



# GLOBAL INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME



# NAIROBI, KENYA

Communities in crisis,  
gangs in charge

Antônio Sampaio | Ken Opala | Joyce Kimani

NOVEMBER 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the interviewees who took time to talk to them. This programme is supported by GLZ.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Joyce Kimani** is GI-TOC observatory coordinator for East Africa and the Horn. She is the current vice chair of the Kenya Correspondent Association. Previously, she worked as an investigative journalist for the *Mail & Guardian* exposing stories on graft, human trafficking and small arms trafficking, and flora and fauna crimes.

**Ken Opala** is analyst for Kenya at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. He previously worked at Nation Media Group as deputy investigative editor and as editor-in-chief at the Nairobi Law Monthly. He has won several journalistic awards, including CNN African Journalist of the Year 1997, Kenya Print Journalist of the Year 2000, Peter Jenkins Award for Conservation Journalism 2002 and the Lorenzo Natali Prize 2003.

**Antônio Sampaio** is a senior analyst at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). He examines the challenges posed by urban armed violence and non-state armed groups to governance and security. Before joining the GI-TOC, he worked for nine years at The International Institute for Strategic Studies – most recently as research fellow – and as a journalist in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

© 2021 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.  
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Global Initiative.

Cover: © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images  
Cartography: Rudi de Lange

Please direct inquiries to:  
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime  
Avenue de France 23  
Geneva, CH-1202  
Switzerland

[www.globalinitiative.net](http://www.globalinitiative.net)

# CONTENTS

Summary.....	ii
Background.....	1
Criminal governance in Nairobi during COVID-19 .....	4
Increasing extortion in the matatu industry .....	4
Water and electricity provision .....	5
Public toilets and waste management.....	5
Gatekeeping and aid in the pandemic .....	7
State violence overshadows state aid .....	9
Conclusion .....	11
Notes .....	13

## CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE IN CITIES DURING COVID-19

This case study is part of a research project conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), with support of Germany's GIZ, that examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic challenges accompanying it on criminal governance in cities. The project aims to study how gangs and other non-state armed groups operating in illicit economies have altered their activities in light of the new circumstances in areas of criminal governance, and how governments and civil society have responded.

We define criminal governance as instances in which armed criminal groups set and enforce rules, provide security and other basic services – such as water, electricity or internet access – in an urban area, which may be a part or the whole of an informal settlement or a neighbourhood.

The project uses a comparative methodology, drawing from semi-structured interviews feeding into five separate case studies. The data is then synthesized in a final report that analyzes and summarizes the main trends. A fuller description of the methodology can be found in the final report.

The other case studies in this project are Tumaco (Colombia), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), San Salvador (El Salvador) and Cape Town (South Africa). You can access the five case studies and the final summary report at [criminalgovernance.globalinitiative.net](https://criminalgovernance.globalinitiative.net).



## SUMMARY

This case study focuses on criminal governance in Nairobi from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to mid-2021. During that time, gangs' long-standing provision of basic services and security did not substantially change, and the framework of rules by which such gangs govern local slum communities, as they are often referred to locally, remained intact. The impact of such practices, however, was exacerbated by the COVID-19 context. With more people at home following the closure of schools and workplaces under lockdown, demand for water and electricity in the city's informal settlements increased. Criminal groups often control the supply of these basic services to these areas, and for some essential services, like water, they charged much higher prices than official suppliers. Gangs also seized control of public toilet facilities – a significant development in communities where household toilets are extremely scarce.

Extortion remained a steady source of revenue for the gangs, in part due to the fact that many slum dwellers, who generally work in the informal sector, had to keep travelling to work leaving themselves vulnerable to being extorted for 'protection' or use of public transport. In some instances, such as in the matatu industry (cheap public transport using vans and minibuses), extortion actually increased, in part to compensate for the declining number of drivers on the road. Out-of-work drivers and conductors also formed their own extortion groups, increasing criminal governance in this sector.

Gangs frequently engaged with civil society organizations during the pandemic, mostly by acting as 'gatekeepers' to allow NGOs to access communities in order to provide aid, but in some instances this relationship was predatory, with gangs demanding a share of the aid before it reached communities. The government also sought to provide aid, employment and economic relief during the pandemic, but these efforts drew allegations of nepotism and insufficient coverage.

Law enforcement also came in for heavy criticism from residents in informal settlements due to the repressive and often violent tactics employed by the police to enforce the government curfew (imposed in March 2020 and only lifted on 20 October 2021).<sup>1</sup> The Kenya Human Rights Commission, an NGO, reported 17 deaths due to police excesses in the slum area of Mathare alone between April and August 2020, 'with 13 out of the 17 persons being tortured to death'.<sup>2</sup> These acts of police brutality have merely reinforced the long-standing fear and suspicion of the state among slum residents, and may drive an increased reliance on non-state actors, such as gangs and ethnic militias, for security in these low-income areas – a shift that would strengthen criminal governance at the expense of the state.



