



Document #2130455

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Author)

Kenya: The Mungiki group, including its status, organizational structure, leadership, membership, recruitment methods, and activities; the relationship between the Kenyan government and the group; whether state protection is available to its victims (2023–September 2025) [KEN202389.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources describe the Mungiki [1] group as a "Kikuyu [2] youth gang" (Frederiksen 2024-02-11), "a Kikuyu sect which became a highly feared criminal gang" (GI-TOC 2020-11, 10), or an Indigenous "syncretic revivalist group" (Kenya 2024, 11, 16). The Kenya Times, an online news source, notes that the Mungiki was formed [in the 1980s (The Kenya Times 2023-07-14)] as "a religious-cultural movement" promoting Kikuyu traditions but "evolved into a violent sect and criminal gang" (The Kenya Times 2025-08-02). The National Crime Research Centre (NCRC), a public institution whose mandate is to "carry out research into the causes of crime and its prevention and to disseminate the research findings and recommendations" to government agencies (Kenya n.d.a), indicates that the Mungiki group "have often used their cultural and religious identity as a cover for their involvement in various criminal activities" (Kenya 2024, 16).

According to Bodil Folke Frederiksen, an associate professor emerita at Roskilde University in Denmark who has studied the Mungiki during field

research, the group formed in the late 1980s as a Kikuyu youth movement in the context of interethnic conflict in Kenya's Rift Valley Province; the group then aimed to protect the "dispossessed: women, migrants and landless youth" (2024-02-11). Later, it was "co-opted" by politicians to serve as a "violent youth militia" in support of their campaigns, particularly during the 1997, 2002, and 2007 elections (Frederiksen 2024-02-11). By the 2000s, the group became a "mostly urban phenomenon"; the government "neglected" urban informal settlements, where the Mungiki began battling other groups to control essential services and demanding "protection money" from businesses (Frederiksen 2024-02-11).

The NCRC reports that the Mungiki group "has been linked to activities such as extortion, violence, killings and drug trafficking" (Kenya 2024, 16). Ken Opala, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) [3] regional coordinator for East and Southern Africa, notes in a paper published by the organization Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organised Crime (ENACT), that the Mungiki "was involved in murder, extortion and racketeering, illegal connections of utilities, kidnappings and political thuggery in central Kenya and Nairobi" (Opala 2023-03, 10, 25). *Daily Nation*, a Kenyan newspaper, similarly states that "the gang is notorious for criminal activities including extortion and murder" (2025-01-27).

A 2020 GI-TOC report notes that the Mungiki was a "vast criminal and political entity" based on "extortion" of the *matatu* [minibuses operating as shared taxis] industry, which became an "even more formidable criminal force" in 2002, when its leader Maina Njenga endorsed President Daniel arap Moi's favoured candidate Uhuru Kenyatta for the election of that year (2020-11, 14). The group eventually became known for election violence and played a "leading role" in the violence surrounding Kenya's 2007 elections [4] (GI-TOC 2020-11, 14, 15).

The 2020 GI-TOC report notes that the Mungiki have since lessened their dependence on politicians, become "embedded" into the *matatu* industry, and moved into the "licit economy," and indicates that sources disagree on the group's continued existence (2020-11, 17, 30). The state run media organization Kenya News Agency (KNA), cites the Kenya Interior and National Administration Cabinet Secretary as stating that the "Mungiki remains one of the most dreaded homegrown gangs in Kenya" (KNA 2025-01-25).

1.1 Status

According to sources, the Mungiki group was banned "about" (Opala 2023-03) or in 2002 (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-27), "following deadly slum violence" (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-27). Frederiksen indicates that although the group's leader, Maina Njenga, declared the movement "finished" in

2009, following its ban earlier in the 2000s, the Mungiki group "still resurfaces, although much less strongly than in its heyday" (2024-02-11). The KNA, citing the Cabinet Secretary, indicates that "the Mungiki have regrouped and are now engaged in extorting matatu operators and other business owners" in central Kenya (2025-01-25). Some sources report that there is fear of the group's resurgence (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a; Capital FM 2025-01-05; The Africa Report 2024-01-03).

According to Capital FM, a Nairobi radio station, officials, including the former Deputy President, have said that the Mungiki group has been revived to "intimidate voters" (2025-01-05). The *Standard*, an English-language newspaper in Kenya, reports that "[g]overnment officials seem to disagree on whether or not the [Mungiki group] is back," notably considering "heightened political activities [at Mount Kenya] ... leading to the militarization of politics and the emergence of groups of militant youth," including suspected Mungiki members (*The Standard* 2024-01-05). However, the same source, citing a professor "who has authored in-depth articles on Mungiki," indicates that political activities in Mount Kenya are not synonymous with a resurgence of the gang but the result of "the intolerance of disgruntled jobless youth who feel cheated by the Kenya Kwanza [5] administration" (*The Standard* 2024-01-05). An article in the Kenya Times reports that Njenga dismissed claims made by some governmental officials about the return of the group in an interview with the Kenyan radio station Spice FM (2023-07-14). Njenga told the station that there are "no activities" indicating the resurgence of the group, and suggested that as "Mungiki have naturally retired by age ... the claim of its return is unbelievable," on the basis that it was a youth movement and its previous members would now be in their 40s (The Kenya Times 2023-07-14).

