

State Capacity and Counter-Terrorism Challenges in Kenya: A Case Study of Garissa County

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ABSTRACT

This article examines state capacity and counter- terrorism challenges in Kenya, with a particular focus on Garissa County, a region especially susceptible to cross- border terrorism due to its proximity to Somalia. Utilizing the Strategic Theory of Terrorism, the study conceptualizes terrorism as a rational and adaptable form of violence that exploits systemic vulnerabilities within state structures. The research employs a descriptive design, targeting 163,914 residents and selecting a sample of 399 respondents based on the Krejcie and Morgan formula. Data collection methods include questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, with analysis conducted through both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic qualitative analysis. The findings demonstrate that terrorist activities have a substantial negative impact on livelihoods, security, and socio- economic development in Garissa County. Key counter- terrorism challenges identified encompass porous borders facilitating militant movement and weapons trafficking, technological gaps constraining surveillance and intelligence capabilities, and inadequate law enforcement resources. Furthermore, the study indicates that media coverage may unintentionally advance terrorist objectives, while weak community cooperation and mistrust hinder effective intelligence sharing. Socio- economic factors, notably youth unemployment, significantly heighten vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment by groups such as Al- Shabaab. The study concludes that structural, operational, and socio- economic constraints reveal critical deficiencies in Kenya' s capacity to effectively combat terrorism. It recommends a multidimensional approach, including investment in intelligence- led policing, reinforcement of border security, enhanced community engagement, and targeted youth empowerment, as essential measures to strengthen counter- terrorism strategies and resilience in the affected regions.

Keywords: *State Capacity; Counter-Terrorism; Mitigation Challenges; Community Distrust; Community Engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism remains a significant global threat with extensive human rights, social, and economic consequences. From a victim's perspective, terrorism causes psychological trauma, social disruption, and breaches of fundamental freedoms depending on proximity, age, gender, and socio-political ties (Zalman, 2013). Beyond immediate impacts, terrorism also hampers national economies by redirecting development resources towards security measures.

According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD, 2020), deaths related to global terrorism have varied considerably over the past twenty years, with a high concentration in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Events such as the September 11th, 2001 attacks and other international incidents demonstrate the changing and transnational character of terrorism, which has also impacted African nations through weak state capacity, porous borders, and fragile security systems.

In Africa, particularly East Africa, terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have heightened insecurity, resulting in loss of life, displacement, and economic instability (Olanrewaju, 2019). Kenya has faced repeated terrorist attacks since 1975, including the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombing, which killed over 200 people, and the 2013 Westgate Mall assault, which caused more than 67 deaths from various nationalities, illustrating the country's vulnerability (Rhaman, 2016). Despite the establishment of counter-terrorism agencies like the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) and the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), terrorism continues to impose significant economic and social costs, such as reduced tourism, increased living expenses, and limited development (Zalman, 2013; UNDP, 2017).

Garissa County has become one of the most affected regions due to its proximity to Somalia and exposure to cross-border threats. The county has experienced frequent attacks, notably the 2015 Garissa University College attack, which caused significant loss of life and heightened insecurity (Mogire, Mkutu & Alusa, 2017). These attacks have led to school closures, economic decline, and ongoing fear among residents, undermining livelihoods and social cohesion (Momanyi, 2015).

Despite government efforts such as enhanced security operations, community policing, and youth-focused interventions, terrorism remains prevalent. This study is therefore premised on the need to examine the effects of terrorism, assess the government's challenges in mitigating it, and identify effective strategies to improve security and living conditions in Garissa County.

Research Objective

The objective of this article is to examine state capacity and counterterrorism challenges in Kenya, with a focus on Garissa County.

Significance of the study

This study offers the Government of Kenya insights into how state capacity affects counter-terrorism effectiveness. It shows that gaps in physical, personnel, and procedural security can weaken responses to threats like those from Al-Shabaab. The research recommends strengthening border infrastructure, improving training and welfare for security personnel, and enhancing policy coordination. These measures are intended to improve security and increase residents' sense of safety in regions such as Garissa County. The findings should also help build public trust in government institutions, supporting social cohesion and economic stability. This information is especially relevant for security agencies, including the National Police Service, as it clarifies state capacity challenges and proposes practical strategies to improve enforcement and security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Terrorism poses complex and ongoing challenges to state capacity due to its evolving nature, transnational characteristics, and high operational costs. Historically, Kenya's counter-terrorism efforts have been influenced by geopolitical factors such as Somali irredentism, where the push for a "Greater Somalia" complicated issues related to national security and territorial integrity (Luengo-Cabrera & Pauwels, 2016).

