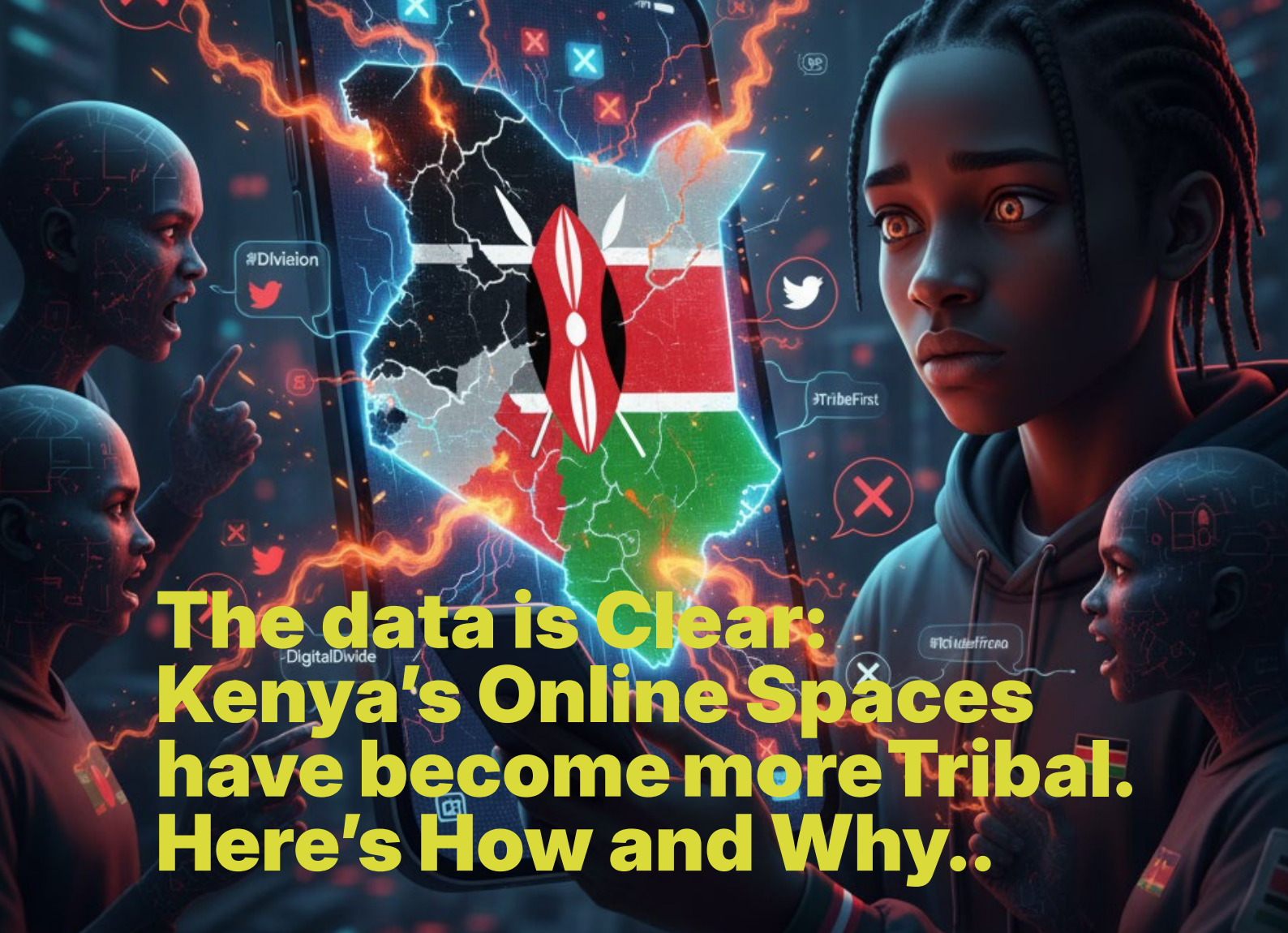




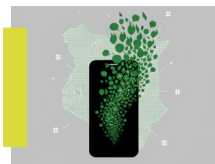


The data is Clear: Kenya's Online Spaces have become more Tribal. Here's How and Why..

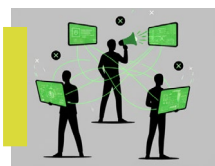
The Gen Z dream was to slay tribalism. Instead, our data shows it's a hydra; cut off one head, and it grows three more.

TLDR: The core insight

Our research, based on over 6 million posts on X (formerly Twitter) between Jan 1 2024 and October 31 2025 shows that Kenya's online space is a **digital echo of a profound societal and political stress test**. The Gen Z protests shook the foundation of Kenya's political system, triggering:



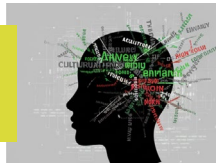
1. **A sharp rise in ethnic rhetoric online:** This is largely in response to political actors using ethnically charged rage baiting and consolidatory speech both online and offline. This is a telling sign of how much ethnicity will be at the forefront of Kenya's 2027 elections.



2. **Orchestrated Amplification:** Political actors strategically exploiting that organic energy, using disinformation to direct, focus, and intensify it for their own ends.



3. **Significant pushback from users:** Many users online are not taking the bait and there's active debate and pushback at the attempts to balkanize the country by ethnic groupings.



4. **A language nuance in tribal speech:** when online users switch to Kiswahili or Sheng, the likelihood of them using harmful speech rises. Reflecting broader cultural trends offline in how people tend to reach for languages that feel more rooted in how they actually talk about politics and more accurately convey what they mean.

While there has been a lot of interrogation about Gen Z's leaderlessness and partylessness, our data suggests the one message that seems to have maintained some form of traction since the events of 2024 is the youth's urge to cure the country of ethnic division.

By Odipo Dev and Tribeless Youth.

Tribalism, in its simplest definition, refers to loyalty to one's own group. In Kenya, that loyalty has been shaped by a history where ethnic identity has too often been weaponized for political gain. Since independence, the struggle for power, resources, and recognition has followed tribal lines, turning elections into moments of existential survival rather than exercises in democracy. The quest for national cohesion has therefore been about confronting and healing these divisions and building a sense of identity that rises above ethnicity.