Opala states that

[r]esearchers have uncovered the active operations of notorious gangs the authorities claim to have obliterated years ago, such as the Mungiki, which has rebranded to 'Confirm' (a different group from the gang with the same name in Nakuru) and 'Godfather' in Nairobi and Wasame in Murang'a County. (2023-03, 5)

A March 2018 report by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), a "statutory body" working to promote "peaceful co-existence between persons of the different ethnic, religious and racial communities of Kenya," notes that the Mungiki has rebranded as different gangs, including "Quails in Kiambu County, Siafu and Gaza in Nairobi County, and Kwekwe in Murang'a County" (Kenya 2018-03, 2, 10). Further and corroborating information on whether the Mungiki is affiliated with or has rebranded into these groups could not be found among the sources

consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Organizational Structure, Leadership, and Membership

Information on the Mungiki group's organizational structure, leadership and membership was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources describe Maina Njenga as the former leader of the Mungiki group (The Kenya Times 2023-07-14; *Daily Nation* 2025-01-30b). *Daily Nation* reports that Kung'u Muigai, the Chairman of the Council of the Kenya Cultural Centre and cousin of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, "confess[ed]" that he was among the founding members of the group (2023-06-03).

Opala describes the group as "[h]ierarchical, with thousands of paid-up members" (2023-03).

3. Activities and Areas of Operation

Information on the Mungiki group's activities and areas of operations was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Citing a 2025 NCRC report, the Eastleigh Voice, a news website, lists the Mungiki group among "the most prominent gangs," and adds that the group has an "extensive presence" in the counties of Nakuru, Machakos, Nairobi, and Kiambu (The Eastleigh Voice 2025-04-17). The 2020 GI-TOC report notes that some sources indicate that "cartel extortion" of the matatu industry, by the Mungiki and other gangs, remains "widespread" in Nairobi's city centre and the Eastlands terminals in Southeast Nairobi but that the chair of the Matatu Welfare Association stated that the Mungiki had "mostly been eliminated through extra-judicial killings" since 2008 (2020-11, 30).

According to a 2025 GI-TOC article, citing "a police officer familiar with the Mungiki gang," the group, along with members of other gangs, was involved in attacks which happened in Nairobi in June 2025, where members were "'under instructions to destroy life and property'" after gang leaders offered them 2,000 Kenyan shillings (KES) [C\$21] each for their participation, with 50% paid upfront as well as "the opportunity to loot business premises" (GI-TOC 2025-07-01). Corroborating information

could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that a group of men identified by police as supporters of Maina Njenga organized a rally along Jogoo Road in Nairobi in July 2025, as he had a court hearing on that day (The Kenya Times 2025-07-09; The Nairobi Law Monthly 2025-07-09). The same sources, citing a police officer, indicate that the rally, which was under police surveillance, was peaceful and no one was arrested (The Kenya Times 2025-07-09; The Nairobi Law Monthly 2025-07-09).

4. Relationship with the Government

Information on the relationship between the Mungiki group and the Kenyan government was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Citing "close associates" of Maina Njenga, the *Standard* notes that "more than" 200 of Njenga's followers attended a meeting on 30 March 2025 to plan a welcome for President William Ruto during his campaign tour of the Mount Kenya region and to "'protect' the President from detractors"; however, Njenga's aide as well as allies of the President in the Mount Kenya region, including a Member of Parliament and a former Governor, denied that Njenga was involved (2025-03-31). A statement by the Kenya Head of the Presidential Communication Service, printed in the Kenya Times, dismissed the *Standard's* article as "'manifestly false'" and also "'dangerously irresponsible, reckless, and inciteful'" and added that the President's team met with government officials, Members of Parliament, and Senators to plan the tour and did not "resor[t] to the involvement of nefarious groups" (The Kenya Times 2025-03-31).

4.1 Treatment by Authorities

The Kenya Times reports that Njenga was arrested in May 2023 and was charged by Nakuru Law Courts "with 12 counts including being a Mungiki member and recruiting members into the organization" before being released on a 50,000 KES [C\$533] bond and 100,000 KES [C\$1,067] cash bail (2023-07-14). Another Kenya Times article notes that the prosecution withdrew all charges against Njenga in November 2024 (2024-11-11).

Sources report that, according to local residents, "over 30" (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30) or "more than 100" (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a) "suspected" Mungiki members moved to South Ngariama in Mwea-East sub-county in Kirinyaga, "t[ook] over" some land and "extort[ed] money" (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30; *Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a) since 2024 (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a). Citing local residents, *Daily Nation* indicates that Mungiki members have been returning to the area after they were chased

out "several years ago" (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a). Sources add that local residents set fire to 7 houses belonging to the Mungiki members (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30; *Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a), to drive out the group (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30). The Kenya Times indicates that "[s]everal" members escaped; however, 1 member fought back and was killed by the community members, who set fire to his body (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30). In contrast, *Daily Nation* notes that the residents "stoned and lynched" "more than 100" Mungiki members, and "hacked two of them to death" (*Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a). The Kenya Times notes that police "intensified security" to prevent retaliation from the Mungiki (2025-01-30). Sources note that the police urged the residents to report future incidents, instead of "taking the law into their own hands" (The Kenya Times 2025-01-30; *Daily Nation* 2025-01-30a).