At the global level, weak enforcement mechanisms further weaken counter-terrorism efforts, as international bodies such as the United Nations lack sufficient political authority to enforce compliance among sovereign states, especially in regulating arms proliferation (Lind et al., 2015). These structural limitations continue to hinder effective responses to terrorism. At the operational level, community cooperation remains vital but challenging. While security agencies have increasingly involved religious and local institutions to improve intelligence

gathering, mistrust, fear of victimisation, and weak information-sharing mechanisms hinder effective collaboration (Cherney & Hartley, 2017).

Intelligence failures, such as missed warnings or desensitisation to repeated alerts, further weaken prevention efforts. Additionally, evidence from contexts like Nigeria shows that heavy reliance on military interventions can cause civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure, thereby worsening insecurity and eroding public trust (Ramdeen, 2017). This highlights the need for balanced approaches that integrate security operations with non-military strategies.

In Kenya, socio-economic factors, especially youth unemployment, continue to drive radicalisation and recruitment into extremist groups like Al-Shabaab. Studies show that economic motivations and social vulnerabilities make young people vulnerable to extremist influence, exposing gaps in government intervention strategies (Kariuki, 2019). Although initiatives such as youth empowerment programmes have been proposed, limited attention to broader governance challenges restricts their effectiveness. Collectively, these structural, operational, and socio-economic barriers highlight the limitations of existing counter-terrorism strategies and emphasise the need for more integrated, multi-dimensional approaches.

This article is based on the strategic theory of terrorism by Neumann and Smith (2007). The theory sees terrorism as a rational, adaptable, and goal-driven form of organised violence. It suggests that terrorist groups carefully choose targets, tactics, and timing depending on political circumstances, opportunities, and expected results, aiming to maximise impact while reducing their vulnerabilities. Terrorism is therefore seen as a means to an end, where violence such as bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians and institutions is deliberately employed to cause fear, disrupt socio-economic systems, and sway political outcomes (Martin & Weinberg, 2016). In this context, regions like Garissa County become strategic targets due to their geopolitical vulnerability, especially concerning the operations of Al-Shabaab.

The theory closely aligns with existing literature on counter-terrorism challenges, which highlights how terrorist adaptability and strategic calculation undermine government efforts. For instance, structural weaknesses such as porous borders and weak international enforcement mechanisms (Luengo-Cabrera & Pauwels, 2016), as well as operational challenges including intelligence gaps, community mistrust, and ineffective coordination (Cherney & Hartley, 2017), create opportunities that terrorist groups exploit. Additionally, socio-economic factors such as youth unemployment and marginalisation further boost recruitment and radicalisation, reinforcing findings by Kariuki (2019). These dynamics show that terrorism continues not only because of its strategic aspects but also due to systemic vulnerabilities within state institutions.

Furthermore, the theory explains why government counter-terrorism strategies often yield limited success. As noted by the National Commission on Terrorism (2015) and Wood (2010), poorly coordinated or reactive interventions, including overreliance on military approaches, can produce unintended consequences such as civilian harm, increased radicalisation, and erosion of public trust.

Terrorists also exploit timing and changing technological and social developments to increase their influence. Therefore, the Strategic Theory of Terrorism offers a helpful framework for understanding both the ongoing impacts of terrorism on communities and the capacity challenges faced by governments, highlighting the importance of adaptable, intelligence-led, and context-specific counter-terrorism strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Target Population

The research used a descriptive research design. A descriptive design explains the relationship between independent and dependent variables and offers a detailed account of these variables relevant to the study's hypotheses. According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), a descriptive design is suitable if the study aims to identify characteristics, correlations, and relationships between variables. The research explored how and who is affected by terrorist acts and the extent of their impact on the livelihoods of people in Garissa County.

