



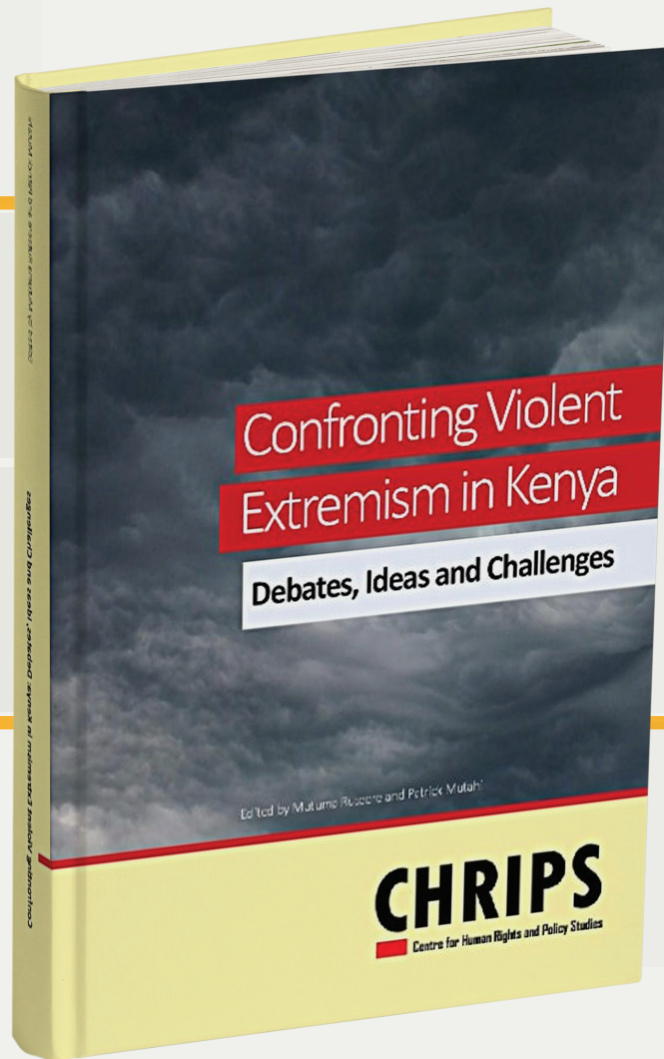
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Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya

Debates, Ideas and Challenges

Edited by Mutuma Ruteere and Patrick Mutahi



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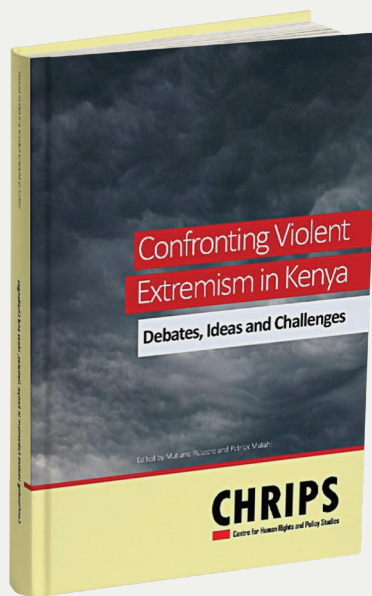
Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya

Debates, Ideas and Challenges

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Human Rights and Politics
Studies, Kenya (2018)

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Over the last two decades or so, violent extremism and terrorism have notoriously become security issues and social challenges rampant in Kenya and East Africa, plaguing regional security being number-one priority in the foreign policy of the countries of the region.

The ubiquity of extremism across Africa set the ball rolling after Al-Qaeda followers returned from Afghanistan, and the West African Sahel became an important battleground for the new war on terrorism in the late 1990s.

With the Somali President Siad Barre ousted from power and forced to exile in 1991, the Union Movement became the most heavily militarized source of extremism in the wake of the collapse of the then Somali Government, until the Union of Islamic Courts sprang to existence in 2006 and became enormously more influential.

Changeability in contemporary insurgencies and the use of terrorism to arouse adverse reactions are the defining features of what is referred to as the Fourth Generation War by contemporary analysts.

The developments that have ensued in Somalia coincided with the transitional stage of Kenya: from being a passive victim of the 1997 US Embassy Attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam to an active partner of the US-led long war on terrorism.