That's why, when Kenya's youth took to the streets in mid-2024 declaring themselves partyless, leaderless and tribeless, many saw in them a glimpse of the nation Kenya could become. While questions remain about whether the 2024 uprising achieved its aims, few doubt that Gen Z posed a direct challenge to an old political order built on ethnic patronage.

But power rarely concedes easily. The political establishment, long practiced in the art of survival, has turned once again to familiar tactics: realigning and fracturing along ethnic lines both within government and opposition. Over the past year, old narratives of regional unity, tribal loyalty and historical grievance have crept back into the national conversation, reigniting an ethnically charged atmosphere more typical of an election year.

What's new, however, is where these narratives are spreading. They are no longer confined to political rallies or speeches but are now also being echoed and amplified by influencers, normal Kenyan internet users and through coordinated disinformation campaigns designed to inflame divisions and manipulate public sentiment.

Lately, many Kenyans have begun to wonder whether online talk about ethnicity is growing more toxic, especially as politicians test the limits of cohesion and civility. To find out, we collected data on online conversations about the ten largest ethnic groups in Kenya, covering the period from January 1, 2024, to October 31, 2025 - a time defined by youth-led demands for accountability and a more equitable future.

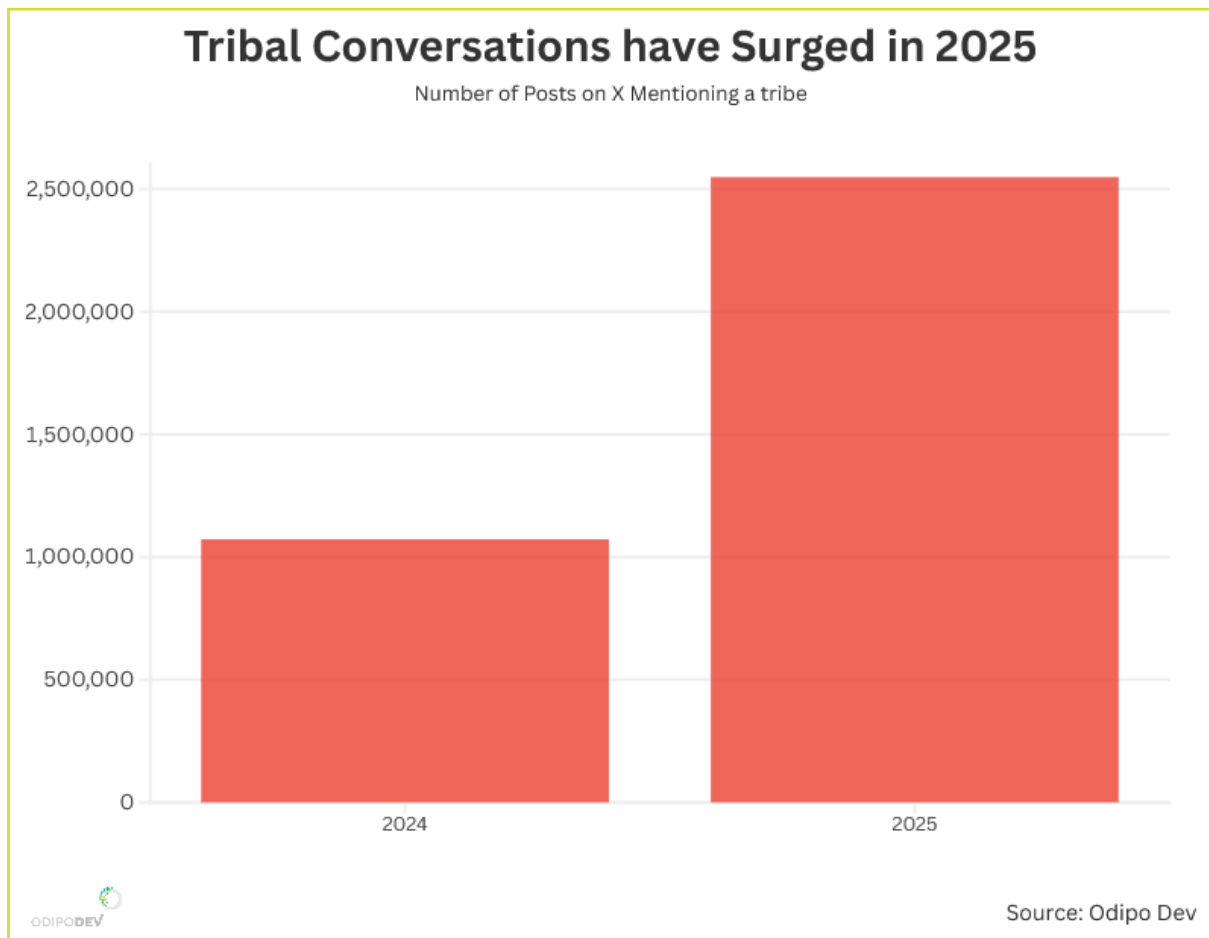


Below are Our Findings:

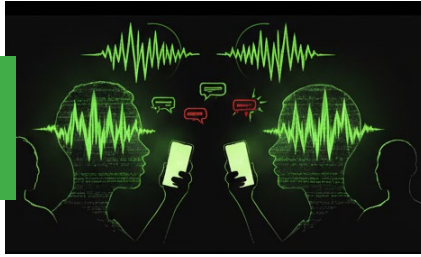


1. Yes, ethnic tension is gaining velocity online. 2025 will see more than a 50% increase in tribal rhetoric on X.

Our research reveals that tribal rhetoric has sharply risen on X (formerly Twitter) in 2025 compared to 2024. The data is unequivocal; in 2024, Kenyans released around 6000 posts per day on X to do with ethnicity, in 2025 they've released close to 10,000 on average. Even before 2025 is over, the volume of tribal related conversations on the platform has already increased by 50% compared to the entirety of 2024.