The study was conducted in Garissa County, situated at a latitude of -0.45280 S and a longitude of 39.6460 E. It is part of Africa and the Southern Hemisphere. Garissa County is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Somalis. The study specifically focused on residents near Garissa University, where terrorist attacks took place. Due to its geographical location, the county is close to Somalia, which is a known source of terrorism (al-Shabaab), making the county relevant for this study.

The target population for this research includes residents and the general public, local chiefs, and police who live near Garissa University College. In this regard, 163,914 residents in the Garissa area are the target population for the survey.

Table 1 Target Population

Population Category	Population	Percentage
Chiefs	96	<1%
Police	317	<1%
Residents	163,501	99.8%
Total	163,914	

Source: Author (2021).

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The research employed random sampling to select residents near Garissa University who agreed to participate in the study. Similarly, purposive sampling was used to select the main informants interviewed for qualitative information: police chiefs and police commanders. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula is commonly used in research to estimate sample size. In this study, the Krejcie and Morgan formula was used to determine the sample size from the primary data.

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 (1-P)} \dots \dots \dots \text{Equation (3.1)}$$

Where S is the ideal sample size, X² is the table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the ideal confidence level, which is 1.96 x 1.96 = 3.841. N is the population size, P is the assumed population proportion of 0.5 to obtain the maximum sample size, and d is the level of precision expressed as a proportion of 0.05.

The population size for this study is 163,914. The sample size S is, therefore:

$$S = (3.8416 \times 163914 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)) / ((0.05)^2 \times (163914 - 1) + 3.8416 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)) = 399 \text{ Respondents}$$

Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis

The survey employed questionnaires, interview schedules, and focus group discussions. The research tools generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, as

well as inferential statistics like correlation and regression analysis. Descriptive statistics offer simple summaries of the population sample and the measures used, making it easier to interpret the key information (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2014).

The analysed data were displayed through frequency tables and charts. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were coded, and information with similar meanings was classified into themes. The researcher organised the responses into categories of recurring themes and patterns and presented them in narratives. This information was used to provide insights regarding the study's objective.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section reports the response rate and provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study, while the findings and corroborations are presented in line with the article's objective.

Response Rate

The study targeted residents and members of the public near Garissa University College, as well as chiefs and the national police in the region. This is because they possess first-hand information on the impacts of terrorism on their livelihoods. A total of 399 questionnaires were distributed, representing the sample size of the study. As shown in Table 1 below, 298 questionnaires were completed and returned.

Table 4.1 Response Rate

Response Rate	Frequency	Percent
No of Questionnaires distributed	399	100%
Questionnaires retrieved	298	74.7%
Questionnaires not collected	101	25.3%

Source: Survey Data.

There were 298 questionnaires filled out and returned, accounting for 74.7% of the total number distributed. As per Carvajal and Hardigan (2016), a return rate over 60% is sufficient for analysis. Additionally, four chiefs and five OCS participated in scheduled one-on-one interviews, while two youth groups, two women's groups, and a group of police officers in three police stations took part in focus group discussions.

This is because, in matters of security, security personnel are more informed and possess the relevant information needed to achieve the objectives of this study. Additionally, youth and women groups were also consulted, as they hold crucial insights into security perspectives and perceptions within the community regarding the implications of terrorism.

Demographic Information

This section outlines the characteristics of the study participants, such as gender, education level, age, place of residence, religion, and community role, to raise awareness about the participants and assess whether they reflect a sample of the target population for generalisation purposes.

Participants Gender

The participants were asked to specify their gender, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 5.3. Gender Distribution

	Frequency	Percent
Male	140	32.1
Female	259	64.9
Total	399	100

Source: Survey Data

As shown in Table 3, female participants dominated the study with 259 individuals (64.9%), compared to male participants, who numbered 140 (32.1%). All participants answered this question. However, the table suggests that both genders were well represented and contributed to the study's findings on the impact of terrorism on the livelihoods of residents in Garissa County. This indicates that terrorists do not discriminate based on gender during attacks.

