



Adaptive and Preparedness Strategies for Political Instability in Coastal Tourism Sector in Kenya: Evidence from Hotels, Tourism Suppliers and Local Communities in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi

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Abstract

Tourism is highly sensitive to political instability, which disrupts visitor flows, weakens business performance, and destabilizes employment systems, particularly in destinations dependent on international arrivals. Coastal Kenya has repeatedly experienced tourism shocks linked to election-related instability, yet empirical evidence on stakeholder coping mechanisms and preparedness strategies remains limited. This study examined strategies for coping with and preparing for political instability among hotels, tourism suppliers, and local communities in these destinations. It was guided by Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), which explains protective responses under perceived threat conditions, and the Tourism Social-Ecological Resilience Theory, which frames tourism systems as interconnected social and ecological networks that adapt to shocks through learning, flexibility, and institutional support. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was applied. Primary data were collected from 284 respondents drawn from 35 hotel managers, 29 tourism suppliers, and 220 local community participants through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings show that stakeholders primarily relied on market-driven and adaptive coping strategies. Marketing and aggressive promotion dominated responses among tourism suppliers (57.9%) and hotels (44.4%), while security enhancement was also



widely adopted (suppliers 15.8%; hotels 14.8%). To address revenue decline, stakeholders prioritized local marketing (33.3%), price reductions (22.2%), and operational cost control (14.8%). Employment management strategies included rotational employment (31.2%), multi-tasking (27.9%), temporary layoffs (18.3%), and salary reductions (15.4%). Qualitative data revealed that these measures helped sustain operations but often reduced worker welfare and household incomes. For future preparedness, respondents emphasized peace promotion (33.3% hotels), security improvement (29.6% hotels; 26.3% suppliers; 46.7% community), infrastructure development (20.0% community), and increased tourism funding (15.8% suppliers). Peace awareness campaigns (hotels 40.7%; suppliers 42.1%; community 33.3%) and mixed employment practices (33.3% hotels) emerged as key social cohesion interventions. However, perceptions of future instability remained high, with 33.3% of hotel managers and local community members anticipating renewed political disruption, while 50.0% of suppliers expected tourism decline during elections. The study concludes that tourism stakeholders largely depend on short-term adaptive coping mechanisms, while long-term resilience remains constrained by limited institutional preparedness and persistent political risk perceptions. Strengthening structured crisis management systems, social cohesion programs, and integrated governance frameworks is necessary to enhance tourism resilience in coastal Kenya.

Keywords: Political instability, Tourism Resilience, Coastal Kenya, Coping Strategies, Peacebuilding, Destination Security, Mombasa, Diani, Malindi

Introduction

Tourism serves as a critical engine of socio-economic development, employment creation, and foreign exchange earnings globally. In developing economies, the sector acts as a primary pillar of macroeconomic stability, fostering local entrepreneurship, infrastructure development, and community livelihoods. In Kenya, tourism stands as one of the largest sources of foreign exchange alongside agriculture and diaspora remittances. The industry represents a significant share of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and supports over 1.7 million formal and informal jobs, with its historical foundational roots tied intricately to wildlife safaris and beach-based leisure tourism along the Indian Ocean coastline (Juma, 2024; Region, 2008).

Despite its profound economic significance, the inherent competitiveness of the tourism industry is highly susceptible to external shocks, particularly security challenges, geopolitical risks, and domestic political instability. Inbound tourism demand is heavily dependent on international and local perceptions of safety, as tourists are naturally demotivated to visit destinations experiencing volatile political realities (Njoya et al., 2022). Politically motivated violent events, civil unrest, and subsequent negative travel advisories systematically disrupt travel patterns, reduce



visitor arrivals, and cause severe long-term contractions within a host country's broader economy (Neumayer, 2004; Njoya et al., 2022).

Kenya's political landscape has historically subjected its tourism sector to recurrent cyclical shocks, most notably seen during election cycles and subsequent periods of political contestation and localized security threats (Khanna, 2016). These vulnerabilities are disproportionately felt along the Kenyan coast, where tourism infrastructure is geographically concentrated and heavily reliant on international holidaymakers. When political instability occurs, international media reports trigger immediate declines in foreign arrivals, disproportionately devastating regional micro-economies like Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi (Khanna, 2016).

The impacts of these political disruptions are felt across a complex network of coastal stakeholders, ranging from large corporate entities to informal sector players. The hospitality sector, consisting of hotels and resorts, faces immediate room cancellations, plummeting occupancy rates, and significant financial overheads (Khanna, 2016). Simultaneously, tourism suppliers such as tour operators, local transport providers, and curio dealers experience immediate drops in micro-revenues and face severe asset underutilization (Kareithi, 2003; Rogerson, 2018). Most critically, the local community and vulnerable residents who depend on the tourism value chain for daily livelihoods face structural exclusion, job losses, and profound income insecurity during prolonged periods of unrest (Rogerson, 2018). While the vulnerability of tourism demand to political shocks is well-documented, the specific mechanisms through which coastal stakeholders absorb these crises remain theoretically and empirically underexplored. Research indicates that our understanding of the specific coping strategies utilized at organizational and community levels remains incomplete, particularly regarding how different nodes of the tourism ecosystem survive immediate political crises (Njoya et al., 2022). This structural knowledge gap limits the ability of policy frameworks to build sustainable, long-term industry resilience, often leaving stakeholders to navigate recurring shocks in isolation (Juma, 2024).

To address these empirical gaps, this study investigates the dual dimensions of crisis management reactive adaptation and proactive preparedness within three distinct hubs of Kenya's coastal tourism ecosystem. These hubs include Mombasa City, a bustling urban and commercial tourism center; Diani, a premier enclave beach resort destination; and Malindi, a cultural and heritage holiday hub. First, the study examines the immediate, short-term strategies undertaken by hotels, suppliers, and local communities to cope with the economic and operational shocks of political instability. Second, the paper evaluates the long-term preparedness mechanisms and institutional frameworks that must be established to safeguard these stakeholders against future political volatility.



