

Peace, security and governance in East Africa

2023–2025

Nicodemus Minde



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Executive summary

This monograph analyses the prevailing dynamics shaping the state of peace, security and governance in East Africa between 2023–2025. Drawing on primary fieldwork and extensive secondary data, the monograph discusses the structural, historical and contemporary causes of instability and insecurity in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia during the two-year period. A country-level analysis identifies distinct drivers of conflict in each state.

In Kenya, ongoing intercommunal violence is driven by competition over scarce natural resources, historical grievances and the involvement of politics in local disputes – particularly in the arid and semi-arid lands, which are dominated by pastoralists. Weak governance structures worsen these conflicts.

Tanzania's traditionally stable image is being eroded by the state-led evictions of the Maasai ethnic minority under the guise of conservation, and by the retreat to authoritarianism as orchestrated by the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). The government's 'green grab' policies have triggered violent confrontations and human rights abuses against the indigenous Maasai people. The CCM has ruled Tanzania for over six decades, and recent trends show increased authoritarian tendencies that have constrained opposition and media freedoms.

Uganda's longstanding autocratic governance under the ruling party, President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement, has undermined democracy and fuelled unrest. Elections have been violent and neither free nor fair. Although large-scale armed conflict is limited, sporadic attacks by rebel groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces and cross-border cattle raids add to insecurity.

In Somalia, powerful non-state armed groups have created pervasive instability. With a history of state fragility, Somalia also faces Islamic terrorism in the form of the al-Shabaab group, which fuels insecurity. The country's federal government remains weak and contested by clan militias, leading to chronic violence and humanitarian crises.

International rankings such as Freedom House's Freedom in the World survey, Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, and the Global Peace Index paint a grim picture: worsening civic freedoms, weak institutional checks and escalating security risks. Climate-related shocks, such as the 2022–2023 drought, have displaced millions of East Africans and deepened conflict dynamics in the region.

A cross-country comparison shows that all four of the countries discussed in this monograph score poorly on democracy indexes. Kenya has fared better but there is a worrying decline in its governance and human rights.

The comparative discussion highlights common factors such as elite dominance, resource competition, weak rule of law and divergent patterns in how these drivers manifest across countries. Careful policy interventions are required to address these instability gaps. This monograph includes suggestions for improving institutional strength, land reforms and domestic conflict resolution techniques, as well as recommendations for how Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia and the East African Community can enhance democratic and governance structures.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AfCHPR	African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ASAL(s)	Arid and semi-arid land(s)
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi
CET	Common external tariff
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
GDP	Gross domestic product
GPI	Global Peace Index
HDI	Human Development Index
IED	Improvised explosive device
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LAPSSET	Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport
NCA	Ngorongoro Conservation Area
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OBC	Ortello Business Corporation
SNA	Somali National Army
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
US	United States
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Located at the crossroads of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, East Africa is a region of profound strategic significance. It serves as a vital hub for global trade, resource wealth, culture and geopolitical influence. However, it is bombarded with complex challenges that undermine its stability and developmental potential.¹

The traditional political landscape of East Africa is mapped in the East African Community (EAC) – a regional bloc founded by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The EAC expanded gradually and now stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean and includes Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, South Sudan and Somalia. These eight countries are bound by shared historical ties and economic interdependence, yet they face different challenges that threaten their collective stability.

Located at the crossroads of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, East Africa is a region of profound strategic significance

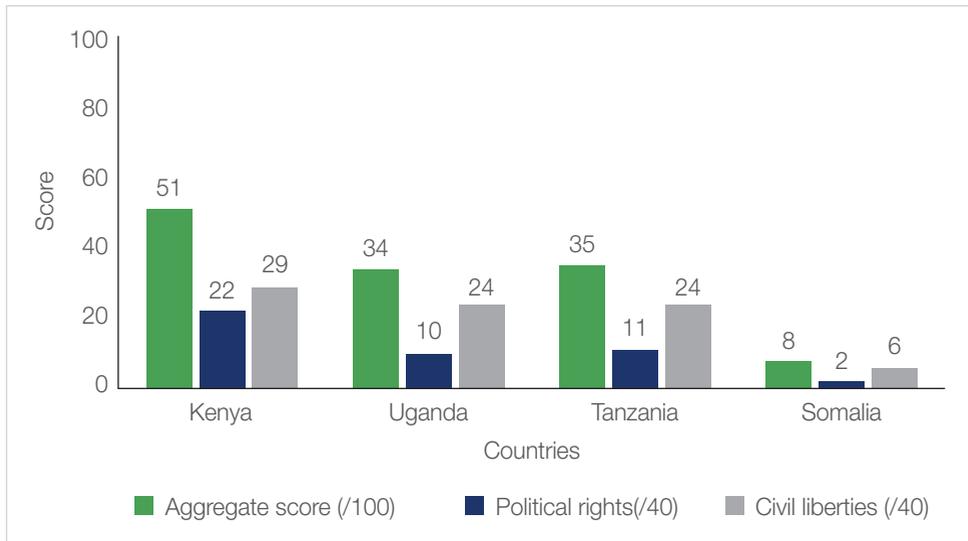
This geographical reality intertwines with the East African ‘regional conflict complex.’² Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia, the key members of the EAC, are confronted with distinct yet related drivers of instability – intercommunal violence, authoritarian governance, resource competition and non-state armed groups. These challenges are rooted in historical legacies of colonialism and the failures of state-building in the post-independence eras. In addition, they are worsened by contemporary pressures such as climate-induced stressors, economic inequality, cross-border dynamics and further governance difficulties.

The region’s strategic ports facilitate trade across the Indian Ocean while its natural resources, including oil, gas and minerals, attract global investment. With a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$120 billion in 2024, Kenya anchors the region economically, serving as a critical centre for technology and finance.³ Tanzania experienced a 5.1% growth in GDP and leverages its tourism sector, contributing 17%

to national revenue.⁴ Uganda’s emerging oil sector promises economic transformation, while Somalia’s untapped resources remain inhibited by state collapse.

Despite these assets, East Africa faces persistent challenges. Violence breaks out between communities in Kenya’s North Rift, the Maasai community in Tanzania experiences state-driven tensions, Ugandans are repressed by an autocratic government, and Somalia is threatened by an al-Shabaab insurgency. Cross-cutting factors including climate change, economic inequality and weak regional cooperation only amplify these issues.

Chart 1: Freedom House’s Freedom in the World survey, 2024



Source: Aggregated from Freedom House (2024)

International and regional governance metrics indicate the region’s deteriorating democracy, civic space and human rights. In 2024, Freedom House, an international non-profit organisation that assesses the democracy, political freedoms and human rights of individuals, classified Tanzania and Uganda as ‘not free’. The two countries scored 35⁵ and 34 out of 100,⁶ respectively, in its Freedom in the World survey. Kenya is categorised as ‘partly free’,⁷ with a score of 52, reflecting competitive elections but significant democratic deficits. Somalia is rated 8, one of the world’s lowest scores, and continues to face severe restrictions on political rights and civil liberties.⁸

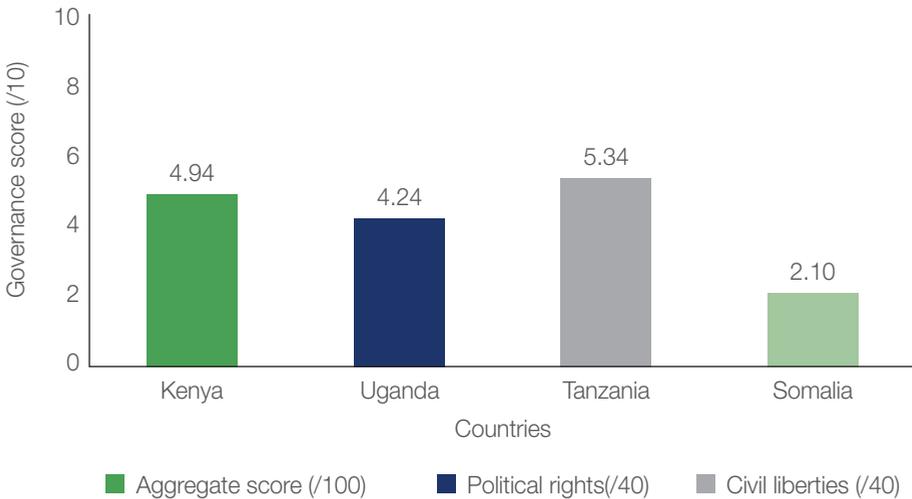
The Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) measures the status of development and national governance as well as the processes towards political and economic transformation in developing and transition countries worldwide. Like the Freedom in the World survey, this index also ranks the four East African

countries very low. In the governance category, which refers to ‘the quality of political management in transformation processes,’ Tanzania scored a value of 5.34 out of 10. Kenya scored 4.94, followed by Uganda at 4.24 and Somalia at 2.10. These values illustrate a spectrum from moderate capacity to state failure.