Al-Shabaab in Somalia is considered in Kenya the main challenge of terrorism, as it mounted repeated attacks in border and urban areas such as Nairobi, which most notably included

the Westgate Mall Attack in Nairobi in 2013 that killed more than 70 people. In the same vein, the gunmen stormed the Garissa University College, killing 148 people and injuring 79 in April, 2015. As reported by the Center for Human Rights and Politics, there were 49 attacks recorded between January and November 2017, claiming the lives of 108 people in a genocidal brutal butchery.

As Al-Shabaab mushroomed very rapidly, creating several local recruitment networks in Kenya, the Kenyan government - over the past years - has implemented a range of legal and political measures to disrupt, prevent and scupper such recruitment clandestine activities made by Al-Shabaab Movement and other similar organizations. However, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia has boomeranged on their efforts; such intervention further supported the fake narrative of terrorists to recruit more extremists in Somalia and Kenya. The writer advocates and calls for rebuilding community relations by non-government actors after the end of the military clash. As such, this helps to present a counter-narrative and review the existing legislations and procedures to better strike a balance between the protection of society and the preservation of the civil rights of individuals. Equally important, the reconstruction of the governing relations per se will help in addressing the existing and potential gaps in counterterrorism laws, demystifying the concept of terrorism, and calling a halt to the inhumane actions of the government while dealing with suspects, which may bring the problem further to a more complicated level.

The eight chapters of *Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges* (2018) place a special focus on the paths that lead individuals to fall into the trap of extremism and join violent extremist movements. The book walks the reader through in-depth discussion of the complexities of employment in groups such as Mujahideen Youth Movement, drawing on the field recruitment hunt in the Kenyan coast. In different parts of the eight chapters, a strong emphasis is placed to indicate that no one single factor explains why

the youth are recruited into Mujahideen Youth Movement and other similar organizations. Some observers point to grievances, injustices, corruption and discrimination in access to services. Others, however, argue the Kenyan military operation mounted in Somalia is merely a source of discontent and disgruntlement. Furthermore, others see that the impact of social networks in attracting the youth and the employment opportunities provided by Al-Shabaab Movement make up enticing job offers.

The eight-chapter book equally provides insights and lessons for actors to learn more about these complexities; much of the compelling investigation conducted by the book is best considered for the preparation and implementation of prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration and social inclusion programs. The key ideas brought to focus by the authors and contributors of the book across the eight chapters are further described in the next paragraphs:

Extremism in Kenya and the Horn of Africa

Chapter One, written by Paul Goldsmith, examines comparative perspectives on extremism in Kenya and the Horn of Africa, and further spells out how extremism of terrorist organizations has snowballed into a glaringly ever-present phenomenon through aggravating fear and insecurity with terrorist organizations carrying out attacks against civilians and symbolic cultural edifices and icons. These unpredictable methods and plans (strategies) give the go-ahead to the new enemy to spell trouble for the governments and overburden societies and increase anxiety and insecurity.

Changeability in contemporary insurgencies and the use of terrorism to arouse adverse reactions are the defining features of what is referred to as the Fourth Generation War by contemporary analysts. The onerous scenarios of contemporary methods of terrorism and the resulting shocks triggered off require timely



responses. However, it is difficult for state leaders to fritter away time waiting inactively and desultorily for something they well know it will happen without being wittingly aware of when or where! Factors that have pushed Kenya into a battleground for terrorist movements in the Horn of Africa strongly reinforce this idea.

It can be inferred that specific factors can spark off and support violent insurgency. The impact of social media and networks is, for instance, one factor of several others to draw a line between religious extremism we observe today and extremist movements the world experienced in the past. It is worth noting that extremist strategies are developed to cause chaos, insecurity and unrest. Many of the insurgency practices of terrorist movements are concerned with the long-term effects that exhaust the adversary over time. The world countries can potentially clamp down on the movements of terrorist organizations, but this does not mean they can nip extremism in the bud with the curtain falling on it; insurgency can creep into almost everywhere and sneak

in through the back door, so to speak, in a much stronger, tougher and more organized fashion. This underscores the crucial importance of a general review of perceptions and policies, so that the existing governments can reconsider their ad hoc counter-terrorism strategies.

Despite the regional collapse of Daesh, the motives and causes of violence stubbornly persist and things get glaringly worse. The number of terrorists is increasingly growing along with mobilization at the time of crises and disasters that plague and storm the region, reducing the time required to mobilize in any given arena. Consequently, the successors of every generation of terrorists become more radical in their chimeras, more diverse in their recruitment than their predecessors.

Kenya is a good case study of how civil society and other actors are controlling the chaos of a failed military strategy.

