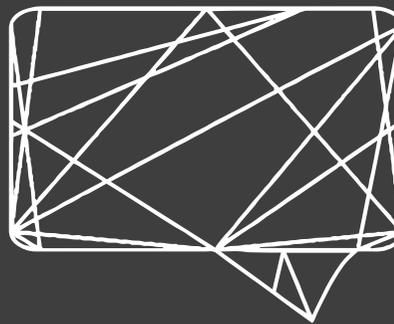




MONITORING  
ONLINE HATE  
SPEECH

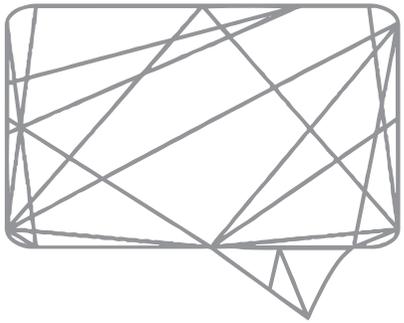


## UMATI MONITORING REPORT

July - September 2013

THIS RESEARCH WAS FUNDED BY INTERNEWS





## **UMATI MONITORING REPORT**

July - September 2013

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Umati project seeks to understand the dissemination of hate and dangerous speech in the Kenyan online space. During the 2007 general election in Kenya, when Internet penetration in the country was still quite low, mobile text messages (SMS) were sent to incite the public to violence that left over 1,100 people dead and about 300,000 displaced<sup>1</sup>. With today's technological advancements and the rapid growth of social media, hate speech can reach thousands of people online, and potentially, cause much more damage. With the Internet's potential reach and influence, as both a possible threat and solution, the Umati project set out to create the tools and methodology to monitor the online discourse and analyse the roots of hate and dangerous speech.

The first phase of Umati ran from September 2012 through May 2013. After a month recess, the second phase began in late July 2013. This quarterly report summarizes the progress and findings of the period from July to September 2013. In the second phase, we have continued to monitor online content and record incidents of hate and dangerous speech in online forums, social media networks and blogs. We were also able to expand the project methodology to include some efforts at automating the monitoring process through Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP).

During the period from the end of July through September 2013, we discovered several distinct findings. First, hate speech has become more diverse; it is not only tribal, but also includes other forms of hate speech based on religion, sexuality, and gender. In the previous phase, most hate speech found online was focused on tribal divisions. This recent period also saw offensive speech (the lowest category of hate and dangerous speech) as the most common form of hate speech, followed by moderately dangerous, and finally, the extremely dangerous category. This trend seems to roughly follow previous trends shown in the first monitoring phase<sup>2</sup>. This is a shift from the election period when more direct calls to violent action were more common.

We also found that identifiable commenters were the most active disseminators of hate speech. This could be attributed to the lack of serious action taken against propagators by the National Cohesion and Integration Committee (NCIC), the government body tasked with addressing or taking action against such speech. There could be a perceived lack of consequences for disseminating hate speech.

Finally, the Umati project has been collecting growing evidence that most hate speech occurs as a response to ongoing events on the ground, especially as these events get aired on mainstream media and are shared via online media. We found that mainstream media (print, radio, television) plays an important role in setting the narrative for the topics discussed online. This was evident in the online conversations around the ICC cases and Nairobi Westgate Mall attack, around which a surge in hate speech was noted. In another analysis<sup>3</sup> of the two major news topics in the country -the ICC cases and the devolution process- it was noted that these major events and topics have an influence on the direction of online conversations and more specifically hate speech. Traditional mainstream media was also a major source of information and driver of these topics<sup>4</sup>. It is therefore important that media houses practise responsible reporting as they are an influential player in shaping the types of conversations occurring online.

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1 On. et al, 2008

2 Umati Final Report, 2013

3 Morara & Sambuli, 2013

4 Morara & Sambuli, 2013

# INTRODUCTION

According to the National Cohesion and Integration (Kenya) Act of 2008, hate speech is defined as “that which advocates or encourages violent acts against a specific group and creates a climate of hate or prejudice, which may, in turn, foster the commission of hate crimes.<sup>5</sup>” Hate speech gained national attention in Kenya, with speculation about the key role that mobile text messages (SMS) and coded radio commentary played towards catalyzing post-election violence in 2007/8. Increased incidences of hate speech, largely playing on ethnic divisions, might have contributed to catalyzing the violence that resulted in the death of over 1,100 Kenyans and the displacement of approximately 300,000<sup>6</sup> others.

The definition given by the aforementioned act is fairly vague and makes no mention of other forms of hatred such as that based on religion, gender, race, nationality, sexuality or any other group category. The Umati project sought a more nuanced understanding of hate speech. A more clear definition with real on-the-ground applicability could be of greater assistance to NGOs, politicians, government officials and the general public as we work to define, identify, report, and mitigate hate speech.

Umati has therefore adopted the Dangerous Speech Framework by Professor Susan Benesch of the American University, who is an authority on hate speech analysis. Benesch coined the term “dangerous speech” to encompass speech that has the reasonable possibility to catalyse violence.

## **The Benesch Framework<sup>7</sup> comprises five criteria to determine dangerous speech:**

- The speaker and his or her influence over a given audience whereby a political, cultural or religious leader or any other individuals with a significant following will tend to have more influence over a crowd.
- The susceptibility of the audience; are they misinformed, uneducated, desperate or in fear of the speaker, making them vulnerable to incitement?
- The content of the speech that may be taken as inflammatory or offensive to the audience/listener.
- The social and historical context of the speech; for instance, were there previous clashes or any kind of competition between two groups?
- Finally, the means of spreading the speech which includes the language in which it was expressed and the medium used.