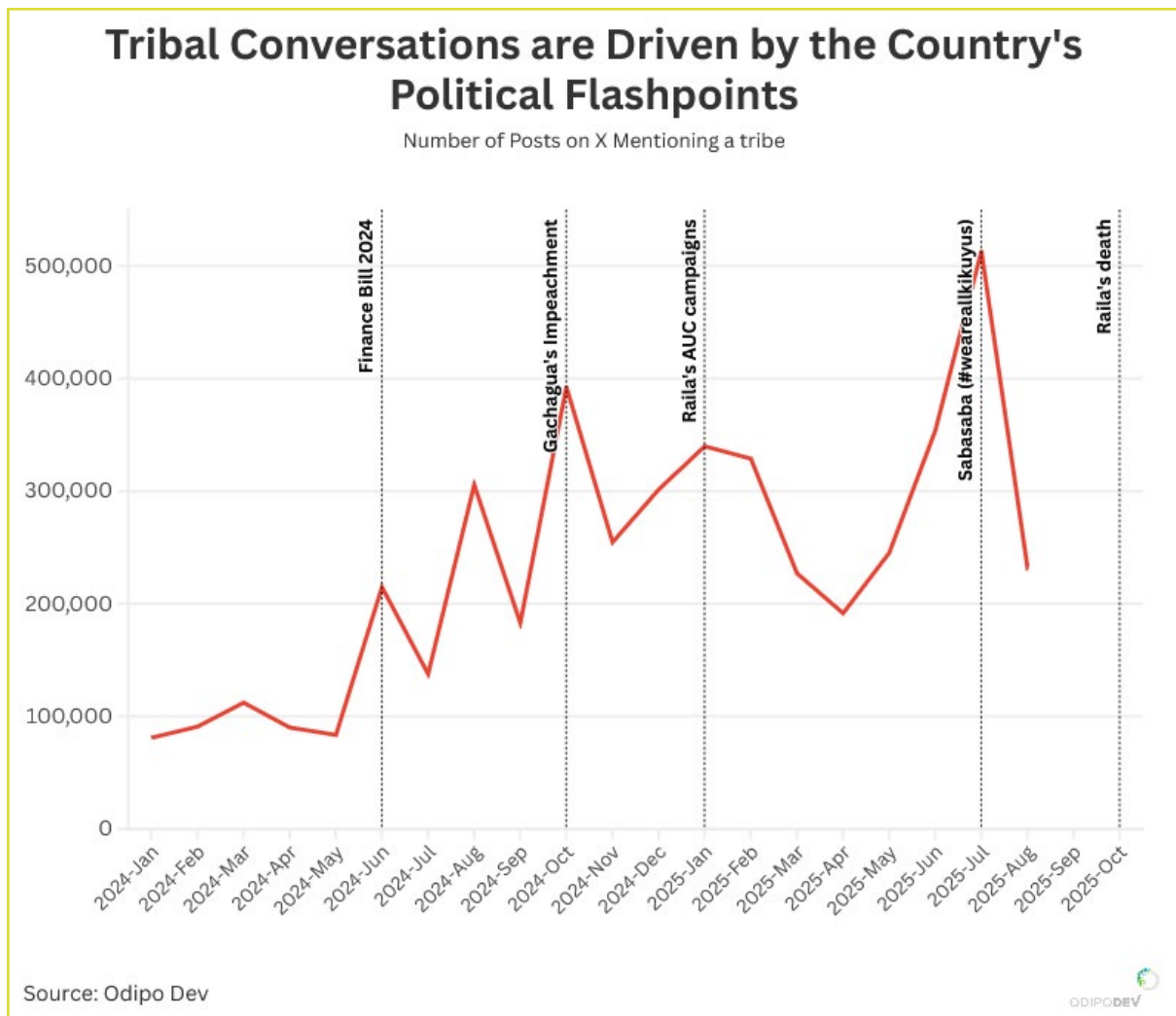


Data illustration showing the difference in the number of posts related to ethnic rhetoric between 2024 and 2025.



2. The June 2024 Gen Z protests were the trigger, and major political flashpoints since have sustained the momentum.

Our research reveals the spike in tribal-related conversations began precisely in June 2024, coinciding with the Gen Z-led protests. That moment marks a clear turning point: the “before” and “after” are two distinct eras in online discourse.



Data illustration mapping political flashpoints with conversation volume about tribes online.