## BACKGROUND

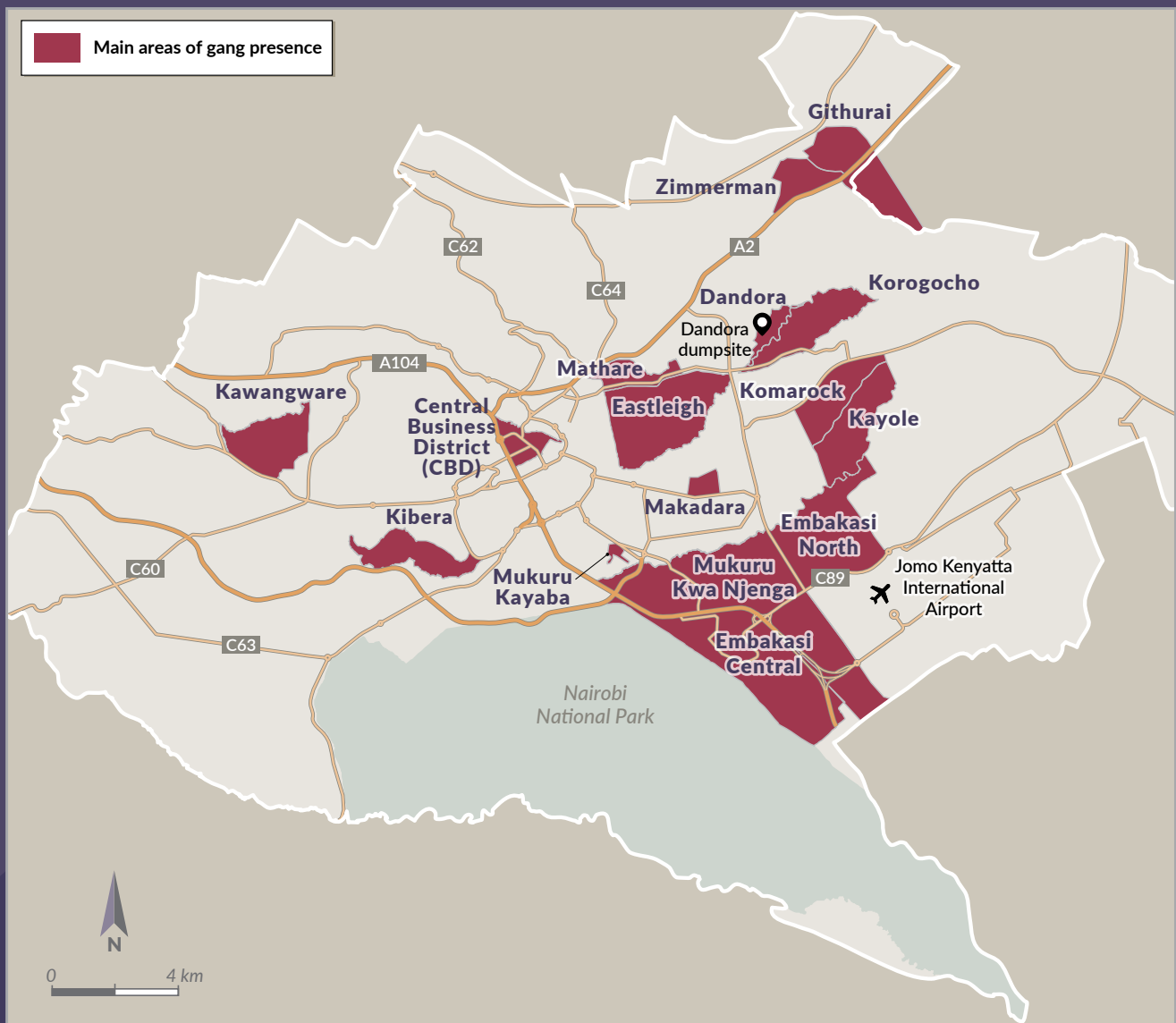
**G**angs in Nairobi are relatively small and localized in operation, and in recent years they have greatly increased in number. In 2017, the National Crime Research Centre ascertained that the number of organized criminal groups in the country had risen from 33 in 2010 to 326 in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Nairobi, the capital, has the largest number (52) among all Kenya's counties.

Criminal governance is embedded in many armed groups' practices, with security provision (often in the form of extortion or so-called 'protection fees') being common among armed groups originating from vigilante roles or strongly linked to protection of ethnically homogeneous areas. In a 2012 survey by the National Crime Research Centre, 34% of interviewees in crime-affected areas nationwide reported knowledge of extortion, including paying protection money.<sup>4</sup>

In Nairobi, this provision of 'security' has its roots in the widespread perception among slum dwellers that the police are brutal and repressive,<sup>5</sup> leading local communities to seek non-state protection. Many gangs in Nairobi's Kibera informal settlement (one of Africa's largest) began as vigilante groups with the support of local community leaders,<sup>6</sup> while ethnic tensions (which were particularly acute in Nairobi's informal settlements in the 1990s) have also led to the emergence of ethnic militias to protect their respective ethnic groups and areas.<sup>7</sup> Ethnic gangs also receive support from their own ethnic communities, mainly through residents helping to protect gang members from the police.<sup>8</sup>

