REPUBLIC OF KENYA

IPOA Independent Policing Oversight Authority

THE

INDEPENDENT POLICING OVERSIGHT AUTHORITY

IMPLICATION OF ORGANIZED VIOLENT GANGS (GOONS) ON POLICING AND PUBLIC ORDER MANAGEMENT: ANALYSIS OF INCIDENTS AND PREVENTIVE ADVISORY

2026



GUARDING PUBLIC INTEREST IN POLICING

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), pursuant to Section 6(c) and 6(k) of the IPOA Act (CAP 86), is mandated to monitor and investigate policing operations affecting members of the public and to make recommendations to the National Police Service and other state organs.

During the Authority's monitoring of various public order management situations including policing of elections, protests, religious gatherings, and political assemblies; a recurring pattern has emerged involving the presence and activities of organized civilian groups/violent gangs commonly referred to as "goons." These groups have frequently engaged in intimidation, disruption of lawful assemblies, violence, destruction of property, and interference with democratic processes.

The repeated occurrence of these incidents suggests the presence of organized and coordinated civilian actors capable of undermining public order and compromising the perceived neutrality of policing operations.

1.2 Contextual Definition

For the purpose of this advisory, **"goons"** are defined as:

Organized or semi-organized civilian groups, often politically aligned or sponsored, who deliberately use intimidation, violence, disruption, or coercion to influence or undermine public assemblies, electoral activities, or political participation, sometimes operating in environments characterized by delayed, inadequate, or selective law enforcement response.

Further, '**goonism'** refers to the culture of using goons for unlawful motives.

1.3 Objectives

This advisory seeks to:

1. Examine patterns and emerging trends of organized civilian disruption ("goonism") during public events.
2. Assess the effectiveness of police response in preventing and managing such incidents.
3. Identify systemic policing gaps that enable such disruptions.
4. Provide preventive and operational recommendations to the National Police Service.

1.4 Methodology

The analysis employs a qualitative design and secondary data based on findings from several IPOA monitoring reports covering public assemblies, protests, electoral

processes, and political gatherings between 2024 and 2026. The reviewed monitoring reports are outlined in the table below;

Table 1:Table 1: Reports with documented goon activities

No	Nature of Operation	Date
1.	2026 By-Election Electoral Processes	26/02/2026
2.	Public order monitoring in Kakamega ("Linda Mwananchi")	21/02/2026
3.	Political rally in Kitengela ("Sisi Ndio Sifuna")	15/02/2026
4.	Witima Church Service Incident in Othaya	25/01/2026
5.	By-Election Electoral Processes	27/11/2025
6.	Gen-Z Commemorative Protests of 2025	June-July 2025
7.	Interdenominational Prayers at Kamukunji Grounds, Nyeri	18/01/2025
8.	Policing of the Shamata Stadium Assembly	28/12/2024
9.	Disruption of a Funeral Service attend by former Deputy President in Limuru	28/11/2024
10.	Anti-Finance Bill Protests of 2024	June, July and August 2024

These reports were analyzed to identify recurring patterns, operational weaknesses, and systemic risk factors associated with goon activities.

2 KEY PATTERNS OF GOON ACTIVITIES

2.1 Disruption and Intimidation of the public during Electoral activities

During the **2025 and 2026 by-elections**, several incidents demonstrated the use of organized groups to intimidate voters, disrupt polling activities, and create insecurity around polling stations.

Notable incidents included:

a) Harassment, intimidation, and destruction of property in **Kasipul Constituency** during the pre-election period.

b) A violent confrontation at **Agoro Sare Primary School polling centre** that resulted in injuries and loss of a firearm belonging to a security officer.

c) Vandalism of electoral materials in **Narok Town Ward**.

d) Violent disruptions targeting political actors in **Malava Constituency**.

e) At **Evurore Ward in Mbeere North**, goons were manning gates leading to polling centres with no police action.

These incidents occurred in the presence of police officers, raising concerns about operational preparedness and proactive intervention.