The modest gains reaped by the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) with the support of the Somali National Army explain the difficulty of the mission, but at the same time it is an indicator of the slow and steady progress towards containing the military threat of Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahideen, more commonly known as Al-Shabaab. Coordinated progress can disperse terrorists, albeit not a final solution. The capacity of extremists in Africa is relatively underdeveloped compared to their counterparts in the hot spots and flashpoints of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The conditions in Nigeria have created a favorable environment conducive for Boko Haram to operate. Admittedly, Boko Haram is a dangerous movement but lacks coherence; while, the Mujahideen Youth Movement in Kenya is a more focused and flexible opponent, but still relatively modest compared to the standards of other contemporary insurgencies. The strength of the Mujahideen Youth Movement lies in a track record of reactions and special adaptation to internal and external setbacks, in a much pragmatic approach. In terms of propaganda, the Mujahideen Youth Movement avoids the tone of Daesh content in favor of a sophisticated mix of subtle nuances couched in criticism and uses surprisingly familiar symbolic language for the reader of Kenya's historical narrative.

Recognizing the historical path that fuels extremism in the world countries, such as Kenya, further facilitates the task of the security forces and contributes to building a flexible strategy. However, the developments sped up in Kenya are incompatible with such a proposal. Simply put, Kenya has tended to neglect soft and easy methods that help legitimize military operations. In the same vein, the vision of the Kenyan government indirectly rejects the view that states "the problem of terrorism is closely linked to other sources of conflict, border disputes, and historical grievances, and hence requires broad regional participation in the war on terrorism".

Instead of discussing eradication, it may be better for the AMISOM to utilize the internal gaps

of the insurgents in order to speed up any future negotiations with their Somali colleagues. At this point in time, this option seems to be more successful than any other military solutions. As for Kenya, negotiating the challenges brought about by what is termed as Islamization of Terrorism will never be that easy. Again, Kenya is a good case study of how civil society and other actors can control the chaos of a failed military strategy.

Efficacy of Law

Chapter Two, written by Ken Nyaundi, discusses the legal framework for countering terrorism in Kenya. Unlike many other world countries, Kenya has successfully drafted a counter-terrorism law compatible with international human rights law. The Kenyan counter-terrorism law includes some facilities that allow the Government to provide security services within the limits of the rule of law and respect for human rights. For example, more prudent and humane procedures are revealed by search and control operations, interception of correspondence and arrests of suspects. These gains along with several others were reaped from the experiences of other countries and repeated observations by civil society and human rights activists.

Impact of Women

Chapter Three, written by Nerida Nthamburi, discusses the engagement of women in the face of extremism. The author brings to the reader's attention that in the past the fight against violent extremism was highly spearheaded by males, with women relatively absent from public discourse. The debate on the importance of gender mainstreaming is therefore very important. Globally, women and even girls are paying a heavy price for the practices of terrorist groups involving sexual violence, violations of basic human rights and the destruction of social and economic development. The situation

Women can have a profound impact on change and can potentially act decisively in discovering the early portentous signs of extremism; they can intervene before individuals turn violent and fall into the trap of extremism.

in Kenya is admittedly no different. The impact of women on peacekeeping operations and the resolution of previous disputes and conflicts in Kenya is a reminder of the critical impact of women in the security arena. The significant impact of women on peacebuilding and conflict resolution can be replicated again. Research studies conducted in certain countries suggest that the policies that integrate women into counter-violent extremism are more effective than those in which women are overshadowed, ignored or otherwise expressed. For example, women can have a profound impact on change and can potentially act decisively in discovering the early portentous signs of extremism; they can intervene before individuals turn violent and fall into the trap of extremism. Women can help to delegitimize violent extremist narratives. More attention should therefore be given to promoting women's participation and empowerment in the face of violent extremism, including participation in policy-making and law enforcement. The capacities of organizations and civil society institutions led by women must be further explored to prevent and combat violent extremism.

Equilibrium of Security and Privacy

Chapter Four, authored by Fathima Badurdeen, discusses the exploitation of the internet in recruiting and hunting the youth for the Mujahideen Youth Movement, highlighting how extremist networks use the internet environment to target the vulnerabilities of the youth to drive and trap them into such clandestine networks.

With the increasingly growing trend of the youth using smart mobile phones and the internet ubiquitously, they have become pathogens to drum up for extremist ideas among themselves. Recognizing the devastating impact of individual freedom of choice on the adoption of violent extremist ideas, collective attention must be duly paid to the youth who develop their critical thinking and independence and form views on major events. By the same token, a special emphasis must be placed on how meticulously and closely to provide them with counselling services. It is equally important to realize that the youth may engage in online conversations with others who seek to brainwash and imbibe them with violent extremism, then inveigle them into traveling to Somalia, Syria or Libya, and then come back and learn how to launch attacks on easy targets in Kenya.