Further complicating the 'criminal' identity of these groups is the fact that some Kenyan politicians have long used these local 'specialists in violence' as tools to

▲ Members of the Kenyan Red Cross deliver sanitizers to residents in Mathare, Nairobi, May 2020. © Patrick Meinhardt/ AFP via Getty Images



**FIGURE 1** The city of Nairobi showing principal gang areas.

promote their interests during electoral campaigns.<sup>9</sup> The armed groups' role nominally consists of security provision in the informal settlements during political campaigns, but this often extends to voter intimidation, attacks on rival campaigns and participation in violent clashes between ethnic and political groups during electoral campaigns.<sup>10</sup> This type of patronage has, according to one analyst, produced 'increasingly well-organized and well-resourced criminal organizations'.<sup>11</sup> Armed groups therefore do not have one fixed identity, but are fluid in their strategy and tactics depending on the goal at hand, and can transition from engaging in criminal activity, acting as ethnic vigilantes or functioning as political protection – and sometimes these roles overlap. In this way, armed groups 'typically combine multiple roles and functions at once'.<sup>1,12</sup>



In addition to the provision of 'protection' for residents of informal settlements and politicians, gangs extort drivers and regulate passenger ranks in the matatu transport industry. A member of the Kamjeshi gang in Nairobi explained how in the late 1990s, gangs had 'studied the business and realized that during rush hours, passengers used to scramble to board public transport', and realized that the sector provided a perfect opportunity for strong-arm criminal involvement: 'What if we seized matatu termini and organized them by helping passengers to queue at a cost to owners of matatu?'<sup>13</sup>

Gangs also control the provision and delivery in informal settlements of basic services, such as water, electricity and access to public toilets, as many dwellings lack such facilities.<sup>14</sup> This control has a significant impact on residents, as gangs sometimes charge much higher prices than official vendors and supply is limited, posing severe challenges to public health. Armed groups are also involved in the rubbish collection business and the management of the Dandora dumpsite, Nairobi's main waste disposal point (see the map). In both of these instances, gangs have formed links with corrupt public officials that allow them to siphon off public money, further increasing criminal governance.

Such is the extent of gang presence that the police rarely venture into some parts of Nairobi. The Dandora dumpsite is perhaps the most egregious example of this, where the lack of state presence has led the area to become a haven for a range of criminal groups who engage in a variety of illicit activities, from arms and drugs trafficking to the extortion of waste pickers, enforced by high levels of violence, including homicide.<sup>15</sup>

**The huge Dandora dumpsite in Nairobi has become a haven for gang activity.** © Simon Maina/ AFP via Getty Images





▲ Commuters and public transport operators in Nairobi have been targeted for extortion during the pandemic. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/ AFP via Getty Images

## CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE IN NAIROBI DURING COVID-19

### Increasing extortion in the matatu industry

Matatu operators reported significant drops in business during the initial months of the pandemic, when bars, restaurants, religious services and schools were ordered to close. One official at the Kenya Matatu Owners Association estimated that 50% of people employed in the matatu industry lost their jobs during the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Some drivers and conductors became redundant due to COVID-19 joined gangs or formed new ones to seize passenger pick-up and drop-off points in Nairobi or to extort the few remaining vehicles on the road. One matatu operator based in Mathare, an informal settlement of the capital, reported an increase in extortion practices in the public transport sector since the start of the pandemic:

We are forced to part with 50 Kenyan shillings [US\$0.45] per trip. The cash is normally collected by a man, who would block your vehicle until you gave them cash [and this occurred] every time you ply their route. I do not know if this could be related to the upcoming elections [in 2022] or to the pandemic, but I do know that they never existed before March 2020.<sup>17</sup>

The same operator said the Mungiki gang was especially active in matatu extortion during the pandemic. According to another operator, 'matatu operators had to increase fares, partly to cover for loss of business and extortion by cartels and gangs'.<sup>18</sup>



## Water and electricity provision

Another criminal practice pre-dating the pandemic but which had a heightened impact during the pandemic was water provision. Running water is scarce in the city's informal settlements. In Mathare, for instance, only 11% of residents have private municipal water connections<sup>19</sup> – but what little water infrastructure does exist is often controlled and manipulated by gangs. According to an industry source, more than 90% of water in some informal settlements is stolen and sold by gangs, cartels and water mafias.<sup>20</sup> Many community taps are controlled by cartels and price spikes are frequent, especially during droughts,<sup>21</sup> with groups known to have increased the price of water tenfold – creating huge profits for the gangs.<sup>22</sup> In Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement, water often accounts for a third of a household's daily expenditure.<sup>23</sup> Despite occasional protests, complaints over such practices are rare, with residents intimidated into silence by the gangs.<sup>24</sup>

