LATEST
TRAVEL ADVISORY
The Kenyan Election and Associated Security Risks

**KEY POINTS**
- Kenyans will go to the polls on 08 August 2017, in a closely observed vote.
- The head of Kenya’s computerised voting system has been killed in pre-election violence.
- Civil unrest is likely in the lead up to and after the vote.

**SITUATIONAL SUMMARY**

Political: On 08 August 2017, Kenyan voters will go to the polls in their general election. Voters will elect a new president, members of parliament, and local officials. There are nearly 20 million registered voters in Kenya. The president of Kenya is elected using a potential two-round system. In order to become the victorious candidate, the winner needs to receive over 50 per cent of the vote and at least 25 per cent in at least 24 counties. A second-round vote is a possibility. The 337 members of Kenya’s National Assembly are elected by two means. 290 are elected in single member constituencies by a first-past-the-post system. 47 seats are
specifically reserved for women and are based on single-member constituencies from the 47 counties. Of the 67 senate members, 47 are elected in single-member constituencies based on the counties. 16 seats are reserved for women, with two for youth and two for disabled candidates based on seat share. Elections occur every five years and in total 1,880 elected positions will be filled.

**SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT**

*International Observation*

These elections are being closely watched around the world and within the region itself. Kenya is a key ally in the western war against terror in Africa. Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) are a key contributor to AMISON, the African Union Mission in Somalia, where they are targeting Al Shabaab militants and trying to stabilise the country. However, Raila Odinga, the main presidential opposition candidate, has vowed to pull back from commitments to AMISON. The KDF also contribute to UN peacekeeping missions.

Nairobi is a key economic hub in East Africa and the country has the second-largest economy in the region, after Ethiopia. Kenya has welcomed foreign investment into a number of industries, helping the government coffers and providing employment to thousands. The major port of Mombasa serves Kenya’s landlocked neighbours including Uganda and South Sudan. Many UN agencies and non-governmental organisations providing aid to Somalia, South Sudan, and other countries in the region are based in Kenya; the country is also home to refugees from such locations. Unrest has the potential to detrimentally affect local and regional economies and could take some time for its impact to be overcome.

Both major candidates, Kenyatta and Odinga, are viewed as being pro-western and pro-America.

*In the Shadow of 2007*

Kenya is still haunted by post-election violence after the vote in December 2007. 1,300 people were killed and more than 600,000 were driven from their homes. The unrest erupted after the validity of the vote was called into question. Tribal clashes ensued, beginning in slums and expanding from there, with Rift Valley a particular flashpoint. Farms were looted, shops were shuttered, and there was almost constant rioting which lasted into 2008. Crime levels exploded and many felt forced to flee Kenya into Uganda and other neighbouring countries. Only in April 2008, did Kenya’s security situation stabilise.

The 2013 elections were largely peaceful in comparison with the previous election. Tribal conflicts and unrest was reported prior to the vote, specifically during the primary period. Also, a criminal gang killed six police officers in the Mombasa region on the eve of the vote. Post-election violence was limited, however. This can be attributed to the seven-point winning margin for Uhuru Kenyatta.

*Violence in 2017?*

Opinion polls have tightened in recent weeks. Opposition leader Raila Odinga now holds a slight lead over President Kenyatta. Both sides are hiring election observers. The closeness of these polls increases the possibility for post-election violence, as both sides may believe that they have been cheated out of the vote. There are fears that hate speech by party functionaries is occurring at lower levels, away from the eyes of the media and observers. More concerning is the split of the vote along tribal and ethnic lines, polarising the electorate. Kenyatta largely draws his support from the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin. Odinga’s constituency largely consists of the Luo, Lukya, and the Kamba. There are reports in the country of families moving away from ethnically mixed neighbourhoods; there is a higher likelihood of unrest in such areas.

Pockets of violence have occurred in the lead up to the vote on 08 August, including clashes at campaign rallies. Most notably, the individual in charge of Kenya’s computerised voting system was found dead on 01 August after being tortured. Also, a man armed
with a machete wounded a security officer when he attacked the home of Vice President William Ruto. Ruto and his family were not home at the time. Voter intimidation was also reported during the May and June 2017 primary season.

Opposition parties have already alleged irregularities in the electoral system and Human Rights Watch (HRW) has highlighted concerns over freedoms of expression and assembly in the lead up to the vote. Indeed, HRW has lobbied the government to investigate claims of threats and voter intimidation in Nakuru County. The presence of ‘fake news’ could also lead to post-election unrest, if it is believed that it had an effect on voters as it did in the 2016 US Presidential Election. Opposition groups have also criticised the impartiality of the country’s Supreme Court and have vowed to take to the streets, rather than go through the courts, if they suspect vote rigging. This has heightened the fears for the potential of violence.

Some commentators have suggested that measures implemented after the violence surrounding the 2007 elections appear to be working. Politicians using hate speech have been prosecuted and decentralisation efforts have reduced the atmosphere of ‘winner-takes-all’. Though other suggest that underlying issues remain prominent and that Kenyan authorities are less prepared for this vote than they were in the previous elections.

Where Might Election Violence Occur?

Although difficult to predict, authorities have noted areas of concern. Informal and slum settlements in Nairobi, including Globe, Ziwani, Landhies Road, Makadara, Dandora, Mowlem Savannah, and Mukuru are viewed to be at heightened risk of political unrest. In 2007-08, Violence also occurred in Rift Valley, Mombasa, Eldoret, Kericho, Kisumu, (where protests occurred in April of this year) and Nakuru. Other areas of concern are Kiambu, Uasin Gishu, West Pokot, Narok, Kisii, Turkana, Bungoma, Nakuru, Lamu, Kilifi, Homabay, Meru, Isiolo, Migori, Baringo, Kericho and Elgeyo/Marakwet counties, according to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission.

150,000 security officers are being deployed nationwide to help maintain order and contain any outbreak.
Travellers should heighten their level of situational awareness during this time. Travellers should try and identify ethnically mixed areas as if violence occurs, it is more likely to begin in such places and with a greater intensity. Travellers should note that pre-election violence is more common in Sub-Saharan Africa (but generally less impactful) than post-election unrest. Should large demonstrations occur, they should be avoided. Not only are demonstrations likely to lead to violence but police have also been accused to being heavy-handed as they seek to control protests.

Travellers should ensure that they have the necessary medical cover in case post-election violence does occur and that they have prepared appropriate supplies such as water and food in case of service shut down. It is also imperative that travellers follow local media reports closely, with violence likely to spread quickly if it does occur. Some reports suggest that flights out of Kenya on dates around 08 August are fully booked. Travellers may need to contact a security provider with access to private aircraft in case of serious, widespread unrest.

During the pre- and post-election period, travellers are reminded to be discreet and maintain sensible security precautions at all times. While violent unrest is potentially the most impactful risk during this period in Kenya, travellers will still be threatened by the high level of violent crime, as well as terrorism – the Islamist Al Shabaab terror group have threatened to attack Kenya during the election campaign.

Travellers to Kenya are advised to employ the minimum of a security driver and airport meet and greet during this period. The level of security provision may need to be enhanced dependent on the area of travel. Travellers are also advised to use travel-tracking technology with an intelligence feed. This should enable a traveller to be alerted of any security updates within their vicinity, and to update others of their movements in case of an emergency.