

The GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Brief

Research and Analysis in Security and Defence Pillar

The prevalence of gangs in Nakuru County: contributory factors

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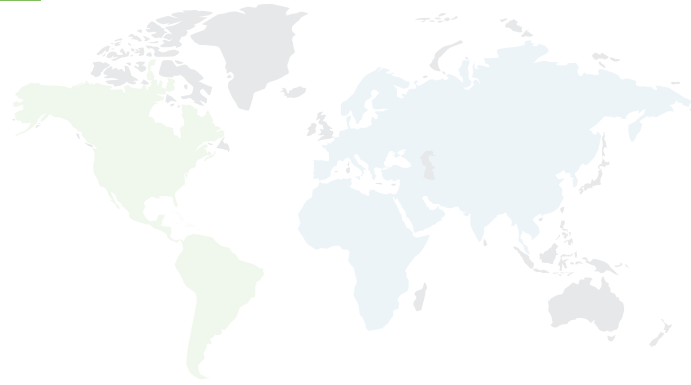
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Executive Summary

As we approach the August 9, 2022 elections, runaway insecurity perpetrated by gangs in Nakuru County is a source of concern. The brief situates that the curse of political patronage, reactionary security operations, widespread unemployment, and drug trafficking as key contributing factors to the occurrence of these groups. It recommends, among others, a multi-

agency approach in enforcing the Prevention of Organized Crime Act (2010) to pre-empt backing of gangs by the political class, strengthening land and border controls to curtail drug trafficking, enhancing collaborations and partnerships to address unemployment, and leveraging on community policing as a proactive crime deterrence intervention.



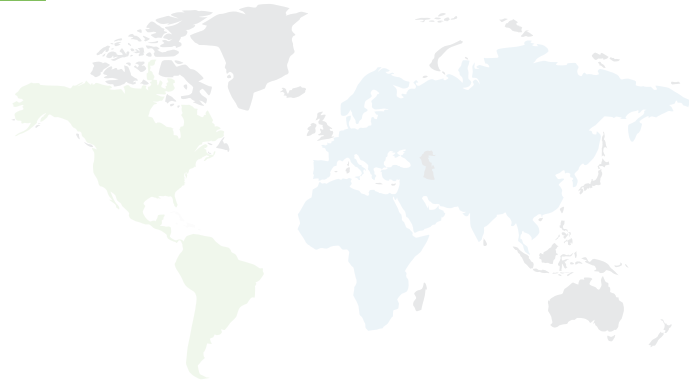


Context

About 15 gangs are operational in Nakuru County, which continues to be a security threat. Among them are *Confirm*, *Gaza*, *Watzed*, *Mauki*, *Eastlando*, *Msafi Kwanza*, *Five Fingers*, and *Dragon*. They orchestrate robbery with violence, muggings, Sexual-Gender Based Violence (SGBV), and murder. Their modus operandi include the use of metal rods, guns, machetes, and swords. The most affected areas include Kwa Rhonda, Kaptembwa, Kivumbini, Mawanga, Flamingo, Lake View, and Bondeni slums. These informal settlements face severe inequalities in the distribution of economic, political and social resources creating an enabling environment for crime to thrive.

While there have been multiple security interventions to curtail their activities, these groups have proved to be resistant. Interventions like deployment of special police units and banning of these groups have proved to be ineffective. Despite being banned in 2016, *Confirm* continues to perpetrate illegal activities causing residents to continue living in fear and panic. Their resilience is linked to among others, political benefaction, inadequate policing, and a poor economic outlook. This continues to negatively affect business activities in the area, a situation that calls for renewed policy interventions to mitigate the soaring crime rates.





Key Issues

The following issues are the key causal factors for the prevalence of gangs in Nakuru.



