# Policy Brief

## Preventing Violent Extremism in Kenya: Policy Options
February 2016

### Introduction

Soon after Kenya's October 2011 military intervention in Somalia, the Al Shabaab terrorist group intensified attacks inside Kenya resulting in many fatalities and considerable damage to the Kenyan economy. The reality of violent extremism as an actual threat in Kenya has provoked policy, academic and popular debate in search of solutions to the challenge. The nature and patterns of violent extremism has also changed from a threat primarily emanating from Somalia, to a home-grown, Kenyan problem, necessitating a review of the strategies of how to counter it.

For a long time, the Kenyan government, and security agencies in particular, relied on security-focused measures to address violent extremism. Some of these measures have resulted in serious violations of the individual rights and liberties of people, and the profiling of Somalis and Muslims on ethnic and religious lines. Given that extremist violence is underpinned by an ideology of marginalization and victimization that is shared by some Muslim youth in the coastal and northern regions of Kenya, these harsh measures likely push more and more young men towards extremism.

This focus on counterterrorism interventions has tended to dominate policy considerations and government action on terrorism and radicalization, often to the exclusion of preventive considerations. Counterterrorism efforts are of course critical in dealing with extremist violence when it arises. However, in the absence of a robust, coherent, high-level strategy to counter and prevent violent extremism, the danger is that only the security aspects will be attended to and will continue to define the full scope of policy interventions in dealing with terrorism.

There are also challenges such as weak inter-agency coordination, policy fragmentation, resource constraints and weak public communication that continue to limit the effectiveness of the Kenya government's efforts to address terrorism and radicalization.

This brief discusses some of the drivers of violent extremism in Kenya, and the available policy opportunities that Kenyan and regional policymakers should consider to effectively address the problem.

### Drivers of Violent Extremism

Socio-economic factors: Poverty, inequality and economic marginalization are factors that limit the livelihood opportunities available to young people, making them especially vulnerable to crime, violence and extremist ideas.[1] This has been the case in parts of coastal and north-eastern Kenya where youths with few livelihood opportunities have been driven towards violent extremism.[2]

Extremist ideologies: Ideology provides recruits and potential recruits with a framework for making sense of, and articulating their grievances. In Kenya, an extremist brand of Islam has provided recruits to Al Shabaab with the faith-based ideology for justifying their violence. Extremist preachers have used some mosques and exploited social media such as Twitter and Facebook to recruit new members and spread their violent ideas. Online newsletters such as "Gaidi Mtaani" as well as online videos such as 'Mujahideen Moments', have featured Kiswahili-speaking extremists who legitimize their calls for violence on account of the "humiliation suffered by Muslims in Kenya," the "Christian occupation of coastal land," and the "revenge for the killing of prominent Islamic preachers."[3]

Security operations: A key criticism of state-led counterterrorism measures is that they are often repressive. There have been credible claims that counterterrorism operations undertaken in

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1   Schmid, Alex, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. New York: Routledge, pp 272-278.
2   Northern Kenya lags behind other parts of Kenya in terms of development. The primary policy challenge is how to close this gap and achieve national integration in ways that benefit the people of the region and the country as a whole (see Republic of Kenya, *Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands Final August 2011*). According to the Kenya Integrated Household Survey (2005/6), the north-eastern region was rated as the poorest region of the country, with 73.9% incidence of poverty, followed by coastal region with a 69.7% incidence of poverty (See *Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya,* 2011). There is also underinvestment in critical infrastructure, including water, roads, electricity and communications networks, and pervasive insecurity. At the coast, poverty and marginalization have spawned calls for secession, most recently seen in the rise of the proscribed Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) movement, which has been arguing that secession would liberate the coastal people from what is perceived as their neglect by successive governments.
3   Jeremy Prestholdt, "Kenya at the Precipice: Al-Shabaab and the Coast Crisis," *Daily Nation*, July 18, 2014,

Nairobi's Eastleigh area, Garissa, Mandera, Wajir and Mombasa have involved excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions, and executions of terrorism suspects. For example, serious violations of human rights occurred during the 2014 *Operation Usalama Watch* in the predominantly Somali Eastleigh estate after a series of violent attacks on public transport vehicles suspected to have been carried out by Al Shabaab. Reports by the media and local and international human rights groups, as well as the testimony of local residents, established that the operation was marred by arbitrary arrests, rape, torture and extortion.[4] More than 4,000 suspected illegal immigrants and refugees mainly from Somalia were arrested and detained at the Kasarani Safaricom Stadium in Nairobi for screening by authorities. Others were sent to the Dabaab Refugee Camp in northern Kenya, and in some cases families were separated as a result.

