

The Socio-Economic Impacts of Election-Related Violence in Nairobi from 1992 to 2022

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Abstract: *This article examines the socio-economic impacts of election-related violence in Nairobi over a thirty-year period, from 1992 to 2022, focusing on how recurring violence during election periods has profoundly affected the city's social structures and economic development. The study, conducted in eight constituencies, gathered data from directly affected populations, including traders, election officials, politicians, and civil society members, using purposive and snowball sampling methods. The findings reveal significant loss of lives, psychological trauma, displacement, and economic disruption, including damage to infrastructure and reduced investment. The findings highlight the persistent connection between election-related violence and socio-economic instability in Nairobi, offering insights into the long-term impacts on the city's development.*

Keywords: Election-related violence, social impacts, Economic impacts, Nairobi

1. Introduction

Election-related violence in Nairobi has been a persistent and destructive force, deeply influencing the city's socio-economic development over the past three decades. Since the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1992, Nairobi has witnessed repeated cycles of violence during election periods, with devastating consequences for both its social structures and economic progress. The violence has claimed numerous lives, displaced thousands, and left deep psychological scars on survivors. Communities have been torn apart, with ethnic tensions deepened and trust within and between groups eroded. Economically, the impact has been equally severe, with key industries such as tourism, manufacturing, and retail suffering significant setbacks due to the widespread destruction of property and the disruption of business activities. This article explores these impacts in detail, highlighting the deep connections between election-related violence and socio-economic instability in Nairobi.

2. Methodology

The study employed a case study research design, enabling an in-depth, contextually rich analysis focused on Nairobi, a specific geographical area. This approach allowed the researcher to thoroughly explore election-related violence, its local and national influences, and assess the effectiveness of various interventions. Nairobi County, chosen for its political significance and history of election-related violence, served as the study area, with research conducted in eight constituencies particularly prone to such violence, including Mathare, Dagoretti North, Kibra, Embakasi South, Ruaraka, Starehe, Kamukunji, and Embakasi North. The target population included traders affected by looting, election officials with firsthand electoral process experience, politicians and grassroots mobilizers actively involved in elections, and members of civil society and human rights

groups documenting election-related violence. The study used purposive and snowball sampling methods to select participants, focusing on those with direct experience of election-related violence. The instruments of data collection were interview guides, document analysis guides, and focus group discussions guide.

3. Discussion

3.1 Social Impacts of Election-Related Violence in Nairobi

Election-related violence in Nairobi has had a devastating impact on the city, with one of the most severe consequences being the loss of lives and the resulting psychological trauma. Over the years, each election cycle has been marred by violence that has claimed numerous lives, leaving behind families and communities grappling with grief and trauma. The 1992 and 1997 elections saw ethnic clashes leading to numerous deaths, particularly in Nairobi's slums, where gangs targeted residents based on political and ethnic affiliations (Thrup & Hornsby, 1998; Klopp, 2001). The 2007-2008 post-election violence was particularly devastating, with over 1,100 people killed nationwide, including 125 in Nairobi, where brutal clashes between ethnic groups led to deaths in areas like Kibera, Mathare, and Dandora (CIPEV, 2008). The 2017 elections saw further bloodshed, with Human Rights Watch documenting 37 police-related killings in neighborhoods such as Embakasi and Kangemi (Human Rights Watch, 2017). These deaths not only cause immense grief but also leave lasting psychological scars, leading to widespread trauma, depression, and anxiety among survivors (Ndeti, 2009). The loss of lives disrupts families, weakens community bonds, and deepens interethnic tensions, fueling cycles of reprisal violence and complicating reconciliation efforts, as seen during the 2007 violence when Kikuyu youths affiliated with the Mungiki sect targeted non-Kikuyu residents in Dandora (CIPEV, 2008).