<sup>5</sup> The National Cohesion and Integration Act, 2008

<sup>6</sup> On et al, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Benesch, 2012.

# WHY ONLINE?

The internet provides great communication tools and platforms for self-expression. Just as good speech has been observed, hateful and vitriolic speech is also generated and propagated under various contexts. In Kenya, although hate speech gained much attention during the 2007/8 post election violence, most hate speech projects have focused on mainstream media monitoring, not the online space. The initial Umati project pioneered the assessment of online hate speech. Umati Phase I, cognizant of the rise and popularity of new media (the blogosphere, social media, online forums) since 2007, monitored these new online spaces preceding, during, and after the 2013 election.

These new media have also created space for other parties (individuals, institutions) apart from mainstream media to wield influence. It is against this backdrop that the second phase of the project seeks to streamline the monitoring<sup>8</sup> process to improve on the identification of hate speech, to better understand the influencers who drive the discussions around such speech and possible methods to reduce hate speech online.

## WHY WE ARE STILL MONITORING HATE SPEECH ONLINE:

Despite the close of the 2013 election season, hate speech remains common in the Kenyan online space. In the past quarter, we found more dangerous speech than expected given a non-election period. So, we investigated further to understand how other events and issues influence hate speech online, what form it takes, and who or what the key drivers are. Many transitional democracies have socio-economic, ethnic, political and religious cleavages that are the root of online dangerous speech and violence. In fact, even the post election violence in Kenya was due in part to pre-existing conflicts regarding land rights, ethnic divisions, and political competition. Yet, there was no systematic monitoring of the online space before the election to provide a baseline of hate and dangerous speech; it was only after the violence erupted that this gap in information was addressed. Thus, continued online monitoring could lead to the identification of appropriate technologies and tools to track and analyse structural tensions, social divides and national friction points through online data.

Even as we export the Umati project to other countries, it remains important to continue with the monitoring of the Kenyan online space and use it as the testing ground for the open source Umati software. Continuing to build the Kenyan online hate speech database is an important contribution to the growing research on online hate speech.

<sup>8</sup> National Cohesion and Integration Commission, 2012.

# METHODOLOGY

## MONITORING PROCESS AND TOOLS

The first phase of Umati relied on a largely manual process of collecting and categorizing hate speech. We realized that the nuanced insights necessary to accurately review local vernacular languages required heavy human input that a computer could not replicate at the time since no previous database of vernacular text existed. Now, with a significant database of inflammatory speech in over 5 different Kenyan vernacular languages, built from the content of over 12 months of monitoring, it is possible to begin automating the process. An automated process will increase efficiency and productivity, and decrease costs. In addition, by building on existing open source code, we are creating a tool to monitor online dangerous speech anywhere in the world.

The first phase of Umati was useful in testing the practical application of the Benesch Framework on Dangerous Speech in the Kenyan online context. Nonetheless, the process developed requires streamlining, particularly in the collection of online data. Umati Phase II, therefore, looks at employing Machine Learning (ML) techniques and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to detect, collect, select, and sort hate and dangerous speech from the Kenyan online space. Experts in ML and NLP will work together with our Data Lab scientists to automate the current Umati methodology and improve the scalability of the system.

This process is currently being carried out by five monitors, three of the largest ethnic groups in Kenya (Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo) are monitored by one each; one monitoring Swahili, the national language, and Sheng, a pidgin language incorporating Swahili, local languages, and English; and one focused on two key issues in Kenya: devolution, the newly introduced mode of governance, and the on-going trials at the International Criminal Court (ICC). These topics were chosen for their potential national impact (Morara and Sambuli, 2013).

During the most recent period (July - Sept), we have tested out several tools for analysing online content. One such tool is Phantom JS<sup>9</sup>, a scriptable headless webkit used for scraping data from websites. We faced some challenges with the tool as all websites do not use a uniform template. A potential solution to this barrier is to build different modules for the different website templates. Testing of WEKA<sup>10</sup>, a Machine Learning software, is still ongoing and more time is needed to assess its viability.

The monitors also used different applications to monitor social media platforms. Some of these applications include Topsy<sup>11</sup>, Twitterfall<sup>12</sup> and Trendsmap<sup>13</sup> for Twitter. These search engines give real-time insights into online conversations and enable one to monitor how content is being shared, who is sharing it, the key influencers, and the sentiments over time, by use of key words. Trendsmap also gives a detailed view of current trends on Twitter with the help of Google Maps to depict the geographical location of each trend. For Facebook, the monitors leveraged the Open Status Search tool<sup>14</sup>, an application that allows one to do keyword searches of public conversations on Facebook. Ideally, these applications could enable the Umati project to follow the events as they unfold.

9 <http://phantomjs.org>

10 <http://weka.pentaho.com/>

11 <http://topsy.com>

12 <http://www.twitterfall.com>

13 <http://trendsmap.com>

14 <http://openstatussearch.com>

## CATEGORIZATION PROCESS:

The different levels of dangerous speech used throughout the Umati process were selected to reflect the ranges one would expect in the intensity of the analysed comments. When using human monitors, we expect these levels to vary based on personal bias and perception, creating inconsistencies especially between comments categorised as moderately dangerous and extremely dangerous speech. It is for this reason that automation of the process is necessary to improve consistency in the ranking of levels of hate speech.