Theoretical Review

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT)

Originally formulated by Rogers (1975) and later expanded in cognitive psychology, Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals and business organizations evaluate risks and choose specific coping mechanisms when faced with threats like political instability. PMT posits that when stakeholders are exposed to a crisis threat, they engage in two cognitive mediating processes such as threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal evaluates the perceived severity of the political instability (e.g., expected drop in hotel occupancy or loss of informal income) and the perceived vulnerability to that threat. Coping appraisal, on the other hand, evaluates the perceived efficacy of a response (whether a strategy will actually work) and self-efficacy (the stakeholder's internal capacity to carry out that strategy, such as a hotel's financial reserves to sustain staff or a tour operator's ability to pivot to local tourists).

In the context of this study, PMT was relevant for explaining the immediate, reactive coping strategies undertaken by hotels, suppliers, and communities in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi. When political unrest triggers cancellations and safety concerns, each stakeholder group performs a localized threat and coping appraisal. PMT thus helps the study map out how differing levels of threat perception and resource capacities dictate the specific, immediate strategies chosen by diverse coastal actors to protect their operations and livelihoods.

Tourism Social-Ecological Resilience Theory

Tourism Social-Ecological Resilience Theory rooted in Holling's (1973) systemic resilience work and adapted to tourism by scholars like Biggs et al. (2012) and Cochrane (2010) explains how complex destination ecosystems adapt, transform, and prepare for future shocks. This theory views a tourism destination not merely as a collection of commercial entities, but as an interconnected social-ecological system (SES) where ecosystems, business networks, institutional frameworks, and local human communities are inextricably linked. Resilience within this framework is defined as the capacity of the system to absorb political disturbances, reorganize its internal structures, and maintain core economic and social functions while undergoing change. It emphasizes moving away from static "bouncing back" to a pre-crisis state, advocating instead for "bouncing forward" through continuous learning, collaborative governance, and structural transformation.

This theory allows this study to analyze how institutional frameworks, public-private partnerships, and community-inclusive safety networks can be woven together to build regional resilience. It offers a framework to evaluate how the formal hospitality sector can collaborate with informal suppliers and local municipal



governance to create collective buffers such as localized crisis communication protocols, regional resilience funds, and diversified domestic tourism products.

Empirical Review

Impacts of Political Instability on Tourism Stakeholders

The empirical literature establishes that political instability acts as a direct, disruptive catalyst across global tourism networks, though its operational and financial shocks are distributed unevenly among destination stakeholders. Globally, the immediate fallout of socio-political crises manifests as sudden structural contractions within inbound tourism markets. Neumayer (2004) conducted a comprehensive cross-national analysis demonstrating that political violence systematically deters international travelers, causing immediate drops in visitor numbers that cross regional boundaries. Haddad (2015) focused on the corporate hospitality sector, showing that political unrest leads to severe capital and liquidity constraints, which directly impacts hotel asset values and forces immediate operational scaling down. From an organizational perspective, Krüger (2020) demonstrated that small-scale tourism providers face immense challenges during political upheavals due to their lack of financial buffers, which often forces them out of business. Similarly, Vu et al. (2022) established that political instability severely impacts local destination supply chains, leading to a breakdown in distribution networks and reducing economic returns for localized tourism businesses.

Drammeh (2025) examined how African tourism subsectors react to sudden political and market disruptions, proving that while large international resorts can absorb initial shocks, local workers bear the brunt through immediate job losses and reduced shifts. This pattern is further supported by Baum and Rogerson (2020), who noted that political crises across sub-Saharan Africa cause major drop-offs in informal tourism spending, directly hurting artisans, drivers, and food vendors. In Southern Africa, Ernest (2025) found that socio-political instability disrupts regional travel corridors, leading to low occupancy rates that stall broader community-based tourism projects. Furthermore, Rogerson (2018) showed that coastal African tourism hubs are highly vulnerable to negative safety perceptions, which leads to immediate financial distress for small-scale community suppliers who lack access to formal credit lines.

In Kenya, empirical studies focus heavily on the cyclical nature of election-induced unrest and its direct consequences for the coastal tourism strip. Khanna (2016) analyzed the effects of political shocks on Kenya's service industry, showing that hotels in coastal areas face immediate room cancellations and low occupancy rates, which completely disrupts seasonal financial planning. Kariru (2021) explored these operational realities further, demonstrating that drops in demand force Kenyan hoteliers to implement immediate staff furloughs and cost-cutting measures, which lowers service quality and impacts worker livelihoods. Beyond the



formal hotel sector, Kareithi (2003) documented the deep financial strain placed on informal operators in Mombasa and Malindi, noting that periods of instability lead to zero-income cycles for beach vendors, boat captains, and curio dealers. This micro-level vulnerability is reinforced by Pepela and Mutanda (2024), who showed that coastal households dependent on tourism experience severe income drops during periods of unrest, which compromises household food security and pushes families toward emergency borrowing.

Dynamics of Reactive Adaptation and Coping Strategies

When political instability occurs, tourism actors deploy various short-term, reactive coping mechanisms to handle immediate drops in revenue and operational disruptions. Globally, these adaptations are often driven by price management and market shifting. Haddad (2015) observed that major international hotel groups routinely use deep price discounting to maintain baseline occupancy during crises, though this approach often depresses local room rates for years. D'Souza (2024) explored how small-to-medium tourism firms handle sudden geopolitical shocks, finding that businesses cut operational hours, freeze hiring, and renegotiate short-term contracts to preserve cash flow. Neumayer (2004) also showed that global tour operators respond to political shocks by shifting their marketing focus away from sensitive international markets, trying to capture less risk-averse regional travelers. For informal actors, Vu et al. (2022) observed that global suppliers adopt defensive survival strategies, including temporarily leaving the tourism sector or selling off business assets to meet immediate household financial needs.