The Global Peace Index (GPI), published by the Institute for Economics & Peace, assesses the relative peacefulness of countries worldwide on a scale of 1–5, with lower scores indicating higher peace. In East Africa, Tanzania ranks as the most peaceful among its neighbours, with a score of 1.987 in 2024, placing it 65th globally. Kenya and Uganda follow with scores of 2.409 and 2.477, ranking at 122nd

Chart 2: Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index – governance scores, 2024

Country	Governance score (/10)	Interpretation
Kenya	4.94	Moderate governance: some policy-setting capability, but weakened institutions and corruption impede effectiveness
Uganda	4.24	Borderline weak governance: authoritarian tendencies, weak checks and balances, high corruption
Tanzania	5.34	Moderate governance with limited effectiveness: persistent corruption and centralised decision-making processes
Somalia	2.10	Weak governance: high institutional fragility, stalled reforms, and widespread corruption and violence



Source: Aggregated from BTI (2024)

and 126th, respectively.⁹ Somalia has a score of 3.1, making it one of the worst-performing countries in the world. These scores and other global matrixes reflect the region's dire security and governance challenges.

Climate change and arms trafficking worsen these dynamics, especially in Kenya and Somalia. The 2022–2023 global drought displaced 1.2 million people in Kenya and 3.8 million in Somalia, intensifying resource competition.¹⁰ Arms trafficking fuels violence in the region, with 600 000 illicit firearms in Kenya and 10 000 smuggled annually into Somalia. Cross-border refugee flows, totaling 1.5 million migrants, strain resources. Meanwhile, initiatives by the EAC and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are only 20–25% implemented and reflect weak regional coordination.¹¹

Controversies surrounding balancing economic growth with democratic progress complicate regional stabilisation, particularly in Tanzania and Uganda

Historical legacies, including colonial land policies and post-independence elite capture, provide a critical context for contemporary conflicts. Controversies surrounding governance reforms – balancing economic growth with democratic progress – further complicate efforts to stabilise the region, particularly in Tanzania and Uganda, where totalitarian regimes prioritise control over inclusion.¹²

With this background, two main research questions emerge:

- What were the main contemporary drivers of instability and insecurity in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia between 2023 and 2025?
- What policy options can be sought to ensure sustainable peace and security in the four selected East African countries?

Answering these questions involved a multidisciplinary approach integrating governance indexes, economic data and conflict statistics with qualitative insights from primary data collected in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, as well as secondary data. Owing to security concerns and significant threats in Somalia, a desktop study was conducted as a substitute for in-person data collection.

Drawing on several primary sources, notably from expert interviews and key informants working on peace, security and governance in the region, the study applied a within-case analysis of the selected countries to understand the contemporary drivers of instability in East Africa. Fieldwork was conducted in January–March 2025 and primary data was collected in Arusha and Dar es Salaam,

Tanzania and in Kampala, Uganda. In Kenya, fieldwork was done in the counties of Nairobi, Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and West Pokot.

Four themes informed the research into the peace and security dynamics in the selected country case studies, at the sites mentioned above:

- Intercommunal conflicts
- Tensions between the state and ethnic communities
- The state of governance and democracy
- Non-state armed groups

Secondary data sources include a variety of datasets and indexes such as the BTI, Freedom House's Freedom in the World survey, the GPI, World Bank data and the Human Development Index (HDI), as well as scholarly texts.

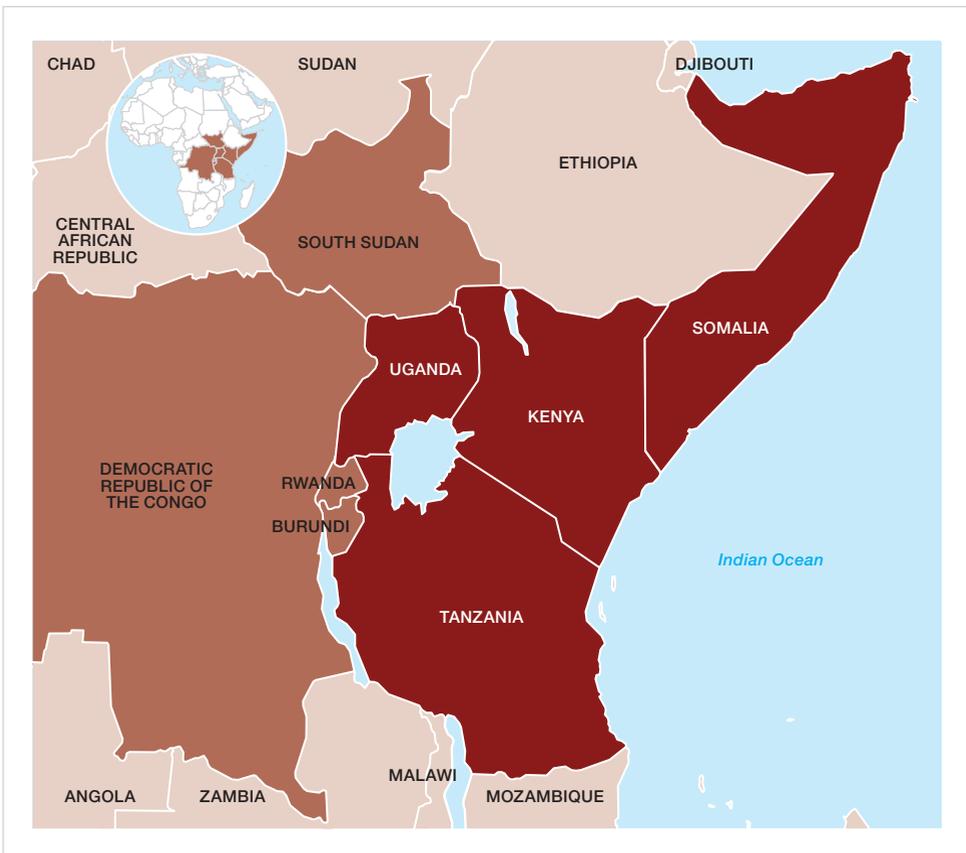
This monograph seeks to unravel the complexities of instability in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia, providing a foundation for policy interventions that can address national and regional insecurity.

CHAPTER 2

Background and thematic analysis

The East African region, which geographically covers the countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, has a long history of conflict. These countries have been directly involved in disputes or impacted by their effects. Because of its strategic location, the region holds significant geo-strategic importance.

Chart 3: Map of East Africa



Source: Institute for Security Studies

In recent years, East African countries have experienced steady economic growth, mainly due to political stability.¹³ Despite this progress, underlying domestic and external challenges threaten peace and security. This monograph examines country-specific peace and security issues in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia from 2023 to 2025.

Kenya and Tanzania have enjoyed relative peace compared to their neighbours in the region. Nonetheless, political and governance challenges are considered the greatest threats to their peace and security.¹⁴ The two countries have been instrumental in efforts to stabilise the Great Lakes area and the greater East Africa region. Kenya has served as an anchor state in the Horn of Africa, mediating conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. Meanwhile, Tanzania has historically adopted a pacifist approach to conflicts in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda, individually and through multilateral initiatives. Conversely, Uganda has experienced periods of relative stability interspersed with conflicts, violence and authoritarian rule.

Kenya's drawn-out conflict involving a pastoralist militia in the North Rift has caused security challenges, and drought has worsened the conflict.¹⁵ Furthermore, climate change has also increased tensions between the livestock farming communities that occupy the Rift Valley, such as the Maasai, Pokot, Samburu, Turkana, Turgen and Chamus peoples, who are continually fighting over access to grazing land and cattle rustling.¹⁶

In recent years, East African countries experienced steady economic growth, mainly due to political stability

In 2023, the Kenyan government launched Operation Maliza Uhalifu North Rift,¹⁷ a security operation aimed to disarm the militia and tackle the structural and systemic issues of pastoralist conflicts, but little has been achieved. On the regional front, East African countries updated the *Protocol on the Prevention, Combating and Eradication of Cattle Rustling in Eastern Africa*, known as the Mifugo Protocol, in 2021 to forge cooperation in the cross-border nature of livestock rustling. Again, nothing substantial has been achieved in this regard.¹⁸

Tanzania, a historically peaceful country, is facing conflict after the government acted on a policy to relocate the Maasai people from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) for what it claims is conservation purposes.¹⁹ The policy has resulted in government brutality, arbitrary arrest and the forced removal of Maasai people from their ancestral land. Reports from human rights organisations indicate that about 70 000 Maasai people have been left without access to grazing land.²⁰

The evictions and displacement of this ethnic minority group has faced criticism both domestically and internationally. In addition, the country has seen increased state repression occasioned by state control of key institutions, which has impacted governance. These tensions persisted even as the country went into the 2025 general elections.

In Uganda, political violence continues to be meted out to the opposition. President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, has ruled by domination, and his anticipated succession has been a source of tension. There were widespread electoral irregularities in the 2021 elections. Members of the opposition were intimidated, others disappeared, and internet services shut down.²¹

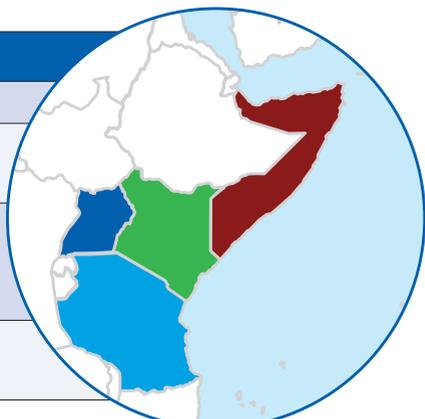
Somalia officially became the eighth EAC member in March 2024. The country has a history of conflicts and internal challenges that threaten the region, which has already borne the brunt of terrorism and piracy from Somalia. The country continues to grapple with the al-Shabaab terrorist group despite efforts by the government and international actors such as the African Union (AU) and IGAD to eliminate the insurgency.

