

The Election Ledger

Into the Goonland

SPECIAL REPORT

JULY 25 2026 | BY MWENDE MUKWANYAGA | 11 MIN READ

Into the Goonland

A Public Report on Organised Intimidation, Political Violence, and the Erosion of Democratic Space

Based on 113 documented incidents, (56 goon attacks, 57 human right violations) between 1 December 2025 – 14 July 2026

Executive Summary: A Warning

"We are slowly descending to the state of Haiti. Haiti started like this. If you get government-engaging goons to disrupt legal proceedings, including church worship proceedings, what are you telling the country?" Former Chief Justice David Maraga.

Between January and July 2026, at least 113 documented and corroborated incidents of political violence, intimidation, and democratic violations have been recorded across Kenya by the Election Ledger.



Defining the Ecosystem: The Goon as a Political Asset

The Goonland ecosystem is a structured intersection of political competition and coercive disruption. As Kenya approaches the 2027 electoral cycle, this phenomenon has evolved into a strategic tool used by various actors to demonstrate local control and suppress dissent.

A goon is not just a criminal. In Kenya's current political landscape, a goon is an individual or member of an organized group participating in politically, criminally, or socially motivated acts of violence, intimidation, or coercion. They are enforcers. Mercenaries. Often funded or orchestrated by political figures or state actors to achieve specific goals; whether that's disrupting a rival rally, intimidating voters, or seizing land.

The key word is *organized*. This isn't spontaneous mob violence. It's *directed and funded*.

What the Numbers Tell Us

Between 1 December 2025 and 14 July 2026, Election Ledger media monitoring project tracked 56 incidents involving goons, organised violence, intimidation, and political disruption.

The key finding: half of these incidents (28) had a political connection. Campaigns, rallies, churches, funerals, civic forums, and public participation processes have become battlegrounds.

What we found	The numbers
Total incidents tracked and corroborated	113
Total democratic violations	57
Total goon incidents tracked	56
Politically linked goon incidents	28 (50%)

July 2026 incidents (partial month)	20
Worst single day	12 July 2026: 8 incidents
Nairobi hotspot	12 incidents (21.4%)

Reported fatalities (inconclusive)	At least 23
Reported casualties (inconclusive)	At least 79

Records with alleged funders or organisers	8 (allegations only, no arrests or prosecutions)
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But the "goon" violence is just one part of a bigger picture. A separate incident log tracking democratic violations between January and June 2026 documented another 57 incidents:

- 17 enforced disappearances or arbitrary arrests (February–June 2026)
- 9 police brutality incidents including 4 with fatalities
- 7 press obstruction attacks on journalists
- 7 by-election related incidents (Emurua Dikirr)
- 6 OI Kalou by-election related incidents (June–July 2026)

The picture is clear: Kenya is experiencing not isolated incidents, but a systematic erosion of democratic space.

Functional Taxonomy of Organised Coercion

Understanding the taxonomy of these groups is critical for assessing risk, as it reveals how violence has been integrated into the standard operational handbook of Kenyan political mobilisation. While these actors are often described in criminal terms, their utility is fundamentally political. The transition from identifying these actors to analysing their methods reveals a highly adaptive weaponization of disruption.

Characteristic	Operational threshold	Evidence from internal dataset
Tactics	Use of pre-meditated weaponry (firearms, machetes/pangas, bows/arrows, stones)	Machetes in Nyahururu (12 July); bows and arrows in Kisumu (12 July)
Target Selection	Intentional targeting of political figures, opposition rallies, and civil society	Ambushes on Kanini Kega (13 July); attack on Martha Karua at Gatoto School (10 July)
Sponsorship	Recurring allegations of funding by state security or high-profile politicians	Allegations involving state security apparatus, Sakaja (Umoja II), Murkomen (Runda)
Severity	Results in fatalities, mass injuries, or significant property destruction	3 fatalities in OI Kalou (12 July), campaign truck vandalised
Strategic Intent	Coercive action aimed at achieving specific political purposes or economic goals	Disruption of rival rallies; forcing specific political communities off ancestral or disputed land
Digital Deception	Use of AI-assisted tools to spread disinformation using coordinated inauthentic behaviour	Fake IEBC and David Maraga website clones

The Electoral Fist: Weaponization of Disruption

The tactical variety observed in the 2025–2026 dataset demonstrates a high degree of adaptability. Goons are equally effective in urban centres like Nairobi as they are in rural church halls or highway corridors. This flexibility complicates media monitoring; what appears to be a local dispute is often part of a broader pattern of electoral fist tactics designed to disrupt a candidate's ability to operate in contested zones.