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In addition to the loss of life, election-related violence has led to significant displacement and fragmentation of communities, creating humanitarian crises as individuals and families are uprooted from their homes often finding themselves without basic necessities like food, water, and shelter. These displacements disrupt social networks and force people into makeshift camps or overcrowded informal settlements, where they face health risks and vulnerabilities (OHCHR, 2009). During the 1997 elections, substantial violence led to widespread displacements in areas like Dandora and Kariobangi (Klopp, 2001). The psychological trauma from such displacements is particularly severe for children, who may suffer long-term developmental consequences, while families often fall into poverty after losing their homes and livelihoods (UN Human Rights Team, 2009). A striking example occurred on the night of December 30, 2007, when Luo men forcibly displaced Kikuyu residents from Mathare 4A, with many seeking refuge at the Mathare/Huruma Chief's Camp, only to find their homes looted and occupied upon return (CIPEV, 2008). These displacements strain urban infrastructure and social services, particularly in already crowded settlements like Kibera, Mukuru, Huruma, and Mathare, where access to basic services becomes even more limited (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022). Displaced populations often face discrimination, stigma, and marginalization, making reintegration into their communities difficult, as they struggle to rebuild their lives and regain a sense of security (Mwangangi, 2017; Musya, 2023).

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) surges during election periods in Nairobi, particularly targeting women and vulnerable populations, and includes rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, harassment, and exploitation (UN Women, 2015). The 2007-2008 post-election violence starkly illustrated this surge, with incidents such as a gang rape in Huruma, the forced circumcision of a 15-year-old boy, and the brutal mutilation of Luo men and boys. The Waki Commission documented 900 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by security agents, militias, and civilians during this time (CIPEV, 2008). Similarly, during the 2017 elections, at least 201 cases of sexual violence were reported, though the actual number is likely higher due to under-reporting, with incidents concentrated in opposition strongholds like Kibera and Mathare (KNCHR, 2017). The chaos and lawlessness of election-related violence enable perpetrators to commit these heinous acts, causing immense physical and psychological harm to survivors, who often face additional social stigma and discrimination, further isolating them and hindering their ability to seek help (ICRC, 2020). Women involved in political activities also face harassment and threats of sexual violence, particularly during campaigns, as a means to suppress their participation and maintain male-dominated power dynamics (UN Women, 2015). Moreover, displaced women and children are particularly vulnerable to SGBV due to the overcrowded and insecure conditions in which they often find themselves during and after election-related violence (OHCHR, 2009).

The education sector in Nairobi has not been spared from the effects of election-related violence. Schools have faced disruptions, students have experienced psychological trauma, and school infrastructure has suffered significant damage. For

instance, during the 2017 general elections, schools like Olympic Primary in Kibera and Moi Avenue Primary were closed due to security concerns, with closures extending for weeks and causing major interruptions in learning (UNICEF, 2017). Violence near schools creates unsafe environments, leading to absenteeism and reduced educational outcomes, as seen in the 2017 elections when violence in Mathare and Kibera resulted in prolonged closures, affecting thousands of students (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The aftermath of the 2022 elections also saw all schools in Nairobi temporarily closed due to anti-government demonstrations, further disrupting education (Mbutia, 2023). This climate of fear affects students' ability to focus, with many experiencing trauma from witnessing violence. A study by Mwanja and Muola (2013) found that during the 2007 post-election violence, 75.45 percent of students in affected schools exhibited PTSD symptoms, severely hindering their academic progress. Moreover, election-related violence forces students and teachers to flee, leading to school displacement and interruptions in schooling, as was evident during the 2007-2008 violence, which led to a sharp decline in school attendance in Nairobi's Eastlands area. The violence also damages school property, further degrading the educational environment, as seen when Olympic Primary was vandalized during the 2007-2008 violence (CIPEV, 2008). Vulnerable groups, particularly children in informal settlements, are disproportionately affected, with ongoing tensions making it perilous for them to attend school, resulting in missed education and interrupted examinations, as was the case in 2017 when national exams were rescheduled multiple times due to violence (Daily Nation, 2017). Schools also often become shelters for displaced persons, leading to further educational disruptions (Amnesty International, 2008).