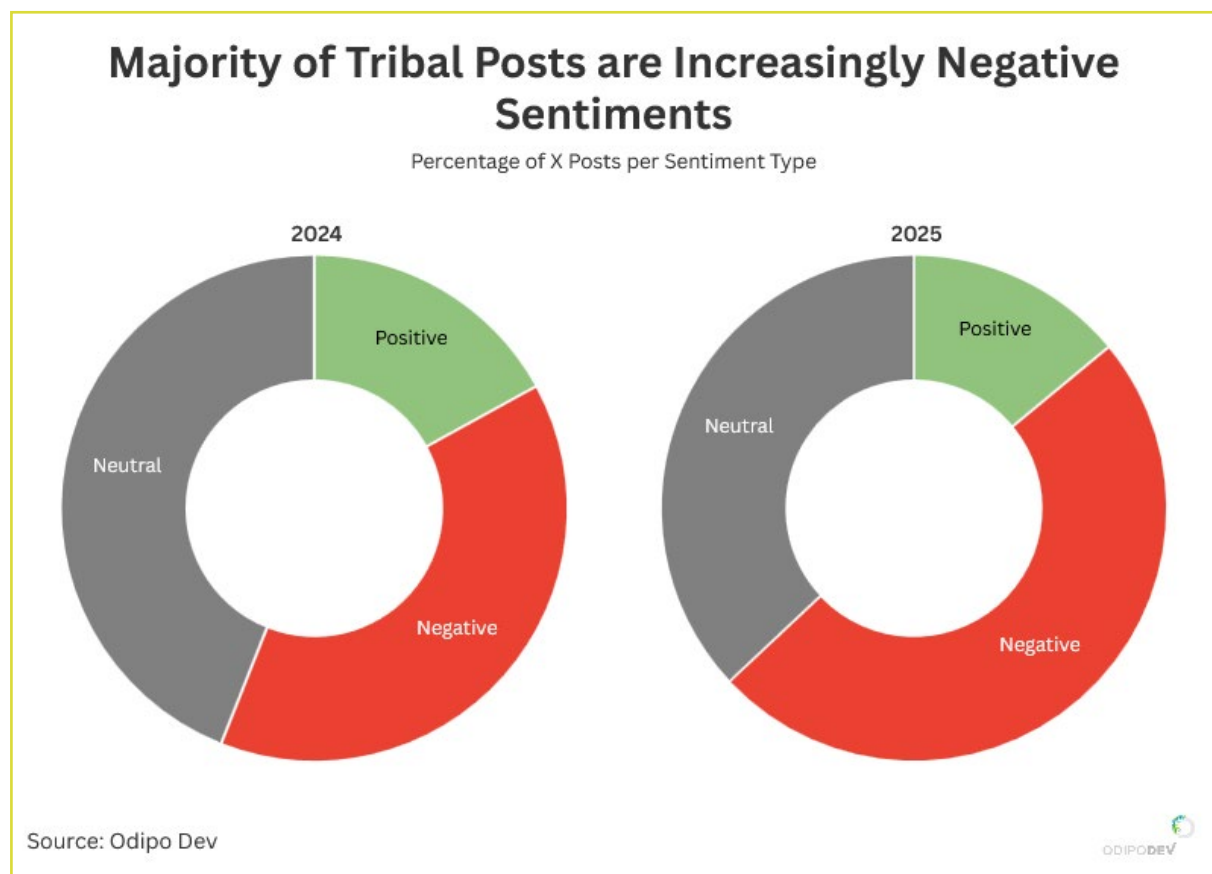
Ironically, a movement calling for a tribeless Kenya seems to have prompted the political establishment to weaponize ethnicity which in turn is reflected online. Our analysis points to a deliberate response. Since the events of June 2024, every major political flashpoint; from the #WeAreAllKikuyus viral movement on July 8th 2025, to the Ruto–Raila handshake, Gachagua’s impeachment, and the deaths of Raila Odinga and Albert Ojwang, has reignited ethnic rhetoric online. Tribal identity has become more deeply woven into how national events are framed and debated.



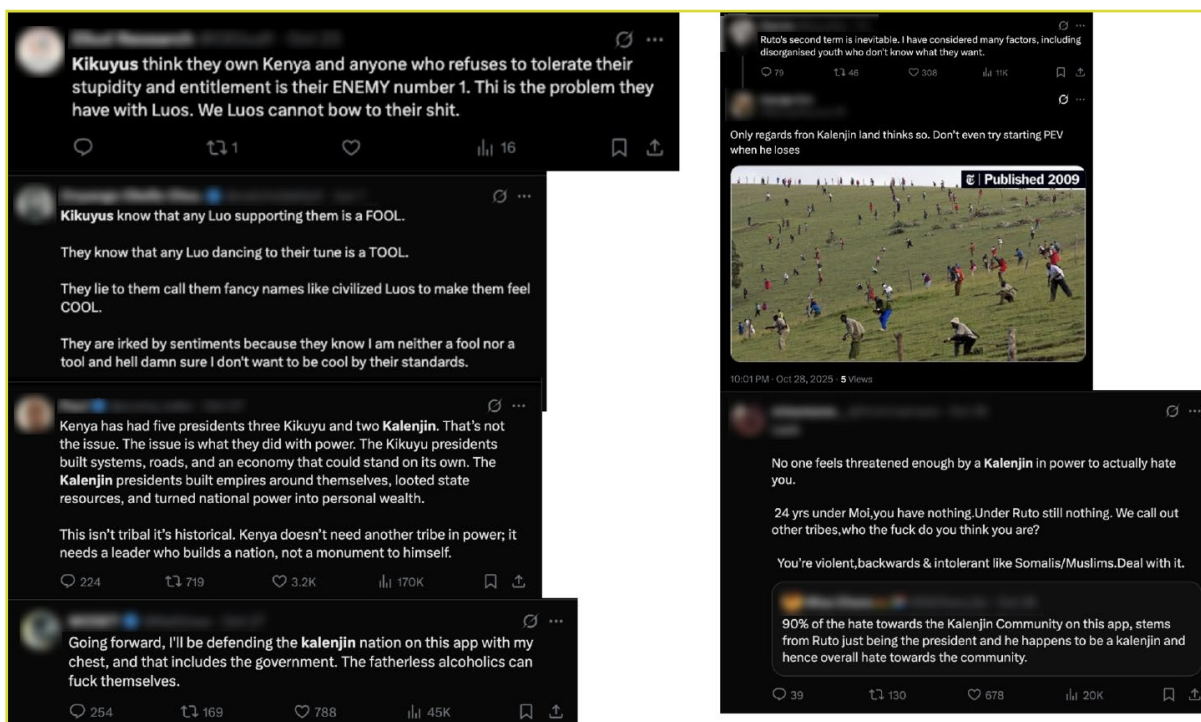
3. Conversations around ethnicity in 2025 are much more charged than they were in 2024. Language plays a role too..

Sentiment analysis measures the polarity of content with regard to how negative or positive a piece of content is. Toxicity measures how likely a piece of text is to be harmful, offensive or abusive or otherwise inappropriate for broad audiences, typically insults and threats. Together, these two provide a measure of how polarized or charged speech on a particular platform is. It's important to emphasize the fact that not all ethnic discourse is harmful; and this study distinguishes between legitimate cultural expression and negative or harmful rhetoric.

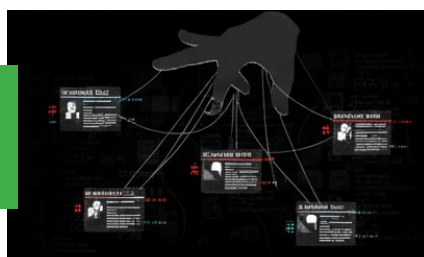
Our sentiment analysis on this data of Kenyans on X shows a worrying shift: not only are Kenyans talking more about tribes in 2025, half of ethnicity-related posts in 2025 on the platform carry negative or toxic tones. In particular, the Kikuyu, Luo and Kalenjin communities experience the highest levels of negative polarization.