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The curse of political patronage

Financing and mobilization of gangs in Nakuru to foster political violence by politicians undermines efforts to eradicate them. They have been previously used to perpetrate electoral violence in the 1992, 1997, 2007, and 2017 elections. In an electoral cycle, their services are particularly in demand as candidates seek protection and zoning of their perceived strongholds, including voter displacement. In the post-polls, their backers abandon them and this opens a window to find opportunities for self-sustenance. Consequently, they resort to finding other illicit avenues to sustain their livelihoods. These include extorting businesses through protection fees, which raises the cost of doing business. In light of recent insecurity posed by these groups in May and June 2022, security officials questioned some Nakuru members of parliament over their suspected linkages with these felons.

Similarly, complicity of government officers such as chiefs and security officials undermines the efficiency of the criminal justice system despite the existence of the Prevention of Organized Crimes Act, 2010. The Act provides measures against individuals who aid and abet criminal groups in furtherance of their activities. However, rogue police officers connive with politicians in protecting these individuals. They frustrate investigations and share information of targeted raids and ongoing operations. They also rent out their weapons, which are used to commit crime. Additionally, whenever these culprits are arrested, politicians bail them out and hire lawyers for them. Consequently, community members do not report cases due to mistrust and the fear of reprisals, given the perceived connections between these criminals and security actors.





Reactionary security operations

Security operations in Nakuru tend to be reactionary instead of preventative, which negatively affects successful containment of these unlawful groups. They are usually mounted when crime is rampant. In June 2020, a police unit was deployed to deal with the *Confirm* gang. Despite the crackdown, the group later resurfaced intensifying its illegitimate undertakings such as mobile money fraud and targeted attacks on

women. In June 2022, another police unit was instituted to weed out the group, which saw the reshuffling of senior police officers. In as much as these operations restore normalcy, they are ineffective as they only address immediate problems. Structural issues such as economic and social disparities remain unaddressed. Additionally, they are characterized by the use of hard power, which aggravates prevailing situations.



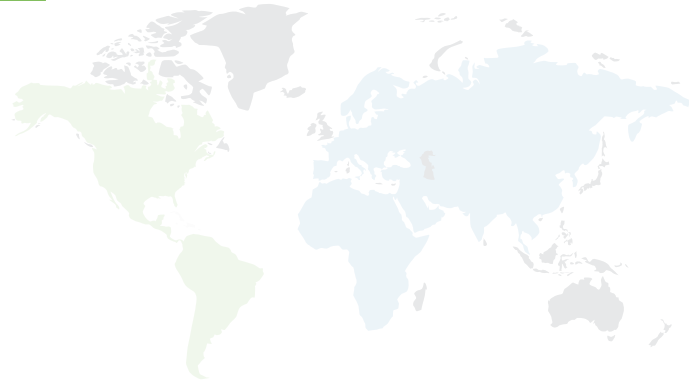
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Widespread unemployment

The widespread unemployment among youth coupled with negative peer pressure influences a section of young people to join these illegal groups. School dropouts and teenagers aged thirteen to twenty-six with unsustainable livelihoods are the majority members of these gangs.

They interact and influence each other in these social systems consequently shaping their behaviours. Their flashy lifestyles which are financed by proceeds of crime are attractive to other youths. It is seen as a get-rich-quick scheme to enhance their survival.





Drug trafficking

Nakuru has well established drug distribution cartels with the drugs originating from Northern Kenya, the Coastal region, and Uganda. Existence of a ready drug market in the county acts as a key enabler for gangs, which undermines efforts to curtail their presence. There is a lucrative market for cocaine, bhang, illicit brew, heroin and an inhalant called 'mafuta ya ndege'. They engage in drug trafficking with protection of barons. Women and girls are used to gather intelligence and in the transportation

of drugs as they are less likely to be suspected. Rivalry in territorial control in the drugs market leads to the rise of splinter groups, and inter-gangs' violence.

Equally, they also engage in drug abuse to boost their confidence when orchestrating their heinous crimes. Prolonged use of these hallucinatory drugs results in addiction and crimes becomes a strategy to sustain this demand.