Participants' Level of Education

The second question on the questionnaire queried the participants' level of education. The question examined the distribution of educational levels, and the results are displayed in Table 5

Table 5.2 Participants' Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	College	28	6.9
	Secondary	178	44.6
	Other	192	48.1
	Total	398	99.6
Missing	System	1	0.4
Total		399	100.0

Source: Survey Data

Table 4 shows that most participants selected the other option for their level of education (192), which is 48.1%. The other option could suggest that they were either at primary or university level. Additionally, a significant number of participants had completed secondary school education, numbering 178 (44.6%), while only 28 (6.9%) had college-level education.

The results suggest that most participants understood the issues of terrorism and its effects on their livelihoods, such as redundancies and economic crises, making them suitable to participate and respond to the study questions. This aligns with Gatimu (2014), who found that the majority of his study participants were casual workers with a secondary school level of education.

Age of the Participants

The third question in the demographic section of the questionnaire concerned the participants' age brackets. Table 5 displays the age distribution of the participants.

Table 5.3 Participants Age Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	21 to 30 years	90	22.66
	31 to 40 years	72	18.04
	40 to 50 years	232	58.1
	Total	399	100.0
Missing	System	5	1.2
Total		399	100.0

Source: Data Survey

As shown in Table 5, most participants were aged between 40 and 50 years, accounting for 232 (58.1%), followed by those in the 21 to 30 years age group, comprising 90 (22.66%). No participants were above 50 years old, and five did not disclose their age. The results indicate that individuals aged 21 to 50 years were well represented in the study. According to Iyekekpola (2017) and Kirui (2019), the even distribution of participants' ages demonstrates that everyone can be affected by acts of terrorism. This is supported by the situation in Garissa County, where both the youth and the elderly are vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

Participants Residence

The survey aimed to verify whether the participants were actually residents of Garissa County to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, and the results are shown in Figure 1 below.

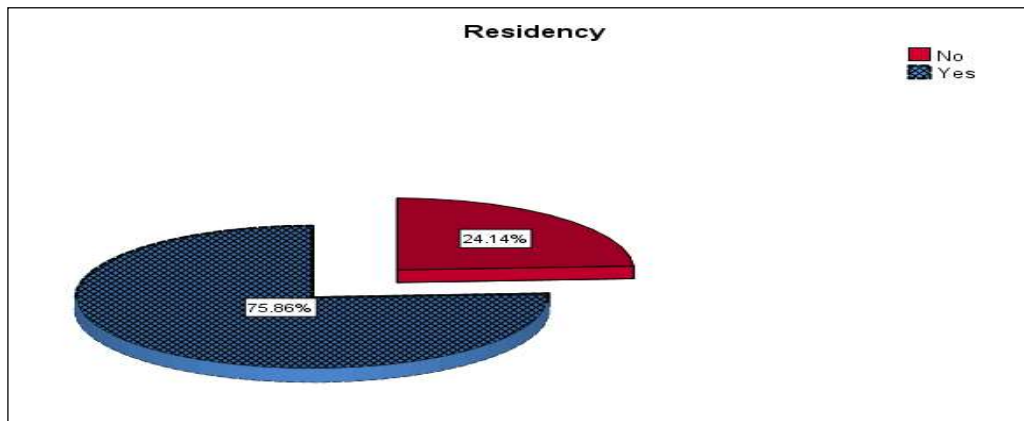


Figure 5.1.6 Participants Residence

The results shown in Figure 1 above indicate that 75.86% of the participants were residents and citizens of Garissa County, while 24.14% stated they were not permanent residents. This suggests that a larger proportion has an understanding of Garissa County in terms of the implications of terrorism and how it affects their living standards and way of life.

Participants Religion

The study aimed to determine the religion of the participants, which was significant due to the perceived link between the Muslim faith and terror attacks. The results are displayed in Figure 2 below.