Primary Methods of Political Violence

Method	Description	Impact
Convoy ambushes	Groups use road blockades and armed interception (e.g., burning of DCP campaign truck on 11 July) to restrict a candidate's physical access to voters	Creates "no-go zones," preventing candidates from reaching constituencies and communicating their platform
Staff and support targeting	Direct attacks on campaign infrastructure (e.g., shooting of Governor Irungu Kang'ata's driver on 12 July)	Increases personal and financial cost of campaigning; deters professional service providers from working with opposition factions
Funeral violence	Disruption of burials (e.g., 11 April Kakamega incident where family forced to remove body for safety during political clash)	Desecrates cultural norms; transforms private communal grieving into high-risk political arenas; intimidates local population
Civic and religious desecration	Targeting of sacred spaces—churches, cathedrals, places of worship	Denies sanctuary; discourages leaders from providing platforms to "unwanted" political voices

The Targeting of Sacred Spaces

The targeting of churches and cathedrals marks a severe escalation in political violence. Two distinct tactical patterns emerged in July 2026:

- Tactical Storming (AIPCA Nyahururu, 12 July): Armed groups used machetes and stones to storm a service attended by opposition leaders, resulting in one person shot and several injured. This was a direct physical disruption designed to break up a gathering in progress.
- Tactical Containment/Siege (ACK Kisumu, 12 July): Youth armed with bows and arrows surrounded the cathedral perimeter, torching motorcycles to trap worshippers inside. This method focuses on denial of movement and psychological siege rather than direct assault on the inner sanctuary.

These localized tactics are not isolated; they form dense spatiotemporal clusters that serve as a clear signal for broader national escalation.

Spatiotemporal Clusters: The July 2026 Escalation

The July 2026 spike in political violence shows that incidents are not randomly distributed; they follow a specific "7–10 days before and after elections" spike pattern. Instead, they cluster around key political events, with violence peaking in the days immediately before and after elections.

During the OI Kalou parliamentary by-election, the number of recorded incidents rose sharply. In the days leading up to and following the vote, the daily average increased from about two incidents to a peak of eight on 12 July. The pattern suggests that violence is used strategically to shape the political environment when competition is at its highest.

Corridor Analysis: OI Kalou–Nyahururu (July 2026)

In the July monitoring period, the Gilgil–OI Kalou–Nyahururu bloc emerged as the most active zone of organised coercion in the country, with violence peaking just days before the vote. Some of the attacks with traction online include:

Date	Incident
1 July 2026	Attack on DCP delegates' meeting at Royal Garden Hotel, OI Kalou
11 July 2026	Armed, hooded men intercept and partially burn campaign truck on Gilgil–OI Kalou Road
12 July 2026	Parallel attacks on Linda Mwananchi rally (driver shot) and AIPCA Nyahururu Cathedral
13 July 2026	Alleged ambush of EALA MP Kanini Kega's convoy after leaving rally in OI Kalou

These clusters suggest that violence is a directed resource, deployed where political or economic control is most contested.

Sponsorship, Complicity, and the Impunity Threshold

The transition from "criminality" to "state-sanctioned intimidation" fundamentally erodes the rule of law. When state security apparatuses are either participants in or silent observers of violence, the distinction between legal enforcement and political thuggery vanishes.

There is a widening disconnect between the official mandate of state security and the documented realities on the ground. While state agencies are constitutionally obligated to protect rights to assembly and association, enforce judicial authority, and maintain neutrality during electoral periods, observed events indicate a systemic failure to uphold these duties.

Official State Mandate vs. Documented Realities:

Obligation	Violation
Protect rights of assembly and association	02 July raid on TISA offices with 13 suspected security officers in unmarked vehicles attempting an illegal apprehension of a lawyer
Enforce judicial authority	10 July failure to provide court-ordered security for Martha Karua at Gatoto Primary School—stone-throwing goon attack proceeded
Maintain neutrality during electoral periods	Allegations of live ammunition usage and rally ambushes in OI Kalou and Kitengela

The "Mercenary" Layer

The dataset contains recurring allegations involving named political figures, suggesting a systemic reliance on "mercenary" groups to bypass formal legal processes.

The editorial finding is clear: the lack of recorded convictions for arrested perpetrators creates an "impunity threshold," encouraging the continued use of hired violence as a political utility.

