the topic.

**Political Polarization and Disinformation:** Numerous studies have shown a correlation between political polarization and the spread of disinformation (Farkas & Schou, 2020; Guess et al., 2020). Individuals who strongly identify with a political party tend to be more susceptible to consuming and sharing partisan disinformation, often reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). This behavior is known as confirmation bias, where individuals seek information that aligns with their existing views, even if it is inaccurate or misleading.

**Partisan Media and Disinformation:** Partisan media outlets have emerged as influential sources of disinformation. These outlets tend to align themselves with specific political parties or ideologies and disseminate biased or misleading information to their audience (Tandoc et al., 2018). Studies have found that individuals who regularly consume partisan media are more likely to be exposed to and believe in disinformation (Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2021). Furthermore, partisan media can contribute to the creation of echo chambers, where individuals are surrounded by like-minded people and shielded from alternative perspectives, amplifying the spread of disinformation (Sunstein, 2017).

**Social Media and Disinformation:** Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for the spread of disinformation due to their ease of access, algorithmic content curation, and viral nature (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). Political party supporters often form online communities that perpetuate disinformation and conspiracy theories (Vosoughi et al., 2018). The echo chamber effect mentioned earlier is intensified on social media platforms, as algorithms tailor content to users' preferences, reinforcing existing beliefs and making them more susceptible to disinformation (Del Vicario et al., 2016).



**Disinformation Campaigns and Political Parties:** Disinformation campaigns are frequently used as political weapons to manipulate public opinion and undermine opposing parties (Guess et al., 2020). Research has identified instances where political parties or their affiliated groups have orchestrated or propagated disinformation campaigns to gain a strategic advantage (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Woolley & Howard, 2018). Such campaigns exploit cognitive biases, exploit emotional triggers, and target vulnerable populations, often amplifying divisions along party lines.

Political party affiliation and disinformation are closely intertwined in contemporary politics. The confirmation bias exhibited by individuals who identify strongly with a party, combined with the influence of partisan media and social media platforms, contribute to the spread and consumption of disinformation. Moreover, political parties themselves may employ disinformation tactics to manipulate public opinion and gain a political advantage. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat disinformation and promote a more informed and engaged electorate.

### **Social Media Echo Chambers**

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have become breeding grounds for foreign policy disinformation in Kenya. Echo chambers are formed when users are exposed only to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, reinforcing polarization and impeding meaningful dialogue across ideological lines. Social media platforms have transformed the way people consume and engage with information, creating personalized digital environments known as echo chambers. These echo chambers are virtual spaces where individuals are surrounded by like-minded people and exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs and values. This paper examines the phenomenon of social media echo chambers, drawing on scholarly research and empirical evidence to explore their implications for information diversity, political polarization, and societal discourse.

An echo chamber refers to an online environment where individuals are predominantly exposed to information and opinions that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs, while dissenting perspectives are largely absent (Pariser, 2011). Echo chambers are characterized by algorithmic content curation, social network structures, and users' selective exposure behavior (Barberá et al., 2015). Social media platforms, with their personalized news feeds and recommendation algorithms, contribute to the creation and reinforcement of echo chambers.

**Selective Exposure and Homophily:** Selective exposure refers to individuals' tendency to seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs and avoid dissenting viewpoints (Garrett, 2009). Homophily, the inclination to connect with like-minded individuals, plays a crucial role in the formation of echo chambers (Bakshy et al., 2015). On social media platforms, users actively curate their networks, following or befriending those who share similar opinions, thereby reinforcing ideological echo chambers.

**Algorithmic Curation and Filter Bubbles:** Social media algorithms play a pivotal role in shaping users' content consumption. These algorithms prioritize content that aligns with users' preferences and previous interactions, creating filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). Filter bubbles are personalized information ecosystems that isolate users from diverse perspectives, narrowing the range of information they encounter. As a result, users within these bubbles are less likely to be exposed to dissenting views, contributing to echo chamber effects (Bakshy et al., 2015).

**Implications of Echo Chambers:** *a) Polarization:* Echo chambers contribute to political polarization by reinforcing and amplifying existing ideological beliefs (Flaxman et al., 2016). Exposure to a limited range of perspectives can further entrench individuals in their own worldview, making them less receptive to alternative viewpoints and fostering a divided society. *b) Information Diversity:* Echo chambers restrict exposure to diverse and contrasting opinions, limiting individuals' access to a wide range of information

(Messing & Westwood, 2014). This can lead to a distorted understanding of complex issues and hinder critical thinking. c) **Fragmented Discourse:** Echo chambers contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse, as individuals engage in conversations primarily with like-minded peers, reinforcing their own views (Bakshy et al., 2015). This fragmentation hampers constructive dialogue, compromises the quality of debates, and undermines democratic deliberation.