The monitors used a categorization process that enabled them to sort each collected statement into categories. The three hate speech categories, in ascending order of severity, are:

- **Category One: Offensive Speech**

Hate speech comments in this category are mainly insults to a particular group. Often, the speaker has little influence over the audience and the content is barely inflammatory, with no calls to action. Most statements in this category are discriminatory and have very low prospects of causing violence on the ground.

- **Category Two: Moderately Dangerous Speech**

In this category, comments are moderately inflammatory and made by speakers with little to moderate influence. Audiences may react differently; to some these comments may be inflammatory, while to others they are not.

- **Category Three: Extremely Dangerous Speech**

Statements in this category are made by speakers with moderate to high influence over a crowd. They are extremely dangerous with a high potential to cause violence. Such comments are usually calls to action (calls to beat, kill, and forcefully evict), stated as truths or orders. These statements are seen to have the highest potential to cause violence as they tend to constitute an action plan that is understood and acted upon by the targeted audience. More on the categorization formula employed can be found in the Umati Phase I final report<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Umati Final Report, 2013 p(15-17)

The Umati team also devised a methodology to identify dangerous speech online. Below are the guidelines for the identification of dangerous speech:

- **Targets a group of people.** It is important to note that a hate comment about an individual is not necessarily hate speech unless it targets the individual as part of a group. In our research, it is quite evident that dangerous speech towards a group can occur across different lines which include religion, tribe, gender, sexuality, political affiliation and racial lines.
- **May contain one hallmark of dangerous speech.** Three hallmarks that are common in dangerous speech comments, as identified by Susan Benesch from previous cases, include:
  - a. Comparing a group of people with animals, insects or vermin
  - b. Suggesting that the audience faces a serious threat or violence from another group (“accusation in a mirror”)
  - c. Suggesting that some people from another group are spoiling the purity or integrity of the speakers’ group
- **Contains a call to action.** Dangerous speech more often than not encourages a particular audience to commit acts of violence towards a group of people. The major calls to action include: discriminate, kill, beat/injure, loot, riot, and forcefully evict.

Our main Umati II goal is to create a simple, and possibly automated process that can be replicated in other countries. We hope that this process will be used to monitor dangerous speech leading up to pivotal events in different contexts. As part of Umati II, we will test the methodology and software in Nigeria, in relation to their upcoming election. This, coupled with continuous monitoring and testing in the Kenyan context, will enrich the automation process we are developing.

# FINDINGS

The following section presents a consolidation of all incidences of hate speech for the months of August and September that have been identified in Kenya's webosphere from four main sources: social networks (Facebook and Twitter), online blogs/forums, websites and the comment sections of online newspapers<sup>16</sup>. Social network pages and blogs of identified influential personalities were monitored, including comments from their followers. These, as well as popular media websites and select sites dealing with relevant content, totaled 124 sources monitored during this period.

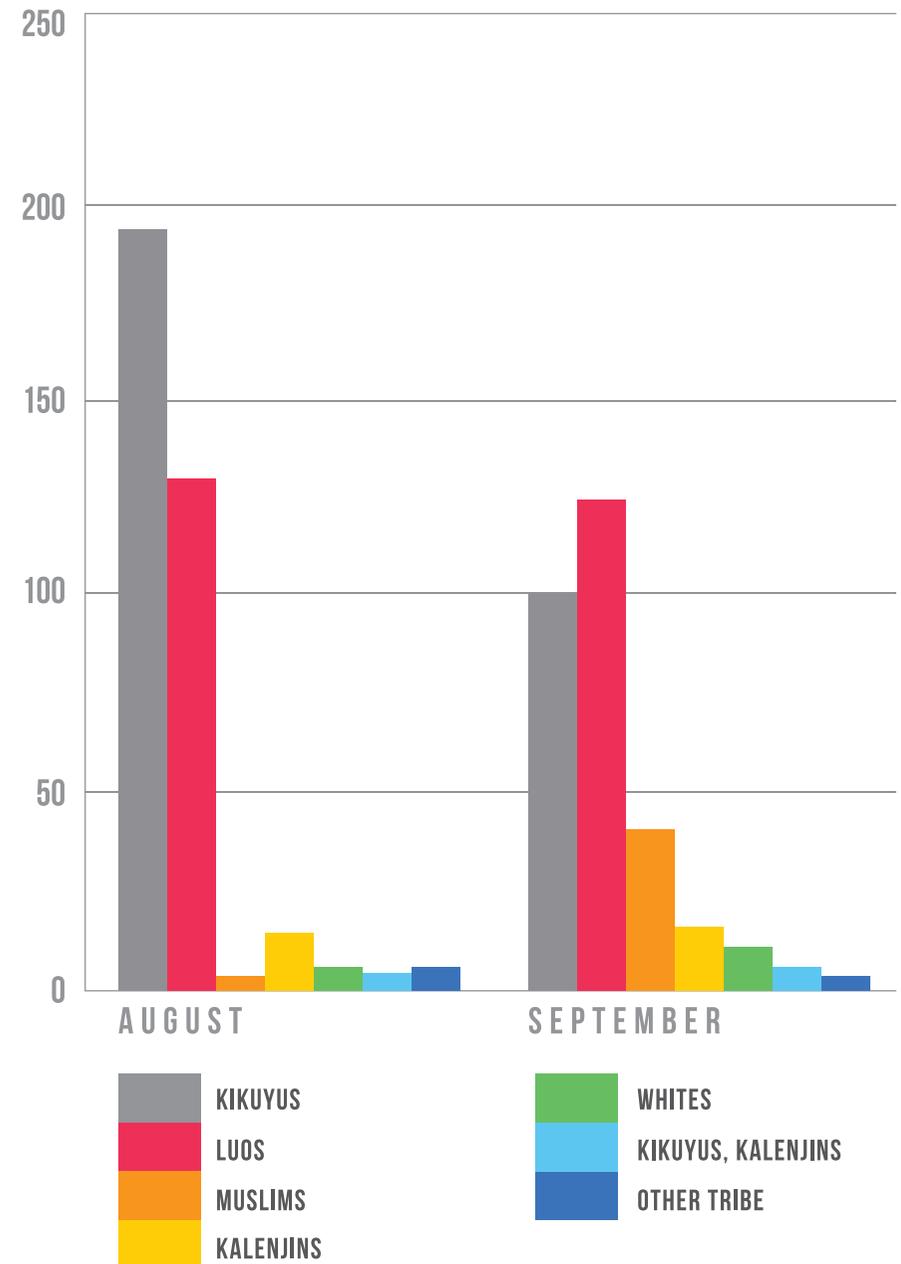
## 1. MUSLIMS ARE A NEW TARGET OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH

The last two months saw most hate speech on tribal lines directed at Kikuyus, Luos and Kalenjins, in that order. These three tribes have historically been the predominant players in the Kenyan political arena. The trend is fairly similar to phase one (October 2012 to June 2013). There has been an increase in religious dangerous speech directed at Muslims as noted in the August-September period, as compared to that collected in phase 1, with a notable surge in September (Figure 1). This surge might be attributed to the aftermath of the September 21 attack at the Nairobi Westgate Mall that resulted in at least 67 deaths and over 200 people wounded<sup>17</sup>. The Al-Shabab Islamist group claimed responsibility for the incident saying the attack on the mall was payback for the killing of Muslims during Kenyan military operations in Somalia. This has led to online talk of all Muslims being terrorists, with particular vitriol against Kenyan Somalis.

<sup>16</sup> The second phase of the project began towards the end of July 2013. Therefore, the monitors only captured comments during the last week of that month. So, for consistency, we discuss only data from August and September in the findings.

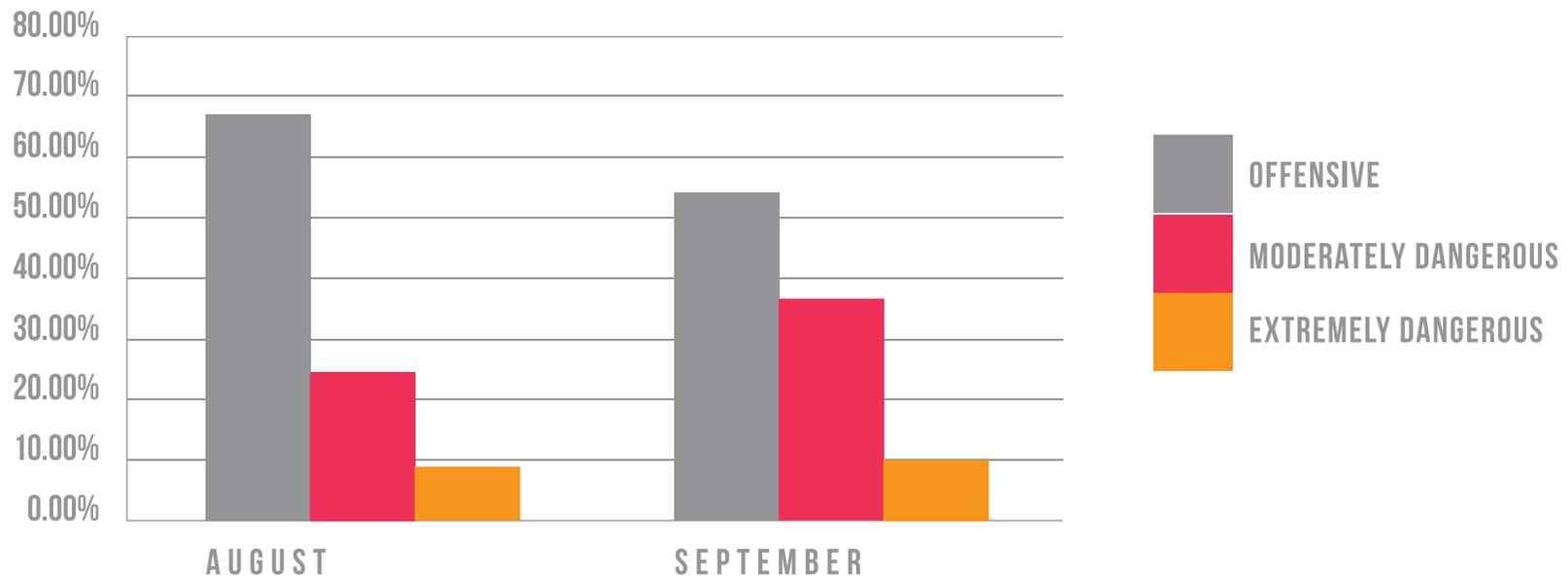
<sup>17</sup> Howden, 2013

## TARGETED GROUP



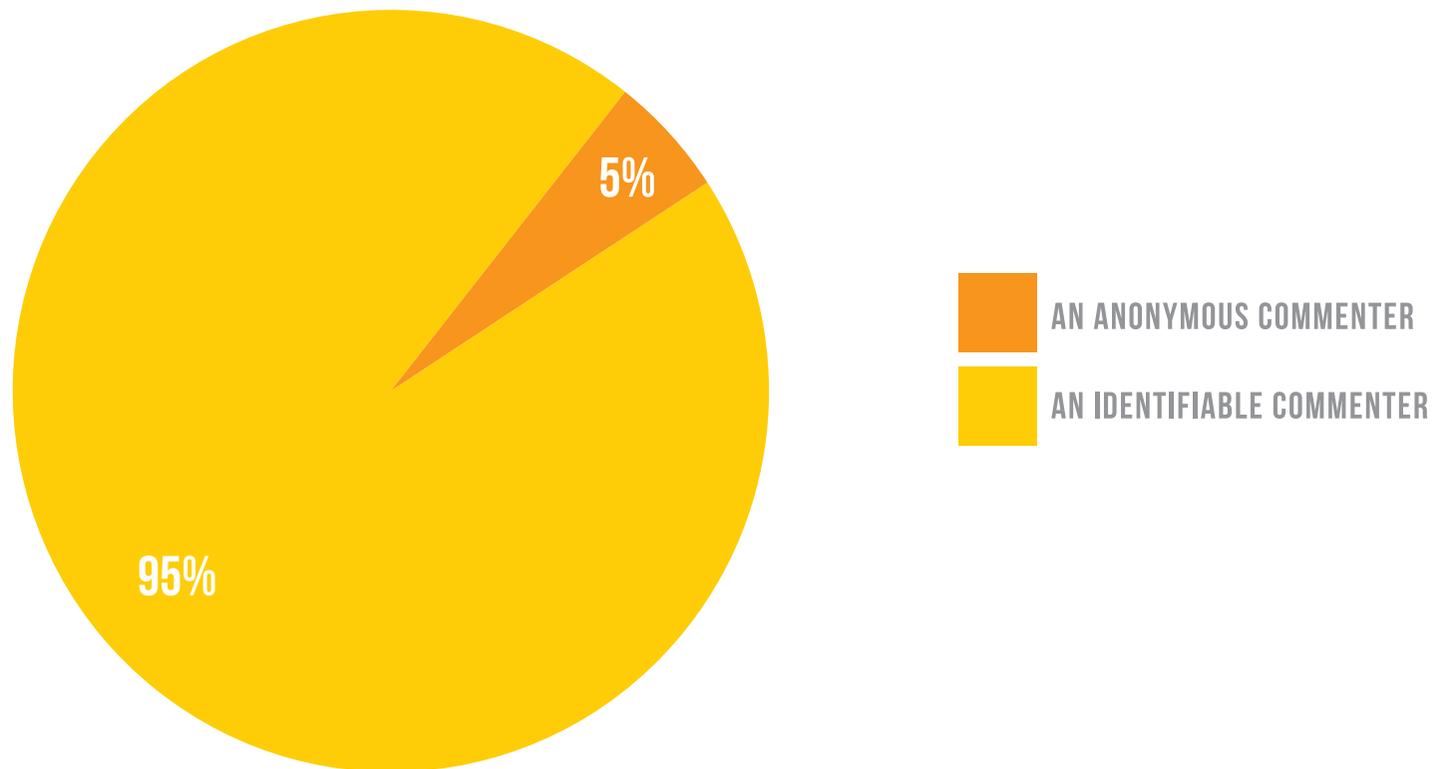
The highest category of hate speech noted in the two months analysed was offensive speech (see Figure 2). The graph below indicates slightly higher levels of dangerous speech in September than in August. This could be explained by the introduction of Muslims as a new target group for hate.

