

# Safety and security: Domain report

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**Abstract**

Residents of African cities are highly vulnerable to widespread manifestations of violence, including crime, political and ethnically motivated intimidation, threats to property, both housing and land rights, and gender-based violence. Drawing on mixed methods research on residents' lived experiences and perceptions of insecurity in six African cities, namely Nairobi, Bukavu, Freetown, Mogadishu, Lagos and Maiduguri, the safety and security domain addressed broad questions regarding the meanings and lived experiences of, and response to, safety and in/security held by different urban residents; and about the range of actors and institutions involved in the production of in/security. From the city studies, safety and security were identified as broad ranging, relating to political, personal, social, health, financial, environmental, and psychological dimensions. Notions of in/security varied across the six case studies, with the lived experience approach revealing differentiated accounts. The studies illustrated the ways in which key political elite leadership and patterns of political contestation, displacement and specific neighbourhood dynamics, for example, are implicated in security outcomes in cities. Key areas of interconnectedness of safety and security with other ACRC urban development domains included informality; land markets and youthhood. Gender was also a key axis of differentiation in the analysis of in/security in African cities. All city studies indicated that the provision of security was addressed through a plurality of individuals, processes, institutions and practices. Though the studies did not provide detailed information on reform coalitions in relation to safety and security, they acknowledged the key role played by residents in African cities in maintaining safety as well as the need for more consistent engagement between government officials, the police and local communities.

**Keywords:** security, urban crime, urban policing, differentiation, lived experiences, plural security, African cities, security reform, security governance

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## Executive summary

### Context

Insecurity, crime and violence have a profound impact on the lived experiences of African city residents, producing significant fear and suffering, often burdening women, children and disadvantaged communities specifically. Perceived and real threats of violence, whether structural or interpersonal, or exposure to violent crime can limit mobility, impacting education, livelihoods and general wellbeing. The prevalence of urban insecurity also shines a spotlight on the histories, and current and often restricted capacities and governance approaches, of city authorities and national leadership. The forms of political settlement adopted shape patterns of violence, responses to insecurity, and potential reform coalitions. Safety and security are intimately tied to the urban realities of African cities.

Cities are sites of significant growth, through natural increase, conflict/displacement-induced migration, economic investment and demographic, infrastructural and spatial expansion. Contestation over land as the pressure for housing grows, and the possibilities for wealth generation emerge, and significant levels of underemployment in urban centres, often mean rising inequalities and insecurity in cities. Cities are often where political battles are fought, where refugees are housed, and where dreams and expectations are fostered.

Responding to insecurity and urban violence is an urgent agenda, and one that multiple governments at varying scales are seeking to address. Coalitions across and within community groups, and between informal security providers, the police and schools are critical sites for future reform.

### Cities in the safety and security domain and research methodology

Six cities were included in this study, each with their own distinct experience of insecurity. **Freetown**, Sierra Leone's capital, is at the forefront of national political contestation. Its rapid growth is impacted by displacement-induced migration from the 11 years of civil war. **Nairobi**, the capital of Kenya, is frequently the site of heightened insecurity tied to land conflicts, elections and state repression. **Mogadishu** is Somalia's capital city, and is a fragile city, troubled by decades of civil war, and with a political context characterised by unstable elite bargains and strong clan competition. **Maiduguri** is the capital of Borno State in northeast Nigeria, shaped by a decade of Boko Haram insurgency and a significant population of internally displaced people (IDPs) alongside weak governance structures. **Lagos**, Nigeria's commercial capital, is rapidly growing in terms of its urban population, with significant levels of insecurity for many ordinary residents. **Bukavu**, one of the Democratic Republic of Congo's largest cities, has been growing rapidly since the 1990s, tied to migration, including of refugees. Proximity to Rwanda shapes its history of insecurity.

Research was conducted in collaboration with other domain teams, and the political settlements and city of systems teams. The lived experiences of lower-income

communities were central to the understanding of safety and security, and teams drew on a mixed methods approach to gather data, including interviews, security diaries, surveys, media reports and community consultations.

### Key findings

Moving beyond headline statistics or generalist overviews of insecurity, the research findings challenged singular readings of violence within African cities through an everyday insecurities approach. The lived experience approach adopted in the city studies revealed differentiated accounts and notions of insecurity. Findings showed that safety and security relate to political, personal, social, health, financial, environmental and psychological dimensions.

In Bukavu, environmental insecurity included erosion on the slopes, fires and unsanitary conditions, while social insecurity related to concerns about the proliferation of strong alcoholic beverages, the presence of brothels, issues of witchcraft and fetishisms, social mechanisms of extortion, and unregulated gambling. While criminality and gang violence were identified as the prime problems in parts of Freetown, in an informal neighbourhood located next to the sea, a primary safety challenge was flooding. Incidences of robbery, assassinations, rape and sexual violence against women and young girls, accusations of witchcraft, especially among children and women of the third age, abduction and kidnapping were widely reported in Lagos, Mogadishu, Maiduguri, Nairobi and Bukavu.

Using the ACRC's political settlements framework, city studies illustrated the varied complex intersections between politics and (in)security operating across urban, regional and national scales. These included different configurations of key actors, who often shaped access to resources, controlled land and determined security strategies. The framework helps identify the ways in which key political elite leadership, along with patterns of political contestation (violent and electoral), displacement and specific neighbourhood dynamics, help to shape security outcomes in cities. Poverty directly exacerbates residents' vulnerability to insecurity, as does gender, ethnicity or displacement. Among the areas of city-level interconnectedness are contexts of informality; the complete absence of, or presence of poor-quality infrastructure; land markets and urban insecurity; and the intersections between youthhood and insecurity (including impacts on and the role of education).

### Implications for urban reform

The safety and security domain research findings highlighted opportunities and challenges that could shape reform efforts in African cities in three key areas pertaining to what constitutes (in)security, integrating plural security governance systems and the possibilities of transforming formal and/or informal security platforms into reform coalitions.

The varied notions of what constitutes insecurity in the cities – from flooding to insecure tenure, witchcraft, gang violence, theft, and so on – showed that insecurity goes

beyond crime. This implies that safety and security challenges are the result of a range of dynamics that cannot be resolved at the level of policing, or security forces, even if there are well designed and locally owned reforms that can be undertaken. Therefore, reforms ought to target the sources of insecurity as much as they target security institutions. For instance, reforms aimed at improving conditions in informal settlements could in/directly produce short- or long-term changes in the experiences and/or perceptions of safety and security in African cities.

The studies found that many organised efforts to address insecurity are provided by actors and local institutions beyond the state. Capturing the strength of the local knowledge, local legitimacy, and local commitment of these informal actors by the state and/or municipal authorities is one potential area for expansion and upscaling. Localisation may also enhance community policing efforts and meaningful engagements between local police and community groups. One potential challenge, though, is that these non-state/informal security actors are often not recognised by legal frameworks in these cities; even though they may be more popular and enjoy more patronage than the police. Usually, reform efforts initiated by the government are directed at state institutions like the police with little or no results leading to divided opinions on whether to abolish the police (as in Nairobi) or to introduce more reforms. In some cities, such as Lagos, providing better resourcing for the police was identified by some city residents as desirable. However, investing in more state-sponsored security is unlikely to prove transformative or ultimately to enhance safety for the majority low-income residents. Since policing and security forces are fundamentally the face of the state, reforms in safety and security are likely to prove difficult without addressing the ways in which specific political settlements are structured. These arrangements often either use state resources to retain elite power or mobilise youth and other groups to either enforce or contest specific elements of the settlement.

Although the research did not identify transformative actions by reform coalitions in relation to safety and security, findings acknowledge the key role played by residents in African cities in maintaining safety, as well as the need for more consistent engagement between the police and local communities. In Freetown, a wide range of actors support community security and perceive some scope for creating momentum for reform. Initiatives like the Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPBs) and Community Service Volunteers (CSVs) were identified as viable community security structures. Similar platforms, like the Social Justice Centres, drug control committees and the Police Community Relations Committee, were identified in Nairobi and Maiduguri as arenas that facilitated dialogue, learning and co-production of security. These platforms could potentially be strengthened into coalitions that could catalyse change in safety and security in these cities.

With regards to overlaps between other domains and the safety and security domain, youth and their role in crime and violence, as both perpetrators and victims, dominates most of the cities studied. The research identified street children as particularly vulnerable, but also as a source of insecurity. Children and youth involvement as

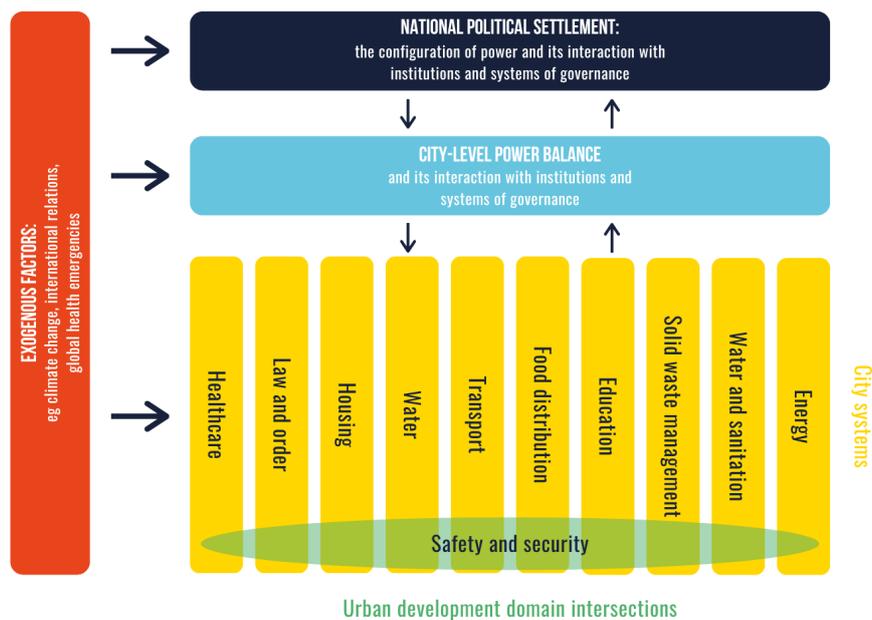
perpetrators must thus be viewed in relation to high levels of unemployment, the mobilisation of youth by political elites, and as a function of wider structural forces shaping African cities, and analyses must avoid the vilification of youths. With the realisation of this overlap between youths and safety and security, the Lagos city research argues that there is a need to improve security through the empowerment of marginalised youths. Youths, particularly young male adults, were the dominant members of informal security provision in cities like Maiduguri. This finding amplified the agency of youths as security providers in fragile cities.

Land markets and their role in underpinning insecurity across many African cities also emerged as a key interconnecting theme. The control of land is often enforced through (in)formal security arrangements and is central to political claims in cities like Lagos. In Bukavu, the research identified a rise in conflicts over land in the city, tied to illicit sales and purchasing of plots. An analysis of power configurations in these cities suggest that reforms in the land sector must include a wider array of actors to reduce the forms of violence or threats of violence that create and sustain insecurity.

## 1. Introduction

The ACRC’s holistic framework for analysing urban development in Africa has three integrated components – **politics**, **systems** and **development domains**. The politics component uses “political settlements” theory to model how power is configured at the national and city levels, and then analyses how these configurations of power shape (and are shaped by) urban development processes in the given city. The systems component analyses the functioning of the key systems (composed of physical infrastructure and people organised in various ways) that sustain and/or improve urban life in the city. The domains component looks at some of the distinct fields of power, policy and practice that have formed around complex, inter-systemic development challenges in the city, and analyses how the actors (political, bureaucratic, professional, and popular) engaged in these fields collaborate and/or compete for authority. The diagram below gives an indication of how these three components come together.

**Figure 1: The ACRC research framework**



The safety and security domain study used this framework to analyse the intersections between the domain, politics, city systems and other urban development domains, such as land and connectivity, and youth and capability development.

### 1.1. Defining the research boundaries

The safety and security research team focused on six African cities, namely, Freetown, Maiduguri, Mogadishu, Lagos, Bukavu and Nairobi (Figure 2). It considered different forms of “everyday insecurity” (Berents, 2015), along spatial and temporal lines, as well

as how the same urban area can contain both relatively secure and highly insecure spaces. The research addresses broad questions about the notions of in/security held by different urban residents; how experiences of safety and security and coping strategies and responses are differentiated (by age, gender, ethnicity, class/wealth, location, and so on); about the types and dimensions of security experienced in selected cities; about the drivers of and structural factors shaping insecurity, as well as the impact of security events; and about the range of actors and institutions involved, both in the production of insecurity and violence, but, equally important, in efforts to create security and safety; and, finally, about the effectiveness of different measures, programmes and models to reduce violence. To address these issues, we adopted an “everyday insecurity” approach, reflecting urban residents’ lived experiences and perceptions of insecurity and different sources of violence. In addition, we explored measures that reduce the prevalence of violence and address the lived perceptions and fear of violence.

**Figure 2: Cities covered by the safety and security domain research**



The specific questions addressed by the research team include:

- *Defining and experiencing safety and security.* How do residents from various positionalities (with particular attention to geography, livelihoods, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and disability) define and perceive security and insecurity in the city? What makes people differentially vulnerable to insecurity? What are local perceptions and experiences of insecurity – including violent crime, political and structural violence? What are the main insights from wider literature into the safety and security experiences/perceptions of urban populations?
- *Production of security.* Who are the most relevant state and non-state actors involved in producing (in-) security and (un)safety in the urban space? What is the nature of the processes by which non-state/informal security groups have formed and in which they are socially embedded? What political-economic and historical-geographic processes underpin the production of security? What is the role of “security” in maintaining (or undermining) political settlements at the national, regional and city level? How do the main producers of in/security and un/safety link to political elites and what role do these (in)formal actors play in sustaining and producing the political settlement?
- *Structural analysis of safety and security.* What are the main structural drivers of (in)security? What processes undergird security and insecurity at the city scale? How do macro processes structure fragility in African cities (see Muggah, 2014) and what are the key conjunctural factors shaping safety and security in cities, including ecological, economic, historical and political? How do key aspects of urbanisation and urban change, including land commodification and urban development, shape violence and insecurity (see Büscher, 2018 for a detailed analysis of urbanisation and its relationship to violent conflict).
- *Event-based analysis of insecurity.* How do particular events, such as elections, floods, fires, “terrorist” attacks, police violence, pandemics, droughts, climate events, evictions, and so on, catalyse processes of insecurity for city residents?
- *Alternatives to securitisation to promote community-based security:* What existing groups, practices, processes and/or movements are building alternatives to securitisation? What opportunities exist to support and further advance such work? And, by extension, what reform projects have already been tried in the security sector which have stalled or failed?

## 1.2. Significance of safety and security in African cities

Since 1990, the number of cities in Africa has doubled from 3,300 to 7,600 and their cumulative population has increased by 500 million people (OECD/UN ECA/AfDB, 2022). Though African cities are the youngest, they are the most rapidly growing cities in the world. The rate of transformation in African cities, accompanied by inadequate infrastructure and services, weak governance systems, high levels of unemployment and limited economic development, has contributed to critical challenges experienced by urban residents. The situation has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Urbanisation processes significantly shape safety and security in cities, and there is thus a renewed interest in understanding the complexity of urban development challenges in African cities, to address them.

African cities are sites where both peace and conflict occur, and these are shaped significantly by urbanisation processes (Büscher, 2018:196; Fox and Beall, 2012). Examples are the emergence of slums in response to refugee and IDP influx into cities, the shaping of neighbourhood composition by forced migration, and “violent struggles over urban public space” (Büscher, 2018: 199). Ehwi and Asafo’s work on land conflict in urban Ghana (2021) is a further example of this intimate relationship. The research incorporates a focus on some processes of urban change, including urban development and land commodification, as well as the conditions of urban environments, such as informal settlements and their relationship to safety and (in)security, but it does not aim to address all aspects of urbanisation in its remit.

The safety and security domain research privileges an understanding of safety and security from the perspective of residents of African cities. It recognises that safety, security, fear and the realities of violence are matters of primary concern for urban households, especially low-income and vulnerable groups (Winton, 2004: 166; Gupte with Commins, 2016; Adzande, 2019), but that middle-class residents are affected too (see Glück’s 2017 work on Kenya). It acknowledges that experiences and practices of insecurity are differentiated, and that this is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989). Differentiation in terms of race, gender, class, religion, migration status, age, clan politics and ethnicity shape the capacities and coping strategies of different residents, and particular intersections of different socio-demographic characteristics compound experiences of oppression. The research approach acknowledges that the subject position of urban actors is ambivalent; so, it avoids a simplistic victim–perpetrator binary, recognising that this is blurred in many cases. It adopts an open approach to categorising urban actors, noting that both formal and informal actors are significant to the research agenda, and that political elites and violence entrepreneurs (Muggah, 2014: 349), for example, are often urban residents themselves.

The research team’s emphasis on the lived experiences of safety, (in)security and violence in African cities is also directly informed by an examination and analysis of wider structural or macro forces shaping everyday violence and safety, which themselves interconnect to a political settlements analysis provided by the ACRC’s overarching framework. These wider forces are multiple and complex, but a few key structural processes stand out. Winton (2004) identifies “deprivation as inequality” as the most significant “form of structural violence”, which she links to the “emergence of everyday reactionary violence”, noting that “poverty itself is not a cause of urban violence. Rather, the exclusionary processes active in the unequal distribution of resources in urban contexts ... have a strong impact on violence levels” (2004: 166-167). Changes and deficiencies in “national and municipal governance” (Muggah, 2014: 351) regimes are a further key structural force shaping urban fragility and insecurity and violence. These have an impact on which groups and spaces in the city are resourced, producing forms of “urban governance ... divided increasingly between the haves and the have-nots” (Muggah, 2014: 351). Winton (2004: 172) refers to state failures to provide protection resulting in the rise of informal justice mechanisms, which

often work in concert with the state, and alongside under-resourced and brutal police forces.

Finally, conflict is both an experience but also a structuring force shaping safety and security within African cities and in part incorporates into our research a focus on security-related events, such as terrorist attacks. Beall and Goodfellow (2014: 20-21) categorise three forms of conflict which have implications for African cities, namely: sovereign (with “direct intervention in warfare by international actors”); civil (“violent conflict between two or more relatively organised groups within sovereign boundaries”); and civic (“forms of violent conflict distinct from warfare”). These forms of conflict are intimately tied to governance regimes and contestations over state resources, as established through a political settlements analysis. Although beyond the remit of this report, subsequent academic analyses could productively examine the nature of conflict, notably when manifested in different forms of violence or threats of violence, and insecurity in each of the six cities under examination here, against the categorisations as set out by Beall and Goodfellow alongside the political settlements’ framework adopted by the ACRC (Kelsall, 2021). The particular contribution of ACRC safety and security domain’s research is to examine varying structural processes through the different city studies, recognising their interconnectedness to everyday experiences and responses to safety and (in)security.

### 1.3. Significance of African cities for global thinking on safety and security

Safety and (in)security operate at multiple scales, both within the city and beyond. Violence and conflict are not confined within city boundaries, but rather are commonly sustained by “transnational networks” (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014: 335) with “new technologies and connectivity” shaping how crime, violence and political practice unfold across fragile cities (Muggah, 2014: 351). Rural-to-urban migration, the displacements of IDPs, and forced and voluntary transnational migration are critical features of all, but particularly (post)conflict cities, meaning that cities in the global South often have “porous violence and conflict boundaries” (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014: 337). These multiple factors mean that neighbourhoods and cities cannot be perceived as separate “bounded entities” (ibid: 336); rather, their shifting connections and linkages across local to global scales are fundamental. Nonetheless, the city is increasingly viewed as the “critical location of conflict and violence” (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014: 336). Specific locations (Green and Sweetman, 2013: 428) and local spaces within the city are central to an understanding of safety and security, including the home space, transport links, hospitals (Green and Sweetman, 2013: 428), streets, schools and neighbourhoods. Indeed “contemporary conflicts are ... fought where people live, work, bring up children and care for their elderly: in the middle of heavily populated areas” (ibid).

Our research acknowledges and operates within these multiple networks and scales but focuses its attention primarily at the scale of the neighbourhood and, where appropriate, the wider city scale (to capture the activities and reach of the political elite and various security actors). It aims to extend understandings of socio-spatial

differentiation by examining safety and security through the lens of neighbourhood and geographic difference, using case study analyses of marginalised, middle- and working-class and IDP-dominated locations. This multi-scalar approach is challenging, as it seeks, on the one hand, to hold onto the political practices, trends and outcomes often generated at the global or national scale, but which unfold at the scale of the city, while at the same time drilling down to the local scale, neighbourhoods, streets and homes to understand “everyday insecurity”. The approach adopted in this research privileged methodologically the scale of the local, but analyses and engagement through the ACRC’s political settlements and city of systems framings ensured that links to broader scales were investigated. Furthermore, residents’ and in/security actors’ perceptions and actions at the local scale are frequently not confined to these spaces, as media accounts and events frequently play out on wider scales.

#### 1.4. Brief description of the cities researched

**Freetown** is the capital and largest city of Sierra Leone, located in the western area of the country. The trajectory of Freetown’s urban development is at the centre of current political contestations in Sierra Leone. Freetown is a city of over 1 million inhabitants and its population is expected to double in size in the next 20 years. The city’s development has been marked by colonial legacies, as well as 11 years of civil war, the Ebola epidemic, the 2017 mudslide, annual flooding and the Covid-19 pandemic. The civil war, which started in 1991, generated an estimated 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Most of them sought refuge in Freetown. When the war ended in 2002, many IDPs remained in the city, as did ex-combatants, who experienced challenges returning to hometowns, often outside of Freetown. This resulted not only in rapid population growth, but also in a dramatic increase in population density (excerpt from Frediani, 2021).

**Nairobi** is the capital of Kenya. The city is often the site of heightened insecurity driven by Kenya’s central government’s contested elections. This is in addition to Kenya’s profound divisions linked to wealth, land and ethnicity, which largely remain unresolved. Nairobi’s insecurities are often related to control of land, evictions, elections, state repression and extrajudicial killings, and terrorism/radicalisation. In areas with disputed land ownership, gangs often collect “protection fees” from housing developers. Gangs are also influential actors in land markets, especially in areas with illegal land invasions and subdivisions. The risk of ethnic-inflected violence is a major concern around elections – including via militias manipulated by key politicians – and such hostilities have occurred in some of Nairobi’s informal settlements. Young men in informal settlements often bear the brunt of police brutality and there has been a marked increase in police killings since the onset of the pandemic. Nairobi is also home to at least 80,000 refugees, largely from Somalia, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia (excerpt from Sverdlik, 2021).

**Mogadishu** is Somalia’s capital city and largest port. Mogadishu is a fragile city, dealing with the legacy of decades of civil war within a political context characterised by unstable elite bargains and an incomplete constitutional transition. These legacies are

felt most keenly in ongoing insecurity and violence, the almost complete absence of the state from the provision of basic services, hybrid forms of governance, and land conflicts rooted in a history of clan competition, forced appropriations and fraudulent transactions. Access to livelihoods, housing and services is mediated through clan networks, leaving minority groups, women and displaced people at a significant disadvantage (excerpt from Earle, 2021; and Chonka and TANA Copenhagen, 2023).

**Maiduguri** is the capital of Borno State in northeast Nigeria. The city has been experiencing insecurity perpetrated by the Boko Haram insurgents for over a decade. The resulting insecurity has contributed to economic stagnation, as the city grapples with the additional burden of supporting internally displaced persons. At the peak of the crisis, more than 800,000 IDPs moved into Maiduguri, exacerbating the vulnerabilities that already existed in the city – including weak capacities of government institutions, poor service provision and high youth unemployment (excerpt from Bell and Card, 2021).

**Lagos**, the former capital of Nigeria, is currently referred to as the commercial capital of Nigeria. It is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world and is by far the most populous and progressive city in Nigeria. With the recent waves of migration, Lagos is projected to become the most populous city in Africa within the next 50 years. More than half of those who live in Lagos experience insecurity – traffic robberies, home break-ins and building collapse, among others, are the face of insecurity in Lagos. Given Lagos' trajectory, it is essential to think about those who live in the city now and, at the same time, those who will live in the city in the future (excerpt from Uduku et al., 2021; and Badiora, 2023).

**Bukavu** is one of the largest cities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its area has not expanded significantly since independence, but since the beginning of the 1990s the number of inhabitants has increased significantly. In addition to “natural” demographic growth, the recent expansion of Bukavu's population is mainly due to three factors: immigration of internal refugees from rural areas, caused by conflict and the activity of armed groups; the presence of business opportunities; and spatial planning problems in the surrounding areas of the city where people have no access to water, electricity and roads. Since the end of the Second Congo War and the subsequent elections in 2006, various national and provincial development programmes have been introduced but they have been largely ineffective. Armed conflicts in the region (particularly the genocide in Rwanda) have dramatically affected the city of Bukavu and heightened insecurity (excerpt from Bisoka et al., 2021).

## 2. Summary of prior knowledge

The safety and security domain research draws on an extensive body of literature, typified by vibrant debates. Much of the significance of this literature will be evidenced through subsequent academic publications, as city and domain teams grapple with the contribution of their analyses to wider debates.

## *Security*

Security is a broad term. The UN defines human security in terms of “freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity” (UN, 2005) which aligns with the ACRC’s broadened use of the term “security” in relation to health, food, safety, economic security and access to services (Kelsall et al., 2022). The safety and security domain research seeks to promote an understanding of security and also support the identification of urban reform coalitions working to enhance security “through measures that reduce violence and crime and address the perception and fear of harm” (Kelsall, et al., 2022: 61).

Jones and Kimari (2019) critique the narrowness of prevailing notions of security, which, they argue, focuses more on practices of protection enacted by men, such as patrols and surveillance, and fails to capture a broader understanding of “safety contributions” (2019:1836) commonly practised by women and children. Thus, the safety and security research looked at in/security as defined by different categories of urban residents in the cities studied, including the gendered nature of residents’ experiences of and responses to in/security. The aim therefore was to identify how differentiated residents perceive, experience and respond to in/security and how these perceptions nuance, differ from, challenge, or even uphold ideas of in/security in African cities demonstrated in the wider literature and by particular urban elites.

## *Violence*

The WHO defines violence as: “... the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.” (WHO, 2002 cited in Moser, 2004: 4). Expanded definitions include material deprivation, symbolic disadvantage and psychological hurt (Moser, 2004: 4). Moser in 2004 produced a classic categorisation of urban violence, which was then broadened in 2014 by Moser and McIlwaine. The 2004 overview identified political, institutional, economic, economic/social and social categories of urban violence (see Moser, 2004: 5 for a detailed explanation of the manifestations of these types of violence in cities). In 2014, Moser and McIlwaine proposed extending the categorisations of urban violence to include conflict, citing the example of Beall and Goodfellow’s triple conflict facing African cities (detailed above). Other forms of violence, including direct, structural and cultural, are recognised (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014) and the intersections between different violences are critical for analysis, such as between structural and symbolic violence (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014: 334). Winton (2004) identifies reactive violence which is created by structural violence (ibid, 2004: 167).

The safety and security research team adopted an approach to understanding violence which incorporated people’s experiences and perception of insecurity as a key feature of its framing. Acknowledgement of psychological impacts (due to both direct and indirect effects), and recognising the interconnections between material deprivation, for

example (with a focus on material realities of informality), were key to nuancing our “everyday insecurities” approach, and for shining a light on the outcomes of violence within African cities. However, the research did not set out to examine all forms of violence in the broadest sense – for example, symbolic disadvantage and deprivation as violences in themselves – but kept its focus more firmly on actual or threatened force tied to injury or worse, and where these impacted directly on access to work, household security and school.

### *Conflict*

Conflict is distinct from violence. Moser (2004) explains that although conflict, like violence, is linked to power, “conflict-based power struggles do not necessarily inflict physical or mental harm on others, while violence by its very nature does” (Moser 2004: 4). Furthermore, conflict can become violent, but it can also be productive, or be resolved “through negotiation without recourse to force” (Moser, 2004: 4). The research incorporates a focus on Beall and Goodfellow’s (2014) three forms of conflict (outlined above) through its wider positioning within a political settlements approach, recognising how the six cities under examination here are variously positioned in relation to sovereign, civil and civic conflict. Analyses of civic conflict were often dominated by the actions of local in/security providers, such as vigilante groups, inter-gang conflict or conflict over land access and rights, rather than the more generative actions of local social movements protesting about particular interventions within cities.

### *Crime*

A crime is “an offence against a public law”. As such, what is considered a crime is the result of a political process, by which a society deems a certain conduct unacceptable and against the law (Uscategui and Andrea (2015)).

“Crime is an act (usually a grave offence) punishable by law, ie, the breach of a legal prohibition, and violent crime, in turn, has been defined as any act that causes a physical or psychological wound or damage and which is against the law” (Moser, 2004: 4).

The phenomenon of urban crime is **multi-causal** and derives from different variables, depending on the urban context. In effect, it is the social fabric and the institutional and historical dimension of each city that explains the variation of crime rates in a determined period (Vanderschueren, 2013).

Therefore, understanding the relationships between different types of criminal acts, notably those entailing violence, requires a wider analysis that begins with the urban landscape, political settlement, and resident perspectives, not with policing or the criminal justice arrangements.

### *Displacement*

Urban centres around the world have become destinations for millions of internally displaced people seeking short-, medium- or long-term refuge. Camps are not,

however, the choice of many of the world's displaced people, and estimates suggest that over 60% of refugees and at least half of IDPs now live in towns and cities (Earle, 2020). However, "little is known about how displaced people negotiate their way in the urban environment, their relationships with host communities and governance institutions and their specific vulnerabilities as compared with other urban residents" (Haysom, 2013:1). Cotroneo (2017) also observed that knowledge about the specific situation of IDPs in urban settings, and how it differs from and impacts on their host communities, is still limited, and responses continue to be inadequate. Meanwhile, displaced persons in cities face varying dimensions of deprivation, including limited access to basic infrastructure and services and significant vulnerability to insecurity. Living in such precarious conditions in cities further exposes IDPs to exploitation by more powerful members of their host communities.

## 2.1. Paradigmatic ideas

### *Everyday insecurity*

Everyday insecurity signals an approach to understanding safety and security which centres on the "people usually rendered invisible in discussions of security", rather than focusing solely on macro-processes of conflict or the state (Berents, 2015: 93). Indeed, an everyday insecurity approach recognises that "formal political processes and intimate, mundane everyday life are not distinct but inform each other" (Berents, 2015: 94). Thus "insecurity must be conceived through the lives and bodies of those living amidst conflict in their everyday lives" (Berents, 2015: 101). Such an approach spotlights bottom-up experiences and responses to insecurity, including practical knowledge (ibid: 93) and potentially more progressive practices. For example, in a study of children in Colombia, Berents reveals how they "constantly and actively seek ways of ameliorating the risks and violences to their lives" (2015: 101).

In a similar way, Kimari's analysis of "war talk" in Nairobi by poor young men centres their subjectivity, arguing that "this vocabulary makes evident what youth see as the continuation of war in their space, as manifested in the very real negotiations for life and death they make on a daily basis" (Kimari, 2020: 719). Their combat language frequently evidences police violations in particular. The influential work of Asef Bayat (1997) and the concept of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" is productive here in thinking through the ways in which everyday agencies are enacted, often in micro, invisible ways in response to urban insecurity. Bayat describes "molecular" changes, which may be "silent, patient, protracted" (1997: 57) to understand how the actions of the urban poor can work to produce change. Bayat centres the urban reality of crisis (for example, following a war) as providing a key opportunity for different groups of urban poor people to act in these quiet ways while remaining "tolerable" (ibid: 62).

Everyday insecurity acknowledges the pervasiveness of insecurity within cities, or areas of cities, recognising how this is differentiated across urban spaces. Temporality is central to how this is experienced and managed. Access to toilets during the night for women and children poses particular challenges around safety, and the introduction of

electrification, including street lighting and leisure facilities, shapes urban residents' night-time practices and vulnerabilities (Meth and Buthelezi, 2017).

Experiences of fear are pivotal to everyday insecurity. Winton (2004) notes how fear can be both a cause and an effect of urban violence (2004: 176). Increases in fear, often fuelled by the media, can shape the dispositions of wider society around issues such as the death penalty, tolerance of police violence and tendencies to carry guns. These “can contribute to the continuation of violence” (ibid) as well as the normalisation of violence. Jones and Kimari (op. cit., 2019) illustrate how fear of reprisals in particular works to undermine security provision for women in Nairobi. They conclude that “fear was particularly gendered due to perceived vulnerability to retribution” (2019: 1844).

Residents of African cities practise a range of tactics to manage and counter crime, as well as everyday conflicts which may result in violence. This can at times be community enhancing and provide residents with significant protection and avenues for justice; however, often vigilante groups fuel violence and fear and can invoke tactics which are highly unjust. In informal settlements, where experiences of insecurity are often significant and levels of fear are high, various responses to insecurity are enacted by residents, including the operation of informal patrols and other “protection work” commonly carried out by men (Jones and Kimari, 2019: 1846).

The actions of women in response to urban insecurity can often be overlooked. Jones and Kimari (2019) identify a range of female-dominated actions, including “invoking and building social relations”, which, they argue, evidence “invisible security work” in Mathare, Nairobi (ibid). They describe these activities in positive terms and as often invisible, achieved through practices such as talking (“a quiet word to a youth”), protesting at meetings, hiding residents (wrongly) accused by the police, and intervening, for example, when young men in the community are faced with police violence and threats (2019: 1846). This encouragement to recognise the varied activities of a range of security actors has informed the research of the safety and security team.

### *Hybrid governance*

This is a popular term referencing a wider set of debates around the potential for merging formal versus informal/bottom-up versus top-down approaches to governance, which may variously deliver more effective and legitimate governance (Bagayoko et al, 2016; Bryld et al., 2019; Bjarnesen, 2023). It is also used to reference forms of governance which sit between democratisation and authoritarianism: Goodfellow and Jackman use hybrid governance as synonymous with “‘semi-authoritarian’ rule” (2020: 3).

Meagher (2012) uses the term “hybrid governance” to refer to the operation in fragile regions of states “alongside ‘informal’ and other ‘non-state’ forms of organisation in the exercise of public authority and service provision” (Meagher, 2012: 1075). Meagher notes how these approaches to understanding governance in African countries have emphasised more ethnographic approaches which examine day-to-day practices

(2012: 1077), and a recognition of heterogeneity. Offering a review of previous scholarship on hybrid governance, Meagher questions “the often uncritical references to the ‘embeddedness’ of nonstate forms of order [which] ... tend to blur the question of whether [they] ... are desirable because they are locally acceptable or because they are cheaper than building sovereign and accountable states” (Meagher, 2012: 1078). Furthermore, she asks “[t]o what extent does the celebration of local orders simply make a virtue of deprivation, rather than contributing to the improvement of governance and public accountability?” (ibid: 1077).

Meagher’s challenge is significant for ACRC safety and security research, which aims to advance more ethnographic understandings of security governance, but which also seeks to distinguish between “constructive and corrosive forms of non-state order” (ibid: 1074). Importantly, Goodfellow and Jackman’s (2020: 12) observation that it is within hybrid regimes where “patterns of urban protest and violent state response are most pronounced” suggests that our research should approach this concept with critical caution.

### *Cities, crime and insecurity*

Various writers explore the interconnections between cities, spatial planning, design, fear and insecurity. Caldeira’s focus on “city of walls” in her 2000 book and fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 1996) illustrates the spatial technologies and strategies implemented in response to crime as well as violence and the fear thereof, described as “a widespread aesthetic of security” (2000: 257). She details the rising segregation of spaces within Sao Paulo catering for the elite, typified by the rise of closed condominiums, which are the residential version of what she calls “fortified enclaves” (shopping centres, theme parks, and so on) (2000: 258).

Glück (2017) identifies the erection of razor and electric fencing around homes and business spaces in Nairobi, such that “large swathes of the city come to resemble the fortified and militarised enclaves of Johannesburg” (2017: 306). Furthermore, the introduction of checkpoints and the use of security guards to turn away particular residents from often elite spaces (ibid, 2017) is evident. In poorer parts of Nairobi, Kimari (2020) details the presence of four police stations, arguing that the state offers “fortification of this area should those who are abandoned [in terms of services] choose to show their discontent in richer parts of the city” (2020: 710). Goodfellow and Jackman (2020), using Istanbul and Cairo as examples, describe how cities have responded to political and urban uprisings by transforming urban planning through measures which securitise public spaces in cities, including introducing blockades.

Our research operates at the intersection between African cities and safety and security. We propose using a broadened adoption of Glück’s conceptualisation of “security urbanism” as one important way in which this intersection is understood. Referring to Kenya’s growing war on terror, Glück defines this as:

“the spatial expression of the rise of the counterterror state at the scale of the city: a kind of urban sociality forged in and through the spread of security ideologies, fear,

classism, checkpoints, protests and police interventions ... [it is a] process through which the very relations of state and society are being reorganised" (2017: 314).

The safety and security research (where appropriate) adopts this concept of security urbanism to understand the security/urbanism nexus more broadly and aims to explore this notion more fully in subsequent academic publications.

### *Informality, crime and insecurity*

Muggah (2014) argues that rapid urbanisation shapes urban fragility, citing the significant rise in the world's "slum populations" (2014: 350). He points to civic violence and associated humanitarian challenges of such urban growth but notes that "the widespread presumption of a positive correlation between city size/population density and the incidence of urban violence is contested" (2014: 350.). He does, however, argue that residents living in shanty towns and the like, "the have-nots", are exposed to multiple threats and they become "quite literally trapped, physically, psychologically and symbolically, across generations" (2014: 351). Jones and Kimari (2019) provide a detailed analysis of "key insecurities" in Mathare, Nairobi (2019: 1838). Their analysis identifies these "within complex spatial conditions shaped by a lack of service provision ... tenure contestations, unemployment, social-economic rights, ethno-political fault-lines, patriarchy and generation" (2019: 1837).

Meth (2017) notes how the materiality of informal housing poses challenges for security, with housing often proving to be "hyper-permeable" to potential intruders (2017: 408), but that housing formalisation (such as upgrading) does not necessarily reduce violence, especially domestic, although it can improve safety and security in terms of crime (Meth et al., 2018). Similarly, Jones and Kimari (2019) identify a particular risk for women, arguing that the materiality of housing, particularly those constructed with corrugated iron sheets, means they can be "easily accessed, damaged or pierced by the 'stray' bullets of police officers" (2019: 1840). They also identify the risks posed to women in accessing sanitation services in informal settlements, citing several accounts of rape, with the temporal risks of "inconvenient hours" playing an added role, although their findings suggest such risk is pervasive (2019: 1840).

### *Political settlement*

Numerous interpretations of the concept of political settlement are evident. The safety and security domain research employs the definition which informs the wider ACRC's conceptual framing:

"an agreement or common understanding among a society's powerful groups about the basic rules (or institutions) of the political and economic game, which, by providing opportunities for those groups to acquire a minimally acceptable level of benefits, prevents a descent into all-out warfare" (Kelsall et al., 2022: 9).

Aligning with our "beyond formal" approach to understanding governance, the "notion of a political settlement ... [uncovers] the underlying forms of power and politics that

shape which institutions emerge and how they actually function in practice” (ibid). Within ACRC, political settlements are also understood in terms of elite influence on urban politics and “contestation between elites within the urban context” (ibid) but it also maintains a focus on the actions of politics and action from below. These actions from below vary widely, including practices such as dissent and protest (individualised or at the level of the community or particular groups), disengagement and apathy, participation in formal citizen processes, including voting, and collusion or employment through elites, thereby purchasing political loyalty.

The interconnections between political settlements and safety, security, conflict and violence are significant. Capable, often powerful groups, in societies can challenge political leadership through “fighting, demonstrating, criticising” and so on, and in response to these and the actions of “powerless marginal groups”, leaders may use forms of repression, including the threat of, or actual violence (ibid). Goodfellow and Jackman (2020) contrast generative versus repressive interventions and unpack the latter to a broad understanding, including that of “violent coercion”, using practices such as the enrolment of “violence specialists in the form of urban gangs, vigilantes and ethnic militias” as well as practices such as “surveillance, government programmes and urban design” (Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020: 18). To understand how political settlements might play out at the scale of the city, the safety and security domain research, where appropriate, builds from the local experiences that grounded the city studies and the assessments of each city team on the specifics of multi-scalar political and power relations, and the domain at the city scale.

### 3. Methodology

This section summarises the methodological processes and approaches taken in researching safety and security across the six case study cities, drawing attention to any substantive differences in methods or methodological challenges between the cities.

As noted above, the safety and security domain research prioritised an “everyday insecurity” approach, recognising that it was the lived experiences of safety and security that mattered. This more bottom-up approach situated residents, particularly those in poorer areas of the city, as central to an understanding of safety and security. Given this, teams approached their research in slightly different ways, adopting varied stances on how to define and interpret “safety” and “security”. In Mogadishu, for example, the team adopted an inductive research strategy, avoiding a predefined understanding of safety and security, determining instead their definitions from local peoples’ understandings of them. They considered their more flexible and open-ended approach as essential for capturing the different experiences of safety and security across different social groups. In Bukavu, the team identified safety and security as very broad-ranging, relating to political, personal, social, health, financial, environmental, psychological dimensions, and security (or peace) that was understood in its negative sense: “[the] absence of gunshots in the entity” (Bukavu). In contrast, in

Freetown, safety is defined as the “the state of being away from hazards that are randomly caused by natural forces or human errors”. On the other hand, urban residents defined security as “the state of being away from hazards caused by the deliberate intention of humans to cause harm” (de Bruijne and Bangura, 2023: 4). These varied understandings of safety and security enrich the data, and the section below on geographic variations within cities details the ways in which varying experiences map across different geographic spaces within African cities. Invariably, data across cities is not directly comparable, given the different understandings of security; however, the data all speaks to the wider question of everyday experiences of in/security in African cities. When the data is analysed alongside existing political settlements and different city systems, comparability is possible and productive.

City research teams drew on a broad range of primarily qualitative methods to determine a rich understanding of safety and security issues, how these are experienced by residents, how these link to questions of political settlement and responses to insecurity. The Lagos team also employed quantitative methods to advance their understanding of safety and security trends over time.

In most cities, researchers began with reviews of academic materials, white papers of commissions of enquiry, reports, media reports, policy analyses and other grey literature. The teams also emphasise their long-standing expertise within their cities, noting how this shapes their research activities for this ACRC study, and their interpretation and understanding of the findings. In Nairobi, for example, the team drew on over ten years of ethnographic expertise in the city to inform their subsequent work.

The collection of primary data varied from city to city but included: security diaries; community consultations; key informant interviews (including city-wide with officials and so on); semi-structured interviews (usually with residents); focus group discussions; mobile interviews undertaken on the move; large surveys (for example, 315 people); petty offences surveys (40 people); identification of priority complex problems<sup>1</sup> and possible policy interventions, or post-fieldwork workshops. Who was identified as a key informant varied, depending on the context. The Bukavu team, for example, interviewed the mayor, chiefs of police, the head of avenues, church leaders, leaders of women’s associations and so on, and Freetown included gang members as well as state and party officials. In Maiduguri, traders, community leaders, civil society organisations (CSOs), state security agents, government officials and private security guards were also included. In Nairobi, the key informants included the Office of the Inspector General, urban planners and activists.

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<sup>1</sup> A priority complex problem (PCP) is a process that is preventing the achievement of poverty reduction and/or economic development and/or is exacerbating the climate emergency. Specifically, ACRC is focused on processes that are related to the political economy and associated political relations, and system failures, particularly those related to the lack of system integration.

**Table 1: Overview of data collected**

City	Key informant interviews	Resident or semi-structured interviews	Surveys	Focus groups (FGs)	Mobile interviews	Security diaries	Community consultation
Mogadishu	5	30					
Freetown	32	19 - following FGs	315 (158 female / 156 male)	8 FGs with 49 people (25 male / 24 female)			
Maiduguri	12	80		12	12		
Nairobi	yes		40			8	2
Lagos	yes	50 (46% female)					
Bukavu	66			3 FGs with 6 participants per 11 areas: 198			

Many of the teams approached interviews in an open-ended manner, seeking to encourage discussion and conversation rather than limit responses to single words or phrases. They sought to instil trust and engagement with their interviewees. Interviews with residents focused primarily on their perceptions and experiences of safety and security, while interviews with key informants addressed these too, but also examined how the city's particular political settlement shaped safety and security for the varying participants, who were identified as key actors in relation to safety and security, and what possible solutions or responses could be identified.

All teams devised sampling approaches to manage their interview or survey recruitment, focusing on different genders, sexual orientations, ages, classes and locations within their cities, carefully identifying which key informants were most important for their topic, as well as who was likely to engage. In Freetown, for example, the team surveyed equivalent proportions of male and female participants and ensured a varied age range: a total of 315 people participated in the survey, including 158 females and 156 males. In terms of age, 64.8% of the participants were between 18 and 35, and 35.2% were over 35.

As Table 1 indicates, the range of methods across teams varied – but in all cases the “mixing” of methods was employed, to inform a deeper or more complex understanding of safety and security issues. In Freetown, for example, the team used focus groups in the areas where the surveys had been conducted, using the focus group questions to

extend, probe and illuminate issues identified during the surveys. In Lagos, the multi-methodological approach enabled the triangulation of oral testimonies with the available literature and quantitative research findings.

### 3.1. Methodological challenges

The research teams experienced various challenges in the process of data collection. This was unsurprising, given the focus of the research, which is both politically sensitive and highly emotive in contexts of high insecurity.

One issue identified by the Maiduguri team was the lack of clarity and agreement over translation and language and the meanings of words – requiring careful discussion across teams about the local language terminology for English words, or the meaning of certain terms. In Nairobi, in particular, data collection efforts coincided with election periods, making it impossible to carry out research at that time, due to significant safety concerns for the research team. The team therefore had to adapt their strategies in order to secure data collection.

Further issues of safety were identified, for example, in Maiduguri, where field researchers were vulnerable to harassment from local youth demanding money while they were conducting research. Finally, a consistent challenge identified by numerous teams was the difficulties of researching gender-based violence (GBV). The dominance of social and cultural stigmas shaping how women and men understand and talk about GBV is likely to have produced significant under-reporting, in both poorer and wealthier areas. It was noted, particularly in Mogadishu, that female IDPs were likely to be experiencing very high levels of GBV but that they were hard to reach.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Political settlement questions and insecurity

Political settlements occur at multiple levels, in ways that may undermine security for local communities. This could be summarised as resilient elections and brittle politics.

The relationship between politics and violence involving supporters of rival political parties has occurred within the framework of competitive electoral processes, where the parties have sought to influence the electoral outcome rather than overthrow the state. What can occur is that violence can become institutionalised in the political context. Endemic violence can foster an unstable political environment that develops in part out of a symbiotic relationship between informal youth and/or security organisations and violence. Consequently, the political process becomes destabilised by the corrosive influence of partisan politics, whereby party loyalists who are dependent on political patronage are encouraged by the parties to defend local constituencies and participate in political conflict.

The boundaries between political violence and “criminal” violence becomes blurred when land and access to other resources is involved, as well as the linkages or spillover between political elites and criminal organisations.

In Freetown, land registration has led to tensions in the Western Area. These tensions are especially pronounced when amorphous boundaries begin to require formal demarcation for commercial purposes (including the transfer of private land). Fierce resistance to demarcation outcomes has arisen in some communities (Aberdeen, Freetown centre), often rooted in clientelism, political patronage and unclear inheritance systems. The construction boom in the city over the last two decades, and the ensuing land grabbing that has permeated it, have been catalysts of power in this respect.

The ensuing effects have been violent confrontations in communities in Freetown and its surroundings, especially along the peninsula and the hillside (Land Portal, 2018). Some key driving forces are the growth of informal settlements, the competition in acquiring land, and corruption. Moreover, land is often sold to multiple people, with each struggling to lay claim to the land and its title. In this process, caretakers and informal security organisations are usually hired to secure the ownership of land. These caretakers can be ex-combatants or youth groups, who are believed to be strong enough to protect the land.

In Nairobi, the security institutions take up the function of protecting concentrated wealth and securing the means of capital accumulation around land tenure. This can take many forms: from protecting land and farms owned by elites, to enforcing the eviction of residents from a plot of land in Nairobi and protecting its speculative redevelopment by real estate capital. Police play a primary role in such contexts, of what Didier Fassin (2013) calls “enforcing order”, which often means maintaining the status quo and (re)enforcing social inequality built on wide- scale land dispossession, clientelism and patronage networks.

The relationships between the political settlement and insecurity were found across the research cities to be multifaceted and frequently linked with a) competitive electoral politics and b) federal systems, where competing parties held different offices at different levels of government – that is, city, regional/provincial and federal. In Freetown, the law and order system and the security domain are closely linked to national politics and national (economic) interests. Because of the political tensions in Sierra Leone between the regime and the opposition, between Freetown’s city authorities and the central state, and tensions within the two main political parties, there are sustained links between politicians and security actors. For the state’s security forces and various types of party militias, these links are extensive and relatively stable. Links with different gangs and quasi political, informal groups are also important but subject to greater variations. A key problem for Freetown is that it is the centre of state power and that all (strong) security groups have a presence in the city. Political players therefore have to manage these groups, and they can also benefit from links therewith, leveraging them for political capital and (sometimes) economic

benefits. There is an interconnected, multi-scale dynamic of violence at the city level, connected with, but not completely subject to, national political competition.

In Lagos, violence can be perpetuated by state elites, who use it to preserve unequal distribution of power and resources. Such elites ally with violent groups – “area boys” – in Lagos and operate with them “behind the scenes”. Violence is most often carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited, financed and sometimes armed by public officials, politicians and party officials or their representatives. Composed primarily of unemployed young men, these gangs are mobilised to attack their sponsors’ rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections and protect their patrons from similar attacks. Often, sponsors of violence turn repeatedly to the same criminal gangs, cults and other sources to recruit agents for elite political interests. Most times, the run-up to the elections sees political assassinations, kidnappings and deadly clashes between rival gangs – organised by political elites and parties. They usually do this to discourage many Nigerians from coming out to vote – voters who do come out to vote may face all sorts of violent crimes and conflicts (Akinkuotu, 2023; Nwangwu, 2023).

Because security forces play a major role in the praxis and calculus of power relations in Kenyan society, in Nairobi there is a constant need for mechanisms to manage the political settlement. One of the continuous mechanisms for managing this situation is reliance upon patronage networks and ethnic politics. These provide the state with a selective basis (and bases) of support, albeit while inflaming social tensions along ethnic lines that perennially threaten to erupt (as they did in the election cycle of 2007-08). The Kenyan state is underpinned by these twin logics of selective incorporation: ethnic politics and patronage, coupled with class-based selective hegemony.

In Nairobi, security organs play a complex role in relation to votes and elections. In their most glaring and alarming articulation, during the 2007-08 election cycle, security forces exacerbated politicised ethnic conflict, varyingly failed to protect citizens, and carried out their own violence against portions of the electorate. During every election since this time, there has been a pervasive sense of apprehension and anxiety that things could take a turn for the worse again, with political contestation transmuting into violent conflict. This has created complex dynamics within the domain of safety and security: “The crisis of insecurity and lack of safety is real and rampant for so many residents. And the means to address this crisis is so deeply lacking through present formal channels” (Glück and Kimari, 2023: 5).

The relationship between “votes” and “security” (broadly defined) is highly complex to map out and analyse. Perhaps the main reason is simply that elections implicate various actors and reshuffle their relationships significantly, in a temporary manner, which, nonetheless, often has enduring consequences and effects.

In September 2013, with its international partners, the government of Somalia developed and implemented an architecture for coordination, cooperation and dialogue for peacebuilding and state-building, particularly in regard to the security and justice

sectors. In May 2017, three months after the election of Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo as Somalia's new president, political agreement around the National Security Architecture and an international security pact were endorsed in London. The agreement was not implemented, primarily due to the difficult relationship between the federal government of Somalia in the capital and the emerging regional federal member states. These centre–periphery tensions in Somalia's contested political settlement intensified under the subsequent term of President Mohamed Adullahi “Farmaajo” (2017-22). This hampered the stabilisation needed for the holding of one-person-one-vote elections – which themselves became an issue that threatened to unravel the fragile political settlement established with the Somali federal government in 2012.

This came into stark relief in the early part of 2021, when different clan/partisan-aligned units within the security forces engaged in violent confrontation over Somalia's delayed elections and President Farmaajo's (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to secure a term extension (Somali Dialogue Platform/Rift Valley Institute, 2022). This violence (which temporarily displaced significant populations from districts such as Hodan and Howlwadaag) represented the greatest threat to Somalia's post-2012 elite political settlement and the greatest prospect of a full-scale outbreak of armed conflict across the capital (Somali Dialogue Platform/Rift Valley Institute 2022).

Political violence in Mogadishu that accompanied disputes over the last indirect election process was still fresh in the minds of interviewees. This was particularly true in Hodan, where different factions of the armed forces were mobilised to support different sides in the struggle over the elections, which caused temporary displacement. Although this situation was resolved and widespread fears about broader destabilisation were averted, this period highlighted the fragility of Somalia's political settlement and the continued fragmentation of armed/security forces along clan–political lines in the capital. The genuine integration and coordination of government armed forces remains a challenge for the recently elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, just as it was under his previous tenure in office (2012-17), during which limited progress was made in relation to security sector reform and anti-corruption efforts.

In Maiduguri, corruption is a key issue shaping the politics and resourcing of security governance. In addition to exploiting the security situation for amassing legitimacy and political support, the political elite, top security officials, as well as community leaders and civil society organisations, draw rents from the security situation. Security votes are not subjected to any form of legislative oversight or independent auditing and serve as a channel for state officials to steal money. In states across the country, governors use security votes to accumulate property, finance their campaigns and sustain political patronage and support.

Residents of Maiduguri generally perceive the top military officers and commanders as corrupt. Across both low- and middle-income neighbourhoods, there is a significant consensus that military commanders posted to Borno state have used the fight against

the insurgents to enrich themselves. For example, according to a resident of the Old GRA neighbourhood:

“Most of the high-ranking officers are not here to help us. They are here to make as much money as possible before they go back to where they came from. Borno state has become to them like what Niger Delta used to be, where soldiers sent for peacekeeping ended up using the situation to make money. Some of the soldiers are buying property here in Maiduguri.” (Madueke, 2023: 28)

Freetown provides an important example in relation to police brutality which entails the instrumentalisation of the police by the political elite. This is not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leone’s political history. Under the one-party system of both Siaka Stevens and Joseph Saidu Momoh, both the military and the police had seats in the Cabinet and were an integral part of the executive of the country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Sierra Leone (TRCSL) report in 2004<sup>2</sup> pointed to police brutality as one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the country’s 11-year civil war.

Insecurity in Freetown is rooted in the systemic failure of (at least) two systems established after the civil war: the law and order system and the educational system (including a disconnect from livelihood prospects). The law and order system in particular bears a distinct post-war signature. The whole institutional arrangement of the security field and disaster management was set up in just two years following the war. Twenty years later, and in a different political context, most of the law and order system is increasingly ineffective. The police force – which had a clear community policing hallmark after the war – is strongly politicised; post-war hybrid community mechanisms – for example, the Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPBs) and community service volunteers (CSVs) – remain popular but are increasingly ineffective, under the influence of national- and city-level politics; and the army – previously a somewhat republican outfit, with loyalty to the state rather than politicians – is increasingly coming under the influence of politicians.

The retention of political power is an issue in the production of insecurity in Bukavu. The research showed that certain political actors mobilise and instrumentalise young people, most of whom are idle, due to lack of livelihood opportunities. Youth are mobilised to support the goals of these political actors and young people are engaged to support the actors. The youth also seek to gain more access to different powerholders. Several previous studies highlight public actors as perpetrators of insecurity in the city of Bukavu, sometimes specifically through the mobilisation of youth (Berghezan and Zeebroek, 2011; Till, 2019).

Opinion polls by the National Institute of Statistics in the city of Bukavu, for example, show a continuous decline in confidence in public security and justice institutions and actors (police, civil justice and military justice). Polling over several years reveals that an average of 20% or less of residents trust these institutions. Interviews indicated that people view the police in Bukavu as working hand-in-hand with “thugs”, including

<sup>2</sup> See: [sierraleonetrc.org/index.php/view-the-final-report](http://sierraleonetrc.org/index.php/view-the-final-report) (accessed 9 January 2024).

sharing resources such as uniforms and weapons; and carrying out excessive violence against urban traders, as well as confiscating goods (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023: 34).

Previous work on political settlements distinguished between “settled”, “unsettled”, “semi-settled” and “challenged” settlements (Kelsall et al., 2022). The city studies contain both assessments of urban political settlements and the interplay between city, regional and national politics, as they relate to safety and security. In Nairobi, for example, the compromises after the 2007 election violence have meant a reduced level of tensions between different political parties compared to 15 years ago. This is also reflected in the lack of contestation between the leading parties over the security systems, compared to Maiduguri or Freetown. For example, the semi-settled situation in Sierra Leone reflects both the ongoing tensions between the two major parties and the reduced effectiveness of the post-civil war arrangements for security and policing.

In Freetown, influence over the formal and informal security sector provides four political benefits. Firstly, violence helps to put pressure on opponents. Over the last five years, there have been multiple examples of violence. Threats of violence have been used to deny entry to key elites during important decision making (within the APC in 2018; and SLPP, 2016/2017),<sup>3</sup> to intimidate those who challenged certain selections in the APC,<sup>4</sup> to spy on and threaten contenders,<sup>5</sup> to threaten mayhem when being dismissed from office (Thomas, 2019), to intimidate key party officials<sup>6</sup> and even to kill individuals who risked exposing secret information and/or threatened the power structure (2016 and 2017).<sup>7</sup> A second political benefit of controlling the security sector has been ensuring regime survival vis-a-vis the opposition. A third benefit is that the elites (and powerful groups) become politically attractive when they are able to control violence. A final benefit is that control over the security domain provides individual protection.

“There are early signs that political violence in the country is on the rise. In the middle of 2019, Sierra Leone dropped 10% on the Global Peace Index, and was among the five sub-Saharan countries with the worst deterioration of stability. In early 2020, a new Afrobarometer survey revealed that 80% of Sierra Leoneans surveyed believed that politics ‘often’ or ‘always’ leads to violence” (De Bruijne, 2020: 5).

Community members point out how such political lines are a direct problem for them:

<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2020 alone, there were incidents with regard to the appointment of Alpha Kanu and an attack on Eddie Turay at the APC office. Party marshalls were key in denying KKY (later NGC) individuals the opportunity to stand for zonal elections within the SLPP.

<sup>4</sup> Gangs placed within the entourage of candidates were ultimately loyal to one person. Interview, 25 June 2019, cited in de Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 43).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a member of the SLPP’s internal spy network, 6 April 2019, cited in de Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 43).

<sup>6</sup> At the SLPP office, Napoleon Karoma (the secretary general) was driven out (eyewitness account).

<sup>7</sup> Examples are rumoured to include Moseray Fadika and SOW Williams.

“The last time I reported a guy to the police, after a few days I saw the guy again outside and he even boasted that he had a strong relationship with the police, so I was just wasting my time and money reporting him to the police.”<sup>8</sup>

The above quotation also highlights the issue and problem that people have to pay for justice. A further indicator of the links with politicians was provided by a section chief from Portee who noted the following:

“When criminals are captured, they need to go to jail. The reality is that when you hand them over to the police it is not so long, two to three days, before they will be released. They have boys among them who are also clique members. The criminals have a relationship with the police. And, finally, the police will receive orders from above to let certain people go.”<sup>9</sup>

In Lagos, it is pertinent to note that the state’s monopoly on national security is as a result of a collective agreement among the political elites. Hills’ (2007) observation that key chief officers of security agencies are accountable to the president supports this assertion: this is evident in Nigeria, where the president appoints senior security officials. Okenyodo (2016) maintains that the appointment of chief security officials is based on political affiliations and affects the quality of security services provided; these officers are loyal to the president and his allies at the expense of the state. Many top-level government officials have not only failed to rein in corruption at lower levels; they have repeatedly been implicated in scandals themselves and escaped any form of sanction.

The ACRC conceptual framework and the city political settlement reports distinguish between a leader’s bloc, contingently loyal bloc and opposition bloc in each city. Depending on the local political configurations, the experience of safety and security is different for members of the different blocs.

A major finding, that echoes lessons from Jamaica’s politically motivated violence from gangs affiliated with the two major parties, is that federal systems with competitive elections can generate higher levels of violence, due to the competitiveness of the electoral system, as noted in Freetown, and in different ways in Lagos and Maiduguri. Also, in Freetown, different youth gangs or political militias were frequently identified with specific neighbourhoods, resulting in less security for individuals and groups identified with the other political party. In Maiduguri, the political motivation also emerges from the relative willingness or unwillingness of the national or state/provincial government to assist with security needs in cities governed by another party. The incentive to undermine the credibility of the city government is not unique to Africa but the impact may be more severe in relatively insecure settings.

This was manifest in different ways in Mogadishu, where the distinction between “clan militia” and “state security forces” is often blurred, as the same soldiers may either fulfil

<sup>8</sup> Focus group discussion, Lumley men, 13 July 2022, cited in de Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 23).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with a section chief, 2 August 2022, Portee, cited in de Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 23).

state security tasks, pursue military objectives in the interest of their clan family, or engage in freelance mercenary and criminal activities (OCVP, 2014). Clan militia – whether in uniform or not – operate with little accountability. They are a constant threat to minority and numerically weaker groups in the capital, which relates both to the overall political settlement and to neighbourhood security factors. Clan militia play a key role in upholding stratified power relations in Mogadishu between – to simplify – locally dominant Hawiye clan lineages at the top of the hierarchy, other majority Somali clans from other parts of Somalia in a middle tier, and IDPs and “guests”, who are often from minority and/or weaker clan families at the bottom (Cassanelli, 2015).

A large proportion of those who live in camps for displaced people in Mogadishu come from racially discriminated Somali Bantu-Jareer clans, as well as predominantly Af Maay dialect-speaking Digil and Mirifle clans. Neither of these groups (themselves divided into multiple lineages) have historical claims to residence and representation in the capital and are usually in subordinate positions to various gatekeepers or intermediaries, who belong to (or have connections with) dominant clans (Bakonyi and Chonka, 2023).

#### 4.2. Plurality of security provision, and institutional frameworks

All cities indicated that the provision of security was achieved through a plurality of individuals, processes, institutions and practices. We argue that the practice of providing or ensuring security must be viewed as co-produced; in other words, it is produced by a multitude of individuals and organisations, even where their roles may seem invisible, such as the actions of women in the home space. This is important, as it helps to overcome a narrow view of security, and the perception that it is only powerful men who can and do work to provide security in African cities.

All cities employed a range of state-sponsored formal security actors, including the police and military, with significant critique from residents and organisations about the effectiveness of these institutions and actors. The police were viewed as under-resourced and poorly trained, insufficient in numbers and lacking equipped stations in key areas. In Bukavu, for example, dire shortages of police stations, equipment and scientific training undermine their effectiveness as security actors, with residents querying the capacity for security provided by unarmed police moving through the city. More problematically, the police were identified as inherently violent.

In most areas of African cities, a complex array of “informal” security providers was evident, frequently eliciting positive evaluations from local residents for their presence on the ground and capacity to keep the peace, deal with suspected criminals and respond to emergencies (although their production of insecurity was also widely cited). These informal security providers consist of a complex mix of groups (the example below from Maiduguri illustrates this), precluding simple categorisations of “informal” providers’ relationship with the formal state – they each have differing relations with the state, which in themselves are fluid, depending on local power struggles, political leadership and changing local resources. Even al-Shabaab in Mogadishu, which is

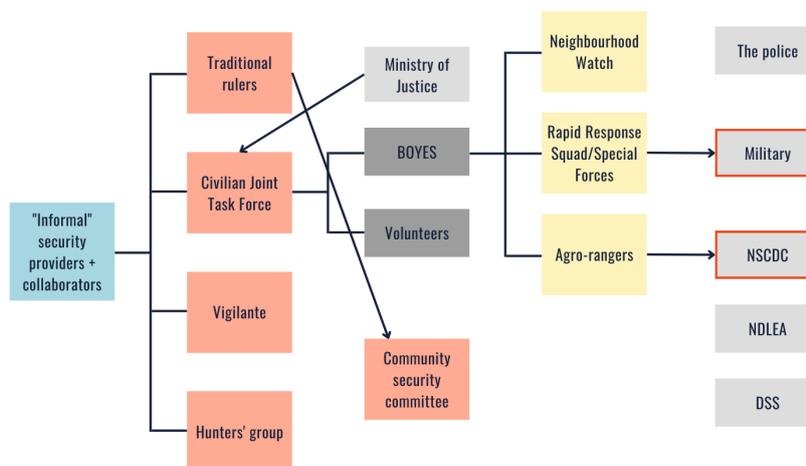
identified as a terrorist organisation, provides critical security to particular local residents, and advances legitimacy with residents through this role. In many of the cities, histories of civil conflict shape subsequent informal security provision. In Bukavu, armed groups, including self-defence militias, have links to former armed conflict (possessing weapons or benefiting from training from commanders), and these (in)security providers shift between the status of from being civilians, to being members of armed groups and gang members (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al, 2023: 18). Many gain legitimacy through their capacity to respond to crimes and are also used by the army and police for information; however, they are arguably complicit with criminals and thugs (ibid: 21).

Figure 1 illustrates the array of organisations and individuals engaged in security provision (for details, see Adzande, 2022; and Madueke, 2023). Here the key point is recognition of the differing informal providers, including vigilante groups, hunters' groups and the Civilian Joint Task Forces (CJTF), comprising the Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES) and the Volunteers.

“The CJTF was established in 2013 by the Borno State government to support state security forces and to protect communities against Boko Haram ... [and it] also plays a mediating role between [non-local] state security forces ... and local communities within Maiduguri” (Madueke, 2023).

The volunteers recruited into the CJTF are vetted by the Department of State Services, and regulated by the Ministry of Justice, illustrating the co-working of formal and informal structures. BOYES benefit from uniforms, training, weapons and stipend payments, while non-BOYES volunteers are excluded from this “reward package” (Adzande, 2022), thereby producing tensions within these groups. Hunters and vigilante groups generally operate outside of this more formalised framework, but many are on a state payroll, and are informally under the authority of the Bulamas (traditional rulers) of their wards. They too receive some training from the military (Madueke, 2023).

**Figure 3: The complex landscape of (in)formal security provision in Maiduguri**



Source: Adzande (2022)

Institutional mechanisms (at multiple scales) mean many African cities are unable to provide a coordinated approach to managing informal security providers, with deployments unevenly spread across areas, and a lack of accountability enhancing the risks of human rights violations, as is evident in Maiduguri. There is a need to enhance the institutional capacities of cities to manage informal security provision, while retaining its benefits (local presence and knowledge). These findings speak back to our report's caution against wholesale adoption of the notion of hybrid governance, and a recognition that often these forms of security provision and governance are pluralised, fluid and fragmented.

#### 4.3. Safety and security and difference: Experiences of safety and security, vulnerability, agency and experience

##### *Varied understandings, experiences and responses to safety and security*

Across all cities, the extent of insecurity was overwhelming. A Nairobi resident voiced this concern thus: "The crisis of insecurity and lack of safety is real and rampant for so many residents. And the means to address this crisis is so deeply lacking through present formal channels" (cited in Glück and Kimari, 2023: 5).

Notions of in/security varied across the six cities covered in the research. The lived experience approach adopted in the city studies revealed differentiated accounts of insecurity and crisis. For instance, in Bukavu, residents described security as peace in its negative sense: "absence of gunshots in the entity"; while in Freetown, "people perceived criminality and gang violence as their prime problem", and "for an informal neighbourhood located next to the sea, a primary safety challenge was flooding" (ibid, 2023: 14). Findings also showed that safety and security relate to political, personal, social, health, financial, environmental and psychological dimensions. For physical insecurity, incidences of robbery, assassinations, rape and sexual violence against women and young girls, accusation of witchcraft, especially among children and women of the third age, abduction and kidnapping were widely reported. In Maiduguri, street gangs and criminal networks that engage in armed robbery, burglary, theft, rape, kidnapping and drug trafficking are rampant (2023: 7-8). In Bukavu, environmental insecurity included unregulated and informal constructions, erosion on the slopes, fires and unsanitary conditions, while social insecurity related to concerns about the proliferation of strong alcoholic beverages, presence of brothels, issues of witchcraft and fetishisms, social mechanisms of extortion, and unregulated gambling.

As discussed above, political settlements and particular histories of conflict shape variations in safety and insecurity across different cities. Some unique features produce particular insecurity outcomes – for example, Bukavu's location adjacent to the border with Rwanda is a location-specific factor determining the city's experiences of insecurity. City reports revealed wide internal variations in residents' experiences of and perceptions of safety and security within and between cities. This was tied to cities' histories, current political settlements, forms of insecurity and governance responses to

these. Notions of safety also drew attention to environmental hazards (including flooding, landslides, fires) or fears of building safety.

Geographic differences between and across cities shaped varying experiences of safety and security, as well as perceptions of who the key producers of insecurity were. In Bukavu, particular sites, such as markets and transport hubs, were identified by researchers and informants as significant for robbery. Across all cities, the researchers interviewed residents within different neighbourhoods, representing areas of varying wealth, ethnic identity, political allegiance, class, housing form and histories of displacement. The different city research teams also noted that even within similar locations, areas and residents and their experiences of safety and security were by no means homogenous. Examples of geographical variations include the following:

- Within Mogadishu, two cases were examined, namely the Hodan and Khadan districts. Hodan is relatively central, with a growing middle class and “high-profile targets for al-Shabaab violence”. There, fears of street crime were increasing. Khadan is more peripheral, tied to “displacement-linked in-migration”, with higher density camps, and a growth in more permanent structures. Robbery was an overarching concern, but GBV [was] significant for IDPs in “ill-secured camps” (Chonka and TANA Copenhagen, 2023: 4). Permanent versus camp living emerged as a key axis of inequality (ibid).
- In Freetown, concerns varied significantly across the city, using comparisons across Kroo Bay, Aberdeen and Portee. In informal Kroo Bay, levels of violence were very high, gang control by COs (commanders) and “godfathers” was significant, and criminality and flooding were dominant concerns. Portee, in contrast, lay at the heart of political tension between political parties (SLPP and APC) and in Aberdeen COs and godfathers were key to producing insecurity but residents’ perceptions reported them as less threatening compared with other areas (De Bruijne and Bangura, 2023).
- Maiduguri’s low-income areas were the most vulnerable, including Old Maiduguri, Shuwari and Zango-Gwange. Here, street gangs and criminal networks perpetuate everyday insecurity for residents through armed robbery, drug trafficking, gang fights and sexual violence, proving more significant for residents than fears of a Boko Haram resurgence. Low government presence and unaffordability of security features (high walls and so on) enhance vulnerability, with residents relying on local vigilante groups (Madueke, 2023).
- In Lagos, on the mainland, Mushin and Oshodi-Isolo (both lower-income areas) experience low political buy-in, hence fewer interventions to tackle crime were evident. Within Mushin, violent robbery was pervasive, and the lack of street lighting was noted by residents as a key concern. Peri-urban Ikorodu (also a lower-income area) was the site of numerous emergencies, including explosions and building collapses. Indeed, across Lagos, alongside crime, building collapse, flooding and risk of fire were significant sources of unsafety (Badiora, 2023).
- Insecurity in the Bukavu neighbourhoods of Essence and Nkafu is surprisingly diverse. A young man from Nkafu explains: “The neighbourhood of Nkafu is totally devoid of security, but this insecurity varies according to the place. There are places that are hard hit and others that are less so” (cited in Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023). In Nkafu, almost all the avenues seem to have

their own dynamics of insecurity. Moreover, in the two neighbourhoods, each form of insecurity presents itself in a different way. As one woman at Essence observed: “They [the criminals] compartmentalise their tasks. Everyone has their own job”. Nevertheless, several forms of insecurity are common in both Nkafu and Essence – and throughout the city (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023: 10).

### *Differentiation of vulnerability, agency and experience*

An intersectional analysis reveals the complexities and variations in experiences of and vulnerability to urban insecurity, as well as varying forms of insecurity. Intersectionality also shapes agency in coping with, responding to or perpetuating insecurities, tied to wealth, ethnicity, disability, age, migration status and gender. Urban disabled residents were frequently cited as especially vulnerable but little direct research on this group was available. The Lagos report (Badiora, 2023) does note that transport fails to take into account the needs of disabled people, hence failing to deliver on “inclusive” planning in transportation.

We address gender as a key axis of inequality here, with a brief consideration of class/wealth and the status of displaced migrants. Age, particularly youth, and its interconnection with insecurity is a dominant theme across all cities and is discussed below in relation to the interconnections of the findings of the safety and security research with those of the youth domain.

### *Gender and vulnerability to insecurity in urban Africa*

Women’s vulnerability was ubiquitous across the cities, as this Freetown example shows:

“Women are the primary victims of most of the security and safety problems that we have in our community. They are the victims of sexual violence, harassment, abuse in homes and communities, and they face the risk of trading on the streets, fetching water from distant places, and they also do the cooking, which exposes them to the danger of burning themselves, and people just do not notice what they have to go through.”<sup>10</sup>

In Bukavu, women’s vulnerability extended to accusations of witchcraft, with around ten indictment cases since the beginning of 2023, leading to mob justice and local conflicts. In Lagos, women were frequent victims of violent robbery, particularly when using public transport or walking in the streets. Attacks by Lagos “area boys”, street thugs and drivers, especially after dark, meant reductions in gendered mobility, with girls and women “dropping out of night routines, intensifying their social isolation” (Badiora, 2023:24).

In Nairobi, gender non-conforming and queer Kenyans experienced sexual and gendered harassment by police and transport workers, as well as everyday forms of violence and harassment by the random public but also those familiar to them, including neighbours and even political comrades (Glück and Kimari, 2023). High levels

<sup>10</sup> Interview cited in de Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 16).

of displacement due to insurgency within Nigeria meant female migrants to cities such as Lagos were often forced to work as sex workers to overcome urban poverty, and in Bukavu, sex work was viewed as a primary site of insecurity as well as contamination. Sexual violence against women was also cited by interviewees as a “weapon of war” but researchers found that it continues beyond the context of armed conflict (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023: 28).

As the analysis above indicates, women are clearly vulnerable to sexual violence and crime outside of their homes, but vulnerability within home spaces, including domestic violence and rape, was also evident. Within Mogadishu, displaced populations, in particular divorced or widowed women living in displacement camps, were identified as the most vulnerable populations in the city’s analysis by the ACRC researchers. For example, in the district of Kahda, displaced residents are often from marginalised clans or ethnic groups and make up a significant proportion of the population. They live in ill-protected camps and shelters, where their status (ethnicity, gender and living without husbands) precludes them from protection from attack. Furthermore, their temporary structures, unlike the permanent brick structures of other residents, provide no protection. These displaced women are vulnerable to sexual assault from attackers but also from soldiers. Camp managers appear unable to provide protection, with victims, rather than perpetrators, often blamed. Local informal security provision requires payment (\$4 per month per household) covering the costs of surveillance teams, but female IDPs are unable to cover this cost (Chonka and TANA Copenhagen, 2023):

“For the neighbourhoods who pay the money, there are torches hovering all around and there is whistling, while the poor’s [settlements] are dark and invite attackers.”<sup>11</sup>

Women’s vulnerability within and outside the home is compounded by patriarchal social norms, which make the reporting of sexual violence very difficult. Stigma around sexual violence was evident across all cities, and commonly resulted in low rates of reporting and limited recourse to the law for girls and women. Within Freetown, the issue of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) persisted as a significant challenge for girls and women, compounded by the involvement of politicians in sponsoring FGM/C to secure votes around election times, particularly from poorer households who cannot afford to pay for such cultural practices. Families perceive such practices as fundamental to securing marriage, and challenges to this cultural norm are strongly resisted: “Politicians know that the day they outrightly try to ban FGM will be the day that they will lose our votes forever”.<sup>12</sup>

Sexual assault and domestic violence are also pervasive within Freetown, affecting young girls, as well as adult women. Reportage is very low, due to the shame associated with such violence, with a “culture of silence” identified in the city and country. Police resources to support cases are weak, although the government implemented legal revisions through the Amended Sexual Offences Act on 19

<sup>11</sup> Interview with female INGO worker living in Kadha, cited in Chonka and TANA Copenhagen (2023: 29-30).

<sup>12</sup> Female traditional leader cited in De Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 25).

September 2019. In Maiduguri, the lack of channels to report gendered violence is a barrier for female victims, exacerbated by the fact that perpetrators are often vigilante or security personnel (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023).

In Maiduguri, young men are frequently the victims of vigilante violence (see Adzande, 2023), and in Freetown, young men's vulnerability to gang violence was notable. As Fox and Beall (2016) note, violence carried out by vigilante or neighbourhood groups within African cities often has significant social impacts, and can operate brutally, including the assassination of drug dealers. These trends are invariably gendered. Across all cities, poorer and younger men were frequently at the forefront of violent activities, as victims as well as perpetrators. Their financial insecurity often resulted in their engagement in in/security labour to generate an income, often funded by wealthy or powerful male politicians or leaders and even terrorist groups like al-Shabaab, as was reported in Mogadishu.

### *Gender, agency and perpetration of insecurity*

Within Nairobi, the research team identified the invisible, emotional and gendered labour carried out by women within the city as they manage and navigate insecurity. Indeed, how one defines "responses to insecurity" either brought into view or obscured women's roles. In Freetown, the research team noted that violence between male gang members frequently resulted in financial costs for their families, including medical care and compensation for victims, with women often responsible for payments. Women's agency in relation to achieving security, enhancing safety and resolving tensions was often unseen, and women frequently had to rely on male protectors for their safety and for evaluating their allegations. Women of all ages in Maiduguri were commonly excluded from public discussions about security, and viewed as playing limited roles, whereas men, particularly younger men, were viewed as actively contributing to security in their communities:

"...men (ie, community leaders, youth leaders and younger men in general) tend to express a stronger sense of agency and also play a more active role in local security mobilisation than older men (or women)" (Madueke, 2023: 42).

Efforts to secure women's voices in decisionmaking are also challenging. In Lagos, for example, although 35-40% of political appointments should be reserved for women, ruling parties have failed to implement this initiative (Badiora, 2023: 40). The invisibility of women and their lack of voice exacerbated the failure to respond to sexual violence cases, as noted above.

Men were overwhelmingly cited as perpetrators of insecurity and violence across all cities, dominating formal security services, including the police, military and judiciary, with Nairobi strongly centring police as key perpetrators of violence. Masculinised informal security providers, vigilantes, area boys, land guards, hunters, insurgents, terrorist groups and gangs, and trade or working groups, including bikers and bajajists, (ie, drivers of auto-rickshaws) were cited as frequent perpetrators of insecurity and/or crime in cities such as Lagos, Maiduguri and Bukavu. Men use social media to

publicise their violence and power and to intimidate residents into cooperation, particularly in Mogadishu. For many men, the offer of stipendiary payments and official recognition (such as for informal security providers in Maiduguri) is central to their livelihoods and identity, linked to widespread unemployment, their urban marginalisation, displacement for many and histories of insurgency. In Bukavu, this connection is clearly identified, with rates of youth unemployment at 80% and “acts of insecurity” viewed as an easy way to ensure survival (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023: 18). The roles and power of adult men (politicians and the police, for example) as key axes of violence is a dominant theme across all cities but there are no simple categories defining perpetrators of violence, or indeed victims.

*Class and income: Insecurity, vulnerability and exclusion from decisionmaking*

Poverty (tied to employment status, ethnicity or clan, history of displacement, gender or age) directly exacerbates residents' vulnerability to insecurity, as noted above in relation to displaced women living in poorly constructed camps in Mogadishu. Within Nairobi, the research identified class as having a huge impact on security, with upper- and middle-class residents relating to security in very different ways to poor urban residents.

The poor were often seen by the rich as insecurity agents “always lurking (if only in their imaginations) just outside the gates of their questionably ‘secure’ compounds” (Glück and Kimari, 2023: 5). Poor residents were frequently harassed and violated by the police, whereas wealthier residents viewed the police as ineffectual but “actual agents” of potential safety. Within Nairobi, poverty is viewed as an important factor “in producing interlocking crises of insecurity for many residents and generates numerous cascading effects” (ibid) tied to food, education, infrastructure and risks of fire and flooding. In Bukavu, extreme poverty within rural and urban households often resulted in children being forced onto the streets. They then become the core focus of wider residents' intolerance, as they are cited as key sources of insecurity: “insecurity will not end in this city as long as we continue to tolerate street children”.<sup>13</sup>

Not only does poverty reduce one's ability to defend oneself, but it also frequently maps onto residents' authority and capacity to shape decisionmaking and influence change. In Maiduguri, the lack of inclusion of low-income residents in decisionmaking is cited as central to the various insecurity challenges in the city:

“Paradoxically, the sections most affected by insecurity are the least involved in discourses and decisions around safety and security. For example, the IDPs in Maiduguri were not adequately involved in the decision to close the IDP camps” (Madueke, 2023: 17).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a member of the Civil Society Coordination Office, cited in Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al. (2023: 28).

In this case, IDPs were resettled back to their original communities without an in-depth analysis of the security situation or recognition of their views. A similar failure to include them in decisions around rehabilitating former insurgents produced low approval of the scheme. These governance failings entrench urban inequality and undermine security efforts. Insecurity also shapes and entrenches poverty or financial insecurity. In Bukavu, one female trader noted it took her five years to recover financially from an armed robbery. Insecurity also impacts residents' abilities to work or secure an income (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023: 31). The safety and security domain research specifically focused on poor urban residents across all six cities; however, some engagement with the urban middle class was advanced. While the wider literature on the securitisation practices of elites and middle classes focuses on the production of fortified enclaves (see Caldeira, 2000) including within African cities (see Lemanski, 2006), this form of spatial seclusion as a response to urban violence and insecurity was not a dominant theme within this study. Residents detailed rather their micro-material practices of securing their individual properties within neighbourhood spaces, and more frequently employed security labour (vigilantes, for example) to provide the kind of security achieved by wealthy residents through high walls, gates and formal security personnel.

#### 4.4. Interconnectedness: Wider urban realities, city systems and domains

The above discussion has focused on the ways in which safety and security are experienced differently, emphasising a gendered and class analysis. "Youth-hood" and age can also be viewed as a key axis of difference, but in this report, it is addressed below as one of the domains which intersect in significant ways with the domain of safety and security. Across all of the cities, the need to understand the interconnectedness of safety and security concerns with factors legible through a cities-as-systems analysis (including the significance of networks and urban materialities, and specific core systems, including transport, law and order, education) and other ACRC domains was a continual theme. Some of these interconnections are explored elsewhere in this report, including how transport providers are implicated in causing insecurity. Not all systems emerged as significant, despite awareness of the tensions surrounding their provision and use (for example, access to water).

This crosscutting report focuses on only those key interconnections that emerged through the city reports. Thus, although this report does not discuss further interconnections with the health, wellbeing and nutrition domain explicitly, a dominant theme emerging across all cities is that urban spaces are frequently sites of trauma, an insight developed through recognition of lived experiences of insecurity. Consequently, mental health is noted to be impacted, with post-traumatic stress a reality (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023).

That cities display overwhelming extents of insecurity and violent crime is a dominant reality. These realities produce psychological impacts which persist over time: "The feeling of insecurity is a difficult wound to heal" (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023, 21). Methods used for violence reveal this: "Machetes, knives, scalpels, poisons,

expired drugs, proliferation of mob justice cases”<sup>14</sup> and more, including the lynching and burning of suspected perpetrators and an increase in kidnapping to extort money (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023).

“Maiduguri was the stronghold of insurgents and almost a decade later residents ... are still reeling in the trauma of that experience. But (now) .... residents are currently confronted with a surge in crime levels. Street gangs and criminal networks that engage in armed robbery, burglary, theft, rape, kidnapping and drug trafficking are rampant” (Madueke, 2023: 7-8).

The Bukavu team challenges the enthusiasm by which media agencies (which may be individuals or organisations) display and convey stories of violence and insecurity, noting the impact these often-exaggerated accounts have on residents’ fear. Yet, overall, all reports suggest that cities as sites of trauma underscore the need for awareness around the wellbeing challenges tied to insecurity and violence.

Here, we identify four key areas of interconnectedness with other ACRC urban development domains as significant for safety and security. Gender as a key axis of differentiation in an analysis of in/security in African cities has already been discussed, supporting the ACRC’s recognition of gender as a key crosscutting theme. The four areas of interconnectedness are: contexts of informality; the complete absence of, or presence of poor-quality infrastructure; land markets and urban insecurity; and the intersections between youthhood and insecurity (including impacts on and the role of education).

### *Safety and security in contexts of informality: Infrastructural challenges*

Although not all low-income areas are necessarily informal, there is a strong correlation between income levels and informality, with key issues being how properties are constructed, levels of density, accessibility of land, the fluidity of migration into and out of the community and poor-quality infrastructure. Our research found informal settlements across all cities to be particularly vulnerable to insecurity:

“The safety in this area is influenced by the material wealth of the people living here. Being that many of them are poor, they live vulnerably. They live in a house where the doors are not effective for keeping burglars or any other intruders away. To feel safe and secure, a change in their state of living is recommended, for instance, a good home with assured security from external intrusion.”<sup>15</sup>

Lack of street lighting was identified as a facilitator of urban crime in cities such as Lagos: “Thieves are bolder in and around these pitch-black environments as the police struggle to enforce law and order in the dark Lagos environment in the night” (Badiora, 2023: 23).

<sup>14</sup> Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., slide presentation at ACRC network meeting, Dar es Salaam, May 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Research diary from Huruma, Mathare – Nairobi, cited in Gluck and Kimari (2023).

In Maiduguri, low-income areas are key sites of insecurity but also identified as hotspots of criminality. Lack of affordability reduces residents' capacities to build high boundary fences and hire private security. Instead, residents negotiate their security with local vigilante groups and other informal security providers. The areas experience low government presence. Historically, the housing form of close-knit buildings and complex street layout was seen to advantage insurgents' abilities to embed themselves within communities. Accessibility for state security forces was undermined by the dilapidated condition of the streets and their limited familiarity with residential environments. More recently, residents are vulnerable to rapidly rising levels of gang violence, armed robbery and criminal networks, indicating that these are now perceived as far more urgent security issues than those potentially posed by Boko Haram insurgents invading the city again.

The establishment of criminal enclaves within low-income areas was identified as a key feature and factor in rising levels of crime. Enclaves were sites of drug use, drug trafficking and the focus of turf wars between rival gangs. They form bases from which criminal acts are enacted against local residents. Within Bukavu, the areas of Essence and Nkafu were described as criminogenic. Their vulnerability to crime was understood to be a result of their density, location and function (markets, ports and so on), meaning large crowds were drawn to the areas, proving attractive for criminals. Abandoned spaces and poor lighting shaped vulnerability. On the city's fringes, "anarchic" construction of housing on hilly land unsuitable for habitation created risks of landslides, and reduced mobility, due to dense construction.

Within Lagos, such criminal enclaves are similarly identified: "... poorly designed streets (eg, darkness in the night), uncompleted and abandoned buildings have become places where criminals can plan their operations, as well as store and distribute arms ..." (Badiora, 2023: 23). Caution over elite interpretations of "slum areas" as criminal hotspots is, however, needed, with poor urban residents and their locations frequently bearing the blame for society's ills. Nuanced understandings are necessary so that intra-urban differences across different areas are carefully understood and structural causes appropriately identified.

Areas of informal trading, including markets, are identified as at times supporting illegal trade and financial insecurity. Within Maiduguri, markets, including the cattle market, are used by insurgents to sustain the financial flows needed to fund insurgent practices. Sales from cattle rustling support the purchase of weaponry. Similarly, insurgent control over informal but commercial fishing in Lake Chad produces significant financial resources for insurgent groups, and places cities such as Maiduguri at the centre, as it forms a key distribution hub. The activities of informal transport providers (including *bajajists*) were noted above as a key source of insecurity across many African cities. Within Maiduguri, insurgents also used motorcycles to launch attacks. Efforts, however, to ban motorcyclists in this and other cities where authorities cannot distinguish between criminal and non-criminal drivers have significant impacts on local employment, particularly of young men.

### *Land markets and urban insecurity*

Land markets and their role in underpinning insecurity across many African cities emerged as a key interconnecting theme. The control of land is often enforced through (in)formal security arrangements, and is central to political claims in various cities:

“Lagos is currently a destination for Hausa-Fulani IDPs from northern Nigeria and Igbo migrants from the Eastern Nigeria ... it is not a question of simply providing a home for IDPs and business opportunities for the Igbo migrants, but also the tactical way to acquire land, gain some power and political relevance” (Badiora, 2023). In Mogadishu, disputes over centrally located land in areas where urban reconstruction is advancing has resulted in significant movement of formerly displaced rural squatters to the city’s edge, compounding their insecurity further. In Freetown, conflicts over land were viewed as a particular challenge for the small group of elite or middle-class residents, who were more likely to own or seek to own land. Over 70% of local court cases relate to land disputes (de Bruijne and Bangura, 2023: 27). Rising land grabbing, multiple sales, unclear inheritance systems and growing competition for land mean the employment of caretakers to secure land is common practice. Caretakers are often former combatants, and efforts to protect land can prove violent. Tensions are compounded by the use of land for patronage by politicians, as well as for their personal gain. A revised land law implemented in 2022 potentially provides opportunities for new norms around the politicisation of land and the use of violence. Similarly, in Bukavu, the research identified a rapid rise in conflicts over land in the city, tied to illicit sales and purchasing of plots, and the impacts of congested construction – resulting, for example, in neighbouring properties being damaged by water runoff, plots overlapping, and so on (Kaganda Mulume-Oderhwa et al., 2023). Forms of resolution vary according to class, with wealthier residents able to access legal routes.

Land is a critical resource and can also be used to support efforts to reduce the impacts of insecurity, while evidencing inequalities in historic ownership practices. Within Mogadishu, “humanitarian entrepreneurship” is evident as landowners (hailing from dominant land-owning clans) receive rents or payments (drawn from aid flows) to provide shelter and services to displaced residents (usually from minor clans) through the construction of displacement camps. This practice is, however, often mediated by gatekeepers, on whom displaced residents are dependent to maintain access to camps and the land. Where landowners seek to reclaim their land, evictions unfold, often violent. Displacement camps are highly vulnerable, with negligible tenure security and limited access to judicial mechanisms, including local elders (Chonka and TANA Copenhagen, 2023).

### *Safety and security and urban youth*

Youth and their role in crime and violence, as both perpetrators and victims, dominates most of the cities studied. The research identified street children as particularly

vulnerable, including to sexual abuse and being forced to sell drugs but also as a source of insecurity, particularly in the context of Bukavu. This duality is evident in Freetown, for example:

“29.5% of victims are children .... violence is an important commodity in political competition. This ensures a constant demand for violence where young people – with few prospects – are lured into ‘selling’ violence to those who need it, often in schemes that put gangs and providers on a retainer until they are no longer needed” (de Bruijne and Bangura, 2023: 5).

Children and youth involvement as perpetrators must thus be viewed in relation to high levels of unemployment and as a function of wider structural forces shaping African cities, and analyses must avoid “blaming” youth for high levels of insecurity. In Bukavu, youth engagement as security actors is underpinned by a desire for sociopolitical importance, in a context where they have limited influence in decisionmaking. Street children (known locally as “maibobo”) within Bukavu engage in pickpocketing at a local market in Nkafu and are labelled “two fingers” for their deft skills, as well as using slingshots to distract traders into leaving their sites, allowing theft of products. Street children are vulnerable to sexual, physical and emotional abuse, particularly at the hands of the police, but were dominant in narratives of Bukavu residents as a key source of insecurity.

Children’s education is often affected by civil war and terrorism, as well as everyday insecurity and crime. Within Maiduguri, ongoing insurgency has resulted in the death of teachers and damage to school infrastructure. When insurgency is severe, school closures are common. Despite state investment in new buildings, the large numbers of IDPs and ongoing closures mean schools face significant pressures on pupil numbers. Gang-related activity can spill over into school contexts too, proving disruptive. Within Freetown, intra- and inter-school violence was persistent, as well as violence across higher education colleges, particularly during student union elections. In other contexts, education (including secondary and higher qualifications) may be provided but may not yield employment, with this outcome fuelling engagement in crime, as noted in Bukavu. This discussion reveals that schools are key sites of urban in/security, and that while education is fundamental to supporting sustainable lives in African cities, failures to address other aspects of urban living, including work, mean the value of education in countering crime and violence can be undermined.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1. What have we learned?

The six city studies have revealed the complex and pervasive connection between political settlements and safety and security, illustrating the ways in which key political elite leadership and patterns of political contestation (violent and electoral), displacement and specific neighbourhood dynamics, for example, are implicated in security outcomes in cities. Historic and ongoing instability is fundamental in shaping

everyday insecurity, as seen in the contestation over political power in cities such as Freetown, Lagos and Mogadishu. We have learned that safety and security are temporally dynamic. It shifts in relation to political change, as new allegiances are sought and the strength or weakness of parties or individuals wanes. Political settlements are also fluid and scalar. Arrangements at the local scale (city governments, gang leadership and so on) frequently challenge or rub up against national legal and political-party frameworks. These points are elaborated below, in reflections on political settlements and safety and security.

Scalar tensions can sometimes erupt into overt forms of violence and repression at neighbourhood and city levels. The violent nature of policing was revealed to be a key weapon of the state in numerous cities. Informal security provision was pervasive (but complex), with contradictory impacts on residents' safety.

Insecurity also has a complex relationship with economic structural forces, with poverty both an outcome and cause of urban crime and engagement in insecurity labour, and wealth status critical in shaping capacities to protect oneself. The flow of money underpinned much risk of insecurity and (in)security work (that is, working to achieve both insecurity and security). Lack of economic funding for police equipment, salaries and training shaped widely held concerns about police incompetence, while cash payments to local security volunteers and actors were fundamental in maintaining their willingness to perform night watches. Class positions were thus critical, with poor urban residents repeatedly suffering at the hands of weak justice mechanisms, threats from the police, and vulnerability to criminal practices. Although the six city studies did not specifically research the urban elite or middle classes in any depth, the privatisation of security services, justice mechanisms and secure living arrangements were identified as significant across all urban spaces.

Resources (funding for police, training, infrastructure, including cars and defensive weapons), skills, types of crime and forms of violence, modes of intervention, strategies, institutional mandates and fears also change over time, depending on political pressures, and the capacity for residents to agitate for a change in governance or to secure local responses to their grievances. The presence of resources also can fuel insecurity. In Nairobi, the funding of police may exacerbate insecurity, and in Bukavu the rise in former military personnel as refugees from Rwanda means the city is flooded with small arms, worsening violence. Within a broader multi-scalar understanding of safety and security, we have learned that spatial distinctions are clearly evident, and determined by a mix of location, housing form, income level, ethnic identity, being displaced or not and political allegiance. Overall, it is poor urban residents who are the most vulnerable, with women experiencing vulnerability to sexual violence, while young men are often victims of violent assaults and murder as well as violence meted out by the state or "security personnel".

Interconnections between the safety and security domain were evident across most of ACRC's domains and crosscutting themes, although links with informality, youth, land and infrastructure were particularly powerful. Gender within the ACRC framework is a

crosscutting theme in its own right and was powerfully connected to experiences of urban in/security within African cities. In addition, we also identified class and at times ethnicity as significant axes of intersectionality, revealing its multidimensional nature.

The studies did not provide detailed information on reform coalitions in relation to safety and security, although they acknowledged the key role played by residents in African cities in maintaining safety and supporting each other at times of insecurity, as well as the need for more consistent engagement between the police and local communities. This finding must, however, be nuanced, given the extreme distrust of the police in many of the case study locations. More consistent engagement may indeed produce more consistent police abuse and harassment, which is not the desired outcome.

One example that did emerge came from Lagos security agencies' violence, human rights violations, and abuses, which led to the #ENDSARS protest in 2020. The protest, which also led to shooting by the security agencies, was the largest singular youth protest against the police in the history of Nigeria. To some of our respondents, this protest was a call for police and governance reforms;<sup>16</sup> ; and to expose long-delayed initiatives to enhance professionalism and oversight of Nigerian police.<sup>17</sup> Another respondent said that the protest, although it started with demands to end police brutality, later shifted to demands for institutionalising good governance, reforms, economic equality, jobs creation and better infrastructure and public goods and services. One of the protesters interviewed during our field work said, "All we (youth) wanted then was a new Nigeria, where we will have equality and the same opportunity as children of political elites and the wealthy."<sup>18</sup>

## 5.2. Contributions to theory

The safety and security reports contribute to the wider body of theory in varying ways.

First, the reports evidence the methodological, intellectual and policy significance of advancing an everyday insecurities approach. Moving beyond headline statistics or generalist overviews of insecurity, the reports challenged singular readings of violence within African cities. They highlighted the notion of co-produced safety and security provision as one approach to help identify the more mundane, everyday responses to unsafety in African cities, including caring practices and safety labour often carried out by "invisible" women. However, simplistic gendered categorisations of who steps up to undertake security labour, who perpetrates violence and sows insecurity, and how experiences of in/security unfold, must be avoided. This report has revealed complexities behind these trends and emphasises that analyses need to go beyond the obvious, to understand less visible impacts and efforts.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with people on streets (Lagos Island), September 2022, cited in Badiora (2023: 19).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with people on streets (Lagos Mainland), September 2022, cited in Badiora (2023: 19).

Scrutiny of informal provisions of security and their relationship with formal providers proved conceptually challenging, meaning deployment of terms such as “hybrid” to capture their convergences and divergences proved insufficient. An alternative framing of “plural” security providers was mooted, but the theoretical implications of this are as yet unresolved – the team sees this as a productive site for further academic debate and engagement.

The reports evidenced the importance of intersectionality throughout, supporting existing theoretical calls for such an approach. The studies adopted a strong focus on gender, through recognition of gender-based violence in all of the cities studied. We noted women’s vulnerability across multiple scales and at the hands of a diverse group of insecurity actors, as well as the challenges of poorly applied legal mechanisms and strong cultural norms which operated against their efforts to seek redress. The insecurity of young men, in particular, and the implications for gendered analysis of safety and security is a further theoretical contribution of the studies. It pushes analyses of state-sponsored and everyday insecurity to consider which bodies are the recipients of violence and how masculinities are drawn into employment as (in)security actors.

Power over other individuals and to command access to weaponry, resources and insecurity actors, was a strong but seldom conceptualised theme throughout the reports, linking directly to the political settlements analyses, as outlined above.

The research focus on violence and insecurity in cities illustrates the essence of physical and psychological power over residents and how this is tied to political leadership, ethnic identity, or financial clout. Not all perpetrators of violence were necessarily fundamentally powerful, but often they were funded and supported by, or were benefiting more powerful figures within their cities. This mix of politicians, police, business leaders, clan elders, gang commanders and government officials frequently hold the power “purse strings” and they use high unemployment and material deficiencies as the basis to mobilise those without power to promote and sustain their goals, whether political, economic – such as land grabs – or social.

### 5.3. The merits (or not) of domain-level analysis within the conceptual framework

We understand that the prime task of understanding safety and security within a political settlements approach has been to explore the interactions between specific political settlements broadly conceived, and the particular nature of safety and security, as perceived and experienced by local communities. In particular, identifying how, when and why particular settlements shape how policing and other forms of security function and how these impact on safety and security has been a core focus.

We believe that key determinants include: the evolving relationship between political settlements and security domains; and the role of “shadow state agents” and “spoilers”, who have complex relationships with the public institutions and politicians; this in turn

shapes the institutional arrangements, capacity, leadership and “political will” around safety and security.

The research has sought to understand the balance between a state’s “survival” activities and social expectations regarding security, including how political settlements and contests over resources affect the prioritisation and sequencing of security programmes.

Key determinants of the ways in which political settlements have an impact on safety and security included:

- The nature and evolution of the political settlement; how inclusive/exclusionary it has been and whether it has created a space to foster reforms in the security sector.
- The ways in which the political settlement shapes the state’s survival functions, including security, and whether these are in fact more influential/significant than other functions on the future capability and responsiveness of the public sector to security reforms. As outlined in this report, the multi-scale nature of political settlements – especially in competitive democracies, where different political parties control different levels of government – may increase the incentives for state and non-state forms of violent coercion to retain political power or undermine powerholders in other political parties.
- The dynamics of state–society relations (especially in terms of the security sector) and whether pressures for reform come from the top, the bottom, or a combination of both, means that the processes of such changes are shaped by factors linked with but also partly outside of formal politics, including the power of different non-state actors, formally mobilised or exercised through mediating institutions.
- The “rules of the game” and the degree to which formal rules are institutionalised and interact with informal rules and power structures (for example, political competition; distribution of power; parallel and competing security power structures capturing public and private resources). This process is never fixed or settled but may be sustained as much by informal social norms about political competition as by any government structures.

#### 5.4. Strategic/policy implications: The future of reform efforts and interventions

Safety and security challenges are the result of a range of dynamics that cannot be resolved at the level of policing or security forces, even if there are well designed and locally owned reforms that can be undertaken. In some cities, such as Lagos, providing better resourcing for the police was identified as desirable. However, given the complex interweaving of security services with powerful structures (such as politicians and business leaders) across cities and nations, investing in more state-sponsored security is unlikely to prove transformative or ultimately to enhance safety for the majority urban poor residents. For example, in Maiduguri, decisions about resettling IDPs failed to adequately engage IDPs and residents locally and have struggled to sustain legitimacy as a result.

Local vigilante groups and informal security providers do offer key safety responses across African cities, notwithstanding their implication in violence and insecurity themselves. Capturing the strength of their local knowledge, local legitimacy and local commitment is one potential area for expansion and upscaling. This intervention may also speak to efforts to enhance or strengthen community policing efforts and meaningful engagements between local police forces and community groups.

Policing and security forces are fundamentally the face of the state. And thus, compared with other ACRC domains, reforms or resolutions in the realm of safety and security are likely to prove very difficult, unless significant changes in political settlement are achieved. The Nairobi team concluded that the abolition of Kenya's police force was the only viable solution to overcome police brutality, corruption and preferential treatment of citizens. This solution is proposed in the Kenyan context, following a substantive critique of prior reform efforts in the country and their perceived failure.

The ways in which the political settlement sets out the relationships between the major power holders (this includes political actors, but also economic actors involved in land acquisition and ownership, for example) mean that reforms in the sector must include a wider array of actors in reducing the forms of violence or threats of violence that create and sustain insecurity and a lack of safety. This call for the inclusion of community groups in decisionmaking about safety and security emerges across all cities, as well as how to address different (more positive and more negative) vested interests.

The Freetown study concluded with insights into reform coalitions that have resonance with some of the findings in other cities. The study highlighted the wide range of actors in support of tackling community security, and saw some scope for creating momentum, as follows:

- Within the communities there is widespread support among the population, community leaders and those who in the past have been involved in institutions such as the Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPBs) and Community Service Volunteers (CSVs). These initiatives are also embraced by civil society organisations working in the field of peace and security (Campaign for Good Governance, WANEP,<sup>19</sup> Fambul Tok, SLANGO,<sup>20</sup> IGR<sup>21</sup>).
- At the level of the national government, there is strong buy-in from the main player, the Office of National Security. In a recent internal review with a limited set of donors and civil society organisations, the conclusion was reached that community security structures such as the LPPB should be revamped.
- At the political level, there is buy-in from the present regime, which has demonstrated a political interest in limiting both the influence of gangs (not considered to be fully aligned) and maintaining an impression of order.<sup>22</sup> The

<sup>19</sup> West African Network for Peacebuilding.

<sup>20</sup> Sierra Leone Association of Non-governmental Organisations.

<sup>21</sup> Institute of Governance Reform.

<sup>22</sup> Confidential interview with a donor, 2 August 2022, Freetown, cited in De Bruijne and Bangura (2023: 79).

impacts of the 10 August (2022) demonstrations might also provide an entry point for improving trust between the police and the communities.

## 6. Conclusions

In exploring the interactions between political settlements, city of systems and the domain of safety and security, the city-level research has helped to identify the incentives that motivate or constrain the willingness of different actors to engage in forms of violence as well as efforts to secure safety within African cities. Safety and security within urban contexts are intimately tied to wider political events, including national-level competition, civil wars or terrorist activities. These often originate far beyond the city boundaries, or arise out of international or regional instabilities, which set in train extensive migrations of residents, with the consequent establishment of IDP camps, placing pressure on urban systems to absorb refugees. Ongoing political instability or opposition (at national or municipal levels), and the heightened stakes around securing political domination, serve to fuel ongoing insecurity at the scale of the city. The political elites' hold on power is often tenuous, and efforts to maintain power take centre stage, often through the labour of informal security in conjunction with local police and military.

Following this, the studies have helped to identify the roles of the delivery of policing and security resources (including formal and informal) which may strengthen or undermine the urban social compact. We understand the social compact as a dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities. One reason why using a social compact framework in development has gained so much traction is because it speaks to critical development issues: the policy implementation gap,<sup>23</sup> the diagnostic of binding constraints to development, fragility and conflict, taxation and service delivery, and social protection. The 2017 World Development Report on *Governance and the Law*, for example, argues that “policies that should be effective in generating positive development outcomes, are often not adopted, are poorly implemented, or end up backfiring over time”, and that the radically uneven character of public policy formulation, implementation and enforcement is a matter of governance: namely, “the process through which state and non-state actors interact to design and implement policies within a given set of formal and informal rules that shape and are shaped by power” (World Bank, 2017). In other words, it boils down to the nature of the social compact.

The impacts of different models and approaches to policing and security provision, including formal policing agencies, militias and vigilantes, gangs and community-based mechanisms, represent the enormous breadth of approaches to reducing or often managing, rather than eliminating violence. The ways in which security resources are mobilised impact the local communities and the balance between short-term quick wins

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<sup>23</sup> The policy implementation gap according to the World Bank (2017), Bovill (2009) and Hudson et al. (2019) is the difference between the policies, legislation or laws that are adopted and what ends up being implemented on the ground. It is related to questions of political economy, capacity building and idiosyncratic mimicry.

(for example, for political visibility or for the capture and punishment of suspected criminals or the return of stolen items) and the longer-term institutionalisation of progressive governance structures and processes, which engender local trust and legitimacy, as well as responsiveness and accountability to citizens.

In all the cases, there were significant roles for a wide range of non-state actors and other vested interests in promoting or hindering security, representing the complex local and national political incentives and the incentives for security services at different levels of the state, and in different federal political and governance structures.

The divide between lower-income residents and the urban elite is reflected through divergent experiences of insecurity and security provision. Financial and political resources secure individualised responses, while poorer residents frequently bear the burden of insecurity and have limited capacity to seek protection. This recognition of differentiation was woven through all analyses, showing that an intersectional approach to understanding experiences of insecurity is fundamental. Gender and age were central markers of vulnerability, and women's extensive experiences of sexual violence within the home and in public spaces was a key feature of safety and insecurity in urban Africa. Looking forward, it is the impacts on and implications for African urban youth that are of key importance. Safety and security are fundamental to their lives in cities, providing for many male youths, in particular, an avenue for income generation through "security work", in a context of extensive unemployment and poverty. Labour in this context is often unsafe. Simultaneously, insecurity directly hampers the education prospects of youth, and frequently places children and young people at direct risk of harm or worse, including from police. Street children epitomise this in the extreme, but all youth need a coherent safety and security response that has legitimacy from the bottom up.

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