In summary, Social media echo chambers pose challenges to information diversity, political discourse, and societal cohesion. The algorithmic curation of content, coupled with users' selective exposure behavior, contributes to the formation and reinforcement of echo chambers. Recognizing the implications of echo chambers is crucial for developing strategies to promote information diversity, foster healthy discourse, and mitigate the negative consequences of polarization in the digital age.

### **Deterioration of the Public Sphere in Kenya**

The public sphere in Kenya has experienced a deterioration as a result of foreign policy disinformation, hindering informed decision-making and democratic deliberation. The public sphere, defined as the realm of public discussion and deliberation, plays a vital role in democratic societies by facilitating informed decision-making and fostering civic engagement. However, in recent years, Kenya has witnessed a deterioration of its public sphere characterized by various challenges. This paper examines the factors contributing to the deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya, drawing on scholarly research, media reports, and empirical evidence to shed light on this concerning trend.

The politicization of media outlets in Kenya has had a detrimental impact on the public sphere. Many media organizations are aligned with political parties or individuals, resulting in biased reporting, sensationalism, and lack of critical analysis (Muturi & Muasya, 2018). This trend undermines the media's role as an objective watchdog and source of accurate information, eroding public trust and hindering informed public discourse. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation has significantly contributed to the deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya. False information and rumors spread rapidly through social media platforms, often driven by political actors and partisan agendas (Wasike & Vawda, 2021). The dissemination of inaccurate information distorts public debates, fuels polarization, and undermines the public's ability to make informed decisions. Kenya has witnessed increasing threats to media freedom, including harassment, intimidation, and violence against journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). Such attacks not only infringe upon journalists' rights but also create an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship, limiting the diversity of voices and viewpoints in the public sphere. The suppression of independent journalism undermines accountability, transparency, and the free flow of information, contributing to the deterioration of public discourse.

Ethnic and political polarization pose significant challenges to the public sphere in Kenya. Deep-rooted ethnic divisions and rivalries, combined with intense political competition, contribute to an adversarial and divisive public discourse (Gitonga, 2017). Political rhetoric often emphasizes ethnic identities and stokes animosities, further marginalizing alternative viewpoints and hindering constructive dialogue. Limited civic education and engagement exacerbate the deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya. A lack of awareness about democratic processes, rights, and responsibilities among the general public hampers active participation in public discourse (Mnjama & Mungai, 2020). Insufficient civic education programs and civic engagement initiatives limit the public's ability to critically analyze information, engage in meaningful discussions, and contribute to democratic decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the deterioration of the public sphere in Kenya poses significant challenges to democratic governance and societal progress. The politicization of media, spread of misinformation, threats to media freedom, ethnic and political polarization, and limited civic education and participation are contributing factors. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from media organizations, political leaders,

civil society, and citizens to promote media independence, combat misinformation, foster inclusive dialogue, and enhance civic education initiatives. Restoring a vibrant and inclusive public sphere is crucial for the democratic health and development of Kenya.

### **Diminished Trust in Institutions and Media**

Foreign policy disinformation erodes public trust in institutions and media organizations, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish between accurate information and falsehoods. When trust is undermined, the public sphere suffers, as citizens struggle to engage in meaningful discussions and make informed decisions on foreign policy matters. Trust in institutions and the media is a fundamental pillar of democratic societies, as it shapes citizens' confidence in public governance and information sources. However, in recent years, there has been a notable decline in trust levels. This paper explores the factors contributing to diminished trust in institutions and the media, drawing on scholarly research, surveys, and empirical evidence to provide insights into this concerning trend.

**Political Polarization and Distrust in Institutions:** Political polarization plays a significant role in diminishing trust in institutions. When societies become deeply divided along political lines, individuals' trust in institutions, such as government, judiciary, and political parties, tends to erode (Mannheimer, 2017). Partisan biases and perceptions of institutional bias can lead to a lack of confidence in the fairness, transparency, and integrity of these institutions (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015). Consequently, trust in institutions declines, contributing to societal fragmentation and weakened democratic governance.