Addressing the state of peace and security in the East African region requires a multifaceted approach. This includes exploring the root causes of conflicts, understanding the role of regional economic communities and regional mechanisms in resolving these conflicts, and analysing the effectiveness of these initiatives. By understanding the historical contexts and contemporary dynamics of conflict, and implementing regional initiatives, there is potential to create a more stable and secure environment – fostering sustainable development and prosperity for all East Africans.

This monograph begins by discussing the violence between different communities in Kenya, followed by Tanzania’s state-driven tensions, Uganda’s autocratic repression and Somalia’s armed insurgency. It then weaves together the findings into a comparative discussion and concludes with actionable recommendations.

Chart 4: Themes of study

Theme	Country
Intercommunal violence	Kenya
Tensions between the state and ethnic communities	Tanzania
State of governance and democracy	Kenya Uganda Tanzania
State collapse and non-state armed groups	Somalia



Source: author

CHAPTER 3

Kenya

Intercommunal violence

How resource competition and political manipulation fuels the violence

One of Kenya's sources of instability has been the conflicts between different communities in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), which span 80% of the country's landmass and are home to 14 million people.²² These conflicts are concentrated in the Northern Rift counties: Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Marsabit, Samburu, Turkana, Uasin Gishu and West Pokot. Scholars and policymakers have challenged the concept of 'intercommunal violence', arguing that its continued usage downplays the real drivers of conflict, which include new political and elite actors.²³ These new actors are discussed in detail below, based on fieldwork data in the Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and West Pokot counties.

Conflicts are not merely rooted in traditional
livestock farming practices but are also worsened
by modern dynamics

Historically, the conflict in the North Rift area has been driven by a complex interplay of resource scarcity, ethnic rivalries and political manipulation, resulting in hundreds of deaths and tens of thousands of people displaced annually.²⁴ The World Bank reports that 33.6% of Kenyans live below the international poverty line of US\$2.15 per day, with ASAL poverty rates reaching 70% in Turkana, creating a fertile ground for violence.²⁵ The pastoralist communities of the ASALs, which include Borana, Gabbra, Ilchamus, Pokot, Samburu and Turkana, depend on livestock for their livelihoods, making access to grazing land and water critical.²⁶

The 2022–2023 drought, one of the most severe in four decades, decimated 2.5 million livestock and displaced 1.2 million people, intensifying competition for dwindling resources.²⁷ These conflicts are not merely rooted in traditional livestock farming practices but they are also worsened by modern dynamics. For example,

political elites mobilising ethnic militias to secure electoral support, the rapid increase of smuggled arms, with an estimated 600 000 illicit firearms from South Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia, and inadequate policing that covers only 20% of ASALs.²⁸ In 2023, Baringo County witnessed violent clashes between the Pokot and Tugen communities over grazing land, resulting in 50 deaths and 10 000 displacements.²⁹

How pastoralist conflict spills over local boundaries and across national borders

Boundary issues is the other primary driver of intercommunal conflict, especially in the North Rift counties. One respondent observed:

The boundaries touching Baringo (Elgeyo Marakwet); Turkana (Kapedo), Turkana East and Turkana South; bordering Samburu; bordering Tiaty East; Baringo and Laikipia (Tiaty East and Laikipia) have been a source of conflict over the years.³⁰

Another respondent echoed this sentiment:

There has been an increase in cases of armed pastoralists who possess firearms. This has been exacerbated by modernisation, boundary polarisation and the proliferation of small arms.³¹

In these North Rift counties, violence tied to the culture of cattle rustling,³² resource competition and domestic politics have claimed lives. Evidence suggests that politicians armed militant fighters to sway votes, a tactic reported in these counties since the Kenyan government was decentralised under a new constitution in 2010.³³ This political practice gradually continued, with elites capitalising on intercommunal tensions in the region to advance their political aspirations.³⁴ Adding political exploitation and weapons to the economy of cattle rustling has only inflamed the crisis.³⁵ These incidents illustrate how elite manipulation transforms resource disputes into ethnic and political violence, undermining social cohesion.

Historically, colonial land policies allocated prime agricultural land to European settlers, marginalising pastoralists and creating a legacy of exclusion that post-independence governments failed to address.³⁶ The 2010 constitution's devolution framework sought to empower local governance but subsequently introduced new ethnic and elite rivalries at the county level. Since 2013, 30% of disputes have been linked to devolved politics.³⁷

Counties such as Baringo, Turkana and West Pokot have limited infrastructure and poorly paved roads, restricting economic opportunities and state presence, and perpetuating marginalisation.³⁸

Another driver of intercommunal conflict is the cross-border dynamics, which significantly amplify Kenya's insecurity. Cattle raids along the borders with South Sudan

and Ethiopia involved the theft of 50 000 livestock in 2023, resulted in 200 deaths, and were fuelled by arms smuggling networks that supplied 600 000 illicit firearms.³⁹

Many respondents from the fieldwork in the Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and West Pokot counties and at the border of West Pokot and Turkana spoke of the value chain of cattle rustling. Over the past three decades, there has been a shift from the traditional, cultural practice to a more profit-oriented practice.⁴⁰ A community worker in Kapenguria, West Pokot narrated the increasing rate of commercialising the cattle rustling practice. She observed:

The value chain of cattle rustling now stretches beyond the traditional cultural value to a more commercial value addition chain. Cattle are stolen in Uganda, transported in lorries through the border, pass through hidden routes of West Pokot, Marakwet, through Eldoret, and then to Nairobi.⁴¹

The demand for beef in urban centres and international markets, such as the Middle East, has turned cattle rustling into a lucrative business. Stolen livestock is sold for profit, often through black markets.⁴² The distribution of about 600 000 illegal firearms, smuggled from conflict zones in South Sudan and Ethiopia, escalates violence, particularly in cattle rustling, which stole 50 000 livestock in 2023 and resulted in 200 deaths.⁴³

The demand for beef in urban centres and international markets, such as the Middle East, has turned cattle rustling into a lucrative business

Climate change compounds these dynamics, with erratic rainfall and rising temperatures reducing the amount of grazing land available for livestock. Pasture availability drives 70% of conflicts in regions like Baringo, where Pokot–Tugen clashes over grazing land in 2023 killed 50 people and displaced 10 000.⁴⁴

Opportunities for social inclusion

Social dynamics such as gender and education further influence Kenya's conflict landscape.⁴⁵ Women, who comprise 50% of ASAL households, are disproportionately affected by forced migration. 70% of displaced households are being led by women, yet only 10% of women are able to participate in peacebuilding processes. Access to education is severely limited, with 40% of ASAL children out of school, creating a cycle of exclusion that fuels militia recruitment.⁴⁶ Community-based peace efforts led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have mediated the pastoral disputes but they lack state support, limiting their capability to grow and be effective.⁴⁷

Observations in the Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and West Pokot counties show that these NGO-led initiatives have included projects such as interfaith dialogues, elders' dialogues and educational programmes. Importantly, land and water reforms are essential to securing rights to communal tenure in owning and using land and resources, and to reduce seasonal shortages. Respondents from the three counties above mentioned how dams and boreholes have been constructed to increase water access, potentially halving resource-driven conflicts.⁴⁸

In addition, development initiatives have been set up to address poverty rates. Collaborative efforts from the central government, county governments and community-led NGOs have seen investments in education, aiming to reduce school dropouts, and in healthcare programmes, which have helped curb youth recruitment into non-state armed groups.⁴⁹ Social inclusion for women and the youth in particular has been crucial, especially NGO-led initiatives that promote women's participation in peace processes and vocational training.⁵⁰

Governance weaknesses as a source of insecurity

The failures of governance practices are another major factor in Kenya's overall insecurity. Despite competitive elections, the presidency wields disproportionate authority, controlling 60% of national budget decisions, which limits the autonomy of devolved counties.⁵¹ The government has undermined state institutions despite the robustness of the Kenyan constitution, which provides for a system of checks and balances among government arms. Key structures of governance and accountability have struggled to fulfill their roles, leading to diminished trust and confidence among citizens.⁵² For example, judicial independence has wavered, scoring 5/10 on the 2024 BTI, with 20% of high-profile cases dismissed under political pressure – weakening the rule of law.⁵³ Corruption remains a significant barrier, with the BTI scoring anti-corruption efforts at 4/10 in 2024.