Sentiment analysis measures the polarity of content with regard to how negative or positive a piece of content is. Negativity measures the likelihood of a piece of content to be harmful, offensive, abusive or otherwise inappropriate for broad audiences.



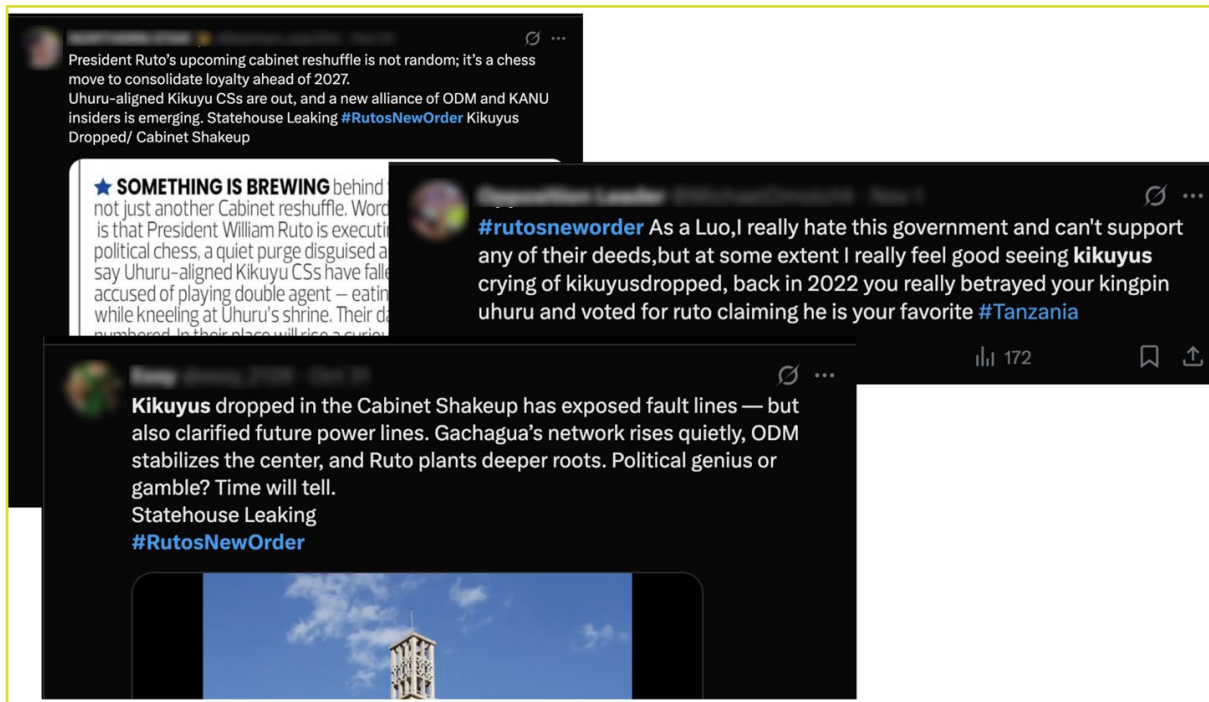
Furthermore, we note that when online users switch to Kiswahili or Sheng, the likelihood of them using harmful speech would rise. Reflecting broader cultural trends offline in how people tend to reach for languages that feel more rooted in how they actually talk about politics and more accurately convey what they mean.



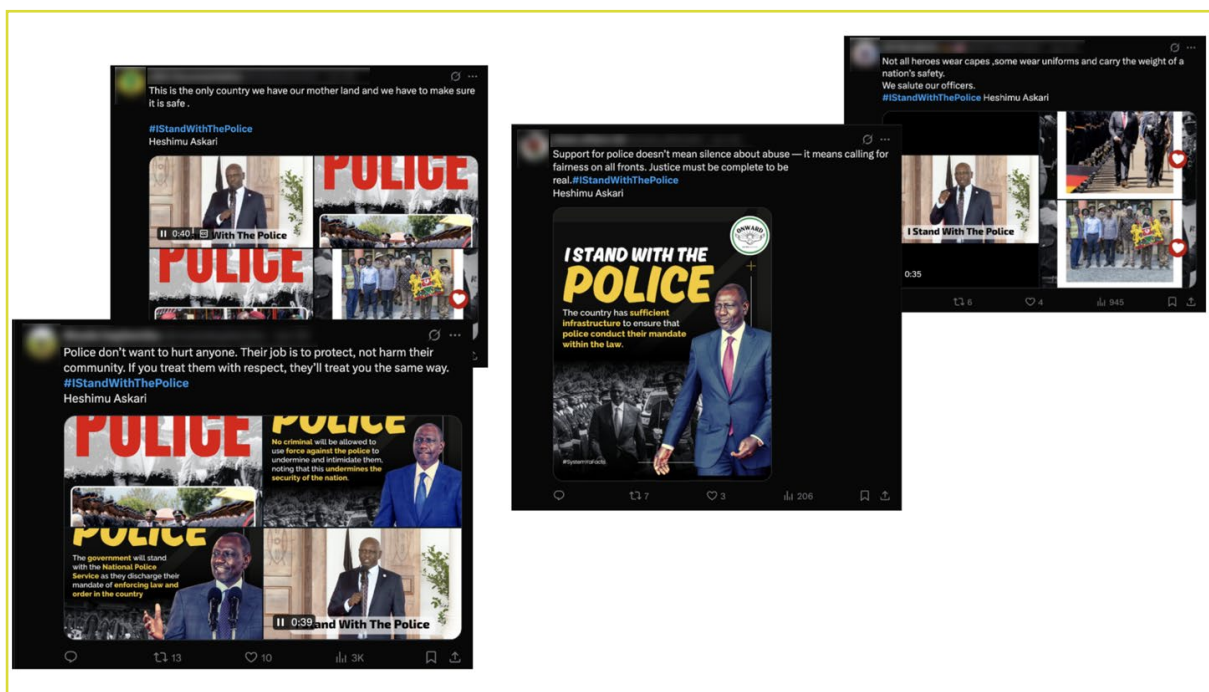
4. Disinformation likely has a role to play in this ecosystem.