## HATE SPEECH LEVELS



## 2. IDENTIFIABLE COMMENTERS ARE THE LEADING DISSEMINATORS OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH

In the two months analysed, identifiable commenters were the biggest drivers of hate speech online, followed by anonymous commenters and a very small percentage of politicians (less than 1%). Identifiable commenters are online users who comment using their real names or pseudo names. This lack of caution on the part of the commenters could be attributed to two key things: first, there have not yet been any concrete cases in Kenya where someone has been prosecuted for the spreading of hate speech, hence speakers may feel they can also get away with use of it. The NCIC's office term has also expired and is yet to be renewed by the National Assembly. It has been accused of having nothing to show for its five years of existence, especially in dealing with hate speech perpetrators. Secondly, the high number of identifiable commenters using hate speech also suggests that these speakers are not concerned about being linked to dangerous speech or of the impact that their comments might have.



### 3. CALLS ENCOURAGING DISCRIMINATION HIGHEST

The most frequent call to action was encouraging discrimination against other groups, as shown in Figure 4. The crafting of statements and reactions has mostly implied the discriminatory speech to be a result of commonly held or acceptable views on the various communities targeted. These calls to action haven't been explicit either, and imply a sense of resignation to holding the discriminatory view against different groups. Examples include, 'All Kikuyus are thieves.' 'Wasichana ni umalaya tu thats y we can't have a female president.' (Translation: Girls are all about prostitution, that's why we can't have a female president.)