In Africa, reactive coping strategies are heavily shaped by a lack of institutional support, forcing stakeholders to rely on informal networks. Ernest (2025) highlighted that tourism firms across the SADC region handle sudden crises by adopting ad-hoc digital marketing platforms and pivoting to local business travel, though these shifts are often limited by inadequate regional infrastructure. Drammeh (2025) found that formal hotels across West Africa react to political crises by cutting labor costs and putting staff on unpaid leave, shifting the economic burden directly onto the local workforce. To survive these periods, Rogerson (2018) showed that informal suppliers in African coastal zones rely heavily on community-based savings groups and multi-income households to offset the loss of international tourist spending. Additionally, Baum and Rogerson (2020) demonstrated that community tourism operators across sub-Saharan Africa react to political disruptions by returning to subsistence agriculture or local trading, using these alternative activities as short-term safety nets.

In Kenya, reactive coping strategies along the coast reflect the distinct differences between formal resorts and informal community operators. Khanna (2016) showed that when international arrivals drop due to political tensions, large resorts in enclave areas like Diani pivot to target the domestic corporate and conference markets through discounted packages. Kariru (2021) confirmed that



Kenyan hotels adapt by converting empty guest rooms into temporary meeting spaces and altering their food and beverage operations to save on daily costs. However, these adjustments do little to protect informal coastal suppliers; Kareithi (2003) found that beach operators and curio dealers in Mombasa and Malindi cope by borrowing from high-interest informal lenders or selling their equipment, which harms their long-term recovery. This is supported by Pepela and Mutanda (2024), who showed that coastal tourism households rely on local micro-credit groups (*Chamas*) and extended family support to survive extended periods without tourism business. Furthermore, Chiawo et al. (2023) noted that a total lack of county-level emergency funding forces local tourism enterprises to rely on ad-hoc barter systems and informal agreements with suppliers just to stay afloat during a crisis.

Institutional Frameworks and Proactive Preparedness for Future Shocks

Moving from short-term survival to long-term readiness requires structured, institutional frameworks that build resilience before political shocks occur. Meyer (2025) used econometric models to show that destination resilience is strongest where governments institutionalize proactive risk management and encourage product diversification well before a crisis hits. Cheer and Lew (2017) expanded on this by proving that destinations with pre-funded crisis recovery frameworks and strong public-private partnerships (PPPs) recover significantly faster from political shocks than those relying on post-crisis state aid. Proactive risk communication is also vital as Slovic (1987) demonstrated that long-term investments in transparent, real-time communication systems help counter negative travel advisories and maintain international market confidence. Furthermore, Krüger (2020) established that global best practices require embedding local community leaders directly into municipal emergency planning to ensure coordinated responses during periods of civil unrest.

Ernest (2025) introduced a regional crisis management model for Africa, arguing that long-term resilience requires integrating digital risk tracking, regional marketing partnerships, and targeted capacity building for informal workers. Rogerson (2018) argued that for African destinations to resist socio-political shocks, policy frameworks must integrate local SMEs directly into the formal tourism value chain, reducing the vulnerability of the traditional enclave resort model. Fletcher et al. (2020) suggested that proactive readiness in African tourism zones requires creating state-backed resilience funds during peak seasons to support local communities when political cycles disrupt the market. Additionally, Seabra and Bhatt (2022) found that continuous stakeholder engagement and formalizing informal supply networks are essential steps for building destination trust and long-term security across emerging African economies.

In Kenya, building long-term preparedness requires clear policy coordination between national recovery strategies and the localized realities of the coastal counties. Chiawo et al. (2023) emphasized that future sustainability in



Kenya's tourism hotspots depends on joint interventions by national and county governments, particularly through creating formal funding pools for tourism SMMEs and community livelihood programs. Pepela and Mutanda (2024) recommended that coastal households form formalized cooperatives and adopt digital marketing tools, allowing local authorities to include them in county contingency plans. For the hospitality sector, Kariru (2021) argued that Kenyan hotels must move away from reactive crisis management and instead institutionalize formal business continuity plans and regular staff crisis training. From a security standpoint, Region (2008) showed that long-term safety along the coast requires a decentralized and well-resourced Tourist Police Unit (TPU) that works directly with local beach management units in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to as it allowed the concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data during a single phase of research. Quantitative data provided measurable, statistically generalizable trends regarding organizational coping mechanisms, while qualitative data captured nuanced, in-depth accounts of community vulnerabilities and institutional gaps. Integrating both approaches ensured that the empirical strengths of survey questionnaires counterbalanced the subjective depth of personal interviews and focus group discussions, yielding a robust framework for assessing destination resilience.

Study Site

The empirical investigation was carried out across three distinct and prominent tourism hubs within the coastal region of Kenya: Mombasa City, Diani, and Malindi. Mombasa City was selected to represent a heavily urbanized, commercial, and cruise-tourism hub characterized by high administrative density and infrastructural vulnerability to political protests. Diani, located in Kwale County, was chosen as a premier enclave beach resort destination heavily reliant on high-spending international holidaymakers and sensitive resort ecosystems. Malindi, situated in Kilifi County, provided an empirical site reflecting unique cultural, heritage, and residential tourism dynamics with historical European market dependencies. Together, these three locations offered a comprehensive geographical and structural cross-section of the diverse coastal tourism value chain.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprised the core institutional and social actors embedded within the coastal tourism ecosystem across Mombasa City, Diani, and Malindi. Specifically, the target population consisted of 117 registered tourist hotels, 97 tourist suppliers (including tour operators, local transport



providers, and curio dealers), and 21,985 local community members whose livelihoods were directly or indirectly linked to the tourism industry. In total, the aggregate target population for the study environment was established at 22,199 potential respondents, as determined through a comprehensive baseline audit of municipal records and local destination registries.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of 284 respondents was selected from the aggregate target population of 22,199 respondents. The operational parameters of the target population were validated through a primary pilot survey conducted by the researcher prior to the main data collection phase. To ensure statistical and contextual representation, sampling thresholds were determined using established methodological criteria (Neuman, 2000), which prescribed that for any stakeholder population below 1,000, a 30% sampling fraction formed the sample size; for populations above 1,000, a 10% fraction was applied; and for extensive community populations of 10,000 and above, a 1% sampling fraction was utilized.

