

Summary

The surge in the cost of living across Kenya has significantly affected key urban centers, such as Nairobi. This has resulted in financial insecurity and citizens expressing their discontent by protesting throughout the summer and into the new year. The looming tax increase expected in 2024 threatens to become a catalyst for further demonstrations in the coming months providing fertile ground for political turmoil. Insurgency groups such as Al-Shabaab will likely capitalize on the frustrations of the population to advance and increase their cause.

Recent events and developments

The Kenya Revenue Authority's impending 2% tax increase set for 2024 under the Finance Act of 2023 is exacerbating household expenses. This economic strain is compounded by rising import costs and declining exports, linked to adverse weather conditions in 2022 and 2023. Extreme drought and floods have hindered domestic food production, leaving farmers unable to meet demands. On December 6, 2023, Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndun'gu admitted the government's five-month struggle to pay public servants, followed by the public demonstrating against the government's poor leadership that same day. On December 12, President Ruto acknowledged the severity of the cost-of-living crisis, defending stringent fiscal policies as necessary for economic stability. Amidst this turmoil, waves of violent protests erupted in March, May, and July 2023, with citizens expressing grievances over high living costs, tax hikes, and electoral injustice in Nairobi and Garissa which lies northeast of Nairobi. Kenya's law enforcement failed to ensure accountability or rein in the violence, resorting to the use of tear gas and excessive force. In December 2023, protests began again, addressing corruption, nepotism, and poor leadership from the government. On December 28, citizens rallied in Nairobi for the implementation of the Affordable Housing Project, and on January 5, they protested the high court's decision to annul the housing levy. However, both remained peaceful.

Impact assessment

The protests during the summer months of 2023 in Nairobi and Garissa resulted in the undermining of trust in Kenya's law enforcement bodies and government. Throughout these protests, tear gas and excessive force were used by Kenyan Police in their efforts to contain and suppress the protests. It remains highly likely that if protests escalate, police will resort to such similar methods of violence increasing the threat to citizens and those in the surrounding area. The opposition party leader, Raila Odinga, had seized the opportunity to galvanize the demonstrations, attributing the government's actions to a deliberate strategy of inflating the cost of living while pinning citizens against the government and consolidating power for himself and his party. The imminent political unrest increases the risk of Nairobi becoming a target for insurgency groups like Al-Shabaab. They are known for their persistent activity in the country's northeastern areas, mainly targeting police forces, overwhelming their capabilities to counter both protests and terror attacks. Therefore, capitalizing on social discontent and furthering their campaign. As a result, this increases the level of insecurity and risk for travelers. This impending scenario highlights the resonance of past events and underscores the potential for heightened tensions amongst the government and police as Kenya grapples with the looming fiscal measures.

Advice from Forth Global

- Monitor local news and liaise with local contacts to be informed of recent developments.
- Travellers should remain vigilant of their surroundings and avoid crowds and demonstrations.
- Travellers should ensure emergency plans and security procedures are set up, and that on-site employees are familiar with protocols and emergency contacts.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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