During the pandemic, water mafias constructed an illicit underground network of pipes in Mukuru Kwa Njenga and Mukuru Kayaba to supply water to slum dwellers at high prices.<sup>25</sup> An attempt in July 2021 by the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company (NWSC) to disconnect illegal pipes in Mukuru Kwa Njenga was thwarted by youths who threatened the company's personnel.<sup>26</sup>

Field research in Kayole and neighbouring Komarock Estate revealed that the number of gangs and cartels providing water increased during the lockdown, with the closure of learning institutions and most workplaces, leading to increased demand for water for home use. Colluding with corrupt personnel in local agencies, gangs would disconnect water supply systems in the areas, leading to shortages. Gang members would then sell water drawn from boreholes or siphoned from supply lines for Ksh 60 (about US\$0.56) per 40 litres. By comparison, the cost of the same volume of water from the NWSC supplied through its official network is Ksh 1 (less than 1 US cent).

In some areas, gangs also control the provision of electricity – another utility that saw increased domestic demand during lockdown. Gangs continued to control the supply of electricity during the pandemic in several informal settlements, particularly Korogocho, Mathare, Dandora, Mukuru Kayaba, Mukuru Kwa Reuben and Mukuru Sinai, with illegal connections to the official provider's network being a common method of supply.<sup>27</sup> Gangs charge different rates for households and businesses, but in most cases the rates are lower than those charged by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company. Police and personnel from the company were reluctant to venture into some areas for fear of violence at the hands of gangs.

## Public toilets and waste management

Basic services for public health, such as sanitation and rubbish management, were increasingly exploited by criminals during the pandemic. Approximately 2.5 million Nairobi informal settlement dwellers are estimated to lack access to toilets within their homes, requiring them to use public ones.<sup>28</sup> The public toilets often require payment to the companies that operate them, but such facilities occasionally are taken over by small youth gangs, who demand payment instead.



**A child observes a public health message during COVID-19. Schools were closed in Kenya in 2020 and children became more vulnerable to gang recruitment.** © Alissa Everett/ Getty Images

Control over what one Kenyan newspaper described as the ‘lucrative public toilets business’ is quite fragmented, with both small local youth gangs and larger, more organized, groups involved.<sup>29</sup> In July 2018, a high court ordered the police to take measures to stop the criminal gangs taking over public toilets in the Central Business District,<sup>30</sup> but the practice is widespread in informal settlements where the reach of the police tends to be more limited. During the pandemic, youths seized public toilets in Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Mukuru Kayaba and Korogocho that had been constructed or repaired during COVID-19 using taxpayers’ money.<sup>31</sup>

Another critical service for public health that is often controlled by gangs, particularly in informal settlements, is solid waste management, including rubbish collection. The Mungiki and Gaza gangs are among the groups involved in the rubbish collection business. This practice continued during the pandemic, with gangs charging higher fees than in other city areas for rubbish collection and threatening those who failed to pay for the service with violence.<sup>32</sup>

Criminal groups also regulate the disposal of solid waste in Nairobi’s only official dumpsite, in Dandora, by demanding fees from each of the 100-odd trucks that dump rubbish there each day.<sup>33</sup> One NGO employee said that these criminal groups ‘are an inhibition to proper waste management ... because they tend to control who gets into those sites [dumpsite], where they dump and how they dump it’, as well as charging fees.<sup>34</sup>

The area around the dumpsite has become a gang territory, with one police officer who used to be deployed there explaining that the police can walk through the area to patrol, but cannot risk making arrests.<sup>35</sup> The lack of a regular police presence has also





made the area a preferred storage space for gangs' drugs and guns, though it is not clear if the criminal groups using the area for storage of illegal goods are directly linked to the cartels regulating entry into the dumpsite.<sup>36</sup> The situation is complicated by the diversity of armed groups in Dandora, ranging from residents who arm themselves to maintain their control over the waste-picking business to white-collar cartels formed by powerful individuals with contacts in local governing agencies.<sup>37</sup>

Gangs' territorial influence in the dumpsite is greater than in most other Nairobi informal settlements, and their access to guns prevented police and other government agencies from accessing the area to implement lockdown measures.<sup>38</sup> This was the only evidence of a gang in Nairobi preventing COVID-19 social distancing measures from being implemented.

**Volunteers prepare packages of food and other essentials to be distributed in Nairobi's informal settlements. During lockdown, such aid was often 'taxed' by gangs.** © Luis Tato/ APF via Getty Images

## Gatekeeping and aid in the pandemic

As well as profiteering from the daily necessities of life under lockdown, gangs also influenced the delivery of COVID-19 aid by civil society organizations in the city's informal settlements. Although the government provided social support measures, it was civil society groups – including many from within the slums – that delivered much of the direct aid in terms of food and hygiene products and services. For instance, in Mathare, a coalition of community-led organizations collected food donations and set up hand-washing stations with water and soap.<sup>39</sup> In some informal settlements, this effort to provide aid was affected by the territorial dynamics of local armed groups.