Chapter Four also provides the context that requires intervention to prevent extremist content on the internet. Of course, censorship regulations often conflict with privacy laws, so there is a need to balance digital space surveillance with privacy rights as part of the efforts to combat extremism and how it is used via the internet. For this balance to be realized, policymakers, decision makers and legislators are required to recognize public rights to ensure that they are not derogated, curtailed, restricted or otherwise expressed to balance national security and privacy rights, and to use practical evidence of when and how an individual becomes a threat to national security.

More research is still needed to understand the mechanisms used to drum up for extremism, the dynamics of making progress and online recruitment for the youth, discourse analysis and extremist narratives.

More research is still needed to understand the mechanisms used to drum up for extremism, the dynamics of making progress and online

recruitment for the youth, discourse analysis and extremist narratives. In addition, research should address the legal objections to censorship of the internet platforms to mitigate extremism and recruitment operations, which are often subject to constant criticism. These topics need to be examined in depth in order to take effective operational measures to address online recruitment strategies. Finally, a pressing need is much felt to open channels of communication via the internet to cushion the anger of the youth stirred up by injustices and grievances and acts of violence against them, while encouraging political discourse and active political participation, and facilitating the internet platforms that support peaceful opposition, so that the youth do not need to solicit support from extremist groups. Innovative initiatives based on social media platforms can help the youth to unleash their energies, participate more in creative debates, and form groups that will facilitate their engagement in deliberations of democratic practice.

Lessons from Lamu

Lamu is a province bordering Kenya and Somalia and is seen as the entry point for Al-Shabaab activities. Chapter Five, written by Patrick Motahi and Nathaniel Kabala, provides

a case study of violent extremism in the region. The two authors stress that joining violent extremist groups is a complex process involving structural and individual incentives, including police harassment, discrimination and marginalization, youth unemployment and grievances. The catalysts and the paths of violent extremism are various, multiple and difficult to define. Responsible bodies and actors should not therefore make direct and causal assumptions about how individuals turn extremist, simply because the field data show that unemployment per se has not necessarily pushed individuals to join violent extremist groups, and the association between the phenomenon does not mean that the former entailed the latter. Admittedly, it is true that unemployment may lull some individuals into joining violent extremist groups for better income and living opportunities. However, a perfunctory solution to the problem of unemployment to combat or even reduce violent extremism is a desultory and risible attempt; it does not necessarily reduce the number of people joining the Mujahideen Movement. Similarly, being a member of a criminal group in Lamu does not necessarily mean being a member of violent extremist groups, and is not required to join a terrorist group. Policymakers and other actors must therefore be aware that the efforts to tackle unemployment or criminality will not necessarily reduce violent



extremism. Efforts should therefore be made to attest a combination of different and potential causal methods before developing programs to combat violent extremism, including the tempting extremist ideologies, the appealing narratives and the harangue capabilities of extremist fiery preachers.

Community Participation

Chapter Six, written by Kamau Wairuri, calls for revisiting and rethinking of the current approach to combating violent extremism. The author challenges the current approaches to countering violent extremism by criticizing the underlying assumptions about citizen vulnerability and the power exercised by the government. The author further argues that even a vulnerable population can act on a political plan that obstructs and complicates the efforts put in by the government, and that policymaking requires effective intervention to take a more nuanced and focused approach for the government and society, while taking into account the complexity of this phenomenon rather than continuously making efforts to facilitate it. Again, the author underscores the need to engage communities and stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of programs to combat violent extremism in that power and knowledge are not generated from one single place.

Rehabilitation Challenges

Chapter Seven, written by Mohammed Daghar, discusses the challenges Kenya is facing, most notably the reintegration of the youth - who belonged to the Mujahideen Youth Movement in Somalia - into society.

Over the recent years, the Kenyan government has issued public assurances about the need to rehabilitate the youth previously involved in terrorist organizations and promised to grant them with pardon, clemency, reprieve or

commutation. However, the government has not set a legal framework for rehabilitation efforts, and there is still a serious lack of rehabilitation. Although some rehabilitation programs have been developed across the Kenyan coast, questions remain unanswered about the policies that guide the actions of such programs. The leading questions include: are such programs voluntary or compulsory? On what basis are decisions made on whether a person is fully or partially rehabilitated? What entities or government institutions are readily competent to operate such programs? What laws govern their implementation and supervision?