Key governance and accountability structures have struggled to fulfill their roles, leading to diminished trust and confidence among citizens

Kenya's youth, comprising 35% of the population, are a dynamic force for change but they are significantly alienated, driving both protests and militia recruitment. The Kenyan Generation Z movement, leveraging social media platforms like X, has become a vocal critic of governance failures. In 2024 and 2025, Gen Z-led protests against the Finance Bill, which proposed tax hikes on essential goods, paralysed major cities Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa, drawing tens of thousands to the streets. Security forces responded with excessive force, using live ammunition and

tear gas, resulting in 15 deaths, 200 injuries and 300 arrests between June and August 2023.⁵⁴

A notable incident saw 22-year-old activist Rex Kanyike Masai shot dead during a June 2024 demonstration, sparking nationwide outrage and hashtags like #JusticeForRex trending on X. In 2024, protests escalated in Nairobi's central business district, where the youth occupied the parliament building to demand accountability, only to face tear gas and arrests once again. These protests reflect frustrations with corruption, the high costs of living and limited opportunities, with 70% of young people citing governance failures as their primary grievance. Youth unrest underscores the need for inclusive economic policies and political dialogue.

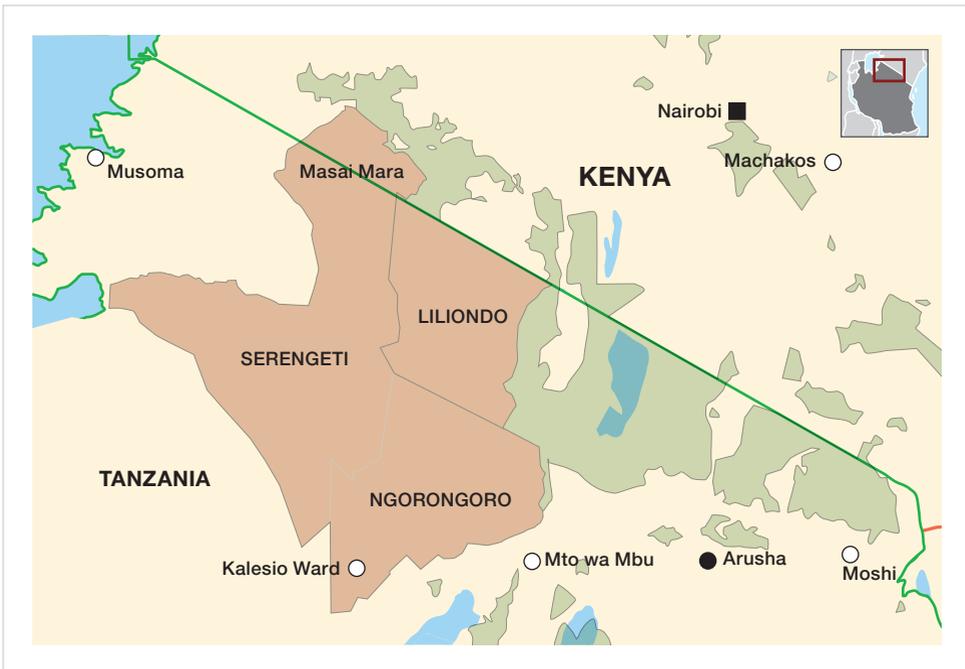
CHAPTER 4

Tanzania

State-driven tensions

Among the countries in East Africa that have enjoyed stability and peace over the years is Tanzania.⁵⁵ However, this status is increasingly becoming precarious, undermined by two main factors. The first is the state's decision to evict the Maasai ethnic group, a livestock farming community living in northern Tanzania, from their traditional land. The government framed the evictions as planned conservation for the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), an area known for its rich biodiversity and ecological significance.⁵⁶ The second factor to Tanzania's growing instability is the country's turn to authoritarianism under the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party, which has held power since 1961.⁵⁷

Chart 5: Map of Ngorongoro evictions



Source: Oakland Institute

Maasai evictions and the implications for peace and security

Historically, the Maasai people, who are pastoralists and indigenous to the Nile Valley, have lived alongside wildlife in the northern region of Tanzania, which borders Kenya. When the Serengeti ecosystem was declared a national park in 1951, many of the Maasai people who occupied the Serengeti plains relocated to the NCA. A Maasai rights activist highlighted the historical changes in administration and land systems and how these affected the Maasai people. He argues that the contradictions between local versus international interests, balancing between community rights and research from scientists who advocate for ecological preservation and conservation, have been the subject of discussion since Tanzania gained independence in 1961.⁵⁸

After decades of back and forth and negotiations on the crucial but divisive question of conservation, the government decided in 2021 to go ahead with the plan to relocate the Maasai people from their traditional habitat in the NCA. President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who had just succeeded former-president John Magufuli, who died in office in March 2021, began government efforts for relocation less than a month later in April.⁵⁹ The NCA is identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site. To justify the forced removal, the government claimed that the World Heritage Site was overpopulated and put pressure on biodiversity as a result, which Maasai rights activists dispute.⁶⁰

Maasai advocates and human rights activists see the government's rationale for conservation as driven by economic interests, especially tourism, game hunting and carbon credits.⁶¹ Tourism contributes about 17% to Tanzania's GDP. It drives the conversion of pastoralist lands into safari parks and conservation zones, denying the Maasai people access to grazing lands that are essential for their livestock-based livelihoods.⁶²

The primary driver of state-driven tensions in Tanzania is the government's decision to prioritise economic interests, particularly tourism-related conservation, over the rights of indigenous and marginalised communities. This practice is exemplified by the Maasai people's evictions from the NCA and the Serengeti.

In addition, the government leased 1 500 km² of NCA land to the Ortello Business Corporation (OBC), a firm based in the United Arab Emirates, for trophy hunting and elite tourism in Tanzania. This 'green grab' policy reflects a broader trend of commodifying indigenous lands for revenue, with 90% of conservation decisions excluding Maasai consultation, violating the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.⁶³ Historically, colonial conservation models restricted access for livestock farming communities, a legacy that has been continued by post-independence CCM policies. The 1999 Land Act's failure to allocate 80% of the land to pastoralist activities allowed for the state seizure of these lands.⁶⁴

The forced eviction of over 80 000 Maasai people from the NCA since 2022 is a stark display of Tanzania's state-driven tensions. Announced in April 2021 under the multiple land use management and resettlement plan, the evictions aim to designate the NCA as a game reserve, effectively prioritising tourism over the Maasai people's ancestral rights.⁶⁵ The government's partnership with OBC to develop hunting concessions has displaced Maasai communities to the Handeni district and Msomera village in the Tanga region, areas with inadequate grazing and water, threatening livelihoods.

In June 2022, violent clashes for Maasai land in Loliondo village saw security forces fire live ammunition and tear gas, injuring 50 people, killing one and arresting 200. About 30% of incidents involved excessive force, including beatings and sexual violence.⁶⁶ The Maasai people, constituting only 1% of Tanzania's 60 million population, have faced systematic marginalisation, with 60% of communities fearing further forced migration.

Colonial conservation models restricted access for livestock farming, a legacy that has been continued by post-independence CCM policies

According to a Maasai rights activist, the Maasai people secured a stop order from the East African Court of Justice in 2018. However, the government's non-compliance has prolonged legal battles, prompting appeals to the United Nations (UN), the United Kingdom, the United States (US) and the European Union, with over 150 000 signatures protesting the evictions.⁶⁷ The removals contravene international frameworks, as 90% of conservation decisions have bypassed community consent. In the Serengeti, 5 000 Maasai people were displaced in 2023 and 20% of grazing lands were converted to tourism infrastructure, resulting in 10 deaths during clashes with rangers.

Impacts of state-driven tensions

The results of Tanzania's state-driven tensions, particularly the Maasai evictions, are multifaceted. Human costs include the displacement of over 80 000 Maasai people, with 70% of households losing access to grazing lands, leading to food insecurity and income loss. Violent clashes have injured 100 people and killed 11 since 2022, and the arrest of 200 people has undermined community cohesion.⁶⁸ Displaced Maasai communities are unable to sustain livestock-based economies in these conditions, reducing household incomes in Ngorongoro and resulting in significant economic losses.⁶⁹ Social division is evident, with Maasai people reporting distrust in state institutions, which complicates reconciliation.

When the evictions began, there was much political repression, as journalists and activists faced arrest and harassment.⁷⁰ The resettlement of those evicted to Msomera has resulted in a population surge, causing resource strain, land competition and ethnic tensions with locals. One Maasai rights activist observed that the forced migration has threatened the democratic rights of the Maasai people.⁷¹

In 2024, a case was filed at the High Court of Tanzania challenging the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for transferring voters from Ngorongoro to Msomera.⁷² The main issue that residents and registered voters from Ngorongoro raised was voter suppression and the unlawful nature of transferring residents from their polling districts without their knowledge or consent. The applicants argued that the INEC had no mandate to modify polling districts and move voters across constituencies. According to the case proceedings and key informants, the government's strategy to forcibly relocate residents by using administrative and legal tools threatens their socio-political and human rights.⁷³

Addressing Tanzania's state-driven tensions requires a balanced approach that targets indigenous rights, democratic reforms and inclusive development. Halting Maasai evictions and ensuring that the minority group is consulted in 80% of conservation decisions by 2026, in line with the UN's indigenous rights frameworks, is crucial. Legal enforcement of the 1999 Land Act, demarcating 50% of pastoralist lands by 2027, can allow Maasai farmers to secure communal tenure for owning and using land.⁷⁴

Addressing Tanzania's state-driven tensions requires a balanced approach that targets indigenous rights, democratic reforms and inclusive development

Economic interventions should address rural disparities. For example, allocating 30% of tourism revenue to marginalised areas like Ngorongoro to reduce poverty rates by 50%. Infrastructure investments, such as increasing access to electricity in rural areas from 25% to 50% by 2030, can support development, with US\$1 billion needed annually. International pressure, including sanctions on OBC and conditions on aid, can hold the government accountable and promote sustainable policies.

