

Demystifying policing 'hotspots'.

Just having entered the election homestretch, the discussions and conversations in the public space has taken a new focus and interest on a criminological area of study called 'hotspot'. Every media practitioner, including the general public during the many TV and radio call-ins that I have attended as the police spokesperson pose a pertinent question related to areas classified as 'hotspots': *what they are, what they mean and portend during pre, during and beyond elections, and what the mitigating plans are.*

Firstly, it seems there's no unified definition and understanding of what a hotspot is with regard to elections in the Kenyan context. The term seems to mean different things to different people and/or different interest groups. For example, from the police and law enforcement corner, the term 'hotspot' would be applied on a situation of high crime incident clustered in one limited geographic space. This is based on recorded police crime and incidents data. For NCIC, the application would be tilted more towards variables related to high volume political incidences or perceptions of bad mouthing with the potential of causing disharmony in communities, leading to crimes of violence. This is obtained from observable data than official records, hence assessments more than hard facts. Other actors such as the civil organizations may equally have their specific qualifications ascribed to their proprietary naming.

And this is where the problem lies.

When people hear the term "hotspot's" in our Kenyan political context, their antennas shoot up and expect only the worst. The message they get isn't what is communicated or intended by authorities. People's collective subconscious minds dig back into history and only remember our ugly past. And this is why choice of words at this time matters.

'Hotspotting' is a normal crime or incidence mapping strategy aimed at understanding the prevalence of crimes and disorders and how well to effectively and efficiently apply interventions by apportioning countermeasure resources. And these interventions are at two levels: crime prevention strategies and tactical crime responses.

Policing resources are ever meagre, and continue to shrink by the day and time. How to deploy such resources for optimum policing outcomes is the genius of any police manager. As such, hotspotting is more an internal managerial tool to aid economies of scales of effectiveness and efficiency than for public consumption. It can, to the contrary, only lead to miscommunication and create grief instead of hope, hence discourage voters.

With regards to the general elections, police, just as their other law enforcement partners have conducted mappings to inform timely interventions. Such mappings have been ongoing and mitigated in real-time through the whole-of-government security and law enforcement approach. This continuous vigilance of the political arena by law enforcement is what makes the space itself peaceful and secure since tensions and other public order challenges are promptly diffused. Therefore a hotspot isn't and doesn't remain constant. It changes in time and space in response

to solutions applied. A hotspot of yesterday, if attended to effectively, is a peace haven of today.

Let us therefore approach the elections with the promise and assurance of maximum peace and utmost security. Disproportionate deployment of resources in some areas more than others is not simply an act of response to hotspots per se, nor should it suggest as much, but merely a strategic deployment by police of meagre resources to meet desired objectives of peace and security across the length and breadth of an expansive Nation undergoing elections.

Therefore, a heavy presence of law enforcement personnel and hardware in certain areas is a good enough reason to celebrate and support. It is a testament of police preparation to serve and protect. More security implies and translate into more protection outputs than anarchy. It is only out of an abundance of caution to attend to unforeseen contingencies that such deployments are considered. NPS and partners therefore are and remain committed to secure the general elections through democratic policing ideals focused on respect to human rights than hard policing options.

Let's all be supportive.

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