Sources report that in January 2024, 297 individuals in Nyeri county [between the ages of 19 and 64 (KNA 2024-01-04)] were arrested [on 31 December 2024 (KNA 2024-01-04)] due to suspicion of being Mungiki members and were later released on a bond of 10,000 KES [C\$107] each, after being charged and pleading not guilty (*The Standard* 2024-01-05; KNA 2024-01-04). According to the *Standard*, 25 "elder[ly]" individuals arrested on 31 December 2023 over charges of being Mungiki members were released in February 2024 on the basis that "there was no sufficient evidence to sustain charges" (2024-02-29).

4.2 State Protection

Information on state protection for victims of the Mungiki was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Kenya Times, the Kwekwe Squad [was] a police unit created to address issues related to the Mungiki (2025-08-02). A 2021 *Daily Nation* article notes that the Kwekwe Squad, which carried out "assassinations" of Mungiki members, is "defunct" (2021-05-10). According to other articles from the *Daily Nation*, the Kwekwe Squad was a unit of the Flying Squad (2020-06-28) or "was renamed Eagle" and its base of operations was moved (2022-11-01). The *Star*, a Kenyan newspaper, indicates that the Kwekwe Squad was disbanded in 2009 (2009-03-03). A 2022 press statement by the Police Reforms Working Group-Kenya (PRWG-K), an alliance of 20 "organisations committed to professional, accountable and human-rights compliant policing" that includes Amnesty International, notes that although Kwekwe and Flying Squads, which were "accused of serious violations," were disbanded, this did not "necessarily en[d] the violations" (2022-10-19).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive

as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The name "mungiki" or "mũngĩkĩ" means "a united people" or "multitude" in the Kikuyu language (GI-TOC 2025-07-01; *Daily Nation* 2025-01-27). [\[back\]](#)

[2] According to sources, the Kikuyu are the largest ethnic group in Kenya (Owen 2025; Frederiksen 2024-02-11). [\[back\]](#)

[3] GI-TOC is an "independent civil-society organization, headquartered in Geneva" (GI-TOC n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[4] The Mungiki "played a leading role in the killings, displacement and sexual and gender-based violence" of the 2007 elections, which led the International Criminal Court (ICC) to charge President Kenyatta and 5 others, including William Ruto [President of Kenya since 2022 (BBC 2025-05-13)], with crimes against humanity (GI-TOC 2020-11, 15). The ICC prosecutor "alleged that Kenyatta commanded the Mungiki to carry out the attacks," but the ICC later dropped all charges against Kenyatta and the others "due to a lack of evidence" (GI-TOC 2020-11, 14-15). [\[back\]](#)

[5] The Kenya Kwanza Alliance is a political alliance comprised of 18 political parties, including the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) (Kenya n.d.b). The UDA is the party of President William Ruto (*Political Handbook of the World* 2023). [\[back\]](#)

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Associate professor at a Danish university who specializes in the Mungiki group and other religious groups in Kenya; Kenya Human Rights Commission; Kituo Cha Sheria; National Crime Research Centre; Norwegian Centre for Human Rights; professor at a French university whose expertise focuses on the Mungiki group and elections in Kenya; professor at a Norwegian institute whose research interests focus on Mungiki group and human rights in Kenya; Youth Agenda.

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Austrian Red Cross – ecoi.net; Belgium – Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides; Bertelsmann Stiftung; The Brookings Institution; Business Today; CBC; Center for Strategic & International Studies; Citizen Digital; Deutsche Welle; *The EastAfrican*; EU – Election Observation Mission, EU Agency for Asylum; Fédération internationale pour les droits humains; *Financial Times*; *Forbes*; Foreign Policy Centre; Foreign Policy Research Institute; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; France 24; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; International Criminal Court; International Crisis Group; Kenya – MyGov.go.ke, Presidency; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights; Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation; Kenyans.co.ke; *The New York Times*; Norway – Landinfo; Organisation mondiale contre la torture; Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés; *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*; *The Times* [UK]; Transparency International; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State, Library of Congress; *The Washington Post*.

Associated documents

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Kenya

Query response on Kenya: Mungiki criminal group (2023 - September 2025) (status; structure, leadership and

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Kenya : information sur le groupe des Mungikis, y compris son statut, sa structure organisationnelle, ses chefs, ses membres, ses méthodes de recrutement et ses activités; les relations entre le gouvernement du Kenya et le groupe; information indiquant si l'État offre une protection aux victimes du groupe (2023-septembre 2025) [KEN202389.EF] (Response, French)

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