Consequently, a multi-stage sampling approach combining probability and non-probability techniques was deployed across the strata. For the registered hotels, purposive sampling was used to select 35 hotel managers who possessed institutional authority and strategic oversight regarding crisis management. Simple random sampling was applied to the tourism suppliers to select 29 participants, ensuring every registered operator had an equal chance of inclusion. For the local community, purposive sampling was applied to select homogeneous segments of the population to participate in qualitative sessions. Following the guidelines of Kombo and Tromp (2006), which define a focus group as a cluster of 6 to 10 individuals sharing uniform socio-economic characteristics, the community sample size of 220 individuals was operationalized through 22 focus group discussions, with each group containing exactly 10 members.

Data Collection

Data was systematically gathered from both primary and secondary sources to ensure comprehensive empirical triangulation. Secondary information was obtained from published and unpublished institutional sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journals, verified internet databases, postgraduate theses, and sectoral economic reports. Primary data collection was executed concurrently using three distinct instruments: self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face personal interviews, and semi-structured focus group discussions. The self-administered questionnaires, containing both open-ended and closed-ended items, were deployed to capture quantitative organizational metrics. This flexible administration method ensured that participants could complete the forms at their convenience while allowing the researcher to provide clarifications when technical difficulties arose.



Personal interviews were specifically conducted with the sampled tourism suppliers. This face-to-face contact allowed the researcher to establish rapport, cross-examine initial answers, and gather rich information regarding micro-revenue losses and operational adaptations during periods of political unrest. Qualitative depth was further enhanced through focus group discussions conducted with the local community members. These interactive sessions allowed the researcher to capture collective attitudes, shared grievances, and localized coping patterns that standard quantitative metrics could not fully document.

Reliability and Validity

To guarantee the quality of the primary research instruments, both validity and reliability measures were strictly enforced. Face and content validity were established by submitting the draft questionnaires and interview guides to university supervisors and tourism management experts, whose feedback was used to refine the clarity, relevance, and formatting of the questions. The reliability of the quantitative questionnaire items was determined by conducting a pre-test among a pilot sample of hotel managers and suppliers outside the final study area. The pilot data was subjected to internal consistency testing, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (alpha) greater than 0.70, which confirmed that the scale items were stable and reliable for field deployment. For the qualitative data, trustworthiness and credibility were maintained through rigorous member-checking and source triangulation.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the field were analyzed using separate yet complementary analytical tracks. Quantitative data derived from the closed-ended sections of the questionnaires were coded, cleaned, and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, to summarize organizational coping trends. Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire sections, personal interviews, and focus group transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussions

Demographic and Operational Profiles of Hotels

This study profiled the participating establishments using three primary operational metrics: formal star-rating classification, years of continuous operation within the coastal ecosystem, and the core structural composition of their target clientele across Mombasa City, Diani, and Malindi. The findings are detailed in Table 1.



Table 1: Hotel Classification, Years of Operation, and Clientele Structure

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Hotel classification	1-star	2	7.4
	2-star	1	3.7
	3-star	8	29.6
	4-star	3	11.1
	5-star	2	7.4
	Cottages	2	7.4
	Budget	4	14.8
	No response	5	18.5
Years of operation	<5 years	6	22.2
	5–10 years	10	37.0
	11–15 years	2	7.4
	>15 years	9	33.3
Clientele type	Domestic tourists	3	11.1
	International tourists	2	7.4
	Both domestic & international	20	74.1
	No response	2	7.4

Strategies Undertaken to Cope with Political Instability in the Tourism Sector Coping Strategies Adopted by Tourism Suppliers and Hotels During Political Instability

The study sought to establish the strategies adopted by tourism suppliers and hotels to mitigate the effects of political instability on business operations. The findings are presented in Table 2. The findings revealed that marketing and publicity initiatives were the most commonly adopted coping strategies among both tourism suppliers and hotels during periods of political instability. Marketing was identified by 57.9% of tourism suppliers and 44.4% of hotel managers, while overseas publicity was reported by 31.6% of suppliers. These findings support the argument advanced by Neumayer (2004) that tourism stakeholders often respond to political shocks by redirecting promotional efforts toward less risk-sensitive markets in an attempt to sustain tourist flows. Similarly, Haddad (2015) observed that hospitality businesses frequently intensify marketing campaigns and offer incentives during periods of unrest to maintain occupancy levels and preserve cash flow. The prominence of marketing-oriented responses in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi demonstrates the dependence of coastal tourism enterprises on visitor demand and their attempts to counter negative destination perceptions associated with political instability. The findings also align with Khanna (2016), who reported that coastal hotels in Kenya



responded to declining international arrivals by targeting domestic and regional markets through aggressive promotional campaigns and discounted packages. Marketing therefore emerged not merely as a revenue-generation strategy but also as a destination image recovery mechanism.

Table 2: Strategies Undertaken to Cope with Political Instability by Tourism Suppliers and Hotels

Strategy	Tourism Suppliers f (%)	Hotels f (%)
Marketing/Aggressive marketing	11 (57.9)	12 (44.4)
Overseas publicity/Positive publicity	6 (31.6)	2 (7.4)
Security improvement	3 (15.8)	4 (14.8)
Debt collection control	2 (10.5)	-
Price control/Reduced charges	2 (10.5)	2 (7.4)
Layoffs/Temporary layoffs	2 (10.5)	5 (18.3)
Improve infrastructure	-	4 (14.8)
Local marketing	-	4 (14.8)
Reduce operational costs	-	1 (3.7)
Diversification of tourism products	-	1 (3.7)
Licensing of cottages and villas	-	1 (3.7)
Reduce power interruptions	-	1 (3.7)
Conduct elections during low tourism seasons	-	1 (3.7)

Qualitative interviews with tourism suppliers reinforced these findings. One supplier in Malindi stated:

"When visitors stopped coming, we increased our promotions and worked with travel agents to convince tourists that the situation was improving. We had no option but to market more aggressively."

Similarly, a hotel manager in Diani noted:

"Most hotels shifted their attention to local and regional clients because international bookings had almost disappeared."