*One NGO worker in Kibera said his organization hired reformed gang members as gatekeepers.*

Some gangs assumed a gatekeeping role, pressuring organizations working in informal settlements with varying degrees of force to give them a portion of the aid supplies or some other benefits. This is different from other types of community involvement, also referred to as gatekeeping, that do not involve active gang members. Some civil society groups in Kibera and Mathare said that when NGOs enter an area that is not their base of operations, they tend to hire members of the local community in an effort to both improve community interaction and to protect against potential criminal attacks. According to a local civil society leader in Kibera, involving local community gatekeepers makes it 'easier to control even criminals interrupting your business, because you [the gatekeeper] know people from that area'.<sup>40</sup> One NGO worker in Kibera said his organization hired 'reformed gang members' as 'gatekeepers'.<sup>41</sup> During the pandemic, external NGOs often involved local community members as a precaution against criminal attacks while conducting COVID-19 relief work.

However, a businessman based in Kibera explained how gangs interpret the gatekeeper role in a more predatory way, intimidating civil society groups and taking some of the supplies being distributed:

You cannot distribute food without including [the gangs]. So you have to use the gangs to access every household, you give them some handouts. Definitely they will take the goods, beat you up or take your money, so the best approach is to include them.<sup>42</sup>

However, this practice does not seem to have been widespread and was probably restricted to areas of more consolidated gang influence, where police rarely venture.

Nairobi's phenomenon of vigilantism also influenced the gatekeeping role of gangs during the pandemic. Many slum communities, particularly those with more or less homogeneous ethnic groups, have vigilante groups who undertake community protection during times of ethnic and political tensions, usually around elections. Many of these vigilantes transition in and out of criminal activities in calmer times. In Kayole, two sources, including a former gang member, said that local vigilantes demanded to have access to aid supplies, such as food vouchers and medication, sent as pandemic relief by civil society groups, ahead of the rest of the community.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, any individual or organization planning projects within the gangs' territory had first to seek their consent.

Another predatory interpretation of gatekeeping involved water provision. Criminal groups strongly opposed to a programme by the state-funded Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) to provide more affordable, clean water to informal settlements attempted to block the drilling of water boreholes, which were planned to supply water trucks and water-vending kiosks. Gang activity was particularly aggressive in Mathare and Mukuru Kwa Njenga. By July 2021, contractors were finding it difficult to access parts of some informal settlements with the water kiosks because gangs were violently opposed to the cheaper municipal water, which threatened to drive them out of business.<sup>44</sup> 'There's so much conflict,' said one of the contractors. '[It] has forced us to relocate some of the works.'<sup>45</sup>



## STATE VIOLENCE OVERSHADOWS STATE AID

▲ Officers of the police General Service Unit on patrol in Nairobi during a curfew, April 2020.  
© Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

**O**n 25 March 2020, President Uhuru Kenyatta declared a countrywide curfew after the first case of COVID-19 was detected on 13 March. Initially, the curfew applied from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. but it was later revised to run between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. Slum dwellers repeatedly complained that the strict curfews posed a disproportionate challenge to them, since their livelihoods consist mostly of informal employment with little to no social security, meaning that they needed to continue working to earn a daily income, and the curfew would have a severe impact on their long commutes to wealthier areas. One Nairobi resident described a journey home in April 2021 in which matatu drivers hiked prices as people rushed to the vehicles in order ‘to reap mega profits from the chaos created by the curfew hours’.<sup>46</sup> The Kenyan government also imposed a 60% capacity limit on matatus following the COVID-19 outbreak, which resulted in price increases and, in many cases, disregard for the new rules.<sup>47</sup> The limit was fully abolished only in August 2021.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the police abuses in the informal settlements revolved around the enforcement of the curfew. On the fourth night of curfew, 13-year-old Yassin Hussein Moyo was shot dead while watching police from the balcony of his family’s house in Kiamaiiko.<sup>49</sup> The police claimed that the boy had been accidentally hit by a bullet fired while they tried to disperse a ‘gang’ that had defied the curfew.<sup>50</sup> The shooting was not an isolated incident, however, with many witness videos over subsequent months indicating that there was a great deal of police brutality towards slum dwellers during the curfew.<sup>51</sup> In August 2021, residents of Kayole took to the streets to

protest after a 38-year-old man was allegedly killed by police officers after breaching curfew rules.<sup>52</sup> This came shortly after one man was shot dead by police in clashes during a protest in Embu county, to the north-east of Nairobi, over the alleged killing of two brothers during the enforcement of the curfew.<sup>53</sup> On 16 August 2021, Kenya's Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) issued a statement recommending the suspension of six officers suspected of involvement in the deaths of the two brothers.<sup>54</sup>

In April 2021, civil society group Independent Medico-Legal Unit reported that 26 people had died due to 'police abuse related to COVID-19 enforcement guidelines,' in addition to 49 'cases of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment'.<sup>55</sup> According to a report by *The Standard* newspaper, between January and June 2021 the IPOA received 105 'allegations of deaths and serious injuries' caused by police (though this does not refer solely to cases related to COVID-19 regulations).<sup>56</sup> Low-income settlements in Nairobi were particularly affected by police brutality. The Kenya Human Rights Commission, reported 17 deaths due to police excesses in Mathare alone between April and August 2020, with 13 of them being 'tortured to death'.<sup>57</sup>