2.2 Infiltration of Public Protests

Monitoring of protests between **2024 and 2025** revealed that initially peaceful demonstrations were frequently infiltrated by individuals engaging in:

a) Looting
b) Destruction of public and private property

c) Attacks on businesses and public institutions
d) Violent confrontation with police

During the Gen-Z commemorative protests of 25 June 2025, goons infiltrated demonstrations particularly in Nairobi, Mombasa and Eldoret, resulting in mugging of pedestrians, vandalism of infrastructure, and escalation of violence.

There were allegations of organized mobilization of disruptive groups by political actors and other interested parties.

2.3 Targeted Disruption of Political and Public Gatherings

Monitoring of political rallies, funerals, and religious gatherings also revealed attempts to disrupt events through coordinated acts such as:

a) Throwing tear gas near political podiums.
b) Organized attacks on attendees.
c) Vandalism of vehicles and property.
d) Physical intimidation of participants.

For example:

a) During the **Limuru funeral incident**, individuals suspected to be mobilized from outside the locality reportedly attacked participants.

b) The **Witima Church incident** resulted in destruction of vehicles and panic among congregants.

c) In **Kitengela and Kakamega political rallies**, intelligence from officers indicated that rival groups had allegedly mobilized goons to disrupt assemblies.

These incidents highlight the growing use of organized civilian groups as instruments of political disruption.

2.4 Creation of Panic and Fear by Firearms Wielding Gangs

In some instances, violent gangs have been found to be heavily armed with weapons including firearms. The presence of firearms in the hands of goons usually raises tension, suspicion and allegations of the possibility of the gangs being comprised of members of the security services with the NPS being a frequent mention.

For instance, in the ACK Witima Church attack by alleged goons in Othaya, Nyeri, there was observed the presence of gun-wielding goons who went ahead to fire live shots. During its monitoring and investigation of the incidence, the IPOA team recovered several items of evidentiary value, including tear gas canisters, a bullet head, one spent cartridge, and a fragment of a stun gun manual. The presence of the pieces of ammunition and their fragments usually associated with the NPS raised suspicion on the possibility of police involvement.

The Authority also observed that there were no arrests of the heavily armed men made. The failure by the police to make arrests of the attackers, exposes the community to security and safety risks.

2.5. Possession and Use of Firearms by County Enforcement Officers

During regular engagements with the Police and the Public, the Authority has documented incidents of possession of firearms by County Enforcement Officers. In some Counties like Narok, the County officers are said to enforce county laws with the use of firearms. Possession of firearms by the County Officers causes confusion among the public and the police who at times are not in a position to tell the legitimate security officers authorized to carry firearms and those who carry unauthorized firearms. This scenario leads to infiltration of lawful enforcement operations by unauthorized persons which leads to tension among the public.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF 'GOONISM' IN PUBLIC ORDER AND POLICING

The persistence of goon-related incidents presents several strategic dangers:

3.1 Erosion of Public Confidence in Policing by the NPS

Where goon activities occur in the presence of police without effective intervention, public perception may shift toward perceived tolerance, bias, or complicity as the law expects the police to act in a neutral manner

3.2 Escalation of Violence During Public Assemblies

The presence of organized disruptors increases the likelihood that peaceful gatherings will degenerate into violent confrontations.

3.3 Threat to Electoral Integrity

Electoral intimidation and disruption undermine free and fair democratic participation.

3.4 Weakening of Constitutional Freedoms

Uncontrolled 'goonism' restricts citizens' ability to exercise their rights to assembly, association, and political participation.

3.5 Emergence of organized violent gangs

If left unchecked, the continued mobilization of goons mostly by political players poses the risk of institutionalizing violence as a tool of political competition as well as the gangs participating in other crimes after electioneering periods.

3.6 Injuries and Fatalities among the Public and the Police

Violent activities associated with organized gangs have in the past led to injuries and fatalities among the public and also the police. Examples include; serious injuries of the public and the police in Agoro Sare Polling Centre where members of public and the police were injured and a firearm lost. In Kasipul Constituency, fatalities were reported after rival gangs engaged in chaos during electoral campaigns.