Some of this data is organic, but not all of it. It's an open secret that politicians in Kenya seek to control online narratives by paying influencers to seed narratives into online ecosystems. Prior research and press reports have covered how these troll farms are used to target activists, political opponents and media houses. Our research identified several hashtags and campaigns with telltale signs of inauthentic coordination: fresh accounts, sharp, artificial spikes in volume, and repetitive media, all likely aimed at gaming platform algorithms to sow ethnic division. We however couldn't estimate to what extent disinformation is playing a role in the ecosystem.

"Since the events of June 2024, every major political flashpoint"



#RutosNewOrder (Notice the use of similar copy across tweets, in this instance "Kikuyusdropped" "cabinet shakeup" Tweets are also posted at a similar date and time (October 31st) and will take a pro-government spin on prevailing moments, in the case a cabinet reshuffle))



#Istandwiththepolice((Notice the use of similar copy across tweets, in this instance "heshimu askari" Tweets are also posted at a similar date and time (Jun 24th) and will take a pro-government spin on prevailing moments, in this case the anniversary of the June 25th protests)



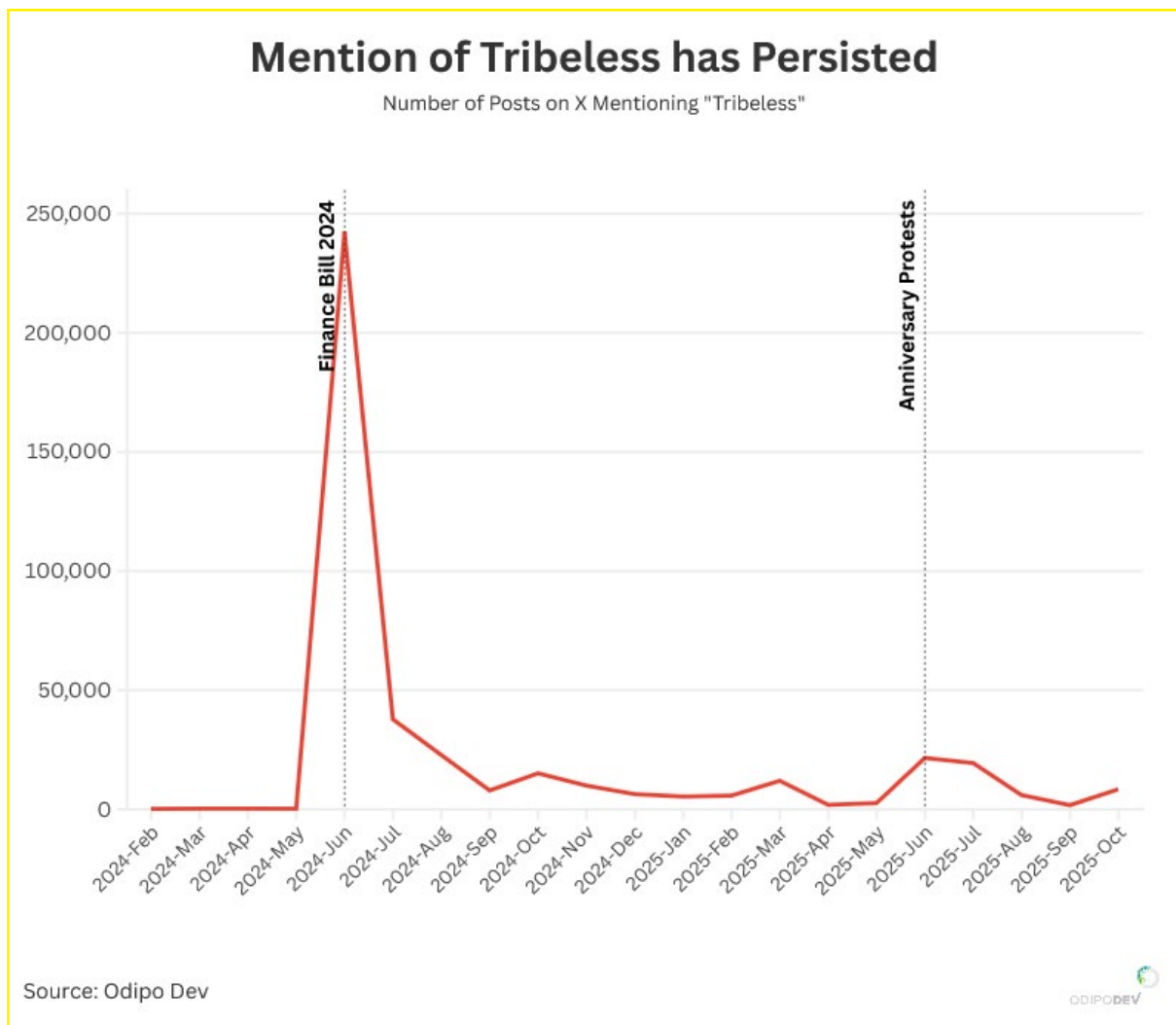
#WamitegoChronicles((Notice the use of the same graphics/images and also language across tweets, in this instance "jaba za RiggyG" Tweets are also posted at a similar date and time (Jul 30th) and will take a pro-government spin on prevailing moments, in this case a sustained effort to discredit former Deputy President Gachagua)

Over the past year, old narratives of regional unity, tribal loyalty and historical grievance have crept back into the national conversation, reigniting an ethnically charged atmosphere more typical of an election year.

So then what?