In December 2024, President Samia unveiled two presidential commissions to look into the conflicts. The first, led by Judge Dr GERALF NDIKA, was tasked with reviewing the land disputes, and the second, led by Musa LYOMBE, was tasked with evaluating the critical question of Maasai evictions. Their work will span three years, but the commissions has already been dismissed by rights activists as a delay tactic by the government.⁷⁵

Authoritarian turn as a driver of instability

There has been a discernible shift in Tanzania's governance in the past decade. Since 2015, political repression, including media censorship and the arrest of opposition figures, has increased, and this has eroded civic space and led to structural insecurity. As discussed in Chapter 1, Freedom House's Freedom in the World survey (2024) rates Tanzania as 'not free', with an overall score of 35/100. Together with a political rights score of 11/40 and civil liberties at 24/60, this reflects constrained political space and repressive governance.⁷⁶

The 2024 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) measured Tanzania's governance score at 5.34 out of 10. Political transformation at 4.90/10 and economic transformation at 5.34/10 highlight robust economic management but weak accountability and participation.⁷⁷ Over the same period, the Global Peace Index (GPI) ranked Tanzania at 65th in the world, with a score of 1.987 out of 5, indicating relative stability compared to its regional peers.⁷⁸ Similarly, the 2023 Human Development Index (HDI) scored Tanzania at 0.549 out of 1, reflecting moderate development with significant rural disparities.⁷⁹

Several gaps in governance and democracy underpin Tanzania's turn to authoritarian rule. The research reveals that the key gaps include:

- Legal and constitutional divides
- Institutional weaknesses
- The erosion of parliamentary oversight
- A lack of trust in the electoral process

The CCM ruling party maintains dominance through repressive legislation, including the media and digital laws, which have led to journalists being harassed.⁸⁰ When President Samia entered office in 2021, she initiated reforms that led to modest improvements in governance,⁸¹ such as reopening select media outlets and removing the ban on political parties. Her reforms were seen as a break from the past. However, a governance expert observed, '[They] were not anchored on strong legal foundations, making them easy to reverse.'⁸²

Tanzania still has outdated and oppressive laws, such as the 2015 Cybercrimes Act, the 2016 Media Services Act, and the Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act, which restrict freedom of expression and assembly. A 2024 report by the Tanzania Centre for Democracy shows that legal gaps undermine the competitive model of democracy. For example, the 2019 Political Parties Act gives the registrar of political parties excessive power.⁸³ According to a senior official working with the Legal and Human Rights Centre, these legal gaps result from the old constitution.⁸⁴

Research findings further point to institutional weakness, especially in the INEC. President Samia began reforms to improve election management. However, the INEC is still not independent from executive interference.⁸⁵ One critical demand has been the need to challenge presidential election results in court. In 2020, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR) ruled that the Tanzanian constitution undermined access to justice and democratic accountability by not providing for this possibility.⁸⁶

The erosion of parliamentary oversight is another key gap. Since the 2020 elections, which saw the opposition lose nearly all representation in parliament, the CCM's excessive dominance over parliamentary affairs has threatened the independence and management of the legislative system.

Trust in the electoral system is low. The Varieties of Democracy's (V-Dem) 2024 Liberal Democracy Index assigns Tanzania a score of 0.29 out of 1, indicating significant democratic backsliding. This is exemplified by opposition leader and lawyer Tundu Lissu's two arrests in 2023.⁸⁷ Only 20% of citizens are confident in the electoral process, and 30% of NGOs face operational restrictions, which stifles civic engagement.

CHAPTER 5

Uganda

Autocratic repression

Like Tanzania and Kenya, Uganda has held periodic elections, but their credibility has deteriorated.⁸⁸ The crumbling of accountability institutions and the rule of law has significantly affected the country's democratic decline.⁸⁹ Uganda's instability is deeply rooted in President Museveni's 40-year rule, which has been characterised by political repression, militarised governance and sporadic violence from the Allied Democratic Forces' (ADF) attacks and cattle raids in the Karamoja region.⁹⁰ With 20.3% of Ugandans living below the US\$2.15 per day poverty line, and youth unemployment at 12%, economic pressures worsen the tensions concerning the Albertine region's US\$15 billion oil reserves.⁹¹

On the governance outlook, the 2024 Freedom in the World survey rated Uganda as 'not free', scoring 34/100. The political rights score of 10/40 and the civil liberties score of 24/60 reflect severe restrictions on electoral freedom and civic space.⁹² Over the same period, the BTI measured Uganda's governance at 4.24/10, with political transformation at 3.88/10 and economic transformation at 4.0/10, indicating weak accountability and widespread military influence.⁹³ Meanwhile, the 2024 GPI ranked Uganda at 126th, with a score of about 2.5, suggesting moderate peacefulness tainted by internal security threats.⁹⁴ The 2023 HDI scores Uganda at 0.582, reflecting low human development with significant gaps in education and healthcare.⁹⁵

The National Resistance Movement (NRM), the country's ruling party, has consolidated power through patronage networks and electoral manipulation. The last elections in 2021 were marred by deaths and the widespread arrests of opposition figures, including National Unity Platform leader Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine.⁹⁶ The 2024 BTI scored Uganda's political transformation at 3.88/10, with participation at 3/10, as 70% of protestors reported being harassed by security forces. Similarly, the Liberal Democracy Index assigned Uganda a score of 0.22, highlighting severe democratic erosion, with the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), the national armed force, controlling 40% of key ministries.⁹⁷

Media suppression is rampant. Reports show 50% of media outlets were censored and 20 journalists arrested in 2023 under anti-terrorism laws, limiting

civic engagement to 30% of citizens.⁹⁸ According to international surveys, trust in electoral integrity is low. Only 25% of citizens are confident in the electoral process, and 30% of votes were allegedly rigged in 2021, further cementing autocratic control.⁹⁹

Museveni's rise to power in 1986 relied on military control and patronage – a system that rewards loyalty with political support. Constitutional amendments have solidified his autocracy, particularly the decision in 2005 to remove limits on the duration of presidential terms.¹⁰⁰ Ethnic tensions fuel violence, particularly in the marginalised Karamoja region, where 60% of Ugandans live below the poverty line (US\$2.15 per day). Furthermore, 80% of parliament is aligned with the NRM, weakening opposition strongholds like the Buganda kingdom.¹⁰¹

Fieldwork findings and empirical literature point to three thematic trends in Uganda's governance gaps that threaten peace and stability:

- The fall of democracy and the rule of law
- Militarised governance and state-sanctioned repression
- Political transition scenarios

Fall of democracy and the rule of law

A systemic weakening of democratic structures has undermined the constitutional provision of the separation of powers. According to one source, institutions, particularly the judiciary and parliament, have been compromised by state interference.¹⁰² Often, judges face harassment for rulings against the regime.

For instance, in January 2025, the Supreme Court of Uganda ruled that it was unconstitutional for military courts to try civilians, citing that it violated the principles of fair trial and that military courts did not have the jurisdiction to do so. However, the government banished the ruling and introduced a bill in parliament to continue trying civilians. This came at a time when chief opposition figure Kizza Besigye was abducted in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2024 before being tried in a military court on treason charges.¹⁰³

Museveni appoints all the heads of the country's critical institutions himself, which ensures individual loyalty over independence.¹⁰⁴ The constitution has seen systematic dismantling, as experienced with land rights amendments and the removal of the president's age limit, making Museveni a president for life.¹⁰⁵ The crumbling of key institutions due to the NRM's dominance and government interference has incapacitated parliament from legislating independently.¹⁰⁶ Parliament has gradually passed amendments that consolidate Museveni's grip on power, with reports of members being bribed or intimidated. Museveni has also personalised power by building a network of co-opted elites, and silencing the opposition.¹⁰⁷

Militarised governance and state-sanctioned repression

‘Uganda is one big prison; we are all prisoners,’ a human rights activist remarked at the beginning of an interview during fieldwork for this study.¹⁰⁸ Over the years, the state and Ugandan politics have been systematically militarised, using military and security forces as tools for control. In 1986, Museveni rose to power through a guerrilla-armed struggle, and he has maintained this gun-based approach to governance.¹⁰⁹ According to one respondent: ‘[The UPDF is] Museveni’s personal army, with his son Muhoozi Kainerugaba consolidating family power.’¹¹⁰ General Kainerugaba was appointed Chief of Defence Forces by Museveni in March 2024, fuelling speculation that he has been prepared to succeed his father.

The extent of militarisation in Uganda goes hand in hand with state violence, extrajudicial arrests, intimidation and harassment by security organs. The involvement of defence forces intersects with politics and the economy. For example, the military has been reserved 10 seats in parliament, blurring the lines between civilian and armed governance.¹¹¹ On the economic side, defence force elites and veteran generals are often rewarded with economic privileges such as contracts and tenders, perpetuating the militarisation of the state and economy.¹¹² This has implications for a breakdown in the rule of law, the strengthening of Museveni’s grip on power, and long-term instability in Uganda.