3.2 Economic Impacts of Election-Related Violence

Election-related violence in Nairobi has had a significant impact on business activities, with commercial establishments such as buildings, markets, and shopping centers being particularly vulnerable to vandalism, arson, and looting. These violent episodes lead to costly repairs and major disruptions in business operations. During the 2007 post-election violence, Nairobi's Maasai Market, a popular spot for both tourists and locals, suffered extensive damage from looting and vandalism, with stalls destroyed and goods stolen, severely disrupting market operations and causing financial losses for many small-scale traders (CIPEV, 2008). Similarly, during the 2017 elections, several shopping centers and markets were targeted, leading to substantial economic disruptions and further financial losses for local businesses, compounded by a loss of consumer confidence, which negatively impacted economic stability (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Industrial facilities and manufacturing plants are also targeted during periods of unrest, suffering damage to machinery, equipment, and warehouses, which disrupts production processes and supply chains, thereby affecting the city's manufacturing sector and overall economic productivity. For instance, during the 2017 violence, several manufacturing plants in Nairobi's Industrial Area reported damage, including broken machinery and looted warehouses, which halted production and delayed deliveries, impacting both the local and national economy due to Nairobi's key role in manufacturing (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The

disruption of business operations during election violence leads to financial losses for enterprises of all sizes, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) particularly vulnerable, as they often lack the resources to recover from such impacts. The Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) reported significant losses for businesses in areas like Gikomba Market, Eastleigh, and River Road due to riots and looting, with many SMEs in areas such as Babadogo, Kibera, and Mathare looted and burned during the 2007 post-election violence, leaving owners with nothing to salvage (CIPEV, 2008). These financial losses not only impact individual entrepreneurs but also contribute to broader economic instability, as the destruction of property and disruption of commerce lead to decreased economic activity, reduced employment opportunities, and slower economic growth.

The damage to infrastructure during election-related violence in Nairobi has equally extensive economic repercussions, affecting critical sectors such as transportation networks, public utilities, commercial buildings, industrial sites, financial institutions, and overall investment confidence. The damage incurred not only demands significant resources for rebuilding and repairs but also impedes the city's economic progress. For instance, the widespread blockage of roads and destruction of rail lines during the 2007 post-election violence had severe repercussions on the broader East African economy. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that fuel costs in Rwanda, Uganda, the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi surged by up to 50% due to the Kenyan crisis. Moreover, trade networks were severely disrupted, particularly for the landlocked economies reliant on the Kenyan port of Mombasa, including Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The violence led to the destruction of 117,216 private properties, including residential houses, commercial premises, vehicles, and farm produce, alongside 491 government-owned properties such as offices, vehicles, health centers, schools, and trees (CIPEV, 2008). During episodes of unrest in Nairobi, vital infrastructure often becomes a target, with roads, public transportation, and utilities suffering extensive damage. The financial burden of these repairs diverts funds from other critical development projects, further stalling economic growth. The 2007 violence saw major roads and highways blocked, and public transport severely disrupted, requiring extensive repairs and diverting government resources from essential projects (African Development Bank, 2009). Similar infrastructure damage occurred during the 2017 elections, where rioters targeted roads and transport services, necessitating costly reconstruction efforts and further hindering economic development (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Election-related violence in Nairobi significantly disrupts financial markets, leading to increased volatility as investors react to uncertainties about political stability. This uncertainty often prompts investors to withdraw funds or delay expansion plans, reducing liquidity, lowering asset prices, and stifling economic growth. This hesitation was evident after the 2007 election violence, when several multinational corporations postponed their entry into the Kenyan market, impacting job creation and economic diversification (Kenya Association of Manufacturers, 2009). The violence also deters foreign direct