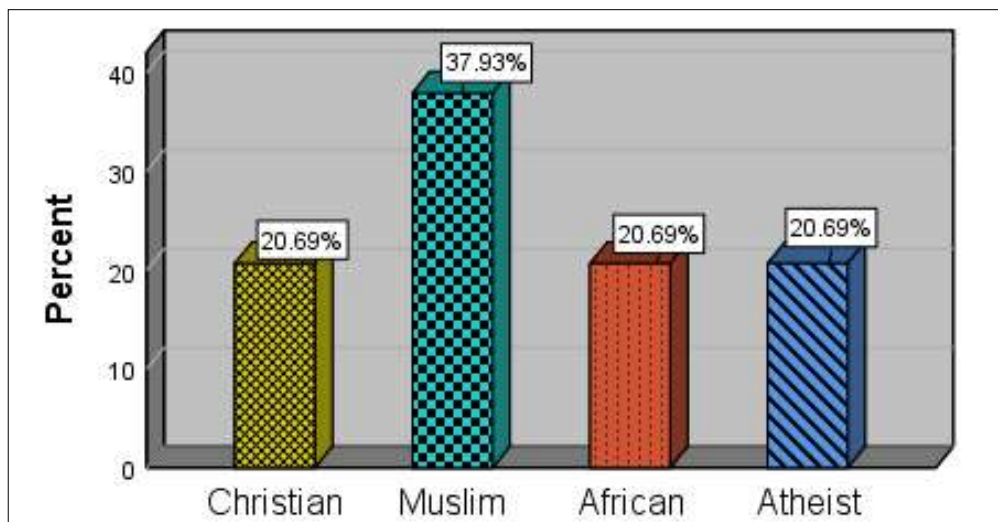


Figure 5.2 Religion Distribution Chart

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the participants were Muslims at 37.93%, while the remaining participants were evenly distributed among Christians, Africans/traditional beliefs, and Atheists at 20.69% each. The high number of Muslims participating in the study is because the residents of Garissa County are predominantly Muslim. However, other religions were also well represented, thereby reducing response bias and enhancing reliability by capturing diverse religious views.

Significantly, terrorism is attributed to either religious ‘fanaticism’ or political and economic factors; therefore, the religion of the participant was relevant to the current study. Akanyisi (2014) established that targeted attacks where Christians are isolated and killed have fostered hatred against Muslims, affecting social relations between the two religions. Similarly, Romanov et al. (2012) found that the number of civilian fatalities in the participants’ own city is negatively correlated with Arab Israelis’ life satisfaction. This indicates that when it comes to terrorism, religion is a sensitive issue that should not be taken lightly.

Position in the Community

The last question on the demographic information was about the position the participant holds within the community. The question aimed to identify the distribution of various roles in the community and whether those involved in the security of the County understand the implications of terrorism. Figure 3 presents the analysis results.