Political transition scenarios as threats to peace and stability

With the subduing of the opposition, a militarised state and a weakened civil society, attention has turned to what a post-Museveni scenario would look like. Uganda’s short-term stability masks long-term fragility with Museveni’s personalisation of power. One respondent observed: ‘In Uganda, we have the unholy trinity that will shape the transition: the Father (Yoweri Museveni), the son General Muhoozi Kainerugaba and the *Unholy* Spirit, the Brother (Salim Saleh).’¹¹³ General Salim Saleh is Museveni’s half-brother and has been considered a key behind-the-scenes operator in the plan for Museveni’s transition from governance.¹¹⁴

Based on fieldwork responses and analysis, three scenarios emerge for Uganda’s anticipated post-Museveni transition, as proposed by Godber Tumushabe and Job Kijja:¹¹⁵

- The crested crane
- The storm in the teacup
- The warrior mad king

The first scenario of the crested crane argues that an election cannot deliver a peaceful transition. Rather, the ideal vision in this scenario is a peaceful, democratic transition through dialogue or negotiation and Museveni’s retirement, with shared prosperity. This can be done through a national dialogue or a negotiated process

that involves structural reforms, citizen mobilisation, and international pressure to ensure free elections.¹¹⁶ In this scenario, Museveni could retire gracefully, allowing for a credible electoral process. However, the possibility of this trajectory is doubtful, given the evidence of Museveni's autocratic tendencies and systemic corruption.¹¹⁷

The second plausible scenario is the storm in a teacup. This represents a persistence of the status quo. Here, the assumption is that Museveni maintains power through electoral manipulation, patronage and limited reforms. This would mean continuing economic stagnation, security force loyalty, and fragmented opposition, which would sustain his rule, but sporadic protests and international scrutiny would also persist. The regime's resilience lies in balancing repression with superficial compromises. Museveni sees himself as a lifelong president. This aligns with the ongoing state control of all institutions in Uganda, including the speaker of parliament, the judiciary and other structures of accountability.¹¹⁸

Uganda has remained stable, but resilient totalitarianism has weakened institutions of governance and poses risks to long-term peace and stability

Finally, the warrior mad king scenario is the worst-case outcome and the most likely.¹¹⁹ The potential for crisis in this scenario is immense. It involves escalating violence, constitutional dismantling, and Museveni's lifetime presidency or succession by a family member (e.g. his son, General Kainerugaba). It could also include constitutional amendments that could trigger mass unrest, met with brutal quelling. The net effect is regional instability. A militarised governance would define this path. In this scenario, the 2026 general elections would see increased resistance, with Museveni going bare-knuckle.¹²⁰

Uganda has remained stable, but resilient totalitarianism, which has weakened institutions of governance, risks long-term peace and stability. Centralising power around Museveni, his family and the military leaves Uganda in a precarious situation. Museveni's long presidency adds to tensions, friction and enduring instability.

CHAPTER 6

Somalia

Insurgency and the crisis of statehood

Somalia's chronic instability, driven by al-Shabaab's longstanding insurgency on the one hand, and pervasive state fragility and deep-seated clan rivalries on the other hand, positions it among the world's most volatile countries. The federal government controls a mere 20% of national territory, primarily capital city Mogadishu and select urban centres. In comparison, al-Shabaab dominates 30% of rural areas, orchestrating over 500 attacks in 2023 that killed 1 000 individuals. Among those killed were civilians, government officials, Somali National Army (SNA) personnel, and African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) peacekeepers.¹²¹

Clan-based militias, often aligned with semi-autonomous regional states like Puntland and Jubaland, further fragment security, contributing to 200 clan-related deaths in 2023.¹²² The humanitarian crisis is acute, with the 2022–2023 drought – the worst in 40 years – displacing 3.8 million people and causing 43 000 deaths, predominantly children. Poverty is pervasive, with 54.4% of Somalis living below the US\$2.15 per day poverty line and 70% living in rural areas, creating a fertile recruiting ground for insurgents.¹²³

Political and financial tensions between the state and al-Shabaab

Regarding governance, the 2024 Freedom in the World survey rated Somalia as 'not free', assigning a markedly low score of 8/100. Its political rights score of 2/40 and civil liberties at 6/60 reflect the absence of democratic institutions.¹²⁴ Over the same period, the BTI classified Somalia as a 'failed state', assigning a governance score of 2.10/10, with political transformation at 2.45/10 and economic transformation at 2.5/10.¹²⁵ Similarly, the 2024 GPI ranked Somalia 153rd in the world, with a score of 3.091 indicating severe insecurity.¹²⁶ The 2023 HDI rated Somalia at 0.380, the lowest in the region, highlighting critical development gaps.¹²⁷

Al-Shabaab's dominance is underpinned by a sophisticated 'shadow economy' that generates an estimated US\$100 million annually through extortion, outpacing federal government revenue by 50% in controlled regions.¹²⁸ In Lower Shabelle, a

key agricultural hub, the terrorist group extracted US\$50 million in 2023 by taxing 10–20% of harvests, 5% of livestock, and US\$10–50 per transport vehicle. This income went into funding 60% of its operations, including buying weapons and paying monthly salaries of US\$100 per fighter.¹²⁹

Al-Shabaab has cultivated local support by providing services like water access and dispute resolution to 10% of rural communities. In 2023, the group recruited 1 500 young people, 60% of whom cited unemployment as a primary motivator for joining.¹³⁰ Urban attacks in Mogadishu, including 20 suicide bombings that killed 200 people, targeted government buildings and civilian markets, with 500 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increasing civilian casualties by 25%.¹³¹ The 2024 BTI rated Somalia's conflict management at 2/10, as the SNA's presence is limited to 5% of rural areas. ATMIS, with 12 000 troops, leads 90% of security operations, underscoring the state's dependence on external forces.¹³²

Al-Shabaab's dominance is underpinned by a sophisticated 'shadow economy' that generates about US\$100 million annually through extortion

Clan violence is a persistent driver of instability, driven by historical rivalries over land and water. In Galmudug, clashes between the Hawiye and Darod clans in 2023 over grazing land killed 50 people and displaced 2 000, worsened by the drought causing a 40% reduction in water availability. In the same year, local militias, armed with 10 000 rifles smuggled annually from Yemen, controlled 50% of checkpoints, extorting US\$1 million from communities. With 70% of fighters under 25 years old, the youth unemployment rate of 40% fuels this cycle of violence.¹³³

Federal mediation efforts have failed, with 80% of peace agreements violated within months due to the absence of enforcement mechanisms.¹³⁴ Elder-led dialogues, a traditional conflict resolution tool, dissolved in 70% of cases, as clans prioritised resource control over reconciliation.

Legacy of governance collapse

Somalia's instability traces back to the 1991 collapse of former president Siad Barre's regime, which plunged the country into civil war and state disintegration.¹³⁵ The power vacuum enabled clan-based warlords to dominate, dividing Somalia into fiefdoms controlled by the Hawiye, Darod and Rahanweyn clans. Al-Shabaab emerged in 2006 from the Islamic Courts Union, capitalising on anti-foreign sentiment and governance voids. The insurgent group has maintained 80% of its

rural strongholds despite US airstrikes (500 since 2011) and deployments by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and ATMIS since 2007.

Established in 2012, the federal government struggles with legitimacy as regional states like Puntland and Jubaland operate semi-autonomously, controlling 40% of the territory and 50% of the revenue streams.¹³⁶ Historical clan rivalries, rooted in pre-colonial pastoralist competition, drove 60% of violence in 2023, with land disputes at the core.¹³⁷

Governance in Somalia is virtually non-existent. The 2021 Liberal Democracy Index scored Somalia at 0.05 out of 1, reflecting the absence of nationwide elections since 1986.¹³⁸ The 2022 presidential election, delayed twice due to clan disputes, was conducted indirectly, with 327 clan-nominated parliamentarians selecting Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to be president, effectively excluding 90% of citizens from the vote.¹³⁹ Allegations of vote-buying further eroded trust, with 30% of votes purchased at US\$10 000 each and only 20% of citizens feeling represented.

Corruption is systemic in the country. Somalia scored 180/180 on Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index. Moreover, 50% of the US\$1 billion received in annual aid was pocketed by elites.¹⁴⁰ The 2024 BTI rated Somalia's anti-corruption at 2/10, noting that al-Shabaab's Sharia courts resolve 40% of disputes in rural areas, which further weakens state legitimacy.¹⁴¹

The absence of a finalised constitution further erodes state legitimacy, with 70% of Somalis viewing the government as ineffective

Puntland's semi-autonomy exemplifies Somalia's fragmentation. In 2023, Puntland rejected federal authority, controlling 50% of port revenues (US\$20 million) and maintaining a militia of 5 000 fighters that clashed with the SNA, killing 30 people.¹⁴² Federal negotiations failed, with 80% of agreements unfulfilled, as Puntland prioritised regional control.¹⁴³ Jubaland, similarly autonomous, controls 30% of southern revenues. Its militia engages al-Shabaab independently, complicating federal counterinsurgency efforts.¹⁴⁴ The absence of a finalised constitution, delayed beyond 2025, further wears away at state legitimacy, with 70% of Somalis viewing the government as ineffective.