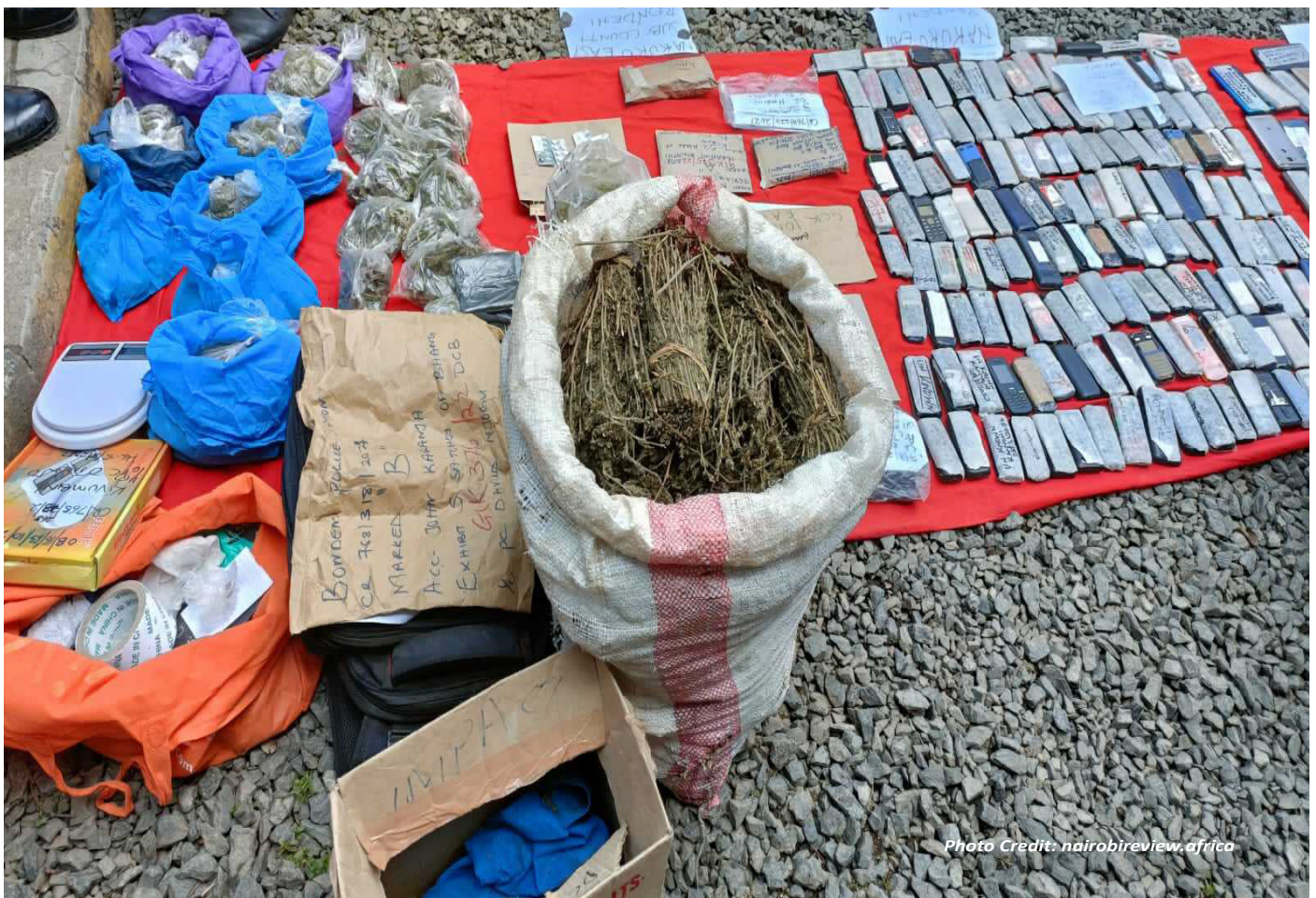
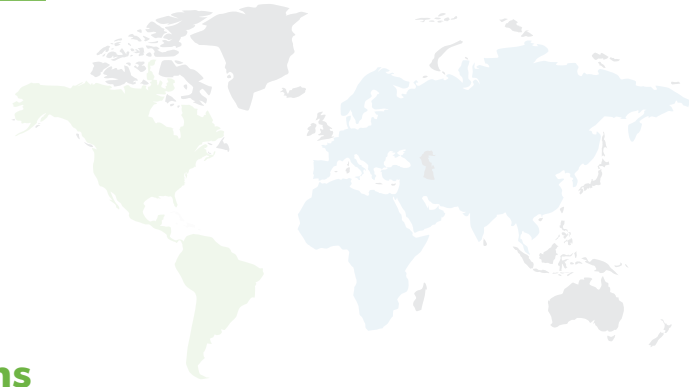