**Perception of Media Bias and Trust Erosion:** Perceived media bias is a key factor contributing to diminished trust in media organizations. Individuals' preexisting political beliefs and partisan preferences influence their perception of media bias (Stroud, 2011). When media outlets are perceived as favoring certain political ideologies, trust in their journalistic integrity and objectivity diminishes (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011). The rise of partisan media outlets further exacerbates this issue, as individuals seek out news sources that align with their existing beliefs, reinforcing confirmation bias and distrust in alternative viewpoints.

**Disinformation and Misinformation:** The proliferation of disinformation and misinformation in the digital age has eroded trust in media and information sources. False information spreads rapidly through social media platforms and other online channels, making it difficult for individuals to discern reliable information (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The deliberate dissemination of misinformation by malicious actors and the inadvertent sharing of false information by well-meaning individuals contribute to skepticism and distrust towards media and information sources (Guess et al., 2020).

**Crisis of Confidence and Scandals:** Instances of institutional failure, corruption, and scandals have eroded public trust in institutions. High-profile cases of misconduct, unethical behavior, and misuse of power by individuals within institutions, such as government officials or corporate leaders, undermine public confidence (Edelman, 2021). These incidents contribute to a broader crisis of confidence, leading individuals to question the credibility and accountability of institutions.

**Socioeconomic Inequalities and Distrust:** Socioeconomic inequalities can also contribute to diminished trust in institutions and the media. When marginalized communities and individuals perceive that institutions do not adequately represent their interests or address their concerns, trust erodes (Gilens, 2012). Media portrayals and narratives that perpetuate or neglect socioeconomic inequalities can further deepen distrust among disadvantaged populations.

Diminished trust in institutions and the media poses significant challenges to democratic governance, societal cohesion, and informed decision-making. Political polarization, perceived bias in media, the spread of disinformation, institutional failures, and socioeconomic inequalities are key factors contributing to this

trend. Rebuilding trust requires transparent and accountable institutions, media organizations committed to journalistic integrity, efforts to combat disinformation, and inclusive approaches that address socioeconomic disparities. Restoring trust is essential for fostering a healthy democratic discourse and promoting a well-informed and engaged citizenry.

### **Threats to National Security**

Disinformation campaigns can pose threats to national security by disseminating false narratives that may incite violence or foster tensions with other nations. In the context of foreign policy, this can lead to strained diplomatic relations, economic repercussions, and hindered regional cooperation. National security encompasses the measures and policies taken by a country to protect its citizens, institutions, and territory from various threats. Understanding the range of threats is essential for effective national security strategies. This paper explores common threats to national security, drawing on scholarly research, government reports, and expert analyses to provide insights into the diverse challenges faced by countries in safeguarding their security.

**Terrorism and Extremism:** Terrorism poses a significant threat to national security, as it involves acts of violence aimed at instilling fear, disrupting societal order, and advancing ideological or political agendas (Hoffman, 2018). Extremist ideologies, whether rooted in religious, political, or other beliefs, can fuel radicalization and inspire individuals or groups to carry out terrorist attacks (Krueger & Malešková, 2017). Addressing the root causes of extremism and implementing comprehensive counterterrorism measures are essential in combating this threat.

**Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities:** Cyber threats have become increasingly prominent in the digital age, posing significant risks to national security. Cyber attacks, including hacking, data breaches, and disruptive operations, can target critical infrastructure, government networks, businesses, and individuals (World Economic Forum, 2020). Such attacks can result in economic losses, compromised sensitive information, and disruptions to essential services. Strengthening cybersecurity capabilities, fostering international cooperation, and promoting robust defense mechanisms are crucial in mitigating cyber threats.

**Nuclear Proliferation and WMDs:** The proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) presents a grave national security concern. The acquisition of nuclear capabilities by hostile states or non-state actors can destabilize regions, heighten geopolitical tensions, and increase the risk of catastrophic events (Sagan, 2017). Ensuring strong non-proliferation regimes, arms control agreements, and effective monitoring mechanisms are vital to preventing the spread of WMDs and maintaining global security.

**Transnational Organized Crime:** Transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering, poses significant threats to national security. These criminal networks operate across borders, undermining governance, fostering corruption, and fueling violence (UNODC, 2019). Strengthening international cooperation, improving law enforcement capabilities, and disrupting criminal networks are essential in combating this multifaceted threat.

**Geopolitical Instabilities and Conflicts:** Geopolitical instabilities and conflicts in different regions can have far-reaching implications for national security. Armed conflicts, territorial disputes, and geopolitical rivalries can result in destabilization, refugee crises, and the spread of extremism (World Bank, 2011). Diplomatic efforts, conflict resolution mechanisms, and peacebuilding initiatives play a crucial role in preventing conflicts and maintaining regional stability.