investment (FDI), with political unrest seen as a sign of instability, resulting in reduced inflows into key sectors like manufacturing, services, and infrastructure development, as noted following the 2007-2008 violence (UNCTAD, 2008). Domestic investors similarly delay projects due to uncertainties, further stalling growth, as seen in 2013 with postponed construction projects. Moreover, the decline in government revenue due to disrupted economic activities affects tax collection, particularly from the informal sector, and reduces potential income from foreign investments (World Bank, 2013). The violence also triggers speculation and hoarding, worsening shortages and driving up prices, leading to artificial inflation. Political instability can cause currency depreciation and increased borrowing costs, as seen during the 2007-2008 and 2017 election periods, when the Kenyan shilling depreciated and interest rates spiked, further straining the economy and reducing consumer purchasing power (Central Bank of Kenya, 2008). Heightened political risk during elections elevates borrowing costs, as investors demand higher interest rates to compensate for the perceived instability, further stalling economic growth, as seen in the 2017 elections (International Crisis Group, 2018). These combined factors contribute to broader economic instability, stalling growth and diminishing the government's ability to generate revenue and invest in development.

In addition to financial market disruptions, key economic sectors in Kenya, particularly tourism, have been severely impacted by election-related violence. The tourism industry, Kenya's second highest foreign exchange earner after horticulture, was severely impacted by the 2007 post-election violence, leading to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, widespread cancellations, and a negative perception of safety in the country. Hotel occupancy rates dropped dramatically from 86% to 30%, resulting in a 54% decline in tourism revenues in the first quarter of 2008 (Holland, 2008). Similarly, the 2017 election violence caused a significant drop in tourist arrivals in Nairobi, with hotel occupancy rates falling to around 49%, affecting the broader economy due to tourism's interconnectedness with other industries (Cytonn, 2017). The violence also resulted in the cancellation or postponement of major events and conferences, including several United Nations forums and the Africa Travel Association's annual congress, which was relocated to Rwanda for security reasons (The Standard, 2017). Negative international media coverage has tarnished Nairobi's reputation as a tourist destination, deterring both tourists and investors and leading to long-term challenges in attracting visitors, even during calmer periods. This has slowed the growth of the tourism sector, crucial for Nairobi's economy, as many investors postponed or canceled development projects due to fears of instability (Kenya Tourism Board, 2019). The 2007 violence also led to estimated economic losses of over \$3.7 billion, with 400,000 jobs at risk, significantly affecting key export industries like tea and flowers, where flower exports alone dropped by 38% in early 2008 (Ksoll, Macchiavello, & Morjaria, 2009). Additionally, violence-related disruptions, such as blocked roads, hindered market access and supply chains, leading to food shortages and increased prices, as seen in the aftermath of the 2022 elections when protesters invaded Northlands farm, stealing livestock (The Star, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The article has delineated the following points. Firstly, the recurrent election-related violence in Nairobi from 1992 to 2022 has resulted in significant social impacts, most notably the tragic loss of lives and widespread psychological trauma among survivors. This violence, particularly during the 1992, 1997, 2007-2008, and 2017 elections, has disrupted families, weakened community bonds, and fueled interethnic tensions, leading to cycles of reprisal violence and deepening societal divisions. Secondly, the violence has caused large-scale displacement, fragmented communities and creating humanitarian crises as individuals and families are uprooted from their homes, often without access to basic necessities like food, water, and shelter. These displacements have strained urban infrastructure and social services, particularly in overcrowded informal settlements, and have made reintegration into communities difficult due to discrimination and marginalization. Thirdly, the article has highlighted the surge in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during election periods, particularly targeting women and vulnerable populations. The breakdown of law enforcement during these times has created an environment where such violence can occur with impunity, leaving survivors with deep physical and psychological scars, compounded by social stigma and discrimination. Fourthly, the disruption of education during election-related violence has had profound effects on students and teachers, with school closures, displacement, and damage to infrastructure significantly hindering academic progress and contributing to long-term educational inequalities. Lastly, the article has discussed the economic impacts of election-related violence, including the disruption of business activities, damage to infrastructure, and the overall economic instability that hampers Nairobi's development. Commercial establishments, industrial facilities, and vital infrastructure have suffered extensive damage, leading to financial losses, reduced employment opportunities, and slower economic growth. Election-related violence, therefore, has had widespread and far-reaching consequences on Nairobi's social and economic landscape.

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