Speech categorized as 'none of the above' comprises statements collected that target the various groups (tribes, religion, gender), whose call to action isn't easily determined without a considerable assumption, as well as those that don't necessarily target the various groups, but are generated in the context of offensive speech targeted at (a) particular group(s).

Examples of speech under this category include:

i) *'Nyeri is cursed. Intercessors need to pray harder to overcome the hurricane of evil deed'* . This was a comment generated in response to a news article on a HIV positive man from the county who was jailed for defiling his daughters. Nyeri is a region mostly inhabited by members of the Kikuyu community. The statement could be viewed as nuanced, and as an indirect discrimination against Kikuyu. It would entail some form of assumption or deduction that it's the intent.

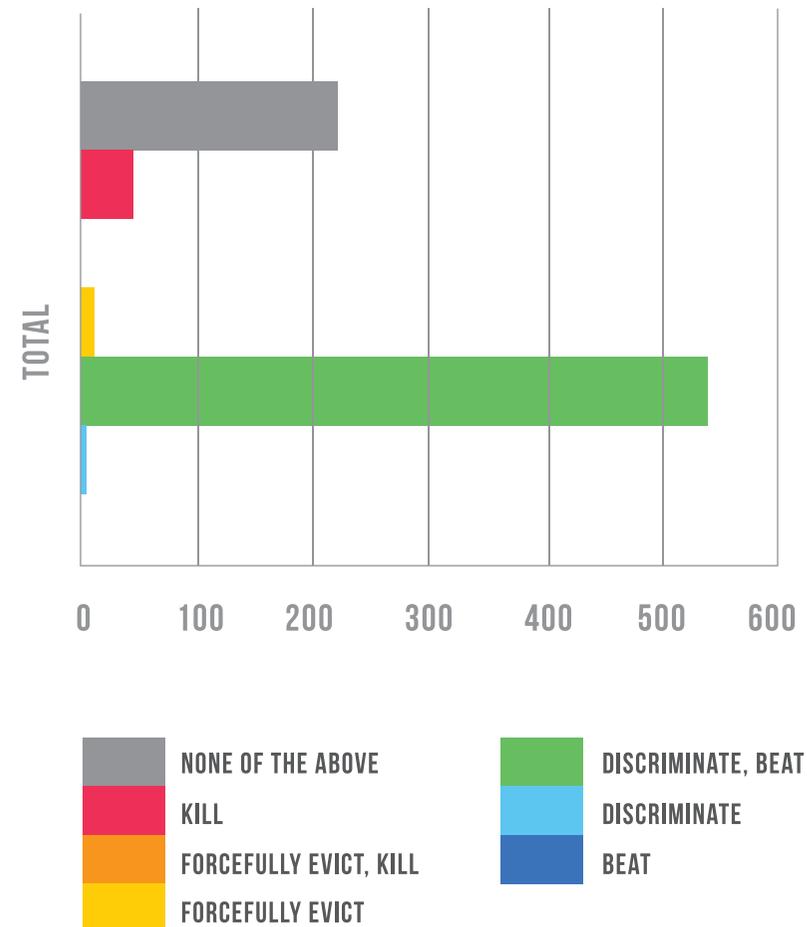
ii) *'Wajaluo ni watu wa maajabu mtakubali lini ukweli? Raila akishindwa mnakataa, Gor Mahia ikishindwa mnakataa, mkiongoza kwa ushoga mnakataa, mkiongoza kwa ukimwi mnakataa ile kitu Raila anasema ndio tu mnkubali!'*

-->Translation<--

Luos when will you accept the truth? If Raila loses you refuse to accept, Gor Mahia loses you refuse to accept, when you lead in homosexuality you refuse, you lead in aids you refuse, what Raila says is what you accept.

This 'loaded' comment is targeted at members of the Luo community; its intent is not quite classifiable in any of the categories.

### CALLS TO ACTION



#### 4. FACEBOOK CONTINUES TO LEAD AS THE SOURCE OF MOST KENYAN HATE SPEECH ONLINE

As previously mentioned, Umati monitored different online platforms. Most hate speech detected during this period was found on Facebook, as compared to the other sites such as Twitter, blogs, and news sites as illustrated below (figure 5).

Only one comment was collected on Twitter (the second most popular social network in Kenya, after Facebook), in the month of September. A number of reasons could explain this sharp difference. Facebook communities are formed around groups and pages, allowing users who share similar opinions and ideas to congregate, engage in discussions and continue to commune around the topic. Members can participate whenever they desire even after the topic is out of date/focus. This is similar to comments sections on blog posts, where readers can continuously engage as long as the moderator/writer leaves it open for such activity. Twitter, in comparison, is often used for real-time news dissemination; when a new topic arises, it tends to overshadow the earlier trending topic, ending its lifetime.