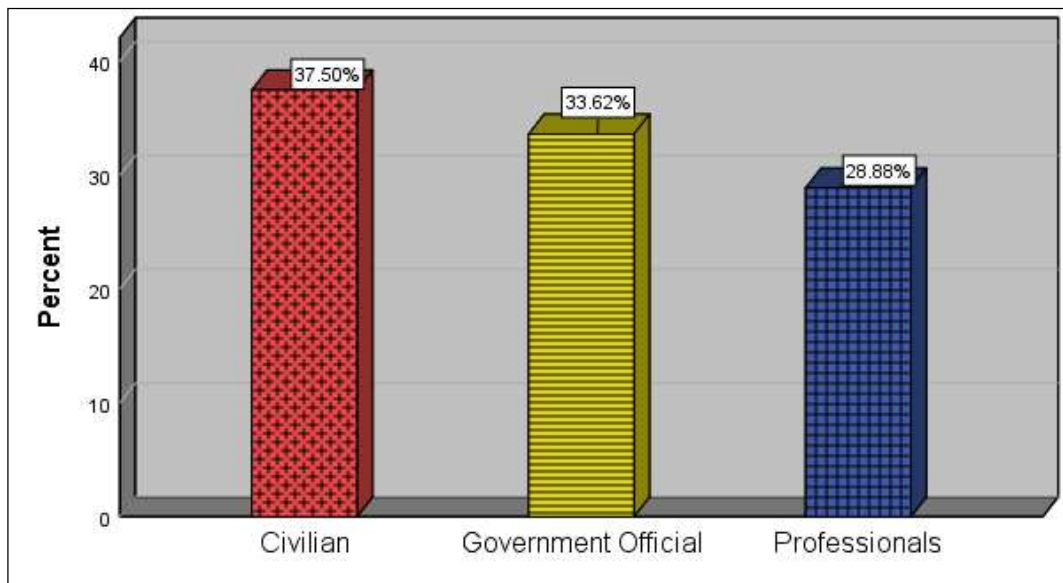


Figure 5.8 Positions in the Community

Figure 3 illustrates that the participants’ positions are fairly evenly spread, with Civilians at 37.5%, government officials, such as police chiefs, and officer commanding stations (OC’s) at 33.62%, and professionals, including doctors, legal practitioners, and teachers, at 28.88%. This indicates that the study successfully captured perspectives from a variety of community members.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

State capacity and counter terrorism challenges experienced by the government of Kenya

This article aimed to identify the counter-terrorism challenges faced by the Kenyan government. Table 9 presents a summary of the perceived obstacles to implementing counter-terrorism strategies.

Table 5.9 Challenges the Government Faces in Mitigating Terrorism

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	StD
Unsecure/ porous borders	0.0%	6.9%	13.8%	37.9%	41.4%	4.1	0.9
Technological Challenges	0.0%	0.0%	6.9%	58.6%	34.5%	4.3	0.6
Lack of law enforcement resources	0.0%	0.0%	13.8%	55.2%	31.0%	4.2	0.6
Media and communication	0.0%	6.9%	20.7%	41.4%	31.0%	4	0.9
Collateral damages	20.0%	10.0%	24.5%	35.2%	10.3%	2.8	0.6
Financial damages	0.0%	36.9%	27.6%	31.7%	13.8%	3.7	0.8

Where NE signifies no extent, SD signifies strongly disagree, D signifies disagree, N signifies Neutral, A signifies Agree, and SA signifies Strongly Agree. StD is the standard deviation (deviation from the mean).

Source: Survey Data

ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISM CHALLENGES

Porous and Insecure Borders

A significant proportion of respondents (79.3%) identified porous borders as a major challenge in countering terrorism. These quantitative results directly converge with qualitative insights from key informants, who emphasized that Garissa County's geographical proximity to Somalia acts as a critical vulnerability. Specifically, participants explained that unmonitored border points allow Al-Shabaab militants to move freely at night, smuggle weapons, and evade detection. Highlighting this systemic threat, a key government official noted:

“One of the most critical barriers is the ease with which terrorist groups move across borders. Weak border controls allow militants to enter and exit countries undetected, enabling them to evade arrest, regroup, and launch attacks. In regions such as East Africa, terrorist groups exploit unmonitored border points to relocate after operations, making it difficult for security agencies to track and neutralize them. This mobility disrupts intelligence continuity and weakens territorial control by the state.”

A porous border is seen as a major obstacle because it is easy to cross between countries. This issue has hampered effective counter-terrorism efforts because there is no control over the movement of firearms and ammunition. Another participant added;

“Porous borders facilitate the illegal trafficking of arms, explosives, and other logistical supplies necessary for terrorist operations. The absence of strict surveillance systems enables networks to move weapons across countries with minimal risk. This strengthens the operational capacity of terrorist groups and complicates counter-terrorism strategies, as security forces must address both internal and cross-border supply chains”.

Technological Challenges and Misuse of Digital Platforms

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (93.1%) identified technological challenges as a major obstacle in countering terrorism. Qualitative findings strongly corroborate this statistical reality, revealing a dual technological deficit: the sophisticated digital agility of terrorist networks and the parallel lack of modern state surveillance infrastructure. Participants observed that the borderless nature of digital platforms amplifies the reach and influence of extremist propaganda, recruitment, and financing. This convergence of quantitative and qualitative data supports earlier findings by the National Commission on Terrorism (2015) regarding systemic intelligence gaps. Explaining how asymmetric digital adoption thwarts state interventions, a government official from Garissa Sub-County (Key Informant 3) noted:

“One of the reasons why terrorism mitigation strategies are not effectively working is because of technology. Terrorists, just like other people, can use technology to their advantage. They use media for publicity and to further their objectives. They use financial technology for

criminal transactions, and the internet for communication. It is difficult to track all their moves.”