Constraints to socio-economic development

Somalia's economy is severely underdeveloped. With a 2023 GDP growth rate of 2.8%, 54.4% of the population lives below the US\$2.15 per day poverty line, rising to 70% in rural areas.¹⁴⁵ The 2024 BTI measured the country's socio-economic

transformation at 2.5/10, with 80% of households reliant on subsistence agriculture or pastoralism.¹⁴⁶ Unemployment stands at 20% overall and 40% for the youth, with 60% of al-Shabaab recruits citing joblessness as a motivator for joining the insurgent group.

The country's infrastructure is minimal. Only 15% of roads are paved and 60% of trade has been disrupted by insurgent-controlled checkpoints. Somalia's US\$5.3 billion debt, partially relieved in 2023, constrains investment into developing the country.¹⁴⁷ The 2022–2023 drought displaced 200 000 people in the Bay region, and al-Shabaab recruited 500 young people by offering food and wages. Government aid reached only 25% of households, and officials diverted 30%.¹⁴⁸ In Mogadishu, 30% of the US\$100 million in humanitarian aid was misallocated, with 20% reaching al-Shabaab, limiting relief to 50% of displaced families.¹⁴⁹

Cross-border dynamics significantly worsen Somalia's instability. Al-Shabaab's attacks in Lamu, Kenya demonstrate its regional reach, while arms smuggling from Yemen fuels clan and insurgent violence.¹⁵⁰ Somalia hosts 1.5 million internally displaced persons and exports refugees to Kenya and Ethiopia, which strains regional resources.

The comparison of political and economic transformation emphasises Somalia's collapse. The BTI scored Somalia's political transformation at 2.45/10 and its economic transformation at 2.5/10. These minimal figures reflect the absence of state capacity and economic infrastructure, which increases state fragility. The GPI score of 3.091 indicates extreme insecurity, while the HDI score of 0.380 highlights critical development deficits. Resolving Somalia's instability requires state-building, counterinsurgency and humanitarian interventions that are supported by international cooperation.

Stabilisation in the East African Community?

Somalia's accession to the EAC on 4 March 2024 marks a pivotal step towards addressing state collapse through regional integration.¹⁵¹ Comprising Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and now Somalia as well, the EAC aims to foster economic, political and social integration. After a decade-long bid initiated in 2012, Somalia's inclusion into the regional bloc leverages its strategic 3 000 km coastline and natural resources, including livestock (50% of exports) and fisheries, to enhance regional trade.¹⁵²

The EAC Customs Union, established in 2005, eliminates tariff barriers and could reverse the 60% decline in cross-border trade that Somalia has experienced since 1991 due to insecurity.¹⁵³ In 2022, 95% of Somalia's imports from EAC states, primarily Kenya, passed through porous borders, suggesting that formal trade channels could boost revenues through the common external tariff (CET).¹⁵⁴ For example, Somalia's livestock exports to Kenya, valued at US\$50 million annually, could double with reduced non-tariff barriers. Access to a market of 300 million

people could stimulate Somalia's economy, which grew by 2.8% in 2023 but remains constrained by insecurity.

EAC membership facilitates infrastructure integration, with projects like the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor enhancing connectivity between Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia.¹⁵⁵ In 2023, Kenya's investment into the Lamu port, 200 km from Somalia, aimed to increase trade, and Somalia's inclusion into the EAC could link ports like Kismayo to regional networks. The EAC's free movement protocol allows Somali entrepreneurs to access markets in Kenya and Tanzania, fostering investment in fisheries and real estate, sectors with untapped potential due to Somalia's 'blue economy'.¹⁵⁶ The blue economy is made up of Somalia's long coastline, rich fisheries and maritime transport and ports, together with the potential oil and gas exploration.

Challenges and risks

Despite these opportunities, Somalia's state collapse poses significant challenges to EAC integration. The persistent threat of al-Shabaab, with 1 200 attacks in 2023, risks spilling over into EAC states, particularly Kenya, where 50% of border attacks occur.¹⁵⁷ The closure of the Somali border with Kenya since 2012, partially reopened in 2023, facilitates smuggling, with Kismayo port acting as a hub for arms trafficking.¹⁵⁸ The EAC's visa-free policy could enable al-Shabaab operatives to move freely, heightening security risks.¹⁵⁹

Regional best practices, like Kenya's anti-money laundering frameworks, could strengthen Somalia's financial oversight and reduce terror financing

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators score Somalia's government effectiveness at 10.5/100, and the country's governance deficits hinder alignment with EAC standards like the rule of law and democracy.¹⁶⁰ With Hargeisa, the capital city of the Republic of Somaliland sovereign state, rejecting Mogadishu's authority, the unresolved Somaliland issue complicates integration, as EAC member states maintain diplomatic presence in both regions.

Corruption risks diverting EAC benefits to elites, with 70% of port revenues unaccounted for. The withdrawal of ATMIS from Somali in 2024 could worsen instability, as the SNA's limited capacity, at 60% urban control, creates a potential security vacuum.¹⁶¹ Without reforms, EAC membership may amplify illicit flows, such as smuggling of the khat stimulant plant, which generates US\$20 million annually but bypasses formal taxation.¹⁶²

Potential for national and regional stability

EAC membership offers Somalia a framework for state-building. Despite ambiguities, the EAC's peace and security protocol could support Somalia's counterterrorism efforts through standby forces post-ATMIS, as seen in the DRC's 2022 EAC Regional Force deployment. Kenya's participation in the Combined Maritime Forces could curb piracy, which cost EAC member states US\$100 million in trade losses in 2023.¹⁶³ Regional best practices, like Kenya's anti-money laundering frameworks, could strengthen Somalia's financial oversight and reduce terror financing.

The EAC's roadmap, outlined in June 2024, aligns Somalia's legal framework with regional standards, potentially accelerating fiscal reforms and consensus between the Federal Government of Somalia and the six Federal Member States.¹⁶⁴ For instance, harmonising Somalia's tax system with the CET could increase revenues by 10%, offsetting losses from tariff removals. Cultural exchanges, leveraging shared Swahili heritage with Kenya and Tanzania, could foster unity, although Somalia's Cushitic identity requires careful integration to avoid marginalisation.

CHAPTER 7

Comparative discussion

The instabilities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia reflect diverse yet interconnected drivers, shaped by varying governance capacities, economic contexts and security challenges in the East Africa region. Kenya's intercommunal violence, driven by resource scarcity and political manipulation, contrasts with Tanzania's state-driven high-handedness, where Maasai evictions prioritise economic gains over indigenous rights. Uganda's autocratic repression under Museveni's 38-year rule fuels political and security instability, while Somalia's al-Shabaab insurgency and state collapse represent the extremes of governance failure.

Despite these differences, common themes emerge that amplify insecurity across the region:

- Weak governance
- Economic inequality
- Climate-induced stressors
- Cross-border dynamics

Governance metrics highlight similarities. Kenya and Tanzania show moderate governance capacity. Their BTI scores of 4.94/10 and 5.34/10 in 2024, respectively, reflect competitive elections and economic management but persistent democratic deficits. Uganda's score of 4.24/10 and Somalia's 2.10/10 indicate severe constraints, with Uganda's autocracy and Somalia's state failure limiting the effectiveness of governance institutions.

Freedom House's Freedom in the World ratings reinforce these observations. In this survey, Kenya is classified as 'partly free' with a score of 52/100. Conversely, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia are categorised as 'not free', with scores of 35/100, 34/100, and 8/100, respectively. V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index scores range from Kenya's 0.47/1 to Somalia's 0.05/1, underscoring a spectrum of democratic erosion.¹⁶⁵

Economic indicators reveal persistent challenges. Kenya's 5.6% GDP growth in 2023, driven by services and agriculture, contrasts with Somalia's 2.8%, hindered by insecurity and weak institutions.¹⁶⁶ Across the four countries, poverty rates

coupled with high inequality fuel social tensions. The rate of poverty stands at 54.4% in Somalia, 33.6% in Kenya, 26.1% in Tanzania, and 20.3% in Uganda, and the combined Gini co-efficient is 0.39–0.40/1.¹⁶⁷

The comparison of political and economic transformation is telling. In Kenya, political transformation (5.85/10) outpaces economic transformation (5.0/10), suggesting that governance challenges hinder economic potential.¹⁶⁸ In Tanzania, economic transformation (5.34/10) surpasses political transformation (4.90/10), reflecting authoritarian prioritisation of economic growth over democracy.¹⁶⁹ Uganda's political transformation (3.88/10) lags behind its economic transformation (4.0/10), limited by autocracy. Meanwhile, Somalia's collapse affects both dimensions equally (2.45/10 and 2.5/10).¹⁷⁰

The 2024 GPI emphasises East Africa's disparities in peace, with Tanzania's 1.987 score indicating relative stability, Kenya's 2.41 and Uganda's 2.477 reflecting moderate insecurity, and Somalia's 3.091 highlighting extreme violence. The countries' human development ratings also stress differences. The 2023 HDI scores range from Kenya's 0.601 to Somalia's 0.380, with Tanzania and Uganda in between at 0.549 and 0.525, respectively, highlighting developmental challenges that worsen instability.

