

Nairobi Burning

Kenya's post-election violence from the perspective of the urban poor

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the elections held in December 2007, Kenya burst into flames. For nearly three months, the country was unsettled by a wave of ethno-political violence. Among the areas most heavily hit was the capital city of Nairobi. With Kenya's political heart, the bulk of the violence took place in the slums. Kenya's next elections are scheduled for 2012, and they are already casting their foreboding shadow. Based on this background, this report shifts our viewpoint to the perspective of Kenya's urban poor in an effort to generate empirical insights about the urban characteristics and dynamics of violence that featured in the city during the fatal period of post-election violence. This is done by drawing from Donald L Horowitz's extensive works on ethnic (riot) violence and based on data collected in the slums by ethnographic means. Finally, the report identifies and deciphers the message(s) inherent in the violence through structured analysis and elaborates detailed policy advice. The latter includes political measures that should be the target of lobbying efforts in an effort to avoid another surge of violence prior to and following the 2012 elections. Furthermore, detailed advice is given concerning the deployment and conduct of riot control units if violence should erupt again – including advice about which actions should be avoided by all means.