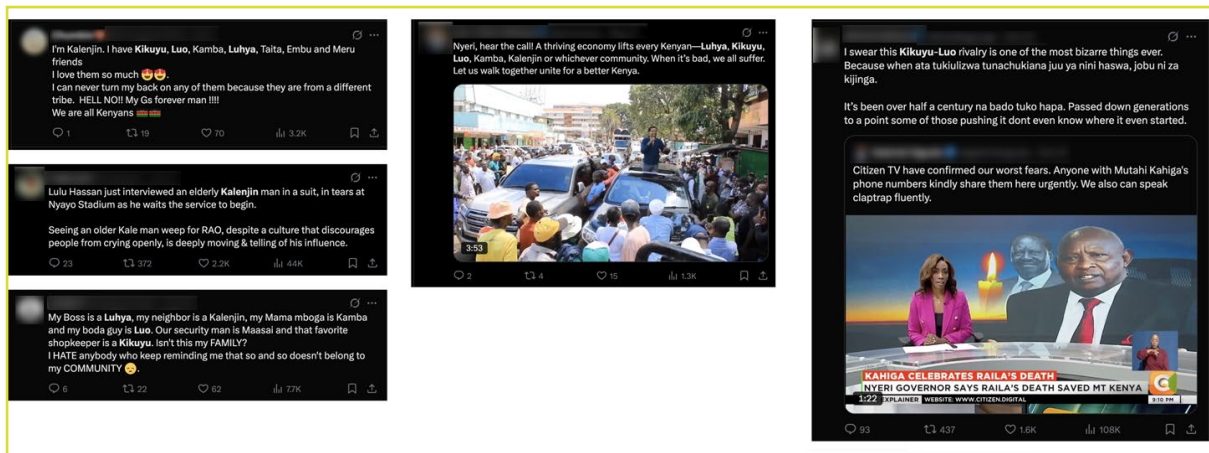
The tribeless dream went mainstream but could be in need of sustenance. In fact, it is arguably more necessary than ever.

Amidst this landscape, we identified one fragile, but important, data point: the word “tribeless” itself. Once obscure, it was thrust into the mainstream by Gen Z. We note that the usage of the term also follows political flashpoints similar to other ethnicity other terms in our data.



Data illustration showing the usage of the term “Tribeless” in 2024

This however doesn't mean that the efforts to fight negative ethnicity have stalled. They're happening under different banners and within the ecosystems of the other terms we monitored as well. Self corrective campaigns like #weareallkikuyus show the sharp reaction with which online audiences can revolt against ethnic baiting.

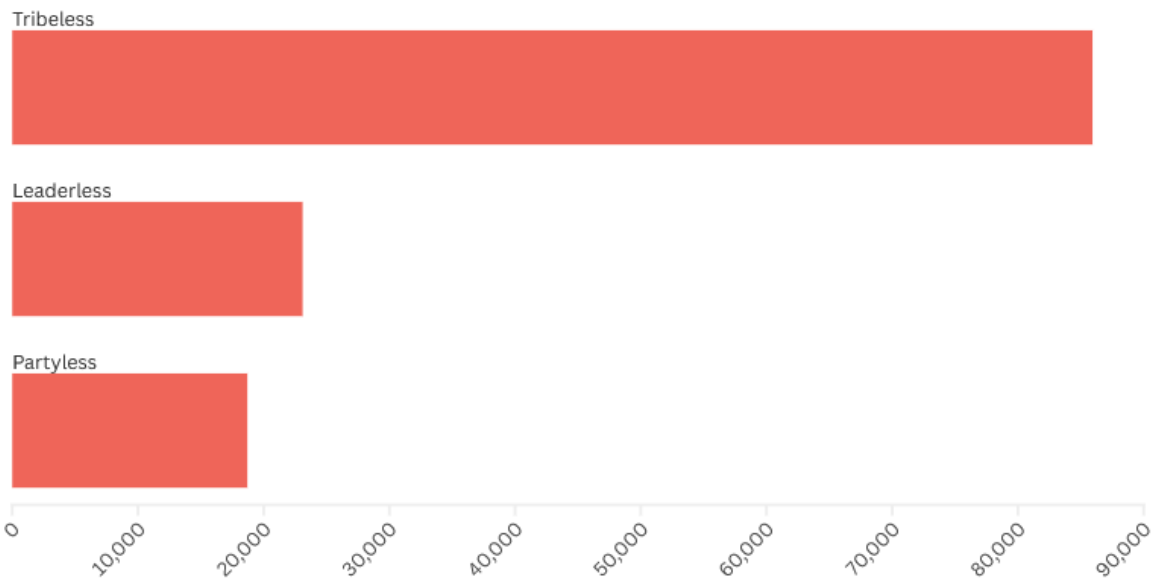


More importantly, this shows how audiences on X and others similar to them could be receptive to messaging that affirms their desire to move beyond tribe. While there has been a lot of interrogation about Gen Z's leaderlessness and partylessness, our data suggests the one platform that seems to have maintained some form of traction since the events of 2024 is the youth's urge to cure the country of ethnic division.



Mention of Tribeless, Leaderless, Partyless in 2025

Number of Posts on X Mentioning a tribe



Source: Odipo Dev



Data illustration showing post counts for partyless, leaderless and tribeless in 2025.

For political operatives : Kenya's tribeless dream remains fragile. The Gen Z movement's refusal to be boxed into ethnic blocs is progressive, but the counter-reaction shows that political elites are mobilizing old grievances and prejudices to reclaim relevance ahead of 2027. This is happening both online and offline.

For platforms: The architecture of X continues to reward divisive, emotionally charged content. Without local moderation, contextual awareness, or algorithmic transparency, online conversations will continue to mirror and magnify Kenya's offline tensions. Our research also shows how disinformation will focus on amplifying harmful tribal narratives and that local language tends to elicit sharper rhetoric. Platforms will need to take this into account when designing interventions for their ecosystems as we move into campaign season.

For civic actors: Counter-narratives like #WeAreAllKikuyus demonstrates that positive mobilization is possible. Campaigners must invest in narrative inoculation: seeding empathy and civic belonging before crises emerge or when they do. Activating around political flashpoints will be key to interventions.