Climate change, particularly the 2022–2023 drought, has intensified resource competition, displacing millions and fueling conflicts in Kenya and Somalia. Cross-border dynamics, including arms trafficking and refugee flows, entangle national insecurities, with 600 000 illicit firearms in Kenya and 10 000 smuggled into Somalia annually.

Controversies surrounding governance reforms are central to the region's challenges. In Tanzania and Uganda, debates focus on balancing economic growth with democratic progress, as critics argue that authoritarian regimes prioritise control over inclusion, risking long-term unrest.¹⁷¹ In Kenya, the devolution's mixed outcomes – empowering local governance but decentralising corruption – have sparked contention over effective decentralisation.¹⁷² Somalia's state-building efforts face scepticism, with regional autonomy undermining federal cohesion. East African cooperation through the EAC and IGAD is critical but hampered by limited implementation. Only 20–25% of security agreements have been put into operation due to funding and political constraints.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion and recommendations

East Africa's instability reflects a complex interplay of governance deficits, socio-economic exclusion, environmental pressures and security threats. Kenya's intercommunal violence, Tanzania's state-driven tensions, Uganda's autocratic repression and Somalia's insurgency highlight diverse challenges with shared roots. Governance weaknesses – from Kenya's corruption to Somalia's state collapse – undermine institutional responses, while economic inequality and climate stressors worsen conflicts.

Cross-border dynamics, including arms trafficking and refugee flows, entangle national insecurities and necessitate regional solutions. The GPI and the HDI highlight peace and development disparities in the region, with Somalia's extreme insecurity and low human development contrasting against Tanzania's relative stability. Resolving these challenges requires tailored interventions that strengthen governance, promote inclusive development and enhance regional cooperation. This strategy would ensure that East Africa's strategic potential is realised through stability and resilience.

Recommendations

To address the specific drivers of instability in each country and to bolster regional resilience, policymakers should adopt the following targeted measures:

Kenya: manage pastoralist conflicts and strengthen institutions

- Land and water reforms: secure land tenure in ASALs through community-based land-use plans and dispute-resolution forums. Invest in water infrastructure (dams, boreholes) to reduce seasonal shortages that trigger cattle raids.
- Disarmament and peacebuilding: implement focused disarmament of illicit firearms in volatile border zones. Facilitate cross-border peace agreements among pastoralist groups (e.g. Kenya–Ethiopia, Kenya–Uganda), and empower local peace committees with early-warning systems.
- Anti-corruption and accountability: enhance transparency in land leases and mineral contracts. Enforce accountability for security force abuses, and strengthen structures of accountability such as parliament, the judiciary and the electoral body.

Tanzania: protect indigenous rights and expand political space

- Maasai land rights: suspend the forced evictions of Maasai people from Ngorongoro. Establish genuine consultative processes with Maasai communities and revise conservation policies to accommodate sustainable grazing alongside wildlife.
- Two presidential commissions on Ngorongoro: ensure that their proposals are on land use and that relocation, if necessary, involves consultation with the Maasai community. The two commissions should also be cognizant of the long history of Maasai and wildlife coexistence, even as they seek to balance between ecological conservation and Maasai rights of living in their traditional habitat.
- Political pluralism: promote diverse ideas, political parties and views in the political space as well as tolerance. Strengthen parliamentary oversight and local government autonomy to rein in executive power. This can be done through a free, fair, credible and competitive election process.

Uganda: liberalise politics and bolster security

- Strengthen the rule of law and political accountability: institutions of accountability, such as parliament, the judiciary and the electoral body, should be allowed to operate without interference from the state.
- Electoral reforms: empower an independent electoral commission with independent electoral commissioners.
- Civil liberties: repeal laws permitting the arbitrary arrests of opposition figures and journalists. Train security services in non-violent crowd-control techniques, and uphold peaceful protest rights.

Somalia: build inclusive governance and counter militancy

- Federal reconciliation: convene federal and regional (Puntland, Jubaland) leaders to finalise a constitution and electoral timetable. Enlist AU and UN support for transparent nationwide elections, and strengthen local administrations with training and resources.
- Finalise the constitution and strengthen federalism: by 2026, pass the long-delayed federal constitution to clarify the roles of regional states and the central government.
- Promote regional cooperation on security issues: the AU, the UN and now the EAC should take a better coordinated approach to all matters related to counterterrorism and security.
- Disrupt militant financing: secure key transport corridors to eliminate al-Shabaab checkpoints. Promote rural economic programmes (agricultural extension, market

access) to reduce dependence on insurgent taxes.

- Humanitarian resilience: invest in drought-resistant crops, water storage and livestock vaccination campaigns to minimise displacement. Implement rigorous monitoring of aid delivery to prevent diversion by armed groups, and engage clan elders in youth recruitment prevention.

Regional and cross-border measures

- Strengthen EAC-facilitated security cooperation, intelligence-sharing and joint development in borderlands to manage pastoral raids, arms trafficking and refugee flows.
- Promote EAC-led frameworks that standardise democratic norms (free media, credible elections, human-rights safeguards) across member states.
- Harmonise governance standards: create an EAC peer review mechanism for democracy, the rule of law and corruption. Finalise the EAC protocol on good governance.

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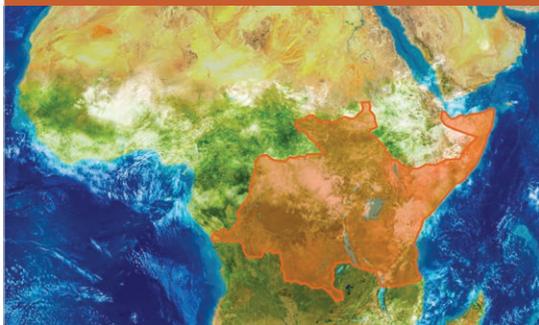
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Too far, too wide? Assessing the expansion of the East African Community

Nicodemus Minde



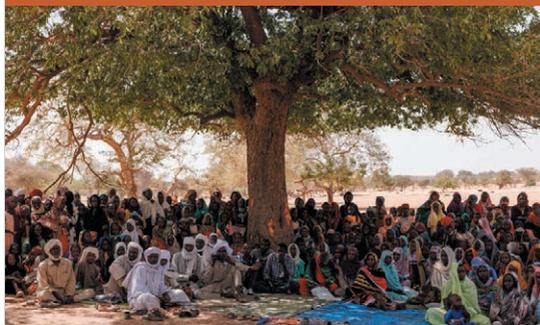
The expansion of the East African Community (EAC) presents opportunities and challenges for the bloc and its member states. Countries are motivated to join by geopolitical, economic and security considerations, as well as foreign policy factors. These reflect both the strategic interests of applying countries and the EAC's regional integration goals. To maximise benefits and reduce risks, expansion must be navigated strategically.

EAST AFRICA REPORT 52 | MAY 2025



Considerations for a workable transitional justice process for Sudan

Tadesse Simie Metekia, Ottilia Anna Maunganidze, Maram Mahdi and Xhanti Mhlambiso



Sustainable peace in Sudan requires complementary justice and accountability. This can be achieved through a well-developed, proactive, national transitional justice policy and implementation plan guided by the African Union and supported by the international community. Such a process does not need a cessation of hostilities to begin but should be integrated into a broader peace process. Once initiated, the process would need local buy-in and should ideally include truth-telling, peacebuilding, reparations, criminal accountability and a key role for independent institutions.

EAST AFRICA REPORT 53 | NOVEMBER 2025



POLICY BRIEF

Somalia in the East African Community

Opportunities and challenges

Nicodemus Minde and Guyo Turi

Somalia's entry into the East African Community (EAC) presents both opportunities and challenges for the country and for the bloc. For the EAC, the rapid expansion presents economic prospects such as increased intra-regional trade, enhanced geopolitical influence, strengthened collective security and more coordinated regional responses to conflict. A crucial question, however, is how the EAC can capitalise on the prospects of Somalia's entry into the bloc while managing the challenges that accompany it.



POLICY BRIEF

Kenya-Uganda Lokirima Peace Accord

Lessons from an unwritten agreement

Guyo Turi

The 1973 Lokirima Peace Accord marked the start of a positive relationship between Kenya's Turkana and Uganda's Matheniko communities. This unwritten indigenous conflict resolution and peacebuilding mechanism favours consensus-building and reconciliation, making it more useful in post-conflict peacebuilding than contemporary punishment- and enforcement-focused approaches. While many other agreements in the region have faltered, this accord, with its culturally relevant, community-centred approach to settling disputes and restoring social order, still holds.

About this monograph

East Africa's instability reflects a complex interplay of governance deficits, socio-economic exclusion, environmental pressures and security threats. Kenya's intercommunal violence, Tanzania's state-driven tensions, Uganda's autocratic repression and Somalia's insurgency highlight the diverse yet interconnected dynamics shaping the state of peace, security and governance in East Africa in 2023–2025. A review of the structural, historical and contemporary causes of instability and insecurity in each of the four countries informs the discussion on tailored interventions to address these challenges.

About the author

Nicodemus Minde is a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies in the East Africa Peace and Security Governance Project in Nairobi, Kenya. His research is focused on international relations and covers Tanzanian politics, China–Africa relations and conflict in East Africa. Nicodemus has a PhD in international relations from the United States International University – Africa.

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