Chapter Seven addresses questions about the feasibility of rehabilitation or detention centers, and their ability to address the societal stigmatization faced by the youth. Admittedly, regardless of whether the youth were previously involved directly or indirectly in terrorist organizations or not, they feel forced for months or even years to face and suffer community stigma; their society still looks down on them as stigmatized albeit rehabilitated or in the process of being so.

The Kenyan youth mostly feel uneasy in that such rehabilitation programs can be used to legitimize the indefinite detention of anyone suspected of being involved in a terrorist group; they fear that such programs are designed to make them fall into the trap of interrogation, torture or termination.

Rehabilitation programs can provide the psychosocial and social support that the youth need when designed according to clear laws and policies. In turn, the government speeches and practices can disrupt rehabilitation efforts. It is a painful irony and discrepancy in the war on terrorism that the societies that should support their members do not do so because of mass surveillance and criminalization. This further complicates and aggravates the problem. The author emphasizes the need for further research

to understand the potential risks and benefits of rehabilitation in the Kenyan context. Given the labyrinthine situation, the Kenyan youth mostly feel uneasy in that such rehabilitation programs can be used to legitimize the indefinite detention of anyone suspected of being involved in a terrorist group; the Kenyan youth fear that such programs are designed to make them fall into the trap of interrogation, torture or termination by the government authorities.

Returnees from Violent Extremism

Chapter Eight, written by Steve Ouma Akoth, addresses the issue of returnees from violent extremism and the issue of justice. The author investigates the alternative justice system as an amnesty mechanism in the Kenyan Province of Kuala. In the same vein, the author stresses that the response made by Kenya to the problems of violent extremism and domestic terrorism is broadly open, including the returnees who have left the battlefield.

Interestingly, it also discusses how best to broaden the concept of returnees, especially as it is not a well-established concept that lacks legal and political clarity. Hence comes the importance of the framework that redefines the concept of reintegration in a broader context of alternative justice systems as in Kuala Province and provides greater opportunities for success.

The Kuala Province experience offers reconciliatory or restorative justice versus criminal justice. What was pivotal to most Kuala community and counterterrorism authorities was the desire to repair amputated relationships, so to speak, and promote rapprochement among the local community members rather than arrest the perpetrators referred to as returnees! Even if we assume and take it for granted that the local community members and the government authorities have agreed to this endeavor to reform, shore up and revamp these relationships, they disagree on

the rationale for justifying restorative justice. Unlike the government-led reintegration model, the community in Kuala expected perpetrators to reach out to members of the community to seek solutions that would otherwise promote reconciliation and reassurance that the past would not be repeated and would not echo down the ages. It seems that the returnees seek an integrated model and activities that absolve them of their immediate, dim and distant past. Most members of the Kuala community view such people not as returnees; rather, as key actors in building a safer environment in the Province.

Conclusion

The authors present a number of fitting conclusions on violent extremism, the most important of which are the following:

- ▶ There is a dearth of literature and research studies conducted on violent extremism in Kenya. Gaps still remain in understanding the trends and behavioral patterns of recruitment in violent extremist groups, and the psychological, ideological, religious and political motivations that tempt them into joining such groups. Much investigation remains yet to be done by researchers and practitioners to ensure that appropriate interventions and narratives based on updated knowledge are addressed to counter violent extremism.
- ▶ Terrorism is not only a national problem; rather, it is a ubiquitous problem at the level of regional policies and conflicts. Such understanding is critically important in addressing the effects of Kenya's military engagement in Somalia, as well as policies on how to rehabilitate and reintegrate former fighters and returnees from Al-Shabaab.
- ▶ It is especially seminal to emphasize the importance of identifying the complexity of violent extremism; there is no easy and

single explanation as to why the youth have joined terrorist groups.

- ▶ Each situation is unique and thus requires the understanding of its own context, which does not mean the absence of broad visions; rather, to emphasize the need for accurate and local interventions.
- ▶ Continued uneasiness encountered by the government measures and interventions to prevent and deter terrorism and violent extremism still exist. The Kenyan government is still restricted in some cases by the Constitution, and these restrictions have led up to a continuous revision of criminal law measures and political systems.
- ▶ Attention to the impact of women and their position in violent extremist movements in the world in general and in Kenya in particular is increasingly growing. However, we are not fully aware of how women are

recruited by groups such as Al-Shabaab. Several questions remain still unanswered: What roles do they play? What can they do to deter recruitment by these groups?