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Conclusion

There is the lack of a one-size fits all approach in curbing the pervasiveness of gangs in Nakuru County. Addressing structural induced violence in the County has the potential to reduce the push and pull factors responsible for the rise of criminal gangs. This can be achieved through efficient policing within a multi-agency framework and focusing on building collective trust and ownership of community policing as a critical tool.





Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered:

1. The Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government should;
 - a) establish a special counter-organized crime unit within a multi-agency approach to strengthen the enforcement of the Prevention of Organized Crimes Act, 2010 in Nakuru County.
 - b) create inter-communal and inter-faith committees in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations to reinforce community policing and pre-empt security threats posed by gangs in Nakuru County.
 - c) strengthen the Anti-Narcotics Unit within the National Police Service to curtail the trafficking of drugs in Nakuru County.
2. The National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) should enhance door-to-door campaigns against drug abuse in Nakuru County informal settlements.
3. Nakuru County Government should intensify public-private collaborations and partnerships to increase job opportunities with a view to forestall the systemic induced violence.

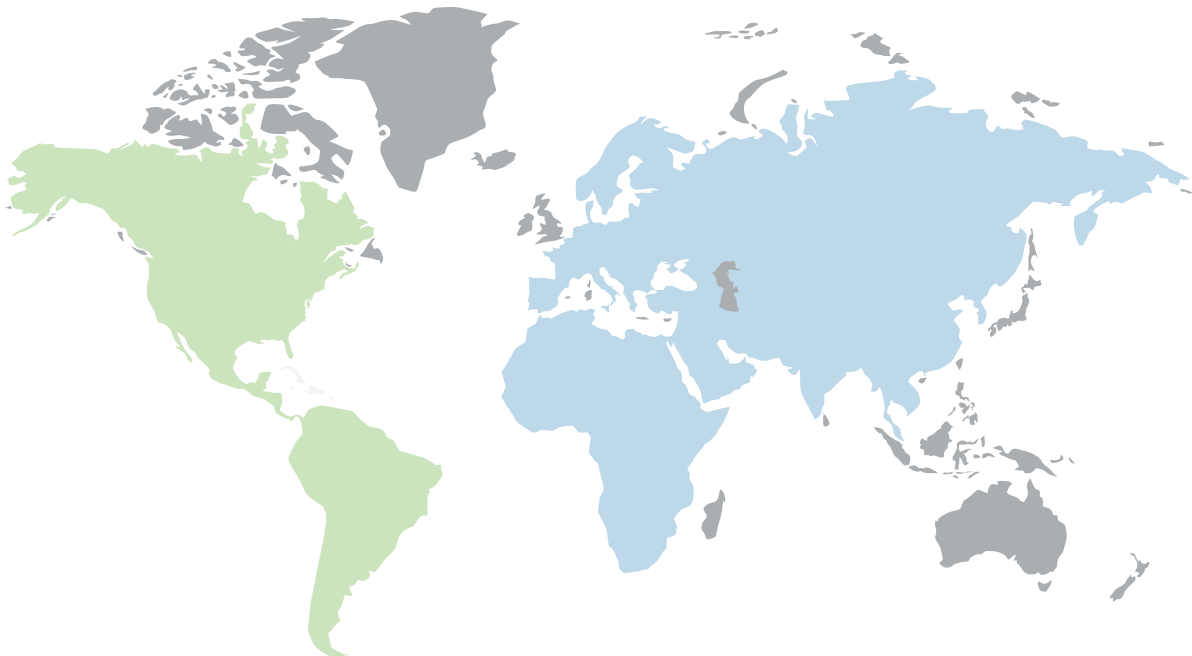


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