



Security personnel cordon off a crime scene in Kampala in 2021. Analysts say heavy rainfall introduces unique security challenges, both immediate and long-term. PHOTO/FILE

Surge in crime explained: It never rains but it pours

Records show burglaries, motorcycle thefts, and street robberies rise sharply once the storms begin, often doubling compared to the dry months.

BY YAHUDU KITUNZI

As the rainy season sweeps across the country, crime statistics climb almost as steadily as the floodwaters. Records show burglaries, motorcycle thefts, and street robberies rise sharply once the storms begin, often doubling compared to the dry months.

For many households, the rainy season is no longer just about water and harvest—it has become a season of fear, where every storm carries not only thunder but the threat of crime.

Ms Sarah Aceng, a shopkeeper in Mbale City, recalls how thieves once broke into her kiosk during a storm.

"The rain was so heavy that no one could hear the lock being cut. By morning, half my stock was gone," she says.

What explains the spike?

Mr Grace Matsiko, the chairperson of the Uganda Private Security Association (TUPSA) and a security analyst, told *Weekend Monitor* that there is a clear pattern of crime spiking during rainy seasons as well as during power blackouts, usually occasioned by the deluge.

"Criminals take advantage of the rains at night because everyone shelters inside their homes, weakening neighbourhood watch. In case of alarms, neighbours often don't hear them over the rain, making rescue difficult. When it rains, the ability to detect intrusion in homes or business premises is compromised, and intruders are

often detected late," Mr Matsiko says.

He notes that the most common crimes during rainy nights include house break-ins, intrusions, muggings, robberies, thefts, assaults, and, in worst-case scenarios, rape and murder.

He adds that economic hardship is a major driver of crime, especially in urban settings.

"Lately, we have witnessed rising crimes in Kampala whenever it rains on busy streets and motorways like the Northern Bypass. Gangs of youths break into cars during traffic jams, snatch belongings, even headlamps and indicators, while security personnel take shelter from the rains, leaving unarmed traffic officers to manage the situation," he says.

Mr Asan Kasingye, Assistant Inspector General of Police (Rtd) and managing director of Tayari Security Company, concurs.

"During downpours, visibility is poor, and electricity often goes off. Wrong elements take advantage of this dark blanket caused by rain to commit crime. Residents cannot easily hear criminals breaking into their houses, and even if they raise an alarm, neighbours rarely hear panic calls over the sound of rain," Mr Kasingye says.

He adds that police patrols are limited during heavy rains, both motorised and on foot, which emboldens criminals. "This gives them confidence to act without fear of detection or arrest."

What can be done to mitigate the problem?

Now working in private security, Mr

Kasingye observes that guards often lack proper raincoats or sweaters, but hastens to add that technology can come in handy.

"People should install Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras, alarms, and other monitoring systems to prevent night intrusions, especially during rainy seasons. Most of these gadgets continue to function even when power goes off. The challenge is often lack of knowledge rather than economics," he says.

Former Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIGP) Julius Odwe says heavy rainfall introduces unique security challenges, both immediate and long-term.

Mr Odwe warns: "The peril of security due to rainfall is real, ranging from the failure of surveillance systems to broader threats to food security and societal stability."

He says the physical and technological threats include surveillance failure, as rain, wind, and lightning obstruct cameras and produce unusable footage.

"False alarms may occur when motion sensors are triggered by rain, leading to desensitisation. Infrastructure damage, such as power outages, can disable alarms and fences, while flooding destroys roads and equipment. Operational disruption arises when slippery surfaces, reduced visibility, and debris hinder patrols," Mr Odwe says.

The crime patterns of concern, Mr Odwe further reveals, are known to be four: crime totals, crime rate, crime wave, and crime trend.

Crime totals refer to the overall number of crimes committed in a particular area. Crime rate indicates how common a specific crime, or all crimes, is within that area.

Crime wave describes the timing of crimes, such as particular hours of the day, days of the week, months, or seasons when crimes are most frequent. Crime trends reflect the broader impact, including who the targets are, what methods offenders use, and what clues are left behind.

Crime pattern analysis is the systematic study of crime data to identify, analyse, and predict trends in offender behaviour, location, and timing.

As Odwe emphasises, "It enables law

CRIME DATA

Crime pattern analysis...

Common types of patterns include "series" (the same offender committing multiple crimes), "spree" (a high frequency of crimes in a short period), "hot spots" (location-specific concentrations of crime), and "hot targets" (specific property types repeatedly targeted).

enforcement to shift from reactive to proactive, allowing them to pinpoint hotspots, link related crimes, and deploy resources efficiently."

The purpose of crime pattern analysis is multifaceted. It identifies trends by detecting emerging patterns, such as a rise in car thefts in specific areas or during certain hours. It links incidents by connecting separate crimes through a common modus operandi. It highlights hotspots by using spatial mapping to find high-risk areas needing increased patrols. It supports offender profiling by analysing behavioural patterns to predict where and when offenders might strike next.

The police spokesperson, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Kituma Rusoke, explains that during rainfall, residents face challenges in hearing when breaks-in occur.

"Criminals often take advantage of this situation because victims cannot easily detect or hear them. When it is raining, it becomes a real challenge for someone to hear if a break-in is happening," Mr Rusoke notes, but adds that police officers remain on the ground to provide protection.

Is the spike in crime rate more nuanced?

The community faces systemic risks when rainfall is excessive or erratic. Food and resource insecurity emerge when crops are destroyed, driving up prices and creating scarcity. Some other effects are more subtle.

"Crime does not uniformly increase during the rainy season; rather, the relationship between rain and crime is nuanced, with certain types of crime increasing while others decrease. While warmer temperatures consistently lead to higher crime rates, heavy rainfall often acts as a deterrent for street crime but may increase crimes related to indoor activity or specific opportunistic theft," Mr Odwe says.

"Outdoor drug deals and street-level crime also decrease as both suspects and victims stay out of the weather. Law enforcement has observed that crime rates often rise immediately after a period of heavy rain, rather than during, as people venture out after being confined, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as 'cabin fever'," he adds.

Studies indicate a rise in assaults, robbery, domestic crime, and sexual offenses during flood disasters, while flooding disables cameras, alarms, and destroys infrastructure, leaving homes and businesses vulnerable. Relief efforts also face risks, as desperation for resources can lead to theft among affected residents.

"Economic hardships during the rainy season are a significant factor impacting livelihoods, particularly in developing regions, agriculture-dependent economies, and areas with poor infrastructure. Increased rainfall, while necessary for agriculture, often intensifies hardships through flooding, infrastructure damage, and supply chain disruptions," he says.

45m

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UboS), Uganda's 2024 population was 45.9m, giving a crime rate of 476 victims per 100,000 people. Theft remained the most prevalent crime as cases fluctuated from 55,704 in 2019, 41,950 in 2020, 43,583 in 2021, 61,508 in 2022, 65,901 in 2023, and 61,529 in 2024.