What's at Stake

The OI Kalou by-election, held on 16 July 2026, was not just about filling a parliamentary seat. It was a proxy battle for political supremacy in the Mt Kenya region; a test of strength between President William Ruto's UDA and former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua's DCP. The contest was viewed as a critical indicator of political momentum ahead of the 2027 General Election. For UDA, a victory would strengthen presidential influence in a region that played a critical role in the 2022 election. For DCP, it presented an opportunity to demonstrate that Gachagua still commands significant support despite his fallout with the Kenya Kwanza administration. The Jubilee Party, which previously held the seat, also sought to reclaim it.

OI Kalou had 73,480 registered voters across 144 polling stations. The race narrowed to a two-horse contest between UDA's Samuel Muchina Nyagah and DCP's Sammy Kamau Ngotho.

On 9 July 2026, IEBC Chairperson Erastus Ethekon flagged widespread violations including voter bribery, campaigns conducted outside legal hours, destruction of property, violence, intimidation, and the reported loss of one life. He warned the Commission could postpone or cancel the by-election if violations continued. On 14 July 2026, Ethekon told a joint press briefing with Inspector General of Police Douglas Kanja: *"There are reports of goons roaming around, and of course facilitated by some of the actors or players."* The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) expressed concern that election-related violence had reportedly spread beyond OI Kalou into neighbouring Gilgil Constituency, raising fears of escalating unrest. A public interest activist formally petitioned the IEBC to postpone the by-election, arguing that the current environment fell short of constitutional standards for a free, fair, and peaceful election.

The Complicity Question

Security sources speaking to The Star on condition of anonymity claimed that before the Linda Mwananchi church attack in Kisumu on 12 July 2026, local security commanders were aware of the group's movements and initially prepared to stop them, but were allegedly instructed by senior officials not to interfere.

Only after violence erupted were officers directed to pursue those responsible. A junior officer alleged: *"The orders are always to favour a certain criminal group out to cause chaos. Then, hours later, you hear that investigations have begun. We are getting it wrong because of politics."*

The Emurua Dikirr Precedent

The Emurua Dikirr by-election in Narok County (held 14 May 2026) offers a clear preview of the OI Kalou pattern:

Incident	Date	Details
Cash inducements	27 March	Voters offered cash during UDA nominations
Multiple voting allegations	27 March	Electronic voting kits arrived late; proxy voting documented
Campaign clashes	12 May	UDA and DCP supporters clashed; three injured
Election eve intimidation	13 May	Groups wielding clubs observed at shopping centre
Polling day violence	14 May	Four injured, including one by Somali sword
Voter suppression	14 May	DCP agents blocked from polling stations
Voter intimidation	14 May	Armed groups targeted DCP agents from 5:30 am

The pattern: Voter bribery, abuse of state resources, violence, and intimidation. The similar pattern repeated in OI Kalou.

The outcome: UDA won with a narrow margin of 365 votes. The DCP's strong showing demonstrated Gachagua's continued political relevance.

What the Government Says

Interior Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen has rejected claims that the government tolerates or works with criminal gangs: *"For the avoidance of doubt, the Government of Kenya does not condone or work with goons or criminals. The police are under instructions to decisively deal with all goons without fear or favour."*

He has stated that more than 20 suspects had been arrested in connection with incidents in Kisumu and Nyahururu, and that 14 suspects had already been charged. Police spokesperson Muchiri Nyaga has confirmed arrests and charges. However, these claims could not be independently verified.

Conclusion: A Warning, Not a Verdict

The "goonland" dataset should be read as a warning, not a final verdict on Kenya's democracy. B The risk is not only physical injury. It is the gradual shrinking of democratic space:

- Candidates unable to travel or meet supporters
- Worshippers afraid to attend services
- Activists unable to present petitions
- Communities deterred from public participation
- Voters learning that visible political affiliation can carry a cost

Our Methodology

This report is based on a media monitoring dataset of 56 incidents (1 December 2025 – 14 July 2026) and a separate incident log of 57 democratic violations (January–June 2026), supplemented by statements from IEBC, KNCHR, and other official sources. All allegations of sponsorship or state involvement are attributed to originating sources and remain unverified unless independently confirmed.

Raw data is available on request. We invite newsrooms, researchers, and civil society organisations to work with us in building a more comprehensive picture of political violence in Kenya.

Work With Us: We are seeking partners to expand this monitoring effort ahead of the 2027 General Election. If you are a newsroom, researcher, or civil society organisation interested in collaborating, please reach out on the "Work with us" button.