In summary, addressing threats to national security requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Terrorism, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, nuclear proliferation, transnational organized crime, and geopolitical instabilities are among the key challenges faced by countries worldwide. By understanding

these threats, governments can develop robust strategies, foster international cooperation, and allocate resources effectively to safeguard national security and ensure the well-being of their citizens.

### **Disinformation in Kenyan Foreign Policy**

Disinformation, defined as the deliberate spread of false or misleading information, has increasingly become a global challenge with significant implications for foreign policy. This paper examines the presence and impact of disinformation in Kenyan foreign policy, providing specific examples and citing relevant sources to shed light on this concerning phenomenon. Disinformation campaigns have significantly impacted Kenyan foreign policy, shaping public opinion, and influencing decision-making processes. By spreading false narratives and manipulating information, disinformation undermines the integrity and effectiveness of foreign policy initiatives.

Disinformation has been observed during electoral periods in Kenya, where false narratives and misleading information are employed to shape international perceptions and influence foreign actors. For instance, during the 2017 general elections, various disinformation campaigns were documented, including the dissemination of fake news and fabricated stories aimed at manipulating international opinions (Wasike & Vawda, 2021). These efforts sought to influence foreign governments, organizations, and media outlets, potentially impacting Kenya's international relations and diplomatic standing. Social media platforms have become fertile grounds for disinformation campaigns, including those related to foreign policy. In the Kenyan context, instances of disinformation on social media platforms have been observed during diplomatic tensions or international incidents. For example, during the maritime dispute between Kenya and Somalia, false information, manipulated images, and misleading narratives were circulated online to shape public opinion and provoke nationalistic sentiments (Napierala, 2020). These efforts aimed to mobilize support domestically and potentially influence international perceptions of the dispute.

**Foreign Interference and Disinformation:** Kenyan foreign policy can also be influenced by disinformation campaigns originating from external actors seeking to advance their own interests. For instance, foreign powers or non-state actors may engage in disinformation tactics to undermine Kenya's diplomatic efforts or manipulate its foreign policy decisions. These campaigns can involve the dissemination of false narratives, propaganda, and the exploitation of existing social and political divisions (Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2020). The impact of such interference on Kenyan foreign policy can be significant, potentially straining diplomatic relations and undermining national interests.

**Implications for Diplomacy and International Relations:** Disinformation in Kenyan foreign policy poses several implications for diplomacy and international relations. It can erode trust between nations, complicate diplomatic negotiations, and damage Kenya's reputation on the global stage. The spread of disinformation can create misunderstandings, misperceptions, and miscalculations, leading to strained relations with key partners and potentially compromising diplomatic efforts (Hameleers & Bos, 2020). Furthermore, disinformation campaigns can undermine Kenya's credibility and influence in international forums, hindering its ability to effectively pursue its foreign policy objectives.

**Manipulation of Regional Alliances:** Disinformation has been used to manipulate perceptions of regional alliances and partnerships, impacting Kenya's foreign policy engagements. For example, during the 2017 Kenyan elections, false narratives circulated, suggesting that certain regional partners were interfering in the electoral process to favor specific candidates (Kamau, 2019). This manipulation of regional alliances through disinformation influences foreign policy decisions and can strain diplomatic relations, hampering collaboration and cooperation.

**Influence on International Perception:** Disinformation campaigns also target international audiences, shaping their perception of Kenyan foreign policy. False narratives can impact how Kenya is viewed by the

international community, affecting diplomatic relations, foreign investments, and trade opportunities. For instance, during the 2013 Kenyan elections, disinformation spread online claiming that certain foreign countries were supporting particular candidates. Such false information can influence international opinions and potentially impact diplomatic engagements (Nyabola, 2018). Impact on Security and Peacekeeping Efforts: Disinformation can have severe implications for security and peacekeeping efforts within Kenyan foreign policy. False narratives and manipulated information can fuel mistrust, incite violence, and hinder peacebuilding initiatives.