Security enhancement emerged as another important coping strategy among suppliers (15.8%) and hotels (14.8%). This finding is consistent with Rogerson (2018), who found that safety perceptions significantly influence tourism demand in African coastal destinations. Political instability often creates uncertainty among travelers, making security interventions essential for restoring confidence. The finding also supports Region (2008), which emphasized the importance of strengthening tourist



security systems and collaboration between tourism operators and security agencies during periods of unrest. A hotel manager observed:

"Tourists were constantly asking about their safety. We had to increase visible security measures and reassure guests that the facilities remained safe."

The study further found that some businesses adopted cost-management measures, including debt collection controls, price reductions, layoffs, and reductions in operational costs. These findings are consistent with D'Souza (2024), who found that tourism enterprises experiencing political disruptions often reduce operational expenditures, freeze hiring, and renegotiate contracts to preserve liquidity. Similarly, Drammeh (2025) reported that hotels across Africa frequently transfer the economic burden of crises to workers through layoffs, reduced shifts, and salary adjustments. The adoption of layoffs and operational cost reductions in the present study therefore reflects common crisis-management practices within tourism-dependent economies.

Strategies Adopted to Address Reduced Income and Sales During Political Instability

The study examined the measures used to counter declining revenues and reduced sales resulting from political instability. As shown in Table 3,

Table 3: Strategies Adopted to Address Reduced Income and Sales During Political Instability

Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Local marketing	9	33.3
Reduced prices for domestic tourists	6	22.2
Reduced operational costs	4	14.8
Special packages for local tourists	3	11.1
Layoffs	2	7.4
No response	3	11.1
Total	27	100.0

The study established that local marketing (33.3%) was the most widely used strategy for addressing reduced income and declining sales margins. This finding reflects the growing importance of domestic tourism as a buffer against external shocks affecting international visitor arrivals. The result supports Khanna (2016), who found that coastal hotels in Kenya increasingly target domestic travelers during periods of political uncertainty because domestic tourists are generally less sensitive to negative international travel advisories. Similarly, Ernest (2025) reported that



tourism businesses across Africa often redirect their services toward local and regional markets when international demand weakens.

The reliance on domestic tourism also supports the destination resilience perspective advanced by Meyer (2025), who argued that diversified tourism markets reduce vulnerability to political shocks. Tourism destinations that depend heavily on international visitors face greater risks during periods of instability because foreign travelers are more likely to cancel or postpone trips in response to security concerns. Focus group discussions with local community members highlighted the significance of domestic tourism in sustaining livelihoods. Participants reported that local tourists continued visiting beaches and recreational facilities even when international arrivals declined sharply. One participant remarked:

"The local visitors helped many businesses survive because foreign tourists were no longer coming in large numbers."

The study also found that 22.2% of respondents reduced prices for domestic tourists, while 11.1% introduced special tourism packages. These findings are consistent with Haddad (2015), who noted that price discounting is one of the most common short-term responses adopted by hospitality businesses during crises. Price incentives help businesses maintain occupancy rates and generate minimum revenue streams, although prolonged discounting may reduce profitability.

Interview findings further demonstrated the importance of pricing strategies. One hotel manager explained:

"We reduced accommodation rates and created weekend packages for Kenyan families because that was the only market still available."

The adoption of reduced operational costs (14.8%) and layoffs (7.4%) also supports findings reported by D'Souza (2024) and Kariru (2021), who observed that tourism enterprises facing declining revenues often cut expenditures and adjust staffing levels to remain operational. Such measures, while necessary for business survival, may have negative consequences for employee welfare and service quality.

Community participants reported reduced incomes from curio sales, transport services, and beach-related activities. A focus group participant in Mombasa stated:

"When tourists stopped coming, many families lost their daily income. Some people had to borrow money while others shifted to small businesses just to survive."

This finding corroborates Pepela and Mutanda (2024), who found that tourism-dependent households often resort to borrowing and alternative livelihood activities when tourism income collapses.

Employment Management Strategies During Political Instability

Political instability often leads to reduced tourist arrivals and declining business revenues, forcing hotels to adopt various workforce management measures. Findings are presented in Table 4.



Table 4: Employment Management Strategies Adopted by Hotels During Political Instability

Strategy	Percent (%)
Rotational employment	31.2
Multi-tasking of employees	27.9
Temporary layoffs	18.3
Salary reductions	15.4
No intervention	7.2
Total	100.0

The findings revealed that rotational employment (31.2%) was the most commonly adopted workforce management strategy among hotels during periods of political instability, followed by employee multi-tasking (27.9%), temporary layoffs (18.3%), and salary reductions (15.4%). These results indicate that hotel managers attempted to balance organizational survival with employee retention by adopting flexible labor management approaches rather than relying solely on permanent retrenchments. Such strategies allowed hotels to reduce operational costs while maintaining a core workforce capable of supporting business recovery once tourist arrivals improved. The findings are consistent with Drammeh (2025), who found that hotels across African tourism destinations frequently adopt labor-flexibility measures during political crises to cope with declining revenues. According to the study, rotational work schedules and reduced working hours are commonly used because they spread the economic burden across employees while preserving organizational capacity. Similarly, Kariru (2021) reported that Kenyan coastal hotels experiencing reduced occupancy rates during periods of political uncertainty often resort to staff furloughs, shift reductions, and workforce restructuring as immediate survival mechanisms.

The prevalence of rotational employment in the present study also supports the observations of Baum and Rogerson (2020), who argued that tourism enterprises in developing economies frequently use flexible staffing arrangements during crises because labor costs constitute a substantial proportion of operational expenditures. Rotational systems enable businesses to continue operating with fewer financial obligations while preventing complete job losses. From a resilience perspective, such arrangements help organizations retain experienced personnel and reduce recruitment and training costs when market conditions improve.

Qualitative interviews with hotel managers provided further insights into the rationale behind rotational employment. One hotel manager in Diani explained:

"We could not afford to keep everyone working full-time because guest numbers had fallen sharply. Rotational schedules allowed employees to continue earning something while helping the hotel manage costs."