- ▶ There is an urgent and crying need to examine and criticize the rhetoric of countering violent extremism to ensure that they do not contribute to the stigmatization of the youth or entire communities.
- ▶ While there is ongoing research and studies to analyze and further explain violent extremism and terrorism, it is only a scattered effort in various platforms that do not work in tandem.
- ▶ *Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges* provides a detailed and holistic view of the evolving nature of violent extremism in Kenya, and the countermeasures and preventive measures that will reduce the phenomenon.

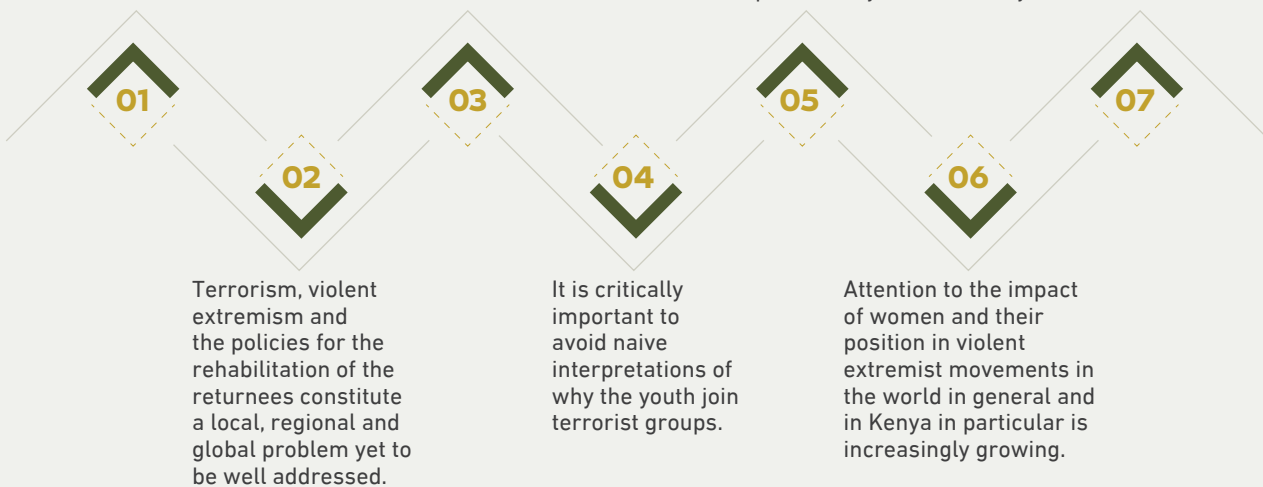
Key Takeaways

There is a paucity of sufficient research into violent extremism in Kenya.

It is especially seminal to emphasize the importance of identifying the complexity of violent extremism.

Continued uneasiness encountered by the government measures to prevent terrorism and violent extremism still exist persistently.

There is an urgent and crying need to examine the rhetoric of countering violent extremism to ensure that they do not contribute to the stigmatization of the youth.



Authors and Contributors

▶ **Dr. Mutuma Ruteere**

Expert on human rights and security, Director of the Center for Human Rights and Policy Studies, Nairobi, Kenya, and former United Nations Rapporteur on racial discrimination

▶ **Patrick Mutahi**

Research Fellow at the Center for Human Rights and Policy Studies. He is a PhD researcher at the University of Edinburgh, specializing in studies of violence, conflict, terrorism, human rights and civil politics.

▶ **Ken Nyaundi**

Lawyer at the Supreme Court and Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Policy Options.

▶ **Kamau Wairuri**

Ph.D. researcher at the University of Edinburgh and holds a master's degree in African studies from the University of Oxford.

▶ **Nerida Nthamburi**

Ph.D. researcher at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and a human rights lawyer in Kenya, specializing in gender-related violence in East and Horn of Africa countries.

▶ **Nathaniel Kabala**

A researcher specializing in community participation in projects to combat violent extremism and conflict resolution in Kenya.

▶ **Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen**

Faculty member at Mombasa Technical University, specializing in studies of combating terrorism and extremism.

▶ **Dr. Samar Al-Bulushi**

Fellow of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, specialized in study of violence and terrorism in East Africa.

▶ **Dr. Paul Goldsmith**

Anthropologist with extensive research experience in conflict issues.

▶ **Mohammed Daghar**

Security Analyst.

▶ **Steve Ouma Akoth**

Researcher and consultant in human rights and anthropology with over 19 years of experience in regional and international work.







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