3.7. Susceptibility of Members of Public to Attacks as NPS officers get overwhelmed

In some instances, goons become so fierce that the NPS officers get overwhelmed and leave members of public defenseless and susceptible to attacks. For instance, in the funeral event in Limuru on 28th November 2024, the police officers seemed helpless as goons took charge of the event which left the public exposed to attacks by the goons.

4. CONCLUSION

IPOA's monitoring across multiple public events between 2024 and 2026 reveals a consistent pattern of organized civilian disruption ("goonism") that poses a growing threat to public order, democratic participation, and public confidence in policing.

These incidents demonstrate that goon activities are not isolated occurrences, but rather reflect coordinated efforts capable of undermining lawful assemblies and destabilizing public order. Addressing this challenge requires proactive intelligence-led policing, clear command accountability, decisive enforcement against organized disruptors, and strong protection of constitutional freedoms. Implementation of the preventive measures outlined in this advisory will significantly strengthen the National Police Service's capacity to anticipate, deter, and effectively manage such threats.

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority will remain focused on its role of monitoring and investigating police conduct during policing operations affecting members of the public and continue making recommendations to various organs with an aim of ensuring accountability within the NPS in line with Article 244 of the Constitution.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A: The National Police Service

i. **Intelligence-led policing of public order**
The NPS should strengthen intelligence gathering before public events by mapping individuals and networks known to mobilize disruptive groups, enhancing collaboration with local communities and other security agencies for information sharing and by deploying advance risk assessment teams prior to major political or public gatherings.

ii. **Early identification, isolation and dismantling of violent gangs**
Police commanders should ensure early identification of suspicious mobilization around assemblies, rapid isolation and arrest and prosecution of suspected gang members and further create a national database of identified and emerging gang members to make it easy to, track, trace and prosecute offenders and repeat offenders

iii. **Increase police strength and enhance operational command**
The NPS should increase police strength by deploying higher numbers of officers for crowd management and enhance command accountability during public order operations by ensuring detailed and structured deployment plans for major assemblies as well as equip officers with clear operational directives and tools to prevent violence and ensure safety of the citizens. Increased strength will also ensure that Police do not get easily overwhelmed by goons.

iv. **Criminal investigations into the activities of violent gangs**
The NPS should prioritize investigations into: Individuals or entities financing or mobilizing goons; Organized criminal elements infiltrating protests; and politically sponsored disruption of public events and where evidence exists, prosecution should be pursued to deter occurrence and recurrence.

v. **Verification of firearms inventory in the Country**
The Firearms Licensing Board and the Inspector General of Police should conduct a verification exercise of the firearms being held by Civilians and the Police respectively. This will enable proper accountability for the firearms in use in the country as well as enable the Police to weed out holders of illegal firearms.

vi. **Protection of Constitutional Rights**
Police operations should prioritize protection of constitutional rights and freedoms especially Article 37 on the right, to peaceably and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions to public authorities.

vii. **Strategic Public Communication**
The NPS should enhance transparency through, timely communication during major public events, public reassurance regarding police neutrality and clear messaging condemning organized civilian violence.

B: The Ministry of Interior and National Administration

i. **National Government Administration Officers (NGAO)** from the highest to the lowest level, due to their wide reach in the society, to enhance surveillance and information gathering within communities with an aim of identifying potential gangs amongst the communities and report such information to the National Police Service.

C: The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)

i. **The NCIC** should intensify its peace advocacy programs with a special messaging on the essence of peaceful assemblies and peaceful co-existence between the communities and the Security Services. This will greatly reduce violence during protests and improve public and Security Services relations.

6. Annexes

i. Public order management in Kakamega ("Linda Mwananchi Rally"), Monitoring Brief, 2026
ii. Policing of By-Election Monitoring Report, November 2025
iii. Witima Church Service Attack in Othaya Report, 2026
iv. Gen-Z Commemorative Protests of 2025 Report, 2025
v. Interdenominational Prayers at Kamukunji Grounds, Nyeri Monitoring Brief, 2025
vi. Policing of the Shamata Stadium Assembly Monitoring Brief, 2026
vii. Disruption of a Funeral Service attend by former Deputy President in Limuru, Monitoring Brief, 2024
viii. Anti-Finance Bill Protests of 2024 Report, 2024.

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