In the context of counter-terrorism operations, disinformation campaigns have spread false information about security forces' actions, leading to public distrust and hindering cooperation between the government and affected communities (Oloo, 2020). For example, During the 2017 Kenyan elections, disinformation circulated claiming that certain foreign governments were interfering in the electoral process, leading to tensions and suspicions regarding external influences (Kamau, 2019). In the aftermath of the 2013 Kenyan elections, disinformation campaigns falsely claimed that specific foreign countries were supporting certain candidates, influencing international perceptions of the election and Kenya's foreign policy (Nyabola, 2018). According to a study by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), during the 2017 Kenyan elections, over 90% of Kenyans surveyed encountered false or misleading information, demonstrating the prevalence and impact of disinformation in the political landscape (Kisia, 2020). A survey conducted by the Communications Authority of Kenya revealed that during the 2017 election period, social media platforms were the primary sources of misinformation and disinformation for the majority of Kenyan internet users (Kamau, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Disinformation poses a significant challenge to Kenyan foreign policy, with its presence observed during electoral periods, through the weaponization of social media platforms, and as a result of foreign interference. The impact of disinformation on Kenyan diplomacy and international relations is far-reaching, potentially affecting bilateral relations, credibility, and the pursuit of national interests. Combating disinformation requires a multifaceted approach, including media literacy initiatives, enhanced cybersecurity measures, and international cooperation to address the root causes and mitigate the adverse effects of disinformation on Kenyan foreign policy. Foreign policy disinformation poses a significant challenge to Kenya's public sphere, amplifying polarization and undermining the quality of public discourse. To address this issue, it is crucial to enhance media literacy education, promote fact-checking initiatives, and strengthen regulations and collaborations between government, media organizations, and tech companies. By empowering citizens with the tools to critically analyze information, Kenya can foster an informed public sphere, ensuring that foreign policy discussions are based on accurate information and contribute to the nation's growth and development. Foreign policy disinformation has had a detrimental impact on Kenya's public sphere, exacerbating polarization and hindering constructive foreign policy discussions. To address this issue, there is a need for collaborative efforts among government institutions, media organizations, civil society, and citizens. Promoting media literacy, investing in fact-checking initiatives, and fostering critical thinking skills are crucial in countering the effects of disinformation and restoring a vibrant and informed public sphere.

### • CONCLUSION

Foreign policy disinformation poses a significant challenge in the modern information landscape, with the potential to undermine diplomatic efforts, sow discord, and hinder constructive dialogue. This article has highlighted the impact of disinformation on Kenya's foreign policy, including the manipulation of election-related issues, amplification of ethnic and regional divisions, polarization in foreign policy discourse, and the deterioration of the public sphere. It is evident that combating foreign policy disinformation requires a multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders.

## • RECOMMENDATIONS

**Strengthen Media Literacy:** Invest in comprehensive media literacy programs to equip individuals with the critical thinking skills necessary to identify and evaluate disinformation. Educational initiatives should focus on teaching digital literacy, fact-checking techniques, and responsible information consumption.

**Enhance Collaboration with Fact-Checking Organizations:** Foster partnerships with independent fact-checking organizations to amplify their efforts in debunking disinformation. Support these organizations through funding, resources, and cooperation to ensure their effectiveness in providing accurate information.

**Promote Transparency in Social Media Algorithms:** Encourage social media platforms to be more transparent about their algorithms and content moderation practices. Platforms should prioritize reliable sources and provide users with clear indicators of content credibility, helping users make informed decisions.

**Strengthen International Cooperation:** Foster international collaboration to address cross-border disinformation campaigns. Establish mechanisms for sharing best practices, intelligence, and coordinated responses to foreign influence operations.

**Enforce Legal Measures:** Implement and enforce robust legal frameworks that address foreign policy disinformation. Laws should strike a balance between protecting freedom of speech and holding individuals and entities accountable for deliberately spreading false information.

**Invest in Technology and Artificial Intelligence:** Support research and development of technological solutions, such as AI-based tools, to detect and combat disinformation more effectively. Develop algorithms that can identify and flag misleading or false content, reducing its impact on public opinion.

**Foster Responsible Journalism:** Encourage responsible reporting by media outlets, emphasizing accuracy, balance, and ethical standards. Journalists should be trained in fact-checking techniques and adhere to professional guidelines to minimize the spread of disinformation.

**Promote Civic Engagement and Dialogue:** Encourage active civic engagement and public participation in foreign policy discussions. Foster inclusive platforms for dialogue, ensuring diverse perspectives are heard and respected. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, media organizations, civil society, and individuals can collectively work towards combating foreign policy disinformation and safeguarding the integrity of public discourse.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges posed by foreign policy disinformation requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. By empowering individuals, strengthening fact-checking mechanisms, promoting transparency, and fostering international cooperation, it is possible to mitigate the impact of disinformation and uphold the integrity of foreign policy discussions. Safeguarding the public sphere is essential for building trust, fostering informed decision-making, and promoting constructive dialogue in Kenya's foreign policy arena and beyond.

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