The contrast between strict and unbending national government rules, often enforced through violence, and the informal and precarious character of life in the informal settlements has been noted by many residents, whose already low esteem of state-provided governance has deteriorated even further. As human rights activist Gacheke Gachihi from the Mathare Social Justice Centre put it:

When you put in place a lockdown in places like Mathare – where people live hand-to-mouth, ... where there is no proper housing, there is no clean water, there are no health care institutions – you [leave] people to starve. [They are forced into] a very bad condition that has been created by the same government, which never built houses for the people and never created sanitation infrastructure.<sup>58</sup>

One government initiative that broke from this pattern was a programme to provide jobs to youths in informal areas, known as Kazi Mtaani (loosely translated as 'jobs in estates'). The government has stated that 200 000 young people have been trained through the programme, which also puts beneficiaries to work in projects to improve the environment and service delivery in informal areas.<sup>59</sup> But allegations sourced by Kenyan news media<sup>60</sup> claimed that local officials in charge of enrolment into the programme have chosen friends and relatives as beneficiaries at the expense of the general community living in low-income areas. In Kayole, one resident claimed some of the job programme's resources were directed towards some of the gangs used by politicians as armed supporters: 'Politicians see the Kazi Mtaani initiative as an avenue to reward youths who do the dirty work for them.'<sup>61</sup> In July 2021, a senator asked the Standing Committee on Roads and Transport to investigate reports of corruption and delayed payments to youths in the programme.<sup>62</sup>

The government also announced additional disbursements of cash for some beneficiaries of the National Safety Net Program, which pre-dates the pandemic. The programme benefits Kenyans considered 'vulnerable,' including elderly people, food-insecure households and people living with disabilities. In July 2021, the government announced that over a million people registered in the programme were set to receive Ksh 8 000 (US\$70),<sup>63</sup> but as one study of the handout programme has highlighted, it still left out a large proportion of people in the country.<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch also reported 'numerous allegations' of officials directing cash transfer benefits to relatives or friends.<sup>65</sup>





## CONCLUSION

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has neither disrupted nor strengthened criminal governance in Nairobi. Instead, it has caused an adaptation, as gangs changed some of their practices in order to recoup lost revenue in a context of heightened unemployment and lower income streams. This was especially the case with matatus, which in the initial few months of the pandemic experienced a sharp decline in activity but faced more aggressive extortion by gangs in some areas, with the drivers and operators still active facing the brunt of extortion at the hands of gangs.

Provision of water and electricity by gangs continued without much change, but their impact was greater because of communities' increased need for these services, as more people were forced to stay at home during lockdown. Residents in Kayole and Komarock Estate reported increased gang involvement in water provision, but even in areas where such criminal exploitation did not experience a noticeable increase, it is highly likely that gangs controlling these basic services profited more than in pre-pandemic levels due to increased demand. One of the clearest changes in this criminal governance area has been the practice of 'gatekeeping' by gangs targeting the Nairobi Metropolitan Services' project to expand the provision of water in slums by blocking the drilling of boreholes and intimidating contractors. Criminal groups did not participate in the enforcement of curfews (contrary to what happened in some parts of Rio), but government agencies were deterred from enforcing COVID-19 measures in areas around the Dandora dumpsite, where gangs and mafias control access.

Excess use of force by the police was a major concern for slum dwellers during the pandemic. Overall, and in contrast to the steady levels of criminal governance, the

▲ A view of Kibera. The city's informal settlements were hard hit during lockdown as gangs sought to exploit vulnerable communities' needs. © Donwilson Odhiambo/SOPA Images via Getty Images

pandemic highlighted the precariousness of public institutions' forms of governance. The fear inculcated by police brutality will feed into the sense of vulnerability felt by these residents and may sustain and strengthen the long-standing demand for security provided by groups of young armed men who initially act as vigilantes in informal settlements. As Nairobi's recent history has shown, many of these vigilante groups may subsequently morph into predatory gangs, often with connections to politicians. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic may serve to further increase gangs' influence in Nairobi, and strengthen the grip of organized crime over the city's most vulnerable communities.