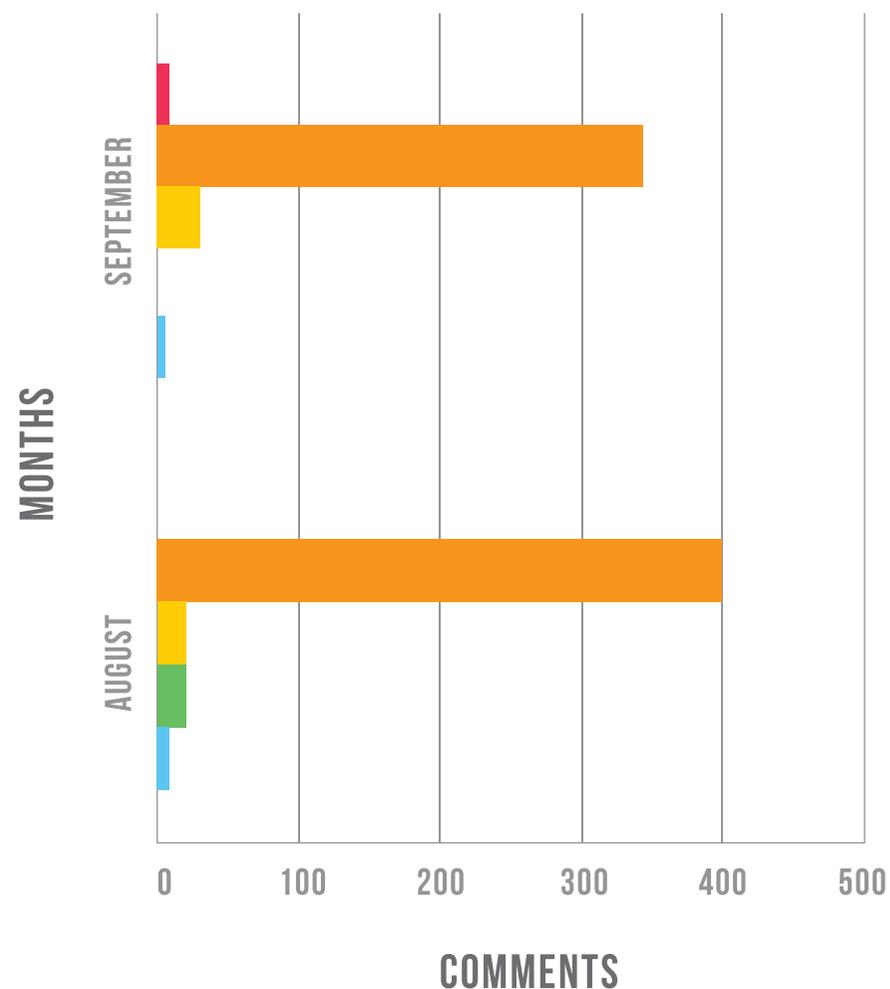
Secondly, Facebook provides for covert and overt behaviour among the users, allowing them to participate in the different domains in parallel. On one hand, a user has his own timeline/private profile where they post their own personal activities and may not necessarily disseminate hate and/or dangerous speech. On the other hand, this same user could engage in various pages and groups in which they generate such speech. This is unlike Twitter where a single user's posts are contained in a single domain/profile hence becomes a bit hard to post hate or dangerous speech as everyone who follows the user can view such posts. (Users might bypass this by having multiple twitter accounts. However, generation of hate speech on the Kenyan twittersphere has been subject to 'KoT<sup>18</sup> cuffing', a phenomenon observed on Twitter where tweets not acceptable by the status quo are openly shunned, and the author of the tweets publicly ridiculed<sup>19</sup>.)

Blog posts also allow some commenters to post anonymously or with a username, providing an option to generate hate speech with one's identity partially protected.