Another respondent from Malindi stated:



"Instead of terminating workers permanently, departments shared the available work so that every employee had a chance to remain employed."

These narratives illustrate the practical value of rotational employment as a compromise between organizational sustainability and employee welfare.

The finding that 27.9% of hotels adopted employee multi-tasking further reflects efforts to maximize labor productivity during periods of reduced demand. This result aligns with D'Souza (2024), who found that tourism businesses experiencing crisis-induced revenue declines often require employees to perform multiple roles to minimize staffing costs. Kariru (2021) similarly observed that hotels along the Kenyan coast increasingly redeployed workers across departments during downturns, allowing establishments to maintain service delivery with fewer staff members.

Qualitative evidence supported this pattern. One hotel manager noted:

"Employees had to learn additional duties. Reception staff assisted with reservations and customer service, while some food and beverage workers supported housekeeping operations."

Such adaptations enabled hotels to maintain operational efficiency despite reduced staffing levels.

The use of temporary layoffs (18.3%) and salary reductions (15.4%) further confirms findings reported in previous studies examining tourism crises. Drammeh (2025) found that African hospitality firms frequently transfer part of the financial burden of political instability to employees through unpaid leave, reduced shifts, and temporary retrenchments. Likewise, Haddad (2015) observed that declining occupancy rates often force hotels to implement workforce reductions and salary adjustments to maintain financial viability.

Interview participants acknowledged that these measures were difficult but often unavoidable. One manager explained:

"The drop in revenue made it impossible to maintain previous salary levels. We had to reduce wages temporarily to avoid closing completely."

Another respondent added:

"Some workers were sent home temporarily because there simply was not enough business to justify full staffing."

These findings demonstrate that while hotels attempted to preserve employment through rotational work and multi-tasking, financial pressures still compelled many establishments to implement more severe labor adjustment measures. The findings also resonate with Krüger (2020), who argued that tourism businesses lacking strong financial reserves are particularly vulnerable during political crises and frequently rely on workforce reductions as a short-term survival strategy. Smaller establishments often have limited capacity to absorb prolonged revenue losses, making labor adjustments one of the few available coping options.

Focus group discussions with community members revealed the broader social implications of these employment management strategies. Participants



reported that reduced working hours, temporary layoffs, and salary cuts affected household incomes and increased economic hardship. One participant observed:

“Many workers remained employed, but their earnings were reduced. Families struggled because the money coming home was no longer enough to meet daily needs.”

Another participant stated:

“Some people who lost tourism jobs moved into casual labor or small trading activities to support their families.”

These experiences support the findings of Pepela and Mutanda (2024), who showed that tourism-dependent households along the Kenyan coast experience significant livelihood disruptions during periods of political instability, often forcing family members to seek alternative income sources.

Mechanisms for Managing Future Political Instability and Sustaining Tourism *Proposed Mechanisms for Future Preparedness Against Political Instability*

The study sought stakeholder views on measures that could strengthen tourism resilience against future political instability. Findings in Table 5 show

Table 5: Proposed Mechanisms for Managing Future Political Instability and Sustaining Tourism

Mechanism	Hotels f (%)	Tourism Suppliers f (%)	Local Community f (%)
Security improvement	8 (29.6)	5 (26.3)	7 (46.7)
Aggressive marketing	1 (3.7)	3 (15.8)	2 (13.3)
Promote peace and avoid violence	9 (33.3)	-	-
Improve infrastructure	-	1 (5.3)	3 (20.0)
Tourism product diversification	-	1 (5.3)	-
Reduce tourism charges	-	-	4 (26.7)
Environmental cleanliness	-	-	3 (20.0)
Transparency and good governance	-	-	2 (13.3)
Encourage tourist-local interaction	-	-	2 (13.3)
Embrace technology	-	1 (5.3)	-
Conduct elections during low tourism seasons	3 (11.1)	-	-
Better tourism funding/budget allocation	-	3 (15.8)	2 (13.3)



The study found broad agreement among tourism stakeholders that peace promotion, security enhancement, marketing, infrastructure development, and improved governance are essential for strengthening tourism resilience against future political instability. Hotel managers identified promoting peace and preventing violence (33.3%) as the most important preparedness mechanism, while tourism suppliers and local community members prioritized security improvement, reported by 26.3% and 46.7% respectively. These findings suggest that stakeholders perceive political stability and destination security as fundamental prerequisites for sustainable tourism growth.

The prominence of peace promotion and violence prevention supports the destination resilience framework advanced by Meyer (2025), which emphasizes that long-term tourism sustainability depends on proactive risk management rather than reactive crisis responses. Similarly, Cheer and Lew (2017) argued that destinations recover more effectively from political shocks when they invest in preventive measures and stakeholder collaboration before crises occur. The findings therefore indicate that tourism stakeholders in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi recognize the importance of addressing the root causes of instability rather than focusing solely on post-crisis recovery.

A hotel manager in Mombasa stated:

"The best strategy is preventing violence from happening in the first place because tourism suffers immediately when instability occurs."

Another respondent remarked:

"Tourism can recover from many challenges, but political violence damages confidence very quickly."

Security improvement emerged as a major recommendation across all stakeholder groups. This finding supports Rogerson (2018), who found that perceptions of safety strongly influence travel decisions in African destinations. Similarly, Region (2008) argued that tourism competitiveness depends heavily on visible and effective security systems capable of protecting visitors and local communities. The strong emphasis placed on security in the current study reflects stakeholders' awareness that political instability damages destination image and reduces tourist confidence. Focus group participants repeatedly highlighted security concerns. One participant explained:

"Tourists need to feel safe before they decide to visit. Without security, even good marketing cannot attract visitors."

Infrastructure improvement emerged as another important preparedness strategy, particularly among local community respondents (20.0%). This result supports Ernest (2025), who found that resilient tourism destinations require strong transport, communication, and service infrastructure to withstand external shocks. Better infrastructure improves accessibility, facilitates emergency response, and strengthens destination competitiveness during both stable and unstable periods.