# NOTES

- 1 Kenya lifts COVID-19 curfew as infection rates ease, president says, Reuters, 20 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyas-president-kenyatta-lifts-coronavirus-curfew-2021-10-20/>.
- 2 Kenya Human Rights Commission, Wanton impunity and exclusion: A report based on human rights violations amid COVID-19 in Kenya (April–August 2020), 2020, p 28, <https://www.khrc.or.ke/mobile-publications/corporate-publications/223-wanton-impunity-and-exclusion-a-report-based-on-human-rights-violations-amid-covid-19-in-kenya-april-august-2020.html?path=corporate-publications>.
- 3 National Crime Research Centre, Issue brief on state of organized criminal gangs in Kenya, 2018, <http://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Issue-Brief-on-State-of-Organized-Criminal-Gangs-in-Kenya.pdf>.
- 4 National Crime Research Centre, A study of organized criminal gangs in Kenya, October 2012, p 51, <http://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Organized-Criminal-Gangs-in-Kenya.pdf>.
- 5 Moritz Schuberth, The impact of drug trafficking on informal security actors in Kenya, *Africa Spectrum*, 49, 3, 58.
- 6 Moritz Schuberth, Hybrid security governance, post-election violence and the legitimacy of community-based armed groups in urban Kenya, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12, 2, 394.
- 7 Adrienne LeBas, Violence and urban order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 48, 3, 247.
- 8 National Crime Research Centre, A study of organized criminal gangs in Kenya, October 2012, p 40, <http://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Organized-Criminal-Gangs-in-Kenya.pdf>.
- 9 Adrienne LeBas, Violence and urban order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 48, 3, 242.
- 10 Ibid., 248; Moritz Schuberth, Hybrid security governance, post-election violence and the legitimacy of community-based armed groups in urban Kenya, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12, 2, 388.
- 11 Adrienne LeBas, Violence and urban order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 48, 3, 248.
- 12 Moritz Schuberth, Hybrid security governance, post-election violence and the legitimacy of community-based armed groups in urban Kenya, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12, 2, 392.
- 13 Interview with anonymous member of Kamjeshi gang, quoted in Simone Haysom and Ken Opala, The politics of crime: Kenya's gang phenomenon, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), November 2020, p 26.
- 14 National Crime Research Centre, A study of organized criminal gangs in Kenya, October 2012, p 62, <http://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Organized-Criminal-Gangs-in-Kenya.pdf>.
- 15 Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa, Risk Bulletin, Issue 15, January–February 2021, GI-TOC, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESA-RB15-web.pdf>.
- 16 Interview with an official of the Kenya Matatu Owners Association, Nairobi, 3 August 2021.
- 17 Interview with a matatu operator, Nairobi, 23 July 2021.



- 18 Interview with a matatu operator, Nairobi, 26 July 2021.
- 19 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Report on the urban safety governance assessment in Mathare, Nairobi City, 2021, p 24, [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal\\_justice/UrbanSafety/Report/USGA\\_UNODCity\\_Nairobi\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/UrbanSafety/Report/USGA_UNODCity_Nairobi_Final_Report.pdf).
- 20 Interview with a source at the Nairobi Sewerage and Water Company, Nairobi, 25 July 2021.
- 21 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Report on the urban safety governance assessment in Mathare, Nairobi City, 2021, p 24, [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal\\_justice/UrbanSafety/Report/USGA\\_UNODCity\\_Nairobi\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/UrbanSafety/Report/USGA_UNODCity_Nairobi_Final_Report.pdf).
- 22 Kenya: The fight for water – a valuable slum commodity, New Humanitarian, 14 August 2007, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2007/08/14/fight-water---valuable-slum-commodity>.
- 23 Katy Migiro and Magdalena Mis, Kenyan women pay the price for slum water “mafias,” Reuters, 26 November 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/women-cities-kenya-water-idINKCN0JAOP620141126>.
- 24 Kenya: The fight for water – a valuable slum commodity, New Humanitarian, 14 August 2007, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2007/08/14/fight-water---valuable-slum-commodity>.
- 25 Interviews with local administrators, constructors and community elders, Nairobi, July–August 2021.
- 26 Interview with a community leader, Mukuru kwa Njenga, Nairobi, 23 July 2021.
- 27 Interview with a source at the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, Audit Department, Nairobi, 4 August 2021.
- 28 Groupe Agence Française de Développement, Toilets in Nairobi’s slums report, 11 October 2015, <https://www.proparco.fr/en/actualites/grand-angle/toilets-nairobis-slums>.
- 29 Josephat Thiong’o, Groups clash over management of public toilets in Nairobi, *The Standard*, 18 July 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/news/article/2001288569/groups-clash-over-management-of-city-public-toilets>.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Interviews with local administrators, construction workers and community elders in Mukuru and Mathare, Nairobi, July and August 2021.
- 32 Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa, Risk Bulletin, Issue 15, January–February 2021, GI-TOC, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESA-RB15-web.pdf>.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Kanyiva Muindi et al, Conflict and crime in municipal solid waste management: Evidence from Mombasa and Nairobi, Kenya, *Cities & Health*, 2020, 5.
- 38 Interview with James Alaman of the Dandora Social Justice Network, Nairobi, 16 July 2021.
- 39 Naomi van Stapele, People-driven Covid-19 response in a Nairobi ghetto, International Institute of Social Studies, 8 July 2020, <https://www.iss.nl/en/news/people-driven-covid-19-response-nairobi-ghetto>.
- 40 Interview with civil society leader, Nairobi, 16 July 2021.
- 41 Interview with Nicholas Atulo, of Miss Koch, Nairobi, 15 July 2021.
- 42 Interview with small business owner, Nairobi, 15 July 2021.
- 43 Interview with a resident of Kayole and a former gang member, Kayole, Nairobi, 4 August 2021.
- 44 Interviews with local administrators, constructors and community elders, July and August 2021.
- 45 Interview with a contractor, Nairobi, 23 July 2021.
- 46 Francis Nderitu, My painful matatu ride home in the Covid-19 curfew era, Nairobi News, 29 April 2021, <https://nairobinews.nation.co.ke/my-painful-matatu-ride-home-in-the-covid-19-curfew-era-francis-nderitu/>.
- 47 Godfrey Kimega, ‘Why matatu operators break Covid rules’, *The Star*, 10 May 2021, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/sasa/travel/2021-05-10-why-matatu-operators-break-covid-rules/>.
- 48 Ojwang Joe, Kisumu matatu operators happy with full capacity directive, to comply with covid rules, Capital News, 09 August 2021. <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2021/08/kisumu-matatu-operators-happy-with-full-capacity-directive-to-comply-with-covid-rules/>.