The involvement of security agencies in a series of killings and disappearances of Muslim leaders, business people and preachers has still not been ruled out.[5] Police have also been accused of detaining individuals for long periods of time in undisclosed locations without providing them access to lawyers or contact with their families as required under the Kenyan constitution.

The manner in which these counterterrorism operations have been conducted has fuelled resentment among many ethnic Somalis and Muslims. The effect of this has been the alienation of the very communities whose support is needed in detecting and preventing terrorist violence.

Growing ethnic profiling and discrimination: For historical reasons- and in particular the history of the Somali separatist war at independence in the 1960s- ethnic Somalis have had a troubled relationship with successive Kenyan governments. At the same time, in the imagination of other Kenyan communities, Kenyan Somalis came to be seen as a 'suspect' community whose loyalty to the country was questioned. Partly as a result of this, the terrorist attacks in recent years in Kenya by Al Shabaab have led to increased official and public suspicion of Kenyan Somalis and Muslims in general, who some believe are sympathetic to terrorist elements operating from within Somalia and Kenya.[6] This hostility has in some instances led to violent attacks against Kenyan Somalis and Muslims[7], and in turn fomented frustrations among them, yet their cooperation and support is central in fighting terrorism and radicalization.

**Core Aspects of a Prevention of Violent Extremism Strategy**

4    Independent Policing Oversight Authority, *Monitoring Report on Operation Sanitization of Eastleigh Publicly Known as "Usalama Watch"*, July 2014, available online)
5    Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) and Open Society Justice Initiative, *We are Tired of Taking You to the Court: Human Rights Abuses by Kenya's Anti-Terrorism Police Unit*. New York: Open Society Foundations, 2013, pp. 23-42
6    Many ethnic Somalis have reported being singled out for thorough security checks at buildings in Nairobi (See Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Kenya, Somalis become casualties of Africa's latest war" at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-kenya-so-malis-become-casualties-of-africas-latest-war/2011/11/21/gIQAwUGXvN_story.html). There have also been many cases where ethnic Somalis seeking to rent houses have been turned away on account of their ethnicity. On occasion, Somalis have also been forced out of public transport by other travellers, and been subjected to verbal abuse by strangers. Police on patrol have also been accused profiling people of Somali origin. Moreover, ethnic Somalis continue to face considerable difficulties in accessing identity cards or passports.
7    On September 30, 2012 for instance, 13 Somalis were injured by a mob in Eastleigh following a grenade attack on on St. Polycarp Church in area that killed one child and injured nine others (See Bosire Boniface, "Somali Kenyans urge police, citizens to stop ethnic profiling" at http://sabahionline.com, December 5,2012). In another incident on November 19, 2012, a mob looted Somali-owned shops in Eastleigh after an explosive device was thrown into a minibus by suspected Al-Shabaab attackers.

Whereas counterterrorism is concerned with disrupting terrorism using security and law enforcement means, preventing violent extremism focuses on strengthening communities' efforts to resist radicalization and extremism. It aims to reduce the appeal of extremists to young people. This section provides policy suggestions on what Kenya's counter violent extremism (CVE) strategy should focus on.

Multi-sectoral linkages and non-securitization: Prevention of extremist violence should be seen as linked to multiple sectors. While it is also a security issue, it should not be primarily about security.

*Policy options*
- The government should review and develop an integrated and comprehensive CVE strategy that brings together different agencies and actors into a multi-sectoral effort. The strategy should take into account the complexity of the drivers of extremist violence and seek to address all of the aspects.