While Key Informant 3 highlighted the digital operational capacity of terror networks, qualitative interviews simultaneously validated the survey data by uncovering acute deficits in state hardware and law enforcement resources. Compounding the challenge of digital tracking, a second government official from Garissa Sub-County (Key Informant 2) emphasized that state agencies are structurally outpaced:

“When you think of terrorism, you also think about modern technology, which is one of the reasons the counter-terrorism strategies are not effective. The non-availability of modern and sufficient equipment in the counterterrorism sector tends to handicap it in its law enforcement role. The inadequacy of facilities, besides limiting the efficiency of the police, also endangers life in case of the occurrence of terror.”

Synthesizing both data streams, these convergent results demonstrate that counter-terrorism efforts are severely constrained by a widening technological gap where state capacity struggles to compete with agile, digitally native terrorist tactics. To mitigate this shared quantitative and qualitative vulnerability, strategic integration is required; the state must allocate substantial funding to counter-terrorism infrastructure, procure advanced surveillance equipment, and embed specialized cyber-intelligence experts alongside localized police and community training frameworks.

Inadequate Law Enforcement Resources

A substantial majority of survey respondents (86.2%) identified insufficient law enforcement resources as a major challenge in counter-terrorism operations. This quantitative consensus directly aligns with qualitative insights gathered from key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), which revealed that critical shortages in personnel, equipment, and investigative capacity acutely compromise security along the volatile Kenya–Somalia border. The qualitative narratives illustrated how systemic funding deficits trickle down to impact the fundamental operational effectiveness, salaries, and overall morale of frontline security forces, creating institutional vulnerabilities that extremist groups actively exploit. Capturing this shared sentiment, a participant in a women's FGD underscored the structural neglect driving these border vulnerabilities, stating:

“I believe that the Kenyan government does not take the issue of security seriously, and the allocated budget is low for law enforcement and security matters. The lack of sufficient police officers to secure the borders is due to low funding. The police officers should be paid well for jobs like border security.”

Ultimately, the quantitative data and qualitative testimonies converge on a single conclusion: the structural underfunding of the security sector directly handicaps the state's protective capacity. By presenting the 86.2% statistic alongside the lived perspectives of community members, these merged findings demonstrate that resolving border insecurity requires more than tactical manoeuvres; it demands a fundamental budgetary shift to elevate law enforcement compensation, improve morale, and scale up personnel deployment at critical border checkpoints.

Media Publicity and Communication Dynamics

About 72.4% of respondents identified media and communication as a challenge. Participants observed that extensive media coverage inadvertently promotes terrorist objectives by amplifying fear and generating publicity. This aligns with the strategic view that terrorism aims for maximum psychological and societal impact through visibility.

One participant from the FGD said:

Most of the time, the media complicates the process of apprehending terrorists. They share a lot of information with the people we are pursuing, making our work very difficult.

Another one added:

"It is very unfortunate that the media publicise security issues. They forget that the terrorists and sponsors are consumers of the same information they share with innocent civilians. The government should limit what the public consumes as well as what the media reports to help us pursue these criminals swiftly".

Financial Constraints and Institutional Limitations

Although a smaller proportion of survey respondents (45.5%) explicitly identified financial and collateral damages as direct challenges, qualitative data meaningfully expanded on this finding by revealing that systemic funding deficits remain a critical underlying driver of insecurity. While the quantitative metric captured direct financial impacts, convergent qualitative analysis uncovered that limited budget allocations severely hinder broader operational imperatives, including recruitment, training, border surveillance, and technological integration. Furthermore, key informants bridged these data streams by stressing that inadequate funding leads to poor remuneration among police officers, which potentially compromises integrity and lowers counter-terrorism effectiveness. Contextualizing this economic pressure, a government official (Key Informant 4) explained:

"Although police officers have in the recent past received increased pay, the salaries are still insufficient to cater for their needs due to the economic situation in the country. Compared to other security personnel and public servants, police pay is relatively low, and this has been used by some of the officers as a justification for their engagement in facilitation of criminal activities, including terrorism."