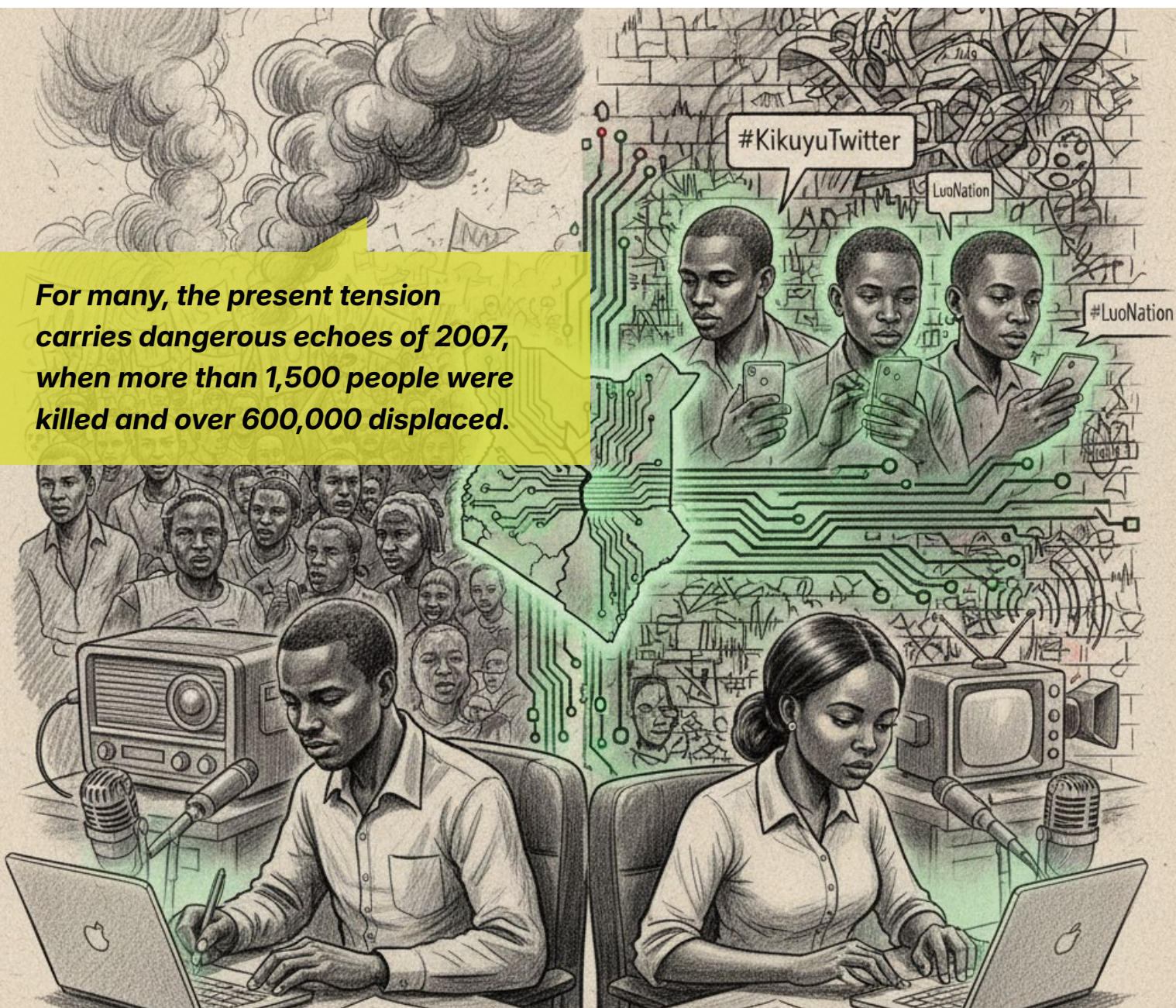
For researchers: Future work must trace how online tribal discourse migrates offline, going into radio talk shows, newsrooms, and street-level mobilization. Kenya offers a case study in how youth-led movements collide with legacy fault lines under the pressure of global platform dynamics.

Kenya's civic stability hangs in the balance once again, but this time shaped by new and complex dynamics. For many, the present tension carries dangerous echoes of 2007, when more than 1,500 people were killed and over 600,000 displaced. Back then, the internet was a minor factor in Kenya's politics; X (then Twitter) was a year old, Facebook barely three, and TikTok didn't exist.

Today, connectivity is near universal. Smartphones are everywhere, and social media has become the main arena for political debate, mobilization, and dissent. But alongside this progress, the darker undercurrents of tribal prejudice have also migrated online. The ethnic polarization that once unfolded in rallies and town halls now plays out on screens, often amplified by algorithms and shadowy disinformation networks.

Each election cycle brings fresh concern about how digital hate speech and propaganda could spill into real-world violence and the adequacy of platform safeguards to prevent harm. Kenya has built legal and institutional safeguards from hate speech laws to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission but as the political battle increasingly moves online, the challenge of keeping the digital public square safe and united has never been greater.

For many, the present tension carries dangerous echoes of 2007, when more than 1,500 people were killed and over 600,000 displaced.



Methodology

This study set out to find out whether the volume and tone of ethnic conversation online in Kenya is worsening. We gathered data related to online conversation around the [10 largest ethnic groups](#) (Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, Kamba, Somali, Kisii, Mijikenda, Meru, Maasai) in Kenya by population, spanning Jan 1 2024 - Oct 31 2025, a period marked by youth-led protests and other major political flash points. This data was collected from X (formerly Twitter) which has 2 million users, was ground zero for how much of Kenya's [youth organize](#) and has an outsized influence on [Kenya's political information ecosystem](#).

The study takes into account both inauthentic and authentic activity. We also emphasize the fact that not all ethnic related conversation is bad and we aimed to distinguish between healthy cultural expression and risky rhetoric. We believe that understanding the shape of ethnic related speech equips stakeholders better in towards mitigating the harmful aspects of it.

This work is part of an ongoing research collaboration between Odipo Dev and Tribeless Youth aiming to decode tribalism in Kenya through data driven approaches. If you are interested in partnering with us. Please send an email to team@odipodev.com.