- Linkages with other programmes: The prevention programme should not be designed as a stand-alone intervention but rather should be linked to ongoing government programmes to have greater impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness. The coordinating mechanism for the suggested inter-agency counterterrorism initiative should generate periodic, internal reports on the impact of their programmes and activities on counter-extremism in order to better monitor and fine-tune their approaches.

- Ensuring non-securitization of prevention interventions: To gain the confidence and support of relevant communities, the prevention approaches must not be securitized as prevention is not a coercive law enforcement tool. A prevention strategy must however interface with what the law enforcement agencies are doing- it must inform their approaches. Ideally therefore, prevention should not be led by any of the agencies leading counterterrorism measures but by a multi-agency institution or coordinating mechanism that can bring together relevant state agencies as well as non-state actors such as religious leaders, youth groups and even the private sector, thereby minimizing competition, incoherence and inconsistencies in approaches. The strategic emphasis and focus of the prevention agenda should be dealing with the push and pull factors rather than disruption which is the domain of law enforcement.

- Leadership and implementation: To be credible and effective, Kenya's CVE strategy should be located and led at the highest levels of government. To ensure inter-agency coherence, and given the magnitude of the challenge, the strategy should be led by the Office of the President. This office is best placed to articulate the vision of inclusion, non-discrimination and equal protection of all Kenyans while confronting the challenges of terrorism.

Addressing grievances: Whether perceived or real, grievances held by communities living in coastal and northern Kenya have driven some of the youth towards extremist violence as they resonate with the message of extremists.

*Policy options*

- Investment in large, public infrastructure projects at the coast and northern Kenya may have the potential to create jobs for young people who are at risk of joining extremist causes.

- There is need to link the issues of peace building to livelihoods. Initiatives such as the Uwezo Fund and National Youth Service programmes should be rationalized to respond to the challenge of radicalization. Models exist of successful interventions by the defunct Ministry of Cooperatives in supporting some youths to set up savings and credit societies to run small businesses. Also, modernization of fishing in the coastal region by investing in motorized boats can change the livelihoods of a significant number of coastal youths.

- Addressing long-standing issues of land rights grievances in the coastal region as part of the reforms in the land sector is key. There are good recommendations in the report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal/Irregular Allocation of Public Land (Ndung'u report) on this.

- Streamlining the issuance of official documents for residents of northern Kenya and the coastal region will go a long way in addressing the perceptions of discrimination that have fuelled resentment against the government over many years. The 2008 report of the Presidential Action Committee to address specific concerns of the Muslim community in regard to alleged harassment and/or discrimination is a good beginning on what can be done.

Countering extremist ideologies and messages: There is need for a critical appraisal and engagement with the ideologies that justify extremist violence.

*Policy options*
- A prevention strategy should take into account the role of religion in countering extremism and in particular, encourage and support both inter and intra-faith dialogue and engagement.

- Work with a diversity of leaders within the Muslim community and not just clerics: Not all youth are associated with mosques or will listen to clerics. It will be important to identify and partner with professionals within the communities and even with non-Muslim groups. Therefore, it is key to facilitate opportunities for publicizing counter-narratives from respected voices within Islam to address contested concepts such as the religious role of violence. This can be done through universities or through partnerships with the media and other institutions to avoid the suspicion that they are the voices of the state, and hence ensure their messages remain credible.

- More effective methods of working better with media—both traditional and social media—are required to disseminate counter-narratives widely and effectively. The government, through the private sector, can set up online portals for receiving information, monitoring what is going on and sending out counter-narrative messages.

- Work with leaders from both the Muslim and Christian establishments in developing the national CVE strategy: This could contribute to addressing xenophobia against Kenyan Somalis and Muslims, and the perception that radicalisation only affects these communities, since case studies have shown there are Christians who have been radicalised and turned to violent extremism.

- Government and all stakeholders should involve women in CVE-related activities, drawing on their special role in families as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, as well as on their strong influence on young people.

Mobilization and recruitment: A prevention strategy needs to pay attention to the networks of mobilization and recruitment of the youth into extremist groups. This should not be turned into surveillance or spying on the community, otherwise the entire prevention strategy will likely collapse.