Weak Community Cooperation and Trust Deficit

The qualitative findings strongly converge on the lack of public support as a crucial challenge, particularly undermining localized community-policing initiatives such as *Nyumba Kumi*. The analyzed data across both streams revealed low community involvement, deep-seated distrust of law enforcement, and a widespread public perception that security remains solely the government's responsibility. This weak collaboration directly hampers intelligence collection and corroborates existing research by Cherney and Hartley (2017) regarding the critical importance and inherent difficulty of community engagement in counter-terrorism. Illustrating this structural disconnect from an institutional perspective, a government official serving as a key informant observed:

"The Nyumba Kumi initiative is a failing attempt at countering terrorism, and this is so because there is no cooperation from the community members or civilians do not understand their responsibilities in security matters. People in the community mainly perceive the task of countering terrorism to be purely the work of the police officers. They forget crime prevention, terrorism included, is a collective responsibility. Therefore, they make minimal efforts in disseminating crime report, and being vigilant."

This institutional perspective on poor cooperation between law enforcement and local citizens directly converges with the testimonies shared during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Validating the key informant's view, a participant within the women's FGD identified this lack of collaboration as a fundamental barrier to effective counter-terrorism, stating:

"In relation to counter-terrorism, communities have a key role to play, but the problem is that they do not understand their role in policing. People in the community most of the time view police as their enemy rather than their partner in crime prevention and community

policing. This creates friction in terms of collaborating and cooperating to ensure the security prevails."

Youth Unemployment and Radicalization

The convergent data analysis identified youth unemployment as a primary driver of radicalisation and recruitment into terrorist groups within the study area. Across the data streams, participants observed that unemployed young people are easily enticed by the financial incentives offered by extremist organisations due to their socio-economic vulnerability. This finding directly converges with existing literature by Kariuki (2019), who associates high unemployment rates with a greater susceptibility to radicalisation, thereby emphasizing the profound socio-economic dimensions of counter-terrorism challenges. Illustrating this dynamic, a government official serving as a key informant (Key Informant 5) explained:

"Terrorists achieve their objectives because they can have recruits who are unemployed in the community and, as previously mentioned, who are excluded from the Nyumba-Kumi initiative. Unemployment plays a key part in the recruitment of young people to the terrorist groups due to a lack of income, they are promised a good amount of money, which acts as an incentive to join the terrorist groups."

Consequently, these interconnected socio-economic and structural challenges are perceived to severely hinder effective counter-terrorism strategies in the study area and other terror hot-spots in Kenya. Synthesizing these convergent findings, it is evident that the Kenyan government must take a keen interest in resolving these underlying systemic issues to both enhance national safety and improve the livelihoods of the local people.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. More importantly, the study found that youth radicalization and lack of employment lead to high crime rates and the recruitment of youths into terrorism groups. Therefore, both the county and national governments should address the issue of unemployment, as it acts as a catalyst for terrorist activities. To tackle unemployment, the government and other stakeholders should create an enabling environment that encourages business and entrepreneurship.
2. To invest significantly in intelligence-led policing, which can prevent the planning of a terror attack. The county government of Garissa and the national government ministry of interior and coordination should develop policies and practices for effective intelligence-led policing, invest in technology, and address the current issues of insufficient law enforcement resources.
3. Furthermore, existing counter-terrorism strategies can be enhanced. This study specifically advocates for improving how Nyumba Kumi operates and promotes collaborative efforts between elders and youth against criminal activities. This collaboration will help decrease youth radicalisation and subsequently lower crime rates.

Conclusion

The objective of examining the state capacity and counter-terrorism challenges in Kenya was accomplished. The research findings have informed the recommendations, which are based on data obtained from study participants. The results reveal that deficiencies in state capacity considerably impede counter-terrorism measures within the research context. Principal

challenges encompass inadequate technological capabilities and skills necessary for monitoring online radicalization, recruitment, and financial activities conducted by groups such as Al-Shabaab, alongside insufficient funding and law enforcement resources, particularly along porous borders. Furthermore, the government encounters difficulties in managing media coverage, which can inadvertently serve to amplify terrorist objectives, while ongoing socio-economic issues, such as youth radicalization, further complicate mitigation efforts. These structural, technological, and socio-economic constraints collectively highlight the significant gaps in state capacity that hinder the effective addressing of terrorism.

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