The recommendation for aggressive marketing among suppliers (15.8%) and community members (13.3%) is consistent with findings by Neumayer (2004) who noted that political instability often creates lasting reputational damage that must be addressed through sustained promotional efforts. Stakeholders recognized that rebuilding destination image after political unrest requires continuous engagement with domestic and international tourism markets.

One tourism supplier stated:

"After political problems, people abroad think the whole country is unsafe. Marketing helps communicate that tourism activities have returned to normal."

The study also found support for increased tourism funding and budget allocation. This finding aligns with Fletcher et al. (2020), who argued that tourism destinations should establish resilience funds during stable periods to support businesses and communities during crises. Similarly, Chiawo et al. (2023) emphasized the need for coordinated funding mechanisms involving both national and county governments to strengthen tourism resilience in Kenya.

Community respondents further highlighted transparency, accountability, and good governance as important preparedness measures. These findings support Seabra and Bhatt (2022), who found that stakeholder trust and effective governance structures enhance destination resilience and strengthen collective responses to crises. Political instability often emerges from governance challenges; consequently, improving transparency may help reduce tensions that threaten tourism development.

Focus group discussions strongly supported this argument. One participant observed:

"If leaders are transparent and fair, conflicts become less likely and tourism can grow without disruption."

Another participant added:

"Good governance creates confidence for investors, businesses, and tourists."

The recommendation to encourage interactions between tourists and local communities also aligns with Krüger (2020), who emphasized the importance of community inclusion in destination management and crisis preparedness. Strong relationships between tourism stakeholders and host communities foster social cohesion and reduce vulnerabilities during periods of uncertainty.

Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion Interventions for Preventing Political Instability

The study also examined interventions implemented by tourism stakeholders to promote unity and reduce the likelihood of future political instability as indicated in Table 6.



Table 6: Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion Interventions to Prevent Future Political Instability

Intervention	Hotels f (%)	Tourism Suppliers f (%)	Local Community f (%)
Peace awareness campaigns	11 (40.7)	8 (42.1)	5 (33.3)
Mixed employment/workforce diversity	9 (33.3)	-	-
Community-based tourism initiatives	-	5 (26.3)	-
Social clubs and interactions	4 (14.8)	-	1 (6.7)
Constitutional and policy reforms	-	3 (15.8)	-
Assistance to affected victims	-	-	3 (20.0)
Use of Kiswahili/common language at work	2 (7.4)	-	-
Regular meetings promoting peace	2 (7.4)	-	-
No response/No idea	8 (42.0)	-	3 (20.0)

The findings revealed that peace awareness campaigns were the most widely adopted intervention across all stakeholder groups, cited by 40.7% of hotel managers, 42.1% of tourism suppliers, and 33.3% of local community members. This demonstrates a shared recognition among tourism stakeholders that sustainable tourism development depends on peaceful coexistence and political stability. The findings support Krüger (2020), who argued that community participation and stakeholder engagement in peacebuilding initiatives are fundamental components of destination resilience. Similarly, Cheer and Lew (2017) observed that destinations characterized by strong social cohesion and collaborative stakeholder relationships recover more rapidly from crises than those marked by social fragmentation.

The prominence of peace campaigns also aligns with Meyer (2025), who emphasized that resilience-building should begin before crises occur through proactive interventions aimed at reducing social tensions and strengthening collective identity. Political instability often emerges from unresolved social divisions; therefore, efforts to promote peace awareness may reduce the likelihood of future conflict and protect tourism-dependent livelihoods.

Qualitative findings reinforced the importance of peace education. One hotel manager in Mombasa stated:

"We regularly encourage our employees and communities to maintain peace because even a small conflict can affect tourism and everyone's income."

Similarly, a tourism supplier explained:



"People have seen what political instability can do to tourism. That is why peace campaigns are important before every election period."

These sentiments suggest that stakeholders viewed peacebuilding not merely as a social responsibility but also as an economic necessity.

The study further found that hotels promoted mixed employment and workforce diversity (33.3%) as a mechanism for strengthening social cohesion. This finding supports Krüger (2020), who noted that inclusive workplace practices create opportunities for interaction among individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds, thereby reducing prejudice and fostering mutual understanding. In the Kenyan context, where political instability has historically been linked to ethnic divisions, mixed employment practices can contribute to social integration and reduce the likelihood of workplace tensions spilling into broader community conflicts.

Qualitative interviews highlighted the perceived value of workforce diversity. One hotel manager remarked:

"Our employees come from different communities. Working together every day helps them appreciate each other and reduces the stereotypes that often cause divisions."

This observation supports social cohesion theories, which suggest that sustained interpersonal interactions can strengthen trust and collective identity.

Tourism suppliers identified community-based tourism initiatives (26.3%) as another important intervention for promoting unity. This finding aligns with Rogerson (2018), who argued that community participation in tourism creates shared economic interests that encourage cooperation and reduce social conflict. Community-based tourism enables local residents from different backgrounds to work collectively toward common development goals, thereby strengthening social bonds and reducing vulnerability to political manipulation.

Focus group participants echoed this perspective. One participant noted:

"When people benefit together from tourism activities, they become less interested in conflicts that can destroy those opportunities."

This finding also supports Seabra and Bhatt (2022), who found that inclusive tourism governance structures contribute to destination stability and stakeholder trust.

The study also revealed support for constitutional and policy reforms among tourism suppliers (15.8%). This finding reflects an understanding that long-term political stability requires structural governance improvements. Seabra and Bhatt (2022) emphasized that transparent institutions, equitable policies, and accountable governance systems are critical for preventing social unrest and maintaining investor confidence. Similarly, Meyer (2025) argued that tourism resilience cannot be separated from broader governance reforms that address the root causes of political instability.

Within local communities, 20.0% of respondents reported providing support to victims affected by previous episodes of political instability. This finding reflects



efforts toward reconciliation and community healing. According to Krüger (2020), post-conflict recovery processes that address the needs of affected populations help rebuild trust and reduce the likelihood of recurring tensions. Such interventions are particularly important in tourism destinations where social stability directly influences visitor perceptions and economic performance.