*Policy options*
- There is an urgent need for better research, data collection and analysis on how youth are recruited into violent extremist movements in Kenya. Policy development should be informed by research and data and draw from current measures that have been successful in stemming the recruitment and mobilization of the youth into criminal enterprises, gangs and extremist movements. Policy research institutes and universities should be tasked to take the lead in this kind of research and analysis.

- A strategy for rehabilitation should be developed to provide for a coherent approach in reaching out to the youth who may be interested in leaving extremist groups. While the rehabilitation strategy must incorporate security actors, it should not be wholly led by security agencies.

- Community-level efforts in countering recruitment of youth to extremist groups should be strengthened. In the case of returnees, a policy framework to guide their reintegration into society is required.

· Technology is important in countering violent extremism, and access to social media for instance, can be widened to increase the diversity of voices that can challenge and counter the narratives propounded by extremists. Given the complexity of the internet and modern communication technologies, surveillance measures are unlikely to succeed. Rather than focus on online surveillance, the strategy should support actors and institutions such as schools to promote critical thinking among the youth and students so as to equip them with the skills to challenge the ideas that are promoted online by extremists.

· The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology should spearhead efforts aimed at strengthening community-level (as well as school-level) interventions on safe use of the internet as a preventive measure to reduce the risk of youth recruitment into radical groups. Many young people get their information from the internet and there should be greater investment at the school and community levels to promote safe use of the Internet. Parents also need to be encouraged to monitor closely what their children are browsing and reading.

Accountability
- The strategy should be anchored on the constitution and in

particular must ensure that the human rights protections are upheld in any measures to counter and prevent extremist violence.

- A key weakness of some of the counterterrorism measures applied thus far has been the absence of accountability for serious violations that have taken place. For a prevention agenda to succeed, it is important that oversight measures relating to security agencies, including Kenya Police, the National Intelligence Service and the Kenya Defence Forces, are strengthened. For instance, parliamentary oversight over counterterrorism strategies and measures could be strengthened.

Local- level partnerships

- Effective prevention of extremism is local. To that effect, the national CVE strategy should take into account the important role that county governments can play in CVE, provide for partnership with county governments and local community actors, particularly in those counties that are most affected. An effective CVE strategy will therefore reflect the shared role between the national and county governments. County governments have better local knowledge and even local legitimacy in comparison to the national government. County governments should therefore be encouraged to allocate resources to the implementation of the strategy and to align their development policies to the strategy.

**References**

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Republic of Kenya, *Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands Final,* August 2011.

Kenya National Bureau Statistics, Kenya Integrated Household Survey, 2005/2006.

# CHRIPS Publications

*Tangled Ties: Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya (CHRIPS & IDS Sussex, 2015).* This study argues Al-Shabaab remains one of the greatest threats to regional stability and security. Worsening violent insecurity in Kenya suggests that the more important impact of the group has been to simply unmask the country's deep, structural divisions.
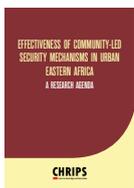
*Effectiveness of Community-Led Security Mechanisms in Urban Eastern Africa: A Research Agenda (CHRIPS, 2015).* This study discusses the methodology for CHRIPS' three-year research project on community-led security initiatives in low income urban neighborhoods in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.
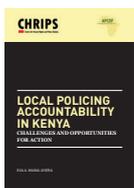
*Local Policing Accountability in Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities for Action (CHRIPS, 2015).* This study examines police accountability structures and needs at the local community level, where the scrutiny of oversight institutions, civil society organizations and the media is often low. It argues that the lack of confidence in the police as the key hindrances to local policing accountability.
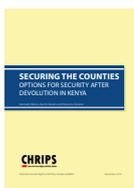
*Securing the Counties: Options for Security after Devolution in Kenya (CHRIPS, 2014).* This study argues that counties are central not only to development but also the implementation of security solutions. Considerable opportunities and capacities for improving security exist at the county level.

*Missing the Point: Violence Reduction and Policy Misadventures in Nairobi's Poor Neighbourhoods (CHRIPS & IDS Sussex, 2014).* The study finds that the failure of the state to provide for basic needs in health, education and social care, as well as a lack of effective policing, has created an opening that criminal organizations and gangs have exploited.

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