18 Kenyans on Twitter

19 Umati Final Report, 2013.

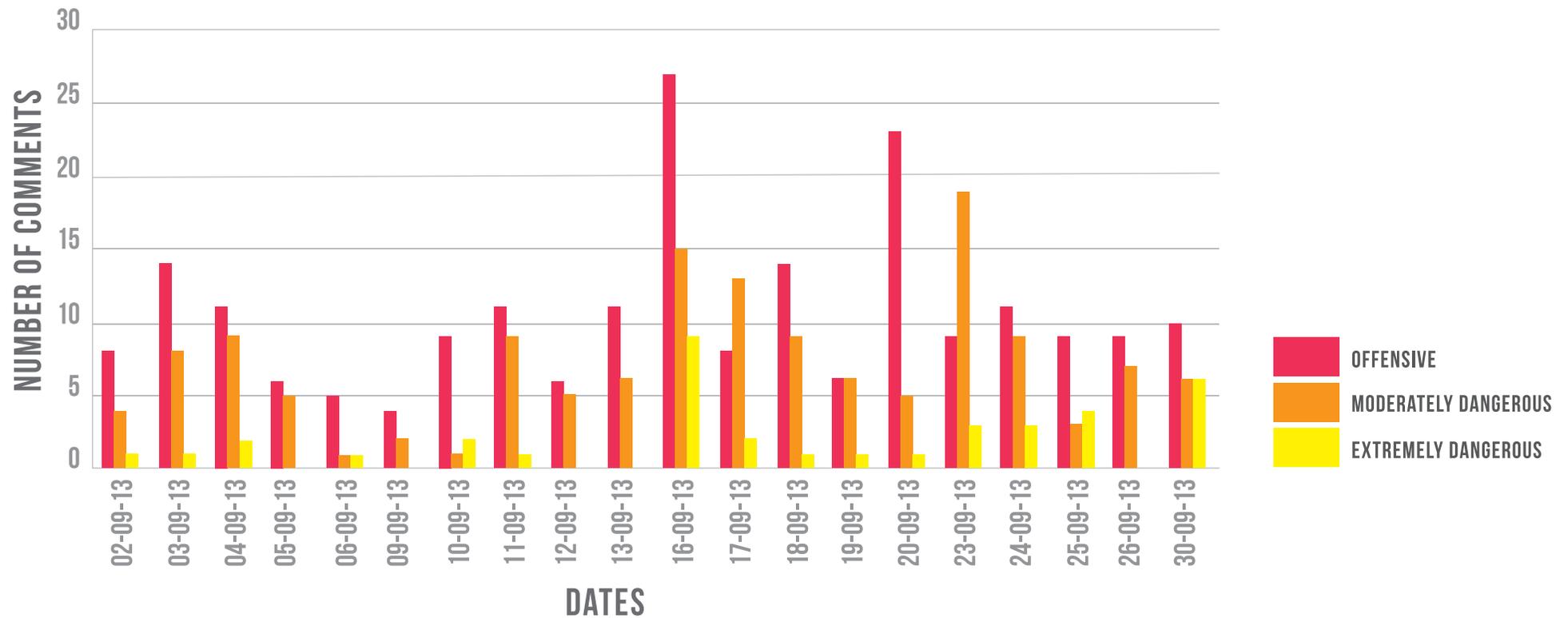
### SITES WITH HATE SPEECH



## SEPTEMBER EVENTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON DANGEROUS SPEECH

September saw slightly higher cases of dangerous speech online. The intensity of hate speech ( moderate and extremely dangerous speech) accelerated from mid-month onwards, between the 16th and 30th of September. The spike in hate speech in September likely relates to the beginning of the Deputy President's ICC case trial, and the Westgate Mall terrorist attack. The ICC case against Deputy President William Ruto commenced on the 10th of September, and the Westgate Mall attack took place between 21st and the 24th of September. Hate speech targeted at members of a religious group (Muslims) was significantly noted in this month.

### TRENDS IN SEPTEMBER



# CONCLUSION

We have found that hate speech is still prevalent in the 2013 post-election period, and is informed by events in the political and socio-cultural realm. That more identifiable commenters are disseminators of online speech coupled with the fact that the state authority mandated with addressing issues of hate speech is currently in limbo, could be informing a state of 'online impunity', which could be emboldening the propagation of hate and dangerous speech. We have noted a trend around offensive speech encouraging discrimination seemingly becoming a norm as it has largely gone unchallenged/unaddressed, which has in turn made it increasingly difficult to categorize hate speech intent, as this discriminatory speech takes new forms of framing and nuance.

We are yet to find instances of online hate speech catalyzing events offline. As 'netizens' congregate and converse online, forming networks around issues of interest, the possibility of organizing offline reactions to online conversations is likely. Authorities, while acknowledging and endorsing online media through adoption (as has been the case with various arms of the Kenyan government) are yet to appreciate these findings and address them effectively. The immediate risk, as seen in the local<sup>20</sup> and continental<sup>21</sup> legislative process' trends could lead to the infringement or rolling back of freedoms of the internet and expression that facilitate the space where both good speech and hate speech are conducted on the web.

As we have previously observed<sup>22</sup>, most dangerous speech occurs as a response to major ongoing events on the ground and this trend could be useful to relevant stakeholders for better understanding of reactions in such instances. Authorities, for instance, should be on high-alert after noteworthy events to be ready to deal with potential acts of backlash violence as evidenced by any subsequent hate and dangerous speech. Mainstream media plays an important role in highlighting what topics are discussed online as most events catch the commenters attention primarily through their channels. It is imperative that media houses take note of work such as Umati's to inform how they relay/report on events, with particular consideration on the framing of narratives.

We continue to monitor and surface these insights, and build a database with which problem statements can be devised towards effective addressing and mitigation of hate speech in the Kenyan online space.

21 Kenya, Parliament, National Assembly, 31 October 2013.

22 Economic Commission for Africa & African Union Commission, 2012

23 Morara & Sambuli, 2013

# DEFINITIONS

**Discrimination:** 'Discrimination' is understood as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, age, economic position, property, marital status, disability, or any other status, that has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition or exercise, on an equal footing, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field of public life<sup>23</sup>.

**Dangerous speech:** This is a term coined by Prof. Susan Benesch to describe incitement to collective violence that has a reasonable chance of succeeding, in other words speech that may help to catalyse violence, due to its content and also the context in which it is made or disseminated. This possibility can be gauged by studying five criteria that may contribute to the dangerousness of speech in context: the speaker (and his/her degree of influence over the audience most likely to react, the audience (and its susceptibility to inflammatory speech), the speech act itself, the historical and social context, and the means of dissemination (which may give greater influence or "force" to the speech).

**Identifiable Commenter:** A person who responds to an online article, blog post or Facebook post who can be identified by a name, regardless of whether the name is real or fake.

<sup>23</sup> La Rue, 2012.

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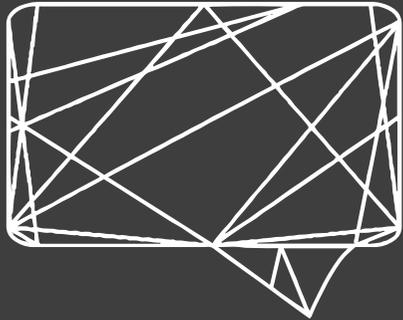
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July - September 2013

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