Qualitative evidence demonstrated the significance of these support mechanisms.

One focus group participant explained:

"Some families lost property and livelihoods during previous conflicts. Helping them recover helps the community move forward together."

Another participant added:

"If people feel forgotten after a crisis, bitterness remains. Supporting victims promotes healing and unity."

The findings further revealed the use of social clubs, inter-community interactions, common workplace languages, and regular meetings as tools for promoting peaceful coexistence. These interventions align with Krüger (2020) argument that frequent interaction among diverse groups strengthens social capital and reduces divisions that may fuel political unrest. The use of Kiswahili as a common language in workplaces is particularly significant because it promotes communication and inclusion across ethnic boundaries.

Stakeholder Expectations Regarding Future Political Instability and Tourism Performance

The study further explored stakeholder perceptions regarding the likelihood of future political instability and its implications for tourism. Findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Stakeholder Expectations of Future Political Instability and Tourism Performance

Expected Outcome	Hotels (%)	Tourism Suppliers (%)	Local Community (%)
Political instability/violence likely	33.3	-	33.3
Fear and tourism decline	-	50.0	20.0
Tourism impact depends on election outcome	25.9	-	13.3
Peaceful environment expected	18.5	25.0	26.7
Business decline expected	-	16.7	-

The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of stakeholders remained concerned about the possibility of future political instability and its implications for tourism. Approximately one-third of hotel managers (33.3%) and local community members (33.3%) anticipated the likelihood of future political instability based on



previous electoral experiences, while 50.0% of tourism suppliers expected fear and a decline in tourism activity due to political uncertainty. These findings demonstrate that memories of past political disruptions continue to shape stakeholder perceptions and future expectations within Kenya's coastal tourism sector. The results support Neumayer (2004), who found that tourism stakeholders often remain highly sensitive to political risks long after instability has subsided because tourism demand is strongly influenced by perceptions of safety and uncertainty.

One hotel manager explained:

"Every election period creates anxiety because tourism has suffered before. People remember what happened and worry that it could happen again."

A tourism supplier similarly stated:

"Even rumors of instability affect bookings because tourists prefer destinations where they feel secure."

These findings support Rogerson (2018), who found that perceptions of insecurity can influence tourism performance even in the absence of actual violence. The finding that tourism suppliers were particularly concerned about fear and declining tourism demand aligns with Vu et al. (2022), who demonstrated that political instability disrupts tourism supply chains and creates uncertainty across local business networks. Tourism suppliers often experience the immediate consequences of reduced tourist arrivals because their incomes depend directly on visitor spending.

Focus group discussions revealed similar concerns among local residents.

One participant observed:

"When tourists become afraid to travel, everyone feels the impact because many families depend on tourism income."

Another respondent noted:

"Even before violence occurs, uncertainty causes cancellations and fewer visitors."

These observations reinforce findings reported by Baum and Rogerson (2020), who found that tourism-dependent communities are highly vulnerable to declines in visitor spending resulting from political uncertainty.

Despite these concerns, the study also found evidence of optimism regarding future political stability. Approximately 18.5% of hotel managers, 25.0% of tourism suppliers, and 26.7% of community members expected peaceful elections and minimal disruption to tourism activities. These findings suggest that stakeholders believe lessons learned from previous episodes of political instability may contribute to more peaceful political processes in the future.

The findings support the argument advanced by Cheer and Lew (2017) that destinations can strengthen resilience through learning and adaptation following previous crises. Stakeholders who have experienced the economic costs of instability may become more supportive of peacebuilding initiatives and preventive measures. Similarly, Meyer (2025) argued that crisis experiences often stimulate



investments in preparedness, coordination, and institutional learning, thereby reducing vulnerability to future shocks.

One community participant stated:

"People understand the consequences of instability better now. Many citizens want peaceful elections because they know how much tourism contributes to livelihoods."

Another hotel manager remarked:

"There is greater awareness today about the economic damage caused by political conflicts, and that may help prevent future problems."

The study also found that some respondents believed the impact of future elections would depend on election outcomes and post-election responses. This perspective reflects the uncertainty often associated with political transitions. According to Slovic (1987), perceptions of risk are influenced not only by actual threats but also by uncertainty surrounding future events. Consequently, tourism stakeholders may remain cautious even when significant preventive measures have been implemented.

Conclusion

The study shows that political instability strongly disrupts tourism operations in Mombasa, Diani, and Malindi through reduced arrivals, revenue losses, and employment insecurity. Hotels, tourism suppliers, and local communities respond mainly through marketing shifts, domestic tourism promotion, cost reduction, and flexible labour arrangements such as rotational work and multi-tasking. While these strategies support short-term survival, they do not remove structural vulnerability tied to insecurity and political uncertainty. Stakeholders also invest in peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts, including awareness campaigns, mixed employment, and community-based tourism, showing awareness that long-term tourism performance depends on stable social relations and effective governance. However, concerns about future instability remain, shaped by past electoral violence experiences, indicating that resilience in the coastal tourism sector still relies heavily on reactive rather than institutionalized preparedness systems.

Recommendations

Tourism authorities and county governments should strengthen coordinated security systems in all major coastal tourism zones, with clear rapid-response mechanisms during political events and election periods. National and county governments should institutionalize a dedicated tourism crisis preparedness fund to support hotels, suppliers, and informal operators during shocks. Destination managers should expand structured domestic tourism programs to stabilize demand during international downturns, supported by targeted pricing frameworks and localized marketing campaigns. Hotels and tourism enterprises should adopt



formal business continuity plans that include staff protection measures, training on crisis response, and clear workforce retention policies to reduce job losses during downturns. Stakeholders should deepen peacebuilding efforts through sustained community dialogue platforms, inclusive employment practices, and joint tourism-community initiatives that strengthen social cohesion. Government communication units should maintain continuous, transparent, and timely risk communication to protect destination image and counter negative travel advisories during periods of political tension.

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