- 49 Max Bearak and Rael Ombuor, Kenyan police shot dead a teenager on his balcony during a coronavirus curfew crackdown, *The Washington Post*, 31 March 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/kenyan-police-shot-dead-a-teenager-on-his-balcony-during-a-coronavirus-curfew-crackdown/2020/03/31/6344c70e-7350-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/kenyan-police-shot-dead-a-teenager-on-his-balcony-during-a-coronavirus-curfew-crackdown/2020/03/31/6344c70e-7350-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc_story.html).
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 BBC News Africa, The bullet and the virus: Police brutality in Kenya's battle against coronavirus, YouTube, 15 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eb3rV5mhpmQ>.
- 52 Hudson Gumbi, Police gone rogue? IPOA now probing 105 deaths, *The Standard*, 21 August 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001421371/police-gone-rogue-ipoa-now-probing-105-deaths>.
- 53 Brian Malila, Police kill man during protest over mysterious death of two Embu brothers, K24, 5 August 2021, <https://www.k24tv.co.ke/news/police-kill-man-during-protest-over-mysterious-death-of-two-embu-brothers-41896/>.
- 54 Winfrey Owino, IPOA, DPP crack whip on suspects of Kianjokoma brothers' death, *The Standard*, 16 August 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001420963/ipoa-dpp-crack-whip-on-suspects-of-kianjokoma-brothers-death>.
- 55 The Independent Medico-Legal Unit, Statement, p 1, <https://www.imlu.org/index.php/shortcode/reports/typography/send/3-reports/107-68th-ordinary-session-of-the-african-commission-on-human-and-peoples-rights-in-banjul-the-gambia-statement-by-the-independent-medico-legal-unit-imlu>.
- 56 Hudson Gumbi, Police gone rogue? IPOA now probing 105 deaths, *The Standard*, 21 August 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001421371/police-gone-rogue-ipoa-now-probing-105-deaths>.
- 57 Kenya Human Rights Commission, Wanton impunity and exclusion: A report based on human rights violations amid COVID-19 in Kenya (April–August 2020), 2020, p 28, <https://www.khrc.or.ke/mobile-publications/corporate-publications/223-wanton-impunity-and-exclusion-a-report-based-on-human-rights-violations-amid-covid-19-in-kenya-april-august-2020.html?path=corporate-publications>.
- 58 Luke Melchiorre, Class and police brutality in Kenya: An interview with activist Gacheke Gachihi, *African Arguments*, 1 July 2021, <https://africanarguments.org/2021/07/class-and-police-brutality-in-kenya-an-interview-with-activist-gacheke-gachihi/>.
- 59 Kenyan State Department for Youth Affairs, Training of Kazi Mtaani beneficiaries, <http://youth.go.ke/kazi-mtaani/>.
- 60 Bribery, nepotism claims stalk Kazi Mtaani project, *People Daily*, 17 July 2020, <https://www.pd.co.ke/news/bribery-nepotism-claims-stalk-kazi-mtaani-project-44302/>.
- 61 Interview with resident, Kayole, 4 August 2021.
- 62 Moses Nyamori, Gideon Moi pushes for faster payment for youth in Kazi Mtaani project, *The Standard*, 22 July 2021, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001418867/gideon-moi-pushes-for-faster-payment-for-youth-in-kazi-mtaani-project>.
- 63 Alice Gworo, Government disburses Sh 8.7 billion to Inua Jamii, Kenya News Agency, 7 July 2021, <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/government-disburses-sh-8-7-billion-to-inua-jamii/>.
- 64 Levi Gikandi, COVID-19 and vulnerable, hardworking Kenyans, Oxfam International, November 2020, p 9, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bp-kenya-social-protection-101120-en.pdf>.
- 65 Otsieno Namwaya and Najma Abdi, "We Are All Vulnerable Here": Kenya's pandemic cash transfer program riddled with irregularities, Human Rights Watch, 20 July 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/07/20/we-are-all-vulnerable-here/kenyas-pandemic-cash-transfer-program-riddled>.







# GLOBAL INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

## ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

[www.globalinitiative.net](http://www.globalinitiative.net)

Supported by



Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH