

The Kenya protests, widely known by hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024, are a series of ongoing decentralized mass protests in Kenya against tax increases, display of opulence by ministers and members of parliament, corruption and demand for accountability. Following the storming of the Kenyan Parliament, president William Ruto reportedly rejected the Bill on 28 June; signed into law the "Appropriations Bill 2024" to address the budget shortfall caused by the rejection. Nonetheless, protests escalated into riots on July 2, with demonstrators now demanding Ruto's resignation.

In May 2024, the proposed tax increases were heavily criticized by younger Kenyans especially concerned with the increase in taxes, and these younger Kenyans have "guided the protests". They initially mobilized online using social media platforms like X, TikTok and Instagram. Young activists circulated calls to action, translated the bill into several local languages, used the artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT to answer questions about the bill, and leaked the phone numbers of political leaders to allow protesters to spam them with SMS and WhatsApp messages.

Peaceful protests began on 18 June in Nairobi, leading to widely condemned arrests. On 18 June, the Kenyan Parliament amended the bill, removing some controversial clauses. However, the bill was nonetheless passed the next day, leading to nationwide protests and heavy clashes with security forces. On 25 June protesters stormed the Parliament buildings, leading to clashes with police that resulted in at least 22 deaths and numerous injuries.

To raise taxes, the finance bill proposed the following measures which would result in the rise of the cost of living:

- Introduction of an "Eco Levy" on all imported products that harm the environment such as sanitary towels, diapers, motorcycles, tires, plastic packaging and electronic equipment.
- Change of tax status of ordinary bread, transportation of sugarcane from farms to milling factories, locally assembled mobile phones, electric bikes, solar and lithium-ion batteries, and electric buses from tax-exempt to standard which would introduce a 16% VAT on the items.
- Change of how excise duty is calculated for alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and tobacco-based products to increase collection on those items. This could see the tax on alcoholic beverages and cigarettes increase by up to 40% or higher for more potent alcoholic beverages.
- Introduction of a 25% excise duty on vegetable and seed oils and 5% duty or KES 27,000 per tons on coal (whichever is higher).
- Increase of the Road Maintenance Levy from KES18 to KES25 per liter of fuel, which will raise the price of fuel even further.
- Increase of excise duty to 20% for financial services transactions, telephone and internet services, lottery, betting, gaming, and advertisements on the internet and social media.
- However, given that there are no cheaper or viable manufacturers for some of these essential products, some of the measures would result in a higher retail price driving up the cost of living.
- Introduction of a 2.5% motor vehicle tax with a minimum of KES 5,000 and a maximum of KES 100,000. This was later amended to remove the ceiling.

The number of casualties is unconfirmed although the current number exceeds 49. The ambiguity is due to the abductions, extrajudicial killings and tampering and withholding of evidence and information committed by the Kenya Police. However, injuries have been experienced by both protesters and police

officers with the former suffering injuries resulting from police's extreme rules of engagement towards protesters. Journalists and observers were among those injured. One police officer lost both forearms when a tear gas canister ignited after he delayed releasing it.

There have been numerous reports detailing arbitrary arrests unsanctioned by courts and abductions of key persons of interest by the various agencies of the Kenya National Police. These include the abduction of veteran journalist, Macharia Gaitho at the Karen police station.

Kenya's independent policing review body, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), launched a probe into the fatal police shooting of protesters with live ammunitions during the protests.

On 25 June, protestors stormed the Parliament in Nairobi after the law was approved. Nineteen people were shot dead by police. Three other people were also killed in other cities.

## **Celebrities**

Some internationally recognized celebrities and public figures such as have drawn attention to and supported the protests through tweets or other acts. For example, Jamaican dancehall artist, Konshens waved a flag and announced his support for the protests during his performance at the 2024 Summerjam festival in Germany.

Amidst the nationwide protests, "football Twitter," a soccer sub-culture on the X platform, simultaneously threw their support behind the protesting youths, rallying the world around Kenya by amplifying the use of hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024.

On 23 June, Ugandan opposition leader and activist Bobi Wine voiced, using X, his support for the protests. Encouraging the protesters, he said, "Power to you, the young people of Kenya. You are speaking up and your voices are being heard far beyond the Kenyan borders. We hope your leaders too are listening! We continue to stand in solidarity with you. Viva." Many other international celebrities have also shown their support for the protesters. They shared posters of demonstrations and other banners.

## **Human Rights Organizations**

On 25 June, Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres urged Kenya's police and security forces to "exercise restraint," stating that he was "deeply concerned over the reported violence that we've seen.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights condemned the flagrant abuses of basic human rights by actions committed by the government including abductions, arbitrary arrests, violence on unarmed protesters and journalists and criticized the premature deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces to support the operations of the Kenya Police.

Human rights groups such as Amnesty Kenya, Kenyan associations of content creators, lawyers, medical officers, human rights defenders, and twenty-seven international organizations have unanimously added their voices to the protests against the bill, calling for uninterrupted internet access during the nationwide protests. Earlier, rumours had spread that the Government of Kenya would shut down the internet during the scheduled protests to impede communication among the protesters.

The United States called for calm, and 13 other nations, including Canada, Germany, and Britain, expressed being "especially shocked" by the scenes outside parliament. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reportedly spoke with President Ruto to urge restraint.

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops condemned the killing of protesters who were killed on June 25 protests.

## Timeline of events

13<sup>th</sup> May to 18<sup>th</sup> June

The #RejectFinanceBill2024 movement commenced on TikTok before spreading to X, with the dissemination of the anti-tax campaign further facilitated by platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Initially, the movement began as a call to action for citizens to urge their members of parliament to vote against the bill by publicly sharing the phone numbers of various parliamentarians. When it became evident that this approach was ineffective, posters calling for a demonstration on Tuesday, 18 June 2024, began circulating on all social media platforms, encouraging widespread participation in protests against the bill. This culminated in the emergence of the hashtag #OccupyParliament.

18<sup>th</sup> June

The first day of protests saw hundreds of Kenyans take to the streets of the capital, Nairobi, to demonstrate against the bill. They urged members of parliament to vote against the bill in the passing of the 2nd reading held on Tuesday. In what was largely a peaceful protest, Kenyans, whose original intention was to sit outside the parliament buildings were thwarted by the police who lobbed tear gas canisters at them. Nairobi Police Commander Adamson Bungei stated that no group had been granted permission to protest. 210 people were arrested, and tear gas was used by police. Concerns about looting led to the temporary closure of multiple businesses. Despite these arrests, demonstrations and a planned sit-in outside parliament buildings continued. The Law Society of Kenya and human rights organizations in Nairobi and across the world condemned the violence of police against the protesters. Journalists were also assaulted in the protests, leading to condemnation from the Media Council of Kenya and several media outlets in Kenya. In spite of the violence, there were no deaths on either side on the first day of protests.

In response to the police violence, Kenyans took to social media platforms like X and publicly published personal information of the police officers captured in photos or videos committing violence against peaceful protesters. They published identification numbers, phone numbers and family details.

All arrested individuals were released the next day following lobbying from the Kenyan people, political leaders and human rights groups like Amnesty International.

20 June

The third day of protests preceded a House sitting for the second reading of the Finance Bill. Thousands of Kenyans in 19 of the country's 47 counties, including the capital Nairobi and the cities and towns of Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Meru, Lodwar, Kakamega, Kisii, Nakuru, Nyeri, Nanyuki, and Kilifi, took to the streets again to urge MPs to vote against the bill during the parliamentary sitting held that day.

The results of the parliamentary voting were 204 against 115, with the majority of MPs voting for the bill.

In the week that led to the introduction of the bill, disgruntled youths leaked the phone numbers of the involved parliamentarians and bombarded them with calls and texts. They expressed dissent and urged them to reject the bill.

In a graduation ceremony at Garissa University attended by President Ruto, people could be seen chanting "Reject Finance Bill 2024" as the presidential motorcade drove through the town.

Security forces were deployed to contain the protests, and in a bid to disperse the protesters, the police used water cannons and tear gas against them. There were also allegations of the use of live ammunition against the protesters. As a result, more than 200 people were injured, with 8 considered to be in critical condition and two dead, according to the Kenya Red Cross Society. One protester was reported dead after being shot by a law enforcement officer. Another protester, who was injured during the protests after a tear gas canister hit him.

In reaction to the killings of protesters, the youths declared "7 days of rage" and called for a national strike on 25 June to protest police brutality against fellow demonstrators.

22 June

Protesters were called to visit all its usual bars and clubs. It was announced that all music stopped at midnight, and chants of "Ruto must go!" and "Reject finance bill!" reverberated through the towns.

23 June

The Government of Kenya said President Ruto was ready for conversations with the protesters, saying that he was "proud of our young people." Nevertheless, protesters called for a nationwide strike on 25 June 2024 to further their demands.

Catholic youths in Nairobi's Archdiocese joined protests against calling it an "enemy" for its potential to overtax citizens and promote oppression. They appealed for prayers and public understanding of the bill's implications. Kenyan Catholic Bishops supported the youth, condemning the bill's punitive taxes and urging the government to address protesters' concerns thoughtfully and peacefully.

Kenyans in Dallas, led by the Roots Party leader, George Wajackoyah protested against the bill.

24 June

Hundreds of youths from Lamu County staged street protests against the bill. The protesters condemned the government for pushing what they termed as an "unrealistic agenda.

The Government of Kenya said it would allow the planned nationwide protest scheduled for 25 June. The Interior Security Cabinet Secretary, Kithure Kindiki, stated that those who wished to demonstrate could go ahead as long as the protests remained peaceful.

Rights groups called for uninterrupted Internet during protests.

25 June

## Main article: 2024 storming of the Kenyan Parliament

Protesters, numbering in thousands, managed to break through police barricades and entered the parliamentary complex. Amnesty International Kenya reported that police fired live rounds, injuring many protesters. In the chaos, a section of Parliament housing offices was set on fire, further escalating the situation. Heavy gunfire from police officers continued as they struggled to control the defiant crowd.

President Ruto later denounced the protests, calling them "treasonous." The Ministry of Defence stated that the military had been deployed to support the police.

26 June

In a press conference with news outlets, the president of the Kenya Medical Association, Simon Kigodu, said that at least 13 people had been killed, adding that he had never seen "such level of violence against unarmed people."

Deputy Azimio opposition leader Martha Karua termed the deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces unconstitutional. Hours later the chief Azimio opposition leader Raila Odinga said "The Constitution seems to have been suspended. We cannot allow that. The government has unleashed brute force on our country's children and more seems to be on the way. We cannot allow that," Instead he called on the government to consider dialogue with Kenyans opposed to the Finance Bill 2024.

The Law Society of Kenya sued Defence CS, Aden Duale, and the National Assembly over military deployment. It urged the court to suspend the decision to deploy the military pending a hearing and determination of the case. It also called upon the International Community to conduct an independent investigation on the security operations on the Githurai area the previous night.

In the evening the Kenya National Human Rights Commission said that at least 22 people were killed, and their Commission chairperson Roseline Odede told journalists that 300 others were injured and 50 people were arrested.

President Ruto addressed the nation, saying that he would not sign the 2024 Finance Bill, stating that, "the people have spoken." He added that it will be withdrawn and he had come to an agreement with the MPs of his party for that to be their collective position. Despite this, protestors said they will go ahead with a "One Million People March", with plans to "block roads leading to the capital," and calls to occupy the State House in Nairobi.

27 June

Events that occurred: Protests were held in cities across the country with demonstrators calling for Ruto's resignation. Seven people were shot by police in Homa Bay, The Communist Party of Kenya called for Ruto to resign and presented ten demands to the government, calling for a "total cessation of taxation on basic commodities such as food, healthcare, and education, and the complete rejection of the Finance Bill 2024".

28 June

Events that occurred: The High Court prohibited the National Police Service from using water cannons, tear gas, live ammunition, rubber bullets, and other crude weapons against protesters opposing the

Finance Bill 2024. The decision followed a petition by Saitabao Ole Kanchory, who argued that the police had been violating protesters' rights through arbitrary arrests and intimidation.

Following widespread protests, President Ruto rejected the Finance Bill and ordered a Sh346 billion budget cut. At the same time, he signed the "Appropriations Bill 2024" into law. These budget cuts affected national and county governments, including the executive, legislature, judiciary, and constitutional commissions. The National Treasury was directed to prepare supplementary estimates to reflect these reductions and restrict spending to essential services. Ruto emphasized that these measures were necessary to compensate for the revenue shortfall from the rejected Finance Bill.

29 June

Hundreds of protesters carried the casket of Benson Kamau, who was one of the protesters killed during the storming of Parliament.

1 July

Finance Minister Njuguna Ndung'u emphasized the government's commitment to reducing spending after withdrawing the proposed tax hikes.

Protesters rejected President Ruto's appeals for dialogue as their demands had escalated, including calls for his resignation. They announced fresh protests scheduled for July 2 to occupy Nairobi's Central Business District, sharing their plans on social media under the hashtag #OccupyCBDTuesday.

2 July

Clashes broke out in Nairobi between police and protesters demanding Ruto's resignation.[15] Protesters barricaded Waiyaki Way, the main road through Nairobi's center, and threw stones at police in the central business district, while police used tear gas on them. Protests also occurred in Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Nyeri. About 272 people were arrested on suspicion of looting during the protests.

5 July

Ruto addressed protesters on X at a forum hosted by influencer Osama Otero. He apologized for Otero's abduction by police during the protest as well as the "arrogance and show of opulence" by legislators and ministers from his party. He also pledged to act against "rogue" police officers who fired at unarmed civilians during the protests. President Ruto announced significant austerity measures following the protests. He eliminated budget provisions for the First and Second Ladies' offices, cut government renovation budgets by 50%, dissolved 47 state corporations, halted the hiring of chief administrative secretaries, and mandated the retirement of civil servants aged 60 and above. These steps aimed to address Kenya's high public debt, which stood at 68% of GDP.

7 July

Coinciding with the anniversary of the 1990 Saba Saba Day protests that led to the introduction of multiparty democracy in Kenya, a concert was held in Uhuru Park in Nairobi to commemorate those killed during the protests against the finance bill.

11 July

In a state briefing, president Ruto dissolved his cabinet, with the exception of deputy president Rigathi Gachagua and prime cabinet secretary and concurrent foreign minister Musalia Mudavadi.

12 July

Student protesters blocked a major highway in protest over the discovery of the remains of a protester who was killed and dumped in a quarry outside Nairobi. The demonstrators accused police of killing the victim after he posted a video of himself participating in the storming of the Kenyan parliament.

Japheth Koome Nchebere resigned as Inspector-general of Police amid the outcry over authorities' response to the protests. He was replaced by his deputy, Douglas Kanja.

16 July

Protests demanding Ruto's resignation were held in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Eldoret, leading to clashes with security forces. Protesters also blocked the Nairobi-Namanga highway and lit bonfires there. One person was killed, bringing the total number of deaths since the start of the protests to at least 50.

17 July

Police ordered an indefinite ban on protests in the center of Nairobi, citing public safety issues.

18 July

The High Court issued a "conservatory order" against the ban on protests in Nairobi imposed by police the previous day, citing violations on the right to assembly.

### **List of the People Abducted**

At least 32 people, including activists, medical workers and social media influencers, have been abducted or arbitrarily detained, according to interviews with human rights monitors and dozens of activists, including five who recounted being seized. Some spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retribution.

1. Billy Simani also known by his twitter name crazyNairobian with over 500000 followers was the first one to be abducted from his home in the middle of the night.
2. Shad khalif was also abducted in south C outside a club by rogue police officers using a prado and it was all recorded leading to the #Freeshad.
3. Kevin Monari known by his twitter Osama otero with a massive following on twitter was also abducted after pushing the hashtag #rutomustgo and also hosting X spaces to discuss and demand for accountability against the government.
4. Macharia Gaith was also abducted allegedly due to an article written against the government where the DCI say it was a case of mistaken identity.
5. **Gabriel Oguda** Vocal social media and political activist Gabriel Oguda was abducted on Tuesday 25th June hours to the Finance Bill demonstrations. In his last message before going offline, Oguda remarked that cops were at his gate. Despite him going offline, Oguda's X account continued posting rallying calls for Kenyans to turn up for the demonstrations.
6. Kasamuel McOure, Kenyan activist Kasamuel McOure went missing during the anti-government protests since he was so vocal about the punitive taxes that the government wanted to impose on the citizens.

7. Joshua Okayo, KSL student Joshua okayo was abducted for atleast 72hours by unknown people. According to Okayo he was abducted as he went to greet people who he thought were students at the KSL. Prior to the abduction he had received three phone calls asking him to leave wherever he was and go into hiding because some people were looking for him.
8. Alfred Keter Former Nandi Hills Member of Parliament Alfred Keter was on June 30th released hours after he was dramatically arrested in Kileleshwa, Nairobi. Law Society of Kenya President Faith Odhiambo led a group of lawyers to Kamukunji Police station to successfully seek his release.
9. Leslie Muturi, the son of Attorney General (AG) Justin Muturi (abducted on Saturday, June 22, 2024, released on Sunday).
10. Dr. Austin Omondi aka Ja Prado a doctor was also abducted on Sunday, June 22, 2024, released hours later.
11. George Towett Diano, a human rights activist and farmer in Trans-Nzoia County in the Rift Valley, President Ruto's stronghold, said that for weeks he had received anonymous calls urging him to stop protesting against the finance bill.

Other people kidnapped and abducted by rogue officers for peaceful protesting include John Frank Ngemi, Ray Mwangi, Nyerere Earnest, Kevin Munari, Harriet Nyongesa, and Zadock Machaveli, Drey Mwangi, TemperCR7, Harriet, Shad, Franje, Worldsmith, and Hilla<sup>254</sup>